Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry

Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

OCTOBER

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Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975, by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

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Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

An OCTOBER Book

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To Felix

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Acknowledgments

It is difficult to compose acknowledgments for a collection of essays that were written over the past twenty-five years without lapsing into some kind of autobiographical account. Obviously, the number of friends and colleagues who have supported this writer and his writings are numerous by now, even though, as it seems at times of delusion, never numerous enough.

If given the space and the time, I would gladly contemplate the full diversity of these communicative bonds, the manifest and latent dialogues over shorter or lengthier periods of time, over sometimes considerable distances, both spatial-geographic and temporal-generational. Or I would talk about the peculiar differences among debts of gratitude: some were incurred in brief encounters and others have grown over a quarter of a century.

Among the brief encounters—and I might as well begin with them, since they make up one crucial part of my daily professional life—are the numerous exchanges with students in lectures and in the seminar room, or in the discussion of dissertation work. A question or a response can suddenly reveal a shared comprehension, or a newly discovered subject or a challenging theoretical problem, and thereby signal and sustain the dialogic transformations of seeing, thinking, and writing, giving evidence of the partial success of the often dubious project of pedagogy.

Among many such encounters at various institutions, most recently at Columbia University and at the Whitney Independent Study Program, I have been fortunate to work in various ways with George Baker, T. J. Demos, Leah Dickerman, Hannah Feldman, Claire Gilman, Rachel Haidu, Carrie Lambert, Jaleh Mansoor, Julia Robinson, Judith Rodenbeck, and Sebastian Zeidler.

The relations of *longue durée* are clearly the most important ones, and they would be mentioned first were hierarchy to structure gratitude. These are the friends of many years, with whom the dialogue never seems to be interrupted, even if sometimes suspended due to daily demands: here, first of all, it is to Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois that I owe and wish to give thanks for friendship sustained across many differences and difficulties.

I could say without hyperbole that Rosalind Krauss, in the early seventies, was the luminous critic who from afar ignited my belief in the possibility of writing twentieth-century art history and criticism when I was still living in Germany, a country that had significantly contributed to the eradication of those beliefs and the extinction of those practices. She would also become the first intellectual to extend a welcome to me after my arrival on these shores, a welcome that has never been revoked and that has grown into a complex friendship and dialogue on our shared and opposing aesthetic and theoretical investments. Her presence and her work have influenced (and continue to influence) the development of my own work as a historian and critic in innumerable ways.

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Paradoxically, two other colleagues who changed continents have seemed closer to me in terms of their politics and methods while remaining personally more distant. Nevertheless, I count them among my perpetual interlocutors: first of all, T. J. Clark, whose work has again and again renewed my hope that the pas-

sion for the aesthetic object can in fact be fused with the writing of art history. More recently, yet in many ways more crucial than he knows, Denis Hollier has emerged as a figure whose subjectivity and whose writings have greatly increased my desire to work on an account of postwar European art, the subject of my next book if there ever will be one.

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The "other" group of friends are those outside academia, artists all, from whom I have learned—as it seems at times—everything, at least more than I can recognize at this point. I consider myself fortunate to have known, for the last four years of his life, the late Marcel Broodthaers, whose radicality and sublime wit served as an introduction to a deeper sense of dialectics than my studies in Marxist philosophy had allowed me to acquire. If this volume's cover carries the first image of his work I ever saw, in the office of a lawyer in Berlin who defended the members of the anarchist left, it is meant to be seen as a tribute both to Broodthaers and to that moment in 1969.

Of equal importance, and fortunately still continuing, is my friendship with Gerhard Richter. Since the early 1970s, he has taught me the opposite half of the dialectical engagement, the one that posits at all times a commitment to the most differentiated specificity of practice and perception (not just in painting) against any theoretical or political doctrine. If I have included only the first of my numerous essays on his oeuvre in this volume, it is because my monographic study of Richter's work will follow the publication of these essays in the not too distant future.

I consider myself equally fortunate to have known and to have worked, either as a writer or as an editor, either repeatedly or over extended periods, with Michael Asher and Daniel Buren, James Coleman, Isa Genzken and Dan Graham, Hans Haacke and John Knight, Martha Rosler and Allan Sekula, and, of course, Lawrence Weiner. Among the artists of that generation, James Coleman, Hans Haacke, John Knight, and Allan Sekula have remained the closest friends.

Louise Lawler, my companion for ten of the twenty-five years in which these essays were written, is among those artists from whom I have learned most. I continue to learn from actual or imaginary dialogues with all of them.

Among the younger generation of artists whose work has encouraged me to believe in the necessity and the possibility of continuing artistic practices under the most difficult circumstances, first of all comes Gabriel Orozco. I would like to thank him for a friendship that I consider all the more precious since it has been extended across a generational and a geopolitical divide.

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Debts of a different kind have been accumulated over many years to the numerous editors and translators, curators and colleagues, who have contributed in multiple ways to the initial publication of these essays. Here I should mention with particular gratitude my French friends Claude Gintz and Jean Louis Maubant, the first ever to commit themselves to publish some of these writings in book form. And thanks are due to Anne Rorimer, formerly of the Art Institute of Chicago, a now distant friend of many years, who commissioned my first-ever published essay, which will be republished in the second volume of these collected writings. Thanks are also due to Marian Goodman, who has been a subtle and generous presence in many more moments and in many more ways than she might be aware of.

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would end well after all. Matthew Abbate, also at the MIT Press, has been an outstanding and exceptionally gracious and generous editor, and I would like to thank him for his untiring efforts and commitment.

The last of the gestures of gratitude is often reserved for the most important, and so be it here, even though I tried to follow a nonhierarchical principle in this task. It goes in this case to Catherine de Zegher, my companion of many of the years in which the essays for this volume were written. As a friend and as the editor of the *October* book series she has done more than anybody to make this book (and its sequel volume) happen despite the author's reluctance to look back.

Benjamin Buchloh, New York, May 2000

Introduction

The nineteen essays selected for this volume, from among a significantly larger group of monographic texts published in the past two decades, were all written—with the exception of the early essays on Gerhard Richter and Dan Graham—after my arrival in North America in 1977. Thus they not only span a considerable period of time but also resonate with the conflicting repercussions of the author's voluntary displacement and the aftereffects of having abandoned the site and the language of an "original" cultural context. In spite of the seemingly never-ending retrospective doubts about the wisdom of such a decision, it should be said from the start that one of my initial reasons to escape from the strictures of the highly overdetermined cultural identity of postwar Germany had in fact been the hope of finding a situation in which the model of a postnational cultural identity seemed to have been historically achieved at least in its initial stages.

At that time (that is, from the late sixties onward), and all the more so from the perspective of postwar Germany, it certainly appeared that artistic production in the United States (in particular Pop art, Fluxus, Minimalism, and Conceptual art), as much as the critical and art-historical discourses on twentieth-century and contemporary art (in my case, from the avidly read criticism of Clement Greenberg to that of Rosalind Krauss), had already embraced—even if unknowingly—such a model of posttraditional identity formation. In hindsight, however, this

condition appears now more like a different, slightly advanced version of a discourse of cultural hegemony in a country that Hegel once famously called "a bourgeois society without a state." This could provide a possible explanation of the fact that the secret and latent ground of American postwar culture has increasingly been determined by the hegemonic exclusion typical of economic competition among global corporations rather than by the competing models of national cultures that had previously, however falsely, determined cultural differences in the European nation-states.

Not surprisingly, then, one of the continuous motifs of these essays is exactly the attempt to clarify the specific differences between postwar American and postwar European neo-avantgarde culture—a distinction equally important to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. More precisely, these essays try to find the proper criteria (historical, ideological, and aesthetic) with which such a differentiation—evident in the works themselves—could be convincingly argued.

But the pursuit of these differences was overdetermined in so many ways that a single, let alone a simple answer would appear impossible: had not, paradoxically, the very models of identity formation that had been operative throughout progressivist modernist culture simultaneously solicited a subversive defiance of national identity and the deconstruction of bourgeois subjectivity? And was it not one of the many problems of the neo-avantgarde in general, and of European reconstruction culture in particular, that it could no longer find an easy recourse to what appeared in retrospect as the once solid foundations of Modernism in the European culture of the nation-states (e.g., the essential Frenchness of Matisse, Braque, and Léger, the indisputable *italianità* of Futurism and *pittura metafisica,* or the Germanness of Expressionism)? And furthermore, was it not now, under the impact of an ever-intensified American enforcement of a global culture industry, all the more urgent to conceive of an artistic production in which the anchoring of culture in the specificity of the region and the identity of the nation could once again be reasserted in a new project of critical regionalism, as Kenneth Frampton once called it?

The undecidability of these conflicts, the perpetual oscillation and conversion between a progressive opposition against and a reactionary affirmation of

traditional concepts of identity, would inevitably not only demarcate numerous phases of artistic production discussed in the essays of this book. These conflicts would also pose questions in the writing of a critical history of that period: for example, what was it that made Pop art specifically American? Was it the peculiar belatedness of the reception of the crucial paradigms of Duchamp, Picabia, and Dada at large, or was it the explicitly American iconography and scale of it all? Or, in the European context: what was intrinsically Italian about *arte povera*? Its rearticulation of the anti-modernist stances of de Chirico, or its uniquely contemporaneous seduction resulting from the aesthetic fusion of artisanal and industrial design?

Most important, perhaps, was the question of whether it was the *adherence to* or the *departure from* such concepts of regional and national culture that had made these works of the neo-avantgarde aesthetically legible and productive in the present. Further, even if one could identify certain aspects of a work as nationally specific, how would one position these aspects in an interpretive hierarchy from weak to strong readings? Are these criteria of the national or regional specificity of a work (as opposed to others such as questions of gender politics, social-political ideology, or formal-aesthetic structures) *marginal* or *central* to that particular work's interpretation? And finally, how can one establish such an interpretive order and such criteria of judgment with any credibility at all, if they perhaps originate merely in the rapidly shifting projective investments of one particular group of readers at a specific moment in time?

But the consideration of national specificity implies an additional set of questions, heretofore not introduced into the discussion of the works of the neo-avantgarde: to what extent can these criteria be detached from the political-ideological agenda of the European nations and the United States in the period of European reconstruction culture and the formation of a specifically American neo-avantgarde? If it is adequate, as Serge Guilbaut suggested in his groundbreaking study of Abstract Expressionism, to situate American cultural production almost entirely within the framework of an ideological instrumentalization in the service of liberal capitalist democracy (i.e., the United States), would it then not be equally sufficient to contemplate German postwar culture, as I am

now tempted to argue in a somewhat analogous fashion, as having been determined in its entirety by the conditions of a collectively enforced political and psychic amnesia?

How could the condition of an almost complete repression of the memory of having inflicted the holocaust and the devastation of war on a geopolitical and cultural formation previously considered the "bourgeois humanist civilization" of the European continent *not* affect the definition and the practices of postwar cultural production in that country?

Even if the proposal to read postwar German culture in those terms should turn out to be a deeply inadequate explanatory model, we would still be left with the task of understanding how those determining conditions (since by now it appears beyond doubt that they must be considered as such) could be incorporated within the readings of the various other registers, including those that are presumed to be the purely formal and aesthetic ones. Yet, while the concept of national difference is in fact a key issue of critical reflection in my current work's attempts to discuss the precarious dialectics of such identity formations in postwar European art, it might have appeared only as a subtext at the time when most of the essays gathered in this volume were first written. One additional important task then would be to clarify to what extent aesthetic resistance toward the systematic destruction of subjectivity in the Second World War and the postwar period had to return to these problematic concepts of traditional identity formation in order to mobilize whatever mnemonic resources a particular culture might still have held at that time.

Its dialectical opposite would concern those artistic practices that seem to have transcended traditional identity formations altogether, such as American art of the postwar period, for example, or certain practices of Latin American countries in the 1950s and their peculiar internationalisms. These practices appear no longer to originate in the cultural matrix of the nation-state, nor in the fictions of national identity as their ultimate social anchoring ground (with all the extremely problematic ideological ramifications that this model always entailed). Their "international style," by contrast, seems to have shifted (perhaps already starting with Abstract Expressionism) toward a model of cultural production that

is ultimately grounded in the economic structures of advanced global corporate capitalism that have definitively left those conditions of traditional identity formation behind.

This problematic opposition is at the center of my discussion of the work of Joseph Beuys, for example, an essay that is marked by all the juvenile rage with which a return of the repressed can be encountered in or projected onto culture. But the essay is equally marked by all the positive aspirations with which German postwar audiences—driven by their dire need to reestablish themselves within the broader community of fictions of an uncontaminated modernity—invested the reading of contrasting practices that had emerged from a seemingly postnational culture (in this context for example the works of Richard Serra or Robert Morris) and that appeared to be free from any entanglements with the disastrous histories of the European nation-states. By contrast, the work of Beuys, caught as it was in its attempts to construct at least a latent narrative of the fate of identity under the conditions of a self-inflicted destruction, and more importantly under the conditions of a violent destruction of the identities of others, obviously risked appearing as an instance of formal obsolescence and epistemic quaintness, suffering already, by its attempts for *narrative* and *representation,* from a seemingly inevitable historical or structural deficiency within the continuously advancing discursive formations and institutions of contemporary art itself.

Or another question, concerning the present, at the opposite end of the spectrum: must certain contemporary practices that have been defined within a posttraditional model of identity inevitably end up in a vacuous "international style" (e.g., that of a certain type of academicized minimalism, or more recently a certain light-box photo-conceptualism)? This type of installation art and photo-conceptualism now produces a techno-lingo of the image that can pride itself in being the first to have fully absorbed the very technologies that made the culture of spectacle and the production of advertisement imagery a monolithic global power. Such affirmative mimesis makes it seem inescapable that artistic practices would, if not actually pave the way for, at least finally succumb to the powers of spectacle culture to permeate all conventions of perception and communication without any form of resistance whatsoever. It implies that even the

mere thought and the slightest gesture of opposition appear dwarfed and ludicrous in the face of the totalitarian control and domination by spectacle.

A present result of this is a rise of the pressures on the subject's narcissistic self-defense against such forms of universalization as control. These pressures reach a point where the conception of art as a (negative) theology, as the solely accessible, secularized experience of the *sacred,* might seem to reemerge as the last possibility for legitimizing any continuation of any kind of artistic practice at all. Here the (artistic) subject has to be extrapolated from all discursive and institutional contexts and has to be imagined as the quintessentially transhistorical and metasocial figure whose paintings (to give Brice Marden as one recent example) are best seen in comparison with three-thousand-year-old tombstones from China. It is, of course, precisely in the relapse into the ideology of the total asociality of the isolated subject as the subject's last and sole instantiation that all experiences of subjectivity are finally annihilated.

A second and equally consistent topic addressed in these essays is also a project with which I am still engaged: it is an attempt to clarify the complex and ever-changing relationships between the historical avant-garde of the 1915–1925 period and the neo-avantgarde during the reconstruction period in New York and postwar Europe from 1945 to 1975. Or, as the question should have been posed when most of these essays were written but for which I lacked the theoretical framework at the time: how have the different structures of public experience, from the waning bourgeois public sphere (and the desperate attempts at its redemption and resuscitation) in the works of an artist such as Henri Matisse to the avant-garde attempts of John Heartfield to construct an emerging proletarian public sphere, dramatically affected conception and reception of art in the prewar and the postwar period? Seen from the perspective of Jürgen Habermas's theoretical framework, it becomes all the more urgent to attempt to describe the "public" sphere of an artist like Andy Warhol, to name but the most conspicuous of postwar artists situated in the moment when culture industry and spectacle massively invade the once relatively autonomous spaces, institutions, and practices of avant-garde culture and begin to control them.

Rather than settling for the comfort that the left has traditionally taken in declaring these spaces and practices of neo-avantgarde production to be foreclosed or corrupted, commercial or contaminated, recuperative or complicit, the title of this collection of essays would signal to the reader that its author continues to see a dialectic in which the mutually exclusive forces of artistic production and of the culture industry as its utmost opposite can still be traced in their perpetual interactions. These range from mimetic affirmation (e.g., Andy Warhol) to an ostentatious asceticism (e.g., Michael Asher) that—in its condemnation to a radical purity of means—more often than not in the last decade had to risk losing the very ground of the real upon which critical opposition could have been inscribed.

The dates for the essays selected here, dealing with American and European work produced between 1955 and 1975, are not as randomly chosen as they might at first appear. For example, I still believe that Abstract Expressionism (excluded by my dating scheme) was in many ways a logical development emerging directly from the transfer of painterly Surrealism to the territory of the United States. In the rigorous distinction, initially provided by Peter Bürger, between the two formations of the historical avant-garde and the neo-avantgarde, New York School painting of the 1940s and early 1950s would not even qualify as a real "neo-avantgarde." Rather it would appear as an immediate extension, if not continuation, of what Bürger caller the "historical" avant-garde.

After all, only beginning about 1951 did the process of rediscovering the post-Cubist legacies of Dada and Constructivism really establish the complicated relationships between the two avant-garde formations for the first time: that is, the dialectics of the persistence and the repetition of artistic paradigms and their qualitative transformation. As of this moment (or shortly before or thereafter), we witness in the work of Lucio Fontana and Robert Rauschenberg, of Ellsworth Kelly and Yves Klein, of Jacques de la Villeglé and Jasper Johns, the reemergence of the key paradigms of the historical avant-garde of 1913: grid formation and monochrome painting, the readymade, collage and assemblage (in both their pictorial and their sculptural versions), and—in highly pictorialized forms—the return of the aesthetic of photomontage.

On the other hand I would argue that it is not before the rise of Conceptual art around 1968, culminating in the mid–1970s as the closing date of this volume, that we witness the emergence of artistic positions in the work of Michael Asher and Daniel Buren, Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke, Dan Graham and Lawrence Weiner, that detach themselves more than any other postwar activity from the legacy of the historical avant-garde. Therefore I would suggest that only at this time did a radically different basis for critical interventions in the discursive and institutional frameworks determining the production and the reception of contemporary art become established, generating propositions of audience reception, distribution form, and institutional critique that were distinctly different from the critical models invoked by Bürger.

It was primarily his ignorance of these artistic practices that made Bürger's incisive division between the two formations and his outright disdain for contemporary art so profoundly unacceptable. The first of Bürger's many delusions (and my own as well) was of course to situate neo-avantgarde practices in a perpetual, almost Oedipal relation to the accomplishments of the parental avant-garde of the twenties. Rather than recognizing that the failure of the generation of the parents in *political* and *historical* terms, not in *artistic* ones, would have to provide the framework from which to rethink the conditions of whether and how culture could be reconceived after the Second World War, Bürger insisted on gauging all activities of the postwar moment against the artistic accomplishments of the historical avant-garde.

The second and equally fatal delusion, shared by Bürger and this author to some extent (at least throughout the earlier essays of this book), was the assumption that the criteria for aesthetic judgment would have to be linked at all times, if not to models of an outright instrumentalized political efficacy, then at least to a compulsory mode of critical negativity. Still, then and now, I would argue that *one* among the infinite multiplicity of functions intrinsic to aesthetic structures is in fact to provide at least an immediate and concrete illusion, if not an actual instantiation, of a universally accessible suspension of power.

Thus the aesthetic structure dissolves all forms of domination, beginning with the dissolution of repression in whatever form it might have inscribed it-

self in codes and conventions: be they linguistic, specular, representational, or the behavioral structures of social interaction. Yet how this aesthetic experience is actually achieved (always, it seems, taking for its initial departure the dissolution of the power of the reigning paradigm itself, hence the inescapable necessity for "newness" at all times in modernity) is a matter about which I now disagree to a considerable extent with authors like Bürger, as much as with the author of these early essays. Other structures generating the dissolution of power and repression (and here, for me, the partial analogy still holds between the aesthetic and the joke and the dream and their relation to the unconscious) are clearly of equal centrality: beginning with my essay on Hans Haacke in 1988, and perhaps more systematically in my work on Gerhard Richter in recent years, I have focused on the aesthetic capacity to construct the mnemonic experience as one of the few acts of resistance against the totality of spectacularization. After all, it has become painfully apparent that the sclerotic fixation on a model of reductivist criticality or instrumentalized rationality in artistic practices does not promise to be any more productive than an adherence to the foundationalist myths of the perennial validity of the classical genres and production procedures of painting and sculpture.

But Bürger's refusal to recognize the specificity and relevance of postwar practices was just one version of many among the theoreticians and art historians of the New Left in their largely contemptuous outlook on contemporary cultural production at large, their profound doubts about its legitimacy, if not its historical possibility altogether. These essays then attempt to come to terms at least partially with this prohibition on contemporary culture that the left had pronounced from Guy Debord in the late 1950s onward, an attempt that certainly originated in the author's reflection on his own prohibitive tendencies as they had been formed in the moment of 1968.

Theodor W. Adorno's famous dictum that artistic phenomena prevent by their very presence the political realization of the political progress that they promised as artistic practices, was of course only the most complex articulation of a set of assumptions in which a latent resentment against contemporary culture at large could be linked with a leftist prejudice against any form of aesthetic

deviance and transgression that did not comply with the prescribed patterns of the political models of critique and theoretical transformation.

In all of the reproaches leveled by the left against contemporary cultural practices reverberates the resentment against the seemingly antiquated claims of artists (and their *amateurs,* if you will) that the annihilation of the (bourgeois) subject—in spite of the ever-more-massive onslaught of media culture—has not yet been completed nor accepted as a universally governing condition. Counter-evidence is provided by the more or less traditional forms of aesthetic experience and its objects (ranging in fact from the fetishistic artisanal forms of manual production to the advanced forms of technological mimicry, from the totally hedonistic to the purely ascetic). Inevitably, the argument that artistic production should be recognized as an exemplary form of resistance within which the subject maintains its irreversible claims, signals a reactionary quest for the sustenance of privileged forms of experience. These, more than ever as it appears now, remain accessible only to those who have been fortunate enough to escape the universal enforcement of the subject's annihilation (or, worse yet, to those who have access to the principle of expenditure and the destruction of socially produced surplus value on a grand scale, i.e., the fortuitous resources to invest financially in the often staggering increase in the production of exchange value that works of art exceptionally act out like the shadow play of capitalism itself).

Yet, in many ways these essays were written precisely against these simple convictions, in that they attempt to make the relationships and the mediations between the apparatus of ideology and the apparatus of artistic production more complex, without, however, obliterating the fact that those mediations are among the most important questions that any study of contemporary art would have to confront. Thus they attempt to articulate the actually existing degree of differentiation operative in the works of the period under consideration and to make these practices transparent as the subjects, spaces, and discursive formations of an infinitely more subtle and complex range of oppositions and resistances, of forms of subjective self-constitution and public critiques of reification, than the political theories of the left could ever have allowed, either in the public sphere or in the private domain of individual experience.

What was at stake then, once again, was the question of the legitimacy of judgments, both the philosophical-theoretical one that simply arrogates the authority to pronounce the death of artistic practices *tout court* and the historical one that suspects art of having simply succumbed to a universal submission to commodity culture and of functioning as a pioneering branch and scouting device of the larger apparatus of the culture industry. What was at stake furthermore was the academic judgment of historians and critics of the left (like the author himself in many moments in these essays) who claim to have found the exact system of overdetermination within which the work of art can be grounded, so that the interpreters can now prove that works of art, just like their interpreters, have in fact never reached a condition of any transcendentality whatsoever.

Worse yet, from such a perspective works of art can be suspected (in this respect totally unlike the academic authors) of having not even known the extent, much less the totality, of the latent and unconscious determinations of which both the artistic producer and the artistic product were the unknowing victims, a victimhood from which the readings of the critics and historians now promise to deliver them.

Therefore the third central topic addressed in almost all of the essays is the question of the interdependence between artistic and ideological formations in the practices of the postwar period. While it was slightly less common a topic in the late seventies than it is nowadays, I now have to live with the methodological crudity of most of these essays on this point. I can partially attribute it to the fact that my active interest in contemporary artistic production was formed in the late sixties in Berlin, when crude questions concerning the relationship between cultural and ideological formations were in order (at least it seemed so to me at the time). It might also be borne in mind that contemporary art criticism was all but nonexistent in postwar West Germany. It was not until the early seventies that I discovered American criticism and recognized the extreme limitations of European contemporary aesthetic thought. This discovery was one motivating factor in my eventual departure for an actual proximity to both the production and the critical reflection of contemporary art on this side of the Atlantic.

I have, however, not given up my convictions concerning the importance of European artists (in particular, but not only, the generation defining itself in the late sixties). In fact I believe many of them to be among the central figures of the second half of the twentieth century, though they have not received adequate American recognition. Accordingly, I have included essays on some of them in this book (Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Gerhard Richter, and Sigmar Polke, for example). I regret not having written more extensively on the German artist Palermo and nothing at all on the Italian artists Anselmo, Luciano Fabro, and Jannis Kounellis. By contrast I think that other key figures of the late fifties and early sixties, such as Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein, have been overestimated in U.S. reception, to the detriment of artists such as—most obviously—Piero Manzoni, who has never been adequately understood or presented in this country, or such as the French *décollage* artists François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, and Jacques de la Villeglé.

Yet, paradoxically, it is precisely the traditional critical ambition to construct "greatness" and the status of "masterly achievement," the task of providing criteria and norms for the admission into a hegemonic canon, from which I would now want to distance myself most: having finally understood that this is the first step toward the institutionalization and control of cultural practices.

The selection of the artists addressed in these essays does not at all indicate that they are my exclusive interests: earlier essays on Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra, for example, written in the mid-1970s in Europe, simply did not seem adequate any longer for a contemporary discussion of their extremely important work, which laid the foundations for many of my ideas about contemporary practices. Essays that I would have liked to have rewritten, in particular one on Eva Hesse and an early essay sketch on Yvonne Rainer, whose films were among my most important aesthetic experiences of the mid-seventies, were actually begun, or even published in parts, but were never completed or accomplished enough to be included in this book.

I do not exclude the possibility that my lack of commitment to the work of women artists, glaringly evident in the selection of artists in this book, initially followed, even if totally unconsciously, the rules of patriarchal order and the cor-

relative psychological investment that often governs conventional artist-critic and artist-curator relationships. Yet it would have appeared more dishonest to retroactively falsify my record by adding essays on female artists to a historical panorama that had clearly ignored or obscured them at the time when the majority of these essays were written.

It was not until 1982, in an essay "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art" (soon to be published in a second volume of my writings dealing with general and theoretical questions), that I wrote about a new generation of female artists, finally recognizing the central importance of their work for the decade of the 1980s. Their centrality resulted partially, I assume, from the fact that they had refrained at least for a time from the regression into the most traditional role behavior of the artist when this role and its tools became once again—with the rediscovery of Neo-Expressionist painting—the order of the institution and of the market in the early eighties.

As a matter of principle I have left these essays for the most part in their original state, problematic as that condition often seems by now. I have not rewritten them either in part or in their entirety, which ultimately would have been the only cure for their flaws and insufficiencies. But I have cut them occasionally where they appeared too wordy, and I have made changes in style and grammar whenever the rules required it (rules that I still have only partially mastered, as the reader will undoubtedly notice). Therefore these essays should be considered merely as early documents of my efforts to come to terms with some of the most contradictory and mesmerizing phenomena of contemporary experience, the artistic production of late capitalism at the end of the "terrible twentieth century" as Marcel Broodthaers once called it. Whatever understanding and cognition of this experience these essays might still provide, the author derived first and most from the study of the works of these artists.

It has become more difficult in recent years to determine the functions critical writing can still perform in contemporary art and its once-public institutions. What appears first of all as obsolete about criticism (even across its rather broad spectrum of positions and methods) would be the claim with which all critics have stepped up: that they have had a higher degree of insight, a deeper

level of knowledge, a different temporality of perception. Critics have always claimed that they could "see" sooner than others, that they have "discovered" earlier what is crucial as an artistic development, that they have even retroactively discerned the importance of what had been overlooked in the past. All of these claims could of course to some extent be justified by referring to historical examples (e.g., Willem Thoré Bürger's amazing insights and discoveries in the nineteenth century, or Julius Meier-Graefe's uncanny precision in discerning the art of the loathsome late nineteenth century in Germany from the extraordinary developments in France). But when it comes to the second half of the twentieth century, Clement Greenberg, the most outstanding critic of the postwar period, erred as much, if not more, as he got things right (though when it concerned painting of a certain vein, he even got it right with an astonishing clarity, often at early moments). But it took almost two generations (and the job is still not done) to get out from under Greenberg's falsification of history and the stranglehold of his type of American formalist thought and his scenario of Modernism. All of them have prevented the comprehension of whole generations (e.g., the Dadaists, the Fluxus artists, the Conceptualists), not to say entire chapters of art history (e.g., the Russian avant-garde, Weimar culture) and avant-garde practices throughout the twentieth century.

Obviously, the claims for the critic's privileged mode of vision and aesthetic knowledge must appear all the more dubious, if not outright obsolete, once the work of art itself (after Marcel Duchamp's invention of the readymade and in ever-renewed assaults since then) had specifically critiqued all those forms of artistic skill and artisanal competence in which privileged modes of seeing, reading, and critical judgment had been anchored within the artistic construct. The last such instance in which artistic production itself had programmatically attacked the distinction between primary experts and secondary readers was certainly the moment when Conceptual art consciously assumed the place and the language of the critical text itself in order to displace, among other things, the apparently superfluous intermediary of the critic's exegesis.

But there are other factors to be considered before one discards the roles and functions of the traditional critic with a sigh of relief. The critic—admittedly

as a self-appointed figure who impertinently claimed superiority and anteriority over the common capacity to see what is made to be seen, to read what has been conceived precisely with the deconstruction of the privileged reader in mind—certainly played a major role throughout the 1950s and 1960s in maintaining the "publicness" of art as one of its integral conditions. What I would call the "public" dimension of art is the assumption that artistic production (like philosophy or the study of law, for example) operates and defines its parameters—regardless of its actual reception or comprehension by a major or a mass audience—inextricably within the public sphere; that is, in those cognitive, perceptual, epistemological, and linguistic conventions where the prelinguistic or unconscious forms of knowledge and communication are symbolized. In spite of some extreme formulations that position aesthetic practices at the threshold of the opaque and the hermetic, all aesthetic practices insist on their potential public and collective legibility. In fact, I would go as far as to suggest that artistic production is in itself an integral element in defining the actual conditions of public experience, even if it is not at all evident anymore that the "publicness" of aesthetic experience is still considered a subject of general concern.

Thus the seemingly triumphant defeat of criticism at the hands of Conceptual art had an unanticipated external determination as its cause: it not only announced—as artists and critics since the early 1960s had hoped—the demise of the author and the birth of the reader (e.g., Susan Sontag's notorious essay "Against Interpretation," which popularized the message that had been sent by French structuralist theoreticians such as Roland Barthes earlier), but it also enacted a crucial structural transformation within the institution of art itself. After all, it was only at the moment of the late 1970s that the traditional division of labor, or rather we should say the traditional separation of powers, ceased to operate. This classical separation had originally divided and differentiated the functions of museums, galleries, and journals as much as it had positioned curators, dealers/collectors, and critics as separate but interactive institutional, economic, and discursive figures and formations within the public sphere of art. When it became evident that the mechanisms that govern the infinitely more powerful culture industry could be successfully transferred to the cultural

institutions of the bourgeois public sphere, this traditional separation of powers and the differentiation of professional competences was eroded and eventually dismissed altogether.

This meant in fact that from now on even the semblance of credibility with which criticism had been previously invested, was simply disqualified as so much old-fashioned and obsolete meddling in a stratified racket of institutional and economical forces organizing the sphere of contemporary culture according to the parameters of the culture industry itself.

The dismantling of the critical functions operated as though it had taken as its model the field of cinema criticism and its relation to the movie and television industries. Here, the majority of critics had long since become paid puppets of the industrial apparatus, and even if an occasional lone voice might oppose the homogeneity of the paid claque and dissent from the uniform massiveness of remote control affirmation, it would do so at the risk of being publicly pathologized or just plain ignored.

In a similar manner, the eighties and nineties have taught us to recognize that the pact defining contemporary culture can now be made easily between artistic producers, museum institutions, galleries, and collectors without the interference of anybody's claim to an independent critical authority: the rise and fall of the painters of the eighties remains the central example here. Aesthetic authority is now given (and taken away) according to the rapidity with which the investment in a particular artistic product pays off on the scoreboard of institutional visibility or the spreadsheet of economic speculation. But even here, things are not running quite as smoothly as the Saatchi Brothers might have hoped: many an artist who saw himself rise from nullity to blue chip took only a season or two more to find his work among the junk bonds. And many an institution that considered itself at the forefront of fashion and industry in artistic production looks now as dilapidated as an outdated department store.

Inevitably these remarks will be read as a personal lament on the disqualification and displacement of the critic. But they could also be read as an attempt to understand what actually happens to artistic production, to the discourses surrounding it, and to the museum as an institution of the public sphere when the

separateness of competences and the differentiation of the various forms of knowledge are abandoned under the pressure of a structural homogenization whose motivations to increasingly enforce consensus are far from transparent at this point. If nothing worse, this consensus entails the transfer of models of corporate consolidation onto the restructuring of cultural production itself, the definitive foreclosure of those spaces and practices of dissidence and deviance that had made possible the social registers and individual identities of cultural production. By contrast, these tend now to be organized around strict principles of exchange and surplus value production as the single criterion for the credibility of culture.

But it is not just the Saatchis and the Geffens of this world that have discovered that the greatest triumph is to *own* the supreme trophies of a culture of radical subjectivity that their industrial and corporate production is eliminating incessantly in everyday life, even in its slightest residual traces and emerging possibilities. High cultural objects, in their hands, have become the emblems of the total triumph of spectacle: its controlling force can best be demonstrated by the fact that the tycoons of the culture industry can now apply the principle of total expenditure and ownership even, or rather especially, to those objects that had been initially conceived to contest spectacle's universal validity.

But this magnetism of contemporary culture has its superstructural counterpart as well. Ultimately, the dismantling of disciplinary specialization has affected no subject as much as that of contemporary art in academia: here the insistence upon a degree of specialized and differentiated knowledge (still as integral to the practice of philosophy as to that of neuroscience) has no longer any rights in the field of contemporary art. It has become a terrain where every voice claims instant competence and authority in order to suture itself in a semiotic field whose economic glamour and potent sign exchange value suddenly qualify as a symbolic system within which quick specular surrogates for identity at the end of the twentieth century can still be constructed.

Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry

Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture

Concrete material reality and social meaning should always be the primary criteria of specification. Before all else, we see in ideological objects various connections between meaning and its material body. This connection may be more or less deep and organic. For instance, the meaning of art is completely inseparable from all the details of its material body. The work of art is meaningful in its entirety. The very constructing of the body-sign has a primary importance in this instance. Technically auxiliary and therefore replaceable elements are held to a minimum. The individual reality of the object, with all the uniqueness of its features, acquires artistic meaning here.

—*M. M. Bakhtin,* The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship[1]

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I

Sculpture traditionally differed from painting through its seemingly unquestionable three-dimensionality, its physical and physiological corporeality, defined as a literal "embodiment" of subjective plastic concerns. It was determined as much by the historically specific aesthetic conditions of the sculptural discourse as by the spectators' (often the patron's) ability to recognize their own corporeal being in the world in the sculptural embodiment. Or, as Rosalind Krauss recently stated:

> The logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning and the use of that place.[2]

As we will be dealing in the following essay with contemporary sculptural works in general, and in particular with two works by Michael Asher conceived in 1979 for two museums in Chicago, it seems appropriate to consider these works—while perhaps not immediately recognizable as sculpture—in Krauss's terms, as they do in fact "sit in a particular place and speak in a symbolical tongue about the meaning and the use of that place." The complexity of these works necessitates, however, closer attention to the material and procedural transformations that have taken place in the evolution of contemporary sculpture, and we will have to recapitulate some of the crucial paradigmatic changes that define sculpture in the history of Modernism.

Looking at the specific features of Modernist sculpture (that is, its materials and its procedures of production) as well as at its changing reception, one could almost come to the conclusion that sculpture, because of its more concrete "nature" than that of any other art practice, seems to lend itself to a particularly obdurate aesthetic: how can one—under the conditions of a highly industrialized society—continue atavistic modes of production (modeling, carving, casting, cutting, welding) and apply them convincingly to semi-precious or so-called

"natural" materials (bronze, marble, wood)? Only twenty years ago (if not more recently) the works of Alberto Giacometti and Henry Moore could seem the epitome of the sculptural, when in fact their archaic iconography and plastic structures revealed their authors' (and the public's) conviction that sculpture had not lost any of its historic credibility in the first decade of this century. Even a practicing sculptor and sculpture historian—commenting on Rodin—seems to acknowledge the specific dilemma of his own discipline, without, however, coming to an adequate understanding of its historical determination:

> Thus, Rodin's mature sculpture follows the effective emergence of modern painting, moreover, in comparison with the directness, simplicity, and objectivity of the new painting; the statement in sculpture seems tentative, half-formed and weighed down by a burden of Romantic and dramatic subject matter of moral and public "function", which the Impressionists had been able to jettison from the first. The reasons for the late arrival and confused intentions of the new sculpture lie partly in the physical character of sculpture and painting, partly in their relative development in Europe since the Renaissance, partly in the specific conditions of patronage and public taste which obtained in nineteenth century France. . . . Sculpture became an art in which the taste and ambition of the public patron became the determining factor, and virtuosity and craftsmanship the criteria of artistic achievement.[3]

A more rigorous reading of the history of modernist sculpture would have to acknowledge that most of its seemingly stable paradigms, which had been valid to some extent until the late nineteenth century (i.e., the representation of individual, anthropomorphic whole or fragmented bodies in space, modeled of inert but lasting, if not eternal, matter and imbued with illusionary moments of spurious life), had been—in analogy to the abolition of representation in painting—definitely abolished by 1913. Vladimir Tatlin's corner-counter reliefs and subsequent *Monument to the Third International* and Marcel Duchamp's

readymades emerged logically from Synthetic Cubism, and they have constituted since then the extremes of sculptural reflection in Modernism: they recognize the dialectics of sculpture from now on to be operative either as a model for the artistic production of reality (e.g., sculpture's transition toward architecture and design) or as an epistemic model that investigates the status and conditions of aesthetic object production (the readymade, the allegory, the fetish). Or, more precisely: architecture on the one hand and the epistemological model on the other are the two poles toward which relevant sculpture since 1913 has developed, each implying the eventual dissolution of "sculpture" as a separate discourse and category.

The precarious condition of sculpture, if not the decline of the discipline, had been sensed as early as 1903 by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke in his study of Rodin, conveyed, not surprisingly, in a tone of lament since the withering of the category was indicative for him of the vanishing privileges and esoteric experiences the autonomous art object seemed to have guaranteed:

> Sculpture was a separate thing, as was the easel picture, but it did not require a wall like the picture. It did not even need a roof. It was an object that could exist for itself alone, and it was well to give it entirely the character of a complete thing about which one could walk, and which one could look at from all sides. And yet it had to distinguish itself somehow from other things, the ordinary things which everyone could touch.[4]

II

Sculptural materials, even before their iconic, formal, or procedural definitions, have to be considered as part of a symbolic system that is itself highly determined. For example, the "nobility" of bronze and marble in the late nineteenth-century work of Rodin was at least in part a result of his dependence on the class of bourgeois amateurs. Symbolic determinations of sculptural materials result not only from the author's professional idiosyncrasies—whether his or her individual psychosexual organization tends more toward modeling soft and palpable masses

(like clay) or whether he or she feels like cutting stone or carving wood—but also from the audience's expectations: whether the specific materials and the production procedures allow for a projective identification and seem in fact to embody the viewer's physical being in the world. In contradistinction to Rodin, the truly radical modernity of Medardo Rosso's sculptures resisted this incorporation into bronze in most of his works, and the sculptural production process itself was arrested and fragmented at the level of the wax and plaster model: materials that by their very nature quite explicitly reject any heroic or sublime connotations. Rosso often stated that he wanted the materials of his sculptures to pass unnoticed because they were meant to blend with the unity of the world that surrounded them. The actual fragmentation of the sculptural production procedure—whether deliberate or circumstantial—corresponds to Rosso's fragmentation of the sculptural representation itself. His reluctance to fulfill all the steps required by the traditional process of sculptural production, from modeling to casting, indicates an essential critical shift of attitude.

It reveals the increasing doubts about artisanally produced sculpture, namely that the completion of an organic cycle of production, conceived and executed by one individual, had become obsolete. The fragmentation of the production process coincided with the phenomenon of a heterogeneous materiality: prefabricated elements, alien to the craft of sculpture up to the nineteenth century, were introduced—or intruded—into the conventionally unified sculptural body. The only sculpture by Edgar Degas that was publicly exhibited during his lifetime and cast in bronze posthumously, his *Little Dancer of Fourteen* (1881), was the first to generate this modernist scandal. When it was exhibited at the Exposition des Indépendants in 1881, Joris Huysmans hailed it as follows:

> At once refined and barbaric with her industrious costume and her colored flesh which palpitates furrowed by the work of the muscles, this statue is the only truly modern attempt I know in sculpture.[5]

Both phenomena—the fragmentation of representation and the production process and the juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials—would soon

emerge as the dominant traits of modernist sculpture. If they appeared exceptional at first, as in the case of Degas, it would soon thereafter, in Cubism and Futurism, become the rule to combine individually crafted sculptural structures with mechanically produced objects and fragments. Ultimately, in Duchamp's readymades, the aesthetic construct would be displaced altogether by the mechanically produced object.

These phenomena receive a meticulous description and precise historical analysis in Georg Lukács's attempt to define the conditions of reification in 1928:

> Rationalization in the sense of being able to predict with ever greater precision all the results to be achieved is only to be acquired by the exact breakdown of every complex into its elements and by the study of the special laws governing production. Accordingly, it must declare war on the organic manufacture of whole products based on the traditional amalgam of empirical experiences of work. . . . The finished article ceases to be the object of the work process. . . . This destroys the organic necessity with which interrelated special operations are unified in the end product. Neither objectively nor in his relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process: on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. He finds it already preexistent and self-sufficient; it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not. As labour is progressively rationalized and mechanized, his lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative. The contemplative stance adopted toward a process mechanically conforming to fixed laws and enacted independently of man's consciousness and impervious to human intervention, i.e., a perfectly closed system, must likewise transform the basic categories of man's immediate attitude to the world: It re-

> duces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space.[6]

III

The intrusion of alien materials in Degas's sculpture established a very precarious balance between the conditions of subjective aesthetic creation and those of the reality of production pointed out by Lukács. Ever since, and most definitely since Duchamp's readymades, these historical conditions have been forced to their most logical extreme. Duchamp's work features most prominently the character of spatialized time in the object that Lukács talks about, since the arrest of temporal flux and passive contemplation are the modes in which the melancholic perceives the world and his increasing estrangement from it. Thus, paradoxically, a more traditional reading of Duchamp as the artist who continued the nineteenth-century tradition of the dandy, refusing participation in the collective production process, inverting his role as procreator into that of the flâneur who simply designates found objects as art, converges precisely with Lukács's observation. Inevitably, at this point, Walter Benjamin's observation on the interaction between allegory, commodity, and sculptural form has to be cited: "The devaluation of the world of objects by the allegory is exceeded within the world of objects itself by the commodity."[7]

Thus, from the first decade of the twentieth century onward, this precarious ambiguity between the apparent autonomy of sculptural constructs and the socially determined conditions of material production—between aesthetic object and symbolic space on the one hand and real object and actual space on the other—has determined the practice of sculpture. Aesthetic production, however, does not always evolve logically according to its own inherent laws, any more than it develops purely in response to the changing conditions of material production. Quite to the contrary, one of the essential features of aesthetic production—at least in twentieth-century art history—seems to have been a reiterated opposition to precisely an all too easy acceptance of those determinations. But

since the contradictions originating in the organization of the means of production cannot be resolved by aesthetic means alone, every generation producing within an obsolete paradigm generates increasingly mythical structures.

The history of post–World War II sculpture is particularly rich with these mythical forms, and only one should be briefly discussed as an example and as a link to the present: the type of postwar construction sculpture in which Constructivism's and Dada's attitudes toward the mass-produced object seem to coalesce, as, for example, in the works of David Smith and Anthony Caro.[8] If anything, the welding of metal and junk sculpture in their work seems to resolve in a most comforting manner the blatant contradiction between individual aesthetic and collective social production. This contradiction is, however, mythified by the work's apparent synthesis of the gesture of construction and the melancholic gesture of denial. In the same way, these artists, as public figures and biographical myths, combine the image of the proletarian producer, taming the elements and extracting wealth from the furnace, with that of the melancholic stroller in the junkyards of capitalist technology—an image that has persisted into the present in figures like Carl Andre and Richard Serra. The necessarily fetishistic character of this work had already been adequately diagnosed in the 1920s by the Russian productivist artist and theoretician Boris Arvatov, who wrote in his essay "Art and Production":

> While the totality of capitalist technology is based on the highest and latest achievements and represents a technique of mass production (industry, radio, transport, newspaper, scientific laboratory), bourgeois art in principle has remained on the level of individual crafts and therefore has been isolated increasingly from the collective social practice of mankind, has entered the realm of pure aesthetics. The lonely master—that is the only type in capitalist society, the type of specialist of "pure art" who can work outside of an immediately utilitarian practice, because it is based on machine technology. From here originates the total illusion of art's purposelessness and autonomy, from here art's bourgeois fetishistic nature.[9]

Scrap metal assemblage sculpture and the technique of welding concretize the historic dilemma between obsolete means of artistic production and their fetishization, on the one hand, and the actually existing means of the social production of representation on the other. Their failure to solve this dilemma, inasmuch as it becomes evident in the work itself, is then the works' historic and aesthetic authenticity. Julio González, who had been trained as a stonecutter, learned welding in the French Renault car factories during World War I and integrated the experience he acquired from alienated labor into his artistic production. Or, from a different point of view, one could argue that he adapted his aesthetic procedures to his experience of collective production. This "modernization" of the sculptural discourse was instantly successful because it seemed to respond to a desire within artist and public alike to achieve at least a symbolic reconciliation of sculpture's increasingly apparent contradictions. Picasso adopted this technique in the early 1920s and a new sculptural category and production technique was born. When David Smith "discovered" González's and Picasso's work through the mediation of the art magazine *Cahiers d'art* and imported the technique to North America, a further crucial step in the mythification of a sculptural procedure had taken place, one that had originated in Cubism's conceptualization and representation of spatial relations. To enhance the mythification, Smith, more than González, propounded the image of the proletarian producer by linking it to the mythical Hephaistos/Vulcan figure.[10]

The next phase of mythification occurred when this modernized sculptural production procedure was "rediscovered" and "reimported" to Europe by Anthony Caro, after his encounter with David Smith in 1960, during his first visit to North America. Caro's overnight shift from figurative bronze casting to nonrepresentational welded assemblage sculptures made of scrap metal, and his subsequent step of investigating the decorative potential of gaudily painted arrangements of metalwork samples, accomplished historically the aesthetic falsification and "cultural" inversion of every single aspect that Constructivist sculpture had originally intended and achieved within its limited resources and political possibilities.

IV

It took artists of the Minimal and post-Minimal generation like Andre and Serra in the mid to late 1960s to literally "decompose" these mythified construction techniques and production procedures. The aesthetic shock and subsequent relief that their work might have caused originally resulted precisely from the deconstruction of that type of sculpture, their persistent use of singularized, particular elements, their clarification of the constituent forces within the sculptural construct, and the transparency of the production procedures evident in their work. It is symptomatic in this context that Serra referred to the technique of welding as "stitching" during the 1960s and that he nevertheless readopted that very same technique in his later work in the 1970s, when he himself returned to the mythification of the constructivist legacy in order to pursue a problematic project of seemingly public monumental sculpture.

Radical sculpture, ever since the first decade of this century, has not only increased the fragmentation of sculptural representation and, as we have argued, the fragmentation of the production process itself as well, but it has also intensified the reflection on the constituent factors determining this process. Internally, the material elements assembling the sculptural phenomenon have become increasingly isolated, singularized, and specific; and the procedures of its fabrication, as well as the physical laws and forces (weight, mass, gravity, specific material properties) generating its appearance in space, have become more and more the center of sculptural investigation. Externally, as a result of the discovery of phenomenological thought, an analysis of the relations that connect the sculptural object with the perceptual acts of the subject was increasingly incorporated into the very conception of sculpture. A systematic reflection of the interdependence of the construct and its surrounding spatial/architectural container became again an integral part of sculpture's project in the 1960s.

Despite numerous and reiterated affirmations by American critics and historians that Minimal and post-Minimal works are not to be seen in the historical context of Modernist sculpture, the contrary holds true: too frequent are the references by the artists themselves, both implicit and explicitly expressed in works and

Carl Andre, *Cedar Piece,* 1960–1964. Cedar, 72 × 36¼ × 36¼ in. Collection: Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel.

statements, that acknowledge the rediscovery of the sculptural principles and theoretical positions that had been articulated in Duchamp's work as well as in that of the Constructivists (for example, Andre's references to Rodchenko, Donald Judd speaking on Duchamp and Malevich, Dan Flavin paying tribute to Tatlin, and Robert Morris's scholarly interest in Duchamp and the adaptation of Duchampian principles in his early work). This was precisely the part of the modernist tradition that had been ignored and rejected by the neoformalist aesthetics of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried (the key champions and promoters of Smith and Caro). To reconsider these positions—in particular, to transform the dialogue with the positivist legacy of formalism into a laconic pragmatism—provided another essential element of the foundation for the new sculptural work of the mid-1960s. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's recently (1965) translated *Phenomenology of Perception* added to the paradoxical synthesis of philosophical legacies, ranging now from Modernism's empiro-critical skepticism investigating the epistemology of painterly and sculptural signs, to the artists' discovery of logical positivism and semiology. Frank Stella, in many ways the first artist to integrate all of these elements, articulated this condensation in his now famous, lapidary statement, "What you see is what you see."

V

The formalist concept of "self-referentiality" had been a theoretical prescription by which art until around 1965 had to abide. What amounted to a pictorial or sculptural analogy to the semiological understanding of the sign, and the self-reflexivity resulting from that analogy in artistic production, had been achieved by both Duchamp and Malevich in 1913, at least in principle if not in an explicit theoretical project. One of the first Minimal works to considerably expand the notion of self-referentiality was Morris's *Mirrored Cubes* (1964).[11] It was against this background of a Minimal and post-Minimal aesthetic that Michael Asher's work was developed in the 1960s. When Asher went to New York for a year in 1963–1964, he became very interested in Flavin's and Judd's work, and, upon his return to California in 1966, he constructed several tapered wedge pieces that follow a similar logic of suspending the sculptural object between self-referentiality and contextual

Alexander Rodchenko, *Spatial Construction No. 12,* 1920. Plywood and wire, 83.5 × 43.3 cm. Costakis Collection, Athens.

contingency. These wedges were installed flush against the wall and painted over with a color identical to the wall that supported them. As in Morris's and Larry Bell's mirrored cubes, the most prominent characteristic of Asher's early work would be its analytical approach to the triadic condition of the sculptural phenomenon: to function as an autonomous aesthetic/spatial sign; to be constituted within a larger architectural context, which may or may not purport its own and different order of signs; and to be activated only through the spectator's individual act of perception. The sculptural sign itself, at least in Morris's early work and in Asher's wedge pieces, negates any inherent sculptural value and merely demarcates the difference between subjective perception and objective spatial conditions.

Dan Graham, later to become a close friend of Asher's, underwent a similar development in his work, leading gradually out of formalist and Minimal aesthetics. He described his conception of a sculptural structure as follows:

> There is a "shell" placed between the external "empty" material of place and the interior, empty material of language: systems of information exist halfway between material and concept without being either one.[12]

In this critique, the formalist notion of self-referentiality was replaced by an increasingly complex analytical system (semiological, sociological, systems-analysis) that would make the work operative rather than self-reflexive. The idea of a "situational aesthetics" (a term coined by the English artist Victor Burgin) implied that a work would function analytically within all the parameters of its historical determination, not only in its linguistic or formal framework. Three concepts would become crucial for the definition of "situational aesthetics": first, the notion of material- and site-specificity; second, the notion of place; third, that of presence. A similar transition had already occurred in the shift from Russian formalist methodology toward a new materialist semiology and productivist theory.[13]

When Judd defined his understanding of material specificity by almost literally transferring a key term of Russian formalist criticism to sculpture, his

Donald Judd, *Untitled,* 1968. Galvanized iron, 10 × 27 × 24 in. Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Schwartz. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Geoffrey Clements.

definition still resounded with the impact of Modernism's positivist pragmatism. He wrote, for example, in his 1965 essay "Specific Objects": "Materials vary greatly and are simply materials—formica, aluminum, cold-rolled steel, plexiglas, red and common brass and so forth. They are specific. Also they are usually aggressive."[14] Shortly afterward, Michael Asher and a whole generation of artists set out to prove that materials are not simply materials but are procedurally and contextually determined. For example, Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn argued already in their early critique of Judd:

> Aren't you saying you want the association to be restricted or localized to the object or its immediate (i.e. architectural) environment? Along with an autonomous form of art, you wanted a more autonomous art object, what you would call more objective. Traditionally, art objects are associated with other art and art history by way of their materials and by being a conventional type of art object. Such associations would, I suppose, in your words, be specific. But this was the last thing you wanted. The autonomy you developed for your objects had to function in respect to your presupposition of an art (historical) context and hence you still needed a means of associating the object with that context. Since the object itself denied any associations, the physical situation became a more important vehicle. That is to say, the object had to be circumstantially associated with its art context.[15]

The second concept, that of place (as opposed to object or anthropomorphic representation), was developed mainly by Andre and Flavin.[16] Pointing to the *spatial* specificity of the sculptural work (as opposed to the *material* specificity that Judd talked about), Andre's definition also originally implied (as did Flavin's practice) a subversive assault on the commodity status of works of art (given that they were movable objects, contextless, offering themselves to every kind of transaction). Sculpture as place was supposed to integrate into its actual formation the spatial conditions into which it inscribed itself as constituent elements. Graham observed with lucidity:

Carl Andre, *144 Copper Square,* 1969. Copper, 3/8 × 144 × 144 in. Collection: The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Dan Flavin, view of the installations in the Green Gallery, New York, 1964. Cool white fluorescent light; various dimensions. Photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.

> I liked that as a side effect of Flavin's fluorescents the gallery walls became a canvas. The lights dramatized the people (like spotlights) in a gallery, throwing the content of the exhibition out to the people in the process of perceiving; the gallery interior cube itself became the real framework.[17]

Independently reflecting on similar issues, the French artist Daniel Buren wrote a perspicacious critique of Duchamp's readymade concept in 1970. If read along with Graham's description of Flavin's work, the essay reveals the hitherto unreflected and problematic points of the minimalist concept of place, in particular its unconscious indebtedness to Duchamp. Furthermore, it identified exactly those issues on which Asher would focus, and the essay's almost literal correspondence to Graham's statement points to the objective nature of these artistic concerns of the post-Minimal generation:

> The Museum/Gallery for lack of being taken into consideration is the framework, the habit . . . the inescapable "support" on which art history is "painted." Wishing to eliminate the tableau/support, on the pretext that what is painted can only be illusion, Duchamp introduces into a new framework/tableau a real object, which at the same time becomes artificial, motiveless, i.e., artistic.[18]

Temporal specificity is defined as the third condition for a situational aesthetics—presence—which is closely interrelated with its spatial and material counterparts. Again, the term refers not only to the fact that an installation is determined by the specific temporal circumstances into which it is introduced, but equally, if not more, to the fact that it obtains within these circumstances a temporally specific, limited function, and that the work might become disposable after its appearance in time. Again, it was Graham who pointed this out when writing about an exhibition of Flavin's work in Chicago in 1967:

> The components of a particular exhibition, upon its termination, are replaced in another situation—perhaps put to a non-art use as a part of a different whole in a different future.[19]

VI

Asher later adopted the term "situational aesthetics," integrating the concepts of both spatial and temporal specificity. It had become fairly clear by 1968 that the Minimalists had abandoned the original implications of these aesthetic strategies by adapting their work increasingly to the needs of the art market. It had also become evident that these strategies would have to be radically modified, if they were to maintain their critical function of investigating the social and institutional framework that determines the production and the reception of art. Thus, on the occasion of his first exhibition, at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1969, Asher applied the Minimalist principles of self-referentiality and specificity with a new literalness and immediacy to the architectural container of the exhibition space itself. Thereby he not only revealed Minimalism's latent formalist heritage, but also defined a new understanding of sculptural materiality:

> The presentation at San Francisco was clearly dictated by every element which was available and it suggested a way of working for the future: using just elements which already existed without a great modification to the space.[20]

If Asher's work overcomes the Modernist legacy (i.e., the neopositivist formalism originating in the Constructivist legacy and embraced by the Minimalists), then the work of Broodthaers and Buren critically transcends the limitations of Duchamp's concept of the readymade, which had kept almost all object-oriented art in its spell.[21] Both positions—the constructive and the allegorical—seem to coalesce and henceforth determine the historically relevant work in contemporary art production. It is therefore crucial to comprehend first of all that the two critiques are fused in Michael Asher's installations at the Art

Michael Asher, *Galleria Toselli, Milan,* 1972. Sand-blasted gallery walls. Courtesy of the artist.

Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and to read them at the same time from the historical perspective of sculpture rather than merely within the context of "conceptual art" or, worse yet, to align them, as has been suggested, with a Dada-environment tradition.

Asher's sculptural installations seem to be constituted solely by conceptual gestures and directives, deploying "found" objects and materials or, more correctly, the "given" conditions of a particular museum/exhibition context. The specificity of sculpture's materials or its production processes is now totally negated. The consequence of Asher's contextual orientation surpasses even the most radical conceptual definitions of sculptural processes outlined in Lawrence Weiner's *Statements* from 1968, where one can still detect remnants of traditional sculptural concerns, as in, "A field cratered by structured, simultaneous TNT explosions."[22] Rigorously denying spatial and temporal transcendence, Asher's works are constituted first of all within their own spatial, institutional context, the museum; and they become the performative articulation of their actually given historical time, the allocated exhibition period itself.[23]

Asher's work at the Art Institute of Chicago bracketed three different situations of display with three different experiences of perceptual discontinuity. The first phase of his contribution to the 73rd American Exhibition consisted of the removal of a bronze cast (after Jean-Antoine Houdon's marble representation of George Washington from 1788), which had been installed at the main entrance of the Allerton Building—a late nineteenth century neo-Renaissance building—on Michigan Avenue in 1925. The resulting work ruptured the message of aesthetic authority and national heritage that the sculpture had conveyed as an integral part of the museum's facade.

The second step of the installation was to place the bronze within its original art historical context in a period room (Gallery 219) featuring European paintings, furniture, and the decorative arts of the eighteenth century. The cast was placed in the center of the gallery on a wooden base, identical in height and color to the other wooden bases in the gallery, while its "original" marble pedestal was put into storage. In this second display situation, a reconstruction of an imaginary eighteenth-century interior, the contextualized sculpture caused a

different rupture: even though its bright green-blue patina almost matched the turquoise of the painted walls and some of the silk covers of the eighteenth-century furniture, the patina made it all the more obvious that the sculpture had been put to a different use in the past and had therefore acquired material features that conflicted with its definition as an object of high art in a well-guarded museum interior. Its function as a monument made itself felt in a way that Proust had once described: "all the gazes that objects have ever received seem to remain with them as veils."

The third element of the work consisted of a plexiglas box inside the gallery containing leaflets that identified this installation as Asher's contribution to the 73rd American Exhibition, and they directed the viewer to this show of contemporary work in the Morton Wing of the museum. Downstairs, at the entrance to the exhibition, another box contained leaflets (see appendix A) that gave a description of the work but directed the viewer upstairs to the eighteenth-century period room in Gallery 219.

The visitor who had been circulating in the survey of contemporary work displayed in the 73rd American Exhibition, experienced the third rupture in Asher's piece when confronting the sculpture contextualized in the setting of Gallery 219 in tandem with the installation method in the Morton Wing. This passage through history juxtaposed a more or less stylistically homogeneous group of conceptual and painterly work with the equally homogeneous group of artistic objects from the eighteenth century. The confrontation historicized the actuality and dynamic immediacy that contemporary works generate in the viewer's perception and emphasized, by contrast, the historicity of their present aesthetic experience.

A second work by Asher was coincidentally installed at the same time at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. In their modus operandi, the two works were clearly similar: both dismantled a given architectural display system embodied within the elements of a facade. If the Art Institute had appropriated an eighteenth-century work of sculpture (or more precisely a twentieth-century bronze replica) for its facade, then the architects of the new Museum of Contemporary Art had appropriated what they believed to be the stylistic idiom of Minimal sculpture as a reference for their design of a modular system of

Michael Asher, *73rd American Exhibition,* 1979. Art Institute of Chicago, Michigan Avenue entrance, showing the 1917 bronze replica of Jean-Antoine Houdon's *George Washington* (1788) in its original location. Photo: Rusty Culp.

Michael Asher, *73rd American Exhibition,* 1979. Art Institute of Chicago, Gallery 219, showing the 1917 bronze replica of Jean-Antoine Houdon's *George Washington* after its relocation to the eighteenth-century period room. Installation view. Photo: Rusty Culp.

Michael Asher, *Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago,* 1979. Facade before installation. Photo: Tom van Eynde.

Michael Asher, *Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago,* 1979. Facade after removal of panels during exhibition. Photo: Tom van Eynde.

architectural decoration. This appropriation of the serial modular elements of Minimal sculpture sought to convey a technocratic notion of progress (whether this notion was embedded already in the idiom of Minimal sculpture is disputable).

As his work for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Asher stipulated (see appendix B) that during the exhibition the two horizontal rows of aluminum panels that were in line with the Bergman Gallery windows should be removed from the facade and should be placed on the interior wall of the gallery. The ten panels from the east side of the building and eight panels from the west side were to be arranged on the inside in the same formation and sequence, placed sequentially as a planar relief.[24] The entire work, both its exterior elements (the withdrawn parts) and its interior elements (the displayed parts), could be viewed from the street. Once the panels were placed on the walls within the interior they became subject to the same perceptual conditions that determine the reading of material constructs as discursive (i.e., sculptural) objects. Again, the juxtaposition of the exterior elements (the remaining cladding) and their semifunctional architectural usage and the interior elements (their defunctionalized sculptural display) resulted in a double negation of both architectural and sculptural discourses. As in the work at the Art Institute, there was a third element of deconstruction: the Museum of Contemporary Art had agreed—five months prior to actual installation—to buy the work for its permanent collection. Therefore, a paradoxical situation occurred: once the exhibition was finished and the cladding was reinstalled in its proper place as architectural decoration, the work seemed to cease to exist while, in fact, Asher's "sculpture" was simply placed in a different institutional register, generally identified as "storage." Yet, since it was placed on the museum's facade, it remained accessible to public view at all times, as distinct from conventionally stored work which remains inaccessible. Moreover, being bound into the specific situation of the given institutional architecture, the work—according to the artist's instructions specified in the acquisition contract with the museum—would cease to exist as part of the collection as soon as the institution's architecture was altered. (Plans for an expansion were then already being discussed and have since been executed; the work, therefore, has to be considered no longer extant.)

Michael Asher, *Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago,* 1979. Installation interior view, showing aluminum panels from the museum's facade installed in the Bergman Gallery. Photo: Tom van Eynde.

VII

Conditions of collective reification change gradually (or, under the particular circumstances of crisis, rapidly and drastically). Their aesthetic representations appear accordingly: no single object—whether individually crafted or mass-produced—can at this time reflect appropriately upon the degree of abstraction within which collective reification is operating and institutionalized. The production of art itself has become an activity that shares the conditions of the culture industry, on the one hand embellishing corporate public image and on the other depending on an elaborate corporate support system amounting to a cultural civil service. Art production thus helps to channel any attempt at critical negation into a hermetically sealed ideology of culture. During those historical periods in which the governing powers want to convey a sense of conclusion (more precisely, that history as process and change has been concluded), the experience of subtle oppression and stagnation is extrapolated in monumental public structures. Amnesia, the loss of memory at the origin of the destruction of historical dialectics, tends to incorporate itself in false public commemorative representations. Their stability and weight seem to balance the insecurity that individuals and society at large experience once they have been totally deprived of active participation in the decision-making process of history. At this point sculptors seem to be tempted to offer their services for monumental public commissions that embody those latent tendencies; they fill the gaps of historic identity with gigantic monuments. The recent increase in public commissions for monumental sculpture confirms this hypothesis, and the critics rhapsodize already in a new ideology of postmodernist populism:

> The root of the difficulty would seem to lie back at the turn of the century with the disappearance of the monument. Avant-garde art in general, with its oppressive neutrality of content, has a long history of being perceived by the public at large as irrelevant. Its abstractness, however, is not the problem as much as its failure to conduct a public dialogue. Belief or conviction on the part of the artist, while perhaps the most important single ingredient of a great work of art, is not, as far as the

> public is concerned, a substitute for symbolic content. . . . The artists who succeed there . . . will be those who are willing to come to terms with the notion of public commitment, who realize that such a stance, far from compromising their work, can infuse it with non-esthetic content which has absented itself from modernist art.[25]

Michael Asher's works operate with increasingly analytical precision on the threshold between symbolic space and actual space, continuously increasing the ambiguity between functional object and aesthetic object, as though to prove from within the analysis of sculpture itself that it has lost its material and historical legitimacy. In his two installations in Chicago, Asher did not adapt to these historic tendencies but incorporated them manifestly into his work to make them transparent. The specificity of his installations identified all the elements that enter the conception, production, and reception of a sculptural construct, resulting in a model case of historical analysis. This analytical model dismantles the new historicism of postmodernity, where regressions into a mythical language of the transhistorical validity of the monument merely cover up the problematic conditions of sculptural production and perceptual experience in the present.

Appendix A

Handout prepared by Michael Asher for Art Institute installation

Michael Asher
73rd American Exhibition
The Art Institute of Chicago
June 9 to August 5, 1979

The sculpture of *George Washington,* cast in 1917, is a replica of the marble sculpture of 1788 by Jean Antoine Houdon. In 1925 it was installed in front of the Michigan Avenue entrance of the Art Institute.

As my work for the 73rd American Exhibition (June 9–August 5, 1979), I have moved the sculpture of *George Washington* into the galleries. The sculpture is on the second floor in Gallery 219. For directions please ask one of the guards.

In this work I am interested in the way the sculpture functions when it is viewed in its eighteenth-century context instead of in its prior relationship to the façade of the building, where it has been for fifty-four years. Once inside Gallery 219, the sculpture can be seen in connection with the ideas of other European works of the same period. By locating the sculpture within its own time frame in Gallery 219, I am placing it within the framework of a contemporary exhibition, through my participation in that exhibition.

Appendix B

Handout prepared by Michael Asher for Museum of Contemporary Art installation

Michael Asher
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
June 8 through August 12, 1979
The newly remodeled building of the Museum of Contemporary Art, designed by the architectural firm of Booth, Nagel and Hartray, was completed in March 1979. The façade of the museum is planned on a five-and-one-half-foot-square grid pattern and is constructed with glass and aluminum. Two rows of aluminum panels, which are attached to and cover an underlying brick structure, line up horizontally with the two rows of glass windows of the Bergman Gallery. The glassed-in Bergman Gallery functions as a showcase so that art is visible from the street.

In this work, I have removed from the façade the two horizontal rows of aluminum panels that are in line with the Bergman Gallery and have placed them on the interior wall of the gallery. The ten panels from the east side of the building and the eight from the west are arranged inside so that they correspond exactly to their previous positions outside. After August 12, 1979, the aluminum panels will be reinstalled on the exterior of the building.

This work belongs to the museum's permanent collection. It is intended to be repeated each year for approximately two months, or the length of a temporary exhibition.

Notes

1

M. M. Bakhtin and P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 12.

2

Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (1979), p. 33.

3

William Tucker, *Early Modern Sculpture* (New York and London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), pp. 15, 19.

4

Rainer Maria Rilke, quoted in Tucker, *Early Modern Sculpture,* p. 9.

5

Joris K. Huysmans, “L’Exposition des Indépendants en 1881,” in *L’art moderne* (Paris, 1908), pp. 250–255, quoted in C. W. Millard, *The Sculpture of Edgar Degas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 124.

6

Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 88f.

7

Walter Benjamin, “Zentralpark,” in *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 1, part 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), p. 655.

8

On the subject of procedures and materials, it seems only a matter of time before the return to traditional artisanal techniques (including bronze casting and wood carving) is celebrated as a return to the unalterable traditions of sculpture. It is noteworthy that even five years ago such a shift would have been inconceivable, but that for somebody like Caro it is now the fully acceptable modus operandi. For more recent examples see the work of Barry Flanagan, the Italians Enzo Cucchi and Sandro Chia, or the Germans Georg Baselitz and Markus Lüpertz.

9

Boris Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion* (1926; Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1972), p. 11 (my translation).

10

On frequent occasions Smith pointed to the importance of factory labor in the development of his work, in particular his experience as a welder in a World War II tank factory. He referred to his welded sculptures as constructions on the same historical order as locomotives. To what degree this self-image of the welding-mask-wearing proletarian producer and twentieth-century Vulcan possessed mythical attractions for Smith is revealed by his widow, who argued that most of his claims of having endured extended work periods as a factory welder were, in fact, exaggerated. Thus we read in Cleve Gray, ed., *David Smith* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968):

> Smith often made a point of his poverty during the thirties and forties and his consequent need to work. In his statement for Elaine de Kooning's article "David Smith Makes a Sculpture" in *Art News* (no. 50, September 1951, p. 37) he wrote: "All of my life the workday has been any part of the twenty four hours on oil tankers, driving hacks and the shifts in factories." His first wife, Dorothy Dehner, has said that Smith exaggerated this aspect of his life greatly and that due to a small income of hers at this time Smith's obligation to work at odd jobs was almost non-existent.

But information on this subject seems contradictory, since we read in Rosalind Krauss's dissertation, published as *David Smith: Terminal Iron Works* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), the following (p. 60, n. 16):

> In the three years in Schenectady during which he worked eight hours a day in a factory as a welder on M7 tanks and locomotives, Smith identified himself increasingly with his fellow workers. Not only was he fiercely proud of his status within the factory unit and a "first class armor plate welder" (see Archive IV/280), but his sculptural output dropped off radically at this time, as he became absorbed in his work in the munitions plant. From 1942 to 1944 he made almost no metal sculpture, beginning instead to learn stonecutting and carving, and in the entire span of these years, he produced only fifteen pieces.

11

Morris's work refers explicitly to an unexecuted project by Duchamp, which he had defined in the *Green Box,* suggesting the placement of mirrored glass on the floor of a room. Duchamp's notes in the *Green Box* read as follows:

> Flat container in glass—holding all sorts of liquids. Colored pieces of wood, of iron, chemical reactions. Shake the container and look through it. Parts to look at crossed eyed, like a piece of silvered glass, in which are reflected the objects in a room.

See Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., 1960), n.p.

The project found an independently conceived parallel echo on the West Coast in the early mirrored cubes of Larry Bell, an artist who would be of temporary relevance for the development of Michael Asher's critique of Modernist self-referentiality.

12

Dan Graham, "Other Observations," in *For Publication* (Los Angeles: Otis Art Institute, 1976), n.p.

13

See, for example, Bakhtin and Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literacy Scholarship,* or, to give another example, the radical changes in the writings of Osip Brik, who also shifted from a purely formalist position to one of a committed productivist practice in essays such as "Into *Production*" as early as 1923.

It is symptomatic that by contrast, artists, critics, and historians in the present and recent past seem to respond in a defensive or conservative manner when confronted with such a radical paradigmatic shift in sculptural production.

For example, Rosalind Krauss, whose book *Passages* (New York: Viking, 1977) can be rightfully considered the most complex and advanced reading of Modernist and post-Modernist sculpture to date, literally excludes all of those sculptural activities that question the materials and production procedures of traditional sculpture and that conceive "sculptural" phenomena (i.e., perceptual and actual subject/object interactions) within a historically and socially defined set or system of time-space coordinates. Krauss does not once mention the work of Asher, Robert Barry, Dan Graham, or Lawrence Weiner—artists who have all substantially redefined the idea of the "sculptural" in their work.

Ten years earlier, Jack Burnham's *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), also considered the most advanced critical study of modernist sculpture at the time, *omitted equally the crucial innovations within the very discipline of sculpture to which it was dedicated.* Published at a time when crucial steps in the definition of Minimal sculpture had been taken, this book did not mention Andre once and only randomly dealt with the work of the other Minimalists.

It seems, then, that—in such situations of radical epistemic shifts—critics and historians displace their attention to derivative, secondary, or academicized forms of artistic production. Even if they are conspicuously obsolete, at least these forms seem to reaffirm the validity of aesthetic categories and the corresponding critical concepts.

By analogy, sculptors tend to make apodictic statements in such situations that shift the category of sculpture from the historical to the ontological level. See, for example, a recent

statement by Richard Serra (*October* 10 [1979], p. 73), reaffirming the universal and transhistorical validity of sculptural notions:

> I have always thought that the basic assumption of film could never be sculptural in any way and to beg the analogy between what is assumed to be sculptural in sculpture and what is assumed to be sculptural in film is not really to understand the potential of what sculpture is and always has been.

14

Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" (1965), in *Complete Writings* (New York and Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 181.

15

Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, "Donald Judd," *The Fox* 2 (1975), p. 130.

16

The notion of "place" in sculpture was originally defined by Barnett Newman in regard to his sculpture *Here I* (1951). It can be assumed that both Andre and Flavin, fervent admirers of Newman's work, derived their concept of place in sculpture from him. For Newman's discussion of his understanding of sculpture as place, see Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Abrams, 1978), p. 63.

17

Dan Graham, letter to the author, July 22, 1979.

18

Daniel Buren, "Standpoints," in *Five Texts* (New York: John Weber Gallery; London: Jack Wendler Gallery, 1973), p. 38.

19

Dan Graham, in *Pink and Yellow: Dan Flavin* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1967), n.p.

20

Michael Asher, unpublished notes. See also *Michael Asher: Writings 1971–1981 on Works 1966–1976,* ed. Benjamin Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1981). Asher divided the allocated exhibition space at the San Francisco Art Institute into halves by constructing a wall from the existing display panels that normally served as additional support surfaces in the gallery's exhibition spaces. One half of the room contained a door and was fairly dark, because of the

wall construction, while light flooded into the other half of the room through windows and a skylight. The bright half of the room was accessible only by a passage left open between Asher's constructed walls and the permanent walls of the gallery.

21

The very same year as Asher's San Francisco debut, Marcel Broodthaers, a hitherto almost totally unknown artist, embarked on, as it seemed at the time, a fairly eccentric adventure: he had printed a well-designed letterhead that announced in conservative typography the foundation of a new museum in Brussels: "Musée d'Art Moderne (Section XIXème siècle), Département des Aigles." He appointed himself director of this museum, and guests, among them Daniel Buren, were invited for an official opening. The opening speech was delivered by the director of a "real" museum in Broodthaers's former "studio," a room filled with empty wooden picture-crates that museums use for the transport of works of art, a number of postcard reproductions of mostly nineteenth century paintings tacked to the walls, and regular installation equipment, such as ladders and lamps.

Broodthaers, perhaps even before Buren, had quite clearly developed an awareness of Duchamp's dilemma; his seemingly eccentric activity turned out to be the beginning of a systematic analysis of the myth of the museum and its transforming capacities in the process of acculturation. As early as 1966 he had pointed to the various hidden frames that determine the perception of the art object: "Every object is a victim of its nature: even in a transparent painting the color still hides the canvas and the molding hides the frame."

As much as Asher's and Broodthaers's installations seem to be incomparable initially, they do reveal upon closer analysis their actual historic connection in the critical reflection on the Duchamp legacy, despite the major morphological and stylistic differences that had developed in this regard between European and American art since the 1940s.

22

Lawrence Weiner, *Statements* (New York: Louis Kellner Foundation/Seth Siegelaub, 1968), n.p.

23

Jack Burnham, while discussing Hans Haacke's works, which were equally concerned with the museum and its institutional practices, described the necessity of the methods of institutional critique developed by these artists:

> The questions had to be asked in the galleries and the gallery public had to be confronted with its self-portrait in that same environment. The walls of the

Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'art moderne, Département des aigles, Section XIXème siècle,* Brussels, 1968. Photo: Maria Gilissen. © Estate of Marcel Broodthaers/ SABAM, Belgium/ VAGA, NY, NY.

> museum or gallery are as much a part of his work as the items displayed on them. These works also need the "impregnation" of the gallery to set them in opposition to other contemporary art.

See Jack Burnham, in *Hans Haacke: Framing and Being Framed,* ed. Kasper König (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1977), p. 137.

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On the east side, ten panels extended twenty-two feet along the wall; for the part beginning on the west side, eight panels extended twenty-four feet, nine inches toward the center of the wall. This left thirty feet of unused wall space on which Sol LeWitt—whose work was exhibited simultaneously in a retrospective show at the Museum of Contemporary Art—executed a black wall drawing.

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Nancy Foote, "Monument, Sculpture, Earthwork," *Artforum* 18 (October 1979), p. 37.

Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique

The fact that people in Germany deceive themselves concerning Wagner does not surprise me. The reverse would surprise me. The Germans have modelled a Wagner for themselves, whom they can honour: never yet have they been psychologists; they are thankful that they misunderstand. But that people should also deceive themselves concerning Wagner in Paris? Where people are scarcely anything else than psychologists. . . . How intimately related must Wagner be to the entire decadence of Europe for her not to have felt that he was a decadent. He belongs to it: he is its protagonist, its greatest name. . . . All that the world most needs today, is combined in the most seductive manner in his art—the three great stimulants of exhausted people: brutality, artificiality and innocence (idiocy). . . . *Wagner est une névrose.*
—Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Case of Wagner"[1]

First published in *Artforum,* January 1980, pp. 35–43.

During these days of the Guggenheim Museum's Joseph Beuys exhibition, one wonders why that most beautiful building, normally beaming with clarity, warmth, and light, is dimly lit in a gray and moody twilight. What is this theatrical trick, creating a setting of "Northern Romantic" light, meant to obscure? What mental semi-trance are we supposed to enter before we are allowed to wander down the spiral of twenty-four stations (whose martyrium, whose mysterium)? In this manner we are perhaps prevented from seeing belated automatist drawings on the walls, pompously framed in chthonic iron, and weathered, withering relics and vestiges of the artist's past activities, which might be "souvenirs of a life of spectacle, poor dead things. Bereft of the confectioner, the life of his art has vanished."[2]

The presentation of the souvenirs, however, is most elaborate. Enshrined in specifically designed glass and wood cases that look like a crossover between vitrines in Victorian museums of ethnography and display cases in turn-of-the-century boarding schools, the objects, or rather their containers, signal to the viewer: "you are entering interior spaces, the realm of archetypal memories, a historic communion." Ahistoricity, that unconscious or deliberate obliviousness toward the specific conditions that determine the reality of an individual's being and work in historical time, is the functional basis on which public and private mythologies can be erected, presuming that a public exists that craves myths in proportion to its lack of comprehension of historic actuality. The ahistoric mythology of fascism, to give an example from political history, could only develop and gain credibility as a response to the chiliastic and debauched hopes of the starving and uneducated masses of the German Weimar Republic and post-monarchic Italy. Veneration for leaders grows out of the experiences of severe deficiency.

The private and public mythology of Beuys, to give an example from art history, could only be developed and maintained on the ahistoricity of aesthetic production and consumption in postwar Europe. The substantially retarded comprehension of European Dada and Russian and Soviet Constructivism, and their political as well as their epistemological implications, determined both European and American art up until the late 1950s and served for both producers

and recipients as a basis for mythifying subsequent aesthetic work. Once put into their proper historic context, these works would lose their mystery and seemingly metaphysical origin and could be judged more appropriately for their actual formal and material, i.e., historical, achievements within the situation and the specific point of development of the discourse into which they insert themselves. The public myth of Beuys's life and work, by now having achieved proportions that make any attempt to question it or to put it into historic perspective an almost impossible critical task, is a result of these conditions, just as it tries to perpetuate them by obscuring historical facticity. This very attitude of making the artist a cult figure, however, historicizes Beuys and aligns him with representatives of his own generation in Europe during the 1950s who were equally grand masters of fusing the avant-garde with the culture of spectacle (figures like Yves Klein and Georges Mathieu). No other artist (with the possible exception of Andy Warhol, who certainly generated a totally different kind of myth) managed—or probably ever intended—to puzzle and scandalize his primarily bourgeois art audience to the extent that he would become a figure of social worship. No other artist succeeded so systematically in aligning himself at a given time with artistic and political currents, absorbing them into his myth and work and thereby neutralizing and aestheticizing them. Everybody who was seriously involved in radical student politics during the 1960s in Germany, for example, and who worked on the development of an adequate political analysis and practice, laughed at or derided Beuys's public relations move of founding his International Student Party, which was supposed to return an air of radicality to the master who was becoming aesthetically dated. Nobody who understands any contemporary science, politics, or aesthetics, for that matter, could want to see in Beuys's proposal for an integration of art, sciences, and politics—as his program for the Free International University demands—anything more than simple-minded utopian drivel lacking elementary political and educational practicality. Beuys's existential and ideological followers and admirers, as opposed to his bourgeois collectors and speculators, are blindfolded like cultists by their leader's "charisma." As usual with charisma, Beuys's magnetism seems to result from a psychic transfer between his own hypertrophic unconscious processes at the edge of sanity and the

Joseph Beuys at press conference, *Documenta VII,* 1982. Kassel, West Germany. Photo: Hans Haacke.

zombie-like existence of his followers. Their supposed "normality," in which individuation has been totally extinguished, predisposes them to become "followers" of whomever seems to be alive. Ernst Bloch, the German philosopher, discussing Beuys's philosophical master Rudolf Steiner, identifies those processes that constitute the mythical figure and the cult, and his portrayal seems to describe Joseph Beuys in precise detail:

> It is not surprising that special dreamers are to be met here too. They are perforated enough to allow unstandardized states to enter into them. That which is deranged has so deranged the limits of the ordinary everyday that it can easily coat the unusual with the everyday and vice-versa. Into the ego thus split there enters not only a sense of sin of a strength long presumed dead. Here, as incorporated super-ego, a pride, a certainty copied from the saviour takes root, such as the sane, even with the extremist arrogance, could never bring off. No false Demetrius can hold out for long, but a false Jesus among lunatics certainly can. . . . At the peak of "Knowledge of Higher Worlds" the occult journalist Rudolf Steiner established himself, a mediocrity in his own right. A mediocre, indeed unbearable curiosity, yet effective, as if mistletoe were still being broken off here, as if something shoddily druidical were fermenting, soaking, murmuring and chatting on newspaper.[3]

In Beuys, the cult and the myth seem to have become inseparable from the work; as his confusion of art and life is a deliberate programmatic position, an "integration" to be achieved by everybody, it seems appropriate to take a critical look at some aspects of his private "myth of origin" before looking at the actual work.

