

An abstract expressionist painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes in a rich palette of red, green, blue, yellow, and black. The composition is dynamic and layered, with various colors and textures overlapping. The text 'WOMEN OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM' is overlaid in the lower right quadrant.

WOMEN OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

WOMEN OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

EDITED BY JOAN MARTER

**INTRODUCTION BY
GWEN F. CHANZIT, EXHIBITION CURATOR**

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Frontispiece: Jay DeFeo, *Incision*, 1958–61 (detail of cat. 6)

Page 5: Helen Frankenthaler, *Jacob's Ladder*, 1957 (detail of cat. 17)

Cover illustration: Elaine de Kooning, *Bullfight*, 1959 (detail of cat. 11)

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KRASNER, MITCHELL, AND FRANKENTHALER

NATURE AS METONYM

ROBERT HOBBS

Since critics and art historians have long thought that first-generation Abstract Expressionism, with the sole exception of Lee Krasner, was comprised of only men, there has been a concomitant tendency to regard this art as a singularly male prerogative. According to this gender-biased reading, only in the early 1950s, when the ideas of this art began to be disseminated, were women able to participate in this primarily heroic and macho-oriented art, and they did so by diminishing the work's intuitive power and its rigorous emphasis on individual autonomy. In this scenario, the second generation, which includes Joan Mitchell and Helen Frankenthaler among other females, never managed to plumb the depths of the unconscious that had served as the first generation's fountainhead, and so their art became more associated with an external rather than an internal nature. Like many myths, this one contains some truths, while falsifying others, and it glorifies works by members of the first generation, at the expense of art by later artists, because it does not recognize that these subsequent individuals were using improvisational techniques to achieve very different goals. In this essay, I will be looking at the work of three widely acknowledged women Abstract Expressionists—Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler—in terms of the poetic tropes found in their works that diverge substantially from those utilized by male artists of the first generation. These differences, in my opinion,

are predicated on the women's preference for metonyms instead of the metaphors found in work by male Abstract Expressionists. My basic understanding of metonyms is indebted to Hugh Bredin's excellent analysis.¹ Stated simply, metonymy is a noncomplex and nondependent relation between objects that is already known through established conventions, while metaphor is an invented relation dependent on an overarching concept.²

In recent years, feminist scholars in a number of fields have tried to characterize metonymy as a universal trope characteristic of women, while metaphor is viewed as belonging to the male domain. Consequently, French literary theorist and feminist Domna C. Stanton questions the appropriateness of metaphor for symbolizing motherhood. She finds metonymy more suitable for "generat[ing] indefinite explorations of other desirable known and unknown female functions," because it explores "concrete contextual inscriptions of differences within/among women."³ Traditionally, metonymy has been regarded as marginally figurative: according to this rationale, it is useful for condensing and classing established contingent, tangential, and contextual relationships in terms of associations, making it especially relevant for realistic prose and representational art, more so than for poetry and abstraction. Beginning with the Greeks, philosophers have tended to personify metonymy indirectly as the lackluster stepsister of its



assumed-to-be more mature, original, intelligent, and proactive poetic male counterpart, metaphor, due to the latter's capability to transpose terms from one semantic field to another, thereby enacting stirring and often innovative shifts in thought.⁴ In 1982, the respected feminist, ethicist, and psychologist Carol Gilligan took the important step of making positive connections between traditional metonymical characteristics and females' orientation to the world. She postulates, "The psychology of women that has consistently been described as distinctive in its great orientation toward relationships and interdependence implies a more contextual mode of judgment [i.e., metonymy] and a different moral understanding." She believes an ethics with "insistent contextual relativism" might appear to be "inclusive and diffuse to the male perspective." Gilligan is convinced that "women's development points toward a different history of human attachment, stressing continuity and change in configuration, rather than replacement and separation."⁵ Literary theorist Jill Matus reinforces this metonymical reading in terms of "a new language in psychology to deal with a different sense of [the female] self—one that emphasizes affiliations, maintenance of connections and relationships," thereby stressing "context, relativism and connection links."⁶

