

# Art in Terms of Narrativity



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# Art in Terms of Narrativity

- Introduction: Structure of lecture and some key terms
- Pre-Modern: Narrative
- Modernism: Narrativity and Non-Narrativity
- After Modernism: Critiquing Narrative Structure
- A (sort of) Conclusion

# Lecture Structure

- Art Historical Survey, but understood through a particular lens
- Three part structure: pre-Modern / Modern / After Modern
- What do I mean by 'in terms of'?
- Limits of the scope of the lecture: Partial / Western / Familiar

# Terms Related to Narrativity

(after Gérard Genette, but simplified and extrapolated)

- **Order** – how are the elements of the story arranged? Are they in the order they happened or have they been altered to make a better or more exciting story or to reveal certain themes?
- **Frequency** – how often are events recounted and are there differences in the way they are told?
- **Duration** – how long does it take to narrate something when compared with the duration of the thing being narrated?
- **Voice** – who is narrating? Is the narrator reliable?
- **Mode** – how close is the narrator to the action? Is it a ‘first person’ narration or perhaps a ‘third person’?

# Pre-Modern: Narrative



1305 - Giotto, *Lamentation*  
Scrovegni Chapel, Padua



Scrovegni Chapel, Padua



1450 - Piero della Francesca, *The Baptism of Christ*  
National Gallery, London



1648 - Nicolas Poussin, *Landscape with Man Killed by a Snake*  
National Gallery, London



1661–2 - Rembrandt Van Rijn, *Claudius Civilis*  
Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm



1819 - Théodore Géricault, *Raft of the Medusa*  
7.16m x 4.91m (!)  
Louvre, Paris



1839 - J M W Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire*  
Tate Britain, London

# Further Research

Gerard Genette

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%A9rard\\_Genette](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%A9rard_Genette)

Poussin's *Landscape with Man Killed by a Snake*

- T J Clark 'The Sight of Death' (book)

Rembrandt's *Claudius Civilis*

- Simon Schama 'The Power of Art' (TV series and book)

Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*

- Julian Barnes 'The History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters' (novel)

Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire*

- Radio 4: 'In Our Time: The Fighting Temeraire' (BBC podcast)



**Modernism:  
Narrativity / Non-Narrativity**



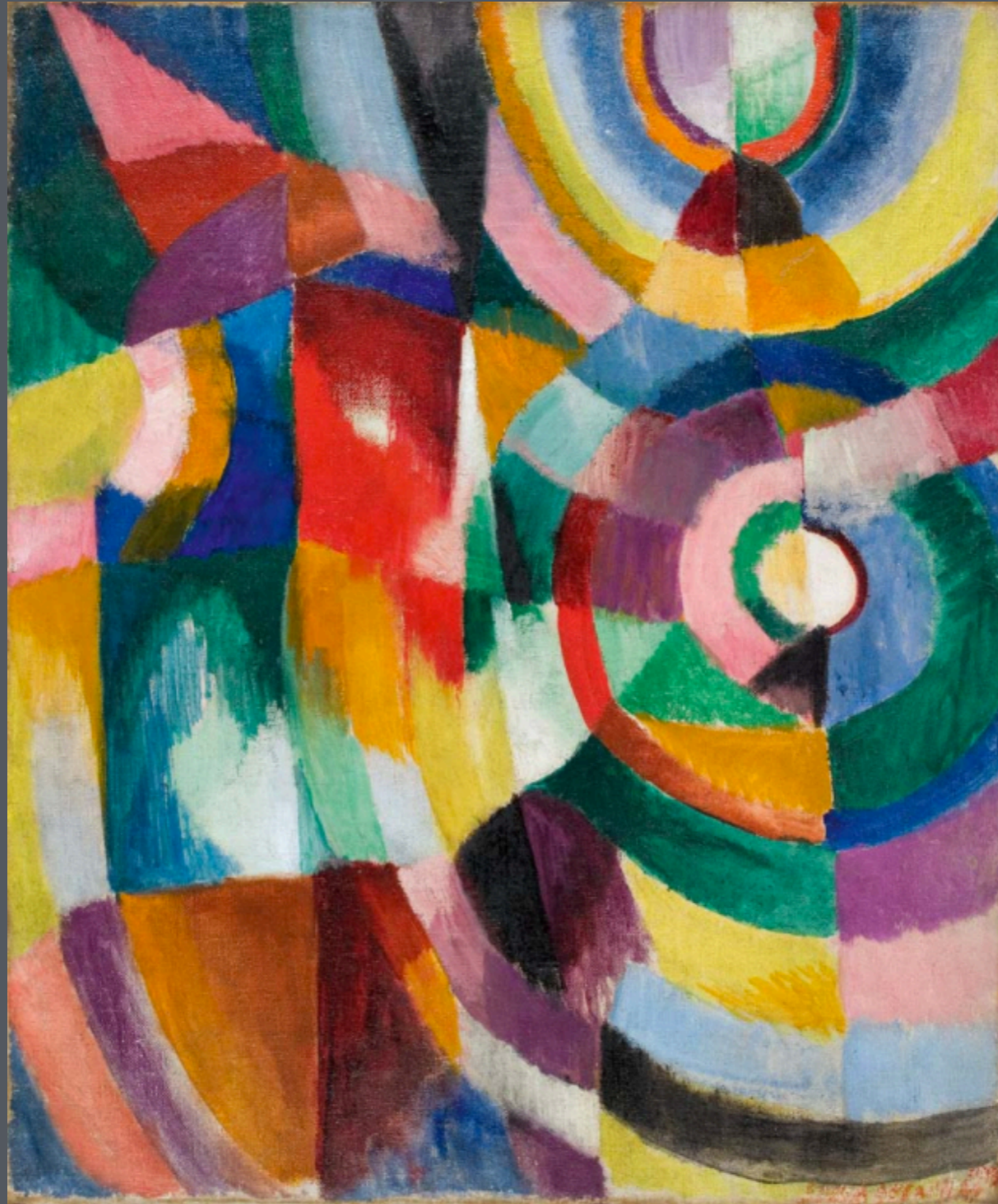
1873 - Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*  
Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris



1874 - Edgar Degas, *Ballet Rehearsal*  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



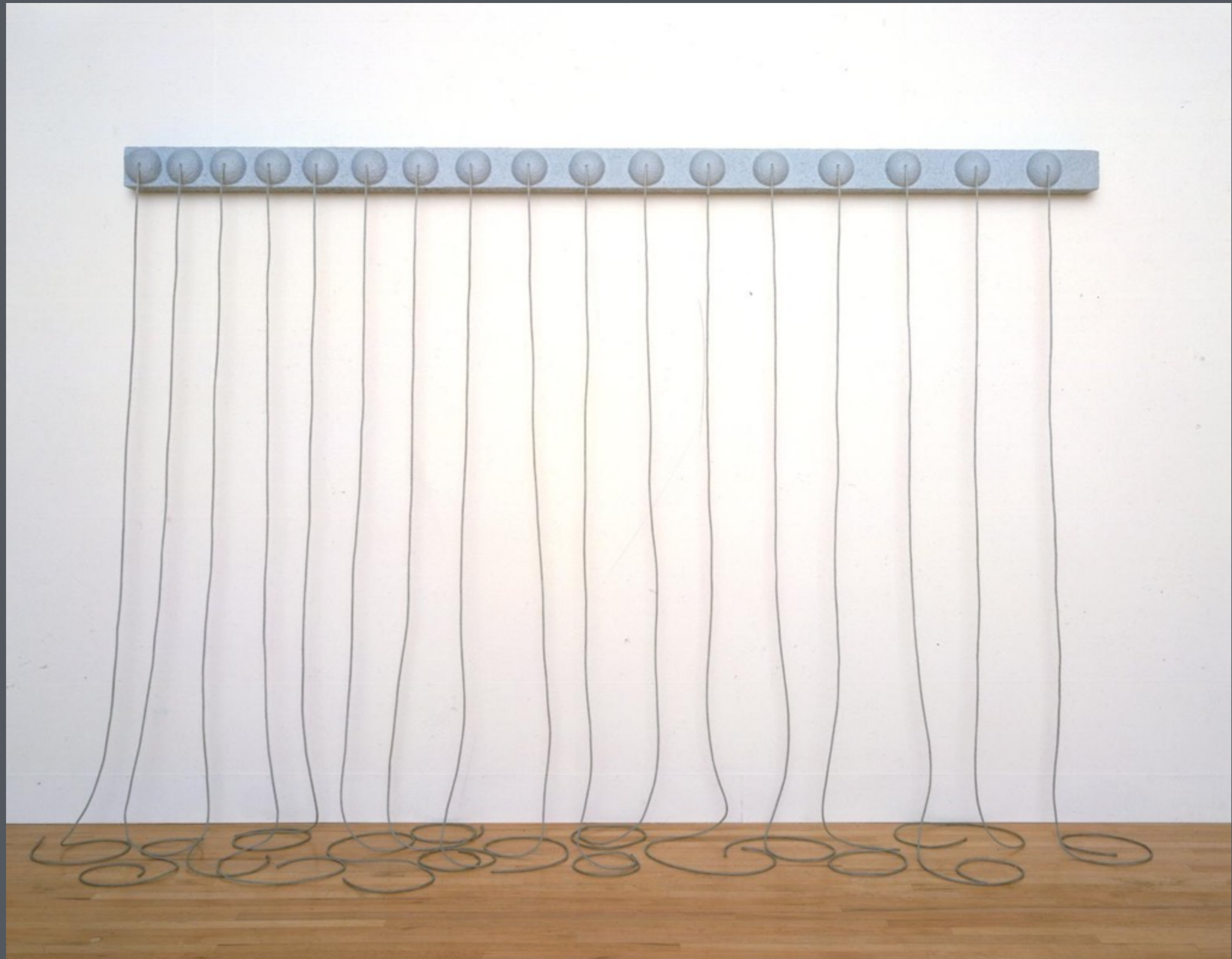
1912 - Pablo Picasso, *Still-Life with Chair Caning*  
Musée Picasso, Paris