Beuys's most spectacular biographic *fable convenue,* the plane crash in the Crimea that supposedly brought him into contact with Tartars, has never been questioned, even though it seems as contrived as it is dramatic. The photographic evidence, produced by Beuys to give credibility to his "myth of origin," turns

against itself: in Götz Adriani's monograph (until the Guggenheim catalogue, the most comprehensive documentation of his life and work, and established in cooperation with the artist) we see Beuys standing beside a JU 87 that is in fairly good shape and flat on the ground. The caption reads: "Joseph Beuys after a forced landing in the Crimea in 1943." The accompanying text reads as follows:

> During the capture of the plane over an enemy anti-aircraft site, Beuys was hit by Russian gunfire. He succeeded in bringing his plane behind German lines, only to have the altimeter fail during a sudden snowstorm; consequently the plane could no longer function properly. Tartars discovered Beuys "in total wilderness in the bottleneck area of the Crimea," in the wreckage of the JU 87, and they cared for Beuys, who was unconscious, most of the time, for about eight days, until a German search commando effected his transport to a military hospital.[4]

Caroline Tisdall's Guggenheim catalogue reproduces three totally different photographs showing a severely damaged and tipped-over plane that under no circumstances can be identical with the one shown in Adriani's book.[5] Beuys's own recollection (an updated version of the *fable convenue*) reads as follows:

> Had it not been for the Tartars I would not be alive today. . . . Yet it was they who discovered me in the snow after the crash, when the German search parties had given up. I was still unconscious then and only came round completely after twelve days or so, and by then I was back in a German field hospital. . . . The last thing I remember was that it was too late to jump, too late for the parachute to open. That must have been a couple of seconds before hitting the ground. . . . My friend was strapped in and he was atomized by the impact—there was almost nothing to be found of him afterwards. But I must have shot through the windscreen as it flew back at the same speed as the plane hit the ground and that saved me, though I had

> bad skull and jaw injuries. Then the tail flipped over and I was completely buried in the snow. That's how the Tartars found me days later. I remember voices saying "Voda" ("water"), then the felt of their tents and the dense pungent smell of cheese, fat and milk. They covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep the warmth in.[6]

Who would, or could, pose for photographs after a plane crash, when severely injured? And who took the photographs? The Tartars with their fat-and-felt camera?

Beuys's "myth of origin," like every other individual or collective myth, is an intricate mixture of facts and memory material rearranged according to the dynamics of the neurotic lie: that myth-creating impulse that cannot accept, for various reasons, the facticity of the individual's autobiographic history as such (a typical example would be the fantasy, more common in the beginning of this century, of being the illegitimate child of an alien nobleman, not the simple progeny of a factory worker). As in every such retro-projective fantasy—such narcissistic and slightly pathetic distortion (either dramatization or ennoblement) of the factually normal conditions (made either more traumatic or more heroic) of the individual's coming into the world—the story told by the myth's author reveals truths, but not truths their author would want to acknowledge. Beuys's story of the messianic bomber pilot turned plastic artist, rising out of the ashes and shambles of his plane crash in Siberia, reborn, nurtured, and healed by the Tartars with fat and felt, does not necessarily tell us about and convince us of the transcendental impact of his artistic work (which is the manifest intention of the *fable*). What the myth does tell us, however, is how an artist whose work developed in the middle and late 1950s, and whose intellectual and aesthetic formation must have occurred somehow in the preceding decade, tries to come to terms with the period of history marked by German fascism and the war resulting from it, destroying and annihilating cultural memory and continuity for almost two decades and causing a rupture in history that left mental blocks and blanks and severe psychic scars on everybody living in this period and the

generations following it. Beuys's individual myth is an attempt to come to terms with those blocks and scars. When he quotes the Tartars as saying, "'Du nix njemcky' [you are not German], they would say, 'du Tatar,' and try to persuade me to join their clan,"[7] it is fairly evident that the myth is designed to deny his citizenship and his participation in the German war. But, of course, the repressed returns with ever-increasing strength, and the very negation of Beuys's origin in a historic period of German fascism affirms every aspect of his work as being totally dependent on, and deriving from, that period. Here lies, one has also to admit, certainly one of the strongest features of the work, its historic *authenticity* (formally, materially, morphologically). Hardly ever have the characteristic and peculiar traits of the anal-retentive character, which forms the characterological basis of authoritarian fascism (inasmuch as these features, once specific to the German petit-bourgeois, have by now become dangerously universal), been more acutely and accurately concretized and incorporated into the art of the postwar period.

In the work and public myth of Joseph Beuys, the German spirit of the postwar period finds its new identity by pardoning and reconciling itself prematurely with its own reminiscences of a responsibility for one of the most cruel and devastating forms of collective political madness that history has known. As much as Richard Wagner's work anticipated and celebrated these collective regressions into Germanic mythology and Teutonic stupor in the realm of music, before they became the actual reality and the nightmare that set out to destroy Europe (what Karl Kraus had anticipated more accurately as the *Last Days of Mankind*), it would be possible to see in Beuys's work the absurd aftermath of that nightmare, a grotesque coda acted out by a perfidious trickster.

Speculators in Beuys's work did well: he was bound to become a national hero of the first order, having reinstalled and restored that sense of a—however deranged—national self and historic identity.

Beuys's obsession with fat, wax, felt, and a particularly obvious kind of brown paint that at times covers objects totally and at others is used as a liquid for painting and drawing on paper and other materials, and his compulsive interest in accumulating and combining quantities of rejected, dusty old objects of the

kind that one finds in rural cellars and stables, are imbued with metaphysical meaning by the artist and his eager exegetes: they could just as easily be read in psychoanalytic terms, and perhaps more convincingly so (which, again, would by no means disqualify the work). Obviously, Beuys himself consciously implements materials and forms that suggest a prominent sense of the infantile anal stage of instinct development:

> I placed it [the fat] on a chair to emphasize this, since here the chair represents a kind of human anatomy, the area of digestive and excretive warmth processes, sexual organs and interesting chemical change, relating psychologically to will power. In German, the joke is compounded as a pun since "*Stuhl*" (chair) is also the polite way of saying "shit" (stool), and that too is a used and mineralized material with chaotic character, reflected in the cross section of fat.[8]

But an outspoken affirmation of one's compulsive inclinations does not necessarily transform or dissolve them, neither in one's behavior nor in one's work and object production. Let us quote from a popularized comprehensive study of psychoanalytic theory, published in 1945, when Beuys, aged twenty-four, could easily have started to familiarize himself with recent psychoanalytical theories:

> If an adult person still has sexual excitability connected with the execretory functions (either with those of his object or autoerotically with his own) he clearly shows that his sexuality is on an infantile level. But in these uses too, the regression serves as a defense against genital wishes, not only in a general way as in any compulsion neurotic but also in a more specific way, the coprophilic fantasies regularly representing attempts to deny the danger of castration. . . . The stressed anality expresses the wish to have sexual pleasure without being reminded of the difference of the sexes, which would mobilize castration fear.[9]

Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair,* 1964. Wooden chair with fat, 90 × 30 × 30 cm. Collection: Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt. Courtesy Eva Beuys.

But Beuys, in his general contempt for the specific knowledge of contemporary sciences and in his ridiculous presumptuousness about the idea of a universal synthesis of the sciences and of art, as late as 1966 phrased his disdain for psychoanalysis in a polemic against the German psychoanalyst Alexander Mitscherlich by calling the discipline "bad shit" (*schlechter Mist*).[10] Apparently, he follows the archaic and infantile principle that as long as you do not acknowledge the existence of real things that seem to threaten your ideas, they will not concern or affect you.

Functional structures of meaning in art, as in other sign systems, are intricately bound into their historical context. Only inasmuch as they are dynamic and permanently changing their field and form of meaning do they remain functional, initiating cognitive processes. Otherwise, they simply become conventions of meaning or clichés. As such, they do, of course, follow different purposes, becoming the object of historically and socially latent interests contradictory to the author's original aim of trying to develop a meaningful sign. Obviously, it is possible to ignore or reject the basic scientific steps that have been taken in twentieth-century science, such as Freudian psychoanalysis or de Saussure's linguistic and semiotic concepts (to give only the two most prominent examples that Beuys does reject). It is also possible to ignore or reject the crucial epistemological changes that have occurred in one's own field of discourse, for example the consequences of Duchamp's work for art in the second half of the twentieth century. But again, such infantile behavior, closing one's eyes and disavowing phenomena apparently threatening one's existence in order to make them disappear, is of very limited success. When Beuys made his notorious (and obscure) 1964 statement that "the silence of Marcel Duchamp has been overrated,"[11] he publicly confessed not to have the slightest clue of the scope of Duchamp's theoretical positions and the lasting significance of his work. This becomes even more evident when Beuys comments on his own statement:

> This statement on Duchamp is highly ambivalent. It contains a criticism of Duchamp's anti-art concept and equally of the cult of his later behavior. . . . Apart from that Duchamp had expressed a very

> negative opinion of the Fluxus artists claiming that they had no new ideas since he had anticipated it all. . . . Most prominent, though, is the disapproval of Duchamp's anti-art concept.[12]

Just as the functions of artistic meaning are permanently altered, so its forms, objects, and materials change within that dynamic process. The designation of a given, industrially produced, readymade object and its integration into artistic context were viable and relevant primarily as epistemological reflections and decisions within the formal discourse of post-Cubist painting and sculpture. Within this context the "meaning" of these objects is established, and here they fulfill their "function": they change the state of a formal language according to given historical conditions. Only later, when the original steps become conventionalized, imitated, interpreted, received, misunderstood, do they enter that field of psychological projection. Only then do they acquire a certain type of transcendental meaning, until they are finally reimbued with myth.

Unlike his European peers from the late 1950s—Piero Manzoni, Arman, or even Yves Klein—Beuys does not change the *state of the object within the discourse itself.* Quite to the contrary, he dilutes and dissolves the conceptual precision of Duchamp's readymade by reintegrating the object into the most traditional context of literary and referential representation: *this* object stands for *that* idea, and *that* idea is represented in *this* object. Beuys has often affirmed this himself, obviously intrigued by Duchamp but never coming to historical terms with him—as, for example, when talking about his own work, *Bathtub* (1960):

> But it would be wrong to interpret the *Bathtub* as a kind of self-reflection. Nor does it have anything to do with the concept of the readymade: quite the opposite, *since here the stress is on the meaning of the object* [my italics]. It relates to the reality of being born in such an area and in such circumstances.[13]

Or, when he comments on *Fat Chair* (1964):

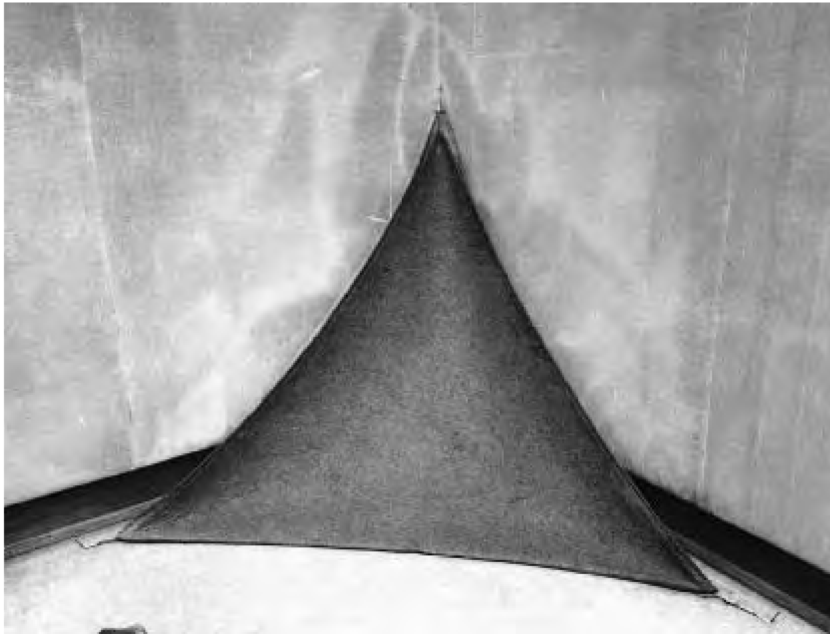
> The presence of the chair has nothing to do with Duchamp's Ready-mades, or his combination of a stool with a bicycle wheel, although they share an initial impact as humorous objects.[14]

The more an aesthetic decision, a formal or material procedure, is removed from its functional historical context—which, in the system of art, is first of all the aesthetic discourse itself—the more the work will attract other meanings that may be assigned to it. The very suggestiveness, the highly associative potential and quasi-magical attraction that Beuys's work seems to exert on many followers and his public, results paradoxically enough precisely from that state of obsolescence that his works maintain within the discourse of art itself. It seems that the more the aesthetic discourse is removed from the formal analysis of the aesthetic object and its correspondences to cognitive processes—or, for that matter, the more it is removed from historical specificity—the more urgent will the claim for a metaphysical meaning become. Visual ideology (commercial movies and television, advertising and product propaganda) immerses its viewers in that type of signification as much as the discourses of religion and neurosis do: to the extent that literally everything within these belief systems is "meaningful," reaffirming the individual's ties to such systems, the actual capacities of individual development are repressed. Beuys keeps insisting on the fact that his objects and dramatic performance activities have precisely that type of "metaphysical" meaning, transcending their actual visual concretion and material appearance within their proper discourse. He quite outspokenly refers to an antihistoric, religious experience as a major source and model of his art production: "This is the concept of art that carries within itself the revolutionizing not only of the historic bourgeois concept of knowledge (materialism, positivism) but also of religious activity."[15]

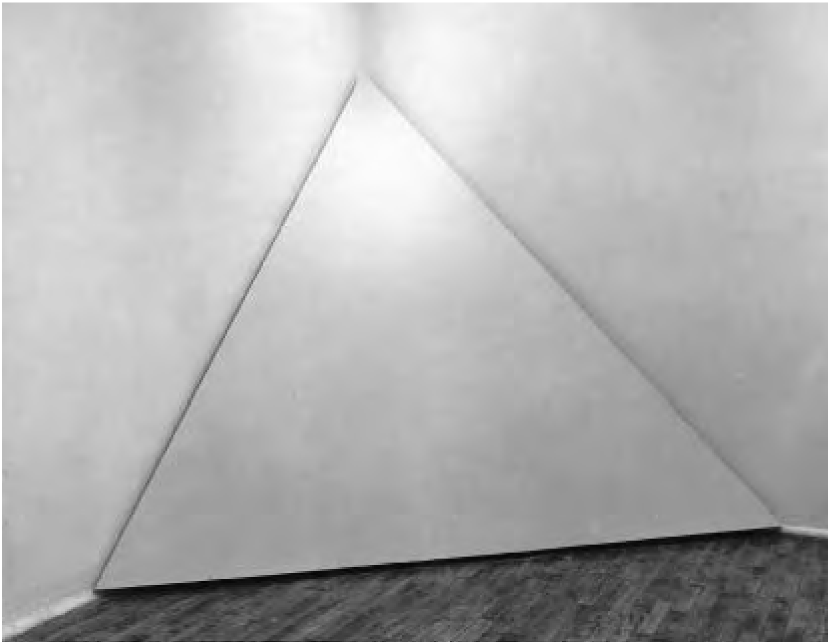
Notably, Beuys does not even attempt to qualify his understanding of "religious activity" in historical terms, which would seem obvious, since Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud have analyzed religion in a manner that hardly allows for a simplistic concept of "religious activity." Again, it seems inevitable to quote from Nietzsche's poignant analysis of Wagner's aesthetic position, discovering once again an amazing congruence with that of Beuys:

> As a matter of fact, his whole life long he [Wagner] did nothing but repeat one proposition: that his music did not mean music alone. But something more! Something immeasurably more! . . . Music can never be anything else than a means. This was his theory; but above all it was the only practice that lay open to him. No musician however thinks in this way! Wagner was in need of literature, in order to persuade the whole world to take his music seriously, profoundly, because it *meant* an infinity of things.[16]

Precisely because of Beuys's attitudes toward the functions and constructions of meaning in linguistic and visual signs, and his seemingly radical ahistoricity (which is a maneuver to disguise his eclecticism), his work is different from that of some of his European colleagues as well as his American contemporaries. This becomes particularly evident in a comparison of works that seem to be connected by striking morphological similarities: Beuys's *Fat Corner* (1960–1963?) and *Felt Corner* (1963–1964?) with Robert Morris's *Corner Piece* (1964) and Richard Serra's *Lead Antimony* (1969); Beuys's *Fat Up to This Level* (1971) with Bruce Nauman's *Concrete Tape Recorder* (1968); Beuys's *Site* (1967) with Carl Andre's *12 Pieces of Steel* (exhibited in Düsseldorf in 1967). In many instances it seems appropriate to speculate about priorities of formal "invention" in these works that appear to be structurally comparable,[17] as Beuys certainly commands an amazing integration and absorbtion of principles of formal organization that have been developed in totally different contexts, charging them with his private projections so that, in fact, they no longer seem in any way comparable. In other cases, such as with Beuys's *Rubberized Box* (1957) and *Fat Chair,* there simply can be no doubt about his original vision in introducing into a sculptural discourse issues that became crucial years later in Minimal and post-Minimal art. If we compare Beuys's *Fat Corner* with Richard Serra's *Splashing* (1968; illustrated on p. 419 below), we discover a comparable concern for the dissolution of a traditional object/construct-oriented conception of sculpture in favor of a more process-bound and architectural understanding of sculptural production and perception. On the other hand, one tends to overestimate Beuys's



Joseph Beuys, *Felt Corner,* 1963. Felt. Collection: Sammlung Ströher, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt. Courtesy Eva Beuys.



Robert Morris, *Corner Piece,* 1964. Painted plywood, 6 ft 6 in high × 9 ft wide. Collection: Count Panza DiBiumo, Milan. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.

originality and inventiveness if one forgets about his eclectic selection of historical information and influences absorbed from Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Dada, and Surrealism, as well as their American and European successors in happenings and Fluxus activities, plus the Nouveaux Réalistes.

Beuys's sense of the specific nature of sculptural materials, and the wide variety of materials that could be introduced into sculpture, was most obviously informed by the Italian Futurists, who in turn pointed to Medardo Rosso as one of their precursors.[18] One should recall Umberto Boccioni's "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture" (1912): "We claim that even twenty different materials can be used in a single work to achieve sculptural emotion. Let us mention only a few: glass, wood, cardboard, horsehair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric light, etc. etc."[19] Moreover, the sculptural discovery of that crucial point in space where two planes meet at an angle of ninety degrees, thus constituting the most elementary evidence of spatial volume and, one could argue, a point of transition between sculptural space and architectural space, finds its first clear demarcation in twentieth-century art in Tatlin's Cubo-Futurist *Corner Counter-Reliefs* of 1915, and the explicit use of an inserted triangle shape in Tatlin's and Yakulov's decoration of the *Café Pittoresque* in Moscow in 1917. Beuys, whenever he might have placed his first triangle into a corner—whether fat or felt—has to be seen as much in that perspective as with respect to Morris's *Corner Piece* and Serra's *Splashing*.

That other great German artist who was an eclectic of the first order, and knew equally well how to conceal and transform his sources to the point of almost total unrecognizability, Kurt Schwitters—certainly the focal point of Beuys's references, within German art history of the twentieth-century[20]—was equally aware of Italian Futurist notions in sculpture, as well as of Russian Cubo-Futurist works. By joining the former's innovative sense of sculptural materiality with the latter's idea of sculptural expansion into architectural dimensions, and by merging them with his peculiar brand of German Dada, Schwitters conceived the *Merzbau* environment. This *Gesamtkunstwerk,* which included live guinea pigs and bottles of urine collected from his friends, obviously attempted to define sculpture as an all-encompassing activity, incorporating everyday life into aesthetic creation. Beuys's definition of "sculpture as an evolutionary process,

Vladimir Tatlin, *Complex Corner Relief,* 1915. Reconstructed by Martyn Chalk (edition of 5), 1960–1970. 78.8 × 152.4 × 76.2 cm. Collection: Annely Juda Fine Art, London.

everyone an artist"[21] has its visual/plastic roots here as much as it paraphrases Lautréamont's famous proto-surrealist dictum, "Poetry must be made by all."

Beuys's problematic attempt to revitalize Dada and Surrealist positions becomes apparent within the concrete materiality and formal organization of his sculptural work itself. Precisely because of its claims for universal solutions and global validity, this work does not achieve the acuity and impact of some of the seemingly comparable sculptures mentioned above. The historic precision and function within (as it seems) the limits of a formalist tradition and of work growing out of it (such as Serra's, Nauman's, or Andre's) is altogether lacking in Beuys's works. Their opulent nebulousness and their adherence to a conventional definition of artistic signification make the visual experience of them profoundly dissatisfying. His work does not initiate cognitive changes, but reaffirms a conservative position of *metaphoricity.* The same becomes evident in a comparison between Beuys's work and sculptural works done in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Europe. Arman's *Le plein* (1960), in which the artist filled a gallery space with two truckloads of garbage (expanding his sculptural procedure of "poubelles"—garbage accumulations), still strikes us today as a crucial and consequential work (and more complex in its ramifications), precisely because of its self-imposed restriction to function first of all, and critically within the discourse of art.

The same is true for Stanley Brouwn's proposal in 1960 to declare all shoe stores of Amsterdam as his exhibition, or for every single work of Piero Manzoni's since 1958. It seems that, after all, Gustave Flaubert was correct in predicting, "The more art develops, the more scientific it must be, just as science will become aesthetic."

Aesthetic as well as political truths are concrete phenomena. They manifest themselves in specific reflections and acts, hardly in grandiose gesticulations and global speculations. Beuys's supposedly radical position, as in so many aspects of his activities, is primarily marked by his compulsive self-exposure as the messianic artist (think, for example, of his preposterous over at a women's liberation gathering in New York: "What can I do for you?"). When called upon for particular commitments within the art world, which is, after all, the prime and final

sphere of his operations, he shows an astonishing reluctance to commit himself to anything that might harm his good standing with the existing power structure of cultural institutions. When, for instance, in 1971 the Guggenheim Museum censored and closed down its Hans Haacke exhibition, firing its curator Edward Fry, an impressive list of signatures by artists and critics—proof of international solidarity—was circulated to support Haacke and condemn publicly the oppressive politics of the Guggenheim's director, Thomas Messer. Joseph Beuys never signed. Shortly afterward, an international group show, *Amsterdam-Paris-Düsseldorf,* was installed at the Guggenheim. Marcel Broodthaers, then living and working in Düsseldorf, withdrew his contribution from the show (his work had been originally dedicated to Daniel Buren, whose work had been equally censored at the Guggenheim's international exhibition the preceding year) to protest the treatment of Haacke's and Fry's work, and it was on this occasion that Broodthaers published his famous "Open Letter to Joseph Beuys" in a Düsseldorf newspaper. The letter, disguised as a letter by the German-French composer Jacques Offenbach addressing Richard Wagner, reads as follows:

> Your essay "Art and Revolution" discusses magic . . . politics the politics of magic? Of beauty or of ugliness? Messiah, I can hardly go along with that contention of yours, and at any rate I wish to register my disagreement if you allow a definition of art to include one of politics . . . and magic. . . . But is not the enthusiasm that His Majesty displays for you motivated by a political choice as well? What ends do you serve, Wagner? Why? How? Miserable artists that we are.[22]

The aesthetic conservatism of Beuys is logically complemented by his politically retrograde, not to say reactionary, attitudes. Both are inscribed into a seemingly progressive and radical humanitarian program of aesthetic and social evolution. The abstract universality of his vision has its equivalent in the privatistic and deeply subjectivist nature of his actual work. Any attempt on his side to join the two aspects results in curious sectarianism. The roots of Beuys's

dilemma lie in the misconception that politics could become a matter of aesthetics, as he repeats frequently: "real future political intentions must be artistic." Or, even more outrageously:

> How I actually bring it as theory to the totalized concept of art, which means everything. The totalized concept of art, that is the principle that I wanted to express with this material, which in the end refers to everything, to all forms in the world. And not only to artistic forms, but also to social forms or legal forms or economic forms. . . . All questions of man can be only a question of form, and that is the totalized concept of art.[23]

Or, finally speaking in the explicit terms of crypto-fascist Futurism:

> I would say . . . that the concept of politics must be eliminated as quickly as possible and must be replaced by the capability of form of human art. *I do not want to carry art into politics, but make politics into art.*[24]

The Futurist heritage has not only shaped Beuys's thoughts on sculpture; even more so, it seems, his political ideas fulfill the criteria of the totalitarian in art just as they were propounded by Italian Futurism on the eve of European fascism. It seems that Walter Benjamin's most overquoted essay has still not been understood by all. It ends as follows:

> "*Fiat ars—pereat mundus,*" says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. . . . [Mankind's] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.[25]

Notes

1

Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Case of Wagner," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche,* ed. Oscar Levy (Edinburgh and London: T. N. Foulis, 1909), pp. 12–14.

The idea of seeing Joseph Beuys in the tradition of Richard Wagner was first proposed by the late Marcel Broodthaers in his "Public letter to Joseph Beuys," *Rheinische Post* (Düsseldorf), October 3, 1972. The letter was subsequently published as a book by Marcel Broodthaers under the title *Magie: art et politique* (Paris: Editions Multiplicata, 1973).

2

This is the way Dore Ashton described her impressions of Yves Klein's work in 1967 on the occasion of his first retrospective show in New York, in her essay "Art as Spectacle," *Arts Magazine* (March 1967), p. 44.

3

Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope,* trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), vol. 3, pp. 1184–1186.

4

Götz Adriani et al., *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works* (New York: Barron Books, 1979), p. 16.

5

Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Guggenheim Museum; London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), p. 19.

6

Ibid., p. 17.

7

Ibid., p. 16.

8

Ibid., p. 72.

9

Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytical Theory of Neurosis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1945), p. 349.

10

Joseph Beuys, *Sigmar Polke,* exh. cat. (Berlin: René Block Gallery, 1966), n.p.

11

Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys,* p. 92.

12

Ibid., p. 92.

13

Ibid., p. 10.

14

Ibid., p. 72.

15

Ibid., p. 269.

16

Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner,* p. 30.

17

As was already evident in his *fable convenue,* Beuys at times takes a certain license with the concept of truth. This seems to apply to the dating of his own work as well, since the dates given by him are on occasion either completely contradictory or highly dubious. For example, Adriani (*Joseph Beuys,* p. 96) quotes Beuys as asserting:

> The titles are not original, many of them were given later, because exhibitors and buyers felt the need to name these works. On the evening at the Zwirner Gallery [on the occasion of a lecture by Allan Kaprow, Cologne, 1963] fat actually made its first appearance in the form of a carton of lard.

Caroline Tisdall maintains in the Guggenheim catalogue text that "*Fat Chair* appeared at the same time as the first *Fat Corners*." On following pages, however, *Fat Corner* and *Filter Fat Corner* are dated 1960 and 1962, respectively (see Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys,* pp. 72–75). *Filter Fat Corner* is dated 1963 in Adriani's monograph (*Joseph Beuys,* p. 102). *Felt Corner* is dated 1953 on p. 75 of the Guggenheim catalogue but 1964 on p. 125, in a slightly different photograph of the same installation.

Tisdall's information on Beuys's work seems unreliable in other regards as well. For example, on p. 271 of the catalogue we are made to believe that Beuys swept up Karl Marx Platz in *East* Berlin on May Day in 1972. Obviously, it would have been quite spectacular and courageous (or rather foolishly provocative) to perform such an activity under the conditions of the rigid police control of the regime in East Berlin, particularly during the official May Day celebrations of the Communist Party. Unfortunately (or fortunately), however, Beuys did perform his little act in West Berlin, where nobody cares about harmless artistic jokes and where you can express "solidarity with the revolutionary principles through the bright red broom" (Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys,* p. 271) at any given time.

18

The beginning of modernist sculpture is marked by a mixture of heterogeneous materials within the sculptural unit: Degas's *Little Dancer of Fourteen* (1876) assembles wax, cloth, and wood. And Medardo Rosso's wax-over-plaster sculptures, which were supposed to "blend with the unity of the world that surrounded them," should be remembered when Beuys talks about the universally process-oriented nature of sculpture. Rosso's use of beeswax as a sculptural material that can maintain two aggregate states, liquid and solid, has a particularly strong process quality, thanks also to the precision with which it records modeling processes.

19

Umberto Boccioni, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture" (1912), in *Futurist Manifestos,* ed. Umbro Apollonio (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 51–65.

20

In Germany the drawings of Kurt Schwitters would be the key reference for Beuys's drawings. In drawings from around 1919 Schwitters combined the expressionistic tradition with the mechanomorphic "drawing" elements that he had undoubtedly recognized in Picabia's work from the mid teens. The mechanical rubber stamp impression as a counterbalance to the lyrical and scriptural expressionist line later figures prominently in Beuys's drawings. Unlike Beuys, the French artist Arman acknowledged the debt to Schwitters when he produced his own rubber stamp drawings and paintings in the late 1950s, again a few years before Beuys discovered the device.

21

Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys,* p. 7.

22

Broodthaers, *Magie,* p. 11.

23

Adriani, *Joseph Beuys,* p. 283.

24

Ibid., p. 277 (emphasis mine).

25

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 242.

Marcel Broodthaers: Open Letters, Industrial Poems

> The participation of a hitherto ignored people in the political life of France is a social fact that will honour the whole of the close of the nineteenth century. A parallel is found in artistic matters, the way being prepared by an evolution which the public with rare prescience dubbed, from its first appearance, Intransigeant, which in political language means radical and democratic. . . . Such, to those who can see in this the representative art of a period which cannot isolate itself from the equally characteristic politics and industry, must seem the meaning of the manner of painting we have discussed here.
> —*Stéphane Mallarmé*[1]

During the twelve years that Marcel Broodthaers declared himself an artist, he produced a wide variety of internally coherent if elliptical groups of work. One such group, identified by him as *Industrial Poems,*[2] dating from 1968 to 1970, has gone practically without any critical comment. While this group is no more

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hermetic and enigmatic than any of his other work, it seems to offer, by its very identification as "poems," access to Broodthaers's motivation to abandon his lifelong profession as a poet in 1964 and to engage henceforth in the production of visual objects.

Yet by their simultaneous identification as "industrial" they also link Broodthaers's work with that fundamental assumption of modernist thought to which Stéphane Mallarmé refers in the passage quoted above. Namely, that an inextricable dialectic links the advancement of the artistic forms of a society to the advancement of its technical means and that the transformation of the hierarchical structures of a social totality necessitates the transformation of aesthetic hierarchies. It was believed at the outset of Modernism that the participation of the masses in the social production and political life of a state would inevitably lead to their participation in the development of radically different forms of perception. These assumptions formed the basis for the modernist insistence on the absolute contemporaneity of subjects, materials, and procedures, as they did for the critical reflection on the work of art as a unique object.

But Broodthaers's decision to identify his poems as "industrial" could not possibly be attributed to this position of the modernist artist. After all, Broodthaers no longer incorporated naively the effect of industrial modes of production upon artistic practice, and he explicitly criticized the seemingly progressive structural simplification of artistic work as the aesthetic internalization of rationalistic order and technocratic instrumentality, denouncing them as a "singleness which condems the mind to monomania: minimal art, robot, computer."[3]

It seems that from the very beginning of his work as an artist he viewed the heroic embrace of advanced technology by visual culture with considerable skepticism. After all, Broodthaers had only recently witnessed this putatively utopian synthesis of artistic and social production in the work of the Nouveaux Réalistes and the American Pop artists of the early 1960s, and he suspected the work to be the result of both a misunderstanding of modernity and an extreme simplification of its artistic legacy: "The literalness linked to the appropriation of the real didn't suit me, since it conveyed a pure and simple acceptance of progress in art . . . and elsewhere as well."[4]

Marcel Broodthaers, *Otto Hahn Next to a Plaster Cast by Segal,* 1965. Photograph with ink drawing, published in *Phantomas* no. 51–61. Courtesy Yves Gevaert. All works of art by Marcel Broodthaers © Estate of Marcel Broodthaers/SABAM, Belgium/ VAGA, NY, NY.

But from the highly enigmatic and esoteric character of his work it is clear that Broodthaers also did not build on the other modernist foundation mentioned by Mallarmé, namely the influence of the "participation of hitherto ignored people in political life" and its consequences for the modes of contemporary artistic reception. Rarely, if ever, do we find in Broodthaers's work from the mid-sixties onward an explicit reference to the political nature of his artistic endeavor. And neither does he deploy strategies which already, qua strategies, mode of distribution, or materials, would criticize the separateness of the aesthetic in favor of an explicitly political conception of art. While—in the historical context of Conceptual art—he employed almost all of the late 1960s and early 1970s forms of distribution (the book, film, print editions, and the "plaques"), calling into question the status of the work of art as a unique, auratic object, he also criticized in particular that form of supposedly democratic distribution that spread in the 1960s, the "multiple." Looking upon this phenomenon with doubt, he almost always limited his own editions to relatively—often artificially—small edition sizes. The only real public form that Broodthaers deployed was the "Open Letter," paradoxically addressed in most cases to an individual, or to "friends."

Broodthaers's frequently voiced skepticism toward the concept of "progress in art and elsewhere as well" not only raises doubts about his commitment to the modernist idea of "contemporaneity" and its inherent progressivity, but it also must surprise those who associate him with the legacy of 1960s political and cultural critique. After all, as a poet, Broodthaers had been associated since the forties with the radical left wing of the Belgian Surrealist movement.[5]

Furthermore, during the "cultural revolution" of the Brussels student movement in May 1968, Broodthaers the artist had participated in the temporary occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts ("my museum originates from that date"), and he had been affiliated with the Brussels circle around Lucien Goldmann, the disciple of Georg Lukács (the artist refers to one of his books as the result of his participation in Goldmann's seminar).[6]

Since Broodthaers's work seems to have generally distanced itself from the progressivism of the modernist credo, from the devotion to contemporaneity as much as from the devices of a scientific or technological modernity, and even more

so from those positions that defined explicitly political perspectives, his work has been frequently accused of remaining ultimately within the domain of the poetical, of being a "literary" practice—a quality for which the work is reproached even now by the professionals of plasticity. It is an accusation Broodthaers invoked voluntarily and upon which he commented with amusement: "This denomination (literary) has a pejorative connotation (I wonder why?)."[7]

Paradoxically, it was with a public demonstration of the entombment of the literary (the remainder of the edition of his last volume of poetry) that Broodthaers's work as an artist began; and it was in the erasure or the suspension of reading and the displacement of the literary that some of his most important works (operating under the cover of books) would subsequently be accomplished.[8] This fact alone should indicate that Broodthaers's work—while clearly situating itself critically with regard to the progressive and political implications of Modernism—can certainly not be reclaimed for a conservative critique of contemporary visual culture from the perspective of the literary.[9] And this is true even though the often extremely stylized appearances of Broodthaers's work might mislead naive viewers into the assumption that the stylistic intonations of mourning and melancholia lament the loss of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, embodied in institutions like the museum—the museum, of course, constituting one of the centers of Broodthaers's critical contemplation.

On the occasion of his first exhibition at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels in 1964, Marcel Broodthaers published a by now frequently quoted statement in which he draws a facetious connection between the commodity and the commonly held suspicion that all art is inherently fraudulent. This analogy is implied in the revelation that it took only three months to produce the work for his first exhibition as an artist and that he did not even suspect himself of having produced art until his future dealer told him so:

> I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. I had for quite a little while been good for nothing. I am forty years old. . . . The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once. At the end of three months I

> showed what I'd done to Ph. Edouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie Saint-Laurent. "But this is art," he said, "and I will gladly show it all." If I sell something he'll take thirty percent. These, it seems, are normal conditions; some galleries take seventy-five percent. What is it? In fact, only some objects.[10]

This definition of the art object as "something insincere" establishes one of the many parameters of Broodthaers's future investigations: a continuous reflection on the status of the (art) object under the universal reign of commodity production, once it had lost the credibility of its modernist utopian dimension. For Broodthaers the work of art no longer operated in terms of its inherited, quintessentially modernist dialectic: to be simultaneously the *exemplary* object of all commodity production and the *exceptional* object that denies and resists the universality of that reign. Instead, in the final subsumption of artistic production under the reign of the culture industry—and that is the industry that the *Industrial Poems* actually address—the work can now only engage in the public destruction of that dialectic.

This advent of the culture industry within the sphere of avant-garde culture—as we have witnessed it in the past decade—was predicted by Broodthaers with a prophetic clarity that, at the time, made him appear a cynical pessimist in contrast to his peers of the late sixties and early seventies who apparently produced a progressivist art. If, therefore, the title *Industrial Poems* refers at all to the industrial and political conditions mentioned by Mallarmé in his essay on Manet, it addresses a much more specific condition: that of aesthetic production emerging as but one industry among others in the culture of spectacle. It was precisely in the disavowal of the complete disintegration of the aesthetic, in its refusal to recognize these radically altered historical circumstances that had irreparably affected all material and structural conditions of the art object itself, that Broodthaers detected the profound insincerity of the work of art:

> I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of art unless we examine the question in terms of one constant—namely

> the transformation of art into merchandise. In our time this process has accelerated to the point at which artistic and commercial values are superimposed. And if we are concerned with the phenomenon of reification then art will be a particular instance of that phenomenon—a form of tautology.[11]

More precisely, it seemed impossible, under those circumstances, to reemploy those definitions of the pictorial and plastic object that had been developed at the height of Modernism. Thus, Broodthaers, far from assuming a position of unequivocal reverence for Duchamp, would recognize from the very beginning of his artistic career the necessity of differentiating the specific conditions that determined the conception of the Duchampian readymade from those determining his own work. He criticized the assumptions implied in Pop art and Nouveau Réalisme that promoted the apparently unproblematical continuation of artistic paradigms originating in Dada, voicing his doubt already in the mid-sixties, as in the following statement from an interview in 1965:

> One could find the origin of Pop art in Dada, but society has changed to such an extent since then that any comparison would inevitably draw us into some kind of confusion with Dada and Surrealism. I think rather that Pop Art is an original expression of our times, or better yet, our actuality. Pop Art did at first develop in American society. American life presents a character—due to the industrial factor—which invades absolutely every aspect of private existence. In America nothing happens anymore on the level of individual life. American life consists of a whole series of disavowals which build up, neutralize themselves, and finally annihilate completely the pleasures of existence which a human being normally possesses. I might as well admit that the same phenomenon occurs in Europe.[12]

Consequently, the usage of language in Broodthaers's *Industrial Poems* differs programmatically from the artistic and poetic rediscoveries of the

Cubo-Futurist and Dadaist legacies, the *Parole in libertà,* the Russian *Zaum* poetry, or Kurt Schwitters's *Ursonate,* as much as it differs from the writings of the *lettristes* of the late 1940s and the Concrete and Fluxus poets of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The double inversion of Broodthaers's "writing" was that, on the one hand, it seemed to engage in precisely that modernist strategy of hermetic resistance by which the visual or linguistic sign constitutes itself to refuse both sensual data and instrumentalized communication which the viewer demands, a refusal that operates in the disguise of the sign as an anomic object; on the other hand, however, Broodthaers's "writing" was equally determined to investigate the process of reification that the visual sign undergoes when it is transformed into that modernist object of artistic withdrawal and resistance.

Echoing Sartre's identification of Mallarmé as the "prophet who announces our century," Broodthaers identified Mallarmé already in the mid-1960s as the fountainhead of contemporary artistic projects within the medium of language, since the spatialization of the semantic and lexical elements of language occur at the very beginning of Modernism in the work of Mallarmé. But that spatialization—motivated precisely by the desire for the semblance of an absolute autonomy of the textual—was achieved at the price of an artificial anomie resulting from the destruction of meaning and the erasure of memory from the semantic axis of language. This insistence on the demonstration of an autonomous physicality and pure semiotic opacity of language within the universe of instrumentalized speech therefore transformed the very opponent of reification—poetic language—into mute plasticity and objecthood.

Broodthaers's famous statement "I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something" seems to travesty a 1912 statement by Guillaume Apollinaire, who declared on the occasion of his "invention" of spatialized poetic language (the calligram), "And I, too, am a painter [*Et moi aussi je suis peintre*]." Yet one does not believe that even with Apollinaire this proclamation would have reflected merely the ambition to rival his painter friends whose projects he would soon describe in *Les peintres cubistes,* and certainly one can believe even less that it originated merely in a strategy to abolish genre boundaries and poetical categories, as the academic explanation would have it. Rather, it seems that Apolli-

naire already attempted to accommodate the fact that the very modes engendered by these conventions of meaning production were threatened and destroyed by factors outside of poetry and painting, considerations described by Walter Benjamin twenty years later: "Now the letter and the word which have rested for centuries in the flatbed of the book's horizontal pages have been wrenched from their position and have been erected on vertical scaffolds in the streets as advertisement."[13]

Thus our questions regarding Broodthaers's work, especially the *Industrial Poems,* should first of all address the external factors determining his redeployment of these earlier modernist strategies, in particular those of fragmentation and erasure. For these are strategies which—while of central importance and universally present in the work of the Dadaists—would have clearly acquired different functions in Broodthaers's reflection on the current conditions of artistic production.

Broodthaers's suspension of the *Industrial Poems* between both language and object and their mutual cancellation differentiated his work from the critique of the commodity status of the work of art formulated in late 1960s Conceptual art, which abandoned traditional pictorial and sculptural materials and procedures in favor of a transformation of art into linguistic definitions.

Deletion and Erasure

> The white spaces indeed take on importance, are initially striking; ordinarily versification required them around like silence. . . . I do not transgress this measure, only disperse it. The paper intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws, accepting the succession of others.
> —*Stéphane Mallarmé*[14]

Semantic deletion and visual erasure—the undermining of those lexical and typographic elements that perform the semantic functions of language—emerged to give plastic autonomy and opaque presence to the elements of typography, but did so through language in the name of an opposition to the universal

instrumentalization of language. Thus, in its very opposition to reification, poetry was caught mimicking that very anomie it opposed. Triumphantly acquiring the status of an object, a spatial and plastic force to match and overcome that force of spatialization that language had acquired in its everyday usage in newspaper typography and advertisement, poetry had become mere *chose,* an object among other objects. Its powerful presence as a spatial construct was acquired at the price of the loss of narrativity and representation, of temporality and referentiality.

Poetry had to renounce the wealth of experience that the semantic dimension of language had once offered its readers, and which the visual and spatial dimension now refused through acts of rigorous deletion and erasure.

The third of the major heuristic assumptions about the elimination of traditional semantic functions is that the purification of the pictorial or linguistic signifier would in and of itself accomplish an act of resistance against the positivist and instrumentalist subjection of language to meaning and communication. This belief is still operative even in deconstructive criticism, as evident, for example, in Geoffrey Hartman's question:

> Can Derrida's analysis justify a massive displacement of interest from signified to signifier? More precisely, from the conceptualization that transforms signifier into signified to those unconceptualizable qualities of the signifier that keep it unsettled in form or meaning. Is the force of the written sign such that every attributed meaning pales before the originary and residual violence of a sound that cannot be fully inscribed because as sound it is already writing or incision . . . ?[15]

Fragmentation

> We read in two ways: a new or unknown word is spelled out letter by letter; but a common, ordinary word is embraced by a single glance, independently of its letters, so that the image of the whole word acquires an ideographic value.
> —*Ferdinand de Saussure*[16]

Concomitant with the strategies of deletion and erasure, the strategy of fragmentation succeeds in the abolition of meaning in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century advanced poetry. Like its strategic allies, it is riddled with the deficiencies of the spatial liberation's dialectic counterpart: it finds itself merely in the cul de sac of the alphabet's infinite permutational and combinatory possibilities. Not unlike the problems faced by the non-representational painters of that generation, when the abolition of representation and referentiality opened up the abyss of infinitely arbitrary chromatic and compositional permutations, so linguistic reduction of the syntactical structure to the lexical unit, of the lexical unit to the phonetic element, of the phonetic element to the single letter, allow for a spiritual flight into an infinity of combinations that rapidly leads to an anomic impasse. Louis Aragon had anticipated this already in his poem "Suicide" in 1924, where the "poem" ends in the mere restriction to the mechanistic rehearsal and infinite repetition of the given terms of the 26 letters of the alphabet. This nightmare of reductivism would come to pass in the hands of successive generations of "language administration" exercised by the functionaries of concrete poetry in the postwar period.

A wide range of explanatory schemes has been devised by critics and art historians to account for the meaning and functions of these strategies of fragmentation and erasure in both modernist literature and painting. These extend from the merely mimetic to the concept of allegorical language and the hypothesis of a primary semiotic experience these strategies supposedly initiate. It seems to have mattered little to most historians that similar or identical literary techniques operated simultaneously not only to perform diverse, if not opposite, functions, but also in totally different political, social, and ideological environments (contexts as different as the revolutionary Soviet Union, fascist Italy, bourgeois Paris, and proto-revolutionary imperial Berlin, to mention only the most obvious examples where a purely phonetic poetry emerged). At the same time, it is argued that, for example, the fragmentation of the Futurist poem was primarily mimetic, since it was supposed to stage the new perceptual and auditory conditions of urban life in advanced capitalist industrialized nations on the level of syntax and grammar, within the unit of

SUICIDE

A b c d e f
g h i j k l
m n o p q r
s t u v w
x y z

Louis ARAGON.

Louis Aragon, "Suicide," 1924.

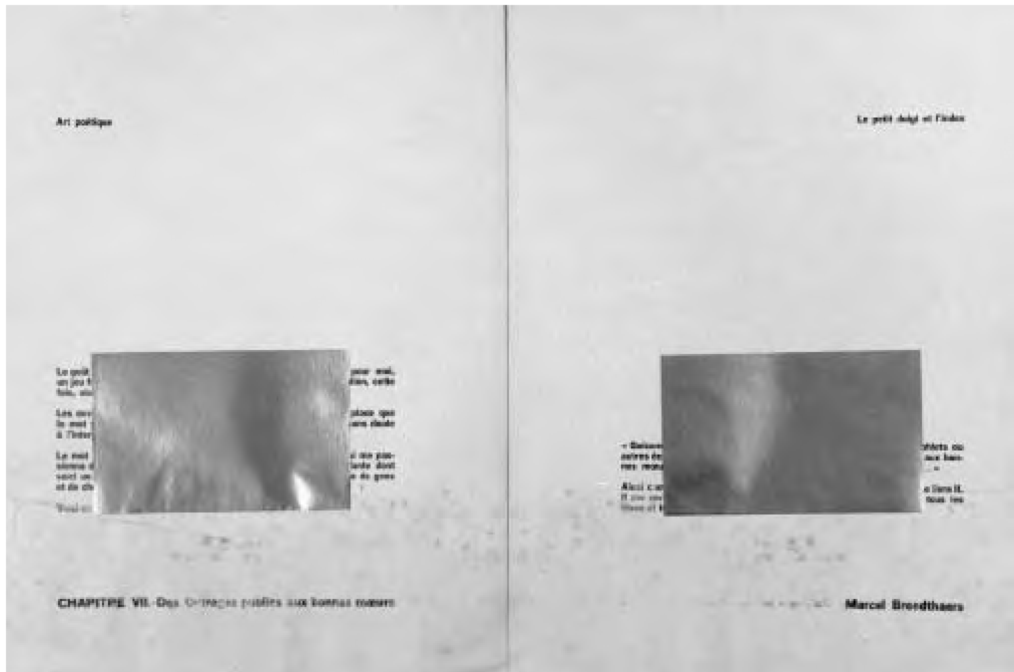
the word and the phoneme itself. Thus, fragmentation seems to repeat, within the nucleus of language, the very type of experience to which individuals were now increasingly subjected. Fragmentation of language not only performed the depletion of meaning, but also—as has been widely discussed, in particular in the reading of Futurist poetry—had a mimetic function in which the heroic condition of modern life, its technological accomplishments, could be captured. Speed of movement, compartmentalization of time into smaller and smaller units, simultaneity of vision are the perceptual and cognitive instances that the fracturing of syntactical and semantic continuity mimetically reproduces in Futurism.[17]

Broodthaers's exhibition announcement for the Galerie Saint-Laurent recapitulates these strategies of erasure and fragmentation and transposes them into an unforeseen context (the advertisement of art). The announcement anticipates in many respects the typographical style and design of many of his subsequent works, in which design conventions of both high art and mass culture are incorporated into the more general reflection on the generation and reification of meaning. Printed on both sides, the announcement uses a set of found advertisement images from a fashion magazine. After rotating them ninety degrees, Broodthaers spread a grid of evenly distributed type across the two pages, a grid that all but bars the reading of the advertising information and generates a reading of his self-advertisement as an artist.

Possibly the most important work in this exhibition, *Pense-Bête,* resulted from Broodthaers's astonishing decision to destroy the remaining parts of his last volume of poetry in 1964. This gesture acquires once again a radically different reading from the perspective of a historical situation in which it had become fully evident that the strategies of the Dadaists and their postwar followers faced bankruptcy or academicization. Yet even before he decided to insert the remaining edition of his last volume of poetry into plaster, Broodthaers had already transfigured the volume itself by superimposing rectangles of colored monochrome paper onto its pages, thus "prohibiting" the reading of the poems. "Erasure" in this instance then anticipates exactly the procedure Broodthaers would apply four years later when he transformed the linear structures of Mallarmé's *Coup de*

Marcel Broodthaers, Exhibition announcement for Galerie Saint-Laurent, Brussels, April 10–25, 1964. Double-page tearsheet from magazine overprinted recto-verso, 25 × 33.5 cm.

Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête,* 1963. Books, paper, plaster, plastic spheres, and wood, 98 × 84 × 43 cm. Collection: Anne-Marie and Stéphane Rona. Photo: Maria Gilissen.



Marcel Broodthaers, altered pages from *Pense-Bête,* 1963–1964. Book, 32 pages, monochrome colored paper tipped on double pages; 27.5 × 21.5 cm.

dés into "mere" black bands, which appear simultaneously as erasures and as elements of an emphatic spatialization.

The chromatic squares and rectangles collaged by Broodthaers onto the surfaces of his poems perform both erasure and fragmentation simultaneously, since sometimes they leave the beginnings and the ends of a verse readable, while in other instances they conceal the text in its entirety. Occasionally the paper is only tipped in at the top and can be lifted like a curtain if the reader is curious enough to do so.

But it seems that these visual erasures of the poems in *Pense-Bête* did not satisfy their author as sufficient to their task of annihilating the poetic text, since he decided shortly thereafter to reduplicate this process of erasure on yet another level. This new form of objectification occurred when he embedded the remaining copies of the edition in a plaster base, thus adding to the process of semantic destruction by preventing the book from being opened and read at all. To the degree that the semantic and lexical dimension of the poetry is annihilated, the plasticity and presence of the artifact was paradoxically increased. Since Broodthaers addressed this paradox so extensively in the subsequent development of his work, one could argue that it was motivated already in this first act of transformation from poetry to plasticity and that he considered that dialectic constitutive of the nature of contemporary art production.

In a—presumably fictitious—interview with Richard Lucas, a small Brussels publisher and art dealer, Broodthaers facetiously poses the question: "Is there a profound relation between art and merchandise?" and he continues by saying he had decided to write in order "to make dedications and to establish this relationship between art and commodity. In fact, there is a special kind of writing to abolish certain problems."[18]

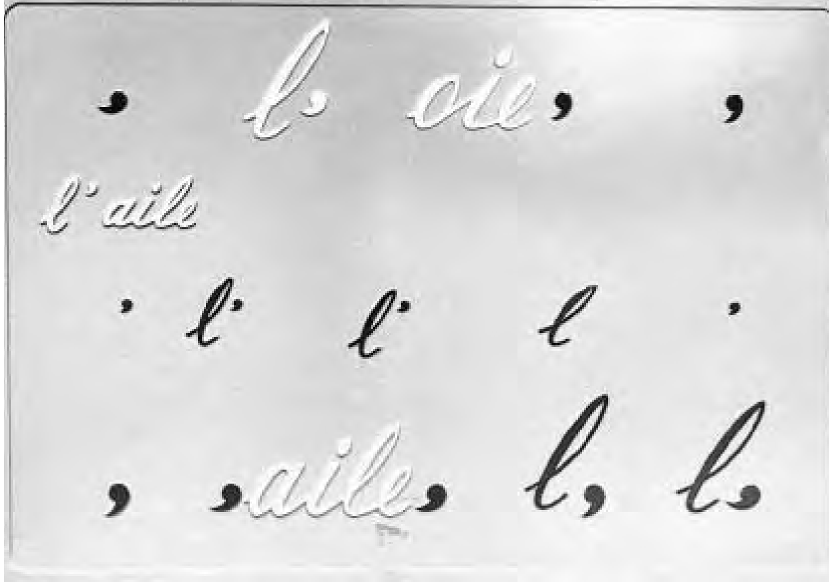
As is so often the case in Broodthaers's statements, what this "special kind of writing" and what "certain problems" could possibly be remains enigmatic. Can we suppose that Broodthaers's own writing practices, his *Industrial Poems* in particular, were designed to assume these functions?

He began the series of works titled *Poèmes industriels* in 1968—before the foundation of his key work, the *Musée d'art moderne, Département des aigles*—and

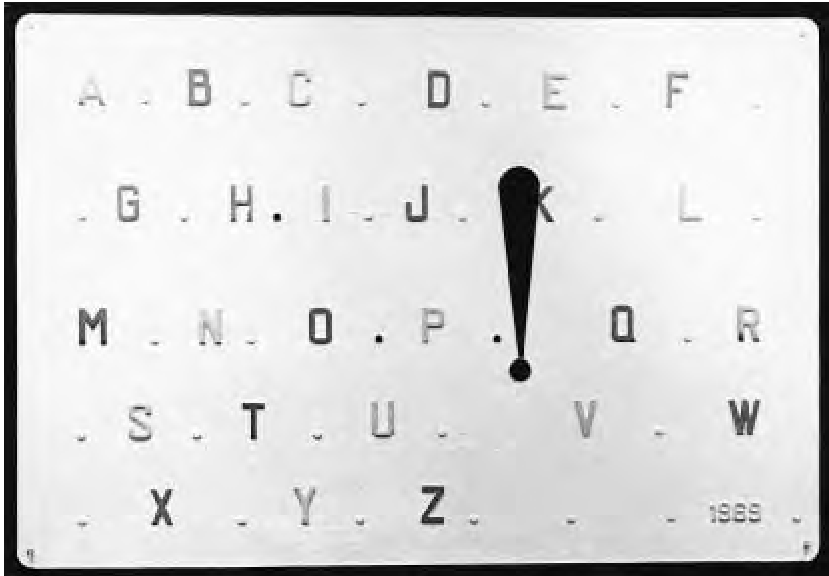
continued it with interruptions until 1970. As a whole, this group exemplifies these visual and textual strategies—even though they are present in Broodthaers's work from the very beginning—in their most differentiated and developed form. As we will see, the artist has extensively commented on a variety of aspects of these works, in particular their manufacturing technology, the meaning of that technology, and the historical context in which the choice of this procedure situated itself; but he has not, to my knowledge, commented upon the generic title of the group.

> To present Marcel Broodthaers as though he were an "artist" who imprints texts on plaques made of plastic, and thus to show his importance with regard to other artists, would mean to inscribe oneself into the existing cultural order. To say that, through his voluntary confusion of all categories (painting, poetry, sculpture, cinema, etc.), Broodthaers eludes these very traditional cultural classifications, opposing them theoretically and practically at the same time, is not sufficient either.[19]

This text by Alain Jouffroy appeared on the occasion of the first exhibition of the plaques, announced by Broodthaers as an exhibition of "limited and unlimited editions of industrial poems" and addressed—as with several of his open letters—"to my friends." Officially this exhibition was presented by a "department" of the fictitious *Musée d'Art Moderne* that seems to have existed only on this occasion, identified by Broodthaers in the announcement as the CAB.INE.T D.ES . E.STA.MP.E.S. The spelling of the department's name subjects the familiar term of artistic categorization to the very process of fragmentation that classification itself exerts on the objects of its discursive order. In this case the fragmentation achieves what one could call a phonetic metonymy, since the actual semantic totality of each word is left intact while phonetic units are isolated and foregrounded, establishing a momentary semblance of rupture within the semantic function. But immediately restored to reexert its presence, this function effects a reading that—against the appearance of rupture—



Marcel Broodthaers, *L'oie, l'aile* (*The Goose, the Wing*), 1968. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, edition of 7; 85 × 120 cm.



Marcel Broodthaers, *L'alphabet,* 1969. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, edition of 7; 85 × 120 cm.

produces a renewed containment within both the discursive and the institutional orders.

While Jouffroy's statement seems dated, reverberating as it does with the radical language of May 1968, it nonetheless indicates the extent to which opposition to traditional artistic categories was then viewed as an actual instance of critical resistance to wider cultural roles and functions. Further, it signals the degree to which such linguistic operations actually concretized the critical and political ambitions of that moment. Six months earlier these ambitions had been stated more programmatically still, in one of the manifestos issued during the May 30, 1968, occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. This pamphlet, most likely coauthored by Broodthaers, thus predates both the production of the first plaques and their exhibition. It states that the Free Association (as the occupiers identified themselves) "condemns the commercialization of all forms of art considered as objects of consumption."[20]

Once the occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts was concluded (as a result of negotiations), this tone of political condemnation receded. In what we must assume to be at the same time the last manifesto issued by the former occupiers of the Palais des Beaux-Arts (even though still dated "Palais des Beaux-Arts, June 7, 1968") and the first of the "open letters," now written and signed by the artist and addressed "à mes amis," we read the introductory statement:

> Peace and silence. A fundamental gesture has been made here that throws a vivid light on culture and on the ambitions of certain people who aspire to control it one way or the other: what this means is that culture is an obedient, malleable matter.[21]

Written three days after Valerie Solanas's attempt on Andy Warhol's life on June 4, 1968, the letter ends with the rather surprising remark:

> And another word for those who have not participated in these days [of occupation of the Palais des Beaux-Arts] and who have despised

> them: you don't have to feel that you sold out before having been bought, or hardly. My friends, I cry with you for Andy Warhol.

This letter gives no reason to doubt the sincerity of Broodthaers's compassion for Warhol. Yet by this time Broodthaers had also considerably modified his earlier optimistic views on Pop art, so that he would have thought of Warhol as a typical example of the artist who had chosen exactly the opposite road: that of a complete embrace rather than of a political contestation of the conditions the occupiers of the Palais des Beaux-Arts had still attempted to oppose, if not actually to change. To the same degree that it had become obvious to Broodthaers that those conditions would have to be accepted as inescapable once the decision had been made to shift from the political to the artistic, Warhol's role and his strategies of pure affirmation warranted increasing suspicion and critique.

It seems, then, that for Broodthaers the inevitable subjugation of artistic practice to the commodity form, and its product's strict congruence with that form (later he would call the work of art "the tautology of reification"), required an equally strict elimination of all aesthetic illusion (the illusion of rupture and of transcendence, that of pleasure or of political critique, above all that of poetic liberation). But in one respect Broodthaers sets up a crucial distinction between his own attitude and that of most of his (American) peers: this destruction of aesthetic illusion does not imply a parallel destruction of the dimension of critical negation in artistic practice. Such negation, first of all, would contest the continually renewed aesthetic claims that the artistic construct had actually transcended its economic, its discursive, or its institutional boundaries; and second, it would attack the work's continually renewed pretenses to provide anything but the reification of either an image or a theory of transgression. Thus, in an explicit critique of his conceptualist peers, Broodthaers would later come to say, "If the artistic product is the thing of things, theory becomes private property."[22]

The second open letter, signed by Marcel Broodthaers and again addressed "à mes amis," is dated "Kassel, June 27, '68." The first two of its three sections were soon to become the texts of the first two *Industrial Poems;* the third section, the actual letter, provides a correction to the letter of June 7:

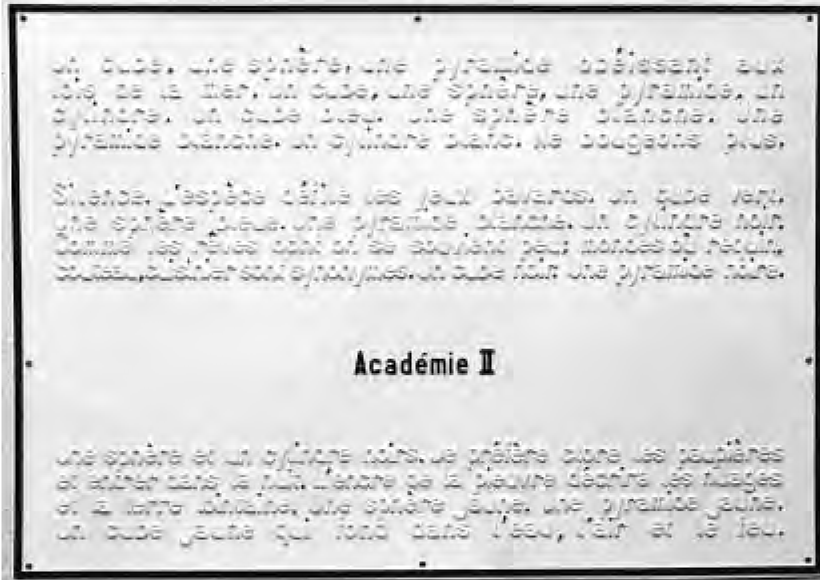
> In my letter of June 7, '68, it should not read: "You don't have to feel that you sold out before having been bought." Rather, it should read: "You don't have to feel that you sold out after having been bought." This is only to content everybody's ass and everybody's father. My friends, who is Warhol? And Lamelas?[23]

Obviously, as in so many subsequent cases, Broodthaers's literal reversal of a position he had just pronounced does not derive from an attitude of irony (in 1972 he would disqualify "irony as so much straw"). Rather, it constitutes the public performance of an opportunistic revision of a moralistic position that had come to appear as no longer tenable. Broodthaers recognized this element of opportunism as an inextricable condition of adaptation to the reality of artistic production. The letter's revision of a critical and radical belief, held until just before the public recantation, performs the very contradictions inherent in the transition from political thought to artistic practice; or, as he would phrase it shortly thereafter, "If the work of art finds itself under the conditions of fraudulence and falseness, can we still call it a work of art? I have no answer to this."[24]

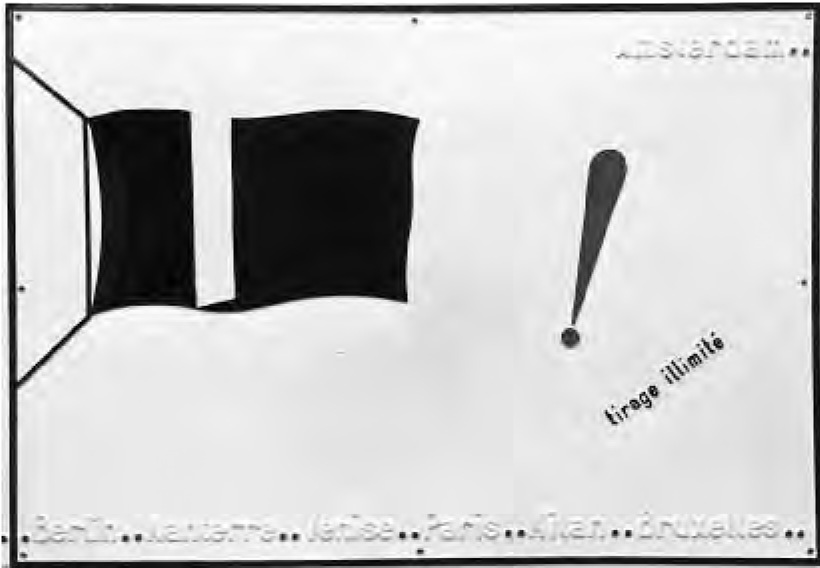
The other two texts in the open letter, titled "Académie III" and "Le noir et le rouge," became the texts of the next two of Broodthaers's plaques, which he produced in the following months. Both texts were, however, to be slightly modified in their transition from "open letter" to "painting" (as Broodthaers would later identify the plaques).[25] *Académie III* was changed to *Académie I* for the black (negative) version of the first plaque, while *Académie II* became the title of the white cast of the otherwise exact replica of the negative version. Each of these was produced, as announced in the open letter, in a "limited edition" (seven copies), thus opposing from the outset the delusory and mythologizing claims—typical of the late 1960s and early 1970s craze for the "multiple"—of a democratization of the art object by means of its mere technical replication.

Yet there was one exception to the principle of producing these embossed plastic reliefs in an edition of seven copies, a principle that governed all of the thirty-odd plaques that followed in the course of the next two years. This exception was *Le noir et le rouge,* already conceived and announced in the open

Marcel Broodthaers, *Académie I,* 1968. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, edition of 7; 85 × 120 cm.



Marcel Broodthaers, *Académie II,* 1968. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, edition of 7; 85 × 120 cm.



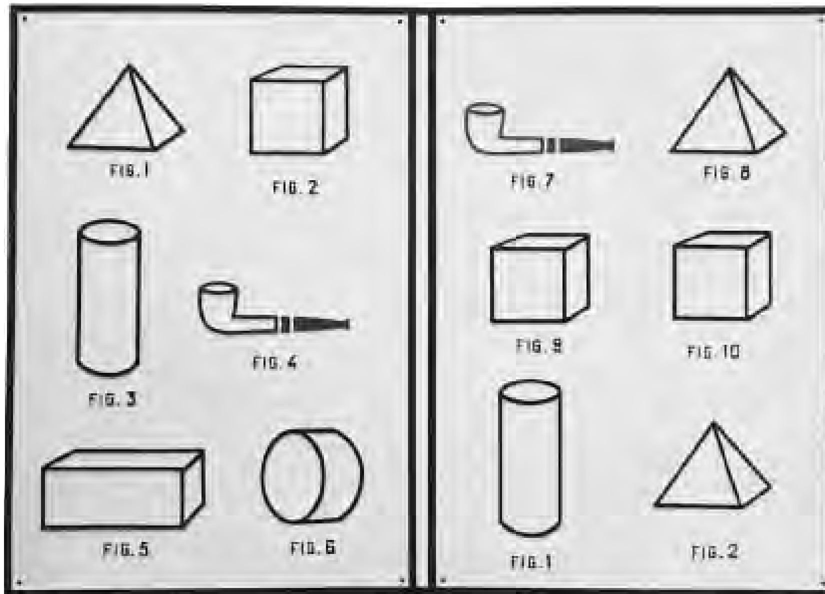
Marcel Broodthaers, *Le drapeau noir. Tirage illimité,* 1968. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, painted, 85 × 120 cm.

letter as "tirage illimité," and it was in fact the only plaque to be produced in an unlimited edition. In its transition from the "open letter" to the art object, *Le noir et le rouge* not only lost the pregnancy of its literary and political title (and its inversion), but was subjected to another slight modification. The original text was conceived to name the cities where the radical political movements of the late 1960s had either originated (as in Amsterdam, Berlin, and Nanterre) or subsequently found their internationalist expansion (as in Brussels, Milan, Venice). In its incarnation as a plaque, the text omits four cities—Belgrade, Louvain, Prague, and Washington.

The dateline of the second open letter by Broodthaers indicates that he no longer writes from a (recently occupied) traditional art institution, but from the opening of an international art world event: Kassel's *Documenta IV.* This, needless to say, was an exhibition that did not at that time include artists like Marcel Broodthaers.[26] What the show did represent, however, and what it became instantly notorious for doing, was a peculiar synthesis of Pop art on the one hand and late modernist abstraction on the other. The latter was presented in an immense range of reductivist geometric variations ("Post-Painterly Abstraktion" is the title of one of the catalogue essays), with examples ranging from Josef Albers and Richard Paul Lohse, to the Op art of Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely, to the newly emerged American contributions to that tradition in—to European eyes in the late 1960s—the stunning guise of Minimal art with works by Carl Andre, Jo Baer, Larry Bell, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, and Frank Stella.

The titles of the other three catalogue essays clearly indicate the spectrum of the art world's concerns at the time: "Probleme der Pop Art," "Op Art und Kinetik," and "Graphics and Objects: Multiple Art." It is easier in hindsight to understand why Broodthaers would have written the following text for his open letter from *Documenta,* and why this text would constitute his own first contribution to the increasing galaxy of mechanically produced art objects:

> A cube, a sphere, a pyramid obeying the laws of the ocean. A cube, a sphere, a pyramid, a cylinder. A blue cube. A white sphere. A white pyramid. A white cylinder. We will not make any more



Marcel Broodthaers, *Pipe et formes académiques,* 1969–1970. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, edition of 7; 85 × 120 cm. Photo: Maria Gilissen.

> moves. Silence. The species marches on with jabbering eyes. A green cube. A blue sphere. A white pyramid. A black cylinder. Like the dreams one hardly remembers; worlds where the shark, the knife, and the cook are synonyms. A black cube. A black pyramid. A sphere and a black cylinder. I prefer to close my eyes and walk into the night. The squid's ink will describe the clouds and the distant earth. A yellow sphere. A yellow pyramid. A yellow cube that melts in the water, the air, and the fire.

It would thus seem that the plaques, both as a type and a category of Broodthaers's work, correspond at least partially to the condition of geometrical art at that historical moment. This critical reflection on geometric abstraction occurs in every detail of their textual and visual form, as well as in their materials and production. Displacing the political pamphlet or agitational handout, they exchange the direct and instrumental language of political polemic and communication for that of art's allegorical metalanguage; and they assume the guise of an advertising device announcing their status as discursive aesthetic objects. But the plaques also insist that the suspension of critique and communication is externally determined, enforced by the seemingly inevitable transition from the political realm to the cultural. It is this suspension of the political that Broodthaers perceived to be the condition necessary to the process of aestheticization and it occurs precisely in the transition from language to visual object, a moment that the plaques reenact programmatically in every single feature.

The technical process of their manufacture (a standard and relatively primitive process of vacuum forming a sheet of plastic over a mold/relief of wooden letters and fiberboard cut-out shapes), seems to have perfectly accommodated Broodthaers's needs. As for their typographic design, it is in these plaques that the artist finally overcomes even the last remnants of Cubo-Futurist and Dadaist typography. This decisive break takes place both at the level of the specifics of avant-garde typography as much as at the level of design strategies that had appeared in the pages of the traditionally formatted poetry books or in the paradoxically "auratic" collage originals. By contrast, Broodthaers's deployment of

the casting process not only allowed for a complete integration of typographic and formal elements in one continuous surface but also incorporated the negative white space that the traditional page or the ground of the collage still had to offer. Thus, the erasure of language in these panels seems to result first of all as an inevitable consequence of the casting process itself, where language appears literally blinded (blind-stamped), and where it acquires the status of the relief at the cost of readability. Poetic text, artistic object, discursive classification, and institutional demarcation are all literally made "of a piece," and of one material; in their final format they are framed as mere advertisement and, in their final form, they are contained as mere object (another art commodity). It is this homogenization (with all its losses of functional difference or of experiential specificity) that these plaques accomplish more than any of Broodthaers's earlier works, even though, as we have seen, the necessity for these strategies is already fully recognized in 1964 in the sculpture *Pense-Bête*.

The strategies that Broodthaers employs in these plaques indicate an obvious and full awareness of previous pictorial devices as they had been developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s in both Europe and the United States. But monochromy and serial repetition, as these would have been known to Broodthaers from the work of Piero Manzoni, for example, acquire radically different qualities and functions in the blinding of the text of the *Industrial Poems*. Similarly, quasi-mechanical casting, the quintessentially anti-artistic process (at least since Duchamp's late work), which had been widely assimilated in the work of artists of the early 1960s, operates here in an inverted manner. Broodthaers's provocative literalness, turning this industrial process back onto its original function of sign production, rather than projecting it onto the production of aesthetic objects, deploys this process precisely to resist the aestheticization of technology.

It would seem, then, that Broodthaers's work since 1968 was increasingly motivated by a desire to contest these aesthetic practices on their own territory and their own terms. In order to perform this task successfully, his own work had to mimic the dominant stylistic fashions that rapidly emerged and succeeded one another after the mid-1960s. The inherently mythical nature of art production with its constantly renewed claims to provide innovation and pleasure, while actually pro-

hibiting recognition of the conditions of its own restrictions, becomes the target of Broodthaers's mythoclastic project. It is directed at the visual object's false specialization, at the condition of the work of art as commodity, as much as at its inherent cultural function of providing ideological affirmation and class legimitation.

Inevitably, such an approach required various rhetorical strategies: not only mimetic paraphrase and elliptical allegory, but also an immediate and instrumental use of language and of polemical commentary on the artistic production of his peers. Thus, in an open letter of April 1968, mailed in response to an invitation to participate in an international group exhibition in Lignano, Broodthaers already distances himself from a range of contemporary stylistic currencies:

> At first I displayed objects of everyday reality—mussels, eggs, pots, and advertisement imagery. This point of departure inscribed me within the context of "nouveau" réalisme and sometimes that of Pop Art . . . Today when the image destined for current consumption has assumed the subtleties and violence of nouveau réalisme and pop art, I would hope that definitions of art would support a critical vision both of society and of art as well as of art criticism itself. The language of forms must be united with that of words. There are no "Primary Structures."[27]

In what had become his typical strategy of publicly contradicting (or correcting, or updating) himself, Broodthaers soon forwarded another letter to the organizers of the Lignano exhibition, this one dated August 27, 1968. Extensively quoting his earlier letter, he comments upon his statements, arguing that

> today, in August, I would have preferred to have the word "repression" printed rather than "consumption," even though the two terms have a tendency to be confused with one another. Current events generate new synonyms. . . . There are no "Primary Structures" . . . I forgot to justify this assertion. That is evident because half of it is missing. This is not the moment, dear friends, to

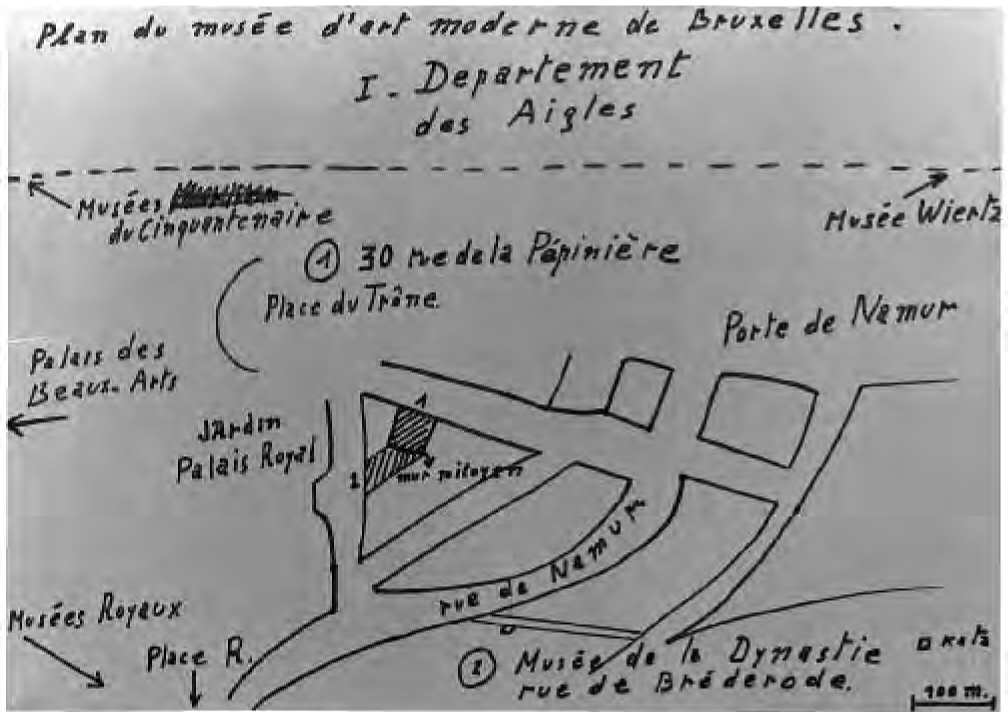
Marcel Broodthaers, *Il n'y a pas de structures primaires,* 1968. Oil on canvas, 77.5 × 115 cm. Photo: Maria Gilissen.

conclude by confessing to you that on 999 days out of 1,000, I am exposed only to boredom.[28]

In this concluding remark, with its deliberate enigma concerning "Primary Structures" (what could figure as their other half in Broodthaers's thinking: secondary myth or the sequel of "primary structures," namely, Conceptual art?) and its peculiar exaggeration (the 999 days of boredom out of 1,000), Broodthaers once again implicates newly emerging aesthetic strategies, in this case those of Conceptual art, in his constantly critical but elliptical paraphrase. Conceptualism's strategies of extreme spatial and temporal expansion and the recourse to systematic ordering and serialization, typical of the work of many artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Stanley Brouwn's *1 Step to 10,000 Steps,* Alighiero e Boetti's *The 1,000 Longest Rivers,* On Kawara's *1,000,000 Years,* Hanne Darboven's accounting procedures of years and centuries), find their polemical paraphrase and comic travesty in Broodthaers's commonsensical pose.

If these artists incorporated the conditions of what Theodor W. Adorno had notoriously called the "totally administered world" into the very structure and material principles of their work (creating a period style of the index card and the looseleaf binder, of the Xerox machine and the filing cabinet, of the typewriter and the Telex machine) in order to develop one of the most significant and authentic aesthetic changes of the postwar era, Broodthaers, the dialectician, replied to this aestheticization of bureaucracy with the bureaucratization of the aesthetic. Thus on September 7, 1968, twenty days before the actual opening of his museum, he issued another open letter, claiming it to have originated from the "Cabinet des Ministres de la Culture" in Ostende (the former home of James Ensor, a Flemish North Sea bathing resort and fishing port, and the least likely place in Belgium for the offices of the minister of culture to be found). He signs this letter not yet as director of the newly founded museum—a role he will assume shortly thereafter—but with the signature of an accessory: "For one of the ministers: Marcel Broodthaers."

This letter announces to the "customers and the curious" the imminent opening ceremony of the *Département des Aigles* of the newly founded *Musée d'Art*



Marcel Broodthaers, *Plan du Musée d'Art Moderne de Bruxelles,* 1969. Red felt pen on cardboard, 59.5 × 85 cm. Collection: Benjamin Katz, Köln.

Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle,* Brussels, 1968. Photo: Maria Gilissen.

Moderne, and it promises to let "poetry and the plastic arts shine hand-in-hand." The letter concludes with the statement, "We hope that our formula 'disinterestedness plus admiration' will seduce you."[29]

Once again, this letter contains a second textual element that is clearly separate from the letter itself, an accumulation of words, serially repeated and placed in a strict eight-line, eight-column grid. The "poem" can be read either vertically, which would imply the eightfold repetition of each term, or laterally in lines of nine words each, repeating the words *objet métal esprit* three times. Five of these eight lines from the open letter would soon reappear in identical form on one of the plastic plaques, presumably the third of the series, which would be produced in late 1968 and titled *Téléphone.* Two additional lines of text appear on the plaque, and the ideogrammatic rendering of a telephone repeated seven times forms another line. The juxtaposition of these elements provides an example of what Broodthaers might have had in mind when he spoke of the shining appearance of poetry and the plastic arts joining hands.

The two additional lines of text are repeated once each and are combined with a third line of the word accumulation *Objet Métal Esprit* (which is now repeated only twice per line, rather than three times as in the open letter), visually forming what at first glance might appear as a three-line verse of a poem. The lines from the plaque that accompany the accumulation of terms already found in the open letter now read as follows:

> I am made to register signals.
> I am a signal. I I I I I I I I

The French *je,* repeated eight times, registers as a fragment of the continuously reiterated *objet,* and this again functions as what one could call phonetic metonymy, establishing a dialectical relationship between *je* (the shifter "I"), the particularized syllable of the word *objet,* and the word *objet.* The version of the open letter as *Industrial Poem* incorporates yet another element from an even earlier open letter, written from the Palais des Beaux-Arts, which states: "What is culture? I write. I have taken the floor. I am a negotiator for an hour or two. I say I.

Marcel Broodthaers, *Téléphone,* 1969. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, 85 × 120 cm.

I re-assume my personal attitude. I am afraid of anonymity. (I would like to control the meaning/direction of culture.)"[30]

Offering itself at first glance as an emphatic declaration of artistic intent, this statement becomes increasingly contradictory when considered within its historical context, namely, a situation of collective political action that had just been compromised and silenced by negotiations. Saying "I" in this collective context and thereby resisting anonymity meant, paradoxically, yielding to the pressures of pacification. Cultural practice as a process of continuous reconciliation emerges from within this compromise. At the same time it is in the speech act that the subject constitutes itself as an instantiation of resistance, as it is within and through language that the dominant mythology of the visual object can be dismantled. Accordingly, the meaning and place assigned to the shifter *je* in the plaque *Téléphone* are, indeed, continuously shifting, and can relate to the speaking subject as much as to the terms *Objet, Métal, Esprit,* either in succession or all at once. In true shifter fashion, the *je* can alternately refer to the telephone ("I am made to register signals"), to the plaque as a sign in and of itself ("I am a signal"), or to the *je* of the speaker or of the reader.

Broodthaers repeatedly emphasized that the model of language upon which he preferred to base his work was that of direct, communicative action among individual subjects, going beyond his own emphatically reiterated demand that language be joined to the (visual) objects of artistic production. In the next open letter, written and published in Düsseldorf on September 19, 1968, eight days before the opening of the *Musée d'Art Moderne,* he states, "I feel solidarity with all approaches which have objective communication as their goal." Or again, a little over a year later in a letter to David Lamelas, he writes, "How I tend to defend a sense of reality rather than theory or dream." But it is in the earlier letter that the dialectical nature of Broodthaers's reflection upon instrumental language and communicative action becomes apparent. It emerges when he instantly negates the historical possibilities of language as communicative action, except for those that would originate "[in] a revolutionary critique of the dishonesty of those extraordinary means that we call ours: the press, the radio, television in black and color."[31]

Paradoxically, in this very same letter, where the goal of "objective communication" is defined as the revolutionary critique of mass-cultural and ideological domination, the "Museum" is explicitly presented and "Département des Aigles" appears for the first time on the letterhead. In a manifest contradiction to the claim for a political critique of mass-cultural representations, the *Museum* is now introduced with the following descriptive statement:

> MUSEUM . . . a rectangular director. A round servant . . . A triangular cashier . . . A square guard . . . To my friends, people are not admitted. One plays here daily until the end of the world.

