What could have been and never was: the intellectual context of Clement Greenberg's 'Byzantine Parallels'

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When presented with the observation that a painting by Barnett Newman looks like a Byzantine mosaic, Donald Judd replied, 'A lot of things look alike, but they're not necessarily very much alike.'[1] Judd responded to what he likely viewed as a truism – the assertion that modern art looks like Byzantine art – with a truism of his own. Visual resemblance does not indicate ontological equivalence. In this instance, Judd precludes further discussion with his interviewer on the topic. Yet the comparative approach, especially pertaining to the relationship between medieval and modern, has found renewed interest amongst contemporary art historians. By virtue of their specialized training, many scholars who transgress the boundaries of conventional periodization tend to be pre- or early modernists.[2]

A perspective from the modernist side of the border comes from Clement Greenberg in his essay, 'Byzantine Parallels,' written in 1958.[3] Prior to Judd's dismissal of the Byzantine-modern connection, Greenberg reached the same conclusion. But if things that look alike are not alike after all, if the relationship between the two winds up in a pseudomorphic cul-de-sac, then why expend the effort to make the association in the first place? For Greenberg, the comparative approach was a defensive tactic meant to legitimize modern abstraction in the face of criticism leveled specifically by art historians. An account of the intellectual history surrounding 'Byzantine Parallels' not only reveals Greenberg's unrealized investment in such a defence, but also the ways in which the study of Byzantine art history in the early twentieth century was intertwined with modernist discourse. Look-alikes are less about the objects in question and more about those who are doing the looking.

[1] Donald Judd, as said in an interview with Bruce Glaser. See Lucy Lippard, ed, 'Questions to Stella and Judd', *ARTnews* 65, no. 5, September 1966, 61. I thank Richard Shiff, Terry Smith, and Jeannie McKetta for their thoughtful criticism of this essay.
[2] See for example Alexander Nagel, *Medieval Modern: Art out of Time*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2012; and Amy K. Powell, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum*, New York: Zone Books, 2012. For an example in exhibition practice, see Glenn Peers, ed, *Byzantine Things in the World*, Houston: Menil Collection, 2013.
[3] Clement Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', (1958) in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1961, 167-170.

Look-alikes

Greenberg wrote 'Byzantine Parallels' in the spring of 1958 with the goal of seeing it in the pages of *Paris Review*.[4] After an initial submission to the journal, he revised his draft and sent a final manuscript later that same year.[5] The exact reason for the editor's decision remains unknown; whatever the case, 'Byzantine Parallels' was published for the first time not in the periodical but in Greenberg's anthology, *Art and Culture*, three years later in 1961. The initial rejection of 'Byzantine Parallels' hints at the hidden context to which it belongs: Greenberg's unrealized attempts to write a book-length feature that compared older art to modern art.

Before delving into a history of the unpublished oeuvre, it would be fruitful to examine 'Byzantine Parallels' for what it is: an anomalous text in Greenberg's published body of work. The essay is one of eleven that fall outside the purview of what Greenberg would consider modern art, out of over 300 texts. Other essays belonging to this 'non-modern' category tend to have been written on the occasions of exhibitions or as book reviews, whereas 'Byzantine Parallels' is an autonomous attempt not so much at criticism but at long-range historical theorizing.

At the outset, the title of the essay indicates a conception of a flattened history. Visualized on spatial terms, parallel lines exist on a two-dimensional plane. The parallels in the argument are not the categories of Byzantine and modern as set against one another, but a comparison between the stylistic changes that would lead from previous traditions to the opticality prominent – in Greenberg's eyes – of the art of both time periods. Greenberg perceived a pivot from haptic to optic, tactile to visual, non-decorative to decorative, that occurred in the shifts from Greco-Roman to Byzantine, and the Western Renaissance tradition to Modern. The parallels can be visualized as follows:

Haptic → Optic
Greco-Roman → Byzantine
Western → Modern

For Greenberg, the relationship of the binary pairs from one end of each segment to the other are dialectic in nature, with 'Cubism and Byzantine mural art' as the wrenches that reverse the trajectory of the sculptural to orient art toward the pictorial.[6] The linear terms evoke a determinist teleology, though for Greenberg these shifts occur not as a result of evolution but devolution, a 'turning inside out' of naturalism by both Byzantine and modern makers of art, especially as it relates to

[4] Clement Greenberg Papers, 1928-1995, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 950085, Series II, Box 19, 1958 appointment book, 16-26 March, hereafter cited as CGP.
[5] CGP, Series II, Box 19, 1958 appointment book, 28-30 September.
[6] Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', 168.

the flatness of the picture plane.[7] One might concede the point of flatness and accept this as a fair narrative, though only in a very general sense. As with all binary structures, it invites a surfacing of exceptions to the rule.

Long on generalizations and short on specifics, 'Byzantine Parallels' demands a literate readership to fill in the blanks of Greenberg's arguments. Modern qualities considered wholesale are the flatness of Cubism, the vivid colour of '[Paul] Gauguin and Late Impressionism', and the 'polemiciz[ing] of value contrasts' by Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still.[8] Though excised from the final version of the essay, Greenberg considered large size as a common feature between the latter three mid-century artists and Byzantine mosaics. Newman's, Rothko's, and Still's paintings,

> like the [Byzantine] mosaics, . . . are unthinkable in a small size. The glitter of the tesserae makes it hard to define anything but large and simplified shapes by their means, the pulsation of warm dark, uncontrasted color demands (as Monet already sensed) a large amount of space in order to state pictorial forms.[9]

In addition to these three artists, Greenberg singles out Jackson Pollock for his luminous color, particularly in the artist's works using aluminium paint.[10] The specifics did not survive the final editing, but Greenberg was thinking of Pollock's *Lavender Mist* and *Number 1A* of 1948 as exemplars of 'the sheerest light seen in painting since the gold leaf and mosaics of the Byzantines.'[11]

Greenberg makes a passing reference to David Talbot Rice in his essay, indicating a source for his knowledge of Byzantine art.[12] In the spring of 1958, Greenberg read Talbot Rice's *Byzantine Art* as he prepared his first draft of 'Byzantine Parallels.'[13] One might be tempted to use Talbot Rice as a guide, to find clues in Greenberg's essay and locate examples from the Byzantine survey book to pair with modern works. For instance, an ivory plaque of St. John the Baptist with four saints could stand in as a 'Byzantine carving tend[ing] toward pictorial, nontactile effects', a bas-relief 'made. . . lower, less rounded and modeled, more

