

“The Use Of Humoristic Absurdity In Contemporary Art To Disguise The Romantic Metaphor”

By Renato Osoy

The role of the audience in contemporary art is vital to the existence of the work of art because of its marriage to the essentiality of the concept itself. The participatory relation that exists between *spectator* and *work of art* is not only another part of the piece, but more precisely one of the key elements that give existence and value to the contemporary work of art in most of the cases¹. In this connection we can find an interesting relation interweaving with the history of art and the production of art works to the present day. This particular coincidence we are referring to, is the *metaphor*, as it was perceived, conceived and represented in the *Romantic Period* by artist and audience. As reviewed by Hegel [...] “The speculative proposition wherein opinions become moments of the concept.”² Even though we might think contemporary art is all that new and innovative, it is worth to stop and briefly consider that there exists a similarity in content and purpose when we examine the relation audience-artist and its effect (and role) in the work of art then and today. Maybe after all this time, the metaphor hasn’t really evolved in its intentionality but might have only concealed itself in a *suit of disguise* while remaining stationary in content. This disguise suit we are speaking of might be considered *the form* in the work of art. In the case of this discussion, it is *the use of humoristic absurdity (as form) in the concealment of the romantic metaphor* that concerns us as parameters on this brief reflection. As this essay develops, we’ll try to regard and consider the possibilities of this observation by highlighting the simultaneities that interlace among the *Romantic artists* and *Contemporary art makers* in the construction and representation of the metaphor.

In an attempt to forge this conceptual wall, we’ll continue laying bricks as it becomes clearly important to define our *contextual* arena and profile the respective actors that come into play. Difficulties arise simply by trying to define or pinpoint art related matters in a meticulous way. Although Romanticism was a very turbulent period in art history, and lots of changes took place in the way art was seen and produced, we rest our viewpoint on a few concepts that relate to our concern in associating the Romantic metaphor to the Contemporary metaphor.

From art history we know that the Romantic period was a time where the artist dramatically changed his role from being a passive collective commissioned participant of

society, towards an alienated individual in search of existential meaning through empirical means. “From this vantage point the artist was opposed to the rest of society and able both to comment on it, and to contemplate things beyond it. The romantic genius was able to see the world unrestrained by society, and through his own experience of the world.” And also “it was the first time that an artist’s feelings and emotions were seen as central to artistic expression. It valued the irrational, the subjective and the spiritual.”³ When we take in consideration ideas like the irrational, the subjective and the spiritual, we obviously talk about artists expressing rationally or through rational means, things that cannot be properly measured or clearly define when we ponder our thoughts on how the moral of society was put under the scrutiny of artistic reflection. The Romantics were stirring the values towards the moral passiveness of their socio-environments at all levels, in art, literature, music and philosophy. In a way they were counter reacting with their representational actions using the *classical forms* of depiction from their respective mediums, in order to construct metaphors that their audience could perceive with ease for them to behold and later, to reflect upon.

As we see in art practice today, were artist’s use innovative depictional mediums and techniques inherited from past movements like Dada and Surrealism; experimental film, collage making, etc. Where absurdity and ridiculization were used as mechanisms of reaction. And more recent adaptations like ready-mades, installations and performances were absurdity and humorous situations are more and more present, and of course we should reconsider the use of satire and parody in Romantic times, caricaturist Daumier comes to mind. But first, let’s understand some things about humor and why it might result as an interesting formal mechanism to be used by contemporary artists.

We know that humor should be simple to get and spontaneously presented, elaborated humor or trying to be funny are the anticlimactic agents of the *humorous situation*. That is true of the superficial presence of humor, but when we explore some of its characteristics, we find humor to be a more complex deal. For example humor is cataloged as a psychological state, and we know from experience that the cleverer the joke, the better, because “complexity seems to increase the degree of perceived humor”⁴. But its presence in the human soul goes further as we note that, “It lies in the fact that the sense of humor consists in part at least in *responding* to certain things because they are amusing. [...] Having a sense of humor affects one’s life globally; one does not take everything tragically or earnestly; one looks on the light side; “*one mutes misfortune with jokes*”—having a sense of humor is almost like having a philosophy. Something is of the same sort and it is true of the aesthetic sense, as indeed it is true of the moral sense, there being as much justification for postulating it as either of the others.”⁵ And while digging in other

coexisting crevices we can clearly see that on the contemporary art scene the use of absurdity might just be a sort of whiplash response to the conditions that the artist *is submitted to*, in order to exist and be a participant *in the art world*⁶. They probably use absurd humor as a preconceived intention of an action-reaction matter; but by making this subject such a case in all levels of art, we also see that the excessive and repetitive use of absurdity as form also transforms form into content, if it is to be getting all over the place, but that takes our lead somewhere else.