1913 - Sonia Delaunay, *Prismes Électriques*



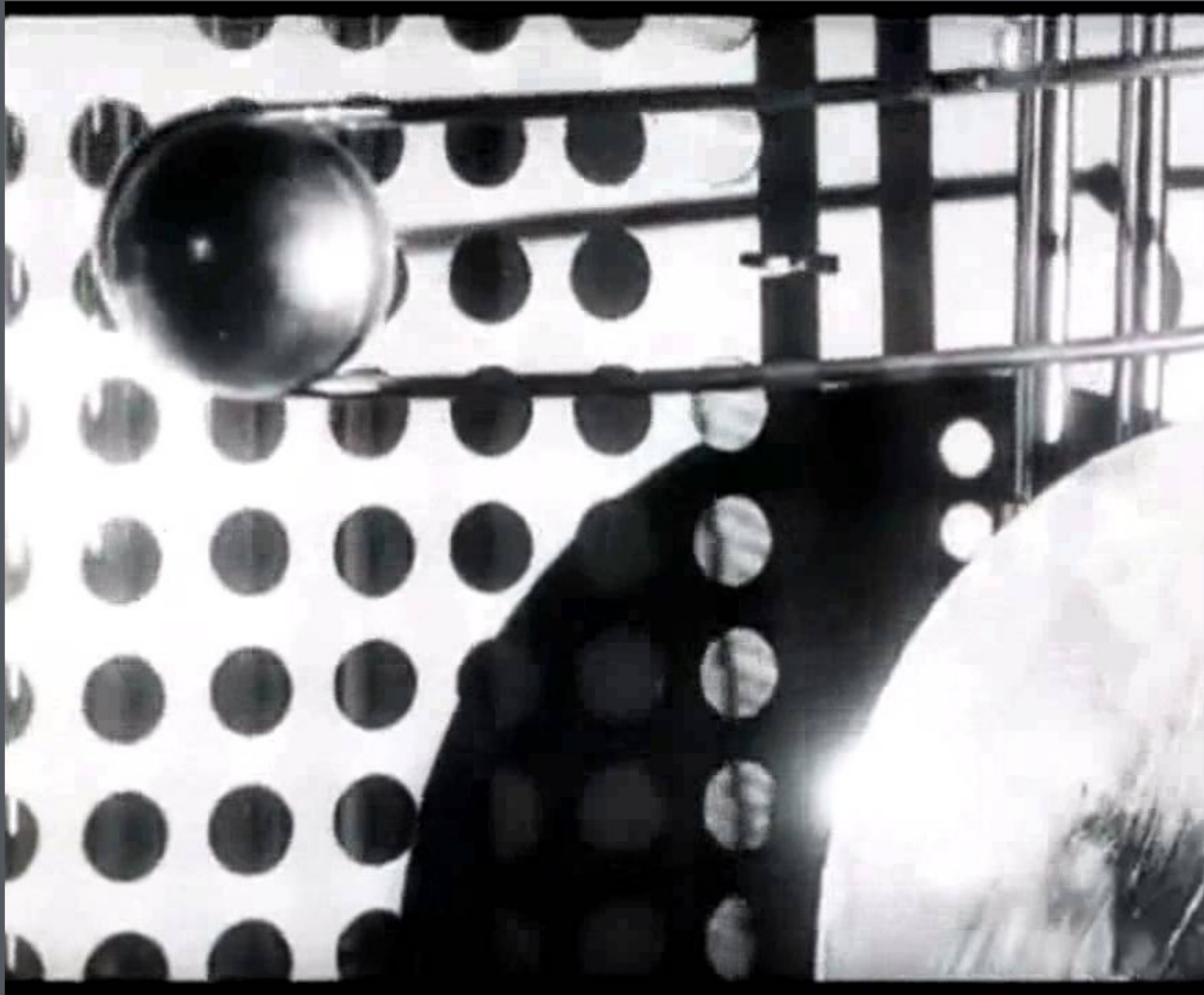
c1958 - Mark Rothko, *Seagram Murals*  
Tate Modern, London



1967 - Eva Hesse, *Addendum*  
Tate Modern, London



1881 - Paul Puvis de Chavannes, *The Poor Fisherman*  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris



1930 - László Moholy-Nagy - *Black White Grey*



1937 - Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*  
Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid

# Further Research

More early films:

- Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (Classic surreal film. Very disturbing and very influential)
- Eadweard Muybridge's 'motion films'