[7] Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', 167-168.
[8] Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', 168-169.
[9] CGP, Series III, Box 25, Folder 5. See typewritten manuscript on blue paper, 15.
[10] Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', 169.
[11] CGP, Series III, Box 25, Folder 4. See handwritten notes on gold paper.
[12] Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', 169.
[13] CGP, Series II, Box 19, 1958 appointment book, 23-24 March. See also David Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1954. Talbot Rice's survey was first published by Clarendon Press in 1935. Greenberg's note identifies the Pelican second edition as the one he read.

undercut and perforated, than it had been in Greco-Roman practice (fig. 1).'[14] And as Greenberg mentioned Constructivist sculpture in a general way, one might compare the Byzantine ivory to Naum Gabo's *Linear Construction in Space No. 1*, based solely on the formal grounds of opticality (fig. 2). Gabo's work could stand in for a sculpture that is, in Greenberg's words, 'more and more an art of aerial drawing in which three-dimensional space is indicated and enclosed but hardly filled.'[15]

Figure 1 Plaque of St. John the Baptist and Four Saints, late tenth century. Elephant ivory with traces of gilding, 23.2 x 13.3 x 0.8 cm. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Figure 2 Naum Gabo, *Linear Construction in Space No. 1*, c. 1945-46. Perspex with nylon monofilament, 44.8 x 45.7 x 9.8 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection, 47.1101.

The act of trying to remedy Greenberg's generalizations by finding specific works to suit those observations points to a larger criticism, that the critic himself was engaged in a cherry-picking through one millennium of Byzantine art. He treats Byzantine art as a homogeneous entity, jumping across several hundred years to present his case. The essay begins with a transition from Greco-Roman to Byzantine (fourth and fifth centuries) and at one point brings up Iconoclasm (eighth and ninth centuries) as an 'echo of certain aesthetically felt objections to the figurative' despite its 'entirely religious' motives.[16] The generous view would be to afford Greenberg with some latitude as he is, after all, a critic and not a historian. In comparing

[14] Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', 168 and Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, plate 54.
[15] Greenberg, 'Byzantine Parallels', 167.
[16] Greenberg 'Byzantine Parallels', 168.

modern to Byzantine, Greenberg crosses the boundaries of conventional periodization, an enterprise that at the start can be designated more leniently as trans-historical, or less forgivingly as ahistorical.

A far less simplistic binary comes at the conclusion of the essay, when Greenberg collapses Byzantine transcendence and modern literalness, identifying these two opposing aims as leading to the same qualities in art.

> The Byzantines excluded appeals to literal experience against the transcendent, whereas we seem to exclude appeals to anything but the literal; but in both cases the distinction between the firsthand and the secondhand tends to get blurred. . . A radically transcendental and a radically positivist exclusiveness both arrive at anti-illusionist, or rather counter-illusionist, art.[17]

In other words, things that are not alike lead to things that look alike, to invert Judd's truism.

In this same discussion of the ontological differences between Byzantine and modern art, Greenberg refers to Talbot Rice, albeit in passing: 'The parallels between Byzantine and modernist art cannot be extended indefinitely, but – as David Talbot Rice has suggested in a different context – they may help us to discern at least part of the extra-artistic significance of modernism.'[18] The discipline of art history has cast Greenberg as a staunch Formalist, so to see a nod at context is noteworthy. Even more significant, Greenberg arrives at the interpretation as a result of reading the work of Talbot Rice, a byzantinist.

The concluding section of the present essay traces and contextualizes this non-formal strand of Greenberg's understanding of modernism, demonstrating that Talbot Rice gleans his interpretation of Byzantine abstraction through the theoretical framework of Wilhelm Worringer, who in turn was inspired by Georg Simmel's ideas on modern experience. While Byzantine and modern may be two separate temporal sub-fields in art history with seemingly little in common beyond superficial similarities in form, the production of scholarship on Byzantine art occurred against the contextual backdrop of modernist thought. Accordingly, interpretations made in both fields may inform one another.

A history of the ahistorical

As far as exposure to the idea of a connection between Byzantine and modern art, Greenberg likely read George L. K. Morris' essay, 'Relations of Painting and Sculpture' of 1943 in *Partisan Review*, a publication for which Greenberg served as

[17] Greenberg 'Byzantine Parallels', 169.
[18] Greenberg 'Byzantine Parallels', 169.

editor at the time.[19] This essay, too, was a tract on the haptic and optic qualities of the two media, advancing the 'hereness' of sculpture and the illusionist quality of a 'window into another world' exemplified by traditional painting since the Renaissance.[20] Morris praised paintings that 'assert themselves most intensely *as paintings*,' echoing the distinctions Greenberg had made three years earlier in his essay, 'Towards a Newer Laocöon', also published in *Partisan Review*.[21] In addition to the Impressionists, Morris ascribed this quality to the work of Paul Cézanne, whose visible brushstrokes achieved the same effect of Byzantine mosaics. Though not painted at all, strictly speaking, Byzantine mosaics nevertheless 'project the qualities of painting', according to Morris.[22]

> In the mosaics there is a definite recession of planes and a strong modeling of the figures, yet over all lurks the mosaic-technique, creating a surface life with its occasional stone of intensified color that acts as a spot to keep the eye unconsciously on the surface.[23]

Just as the digital quality of Cézanne's *passage* technique forces the eye to acknowledge the picture plane, the fragmented tesserae of a mosaic reinforce the materiality of the medium.

The extent to which Morris influenced Greenberg's 'Byzantine Parallels' should not be overstated.[24] Perhaps the question of influence is a mutual one. Greenberg had already advanced these ideas on the properties of painting and the self-assertion of the medium in his seminal text, 'Towards a Newer Laocöon.' Yet that essay of 1940, published three years prior to Morris' text, served as a 'historical apology for abstract art', focusing on the 'corrupt influence' of 'literature' on painting, without mention of Byzantine mosaics as an antecedent example of a self-assertive medium.[25]

A figure who looms large in the background of this analogical thinking that connected Byzantine and modern in the mid-twentieth century is Meyer Schapiro.