This text would serve as the basis for the next *Industrial Poem,* titled *Museum* (1968)—the object that most clearly established the intricate parallelism between the plaques and the museum fictions.[32] Again, the modifications between the two versions of the text illuminate the categorical differences between the two presentational modes and the radically different conceptions of language deployed in them. The statement "People are not admitted"—ringing with connotations of class and politics—is changed into the more grotesque and authoritarian "children are not admitted." The list of the geometricized administrative roles is equally modified.

Obviously, Broodthaers decided that the plaque required a text whose appearance would seem more devoted to serious reflection on visuality and plasticity than the open letter's rather comical conflation of the discourse on abstract geometric forms with the language of administration. The listing of the quintessentially modernist terms of visual neutrality—"a form a surface a volume"—suddenly concludes with the unexpected qualifier "servile," a term simultaneously setting up a link with the subsequent listing of the institutional and administrative functions which will now read: "A director a [female] servant and a cashier." And the statement "One plays here daily until the end of the world" is reduced to the laconic, "all day long until the end of time."

From their very opening line of salutation, the open letters embody and practice Broodthaers's conception of language as an active exchange and direct

Marcel Broodthaers, *Enfants non admis,* 1969. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, 85 × 120 cm.

communication between politically defined subjects. The letters are generally addressed to "Chers amis," and this term is only occasionally changed, or else it appears in parentheses, accompanied by a "Cher monsieur." This occurs when the letter addresses an institution or an art official, comically indicating that, at the very moment that the shift onto the institutional level of aesthetic reception has transpired, a discursive alteration in the mode of address is already inevitable.

In opposition to the open letters, the *Industrial Poems* incorporate those transformations to which language is subjected in the process of acculturation: while now claiming to be a language of aesthetic rupture and transgression—and no longer one of communicative action—it ends up consistently in institutional containment, all the more so since the disavowal of that containment is the condition of its transgressive aesthetic appeal (recall his phrase, "we hope that our formula 'disinterestedness plus admiration' will seduce you").

It is this awareness that distinguishes Broodthaers's textual and visual constructs from the legacies of the avant-garde texts that they seem, at first glance, to resemble. They are texts that always already know that they will not

> escape their structural basis (as avant-garde texts in the guise of which they will enter into the analogical series of one of the general textual modes); nor will they escape from their ideological basis (they will always speak the language of the archetype, either for or against it); nor will they escape their institutional basis (they will be read—even after their posthumous destination—from the perspective of the institution).[33]

In conceiving his *Industrial Poems,* Broodthaers not only articulated this awareness of the peculiar condition of the avant-garde text, but also his skepticism against the general enthusiasm with which language was being incorporated into the works of Conceptual art.

And I assume that it is partially in response to this development that Broodthaers added another section to his *Museum,* the *Section Littéraire* from which a further group of open letters originated. The first, dated October 31,

1969, was addressed in English to a Conceptual artist. It begins with the reversal of the first of Sol LeWitt's "Sentences on Conceptual Art," reading:

> Conceptual artists are more rationalists rather than mystics . . . etc. . . . [34]

What follows is perhaps the most pointed critique of the Conceptual movement to be articulated by one of the artists whom art history has already relegated to that movement. Once again staging the ritual of a public self-correction, Broodthaers negates the validity of a statement he had submitted as his original contribution ("to be presented on the level of the page") to the first major European exhibition of Conceptual art:

> Let us imagine, in the meantime, dear sir (dear friends), the real text and the reality of the text as a single world. And its roads, its oceans, its clouds as if they were those of liberty and justice.[35]

Now the artist suggests the following correction:

> In one of my last letters, dated August 25, still under the aegis of the XIXth century and addressed to the organizers of an exhibition currently in Leverkusen, instead of "its roads, its oceans, its clouds as if they were those of liberty and justice" one should read the following: "its roads, its oceans, its clouds as if those of repression and absence." Because the reality of the text and the text of the real are far from forming a single world.[36]

As of 1969 the museum's *Section Littéraire* seems to have taken on the function of questioning the validity of precisely that type of art practice where the reality of the text and the text of the real seemed in fact to have found their synthesis. Broodthaers's allegorical impulse in the *Section Littéraire* simultaneously invalidates and conserves. Even as it contests the legitimacy of the historical

Marcel Broodthaers, *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle,* 1968. Vacuum-formed plastic plaque, 85 × 120 cm.

avant-garde text in the present, it historicizes present practices by linking them to their modernist origins. At the same time it recognizes and conserves the original and immutable radicality of that legacy. This impulse generated one of Broodthaers's most important book projects, the transformation of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* into a version subtitled *Image.* In this intervention Broodthaers erases the text of the poem and replaces it by spatial configurations of the poem's original linear sequence and typographical variations, which he identified as the poem's "traces" (*sillons*).

This book, undoubtedly one of Broodthaers's central works, parallels the plaques in its attitude toward the textual legacies of the avant-garde, in its treatment of language and visual plasticity, and in its allegorization of conceptual art. He comments on it in an open letter dated December 2, 1969, issued on the occasion of the opening of his exhibition *Exposition Littéraire autour de Mallarmé* at the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp:[37]

> Why? Without doubt, I once encountered Magritte, long ago, and he invited me to contemplate this poem. So, I forgot it; I contemplated it . . . today, I make this Image. I say farewell. A long period of life. Farewell to all, to the men of letters that are deceased.
>
> The dead artists. New! New? Perhaps. Excepted. A Constellation.[38]

Though disguised as personal commemoration (and certainly originating in it), and as a farewell to the poets, the sincerity of this homage is belied by the deliberately unacknowledged Mallarmé quotation at the end of the explanation of his project. Like the activities of the *Section Littéraire,* it serves once again as an allegorical commentary upon the aesthetic practices of the present. In exact reverse of the claims of Conceptual art, Broodthaers's visualization of textuality now goes as far as presenting Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* in a special edition of twelve copies in which the spatialized version of the poem has been engraved into anodized aluminum, literally reifying and deliberately commodifying the poem's past insistence on its linguistic and visual autonomy. While Conceptual

art disavowed both its historical origins (in the quest of the avant-garde text for an absolute self-referentiality) and its contemporary dilemma (in the text's radical denial of objecthood to which it nonetheless remains bound by institutional and economic frames of mediation), Broodthaers's objectified textuality foregrounds these disavowed conditions.

After four years of existence, Broodthaers's fictitious museum was officially closed by its founder and director, an action which served as his contribution to *Documenta V* in 1972. On this occasion, however, yet another "section" was opened and a final open letter was issued under the auspices of the *Musée d'Art Moderne* (all subsequent open letters were simply issued by Marcel Broodthaers). Published by the *Sections Art Moderne et Publicité,* the letter justifies the closure of the *Musée d'Art Moderne* because it had—as the letter argues—passed from a "heroic and solitary form to one bordering on consecration due to the help of . . . the *Documenta* exhibition. It is only logical that it would grind down in boredom."

The letter elaborates on the newly added *Section Publicité*—which in fact consisted an of an installation of documents and frames, photographs and catalogues, and one of the plaques—arguing,

> It seems a little premature to describe the intentions that have guided me in the realization of the section "Public Relations." Since its image coincides with that of the advertising section of the catalogue of *Documenta,* it will help me to avoid a long speech. Once you busy yourself with art, you will always fall from one catalogue to the next.[39]

Broodthaers's remarks remain at least partially cryptic, since, although the catalogue of *Documenta V* does contain a section that documents and analyzes advertising, this chapter does not reproduce any imagery reminiscent of Broodthaers's work. By contrast, the catalogue section "Political Propaganda" begins with three pages of collected eagle images, which could almost have been borrowed from Broodthaers's catalogue of the *Section des Figures,* an exhibition staged earlier that year at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf; and in fact these pages had been inserted by the editors of the catalogue "in the manner of Broodthaers."[40] More

important, though, is Broodthaers's remark that "once you busy yourself with art you always fall from one catalogue to the next." For this serves as a renewed critique of the Conceptualists' declaration that supplements such as catalogues and exhibition announcements are not only legitimate carriers of artistic information but also egalitarian forms of art distribution.[41]

While Broodthaers was clearly reflecting on the role that these disavowed supplements play in the constitution of the artistic construct and its readings, he opposed their transformation into an actual work with all the vehemence of his annihilating humor. The problematic status of the auratic original, which had emerged from a history segmented by class and its radically diverse options for sublimation, could not, according to Broodthaers, be resolved by a mere abolition of high art's status and commodity form. While the experiences embedded in the objects of that past and its legacy had to be defended against the desublimation of the present, the consciousness of the present as one of political conflict had to be defended against the artistic promises of the present to provide an instant solution of these contradictions. It is therefore only logical that when Broodthaers responds to the question of whether his own "supplements," such as the plaques, could actually be considered works of art, he says:

> [The plaques] are intended to be read on a double level—each one involved in a negative attitude which seems to me specific to the stance of the artist: not to place the message completely on one side alone, neither image nor text. That is, the refusal to deliver a clear message—as if this role were not incumbent upon the artist, and by extension upon all producers with an economic interest. . . . I prefer to sign my name to these booby traps.

And when asked what kind of spectators he intended to catch with these traps, he identified them as "simpletons":

> Well, those who take these plaques for pictures and hang them on their walls. Although there is no proof that the real simpleton isn't

the author himself, who thought he was a linguist able to leap over the bar in the signifier/signified formula, but who might in fact have been merely playing the professor.[42]

Notes

1

Stéphane Mallarmé, "The Impressionists and Edouard Manet" (1876), quoted in Penny Florence, *Mallarmé, Manet & Redon* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 18.

2

According to Maria Gilissen-Broodthaers, the artist identified these works by the title *Industrial Poems* only once, on the occasion of their first exhibition in Paris in 1968. The title might, in fact, point backward to Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, "De la littérature industrielle," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (4e série, 1839), pp. 682–683.

3

Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward" (after an interview with Irmeline Lebeer), in *Marcel Broodthaers,* ed. Yves Gevaert (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1974), pp. 65–68. This and all subsequent quotations are from the English translation of this interview, in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ed., *Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 39–48.

4

Ibid., p. 43.

5

On November 15, 1945, Broodthaers participated for the first time in a gathering of Belgian surrealists along with Pol Bury, Achille Chavée, Paul Colinet, Christian Dotremont, Marcel Marien, Louis Scutenaire, among others. See "Lettre de Chavée à Magritte et Nougé," in Marcel Marien, *L'activité surréaliste en Belgique* (Brussels: Editions Lebeer-Hossmann, 1979), p. 342.

In 1947 Broodthaers signed the manifesto "Pas de quartier dans la révolution" along with René Magritte and Paul Nougé, and in 1948 he published two poems ("Projet pour un film" and "Trois poèmes de l'île déserte") in the journal *Le surréalisme révolutionnaire.*

6

Marcel Broodthaers, *Charles Baudelaire: Je haïs le mouvement qui déplace les lignes* (Hamburg: Editions Hossmann, 1973). The actual reference reads as follows: "This book finds its origin in a

seminar by Lucien Goldmann on Baudelaire, which took place in Brussels during the winter of 1969–1970 and to which I was invited to participate as an *artist.*"

7

Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 39.

8

The work under discussion is *Pense-Bête* (1964), which is described in great detail in Dieter Schwarz's essay "Look! Books in Plaster," in Buchloh, ed., *Broodthaers,* pp. 57–66.

For subsequent examples of this crucial strategy, we are thinking here namely of Broodthaers's work *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard,* published as a book in 1969 and discussed by Anne Rorimer in her essay "The Exhibition at the MTL Gallery in Brussels," in Buchloh, ed., *Broodthaers,* pp. 101–126; and the later work *Pauvre Belgique* (1974) which is the subject of Yves Gevaert's essay "Pauvre Belgique: An Asterisk in History," in the same volume (pp. 183–195).

9

For an example of this misconception of Broodthaers's critique and its reclamation for a conservative ideology, see Michael Compton, "Marcel Broodthaers," in *Marcel Broodthaers* (London: Tate Gallery, 1980), pp. 13–25.

10

From the exhibition announcement *Marcel Broodthaers* (Brussels: Galerie Saint-Laurent, 1964) (my translation). The announcement was printed on tear sheets from magazines reproducing advertisements.

11

Marcel Broodthaers, "To be *bien pensant* or not to be. To be blind," originally in French in *Le privilège de l'art* (Oxford, U.K.: Museum of Modern Art, 1975). English translation by Paul Schmidt in Buchloh, ed., *Broodthaers,* p. 35 (translation modified by the author).

12

Jean Michel Vlaeminckx, "Entretien avec Marcel Broodthaers," *Degré zéro,* no. 1 (1965), n.p. (my translation).

13

Walter Benjamin, "Zentralpark," in *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 1, part 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 659.

14

Stéphane Mallarmé, "Préface," *Oeuvres complètes,* ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 455.

15

Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 119–129.

16

Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916; Paris: Payot, 1964), p. 57.

17

For an overview of the various interpretive models in the context of phonetic poetry, see Willard Bohn, *Aesthetics of Visual Poetry 1914–1928* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

18

Marcel Broodthaers, *Vingt ans après* (Brussels: R. Lucas, 1969), n.p.

19

Alain Jouffroy, untitled text on exhibition flyer for Marcel Broodthaers, *Poèmes industriels* (Paris, Librairie St.-Germain-des-Prés, October 29, 1968).

20

See facsimile reproduction of manifesto, dated May 30, 1968, in the exhibition catalogue *Museum in Motion* (The Hague, 1979), p. 249.

21

Marcel Broodthaers, public letter, "Palais des Beaux Arts le 7/6/68," reprinted in *Museum in Motion,* p. 249.

22

Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 45.

23

Broodthaers had seen a crucial work by David Lamelas at the Argentinian Pavilion of the 1968 Venice Biennale and had become friends with him during Lamelas's subsequent visits and exhibitions in Antwerp and Brussels.

24

Marcel Broodthaers, quoted by Johannes Cladders, in "Befragung der Realität: Bildwelten Heute," in *Documenta V* (Kassel, 1972), p. 162.

25

Broodthaers wrote about his plaque titled *The Goose:*

> "The Wing and the Goose" or "The Goose and the Wing," depending on whether one looks from the left or from the right. 1. The Goose: the painting is

> white like the feathers of a goose. The letter types are clumsy to imitate the bird's walk, besides, the wing is placed clumsily between the commas. Did this painting in white plastic make those who produced it think? In order to understand this question, one must know that this type of image depends directly on an industrial technique, on skilled labor. 2. This "painting" is black; the goose has become a wing and the commas have only retained the appearance of commas. In reality they are the indication of a blue dream running along the text. Dream of the goose lost in a blue and stupid world. I would add that my "paintings" are not worth much—not that they are not worth anything. But they are meant for people who prefer paintings to money; unless a change occurs and causes my prices to rise.

26

While Broodthaers did not participate in *Documenta IV,* he attended the opening because he was represented in a group show organized by an Antwerp gallery that had begun to support his work (the Wide White Space Gallery of Anny de Decker and Bernd Lohaus). On the occasion of the opening of *Documenta IV,* several galleries had organized an exhibition of work by contemporary artists in the Hotel Hessenland in Kassel. As had been the case at the opening of the Milan *triennale* earlier that year, the opening of *Documenta IV* was perceived as a traditional enterprise of the cultural establishment and was confronted with active protests from numerous members of the German extra-parliamentary opposition, political activists, artists, and students. For comprehensive documentation of these events and the spirit of "anti-Documenta" protest, see Friedrich Wolfram Heubach, ed., *Interfunktionen,* vol. 1, no. 1 (1968), a journal born out of cultural protest against the domination of the exhibition by mainstream institutional and market interests.

27

Marcel Broodthaers, open letter, dated "Brussels, April '68," mailed to the Swiss-American art journal *Art International* and published in the catalogue of the exhibition *Lignano Biennale 1* (Lignano, 1968). Broodthaers clearly refers to the title of the exhibition *Primary Structures,* organized by Kynaston McShine for the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966. This show would subsequently serve for a while as a stylistic identification for post-Minimal and proto-Conceptual painting and sculpture. The then—at least in Europe—common confusion between and/or simultaneity of the various artistic practices with which Broodthaers would have seen himself confronted is evidenced by an exhibition that ran parallel to *Documenta IV,* titled

Primary Structure, Minimal Art, Pop Art, Anti-Form (Galerie Rolf Ricke, Kassel, June–September 1968).

In 1968, presumably at the time of this letter or slightly later, Broodthaers also painted a rather polemical canvas, with the same title, *Il n'y a pas de structures primaires,* inscribed in white on a black field, along with an accumulation of dispersed signatures (e.g., M.B.) and the two words "signature" and "catalogue" and the dates 1964 and 1968. Erasures performed by overpainting and crossout marks, and the even distribution of the text over the panel, make the painting appear to be a direct parallel, if not an anticipation of the plastic plaques Broodthaers produced at that time or shortly thereafter.

28

Marcel Broodthaers, open letter, dated "Lignano, August 27, 1968."

29

Marcel Broodthaers, public letter, "September 7, 1968," reproduced in *Museum in Motion,* p. 249.

30

Marcel Broodthaers, public letter, "Palais des Beaux Arts, May 7, 1968," republished in *Museum in Motion,* p. 249. The French original reads:

> Qu'est-ce que la culture? J'écris. J'ai pris la parole. Je suis négociateur pour une heure ou deux. Je dis je. Je reprends mon attitude personelle. Je crains l'anonymat. (J'aimerais contrôler le sens de la culture).

The line "Je dis je" appears first in the poem "Ma Rhétorique," published in 1966 in a small catalogue that accompanied Broodthaers's first exhibition with the Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp. (See Marcel Broodthaers, *Moules, oeufs, frites, pots, charbon, perroquets* [Antwerp, 1966], n.p.) It is in this catalogue, as well as in the special issue of the magazine *Phantomas* (no. 62 [February 1966]), that one can see examples of text accumulations by Broodthaers that fully abandon the formats of his earlier poetry in favor of serially structured, visual and textual grids consisting of three or four nouns only—repeated over and over—anticipating the textual formats of the *Industrial Poems.*

31

Marcel Broodthaers, public letter, "Département des Aigles, Düsseldorf, September 19, 1968," reproduced in *Museum in Motion,* p. 250. The end of the original letter contains a typo—the omission of the letter "o" from "en couleur," generating "enculeur," i.e., the

bugger and manipulator—a pun as deliberate as the term "télévision en noir" (instead of "noir et blanc").

32

In a statement from 1968, Broodthaers comments on the proximity of the plaques to the museum fictions:

> The atmosphere of this museum is also that of the plastic panels. These plaques (85 × 125 cm), fabricated in the manner of industrially produced signs, occupy the border between object and image. According to their mechanical production they seem to deny their status as art objects, or rather I should say, they tend to prove art and its reality by means of "negativity." These plaques express irrelevance; they refer to something other than themselves.

See *BROODTHAERS,* exhibition announcement, published by Benjamin Katz, Galerie Gerda Bassenge, Berlin, 1970.

33

Charles Grivel, "Production de l'intérêt romanesque. Un état du texte," *Approaches to Semiotics,* no. 34 (1973), pp. 64ff.

34

Sol LeWitt's "Sentences on Conceptual Art" were first published in the English journal *Art and Language* (vol. 1, no. 1 [May 1969], pp. 11–13), and shortly thereafter in the catalogue to the exhibition *Konzeption-Conception* (ed. Konrad Fischer and Rolf Wedewer [Leverkusen, Germany: Städtisches Museum, Schloss Morsbroich, 1969]), in which Broodthaers participated. LeWitt's original sentence read: "Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists."

35

Marcel Broodthaers, public letter, "Brussels, August 25, 1969," submitted as a contribution to the exhibition and exhibition catalogue *Konzeption/Conception.*

36

Marcel Broodthaers, public letter to David Lamelas, dated "Brussels, October 31," and identified as originating from the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Section Littéraire, Département des Aigles.*

37

The frequently used abbreviation for this gallery, WWS, served Broodthaers as the basis for an additional pun in the announcement of his exhibition, which he subtitled, "Marcel Broodthaers at the Debliou-debliou/S." It simultaneously mocks the European craze for all

(art) things American, as well as the 1960s fashion to posture galleries and art dealers as the disinterested, neutral, and efficient if not merely administrative agencies of the ventures of contemporary art, indicated through names such as "MTL," "Art and Project," "Modern Art Agency," "Wide White Space."

38

Marcel Broodthaers, open letter, "Antwerp, December 2, 1969." René Magritte had presented a copy of Mallarmé's posthumously published *Un coup de dés* (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Française, 1914) to Broodthaers at the beginning of their friendship in the mid-1940s.

39

Marcel Broodthaers, leaflet published by the *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Sections Art Moderne et Publicité*. For an extensive discussion of the *Section Publicité,* see my essay "Contemplating Publicity: Marcel Broodthaers' *Section Publicité,*" in *Marcel Broodthaers: Section Publicité,* ed. Benjamin Buchloh (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1995). This catalogue also contains complete documentation of the *Section Publicité,* including its history, and its contents and the letter quoted here.

40

For an extensive discussion of the Düsseldorf exhibition *Section des Figures: The Eagle from the Oligocene until Today,* see the essay by Rainer Borgemeister in Buchloh, ed., *Broodthaers*.

41

Only one of the plaques actually figured as an element in the installation of the *Section Publicité,* the one inscribed "Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Service Publicité."

42

Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," p. 42.

The Museum and the Monument: Daniel Buren's *Les couleurs/Les formes*

> Museums, as modern ceremonial monuments, belong to the same architectural class as temples, churches, shrines, and certain kinds of palaces. Although all architecture has an ideological aspect, only ceremonial monuments are dedicated exclusively to ideology. Their social importance is underscored by the enormous resources lavished on their construction and decoration. Absorbing more manual and imaginative labor than any other type of architecture, these buildings affirm the power and social authority of a patron class.
> —*Carol Duncan/Allan Wallach*[1]

In historical periods of economic crisis that indicate the necessity for basic changes in the organization of the means of production and the distribution of social wealth, liberalism turns out its complementary phase, authoritarianism. The arts in these times undergo equally radical and paradoxical changes. The

First published in *Daniel Buren: Les couleurs/Les formes,* ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Jean-Hubert Martin (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou; Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), pp. 6–24.

increase of "private" and "public" support, i.e., corporate and state monies, leads to an enormous expansion in the variety, size, and scale of artistic production. This gigantic apparatus of industrialized culture serves as public proof of liberalism's seemingly unlimited generosity in encouraging individual cultural production as the symbolic legitimation of private enterprise. At the same time, it fulfills the elementary necessity to displace impulses of critical negation, shifting them from the perspective of political self-organization to the realm of aesthetic self-expression.

This attitude may either appear in condescending loyalty and apparent generosity toward aesthetic producers by corporate sponsors, or it may emerge in carefully orchestrated activities of control by the state support systems. Both approaches evidently refuse the idea of linking cultural production any longer to political analysis and critique. In moments of socio-economic crisis, the cultural support system therefore rids itself of its public risk factors, such as the discourse of critical theory within aesthetic practice; and even the last vestige of artistic "freedom"—to simulate critical self-reflexivity, autonomy, and transgression—seems to have vanished. When state support and corporate enterprise have finally taken full command of artistic production and distribution, formal opposition and conceptual negation become totally alien to the artistic project that aims to enter these support systems. Or, in reverse perspective: aesthetic producers now totally conform to these new conditions imposed by the governmental or corporate support structure, even though they might have celebrated radical individuality, the role of the unique producer supplying the individual private collector under the more affluent and liberal circumstances of the 1960s.

Art production as a symbolic (and substitutional) ritual of subject formation is intrinsically intertwined with the social organization of individuation: a liberal surplus of personal freedom as incentive to increase standards of consumption, like that of the late 1960s and early 1970s, could generate forms of art production that were defined by radical and rational dimensions as well as by progressive formal attitudes. These were some of the characteristics of Minimal and Conceptual art. In the present moment, by contrast, artistic producers are free once again from the strictures of rational and empiricist reflexivity—as long as

they remain within a traditional definition and ideology of *culture:* to update, develop, and differentiate the functions of the cultural alibi. Thus, any aesthetic productivity that becomes increasingly dependent on government or corporate support will eventually end up as a form of cultural civil service whose function it is merely to maintain the myth of individual productivity, at a moment when the working and living conditions of everyday life destroy individual productivity and have finally made even the concept of subjectivity totally obsolete.

Just as artists seem to be hardly aware of the political implications of corporate and state patronage, so the "liberal" corporate and state patron hardly care about the actual cultural production generated through its subsidies—as long as the output does not seriously threaten the pacifiying effects of the cultural-economical pact, and as long as it maintains the myth that "culture" *can actually flourish within the framework of the late capitalist state.* To maintain the illusion of an independent national cultural identity, literally anything "goes," as long as it goes into the governmental and private museum institutions, art banks, and administration offices, or circulates in the labyrinthine tracks of an incestuous "alternative space" system. Under these conditions, the economic resources for art production lie halfway between governmentally administered dumping grounds for surplus tax monies and the generous allocation of public relations budgets that help to create and maintain a corporation's public image of the committed sponsor.

Governmental and corporate interests of national and ideological self-representation operate inevitably out of utter disregard for the individual artist's motivation. Therefore, particularly in moments of growing economic crisis, when the budgets have to be restricted, the claim for the culture's national identity turns into outright chauvinism. Then, the artistic producers themselves develop an appropriate ideology of regionalism, of the necessity to preserve national cultural identity, to protect the privileged purses of cultural civil servants. This happens, ironically enough, precisely at a point when the national bourgeoisie of a country, in the face of imminent crisis, can be more openly observed in its flagrant practices of exporting capital and labor and selling out national resources to its multinational corporate affiliations, precisely

those powers that represent culturally the imperialist threat to their assumed national identity. And it is worthwhile to notice that precisely those styles (e.g., Neo-Expressionism) that claim the deepest involvement in the national or regional heritage and its forms become, in those periods of severe restoration, the most interchangeable stereotypes, fully depersonalized authoritarian clichés.

This fairly abstract process manifests itself in the formal and material development of certain works of recent art. Whereas art of the sixties and early seventies had been marked by a distinct tendency to abolish traditional art genres and categories, it seems that more recent work by younger artists, both in Europe and in North America, tends to revitalize the traditions of the specifically *sculptural* in sculpture, the specifically *painterly* in painting, the specifically *theatrical* in performance activities. The artistic investigations of the sixties had at least partially attempted to dissolve all remnants of these ubiquitous *beaux-arts* classifications, for the sake of a new integration—if only in a symbolic mode—of art production as well as social production (such had been the case earlier during the few heroic and successful moments of Russian Productivism and Constructivism and in some of the practices of Dada). However, the present-day reversal of these progressive aesthetic positions seems only to be the blind reflection of more fundamental political changes. In the reemergence of restrictive conventional categories the sculptural now tends to be *monumental,* and the pictorial becomes inevitably *figurative-representational, ornamental,* or *expressive* (or, as in most cases, a mixture of all these, becoming simply *decorative*). Traditional aesthetic categories seem to offer themselves as readily available patterns of production that correspond to the more general reinforcement of behavioral patterns that have been conditioned by the priorities of private property. Abandoned modes of perception (and aesthetic production) seem to linger around in history like deserted tools of a formerly potent force, ready to be reintroduced at any given moment by those artists who voluntarily accept the limitations of being nothing but the blind instruments and timely executors of a reactionary legacy. Those aesthetic structures, even though they may have appeared obsolete and discarded in certain periods, reappear now as historical carcasses: no

longer do they contain any dynamic of a progressive development and its cultural reflection, but they serve solely to adorn political restoration with the halo of cultural perpetuity.

Sculpture as Monument

A general awakening of a new engagement with public monumental sculpture seems to be one of the aesthetic reactions to the growing disillusionment in the domain of the social real. As the arts are currently deprived of their capacities of establishing a cultural dialectic of critical negation, they seem to find cynical compensation in the expanded size and scale as much as the renewed materiality of painterly and sculptural work. Any idea of an avant-garde practice that could be capable, not only of analyzing a given historical reality but potentially even of introducing a dimension of critical cultural change—if only within the domain of its own artistic discourse—seems to have been discarded entirely in favor of sheer material solidity and opulence, guaranteeing the continuity and endurance of the tradition. Frank Stella's recent reliefs as corporate lobby decorations and Richard Serra's gigantic expansions of Cor-Ten steel that claim to reflect public space are cases in point.

Monuments tend to be erected in periods of history when the utopian dimension of critical negation, the concrete deconstruction of false consciousness by radical thought and real political practice, are being coopted into the massive representation of an affirmation of the actually existing order of things. The monument therefore seems to occupy the space and moment in history when memory as the source of dialectic alteration of a given reality is destroyed and lost. Monuments are implanted into that collective void of an absent memory of historical process and aspiration, and the monument's mass and size are awe-inspiring physical presences whose primary function now appears to be to balance the static depression resulting from a seemingly unchangeable status quo. Periods of growing consciousness, however, tend to destroy those monuments, as, for example, in the famous case of the destruction of the Place Vendôme column in 1871, according to Courbet's plans.

The Museum as Monument

In tandem with the development of monumental sculpture, we witness the transformation of museum architecture into modern ceremonial monuments, as Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach identify the phenomenon in their essay on the subject.[2] The enormous efforts to build new representative museum architecture—a phenomenon to be observed equally in Europe and in North America—originates in the same historical and ideological tendencies operative in the creation of public monuments.[3] The once utopian promise of the museum, to offer equality and public access to historic knowledge and cultural experience, is now perverted into a cynical strategy of populism that sells public legacies of bourgeois culture as a sedative/substitute. The function of these new culture cathedrals is neither to provide access to history as one of collective oppression and defeat, nor to give access to the work of artists in order to reveal it as the result of an exemplary struggle for individuation. Their function is to offer the myths of culture as easily consumable goods, following the general deception of all consumption to conceal its real price of labor. This illusion of an effortless public access is one of the central myths to be implemented by the museum's new strategies of cultural consumption.

Nowhere does this become more transparent, quite literally, than in the architectural structure of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, where Daniel Buren's works *Les couleurs: sculptures* and *Les formes: peintures* are located. The public cultural package is presented in an architectural sign system that speaks the language of the advertising campaign. The militantly modernist facade of this mythical "ship of modernity" is reminiscent of Russian Constructivist architecture inasmuch as it poses as a factory and as a place of production, yet at the same time recalls French Art Deco steamliner architecture with its utopian promise to take you away from everyday reality. The combination of all these elements, resulting in an architectural structure that oscillates between department store and tourist destination, suggests a spectacular offer: the free availability of commodified identity.

Les couleurs: sculptures, 1975–1977

Daniel Buren's work for the permanent collection of the Centre Pompidou, consisting of a series of flag-like signs to be installed on public and commercial buildings, is paradoxically titled *Les couleurs: sculptures*. As "les couleurs" also means in French the national flag, the work's title already inscribes it explicitly into a discourse of public monumentality by aligning it with official public signs of identity.

Flags, banners on vertically erected poles, traditionally suggest heroic accomplishments: victory, conquest, appropriation. They signal individual or collective, private or public identity: the belonging to a nationality, a corporation, a political party, or a club. To the extent, however, that it has become evident that the concept of nationality obstructs collective economic interest in the social and public sphere into a mere obedience to governmental rule, the flag as national emblem has lost its credibility (which does not preclude the false concepts of nationality from being reintroduced). The commercial and corporate flags on department stores and office buildings, or (especially in France) those on supermarkets and gas stations have, therefore, gained a higher degree of "objective reality" than the national emblems, since commercial flags stand for a genuine, collectively shared experience: the compulsive consumption of goods, the successful domination of human desire and demands, the glorious oppression of real needs, and the organized expropriation of surplus value resulting from alienated labor. Buren's work and its elements (fifteen rectangular pieces of vertically striped, colored and white cloth material, each 200 × 300 cm, the center stripe having been covered with white acrylic paint, to be installed on flagpoles on top of buildings throughout the city of Paris) align themselves within the discourse of identity signs through their form, their modes, and their place of installation. They stand in between the national emblems of enforced identity and governmental power (e.g., on top of the Palais Chaillot, the Grand Palais, or the Louvre, locations normally reserved for the installation of the French Tricolore), and the corporate signals of mercantile power (e.g., the department stores Galeries

Lafayette, Samaritaine, and Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville). By their shape and their placement, these elements (Buren's zero-sign striped material, the center stripe painted with white acrylic) are explicitly transformed from mere "aesthetic" objects into semi-functional objects of common usage.

Buren's use of flags in *Les couleurs* as highly overdetermined signs and quasi-functional objects, appearing simultaneously as aesthetic signs and real, contextually bound objects, continues and expands one particular feature of his practice that is not, however, a constitutive factor of all of his works. But Buren had incorporated already in a number of earlier pieces this extreme ambiguity into his work: its permanent shift between being an aesthetic sign and an element of everyday perceptual reality.

In a recent interview Buren pointed to this problem:

> For sure the people who see the work I did with the billboard never relate to it as art, but they relate to the function of a billboard. And that is as interesting as the functions of a museum. It is a different discourse. That's all.

Later on, in the same conversation, he stated: "I would like to make the same discourse that an awning is doing."[4] The double nature of these works indicates quite precisely their inherent dilemma and the attempts at solving one of the most crucial problems in twentieth-century art: the dialectic between aesthetic reification and the counter-concept of aesthetic use value. The historical range of this dilemma becomes apparent if we consider the schism as one that has marked all relevant artistic achievements from Russian Constructivism and Productivism onward, including the corresponding Western capitalist phenomenon of the Duchampian readymade and its continuing repercussions. In Buren's installation this ambiguity between aesthetic sign and functional object is increased by the fact that these elements (the painted flag elements) shift from sign to function. But they are simultaneously juxtaposed with a different set of objects that constitute the work to an equal degree: the telescopes. These rooftop telescopes, installed on the Centre Pompidou for the pleasure of tourists, were

Daniel Buren, *Les couleurs: sculptures,* 1977. Detail. Pavillon de Flore, Louvre Museum, Paris. Yellow and white striped fabric, 200 × 300 cm.

Daniel Buren, *Les couleurs: sculptures,* 1977. Detail. Samaritaine Department Store, Paris. Orange and white striped fabric, 200 × 300 cm.

Daniel Buren, *Les couleurs: sculptures,* 1977. Detail. The Trocadéro, Paris. Blue and white striped fabric, 200 × 300 cm. Collection: Musée National d'Art Moderne/Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Daniel Buren, *200 Elements Green and White Striped Paper, Distributed in Paris,* April 1968. Photo: B. Boyer.

Daniel Buren, *Installation at the Guggenheim International Exhibition,* 1971.

accompanied as part of Buren's installation by a map indicating the various locations where the flag elements of *Les couleurs* could be discovered. Therefore, the telescopes, as preexisting elements operating in a reality context, were now "aestheticized" by their integration into Buren's work, in the same manner that the flag elements of the work were "functionalized" by their integration into the given urban and institutional context. Furthermore, the telescopes literally concretized the (art) viewer's activity in the museum: to look for distant objects of the cultural past or the artistic promises of the future, looking for the consolidation and consolation of history. Like the tourists who travel in space to change their physical environment, the museum visitor travels in historico-cultural time. However, quite in contradistinction to the promises of long distance views in time and space, backward into the past and forward into future history, the telescopes in Buren's work are treacherous: they lead into the present reality of the work and of the act of viewing itself. Because of their paradoxical installation of exaggerated exposure to and their simultaneous withdrawal from perception, the striped and painted elements of the distant flags (which lack any significance since they offer nothing as "to be seen") return the viewer's perception back into the present.

This dialogue of the objects themselves, the functional telescopes and the aesthetic signs, both of which constitute Buren's sculpture *Les couleurs,* instigates an understanding of "vision" while it is "produced": as a dialectical relationship between material (i.e., social and political) and superstructural phenomena.

Aestheticization of the functional object and functionalization of the aesthetic sign correspond in Buren's work. The dialectics of this relationship mimetically reproduce the conditions under which the work of art itself nowadays has to be conceived. Inasmuch as any work of art becomes increasingly superfluous under the conditions of total reification because it has lost its function as a model of a critical reflection of social reality, it approaches a state of either mere objecthood or of mere aesthetic voluntarism, i.e., decoration. *Les couleurs* concretizes the dilemma between obedient object and arbitrary sign. It articulates the distance between the political reality that strips aesthetic production of its essential capacity for negation and the material presence of art (as one that is irrelevant in

terms of that reality). The grotesque, the ornament, in its purposeless stagnation of repetitive aesthetic functions, signals the abstraction of power barred from critical negation. Buren's installation of flags, a *grotesque* in the true sense of the word, in its triumphant and victorious gesture, signals defeat.

Les formes: peintures, 1976–1978

Complementing *Les couleurs: sculptures, Les formes: peintures* has been integrated into the permanent collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne (Centre Pompidou) in Paris. Purchased in 1978 and subsequently installed in the museum, the piece has one prefiguration and numerous contextual parallels in preceding works by Buren. It had been installed first as *Untitled* in 1976 in Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum as part of a larger installation within that building, which itself was part of a gigantic exhibition involving three Dutch museums simultaneously (the Stedelijk van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, and the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, were the other two). *Les formes* is defined as follows: a number of paintings from the permanent collection of the museum is to be selected by the curator(s) and to be designated for inclusion in Buren's installed work. A rectangle of Buren's standard striped canvas material is cut to the exact dimensions of each of the chosen framed paintings from the permanent collection and attached to the wall behind the painting. Buren's element is not visible upon frontal observation of the painting and only slightly discernible upon closer inspection of the side of the painting where the thin edge of the striped canvas is congruent with the frame. A third element of this installation, however, alerts the viewer to the existence of a second work within the apparently unaltered presentation: a label underneath the painting's usual label, which informs the observer of author, title, technique, and date of the painting, now additionally informs the viewer of those same data for Buren's piece inserted underneath. The two labels initiate a visible dialogue between two (art) historical phenomena, a present-day work that is literally about to position itself in the place of its historical predecessor, and a historical work that is superimposed on a present-day aesthetic reality. This dialogue concretizes the functions of the institutional

space in which they are installed: to historicize the present, reactivate the past, and superimpose it onto the present.

Buren's installation, concealing itself as the dimension of history, reveals the secretive practices of the museum, its installation modes, its institutional power as those of historicizing actuality and actualizing history in a seemingly neutral space. Buren's elements, potentially undetected by viewers of the paintings, function as stored visual information. As visual elements, they oscillate between an image of the past that can be *memorized,* even though it is covered with a "present" image, and one that can be *actualized* as a potential, in the event it is liberated from its domination by a historical camouflage to enter actual visibility. The ambiguous presence of these elements, which exist as *known* but not as *seen* images in the exhibition space, dramatically alter our perception of the visible paintings: once we have been informed by the second label that another work of art is physically, if not perceptually present, our relationship to the painting is changed in much the same way that a dialogue with a person would be affected by the sudden discovery of a third person hidden in the same room.

Beyond this general dialogue, the two works unavoidably enter a formal dialogue between themselves, even though the relationship that has been established between them is supposed to be the result of a "random and arbitrary" choice. It happened, for instance, in the installation of this piece at the Stedelijk Museum that one of Buren's elements was inserted underneath Barnett Newman's painting *The Gate* (1954). Even though the curator's choice of this particular painting might have been as accidental as his selection of paintings by Vuillard and Malevich, the two works necessarily invited a formal comparison. Buren's very strategy of concealing the appearance of the work itself pointed to one of Newman's essential pictorial and plastic approaches: the principle of establishing compositional order by means of hidden symmetry and the actual concealment of negative space.[5]

In strictly pictorial and formal terms, Buren's procedure is very similar: he covers one pictorial element (his own degree zero painting) with the historically charged element (the particular painting chosen by the curator, the particular position of the painting in the museum's collection). The latter element is installed and displayed as usual, unaltered in its position, lighting, or context, while the

former is installed invisibly, yet radically changes our perception of the seemingly static, institutionalized work of art.

To what extent the two phenomena of negative space and concealed space[6] are interdependent becomes apparent if we compare *Les formes: peintures* with an earlier Buren work, *A partir de là* (Museum Mönchengladbach, 1975). In this piece Buren had applied literally the opposite strategy, while still addressing the presence or absence of paintings in a museum space and their modes of exhibition. Paintings and other images were chosen by the artist arbitrarily from the museum's exhibition program of the previous ten years and reinstalled in precisely the positions where they had been installed originally. Rectangles the size of each of the selected works were cut out of large expanses of Buren's standard color/white striped material, which covered the exhibition spaces like wallpaper. Like the shadows of past exhibitions, reminiscent of the faint white rectangles that remain on a wall when one removes a painting from its established place after long exposure to light, Buren's negative spaces, resulting from the pictorial/sculptural gesture of locating a cut in space, recalled a wide variety of works from very different periods along with their amazingly stereotyped modes of installation. The material presence of these paintings, or at least their geometrical shapes, were marked by voids (the absence of material) comparable to the concealed rectangles in *Les formes,* whose presence was equally increased by the fact that they were withdrawn from immediate visual access. In *A partir de là* figure-ground relationships have been totally inverted: the figure—normally the defining mark in space, the drawing or brushstroke on a flat surface, the cutting or modeling of plastic material—is here constituted by a void cut-out, revealing a residue of ground as figure. The ground, having achieved architectural dimensions by literally covering the walls normally supporting the paintings, is made of the material—the striped canvas—that normally constitutes Buren's definition of "figures." This paradoxical inversion of figure-ground finds its exact complement in the inversion of these relationships in *Les formes: peintures*.

One could argue that the paintings selected from the collection function as "figures" that are placed on the invisible, identically sized ground of the striped elements. But one might equally argue that the selection of paintings actually serves

as "ground" for the elements of Buren's work, since the paintings themselves function as historical ground onto which the concealed elements are inscribed.

Considering this degree of contradiction inherent in the figure-ground relationships of both *A partir de là* and *Les formes,* it becomes obvious that the traditional description of the interrelationships of perceptual phenomena is no longer sufficient to come to terms with the implications of Buren's work. The main reason for this would be that the definition of "space" in these works is no longer given as a neutral physical condition or a phenomenological perceptual model. In both works, space is temporally defined as well: space is recognized and treated as a dimension and category of discursive history and institutional sociality itself.

It is important, however, to notice that in Buren's work "architectural" qualities are intrinsically connected with the specific painterly dimension of his material and its tradition. Buren's choice of a ready-made, industrially produced striped material grew out of an increasingly mechanized approach to the application of painterly matter on canvas. This approach, the actual synthesis of paint and canvas support, intricately interwoven and materially joined, is equally relevant to Buren's choice of "painterly" material: his color figures, however, are *factually* interwoven with the canvas support and therefore transcend even the most mechanical and "objectified" procedures of paint application (as, for example, in Stella's or Judd's works of the early sixties, when Buren started his own investigation).

As Buren's work adds surfaces onto architectural surfaces without actually altering the architectural elements, it enters the discourse that is traditionally defined as *decoration*. But Buren's concern for *decoration* is not simply the result of the painterly origins of his work or an inherent incapacity of his tools to come to terms with architectural issues, but it is a logical consequence of his recognition that art production is innately bound to the realm of superstructure (i.e., decoration, fashion, etc.):

> Because these phenomena against which the artist struggles are only epiphenomena or, more precisely, these are only the superstructures compared to the foundation which conditions art and is art. And art has changed 100 times, if not more, its tradition, academism, taboos,

> school, etc., because anything superficial has by nature to be changed constantly, and since the foundation remains untouched, obviously nothing is fundamentally changed. . . . Art is the most beautiful ornament of society as it is now, and not the warning signal for society as it should be—never that.[7]

"Decoration" in Buren's work therefore reveals the inherent tendency of the artist's production to falsify its own intentions: the work of art perpetually pretends to alter material conditions and always ends up by being reduced to a cultural embellishment of the political conditions that have not even been questioned during the acculturation of the artist's work. It is this relentless awareness of the perpetual adaptation that leads to the conscious identification with the role of the artist as "decorator."

This differentiation between the artist's contemporary role and the traditional model of the anti-bourgeois avant-gardist identifies explicitly with the inextricable appropriation of aesthetic production under late monopoly capital. The artist as deliberate decorator of the status quo, as a conscious purveyor of aesthetic and intellectual fashions, as a producer of superstructural changes, seems to realize cynically and with passive resignation the functions his work has in fact been reduced to. Quite unlike the more recent examples of public monumental sculpture, which pretend to have solved the contradictions between individual aesthetic producer and collective labor conditions, reflected in the transgression of their work from individual sculptural unit to the monumental structures bordering on architecture, Buren's work maintains these contradictions precisely because of its painterly *decorative* dimensions that dialectically negate the successful achievement of an architectural dimension of public space.

In contradistinction, Buren's complementary works *Les couleurs and Les formes* in the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne incorporate these contradictions of aesthetic production. The seemingly heroic posture of *Les couleurs,* erecting the individual flag, publicly reveals and ridicules the delusional nature of the public acculturation of art. In proportion to the posture of an emphatic public exposure of the individual artist's achievement, this *grotesque*

eventually destroys even the museum's claim of displaying another victorious cultural feat. *Les formes,* in its self-negating concealment, seems to retreat from visibility altogether, as it seems to refuse to participate any longer in the conditions of public exhibition and perception. But it concretizes the form of historical memory and its promises of an actual moment of progress.

Notes

1

Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach, "The Museum of Modern Art as a Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis," *Marxist Perspectives* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1978), pp. 28–51.

2

Ibid.

3

See, for example, I. M. Pei's new extension wing at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, Piano and Rogers's Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Hans Hollein's museum buildings for Frankfurt and Mönchengladbach, and James Stirling's new building in Stuttgart (to mention only a few of the dozen or more monumental museum projects currently under construction). In all instances it is conspicuously clear that the architect's primary concern and function are to create a museum structure that can fulfill its purposes for culture as *spectacle.*

This spectacle–culture is the primary concern of the corporate and governmental instigators of this new museum craze, not at all an actual concern for the historical preservation and the mediation of the experience of history at large. A more precise reading and analysis of this architectural accommodation of the needs of spectacle would reveal how and why in all of these museum buildings the architecture itself takes both economic and semiotic priority over the actual works of art it was constructed to preserve and to display. For such a discussion, see some of the essays by Daniel Buren since 1969, the essay by Duncan, and Wallach already mentioned, and, more recently, with specific regard to the Centre Pompidou, the essay by Jean Baudrillard, "L'effet Beaubourg" (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1977).

4

See Robin White, "Interview with Daniel Buren," *View Magazine,* no. 9 (1979), pp. 15, 21.

5

Concealed space in pictorial terms (as opposed to in sculptural bodies, where it is traditionally almost a "naturally" given phenomenon as the interior of three-dimensional volumes) has to

be considered as a more or less accidentally given aspect of collage and montage aesthetics. Barnett Newman's use of masking tape as a template or painterly stencil and as a relief that covers a negative space are examples of how montage aesthetics affected even abstract painting in the postwar period.

6

It seems worthwhile to mention that works which aimed at the integration of painterly and sculptural figure and supporting architectural ground had already been defined by other artists. For instance, Lawrence Weiner's *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use* (1968) or his *A Square Removal from a Wallboard to the Lathing* (1968) had collapsed the sculptural figure and the supporting architectural ground into one and the same structure.

7

Daniel Buren, "Is Teaching Art Necessary?" in *Galerie des Arts* (September 1968); quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 51.

Memory Lessons and History Tableaux: James Coleman's Archaeology of Spectacle

> I have already remarked that memory is the great criterion of art; art is a mnemotechny of the beautiful.
> —*Charles Baudelaire,* Salon of 1846

Baudelaire's remark seems to have sprung from an intuition of imminent loss, articulating the insight that his (and Manet's) was the last possible moment of modernity when the aesthetic could still be related to the mnemonic. The statement's normative emphasis went clearly unheeded in the subsequent unfolding of modern visuality, since the exact opposite of Baudelaire's desire became the founding principle of Modernism in the twentieth century: the triumphant annihilation of cultural memory. The orders to eradicate all remnants of the past, the imperatives to make it "new" and to be absolutely "modern," remained strident from the inception of the avant-garde up to the late 1960s. Already a contemporary of Baudelaire, the politically reactionary Maxime Du Camp, would

First published in *James Coleman: Projected Images, 1972–1994* (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1995), pp. 47–74.

voice the first proto-Futurist proclamations for the need to assimilate artistic practice into the structure of science and industrial technology, and would suggest that the imagery of the myths of antiquity should be effaced by modernity's myths of technical progress:

> Everything advances, expands and increases around us. . . . Science produces marvels, industry accomplishes miracles, and we remain impassive, insensitive, disdainful, scratching the false cords of our lyres, closing our eyes in order not to see, or persisting in looking towards a past that nothing ought to make us regret. Steam is discovered, and we sing to Venus, daughter of the briny main; electricity is discovered and we sing to Bacchus, friend of the rosy grape. It's absurd.[1]

If Modernism did not try to assimilate the governing techno-scientific paradigms, resulting in nonrepresentational painting and construction, it engaged in the mimicry of the commodity image, approximating congruence with the actual object in the collage and the readymade. In 1912 the *tabula rasa* of abstraction promised liberation from the fetters of Beaux-Arts culture in favor of the new social and cultural hygiene of industrial society with the same vehement conviction with which Minimalist abstraction in 1960 pronounced the shift from a purely self-reflexive empiricism to a phenomenologically defined perception, by assimilating the morphology and materials of technological and corporate design. Similarly, a prohibitionist tradition in literature was established and maintained, from the emphatic declaration of a structural linguistic foundation of poetry in the phonetic revolution of 1912 to Theodor W. Adorno's final interdiction of all possibilities of lyrical poetry after the Holocaust.

While each generational account argued in different terms against the mnemonic dimension of culture, the declared enemies were identical and remained the same throughout the twentieth century: historical narrativity, figural representation, theatrical enactment—in other words, all the conventions of depiction and figuration that painting had once shared with the other arts, theater and literature in particular.

In contrast to visual modernity, however, literature, theater, and the cinema retained in all but the most radical instances (such as structural cinema and so-called "experimental" poetry) a complex network of interrelationships with the representational conventions that modernist aesthetics had set out to displace. Yet, even in structural cinema, the authors who had most systematically dismantled narrative and representation in sixties experimental film reconsidered these conventions barely a decade later (e.g., Michael Snow's *Rameau's Nephew* and Yvonne Rainer's *Christina Talking Pictures*), without foregoing their originary criticism of the ideological implications and effects of cinematic narrativity.

Structural film could never claim to be the authoritative and exclusively valid voice of cinematic modernity in the manner that its static visual counterparts always insisted on being definitive on a constantly changing stage (this was even truer in literature, where nobody would even have thought of doubting, for example, the validity of Paul Celan's work, in spite of its manifest deviation from the historical prognosis issued by Adorno). Perhaps, more importantly, theater and literature maintained a consciousness of their own discursive status *as* representation and fiction, an awareness of their origin in complex traditions of rhetoric and dramaturgy that—while displaced—were nevertheless sublated in the new forms (the way dialogue with Aristotelian theatrical conventions permeates Brecht's epic theater throughout).

By contrast, visual modernity of the twentieth century—at least in its most relevant moments—insisted not only on its absolute break with tradition, but furthermore on its proximity to, if not congruity with, the "real," emphasizing its characteristic of immediate intervention within its parameters. The visual avant-garde claimed effects for these interventions that varied as widely as the positions from which it departed, ranging from the positivist ideal of empirical verifiability, forced to the extreme of the tautological ("the black square is a black square"), to another moment when the repressive force of abstraction as cognitive and perceptual purification promised a heightened degree of transparency, both in the construction of the object and in its modes of experience. Later yet, that very tradition—as, for example, in the Conceptual art practices of the late 1960s—promised that a rigorous elimination of all

remnants of symbolic space and rhetorical figuration could purge representation altogether, engendering a language of "mere" information, a photographic imagery of "pure" documentation and performative interventions, allowing for an unmediated presence and egalitarian exchange between performer and spectator.

And inasmuch as modernist representational strategies insisted on being coextensive with, rather than fundamentally different from, the objects of the "real," they also insisted on the aesthetic object's almost miraculous inversion of object experience within the spaces of the "real": to the extent that all object relations were increasingly controlled and had acquired the condition of the fetish, the aesthetic object had to inscribe itself mimetically within these conditions to generate at least the illusion—if not actual instances—of a critical negation of the principles of instrumentalizing rationality and fetishization. The aesthetic object claimed to situate itself in a manifest opposition against false consciousness constituted in ideology.

One could argue, then, that it had been one of the most crucial preconditions of *visual* modernity not only to disavow its mnemonic functions, but equally to annihilate the memory of its proper discursivity as visual fiction (e.g., its status within a long and complex system of representational traditions) as well as its conventionality (in the linguistic sense). This meant concretely that it had to deny its *functions of figuration* and its *rhetorical* dimension. A critical departure from this positivist/empiricist fallacy of Modernism in the field of literature is described by Wlad Godzich:

> The realm of the apparent holds the truth hidden away, so that its only means of access are the figures of the apparent; yet these figures are not known to be figures for they are the only mode of being that lends itself to knowledge. . . . In the (deluded) possibility of methodological absolutism, truth is meant to be visible in unmediated form, in and of itself, and especially free of figuration. In the realm that is ours, where we have shed any belief in the ineffable and know the impossibility of unmediated truth, we are indeed back in

> the figural; but more specifically, in a relation to the figural where the figural is known as figural. In other words, we are in the rhetorical, as Paul de Man has been showing us all along.[2]

While the beginnings of the work of James Coleman can be situated in the final chapter of Modernism in the late 1960s, the formation of his independent work from the mid 1970s onward illuminates the degree to which the definition of his artistic project no longer depended on the modernist paradigm of a radical dismantling of traditions. Its intense critical dialogue with the—primarily American—context of post-Minimal and Conceptual art opened the apparatus of the historical repressions constitutive of this last phase of high modernist and literalist art, precisely in order to reconsider the disavowal of rhetoric and figuration in these practices—questions already posed by post-minimalism's Italian counterpart, Arte Povera,[3] and certainly articulated theoretically in Paul de Man's simultaneously emerging reconsideration of modernist literary studies.[4]

The first works that Coleman installed in gallery spaces in Milan in the early seventies, such as *Flash Piece* (1970), shared all the features of the most advanced practices of that historical moment.[5] While following a complex set of instructions from experimental psychology textbooks and philosophical introductions to the principles of phenomenology, Coleman's work suggested the radical dissolution of the aesthetic object, the deployment of quasi-scientific means and technical tools to engage the viewer at the highest level of a critically self-conscious participation, and the decision to focus increasingly, if not exclusively, on the available and constitutive conditions of perception.

These are the premises that link Coleman's early practice directly with the contemporaneous work of artists such as Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham (who would become a close friend of Coleman's at that time). Both Nauman and Graham had attempted to radicalize the implications of Minimal sculpture, which in their view had remained implicated with the pictorial and the sculptural in spite of the Minimalists' claims to have literally incorporated a new spectator. Michael Newman situates Coleman's work accurately in this historical context:

James Coleman, *Flash Piece,* 1970. Electronic flash. Courtesy of the artist.

> While much conceptual art appeared in the form of a proposition or commentary, Coleman's "pieces" of 1972–1974 involved the viewer in a *process* of investigation or problem solving (without necessarily presupposing a definitive solution) which his works continue to do to this day. . . . Through all these works, time, memory and causality are in question: How do different interpretations come about? What part do inference and memory play? Does this imply a continuity or discontinuity of the subject through time? . . . Coleman is concerned with the relationship between the identities of the subject and image as they are mutually "conditioned" or caused through time: Is it the subject who "projects" a different interpretation or the aspects of duck and rabbit which cause a change in the subject by inserting him or her in the field of representation? Does the continuation of the "absent" figure in the memory of the viewer "anticipate" its reappearance?[6]

The accuracy of the critic's description, however, reveals also the scientistic literalism which Coleman's work of the early 1970s shares with that of many of his contemporaries, a literalism embodied emblematically in his deployment of schemata from standard works of theories of perception (such as the "duck-rabbit" schema of perceptual ambivalence). But typically, in an effort at critical distancing from that aesthetic, Coleman has commented that the deployment of these schemata was addressed at *undoing* rather than *enforcing* the traditionally convenient scientific concept of ambiguity:

> I would never use the word "ambiguity," I dislike it intensely. The *Duck/Rabbit* piece exemplifies that there is no ambiguity—but those are clearly two images, *ambiguities* are the result of the perception that insists on a resolution of those images.[7]

Conflicting definitions of spectatorship seem to determine the specific dialectic of Coleman's works from the early seventies: on the one hand, *Flash Piece,*

James Coleman, *Playback for a Daydream,* 1974. 16 mm black and white film. Courtesy of the artist.

in its functional and experimental deployment of colored electric lights, demarcates a polemical departure from the still primarily painterly and pictorial concerns of the work of Dan Flavin, who had recently electrified abstraction but who had repositioned the viewer in a space- and object-experience of traditionally passive and contemplative reception. On the other hand, the activation of spectatorship in Coleman's installation (as in many works by Dan Graham from that time), with its emphatic disregard for any convention of pictoriality or plasticity, reduced the viewer to the dubiously emancipated role of the participant in an elementary scientific experiment on the phenomenological relation between memory and perception.

This dilemma, constitutive of the radicality of post-Minimal work in general, resulted from an unresolvable historical contradiction: namely, that the work's phenomenological and theoretical ambition could no longer acknowledge its specific status as an aesthetic object, nor admit its linguistic conventionality within traditions of artistic and, therefore, rhetorical figuration. At the same time, the work's dependence on institutional and discursive legitimation prevented it from actually abandoning its status as a traditional aesthetic object claiming the status of a scientific or political intervention.

This reductivist dilemma applies even more to *Memory Piece* (1971), which literally eliminated all traces of perceptual plasticity in favor of a programmatic foregrounding of the viewers' public enactment of mnemonic processes. The work took the participatory dimension within a simply defined structure to its logical conclusion: with a vengeance typical of early seventies deconstructions of notions of authorship, the work effaced its artistic "original" textual definition only to have it replaced by a potentially infinite contingency of viewers' memory projections. These recorded responses were superimposed on the artistic "urtext" as so many accumulated palimpsests which eventually made up the work in its entirety. As a result of its exclusion of visuality and its focus on speech and the subject's enunciation, another important shift was indicated: *Memory Piece* not only leads from the death of the author to the birth of the viewer but also from the dissolution of the primacy of the visual to the instantiation of the subject in linguistic articulation. Anne Rorimer's minute and eloquent descrip-

tion of *Memory Piece* clearly indicates that the work is generating a precariously circular viewing condition:

> *Memory Piece* reflects on the role of memory with regard to perception. . . . Coleman replicates the mnemonic process. He accomplishes this by means of two tape recorders. The first tape recorder supplies a text of about three to five minutes in length. The participant in the work may hear the original text just once, and, having attempted to memorize it, must record it on the second machine. This text in turn must be recorded once again as remembered. The activity may be repeated, in theory, ad infinitum, or until the nearly inexhaustible supply of tapes runs out. Previously recorded texts are not accessible, and as completed, are kept in a provided storage unit.[8]

Spectators/participants are suspended within the sudden and radical emancipation from their status as mere viewers, only to find themselves restricted to the experience of the deconstruction of their traditional aesthetic expectations.

What seems to have become evident to Coleman, then, was a dilemma similar to the one recently identified by Jürgen Habermas concerning the function of philosophy once it has become apparent that the philosopher can no longer pretend to provide privileged access to truth: namely, the question of how aesthetic objects can claim a specific truth value and how this claim can be legitimized. For Coleman, this problem posed itself first of all with regard to an artistic activity that demanded the absolute dissolution of the author's privileged position and of the object's special status, and secondly with regard to the condition that artistic practice had increasingly insisted on the necessity to abolish the specific forms of experience it had traditionally generated. The contradictory nature of such a claim would become all the more evident once the aesthetic object had assimilated itself in its entirety to the condition of the scientific experiment, yet continued to operate exclusively within an institutional and discursive framework that provided definitions which were exclusively valid within the sphere of aesthetic experience.[9]

In order to resolve this dilemma in a complex process of critical differentiations, Coleman's work had to engage with several problems simultaneously. The first one was the legacy of the neo-Kantian aesthetic of (American) Modernism, with its emphasis on perceptual empiricism, self-reflexivity, and medium-specificity and its prescription of an essential and exclusive visuality as the sole legitimate modus of the experience of high art objects. The fallacies of this position had been brillantly (and inadvertently) articulated in 1967 in the swansong of late Modernist criticism, Michael Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood." In an almost desperate attempt to shore up the territory of American Modernism at the moment of its definitive disappearance, Fried had uncannily singled out *theater,* precisely the domain of Modernism's utmost historical repression, as its primary enemy. In a statement sounding off its attack on Minimalism with a peculiar hybrid of nineteenth-century phraseological and terminological borrowings from Walter Pater's normative aestheticism and Max Nordau's theory of degeneracy, Fried had pronounced a highly phobic prohibition against theatricality:

> Theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such. . . .
>
> The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre. Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre. Theatre is the common denominator that binds a large and seemingly disparate variety of activities to one another, and that distinguishes those activities from the radically different enterprises of the modernist arts. . . .
>
> The concepts of quality and value—and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself—are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theatre.[10]

It is certainly against this doxa of modernist visuality that Coleman directed his—at first gradual, and then almost programmatic—embrace of the

conventions of theatricality and narrativity in his work after 1973. At the same time, he would have wanted to reposition himself in relation to post-Minimalism and Conceptual art, work which had in fact already initiated a critical analysis of that modernist legacy, yet which had remained ultimately within the orbit of Modernism's parameters. It was precisely this work that had become the actual target of Fried's polemical (and erroneous) association of the phenomenological dimensions of Minimal art with the conditions of theatricality.

Evidently, this duality of a simultaneous differentiation and critical negation of both the Modernist as well as the Minimal and Conceptual aesthetic would have situated Coleman in a complicated dialogic relationship with the practices of his contemporaries.[11]

The key objection against the theatrical implications of Minimal sculpture in Fried's argument had addressed the fact that the presence of the beholder was programmatically foregrounded, in manifest opposition to Modernist work that had been defined as autonomous and complete. Fried's argument had actually claimed that a medium-specific object could be envisaged without considering either the spectator or the discursive and institutional framework constitutive of the specificity of aesthetic experience. With hindsight the argument appears as a last attempt to maintain the traditionally defined and regulated place of the spectator and to prohibit the emerging comprehension of the necessary syntagmatic character of structurally produced (visual) meaning:

> Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work. [Robert] Morris makes this explicit. Whereas in previous art "what is to be had from the work is located strictly within (it)," the experience of literalist art is of an object *in a situation*—one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder.*[12]

Coleman's critical departure from this position, as for example in *Slide Piece* (1972–1973), would therefore not just redeem perceptual phenomenology in explicit opposition to late Modernist claims, but would radicalize the phenome-

nological as the reappearance of the theatrical. This all the more so since he would explicitly historicize the theatrical within its proper discursive conventions (speech and rhetoric, enunciation and performance), positioning it against the Minimalists' and post-Minimalists' claims for a universal legibility of the phenomenological object or performance: after all, the performances of Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, and Bruce Nauman had reincorporated the theatrical in both speech and gesture, precisely in total opposition to traditional definitions of theatricality; they had enacted theatricality as manifestly *outside* of the conventions of rhetoric, enunciation, and dramaturgy.

In Coleman's *Slide Piece,* a projected photographic image of an apparently banal urban site becomes the subject of numerous (between three and five) oral descriptions, recorded in the language of whatever country the piece happened to be installed in. Each of these descriptions—in a Rashomon-effect of diverse perceptions and narrative recountings of a singular incident—isolates utterly different aspects of the photograph. Each speaker/observer seems to follow a different perceptual logic, while the viewer follows the continuous sequence of the reiterative projection of identical slides. *Slide Piece* both withholds perceptual information (or rather reduces it to the threshold of the most minute differences of an extremely slow, gradual perception) and emphasizes that perceptual objects are unthinkable outside or independently of the linguistic activation and consciousness of the viewer. Thus, the work reverts attention utterly onto the level of reception. In fact, it is constituted exclusively in the polyphonous acts of reading, since the "work" itself provides nothing but an empty iconic point of reference for the activation of the speakers' (and the viewers') responses. "Theatricality" for Coleman meant at this early moment to displace the traditional concept of the visual object as the integrated and privileged locus of aesthetic knowledge/experience, and to dismantle it as the site of a supposedly autonomous visual specificity.

Yet the interaction between Coleman's work and the work of his immediate peers of the 1970s is even more complex than his critical differentiation from the modernist legacies of the sixties. Within the very moment of Conceptual art in which his work originated, Coleman reformulated his approach to language

James Coleman, *Slide Piece,* 1972–1973. Projected images with synchronized audio narration. Courtesy of the artist.

in distinct opposition to the preoccupations of Conceptual artists whose work originated primarily from principles of analytical philosophy or structural linguistics. While they had articulated a purely textual aesthetic in critical response to Minimalism, and had advanced language as a matrix for artistic practice by defining it either according to the philosophical model of the analytic proposition or that of the linguistic performative, Coleman's work would now expand the range of linguistic conventions eligible for artistic practice to include rhetoric and dramaturgy, and—perhaps most important—the register that Roland Barthes would call the "grain of the voice": the phonetic definition of subjectivity within the acts of enunciation.

Coleman's work would insist—once again in distinct opposition to Conceptual art—on the necessity to sustain the dialectic between the linguistic dimension and the dimension of visual and theatrical representation. Since the mid-1970s, his work has juxtaposed these extended registers of linguistic competence with an equally expanded conception of visuality, incorporating all those practices of theatrical and performative figuration that Modernist visuality had excluded. Even though some Conceptualists, such as Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner, had already situated their work within an emphatic and often unfathomably ambiguous relation to both the language of theory with its instrumental logic and poetry with its seemingly random and arbitrary conditions, Coleman would now construct a manifest hybridity of linguistic functions, operating simultaneously within each of his projects: the performative, the rhetorical, and the dialogical/theatrical.

It is certainly not accidental that slide projection would become one of Coleman's typical formats, a technology and presentational device first introduced into the visual arts in the context of Conceptual practices of the late 1960s. For example, Robert Barry's projections of typewritten or typeset slides showing word lists to be read as accumulations of performative statements open—as did Lawrence Weiner's *Statements* in 1968—the limited definitions of language functions given in the Conceptual model of the analytic proposition. By introducing the decisively temporal dimension of the linguistic structure, they displaced the static visuality of Modernist pictoriality as well as the problematic

compromises with the visual in more recent photographic works that conceived the visual as "pure" documentary records.

From the first installation of *Slide Piece* in 1973, Coleman would construct the *visuality* of the projection within the traditions of static pictoriality and the *linguistic* and *performative* dimensions of the projection within the hybrid conventions of linguistic temporality, theatricality, and narrativity. As much as the photographic aesthetic of Conceptual art is at the center of Coleman's strategies from the mid-seventies onward, his work never acquires the mythical status of Conceptual photography as purely functional documentation. On the contrary, the photographic image itself is constantly suspended in juxtapositions with language and pictoriality. Thus, the presentational format of the slide projection emerges as an ideal device to sustain the dialectics between the pictorial and the photographic, between narrativity and stasis, between language in its performative and theatrical modes.

To the *avant-gardiste* triumphalism of certain forms of Conceptual art, which prides itself on having shed the last fetters of visuality and advanced to a realm of pure linguistic performativity, Coleman's work responds with skeptical contemplation and a countermemory of the forms of experience still embedded in the representational and linguistic conventions from which Conceptualism had proudly divested itself. Similar to Marcel Broodthaers's insistently posed—yet highly rhetorical—questions concerning the incompatibility between the language models underlying Conceptual art and those originating in late nineteenth-century literary modernity, Coleman poses questions concerning the apparent incompatibility between the radically emancipatory forms of a linguistic and photographic critique of traditional models of visuality and the differentiated forms of linguistic and specular experience embedded in the traditions of figuration, rhetoric, and dramaturgy. Yet at no moment in Coleman's work does countermemory as resistance against *avant-gardiste* triumphalism make the profoundly reactionary claim to have the privilege of historical continuity, or, worse yet, to have renewed the forms of experience that *avant-gardiste* enterprise had publicly and exemplarily declared as annihilated.

Seeing, through Coleman's work, Fried's blindness concerning the phenomenologically refigured spectator, however, reveals that spectatorship was not

the sole, perhaps not even the primary question that motivated Coleman's critical contribution to the demise of Modernist positions. Rather, it seems that his aesthetic of "theatricality" corresponded as well to the problematic implications of theories of subjectivity and signification that had been *implicit* since Duchamp's declaration of the death of the author in the aesthetic of the readymade, and that had become theoretically *explicit* in the influence of post-structuralist theories of subjectivity on artistic practice of the 1970s. Most important, however, was the realization that Duchamp himself had already articulated a polemical revision of the universally accepted aesthetic of the readymade when engaging in the clandestine project of *Etant donnés* as an allegory staging the desire of figuration.

The *tableau vivant* as a hybrid model between pictoriality and theater, between an aesthetic of randomness and one of extremely studied precision, had already attracted artists like Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris in the mid-1960s. That genre's innate dialectic corresponded to their desire to deconstruct the traditions of virtuoso (dance) performance and simultaneously to adopt the antihierarchical logic of Duchamp and Cage (without ending up with a static object conception or the atrophy of orthodox Minimalism).[13]

As a genre redeemed from obscurity and as the most outmoded and unlikely convention of proto-theatrical display, the *tableau vivant* suited Coleman's investigation of the phenomenological boundaries of Minimalism and its followers: its fusion of choreographed movement and pictorial stasis, its synthesis of present immediacy and arrested temporality (making the present appear incessantly to be verging on the past), its aleatory choices from an infinity of possible moments fused with a decisive specificity—all of these were features of considerable interest in the elaboration of Coleman's subsequent projects. Once again, though, his systematic engagement with the model of the *tableau vivant* in his work since the early 1980s—in performances such as *Now and Then* (1981) or his exceptional video work *So Different and Yet* (1980)—seems not only to voice doubts about the restrictive and literalist interpretations of the Modernist and Duchampian legacies in post-Minimal and Conceptual work, but, more important, it seems to question the restrictive and orthodox applications of post-structuralist concepts of subjectivity. What emerges from a contemplation of

James Coleman, *Now and Then,* 1981. Theater performance. Project Arts Centre Dublin. On stage, Olwen Fouere and James McHale; piano, Roger Doyle. Courtesy of the artist.

Coleman's work is neither a literal enactment of post-structuralist concepts of subjectivity (as many of his best interpreters have argued)[14] nor the extension of Duchampian concepts of authorship and objecthood, but rather a critical complication of these concepts in a manner similar to Duchamp's own critical revision of his readymade doxa and the prematurely proclaimed death of the artistic author in the return to the figuration of the *Etant donnés.* Arguments developed by Maurice Blanchot in response to the legacies of Foucault and the prematurely proclaimed death of the subject seem to articulate a position that parallels the critical complexity of Coleman's dialogue with these legacies:

> For example, it is accepted as a certainty that Foucault, adhering in this to a certain conception of literary production, got rid of, purely and simply, the notion of the subject: no more oeuvre, no more author, no more creative unity. But things are not that simple. The subject does not disappear; rather, its excessively determined unity is put in question. What arouses interest and inquiry is its disappearance (that is, the new manner of being which disappearance is), or rather its dispersal, which does not annihilate it but offers us, out of it, no more than a plurality of positions and a discontinuity of functions (and here we reencounter the *system of discontinuities,* which, rightly or wrongly, seemed at one time to be a characteristic of serial music.[15]

Such a "system of discontinuities" is certainly apparent as one of the structuring principles of Coleman's work from the late seventies onward, and it is precisely in the emphatic juxtaposition of methodological fragments—in the works' deliberately constructed incompatibility of visual and textual conventions—that its profoundly allegorical character manifests and mourns the inability of contemporary visual practices to contemplate subjectivity, construct narratives, and represent the process of historical experience. Yet it is evident that Coleman's "system of discontinuities" resists at the same time even the slightest thought of a simple return to a centered humanist subject conception or a pre-Duchampian aesthetic.

Coleman's *Box* (*ahhareturnabout*) (1977) is almost programmatic in its reinscription of both figural representation and literary narrative into the traditional, perceptually determined object. A loop of found film footage is combined with alternating insertions of short units of black film leader and a soundtrack of an internal monologue scripted by the artist. Jean Fisher has observed with great clarity how the text operates in the structure of the work:

> The text is a "dramatized recitation," addressing itself to listening, not reading. This is due in part to its use of phonetic puns; but it is also the result of its dependence on the voice itself to bring out meaning, relying as much on what Barthes described as the "grain of the voice" (enunciation) as on those expressive qualities which are signifiers of character in theatre. Insofar as it is a performed recitation, *Box* may be said to be "theatrical"; but in presenting an associative rather than syntagmatic narrative, it is not typical of conventional theatre.[16]

One could understand *Box*'s subtitle, *ahhareturnabout,* not just as a reference to a strategy in the prize fighter's arsenal of aggressive and defensive movements, but also as an announcement of a radical reversal of the paradigmatic features governing post-Minimal and post-Conceptual artistic production in the mid-1970s. As Coleman's film loop follows mimetically an exchange of punches in rapidly alternating sequences of blackouts and image-sound flashes, it literalizes the optical beat that has been brillantly described by Rosalind Krauss as the moment of departure from disembodied Modernist opticality toward a phenomenological inscription, toward the grounding of visual experience in the range of the optical unconscious and its bodily foundations.[17] Yet to the same degree that *Box* reiterates the experience of the perceptual pulse in the spectator, pushing it almost literally across the threshold of physical discomfort, this pulse alternates with an iconic sign of two fighters exchanging actual punches. Not only does this correspondence generate an effect of the doubling of the semiotic as the physical (bordering on a pun), but it also situates the image of bodily performance within a

James Coleman, *Box* (*ahhareturnabout*), 1977. 16 mm black and white film, synchronized audio. Courtesy of the artist.

very specific historical event and within the confrontation of two historically identifiable protagonists.

Box (*ahhareturnabout*) signals a major departure from American post-Minimalist aesthetics, since the bodies of Coleman's performers no longer appear as neutral and naturalized transhistorical givens within a universally valid field of potential phenomenological inscriptions—the manner in which the body was still being presented in the work of Graham or Nauman in order to oppose the techno-scientific orthodoxy and morphology of Minimalist literalism, while ultimately still participating in its very logic. Jean Fisher succinctly describes the refiguration of the body in Coleman's work in a more theoretical perspective, stating that "if the 'body' returns here, it is not as 'nature' but as a referent to the conflictual sociopolitical narratives that constitute the real conditions of experience."[18]

In comparison to *Flash Piece,* which deployed the device of flashing lights as a phenomenological critique of opticality, *Box* reveals the degree to which Coleman's approach was changing by mid-1970s. In his manifest theatricalization of the performing body, this work weaves the reappearance of figuration instantly into a complex set of historical references and of immediate experiences and dialogic responses. Integrated within the perceptual pulse we now encounter both an acoustic as well a representational and a narrative dimension, even though the seriality of the loop as well as the internal repetition still recall the structuring principles of sculptural work and structural film of the seventies. The stark graphic and grainy loop of found footage evokes the persistence of the iconic dimension in the images of Warhol's paintings, and their incessant reminder of the inescapable condition of referentiality, even in the most rigorously serial structural order of pure repetition.[19]

Rather than simply initiating a return to a cinematic mode of representation, unleashing a false plenitude of narrative upon the spectator, *Box* operates clearly within the demarcations that the critiques of Modernist practice themselves had articulated, since these restrictions of representation are the focal points of Coleman's analytical approach as much as his resuscitations of figuration and narrativity emerge as the subversive strategy aiming to dismantle these restrictions.

This dialectic of Coleman's complex allegorical operations since the mid-1970s, in its attempt to criticize the inability of visual practice to engage in narrativity and figuration and at the same time to probe the possibilities of their redemption as fragments, is articulated in the continuous reworkings of these paradigmatic restrictions, in the opposition between the emphatic recovery of the mnemonic dimension and the rupture of the governing conventions of visuality. Thus, the viewer of *Box* is suspended in a continuous alternation—in a manner similar to the condition of undecidability in the "Duck-Rabbit" work titled *Playback for a Daydream* from a few years earlier: on the one hand, the visual pulse of phenomenological inscription and the indexical registration of the light-emitting projector, and, on the other, the historically specific event of the boxing match and its iconic representation.

It is in the light of this programmatic declaration of the return to a historic subject that Coleman's subtitle itself—*ahhareturnabout*—almost reads as an indication of a strategic move of the artist within the field of given artistic operations. Moreover, one could argue that within the general project of reconstituting a historically specific body to the universalist abstraction of phenomenology, Coleman insists on a socio-politically specific body, structured by the discourse on national identity (in this case by the presentation of the Irish fighter Gene Tunney as the struggling protagonist who tries to save his boxing championship as much as his socio-political identity as an Irishman).

The emphasis on this geopolitical specificity opens the way for yet another critical dimension in Coleman's work: rather than claim a space of phenomenological neutrality or aesthetic exemption from the apparatus of spectacle culture, Coleman positions his work instantly within the spectacle's own parameters by invoking the archaic imagery of the boxing match as one of the most charged metaphors of social conduct within capitalism and one of the key topoi of modernity and its spectacular forms of mass entertainment.[20]

Precisely in his insistence on the historical specificity of the incident and its ramifications for the conception of a national identity constituted by means of a cultural construct, Coleman also opposes the totalizing claims of spectacle, since it is only in the extreme emphasis on the particularity of historical

experience that the last vestige or the first index of unalienated subjectivity is to be found. Paradoxically, this specificity and concreteness can only assert itself with the allegorical hindsight of the cultural construct, since any insistence on a realization of that specificity of identity within the very socio-political reality that has totally obliterated it would instantly turn into the most reactionary conviction of nationalism and ethnicism currently played out on the stages of the disintegrated nation-states.

A position similar in complexity to Coleman's approach to the problematic intertwinement between cultural production and socio-political identity has been described by Seamus Deane with regard to Irish literature and its reception:

> To combat some fetishized version of Irishness on the political and social level often has, as a consequence, the acceptance of an equally fetishized notion of Art. If the Art is Literature, and if the Irish are agreed to be quite gifted in this area, then there is, inevitably, a resmuggled version of Irishness operating within the economy of the debate. Literature, art, poetry, the province formerly assigned to the 19th-century colonial version of the Celt, has now become part of a late-20th-century repossession of Irishness by those who would, in all other respects, reject the existence of such an essentialized quality. . . . The politics of such countries not only become less interesting than their literature, they are effectively erased by it. The inflation of the esthetic always leaves a political deficit. The recruitment of postcolonial literature to post-Modernity dooms the politics of postcolonial societies to pre-Modernity. . . . Postcolonial theory conspires at times with the very essentialisms that it aspires to rebuke; it permits the reintroduction of the "feminized" construct that it took so much trouble to expel, and it is persuaded to do so in the name of "Art." In a similar, but also different way, feminism confronts this issue, wishing to assert for itself a radical independence that is over and again rearticulated in the residually essentialist discourse it wishes to erase. Perhaps Irigaray's way of going through it

> in order to come out the other side, or on the side of the Other, is the only recourse. A stereotype should not perhaps be demolished until it has been reinhabited.[21]

This dialectic seems to assume a central importance in the subsequent development of Coleman's work, since in all instances the abstract universality of specular conventions and spectacular display is juxtaposed with an interrogation of the possibilities of temporally and geopolitically determined forms of experience. The conception of identity through the means of aesthetic practice now seems to be constituted within unresolvable contradictions: the necessary cultural production of sites of subject articulation and structures of memory conflicts with the simultaneous, inevitably ideological enforcement of a mythical identity; and the same schism exists between cultural production as the most complex form of spectacularization and cultural practices as the last resistances against the global homogenization generated by spectacle.

This becomes evident if one considers, for example, Coleman's exceptional (and singular) tribute to the conventions of static sculpture in his work *The Ploughman's Party* (1979–1980).[22] Conceived as an "Irish" contribution to an exhibition of Irish art in England in 1981, *The Ploughman's Party* intensifies the confrontation between artistic constructions of identity and their immediate falsification within the process of spectacularization that cultural consumption now inevitably enforces. One of the rare static and non-photographic works by Coleman, it consists of a forged iron relief in the shape of a plow (reminiscent of both the stellar constellation and the political emblem of Sinn Féin, the historical protagonist and name of the political party for an independent and united Ireland). Its surfaces covered with gold leaf, the relief was installed in a room lined in its entirety with white felt and lit from behind by bright blue neon light. As though the already insufferable association of a symbol of radical identity politics with a luxurious cultural construct of dubious pedigree did not suffce, the relief ostentatiously positioned itself within a derivative and hybrid aesthetic, fusing David Smith and Dan Flavin via an excursion through the legacy of Yves Klein.

The audio component of *The Ploughman's Party,* played continuously, reiterated the slippage from the symbol of a radical political cause to the luxurious pomp of yet another variation of installation art: an actor's voice on a tape loop recited a textual montage written by Coleman that made the listeners slide through similar turns and inversions of language modes. In a perpetual phonetic and lexical *glissando* the speaker articulated all the demarcations of class that can be revealed through enunciation and vocabulary. Ranging from a statement of peasant rules to the promises of perfume and jewelry advertisements, the recitation alternated in sudden switches between the grainy voice of a subjectivity seemingly in its "natural" state and uttering obscenities, and the histrionics of a commercial pulling all phonetic registers of seduction. This sculptural and phonetic grotesque—certainly Coleman's most comical work—deploys the allegorial strategy of a simultaneous devalorization of all accepted linguistic and artistic conventions to induce the experience of a semiotic amok and the travesty necessary for a cathartic emancipation from the aspirations to culturally or politically constructed identity in the present.