As we reflect further on this concepts, we come to perceive that humor in all its simplicity has the perfect form to disguise complex matters, and then we wonder if this escalating use of absurd humor constantly presented on contemporary art, couldn't be deliberately used as bait to bring the *listening mass* closer. Because although humor for humor sake, is just too first layer and easily disposed by more complex mechanisms of the intellect, we can easily realize that the joke is not funny when it is being played on us, or more precisely, Where is the joke when our moral values are stirred and assaulted ingenuously in our faces, while we laugh distractedly at something else, only faintly perceiving the surface of meanings and artistic intentions.

Simply looking at it, a metaphor is a picture, a depiction of something with an intellectual intervention, a representation. The need to use the metaphor comes immediately implicit in the creation of art forms, because of its relation to ways of representation and the depiction of concepts. The metaphor appears in art through the use of diverse mediums of human expression, be it painting, writing and music to name a few. In the romantic period we can note the struggle and concern of the artist to connect with the audience and create a change of feeling or a reaction. We note in music for example “the works of Chopin, Liszt and Brahms had many common features, [...] bringing feelings of loneliness and depression, while others – calmness and tenderness. Music of this period developed sensitivity in people”⁷ Also in literature, quoting John Keats “*Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul?*” The evidence on the preoccupation of the artist to connect with someone outside of him, and cause an emotional and intellectual reaction was a clear concern, although oddly enough the artists of the time emphasized the idea of loneliness and individuality as means of encounter with the self. In that concern, the spread of the press and other massive mediums of distribution, made it possible for people to contemplate and reflect on art thoughts more on their own. But that audience left without guidance and at the mercy of their own intellects had to be able to grasp the metaphor somehow. Because the audience and the participatory role that they played, were crucial in giving existence to the work of art as Lord Byron exposed in his thoughts: “*Society is now one polish'd horde, Form'd of two mighty*

tribes, the Bores and Bored.” And, “*Fools are my theme, let satire be my song.*” And recounting again Keats “*I never wrote a single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought.*” It was particularly that correlation, *artist-audience* to the reactions and the relations that evolved from that, were the key elements are found in the conception of the Romantic metaphor in all its essentiality and purpose.

Now, when referring to the romantic metaphor in today’s view and the concern of contemporary thought, human moral and the relations in art representation we find clear evidence on similar preoccupations in the relation author-audience, “[...]is that both Derrida and romanticism are peculiarly preoccupied with the problem of life, death, and living-on.”⁸ Also when we consider the platform of post-modern thought “Starting more or less in the 1970's, romanticism became the hinterland where North American literary studies in particular demonstrated a prescient cordiality towards what would come to be called theory, welcoming--although not without some trepidation--its embodiment in the strange and changeful shapes of Derrida and Paul de Man.” We observe that a branch of intellectuals already decided to revisit past ideologies, and deliberately decided to *recontextualize* those concepts in a modern day scenario, and replant them through the veins of contemporary culture where artists and crowd feed. To deal with this concept of *recontextualizing the scenario* we could make a sort of parallel on man’s contemporary social preoccupations en route to Wordsworth’s ideas of man, existence and nature, towards an understanding of our day-to-day relations to urban landscape, heterotopias, consumerism, mass media and the informatic illusion of the ever-inexhaustible access to web as a mean of intellectual emancipation. Understood as the existential scenario, and milieu where contemporary man dwells and deals⁹.

Form as content or content as form as constitutive part of the metaphor; referring to form as *sensory appearance* in the appreciation of the work of art, from there we can make a case that all the elements that compose the immediate perception on the work of art are as important to one another as form is to content.¹⁰ Further on we can examine directly at our *formal* perception when we come to behold the oeuvre for the first time, this immediacy being referred to as when reviewing contemporary art works, where absurd humor is present, brings to evidence that that first reaction we have when looking at an artwork that only appears to be funny or present a humoristic scene in its immediacy, obviously defeats the idea that captivated us on the first place if we thought we were beholding a work of art, were an intellectual aspect and an emotional aspect are implicit contents meant to challenge the spectator. Because we know from previous statements that “complexity seems to increase the degree of perceived humor”, that implies that if the artists has been clever enough to apply a sort of *layering of intentions* to his art piece for

us to be captivated further than just some *brainy humor*, we might be heading in the right direction of understanding this argument. Following that thread we could deduct that absurd humor, as first perceptual reaction from the spectator can be an aspect of form that serves to camouflage the deeper and hidden meanings of the metaphor.

