Gestural Abstraction in Australian Art 1947 – 1963: Repositioning the Work of Albert Tucker

Volume One

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Abstract

Gestural abstraction in the work of Australian painters was little understood and often ignored or misconstrued in the local Australian context during the tendency's international high point from 1947-1963. Distinguished by the mark of the artist evident in the finished work, gestural abstraction included a number of international variations such as European *tachisme* or *l'art informel*, *l'art brut*, *matière* or matter painting and American Abstract Expressionism. This thesis will examine the reasons for the lack of significance attributed to gestural abstraction by Australian art critics and art historians by taking a unique analytical approach which is developed in the first half of the thesis. This approach draws on interdisciplinary sources to establish a framework for repositioning examples of Australian painting which would be better appreciated as examples of gestural abstraction. The work of Australian artist Albert Tucker produced during the relevant period will be the main focus in the artist chapters.

This thesis will demonstrate that certain art works can benefit from a reclassification which brings out qualities which enhance the perceived significance of the work. Such reconfiguration of elements can lead to better informed reception. Art historical approaches have not as a rule focused on aesthetic theory, concentrating rather on art historical precedent. This can involve overlooking the relevant social and historical aspects of the work's making and reception in favour of dominant styles favoured at the time or location of reception. Once the critical precedent is set for an artist's work of a particular period, it can be difficult to revise; such is the role of precedent in art criticism of certain periods, particularly within Australia at the time of this study. What is deemed the relevant art historical precedent for any given work in part determines how the work is received. However, this is rarely acknowledged. Instead, art historical classifications eventually are treated as objective properties of the work. Aesthetic theory, in contrast, reveals the contingency of such classifications. In addition to philosophical aesthetics, this thesis will draw on sociological field theory to account for the dynamic process through which aesthetic categorisations become active. This reveals the relevant contextual elements necessary to confirm the appropriate category, enabling optimal placement of the work to best appreciate its historical significance. A robust analytical methodology is developed on the basis of which art historical accounts can be evaluated. This involves examining the Australian art historiography and curatorial practices which led to the perception of these works in categories other than those in which they were produced and initially exhibited by the artist.

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Abbreviations

AMB	*Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized* (McMahon, [2007] 2009)
AGNSW	Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
ATP	Albert Tucker Papers, MS13373, State Library of Victoria archives, Melbourne
CA	*Categories of Art* (Walton, 1970)
CAAB	Commonwealth Art Advisory Board
CAS	Contemporary Art Society
ICA	Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
INHA	*Institut national d'histoire de l'art*, Paris
LAP	Lawrence Alloway papers, Getty Research Institute, Research Library, Los Angeles, CA
MOMA	Museum of Modern Art, New York
MOMAA	Museum of Modern Art of Australia, Melbourne
NGA	National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
NGV	National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
PIFA	Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney
SLV	State Library of Victoria archives, Melbourne

Introduction

The aims of this thesis are to develop a model which can be used to situate art works in the appropriate category for their utmost appreciation; to gain an understanding of the way in which art critical discourse constitutes, in part, the way the work is perceived within the field of cultural production; to understand how we have come to know the gestural work of the period of study in the way we have; and to take the first step in the process of repositioning the gestural work of Australian painter Albert Tucker (1914-1999) for better curatorial and art historical appreciation regarding its significance in Australian art history.

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Due to the nature of this thesis which draws on interdisciplinary sources to construct an analytical framework used in the analysis of the gestural artwork under consideration, the literature review is integrated throughout the thesis in the appropriate chapters. Chapters One and Two consider theories of philosophical aesthetics applicable to the present study, and Chapter Three focuses on the sociology of art worlds. Chapter Four includes a critique of the treatment of the subject of gestural abstraction in Australian art histories to date. The key authors and theorists drawn upon in each chapter are referenced in the outline of the structure of this thesis below.

Gestural abstraction has been largely understated or overlooked in Australian art historical accounts and little literature exists on this aspect of Australian art. Art historian Christopher Heathcote's (1995) *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968* focuses on the period of study but not on gestural abstraction in particular.[1] There are brief sections in the comprehensive Australian art history texts (discussed in Chapter 4) covering the period from colonisation to the present but there are no history texts devoted solely to gestural abstraction. Instead, this stylistic tendency is most frequently dealt with as just one aspect in the overall *oeuvre* of a particular artist in a monograph, in exhibition catalogues or in informational booklets such as art historian and critic Patrick McCaughey's early publication *Australian Abstract Art* (1969).[2] Such texts often reference influences of other artists or particular movements, citing a range of influences at a given time or over time in development of the artist. There is relatively little discussion of the development of the postwar aesthetic per se. However, in analysing

[1] Heathcote, Christopher*, A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1995.
[2] McCaughey, Patrick, *Australian Abstract Art*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969.

individual works, the relevant descriptive properties of the category are mentioned. This study will therefore seek to fill a gap in the literature by specifically examining the gestural abstract work of Albert Tucker during the period to expand on current research and promote further critical understanding.[3]

However, this thesis also examines how it is possible to overlook an artist's significance in order to motivate this re-evaluation of Tucker's work. Naïve notions of art as simply given, and of the artist as socially independent genius, are debunked in the process. But this is not the goal of the thesis; merely a by-product. The aim in the first part of the thesis is to provide the basis upon which a re-evaluation of an artist's work might be justified. It argues that as so much of what we perceive in a work is determined by the art historical classifications we have internalised in relation to it, it may be possible for a work or body of work to gain significance well after the time of its initial reception.

I note that increased interest in gestural abstraction has been apparent in curatorial and academic projects in recent years, since inception of my research. Examples are the symposium on Abstract Expressionism titled '*Action. Painting. Now.'* held at the National Gallery of Australia ('NGA') 24-25 August, 2012 (accompanying an exhibition from 14 July 2012 - 24 February 2013), and the exhibition *Abstraction: The Heide Collection, From Nolan to the '90s*, held at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, Victoria from 4 July - 11 October 2015. The latter focuses on lyrical abstraction in a group exhibition featuring both late modernist and contemporary abstract painters. Neither of these exhibitions adopted a narrative which might reposition artists such as Tucker however. Both reflected continuing ambiguity on the positioning of a number of Australian abstract artists which supports the discussion in Chapter Four (4.4) of this thesis.

Before leaving the topic of literature review, it is important to note that this thesis does not seek to revisit those areas of research enquiry well explored by others. Such studies do not offer a comprehensive analysis of the research questions I address. Art historian Sarah Scott has covered the politics of exhibiting Australian art abroad from 1953-1964 in her 2004 thesis and related journal articles.[4] While her work highlights contextual elements relevant to consideration of the dissemination and reception of Albert Tucker's work in the U.K., this is but one factor

[3] See Chapter 4 (4.3) for a discussion of recent attempts at updating art historical accounts of abstract art.
[4] Scott, Sarah Russell, 'The Politics of Patronage: Australian Art for Export 1953-1964', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Art History, Classics, Cinema Studies and Archaeology, University of Melbourne, October 2004; see Scott, Sarah, 'Imaging a Nation, Australia's Representation at the Venice Biennale, 1958' in *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 79, 2003, pp. 53-63.

considered in this thesis. While Scott characterised the features of Tucker's work in a manner sympathetic to the approach taken in this thesis, her study did not reposition it within a more appropriate category. Similarly, the work by art historians A.D.S. Donaldson and Rex Butler on 'un-Australian' artists and the way in which artists working overseas were omitted from Australian art historical accounts is considered and factored into my analysis.[5] Neither these studies, nor that of Scott, provide the key to fully understanding why the gestural abstract work of the period was overlooked. Furthermore, and most significantly, they do not provide a satisfactory way of updating the categorisation of such gestural work nor do they clarify confusion apparent in art historical and more recent curatorial approaches to gestural abstraction.

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This thesis will introduce a number of key terms in the early chapters which will be used throughout the analysis to follow in later chapters. I highlight these terms in the summary of the thesis organisation below and provide a list of terms in Appendix C.

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This thesis is organised into eight chapters. In order to situate the gestural abstract work of Albert Tucker within the category in which it can best be appreciated, I proceed by defining an analytical framework which draws upon relevant theory from philosophical aesthetics, the sociology of art worlds and appropriate historical classifications of abstract art. The framework is developed in Part I of the thesis, particularly in the first three chapters, with the fourth chapter providing the relevant art historical terms for classification of abstract art. Part II of the thesis examines the art historical discourse in the relevant art worlds and the attendant positioning of Tucker's gestural work to date. In conclusion, a repositioning is proposed to more fully appreciate Tucker's significance as the first ***matière*** painter in Australian art history.

Chapter One examines the way in which classification or **categorisation** of an artwork affects perception of the artwork, drawing upon philosopher **Kendall Walton's** classic theory of aesthetic appreciation. Categories of art, according to Walton, are perceptually distinguishable

[5] See Donaldson, ADS, 'Mary Webb: Our Last Unknown Artist', unpublished PhD Thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, Sydney, 2008. See Butler, Rex and Donaldson, A. D. S., 'A short history of unAustralian art', in North Ian, ed., *Visual Animals: Crossovers, Evolution and New Aesthetics,* Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Parkside, SA, 2007, pp. 107-122.

and for painting include genre and style. Walton argues that the **aesthetic properties** of artworks depend on their perceptual properties when viewed in their correct category. I introduce Walton's theory of categorisation which is based on identification of **features** which may be **standard, contra-standard or variable** for a given category as defined in the chapter. Once a preliminary categorisation is made, I apply **Walton's four criteria** to assist in confirming whether the correct category choice has been made. These are: (i) whether the work displays a large number of features standard to a particular category (and minimises contra-standard features); (ii) which category would lead to its greatest appreciation and significance relative to the art world (such that it is perceived as better, more interesting or pleasing); (iii) whether the categorisation reflects the artist's intentions at least hypothetically[6]; and (iv) whether the artist's contemporaries would most likely have categorised it in a given category. Further considerations based upon the interpretation of Walton's theory by philosopher **Brian Laetz** demonstrate how the work's context in the field of reception determines its **aesthetically active category**, as well as how the work's **purpose** and placement within the artist's *oeuvre* play a role in determining its categorisation. I demonstrate the concepts grounding the framework through an example of a work by American painter Mark Rothko.

Chapter Two examines how recasting our categorisation of a work changes the way we perceptually characterise or configure it and, hence, our appreciation of it, with reference to the theories of philosophers **Philip Pettit** and **Arthur C. Danto** on aesthetic characterisation, **discernible variations** (or reference classes for a work) and the impact of changes in the art world. In this chapter I demonstrate the application of the framework concepts developed up to this point and introduce one of the key categories of gestural abstraction examined in this study. I complete the Rothko example introduced in Chapter One and provide a further example, this time an artwork by a *matière* artist, French painter Jean Fautrier. The way in which we categorise a work determines the features we attend to and our interpretation of it. The viewer's ability to reference a sufficient number of other works of the category, known as discernible variations, is important in positioning a work for best appreciating its significance.

Chapter Three explores how perception of art is mediated by social and institutional aspects of the art world. Theories of social systems of art worlds are introduced and **field theory** is employed to further refine the framework both to demonstrate the role of precedent in art

[6] Regarding hypothetical intention, see Levinson, Jerrold, 'Intention and Interpretation in Literature', in Lamarque, Peter, and Olsen, Stein Haugom, *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*, Blackwell, Malden, MA, and Oxford, UK, 2004, pp. 200-222.

historical classification and reception, and to incorporate relevant contextual elements to account for the way in which an aesthetic categorisation emerges in the art world. Once contextualised, the works of art to be assessed in the artist chapters (6 and 7) can be viewed as events or **positions** in the cultural field in their own right, to facilitate interpretation. Field theory is particularly suited to facilitating explication of why and how the process of **consecration** of an artist or art work takes place. A number of theorists are discussed in the introduction to this chapter to position the study of art worlds and draw out the elements of relevance to this study. The foundational work of **Danto** and philosopher **George Dickie** and sociologist **Howard Becker** are discussed while the work of French social theorist **Pierre Bourdieu** is drawn upon. Bourdieu's approach adds a dynamic aspect to the analysis of the artistic milieu lacking in the philosophical approaches. This chapter is important for developing the key terms to be used to describe the processes and boundaries of the art worlds in which the artist's work, to be analysed in the later chapters, was produced and exhibited. Key positions or agents in the field are identified, and the way in which intellectual discourse and **art critical discourse** interact in the **fields of production and reception** to produce the artwork and artist as we come to know them is articulated. Sociological theory assists in understanding how categories become active and gain prominence in the art world. A demonstration of field theory at work is provided by way of the example of American gestural painter Mark Tobey.

Chapter Four examines art historical methodologies for interpreting abstract art and considers issues and influences in Australian art historiography which may have contributed to misclassifications of works or perpetuated misinterpretations by early reviewers. The development of art historical discourse and approaches to categorising modes of abstraction, both in Australia and in the European field of production where Tucker's mature gestural style came to fruition, are examined. Classification schemas used by Australian art historian **Bernard Smith** and French art critic **Alain Jouffroy** are considered. Jouffroy's categorisations demonstrate that European critics had sufficient terms at their disposal to describe gestural abstract art of the period. Smith's early categories however, were inadequate for the categories and sub-categories of gestural abstraction. An additional ahistorical classification scheme is considered which recognises work that falls between polarised definitions of figuration and abstraction. Referenced in the work of philosopher **Elizabeth Grosz**, this category, known as the '***figural***', is applicable to the work of Albert Tucker, examined in Chapters Six and Seven. A set of terms is developed to classify abstract art for use in the analysis conducted in later chapters. The terms applicable to the work of Albert Tucker include **allusive abstraction** and ***matière*** painting.

An analysis of the role of key critics in framing art critical discourse is introduced in Chapter Four. (Among the critics referenced are: American **Clement Greenberg**, British critic **Lawrence Alloway**, French critic **Alain Jouffroy,** and critic and writer **Michel Seuphor**.) Through close examination of the art histories pertaining to the period, we begin to see the extent to which key positions in the field of cultural production, reception and transmission influence the way that artists and their work become known. This demonstrates not only the power relations in the field of cultural production introduced in Chapter Three, but the way in which contextual information or art critical discourse forms part of the augmented artwork which is perceived according to the features emphasised in such discourse. (Among the Australian art historians referenced are: **Bernard Smith**, **Terry Smith**, **Robert Hughes**, **Rex Butler** and **Sasha Grishin**.) This chapter begins to reveal the reasons for the omission of gestural abstraction in Australian art histories. While Australian categories of art in use were updated in a 1971 revision to Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting 1788-1970,* a major reference text for art historians and curators, the work of artists previously classified in an early edition was not reclassified in accordance with the updated terms. Future art historical accounts by others tended to perpetuate earlier categorisations made by Smith. Smith's categorisation scheme became the benchmark. To make matters worse, decisions made early on to omit from Australian art historical accounts artwork produced overseas by Australian artists, were not reversed. That is, only the art work of earlier artists which had already been written into Australian art history was included in subsequent art histories.

Part II of the thesis situates the production of Albert Tucker within the relevant discourses of the day. This involves considering the art worlds and the art critical context within which he made and exhibited his gestural work. I analyse its reception and subsequent consecration as evidenced in art historical accounts. Chapter Five focuses in particular on the art critical discourse of the period as considered in the reception of gestural abstraction in the art worlds of Paris, London and New York. This provides further milieu-specific context for the analysis of Tucker's gestural abstract work in later chapters. The role of influential art critics and key agents in the field is examined with respect to the creation of meaning and the social construction of an artwork and artist. (Among the critics referenced are: **Lawrence Alloway,** French critics **Michel Tapié** and **Pierre Restany;** British critics **Sir Herbert Read, David Sylvester,** and **Patrick Heron;** and American critic **Harold Rosenberg**.) In this chapter, I identify **seven strategies** employed by critics, dealer/gallerists and artists which assisted in establishing the active category for new painting styles. These are developed through an investigation of the way in which new gestural

styles came to be known in the European field of cultural production, but have applicability across the art worlds discussed in this study. The approach to categorisation of semi-abstract work in the fields of reception is considered. In addition, this chapter introduces the reception of Australian art in London, while the reception of Tucker's work in particular is discussed in Chapter Six.

Chapters Six and Seven explore the art criticism and art historical discourse related to the gestural abstract work of Albert Tucker, produced during the period. Tucker is considered an apt example for this study due to the challenging nature of his work which proved difficult to classify for critics and art historians of the day. His work is strongly gestural while retaining figurative elements. It is innovative in its use of textural *matière* techniques (a sub-category of gestural abstraction as defined in Chapter 4) and its allusive or semi-abstract subject matter. Tucker's work was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York ('MOMA') in 1958 due to its affinity with the European *art brut* ('raw art') stylistic tendency which expressed primitivism and strongly emphasised materials through a highly textured rendering of surface. MOMA acquired a second work by Tucker in 1960, the same year that the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York ('the Guggenheim') acquired one of Tucker's works. Both of these 1960 acquisitions were semi-abstract in nature, while emphasising texture and materials.

In Chapter Six, Tucker's work is analysed and positioned according to the framework developed in Part I of the thesis. This includes the categorisation of the work by key positions or agents in the international cultural field of production, and the art critical reception of his work as evidenced in published reviews in newspapers and articles. Tucker's use of the seven strategies identified in Chapter Five to position his gestural work within the field of reception is assessed and found to be limited. Further, the strength of key positions such as patrons and critics in the Australian field of reception tended to dominate the discourse surrounding Tucker's work which focused on an earlier period in his *oeuvre*.

Chapter Seven examines the way in which Tucker's work has been categorised in Australian art historical accounts and curatorial narratives up to the present. An implication of this thesis is that there is a pluralism in the way a work can be received and this must be taken into account when determining its art historical classification. It is argued that repositioning Tucker's gestural works, as recommended in this thesis, can lead to greater appreciation of their significance and belatedly recognise Tucker's contribution to the development of gestural abstraction in Australian art. To reposition the work, I relate it to the relevant discernible variations

in the field, that is, to the work of those artists compared to which its features appear standard. Among these are the gestural artists of the European CoBrA group of painters, and semi-abstract *figural* painters such as British artist Francis Bacon and American Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning, as well as the textural or *matière* gestural painters Antoni Tàpies and Alberto Burri. Against such work, I argue, Tucker's painting of the relevant period is perceived in its best light.

In Chapter Eight I conclude that although Tucker's position in Australian art history appears strongly fixed within the pre-war group of Melbourne modernist artists known as the 'Angry Penguins' and his work is most often associated with Expressionism, nonetheless, opportunity exists to reposition Tucker's work of the period on the basis outlined in this thesis. This will lead to appreciating its innovative gestural aspects and will increase its art historical significance, particularly given that Tucker was the first Australian painter to work in the *matière* category. It will help to explain the nature of the ***figural*** (or semi-abstract) work which previously has tended to be categorised as figurative within Australian art historical discourse.

I propose in Chapter Eight that reception and transmission of Tucker's work can be envisaged in **five phases**. The first covered his period of international reception (Chapter 6) at the end of which his work was acquired by MOMA and the Guggenheim. The second, upon his return to Australia, focused not on Tucker's mature gestural work, but on his earlier experimental work, due to the way he was presented in exhibitions with pre-war curatorial narrative themes. In addition, the strong influence of his patron (Melbourne solicitor John Reed) and influential Australian critics such as Bernard Smith (who favoured figuration) and Robert Hughes, perpetuated early impressions of Tucker dating from 1940s Melbourne. This is therefore the body of work which was the subject of art historical accounts written in the early to mid-1960s. Subsequent art histories perpetuated the categorisations contained in these initial accounts (Chapter 7). The third phase is the current phase in which the Heide Museum of Modern Art ('Heide'), through its Albert and Barbara Tucker Gallery opened in 2006, has presented a series of themed exhibitions of Tucker's work and associated curatorial materials and writing. I propose **two new phases** in this thesis to begin the process of bringing the gestural features of Tucker's work into view to begin to position it with the categories for which, I argue, his work is better aligned, those of allusive abstraction and *matière* painting.

Recent interest in Tucker's work has been stimulated by the contemporary interest in outsider art, or naïve art made by untrained artists (as defined in Chapter 4). The retrospective

exhibitions of the *matière* gestural work of Italian painter Alberto Burri in New York and Catalan painter Antoni Tàpies in Miami and Barcelona in 2015 are additional sources generating interest in gestural work of the period.[7] In seeking to promote an enhanced appreciation of Tucker's contribution in developing the *matière* stylistic tendency in Australian art, these sources can be drawn upon in implementing my proposed steps (Chapter 8) for repositioning Tucker's work for reception by Australian audiences. Further, as I note throughout the thesis, the textural qualities of *matière* work invoke a **haptic** response for the viewer. Such responses have been the subject of recent curatorial explorations and in fact, as I discuss in Chapters Four through Eight, the haptic is an element of Tucker's work which has not been fully appreciated in art historical accounts and an area to which further research may be directed.[8]

I propose to curate an exhibition of the work of Tucker based on this thesis, with an exhibition catalogue written by me which not only demonstrates the correct category for Tucker's work of the period, but also demonstrates a confluence of disciplines in establishing a framework for re-positioning art work, namely philosophy, sociology, and art history.

[7] These exhibitions are: *Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, October 9, 2015 - January 6, 2016; *Tàpies: From Within*, Pérez Art Museum, Miami, 6 February - 3 May 2015; and *Tàpies: An Artist's Collection, Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, Barcelona, 12 June 2015 - 10 January 2016. See Chapter 5 (5.2) for Tàpies' strategies in the field of reception, and Chapter 6 noting the contemporaneous acquisition and exhibition of Tàpies' work by MOMA with that of Tucker.

[8] A recent exhibition at the Tate Britain, London, *Tate Sensorium*, 26 August - 20 September 2015, demonstrates current curatorial interest in this aspect, although viewer response in this case is manufactured by curatorial interventions which directly stimulate the senses. Relevant to this study is that one of the four artworks selected for the exhibition is British artist Francis Bacon's *Figure in a Landscape*, 1945. Tucker's semi-abstract or *figural* work shares affinities with that of Bacon (see Chapters 4-6). Tucker's unique approach to *matière* painting features 'landscape-in-head' imagery as a recurring motif.

Chapter One: The Categorisation of Art Works

This chapter will draw on the discipline of philosophical aesthetics and in particular on theories of classification or categorisation of art works as a basis upon which to build a framework for examining the gestural abstract works of Albert Tucker produced during the period 1947-1963. Drawing on analytical philosophy, a model or framework is developed in this thesis for analysing art works and positioning them to best appreciate their aesthetic qualities and understand their significance in the cultural field. The model will provide an alternative to traditional art historical approaches. Through the use of the framework I seek to provide an objective or fresh view to enable explication of the lack of previous attention to the gestural abstraction tendency in the local Australian context during its international highpoint. Art historical approaches have not as a rule focused on aesthetic theory, concentrating rather on perceiving the relevant social and historical aspects of the work's making, reception and ways of interpreting the subject matter of the work through the prism of art historical precedent.[9] This means that what is deemed the relevant art historical precedent for any given work in part determines how the work is received. However, this is rarely acknowledged. Instead, art historical classifications eventually are treated as objective properties of the work. Aesthetic theory, in contrast, reveals the contingency of such classifications. It will be demonstrated that certain art works can benefit from a reclassification which brings out qualities which enhance the perceived significance of the work.

1.1 Introduction: Contextualising the approach

Art historian Francis Halsall articulates a benefit of the approach employed in the present study, which attempts the reconstruction of a work of art informed by philosophical aesthetics, as

> …a project by which an account might be provided of an object which is sympathetic to its past, present and future receptions; to its material particularities, and to the conditions of its reception. Reception here is understood as the processing by which the individual subject or larger systems of 'observation' (to use a term from Luhmann's systems theory) reconstitute the work. These are systems such as those of display (the gallery), discourse (art history), education (the university), and commerce (the art market).[10]

As will be seen in later chapters of this thesis, the way in which attention is focused on a work initially may vary from the way it is later viewed. A different group of art critics may work more

[9] See Woodfield, Richard, 'Aesthetics: Field and Discipline', in Elkins, James, ed., *Art History Versus Aesthetics,* Routledge, New York and London, 2006, p. 113.
[10] Halsall, Francis, 'Art History versus Aesthetics', in Ibid., p. 110. See Luhmann, Niklas, *Art as a Social System*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000, (see Chapter 3 (3.3)).

closely with particular artists and a new organising principle may emerge through such interaction which may not have been clear to reviewers at the time of the initial exhibition of the work.

In this chapter I begin by examining philosopher Kendall Walton's theory of aesthetic appreciation originally published in 1970. This will lay the foundation for development of an analytical model to be used in the categorisation and discussion of the works of the subject artist in Chapters Six and Seven. Additional elements of the model (to support and clarify Walton) will be introduced in section 1.3 of this chapter in which further considerations raised by philosopher Brian Laetz are considered, and in Chapter Two with respect to those considerations raised by philosophers Philip Pettit and Arthur C. Danto. Chapter Three will further refine the model by introducing elements drawn from relevant sociological and contextual approaches to determine how an aesthetic categorisation emerges in the art world. Chapter Four will incorporate art historical methodologies and definitions of abstraction to provide the basis for the classification systems used to position works for their appreciation. Key European and other stylistic tendencies or categories of art relevant to the period of this study, illustrating the aesthetic characteristics of each, are examined in Chapters Four and Five.

1.2 Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art'

Walton's seminal paper 'Categories of Art' ('*CA*') provides an explanation for how it is possible to categorise art works according to their perceived properties.[11] These properties may include both **formal properties** of the work such as line, colour, texture, form, and rhythm; and **aesthetic properties** such as balance, tension, coherence, lyricism, and energy; as well as representational or resemblance properties.[12] Prior knowledge of a range of possible categories (such as art historical tendencies or styles) and a field of reference of other works exemplifying the various categories is also required in order to effectively identify potential categories. The terms in our framework so far then are formal and aesthetic properties, and art historical categories.

According to Walton's theory of categories of art, **categories** are perceptually distinguishable and for painting include genre and style. Walton argues that the aesthetic properties of artworks depend on their perceptual properties when viewed in their correct

[11] Walton, Kendall, 'Categories of Art', in *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 79, No. 3, 1970, pp. 334-367, (hereafter '*CA*'). For Walton, aesthetic properties are features or characteristics of works to be perceived as much as non-aesthetic properties are (*CA,* p. 336). See Sibley, Frank, 'Aesthetic Concepts', in Lamarque and Olsen, 2004, pp. 127-141. (Reprinted from Margolis, Joseph, ed., *Philosophy Looks at the Arts: Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1978, pp. 64-87). Sibley defined aesthetic concepts or taste concepts and provided examples in his paper 'Aesthetic Concepts´ published in an early version in 1959.

[12] For representational and resemblance properties see Chapter 3.

category. Walton's taxonomy of categories includes standard, contra-standard and variable properties. Regarding categories, if a viewer is attending an exhibition of Impressionist paintings and encounters a Fauvist work among those exhibited when expecting to see another Impressionist work, he or she may find that work disturbing or garish if unfamiliar with the Fauvist tendency. This is due to the fact its properties such as vivid and arbitrary colouration and violent brush strokes are **contra-standard** or atypical of an Impressionist work and the viewer might subsequently view the work as inept. In contrast, when viewing a well-known category with which one is familiar, in this example the Impressionist works, he or she may recognise the overall *Gestalt* of the Impressionist works as a class through prior exposure to many works of this category. In this case, the features of the works can be appreciated as standard features relative to configurations already internalised by the viewer.[13]

Identifying a work successfully within a particular category, means facilitating a coherent reading of the work by the viewer. **'Standard'** features are identified by Walton as those features which qualify a work in belonging to a particular category and which, when absent, tend to disqualify a work from belonging to that category.[14] The presence of a large number of standard features for a category helps to position the work within the category and enables its being perceived as having a sense of order or coherence in virtue of the features of that category. Standard features may be described as those features represented by a convention constituted by a set of practices common to that convention such as is the case with a style or genre (McMahon).[15] In contrast, its **variable features** do not determine membership in the category nor disqualify a work from a category. Such features do however contribute to its expressive or representational ability. The viewer considers the work's standard properties to determine what kind of representation the work is, and then looks to its variable properties to determine what is being represented. As a demonstration of this, consider that once the viewer has identified a work as a member of a category, say 'landscape painting', perhaps by noting it exhibits the flatness, support and medium of a painting and observing that it contains a horizon line demarcating sky and ground across its surface, he or she may then respond to its variable features such as the elements of colour and form and the type of brush strokes which convey a mood or feeling. The aesthetic response to the art work is considered well-directed, and the art work is appreciated,

[13] By *Gestalt* Walton refers to the overall look of the work, a single quality, rather than a process of applying a rule based on recognising the sum of its features. For Walton, a work's perceptual properties include both aesthetic and non-aesthetic ones. Such properties are 'features' or characteristics of works of art to be perceived (*CA,* pp. 340-342).
[14] Walton, *CA*, p. 339.
[15] McMahon, Jennifer A., *Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized*, Routledge, New York and London, [2007] 2009, p. 48. Hereafter '*AMB*'.

when it is made in response to those variable features of the work under its correct categorisation.[16]

Walton notes that the innovative addition of objects or juxtaposed materials protruding from paintings was initially unsettling and confusing to early Twentieth Century viewers who found such features contra-standard for a painting.[17] Frequent exposure to such features later enables the works to be seen as members of a new category of 'collage' for which these features become standard. Alternatively, the category of 'painting' may expand to encompass members which are flat and those with protruding objects. Thus categories are adjusted over time to recognise new features and practices. While for Walton there are 'indefinitely many ways in which a work of art might conceivably be perceived … most of them are easily recognised as improper or incorrect by a suitably experienced viewer (defined below) and the work is not to be judged by how it appears when so perceived.'[18] Walton claims in *Categories of Art* that certain circumstances of a work's origin (in the cultural field of production) importantly influence how it is correctly perceived. These are highlighted in his guidelines which I examine below.

How can we determine in which categories a work is correctly perceived? Walton outlines **four criteria** to assist in determining whether the best category of fit has been chosen to enable the most apt characterisation of the work. These include reference to (i) whether the work displays a large number of features standard to a particular category (and minimises contra-standard features); (ii) which category would lead to its greatest appreciation and significance relative to the art world (such that it is perceived as better, more interesting or pleasing); (iii) the artist's intentions if known; and (iv) whether the artist's contemporaries would most likely have categorised it in a given category.[19] I will turn to an illustrative example below. Further, 'perceiving a work in a certain category or set of categories is a skill that must be acquired by training, and exposure to a great many other works or the category or categories in question is ordinarily … an essential part of this training.'[20] This demonstrates Walton's concept of perceiving an artwork in a particular category is not based on a naïve perception alone on the part of the viewer. Rather, he

[16] See Allen, Barry G., 'Seeing Art', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1982, p. 504.
[17] *CA*, p. 352.
[18] Walton, Kendall L., 'Categories and Intentions: A Reply', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 32, No. 2 1973, pp. 267. See *CA*, p. 367, regarding experience of the viewer with relevant categories.
[19] *CA*, p. 357. Allen cautions that when applying Walton's four criteria we must be careful not to radically reinterpret or reorganise features in a way the artist could never have meant based on categories we have invented. Allen, 1982, p. 507.
[20] *CA*, pp. 366-367.

acknowledges the degree to which perception is influenced by experience, training and knowledge.

To illustrate the application of Walton's criteria and any amendments I will make as I proceed to build the foundations of an analytical framework in this chapter and the next, I will look at two sample art works from the period of this study. In this chapter and in sections 2.1 and 2.2 of Chapter Two, a work by American painter Mark Rothko (1903 - 1970) will serve to illustrate the difficulty in classification of a work at a point of transition to a new style or tendency (in Walton's terms, **category**). In this instance the sample work was not typical of the artist's mature style although source elements in that work typified those drawn on by artists who came to be associated with the new category. The second example, (Chapter Two (2.3)), is a work by French artist Jean Fautrier (1898 - 1964) who became strongly associated with a new European tendency or category emerging during the period of study, notwithstanding his later style changing considerably.

Let us begin by looking at Rothko's painting *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, 1944, held in the MOMA collection, New York (fig. 1.1). This work, while executed by an artist most strongly identified with an American tendency, Abstract Expressionism, has been selected to illustrate a range of difficulties posed in attempting to 'correctly' position a work for a number of reasons I will discuss below. To determine the category within which to appreciate this work of art, I turn to Walton's criteria which presuppose knowledge of art historical categories and knowledge of sufficient examples of other works to facilitate a judgment. Following Walton, I will look first to the features of the work itself and begin by examining its non-aesthetic properties. The formal elements of this work include spiral and swirling lines, stripes and assorted shapes. These create rhythm and combine to form a balanced composition (aesthetic property). Visual depth is shallow. Representational properties are alluded to by a horizontal demarcation between two neutral colour blocks suggestive of land and sky or seabed and water. Referring to formal properties again, colour is applied in transparent layers. The palette is neutral with soft washes of blue, green, yellow, and red/orange accenting the two predominant shapes which suggest biomorphic figures. The various properties combine to suggest these abstract figures are positioned in an imaginary landscape, their curving shapes suggesting volumetric form and their initiation of swirling movement. The additional markings in the area above the horizon line suggest movement of water or matter within the shallow depth of the picture plane. The aesthetic properties of the work are of a lyrical, delicate, floating or whimsical nature with a dynamic energy suggestive of its

subtitle, *Mell Ecstatic,* given to it by the artist in reference to his wife, Mary Alice (known as Mary Ellen or 'Mell').

Next I will assess the work's probable correct category. Based on the formal properties and representational aspects identified, it appears that while the figurative elements do not present recognisable natural objects, the way in which the forms are presented and the dream-like nature and overall *Gestalt* of the work are standard for the category of Surrealism.[21] The whimsical brushwork and somewhat carefree mood lend the work an affinity with that of artists Paul Klee or Joan Miró. Certainly none of the darker psychological undertones of the paranoiac stream of Surrealism typified by the work of Salvador Dali are in evidence. The work is not particularly provocative, presenting without any bizarre Surrealist juxtaposition of forms or shock value, but portrays an imaginary world. A viewer familiar with Surrealism might find this work cohesive if a bit light or frivolous. The work is lyrically expressive or poetic and the colouring perhaps rather low key for a Surrealist work; however, colour is a variable feature for such works in any event.

There are no 'contra-standard´ features present in the work which, under Walton's definition of terms, if present, would preclude it from being a member of the category of Surrealist paintings. We might continue by asking whether there is another category of art works which may include Surrealist elements as standard for that category in case we have categorised the work too hastily in a way which reduces our satisfaction in or the significance of the work. In fact, early Abstract Expressionism did draw on Surrealism and the distinction will therefore be a matter of comparing a sufficient number of examples of works in the respective categories and obtaining further background information to facilitate our judgment of the 'best fit' category within which to position this work for its most favourable characterisation. This work does not display the 'all-overness' typical of later Abstract Expressionist works which we will encounter in the chapters to follow so our categorisation of it as a forerunner to Abstract Expressionism is not recommended on these grounds at least. Alternatively, the work might be perceived as a decorative piece. As a decorative piece, the curving markings and lines applied in a gestural fashion in the upper regions of the work might be seen as a design feature with the work appearing flat and the swirls simply seen as surface embellishments to spread the composition more evenly across the picture plane

[21] During the early 1940s a number of Surrealist painters including André Breton, Max Ernst, Roberto Matta, Salvador Dali and André Masson took up residence in New York. While early Surrealist philosophies had lost relevance by then, Surrealist devices continued to influence painting. See Selz, Peter, 'Surrealism and the Chicago Imagists of the 1950s: A Comparison and Contrast', in *Art Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 1985, pp. 303-306.

to provide balance. In this case the two 'figures' would appear as flat design elements reminiscent of primitive art.

To determine the most powerful interpretation of the work, after we have initially perceived that it has a number of standard features of a category, '*C*', and in which it has a minimum of contra-standard features for us (Walton's criteria (i)), we can follow Walton (ii-iv) in considering whether:

1. the work perceived in category *C* is more interesting, pleasing, worth experiencing than it is perceived in alternative ways (aesthetic value of the work is maximised),
2. the artist intended or expected the work to be perceived in category *C*, and
3. the category is well established in and recognised by the society in which the work was produced.[22]

To determine the answers to points 2 and 3, we can explore the historical and social context of the work's production. The relevant category for the viewer can be established by identifying the category in which the work is most satisfying and imbued with the most significance (point 1 above). With respect to the artist's intention, if the artist produced diaries and writing, or if records of their interviews exist, we can examine them. Fortunately, Rothko did record his intentions in this way which various curators have interpreted. According to explanations provided in the exhibition context of MOMA, Rothko's explanation of intent with respect to the subject matter of this work was to convey 'the principle and passion of organisms' while the forms themselves featured in the work did not correspond directly with any actual experience or object.[23] Rothko is said to have looked inward to his own unconscious mind for inspiration and material for his work.[24] Given the deviations from Surrealism noted above, we could argue that he was attempting to produce a new kind of art, different from Surrealism although acknowledging such influences. The new category, however, had yet to be established at the time of the work's creation.[25] This interpretation is supported by a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* on 7 June 1943, in which Rothko and fellow painter Adolph Gottlieb, with input from painter Barnett Newman, presented the painters'

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[22] *CA*, p. 366. In the early days of a new movement there may be a divergence between an artist's intentions and recognised categories. In such cases and where artistic intentions are unknown, the other conditions (standard features, most interesting, and established / recognised within the society of the work's production) will serve as default assessment criteria. Walton expected that either point 2 or 3 above (the historical conditions) would be relevant in most cases (*CA*, p. 361).

[23] MOMA, New York, wall label sighted February 2013.

[24] See MOMA, <www.moma.org/collection>, accessed 20 March 2013. Curator Ann Temkin indicates on the museum's website that Rothko, 'like other Abstract Expressionists seeking to create a new type of art', may have included 'birth, fertility and generation symbolism' in the work.

[25] See Levinson, Jerrold, *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1996, p. 245, for a discussion of the difficulty of using style as an artistic property, particularly in the case of an emerging new style or genre category.

response to a critic who had, they felt, misunderstood their work exhibited at the Federation Show group exhibition in New York. They referred to the archaic symbols and poetic expression of their works, stating, 'No possible set of notes can explain our paintings. Their explanations must come out of a consummated experience between picture and onlooker'.[26] They continued by listing their artistic beliefs including their wish to 'reassert the picture plane', advocating the use of flat forms which 'destroy illusion and reveal truth', and claiming a spiritual kinship with primitive and archaic art.[27] I will return to this artists' statement again below after briefly examining Walton's next guideline but we can recognise in it a precursor to the aims of Abstract Expressionism.

To confirm this categorisation, and attempt to name the possible new category, I turn now to Walton's criterion (iv) of how the artist's contemporaries may have viewed the work and how it may have been recognised in the art world in which it was produced. In determining how the categories of Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism were then positioned, we may look to past exhibition history and published reviews of the period. Rothko's *Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea* was included in his first solo exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's *Art of This Century Gallery* in New York in January 1945 which featured fifteen of the artist's myth-based works and it was purchased by Peggy Guggenheim. A 1945 review by critic Jon Stroup said of the work, 'It conjures up for us an image of heroic grandeur and, at the same time, of lugubriousness, similar to that of the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon executing the quadrille. Paradoxically and typically, for Rothko's art permits both.'[28] This comic/tragic juxtaposition in a work will be seen again in Chapter Six in the case study of Australian artist Albert Tucker. Stroup's review suggests something different from a Surrealistic categorisation of the work and acknowledges the 'Modern Man' trope of the new art of the day, discussed further below.

Works by Rothko were included in a 1945 exhibition, *A Problem for Critics*, at Howard Putzel's *67 Gallery* in New York in May-June 1945 along with works by American painters William Baziotes, Hans Hofmann (b. Germany, arr. New York 1936), Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock and Clyfford Still and works by European artists including Hans Arp, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and André Masson.[29] Putzel, an art writer, advisor, and dealer, proposed that a new school of art combining elements of Surrealism and abstraction was being formed in New York, drawing on

[26] *New York Times*, 'Letter to the Art Editor', 7 June 1943, in Gayford, Martin, and Wright, Karen, *The Grove Book of Art Writing*, Grove Press, New York, 1998, pp. 530-532.
[27] Idem.
[28] Stroup, Jon, '. . . In Lyricism', in *Town and Country*, January 1945, p. 48, cited in Leja, Michael, *Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s,* Yale University Press, New Haven, CONN, and London, 1993, p. 111.
[29] Balken, Debra Bricker, *Abstract Expressionism*, Tate, London, 2005, p. 8. See Leja, 1993, pp. 24-27.

'totemic, early Mediterranean, and other archaic images.'[30] Putzel termed the new category, 'new metamorphism', a term which appears apt when considering Rothko's *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*. Critic Clement Greenberg later suggested the term 'Surrealistic biomorphism' might be more appropriate.[31] Robert Coates, writing in the *New Yorker,* indicated that the new category was a 'synthesis of aspects of abstraction, Surrealism and expressionism.'[32] Later the term 'Abstract Expressionism' came to be used for the new category and its debt to Surrealism was acknowledged. The feeling and rhetoric of nationalism that became associated with the new movement began to downplay any acknowledgement of European sources as its origins and the category was for a time called 'American-type painting' by Greenberg.[33]

Based on this brief survey of the categories established at the time and the society in which the work was produced, it is easy to understand why there may have been some confusion initially in classifying the work as either Surrealist or nominating an appropriate name for the emerging tendency that later became known as Abstract Expressionism. While the latter term was coined by New York art critic Robert Coates in 1946, it was still not in common usage in 1947 when a number of the artists later caught under this category showed their work in an exhibition called *The Ideographic Picture*, which played down any relation to European tendencies use of the term 'Expressionism' might invoke.[34] The primary difficulty in categorising Rothko's *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea* at the time was its transitional nature as reviewers developed a new language to describe the emerging style of the New York School painters.[35] Of those categories available at the time, Greenberg's term 'Surrealist biomorphism' was perhaps most apt. I will return to this dilemma of categorisation at times of transition in my discussion of the role of art

[30] Balken, 2005, p. 8.
[31] Ibid, p. 9.
[32] Leja, 1993, p. 32. See Balken, 2005, p. 7. Coates coined the term in March 1946 in a review of Hans Hofmann's work shown at the Mortimer Brandt Gallery in New York. See n. 34.
[33] For a discussion of American national identity and the use of art to promote Western ideals during the Cold War see Meecham, Pam, and Sheldon, Julie, *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, 2005, pp. 190-192. See Gibson, Ann Eden, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CONN, and London, 1997, for an in-depth analysis.
[34] Balken, 2005, p. 14. Alfred H. Barr Jr. claimed to have used the term 'Abstract Expressionism' with respect to the work of Wassily Kandinsky as early as 1929; however, by 1958-1959 as American Abstract Expressionism was presented in a touring exhibition *The New American Painting*, he retracted that claim and cited the artists' rejection of any association with Kandinsky (Balken, 2005, pp. 33, 52).
[35] The term 'New York School', first used by artist Robert Motherwell in a 1949 lecture on modernism, came to be used in the late 1940s to describe the group of artists who were interchangeably known as Abstract Expressionists. See Balken, 2005, pp. 26-27. The term is sometimes used to describe the second generation of Abstract Expressionists. Art critic Harold Rosenberg who coined the term 'Action Painting' was reticent in labelling the new movement a school, nor did he like the term 'Abstract Expressionism', focusing rather on the process of painting. He did not consider the group of painters sufficiently cohesive as a group to warrant the term 'school'.

criticism in the development of art historical discourse in Chapter Five and in the artist chapters which follow. Categorisations for abstract art will be explored in Chapter Four.

Let us turn again to the role of artistic intention which I touched on briefly above. The challenge in naming this emerging type or category of art as represented by Rothko's *Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea* was, in part, due to the conscious resistance by artists of the period to associating their work with a given tendency in order to maintain their individuality.[36] Rothko himself rejected the critics' references to metamorphism and, in the letter to the editor of the *New York Times* mentioned above, explained that artists 'are in a sense mythmakers… [artists have] no prejudices for or against reality', and rather, he considered such works the 'pictorial equivalent for man's new knowledge and consciousness of his more complex inner self'.[37] Rothko's comment is reflective of the 'Modern Man' trope which originated in American literature of the 1920s in reaction to societal changes and was again highlighted in the 1940s art and literary circles.[38] Modern Man thinking expressed an interest in anthropology and primitive art and the ability to communicate through art using a timeless language without a semiotic basis.[39] The idea of artists as myth-makers, popular with the American Abstract Expressionists, resonated with ideas based on Jungian psychology and replaced, for them, the role of Freudian psychology drawn upon by Surrealists such as Salvador Dali. The debate of the day concerning abstraction versus realism will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four. Rothko further indicated that any resemblance between symbols used by the group of artists making this new art and archaic forms were not 'consciously derived' but occurred 'because we are concerned with similar states of consciousness and relationship to the world'.[40] There was no intention that realism be equated with resemblance; rather the artist was concerned with expressing an inner realism. In this case, referring to the artist's writings of the day appears to reject Surrealist biomorphism as the active

[36] Critic and painter Barnett Newman, in 1946 noted primitive art is often abstract in appearance. He posited that the new American painting drew as a source on the same mythological subject matter as the South Sea artists then exhibited at MOMA. He claimed the new American abstraction was closer to South Sea art than it was to Surrealism and could be 'discussed only in metaphysical terms.' See Golding, John, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000, pp.187 and 194.
[37] Rothko letter to editor, *New York Times*, 8 July 1945, Sec. 2, p. 2, in Leja, 1993, p. 26.
[38] See Golding, 2000, p. 114.
[39] See Leja, 1993, pp. 49-120 for a detailed discussion. Semiotics is the study or science of signs based on the work of philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce and linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and advanced by philosophers Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco and Julia Kristeva among others. See Cazeaux, Clive, *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, p. 730. See Fuery, Patrick and Mansfield, Nick, *Cultural Studies and Critical Theory*, Oxford University Press, [1997] 2000, pp. 47-55. While meaning may be made from signs through denotation and connotation, artists like Tucker have employed symbols in an evocative way without the intention to signify a particular meaning that can be 'decoded' or read as a 'text' by the viewer or critic.
[40] Idem.

category but does not preclude gestural abstraction or the 'New American Painting' style, later known as Abstract Expressionism.[41]

Up to this point, we have determined that Rothko's *Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea* may be a member of a new stylistic tendency which draws on aspects of Surrealism. To arrive at this understanding, the viewer has identified the work as displaying a resemblance to examples of Surrealist works whose perceived features include the non-aesthetic properties of biomorphic figuration, shallow space with juxtaposed markings; and expressive, lyrical aesthetic properties configured into a cohesive and pleasing whole. The viewer would recognise this category as apt if they have previously been exposed to Surrealist works, and internalised the category. This is then triggered by viewing other relevant works. Additional contextual information in the form of the artist's statements of intention and critical reviews has assisted in confirming the category.

Implicit in Walton's account is the premise that, the pleasurable experience the viewer derives from engaging with the contextual properties of the work provides the artistic value of the painting.[42] Alternatively, a work might convey an idea or present a new and interesting stylistic approach to evoke such a response. As detailed on page 15 above, if construed as a Surrealist work, this work would be viewed in the context of other Surrealist works of the period and its features found to be standard in some ways as indicated above. The work does present a coherent unity on this basis. Its variable features which contribute to the work's expressive ability or mood, including its lyrical, poetic brushwork, abstracted forms and neutral background colouration together with its allusive title (to a psychological state), also suggest another category could be possible. While at this time Rothko was exhibiting with the artists who later became known as the Abstract Expressionists, galleries continued to show his earlier Surrealist inspired works, categorised as Surrealist, contemporaneously. The critical reviews of this period together with the artist's stated intentions, however, indicate that something different was beginning to manifest in his work. Viewing the work as an early example of a new tendency adds to its inherent interest from the standpoint of the viewer engaging with it due to the novelty value.[43]

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[41] Further, the term coined by Greenberg, 'Surrealist biomorphism' did not stick and is therefore not the appropriate category.

[42] See Budd, Malcolm, 'Artistic Value', in Lamarque and Olsen, 2004, pp. 262-273, for a discussion of the aim of evaluating art as art. For Budd, art criticism tries to enforce agreement as to the description of the work under which the work can be appreciated. The interpretation arising from criticism is intended to establish a work's artistic value by drawing attention to its aesthetic and non-aesthetic features upon which its value depends (p. 270).

[43] For an example of the emergence of a new literary sub-genre, see Friend, Stacie, 'Fiction as a Genre', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, CXII (2), 2012, pp. 179-206.

Walton's classification schema, however, is compatible with understanding the significance of a work with respect to the artist's total production; that is, looking at a work in light of later work by the same artist. The work may be typical of a signature style for the artist or simply a standalone experimental work which was an anomaly within the artist's *oeuvre*. Walton does not suggest how to categorise the artist's body of work relative to his mature style on the basis of which we could perceive this work as representative of it or not. While Walton's approach to categorisation requires only that the viewer have an *idea* of a category or style through knowledge of standard features for that category, without needing to know all members of the category, his approach does not take into account other ways in which membership in a category might be ascertained and hence, other ways in which the work might be aesthetically relevant. Relative significance, explained further below, is a key consideration in the analysis in this thesis which we will see examines the gestural abstract works of Albert Tucker over a period of time and seeks to understand why these particular works did not receive adequate critical attention. To factor this aspect into my approach, I turn to philosopher Brian Laetz for consideration of the modes of categorical aesthetic relevance before finalising my analysis of the Rothko example.

1.3 Confirming role of active reception

In his essay, 'Categories of Art: A Critical Commentary' (2010), Laetz examines Walton's account of categories of art and proposes additional criteria to aid in understanding the role that categorisation plays in the perception of what we take to be the artwork.[44] Walton implies there is an aesthetic character and it is to be discovered in a work, whereas Laetz implies that it is in part created in reception. For Laetz, the match between artist intention and reception is more unstable or fluid. Laetz seems to imply that Walton overstates the notion of a true evaluation and the suggestion is that this was because of his efforts to avoid relativism. However, Laetz argues that it is quite compatible with Walton's theory to recognise that there is more than one characterisation but that there is a basis for choosing between characterisations based on Walton's four conditions including the artist's *oeuvre*. By this Laetz does not mean 'anything goes' but rather that configuring the work in an appropriate way is not a passive process. This is arguably what Walton meant. However, as Laetz points out, there are a range of interpretations of Walton, some of which miss this crucial point.

[44] Laetz, Brian, 'Kendall Walton's 'Categories of Art': A Critical Commentary', in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2010, pp. 287-306.

Laetz's addition of privileged category and comparative aesthetic relevance

Laetz finds Walton's view of categories and the ways in which membership in a category might be aesthetically relevant to be overly restrictive for the purposes of art historical interpretation of artworks. While Walton acknowledges artistic intention and includes it in his tests for determining which is the correct category within which to position the work for aesthetic appreciation, Laetz asserts Walton does not go far enough in considering the various purposes that an artwork may seek to fulfil.[45] For Laetz the potential *purpose* of an artwork is relevant with respect to its classification. Recall, Walton limits his terms of appreciation to 'pleasure' and 'significance'. This has led to objections regarding the various bases to possible appreciation of an artwork as if Walton meant 'pleasure' in a superficial way. For example, that our pleasure might be based on the insight or interest invoked is completely compatible with Walton on this point. Nonetheless, Laetz's introduction of the purpose of the artwork when discussing artistic intention is relevant to this thesis.[46] A work in a given category may have a purpose or be 'comparatively relevant' in relation to other works in the artist's *oeuvre* and this forms the basis of one's perception of the work.[47]

Philosopher Daniel Kaufman's account of the purposes of art is applicable here. Laetz draws on the work of Kaufman with respect to the kinds of purposes that are relevant for art critical evaluation of artworks in their capacity as cultural artifacts.[48] With respect to Abstract Expressionist works, Kaufman notes,

> …Art had become self-reflexive, and the artistic interests of this period reflected a deeper cultural interest in art-in-itself, in the very materials and processes of painting whether the inherent two-dimensionality (the flatness) of the picture plane, the gestural nature of the painting-act, or the inherent textural qualities of the paint.[49]

[45] While Walton considers artists' intentions among relevant historical considerations, in his account such intention may not necessarily be reflected in the aesthetic properties of a work (*CA*, p. 364). See Abell, Catharine, 'Genre, Interpretation and Evaluation', in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, CXV (1 pt.1), 2015, pp. 25-40, for a discussion of how genres may be distinguished as categories according to the purposes the works within those genres are intended to serve. Abell is concerned with general accounts of genre and genre membership. See Brown, Neil C.M., 'Aesthetic Description and Realism in Art Education', in *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1989, pp. 212-224.

[46] Laetz argues that a work's aesthetic character would depend on how well the work realises its purpose. He calls this mode of categorical relevance 'teleological aesthetic relevance' (Laetz, 2010, p. 304). In this thesis I will refer to this mode simply as 'purpose'.

[47] Ibid., p. 305.

[48] Kaufman, Daniel A., 'Normative Criticism and the Objective Value of Artworks', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 60, No. 2, 2002, pp. 151-166.

[49] Ibid., p. 157.

Such artworks sought to bring the viewer's attention to those salient aspects and to the extent they did so in an aesthetically pleasing or interesting way, could be considered successful in realising their purpose. The difficulty, according to Kaufman, is that the concept of an artistic purpose itself is highly indexical.[50] By this he means that an artistic purpose is a form of cultural communication having no fixed content; rather the manner of the communication, through aesthetic means, is of interest.[51] As we will see in Chapter Four, in the case of abstract artworks such communication poses difficulty in reception for viewers not yet familiar with new tendencies that challenge previous categorical norms and ways of understanding. In Walton's terms, the contra-standard features present in such works are innovative in nature and may indicate a departure from an established tendency leading to a new category or extending a previous category by varying certain features of the category. This makes the work interesting to the viewer as novelty is part of appreciation.[52] This does not go far enough however, limiting aesthetic interest where purposes are concerned to novelty. Further, as Kaufman points out, artworks are of mixed quality; hence, the role of the critic becomes important in assisting the viewer in determining whether a work is in fact successful in achieving its purpose. Kaufman notes that critics make judgments of value or importance of works within particular stylistic tendencies based on 'the underlying interests and purpose responsible for those artworks'.[53] Artistic kinds or tendencies are based on such aesthetic and programmatic distinctions. I will explore the role of critics in interpreting and evaluating artworks further in Chapter Four in relation to the development of art historical discourse pertaining to gestural abstraction. As we will see in Chapters Four and Five with respect to the 'anti-aesthetic' of the postwar period, particularly in the category of *matière* painting, in which coarse materials may be mixed together with paint and applied in thick impasto technique to the support, the presence of negative aesthetic qualities which evoke shock or revulsion in the viewer may be consistent with the desired artistic end and the work may therefore be considered successful.[54] Kaufman's discussion of purpose is therefore compatible with Walton but explains the finer detail of items to be brought into our analysis.

[50] Ibid., p. 158.
[51] *Cf.* Wiggins' (1978) concept of authentic effect in which the effect of the work is traceable to the identifiability of the artist's purpose. Wiggins, D., 'Reply to Richard Wollheim', *Ratio*, 1978, pp. 52-68, cited in Brown, 1989, p. 220. See Chapter 3.
[52] See Friend, 2012, p 16.
[53] Kaufman, 2002, p. 161.
[54] See Lamarque, Peter, *Work and Object: Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK and New York, 2010, pp. 227-228 for a discussion of the anti-aesthetic and non-aesthetic. See *AMB,* Ch. 8, 'Ugliness', pp. 162-176.

Laetz refutes common interpretations of Walton which treat his idea of correct category as implying that correct category allocation can be achieved by simply perceiving the distinguishing features of the work, as though our perception was not shaped by the categories to which we had been exposed previously. Laetz suggests that a way to avoid making such an interpretation is to construe the correct category as not simply the category to which a work belongs, but the one among the various categories a work belongs to, that actually helps to determine a work's aesthetic character. This construal includes a consideration of artistic intention or purpose which is not art-reflexive and is therefore broader than Walton's sense of artistic intention. Under Laetz's suggestion, Walton's guidelines would provide a means to determine the correct category between competing views on the subject. In framing his argument supporting this amendment to Walton, Laetz defines the 'privileged category' as that category in which the work is aesthetically active for the viewer. That is, among all the possible categories to which a work could belong, the privileged category is the one in which the work is perceived as being most meaningful. This suggests that the only difference between Walton and Laetz on this point is that Laetz uses 'meaningfulness' instead of 'pleasure' or 'significance' (Walton (ii) and (iv) in (1.2)). However, the amendment is to recognise the degree to which these categories depend on the context of the perceiver, so that even when attempting to perceive the work in light of the context of its creation, the context of reception will inadvertently be incorporated. It is important to note, however, that this is arguably Walton's point in including his fourth criterion which is that an artwork should be interpreted in accordance with what the artist's contemporaries would have perceived it to be. This may be a sub-category, such as a Cubist painting within the category of paintings.

Importantly for this thesis, Laetz's interpretation of Walton acknowledges that an artwork might be incorrectly categorised and, consequently, not deemed as significant as it might otherwise have been. In applying Walton's guidelines, interpreted in accordance with Laetz's construal, we can attempt to ensure all the available sub-categories are taken into consideration in our analysis. In this thesis I will argue that the respective gestural abstract works of the exemplar artists, discussed in the chapters to follow, were aesthetically active in certain sub-categories of gestural abstraction (Chapter 4) consistent with the circumstances of the work's production rather than the categories by which they were classified and consequently diminished by the Australian critics in the aftermath of the relevant period.

Returning to our example of the Rothko work above, recall that the category in which Rothko's work was aesthetically active at the time of production (Laetz's privileged category) was

either Surrealism or 'new American painting', whether in its Surrealist biomorphism, new metamorphism or abstract guises. The work is gestural and expressive in nature. Here I note that consideration has not been given to tendencies related to European gestural abstraction. There was a propensity to discount such linkages at the time, other than acknowledging the influences of Surrealism and Cubism. Later, even the influence of Surrealism on the Abstract Expressionists was played down by critic Clement Greenberg as we will see in Chapters Four and Five. With respect to this work, the affinity to the work of Miró or Klee has been noted above. The artist's writings and information provided in curatorial materials indicate Rothko was concerned with conveying a feeling and transporting the viewer into an unknown world; one which included a variety of archaic non-semiotic markings. The expressive aim or purpose of the work was to present a dream-like state. Retrospectively the term 'early Abstract Expressionism' could also be an appropriate categorisation. Due to the transitional nature of the work, which manifests a number of perceptual properties of Surrealism, the classification is still ambivalent at this stage.[55] Laetz's modes of aesthetic relevance may assist in resolving the categorisation.

With respect to comparative aesthetic relevance, let us consider the work within Rothko's *oeuvre*. Rothko painted in a Surrealist style in the early to mid-1940s and many of these were described as myth-based works. He gradually reduced the figurative elements in his work, paring back to colour alone with minimal allusion to any form whatsoever to convey sensation. Between 1945 and 1949 the biomorphic elements of Surrealism gave way to soft-edged smudgy shapes resembling stained patches. These transitional works are sometimes called 'multi-forms'. The way in which the ground and background are rendered in *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, in two rectangular horizontally placed blocks of colour became an enduring feature of Rothko's later colour band paintings with figurative lines and shapes removed. In his writings, he indicated he was 'interested only in expressing basic human emotions', rather than simply providing an exercise in experiencing colour relationships.[56] This purpose was common throughout all his stylistic periods. Rothko became known as an Abstract Expressionist through exhibition of his works with those of other members of the New York School and through critical review. It is this tendency with which he is most closely associated as an artist; hence, the subject work, while a

[55] Friend notes where classification remains ambiguous this may be due to standard features of more than one classification being apparent in the work and the author/maker's classification intention and contemporary practices of categorisation failing to place the work in one genre or another (Friend, 2012, p. 204).
[56] Holloway, Memory, 'Mark Rothko's Untitled (Red): Colour and the Experience of the Sublime', in *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, No. 23, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1982, p. 13.

precursor to his mature style, might well be cast as an 'early Abstract Expressionist' work.[57] In coming to an understanding of this work as an example of new American painting, the role of critics and dealers like Putzel was pivotal. In the absence of such discourse, the perceptual features of this work point also to a Surrealist categorisation, due to certain common standard features. Laetz's account has been useful in highlighting that how a work is perceived is in large part due to how it is classified, rather than classified by how it is perceived.

To understand the mechanics of how recasting our categorisation of a work changes the way we perceptually characterise or configure the work and hence our appreciation of it, I turn now to the work of philosopher Philip Pettit on aesthetic characterisation and discernible variation.[58] In addition, Pettit cites philosopher Roger Scruton's examples of aesthetic predicates which I examine in the next chapter to inform discussion later in this thesis with respect to art critical discourse (Chapter 5) and assist in laying the groundwork for reconfiguring the artworks in Chapters Six and Seven.[59]

[57] Levinson makes a strong case for showing that 'later works in an artist's oeuvre may augment or affect the meaning of earlier ones … an object of interpretation (an early work) can change its nature in the light of later interpretation, it may be viewed as 'incomplete' and seemingly 'indeterminate' in its original form.' Levinson, 1990, p. 208.

[58] See Pettit, Philip, 'The possibility of aesthetic realism', in Schaper, Eva, ed., *Pleasure, preference and value: Studies in philosophical aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London, New York, 1983, pp. 16-38.

[59] Pettit's essay is primarily concerned with examining the broader issue of aesthetic realism and in this context Scruton is included as an example of an 'affective' theorist, one who contends that aesthetic properties can only be discerned by a viewer with direct non-cognitive experience of the work or object, and cannot be conveyed by the testimony of another. For a discussion of the philosophical debate, see Budd, Malcolm, 'The Acquaintance Principle', in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2003, pp. 386-392. Budd concludes, 'Although aesthetic judgments to not carry appreciation with them, judgments of aesthetic properties are as transmissible from one person to another as are other kinds of judgments' (p. 392).

Chapter Two: The Aesthetic Characterisation of Art Works

In this chapter I continue to build an analytical framework for positioning art works for optimal appreciation and evaluation of their significance. I examine how recasting our categorisation of a work changes the way we perceptually characterise or configure it and, hence, our appreciation of it. To clarify Walton, I draw on the theories of philosophers Philip Pettit and Arthur C. Danto on aesthetic characterisation, discernible variations (or reference classes for a work) and the impact of changes in the art world. Pettit emphasises the network dependency of an aesthetic characterisation. That is, every property or feature depends on the system of properties or features within which it is perceived. A change in any one feature will result in the property being perceived differently. Pettit explores this through the constraints of holism and humanism. Danto provides a judicious and balanced consideration of the way background knowledge influences what we perceive in earlier periods. The more predicates (terms) we have available to perceive in a work, the more we actually perceive. Danto continues Pettit's emphasis on the role of the network but presents the idea in terms of a matrix of styles of art rather than more narrowly conceived aesthetic predicates as features or properties. I complete my discussion of Rothko's work *Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea* and illustrate the application of the framework up to this point by way of an analysis of French artist Jean Fautrier's work, *Swirls*, 1958.