While these thoughtful engendered interpretations of metaphor and metonymy aim to establish universal

differences throughout time, my investigation of paintings by Krasner, Mitchell, and Frankenthaler in terms of metonyms will consider the appearance of this trope in their work from a strictly historical point of view. It will not regard either metaphor or metonymy as the universally valid and sole prerogative of either one gender or the other throughout time. Instead, it will look at metonyms in the art of these three Abstract Expressionists in terms of the mid-twentieth century, when they were acculturated to certain expectations about women's traditional roles.

Krasner was able to take advantage of the Roosevelt administration's emergency tactics for helping unemployed artists during the Great Depression, resulting in the formation of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), when she joined its mural division. And she, together with Mitchell and Frankenthaler, faced changing attitudes toward women both during and after World War II. Throughout the war, women were first ushered into the workforce in great numbers, before having to cope with an entirely different set of postwar cultural norms, many propagated by the U.S. government, in its efforts to find jobs for returning soldiers, while redirecting former "Rosie the Riveters" to the home and to old-style family values.⁷ Although both Mitchell and Frankenthaler were still in school during World War II, their life choices indicate their appreciation of the brief move away from stereotypical roles for women

FIG. 45. Lee Krasner, *The Eye Is the First Circle*, 1960. Oil paint on canvas, 92³/₄ in. × 15 ft., 11⁷/₈ in. (235.59 × 487.36 cm). Private collection.



FIG. 46. Lee Krasner, *Listen*, 1957. Oil paint on cotton duck, 63 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 58 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (160.66 × 148.59 cm). Private collection.

during the war and their rejection of the reimplementa-
tion of traditional attitudes toward women after the war.

As Abstract Expressionists, all three were among the few female members welcomed into the male-dominated group known as the Eighth Street Club (and simply called The Club), which was founded in late 1949. And yet, as artists, they were confronted with an entrenched male-dominated style predicated on assertive metaphors. In order to appreciate the far-ranging use of this imperative trope, one need only recall Jackson Pollock's famous assertion, "I am nature"; Barnett Newman's "The first man was an artist";⁸ Rothko's "I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers";⁹ Clyfford Still's "I never wanted color to be color. I never wanted texture to be texture, or images to become shapes. I wanted them to fuse together into a living spirit";¹⁰ and Willem de Kooning's "Some painters, including myself, do not care what chair they are sitting on. . . . They do not want to 'sit in style.' Rather they have found that painting . . . to be painting at all [is], in fact—a style of living."¹¹ These artists metaphorize art, respectively, as nature, work by male artists, drama, living spirit, and life. One of the more ecstatic metaphors is by Richard Pousette-Dart, the least macho artist in the group. He allies his work with the following string of metaphors: "Art for me is the

heavens forever opening up, like asymmetrical, unpredictable spontaneous kaleidoscopes. It is magic, it is joy, it is gardens of surprise and miracle. It is energy, impulse. It is question and answer. It is transcendental reason. It is total in its spirit . . . it is a doorway to liberation. It is a spark from an invisible central fire. . . . Paintings must have form but not necessarily in any preconceived or set known way."¹² Although one will certainly find metonymical statements by some of these artists, the metaphorical ones take precedence. They do so because this trope enables these men to address the then all-important role of being generators and disseminators of form, and to realize in their work the type of inspiration they believed only male artists, as enlightened individuals, were capable of handling.