[19] George L. K. Morris, 'Relations of Painting and Sculpture', *Partisan Review* 10, no. 1, January/February 1943, 63-71.
[20] Morris, 'Relations of Painting and Sculpture', 66.
[21] Morris 'Relations of Painting and Sculpture', 68. Emphasis original. See also Clement Greenberg, 'Towards a Newer Laocöon' (1940), in John O'Brian, ed, *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 23-38; hereafter cited as *CG:CEC*.
[22] Morris 'Relations of Painting and Sculpture', 68.
[23] Morris 'Relations of Painting and Sculpture', 68.
[24] The two critics were debating in public by 1948 in the pages of *Partisan Review* and *Horizon*, not about the Byzantine issue but on the specifics of cubism. See Clement Greenberg, 'Reply to George L. K. Morris', (1948) in *CG:CEC*, vol. 2, 242-245. See also George L. K. Morris, 'The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture', *Horizon*, October 1947.
[25] Greenberg 1940, 37.

Morris thanked Schapiro for calling his attention to Byzantine art, and the problems of 'realness' posed by sculpture in debates on idolatry during the Iconoclasm period.[26] Schapiro also ran in the same intellectual circles as Greenberg, participating in a *Life* roundtable on modern art with the critic in 1948.[27] This encounter had a lasting effect on Greenberg. As late as 1977, nearly thirty years after the *Life* seminar, Greenberg recalled fragments of his conversations with Schapiro at this event in his private journals.[28] In 1950, Greenberg and Schapiro collaborated on selecting artists for *Talent*, an exhibition at the Kootz Gallery. And when Judd's interviewer compared Barnett Newman's zip painting to a Byzantine mosaic depicting a vertically oriented Madonna, he cited Schapiro as the source for this observation.[29]

Three months before Greenberg and Schapiro participated in a symposium together, Greenberg recorded some thoughts about the medieval picture plane in comparison to the modern one. In a private journal entry dated 22 March 1948, Greenberg considered the relationship between figure and ground in medieval painting, noting how a flat background asserts itself in negative fashion, subordinately but necessarily, in relation to the forms upon it.[30] 'In modern ptg (sic) the background has come forward again', though in this instance the forms become 'submerged.'[31] Greenberg reconsiders the hierarchical presentation of this relationship, when he writes, 'or else there is an established ambiguity of stress, so that the background and forms take turns as protagonist.'[32] Unsurprising is Greenberg's attraction to medieval art as a formal precedent for the phenomena he sees in the paintings of his contemporaries, and so too is the nature of the content: thoughts solely on the formal aspects of the picture plane. This journal entry ends

[26] Morris 'Relations of Painting and Sculpture', 64n.
[27] See Russel W. Davenport, ed, 'A *Life* Round Table on Modern Art', *Life*, vol. 25, 11 October 1948. For an interpretation of Schapiro's and Greenberg's comments at this event, see Richard Shiff, 'Unexplained', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 94, no. 3, September 2012, 339-343. Georges Duthuit was also a participant at this round table; Duthuit wrote of connections between Byzantine and modern art, via the encompassing totality of Byzantine space as compared to Henri Matisse's understanding of vibratory space. See Georges Duthuit, 'Matisse and Byzantine Space', *Transition*, vol. 5, 1949, 20-37. Finally, for Schapiro's friendships and influence on several modern artists, see Thomas B. Hess, 'Sketch for a Portrait of the Art Historian Among Artists', *Social Research*, vol. 45, no. 1, Spring 1978, 6-14.
[28] CGP, Series II, Box 15, Folder 6, Journal 28, entry dated 28 June 1977. Greenberg recalled Schapiro discussing the demonstrability of aesthetic judgment on the way to the *Life* roundtable.
[29] Lippard 'Questions to Stella and Judd', 61.
[30] CGP, Series II, Box 14, Folder 12.
[31] CGP, Series II, Box 14, Folder 12.
[32] CGP, Series II, Box 14, Folder 12.

with an intriguing conclusion that links the 'ambiguity of stress' between figure and ground to 'the general relativity of all experience.'[33]

At this stage, Greenberg's handwritten thoughts remained inchoate. Yet the context to which the journal entry belongs in Greenberg's oeuvre is in his failed attempts to write and publish a book on the relationship between the Old Masters and modern art. Greenberg first conceived of *The Old Masters Revisited* no later than 1950.[34] In his proposal, Greenberg lamented that the art-historical authorities on the Old Masters – namely Bernard Berenson, Max Friedländer, and Lionello Venturi – consider Cubism as 'a passing aberration' and are 'unable or refuse to enjoy' modern painting.[35] As a remedy, Greenberg proposed to present 'what in art of the past meets the test of modern taste and what does not, what in the oeuvre of each master still remains intrinsically valuable.'[36] This 375-page series of comparative studies was to begin with the Byzantine mosaics at Ravenna. The scope and chronology of the work would have included Cimabue and Giotto, the Siena school, artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy and Flanders, and individually identified painters such as Diego Velasquez, Peter Paul Rubens, El Greco, Jean-Antoine Watteau, and François Boucher, before finally concluding with Francisco de Goya.

Though such a project would have integrated the work of canonical figures in Western painting, Greenberg was quick to admit that what he envisioned was not the production of an art-historical account: 'I am less interested in background or history than in quality.'[37] This presentist outlook complements the means by which he was to arrive at his conclusions. 'The writing will have to be done, literally, in the presence of the works of art themselves; I am not an art scholar and am concerned with the immediacy of my experience rather than with the rendition of facts and theories.'[38] Greenberg underscores this insistence on embodied viewership in the section on proposed images. He anticipated 75 to 100 half-tone plates, but went on to admit that he 'distrust[s] all reproductions and would be just as well satisfied to see the book without any: the main thing is to drive the reader to the originals.'[39]

[33] CGP, Series II, Box 14, Folder 12.
[34] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 2 pages. Greenberg concluded the proposal with a timeline: 'The manuscript should be finished, I estimate at this point, by at least the fall of 1951 – finished, that is, in its final form. Knowing my working habits, I would expect to have a first draft ready by the end of 1950.' One might recall that Greenberg was working with Schapiro on the *Talent* exhibition for Kootz Gallery in 1950, and hazard a connection between that venture and this proposal; however, the lack of a firm date and of specific mention of Schapiro in the proposal leaves the connection uncertain.
[35] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 1.
[36] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 1.
[37] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 1.
[38] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 2.
[39] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 2.