2.1 Pettit and the possibility of discernible variation

In his essay, 'The Possibility of Aesthetic Realism' (1983), Pettit observes that an artwork may have many aesthetic properties and he argues that it exists in a multi-dimensional aesthetic space.[60] An artwork displays its aesthetic character or properties when its perceived properties enable it to be assigned to an appropriate reference class. That is, the work may belong simultaneously to a number of different categories or sub-categories. Pettit can be understood to be in agreement with Walton when he argues that an artwork may be seen to belong to a category depending upon which of its properties are brought into view. Each work to which an aesthetic characterisation is ascribed is viewed against the background of a class of discernible variations which are a reference class for that work. In effect, how we view a work depends on what we compare it with.[61] Pettit provides a more detailed account than Walton on how a characterisation (or aesthetically active category in Laetz's terms) comes into view in practice. Pettit emphasises

[60] Pettit, 1983, pp. 16-38.

[61] This is more than a simple juxtaposition of a work with other artworks, as might occur in a thematically curated exhibition. This process refers to a mental positioning based on the *habitus* of the viewer as I will define and discuss in Chapter 3.

the degree to which each aesthetic characterisation relies on the network of characterisations within which and by which it is defined.

Initial aesthetic characterisations are generally assumed to be 'primitive' or descriptive in nature. The way a picture is perceived by a viewer relies on a process of putting the work through a series of imaginative positionings. This process relies on the viewer identifying appropriate reference classes by perceiving the work while being aware of other works of the type encountered (through prior exposure). The viewer imagines various possible positions (or categorisations) and thereby comes to apprehend the work objectively. 'Rectified' aesthetic characterisations, as defined by Pettit, begin with a reference to a primitive characterisation in which an aspect of the object causes the viewer to position it in a preliminary categorisation, and then draw on relevant background information to confirm the perceived category. Brown (1989) asserts that rectification offers a legitimacy to the characterisation which might otherwise simply be a matter of aspectival seeing. It is a check on or confirmation of the categorisation.[62] McMahon (2007) posits that once the viewer sees a particular aspect of the work, that aspect may dominate perception of it.[63] Once this happens additional background information may be required if the object is to be seen under any other aspect. Therefore, what we actually perceive as the salient features of a work and hence whether it is unified or not, depends on contextual features. 'Appreciation of a work is not a matter of knowing what its aesthetic properties are, but of perceiving them as realised in the work.'[64]

For Pettit, if a work is to be correctly positioned and achieve coherence both overall and in its parts, two constraints which operate together must be observed. He calls these constraints the holistic constraint and the humanistic constraint respectively. The holistic constraint implies that how we position a work for one kind of aesthetic property will impact on the way we view another. Certain positionings (categorisations or reference classes) may be incorrect for viewing particular aesthetic properties. Lopes (2009) points to the way in which different features come into view in the case of Mondrian's famous painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (fig. 2.1), depending upon whether it is viewed as a member of the reference class 'abstract paintings' or

[62] *AMB*, p. 43. See Brown, 1989, pp. 212-224. Brown demonstrates that successful rectification means that assertions about the work's aesthetic properties can be accepted without the reader's / viewer's first-hand perceptual experience of the work itself (p. 221).
[63] See *AMB*, pp. 44-47 and p. 203, n. 3-15 for a discussion of aspect and the derivations of the term.
[64] Budd, 2003, p. 392.

that of 'Mondrian paintings'.[65] As an abstract painting it is seen as spare, rigid or controlled; however, when compared to other paintings in Mondrian's *oeuvre*, it may appear joyous, full of movement, or exuberant.[66] This shift in the attributed aesthetic characterisation is achieved simply through a switch of relative reference class in which the work is being considered. This directs the viewer's attention to different salient perceptual qualities of the work against other works in each reference class in which the work is considered for appreciation. The comparison is made through the process of imaginative positioning among the class of relevant contrasts (discernible variations) to which the viewer refers, drawing on his or her internalised configurations learned over time through experiencing other artworks under particular descriptions of style or genre.[67]

The second constraint is the humanistic constraint. Under the humanistic constraint the work is considered in the context of the milieu of conception and reception. The artist and his or her intended audience share a common knowledge in the sense that the artist anticipates a response from the viewer. The work is seen as 'something intelligible that a human being should have produced' rather than inferring the artist's motives.[68] This is a broad view of artistic intention. Brown notes that positioning can also be seen as mediating meaning as a result of the way the work is perceived against present and past examples, according to the conventions of representation.[69] In considering the artist's milieu, and having regard to what the artist may have intended, we attempt to construe the possible beliefs or desires the artist acted upon in producing the work. In so doing, Pettit cautions that we must avoid ascribing 'beliefs or desires which are unintelligible or which it is unintelligible that the painter, granted his milieu, should have had or should have acted upon.'[70] This is an important consideration for this study given that we are looking back to the period of production from our 'post-postmodernist' vantage point. Appropriate positioning is therefore rectified to the extent possible by seeking appropriate background information. Rectified characterisation importantly takes into account what the artist *could* have meant.

Pettit's account highlights the importance of the viewer's ability to reference a sufficient number of other works among possible reference classes to facilitate the imaginative positioning of the work, and the way in which a work may become fixed within an appropriate system of

[65] Lopes, Dominic McIver, *A Philosophy of Computer Art*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2009, p. 17, in Friend, 2012, pp. 197-198.
[66] Idem.
[67] *AMB*, p. 43.
[68] Pettit, 1983, p. 35.
[69] Brown, 1989, p. 222.
[70] Pettit, 1983, p. 36.

reference as a result of association with a particular artistic milieu.[71] With changes in the membership of the reference class, as new members are added, the positioning changes, and as the positioning changes, the property in question may come into, or go out of view.[72] Later in this thesis I will explore the way in which certain categorisations of gestural abstract works of the exemplar artist may have become 'fixed' art historically in categories other than those optimal for our appreciation of them as a result of critical review, and curatorial or art historical accounts. I will argue that these accounts initially placed them in categories that were inappropriate and which influenced their subsequent presentation to the detriment of the works' significance.[73] Following Pettit, this may have occurred due to there being an insufficient number of works in the new category in Australia with which local critics in the field of reception could compare the subject work. Furthermore, critics may have lacked sufficient knowledge regarding the milieu of production. Existing works in the Australian field of reception may have shared some features with these new works which led critics to perceive them under inappropriate categories. The crucial evidence for this is in the relevant field of production, a notion to which I return in Chapter Three.

With reference to Rothko's *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*, 1944 (Chapter 1), a reading of this work as a Surrealist painting closer to the time of production did not result in the artist being labelled a Surrealist painter either at the time or subsequently. Rather, from a time in relatively close proximity to its production, the artist became known as an Abstract Expressionist and this label tended to survive, providing the categorical reference through which to appreciate most of his *oeuvre*. This is a contrast to the experience of Australian artist Albert Tucker discussed in Chapters Six through Eight. As discussed in Chapter One (I.2), the reasons for the association of Rothko with a newly emerging category were in no small part due to the efforts of gallerists and critics. They took an interest in promoting the newly emerging tendency, and presented and commented on Rothko's work alongside that of other emerging artists linked to that tendency, however loosely, at the time and shortly after production of this work. In the Australian case, the critics for the most part seemed intent on consolidating Australian expressions of earlier modernist tendencies such as Expressionism and Surrealism.

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[71] Pettit, 1983, p. 32.
[72] Idem.
[73] Walton's discussion of the causes of our perceiving works of art in certain categories also highlights that 'what we have heard critics and others say about works we have experienced, how they have categorized them, and what resemblances they have pointed out to us', is a factor in our apprehension of a work. *CA*, p. 341. The way we are introduced to the work in question through exhibition with other works will influence our decision on category. *CA*, p. 342.

Before leaving Pettit to return later, I note his reference to philosopher Roger Scruton's (1982) examples of aesthetic characterisations of art, both pictorial and non-pictorial.[74] While a debate on the philosophy of aesthetic realism is beyond the scope of this thesis, the relevant aspect of Pettit's discussion of terms used to describe works of art is the contrast between terms whose primary use, according to Scruton, is aesthetic judgment (such terms or 'predicates' as 'beautiful', 'elegant', 'graceful', 'lovely', and the like) and those describing the technical or formal properties of the art work (such as 'balanced', 'unified', 'expressive', or 'dynamic').[75] Other predicates often used are those which describe mental and emotional states (such as 'sad', 'joyful', or 'agitated'). Predicates such as beautiful, ugly or lovely are sometimes said to be solely evaluative in nature while the technical terms are descriptive of the work. Some words used as predicates such as 'garish', 'hideous', 'graceful', or 'elegant' may have an 'evaluation-added' quality. While such a classification of predicates is posited by Scruton and by P.F. Strawson (1966), Frank Sibley (1974) cautions against attempting to say that certain criteria are evaluative versus descriptive.[76] Sibley finds this distinction murky and ambiguous and for the purposes of this study such a distinction will not be made. Rather, a predicate is defined as aesthetic according to whether it contributes to an aesthetic characterisation, understood in terms of the variables and categories derived from Walton's, Laetz's and, as we will see, Pettit's aesthetic theory. In Chapters Five through Seven, I will explore the way in which art criticism and curatorial placement have employed aesthetic characterisations in the configuring of art works. Some critics consider themselves arbiters of taste, while others proffer an explication of the formal properties of the art works to assist viewers to attend to the relevant characteristics. It is the latter approach with which we are concerned. With respect to the judgmental variety of predicates, qualities of beauty valued in classical art were rejected in the anti-aesthetic of much immediate postwar art and some predicates used to describe psychological states were often attributed to the expressive qualities of art works. At times primitive descriptions of what works represent were put forward as criticism. In my analysis I will be focusing on predicates relevant to aesthetic characterisation (as per Walton, Laetz and Pettit) rather than distinguishing between evaluative and technical terms.

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[74] Pettit, 1983, p. 19. See Scruton, Roger, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of the Mind*, Routledge, London, [1981] 1982, p. 38. See also *CA*, pp. 335-336 wherein Walton cites Sibley as providing examples of aesthetic and non-aesthetic terms and states, 'Aesthetic properties are features or characteristics of works of art just as much as non-aesthetic ones are. They are in the works, to be seen, heard, or otherwise perceived there.' (CA, p. 336).

[75] On aesthetic realism, see Alcaraz León, Maria José, 'The Rational Justification of Aesthetic Judgments', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 2008, pp. 291-300. Following Pettit, acquaintance is necessary but not sufficient to perceive the artwork under its correct aesthetic category ((Pettit, 1983, pp.26-27) in Alcaraz León, 2008, p. 292). This points to the need for the critic to guide the viewer toward perceiving the relevant properties of the work or seeing the relevant aspect even where the viewer may have experienced the actual work (see Chapter 5).

[76] Sibley, Frank, 'Particularity, Art and Evaluation', in Lamarque and Olsen, 2004, pp. 243-252 (esp. p. 245). (Reprinted from *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. Vol. 48, 1974, pp. 1-21). See Strawson, P.F., 'Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art', in Ibid., pp. 237-242.

Referring to our Rothko example introduced in Chapter One, the artist's explanation of intent with respect to the subject matter was to convey 'the principle and passion of organisms'.[77] The presentation is inventive and displays qualities alluding to an imaginary landscape or seascape rendered in a dreamlike manner. In this case the artist's utterance is useful in communicating to a viewer the intended aesthetic properties of the work which are in fact realised in its execution.

As discussed in section 1.2 of Chapter One, this Rothko work may have originally been cast in a number of categories. The possibilities included Surrealism, 'new American painting', Cubist derived abstraction, and European abstraction. Exhibitions of the day included both Surrealist and abstract art displayed together and, in some cases, both European and American artists were included. The cross-overs between figurative and totally abstract works were often not clear (see Chapter 4) nor were demarcations between tendencies during times of transition to new styles.[78] As will be seen in the artist chapters to follow, the categorisation of works as Surrealistic tended to stick longer in Australia where works were less likely to move category due to fewer examples of alternative categories being available at an appropriate time to facilitate the classification process and learning on the part of viewers and critics alike. In the absence of such other works for comparison, different coordinates did not come into view to facilitate reconfiguration within a more appropriate category. Neither did Australian critics seem motivated or confident in identifying new artistic tendencies but rather tended to categorise works into the most visible and familiar international tendencies.

To position the Rothko example above, we may view it in relation to Paul Klee's mature work. Viewed in this reference class, we may see the lyrical curved markings across the upper coordinates of the picture plane which are executed with the same degree of control and attention as the rest of the work, and notice the overall effect of the markings across the canvas. In contrast, if we then imaginatively position the work in relation to Salvador Dali's Surrealist works, we may focus on the two twirling figures with their bases on the lower foreground of the picture space and the depth of the image within the dreamspace demarcated by the horizon line, and we

[77] See Chapter 1, p. 17, n.23 and n.24.
[78] See Selz, Peter, 'Surrealism and the Chicago Imagists of the 1950s: A Comparison and Contrast', in *Art Journal*, Vol. 45, Issue. 4, 1985, pp. 303-306. Some Surrealists like Masson came close to total abstraction. The Chicago imagists shared the Surrealist interest in the tribal and primitive, and the psychological. The New York artists drew on psychic automatism in their Action Painting. See Friend, 2012, pp. 17-18, for a literary example of a hybrid category which may be classified as either fiction or non-fiction for different reasons leading to a difference in the way the work is read and appreciated.

may notice the swirling energy generated by the figures. In fact, when placed among examples of paranoiac Surrealist works characterised by deep space, mutated forms and odd juxtapositions, we may think this work looks a bit Surreal but may find the shallow space, colouring and lyricism an aberration. Repositioning the work with reference to one by American painter Mark Tobey, we may note the graffiti-like markings and archaeological symbolic elements of the composition and place the work within the new American painting category.

An apt aesthetic characterisation of a similar Rothko work, *Archaic Idol*, 1945 (fig. 2.2), based upon well informed positioning was provided by American art critic, writer, museum director and curator, and patron of the arts, James Thrall Soby in the MOMA, New York, publication *Contemporary Painters* published in 1948.[79] Soby's sensitive approach proposed 'tenable if untried juxtapositions and categories' and included some lesser known artists.[80] Deliberately avoiding simply following convenient terms he stated,

> No serious critic would deny the value of labels in studying modern art: the danger is that we shall come to trust too much in the limiting dogmas to which these labels are affixed. It seems to me that we pre-empt a function of history when we attempt to decide unreservedly what kinds of art are truly 'modern' and what are static or reactionary.[81]

Whether this was a jab at Greenberg or other critics we can only surmise. Rothko's *Archaic Idol* is very similar compositionally to our example, *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea*. In a chapter titled 'Some Younger American Painters', Rothko is positioned by Soby with Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974), known for his pictographs utilising symbolic forms reminiscent of primitive or ancient art, and Theodoros Stamos (1922-1997), known for organic abstraction. Rothko is described as being of a 'different temperament', belonging to the 'sensibility tradition' and his painting is said to be 'gracious, sensitive, and lyric'.[82] These three artists are said to be of 'roughly related tendency' or style and Surrealism, while continuing to make a contribution to the 'imaginative faculties', is said to be dying out as a style in American painting.[83] Rothko is not grouped with the painters indebted to Surrealism in this text. Thus, while Soby does not invoke the Abstract Expressionist label, he does provide an aesthetic characterisation of the work within its subset of the new American painting category sufficient to convey to the reader the salient properties of the work. This example demonstrates that although a category had not been formally agreed upon, Rothko was

[79] Soby, James Thrall, *Contemporary Painters*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1948.
[80] Ibid., pp. 77-79.
[81] Ibid. p. 7.
[82] Ibid. p. 79.
[83] Idem.

considered in a gestural (lyrical) abstract category drawing on archaic symbolism and related to organic abstraction (the characterisation of early Abstract Expressionism as noted in Chapter 1, pages 17-18). Rothko's *Archaic Idol* is today classified as Abstract Expressionist by MOMA.

Pettit looks to the addition of contextual information to determine a work's most appropriate characterisation for aesthetic appreciation. The use of background knowledge as well as visual information is involved in a process of rectification which for Pettit involves 'placement of properties into their normalised reference class.'[84] Here I note that while we seek background information to confirm what we see 'here and now' in observing a work, reliance on past information may not rectify or confirm the characterisation if there has been a change in the way we view properties. Pettit states, '… the realistic construal of rectified characterisations may be undermined by a non-realism in respect of the utterances, related to other minds and perhaps the distant past, which constitute relevant background information.'[85] Art which was novel and innovative in its day might seem to us staid and dull, as its forms became entrenched and established. For the purpose of this study, it is therefore important to also examine the previous utterances encapsulated in the background information in existence (originating from any of the agents in the fields of cultural production and reception I will discuss in Chapter 3). Following Pettit, in assessing such background information, we may seek to judge the accuracy of an artist's comments against what they could have meant or what is evidenced in their work relative to other work in their *oeuvre* and that of other artists of their time and previously. This study will specifically look at the previous characterisations and utterances about Tucker's work reflected in existing art historical materials to inform the analysis in Chapters Six and Seven.

Previous characterisations may also undermine 'rectified characterisations' which are based on a more rigorous examination of the context of production. I will examine this issue in respect of art historical or curatorial influence (whereby early mis-categorisations become perpetuated and the artists themselves may choose to 'go along' with the narrative or adjust to the apparent market or institutional construal) later in this thesis.[86] To further consider the dynamics of reception, that is, the way in which the entire evaluation system changes as new cases or tendencies are added, and aid in understanding the shift that may have occurred in our

[84] Pettit, 1983, p. 37. See Brown, 1989, p. 221.
[85] Pettit, 1983, p. 38.
[86] See Chapter 6 (6.3) for the example of Albert Tucker.

appreciation of some of the works produced by the artists in this study, I turn briefly to the work of Danto who will also lead us into an examination of art worlds in Chapter Three.[87]

2.2 Danto's style matrix

Danto's body of work pertaining to the philosophy of art spans several decades and accordingly some elements of his earlier theories were superseded by later work.[88] Danto's philosophy of art draws together many of the aspects of the accounts discussed here. Similar to Walton's theory, Danto's system is reliant on knowledge of critical vocabulary. The more knowledge the critic or viewer has of genres or art historical classifications and tendencies, the greater the range of predicates (which are based on styles) available to choose from in classifying a work. Like Pettit, Danto has proposed a system of aesthetic characterisations. He called it a 'style matrix' and conceived it in terms of predicates comprised of pairs of opposites.[89] Danto identifies representational expressionistic (as in Fauvism), representational nonexpressionistic (Ingres for example), nonrepresentational expressionistic (as in Abstract Expressionism) and nonrepresentational nonexpressionistic (as in hard edge abstraction) as potential predicates.[90] In Chapters Four and Five I will examine the categories active during the period of study which will feed into the analytical model to be used in the artist chapters to follow. Arguably Danto does not add anything new in substance to the accounts of Walton and Pettit but he does explain the implications of the contingency of aesthetic characterisations. Danto notes that stylistic predicates are not available contemporaneously but take time to form. These are applied retrospectively to be most apt and are related to art historical discourse, the subject of Chapter Five.

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[87] For the way in which the whole existing order shifts and the values of each work of art in relation to the whole are adjusted as new features and works gain significance, see also Eliot, T.S., 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in Lambropoulos, Vassilis and Miller, David Neal, *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: An Introductory Anthology*, SUNY Press, 1987, p. 146, quoted in Carroll, Noel, 'Danto, Style and Intention' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 53, No. 3 , 1995, p. 254. In effect, Danto's style matrix would grow as additional pairs of predicates are created when a new work of art is created that does not fit the existing order.

[88] See Alcaraz León, Maria José, *'La Teoria Del Arte de Arthur Danto: de los objetos indiscernibles a los significados encamados*', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Murcia, Spain, Department of Philosophy and Logic, 2006. (English trans. summary available at <http://www.tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/10823/AlcarazLeon11de11.pdf>, accessed 18 August 2015. See Carroll, 1995, pp. 251-257.

[89] See Danto, Arthur C., 'The Artworld', in Lamarque and Olsen, 2004, pp. 27-34 (esp. pp. 33-34). (Reprinted from *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, 1964, pp. 571-584.)
See ___, 'Narrative and Style', in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 49, No. 3, 1991, pp. 201-209. While aspects of Danto's style matrix have been superseded by his later writings and he did not develop the concept further, these broad brush characterisations were of the variety used by art critics of the period (see Chapters 3-7). *Cf.* Boardman (2015) provides a new interpretation of Danto's style matrix but defends a version of it other than Danto's own. While Boardman includes a distinction between representational and lyrical paintings, and attempts to provide an alternative more compatible with historicism, this does not offer any additional benefits to the framework developed in this thesis. Boardman, Frank, 'Back in Style: A New Interpretation of Danto's Style Matrix', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 73, No. 4, Fall 2015, pp. 441-448.

[90] See Danto, 1964, pp. 33-34.

Danto's construct of the philosophy of history as a 'narrative sentence' is useful to consider when categorising artworks of past periods.[91] Such a sentence is one that may be stated about a past event in light of what we know today; however, such information was unknown to contemporaries of the event. With respect to the work of a given artist, this means that the seeds of potential style may be sown early in the artist's career but may not become manifest until later within the artist's *oeuvre*. Critics at the time of the initial work may not have recognised the emergent style while hindsight permits later reviewers to better identify such qualities or features (consistent with Laetz's construal of comparative aesthetic relevance). These stylistic features may not be reflected in artistic intentions as the artist may have been unaware at the time of production of the developmental trajectory their work might take. The implication for the present study is that, when categorising works according to the features and qualities standard for particular categories, the exercise must be undertaken in two parts. Firstly, to some extent it must be done in retrospect, 'reading back' to that point in time (to understand what tools were available to critics of the day). Secondly, it must be done in light of how we characterise such features today to facilitate an understanding of how we have come to know these works as we do and how artists or their works may have previously been misclassified. As can be seen in the Rothko example above, critics of the day alluded to elements of abstraction, Surrealism and Expressionism and a combination of these in a given work which later became standard features for the category Abstract Expressionism. Had critics not yet been aware of this emerging tendency, and not actively assisted in its promotion, it is quite possible the label 'Surrealist' might have become and remained the official categorisation of the work. As such it would represent the last flickers of a dying style rather than the first intimation towards a new and exciting style.

Danto's explanation of how new types of artwork become accepted as new features become emphasised and significant, and the changing atmosphere of artistic theories and the history of painting, highlights the way tendencies move in and out of fashion and works may be reinterpreted through a perspective based on the current state of the art world. This is particularly relevant to this project. This ratifying power of art institutions is further considered in the sociological additions to the proposed analytical framework in Chapter Three. In relation to the work of the artists featured in this study, more relevant reference categories were available in Europe but not well known in Australia. Once they became well known in Australia it seems the prior inappropriate categorisation of the works had become so entrenched that they remained.

[91] This concept is introduced in Danto, 1991.

Unfortunately the perception of this work has never been updated according to the more appropriate categories, as this thesis will argue. In examining when an aesthetic judgment may be justified, philosopher Maria José Alcaraz León observes,

> …it must be noticed that a picture of aesthetic justification need not guarantee that a justified judgment is totally immune to possible new aesthetic descriptions that enrich an object's aesthetic description. As well as the fact that our sensory capacities may be more sensitive when trained and thus can provide us deeper access to aspects of the objects we experience, our aesthetic sensibility can also develop so that we can eventually aesthetically redescribe an object.[92]

With reference to the Rothko example, the ratifying power of key critics of the day and galleries such as the *Art of This Century Gallery*; the purchaser of the work, wealthy art patron and gallerist Peggy Guggenheim; critics such as Clement Greenberg; and MOMA, all contributed to Rothko's placement among the newly emerging Abstract Expressionist group of painters. Significantly, the influence of European tendencies was one which was played down in the quest to identify an emerging American style. In the case of this Rothko work, its categorisation within the newly emerging category of Abstract Expressionism, served to heighten its significance, and increase the appreciation of it, and the artist to the present day.

This initial example of categorising a work by an American artist, illustrates a number of difficulties which may arise when categorising a work produced during a transitional art historical period (as is the case for any avant-garde work). One of these, applicable to the period of study, is the apparent non-recognition of the influence of European stylistic tendencies in the face of strong nationalistic sentiments. Issues related to artistic intention may arise in cases of vagueness of an artist's stated intent, particularly when his or her mature style may not yet have fully developed or where a work is experimental in nature. Further, there are dangers in 'reading back' or attributing artistic intention to a work of a prior period after tendencies have fully emerged and played out historically, since the artist could not have been aware of future developments. Generally accepted art critical terminology, category names and classifications emerge through the discourse of the art world as I will explore in the next chapter.

The flexibility of adopting Walton's approach to categorisation (albeit tempered with perspectives provided by Laetz, Pettit and Danto) for the present study is that it accommodates a comprehensive set of features: artistic intention, contextualist readings, and formal aesthetic properties, compatible with interrogating the art historical approach to analysis I will discuss in

[92] Alcaraz León, 2008, p. 297.

Chapter Four. The role of art historical discourse as a vital element of the contextualisation necessary for category rectification is highlighted by the supporting work of Laetz, Pettit and Danto discussed above and will be examined in Chapter Five.

2.3 Illustrative Example and Conclusion

I will look next at a work by French artist Jean Fautrier (1898 - 1964), *Swirls*, 1958 (figs. 2.3 and 2.4), to illustrate the application of the model developed to this point for categorising an art work and appreciating its aesthetic qualities (following Walton with Laetz, Pettit, and Danto). To begin, I will examine the work's features beginning with its aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties. Materials are a key feature of this work produced by building up paper on canvas, coating it with powdered pigment and then varnishing. While the work is supported on canvas within a frame, unlike the flatness which is standard for a painting, its heavy impasto rendering gives it a sculptural quality which would normally be contra-standard for a painting. This gives it a bas-relief or object-like presence.

The work is heavily gestural with the mark of the artist clearly in evidence. Strokes appear as coloured patches applied with a swirling, ripple effect. A single dominant shape, roughly rectangular with rounded off corners, appears in the centre of the work, like a rocky island in the middle of the sea, a primitive protozoa or amoeba floating in plasma. The lyricism of the brushstrokes is offset to some extent by the weight of the materials which give the work a topographical effect. A limited colour palette of calm tonings of blue and green-blue, mixed alternately with white and black, unifies the work. The darker blue-black tones are applied to the central shape which rises above the surrounding lighter blue-green background. The rippling strokes provide a gentle rhythm, reminiscent of the sea. There is no sense of perspective although the work is suggestive of an aerial view.

To determine the appropriate category based on the standard and non-standard features identified (relative to a painting), and observing that the work is not depictive of a particular natural object but could be abstract allusive, (or, in Danto's terms could be considered expressive non-representational, non-figurative), there are a couple of possible categorisations.[93] Focusing on the work's brushwork and possible abstract allusive character echoed in its allusive title, the work might be considered as a *tachiste* or *informel* painting (4.5). Such works were characterised by

[93] While these categories or tendencies will be detailed in Chapter 4 (4.5), the present discussion will simply refer to them and refer the reader to the appropriate reference within this thesis.

sensuous paint, density of application, directness and, at times, vehemence of brushstrokes or slashing palette knife incisions, and could have been incepted through the Surrealist device of 'psychic automatism' said to draw on the unconscious emotions of the artist. The extreme thickness of the surface of the central form in this work with its skin-like effect and the heaviness of the work particularly apparent in side view (fig. 2.4) are contra-standard features for a *tachiste* painting, however, and a viewer experiencing it under this categorisation might find it disturbing or repellent. Alternatively, focusing on the topographical nature of the built up central form and its sculpted feel, which invokes a visceral reaction and haptic sensation for the viewer and presents a heaviness suggestive of an archaic *bas relief* or tablet, it could be perceived to strongly display characteristics of a *matière* painting or *haute pâte.*[94] As such it might be found interesting for its novelty value and for the sensual nature of its materials.

Matière works (matter or texture paintings) displayed effects linked to Baudelairean notions of decomposition or to Surrealist writer George Bataille's concept of the *informe*, including primitive, provocative or mucous and excremental effects. Given the nature of the latter qualities, Freudian interpretations of such works have often been invoked (Chapter 4). To determine which of the possible categories may be more appropriate, we can turn to the artist's intended category and the degree to which such a category was established in 1958 when the work was produced. If these categories were not well known at the time, it is possible that to some viewers of the day, not accustomed to viewing a painting rendered in such a built-up fashion, the work might be found ungainly, if not hideous if it were incorrectly perceived in another category or exhibited as such.

Fautrier exhibited in Paris in November 1951 in an exhibition titled '*Signifiants de l'informel*' at the Studio Facchetti, together with European artists Wols, Karl Hartung, Jean Dubuffet, Mathieu, Michaux, Riopelle and Serpan. Fautrier was also a sculptor. His earlier series of heavy impasto works, *Otages*, (*Hostages*), shown at the *Galerie Drouin* in Paris in 1945 expressed the horror associated with the plight of hostages massacred by the Nazis during the occupation of France. It was in this series that he introduced some of the techniques for which he became best known, including the use of rag papers on canvas, coated with coloured powder pigment and then varnished. He also exhibited in an exhibition titled 'White and Black' at *Galerie des Deux Iles* in July 1948 together with Hans Hartung, Jean Arp, Georges Matthieu, Francis Picabia, Wols; and at *Galerie Rive Dróit* in 1957 in an exhibition titled 'Fautrier: '*30 anneés de*

[94] The term *haute pâte* or 'high paste' refers to the thick impasto matière painting often incorporating sand or other materials mixed into the paint and sometimes likened to excrement – a technique also used by French artist Jean Dubuffet in his primitivist *art brut* or 'raw art'. See Chapter 4 (4.5).

figuration informel'. In the year the subject work was produced, 1958, the artist could be identified with art *informel* or gestural abstraction as a relevant category, the term having been coined in 1951 and having been in circulation from that time. *Matièrisme* or *matière* painting was a subset of *l'art informel*, made popular by Fautrier and by Jean Dubuffet. Wols, Dubuffet and Fautrier were known as the pioneers of *l'art informel*. (*Matière* painting was not yet recognised in Australia in 1958 as a category in its own right as I will discuss in Chapter 6 with respect to Albert Tucker.) Based on Fautrier's exhibition history and the presentation of similar works by other artists shown together at the time, the broad category *art informel* appears appropriate and in particular its subcategory of *matière* painting applies to this work.[95] These are categories of gestural abstraction and, following Laetz, the categories in which the work was aesthetically active. These categories were established and recognised by the society in which the work was produced although *l'art informel* was a catch-all term for modes of gestural abstraction and included more specific sub-categories as we will see in Chapter Four.

Turning to the criterion of comparative aesthetic relevance (Laetz, Chapter 1 (1.3)), we can compare this work with others in Fautrier's *oeuvre*. Fautrier began painting in the 1920s and achieved recognition for a series of glacier paintings produced at that time. The *Otages* series mentioned above was his first of the heavy impasto style works. With respect to our example, *Swirls*, 1958, I note that the artist produced a number of works following a similar format of production with some variations in composition and colour but all using the central ovoid or rectangular shape as a focal motif on a rectangular ground. These included works with titles such as *Vegetables*, 1957; Forest, 1943, *The Big Vegetables*, 1960-61, and other similar works produced in 1957-58 named with song titles. The subject work is therefore characteristic of the artist's work during the period and the art *informel* category (and *matière* sub-category) is appropriate.

In terms of artistic purpose (Laetz), while the artist's series *Otages* denoted strong meanings in virtue of style alone, either as an *informel* painting or as a *matière* work, expressing emotion in reaction to a real event and serving a social commentary purpose, this work is evocative as a painting but vaguer in purpose in comparison. As a *matière* work as opposed to a painting, however, it succeeds in demonstrating the artist's facility in handling of materials and

[95] British art critic Lawrence Alloway in a 1959 review of the exhibition *Documenta II* in Kassel Germany noted that there was a continuum of sub-categories of *l'art informe*l, a catch all term for 'gestural abstraction' (see Chapter 4). He identified six degrees of textural emphasis. At this time the *matière* category was not yet recognised in Australia, much less calibrated. Alloway, Lawrence, 'Before and After 1945: Reflections on Documenta II', *Art International*, Vol. 7, 1959, p. 31. Lawrence Alloway papers, Getty Research Institute, Research Library, Los Angeles (hereafter 'LAP').

draws attention to the process of its creation. It may be intended to evoke a feeling in the viewer and its pillowy central shape and swirling strokes could evoke a psychological state of calm or may be suggestive of a creation myth. It is not known whether this was an intention of the artist. The nature of the *matière* technique is such that it can provoke feelings of perceptual and affective sensation. British art critic Lawrence Alloway noted in a 1959 review of post-war art that much painting and sculpture of the period was 'referentially promiscuous' or open to the viewer's interpretation.[96]

Fautrier was linked to the literary circles of Malraux, Francis Pongé, and Jean Paulhan who were among those to make the first public utterances about his work.[97] Writer and critic Paulhan advised prospective viewers of Fautrier's work to put aside thoughts of any work they had known before in order to approach the work as an experience. He referred to such works as *événements*, events which would generate feelings of pleasure or repulsion for the viewer through the experience of the work's materiality. The physicality of the paint and matter could evoke an unexpected disruptive physical sensation (see 4.4). Similarly, modernist poet Francis Pongé wrote about Fautrier's *Otages* series. While Pongé noted that Fautrier's work combined 'rapture and horror', he reportedly chose ambiguous language to discuss the works in order to avoid imposing a thought on the painting and forcing an interpretation onto the viewer. In his view, words could not adequately express a painting as language itself is not perceivable. This is an interesting observation as we will find other examples of vague critical review language discussed in later chapters (see Chapters 4 (4.2, n.186, n.187), 6(6.4), and 7(7.1)).

With respect to reception of Fautrier's work, by 1958 when this work was produced, Fautrier had reworked this central shape in a formulaic manner many times in various works since its first appearance in the early 1940s. This led to accusations that the artist's choice of colour in some of his works of this nature, particularly where pastel colours were chosen, was out of keeping with the nature of the artist's materials resulting in works which bordered on kitsch.[98] At times critics experienced difficulties with his work when delicate pastel colouration did not match the baseness of the materials or in the case of the *Otages,* the serious nature of the subject matter. Fautrier himself was not comfortable with the label of *informel* artist or expressionist and

[96] Ibid., p. 34.
[97] See Butler, Karen K, 'Fautrier's First Critics: Andre Malraux, Jean Paulhan, and Francis Pongé', in Carter, Curtis L, and Butler, Karen K, *Jean Fautrier, 1898-1964*, exh. cat., Sept. 19, 2002 - July 20, 2003, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum, Wallach Art Gallery, and Fogg Art Museum, Yale University Press, Newhaven, CT, 2002, pp. 35-55.
[98] See Bois, Yve-Alain, 'The Falling Trapeze', in Ibid., pp. 57-60, for a discussion of Fautrier's work *Surface colorée, Tableau à 4 cotes*, 1958, which further examines these issues.

preferred to think his work was an attack on culture, similar to the stance of his contemporary Jean Dubuffet. Fautrier considered himself to be an innovator and was also one of the first to work in multiples.

In terms of Pettit's predicates and Danto's narrative sentence, I note that the characterisation of Fautrier's work in the category *l'art informel* was given these coordinates through the strong curatorial and critical influence of Michel Tapié and other gallerists of the day. Tapié cited Fautrier as a precursor of *l'art informel* and included him in two key exhibitions as noted above. This is the category that has most often been used in placing the work of this artist to this day. As we have seen above, while the broad category of informel is not incorrect, the sub-category of *matière* painting best captures the teleological relevance of the work and provides the viewer with appreciation that the artist's intent has been realised. The viewer's haptic response to its tactile qualities is therefore appropriate. Fautrier himself at various times in his career painted in other genres including landscape, the nude and still life, however, it is for his inventive and creative contribution to development of *informel* and *matière* painting that he was deemed to make the greatest aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) contribution. (See Chapter 4.)

In Chapters One and Two we have reviewed key literature from philosophical aesthetics and aesthetic theory on classification and aesthetic characterisation of art works with a focus on responses to Walton's seminal essay 'Categories of Art'. The use of Walton's approach as a base upon which to build a framework for the present study is supported with modifications based on further suggestions which enhance the power of the model by adding to the contextual component. The contextual analysis is supported by additions from Laetz including the idea of a 'privileged category' in which the work is aesthetically active; comparative relevance in which the work is viewed against other works in the artist's *oeuvre;* and purpose. Pettit underscores the importance of having a sufficient number of works to determine aesthetic characterisation and the multi-dimensional character of aesthetic space. Danto asserts that as new styles emerge, the entire order shifts and different features and works gain significance. He argues that past aesthetic judgments and categorisations are often revisited as styles develop and become better known, causing some works to shift in their perceived category. For our purposes, Danto's work confirms the contingency of art historical categorisations. Two examples of art works loosely bracketing the period within which the work examined in later chapters was produced, (1944/1958), were examined to highlight the considerations in categorising a work of a new tendency, and the difference a correct categorisation makes to the work's reception.

In conclusion, based on the foregoing examination of relevant theories of aesthetic characterisation, the following **five components** will set the parameters of the framework for this study:

Firstly, I will closely examine the properties of the work, both aesthetic and non-aesthetic.

Secondly, an assessment will be made of the work's probable correct category given the historical and social context of its production.

Thirdly, the aesthetically active category can be established in terms of Walton's criteria including the category in which the work is most satisfying and imbued with the most significance.

Fourth, the aesthetic relevance of the work to the *oeuvre* of the artist will be considered and whether the category imbues the work with purpose (both related to artistic intention).

And finally, shifts that may have occurred in the work's categorisation over time will be considered to see how these shifts have affected what is perceived as the meaning and significance of the work.

Based on this framework I will argue that the work from a certain period of the exemplar artist's *oeuvre* was mis-classified and as a result, its true significance overlooked.

However, before turning to the artworks in question, there is more to add to the analytical framework. I turn now to an examination of art worlds as social systems in the next chapter to continue to refine the elements of the analytical framework to be applied in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three: Sociological Theory and Art Worlds

This chapter will continue to refine the analytical framework for re-evaluating artworks (introduced in Chapters 1 and 2) by drawing upon theories of the art world from the discipline of sociology. This will incorporate the relevant contextual elements into the framework required to position correctly (or 'rectify' according to Pettit) the aesthetic characterisation of the artwork targetted in Chapters Six and Seven, and to assist in bringing out its perceived significance. While the core focus of this study will be art historical, social systems theory is included in order to show how perception of art is mediated by social and institutional aspects of the art world. Once contextualised, the works of art to be assessed in the artist chapters can be viewed as events or positions in the cultural field in their own right, to facilitate interpretation.

Chapters One and Two focused on determining the aesthetically active category for an artwork based on its significance and satisfaction to the viewer. This chapter aims to understand the relation between the aesthetically active category (as defined in Chapter 1) and the way such categories originate and become perpetuated. To determine what constitutes the significance of a category, and how it becomes active, entails an examination of: (1) the dynamics of the systems or cultural fields related to production, reception and transmission, and (2) the agents (as defined below) active in those fields, together with (3) the generation and role of critical and art historical discourse. Sociological theory does not contravene aesthetic characterisation but assists in understanding how such characterisations become active and gain prominence. We will see that the reception of an art work is determined by the dynamics of the cultural field.

3.1 Introduction: Art Worlds as Social Systems

We saw in the previous two chapters that the aesthetic characterisation of an artwork provides a way of understanding how historical background knowledge and experience can influence the appreciation of art. In this chapter I consider the way in which characterisations are brought to life in the art world and this will involve the sociological concept referred to as the '**field**'. The field is the cultural and economic milieu in which the artist and artwork are socially 'produced', interact and circulate, and comprises the set of agents (institutions or individuals such as artists) and structures (including norms and practices) within and through which cultural interactions or exchanges take place. Within the social space, market or system of the field, a set of objective

relations links positions occupied by agents.[99] Thus the artist, through his or her **position** in the field known as the 'art world', is objectively related to positions of critics, dealers, collectors, curators and others. Each 'creator' internalises what is possible in reference to the other positions.[100] In this respect field theory differs from earlier institutional and network theory which merely identified linkages but did not account for dynamics in the field or the processes of its operation as we will see below. There are a number of streams of sociological theory which define and examine the functioning of the cultural field of the arts and I will focus on those of greatest significance for this thesis based on review of the literature.

Through the lens of a sociological approach the field is divided into cultural production, reception and transmission. This will provide a means by which to assess the adequacy of the art historical classification of the artworks in question.[101] As we have seen, **reception** involves the individual subject (viewer) in reconstituting a work through systems of observation. These systems include those of display (the gallery), discourse (art history and criticism), education (the university), and commerce (the art market).[102] This chapter will explain how initial focus on a work may vary from the way it is later viewed.

Research and theory in the field of cultural sociology of the arts in the late Twentieth Century tended to focus on the social, economic and power relations between institutions and agents in the social fields of cultural production and reception. The artwork was often treated as a cultural 'text' (literary or other), the meaning of which could be 'read' or interpreted according to the purpose of the researcher.[103] I will focus on (1) how perception of an artwork is mediated by social constructs to create meaning, and (2) the dynamics of how categories (or styles/genres) become active and are perpetuated in the fields of reception and transmission.

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[99] See Savage, Mike, and Silva, Elizabeth B., 'Field Analysis in Cultural Sociology', in *Cultural Sociology*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2013, pp. 111-126. Bourdieu introduced his concept of the 'field' in 1971 (while that of *habitus,* discussed below, was introduced in the early 1960s and 'capital' in the mid-1960s) and it is used sparingly and interchangeably with terms such as art world or social space, market, or system (p 115).

[100] Shusterman, Richard, ed., *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford and Malden, Mass., 1999, p. 216.

[101] Zolberg (1990) notes that the *catalogue raisonné* tracing styles or tendencies in chronological order according to national origins or covering a single artist's *oeuvre* remained the most popular type of art historical study up to the time of writing. Socially contextualised studies remained controversial. Zolberg, Vera L., *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, 1990, p. 55.

[102] Halsall, in Elkins, 2006, p. 110. See Luhmann, 2000.

[103] I will discuss 'reading' an artwork in a semiotic manner (deciphering it in drawing an interpretation) further in Chapter 4 (4.1 and 4.2) in the context of art historical methodologies. Sociologists and art historians have looked to art historian Erwin Panofsky's approach to iconological interpretation in the case of pictorial (figurative) art.

While the roots of sociological enquiry into the arts may be traced back to the Nineteenth Century and the founding fathers of sociology including French sociologist, social psychologist and philosopher Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), German sociologist, philosopher and critic Georg Simmel (1858-1918), and German sociologist, philosopher and economic theorist Karl Emil Maximilian ('Max') Weber, the in-depth study of the sociology of art and art worlds as a distinct branch of research is a relatively recent phenomenon.[104] Philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto coined the term '**artworld**' in 1964 famously stating, 'To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld.'[105] Now classic studies of art worlds include those of philosophers Danto and George Dickie (the institutional theory of art)[106], French theorist Pierre Bourdieu (specifically the works footnoted below)[107], and those of sociologists Janet Wolff and Howard S Becker.[108] Sociologist Eduardo de la Fuenta (2010) notes that the three most cited works in the field of sociology of art have been Becker (1982), and Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) and *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993).[109]

I will briefly discuss the early work of philosophers Danto and Dickie which served as a point of departure for later theorists, particularly Becker, before addressing the key research streams and themes in subsequent sociological theory development. My aim is to draw out relevant criteria or insights for research design, investigation and interpretation that will contribute to the analytical approach to be taken in Chapters Six and Seven.

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[104] As indicated in notes 105-108 below the key texts in establishing this sub-field of sociological enquiry date from 1964 through 1996. For the origins of the sociology of the arts see Zolberg, 1990, pp. 8-52. See Alexander, Victoria D.*, Sociology of the Arts: Exploring Fine and Popular Forms*, Blackwell, Malden, MA and Oxford UK, 2003, for a discussion of the four styles of research in sociology – positivist, interpretive (hermeneutics), critical, and postmodern.

[105] Danto, Arthur C, 'The Artworld', 1964, p. 580, cited in Becker, Howard S., *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles CA, London, 1982, p. 148.

[106] Danto, Arthur C., 'The Artworld', in *Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 61, 1964, pp. 571-584;
Dickie, George, *Art and the Aesthetic*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1974. See Dickie, *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art*, Haven Publications, New York, 1984.

[107] Bourdieu, Pierre, trans. Emanuel, Susan, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, (1992 French, *Les Règles de l'art*), Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1996. Hereafter '*RA*';
_____, ed. and intro. Johnson, Randal, *Pierre Bourdieu: The Field of Cultural Production: essays on art and literature*, Columbia University Press and Polity Press, New York and London, 1993;
_____, trans. Nice, R., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MASS, 1984, [first published as *La Distinction, Critique sociale du jugement*, Ed. de Minuit, Paris, [1979] 1982].

[108] Becker, Howard S., *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles CA, London, 1982;
Wolff, Janet, *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan Press, London, 1981.

[109] De la Fuente, Eduardo, 'The Artwork Made Me Do It: Introduction to the New Sociology of Art', in *Thesis Eleven*, Vol. 103, No.1, 2010, pp. 3-9, available at <http://www.sagepublications.com>, record date 10 Dec. 2010, accessed 2 July 2013.

3.2 Institutional Theories of Art, Network and Field Theories

The early institutional theories of aesthetics of Danto (1964) and Dickie (1974) focus on the practices and construction of social interactions related to production and consumption of the arts in a broadly defined art world in which artists and the core 'personnel' or agents of the art world operate. The mediation between an artwork and its audience includes artists, producers, art dealers and gallerists, museum directors and curators, critics, art historians, art theorists, newspaper reporters, and philosophers of art. Becker (1982) observes that the institutional theory of art (philosophical) and sociological theories overlap since 'both see the character of their subject matter as depending on the way people acting collectively define it.'[110] Danto and Dickie do not specify how many art worlds there are, but indicate there may be many segments or sub-segments.[111]

The institutional theories of the art world are early attempts at identifying the **positions** or agents and their roles or functions in the art world including the codes of conduct in the artistic milieu. They do not attempt to address the mechanisms of consecration of art works and recognition of an artist. Neither do they explain the way in which art criticism and discourse interact with the spheres of production and reception including their influence on curatorial decisions regarding acquisition and display.[112] They do not attempt to account for the basis of appreciation for aesthetically active categories in the field of reception. Without evaluative definitions under philosophical aesthetics, institutional theories do not explain how meaning is imbued in an artwork or account for any shifts in its positioning as a member of a category or style, which might alter our perception of its aesthetic properties. Danto, however, furthers his account beyond the typical institutional account by formulating what he refers to as the style matrix (Chapter 2, (2.2)). He recognises the importance of art critical vocabulary and knowledge of art historical classifications or styles to the apprehension of an artwork. Danto's (1991) concept of the narrative sentence, suggests that the changing 'atmosphere' of artistic theories in the artworld may lead to new features becoming emphasised and held to be significant, causing works to

[110] Danto, 1964, p. 581, quoted in Becker, 1982, p. 149. See Lopes, Dominic McIver, 'The Myth of (Non-Aesthetic) Artistic Value', in *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 244, 2011, pp.518-536. See Dickie, *Art and Value*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001, Ch. 6. Regarding the lack of evaluative definitions of art in either institutional or historical theories of art under philosophical aesthetics, see Abell, Catharine, 'Art: What It Is and Why It Matters', in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 85 Issue 3, 2012, pp. 671-691.

[111] Becker, 1982, p. 158.

[112] See Harrington, Austin, *Art and Social Theory: Social Arguments in Aesthetics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, 2004. See Van Maanen, Hans, *How to Study Art Worlds: On the Societal Functioning of Aesthetic Values*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2009, p. 36.

move in or out of fashion as new styles emerge.[113] Works may be reinterpreted based on updated theory. Danto's views on the importance of artistic intention changed somewhat over the years and he did not develop his ideas regarding the style matrix any further.[114] He himself later became well-known as an art critic while Dickie was associated with further developing the institutional theory of art.[115] I will discuss the role of art critical discourse further as I examine more robust theories below, and, more specifically to the period of study, in Chapter Five.

These early institutional theories of the art world are discussed here to highlight the ideas in formulation at the time of production and reception relevant to this study, even though such theory had not yet emerged within the field of intellectual discourse of the art world in question. The gestural abstract art which is the subject of this thesis was made at a time when art criticism was struggling to keep up with practice. Art theory and sociology of the arts were both in embryonic stages and these theories were developed in the context or 'atmosphere' of the art world covered by this study. While early aspects of institutional theory began to emerge in publication from 1964 (Danto) and 1969 (Dickie), Dickie's mature work on the subject was published well after the gestural abstraction, colour field and minimalism, and pop art tendencies had been absorbed as was Danto's well-known work *Beyond the Brillo Box* (1992).[116]

Becker (1982) attempted to respond to the vagueness of early institutional theory in developing his model of art worlds by examining the way in which art worlds actually worked. He defined the art world as a 'network of people whose cooperative activities and links between participants produces the kind of art works that the art world is noted for'.[117] Becker draws on the

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[113] Danto, 1991, cited in Carroll, 1995, p. 253. Danto's definition of art as embodying its meaning has scope to include an affective reaction to the materiality of the subject; however, Danto emphasises the cognitive. See Alcarez-Leon, 2006, pp. 336-343. These concepts are relevant to the work of Albert Tucker (Chapters 6 and 7).

[114] See Chapter 2, (2.2), esp. see n.88 and n.91. Due to these inconsistencies, Carroll called on Danto to disavow the style matrix. While it was never recanted, and Danto did not build upon it in his later work (Carroll, 1995, p. 257). Carroll finds style-matrix-type language may assist in guiding viewer attention, but does not in fact characterise the real properties of artworks.

[115] This observation relates to early versions of institutional theory. Danto has contributed to our understanding of the art world and gestural abstraction as the art critic for the periodical *The Nation* for twenty five years (1984-2009) in addition to his work and ongoing publication as a philosopher and academic. Regarding Dickie's elaboration of the institutional theory of art (1969 - 1984), see Van Maanen, 2009, pp. 17-28. See Sutton, Tiffany, *The Classification of Visual Art: A Philosophical Myth and Its History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK and New York, 2000, pp. 4-7.

[116] Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-historical Perspective*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, and London, 1992, pp. 233-248. See Chapter 2, n.88. See n.106 and n.110 above for citations of Dickie's relevant works of 1974, 1984 and 2001. See Dickie, 'The New Institutional Theory of Art', *Proceedings of the 8th Wittgenstein Symposium*, Vol. 10, 1983, pp. 57-64.

[117] Van Maanen, 2009, p. 34. See Fowler, Bridget, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigation*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, and London, 1997. Fowler notes Becker's theory of the art institution was later adopted in the field of aesthetics. See Graham, Gordon, *Philosophy of the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetics*, Routledge, New York

methodologies of anthropological and ethnological studies of small groups in construing his theory and considers patterns of interaction through which the artwork is emergent. He found participants in particular art worlds are guided by social conventions – a set of collective beliefs which structure action and shape art practice. These conventions are learned through observing the habits of other agents in the art world. Shared convention implicitly structures interactions in the cultural field. Specific features and meanings such as those represented by categories of art emerge through interaction. While Becker's approach expands on those of Dickie and Danto, it too is essentially descriptive, serving to guide empirical research rather than having explicatory value. Becker described his early approach as that of an 'urban anthropologist'. While Becker maintains the circularity of definition commonly cited as a criticism of institutional theories, he provides some explanation of the functioning of the art world to mitigate this criticism.

Unlike Danto and Dickie, however, Becker *did* acknowledge the role of agents such as museum professionals in revaluing art historical styles and genres and in making influential curatorial decisions. He notes French sociologist Raymonde Moulin's assertion that,

> …the revaluation of certain styles and certain genres is not independent of the efforts of specialists, historians or museum curators… [There is an] involuntary collaboration between intellectual research and commercial initiatives in the rediscovery and launching of artistic values of the past.[118]

This is of particular interest not only as an aim of the present study in taking a fresh look at gestural works classified in other categories in the past, but in view of the significant body of 'rediscovery' and 'repositioning' in art historical and curatorial scholarship and practice now taking place. Moulin's assertion was made in the context of calling the attention of potential buyers or collectors to the work of artists previously relatively unknown or undervalued.[119] Art historians may research previously unstudied artists while dealers may look for such works to sell. During the period of this study, directors of major collecting institutions such as MOMA and the Guggenheim, frequented small commercial galleries in New York and Europe where they often identified works which they would recommend to their institutions for acquisition.[120] Such purchases served to augment the meaning of a work of art in the fields of production and reception. The meaning of

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and London, [1997] 2005, p. 228. Nevertheless, who or what confers status as a work of art upon an object remains open to debate under institutional theory.

[118] Moulin, 1967, p. 430, trans. Becker, cited in Becker, 1982, pp. 142-143. See Moulin, Raymonde, trans. Goldhammer, A., *The French art market: a sociological view*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ., [1967] 1987.

[119] See Harrington, 2004, p. 80. While private collectors and dealers collected works 'by particular artists in particular genres' and set market prices for works. ... 'public art institutions played a gatekeeper role.'

[120] For example, a work by Tucker, discussed in Chapter 6 (6.2), was acquired by MOMA, New York in 1958.

the work was established in virtue of the actions of the museum director. He or she would highlight the features of the work which made it of interest as an acquisition to the Museum Board or Acquisitions Committee to justify the purchase. Meaning for the acquired work emerged, in part, through those decisions made by the director as to whose work it was exhibited with and the way it was described in associated catalogues. These descriptions then became part of the discourse surrounding a work or artist. Commercial gallerist/dealers building their relationships with major collecting institutions would structure their exhibitions to gain the attention of these influential buyers (museums). Artists would often take cues from the dealer with respect to their production. Once acquired by a major collecting institution, the artist became 'consecrated' within the art world and an increased interest in and appreciation of their work among the collecting and viewing public was stimulated (as we will see in Chapters 6 and 7 with respect to Albert Tucker).

With respect to the role of art theory and criticism, Becker posits that aestheticians and art critics continually update 'value-creating' theory which in the form of art criticism adapts current theory to the work artists actually produce.[121] Importantly for this study, the way in which art acquires meaning or the way that perception of art changes can very much be driven by key agents in the field of cultural production and reception. That is, theory which impacts on the perception of art is driven by practice. New work produced by artists is made,

> …not only [in response] to the considerations of formal aesthetics but also in response to the traditions of the art worlds in which they participate, traditions which can profitably be viewed as sequences of problem definitions and solutions (Kubler, 1962); in response to suggestions implicit in other traditions, … in response to the possibilities contained in new technical developments; and so on.[122]

During the period of this study, this is evidenced in the influence of art critics such as Clement Greenberg in relation to the American Abstract Expressionists, and in France, of critics and art dealers including Pierre Restany and Michel Tapié (Chapters 4 and 5).

Becker's study placed greater emphasis both on aesthetics and the organisation and operation of the art world than earlier sociological accounts and began to examine the distribution system in the fields of cultural production and reception. Becker examined mechanisms supporting artists in the field of production, such as patronage and self-support, and the way in which distribution systems might influence an artist's production as well as reception. His early

[121] See Becker, 1982, pp. 137-138.
[122] Idem. See Wolff, 1981.

work provided a step toward more dynamic 'field' models in the sociology of the arts. Becker's interactional approach is a precursor of what came to be called network theory.[123] As the term implies, network theory examines the linkages between, and roles played by, actors, whether individuals or institutions, and other constituent elements comprising the art world through which the actor or agent must navigate. Network and early institutional theories of art provide descriptive frameworks to guide research and interpretation of the operations of the artistic milieu within which a particular artist, category, or artwork can be located. However, they do not account for how institutional processes are effected. For this we must turn to what are known as field theories.

Field theories, drawing on the ideas of Weber and philosopher, economist and social scientist Karl Marx, attempt to apply a more scientific or objective methodology having regard to the forces governing exchange in the larger social and economic context.[124] Field theory takes into account the concept of capital, whether social status or economic, which is conferred within the artworld relevant to the consecration of an artist or artwork. Each creator or **position** within the artworld internalises what is possible with respect to the other positions. What is possible for an artist depends on what has already been done, and what is presently being done by others. The artist is therefore objectively related to other positions rather than simply an autonomous producer of an object to be circulated. Field theory captures this dynamic aspect of the forces at play in the artworld.

The best known of these field theories of the sociology of the arts is that of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. While he was a leading proponent of the sociology of the arts in Europe for many years, Bourdieu's ideas took time to become popular in North America due to misapprehensions not aided by the density and style of his analysis.[125] Becker's work was a reaction to Bourdieu's early work but did not take into account Bourdieu's later work which better explained his ideas. Nevertheless, the Bourdieusian model, with origins in the gestalt theory of social psychologist Kurt Lewin, continues in its applicability to sociological research of the arts

[123] Becker elaborated on his theory and others contributed to a 'New Institutionalism' in sociology during the 1990s.
[124] Nevertheless, Becker's approach (in its updated version) continues to be applied in current research. See, Van den Bosch, Annette, *The Australian Art World: Aesthetics in a Global Market*, Allan and Unwin, Sydney, 2005. For a press interview with Becker discussing a resurgence of his popularity in France, see Gopnick, Adam, 'The Outside Game: How the Sociologist Howard Becker Studies the Conventions of the Unconventional', in 'Paris Journal', *The New Yorker*, Jan. 12, 2015, published at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/12/outside-game>, accessed 17 Jan. 2015.
[125] See Guillory, John, 'Bourdieu's Refusal', in Brown, Nicholas and Szeman, Imre, eds., *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York and Oxford, 2000, pp. 19-43.

today. Sociologists Mike Savage and Elizabeth Silva (2013) note the popularity of field analysis over the past ten years citing a number of studies in which it has been successfully applied.[126] This approach has been considered superior to more static methods of variables, categories or social groups due to its perceived scientific character, and particularly its dynamism resulting from its attention to forces and processes in the cultural field. The tension between competition and integration within the field is usually overlooked by other network theories. Bourdieu's concept of the cultural 'field' of production is useful in examining the set of relations in the changing art market of the period relevant to this study.[127] This shared creation of value is a significant departure from the earlier institutional theories of Danto and Dickie as well as from traditional approaches to art history, all of which, in contrast, focus on the autonomous artist and the artwork as an object created within field of production (see Chapter 4). Field theories help us to understand how a category becomes aesthetically active by recognising not only networks of positions within the field of cultural production but the way in which the cultural field is part of a wider field of power. This means that particular positions in the field may exercise considerable power in respect of the distribution of cultural capital and consecration of individual artists, groups of artists or particular categories of art. This might be an individual such as a dealer or critic who proves to be influential by advocating for the artist.[128]

To facilitate the discussion of field theory as it applies to our framework, I will examine its key aspects under the headings outlined below. While at first glance many sociological theories may appear to the art historian to cover similar territory to an art historical assessment, as we will see in Chapter Four, this is not necessarily the case. I will demonstrate that the systematic application of the framework developed in this thesis, using an aesthetic characterisation of the artwork as a starting point and drawing on relevant contextual factors informed by an understanding of the dynamics of the artistic milieu, can enhance our perception of the aesthetic properties of the artwork. To the extent such contextual information can be obtained, our appreciation of the work can be maximised.

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[126] Savage and Silva, 2013, pp. 111-126. The authors cite Fligstein, 2001; Martin, 2003; 2011; Savage, 2010, Savage and Gayo-Cal, 2011; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012 as examples of applied field theory (p. 111, 125, and 126).

[127] Bourdieu has been a prolific author and his theories are dense with specialised terminology. For the purpose of this study in this subsection I have elided and simplified his model of the field of cultural production. For further detail see Bourdieu 1993 and 1984, and *RA,* 1996.

[128] See Harrington, 2004. Harrington observes, '… the mind of the art critic, or the reading public for that matter, is not itself immune to social interest and conditioning' (p. 227). Art critical discourse is itself a product of social relations and practices and is therefore contingent. See Wolff, 1981, pp. 139-140 and p. 14. This leaves open the possibility of later revision assumed in this study.

3.3 The Field: Relevant Terms of Reference

Field theory bears certain features in common with institutional theories of art but differs in ways very relevant to this present study. The artist is viewed as an actor in the field and must be analysed with reference to other positions in the social space of the field, not simply as a standalone independent autonomous entity, or with reference to biographical information. Field theory views biographical information itself as a product of the individual's social placement or displacement within the social sphere. Bourdieu does recognise the artist's biography but in a way which distinguishes it from standard philosophical theories of art. Bourdieu treats the artist's biography as an indicator which can establish the artist to be worthy of our attention through what he calls the 'discourse of celebration'.

Importantly, the cycle of **consecration** of an artist and his or her work includes all of those involved in interpreting, exhibiting, cataloguing and writing about a work of art. 'Discourse on the work' for Bourdieu, 'is not a simple side-effect, designed to encourage its apprehension and appreciation, but a moment which is part of the production of the work, of its meaning and its value'.[129] This is a central tenet of this thesis and will be demonstrated in the chapters to follow. Significantly for this study, Bourdieu highlights the way in which the social context of production is reinforced by the feedback artists receive from other positions in the field (including fellow artists, critics, collectors and dealer/gallerists). That is, the artists' images of themselves and of their own production, and through this their production itself, is affected by the image of themselves and their work that comes back to them through the eyes of other positions in the field.[130] This is an observation we will see borne out in examining the artists and positions discussed in Part II.