While the metonymical/metaphoric split has traditionally privileged the latter poetic trope with actively changing thought and the former with simple stenographic condensation, such widely assumed polarities between the two have been overstated and, in fact, falsify the evidence, giving metonym insufficient credit for being a selective and highly poetic trope. Metonymic relationships are not as self-evident as has been supposed: they are chosen from a number of possibilities that can be "contextual, contiguous, spatial," according to Matus, making this figure a far more creative and useful trope than formerly considered.¹³ French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan has rightly understood metonymy's role in the contiguity and displacement that the unconscious mind enacts, thereby connecting it with desire or longing. Lacan explains: "And the enigmas that desire . . . poses for any sort of 'natural philosophy' are based on no other derangement of instinct than the fact that it is caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the desire for something else."¹⁴ Viewed in this way, metonymy serves as an excellent retrospective tool for looking at the role desire plays in Krasner's, Mitchell's, and Frankenthaler's works where nature's metonymic connections are not reified or known beforehand in terms of either a specific or generalized landscape. Instead they are established through intuited needs and yet held in abeyance as perpetual mysteries, with clues tauntingly revealed slowly over time in terms of painted fragments, shards reflective of lives undergoing continual transformation in terms of breakup, renewal, and reconnection.

Since Lee Krasner almost never titled her own works and instead depended on conversations with friends and their suggestions, she was surprised to realize instinctively one of her *Umber* paintings needed to be called

The Eye Is the First Circle (fig. 45), which she later discovered was the first line of American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Circles" (1841), an essay she had read during her teens and thought she had completely forgotten. In this piece, experiences, whether good or tragic, encourage people to break free of conditioned attitudes in order to enter ever-increasing and wider spheres of understanding.¹⁵ In "Circles," Emerson moves far from the fixed view expressed only five years before in "Nature," which he had conceived as a metaphor of the human mind. Instead, he embraces in "Circles" a metonymical view of the world by pointing out "there are no fixtures in nature," because "the universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a world of degrees."¹⁶ Given the number of eyes emerging from the cascading waves of loosely brushed and flung paint in *The Eye Is the First Circle*, suggesting a range of view-points, we might conjecture that the theme of eyes puns the shifting pronoun "I," which refers back to whomever is using it, undermines the type of unitary self often clearly expressed in metaphors, and posits, instead, the work of art and the self as multifaceted consciousnesses that look back at viewers, appraising and interrogating them. It is significant that Krasner remembers only seeing the eyes after the painting was done and was initially unaware that her own painting was in fact appraising her.¹⁷

Perhaps the clearest example of a metonym in Krasner's work is the *Earth Green* series painted soon after Pollock's death. Beginning with *Listen*, which her friend and collector, B. H. Friedman, helped name, Krasner elaborates on her signature so that it expands to become the armature for the entire painting (fig. 46).¹⁸ This emphasis on her connection to her own name occurs in a number of other contemporaneous works, including *Sun Woman I* (fig. 47), *Sun Woman II* (1957–c. 1973, Pollock-Krasner Foundation), and *The Seasons* (cat. 34). Far more than the simple act of affixing her name to a work of art, the umber-colored signature and its extension into the painting come at a time when Krasner was forging a separate identity from Pollock and a period when many Abstract Expressionists had already settled on self-defining schemas known as their "signature images," including Pollock's drips, Rothko's veils, Newman's zips, Still's rugged patchwork of stalactitic and stalagmitic forms, Motherwell's ripped and torn edges, Gottlieb's primordial *Bursts*, and Willem de Kooning's women. Whether Krasner chose to be a maverick or accepted this default role as her path, her prominent signature and its underlying and unifying role in *Listen* can be considered a parody of one-image art. But its significance does not end here.



Starting in the lower right of *Listen*, Krasner's sprawling name appears either to have initiated or concluded the initial phase of outlining the composition with an umber *imprimatura*. Whether undertaken at the beginning or reinforced at the end of this process, the integral use of the artist's name connects the overall work with her identity and helps to explain the intense emotional reaction she felt while making it. "I can remember," she later told her friend, the poet and noted translator Richard Howard, "that when I was painting *Listen* which is so highly keyed in color—I've seen it many times since and it looks like such a happy painting—I can remember that while I was painting it I almost didn't see it, because tears were literally pouring down."¹⁹ As Krasner later said, "No one was more surprised than I was when the breasts appeared."²⁰ Instead of invoking

FIG. 47. Lee Krasner, *Sun Woman I*, 1957. Oil paint on canvas, 97 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 70 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (247.02 × 178.44 cm). Private collection.