As a precedent for his book, Greenberg identified Eugène Fromentin's *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois*, an account of Northern European art of the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries originally published in 1875.[40] Though Greenberg did not provide specific reasons as to why he viewed Fromentin as having set a high standard, his affinity for the nineteenth-century writer becomes clear in light of Fromentin's explication of his own method: 'I shall describe, in the presence of certain pictures, the effects of surprise, pleasure, astonishment, and no less exactly of disappointment, which [the artworks] happened to cause me.'[41] Using Fromentin as a model, Greenberg proposed to produce his writing 'in the presence of the works of art' and valued the primacy of experience. In his assessment of Fromentin, Schapiro praised this type of writing as 'plein-air criticism.'[42] Just as the Impressionists recorded their immediate perceptions using paint on canvas, Fromentin, as their contemporary, documented his direct experiences with the medium of language. What Fromentin achieved, and what Greenberg proposed to do, is to write ekphrases.

Jas Elsner interprets the ekphrasis, or the textual description of a work of art, as the foundational root of all art history.[43] Despite Greenberg's insistence on the absence of background, history, facts, and theories, his project would have been a modernist – in his conception of the term – work of art history. If the asserted flatness of the picture plane is the result of the complete reduction of the medium to its purest form, then a book of ekphrases constitutes a modern equivalent in art-historical writing. Yet ekphrases are not mere descriptions. Historically speaking, since the Second Sophistic period and the codification of literary styles in the *Progymnasmata* treatises from the late second to the fifth century CE, the ekphrasis belongs to a tradition of rhetoric with the intention to persuade.[44]

This type of illocutionary speech is evident in Fromentin's work, as seen in his treatment of Rubens. Fromentin describes Rubens' style as 'what would be called in literature an orator's style. . . in all cases it is surpassingly convincing and persuasive.'[45] Though Fromentin ascribes Rubens with the power of persuasion, the former's own language exhibits these very same qualities. Consider Fromentin's rhetoric in his description of Rubens' *Martyrdom of St. Livinus* (fig. 3):

[40] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 2. See also Eugène Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time; Dutch and Flemish Painting from Van Eyck to Rembrandt*, trans. Andrew Boyle, London: Phaidon Press, 1948. Originally published as *Les Maîtres d'Autrefois* (1875).
[41] Fromentin *The Masters of Past Time*, xv.
[42] Meyer Schapiro, 'Eugène Fromentin as Critic' (1963) in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society*, New York: George Braziller, 1994, 111.
[43] Jas Elsner, 'Art History as Ekphrasis', *Art History*, February 2010, 11.
[44] For the importance of ekphrasis as a rhetorical device in the intellectual and social context of the Second Sophistic period, see Shadi Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, 7-10.
[45] Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time*, 26.

> Forget that the subject is an ignominious and barbarous murder of a holy bishop. . . Forget the three executioners torturing him. . . Only look at the white horse which rears itself in the white sky; the bishop's golden cloak, his white stole; the dogs, speckled with white and black, four or five of them black; two red bonnets; the flushed red-bearded faces; and all around in this vast field of canvas the delightful harmony of the greys, blues, the whites either dark or pale – and you will only have an impression of a beautiful blending of color, the most wonderful perhaps and most unexpected that Rubens ever used to express, or, if you wish, to help out and lighten, a scene of horror.[46]

Fromentin communicates with the reader in the second person – (*you*) 'forget' – telling her or him to momentarily set aside the iconography of the work in favor of the formal aspect of its color, a rhetorical move Greenberg would have appreciated.

Figure 3 Peter Paul Rubens, *Martyrdom of St. Livinus*, 1633. Oil on canvas, 455 x 347 cm. © Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns – Art Photography

At the most basic level, Fromentin provides a description of Rubens' painting. Yet this passage also serves as a record of Fromentin's having seen the work in person. More explicitly, and in reference to *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, another work by Rubens, Fromentin asserts his embodied presence with the artwork as follows: 'Do you mind if we come back to the picture once more for a moment? It is here before me, and this is an opportunity which one seldom has, and

[46] Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time*, 24-25.

which I shall never have again. I shall take it.'[47] Noteworthy in this passage is Fromentin's direct address to the reader, again virtually situating her or him with Fromentin in the presence of Rubens' painting.

Ekphrases might wear the guise of passivity, as they purport to be mere observations of form. Yet as Elsner argues, ekphrases are 'tendentious' translations of visual experience; as such, they cannot be divorced from the author's original purpose in writing them, often to serve as evidence for a larger argument.[48] Denying this aspect of persuasion, Greenberg wrote, 'I do not. . . propose to tell the reader how to look at art; I am not interested in writing a primer; but I do want to show him how I look at paintings and pieces of sculpture.'[49] This proclamation is likely an implicit barb toward Venturi, whose primer Greenberg rebuked in 1945.[50] Nevertheless, such a conceit raises the question, 'to what end?' Even to 'drive readers to the originals' and to invite the reader to check her or his experience with Greenberg's is a form of persuasion. Moreover, Greenberg's primary motivation, as he presented in the introduction to his proposal, is to convince readers that a connection exists between older art and modern art, saving the latter against criticisms made especially by art historians. Any ekphrases written by Greenberg to serve this purpose are by definition tendentious.