The field may be seen to delineate the set of possibilities available to the artist and fosters the artist's strategy or 'feel for the game' which embodies Bourdieu's concept of commitment to the game (of the artworld and its functioning) in a practical sense.[131] This element of self-reflexivity by which the artist understands the rules and develops his/her ability to negotiate the cultural field is important for the artist seeking to achieve cultural capital (consecration or status) in the art world. This concept appears to me to be analogous to the idea of an artist being 'authentic', which was considered important during the period of study. Determination of an artist's

[129] *RA*, p.170. See Bourdieu, 1993.
[130] See Bourdieu, Pierre, 'The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 46, 1987, pp. 201-206.
[131] Bourdieu calls this feel for the game the *'illusio'*. See Savage and Silva, 2013, p. 119.

commitment however, by a critic, was highly subjective. Nevertheless, critics often made such an assessment in their reviews. Such terminology attributed high value to originality or artistic integrity and low value to being 'derivative' of the style of others. The work of female artists was often negatively criticised (both in Australia and in the USA) during the period of this study for being derivative or, worse, decorative, 'colourist', or an example of the 'School of Paris'.[132] Further, in order for artists to learn the 'rules of the game' social interaction with fellow artists through circles, *ateliers* or schools, and with dealers and critics was beneficial.

Field of Cultural Production

The creative sphere is organised, regulated and structured like other social fields with its own rules, discourses, narratives, agents, institutions, and specific capital.[133] Whereas Becker considered the art world to be characterised by cooperation between agents; Bourdieu points to the competitive forces and 'organised striving' present in the field of cultural production and the wider field of power. There is a tension between competition and integration often overlooked by network theories. Sociologist Nick Herd describes Bourdieu's approach as 'economic sociology' (rather than Bourdieu's preferred label of 'economic anthropology') as it recognises the exchanges resulting from social relations between actors in the cultural field as being akin to those of economic markets.[134] Groups or individuals in the field determine how 'capital', which may be either symbolic or economic, will be distributed.

Symbolic capital is sought by the autonomous artist while economic capital is sought by the commercial artist.[135] I will demonstrate in this thesis the way in which artists producing abstract art during the focus years of this study initially produced their art autonomously for reception by their peer group of fellow artists and teachers in their circles, often not expecting to sell it. As a new field is constituted around an emerging tendency or category, artists may need to support their artistic production in the partially formed new field through patronage or other work. Later, as the climate in the field of reception grew more favourable and as the dealer/gallery

[132] Examples include Australian gestural painter Yvonne Audette, and American Abstract Expressionist painter Joan Mitchell. 'School of Paris' was a term used for artists who continued to work in traditional styles and genres (landscape, portrait, still life, history painting) as new innovative styles emerged. Often used pejoratively, by critics such as Greenberg, the term was also used in reference to the expatriate artists who flocked to Paris to train in the *ateliers* of master artists. See Chapter 4.
[133] Webb, Jenn, Shirato, Tony, and Danaher, Geoff, *Understanding Bourdieu*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000, p. 150.
[134] Herd, Nick, 'Bourdieu and the fields of art in Australia: On the functioning of art worlds', *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 49(2-3), 2013, pp. 373-384, available at < www.sagepublications.com>, accessed 2 July 2013.
[135] See Fowler, Bridget ed., *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford and Malden MA, 2000, p. 9.

system became accessible to more artists, inevitably pressures toward creating works for the developing contemporary art market increased.[136]

Bourdieu conceived of the field of cultural production on a national level. Recent studies of interest for this thesis have examined the international application of his theory. The existence of a transnational elite and of global cultural processes which transcend national boundaries has been one area of investigation.[137] Such interaction across multiple art worlds became popular during the postwar period with the greater mobility of artists and participation in events such as the Venice Biennales and travelling exhibitions both at home and abroad as we will see in Part II of this thesis. The analysis will therefore consider: whether the artist had a national or international reputation; any issues related to utterances or communication in the making of a work; and the perception of and communication about art within the art world or art system which affected the particular artist's production. I discuss art critical discourse further below. In terms of what Bourdieu calls the 'Field of Distribution', the ease with which the exemplar artist was able to navigate networks and structures pertaining to processes and outcomes in the applicable fields will be examined with in later chapters.

Field of Reception

With this term we move from production to reception. Bourdieu asserts that since the 'text' or work of art does not circulate only within the field of production in which it was created, recipients reinterpret it in accordance with their own field of reception.[138] Artistic mediators including critics, dealers, the *académie*, and other agents contribute to producing meaning and value of the work so that it is an expression of the field as a whole.[139] I consider Bourdieu's approach to creation of meaning to have greater explicatory value than other approaches (both institutional and new network-based approaches which I will touch on below). Its value lies in its emphasis on reception and on the impact of key positions or agents in the field in shaping discourse around a work or artist, thereby influencing the viewer's perception and ultimate appreciation of the work. An implication for this study, I will argue, is that in the case of European (or other international)

[136] For a discussion of how artists are involved in the commercial exchanges in the field see Fowler, Bridget, 'Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Theory of Culture' in *Variant*, Vol. 2, No. 8, 1999, pp. 1-4. Further, Bourdieu raises the question of recognition of artists being linked to production in a major metropolis. The centre/periphery debate has been extensively documented by earlier researchers and I will not revisit it in this thesis apart from noting certain art historians were involved in this debate with respect to the period covered by this study. See Chapter 4 for the examples of art historians Bernard Smith and Terry Smith.
[137] See Shusterman, Richard, ed., *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, UK, and Malden, MASS, 1999.
[138] Ibid., p. 221.
[139] Johnson, Randal, Intro., in Bourdieu, 1993, p.11.

modes of artistic expression, Australian audiences may have been less familiar or receptive to particular artists working in these new categories due to their remove from the site of production and its context, including relevant discourse. Bourdieu asserts, and I largely agree, that the discourses and practices operating within the field of cultural production, and the activities of the networks of agents and institutions that support that production and further produce its value (museums, galleries, academics, critics and commentators and so on), are of equal if not greater importance than the artworks themselves and the social conditions experienced by their makers, patrons and consumers.[140]

Bourdieu rejects narrowly based readings of artworks (as texts). In contrast he argues that reception involves a number of processes. We would relate the artist's biography to the artwork of interest; we would relate the artist's 'social class' of origin to the work; and we would perform either an internal or an intertextual analysis of a work (as we might do in taking an art historical approach). Bourdieu proposes that all of these factors are involved.[141] With respect to intertextuality, texts for Bourdieu would be analysed in relation to other texts *as well as* to the structure of the field and agents involved. Sociologist Randal Johnson observes that Bourdieu does not view a work as having a separate existence and value independent of its changing circumstances including social and institutional factors.[142] While the socially constituted nature of the meaning of an artwork is a key premise of Bourdieu's theory, it is also an object of criticism. An objection may be made that the social reconstruction of an artwork from one period to another does not account for the existence of masterpieces, which transcend context or which appear to have timeless non-contextual aesthetic appeal. Bourdieu could reply, however, that acculturation would account for this phenomenon, given there are many cultures in the world which would not recognise the Western canon.

Art Critical Discourse

Bourdieu's emphasis on the importance of the elaboration of an artistic language is particularly relevant to this project, which is concerned with the reception of gestural abstract artworks. For Bourdieu, artistic language refers to 'the way of speaking about painting itself, of pictorial techniques [and] using appropriate words' to describe the painter's style 'whose existence it socially constitutes by naming it'.[143] Thus with respect to a new stylistic tendency or category, such language or discourse accompanies the emergence of a field of production and is particularly important to

[140] See *CA*, pp. 292-295.
[141] Johnson, in Bourdieu, 1993, p. 11. See Savage and Silva, 2013, pp. 111-126.
[142] Johnson, in Bourdieu, 1993, p. 10.
[143] *RA*, p. 292.

facilitate reception of the work. Bourdieu relates his theory to art historical categories. In 'The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic', he states,

> …the categories which are used in order to perceive and appreciate the work of art are doubly bound to the historical context. Linked to a situated and dated social universe, they become the subject of usages which are themselves socially marked by the social users who exercise the constitutive dispositions of their **habitus** in the aesthetic choices these categories make possible.[144]

By this Bourdieu refers to the aesthetic predicates or adjective pairs referenced in Chapters One and Two to characterise artworks. These may take on different meaning in the course of various historical periods and, I will argue, can shape the way we perceive the aesthetic properties of an artwork and our interpretation. An example of a feature in painting which has been appreciated differently in different historical periods is that of 'finish' of an artwork. This referred to the use of glazes and refinement of brushstrokes typical of academic painting prior to the Twentieth Century. Later, as Bourdieu points out, Manet and the Impressionists banished this approach as did Twentieth Century movements including the American Abstract Expressionists I will refer to in the ensuing chapters.[145] This aspect was also a key evaluative feature for the American art critic Clement Greenberg who tended to associate 'finish' with European painting. Greenberg cited the lack of finish as a positive quality in the 'masculine' and visceral work of the gestural abstract painters whose work he championed. Interestingly, the next group of painters he favoured abandoned this approach and adopted a colour field style in which brush strokes could not be discerned; however, neither were glazes used. This demonstrates Bourdieu's point.

In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu discusses how a category becomes active but can eventually fade from view in favour of another. Establishing and maintaining the aesthetic category also involves overturning the established category. A work, artist or category (such as a stylistic tendency) may undergo a process of 'social ageing' or dissemination by which it is pushed toward the *déclassé* or classic.[146] This may occur as the field responds to new works being created or to changes in the audience or simply to the loss of novelty and interest. New audiences

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[144] Bourdieu, 1987, pp. 205-206. *Habitus* 'refers to the recipient of art's disposition, schemes of perception and appreciation.' *Habitus* evokes the characteristics of the art audience and critics or tastemakers (reception). Bourdieu draws on Panofsky's concept of 'mental habit' which includes' the sum of ideas, styles of thought and action, perceptions and a particular mode of being in art and myth, which is prevalent in society at any point in time.' See Lechte, John, 'The Beauty of Bourdieu', in Browitt, Jeff, and Nelson, Brian eds., *Practising Theory: Pierre Bourdieu and the Field of Cultural Production*, University of Delaware Press, Cranbury, NJ, 2004, pp. 65-73. For an illustrative example, see Browitt, Jeff, 'Modernismo, Ruben Dario, and the construction of the Autonomous Literary Field in Latin America', in Browitt et al, 2004, pp. 113- 129.

[145] *RA*, p. 297.

[146] Ibid., pp. 254-255.

may emerge for emerging categories and gain critical attention and consecration. This later work of Bourdieu may in fact counter some of the criticisms of his early work noted below.

Limitations

While Bourdieu's theory regarding the field of cultural production provides a useful conceptual framework for analysis for the purpose of this research, its limitations are acknowledged but deemed manageable.[147] While not taken into account by Bourdieu, it is recognised that a change in discursive practice, that is, in the standards used in art criticism and evaluation or the manner of referencing art, may modify the field itself. In examining this art historical period such change is indeed evident toward the period end and is factored into the analysis.[148] With respect to painting, this can be seen in the way in which the properties valued in an abstract artwork changed from an appreciation of materials and the evidence of brush strokes or the mark of the maker in the work (gestural abstraction), to a preference for quite the opposite effect characterised by colour fields floating in pictorial space without evidence of a trace of brushwork. Similarly, the blurring of the distinction between 'high art' and popular culture occurred at the end of the period with the advent of Pop art and Minimalism, leaving some critics at an initial loss for evaluative terms.

Sociologist James Bohman asserts that confining critical reflexivity to a narrow professional elite (such as that of art critics) 'belies the presence of non-professional critical and transformative agency' (such as collectors, curators and the viewing public).[149] Since these agents will be factored into the analysis, following on from Moulin's findings referenced above, such concerns are not applicable to the present study. Bourdieu's theory is not being used in isolation but utilised to structure enquiry to draw out relevant contextual features supplementing the aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties of a work to determine its appropriate category for maximising its appreciation. Criticisms that Bourdieu's social theory loses sight of the aesthetic judgment itself, apply only to strictly sociological studies and are thus avoided in this study.[150]

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[147] For an application of Bourdieu's theories, see Cook, Roger, 'The mediated manufacture of an 'avant-garde': a Bourdieusian analysis of the field of contemporary art in: London, 1997-1999', in Fowler, 1997, pp. 164-185.

[148] For Bourdieu, in the field of artistic production the orthodoxy of the art world (artists, collectors, and dealers) endorse existing definitions of standards. Heterodox artists, critics or other agents 'challenge the dominant standards and actively set out to revise the criteria that underpin the distribution of artistic capital.' See Warquant, Loic, 'Durkheim and Bourdieu: the common plinth and its cracks' in Fowler, 2000, p. 142.

[149] Bohman, James, 'Practical Reason and Cultural Constraint: Agency in Bourdieu's Theory of Practice' in Shusterman, 1999, p. 7.

[150] See Dunn, Allen, 'Who Needs a Sociology of the Aesthetic? Freedom and Value in Pierre Bourdieu's Rules of Art', in *boundary 2*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1998, pp. 109-110. Bourdieusian analysis has been used successfully by art historians in a range of situations. See n. 134. See Robbins, Derek M., 'The English Intellectual Field in the 1790s' in Fowler, 2000, pp. 190-195.

Bourdieu's earlier concepts are more controversial, particularly his theory of the '*habitus*'. The ***habitus*** is the frame of reference of embodied rituals, formed in the context of an individual's family, education and social class, by which a culture produces and sustains its beliefs and which links agents and positions in the field to one another.[151] Also controversial is Bourdieu's notion of 'predisposition' and the social conditioning to receptivity to art works. These ideas were based on his study of the French literary field at the end of the nineteenth century; on a study of French museum attendance in 1966; and on studies of rural societies in south-west France and Algeria.[152] The notion of *habitus* has been criticised as not allowing for reinterpretation and revision of behaviour by agents. This may be applicable to the extent that conditioning of the viewing public may result once an artist or work is categorised, colouring future perceptions and interpretations of other works in the artist's *oeuvre*. The early articulation of the concept of *habitus* clearly followed a Marxist approach to discussion of social class and the distribution of capital, and there remains some merit to the concept of a *habitus* with respect to reception of a work. For Bourdieu, a work of art has 'meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded.'[153] This concept is analogous to Walton's caveat that perceiving a work in a certain category or set of categories is not based on a naïve perception on the part of the viewer but is influenced by experience, training and knowledge (Chapter 1). I propose (and seek to demonstrate in Part II of this thesis) that conditioning in the cultural field developed by practitioners and institutional agents within the applicable art world serves to create, to some degree, a self-fulfilling prophecy with respect to the way in which particular artists or works come to be known, based on previous utterances in the field which then become sanctioned. Given the nature of the present study and the evolution of art criticism and the close artist-dealer relationships during the period, such considerations are essential in any analytical schema applied.

Bourdieu's theory contributes significantly to the development of concepts of the art world and its functioning. Bourdieu's field theory model places the *avant-garde* within the overall cultural field, itself positioned within the field of power, and acknowledges the value-creation effect of the consecration of the artist within the art market in terms of status (symbolic capital). In its construal of art competence as a preliminary knowledge of possible classes of a universe of representations (as part of the *habitus* of a viewer), Bourdieu's view of appreciation of an artwork is consistent with

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[151] See n. 144.
[152] See Webb, Jenn et al, *Understanding Bourdieu*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000, pp. 57-58. See Bourdieu, 1984; and *RA*.
[153] Johnson, Intro., in Bourdieu, 1993, p. 6.

the approach I have adopted in Chapters One and Two after Walton, Pettit and Laetz.[154] Bourdieu's approach has explicatory value in that it can account for movement in positioning due to the impact of art critical discourse, the power of the 'gatekeepers' of the art world and the dynamic state of flux and social change in the dissemination process. While it acknowledges the emergence of an *avant-garde* it does not account for popular art; however, this is less of an issue for the period relevant to this study and more of an issue post-1963 with the emergence of Pop and other new categories. We will see in Chapter Four, that art historian Michael Leja implicitly draws on Bourdieusian theory in his account of American Abstract Expressionism which he seeks to reframe. Importantly for this study, Bourdieu's theory of the cultural field as a 'radical contextualisation' offers us an all-encompassing complex approach which includes 'the set of social conditions of the production, circulation and consumption of symbolic goods'.[155] This differs from an art historical approach, as discussed in Chapter Four, which may follow one or more of several alternative approaches in gathering research evidence for the subject being studied, chosen by the researcher as appropriate – rather than the more complex interaction of a range of factors.

Bourdieu's account of the consecration process in the fields of cultural production and reception is confirmed in findings by cultural sociologist Diana Crane (1987).[156] Crane demonstrates how leading art galleries of the 1950s in New York (MOMA and the Guggenheim) were quick to acquire works of abstract expressionist art and thereby sanction this genre as part of a new canon of American modernism, but they were slow to acquire works of Pop art in the 1960s. To put this in Bourdieu's terms, 'once artists have made their careers in mainly commercially driven marketplaces of cultural goods, public institutions help to stabilise their careers by conferring status upon them', thereby 'consecrating' them. This consecration process is evident with respect to the work of Albert Tucker, whose success in Australia occurred following consecration arguably by virtue of his work being acquired by MOMA and the Guggenheim. In Chapter Six we will see further that Bourdieu's field theory has more explanatory power than theories of art which treat the artist as an isolated agent.[157]

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[154] Bourdieu, Pierre, 'Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception', in *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 20, 1968, pp. 589-612. (Originally published as 'Éléments d'une théorie sociologique de la perception artistique', *Revue internationale des sciences sociales*, Vol. 20, No.4, 1968, pp. 5-14.)

[155] Johnson, Intro., in Bourdieu, 1993, p. 9.

[156] See Harrington, 2004, p. 80. See Crane, Diana, *The transformation of the avant-garde: The New York art world 1940-1985*, University of Chicago Press, 1987.

[157] *Cf*. Actor Network Theory ('ANT'), an extension of field theory attributes authorial power to the maker of the work (at odds with the view taken in this thesis as to the social construction of an artwork). See Latour, Bruno, 'On Recalling ANT', in Law, John, and Hassard, John, *Actor Network Theory and After*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2004. Luhmann's social systems theory which focuses on communication between social systems does not add anything

3.4 Sociological contextual analysis – A demonstration of the field at work

As we saw in Chapter One in categorising a work by Mark Rothko, the ratifying power of key critics of the day such as Clement Greenberg, galleries and collecting institutions such as the Art of This Century Gallery and MOMA, and the purchaser of the work, wealthy art patron and gallerist Peggy Guggenheim, all contributed to Rothko's placement among the newly emerging Abstract Expressionist group of painters. Significantly, the influence of European tendencies was played down in the quest to identify an emerging American style. In the case of this Rothko work, its eventual categorisation within the newly emerging category of Abstract Expressionism, led to its ongoing appreciation sustained to the present day. On the other hand, if the same work had been classified as Surrealist, it may not have been considered a strong example of the category and may have gone unnoticed art historically. We explored the work of two artists of the period, Mark Rothko and Jean Fautrier to illustrate the aesthetic categorisation and characterisation concepts introduced in Chapters One and Two. I turn now to a further example to demonstrate the contribution of field theory to building our analytical model for evaluating artworks.

Let us examine a work by American artist Mark Tobey (1890 - 1976), *Edge of August*, 1953 (fig. 3.1). Primarily abstract in nature, the work alludes to figuration through its metaphorical title and placement of the predominant semi-rhomboid shape of translucent white colour crossing the picture plane from the left-hand edge toward the right hand side like a curtain, cloud or a ghost-like veil of mist. The small gestural strokes applied transparently to the dominant shape create an ethereal effect with a darker background patch of colour in the upper right corner alluding to a night sky beyond and a warm patch of red in the lower left foreground suggestive of the heat of the northern summer slipping away. While the picture plane is compressed, the angular placement of shapes provides some suggestion of shallow depth in the foreground and the dark area in the upper right suggests deeper space beyond the curtain of white. Our initial categorisation of the work might be as an abstract work – whether gestural abstraction, as evidenced by the lyrical quality and delicacy of the brush strokes and minimal allusion to form, or American Abstract Expressionism due to the all-over application of brush strokes and simplified use of shape and colour. This categorisation might be confirmed by seeking additional

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beyond what we already have using a Bourdieusian derived framework. It has been criticised for its lack of detail with respect to art institutions, commercial and political transactions in the field, and, most importantly for this study, the conditions of discursive power under which aesthetic discriminations are made and promulgated. See Luhmann, 2000. Van Maanen applies an analytical matrix to the fields and relationships involved in the functioning of the art world across the domains of production, distribution, reception and context. He emphasises organisational structures, processes and outcomes, but does not add anything further to the contextualisation available by following the Bourdieusian-derived model I have developed in this thesis. Van Maanen, 2009.

background information pertaining to the elements suggested by the sociological approaches outlined above, in addition to those suggested in Chapter Two.

To begin, let us determine what the category may have been at the time of production by attempting to ascertain the artist's intention, the established category that may have situated the work, whether this was widely recognised in the society of reception and whether there was a historically plausible alternative aesthetically active category for this work. In 1953, the time of production, Tobey was an established artist having held solo exhibitions in New York, Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Portland, and Boston in the USA as well as in London. His work was included in the New York World's Fair of 1939 and in various group exhibitions around the USA over many years. In 1951 his work was shown at a number of prestigious New York collecting institutions including MOMA, the Whitney Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum as well as the major art galleries of Seattle, Chicago and St Louis.[158] One of these was an exhibition titled *Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America* at MOMA, New York. That year Tobey's international exposure included exhibitions at eight galleries in Japan. He was included in a group exhibition of Abstract Expressionism in Japan, the first of its kind in the country. [159] He was exhibited with American artists Brooks, Pollock, Pousette-Dart, Rothko, Stamos, Sterne, Still and Tomlin. He represented the USA at the Sao Paolo Biennale. In addition he exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in an exhibition which travelled to the *Galerie de France*, Paris in 1952.

Tobey's work is known for its fusion of Eastern and Western sensibilities. A self-taught artist, Tobey converted to the Baha'i faith in 1918 and, like Kandinsky before him, was concerned with the spiritual expressed in art. The Baha'i faith informed Tobey's concerns for 'Oneness', progressive revelation and humanity.[160] These ideas were also consistent with the philosophies of the Abstract Expressionists who chose similar themes.[161] He makes use of light as an element of structure in his painting. He studied calligraphy in 1923 and later visited Japan and China in 1934.

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[158] The Brooklyn Museum exhibited abstract art as early as 1926, predating MOMA. See Seuphor, Michel, trans. Izod, Lionel; Montague, John and Scarfe, Francis, *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, preceded by a History of Abstract Painting*, Methuen and Co. London, 1958, p. 109.

[159] See Kachur, Lewis, 'The View from the East: The Reception of Jackson Pollock among Japanese *Gutai* Artists', in Marter, Joan, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: The International Context*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick NJ and London, 2007, pp. 152-153. Founded in the Osaka area in mid-1954, the *Gutai* artists association, comprising seventeen Japanese artists, was interested in engaging with Abstract Expressionism.

[160] Seitz, William C., *Mark Tobey*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1962, p. 10.

[161] American Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman produced a series of six paintings on the theme 'Onement' commencing in 1948. His work *Onement VI*, 1953 recently sold at auction (Sotheby's New York, May 14, 2013) for $43.8 million (incl. buyer's premium) setting a record for the artist. *Associated Press*, 15 May 2013, 'Barnett Newman painting auctioned $43m', available at < http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/barnett-newman-painting-auctioned-43m/story-fn3dxix6-1226643022848 >, News Limited, accessed 15 May 2013.

He was a collector of West Coast indigenous artefacts and painted totem imagery which was a subject also taken up by the Abstract Expressionists. Tobey was the first to develop an overall application of paint applied from edge to edge of the canvas and to create intricate webs of line. In his first New York exhibition in 1929, at Romany Marie's Café Gallery, he was cited as a surrealist in the catalogue but included both abstract and realist works in the exhibition. At this time he experimented with a variety of stylistic tendencies and subjects in his work. Tobey travelled in Mexico and the Middle East and was interested in archaic symbols and calligraphic markings. He spent eight years in England at Darlington Hall, Devonshire where he taught and painted and from where he embarked on his trip to the Orient in 1931. On his return to England his distinctive 'white writing' style emerged for which he became best known from about 1940. In 1952, Tobey was featured in a film *Mark Tobey: Artist* shown at the Venice Film Festival and the Edinburgh Film Festival.[162]

At this point I will relax my parameters for dating the 'time of production' to include a known exhibition of the work that can provide further information, including the artist's comments about the work. *Edge of August* was featured in an exhibition held at the MOMA, New York from September to November 1962 and at the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago in 1963. One hundred and thirty five of the artist's works were included in the exhibition enabling the curator, William Seitz to trace the formation of Tobey's mature style for the viewing public. By this time, Tobey had represented the USA at the 1958 Venice XXIX Biennale, where he was awarded the International *Grand Prix* for painting, and had exhibited widely internationally as well as at major American art museums. His work was included in the Seattle World's Fair 1962 exhibition *Art Since 1950* and at *Ca'Pessaro* in Venice in the *Exhibition of Work by Grand Prize Winners at Venice Biennale 1948-1960* which closed just after the MOMA exhibition opened. The exhibition catalogue features the work, describing it as the 'masterpiece of Tobey's nature paintings'.[163] The catalogue essay by Seitz notes that the work 'recreates a last essence of peace and warmth', and recalls a quote from a conversation with the artist published in 1957 regarding the work,

> *Edge of August* is trying to express the thing that lies between two conditions of nature, summer and fall. It's trying to capture that transition and make it tangible. Make it sing. You might say that it's bringing the intangible into the tangible.[164]

[162] Gardner, Robert G., director, Tobey, Mark, script, *Mark Tobey: Artist*, Orbit Films, Seattle, 1952, (16mm colour, sound, 20 minutes), cited in Seitz, 1962, p. 105.
[163] Seitz, 1962, p. 38.
[164] Seitz, 1962, p. 40 (first published in Rodman, Selden, *Conversations with Artists*, Devin-Adair, New York, 1957, p. 17).

Seitz avoids categorising Tobey, instead tracing the development of his personal style and sources as noted above. While the language describing Tobey's work shares much with the philosophies of the Abstract Expressionists of the day, by 1962 this movement was fading in significance and already certain of the artists previously shown together were beginning to be understood in different sub-categories. Tobey was identified as the founder of the Northwest School or the 'School of the Pacific'. Sietz notes Tobey shared an ambiguous relationship with other tendencies and artist groupings of the day as his art shared a number of characteristics with them resulting in a mixed reception to his work.

Tobey is known for his use of line and brush strokes and his 'white writing' drawing on Middle Eastern cuneiform and Eastern calligraphic influences. He builds mass in his works through layering of lines and pioneered the painting of works 'off the picture' with his all-over brush strokes utilising all areas of the canvas equally. He seeks 'equilibrium' or balance in his works and believed a painting must 'breathe'.[165]

Up to this point we have established the work is either a lyrical abstraction or Abstract Expressionist work. The artist wishes to convey the feeling of a state of transition in the seasons. The work is an example of the artist's mature style and the 'white writing' for which he was known. The aesthetically active category could well be Abstract Expressionism at this time although the work is smaller than the mural sized works favoured by other artists of the New York School.

I turn now to additional elements drawn from the sociological theories of the field of cultural production and art worlds to examine briefly how Tobey has been categorised over the years. This will also provide what Danto called the narrative sentence reflecting what we know today about the artist. This brief analysis is provided for illustration of the concepts discussed in this chapter which will be drawn upon in developing the analytical framework to be used in this thesis.[166] As demonstrated above, the field of cultural production and the associated intellectual field Tobey participated in were international in scope. In the field of reception, Tobey acquired both symbolic and economic capital through recognition for his contribution to American art (for which he won an art prize) and his international Biennale success.[167] Reception to Tobey's work

[165] Ibid., p. 31.

[166] As such, it is not held out as being a detailed study of the artist. The reader is directed to additional sources including monographs and manuscript documents. See, for example, Dahl, Arthur L., *Mark Tobey: Art and Belief*, George Ronald, Oxford, UK, 1984.

[167] *New York Times*, December 3, 1958, p. 12. In December 1958, the quarterly magazine *Art in America* awarded Tobey its final annual award of one thousand dollars for a major contribution toward furthering interest in American art. See Ten Eyck, Toby A. and Christensen, Emily, 'Speaking of Art: Class code or historical residual?', in *The Social Science Journal,* Vol. 49, 2012, pp. 330-338.

was mixed, particularly in the New York art world which appeared to marginalise his work. While his work was sought for exhibition, Seitz observes Tobey's reception was influenced by

> …his ambiguous relationship to the New York School, the School of the Pacific, and *informel* painting in Europe. Tobey's critical reception in New York between his first show as a mature painter in 1944 and the present [1962] is of interest. It is an odd amalgam of lukewarm admiration, vacillating enthusiasm, and inattention.[168]

A range of agents such as dealers, art gallery directors and art critics were influential in Tobey's consecration as an artist. Among these were Alfred H. Barr Jr. of MOMA, French gallerist and art critic Michel Seuphor, and French art critic and entrepreneur Michel Tapié. Tapié coined the term '*Un art autre'* in 1952 to describe artists producing works which did not fit a particular traditional stylistic category. *L'art informel* later became a catch-all term under which this label was subsumed.

Clement Greenberg, who initially included Tobey in his discussions of American Abstract Expressionism, later revised his view of Tobey.[169] Greenberg wrote in *The Nation*, April 22, 1944 (p. 495), that 'although Tobey's work was 'not major' he had already made one of the few original contributions to contemporary American painting …Tobey's great innovation is his white writing: the calligraphic, tightly meshed interlacing of white line which build up to a vertical rectangular mass reaching almost to the edges of the frame. These cause the picture surface to vibrate in depth or better, toward the spectator.'[170] Three years later, however, Greenberg had changed his opinion. In an article on American painting in an English publication, *Horizon*, he stated that Tobey and painter Morris Graves were influenced by Oriental art and were 'products of the Klee school'.[171] While beginning his article by praising Tobey and Graves as the two most original American painters today, in the sense of being most uniquely and undifferentiatedly American, he shifts his tone later stating 'since they have finished stating their personalities, Graves and Tobey have turned out to be so narrow as to cease even being interesting.'[172] Luckily for Tobey,

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[168] Seitz, 1962, p. 86, n. 99.
[169] See Kleeblatt, Norman, 'Introduction: Action, Abstraction, Reaction', in *Action Abstraction: Pollock, De Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976*, exh. cat., The Jewish Museum, New York, Saint Louis Art Museum, and Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY, 2009, Yale University Press, Hew Haven CONN and London, 2008, p. 8.
[170] Seitz, 1962, p. 86, n. 99.
[171] Minturn, Kent, 'Greenberg Misreading Dubuffet', in Marter, 2007, p. 132. Greenberg was dismissive of the graffiti-like markings of painter Jean Dubuffet. Although the non-semiotic mark making in Dubuffet's work was similar to the illegible alphabets of French writer and artist Henri Michaux, and reflected an interest in the archaic shared with the American Abstract Expressionists, Greenberg mistakenly associated Dubuffet with existentialism and the markings with literary script. Minturn, in Marter, 2007, pp. 125-137.
[172] Idem. The goal of originality for an artist was 'sacrosanct' among the Abstract Expressionists. See Hess, Thomas, *Abstract Painting Background and American Phases*, Viking Press, New York, 1951, p. 107.
See Gibson, 1997, p. 23. Gibson notes, 'Those to whom more recognised painters were closer in style seemed to suffer most.' Both New York artist Janet Sobel and Tobey were in this category, having sparked Jackson Pollock's

Greenberg's view did not hold sway in Paris, Venice or Japan. Seitz posits that this phenomenon simply reflects that 1940s and 1950s New York may have found Tobey's calm contemplative works tame and at odds with the emphasis of the day on bold, masculine, Action Painting and some critics found his work decorative or 'minor.' Even when Tobey was awarded the *Grand Prix* for Painting at the 1958 Venice Biennale, there was little interest from the New York art magazines. Tobey was the first American painter since Whistler to achieve this honour. Only *The New York Times* and *Life* magazine printed feature articles. Similarly, Tobey's 1961 retrospective at the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs* in the Marsan Pavilion of the Louvre, in which the artist presented 286 works, gained scant mention – receiving one paragraph in *Art News* and a poor review of the downsized version of the exhibition shown in London.[173]

Nonetheless, turning to the field of transmission, Tobey's influence on other artists is significant. Tobey taught at the Cornish School in Seattle, and at Darlington Hall in Devonshire, England. As the first to paint in the 'all-over' style that came to be attributed to the Abstract Expressionists, art critic Michel Seuphor notes that Tobey had a 'quiet but deep' influence on other artists and 'laid the foundations for American painters Jackson Pollock (1914 - 1956), Bradley Walker Tomlin (1899 - 1955), and many others.' [174] In particular, Seuphor deemed Tobey's style of 'writing' which had become popular in the large mural size panels of the Abstract Expressionists as the finest example of direct writing. Tobey worked in a language of signs which did not have a semiotic basis and used the trope of the palimpsest in which erasures are covered with chance markings. The layering of line and use of the trace was popular with lyrical abstractionists and Abstract Expressionists. His works have also been compared to aerial views as of a landscape, which I refer to as allusive abstraction in Chapter Four.

In concluding this example, we may place Tobey's work in the category of gestural or lyrical abstraction and he is one of the strongest precursors to American Abstract Expressionism. In later years he increased the size of his works due to pressure from gallerists and others, more closely aligning him with the style. The foregoing analysis demonstrates that Tobey's work became active in the category of Abstract Expressionism through its exhibition with works of other Abstract Expressionists at major art museums such as MOMA, and in international exhibitions

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intricate pourings. Further, 'the criterion of originality was so arbitrary, so contradictory and so subjectively applied that it could boomerang even among that small core of canonical artists. … Barnett Newman's first show was greeted with 'silence and contempt' because his peers believed that he was somehow less than original…. Newman and Motherwell developed a running battle on who did the first stripe – Still or Newman.'

[173] Idem.

[174] Seuphor, Michel, trans. Izod, Lionel, Montagne, John, and Scarfe, Francis, *A Dictionary of Abstract Painting, preceded by a History of Abstract Painting*, Methuen and Co., London, 1958, p. 79.

such as those in Japan and the Biennales of Venice and Sao Paolo. Tobey's expressed Eastern influences and interest in themes such as 'onement' resonated with ideas espoused by others in the Abstract Expressionist group. Consecration by critics such as Clement Greenberg (notwithstanding the critic's later change of heart), Michel Seuphor and Michel Tapié assisted in defining Tobey's work within the category of early Abstract Expressionism and the European category *l'art informel* or gestural abstraction.

3.5 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In Chapters One and Two, I examined the properties of an art work and how its probable 'correct category' of aesthetic characterisation is established. With further contextual information, its aesthetically active category can be determined. This relates to the reception, significance and satisfaction to the viewer relative to what could have been intended by the artist and, as such, is inter-subjective in nature. The way in which such a characterisation comes to settle into the art historical discourse is dependent on the dynamics of the art world or worlds I have explored in this chapter. The concept of fields of cultural production, reception and transmission helps in explaining this process. In particular, I noted the powerful role of positions or agents within those fields, including art critics, art dealers or gallerists and institutions, all of whom serve to create the discourse around a work and an artist. Such discourse forms part of the work's and the artist's production and reception, raising awareness of the aesthetically active category and helping to script the narrative sentence as described by Danto. It was demonstrated that in some cases, an artist may operate across multiple art worlds, thereby opening the possibility of different interpretations of the work. This might entail working and exhibiting in different cities or regions within one country, across several geographies, or within the international sphere of art fairs and Biennales. Further, the artwork might be perceived by different agents as belonging to different categories either at the same point in time (where different reviewers categorise a work differently) or at different points in time during the artist's career. This chapter has explored the system in virtue of which categories of art emerge and take hold in the relevant art world or worlds.

In the next chapter, I turn to art historical methodologies for the objective parameters and terms of reference involved in development of intellectual and art historical discourse. Importantly, this includes a classification system for abstract art, providing the relevant standard art historical categories necessary in applying the analytical model to the analysis of gestural artwork in Part II of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Art Historical Methodologies and Art Historiography

This chapter will contribute to the framework developed in this thesis by providing the necessary background in the relevant art historical categories to inform category allocation when using the model (in accordance with the five framework components, Chapter 2) and an understanding of why the relevant categories were not always recognised in Australian art historical accounts or art criticism. This grounding will facilitate the aesthetic categorisation, characterisation and interpretation of the artworks discussed in later chapters.

4.1 Introduction: Art Historical Methodologies

> …what defines art is not a mere atmosphere of theory or the artist's intentions – as the institutional theorists hold. Art is a function of images – pictorial, quasi-pictorial, abstract or configurational – created within a historical horizon. This is the normative basis of art history.[175]

Art historical studies, whether of an art work, artist, tendency or period, generally begin by way of investigation of the art works or objects themselves (see Rothko and Fautrier examples, Chapters 1 and 2 respectively). Formalist analysis considers the aesthetic effects created by the component parts of a work's composition. In addition, consideration of available written documents, the social context of the work in production and reception (Chapter 3) and of the key ideologies or theories of art in circulation during the period of study (Chapter 5) provide further information to assist in positioning the work and interpreting it.[176] The analysis or investigation of the art work or object itself would typically include an appraisal of its key compositional elements, an interpretation of its iconography or subject matter to determine its meaning[177], and a stylistic comparison to other artist works of the period to identify influences and characteristics of applicable stylistic tendencies or movements. In the case of abstract or non-objective works, sometimes referred to as non-representational or non-figurative, the 'emotional significance' of elements such as colour, form, texture, size and spatial relationships might be considered as well as reference to the work's title

[175] Crowther, Paul, *The Transhistorical Image: Philosophizing Art and its History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, [2002] 2012, p. 188. (Hereafter '*TI*'.)

[176] These categories broadly correspond to those suggested by art historian Eric Fernie. See Fernie, Eric, *Art History and Its Methods: A Critical Anthology*, Phaidon Press, London, [1995] 1999, p. 327. See Iverson, Margaret, and Melville, Stephen, *Writing Art History: Disciplinary Departures,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2010. See also: Adams, Laurie Schneider, *The Methodologies of Art*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1996; Barnet, Sylvan, *A Short Guide to Writing About Art*, Longman, New York, 2000; and Pointon, Marcia, *History of Art: A Student's Handbook*, Routledge, London and New York, [1994] 2014.

[177] For a discussion of Panofsky's system of iconological interpretation of pictorial subject matter, see Fernie, 1999, p. 345-346; and see Adams, 1996, pp. 36-57.

or other texts such as artist writings.[178] In terms of artistic relevance, the analysis would include a comparison to other works by the same artist within his or her *oeuvre*; and a stylistic comparison to artists of the period or subsequent period in terms of the artist's influence on others and evidence of their influence on local, national and/or international art.

Investigation of available written documents would include examination of primary sources such as artists' writings including autobiography, catalogue interviews, letters, recorded interviews, and exhibition catalogues. It would also include critical reviews of the day including newspaper reports. In addition, consideration would be given to a review of scholarly secondary sources such as books, journal articles and curatorial materials from later periods. An investigation of the social context including production and reception might extend to psychoanalytical readings where appropriate and links to literature and philosophy. Investigation of artistic production in relation to wide reaching major historical developments including the relevance of ideologies and theories of art might proceed by examining art criticism and might use interpretive sociological methods (Chapter 3). If the study was carried out in recent years, a feminist reading of the work and its reception might be undertaken in the case of female artists.[179] Where alternate readings of works according to, say, psychoanalytical or feminist frames of reference would influence an interpretation, this study sets such interpretations aside as it is concerned with the basis of art historical classification. As such, these interpretative frameworks are not ruled out but rather accommodated in terms of the additional contextual background which is drawn upon to confirm or rectify a categorisation (Chapters 1 and 2). (For example, the application of Marxist ideology arises in the debates surrounding figuration or naturalistic representation versus abstraction in Chapter 5 and in interpreting Tucker's work in Chapter 6). Rectified characterisation takes into account what the artist could have meant (either consciously or unconsciously) (Pettit's humanistic constraint of aesthetic positioning) (2.1).

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[178] See Barnet, 2000. With respect to the term 'non-representational', the absence of a naturalised resemblance to a given object or figure does not necessarily imply a lack of representation. It can be argued that thickness of line or paint and gestural marks themselves can convey a sense of corporeality, alluding to the human figure, or horizontals may allude to landscape. (See (4.4).) McMahon (2014) notes that 'the term 'expressive', when employed in philosophical argument … refers to mental constructs generated by minds, whereas 'representational' refers to mental items triggered in response to perceptual input.' McMahon, Jennifer A, *Art and Ethics in a Material World: Kant's Pragmatist Legacy*, Routledge, New York and London, 2014, p. 196, n. 20.
See section (4.5) for terms related to abstraction used in this thesis.

[179] Such readings have been popularised since the 1970s. See Pollock, Griselda, 'Feminist Interventions in the History of Art', in Fernie, 1999, pp. 296. (Reprinted from Pollock, Griselda, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Ar*t, Routledge, London, [1988] 1999, pp. 1-17.) See Barnet, 2000, pp. 156-163; and see Adams, 1996, pp. 79-100. An artwork may be thought of at times as a 'text' which is interpreted or 'read' by a viewer who contributes to its meaning. During the period of study, artworks came to be seen as objects. As an object, the work is situated according to artist, time and place. As a text, it is part of a continuing process of meaning production each time it is encountered in the field of reception. See Carter, Michael, *Framing Art: Introducing Theory and the Visual Image*, Hale & Iremonger, Alexandria, NSW, [1990] 1993, pp. 124-137.

All of these aspects are considered in the framework I develop to guide my analysis. However, to take the analysis in this study a step beyond such approaches, I will argue that art historical classification can impact upon the interpretation and even the perception of a work and therefore the significance attributed to it. Art historical classification positions a work and while such classification responds to objective properties of the work and its context, there can be various sets of such properties (Pettit, (2.1)). The art historian can determine which set of properties is salient for the informed viewer. In addition, my analysis will, most importantly, incorporate an aesthetic characterisation of the art work supported by a more structured contextual assessment of the relevant fields of production, reception and transmission. This will be achieved by drawing on sociological approaches with the aim of 'cross-examining' existing art histories and art historical categorisations, and challenging their adequacy. With respect to the close reading of past art histories, the degree to which the respective historian author has applied the approaches mentioned above and evaluated past secondary sources and interpretations will be critically evaluated, both later in this chapter and in Chapter Seven.

4.2 Traditional Art History: Problems with art historical classifications

Art historians selectively choose the methodologies they feel best fit with the aspect of art under consideration. The methods and perspectives available to the historian at the time are coloured by the prevailing ideological context and interpretive frames then popular.[180] In revisiting earlier periods, a return to primary sources and cross-referencing a wide variety of archival information may lead to greater insight than was available to the researcher of the day. Access to additional information which may only have come into the public domain after earlier art histories were written (such as artist's or critic's writings, notebooks and letters), and the ability of today's researchers to travel with greater ease to visit archives of relevant materials, benefit contemporary art historians as does the wealth of scholarly secondary source material now available. Further, the ability to read another language is clearly an asset in conducting research in this subject area and period, given the debt to European tendencies. A lack of such facility appears to have been a setback to earlier art historians and art critics working in Australia as will be seen later in this chapter and those to follow.[181]

[180] The political aspect of writing a work of history is not to be underestimated. See Smith, Terry, 'Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography', in *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 4, June 2011, p. 6.
[181] The ability to read French or German could have led to greater understanding of European categories and the artists of the day for Australian critics and art historians, facilitating access to relevant European critical reviews,

The key agents in the fields of cultural production and reception, who came to shape the art historical discourse of the period of study, were influenced by their own studies of and indoctrination in the founding principles of the discipline of art history. This brief overview will introduce the relevant theorists and general premises of earlier art historical methods which provided such influence, without attendant in-depth critiques of each founding theoretician or historian and their positions. Rather, I will elaborate on the concepts derived from these sources as required and relevant throughout the thesis. My overarching aim in this chapter is to examine: (i) traditional art historical approaches and problems in application of art historical classifications; (ii) art historiography and underpinning assumptions influencing classifications of artists and artworks, including the role of influential agents; and (iii) the use of the word 'abstraction'.

The idea of an artwork as a constituted object whose meaning could be 'decoded' through investigation by a suitably astute critic or historian predicated much early art criticism. The three levels of iconography developed by art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), (1) formalist analysis, (2) convention and artistic precedent, and (3) image meaning, style and symbolism in the cultural field, seek to do this in arriving at a meaning for an artwork.[182] While at some level, this approach may appear to correspond to my Chapters One to Four which broadly begin with the non-aesthetic properties of a work and add contextual information to further the analysis, I reconstrue the themes in light of more recent scholarship and practice. Further, my approach does not preclude either the role of the viewer in creation of meaning or the shifts in meaning in subsequent encounters with the work in the field of reception. Of particular relevance to this thesis, however, is that Panofsky argued that one should not apply the upper levels of his tripartite interpretive theory to analysing abstract art. That is, one should interpret abstract art based on its formal elements.[183] Perhaps he attempted to avoid the situation noted by art historian Charles Harrison when French critics began writing on abstract art in reference to the early Twentieth

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journals, exhibition catalogue essays and artist writings. Language barriers were also problematic for many Australian artists working in Europe. Translations of many texts did not occur until years or decades later, if at all.

[182] Panofsky was a member of the German Warburg Institute (based in London from World War II) which followed the iconological approach to interpreting art works. See Adams, 1996, p. 36. See Pooke, Grant and Newall, Diana, *Art History: the basics*, Routledge, New York and London, 2008, pp. 68-69. For an in depth analysis of the way in which Panofsky's theories have become embedded in the discipline of art history see Iversen and Melville, 2010, especially Chapters 1-3.

Cf. 'Iconology' was later elaborated on by art historian and Warburg scholar Sir Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001). See Adams, 1996, p. 37. Gombrich was an influence on Australian art historian B. Smith. See Kirk Varnedoe 'Why Abstract Art?, 2006, in Lind, Maria, ed., *Abstraction: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery, London and MIT Press, Cambridge, MASS, 2013, pp. 56-60. Varnedoe notes Gombrich's mistrust of abstract art due to his 'intellectual and even ideological bias' through which he viewed such art as decoration.

[183] See Bois, Yve-Alain, *Painting as Model*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MASS, and London, 1990, p. xxvii.

Century abstract painters' essentialist explanations of their work. Wassily Kandinsky sought to reveal an 'underlying spirituality' in rendering his subject, also described as 'seeing through.'[184] Such ideas were consistent with theories of the Theosophists to which early abstract painters such as Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian subscribed.[185] Interpretation of works produced with such intentions by the artist unavoidably resulted in some fairly esoteric evaluations or descriptions by art reviewers or gallerist/dealers responsible for characterising them to the public. Harrison asserts that such explanations were irrational in nature.[186]

However, American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) paved the way for creating a narrative that derived its content from the contemporary cultural context but could be seen to be closely tied to the formal elements of the work.[187] Perhaps Greenberg could be said to have facilitated a new 'relation between the creator and the contemplators, fixed in the artistic work' after Russian literary and social theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), although he would not have been familiar with Bakhtin's theories.[188] A way to create a new relation between creator and contemplator is to create a new formal element in a work. In effect this is what the *matière* artists and the gestural abstractionists did with the inclusion of built up paint and texture into a form of relief work (see 4.4). In order to appreciate this, Greenberg's approach is again helpful. Seen as derived from the formalist position of British painter and art critic Roger Fry (1866-1934), Greenberg related depth of experience of a work (its aesthetic response) to the viewer's response to the qualities of form over content.[189] Greenberg's 'brand' of formalism was concerned with the 'irreducible' principles of the medium of paint and the flatness of the picture plane which he found to be the defining aspect of modernist painting. Criticisms of Greenberg's formalism were directed

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[184] Harrison, Charles, 'Abstraction', in Franscina, Francis et al, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CONN, and London, 1993, p. 198. See Chapter 1 (1.2, n. 34). In 1939 in conjunction with the MOMA exhibition 'Art in Our Time', Barr referred to Kandinsky as the 'first and most important of the Abstract Expressionists.' See Marter, 2007, p. 16.

[185] The Theosophical Society, (est. 1875), promoted an esoteric stream of philosophy concerned with making the invisible visible and influenced a number of artists up to the Twentieth Century.

[186] See Gleeson, James, 'Interview with Elwyn Lynn, July 24 and September 27, 1979', NGA, Canberra, 1979, p. 35, available at <http://nga.gov.au/Research/Gleeson/pdf/Lynn.pdf >, accessed 4 January 2012. In this 1979 interview, Gleeson (artist and gallery director) noted the earlier French practice of 'trying to create a sort of prose, the equivalent of the sensations of the works'. This style of criticism in Europe was sometimes reflected in art reviews and exhibition catalogue essays of the period of study resulting in the vagueness Harrison found to be 'irrational'.

[187] See Bois, 1990. Bois observes that the French belatedly discovered Greenberg's formalist discourse and, in contrast to the 'extremely mediocre French art criticism of the day', they found his formal analyses a 'remarkable departure … a sort of ABC or criticism, without which nothing serious could be written about' a painter such as American Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock' (p. xvi).

[188] Alois Riegl (1858-1905), arguably the founder of the discipline of art history and known for his 'reception aesthetics', exemplified this view. See Olin, Margaret, 'Forms of Respect: Alois Riegl's Concept of Attentiveness', in *The Art Bulletin*, Volume LXXI, No. 2, 1989, p. 285. See Iversen and Melville, 2010, pp. 91-93. For Bakhtin see n.190 below.

[189] See Adams, 1996, p. 34.

at the unspecified basis of how the critic's judgment of taste was made. In his role as art critic, Greenberg did not always acknowledge a role for social history and agency nor did his 'masculine' view of American Abstract Expressionism which he championed acknowledge the contribution of female artists. In contrast, Bakhtin had argued that the perceiver was an active participant, not a passive receiver as he argued was implied by the standard formalist theories of British art critic and painter Clive Bell (1881-1964) and Fry.[190] Greenberg seems to have ignored this type of account of artistic reception. Yet his account of the Abstract Expressionists did rely on a certain narrative that he created around the work, even if he did not acknowledge what he was doing explicitly.[191] In contrast to Greenberg's approach British art critic, poet and historian Sir Herbert Read's (1881-1965) contextual theory recognised psychological aspects of expression through art. Read argued that the artist expressed her or his emotional reaction to ideas and he employed Paul Klee as his prime example in this respect, emphasising the child-like quality of his work. Klee was a major influence on a number of Australian artists.[192] Read's book *The Meaning of Art* (1931) was popular with Australian artists and included a section on primitivism, relevant to the work of Albert Tucker.[193] Greenberg rejected the way in which his rival, American critic Harold Rosenberg, and British critics Alloway and Read linked their criticism to the act of painting itself, following from Rosenberg's account of 'action painting'.[194]

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[190] With respect to Greenberg's three roles, as art historian, critic and theorist, see de Duve, Thierry, trans. Holmes, Brian, *Clement Greenberg: Between the Lines*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2010. As a critic, Greenberg's judgments at times reflected his own likes or dislikes, i.e. taste concepts. With regard to his work on Modernist painting, Greenberg did recognise the role of the artist community as an audience for avant-garde art; however, de Duve posits that this did not extend to Greenberg's discussion of the works of art themselves. De Duve notes that Greenberg's aesthetics are positioned on the side of taste with the words 'value' and 'quality' often used interchangeably (p. 94).
Bakhtin's 'dialogism', an alternative to formalism, attributes social significance to literature and looks at the way in which a work is in continuous dialogue with other works. Works of Bakhtin and his circle were translated into English from the 1960s. See Haynes, Deborah J., *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, 1995. See Bell, Michael Mayerfield, and Gardiner, Michael, eds. *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*, Sage, London, 1998, pp. 1-11.

[191]Greenberg notes in 1963, that the formal properties of paintings by Louis, Noland and Olitski are 'vehicles of feeling'. See Greenberg [1963] Vol. IV, 1993, p. 153, cited in Harrison, Charles, *Modernism,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1997, p. 60.
Cf. Beyond this, however, Greenberg and Read held very different views when it came to sculpture, for example, as evidenced by their heated exchanges during the mid-1950s. I do not suggest that Greenberg subscribed to Read's views on modernism or abstraction generally. See, Getsy, David J., 'Tactility or opticality, Henry Moore or David Smith: Herbert Read and Clement Greenberg on the Art of Sculpture, 1956', in *Sculpture Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2008, pp. 73-86.

[192] Australian painters Yvonne Audette and John Olsen are two examples.
Read visited Australia for six weeks in May-June 1963 delivering a series of lectures and participating in an art education seminar held in Canberra. 'Noted Critic to Visit Australia', in *The Age*, Melbourne, May 10, 1963, p. 7.

[193] Read, Herbert, *The Meaning of Art*, Penguin Books, Bungay, UK, [1931] 1951, p. 36.

[194] Greenberg, Harold, 'How Art Writing Earns its Bad Name', *Encounter*, December 1962, pp. 67-70. LAP, Box 44/16.

These ideas are symptomatic of the key art historical approaches and theories we will encounter in examining existing art histories pertaining to the artists cited in this study. While art theorists present a concept of art meant to be ahistorical in terms of methodology, in fact, the explanatory power of such concepts is usually limited to particular styles or movements. We will see in examining Tucker's work that the significance of the works is bolstered by adopting certain theories and diminished by adopting others. The application of art historical classifications is influenced by which theory one adopts to explain any given work.

4.3 Australian Art Historiography: Underpinnings of categorisation and influence of key agents

In considering art historiography, I am interested in the historical and theoretical premises underlying the art histories that have been influential in the way we categorise artists.[195] Art historian and critic Terry Smith noted the changing perspectives in Australian art historiography in a 2011 essay in the *Journal of Art Historiography*.[196] He observes with respect to his own art education in Melbourne, Australia during the early to mid-1960s that his key lecturers included Professors Sir Joseph Burke who displayed a concern for 'personified British style connoisseurship', Franz Philipp whose focus was on Vienna School iconological interpretation of art, and Bernard Smith who applied a Marxist social history of art to a national narrative of Australian art. A close reading of Ernst Gombrich's book *Art and Illusion* (1960) was part of the curriculum. (This will inform some of my later comments.) I draw attention to Terry Smith's reflections, as an art historian and critic himself, as I wish to highlight the context in which those who opined on then contemporary art (including abstract art) operated, particularly in Melbourne. (I will later discuss various art critics and others influential in categorising art works and artists including those in Sydney.) Terry Smith's experience illustrates the continuing focus of Australian educational institutions (which was also reflected in collection practices at major art museums) on European art during the 1960s. He notes that 'Bernard Smith did not teach the history of Australian art at Melbourne University despite his pivotal role, at that time and since, in writing that history.'[197] Terry Smith makes the point that university teaching of art history in Australia is a

[195] See Pointon, 2014, p. 41.
[196] Smith, Terry, 'Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography', in *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 4, June 2011.
[197] Ibid., p 2. T. Smith notes Professors Philipp, Ursula Hoff, and Burke did not teach Australian art despite their respective authorships of monographs on Australian artists or involvement in the NGV. B. Smith was resistant to teaching Australian art to undergraduates even after later assuming a teaching position at the Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney ('PIFA') in 1968. This reflected B. Smith's belief that a grounding in European art was vital in the development and training of art historians.

relatively recent phenomenon (commencing in Melbourne in 1947, and Sydney in 1968) and further, 'systematic historical approaches to art made in this country are themselves no older.'[198]

In an earlier article, Terry Smith (1983) noted that revisionary art histories challenging the established orthodoxy were beginning to emerge through scholarship and research in the form of higher research theses and academic journal writings.[199] The emergence of a new general history of Australian art, however, had not occurred up to that time.[200] Terry Smith distinguishes between six key phases or 'moments' with respect to Australian art history writing. These are: the Colonial Period 1788-1880s; Bourgeois Nationalism 1880s-1930s; Realism versus Aestheticism; Europe vis-à-vis Australia: Modernism; the Visual Arts within Australian High Culture; and Recent Developments 1973-1983. The earlier of two periods relevant to this study, Terry Smith called 'Realism versus Aestheticism'. With respect to this period he noted the key text in existence was Bernard Smith's *Place, Taste and Tradition* written in 1945. This text was replaced as the key authority on the period by another of Bernard Smith's books, *Australian Painting 1788-1970* which has become a foundational text in Australian art history.[201] With respect to Bernard Smith's 1945 work, Terry Smith observes,

> … [it] was written during the war by a member of the Communist Party thoroughly committed to the defence of Western civilisation against the fascist barbarism sweeping Europe and threatening the world. Thus the history of Australian art is seen as part of a wider cultural/social struggle – specifically the dialectical struggle between aestheticism and realism. This is a projection back from the crucial debates of the time: between modernism and socialism in art, between fascism and communism in ideology and politics.[202]

I will explore the debates of the day further (Chapter 5); however, at this juncture I simply raise the issue of Bernard Smith's influence and biases (toward socialist realism) before examining the categorisations of abstract art of the day and those to be used in characterising artworks of the period in this thesis.

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[198] Ibid., p. 3. T. Smith notes early attempts at writing art histories by artists themselves, such as William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art*, 1934, which was dismissed by B. Smith as unprofessional. This study will focus on subsequent histories which proved influential.

[199] Smith, Terry, 'Writing the History of Australian Art: Its Past, Present and Possible Future', in *Australian Journal of Art*, Vol. 3, 1983, pp. 10-29.

[200] Several new art histories have appeared since then, including: Allen, Christopher, *Art in Australia: From Colonisation to Postmodernism*, Thames and Hudson, London, [1997] 1998; and Heathcote, 1995. Although not mentioned by T. Smith as it also relates to a particular period, see Catalano, Gary, *The Years of Hope: Australian Art and Criticism 1959-1968*, Oxford University Press, London, 1981 (which had already appeared at the time of Smith's article). A recent general art history text, Grishin, Sasha, *Australian Art: A History*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2013, is discussed below and in Chapter 7.

[201] Smith, Bernard, *Place, Taste, and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art Since 1788*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1945; _____, *Australian Painting, 1788-1970*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne and London, [1962] 1971.

[202] Smith, Terry, 1983, p. 6.

With respect to the second of his own classifications of periods related to this study, titled 'Europe vis-à-vis Australia: Modernism', Terry Smith observes that Bernard Smith, in *Place, Taste and Tradition*, organised Modernism into a second phase called 'modified forms of Cubism and Constructivism', which was followed by Surrealism and Realism. I note that this was in keeping with classifications used by English art critic Herbert Read, who was influential with Australian artists, and accorded with those used by MOMA, New York and its exhibition program.[203] During the 1940s and 1950s debates over realism and abstraction continued in the Australian art world (and elsewhere). Terry Smith observes that while updates and selective revisions were made to Bernard Smith's earlier work, the 1971 edition of *Australian Painting* left the original 1960 version virtually unaltered but added new chapters covering painting in the 1960s, and 'the methodology remained virtually unchanged.'[204] He notes that while artist and critic Robert Hughes attempted to 'rework' Bernard Smith's research in a more 'critically alive' style and to add a section on Sydney abstraction to round out the coverage of abstract tendencies, the result, Hughes' *Art of Australia,* was not a significant departure from Bernard Smith's original art historical categorisations.[205] Rather, according to Terry Smith,

> *Australian Painting* became the basis for most historical accounts and for the essays in the picture books which flourished in the 1970s, and was taken for granted by critics in their weekly reviewing. It also set the framework for detailed art historical research. This situation remains largely the case today [1983].[206]

I raise this observation here to inform my later discussion of art histories and their treatment of the artist Albert Tucker. We will see that Tucker's work was diminished by the tyranny of the representation-abstraction divide which, in the context of its European influences, would not have been the most apt categorisation by which to perceive the work of the period, particularly the work made overseas. Some artists who worked overseas are in fact omitted altogether from these earlier art histories.[207] Tucker was clearly 'type-cast' by Hughes in the 'Angry Decade' chapter of

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[203] Ibid., p. 7.
[204] Ibid., p. 8.
[205] See Hughes, Robert, *The Art of Australia*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, VIC and Hammondsworth, UK, [1966] 1970. Hughes follows a similar chronological approach to B. Smith's, with his period demarcations roughly corresponding to the decades laid out by Smith. There is no reclassification of artists from categories previously assigned by Smith.
[206] Smith, Terry, 1983, p. 8. I note that B. Smith's 1971 update of *Australian Painting* did reflect some additional information from Hughes' (1970) such as references to artists of the 1950s (acknowledged in B. Smith, 1971, p. 459). While Hughes did use some descriptive language relevant to aesthetic characterisations of works in new categories when describing each artist mentioned in his chapters, he did not go so far as to define a categorisation system. Instead, that of B. Smith remained a convenient reference point for art historians and curators.
[207] These include Brisbane painter and printmaker Margaret Cilento who studied in New York, and Sydney artist Mary Webb (see n. 221). Both artists worked and exhibited in Paris. Regarding Cilento, see Rainbird, Stephen, *Breaking New Ground: Brisbane Women artists of the Mid Twentieth Centur*y, exh. cat., Queensland University of Technology,

Art of Australia as the first Australian proponent of German Expressionism, notwithstanding an acknowledgment of the influence of French artist Jean Dubuffet on Tucker in a later section on myth. Tucker's work is particularly diminished by the categorisations Hughes provides in both chapters in which the artist is mentioned. I will examine this further in Chapter Six.

The most recent addition to the category of comprehensive Australian art histories, Sasha Grishin's *Australian Art: A History* (2013)[208] for the most part perpetuates earlier demarcations, as laid out by Bernard Smith with respect to painting, up to the late-modern period. Grishin in fact acknowledges Bernard Smith as having suggested to him, some ten years earlier, that an updated history of Australian art be compiled. A useful addition made in this text is a chapter on printmaking which acknowledges a number of artists previously omitted from art history texts including many who studied in Europe and America during the period of study.[209] Notwithstanding its stated intention of reflecting the latest scholarship, other additions to this version of Australian art history are limited to acknowledging the contribution of Indigenous artists, adding a section on contemporary artists of the past twenty-five years including photographers, and mentioning a few previously unacknowledged and lesser known artists in passing, and in some cases without providing more than a mention of the artist's name with no examples of their work.[210]

As the scholarship for Grishin's volume was generated by soliciting the aid of a number of contributors from academia and curatorial circles, both in suggesting new additions and as members of the editorial panel, the general approach to "retelling" the story remains much the same as it has been handed down. In the case of artists who worked overseas during the period of this study, the visible additions relate to a couple of artists who chose to work overseas but to exhibit in Australia (such as Jeffery Smart and Ken Whisson). While Tucker is not repositioned from Smith's earlier categorisations, John Olsen, working at the same time as Tucker in gestural abstraction, receives good coverage in a chapter dedicated to non-figurative art of the 1950s and

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Brisbane, QLD, 2007; and Underhill, Nancy D.H., *Margaret Cilento*, University Art Museum, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 1981.

[208] Grishin, 2013.

[209] Ibid., pp. 412-429. Among these are Margaret Cilento, John Wolseley, John Olsen, Janet Dawson, and Jacqueline Hick. Cilento, for example, is mentioned only once, to list her name among others who trained and made prints overseas.