Art sometimes might need to use this disguise, because the metaphorical content is too heavy to deal at once. The contemporary man knows too much, as opposed to the man from Romantic times where his naïveté was only a consequence of not knowing from there not being the means, and the Romantic artist playing the role of facilitator could present a more clear, harsh and severe metaphor, an artwork without so much wrapping around it, for the audience couldn't avoid the confrontation. Because when we briefly look at our surroundings we think, who wants to continue listening to more depressive stuff? (Global warming, economic turmoil, religious scandals, etc.) When the world and its mainstream mediatic systems, constantly bombard us with so much overwhelming information, and flood our confused existences with apocalyptic visions of our human destiny, while the controlling forces struggle in their hegemonic purposes. For that, art has to be clever in finding other ways to communicate were the spectator *evades to be confronted*. Let's bring Danto's comment referred to earlier on the table of discussion, "*one mutes misfortune with jokes*", that can evidently note the *why?* in the use of absurd humor, more as a formal aspect on the totality of the art piece rather than an end result. Absurd humor is an easy pill to digest, maybe for that it can be used in art as a perfect disguise when representing a romantic metaphor, it could become a good social mechanism to exorcise the collective soul and bring some sense in it.

To continue this profiling en the metaphoric parallels and relations in the production of art then and now, we'll survey a visual review of some artworks from the past and the present. We can possible recognize with ease how in some Romantic artworks *tragedy* was used as an immediate perceptual form, in opposition to contemporary artworks were *absurd humor* is the formal agent in charge of generating *stop power* for the audience. It might become evident how some artworks are *tragically absurd* while their historical counterparts are in a sense *absurdly tragic*. We can agree that intellectual humor is an oxymoron, and that pretentious and didactic art is dull, still, the artists here reviewed have ingeniously constructed masterpieces that have captivated the audiences that they have seek to connect to. Although while violating the sacred and transfiguring our moral values, we applaud them for having managed to hold our attention and open a dialogue with our most inner feelings, that of course is the case, when the metaphor has been successfully constructed.



Gericault Théodore, "A Kleptomaniac" 1820



Cattelan Maurizio, "Him" 2001

In these two representations we cannot but feel moved by the purity and dignity of how these characters are presented to us. On one hand we see Géricault's mental patient posing for the image with no remorse, at all his truth, can we blame him for being "a kleptomaniac", for having such a condition or should we laugh at him because he is crazy and abnormal¹¹. To the right we see "Him", and although at first we just find funny to see little Adolf on his knees, there, feeling small and begging for forgiveness, how can we punish him when he looks like that, so small and troubled¹². Both representations awaken a sense of ambiguity, we know they should be punished for doing evil, but we also feel sorry for the misery that reigns their existence. As mentioned before, we perceived the human condition portrayed in two ways, absurdly tragic and tragically absurd, and still we feel in doubt and somehow guilty for our troubled response and posture to the works.

In spite of the fact that subjective interpretations have the inability to speak any truth about anything, we cannot approach any of these matters as scientists, and then try to objectify art concepts like they were mathematical equations, because it is "*not what man knows but what man feels that concerns art. All else is science.*" Stated Bernard Berenson, and from there we also consider Hegel's idea stated above on the consequences of separating form from content and so on, in order to continue coupling certain perceived aspects from artworks, as we dig into other samples to enrich the matter at stake.



Couture Thomas, "Little Bather" 1849



Chapman Brothers, "Two Faced Cunt" 1996

The analogous metaphorical content related to innocence and its fragility that we find in "Little Bather" and "Two Faced Cunt" is almost troubling to grasp when we linger superficially to the layer of form in the second one. But as we explore, notice the *anecdotic exterior elements* of the apple and the crucifix in Couture's, and the sneakers in the Chapman's, and then regard how delicate and defenseless their body postures are depicted, the tilted head, the split hair and the flimsy appearance in their hand gestures. We as grown ups are the only ones in charge of disrupting that childish innocence.



Benouville, "The Wrath of Achilles" 1847

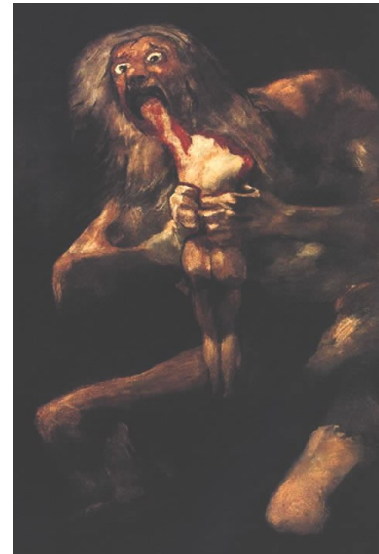


Duane Hanson, "Body Builder" 1990

Then we wonder about Hanson's modern day Achilles and his historical partner, look at them in the fragility of their manhood, the bewildering concern they both share about achieving a successful and victorious life. Benouville's depicted surrounded by elements of great historical implications, the robe, the marble, and the allusion to the splendor of classic Rome and the richness of Greek mythology. The other pumped-up in steroids with a red towel, blue shorts and white sneakers, the great and powerful American flag; we immediately feel compelled to see that behind all this banality our "Bodybuilder" seeks to be a modern day hero and to become a man that leaves no room for failure.



