

# Artists, Secrets, and CIA's Cultural Policy

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Abstract:

The paper examines the nature of secrecy based on an art project by Nicola Atkinson-Griffith. It applies the idea of political obfuscation and shows that it can be cast as a policy of secrecy. This is illustrated by the CIA's Cold War cultural policy in the 1940s and 1950s that made Abstract Expressionist painting the American art form and which came quickly dominate Western aesthetic culture. This policy was neither suggested by a majority of voters nor by the political establishment. A brief discussion of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the *Orwellian Loop* concludes the paper.

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## *I. Secrets, Asymmetric Information and Obfuscation*

Why be interested in secrets? The answer is simple: a secret is often an important part of a strategy and is often the critical factor which determines the feasibility of policy goals and success of corresponding actions. This is no more evident than in the US Cold War cultural policy. It is the contention of this paper that it was the covert support of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the 1940s that made Abstract Expressionist painting the American art form and one that would quickly dominate Western aesthetic culture.

Although not widely recognized, secrecy is not an unknown field of enquiry for economists. It is the very substance of the large literature on asymmetric information, signalling, moral hazard, and adverse selection. There are other strands in economics that deal with secrets: a recent example is the study of “obfuscation” which focuses on the relationship of “lack of information” and growth. The standard hypothesis is that economic growth brings income differences to the light and reduces the obfuscation level which was built up by the government (or the political sector in total) in order to prevent redistributive policy becoming effective so as to be able to grant favours to rent seekers (see Magee et al. 1989).<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I will apply and augment the idea of political obfuscation and show that it can be cast as a policy of secrecy. My aim is to show how a government agency (the CIA) accomplished a successful policy in secrecy which was neither suggested by a majority of voters nor by the political establishment. The policy issue is art in the Cold War period. Of course, secret policies are nothing new,<sup>2</sup> however, it must be said that a secret cultural policy does bear a high degree of originality.

Secrets can be dangerous, beautiful, exiting, immoral; secrets can hurt and please; secrets can be shared. Secrets are produced, sold, and bought. However, secrets are a peculiarly strange sort of good because of their incomplete assignment of property rights.<sup>3</sup> One way to understand the nature of secrecy can be found in an art project by Nicola Atkinson-Griffith. She made use of the myth of secret by asking people to write down their personal, private and public secrets. Her project stirred substantial discussion, especially when put on stage in different places.<sup>4</sup> In Section 2, this work will be described in more detail and a preliminary game theoretical analysis will be outlined. Section 3 gives details of the Cold War cultural policy of the CIA. Secrecy was a major ingredient to guarantee its success. Section 4 concludes the paper with an *Orwellian Loop*.

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<sup>1</sup>For a recent application to Chile and Malaysia and a modeling of the effects, see Hojman (2002).

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Karl Marx’s very lucid analysis of the British secret diplomacy in the Great Nordic war (1700-21) which included violations by Britain of her treaty with Sweden and a secret assistance of the Czar’s expansionary policy - despite the strong anti-Russian feeling in Britain as a result of the dreadful repressive Czarist policy (Marx, 1969).

<sup>3</sup>See the definition by Sofia Blind (2002).

<sup>4</sup>Holler (2002) contains eight contributions which reflect part of this discussion.

## 2. *Shall I give you my secret?*

In 1996, I had the pleasure to organize and to attend the weekly microeconomic research seminar at the University of Hamburg when Nicola Atkinson-Griffith asked the participants to write down their personal, private, and public secrets. More recently, I took the liberty to replicate Nicola's work at a seminar on guru management which I gave to students of jewellery making at the *Technisk Skole* in Copenhagen. I have to confess that I did not ask for Nicola's permission to replicate her work, but I do not feel guilty because pieces of art belong to the public – at least, the ideas, questions and experiences which they provide. If not, then they have to be kept in secret. More specifically, a constituent element of Nicola's work is the discussion which it stirs and the questions which it induces. Replications are a means to find answers to forthcoming questions and new arguments for the discussion.

### 2.1 *The Hamburg experiment*

Nicola Atkinson-Griffith's 1996 Hamburg experiment was attended by close to 40 participants – nearly double the usual number who regularly attend the seminar. More than ten participants were attracted by the fact that an artist was presenting some material (they would not attend a seminar in microeconomic theory) and another ten participants were economics doctoral students from other departments. They were attracted by the expectation of spending two hours on problems that have no obvious relation to their regular work. They were trapped by their curiosity – the curiosity which is the heart of research work. The rest of the participants were members of my department, external and former doctoral students, and guests. This heterogeneity will be important for the interpretation of what follows.