Two years after *Box,* Coleman would produce *So Different . . . and Yet,* his first and—for the time being—only work employing video imagery. As though he was constructing an archaeology of the genres and techniques of the specular and of spectacularization, Coleman went from film and mass cultural athletic ritual in *Box* to the display of the fashion show in his performance *Now and Then;* from the phonetics of alienation in the juxtaposition of advertisement languages and the foundational discourses on identity in *The Plowman's Party* to his critical analysis of video/television conventions in *So Different . . . and Yet;* and culminated in the elegiac and declamatory embrace of the theater in *Living and Presumed Dead* (1983–1985). Coleman's archaeology of figuration appears to be engaged in the investigation of the intricate interrelationships between the historicity of scopic desire from its earlier embodiments in pictorial conventions to their subsequent desublimation and dissipation in mass cultural forms. His archaeology of narrative traces the transformations of language experience from the poetic and communicative dimensions of theatrical dialogue and dramaturgy to their subsequent dilapidation in contemporary film and television and the narrative structures in pulp fiction and the photonovel.[23]

James Coleman, *So Different . . . and Yet,* 1980. Video installation with Olwen Fouere and Roger Doyle. Courtesy of the artist.

In *So Different . . . and Yet,* a single color monitor is displayed in a large white architectural frame, generating a sense of unusual sculptural formality and at the same time clearly opposing the medium's standard self-presentation as a "casual" universal presence, as a "natural" contingency of everyday life. Corresponding to the emphatic recognition of the continuous infliction of the electronic image on spatial and visual experience, a single fifty-minute take of the camera[24] forces the viewer/listener to confront a continuous dialogue between a female and a male protagonist. They assume in rapid succession the roles of a number of increasingly intertwined and disparate characters within a trivial melodrama, unraveling for the patient viewer/listener the almost painfully unusual experience of a visual continuity and temporal duration that the medium's mass cultural conventions strictly prohibit. Thus the work's dialectic unfolds in the tension between the singularized image, its quasi-architectural presentation, the extremely attenuated dialogue and its perpetual intertwining of seemingly incoherent, manifold narrative strands.

The two voices alternate in an unpredictable slipping and sliding between French and English accents. Enunciations range from the "grain of the voice" of affected arrogance and pretense to the vilest language of hypocrisy and abuse. The narrative plots, recited in the most vapid French or haughty English pronunciation of platitudes, are jumbled and compressed, repetitive, fragmented and futile, and they generate an almost grotesque effect of a continuous cancellation of the listener's desire for closure, resulting in the total suspense of any narrative logic or function.

The conventions of visual representation appear on Coleman's archaeological stage in the classical scopic trope of the reclining female figure, the very figuration and staging of patriarchal desire. Originally a pictorial and photographic topos, the female *odalisque* or *gîsante* emerges here as an allegorical device of the desire to "figure," strangely displaced into a pseudo-theatrical performance on the video/television screen.[25] A most peculiar detail of the actress's costume (a strangely outmoded green evening gown continuously referred to in the accompanying narrative), a spiraling red garland ornamenting her right leg from foot to thigh, seems to enforce in the manner of an abstract synecdoche the very

mechanism of scopic desire that the figure embodies at large. In the same manner, the desire for narrative as an archaic mythical structure, deeply embedded in the construction of subjectivity, now appears to have become itself the subject on display, with the female protagonist accompanying the narrative's every twist and turn with a literal repositioning of her body and an adjustment within her repertoire of poses.

The male actor, placed further in the distance, seems to generate the piano music that accompanies the dialogue with the alternatingly haunting and sentimental or naively mimetic dramatic tunes that were once integral to silent film. This peculiar reenactment, confronts us—as do the body language and costume of the actress—with an enigmatic sense of temporal dislocation, an outlived form of experience that suddenly acquires an uncanny sense of presence and reality in the evident contrast with the electronic equipment from which it emanates. After a period of careful observation the viewer recognizes that the male protagonist, dressed in a white tuxedo, wears a pair of horns on his forehead that astound us no less than the spiraling red bandages on the woman's leg.

Clearly, this signals the realm of a return to mythical experience. Yet the mythical structure is not to be found by identifying the ethno-cultural sources of the horned male figure,[26] but rather by recognizing that it is the technological image of television itself and the types of narrative production that it enforces which have inflicted myth with a vengeance onto the aspirations for an emancipation from the cult value of images through their technological reproduction.

Coleman's allegorical operation reconstitutes the by now all but unimaginable experience of temporal duration to the viewer of the electronic image.[27] Yet within the same approach, in an apparently complete reversal of the principles of real time and duration, the uninterrupted imagery confronts the viewer with a persistently fragmented and decentered narrative. It generates a radical negation of the viewer's restless anticipation of narrative closure and provides, once again, the fundamental counterexperience to the governing principles of electronic image production.

In the last of Coleman's early works to concern us here, the slide projection *Living and Presumed Dead* (1983–1985), theater itself seems to have taken the

James Coleman, *Living and Presumed Dead,* 1983–1985. Projected images with synchronized audio narration. Courtesy of the artist.

center of Coleman's archaeology. Yet theater as the historical matrix of spectacle arises here once again only to disintegrate in the very moment of its reconstitution into a series of pointlessly and perpetually shifting, projected photographic images. These images show a large troupe of actors in the masks and costumes of what appears to have been a popular play (one can, after a while, identify some of the figures as a fishwife, skeletons, goblins, acrobats, and other garishly dressed theatrical performers, along with a strangely discomfiting presence of shop-window mannequins dressed in street costumes). The large horizontal line-up of figures suggests that we are, in fact, witnessing a final curtain call. Thus, from the very beginning of the slide sequence, the sense of the end of the play is present. It is only the voice of the narrator, Noel Purcell (an older popular actor from Dublin who performs the role of the narrator with a sublime differentiation of phonetic registers and dramatic *tempi*), that makes us anticipate an unfolding rather than a closure. As the narrator is threading through the complicated story of a number of invented characters, most of whom bear names in an unidentifiable language (Abbas, Borras, Capax), the spectator realizes that each individual projected slide alters the line-up of characters or their positions ever so slightly, even though the overall structure of the panoramic display of disappearing actors remains identical throughout the entire projection. The highly dramatic yet stark and graphic plot, an archetypal, Oedipal story of murder, mayhem, and love, with its convoluted and confusing traps and trackings, is related by the narrator with a vivacity that recalls both a first theatrical experience at the Grand Guignol and a first encounter with Greek tragedy.

Thus the work generates almost an etiology of the desire for narrativity and spectacle by recovering those structures of individual and collective experience in which the desire for theatrical figuration still corresponded to a function in the formation of subjectivity. Roland Barthes identifies the fusion of oedipality and narrativity with extraordinary clarity; his description seems to account for almost every structural aspect of Coleman's *Living and Presumed Dead:*

> The Oedipus complex is a narrative, but this narrative is never made known except through the subject's discourse, where it is presented

> not as a unitary, monological narrative (even if it is a monologue) but as a form broken into fragments, repetitions, infinite metonymies. In its current effort, contemporary literature is at the level of that same expression of an apparently obscured narrative, one which has no other place (no other referent), however, than its own utterance.[28]

We must recall, however, that Coleman's work deliberately situates itself in the discursive and institutional frameworks of visual culture, not those of literature. His work is inextricably bound up, as we have seen, with the domination of spectacle over visuality. But we still have to account for the tension that holds Coleman's elegiac recovery of the origins of theatrical and narrative desire, and their allegorical staging in *Living and Presumed Dead,* to the peculiar photographic presentation of a series of continuously, if minutely, altered static images.

Contrary to expectations, the photographic image in Coleman's work does not provide access to a representational plenitude of which Modernism supposedly deprived its spectators. Neither abolishing its semiotic radicality as a continuously fragmented allegorical image nor accepting that a new figuration, a representation of historical memory embodied in the conventions of cultural production and representation, could no longer be attained, Coleman's work engenders a peculiar dialectic. If the former function establishes the work's critical opposition to spectacle, the latter positions it in critical distance from the limitations of the discursive practices of the sixties, their anti-representational and countermnemonic identification with techno-scientific epistemes or with the paradigm of the commodity image. Each attempt to reconstitute narrative continuity and closure, as with any effort to reconstruct mimetic representation, falls instant prey to the very mechanisms that aesthetic practice at this moment negates if it wants to constitute itself at all in the face of a continuous and totalizing demand of spectacle to demolish particularity and difference. This is all the more obvious in instances of contemporary artistic practice with which Coleman's work could be falsely associated, practices that naively reclaim the realm of representation in the guise of an inscription within the contemporary "realism" of advertising imagery, or that aspire to constitute historical memory by claiming

a possible continuity with the last instance of the mnemonic in painting in the art of Manet.

What remains to be understood is the necessity for Coleman to *refigure*—literally and semiotically—the semiotic status of the aesthetic object. Or, put differently, what determined Coleman in the late 1970s to fuse linguistic performativity, indexical visuality, and the rhetorical conventions of narrativity and of theatrical figuration, and to synthesize these seemingly irreconcilable elements into one of the most complex aesthetic projects of postmodernity? Denis Hollier has recently clarified in a brillant essay the historical shift from the symbolic-iconic axis of traditional literary realism to what he identifies as the performative realism of indexicality. Overcoming the traditionally symbolic and literary dimensions of narrative fiction, Hollier's definition of a "performative realism" seems astonishingly apt also for the semiotic changes brought about in Coleman's continuous citations of theatrical and narrative conventions in his work since the late 1970s:

> Thus the heart of the matter is not a change in the referent, a passage from imaginary to real characters as one would do by leaving the novel for historiography; rather it is a change in the mode of enunciation; the passage to the real must be inferred not by a change of the object as much as by the entry onto the stage of the subject and its index. . . . The real function of photography is not so much allowing the narrator to dispense with the tiresome naturalistic ritual of the description of settings. It begins by indexing the tale. It makes it pass from a descriptive realism to a performative one.[29]

Notes

1

Maxime Du Camp, *Les chants modernes,* 1858, p. 5, as quoted by Robert Herbert in *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 4.

Raymond Williams gives us a more recent critical description of this "naturalized" precondition of avant-garde attitudes toward the historical: "What we now know as modernism,

and certainly as the avantgarde, has changed all this. Creativity is all in new making, new construction: all traditional, academic, even learned models are actually or potentially hostile to it, and must be swept away." See Raymond Williams, "The Politics of the Avantgarde," introduction to *Visions and Blueprints,* ed. Peter Timms and Edward Collier (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 5.

2

Wlad Godzich, introduction to Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. xxvii.

3

It is perhaps noteworthy to remember that Coleman not only spent the late sixties and early seventies in Italy, being acquainted with most and befriending some of the artists of Arte Povera, but also that he actually co-curated an exhibition of Italian Arte Povera in Dublin in 1973. See *An Exhibition of New Italian Art,* ed. Franco Toselli (Belfast: The Arts Council of Northern Ireland; Dublin: David Hendricks Gallery, 1973).

4

Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (first published in 1972).

5

We owe the most precise, differentiated, and legible description of *Flash Piece* to Anne Rorimer:

> Two blue flashes appeared between two yellow in repeated three minute cycles. During each cycle, the time between the flashes differed, although spectators remembered them as being the same. Thus time as measured and time as experienced did not coincide. In this way, Coleman succeeded in introducing a subjective aspect of viewing—namely that of memory—into the subject matter of the resulting work.

See Anne Rorimer, "Michael Asher and James Coleman at Artists Space," in *Michael Asher/James Coleman* (New York: Artists Space, 1988), p. 7.

6

Michael Newman, "Allegories of the Subject: The Theme of Identity in the Work of James Coleman," in *James Coleman,* exh. cat. (Chicago: The Renaissance Society, 1985), pp. 26–27.

7

Author's conversation with the artist, Dublin, May 1994.

8

Anne Rorimer, "James Coleman 1970–1985," in *James Coleman,* exh. cat., p. 8.

9

Coleman's critical response to this dilemma parallels that of other artists, such as Marcel Broodthaers and Gerhard Richter, but shares aspects of the positions developed within Italian Arte Povera that were temporarily and perhaps erroneously associated with post-Minimal and Conceptual art.

10

Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (July 1967); reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology,* ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 139–142.

11

In the early 1970s—resonating with Fried's condemnation—nothing would have appeared more disqualified as a point of departure than a programmatic reconsideration of the conventions of *theatricality.* Coleman's decision to engage precisely with those conventions seems to have alienated audiences both in Europe and the United States, keeping his work in relative historical illegibility and delaying its recognition.

Not surprisingly, audiences of the seventies were oblivious to artistic strategies from the origins of nineteenth-century Modernism, obscured by their proper orthodoxies: when Manet needed to reposition himself with regard to the doxa of Realism, he drew upon the dialectic of historical memory and oblivion, in the same manner that the Surrealists had redeemed figuration, sensing that only the contemplation of obsolescence could recognize the falseness of an orthodoxy of Modernist instrumentalist concepts of truth.

12

Fried, "Art and Objecthood," p. 125.

13

More intuitively, perhaps, than programmatically, Morris had already attempted to reestablish this tradition within the context of a Minimalist performance in his peculiar piece *Site* (1964), which featured Carolee Schneeman reclining in the pose of Manet's *Olympia* (1863). This intervention, however, as much as Yvonne Rainer's, would remain obscure and inconsequential in a larger theorization of the aesthetics of the sixties; yet both artists could now be recognized as precursors to Coleman's systematic deployment of the *tableau vivant*.

14

One of the clearest and most convincing arguments positioning Coleman's work in a post-structuralist perspective is Lynne Cooke's excellent essay on the artist, "A Tempered Agnosia," in *James Coleman* (Lyons: Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, 1990):

In these recent works Coleman engages more closely with the medium in which representation occurs and via that with the ways that the media construct the subject—as much as the object of perception. Because they are indexical, reproductive media of the kind that he employs necessarily refer beyond the realm of aesthetics. If all forms of picturing are intrinsically discursive, if all images require being read, and read in ways that involve and engage psychic, social and institutional "texts," Coleman in this and related ways is able to bypass the self-referential restrictions underpinning the high modernist concept of visuality which Rosalind Krauss ["Antivision," *October* 36 (Spring 1986), p. 147] has aptly termed an engagement with "the intransitive verbs of vision," which excludes the domain of knowledge, both moral and scientific, to revise the visual in the realm of a reflexive relation to the modality of vision rather than to its contents, to savor in and for itself qualities like immediacy, vibrancy, simultaneity, effulgence and to experience these as qualities without objects.

15

Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him," in *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1987), pp. 76–77.

16

Jean Fisher, "The Place of the Spectator in the Work of James Coleman," *Open Letter* 5, nos. 5/6 (1983), p. 53.

17

Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), passim.

18

Jean Fisher, "Inexorable Dissolve: James Coleman Blindsides Art," *Artforum* (December 1993), p. 97.

19

Coleman has emphasized in conversations with the author that Warhol was one of the crucial figures in his own artistic development.

20

The image of boxers fighting calls up historical references to that topos, from Thomas Eakins to George Bellows and August Sander, from Bertolt Brecht to Ernest Hemingway.

21

Seamus Deane, "Critical Reflections," *Artforum* (December 1993), p. 105.

22

Jean Fisher gives us the best description of this piece:

> The air of sorrow that gently murmurs through [Coleman's] works finds its counterpoints in a subtle irony, which in its quiet debunking of myths, questions our understanding of the past. This duality emerges in the play of associations poetically woven into the commentary of *The Ploughman's Party* (1979–1980). Coleman uses a central image, the plough, to reveal how, among other things, this powerful archetypal symbol oscillates through a number of significations: from an earthly myth and peaceful utility, to the historic militancy of the Sinn Féin, to its corruption into mere decoration by a frivolous culture. The visual focus of the piece is a gilded Rococo-style translation of the constellation, which hangs shimmering in an evanescent blue light; an Ultimate Object.

Jean Fisher, "James Coleman," in *James Coleman* (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 1982), p. 20.

23

Coleman has emphasized the extent to which his late 1960s encounters with the Italian model of the *photoromanza* influenced his selection of photographic display formats as much as the construction of his narratives (e.g., his work *Seeing for Oneself,* which is entirely structured in the manner of a *photoromanza*). Narratological studies of pulp fiction (such as the studies of Janis Radway and Tania Modleski's study of the Harlequin romance novel) have been instrumental in the development of both Coleman's selection of popular culture material and his deconstructionist interest in the functions of fiction.

24

While the work is perceived as being the result of a single take, it actually incorporated two edits, which were performed for technical reasons.

25

Once again, Manet's classically modernist figure of *Olympia* comes to mind in the peculiar display of Coleman's protagonist, as in the *tableau vivant* by Robert Morris mentioned earlier. Frédéric Migayrou made this historical association in his essay, "James Coleman: le cas des figures," without, however, coming to similar conclusions. See *James Coleman,* exh. cat., ed. Suzanne Pagé (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989).

26

Michael Newman has suggested that the horns refer to "Cernunnos, the god with the horns of a stag, ram or bull, a symbol of fertility who was assimilated to Satan during the early Christian period." As fascinating as the idea might be to trace Irishness and pagan sources in Coleman's work as part of a broader investigation of the problematic condition of Irish national identity, it seems that the exactitude of the identification in this case generates in fact very little in the reading of the work. See Newman, "Allegories of the Subject."

27

It seems appropriate at this point to recall the filmic work of Andy Warhol, who had also recuperated a subversive anti-narrative dimension through the reconstitution of an experience of actual time in his films of the sixties, most notably in *Chelsea Girls*.

28

Roland Barthes, "On the Fashion System," interview with Raymond Bellour, in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962–1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), p. 53.

29

Denis Hollier, "Surrealist Precipitates: Shadows Don't Cast Shadows," *October* 69 (Summer 1994), p. 126.

Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham

Asked about the essential feature of his work, Dan Graham answered by calling it "photojournalism,"[1] an ironic quotation of a term Marcel Duchamp once used to describe his own activities. Graham voluntarily followed a misunderstanding and misnomer that his work has stirred since its earliest publication in 1965. In 1970 the critic Lucy Lippard could still remark during a discussion with Carl Andre, Jan Dibbets, and Douglas Huebler: "Dan, you've been called a poet and a critic and a photographer. Are you an artist now?"[2]

But even his own contemporaries, artist-friends of the Minimal phase whose work had found in Dan Graham's analytical criticism since 1965 a rarely qualified protagonist, refused—by misinterpreting Graham's visual art production—the recognition of changing basic concepts within the visual arts since 1965. Dan Flavin, for example, even though he was among the first to be seriously interested in Graham's work and the first to publish one of his photographs, wrote about Graham's *Homes for America* (1966): "Your fine photographic

First published in *Dan Graham,* exh. cat., ed. R. H. Fuchs (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbe-Museum, 1978), pp. 73–78.

approach seems to recall the consistently clear and plain deviceless reportage of Henri Cartier-Bresson, which you apply not to people, as he did, but to their 'feats' of banal vernacular architecture and landscape."[3]

This false classification is of particularly revealing historical irony. It shows that from a Minimalist's perspective, photographic information/documentation could not possibly be conceived as "art" (except, perhaps, as "photographic" art). Flavin's misapprehension reveals, moreover an unconscious attempt to eliminate radically innovative implications of post-Minimalist art activity by relating Graham's photographs to a particularly restorative ideology of photography, namely Cartier-Bresson's idea of the Decisive Moment. Whereas photographers like Cartier-Bresson tend to celebrate their passive-receptive activity as a medium of the *one* historical moment they try to conserve in its photographic transubstantiation, Graham intends quite the contrary: to construct functional models of recognition of actual history by his (photographic) media.

Homes for America (1966), which might be considered along with Graham's *Schema* (1966) to be the most complex and relevant of his early works, shall serve as an example. This piece of "photojournalism," which he referred to as "the transition from earlier 'conceptual' pages in magazines and the 1967–1969 articles," takes off from the by then growing recognition that information about works of art is disseminated primarily by reproductions in the (art) media. As Carl Andre had described it in 1968: "The photograph is a lie. I'm afraid we get a great deal of our exposure to art through magazines and through slides, and I think this is dreadful, this is anti-art because art is a direct experience with something in the world and photography is just a rumor, a kind of pornography of art."[4] It is precisely at this anti-art point of "pornography" that Graham starts his inquiry, and it is a signpost of his post-Minimalist attitude that he almost literally inverts Andre's disgust with the media and turns it into a basis for his own artistic strategies.

Graham has commented on this key body of work to the effect that he repeats the intertwinement of the various formal and (art) historical relations and dialectical inversions of the work:

> First it is important that the photos are not alone, but part of a magazine layout. They are illustrations of the text or (inversely), the text functions in relation to/modifying the meaning of the photos. The photos and the text are separate parts of a schematic two-dimensional grid. The photos correlate [to] the lists and columns of serial information and both "represent" the serial logic of the housing developments whose subject matter the article discusses. Despite the fact that the idea of using the "real" outdoor environment as a "site" on which to construct "conceptual" or "earth works" (remember the article was written some years before Smithson's and Oppenheim's works), I think the fact that "Homes for America" was, in the end, only a magazine article, and made no claims for itself as "Art," is its most important aspect.[5]

The informational frame of an art magazine's coverage thus becomes the "found" formal structure. This is, however, juxtaposed with the subject matter of a found "reality" structure—the misery of everyday industrial housing. At the same time, its formal stylistic qualities—the serial order of the cubic house-forms, their permutational principles of single but repetitive elements (whose sum constitutes the "wholeness" of a given formation)—reflect in an obviously ironic and ambiguous manner the formal and stylistic principles of Minimal sculpture. The dialectic of reality structure and formal structure, this capacity to read "buildings and grammars," or reality systems and formal systems, is most typical and significant of all of Graham's early writings and Conceptual works. It places them into a category of structure "as simulacrum of the object of history," as Barthes has defined it,

> a pointed, intentional simulacrum, because the imitated object reveals something which remained invisible or even more incomprehensible with the mere object. . . . This simulacrum is intellect added to the object; and this addition has anthropological value as it is the human being itself, its history, its situation, its freedom and the resistance which nature opposes to his mind.[6]

Homes for America

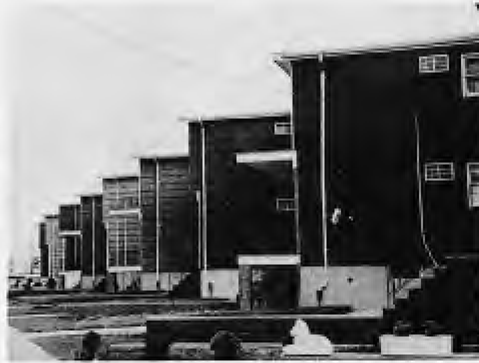
Early 20th-Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discrete Cell of '66

D. GRAHAM

Belleplain
Brooklawn
Colonia
Colonia Manor
Fair Haven
Fair Lawn
Greenfields Village
Green Village
Plainsboro
Pleasant Grove
Pleasant Plains
Sunset Hill Garden
Garden City
Garden City Park
Greenlawn
Island Park
Levittown
Middleville
New City Park
Pine Lawn
Plainview
Plandome Manor
Pleasantside
Pleasantville

Dan Graham, *Homes for America, Arts Magazine,* December 1966.

Although there is perhaps some aesthetic precedence in the row houses which are indigenous to many older cities along the east coast, and built with uniform façades and set-backs early this century, housing developments as an architectural phenomenon seem peculiarly gratuitous. They exist apart from prior standards of 'good' architecture. They were not built to satisfy individual needs or tastes. The owner is completely tangential to the product's completion. His home isn't really possessable in the old sense, it wasn't designed to 'last for generations'; and outside of its immediate 'here and now' context it is useless, designed to be thrown away. Both architecture and craftsmanship as values are subverted by the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardized modular plans. Contingencies such as mass production technology and land use economics make the final decisions, denying the architect his former 'unique' role. Developments stand in an altered relationship to their environment. Designed to fill in 'dead' land areas, the houses needn't adapt to or attempt to withstand Nature. There is no organic unity connecting the land site and the home. Both are without roots — separate parts in a larger, predetermined, synthetic order.



Top left: set-back rows (rear view), Bayonne, N.J.

Top right: set back rows (front view), Bayonne, N.J.

Bottom right: two rows of set backs, Jersey City, N.J.

ARTS MAGAZINE/December 1966-January 1967

Dan Graham, *Two House Homes,* 1966. Color photograph. Collection Herman Daled, Brussels. Courtesy of the artist.

The general misunderstanding and delayed recognition of Graham's work may have had its cause in the work's specifically "non-aesthetic" forms of appearance. These forms are not only a result of Graham's functionalizing of formal concerns, but probably also of an entirely different approach to those historical sources of Constructivism that had become a point of reference in American art since Stella, and which had finally received a "formalist" reading by the generation of Minimal artists, if only reluctantly, as in this acknowledgment by Donald Judd in 1974: "With and since Malevich the several aspects of the best art have been single, like unblended Scotch. Free."[7]

Dan Graham and the Minimal Heritage

> The split between art and real problems emerged in the Sixties in an essentially apolitical and asocial art—to the extent that, for most artists, political engagement meant moving to an extra art activity. . . . The neutrality which this art assumes excludes the possibility of a critical relation to a capitalist form of life.[8]

Formalism in aesthetic practice and the correlating equivalent, an entrepreneur's morality, have not been the original position of the Minimal generation. The Minimalists had not only oriented their formal and material strategies according to Constructivist axioms, but also attempted to reactivitate the latter's sociopolitical implications. This meant demanding an objective functionalism of materials that had to originate from technological products and processes; unlimited capacity of technical reproduction as well as its dialectical counterpart—namely, the idea of the unique and specific work, that could only find its actual function and realization in a particular segment of the time-space continuum; and, finally, the abolition of the artwork's commodity status and the attempt to replace its exchange and exhibition value with a new concept of functional use value.

Even though Flavin may not have understood or appreciated Graham, this is not true for the opposite: Graham has frequently remarked how important his knowledge and understanding of Flavin's work has been to his own development

as an artist. And it remains an open question whether the work of the elder artist offered, in fact, the complexity that Graham discerned in it, or whether he read aspects of complexity into Flavin's work that would become the key features of his own artistic production, anticipating his own future development by projecting it onto the historical screen of the predecessor's work. The transformation of "formalist" terms into a more "functionalist" context, in particular, could be called one of the essential qualities that Graham's work introduced into the visual arts around 1965. For example, Flavin's (and equally Andre's and LeWitt's) notion of *place,* the fact that the work referred to the gallery as the spatial container, along with the notion of *presence,* which had meant in Flavin's work that an installation was contingent on its present situation and therefore always specifically conceived for one particular architectural context, became key issues in Graham's early Conceptual works, as well as in his critical analytical writings (which preceeded his development of performance, film, and video works).

This transformation from plastic-material modes of analyzing perceptual (aesthetic) processes to literal-verbal analyses and conceptualization takes place within Graham's descriptions of the works of Andre, Flavin, Judd, Nauman, Serra, and Sol LeWitt, in texts Graham wrote and published starting in 1965. It seems more appropriate to read these texts as artistic arguments indicating the development of new forms of aesthetic work than as art criticism. Initially, these critical texts open up a historical perspective through their minute descriptive precision, inasmuch as they show the basic principles of Minimalism to be derivatives of Constructivist fundamentals. Graham catalogues these principles in his 1967 description of Flavin's work:

> Fluorescent light objects in place are replaceable in various contingently determined interdependent relations with specific environmental situations and are also replaceable from their fixture and in having a limited existence. The components of a particular exhibition upon its termination are replaced in another situation—perhaps put to a non-art use as a part of a different whole in a different future.[9]

Or even more systematically and explicitly on Carl Andre's sculpture *Crib, Compound, Coin* (1965).

> The component units possessed no intrinsic significance beyond their immediate contextual placement being "replaceable." Works are impossessible by the viewer in the monetary sense, the sense of an artist being possessed of a vision or of satisfying personal inner needs of the viewer. Unweighted with symbolic transcendental or redeeming monetary values, Andre's sculpture does not form some platonically substantial body, but is *recoverable;* for which no one may be poetically transported from view when the exhibition is terminated (the parts having been re-covered and perhaps put to an entirely non-related use as part of a different whole in a different future).[10]

Another reading of Graham's criticism would examine the historicity of the writings themselves, from a present point of view, their acuity in the way they denote almost systematically all the elementary principles of visual thinking as they had been developed by Minimal art practice. At the same time, these texts connote by their very precision the change of artistic procedure into concepts of verbalized materiality and materialized language. This has been quite accurately observed by Robert Smithson, who, as early as 1967, seems to have seen more clearly than Flavin that the historical and aesthetic implications of Graham's writings and photographic works belonged to a new definition of art axioms (updating modes of aesthetic production to the general standards of means of recognition) that drew them closer to their use value potential: "Like some of the other artists Graham can 'read' the language of buildings (*Homes for America,* 1966). . . . The reading of both buildings and grammars enables the artist to avoid out of date appeals to 'function' or 'utilitarianism.'"[11]

In most of his writings Dan Graham has reflected on the double nature of those processes—to the extent that they could be formalized and integrated into the context of his work—by referring to them as "in-formation," indicating that to him formal procedures as well as their material content are indivisible units.

The materiality of the formal processes in Graham's works could therefore be called "specific" in the sense coined by Donald Judd for painterly-sculptural works of the Minimal phase: "Materials vary greatly and are simply materials—formica, aluminum, cold-rolled steel, plexiglas, red and common brass and so forth. They are specific. Also they are usually aggressive."[12]

Graham's critical analysis of the formal and material heritage of Minimal aesthetics not only seems to have led him to the discovery that Minimalist artists' ideas about materiality were in fact rather traditional and positivist (oriented at a neo-Constructivist craft ethos), but moreover he seems to have acknowledged that their original radicality in questioning the role of the artwork in its social context had been given up and that Minimal works had been restored easily into the commodity status, acquiring exchange value inasmuch as they gave up their context-bound idea of use value. Therefore, the materials of reality are for Graham no longer simply "found objects" or the "ready-made elements" of technological everyday reality that they are in Flavin's fluorescent lights or even Andre's metallurgical elements (which are much more technologically "cultivated" than their elementary "natural" look might at first reveal); they are, rather, the found structures beyond visible reality and its seeming concreteness. They determine reality however, with a more subtle and effective impact: equally the psycho-physiological motivations of subjective behavior and the socio-economical conditions of objective political practice, or, even more precisely, the omnipresent mechanisms of interdependence within those systems revealed in the acutely observed situations of their combined effects.

Graham's authentically Conceptual early magazine publications, which were written before his critical articles on fellow artists, took the conventional standard magazine page as their formal ground and common denominator. They were, in a sense, about "themselves." Works like *Figurative* (1965), *Schema* (1966), and *Detumescence* (1966)—which were among the first artworks, if not the very first, to be published in magazine advertisement form—sum up the reflection of Minimal presuppositions by translating them into an entirely different formal language. The historical distance and degrees of differentiation that have actually been achieved by Graham's theoretical thought as well as by his aesthetic pro-

duction can be easily understood by comparing Judd's position regarding materials of art objects and Graham's attitude toward the materiality of art in his "Other Observations" (1969). The essay was written as a comment on *Schema* and reads in parts almost as a word-for-word comparative study and critique of minimalist formal thought and its transformation:

> A page of "Schema" exists as a matter of fact materiality and simultaneously semiotic signifier of this material (present): as a sign it unites, therefore, signifier and signified. . . . In the internal logic, there is the paradox that the concept of "materiality" referred to by the language is to the language itself as some "immaterial" material (a kind of mediumistic ether) and simultaneously is to it as the extensive space. There is a "shell" placed between the external "empty" material of place and the interior "empty" material of "language," (systems of) information (in-formation) exist halfway between *material* and *concept,* without being either one.[13]

The consequent radicality of Graham's formal procedure to reduce *Schema* to a mere formula of self-referentiality finds its dialectical material equivalent in his decision to publish this work in the context of an (art) magazine advertisement, as he has pointed out in later notes on *Schema:*

> But, unlike a Stella painting, for example, the variants of *Schema are not* simply self-referential. This is because of the use of the magazine system as support. Magazines determine a place or a frame of reference both outside and inside what is defined as "Art." Magazines are boundaries (mediating) between the two areas . . . between gallery "Art" and communications about "Art."[14]

Graham is clearly attempting to include the analytical reflection on those determining elements that had been ignored before, the different aspects of a socio-economical framework as well as the individual's psychological framework,

which conditions the production as well as the reception of the artwork. By inverting his perspective from formalist concerns to functionalist strategies, Graham makes them the very subject matter of his art. Again, his own retrospective comment is most illuminating in regard to the changes that his work initiated in comparison to the given (art) historical conditions:

> It was interesting then, that *aesthetically* (but not functionally, that is, in material, economic terms) some of the Minimal Art seemed to refer to the gallery interior space as the ultimate frame or structural support/context and that some "Pop" Art referred to the surrounding media-world of cultural information as framework. But the frame (specific media-form or gallery/museum as economic entity concerned with value) was never made structurally apparent. *Schema*'s strategy was to reduce these two frameworks, to coalesce them into one frame so that they were made more apparent and the "art product" would be radically de-valued. I wanted to make a "Pop" Art which was more literally disposable (an idea which was alluded to in Warhol's idea of replacing "quality" for "quantity"—the logic of a consumer society), I wanted to make an art-form which could not be reproduced *or* exhibited in a gallery/museum, and I wanted to make a further reduction of the "Minimal" object to a not necessarily aesthetic two-dimensional form (which was not painting or drawing): printed matter which is mass reproduced and mass disposable information. Putting it in magazine pages meant that it also could be "read" in juxtaposition to the usual second-hand art criticism, reviews, reproductions in the rest of the magazine and would form a critique of the functioning of the magazine (in relation to the gallery structure).[15]

Graham's *Schema* and his later comments on it, such as "Other Observations" (1969) and "Magazine/Advertisements" (1969), which began with the sentence "Art is a social sign," have to be read along with Daniel Buren's "Limites critiques" (1969, published in English as "Critical Limits" in 1973)[16] as one of the

first and most relevant attempts of that period to make art's most extraneous, repressed, and camouflaged conditions obvious and invert them to become art's subject matter. Anticipating Hans Haacke's somewhat comparable reflections in the late sixties (recently published under the title "Framing and Being Framed"), Graham's framework analysis differs considerably from the work of Buren—who reflects on the historical and museological determinations of the artwork—as well as that of Haacke—who takes the social conditioning of art reception into consideration along with art's historical transformation by becoming an object of capital investment. Graham analyzes the general social conditions of production and reproduction of (art) information and their formal and material consequences.[17]

Graham's processes—compared to Judd's "specific objects"—are specific in a threefold manner: first, in regard to their proper epistemological and historical context (i.e., the visual arts) as they dialectically reflect and transcend the given conditions of Minimal aesthetics; second, in their relation to objective methodology, which consciously and clearly inserts them into a context of more general principles of meaning production, such as their explicit dependence on semiology; third, because of their very concrete reference to a particular segment of reality. It is not least of all for this last reason that Graham's works, his "specific processes," seem to lack visual aesthetic qualities, which would more easily allow them to be read in a cultural context of art history. On the other hand, their lack of surface aesthetics, rooted in their potential function, their insistence on the idea to reinvest the artwork with a potential use value, makes them more similar to certain works of productivist art than a superficial comparison might reveal. It is precisely this lack of aesthetic attraction, which denounces all forms of false reconciliation, that more craft-oriented artworks bring into the world as cultural commodities. Their service to the dominating principles includes restoring art to its most traditional role, namely that of functioning as the mere decorum of the ruling order.

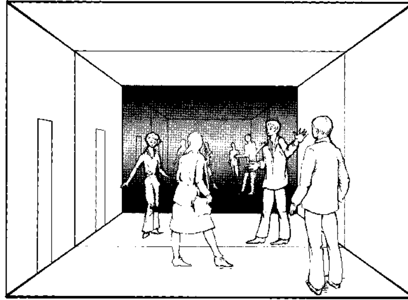
Graham's "Subject Matter" and Post-Minimalism

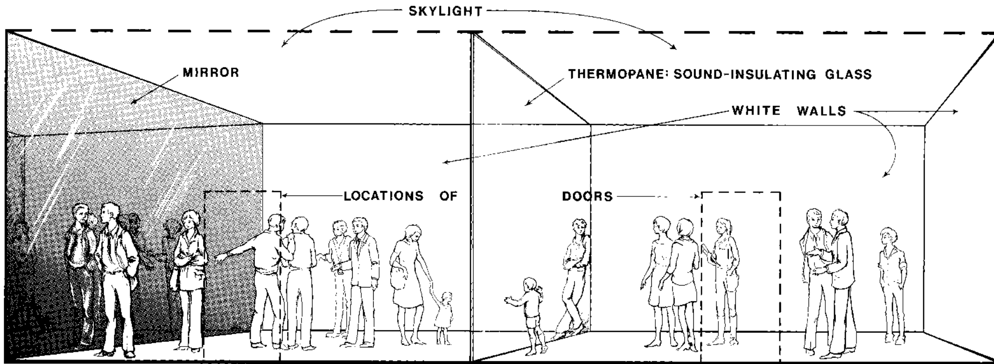
Dan Graham's compilation of critical essays, which was first published in 1969 in his privately edited "End Moments" under the title "Subject Matter," indicated in its

subtitle the paradigmatic change occurring in the visual arts around 1965: "1. the subject (rather than the object), 2. matter (as process not as object)." This collection of "art-critical" writings, which includes one of Graham's earliest pieces on Donald Judd (1964) as well as the latest in a series of analyses on his experience of a performance work by Bruce Nauman (1969), goes further than his other pieces in its attempt to overcome Minimalist presuppositions. "Subject Matter" must be considered in part a reviewing and critical reflection of Graham's own work of the *Schema* period, work he felt still somehow to be part of the "non-anthropomorphic ideology of late '60s New York 'Minimal' art." Parallel to these writings Graham initiates his own first activities, within which he transformed the notions of visual and spatial concretions into the less "aesthetic" yet more concise and immediate perceptual modes of experience, acted out by real performers. Graham's concern for the immediacy of perceptual experience shows that he consequently pursued the reductivist approach to art that had been induced by Stella and had been at issue all through Minimalism, and that he quite necessarily arrived at a concern for the "behavior" of people themselves, their actual practice of perception (the subject) instead of a concern for their behavior in relation to a perceived sculptural object. While Graham most lucidly described and analyzed the gradual shift from the Minimalist object to the post-Minimal focus on process, he underwent in his own work a similar change, albeit though remaining as specific and consistent in attitude just as his works of the *Schema* period had been. Again, the starting point of reflection goes back to Graham's perception of Flavin's work as he has described it in retrospect:

> I liked that as a side effect of Flavin's fluorescents the gallery walls became a "canvas." The lights dramatized the people (like "spotlights") in a gallery—throwing the content of the exhibition onto the people in the process of perceiving; the gallery's interior cube itself became the real framework.[18]

In Graham's essay on Sol LeWitt this reading of a sculptural work, understood in a manner that announces the future development that Graham's own art would take, is even more explicit:





Dan Graham, *Public Space/Two Audiences,* 1976.

Dan Graham, *Performer/Audience/Mirror,* Section III, P. S. 1, New York, December 1977.

Dan Graham, *Octagon for Münster,* 1987. Steel, mirror glass, wood; diameter 370 cm. Location: Schlossgarten in Münster. Photo: Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster.

> As the viewer moves from point to point about the art object the physical continuity of the walk is translated into illusive self-representing depth: the visual complication of representations "develops" a discrete, non-progressive space and time. *There is no disctinction between subject and object.* Object is the viewer, the art and subject is the viewer, the art. Object and subject are not dialectical oppositions but one self-contained identity: reversible interior and exterior termini. All frames of reference read simultaneously: object "subject."[19]

This reveals at the same time the absolutely consequent logic of the extension of formalist concerns into the more functional reality of Graham's later performance activities. It elucidates the strictly nonliterary and nontheatrical quality of Graham's understanding of performance activities. "Acting" in the context of the visual arts is relevant only inasmuch as it performs the elementary procedure of perceiving the network of relationships between performer and perceiver, both being simultaneously subject and object. Graham observed this in detail when confronted with the works of Bruce Nauman, whose performance practices Graham described in "Subject Matter," showing then the process of assimilating and transforming Nauman's influence on his own future work. In a recent comment on "Subject Matter," in particular on the parts concerning the influences of music and performance on his work, Graham describes clearly the importance of these phenomena for his own development:

> I had the idea of the reciprocal interdependence of perceiver (spectator) and the perceived art-object/or the artist as performer (who might in the case of Nauman present himself as or in place of this "object"). In this new subject-object relation the spectator's perceptual processes were correlated to the compositional process (which was also inherent in the material . . . thus a different idea of "*material*" and the relation of this materiality to nature (al) processes was also developed). This change in compositional process came from

> developments in music and dance . . . where the performer or performance was the center of the work, executed and perceived in a durational time continuum. This was the opposite of Minimal Art's durationless presence . . . a series of discontinuous instances, related by a generating self-contained compositional idea (which was *a priori* to the performance or execution of the piece). From music also came the idea of the *physiological* presence . . . a work about the perceptual process itself, taking place simultaneously as an external phenomenon and inside the brain as part of the brain's interior processes. . . . "Subject Matter" was written at the same time as my first films and performances. I wanted to explain these new types of works I was relating to.[20]

The outline of Graham's interests and the strategies of his formal enterprises appear in the writings and in the works as a microscopic analysis of segments of the processes of history itself, their given structures as well as the modes of perceiving them, and the perspectives of analyzing and transforming them. And it is to the degree that the analysis succeeds in mediating the patterns of a given reality structure (individual behavior, modes of interaction)—for example, Graham's subtle revealing of stereotyped male-female roles in his video-performance *Two Consciousness Projections* (1972), the gradual increase of awareness of group behavior versus individual behavior in performances like *Intention/Intentionality Sequence* (1972) or *Performer/Audience Sequence* (1974), and the open structure inducing and elucidating the mechanisms of group identification in his *Public Space/Two Audiences* (1976)—that the works open up an instrumental perspective of further historical proceedings, endowing the viewer with what he experiences as their artwork quality, their aesthetic value.

Epilogue on the Idea of Use Value

> A spindle maintains itself as use value only by being used for spinning. Otherwise, by the specific form which has been given to the

> wood or metal, both the work which produced the form and the material which was shaped by the form would be spoiled for use. Only by being applied as a medium of active work, as an objective moment in its very being, are the use value of wood and metal as well as the form, maintained.
>
> —*Karl Marx, sketches for the* Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie

Use value is art's most heteronomous counterpart, which, defining the artistic activity as organon of history, as instrument of materialist recognition and transformation, determines itself primarily and finally by its historical context: because it can only result from the most advanced state of aesthetic reflection, it must function at the same time within the specific conditions of a given particular historical situation. For example, the artist as Constructivist engineer in revolutionary Russia fulfilled a functional and aesthetic necessity, whereas forty years later, in the era of monopoly, Constructivist engineering necessarily functions merely as aesthetic objects. Restorations on the formal surfaces of social reality effect the opposite of their original intentions, as can be seen clearly in the development of architecture since Constructivism and the Bauhaus. On the other hand, if artistic production gives up altogether the idea of use value, it abolishes its own inherent potential to induce dialectics within the reality of cultural history, thus producing mere artistic facticity incapable of initiating further processes of development. This seems to be true of much contemporary post-Conceptual work, whether so-called "new" painting and sculpture or, even more so, photographic stories and the new theatricality of performance. All these show the features of a decadence in art that is deprived of its inherent function to affect reality, to exist otherwise than just aesthetically, to claim a potential to recognize history. Much present-day art is either infantile or demonic in its pretension, either decorative or dramatic, as it has nothing "to do" but be "art" and somewhat new. These works exhibit a false vivacity that seems to denounce the rigorous abstraction of the best of Conceptual art and react against the tautological cul de sac of Conceptual academicism at its worst, but does not seem aware of the fact that art, once transformed onto

the level of language, had achieved a state of most advanced (potential) communicability and assumed the highest form of abstract use value potential. One could hypothetically argue, then, that if present-day aesthetic language does not maintain communicability and use value, as well as the general level of abstraction achieved by language and its counterpart, the concretion of a specific use value potential (as it does most efficiently in the recent works of Dan Graham or equally in those of Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, and Lawrence Weiner), then art gives in ignorantly to the general conditions of production and, therefore, on the level of superstructure, reflects and shares their dilemma:

> Boredom, resulting from the experience of destroyed use value, until now a problem of the privileged, has now also become a problem of the masses. The avoidance of proletarian revolution enables the capitalist development to take a final step in completing its basic aporia: namely to produce wealth by destroying use value. What will be left over in the end is the unresisted and unquestioned production of simple trash.[21]

Notes

1

See "Photographs by Dan Graham," in *Minimal Art,* ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), p. 175.

2

Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 155.

3

Dan Flavin, "Some Other Remarks by Dan Flavin," *Artforum* (December 1967), p. 27.

Sol LeWitt seems to have had quite a different understanding of Graham's photographical work, proven by the fact that he included one of Graham's photographs as illustration for his "Paragraphs on Conceptual-Art" in an issue of *Artforum* (Summer 1967).

4

Carl Andre, interview with Willoughby Sharp (1968), *Avalanche,* 1970.

5

Dan Graham in a letter to the author, August 1976.

6

Roland Barthes, "L'activité structuraliste," in *Essais Critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 216.

7

Donald Judd, "Malevich," in *Complete Writings* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 212.

8

Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, "Don Judd," *The Fox,* no. 2 (1975), p. 138.

9

Dan Graham, *Dan Flavin* (Chicago, 1967); reprinted partly in *End Moments,* ed. Dan Graham (New York, 1969), p. 15.

10

Dan Graham, "Carl Andre," *Arts Magazine* 42, no. 3 (1967), p. 34.

11

Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 3 (1968), p. 22.

12

Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," first published in *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965), pp. 74–83; reprinted in Judd, *Complete Writings,* p. 181.

13

Dan Graham, "Other Observations," in *For Publication,* exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Otis Art Institute, 1975), n.p.

14

Dan Graham in a letter to the author, August 1976.

15

Ibid.

16

On his relationship to the work of Daniel Buren, Graham commented (letter to the author, August 1976): "I found out about Buren's theory and works many years later. I think of them as a clear advancement on Flavin's, Judd's, LeWitt's positions. It now seems to me that some of the ideas in 'Schema' foreshadow aspects of Buren's theory/practice (I don't think he knew about the piece until 1970 . . . although it is possible that he did, as it was published in 'Art & Language' in 1968)."

17

See also his later work, *Income/Outflow* (1969).

18

Dan Graham, letter to the author, August 1976.

19

Dan Graham, "Sol LeWitt—Two Structures," in *End Moments,* p. 65

20

Letter to the author, August 1976.

21

Wolfgang Pohrt, *Theorie des Gebrauchswertes* (Frankfurt: Syndikat Verlag, 1976), p. 16.

Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason

> Works of art which by their existence take the side of the victims of a rationality that subjugates nature, are even in their protest constitutively implicated in the process of rationalization itself. Were they to try to disown it, they would become both aesthetically and socially powerless: mere clay. The organizing, unifying principle of each and every work of art is borrowed from that very rationality whose claim to totality it seeks to defy.
> —*Theodor W. Adorno*[1]

By now we know that analysis of the reception of a particular work can clarify its immanent meanings and functions as well as the external factors that control its social positioning within that segment of the culture industry generally identified as "the art world." Some types of new artistic production and stylistic shifts are regularly embraced with enthusiasm; they are, in fact, the means by which the art market avoids the twin dangers of economic and aesthetic entropy. At the

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same time, other unacceptable practices are just as regularly relegated to oblivion and silence. In recent history, we have witnessed the extraordinary success of certain artists' work at one moment in time, and have then seen those same artists' reputations wither away to nothingness in less than a decade (e.g., Victor Vasarely). We have also seen the almost complete neglect of other artists (or aesthetic positions), along with the art world's refusal to reconsider work that has suffered decades of indifference (e.g., John Heartfield).

Of course, artists themselves, as "experts of legitimation" (Gramsci), engage in a diversity of strategies ranging from pure acceptance of the culture's ideological usages of their work to, at the opposite extreme, programmatic efforts to contest the very framework of that culture, as well as its ideological apparatus. Whether a given type of work affirms the cultural hegemony of a particular class and its ideology, or instead criticizes and even attacks that hegemony, may obviously determine whether a particular audience accepts or refuses its practices and propositions.

Raymond Williams's reflections on the historical power and persistence of a "selective tradition" can also shed some useful light on Hans Haacke's positioning of specific works within the cultural sphere:

> There is a process which I call the *selective tradition:* that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as "*the* tradition," "*the* significant past." But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible era of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, while certain other meanings and practices are excluded.[2]

It is highly informative to approach the work of Hans Haacke through its reception. A mid-career artist who was born in Cologne in 1936 and took up residence in the U.S. in 1966, Haacke has now produced and exhibited art for more than twenty-six years (his first exhibition took place at New York's Wittenborn One-Wall Gallery in 1962). Before 1986, which saw an atypical flurry of art world attention to his work, it would not have seemed in the least inappropriate to categorize Haacke as a marginalized artist.[3]

As for the reputedly advanced museums of Europe, and especially the former West Germany, they have indeed paid little collective attention to Haacke. Though devoted for the last twenty years to the reconstruction of a modernist and contemporary progressive culture on the pattern of the hegemonic American image, West German museums, with only one exception, have not acquired any of Haacke's mature—i.e., political—works, and none has yet given him a retrospective (it seems that they no more recognize him as a German artist than American museums accept him as an American).[4] Furthermore, Haacke is not included in any of the famous private collections in West Germany. What he has experienced instead is a spectacular scandal of institutional censorship at the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in his hometown of Cologne (the excluded work was *Manet-Projekt '74*), an incident that matched the notorious cancellation of his exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 1971.[5] In addition, there have been several subsequent occasions on which censorship was barely avoided in last-minute compromise solutions, or was practiced under the guise of legalistic pedantry.[6]

Neither the paranoia of the Left nor a conspiracy theory is necessary to explain Haacke's history of marginalization and the extent of his institutional and commercial exclusion in both Europe and North America. What the reception of Haacke's work does prove is that the supposedly all-embracing liberalism of high cultural institutions and of the market may be far more selective than is generally believed, and that those institutions can be rather rigorous in their secret acts of revenge and clandestine repression. It seems that Haacke has too often challenged institutional power and control, and that the institutional, discursive, and economic apparatuses of international high art have not forgiven him for "baring those devices."

It is clear that, for postwar Germany in particular, the type of factually specific memory that Haacke constructs is not very appealing. What the dominant forces in contemporary German culture seem to prefer is work that ostentatiously mourns the political barbarism of the Nazi past. Apparently, Germans can afford to applaud the sublime and polyvalent (or merely politically obscurantist?) poetic meditations and pictorial reconciliations of work by Beuys and Kiefer. What they cannot tolerate is Haacke's devotion to factual accuracy—an accuracy

that has painfully revealed, for instance, how a prominent figure in the economic establishment of the Nazi government, the banker Hermann Joseph Abs, now functions as a major cultural benefactor in the liberal democracy of postwar Germany. Haacke's reconstructions of cultural memory are neither nostalgic nor conciliatory; rather, they alert us to current facts. His work makes one aware, for example, of the links between the politics of repression practiced in remote countries of the Third World and certain individuals or corporations that figure as philanthropists and cultural patrons in various capitals of the First World—and who conceal themselves behind the liberal-democratic character masks provided by those First World cultural activities (e.g., the Guggenheim trustees in Chile; the Philips Corporation in Iran and South Africa; the Bührle Family, the Saatchis, Alcan, Cartier, Mobil, and British Leyland in South Africa). One could argue that Haacke's work invokes the memory of a potential or actual continuity between historic fascism of the 1930s and the politics of liberal democracies under multinational capitalism. Moreover, Haacke constructs this kind of memory by working at the center of our supposedly autonomous and apolitical culture. And since his artistic means are necessitated by both the political and cultural realities within which he inscribes his work, he has inevitably had to redefine the hegemonic methods of representation and to develop a practice in which he can effectively collect and display knowledge as a critique of ideology.

In discussing Haacke's work, one needs to avoid the temptation to construct an image of the artist as a political martyr. Nor should one depoliticize his work in an act of art historical hagiography or canonization. Rather, the critical task is to determine whether his work has in fact been marginalized because it represents a turning point—one of those historical moments in which a set of traditional assumptions about the structures and functions of art are being effectively challenged (in the way that Heartfield's work constituted such an instant in the 1930s).

Thus, it may be important to point out first of all that Haacke's work has always been attacked by those humanist critics who attempt to revitalize universalist notions of the artist's role as a purveyor of the lost values of subjectivity, identity, creativity, and cultural memory, as well as by critics who emphasize the

artist's singular capacity to reenact and continue the history of bourgeois culture.[7] In manifest opposition to such an approach, Haacke affirms a very different view of the artist's role. His work is based on the idea that cultural production and reception have become increasingly subjected to relations and interests of power operating outside the producer's control. Furthermore, Haacke sees the aesthetic construct as constituted primarily by the political associations of high cultural institutions as well as by the ideological uses of high cultural representations. For him, artistic production in our society also has an inescapable dialectical relationship to those mass-cultural formations that govern collective perception. (Many of his works embrace the commodity aesthetic of contemporary advertising and its primary role as the service industry of dominant ideology and state power, and also reflect upon high art's proximity to these practices.)

Any analysis of the reception of Haacke's art must furthermore come to terms with the common argument that his work is marginalized because of its relative lack of artistic merit, its aesthetic shortcomings. This argument is most frequently leveled by those who speak in the name of institutional expertise and critical competence. These critics contend that Haacke's production is too secular in its concerns; that it is incapable of generating the type of visual or cognitive pleasure we supposedly experience from other art; that its rigorous commitment to documentary facts and political subject matter and its quasi-journalistic accumulation of universally available information disqualify it as supreme aesthetic experience.

Guardians of the cultural canon that practice institutional repression and censorship have never presented sufficiently developed arguments for their disregard for Haacke's work, nor have they clarified their objections in aesthetic terms (although they do, of course, supply us with an involuntary caricature of the language of aestheticism and artistic spirituality, a language that has by now become identical with the language of blatant bureaucratic power). Thus, when Horst Keller, then director of the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, argued his case for the censorship of Haacke's work in 1974, he said: "A museum knows nothing about economic power; it does indeed, however, know something about spiritual power."[8] And when Thomas Messer, director of the Guggenheim Museum,

explained the reason for his institution's suppression of Haacke's work in 1971, he invoked the concept of the autonomy of art, stating that he had to fend off an "alien substance that had entered the art museum organism."[9] Elsewhere, Messer articulated his position even more programmatically: "I would say that at the point at which the intention and the result of a work is no longer general, summary, metaphoric and symbolic, by the point it addresses itself to a known specific topical situation, its status as a work of art—or at least its immunity as a work of art—is in question."[10]

It seems appropriate that a critique of Haacke's critics (and by implication a critique of the type of artistic practice they advocate) should privilege concepts of aesthetic autonomy and aesthetic pleasure—the aspects of the artwork that Haacke supposedly violates in the name of political instrumentality. Though one would expect to find a competent articulation of the concept of autonomy in bourgeois aesthetics, oddly enough it is only within Marxist aesthetic thought that an adequate theorization of the dialectic of autonomy and instrumentality can be located. Adorno's essay "Commitment," for example, specifically addresses the problem of the destruction of aesthetic autonomy in the service of instrumental thought and the subordination of aesthetic pleasure under the positivist demands of communication:

> There are two "positions on objectivity" which are constantly at war with one another, even when intellectual life falsely presents them as at peace. A work of art that is committed strips the magic from a work of art that is content to be a fetish, an idle pastime for those who would like to sleep through the deluge that threatens them, in an apoliticism that is in fact deeply political. . . . For autonomous works of art, however, such considerations, and the conception of art which underlies them, are themselves the spiritual catastrophe of which the committed keep warning. Once the life of the mind renounces the duty and liberty of its own pure objectification, it has abdicated. Thereafter, works of art merely assimilate themselves to the brute existence against which they protest, in forms so ephemeral

> . . . that from their first day they belong to the seminars in which they inevitably end. . . . Committed art, necessarily detached, as art, from reality, cancels the distance between the two. "Art for art's sake" denies by its absolute claims that ineradicable connection with reality which is the polemical a priori of the attempt to make art autonomous from the real. Between these two poles the tension in which art has lived in every age till now is dissolved.[11]

While we now understand that Adorno's argument for the autonomy of the art work was historically still dependent upon the modernist model of critical negation and refusal—a model that originated with Mallarmé's Symbolist hermeticism—and even though Adorno himself admits in a later section of his essay that the opposition between the two aesthetic configurations is no longer so clearly defined, his argument is not historically informed by the actual transformations of aesthetic practice that took place within the twentieth century itself. In particular, Adorno ignores the fact that the concept of autotelic purity was actually dismantled early in the century. First, in the aesthetics of Duchamp and Dada after 1913, but even more so in the wake of Constructivist abstraction and Productivist aesthetics in the Soviet Union between 1919 and 1925.

The historical debates and artistic production that emerged from these movements—especially the actual transformation of the structure of the aesthetic object and of the author-audience relationship, and, most important perhaps, the disenfranchising of the hegemony of the visual as the dominant category in which the aesthetic is constituted—were themselves the product of technological advances and of the actual facts of social emancipation and political liberation. What Adorno's traditional modernist thought failed to recognize is that those aesthetic changes and those new technological and social conditions constituted a historically irreversible reality, and that they would continue to do so in spite of the subsequent bureaucratization of socialism and the conquest of the unconscious by postwar advertising and commodification. Indeed, in the meantime, they have become as much of a historical reality as the bourgeois culture of Modernism and its concepts of autonomy. It is the sum total of historical events—not

one particular moment of that history—that is inextricably inscribed in each subsequent aesthetic decision and artistic formation. Yet critical transformations of modernist aesthetics, which constitute a different definition of cultural practice, have been all but erased from our cultural memory; the "selective tradition" of Western hegemonic culture has trained us to disavow and repress them. As a result, artistic practices that still incorporate those changes into their conception of art production now appear to be instrumental as well as deeply implicated in the totality of technocratic and administrative logic. Moreover, their rationalistic character seems especially egregious during a period (like our own) when sudden emphasis is placed on the type of art that nostalgically turns back to the historical origins of bourgeois culture.

It is important to recognize that artists who continue to reject the idea of aesthetic autonomy have also had to abandon traditional procedures of artistic production (and, by implication, of course, the cognitive concepts embedded in them). Former member of Art & Language Ian Burn, an artist whose theories and work of the early 1970s were close to Haacke's, has described this problem as specific to his generation. In the process he provides—or so it might seem at first glance—a rationale for the new cultural conservatism:

> While arguments can be made in favor of discarding "anachronistic" practices in the face of "space-age" technologies, what is so often overlooked is that skills are not merely manual dexterity but forms of knowledge. The acquisition of particular skills implies an access to a body of accumulated knowledge. Thus deskilling means a rupture with an historical body of knowledge—in other words, a dehistoricization of the practice of art.[12]

What Burn's argument omits is that the process of "deskilling" (which is operative in the art of Haacke and the entire generation of post-Minimal and Conceptual artists as much as in that of earlier avant-garde movements) implies not simply a dehistoricization of the "historical body of knowledge," but also a critical analysis of the specific social, political, and ideological interests that cer-

tain forms of aesthetic knowledge have served and fulfilled. On the other hand, it is precisely the anti-aesthetic impulse, the "factographic" dimension in Haacke's work, that demands new skills, develops a different form of historical knowledge, and addresses a different social group and different modes of experience.[13]

As for the presumed incapacity, or refusal, of Haacke's work to generate "aesthetic pleasure," one must turn again to Marxist criticism for the best articulation of the relevant argument about an artistic practice that denies visual pleasure. The German literary critic Gisela Dischner, for example, approaches the issue by discussing the links between the avant-garde's process of artistic dehistoricization and its tendency toward desensualization. For her, both phenomena are destructive elements in contemporary leftist aesthetics, and she sees both as emerging from an undialectical approach to the Enlightenment legacy:

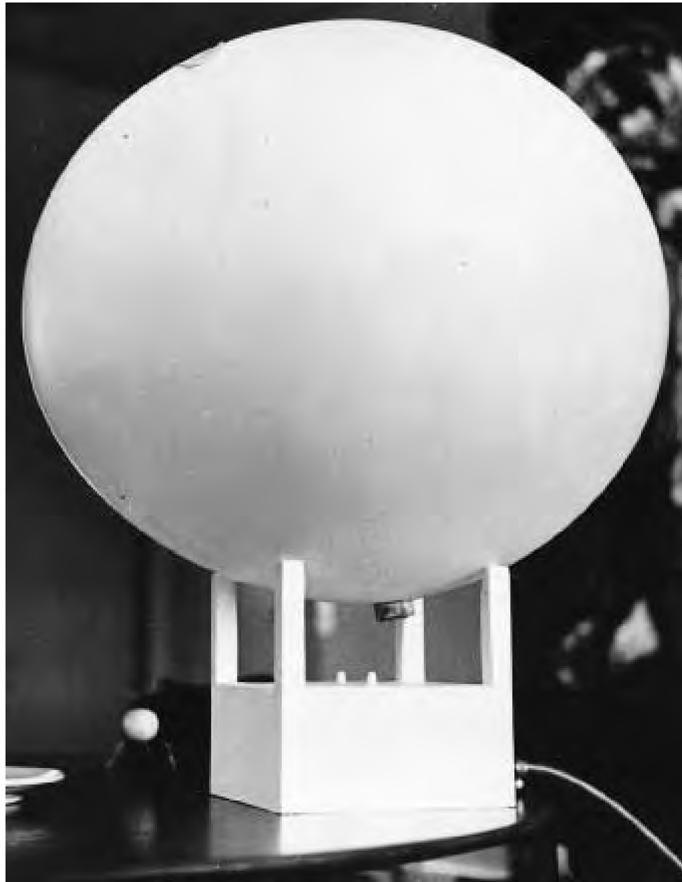
> The question of whether artistic production is still possible as tendentially unalienated labor, or under which circumstances it could become possible, will have to be investigated in the context of a materialistic theory of socialization. . . . As was the case with Benjamin's *angelus novus,* the tendency toward the future will only be revealed in a contemplative gaze upon the past and not in detachment from the past as the misery that has been overcome and left behind—which was the method of the Enlightenment. The latter method is still operative. It appears in the form of dehistoricization and desensualization in the dogmatism of leftist esthetics. This dogmatic left will either reduce literature to the illustration of engaged politics, or it will leave literature, and its critical analysis, entirely to the right.[14]

What Dischner fails to note is that the very notion of the aesthetic as unalienated labor and pure sensory experience is of course itself dependent upon a historic construct: the Romantic conception of creativity. A last bastion of the idea of naturalness, this nineteenth-century notion of instinctive creativity has haunted all modernist aesthetic practice with ever increasing urgency. It appears

in the dialectic between modernist "deskilling" of aesthetic procedures and the modernist emphasis on artistic performance—i.e., on acts that transgress all rationally controlled functional labor. Both aesthetic positions—the idea of the autonomous gesture of deskilling as an avant-garde strategy of negation and resistance as well as its opposite, the Expressionist's definition of aesthetic practice as an instinctual and libidinal act of transgression that reconstitutes the unalienated subject—are dialectical opposites. Both emerged from late nineteenth-century capitalist culture, and both found not only their sociopolitical and ideological analysis but also their aesthetic demolition in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Any critique of Haacke's work that argues against its apparent instrumentalization of the aesthetic (and therefore its implicit or explicit destruction of aesthetic memory) must recognize that the process of dehistoricization is already assumed in those supposedly aesthetically pleasing works that rely on obsolete and inaccessible forms of knowledge and techniques for producing meaning. Haacke does not conceive of memory as a cultural retrieval system, an aesthetic means of legitimizing a political present that has long lost its legitimation. Rather, his work consists of acts of countermemory, in which he refers to the body of acquired legacies and practices, the new social relations that earlier in this century generated the first configurations of a new form of political and cultural legitimation.

Haacke's work first defined itself in the context of a mid-1960s generation that had recognized the historical failure of the modernist concepts of autonomy and visual pleasure. Working in Germany of the late fifties and early sixties, Haacke confronted a situation in which non-representational geometric painting was attempting to acquire renewed vigor and overcome its obvious obsolescence via its association with European postwar transcendental theories, such as those of Yves Klein and the German Zero Group (with which Haacke himself was informally connected for a brief time in the early 1960s). His own dilemma at that time is apparent in an interview with Jack Burnham from 1966, in which he explicitly describes his position as a form of positivist scientism, but at the same time displays a considerable degree of ambivalence about the exclusive rigor of



Piero Manzoni, *Sculpture in Space,* 1960. Balloon with air compressor (destroyed). Courtesy Galleria Notizie, Arte Contemporanea, Torino.

this approach. In a paradoxical statement, Haacke attempts to redeem the transcendental dimension of modernist reductivism, a dimension that the scientism and factual indexicality of his early work had originally set out to negate:

> I believe that a rational, almost positivist approach, a certain sobriety can be developed to a point until they unfold into something very poetical, weightless and irrational. Perhaps this could help to explain the seemingly contradictory nature of my work.[15]

Even before Haacke produced what he calls his "first really political work" (the *MoMA Poll* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, installed and conducted on the occasion of the *Information* exhibition in 1970), his approach seems to have followed—albeit unknowingly, as he has repeatedly asserted—the historical model of Productivist factography and its project of a collaborative and participatory aesthetic. Activating the viewing subject—or, in Walter Benjamin's terms, transforming the passive, contemplative mode of bourgeois aesthetic experience into an (inter)active participatory mode of perception and collaboration—had been one of the programmatic goals of the Productivist aesthetic after 1921.

The extent to which this central issue of a participatory aesthetic was reduced during the 1960s to a simplistic level that had taken an infantilized viewer for granted, is certainly one of the more astonishing facts of postwar history. Haacke's early participatory work, such as his *Photoelectric Viewer Controlled Coordinate System* (1966–1968), dates from this period and incorporates those limiting conditions: indeed, the mere fact that members of his audience were sufficiently implicated in his work's reflexive processes to illuminate the light bulbs of his environmental relief was then enough to make his work seem like a radical departure from traditional aesthetic experience.

Yet along with the Minimalists, Haacke also belongs to the first generation of postwar artists who seriously transcend that early, limited conception of audience participation. The similarities and the differences between his work and that of the Minimal sculptors of the early to mid-sixties are instructive. If the

Minimalists replaced the earlier notion of chance and game as participatory modes with a perceptual model of intricate process-based experience that involved interrelationships between viewer and object and that was derived from phenomenology, Haacke emphasized physiological, physical, and biological processes. Whereas in Haacke's works these processes functioned independently of viewers' perceptual involvements, they often elicited interaction as well.

The terms by which Haacke defined his participatory projects from the mid-to late 1960s may have differed from the phenomenological investigations of the Minimal artists, but he nevertheless shared some of the positivist, experimental and behaviorist features of that generation. Like those of the Minimalists, his projects were still defined by an aesthetic of participatory neutrality that often reduced viewers to the status of a participant in a behavioristic or perceptual experiment. And like the Minimalists, Haacke was concerned with the revelation of process and structure rather than models of language and representation. He emphasized tactility and foregrounded gravity as the basic means of implementing viewer activated participation. These features are addressed in a 1965 leaflet that he published as a private manifesto in Cologne; in it he argues that he wanted to

> make something which experiences, reacts to its environment, changes, is non-stable. . . . To make something indeterminate, which always looks different and the shape of which cannot be predicted precisely. . . . To make something which reacts to light and temperature changes, is subject to air currents and depends, in its functioning, on the forces of gravity. . . . To make something which the "spectator" handles, with which he plays, and thus animates it. . . . To make something which lives in time and makes the "spectator" experience time. . . . To articulate something Natural.[16]

It seems relevant to recognize that the willfulness and abstraction of Haacke's early work of the sixties, the naturalistic and scientistic character of its subjects (the biological and the physical systems he uses abstractly to represent

"life" and "time," as he calls them), are an inevitable product of his positivist, reductivist aesthetic. Works such as *Ice Stick* (1966), in which a cooling system condenses the humidity of the gallery space and transforms it into ice, or *Skyline* (1967), with its line of helium-filled balloons in Central Park, or *Grass Grows* (1969), which was part of the famous *Earth Art* exhibition, all incorporate what K. Michael Hays, in his discussion of Hannes Meyer's Productivist architecture, has identified as a "hypostatized rationalism." Hays sees this phenomenon as "a constraint more than a liberating convention wherein *Sachlichkeit*'s ambition of negation turns back on itself, reentering the work as its opposite—as ideology, as fixed patterns of form, action and thought."[17] Although the Minimalists' claim to neutrality, their apparent refusal to identify the cultural construct by means of its relations to power, effectively turned viewers into unknowing subjects of that power, audience participation in Minimal art, and in Haacke's works of the mid-sixties, generated an aesthetic semblance of democratic equality, a seeming sense of accessibility for the uninitiated.

In a different context, Edward Said has described that illusory equality as it occurs in what he calls "valorized speech":

> By the valorization of speech I mean that the discursive, circumstantially dense interchange of speaker facing hearer is made to stand—sometimes misleadingly—for a democratic equality and copresence in actuality between speaker and hearer. Not only is the discursive relation far from equal in actuality, but the text's attempt to dissemble by seeming to be open democratically to anyone who might read it is also an act of bad faith. . . . As Nietzsche had the perspicacity to see, texts are fundamentally facts of power, not of democratic exchange.[18]

In spite of Haacke's frequent affirmations of the mutual interest and support that related him to some of the Minimalists (in particular, Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and Sol LeWitt), he himself early on emphasized the differences. Talking about his own work during that period, he said:

Hans Haacke, *Chickens Hatching,* 1969. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Canada. Fertilized eggs, incubators, brooder. Courtesy of the artist.

> The overriding requirement . . . is that I allow the process to have its way. . . . I am not aiming for a particular look, so visual terms do not apply. . . . A very important difference between the work of the Minimal sculptors and my work is that they were interested in inertness whereas I was concerned with change.[19]

And although there are obvious structural, material, and morphological similarities between a work like Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (whose first model, according to Haacke, was made in 1963 and first exhibited in the exhibition *Nul* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1966) and, for example, Robert Morris's *Mirrored Cubes* (1965), one can argue that Haacke's art of that period already differed from that of the Minimalist sculptor in several crucial features. Most of all, Haacke's piece emphasizes a physical process (condensation) that is completely independent of the viewer's perception; as a consequence it disenfranchises the supremacy of the visual as the constitutive feature of aesthetic experience. By contrast, Morris's work, despite its ingenious conception of visual experience as constituted in the triad between perceiver, object, and architectural container, and its significant emphasis on the necessity to contextualize perception, remains firmly anchored in the neutral realm of the visual. Because of these differences, as well as the fact that Haacke's work failed—or, rather, refused—to maintain a consistent visual morphology (what Haacke himself has called "the trademark appearance of art"), it is only logical that his work of that period was never accepted by critics and historians into the "canon" of Minimal art.

With his first *Gallery-Goers' Profile* (1969), his performance work *On Sale at the Fondation Maeght* (1970), and the *MoMA Poll* (1970), Haacke began developing an approach to art production that would once again separate his work from that of his peers—in this case, from Conceptual art, the newly emerging artistic position that drew on premises of analytic philosophy in order to reduce the aesthetic construct to a linguistic proposition. By that time, Haacke had already laid the foundations for, or perhaps even fully developed, the complex set of aesthetic strategies that Mary Kelly has recently identified as the agenda of an oppositional Postmodernism of the 1980s. Kelly sees it as

Hans Haacke, *Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Poll,* New York, 1970. An installation for audience participation at the Museum of Modern Art's 1970 *Information* exhibition.

> implementing a shift at the level of content and putting the so-called synthetic proposition back on the agenda, that is . . . reversing Kosuth's dictum that art is an *analytical proposition* and . . . saying that art isn't confined to speaking about art, it can refer to things outside itself, it can have what you would call "social purpose."[20]

Haacke's emphasis on the functional dimension of the aesthetic construct is another concept that clearly relates his work to the factographic tradition. Obviously, this functional dimension depends on the idea of artistic signification as communicative action—a notion which anchors the aesthetic sign to a material referent (the shared referent of communicative action and the labor of representation implied in this concept). The idea of communicative action operates not only in programmatic opposition to the modernist's false concept of autonomy and its legacy in the so-called formalism of the 1960s; in a contemporary context, the idea of communicative action also critically challenges the simulationist variety of Postmodernism, in which artistic signification relies on a misconception of the aesthetic sign as analogous to Baudrillard's simulacrum (which in its turn is based on the notion of the linguistic sign): artistic meaning can be determined exclusively by internal differentials, without the presence of an external referent. Haacke describes his attitude toward a functional aesthetic:

> It helped that I was primarily what you might call job-oriented. Even in the '60s, I wanted things to function, in a very literal, physical sense. I carried this approach over to the more recent work. For example, in order to conduct a poll of the art public, one has to devise certain social situations, and for the presentation of the results, one has to use particular graphic means. Whether they happen to conform to period style or not is irrelevant.[21]

This functional dimension of Haacke's work performs a programmatic critique of the work of art as exchange value. In 1979 Haacke said:

> Obviously I work within a contradiction. Part of my message is that art should have a use-value rather than be seen as the commodity produced by an entrepreneur.[22]

By 1969, Haacke already understood what the contemporary simulationist artists do not comprehend: the fallacies of the Duchamp legacy, about which he (and some of his peers, such as Broodthaers and Buren in Europe, Asher and Smithson in the U.S.) had become increasingly critical, even though Haacke himself had originally been highly susceptible to the radical implications of the readymade model. This attitude toward Duchamp is evident in his reflections on his own mid-sixties work:

> At one time I did think of signing the rain, the ocean, fog, etc. like Duchamp signed a bottle rack or Yves Klein declared Nov 27th 1960 as a worldwide *Théâtre du Vide*. But then I hesitated and wondered if isolation, presentation at one given limited area, an estrangement from the normal is indispensable. It is a very difficult question. It finally boils down to a definition of art and I don't know what this "Art" is.[23]

Unlike the work of the first generation influenced by Duchamp, namely the Pop artists, Haacke seems to have recognized by 1969 that the aesthetic object was constituted as both a discursive and a material object whose possible reading emerged at the intersection of several determining factors: artistic (linguistic) conventions, the practices of institutional power, the ideological investment and economic needs of a shifting audience. Commitment to such a contextual concept of the artwork inevitably required that Haacke dismantle the traditionally integrated artistic construct (integrated in terms of its material and formal elements as much as its iconography or categorical consistency). Consequently, the reliable solidity of a pictorial or sculptural type vanishes altogether from Haacke's work around 1969 (just as it vanishes in the work of his peers in Europe and the U.S.). The closed pictorial and sculptural work is dislodged

in favor of a decentered object whose various and shifting origins and affiliations always remain visible in Haacke's contextual definition as the elements of social conflicts and oppositional interests, as unreconciled contradictions within the sphere of aesthetic production and reception.

By the late 1960s, Haacke and various European artists like Broodthaers and Buren had already critically dismissed Pop art and its legacy. In particular, they rejected Warhol's position, which pretended to effect an actual breakdown of the boundaries between mass culture and high culture, and which they perceived as a typically voluntaristic and libertarian anarchism of the sixties. Warhol's stance promised a release from the fetters of cultural complexity and privileged experience (a populist promise that endeared him to many members of the European Left). Haacke recognized that this promised collapse of the boundaries between mass cultural consumer object and the high cultural object (with its freight of cognition and its potential for critical negation) would in actuality only hasten the progress and increase the efficiency of the process of historical desublimation in which the culture industry remains engaged up to this date. Yet Haacke has never assumed the position of an undialectical cultural conservatism nor defended an obsolete notion of aesthetic experience as inextricably tied to the privileges of a particular class. Quite the opposite: whenever the legacy of the bourgeois cultural past actually enters Haacke's reflection, his work acquires those formal and structural functions that Walter Benjamin has described as allegorical devaluations of the aesthetic object within the object itself. It is in these structural elements that Haacke's work anticipates within itself those processes to which the socially defined forms of use and reception will inevitably subject it.

Haacke's *Manet-Projekt '74* and his *Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1888–1975* (1975) are exemplary models of that approach and clearly are among Haacke's central achievements for defining the terms of future art production. In each of these works, Haacke sets forth the pedigree of a particular painting: a master narrative of ownership and exchange value. In these commemorations of the legacy of bourgeois high culture, the writing of art history is reduced to a mechanical and linear commodity history. The lapidary facts themselves, the detached, yet committed, exactitude with which Haacke has assembled his

Hans Haacke, *Manet-Projekt '74,* 1974. Detail. Collection: Dr. Roger Matthys, Deurle, Belgium. Planned for an exhibition at the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, but rejected, the installation was to have included the original Manet painting, along with ten panels tracing the work's history of ownership. The controversial ninth panel reveals that the chairman of the Wallraf-Richartz Kuratorium was Hitler's minister of economics.

Das Spargel-Stilleben

1880 für 800 Francs gekauft durch

Charles Ephrussi

Geboren 1849 in Odessa, gestorben 1905 in Paris. - Entstammt jüdischer Bankiersfamilie mit Bankunternehmen in Odessa, Wien und Paris. Familiäre Beziehungen zur franz. Hochfinanz (Baron de Reinach, Baron de Rothschild).

Studiert in Odessa und Wien. - 1871 Übersiedlung nach Paris.

Eigene Bankgeschäfte. - Kunstschriftstellerische Arbeiten u. a. über Albrecht Dürer, Jacopo de Barbarij und Paul Baudry. 1875 Mitarbeit an der „Gazette des Beaux Arts", 1885 Mitinhaber, 1894 Herausgeber.

Mitglied zahlreicher kultureller Komitees und Salons der Pariser Gesellschaft. Organisiert mit Gustave Dreyfus, der Comtesse Greffulhes und der Prinzessin Mathilde Kunstausstellungen und Konzerte, u. a. von Werken Richard Wagners. - Zweites Vorbild für Marcel Prousts Swann.

Sammelt Kunst der Renaissance, des 18. Jahrhunderts, Albrecht Dürers, Ostasiatische Kunst und Werke zeitgenössischer Maler.

Zahlt Manet statt der vereinbarten 800 Francs für das „Spargel-Stilleben" insgesamt 1000 Francs. Aus Dankbarkeit schickt im Manet das Stilleben eines einzelnen Spargels (1880, Öl auf Leinwand, 16,5 x 21,5 cm, Paris Musée de l'Impressionisme) mit der Bemerkung: „Es fehlte noch in Ihrem Bündel".

Ritter (1882) und Offizier (1903) der Ehrenlegion.

Gravure von M. Patricot „Charles Ephrussi" aus „La Gazette des Beaux Arts", Paris 1905

Das Spargel-Stilleben erworben durch die Initiative des Vorsitzenden des Wallraf-Richartz-Kuratoriums

Hermann J. Abs

Geboren 1901 in Bonn. - Entstammt wohlhabender katholischer Familie. Vater Dr. Josef Abs, Rechtsanwalt und Justizrat, Mitinhaber der Hubertus Braunkohlen AG. Brüggen, Erft. Mutter Katharina Lückerath.

Abitur 1919 Realgymnasium Bonn. - Ein Sem. Jurastudium Universität Bonn. - Banklehre im Kölner Bankhaus Delbrück von der Heydt & Co. Erwirbt internationale Bankerfahrung in Amsterdam, London, Paris, USA.

Heiratet 1928 Inez Schnitzler. Ihr Vater mit Georg von Schnitzler vom Vorstand des IG. Farben-Konzerns verwandt. Tante verheiratet mit Baron Alfred Neven du Mont. Schwester verheiratet mit Georg Graf von der Goltz. - Geburt der Kinder Thomas und Marion Abs.

Mitglied der Zentrumspartei. - 1929 Prokura im Bankhaus Delbrück, Schickler & Co., Berlin. 1935-37 einer der 5 Teilhaber der Bank.

1937 im Vorstand und Aufsichtsrat der Deutschen Bank, Berlin. Leiter der Auslandsabteilung. - 1939 von Reichswirtschaftsminister Funk in den Beirat der Deutschen Reichsbank berufen. - Mitglied in Ausschüssen der Reichsbank, Reichsgruppe Industrie, Reichsgruppe Banken, Reichswirtschaftskammer und einem Arbeitskreis im Reichswirtschaftsministerium. - 1944 in über 50 Aufsichts- und Verwaltungsräten großer Unternehmen. Mitgliedschaft in Gesellschaften zur Wahrnehmung deutscher Wirtschaftsinteressen im Ausland.

1946 für 6 Wochen in britischer Haft. - Von der Alliierten Entnazifizierungsbehörde als entlastet (5) eingestuft.

1948 bei der Gründung der Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau. Maßgeblich an der Wirtschaftsplanung der Bundesregierung beteiligt. Wirtschaftsberater Konrad Adenauers. - Leiter der deutschen Delegation bei der Londoner Schuldenkonferenz 1951-53. Berater bei den Wiedergutmachungsverhandlungen mit Israel in Den Haag. 1954 Mitglied der CDU.

1952 im Aufsichtsrat der Süddeutschen Bank AG. - 1957-67 Vorstandssprecher der Deutschen Bank AG. Seit 1967 Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats.

Ehrenvorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats:
Deutsche Überseeische Bank, Hamburg - Pittler Maschinenfabrik AG, Langen (Hessen)
Vorsitzender des Aufsichtsrats:
Dahlbusch Verwaltungs-AG, Gelsenkirchen - Daimler Benz AG, Stuttgart-Untertürkheim -
- Deutsche Bank AG, Frankfurt - Deutsche Lufthansa AG, Köln - Philipp Holzmann AG, Frankfurt -
Phoenix Gummiwerke AG, Hamburg-Harburg - RWE Elektrizitätswerk AG, Essen -
Vereinigte Glanzstoff AG, Wuppertal-Elberfeld - Zellstoff-Fabrik Waldhof AG, Mannheim

Ehrenvorsitzender:
Salamander AG, Kornwestheim - Gebr. Stumm GmbH, Brambauer (Westf.) -
Süddeutsche Zucker-AG, Mannheim
Stellvertr. Vors. des Aufsichtsrats:
Badische Anilin- und Sodafabrik AG, Ludwigshafen - Siemens AG, Berlin-München
Mitglied des Aufsichtsrats:
Metallgesellschaft AG, Frankfurt
Präsident des Verwaltungsrats:
Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau - Deutsche Bundesbahn

Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz mit Stern, Päpstl. Stern zum Komturkreuz, Großkreuz Isabella die Katholische von Spanien, Cruzeiro do Sul von Brasilien. - Ritter des Ordens vom Heiligen Grabe. - Dr. h.c. der Univ. Göttingen, Sofia, Tokio und der Wirtschaftshochschule Mannheim.