FIG. 48. Lee Krasner in her Brooklyn studio, c. 1942 (detail). Photograph by Maurice Berezov.

a holistic sense of self in this painting, Krasner presents fragmented images of herself in terms of the signature and the breast-like forms occupying the position traditionally accorded to flowers in a vase, which is comprised partly of flourishes stemming from her signature or culminating in it. The artist's nature is metonymically connected to the breasts and to the leaf-like forms in the painting, which resemble the same scraggly indoor plant appearing in some of Krasner's Picasso-style still-life paintings of the early 1940s and also in a couple of often-reproduced photographs of her made during the time (fig. 48). Since Krasner is metonymically connected to this painting, one might expect that she would, of course, be profoundly moved by amputated breasts and hothouse plant leaves as well as by the lack of connection with an integral or self-sustaining nature that this work underscores.

In light of Krasner's reaction, French deconstructionist Jacques Derrida's conjectures about signatures in works of art as examples of self-sacrifice are particularly relevant: "The law producing and prohibiting the signature (in the first modality) of the proper name, is that by not letting the signature fall outside the text any more, as an undersigned subscription, and by inserting it into the body of the text, you monumentalize, institute and erect it into a thing or a strong object. But in doing so, you also lose the identity, the title of ownership over the text; you let it become a moment or a part of the text, as a thing or common name."²¹ Krasner's sadness in

creating *Listen* indicates an awareness of the necessary loss involved in consigning part of one's identity/nature to a work of art. Once the work is finished, the umbilical cord is cut. Even when a painting is constructed as a surrogate identity, comprised of telling fragments, as *Listen* evidently is, the new ensuing creation assumes an existence separate from that of the artist, and so relations to the self's partial identity in the work are severed, creating yet other metonymical longings needing to be connected.

Looking at aspects of the world as separate from the self and yet connected to it, through the metonym of spontaneously applied paint, is a thematic that took a special turn in the early 1950s, several years before Krasner's *Listen*, when French Impressionism, formerly considered old-fashioned, was rethought as a basis for mid-twentieth-century modern art. In 1953, when New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibited a recently acquired Claude Monet painting of water lilies, critics and artists alike began to discern connections between these early twentieth-century works and advanced post-World War II art. Almost overnight, Monet was hailed as the equal of Paul Cézanne, who until then had been accorded the undisputed role of modern art's father. Three years later, in 1956, this new attitude toward Impressionism continued to resonate. That year, critic Hilton Kramer pronounced, "The process of reconstructing Monet into an avant-garde master of heroic dimensions [seems] now [to be] in full swing."²²

Impressionism, then, was rehabilitated as one of modern art's progenitors in the 1950s with remarkable ease and rapidity. Looking back on this time, critic and art historian Irving Sandler pointed out in the 1970s, "The Impressionist component in the gesture painting of the second generation [of the New York School] . . . more than anything else distinguishes it from that of the first."²³ In her article "Subject: What, How or Who?" published in April 1955 in *ARTnews*, artist and critic Elaine de Kooning could count twice as many Abstract Impressionists as Abstract Expressionists. She took note of Abstract Impressionism's tendency to create allover compositions through a "quiet, uniform pattern of strokes . . . spread over the canvas without climax or emphasis."²⁴ In her opinion, the American Impressionists banish traditional subject matter that interested their nineteenth-century artistic forebears and instead attempt to manifest personally intuited "spiritual states" through resolutely optical means.²⁵