After Nicola's lecture on some of her previous art work, she distributed to each participant a sheet of paper with the three categories labelled, "personal, private and public secret" together with a greyish-green envelop, donated by my department (it looked very bureaucratic). Immediately, discussions started between neighbouring participants as to the difference between public, private and personal secrets. After a while the bilateral discussions turned into multilateral discussions and in the end there was a general discussion which ended with asking Nicola for a resolution. Most participants appeared satisfied with Nicola's response.

The discussion then turned to the question of whether or not the secrets were safe with Nicola. No one, it seems, doubted that Nicola would try to keep the envelopes closed and keep the secrets secret. The question, however, was whether she actually had the ultimate *power* to do so. What if she gets robbed on her way back to Scotland, or if somebody broke into her

home while she is in California? The general conclusion was that Nicola could guarantee that the secrets will be kept secret but that there was a very small probability that she might fail.

The discussion then moved on to the quest for secrets. Isn't such a question tasteless, impolite or even immoral? Why not go looking for something else? However, even days after the experiment nobody could think of something equivalent to a secret. A branch of the discussion led some participants to discuss the nature of information as complementary to a secret. For example, it was argued that one can destroy the secrets in the greyish-green envelopes, as locked away in a steel box in Glasgow, by making the information in the envelopes public knowledge. (I was thinking of exam questions which are a secret only up to the exam day when the secret is destroyed.) Discussion about asymmetric and private information, which are basic concepts of modern microeconomics, continued to dominate lunch conversations for several weeks in connection with questions of trust and power.

Slightly more than half of the participants returned a closed envelope to Nicola. Some of the other half claimed that they abstained because they could not work with the classification into public, private, and personal secret. Others felt like under a shock: they could not cope with being asked to write down their secrets. I had the impression that the number of abstentions and the arguments which supported this reaction could not be differentiated between the group of economists, trained in rational choice modelling, and the other participants with no similar training. (I must admit that I did not undertake a systematic survey and therefore cannot claim scientific status for this observation). I felt myself much too involved and some arguments became only clear days after. Needless to say, my curiosity was not satisfied and I took the next opportunity, albeit five years later, to replicate Nicola's experiment.

## *2.2 The Copenhagen Replication*

Sten Bülow Bredsted arranged that I led an 8-hour seminar on guru management with master students of jewellery making at the *Technisk Skole* in Copenhagen on 20-21 February 2001. It was felt that the students should become aware of the interactive relationships in which they and their work is embedded and get some training to succeed in their social nexus. We discussed the concepts of strategies, players, and preferences and looked for Nash equilibria in Prisoner's Dilemma and Battle of the Sexes games. We learnt that it was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) who invented the sealed-bid second-price auction and that its remarkable properties were first analysed by the late William Vickery who was not only awarded a Nobel Prize for this work but also gave his name for this type of auction. We also learnt how to share property when we get divorced or inherit a house, a garden, a model T car, and a dog jointly with our brothers and sisters. Trust, reputation, morality were reduced to rational choices and the forming of corresponding beliefs (i.e., assessments). It seemed that all members were quite happy with this perspective – at least, in class room.

Things changed dramatically when after more than seven hours of the seminar about rational thinking I asked the students to write down their personal, private, and public secrets. Of course, I promised not to look into the greyish envelopes, and to defend the sealed envelopes with all my strength until my last breathing day. In the end, only four out of the eight seminar participants gave me their sealed envelopes. All of them argued that this was a real challenge and some of them considered it an immoral demand to ask them for their secrets.

It took quite some time until the waves of emotions calmed down and we could start to discuss a game-theoretical approach to analyse the various strings of expectations, mistrust and rejection. In the end, it was felt that situations of conflicting interests and expectations tended to be less threatening to friendly or successful social interaction when interpreted as a game and transformed into game models, which we then tried to solve either by applying game theoretical reasoning or simulation, i.e., playing games.

### *2.3 Towards a Game-theoretical Interpretation*

In its most abstract form, a game is defined by the set of players, by the sets of strategies from which each player can choose his or her plan of action, and by the payoffs of the players which express their interests in the game. *Nicola's Game of Secrets* (NGS) is characterized by the fact that the set of players is ill defined: in general, we know the interviewer and the respondents. Furthermore, there is no perfect guarantee that the envelopes will not be opened. However, making secrets known may imply bringing new players into the game, for example, through activating those agents who share the secrets or are even objects of the secrets.

By the design of the game, it is as yet not clear what the interviewer will do with the secrets – in addition to keeping them secret. Will he or she exhibit the secrets in a public space, or incorporate them in his or her art work, or just simply lock them away in a steel box? Is it in his or her interest to inform others that he or she has the secrets or will he or she open the envelopes one day in the dark room – or destroy them unopened?