Paul McCarthy "Santa Chocolate Shop" 1997



Goya, "Saturn or [...]" c. 1819-23

Who else to describe the grotesque absurdity of human actions than Goya and McCarthy, of course here is Saturn devouring his son, chugging and dismembering the body while blood is spilled all over, and then we see Santa's helper playing innocently with chocolate, but provably not before having altered it by adding bodily segregations to the mix¹³. Both Goya and McCarthy in their pieces reflect the artist desire to criticize societies desperate and perverse behavior¹⁴. One can only imagine the intellectual repression Goya suffered at the time for not being able to manifest such works to the public, unlike McCarthy that leaves in an era where the audience seeks to be shocked, but not by horror but by absurdity.

Below, we contemplate the representation of man's greatest and most powerful emotion, love, and the consequences this passion can unleash when we are infatuated with it, "*I could be martyr'd for my religion. Love is my religion. And I could die for that.*" J.Keats. The intention in both metaphors is clear, Koons take us directly to the heart of it, the great

moment of consummation, and just as we note Brocky's Cupid right at the moment when he is falling in love, both victims of their own devices, Cupid and Koons (as subject of his metaphor) have subjugated all their beings and surrendered to the enchanting power of their muses¹⁵. What other refuge exists for the soul than the heart of the lover, but we know more than anything that these thoughts are nothing but kitsch and a bit too corny, we don't just want to talk about love; we need to relate to the complexity of relationships, the day-to-day consequences of life with a partner, sexual decay, socio-economic matters, etc. We wonder if passionate love can last forever and if it is gone already, where is it, maybe it is here, frozen in these metaphors as a reminder of its simplicity, its beauty and its volatility.



Jeff Koons, "Dirty-Jeff on Top" 1991



Brocky Karoly, "Cupid & Psyche" 1855

In the following works Gericault and Cattelan illustrate majestically the romantic metaphor, part of this is because they both make a use of very simple to read universal symbols that are essentialities of our culture, which are charged with a great amount of implications.



Cattelan Maurizio, "La Nona Ora" 1999



Gericault Théodore, "The Raft Of The Medusa" 1819

First we have the Pope and then we have a raft adrift. The figure of the Pope brings heavy thoughts to mind: at least there is hope, I haven't prayed enough, I am feeling guilt, God is watching, repent yourselves, etc. Again in Cattelan's depiction we seem to feel somehow in an ambiguous situation because there is this symbol that represents so much to us, left at the mercy of elements of nature, if the representative of God on Earth gets hit by a meteorite, what chance do we have then if God even punishes his favorites, is Cattelan going to get punished for this outrage, and so on¹⁶. It is normal that we build questions and question again our values on the figures we rest importance on; who doesn't feel compelled to stretch a hand and lift his Excellency from the floor but not without first secretly laughing, subsequently we develop thoughts related to loss of faith, failure, death, disappearance, etc. On the other hand, exhibiting and accepting the circulation of artworks of this sort as spectators, can bring the collapse of moral and ideological conventions on certain individuals because they can translate them into their own social context with certain altering consequences, that of course if art is able to make a difference in the world¹⁷. To this last stated we encounter the likes in Gericault's "The Raft Of The Medusa", even though one of the first aspects we overlook is its technical magnificence, simply because we are drawn immediately to the matters of its content, to the action of its depiction and the implication that that might have had on its spectators while reviewing this scene at the time it was presented¹⁸. The elevation of hope that we perceived is the most liberating of the themes from this complex composition, but at the same time we feel the despair and the abandonment, it is true, God has spared the life of a few, but what about the others, what about the horror they were exposed to suffer by eating each other after the crew left them adrift at the mercy of their own luck and the elements of nature¹⁹. We have pointed out a few parallels back there on how both artists came to talk about similar things through a conversion of form on the display of their metaphors, but more importantly we value these artworks for the audacity and honesty they possess, in how they show us the ideological attachment to their Romantic concern.

