

REPETITION AS FIRST IDEA OF FORM

The one direction in fine or abstract art today is in the painting of the same form over and over again. The one intensity and the one perfection comes only from long and lonely routine preparation and attention and repetition.

– Ad Reinhardt: 'Art as Art', Environment, Autumn 1962 p53

Endless repetition of infinite sameness

– Ad Reinhardt: '[Art-As-Art]', unpublished notes, 1966-67

Starting over at the beginning non-historical

Eternal return, repetition transmundane

Made, unmade, remade

Open self to the general & universal

– Ad Reinhardt: 'Art-as-Art, unpublished, undated notes (Mandala)

The sestina is an unrhymed form which was invented sometime toward the end of the thirteenth century by the famous Provençal troubador Arnaut Daniel. It was admired and used by Dante and Petrarch in Italy, but was not much used in France and England before the nineteenth century. It is composed in six stanzas of six lines each in blank verse, followed by a three-line envoi, or tornada, as the refrain of a poem was called in Provençal.

Instead of rhyme, the sestina uses word repetition; the end word of each line of the first stanza is repeated in different order, in each of the following stanzas and the envoi. Originally, the end words were supposed to have a feminine ending. The end word in the last line of each stanza becomes the end word in the first line of the next stanza, a device that links the stanzas in a chain of repetition.

The arrangement of repetition is as follows:

Stanza I	1	2	3	4	5	6
Stanza II	6	1	5	2	4	3
Stanza III	3	6	4	1	2	5
Stanza IV	5	3	2	6	1	4
Stanza V	4	5	1	3	6	2
Stanza VI	2	4	6	5	3	1
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	6	1	5	2	4	3
	3	6	4	1	2	5
	5	3	2	6	1	4
	4	5	1	3	6	2
	2	4	6	5	3	1

The envoi contains inner repetition, as well as terminal repetition. The first line has word 2 in the middle and 5 at the end. The second line has word 4 in the middle and 3 at the end, while the third line has word 6 in the middle and 1 at the end.

– Frances Stillman: 'The Poet's Manual and Rhyming Dictionary' Thomas Y. Crowell, New York, 1965

The most striking feature of the new Zen style of painting is that the whole is first painted in one stroke – in one breath, as it were – without regard for the details; it is out of the whole that the parts then emerge. In other words, instead of the many building up to form the one, the one forms, and the many come to appear in it. Instead of the many or the formed aiming for the one or the formless, the one or the formless as fundamental subject expresses itself in the many or the formed. Thus is in complete agreement with Zen's way of Immediate Awakening.

– Shin'ichi Hisamatsu: 'Chan and Chan Culture', public lectures at Harvard, 1957

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