The payoffs and interests of the respondents are even less obvious. For those who have decided to return a sealed envelop, the social pressure of the situation causing them to obey an instruction or to support science or art seems to be a major motivation. Some confessed, however, that they enjoyed writing down their secrets and that they felt better after.

Obviously, however, neither the social pressure of the situation nor the possibility of a mental sensation is sufficient to convince everybody to follow the temptation of submitting secrets. Moreover, there is no guarantee that those who contributed a sealed envelop actually wrote a secret on their sheet. There is no proof at all that they contributed a secret. Perhaps the secret they contributed was a lie, and not a secret. This has to be considered when we discuss the strategies of the respondents. The contents of their writing cannot be controlled before sealing *and* hence for as long as the envelop is sealed. This is implicit to asking for secrets

and promising to keep them secret. All that could be observed, depending on the setting of the experiment, is whether a respondent contributed a sealed envelop or not.

It seems that the set of strategies for the interviewer and the respondent are very large and difficult to define. There are however prominent strategies which are candidates for an equilibrium such that no player can improve his position by choosing an alternative strategy, *given* the strategy choices of the other players. A strategy combination which satisfies this condition is a Nash equilibrium. Note that it implies that the strategies are mutually best replies to each other. Obviously, to write down the weather report of yesterday, or another story of no information and no interest, and the decision not to open the sealed envelopes are such mutually best replies which have, in addition, the nice property that they do not invite new players who would like to steal the secrets in order to exploit them.

As soon as this solution was accepted by the participants in the Copenhagen seminar, they were less critical of me asking for their secrets. They admitted that it takes more than an 8-hour seminar to internalise interactive thinking in a way such that it cannot be challenged by “immoral” demands such as writing down secrets.

As a by-product of this exercise, we learned some peculiar features of the nature of secrets. I may hand a secret in a sealed envelop to you and you may carry this envelop to the other side of the globe. Still I can destroy this secret by publishing the information which is in sealed envelop. But it could also be that there is no information in the envelop and you merely think that you carry a secret with you.

### 3. CIA's Cultural Policy

Art is the laboratory of great emotions, deep thoughts, intense beliefs, and new ideas. Art is also a carrier of ideas. The Cold War period after World War II delivers an example that art is especially successful as a carrier of ideas – and ideology – if (a) the link to other policy issues are kept secret and (b) the philosophy of art and the ideas overlap to a considerable extent. The CIA's policy of the late 1940s and the early 1950s contains ample material on the interplay of rational obfuscation and transparency in politics. The supported art, more specifically, Abstract Expressionist painting, became *the* American art form and soon the dominating Western aesthetic culture. It is not at all obvious that the CIA's secret cultural policy was a “bad thing” while its more or less transparent counterpart at the government level was the better alternative. To quote Saunders (2000, 3), “America's pre-eminent liberal historian”, Arthur Schlesinger, maintained that the CIA's influence was not “always, or often, reactionary and sinister.” In his experience, its leadership was politically enlightened and sophisticated. Saunders concludes that, “This view of the CIA as a haven of liberalism acted as a powerful inducement to collaborate with it, or, if not this, at least to acquiesce to the myth that it was well motivated.”

As we shall see, the CIA gave, directly and indirectly, financial and logistic support to modern art. Abstract Expressionism became the vehicle for America's imperial burden and this vehicle needed fuel. However, why did the government not fuel cultural policy? (a) There was political resistance in the USA and (b) it seems that the secrecy of the financial and logistic support contributed to its acceptance in the Western World and its attraction behind the Iron Curtain.

President Harry Truman did not think much of modern art and even less of the artists who produced it. This evaluation was shared by many politicians – at least, when they talked in public. George Dondero, a Republican from Missouri, declared “modernism to be quite simply part of a worldwide conspiracy to weaken American resolve.” He concluded: “All modern art is Communistic” (Saunders 2000, 253; see also Guilbaut 1983, 3ff). He succeeded to force the withdrawal of a State Department exhibition called “Advancing American Art” which was shown with great success at Paris and Prague. In Congress, however, it was denounced as subversive and “un-American”. The State Department issued a directive ordering that in the future no American artist with Communist or fellow-travelling associations be exhibited at government expense. In the period of the McCarthy witch-hunts this meant that politicians who, in principle, looked benevolently at modern art hesitated to become officially involved. It was the rich, well-educated venturesome east-coast elite who had (a) the insight that Abstract Expressionism could be excellent weapon in the Cold War, (b) they had the financial means and the social connections to do this on their own account, and (c) some of them, such as Nelson Rockefeller, had strong personal links to the CIA, partly as a result of earlier wartime intelligence work. In addition they had the conviction that they had to fight oppressive Russian communism in order to defend freedom – and that Abstract Expressionism is a most exiting art project, adequate to their liberal taste.