At this time, paint itself became metonymically equated with nature, a connection important for

appreciating both Mitchell's and Frankenthaler's work as involved with abstracted fragments referring to landscapes, by conceptualizing them as comprised of nature while representing aspects of nature abstractly. The critic and figurative painter Fairfield Porter opines, "The Impressionists taught us to look at nature very carefully; the Americans teach us to look very carefully at the painting. Paint is as real as nature and the means for a painting can contain its ends."²⁶

Particularly attuned to subtle connections between seeing and feeling in both Impressionism and its mid-twentieth-century abstract offshoot, Hilton Kramer frames this connection in his analysis of "sensation" as a special distillate found in Monet's art: "It was nothing less than the fluidity of sensation itself which came ultimately to occupy the center of Monet's interest—sensation perceived as a continuous interweaving of the particles of experience, unfettered in its headlong course by any single moment of perception and the memory of perception impinging upon and submitting to the sweet flux of all sensation as it unfolds itself to the senses."²⁷

Creating material fragments cohering feeling and seeing in painted passages is a goal to which Mitchell often alludes when commenting on her work, even though she does not use the word "sensation." A few of her statements, however, are enough to underscore her continued insistence on connecting herself to her art through painterly segments, which are, in effect, sensations. In 1957, Mitchell stated that she painted "remembered landscapes which involve my feelings," and added the following year these are "remembered landscapes that I carry with me."²⁸ For the process-oriented *ARTnews* series focusing on cutting-edge artists painting a picture, Mitchell started working on *Bridge* and then switched to *George Went Swimming at Barnes Hole, but It Got Too Cold*, in which her dog, George, and the East Hampton beach provided the artist with the incentive to work (fig. 49).²⁹ Later, Mitchell recalled: "I've got to think of something and get into a situation where I feel something, and where I love something, and it was George. George swimming at Barnes Hole. We used to go swimming together. I think of something that makes me feel good. I paint out of love. Love or feeling is getting out of yourself and focusing instead on someone or something else."³⁰ On another occasion, she spoke of her long fascination with Vincent van Gogh's sunflowers, a strong attachment reaching back to childhood; she articulated her goal as "want[ing] to make something like the feeling of a dying sunflower," thus addressing the desire to

empathize with an aspect of the world, an approach endemic to metonymy.³¹

The special emphasis placed on metonymy in Mitchell's work can be more clearly articulated by considering her long-term great admiration for William Wordsworth's Romantic poetry and feelings of kinship with it, beginning at Smith College when she took two literature courses taught by Helen Randall. In my opinion, the aspects of Wordsworth's poetry most important to Mitchell are this poet's special understanding of Aristotelianism, which relies on his being impressed by a force incarnated in distinct objects and fragments, so that agency is lodged in them rather than in the poet himself. In his poetry Wordsworth embraced several basic Aristotelian beliefs, including first this view of external subjectivities, with their essences comprising nature, which are eminently accessible for understanding, and second a concomitant faith in the impact these spiritualized forms can have on both one's receptive intellect and sense.³² This pair of Aristotelian attitudes is evident in one of this poet's most important works, "Tintern Abbey," where "with an eye made quiet by the power / Of Harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things."³³ And, as we have seen from our cursory summary of Mitchell's statements about her work, this Wordsworthian connection with nature as agent and with the artist as its recipient was crucially important for her and for her work.

Sometimes called an Abstract Impressionist, but more rarely than Mitchell, Helen Frankenthaler was also intrigued with distilling feelings in her work, a goal reaching back to childhood, when she would play the game of attempting to convey emotions or feelings abstractly.³⁴ Later, as a mature artist, Frankenthaler remained fascinated with the concept of manifesting sensations in her Color Field paintings. At one point she couched this desire in terms of the words "clumsy or puzzled." She acknowledged, "[They] are not exactly mastery, but they often lead to the same risk or another word I use: *magic*."³⁵ On another occasion she described her way of painting as being "involved in making her pictures 'hold' an explosive gesture; something that is moving in and out of landscapelike depths but lies flat in local areas—intact but not confined."³⁶