Initially proposed c. 1950, *The Old Masters Revisited* was never realized. Greenberg tried to re-initiate the project once more in 1963 when he applied for funding from the Ford Foundation.[51] Looking back to his first proposal, he wrote that 'its shape has changed a good deal in everything but its essentials.' As with the first venture, this one dismissed 'the injection of scholarship and literary research', instead opting for observation and writing 'on the spot.'[52] This application to the Ford Foundation is less thorough than the first, and presents its scope as 'from Giotto on', no longer starting with the Ravenna mosaics as initially conceived. Perhaps at this point, Greenberg was satisfied in how he addressed the Byzantine connection, as he submitted a copy of *Art and Culture* to the Foundation as evidence of his writing skills. While Fromentin makes no appearance in this second proposal, Greenberg also submitted 'The Early Flemish Masters' as a second sample of his writing on pre-modern art, and perhaps also as an implicit nod toward his nineteenth-century model.[53]

[47] Fromentin, *The Masters of Past Time*, 36.
[48] Elsner, 'Art History as Ekphrasis.'
[49] CGP, Series III, Box 26, Folder 3, 2. Emphasis original.
[50] Clement Greenberg, 'On Looking at Pictures: Review of *Painting and Painters: How to Look at a Picture, From Giotto to Chagall* by Lionello Venturi' (1945) in *CG: CEC*, vol. 2, 34-35.
[51] CGP, Series III, Box 27, Folder 3.
[52] CGP, Series III, Box 27, Folder 3.
[53] CGP, Series III, Box 27, Folder 3. See also Clement Greenberg, 'The Early Flemish Masters' (1960) in *CG: CEC*, vol. 4, 101-106.

Despite the slight chronological shift in scope of the new book project, Greenberg remained interested in Byzantine art even after writing 'Byzantine Parallels.' Throughout the course of his travels, he saved various postcards of artworks.[54] The existence of these souvenirs in his collection belies his outward disavowal of viewing works in reproduction. Regardless of the specific nature of their personal significance, the collection reveals a marked interest in Byzantine art. Of the thirty-nine postcards Greenberg saved, nine (or nearly a quarter) are of mosaics or exterior shots of the Chora Church and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Though undated, the printed text on the reverse of the cards show that they came from the 'Khora Museum', indicating that the trip must have been after 1958, the year that restorations were complete and the building opened to the public.

Perhaps Greenberg collected these postcards during a European trip in the early summer of 1965.[55] A journal entry from Athens reveals more thoughts on Byzantine art, this time venturing into the medium of architecture. Dated 2 May 1965, Greenberg jotted down the following notes:

> Byzantine: antithesis of 6th-5th century BCE Greek. (But same insistence on roundness and symmetry as shape of the precincts of the sacred: tholos + rotunda.) Nothing more different from Parthenon [than] main interlocking vaults of Byzantine churches. (Icons seen in Athens mostly over-rated.) Don't forget Roman mosaics in museum in Old Corinth.[56]

These observations never developed into a published essay, though perhaps Greenberg intended to do something with the information. The phrase 'don't forget' implies as much, as well as the inclusion of a postcard of a Roman villa mosaic from the Museum of Corinth in his collection. Additionally, he cared enough about the journal entry to revisit it and make insertions and modifications, as indicated by the two different colours of ink used for the entry. Perhaps the Byzantine postcards served as visual memory aids for a future project, a work that once again never materialized.

Into the early 1980s, Greenberg continued to tout the Byzantine and modern connection. In the spring of 1982, he rehearsed some ideas during a comparative literature conference sponsored by the Claremont Colleges in California.[57] This talk would later become the 'Beginnings of Modernism', an essay that located the origins

[54] CGP, Series VI, Box 42, Folder 1.
[55] A trip to Italy in 1954 might have been the occasion to see the Ravenna mosaics in person. However, pages from Greenberg's usually informative appointment books from that summer trip remain blank. Archives containing the journal entries from that period are sealed until 2030.
[56] CGP, Series II, Box 16, Folder 6, Journal #22.
[57] CGP, Series III, Box 31, Folder 7.

of modernism, both in terms of literature and the visual arts, in France.[58] As far as the Byzantine is concerned, Greenberg largely rehashed the contents of 'Byzantine Parallels', discussing the transition from Greco-Roman/Western to Byzantine/Modern in terms of the flatness of the picture plane, decorative qualities, and the lower bas-relief sculptures.

To supplement his initial arguments from 1958, Greenberg added a more sustained discussion of 'creative devolution', as well as the public's responses to this development, in both periods. He presents the main problem as follows: 'The question is why modernity, together with art for art's sake, should have compelled innovation in such a way as it had never, apparently, been compelled before: disturbingly, shockingly, provocatively.'[59] The resistance to modernism, according to Greenberg, can be explained in part by 'the devolution of a tradition', namely the tradition of naturalism as prescribed by the Renaissance.[60] He defines 'devolution' as 'the unraveling – not so much the dismantling', which draws a line that separates it from the notions of decline as well as rupture.[61] Far from a decline, Greenberg envisions 'devolution' as 'generat[ing] a greater momentum of innovation, a greater urgency.'[62] This type of 'creative devolution', rather than breaking with the past, preserves a sense of continuity.

Greenberg then presents the Byzantine example as a similar situation of 'creative devolution', though in that case such a transition, he posits, did not meet with public resistance.[63] The endpoints of the parallel segments here are not plotted on the terms of reality or transcendence as chief aims, but with the public's reception and the passage of time. The change from Greco-Roman to Byzantine gradually unfolded over 200 years, writes Greenberg, whereas the modern devolution occurred in the span of approximately sixty years, from the 1850s to the 1910s, 'not that it's finished yet.'[64] Accordingly, Greenberg posits that the abruptness of the modern transition resulted in critical resistance. Talk of public resistance to Byzantine art seems misguided here, especially because Greenberg is only considering church-commissioned and imperially sponsored works – 'products installed straightaway in churches, palaces, other official places.'[65] As official art, the Byzantine imagery that Greenberg evokes would be more aptly paired with the art

[58] Clement Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism' (1983) in Robert C. Morgan, ed, *Clement Greenberg, Late Writings*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 34-41.
[59] Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism', 38.
[60] Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism', 39.
[61] Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism', 39.
[62] Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism', 39.
[63] Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism', 39.
[64] Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism', 40.
[65] Greenberg, 'Beginnings of Modernism', 40.

produced by the French Academy, which undermines the entire argument about public reception.[66]

Resistance to all things Byzantine in intellectual circles in fact coincided roughly with the resistance to modernism in the nineteenth century. Robert S. Nelson traces the 'Othering' of Byzantine art in survey texts to the first art history handbooks written by Franz Kugler and Carl Schnaase in the 1840s.[67] Kugler and Schnaase were students of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whose scathing assessment of the Byzantine spirit presented the empire as 'a disgusting picture of imbecility.'[68] In the mid-nineteenth century lies a Byzantine-modern parallel that requires art-historical arbitration. Intellectual antipathy towards Byzantium was already underway by the 1850s, the temporal origin of artistic modernism per Greenberg. Contemporary with this sentiment was the antagonistic relationship between academic art and modern art. A parallel configuration transforms into an intersection. In art history and in art criticism, to revere Byzantium and to defend modern art would be to assume an anti-academic position. Consciously or unconsciously, this common perspective facilitates the ability to see look-alikes.