[210] An example is gestural painter Yvonne Audette, who worked in Europe and trained in New York. Audette receives passing mention in Grishin's text, but no examples of her work are included. In contrast, contemporary Sydney émigré artist Aida Tomescu (b. Romania, 1955), is referenced in the text as an artist working in the Abstract Expressionist style. Tomescu rates several sentences and a full page colour plate of one of her calligraphic works and it is said she trained 'in the tradition of Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Pierre Soulages'. See Grishin, 2013, pp. 486-488. Audette, who studied at the New York Academy of Design and the Art Students League, New York, from 1952 to1955 contemporaneous with Abstract Expressionists Motherwell, Kline, and de Kooning (who she met) receives no mention.

1960s and this categorisation comes closest to capturing the gestural character of Olsen's work. Significantly, Grishin no longer categorises Olsen as a landscape painter which arguably represents a significant improvement on Smith's text. In Grishin's art history, the prime exemplars of landscape painters are Fred Williams (also arguably a gestural painter) and John Wolseley (on whom Grishin and others have written extensively with respect to landscape) along with Rosalie Gascoigne and contemporary artist William Robinson. Apart from this, categorisations made in earlier art histories by others (Smith and Hughes) appear to be virtually unchanged.

There are few published studies specific to Australian art of the 1940s to 1960 (art historian Christopher Heathcote's *Quiet Revolution* is an exception).[211] As an example of a specialised monograph on abstract art, published closer to the period of study, McCaughey's 1969 National Gallery booklet, *Australian Abstract Art*, provides a chronological overview of the development of abstraction and modernism in Australia from the 1910s onward through the geometric abstraction of Crowley and Balson to the 'all-over' freer style adopted by Balson from the mid-1950s. McCaughey notes sculptor and draughtsman Robert Klippel's involvement in the exhibition *Direction 1*, 1956, along with painters John Passmore, Eric Smith, William Rose and John Olsen. He argued that their work in fact owed more to the French styles of *tachisme* rather than American Abstract Expressionism as was frequently attributed.[212] McCaughey notes other styles of abstraction, such as textural abstraction (which I refer to as *matière* painting later in this chapter), developed in parallel to the predominant mode of Sydney informal abstraction (as he calls the work typified by John Olsen's style). His discussion culminates with reference to the 'New Abstraction' at the time of *The Field* exhibition in 1968 which marked a 'new direction in Australian art'.[213] The New Abstraction left no vestiges of the artist's experience nor did the work contain any allusive messages, but was valued as an object in and of itself without referent, if a somewhat 'garish' or 'drab' one at that, in McCaughey's estimation.

Present literature on abstraction in Australia leaves significant gaps in the development of lyrical abstraction, *tachisme* and *art informel* and how these tendencies were translated and applied by Australian artists. This is not surprising given that many texts on these tendencies have been written in French (and not translated until decades later) and were therefore largely ignored

[211] Heathcote, 1995. Catalano (1981) covers the second half of the period.
[212] McCaughey, Patrick, *Australian Abstract Art*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p. 7. I find this one of the more accurate readings close to the period. By 1969, such categories were becoming better understood in Australia. See Gruner, Billy, 'Painting the Object: Recent formal Australian painting', unpublished PhD (Visual Arts) Thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, 2003, p. 22. Gruner attributes McCaughey with making known Greenberg's updated 'formalist rhetoric' in the late 1960s, reflecting the influence of internationalism on local art practices.
[213] Ibid., pp. 7-8, 30. See *The Field*, exh. cat., 21 August - 28 September 1968, NGV, Melbourne, VIC, 1968.

by scholars in Australia and America. The emphasis on American Abstract Expressionism driven by the political use of this style during the Cold War as exemplifying American superiority and progress has tended to overshadow discussions of other abstract movements of the time. Art historian Nancy Jachec outlines a number of studies since the 1970s which have focused on the way in which abstract art was used for propaganda purposes.[214] Further, it is only in recent years that American scholarship has begun to explore alternative views and to re-evaluate the European contribution in 'writing back' the art history of the period. Jachec continues by examining Existentialism and its popularity among artists and places the debate within the context of art historian Serge Guilbaut's account of the apolitical orientation of the artists themselves whom Guilbaut argues chose to locate themselves on the political margins.[215] The latter view might have been challenged in the politically charged art world of 1940s Melbourne. However, even for Tucker, a less political position was taken once his Australian artistic circle eschewed the ideological dictates of the socialist realist approach in favour of freedom of the artist.[216]

Heathcote further notes the gap in documentation of some Australian postwar artists, particularly those working in abstractionist modes. According to Heathcote, due to the strong influence of art historian and critic Bernard Smith,

> …the very notion of postwar modernity [in Australia] came to be identified with the Antipodeans and their figurative expressionist orbit.[[217]] One by one, those artists who did not conform to this

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[214] Jachec, Nancy, 'The Space Between Art and Political Action': Abstract Expressionism and Ethical Choice in Postwar America 1945-1950', in *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 14, No. 2, 1991, pp. 18-29. *Cf.* Kimmelman, Michael, 'Revisiting the Revisionists: the Modern, its Critics, and the Cold War', in Frascina, Francis, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate,* Routledge, London and New York, 2000. (Reprinted from *Studies in Modern Art 4*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1994.) Kimmelman refutes the accounts which popularised the idea that Abstract Expressionism was used as an instrument of Cold War propaganda by government agencies. See Cockcroft, Eva, 'Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War', in Frascina, Francis and Harris, Jonathan, *Art in Modern Culture: an Anthology of Critical Texts*, Phaidon, London and New York, [1992] 2006, pp. 82-90. (Reprinted from *Artforum*, Vol. 15, No. 10, June 1974, pp. 39-41.)

[215] Guilbaut, Serge, trans. Goldhammer, Arthur, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1983.

[216] In this thesis I use the term 'Socialist Realism' to refer to the figurative artwork valued by the Socialist states including the Soviet Union and Marxist/Communist parties. Such art often depicted political ideals, leaders, industrial landscapes or workers toiling together for the common good in paintings, murals, bas-reliefs, sculpture, or posters and was used as an instrument of propaganda. The term Social Realism is often used interchangeably in older texts, however, this term can also refer to art with a social or moral message such as photographs of poverty or social problems. For a detailed definition see, Chilvers, Ian, *A Dictionary of Twentieth Century Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1999, pp. 579-580.

[217] The 'Antipodeans' comprised a group of Melbourne based artists including Charles Blackman, John Brack, Clifton Pugh, David Boyd, and John Percival and Sydney artist, Robert Dickerson, working in a figurative and landscape style. Their champion and member, critic and art historian B. Smith, drafted their 'Antipodean Manifesto' to accompany an exhibition held by the Victorian Artists Society in August 1959. They opposed abstractionist tendencies including geometric and gestural abstraction, *tachisme*, abstract expressionism, and action painting. See Dixon, Christine and Smith, Terry, exh. cat., *Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting 1942-1962: Dreams, Fears and Desires*, PIFA, Sydney, 1984, p. 32.

> definition were conveniently forgotten. …Even the 'radical' and revisionary approaches developed at this time, such as feminist art history, tended to write off the period 1945-1966 as a non-event. Aside from Joy Hester, women artists were subject to equal neglect.[218]

Most significant for this study, Heathcote notes by the 1990s, 'it became common to dismiss suggestions that there had once been an indigenous vanguard of substance'.[219] Similarly, art historian Stephen Alomes notes, 'distinguished Australian expatriates often do not appear in Australian biographical dictionaries, apparently 'written out' of Australian society.'[220] Mary Webb, an Australian artist who spent nine years working and exhibiting in Paris was virtually unknown in Australia. However, through her influence abstract painters Grace Crowley, Ralph Balson, and Frank Hinder gained international recognition through her recommending their inclusion in Michel Seuphor's *Dictionary of Abstract Art.*[221] Art historian and curator A.D.S. Donaldson notes Webb's omission from Australian art history and suggests that she and others may require a parallel history to be documented for what he terms these 'un-Australian' artists.[222]

The way in which Webb and others were 'written out' of art histories of the day, has an international parallel in the case of American artists who spent long periods working in France. These so called 'demi-Françaises' included Sam Francis and Joan Mitchell. Expatriate American painter Cy Twombly, who worked in Italy, was subject to the same treatment when exhibiting in the U.S. Although Greenberg had advocated Parisian training as a necessary step in artist training, his subsequent treatment and criticism of artists who spent too much time abroad was evident in his reviews. The champion of Abstract Expressionism as a masculine, heroic 'American' movement, Greenberg found the work of European artists too 'finished' and critiqued the work of the demi-Françaises as 'too European'. Similarly, he did not favour gestural abstraction or *art informel*. Nonetheless he acknowledged them as specific styles.

Australian expatriate art critic Robert Hughes, in a 1963 Introduction to a catalogue for the exhibition '*Australian Painting Today'* which toured the six Australian state galleries in 1963-1964, and then Europe, posited that Australia did not have an 'extreme avant-garde' and questioned

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[218] Heathcote, 1995, p. 216.
[219] Ibid., p. 217.
[220] Alomes, Stephen, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1999, p. 4.
[221] Seuphor, 1958.
[222] Donaldson, 2008, p. 20. Webb regularly exhibited in commercial galleries and at the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* with other international abstract artists. She was a member of the *Club International Féminin* in Paris. Her work, *Joie de vivre*, 1958, was recently acquired by the AGNSW (purchased 2011). The wall label in the Gallery categorises this as an '*informel*' abstract painting. It is rare to see a work by an Australian artist categorised as *'informel'* in established collections in Australia. Donaldson and art historian Rex Butler were instrumental in bringing Webb to our attention; however, she is not included in Grishin (2013).

whether abstract painting in Australia was very abstract at all.[223] Rather he found the images being painted by Australian artists in the early 1960s 'metaphorical' whether abstract or figurative in nature.[224] Hughes' comments reflect the lack of a common definition of abstract painting at the time and, in particular, confusion over how to treat works of a semi-abstract or figural nature. His comments on metaphor simply add to the confusion. I will further examine these concepts in the ensuing chapters.

While there were some references to European tendencies and gestural abstraction in the art historical writing of the period (McCaughey), these failed to be taken up in the mainstream art history texts and dominant strands of art criticism. There may have been resistance to what was perceived as 'internationalism' in the work of artists who worked for a time overseas. In any event, Australian artists working in gestural styles during this period found themselves perceived and evaluated by a set of characterisations which ignored their more avant-garde aims.

4.4 Abstract Art: Abstract Art Categories Relevant to this Study

In a collection of essays published in 2002, based on lectures given in 2000, Australian art historian and critic Rex Butler observed, 'Even today, it seems, a generation of museum curators and critics remains largely unaware of an abstract tradition in this country.'[225] Butler's comment directly applies to the modes of abstraction that are the subject of this thesis. Butler noted with respect to a late 1997 exhibition *Geometric Painting in Australia 1941-1997* at the University Art Museum, University of Queensland, Brisbane, that the curator, David Pestorius, defined geometric painting as 'resolutely non-objective and non-representational' and did not include gestural abstraction 'which retains its links with nature'.[226] This definition of the distinction between gestural and geometric abstraction with its association of gestural abstraction with nature, is contentious as I will demonstrate below. This example, however, illustrates the degree to which confusion

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[223] *Australian Painting Today: A Survey of the Past Ten Years*, exh. cat., Intro. Hughes, Robert, Australia and Europe 1963 - 1965, Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, September, 1963, unpaginated.

[224] Art critical metaphor is a typical way of describing or responding to art in journalistic or critical reviews and was common during the period in cases where formalist language was not used. This renders Hughes' statement all the more unhelpful. Abstract artists at times chose titles, after completion of a work, to provide the viewer 'something' to which they could imaginatively relate. The title did not reflect the impetus for the work however. Gallerists often suggested titles for untitled abstract works when mounting exhibitions. Other artists resisted titles, preferring numbering works or leaving them untitled. On metaphor in art related discourse see Cooke, Brandon, 'Imagining Art', in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 47, No. 1, January 2007, pp. 29-45.

[225] Butler, Rex, 'The Anamorphic Monochrome', in *A Secret History of Australian Art*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 2002, p. 58. Butler's comments were made 29 April 2000 in a lecture given at Metro Arts, Brisbane. It is quite possible that curators and critics did in the past reference European influences anachronistically, that is referencing influences from earlier periods rather than contemporaneous with the artists in question.

[226] Ibid., p. 57.

continues to the present as to how to classify subcategories of abstract art.[227] Butler questions in his essay why particular artists were included in the exhibition and others excluded, even based on the definitions given by the curator. While gestural work by Tony Tuckson was included (which is not obviously an example of geometric abstraction) and colour field painting of John Firth-Smith left out (which could fit under the geometric abstraction banner), abstract work by Roy de Maistre was excluded due to an 'analogy between painting and music' said to inspire his work (as though any reference to non-pictorial experience would rule a work out). The analogy to music is often made by artists and critics referencing painting of both geometric and gestural styles. Butler questions why no account of abstract work in Australia, and particularly geometric abstraction, has yet been written. Since his writing in 2002, scholars have begun to address this gap. One example is Dianne Ottley's recent work on painter Grace Crowley which provides insight into the development of geometric abstraction in Australia.[228]

Butler's observations, however, raise other key issues regarding debates over abstract art. It appears that the exhibition he described, covering as it did a wide ranging period, in fact included works drawn from the subcategories of geometric abstraction, gestural abstraction, colour field (sometimes called 'colour form'), and minimalist painting. The exhibition title was therefore something of a misnomer in itself. Butler also references the 1968 exhibition, *The Field*, held at the National Gallery of Victoria, which was a watershed in the acceptance of abstract painting styles in Australia (n. 213).

In this section I examine three early attempts at classification of abstract art pertinent to the present study, and then turn to one ahistorical approach. Drawing on relevant aspects of these approaches, as well as my assessment and evaluation of *tachisme* and gestural abstraction, I develop the terms of reference for the analytical framework used in this thesis. The term 'abstract' has most often been used to refer to those works considered to be 'non-figurative' or non-objective in terms of subject matter, whereby the artist does not intend to create a naturalistic

[227] I have traced the origins of the argument that art works appearing initially to be abstract, but which retain an inspiration from landscape and possibly include organic forms, are in fact figurative, to the views of art historians Michael Fried and John Rajchman, as cited in Colpitt, Frances, *Abstract Art in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2002, p. 157.

[228] Ottley, Dianne, *Grace Crowley's Contribution to Australian Modernism and Geometric Abstraction*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2010; see,
_____ , 'Grace Crowley's contribution to Australian modernism and geometric abstraction', unpublished Thesis (M. Phil.), Dept. of Art History and Theory, Faculty of Arts, University of Sydney, June, 2007; and see Gruner, 2003. Gruner attempts to build a critical post-conceptual study of the contemporary field of abstraction following *The Field* exhibition, 1968.

representation or depiction of an object, scene or person.[229] Where definitions become clouded however, vestiges of such objects or figures remain and works may be perceived as semi-abstract or inspired by natural objects and therefore characterised differently by different viewers. This is the situation advised against by Panofsky presumably, when, according to Bois, he cautioned against applying interpretative frameworks other than formalist ones to abstract artworks. However, the situation since the advent of modern art suggests Panofsky's warning was to no avail given whether a work is abstract is itself sometimes apparently an open question. Art historian Charles Harrison cites the example of cubist painter Pablo Picasso who has variously been described as 'the greatest of all abstract painters' and on the other hand as never having painted an abstract work in his life.[230]

One of the early surveys of artistic tendencies, including abstraction, was scholar and founding director of MOMA, Alfred Hamilton Barr Jr.'s *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936) produced to accompany an exhibition.[231] The catalogue cover featured a famous schematic diagram outlining the development of abstract art based on a teleological progression from one art movement to another with arrows indicating influences of one movement or artist on others (fig. 4.1). The considered belief that one or more tendencies 'begat' or spawned others (a carry-over from early art historical scholarship which dealt with previous periods) fell away during the post-war period as a multiphonic field of cultural production took hold. This period was characterised by a proliferation of tendencies and experimental approaches emerging simultaneously with some, joining with traditional 'School of Paris' genre styles, continuing in popularity even as new styles emerged and became popular. I will discuss these tendencies further in the context of the fields of cultural production and reception, while cross-referencing relevant tendencies below as required to illustrate classifications of abstract art.

The view of abstract art as an outcome of a progression was shared by art critic Clement Greenberg who viewed abstraction as a continuous development following on from representation. Greenberg championed the categories American Abstract Expressionism and Post Painterly Abstraction (also called colour field painting). As noted earlier, due to his ideological position he rejected much European work, finding it too 'finished' and preferring the masculine, visceral gestural work of the Abstract Expressionists. He did not acknowledge the

[229] See Wollheim, Richard, *Painting as an Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1987, p. 19, quoted in Colpitt, *Abstract Art in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 156.
[230] Harrison, Charles, 'Abstraction', in Franscina, Francis, Harrison, Charles, and Perry, Gill, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CONN, and London, 1993, p. 184.
[231] See Meecham, Pam and Sheldon, Julie, *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York, [2000] 2005, pp. 22-23. Barr's schematic is widely reproduced and can be found in multiple sources.

German Expressionist and Surrealist sources drawn on by the first generation Abstract Expressionists, notwithstanding the presence and influence of a number of European émigrés resident in the USA during the war years, some of whom stayed on after the war.

In section 4.3, I referenced the strong influence of Bernard Smith's art history *Australian Painting 1788-1970* (1962, 1965 editions). In that text, Smith included a chapter on figurative and non-figurative Australian art from 1950-1960 in which he acknowledged geometric and constructive categories at the start of the period and increasing influences from European post-war forms of abstraction and later from American Abstract Expressionism as the period progressed. In a later chapter on the 'expressive and symbolic styles of the 1960s' added to the 1971 edition of the text, Smith includes a section on Abstract Expressionism in which he concedes (perhaps noting McCaughey's 1969 work referenced above) that 'Australian abstract expressionism bears a closer family resemblance to European *art informel* than it does to American abstract expressionism so that the latter term is rather misleading as an implicit indication to the source of the style.'[232] While this is a valid statement, it is unfortunate Smith took such a long time to come to this conclusion. It has not gone unnoticed that Smith did not comment on the abstract tendencies he saw firsthand on his earlier visits to Europe, when writing as an art critic and historian in Australia.[233] By 1971, the narrative pertaining to Australian artists working in these styles during the 1950s and 1960s had largely been set through curatorial and critical commentary based on earlier categorisations. In his updated text, Smith did not revise his own earlier categorisations and views of particular artists previously included to attempt to 'set the record straight.' Neither does Smith recognise the category of 'American Abstract Expressionism' as primarily a reference to American action painting which was itself a subset of the overarching tendency of 'gestural abstraction' encompassing the European tendencies and the international variations. He does, however, capture the characteristics of the gestural category in his 1971 description of American abstract expressionism. Moreover, had Smith been better attuned to other positions in the field of cultural production and reception such as the writing of critics Lawrence Alloway (U.K.) and even the artist and art critic Elwyn Lynn in Australia, about whom Smith wrote

[232] Ibid., p. 353.

[233] See Saines, Deborah Durie, 'The Will to Paint: Three Sydney women Artists of the 1950s: Joy Ewart, Nancy Borlase, and Yvonne Audette', unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, Department of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, November, 1992, p. 10. Smith had seen works by Gorky, Pollock and de Kooning when attending the 1950 Venice Biennale and had made no mention of them, nor did he promote their work in his reviews in Australia. At that time Abstract Expressionism had not been seen in Australia, nor was it seen until 1959-1960. It was left to others such as Nancy Borlase (January 1957) and Elwyn Lynn (various, see Chapter 5) to comment on this new category in articles in *Broadsheet*, edited by Lynn (Saines, 1992, p. 11).

as an artist, he may have arrived at this conclusion much earlier. Both Alloway and Lynn were writing about *tachisme*, *l'art informel* and American Abstract Expressionism during the 1950s.

It is noteworthy that in the 1971 edition of his text, Smith goes into considerable detail on the work of Elwyn Lynn and Frank Hodgkinson, both painting in gestural abstract styles and is by this time aware of the European artists relevant in informing their development (artists he did not comment on in earlier years). He is, however, unable to revise his early view of Tucker, embedded as strongly as it is with Smith's recollection of the Melbourne Contemporary Art Society ('CAS') and the Angry Penguin group of the 1940s. He maintains his earlier view, notwithstanding the fact that Tucker's mature work experience and manifestation of gestural tendencies, particularly *matière* painting, not only predates that of Lynn and Hodgkinson, but made him the first Australian artist to rise to international attention for his work in that style.

The five subsections of Smith's new Chapter Eleven in the 1971 edition correspond with five styles that he identifies and provide the updated demarcations for his classification system for abstract art of the late modernist period.[234] The first style, 'the linear abstract expressionists', included works and artists presenting ideographic line, calligraphic brush strokes, portrayals of the inner world of the artist, tachiste blotches as well as biomorphic elements. Smith groups John Olsen in this category in the new edition. The second style, 'the tonal abstract expressionists' included works in which tone and field create a lyricism, similar to French art critic Alain Jouffroy's fifth category of abstract painting described below, in which forms and rhythms are evocative. Smith's third style, 'iconomorphic expression' includes painters involved with 'abstract expressionism' among them 'De Kooning, Appel, Corneille, Jorn, … [and]…Dubuffet…' who continue to include elements of figuration. As can be seen this list includes members of the European CoBrA group of gestural abstractionists as well as Dubuffet (usually perceived in a gestural category of his own) and de Kooning, the latter being the only one of those mentioned generally considered an Abstract Expressionist. This category is similar to the '*figural*' described by art theorist Elizabeth Grosz below. Included in this category by Smith are hybrid forms and visually ambiguous subjects and motifs. Also included is the use of 'conflation, whereby the artist draws upon the repertoire of images contained in his earlier work, and presents a familiar motif in a new context'[235], a practice I note Tucker utilised with his recurring red crescents, lunar landscapes, Antipodean heads and bushrangers. Smith, however, fails to mention any of Tucker's work in this category.

[234] Ibid., Chapter 11, pp. 353-386.
[235] Ibid., p. 365.

The iconomorphic image, for Smith, grows from the pictorial process but may have been initiated by automatism. Works of a labyrinthine nature are included in this category by Smith (due to their emergence as a result of the physical activity and process of the artist, rather than through conscious thought control) which therefore captures all-over works by Pollock and Tobey, as well as that of Australian painter Ian Fairweather. Smith's fourth style, 'texture painting', is commonly recognised as a subcategory of gestural abstraction, and is included in the other classification schemas noted below. In this subsection, Smith acknowledges French artists Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet and the European *art informel, art brut* and *hautes pâtes* (see Chapter 2). He credits Australian painter and art critic Elwyn Lynn with introducing texture painting to Sydney in 1960 and does not mention Tucker's earlier work in this style.[236] Indeed, Smith does not return to rectify or realign any of his earlier classifications of artists of the period from the prior edition of his text, save for expanding his categories of abstract expressionism to capture John Olsen in a more specific subcategory of his original classification. Smith's final style in Chapter Eleven of his updated book is that of 'the emblematic symbolists'. Related to geometric abstraction, Smith finds the work of artists in this category, such as Australian painters Roger Kemp and Leonard French, to be more closely aligned with Cubist and constructivist traditions than with the work of Abstract Expressionists or Antipodean figurative modernists. Also included in this subcategory are luminous works intended to convey a transcendental quality.

While Smith's updated categorisation (1971) is a vast improvement on his earlier approach and attempts to fill in the gaps in his previous account, it suffers from overlap between categories and some potential misallocations of sub-categories particularly with respect to modes of allusive and gestural abstraction. Smith was the most influential art critic of the period under consideration, yet did not have categories available at the time to adequately address the new work. After the period, he developed his 1971 schema, which was not taken up in an influential way. An art critic who did develop categories relevant to work produced during the subject period was French art critic Alain Jouffroy (b. 1928).

[236] I note that Smith in fact relies to a large extent on Elwyn Lynn's own writing about the category of *matière* (texture or matter) painting and, based on this, credits Lynn with studying 'the whole movement' and 'not Tàpies only', and bringing a number of the European artists practising this tendency to his attention [emphasis added] (see Smith, 1971, p. 368). He states that Lynn discovered the style at the Venice Biennale in 1958, and saw the Wols retrospective and works by Spanish and other European artists working in this style during his time in Europe. Smith claims the movement came to international attention in 1960 when Fautrier won the major prize at the Venice Biennale. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 2, this tendency arose much earlier (with Fautrier's *Hostages*, 1945 and Paris group exhibitions in 1948 and 1951 when the term *l'art informel* was coined). Tucker and others working in Paris and Europe were well aware of it long before 1960 and were themselves making *matière* works.

Turning now to European classifications of abstract art, Jouffroy, writing in the Paris weekly *Arts*, distinguished between six main forms or categories of abstract painting:

1) Geometrical abstract pictures following Mondrian's theories to the letter: no curves, nothing but surfaces in proportion; no mixtures, nothing but pure colour;
2) *Tachiste* pictures in the Wols tradition: no outlined forms, nothing but research in 'substances';
3) Automatic pictures: the brush Is not used, only colour squirted, spilled or laid out of the tube;
4) 'Sign' pictures, inspired by Far Eastern calligraphy with some calligraphies by actual Japanese painters along-side;
5) Research in forms and rhythms, but nevertheless evocative, as demonstrated by Atlan and Alechinsky; and
6) 'Abstract landscapes': viewed from above, imagined or inspired by real landscapes.[237]

While not a collectively exhaustive or mutually exclusive list, these categories are of significance to this study due to their reference to European gestural abstraction tendencies and their circulation in discourse at the time. Artists themselves, working in Paris and Europe, were therefore aware of these sub-categories if not of this classification scheme. It was recognised by Jouffroy that this listing was not necessarily representative of all possibilities but it was put forward as a way of assisting viewers and his readers in appreciating the tendencies then prevalent. This approach was suggested as a way of viewers 'finding their way' in understanding Michel Seuphor's *Dictionary of Abstract Painting* (1958) and the accompanying Paris exhibition by Raymond Nacenta, the director of the influential *Galerie Charpentier*.[238] This simplified classification scheme makes a convenient starting point for my discussion of the nature of gestural abstraction, the focus of this thesis, and is useful due to its attention to common sub-categories overlooked in Smith's schema of categories in use in Australian art during the period.

With respect to Jouffroy's categories, I provide the following evaluation in order to identify certain elements which may assist in understanding the emerging styles of the period of study and any useful terms which may help to inform the classification scheme to be used in my analytical framework. In the case of the category (1) geometrical abstraction, Jouffroy is closest to

[237] Quotation cited in Nacenta, Raymond, *School of Paris: The Painters and the artistic Climate of Paris Since 1910*, New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, CT, 1960, p. 62. MOMA archives New York. Jouffroy was a regular contributor to the weekly magazine *Arts*, published in Paris from 1952-1966. Nacenta does not reference the issue of *Arts* in which this article appeared. With respect to *Tachisme* see Chapter 5 (5.2). *Informel* became a catch-all term embracing *Tachisme* and other gestural forms.

[238] Idem. Nacenta, writing in 1960, notes such a schema to be useful 'while an abstract language is being elaborated…a new mood, new reflexes, and new sensibility are being evolved, not exactly among the public but in the period in which we live and in the man of this period.'

definitions used by others than is the case for his remaining categories.[239] The category of geometric abstraction was generally considered a Cubism-derived style and as such was more similarly described by critics and historians working in different art worlds, as noted above in the cases of Alfred H. Barr Jr. and Clement Greenberg.[240]

Jouffroy's second form, the category of (2) *tachiste* abstraction, came to be incorporated within the category of *l'art informel* or gestural abstraction. Art historian Fiona Gaskin has described *tachisme* as a 'chameleon word used by artists and critics to describe a number of idioms.'[241] Significantly for this study, and for my consideration of classification approaches, influential British art historian and critic Lawrence Alloway defined the category as including allusive abstraction in which highly abstract works contained allusions to landscape, still life and the figure within painterly non-figuration.[242] Jouffroy's third category of (3) automatic pictures refers to a technique of paint application rather than to the 'automatic writing' which was a Surrealist device adopted by gestural abstractionists and American Abstract Expressionists as a way of 'accessing the subconscious' to incept a painting. As such, this Jouffroy category can be considered another manifestation of *tachiste* work. The thick impasto application of paint, sometimes directly from the tube, was a method used by *art brut* and *matière* painters, both subcategories of *l'art informel* or gestural abstraction. The fourth category of (4) 'sign' pictures inspired by Eastern calligraphy is also a form of gestural abstraction. This form of gesturally-orientated work with a calligraphic emphasis, as typified by the work of French painter Henri Michaux, has recently been examined by Birgit Mersmann (2012) and found to be distinctly different from American Abstract Expressionism or action painting.[243] In Chapter Three, I examined a work by Mark Tobey whose work was representative of the category 'sign pictures'.

Jouffroy's fifth category of (5) forms and rhythms, as demonstrated in the work of French painter Jean-Michel Atlan (1913-1960) and Belgian painter Pierre Alechinsky (b. 1927), both associated with the CoBrA group of painters, also corresponds to the category of gestural

[239] An exception is the 1997 exhibition *Geometric Painting* noted by Butler (2002) (4.4), which grouped later styles, such as colour field painting, together with geometric abstraction (n. 225).
[240] This Cubist derived 'cold abstraction' was popular before the WWII. Geometric abstraction involves the interplay of shapes and forms within the picture plane. Although the category is commonly recognised, I note that the use of Mondrian as a prime example of geometric abstraction is open to debate. See Bois, 1990, pp. 104-106 and p. 247.
[241] Gaskin, Fiona, 'British Tachisme in the post-war period, 1946-1957', in Garlake, Margaret, *Artists and Patrons in Post-War Britain*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT, 2001, p. 17.
[242] Ibid., pp. 29-31.
[243] Mersmann, Birgit, 'Writing Abstraction in the Work of Henri Michaux', in Crowther, Paul and Wûnsche, Isabel, eds., *Meanings of Abstract Art: Between Nature and Theory*, Routledge, New York and London, 2012, pp. 198-216. Michaux's combination of writing and painting/drawing may be termed 'scriptural abstraction' (p. 198). Other artists employing calligraphy and other forms of ideographic and pictorial writing, also known as calligraphic abstraction, included André Masson, Georges Mathieu, Pierre Soulages, and Michel Tapié (see (4.5)).

abstraction[244]. In the case of Atlan, coloured forms in his paintings are often outlined with gestural black line. Alechinsky, who studied calligraphy in Japan and extended his gestural work to calligraphic compositions in ink, was also a printmaker.

Jouffroy's sixth and final category (6) 'abstract landscapes' is of particular interest to this study as such a subcategory is not often proposed in classification schemes of painting. Any intimation of a horizon line may result in a work being perceived as a landscape, and even a work without such a referent may be described as an 'aerial view' of a landscape. Similarly, theorists and artists often propose that a natural referent, such as a landscape, may serve as the inspiration for an abstract work. Art critic and theorist Harold Rosenberg proposed that action paintings,

> …tend to become landscapes that are metaphors for feelings. Pollock's *Blue Poles* and *Lavender Mist*, Kline's ramplike paint structures, de Kooning's *Gotham News* and East Hampton beach motifs are instances of scenes evoked from moods….The landscape is the emanation of the artist, and it has his emotional physiognomy rather than the atmosphere of a place…Hofmann was predominantly a creator of landscapes seen for the first time when they manifested themselves on the canvas.[245]

Such works were said to portray interior images taken from an interior landscape separate from any specific scene in reality. It is noteworthy that the French considered *dépaysage* a tendency in and of itself. This category was overlooked in Australian art resulting in a number of gestural painters being classified as representational landscape artists. Had these categories been applied to Tucker's work, his reception would have been much different, as we will see with reference to European reviews of his work cited in Chapter Six. None of these categories, however, adequately address work which falls half way between figurative and abstract, although Jouffroy's classifications address the case of abstract landscape. For artwork which falls into this half-way house known as the '*figural*', I draw upon the work of philosopher and art theorist Elizabeth Grosz.

Grosz (2008) offers three broad categories to distinguish between types of abstraction in modern painting and the ways in which they regulate relations between sensation and chaos.[246] The first, simply called (1) abstraction refers to the 'optical geometry' of the type presented in the

[244] The CoBrA group consisting of artists from Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam were opposed to geometric abstraction and favoured spontaneous gestural abstraction drawing on sources from Surrealism, Expressionism, ethnic and folk art. See Chapter 5.
[245] Rosenberg, Harold, *Art on the Edge: Creators and Situations*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1976, p. 84. This was stated with respect to the American Action Painters or Abstract Expressionists.
[246] Grosz, Elizabeth, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, p. 87.

works of the Russian constructivists. This corresponds with the stylistic tendency of geometric abstraction common to the previous categorisation schemas discussed.

Grosz's second category of (2) Abstract Expressionism is dominated by the tactile or haptic rather than the optical.[247] The pattern is no longer discernible, 'all standard frames of reference – top/bottom, figure/ground are subverted. Thus the eye is confused.'[248] Jackson Pollock and the American action painters are examples of this category in which 'chaos is spread throughout the painted field of the work.'[249] This corresponds with Greenberg's 'all-overness'.[250]

Grosz's third category falls 'midway between figurative art and abstractionism', which philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes, following philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1971) as the '*figural*'.[251] This category includes the work of artists such as Cézanne, British painter Francis Bacon, and French painter Chaim Soutine, and, I would suggest, Albert Tucker in this study. These artists 'rely on the visceral force of painting (unlike abstraction) yet aim to contain it to a part but not the whole of the painted field (unlike expressionism)'.[252] I find this a useful classification in its encapsulation of the nature of Tucker's work and in its applicability during the period. It is this category that I find lacking in those categorisation schemes which had difficulty dealing with artists such as Bacon, de Kooning or Tucker.

In determining the appropriate category for a given work, in concluding this section I note philosopher Paul Crowther's concept of synchronic positioning. Crowther views the artist as an operator within a given milieu of artistic practice, climate of ideas, social attitudes and social conditions.[253] The categorisation schemas introduced by Jouffroy and Grosz are useful in reflecting categories which were active in the milieu in which gestural artists working in Europe, and their artistic production, were embedded. This concept is consistent with Walton and Pettit

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[247] The haptic is applicable to gestural abstraction and *matière* painting. See Hetrick, Jay, 'What is Nomad Art? A Benjaminian Reading of Deleuze's Riegl', in *Deleuze Studies*, Vol. 6.1, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, UK, 2012, p. 35. See Lowenfeld, Viktor, trans. Oeser, Oscar, *The Nature of Creative Activity*, Harcourt and Brace, New York, 1939. [Vienna, 1938.]

[248] Idem. See Zepke, Stephan, *Art as Abstract Machine: Ontology and Aesthetics in Deleuze and Guattari*, Routledge, New York and London, 2005.

[249] *Cf.* Taylor, Richard, P., et al, 'Using Science to Investigate Jackson Pollock's Drip Paintings", in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 8-9, 2000, pp. 137-150. Taylor *et al* identify fractal patterns in Pollock's dripped paintings which underpin apparent chaos. The fractal patterns were then 'fine-tuned' by the artist with additional layers of paint creating dimensionality. I refer to chaos in the Deleuzean sense in this thesis rather than in Taylor's sense.

[250] The lack of partitioning of smooth or haptic space creates the possibility of a disorienting vision for the viewer (Hetrick, 2012, pp. 27- 41).

[251] Idem.

[252] Idem.

[253] Crowther, *TI.*

(Chapters 1 and 2) and the focus of this study on the social systems of art and the dynamics of the art world (Chapter 3) in rounding out the analytical framework.[254] As we will see in Chapter Six, the work of exemplar artist Albert Tucker has been categorised variously as fitting into *tachiste* or *matière* categories and as falling between figuration and abstraction. If we consider the artists among whom Tucker was working, in order to discuss his work in line with these terms, we require more finely tuned categorisations. For that reason, I will set out below the categories we need for this purpose. I draw upon relevant categorisations from Smith and Jouffroy; however, I find categories developed by Grosz more recently are helpful in discussing abstract art.

4.5 Abstract Art: Defining the terms employed in this thesis

Recall (Chapter 1 (1.2)), Walton's criteria to assist in determining the category within which to perceive a work to enable its most apt characterisation include: (i) whether the work displays a large number of features standard to a particular category (and minimises contra-standard features); (ii) which category would lead to its greatest appreciation and significance relative to the art world (such that it is perceived as better, more interesting or pleasing); (iii) the artist's intentions if known; and (iv) whether the artist's contemporaries would most likely have categorised it in a given category. From my examination of categorisation schemas for abstract art available in the period of study (to satisfy Walton's criteria, particularly (i) and (iv)), and drawing on relevant explicatory categories from ahistorical approaches, I have determined the classification system outlined below to be most appropriate to frame the analysis of the works discussed in the chapters to follow. While I have chosen to group my sub-categories under four broad categories, I note that allusive abstraction may be considered a subset of gestural abstraction. Nominating allusive abstraction as a distinct category, however, is useful to highlight what has been an area of ambiguity in art historical accounts as I indicated in the previous section.

Geometric abstraction

This category relates to Smith's emblematic symbolists, but draws more heavily on Grosz's notion of 'abstraction' based on optical geometry and conventional definitions of geometrical abstraction

[254] In addition, Crowther draws from his pictorial theory to include the instrumental categories of denotation, connotation, metonymy and metaphors, irony and allegory (*TI,* pp. 77-95). Such pictorial categories indicate the artist's intention to direct the viewer to a referent or source external to the work itself which may be necessary to access the work's meaning. Supplementary information is generally not considered an integral part of the work. Nevertheless, the process of placement of a work within its production context and among other works as precedents and cultural texts is relevant to the process of determining meaning (consistent with Walton and Pettit, Chapters 1 and 2). Crowther's instrumental set of categories presents a refinement to Panofsky's iconographic levels of meaning (*TI*, p. 88).

derived from Cubism and constructivism. Australian examples include Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson, both of whom were cited in Michel Seuphor's 1958 *Dictionary of Abstract Art*. (See Crowley's *Painting*, 1951, fig. 4.2). A geometric abstract example in Crowther's 'optical abstraction' mode (which affects the visual process through optical variation) is *Yllam*, 1949-1952, (fig. 4.3), by French artist Victor Vasarely.

Allusive abstraction

This category, following Alloway (1953) (Chapter 5, (5.3)), includes Smith's iconomorphic, motifs, and labyrinthine modes, the semi-abstract modes of d*épaysage,* abstract landscapes (Jouffroy), landscapes of the mind and biomorphic abstraction. It includes the *figural* as defined by Grosz and some automatic pictures, as noted below. An example of allusive abstraction, in its biomorphic mode, is Chilean born Roberto Matta's *The Spherical Roof Around our Tribe (Revolvers),* 1952 (fig. 4.4). Allusive abstraction will prove to be a particularly important category for discussing Albert Tucker's work of the relevant period.

Gestural abstraction

Gestural abstraction is a stylistic tendency or category which describes works in which the mark of the artist and traces of previous gestures may be discerned. Smith's linear abstraction, texture painting, and tonal expressionist classifications are included in this category as well as labyrinthine all-over works (which Smith includes instead under his iconomorphic category, his equivalent to allusive in my categorisation schema). Gestural abstraction includes all of Jouffroy's non-geometric categories and Grosz's Abstract Expressionism which, in her schema, *does* include the labyrinthine and tactile (both haptic and optical senses are involved). In Chapter Two (2.3), I identified the origins of French lyrical abstraction later known as *l'art informel,* a term coined in 1947 which described the overarching gestural tendency, and gave examples of European artists working in this mode. Jackson Pollock's *Shimmering Substance,* 1946, (fig. 4.5) and Willem de Kooning's *Woman 1*, 1950-52, (fig. 4.6), are American examples of gestural works. The latter work might also be considered allusive or *figural*, however, due to the overriding emphasis on the paint and the brushwork, I have categorised it here. While this tendency was known as Abstract Expressionism in the U.S., that label in effect applied to a very select group of artists, as I discuss in Chapters Three and Five.[255] 'Gestural abstraction' is a broad and internationally applicable term I therefore use in this study and I employ the following sub-categories:

[255] See Gibson, 1997, p. xxix; and see Appendix C.

Tachisme – Characterised by blotches, stains, impasto paint, juxtaposed colour, daubs, or splintering effects in the work. Included are Smith's tonal expressionists, in which form and rhythm produce lyrically evocative works and those works in which the artist explores rhythms and forms (Jouffroy) (fig. 4.7).

Calligraphic abstraction and sign – Works which include calligraphic, ideographic line, mark-making, graffiti, and all structural modes based on signs (figs. 4.8 and 4.9).

All-over – Including labyrinthine (Smith) and interlacings, 'cosmic painting' (a term coined by French artist Georges Mathieu for space no longer conceived in the classic manner) (fig. 4.5).

Matière painting – Also known as material abstraction[256] or texture painting, this category is characterised by the application of very thick paint often mixed with other materials, sometimes evidencing slashing. This includes the *hautes pâtes* (high pastes) of Fautrier and Dubuffet. *Swirls*, 1958, by Fautrier, (figs. 2.3, 2.4) (Chapter 2), and Australian artist Carl Plate's *Up, outwards*, 1962, (fig. 4.10), are examples of this mode.

Automatic pictures, drippings and pourings may fit within more than one sub-category depending on the overall effect of the work – whether the salient feature is the materiality of the paint or the process of its construction in a *matière* work, an 'all-over' interlacing of line, the *tachiste* staining effect of a pouring, or the semi-figurative nature of an allusive abstraction.

Planar abstraction

This category, in which any figure-ground relationships are balanced through distribution of colour or other devices, includes the tendency of colour field painting and monochromes (such as Ad Reinhardt's *Abstract Painting*, 1957, fig. 4.11) in which brush work or marks of the artist are not visible (Crowther). This may include Crowther's category of luminescent abstraction in which works display a strong transition in the contrast from one band of colour to another.[257] Rothko's later works are examples of this category. Due to the contrast between the colour bands or zones, including variations in the density of paint, push-pull effects are set up; forms appear to float in space as clouds of colour. Such works are effective in their allusive power and reflect the espoused desire of the Abstract Expressionists to evoke or express feeling through an art work.

[256] See Crowther, *TI,* pp. 148-165.

[257] 'Planar abstraction' characterises works free of gestural implications or texture, in which the planar unity or balance is achieved through the 'push-pull' optical effects of colour or a balanced figure-ground relationship. The strict two dimensional nature of the picture plane is achieved. The terminology 'push-pull' was conceived by artist and teacher Hans Hofmann who was influential for many of the American Abstract Expressionists. See Rosenberg, 1976, p. 26. Colour field painting is a category which appeared toward the end of the period of study and for which precursors began to appear in the work of the American Abstract Expressionists during the period. Some artists worked in both modes.

These Rothko works are Minimalist precursors with respect to tendency. Rothko's No. 5/No. 24, 1948 (fig. 4.12), is an example of luminescent abstraction. His subsequent works of this type tended toward horizontal bands of colour. This early version evidences the cloud effect with soft edged shapes creating the push-pull effects. Rothko's work has at times been classified in different categories depending on which properties are salient to the reviewer or critic.

There will be cases in which a work might be viewed in one or more of the gestural categories. A work by Jean Dubuffet which contains a stick figure meandering through a flat space (reminiscent of Klee's expression 'taking a line for a walk') and rendered in a heavy impasto possibly with sand or debris blended into the pigment might be categorised as one of allusive abstraction*, matière* painting or linear abstraction. If the work is interpreted as conveying a 'landscape of the mind', it would most probably be interpreted as d*é*paysage (fig. 4.13). In such cases it will be necessary to determine which category would make the work the most significant. This will require consideration of the particular time, place and art movement or stylistic innovation incorporating the parameters developed in Chapters One through Three. In interpreting and applying the categories it is essential to consider the overriding properties of a work. While it can be argued that many abstract works contain some allusive elements, in the case of a work in which the most outstanding characteristic is the quality and rigour of the brushwork and the viscosity of the paint itself, any allusion to figuration may be secondary. This has been the case in interpreting a work such as Willem de Kooning's *Woman 1*, 1950-52, (fig. 4.6).

4.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I examined art historical methodologies for interpreting works of abstract art and considered issues and influences in art historiography which may have contributed to mis-classifications of works. This included a consideration of the way early classifications can be hard to revise and can perpetuate misinterpretations into the future. My discussion of the theories of art history and observations on the difficulties in developing an objective approach to appreciation of abstract art during a period of transition, as new styles gradually became known and appropriate terms to describe the new art developed, will be applied in the assessment of the field of reception for the work of Albert Tucker. In the case of evolving styles, new possibilities open and newer works may necessitate further refinements to existing ways of looking at and describing art. Resistant attitudes toward new categories can be slow to change even among the cognoscenti of the art world.

Finally I explored a range of classification schemas for abstract art. I noted the art historical methodologies in use in the classification of artists and their historical positions. Drawing upon influential categories used to classify abstract art, in parlance at the time in Europe, I defined a set of abstract art categories or definitional parameters to complete my analytical model to be used in the analysis to follow. This framework will be drawn upon to understand in retrospect the art categorisations used in Europe, the field of cultural production for the targetted art works. The methodology sections of this thesis have served to set the scene in preparation for an examination of the art critical discourse of the period.

I turn now to Part II in which I commence with an examination of art critical discourse, the key debates of the day and ideas in circulation in the relevant art worlds (Chapter 5). In examining the power of key positions in the field of cultural production and reception, and debate around emerging tendencies and particularly gestural abstraction, I will seek to determine whether the way the critics framed their categorisations of the art they reviewed differed significantly from my approach and how it aligned with later art historical accounts. This will provide the relevant context in which to frame the analysis and categorisation of the work of the Albert Tucker.

Chapter Five: Art Critical Discourse 1947-1963 – Positioning Gestural Abstraction

In this chapter, I provide evidence of the range of art critical discourse of the period 1947-1963 in the major art worlds of cultural production, dissemination and reception for gestural abstraction in Paris, London and New York, framing the discussion with concepts developed in Part I of this thesis. I conclude with the example of the art critical discourse associated with the reception of Australian art in London which provides background useful in contextualising the reception of the artist featured in Chapters Six and Seven. The weight carried by the commentary of the key critics in these art worlds with respect to the consecration of artists and artworks will be explored. This will provide insight into how particular aesthetic characterisations came to be associated with gestural works or styles (art historical categories) attributed to particular artists and perpetuated in art historical accounts.

5.1 Art Criticism – Key Positions and Agents of Consecration in the Fields of Cultural Production and Reception

The importance of the role of the critic with respect to meaning-creation for self-reflexive late modern abstract art has been widely acknowledged by various art commentators and historians. Philosopher Daniel Herwitz notes that 'it was not for nothing the [avant-garde] movements revolved around those who wrote: poets, critics, theorists.'[258] This is consistent with the Bourdieusian based approach I draw on in this thesis which posits that the artist and artwork are socially created in the fields of production and reception (3.3). Discursive approaches, as philosopher Stanley Cavell implies in discussing the role of the critic, stress that meaning is socially constructed through language arising from interactions in the art world and is not simply something stated as a fact, such as an artist's utterance.[259] Discourse arises in specific contexts as we will see below. While meaning may be created in one art world context, this does not mean it will be conveyed together with the work in the context of another art world or field of reception.[260]

[258] Herwitz, Daniel, *Aesthetics: Key Concepts in Philosophy,* Continuum, London and New York, 2008, p. 116-117.
[259] Cavell, Stanley, 'Music Decomposed', in *Must we mean what we say?,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK and New York, 2002, p. 208.
[260] See Van Maanen, 2009, p. 86, regarding the way in which actors adapt in relation to the setting as they pass through 'translation centres' in the art world.

My examination of art critical discourse and how it has been shaped will encompass the key **positions** in the field (Chapter 3) including critics, dealer/gallerists, major institutions and influential patrons as well as touching on the key intellectual and artistic debates of the day.[261] I will examine how critics assisted their readers or the viewing public in attending to the salient characteristics of the work. Where critics' opinions were simply of the nature of a personal 'like or dislike' of a particular work, such views will only be of interest to the study if the critic was particularly influential. An examination of the relevant art critical discourse will assist in determining whether a particular aesthetic category was recognised by the society in which the work was produced and, importantly, the field in which it was received (Chapter 1, Walton (iv)).

American art historian Michael Leja (1993) implicitly draws on field theory, when he observes that 'the artist, as historical actor, is a subject constituted by cultural and symbolic systems and structures, which in turn are elaborated, developed, and revised by the activities of the artist. The artist's contributions are not determined by those systems.'[262] This involves subjection to the dominant discourses and ideologies present in social interaction (what I refer to as the dynamics of the field, Chapter 3).[263] Importantly, Leja posits that studies of the New York School have generally been thwarted by simplification of the dynamics of the art world. I note that this simplification occurred in many art historian circles including Australian. Leja's approach in examining the field of production and the discursive matrices in which the art was produced and received, is intended to provide rich and precise descriptions of the art as well as assist in its interpretation.[264] Caution is required as the contextualisation process itself is also constructed through the interpretation of the historian or researcher.

Clearly Leja's approach is sympathetic to that of this study. He observes, 'works acquire meanings – along with salient properties and value – in the interaction with specific communities of viewers; meaning is transitive, constituted as much by the interpreting audience as by the work itself. For a work or movement that goes on to achieve canonical status, as Abstract Expressionism has, that process of meaning constitution is especially complex.'[265] Echoing my

[261] In this thesis, I favour a Bourdieusian contextualisation over Luhmann's model (noted in 3.3, n.102). The latter is silent on art institutions and systems of commerce and politics, and does not account for the conditions of discursive power under which aesthetic discriminations come to be asserted and defended (the subject of this chapter). See Harrington, 2004, pp. 200-201.
[262] Leja, 1993, p. 10.
[263] Leja draws on the work of Paul Smith on subject formation and the role of discourse in the cultural field. He cites Smith, Paul, *Discerning the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MINN, 1988, pp. 156-7.
[264] Leja, 1993, p. 11.
[265] Ibid., p. 12.

observations in Chapters One and Two, and recalling Danto, Leja concurs that initial sets of meanings and values may shift over time. While the initial set of meanings and values attributed to a work or artist may account for its initial consecration within the art world and it may be valorised by an initial audience, this may 'become overlain with other meanings and valuations constituted by subsequent audiences.'[266] In the case of Albert Tucker, early art historical and critical interpretations tended to 'stick', as I will demonstrate in Chapter Six, while in the case of an artist such as Jackson Pollock, new interpretations of his work tended to 'degesturalise' his approach as new ways of looking evolved.

In this chapter, I will explore the role of art critics and writers such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg (USA), Robert Hughes (Australia and USA) Roger Fry, Clive Bell, Lawrence Alloway, David Sylvester and Ernst Gombrich (United Kingdom), and Pierre Restany (France) with attention to their influence on the success or recognition (consecration or cultural capital) gained by individual artists working in the gestural abstraction category. This category failed to gain early traction with the critics of the day or the viewing public in Australia. The role of Australian critics such as Bernard Smith, Paul Haefliger, and Elwyn Lynn will be discussed with respect to the work of Albert Tucker in the ensuing chapters. While this thesis examines gestural abstraction and particularly European modes of expression in Tucker's work, the art critical discourse generated by American critics is included in this chapter due to its far reaching influence during the period, including its influence in Europe. Tucker produced work in the U.S. from 1958-1960. American art was featured in a number of touring exhibitions in Europe and at the Venice *Biennales*. A significant contingent of American painters worked and exhibited in Paris in the immediate postwar years and influenced Australian and other artists working in Europe. I will examine art critical discourse in the fields of cultural production and reception in Paris, London and New York and an example of the reception of Australian art in London in the sections to follow. Particulars of reception in other art worlds (such as Italy) will be examined as applicable in Chapter Six.

5.2 Paris and Europe

French artist, curator and entrepreneur Michel Tapié coined the term '*informel'* for the formless art of European artist Wols (born Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze) (fig. 5.1) produced after World War II and later '*un art autre*' for the new art, free of formal aesthetic convention forming a break with the past. 'Art as object' and the role of the spectator (the phenomenology of perception) became part

[266] Idem.

of art critical discourse relevant to the new categories.[267] Both of these implied an active viewer and had implications for strategies of production and exhibition of art work. Works in this neo-Dada mode, '*un art autre*', recalled the anti-art Dadaist rejection of beauty and traditional aesthetics. The New Realists of Restany's circle used everyday materials and junk in assemblages combining elements of painting and sculpture.[268] These strategies were part of a trend in *avant-guerre* Paris in which artists were 'critical of the society they saw around them, and actively engaged in creating artistic languages and forms that might critique and subvert the status quo, if not also change it.'[269] Such new languages or 'counter-discourses' arose within the social milieux of the art worlds in which the new work was produced. Certain art critics, writers and exhibition organisers became highly influential in framing the discourse around an emerging category. They did this through their selection of artists to be exhibited together and the promotional discourse surrounding the works in both the gallery/exhibition context and newspaper articles or journal reviews. The latter promoted the work to the viewing public. Particular galleries became associated with the new categories.[270]

An example of an influential agent within the cultural field is Michel Tapié. He developed and promulgated terms of discourse which presented Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies, in the best possible way from about 1955. As we will see, this is significant for this study because Tàpies was successfully promoted as a *matière* painter. Michel Tapié introduced the artist to gallerist Rodolphe Stadler, of *Galerie Stadler*, Paris and a contract ensued. Antoni Tàpies was represented by both *Galerie Stadler*, Paris and by Martha Jackson's Gallery in New York. Tàpies found that in signing with these galleries, he was relieved of the burden of having to promote himself. At this time the exhibition *Fifty Years of Painting in the United States* was presented in Paris by MOMA, New York, including works by Still, Pollock, Kline, Rothko, Tobey, de Kooning, Motherwell and others. Antoni Tàpies recalled,

> …[together with] the effect caused by Fautrier, Dubuffet, Michaux, Mathieu, Bryen, Hartung, Soulages, Ubac, and others agglutinated by Tapié in France those artists had a great repercussion and were to bring about so many changes in the mentality and taste of people in old

[267] See Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, trans. Smith, Colin, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London, [1962] 2002; also see Elkins, James, *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, Routledge, New York and London, 2006, p. 99.
[268] See Robinson, Julia, ed., *New Realisms: 1957-1961, Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle*, exh. cat., *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia*, Madrid, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London, 2010.
[269] See Leighten, Patricia, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2013, p. 10.
[270] In Paris, for example, *Galerie Charpentier* hosted the *Salon de Mai* exhibitions and continued the *École de Paris* post-cubist tradition, *Galerie Denise René* specialised in geometric abstraction, and *Galerie René Drouin* specialised in vanguard art. See Cone, Michele C., 'Pierre Restany and the Nouveaux Réalistes', in *Yale French Studies*, No. 98, 'The French Fifties', 2000, pp. 50-65.

> Europe and become fashionable in galleries. The reverberations of that vogue included me, and I was often labelled as a member of the movement that was acquiring the name of Informalism.[271]

While Tàpies was not entirely comfortable in being associated with the 'amorphous', he nevertheless saw the benefit of the association. He described the 'avalanche of new -isms' as reflective of the growing consumerism of the period. This example illustrates the benefit to artists of being exhibited in group exhibitions where new tendencies were emerging, no matter how loosely their work may have been stylistically related to that of the other artists included. As we will see, this was a strategy utilised by a number of influential gallerist/dealers and art critics in presenting 'new' work to the viewing public at this time.[272]

Further, while advocates such as Tapié actively promoted new categories, the debate over mimesis or pictorial representation versus abstract or non-objective art continued from about 1946 to 1953. Art historian Natalie Adamson notes with respect to the Parisian artworld that abstract art was viewed by vocal pro-modernist critics such as Leon Degand or Charles Estienne (who were the two most well-known) as the logical advance of painting towards the explorations of its proper means and expressive capacities, much like the attitude of American Clement Greenberg. Degand favoured geometric, or abstraction '*froid*' (cold), whilst Estienne favoured lyrical and subjective abstraction '*chaud*' (hot). Meanwhile French critic Jacques Baschet promoted a return to naturalistic realism.[273] In addition, School of Paris artists (as defined in Chapter 4) continued to work in traditionally derived styles.

Art historian Sarah Wilson notes the influence of French philosophers and writers on the subject matter of art created in the postwar years in Paris, pre-dating the influence of philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who is often credited with being influential. She links the primitivism of artists Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier and their development of *matière painting* and *haut pâtes* resembling detritus to writings of philosophers Henri Bergson and Gaston Bachelard who focused

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[271] Tàpies, Antoni, *A Personal Memoire: Fragments for an Autobiography*, Fundacio Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona and Indiana University Press, Barcelona, and Bloomington, IN, 2009, p. 309.

[272] A counter-example is that of painter Simon Hantaï (b. Hungary 1922) initially associated with the Surrealists. He exhibited in 1953 at the Parisian Surrealist gallery, *L'Etoile Scellée*. Surrealist critic Jean-Louis Bédouin was initially supportive of Hantai's work but denounced him when Hantaï left Breton's Surrealist group. Hantai's name later disappeared from postwar accounts of the Surrealist movement although he initiated an innovative category of *pliage* painting incorporating non-traditional materials. See Durozoi, Gérard, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2002, p. 673, in Warnock, Molly, 'Thought by Painting: The Early Work of Simon Hantaï", unpublished manuscript, PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, October 2008.

[273] Adamson, Nathalie, ''The Serpent Eats its Tail': *Avant-garde* and *Arriere-garde* in Paris 1943-1953', in Adamson, Natalie, and Norris, Toby, eds., *Academics, Pompiers, Official Artists and the Arriere-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900-1960*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, 2009, p.226.

on primal matter, imagination and daydreaming in their writing and lectures before Sartre became active in art criticism.[274] Bergson and Bachelard were explicitly cited by artists as influences at the time. *Matière et mémoire* was a title used by Bergson dating back to 1896, later adopted by poet Francis Pongé in a text for a Dubuffet exhibition.[275] Later, Sartre's work itself was drawn upon by artists such as Wols who used Sartre's text to accompany his paintings in exhibitions held at the *Galerie René Drouin* in 1945. Wols demonstrated the limitation of human intentionality by focusing as far as possible on pure matter. The juxtaposition of Sartre's writing and Wols painting was published in the art journal *Verve* in 1948.[276] In this way philosophical and literary discourse both inspired production and supported reception within the cultural sphere.

Wilson notes Dubuffet's source in the French tradition of caricature, drawing on the well-known French artist Honoré Daumier's (1808-1879) political cartoons, which he mixed with his own child-like approach to art. This is an important observation for this study as the work of Albert Tucker, who worked for a time in Paris, follows similar treatment of subject matter. Tucker's work was therefore found amusing by French audiences who saw in its caricature-like figurative aspects an element of humour, while Australian viewers characterised the work somewhat differently as I will demonstrate in Chapter Six. Dubuffet's series *Les Murs ('The Walls')* represented an area of Paris frequented by prostitutes, the common man and a criminal element. Tucker's early works painted in Paris also feature this subject matter; however, they are often categorised by Australian viewers, including critics and art historians, merely as a continuation of his wartime *Images of Modern Evil* series (hereafter '*Images*').

With respect to other European art, British art critic Lawrence Alloway writing in *Art International* in 1961 noted a parallel between the New York artists' derivation of styles from Cubism and that of Danish artists such as Asger Jorn (a founding member of the CoBrA group) who used fractured and enriched Cubist structures. In the case of the latter, Alloway suggests the approach to 'cosmic Cubism' began with *Der Blaue Reiter* group. De Kooning however is said to exemplify analytic Cubism combined with elements of Picasso and the quotidian and the ironic,

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[274] Wilson, Sarah, 'Paris Postwar: In Search of the Absolute', in Morris, Francis, *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55*, exh. cat., 9 June - 5 September, 1993, Tate Gallery, London, 1993, p. 33. Wilson posits that both Fautrier and Dubuffet were aware of Gaston Bachelard's lectures at *the Collège de France* during the Occupation. In these lectures the theory of *pâte* as primal matter was expressed to an audience of poets, writers and artists. Bachelard linked his ideas to psychoanalysis and the work of Carl Jung. Dubuffet drew on Bachelard's terms in describing his own art.

[275] Idem. See Leighten, 2013, p. 164, for an account of Bergsonism evident in the work of Czech painter František Kupka who worked in Vienna and Paris earlier in the Twentieth Century.

[276] Ibid., p. 35.

while Pollock responds to the Synthetic Cubism of the 1920s which included biomorphism.[277] The CoBrA artists were known to Tucker and his early Paris work alluded to Picasso's influence. As this example demonstrates, critics like Alloway were familiar with both European and American stylistic tendencies in painting and were able to relate to commonalities in aesthetic properties while positioning new work against a wide range of discernible variations (an appropriate range of examples of the relevant category). They also had command of a suitable set of terms to describe to their audiences the characteristics of the works and ground an interpretation of artistic intent (see Jouffroy's terms, (4.4)). This is in strong contrast to the example of Australian critic Bernard Smith discussed in Chapter Four when he updated his art historical tome*, Australian Painting 1788-1970*, in 1971. He neglected to reposition artists or artworks presented in its early chapters in light of later recognition of additional categories which he himself provided. As we saw in Chapter Four, Smith failed to apply the categories he later developed to Tucker's work produced in Europe.

During this period a number of categories started to emerge. The same categories were given political interpretations in some cases and non-political interpretations in others. Terms associated with early Twentieth Century art such as 'primitive, grotesque, instinct, emotion, simplicity, directness, subjective, and nature' and references to the work of children and anthropological artefacts were once again used by artists in the post-World War II period.[278] In particular, the references to the ugly and grotesque came to characterise the anti-aesthetic of categories such as *matière* painting and *l'art brut*. While early abstractionists, such as Czech born František Kupka often painted with a political or spiritual motivation, the post-World War II artists turned toward formalism.[279] Pure formalist critical language began to emerge in the U.K. after World War I. Art critic and philosopher Clive Bell wrote about significant form, while artist and critic Roger Fry adopted a 'formalist reductivism' with respect to describing pictorial space and the relationship of its intersecting planes.[280] During the 1920s, Picasso's art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, developed a formalist and neo-Kantian interpretation of cubist aesthetics.[281] Such formalist language continued on in art critical discourse. Following World War II, political motivations of artists gave way to mounting postwar consumerism.[282]

[277] Alloway, Lawrence, 'Notes on Pollock' in *Art International*, Vol. 4, 1961, pp. 38-41 and 90. LAP, Box 31/3.
[278] See Leighten, 2013, pp. 91-93.
[279] Ibid., p. 179.
[280] See Herwitz, 2008, p. 114.
[281] Idem.
[282] Leighten, 2013, p. 180.