Lebt in Kronberg (Taunus) und auf dem Bentgerhof bei Remagen.

Photo aus Current Biography Yearbook 1970 New York

information on the object-fate and object-status of these early modern paintings, and the correct formality with which he presents this information make the works readable as a metonymic history of aesthetic experience and the motivations of patronage during the last hundred years. Simultaneously they convey a sense of the monumentality of the ruins of that experience. Haacke himself has referred to these panels as the "tombstones" of the paintings whose reception they recount, and he has thereby explicitly indicated that the allegorical dimension of these works resides in their commemorative function.[24] Haacke's works cast a contemplative gaze upon two objects of a lost culture; his commodity histories encapsulate the irretrievable loss of those dimensions of bourgeois culture represented by its early collectors and patrons. Haacke's vantage point is the present, in which these objects have become solely the trophies of corporate investment and institutional legitimation.

That this allegorical depletion of historical substance, a depletion these panels perform by calmly reporting well-known facts, nevertheless unleashes again and again a high degree of institutional censorship attests not so much to the work's agitational provocation (what Thomas Messer in 1971 referred to as Haacke's "muckraking venture") as to its systematic and successfully executed project of delegitimation. But Haacke's work, unlike that of Broodthaers, does not limit itself to the forms of critical negation that such allegorical strategies provide. By emphasizing the functional aspect of his work, by making each of his interventions specific to a particular occasion, and by linking allegorical strategies to instrumentalizing acts of information and communication, Haacke increases the subversive potential of his projects. He nevertheless refrains from agitational aesthetics, since he understands (from his own *Visitors' Polls* if nothing else) that his viewer is not the revolutionary author/producer, but rather a privileged, liberal, middle-class spectator, who is safely contained in the institutional and discursive network within which these works are experienced.

Thus, in his works of the mid-1970s, Haacke had not only critically transformed the Duchamp legacy, but he had also questioned whether the factographic conception of art—developed within the historical context of revolutionary politics—had not forfeited its validity in the same manner that the

radicality of Duchamp's readymade concept had failed. Before that, in the late sixties, Haacke had already addressed the question of whether an activist practice that disregarded the fact that the cultural sphere was relatively autonomous could fulfill any function other than that of a mythified political art within the seemingly monolithic consciousness industry of late capitalist society. The way he responded to this question was to take the relations of power as the subject of his constructs; and it is precisely at that point, when the actual conditions of cultural production in late capitalism begin to determine both the subject matter and the structure of his work, that his production acquires its most complex historical identity and that it abandons all prior historical models.

While Haacke does not claim Gramsci as a source, it seems that his conception of culture in its inextricable association with power is close to Gramsci's ideas, as described, for example, by Edward Said:

> Well before Foucault, Gramsci had grasped the idea that culture serves authority, and ultimately the national State, not because it represses and coerces but because it is affirmative, positive, and persuasive. Culture is productive, Gramsci says, and this—much more than the monopoly of coercion held by the State—is what makes a national Western society strong, difficult for the revolutionary to conquer. . . . For we must be able to see culture as historical force possessing its own configurations, ones that intertwine with those in the socioeconomic sphere and that finally bear on the State as a State.[25]

In the structure of his mature work and in his use of found objects, it is clear that Haacke has broken with Duchamp and his heirs. As deployed within the Duchamp legacy of the 1960s as much as in its rediscovery in the 1980s, consumer objects are stripped of all referentiality, of all allusions or connections to the social context from which they are initially drawn. Indeed, an object only takes on aesthetic meaning when its referentiality has been abolished, when it no longer reminds us of the labor invested in its production, of the exchange value

extracted from its circulation and of the sign value imposed in its consumption. For within that tradition, elimination of referentiality is in fact the quintessential condition for aesthetic pleasure.

In contrast, Haacke makes every effort in his installation work to reconstitute *all* of the contextual aspects of the objects he uses. Just as he insists on the site- and context-specificity of his various interventions in the institutional framework, he also insists on the object-specificity of the elements operating in that intervention. Thus, when Haacke investigates the interrelationships between the cultural and the political activities of an individual or a corporation, he deploys the very objects of their productive enterprise within the aesthetic construct itself. In *The Chocolate Master* (1981), for example, the actual presentation boxes of the products of the Ludwig corporation are used as the visual centerpieces of Haacke's carefully produced panels. The panels document the disparity between the public claims of Peter Ludwig, the cultural benefactor, and the economic reality of the interests of Ludwig the chocolate tycoon (Haacke includes information about the working conditions of those who, by their labor, generate the surplus value that allows Ludwig to act as a cultural benefactor in the first place). Haacke has, ironically, identified the collaged objects he uses in this work as "the real Pop Art of the great Pop Art collector," thus accurately pointing once again to the discrepancies between the cultural pretenses of a seemingly omnipotent patron and his actual contribution to the "cultural" practices of everyday life:

> I quoted the aesthetic of the products as a form of art. I believe this is quite revealing because these packages call up all sorts of unconscious desires. They appeal to notions of value, which are, roughly speaking, very traditional and conservative. I did not want to make a flashy Pop art piece. That would have been cheap pamphleteering. . . . Naturally the collaged packages represent masterpieces of Monheim's Pop Art.[26]

This strategy indicates the extent to which Haacke has critically transcended the limitations of the Duchamp legacy; by comparison, it also reveals the

fallacies and comforts of recent attempts to exploit found-object assemblage as a means of revitalizing sculpture, as if the vanishing practice could be refreshed by the addition of topical mass cultural debris.

Haacke effects the same critical annihilation of the ready-made object as the comfortable *idée reçue,* upon which a whole sculptural movement is currently based, in his *Voici Alcan* piece of 1983. Here he frames the photograph of the murdered South African anti-apartheid leader Stephen Biko and photographs of two opera productions sponsored by the Alcan Corporation with actual products manufactured by this company—aluminum window frames. Along with others, these are the very objects with which this corporation generates the surplus value to finance its cultural advertising ventures, just as its other products sustain the repressive government of South Africa and the company's own business ventures in that country. Haacke's attempt to preserve or reconstitute the referentiality of these visual objects is fundamentally motivated by his awareness that, as Walter Benjamin has famously pointed out, there is "no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."[27]

Just as Haacke's work of the late sixties had to oppose the legacy of formalist thought (or what passed for it), and just as he needed to transform and critically transcend the Duchamp legacy, his work is now confronted with the necessity to oppose definitions of the aesthetic sign as they have emerged from the enthusiastic (and often misunderstood) adaptation of Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum. It seems to be one of the functions of the "free-floating signifier," which currently rules aesthetic perception, to disavow precisely the element of barbarism that the referent provides and upon whose absence the experience of aesthetic pleasure is predicated. If such is, in fact, the motivation for today's prohibition of referentiality, it cannot surprise us that Haacke's work is consistently accused of depriving its viewers of the specific pleasures of that disavowal. In this context, it is useful to reconsider Baudrillard's definition of the simulacrum in *Simulations:*

> So it is with simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. The latter starts from the principle that the sign and the real are

Hans Haacke, *Voici Alcan,* 1983. Detail. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Three 86½ × 41 inch panels with photographs, aluminum windows, acrylic plastic, silver foil. The two outside photos show operatic productions sponsored by Alcan, whose South African affiliate provides aluminum products for that country's police and military. Central photo is of black leader Stephen Biko, mortally wounded while detained by South African police in 1977. Photos: Brian Merrett.

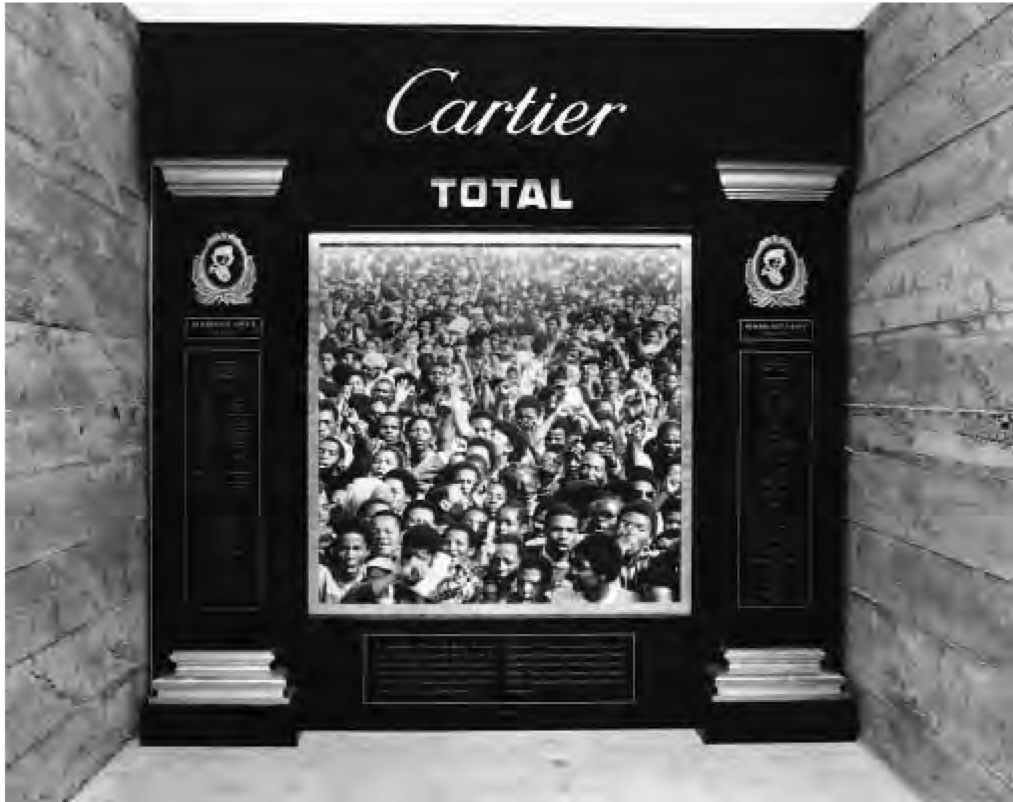
ALCAN
STEPHEN BIKO. Leader noir. A succombé à des blessures
à la tête reçues lors de sa détention par la police sud-africaine.
La filiale d'ALCAN en Afrique du Sud
sud-africain des produits semi-finis pou
l'équipement policier et militaire. La comp
pas le syndicat de ses travailleurs noirs.

ALCAN
NORMA, produit par l'Opéra de Montreal avec des fonds d'ALCAN.
La filiale d'ALCAN en Afrique du Sud a été désignée comme "industrie de pointe" stratégique par le gouvernement sud-africain. Les ouvriers noirs de la compagnie se sont mis en grève en 1981.

> equivalent (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom!). Conversely simulation starts from the *utopia* of this principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value,* from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum.[28]

Baudrillard's assumption that the simulacrum has taken over the function of representation obviously implies the abolition of language as a notion of communicative action; it also thereby obviates all questions concerning audience-specificity and audience participation in aesthetic constructs, and it ultimately negates the dimension of political critique and conscious resistance altogether. Baudrillard's anesthesia/philosophy, this soothing dispensation from the labor of production and material referentiality, has by now lulled an entire generation of artists into the comfort of the accomplice. While Baudrillard's sermon might adequately describe certain conditions of perception and consciousness from a monocentric perspective in the capitals of First World countries, it certainly obscures both the material conditions upon which this mirage is erected and, even more so, the actual conditions in other areas (e.g., the Third World), where resistance and political struggles of opposition fight with their lives the "simulacrum" of First World politics and ideology imposed upon them.

Rather than yield to the generally unspoken agreement that collective communication and political action are aesthetically unrepresentable and at best a nineteenth-century myth (as Baudrillard's contemptuous pamphlet on the concept of the political collective pretends),[29] Haacke, since 1969 and the beginning of his mature work, has insisted on the essentially collaborative character of artistic practice. For him, aesthetic experience takes place within the sphere of communicative action, and it encompasses attempts at the actual representations of the social collective, the socially unrepresentable, and the unrepresented. These representations begin with Haacke's earliest *Visitors' Polls* in 1969, where the presence and participation of viewers complete the "creative act" along the lines



Hans Haacke, *Les musts de Rembrandt,* 1986. Detail. Installation in Le Consortium, Dijon, France. Concrete bunker containing mock facade of a Cartier boutique with photo of South African black workers. Informational plaques establish business links between Cartier-Monde, The Rembrandt Group (a network of South African companies) and GENCOR, a South African mining concern known for its brutal treatment of the black mining workforce.

that Duchamp had predicted (though perhaps in a slightly different manner). They are carried through by the *Real Estate* works, in which one segment of urban architectural experience is bracketed within the privileged space of the museum, and by more recent works such as *MetroMobiltan* (1985) and *Les musts de Rembrandt* (1986). In these recent works, as in several other earlier and subsequent ones, the image of a specific social group struggling for political liberation—the black population of South Africa—is framed by corporate or institutional emblems of the class that dominates and oppresses them.

Of course, Haacke's images of social class (that ultimate "referent" of which contemporary representations would most like to be purified, a cleansing that Baudrillard has in fact encouraged) are always mediated through his critical reflection on the actually available means of access to the experiences of the unrepresented and the unrepresentable—i.e., the means of an artist and of a male, white, middle-class citizen in a First World capital. But to the same degree that Haacke acknowledges in his imagery that the oppressed and the exploited are accessible to the cultural construct only as always already mediated images, he also insists on the necessity to address issues of class and race in cultural representation.

For Haacke, as for many other contemporary artists (including those who are hidden from the art world's eyes), it now seems increasingly obvious that it is the forms of representation that restrict themselves voluntarily to the purely cultural, the forms of representation that do not at least engage in a desperate attempt to represent those issues termed "unrepresentable," that are at this moment the truly barbaric.

Notes

1

Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977), pp. 191–192.

2

Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: New Left Books, 1980), p. 39.

3

Critical support for Haacke's work has been given consistently by only three critics since the late 1960s: Jack Burnham, Lucy Lippard, and John Perreault. The dealer Howard Wise supported Haacke's work in the late sixties and early seventies. Since 1973, the only major commercial gallery in the U.S. to exhibit Haacke's work on a regular basis has been the John Weber Gallery in New York. To my knowledge, no other commercial gallery in the U.S. has ever given Haacke a one-person exhibition.

His 1987 exhibition, organized by Brian Wallis at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, was actually Haacke's first American museum show. Until then, only two public American institutions (Allen Memorial Art Museum of Oberlin College and Ohio State University) had acquired any of his major works.

4

Since this essay was first delivered as a paper on January 21, 1987, at Cooper Union, Haacke's situation has changed somewhat. In addition to his New Museum show in 1987, he was one of only five artists (along with Richard Artschwager, Jenny Holzer, Thomas Schütte, and Richard Serra) whose work was represented in all three of 1987's major European contemporary art exhibitions (*Documenta 8,* Münster's *Skulptur Projekte,* and the Centre Georges Pompidou's *L'Epoque, la mode, la morale, la passion*).

In 1987, the Philadelphia Museum of Art was the first major U.S. museum to acquire a significant, though comparatively apolitical, work by Haacke, a Duchamp paraphrase titled *Broken R. M. . . .* (1986). While one respects the museum's courageous commitment, one also cannot help noting that acquisition of a major work by Haacke (such as one of the groundbreaking *Real Estate* works of 1971) would not only have been more courageous, but would also have followed more directly the inclination of the genius loci of Philadelphia's Arensberg Collection, in whose centennial honor the Duchamp paraphrase was presumably acquired.

In 1987, we also saw Haacke's first work to appear on the auction block. *On Social Grease* (1976) was included as part of the Gilman Paper Corporation Collection sale at Christie's, New York. The work not only attracted several competing bidders, but it also fetched the rather impressive price of slightly more than $90,000.

In light of these developments, it may seem exaggerated to continue to refer to Haacke's work as "marginalized." Nevertheless, the term still seems appropriate to me. Marginalization cannot be measured purely in terms of visibility in the market, the institutional world, and critical/historical literature. It should also be defined as the isolation of a given position and its eventual stylization as a unique stance, which seems to be the current form of marginalization

to which Haacke's work is subjected: he has become a heroic, eccentric outsider of the aesthetic mainstream and is finally being embraced within the terms of that mainstream. This embrace, however, seems to preclude consideration of the basic aesthetic challenge that Haacke's work provides, a challenge also provided, incidentally, by artists who have since the 1970s developed their work in directions suggested by Haacke. (Indeed, some have possibly gone even further than Haacke himself: I am thinking in particular of the work of Fred Lonidier, Martha Rosler, and Allan Sekula.)

All the European museums best known for their special commitment to contemporary art—Cologne's Wallraf-Richartz and Ludwig Museum, the Berlin National Gallery, the museums in Düsseldorf, Krefeld, Hamburg, and Mönchengladbach, the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Kunstmuseum in Basel, the Tate Gallery in London, and the Louisiana Museum in Denmark—have rigorously excluded Haacke's work from their collections (and, with the notable exception of the Tate Gallery, from their exhibitions as well).

The following European exceptions, however, should be mentioned: the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld owns two very early Haacke works, a *Wave* from 1964, acquired by former director Paul Wember, and a *Condensation Piece* from the mid-1960s, acquired by Gerhard Storck in the late seventies. This same museum organized an exhibition of Haacke's early work in 1972. The Neue Berliner Kunstverein organized a major exhibition (but not a retrospective) in collaboration with the Kunsthalle Bern in 1984–1986. The Kunstmuseum Bonn acquired the proposal *No Man's Land* (1973–1974) and the dyptich *If you want to a become a civil servant, you must bend in time* (1976). The Moderna Museet in Stockholm accepted Haacke's *High Voltage Discharge Travelling* (1968) as a donation. The Stedelijk van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven owns a copy of *Seurat's "Les Poseuses" (small version), 1888–1975,* and the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, owns *We believe in the power of creative imagination* (1980). Recently, the Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain de Bourgogne acquired *Bührlesque* (1986), the first Haacke work to enter a French public collection.

5

It has frequently been argued that Haacke's 1971 Guggenheim exhibition was censored because the slumlords of his exposés were actually members of the board of trustees of the Guggenheim Museum. Though clearly false (the *Real Estate* pieces, which provoked the censorship, had no connection whatsoever with the museum's trustees), this commonly repeated mistake suggests that journalists have felt the necessity to construct a convincing scheme to explain an otherwise unfathomable act of censorship. Another equally revealing piece of misinformation is the common

argument that it was Haacke's exposé of the economic involvement of the Guggenheim trustees in Chile that led to the censoring of his 1971 exhibition. Haacke's *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Board of Trustees* dates from 1974 and was surely made in response to the CIA-initiated coup against and murder of the democratically elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende. Obviously, the work also alludes to Haacke's own experience with that institution in 1971.

It should not surprise us unduly that a critic of the 1980s might get his dates and facts wrong when talking about Haacke's work, but the degree of distortion and misinformation that appears in the following example could lead one to assume that the errors are not simply the result of the velocity with which the art world condemns its participants:

> Hans Haacke, who spent much of the Conceptual period making kinetic sculpture, began to extend conceptualism into the political realm with an untitled 1973 work that documented the corporate affiliations of trustees of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (going so far as to implicate three board members in the coup of Chilean president Salvador Allende earlier that year); the piece, produced on the occasion of the Guggenheim's invitation to host a Haacke exhibition, drew art world headlines when it prompted the immediate cancellation of that exhibition [Dan Cameron, in *Art and Its Double* (Barcelona and Madrid: 1987), p. 20].

Apart from its numerous errors, this statement contains the noteworthy suggestion that Haacke "spent much of the Conceptual period making kinetic sculpture." Haacke's *Gallery-Goers' Profile* (1969) and the *Poll* pieces of 1969–1970 can hardly be called kinetic sculpture. Furthermore, it should be understood that it was never Haacke's ambition to join the Conceptual movement, nor to be perceived as part of it. If anything, he would have criticized the movement in the same manner as artists like Marcel Broodthaers and Daniel Buren.

The subtext of Cameron's statement seems to be that Haacke couldn't seriously expect *not* to be censored. The false dates and facts seem to function handily as an ex post facto justification for that censorship, and may, perhaps, be an unconscious expression of the prejudicial attitude with which most of the official art world, and even its younger exemplars, still look at Haacke's work today.

6

One should note the cancellation of Haacke's contribution to the *Westkunst* exhibition in Cologne in 1981, in which a gentleman's agreement between the curator and the artist prevented a scandal. A similar situation occurred on the occasion of the *Von Hier Aus* exhibition

in Düsseldorf in 1984. A more recent example is the legalistic pedantry of the city of Münster, which (in spite of strong support from the exhibition's curators) prevented the installation of Haacke's work on the Mercedes buses of the Municipal Transportation Authority, arguing that "political and ideological messages" do not have the same status as pure "advertising" messages and, like religious messages, are not legally permitted to be displayed on public transportation. See *Skulptur Projekte,* ed. Klaus Bussmann and Kasper König (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum, 1987), pp. 113–16.

7

For an example of a traditionalist argument against Haacke based on an ahistorical and essentialist conception of the artist and the functions of art, see Donald Kuspit, "Regressive Reproduction and Throwaway Conscience," *Artscribe* (January-February 1987), pp. 26–31.

8

Horst Keller, letter to Hans Haacke justifying the censorship of *Manet-PROJEKT '74* from the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, as quoted in *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business,* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), p. 130.

9

As quoted in Haacke, *Unfinished Business,* p. 96.

10

Barbara Reise, "Which Is in Fact What Happened," interview with Thomas Messer, *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971), pp. 34–37.

11

Adorno, "Commitment," pp. 177–178.

12

Ian Burn, "The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath," *Art and Text* 1 (Autumn 1981), p. 52.

13

For an extensive discussion of the concept of "factography" in the context of post-constructivist Soviet Productivism, see my essay "From Faktura to Factography," *October* 30 (Fall 1984), pp. 83–119 (reprinted in *October: The First Decade 1976–1986* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987], pp. 76–113). In brief, "factography" can be defined as an art practice in which the facticity of given social, political, and economical circumstances was seen as complex and important enough to merit artistic representation. It assumed that the new masses of industrial societies would warrant new participatory forms of art production that directly related to their daily experiences and thus transcended the traditional class limitations imposed by the esoteric standards of advanced bourgeois visual culture. While factography certainly constitutes the

epitome of instrumentalized cultural practice, it is wrong to conflate its ventures with "mere" journalism—a criticism that has been leveled from the inception of factography against its major exponents, such as Sergei Tretiakov and John Heartfield, and that has also been consistently voiced as *the* cliché response to the work of Haacke. The extent to which Haacke's work actually inscribes itself into the factographic tradition—of which he was apparently completely unaware—is revealed by Haacke in an interview in 1972:

> I do not want to practice agitation which appeals or accuses. I am satisfied if I can provoke a consciousness of a general context and mutual dependence by *facts* alone. *Facts* are probably stronger and often less comfortable than even the best intended opinions. In the past one defined symbolic signs for the processes of reality and thus transposed them for the most part onto an ideal level. By contrast I would like to make the *processes themselves* appear and I see my work in explicit contradiction to "abstract" art.

And commenting on his *Real Estate* pieces, Haacke said: "Trusting that the *facts would speak for themselves* no validating commentary has accompanied the *factual* information" (italics mine). (From Karin Thomas, "Interview with Hans Haacke," *Kunst, Praxis Heute,* ed. Karin Thomas [Cologne: Dumont, 1972], p. 102.)

Haacke's position is all the more to be seen in the factographic tradition since he defines himself—as did the factography artists—in explicit opposition to the legacy of modernist abstraction.

14

Gisela Dischner, introduction to *Das Unvermögen der Realität* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, 1974), p. 8.

15

Jack Burnham, "Interview with Hans Haacke" (June 1966), *Tri-Quarterly Supplement* 1 (Spring 1967), reprinted in *Hans Haacke,* ed. Edward Fry (Cologne: Dumont, 1972), p. 30.

16

Hans Haacke, untitled leaflet, Cologne, 1965.

17

K. Michael Hays, "Reproduction and Negation: The Cognitive Project of the Avant-Garde," in *Revisions: Architecture, Production and Reproduction* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), p. 17.

18

Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 46.

19

Jeanne Siegel, "Interview with Hans Haacke," *Arts Magazine* 46, no. 7 (May 1971), p. 18 (reprinted in Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords* [Ann Arbor, 1986], pp. 213–214).

20

Mary Kelly and Laura Mulvey, "Conversation," *Afterimage* (March 1986), pp. 6–8.

21

Yve-Alain Bois, Douglas Crimp, and Rosalind Krauss, "A Conversation with Hans Haacke," *October* 30 (Fall 1984), p. 47.

22

Interview with Jack Burnham (1979), unpublished manuscript, courtesy of the artist.

23

Ibid.

24

See Bois, Crimp, and Krauss, "A Conversation with Hans Haacke," p. 37.

25

Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic,* p. 171.

26

Walter Grasskamp, "Information Magic" (interview with Hans Haacke, March 30, 1981), in *Hans Haacke,* exh. cat. (London: The Tate Gallery, 1984), p. 97.

27

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 256.

28

Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 11.

29

Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1984).

Hantaï/Villeglé and the Dialectics of Painting's Dispersal

If the art historian's task were to trace structures common to two rather different if not outright oppositional practices of painting in the immediate aftermath of World War II in France, how would the task be best approached? First of all by accepting as a given the profound incommensurability and incompatibility of the works to be compared: Simon Hantaï and Jacques de la Villeglé, at first glance at least, seem to share nothing at all, except that they were born in the moment of the early twenties: Villeglé in the year of Surrealism's second manifesto in 1926, Hantaï in 1921 in a village near Budapest, the city where he would attend the Academy of Art, in a culture whose avant-garde participation had become known for its proximity to a model of techno-scientific and political revolution (e.g., Béla Balázs, Lajos Kassák, László Moholy-Nagy, Georg Lukács), rather than for a psychoanalytically informed mobilization of the forces of the unconscious to subvert the atrophied libidinal apparatus of the Western European bourgeoisie. Both avant-garde models had of course crossed over and come together

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in various instances throughout the twenties and thirties, and had defined themselves as projects "to create certain links to constitute a new movement which most of all should reestablish a fusion between the cultural creation of the avant-garde and the revolutionary critique of society."[1]

But perhaps we could in fact construct a second context, more credible than merely the generational proximity, a temporal moment and a spatial, if not a discursive, site that both artists shared, one that would instantly set them apart from any comparative reading with the avant-gardes of the 1920s: the year of 1949, when Hantaï arrived in Paris from Hungary via Italy and when Villeglé arrived in Paris from Brittany (and shortly after Ellsworth Kelly, born in 1923, had arrived in October 1948 from the United States). The situation then and there would hardly have allowed for any radical avant-garde aspirations of either kind, given the city's recent fate. The accounts of the larger historical catastrophe grew beyond its horizons and beyond its imagination: the experience of the occupation by the German Fascists, the legacies of the collaborationist Vichy regime, and the gradual recognition of the unimaginable extent of the devastation of European bourgeois culture brought about by Fascism and the Second World War. The very model of a "principle of hope"[2]—so integral to any avant-garde formation—must have appeared unthinkable at that time to anybody contemplating not just the ruins of the avant-garde but the cinders of all bourgeois culture.

Perhaps as a consequence of the difficulties in understanding the mediations between these historical events and artistic practices, we might have to propose a third context, a more dehistoricized one, more narrowly focused, to discuss the work by both artists originating in that moment. We just might have to assume, if not accept, as has become customary again, that artistic beginnings are ultimately independent of the historical calamities that surround them, and occur solely in the mysterious discursive isolation of painterly and sculptural practices. This third proposed context would then require us first of all to ask whether and how Hantaï and Villeglé relate to or formulate a shared episteme of painting in postwar France, what the parameters, the historical structures, and the formal morphologies of this shared episteme might be, and how we could identify and describe them.

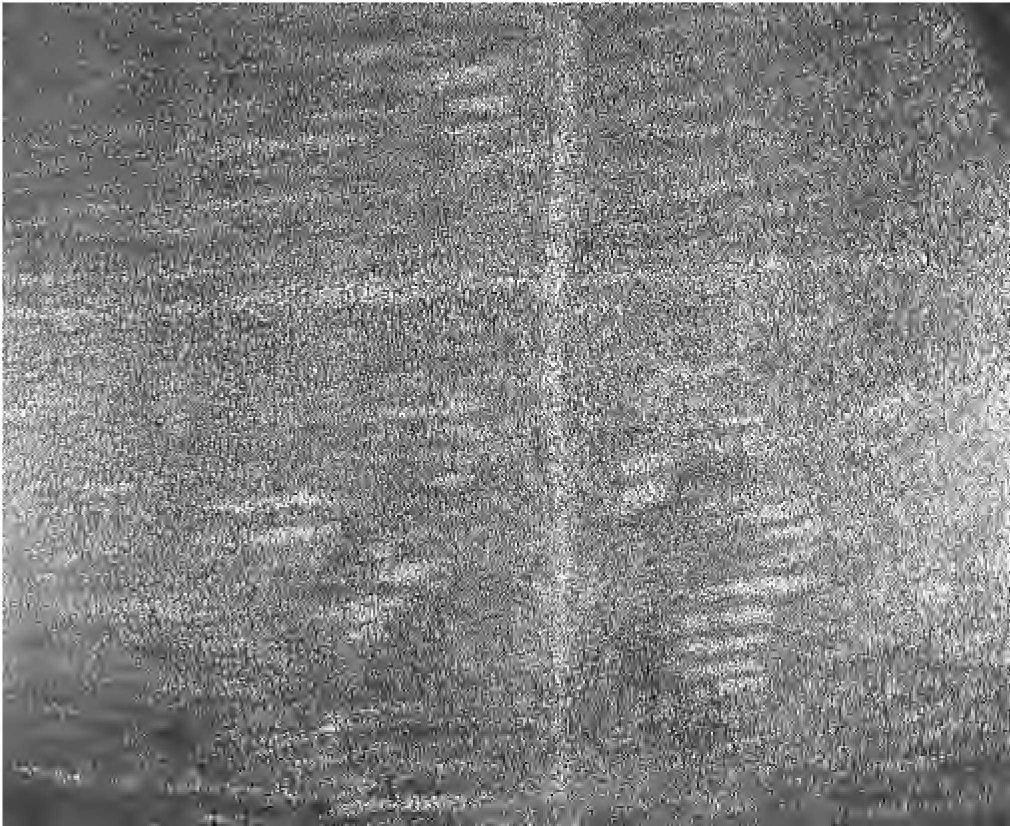
The first layer of such a shared episteme could be called Henri Matisse, since both young artists evidently responded to the postwar presence of the artist of the *papiers découpés* of *Oceania* in 1946 and of *Jazz* in 1947. Therefore we would have to retrace their complex movements in attempting to position and differentiate themselves within that legacy: Hantaï's chromatic schemes, for one, becoming most evident in the work of the early sixties—in the luminosity of cerulean blues or in the chthonic memories of siena and umbrian tones and other metaphorical tints—seem to insist on the continuing validity of Matisse's latent assumption that painterly chroma can never escape its condition of a referential relationship, of a grounding of vision in nature. And even Villeglé's radical substitution of colored papers for pigment could suggest such a comparative approach, one that would read even his early *décollage* work from 1949 onward at least partially as a response to the extraordinary hedonistic seduction of Matisse's *papiers découpés,* since it is in fact unlikely that the legacy of a German from Hannover was accessible in the Paris of 1949.[3] Matisse's redefinition of the morphology of drawing and painterly design could have been another attraction for Hantaï and Villeglé in a postwar recovery of the *découpages,* works that were in many ways more radical than one might anticipate from any other aspect of Matisse's production of the 1930s.[4] Thus both artists attempted to conceive of a new type of painting of pure—almost self-generated—design outside of an author's intentional composition, to allow for a random constellation of chroma and aleatory yet serialized form, in order to transcend the limitations both of a constructivist techno-scientific abstraction and of the biomorphic and automatist design of the Surrealists of the 1920s.

It seems then that Hantaï and Villeglé responded first of all to the overbearing presence of Matisse's attempt to renaturalize the gesture of drawing. As they conceived new dialectical principles of pictorial mark making (the procedures of *pliage* and of *décollage*), they could claim to have suspended, if not sublated—for the moment at least—all of the contradictions between the artisanal and the mechanical, between intentional choice and chance.

The second layer of the painterly episteme that both Hantaï and Villeglé share is a condition of being situated between two types of representational

prohibitions, the first having been initially pronounced by Modernism and the second being the thresholds of representability that recent history had established for artists and writers alike. Thus the question has to be asked whether the European artists of the moment of 1948 faced a historical horizon of specifically European postwar limits and prohibitions that was fundamentally different from that of their American peers: clearly it must have been impossible to judge whether the pursuit of painting after Auschwitz was now any less barbaric than the pursuit of lyrical poetry, as Adorno would notoriously argue in 1954. Historical concerns of this order do not appear to have affected the work of the Americans in Paris at that time (e.g., Sam Francis or Ellsworth Kelly). But if we contemplate Hantaï's monumental *Galla Placidia,* we can be less convinced that painting had indeed forfeited all attempts to respond to recent historical experiences. The explicit reference to Byzantine architecture and its mosaics record Hantaï's visit to Ravenna in 1948, in the course of his escape from Hungary.[5] A muted yet almost luminous figure structured in an overarching cruciform maps the vertical and the horizontal axes of the huge canvas in its entirety, juxtaposed with a ground consisting of myriads of molecular, scraped and fragmented structures of pigment that seem to have grown on their own on the canvas like incrustations. This painting's opposition between monumentality and molecularity reads like an ode to the miracle of survival itself: not just because it seems to be emerging from the contemplation of how the monuments themselves had survived the destruction of culture, but more importantly perhaps because it poses the question of whether and how the experience of the sacred and painting's relationship to it could still be imagined after the Holocaust and the destruction of European culture. Most difficult of all, the painting seems to elaborate upon the doubt of whether any new painting could be begun that would lay claim to that heritage under the conditions of the most tragic devastation of the experience of the sacred and the collective.

Furthermore, the consideration of public sacral architecture at that moment originated in the question of what subjects—if any—could form a new audience to receive the epiphanies of painting after the war, and in what kind of public spaces they would be disseminated. What kind of legibility should



Simon Hantaï, *A Galla Placidia,* 1958–1959. Oil on canvas, 326 × 400 cm.

painting have under these circumstances, or rather, what kind of opacity and inaccessibility should it have in order to defend itself against any and all claims for the reconstruction of a bourgeois humanist, if not religious, model of cultural experience that were being made at that moment? And lastly, painting would have critically reflected the claims for a continuity of aesthetic categories, genres, and production procedures such as Matisse's made at that time, if by no other means than by the fact that it reestablished painting as an artisanal articulation of a deeper sense of the bodily inscription of vision and cognition within the parameters of established pictorial language conventions.

And yet—and here a third shared condition arises—it became evident to Hantaï and to Villeglé that oppositional painting could no longer be modeled on the rebellious recourse to the graffito or the palimpsest that had served Jean Dubuffet so well as the countermodel with which he opposed the classical legacies of the masters of French modernism. Any continuing identification of the artist and the mentally deranged, as staged in Dubuffet's preoccupation with the artists of *art brut,* would have become equally unconvincing at the beginning of the 1950s.

Simultaneously, it seems to have become equally apparent to Hantaï that the carnal register with which painting had been associated in the work of Jean Fautrier would not be accessible to him either, since the inscription of painting within the traumatic dimension was rapidly surpassed by an emerging evidence of a culture of administrative rationality within which painting would have to situate itself in the future. In that sense, Hantaï found himself perhaps in a dilemma parallel to the one encountered by the writers of the *nouveau roman,* who at that very moment sensed an equal urgency to distance themselves from the narratives of the sacred, the body, the wound, and the trauma that had preoccupied the immediate postwar culture, and who were now turning their attention to the rise of an empire of total disaffection and total control of everyday life in the institutions of postwar consumer culture.

Thus, a fourth layer of such a shared painterly episteme could perhaps be called "the acceleration of automatism under the auspices of spectacle culture, or the reception of Jackson Pollock." In the Paris of the early to mid-1940s, on the

opposite end of the spectrum offered by Matisse, Fautrier, and Dubuffet, Francis Picabia for one had already submerged drawing and painterly design within the vulgarity of the mass-cultural photographic matrix. And now, in the late forties, the subjection of painting and drawing to the various mechanomorphic disfigurations had led to the final erosion of such artisanally based practices of a skillful recording of psychically privileged forms of experience. In the increasingly mechanized forms of late Surrealist automatism, these traditional forms and functions of drawing and painterly design were increasingly being dissolved and spatially dispersed. This inexorable disfiguration of painting was most often declared to be the result of a turn to non-Western sources, primarily Asian principles of calligraphic inscription, but the actual historicity of these tendencies would become most striking when Jackson Pollock sent to France his first and strongest signals of painting's shifting registers.[6]

What we would witness at that moment, then, is the formation of a peculiar epistemic couplet in painting, one in which the incessant subjection of painting to the needs and demands of spectacle would be bound up with painting's incessant reassertion of its origins in ritualistic and spiritual experience. It seems to have been necessary to relocate the origins of that renewed spirituality in a dual transfer: outside of the purviews of European Christianity (deeply compromised after the Second World War) and outside of the purviews of traditional European modernist abstraction (discredited in both its biomorphic and geometric versions).

Georges Mathieu would become the first to fully inhabit and articulate this epistemic schism as well as to read Pollock's messages in Paris.[7] He would record accelerated automatism as a signal for the painting of the future, since painting as a practice could no longer remain within the protected spaces of traditional perceptual and artisanal order. It would inevitably have to be transfigured, against its own principles and histories—like all other constructs and conventions of cognition and perception—by the increasing impact of spectacle culture. Mathieu would also be among the first—along with André Breton—not only to recognize the importance of Hantaï's work, but to see it explicitly in the dual terms of a newly accelerated automatism and as a painting claiming the forms of Western mysticism as its origins:

> The arrival of speed in the aesthetics of the West does not require an apprenticeship in mimicking the Asian. The occident does not need to learn anything from the orient in order to express itself. It can eventually coincide with the former. Hantaï's point of departure is very different. Taking off from an outlived Surrealism, he would demand from Breton the abandonment of his ossified positions, and it is he who would be the origin of the overture toward "tachism." His development would be as rapid as it would be organic. He would very swiftly understand the advantages of using a language of immediacy, which he would charge with an entirely Western form of mysticism.[8]

In the hagiographic reception of Pollock in France—as embodied in the work of Mathieu—it would soon become evident to what extent the random expansion of Pollock's radical principles of a newly found painterly performativity would be blindly subjected to the process of spectacularization. The very bodily spaces and carnal structures to which Pollock's painting had had recourse in order to mobilize the somatic inscription against the permeation of gesture by spectacle, to oppose the instrumentalization of the gestural itself (programmatically reenacted as of the mid-1950s in the work of Cy Twombly), would now—in the hands of Mathieu and later of Yves Klein—become the mere advertisement of its own specularity (perhaps that was what Clement Greenberg had aptly called the danger of painting becoming "apocalyptic wallpaper").

Every painter at that moment, Parisian or American, seems to have sought the proper register in which to anchor the determining condition of a total dispersal of a centered Cartesian subjectivity and the discrediting of conscious individual control. What was at stake was the discovery of painterly procedures within which the multiple and incessant fracturing of a heretofore seemingly intact practice of drawing and painterly design could be articulated. Painting now had to find principles in which it could publicly refute the last residues of a visual hedonism, seducing its viewers either by the virtuosity of its graphic, gestural, or chromatic execution or by an enigmatic iconography that pretended to lead to the deepest recesses of the mythical and the prelinguistic unconscious.

This implied first of all a search for the matrices in which painting could acknowledge its relegation to utter iterability. In the recourse to this type of matrix, painting could publicly abdicate all past claims to the heroism of a deeper singularity, to forms of experience more profound than those of the lowest of its common spectators. The matrix provided a mode in which painting could accept the sense of its newly internalized immolation, by exchanging the structure of the singularity of its definition either for that of a "mere" event (cf. Allan Kaprow's "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" in 1958) or for that of a "mere" template (this is the step taken by Jasper Johns in 1954). Hantaï and Villeglé, in establishing precisely those principles at the beginning of the 1950s, thus would certainly have responded critically to the legacy of Matisse as much as to that of Surrealist painting (which is evident in Hantaï's protracted labor of detaching himself from the entanglement with late Surrealist iconographies), if they were not already explicitly responding also in their own ways to the "legacy of Jackson Pollock."

Perhaps this could then be understood as yet another dialectical nexus between Hantaï and Villeglé: both artists were contemplating the erosion of painting as it was taking place under their own eyes, and both were pursuing similar questions from opposite perspectives: they recognized that the esoteric condition of *peinture* as an art of privileged experience was increasingly displaced by the new register of the spectacular. From now on, all gestures and all representations would find themselves inextricably intertwined with the instrumentality of advertisement and the publicity of product propaganda. That even painting itself would now have to face the inexorable necessity to adapt to a universal condition of a desublimatory iterability is the insight pronounced by Villeglé and Raymond Hains already in their magisterial opening statement of *Ach Alma Manétro* in 1949.

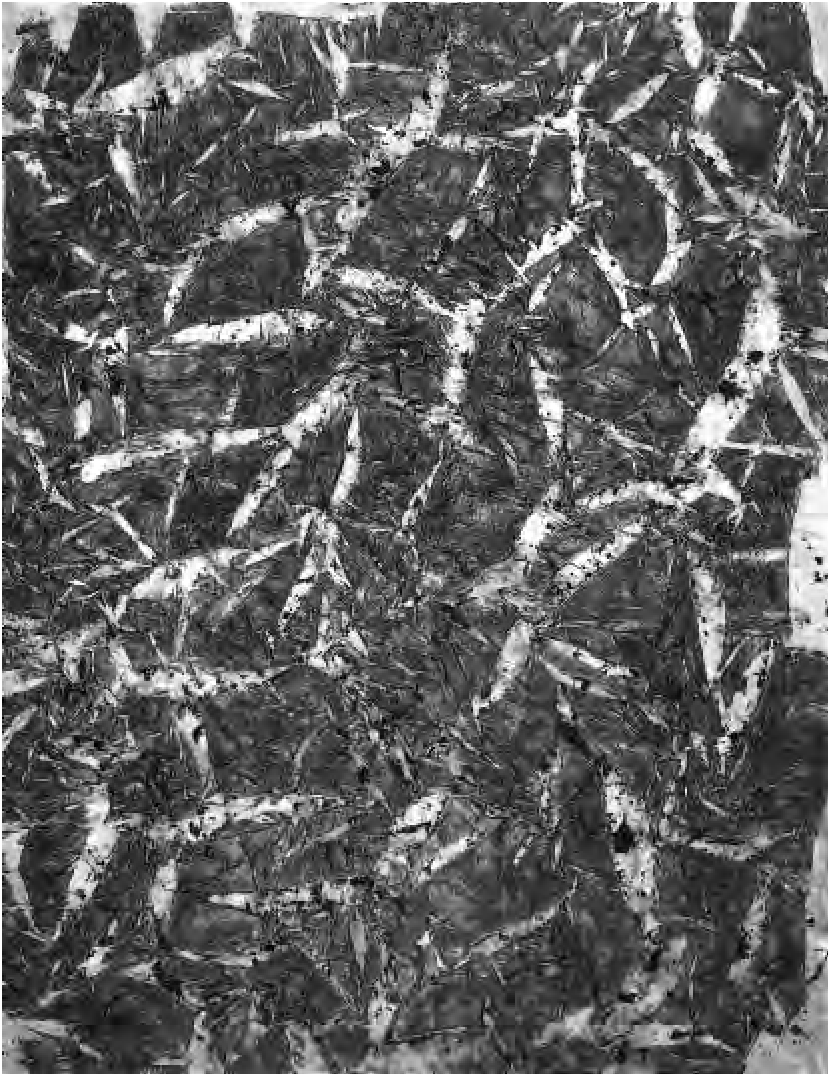
In this, his first *décollage* work, Villeglé arrested and contained the graphic virtuosity of biomorphic drawing and the automatist dimensions of Surrealist painting within the rigid shells of a preproduced typographic matrix of found advertisement structures. At the same time he relocated the historical verdict on the necessary demotion of painterly skills by transferring it to the event structure of clandestine vandalism. Villeglé's pictorialization of language in a random plenitude

of chromatic dissolutions finds its historical counterpart in Hantaï's repositioning of painterly chroma within the rigorous registers of graphic performativity. Thus one could argue that Hantaï's performance of the *pliage* (the semimechanical operation of painterly process in dyeing and folding the canvas in an almost technical manner) has the décollagist's collection of found gestures of vandalism as its procedural counterpart. This principle extended the rationalizing and quantifying order of the pictorial grid, which had heretofore merely mapped the painting's surface, ever deeper into painting's material support structure, and it fragmented even the procedural temporality of painting itself into quantifiable units.

Yet, paradoxically, Hantaï never quite ceased to maintain or reclaim at least a residual access to the natural referent in the pictorial, which gave his matrix—oscillating between the structure of foliage or crystalline morphologies—a certain conventionality. Johns's painting, by comparison, committed itself (in the way that one is "committed" to an institution) to the tautological rigor of mapping the canvas in the numerical or alphabetical matrix, which hermetically enacted the order of total administration in which any hope for the renaturalization of gesture, chroma, and composition had been lost altogether.

Clearly, then, the construction of a historical context for artists as different as Hantaï and Villeglé poses a number of productive problems, in which the necessity of an altogether different approach to painting in the postwar period becomes evident. First of all, it has become clear that any attempt at establishing chronologies of influence—whichever connections one might want to construct—will be profoundly deficient, just as the artists themselves had always already told us. Not a single connection can be verified between *Ach Alma Manétro,* for example, and either the lineage of European Dadaism (in particular Kurt Schwitters) or the American postwar lineage, the newly emerging large-scale canvases of the New York School and their morphology of the torn and shredded surfaces (e.g., Clyfford Still) or the vast fields of crisscrossing graffiti-like inscriptions of the work of Jackson Pollock.

This would leave us, then, with two methodological options to answer the question of how such enormously important work as *Galla Placidia* and Villeglé's *Ach Alma Manétro* could have emerged out of the Parisian context of 1949. The



Simon Hantaï, . . . *Dell'orto,* 1962. Oil and canvas, folded, 267.5 × 209 cm.

first answer would be the one that the formalists have long given us: that the languages of painting, like all other *langues,* are in fact operating in relative independence from the historical contexts within which they operate, but that they are in perpetual change and adjustment within themselves, in comparison and in contradistinction to the paradigmatic changes that occur within the *langues* of painting at any given moment. This argument has the tremendous advantage of clarifying why and how certain chronological inconsistencies can occur. It would then easily defy any attempt to construct causal connections such as "influence" and "interdependence" over time and across vast geopolotical spaces (e.g., the Pollock question, the Dada reception question).

The second option would be the one we have attempted to sketch out above: to recognize the profound asynchronicity in the writing of postwar art history (e.g., the formation of "movements" in the postwar period, when with *Ach Alma Manétro* the beginning of Nouveau Réalisme would have to be relocated to 1949). Or to recognize with *Galla Placidia* an independent model of a very specific European response to the crisis of the easel painting after the Second World War, a model that cannot be addressed with the formalist analysis of post-Greenbergian approaches any more successfully than with the limited tools of a social art history exclusively based on a mechanistic principle of ideology critique. But it is a methodology that has yet to be elaborated, of which we have given here no more than a crude sketch, one in which the structure of the historical experience and the structure of aesthetic production could be recognized within sets of complex analogies that are neither mechanistically determined nor conceived of as arbitrarily autonomous, but that require the specificity of understanding the multiple mediations taking place within each artistic proposition and its historical context.

Notes

1

Guy Debord, introduction to *Potlatch* (1954–1957), in *Potlatch* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1996), p. 8.

2

The title of Ernst Bloch's foundational work of a neo-Marxist eschatology emerging from the experience of devastation and exile, written in the period from 1947 to 1953 and first published in 1959.

3

Kurt Schwitters's work was shown, however, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1948 in a first posthumous memorial exhibition. The first exhibition of work by Schwitters was organized by the gallery of Heinz Berggruen in Paris in 1952, and it is unlikely that Villeglé would have had any prior knowledge of Schwitters's work.

4

Hantaï and Villeglé would by no means remain alone, of course, in recognizing the seduction of the extreme elegance of an almost neoclassical conception of drawing and color resulting from the seemingly radical procedure and morphology of cutting chromatic paper. Ellsworth Kelly, for example, one of their generational American counterparts in the postwar reception of Matisse, would introduce exactly the same responses. For an excellent and detailed account of the number and frequency of American artists arriving in Paris at that time, see Nathalie Brunet, "Chronologie 1943–1954," in Yve-Alain Bois et al., *Ellsworth Kelly: Les années françaises 1948–1954* (Paris: Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, 1992), pp. 177–194.

5

Paradoxically, once again, Hantaï and Kelly seem to have shared exactly the same interests at that time, since Kelly copied extensively from Byzantine manuscripts that he studied in Paris. Yet it would seem fair to argue that he was primarily attracted to their model character as a representational system that operated prior to the establishment of the universal rule of Renaissance perspective, and that he was not concerned with the question, as was Hantaï, of what the relation between the sacred and painting could be after the experience of the Second World War.

6

This became evident, for example, in the work of an American artist such as Sam Francis, who had just arrived in Paris in 1949 as well.

7

Georges Mathieu claims to have prepared the first exhibition of works by Pollock for Paris in 1948, when he writes: "In 1948, at a time when nobody in Paris would have dreamt of presenting such a confrontation, I had a project for an exhibition in which French and American painters of a similar affinity would be united; this exhibition was to include: Bryen,

de Kooning, Hartung, Gorky, Mathieu, Picabia, Pollock, Reinhardt, Rothko, Russell, Sauer, and Wols." It is highly unlikely, however, that any works by Pollock were actually on exhibit, since Mathieu recalls that "unfortunately this exhibition could not be realized in its entirety as planned due to the difficulties in getting works from the American galleries." See Georges Mathieu, *Au delà du tachisme* (Paris: René Julliard, 1963), p. 174.

8

Georges Mathieu, "Triomphe de l'abstraction lyrique," in ibid., pp. 105–106, n. 78.

Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's *Le vide* to Arman's *Le plein*

> The judgment of *Potlatch* concerning the end of modern art might have appeared a little excessive against the background of thinking about the subject in 1954. Since nobody seems to have been able to come up with any explanation, people have actually started to doubt a fact we know in the meantime from rather lengthy experience, namely that since 1954 we have never seen anywhere the appearance of a single artist whose work would be truly of any interest.
> —*Guy Debord,* "*Introduction to* Potlatch" *(1985)*

Artistic truth claims in post–World War II Europe were first of all determined by the dialectics of seemingly immutable social restrictions (e.g., collectively enforced historical disavowal or the acceleration of object consumption) and their opposite, the arbitrariness of artistic memory and radical change (such as the random reclamation of decontextualized modernist paradigms in the immediate

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aftermath of World War II in Paris). The halves of that dialectic governed aesthetic production and the object perception of everyday life in unequal measure: the voluntaristic surplus of aesthetic choices seems to have failed just as much as the sudden restriction of culture to serve as a political project (as, for example, in the belated introduction of Socialist Realism into postwar France, or in Sartre's manifesto "What is Literature?" in 1948).

Paradoxically, it appears that precisely those artists who did not comply with earlier forms of avant-garde aspirations (as Guy Debord would describe them for example, retrospectively, as the task of his magazine *Potlatch* in 1954, "to create certain links to constitute a new movement which most of all should reestablish a fusion between the cultural creation of the avant-garde and the revolutionary critique of society"),[1] and those projects that did not at all correspond to the most important political and philosophical theorization of art at the time, would come to represent some of the central moments of French reconstruction culture.

This essay attempts to clarify at least three questions: the first one considers production, asking why these artists grasped the accessible mediations between discursive prohibitions and newly available artistic epistemes better than their ethically and theoretically superior colleagues. In other words, what changes were necessary for the definition of visual culture so that these artists who ignored restrictions and prohibitions could eventually be recognized as the new producers? And what made their project appear as a more convincing mediation between social production and artistic production, integral to the demands of reconstruction culture?

The second question addresses the process of reception. It attempts to clarify why these practices (some of them distinctly apolitical and anti-social, if not altogether cynically indifferent to the problems of legitimacy and the possibility of artistic truth claims after the war) actually succeded more than the "committed" literary and artistic forms in establishing the neo-avantgarde in the 1950s.

And the third question would inevitably have to be one of critical judgment, specifying the criteria according to which neo-avantgarde production could be evaluated altogether. That is, to determine how aesthetic and ethical

claims of earlier and of oppositional avant-garde models, once they had proven to be ineffective or inadequate in the advanced forms of late capitalist consumer culture, could be reassessed without lapsing either into the latent authoritarianism of Debord's prohibitive doubt about even the slightest historical possibility of any cultural production whatsoever, or into the opposite of that annihilation, embodied, for example, in the writings of Pierre Restany from the same period, which enthusiastically assign the neo-avantgarde the role of a cultural *claque* celebrating the new techno-scientific society of consumption, spectacle, and control.[2]

To answer any of these questions at least partially, we develop in the following a somewhat experimental comparative model, examining how this dialectic of a radical transformation of spaces and objects, and equally radical changes in the paradigms of visual representation, could be traced in a relatively focused moment of postwar French culture. We compare two artists who entered the discursive framework of postwar culture in the mid-1950s in order to trace how they would—within the relatively narrow time of a decade—not only redefine the discursive traditions of painting and sculpture in France in ways that were not at all anticipated in local art development, but also position themselves in the center of a dialectic of historical disavowal and spectacularization that we suggest is *one* of the constitutive conditions of reconstruction culture.

The painter Yves Klein emerged from the modernist history of reductivist abstraction, specifically monochrome painting, whereas the sculptor Arman departed from the equally central paradigm of the readymade. If we accept that these paradigms were in fact essential to the formation of the *discursive* framework of the neo-avantgarde, we still have to identify the specific conditions determining the formation of a *historical* framework. Our primary argument is that the repression of catastrophic historical experience and its opposite, the rapid development of a new culture of spectacle and consumption, were among the founding conditions of the artistic production of that postwar moment. This dialectic of silence and exposure was all the more efficient on European ground since the repression of historical memory had been so emphatically established in everyday life on a collective level, so that most of the visual neo-avantgarde practices

between 1958 and 1968 were formulated as part of a larger project of social modernization and amnesia.[3]

Discursive Memory versus Historical Memory

While it has been firmly established that one of the epistemic specifics of modernist painting had been to prohibit any representation of the historical and to dismantle any referentiality to the material world, it continues to surprise us how vehemently this quest for visual autonomy and self-referentiality was reestablished immediately after the most cataclysmic destruction in European history. This was observable in the postwar period in all the European countries, but it is particularly poignant to study the dynamics of disavowal and modernization in those contexts where the encounters with fascism and the Holocaust had been most dramatic, in the country of the victimizer as much as in those of the victimized.

Numerous parameters of historical mediation have to be brought into the debate to understand the dialectic of mnemosyne and amnesia in European reconstruction culture. For this reason we suggest a preliminary distinction—theoretically untenable as it might be—between discursive and historical memory.[4] If the former considers the degree to which an artistic practice defines its mnemonic horizon with regard to the persistence of aesthetic paradigms, artistic conventions, and formal standards, the latter questions whether history enters reconstruction culture at all, and if it does, whether its most legible traces might not be precisely those occasions when the disavowal of historical trauma has been most successfully accomplished. Such a reflection must also understand whether or not the very emphasis on the historical dimension of reconstruction culture paradoxically conflicts with the initial unfolding of the process of the mnemonic from within the formation of discursive memory itself.

Already, our first example could reveal the full problematic of such a distinction between historical and discursive memory, if we consider only the persistence of culturally constructed and individually enacted models of artistic and authorial identity in postwar France. Postwar French culture had to reckon with

these models as much as it had to distance itself from the patriarchal figures of French Modernism, specifically Picasso and Matisse. These artists and their peers (Braque, Léger) would be immediately repositioned in a place of uncontestable authority against whatever challenges a critical avant-garde might have mobilized against them in the 1920s and 1930s.

The second—and even more complex—example of the construction of discursive memory would be the extent to which other and slightly later members of the historical avant-gardes (e.g., Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian, and Kurt Schwitters), who—by the time of the liberation—had been barely received in Paris, could be incorporated within the formation of French postwar culture. What linked these figures—despite their immense paradigmatic diversity—with the patriarchs of Modernism was not only the fact that they had participated in the production of a prewar aesthetic, but that they had equally witnessed the Second World War and the catastrophic destruction of European humanist culture at the hands of German fascism. Moreover, they had—with very few exceptions—remained equally silent in view of that destruction and acted for the most part as though they had not been affected by it in terms of the conception and continuation of their artistic projects.[5]

It appears reasonable to assume, by contrast, that artists who emerged in the late 1940s and who formulated the aesthetics of reconstruction confronted the experience of the devastation of Europe in a much more fundamental manner. One could thus expect that from this point on all visual avant-garde activities would differ dramatically from all previously valid models, in the way that Maurice Blanchot argued that "no matter when it is written . . . from now on it will be from before Auschwitz."[6] And in fact, if one studies the poetry and literature of that period, a schism emerges between literature's continuous emphasis on the necessity (or the impossibility) of constructing historical memory and a new politically conscious culture, and the almost total absence of comparable theoretical questions, let alone artistic solutions to the problem of historical experience and the possibility of a mnemonic approach to trauma in postwar *visual* culture.[7] While French, Italian, and German literature seems to offer a multitude of attempts to reflect on the experiences of the war and the Holocaust, the

repression of historical experience, the silence on the subject of history, is almost total in the works of the visual neo-avantgarde from 1958 to 1968.

This paradox is all the greater since it had in fact been one of the foundations of French modernity (that strand generally identified as deriving from Courbet's Realism) to address the historical in its most specific aspects (e.g., the conditions of class, the influence of political formations on artistic practice). In the same manner one could argue that French Modernism had subsequently constituted itself within discursive memory (that other strand generally identified with Manet). It seems, then, that the definitions of renewed autonomous visuality in the postwar moment have been distorting or prohibiting both foundations—historical memory as much as discursive memory—in order to position and expose the new type of autonomous visuality within a radically different register.

Recruiting References

In the recruitment of reference figures for the discursive memory of the French neo-avantgarde of the 1950s (as is true for every European country at that time), it is not uncommon to encounter peculiar pairings (historical or paradigmatic) whose immediate compatibility with the practices of the present is far from evident or even plausible. Thus, one could argue that Yves Klein's most crucial reference figure from within the historical avant-garde (yet all the more emphatically denied) was Kazimir Malevich, whereas Jean Dubuffet represented the local postwar generation, with whom Klein found himself in a dialogue of disavowal and displacement. An equally odd pairing can be traced within the artistic development of Arman, Klein's early companion, whose central discovery among the historical avant-garde was Kurt Schwitters—as he has frequently acknowledged—and whose crucial encounter in the postwar period was undoubtedly Jackson Pollock.[8] A third figure, the Dutch artist Hendrik Nicholas Werkman, historically as disconnected from Schwitters as from Pollock, helped Arman to discover the importance of typography and, most important, the artisanally or semi-mechanically produced graphic sign as pictorial device. Obviously, the actual network of relationships and influences in the formation of

postwar artists was infinitely more complex and subtle than the examples of reference figures given here would indicate. The purpose of these examples is to offer insight into the peculiarly contradictory structures of postwar cultural identifications and interests, with European artists blindly reaching for (decontextualized) prewar paradigms of the European avant-garde from which they were totally disconnected, or reaching for American models of postwar production, with which they in fact shared hardly any historical experience at all.

Yves Klein: Abstraction's Afterlife

In 1954, with the publication of Klein's books *Yves: Peintures* and *Haguenault: Peintures* abstraction appeared in France for the first time as a conceptual metalanguage. Dissecting abstraction's historical corpse (one that two generations had already attempted to resurrect in vain during the reconstruction of Modernism after the war), Klein uncovered its mechanical and institutional organs, the technical aspects of its formal conventions, and its fictions of signification.[9]

Klein's revelations emerged in his two books with an allegorical clarity that occurs only rarely, in moments when artists glimpse the profound obsolescence of their epistemes. The two publications, pretending to give an account of Klein's extensive production of monochrome paintings (their size and dates, their site of production, sometimes even the location of their collection), are of course entirely fictitious. They constitute the first instance in which the central modernist paradigm of the monochrome (with all its claims for presence and purity, optical and empiricist self-evidence) was programmatically shifted to the registers of linguistic, discursive, and institutional conventions.

In order to clarify the historical specificity of Klein's restructuring of the monochrome, it would be productive to compare his work to Ellsworth Kelly's (a project we cannot even begin here), the first artist of the postwar moment to resuscitate monochromy in a programmatic fashion. The confidence with which Kelly committed himself to an ontology and phenomenology of the monochrome (even in his most radical works, such as *Window: Museum of Modern Art Paris,* 1949) would become unthinkable for Klein: for him the visual object had

to be ripped out of its age-old embeddedness in substance and texture, in matter and tactility, and Klein would hand it over to a new ostentatious exposure and specularity.

At the very moment of Klein's (fraudulent) claim to have invented monochromy, he presents it already as absent, accessible only through fiction, technical reproduction, and institutional distribution. Even the literal "erasure" of the critical introduction by Claude Pascal (his text consists of black lines filling the white pages) conforms to the allegorical voiding of meaning as plenitude and presence. If they are comparable at all, Klein's miniature monochromes remind us in their radicality of Duchamp's decision in the late 1930s to shift even the readymade object onto the register of technical reproduction by generating miniature replicas for his *Boîte en valise*.[10]

Analogous to Klein's subjection of the monochrome is his treatment of the phenomenon of color as presumably the last empirical evidence of a naturally anchored visuality. His pretense to have "invented" the monochrome is matched by his equally fraudulent claim to have invented "International Klein Blue" (the Symbolist *azur,* visible in the luminous pastels of Odilon Redon since the 1890s). Both claims were then surpassed by his quest to file a patent for the perfectly natural phenomenon of that tint and to coin a brand name for it, incorporating it in its initials (IKB). The property claims and the administrative-legalistic approach to the phenomenology of color not only recognize the parameters of a post-Duchampian aesthetic as inevitable but are also a callous enactment of the insight that the postwar aesthetic would have to be founded on the allegorical ruins of the historical avant-garde as much as on the mechanisms of an increasing fusion of the artistic object with the object of spectacularized consumption.

Klein's notorious 1957 exhibition of eleven identical, differently priced monochrome blue paintings (subtle differences evident only in surface texture) in Milan's Galleria Apollinaire can be seen as the early apogee of that newly forming aesthetic. It is not just the exhibition's emphasis on seriality and repetition, on painting as *production* that makes it legible as a major departure from all previous forms of abstraction, but perhaps even more so the fact that, rather than consider the order of the "exhibition" a mere accumulation of

Yves Klein, *Propositions monochromes,* 1957. Installation view, Galleria Apollinaire, Milan.

individual works, Klein conceives of the painterly work itself as on the order of an "exhibition."

This ambiguity is exacerbated by Klein's decision to mount the seemingly identical paintings on stanchions. The monochrome panels—far from self-reflexive—appear unexpectedly as contingent hybrids between autonomy and a semi-functional object in need of a prosthesis for public display. Suspended between the pictorial convention as *tableaux* and their newly gained assignment as *signs,* these paintings articulate a strange dialectic of pure visuality and pure contingency.[11] Finally, and perhaps most paradoxically, Klein subjects the serialized, quasi-identical paintings to a willful hierarchical order of exchange value, articulating thereby yet another opposition, that between "immaterial pictorial sensibility" and randomly assigned price (anticipating Jean Baudrillard's semiotic formulation of the phenomenon of sign exchange value). Thus we witness—already at the moment of the work's conception—to what extent Klein would play out programmatically the internal conflict between painting as a self-sufficient substantial object and as a contingent structure that is utterly dependent on an array of devices and discursive conventions that had been previously hidden from the view of abstraction.

With inexorable logic, Klein shifted from his easel paintings as semi-functional display panels to the level of architectural framing devices in his first installation of *Le vide* in 1958, completing the first phase of his project of an aesthetic of contingency.[12] Yet, by declaring the empty gallery space itself as the work, and claiming it at the same time as a zone of heightened pictorial, proto-mystical sensibility, he once again mobilized the full range of contradictions already manifest in the preceding projects. Even the quintessentially modernist strategy, that of a rigorously self-critical reduction to the essentials of genre, convention and category, was transferred by Klein onto a new qualitative and quantitative level: the exposure of the empty architectural container.

But Klein's spatialization of painterly reductivism, the endowment of empiricist specificity with architectural dimensions, does not resemble at all the qualitative shift that had occurred in earlier instances of modernity in which pictorial self-reflexivity had suddenly reached—via the mediation of the relief—

an architectural dimension. In these instances the architectural dimension had pointed toward a dialectical sublation of the intimacy of visual reflexivity into a tactile culture of simultaneous collective reception, as, for example, in El Lissitzky's *Proun Room* in Dresden in 1924. More important is a comparison between Klein's *Le vide* and Lissitzky's installation of the *Abstract Cabinet* in Hannover (1926–1928), where the the phenomenological examination of painterly visuality itself became the subject of a critical historicization and the critique became the defining principle of the spatialization and the architectural design, shifting from visual to institutional analysis, from phenomenological space to discursive space, from simultaneous collective perception to the public space of archival order.

The specificity and historical differences of Klein's approach become strikingly evident: if the transition from monochrome painting to architectural installation had initiated a critical reflection on the auratic object's relationship to the institutions of the public sphere and its historically specific audiences, in *Le vide* this historical and theoretical spectrum was not even present as a trace. As in all other steps taken by the artist around 1960, *Le vide* is a project in which the critical enlightenment aspirations of the historical avant-garde are reversed into a practice of newly enforced mythification. Thus the repression of the *historical* dimension in Klein's work takes its origin first of all in the repression of *discursive* memory: rather than a reflection on the originary implications of Lissitzky's foregrounding of the support structure of the institutional display surfaces (museum, gallery, cabinet, exhibition) where radically altered viewing conditions were incorporated into the formal transformation of the aesthetic object, in *Le vide* we witness the opposite agenda: not only the disavowal of Klein's predecessors, but more importantly the inability or the refusal to reflect on the actual implications of modernist paradigms and their historical specificity concerning conventions of vision, the constructions of spectators according to class, and the discursive order of architectural and museological display systems.

Even a strategy like the systematic withdrawal of perceptual information could be altered dramatically in the postwar moment. If the notion of an autonomy of the visual had once been constitutive of a new spectatorial self-awareness,

one that would gradually lead away from the empirical certainty of the visual to one of epistemological doubt, in Klein's hands the withdrawal of perceptual data—rather than wean his audiences from the dependence upon an ontologically and phenomenologically grounded visuality—functioned as a well-calibrated *choc* for the already initiated, a call to partake in a silent consensus that the neo-avantgarde and its increasingly professionalized apparatus were complicit in the initiation into the spectacularization of experience.[13]

The subjection of the aesthetic to that process operates always in tandem with renewed mythification, yet without the latter's ever receiving the critical reflection that theoreticians (like Roland Barthes) developed precisely at that moment to dismantle the increasing mythification of everyday life in postwar France. Klein's project of a counter-Enlightenment renewal of avant-garde devices seems either intentionally or involuntarily to coincide at all times with the socially governing forms of mythification, never to oppose them critically nor to surpass them in an excess of irrationality.

Thus, Klein initiates his painterly project as a paradox, one in which the self-sufficiency and spiritual transcendentality of the aesthetic object are both energetically reclaimed and simultaneously displaced by an aesthetic of the specularized supplement. Yet, to the very degree that Klein recognized that a modernist aesthetic of spiritual or empiro-critical autonomy had failed, he incessantly questioned the fate of these aspirations once the culture of spectacle took over the spaces of the avant-garde. Therefore, Klein could not simply deliver the legacies of abstraction without making the persistence of abstraction's spiritual afterlife evident—after all, the death of painting was one of infinite deferral—an afterlife of uncanny returns, now paradoxically bound up with the new order governing visuality.

Klein's attempt to redeem these obsolete models of aesthetic spirituality while accelerating their subjection to the advanced principles of spectacularization, counteracted as well what he must have perceived as the threatening prospects of a renewed secularization of culture. Critiques formulated in the 1950s by writers, phenomenologists, and psychoanalysts provided a radically different answer to the crisis of humanist models of culture. Klein's notorious and

agressively voiced contempt for Sartre and for a political critique from the Left are cases in point. What makes Klein's work inescapable is precisely that it constructed these epistemic couplets in public visibility: that the attempt to redeem spirituality by artistic means at the moment of the rise of a universal control of consumer culture would inevitably clad the spiritual in a sordid (involuntary?) travesty. By making his work manifestly dependent on all of the previously hidden *dispositifs* (e.g., the spaces of advertisement and the devices of promotion) he would become the first postwar European artist to initiate not only an aesthetic of total institutional and discursive contingency, but also one of total spectacularization.[14]

Arman: The Shelf Life of the Readymade

> After my *Void* came Arman's *Full-Up*. The universal memory of art was still lacking this definitive mummification of quantification.
> —*Yves Klein*[15]

> In reality, I commit always the same act of conservation: I show the condition of catastrophe.
> —*Arman*[16]

What Walter Benjamin famously said of Atget's photographs in 1936, namely that they "withdrew the aura from the photograph as though water was pumped from a sinking ship," could be said about the effect of Arman's first *accumulation* on the paradigms of the readymade and the *objet trouvé*. When the artist decided to abandon his *empreintes-objets* in 1953 (where the object had only served to produce a painterly imprint on the canvas) in favor of the direct presentation of the object itself, the ramifications of both paradigms had been hardly recognized in France.

Arman's formal principles and production procedures—if that is what his cumulative collections could still be called—demarcate a distinct departure from the legacies of Dada and Surrealism: their primary *modus operandi* could be

somewhat schematically described as the iterative act of finding (quasi-mechanical when compared, for example, with Duchamp's notion of a *rendez-vous* with the readymade or with André Breton's ritualistic discovery of the *objet trouvé*) and as serial multiplication, both generating a proliferation of similes or identical objects. Nevertheless, his structural or iconographic decisions could be misunderstood—initially, at least—as introducing only minuscule differences between his work and the object aesthetic that had governed the historical avant-garde.

One dimension of Duchamp's paradigm certainly had been the affirmative celebration of a technical Modernism and a scientifically organized mass culture, and he had indeed pointed—as Le Corbusier and the Soviet artists had—to such a society's radically democratic and participatory potential (his statement about America's singular cultural achievement in the building of bridges and the provision of urban plumbing testifies to that attitude). At the same time, Duchamp's readymades proposed that the embrace of the industrially produced object held in itself a promise of emancipation from the aesthetic of skill and virtuosity as much as from an aesthetic of aura and myth.

Yet the readymade was marred by a structural paradox that Apollinaire had detected as early as 1913: its heroic and hieratic implications imbued the readymade with an almost monumental singularity within reproductive multiplicity.[17] By contrast, a seemingly infinite multiplicity—quite unlike Duchamp's hieratic singularity—appears in Arman's *accumulations* for the first time. As the record of the actually limitless expansion and repetition of object production, this multiplicity provides its spectators with ample evidence of the end of the utopian object aesthetic. Structuring the work as a grid of mechanically reproduced, identical or similar items from all realms of consumer culture, Arman corrects first of all the structural paradox of Duchamp's readymade. If Duchamp had only mused that at some point the galaxy of objects in its entirety could acquire the status of the readymade, Arman fulfilled this Duchampian prognosis.

But the utopian object's emphasis on progress had already been counteracted in the surrealist *objet trouvé*. To reveal the future as one of increasing fetishization and domination by consumption, Surrealism had unveiled that object's darker underside, given it an uncanny, premature appearance of obsoles-

cence. This subversive exemption, operating spatially and temporally, opened up sights where the object's obscene urgency withered into the *démodé* (opening up the object's mnemonic spaces), and its premature aging dissolved its compulsory structure in the present (the compulsion to produce it in order to generate exchange value, the compulsion to acquire it as the subject's substitute).

But even when we compare Arman's work to the final phases of a Surrealist object aesthetic as it operated, for example, in the work of Joseph Cornell—who is historically closer to him than Duchamp and whose assemblages appear at times structurally analogous—the comparison illuminates considerable differences: if Cornell's boxes reach at times a comparable level of repetition and serialization, their morphology and the spaces of presentation remain always open to a spectatorial projection. They seem to want to redeem interiority, and their mnemonic dimension is already embedded in the framing and presentational devices of the boxes, reminiscent of shrine, miniature, and *Wunderkammer.* These aspects have been purged from Arman's *accumulations;* they seem instead like mere reiterations of a pure and unmediated facticity.

Thus, Arman's aesthetic neither shares the utopian promise of the techno-scientistic avant-garde nor does it engender the oneiric freedom of objects that have been liberated—if by no other force than the passage of time—from their services and functions. This is evident not only in the object choices Arman makes in the first five years of his *accumulations,* but even more so in the spatial and structural arrangements of these objects. Two formal principles, both central paradigms of Modernism, determine the structural organization of Arman's *accumulations* and his slightly later *poubelles:* the first is the post-Cubist grid as it had been inscribed in the work of numerous artists of the 1920s. The second paradigm actually fuses two other major principles of Modernism—chance encounter and the random organization of matter according to the physical laws of gravity.[18] Unlike the definition of the chance encounter of heterogeneous objects, however, summed up for the Surrealists in Lautréamont's famous dictum, the encounter between the refuse of production and the residue of consumption in Arman's accumulations neither sets off a traditional poetical spark nor opens up a mnemonic space inviting contemplation of the rapidly changing

subject-object relationships in expanding industrial production. If the object's ambiguity between promise and menace, when invading the temporal and spatial dimensions of subject formation might still have had a demonic drive in Lautréamont's unanticipated encounters, that drive has now been literally and metaphorically flattened in Arman's project: all objects appear as so many specimens of an unclassifiable world of arbitrary variations and expansion, and they have been arranged merely according to the universal order of production and the administration of sameness.

In the *portraits-robot,* as in the *L'affaire du courrier* (1961) or the *Premier portrait-robot d'Yves Klein* (1960), we could at first sight almost speak of a visual correlative to the literary stream of consciousness that had been introduced by Edouard Dujardin into French literature in the late nineteenth century: here, however, the free associations, fleeting thoughts, impulses, and psychic intuitions appear as a barrage of objects of vernacular daily usage, with the subjectivity of the portrait's sitter either fully suspended or manifestly constituted in nothing but multifarious constellations. In the portrait of Klein, among an infinite number of items of mundane trash, half-submerged, half-epiphanous, appears Gaston Bachelard's philosophical pamphlet *La terre et les rêveries,* and the photographic portrait of Yves Klein himself peeps out from the corner of the display case. Other *portrait-robot* sitters, like *Eliane* (Arman's first wife), appear to be less fortunate, since no such programmatic philosophical attribute (unless one considers Wagner's *Parsifal* its equivalent) is to be found in their vernacular objects of sign exchange value at all.

Linguistic iteration, the principle according to which subjectivity is constituted in the production of speech, finds its objective correlation here in the iteration of the act of choosing the object of consumption. Thus Arman's work can no longer propose a radical equivalence between the self-constitution of the subject in the speech act and the constitution of the self in the act of material production as Duchamp had still performed it in his initial readymade proposition. Rather, the *portrait-robot* seems to accept as irreversible fact that the constitution of collective subjectivity springs now from the mere identification with sign exchange value.

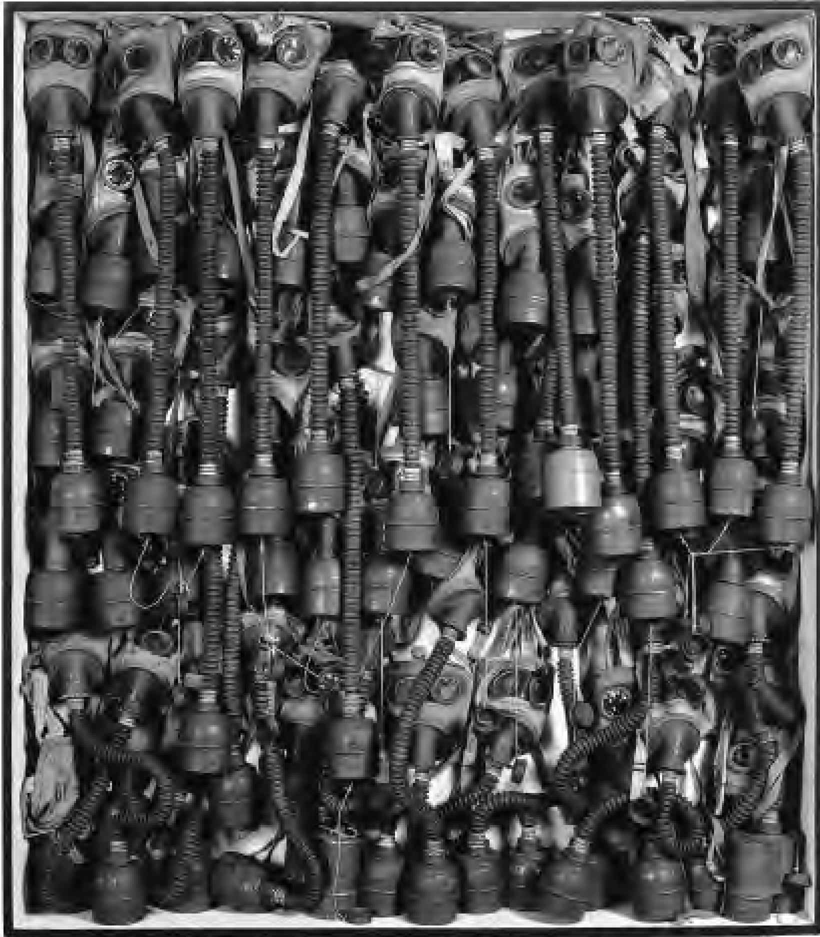
Arman, *Premier portrait-robot d'Yves Klein,* 1960. Accumulation of Klein's personal belongings in box, 76 × 50 × 12 cm. Collection: Mme Rotraut Moquay-Klein.

That the destruction of traditional concepts of subjectivity in the immediate postwar period had reached a heretofore unknown industrial scale is one of the conditions that necessitated these new parameters in Arman's restructuring of the readymade and the *objet trouvé*. The fact that his work is dominated by the image and the object structure of "trash"—as the term's American metaphorical usage explicitly suggests—ultimately corresponds to a condition of collectively failed subjecthood that demarcated post–World War II reconstruction culture at large, since all traditional forms of the articulation of the bourgeois subject had lost credibility.

Without wanting to falsify the inevitably limitless choices of Arman's object aesthetic (and recognizing as integral to his work that any and all objects qualify to perform the function of sign exchange value, and that they have to be without limits in their literally unstoppable intrusion into all structures and spaces of subject formation—privacy, interiority, sexuality), one cannot help but see that some objects in Arman's warehouse are more prone to interpretive projection than others: his accumulations of dentures, reading glasses, and gas masks, even those made out of the hands of puppets, seem to echo the accumulations of clothing, hair, and private objects that Alain Resnais had recorded in *Nuit et brouillard* (1955), the first filmic documentary account of the German Nazi concentration camps.[19] The potential, if not the existing industrialization of death appears as the inexorable counterpart of the industrialization of the subject's destruction.

In their extreme forms, Arman's *accumulations* and *poubelles* cross the threshold to become memory images of the first historical instances of industrialized death. But the temporal dialectic of these accumulations is such that at the same moment that they seem to be contemplating the catastrophic destruction of the recent past, they open up a glimpse toward the imminent future. Anticipating another form of the industrialization of death, Arman's immobile arrangements stare at an emerging ecological catastrophy resulting from an ever accelerating and expanding consumer culture and its increasingly unmanageable production of waste.

As in the climactic moment of Klein's work *Le vide* in 1958, Arman recognized that these changes of subject formation and object experience would



Arman, *Home Sweet Home,* 1960. Accumulation of gas masks in box, 140 × 160 × 20 cm.

become most compelling when the evidence was shifted from the space of the object to the space of architecture. Accordingly, his *Le plein* at Iris Clert's gallery in 1960, the dialogic response to Klein's work, would become one of the single most important paradigmatic changes in the sculpture of reconstruction culture.[20]

It had already become obvious in the *accumulations* and the *portraits-robot* that Arman had understood that sculpture from now on would have to be exclusively situated within the presentational devices of the commodity (the vitrine, the display case) and that the museological conventions of exhibiting sculpture would be increasingly displaced by the display conventions of the department store (as had been evident already with Klein's paintings in the Galleria Apollinaire). *Le plein* alters sculptural components and exhibition conventions by totalizing the order of commodity production, pushing that order beyond the level of excess into its inversion of commodity's alternate state—waste—and thereby an allegorical image of the death of production and the production of death.

All forms that had traditionally juxtaposed the private experience of the object and mediated it with the "public" dimension of sculpture (the separate voluminous body in virtual space, the bases negotiating with actual and ambulatory space, the museological display) are annihilated in *Le plein* by a quintessentially entropic space. The work's entropic condition denies first of all the transition from individual contemplative perception to simultaneous collective perception, which had determined the radical shift from the relief/object to the architectural dimension in the work of the historical avant-garde. The spectator is now positioned within a structure whose stifling and suffocating plenitude refuses the hieratic singularity of the readymade as much as the contemplative ambiguity of the *objet trouvé*.[21]

To clarify Arman's transformations of the sculptural object and of sculptural space further, we should look at one more example, produced a few years after *Le plein* in which the criteria of the object aesthetic of the neo-avantgarde appear in an almost programmatic fashion. When commissioned by one of his most supportive collectors to produce a large sculpture, Arman followed up on his earlier

Arman, *White Orchid,* 1963. Exploded car, 250 × 510 × 130 cm.

group of works titled *Les colères,* in which he had attempted to mechanize automatism in order to divest it fully of its last links to a surrealist, psychoanalytically informed concept of the unconscious. Requisitioning the white MG convertible of his patron, he detonated a small quantity of dynamite underneath the car in a quarry near Düsseldorf and returned the remnants of the exploded car as the sculpture *White Orchid* (1963). Here, all the elements that constitute the aesthetic of reconstruction culture have been integrated: first of all, the readymade object appears now, if not endlessly multiplied then significantly enlarged, and unambiguously contained in the quintessential object of sign exchange value, of accelerated consumption and of planned obsolescence: the car. Secondly, the relationship between artist and patron appears now as a contract of prearranged scandal (somewhat reminiscent of the prearranged parricidal scandal of Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*). This arrangement redefines the newly emerging structure of patronage as one of mutually beneficial artistic/economic exchange so that the work serves as an event from which the artist as much as the patron (typically in this case, as in many others, an advertising agent) would benefit in equal terms, since the public relations fallout to be expected from such a "coup" against the traditional relationships between the collector and his cherished objects of possession was considerable. Arman clearly circumscribed the parameters of criticality within which the neo-avantgarde would from now on operate, or rather, would be recuperated.