This sets the stage. On the one hand, we had the politicians, constrained by their desire for majority support and popular assistance, and, on the other, the East Coast elite, determined to use modern art to defend American liberalism against the communist threat, and, to some degree, also against the corruption of the political establishment and “red-neck” art theories advocated by Republicans from Missouri. Liberalism against populism?<sup>5</sup>

What looked like a fundamental conflict was resolved through recourse to obfuscation and secrecy – private political action under public umbrella and state intervention in the costume of private organizations. Major players of this game were the CIA, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Congress of Cultural Freedom. The relationship between these institutions was the result of historical ties, personal links, and ongoing collaboration.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>This question reflects the title of a volume by Riker (1982). Although Riker's book has been motivated by a different cause, it refers to the same basic dilemma.

<sup>6</sup>The following "portrait" of the three organization summarizes the corresponding material in Saunders (2000). In parts, the description is very close to Saunders's text and quotation marks could be adequate.

### *3.1 The Major Players*

The CIA was created by the National Security Act of 26 July 1947 in order to coordinate military and diplomatic intelligence. Although it was not explicitly authorized to collect intelligence or intervene secretly in the affairs of other nations, the Act mentioned “services of common concern” which was used to move it into espionage, covert action, paramilitary operations, and technical intelligence collection. Saunders (2000, 32f) points out that “the terms under which the Agency was established institutionalized the concepts of ‘the necessary lie’ and ‘plausible deniability’ as legitimate peacetime strategies.” The CIA’s officers were dedicated to the mission to save “western freedom from Communist darkness.” This was the result of the training in solid Christian ethics and in the principles of a robust intellect which most of them enjoyed at some Ivy League school and of the spirit of the Declaration of Independence which they inhaled in their social environment. Some of them had already experienced intelligence work with the Office of Strategic Service (OSS) during war. OSS collected family members of the Vanderbilt’s, DuPont’s, Archbold’s, Weil’s and Whitney’s in its ranks. A son of Ernest Hemingway and two sons of J.P. Morgan were in OSS. To some OSS members the Service was an exiting adventure. In any case, it offered a possibility to enhance reputation and another network to combine with the old school tie. Some of OSS and most of its spirit carried over to the newly created CIA. Young Ivy Leaguers flocked to the Agency to fight the threat of communism and to enjoy the privileges of power and secret brotherhood.

The CIA also had substantial financial means at its disposal to be spent with minimum of bureaucratic control. In 1949, the US Congress passed an Act which allowed the Director of the CIA to spend funds without having to account for disbursement. Some of this money was spent to support the Congress of Cultural Freedom.

At end June 1950, more than 4000 intellectuals of the “free world” gathered in Berlin. They all were invited to stand up and to be counted. The inviting committee included the mayor of Berlin, Ernst Reuter, and several prominent German academics. Reuter delivered an opening speech in which the word “freedom” was regularly repeated. During four days, participants moved from one panel session to the next and discussed about issues such as “good” and “bad” atom bombs. The actor Robert Montgomery declared that “there is no neutral corner in the Freedom’s room!”

Not everyone subscribed to this rhetorical crusade against neutrality and the option of a middle way between Russia and America. Some wondered about the independence of the meeting and about the substantial financial resources which made the event and their participation possible. Others received secret benefaction by the Foreign Office, provided under the cover of the Information Research Department. In an interview in 1994, Tom Braden, OSS officer in his youth and former head of CIA’s International Organizations

Division (IOD)<sup>7</sup>, the greatest single concentration of covert political and propaganda activities of the CIA, reflected on the financing of the Berlin event: “We've got to remember that when we're speaking of those years that Europe was broke. ... There wasn't any money. So they naturally looked to the United States for money.”<sup>8</sup> Simple common sense was enough to find out who was behind the Berlin Congress. Delegates who speculated about who was footing the bill concluded that this was not quite the spontaneous event its organizers claimed.

Despite some irritations, the Berlin Congress was celebrated as a success – by US government officials and the CIA. The Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF) became institutionalised. Its principle task was to win over the fence-sitters: “It was not to be a centre of agitation, but a beachhead in western Europe from which the advance of Communist ideas could be halted. It was to engage in a widespread and cohesive campaign of peer pressure to persuade intellectuals to dissociate themselves from Communist fronts or fellow travelling organizations. It was to encourage the intelligentsia to develop theories and arguments which were directed not at a mass audience, but at the small elite of pressure groups and statesmen who in turn determined government policy. It was not an intelligence-gathering source, and agents in the other CIA divisions were warned not to attempt to use it as such” (Saunders, 2000, 98f).