At this time, French art critic and entrepreneur Pierre Restany organised an exhibition of the work of the French 'New Realists' to be presented in 1961 both at the *Galérie Rive Dróit* in Paris and to New York audiences. He wished to coordinate these exhibitions with an exhibition at MOMA, New York curated by William C. Seitz, titled *The Art of Assemblage*. His aim was to update American audiences on the state of contemporary French art and promote the idea of transatlantic collectivity. The work of the New Realists was based on assemblages of everyday commonplace items, drawing on Duchamp, rather than painting which might be associated with the 'finish' or refinement rejected by New York critics such as Greenberg (see Chapter 4). Restany therefore hoped to introduce the French movement to New York audiences without the usual rejection which met French painting.[283] He aimed to achieve this by exhibiting the work through influential galleries such as New York's Sidney Janis Gallery.

Unfortunately, from Restany's perspective, the exhibition was a failure for a number of reasons. Restany's text accompanying the exhibition was not understood by American audiences in its truncated version and poetic form, the latter a feature of postwar French criticism.[284] The term 'New Realism' had quickly been replaced by 'Pop' art in the United States and previously agreed upon works were not included in the exhibition.[285] These were replaced by works of artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist nominated by Sidney Janis. Thus Restany's attempts to promote 'New Realism' as a movement failed in the trans-Atlantic translation. Restany's efforts had been supported by his art world network of commercial gallerist/dealers in France; however, he was unable to penetrate the New York gallerist/dealer network successfully. This was the case even though the network comprising the Guggenheim Museum and its director James Johnson Sweeney, the Sidney Janis Gallery and the Kootz Gallery in New York had previously promoted the work of French artists Jean Dubuffet, Pierre Soulages, and Mathieu.[286] This is a striking example of the way in which favourable reception in one art world does not necessarily translate to a similar reception in another. We may attribute this in Bourdieu's terms to a difference in the particular perspective or *habitus* of the receiving viewer in the cultural field and a lack of discernible variations (after Pettit, Chapter 2) against

[283] For an account of Restany's interpretive framework for *Nouveau Réalisme*, see Carrick, Jill, *Nouveau Réalisme, 1960s France, and the Neo-avant-garde: Topographies of Chance and Return*, Ashgate, Surrey, UK, and Burlington, VT, 2010, pp. 2-4.
[284] See Gleeson's comments on this style of criticism in (4.2, n.186).
[285] See Rosenberg, Harold, 'The Game of Pop and Illusion: Pop and Gag', in Rosenberg, Harold, *The Anxious Object: Art today and its audience*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1964, pp. 62-75, for an account of the pervasiveness of the term 'New Realities' in modern art at the time. Rosenberg discusses the meaning of the terms 'illusion' and 'illusionist' with respect to the new art which I refer to below.
[286] Berecz, Agnes, 'Close Encounters: On Pierre Restany and Nouveau Réalisme', in Robinson ed., 2010, p. 60.

which critics and viewers could imaginatively position the works to assist in categorising them. The language or 'art words' embedded in the discourse surrounding the exhibition in its New York presentation, did not resonate with the viewers who had just begun to familiarise themselves with the new terminology presented to them to describe emerging tendencies in American art.[287] This will become particularly relevant when I discuss the reception of Tucker's gestural work in Australia.

In this section I have discussed, with respect to the art worlds of Paris and Europe, a number of strategies employed by critics, dealer/gallerists, and artists which assisted in establishing active categorisations for new painting styles. Among these were the **seven key strategies** listed below:

Firstly, the coining of new terms such as *l'art informel* and *un art autre* (Tapié) and alignment of artists with the new tendencies for the purpose of exhibiting their work and presenting it to the public was advocated by a number of critics and gallerist/dealers. Even where artists may have originally been dubious about being identified with a label, they later acknowledged the benefits this had in being identified with a style or movement or something new and emerging (like Tàpies noted above and the American Abstract Expressionists as we will see later).

Secondly, the linkage of artists with existing philosophical or literary work, pairing their visual art with ideas already in circulation, was used to assist in the creation of meaning (Wols link to Sartre).

Third, drawing on precedent already understood as a visual vocabulary such as the tradition of caricature and relating that to current social conditions or making metaphorical or ironical connections in developing a postwar aesthetic (Dubuffet; Tucker as we will see) provided the viewer with a link to assist in creating meaning.

Fourth, developing a new critical approach and facilitating reception for more difficult to access categories such as *matière* and the perceived ugliness of certain postwar art by building on the precedent of past movements was employed as a strategy by critics such as Alloway (who will become a critic crucial to my argument in Chapters 6 and 7). This helped to present the new aesthetic to the viewing public.

[287] For a discussion of how language ('art words') is used within the field of cultural production to position an artist's activities against other art as both *unconventional* (new) and *conventional* (valued in some way), see Cluley, Robert, 'Art Words and Art Worlds: The Methodological Importance of Language Use in Howard S. Becker's Sociology of Art and Cultural Production', in *Cultural Sociology*, Vol. 6, 2012, pp. 201-216 (esp. 212).

Fifth, building on the recognition of primitivist sources informing Cubism and earlier Twentieth Century abstraction, and reconciling this with the interest in psychology and the unconscious in further developing a language applicable to violently gestural works (*matière* and *l'art brut*) assisted in interpretation of difficult content.

Sixth, a strategy of coordinating with other current and complementary developments in other art worlds to highlight new work and present artists in the context of international trends (such as Restany's attempted use of transatlantic gallery networks) was designed to assist in positioning new works for greater understanding.

Finally, the relaxation of the desire to perceive all new categories as developing from previous ones in linear order, accepting instead that co-habitation of tendencies and a number of streams developing in parallel was in fact a model of the art world closer to practice throughout the modernist era, was a facilitating assumption for group exhibitions of artists operating across a number of categories or bringing together artists from different fields of production. Exhibitions such as the Parisian salons operated in this manner.[288]

I will examine the experience of Australian artist Albert Tucker working in the art worlds of Paris and Europe in the next chapter. I turn now to the London art market which was often a gateway and meeting point for Australian artists working in Europe.

5.3 London

London critic Lawrence Alloway was receptive to abstract art and to new movements which converged with the mass market. It was Alloway who coined the term 'Pop Art', and who served as an advocate in the early 1950s for the British Independent Group of artists who incorporated found objects in their work.[289] He also championed a group of eighteen British abstract artists represented in the 1960 exhibitions at the Royal Society and Marlborough Fine Art, London.[290] Alloway later moved to the USA where he held curatorships and art history professorships.[291] In a curatorial essay prepared for a 1958 London exhibition titled *The Exploration of Form, Paintings by René Guiette, Simon Hantaï, Asger Jorn, Antoni Tàpies, William Turnbull* held at Arthur Tooth

[288] See Nacenta, 1960.
[289] The Independent Group was the precursor to 'Pop' art in the U.K. See Chapter 6, n. 440.
[290] The artists exhibited were said to admire American Abstract Expressionism and were working in larger formats which had initially been resisted by British commercial galleries. The Marlborough Fine Art exhibition titled *Situation: An Exhibition of Abstract Art* included 16 of the 18 artists in the Royal Society exhibition plus sculptor Anthony Caro.
[291] Alloway wrote art reviews for a number of publications and journals, among them *Art News*, *The Nation*, and *Art Forum* and was a co-founder of *Art Criticism*. He was an assistant director at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1955-1960) and later senior curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York (1961-1966). He lectured at Southern Illinois University and State University of New York in the USA.

& Sons Gallery, Alloway commented on the primacy of materials in these gestural abstract works. He pointed to the graffiti of Tàpies, the marks of Hantaï, the palette knife strokes across the canvas by Turnbull, Guiette's central oval motif, and Jorn's 'bubbling' images. He suggested a method by which viewers could approach such works which presented something new and evocative. While,

> ...in practice it is asking too much for every picture to be approached as a unique configuration; we learn too quickly and make too many connections for that. Nevertheless, faced with a new type of painting, this approach is ideal, at least until apt responses to the new features have been learned.[292]

Alloway was aware of the way in which previous theorists such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry may have 'saddled modern art with traditional criteria of form (solidarity, balance, etc.)'.[293] Importantly he recognised the distinction between non-figurative art and imagery was no longer clearly delineated. In this respect he is closer to the French critics who were comfortable with some residue of figuration remaining in abstract art. In reviewing the positioning of the work of the artists in the exhibition against each other, he wrote,

> … The forms of an image maker like Jorn have something in common with the linear forms of Hantaï. Hantaï's lean marks are not the pure bones of form but have an undertone of menace and energy, an atmosphere of meaning. Jorn's forms have a plenitude of associations, improvised on a basis of myth and folk-lore: his figures jostle each other like a rush-hour of shamans. To both artists, despite their differences, form has a seminal, evocative function rather than a pure visual one…
> …Formlessness does not stay that way for long and as we become accustomed to it regular features appear. Gradually the spectator learns the constant features of paintings which, at first, looked random. Our knowledge of form is extended by precisely those painters whose work we took to be formless.[294]

In this essay Alloway effectively explains the way in which aesthetic categories come to be 'active', to use the terminology introduced and further the point I made in Chapter One (Laetz). The viewer learns the constant features of paintings which, when first introduced, appeared random. Later, through viewing more examples, the category becomes familiar. At the same time Alloway acknowledges the way in which these gestural artists have positioned their work in the context of the ideas of the day including primitivism, shamanism, myth and expression of feeling. Alloway finds that form is the artist's response to his material as well as an outcome of the use of

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[292] Alloway, Lawrence, 'Introduction', in Arthur Tooth & Sons Ltd, *The Exploration of Form, Paintings by Rene Guiette, Simon Hantaï, Asger Jorn, Antoni Tàpies, William Turnbull*, exh. cat., 21 January - 15 February 1958, London, 1958, unpaginated, first page of catalogue.
[293] Ibid., second page of unpaginated catalogue.
[294] Idem.

matter, particularly in the case of the *matière* paintings of Tàpies. Jorn incorporates human and animal iconography and Alloway notes that while titles 'often refer to myth and legend', the works are not representational. The pictures are not illustrations of pre-given stories; titles come during or after painting and should be regarded as names rather than as explanatory titles.'[295] This was the case for many artists painting in abstract modes. Jackson Pollock's work *Gothic,* 1944 (fig. 5.3), to cite an American example, had figurative elements while appearing to many viewers to be totally abstract. Art historian John Golding notes with respect to Pollock's work that many of his paintings during the period 1944-1946 contained recognisable figurative elements and 'their titles, although invariably conceived after the pictures themselves had been painted, confirm the Jungian content.'[296] With respect to the content of Pollock's work from 1938 to 1946 and the apparent attempt by the artist to portray or symbolize the unconscious, subsequent works were presented as metaphors of the unconscious.[297] Pollock's explanation of the inability of an abstract artist to escape figuration is one echoed by other artists of the period, and is sympathetic to Alloway's observation on formlessness above. Pollock stated, 'Abstract painting is abstract. It confronts you. … When you're painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge.'[298]

Alloway helped to interpret the category of *tachisme* for British audiences. In 1954 for an exhibition titled *Nine Abstract Artists*, he referred to the 'irrational expressionism by *malerisch* means' of the 'painterly abstractionists'.[299] Writing in *Art News and Review* in 1953, Alloway defined the painterly tendency 'as including allusive abstraction – in which highly abstracted pictures contained allusions to landscape, still life and figure – and painterly non-figuration.'[300] In this respect, Alloway's definition of abstract art and the gestural tendency reinforces the sub-categorisations of French art critic Alain Jouffroy examined in Chapter Four.

Not all critics were as amenable to abstract art as Alloway. At the other end of the critical spectrum, Austrian born art historian Ernst H. Gombrich was associated with the Warburg Institute

[295] Ibid., unpaginated, third page.
[296] Golding, John, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000, p. 132.
[297] Ibid., p. 139.
[298] Idem. Golding notes the figurative reasserted itself in Pollock's work of the early 1950s and the gestural was confirmed in works of 1955 (p. 149).
[299] Garlake, Margaret, *Artists and Patrons in Postwar Britain*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT, 2001, p. 20. The group of painterly abstractionists included Roger Hilton and Alan Davie. See Lee, Andrew R., 'Vulgar Pictures: Bacon, de Kooning, and the Figure under Abstraction', in *British Art in the Cultural Field, 1939-1969*, Tickner, Lisa and Corbett, David Peters eds., Wiley-Blackwell, London, 2012. Deleuze used this terminology as did London critic David Sylvester after Sir Herbert Read. For Deleuze this term meant 'painterly', i.e. gestural, and applied to the period 1945-57/58.
[300] Idem. See Alloway, Lawrence, 'The limits of abstract painting', in *Art News and Review*, Vol. 5, No.16, 1953, p. 5.

in London where he resided from 1936 and later held prestigious professorships in the United Kingdom. Gombrich seemed to mistrust abstract art. His essay 'The Tyranny of Abstract Art' was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in April 1958.[301] Gombrich based his aesthetics on the psychology of perception and was known for his work on illusionistic art in which referents could be 'matched' to elements from the real world. This was a concept drawn from the work of philosopher Karl Popper. Jones notes that for Gombrich, 'Abstract art, containing no such referents was considered an aberration.'[302] Therefore, for Gombrich, such work could not claim to have meaning since it was not able to be defined through a matching process to anything in the real world.

Gombrich's books *The Story of Art* (1950) and *Art and Illusion* (1960) were widely read and influenced art historians such as Bernard Smith.[303] While both Greenberg and Gombrich worked actively during the period and acknowledged each other with respect to argumentation presented in their essays, with one responding to claims made by the other, Gombrich held more sway with Smith at the time. Greenberg's influence was felt in Australia only after the currency of gestural abstraction had passed.[304] I will examine this point further with respect to Tucker in Chapter Six.

Sir Herbert Read noted the British critics' aversion to abstract art. Introducing an exhibition by British artist Ben Nicholson in 1955, Read wrote, 'It is indeed a sign of the abject philosophical poverty of English art criticism that it has never come to terms with abstract or non-figurative art.'[305] Art historian Michael Bird observes that by 1956 the debate over socialist realism and abstraction had for the most part played itself out in Britain. However, a touring exhibition of American art titled *Modern Art of the United States*, from MOMA, New York, held that year at the Tate Gallery, London, met mixed reviews.[306] The American exhibition featured works by atmospheric realists Andrew Wyeth and Edward Hopper as well as works by the Abstract

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[301] In a later essay 'How to Read a Painting', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1961, Gombrich softened his stance on abstract art somewhat. See Jones, 2005, p. 122. Jones notes Gombrich's description of abstract art continued to be value-laden, with expressions such as 'inspired gibberish' peppering his account. Jones finds this to be 'the chaos of unreason' (p. 126).

[302] Jones, 2005, p. 103.

[303] As noted by Terry Smith (4.3). Gombrich, E.H., *The Story of Art*, Phaidon, London, [1950] 1995; ___, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Phaidon, London, [1960] 1995; see ___, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, Phaidon, London, [1979] 1994.

[304] Greenberg visited Australia for the first time in 1968 where he presented the Inaugural John Power Lecture, 'Avant-garde Attitudes', delivered at PIFA, 17 May, 1968.

[305] Bird, Michael, *The St. Ives Artists: A Biography of Place and Time*, Lund Humphries, Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT, 2008, p. 123.

[306] Arts Council of Great Britain, *Modern art in the United States: a selection from the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York*, exh. cat., 5 January - 12 February 1956; Tate Gallery, London, 1956.

Expressionists. Some London reviewers dismissed works such as Pollock's *Number 1* and de Kooning's *Woman I* as 'Yankee doodles', while reviewers such as painter and art critic Patrick Heron described the work as 'the most vigorous movement we have seen since the war'.[307] In addition to Pollock and de Kooning, the exhibition included artists Mark Tobey, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Franz Kline, and Clyfford Still; however, the works were not particularly recent. Alloway later noted the influence of American artists on British St. Ives artists, Bryan Wynter and Patrick Heron. Tobey had visited St. Ives at the time of his one man show at the Institute of Contemporary Arts ('ICA') in London in 1955.[308] This example illustrates that none of these painters existed in isolation in the cultural field.

Heron's book *The Changing Forms of Art*, 1955, combined material he had published since 1945 with the changing views toward contemporary abstract art of the period and his own experience as an artist and art critic.[309] Heron experienced resistance and unpopularity in response to his own art critical writing in which he employed formal analysis. Accusations of taking too technical an approach, overly concerned with method, and of being too 'difficult' for a general reader were common. Heron considered the formal approach to criticism to still be in its infancy at that time. He noted that many British critics appeared to believe that the mood, atmosphere, or 'poetry' of a painting were more important than the painting itself and they attempted to explain the subject matter to the reader, naturally finding this to be easier in the case of representational art. Heron posits that in the case of non-figurative art, which may initially appear to lack reference to external objects, over the course of time such work may in fact take on a figurative function.[310] He asserts this is due to the way in which forms become invested with the properties of signs and symbols which have a reference in reality. For this reason certain abstract works come to be seen as landscapes, or figures may be seen among the interlacings of a Pollock painting. This, I contend, echoes the allusive quality of abstraction cited by Alloway and by Jouffroy in their categorisation schemas for abstract art I discussed above and in Chapter Four. It is also consistent with the embodiment aspects of haptic art or gestural abstraction whereby the brush stroke or mark of the artist stands in for the artist him/herself, or for the viewer, as the work is experienced perceptually.[311]

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[307] Ibid., p. 123.
[308] Alloway, Lawrence, 'Introductory Notes', in *ICA Statements: A Review of British Abstract Art in 1956*, 16 January - 16 February, 1957, ICA, London, 1957, unpaginated. LAP.
[309] Heron, Patrick, *The Changing Forms of Art*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1955.
[310] Ibid., p. xi.
[311] See Argyle, Daniel, 'Collective Monochrome: Art Against Doubt', Melbourne, 2008. Sydney Non Objective, Contemporary Art Project, available at < www.sno.org.au >, accessed 9 January 2014.

With regard to the haptic in gestural abstract works, I note Read's championing of the work of German born artist Kurt Schwitters. Art historian Megan Luke notes Schwitters' surprise on arriving in England in 1940 to discover that in comparison to Europe, the state of painting in the United Kingdom was at an artistic standpoint 'from before 1914' in terms of knowledge of modern art movements and artists such as Paul Klee.[312] Schwitters' collage aesthetic, combining pictorial and sculptural elements including found materials, was not appreciated in Britain. At that time British art was still under a Surrealist influence and neo-Romantic and figurative art were popular.[313] Read wrote a catalogue essay for Schwitters' solo exhibition of paintings, collage and sculpture held at The Modern Art Gallery, London, in December 1944. Read commented on the roughness and attention to surface contributing to the tactile appeal of the work, describing the haptic response invoked in the viewer as the work's 'ponderability'.[314] He interpreted Schwitters' *Merz* (collage) technique, combining fragments, as an 'aesthetic of recuperation' intended as a metaphor for the refugee experience. It is noteworthy that this 1944 exhibition clearly highlighted the haptic qualities of works rendered in new European modes of production. Read was popular with Australian artists as noted below. The fact that Schwitters, as an artist, and Read's review of this exhibition appear to have been little known to Australian artists or reviewers most likely reflects the restricted travel situation during the war years. The beginning of the period of the present study, 1947, is the point at which artists from around the world, like Tucker, flocked to Europe after the war.

Finally, with respect to the London art world (and pertinent to my analysis of Tucker's work in Chapter 6), I note the critical response to the work of Francis Bacon and that of Willem de Kooning, both of whom retained figurative elements while painting heavily gestural works. As discussed above, Alloway's approach to aesthetic categorisation was at ease with semi-abstract works or allusional abstraction. Other art critics, and historians such as Andrew Lee, seemed to be comfortable discussing features of semi-abstract work, describing Bacon's brush work as an 'assault…which seems at once to figure and to disfigure.'[315] Both de Kooning and Bacon employed slashing brush strokes, reduction of the figure to a few select features, a blending of figure and ground, and a high degree of abstraction. British critic David Sylvester noted de

[312] Luke, Megan R., 'Sculpture for the Hand: Herbert Read in the Studio of Kurt Schwitters', in Tickner and Corbett, 2012, p. 37.
[313] Ibid., p. 41.
[314] Ibid., p. 42.
[315] Lee, Andrew R., 'Vulgar Pictures: Bacon, de Kooning, and the Figure under Abstraction', in Tickner and Corbett, 2012, p. 175. This description of the work may simply mean that the reviewer finds it powerful rather than being derogatory.

Kooning's 'kind of tightrope walk between what is called figurative painting and abstraction.'[316] Lee cites this 'middle ground' as the development of 'an oppositional figurative stance under the visual regime of gestural abstraction.'[317] This is the '*figural*' I discussed in Chapter Four and demonstrates the usefulness of the term (Grosz).

Sylvester, in 1957, described Bacon's van Gogh portraits as 'illustrational, caricatural, monstrous concessions to the new American style'.[318] (See fig. 5.2.) These gestural works evidence the all-overness of Abstract Expressionism and the speed of execution of Action Painting (fig. 5.3).[319] Lee observes that these works are often ignored by critics (such as John Russell and James Hyman) as *unrepresentative of Bacon's work* [emphasis added]. This series however, clearly exemplifies the gestural category of allusive abstraction referenced above, which was recognised by Alloway and Jouffroy. This is also a style employed during the period by Tucker. Lee suggests that the emphasis on the gestural aspects of such works over the figurative and the dispelling of the figure renders such works, and the body, 'vulgar'. It is noteworthy, as Lee points out, that Sylvester's first trip to New York in 1960, sponsored by the U.S. State Department, and during which he met de Kooning, Harold Rosenberg and others of their circles, converted the critic to the merits of gestural abstraction and to Greenberg's views of 'opticality'.[320] Subsequent to his visit to America, Sylvester drew attention to the new style. While he referred to it as the new 'American style', such works are also characteristic of the *informe* or *l'art informel.* They are captured by Alloway's categorisation of the work of the CoBrA artists such as Jorn and Appel, cited above, and the monster imagery appearing in postwar European art is equally relevant here. Had the new Bacon work been viewed in the context of these European works, with attention focused on its gestural properties, it may have been easier to access both for critics and their audiences.

The London art world during the immediate postwar years was relatively conservative, favouring figuration over abstraction; however, this began to change by the early to mid-1950s

[316] Ibid., pp. 176-177.
[317] Idem.
[318] Ibid., pp. 179-180. The remark was made in reference to an exhibition of Bacon's studies for portraits after Vincent van Gogh held at The Hanover Gallery in London March-April 1957.
[319] *Study for Portrait of Van Gogh VI*, 1957, was delivered to the gallery with paint still wet, just in time for the opening of the exhibition.
[320] Ibid., p. 180. Sylvester concedes that his initial exposure to American Abstract Expressionism at the 1950 Venice Biennale was 'blinded by an old fashioned anti-Americanism'. He was exposed to more work by Pollock from about 1953, but only in January 1956 when the Tate Gallery, London, exhibited 'Modern Art in the United States' did he have his 'epiphany' as a critic. See Sylvester, David, *About Modern Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001, p. 19.

with increased familiarity with *tachisme* influences from Europe evidenced in the work of local artists, followed soon after by American Abstract Expressionist influences. Critics were important in explaining trends to their readers and suggest where the work of local artists fitted within the continuum. Critics such as Alloway were able to frame systems of aesthetic categorisation that could accommodate the new art. Perhaps this was a function of being closer to the art worlds of Paris and Europe than their American and Australian counterparts and therefore better placed to view the new tendencies first hand and to interact with the artists in the field of production. Alloway's articles and reviews were also translated for inclusion in French art journals, and he corresponded during his career with French artists such as Dubuffet.[321] The influence of critics on artists was evident in Alloway's interaction with and organisation of the British Independent Group and the abstract artists represented in the Situation exhibition, and in Patrick Heron's inclusion, as an artist, in the St. Ives group of British painters. Heron's own art criticism proffered a formalist reading of the new categories.[322] In contrast, some more resistant journalistic reviewers continued to favour figuration as will be seen in Chapter Six with respect to reviews of Tucker's work. Commercial galleries became more receptive to exhibiting abstract art, including paintings of increasing size, toward the end of the period. Critics served an educational role for their readership in articles appearing in *Art News and Review* and *Art International*. They provided readers with interpretations based on aesthetics and assisted in categorisation of the new works within emerging categories such as *tachisme*.

Heron (1955) commented on the proliferation of new tendencies still emerging from Paris as an art centre during the period. He considered the stimulating creative climate provided to a painter working in a major art world such as Paris:

> …Paris is a perfect incubator… as potent a breeding-ground as ever it was. The battle of styles is as fierce, urgent, ruthless (in its elimination of the second-rate) as ever….The recognition of the emergence of a new problem, or a new aspect of an old problem, is an experience immediately shared not by half a dozen painters (as in London) but by fifty artists all possessed of a pure professionalism which utterly precludes anything so rudimentary as faulty technique. … Energy is also saved by the existence of a vocabulary of terms which painters, critics and dealers all understand – even if it does not cater for personal refinements of meaning. What a boon such terminological agreement would be here in London! [323]

[321] For example, Alloway and Dubuffet met in London in 1955. They exchanged twenty-two letters or telegrams from 1961-1967 when Alloway was in the U.S. Alloway wrote catalogue essays for a 1960 (London) and a 1966 (New York) exhibition of Dubuffet's work. Letter from Armande de Trentinian, *Directeur, Fondation Jean Dubuffet*, 18 July 1997, to Mme. Sylvia Alloway. LAP, Box 8, 2003.M.46, 3MS.
[322] See Heron, 1955. See Tickner and Corbett, 2012. For St. Ives artists, see Bird, 2008.
[323] Heron, 1955, pp. 265-266.

Heron's comments were made in the mid-1950s. Certainly the difficulties Heron cites resulting from a lack of a common terminology to adequately describe emerging tendencies were felt in other art worlds including those of North America and Australia. By 1962, art historian Max Kozloff, researching the reception of Abstract Expressionism in Europe, reported to be 'shocked by the degree to which British artists and critics accepted Clement Greenberg's formalist aesthetic and assertion of American artistic dominance.'[324] I propose that this ready acceptance of formalism was due to the fact there was already a formalist tradition in British art criticism (Fry, Bell) as well as receptivity to primitivism (Read) which was a feature of much gestural work. While a formalist language for discussing the new categories served British critics well, this language had not yet been developed in Australia. Leaving British formalism for now, I turn now to the New York art world to examine these discourses further.

5.4 New York

It is significant for this study that the critics of the day had so much influence over the way artists' work came to be categorised. Art historian Caroline Jones in her in-depth study of Clement Greenberg observes that 'once Greenberg began to produce a rationale for this art via formalism in the mid-to-late 1940s (a rationale that he initially positioned as historically compelled), then specific artists can be seen to have adapted their work to the new values (abstraction, flatness, all-overness).'[325] Jones notes that artists had in the previous decade already begun to align themselves with formulations of modernism and abstraction to which Greenberg added the codified rationale. One such artist is Jackson Pollock.

Golding explores Pollock's development of his all-over style observing that the artist's 1947 description of his poured and dripped painting technique suggested the metaphysical, with painting perceived as a mystical act or rite in much the same way Kandinsky had made earlier references to shamanistic influences.[326] Golding sees a visceral identification of the artist with the painting surface and 'gesture, as translated into pictorial rhythm' as such requires the large format of the Pollock works, as big [as] or bigger than the man that made them.[327]

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[324] Stephens, Chris, 'The morrow we left behind: Landscape and the Rethinking of Modernism, 1939-53', in Tickner and Corbett, 2012, pp. 394-419. See Smith, Terry, Review: 'Clement Greenberg at 100: Looking Back to Modern Art,' Sackler Museum, Harvard University, April 3-4, 2009, College Art Association, Vol. 70, 2009.
[325] Jones, Caroline A., *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2005, p.60.
[326] Golding, 2000, p. 134.
[327] Idem.

American art critic Harold Rosenberg viewed painting as an act or existentialist trope and coined the term 'Action Painting' for the first generation New York artists working in abstract modes also known as Abstract Expressionism. Rosenberg's approach allowed for psychological readings of works and acknowledgement of sources such as shamanism and Eastern philosophies while Greenberg followed a strictly formalist reading based on materials and the properties of the work alone. Greenberg relied on aesthetic judgment akin to connoisseurship while Rosenberg did not proffer an aesthetic characterisation of the work per se. In Rosenberg's account it was left to the viewer to relate the purposeful brushstrokes on the canvas to the creator of the work, presupposing an understanding of the process of production, in order to imaginatively position it within the category to maximise its appreciation. This process of 'apprehensive reconstruction' is explored by philosopher Evan Neely with respect to the work of American artist Cy Twombly.[328] This demonstrates the fluidity of art's perception.

American art historian and critic Meyer Shapiro initially looked to primitivist influences on abstract art of the period and later used formalist terms to describe abstraction. I will discuss primitivism further in the next section of this chapter. Both Shapiro and Greenberg recognised the connoisseurial judgment necessary to evaluate an abstract work. Shapiro stated in 1959,

> It is the problem of discriminating the good in an unfamiliar form which is often confused by the discouraging mass of insensitive imitations. The best in art can hardly be discerned through rules; it must be discovered in a sustained experience of serious looking and judging, with all the risks of error.[329]

Shapiro's observation furthers my Chapter One assertion of the need for a suitable number of works of a given category to determine the aesthetically active category and position a work for evaluation by the viewer (discernible variations). It also highlights the dilemma of the period with respect to judging originality as new stylistic tendencies sprang up. Such issues particularly plagued Australian artists who worked in gestural abstraction modes recognised in international art worlds but who were often accused by art critics in their home market of being merely imitative. Jones notes that during the period, 'aesthetic judgments of 'quality' are always constructed by the social systems determining those values.

[328] Neely, Evan, 'Cy Twombly and the Ethics of Painting', unpublished PhD Thesis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University, 2010.
[329] Shapiro, Meyer, 'On the Humanity of Abstract Painting', delivered May 20, 1958, at American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1978, p. 459, in Jones, 2005, p 135, n.110.

Similarly, some American artists who spent long periods working in France, the so-called 'demi-Françaises' were subject to the same treatment when exhibiting in the U.S. This group included Sam Francis and Joan Mitchell. Although art critic Clement Greenberg had advocated Parisian training as a necessary step in artist training, his subsequent treatment and criticism of artists who spent too much time abroad was evident in his reviews. The champion of Abstract Expressionism as a masculine, heroic 'American' movement, Greenberg found the work of European artists too 'finished' and critiqued the work of the demi-Françaises as 'too European'. Neither did he favour European categories of gestural abstraction such as *art informel*.[330] Greenberg's attitude was extremely influential with American painters.

Jones notes American painter Helen Frankenthaler's identification, around 1950, of the problem with an artist displaying 'too many styles'.[331] While originality was prized, a repeatable style ensured an artist could become known and was considered necessary for success. Reviews received in the press by Frankenthaler often reported her art to be 'distinctly feminine', 'sensitive', manifestly that of a woman, timid, thin, curvaceous, form-suggesting lines and the like´ while her contemporary, male artist Morris Louis working in a similar technique of staining – known as veils in his case – received descriptions such as 'massive, solid, hard and sharp'.[332] Jones observes that gesture was viewed as masculine while trace was viewed as accidental and liminal.

With respect to originality in the work of the Abstract Expressionists, art historian Ann Eden Gibson notes that artists such as Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman and Clifford Still sought to achieve a 'freedom and spontaneity' of abstraction not linked to a political end and free of pre-war realist imagery.[333] 'For the Abstract Expressionists, originality was linked not only to the idea of being the first to introduce a certain combination of effects but also to certain ideas about the origins of art [such as primitive art].'[334] This brand of primitivism was an essentialist, idealised version of a universal 'primal originality.'[335] Gibson notes this was consistent with the humanist bent of the artists, many of whom had displayed socialist leanings before the war.

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[330] See Marter, 2007. See Landau, Ellen G., ed., *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Content and Critique*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005.
[331] Jones, 2005, p. 324.
[332] Idem. See Salzman, Lisa, ' Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender, Identity, and New York School Painting', in McElreavy, Timothy, ed., *Friedel Dzubas: Critical Painting*, Tufts University Gallery, Medford, MA, 1998.
[333] Gibson, Ann Eden, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CONN, and London, 1997, p. 38.
[334] Idem. See Leja, 1993, p. 30.
[335] Gibson, 1997, p. 38.

In Chapters One and Two, using the example of a work by Mark Rothko, I demonstrated the importance of the role of gallerist/dealers the emergence of the new movement which became known as Abstract Expressionism. It was the gallerist/dealers and art critics who began to flag to the public that such a tendency was emerging and provide these artists a way of organising to promote themselves.[336] Initially many of the artists took exception to the descriptions of their work put forward by the gallerist/dealers, similar to Rothko's rejection of Putzel's attribution of metamorphism to the new painting style emerging as the New York School.[337] Although the role of gallerist/dealers and key critics was vital in promoting an understanding of the new art and positioning it for best appreciation by the viewing public, artists themselves had yet to agree with these key agents in the field their preferred way of articulating that positioning. Through their exchanges in the field, some artists became aligned with the narratives proposed by agents to present their work to the public and this in turn influenced their ongoing production. As we will see, this extended in some cases to determining subject matter and the size of works for example. Tucker pointed out in a 1960 newspaper interview in which he discussed the practice of New York galleries of retaining about two-thirds of sale proceeds,

> … the galleries don't leave it at taking their profits. They tell you what kind of things to paint. They even tell you what size to make them. And they don't tell you who buys your pictures in case you offer the buyer another one direct, by-passing the gallery.[338]

5.5 Reception of 'Australian art' in London

The London art world was difficult to penetrate for Australian artists arriving in the immediate post World War II years. Albert Tucker canvassed the commercial galleries such as Arthur Tooth & Sons, the *Lefevre* Gallery, the Leicester Galleries, the Redfern and Mayer Galleries without successfully generating any interest in his work at that time. The Redfern Gallery was later known for positively receiving the work of Australian artists. Sidney Nolan, Donald Friend and Louis James were among those artists to exhibit there during the 1950s. Unfortunately stereotypes of Australian painting as figurative and landscape-based came to be perpetuated.

An exhibition organised by art dealer Denis Bowen, *Transferences, Recent Paintings by Commonwealth Artists working in Europe* was held at London's Zwemmer's Gallery in June - July 1958 and attracted some press interest. Works by Nolan and Tucker were included in the exhibition. Tucker's *Explorer* paintings, which resembled 'heads in landscape' or 'landscape in

[336] Refer Chapter 1, n .30.
[337] Leja, 1993, p. 26.
[338] 'Playing the Art Circuit with Albert Tucker', *The Bulletin*, December 7, 1960, p. 14. ATP, Box 5B.

heads' due to the heavy textural effects in the handling of paint, drew attention to the prominence of materials in the works typical of the *matière* style (see Chapter 6). The work of the third Australian artist featured in the exhibition, Daryl Hill, was said to demonstrate 'a strong feeling for paint and its spatial potentialities.' [339]

Here I note that Lawrence Alloway had initiated such discourse in response to the 1957 exhibition *Exploration of Paint*.[340] The exhibition featured works by Karel Appel, Jean Dubuffet, Sam Francis, Paul Jenkins, and Jean-Paul Riopelle. The London art world at this time recognised *tachisme* and gestural abstraction as well as the influence of American Abstract Expressionism. Alloway observed in the catalogue Introduction that for new works in this style, the meaning depends to a large extent 'on the physiognomy of the picture and, as a consequence on what happens during the creative act of painting.'[341] Further, he noted, the increase in 'painterliness' … 'characteristic of post-war painting as a whole' emphasised the creative act of the artist and Pollock and de Kooning by excluding traditional criteria of technique, aesthetic order, and nature… defined painting as the record of the artist's gestures with materials.' [342]

By 1960, Australian art was becoming more popular in London. That year Sidney Nolan sold seventy-five works in an exhibition at Matthiesen Gallery. Albert Tucker's Waddington Gallery exhibition featuring his *Explorer* and *Antipodean Head* series generated interest including the attendance of J.J. Sweeney, Director of the Guggenheim collection in New York, which subsequently acquired a work. In addition, Arthur Boyd held a successful one man show at Zwemmer's Gallery.[343] An attempt to present Australian non-figurative art in London had been made in 1960 at the New Vision Centre Gallery. Titled *Fifteen Contemporary Australian Painters*, the exhibition drew on work of the Sydney abstractionists belonging to the CAS of New South Wales. Reviews included comments such as those by Peter Howell writing for *Art News and Review*, that 'the work of fifteen contemporary Australian painters is so very close to European standards … [however,] there are exceptions and certainly all the paintings have characteristics that are not European.'[344] Included in the exhibition were works by Elwyn Lynn and Thomas

[339] Copplestone, Trewin, 'Under the Flag', in *Art News and Review*, June 1958. ATP, Box 5D. See Chapter 6 (6.2).
[340] Arthur Tooth & Sons, *The Exploration of Paint: Karel Appel, Jean Dubuffet, Sam Francis, Paul Jenkins, Jean-Paul Riopelle*, exh. cat., Intro. Alloway, Lawrence, 15 January – 9 February, 1957, London, 1957.
[341] Ibid., Introduction, first page, (unpaginated).
[342] Idem.
[343] Pierse, Simon, *Australian Art and Artists in London, 1950-1965*, Surrey, UK and Burlington, VT, 2012, p. 87. Pierse examines the British reception of Australian art, similar to the work of Scott (2004) who examined the politics of exhibiting Australian art abroad during the period.
[344] Ibid., p. 90. See Anderson, Patricia, *Elwyn Lynn's Art World*, Pandora Press, Sydney, 2001, pp. 79-80.

Gleghorn executed in the *matière* technique.[345] The exhibition venue, specialising in the art of Commonwealth artists, was relatively minor in terms of the London art world. The exhibition was not well noted in the press during its four week run.

As late as 1961, the Whitechapel Gallery exhibition *Recent Australian Painting* did little to assuage expectations of stereotypical Australian painting (figurative, landscape), largely due to the influence of art critic Robert Hughes who wrote the catalogue essay for the exhibition.[346] While the director of the Whitechapel Gallery, Bryan Robertson had previously mounted exhibitions of American Abstract Expressionism and other abstract art, *Recent Australian Painting* included older works by Australian artists, some of whom had previously exhibited in London, as well as more recent works. The linkage between the Sydney abstractionist works of the period and international abstractionist tendencies was not made.

Tucker learned of his inclusion in the Whitechapel exhibition from a press article only a month prior to its scheduled opening. He had not been consulted on the inclusion of his work and the works chosen were not his current work. He wrote to Robertson to object to being included on the basis his work was not being adequately represented and the older works had in any event been shown in London some four or five years previous to the exhibition.[347] Tucker subsequently agreed that two of his older works could be shown in a section of historical works by Dobell, Drysdale, Nolan and Boyd. Both of the works chosen were from 1956 and Tucker specified he wished that to be made clear. This example highlights the way in which logistical issues related to exhibiting work in overseas art worlds may unintentionally impact subsequent meaning of the works exhibited. Where selection of exhibition works is driven by considerations of availability rather than curatorial choice, the works chosen may not be the most current or representative of the artist's work, and hence may not convey the significance of the work or the artist. Thus the positioning of the work within the exhibition may not bring out the desired range of perceptual qualities necessary for appreciation by the viewer. In the case of exhibiting older works, particularly at a time of rapid stylistic change, an artist may become unnecessarily associated with past movements due simply to lack of audience awareness of current work. Due to the distances

[345] Lynn first exhibited works in that category in Australia in the same year. Among the other artists included in the exhibition were Leonard Hessing, Eric Smith, Stanislaus Rapotec, Peter Laverty, Henry Salkauskas, Margot Lewers, Sheila McDonald, Roy Fluke, and John Coburn.
[346] For an account of the Whitechapel exhibition *Recent Australian Painting*, see Pierse, 2012, pp. 97-139. See Scott, 2004.
[347] See Pierse, 2012, p. 106.

and long shipping times during the period of study this was a major issue for artists exhibiting abroad or producing work overseas for exhibition in Australia.

In this case, however, the nature of Tucker's objections to the choice of his works in the Whitechapel exhibition is curious in retrospect, given that in fact the works selected were representative of his gestural work. One of the works, *Lunar Landscape*, the title of which he requested be changed to *Cratered Landscape* for the exhibition, was in fact similar to the work of the same title purchased in 1958 by MOMA. The style of that work was gestural in nature with slashings and thick impasto paint and demonstrated the currency of Tucker's work vis-à-vis international abstractionist tendencies, presumably the reason for its purchase by MOMA in the first place, as will be argued in Chapter Six.[348] The second work to be included, *Gamblers*, was a caricature-like figurative or semi-abstract work, sourced for the exhibition because it was readily available in London. It was lent by Australian artist, curator and independent art dealer Alannah Coleman.

London reviewers' responses to the Whitechapel exhibition echoed Robertson's own portrayal of the work as 'exotic' not only due to its subject matter founded in the myth of the Australian bush but also the colour palette chosen by many of the artists featuring strong bright colour and high contrast and somewhat primitive execution reflecting, in part, the lack of formal art school training of many of the artists represented. The British press had been exposed to Sidney Nolan's work during the 1950s and to that of Drysdale and Boyd. Both Nolan and Boyd had studios in London at the time of the Whitechapel exhibition and in fact at least ten artists represented in the exhibition were then working in London. Although non-objective works were also included in the Whitechapel exhibition, and Robertson's achievement was to present both abstract and *tachiste* works along with semi-abstract and figurative works to the British public, reviewers tended to repeat narratives about Australian bush mythology. Art historian Simon Pierse attributes this line of discourse to the influence of British critic and art historian Sir Kenneth Clark who held a particular dislike for abstraction and internationalism. He was an advisor to Australian state galleries such as the National Gallery of Victoria ('NGV'), which had significant funding available through its Felton Bequest, in making its European art acquisitions. Clark was also said to have been helpful to Australian artist Sidney Nolan during his early years in London. Clark's

[348] See Chapter 6 (6.2).

book *Landscape into Art*, published in 1949 was influential to Nolan's art work and was read by Bernard Smith.[349]

Such art critical discourse surrounding Australian art in the London art world, set up a national 'brand' or expected style that in Australia came to be known as a London image of Australia. Artists who caved in to these expectations came to be criticised heavily by Australian art reviewers for so doing. Furthermore such works were generally categorised as figurative although they were generally semi-abstract due to their primitive or *naïf* execution and the limited drawing ability of some of the self-taught artists. Exceptions to the stereotypical reviewer responses were made with respect to the works of Brett Whiteley, Lawrence Daws, and Charles Blackman, all of whom were approached by Robertson to exhibit at the *Biennale des Jeunes* held in Paris in late 1961.

A link to London was also present when Australia was represented for the first time at the second Paris *Biennale* in 1961. The Australian section was curated by Australian modernist painter Moya Dyring and Bryan Robertson, Director of Whitechapel Gallery.[350] Three paintings by each of Charles Blackman, Lawrence Daws and Brett Whiteley were exhibited. Australia's offering for the third Paris *Biennale* in 1963, curated by Alannah Coleman included eight artists representing a range of tendencies.[351] The painters included David Drian, Donald Laycock, Ross Morrow, William Rose, and Andrew Sibley.

One Australian critic, who summed up the state of art critical discourse surrounding Australian art in the London art market, was Elwyn Lynn, himself an exhibiting artist in both the *Fifteen Contemporary Australian Painters* and *Recent Australian Painting* exhibitions. After reviewing the London art critical reviews with respect to the latter exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, Lynn wrote,

> …one would like to have heard from critics of a wider range of sympathies, such as Alloway, Read, Rouve, or Sylvester, and, if realism is being assessed, some comparisons with, say, Oskar Kokoschka, Emile Nolde, Jean Dubuffet, Max Beckman, Lovis Corinth, Josef Herman, Francis Gruber or Renato Guttoso. So obsessed were the critics with uniqueness and myth that no comments on Australia as an outpost of realism were made.[352]

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[349] Pierse, 2012, pp. 7-12. See Clark, Kenneth, *Landscape into Art*, John Murray, London, 1949.
[350] *Deuxième Biennale de Paris : Manifestation Biennale et Internationale des Jeunes Artistes*, exh. cat, 29 septembre au 5 novembre 1961, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1961. *Institut national d'histoire de l'art*, Paris (hereafter 'INHA') archives.
[351] *Biennale de Paris III / Troisième Biennale de Paris: Manifestation Biennale et Internationale des Jeunes Artistes*, exh. cat., 28 septembre au 3 novembre 1963, Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1963. INHA archives.
[352] Pierse, 2012, p. 122. See Lynn, Elwyn, 'Australia Rediscovered: the Whitechapel Gallery Exhibition', in *Meanjin*, no. 86, vol. xx, no. 3, 1961, p. 337.

Lynn, in his own art production, employed the *matière* devices of Dubuffet and Fautrier generally considered representative of gestural abstraction or *informel*. He was influenced by the work of Burri and Tàpies employing similar techniques. Lynn appears to include Dubuffet as an example of figuration or realism in the quote above. Of the critics Lynn mentions, some may not have linked Dubuffet with figuration or realism. Lynn groups Tucker with the figurative (along with Nolan, Drysdale and Blackman) although *Cratered Landscape* was a non-figurative work. This example further demonstrates the point I made in Chapter Three regarding lack of consistency in categorisation of allusive or semi-abstract works, differences in categorisation between art worlds, and the confusion in London (and Australia) over this 'middle ground'. The implications will be explored in depth in the chapters to follow. By categorising Tucker in the way he did, Lynn certainly increased the significance of his own work as the first example of *matière* painting in Australia.

A major survey exhibition of Australian art, titled *Australian Painting – Colonial – Impressionist – Contemporary* was mounted at the Tate Gallery, London in January 1963, and subsequently toured Canada. The exhibition had previewed in Adelaide in 1962 at the Festival of Arts. The Commonwealth Art Advisory Board ('CAAB') was instrumental in the selection of works to be exhibited. Its notoriously conservative stance in balancing historical works with contemporary received criticism from artists and reviewers due to its overemphasis on older works and lack of breadth in the selection, which excluded some groups such as post-impressionists and included some poorer examples of particular artists' works. Some changes were made to the selection following the Adelaide preview; however, the 'contemporary' section included some artists of advanced age and another (Trennery, 1901-1958), already deceased. A few other contemporary painters were added to the list prior to the Tate opening and additional works by other artists were included. In any event, the final selections included in the Tate exhibition comprised 153 Contemporary works (albeit with a loose definition of 'contemporary'), and in addition thirty Colonial works and thirty-one Impressionist works. The choice of works was problematic as the works were drawn from State Gallery collections and not from private collectors or the exhibited artists themselves, and hence was not necessarily representative of the artists' most current work.

The exhibition met with mixed reviews and several reviewers pointed to the fact the selections had been made by the CAAB with less input than might have been desired from the State Galleries and their directors. This was perceived as a desire to present a national view of Australian visual culture or a national artistic identity to the world. Several reviewers noted that

with respect to the contemporary artists included in the exhibition, their work could best be appreciated within the ambit of international tendencies rather than being exclusively Australian in any way.[353] In fact, as Pierse points out, many of the artists themselves believed they were working in an international context and responding to influences from both Europe and the U.S. The artists therefore would not necessarily have realised that a nationalistic narrative would be applied to their work retrospectively, unless of course they consciously chose to portray subject matter in response to the 'London expectation' of Australian art, as was the case with Sidney Nolan. Pierse cites a number of art reviews commenting on the degree of abstraction displayed in the works. Reviewers appeared ambivalent in categorising the work as purely abstract as a higher degree of figuration remained than was the case with British art in their estimation. Among these were a review in *The Times* and another in the *Manchester Guardian.*[354] Reviewers noted a tendency for artists who produce many works to fall into a repetitive mode, as was attributed to Sidney Nolan who one reviewer said had become 'the victim of his enviable but dangerous facility'.[355]

Soon after the Tate exhibition, Coleman curated the exhibition *Australian Painters and Sculptors in Europe Today,* shown first at a modernist gallery in Folkestone U.K. in April 1963, and later exhibited in Frankfurt.[356] Coleman's exhibition included a number of contemporary Australian artists who had not been included in the Tate exhibition and the calligraphic *tachiste* work of Peter Upward. In his opening remarks for the exhibition, Sir Kenneth Clark stated that, following the phase of nationalist painting, Australian painting had become just a part of modern painting. Reviewers of the exhibition, however, tended to focus on the already better known artists in the group including Nolan, Daws, and David and Arthur Boyd.[357]

The exhibition's Frankfurt tour met with some confusion. The artists selected were all working in Europe hence the affinity to European tendencies was to be expected. The curatorial narrative to the exhibition, however, attempted to invoke an Australian sensibility. German reviewers commented on some aesthetic aspects of works by Frank Hodgkinson (with respect to

[353] For example, reviewer Edwin Mullins' in the *Sunday Telegraph*, stated that the work of artists Rose, Frances Smith, Whiteley, Hessing and James might 'come from anywhere' and that 'artists should not be criticised for adopting international styles, if national ones seem meaningless to them.' Mullins, Edward, 'Portrait of a Nation', *Sunday Telegraph*, 27 January 1963, p. 11, cited in Pierse, 2012, p. 152.
[354] 'Australian art in three phases', *The Times*, 24 January 1963; Butcher, George, 'Australian painting', *The Guardian*, 24 January 1963, p. 9; both cited in Pierse, 2012, p. 153.
[355] Richardson, John, 'Australia's best - it could be from another planet', *Evening Standard*, 28 January 1963, cited in Pierse, 2012, p. 154.
[356] Alomes, 1999, p. 83.
[357] See Pierse, 2012, p. 211. See also Knowles, Roderic, 'Contemporary Australian Painting and Sculpture', *Arts Review*, vol. 15, no. 9, 18 May 1963

expression of mood) and Helen Lamprière (with respect to atmospheric impressions and mood) and noted the lyrical quality of a work by Arthur Boyd. They commented unfavourably on works they found were not well executed. Reviewers reported not having a sense of what exactly the 'Australian character' was that the curatorial narrative claimed to be evidenced in the works. They also remarked on the 'Don Quixote' image within the landscape, characteristic of works by Nolan, and on the 'peculiarly similar pictures by some of the painters'.[358] The consensus view was that Australian contemporary art reflected an international influence, particularly European, and was not significant enough to warrant its own 'individual chapter in modern art history such as the one dedicated to American painting.'[359]

5.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The characterisation of Australian gestural abstraction in overseas fields of reception reflected an acknowledgment of the similarities to European tendencies in the case of a number of critics. For those insistent on focusing on subject matter reflecting 'Australian myth' and attempting to find a national identity in the works, reviews were more problematic. The *figural* was accepted as a semi-abstract style by reviewers familiar with European *tachiste* trends but in Britain, as in Australia, there were still those critics who favoured the figurative over the non-objective. Aesthetic categorisation by critics such as Alloway responded to the standard features of the work consistent with examples of similar work in its milieu of production. This was effective in positioning the work within relevant categories. This was in part due to the particular critic's strong familiarity with a wide range of tendencies and emerging categories. The ironic was better understood in the French art world than in the Australian art world as we will see in the next chapter. In the case of visceral semi-abstract works such as those of Bacon, de Kooning or, as I will argue, Tucker, there was still some controversy as to the best placement for evaluation. Where formalist approaches to evaluation were taken, the material or textual aspects of the works were brought into focus. In such cases, the qualities appreciated in Tucker's *Lunar Landscape* when acquired by MOMA were valued and the work was appreciated as representative of *avant-garde* international trends.

As evidenced above, the skills and dispositions of art critics and reviewers, needed to convey an impression of the aesthetic properties of gestural works to their readers and the

[358] Pierse, 2012, p. 219. For example, Pierse cites a review titled 'New land of art, 27 Australians show paintings and sculptures at the Städel Gallery in Frankfurt.' in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 19 July 1963.
[359] Morschel, Jürgen, 'Australian painting and sculpture exhibition at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2 August 1963, cited in Pierse, 2012, p. 220.

viewing public to facilitate interpretation and appreciation, varied widely between individual critics. Where aesthetic characterisations were not used by the respective critic or reviewer, there was often a tendency to revert to biographical information or other explanations of a work, such as describing nationalistic subject matter or, simplistically, to associate dark colour palettes with post-war angst. While debate continued on the merits of objective versus non-objective art in some art worlds, in others such debates subsided much sooner, leaving artists exhibiting in more than one art world with a need to adapt their presentation (and at times their production) to the expectations of the respective fields of reception, as we will see in the following two chapters.

Chapter Six: Albert Tucker – Matière, Allusive Abstraction and the Haptic

Art Critical Discourse in the Field of Cultural Production and Reception

Albert Tucker spent thirteen years abroad following World War II, working in Europe and the United States. To develop my analysis and present my argument for positioning Tucker's work within the relevant categories, in this chapter I examine the critical international reception of Tucker's work and the aesthetic characterisations invoked by reviewers in the fields of production and reception in the art world in which it was produced. Rather than starting from the artist's biography and his pre-war work, an approach taken in many of the existing art historical accounts (Chapter 7), after briefly describing his pre-1947 practice, I begin by identifying the categories available to critics of the period in order to categorise art works. It is not feasible to analyse a large number of individual art works within one chapter. Tucker's work as presented in particular exhibitions or certain groupings of works sharing common features can, however, be characterised by applying the methodology developed in Part I of this thesis.

I submit that confusion apparent in early Australian art critical reviews (Chapter 7) concerning the relevant mode of abstraction, may have arisen with respect to the expressive nature of the gesture, by definition a standard feature (in Walton's terminology) of the category of gestural abstraction (Chapter 4). This sets it apart from the 'cooler' geometric abstraction practiced by Australian artists such as Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson. This may have led to some of the difficulty in categorising such art in earlier reviews and Australian art histories, due to the time lag before exhibition of many international gestural works in Australia and a corresponding lack of a standardised vocabulary with which to evaluate and discuss new and emerging tendencies. Local Australian art critics were still coming to terms with the new categories from Europe and North America until quite recently. While the tendency was exhibited in the work of Australian artists, it was simply not recognised or detected, masked by the classifications or evaluative concepts in use in Australian art history and criticism at the time. Australia lagged behind Europe in what it was possible to perceive in art as critics and historians simply did not have the relevant concepts with which to recognise and interpret it.[360]

[360] See Dixon and Smith, 1984, p. 32. While the *Herald Exhibition* of 1939 introduced modernist British and French art to the Australian public, the exhibition *French Painting Today* in 1955 brought more recent work and toured Australian state capitals. Many Australian artists had by then departed to work and study overseas. In 1956, *Italian Art of the*

6.1 Introduction

Albert Tucker was one of the early Australian-born artists to gain international recognition. He held one-man shows in Amsterdam, 1951; Paris, 1952; and Rome, 1953 before exhibiting independently at the 1956 Venice Biennale. After this, he exhibited in London in 1957, and then in New York in 1960. Examples of his gestural work in the *matière* tendency, executed in a heavy impasto with materials such as sand mixed into the paint and brush strokes slashing the surface of the canvas, were acquired by MOMA in 1958 and 1960, and by the Guggenheim, New York, in 1960. Works by European painters Antonio Tàpies (Spanish) and Alberto Burri (Italian) using similar technique were acquired by these collecting museums during this period. Significantly, it was only after these overseas institutional acquisitions that Tucker's work found a market in Australia. However, it does not appear to have been appreciated in Australia for its *matière* character and gestural aesthetic qualities which brought Tucker to international attention in the first place.

While Tucker spent 1947-1960 abroad, living and working in London, Paris, Germany, Italy and the United States, developing what is arguably his mature style, he is best known in Australia for his *Images* series completed for the most part in Melbourne between 1943 and 1945. These works are usually linked to German Expressionism. A biographical reading of Tucker's work would reveal his strong association with the Melbourne-based group of artists known during the 1940s as the 'Angry Penguins', which formed the circle of artists supported by art patrons John and Sunday Reed. However, a reference to this period in Tucker's development overshadowed an aesthetic reading of his later work by Australian reviewers as I will highlight in Chapter Seven. The Reeds' home and studio known as 'Heide', located at Heidelberg near Melbourne, was a gathering place for artists. Their extensive library provided the artist circle with access to contemporary international art and literary journals of the day and was a valuable source of information on new developments and tendencies. The Heide circle was known for both avant-garde artistic and social practices.[361]

Twentieth Century toured Australia. It was not until 1967 that the exhibition *Two Decades of American Painting,* featuring Abstract Expressionism, came to Australia. (Examples were included in *French Painting Today* and in the 1964 James A. Mitchener exhibition.)
See Hughes, 1970, pp. 259-260, on why American Abstract Expressionism was not understood in Australia in 1956. *Cf.* My point differs from Bernard Smith's early theorising on the 'time-lag' in the spread of modernism to Australia which has been debated and discounted. See Stephen, Ann, *et al*., eds., *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, in association with Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, 2008, p. xxi.

[361] The Reeds' Heide circle included Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, Sam Atyeo, Moya Dyring, Arthur Boyd, Max Harris, Adrian Lawlor, and Yosl Bergner.

The Reeds were active members in the Contemporary Art Society ('CAS') founded in 1938 in Melbourne. Tucker was a member of the Angry Penguins and contributed articles to the group's journal.[362] While Tucker participated as an artist member in CAS annual group exhibitions from 1939-1944 both in Melbourne and Sydney and, in 1943, in Adelaide, his work was virtually unknown in Australia before the war, other than within a closely knit community of artists.[363] The CAS exhibitions received varying responses from the public and many viewers immensely disliked the experimental works members chose to exhibit. Curator Lesley Harding notes that the critics' language of the time was insufficient to deal with these explorations and the art was little understood.[364] Tucker was president of the CAS from 1943-47, which later added to his credibility (or social and cultural capital in Bourdieusian terms) when exhibiting overseas.

Tucker is included in this study as the reception in Australia of his mature style demonstrates the role of categories and characterisations in the reception of art. In his case, as will be argued, his mature work was miscategorised, undermining its significance and aesthetic value. His mature work manifested French and European influences. These included *matière* painting and *tachisme* in which the touch of the artist is evident in the finished work and the tactile, almost sculptural, effect of the materials used in creating the work is emphasised. His subject matter reflects the interest of the day in psychology, myth and archetype, particularly the psychology of Carl Jung whose ideas were also embraced by the American Abstract Expressionists. Tucker was strongly influenced by Dubuffet (Chapter 4 (4.4, 4.5)). Tucker had been familiar with the work of 'outsider artists' (as they are now known) in Melbourne in the 1940s. He discovered the work of Dubuffet himself in exhibition at the *Galerie René Drouin* in Paris during the 1950s.[365]

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[362] The journal *Angry Penguins* (est. 1940) stated the political attitudes of the Heide circle. In Tucker, Albert, 'Art, Myth and Society', in *Angry Penguins*, No. 4, 1943, pp. 49-54, Tucker highlights the importance of the artist in articulating cultural myths.

[363] See letter John Reed to Albert Tucker, 7 November 1957, 'To whatever extent your name and work are known in Melbourne, they are known almost exclusively because of the unceasing insistence of Sun and myself…'; and John Reed to Albert Tucker, 10 December 1957, 'Factually, and in a broad sense, you are not known here…', SLV, Albert Tucker Papers, MS13373 (hereafter 'ATP'), Box 1F, John Reed to Albert Tucker.
Cf. Recent curatorial essays suggesting Tucker was known before the war for the *Images* series appear to be incorrect. Exhibitions mounted after the war of pre-war artworks made these known to the public (Chapter 7).

[364] Harding, Lesley, 'Faces of War', National Portrait Gallery lecture, May 2011, available at <http://www.portrait.gov.au/content/faces-of-war>, accessed 14 September 2015. See Burke, Janine, *The Eye of the Beholder: Albert Tucker's Photographs*, exh. cat., 11 July - 18 October, 1998, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, VIC, 1998, p. 11.

[365] The term 'outsider art' was coined by art historian Roger Cardinal who introduced the term as an equivalent for the French term *l'art brut* also encompassing naïve art, in *Outsider Art*, Studio Vista Publishers, London, 1972. A recent Heide exhibition titled *Albert Tucker: The Mystery of H.D*., examined the work of amateur artist H. Dearing whose work was exhibited by the Melbourne CAS in 1944. See Underhill, Nancy, 'What Yet Another Hoax?', *Albert Tucker: The Mystery of H.D*., exh. cat. essay, 13 September 2014 - 15 February 2015, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen,

While Dubuffet is often cited as a source of departure for Tucker's work in art historical accounts or interpretations of his work in passing, the work of Dubuffet itself is often misunderstood or its aesthetic categorisation misapprehended when invoking it in reference to work such as Tucker's.[366] Greenberg incorrectly associated Dubuffet with literary linkages (Chapter Three (3.4 and n.171)).[367] In Chapter Four (4.4), I demonstrated that Dubuffet's works can sometimes be classified in different gestural sub-categories and the appropriate categorisation is that which makes the work most significant relative to the art world (1.2). Where materiality and texture are dominant, allusion to figuration may be secondary. In contrast, according to the Australian art historical canon (as established through discursive repetition), while Dubuffet, and in particular his *art brut* category, is cited a source for the work of both Tucker and Australian painter John Olsen, Dubuffet is often treated as a figurative painter by Australian reviewers and art historians. In fact there is a larger body of work by a range of artists using similar devices. Tucker would have been familiar with these other artists also as I will detail below. A number of sources predated Dubuffet's work and others were contemporaneous with it and with Tucker's time in Europe. Dubuffet was a prolific self-promoter and wrote extensively about his own art. Australian reviewers do not appear to have read Dubuffet's own writings, however, but relied on general reports from returning artists and critics, and art journals.[368] Knowledge of the range of sources available to Tucker was not available to Australian reviewers unfamiliar with contemporary European art or with earlier Twentieth Century categories. Bernard Smith's 1971 update to *Australian Painting 1788-1970* included a section on 'iconographic expressionism' in which he included the CoBrA artists, Dubuffet and de Kooning; however, none of Tucker's work was mentioned in association with this category nor were references to Tucker's influences throughout the text updated from the earlier edition (Chapter 4).

In this chapter I will elaborate on my Chapter Four discussion of categorisations of abstraction, semi-abstraction and the figural in my analysis of Tucker's work. Tucker's gestural work shares commonalities with that of the European CoBrA group of painters, the tradition of

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VIC, 2014, available at <http://www.heide.com.au/assets/files/Exhibitions/TuckerH.D.ListofWorks.pdf>, accessed 14 September 2015.