And lastly, by singling out an automobile which at that time in Germany would have been clearly perceived as the apex of luxury consumption, and subjecting it to a staged spectacle of destruction, Arman literally detonated the quintessential symbol of German (if not European) postwar repression and disavowal. Yet, by employing the very technology of war to blast open the repressive apparatus and thus resuscitating the memory from which repression attempted to escape, Arman constructed a peculiar paradox, submitting the body of sculpture simultaneously to anamnesia and spectacle, to repression and reminiscence.

This duality, then, seems finally to describe a crucial condition of the artistic projects of the moment of 1958. What we witness in both Arman and Klein is probably the first instance of a new aesthetic in which the dialectic of inex-

orable anamnesia and inevitable spectacularization is continuously played out. On the one hand, opposition to collective repression of the historical is never systematically articulated, but the artistic structures seem to inscribe themselves mimetically within the discursive as much as within the historical apparatus of disavowal, if not exploding it from within, as in Arman's literal example, then making it continuously surface as evidence of inauthenticity and disavowal. On the other hand, the traditional distinctions between the world of avant-garde culture as critical negation and radical transcendence are now abandoned in favor of a seemingly inescapable assimilation to the very apparatus that the avant-garde had historically opposed (the spheres of consumption as organized through fashion, advertising, and product design).

It is important, however, to recognize to what extent it is first and foremost in the field of the *visual* (rather than that of the literary or the poetical) that the apparatus of historical repression and the apparatus of spectacle are firmly installed with such consequence, as though the specialists of visuality were the (in)voluntary forerunners of that new de-differentiation of the senses. What contaminates their radicality from the start and distinguishes their seemingly aggressive acts from the redefinition of artistic paradigms at the moment of 1913–1919 is first of all the fact that the postwar artists conceived of shock and its audiences, as well as its institutional frameworks, as a calculable set of factors, around which a consensus would be eventually achieved, if not immediately reached.

Notes

1

Guy Debord, introduction to *Potlatch* (1954–1957), in *Potlatch* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 8.

2

A typical example of this uncritical celebration of the circumstances of neo-avantgarde production is Pierre Restany's retrospective account of the formation of Nouveau Réalisme in *60/90: Trente ans de nouveau réalisme* (Paris: Editions La Différence, 1990).

3

For a good discussion of this problematic, one that clarifies the hidden nexus between the repression of political history and the formation of spectacle culture in postwar France, see Alice

Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

For an equally important introduction to the actual conditions of a newly enforced consumer culture based on the American model, see Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

Unfortunately, neither of these important studies considers the specifics of visual neo-avantgarde practices at all; the work in this field remains, for the most part, still to be done.

4

We are not suggesting that there had been no attempts at all to address the events in the period of the war and the immediate postwar years, and we are aware of numerous counterexamples. What is of interest to us in this essay is why those activities that gained and retained international art historical and critical interest were precisely those that refrained completely from any entanglement with the problematic and central question of the representation of historical experience.

5

Again, there are eminent counterexamples, most notably John Heartfield, Josep Renau, and others, who—responding to the rise of fascism—either changed the definition of artistic practice altogether, or who mobilized political opposition because they considered it necessary that the definition of "culture" remain linked to political consciousness, critical opposition, and the transformation of everyday life.

The focus of this essay, however, is precisely the question of the immutability of the mainstream of Modernism (e.g., Mondrian), and Modernism's paradigmatic definitions of visual modernity and its immediate, almost fanatical reconstruction in the postwar period. Once mainstream Modernism had been reestablished, the countermodels were forgotten or excluded for the longest time or considered outright unacceptable.

I would like to emphasize that this argument is not an ethical but primarily a historical one, an argument that attempts to give a descriptive account of what definition of "visual culture" was actually operative in the moment of postwar reconstruction. Once the consequences and implications of such a description have become evident, however, I would not want to exclude the possibility that an altogether different position and valorization might have to be given to the concept of visual culture in the postwar period.

6

Maurice Blanchot, *Vicious Circles* (Barrytown, N. Y.: Station Hill Press, 1985), p. 68.

7

For an excellent discussion of the theoretical and historical dimensions of literature's confrontation with the experience of war in the prewar and postwar periods, see Denis Hollier,

Absent without Leave: French Literature under the Threat of War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

8

For a discussion of Arman's relationship to both Schwitters and Pollock, see the interview and chronology by Daniel Abadie in the exhibition catalogue *Arman* (Paris: Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, 1998). For an earlier and more detailed account of Arman's relationship to Schwitters, see Catherine Millet's interview with Arman, "Arman: qualité, qualité," *Art Press* 8 (December 1973), pp. 14–17.

9

For a detailed description of these two publications, see Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein,* exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1995), pp. 45–46.

10

The extent to which Klein was not only familiar with Duchamp's work but deeply attracted and affected by it at an unusually early date is evidenced by the fact that he offered his close friend Arman, as early as 1948, the catalogue of the famous Surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Maeght with Duchamp's notorious cover of a rubberfoam breast, titled *Prière de toucher.* See Arman's conversation with Daniel Abadie, in *Arman,* p. 44.

11

Klein's Milan show is a forecast of painting's fate in Warhol's hands in that it anticipates Warhol's own version of a prosthetic installation when he propped up his Campbell's Soup paintings on shelves when he first exhibited them at the Irving Blum gallery in 1962.

12

That the awareness of the shift to architecture was common in the thought of that generation is not only evident in Klein's subsequent execution of murals for the Opera House in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, and of his designs for utopian architectural projects, but also by the fact that Pierre Restany announced Arman's exhibition *Le plein* at Iris Clert's (the successor of Klein's *Le vide*) in terms that explicitly pointed to the architectural dimension of the event: "Un évènement capital chez Iris Clert en 1960 donne au nouveau réalisme *sa totale dimension architectonique* [my emphasis]. Dans un tel cadre le fait est d'importance. Jusqu'à présent, aucun geste d'appropriation à l'antipode du vide n'avait cerné d'aussi près l'authentique organicité du réel contingent." Quoted in Catherine Francblin, *Les nouveaux réalistes* (Paris: Editions du Regard, 1997), p. 89.

13

This attitude is beautifully expressed in Denyse Durand-Ruel's introduction to the second volume of Arman's catalogue raisonné, where she recalls her first encounter with the works of Yves Klein and Arman:

> My first encounter with Arman's work was completely unexpected, surprising even, since it took place in my home, at the beginning of the sixties. I came in and found my apartment filled with strange works: blue monochromes, dismembered musical instruments, old objects. . . . My husband had fallen in love at first sight and had bought a complete exhibition of Yves Klein and Arman! All the art of the epoch is before me in one fell swoop. What strength, what imagination, what a profusion! I was disturbed, but suddenly, everything became clear. That freedom, that audacity fascinated me, I saw art in a different way. . . . A shock!

See Denyse Durand-Ruel, *Arman, Catalogue Raisonné,* vol. 2 (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1991), p. 9.

14

The only other contestant for an approach that one could adequately call proto-Conceptual would be Robert Rauschenberg in the American context, where a similar transformation of the substantiality of the plastic enterprise gives way to its increasingly supplemental and allegorical analysis, most evidently in his notorious *Erased de Kooning Drawing* from 1953.

15

Yves Klein, cited in Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, *Arman* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1988).

16

Arman in conversation with Daniel Abadie, "L'archéologie du futur," in *Arman,* p. 37.

17

The same paradox had troubled Dadaism's initial collage and photomontage works in 1919: to have become a *unique* artistic object about technical reproduction, but not yet a technically (re)produced artistic object. Apollinaire's discussion of the hieratic appearance of Duchamp's work is found in his *Les peintres cubistes* (1913) (Geneva: Editions Pierre Cailler, 1950), p. 76: "Cet art peut produire des oeuvres d'une force dont on n'a pas d'idée. Il se peut même qu'il joue un rôle social. De même que l'on avait promené une oeuvre de Cimabué, notre siècle a su vu promener triomphalement pour être mené aux Arts et Métiers, l'aéroplane de Blériot tout chargé d'humanité, d'efforts millénaires, d'art nécessaire. Il sera peut-être réservé à un artiste aussi dégagé de préoccupations esthétiques, aussi préoccupé d'énergie que Marcel Duchamp, de réconcilier l'Art et le Peuple."

18

Arman was apparently quite conscious of the complex implications of these strategies, for he described them with almost programmatic clarity in hindsight: "In the first *accumulations* havoc

reigned and the objects found their place on their own, they had a tendency to compose themselves according to the law of gravity" ("L'archéologie du futur," p. 45).

19

Arman has recently confirmed that he saw the film upon its release and remembers it as having had a profound impact on him. Interview with the author, March 1998.

20

The only other comparable event in the transformation of European postwar sculpture is Jean Tinguely's *Hommage à New York,* installed and executed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1960. As in Arman's *Le plein* and Klein's *Le vide,* the magnitude of the structure served first of all to accomodate the transition from the visuality of the object to the dimensions of spectacularization, not the conception of architectural public space. As with Arman's *Le plein,* the entropic condition of the structure operated as a total denial of all the previous forms of object perception and spatial perception that the readymade and the Surrealist tradition had suggested.

21

For a discussion of the concept of the entropic in terms of sculptural production of the sixties, see Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *L'informe* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, 1996).

Knight's Moves: Situating the Art/Object

> The entire world of art has reached such a low level, it has been commercialized to such a degree that art and everything relating to it has become one of the most trivial activities of our epoch. Art in these times has probably reached one of its lowest points ever in its history, probably even lower than in the late eighteenth century when there was no great art but only frivolity. Art in the twentieth century has come to a similar function as a mere entertainment, as though we were living in an amusing period, in spite of all the wars that we have experienced as part of our setting.
> —*Marcel Duchamp*[1]

Until recently, the work of John Knight has appeared strangely obscure to American audiences. Perhaps this is because of his West Coast location, his informed orientation toward the ideas and practices of particular European artists of the 1960s (like Piero Manzoni), and his early studies in architecture. Yet, while

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First published in *John Knight,* exh. cat. (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1986), pp. 3–20.

Knight changed his focus from architecture to art, the spatial context of beings and objects—with their placement and shifts, their movements and functions—remains central to his concerns as an artist. This architectural grounding might, in part, account for the range of questions posited in Knight's work—questions that might initially appear peripheral to the traditional conception of art as the autonomous, discursive production of objects.

Knight's work addresses framing (literally and metaphorically), presentation and display, the intersection of visible and invisible support systems, and the often disturbing parallels and interferences between high art's presumed autonomy and other discursive practices upon which it might depend (e.g., the language and the products of design); or those which, in turn, might result from its activities (e.g., advertising strategies). His work came into its own in the mid-1970s when economic, institutional, and critical attention shifted gradually away from the complexity and radicality of Minimal and post-Minimal sculpture and the Conceptual work of the late 1960s. While this work provided the primary historical context for Knight's first activities, artists of the early 1960s, like Richard Artschwager, Claes Oldenburg, and Edward Ruscha, were also of considerable importance to his development. In the early 1970s post-Conceptual artists like Michael Asher and Dan Graham were to become his friends. The shift of the mid-1970s constituted a massive restoration of what had appeared only a decade before as historically obsolete positions and practices in painting and sculpture. Within a very short time a new generation of collectors and critics, curators and artists, would successfully disguise this new amnesia as a form of historical commemoration.

It was in part because of this drastic shift that the post-Conceptual work of Knight's generation would only gradually become known, since its positions were generally associated with the spectrum of Conceptual art. The work of this generation then expanded the concerns and positions of the artist of the 1960s and attempted to transcend critically the historical limitations of these practices as they had gradually become apparent. As John Knight once phrased it: "At one point I recognized that these artists were racing into a corner and since I was a little behind them and could see the mistakes all the more easily, I could devise strategies to avoid them."[2]

Knight's critique initiated a reversal of the terms in which the Conceptual movement had defined its most radical positions. It had been one of the paradoxes of Conceptual art that while it emphasized its universal availability and its potential collective accessibility, and underlined its freedom from the determinations of the discursive and economic framing conventions governing traditional art production and reception, it was, nevertheless, perceived as the most esoteric and elitist artistic mode precisely because of its elusive character, its linguistic status, and its explicit alignment with analytic philosophy. As with the heroic phrases of non-representational art, the intentions of Conceptual art were diametrically opposed to the conditions it actually generated when entering the culture. While aiming at universal comprehension, it generated elitist and exclusionary readings, reducing its definition of art to the analytical propositions and investigation of the relationships that determine the perceptual conventions of interpreting a visual construct; it ended up as the quintessentially self-referential and non-representational practice. While aiming at the transgression and rigorous exclusion of traditional categories it soon became the justification and rationale for reestablishing new academic versions of the artistic production that would haunt European and American art of the 1980s.

These problems, discovered in Conceptual practice by Knight's generation, obviously were not the same difficulties institutions and collectors had experienced in the instability of the work's distribution form: the manifest and deliberate lack of a comforting aesthetic surplus springing inevitably from the deployment of traditional materials and production procedures, and the absence of a marketable auratic object. By contrast, Knight's critique of the Conceptual legacy focused on precisely the aspect which had been one of its most pertinent achievements: the transformation of the aesthetic object into a linguistic structure. While the general response to this feature seems to have been one of deprivation in the face of aesthetic withdrawal, Knight's claims for the necessity to rematerialize the object were motivated by the need to reincorporate other functions of representation into the artistic structure—for example, the representational practices of decoration and design, and the techniques of display and presentation in advertising and architecture. Knight perceives the aesthetic

construct to be inextricably intertwined with these functions and discursive practices. It seemed necessary to take an approach impure by comparison to the purist definition of the aesthetic object of Conceptual art, and that impurity would have to defy the rigorous and self-imposed limitations of Conceptualism's version of Modernist self-referentiality.

While Conceptual art had generally acknowledged its indebtedness to Duchamp and the readymade model, it now seemed increasingly important to acknowledge that to the same extent that aesthetic conventions determined artistic reflection, the languages of mass cultural representation now determined aesthetic production and reception, regardless of their explicit awareness or disavowal of these conditions. Thus, for example, the artificial opposition between mass cultural representation in Pop art and the programmatic elision of that representation in Minimal and Conceptual art was by now considered to be a moot point. Therefore, Knight's work would insist on a reflection of the actual object conditions a Conceptual work (like every other work of art) would inevitably acquire upon its entry into the culture, addressing the dialectic that awaits the aesthetic object once it has left its discursive space and has entered the institutional space of the museum, the economic space of the gallery, and finally the space of consumption and use in the private home or the corporate collection.

The Status of the (Art) Object

Knight's work dissociates itself critically from another legacy of the art of the 1960s, its often rather simplistic rediscovery and reconstitution of the Duchampian readymade model, as it occurred in the context of Pop art. But his work not only critically resists that legacy, it also pronounces implicit skepticism on certain current practices that reinstate the familiar through sudden, seemingly radical acts of altering it. In Knight's work the dialectic of mass cultural representation and its high cultural counterparts is not resolved by simple acts of estranging the familiar object in order to assert the supreme validity of the high art system. In fact, his work refuses to function simply as yet another hybrid in the ideological panoply, or as contemporary art that has amalgamated proudly the

techniques of the culture industry, adjusting to its modes of distribution and assimilated its methods of meaning production. Yet, it simultaneously remains conservative in its concern about its place in the apparatus of high culture, whose functions and structure, whose institutional and economic *form,* it never questions in spite of its declamatory assault on the *image* of culture.

Knight's work perpetually questions *both* parameters within which aesthetic objects constitute meaning and generate reading. Like all work that inscribes itself in the now distant yet ever-present tradition of Duchamp's readymade, it suspends the utilitarian dimension of the object to the same degree that it imbues the mute mass cultural object with a discursive dimension. Yet, unlike most of the recent epigones of that endless repetition of the radical gesture of altering exhausted discursive conventions, Knight moves beyond a simple repetition of that paradigm. His work questions the viability of the readymade concept under the circumstances of a historical situation that is as marked by the transformation of the readymade strategy into a convenient rhetorical trope for decorators as it is defined by a collective relationship to objects that has altogether shifted to the object's semiotic dimension of sign exchange value.

This paroxysm of the object experience delineates the space in which Knight's objects function, and his *Journals Series,* initiated in 1977 and still continuing, embodies his strategies to operate within these conditions.[3] It consists of an apparently random (but actually rather carefully chosen) sample of friends, colleagues, collectors, curators, and critics, who each receive a prepaid subscription to a particular journal, selected specifically for the individual recipient. The subscriptions are imposed on these recipients without prior notification, consultation, or consent, nor are they given an explanation of the overall purpose of the enterprise: a journal such as *Antiques World* was sent to one of the most important Pop artists; *Unique Homes* went to a Belgian collector; *Soviet Life* reached a contemporary critic. Although these selections appear random at first, they actually establish an ambiguous semblance of correspondence to the receiver's presumed personal interests and identity. Perhaps the selection principle has as one of its antecedents the random manner by which Piero Manzoni selected individuals, in whole or in part, to be designated as works of art for limited or

John Knight, *Journals Series,* 1982. Installation at 74th American Exhibition, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photo: Luis Medina.

indefinite periods of time; or perhaps it derives from the random manner that seems to have determined the selection of recipients of On Kawara's postcard and telegram series, which he has sent to numerous individuals since 1968 and 1970 respectively.

The *Journals Series* destabilizes conventions of both the production and the reception of the art object by dismantling first of all the very artistic convention from which it descends: Duchamp's readymade model (a feature which almost all of the "new" assemblage works by younger artists lack, either as a result of conceptual simplicity, ignorance, or market opportunism). It is now well known that Duchamp's readymades depended not only on the suspension of an object's utilitarian functions but equally on the placement of that object into the peculiar intersection of institutional space (the frame or the wall, declaring every object within its confines—through institutional power and convention—to be an object of aesthetic experience) and discursive space (where linguistic conventions arrange experience for contemplation and memory, the space of perceptual reflection and cognition). While Knight's declaration of the *Journals* as a "work" inevitably differentiates them as art objects in the manner of a readymade, they nevertheless continue to operate within their traditionally assigned object functions and space (to sit on a table or shelf as reading or display material), available for both consumptive use and aesthetic contemplation. However, the *Journals* differ from the traditional readymade by being, from the outset, already "discursive" objects rather than functional objects; they are reproductions and representations of objects. These journals speak of fashion, interior design, architecture, and taste—discourses that border on the aesthetic experience or may become congruent with it. By definition and placement, these journals now enter into the discursive conventions of the art object, establishing a parallel between the two systems, which becomes all the more visible when they are chosen for an exhibition or when they are suddenly treated by their owner as works of art.

But Knight's *Journals Series* employs further strategies to invert the conventions of reception by replacing the act of individual choice and selection with a form of aesthetic *octroi*. Traditionally, aesthetic judgment and taste determine the

attraction and devotion of the amateur and historian, critic and collector, and only the criteria of artistic and historical merit or a personal emotional, psychological investment determine the choice. By blurring the boundaries between choice and imposition, the *Journals Series* interferes with the aesthetic object's supposedly distinct spheres of private and public. Knight's *Journals Series* (as an unsolicited public mass cultural object) intrudes into the private sphere, and thereby reverses the traditional fate of the essentially public art object to disappear into the private sphere as the object of possession. Moreover, Knight's work reverses the artist's traditional role by becoming a sponsor of the collector's property. Rather than being chosen himself as an object of institutional or private collecting, in the *Journal Series* it is the artist who actively chooses the recipients of the work, by arranging a subscription to a particular journal he deems adequate and by offering it to its future owner without receiving the owner's prior consent.

The effects of this inversion are evident in an anecdote about a very conscientious collector who suddenly received an unsolicited subscription to a magazine and returned all of the issues in protest against what he perceived to be an intrusion on his privacy. On learning that these intrusive magazines were, in fact, sponsored by John Knight as a work, he became anxious to retrieve those issues in order to obtain the full run of the series and reconstitute the work.

But the relationship between the private and the public is reversed in yet another, possibly even more consequential manner. The art object traditionally registers projections of identity (individual, cultural, national, ethnic, or class-based). Paradoxically, the experience of identity is mediated by an act of reification, an act in which parts of the self are invested in the object's receiving the projected image of that identity like a mirror. The *Journals Series* subverts these expectations to function as an object mediating the experience of identity. It is through this artificial construction of identity by approximation that the implicit claim to constitute and mirror identity—made by the artistic object as much as by the demands upon it—becomes evidently grotesque. It is even more effective since the journals, as discursive objects in themselves, practice the provision of identity in neatly segmented divisions of needs and desire. They reveal the extent to which the individual's claim for identity is always the subject of manage-

able and constructed systems of signs, containing and structuring individual needs according to the strategies of consumption.

In this context it becomes most evident why and how the *Journals Series* has departed from a mere repetition of the readymade model. As Jean Baudrillard has observed, the process of fetishization no longer occurs primarily in human relations to actual objects, but rather in the ideological containment of individual desire within the sign itself. If aesthetic practice claims to be a negation and resistance against the very act and condition of the fetishization of needs, the mere application of the traditional readymade strategy fails even to recognize the actual historical conditions within which it operates. If, in fact, Duchamp's readymade model was appropriate for the situation in which it emerged, then it would certainly be aesthetic naiveté to now substitute the mass cultural object for that of high culture, assuming that a critical dimension would open up inevitably in that reversal. The one-way street of assemblage aesthetics (either of Pop art or the most recent version of it from the Lower East Side) fails precisely in those terms. It rejuvenates high art iconography by slumming through mass cultural imagery, providing an audience sensorially fatigued by the sublimity of neo-expressive figuration with the shock of the mass cultural object. The purported aesthetic radicalization (as though a Japanese transistor radio or a rubber mask were conceptually any more radical than a urinal or a typewriter cover was seventy years ago) conceals the profoundly conservative attitude of these strategies with regard to the inherent dialectics of the high art system and its ideological functions. From its inception, the shock value of these current objects was tailored to slide right into the stable conventions of the institution and the discursive order of art—the museum, the collection, the market. While they pretend to engage in a critical annihilation of mass-cultural fetishization, they reinforce the fetishization of the high cultural object even more: not a single discursive frame is undone, not a single aspect of the support systems is reflected, not one institutional device is touched upon.

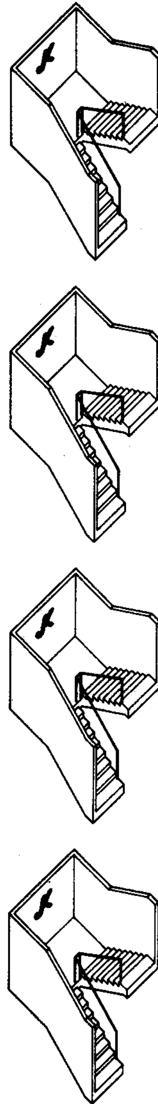
By contrast, Knight's *Journals Series* initiates an almost infinite series of interferences in these discursive conventions, once the work enters the traditional institutional context. These ruptures are concretized in the actual difficulties the

journals pose in terms of their possible display and installation and the various conflicting readings their presentation alone can generate. Are they objects of primary aesthetic information or are they supplements, like catalogues, posters, and brochures accompanying an exhibition? If they are primary rather than supplementary, whose determination transformed them? Are they pictorial objects or sculptural objects (i.e., should we contemplate the variety of the representations on the covers of a series or simply a serial stack)? Should they be encased as art objects, and with their newly acquired value thus be protected from use; or should the magazines remain accessible for potential readers? Where does their value reside: in the function that they can exert or in the aesthetic dimension that they have acquired, once properly exhibited? Can they change owners, or are they personalized to such an extent that their polemical destruction of any pretense to subjective identity would be deleted if they were removed from the condition of original ownership? Would this removal then destroy their aesthetic identity?

Authorship and Ownership

In 1982, John Knight designed eight identically sized logo-typographical elements, for a site-specific installation at *Documenta VII* in Kassel, four of which were placed on each of the four landings of the two main staircases in the exhibition building. The choice of a deliberately marginal space for the installation of these elements complemented the provocative evacuation of aesthetic information from these signs and their formal reduction to the mere initials of his name. The capital letters J and K were contracted into a ligature and enlarged to wooden logotype reliefs, such as one might find on the facade of a building or in the lobby of a corporation.

These reliefs offered only one additional feature, since each of the eight elements was wrapped and almost entirely covered by a different printed color reproduction of a photograph: travel posters for various countries in seven instances, and in one case a poster to advertise the services of a California bank. While the images of these posters were constantly fragmented, they still con-



John Knight, *Project for Documenta VII,* 1982. Isometric installation drawing. Courtesy of the artist.

John Knight, *Project for Documenta VII* (*Logotypes*), 1982. Birch plywood and advertising poster, 24 × 30 × 1⅝ in. Private Collection, New York. Photo: Louise Lawler.

veyed, by their technique of photographic reproduction and by their lush imagery, their original function of lure and seduction.

This work addresses the question of *authorship* with the same rigor that the *Journals Series* applied to the *ownership* of the art object, since it subjects the entire formal structure to the performance and display of the author's signature. The ligature of the initials has submerged all formal and visual possibilities that the category of a relief once had. In fact, Knight's reliefs seem to take the Cubist legacy literally and restore some of its original radicality through the rigid juxtaposition of linguistic sign and visual form, of mass cultural representation and self-referential artistic object. In its self-imposed restriction to a template or stenciled formal structure, the work establishes an equally surprising radicalization of the pictorial strategy that Jasper Johns had introduced into American art in the early 1950s, where the template of the flag, the target, or the number seemingly precluded all further formal variation and compositional play. Yet here the template is multiplied and serialized rather than a paradoxical pictorial original.

The presence of the signature—that sign which supposedly guarantees the authenticity of authorship and therefore assumes inevitably the functions of a trademark to vouch for the originality of a commodity—has been a focal point of artistic reflection since the beginning of Modernism (e.g., Manet's constant play with the signature's incompatibility with other pictorial representations). But it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that it becomes the actual figure or the subject of a pictorial construct itself, as in a series of paintings by Robert Ryman from the early 1960s, where the signature assumes a place of prominence coexisting with the actual facture of the painting's brushmarks, where it will eventually become the "figure" of the painting altogether. Thus, the facture of the pictorial sign in Modernism is caught between a transcendental movement and a declaration of commercial warranty, as Yve-Alain Bois remarks in a brilliant observation of this problem in the context of early twentieth-century abstraction.[4] In art from the later 1960s, the signature as trademark of authorship assumes the position of an exclusive figure and of primary visual information, as in the neon signs by Robert Watts from around 1966, and it appears in the plaques by Marcel Broodthaers between 1969 and 1972. It is also

evident in at least one work by Jannis Kounellis from 1971 (which spells the artist's name in small gas flames) and in various neon pieces by Luciano Fabro from the same period, which identify the artist's name and address. All these works make the signature their subject in a tautological movement typical of the Conceptual approach of the late 1960s.

In their programmatic devotion to the design of corporate anonymity (Knight chose italicized Helvetica since it represents what he calls "the ultimate mainstream corporate font"), John Knight's logo-types anticipate the fate all Modernist reductivist abstraction has had to face in its history. Whether it was the utopianism of architecture or typography and design, it was inevitably "incorporated" into the needs of the postwar ideologies of accelerated and enforced consumption. After all, that is one of the dialectical features in the historical legacy of modernist abstraction: to have set out as the sign system of a radical social utopia and to have ended up as the agent of the totalizing claims of profit maximization. The utopia of abstraction became the basic (de)sign-system for the dissemination of the ideology and the products of corporate post-war culture.

Knight's series of logotypes is suspended between the historical dilemma of its proper discursive formation (that all forms of extreme self-reflexivity and semiotic self-purification of pictorial signs were transformed into pure commodity propaganda) and the current reality of the institutional system in which the display of a mythical foundation of subjectivity and the author's authentic creativity are transformed into the evident subject of myth and spectacle.

As in the *Journals Series,* these reliefs interrelate and interfere with parallel discursive practices. The fragmented photographic imagery of tourism hinges viewers' quest for pure aesthetic experience on similar quests for the new and the exotic, the alien and the Other. Simultaneously, the artist's monogram, supposedly the most personal and reliable "authorization" of a work, is linked to the anonymous display systems that identify the corporate megastructure.

Once again, the logotypes reverse the order of private and public: the most individual and supposedly unique feature of the artist becomes incorporated in an anonymous design, whereas the audience's demand for the innermost revela-

tion of an authentic and individual aesthetic truth receives its response in the language of public and collective mythology.

The aesthetic vacuity of the reliefs accounts for the critical force of the work, but it is in the concrete and specific placement in both the architectural and discursive context of this particular exhibition that the work gained its destabilizing momentum. Voluntarily marginalized in the staircases of an exhibition devoted to the renewed and reinforced celebration of traditional notions of authorship and originality, Knight's work accompanied viewers on their way up or down through the spectacular display of an infinite variety of artistically authentic and individual revelations. The logotypes operated as an unwarranted and impertinent subtext to that official message, especially since they had not been incorporated into the main spaces of the exhibition. As a subtext of the repressed discursive legacy, they spoke of the past failures of modernist promises, the latent conditions of its currently renewed projects, and its future functions as the helpless object of possession and as the powerless decoration of the corporate wall.

Mirror Series

Knight's most recent work, the *Mirror Series* (1986), integrates features of both the *Journals Series* and the logotypes in an uneasy synthesis (the vacuity and blandness of the former and the rigorous corporate design of the latter). In the same way, it brackets the discursive space of modernist geometric abstraction (and, by implication, the current efforts of its revitalization or attempts at petty parody) with the two social spaces of the future destinations of contemporary art: the corporate and the domestic collections (the institutional space of the museum increasingly functioning as a space of legitimization and discursive validation vouching for the product's economic reliability). The use of mirrors in the new series inscribes the work inevitably (as with the logotype series, in terms of its design and display conventions) in a long history of the deployment of a material device, which, in its quasi-mechanically produced self-reflexivity and its instantaneous display of pure index signs, performs a profoundly adversarial and subversive role directed against the manually crafted self-reflexivity of the modernist pictorial sign.

John Knight, *The Mirror Series,* 1986. Installation view. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

John Knight, *The Mirror Series,* 1986, detail. Tongue and groove #741 knotty pine and front-faced mirror, 42 × 42 × ¾ in. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

The mirror, as an archaic optical device is as far from the painted picture plane as it is close to the optical instrument or the mechanical vision of the camera. Its constant, instant capacity to reduce the image to a zero degree of representation has made it throughout the history of Western painting the *instrument* and the iconic subject of the painter's craft and of pictorial depiction. Yet, with the same obsession that the mirror has been depicted as the metaphor of painting, it has had to be avoided as the painter's actual *material* surface.

It is not at all coincidental that the first use of this material occurs in a historical context that not only dismantled the conventions of pictorial representation, but also discovered, rather rapidly, that the substitution of abstract geometric formations for the obsolete figurative formations had its own historical limitations and shortcomings, recognizing that the triumph of non-representational art was a necessarily short-lived developmental phase. Thus, the proposal to employ mirrored materials and surfaces occurs in several instances between 1919 and 1922, during the period when the newly established convention of post-Cubist geometric abstraction is radically criticized and transcended by Marcel Duchamp and the artists of the post-Suprematist Soviet avant-garde.[5] Then, after a considerable absence (a result of the general postwar excitement about the liberated and liberating experience of pigment dispersal), this profoundly disturbing material appears again. It responds to both a crisis of representational conventions and the increasingly obvious inability of non-representational pictorial and sculptural structures to resolve this crisis—as, for example, in the early 1960s context of Minimal art, particularly in the work of Robert Morris, and simultaneously (or slightly later) in the work of Larry Bell on the West Coast.

Transformed and enlarged in the work of Dan Graham in the mid- to late 1970s (e.g., *Two Adjacent Pavilions,* 1978–1982), the mirrored surface now functions simultaneously as a device of instant visual feedback to generate audience consciousness and participation, quite as much as it is still linked with the architectural idiom of the International Style's glass curtain walls. These have become the mirrored veils of a corporate architecture, attempting to appear as a transparent and publicly accessible structure, as Graham has pointed out in his writings.

Knight's *Mirror Series* inverts that heroic step in Graham's work to construct a truly public sculpture; it reintroduces the material into the explicitly discourse-oriented format of the gallery object, without, however, giving up on its established link to the languages of corporate design. Suspended between the design codes of the domestic utilitarian or decorative object, and the design codes of corporate identity, Knight's work keeps the discourse on the geometric tradition of non-representational painting in check. Once again, as was the case with the *Journals Series,* the work's categorical instability affects the stable conventions of the objects of its surroundings. The *Mirror Series* confronts these most efficiently when the mirrors are actually placed in their intended site: a site that is defined by a more or less controlled mingling of architectural spaces and surfaces, by the jumble of objects designed for utilitarian functions and objects whose function it is to be designed, that accumulation of discrete, separate aesthetic constructs, each "holding" or "defending" its space, marking its "territory," the site of the art collection. The elements of the *Mirror Series* maintain at all times and under all contextual circumstances their subversive allusions to potential use value and the connotations of their domestic functions. We know they are not regular mirrors: they are oversized and their front surface coating makes them unusually brilliant. Yet no one can resist being caught in a quick exchange with the reflection of the self, that utilitarian release from the demand of the aesthetic offered by the visual trap of the mirror; it can occur even in the mere reflection of a glass pane covering any work of art. These mirrors bring considerable discomfort upon all other objects surrounding them, objects solely devoted to aesthetic contemplation. The mere presence of the dimension of use value has threatened and fascinated the modernist pictorial construct at least as much as, if not more than, the magic object's functions. Beginning in Cubist painting, for example, this dimension appears in the illusionistically painted functional device of the nail that keeps the painting on the wall.

The instability of conventional, categorical, and spatial borders in Knight's work points to the threshold that has provoked the greatest departures in the twentieth century. Those who survived the adventure of crossing these thresholds almost always returned not as productivists, but as designers with their hands full of products.

The territorial instability of Knight's work (the mirrors are equally homeless in the corporate lobby, the living room, and on the museum wall) points incessantly to that necessary transition and shifting from one social sphere to the other: from the private collection as the site of intimate individual cultural identity to its complementary opposite, the public sphere, where art is destined to function as the site of public knowledge and commemoration, of public exchange and free circulation. In its shift, the work proves that there exists neither sphere nor any given space in which the aesthetic construct could presently fulfill any of these public or private functions without instantly falsifying both. The corporate logotypes framing Knight's mirrors continually remind us of the ultimate corporate reality that controls and determines the most secluded interior reflection. In the same manner, the trivial domesticity of the mirrors leaves no doubt that the aesthetic withdrawal from its public social function has no other place than that of the private framed reflex.

Notes

1

Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Herbert Molderings, "Zwischen Atelier und Ausstellung," in Sarkis, *Kriegsschatz* (Munster: Westfälischer Kunstverein, 1978), n.p.

2

In conversation with the author, November 1986.

3

For a discussion of John Knight's work to which my essay is indebted in many ways, see Anne Rorimer, "On John Knight," in *John Knight* (Chicago: The Renaissance Society, 1983), n.p. On the journals, see also Dan Graham, "On John Knight's Journals Work," *Journal* (John Knight catalogue) 4, no. 40 (Los Angeles: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984), pp. 110f.

4

Yve-Alain Bois, "Malevich, le carré, le degré zéro," *Macula* 1 (1978), p. 37.

5

For a more developed discussion of the use of mirrors in sculpture, see my essay "Construire (l'histoire de) la sculpture," in *Qu'est-ce que la sculpture moderne,* ed. Margit Rowell (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1986), pp. 254–274.

Structure, Sign, and Reference in the Work of David Lamelas

> The internal politics of style (how the elements are put together) is determined by its external politics (its relationship to alien discourse). Discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context.
> —*Mikhail Bakhtin*[1]

Traditional assumptions have it that hegemonic centers determine the course of cultural production in the so-called peripheries through the mediation of the commonly accessible tools of distribution and dissemination (the culture industry apparatus of exhibitions, catalogues, and art magazines). This model of influence and dependence is clearly inappropriate when we begin to study the work of David Lamelas, who emerges in the late 1960s in Buenos Aires with an arsenal of artistic strategies and a clarity of concepts about the conditions and the necessities of contemporary artistic production, which at that time had hardly been

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formulated in *any* cultural context of the metropolitan centers of either the United States or Europe.

If we want to contextualize Lamelas's practices within a comparative historical frame that would allow for a more differentiated understanding of the specificity and relevance of his work, we will have to depart—initially at least—from the type of question traditionally posed in the discussion of Conceptual art, the movement within which his work has been generally situated. What interests us, then, as the first question is how the work of Lamelas, as one of the most advanced artistic positions to emerge in the late 1960s, could have been formulated in a Latin American metropolis outside of the hegemonic centers of the (neo)avant-garde.

In order to answer this question we will have to reconsider first of all the concept of "influence," the most comforting and traditional assumption about cultural interaction. This explanatory model is all the more at a loss when it comes to the study of artistic practices that are no longer bound by the traditional categories or by the procedures of painting and sculpture. One could argue that what distinguishes the neo-avantgarde activities of the 1950s and early 1960s in the hegemonic centers of Europe and the United States from the activities of Latin American artists is precisely that the former still attempted—at least in the initial phases of cultural reconstruction—to reconnect their production with the layers of a national bourgeois culture. In fact, one could invert the argument and suggest that culture in the European centers after the Second World War failed most dramatically, to the degree that they insisted on the continuity of a culture of national identity presumably guaranteed within pictorial and sculptural conventions. Evidently these conventions had already become problematical, if not outright illegible or invisible as national or regional culture, at precisely the moment when the disintegrating ideology of the nation-state could no longer present itself as the matrix of cultural identity. At that moment, in the early part of the twentieth century, some of the major figures of the historical avant-gardes had aligned themselves with strong articulations of internationalist utopian thought (e.g., Mondrian with de Stijl, Rodchenko with Constructivism, Arp and Tzara with Dada).[2]

The internationalism of these groups had been either explicitly associated with or ran parallel to the internationalism of Marxist and socialist political theorists who had criticized the ideology of national identity as a remnant of the formation of the bourgeois nation-state and its ideological state apparatus. In other cases, when abstraction was not explicitly associated with the universalism of socialist politics (the work of Kandinsky and Klee, for example), it wanted to be at least aligned with the universal enlightenment progress of science and technology, or, worse yet, it wanted to be linked with a spiritual Esperanto and secularized forms of transcendental thought.[3]

A second question emerges, relating directly to the first one, concerning the subject of the interdependence of hegemonic cultural centers and peripheries in postwar history: at what point in the writing of the art history of the neo-avantgarde would it become irrefutably necessary to conceive of a radically *different* aesthetic of abstraction? What would be the typology and the morphology of an aesthetic that had clearly not been developed from the prospects of an emancipatory transcendence of the cultural specifics of regional and national language conventions (be they linguistic, pictorial, or sculptural) but from the experience of universal displacement, of exile and of imposed decontextualization? Furthermore, what would be a proper terminology for the description and critical analysis of formal structures that had not emerged from a *chosen* but from an *enforced,* if not a traumatizing condition of post-national and post-traditional concepts of identity?

These questions would have to be differentiated within various geopolitical postwar contexts and within each individual history, since the destruction of the universalist ideals of the historical avant-garde and the annihilation of the culture of the nation-state were globally applicable conditions, whereas the conditions of exile and loss were different in each individual case. For example, one could trace in the work of both Eva Hesse and Piero Manzoni the critique of the universalist ideals of abstraction, enacted in an emphasis on the somatic and atopian dimension of the aesthetic structure. Yet only in Hesse's work would it be appropriate to study the impact of childhood trauma and of exile on her particular formulation of an art refusing representation.

David Lamelas mentions three influences, exemplifying the cultural context of the dispersed and displaced avant-gardes after the war, situated in Argentina (in Buenos Aires and Rosario de Santa Fe), as an integral part of his formation: the works of Georges Vantongerloo, Lucio Fontana, and the Madi Group, in particular Tomás Maldonado, who abandoned the production of art in favor of the development of design as a public service agency. All of these artists, however different in their background and ultimate development, shared the experience of cultural dislocation and of the loss of a secured national identity (since they were either the children of immigrants or, as in the case of Vantongerloo, actual emigrants).[4]

Initially these artists might have attempted to continue the project of abstraction in its most recent and seemingly final phase by resuscitating its old paradigmatic definitions as a universal language. Since it became increasingly apparent, however, that none of the progressive avant-garde aspirations of the project of abstraction could be maintained any longer, especially in a context of historical delay and geopolitical displacement, artists such as Fontana would be the first to formulate the factors of that project's inevitable failure and transfigure them into contemporary strategies of pictorial abstraction. Not surprisingly, then, it would be the work of precisely those artists who challenged the possibility of a continuity of abstraction most radically, especially in the context of Latin American art (besides Fontana one would have to think of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica), that would—with substantial delays—appear to be among the most advanced and significant of the attempts to articulate a range of positions intricately connected to the actually existing difficulties of formulating a postwar aesthetic of abstraction.

In formal terms one would recognize these transformations first of all in the manner in which the crisis of drawing and linearity had been emphasized in the works of all the artists invoked by Lamelas as important influences. As a result, linear formations ended up "simply" as framing devices of planar chromatic expansions (as was the case for most of the "shaped canvas" relief work of the Madi Group). Alternately, they were defined according to an opposite strategy of immanent planar cuts and divisions, where linear definition now coalesced

with the physical laceration of the pictorial support (as it would be most dramatically performed in the work of Fontana after 1949), asserting the discovery of actual space (a notion that would later become exceedingly important in the discussions around American Minimalism as well).

As a consequence of the crisis of spatial delineation in drawing, the work of all these artists became suspended between the boundaries of the traditional pictorial frame and the emergence of architectural dimensions. This horizon of pictorial development had obviously already become apparent in much earlier reflections of this problem by artists such as El Lissitzky in the 1920s. In Lissitzky's work, however, the transition into architectural space had convincingly argued for a newly emerging phenomenology of spatial experience and social interaction and had anticipated the formation of, if not a proletarian public sphere, at least a newly defined institutional and discursive public space of experience.

When, by contrast, this very same transition was accomplished by the displaced postwar artists, the resulting spatial structures would always remain strangely abstract, dislocated, or would become manifestly placeless. Environmental installations of the immediate postwar period (the neon structures by Fontana in Italy or the kinetic installations by Julio le Parc in Argentina) were manifestly unable (or unwilling), even in the transgression of the traditional categories, to conceive a socially or geopolitically specific phenomenology of the newly emerging forms of subject-object interaction in architectural space.

The earliest works produced by Lamelas in the period from 1963 to 1965 all show the contradictions typical of the legacy of abstraction and the generally unresolved schisms in the sculpture of that time. It is certainly not accidental that before he discovered the work of the American Minimalists Lamelas felt attracted briefly to the work of British sculptors (Anthony Caro, Barry Flanagan, Philip King, and others), where those contradictions were most evident. Their work not only signaled (unbeknownst to the artists themselves, one presumes) the definitive end of Construction sculpture, but much more so the failure of a traditional *definition* of the sculptural (its materials, its procedures, its spatial conceptions). This definition held sculpture to be generative of and mimetically responding to object and spatial experiences analogous to the forms of social

interaction in the regime of industrial production (material exchange and transformation, utilitarism and pure instrumentality).

It had become increasingly obvious, however, that sculpture in the present could no longer be defined by mass-volume epistemes nor by the related episteme that considered sculpture exclusively in terms of material structure and space. What one could expect least of all was that the once radical shift from artisanal modes of sculptural production to industrial modes could adequately redefine the phenomenology of public space and social relations within the terms of an emerging post-industrial society of information, administration, and spectacle. The desperate attempts at chromatic and structural eccentricity in British sculpture of the early sixties articulated (and American Minimalism would share this condition to some extent) the unspoken realization that a culture of the sign was about to displace the culture of material objects: more concretely, that the production of advertising and consumer culture had eroded all previously autonomous spaces of social experience to such an extent that any claim for an exemption and relative autonomy of objects and spaces from these regimes would instantly mythify the actually governing forms of experience.[5]

Lamelas's early works, such as *Piece Connected to a Wall* (1963) or *El super elástico* (1964), reiterate the British dilemma: to conjure from the conflation of Supergraphics and Constructivist residues a new credibility for traditional concepts of sculptural autonomy. The fact that Lamelas seems to have been attracted for about two years to the model of British sculpture rather than to that of the simultaneously emerging American Minimalists might be explained paradoxically by the observation that some of the most prominent figures of Minimalism (specifically Carl Andre and Donald Judd) had attempted precisely to redeem sculpture in its more traditional parameters of mass and volume, of matter and industrial production (through their peculiar synthesis of the discovery of Russian Constructivism and French phenomenology), whereas Lamelas—from the beginning of his work—was more engaged with a notion of sculpture that would transcend the sculptural myths of a purely phenomenological definition of space and material solidity through an emphasis on a radically different definition.

David Lamelas, *Pieza conectada a una pared,* 1963. Installation view at the Galeria Guernica, Buenos Aires, 1965.

Sculpture would now have to become a construct demarcating social, spatial, and object relations under historical circumstances, where these were primarily governed by the universal presence of spectacularized signs, by an increasingly globalized regime of administration, and by the industrial production of communication.

The "classical" minimalists (Andre, Dan Flavin, Judd) by contrast had all been entangled in two manifest contradictions: the first one resulted from the attempt to retain the structural organization of traditional sculpture as a semi-autonomous sphere of object and spatial experience while trying at the same time to perforate this autonomy through the emphasis on the industrial nature of sculpture's constituent parts (fluorescent light tubes, precut metal plates, industrial fabrication). The second contradiction sprang from the emphasis on Minimalism's universally applicable conditions of perceptual experience as they had been defined in the phenomenological model, while trying at the same time to expand sculpture into the dimension of architecture without even questioning the terms that structure discursive practices and govern social interaction within social and architectural space.

Lamelas's works of 1963–1964 emphasize not only this hybrid status between sculpture and architecture (which was at that time merely a commonplace) but also their oscillation between sculpture and sign systems (e.g., *Supergraphics*), that is between the traditional definition of sculpture as a volumetric and spatial object and its newly evident status as social sign. Thus, while in works such as *Skin Surface* (1964) sculpture becomes a spatial marker, a device of bodily display and perception, perhaps even a gadget, it has certainly abandoned its seemingly guaranteed ontological status and its claim to generate purely phenomenological conditions of experience. The critique of Minimalist sculpture by artists such as Bruce Nauman would in fact operate along identical lines and deploy strategies that were similar to those developed by Lamelas at that time. It was a critical response that had understood that Minimalism could not decide whether it wanted to maintain sculpture's ontological and phenomenological guarantees or whether it would make sculpture acknowledge its newly inflicted status, where all previously held spatial and material convictions had to be challenged.

In *Four Changeable Plaques* (1965) it becomes fully evident to what extent Lamelas had already gone beyond the typical concerns of the Minimalists: while the morphology and the material of the work remind one that Lamelas had studied Minimal sculpture by that time, the work's open structure (the fact that it could be deployed in alternating positions) and its foregrounding of the determining force of gravity as a structuring element in the formation of the sculpture put the work in direct relationship with the critical self-reflection of Minimalism occurring at that time in Nauman's work, as well as in the work of Robert Morris and Richard Serra.

It is precisely in these early departures from—if not explicit counterpositions to American Minimalism—that Lamelas's project appears with hindsight not only comparable to the approaches developed by the post-Minimal generation, but—in its radical reorientation of sculpture—even more analogous to the work of artists such as Michael Asher or Hans Haacke, who would soon abandon—like Lamelas himself—the traditional definitions of sculpture altogether and replace its materials and modes of production by a fundamentally different aesthetic.

Two works by Lamelas from 1966 are once again prognostic in their formulation of the new parameters of sculptural abstraction and its spatial/architectural conceptualization. While it cannot surprise us that these works remained largely illegible to an ill-prepared initial audience, it is certainly astonishing that they remained equally unrecognized by the professional audiences in European and American centers even thirty years after they were first exhibited in Buenos Aires. The first work, titled *28 Metal Plates,* was exhibited in 1966 at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires. It is in the discussion of this work that the historical argument about the circulation of information and the influences flowing from center to periphery breaks down most obviously.

The modular components of Lamelas's installation were square steel plates identical to the ones that Carl Andre would soon thereafter deploy in his steel plate works first exhibited in Europe in 1968. But beyond the astonishing formal and material similarity, with both works focusing on the modular condition of the constitutive units of a sculptural structure (a condition which, after all, was

David Lamelas, *28 placas ubicadas en dos formas no convencionales,* 1966–1967. Installation view in the exhibition *Materiales, nuevas técnicas, nuevas expresiones,* 1968. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, 1968.

one of the logical outcomes of serious reflection on sculpture throughout the twentieth century after Brancusi), it is really the radical difference between Andre's and Lamelas's approach to serial organization that separates the two artists not just geographically but paradigmatically as well.

Lamelas's installation was defined in two parts: its first part in a manner similar to the way modular units would be arranged in a typical work of Andre's, that is, nine square metal plates were directly placed upon the floor surfaces of the museum space. The second part of the installation could only be attained by the spectators after they had passed the geometrically organized threshold in order to follow the remaining plates that had been dispersed in an irregular pattern across the surfaces of a gallery walkway leading from one part of the museum to an adjacent building.[6] The work constructed first of all an opposition between the closed geometric form of the modular units (the square) and an open volumetric structure of scattered dissemination (the ambient space of the walkway), confronting the viewers with a rather puzzling dissolution of the boundaries between the sculptural construct, the surfaces supporting it and the surrounding spatial structure (precisely the boundaries that Andre's work would very rarely, if ever, put into question in spite of its location on the floor). Put differently, the work retained a closed form of regularly positioned modules in its initial stage only to dissolve subsequently into an arrangement of randomly dispersed units. The work's organization seemed to be as engaged in the juxtaposition of modular structure with an open distributional form as it was in the demarcation of the spectators' passage from the perception of sculpture to the institutional architecture of display.

The second work, *Conexión de tres espacios,* was installed in the di Tella Institute in Buenos Aires, where it received a special award in 1966. Again, at first sight this installation seemed to have addressed the aesthetics of minimalist sculpture, yet it engaged with the tools and formal structures of that aesthetic toward radically different ends. Deploying four rectangular units ranging from wall size to sculptural box in three different exhibition rooms, the work immediately announced that it was involved with the architecture of exhibition and display to the same extent that it reflected upon the limitations of minimalist sculpture.

The units' surfaces of frosted glass, their aluminum framing, and their illumination by fluorescent lights might have made these volumes appear initially as mere exhibition display cases functioning within the context of store or museum architecture. The spectators inevitably linked the three spaces by observing the different, yet homologous, sculptural units, and reflected at the same time on the actual sculptural condition of each illuminated volume; as a result, the dialectic engendered by the work was once again the opposition of static sculptural object and the dynamic architectural passageway. Perhaps one could argue more literally that the work articulated first of all its proper passage *between* the phenomena of architecture and sculpture.

As in the deployment of the modular unit of the steel square in the previous work, here it was fluorescent light as readymade, which had been inserted by Dan Flavin into the context of sculpture in the early 1960s and had been elevated to purely pictorial and contemplative aesthetic purposes. Nauman's critical response to the deployment of fluorescent light in Flavin's work had still concretized sculpture's corporeal dimension of spatial and object experience phenomenologically, yet by literally reverting the fluorescent tube to the order of a gadget, it now served as a prop of bodily interaction, not of spectatorial contemplation. Performed by the artist in programmatic isolation from any pretense that sculpture still provided access to a comprehension of the social dimension of public space, Nauman's work foregrounded the abstract intimacy of the body's objectual and spatial relationships as the sole site within which sculptural experience could still be claimed with any credibility. As a consequence, the sculptural object had to be manipulated by the artist as a demonstrational object/performance, and the medium of video appropriately recorded and presented this demonstration in temporally and spatially mediated form to the spectator, removing it from sculpture's traditional claims for an immediacy of object and space experience.

Lamelas's critique or reversal of the minimalist readymade and its architectural displays shifts onto a rather different level, where the vacuity of the claims for socially exempt spaces of (sculptural) object experience becomes equally evident. In his installation, however, the fluorescent light tube as a device reverted

to a sudden recontextualization of its *actual* vernacular functions within the display conventions of exhibition architecture. This reversal engendered first of all a sudden reflection on the structure of the exhibition as a *discursive* and as an *architectural* parcours rather than as a seemingly neutral presentation of autonomous objects of painterly or sculptural plasticity. Lamelas' departure from this principle would already have been a sufficiently significant artistic strategy and it would once again situate his work within an emerging aesthetic of institutional critique, addressing first and foremost Minimalism's generally blissful indifference to these questions (the traditionality of its means and the absence of a specific reflection on the actually existing conditions of spectatorial behavior as social forms of experience within the public institution of the museum/exhibition space).

More important, however, than Lamelas's critical awareness of the false neutrality of the means and the spaces of Minimalist sculpture were his specific analysis of the discrepancy between the types of social experience occurring inside an exhibition and its architectural framework, and the conditions of communication governing social spaces and relations at large. In Lamelas's installation at the di Tella Institute the critical erosion of purely phenomenological reflections on sculptural plasticity manifests at the same time the actual emptiness of the traditionally exempt spaces of a protected (neo)avant-garde production.

The logic of this investigation seems to have led to a work titled programmatically *Situation of Time,* produced by Lamelas one year later and again exhibited at the di Tella Institute. This work signaled Lamelas's definitive departure from the critical dialogue with Minimalism in favor of a radical repositioning of sculptural reflection within the inexorable perspective of the actually existing dialectic of public space and media technology. Lamelas's display of seventeen state-of-the-art television sets (provided for the occasion by di Tella Industries, the corporate sponsor of the di Tella Institute's activities and the major manufacturer of TV sets in Argentina) at first seemed to look back one last time to the perceived historical deficiencies of Minimalism, paraphrasing Judd's formalist emphasis on modular seriality in the alignment of the mass-produced sets and responding to the painterly quaintness of Flavin's fluorescent tubes with monochrome, imageless, electronically generated light. Since the space of the gallery

David Lamelas, *Situación de tiempo,* 1967. Installation view at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires, 1967.

had been transformed in its entirety into an area of media reception, all sculptural options for physical and tactile interaction with objects, all opportunities for the enactment of perceptual conventions and bodily phenomenology were dissolved, and the traditional questions concerning sculpture and architectural space appeared to be surpassed in one single gesture: from now on the production of sculptural objects, and their reflection on the architecture of their exhibition would be considered by Lamelas primarily in terms of collectively governing forms of "publicity" (or rather its remnants and substitutes).[7]

It is important to realize that Lamelas's embrace of the epistemes of scientific and technological rationality did not in the least continue the aspirations of an earlier, futuristic moment when the fusion of technology and avant-garde ideology had assaulted bourgeois culture by defying historical experience and by abolishing culture's mnemonic dimensions.

Yet it was not just the shift from sculptural conventions to media technology that made *Situation of Time* a rather prognostic project. Rather, in a gesture of seemingly neutral self-reflexivity, Lamelas ingenuously collapsed the corporate sponsor's technological contribution into a critical reflection of the structural changes occurring within the cultural institutions of the public sphere. This condition bestowed eerie evidence of the fact that the "sculptural" assimilation of media technology was inextricably bound up with a more fundamental transformation of the social economy of culture: namely, that its traditionally guaranteed public and relatively autonomous functions, its institutions and exhibition spaces themselves, would eventually be restructured by the *economical* organization of corporate capitalism, whose *technological models* had already determined the morphology of cultural production.[8]

In its prognostic analysis of the inextricable fusion of the technological and the cultural object on the one hand and of the fusion of the principles of sociopolitical and economical organization with the institutional support systems of culture on the other, *Situation of Time* anticipated the future (and by now fully realized) transition from a culture once situated and supported within the relative autonomy of the institutions of the bourgeois public sphere into the era of corporate culture, sponsorship and control.

David Lamelas, *Situación de tiempo,* 1967. Installation view at Witte de With, Rotterdam, 1997.

The extent to which Lamelas's works of the late sixties that enacted this integration of the aesthetic and the technological, the fusion of the public and the corporate sphere, turned the media optimism of the 1920s (or that of late 1960s McLuhanism, for that matter) into a deeply pessimistic, if not outright critical, position becomes all the more visible in a second installation that relied in its entirety on the available tools of advanced media culture. When Lamelas was asked in 1968 to represent Argentina (with two other artists) at the XXXIV Venice Biennale (his first exhibition in Europe), he installed a work titled *Information Complex on a Subject Selected from the Three Levels of the Image* (*Visual, Writing, Sound*), a title later changed by the artist to point more explicitly to the actual subject of his installation: *Office of Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: The Visual Image, Text, and Audio.*

By introducing a continuous flow of information on the developments of the Vietnam War supplied by international news agencies to an Italian agency in Rome and fed by a telex machine into the pavilion, Lamelas transformed the exhibition space of the national pavilion literally into an international newsroom. A secretary read the incoming news via a microphone in several languages to the viewers. The messages were simultaneously recorded on a tape recorder for the duration of the exhibition (sixty days), constructing, as it were, an archive of factual information and an exact account of the time period during which the "work," the "site," and the "exhibition" coincided.

Rather than maintain the traditional claim of exhibition spaces to be engaged in discourses and objects of visuality as their primary if not exclusive experiential mode, Lamelas activated the space and its spectators acoustically, incorporating sound as a universal and *integral* aspect of techniques of representation. He restructured the conventions of display and spectatorial behavior along the parameters of media technology. "Sculptural work" and "site of display" were now integrated in Lamelas's project[9] in a manner that bypassed the mere inflation of the sculptural object onto an architectural scale commonly suggested by the post-Minimalist generation in American art (Nauman, Serra) or the historically simultaneous aggrandizement of sculpture to the dimensions of the stage set or the theatrical prop in European Arte Povera (Kounellis). This

David Lamelas, *Office of Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: The Visual Image, Text, and Audio,* 1968. Installation view at the XXXIV Biennale di Venezia, Venice, 1968.

transformation of the space of exhibition into a space of media reception was manifestly at odds with what government agencies and the public expected from a cultural display at a national pavilion of the Venice Biennale, and it was one of the most striking—and paradoxically one of the most overlooked—critical dimensions of Lamelas's work.

In a similarly critical manner, the work questioned the discursive framework of Conceptual art by introducing a model of language as information and communicative action (rather than a model of language as analytical proposition, as self-reflexive structure, or as one of deferral and difference).[10] In linking institutional exhibition space directly with the functions of public and political communication, Lamelas not only constructed a dialectic between the forms and spaces of common social experience on the one hand and exhibition spaces of exceptional, if not hermetic forms of vision and knowledge on the other, but he reconstituted a seemingly lost public and political dimension to the institutions of cultural representation, pointing back to their origins as institutions of political reflection and historical identity formation in the bourgeois public sphere.

A year later Lamelas produced a work for the Camden Arts Centre in London, in which all of the radical premises that had been articulated in the two previous works came to their logical conclusion. The fact that the general reception process of the art of the late sixties and early seventies left the work in relative obscurity (as is true for the Venice Biennale installation) points once again to the considerable inability of audiences and critics of that period (let alone those of the following generations) to situate Lamelas's work in a historical and interpretative context.

Instead of producing and installing an exhibition at the Camden Arts Centre, Lamelas suggested using the available financial resources for the production of a short black and white film, titled *An Investigation of the Relations between Inner and Outer Space*. Substituting a *film production* (modest as it was in terms of technology and budget) for an *exhibition production* appears now more clearly as a programmatic conclusion of the earlier projects. Rather than reflect any longer on the institutional and discursive conventions of exhibitions and their architectural containers, rather than criticize the limitations of the phenomenology of

sculpture and the institutional restrictions of architectural space, Lamelas decided from the start to conceive the "work" as much as the "exhibition" within the discursive and material technology of media culture.

As in his Venice Biennale installation the preceding year, Lamelas deployed relatively advanced tools (film and sound recording) within a space traditionally reserved for the display of mute and static high art objects. But in a sudden reversal, the exhibition space itself now became the "object" to be contemplated first of all. From the perspective of Lamelas's filmic investigation (and, by implication, of media technology at large) the architectural container now appeared as merely *one* possible site of departure for an investigative project, not as the conclusive destination of the work of art. In its filmic presentation as a remote if not obsolete condition, appearing almost in a state of historical abandon, the site of a work's presentation emerged as a lost, irretrievable allegorical structure where the relative autonomy of traditional exhibitions and their objects had once been convincingly practiced. Lamelas, however, does not implement film technology merely as a radical substitute for a sculptural object/installation or even an exhibition;[11] rather, he deploys film's inherent ability to record factual information in order to document the conditions determining the particularities of the production of exhibitions and of social production at large.

The film starts with an almost parodic performance of late modernist self-referentiality[12] by measuring the entire exhibition space and making the camera travel along all of the neutral white architectural surfaces that constitute the "White Cube," as though to look at them for the last time. The film then presents interviews with the three-member crew of the institution, talking about their daily activities and operations. It is in these interviews, with their *cinéma vérité* qualities of cruelly unadulterated reports about the tasks being performed in the maintenance and administration of a space devoted to the exhibition of contemporary culture, that the film's critical undertow gains considerable force: the Jamaican guard, the female clerk, and the white British supervisor perceive and describe their devotion and their seriously performed tasks in terms of obedience, subjection, surveillance, and control, tasks whose larger purpose and functions, not to mention interest and audiences, seem to be inaccessible if not

totally unbeknownst to them. This insufferable banality of the situation, an involuntary travesty, acts as the true counterpart (and manifest justification) to the work's conceptual radicality of having evacuated literally and theoretically the traditional confines of the exhibition space altogether.

The film moves on to list in a deadpan descriptive voice-over a litany of urban statistics. Aided by the insertion of charts and diagrams, it presents the spatial parameters of urban organization beyond the exhibition space, its geographical sites and means of transportation (subway and bus systems, local and regional train systems, regional and national airports), as well as the technological and the institutional media that constitute spectators' social identities. The film concludes in an almost grotesque climax, expanding the oppositional concepts of inner and outer space to a literal pun: a protagonist conducts a series of casual interviews with randomly chosen, anonymous pedestrians on the subject of extraterrestrial travel. As it turns out, the film was shot on the day of the first manned landing on the moon.[13]

Participating in late modernist art's persistent impulse toward ever-increasing fragmentation and medium-specificity, Lamelas's next series of works, produced in 1969 and 1970 and titled *Time as Activity,* contributes some of the most radical propositions to the project of a critique of the visual and textual conventions of representation that would emerge at the center of Conceptualism. Lamelas isolates the dimensions of temporality and presentness and engages in the difficult proposition of a representation of pure duration, one that supposedly knows neither anteriority nor posteriority. The photographic and filmic recordings of *Time as Activity* are arbitrary subjects and sites: the series *Düsseldorf,* for example, includes a spouting fountain in a park, urban traffic at an intersection, and the building of the Kunsthalle where the work was to be shown on the occasion of the exhibition *Prospect* in 1969. All of them privilege a model of visuality that has been programmatically depleted of all those representational functions that visual and textual production had offered up until the early sixties. In sculptural terms these images negate the seemingly guaranteed conditions of the phenomenological experience of objects and spaces; in photographic terms they explicitly void all possibilities of coherent subject matter and all rationale for photographic skills;

in filmic terms they deny even the slightest possibility of the viewer's projection of narrative structure (e.g., storyline or anecdote, subject or series), least of all that of a privileged subjectivity, emerging from the representation of a "character" or an "event" onto these utterly banal and meaningless images.

If one wanted to recognize the full degree of Lamelas's radicality in the critical negation of representation, one would only have to compare the series *Time as Activity* with work (photographic and filmic) by artists produced slightly earlier or at the same time, addressing similar issues, activities that were certainly known to Lamelas. One could, for example, point to the bookworks of Edward Ruscha or to Dan Graham's photographs of the mid-sixties, projects in which the principles of random choice of sites and serial structure were as central as the programmatic effacement of camera skills.

Yet in all of these instances one could still—in a comparison with Lamelas's work from 1969–1970—reconstruct some kind of underlying principle of selection, or even a latent narrative (if nothing else, that of accumulation, seriality, and structure itself). One artist, however, whose project seems in many ways even more comparable to that of Lamelas's photographic and filmic work of 1969–1970, is On Kawara. His series of registered acts and encounters (containing entries such as "I went," "I met," "I got up"), mailed from continuously changing locations during his peregrinations in the sixties, partake of a similar radicality of dislocation and dis-representation. One could almost speak of a reciprocity between sitelessness or dislocation and the *extreme focus* on the *indexical specificity* and the *performative precision* of the most minute events being recorded in Kawara's work: the preconditions to prevent the work from even approaching the threshold of narrativity and representation, replacing them with an aesthetic of pure *information*.[14]

It does not appear to be accidental that the internationalism of Conceptual art emerged precisely at this moment of the late sixties—the moment when media culture and the entertainment industries were generally referred to as the culture of spectacle—and made a definitive shift away from the last remnants of nationally or regionally specific cultures. And inasmuch as Conceptual art insisted on the assimilation of the technologies of the increasingly global commu-

nications industries it removed itself further than any avant-garde internationalism from the framework of cultural specificities, be they those of discursive conventions, social institutions, or the cultural orders of the nation-state.

Thus, if "disembodiment" and "displacement" in the most literal sense of these terms were the conditions to which art aspired in the late 1960s (perhaps that was what Lucy Lippard really meant when she coined the famous concept of the "dematerialization of art"), then the question whether contemporary cultures could still renew traditional models of identity (along the parameters of ethnicity, race, and nation) that once had been generated by the nation-state seems pointless, since global production and communication have become the universally governing law. What seems less pointless, however, is the attempt to understand what *kind* of a post-national identity could in fact emerge from these cultural assimilations of the governing principles of globalization.

A new model of internationalism and "abstraction" had been developed by Conceptual art in general and in Lamelas's work of the late 1960s in particular. It is an abstraction, however, that no longer shares any of the aspirations of the earlier avant-garde projects since it is governed by the recognition that media culture and technological reproduction determine the experience of simultaneous collective reception (certainly *one* definition of the phenomenology of sculpture that had remained fundamentally valid up to the 1920s). It is an abstraction that recognizes that the dematerialization of object experience is dependent upon the logic of sign exchange value and that it would be futile to conceive of sculpture in industrial materials and focus again and again on the architectures of display, since both approaches would still offer the spectator a promise of perceptual specificity, bodily tactility, and concrete materiality.

Two contradictory tendencies seem to operate at the center of this new abstraction. One aspires to be emancipatory and self-critical, to purify the aesthetic of narrative and representation from its implicit parasitical dependency on myth and cult. The other enacts an oppressive and controlling condition, eroding the very possibility of aesthetic experience altogether, inasmuch as the aesthetic could have been defined as an anamnetic practice within which historical experience could be reflected and reconstructed.

Abstraction from this perspective emerged first of all as a critique of representational conventions, no longer defined by the limited definition of the "figurative" but more generally and radically addressing the very universality of the condition of "fiction" (as opposed to political or psychoanalytically established factuality). Artistic and literary production had remained entangled with traditional models of representation and narrative throughout the second part of the twentieth century in spite of many earlier critiques of representation that had insisted on positivist models of unmediated truth content and on political projects of radical dehierarchization. The formulation of a purely textual aesthetic in Russian formalism or the dismantling of historical narrative in terms of "event" and "agent" in the conception of the historical process, as redefined by the *Annales* historians of the thirties, found their aesthetic parallels in Surrealism's critique of fiction or Soviet factography's assault on representation. The French *nouveau roman* would emerge as the most rigorous critique within the context of literature in the postwar period, and it is certainly not accidental that it would acquire cult status among the generation of Minimalist/post-Minimalist and Conceptual artists.[15]

The apogee of such a purging critique of the residual dimensions of representation and narrative was reached in a three-part film that Lamelas contributed to the exhibition *18 Paris IV 1970,* titled laconically *Film 18 Paris IV 1970.*[16] The three segments of the film consisted "simply" of the recording of three performers appearing sequentially in utterly banal urban situations (in the street, on a roof overlooking Paris), calling out the beginning and the end of the three-minute sequence. Their only other activity during the film consisted of checking their watches at irregular intervals—in an appearance of calm, impatience, or expectation—to observe the flux of time in the allocated duration. Thus, the time recorded and the time represented coincided in the most literal possible fashion.

This principle of real time was exacerbated in one of the three segments by the fact that the protagonist actually carried the sound equipment with which he recorded his announcements at the beginning and at the end of the three-minute sequence. This systematic restriction to the elementary principles of a critique of representation combines all of the strategies previously applied separately in the

pictorial, sculptural, and filmic conventions of representation: in this manner the real time principle is combined with the principle of self-reflexivity; the indexical gesture (the "image" is merely the trace of the person calling out and waiting through the temporal duration) is superimposed on the language of pure performativity (the vocal statements confirm merely the actual process of time passing and time having elapsed). Filmic representation in this advanced state of tautological self-reflexivity recognizes only the temporal and the kinetic dimension of its medium as the essential conditions of film (not its narrative conventions or its illusionistic representations).[17]

Both the semiotic model of the *index* and the linguistic model of *performativity* (and often their combination) become central to the aesthetic of Conceptual art and they also define the specific visuality and textuality of Lamelas's filmic and photographic work of the late sixties. If, in the former, depiction and figuration are displaced by the mere trace and pure record that the photograph or the film and video recording supply when reduced to *pure information,* then we encounter in the latter a model of textuality where rhetoric, narrative plot and fiction, agency and psychobiography, are all dismissed as integrally participating in the conditions of the ideological and of myth (in Barthes's definition).

Yet in Lamelas's rigorous reduction of the filmic image to its most elementary functions (pure duration, pure recording, pure indexical presence) the dialectic of late modernist rationality suddenly appears: that the elimination of narrative and agency, of representation and the imaginary from the (filmic) image, driven by the desire to dismantle the ideological conditions of media representation, makes manifest the very order of technocratic and administrative rationality that the calculated and industrially produced forms of narrative and myth conceal. Stripped of narrative's compensatory functions and of representation's substitutional effects, the actually governing conditions of vacuity and separateness, the absence of sociality and communication ruling public social space (and therefore—do we dare repeat it?—the very conditions that constitute the parameters within which the "sculptural" is conceived), appear now in undisguised violence within the restrictive prohibitions of the aesthetic structure itself.

It was this dialectic that remained mostly unreflected in Conceptualism's radical critique of representation. To the degree that it eliminated representation as a privileged convention of artistic knowledge and historical memory, it also prolonged—at the very center of a cultural practice of resistance—the elimination of experience that the principles of a technologically advanced culture of spectacle enforced; to the extent that the critique of representation insisted on a positivist factuality of minute, specific, reduced modes of experience, it actually extended the common forfeiture of experience in an advanced society of total administration into the very core of contemporary culture.

Lamelas's first professionally produced film, called *The Desert People* and made in 1974, demarcates the point of his critical departure from the premises of Conceptual art. His decision to reposition it within the culturally dominant medium of commercial film situated Lamelas's work once again outside of a by then fully established, not to say normative, aesthetic of Conceptualism as much as it reiterated his fundamental strategy of fusing his work ever more symbiotically within the context of the advanced techniques of the culture industry.[18]

This departure seems to have been motivated by several factors: first of all by Lamelas's insight into the reductivist limitations of Conceptualism's critique of representation. Second, by increasingly irrefutable evidence that the rigorous elimination of artistic conventions and the incorporation of the parameters of industrial communication did not succeed at all in removing artistic practices from their cul de sac of social isolation. It had become evident that if any more radical attempts to dissolve the boundaries between contemporary artistic production and the audiences of the culture industry were to be made at all they would have to lead deeper into the territory of that industry by the deployment of ever more mimetic strategies. That this would eventually mean embracing the codes of mass culture fully—as it had already been suggested to some extent under the auspices of Pop art, to the point of simulating a total congruity between the two discursive formations—seems to have been realized in Lamelas's first commercial film project.

The third motivation for his break with Conceptualism was undoubtedly the most crucial one, since it was based entirely on an epistemological reflection

of the deficiencies of the Conceptualist critique: namely that even in the most consequential pursuit of a pure and unmediated presence (whether of the indexical sign or the performative linguistic statement), the condition of "representation" would continue to mitigate the demand for pure semiotic opacity and immediate presence by imposing structural and temporal difference. Furthermore, Lamelas seems to have realized that even the most radical practices of Conceptual art ultimately originated within a preestablished discursive and institutional framework called "avant-garde production." They were inextricably intertwined with the very conventionality of "language," a condition that would inevitably disqualify the claims for an unmediated critique of linguistic and cultural conventions altogether.

The sudden reintroduction of narrative and fiction, of protagonists and representation in Lamelas's film *The Desert People* refuses, however, to promise its spectators newly rediscovered and reaffirmed access to the unproblematic conventions of pictorial, photographic and filmic representation and narrative. Rather, it confronts them with a peculiar structural principle that for the time being we would like to call the dispersal of representation.

Five professional actors (as opposed to the lay performers that had peopled Lamelas's earlier films) divide the time of the movie into almost equal temporal segments (a convention comparable to the earlier film *Time as Activity*), and recall their different perceptions and memories of a visit to an Indian reservation of the Papago tribe. The five characters vary considerably in detail of dress, speech pattern, vocabulary, and gesture, and each of them represents a distinct social type (the hippie, the progressive anthropologist, the hedonist California liberal, the hip New York journalist, and the "authentic" member of the Indian tribe). This range of differences becomes all the more striking in its comparative serial alignment of one actor after another appearing before the camera, frontally, all of them linked by their shared reference point, yet infinitely differentiated by the manifest discrepancies of their narratives. *The Desert People* both continues and concludes the structuralist aesthetic of late sixties art, yet it initiates simultaneously a new aesthetic of a critical revision of narrativity and representation. It is only now that we can begin to grasp the importance of Lamelas's reflection on

the inextricable relations between artistic production and memory, and between memory and narrative and representation.

The dispersal of narrative (highly reminiscent of the principle of the multiple narrator position in *Rashomon*) results from that manifest discrepancy between the shared referent (the visit to the "original" and "authentic" "other") and the difference of observations and reminiscences within the performers' accounts.[19] Rather than present narrative as a unifying force and a principle of closure, *The Desert People* treats narrative as the matrix from which the linguistic performance emerges as always already fractured and multiplied, underscoring the relativity of each position of enunciation. This principle of a fractured narration culminates in the performance of Manny, the Papago Indian, appearing last in the sequence and shifting his account—almost in the manner of a structural permutation found in late sixties Minimal and post-Minimal art—from English to Spanish to his native Indian dialect. Yet the principle of permutation is transferred to a rather different concept that has itself by now come under considerable pressure, if not dispersal, namely, identity.

Permutation in Lamelas's film examines identity as *representation,* as linguistically, culturally, and historically constructed. The film plays with the reaffirmation of representational conventions by pretending to be engaged with the most "authentic" of all filmic genres, the documentary. In accordance with this principle it makes the actors appear as though they were non-actors delivering their authentic and objective accounts in front of a neutral camera. Yet, in a totally unexpected conclusion of the film, a violent and spectacular disaster makes all five of the protagonists disappear as in a randomly decided, willful act of the film's script to change genres at the last moment, to turn away suddenly from the credibility of the documentary and engage instead with a genre of pure fiction.

In the years following *The Desert People* Lamelas moved to Hollywood, always aspiring to consummate a true union between artistic production and the most advanced forms of the culture industry: his vision of a late twentieth-century *Gesamtkunstwerk* seems to have been to situate his artistic project of a radical demythification at the very heart of an actual Hollywood movie. Or, put differently, to construct the enlightenment project of critical practice of particu-

larity and self-reflexivity in a seamless fusion with the totalizing images and practices of the industrial production of myth. One of the most successful projects on this road became a still from a videotape by Lamelas (now reprinted as the poster for his retrospective exhibition) in which the artist appears in the pose of an enraptured rock star: here the inextricable synthesis between industrial production and myth, between the simulacrum of pure ecstasy and the manufacture of enchantment have found their supreme articulation. Its construction is so authentic that the image's inherent dimension of travesty flashes up only in a brief instant before the viewer's incredulous eyes: the travesty of the artist's aspirations to construct the critical act of avant-garde intervention in the guise of rock and roll.

To recognize, let alone to accept, the relative immutability of historically formed discursive artistic genres, institutional structures, and distribution forms as obstacles that are ultimately persistent (if not insurmountable) marks the most profound crisis for the artist identified with a model of avant-garde practice. It seems that this recognition, at least in its twentieth-century examples, was inevitably equivalent not only to a public acknowledgement of the failure of the avant-garde's projects (e.g., Rodchenko's last paintings after he had devoted almost an entire lifetime to photography as an art of the future proletarian public sphere), but most often also to a politically retrograde cultural intervention. The other half of that historical dialectic—which is by now perhaps even more difficult to accept for avant-garde artists—is the fact that their assaults upon culture industry production remain futile since the culture industry has become more monolithic than ever, hermetically sealed against any type of critical intervention.

As even the slightest critical encroachment upon the culture industry's fundamental rule of the effacement of subjectivity and the denial of political self-determination will be instantly repelled, so will the opposite strategies of simulacral assimilation be recuperated in order to affirm the industry's encroachment on the previously autonomous sphere of avant-garde practice.

This dialectic between an insurmountable persistence of tradition (of genres, discourses, institutions of avant-garde art) and an unassailable monolithic power of mass culture appears to be the space that artists have shared since the end (not to say, necessarily, the failure) of Conceptual art. It is a space that was

David Lamelas, *Rock Star* (*Character Appropriation*), 1974.

perhaps first opened by Marcel Broodthaers in the early 1970s after he concluded his major critical project of the *Museum Fictions* and began his series of *Décors;* it is a space where the avant-garde's former claim to disregard the persistence of social memory embedded in institutional practices and discursive conventions has been exchanged for the recognition that it is precisely from the reflection of these conventions that the only remaining potentials for resistance against spectacle culture and the totality of administrative control can be mobilized.

This recourse to the persistence of historical formations as a form of social memory is presented, however, in the relevant work of the post-seventies period, inevitably as an act of allegorical recollection. We define the allegorical in this context as precisely a recognition of the avant-garde's dual loss of power. This loss results first from the avant-garde's failure either to escape tradition or to renew access to it (in any other way than through allegorical reflection) and, second, from its failure to assault culture industry formations in a manner that would at all continue its original critical aspirations.

The work Lamelas has produced in the last few years seems to share the conditions of that allegorical space. His installation at the Royal Museum for Fine Arts in Antwerp, *Quand le ciel est bas et lourd,*[20] repositions itself at first sight within the traditions of monumental sculpture, while Lamelas's programmatic engagement with the parameters of media culture and technology has been left behind. A more recent work, *Maquette for a Living Space,* reconnects Lamelas even more explicitly with the conventions of sculpture and architecture that were his original points of departure. In both works the condition of loss that we have defined as integral to the model of the "allegorical" seems manifest, since both projects not only create reenactments of seemingly obsolete genres, but also define as precarious the internal relationships of the terms with which they engage: the opposition between nature and culture in the first, and between inhabited space (domestic architecture) and discursive space (sculpture) in the second.

The sculptural installation *Quand le ciel est bas et lourd,* signaling the allegorical tradition in its striking Baudelairean title and its traditional forms of sculptural production, might appear at first like a renewal of late 1960s Arte Povera aesthetics. But in Lamelas's work the opposition of nature and culture is

aggrandized to the level of the outdoor monument—a tendency it is crucial to emphasize here—which Arte Povera had been careful to avoid. Yet it would be equally unconvincing to argue that the enigmatic installation of a field of trees that grow under a shield of steel, hovering over them like a shadow of extreme protection inevitably thwarting growth, eventually deforming and crippling them, participates in a fairly recent tradition of sculptural works that—out of ecological concerns with romantic/remedial intentions—have incorporated trees or micro-ecologies into the conception of sculpture.[21]

Yet it soon becomes evident that Lamelas's reorientation toward the persistence of sculptural, if not monumental conventions aims at a different target altogether. Manifestly repositioning itself and inhabiting the inescapable persistence of the institution of sculpture, Lamelas's work constructs an even more specific historicist allegory of two failed sculptural conventions from the recent past: the romanticization of the simplicity and universal availability of natural resources as sculptural raw materials (as in the work of Richard Long) and the heroicization and increasingly hollow rhetoric of large-scale sculptural projects produced with tremendous industrial means, which fail to recognize the collapse of their claims as public sculpture in the ruinous public sphere. Lamelas's installation entangles these two seemingly mutually exclusive sculptural conventions and intertwines them in a double negation: neither the rhetoric of sculpture as industrial construction (its origins revealed as the origins of ecological devastation) nor the remedial concerns of a romantic commemoration of nature (and its mere ecological tokenism) can serve any longer as paradigms for contemporary sculptural constructs without acquiring immediately the features of fraudulence. Yet the allegorical space to which the work has returned, beyond a false identification with media culture and beyond the avant-garde's transgressive utopian aspiration, appears as a space of critical resistance.

In *Maquette for a Living Space* a comparable situation of extreme ambiguity is constructed by Lamelas's repositioning of his work within the persistence of discursive traditions. His installations of the late 1960s were engaged in a project to articulate the actually governing conditions of social communication as the founding principles of a new definition of sculptural media and spaces. In a man-

ner comparable to the radical restructuring of the conditions of simultaneous collective reception in works such as El Lissitzky's *Abstract Cabinet,* Lamelas's work of the late 1960s articulated an optimistic reading of the structural transformations of the bourgeois public sphere. By contrast, in his *Maquette for a Living Space,* with its double entendre about the space of the private home as one of precarious suspense or disintegration, all interventions along the parameters of Lissitzky's aspirations for a newly developing proletarian public sphere disappear, just as the aspirations of McLuhan's media optimism that governed Lamelas's earlier work are literally suspended. Neither the conditions of media communication nor the certainty of architecture as a discourse of public collective experience apply in this allegorical space. Neither the neutral white wall as the sole site for the inscription of Modernism nor the reiteration of a fully exhausted critique of the false neutrality of the "White Cube" as the architectural container, critically reflected by post-Minimal sculpture, can still operate as paradigms in this hybrid construction of a Modernist ruin.