This in-and-out movement provides an important clue to the ongoing operative of "sensation" in Frankenthaler's painting, referring again to Hilton Kramer's insight into Monet's art. It also is a basis for the lyricism found in all her work, constituting a primary reason for referring to her painting as "lyrical abstraction," which



has usually been reserved for a later development of her Color Field work. However, in Frankenthaler's case, lyrical abstraction can be used to describe her entire oeuvre after the breakthrough painting *Mountains and Sea* (see fig. 6). While lyricism is traditionally connected etymologically with the lyre and its associations with music as well as with singing and time-based intangibles, in the visual arts it takes the form of soft light, hazy atmospheres, liquidity, seeming artlessness, lack of pretension, graceful arabesques, subtle modulations, the pastoral tradition, gentle melancholy, and evocations of nostalgia.³⁷

Lyricism, as philosopher Scott Alexander Howard has pointed out, can also be analyzed in terms of a specific ongoing tension. In "Lyrical Emotions and Sentimentality," Howard identifies the components comprising lyrical emotions as well as their distinct manner of interacting.³⁸ Using haiku as a guide, he finds lyrical feelings arising from situations involving temporal contrasts between evanescent moments projected in high relief against timeless or long-term universals, resulting in piercing, yet briefly poignant realizations of beauty's fugitiveness, the brevity of life, and the transitoriness of things. This affective emotion is predicated on contrasts between the momentousness of a single instant projected against the screen of eternity, making specific fragments of time appear particularly moving and descriptions of metonymical associations connecting specific moments essential. Frankenthaler's improvisations of poured, sponged, and drawn paint seen in terms of her many allusions to enduring landscapes and art's universality is sufficient for generating lyricism's affecting emotions. In addition, the contiguity of paint utilized as nature and naturalized as artistic media—coupled with evocations of a blank eternal silence, arising from the white spaces of the unprimed canvas she often left untouched—forms a sufficient conjunction of related, yet opposing perspectives between the transient and the eternal for viewers to experience lyric sensations in her work.

This essay has set out to historicize the woman-metonymy dyad in terms of the historically based and engendered views affecting the ways Krasner, Mitchell, and Frankenthaler have each figured aspects of themselves when connecting with external nature. "Nature," however, is such a troublesome term that the renowned Welsh New Left theorist Raymond Williams regarded it as one of the most complex words in the English language.³⁹ Similar to environmentalist Bill McKibben in *The End of Nature*, I am convinced nature's power is to be found in "its separation from human society,"

where it remains undefined and uncircumscribed.⁴⁰ Instead of being in league with human destiny or conformable to it, nature is better understood as an ongoing conundrum, existing as both part of and apart from human beings. The alternative view of nature as no longer significant in the highly industrialized world of the mid-twentieth-century United States, which believed itself to have moved beyond it, is perhaps overly severe, because it condemns people to life alone in the cosmos, existing in a world of their own construction. One of the major strengths of the metonymical strategies evidenced by Krasner's, Mitchell's, and Frankenthaler's art is the mystery of fragmented references to themselves and nature in their art, causing both to remain unassailably diffuse and continually recalcitrant. Alliances with nature in particular works are only temporarily fashioned and uneasily won. Sustaining a connection with nature is not easy: usually it must be begun afresh in the next painting, as one's own human nature, a perpetual enigma, and its bonds with its external counterpart must yet again be plumbed, rediscovered, and then mined in the course of making art. Rather than regarding works by these three Abstract Expressionists as essentialized and reified pictures of nature, we can more productively regard them as contingent views of each of these women's own nature, which is partially and indistinctly witnessed through its connections with the physical world as it is being poetically invoked through the process of painting. Because paint in the mid-century United States was itself thought to be related to nature, each of these three women were in effect using nature (their paint) to forge composite personal and external conditional attachments between themselves and the world.