366 See Chapter 7, n. 454.

367 Minturn, in Marter, 2007, pp. 125-137. See 3.4, n.171.

368 See Barker, Heather and Green, Charles, 'No place like home: Australian art history and contemporary art at the start of the 1970s', in *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 4, June 2011, pp. 1-17, available at <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/barker-green-no-place.pdf > , accessed 17 August 2015. The authors note that only a couple of Australian art historians or critics sought to engage with the world of international art and cite art critic Donald Brook's observation that critics failed to keep abreast of new developments in contemporary art. See Chapter 7 (7.1 and n. 453 and n. 469).

French caricature, and elements of American Abstract Expressionism which also draws on Surrealist devices. The work of Willem de Kooning and British painter Francis Bacon in their *figural*, gestural mode comes to mind when positioning Tucker. I will explore the difference in treatment between Tucker and other artists of the period who, like him, experimented with different stylistic modes over the course of their *oeuvres*. In most of these cases, the gestural phase is considered more art historically significant than the figurative works of other periods in the respective artist's *oeuvre*.[369] In Tucker's case, such works were ignored or discounted and art historians focused instead on his work of 1943-1945 which, I will argue, is of lesser interest and significance than his mature gestural work.

6.2 Art Critical Discourse in the Field of Reception – International

Tucker's first solo exhibition in Europe was held in 1951 at the *Kunstzaal van Lier* in Amsterdam, a well-known commercial gallery featuring avant-garde art. The CoBrA group exhibited there from 1948-1951 and CoBrA artist Karel Appel held a solo exhibition there in 1951. CoBrA, in seeking a free form of expression, was receptive to Klee and Miró influences and rejected Surrealism. Tucker exhibited works produced in 1951. While no works sold, exhibiting in this gallery would have given Tucker exposure to the work of the CoBrA artists. Their semi-abstract works inspired by primitive and folk art were characterised by distorted totem-like forms, violent brush work and brilliant colour and were considered significant in the development of European *tachisme* (figs. 4.7, 6.1 - 6.7, 6.19 - 6.26). Work of the CoBrA group has been called a European version of Abstract Expressionism.

The CoBrA artists used a number of symbols and forms in their work which are similar to those used by Tucker including the red crescent shape, one of Tucker's key motifs. This can be traced to sources in the work of Klee and Miró earlier in the Twentieth Century (figs. 6.17 and 6.18). Cartoon-like rendering of figures in profile is common to the work of CoBrA, Dubuffet and Tucker. CoBrA imagery may also have sparked the later faun imagery employed by Tucker (figs. 6.19 and 6.48). A number of devices were also common to the work of Picasso as I will discuss below. Tucker had begun to use the crescent shape in his work prior to arriving in Europe. He would have seen such symbols used in works in reproduction and possibly in the 1939 *Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* ('the *Herald Exhibition'*) in Melbourne. The use

[369] Examples include Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. An exception was Canadian born New York School painter Philip Guston, whose late figurative work is often judged to be more significant than his gestural work produced as a first generation Abstract Expressionist.

of these motifs by other artists whose work he encountered in his European production milieu would have served to reinforce his own use of such devices. In earlier Twentieth Century art, the mouth and sickle face were elements indicative of the trope of lunacy.[370] As such they are relevant to Tucker's work and consistent with his focus on the psychological. The ambiguity and ambivalence stressed by French Surrealist Georges Bataille in his early writing, and the linkage of the feminine with the moon by Baudelaire are literary sources for the development of this motif. The jutting jaw with hideous teeth is found in postwar monster imagery (discussed below) and can be interpreted as expressing the affective violence and contradictory smiling and frightening face of unreason. While Tucker may or may not have been aware of the derivations of the symbol he appropriated, his use of it is often consistent with this iconographic reading. In Tucker's early works *Sunday Reed and John Perceval,* 1943, and *Mask*, 1943, the crescent shape begins to emerge (figs. 6.28, 6.29). The former conveys Tucker's ambivalence toward Sunday Reed. Tucker and the Heide artists were interested in the work of Löwenfeld ([1936] 1939) (discussed in Chapter 4).[371] They were friendly with psychoanalyst and psychiatrist R.S. Ellery whom they met through the Reeds. The artists were interested in the portrayal of criminals and 'psychotic types' in their work.

In response to Tucker's 1952 solo exhibition at *Galerie Huit* in Paris, reviewer Pedro Carney noted Tucker's …

> … approach to painting is against the usual grain of French art. It incorporates aspects of the latter, such as rich, sensuous colouring, yet remains less decorative and emotionally more expressive. Alongside of Australian settings at the exhibit are hung recently executed Parisian scenes, where several garishly attired prostitutes add a humorous note.[372]

(See fig. 6.8.) A review in the French journal *L'actualité artistique internationale*, commented on the child-like characteristics of Tucker's work, similar to that of the mentally ill, and described his world as a nightmarish universe.[373] The reviewer does not assign the works to a category but rather describes formal aspects and allusive qualities of the works. These characterisations place Tucker's work in a category similar to that of Dubuffet or the CoBrA artists while acknowledging its demonstrated expressiveness of gesture. Monster imagery was common in the art of the 1940s

[370] For a detailed discussion of the origins of this trope and Bataille's 1930 *Homage à Picasso: Soleil pourri* ['Rotten Sun'] see Miller, C.F.B., 'Rotten Sun', in Grant, Catherine and Rubin, Patricia, eds., *Creative Writing and Art History*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, UK and Malden, MA, 2012, pp. 167-189.
[371] Löwenfeld, 1939. See section 6.4.
[372] Carney, Pedro, 'Art and Artists', *New York Herald Tribune*, Paris, July 3, 1952. ATP, Box 5B.
[373] *Actualité Artistique Internationale*, Paris, 12 June 1952, p. 8. Commenting on Tucker's 'unstable' graphics *'mais expressif à la manière des dessins d'enfants ou de malades mentaux, dont il semble*' the reviewer notes '*ses figures grimaçantes nous introduisent dans un univers de cauchemar.*' ATP, Box 5B. [Translation in text above my own.]

and the immediate postwar period and the CoBrA artists were among those producing works with such subject matter rendered in a semi-figurative cartoon-like style.[374] Both American Jackson Pollock and CoBrA artist Asger Jorn produced such works. Jorn used gesture to parody and deface painting, and praised kitsch. His monsters include the element of humour. *Galerie Huit*, run by American artists in Paris, was an exhibition space available to expatriate artists for showing their work.

A review of Tucker's Rome exhibition held at the *Galleria ai Quatro Vente*, published in *Il Momento*, May 6, 1953, found Tucker's work 'essentially surrealist' but 'different in manner from current Anglo-Saxon trends'. It was said Tucker 'synthesises reality and fantasy'.[375] In this case the reviewer has perceived the use of Surrealist devices in Tucker's work but has not identified such devices as common to other styles of gestural abstraction, although noting it is different in manner from other Surrealist work. I propose that this misapprehension on the part of the reviewer reflects a similar reaction to that received by the early Abstract Expressionists at the time of the 1945 exhibition *A Problem for Critics* at Putzel's gallery in New York, referenced in Chapter One with respect to Rothko's work, which combined Surrealist and abstract elements.

A further review of the *Galleria ai Quattro Venti* exhibition in *Il Popolo di Roma*, 13 May, 1953 identified Tucker's interest in 'pre-war psychological representations of people' and noted an 'echo of a Picasso period with a derivation from Rouault'.[376] Tucker is described as 'a painter who has looked on the latest European painting with interest, drawing from it conclusions and training which, however, has not taken away his native vein.'[377] Tucker's treatment of Christian themes was found to be unusual. Both Tucker and Nolan turned to such subject matter during their time in Italy. Christian themes were also a strong feature of the work of British painters (discussed below). In one of the more colourful descriptions of Tucker's work, the reviewer proffers a metaphorical interpretation of Tucker's exhibition and possibly his *oeuvre*, suggesting,

> And if it did not seem strange, we would say that his canvases form a real *via-crucis* (way of the cross) in which the Pharisees are always represented by policemen, and the public at large, the

[374] See, Alloway, Lawrence, 'The XXX Venice Biennale', in *Art International*, Vol. IV/7, Sept. 25, 1960, pp. 26-29, LAP, Box 30/17.
[375] *Il Momento*, May 6, 1953, ATP, Box 5B, translated from Italian, translator unknown.
[376] For what I believe is a Picasso work of great influence on Tucker see fig. 6.66. *Massacre en Corée,* 1951*,* was featured on the cover of the 1951 *Salon de Mai* catalogue which Tucker would have seen. Tucker's armed bushrangers and legions, footballers and groups of profiled (and conjoined) totem-like figures bear strong similarities. See figs.6.67 and 6.68.
[377] 'Ai Quattro Venti – Tucker Exhibition', in *Il Popolo di Roma*, 13 May 1953, translator unknown; ATP, Box 5B.

bourgeoisie, by enormous and flaccid pigs who grin from the corners of the painting or from the background.[378]

This example indicates that reviewers in Rome looked to both Tucker's Australian work and his work in the Italian production context, without recognising the extent to which artists like Tucker, familiar with the work of their British counterparts, were influenced by them and by other fellow artists with whom they interacted. Tucker arrived first in London before continuing on to Europe and quickly became familiar with the work of British artists such as Graham Sutherland and Francis Bacon by seeing their work first hand in exhibition and through reproduction in art journals and press reviews.[379] Tucker's close friend Sidney Nolan of the Heide circle resided in London. They discussed trends, art and subject matter, as well as strategies to gain acceptance in the market. Significantly, Nolan was mentored by British art connoisseur and art historian Sir Kenneth Clark who also championed Sutherland's work. Clark promoted Australian art in London and owned works by Nolan. Sutherland's work had been seen in Australia in the 1939 *Herald Exhibition*.[380] (See figs. 6.30 - 32 for examples of Sutherland's religious themed and 'head' imagery.)

With respect to the *Il Popolo* reviewer's reference to the work of French painter Georges Rouault, I note that Dubuffet also produced works inspired by Rouault and Tucker may have responded to either of them as he saw both artists' work in London in 1947 (figs. 6.36 - 38). Rouault is often invoked as a source for Tucker's work simply due to his dark colour palette and interest in religious themes. In fact, Tucker's work is much cruder and his use of colour more garish. Rouault's religious works are not as shocking as some Fauvist work, due to containment of colour blocks by dark line similar to a stained glass window. Rouault's work, however, is unique in a couple of respects which are relevant to drawing comparisons with Tucker's work and which are not usually emphasised in reviews. Rouault's painterly execution of his work has been referred to as gestural and has been said to indicate a love of *matière*. He also used a slashing technique of incisions, gouging and reworking areas of the work's surface. These methods presage the postwar techniques of Burri, Tàpies, and Italian painter Lucio Fontana and give the works a

[378] Ibid. *Galleria ai Quattro Venti* was owned by Gino Nibbi, known to Tucker as the owner of the Leonardo Art Shop in Melbourne.
[379] See Letter, Tucker to Nolan, October 1947, from London, advising he had seen work of Sutherland, Moore, Rouault, in McCaughey, Patrick, ed. and intro., *Bert & Ned: The Correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, VIC, 2006, pp. 65-66.
[380] Sutherland was an influence on a number of Australian artists including Russell Drysdale who studied in London. Sutherland's work was known through reproduction in the 1943 *Penguin Modern Painters* monograph. Pierse, 2012, p. 18.

sculptural effect which emphasises the haptic aspect.[381] Further, Rouault's subject matter often includes clowns and prostitutes. Tucker tended to favour such subject matter and this interest in the physiognomic expressions of the subjects, albeit in a cartoon-like rendering with distortion in facial features in the case of Tucker's work, is a continuation of a French tradition of caricature. For a number of artists it also represents a reaction to the horrors they saw or experienced during the war years.[382] The French cartoon tradition (Chapter Five (5.2)) is exemplified by the work of Daumier.[383] Rouault's treatment of clowns and prostitutes, while looking at the underside of life, is capable of eliciting pathos. Tucker's work tends to be more simplistic. However, a work such as *The Old Eve*, 1951 (fig. 6.15), does evoke a sense of sympathy or pity. In this work Tucker presents an ageing prostitute with decaying body rendered in a gestural manner common to the portrayals of women in the work of Austrian painter Egon Schiele (1890-1918) or Willem de Kooning.[384] While it is less likely Tucker would have seen Schiele's work, he would have been familiar with that of de Kooning through reproduction and articles in art journals as well as in exhibition in Europe particularly at the 1950 Venice Biennale, just before *The Old Eve* was painted.[385] Dubuffet also presented the female form in a decaying, bloated, semi-abstract manner in his series *Corps de Dames* created between 1943 and 1952 (fig. 6.39).

In 1954, Tucker and Nolan exhibited jointly at the Foreign Press Club in Rome. Titled *Mostra dei pittori australiani: Albert Tucker e Sidney Nolan*, the exhibition featured works referencing myth, explorers and religious allegory influenced by the artists' experiences in Italy. The works chosen demonstrated the two different approaches to modernism taken by the artists. Tucker's work was, for the most part, created in 1954 while Nolan's works spanned a five year period up to 1953. A review of the exhibition published 31 May, 1954, observed that Europeans … 'who are rather ill-informed on Australian culture, are somewhat surprised when confronted with these paintings… We discovered in them quite a Parisian malice, the product of a hardened and '*à la page*' culture'. In Tucker there was said to be 'clear evidence of a cartoonist style in the

[381] Fontana slashed and punctured his heavily inpastoed monochrome canvases, at times incorporating broken glass with the medium. He resisted gestural categorisation, claiming the finished artwork as object was his intended outcome, rather than the expressive gesture. See White, Anthony, *Lucio Fontana: Between Utopia and Kitsch*, MIT Press, Cambridge MASS, and London, 2011.

[382] Tucker had both experienced and toured army hospitals in Australia and Japan before leaving for Europe. He was exposed to the physically and psychologically wounded. Wols, Fautrier and CoBrA artists expressed similar reactions through their art.

[383] Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* also pointed to the caricature of Daumier; however, he noted the use of ambiguity in form can imbue vitality and expression. Tucker's simplicity of rendering leads to retention of the element of humour, while Daumier, as Gombrich claims, employs caricature in a manner devoid of humour to heighten the intensity or horror of expression (Gombrich, 1960, pp. 354-356).

[384] The misogynistic reading of Tucker's work sometimes invoked would have been unremarkable at the time.

[385] Schiele's work was collected by a few collectors during the 1940s - 1950s but was considered difficult subject matter as audiences of the day found it pornographic. It had been deemed 'degenerate' under the Nazi regime.

Depero fashion and a powerful sense of the monstrous in the style of Picasso, although a much more 'readable' Picasso'.[386] His symbolism was found to be 'somewhat curious'. In addition, the reviewer noted,

> … Anyone who imagines that he will find in Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan two artists capable of genuinely expressing the atmosphere, the light and the feeling of the continent in which they live, will be disappointed. They are rather painters who know perfectly the modern European alphabet and adjust themselves to it without any reservations.'[387]

While this review suggests a chameleon-like adaptation of the artists to their new environment, most reviewers found in Tucker's work a contemporary handling of materials while retaining an Australian flavour.[388]

A review in the *Rome Daily American,* June 27, 1956, the year in which Tucker showed his work at the Venice Biennale as an expatriate resident in Italy, noted Tucker's previous Rome exhibitions in May 1953 and with Nolan in 1954, stating Tucker's work was 'grounded in imagery of Australia's interior bushland' but 'relates to the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean basin also.'[389] It is significant that Tucker's participation in the Venice Biennale received no art critical or journalistic coverage in Australia. Indeed, Australia's participation in the Venice Biennale was fraught due to the strongly held conservative views of those on selection committees regarding the type of art work that should represent the nation in such events, as Scott has detailed.[390] The conservative government officials involved in selection favoured earlier Australian art and misunderstood the nature of the Biennale in showcasing innovative contemporary work by living artists. However, up until this time, nine years after his arrival in Europe, none of the reviewers specifically discuss Tucker's work in terms of *matière* painting or *tachiste* painting.[391]

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[386] *Il Tempo*, 31 May 1954, ATP, Box 5B. Fortunato Depero (1825-1895) was an Italian caricaturist. His flattened images of simplified multiple figures in profile do appear a possible source for Tucker. It is not known whether Tucker viewed Depero's work while in Italy or in publications. The reviewer is surprised to find the Australians 'à la page' or up-to-date culturally in expressing a European idiom.

[387] Idem.

[388] See Walmsley, L.G., 'Australian art display surprises Rome', in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June, 1954, p.9. Available at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/18434955?searchTerm=Venice%20Biennale>, accessed 8 September 2015.

[389] *Rome Daily American*, June 29, 1956, ATP, Box 5C.

[390] See Scott, 2003; and Scott, 2004.

[391] This is, in part, due to (1) the style of art writing in Europe at the time (see n.186 and n.187); (2) Tucker's reticence in exhibiting in Europe given the expense and gallery requirements (see Letter, Tucker to Nolan, from Paris, June 11, 1948 in McCaughey, Patrick, ed. and intro., *Bert & Ned: The Correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, VIC, 2006, pp. 88-91); and (3) in the case of Tucker's joint exhibition with Nolan, the exhibition narrative that Nolan chose to promote his work.
Tucker arrived London 1947, Paris 1948.

British reception to Tucker's work differed from the Continental view. Charles S. Spencer in a London column 'Art News and Review', April 27, 1957, reviewed Tucker's solo exhibition at the Imperial Institute, London. He described Tucker's symbolism to be of the Australian aboriginal and Australian 'cockney' variety, and expressed the view that Tucker's 'large bold style' carried an 'extrovert digger stamp' in which 'occasionally the cult of ugliness is pushed beyond its bearable limits'.[392] The art critic of the London *Times*, reviewing the exhibition on 15 May 1957, found that although Tucker had worked in Europe for the past eight years, 'his painting remains fiercely indigenous and un-European in spirit' and that the artist worked in 'a style of crude but genuine power.'[393] In June 1957, London reviewer Desmond Fennessy lamented that Tucker was not better known in his own country as he viewed the artist's work as original.[394] Of this series of reviews, that of Spencer identifies an 'anti-aesthetic' in Tucker's work, noting its perceived ugliness and coarseness which nonetheless leave it interesting. Unfortunately the *London Times* reviewer cannot come to terms with the *figural* or semi-abstract subject matter to fully appreciate the manner of execution of the works. Only Fennessy acknowledges the originality of the work but none of these British reviewers appear conscious of the category of *matière* painting.

A review of the same exhibition published across the Atlantic, in the 'Art Notes' column of *The Jewish Chronicle*, New York, April 26, 1957, noted Tucker's work under the subheading 'Social Realist'. It stated, 'his figures are harsh and totem-like and his landscapes are littered with craters and blasted tree trunks.'[395] While this review appears to cast Tucker into a figurative mode, the totem-like features were akin to those found in early Abstract Expressionist works of artists such as Pollock (fig. 6.41). The craters and blasted tree trunks are more similar to the slashings of European tendencies (such as the work of Fontana, fig. 6.42). Further, the heavy textural qualities and blasted appearance are not standard features of socialist realism. Tucker's work was assessed by this reviewer perhaps based on prior biographical information since its apparent subject matter is also inconsistent with the aims of socialist realism and reflects instead myth and primitivism.

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[392] Spencer, Charles S., 'Digger', in 'Art News and Review', [publication unknown], London, April 27, 1957. ATP, Box 5C.

[393] 'An Australian Artist', in *The Times*, London, 15 May 1957, p. 3, ATP Box 5C. [During the period of study, not all newspapers named the critic, reviewer or columnist in the column. The practice of unsigned articles and reviews was common until the 1970s. In archived news clipping files, such information is often not recorded on the clipping and in many cases, neither is the name of the publication. Clippings originate from a variety of sources including donated artist or dealer files and personal correspondence. Investigation has been made to trace this information to the extent possible. All such clippings referenced in this thesis have been sighted in the archives indicated. This is common to research by Pierse (2012) and Scott (2004) for example.]

[394] Fennessy, Desmond, 'Towards an *école du Pacifique*: Tucker's Powerful Canvases', in *The Age*, London, June 8, 1957, p. 18. ATP, Box 5C.

[395] 'Art Notes' in *The Jewish Chronicle*, New York, April 26, 1957, ATP, Box 5C.

It was not until December 1957 that the *tachiste* aspects of Tucker's work were appreciated along with the *matière* use of materials. *The Times* art critic, in a review December 21, 1957, noted with respect to the Australian Artists Association group exhibition at the Imperial Institute (which included Tucker, Nolan, Russell Drysdale, and Roy de Maistre among others) that the missing element 'is the Australian landscape itself'.[396] The reviewer proposed that this 'indicates how maturely the best Australian painting has absorbed an authentic character from its native landscape without needing to rely entirely on its outward appearances.' With respect to Tucker's three paintings of the Thames featured in the exhibition as a 'Homage to Turner', the reviewer notes Tucker's execution of the works 'in the typically prosy materials of today's painting – grit and sand, bits of cardboard, large passages of *tachiste* colour and angular, jutting shapes.'[397] (Fig. 6.40.)

Reviewer Nevile Wallis, writing in the *London Observer,* 29 December 1957 of the same exhibition, found that, rather than the expected indigenous character of previous exhibitions of Australian art, these artists who had been working of late in Britain and Europe reflected a style moderated by their recent experience. He found the most striking feature of the show to be 'a series of Turner's riverside scenes translated, with curious success into *tachiste* and cut-out collage patterns by Albert Tucker, a name unknown to fame, or at least to me.'[398] This reviewer was unbiased by any previous knowledge of Tucker's work and immediately categorised Tucker's work as *tachiste* based on its perceived features. This review and *The Times* review above demonstrate that London reviewers were familiar with the variations of gestural abstraction at this time and classified Tucker's work as suitably positioned in that classification based on its perceived features standard for the category. Further, they found it interesting when perceived as such.

The monthly English publication known as *Kemp's Commonwealth Calling* circulated to Commonwealth countries to generate interest in migration. The February 1958 issue featured an article on Tucker entitled 'Top Modern Artist from Melbourne Australia' together with an image of his work *The Bogong High Plains*, 1956-57 (fig. 6.46).[399] The work depicted a 'wounded, scarred land' similar to his lunar landscape paintings, executed in a gestural fashion devoid of human

[396] 'From our art critic', in *The Times*, London, December 21, 1957, p. 9, ATP, Box 5C.
[397] Idem.
[398] Wallis, Nevile, 'Ancestral Faces', in 'At the Galleries', *The Observer*, London, 29 December 1957, ATP, Box 5C.
[399] 'Top Modern Artist from Melbourne Australia', in Kemp's *Commonwealth Calling,* London*,* February 1958; ATP, Box 5D.

figures. The slashing and scarring of the pictorial surface is similar to that of Italian artists Burri or Fontana. The article referenced Tucker's April 1957 solo exhibition at the Imperial Institute London and his inclusion in the group exhibition of Australian artists held there in December 1957. Had Australian critics and curators been aware of articles such as this, presenting images of Tucker's recent work, they may have realised that Tucker had progressed from the *Images* series. It is unlikely the circulation of this publication would have reached those Australian critics and curators who later commented on Tucker's work. At this time major Australian collecting institutions were not collecting contemporary art nor did they have designated Australian art curators. It was also the practice at the time to ignore work not produced within Australia, as we will see in Chapter Seven.

Tucker's use of *matière* techniques was remarked upon in a review of the *Transference* exhibition (Zwemmer, London, Chapter 5 (5.5)) titled 'Commonwealth artists turn to Europe' in June 1958. It stated, 'Mr Tucker finds a new use for roughly handled pigment, allowing his image to sink into rather than arise autonomously out of the paint as though the 'Explorers' he depicts were being eaten up, dissolved or absorbed into the very soil they are exploring.'[400] It is significant that Tucker's work is characterised correctly by this reviewer (anon.) as being predominantly focused on the handling of materials and gesture. The reviewer does not go so far as to call it matter painting or textural painting, however, accurately describes the characteristics of the technique. This focus was not adopted by the Australian critics, as I will discuss in Chapter Seven. Art critic Robert Hughes refused to acknowledge Tucker as the first Australian artist to work in this technique or to classify Tucker as a gestural painter or abstractionist.

In July 1958, London reviewer Trewin Copplestone commented in reference to the Commonwealth Painters Show (*Transferences*), 'Particularly effective in the use of materials is Albert Tucker's *Explorer II*, a head on which the nature of the land explored and its topography are graphically integrated. Less successful because trite and obvious (how could he exhibit those legs) is his *Explorer III*.'[401] This reviewer easily identifies the gestural, *matière* properties of the work. Criticisms of being trite and obvious relate to the crude form of the explorer figure, one of Tucker's core motifs. It must be recognised however, that many artists of this period, used particular symbols or forms in the manner of a 'trademark' or identifying feature. This was not always well received by reviewers and was little understood by some early Australian art

[400] 'Commonwealth artists turn to Europe', 25 June 1958, news clipping, publication unknown thought to be British (see n. 393), ATP, Box 5D. See Chapter 5, (5.5).
[401] Copplestone, Trewin, 'Under the Flag', in *Art News and Review*, 5 July 1958. ATP, Box 5D.

historians. Further, Copplestone cited the Indian painter F.N. Souza as 'the only firmly figurative painter in the group.'[402] A review of the same exhibition in *Burlington Magazine* of August 1958 stated, 'Outstanding painters are Canadians [Paul-Émile] Borduas and [Jean-Paul] Riopelle, and Albert Tucker of Australia' in assessing the artists presented.[403] It is interesting that Souza's work was classified categorically as 'firmly figurative'. One of Souza's works was representative of the head motif popular in much gestural work of the period, and was rendered in heavy impasto, similar to Tucker's 'landscapes within heads' (fig. 6.49).

In October 1958, art critic Robert Hughes described Tucker in *The Observer* as 'an unclassifiable eccentric if ever there was one' and noted the artist had won the *Australian Women's Weekly* art prize with his work *Australian Gothic* (fig. 6.54).[404] The latter work combines figurative elements with the textured Antipodean head motifs now extended into full bushranger figures playing cards. The composition is a variation on a common theme in art works from earlier periods by various artists.[405] The use of materials is prominent, with the gnarled faces of the card players echoing the woodgrain of the table.

Tucker's *Lunar Landscape, 1957,* was acquired by MOMA, New York in April 1958 (fig. 6.51). It was shown in the museum's *Recent Acquisitions Exhibition*, January 30 - April 19, 1959. In his statement accompanying the exhibition, Tucker described himself as a …

> …self-exile for cultural-nostalgic reasons. Now nostalgia operates in reverse. Find myself a dissociated fragment of a newly emerging national psyche…As for painting itself, I am not concerned with 'abstract 'or 'figurative' – all meaningless to me. For me a painting is a fabricated symbol through which we view a hitherto invisible aspect of reality.[406]

He called *Lunar Landscape* 'a memory of an Australian land-image.'[407] Also included among MOMA acquisitions that year were works by Spanish painter Antoni Tàpies in oil and sand on

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[402] Idem.
[403] *Burlington Magazine*, August 1955. ATP, Box 5D. Bourduas and Riopelle (a French resident for twenty-five years) were founding members of the French-Canadian *Automatistes* group of gestural abstract painters.
[404] Hughes, Robert, 'Worthy Portraits', *The Observer*, London, October 4, 1958, p. 530. ATP, Box 5D.
[405] Precedent card player works include Cezanne's *The Card Players*, 1891; Picasso's *Card Player*, 1913-14; and André Masson's *Card Trick*, 1923 (and much earlier, Caravaggio's *The Cardsharps*, c 1594). A 1948 MOMA publication included a black and white reproduction of Max Beckmann's *Four Men around the Table*, 1943. (See Soby, 1948, p. 89.) Whether Tucker saw this publication is unknown. An illustration in Herbert Read's *Contemporary British Art*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, UK, [1951]1964 presents a drawing by British artist Merlyn Evans, *The Chess Players*, 1940, with a similar composition to Tucker's work (fig. 6.53). Tucker would most likely have seen this book. The woodgrain of Tucker's bushranger card players echoes the striations in Evans' figures.
[406] *Museum of Modern Art*, *Checklist with Notes*, No. 9a, 1959, p. 6.
[407] Idem. This description would become part of art historical discourse concerning this work and would be misinterpreted as indicative of a landscape category of representational painting, rather than the 'mindscape' or gestural abstraction it was meant to be.

canvas, and sawdust and oil on canvas (fig. 6.52). The press release for the exhibition indicated the group of works represented twenty four artists from fifteen countries, twenty one of whom were first time additions to the MOMA collection. The average age of the artists was thirty five, 'except for a few older men who had won minor reputations before the War but have since changed their styles radically.'[408] Director of Museum Collections, Alfred H. Barr Jr. noted that few of the works were in the dominant Abstract Expressionist style and that the aim of the exhibition was to 'confirm the persistent individualism and frequent heterodoxy of contemporary artists.' The museum's collection policies resulted in the emphasis on a broad representation of international additions to the collection, the variety of which was said to 'prove once more the quite extraordinary international mobility of artists, works of art and, incidentally, museum personnel.'[409]

A feature article on Tucker in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, September 9, 1959, by the magazine's New York correspondent, was aptly titled 'Australian artist paints with cement'. The article describes how Barr spotted Tucker's *Lunar Landscape,* 1957, at the Poindexter Gallery in Manhattan and quotes the MOMA Director's rationale for recommending its acquisition:

> I saw this piece of insistent crudeness…and recognised a master illusionist at work. The raised paint and the colour combined to create a perspective in relief that put me immediately in mind of the old *art brut* in France, where painters consciously defied good taste and restraint. I decided to recommend the Tucker purchase.[410]

The article referenced Australian art critic John Yule's assessment that Tucker's art displays echoes of Beckmann, Ernst, Rouault and Picasso and, according to Yule, the artist shows 'a savage psychological penetration veering from the exciting to the intentionally repellent.'[411] The *Women's Weekly* article and quote from Barr clearly identify the aesthetic properties of crude execution and emphasis on materials, standard for *matière* painting, and a deliberate cultivation of an 'anti-aesthetic' common in postwar art, and positioned it against works of an *art brut* style. It is a balanced article and responds to the properties of the work and its imaginative positioning against other tendencies. It is therefore curious, as I will discuss further in Chapter Seven, that Australian expatriate critic and art historian Robert Hughes chose to

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[408] Press release No. 9, MOMA, January 30, 1959.
[409] Idem.
[410] Feldmun, Robert, 'Australian Artist paints With Cement', in *The Australian Women's Weekly*, September 9, 1959, p. 11. ATP, Box 5D. Barr's quote is also included in a column on Albert Tucker in Elwyn Lynn's November 1960 issue of *The Contemporary Art Society Broadsheet*, NSW, p.3. ATP, Box 5E.
The work was not on exhibition but held in the stockroom at the Poindexter Gallery. It was left with the gallery by Tucker's partner Mary Dickson on her return to the U.S. from Europe in the hope of generating interest in Tucker's work. Barr visited galleries on weekends to peruse works in their stockrooms. (Mollison, James, and Minchin, Jan, *Albert Tucker: A Retrospective*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1990, p. 14.)
[411] Idem.

misconstrue Barr's comment that Tucker was an 'illusionist'. Hughes later used this phrase out of context to discount Tucker's *matière* work. Of all the comments made about Tucker's work during the artist's thirteen year period abroad, this one in particular together with its misinterpretation by Hughes when taken out of context, seems to have had the greatest impact on Tucker's consecration into the annals of Australian art history. This is particularly the case when later combined with Bernard Smith's classification which focused solely on Tucker's earlier Melbourne work. Hughes then perpetuated his own misconstrual in his later writing about Tucker. I will discuss the connotations of the term 'illusionist' further in Chapter Seven.

In October 1959, the 'Transferences' exhibition of Commonwealth painting toured North America. Memphis art reviewer Guy Northrop Jr. found Tucker's work spoke to the spirit of the times, stating,

> Two other Australians, Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan, set the true tone of the show, however. Both are obsessed with man's fate in today's shrinking but tension-torn world. Tucker's *Explorer* series seems to range from the prehistoric slime from which man's forebears crawled to the militaristic pinnacle man has now reached….For all its unpleasant immediacy, the show is a sermon on this anxious, faith-shorn age. [412]

Doré Ashton, art critic for *The New York Times,* wrote November 26, 1959 of the opening of The Hirschl and Adler Galleries inaugural exhibition introducing 'some new talents, among them the Australian painter Albert Tucker.' Ashton remarked that from this first selection offered by the gallery, it 'appears Hirschl and Adler will enter the contemporary field with high style.'[413] A review of the show by Stuart Preston in April 1960 characterised Tucker's work as semi-abstract and reminiscent of Jean Dubuffet particularly with regard to the handling of paint. He wrote,

> Australian modern art so far has made little impact on the international scene. This situation is unlikely to continue as its general character is becoming more widely known, first with Sidney Nolan, and now with Albert Tucker showing semi-abstract landscapes and figures at Hirshl and Adler, 21 East Sixty-seventh Street….Mr Tucker mixes memory and vision in these harsh and fantastic semi-lunar landscapes, whose strong, uncouth nature gives a picture of the world as it might look before the dawn of history or after history's sunset. Violence, in the form of explorers who could have been conceived by some Frankenstein down under, stalks these wide open spaces. Paint is earth colour with something of Dubuffet's frenzy in its handling.[414]

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[412] Northrop, Guy Jr., 'Adventures into Art – Four Way Art Treat in Store for Visiting Museum Leaders', in *The Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, October 11, 1959. ATP, Box 5D.
[413] Ashton, Dore, 'Art: Flexibility of Fancy', in *The New York Times*, November 26, 1959. ATP, Box 5D.
[414] Preston, Stuart, 'Art: Australian View: Semi-Abstracts by Tucker Exhibited', in *The New York Times*, April 2, 1960. ATP, Box 5D.

Writing to Tucker, June 6, 1960, Barr advised that the MOMA acquisition Committee had approved the purchase of Tucker's work *Explorers: Burke and Wills,* 1960 (fig. 6.56). The museum collection's aim was to demonstrate the existence of nationally based variations to the international style of contemporary art and individual variations within that. The objective was to establish the collection as a background for study of the emerging masters of modern art.[415] Both abstract and semi-abstract, as well as figurative work were included among the ninety-four contemporary works acquired during the year. In this case there is therefore some implication that this Tucker work was acquired as an example of work by a contemporary Australian artist. Despite its title, referencing historical personages, the features of Tucker's work *Explorers: Burke and Wills* clearly place it in the *matière* category for which its emphasis on texture and the handling of materials are standard features. It is executed in a semi-abstract mode of expression, albeit veering toward naïf figuration in this case, with its landscape-in-head imagery extending to the full cut-out figures of the bushrangers. In contrast, *Lunar Landscape*, 1957, acquired two years earlier, was devoid of figuration.

Tucker's exhibition at The Waddington Galleries in London in July 1960 included lunar landscapes and Antipodean head imagery. A review in the *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post* of July 14, 1960 found Tucker's use of materials, particularly the incorporation of sand within the paint, was used to 'good effect', notwithstanding the device was often abused by painters of the day according to reviewer Terence Mullaly.[416] A review of the exhibition by Michael Shepherd described the artist as a 'myth maker' and 'more involved than Nolan in his paint as matter'. He posited, 'Stylistically they recall the unfocused dramatics of Italian post-war painting, but here at the service of an idea … firmness of the basic idea is all that saves some of these paintings from being empty, forced or overblown and one hopes for further development of these ideas.'[417] A review of the Waddington show in a column 'News from the Galleries and Salerooms' found 'Tucker's work doesn't betray his prolonged stay in Europe but rather emphasises his origins'. This reviewer focused primarily on the subject matter such as bushranger imagery, rather than the *matière* approach to painting. Significantly for Tucker, one of the visitors to the Waddington Gallery exhibition was J.J. Sweeney, curator of the Guggenheim Foundation, New York. Sweeney

[415] *Museum of Modern Art*, *Recent Acquisitions Painting and Sculpture, December 19 - February 25, 1962*, No. 151a, and *Checklist: Painting and Sculpture*, Museum of Modern Art, Research Resources, available at <www.moma.org >, accessed 11 February 2012.
[416] *Albert Tucker: Recent Paintings*, 4-27 July, 1960, The Waddington Galleries, London; Mullaly, Terence, 'Desert Moods Captured – Emotional Appeal of Tucker's Art', in the *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*, July 14, 1960, p. 15., ATP, Box 5E.
[417] Shepherd, Michael, 'Waddington Gallery until July 27: Albert Tucker', newspaper clipping, publication unknown, ATP, Box 5E.

had stated, in a 1958 letter discussing a sampling of Tucker's work, that he preferred Tucker's works which emphasised handling of materials to those of a caricatural nature.[418] The Guggenheim subsequently acquired a Tucker work of the Antipodean head series (fig. 7.9).[419]

In Chapter Five, (5.5), I discussed the 1961 Whitechapel Gallery, London exhibition *Recent Australian Painting* which included work by Tucker. This exhibition is significant for this thesis in that the catalogue essays for the exhibition, particularly that by Robert Hughes, failed to position Australian abstractionism within the context of European trends. Instead, Hughes resorted to the well-worn abstraction/realism dichotomy which had by this time run its course in the U.K. and Europe, and to the folkloric clichéd imagery of the Australian bush thought to be appreciated by British audiences. This placed Australian artists who positioned themselves within avant-garde modes of practice at a disadvantage in terms of expectations and interpretation of their work.[420] Hardest hit were those working in gestural styles which were not accurately characterised or categorised to facilitate their full appreciation. This exhibition narrative served to perpetuate a nationalistic identification with landscape painting which was a carryover from much earlier periods in presenting Australian art from the colony to the British audience.[421]

In Chapter Five I discussed Hughes' failure to recognise Tucker's gestural work and his semi-abstract *matière* work in his catalogue essay for the Whitechapel exhibition and I will return to Hughes' role in the field of reception and the consecration of Tucker's work in Chapter Seven.[422] Neither Robertson nor Hughes attempted to position the Australian artists within the field of Commonwealth artists previously exhibited in London (5.5), nor did they position the semi-figural group of works in the exhibition in the context of works of that type by British artists. Such positioning would facilitate greater appreciation of the currency of the modes of expression used

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[418] See Chapter 7 (7.1, n. 519-521) in which I detail supporting archival material sourced from the Guggenheim archives.
[419] Sheldon-Williams, PMT, 'Tough Man from Melbourne', in *Time and Tide*, 23 July 1960; ATP, Box 5E. See fig. 6.55 for a similar work.
[420] This is a practical example of Cluley's theory of 'art words' (Chapter 5, n.286) consistent with Bourdieu's elements of the artistic field, 'elaboration of an artistic language' and the 'action of the producers themselves' (Chapter 3). See Cluley, 2012, pp. 201-216.
[421] See Chapter 5 (5.5, esp. n. 352).
[422] *Cf.* Scott argues that *Recent Australian Painting* was highly innovative compared to the Tate show of 1963. While I agree that the earlier exhibition provided a more appropriate cross-section of artists, the catalogue essays nevertheless did not effectively position the works presented against the appropriate contemporary reference classes. Hughes' catalogue essay and his misconstrual of the correct category for Tucker's gestural work had a lasting effect. See Scott, Sarah, 'A colonial legacy: *Australian Painting* at the Tate Gallery, London, 1963' in *Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World*, Darian-Smith, Kate, et al., eds., Monash University ePress, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 19.1-19.22.

by artists such as Tucker, rather than harking back to pre-war modes of experimentation and early critical reviews.

Tucker appeared in a second MOMA 'recent acquisitions' group show in 1962. This time his work was *Explorers: Burke and Wills.* A review appearing in *Art International,* March 1962, observed of Tucker's work,

> This Australian has brought off some images half cartooned, half abstract, at which one doesn't know whether to smirk a little, or acknowledge a sensation of horror (an uncomfortable situation). Other artists with far-fetched affinities to Tucker were James McGarrell, who perpetrates a world parallel to Purvis de Chevannes' but gone mad, and the Columbian Fernando Botero, author of the most ludicrous painting in the show, *Mona Lisa Age Twelve*.[423]

The review found Tucker's work straddled both the idiom expressed in the work by Tàpies, *Painting, 1957* (fig. 6.52) included in the MOMA exhibition (executed in latex paint and marble dust on canvas), as well as that of the figure painters represented at the Whitney Gallery, New York, in another exhibition reviewed in the same column.[424] While this reviewer could see figurative elements in the work, given the predominance of materials, the *matière* classification would have been most apt for its appreciation. Clearly confusion around the semi-abstract category was not unique to the Australian art world during the period.

In Chapter Five (5.5) I discussed the exhibition *Australian Painting – Colonial – Impressionist – Contemporary* (Tate Gallery, London, January 1963). The exhibition was criticised by Australian artists, Australian state gallery directors and many in the London art world for its politicised selection process. The works chosen reinforced the idea of a Commonwealth colony reporting to the homeland as it included only stereotypical images of Australia with a strong emphasis on landscape.[425] Tucker's prior exhibition history in London (particularly his inclusion in the Whitechapel exhibition) was both a positive and negative factor for appreciation of his work. Due to the Whitechapel catalogue essay by Hughes (5.5 and 6.3), Tucker's work tended to be 'type-cast' as London reviewers looked to that essay in making sense of the Tate exhibition. Further, as noted by Scott with respect to the Tate exhibition, reviewers were reluctant to draw any comparisons with or position any of the artists against European modernism.[426] The exhibition

[423] *Art International*, V 1 / 2, March 1962. Also referenced in Letter, Elwyn Lynn to Tucker, 8 May 1962; ATP, Box 1J.
[424] Idem.
[425] For an account of the mistrust of internationalism and particularly abstract tendencies during the period, see Chanin, Eileen, 'Antipodean Autonomy and Contingency', in *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2009, pp. 615-621 (616).
[426] Scott, 2008, pp. 19.1–19.22. See Tucker, Albert, 'Art Exhibition for the Tate, Misrepresentation of Our Ability', *Herald*, Melbourne, 28 March 1962.

received a lukewarm reception from London audiences, perhaps because another 'colonial' exhibition was of less interest than exhibitions representative of emerging trends in Pop art and American art during this time of major social and cultural change.

In this section I have examined the way in which reviewers characterised and categorised Tucker's work during the period. I will draw together the implications in the chapter conclusion. There are four aspects of Tucker's work raised by the reviews of his exhibited work to which I will return in Chapter Seven. These aspects are relevant to the problem of interpretation that the work posed for many reviewers and art historians. These are the:

(1) use of motifs and non-semiotic symbols;

(2) simplistic rendering of form. This is often seized upon as indicating Tucker's lack of technical ability as a largely self-taught artist. In fact, as I have demonstrated, there was a long tradition of such disembodied head imagery in European art, both of the period and earlier in the Twentieth Century;

(3) *figural* or semi-abstract and the distorted representation of the human figure including a treatment of the female figure and nude which were often controversial. Other artists painting in this mode included Bacon, de Kooning, Dubuffet and the CoBrA group artists; and,

(4) Hughes' interpretation of Barr's use of the term 'illusionism'. This is the reference Barr made when citing his rationale for recommending the purchase of *Lunar Landscape,* 1957, a non-objective work, to the MOMA acquisitions committee, which Hughes misinterpreted.

While a number of reviewers did characterise Tucker's work according to its lyrical, *tachiste* or *matière* properties, categorisation proved problematic. In part this was due to Tucker's relative independence from other artists during his time in Europe and his failure to adopt strategies which might assist reviewers in categorising his work to focus perception on its key features for best appreciation. As discussed in Chapter Five (5.2), artists employed strategies to position themselves within the field of reception. Of the seven strategies cited in Chapter Five as aids in establishing active characterisations for new painting styles, or in this case for forging an identity as a gestural abstractionist, Tucker utilised only a few of these and did so with limited effect. While Tucker did align with precedent such as the work of other artists whose work was understood in the European field of production, including Dubuffet and Tàpies, and drew on primitivist sources from earlier periods of abstraction, he did not actively pursue strategies to address how best to present this new aesthetic to the viewing public. Furthermore, he did not

consider that his work might not be understood in the Australian field of reception, an art world different to his production milieu.

6.3 Art Critical Discourse in the Field of Reception – Australian

In this subsection I will briefly discuss Tucker's Australian reception upon his return from Europe before evaluating his use of the strategies introduced in section (5.2).

Tucker received a stipend while working in Europe, from his sponsors, art patrons John and Sunday Reed. Tucker did not regularly send new artworks back to Australia nor did he employ a strategy of regularly exhibiting in Australia while working overseas. Reed organised two exhibitions, one just before and one just after the time of Tucker's return to Australia. The first, a group exhibition of contemporary Australian painting held in Sydney in February 1959, featured artists Lawlor, Fairweather, Nolan, Tucker, Boyd, Perceval, Gleeson, Counihan, Vassilieff and Atyeo. Reviews were mixed, in part due to the inclusion of Boyd's then controversial *Love, Marriage and Death of a Half-Caste* series, featuring a part-Aboriginal figure. The second, a solo-exhibition organised by Reed in 1960, was shown initially at the Museum of Modern Art of Australia, Melbourne (hereafter 'MOMAA'), and then toured the major capitals of Australia. MOMAA was founded by John Reed in1958 and he was its first director. This exhibition celebrated Tucker's return to Australia after thirteen years abroad. Tucker's success overseas translated into a high volume of sales from this exhibition and his work began to command prices which were noted in the press as setting a new bar for Australian prices in commercial gallery sales.[427]

While Tucker's solo exhibition included fifty newer works produced overseas between 1955 and 1960, it was Tucker's subsequent participation in a MOMAA exhibition titled *The Formative Years: 1940-1945* focusing on pre-war art, held October - November 1961, that began to foreground the style of work for which Tucker was to become best known. Unfortunately for the consecration and appreciation of the mature gestural work within Tucker's *oeuvre*, this was his earlier work. This was a better fit with the Reed's extensive collection of work by fellow Heide artists Nolan and Perceval and with the exhibition narrative, developed by John Reed who

[427] Tucker was cognisant of the gallery/dealer systems and differences between the art worlds of Europe, the US and Australia and commented upon these in a press article of December 7, 1960. See 'Playing the Art Circuit with Albert Tucker', in *The Bulletin*, December 7, 1960, p.14, ATP, Box 5E. Reviewer Geoffrey Dutton writing in *The News*, Adelaide, 14 November 1962, [ATP, Box 6A], noted that Tucker's show in Melbourne had broken records by netting over £10,000 and it appeared that the myth of inflated overseas prices would no longer apply. '…there is nothing gimmicky about these paintings which are almost austerely lyrical, nor is there about the prices (£300 - £1,000).'

coordinated the exhibition. This exhibition was held prior to the 1961 Whitechapel Exhibition in London, mentioned above, and may have influenced Hughes in his remarks. Hughes, in presenting Whitechapel, tended to reinforce a perception of Tucker based on his earlier work. Australian critic Lynn expressed regret that the newer work by Australian artists was not met by Whitechapel reviewers with a wider range of sympathies (Chapter 5, (5.5, n. 352)). Instead, stereotypes were reinforced.

Following Whitechapel, Tucker was next included in a landmark Australian group exhibition in August - September 1962 titled *Rebels and Precursors: Aspects of Painting in Melbourne 1937-1947* held at the NGV. The exhibition was later shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Queensland Art Gallery. *Rebels and Precursors* was recognised for showing works by six 'major Expressionist/Surrealists' not seen for nearly two decades and for beginning the process of 're-evaluation' of art of the period.[428] This exhibition included thirty nine works by Tucker among the 180 presented as well as works by Nolan, Perceval, Boyd and Vassilieff.[429] Nolan's first Ned Kelly series, Boyd's biblical paintings and Tucker's *Images* attracted favourable attention from the public. It is noteworthy that the way in which this exhibition was constructed was influenced by Tucker who chose to lend works to fit the desired narrative proposed by the exhibition's curators. This exhibition acknowledged the contribution of the Angry Penguins of the 1940s to the development of Australian modernism. The extensive catalogue accompanying the exhibition was the first of its kind and detailed aspects of Surrealist, Socialist Realist and Expressionist art as well as highlighting the politics of the art scene in Melbourne and its realist / abstractionist factions.[430]

Tucker 's gestural abstraction leanings were not acknowledged as there was no narrative around such an approach forthcoming in the Australian context. The fact that Tucker participated in this exhibition and the MOMAA exhibition organised by Reed, served to preserve his art critical categorisation derived from associations with German Expressionism and Surrealism to the detriment of gaining recognition for his mature gestural work. As demonstrated in this example, artists themselves became generally identified with a particular style or movement, rather than categorising individual works or series of works. It was difficult for curators to deal with artists whose *oeuvres* spanned a variety of tendencies. As curators selected works to fit a particular exhibition theme, the participating artist became associated with the tendency of focus through the

[428] Dixon and Smith, 1984, p. 32.
[429] Mollison and Minchin, 1990, p. 116.
[430] Haese, Richard, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, Allen Lane, Ringwood, VIC, 1981.

viewer's experience of the exhibition narrative effected through the exhibition design. Viewers attended to the perceptual features of the works emphasised in the curatorial narrative and contextualised the work and the artist through their placement with works of other artists selected to support the theme.

It is apparent in the context of this thesis, in which I have examined the way the dynamics of the art world and the key positions in the field of production and reception are implicated in positioning and categorising an artist and his or her work, that Tucker's participation in these exhibitions was a significant factor in his subsequent art historical placement. Tucker's agreement to being exhibited in the pre-war context of the two exhibitions above, so soon after his return to Australia after thirteen years abroad during which he did not exhibit in Australia, in effect introduced him to the viewing public in a category from which it became virtually impossible to later reposition himself and his work. Tucker may have been influenced by John Reed's earlier words of warning in 1957 regarding his lack of reputation in Australia. If so, he may have been pleased to have the opportunity to exhibit his work according to a prescribed curatorial script, with assistance from Reed in mounting his initial exhibitions.[431] Tucker had solo exhibitions at *Australian Galleries*[432] in Melbourne each year from 1962 to 1964, and was featured in the 1963 *Australian Painting Today* exhibition touring Australia and Europe in 1963-1965 (Chapter 4 (4.3, n. 223)). As discussed above, the latter exhibition did nothing to reposition Tucker into a gestural category as it focused on a particular characterisation of colonial Australia. Tucker was included in the 1963 *VII Bienal de São Paolo* at the Museum of Modern Art, São Paolo, Brazil; however, that exhibition received little, if any, Australian coverage.[433] Four of Tucker's works were exhibited including two of the *Explorer* series, one *Antipodean Head* and *Surrender at Glenrowan.* They were all *matière,* semi-abstract works. Also included were four works by each of Daws, Dickerson, French, Hessing and Fairweather and three by Perceval. These ranged from gestural abstract to figurative modernist works.

6.4 Dynamics in the field – establishment of the active category

In this section I examine the potential strategies, as introduced in Chapter Five (5.2), which could have aided in positioning Tucker's gestural work appropriately had they been implemented effectively. I list seven strategies in all, and here I examine them within the relevant context.

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[431] See n. 363.
[432] An influential gallery founded in Collingwood, Melbourne in 1956 by Anne and Tam Purves (since expanded).
[433] *VII Bienal de São Paulo (1963) – Catálogo*, Fundacao Bienal de São Paolo, exh. cat., São Paolo, Brazil, 1963, pp. 50-56, available at < http://issuu.com/bienal/docs/name58cfb4 >, accessed 4 August 2015.

With respect to our first strategy of coining new terms to describe a painting approach or alignment with other artists, Tucker was not fortunate enough to be located within a group of artists specifically identifying with the new tendencies. Such alignment would have assisted with classification in a gestural or *matière* category, whether *l'art informel* or *autre art*, to direct attention to features such as the texture and novelty of the work and its affinities with the work of artist peers working in similar modes. In the case of *matière* works these might have included Fautrier, Dubuffet, Bacon, Burri and Tàpies. In the case of the cartoon-like semi-abstract works best appreciation may have been achieved in reference to the work of the CoBrA artists or Dubuffet. In England, Alloway had initiated such discourse around new works in exhibitions such as the January 1957 *Exploration of Paint* which featured works by Karel Appel, Jean Dubuffet, and three 'demi-Françaises' artists working in Paris – Americans Sam Francis and Paul Jenkins, and Canadian Jean-Paul Riopelle (Chapter 5). The London art world at this time recognised *tachisme* and gestural abstraction as well as the influence of American Abstract Expressionism. In Australia, the vehement attack against the gestural from Bernard Smith and his circle of Antipodeans made the term 'gestural' undesirable as a label; however, this was not an issue for Tucker in his overseas exhibitions.[434] Instead, at times Tucker suffered from stereotyping as reviewers in the field of production and initial reception of his gestural work sometimes applied preconceived notions about what Australian art *should* be in attempting to categorise Tucker's work. Sir Kenneth Clark tended to perpetuate such expectations through his support of Drysdale's and Nolan's work. This may, in turn, have influenced other reviewers. This demonstrates the difficulty faced by artists working in a field of production and reception in an art world where reviewers do not identify an applicable cohort of artists and other works of similar perceptual features through which to establish the aesthetically active category.

For Tucker, exhibitions such as the *Commonwealth Painters Show* in London in 1958 and the *Transferences* touring exhibition of 1959 were an excellent way in which to align his work with other painters working in similar styles. Similarly, reviewers of the group exhibition at Hirschl and Adler's in New York, referenced above, responded to the gestural character of Tucker's work. However, these overseas exhibitions did not receive sufficient publicity in Australia to have an impact on the reception of Tucker or his gestural work in the Australian art world. Further, upon Tucker's immediate return, there were no other artists working in the *matière* tendency to provide

[434] It may, however, account for Tucker's 'fence-sitting' position with respect to discussing his own work as gestural once back in Australia. The Antipodeans largely opposed abstractionist tendencies including geometric and gestural abstraction, *tachisme*, abstract expressionism, and action painting.

a context of discernible variations with which local reviewers could position his work and confirm the intended aesthetically active category.

Instead, as we will see in Chapter Seven, Australian reviewers and art historians applied their own methods of aligning artists into groupings based loosely on the artist's domicile within Australia and its associated painting circles – distinguishing broadly between Sydney abstractionists and Melbourne modernists. In the case of Melbourne artists, a distinction was made between the Heide vanguard artists of the Reed circle and the socialist realist Antipodean group centred around Smith. (Brisbane artists and others were often omitted from the discussion altogether.) Such simplified groupings did not take into account the range of artists in both locations working in abstract and figurative modes nor was there any consideration of the semi-abstract modes of expression which would have better classified much of Tucker's gestural work (although still not taking into account Tucker's *matière* work which was a new tendency for Australia). These groupings worked against Tucker's gestural work being recognised for its innovative qualities.

Early work of artists who later became identified with a particular style often included experimental works, or comprised a phase or phases during which the artist worked in an entirely different mode within their *oeuvres* from that for which they later became best known. This was typical of artists working in all art worlds at this time, not only in Australia.[435] In Tucker's case, such examples included his pre-war work made during a period in which he, like many artists, was initially aligned with Communist ideologies. Tucker exhibited six paintings and a few drawings in the 1942 CAS *Anti-Fascist Exhibition*, shown in Melbourne and Adelaide. The exhibition included mainly socialist realist works by artists Noel Counihan and Vic O'Connor (who later became Antipodeans) who, together with Tucker, contributed most of the works with Heide circle members John Perceval and Yosl Bergner participating.[436] Tucker exhibited jointly with Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd in 1946 at the Rowden White Library, University of Melbourne and was eventually to be grouped with them in the Heide circle against the socialist realists. Although these early exhibitions included Tucker's work in his early pre-war experimental styles before the Heide group split into two camps, his work was not well known outside of artist circles at that time. The CAS

[435] There are many examples, among them: Picasso, Pollock, Rothko, Motherwell, Hantai, American painter Hedda Sterne, American sculptor and painter Claire Falkenstein, American Pacific School painter Elmer Bischoff, to name a few.

[436] Tucker and the Heide artists subsequently broke with the Communist party due to their perception of its stance of 'prescriptive interference' in determining the appropriate subject matter for artists. They became known as vanguard artists, opposed to socialist realism, and explored techniques drawn from Surrealism, abstraction and dream imagery.

exhibitions were not popular with the general public. Author, art critic and bookseller Gino Nibbi, John Reed, and art critic Basil Burdett (who had organised the works presented in *The Herald Exhibition*, 1939, for Sir Keith Murdoch) were the only reviewers to give serious press attention to Tucker before he travelled to Europe. Basil Burdett, the *Herald* art critic, found the young Tucker to be 'a painter of promise', going so far as to compare him to Melbourne painter, director of an art school, and president of the CAS, George Bell.[437] It was Tucker's post-war exhibition strategy, however, and the influence of art patron John Reed which ultimately led to these early works becoming better known.

Secondly with respect to our identified positioning strategies, Tucker's use of linkages to the literary or to ideas in circulation to create meaning and enhance appreciation of his gestural works was not employed as effectively as it might have been. Tucker did not write anything which might reinforce the gestural aspects of his work (as artists such as Jean Dubuffet did to explicate and promote his work, or as Wols did in pairing his work with philosophical texts by Sartre, both in exhibition and in publication in the art journal *Verve* as mentioned in Chapter 5).[438] American Abstract Expressionist Robert Motherwell who created his signature series of work, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* to present his moral concerns about the Spanish Civil War, linked his work to a poetic theme. The series was incepted in 1948 with a drawing accompanying a poem by art critic Harold Rosenberg and Motherwell was later inspired by the poetry of Spanish poet and playwright Frederico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936). Motherwell's 1949 painting *At five in the afternoon* drew its title from a Lorca poem. Tucker's gestural work, however, is not linked to any particular texts which might serve to create meaning, although he made use of allusive titles for his work on a case by case basis. Many artists at the time referred to T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* which Tucker referenced in his earlier Surrealist influenced work such as *The Futile City*,1940 (fig. 6.63). His nocturnes were said to be influenced by Eliot's *The Hollow Men*. Artist and critic Elwyn Lynn observed that Americans, like Melburnians, 'put myth to social and personal uses' and noted that Australian artists were reading the same literature as their American counterparts.[439] Notwithstanding his knowledge of such literature and his painted expression of current ideas, Tucker was to remain strongly associated with the pre-war *Angry Penguins* journal.

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[437] Burke, 1998, p. 11.

[438] On Dubuffet's 'intellectual finesse' in writing about his art, see Kramer, Hilton, *The Age of the Avant-garde 1956-1972*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick NJ and London, 2009. (Originally published by Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1973.)

[439] Lynn, Elwyn, *Sidney Nolan: Myth and Imagery*, MacMillan, London and Melbourne, AUS, 1967, p. 12. Lynn was an Australian artist, critic, writer and curator receptive to international trends. He described the work of John Perceval, Arthur Boyd and Tucker as expressionist surrealism (p. 11).

Tucker did associate his gestural work with concepts of Jungian psychology and later with folklore or myth in the case of bushranger or Australian hero imagery. He utilised archaeological aspects in his 'landscape-in-head' imagery. His artist statement appearing in the MOMA exhibition list for the new acquisitions exhibition of 1959 was written in the vague language of the time invoking the role of the subconscious and mirroring Klee's famous statement from his 1920 'Creative Confession' that 'art does not reproduce the visible, it makes visible.'[440] Tucker's MOMA exhibition artist statement did serve to indicate his lack of concern for embracing either total abstraction or total figuration as already noted. Tucker did not aim to achieve naturalistic representation but was attempting to express a psychological state in his 'memory of an Australian land-image' through his work *Lunar Landscape,* 1957. It seems that Australian reviewers were not attuned to such descriptions and the implication that the work be viewed as *dépaysage* in nature. In this respect they also misunderstood Dubuffet when they interpreted him as a figurative artist.[441] Elwyn Lynn, one of the more knowledgeable Australian art critics with respect to international tendencies, nonetheless misrepresented Dubuffet in his 1961 review of the Whitechapel exhibition, as noted in Chapter Five (5.5, n. 352), despite his own work being influenced by Dubuffet's *matière* work.

There is evidence that Tucker to some extent deliberately resisted categorisation or elucidating the inspiration for his work, as documented in transcriptions of interviews. He allowed interviewers to propose possible sources for his red crescent shape motif which they had imagined (such as a derivation from Celtic symbolism), and to repeat stories about his early work which he did not seek to correct (such as that concerning inception of his early work *Victory Girls*).[442] Then, by taking an idea proposed by one interviewer (perhaps in deference to their art critical authority) and repeating it to another interviewer, such ideas were brought into his own

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[440] 'See Museum of Modern Art, No. 9a, 1959, p. 6. Klee's often quoted 'Art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes it visible,' was popular with artists at this time. See Klee, Paul, *trans.*, Norden, Heinz, Spiller, Jürg, ed., *Notebooks Volume 2: The nature of nature*, George Wittenborn Inc, New York, 1973.

[441] In contrast, British reviewers attempted to draw parallels with the work of Dubuffet and the British Independent Group (IG) of artists and critics and with the Brutalist architects (interested in heavy textures and evocative markings in stark modernist architecture). Championed by Alloway, the IG group was instrumental in bringing the 'found object' or *objet trouvé* aesthetic to Britain. Australia did not have a collage movement to speak of and although sculptor Robert Klippel was an early proponent of the junk aesthetic or assemblage, it was not until the Annandale Imitation Realists formed in 1961 that Australian reviewers began to acknowledge this movement. Any of the Australian critics and artists who had attended European exhibitions and the Venice Biennales during the 1950s would have been exposed to this aesthetic.

[442] See 'Tucker interview with James Mollison', in Mollison and Minchin, 1990, pp. 7-16; and National Gallery of Australia, 'Interview of artist Albert Tucker by James Gleeson', May 1979, available at <nga.gov.au/Research/Gleeson/pdf/Tucker.pdf>, accessed 24 September 2011. This particular series was controversial as it has been given a range of interpretations, all relative to narrative. This is not relevant to my discussion; therefore I do not elaborate on it here. See catalogue essay by Chris McAuliffe, n. 449 below.

narrative.[443] One example is Hughes' suggestion to Tucker that his cratered lunar surfaces and landscape-in-head imagery might be linked to the disfigured or wounded servicemen Tucker saw and painted following his visits to army hospitals at the end of the war. While Tucker had not identified this as a source initially, he later repeated this conjecture in an interview with artist, art writer and art gallery director James Gleeson. Such slashings of the surface were, in fact, common in the work of many post-war artists which Tucker had observed, as identified earlier, and these European artists were not responding to a war theme (see figs. 8.2 and 8.3).