Notes

1

M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 284.

2

As in almost all instances of a discussion of twentieth-century avant-garde matters, one should immediately relativize the statement by pointing to the fact that there were probably just as many instances—perhaps not quite as powerful and important ones—where the avant-garde argued—in collaboration with ideologies of a return to the foundational concepts of the nation-state—for cultural practices of an extreme specificity in the continuation of regional or national cultural conventions. The judgment still seems open whether we can easily identify the former with progressive emancipatory politics and the latter simply with reactionary or even proto-fascist politics, since the dissolution of the specificity of regional and national cultural conventions could also be theorized in the perspective of late capitalism's increasing destruction of the formative stages of subjectivity and its profound historical connections to the various cultural conventions encoded in the ideologies of the nation-state.

3

This subject cannot and need not be discussed further in this context, especially since the complex programs and ideological implications of the avant-garde's claim for the establishment of a world language have already been fairly extensively studied. For the most recent examples of a massive dehistoricization of abstraction, see the catalogue by Mark Rosenthal, *Abstraction* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1996), and before that the catalogue by Maurice Tuchman et al., *The Spiritual in Art* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989).

4

These are the artists that Lamelas mentioned in a recent conversation with the author (October 6, 1996) as having been of particular interest and of considerable visibility in Buenos Aires during the time of his education at the Academia de Bellas Artes.

The Madi Group, certainly nowadays the least known of the three, is of particular historical interest for a discussion of emigration and assimilation, since some of its members were the children of first-generation immigrants to Argentina while others were emigrants who had recently arrived from Europe to escape from political persecution, war, and holocaust. One of the key figures who linked these different individuals and kept the relationships alive was the German Jewish photographer Grete Stern, who had been—with her companion, Ellen Auerbach—one of the leading photography artists and advertisement designers in Berlin, where they had founded the agency Ringl and Pit. Through her familiarity with figures from the Bauhaus—where she had studied with Walter Peterhans—Stern not only communicated the ideas of that institution and its avant-garde context to her newly found artistic milieu in Buenos Aires but she also remained in touch with participants from that history in the immediate postwar period.

David Lamelas is the son of Spanish parents who emigrated in 1936 from Spanish Galicia to Argentina.

5

One could point to a historical anticipation of this phenomenon in the context of architectural production of the 1920s when suddenly the fusion of linguistic and semiotic (advertising) elements with the tectonic (structural, volumetric, and material) dimensions of architecture becomes a key subject leading to the discovery of a new genre, soon to be called "Reklame-Architektur," and the "kiosk" becomes one of the most attractive architectural types of modernity.

6

In a project made for a rather comparable situation (a glassed-in gallery passageway in a contemporary exhibition space), Michael Asher installed a work that followed a similar logic of sculptural

dispersal and architectural determination at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1976. See my essay "Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Modernist Sculpture" in this book.

7

I define the term "publicity" here according to Jürgen Habermas's concept of *Öffentlichkeit* as a formation of institutions and formally established modes of social interaction, in which private needs and desires and public necessities are politically, legally, ethically, and culturally mediated. The use of the term is thus drastically different from its more vernacular use in the English language, where it traditionally signifies "advertisement"—which means, of course, the opposite, namely the commercial privatization of public experience. At the same time, the paradox prevails that what was once experienced as "publicity" in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere has been increasingly subjected to the more recent redefinition of the public sphere: actual publicity as management and control of desire and the depoliticization that goes hand in hand with the increasing intensification and enforcement of the practices of consumer culture.

8

This recognition would become a central project in the work of Hans Haacke, but it was really only in the early 1970s that Haacke developed his investigations that focused with increasing precision on the question of a fundamental change in the socio-economic foundation of contemporary culture and its subjection to the principles of corporate interests.

9

This radical conflation of "work," "exhibition site," and "spectatorial conventions" were matched by Michael Asher a few years later in installations such as his Galleria Toselli piece in 1972 and the 1976 work for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago mentioned above.

10

When Hans Haacke shifted at about the same time toward a radically different approach to language his work was met with equal skepticism. One of his earliest explicitly political works, his contribution to the *Prospect* exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in 1969, in a proposal almost identical to that of Lamelas's Venice Biennale work, integrated a seemingly formal procedure (the neutral delivery of information) with a radically different set of language operations (instrumentalized forms of news and media communication) and introduced them into the institutional framework of a disparate sphere (the museum and exhibition space of visual culture).

11

This would not have been in and of itself such an unusual strategy since many artists and filmmakers at that moment (Michael Asher, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Michael Snow) would have replaced a sculptural installation by the projection of a film.

12

The procedure seems to enact as a film performance what Mel Bochner's *Measurement Series* (1967) had literally inscribed with great modernist earnestness on the empty white walls of exhibition spaces.

13

While it is not easy to believe, David Lamelas claims that it was purely coincidental that the movie was shot on the same day as the moon landing.

14

It is not at all accidental that the cult of "information" would find its programmatic declaration in 1970 when Kynaston McShine curated an exhibition titled *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where many of the artists (including Lamelas) were first brought together in an apparent celebration of having shed the last layers of craft-, object-, and matter-derived definitions of sculptural and pictorial practice.

15

David Lamelas has emphasized that the discovery of the French *nouveau roman* was an essential formative stage in the development of his artistic practice; he is not, of course, the only artist of his generation to have attested to that. (His later work *An Interview with Marguerite Duras* still echoes that involvement.) Other artists, such as Dan Graham and Lawrence Weiner, have explicitly stated in interviews or in their work that the writings of Alain Robbe-Grillet and the films of Alain Resnais played an important role in the development of a post-Minimal, proto-Conceptual aesthetic.

16

The exhibition was curated by Michel Claura and Seth Siegelaub and constituted the arrival of a more complex definition of Conceptual art in France (Conceptual work had, in fact, been exhibited since 1968 in Germany at the *Prospect I* and *Prospect II* exhibitions).

17

Such a project was best exemplified in Warhol's cinematic attack on Hollywood narrativity in his filmic work of the early sixties, which held an extraordinary significance for Conceptual art in general (as it did for the filmic work of Lamelas).

18

We know of only one other artist's work of the early 1970s in which a similarly radical break was formulated from within the purview of the Conceptualist position itself: James Coleman. It is important to recognize that the first piece in his oeuvre that signaled his critical departure from the aesthetics of post-Minimalism and Conceptual art (*Slide Piece,* 1972–1973) embarked

on strategies of a critical revision of Conceptualism's ban on representation that were in many ways comparable, if not identical to those applied by Lamelas. The other figure to cite here, albeit an artist who from the beginning made Conceptualism's misconceptions one of the focal points of his works, is Marcel Broodthaers. By 1969, after seeing Lamelas's installation in Venice, Broodthaers became a friend of the artist and may well have contributed to Lamelas's increasingly critical reflection on Conceptualism's fallacious orthodoxies.

19

It is certainly not accidental that James Coleman's *Slide Piece* reintroduces narrative structures at the height of Conceptual art in a manner that would be applied by Lamelas as well, namely, to subject these structures at the same time that they are reconsidered to a procedure of dissemination.

20

The work was produced and installed on the occasion of the exhibition *America: Bride of the Sun* at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp. The section of contemporary Latin American art was curated by Catherine de Zegher.

21

Joseph Beuys's *10,000 Oaks* at *Documenta VI* in Kassel in 1978; Michael Asher's proposal from the same year to plant an alley of trees instead of constructing large outdoor monumental sculptures for the urban sculpture renewal exhibition in Münster; more recent works by Katharina Fritsch and Meg Webster.

Parody and Appropriation in Francis Picabia, Pop, and Sigmar Polke

> It is not the passion (whether of objects or subjects) for substances that speaks in fetishism, it is the passion for the code, which, by governing both objects and subjects, and by subordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation. This is the fundamental articulation of the ideological process: not in the projection of alienated consciousness into various superstructures, but in the generalization at all levels of a structural code.
> —*Jean Baudrillard,* Fetishism and Ideology, *1981*

All cultural practice appropriates alien or exotic, peripheral or obsolete elements of discourse into its changing idioms. The motivations and criteria of selection for appropriation are intricately connected with the momentary driving forces of each culture's dynamics. They may range from the crudest motives of imperialist appropriation of foreign (cultural) wealth to the subtle procedures of historic and scientific exploration. In aesthetic practice, appropriation may result from an

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Sigmar Polke, ". . . *Höhere Wesen befehlen,*" 4 of a series of 14 prints after photographs of Polke and Chris Kohlhöfer, 1968. *Edition 10,* Galerie René Block, Berlin. Edition of 50 boxes.

Knopfpalme

Wattepalme

Zollstockpalme

authentic desire to question the historical validity of a local, contemporary code by linking it to a different set of codes, such as previous styles, heterogeneous iconic sources, or to different modes of production and reception. Appropriation of historical models may be motivated by a desire to establish continuity and tradition and a fiction of identity, as well as originating from a wish to attain universal mastery of all codification systems.

In its most fickle but most powerful version—the discourse of fashion—appropriation as a strategy of commodity innovation reveals its quintessential function: to grant a semblance of historical identity through ritualized consumption. Each act of appropriation is a promise of transformation: each act of acquisition anticipates the supposed transubstantiation. But instead, it generates and perpetuates reification, the malaise appropriation promises to cure. The social behavior of the contemporary individual, defining itself in the gridlock of depoliticized consumption and consumerized politics, finds its mirror in the model of the contemporary neo-avantgarde artist.

Restricted by postwar Modernism to an artistic practice cut off from socio-political perspectives and the production of use value, the artist was condemned to produce pure exchange value. A contemporary work's capacity to generate exchange value has become the ultimate gauge of its aesthetic validity. The question of style, in much emerging contemporary painting, involves a kind of secret pact, between the producers and their audience, to accept the historical limitations imposed upon them and to abide by them in a futile repetition of symbolic liberation. This pact of style implies the tacit understanding that, for a period of time, a very limited and precisely defined set of operations on the pictorial signifier is accessible and permitted. All other activities, different or deviant, are temporarily excluded from public perception and suffer defeat before they can acquire cultural standing.

The Modernist artist's isolation from socio-political practice has been framed and legitimized in such ideological concepts as aesthetic autonomy and formalism. It has been continually assaulted from within aesthetic practice itself, by artists who have appropriated production procedures and materials, iconic

references, and modes of reception from the domain of so-called "low" culture or "mass" culture, introducing them into the discourse of "high" culture. The range of historical and geographical provinces—from which the elements required for the generation of a particular cultural coding system are extracted—changes as rapidly as the avant-garde's need for innovative appropriation. A case in point is the shift from the late nineteenth-century interest in *japonisme* to the Cubists' discovery of *art nègre* only to be followed by the Surrealists' subsequent uncovering of yet another terrain of authentic primitivism on the way to children's art and *art brut.* From *faux bois* to *faux naïf,* one discovers in each historical instance of appropriation as much disguise as revelation. High art poses as low art; sophisticated academic erudition poses as primary, unmediated expression; exchange value poses as use value; contemporaneity (and exposure to very specific current ideological pressure) appears in the guise of a concern for universality and timelessness. Every time the avant-garde appropriates elements from the discourses of low, folk, or mass culture, it publicly denounces its own elitist isolation and the obsolescence of its inherited production procedures. Ultimately, each such instance of "bridging the gap between art and life," as Robert Rauschenberg famously put it, only reaffirms the stability of the division because it remains within the context of high art. Each act of cultural appropriation, therefore, constructs a simulacrum of a double negation, denying the validity of individual and original production, yet denying equally the relevance of the specific context and function of the work's own practice.

When Marcel Duchamp appropriated an industrially produced, quotidian object, in order to redefine the cognitive and epistemological status of the aesthetic object, the prophetic voice of Guillaume Apollinaire rightfully hailed him as the one artist who might possibly reconcile art and the people in the twentieth century.

However, this original productivist dimension in Duchamp's work—the symbolic substitution of use value objects for exhibition/exchange value—was ultimately lost in the work's acculturation process. The readymade was reduced to a philosophical speculation on the epistemological status of objects that func-

tion as semiotic elements within an aesthetic structure. Almost fifty years later, at the origin of American Pop art, similar questions were addressed and the same contradictions became apparent. When Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol introduced mechanically produced, "found" imagery into the high art discourse of painting (by technological procedures of reproduction, such as the dye transfer process and silkscreen printing), gestural identity and originality of expression were repudiated. The very procedures that had concretized notions of creative invention and individual productivity in the preceding decade were now negated in the mechanical construction of the painting. Yet, within the subsequent acculturation process, these works acquired a historical "meaning" that entirely inverted their original intentions. They became the artistic masterpieces and icons of a decade that established a new viability for the procedures of painting. This occurred despite their radical assault on the isolation of high art, their critique of the rarefied, auratic status imposed on objects in acquiring exchange value, and their denunciation of the obsolescence of artistic constructs originating from the conditions of this isolated social practice.

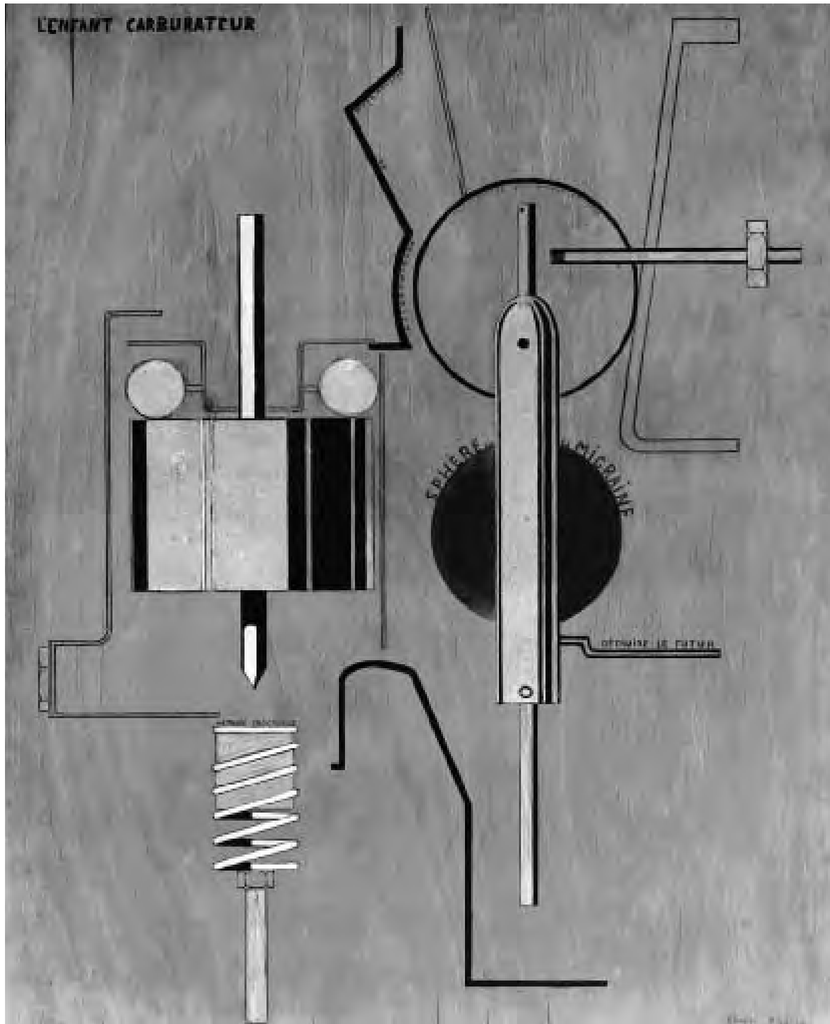
Each act of appropriation, therefore, inevitably constructs a simulacrum of a double position, distinguishing high from low culture, exchange value from use value, the individual from the social. It perpetuates the separation of various cultural practices, and reaffirms the isolation of individual producers from the collective interests of the society within which they operate. It widens the gap it set out to bridge; it creates the commodity it set out to abolish. By becoming the property of the "cultural," it prevents the political from becoming real. Politically committed producers become singularized and classified as "political" artists, in opposition to "formally" oriented artists or "self" and "expression" oriented artists.

Thus, each act of appropriation seems to reaffirm precisely those contradictions it set out to eliminate. Parodistic appropriation reveals the divided situation of the individual in contemporary artistic practice. The individual must claim the constitution of the self in original primary utterances, while being painfully aware of the degree of determination necessary to inscribe the utterance into dominant conventions and rules of codification; reigning signifying practice must be subverted and its deconstruction must be placed in a distribution system

(the market), a circulation form (the commodity), and a cultural legitimation system (the institutions of art). All these double binds cancel out the effect of avant-garde interference within the signifying practice, and turn it into a renewed legitimation of existing power structures. Parodistic appropriation anticipates the failure of any attempt to subvert the ruling codification and allies itself, in advance, with the powers that will ultimately turn its deconstructive efforts into a cultural success. Its seemingly radical denial of authorship, in fact, proposes a voluntary submission to, and passive acceptance of, the hierarchical ordering systems of the code, the division of labor, and the alienation resulting from the work's reification as a commodity. It remains open whether those who pursue strategies of parodistic appropriation know, in advance, that they will emerge victorious from the game of self-denial, once they have been processed through the rules of cultural industry. Or whether their apparent negation of subjectivity and authorship is ultimately only a device to encourage passive acceptance of the limitations that the ideological molds of society hold for its subjects.

The diversity and range of modes of appropriation were already evident in the first decade of this century, when the original avant-garde confronted the implications of the mass-produced object and its impact on the auratic, singular work of art. If we compare Duchamp's introduction of use value objects into the sphere of exhibition/exchange value with the drawings and paintings of Francis Picabia's mechanical period, the former seems, at first glance, to be far more radical and consequential. Picabia's parodistic appropriation of the drawing style of engineering plans and diagrams makes the linear, individual drawing gesture appear like the blueprint of an alien conception that cancels out the presence of the artistic author; yet this parody remains entirely on the surface of the pictorial construct and within the confines of Modernist avant-garde practice. From its very inception, Picabia's ultimately conservative work limited itself to the dialectical juxtaposition of parodistic mimicry and libidinal reification, which operates within the signifying system alone.

On the other hand, it is Duchamp's radicality that seemingly breached the confines of Modernist aesthetic practice, by actually exchanging the individually crafted or painted simulacrum for the real mass-produced object in actual space.



Francis Picabia, *The Child Carburetor,* 1919. Oil, enamel, metallic paint, gold leaf, pencil, and crayon on stained plywood, 49¾ × 39⅞ in. Collection: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Robert E. Mates.

Paradoxically, it is the radicality of this solution—a petit bourgeois radicality, as Daniel Buren once called it—that obliterates the ideological framework (the institution of the museum and the discursive formations of avant-garde production) determining the manipulation of the code. Inevitably, Picabia's position, which remains within the conventions and delimitations of the discourse (while manipulating the codes in a parodistic fashion), is now, once again, the more successful and comfortable position for artists to assume.

Parody, as a mode of ultimate complicity and secret reconciliation (a mode in which the victim identifies itself voluntarily with its defeat, in spite of its seemingly demolishing victory over the oppressor's codes by laughter), not only generates a higher degree of analytical precision in limiting itself to operations upon the signifying system, but also generates a higher degree of historical authenticity, in taking sides with the ruling order (it bathes in ideology, as Louis Althusser once described the condition of art in general). Its opposite denies the exclusive validity of the system and its codification and insists upon the necessity of transgressing the historical limitations in order to establish a dialectical relationship with realities existing outside of high art practice (such as Duchamp's readymade concept, Productivist art, the theory of factography, and recent contemporary strategies focusing on the introduction of political and critical practice into aesthetic discussion). Despite the apparent radicality and actual critical negation that this work provides, it most often fails to enter the circuit of distribution, the modes of viewing and reading established and maintained by institutions and audiences alike. Ultimately, inasmuch as these aspects are all integral parts of artistic production, such work thereby paradoxically fails to change the practice of art.

What does it mean, therefore, when a cultural center that for thirty years has almost programmatically ignored and rejected contemporary art on the European continent, suddenly "discovers" the "indigenous" cultural products of its satellites and recycles them into its present-day cultural life? Is it historical justice that the current American interest in European (specifically, Italian and German) painting marks a rediscovery of the cultural autonomy of the overseas provinces? Or does the expertise in traditional modes of meaning production, generally attributed to Europe as a purveyor of traditionally produced luxury goods,

revalidate and authenticate the "discovery" of local representational painting? If a warranty is needed for the authenticity of historically obsolete practices within an advanced context (cultural or socio-political), one may be found in "exoticism," the structure by which one language appropriates elements from a foreign or ancient language to recognize and rationalize its own contemporary atavisms. It is symptomatic of these situations that the proper criteria of evaluation, belonging to the cultural standards of the appropriator as well as those inherent in the language of the colonized culture, are not even recognized. The primary function of this model is not to document the existence of alien rituals, rules, or practices, but to cast the local atavism into a historical or alien form, to authenticate and valorize the local product. It is not surprising that in the present "discovery" of German painting by the American market, neither the criteria of quality that have been developed within the North American context itself are applied, nor are the "discovered" artists those who actually played a significant role in artistic production in Europe during the 1960s and 1970s.

Therefore, it is necessary to introduce into the current (re)discovery of early 1960s German neo-Expressionist painters of minor interest (if we can call the vigor of momentary needs of taste and fashion "minor") a figure whose body of work from the 1960s and early 1970s is far more consequential for actual pictorial thinking and production, and demonstrates a far more complex understanding of Modernist European and German art of those two decades. Sigmar Polke is an artist from the historical and geographical provinces of picture production. His work emerged in a situation marked by a lack of understanding and neglect of its proper historical sources, and one that had to open itself all the more to the dominance of American art. The impact of Dada and Duchamp, the positions of the Constructivists and Productivists, were not recognized and reinterpreted, in the German context, until the advent of Fluxus activities, embodied in such figures as George Maciunas. For example, in a letter to the German Fluxus artist Tomas Schmit, Maciunas wrote:

> The goals of Fluxus are social (not aesthetic). Ideologically, they relate to those of the LEF group in 1929 in the Soviet Union, and they

> aim at the gradual elimination of the fine arts. Therefore, Fluxus is strictly against the art object as a dysfunctional commodity, whose only purpose is to be sold and to support the artist. At best, it can have a temporary pedagogical function and clarify how superfluous art is and how superfluous ultimately it is itself. . . . Secondly, Fluxus is against art as a medium and vehicle for the artist's ego; the applied arts must express objective problems which have to be solved, not the artist's individuality or ego. Therefore, Fluxus has a tendency toward the spirit of the collective, toward anonymity and anti-individualism.

In contrast, the present situation is marked by disillusionment and skepticism toward that progressive legacy of the Modernist tradition. If the first situation was one of naiveté, then the second is one of cynicism. The early beginnings of the neo-avantgarde's practices and the current conclusions (which "[stir] in the thickets of long ago," in Walter Benjamin's phrase) seem to have congruent features but they have different origins. Still, both situations—the amazement that originally accompanied the discovery of the avant-garde and now, twenty years later, the cynical rejection and disbelief—use parody as a rhetorical mode for denouncing the claims of a dominant Modernist ideology lacking validity today.

In the early 1960s, when Polke (born in 1941) studied at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts (after leaving East Germany in 1953), West Germany was a cultural wasteland. The viable indigenous activities of the Weimar Republic had yet to be unearthed from the rubble of the various local mimicries of post-Surrealist automatist painting. German variations of Tachism and Informel painting dominated the academies, and the market's attention was split between imports from the old avant-garde center, Paris, and the newly emerging domination of the New York School. Avant-garde culture was a foreign language, whose speakers had French, Italian, or American names. This country that had recently abandoned its own Modernist traditions had become an ideal province for the importation of neo-avantgarde art, and now generated visual strategies of parody and appropriation, gazing at the legacy of Modernism from the outside while adapting to its linguistic standards through quotation. The first exhibition

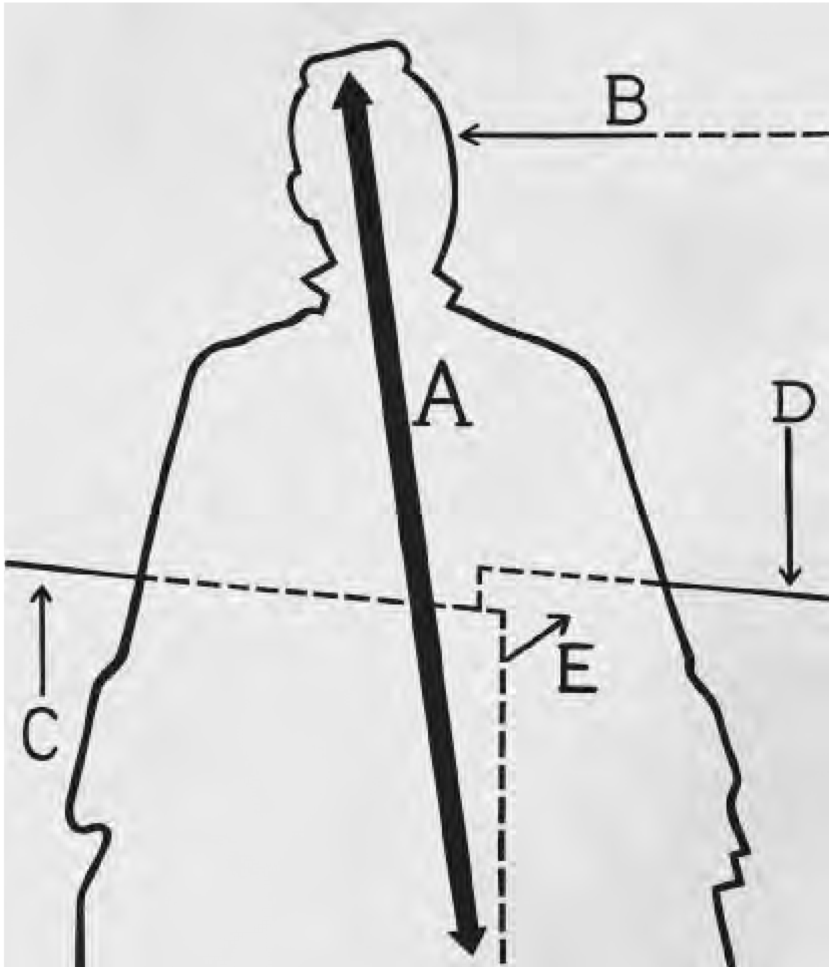
in which Polke participated took place in a rented butcher shop in Düsseldorf in 1963, and grouped him with three other artists. One of them (then a close friend of Polke's) was Gerhard Richter, who has since become known as a key figure in the ironic deconstruction of painting by painting itself. From the very beginning Polke and Richter systematically opposed the inauthentic attempts of neo-Expressionist painters such as Georg Baselitz (who also began working and exhibiting in the early 1960s) to reestablish a local or national continuity of painting, but one that ignored those major developments in twentieth-century German art production after Expressionism that were just about to be rediscovered in the second decade of the postwar period.

Polke and Richter, representing the second generation of the neo-avantgarde in Europe (if we consider Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, and Piero Manzoni to be the first), adopted strategies of appropriation, quotation, and parody in a manner similar to that of the generation of American artists that had rediscovered these strategies as part of a more general understanding of the implications of the works of the Dadaists. Labeled "Pop artists," Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and their generation faced the same historical dilemma as the European neo-avantgarde. The set of problems was not entirely different from the questions posed by the original avant-garde of the period between 1915 and 1925: the blatant contradictions between mass culture and high culture; the extraordinary impact of technical processes of reproduction on the notion of the unique, auratic work; and the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the isolated, elitist practices of high art production and its ultimate powerlessness in attaining readability for mass audiences. In addition, the neo-avantgarde had to contend with the extraordinary increase in visual manipulation brought about by the rise of advertising, photography, cinema, and television. The utopian, naive hopes for a possible reconciliation of the two spheres—which had inspired the writings of the Russian Productivists and the Surrealists, as well as the theoretical reflections of Walter Benjamin (who was indebted to both)—could no longer be maintained after the war.

It was no surprise, then, that within such a seemingly hermetically secured system of product propaganda and ideological stratification the manipulation of

visual signifiers—if they related to objects of reality at all—was performed with an attitude of camp and melancholy, parody and indifference, resignation and indulgence. At the same time, a deeply rooted skepticism toward the validity of the continued production of isolated, high art activities marked the attitude and statements of this generation. When, for example, Lichtenstein talks about his interest in the iconography of the comic strip and Richter talks about his interest in the iconography of amateur photography, both artists refer to the sources that seem to protect their own artistic production from being instantly identified with being merely a high art practice. Criticism of such strategies as being purely affirmative of mass cultural manipulations, and glamorizing collective alienation, fails to ask the crucial questions these strategies raise, and fails to recognize the actual place of these strategies within the tradition of twentieth-century art. Such criticism also fails to take into account the context of the Modernist tradition as contemporary art's proper historical framework, which must be evaluated before art's transgression of its own codes can be discussed. Therefore, it is not accidental that, in the early to mid-1960s, artists such as Lichtenstein and Warhol interchangeably used iconic representations of objects from advertising and "low" commodity culture as much as they did the fetish images from the catalogue of mechanically reproduced works of high art. The same holds true for such European artists of the mid- to late 1960s as Richter, and, in a more programmatic, parodistic fashion, for Polke.

In Germany at that time, Richter and Polke chose the programmatic stance of what they called "Capitalist Realism." The profile of this stance became most poignantly evident during Richter's and Konrad Lueg's *Demonstration for Capitalist Realism* in Düsseldorf (1963), when, for several hours, the two artists placed themselves—as living sculptures—in comfortable chairs on pedestals, in the furniture showroom of a department store. The artists on display epitomized this historical dilemma between high art practice and mass culture, which started with Duchamp and continues right into the present. In Polke's work of that period, this dialectic is concretized in the constant juxtaposition of iconic appropriations from low culture and stylistic appropriations from the signifying practices of high culture. In his large group of "dot" paintings, produced



Roy Lichtenstein, *Portrait of Madame Cézanne,* 1962. Magna on canvas, 68 × 56 in. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Rudolph Burckhardt.

Sigmar Polke, *Untitled* (*Kino*), c. 1968. Gouache, white and black, on cardboard on paper, 29.5 × 27.5 cm. Collection: Städtisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn.

Sigmar Polke, *Portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald,* 1963. Drawing with ben-day-dot screen. Gouache, pencil, rubber stamp, and brush on paper, 94.8 × 69.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

between 1963 and 1969, Polke introduced mechanically generated iconic schemes (found photographs representing stereotypes of perception). These were imposed on his iconic, chromatic, and compositional ordering principles of a rigid, predetermined nature, and enabled him to refrain from almost all "creative" decisions. Yet, this apparently total determination of iconic representation was negated by its actual construction and manual execution in the painting procedure itself. As in Jasper Johns's flag paintings and Lichtenstein's and Richter's paintings of the early 1960s (and in stark contrast to Warhol's production), each pictorial unit is meticulously executed; critical balance is maintained between the mechanically mass-produced icons and the individually crafted brushstroke, juxtaposing reified code and subversive recodification. In much of this work, from Rauschenberg to Polke, the very nature of the procedure of manufacturing individual visual signs denies its own validity as a process of individuation, by limiting itself to a tightly controlled painterly exercise.

On the other hand, in a group of cloth paintings Polke produced during the same period, all of these principles are inverted. Whereas in the "dot" paintings, the particularization of the constituent elements of the visual signifier decomposed the found figure into a molecular field, the "cloth" paintings introduce found materials (black velvet, fake leopard skin, bed sheets, cheap *chinoiserie* silk) as supports. Superimposed on grounds of deliriously bad taste, as in *Polke as Astronaut* for example, we then find gestures of Modernist painting emptied, made futile by parodistic repetition. In these paintings, expressive and constructive gestures (as well as the self-referential brushstroke and the belabored denotative contours of iconic representation) are often arbitrarily placed side by side, becoming abbreviations of historical obsolescence and ostentatious stylistic incompetence. They are reminiscent of the involuntary parodistic accumulation of pictorial styles in late Kandinsky or in early Abstract Expressionist work such as Hans Hofmann's, in which automatism, biomorphism, and geometric abstraction were juggled.

At this point, it might be worthwhile to remember that these were strategies Picabia had fully developed by the 1920s. We see succeeding sets of parodistic appropriations in the various phases of his oeuvre: the carbon copy icons of his mechanical period, and the contour fixations of art historical references in

Sigmar Polke, *Polke als Astronaut,* 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 90 × 75 cm.

his "transparency" series of the mid-1920s (when he traced and trailed the authoritarian tendencies of *retour à l'ordre* Neoclassicism), followed by his mimetic rendition of pornographic imagery from cinematic or product propaganda sources all through the 1930s and into the early 1940s. By that point, Picabia's production had been overtaken by a compulsive return to representation, the reduction of the visual construct and of perceptual apprehension to isolated scopic acts of identifying and repeating outlined prefigurations. This regressive process corresponded to the fascist violation of political life, in which Picabia participated as an artist (and ultimately as a political subject).

Nowadays, the aesthetic neutralization of the political conflict between high culture and mass culture generates the demeaning pleasures of camp appropriations. Bad taste and black velvet are used as supposedly subversive antidotes to the elitist isolation of bourgeois easel painting and its infralinguistic disputes. Yet it seems that camp always ultimately sides with the paternal law, as do all discursive practices that attempt to resolve the conflict of domination by disguising their actual oppositional, historical identity in mockery of the ruling order. As in fashion, defined by Walter Benjamin as the "tiger's leap into the past that happens in an arena which is commanded by the ruling class," the manipulation of a code in stylistic terms alone never leads to the transgression of the code.

Successfully entering the symbolic order of aesthetic language and its conventions, a given style is instantly recognized, commodified, and imitated. But the highly overdetermined language conventions of Modernist art practice allow only for a limited number of meaning operations within Modernism's framework; among them are appropriation and quotation, parody and mimicry. Appropriation of style functions as an arbitrary, but strictly delineated, gesture of symbolic subversion of the original code of the style. To remain recognizable, or to be deciphered as parody, the simulacrum has to follow the outline of the code and must ultimately remain within its limits. However, the relationship between the two structures of codification juxtaposed in a parody can vary from tautological to dialectical, and the mode of quotation established with the object, which quotes from them, can range from undulating, ornamental paraphrase to negation of the validity of the coding convention itself.

As previously noted, a given style is the tacit ideological handshake between an author and the institutions that control the definition and distribution of cultural meaning. Thus style, as the very model of individual identity, ends up being a tool for producing instant cultural alienation. The rigor with which a culture has to protect its hierarchical order and privileges determines the degree to which its art will be stylized and the range of stylistic options that will be admissible. The cynical quotation of the historical limitations of a particular stylistic practice today functions as a reassurance for the validity of that practice. Much parodistic appropriation of style denies the speaker's presence and his or her role in attempting to reveal the obsolescence of the discourse. This parodistic speech borders on style only to negate style's validity. Parody of style, however, is not a reliable position. Its ambiguity and balance can be tilted at any moment, and it can easily turn from subversive mimicry to obedience. The mode of parody denies the notion of individuality as private property, which the practice of style in much other contemporary art production seems to suggest. In fact, parodistic appropriation might ultimately deny the validity of art practice as individuation altogether.

Therefore, the historical place of Polke's work is at a juncture (as was that of late Picabia) and emerges from a moment when the credibility of Modernism is in shambles, and its failure and obsolescence have become all too obvious. But this failure is dictated by the violence of political and economic conditions, not by individual or aesthetic circumstances. If we look at parody from the outside, from a perspective that has left behind the field of petty Modernist jokes, which are duplicated by each generation that spirals along the cul-de-sac of Modernism, then its work looks clownish, enslaved, and despondent; it appears to be lost in desuetude. If we look at parody from the inside, however, it seems to perform liberation with subversive vigor; it seems to battle successfully against the haunting spirits of false consciousness that the socio-cultural practice of visual meaning production—once rightfully called "Modernist art"—nowadays releases. What it fails to claim is the historical option of a perspective that looks at Modernism from the outside, one that insists on reconciling both the individual's constitution in language and ideology, and a foundation in material production and political consciousness.

Readymade, Photography, and Painting in the Painting of Gerhard Richter

> One sees here that solipsism, carried to extremes, coincides with realism.
>
> —*Ludwig Wittgenstein*[1]

In the field of painting, there is hardly anyone today who would not say that painting is merely about painting, nothing else. Talk about painting only refers back to the speaker, who does not use the language of the painter, who has painted and then remained silent. That painting is painting, and that talk about painting has no meaning outside of itself, might be an admissible viewpoint if it did not imply that painting can have nothing to say, but can only be "painting."

Here, as in other disciplines, such empirico-critical positivism overlooks a conspicuous fact: namely, that its acquiescence to such a viewpoint runs counter to its own interests. The painting of Gerhard Richter actually provokes this

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epistemological skepticism. Indeed, the complexity, variety, and contradiction implicit in his working methods and aesthetic ideas are perhaps based on these very epistemological scruples: namely, that if reality is at all knowable, it is only indirectly so, and then only in disparate fragments. The consequence of such inevitably incoherent perspectives is incongruous results.

Thus, it is precisely those critics with no sense of history who have accused his painting of lacking identity or moral engagement, or even of aesthetic cynicism. In contrast, representatives of cultural and ideological interests have praised Richter's painting for its very flexibility, its refusal to be pinned down to any particular position, thereby expressing the relativity of art and, above all, reality. In this way, while evading the actual visual problems posed by Richter's pictures, they contrive to use the reality they represent in order to make some rhetorical and ideological point. Quite contrary to this point of view, and indeed to the general one, an attempt will be made here to interpret the painting of Gerhard Richter as a kind of "pure realism"—perhaps in opposition to many explicit statements made by the artist himself—and to reveal it as the aesthetic outcome of a personal consideration of historical and material processes.

Such a process has been described by Georg Lukács in another context:

> The adventures of subjectivity—if I may be allowed that expression—which, by the very nature of things, always have objective causes and are based on a reflection of reality, often lead to errors. . . . Nevertheless, by such means, definitions of reality can be discovered which could never have been arrived at by then current logical thought processes, and whose theoretical nature would, in such a situation, have been unascertainable.[2]

Historical and Biographical Outline

> Thus our present historical situation still clearly shows how social institutions persist as forces independent of the people who produced them. As long as this situation exists, it remains our duty to make

> man the master of his own history by recognizing and eliminating these contexts of alienation and reification.[3]

It was in Dresden, the old metropolis of Saxo-Prussian culture (and at whose famous Academy Caspar David Friedrich was refused the chair of landscape painting in 1824), that Gerhard Richter, having already worked as a commercial artist and photographic assistant, began his studies as a painter. Picasso, who as member of the French Communist Party had attended the Congress for World Peace in Breslau in 1948, was one of the few contemporary artists whose work, in the form of reproductions and in various publications, was circulating in the German socialist state. He was the first artistic model for this typical twenty-year-old student at the Academy. In 1961, having completed his education in the tradition of "Socialist Realism," he left the German Democratic Republic. By this time he had acquired a sound knowledge of Russian and a certain competence with representational painting, which he had tried to put into the service of socialist progress (cf. his mural in the Museum of Hygiene, Dresden). In 1961, after his arrival in the West, he again took up his study of painting at the Düsseldorf Academy—an institution no less steeped in tradition than Dresden's. At the time of his arrival, it had become a sort of annex of the Ecole de Paris; indeed, the painting of Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet were important new influences that Richter had to digest, whereas he regarded with some skepticism the enthusiastic reception West Germans accorded to Yves Klein, a typical artist of the neo-avantgarde.

By that time, Richter was already more interested in the activities of Fluxus and the Happenings of young American artists. Given the relationship between artistic and social activity and the artist's attitude toward himself, political realities, and the general state of knowledge and technical reproduction, their ideas corresponded much more to his than did the egocentric mystifications of Georges Mathieu or Klein or Joseph Beuys. In marked contrast to these artists, artists of the Fluxus and the Happening movements were not content merely to accept the aesthetic consequences of Surrealism and of Marcel Duchamp; they also wanted to see the theoretical and socio-political implications of their positions—customarily suppressed as they were received into the body of art

Gerhard Richter, *Triple Portrait: Picasso, Fougeron, Gerasimov,* 1959.

Gerhard Richter, *Demonstration for Capitalist Realism,* 1963. Courtesy of the artist.

history—implemented and developed. In this context, the first public exhibition organized by Richter, in 1963 in Düsseldorf with Konrad Lueg and titled *Demonstration for Capitalist Realism,* might be seen, with some justification, as a programmatic rejection of the dominant aesthetic modes of the time and as Richter's first independent response to the confusion that art or "monochrome mysticism" had aroused in him. This event, which lasted for an evening, displayed the contents of a West German furniture store and, installed in a special room, the artists themselves perched on white pedestals as *living sculptures*. By all accounts this seems to have been the first explicit postwar investigation of the applicability of Marcel Duchamp's concept of the readymade within the contemporary German situation.

Conception and Reception of the Readymade

Demonstration for Capitalist Realism embodied references to two other attempts to radicalize the concept of the readymade under changed historical conditions. The first was Piero Manzoni's *Scultura vivente* and his "magic pedestal" of 1961: by the artist's decree, individuals could be transformed into "living sculptures" and indeed all objects could be endowed with the status of a work of art merely by placing them on a pedestal. The second was Claes Oldenburg's *Store* activities, also in 1961, in which he rented a Lower East Side store front and in it arranged replicas of everyday objects—in the form of painted sculpture—in a new order that served as a stage for Happenings as well as an exhibition of his works. As Joseph Masheck wrote, Duchamp himself had foreseen that the category of the readymade would be extended until it embraced the whole galaxy of objects with which we are surrounded.[4] In this context, the question of the direct influence of Duchamp's ideas on art of the early 1960s is less compelling than their dissemination through the medium of Happenings and the activities of Fluxus artists and Nouveaux Réalistes, and above all, through the work of John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg. It is against this entire background that Richter decided to choose, as material for his own aesthetic activity, a specific type of "given" everyday reality: the amateur photograph.

It must be understood that the conception of the readymade and its reception were, in some ways, quite contradictory phenomena. What may have represented a radical epistemological position in 1913 need not, fifty years later, necessarily meet with a reception that welcomed innovation. It is certainly not here that we find fulfillment of the prophecy with which Guillaume Apollinaire in 1913 ended his essay on Marcel Duchamp: "Perhaps it will be the destiny of an artist like Marcel Duchamp, who is as little concerned with aesthetic problems as he is much concerned with energy, to reconcile art and the people."[5]

What may have been a materialist conception of the world of things in 1913 may, in its reception, degenerate into a reified idealist conception. It is against this distortion of his concept, rather than against the artist himself, that the critical controversy about Duchamp ensued among European and American artists. Richter's *Demonstration for Capitalist Realism,* his painting of *Ema* (*Nude on a Staircase*) (1966), and his *4 Panes of Glass* (1967) are all dialectic negations of the historical reception of the readymade. Richter's *Ema* is a key picture in the development of his continuing dialogue with Duchamp: it makes explicit reference to the "last" of Duchamp's "perceptual paintings" (in fact, *Nude Descending a Staircase* is not Duchamp's last painting, but it is his most important one before his transition to the readymade). Further, like all of Richter's paintings from photographs, it is an explicit reflection of painting as a readymade. Richter's contemporary, Daniel Buren, defined this position of reflecting painting with the means of the readymade in his manifesto "Mise en garde" (1969):

> The "concept" exhibited becomes an "ideal object," which is returned to us in the form of art—that is to say, it becomes the illusion of something and not the thing itself. In the same way as writing becomes ever less the mere transcription of the word, so painting should no longer be the mere illusion/vision—not even mental—of a phenomenon (natural, subconscious, geometric), but the VISUALITY of the painting itself. So we arrive at a concept which is more akin to a method than to any kind of inspiration—a method which requires, in order to frontally attack the problem of the object

Gerhard Richter, *Ema* (*Nude on a Staircase*), 1966. Oil on canvas, 200 × 130 cm. Collection: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and Museum Ludwig, Köln. Courtesy of the artist.

> so-called, that painting itself create a method, a specific system, which would not dictate how to look, but would be made for looking at.[6]

With his *4 Panes of Glass,* in an explicit relationship to Duchamp, Richter achieves a complete dialectic reversal of the specific possibilities of the object. The *4 Panes of Glass* negate the new mystification of painting, which—by a detour—had accumulated in the *Large Glass.* Just as Richter had disputed the present-day viability of the readymade through the medium of painting in *Ema,* here, by means of the object itself, Richter denies painting any dimension of speculative transcendence. Without referring to the entire tradition of the representation of windows in pictures or of pictures *as* windows from the time of the Renaissance, a typological lineage in the twentieth century could easily be established, of which Richter's *4 Panes of Glass* forms a part. This lineage would begin in the twentieth century with Robert Delaunay's series of *Windows,* which Joseph Masheck has described as a kind of "conceptual precursor" of Duchamp's *Large Glass;* and it would continue with Francis Picabia's *Elle corrige les moeurs en riant* (1915), which could already be seen as an ironic paraphrase of Duchamp's complicated *Mariée,* begun the same year. In Picabia's work, the two halves of the glass panes—which, in the Duchamp work, are those of the bride and her bachelors—can be easily moved in their metal frame. The lineage continues through Ellsworth Kelly's *Window, Museum of Modern Art Paris* (1949) which, in reducing the problem of rendering the transparency of the window to a problem of painterly rendering and form, has already turned its back on Duchamp. Richter accomplishes this in his *4 Glass Panes* in an even more radical fashion. The piece refers to nothing beyond itself and its own concrete and material objectivity, thereby directing spectators' attention back on to themselves. By the position of each of the panes, as well as by the almost infinite sum of possible positions and indeterminate relations they can establish among themselves, the object defines itself as the sum of its unlimited and equivalent compositional possibilities.

This sets Richter's *4 Panes of Glass* in the historical context of Minimal sculpture which, at the same time, was trying to transform Pollock's pictorial principle of "all-over" painting into terms of sculptural space. As serial elements

Gerhard Richter, *4 Panes of Glass,* 1967. Four glass panels in steel frames, each 190 × 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

in space, the *4 Panes of Glass* renounce the qualities of hieratic uniqueness and transcendental mystification attached to Duchamp's *Large Glass,* and the work positions itself as an architectural presence in space. This presence makes viewers' subjective responses the focal point of the work. The seemingly insoluble schism in art brought about by Duchamp—between a willful aesthetic act on the one hand, and the world of immutable objectivity on the other—also informs the dialectic of these works by Richter.

Thus we could argue from the start that the concept of the readymade, the iconography of photography, and the practice of painting form the three basic constituents—with their dialectically contradictory links and yet their overall unity—of Richter's painting. To the extent that he succeeds in manipulating the conventional materials of painting in a photographic readymade in a traditional manner (oil on canvas on stretcher, figurative representation, composition, tonal and chromatic values), he unravels their specific dialectic. More concretely, just as the technical perfection of the painting can make us forget that we are looking at a painted photograph, so, in the same way, can this illusionistic and figurative painting cause us to fail to recognize that we are witnessing an exercise in the practice of painting. Moreover, the successful unity of the two procedures might lead us to believe that we are looking at a traditional picture when, in fact, conceptually speaking we are looking at a painted readymade. It is in this sense that we must interpret Richter's apocryphal—and hence often misunderstood—observation:

> It is not a question of imitating a photograph. I want to actually make a photograph. And because I want to go beyond the idea of photography conceived merely as a piece of light-sensitive paper, I make photographs with other means—not just pictures which are derived from photographs. The same holds true for pictures (abstracts, etc.) which, without a photographic model, produce photographs.[7]

For however much spectators try to conventionalize Richter's pictorial project, they are forced to recognize that it is precisely the traditional assumptions about

painting that elude them most of all. The status of the objects (painted photographs) to which Richter has reduced his paintings does not allow us to move in the direction of convention: indeed, the degree of convention his pictures allow us is as misleading as our desire for it. On the other hand, the appearance of perceptual illusion Richter confers on his painted photographs facilitates a contemplation of the status of unconscious reification. Is it possible to speculate that in Richter's work, photographic representation has become the signifier but painting is its signified?

Photography and Painting

> There is no doubt that nature, as it manifests itself to the camera, is different from nature as it manifests itself to the human eye; different above all, in that for a perceptual space permeated by human consciousness is substituted one which is not.
>
> —*Walter Benjamin*[8]

In a historical era whose particular vision is determined by a collective tendency to examine the past through photography, which is always presented as the most empirical of all the media, it is difficult to preserve a critical distance with regard to the camera. "La soupe de Daguerre"[9] was the name given several years ago by Marcel Broodthaers to this spiritual regression toward a false objectification. Photography not only gives presence to what already exists but, by its participation in the past, confers upon it an additional degree of authenticity. It thereby serves to justify and preserve the status quo.

Over the entrance leading to the studio of Eugène Atget hung a sign inscribed "Documents for artists." This underestimation of his own métier was complemented, at the other extreme, by the overestimation of photography by an "establishment" artist, when Delaroche supposedly exclaimed on seeing some early photographs in 1839: "From today, painting is dead." The relationship between painting and photography has oscillated between these two extremes of respect and contempt right up to the present day. Even if now there is an in-

creased tendency to overestimate the importance of the photographic medium, it would be wrong to think that this recent predilection for images having the greatest fidelity to nature bears witness to a general, realistic (or rather, materialist) recognition of the natural and historical conditions of perception. On the contrary, it is one of the fatal dangers of the photographic medium that it peculiarly lends itself to the interests of ideology, on the basis of its high degree of illusionism.

In addition to its tautological grip on reality, photography can supply another power of suggestion: namely, by producing as a reality effect what is absent in space and time, thereby displacing the actual perception of the "real." As Gisèle Freund stated:

> When, for the first time, photography was celebrating its debut in the framework of the "Grande exposition internationale" of 1855, and the public was admiring faithful copies of reality, this same public boycotted the paintings of the first "realists," although their aims apparently expressed the same tendencies. For a painter like Courbet, whose works bore the signature "Courbet sans religion et sans idéal," there was no place available in any Salon. It was at his own expense that he installed a gallery in the Avenue Montaigne, over whose entrance was flaunted the word "Réalisme."[10]

It seems therefore appropriate to place the painting of Richter in the tradition of painterly Realism. Indeed, the principles and conditions of a pictorial realism have developed as a function of the change undergone by the conditions of the material production of reality and, along with these, the forms of our perception. The complex history of the influence of photography on painting cannot be traced here, especially since photography is essentially defined in terms of the different forms in which it is used, and, in ways that are very divergent, if not contradictory. It is one of these various forms, the amateur or reportage photograph (quantitatively the most important form) that Richter used for his pictorial practice in paintings he produced between 1962 and 1966.

Among the different forms and methods by which painting has utilized photography, Richter's practice must be considered in its historical specificity. Just as it refers to a particular status of photography, it also refers to a particular condition of painting. Given our present state of scientific knowledge, it is difficult to conceive that painting could ally itself with photography in its conception of nature, as Delacroix, with increasing conviction, had recommended: "Painting ought to use photography as a 'dictionary of nature,' which should be carefully consulted." This Positivistic and confident naturalism, prevalent in the early period of photography (which, incidentally, corresponded perfectly to the conception of nature of this epoch of expanding industrialism), overlooked one basic fact of human activity as an annexation of nature: that in so doing, it transformed it into culture. The same holds true for photography, whose relationship to nature was described by Siegfried Kracauer: "Photographers do not merely copy nature, but transform it in transposing it as a three-dimensional phenomenon onto a two-dimensional plane, thereby dissolving its contacts with its environment and substituting black, gray, and white for the natural play of colors."[11]

For Richter, photography—or, to be more exact, the sum total of anonymous, everyday photographs, whether amateur or reportage, which, random though their subjects may be, join to constitute his iconography—should rather be used as a "dictionary of culture." In his painting, Richter is concerned with studying the collective conditions of perception, and endeavoring to demonstrate the indissoluble link between culturally conditioned elements and the natural process of perception. His painting thus poses the question as to which components—if any—of the normal process of perception could be revealed as primary and unconditioned.

There is a second element essential to photography: it transposes a lived reality into history, fixing it in a reproduction by simultaneously rescuing from time what was doomed to oblivion and reintegrating it into the present as an artificial presence. In his "Rhétorique de l'image," Roland Barthes has formulated this process and its effect: "Thus, in photography, we are dealing with a new category of the dimension space-time: instantaneous in space and past in time. In photography, an illogical link between the now and the then is forged . . . the

'has been' encroaches on the 'is now.'"[12] Although this conflict can hardly be interpreted as a fundamental principle of all artistic practice, it has, since Dada and Surrealism, been at the very center of aesthetic debates. Both the strategy of the readymade concept and the surrealist use of the *objet trouvé* (cf. the title of Picabia's picture, *Révérence:* an object which has nothing to do with respect for the past) were attempts to eliminate, by aesthetic means, the growing separation between the life of the unconscious and of mnemonic experience on the one hand and communicative action, directed toward the transformation of actually existing conditions in the real, on the other. It was only logical that artists like Richter, analyzing in the early 1960s the state of affairs in the aftermath of the avant-garde, should abandon the world of objects and turn to the investigation of reified forms of perception in photography. Already in 1964, Max Kozloff had drawn attention to this shift from the object to photography and the analogous development in the paintings of Robert Rauschenberg. He did not, however, analyze the question of the underlying motivation: "The fact that Rauschenberg now incorporates all sorts of journalistic photographs in his pictures by means of silk-screen techniques as if they were concrete objects, has subtly altered the meaning and the importance of photography in our lives."[13] If we compare Kozloff's remarks with those of Richter during this period, we clearly see how similar artists' positions on photography were at the beginning of the 1960s: "I wanted to do something which had nothing to do with art as I knew it, nothing to do with painting, composition, color, invention, design, etc." Richter's statements sound like a reinitiation of the concept of the readymade, transposed from the world of objects to the plane of perception and of object reification in photography:

> The photograph, which plays such an enormous part in everyday life, took me by surprise. Suddenly I could see it quite differently: as an image which, deprived of all the conventional criteria which I had till then associated with art, provided me with a new way of seeing. It had no style, no composition, it was not judgmental, it liberated me from my personal experience. It had, in fact, nothing: it was pure

> image. That is why I wanted to possess it, to show it, not use it as a vehicle for painting, but use painting as a vehicle for photography.[14]

In the same way that Richter uses photography under the artistic auspices of the readymade concept, the practice also reflects historically specific conditions of amateur and journalistic photographs. In fact, from a traditional vantage point, nothing could appear less "artistic" than the work of the amateur photographer, of whom Pierre Bourdieu says: "he demands the greatest possible number of operations from the machine, instead of his own subjectivity, identifying the degree of perfection of the machine with his own degree of automatic action."[15]

It is difficult to think of a better dictionary of the history of collective perception than the amateur photograph.[16] If photography as "has been" encroaches on (or is in conflict with) the "is now," then it must be said that only a certain "is now" makes compulsive use of the instrument of photography in order to preserve the memory of the past. Industrial technology has, through the medium of the photographic image, given to the historically disinherited masses the possibility of securing photographic semblance of their experience. Therefore, the photographs of amateurs are memory aids in their struggle against temporal destruction, as well as trophies of amateurs' lived lives. Since it is the vocation of photography to immortalize time and to celebrate the individual's experience, it cannot abandon itself to the hazards of the individual fantasy. On the contrary, it must obey the fixed rules of perceptual schemata as they are transmitted in collective practice: "One cannot photograph what ought not to be photographed" (Pierre Bourdieu).

Just as amateur photography is defined by its need to possess time, it equally determines the experience of space and material reality. Of all the qualities that characterize the material world, photography appropriates only the visual aspects of surfaces that are apparent at the moment the photograph is taken. Thus, it is a mechanical realization of a specific perception of space—an automatically enacted vision of central perspective, as it were. It is precisely because of this specific manner of reproducing spatio-temporal relations that photography can

become a substitute for the real world. Our habitual ways of seeing are projected onto the substitute. In this way, amateur photography must be considered to be among those social practices that have mediated between subjective pathology and its rituals and the objective norms of adaptation. This aspect was equally recognized by Kracauer when he wrote:

> Perhaps something might be said here on the subject of the possible role of melancholia in photography. . . . The melancholic sensibility does not feel itself attracted only to elegiac subjects, but is marked by another important characteristic: it is drawn to self-alienation, which in its turn involves identification with a considerable number of objects. The melancholic person strives involuntarily to lose himself in the contingent events of the world surrounding him; and he absorbs them with an intensity which has nothing to do with personal inclination or predilection. His receptivity is like that of the photographer in Proust who plays the role of a stranger.[17]

It is against this background of amateur photography, as a particular historical stage of photographic technique, that Richter's paintings must be seen. These convert the elements of common perception from the spatio-temporal appropriation of the photographic image into an objective material perception. They convert this detemporalized and this de-materialized spatiality back into real time and real space. We see the operation of painting, color, canvas, and frame. The act of painting restores perception's lost objectivity. Richter has himself described the functional nature of his pictures: "I have no aesthetic problem, and the actual method used is unimportant. No one picture is distinct from another, and I shall change techniques whenever necessary."[18]

It is only in this sense that the totally arbitrary choice of Richter's photographic subjects can be understood. Yet, naturally, this arbitrariness carries the marks of the systematic character of stereotyped perception against which it is directed. Certain formal elements are always inevitably maintained: the central position of the hieratic figures, the hierarchic composition of the group, the visual

Gerhard Richter, *Sailors,* 1966. Oil on canvas, 150 × 200 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Gerhard Richter, *Great Sphinx of Gizeh,* 1964. Oil on canvas, 150 × 170 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

devices of these photographic rituals for the preservation of time or of experienced space in the amateur's photographs of exceptional places or landscapes.

Pierre Bourdieu has observed that landscapes photographed by tourists never really refer to landscape, but rather to the amateur photographer's experience associated with them. In an astonishing way, this corresponds to the groups of colored landscapes Richter has executed since 1968, using his own photographs as a working basis.

There have been many attempts to place Richter's landscapes in the historical context of German Romantic landscape painting (such as the painting of Caspar David Friedrich, whom Richter greatly admires). This phenomenon owes its historic dynamism to real situations of imposed restrictions and opposition that did not permit the realization of subjectivity in actual life. Otherwise, how are we to explain that in Friedrich's landscapes, the figures turn their backs on reality (the reality of the viewer), and that one cannot see their faces, completely turned, as they are, toward the infinity of the landscape? In the landscapes of Richter, figures have disappeared. On the subject of his relationship to German Romanticism, Richter has said: "I simply think that we have not yet got over the Romantic epoch. The pictures of that period still constitute a part of our sensibility . . . if not, we would no longer look at them. Romanticism is far from dead. Exactly like fascism."[19]

Consciousness of history, and of the laws by which it becomes photographically transformed into reality, appears also in Richter's pictures made from photojournalistic sources. This becomes even clearer in the extensive work, *48 Portraits,* which Richter executed in 1971–1972 for the West German pavilion at the Venice Biennale. This first important work since 1966, which again uses "found" photographs, no longer draws on the history of collective perception but rather directly on the "dictionary" of history itself: portrait-photographs of historical personalities. Certainly their selection is based on criteria that clearly define the series iconographically: all the figures included are people who left a profound mark upon their time, either in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. All the portraits are of men, including poets, writers, philosophers, a physicist, musicians, and psychologists, but no artists or politicians. Richter explained

Gerhard Richter, *48 Portraits,* 1971–1972. Installation at the German Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, 1972. Oil on canvas, each 70 × 55 cm. Collection: Museum Ludwig, Köln. Courtesy of the artist.

Gerhard Richter, *Franz Kafka* from *48 Portraits*.

his selection on the grounds that he could not have portrayed other painters, because then there would have arisen the possible misunderstanding that he was paying homage to certain precursors in painting. Beyond that, however, the choice of portraits within these professional categories is so contradictory that it does not allow any conclusion to be drawn as to the reasons for inclusion, randomly combining Mahler and Puccini, Kafka and Rilke.

The criterion of selection—apart from the random chances of availability, physiognomic attraction, etc.—was, primarily the "paintability" of the dictionary-portraits. Out of a possible seventy, Richter eventually chose forty-eight portraits (according to criteria of pictorial quality) for his installation at the pavilion of the Biennale. The plan of this installation was based on a simple formal principle: in the center, a frontal portrait (the physicist Blackett), while the adjoining portraits to the left, pictured in up to three-quarters profile, all looked, to varying degrees, in that direction; those to the right completed the row of portraits symmetrically, but faced in the opposite direction.

Here again, an unusually "communicative" iconographic program is ordered by quite simple and rigid principles of execution and arrangement; and the serial, repetitive spatial arrangement of the work, which lends it a minimal, architectural quality, stands in glaring contradiction to the iconographic eloquence of the painted photo-portraits. This dialectic, between plastic-pictorial presence and iconic-photographic absence, and this perpetual changing of the past and the present all conducted in one and the same picture, leads—like all constellations of interwoven absence and presence—to the essence of the work as a monumental enigma, whose questions, set in the course of history, unresolved in the present, remain to be answered.

The Painting of Painting

> One must believe in what one is doing. One must be really engaged in order to be a painter. Once obsessed by it, one eventually gets to the point where one thinks that humanity could be changed by painting. But when that passion deserts you, there is nothing else left

> to do. Then it is better to stop it altogether. Because basically painting is pure idiocy.[20]

All Richter's work manifests a structural opposition concerning the practice of pictorial means, a polarity found not only in each individual work but also in the complementarity of his groups. Although it is difficult to classify the innumerable differentiations of this polarity, some of its specific characteristics can be determined, such as the morphological polarity of the subjects represented, as seen in the stark impasto applications of the *Cityscapes,* opposed by the diffuse and diaphanous transparency of the *Cloudpictures*. Another opposition is evident in Richter's argument that one mode of working is as good as another: "A painting of color chips is no different from a little green landscape. Both reflect the same fundamental attitude. The attitude alone is decisive."[21]

Richter's paintings, as a means of representing the phenomenon of reality as well as the phenomenon of perception, run the whole gamut of possible reciprocal relations between the pictorial signifier and the signified. The indices of represented reality and the indices of the reality of the representation are interwoven with each other in various arrangements. What appears blurred is, in fact, the very precision of the self-reflexive pictorial practice: "What we call blurred is imprecision, that is to say something quite different if one compares it with the real object represented. But since paintings are not painted in order to be compared with reality, they cannot be blurred, nor imprecise, nor different from (different from what?). How could paint on canvas be blurred?"[22]

The evolution of Richter's production as a painter reveals the simultaneous existence of two opposed types of work. On the one hand, in the group of illusionistic works *Curtains* (1965), *Corrugated Iron* (1967), *Tubes* (1967), and *Shadow Pictures* (1968), we witness the fallacy of all representational painting in its claim to reunite representation by illusionistic efforts with the represented. On the other hand, in the series of *Details* (1970–1971), the attempt to offer the means of representation as the real itself leads to perceptual (and conceptual) tautology. In contrast, the *Finger Paintings* (1970), the *Untitled Green Pictures* (1971), and the *Blurred Paintings* (1973) lose their appearance of objective density—in

contrast to the painted photographs, of which they are the complete reverse—but they gain in terms of the autonomy of pictorial discourse. This autonomy borders on the grotesque (in the original sense of the term, signifying a type of ornament). The emptiness of their discourse is the price they have to pay to obtain the pure identity of representation; and it is only in turning to the grotesque that they find their balance. (Their perfection lies precisely in their controlled proximity to idiocy, whereas the perfection of the painted photographs is in their controlled proximity to ideology.) In his "Aesthetik des Hässlichen" (The Aesthetics of Ugliness) (1853), Karl Rosenkranz already drew attention to this "empty discourse" as being an aesthetic possibility:

> If contemplation is empty to the extent that we notice the time as time, we experience the lack of content of unadulterated time, and this feeling is boredom. This is, therefore, not at all comic in itself, but it marks the turning point where things become comic, when the tautological element and the boredom produced become parodies of themselves, or even irony.[23]

As in his manipulation of the iconic and in his epistemological reflection, Richter proves to be, in the immediate practice of his painting, a dialectician. To the extent that he succeeds in making his painting act against the reifying function of the copy and of the reproduction—without, however, depriving painting of its claim to knowledge of reality—his painted photographs can be regarded as discourses filled with reality (devoid of any subjective expression). Yet, at the same time, it is exactly in his autonomous pictorial discourse that his language becomes transformed into an empty language (full of objective irony). He refrains from that inverted reification of painting which results from the reduction of painting to its expressive functions.

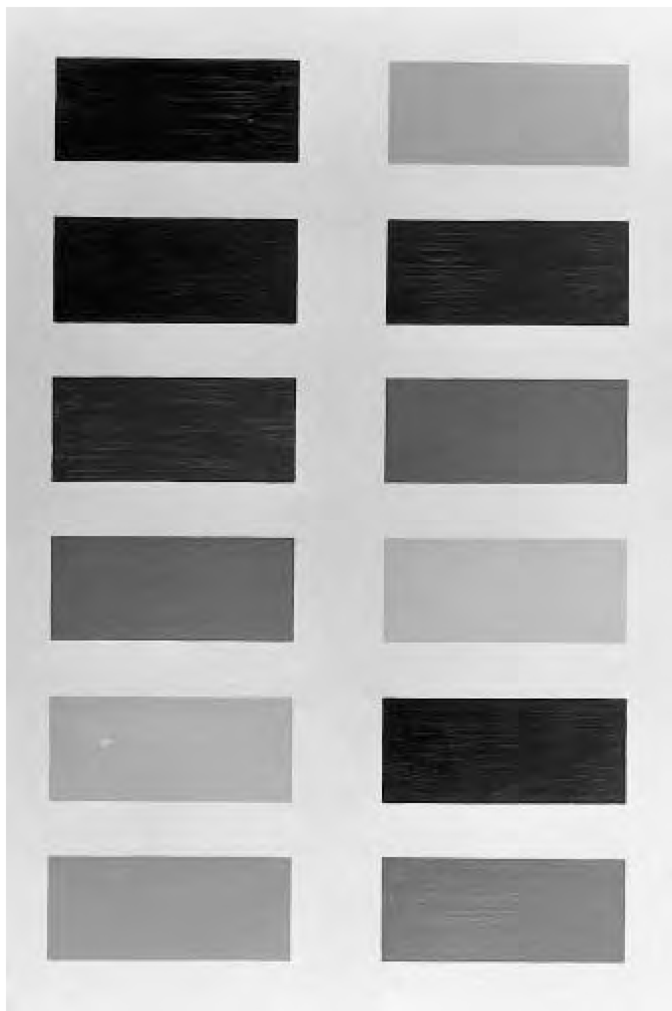
It is in this, precisely, that he is fundamentally distinct from the (German) tradition of Expressionist painting, which is much appreciated again in our own times—a sign of a general regression. This tradition reduces painting to an exclusively expressive function. It is the product of a consciousness that fails to

perceive the historical determination of its own condition. It destroys the complex range of aesthetic functions precisely to the extent that it adapts itself, unconditionally, to this role of expression. What could possibly qualify as the authentic expression of free subjectivity if this subjectivity can be acquired only at the price of a loss of all objective reality? Conversely, it can be said that recent forms of pictorial reification, peculiar to the self-reflexive modernist discourse of painting, in pretending to attain pictorial objectivity in fact renounced that objectivity long ago. They have degenerated into an objectivist rhetoric, without having maintained the slightest trace of the subject of subjectivity.

Richter's work reveals the action of these antagonisms in all their forms and acts out before our very eyes an essential dilemma of plastic language that applies equally, as Roland Barthes has shown, to language in general:

> It is true that ideologism resolves the contradiction of alienated reality by an amputation, not a synthesis. . . . It seems that this is a difficulty pertaining to our times: there is as yet only one possible choice, and this choice can bear only on two equally extreme methods: either to posit a reality which is entirely permeable to history, and ideologize; or, conversely, to posit a reality which is *ultimately* impenetrable, irreducible, and, in this case, poeticize. In a word, I do not yet see a synthesis between ideology and poetry (by poetry, I understand, in a very general way, the search for the inalienable meaning of things).[24]

Among Richter's works of the 1970s, two groups of pictures emphasize this opposition more than the others: the series of *Color Charts* (1971–1973) and the series of *Gray Pictures* (1972–1975). These two series may be considered complementary groups of works, and have been developing in the context of Richter's painting since 1966. The first, *Farbtafelbild* ("color chart picture") appeared in 1966, and belongs historically to the transitional phase in which the iconography of Pop art was exhausted, establishing elementary forms as those most important for the plastic arts—forms often taken from the context of



Gerhard Richter, *Twelve Colors,* 1966. Industrial enamel on canvas, 150 × 110 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

everyday life, like Jim Dine's *Color Chart* (1963) and Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* (1964). With the exception of *Ema,* dating from the same period, Richter's *Color Charts* are the first paintings in which he uses color. These are also the first of Richter's pictures to cease addressing the problem of photographic representation and its relationship to the referent. For the first time, the one and the other seem congruent, although the color chart paintings, using the chart as iconographic material, still establish an illustrative rapport, which is precisely what gives the pictures their ironic ambivalence.

But already the third of the *Color Charts,* called *192 Colors,* departs from this model. In it, color acquires autonomy as a pictorial element, in the same way that later the graphic gestural element would detach itself formally from the context of representation or expression. Color no longer functions here as part of a system of denotative chromatic values; nor does it adhere to the model followed by theoreticians and practitioners of color who once claimed to have discovered color's scientific exactitude.[25]

In 1971, Richter again took up the theme of color samples. This resulted in two large series devoted to a systematic examination of the random arrangement of colors (*4 Color Charts of 180 Colors* and *20 Smaller Color Charts of 9 Colors,* 1971). An essential characteristic of these pictures is their format (800 x 200 cm) and the division of the colors into a scale of 180 tones. In effect, the serial but random field formed by the arrangement of the colors into equal series of rectangles of the same size—as equal, isolated elements—approaches a spatial and architectural universality. This could be convincingly achieved only if color acquired autonomy from its traditional symbolic or expressive function, if it became independent from all compositional or proportional hierarchies and functioned as a material element of painting, revealing itself in its pure tautological materiality as painted color (on canvas). The passage from quantity, as constituted by the serial arrangement of colored surfaces, to a quality of elementary spatiality—concretely realized by the number and size of the supports—is systematically represented in a group of five pictures: *Color Fields* (1973–1974). Integrating a quantitative and qualitative progressive element (in this case the division and multiplication of each color by four) and the quantitative spatial el-

ement of permutation (the number of possible arrangements of colors limited to 1,024, which could result in an almost infinite number, arising from the division into three—or, in Richter's case, four—of the fundamental colors) into a plastic principle, Richter demonstrates through painting the elementary material principles of the absolute equivalence of all chromatic qualities. Concerning these four pictures, titled collectively *1024 Colors in 4 Permutations,* he himself wrote in 1973, "The kind of artificial naturalism is something which fascinates me; like the fact that, if I had painted all the possible permutations, light would have needed more than 400 billion years to go from the first to the last picture. I wanted to paint four great multicolored pictures."[26]

In contrast, the *Gray Pictures,* painted by Richter since 1972, could be seen as a complementary group to the *Color Charts* and the *Color Fields,* which he has planned and worked on simultaneously since 1966. On the subject of gray, which, since his first pictures in 1962, dominated practically all his work, Richter said: "Of all colors, only gray has the quality of representing nothing." This noncolor would therefore constitute another element in the strategy to abolish all the specific and historically determined expectations concerning the elements of pictorial production. However, this desire to represent "nothing" in fact represents the radical negation of the historically defined, representational value of color, and becomes the representation of the materiality of autonomous color. But to the extent that the *Color Fields* "suspended" the expressive and local qualities of the phenomenon of color, emphasizing their pure material quality, the *Gray Pictures* succeeded in removing the historically determined qualities of pictorial practice as gestural activity—whether that gesture is expressive-subjectivist or self-reflexive and analytically objective.

In the same way that the permutation of his serial color fields confers, on pictures characterized by the pure autonomy of the materiality of color, a formal *Gestalt* that is neutral and objective (identical series of equal rectangles), so the *Gray Pictures* define themselves as works of a pure pictorial practice in a chromatic *Gestalt* that is neutrally and objectively colored in monochrome gray. At the moment of the negation of a pictorial element and its historical qualities, Richter always adds a complementary element: painting as autonomous color appears here

Gerhard Richter, *Untitled* (*Gray*), 1968. Oil on canvas, 50 × 50 cm. Collection: Museum Folkwang, Essen, on permanent loan Sammlung Onnasch, Berlin. Courtesy of the artist.

in the negation of gestural form; autonomous painting as gestural form appears in the negation of all qualifications of color. It is through this double negation that the *Color Fields* and the *Gray Pictures* acquire their identity, which leads them out of the dialectic of empty and full discourse (out of the relationship in painting between ideology and idiocy), conferring on them a linguistic objectivity of pictorial form.

Richter's so-called *Abstract Paintings*—a series that originated around 1976 and has since undergone a number of subtle transformations—have elicited, on numerous occasions and in particular from American viewers, questions concerning their historical place and their aesthetic attitude. Responses range from the argument that his attitude is that of the quintessentially postmodern painter (since 1962) to the argument that his paintings look like second-generation Abstract Expressionist painting.

While the first argument suggests that paraphrase and citation, parody and repetition are the tropes of Richter's painterly rhetoric, the second one (an obvious but telling misperception) suggests that his dilemma is, simultaneously, that of a latecomer and virtuoso: to have mastered a craft and a skill at a moment in history when the practices of visual meaning production have already moved on to other contingencies requiring different techniques, and where the meaning produced by the belatedly acquired virtuoso performance generates an empty discourse.

But Richter's language is neither: he is not the omniscient author-painter, who easily commands the past practices of painting and subjects them at will to the needs of the present (like the cynicism of certain so-called postmodern architects, for example); nor is he the convinced practitioner of a craft whose moment of rediscovery has not yet come (like the rediscovery of obsolete expressionist and figurative modes of painting that emerged in the late seventies against all normative aesthetic logic). To resolve this dilemma, the obvious answer would be to argue that a supreme irony is at work in Richter's painterly production. Yet any attempt by the astute observer to view the *Abstract Paintings* in those terms would surely reveal that irony is not Richter's mode of thinking and painting, any more than it is the mode of Ryman's work, for example. The series

of *Abstract Paintings* emerged, according to Richter's own testimony, as a response to the series of large-format monochrome gray paintings that were produced by semi-mechanical painting procedures (rollers, sponges) in 1975. Richter has described the gray paintings as "the most complete ones I could imagine." For him, the gray monochrome paintings were

> the welcome and only correspondence to indifference, to a lack of conviction, the negation of commitment, anomie. After the gray paintings, after the dogma of "Fundamental Painting," whose purist and moralizing aspects fascinated me to a degree bordering on self-denial, all I could do was to start all over again. This was the beginning of the first "color sketches," conceived in complete openness and uncertainty under the premise of "multi-chromatic and complicated," which obviously meant the opposite of anti-painting and of painting that doubts its proper legitimacy.[27]

Thus it seems that Richter, in 1976, abandoned his previous position as one of the most radical painters of the European neo-avantgarde: a painter who had challenged, with each series he initiated, received ideas about painting in general as well as about his art in particular, by confronting his viewers on each occasion with a *volte-face*. But this time, so it seemed, the conversion of 1976 was not one that remained faithful to the parameters that had been established, since 1913, as the critique of the institution of art by the means of artistic production. Those very ideas about a pictorial practice of self-reflection and self-referentiality were explicitly rejected when Richter said: "there is no color on canvas that means nothing but itself and nothing beyond it, otherwise the *Black Square* by Malevich would just be a silly coat of paint." While Richter seems to reject the aesthetic positions of the 1960s, which clearly had been his own, it is revealing that, in the discussion of the implicit meaning of monochrome painting, he refers to Malevich, the first painter in the long and complicated history of monochrome painting who associated the decision to paint a monochrome central pictorial figure with a spiritual and metaphysical explanation. Already, Malevich's

immediate successor, Alexander Rodchenko, had detached programmatically any spiritual or metaphysical meaning from the first truly monochrome triptych that he painted in 1921. Richter's emphatic assertion of the meaning of painting would thus prohibit a reading of his paintings in the terms of an anti-painter, as he once identified his previous attitude. Nor do we look at a supreme irony and detachment, or a critical assault on the practices of painting, which were clearly aspects of his practice during the 1960s and early 1970s, when the refusal of meaning, the denial of the artist's role and its traditional implications, were at the center of his concerns.

While we have no reason to assume that Richter would have changed his attitudes about painting out of sheer historical opportunism (at an early moment, incidentally, since in 1976 the subsequent reversal of pictorial aesthetics was still difficult to anticipate), at least two major projects, the *Mirrors* from 1981 and the mural-sized yellow *Brushstrokes* from 1980, would already complicate—if not outright contradict—his claim of assuming a traditionalist position with regard to the assignment of meaning to pictorial structures. It is important to understand the process of transition that led to the new polychrome gestural paintings, resembling the attempts of earlier artists to convey emotional, spiritual, or psychosexual meaning through semi-automatist, highly gestural, non-representational modes of painting.

Richter has described that transition as the phase in which he produced what he called "color sketches," and he gives us a reason why he identified these small-scale paintings (by now considered fully autonomous, valid paintings) as sketches: "I called them sketches to make them harmless in order to be able to continue working in that manner." These sketches were subsequently subjected to a technical process of reproduction and scale differentiation, which has become the essential working procedure for the mostly large-scale gestural *Abstract Paintings* Richter has produced since 1976. In two instances, the full range of "meaning" inherent in this technique has assumed an exemplary significance in his work that invites a perspective on the *Abstract Paintings* as a category of work in general. As specific to the tradition of Modernism, it is the technique and the process of production that transform the conventions of reading and seeing, and

it is in this transformation that the work's "meaning" is operative. The first instance involved a project from 1978, for which Richter decided to photograph one of these "color sketches" unstretched in various positions and from various angles on a chair. As he described it:

> In the summer of 1978 I took photographs of the surface of an oil-sketch on canvas. . . . The photographs were taken from various sides, from various angles, various distances and under different light conditions. The resulting photographs were organized in two versions: one, the sequential order that is presented here under the covers of a book, and a second version which is presented pictorially in grid form.[28]

The second instance, structurally comparable yet technically different, involved the production of two architectural murals commissioned for a public institution. The two paintings, titled *Zwei gelbe Striche* (Two Yellow Brushstrokes), measure 190 cm × 2,000 cm (6 ft × 63 ft) and are the largest paintings that Richter has yet produced. A single yellow brushstroke is minutely reconstructed through photographic details. These details are subsequently assembled to form a large composite image of a giant gesture of the painterly act through photographic projection onto the various canvas panels by a laborious transfer process of molecular painterly elements.

This process of mediating an original, direct, organic painterly activity (organic in the sense of the traditional definition of the artistic sign that supposedly renders an unmediated and substantial presence of the transcendental experience) through the various stages and practices of a mechanical construction of a pictorial sign (the photographic recording of the presumably original and immediate trace of expression, its transfer and enlargement, change of scale, and pictorial execution), is the manifest subject of Richter's *Abstract Paintings* (in the way that, already in 1919, Lubov Popova said that "facture is the subject of painting"). While it differs from the two extreme examples cited above, the process of structural transformation in the *Abstract Paintings* remains essentially the

same, even if the result of the investigation is another painting (rather than a photographic grid or a mural-sized architectural decoration).

The *Abstract Paintings,* therefore, provide us with immediate insight into the contemporary conditions of painting: to exist between the irreconcilable demands of the spectacle and the synecdoche. It is this dialectic that determines the reading of the *Abstract Paintings.* As the work fulfills these two historical requests simultaneously, it unfolds an infinite range of combinations and future tentative reconciliations of this dialectic; at the same time, it rehearses a recollection of previous potentials and devices of painterly practice. Thus, Richter's paintings constitute a memory of painting's past—when gesture could still engender the experience of emotional turbulence, when chromatic veils credibly conveyed a sense of transparence and spatial infinity, when impasto could read as immediacy and emphatic material presence, when linear formation read as direction in space, movement through time, as operative force of the will of the subject, and when composition and successful integration of all of these elements into painting constituted the experience of the subject.

But this totality of the vision—the centrality of the human subject—had long ago lost historical credibility and had been increasingly replaced by the necessity for fragmented vision, restriction to detail, critical negation of the aesthetic's function to provide transcendental compensation for a secularized society. It was the plight of the modernist artist to provide the representation of truth in the guise of those reductions and strictures. Modernist painting tells a history of the increasingly radical exclusion of all plenitude and totality, of all symbolic and organic completeness of expression and identity; it is the history of self-purification and self-imposed limitation of means, foregrounding of the technique and the device, purging of subject matter and emphatic presentation of the synecdoche as the ultimate mode within which visual truth could be constructed and imbued with historical credibility. The practice of the synecdoche (in the tradition of Realism) promised a form of resistance and opposition to the totality of myth in the mass cultural forms of representation that govern everyday life: the spectacle of consumption and the consumption of the spectacle. Richter has explicitly referred to the hermetic nature of painting as a strategy of

resistance against the dominance of consumption: he has stated that "painting is the creation of an analogy for the invisible and the unintelligible, which should become figure and should become accessible. . . . Good paintings are therefore incomprehensible. . . . They are incomprehensible so that they cannot be consumed and remain essential."[29]

If Richter has defined his current *Abstract Paintings* as a programmatic departure from the dilemma of his gray monochrome paintings in 1975, they must be seen as a dialectical negation of the former's implications. Thus, abnegation of the purity of means and the self-reflection of procedure would imply the embrace of the spectacle and the renewed mythification of painting—that from 1975 on, gesture no longer meant facture but rather emotional experience on display for others; that color no longer meant chromatic relationships, their interaction and scientific intelligibility, but, meant again, the simulacrum of spiritual space. "Polychrome and complicated" were the terms Richter used to identify the qualities of the paintings with which he wanted to be engaged. Yet, he did not mention that they would be mediated through changes of scale and photographic technology, or that their "facture" would be shifted from the immediate to the constructed, or that the catalogue of pictorial devices—the memory of painting—would suddenly assume the dimension of a manifestation of the conditions of spectacle within the practices of painting itself; or that it would betray the previously unknown degree to which the pursuit of the high, modernist art of painting had already assumed its historical share to exist in the culture of the spectacle itself. As the one practice that remained outside of that totality, it had become its most precious domain.