The term *relation* has been a key word through out this essay, specially considering the importance that the role of the audience had in the Romantic period and also now a days in "Relational Art"²⁰. Bearing in mind that "the idea" that then and now on the role of artist, is and was to instigate the audience, to affect them in a way, and make them somehow change and question their mundanity to become participants of their concepts²¹. And although humor in art is a lot of fun, it runs a great risk as well, specially if we get stuck abusing and exhausting this form; we begin to caress the possibility of just becoming a desensitized society, maybe will just look at everything with sarcasm and irony while transforming into a Homo Cynicus, which makes us wonder if we are not becoming cynical but maybe we are already there, as Erwin Wurm states in an interview

for Art Review Jan/Feb Issue 2011, as this essay was being written: “*It’s always best when it’s hurting and it’s cynical and it’s not nice*”, But again we are just reviewing the use of absurd humor in disguising the Romantic metaphor, and maybe we should just concern ourselves with what could become another efficient mechanism of disguising the Romantic metaphor, or are we just going to abandon it altogether again, as form morphs into content altogether.

¹ Observation will not do, appreciation is required. But the fact of responsiveness is built into the concept of emotion, and it would be difficult to know what moral life would be like, or if indeed there could be such a thing as a moral life, if there were not responses like indignation, concern, shame or sympathy. [...] values involve a relationship between ourselves and the world, [...]. (Chapter on Aesthetics and the work of art) “The Transfiguration of the Commonplace” Arthur C. Danto. Harvard Press 1981.

² Pg. 80 “What is Philosophy” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatari. Verso Press 2009.

³ Romanticism was a movement in all the arts. It was the reaction against both Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment [...]. The certainties of the Enlightenment were challenged by the rise in religious skepticism and the French revolution. With the authority of the state and the church being questioned, a new type of artist was created, one that was inward looking and was detached from mainstream society. The idea of the artist in the romantic period was all about the individual [...]. From this vantage point [...]. Pg. 64 to 66 “Art Theory for Beginners” Richard Osborne, Dan Sturgis, Natalie Turner. Zidane Press 2006.

⁴ There exists a certain psychological state, which tends to produce laughter, which is the natural phenomenon or process of "humor", or "humor perception". The necessary and (jointly) sufficient conditions for the perception of humor are:

(V) The perceiver has in mind a view of the situation as constituting a violation of some affective commitment of the perceiver to the way something in the situation ought to be. That is, a "subjective moral principle" (cf. next section) of the perceiver is violated.

(N) The perceiver has in mind a predominating view of the situation as being normal.

(Simultaneity)

The N and V understandings are present in the mind of the perceiver at the same instant in time.

Restating more briefly and less precisely, humor occurs when it seems that things are normal (N) while at the same time something seems wrong (V). Or, in an only apparent paradox, Humor is (emotional) pain (V) that doesn't hurt (N). from text "Humor is Affective Absurdity".

To reiterate: "That's not funny!" has two meanings under this theory of humor. It could mean, "That's offensive!", in cases where the violated principle is held too dear, and the N interpretation cannot predominate or is lacking entirely. Or it could be like saying, "So, what's the point?" Laughter is often considered disrespectful. (For example, individual laughter is frowned upon in some churches.) Most people are personally offended when they are laughed at - a basic fact of human social reality. Disrespect naturally occurs when one person's emotional pain is seen as acceptable by another. From text "What isn't funny?"

Among funny things, some things are funnier than others. Why? Because more is better. First, complexity seems to increase the degree of perceived humor, so that if a joke is seen to contain several hidden violations, it will be more funny than if fewer were noticed. On the other hand, if a humorous situation is elaborated, by pointing out further violations or further instances of the same violation, the humorous interpretation may be intensified or prolonged. Second, if a violation is itself pleasurable, as in cases where for example a joke points out a violation of some person, group, or practice which is disliked, it seems more funny. Third, familiarity with and intensity of the violation have an important role. People sometimes find a situation or a joke more funny when it evokes an experience they have had before, or when the audience has had personal encounters with the violations evoked in the joke. From text "Degrees of humor".

Humor may be either a cause or a consequence of emotional transformation. It is a consequence in that after a situation has been normalized or the emotional pain in it has been reduced, this emotional distance can enable humor to be perceived. That is, as one gets a better perspective on a formerly painful situation, one may then be able to laugh about it. However, it is equally true that humor can have the opposite transforming effect, too, as when a person discovers he is the object of laughter (being the object of laughter means being responsible for the perceived violation), and reinterprets what had seemed a normal and unremarkable experience as one in which he has been negatively judged -- demeaned and degraded. From text "Humor and Emotional Transformation".

By Tom Veatch. <http://www.tomveatch.com/else/humor/paper/node2.html>

⁵ Or again, it may be argued that the senses of taste and humor are culturally condition [...]. Laughter, when at a thing or act because the thing or act is comical, is a good enough example of what I mean by a response, though of course there are other modes of response. (Chapter on Aesthetics and the work of art) "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace" Arthur C. Danto. Harvard Press 1981.