The CCF managers were answerable to Tom Braden, then head of IOD. Its activities were either directly financed by CIA's Farfield Foundation or, indirectly, by one of the many foundations that were more than willing to transfer CIA money to CCF officials or to contributors to CCF projects, e.g., museum directors, gallery owners, art critics, journalists or artists.<sup>9</sup>

Some contributors were supported by their own foundation, and thus did not depend on CIA money. This did not hinder them in closely cooperating with the CCF. For most of the 1940s and 1950s, Nelson Rockefeller was the president of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). His mother was one of museum's five founders in 1929. During World War II, Nelson Rockefeller was in charge of all intelligence in Latin America. His organization sponsored touring exhibitions of “contemporary American painting” of which 19 were contracted to MoMA. Rockefeller was not involved in OSS but his close friendship with Allen Dulles, who was in charge of OSS wartimes operations in Europe, younger brother to secretary of state John Foster Dulles and CIA's director during 1953-61, compensated for this shortcoming. Allen Dulles and Tom Braden delivered briefings on covert activities of the CIA on a regular basis to Nelson Rockefeller. In 1954, Rockefeller was appointed to Eisenhower's

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<sup>7</sup>IOD's policy aimed at uniting the intellectuals of the “free world” against what was being offered in the Soviet Union.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted after Saunders (2000, 82).

<sup>9</sup>The CIA undercover activities were generously subsidised by Marshall Plan money. Recipient countries were asked to deposit an amount equal to the US contribution in its central bank. 95 percent of the currency funds remained the legal property of the recipient country's government, while 5 per cent became the property of the US government - and were made available as a war chest for the CIA (Saunders 2000, 105f).

special advisor on Cold War strategy. He was also chairman of the Planning Coordination Group which controlled the National Security Council and CIA's covert operations.

The various engagements of William Burden,<sup>10</sup> a great-great-grandson of Commodore Vanderbilt, illustrates the connections between CIA, CCF, and MoMA. During the war, he worked for Nelson Rockefeller's intelligence service. After the war, he became director of CIA's Farfield Foundation and thus decided on the financial support to CCF, sat as chairman of the advisory committee of the MoMA, and became MoMA's president in 1956. Saunders introduces several other high ranking officials to us who held similar links to at least two of these institutions. There are however also actions in which these institutions repeatedly collaborated.

By 1956, the International Program of MoMA had organized 33 exhibitions, including the US participation in the Venice Biennale.<sup>11</sup> When MoMA contracted to supply the art material for CCF's 1952 Masterpieces festival in Paris, "it did so under the auspices of trustees who were fully cognizant of the CIA's role in that organization" (Saunders, 2000, 268) and of its propaganda value. On the other hand, the collaboration with the CCF brought MoMA and its favoured Abstract Expressionism access to many of the most prestigious art institutions in Europe whose directors were sitting on the Arts Committee of the CCF.

During 1953-54, MoMA organized a tour to Europe, dedicated exclusively to Abstract Expressionism. The show, entitled "Twelve Contemporary American Painters and Sculptures" had its opening at the *Musé National d'Art Moderne* in Paris. This was achieved with the help of the American Embassy in Paris (which acted as a quiet liaison between MoMA and its French hosts) and with the financial support of the Nelson Rockefeller Fund which was partly conducted through the *Association Francaise d'Action Artistique*. This association was a donor to the CCF and its director, Philippe Erlanger, was a designated CIA contact at the French Foreign Office (Saunders 2000, 270).

In a 1974 article, Eva Cockroft discussed the relationship of CIA's cultural apparatus and MoMA's international program. The functions of both institutions were similar and "mutually supportive". Saunders (2000, 264) concludes that "there is no *prima facie* evidence for any formal agreement between the CIA and the Museum of Modern Art. The fact is, it simply wasn't necessary." The motivations of both institutions, being at least functionally divergent, converged in the support for the Abstract Expressionism and its advance throughout the "free world" and to some dissident circles behind the Iron Curtain. Why Abstract Expressionism? Wasn't it rejected by America's silent majority and by some of its very out-spoken politicians?

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<sup>10</sup>See Saunders (2000, 137) for this short portrait and further details illustrating William Burden's political and cultural role.

<sup>11</sup>Saunders (2000, 268) remarks that by this the USA were the only country to be privately represented - a hallmark of the "artistic free enterprise" strategy identified with Abstract Expressionism.