Separated by 25 years, the bookends of 'Byzantine Parallels' and 'Beginnings of Modernism' are the remaining published hints of the comparisons Greenberg might have written in *The Old Masters Revisited*. The major difference between these essays and the unrealized book project lies in their form. Without the appropriate funding, Greenberg could not write ekphrases, 'on the spot.' The essays remain general and in want of analyses of specific works. Additionally, while the essays center on formal aspects, they also venture into contextual territory, a manoeuvre that likely had no place in *The Old Masters Revisited*.

At the heart of both the essays and the potential book is a justification for modern art that involves relating it to the art of the past. Greenberg was not alone in this strategy. As Richard Meyer has shown, Alfred H. Barr's exhibition practice at the Museum of Modern Art in New York during the 1930s and 1940s sought to indirectly pair the new with the old.[69] Although installed on different floors in MoMA, exhibitions of prehistoric imagery, of Italian Master paintings, and of Russian icons suggested formal connections to the twentieth-century works elsewhere in the museum. In 1931, MoMA was in the planning stage of a large-scale exhibition called 'Modern Art, Past and Present', a show that would have been more specific in its direct juxtapositions and broader in its geographic and temporal

[66] A discussion of Iconoclasm – a mode of actual resistance – might have served Greenberg better, but then again that phase in Byzantine history happened 200 years after the end of the transition period that fascinated him.

[67] Robert S. Nelson, 'Living on the Byzantine Borders of Western Art', *Gesta*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1996, 3-11.

[68] As quoted in Nelson, 'Living on the Byzantine Borders', 7.

[69] Richard Meyer, 'Prehistoric Modern (1937)' in *What Was Contemporary Art?*, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2013, 115-189.

reach.[70] Alongside modern works in the same exhibition space, Barr intended to show objects from various historical periods: ancient Egypt, pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, sixteenth-century Europe, and T'ang China, to name a few. Similar to Greenberg's motivation for *The Old Masters Revisited*, Barr's aim in this show was for the public to 'learn to tolerate the strange even though it is contemporary'.[71] Just as Greenberg's book never materialized, Barr's larger exhibition was never staged.

Meyer speculates that 'Modern Art, Past and Present' was ultimately thwarted by logistical and financial difficulties.[72] In addition to practical hurdles, Barr's bridging of old and new also incited external criticism and internal resistance. Contemporary American artists such as George L. K. Morris and Ad Reinhardt begrudged Barr the Italian Masters show, a sentiment underscored by MoMA's own Advisory Committee's decision to censure the exhibition.[73] That both Barr's and Greenberg's projects saw similar fates indicates that the comparative approach itself might have been institutionally unpalatable, at least to the venues that rendered their judgments.

The comparative approach reveals plainly the active and discerning hand of the interpretant in its process of making formal juxtapositions, a type of indexicality unwelcomed in the mid-twentieth century. In his review of *Art and Culture*, the sole venue for 'Byzantine Parallels', Robert Goldwater castigated Greenberg for writing a formal narrative of modern art that was obsessed with Cubism at the exclusion of Surrealism.[74] Goldwater's strongest criticism of Greenberg's interpretation is that it 'reduces the whole history of modern art to the successive solutions found to an immanently developing formal problem.'[75] Though Goldwater likely meant this to be a rebuke, Greenberg might have conceded that he was indeed invested in the idea of continuity.

Despite his other criticisms of Venturi's work, Greenberg praises the Italian art historian on his ability to make formal connections across historical periods. In a review of Venturi's *Four Steps Toward Modern Art*, Greenberg writes, 'It is possible that Professor Venturi overemphasizes the continuity of our Western art, but if so, it is a welcome corrective to the opposite and far more prevalent tendency to treat modern art as an utter historical novelty.'[76] However, Greenberg takes issue with Venturi's chosen starting point to illustrate said continuity. 'Why start. . . with Giorgione, the appearance of whose art is less modern than that of Piero della Francesca's, which is in turn less modern than that of many a Byzantine mosaic and

[70] Meyer, 'Prehistoric Modern', 118n6.
[71] As quoted in Meyer, 'Prehistoric Modern', 117.
[72] Meyer, 'Prehistoric Modern', 118.
[73] Meyer, 'Prehistoric Modern', 180n88, 182-184.
[74] Robert Goldwater, 'Art and Criticism', *Partisan Review*, vol. 28, nos. 5-6, July 1961, 688-694.
[75] Goldwater, 'Art and Criticism', 690.
[76] Clement Greenberg, 'Review of *Four Steps Toward Modern Art* by Lionello Venturi' (1956) in *CG:CEC*, vol. 3, 263.

fresco?'[77] In light of Greenberg's desire to write and publish *The Old Masters Revisited*, this criticism takes on the form of both a corrective and a poignant appeal to what could have been and never was.

The context of form

In his survey, initially written in 1935, Talbot Rice presents the Byzantine style as one of 'fusion', with formal origins stemming from six geographic regions within the empire: Greece and the Hellenistic world, Rome and Italy, Asia Minor, Syria and the Semitic East, Western Persia and Lower Mesopotamia, and North-eastern Persia.[78] The section on Syrian influence likely resonated with Greenberg, because Talbot Rice identifies this region as contributing the stylistic exaggeration of forms with the tendency towards abstraction.[79] Talbot Rice explains this Syrian tendency towards abstraction as a result of the 'material conditions' of the environment.[80] He discusses a major drought that led to a decimation of the population and surmises that a difficult life may have led to 'an avoidance of the superficial.'[81] One could imagine an alert Greenberg reading the following interpretation posited by Talbot Rice in *Byzantine Art*:

> Just as the severe conditions of industrialism on the one hand and of political instability on the other have produced in the art of today a love of abstraction and an avoidance of mere prettiness, so in the early Christian age did the troubles of life bring about similar results.[82]

Perhaps Greenberg had this exact passage in mind when he credits Talbot Rice for considering 'the extra-artistic significance of modernism' in 'Byzantine Parallels.'