Regarding painting in the Modern Era

- Clement Greenberg's *Avant Garde and Kitsch* (Essay)
- Neil Cox's *Cubism* (Book)

Picasso's *Guernica*

- Radio 4: 'In Our Time: Guernica' (BBC podcast)



# **After Modernism: Critiquing Narrative**



1957 - Robert Rauschenberg, *Factum I and II*



1987 - Fischli and Weiss - *The Way Things Go*

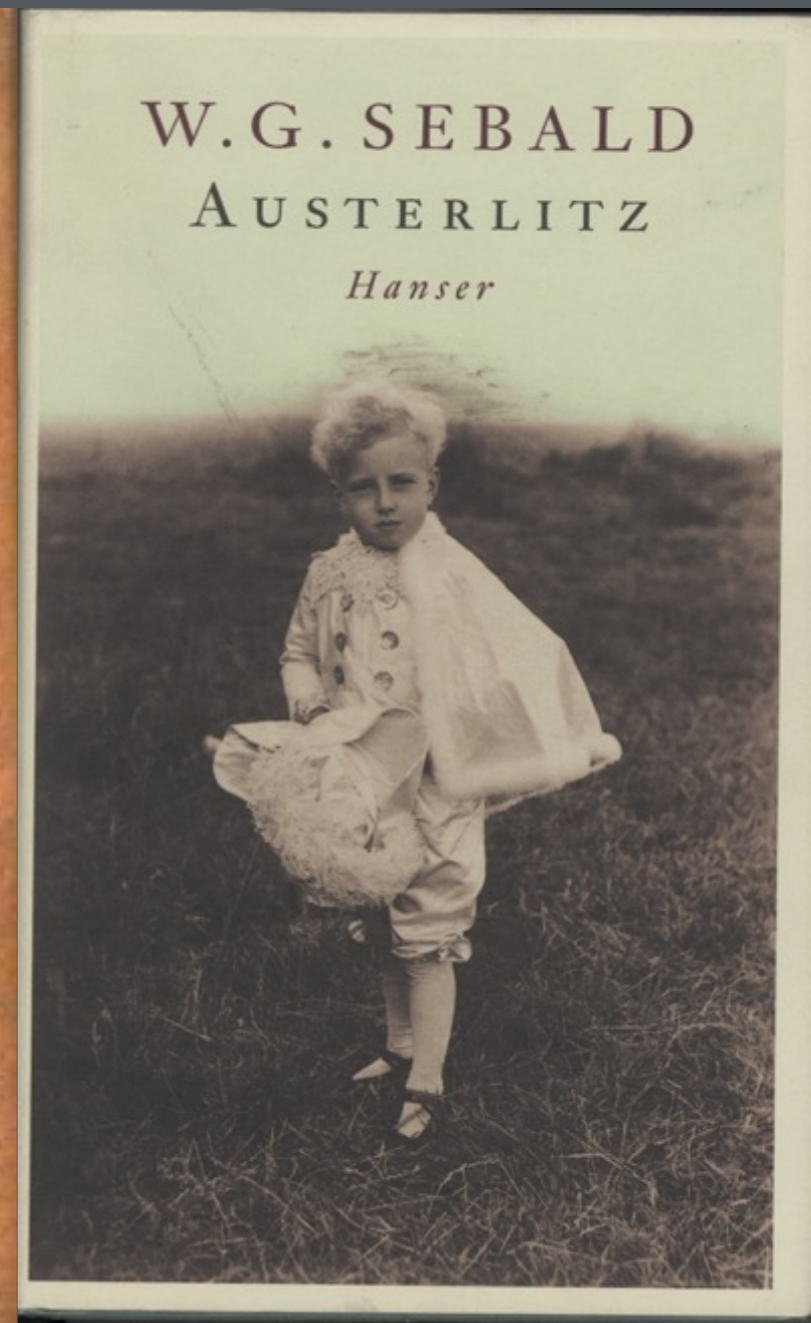
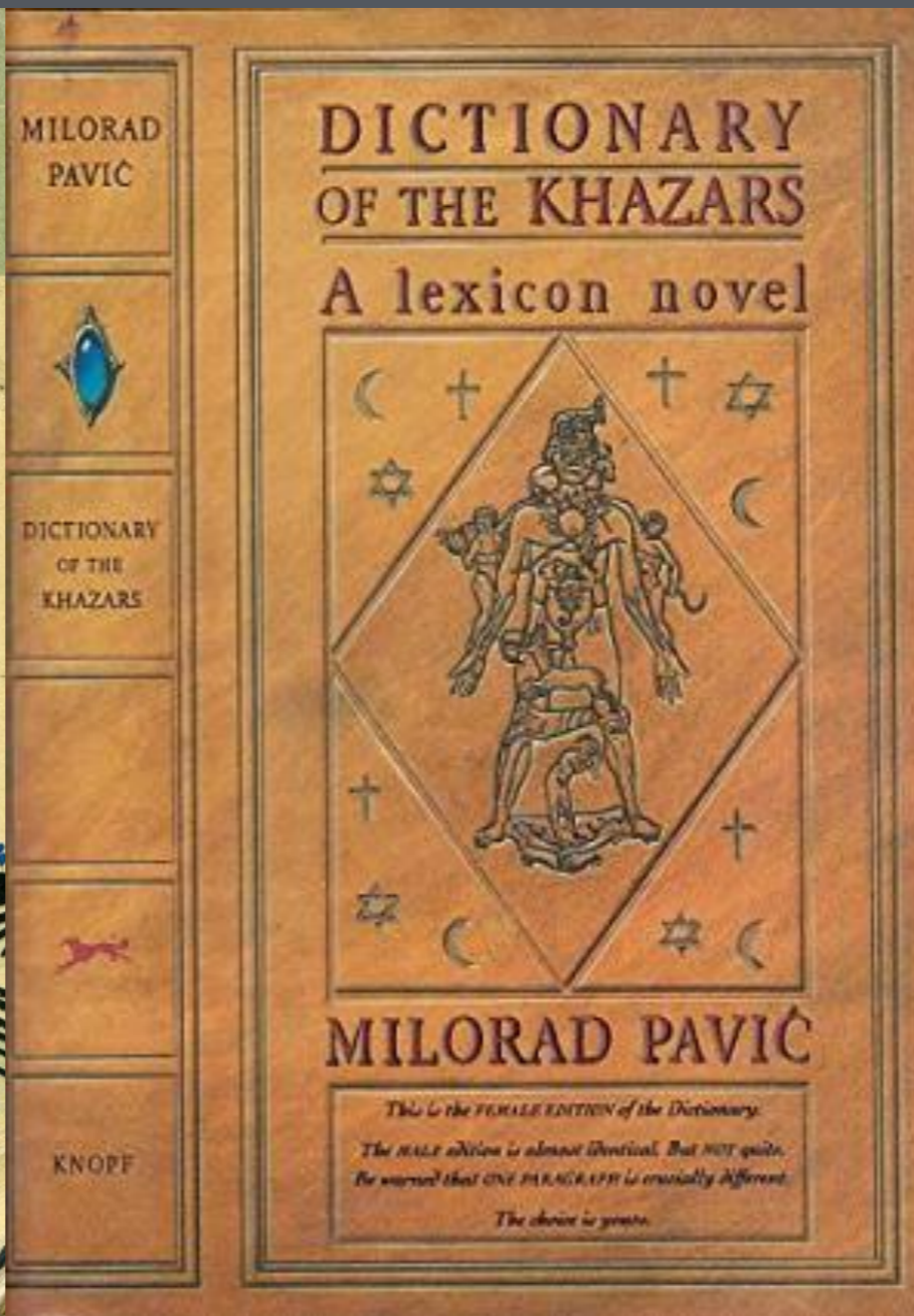
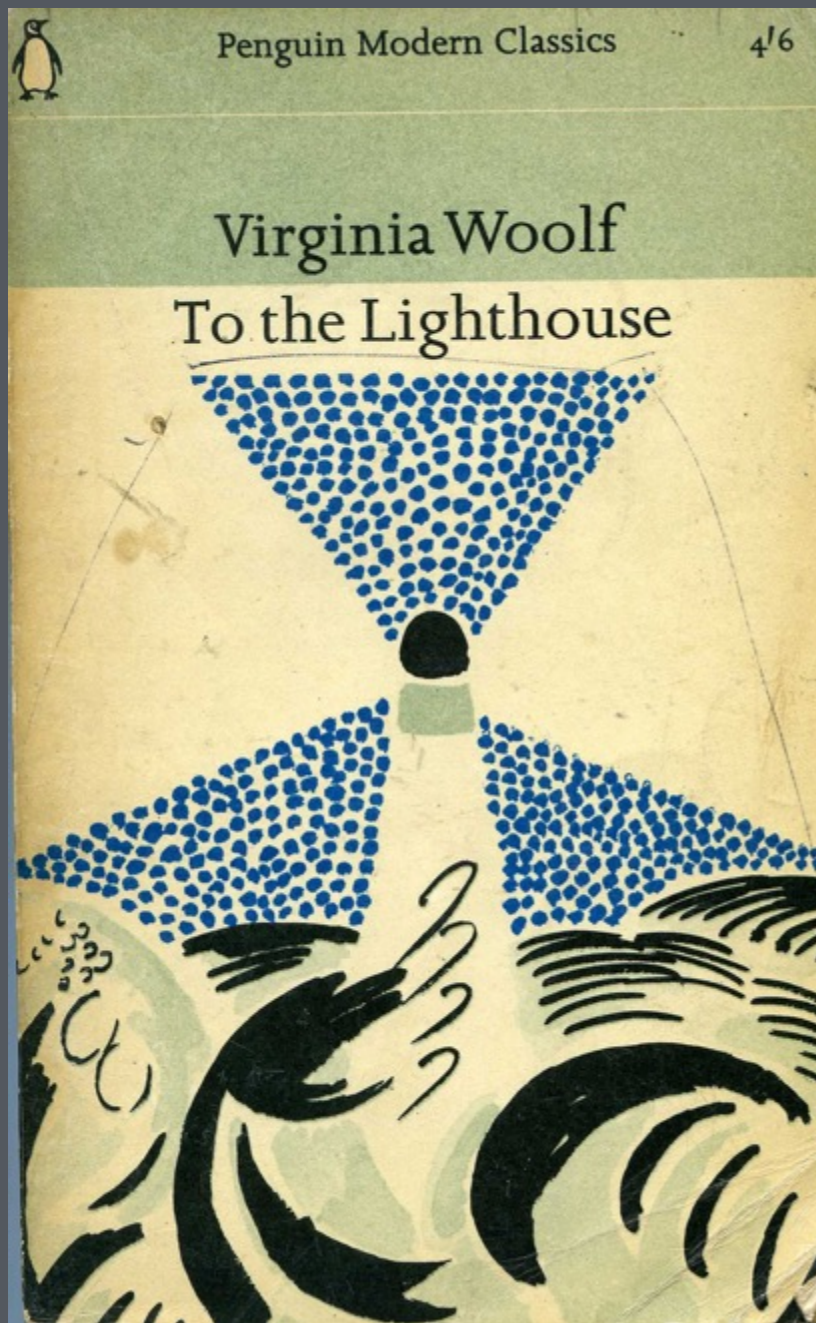


