Clock-wise or Counter Clock-wise: which way to take to better interpret a picture?

Timofeev V.

Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia

vg@smolny.org

Some pictures like Peter Blume’s The Rock (1948) combat facile interpretation. The main hypothesis of the paper tested experimentally, is that the interpretation of The Rock depends on the direction of the eye movement of the viewer. It might be either optimistic or tragic, depending on which of the two Golden ratio spirals the viewer would follow: a clock-wise or a counter clock-wise one. A scared, yet horrific monumental rock serves as the fulcrum of the composition, juxtaposing contrasting images, referring to both decay and rebirth. A revolutionary style building under construction, is on left-hand side of the picture. A bombed ruin of a traditional brick family home is on the right-hand side. The rock is surrounded by men of different age and races working hard. Some animal bones are placed on the left of the rock, a bright red flower is on its right. The atmosphere of ambiguity is strengthened by the image of a woman kneeling on the ground with her arms outstretched toward the rock or the sky that might stand for praying as well as cursing. According to Peter Blume, The Rock symbolizes “the continual process of man’s rebuilding out of a devastating world”. For this interpretation to be possible the viewer should follow the clock-wise Golden Ratio spiral starting at its center and finishing at the building under construction. Choosing the second option the viewer would come to the idea of tragic futility as the central one of the picture.