This line of thinking – that a difficult life inspires abstract art – is by no means a novel interpretation. Though uncited, Talbot Rice is calling upon the main thesis presented by Wilhelm Worringer in his text, *Abstraction and Empathy*, a doctoral dissertation written in 1907 that subsequently gained particular renown in the art-historical milieus of early twentieth-century Europe.[83] As a British scholar, Talbot Rice could have been exposed to Worringer via T. E. Hulme, who was a

[77] Greenberg 'Review of *Four Steps Toward Modern Art*', 263.
[78] Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, 43-55.
[79] Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, 47-49.
[80] Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, 48.
[81] Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, 48.
[82] Talbot Rice, *Byzantine Art*, 48.
[83] Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1963. Originally published as *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1907).

prominent figure in spreading Worringer's ideas in Britain.[84] Another possible point of contact for Talbot Rice is Herbert Read, a friend of Worringer's who translated the German's writings to English and was Talbot Rice's predecessor as professor of fine art at the University of Edinburgh. As Geoffrey C. W. Waite notes, 'the Anglo-American reception of Worringer's text is characterized by uncritical enthusiasm.'[85] Regardless of the specific nature of the transmission of ideas from Germany to England, this interpretation of abstract art was widespread enough by the mid-1930s not to merit a citation in Talbot Rice's book.

Relying on Aloïs Riegl's notion of *Kunstwollen*, a will-to-form or artistic volition, Worringer argued that artistic style is not to be explained by a lack of technical ability, but by an artistic will inspired by 'people's feelings about the world', or what he called their 'psychic attitudes.'[86] A positive relationship with the world produces an artistic volition that tended toward 'the organic truths of life', generating naturalistic art. On the other hand, abstraction stems from 'a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world.'[87] Hence, Talbot Rice postulates that a severe climate in Syria led to abstract forms in Syrian art.

For Worringer, the value of a work of art lies in its 'power to bestow happiness.'[88] The two different psychic attitudes – happiness and unease – lead to different modes of aesthetic enjoyment. Happiness with the world allows for empathy; an individual my self-project onto an object of the world, a positive connection that leads to naturalistic forms. On the contrary, an artist living in relatively turbulent times would 'wrest the object of the external world out of its natural context', 'approximate its absolute value', and eternalize it through abstract forms.[89] Aesthetic enjoyment in abstraction, according to Worringer, has to do with the impulse of self-alienation, speaking to a desire for 'deliverance from the fortuitousness of humanity.'[90]

Worringer's idea of alienation as a form of deliverance evokes Georg Simmel's arguments in the latter's text on the modern condition, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', written in 1903, five years prior to Worringer's first publication of

[84] Geoffrey C. W. Waite, 'Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*: Remarks on its reception and on the rhetoric of its criticism', in: Neil H. Donahue, ed, *Invisible Cathedrals: The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, 17. Hulme has advanced that he arrived at similar conclusions before reading *Abstraction and Empathy*, which is why he subsequently aligned his own thought to Worringer's. See T. E. Hulme, 'Modern Art II: A Preface Note and Neo-Realism' (1914) in: Karen Csengeri, ed, T. E. Hulme, *The Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 287.
[85] Waite, 'Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*', 17.
[86] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 15.
[87] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 15.
[88] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 13.
[89] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 16-17.
[90] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 23-24.

Abstraction and Empathy.[91] The two texts are connected not only on a superficial level of common themes, but also through a direct personal encounter. In 1948, Worringer wrote of an earlier serendipitous meeting with Simmel at the Trocadéro.[92] A young Worringer had previously attended Simmel's lectures prior to this encounter, but their long conversations in this instance inspired Worringer's dissertation.

Simmel opens his essay on the metropolis with a diagnosis on the modern condition: 'The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life.'[93] Simmel stakes his argument along the sociological lines of a binary: structure vs. agency. The modern individual, an agent, needs to navigate the structures of modern life in a metropolis. Simmel identifies these social forces as industrialization and capitalism, external structures further intensified by the transitory experiences and fleeting imagery of city life.[94] As a result, the modern individual develops a psychological outer shell of 'intellectuality' and 'reserve' in order to process experiences and cope with the external pressures.[95] For Simmel, this trait of 'reserve', or 'blasé attitude', contains within it an 'overtone of hidden aversion', one that allows for a distinction between self and other, which is a necessary step in gaining social freedom.[96] In other words, alienation is a condition of possibility for a modern individual to 'preserve [his] autonomy and individuality.'

Both Simmel and Worringer address the issue of man's relationship with the external world, though Simmel is more specific in keeping his interpretation to the social realm. Both writers also discuss the psychic attitudes that reflect on this relationship between individual and external phenomena, be it city life or natural environment. For Simmel, the unease with the world, brought on by the 'increased nervous stimulation' found in a metropolis, leads to the development of a psychic attitude. Worringer adopts Simmel's conclusions, turning them into a premise for his own text, and presents the anxious psychic attitude as a source of an artistic volition toward abstraction. The tracing of Greenberg's understanding of 'the extra-artistic significance of modernism' through the texts of Talbot Rice, Worringer, and Simmel is not meant to suggest that Greenberg was exposed to this line of thinking only as late as 1958, or that he even adopted the ideas in wholesale fashion.

[91] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in: Richard Sennet, ed, *Classic Essays on the Cuture of Cities*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969, 47-60.
[92] Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, vii-xiii.
[93] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', 47.
[94] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', 47-49.
[95] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', 49-53.
[96] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', 53.