Looking at these three female Abstract Expressionists developing metonymical relations with their artistic selves enables us to reconsider the type of male-dominated Abstract Expressionism that has been hailed as "American Type Painting"⁴¹ and "the Triumph of American Painting."⁴² Instead of allying work by Krasner, Mitchell, and Frankenthaler with the hegemony of the United States during the postwar period, my consideration of paintings by these women strongly points to coexistence rather than dominance; continuity with earlier artists attuned to relationships with nature—Charles Burchfield, Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Wassily Kandinsky, among others, come to mind—rather than breaking off connections with the past; and contextual affiliations with the world around them rather than one-image works reifying individuality in terms of developing and sustaining a particular brand.

FIG. 49. Joan Mitchell, *George Went Swimming at Barnes Hole, but It Got Too Cold*, 1957. Oil paint on canvas, 87³/₄ × 80¹/₂ × 2⁵/₈ in. (222.90 × 204.47 × 6.67 cm). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N.Y. Gift of Seymour H. Knox Jr., 1958.

Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges the help of Samina Iqbal, Thalheimer Research Assistant in Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of Art History, in finding relevant statements by Mitchell and Frankenthaler.

1. Hugh Bredin, "Metonymy," *Poetics Today* 5, no. 1 (1984): 45–58.
2. Ibid., 53–58.
3. Domna C. Stanton, "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 175.
4. Both this phrase and the concept of transferring items from one semantic field to another are indebted to the thoughtful analysis of metaphors by feminist philosopher Eva Feder Kittay; see Eva Feder Kittay, "The Identification of Metaphor," *Synthese* 58, no. 2 (February 1984): 153–202. The phrase I cite can be found on p. 174. A fuller development of Kittay's approach is found in Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).
5. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 22 and 48, cited in Jill Matus, "Proxy and Proximity: Metonymic Signing," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (winter 1998/99): 318–19.
6. Matus, "Proxy and Proximity," 319.
7. I am also relying on continental philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's groundbreaking studies *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), in which she explored traditional views of intrinsic sexual differences and found them to be mostly acculturated, part of a largely unexamined and little-understood ideology. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler employed the term "performative" to indicate the coercive social, historical, and political norms serving to present gender as a grand masquerade naturalized as part of daily life. Her use of "performative" comes from J. L. Austin's posthumously published book *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), in which he refers to such societal acts as saying "I do" in a wedding ceremony as performatives because they are determined by social and linguistic conventions, not personal intention. Relying on this definition, Butler theorizes gender itself as a performative, a way of enacting the imposition of societal norms through which one's gender is constituted in advance, making it cultural rather than natural, and a compulsory act, not a personal choice; see Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 125.
8. Barnett Newman, "The First Man Was an Artist," *The Tiger's Eye* 1, no. 1 (October 1947): 57–60.
9. Mark Rothko, "The Romantics Were Prompted," *Possibilities* 1 (winter 1947–48): 84.
10. Clyfford Still statement quoted by Katherine Kuh, without source, in John O'Neill, *Clyfford Still* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), 11.
11. Willem de Kooning, "What Abstract Art Means to Me" (lecture, "What Is Abstract Art?" symposium, Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 5, 1951).

12. Richard Pousette-Dart (lecture, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1951), 2. A typescript of this talk is on deposit in the library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

13. Matus, "Proxy and Proximity," 307.

14. Jacques Lacan, "Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 166–67.

15. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," in *Essays: First Series* (1841), text online at Ralph Waldo Emerson Texts, <http://www.emersoncentral.com/circles.htm>. Emerson's beginning is:

The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world. St. Augustine described the nature of God as a circle whose centre was everywhere, and its circumference nowhere.