⁶ Examination of the language, regulations, and circumstances surrounding contemporary art and auction house customs reveal a culture driven by absurdity. From the language surrounding an evening sale at Christie's or Sotheby's, to the contemporary status of auctioneer as celebrity, absurdity penetrates the sale of contemporary art on the global market. Auction houses work in tandem with internationally acclaimed dealers, curators, and collectors to stimulate the highest sales possible. Absurdities include, but are not limited to, the arising situation for unquestioned cultural growth in the United Arab Emirates, the psychology and inner workings of Contemporary Art Fairs, and the long utilized practice of waitlisting for artwork. It becomes clear that these absurdities are cleverly calculated forms of hegemony introduced by a small number of people to maintain influence, wealth and power within the contemporary arts community. This notion of inappropriateness is easily understood and even useful when considering the production of creative works. Artists are frequently associated with going against the norm, unveiling unconsidered and often wildly unreasonable perspectives, and harnessing unfamiliarity. In many cases, creative works can be enhanced by the notion of absurdity as it allows for unconventional thought. However, this same notion of absurdity becomes problematic when defining the global market for contemporary art. This is mainly because the global art market mirrors a Eurocentric status hierarchy, held predominantly by the Western elite, to demonstrate a dispersal of wealth and power. Thomas Hoving, former Director for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, clearly demonstrates this as quoted by Thompson in *The \$12 Million Dollar Stuffed Shark*: "Art is sexy! Art is money-sexy! Art is money-sexy-social-climbing-fantastic!" "Concordia Undergraduate Journal of Art History" From the text "Absurdity, Contemporary Art and Auction Culture" By Tarnjeev Guram. <http://cujah.com/publications/volume-vi/absurdity-contemporary-art-and-auction-culture/>

⁷ The works of outstanding composers of this period (Shubert, Chopin, Liszt, and Brahms) are penetrated with freedom, deep concern in human inner world and strong feelings of a creative personality. Creative “works of Frederic Chopin, Franz Liszt and Johannes Brahms had many common features, as all of these composers lived during one historical period. Some romantic composers bring feelings of loneliness and depression, others – calmness and tenderness. Music of this period developed sensitivity in people” and softened their souls. People were charmed with simple and clear melodies. “Art Appreciation” <http://www.essay-911.com/samples/art-appreciation.htm>

⁸ The seemingly one-sided conversation that obtains between "Derrida" and "romanticism" thus stages and anticipates the opaque operation of the legacy it describes, for, to switch metaphors from a vocal to a visual register, in the wake of the philosopher's oeuvre, whose outer edges no longer seem discernible, romanticists seem almost to fall under the gaze of a gracious and beneficent master whose eyes they cannot meet, and whose mastery is anything but a sure thing. “Lost and found in translation: romanticism and the legacies of Jacques Derrida.” Article from: Studies in Romanticism, Article date: June 22, 2007. Author: Clark, David L. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-172908072.html>

⁹ The romantic emphasis on the individual was reflected in ideas of self-realization and nature. Wordsworth thought that the individual could directly understand nature without the need for society and social artifice; salvation is achieved by the solitary individual rather than through political movements. “Romanticism” by Roger Jones. <http://www.philosopher.org.uk/rom.htm>

¹⁰ Two related paradoxes also emerge from the same basic conception of the aesthetic experience. The first was given extended consideration by Hegel, who argued, in his *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik* (1832; "Lectures on Aesthetics"; Eng. trans., *Philosophy of Fine Art*), roughly as follows: Our sensuous appreciation of art concentrates upon the given "appearance"--the "form." It is this that holds our attention and that gives to the work of art its peculiar individuality. Because it addresses itself to our sensory appreciation, the work of art is essentially concrete, to be understood by an act of perception rather than by a process of discursive thought. At the same time, our understanding of the work of art is in part intellectual; we seek in it a conceptual content, which it presents to us in the form of an idea. One purpose of critical interpretation is to expound this idea in discursive form--to give the equivalent of the content of the work of art in another, nonsensuous idiom. But criticism can never succeed in this task, for, by separating the content from the particular form, it abolishes its individuality. The content presented then ceases to be the exact content of that work of art. In losing its individuality, the content loses its aesthetic reality; it thus ceases to be a reason for attending to the particular work of art that first attracted our critical attention. It cannot be this that we saw in the original work and that explained its power over us. For this content, displayed in the discursive idiom of the critical intellect, is no more than a husk, a discarded relic of a meaning that eluded us in the act of seizing it. If the content is to be the true object of aesthetic interest, it must remain wedded to its individuality: it cannot be detached from its "sensuous embodiment" without being detached from itself. Content is, therefore, inseparable from form and form in turn inseparable from content. (It is the form that it is only by virtue of the content that it embodies.) “Aesthetics, Relationship between form and content”, 1995 Encyclopedia Britannica. http://www.uv.es/EBRIT/macro/macro_5000_1_5.html