However, Greenberg did read Worringer in between writing drafts of his essay, indicating at the very least that those ideas may have been in the background of the conclusions of 'Byzantine Parallels.'[97]

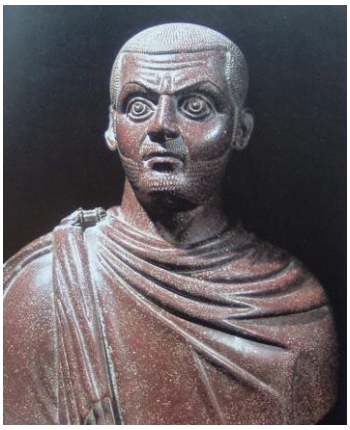

Figure 4 Arch of Constantine frieze, north face, Constantine giving a speech, 312-315. Rome. Image in the public domain / photo: Steven Zucker
Figure 5 Bust of a tetrarch (formerly called Licinius), early fourth century. Porphyry, 40 cm. Cairo: Egyptian Museum. Image in the public domain.

Elsewhere, Greenberg exhibits a familiarity with the works of Worringer and Riegl in a review of Bernard Berenson's book, *The Arch of Constantine*, written three years previously in 1955.[98] Berenson, as one might recall, is one of the identified art historians with whom Greenberg took issue in his original book proposal for *The Old Masters Revisited*. In this assessment, Greenberg lamented the major premise of decline that forms the crux of Berenson's argument. 'Rejecting the notion that we are confronted with the first emergence of a proto-Byzantine or proto-Romanesque style, [Berenson] ascribes the "newness" of these reliefs [on the Arch of Constantine] to simple ineptitude.'[99] Greenberg counters Berenson's argument with a favorable analysis of the friezes depicting Constantine distributing largess and delivering a speech, characterizing these scenes as original by virtue of their 'frontality, repeated verticals, and the geometrical rigidity and symmetrically centered design (fig. 4).'[100]

Greenberg makes a more striking remark in his evaluation of Berenson's method in *The Arch of Constantine*. '[Berenson's] chief object is to trace the phenomena as such of decline, and to describe and define them – he implies – in the

[97] CGP, Series II, Box 19, 1958 appointment book, 20 July.
[98] Clement Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca* and *The Arch of Constantine*, both by Bernard Berenson' (1955), in *CG: CEC*, vol. 3, 247-253. See also Bernard Berenson, *The Arch of Constantine; Or, The Decline of Form*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1954.
[99] Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca*', 251.
[100] Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca*', 251.

autonomous terms of art.'[101] Though receiving his own share of criticism on his writings about art's autonomy, Greenberg levels one at Berenson: 'It is not of course as simple as that.'[102] The most telling difference comes in a disagreement about the bust of a tetrarch (fig. 5).[103] Berenson characterizes this work as distant from humanization and 'terrifyingly sinister'.[104] Greenberg responds as follows:

> The large, staring eyes. . . which become so conspicuous in representations of the human face from Constantine's time on, cannot be taken simply as evidence of a failure of feeling and skill: it is just as easy to carve or paint eyes small as large. Obviously – and I am surprised Mr. Berenson does not accept it – the large eyes mean a new attitude to the human person, and the 'will' to show it in art through a new style.[105]

By evoking an 'attitude' and a 'will' to explain the manifestation of form, Greenberg wields a coded language that permeates the writings of both Worringer and Riegl. Additionally, by disapproving of Berenson's characterization of decline, Greenberg casts the art historian as siding with the outdated camp of Gottfried Semper and his technical-materialist explanation for the development of art, the very same interpretation that Riegl initially opposed when formulating the notion of the *Kunstwollen*.[106] Greenberg firmly situates Berenson in Semper's camp when he writes, '[Berenson] lets a standard of naturalism on the Hellenic model decide too much, as if all representations of the human form were to be judged by their distance from it, and had no qualitative dependence in relation to other aims.'[107]

That Greenberg aligned his thinking with two of the major philosophers of art since the nineteenth century is not the significant issue here. After all, both Worringer's and Riegl's tracts on art constitute 'apologies' for abstraction as well, even specifically as it pertains to Byzantine art. By characterizing these types of interpretations as 'obvious' – and conversely, Berenson's views as antiquated – by 1955, Greenberg perhaps no longer felt the need to explain 'the extra-artistic significance of modernism' beyond a reference to Talbot Rice.

What is notable is that Greenberg's implicit nods to context as it relates to abstraction (and by extension, modernism at large in Greenberg's view) occurs in his writing on topics that involve pre-modern art. As his book proposal explicitly

[101] Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca*', 252.
[102] Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca*', 252.
[103] This statue is now referred to as the bust of a tetrarch. Previous scholars, including Berenson and Greenberg, identified it as Licinius.
[104] As quoted in Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca*', 252.
[105] Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca*, 252.
[106] Aloïs Riegl, *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*, Evelyn Kain, trans, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.
[107] Greenberg, 'Review of *Piero Della Francesca*', 252-253.

states, it is the negative views of modern abstraction coming from art historians such as Berenson that prompted the proposal of a book project in the first place. By connecting multiple time periods, *The Old Masters Revisited* was to redeem modern abstraction, to legitimize it in the face of criticism coming from such scholars.

Such fluidities in periodization may have seemed outlandish to the original recipient of the book proposal, and likewise to the Ford Foundation, as *The Old Masters Revisited* was never written. Yet by tracing one strand of thought in 'Byzantine Parallels', the trans-historical was not such a foreign notion during the mid-twentieth century. In the case of Talbot Rice, an undercurrent of modernist thought propels an interpretation of Byzantine abstraction, adopted in turn by Greenberg. The confluence of thought results in an intellectual eddy fed by multiple currents of sociology and aesthetic theory, as well as two temporal sub-fields of art history. For Greenberg, this type of constellational thinking may have been 'obvious', as self-evident as it was to Donald Judd to dismiss the very same thought process: 'A lot of things look alike, but they're not necessarily very much alike.' Nevertheless, Greenberg found value in such visual analogies, and sought to use them in order to validate modern art.

Looking back on the situation in the early twentieth century, Hans Belting noted, 'Art history as an academic discipline was established before modern art appeared. It was often practiced alongside modern art, as if the latter did not exist at all.'[108] It is in this larger context – modern art history's inability to account for modern art – that a modern critic endeavoured to insert himself. *The Old Masters Revisited* in its full intended scope never materialized, though not for lack of trying.

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[108] Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987, 56.