Löwenfeld's 1939 *The Nature of Creative Activity* contains a wealth of potential source material for artists interested in the 'primitive'. Its illustrations comprise sketches and plates of artworks by children and visually impaired subjects, including illustrations of cratered head imagery. At this time, artists were reticent in disclosing sources although many of them openly appropriated subject matter and devices from newspaper articles, art journals and the work of other artists. One example is Tucker's work *Marilyn Monroe Looking for her Father*, 1956, acknowledged by the artist as having been inspired by a newspaper article (fig. 6.57). This practice was not considered out of the ordinary by artists, however, reviewers liked to comment on the 'authenticity' of an artist and his or her unique response to his or her experiences. They did not recognise the often mundane nature of an artist's starting point for a particular work. Tucker stated,

> I think it is good to get stimulus from other painters' work as long as you don't stay with it. You look at their works and there is an aspect of it that stimulates you. It might be a technical procedure, it might be a form, or it might be a colour relationship – anything. These are valid starting points always because there is no such thing as art out of empty space, out of a void. We all depend on one another; we are all interconnected and interrelated. This is how all these interconnections show up. This is a valid way of how one can cross fertilise all other painters.[444]

The insistence on the part of interviewers and reviewers to attempt to identify a meaning or source for perceptual aspects, or to seek the 'intended' subject matter of artworks was annoying to many post-war abstractionists, some of whom strongly voiced their displeasure.[445]

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[443] For this reason, among others, some art critics such as Greenberg favoured formalist interpretations, discounting artist utterances. This also placed tremendous power in the hands of critics and gallerist/dealers presenting the work to the viewing and collecting public.

[444] National Gallery of Australia, Interview of artist Albert Tucker by James Gleeson, 2 May 1979, p. 39, available at <nga.gov.au/Research/Gleeson/pdf/Tucker.pdf >, accessed 24 September 2011.

[445] American Abstract Expressionist Ad Reinhardt went so far as to write an article 'The Artist in Search of a Code of Ethics' which urged artists not to encourage art critics to write far-fetched interpretations for their use of particular symbols or techniques. He famously stated, 'Art is art; everything else is everything else.' See Highmore, Ben, 'Paint it Black: Ad Reinhardt's Paradoxical Avant-Gardism' in Scheunemann, Dietrich, *Avant-Garde / Neo-Avant-Garde,* Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam and New York, 2005, pp. 109-128 (111). See, 'Art Vital to Community', *The Examiner*, February 4, 1961, ATP, Box 5B. This article quotes John Reed as stating, 'A great deal of confusion arises from

Tucker at times acquiesced and allowed reviewers to state their interpretations of possible meanings for his work, whether or not this had been his intention, as he did in adopting Hughes' suggestions for the source of his crescent shape, cratered head and lunar landscapes. This had repercussions for the later art historical positioning of his work. The irony of the situation is that, had Tucker identified his actual sources, namely the work of other gestural artists or predecessor early abstractionists, it might have assisted reviewers in positioning his work for greater appreciation. Tucker did acknowledge Dubuffet and sculptor/draughtsman Henry Moore as influences in a late interview (1979) with James Gleeson.

Thirdly, in drawing on precedent, Tucker employed the visual vocabulary of the tradition of caricature in his earlier works of the period such as those produced in Paris. The 'comic', as first expressed in Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la Vie Modern (The Painter of Modern Life)*, 1863, carried with it the dark side representative of street life in the modern city in which the artist *flâneur* blends into the crowd as a viewer, drawing pleasure from the spectacle.[446] The duality captures the ugly and the beautiful. Beauty is said to be found in works representing humanity's moral and physical ugliness. Reviewers in Europe were receptive to this concept and to the practice of artists who related the caricature tradition to then current social conditions, or made metaphorical or ironical connections in developing a postwar aesthetic (much like Dubuffet). Reception of Tucker's work in Australia, however, was not aided by the lack of knowledge of the nature of caricature by reviewers. Caricature relies on audiences having an existing knowledge of the characters and the associated meaning in order to understand the message. An example is Rouault's use of the clown image in his *Misère* series.[447] Instead, Tucker's semi-abstract treatment of his subject matter was interpreted simply as his inability to execute a realistically drawn figure due to his lack of formal training, and was seen as a crude attempt at representation by some Australian reviewers. Tucker's early Melbourne work was often interpreted as the artist's expression of moral outrage at the decadence of society. The Heide painters in fact eschewed socialist realism (from about 1943) and focused on the psychological and dream aspects of their subject matter in a semi-abstract style which often included the humour/horror duality.[448] Further,

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people's insistence on knowing the meaning of paintings. It is a visual act and the initial approach must be a visual one.'

[446] See Shaw, Mary Lewis, *Performance in the Texts of Mallarmé: The Passage from Art to Ritual*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1993, p. 252. See Baudelaire, Charles, *The Painter of Modern Life*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1964. (Originally published in *Le Figaro*, Paris, 1863.)

[447] See, Cernuschi, Claude, 'Georges Rouault and the Rhetoric of Expressionism', in *Religion and the Arts*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, 2008, pp. 479-539 (508). Rouault admired those who admitted in admiring his work, 'This is beautiful because it is ugly'…for ugly of course, read 'true' (Idem).

[448] The Heide artists including Tucker and Hester created a series of works related to Luna Park in Melbourne. A recent thematic exhibition of Tucker's work at Heide Museum focuses on the carnivalesque and theatre influences on

as art historian Chris McAuliffe has noted, Tucker made early unpublished statements about his processes in creating works such as *The Futile City*, 1940, and only later began to adopt the language of reviewers, referencing 'moral outrage'. While Tucker, Hester and other Heide artists consciously explored ideas from the fields of psychology and psychiatry and references to the work of European artists in their experimental works of this period, reviewers tended to take a simplistic approach in assuming the works were autobiographical or related to life in Melbourne.[449]

Similarly, the lack of familiarity with disembodied head imagery, monster imagery and 'stick-man', cartoon-like imagery which were common in European art prevented Australian reviewers or audiences from understanding that Tucker's work belonged to an established and current category of artistic practice.[450] Perhaps because they were unable to imaginatively position the art among works with similar features, Australian reviewers missed the humour which is also an element in the work of Klee, Miró and the CoBrA artists.[451] Tucker's later imagery, particularly after his return to Australia, was less subtle, with the folkloric bushranger being an obvious motif. However, this motif too was a vehicle for gestural expression and a metaphorical link to man's struggle for survival in the outback in its earliest conception as the cut-out head figure, rather than a naturalistic figurative portrayal which some reviewers interpreted it to be. The dilemma for reviewers interpreting these works is similar to that faced by reviewers of de Kooning's *Woman* series. The woman figure is interpreted as a point of departure for de Kooning's abstraction, that is, the way in which the artist in effect deconstructs naturalistic illusion by reducing the woman to her perceived key features (as American critic and art historian Sam

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Tucker who painted stage sets as one of his early jobs in Melbourne. This is a fairly literal interpretation of a source of influence. In fact, the carnivalesque has a long history in painting and Picasso as well as the Impressionists and post-Impressionists often used such subject matter as did Rouault mentioned above. The concept of the carnivalesque does capture the playful, humorous quality of the lyricism however.

[449] See McAuliffe, Chris, 'Footloose fillies and pretentious penguins: 'Victory girls', modern evil and the politics of the Melbourne art world', in Heide Museum of Modern Art, *Albert Tucker: images of modern evil*, Bulleen, VIC, 2011, pp. 45-51. McAuliffe noted that Tucker drew on imagery from theatre and set design as well as wartime propaganda posters; however, his painting *Victory Girls* is most certainly a statement against socialist realist control of artistic subject matter, and was decried as degenerate at the time (p. 49).

[450] The selection of work presented in the 1939 *Herald Exhibition* may have been partially to blame. Haese notes the exhibition contained no examples of a number of then current European categories. British artists influenced by Surrealism, such as Sutherland, were included. A 'safe' range of work was presented, however, much of the work was considered degenerate. The state galleries at the time preferred to collect British realist art and were neither aware of international contemporary art nor interested in it. See Haese, Richard, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, Allen Lane, Ringwood, VIC, 1981, p. 63.

[451] *Cf.* Soby, 1948 (pp. 99-103) noted that Klee, Miró and sculptor Alexander Calder are artists who demonstrate visual wit and a sense of humour in their work. Further, the earthy style of humour in the work of Miró and Calder includes sexual references. Australian reviewers did not understand this aspect of Tucker's work and instead labelled it 'moral outrage'. This was reflective of the sentiment of the day. See n. 425.

Hunter suggested in 1956).[452] To the more literal among critics and reviewers, however, taking the work at face value based on the vestiges of figuration remaining in the work, a different classification and interpretation can result. Further, the two interpretations can imply quite opposite readings of the artist's intentions (either an appreciation of the feminine or loathing, sometimes interpreted as violence toward it).

Fourth, the inherent ugliness of tendencies such as *matière* and certain postwar art was difficult for Australian reviewers who were unable to explain the new aesthetic to the viewing public in a positive way. Australian reviewers were not familiar with earlier Twentieth Century constructivist and collage styles, which were under-represented in the 1939 *Herald Exhibition*, nor with contemporary European examples. They were unable to suggest how the new art might add to the precedent of Cubism while drawing on the anti-aesthetic of Dada. Although Tucker's work and technique were featured in the *Women's Weekly* article referenced above in 1959, it was not until Australian artist and critic Elwyn Lynn exhibited *matière* works at Macquarie Galleries in Sydney in 1960 that Bernard Smith began to take notice. Lynn took up the style after seeing such works in Europe in 1958. The 1971 edition of Smith's *Australian Art* was updated to account for this style based on Lynn's description of the category. As a result of this collaboration between Smith and Lynn, together with Hughes' comments on Tucker's work, Lynn is cited as the first Australian artist to work in this mode.[453]

Fifth, in Australia, as we will see in Chapter Seven, while Tucker's work has been interpreted in art historical accounts as reflecting the artist's interest in psychology and the unconscious, this interpretation did not extend to developing the art critical language needed to explicate his *matière* work. Tucker's art work, when categorised by Australian reviewers as socialist realist, Expressionist or Surrealist, was often interpreted as expressing the biographical experience of the artist. In the case of Tucker's early work, it was said to reflect his puritanical leanings and marital difficulties, or to express the artist's horror at the shock of war or moral decadence in society. This was a readily accessible narrative for audiences to grasp; however,

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[452] See Hunter, Sam, 'Jackson Pollock: The Maze and the Minotaur', in *New World Writing*, Vol. 9, 1956, pp. 174-192, LAP, Box 10/3. De Kooning was known for erasure and fellow artist Robert Rauschenberg famously presented a work titled *Erased de Kooning drawing* in 1953 to make his own conceptual statement.

[453] Another reason sometimes proffered for recognising Lynn over Tucker as the first to bring this work to Australia is that Tucker produced his first such work overseas. B. Smith adopted the practice, then taken up by Hughes and Andrew Sayers respectively in their Australian art histories, of simply ignoring the production of Australian artists in the case of works made overseas. Art historians A.D.S. Donaldson and Rex Butler have written various articles, and in Donaldson's case a related dissertation, on this phenomenon (Chapter 4 (4.3)). See Donaldson, A.D.S., and Butler, Rex, 'A Short History of UnAustralian Art', in North, Ian, ed., *Visual Animals: Crossovers, Evolution and New Aesthetics*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Parkside, SA, Australia, 2007, pp. 107-122.

this was not sufficient to account for the *matière* work and was a simplistic interpretation of the early gestural work. For some reason, reviewers did not always explicate Tucker's art with reference to primitivist sources and to *l'art brut* although often citing Dubuffet as a source. In so doing, they missed Dubuffet's point.[454] Reviewers in Australia were not aware of the 'junk' (*objet trouvé*) or assemblage aesthetic in neo-Dadaist European tendencies (an extension of collage and sculptural techniques based on combining found objects and refuse) or with the origins of *l'art brut*.[455] The interest of the Heide painters in the art of the mentally ill and untrained artists was not remarked on when reviewing Tucker's work, although art historian Christopher Uhl later mentions this in his art historical account, as we will see in Chapter Seven. In fact, I contend that this is one of the strongest links to characterising and positioning Tucker's gestural work. Instead, references to Surrealism (due to Surrealist artists' acknowledged interest in Freudian psychology) were often made in Australia to account for work dealing with the psychological.

Sixth, at times Tucker was able to coordinate exhibition of his work with current and complementary developments in other art worlds which served to highlight new work and present artists in the context of international trends. Tucker was well positioned in the MOMA new acquisitions exhibition of 1959 and in the Commonwealth *Transference* exhibition referenced above. Both of these exhibitions promoted greater understanding by positioning Tucker's work among artist contemporaries who shared common approaches or themes, or reflected a similar reaction to the times. In Australia, Tucker's positioning left him most strongly associated with his pre-war works, in the modernist category not far from socialist realism. Australian critics did not recognise a middle ground between totally non-objective painting with no vestiges of form and totally representational art. Tucker's semi-abstract gestural work with allusions to figuration was not appreciated for its primary emphasis on materials but instead reviewers attempted to interpret subject matter. There was a strong tendency to rely on allusive or metaphorical titles of works and to invoke myth and allegory. It was thought that work such as Tucker's was too 'difficult' for the general viewing public to understand or appreciate. The dark colour tonings of the early work, due to the fact Tucker made his own paints and could not afford to purchase better pigments at the time, was interpreted as carrying 'dark' psychological connotations in terms of meaning.

Lastly, as we will see in Chapter Seven, Tucker tended to be 'pigeon-holed' as a Heide modernist painter due to the difficulty reviewers and art historians had in accepting that artists

[454] Dubuffet was arguably little understood until 1982 in Australia (see Chapter 7 (7.1 and n. 469)).
[455] See n. 441.

could work across a number of genres or styles of painting concurrently or at different points in their careers. Rather than abstract art being a recent development in relation to other tendencies, both realist and abstract art was made simultaneously and continuously throughout the Century. It is noteworthy that painters like Rothko and Fautrier, discussed in Chapters One and Two, painted in figurative modes for periods of time yet were recognised for their more significant gestural work and came to be strongly associated with abstraction. In Rothko's case this included both Abstract Expressionism and colour field painting. If we consider Rothko's *Entrance to Subway*, 1938 (fig. 6.64), or *Untitled* (figure), 1939 (fig. 6.65), both of which are examples of modernism but not particularly interesting, one can appreciate the difference in significance an artist might attain (in terms of cultural capital) if their lesser works were the only ones reviewed or understood. As artist Antoni Tàpies observed (Chapter 5) benefits accrued from the recognition afforded by being associated with a newly defined tendency. Gallerist/dealers and art critics were better able to communicate about the works with the general public if it could be understood as part of a larger trend or movement. Jackson Pollock was recognised for his totem imagery as well as his labyrinthine skein paintings and drippings. Positioning of the latter changed over time as new ways of describing abstract art developed and became known, and theory advanced in reaction to practice. Alloway noted in 1966 that Pollock's drip paintings of the 1950s had by then been 'de-gesturalised' by a few years passing.[456] Whereas they were initially regarded as directional 'tracks' identifying the gesture of the maker, the emphasis shifted to condense the works into 'unitary fields of colour'. In this way a linkage to the later work of Still, Newman and Rothko was made possible. Such art historical discourse continues to evolve. However, in Tucker's case, repositioning has been particularly slow, for reasons I will examine in the next chapter.

6.5 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the art critical response to Tucker's work in the field of cultural production and reception from 1947 to 1963. I related Tucker's work to the discernible variations in the field, including the gestural work of the CoBrA and British painters (Sutherland, Davie, and Bacon) and the *matière* work of Spanish, Italian and French artists. Affinities with American Abstract Expressionism were identified. In positioning Tucker's gestural work in this context, Smith's 1971 category of 'iconographic expressionism' would apply. Using the classification schema developed in this thesis, the work would be classified as gestural abstraction in the allusive abstraction and *matière* sub-categories.

[456] Alloway, Lawrence, *Systemic Painting*, exh. cat., September 24 - November 27, 1966, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1966, p. 122.

The international reception of Tucker's work during the period, as evidenced in art critical reviews published in art journals and newspaper columns, confirmed its gestural characterisation but critics varied in its classification, where classification was attempted at all. European reviewers identified the aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties and gestural character of the work (noting its crude, coarse, savage, heavily textured and blasted appearance) and classified it as semi-abstract, material-focused and often concerned with the psychological. The naïve quality of Tucker's work was appreciated for its humour, painterly brushwork and surface incisions, and primitive cartoon-like treatment of form. Tucker and his work were not identified consistently with a particular tendency, although *tachisme* and *l'art brut* were often mentioned.

Reviewers noted that Surrealist elements such as non-semiotic signs and motifs were used in a manner differing from standard examples of Surrealism. However, reviewers did not make a connection between Tucker's work and that of British artists. Sutherland, Davie and Bacon were producing gestural works based on religious themes in addition to a range of semi-abstract painterly works at the time. Reviewers did point to Picasso-like qualities in Tucker's work in general and particularly in his early Paris work, however, the origins of the bushranger and 'landscape in head' imagery could also have been more strongly linked to Picasso or other European artists. Further, the use of non-semiotic symbols could have been identified as not only deriving from Picasso but also from Miró, Klee and CoBrA influences all of which were known to Tucker.

In Chapter Five I noted that British art critic Alloway accurately identified *tachiste* or gestural abstractionist qualities of art works for his readers, in the work of artists such as Jorn or Tàpies. This included recognising that while titles of works may have referred to myth and legend, the works were not necessarily representational. Rather, the work might be intended to convey an expression of the unconscious or might simply be self-referential to the materials of which it was made. Unfortunately for Tucker, critics such as Hughes took a more literal approach, even while citing artist statements to the contrary. Hughes chose to ignore Tucker's artist statement regarding *Lunar Landscape* being a 'memory of a land image' – that is, a mindscape drawn from the imagination (an example of allusive abstraction). Tucker himself indicated in interviews that he was not concerned as to which end of the abstraction-figuration continuum his work fell on. Tucker's emphasis on materials was appreciated by reviewers and collecting institutions in the

U.S. reflecting an interest in European *matière* painting identified with the *art brut* of Dubuffet, or the tactility of Tàpies or Burri.

The exceptions to noting Tucker's gestural approach were reviewers who were familiar with Tucker's early work. Hughes, did not depart from his preconception of Tucker's style or positioning (which he labelled 'figurative expressionism') when faced with the artist's new gestural works produced in Europe. Later London reviewers often turned to the Whitechapel exhibition catalogue essay (by Hughes) as a reference to inform themselves on the artist's background, colouring their interpretations. Tucker's new work would have been better positioned among that of artists in its production milieu working in similar gestural modes for optimal appreciation.

I identified four aspects of Tucker's work to be further investigated in Chapter Seven – the use of motifs and non-semiotic symbols; the naïve style of Tucker's work; classification of the semi-abstract; and Hughes' use of the term 'illusionism', all of which contributed to difficulty in classification. I assessed Tucker's use of strategies to position himself and his work within the field of reception and found his efforts had limited effect and did not serve to emphasise his gestural work. Tucker did not align himself with any exhibiting groups of gestural abstract artists, or with a supportive gallerist/dealer or art critic, nor did he write any explicatory texts about his gestural work. Instead, he was a curiosity for European viewers when exhibiting on his own, or on one occasion with Nolan, and was the subject of a number of newspaper art reviews by a range of reviewers without being championed by any influential critic in particular. In the Australian art world, the influence of particular positions, such as his patron John Reed, then director of MOMAA, and critic and art historian Bernard Smith tended to dominate the developing art critical discourse associated with Tucker and his work. Tucker did not adopt any strategies to counter the strength of these positions. Rather, he went along with strategies suggested by art world personages such as curators, allowing a focus on his early pre-war work to dominate his exhibition programme in the years immediately following his return to Australia. The impact of this decision will be seen in the next chapter. Further, since Tucker had been away from Australia during the formative phase of the Sydney abstractionist groups such as the Passmore circle, who exhibited in the 1956 *Direction 1* exhibition, the Sydney 9, formed in 1960, and the Annandale Imitation Realists, formed in 1961, on his return to Australia he had no peer group with which to position himself in producing his *matière* and gestural works. The 'assistance' he received from his former patron John Reed in organising his interface with the viewing and collecting public served to label him as an Angry Penguin for perpetuity.

In Chapter Seven I consider and analyse art historical accounts and classifications from the time of Tucker's return to Australia. I examine the link between art critical reviews and other relevant discourse (such as curatorial narratives) which developed around Tucker's work and his artistic identity to determine why the gestural abstraction in his *oeuvre* has not attracted greater historical attention and appreciation.

Chapter Seven: Positioning the Gestural Abstraction of Albert Tucker

Part I – Consecrating the Artist in the Fields of Reception and Transmission

In this chapter I analyse the way in which categorisations of Tucker's gestural work by key positions in the cultural field discussed in Chapter Six have been incorporated into art historical accounts in the intervening years. I explore whether early categorisations have been perpetuated and, where movement in the ascribed category has already taken place, examine the mechanisms by which this occurred. I consider the apparent lack of significance attributed to Tucker's gestural abstract works produced from 1947-1963 as reflected in subsequent art historical accounts, formulating an explication for why this is the case. I argue that repositioning these works, as I will recommend, leads to greater appreciation of their significance.

7.1 Art Historical Discourse: Positioning Tucker's Work – 1966 to 2001

The accounts which have fixed Tucker's position within the art historical canon were, for the most part, laid down by 1981 with a further attempt at a minor change in positioning made in 2001. In Chapter Four, I examined Bernard Smith's influence in shaping the presentation of Australian art history, discussed Australian art historiography and provided a review of the major art historical accounts of the period up to the present with respect to coverage of abstract art. In this section I examine interpretations and categorisations made in the key art historical accounts beyond Smith's which have informed later art historical and curatorial narratives pertaining to Tucker and his work. By way of illustration, I provide a brief assessment of two major group exhibitions in which Tucker's work was included later during this period (in 1984 and 1988) and two significant acquisitions of his work. Rather than providing an in-depth critique of each art historical account, I focus on the salient points in these art histories which acknowledge the gestural character of the work or assist in explicating why the gestural in Tucker's *oeuvre* was overlooked or misconstrued.

Hughes (1970) identified Tucker, along with Nolan, as a 'figurative expressionist' and uses the term 'psycho-expressionism' to describe the Melbourne avant-garde work of the 1940s.[457] The latter is a term used by Tucker in a letter written to Nolan, 16 July, 1961, and later used by Tucker in an interview with James Gleeson to describe his style with respect to

[457] Hughes, 1970, pp. 132-133. Hughes notes the influence of art critic and historian Sir Herbert Read's ideas regarding the subconscious on Harris, Tucker and Reed (p. 137). See Haese, 1981 (p 119).

portraiture.[458] Hughes notes the strong literary influences of the Melbourne avant-garde artists whose journal *Angry Penguins* featured their essays and poems (Chapter 6, (6.3)). A relation between painting and literature or poetry is often associated with the Surrealist movement, just as a relation between New York poets and the American Abstract Expressionists has been made in recent studies.[459] Nonetheless, Hughes links the humble backgrounds of many of these untrained artists to the raw and often crude quality of the works they produced.[460] This biographical inference made by Hughes' based on his conceptions of working class predispositions is, I will argue below, prejudicial to the appreciation of the originality in Tucker's work and tended to colour Hughes' assessment of Tucker's ability to realise the purpose of the work.

In reference to Tucker's work in particular, Hughes associates his style with German Expressionism although the artist's work from 1937-1939 pre-dates knowledge of the category in Australia.[461] German Expressionism was not seen, even in reproduction, in Australia until about 1939 when Tucker first saw prints of work by *Blaue Reiter* group in the Melbourne Library.[462] Tucker's pre-1939 work is, of course, naïve in comparison to the pictorial sophistication of *Blaue Reiter*. To account for this anomaly, Tucker's early figurative strain of Australian modernism was said to be influenced in part by *émigré* artists Danila Vassilieff and Josl Bergner, both of whom arrived in Melbourne in 1937 and were familiar with pre-war European tendencies. Both were acquainted with the Heide circle artists through the CAS. This often cited reference to the influence of these *émigré* artists, particularly Vassilieff, on the work of Tucker and his wife, artist Joy Hester, has been discounted by art historian and curator Frank Klepner; however, it remains embedded in the art historical narrative.[463] The way in which Hughes, an art critic and historian, invoked German Expressionism as a possible active category for the work of an artist who had not seen German Expressionist works other than second hand or in reproduction, demonstrates the way in which categorisations based on perceived standard features of an artwork may reflect the *habitus* of the reviewer rather than the artist. Critics at this time were limited in the number of discernible variations that were available from which to draw comparisons and imaginatively

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[458] Letter, Tucker to Nolan, in McCaughey, Patrick, ed. and intro., *Bert & Ned: The Correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan*, Miegunyah Press, Carlton, VIC, 2006, pp. 217-18; Letter Nolan to Tucker, 6 August 1961, expressing interest in the term, ATP, Box 2/A; NGA, Interview of artist Albert Tucker by James Gleeson, May 1979.
[459] See Quilter, Jenni, and Power, Allison, eds., *New York School Painters & Poets: Neon in Daylight*, Rizzoli, New York, London, Paris, Milan, 2014; and Silverberg, Mark, *The New York School Poets and the Neo-Avant-Garde: Between Radical Art and Radical Chic,* Ashgate, Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT, 2010.
[460] Hughes, 1970, p. 137-138. He commented on what he thought was Tucker's limited technical facility.
[461] Recall (Chapter 4 (4.3 and n. 205)) that Hughes did not define a classification system for artworks but simply used descriptive terms when discussing their aesthetic and non-aesthetic properties.
[462] Ibid., p. 150.
[463] Klepner, Frank, *Yosl Bergner: Art as a Meeting of Cultures*, MacMillan, South Yarra, VIC, 2004, p. 41. Klepner states that any claim that their painting changed as a result of this influence is an exaggeration.

position works. In Australia, the ability to reference appropriate works to assist in the positioning process depended very much on the access the reviewer had to art journals and circulating publications to view reproductions, since examples of international contemporary art did not travel in exhibition until much later.

An example of an artist of the period rejecting the label 'German Expressionism' is American painter Robert Motherwell. He contended that whereas German Expressionism implies the self-expression of the artist, he and his fellow Abstract Expressionists attempted to transcend the self. Their art was considered to be a way of engaging with the universe (the sublime). This alternative view, cited by art historians Edward M. Levine (1971) and Robert Rosenblum (1969), suggests that,

> … art is not, for him [Motherwell], the expression of Angst nor an existential nausea but a transcendence of this condition and a reunification with the cosmos through a reunification of the ego … Action Painting is more in tune with a metaphysical view of the universe rather than with an existential outlook which is so close to the art of Picasso.[464]

I note this alternative interpretation as it was made by historians close to the period, hence the generally espoused 'post-war angst' which attaches to Tucker's work of the 1940s in art historical accounts could well have been otherwise interpreted. Once again, it can be seen that while properties of different art works may be perceptually similar, interpretation can be quite different. Certain features or properties may be common to Surrealism, Expressionism and Abstract Expressionism/gestural abstraction, however, once additional contextual information is considered, the outcome in confirming the category can vary. In one case, the work may be interpreted as an expression of the artist's subjective experience or emotions; in another, a more mystical connotation related to seeking unity can be invoked. Recall (Chapters 1 and 2) that Walton's criteria for determining the most powerful interpretation of the work include the artist's intentions or expectations as to how the work will be received, and the degree to which the category is established and recognised. In our Chapter One (1.2) example, artists Gottlieb, Newman and Rothko objected to what they considered to be an invalid categorisation of their work by a reviewer. In a letter to the editor of *The New York Times,* they explained how their connection with the archaic differed from the Surrealist position. Rothko's *Onement* series expressed this notion of unity (3.4).

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[464] Levine, Edward M., 'Abstract Expressionism: The Mystical Experience', in College Art Association, *Art Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1971, pp. 22-25; Rosenblum, Robert, 'The Abstract Sublime', in Geldzahler, Henry, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970,* E.P. Dutton, New York, 1969, p. 358. (Reprinted from *Art News*, February, 1961.)

While Hughes (1970) categorised Tucker's pre-1941 work as derivative of German Expressionism, he categorises the artist's work from 1941 as drawing on Surrealism regarding its use of symbolic procedures in development of pictorial form. He considers Tucker's series *Images,* Nolan's first Ned Kelly series of 1947 and Drysdale's outback paintings of 1941-5 to be definitive for the development of Australian modernism. He ranks Tucker slightly behind these two peers in terms of articulation and execution.[465] Hughes identifies Tucker's use of a red crescent shape as a 'metaphysical radiator … which had never arisen in Australian art before'.[466] This recurring symbol in Tucker's work was said to be an interest in iconographic form shared with Sidney Nolan. At this point, Hughes begins to refer to the 'metaphysical' rather than merely the subjective expression of the artist's 'psyche'. He describes the crescent symbol as cryptic and abstract; however, he does not observe its potential source in the work of European artists noted below. While noting the static quality of Tucker's work (and Nolan's), Hughes does not comment on the cartoon-like aspect of the work or suggest sources for such imagery.

In tracing Tucker's development as an artist during his time overseas, Hughes (1970) identifies Jean Dubuffet as the single greatest influence on Tucker. He states,

> … it is to Dubuffet that one must look for the origins *of his mature style*, with its thick craggy impastos, its coarse punning between organic and mineral matter (flesh and earth), and its self-conscious brutalism. The lumpish forms of *art brut* can be traced in a painting of 1950, *Maquereau of Place Pigalle*, in which he stumbled on the form which led to his present 'Antipodean Head' shape.[467] [Emphasis added.]

As I discussed in Chapter Six, this gaping mouth head shape is a motif found in the work of a number of artists including Dubuffet, Giacometti (fig. 7.3), and the CoBrA group artists. Dubuffet's work *Man with a Rose* completed in 1949, the same year as Tucker's *Macro* or *Maquereau*, is similar in composition (figs. 6.10, 6.9). Although Hughes considers the Dubuffet-influenced works in Tucker's *oeuvre* to exemplify the artist's mature style, he nominates Tucker's pre-war work as making the strongest contribution to Australian art. It appears he does not give Tucker credit for work in that mature style, which would typically be expected to be the work for which an artist is best known and recognised art historically.

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[465] Ibid., p. 152.
[466] Ibid., p. 165.
[467] Ibid., p. 228. Hughes corrects the spelling of the title of the work to reflect the French word for 'pimp' which Tucker had recorded as 'Macro' (as it sounded in English). It is documented in either way in various sources. The date of the work is recorded as 1949 by the NGV where the work is held.

By the time of his 1970 update to *The Art of Australia*, Hughes had further familiarised himself with the work of Dubuffet, but did not update his interpretation of Tucker in the new edition. It appears unlikely, however, that Hughes was familiar with Greenberg's February 1,1947 review article in *The Nation* in which Greenberg compares Pollock to Dubuffet and makes his first mention of 'all-overness'.[468] Had Hughes been aware of this connection, and of the body of art critical writing pertaining to Dubuffet's work, he may have held Tucker's work in greater esteem. That is, Hughes interpreted Dubuffet too narrowly as confined to *l'art brut* and limited appreciation of Tucker's work also by this reference. Greenberg made an important distinction in his review of the separate 1947 exhibitions of Pollock and Dubuffet regarding the two artists' treatment of subject matter. He observed that Pollock's work at that time contained no ideographs, with subject matter having been removed; whereas Dubuffet's work was said to represent a state of mind. The latter comment was often made by Australian reviewers with respect to Tucker's work. Hughes did not comment on the comic aspect of Tucker's work, which was another element Tucker shared with Dubuffet. Hughes later identified 'the beauty of comedy' in Dubuffet's work in a 1973 review of a Dubuffet retrospective held at the Guggenheim, New York, showing that by this time Hughes, then the art critic for *The New York Times*, had updated his understanding of Dubuffet somewhat. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue which he may have sighted. Unfortunately, Hughes did not recognise Tucker's work in the same vein as that of Dubuffet once he had updated his understanding of Dubuffet. In fact, Tucker's work could have been categorised with that of Dubuffet in many more interesting and significant respects than the 'self-conscious brutalism' that Hughes noted. Australian critics did not have sufficient terms to account for these variations of gestural abstraction.[469] Like Tucker, Dubuffet often defied classification in Australia.

In evaluating Tucker's work, Hughes focuses not on its gestural aspects, on which he does not comment at all despite acknowledging the use of impasto technique, but on the expressionistic and the symbolic, having regard to shape and form. In this respect he simply echoes previous accounts. While categorising Tucker's 1947 work *The Footballer* as 'abstract-surrealist', he does not acknowledge that a combination of abstract and surrealist elements was also informing the work of American artists at this time, and was an aspect of an emerging style of painting. Instead he focuses on how the symbols and forms evolve, with the crescent merging into

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[468] O'Brien, John, ed., *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Volume IV, 'Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969', Chicago University Press, Chicago and London, 1993, p. 111, cited in de Duve, 2010, p. 26. See Greenberg, Clement, 'A Review of the Exhibitions of Jean Dubuffet and Jackson Pollock, in *The Nation*, February 1, 1947, pp. 136-137 and 139. See Minturn, in Marter, 2007, pp. 125-137.

[469] For the early interpretation of Dubuffet in Australia, see Dixon, Annette, 'Jean Dubuffet – *Arabe au burnous'* in *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, No. 23, 1982, pp. 51-55, discussed later in this section.

a new shape, repeated as a motif in subsequent works. In the case of *The Footballer*, Tucker's semi-figurative or naïve rendering of the figure, which blends into a goal post, bears an affinity to Max Beckmann's *Rugby Players,* 1929 (fig. 7.1), and works by Picasso which Hughes does not pick up on. There are also similarities to illustrations in the 1939 translation of Löwenfeld's *The Nature of Creative Activity*.[470] The latter source provides a link to the primitive, a guiding purpose of Dubuffet's work. In such work, the artist consciously sought to work in a primitive style, repeating a central set of motifs and other devices. This practice, evidenced in Tucker's work, was sometimes described as 'obsessive' by Australian reviewers. A variety of reviews and discussions around work of Heide artists Hughes had written over the years, betrayed a certain contempt for the execution of works by the untrained artists. Had Hughes understood in their *naïf* work the primitivistic intent shared with the work of Dubuffet, he may have been more receptive to this painting style.

With respect to Tucker's symbolism, Hughes provides no explanation as to possible sources for these symbols and motifs. It is quite possible, given his age and Australian background, that Hughes had not sufficiently built his own knowledge of European contemporary art up to the point of writing his account in 1966, to enable identification of relevant sources. Hughes, while an Australian resident, worked with gallery director Bryan Robertson in compiling the catalogue for the London Whitechapel exhibition in 1961. Hughes later left Australia for Europe in 1964, aged 26, and arrived in London in 1965 after spending time in Italy. By 1966, Hughes had been working in London, would have been exposed to painters including the British *tachistes* (such as Alan Davie) and would have encountered other artists also drawing on ideographic symbols (among them Graham Sutherland).[471] While Hughes arrived in London some time after the 1953 exhibition, *The Wonder and Horror of the Human Head* at the ICA, which included one of Francis Bacon's works titled *Head,* such 'disembodied head' imagery had been popular in European art. A variety of reference sources with examples of such images, including published reviews and exhibition catalogues, were in circulation at this time.[472] Hughes draws no comparison between Tucker's use of such imagery and any European artists other than Picasso and Dubuffet. (In the case of affinities with the work of Picasso, it is with the Cubist distortion and fragmentation of form that a parallel is drawn.) This is odd given that such shapes and signs

[470] See Löwenfeld, 1939, pp. 194-204.
[471] Ideographic symbols are symbols without referents or non-semiotic signs. Sutherland used the sickle, lop-sided disc, crescent, clover-leaf shape, flame, sword and other symbols in his pre-war work. See Heron, 1955, p. 167. Heron noted the difficulty for critics of the day and the 'unprecedented difficulty we all experience nowadays in being able to agree even about the meaning of simple critical terms…', (p. viii).
[472] Hammer, 2005, p. 147.

feature prominently in the work of Miró, Klee and Malevich as well as painter and sculptor Giacometti, all of whom were exhibited widely and had their work regularly reproduced in art journals. While the profile head shape that recurs in Tucker's work can be easily seen to have an affinity with the work of Picasso and Klee, the more rounded head shapes resemble work by Dubuffet (as stated by Hughes)(fig. 7.4) as well as that of a number of other painters using this approach. In view of the recurrence of disembodied head imagery and totem-like figures in Twentieth Century art, Hughes' expressed apprehension due to Tucker's limited technical facility in execution of his work (noted earlier in this section) appears harsh and fails to position him among other naïve painters working in a semi-abstract mode. While Hughes notes Tucker's use of thick pastes from his time in Rome onward (1953) and describes their use as a modelling technique which produced a 'hyper-naturalistic illusion' that became central to his method, he refuses to go so far as to give Tucker credit for being the first Australian painter to work in this technique. This is an interesting oversight by Hughes and one which I consider responsible for denying Tucker his place as the first Australian *matière* painter. Elwyn Lynn, whom Hughes and Smith consecrate as such, did not visit Europe until 1958 when he attended the Venice Biennale and saw the work of Burri and Tàpies for the first time. He did not paint in this style until his return to Australia following six months in Europe, first exhibiting such works in Sydney in 1960.[473]

Hughes' use of the word 'illusion' and term 'illusionist' arose from his interpretation of a comment made by MOMA director Alfred H. Barr Jr. quoted in the press (*The Australian Women's Weekly*, September 9, 1959 (6.2, n. 410)).[474] I suggest that Barr's use of the term 'illusionist' and that of Hughes have different connotations. Barr uses the term while categorising Tucker's work as similar to *l'art brut* due to its crudeness and materiality. Within the context of the museum's acquisitions that year, Tucker's work is positioned alongside that of Burri; that is, together with texture or *matière* painting. Such work appeals to the sense of touch or the haptic. This usage of the term 'illusion' is closer to the Greenbergian notion of touch. Art historian and critic Michael Fried employs Greenberg's distinction between opticality and touch when he refers to a

[473] By 1960, Anderson notes '…Lynn was by no means the only artist working with heavily textured surfaces at this time. Other Australian artists exploring surface were Frank Hodgkinson, Carl Plate, William Peascod and Leonard Hessing. Furthermore, Albert Tucker was fusing single solemn Antipodean heads with corrugated surfaces, in such a way that the head became a textured landform as well as a rugged profile.' See Anderson, Patricia, *Elwyn Lynn's Art World*, Pandora Press, Sydney, 2001, pp. 79-80.

[474] In a review of artist Elwyn Lynn's exhibition of textural paintings at Terry Clune Galleries in Sydney in 1963, Hughes noted that Tucker and Frank Hodgkinson had made textural works overseas, but Lynn was said to be the first to introduce [the category] to Australia. Hughes then stated, 'But Tucker is an illusionist', using Barr's term without the context describing the *art brut* character of the work, which was the basis of Barr's explanation for his response to it. Hughes, Robert, 'Hard pastes – and the art of silences', in *Sunday Mirror*, Sydney, 7 April 1963. AGNSW archives, Artist files, Elwyn Lynn.

breakthrough achieved by colour field painter Morris Louis in development of the staining technique (devoid of brushstrokes), after Helen Frankenthaler. This was said to render the work produced 'illusively intangible – as accessible to eyesight but not to touch.'[475]

In contrast, Hughes uses the term 'illusion' in the sense of Gombrich, to imply a perspectival approach to representation (refer Chapter 4). Tucker, in his *naïf* approach, continued to work in a semi-abstract or *figural* mode where allusion to human figures was concerned or in a textural *dépaysage* mode where a horizon line implied a landscape or mindscape in the case of his lunar landscapes (as described in (4.4)). Rather than using one-point perspective and *chiaroscuro* modelling techniques to develop a sense of pictorial depth or deep space which the viewer can imagine herself walking into, Tucker's modernist picture space is flat, with built up materials jutting out from the support. The result does not convey a naturalistic representation of form but leads to an embodied experience for the viewer who can respond to the work's tactility. This is similar to the work of the French New Realists working in the 'junk aesthetic' or assemblage mode, to the *Merz* collages of German artist Kurt Schwitters, championed by Read in the U.K., or to de Kooning's emphasis on visceral, aggressive brushwork rather than naturalistic rendering of the human figure.[476] In the case of Tucker's work, the emphasis was on materials, not on naturalistic presentation of subject matter; hence a *matière* classification is appropriate. If anything, the *bas-relief* effect achieved through the use of materials incorporated into the medium (similar to Fautrier's 'lozenges' we saw in Chapter 2) recalls the archaic, which many gestural artists sought to convey in their work during the period. Tucker's work does not attempt to achieve naturalistic representation and his cartoon-like forms could not be considered 'hyper-natural' as Hughes suggests.

A further definition of 'illusionism' perhaps closer to Barr's intended meaning is found in American art critic Dore Ashton's 1965 essay 'In Praise of Illusion'.[477] Ashton discusses the role of the imagination and the vagueness of psychological interpretation of art works. She states that a work of art is an illusion since 'its material is not necessarily its meaning'. Art includes both the

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[475] Carrier, David, *Writing About Visual Art*, Allworth Press, New York, 2003, p. 160.
[476] See Rosenberg, Harold, *The Anxious Object: Art today and its audience*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1964, pp. 62-64 and 75, for a discussion of illusionism and the work of the New Realists. Rosenberg notes that a 'work of art today is not illusory in the sense of being a representation' (p. 62). This is relevant to Tucker's situation and I note Rosenberg's later use of the term 'hyper-objectivism ' in discussing Pop art (p. 75), which may have influenced Hughes' terminology. If Tucker was perceived as an illusionist in these terms, his art could be said to be a bridge toward assemblage. In this sense it would be innovative, rather than representational in the sense Hughes implies.
[477] Ashton, Dore, 'In Praise of Illusion', in Everett, Sally, ed., *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of formalist Avant-Garde, Contextualist, and Post-Modernist Thought*, McFarland & Co., Jefferson, NC, and London, 1991, pp. 125-131.

artist's input and the viewer's interpretation. Clearly illusionism for Ashton is not meant in the sense of naturalistic perspective and representation at all. This interpretation is opposite to the literal interpretation taken by Hughes in which the medium stands in for and models a naturalistic object.

In fact, the crude characteristics of *matière* work as identified by Barr in viewing Tucker's *Lunar Landscape*, 1957, could be related to the existentialist ideas of viscosity and bodily sensation and to physical disgust or alienation. Hughes did not make this leap of imagination as he categorised Tucker's works as primarily figurative in nature. Had he done so he would have understood Barr's link to *l'art brut,* which was the basis for his comment, differently to the way he represented it in his book (n. 465). While Hughes' (1970) recognition of Dubuffet as an 'influence' on Tucker intimates the presence of a large number of *l'art brut* standard features in Tucker's work, Hughes does not position the work within that category, nor does he appear to locate the *art brut* category within the broader category of *Informel* or gestural abstraction. By 1970, Hughes would have had a category of 'textural painting' (equivalent to *matière* or *l'art brut*) in his repertoire, however, he did not apply it to Tucker's work.

Hughes' account of the Melbourne artists including Nolan, Tucker and Boyd in *The Art of Australia* draws attention to the working class backgrounds of the artists, and implies this may have had an impact on their painting. He comments that these painters were not particularly successful in assimilating influences. I contend that Hughes' attitude toward these artists who were non-academic (although far from illiterate, given Tucker in fact published articles and essays) was formed during their (and his) pre-war years in Australia and coloured his assessment of their work in later years. Further, Hughes' ability to understand the influences the artists *were* assimilating was limited by his lack of a broad knowledge of international trends at the time. At this early stage, however, the artists were influenced largely by works seen only in reproduction and discussed in art journals. This deliberate disregard by Hughes and other reviewers for the intellectual project and motivation of the group of Heide artists experimenting with European trends and exploring contemporary ideas of psychology and culture was recently noted by curator Juliet Peers as being ironical.[478] I concur that it is this aspect of their work which has preserved its interest for viewers and art world professionals up to the present. Rather than acknowledge this active experimentation by artists, art historians attempted to make psychological interpretations of

[478] Peers, Juliet, 'Which Evil? Which War?' in Harding, Lesley, ed., *Albert Tucker: images of modern evil, exh. cat.*, 19 March - 26 June 2011, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, VIC, 2011, p. 60.

an artist's work, reverting to biographical information as the perceived basis for his or her 'expression'. This diminished the appreciation of the successful achievement of the artist's aims as realised in the work (its teleological significance in Laetz's terms presented in Chapter 1(1.3)). The role of the critic, as discussed in Chapters One and Five becomes important in assisting the viewer to determine whether a work is in fact successful in achieving its purpose, particularly in the case of innovative works. This proved a challenge for art critics and historians as art critical language and knowledge of tendencies developed in response to, that is, a step behind artistic practice.

Australian art historian Christopher Uhl, in an early study of Tucker's *oeuvre* completed in 1969, notes Tucker's identification with Melbourne painters including Nolan and Arthur Boyd in art historical accounts.[479] After examining Tucker's art over three decades, Uhl concludes that Tucker's 'responses to several modern European art movements … are not always fully absorbed'.[480] He finds the use of repetitive symbols and recurring forms such as the crescent shape and 'Antipodean heads' to be 'obsessive compulsive elements' in Tucker's work. In terms of European tendencies, Uhl cited the influences on Tucker of Picasso, Jean Dubuffet with respect to texture, and of German Expressionism with respect to his work of the 1940s, particularly noting the work of the 'New Objectivists' Max Beckmann, George Grosz and Otto Dix. In passing, Uhl notes a *tachiste* influence in some elements of technique; however, he does not draw attention to the gestural as the defining aspect of Tucker's work. Interpreted as primarily gestural, the repetitive symbols and recurring forms become vehicles for gesture, rather than in terms of symbols as the subject matter of the work and hence vulnerable to the critique regarding 'obsessive compulsive elements'.[481] Instead, Uhl mainly attributes Tucker's 1940s style to literary Surrealism.[482]

Uhl's assessment of Tucker's sensibility during his Heide period as that of a 'haptic' rather than 'visual' artist, provides a fitting view of Tucker's use of visual space and projection of emotion

[479] Uhl, Christopher; Henshaw, John, ed., *Albert Tucker*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1969, p. 7.
[480] Idem.
[481] The repetition of a particular symbol or form was a popular device at the time to distinguish a particular artist (Fautrier's 'lozenge' and *otage* shapes (Chapter 2)). American Abstract Expressionist Robert Motherwell repeated his *Elegies* series motif (inspired by the Spanish Civil War and a poem written by art critic Harold Rosenberg), producing about 150 works in the series over a number of years.
[482] Uhl, 1969, p. 16. *Cf*. Haese in comparison, correctly states that while Surrealist devices play a role in the work of a number of Australian artists, including Tucker, at the same time 'none of those artists should be thought of as a programmatic Surrealist, which was the case for James Gleeson' (Haese, 1981, p. 92). Unfortunately this 1981 assessment by Haese came too late to make any impact on the art histories written by Smith, Hughes or Uhl.

through exaggerated distortion of figure and form and the use of colour.[483] Uhl draws on the ideas of Löwenfeld (1939) whose work Tucker read at the time (Chapters 4 and 6). In this aspect, Uhl was insightful and has picked up on the crux of gestural abstraction – its touch and embodiment qualities. However, Uhl is critical of Tucker and suggests the artist was incapable of carrying out intention nor was he able to communicate effectively.[484] Had Uhl perceived Tucker's work as gestural, he would have had no grounds for such a claim. Similarly, had Uhl been aware of the work of the CoBrA artists, he would have had a reference point for assessing the naïve features of the works which could have led to greater appreciation. This is an example of the role of evaluative concepts in shaping how we construe what we see and what we notice. While Uhl includes images of works such as *Woman*, 1943; *Figure*, 1954, a totem female; and *Girl*, 1951 as well as other 'woman' images, he does not seek the sources from which these may have been drawn. This is a fatal flaw in Uhl's positioning of Tucker's work for best appreciation.

Uhl acknowledges the influence on Tucker of the work of British sculptor and draughtsman Henry Moore, particularly Moore's 'woman' series (figs. 6.43, 6.44). However, he appears to ignore the strong influence of European artists Fautrier and Dubuffet, and possibly American artist de Kooning, in these works as well as the artistic penchant of the day for including totems and symbols associated with primitivism. There is some acknowledgement of Dubuffet's influence with respect to *matière* painting, use of the elements of chance and child-like execution of form, and later to Dubuffet's *Corps de Dames*, 1950, which is interpreted as a 'brutal attack on women' (fig. 6.39).[485] Uhl does acknowledge the lyrical quality of Tucker's work during the early 1950s but does not go so far as to admit a gestural categorisation would be appropriate despite this apt characterisation.[486] As we saw in section 6.2 with respect to the international reception of Tucker's *matière* work, this is another example of the way in which critics (or art historians) may agree on their perceptions of the objective (or non-evaluative) formal properties of works while differing in their evaluative responses to those properties.[487]

While referencing Tucker's use of allegorical themes in his *oeuvre*, as evidenced in his religious imagery during the mid-1950s, Uhl does not acknowledge that use of allegorical themes was common in art of the period. Both early American Abstract Expressionists, such as Jackson

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[483] Uhl, 1969, p. 24.
[484] Ibid. p. 38.
[485] Ibid. p. 50.
[486] Idem.
[487] See Goldman, Alan H., 'Realism about aesthetic properties', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51, Issue1, 1993, pp. 31-37 (33).

Pollock, and School of Paris colourists like Australian painters Jean Bellette and David Strachan of the so-called 'Sydney Charm School' were presenting allegorical themes in their work at this time.[488] Further, there was a strong interest from artists in Jungian archetypes. Carl Jung's writing detailing his psychoanalytic approach was read by Tucker at the time and was popular with the American Abstract Expressionists.[489] Tucker interacted with a number of American artists throughout his time abroad. His 1952 exhibition at *Galerie Huit* in Paris, a gallery popular with American artists, was noted above.

Uhl finds Tucker's later period of Australian iconography, particularly from the 1960s, to be a period of artistic weakness. He felt Tucker traded on ideas expressed by Sidney Nolan in 1954 when the pair met in Rome to discuss their joint exhibition. Since Tucker had never seen the outback firsthand, but based his impressions of it on Nolan's photographs, Uhl finds Tucker's paintings of this period lack conviction.[490] However, Uhl misses the point of Tucker's work. The subject matter was used to inspire a tactile response not to represent particular Australian locations of landscape. Once back in Melbourne after 1960, Uhl notes Tucker's prolific production of figure paintings of explorers, intruders and fauns, citing a 'suffocating repetition' in this manufactured 'Australianness' which was also picked up by local critics.[491] An American parallel was the early work of Jackson Pollock whose frontier imagery in works such as *Going West,* 1934-35, was influenced by his mentor Thomas Hart Benton (fig. 7.5). A number of early works by Pollock reference a dream-like pioneer theme and feature bones, skeletons and crucifixes (fig. 7.6). Pollock was influenced by Mexican mural painters David Alfaro Siquieros, who promoted the use of enamel paint, and José Clemente Orozco. Pollock's work was shown in Europe from 1948 and in London from 1953. If Tucker did not have the opportunity to view Pollock's work in exhibition first-hand, he would certainly have been familiar with written reviews of it.

All in all, Uhl's assessment of Tucker is not particularly flattering. Had Uhl focused on the gestural abstraction in Tucker's work, he would instead have recognised its innovative qualities when positioned alongside works by artists such as the CoBrA group, Bacon, Sutherland,

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[488] See Hughes, p. 170-71 and 177. The term 'Charm School' implied less serious art such as *intimisme,* decorative or Romantic painting, marginal to the main innovations of the time. Sydney art critic Paul Haefliger used the term in 1948, see Our Art Critic, 'Artist relies on charm', in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 1948, available at < http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/18098956>, accessed 24 September, 2015. The term was used by other critics from time to time thereafter. See Alomes, 1999, p. 34.

[489] I note that Jung was not yet popular with French artists at this time as French translations of his work appeared only much later. The French were, however, interested in primitivism and archaic references. Uhl notes Tucker read Jung's *Answer to Job* (1952, trans. 1954) at this time.

[490] Uhl p. 68.

[491] Ibid, p 78.

Dubuffet or de Kooning. Further, had he been aware of artists such as Fautrier and Motherwell, the repetition of particular forms would have been recognised as an element common to the art of a number of artists of the day who sought to have a unique identifying feature in their work.[492] Art historian Janine Burke finds that Uhl's assessment of Tucker dismisses details of the relevant field of production in favour of 'a highly critical discussion of the artist's oeuvre to 1968'.[493] In other words, Uhl takes a formalist approach and lets the works 'speak for themselves'. Such an approach was in keeping with its time.

Art historian Richard Haese presents Tucker as an artist-intellectual in *Rebels and Precursors* (1981) developed from his Doctoral thesis *Cultural Radicals in Australian Society 1937-1947*.[494] The 1962 exhibition *Rebels and Precursors* was discussed previously (6.3). I find Haese to be indebted to Uhl to some extent, particularly with respect to analysis of the primitive and haptic aspects of Tucker's work.[495] Haese's interpretation of Tucker and his relation to Surrealism is predicated upon the perceived qualities of the new art 'exemplified in four traits: (i) an acknowledgement of the significance of dreams, (ii) the cult of childhood, (iii) humour and delight in the absurd, and (iv) ambiguity.[496] In making this interpretation which links Tucker and other Heide artists to Surrealism, Haese and other Australian art historians and subsequent writers, appear to have neglected to fully explore the way in which elements of Surrealism had been appropriated by more recent art movements (since Surrealism's peak in the 1930s) with very different outcomes to the typical Surrealistic exemplars of Dali, Magritte and Ernst. While Haese points to the influences of Herbert Read, Freud and Marx, in fact, the literature circulating among Australian artists of the period included sources used by the American Abstract Expressionists as well as European *tachistes.* These related to ideas drawn from Jung (in the case of American artists), Zen Buddhism and oriental calligraphy, and poetry, as well as journals such as *Cahiers d'Art*. Haese does acknowledge that by 1942 reproductions of American works were appearing in the publication *Art in Australia* together with writings by MOMA director, Alfred H. Barr Jr., but he does not fully realise the implications of this.[497]

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[492] See Fer, Briony, 'Rothko and Repetition', in Phillips, Glenn and Crow, Thomas eds., *Seeing Rothko*, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2005, p. 160. Among these signature styles are Pollock's drips, Gottlieb's bursts, Barnett Newman's zips, de Kooning's slashes, Motherwell's elegies to name a few. In Australia we find Nolan's Ned Kelly helmets and Tucker's Antipodean heads.
[493] Idem.
[494] Haese, 1981.
[495] Ibid., p. 189, for example, referencing Löwenfeld's work, is informed by Uhl and noted accordingly.
[496] Haese, p 185.
[497] Ibid., p.187.

An example of the relatively slow pace with which familiarity with European tendencies was acquired in Australia is explored by Annette Dixon (1982). Dixon, then curator of European and American art at the NGV, writing in the *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, examines the contribution of French artist and theorist Jean Dubuffet following his trips to the Sahara to explore primitivism in art.[498] She concludes that the period from 1947-1949 during which Dubuffet laid down some of his influential theories about *art brut* and exhibited at the *Galerie René Drouin* in Paris were only just beginning to be fully understood in Australia at the time of her writing *in 1982* [emphasis added]. This was a significant time lag in terms of understanding of mid-century European tendencies in Australia. It was all the more surprising due to the way references to Dubuffet had been handed down in the art historical narratives about artists such as Tucker and Olsen with little investigation into the nature of Dubuffet's work and its positioning in the field of cultural production and reception. Such research could have led to greater understanding of the gestural work of the Australian artists concerned. Language barriers in accessing art critical material and reviews do not in and of themselves account for this lag as Dubuffet was reviewed in the U.S. from 1946. The lack of understanding, however, can be explained in part by Terry Smith's observation that there was little interest in studying international contemporary art until well into the 1960s. Bernard Smith was the inaugural director and Professor of Contemporary Art of the Power Institute of Fine Arts ('PIFA') which was founded in 1968 at the University of Sydney. Terry Smith was instrumental in encouraging Bernard Smith, to add international contemporary art to PIFA's art history curriculum. With respect to Dubuffet, Dixon indicates by the time Australian curators and scholars were coming to terms with his work and theories, interest in his art had long since dissipated in the U.S. and Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting* had been updated for the last time. Subsequent art historical accounts did not revisit the minimal references to Dubuffet who had simply been invoked as a source with little detail in terms of characterisation and the nature of the relevant category. In this way the earlier art histories were able to discuss semi-abstract works as figurative and did not deal with the *matière* aspects, notwithstanding that Dubuffet and Fautrier were the two leading proponents of the *haute pâte* (high paste) mode of expression (2.3).

The National Gallery of Australia opened in 1982. In advance of its opening, so as to build its collection and participate in development of the gallery, James Mollison was appointed Acting Director in 1971 and Director in 1977. In 1978-79, Mollison negotiated with Tucker and his son Sweeney Reed for the purchase of a number of works from Tucker's *Images* series (listed in the negotiation documents as *Night Images*). An internal document by Keith L. Avent, prepared in

[498] Dixon, 1982, pp. 51-55.

1996 as part of an audit and review of records, sheds light on the way the 'series' *Images* came to be known.[499] This is significant as it defines the early strategy for the way in which Tucker's work was presented to the public.

The works were initially produced individually and were controversial from the outset to a conservative viewing public, due to their disturbing content and manner of execution. Avent found no consistent use of titles with both *Images of Modern Evil* and *Night Images* in use to refer to the series. He also found inconsistencies in Uhl's account of the naming of the series against the data in the NGA's records. In the 1940s the works were often identified as *Images* while from 1961 the name *Night Images* was often used. As *Images* was used more frequently and was the earlier name for the series, it was recommended for use. More tellingly, it was not clear which works were in fact part of the 'series'. Avent notes that the works vary stylistically with regard to execution of the figurative elements. To make matters worse, while the majority of the works were produced in Australia, some of the works described as 'more sophisticated in style' and showing stronger influences of Picasso and other European artists, which were produced while Tucker was in Europe, are sometimes included. *Paris Night*, 1948, is the final one of these (fig. 6.8). Uhl (1969) includes some of the works in a section of his book under 'Figure Paintings in London and Paris 1947-1950'. Further works were identified which were not included in the acquisition by the NGA. In addition to Uhl, Mollison and Bonham (1982); Mollison and Minchin (1990); and a catalogue from the Sweeney Reed Gallery produced in the late 1970s were used as references in conducting the 1996 audit and review by Avent. Avent concludes that a number of early works acquired, dating from 1939-1944, should not be included in the series. He argued that a number of later works (dating from 1944-1978) which carry stylistic similarities do not reflect the theme of anger or trepidation of the *Images* series and hence should also be excluded. As can be seen from this example, Tucker's independent production of his works without a major dealer/gallerist to promote them initially left the artist free to 'package' the works in line with the discourse that had already developed around them. The works referred to as *Images* had become known as a 'series' through their exhibition history beginning with the Reeds. It is noteworthy that the Reeds gifted twenty-five of the twenty-seven paintings in Sidney Nolan's best known *Ned Kelly* series, 1946-47, to the NGA in 1977. This is a further demonstration of the power of patrons and collectors in the field of reception, consecration and transmission.

[499] Avent, Keith, 'Albert Tucker's images of modern evil : a review of content and context', Department of Australian Art, National Gallery of Australia, 1996. NGA Library and Archives, Canberra.

The NGA had moved quickly to acquire the Tucker series of *Images*. In Melbourne, it was not until the appointment of Patrick McCaughey as Director of the National Gallery of Victoria ('NGV') in 1981 that the gaps in the collection began to be filled. Six Tucker works were acquired in 1980-82 including examples of Tucker's gestural work. Significantly, McCaughey indicated the gallery sought to include examples drawn from Tucker's 'rich expatriate years, then largely unfamiliar to contemporary audiences.'[500] Among the works acquired were important works such as *Cratered Head*, 1958; *Macro of Place Pigalle*, 1949; and *Judas*, 1955. *Ascension*, 1962, had been acquired in 1971 (figs. 6.50, 6.9, 7.7, 6.62). In theory, this body of work provided a basis for a discussion of the engagement of the artist with European tendencies.

A group exhibition held in association with the 1984 Biennale of Sydney, *Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting 1942 - 1962: Dreams, Fears and* Desires, mounted by PIFA further reinforced Tucker's position among Australian figurative modernists. In her Introduction to the exhibition catalogue, art historian Virginia Spate identifies the recurring imagery of the hero, explorer, outlaw, child and Aborigine common in the work of many of the artists. She notes their emblematic 'almost obsessive' presence recalling Uhl's 1969 criticism of Tucker.[501] Significantly, Spate questions the so called 'myth-making' of the Antipodeans, aligning the artists' expression of alienation and isolation with the dominant discourses of the 1950s centred on fear and the human condition. This was not unique to Australian artists.[502] It is therefore useful to 'interrogate' such images rather than simply subscribing to past interpretations – consistent with the aim of the present study. This exhibition was organised chronologically and thematically. The six thematic sections centred on: war, wounding of women, still life in the city, empty centre and anti-hero, childhood, and black and white. Tucker's work is discussed under the war section with reference to the *Images* series. The exhibition context highlighted the artists' flight to Europe in the immediate postwar period, during which many sought international recognition.[503] Another influence on the way Tucker was categorised is the tendency of curators to adopt a thematic approach. We will return to this point again in the next section.

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[500] McCaughey, Patrick, 'Collecting the forties in the eighties', in *Art Journal,* Vol. 50, NGV, Melbourne, VIC, 2011, available at <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/collecting-the-forties-in-the-eighties/>, accessed 5 August 2015., unpaginated.

[501] Dixon, Christine and Smith, Terry, *Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting 1942-1962: Dreams, Fears and Desires*, PIFA, Sydney, 1984, p. 7.

[502] Idem.

[503] Ibid., p. 27 and 31. At least thirty major artists were away from Australia during this period and tended to go in the years between 1948-1953 or 1957-1960.

In a 1986 journal article, art lecturer Theodora Green, following on from a lecture given at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1984, recognised the influence on Australian artists of American Abstract Expressionism. Green observed this influence was felt earlier than is formally acknowledged in Australian art historical accounts. Knowledge of the category was conveyed through exposure of artists to art journals such as *Art News* and other sources prior to original works ever being shown in Australia. One such additional source was the text *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase* (1951) by T.B. Hess, known to be popular in Australian artist circles.[504] This influence can account for the presence of features commonly identified as Surrealist by Australian critics, which were common to gestural abstraction (or Abstract Expressionism in its American form).