### 3.2 Individualism and Universalism

If the CIA, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Congress of Cultural Freedom were major players in the cultural war game, then the Abstract Expressionist artists were the pawns. In fact, the major players did not really care about the individual artists but focused on their work and the ideology behind their work. This was, in a sense, paradoxical because individualism was one of the cornerstones of Abstract Expressionism and a major reason why this art was supported as an alternative to the “collectivistic art of socialism”. The art works showed substantial variety, but the variation among the artists seemed even larger and “most of them were people who had very little respect for the government in particular and certainly not for the CIA”, said Donald Jameson in an interview in Washington in June 1994.<sup>12</sup> Jackson Pollock was a drunk and was killed in a car crash; Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb were committed anti-Communists; Barnett Newman was painting for America; Robert Motherwell and Willem de Kooning, both Dutch born, did not think highly of a national context for their work; and Ad Reinhardt participated in the March on Washington for black rights in August 1963. It seems that nothing specific can be said about Clyfford Still’s life and political orientation. There were times when he refused to be co-opted by the museums and the critical establishment, directed by a Clement Greenberg,<sup>13</sup> but he still wished to be perceived as a spiritual leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement. (See Guilbaut 1983, 201.) These artists formed the “essential eight” of Abstract Expressionism. Others who were added to this group are William Bazotes, Arshil Gorky (who hanged himself), Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, Fritz Kline, Richard Pousette-Dart, Mark Tobey, and Bradley Walker Tomlin (see Gibson 1997, xx). However, instead of going deeper into the individual history and political beliefs of these people, I will follow the strategy of the three major players and focus on the ideology of art which made Abstract Expressionism.

Danto (1999, 75) summarizes the essence of Abstract Expressionism, "with its celebration of the self, of the inner states that painting allegedly made objective, and of paint itself as the medium par excellence through which this inner states were externally transcribed. In a certain sense, abstract expressionist painting was a kind of private pictorial language, a turning away from the public and the political in the interest of producing an art that was, in the words of Robert Motherwell, 'plastic, mysterious, and sublime.'" The focus on colour instead of form or narrative expressions represented the abstract dimension. The discovery of the Unconscious with the help of colour contained the expressionist dimension. "Marxism gave way to psychiatry" (Guilbaut 1983, 165). The two dimensions met in automatic painting, doodling, action painting, and Jackson Pollock' dripping method.

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<sup>12</sup>Reproduced in Saunders (2000, 260).

<sup>13</sup>March 1948, art critic Clement Greenberg was the first to declare that New York had achieved international status as a cultural centre and even replaced Paris as the cultural symbol of the Western world: American art was the foremost in the world.

Gottlieb and Rothko were dedicated readers of Freud and Jung, and of the anthropologists. This concurred with the focus on creativity (or originality) as one of the core principles of Abstract Expressionism. "Originality, like abstraction, was an important way predicated on the denial of politics" (Gibson 1997, xxviii).

"The American problem," Robert Motherwell emphasized, "was to find a creative principle that was not a style, not stylistic, not an imposed aesthetic."<sup>14</sup> Many Abstract Expressionist artists were followers of Carl Jung. "As Jungians they believed that the collective unconscious was universal - self identical in all human beings" (Gibson 1997, 48). The function of art was considered as the invention of codes to transpose universal, rather than local, meaning into visual form. This was the spiritual-intellectual basis for the claim on universalism and the discharge of the isolationist spirit of pre-war America - a pre-condition for applying art to cultural warfare.

Paradoxically, to some extent Abstract Expressionism contained a turning away from the market. Before it was discovered as an instrument of Cold War its main representatives were not very much of a success on the art market. By the simple fact that this art often used immense formats - different from the European predecessors - it necessitated museums and other public spaces which was only made available in the course of Cold War cultural policy. In principle, this conflicted with the private pictorial language and its non political attitude, and made its dissemination dependent on private and public (political) entrepreneurship as developed by the CIA, MoMA, and CCF.

There are many paradoxes embedded in Abstract Expressionism; some are embedded to the inconsistency of its claim of individualism and freedom, on the one hand, and its policy effects which focus on dominance of ideas, ideology, and power on the other.