¹¹ Gericault's entire history is one of change and innovation, and nothing is more novel than his portraits of the insane. Painted for a Dr Georget, one of the pioneers of psychiatry, each of these paintings illustrates a different psychotic condition such as kleptomania, delusions of grandeur, and so forth. It is not certain whether these works were painted by Gericault as a favor to Dr Georget, or whether they were in fact a kind of occupational therapy prescribed by Georget for one of Gericault's frequent bouts of depression. Gericault painted ten of these canvases in all; only five are extant, a fine example being *The Mad Assassin* (1822). The uniqueness of the works lies in the fact that they were among the first to depict an abnormal mental state as an illness, rather than as a subject for laughter. Encyclopedia of Irish and World Art, “Biography & Paintings of 19th French Romantic Artist: Narrative History Picture "The Raft of the Medusa".” <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/famous-artists/gericault-theodore.htm>

¹² **HIM** is one in a series of sculptures by Maurizio Cattelan that places modern and contemporary figures such as President John F. Kennedy and Pope John Paul II in situations to provoke contemplation or debate about the most disturbing aspects of humanity -- in this case, the presence and nature of evil. This work juxtaposes the vulnerable, seemingly innocent body of a boy with the adult face of Adolf Hitler, who is widely considered the most evil person of the twentieth century for his responsibility for the deaths of six million Jews in the Holocaust and for the deaths of millions of others in World War II. HIM may serve as a reminder that the face of evil is not always easily recognizable and that individuals can cause terrible destruction. Cattelan's combination of imagery and the experience of encountering this work, provide opportunity for reflection -- on the Holocaust, on one individual's power to create evil in recent history, and on the personal and societal responses to past, present, and future atrocities. “Maurizio Cattelan” at Terminartors, http://www.terminartors.com/artistprofile/Cattelan_Maurizio

¹³ Mccarthy exposes behavior that is usually suppressed. PM employs ketchup and chocolate sauce as ersatz blood and shit in his installations, performances and video. All of which present a theatrical antithesis to the composed, socialized body that represents clean-cut American cultural values. Father Christmas and characters from Disney fairytales conduct violent and perverse acts, as well as the more benign functional acts of daily life, cynically transmuting the condiments of good clean fun into blood and excreta. "The Body in Contemporary Art", Sally O'Reilly, Thames and Hudson 2009.

¹⁴ In Goya's image, though, there is no context of legend, but instead a stripped-down scene of cannibalistic horror. What is Goya's improvisation on this familiar icon of art and literature? For one, he renders it blatantly insane, Saturn shown without any recognizable expression of premeditation. Another is no context given of the ethical system of mythology. What system could explain this picture? Apostle Paul said that the heathen do not worship gods, but demons masquerading. Has Goya stripped away all the academic and literary cloakings for Saturn and thrown out this portrait as a simple bit of Christian dogma, however dark and crazed? But if Goya said anything to explain why he painted it this way, it has not survived, and all the explanations are guesses. He rendered the picture quickly and without the technical gloss and fine finish he was quite capable of doing when a particular painting was to be shown in public. That, probably more than anything else, says that Goya had little, if any, investment in making sure an intended audience understood the picture. "SATURN also called Saturn Devouring his Son, Saturno devorando a su hijo" By Erik Weems, <http://eeweems.com/goya/saturn.html>

¹⁵ The works from Made in Heaven disappeared from public view for many years. The original show was criticized severely in the press, and there was also the matter that Koons and Iona Staller, his wife and model for the work, split up in 1992, shortly after the birth of their son, Ludwig. Koons destroyed much of the work when Staller took Ludwig away to Italy, and the two have been embroiled in legal battles ever since. In 1997, Koons twice postponed and ultimately canceled his show of this work at the Guggenheim. In those years, Koons was still very raw from the divorce and the child-custody issues. Nevertheless, he has always maintained that this is his most important body of work, the most radical, the most risky and the most sincere. Yet he was so conflicted about it because of what was unfolding in real life that he'd change his mind every week about presenting it. Now it seems that Koons is finally making peace with the series. He gave his blessing to include several Made in Heaven paintings and sculptures in the Pop Life group show at the Tate Modern in London last year. "Jeff Koons: The Infamous "Made In Heaven" Series", October 3, 2010, Patrick Zimmerman, <http://disembedded.wordpress.com/2010/10/03/jeff-koons-the-infamous-made-in-heaven-series/>