A group exhibition *Angry Penguins and Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940s* was held from 19 May - 14 August 1988, at the Hayward Gallery, London, and was organised jointly by the South Bank Centre, the Australian National Gallery and the Australian Bicentennial Authority. Works by Nolan, Tucker, Boyd, Perceval and Hester were presented in the Angry Penguin category associated with the Reed circle in Melbourne, and works in the realist group, favoured by Bernard Smith, included Counihan, Bergner and O'Connor. The exhibition was said to be an attempt to break the stereotypes of Australian art and its long associations with the bush and outback. Life at Heide is described in a catalogue essay by Barrett Reid while Bernard Smith contributes an essay on Realist Art in Wartime Australia. Smith dismisses Haese's 1981 *Rebels and Precursors,* as 'a product of aesthetic values generated by the Cold War.[505] This includes the Heide painters. According to Smith, Haese's study gave 'an air of historical legitimacy to an implicit attitude that has marginalised realist art…since the 1940s'. Smith is clearly defensive of his group of socialist realist Antipodeans. His assertions, however, are debatable. It has not gone unnoticed that Smith failed to report, upon his return to Australia, the art world developments he had seen in his visits to Europe, where he directly encountered the work of American Abstract Expressionists as well as the European *tachistes*.[506]

Tucker's work is discussed in the Hayward catalogue essay by Charles Merewether titled 'Modernism from the Lower Depths'. The essay identifies a feeling of anxiety conveyed in the

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[504] See Green, Theodora, 'Abstract Expressionism in Australia – American parallels and influences', in *Art and Australia*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1986, pp. 485-491 (487). See Heathcote, 1995, p. 95.
[505] *Angry Penguins and Realist Painting in Melbourne in the 1940s,* exh. cat., 19 May to 14 August 1988, Hayward Gallery, London, 1988, p. 56.
[506] See Heathcote, 1995, p. 113-117. In February - March 1959 for example, MOMA's travelling exhibition *The New American Painting* caused a stir at the Tate Gallery in London. See Scott, 2004.

works of the period which explored psychological states associated with modern life. Vassilieff is said to have introduced concepts of spontaneity and chance, as well as graffiti effects to the Melbourne artists. Merewether notes 'the interest in the insane, the ill or criminal and deviant were all used as metaphors of disclosure of a human condition.'[507] He cites Löwenfeld (1939) as a source for the artists, drawing on Uhl's earlier art historical account.[508]Tucker's work is associated with that of Hester, Boyd and Perceval in its depiction of daily civilian life reflecting the madness and violence of war. All in all, the exhibition does not appear to have countered any stereotypes but repeats the familiar discourse laid down in exhibition narratives from 1959-1962 as detailed in Chapter Six (6.2).

Heathcote's (1995) art history *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968,* (Chapter 4 (4.3)), offers an interpretation of the Heide circle's preference for expression of thought and feeling through abstraction. His account provides a balanced view of the artistic debate and promulgation of ideas related to non-objective art in Melbourne at the time within the CAS and general art circles, not restricted to the Heide sphere. Heathcote highlights the role of artists such as painter and CAS member Ian Sime in stimulating debate and promoting ideas from the overseas art movements during the mid- to late 1950s. These included the use of psychic automatism, wherein the unconscious is tapped to initiate a work of art, the role of chance and spontaneity, and an awareness of international artists rising to prominence at the time.[509] This art historical account however, did not reposition Tucker in any significant way.

Art historian Janine Burke attempts to go beyond earlier art historical accounts in her 2001 doctoral thesis, *A Portrait of Albert Tucker, 1914-1960*. Tucker had only been discussed as a formalist by Uhl (1969), as a Romantic by Haese (1981), and in passing by Mollison and Bonham (1982), and Richard and Mollison (1990). By adopting a psychological approach, Burke sought to explore how the cultural field of production, and particularly personal biographical background pertaining to Tucker's work, might shed light on the artist's motivation and provide further insight.[510] Her study provides an interpretation of Tucker's work from the 1940s to 1960.[511]

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[507] *Angry Penguins*, 1988, p. 73.
[508] Ibid., p. 74.
[509] Heathcote, 1995, pp. 78-79. I note that in Sydney, artist Robert Klippel performed a similar function for the artists of the John Passmore circle (including Passmore, Olsen, Hodgkinson, Eric Rose and, on occasion, Yvonne Audette).
[510] See Mollison, James and Bonham, Nicholas, *Albert Tucker*, MacMillan, Melbourne, 1982. See Mollison, James and Minchin, Jan, *Albert Tucker: A Retrospective*, exh. cat., NGV, Melbourne, 1990. See Haese, 1981. Haese includes Tucker in his chapters on the 1940s in Melbourne as an artist working within what he terms the 'modern Romantic tradition' to which primitive and naïf art was central in presenting art reflecting human reality (p. 185).
[511] Due to her particular interest in Hester's influence on Tucker's art, Burke chose the year of Hester's death, 1960, as the endpoint for her study.

Burke's limited knowledge of overseas tendencies, however, prevents her going beyond the usual connections with German Expressionism and Surrealism in categorising it. She attributes Tucker's preoccupation with psychological content to the interest in the subconscious, irrational and dream states explored by the Surrealists. Burke's interest in Tucker relates largely to feminist issues following her earlier study of Tucker's wife artist Joy Hester. Burke attempts to explain Tucker's motivation in relation to Hester's influence on his art. This overarching framework dominates her analysis of Tucker's *oeuvre*. Such psychological approaches in art historical methodology are noted in Chapter Four. Burke views Tucker's time abroad as 'a period of quiet enrichment, rather than radical change'.[512] I argue that, in fact, Tucker's work produced while abroad was his most interesting, and reflected his contemporaneity with international trends in gestural abstraction which were not yet established in Australia.

While Burke attempted in her thesis to go beyond previous art histories, she draws heavily on Haese's 1981 interpretation cited above and this holds her under the sway of past interpretations indebted to Surrealism. Burke posits that Tucker has been the subject of uneven and insubstantial scholarly attention.[513] She notes Bernard Smith's dismissal of Tucker's essay 'Art, Myth and Society', published in 1943, as 'useless anachronism and mysticism of an aesthetic vanguard'.[514] In my view, this critique further evidences Smith's outright rejection of abstraction and his contempt for the popular rhetoric enunciated by the American Abstract Expressionists.[515] The contrast between the American Abstract Expressionists' success and the neglect of the category most apt for the gestural work of Tucker's European years, underscores the fact that the American Abstract Expressionists were championed by the most influential American art critic of the day (Clement Greenberg), while the category most apt for Tucker was refused a position in the Australian cultural field by its most influential art critic/historian of the day.

While Burke finds Hughes' account *does* focus on personal aspects of Tucker's life in assessing his work, she claims Hughes does not identify critical shifts in Tucker's art nor emphasise a link with Surrealism.[516] Further, she asserts that Hughes overlooks Tucker's religious imagery and the emergence of the landscape in his work without looking at the works in depth.[517]

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[512] Burke, Janine, *The Eye of the Beholder: Albert Tucker's Photographs*, exh. cat., 11 July – 18 October, 1998, Heide Museum of Modern Art, and 1998 – 2000 various, Melbourne, 1998, p. 12.
[513] Burke, Janine, 'A Portrait of Albert Tucker, 1914 -1960', unpublished PhD Thesis, Deakin University, Melbourne, September, 2001, p. 3.
[514] Ibid., p. 11
[515] As expressed in the 1959 Antipodean Manifesto written by Smith (Chapter 4, n. 216).
[516] Burke, 2001, p. 15.
[517] Ibid., p. 16.

As I have indicated earlier in this chapter, the relationship between the use of Surrealist devices and the combination of these with gestural abstraction was not well understood in Australia. I agree with Burke that Hughes did not pay sufficient attention to Tucker's source of religious imagery; however, I locate that imagery in an interest shared with British artists such as Bacon and Sutherland who did not necessarily profess religious beliefs.[518] Rather, crucifixion symbolism could be viewed as another aspect of the Modern Man trope in which everyman replaces Christ. Disembodied heads or screaming heads such as those in the work of Bacon, Giacometti or Fautrier were another variation on this theme. Burke was not sufficiently familiar with international trends to effectively position the works but was correct in her assessment that Hughes had overlooked various aspects in evaluating Tucker's work. Similarly, Burke's focus on landscape in Tucker's work does not recognise what Tucker could have meant by his comment on lunar landscapes as the 'memory of a land-image'. In effect, Tucker indicated that such works were *dépaysages*, based on psychographic space rather than natural illusionistic space (a mode of allusive abstraction, a subset of gestural abstraction (4.4)). In this respect Burke's approach reflected the strong emphasis on landscape embedded in Australian art historiography which Bernard Smith preserved in his first edition of *Australian Painting 1788-1970* as discussed in Chapter Four.

Burke observed that the majority of earlier art historical accounts tended to compare Tucker's work to that of his male peers, particularly Nolan, Boyd and Perceval. I argue that, in fact, apart from one joint exhibition shared with Nolan in Rome in 1954, Tucker's peers during the period 1947-1963 were an international group of artists. The group with which Tucker is most often located in Australian historical accounts was a pre-war group which is often simplistically split into figurative socialist realists and Australian vanguard modernists. The Melbourne group, however, are generally classified as favouring naturalistic figuration while the Sydney artists are grouped into 'Charm School'/decorative/School of Paris types or the abstractionists of the extended Passmore circle. The Melbourne group of artists with which Tucker is grouped did not duplicate his experiences in Paris, Rome and the USA nor did they have the same first-hand experience with the European *tachistes* and *matière* painters on the Continent.

In terms of Burke's focus, it can be said that Hester developed the box-like shape or Ned Kelly head motif in her work *Fun Fair*, 1946, later utilised so successfully by Nolan in his best-known series of paintings (fig. 7.8). Apart from that contribution, Hester (married to Tucker)

[518] I note that Tucker was impressed by Bacon's work which he saw at the 1954 Venice Biennale. See Letter, Tucker to Nolan, August 1954, [received by Nolan 28 August 1954], in McCaughey, 2006, pp. 168-169.

assisted in developing the couple's relationship with the Reeds who later supported Tucker's overseas venture. I note that it is Tucker's break-up with Hester whom he subsequently divorced, that was the impetus for his departure from Australia and his long expatriate period in Europe and America, during which time he produced his most interesting and fully resolved gestural work. It is Tucker's companion in Europe, American Mary Dickson whom he met subsequent to the endpoint of Burke's study, who aided Tucker's career in two key ways. First, her language skills enabled Tucker to live and work in France, Germany and Italy, giving Tucker an advantage not enjoyed by other Australian artists who, like him, spoke English only (leading many of them to confine themselves to the London art world). Secondly, Dickson was instrumental in later taking Tucker's work to New York and leaving it with Poindexter's Gallery where it came to the attention of Alfred H. Barr Jr., director of MOMA. This helped launch Tucker's career from relative obscurity to becoming a fixture of Australian modernism of the mid-twentieth century, following MOMA's purchase of *Lunar Landscape*, 1957.

In my archival research, I discovered that Dickson actively solicited the interest of Guggenheim Director, J. J. Sweeney in Tucker's work. Dickson, through Poindexter's Gallery, New York, in November 1957 sent six Tucker works to Sweeney at the Guggenheim for acquisition consideration by the museum.[519] Included were works titled *Card Players*, *Lunar Head*, *The Metamorphosis of Ned Kelly*, *Mourners*, *Omnipotent Figure*, and *Wounded Mountain*. Sweeney replied June 2, 1958 expressing interest in one of the works, *Wounded Mountain*, which he indicated could be considered that autumn for possible acquisition if it were still available. He found this work to best demonstrate Tucker's ability to 'exaggerate features most dramatically' and stated he preferred this work to the more caricatural works such as *Metamorphosis of Ned Kelly* or *Omnipotent Figure*. He states that he appreciates the 'handling of materials' in *Wounded Mountain* (noting the standard features for the *matière* category). The selection of works was returned to Dickson through the Poindexter Gallery. In later correspondence, Tucker's handwritten letter to Sweeney dated June 12, 1960 indicates that Sweeney had taken an interest in *Antipodean Head*.[520] Tucker plans to meet Sweeney in London coinciding with the 4 July opening of his exhibition at Waddington Gallery. Sweeney responded in a letter to Tucker June 16, 1960, acknowledging receipt of Tucker's letter and advising that the Museum Committee had voted to

[519] Letter (cc.), James Johnson Sweeney to Miss Mary Dickson, June 2, 1958, with attachment Report from Registrar, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, November 26, 1957. Guggenheim Archives, Artist and Object Files, James Johnson Sweeney 1952-1960, Folder 000570, 1960, Box 214, folder 39.
[520] Letter, Tucker to Sweeney, June 12, 1960, Guggenheim Archives, Artist and Object Files, J.J. Sweeney 1952-1960, Folder 000570, 1960, folder 1960.

acquire Tucker's work *Antipodean Head*, 1959 (fig. 7.9).[521] This is a *matière* landscape-in-head work.

In this section I examined art historical accounts which have served to place Tucker firmly in his Angry Penguin, figurative expressionist niche in art historical accounts. While gestural features of his work were perceived and accurately reflected in discussion of many works, historians did not have knowledge of the range of contemporary international categories with which to imaginatively position the work. Various approaches to art historical analysis in formal accounts were taken, ranging from formalist to psychological. Exhibition themes tended to mirror the demarcations Smith had set out in *Australian Painting 1788-1970.* It appears that confusion arose at the intersection of Surrealist devices (uncoupled from its philosophies and subject matter) and abstraction. Australian reviewers were not aware that the features they deemed Surrealist were involved in various categories internationally. No category existed within the art critical discourse in Australia to describe the semi-abstract work in which traces of or partial figuration remained. Naïve art was not taken seriously as a category. Rather than being appreciated for its intended primitive character, such work was interpreted as being poorly executed or demonstrating a lack of artistic skill. It is also apparent that many reviewers and art historians did not read widely with respect to international art critical reviews apart from a particular set of art journals.[522] This was due in part to the relatively late focus on international contemporary art in the Australian university curriculum.

The general viewing public was not exposed to Tucker's work, other than in the selected exhibitions noted, until the major collecting institutions began to acquire modern and contemporary works. In the case of the National Gallery of Australia, it was Tucker's early work that was acquired in time for its opening in 1982. In the case of the National Gallery of Victoria, it was not until the appointment of Patrick McCaughey as director in the 1980s, and his efforts to acquire works by significant Melbourne artists, that Tucker became better represented in the collection. I turn now to more recent curatorial and art critical discourse about the artist and his work to identify whether any repositioning is taking place in light of further knowledge of international trends, new theory or changes in what is attended to in artworks.

[521] Letter (cc.) James Johnson Sweeney to Albert Tucker, June 16, 1960. Guggenheim Archives, Artist and Object Files, James Johnson Sweeney 1952-1960, Folder 000570, 1960, folder 1960.
[522] For example, when artist, critic and art writer Elwyn Lynn briefly met Alloway in the U.S. in 1964, and discussed the journals he was reading to keep up to date, such as *Art News*, Alloway advised him that the journals *Art Forum* and *Second Coming* might be more useful to keep in touch with emerging trends. Cited in Pinson, Peter, *Elwyn Lynn: Metaphor and Texture*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 2002, p. 53. See Barker and Green, 2011.

Part II – Dissemination: the movement of a work or category into or out of view

7.2 Positioning Tucker in the Twenty-first Century

In this section I briefly discuss key exhibitions since the period of study which have interacted with the art historical accounts above to position Tucker and his work. Two additional art histories and one further Tucker monograph which have appeared, but which simply perpetuate previous accounts, are noted. The monograph, by art writer and curator Gavin Fry (2005), follows a biographical approach after Burke, in which the artist's *oeuvre* is presented as a story.[523] Fry does not make any attempt to reposition Tucker's work from previous categories or accounts. The two chapters most relevant to this study, of the five in total, are titled the 'Art of Darkness' in which pre-war work and Paris work are combined, and 'Travelling Light', focusing on Europe. Fry follows the 'progression of shapes' approach to analysing Tucker's use of symbols, after Hughes, but does not look independently to other potential sources for the imagery. The useful additions by Fry are acknowledgement of Mary Dickson's support in Tucker's career (without the further archival information I have noted (n. 519-21)) and that of Tucker's wife Barbara Tucker in the period subsequent to this study, and reference to Tucker's discovery of the work of Bacon at the 1954 Venice Biennale (referenced also by McCaughey (2006) (n.518)). The monograph was prepared with the assistance of Barbara Tucker.

A significant development in making Tucker's work more accessible and better known is the 2006 opening of the Albert and Barbara Tucker Gallery at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, Victoria (hereafter the 'Tucker Gallery'). Works were donated by Barbara Tucker. The Gallery has mounted a series of themed exhibitions since its opening, a number of which are included in the chronology below. This has made possible a renewed interest in Tucker's work and provides a valuable archive for research.

Particularly relevant to this study, the inaugural Tucker Gallery exhibition held July - November 2006, featured fifty artworks including some from the artist's 1952 *Galerie Huit*, Paris exhibition together with drawings and photographs.[524] Curator Lesley Harding cites links to Cubism (via Picasso-esque figures), Surrealism and Expressionism, as relevant to what she sees as Tucker's continuing interest in portraying psychological states. A further exhibition relevant to

[523] Fry, Gavin, *Albert Tucker*, Beagle Press, Melbourne, 2005.
[524] Harding, Lesley, curator, *Meeting a Dream: Albert Tucker in Paris 1948-1952,* exh. cat., 18 July - 5 November 2006, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, VIC, 2006.

the period of this study was mounted from November 2006 - May 2007 as a re-creation of the joint Tucker-Nolan 1954 Rome exhibition including twenty three of the twenty eight paintings originally exhibited.[525] This exhibition was of interest in raising historical awareness of the activities of the artists in Europe; however, no attempt was made to reposition Tucker as a *matière* painter.

The Tucker Gallery exhibition held May to October 2007, *The Goddess grins: Albert Tucker and the female image*, curated by art historian Sheridan Palmer, examined Tucker's female imagery from the 1930s through 1990s. Palmer is Bernard Smith's biographer. Palmer refers to Tucker's 'psycho-expressionism' (as noted above (7.1, n. 458)) in describing his work of the mid-1940s which she finds reflected European trends. While the exhibition supplements the Heide collection and archives with works borrowed from private and public sources, there is little new in the interpretation of these works. There is no deeper investigation into the origins of the crescent shape, from which the exhibition takes its title. It is treated as a smile or grin, literally. This might have been an opportunity to emphasise the gestural and to draw comparisons to Dubuffet, de Kooning, Bacon, CoBrA and associated international positioning of gestural work. Unfortunately, although the curator indicated the exhibition was intended to show the way in which Tucker empowered and celebrated women, the images are still largely maligned by the public. Due to a lack of understanding of the comic and caricature, as referenced in Chapter Six, Tucker's images of women are still often interpreted as being misogynistic in journalistic reviews.

A 2008 art historical account, *Encounters with Australian Modern Art*, by Heathcote, McCaughey and Thomas, is based around the holdings of the TarraWarra Museum of Art near Melbourne. This private art museum opened to the public in 2003 and features works donated by art collectors and patrons Eva and Marc Besen. The collection is built upon a large number of works by Sidney Nolan and John Perceval acquired when they were de-accessioned from the now defunct MOMAA (opened in 1958 under John Reed's directorship). Like previous art histories, a chronological presentation leads to Albert Tucker's work being grouped into a section titled 'In the Spotlight' or, in my copy of the text, *'Sous les Projecteurs'*, by art critic and historian Patrick McCaughey. This section references the work of John Passmore, Margaret Preston, Sidney Nolan, Tucker (represented by three works), William Dobell, Sali Herman, John Perceval, Arthur Boyd and Charles Blackman. Tucker is associated with 'dark epiphanies' of the urban experience in the *Images* series and 'expressionistic postwar outpourings'[526] The paintings

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[525] _____, curator, *A link and a trust A Link and a Trust: Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan's Rome Exhibition,* exh. cat., 18 November 2006 - 20 May 2007, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, VIC, 2006.
[526] Ibid., pp. 160 and 200.

presented are drawn from the *Images* series as well including *Explorer* (1964) which features a profiled Antipodean head, its face rendered in a wood-grain texture, and topped with hat and dangling corks against a background echoing the ochres of the outback landscape. Tucker is relatively under-represented in this collection which emphasises the work of Perceval and Nolan. Influences on Tucker such as Dubuffet are more fully explored in a later section of the text with reference to gestural painter and curator Tony Tuckson.[527] The categorisation of Tucker's work in the later section is closer to my own view and demonstrates that more recent art histories or curatorial accounts are more cognisant of the influence of Dubuffet. The categorisation of the works relies on an imaginative positioning with the work of Dubuffet, which places them in the gestural abstraction category. However, reviewers are not always clear on how to best classify Dubuffet and this text is no exception. Some Australian reviewers have previously placed Dubuffet in a figurative category (as did Elwyn Lynn).[528]

Another exhibition which drew on the link with Dubuffet in presenting Tucker's work was an eclectic group exhibition held in 2011 in Canberra and Brisbane titled *Inner Worlds: Portraits and Psychology*. Curated by Christopher Chapman, the exhibition juxtaposed work by 'outsiders' or mental health patients (from the Cunningham Dax Collection, Melbourne) with portraits by mainstream artists interested in the subconscious. The artists included Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and Joy Hester, and contemporary works by Mike Parr, Dale Frank and Anne Ferran. Tucker's featured work included faces and figures created in the 1940s along with works by Joy Hester and Sidney Nolan reflecting their interest in psychological trauma and the expression of psychological states through art. While it is of interest to link Tucker to a source like this, it is not particularly helpful in developing an understanding of why it was that artists looked to the art of 'outsiders' in the first place. Although the exhibition is mixed in terms of purpose, at the very least it demonstrates that Tucker is beginning to be shown in different contexts. It also demonstrates that the themes of the period remain contemporary. This is important in terms of transmission as it assists in positioning Tucker's work further toward its original intention and enhances its interest and significance.

A 2011 journal article by Doctoral candidate and curator Glenn Barkley, reflects current interest in re-evaluating past interpretations of artists like Tucker. Barkley too identifies the

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[527] Ibid, p. 130.

[528] Lynn positioned Dubuffet in a group of realist painters along with European painters Oskar Kokoschka, Emile Nolde, Max Beckman, Lovis Corinth, Josef Herman, Francis Gruber and Renato Guttuso in a September 1961 review referencing the Whitechapel exhibition. Lynn, Elwyn, 'Australia Rediscovered', *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1961, pp. 337-339 (338).

connection with the work of Dubuffet and the early interest of the Heide artists in the work of children, mentally ill and 'outsiders'. Like previous accounts by Uhl and Haese above, Barkley references Löwenfeld (1939), noting that the book's illustrations also served as source material for the Reed circle, among them Tucker, Hester and Nolan.[529] The work of Melbourne naïve artist Henry Dearing was also appreciated by the group.[530] In effect this is a step toward repositioning Tucker which raises awareness of the gestural nature of the work and the tactile, haptic aspects as well as its *naïveté* and sources. This spontaneous approach to expression is one of the aims of Tucker's gestural work (Laetz's purpose, Chapter 1) which makes it more interesting as an Australian example of this category.

The British Museum, London mounted an important exhibition in terms of updating the scholarship on the Australian art of the period for overseas audiences from May to September 2011. *Out of Australia: Prints and Drawings from Sidney Nolan to Rover Thomas,* was curated by Stephen Coppel. This recent exhibition presented 126 works by sixty artists in a chronology moving from modernism to contemporary. Interestingly, it began with Albert Tucker. The transitional nature of his work, which bridges the pre- and post-war periods, was an important factor in his inclusion in the exhibition. The catalogue to the exhibition, Coppel notes the breakthroughs in Australian modernism during the 1940s, particularly in the work of Boyd, Nolan and Tucker. While acknowledging Tucker's *Images* series as his best known, Coppel asserts that '[Tucker] produced some of his most interesting and original work during his itinerant years in Paris (1948-50 and 1952), Germany (1951), Italy and Rome (1952-6), London (1956-8) and New York (1958-60)', which therefore deserves our further attention.[531] Clearly, this assessment reflects my own and also reflects the value placed on gestural work of this period for its innovation. This exhibition emphasises prints and drawings and notes Tucker's early use of drawing as a substitute for painting during times when struggling artists found materials expensive and scarce. Tucker had described drawings as 'notes toward paintings' however, the curator observes that in many cases the drawings presented fully resolved works, and paintings did not necessarily ensue.[532] While observing early references to Surrealism through the artist's use of devices such as the Dali-esque 'eye stalk' and the recurring red crescent mouth symbolically denoting sexuality, the catalogue essay identifies the strong influence of Jean Dubuffet,

[529] Barkley, Glenn, 'Overlapping Worlds: Outsider Art in an Australian Context', in *Art & Australia*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2011, pp. 718-727 (723).
[530] Idem. See Chapter 6, n. 365, regarding a 2014-15 Heide exhibition featuring Dearing's work.
[531] Coppel, Stephen, *Out of Australia: Prints and Drawings from Sidney Nolan to Rover Thomas*, exh. cat., 26 May - 11 September 2011, The British Museum, British Museum Press, London, 2011, p. 24.
[532] Ibid., p 26.

references to archaeological forms, slashing and other techniques featured in the exhibited works which led to the artist's later series of 'landscaped' Antipodean heads. This assessment of Tucker's contribution is closest to my own. Tucker's work is followed in the exhibition by that of Joy Hester, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and dark works by Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack, Erwin Fabian, Klaus Friedberger and Louis Kahan. After these, the Melbourne figurative painters and socialist realists John Brack, Charles Blackman, Noel Counihan are presented before Fred Williams, Eric Thake and finally the mixed media studies by Robert Klippel.

I noted in Chapter Four (4.3) that Grishin's recent book, *Australian Art: A History*, 2013, does not reposition Tucker from the placement he received in the accounts of Smith and Hughes. Again, an opportunity to focus on the gestural features of Tucker's work and potentially reposition it in the international context was lost. Surprisingly this is due to the fact Grishin, following the example of Smith and Hughes, chooses to omit from sight works produced outside Australia, unless they were exhibited in Australia during the period of production. This means that for artists like Tucker, who produced and exhibited in an overseas field of production before showing their new work in Australia, such work was hidden from view. Art historian Rex Butler noted in 2013, when speaking of artists who had been omitted from Australian art history, that this practice started with Smith.[533] An earlier art history, *The Story of Australian Art*, 1939, by Brisbane critic William Moore who monitored overseas developments in the art world, particularly in France, did not take such an approach. A countervailing view and interest in cosmopolitanism has been the subject of individual ad hoc studies and exhibitions from time to time.[534]

Finally, the most recent thematic exhibition of Tucker's work, *Albert Tucker: The Truth in Masquerade*, held at the Tucker Gallery from February to August 2015, examined Tucker's sources in theatre, amusement parks and the carnivalesque. This expands on comments made by McAuliffe in 2011, noted in Chapter Six, with respect to the exhibition *Albert Tucker: images of modern evil*.[535] Acknowledging the carnivalesque aspect of Tucker's work is a step toward a linkage with the European gestural work of the period and with comic/tragic ambivalence and caricature found in the work of European artists discussed in Chapter Six. As discussed earlier in this thesis, Tucker drew on a variety of international sources and while his Melbourne experience

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533 Butler, Rex, '*A new impression of Australian art',* 13 August 2013, available at <http://www.abc.net.au/arts/blog/arts-desk/Rex-Butler-Australian-Impressionists-NGV-130812/default.htm>, accessed 5 August 2015.

534 One such exhibition is *Australian Impressionists in France, held at the The Ian Potter Centre, NGV, 15 June – 06 October 2013.*

535 See Ch. 6, n. 448 and n. 449.

with amusement parks and theatre may have provided some inspiration, such themes were evident in work by many modernist artists.

I note that an exhibition at Heide Museum of Modern Art, titled *Abstraction: The Heide Collection from Nolan to the 90s*, 4 July - 11 October 2015, includes a range of artists from the period of study, however, omits Tucker.[536] Sidney Nolan is included as is Sydney artist Robert Klippel. Contemporary artist Aida Tomescu is included. The exhibition goal is stated as bringing together a range of individual approaches to abstraction with a focus on 'painters who share a gestural or lyrical style of mark-making'. One can only surmise that Tucker's gestural work is omitted either because it is held in collections of other galleries (NGA and NGV) or because the preference is to present Tucker's work in the range of themed exhibitions noted above. While this exhibition does show that awareness of gestural abstraction has increased over the past five years or so, it is unfortunate that these aspects of Tucker's work cannot be showcased in this context. The addition of Aida Tomescu's work presents a contemporary *matière* approach while Tucker's pioneering work in this tendency is omitted.

7.3 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined art historical accounts, acquisitions of Tucker's work by major collecting institutions and recent exhibitions in which Tucker has been included to identify any movement in the positioning of his work within the art historical narrative. It seems that the foundational positioning of Tucker within the Melbourne Angry Penguin pre-war avant-garde group of artists by Bernard Smith and Robert Hughes has been difficult to counter. Recent exhibitions, particularly *Out of Australia,* at the British Museum, London, (2011), are beginning to identify the more interesting and important aspects of Tucker's gestural work. The Heide Museum of Modern Art is gradually moving toward exploration of gestural abstraction. Up until recently, the ongoing involvement of its patron Barbara Tucker and the thematic approach to presenting the Tucker legacy by mining the collection, has tended to preclude any movement in categorisation, other than incremental acknowledgement of standard features pertinent to characterisation of the work. Renewed interest in Tucker's work, however, is being spawned by the contemporary interest in outsider art and this holds promise for exploring Tucker's gestural *oeuvre* more fully, given its focus on the primitive and its affinity with the work of Dubuffet, Bacon, and the CoBrA artists I have highlighted throughout this thesis.

[536] See < http://www.heide.com.au/exhibitions/now-showing/exhibition/abstraction-the-heide-collection-from-nolan-to-the-90s/edate/2015-07-04/eid/946>, accessed 21 August 2015.

In the next chapter, I delineate my Bourdieusian influenced analysis based on the framework developed in Part I of this thesis, propose future research directions and draw final conclusions.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Explicating the Lack of Appreciation for Tucker's Gestural Abstraction

Gestural abstraction and innovative features in the work of Albert Tucker were neither recognised nor appreciated at the time of the initial Australian reception of these works and in subsequent art historical accounts. In this thesis I identified reasons for this oversight by examining the way in which art critics and art historians have approached categorisation of Tucker's work and how it might be repositioned in future curatorial or art historical projects to better appreciate its significance.

While art critics and art historians correctly perceived the descriptive properties standard for gestural abstraction in Tucker's work produced between 1947 and 1963; categorisation, and hence the key features brought into view, varied between reviewers as did their evaluative responses. Tucker's purpose was to present his work in a primitivist or naïve manner, drawing on the archaic and myth. Australian art critical discourse, however, was not always attuned to the artist's intention and was coloured by the debates of the day (and predominantly that of figuration versus abstraction) as well as by the continuing desire of some critics and art historians to identify a national 'school' or character for 'Australian art'. Further, such discourse was also limited by the degree to which reviewers and critics had themselves been exposed to a sufficient number of works characteristic of emerging tendencies (discernible variations) and were conversant with contemporary trends.

Art critics and reviewers in Australia for the most part were not formally trained and reviews were often little more than journalistic reportage.[537] (From the 1960s, a new generation of Australian art critics was more receptive to contemporary art and in particular to abstract art.[538]) Australian art and international contemporary art were not part of the university curriculum for art

[537] See Heathcote, 1995, pp. 180-181. See Olsen, John, *Drawn from Life*, Duffy and Snellgrove, Sydney, 1997, p. 87. Olsen describes the Sydney exhibition review process whereby all the critics viewed the exhibitions together. 'Criticisms then were all written in the gallery, and every critic had his special spot to work. It was not unusual, going into Macquarie Galleries on Tuesday, to see all the critics scribbling their notes…Quite often, critics would argue the respective merits of an exhibition in the gallery itself.' This explains why common threads often run through the criticisms offered by different reviewers. It is not so much a matter of having read another's review but a function of discussing or debating the merits of the exhibitions together before writing the reviews.

[538] See Heathcote, 1995, p. 113. Patrick McCaughey and *The Australian's* art critic Laurie Thomas were among the better credentialed critics who were better placed to write about abstraction than some of the earlier critics of the period. Heathcote notes a 'resurgence in art writing' in the 1960s.

history studies in Australia during this period and the circulation of international art journals was limited.[539] Before the 1960s, major collecting institutions in Australia had not begun to collect contemporary Australian art, often focusing their collection strategies toward acquiring British art. Artists' strategies in navigating the fields of cultural production and reception (Chapter 5) were not always effective. The power of leading critics, who often favoured one group or style over another in the fields of production and reception, was immense.[540] So too was the influence of dominant dealer/gallerists in particular art worlds. The Australian gallery system was developing at this time and toward the close of the period began to adopt practices more similar to overseas models with the opening of a number of new commercial galleries in the early 1960s.[541]

Tucker's early work was generally categorised in Australian reviews and art historical accounts as figurative Expressionist and Surrealist. His later work was considered figurative or semi-abstract but was not discussed as *matière* or texture painting, as was the painting of Sydney artist and critic Elwyn Lynn whose work also emphasised materials. I argue that in relation to Tucker's *oeuvre*, his gestural work produced during the period of this study is of greatest significance. The category of allusive abstraction, a subset of gestural abstraction, was not recognised in Australia and often such work was categorised as 'landscape' or figurative depending on the configuration of the work. This was the fate of Tucker's work produced while in Europe and America. Neither had *matière* painting been seen in Australia before 1960. Thus while reviewers were often able to identify the properties of a work, these were not yet associated with an established category. (Recall our Rothko example, Chapter 1.)

In examining Tucker's *oeuvre* within the context of his international peers, I noted that many artists worked in figurative modes during the 1930s and 1940s and later moved toward gestural abstraction. Some returned to figurative modes during the 1960s, others continued to work in abstract and semi-abstract modes throughout their careers. Artists such as Rothko, Fautrier and Dubuffet are best known for their gestural work (and in Rothko's case also for his

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[539] See Barker and Green, 2011.

[540] Artist John Olsen noted in his early autobiography that art criticism had changed for the better over the years. Critics no longer held sufficient power to determine the success or failure of a particular artist. He noted Sydney critic Paul Haefliger's biting and cutting reviews during the period of this study, and remarked on the 'lethal [critical] atmosphere in this country [Australia]'. Olsen, 1997, p. 119.

[541] In Sydney, early commercial galleries included Macquarie (est. 1925) and Grosvenor (est. 1925), with new galleries opening later in the period including Terry Clune (est. 1957), Rudy Kumon (est. 1959), and later Bonython's Hungry Horse Gallery (est. 1966). Previously, contemporary art had been shown at department store galleries such as David Jones Galleries and Farmer's Blaxland, and the CAS. See, Anderson, Patricia, 'Elwyn Lynn's Art World', in *Quadrant*, Sept. 1997, pp. 17-20 (p. 18); and see Heathcote, 1995, for the Melbourne scene (pp. 134-5). Gallery A, Melbourne, featuring abstract art opened in 1959 and expanded to Sydney in 1964.

subsequent colour field work). In Tucker's case, the artist became identified with figuration and the Melbourne Angry Penguins group of the early 1940s, rather than becoming known for his mature gestural and *matière* work. The reasons for this included the power of patrons (Reed), strong critics and art historians (Smith, Hughes), and the curatorial narratives through which Tucker's work was introduced to the public (such as the *Rebels and Precursors* exhibition) which focused on the pre-war period. This is all the more remarkable considering that it was Tucker's gestural work that brought him to the attention of the two major New York collecting institutions which acquired his work, serving to anchor his reputation as one of the most recognised Australian artists of the day. In terms of art historical accounts, Bernard Smith's decision to exclude art made overseas, unless it had already been exhibited in Australia, from his influential account of the history of Australian art meant that Tucker's gestural body of work was placed out of view while his lesser, early works were included. Surprisingly, this practice has been perpetuated as noted in Chapter Seven. Luckily, although his gestural work and acknowledgement of Tucker's use of *matière* techniques was excluded from Smith's art history, newspaper reviews and journals featured articles about Tucker's work and technique in response to his overseas exhibitions and his U.S. success in selling works to MOMA and the Guggenheim. However, while the record is there, the art history writing whose influence still pervades perception of Tucker's work is Bernard Smith's.

Confusion as to how to best classify Tucker's work could be attributed to its semi-abstract form, the use of devices which were also standard features of the tendency of Surrealism, and the novelty of the *matière* tendency which had not been seen before in Australia. In addition, much of Tucker's work was considered unappealing to the uninitiated due to its vulgarity and the shock of its crude, 'anti-aesthetic' nature. Its self-conscious primitivism was little understood (and was in fact a gestural act) and its humour was often overlooked. There was also a strong preference for figuration by reviewers and historians such as Bernard Smith who favoured socialist realism over abstraction reflecting both his political leanings and connoisseurship approach.[542] The language of art criticism was still evolving in response to practice as we have seen throughout this thesis. Critics and reviewers did not, in many cases, have a sufficient art specific vocabulary or common terms of reference to describe and interpret gestural abstract works. Unlike the art worlds of the

[542] Connoisseurship refers to the view that good taste and a higher sensibility are necessary for appreciating the quality of art. Art critics may be considered arbiters of taste. British art critic Clive Bell, in an earlier period, and Greenberg and Bernard Smith during the period of study were examples of critics as 'tastemakers' (4.3, 5.4). See Jones, 2005, pp. 70 and 76. 'Abstract quality … was something you recognised when you saw it – if you had an Eye' (p. 76). Only Greenberg and his followers could arbitrate where such quality lay. Dissenting critics such as John Canaday of *The New York Times* were quashed. See Canaday, John, *Embattled Critic: Views on Modern Art*, Farrar, Straus, New York, [1959] 1963.

U.K. and the U.S., there was no tradition of formalist analysis of art works which may have assisted in responding to abstract work. Further, the subject matter of work of this period posed a descriptive and interpretive challenge for critics where it was said to be indicative of a 'state of mind'. Knowledge of European gestural styles was limited in Australia. As demonstrated through the example earlier in this thesis of critic Robert Hughes' interpretation of a comment made by Barr regarding Tucker's work, utterances in one art world could impact on reception in another quite differently when taken out of context. This was particularly the case where a new category was not yet understood in a field of reception removed from the field of production.

In contrast, art historian Natalie Adamson notes that Descargues, a French journalist art reviewer without a formal art history background, in a 1953 article for the *Premier Bilan de l'art Actuel* entitled '*Les Frontaliers'* ('Boundary Dwellers'), talked about the rebirth of abstract art in the mid-Twentieth Century and the artists working at the juncture of non-figuration and figuration.[543] This 'group' of disparate artists was said to operate independently between realism and abstraction. Descargues looked upon this as 'a fusion of tendencies' and it represented a position in the field which artists could choose to take up. Since there was no longer an avant-garde, Descargues called this group the '*arriere-garde'* of modern art. I noted in Chapter Four that the *figural*, allusive or semi-abstract was recognised in France, as this example demonstrates, as well as in London, by Alloway for example.

While it has become more common for artists to be known for their work in more than one stylistic tendency, this was problematic for reviewers and art historians of the period who attempted to categorise artists to fit their preferred teleological narratives as we saw in Chapter Four (Barr and Greenberg were two examples). In Tucker's case, the work within his *oeuvre* might have been categorised as figurative modernist/expressionist with respect to his earlier pre-war experimental work, followed by gestural abstractionist (*tachiste* or allusive) and *matière* in his later work. European critics noted that his work spanned both figuration and the gestural. Beyond the period of study Tucker also produced gestural portraiture and made sculptures based on his gestural imagery. He is most often categorised in art historical accounts as figurative Expressionist and Surrealist. However, as we have seen, he was not a Surrealist but made a few early experimental works based on Surrealism as did the American Abstract Expressionists like Rothko. Australian reviewers did not recognise that during the 1940s, American artists were producing works concerned with myth and the primitive in what art critic Sam Hunter termed 'a

[543] Adamson, 2009, p. 227.

form of symbolic, surrealist-tinctured abstraction'.[544] This description is apt in describing the work of Tucker and the Heide modernists in their experimental pursuits at that time. Tucker went on to combine allusive abstraction with the emphasis on materials of *matière* painting in making an original contribution with his 'landscape-in-heads'. However, the paintings have proven difficult to position within popular classification categories used at the time and still pervading contemporary classification of this work. Tucker's *Images* series is known as emblematic of the 1940s Angry Penguins period in Melbourne and this is the work for which Tucker is mainly known in Australia. As discussed in Chapter Seven, however, this body of work was not produced as a series. The works are small sized sketch-like paintings that were made in that format due to the scarcity of materials at the time and their experimental nature.[545] In contrast, I have argued that Tucker's most original work, and of most interest, is his matière gestural work produced in Europe and the U.S.

The difficulty in categorising Tucker's work was summed up by Hughes who called Tucker 'an unclassifiable eccentric if ever there was one'.[546] As I have noted in earlier chapters, it was not uncommon for artists during this period to resist classification. A number of American Abstract Expressionists did so, sometimes quite vocally, writing letters to newspaper editors in the event their work was mis-categorised by a reviewer or publishing their versions of their intentions in manifestos. Among the best known artists to whom this categorisation dilemma applied were Dubuffet, de Kooning and Bacon. A passage in a MOMA exhibition catalogue of 1955 included the observation that, 'among artists of the past decade there are, fortunately, a few embattled eccentrics like Dubuffet and Bacon, who go their own way.'[547] I argue that Tucker too could be positioned in this *figural* or semi-abstract category (within allusive or gestural abstraction (4.5) depending on the degree of emphasis placed on materials).

A further issue in consecration of an artist and his or her work and their transmission (or subsequent influence) is the quality of art critical discourse and the scope and methodology of previous art historical investigation. Art history was a new discipline in Australia in the 1960s and

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[544] Hunter, 1956, p. 178.
[545] See 'Playing the Art Circuit with Albert Tucker', in *The Bulletin*, December 7, 1960, p. 14. This article highlights gallery and dealer practices with respect to showing artists' work and the applicable commission structures. The review indicates that Tucker kept most of his early work including drawings and sketches. Tucker states his intention to release his work to the market in controlled batches. One such batch of work appears to have been the group we now know as the *Images* series as discussed in Chapter 7.
[546] See Ch. 6, n.402.
[547] Ritchie, Andrew Carrduff, *The New Decade: 22 European Painters and Sculptors*, exh. cat., MOMA, 1955, p. 9, cited in D'Souza, Aruna,' 'I Think Your Work Looks a Lot Like Dubuffet': Dubuffet and America, 1946-1962', in *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1997, pp. 61-73.

those who wrote previous histories were still active in the field, including in the education of art historians and writing art criticism.

A further reason for the lack of transmission of a satisfactory interpretation of Tucker's gestural work in Australian art history accounts is the way in which art history is presented and published. Writing in 1983, Terry Smith, commented on the difference between the popular version of Australian art prepared for a non-specialist public as compared to a more academic version (for use in art history education). In fact, he found, the popular version of art history, which tends to be a form of mythology referencing Australian landscape, the bush and the artist hero, was not very different from that included in histories such as Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting 1788-1970*. (I would add Grishin's *Australian Art: A History* (2013) to the list of such publications.) The format of such histories generally provides biographical information about each artist, and possibly information about their circle, and commentary on selected artworks. As Terry Smith states, content is confined to 'source-pointing and shorthand characterisations, especially stylistic ones'.[548] I have found this to be the case with the more commercial generalist art histories reviewed in this study while the more academic, artist monographs, often following from academic research are more relevant and apt. It is beyond the scope of the survey style art histories, spanning many periods, to include sufficient information to adequately contextualise an artist within his or her field of cultural production. However, it is easy to pass along stories sketched decades ago and repeated without further investigation. As I have noted throughout this study, while reviewers and art historians may have been able to identify and describe perceptual properties of works, they have not always attributed the appropriate 'active category' to the work to focus attention on its most important features for appreciation. I have argued that field theory can assist in determining additional areas for examination to verify the category and apprehend the work appropriately to satisfy the criteria identified by Walton as the correct categorisation.

This leads to the delicate discussion of how we come to know the histories that have been perpetuated. As we have seen, artistic utterances can be influenced by a 'social desirability response' when an artist is questioned by an influential interviewer or critic and responds in a manner they think to be expected. Artist statements are therefore often taken to be unreliable and yet artists are often quoted. Similarly, art historian Elizabeth D. Ermarth observes that historical

[548] Smith, 1983, p. 21.

method is rarely spoken or weighed.[549] While objectivity is assumed, 'method silently inscribes ideas.' As we have seen in Chapter Four, even academic researchers may base their judgment on an incomplete knowledge of relevant tendencies or sources of reference for the subject or artist being researched (through an error of omission). In Chapter Four, we saw the range of methodologies open to the art historian, any of which may be used depending on the focus of the study. Limitations must be identified for the method chosen and interpretation risks mitigated where possible. Generally, however, historians do not detail their methodology. Further, no matter how detailed the research design there is always the possibility an important aspect or position in the field will be overlooked which can impact on how we come to know the work or artist being studied. The use of field theory to guide relevant contextualising is advocated in this study due to its recognition of the need for the researcher to identify the full range of key positions and exchanges in the relevant fields of cultural production and the larger field of power. These are involved in the process of the making and reception of an artwork and the processes by which the artist's influence and significance is understood and transmitted. Of course, if a limiting assumption is imposed by the researcher, which serves to truncate the field, such as omitting all works of a particular type from the analysis, the validity of the findings may be compromised. In the case of analysing an artist's positioning, all applicable art worlds need to be considered.

8.2 Research Directions: Contextualising Tucker's Gestural Abstraction – Past, Present, Future

I propose that Tucker's gestural work can be located within the fields of art critical discourse (reception) and transmission in five phases. The first three cover past and present. Phase I relates to the period of the artist's international reception, described in Chapter Six, during which acquisitions were made by MOMA and the Guggenheim. This phase positioned Tucker with other international artists working in gestural modes. Phase II, upon his return to Australia, placed Tucker within the context defined in the exhibitions *Rebels and Precursors*, and the MOMAA exhibitions (6.3). This did not focus on the gestural at all, emphasising figurative Expressionism and Surrealism. Subsequent exhibitions during the artist's lifetime perpetuated this narrative. Post-mortem phases in the field of transmission include three phases. Phase III, in which the Heide Museum of Modern Art thematic exhibitions are included, focuses on particular themes in Tucker's art as discussed in Chapter Seven (7.2). For the most part, these have drawn on elements identified in passing in earlier exhibitions or art historical accounts. While tending to

[549] Ermarth, Elizabeth Deeds, 'The closed space of choice: A manifesto on the future of history', in Jenkins, Keith et al, eds., *Manifestos for History*, Routledge, London, 2007, pp. 50-66.

perpetuate the status quo in Tucker's positioning, there is some movement in the way in which Tucker is being presented, as evidenced by the recent exhibition examining the carnivalesque (2015) and comic/tragic ambivalence of Tucker's work discussed in earlier chapters (5.2 and 6.2).

Two new phases or future directions are envisaged in this thesis. Phase IV, toward which this thesis attempts to make a contribution, is one in which Tucker's significance in introducing the *matière* category to Australia will come to be acknowledged. His work can further be re-contextualised with the relevant discernible variations of the categories manifested in his work as identified in earlier chapters. This will position his European produced gestural work with that of the CoBrA artists, Bacon, Davie, Sutherland, Dubuffet, and disembodied head imagery generally. The primitive and caricatural aspects will be aptly identified and appreciated through this category. Finally, there is an emerging interest in the haptic which is of utmost relevance to appreciation of Tucker's work. Recent exhibitions exploring the primitive and an interest in outsider art have taken a step in this direction but not specifically in relation to Tucker's work. This can now be addressed. A 2015 exhibition at the Tate Britain, London, focused on the para-haptic, raising awareness of this aspect of experiencing art work.[550] Phase V, which pertains to the gestural work of all the artists noted in Phase IV, would formally recognise the haptic. This includes the viewer's affective response to these works and the notion of embodiment.

I have located this project in the field of transmission as a way of demonstrating the continuing relevance of Tucker's work. Reviewers at the time of production also noted that art critical discourse of the day was inadequate to deal with this aspect of a direct experiential response to art (5.3, 5.4). This was in fact the non-standard feature of painting styles of the time which led to the inception of terms such as 'action painting' and 'gestural' in the first place. The haptic was also discussed with respect to the scale of a painting with artists like Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman relating the scale of a person (the viewer) to his 'zipped' works and their orientation (in which the life-sized vertical is emphasised). Tucker also adopted a life sized scale in his later *Explorer* series of paintings. The haptic is particularly applicable in the 'anti-aesthetic', *l'art brut* and assemblage related categories. These works can all be more fully appreciated by this repositioning. The haptic qualities of Tucker's art have not been adequately explored, although revulsion was noted even in response to Tucker's pre-war work. Rather than connecting these works to outsider art, here we find 'insider' artists deliberately accessing the primitive and choosing material or medium for its emotive impact and sensuality. Again, it is hoped

[550] Tate Britain, *Tate Sensorium*, London, 2015 (see Intro., n. 8).

this thesis will contribute toward and motivate interest in further study to facilitate greater appreciation of the significance of Tucker's gestural work.

This lack of previous attention to the haptic, apart from receiving passing mention in art historical accounts following from Uhl's 1969 study, leads to the issue of the way in which viewer attention is directed to perceive particular properties of art works by critics and art historians in virtue of the way they categorise the work.

8.3 Bringing the Gestural into View

Within the field of transmission there has not been any major repositioning of Tucker's work over time. The focus of the exhibitions of the early 1960s was on Tucker's earlier work of the 1940s. Exhibitions to re-launch an awareness of Tucker's work during the 1980s perpetuated earlier themes. Opportunities to vary the narrative were present during the 1980s when the NGV acquired gestural works by Tucker (and consciously chose contemporary rather than the pre-war examples), but this did not occur.

The opening of the Albert Tucker Gallery of the Heide Museum of Modern Art in 2006 was a major milestone, presenting potential for re-evaluating Tucker's work. Exhibitions are gradually moving toward drawing attention to the gestural without going so far as to say the work is not German Expressionist influenced or Surrealist in nature. The focus has been on a themed approach to presenting the collection with exhibition narrative drawing on art historical methods of biography, influences on the artist and psychological analysis. In contrast, the recent interest in outsider art provides an opportunity to look again at Tucker's work and its primitivist aims. The stylistic characteristics which Tucker's work shares with that of Dubuffet, have attracted a sustained and increasing interest in international contemporary art, suggesting a continuing interest in his work is probable if aptly categorised.

The semi-abstract nature of Tucker's work may make it interesting to contemporary viewers who are now accustomed to viewing the naïve work of American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, graffiti and street art. In contrast, the work of Elwyn Lynn, who adopted a more 'all-over' *matière* style, has been described as lacking in intrinsic interest.[551] A similar criticism has at times

[551] For example critic Alan McCulloch said of a 1970 exhibition of Lynn's texture paintings that the surfaces were 'petrified waves and ruffles that were allusive and near-classic', lacking the 'element of surprise'… which 'had made

been leveled at the work of Burri.[552] Nonetheless, interest in the *matière* stylistic tendency is likely to increase with the opening of the blockbuster retrospective *Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting* at the Guggenheim, New York, running from October 9, 2015 to January 6, 2016. In addition, in Australia the work of contemporary émigré artist Aida Tomescu presents an updated version of *matière* often in lighter, brighter colours executed in a heavy impasto technique. Tomescu is typical of the articulate contemporary artist conversant with art history and theory. She draws upon art history and theory to compare her work to that of the period of Abstract Expressionism. Her inclusion in the exhibition of lyrical abstraction at Heide and in the new Grishin art history has served to consecrate her position as an established contemporary gestural painter.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, the 2011 London exhibition of Australian prints and drawings at the British Museum, *Out of Australia,* was a considered attempt to try to break down the stereotype of Australian art and drew attention to Tucker's gestural work. In contrast, the most recent group survey exhibition of Australian art held in London in 2013 at the Royal Academy, elicited a variety of negative responses. Titled *Australia*, the landscape themed exhibition was organised by the NGA and presented some 212 paintings by Australian artists. Tucker's Surrealist inspired work *Sunbathers*, 1944, was included (Figure 8.1).[553] While Tucker's gestural work was not included, the larger body of all artists' works presented included allusive abstract works which could have benefited from positioning them as 'gestural' in nature. A better representative of Tucker's work for the exhibition might have been an example of his unique landscape-in-head *matière* work or a cratered lunar surface. While the exhibition received some positive reviews, the more negative reviews found a number of the works presented to be 'derivative' of European tendencies, echoing critical responses to the Tate exhibition of 1963 (5.5).

It is interesting that British reviewers today still do not acknowledge the expatriate artists who worked in Europe during the postwar years as having being part of the field of cultural production in which their work was produced. Rather than being derivative, these artists actively

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Tàpies great'. See Pinson, 2002, p. 79. Hughes, in 1963, had described Lynn's work as 'completely objective' in contrast to that of Tucker who he called 'an illusionist'. Hughes, 'Hard Pastes', *Sunday Mirror*, 1 April, 1963.

[552] See Alloway, Lawrence, *Art International*, 'London Letter', Vol. IV, No. 4, 1960, p. 53. LAP, Box 30/17. Alloway states, 'the effect of group of Burris on me is of oppression and monotony, because the work lacks the sign-quality of painting or the idol-dimension of sculpture…Burri's manipulative skill is insufficient to lighten the dead weight of his materials.'

[553] Curator Anna Gray indicated this work was included as an example of the 'weirdness' of Australia which has been portrayed in landscape painting. She contrasts the 'hunks of blistering flesh thrown down on lurid sand backed by a blackened sky' presented in Tucker's *Sunbathers* with Max Dupain's 'iconic 1930s image of the sunbaker with drops of water glistening on his bronzed shoulders'. See Gray, Anna, 'Exhibiting Australia at the Royal Academy, 2013', AAANZ 'Inter-discipline' conference proceedings, December 2014, pp. 7 and 9, available at < http://aaanz.info/aaanz-home/conferences/aaanz-inter-discipline-proceedings>, accessed 2 September 2015.

occupied positions in the cultural field or artistic milieu from which the observed tendencies sprang. They were part of an international *coterie* of artists, working in Europe at the time, all of whom interpreted gestural techniques in their own way. It is perhaps a shortcoming of the way in which the *Australia* 2013 exhibition was presented that the curators did not convey the circumstances of the works' making. A review of the debate raised by the 2013 London exhibition in the Australian press questioned whether in fact such an exhibition makes sense today when Australia is no longer seeking approval for its art, why landscape would be the focus of the exhibition, and why the London art world would be interested.[554]

I note that confusion is still evident among some Australian curatorial professionals as to how to classify abstract art works. The NGA symposium on Abstract Expressionism titled 'Action. *Painting. Now.',* held in August 2012, accompanied an exhibition of abstract art drawn from major Australian collecting institutions. The works featured were said to be examples of Abstract Expressionism ('gestural abstraction' in this study), however, among them were included some geometric abstraction and some modernist/expressionist works.[555] Comments made during the question and answer times reinforced this perception of confusion. The answers given as to why a number of paintings were included in the exhibition did not clear this up. In visiting the NGA galleries during the conference, Tucker's work could be found in the Expressionism and the Surrealism themed galleries.

In considering how the positioning of an artist and his or her work may shift over time, I return to an illustrative example of the work of American artist Cy Twombly referenced in Chapter Five. The critical dismissal and historiographical misapprehension of gestural abstraction has been discussed by Neely (2010) with respect to Twombly's work.[556] Neely posits that viewers needed some understanding of the process of production and the reason for its historical

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[554] Totaro, Paola, 'A worthy display covering 200 years or another cringe festival?', in *The Weekend Australian*, Inquirer, September 28-29, 2013, p. 22. See Gray, Anna, 'Exhibiting Australia at the Royal Academy, 2013', accessed at AAANZ 'Inter-discipline' conference proceedings, December 2014, available at < http://aaanz.info/aaanz-home/conferences/aaanz-inter-discipline-proceedings>, accessed 20 August 2015.

[555] Among the included works were Stanislaus Rapotec's *Experience in the Far West*, 1961, a dark gestural work with calligraphic elements alluding to figuration; Ralph Balson's *Matter Painting*, 1960, an experimental dripped or poured work rather than a matter painting; another Balson, *Matter Painting No. 4*, 1962, which *is* a matter painting incorporating sand and enamel; Ian Fairweather's *House by the Sea*, 1967, an all-over *déypaysage* work with figurative elements, and Helen Frankenthaler's *Cape (Provincetown)* 1964, an early colour field work. Balson's work exhibited elsewhere in the NGV galleries at this time included the geometric abstraction for which he is best known, such as *Painting* 1941, and a constructivist (geometric) work, *No. 10*, 1944. See a selection of included works at <http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/abstractexpress/Default.cfm?MnuID=ARTISTS>, accessed 2 September 2015.

[556] Neely, 2010. Similarly, Gaskin in Garlake (2001) notes that recent scholarship in the U.K. has also been dismissive of gestural abstraction as an oddity in the development of late modernism (Gaskin in Garlake, 2001, p. 46).

invention to appreciate Twombly's work. Neely calls this 'apprehensive reconstruction' which occurs when a viewer is able to fully engage with the work. In Twombly's case, according to Neely, a shift in positioning occurred as gestural work became unfashionable during the early 1960s, resulting in Twombly's work being aligned with graffiti. In effect this stripped the meaning from the artist's gesture. The all-over composition of Twombly's work, however, would clearly categorise it with Abstract Expressionism, following earlier codes of categorisation. It is interesting to note that at the end of the period of production in Rome, Twombly presented his series *Nine Discourses on Commodus* (1963) in New York in 1964 to reviews deriding it as 'School of Paris' or '*Art Informel*'. The series was allegorically allusive and while the title references discourse, recall that Motherwell was releasing his *Elegies* at the same time. The significant difference between them is that Motherwell's work was produced in America while Twombly's was produced in Rome. Consequently, Twombly received the lukewarm reception many Australian artists did when returning from an extended period overseas. Motherwell's work was well received in spite of the fact that by this time Pop art, Minimalism and Colour Field Painting had overtaken the earlier gestural Abstract Expressionist style in popularity.

To explain and apprehend novel elements in Tucker's work, and bring them into view for the audience, it is useful to look to other artists of the period who were part of the field of cultural production. We have seen that the appropriation of Surrealist devices, used in a new way, in proto-abstract expressionism is an important example. In cases where reviewers or critics were distanced from the novel apprehension of such features in the field of production, as were the Australian art critics, reception was reliant on old interpretations and novelty was misunderstood or rejected altogether. This, I contend is the issue with respect to Tucker's gestural work, particularly his allusive mindscapes (and lunar landscapes), cratered head, landscape-in-head and explorer works. In all of these, the surface qualities of the works were predominant, yet in many cases reviewers chose to cling to the vestiges of figuration and invoke narrative subject matter. By drawing attention to the presence of features common not only to the novel use of Surrealist elements, but to the myth-based symbolic early abstraction and the primitive in the work of other artists such as those suggested above, the perceived features can be understood as standard for the active category of gestural abstraction, and in particular of *matière* or allusive abstraction. Early works of the American Abstract Expressionists or European *Informel* artists could serve as appropriate reference groups.

I am not proposing that Tucker's work in any way presents 'all-overness' found in a Pollock skein (dripped) painting. Rather, his work has affinities to the gestural artists I have identified in earlier chapters. Affinities were identified with the CoBrA artists, in respect of their cartoon-like, monster and totem imagery; with the *haute pâtes* of Fautrier and Dubuffet, the collages of Schwitters; and with the primitive Picasso / Klee / Dubuffet head shapes and *l'art brut*. With respect to the depiction of women and the figure, Tucker employs fragmented body parts and savage gestural brush work similar to the immediacy of the work of de Kooning or Bacon and drawing on the viscous nature of *l'art brut*. This is often associated with sexuality and vulgarity. (Australian reviewers simply took this to be a continuation of Tucker's pre-war 'outrage' narrative or misogynistic attitude toward women which had been initiated through review comments rather than from the artist's espoused intent as previously noted.) Tucker also employs caricature and humour in his painterly rendering of figures. Like de Kooning, Tucker continued with easel painting. However, he later created larger works as many gallerist/dealers had begun to recommend. Tucker's early work, for which he became best known, was very small in size, in part due to the preference of the time, the scarcity of materials and the experimental nature of the works, many of which appear as potential studies or sketches for later works.

For early reviewers and the viewing public alike, the ability to locate an abstract work to make it meaningful was determined by awareness of the broader field of production and suitable comparative works in order to connect it to its place within the realm or genre of painting. Only in this way could they grasp the significance of the creation of a gestural work, rather than merely analysing its formal properties. The term 'action painting' was known as was 'painterly' execution. Rosenberg identified the critic's role as one of mediating between action painters and an unreceptive public. Existentialist interpretations of gestural work later went out of fashion, post-1960. Concepts such as 'embodiment' and 're-creative experience' were some time away in the development of art critical terminology. We have now arrived at a deeper level of understanding of ways to appreciate abstract art and such terms can now begin to be explored in our continuing interest in Tucker's gestural works. Enabling the viewing public to engage with these works in a new way is a project to be explored in future curatorial and revisionary art historical research and exhibitions.

8.4 Conclusion

Renewed interest in Tucker's work is being spawned by contemporary interest in outsider art. This provides an opportunity for exploring Tucker's gestural *oeuvre* more fully, given its focus on the

primitive and its affinity with the work of Dubuffet, Bacon, and the CoBrA artists I have highlighted throughout this thesis. In order to fully appreciate Tucker's gestural contribution, what is required is not merely a curatorial juxtaposition of his work with that of other artists to provoke thought. In addition to moving forward to Phases IV and V of my recommendations above and highlighting the gestural categories in any new revisionary art histories to be published, a wholesale re-evaluation of the work of the group of Australian artists who worked in European gestural modalities during the period needs to be undertaken. This will identify the appropriate reference classes with which such work must be contextualised if its significance is to be appreciated. In so doing, it is possible the significance of other artists, already acknowledged in art historical accounts, may shift within our art historical landscape. Through the use of the framework developed in this thesis, it is hoped the category of gestural abstraction in the work of Australian artists can now be formally recognised and appreciated. This may also serve to enhance the value placed on the work of our contemporary gestural artists.

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