1988 - Paula Rego, *The Dance*  
Tate, London

Virginia Woolf - 1927

Milorad Pavič - 1988

W. G. Sebald - 2001





1992 - Quentin Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs*



1961 - Resnais - *Last Year in Marienbad*

Gunther Marx, a professor of German: “I'll explain it all for you [...] You have the lover, the loved one and the authority figure. The movie proposes that the lovers had an affair, that they didn't, that they met before, that they didn't, that the authority figure knew it, that he didn't, that he killed her, that he didn't. Any questions?”

[...]The idea, I think, is that life is like this movie: No matter how many theories you apply to it, life presses on indifferently toward its own inscrutable ends. The fun is in asking questions. Answers are a form of defeat.

<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-last-year-at-marienbad-1961> (accessed 9/1/17)



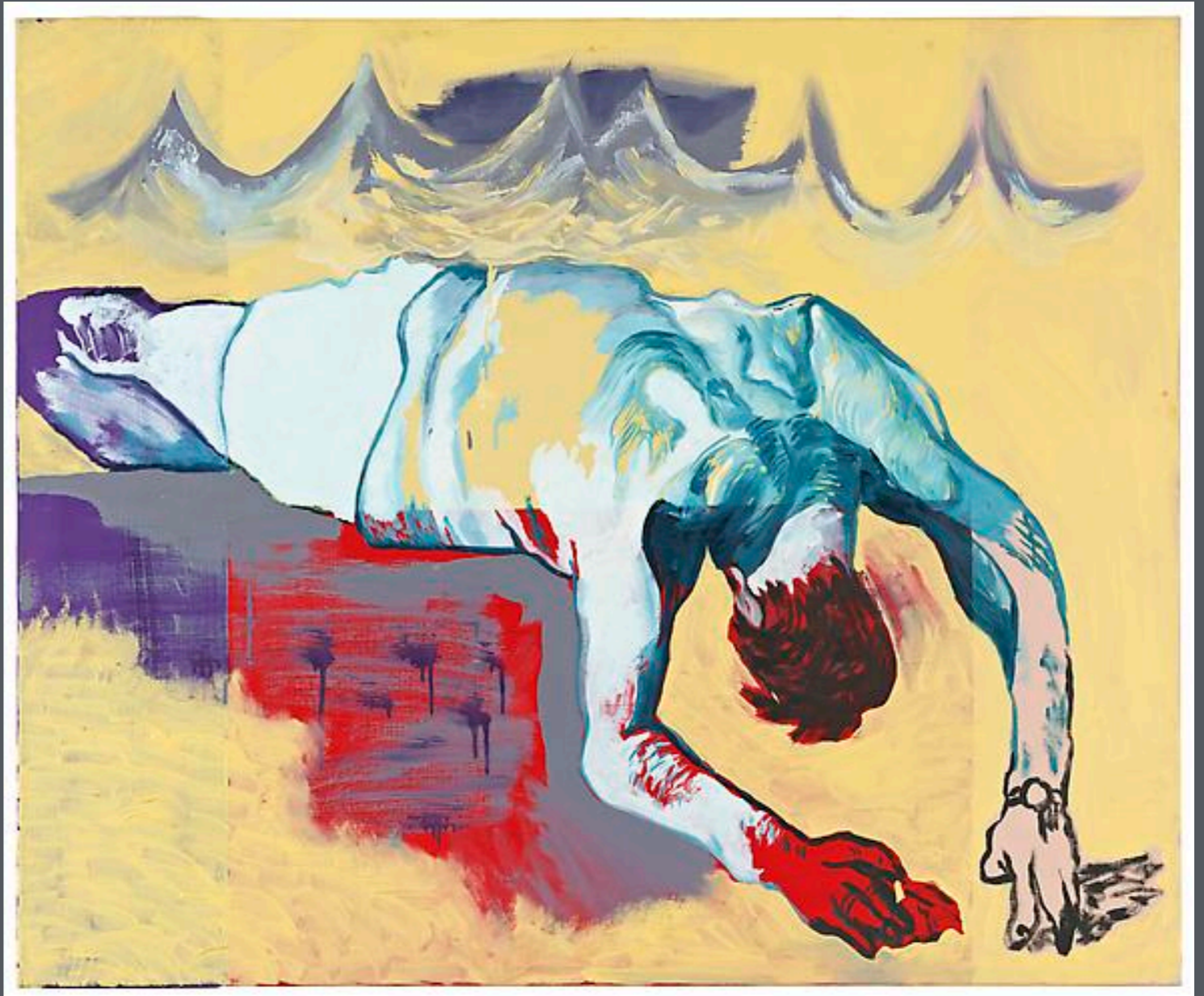
Joseph Beuys



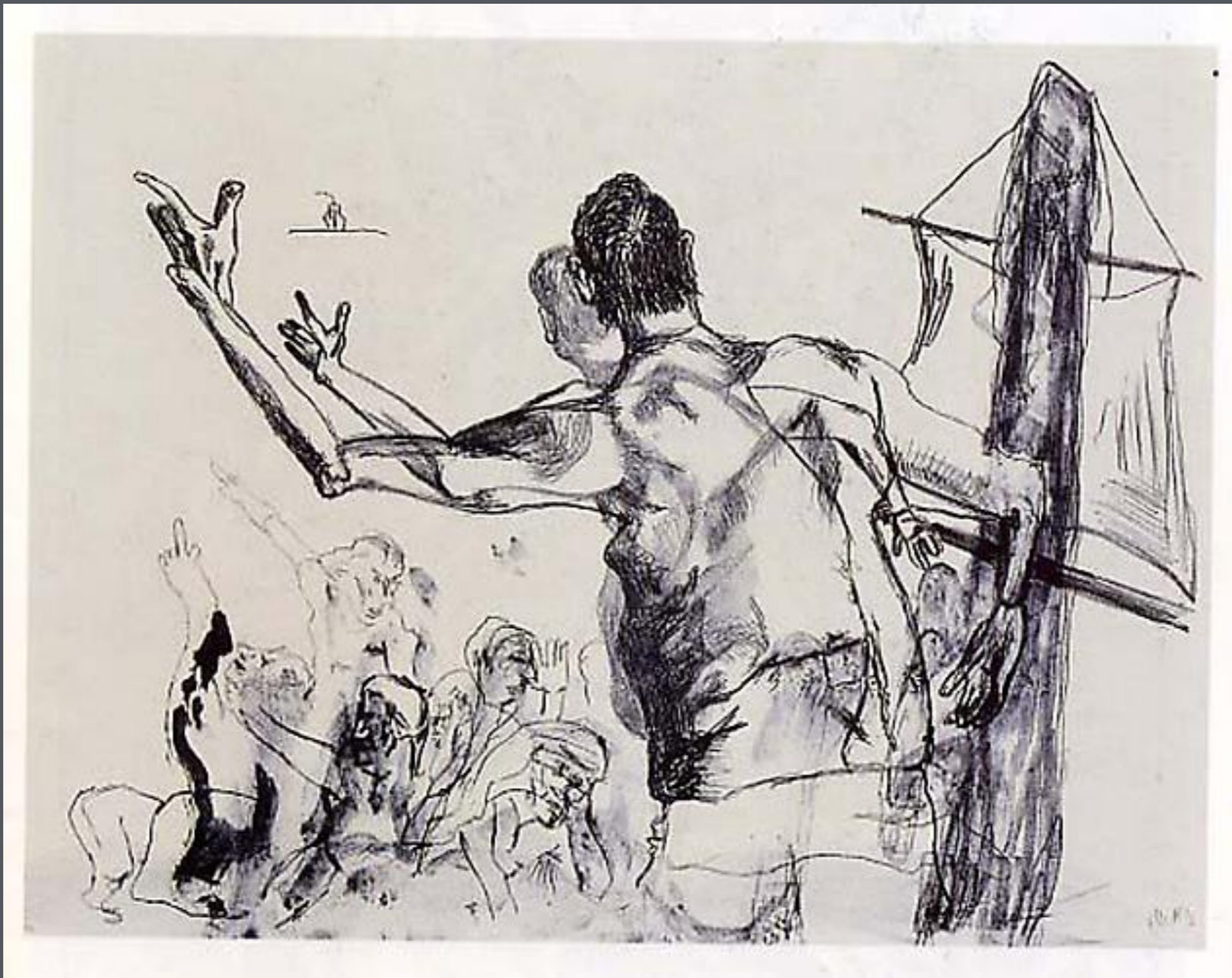
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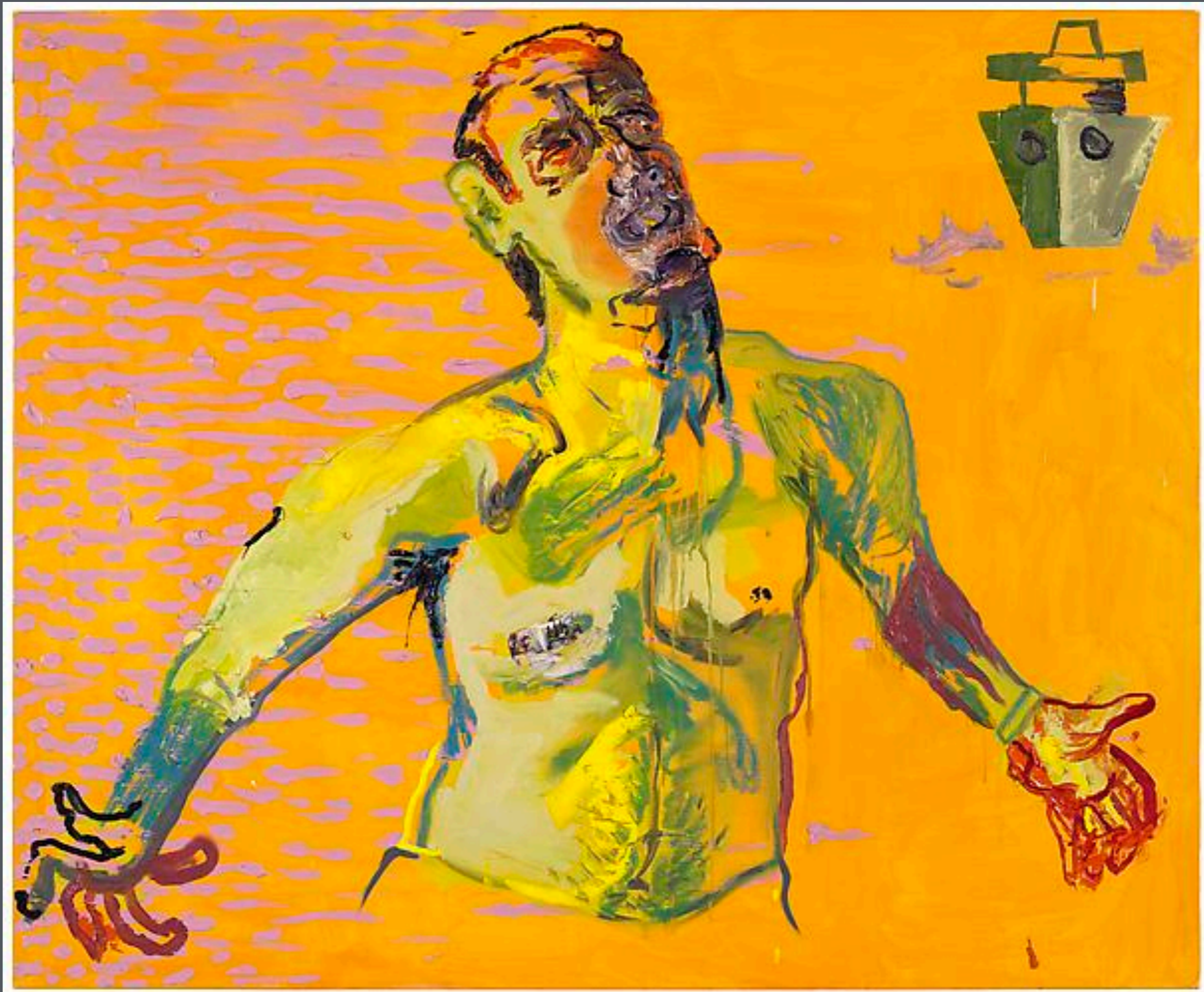
1996 - Martin Kippenberger - *Medusa* Paintings



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1998 - Tracey Emin - *My Bed*



2003 - Breda Beban - *Walk of the Three Chairs*



2010 - Christian Marclay - *The Clock*



2000 - Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*



**A (sort of) Conclusion**

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# To think about

- How can terms from one discipline be applied to another?
- What is revealed by doing so and is it different from what 'traditional' analysis might?
- What are the limits of this technique?
- How might the work you make be different in the light of the knowledge you've gained?

**Thank You**