¹⁶ LA NONA ORA, which takes its title from the hour of Jesus Christ's death, was featured in the Royal Academy in London's Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art. The scene: a wax sculpture of the pope—painstaking in its realism—lay on one side of the room, crushed under the weight of an equally realistic meteorite that seemed to have come crashing through a skylight. Glass was scattered about the floor. The scene was upsetting to many, and on December 21st, 1999, the story goes, while the installation was on in Warsaw's National Gallery, two Polish politicians ordered the meteor's removal. The figure of the pope, they decreed, was to be put on its feet. «I like the idea that someone is trying to save the Pope, like an upside-down miracle, coming not from the heavens but from earth.» Cattelan told Artnet News through a spokesperson. «In the end it is only a piece of wax.» Terminartors, http://www.terminartors.com/artistprofile/Cattelan_Maurizio

¹⁷ Related by the feelings they evoke, like pity or disgust, they are often masked by the joke: a technique that Freud saw as a form of 'fore-pleasure', allowing a socially acceptable release of internal inhibitions. As such, Cattelan's jokiness might be seen as a nervous façade, diverting attention from the realisation that art is unable to make a difference in the world. "Maurizio Cattelan, Le Consortium, Dijon, France", Elizabeth Janus, First published in Issue 34, May 1997 http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/maurizio_cattelan1/

¹⁸ Géricault that shook up his image as the prototypical Romantic hero - a precocious, self-taught, dandified rebel who died at 33, whose theatrical paintings mirrored a turbulent inner life. It revealed instead a meticulous scholar of anatomy; a pioneering technician who was one of the first in France to make lithographs; an activist responding to the political tensions and social unrest of his time; and an artist whose work remains pointedly relevant, capable of touching on both the sublime and the terrible. "Théodore Géricault, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France" By Laurie Attias, First published in Issue 41, June-August 1998, http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/theodore_gericault/

¹⁹ The Raft of the Medusa (1819) is a truly innovative painting, not only in raising a subject from modern life to the proportions once reserved for paintings of the Antique, but also in its construction. Gericault was extremely daring in organizing his painting around a pyramid, which culminates in the figure of the negro waving a rag in the direction of the rescue ship, faintly visible on the horizon. However, this composition gives such power to the expression of hope among the shipwrecked survivors that it succeeds admirably. Despite its qualities, the Medusa was not well received by the critics, nor was it bought by the government as Gericault had hoped it would be. Disillusioned by his relative failure after so much intense work, he took the painting to England early in 1820; he made a considerable amount of money by showing it there in a travelling exhibition. "Encyclopedia of Irish and World Art, Biography & Paintings of 19th French Romantic Artist: Narrative History Picture "The Raft of the Medusa"."
<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/famous-artists/gericault-theodore.htm>

²⁰ In relational art, the artist is no longer at the center. They are no longer the soul creator, the master or even celebrity. The artist, instead, is the catalyst. They kick-start a question, frame a point of consideration, or highlight an everyday moment. [...]To Bourriaud's mind, and the artists who's aesthetic is you and I, the relational aspect of their activities is the fundamental difference between today's art experience and previous art activities such as Fluxist, Happenings and Performance Art to name a few. Moreover, today's relational art emerges from the profound and ever-changing impact of media technologies. "Happy to Meet You: An Introduction to Relational Art", Relational Aesthetics and Arts-Based Service Learning, PLACE Program, http://place.unm.edu/relational_art.html

²¹ ROBECCHI: Warhol certainly wasn't an apolitical artist, as a lot of people would love to believe. Yet I'm not sure if his acceptance of certain values, like celebrity, was revolutionary in the way that you mean.
CATTELAN: In the long run, he was more revolutionary than a lot of artists who were openly championing the very same values that he was incorporating into his work. In Warhol's work, serial repetition acts as a depowering or destabilizing force. He knew that believing in art as a society-changing weapon can be detrimental. There must be more to it than that. It has to be sensual, or witty, or visually appealing. The worst possible thing is when ideological art becomes didactic. What you get as a result is little more than propaganda—and then it doesn't matter which side of the barricade you're on.
ROBECCHI: How about your sculptures of John Fitzgerald Kennedy [Now, 2004] or Adolf Hitler [Him, 2001]? Aren't these works plainly political?
CATTELAN: What I'm interested in are images. I'm sure you can tell. Who in his right mind would deliberately represent the pope struck by a meteorite in order to deliver a political message about the church? Or a hooded kid nailed to a school desk? It takes a very deviated and imaginative mind—say, Roger Waters in his The Wall period—to conceive something like that as a critique of the educational system. Maurizio Cattelan
By Michele Robecchi, Interview Magazine <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/maurizio-cattelan/>