### *3.3 Policy Effects*

Saunders (2000, 5) raised a number of questions which could serve as a starting point of an evaluation of the CIA's engagement in the cultural warfare. The first question raises the issue of freedom. "Clearly, by camouflaging its investment, the CIA acted on the supposition that its blandishments would be refused if offered openly. What kind of freedom can be advanced by such deception?" Of course, this question was relevant for the Free World and its frontier states towards the Soviet Empire. However, it was also of interest to the political, economic, and social life within the borders of the USA. A preliminary answer to this question is: a liberal freedom controlled by an elite and the elite's principle. For instance, with respect to the contribution of MoMA and the various private foundations which supported the cultural warfare, Liberalism implies that there is nothing to prevent an individual from exerting as

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<sup>14</sup>Quotation taken from Danto (1999, 23).

much influence through his work in a private foundation as he could through work in the government.

The Founding Fathers, and more specifically James Madison, wanted to refine the voice of people in government, not replicate it. They proposed various restraints to majority voting which were thought to shelter the governing elite from direct popular impact. To create and to use a policy frame which is independent of parliamentary support is a natural consequence of this principle of American liberalism, as soon as the elite finds the elected representatives too narrow-minded, and too close to popular values, to collaborate in the pursuit of the grand scheme.

More specifically, in his next question Saunders (2000, 5) asks: “Did financial aid distort the process by which intellectuals and artists were advanced? ... Were reputations secured or enhanced by membership of the CIA’s cultural consortium?” Ex-post one can conclude that most of writers, film makers, and artists selected by the CIA sponsorship were of extremely high quality. The Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko have defined the world art of their period. But it seems impossible to answer whether they could have done this without the support which they derived, directly or indirectly, from the resources which the CIA invested in the secret cultural warfare. As a general result this might be difficult to demonstrate.<sup>15</sup> However, we have to see that Abstract Expressionism entails a high degree of exclusiveness and of cartelisation so that its support had a substantial discriminating effect on American art – with precarious consequences to those you were not member of the cartel. Ann Eden Gibson (1997, xxi) summarizes: “To the extent that the work of an artist who is not in the canon looks like that of one who is, the noncanonical artist’s work is derivative. To the extent that the noncanonical work does not resemble that in the canon, the contending work is not Abstract Expressionist.”

Paradoxically, the discriminating effect resulted from the focus on universality. This excluded artists whose identity did not generalize “in a postwar society whose standards were racist, misogynist, and homophobic” (Gibson 1997, xxii). The mechanism of this society functioned to reinforce the power of European, male and heterosexual identity and discriminated against artists who did not fit in this pattern. It was the claim for universalism, together with its individualistic ideology, which made Abstract Expressionism and the artists who are in the canon of interest to Cold War strategists. However, isn't Communism also claiming universalism?

The CIA was grateful for this pre-selection of artists and their work; it made it less cumbersome to transfer Western values to the rest of the world. The standards of the postwar society were racist, misogynist, and homophobic not only in America. However, one may ask, “was there any real justification for assuming that the principles of western democracy couldn't be revived in post-war Europe according to some internal mechanism? Or for not

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<sup>15</sup>“There is ...incontrovertible evidence that the CIA was an active component in the machinery which promoted Abstract Expressionism” (Saunders 2000, 273).

assuming that democracy could be more complex than was implied by the lauding of American liberalism?”(Saunders (2000, 5). Indeed, democracy is a complex concept. Left to the internal mechanism it is not obvious that a democratic equilibrium evolves. From a theoretical point of view, coordination on a democratic equilibrium seems to be easily solvable by the implementation of American liberalism – and the American way of life as the focal point. However, when it comes to modern art as a vehicle to disseminate American liberalism, it faced, as we have seen, popular resistance from inside. Undercover operations was a way to circumvent this problem. This violates the majority principle of democracy but not necessarily the liberal perspective of it. As Gordon Wood, author of *The American Revolution: A History*, writes “What really counts in maintaining democracy are the liberties protected by the Bill of Rights and the underlying conditions of the country – its culture, its social arrangements, its economic well-being, and the political experience of its citizens and their leaders” (Wood 2002, 21).

If the financing were done openly, the liberal elite would see itself in conflict with the political sector which (a) relies on majorities and thus depends on popularity, and (b) whose members are, in general, not as well equipped to enjoy modern art as the members of the elite.

#### 4. Secrecy and the Orwellian Loop

Secrecy was necessary for the conquest of the Western art community through sponsored exhibitions and gallery work. Were the shows which finally installed Abstract Expressionism in Western Europe during the post-war period openly financed by the US government, their success is likely to be far less effective. For instance, it is evident that some participants of the Berlin Congress and later affiliates to the CCF did not know that they were, at least partly, financed by the CIA. Once they were informed they left corresponding projects and publicly distanced themselves from their donor. Other participants claimed that they did not know that they were financed by the CIA. They needed this umbrella to (a) keep up social respect, (b) be acceptable for the cultural or political community, and (c) avoid political or social resistance and concomitant backlashes about their work.