It has indeed been a privilege and pleasure over the years to be able to undertake and complete two sustained meditations on Lee Krasner's work. The first is Robert Hobbs, *Lee Krasner* (New York: Abbeville, 1993), which is vol. 15 in Abbeville's *Modern Masters* series. The second, also titled *Lee Krasner*, served as the catalogue for the first full-scale retrospective of her work, which opened at LACMA in 1999 before traveling to the Des Moines Art Center and Akron Art Museum (2000), then concluding its tour in 2001 at the Brooklyn Museum; see Robert Hobbs, *Lee Krasner* (New York: Independent Curators International, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1999). My discussion of Krasner's art in this essay, not surprisingly, builds on my prior work.

16. Emerson, "Circles."

17. Lee Krasner, conversation with author, summer 1977, Springs, New York.

18. B. H. Friedman, telephone conversation with author, January 22, 1999.

19. Richard Howard, "A Conversation with Lee Krasner," *Lee Krasner Paintings 1959–1962* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1979), n.p.

20. Krasner cited in Ellen Landau, "Lee Krasner's Past Continuous," *ARTnews* 83 (February 1984): 76.

21. Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 56.

22. Hilton Kramer, "Month in Review," *Arts* 31, no. 2 (November 1956): 52–54.

23. Irving Sandler, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 55.

24. Elaine de Kooning, "Subject: What, How or Who?" *ARTnews* 54, no. 2 (April 1955): 26.

25. Ibid.

26. Fairfield Porter, "American Non-Objective Painting," *The Nation*, October 3, 1959, reprinted in Rackstraw Downes, ed., *Fairfield Porter: Art in Its Own Terms: Selected Criticism 1935–1973* (New York: Tapplinger, 1979), 56.

27. Kramer, "Month in Review," 54. While the word "sensation" is of crucial importance to French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his landmark book *The Phenomenology of Perception*, published in France in 1945, his treatment of it as a "unit of experience" would have been rarely known in New York in the 1950s. It became current in the 1960s, when many of this thinker's writings were published in English. My research on critic Harold Rosenberg has revealed a close friendship with Merleau-Ponty and the importance of his phenomenological views for Rosenberg's "The American Action Painters," published in the December 1952 issue of *ARTnews*. See Robert Hobbs, "Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Installation Art," in *Installations, Mattress Factory, 1990–1999*, ed. Claudia Giannini (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 18–23.
28. "Women Artists in Ascendance," *Life*, May 13, 1957, 76; and Joan Mitchell, letter to John I. H. Baur, quoted in *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1958), 75.
29. Irving Sandler, "Mitchell Paints a Picture," *ARTnews* 56 (October 1957): 70.
30. Judith E. Bernstock, *Joan Mitchell* (New York: Hudson Hills, in association with Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 1988), 43.
31. Yves Michaud, "Joan Mitchell: Abstract Expressionism and Feeling," in *Joan Mitchell*, ed. Nils Ohlsen (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2009).
32. Essaka Joshua, "Wordsworth amongst the Aristotelians," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 3 (July 2006): 511–12.
33. William Wordsworth, *Poems*, vol. 2, ed. John O. Hayden (London: Penguin, 1977), "Tintern Abbey," 48–50, cited in Joshua, "Wordsworth amongst the Aristotelians," 513.
34. John Elderfield, *Frankenthaler* (New York: Abrams, 1989), 121.
35. Cindy Nemser, "Interview with Helen Frankenthaler," *Arts* 46 (November 1971): 38.
36. "Helen Frankenthaler" in "New Talent," *Art in America* 45 (March 1957): 29.
37. Robert Reiff, "Lyricism as Applied to the Visual Arts," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 8, no. 2 (April 1974): 73–78. Reiff's mellifluous prose and abundant descriptions of lyricism in the visual arts, making his essay a prose poem, is very helpful in circumscribing the type of visual work that can be called "lyric."
38. Scott Alexander Howard, "Lyrical Emotions and Sentimentality," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 62, no. 248 (July 2012): 546–68.
39. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 219.
40. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), 64.
41. Clement Greenberg, "'American Type' Painting," *Partisan Review* 22 (spring 1955): 179–96; reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1961), 208–29.
42. Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).