In 1966, a series of articles was published in the *New York Times* on the CIA’s covert operations. Amidst reports on political assassinations and ruthless political intervention came details about the support which the CIA gave to the cultural sector. The consequence was that the moral authority which the intellectuals enjoyed during the height of the Cold War was “seriously undermined and frequently mocked” (Saunders 2000, 6). Was this intended? Or, was it just the consequence of a change in art style: from Jackson Pollock’s *Drippings* to Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Box* and his *Campbell’s Soup Cans*, the latter perhaps more appropriate to reflect the consumerism of capitalism than the worship of colour and the celebration of the lonely hero that characterized the former.

However, what if the CIA has staged the recent discussion of its role in the Cold War in order to tell the world how politically enlightened and sophisticated its leadership was, and perhaps still is, and how much it contributed to today's culture. It is not always easy for a secret agency to bring the truth about its merits to the light. To some extent it is paradoxical because of its self-reference. In Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we learn about truth from a "book in the book", supposedly authored by the dissident hero Goldstein. Only towards the end of the story Winston Smith was told by the thought police officer that the book is an invention of the thought police. That is where truth breaks down in Orwell's book and the attentive reader is left with crumbs of a society which contradicts itself in values and action.

I am not sure that Orwell was aware of the logical dilemma, a self-referential "strange loop", into which his book ran when he made the Goldstein book a thought police product.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps he himself became a victim of the "strange loop" of the story of the book. Orwell died in 1950. Before he died he gave the specific instruction that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* should not be altered in any way.

The film *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was ready for distribution in 1956. Sol Stein, Executive Director of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, helped producer Peter Rathvon to provide a Cold War version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This needed a substantial reinterpretation of the book as Orwell's text is generally read as a protest against all lies, especially against all tricks played by government, and as an expression of distrust against mass culture. Interestingly, to Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, the Abstract Expressionism was a form of cultural criticism - an "indictment of the values of a commercialized, 'capitalist' society in favor of one more primitive and more true to human nature understood as embodied in the symbolic contents of the unconscious mind" (Danto 1999, 77). Abstract Expressionists thought the urban vitality of America and its accent on machined rhythms "deadening to the human soul and had to escape" (Kozloff 1973, 45). The anti-modernist and anti-capitalist dimension was however never emphasized in the Cold War period and the critique of industrial society and its totalitarian dimension was targeted towards the Communist Empire.

The book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ends with Winston Smith's spirit broken: He loved Big Brother. Needless to say that this ending was not acceptable for a Cold War version. In fact, the film was given two different endings: one for the American public and one for British public; and neither represented the ending of the book itself. In the British version Winston Smith was shot down after crying, "Down with Big Brother!".<sup>17</sup> To quote Georges Duby: "Part of what remains of the lives of men of the past is discourse, in both written and plastic form. The most startling discoveries that remain to be made, I think, will come from the

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<sup>16</sup>The logical structure of the book can be illustrated by the famous statement by Epimenides: "All Cretians are liars". Since Epimenides was a Cretian the logical structure of this statement concurs with the statement "I am lying". (See Hofstadter 1990, 17.)

<sup>17</sup>This is a summary of Saunders (2000, 295-298).

attempt to find out what was left out of the discourse, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, to determine what was hidden, consciously or unconsciously."<sup>18</sup>

### 5. *Breaking the Secret*

The *Nineteen Eighty-Four* example demonstrates how detailed the interventions of secret agencies can be – here it is the American Committee for Cultural Freedom which received covert money from the CIA. However, perhaps we owe this very information to the agency itself and the argument circles in a Orwellian loop. In fact, this brings us back to the questions which were raised by Nicola Atkinson-Griffith's art work and its interpretation as an experiment: who controls the secret? The donor or the receiver? After an officer of the thought police tells Winston Smith that the "book in the book", supposedly authored by Goldstein, is an invention of the thought police, the secret has been broken. The book can be authored by Goldstein, by the thought police, or a third party, but it no longer contains a secret. A careful analysis of Atkinson-Griffith's art work will demonstrate that the envelopes do not contain secrets if the donor and receiver are rational: the envelopes may contain an information which is true, but how do we know whether it is true?

To quote Georges Duby again: "What we need are new scholarly tools, tools better adapted than those we now have to bringing out the negative in what we are shown, to laying bare the things that men deliberately cover up. At times these suddenly reveal themselves quite by accident, but most of the time they must be carefully deciphered between the lines of what is actually said"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Quotation taken from Guilbaut (1983, 6).

<sup>19</sup>Quotation taken from Guilbaut (1983, 6).

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