Notes

1

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tagebücher 1914–1916* [Notebooks 1914–1916], in his *Schriften,* vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 174.

2

Georg Lukács, *Aesthetik I* (Berlin: Luchterhand; 1963), p. 188.

3

Wolfgang Abendroth, *Antagonistische Gesellschaft und politische Demokratie,* Soziologische Texte, vol. 47 (Berlin und Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1967), p. 350.

4

Joseph Masheck, "Chance is Zee Fool's Name for Fail," *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective,* ed. Joseph Masheck (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975), p. 15.

5

Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les peintres cubistes* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1950), p. 76.

6

Daniel Buren, "Mise en garde," in *Konzeption/Conception,* exh. cat. (Leverkusen: Städtisches Museum, 1969), n.p.

7

Gerhard Richter, interviewed by Rolf Gunther Dienst in *Gerhard Richter,* exh. cat. (Venice: XXXVIth Biennale, 1972), p. 23.

8

Walter Benjamin, "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie" (1931), in *Angelus Novus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 232.

9

Marcel Broodthaers, *La soupe de Daguerre* (New York: Castelli Graphics), 1975.

10

Gisèle Freund, *Photographie und Gesellschaft* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1974), p. 84; originally published in *La photographie en France au XIX siècle* (Paris, 1936), p. 84.

11

Siegfried Kracauer, *Theorie des Films* (Frankfurt, 1964), p. 40.

12

Roland Barthes, "Rhétorique de l'image," *Communications* 4 (1964), pp. 40–51.

13

Max Kozloff, "Critical and Historical Problems in Photography" (1964), in *Renderings: Critical Essays on a Century of Modern Art,* ed. Max Kozloff (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 289.

14

Gerhard Richter in conversation with Irmeline Lebeer. Irmeline Lebeer, "Gerhard Richter ou la réalité de l'image" (interview), *Chronique de l'art vivant* 36 (February 1973), pp. 13–16. Compare this quotation from Richter with one of Duchamp's comments on his use of the ready-

made: "Above all, I wanted to avoid a 'look' . . . so you have to select an object which leaves you absolutely cold, which arouses no aesthetic emotion whatsoever. So the choice of a ready-made must be based on visual indifference and a complete absence of good or bad taste." Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), p. 48 (translation modified). Compare this in turn with the following observations by Daniel Buren on the same subject: "The legend has it that Duchamp chose the subjects he exhibited totally at random, as long as they were characterless, as 'ordinary' as possible, and that good or bad taste had had nothing to do with the choice. The fact is, however, that a whole series of his objects do have a 'manufactured' style, and are, therefore, formally linked. In other words, there is the same aesthetic rapport between the wheel of a bicycle and a bottle-rack as there is between the *Moulin de la Galette* and the *Balancoire* of Renoir." Daniel Buren, "Stationen," in *Position, Proposition* (Mönchengladbach: Städtisches Museum, 1971).

15

Pierre Bourdieu, *Un art moyen: Essais sur les usages sociaux de la photographie* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1965), p. 23. English translation: *Photography: A Middle Brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

16

What follows is largely based on Pierre Bourdieu's important reflections on the phenomenon of amateur photography (see preceding note).

17

Kracauer, *Theorie des Films,* p. 42.

18

Gerhard Richter, interview with Rolf G. Dienst in *Gerhard Richter* (Venice Biennale), p. 21.

19

Gerhard Richter in conversation with Irmeline Lebeer.

20

Gerhard Richter, "Notizen 1973," English translation in Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews 1962–1993,* ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1995), p. 78 (translation modified).

21

Gerhard Richter in conversation with the author, May 1976.

22

Gerhard Richter, "Interview with Rolf Schön," in *Gerhard Richter,* exh. cat., 36th Biennale (Venice, 1972). Reprinted in Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting,* p. 74 (translation modified).

23

Karl Rosenkranz, *Aesthetik des Hässlichen* (1853) (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), p. 298.

24

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), pp. 158–159.

25

Incidentally, it should be noted that in the American tradition, the problem of color as a completely autonomous, non-expressive element—from whatever theory this had been deduced—was resolved by the mid-1960s. It is perhaps sufficient to mention *Spectrum Colors Arranged by Chance* (1952) by Ellsworth Kelly.

26

Gerhard Richter, *Gerhard Richter,* exh. cat. (Brussels: Palais des Beaux Arts, 1974).

27

This and all following quotations by Gerhard Richter are contained in Heribert Heere, "Gerhard Richter—Die abstrakten Bilder: Zur Frage des Inhalts," in *Gerhard Richter—Abstrakte Bilder 1976–1981,* exh. cat. (Bielefeld/Mannheim: Kunsthalle Bielefeld/Kunsthalle Mannheim, 1982), pp. 9–20 (my translations).

28

Statement by Gerhard Richter in *128 Details from a Picture: Halifax 1978,* The Nova Scotia Pamphlets, vol. 2 (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1980), p. 65.

29

Gerhard Richter, interview with Irmeline Lebeer, p. 15. The last segment of this essay has been added to the original text from 1976 and is based on fragments from the essay "Richter's Facture: Between the Synecdoche and the Spectacle," originally published in *Gerhard Richter* (New York: Marian Goodman Gallery and Sperone-Westwater Gallery, 1985).

Process Sculpture and Film in Richard Serra's Work

> But when you're talking about intentions, all you're telling people about is the relation of physical facts. And I think an artwork is not merely predicting correctly all the relations you can measure.
> —*Richard Serra*[1]

Today the artwork can identify less than ever before with the secure role the classical categories of media used to afford it. Inasmuch as they are the results of really novel aesthetic procedures (and of necessity identical with these), painting, sculpture, and film refuse to lend themselves to the generalization of a category to the very extent to which—being practical procedures—they necessarily have to flout any attempt at categorizing practice. Practice now seems historically convincing only where it raises doubts not only about itself as art but also about the allocation of specialized roles, the methods of production, and the conventional materials. It can be demonstrated that, without exception, real progress has

First published in *Richard Serra,* exh. cat., ed. Clara Weyergraf (Tübingen: Kunsthalle Tübingen, 1978), pp. 228–239.

occurred only whenever a change intended a fundamental transformation in the procedure, rather than contenting itself with transcending in a formal way a particular tradition in art. If something ceases to be painting or sculpture, the idea is to focus on what it is beginning to be.

Richard Serra's films meet these criteria of transcending the traditional terms of a métier and cannot simply be included in the specific tradition of any single medium: they are neither in a purely sculptural tradition—if this implies the acceptance of certain conventions regarding materials and procedures—nor do they unequivocally obey the specific formal principles of film (a hybrid form combining narrative epic-dramatic elements with a photographic-painterly representational image language). Also, being "sculptural" films, they differ from the general run of films by artists who until the mid-sixties had almost without exception either adopted the traditional criteria of a more literary-minded film language or translated their own artistic approach literally into film language (though this, of course, applies not at all to those artists who had renounced the traditional plastic arts in favor of filmmaking, e.g., Hollis Frampton). The phenomenon of the sculptural film is thus relatively undefined and does not necessarily imply more than the fact that the author is a sculptor whose sculptural work can be seen to belong in the modern tradition since Rodin, and that the approach in his films is a specifically "sculptural" one, i.e., that they are clearly different from the filmic or painterly practices we observe in artists' films.

To take but one example, Fernand Léger's famous film *Ballet mécanique* (1924)—for all the essentially sculptural concern with the movement of bodies in space that its title seems to imply—could be described as a Cubist artist's film that employs the resources of film in translating a painterly analysis into a synthesis of collage, painting, and narrative cinematographic techniques. At the same time, it fails to perceive the inherent potential of film for a work that would have paralleled the then incipient dissolution of the concept of sculpture: a dissolution and change in the idea of sculpture that was articulated in concrete terms in an integration of positive and negative spatial elements, a gradual opening of the solid continuity of closed sculptural bodies in favor of relating them to the

surrounding architectural space. This was put programmatically by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner in 1920 in their "Realistic Manifesto":

> Space and Time are reborn to us today. Space and Time are the only forms on which life is built and hence art must be constructed. . . . The realization of our perceptions of the world in the forms of Space and Time is the only aim of our pictorial and plastic art. . . . We renounce volume as a pictorial and plastic form of space; one cannot measure liquids in yards: look at our space . . . what is it, if not continuous depth.[2]

But even though the revolutionary technical possibilities of film (the medium was then just coming into its own) strike one as eminently suited to that kind of sculptural aesthetics, other factors prevented the creation of a specifically sculptural film tradition. The truly revolutionary film artists of the period, such as Lev Kuleshov and Dziga Vertov, saw the purpose and promise of the new medium not primarily in aesthetic, let alone in sculptural terms, but in its potential as an enlightening instrument in educating the political awareness of the masses, and this in turn led them to see the cinematographic capacity for documentary reproduction of processes taking place in reality in a real space-time continuum as the essentially characteristic new possibilities of film within the context of a generally transformed conception of art.

On the other hand, the Surrealists and their successors would chiefly go for the magic and evocative qualities of the new medium (if they used it at all), whose literary aspect came so close to their traditional artistic notions. The films of Man Ray and Joseph Cornell, American artists and sculptors whose sculptural works had exercised considerable influence on the evolution of American sculpture, are clearly not to be seen as sculptural films but as filmic equivalents to the painterly-plastic juxtapositions of objects that they had developed as formal principles in collage and assemblage.

The impressive extent to which the influence of these traditional filmic procedures—a narrative filmic convention on the one hand, a representational

and illustrative function determined by plastic and painterly considerations on the other—continued to affect post-Surrealist film can be gauged with clarity from Claes Oldenburg's films, e.g., *Store Days* (1962) and *Nekropolis* (1962). This is all the more remarkable since Oldenburg must be seen as a figure of central importance for Serra's concept of sculpture, for he had taken the reduction of plastic phenomena to its natural origin: the system of coordinates formed by gravity, and the temporal-spatial continuum, where gradual processes involving masses and relative forces become plastic events, as clearly concretized in Oldenburg's *Soft Objects.* It is sufficiently well known and evident that Serra's (but also Bruce Nauman's) early works were basically arrived at by eliminating the representational object relation of Oldenburg's sculpture in favor of an immediate implementation and demonstration of these fundamental plastic phenomena.

One historic precursor did, however, meet the criteria of a specifically sculptural film: László Moholy-Nagy's *Light Display, Black and White and Gray* (1928–1930). Exploiting the technical possibilities offered by a specially designed functional sculpture, the *Light/Space Modulator* (1921–1930), this film gave an immediate representation of the plastic phenomenon as process. It resulted in a dismissal of the ossified conception of the nature of sculpture as a clearly defined mass in space in favor of a visualization of the space-time continuum that involves the whole of space in the plastic definition. Historically speaking, the development of this type of sculptural film—as evidenced by Serra's films, but equally so by Bruce Nauman's and Dan Graham's films from the same period—can be seen in the same terms that Barbara Rose once outlined with regard to the situation of artists in the twenties and their historical motivation for expanding the traditional techniques of sculpture to include film:

> The films of the Hungarian Constructivist Moholy-Nagy and the American Dadaist Man Ray have special relevance as historical precedents for the current cinematic activity on the part of painters and sculptors. Their films were a response to certain contradictions inherent in the very aims and ideologies of the modernist move-

> ments themselves, and thus provide a locus for studying a crisis within the plastic arts which reasserts itself today. . . . In this context, artists questioned, as they are questioning today, the social relevance of the traditional arts, as well as their ability to sustain a level of innovation equal to that of modern science and industry.[3]

However, if in the latter half of the sixties numerous artists became involved in the "more public" medium of film, this was not only because they were reflecting upon the historical inadequacy of certain traditional forms of artistic production. Neither was it because of a politically motivated awareness among artists of the need for the artwork to become divorced from its predetermined character as a unique original (which had guaranteed its commodity character), and the need to develop forms of production more in keeping with the general level of development of the means of production and able to initiate a more general public presence and public character of the artwork. It is easy to see—especially with hindsight now that McLuhanite optimism has been exposed as a sham and the general euphoria concerning media has evaporated—that another important aspect was involved in this transition from a traditional plastic medium to film and videotape. This aspect is primarily based on the insight that new realizations concerning the nature of sculpture would translate most readily into the medium of film, which by its very definition permits the reproduction of the space-time continuum. It is therefore hardly surprising that this use of film and video only evolved in the generation of the post-Minimal artists. For the transformation and expansion of plastic thought brought about by artists such as Carl Andre and Donald Judd—though very consequential as an attack on traditional forms of sculptural discourse and influential as a prerequisite, together with Claes Oldenburg's work, for the evolution of Serra's sculptural conception—certainly did not include the dimension of process. It was the recognition of the very principles that constitute plastic phenomena and procedures of plastic production—the alternation of positive and negative spatial segments, the casting of materials in molds, the setting up of masses against gravity, weighting and balancing them in the space-time continuum—and the need to render them in visual terms that

required the introduction of filmic means into the sculptural-static discourse. What distinguishes Richard Serra's films is the fact that, in arriving at a new definition of the plastic phenomenon through the necessary use of film, they equally vindicate their own necessity as films.

Therefore, neither is it surprising that it was the generation of post-Minimal artists in the mid-sixties that developed the relations between plastic spatial arts and musical or choreographic temporal arts. There was a great deal of intense mutual influence between musicians and dancers on the one hand and visual artists on the other. This led to collaboration on numerous projects that ended up being collectively and somewhat ambiguously labeled "performance," a term that implied at the time—in contradistinction to its more recent neo-theatrical, expressive literalization—that very amalgam of static plastic art and temporal art. Yvonne Rainer's 1966 essay "The Mind Is a Muscle (A Quasi Survey of Some Minimalist Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A),"[4] whose very title suggests the combination of plastic and temporal art, the synthesis of physiological and psycho-mental practice, could be regarded as a programmatic exposition of this development that was a logical sequel to the Minimal period. The collaboration between Rainer and Robert Morris, the joint projects executed by Bruce Nauman and Meredith Monk, or those by Richard Serra and Joan Jonas would also have to be considered in this context. At the same time, visual artists and musicians also evolved new forms of collaborative work. Whereas the traditional approach illustrated by the collaboration of John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg had been aiming to integrate the various performing arts in some sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk,* the new forms were based on an awareness of the objective correspondence of the investigations in the plastic and temporal arts. Serra's friendship with Steve Reich and Phil Glass, musicians both, stimulated his work. Reich, in discussing the parallel between plastic art and music, once put it in a way that makes it easy to see how collaborations of the 1960s differed from their predecessors. "The analogy I saw with Serra's sculpture, his propped lead sheets and pole pieces (that were, among other things, demonstrations of physical facts about

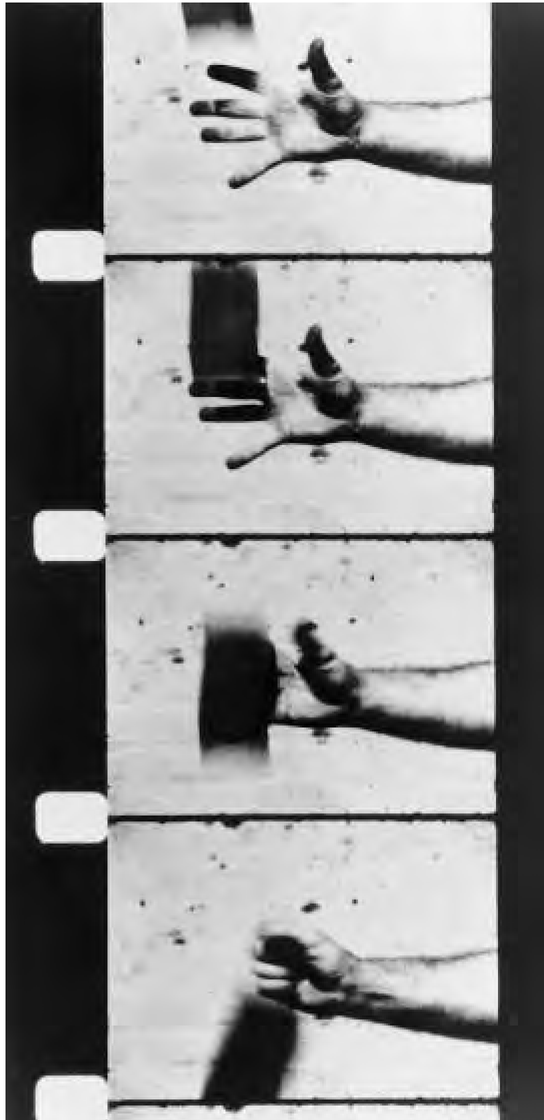
the nature of lead), was that his works and mine are both more about materials and process than they are about psychology."[5]

Serra twice participated in the performance of Reich's *Pendulum Music* (1968),[6] a piece that is now being seen by many artists as a key post-Minimalist work. He conceived and executed *Long Beach Word Location* in 1969 with Phil Glass, and Glass in turn was involved in the production of Serra's early films. It can be assumed that the decision to work with "processes" rather than subjective individual psychology was also behind Serra's early films: *Hand Catching Lead* (1968), *Hands Tied* (1968), *Hands Scraping* (1968), *Hands Lead Fulcrum* (1968), and *Frame* (1969). Reich said, "And that's what makes the piece interesting: there's more in it than I put in it. That's the joy of working with processes. If you follow your personal taste, you get your taste back. But if you follow a musical process you get your taste plus a few surprises that may educate you to make some other music."[7]

Candle Piece (1968) is one of Serra's earliest true process sculptures, if not the very first one, and it is probably no coincidence that it belonged for a long time to Steve Reich. Here the introduction of the concept of process into sculpture is all the more striking, as it still seems to be embedded in an almost unconscious post-surreal arbitrary juxtaposition of heterogeneous object elements, a combine or assemblage approach that signals the impression Rauschenberg's work left on Serra. At the same time, the piece affords us an insight into the early forms of Serra's investigation of Minimal sculpture. *Candle Piece* amazingly resembles Andre's early Brancusi paraphrases, e.g., *Last Ladder* (1959), as if Serra had turned it from the vertical to the horizontal and "enlightened" the sculpture. The serial disposition of positive and negative spatial segments combined with the row of candles transforms the piece—when it is lit—into an elementary minimal object that implements at the same time an elementary process. Though object and process are still disparate elements, *Candle Piece* can already be seen as an early precursor to later process sculptures, and even more so to the films that integrate object and process—as well as the link created between them in the viewer's perception—into one sculptural unity.

In *Candle Piece* Serra attempts to overcome with an archaic impetus the rigidity and heavy materiality of Minimal sculpture. Unlike the serial principle

Richard Serra, *Candle Piece,* 1968.



Richard Serra, *Hand Catching Lead,* 1969. Black and white silent film, 16mm, 3´30˝. Camera: Robert Fiore.

that had so largely informed Minimal sculpture, his operation goes beyond the merely formal dimension of seriality, in that it involves an actual process of change. On the other hand, Minimal sculpture had already taken series and process to the threshold of this transition. A Fibonacci series employed as a compositional principle in one of Judd's progressions, for example, could be seen as a frozen process. But even Carl Andre's *Spill* (*Scatter Piece*) (1966), the first Minimal work to introduce an actual process into sculpture, was essentially determined by traditional conceptions of space and material, though its formal disposition was redefined with each scattering of the elements, thus directly integrating the process of its execution into the plastic appearance of the sculpture. Though *Spill* had introduced into sculpture Pollock's principle of confronting the viewer with a de-differentiated field in its all-over structure, this piece was to the same extent defined in a traditional way by the identical cubic elements that composed the field. This becomes more evident in a comparison with the first true process sculptures: Nauman's *Flour Arrangements on the Floor* (1966), Serra's *Scatter Piece* (1967), and above all his *Splashing* (1968) and the subsequent *Castings* (1969). Such manipulation of plastic materials has probably done more than anything else to erode the traditional idea of the closed sculptural body and to substitute a spatial field for it, in the same way that the sculptural object as a body in space became dissolved and was replaced by visualization of the production process itself and by the presence of sculptural materiality. The fact that science has shown the latter to consist of molecules and processes, and the extent to which this knowledge has become generally disseminated, seem to have gone a long way in disqualifying conventional forms of representing matter in geometrically defined masses as plainly inconsistent with scientific consciousness.

The manifestation of process qualities in sculpture around 1966 is thus based on the discovery and representation of the forces that constitute sculpture, and on a fundamentally more precise understanding of the properties of the sculptural matter in which sculpture is concretized, a realization that may very well have been initiated in part by Andre's prior reflection upon the specificity of materials. Yet another aspect of the process phenomena is revealed in the procedures involved in the production of sculpture, as listed systematically in Serra's

Verb List (1967–1968), which he himself referred to as "Actions to relate to one-self, material, place and process."[8] A whole group of early works (in fact, all his sculptures prior to the *Prop Pieces*) corresponds to this catalogue of possible manipulations of sculptural material. In each case one activity determined the form and appearance of the sculpture: the casting of liquid material, the rolling of sheets of lead, the folding of lead, sawing, tearing, setting up.

Such a systematic-analytic conception and differentiation of all the various elements that go into the making of sculpture—subjective activity and decision, physical work, objective materials and their specific properties, physical laws concerning matter in the space-time continuum—are subjected in Serra's process sculptures and in his early films to an analytical exposition endowing them with rational transparency. At the same time, they are being shown in a synthesis of the merely necessary reduction, and this is the source of their stringent plastic dynamics. Dan Graham paraphrased this differentiation process in a very precise way, and Serra himself cited Graham's words in reference to his own film work. "The works are described by a simple verb action performed on the material by the artist, available to the viewer as residue of an in-formation (the stage of the process described in applying the verb action to the material place where it is present) time. The viewer's time field is as much part of the process (reading) as the artist's former relation to the same material and the material's process in the former time."[9]

With the idea of the "time field" as another modality of experience contingent as a form of perception on the spatial field, Graham points to another essential aspect of the change in the conception of sculpture as articulated in Serra's work (and especially in his films) in contrast to and logically based on Minimal sculpture. Ultimately, Minimal artists based their spatial conception on the post-Cubist representation of space in a grid system. Sol LeWitt's *Open Modular Cubes* (1966) remained the only work that brought this conception of space to its logical conclusion and transcended it. In discussing Serra's sculpture and the conception of space expressed in it, Rosalind Krauss notes that they are clearly opposed to the Minimal conception of space that still posited the viewer and the sculpture as chess figures in a geometrically defined field, one moving around the

to roll
to crease
to fold
to store
to bend
to shorten
to twist
to dapple
to crumple
to shave
to tear
to chip
to split
to cut
to sever
to drop
to remove
to simplify
to differ
to disarrange
to open
to mix
to splash
to knot
to spill
to droop
to flow

to curve
to lift
to inlay
to impress
to fire
to flood
to smear
to rotate
to swirl
to support
to hook
to suspend
to spread
to hang
to collect
of tension
of gravity
of entropy
of nature
of grouping
of layering
of felting
to grasp
to tighten
to bundle
to heap
to gather

Richard Serra, *Verb List,* 1967–1968. Stolen.

to scatter
to arrange
to repair
to discard
to pair
to distribute
to surfeit
to complement
to enclose
to surround
to encircle
to hide
to cover
to wrap
to dig
to tie
to bind
to weave
to join
to match
to laminate
to bond
to hinge
to mark
to expand
to dilute
to light

to modulate
to distill
of waves
of electromagnetic
of inertia
of ionization
of polarization
of refraction
of simultaneity
of tides
of reflection
of equilibrium
of symmetry
of friction
to stretch
to bounce
to erase
to spray
to systematize
to refer
to force
of mapping
of location
of context
of time
of carbonization
to continue

other: "The distinction between Serra's sculpture and that of minimalism comes in part out of Serra's rejection of the a priori geometries of the grid. For the grid is an abstract tool describing a space which always begins at a point just in front of the person who views it. The diorama of analytic sensibility, the grid, forever leaves the viewer outside looking in."[10]

With *Splashing* deliberately inserted in the right angle between wall and floor, Serra had made a point of visually canceling that angle and thus dissolving the architecturally defined "artificial" cubic space by eliminating its demarcation lines. At the same time, process sculptures such as *Splashing* and *Casting,* by virtue of the evident presence of a material procedure in themselves, had not only dissolved the traditional mode of appearance of a rigidly defined (geometrical) body, they had also emancipated its shape (that which is separate from space) from the clear division of the figure-ground relation. By decentralizing the viewer's visual field in an amorphous all-over structure, in a de-differentiated distribution of sculptural masses, sculpture as "container of space" and space as "container of the container of space" were transcended in the discovery of a spatial continuum that is experienced by the viewer physiologically and phenomenologically as a mode of transition to the temporal continuum. The transition from spatial to temporal field is no more than a logical continuation of the systematic analysis of the relations between the perceiving subject and the sculptural object that had been initiated in Minimal sculpture.

If the temporal field as a mode of experience is linked in this way with the spatial field of perception, and once this is recognized to be constitutive both in the plastic phenomenon and in its perception, the technical formal necessity of the step from process sculpture to sculptural film becomes evident. The perception of a spatio-temporal field is the very principle of film, and the viewer's simultaneous observation partakes in this continuity. One may hypothesize, then, that sculptural reflection reaches its most advanced position precisely at the point where sculpture as a concrete phenomenon is transcended and transformed into sculptural film, i.e., in works such as Serra's early films *Hand Catching Lead, Hands Scraping,* and *Hands Tied* (1968), which are no longer sculpture and no longer film, but induce the viewer's access to more modes of perceiving active

Richard Serra, *Splashing,* 1968. Lead, indeterminate dimensions. Destroyed.

physiological and psychological identity than the traditions of these two categories used to permit; or, as Serra put it in describing one particular film project: "As a telecommunication tool, it informs the viewer in an area of kinetic abstraction. The interacting, sequential flow of a complex kinemorphic construction (film) reveals a communication system derived from body motion."[11] This step—the dematerialization of sculpture—was historically due. It resulted necessarily from the sum total of all those apparently divergent concerns and intentions in the plastic art of the mid-sixties, as in Yvonne Rainer's programmatic essay referred to above: objectification of cognition, dis-individualization, and non-psychological forms of representation; dissolution of the traditional manufacture of the artwork and destruction of its commodity state; general dissemination and accessibility of the work through its reproducability by technical means.

Historically, the medium of film and—because of its spontaneity—to an even higher degree the medium of video came in handy as instruments in this transformation of aesthetic orientation. At first it seemed as if they would altogether replace traditional sculptural means. This shift in the material use of aesthetic and formal-technical resources—foreshadowing with increasing clarity both effect and cause of a concept of art radically changed since 1965—has been analyzed in its historical plausibility and necessity by Dan Graham, who himself pioneered this development in the sculptural use of technical media:

> Ironically it wasn't the new medium of cinema which devolved from Edison's invention, but the steps along its path—the analysis of motion—which first "moved" artists. Marey's work is recalled by the Futurists and most notably by Marcel Duchamp's paintings, culminating in *Nude Descending a Staircase,* whose overlapping time-space was directly modeled after Marey's superimposed series. Léger, Moholy-Nagy and others did utilize the motion picture (also Duchamp at a later date), but only as an available tool and not in terms of its structural underpinnings. It wasn't until recently with the "Minimalist" reduction of the medium to its structural support in itself considered as an "object" that photography could find its own subject matter.[12]

Richard Serra's films occupy a central position in this evolution. It is significant that Rosalind Krauss begins the last chapter of *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977) with a detailed description of Richard Serra's first film, *Hand Catching Lead* (1968). At the end of the chapter, in an analytical description of the main characteristics of this film, she compares, it as a sculpture to Rodin's *Balzac* and Brancusi's *Torso of a Young Man,* thus placing it in the context of key works of twentieth-century sculpture.[13] This altogether appropriate judgment might easily induce one to conclude that contemporary sculpture had reached its climax in sculptural film, and that Serra's process-sculptural films occupied an eminent position in his oeuvre, transforming our conception of sculpture into the historically adequate form that transcends morphology and phenomenon, material and procedure, medium of presentation and mode of perception of traditional sculpture.

All Serra's early films imply two essentially new procedures that make them differ from specific filmic techniques, as they change substantially the methods of sculptural reflection: one is the principle of fragmentation, also applied in the later films *Frame* (1969) and *Color Aid* (1971), and the other is the real-time process of a task-oriented performance, which defines the films dramaturgically and limits them temporally. The implications of these principles reach further than Krauss's strictly formalist analysis might reveal.

The principle of fragmentation results necessarily from Serra's more general procedure of analyzing the elementary constituents of a plastic phenomenon. On the one hand, this reduction of the cinematographic segment, showing only the hand and arm of a person as the veritable "actors" of the film, points to the essential element of the process (or the instrument, the procedure, the material) to be visually represented while producing the sculptural phenomenon: in this particular case the physiological functions transforming and forming matter by work. On the other hand, the cinematographic fragmentation defines the segment according to Ernst Mach's diagram of the visual field, delimiting the subject's boundaries of physical self-perception. Therefore, no subject-object relationship is established between viewer and actor, but the viewer experiences the physiological activity in an optical frame that remains within the limits of his

or her own physiological self-perception, which is quasi-extended by the filmic image. Fragmentation here means the deliberate abolition of the separation between subjective perception and objective representation. From this abolition, however, results the elimination of any narrative or dramatic quality in the representation of a sequence of actions, thus reducing it to a self-referential activity, a self-evident representative function without any "meaning" whatsoever.

This is how Serra, for the first time in the practice of filmic representation of sequences of body movements and actions, succeeds in applying a formal principle (originally developed in Pollock's painting): to change the perception of images of the human body itself in accordance with the de-differentiation of the visual field, the abandonment of central perspective or a fixed focus in favor of a bodily all-over structure. In traditional drama or film the gaze had always been oriented by the anthropomorphous hierarchy, from which all compositional dispositions derived, with the head or the physiognomic expression as the center of perception. This objectification of action necessarily results in an enhanced self-perception of the viewing subject, who no longer experiences the filmic process in illusionist identification with the actor but begins to see it as an objective process involving the transformation of bodily energy into movement and work. A lucid description of this process was given by Dan Graham, who, since 1969, has made the change in perceptions of body representation a central concern in his work in film, video, and performance, contributing substantially to the development:

> Phenomenologically, the camera's representations and the spectator's view is the meeting point between (and can be seen to be any of) the elements of visual consciousness if consciousness is partly external (situated in the object/situated in what is seen), partly internal (situated in the eye or camera) and partly cybernetic or interpretive (situated in the central nervous system or the process of attention which, with a body's muscle/skeletal systems, achieves the orientation in world). . . . The process of physiological orientation—attention—of the performer(s) is correlated to the spectator's process of attention.[14]

Such objective presentation of action sequences reduces the representation of an activity to the plausible performance of a task and to the time span needed to complete this task, during which a certain necessary quantity of motion and work energy is exhibited in "task-oriented performance." Analogous to the objectification of temporal representation, the reduction of "action" to the performance of a temporally, spatially, and energetically (according to the law of entropy) determined task can be seen to result from formal reflections previously developed in painting and sculpture. As early as 1964 Frank Stella—in his now notorious interview with Bruce Glaser—declared his famous maxim, "What you see is what you see," which implied a commitment to the identity of the representation and the represented (or in semiological terms, of the signifier and the signified) in painting. Subsequently, this was applied to sculpture when it became a central concern in Minimalism. The same demand can be recognized in Serra's reduction of "dramatic" action to a self-contained and necessary performance of a task. Serra, like Stella, addressed the problem of the relation of action and meaning, concerning the necessity to see both of them in an integral entity: "It's how we do what we do that confers meaning on what we've done."[15]

Serra's only actual "performance" (i.e., public performance of one of these self-evident sequences of action and motion that confer meaning on themselves) demonstrated the principle even more strikingly: offstage he had friends spinning him around until he became quite dizzy and was about to lose his balance and fall. At this precise moment he was pushed onstage, and it became the "task" of his "performance" to overcome his dizziness and regain his sense of balance.

Yvonne Rainer's "Quasi Survey of Some Minimalist Tendencies," referred to above, elaborated the parallel between painterly and plastic phenomena and those of the temporal arts, dance and performance. Rainer saw the need for an exact correspondence between the formal criteria of the new sculptural conceptions and the temporal principles. She stipulated that "neutral performance" corresponded to the "non-referential forms" (in post-Stella painting and sculpture); that "repetition of discrete events," the repetition of self-contained events or sequences of action, corresponds to "uninterrupted surface," the wholeness of a visual form and the holistic visual field; that "task or task-like activity" in the

performing (temporal) arts corresponded to "literalness," that often-quoted identity in Minimalist sculpture of the signifier and the signified.[16] All these principles were introduced with great precision in Serra's early films, as if he had literally applied to sculptural film the catalogue of aesthetic norms of the new temporal art as defined by Rainer. It would be difficult to conceive of anything that could surpass these films as a synthesis of the principles of plastic-spatial-static and mimetic-temporal-dynamic art conceptions, as an analytically transparent integration of all the elements that combine to form the plastic appearance and the perception of these very phenomena.

If in *Hand Catching Lead* the sculptural material (lead pieces dropped from above into the visual field of the camera by Phil Glass in regular-irregular sequence) is missed, caught, held, and deformed by Serra's (the performer's) hand according to the laws of chance, this seems to reflect the exact degree of individual manipulation and subjective effect on the sculptural material that would be possible and adequate in Serra's conception of the construction of sculpture. The visualization of the gravity of the falling pieces of metal in turn corresponds to the reproductive materiality of the filmic medium. The falling elements imitate the downward movement of the film print in passing through the projector. In contrast to Serra's process sculptures, his films are thus characterized by a greater identity of all its constituent elements: rather than merely appear as results, they demonstrate the process itself and enable the viewer to reconstruct it (though this does not apply to the *Prop Pieces,* where process and appearance have been fused in a thoroughly evident and present identity). The confrontation between manual (subjective) labor power and (objective) matter and physical laws determines in equal parts the group of early films. But the proportions in which these various elements and forces become effective differs from film to film. If the manual part is relatively insignificant in *Hand Catching Lead,* if the interventions by the subject in the objective laws of physical necessity even begin to appear absurd and arbitrary, the proportions are reversed in *Hands Tied,* where the subjective capacity for work is the dominant function in the solution of the sculptural task. These forces themselves—the hands freeing themselves from the fetters—become plastic phenomena in the same way that the protagonists succeed

in freeing themselves from the traditional laws that conditioned and created sculpture, employing sculptural material by means of force or of its own inertia in such a manner as to obtain a space-encompassing volume or body of stretched material.

To the very extent to which Serra in his early films and sculptures succeeded in showing—by means of fragmentation and reduction—the self-evident procedures of the sculptural as its true meaning in a previously unknown identity, they seem to have provoked the problem of a metaphorical interpretation. It is as if the sight of a real and purely self-referential process, of a sequence of actions that refers only to itself, of a sculptural phenomenon that is simply governed by the exigencies of physical laws and the properties of its material, were—because of the intensity of its presence—unacceptable to human perception, which would attempt to protect itself by the projection of meanings. "As in *Hand Catching Lead* and *Hands Scraping,*" writes Liza Béar, "the hands become the performers and acquire a physical expressiveness of their own which is akin to that of the thief in Bresson's *Pickpocket*."[17] Or Kenneth Baker, who submits more readily to the temptation of a metaphorical reading: "As constructions, Serra's pieces were metaphors for the condition of the constructions we put upon what happens."[18] Philip Leider, finally, seems to have recognized the problem from the outset, and he avoids it so dramatically that he almost ends up falling right into it: "The process and the work are one, the art and its making both delivered with complete clarity. It is difficult to account for the energy that is released when the mystery of the making is dispelled, but one feels it."[19]

The transition from identical plastic reality to the level of metaphor can even be perceived in Rosalind Krauss's description when she says,

> Richard Serra's sculpture is about sculpture: about the weight, the extension, the density and the opacity of matter, and about the promise of the sculptural project to break through that opacity with systems which will make the work's structure both transparent to itself and to the viewer who looks on from outside. . . . Again and again, Serra's sculpture makes a viewer realize that the hidden

Richard Serra, *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram, Right Angles Inverted,* 1970. Steel, 26 ft diameter, 8 in rim. Location: 183rd St. and Webster St., The Bronx, New York City. Collection: Ronald Greenberg, St. Louis, Missouri.

> meanings he reads into the corporate body of the world are his own projections and that interiority he had thought belonged to the sculpture is in fact his own interiority—the manifestation from the still point of his point of view.[20]

Paradoxically, it is invariably the more objectified visual or linguistic forms that by virtue of their hermetic identity seem particularly apt at triggering this projective mechanism. One only has to recall how the objectivity of language processes in Kafka's or Beckett's works, in describing nothing but their own linguistic structure, has provoked an incredible host of projections. On the other hand, Serra himself, in the statement quoted at the beginning of this article, points out that the artwork does not consist merely of a correct prediction of all the relations one can measure.

Notes

1

"Richard Serra Talking to Liza Béar," *Avalanche Newspaper,* Summer/Fall 1973. Reprinted in Clara Weyergraf, ed., *Richard Serra: Interviews Etc. 1970–1980* (Yonkers: The Hudson River Museum, 1988), p. 37.

2

Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, "Realistic Manifesto" (1920), in *The Tradition of Constructivism,* ed. Stephen Bann (New York: Viking, 1974), p. 9.

3

Barbara Rose, "Kinetic Solutions to Pictorial Problems: The Films of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy," *Artforum* (September 1971), pp. 68 ff.

4

Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–1973* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), p. 63.

5

Emily Wasserman, "An Interview with Steve Reich," *Artforum* (May 1972), p. 48.

6

Serra participated repeatedly in the performance of Steve Reich's now famous *Pendulum Music:* once in 1968 with Bruce Nauman and Michael Snow, another time with Laura Dean and Steve

Paxton—a combination of artists, filmmakers, musicians, and dancers that illuminates very clearly this phase in the transition between the traditional categories.

7

Steve Reich, interview with Emily Wasserman, p. 49.

8

Richard Serra, in *Avalanche* (Winter 1971), p. 20.

9

Ibid., pp. 20–21; quoted from Dan Graham, *End Moments* (New York: self-published, 1969).

10

Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture Redrawn," *Artforum* (May 1972), p. 38.

11

Richard Serra, in *Avalanche* (Winter 1971), p. 20.

12

Dan Graham, "Muybridge Moments," *Arts Magazine* (February 1967), reprinted as "Photographs of Motion" in *End Moments,* p. 31.

13

Rosalind Krauss, "The Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture," in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 279.

14

Dan Graham, "Six Films 1969–1974," in *Dan Graham* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 1976), p. 22.

15

Richard Serra, interview with Liza Béar, n.p.

16

Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–1973,* p. 63.

17

Liza Béar, in *Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films,* vol. 1, no. 1 (New York, 1974), p. 188.

18

Kenneth Baker, "Some Exercises in Slow Perception," *Artforum* (November 1977), p. 28.

19

Philip Leider, "Richard Serra, a Review of the Castelli Warehouse Show," *Artforum* (February 1970), p. 69.

20

Rosalind Krauss, "A View on Modernism," *Artforum* (September 1972), pp. 48 ff.

Spero's Other Traditions

> In choosing Artaud, I chose a pariah, a madman. He was the Other, a brilliant artist, but a victim running in circles.
> —*Nancy Spero*[1]

The (failed) reception of Nancy Spero's work within the context of mainstream critical debates and institutional evaluations of artistic production of the sixties and seventies, in both Europe and the United States, points to a larger complex of social, psychological, and aesthetic investments that have remained powerfully latent and have thereby governed aesthetic judgment all the more. Obviously, the first obstacle one needs to mention is the fact that Spero is a woman artist and has been a practicing and often radically outspoken feminist for the past thirty years. Any attempt to understand the conditions of discrimination that have excluded her work consistently from critical evaluation, from public and private collections during the past three decades would have to start from this inevitable

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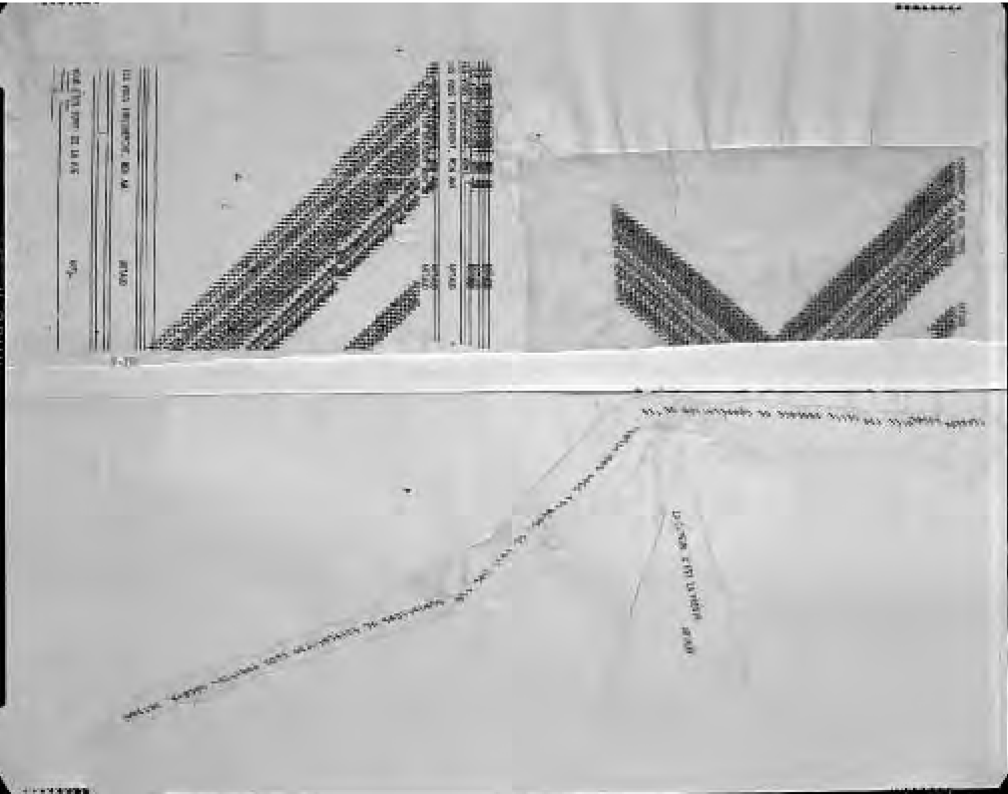


Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud XVIII* and *XIX,* 1972. Typewriter and painted collage on paper, 140 × 16 in. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: David Reynolds.

perspective. But what exactly determined the patriarchal criteria of choice and exclusion seems insufficiently explored in the feminist accounts of Spero's works. In fact, they have even obscured some of the persistent obstacles to reading Spero's "other traditions."

I will, therefore, suggest a different and complementary perspective: instead of positioning Spero once again outside of the established practices of the sixties and seventies and thereby perpetuating her marginality, I will attempt to compare certain aspects of her artistic production with so-called canonical works of the period. This comparison could first of all clarify some aspects of Spero's work that have made its acceptance difficult if not impossible. It could also illuminate the specific investments of Modernist canonical criticism and why it had either to ignore or to marginalize Spero's attempts to establish "other" traditions within the territory of Modernism. I will sketch such a project of historical contextualization by affiliating Spero (born 1927) with artists that were her generational and historical "peers," such as Cy Twombly (born 1928).

Spero's early work originated—like Twombly's—in the continuing dialogue with Abstract Expressionism, but both artists had voluntarily taken on positions as aesthetic and geographic outsiders in the face of the New York School. Spero resisted the New York School's influence stylistically by continuing to paint in a mode of figurative representation and considering Dubuffet's alternate model of *art brut* as one of her foundations. Furthermore, she deliberately placed herself outside the New York School's orbit by moving from Chicago to Paris in 1959 and remaining there until 1964. In a similar manner Twombly adopted pictorial devices manifestly derived from European artists such as Fautrier and Dubuffet, and he settled in Italy in 1957. By focusing on Spero's Artaud paintings from the late 1960s and more specifically on the *Codex Artaud* (1971–1972), I hope to demonstrate that Spero articulated specific critiques of New York School-derived concepts of painting still prevailing at that time, suggesting an alternate model of visuality and definitions of avant-garde practice; but I also want to illuminate the differences in her deployment of language and the displacement of the pictorial in the *Codex Artaud* by comparing her work with other, contemporary practices of inserting text fragments or textual quotations within the field

of painting. This trajectory, emerging in the American context first within the work of Jasper Johns in the early 1950s, would lead eventually to the emergence of a rigorously textual and linguistic definition of artistic production in Conceptual art in 1968, thus encompassing the exact period of the development of Spero's own oeuvre up to the Artaud paintings and the *Codex*.

At first glance, the painterly projects of Spero's peers seem to have been altogether different from her own, inasmuch as Jackson Pollock remained the central figure for the male artists of that generation (both of venerating reference and of patricidal articulation). For Spero, by contrast, it was precisely the initial—and indeed continuing—doubt about Pollock's status as the most important (American) artist of the postwar period that set her radically apart. Yet in the development of a critical opposition to the figure "Pollock," she would inevitably develop similar strategies, directed not necessarily or solely at Pollock's painting but rather at the terminology developed in the work's critical reception. One such strategy was Spero's insistence on the continuing possibilities and functions of figurative representation, a strategy she clearly shared with most of the artists emerging in the late fifties and early sixties who were later identified as the "Pop artists." The other strategy—and possibly the more consequential one—was Spero's programmatic departure in 1966 from traditional painting altogether toward an increasing retrieval of collage techniques, the insertion of mechanically produced imagery, and the extensive quotation and graphic articulation of language elements within the visual construct, leading up to primarily textual and graphic constructions on paper, as in the *Codex Artaud*.

Pollock, not unlike Picasso, represented for Spero first of all the culturally hegemonic definition of painting as an exclusively male-gendered practice, and Pollock's hagiographers until this day leave little doubt that they perceive his greatness as a painter as having been intricately intertwined with the performance of his virility. But in the beginning of the sixties, at the time of Spero's own initial articulation as an artist, Pollock had also come to represent Modernist visuality, or rather opticality, the core concept of American Modernism as it had been formulated by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. The construction of this concept as a central term of critical evaluation had depended upon a series of maneuvers that would

henceforth determine the course of the most visible and official American art throughout the 1970s. The first maneuver was to eliminate the avant-garde's inextricable involvement with literary practices, since literature had proven to be incompatible with medium-specific Modernist art and the increasingly specialized eyes of its viewers. This specialization of perception, amounting de facto to an accelerated division of the labor of the senses, was accomplished furthermore not just by banning all forms of figurative representation from the field of painting but also by barring all traces of cultural and historical memory from the pictorial pursuit. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, as the recent critical revisions of the Pollock literature have convincingly clarified,[2] the Modernist account of his work had not only eliminated an understanding of the base, physiological underpinnings of his production methods but it had also banned the sexual and the somatic dimensions from perception and artistic production altogether.

Yet even in the immediate aftermath of Abstract Expressionism's critical triumph—if not already at its apogee—the first voices emerged, even if tentatively, to oppose the one-dimensional restructuring of Modernism developed by Greenberg. One example was a paradoxical editorial venture undertaken by one of the Abstract Expressionists' slightly younger and slightly less authentic and respected members. Robert Motherwell's collection *The Dada Painters and Poets,* published by George Wittenborn in 1951, not only attempted to open up the horizon of New York School artists to a radically different moment of textuality in recent avant-garde history, but opposed explicitly the seemingly ineluctable teleology of Modernist visuality from Cubism to Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism that had been prominently established by Greenberg and Alfred Barr. Motherwell's anthology attempted to reestablish a correlation between the poetical language of the avant-garde and the visual production of its artists, a correlation that had been constitutive of Modernism since its origins in the nineteenth century, as exemplified in the affiliations between Courbet and Champfleury, between Baudelaire and Manet, between Mallarmé and Degas, between Apollinaire and the Cubists.

But Motherwell's editorial emphasis on the poetical and literary complements of avant-garde painting seems to have been presented not just as a form of

countermemory but also with an underlying critical agenda: namely to destabilize, within the very moment of its formation and at the site of its increasingly chauvinist convictions, the supposed genealogy of Abstract Expressionism, and to oppose the instrumental specialization of Greenberg's Modernism and its hegemonic concepts of medium specificity and opticality on their proper territory.

It is of course not accidental that the significance of Motherwell's collection would only become evident in the next generation of artists (rather than in his own work, let alone that of his peers). Thus, for the first time in the New York School context, the function of poetical and philosophical texts—or, more specifically, the status of linguistic signifiers within painterly representation or, ultimately and most importantly, the status of painterly representation *as* a linguistic signifier—would be systematically explored by Cy Twombly (who had met Motherwell at Black Mountain College) and Jasper Johns, from the early to mid-1950s onward.

It is now evident that the rigorous autoreflexive logic of Modernist painting, in its persistent paring down to its constitutive features, made it inevitably approach the condition of a "language," inasmuch as it functioned like a regularized structure and system following its own laws and conventions. Thus painting, presumed to be essentially incommensurable with language, fulfilled its inherent subjection to the forces of enlightenment and technology, with which it had been involuntarily or intentionally allied ever since the avant-garde made the cause of the collectively dominating, social conditions of perception its own. And in doing so, painting programmatically eliminated the last traces of its traditional affinity with myth and its supposedly "natural" association with the forces of the unconscious.

One must take into account that it was at that very moment that the Freudian theorization of the unconscious and conceptions of sexuality as the last domain of the natural, the irrational, and the profoundly prelinguistic were giving way to theorizations such as Jacques Lacan's, in which the unconscious was conceived for the first time in analogy to the structuring principles of language. In the context of painting—more precisely in Surrealist automatism and its af-

termath—the traditional Freudian models of the libidinal seemed to have found their most compelling evidence in the specifically male-encoded methods of Abstract Expressionism. Inasmuch as the myth of the pictorial gesture as the self-evident correlative of the "natural" and of the "unconscious," as a prelinguistic "presence," was embodied in gestural performance, it was primarily on the level of pictorial execution that at the beginning of the 1950s this new process of an increasing secularization and demythification of painting occurred. Inevitably, this "denaturalizing" critique of the painterly gesture entailed also the critique of the latent and profoundly gendered assumptions about painting's intricate association with virility. The transition from Pollock's work to Jasper Johns's mid-1950s work and from there to the late 1950s and early 1960s work of Robert Ryman and Frank Stella illustrates the rapid and consequential demythification of the gestural mark-making process and the critical deconstruction of this last mythical site of painting. Yet this traditional account of a seemingly ineluctable development from Pollock to Johns to Ryman and Stella necessarily had to omit figures like Twombly and Spero from its narrative, since they represented positions that were quite evidently more complicated and contradicted the evolution of the logic of Modernist painting in its final stages. What demarcates the differences in Spero's and Twombly's response to the dialectic of enlightenment produced within the reflection on the discursive traditions of painting is the fact that they both reinvest painting with a reconsideration of painting's profound entanglement not just with myth but with historical and cultural memory. These contradictions were articulated both in their particular way of incorporating literature and language within the pictorial construct as well as in the manner of reinvesting the painterly mark-making process with a profoundly different type of corporeality.

It seems to have been left precisely to Spero as a woman and a feminist artist and to Twombly as a gay artist to develop a countercritique from the perspectives of a generation of radically different models of sexual identity. Spero's work would be based on an altogether different model of the relationship between painting and sublimation and would set out from a radically different conception of painting as the site of the articulation and inscription of the

unconscious. It is certainly not accidental that Spero and Twombly shared a deep involvement with the structure and morphology of the graffito as much as with its poetical/textual equivalent of written profanity. Pictorially speaking, the graffito is a type of random and anonymous mark-making process; in its conscious artistic deployment, however, it reinvested the emptied and routine gesture of Modernist painting and its deconstruction with a rather different type of spontaneity and immediacy altogether. The graffito inscription was no longer imbued with a celebration of (male) mastery and the sublime achievement of competence and skill, but rather emphasized the libidinal compulsion of the pictorial mark-making process, which is as intensely compulsive as it is confined and incompetent.

The dialectical nature of all artistic practice as sublimation is instantly evident in this emphasis on the contorted conditions of articulation. It is apparent in the continuous oscillation between retentive disgust and elated discharge where all graffiti gestures—authentic or consciously adopted—hover: *disgusted* with the conditions of confinement and the evident absence of linguistic competence to articulate oneself publicly, a condition that condemns the speaker precisely to clandestine forms of speech, and *elated* at finding any means and sites of articulation at all in an overall regime of interdiction.

Artaud's famous essay "All Writing Is Pigshit"—especially important to Spero's reading of Artaud[3]—announces precisely this dialectic, and it formulates the countersublimatory impulse at work in certain artistic oppositions that refuse the compensatory functions of artistic production. One could argue that Spero's *Codex Artaud* functions as a manifesto of countersublimation and counterenlightenment at the moment of Modernism's climactic completion of the project of demythifying painting in the formation of Conceptual art. It is here that we find the continuous invocation of a radically different model of culture: as literature it is different from Modernist visuality, and as historical referent it points toward a different set of cultural topoi and tropes. In Spero's *Codex* this appeal points not only to the fate of the outcast writer Artaud but to literary culture at large, to the continuation of writing in painting and to the somatic dimension of writing. But Spero's consistent references to medieval imagery

Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud XIII,* 1972. Typewriter and painted collage on paper, 51¼ × 24½ in. Courtesy of the artist.

and Egyptian mythology point equally to painting's lost resources in myth. Image types taken from Egyptian scrolls and the *Book of the Dead,* a text that had been of considerable importance to Artaud and later to Spero herself, correspond to other elegies on lost cultures pronounced in the late sixties: Twombly's consistent appeal to the memories of classical antiquity or Marcel Broodthaers's continuous evocation of the central poets of modernity, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, and the loss of their literary legacies in the present instrumentalization of language.

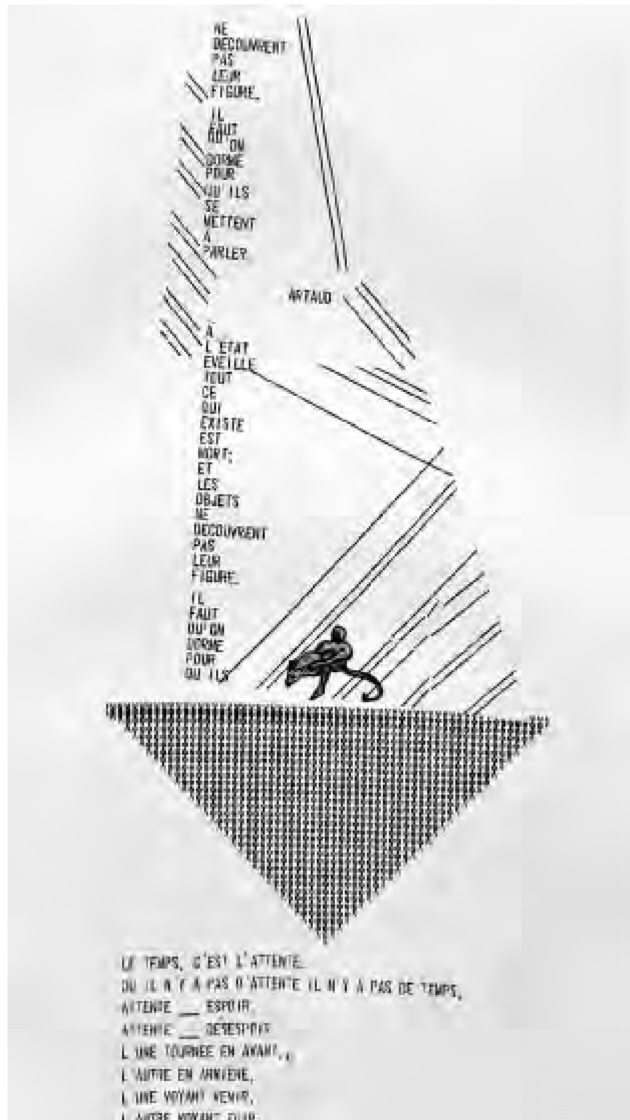
The duality of painting as writing and of writing as painting is central to the inversion of a Modernist trajectory at that moment. Not only are the literary dimensions of culture invoked in a gesture that mourns the hermetic inaccessibility of those cultural legacies, but the literary dimension is also reinscribed as an aggressive challenge to the myopic definitions of the pictorial in the Modernist framework and of the linguistic in Conceptual art. "Writing" and the invocation of Artaud as Spero's "male muse" also assumes a double function in its emergence in Spero's work in the late 1960s. It resituates "painting" within the larger context of speech, language, and poetical representation, and it frees painting from the exclusively perceptual forms of experience to which it had been restricted by Modernism. Paradoxically, "writing" in Spero's work now also assumes a function of opposing precisely the patent congruence of the "writing" of Conceptual art. The underlying model of Conceptual art, the analytic proposition, claimed to have sublated the dialectic of painting between pure physicality and spiritual transcendentality, between the pre- and the paralinguistic, and it had pronounced the final reduction of the painterly to the textual. Spero positions the *Codex Artaud* explicitly in the crucial discussion of the early seventies by donning the appearance of a related enterprise and by adopting the Conceptualists' most cherished design device, the "radical" reduction of all painting to the typewriter text. In the late sixties and early seventies this readymade typography was evidently perceived as a quintessential anti-design feature signaling a new "textual objectivity." By now it appears to have been merely the aesthetic of the tautological and of the totality of administrative order.

Thus for Spero in the *Codex Artaud* the "scene of writing" is a dialectical project of both defacing painting in the name of literature and poetry and challenging, if not erasing, the "writings" of Conceptual artists in the name of painting. It is crucial to see, for example, how reductivist painterly concepts such as monochromy and textuality are radically transfigured in their deployment in Spero's *Codex.* The paradigm of monochrome painting had been registered throughout its Modernist history as a strategy of reductivist logic, as a consequential paring down of the chromatic and textural elements of painterly representation. Monochromy appears now in Spero's large-scale scrolls as an aggressive assault on that very reductivist logic and pictorial visuality altogether in favor of the definition of the painting as a "page," as a receptacle of writing.[4] The countersublimatory impulse operates throughout Spero's work, consistently negating the privilege of the pictorial over the literary as much as it defaces the triumphant claims of the "language" of Conceptual art to have done away with pictorial representation and painterly practice altogether. Thus Spero's dialogue with Conceptual art inverts practically every single claim of that movement's primary figures.

The oversized typeface of Spero's (deliberately chosen) Bulletin typewriter mocks the "avant-garde" claims of the Conceptualists, their commitment to the purity of language functions and analytical thought. Again, Spero's counter-enlightenment impulse reveals suddenly the hidden folly and violence of the rationalist project of Conceptualism, its mere affirmation of a rigorous and all-encompassing control of instrumentalizing rationality, even within the sphere of artistic production. It is against this totalizing claim that Spero mobilizes her dialectic project of painting and writing, and it is against this order that she implores Artaud's testimony.

The fragments of pictorial representation, disseminated like shards throughout the scrolls of the *Codex,* allegorize the teleology of progressivist pictorial Modernism as a failed and insufficient project. The continuous attempts to organize the fields of language fragments into purely graphic, not to say pictorial, terms likewise denounce the premature sublation of the pictorial within the linguistic as self-deception, if not historical fraud.

Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud VI,* 1971. Detail. Typewriter and painted collage on paper, 20½ × 124½ in. Courtesy of the artist.



Nancy Spero, *Codex Artaud XXI,* 1972. Detail. Typewriter and painted collage on paper, 68½ × 20½ in. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: David Reynolds.

Notes

1

Interview with Barbara Flynn, in *Nancy Spero: 43 Works on Paper. Excerpts from the Writings of Antonin Artaud* (Cologne: Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, 1987), p. 1.

2

The revision of the Modernist account of Pollock has been accomplished most notably in Rosalind Krauss's *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

3

Amy Schlegel, author of a doctoral dissertation on Nancy Spero, was kind enough to inform me that this particular text is marked by Spero in her copy of Jack Hirschman's *Artaud Anthology* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1965) and is the main—if not the first—source of Spero's encounter with the writings of Artaud.

4

One could make the argument that this process was prefigured in Twombly's paintings of the mid- to late 1950s, where the baring of the canvas as a white ground resulted from both the reductivist logic of pictorial self-reflexivity and the desecratory impulse, as it transformed the canvas from a site of privileged pictorial visuality into a "mere" white page of writing.

Villeglé: From Fragment to Detail

> The collage of the future will be executed without scissors or razor or glue, etc., in short: without any of the utensils that were necessary until now. It will leave behind the worktable and the artist's cardboard surfaces and it will take its place on the walls of the big city, the unlimited field of poetic achievements.
> —*Léo Malet, 1936*

Malet's prophetic statement is of threefold interest here: first, as a prognosis concerning the transformation of the medium and technology of collage; second, with regard to the programmatic shift of the site of artistic intervention (from the studio worktable to the "walls of the big city"); and, third, because of the naive utopianism with which a second-generation Surrealist projects the walls of the city of 1936 as the "unlimited field of poetic achievements" of the future.

What would actually happen on the walls of the big French city was, of course, the exact opposite of Malet's heroic aspiration. Initially, after the German

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invasion, these walls would become the site of intense political propaganda and fascist prohibition (interdictions that many dared to oppose at the risk of their lives). Then, after the liberation from German fascism, these very same walls would become the site of a rather different form of propaganda and a subtler form of violence: the newly devised strategies of advertising, initiating the emergence of a new consumer culture of the 1950s.

As one of the essential *dispositifs* of enforcing consumption on a heretofore unimaginable scale, advertising would at first deploy the newly refined technique of large-scale color offset lithography on outdoor billboards, a technology that would contribute tremendously to the transformation of the experience of public urban space. This upgraded version of the nineteenth-century technology of the large sized public poster, identified already at the time of Toulouse-Lautrec as *l'affiche américaine* (primitive and arcane by comparison to its electronic successors), would insure from now on that not a single moment of distracted strolling in the city could be spent in the absence of the commodity image. Its pervasive presence would correspond to the more universal regimentation of leisure activities in the spaces of the city and the home.

And a third condition is perhaps even more important for the transformation of collage aesthetics in the postwar period. Once the technologies of invading and controlling the private space of the home had become widely and securely (re)established in the early 1950s by means of radio and glossy illustrated magazines—tools that would soon be displaced in turn by television advertisement—the formerly embattled public space of the city would gradually be *evacuated*. The leisurely passersby, relaxing from the regimen of work, would progressively abandon these spaces, making space for a new industrial work force, the haunting masses of tourists. As an immediate consequence, the campaigns and signs that had striven to engage the attention of distracted citizens came to wither away from their fields of daily vision. The flâneur would become as much a literary myth of the past as now the walls of the city came gradually to shift—in the order of public attention—from a position of centrality to one of marginality. Urban spaces and surfaces would reach near-obsolescence in the late 1960s, when they would acquire—as had the flâneur—the poetic dimension of extinct species.

Within the first phase of postwar reconstruction, up to the mid-1950s, the formerly public spaces of the big cities became increasingly rationalized: they were planned to serve as organized spaces of traffic flow in areas of urban labor and production, designed to allow crowd control in areas restricted for organized mass consumption (malls), or instrumentalized as axes for rapid transportation between these spaces and the correlative suburban dormitories. Complementing these rationally managed urban spaces would be the more and more uninhabitable areas of urban leftovers and increasingly derelict spaces of the (sub)urban agglomerations—the *banlieue.*

The decline of the formerly powerful (and innovative) technologies of advertisement would be indicated either by their relocation to these marginal areas or by the fact that this type of advertising had itself deteriorated (as in the seemingly still prominent billboards of the Paris subway, for example) to the level of a mere back-up system for the electronic media controlling leisure and consumption at the homefront. Accordingly, by the early 1950s, the sites of public urban display, the formats of the billboard, the *affiche américaine,* and the technique of large-scale printed image/text messages experienced their last climactic moment. Once on the wane, they would increasingly qualify as an artistic attraction, the same way that all evacuated locations (ruins) and obsolete technologies, appearing to be exempt from or abandoned by the logic of the commodity and the instrumentality of engineered desire, had so qualified.

In direct continuation of the Surrealist attraction to the outmoded, these urban spaces and their derelict forms of advertisement would now become sites where the articulation of a new artistic rebellion could be inscribed. Brassaï's photographic collection of anonymous gestures of defacement prefigures the *décollagiste*'s recordings of the gestures of anonymous lacerators of billboards by more than fifteen years, sharing as well a concern to articulate powerless rebellion in an abandoned urban space and in a medium of obsolescence. In order to recognize the intricate connection between obsolescence and aesthetic attraction at this moment one has only to remind oneself that the truly viable new media and spaces of advertisement would obviously never have tolerated any such anonymous destructive intervention. Similarly, an earlier moment in the

complex history of interactions between advertising and the avant-garde might help us recognize the particular element of romantic desperation in the oppositional gestures of the postwar activities: the delusion in the 1920s on the part of the historical avant-garde that it could cooperate with, if not coopt and optimize, the dynamic conquest of public visual experience upon advertising's first triumph. Schwitters, Moholy-Nagy, and Rodchenko, albeit under radically different social circumstances, all imagined the necessity of designing consumer products and product propaganda on avant-garde terms, presumably in order to improve the efficiency of such propaganda and the socially beneficial effects of a successful dissemination of new products.

By contrast, the rebellious subject enacting postwar *décollage* is not only an anonymous vandal of product propaganda, but also an artistic agent whose aspirations to intervene in public space have diminished drastically. Neither the anonymous vandal nor the artist who collects these gestures of defacement wrought upon the advertisement can associate his or her activities with the utopian hopes of the prewar artist-designers, who were aiming at a successful collaboration between avant-garde artists and product propaganda in order to achieve a democratic distribution of the amenities of consumption. This mounting pessimism on the part of the most radical of the postwar artists recognizes for the first time the extreme reduction of public experience and self-determination to which advertising culture would subject its audiences. The pessimistic radicals would also understand how the deprivation of public social space would affect the definition of avant-garde practices themselves.

The specificity of the *décollage* aesthetic becomes even more apparent in a comparison with other artistic conceptions of resistance and the gestures of intervention that artists proposed within the diminishing options of social intervention in public spaces of the 1940s and 1950s. Brassaï's photographic recording of graffiti (and Aaron Siskind's subsequent stylization of the material) reintroduces a wider concern for the primitive scriptures of the anonymous *agent brut:* a figure who, while not novel in twentieth-century art history (witness Hans Prinzhorn's collections and exhibitions of the mid-twenties), reemerges out of the shambles of the Second World War with renewed credibility. Dubuffet

Jean Dubuffet, *Vue de Paris, la vie de plaisir,* 1944. Oil on canvas, 35 × 45¾ in. Private collection, New York.

would romanticize that figure in his devotion to *art brut* as well as in his new iconography of the city and its inhabitants. His solution to the blight of urban industrial life and the new consumer culture seems to consist of a continuous regression to the imagery of childhood and a celebration of the expressive forms of the demented as heroic acts of resistance. It goes without saying that these imaginary last resorts of traditional concepts of artistic creativity neither address the actual conditions of such a reduced state of existence nor, least of all, articulate the external conditions that determine the present confinement of artistic conceptions, i.e., the postwar position. For it is only from within this position that the primitivist rebellion against an all-consuming industrial culture could appear as a true artistic opposition when, in fact, it ultimately opened up even the last spaces of that imaginary freedom of the deranged and the deviant to more efficient control and aesthetic consumption.

One of the basic fallacies of recent studies of neo-avantgarde practices of the 1950s—traditional iconographies disguised as social art history (like Sidra Stich's study *Made in USA*)—is that only in the postwar reconstruction period were an aggressive language of product propaganda and an enforced ideology of consumption and spectacle culture put into place, leading to the uniquely American imagery and distribution forms of Pop art. Needless to say, the mid-1920s had seen an unimaginable expansion of these strategies right up to the moment when they collapsed into or became congruent with fascism. Another and possibly more objectionable misconception of postwar practices—the one, incidentally, that governed the Museum of Modern Art's *High and Low* exhibition—is the assumption of an iconographic, morphological, and structural *continuity* of the interaction between avant-garde practices and the media and the spaces of mass culture, as though artists operate from a position of conscious control. A more careful approach recognizes that the rapidity with which options over public space diminished after World War II determined the manner and scale of artistic interventions within the culture industry, once it had been established successfully in a position of unchallenged power.

In the following remarks on some of the Parisian postwar *décollage* artists, I will try to clarify to what extent radically altered circumstances actually gener-

ated a historically specific *discontinuity,* while their practices could be—and still are, in fact—presented by art historians as an apparent continuation of the paradigm of collage aesthetics. (William Seitz's 1962 *Assemblage* show, for example, was the first and only American museum display of the *décollage* artists' work until their recent inclusion in the *High and Low* exhibition.)

In his brief autobiographical essay "In illo tempore,"[1] Jacques de la Villeglé precisely and polemically outlines the dilemma of defining an artistic position in the immediate postwar years in Paris. Arriving in his early twenties from provincial Brittany, where he had met Raymond Hains, with whom he would soon (in 1949) collaborate on the first *décollage,* he seems to have experienced a strong sense of confinement—both aesthetically and politically. Artists of this generation (both Villeglé and Hains were born in 1926) felt artistically confined by the entrenched practices of Ecole de Paris abstraction, in all its governing modes of *abstraction chaude* (represented by artists such as Fautrier, Hartung, Soulages, and Wols), and of *abstraction froide* (Dewasne, Herbin, Vasarely).

Constituting what Jean-Philippe Talbo, in the first essay on Hains and Villeglé, called the "eye of the cyclops of the Ecole de Paris,"[2] these artists of the third generation of the Ecole de Paris were defended by established critics such as Michel Seuphor, Michel Tapié, Charles Estienne, and Léon Degand (around the journal *Art d'aujourd'hui*), who, like the artists themselves, were engaged in a desperate project to restore prewar Modernist pictorial aesthetics and establish a credible continuity within the present. This effort at reconstruction was all the more bound to fail in that the various factions of the historical avant-garde (particularly within the Parisian Dada and Surrealist context) had already been highly incompatible, and they certainly could not be reconciled under the claim for a reconstituted hegemony of Ecole de Paris painting.

Postwar abstraction in Paris was first of all understood to provide the moral and artistic expression of liberation from the fascist yoke of German occupation and the reactionary nationalist culture of the collaborating French Vichy régime. Furthermore, the new abstraction seemed to promise liberation from the Stalinist threat that had emerged from within the ranks of the French intellectual and artistic Left, represented paradoxically both by Socialist Realist artists such as

André Fougeron and by the Stalinist faction of former Dadaists and Surrealists, figures like Louis Aragon and Tristan Tzara.

These problematic positions of the members of the heroic moments of avant-garde history contributed to a sense of political confinement among the younger artists, corroborating that generation's suspicion that *all* the radical political agendas of the prewar avant-gardes, in particular those of Dada and Surrealism, had been annihilated by World War II. Thus, just as the newly reestablished ideology of consumer capitalism required altogether different responses, it now appeared that any aspiration toward a successful synthesis of aesthetic and political transgression had been once and for all discredited by these failed efforts.

The difficulties of the younger generation of postwar artists were compounded by the fact that actual knowledge about various prewar avant-garde projects was both incomplete and erratic (Villeglé explicitly refers to this fact in another essay as the "climate of underinformation"). These artists realized that they had to perform a labor of avant-garde archaeology—paradoxical in itself—in order to (re)discover the Dadaists relevant to their own departures, figures like Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters, and most importantly Alfred Baader, whom Villeglé would later identify as one of two influential predecessors (the other being Léo Malet, the second-generation Surrealist who in the 1930s coined the term *décollage*).

At the same time, a third element contributed to that sense of confinement and determined the artistic attitudes of that generation to an equal, if not higher degree, as did the disenchantment with the political bankruptcy of the avant-garde. This feeling of containment emerged from the newly reinforced principles of consumer culture and its increasingly successful forms of domination. The generation of Hains and Villeglé clearly understood that artistic practice was inconceivable outside of these collective forms of control. Yet if they wanted to develop strategies of artistic opposition and if they wanted to rupture the new forms of spectacle culture, they had to reconcile these strategies with their disenchantment with the political ambitions of the former avant-gardes, in particular the local Surrealists.

Even at first glance, several parameters seem to distinguish the practices of the *décollagistes* from the tradition of collage aesthetics. Primary among the new parameters was the shift of location, as predicted by Léo Malet. Rather than representing urban spaces iconically in the indirect trace of the found images of advertisement, newsprint, or photographic representation, the *décollagistes* shifted their operation from the space of the studio to that of immediate intervention. If in Schwitters's and the Dadaists' work the found materials from the street had ultimately only invaded the space of painting, in the work of the *décollage* artists the street is the site where the artistic intervention actually takes place. Secondly, rather than merely engaging in the elaboration of a new aesthetic of anti-contemplative tactility—as Walter Benjamin had discerned it in the work of the Dadaists—tactility in *décollage* achieved the level of an actual collaborative act. Thus, it seems that the *décollagistes* attempted to reactivate Louis Aragon's demand for the aesthetic of collective participation that ends his account of collage aesthetics, "La peinture au défi" (1930). By citing Isidore Ducasse's famous statement, "The marvelous must be made by all and not by one," Aragon stressed in the last paragraph of his essay that the collective dimension was the quintessential difference between collage aesthetics and the conventions of painting.[3]

Yet neither Surrealism as a historical project nor its various strategies as models of production and participation can adequately explain the strategies of Hains and Villeglé when, in 1949, they decided to declare their first jointly found frieze of lacerated posters to be a work of art, naming it *Ach Alma Manétro* after the three word fragments still legible in the vast field of scattered layers of torn paper.[4]

In the *décollagistes'* pact with anonymous vandalizers of urban product propaganda, these collaborative acts acquired a new and direct agressivity. A type of intervention emerged that seems to have anticipated the practices that the Lettrists and Situationists would soon call *détournement,* practices developed in response to conditions that Guy Debord contextualized in 1967: "A world at once present and absent which the spectacle makes visible is the world of commodity dominating all that is lived."[5]

On yet another level, the *décollagistes'* acts differed programmatically from the Surrealists' notion of the chance encounter (even though Villeglé often

Jacques de la Villeglé/Raymond Hains, *Ach Alma Manétro,* 1949. Torn posters on canvas, 58 × 256 cm. Collection: Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

invokes the devices of the *cadavre exquis* as an earlier model of collaboration). They negated the assumption that the delirious flâneur would in fact—as suggested in Breton's *Nadja*—encounter the female impersonator of the unconscious as a liberating force of defetishization that reconstitutes subjectivity and experience. And to the same extent they opposed the extension of Surrealist automatism into the performative rituals of painting in the studio on canvas (as exemplified most compellingly by the emerging mythology surrounding Jackson Pollock in France). By contrast, the *décollagistes* redefined artistic notions of the collective unconscious, expressly resituating these, not within mythical or archetypal models, but as inextricably and exclusively constituted within the urban space of commodity consumption and spectacle culture. In direct opposition to the mythology of action painting *décollage* did not "elaborate the spectacle of refusal but rather refuse[d] the spectacle" (Vaneigem).

What, then, determines the historically specific structure of fragmentation, the spatial distribution and its temporal ordering, in the work of the *décollagistes?* What materials qualify at a particular historical moment to be subjected to a newly enforced fragmentation in the paradigm of collage, materials of emerging technologies or those newly evacuated, obsolescent ones? Since the short period of its historical beginnings (1911–1919), the paradigm of collage and the procedure of fragmentation had been radically and rapidly transformed according to the specificity of the technological processes of its "raw" materials (as in the shift from collage to photomontage). The same is true for collage's procedure: the spacing of its elements, the modes and criteria of their juxtaposition. The tearing gesture of Jean Arp's early 1916 *papiers déchirés* activates and temporalizes the fragmentation of collage to the same extent that the surface fissures and textural discrepancies had spatialized it.

If Kurt Schwitters has acquired (not without great difficulties and delays of reception) a position of masterful centrality for the definition of collage, this certainly results in part from the traditional nature of his enterprise: within his work from 1919 onward, it is precisely the discovery of a new cosmos of materials, surfaces, and textures that, paradoxically, rescues painting from its imminent extinction. To the *pictorialization* of surfaces and materials in Schwitters's work

(advertisement fragments, printed phonemes, production processes, industrial refuse) there corresponds the *compositional differentiation* with which these elements are balanced in an infinite process of arrangements.

By contrast, the process of *décollage* introduces a number of different features into the paradigm of collage. Even while continuing an explicitly antipainterly attitude in its attack on the advanced forms of urban mass culture as the governing language that contains and suspends traditional practices of artistic representation, it ruptures the collage paradigm both in terms of its materials and procedures. Rather than constructing a new pictorial universe from the affluence of industrial detritus and the languages and signs of consumer culture, it limits its choices to the images and messages of urban advertisement, the *affiches* found on billboards or dispersed on the walls lining city streets. And rather than comparing fragments and textures, surfaces and seams, and arranging them according to the laws of a balanced relational composition, *décollage* foregrounds the latent temporal quality inherent in the collage paradigm, a dimension which—with the exception of Arp's *papiers déchirés*—had previously remained hidden.

The random gesturality of tearing and—as an inevitable consequence—the seemingly infinite repetition of that gesture, bringing with it a potentially infinite seriality in the resulting "work," determine the structure of *décollage* to an extent unprecedented even in the collage aesthetic of Dada. There, by contrast, an organized pictorial totality, complete in itself, resulted from the procedure of balancing, matching, and shifting the found fragments in each instance (not only in Schwitters's work but equally in Hausmann's and Höch's, for example).

At the same time, the *décollagistes'* insistence on gesturality and anonymous participation in the process of creation clearly transcends the legacy of Surrealist automatism and its emphasis on random acts, leading to an increased fragmentation and to a potentially infinite repetition of the lacerating gesture, with its implied abolition of the notion of a completed "work" or "object." Inevitably, these tenets also suggest the total disintegration of internal pictorial relationships and the almost complete erasure of the phonetic, semantic, and lexical dimensions of the written signs found in the collaged fragments.

It is this quality that distinguishes the work of the *décollage* artists most programmatically from that of their avant-garde predecessors in any of the historical contexts with which one might want to associate them. Whether Surrealist automatist poetry or Apollinaire's ideographic *Calligrammes,* whether Dada sound poetry (Arp's, Hausmann's, and Tzara's in particular) or Marinetti's *parole in libertà,* in each of these cases it was the gradual reduction of the sentence to the word, of the word to the syllable, of the syllable to the phonetic and lexical unit that constituted the degree of fragmentation—just as had occurred within the language of post-Cubist collages of the historical avant-gardes. And while individual letters were occasionally subjected to accidental fragmentation as well, it is within *décollage* that the total erosion of even the smallest semantic units is accomplished. This could go even further: in 1954, for example, François Dufrêne discovered in his encounter with Hains and Villeglé that his own efforts at constructing a purely phonetic language that would eliminate all semiotic and semantic conventions were paralleled by Hains and Villeglé's attempts to construct spatialized graphic devices to disentangle language from the possibilities of production of what they regarded as instrumentalizing meaning—what the Lettrists would call the "militarization of language."

The trajectory of Dufrêne's development, this third member of the Parisian *affichistes,* could be taken as symptomatic of the range of conflicts faced by these artists. Dufrêne was a poet and a member of the Lettrisme group around Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître until 1952. In 1953 he dissociated himself from this group, which was still attempting to expand the poetic positions of Breton's concept of automatism, in order to found with Jean-Louis Brau, Guy Debord, and Gil Wolman the Internationale Lettriste group. When in turn this formation became politically radicalized, systematically criticizing the social role of the artist in postwar society along the lines of a Gramscian critique of the legitimizing functions of all cultural production (as, for example, in the comparison between artists and the police in the Lettrist essay titled "The Struggle for Control over the New Techniques of Conditioning"),[6] François Dufrêne did not participate in the transformation of the Internationale Lettriste into the Internationale Situationniste in 1957. Like Hains and Villeglé—who had equally eschewed a liaison

Jacques de la Villeglé, *Quai de la Rapée, 19 mars 1963,* 1963. Torn posters on canvas, 60 × 52 cm. Photo: Shunk-Kender.

François Dufrêne, *Au 136 du boulevard Saint-Germain, zone bleue,* 1966. Torn posters on canvas, 130 × 162 cm.

Jacques de la Villeglé, *Avenue de la Liberté,* 1961. Torn posters on canvas, 160 × 229 cm. Collection Wallraf-Richartz-Museum and Museum Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv.

with the Internationale Situationniste, in spite of their frequent and, as it seems, temporarily close contact with Wolman and Debord—Dufrêne would orient himself toward a more disillusioned and skeptical acceptance of the social compartmentalization of transgressive activities. In the same manner that he had rejected the poetical position of the Lettrist movement as too conservative in its naive attempt simply to expand Surrealist concepts of poetry in a linear evolution, the *affichistes* now resisted association with any quest for revolutionary political avant-garde activity (as proposed by their friends in the Internationale Situationniste), considering it too radical and politically naive. As Villeglé formulated this skepticism in hindsight: "The death of easel painting and the shift of the studio out into the streets did not happen."[7]

This element of a conservative skepticism is the basis for the entrenchment of the neo-avantgarde artists in the immediate postwar period in Paris in general, and in the case of Yves Klein it would lead to an outright reactionary attitude with regard to the political realities of the Fifth Republic. In the case of Dufrêne, Hains, and Villeglé, however, it led to a paradoxical position suspended between this pessimism concerning the revolutionary potential of the neo-avantgarde and an insistence upon radical gestures of opposition: to transform the internal structure of the aesthetic object; to emphasize the collaborative nature of the artistic project; and to demonstrate the relocation of artistic practice in the collective urban space of advanced industrial consumer culture.

Notes

1

Jacques de la Villeglé, "In illo tempore," in *Urbi et Orbi,* ed. Alain Coulange (Mâcon: Editions W, Collection Gramma, 1986), pp. 7–13.

2

Jean-Philippe Talbo, *Loi du 29 juillet 1881: Hains et Villeglé,* exh. cat. (Paris: Colete Allendy Gallery, 1957).

3

Louis Aragon, "La peinture au défi" (1930), reprinted in Aragon, *Les collages* (Paris: Collection Savoir, Hermann Editeurs, 1980), p. 77.

4

Ironically, the syllable "ach" in the title is a fragment of "Bach," which had already figured prominently in the originary moment of collage in 1912–1913 in Braque's and Picasso's work.

5

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1977), p. 37.

6

"La Lutte pour le contrôle des nouvelles techniques de conditionnement," *Internationale Situationniste,* no. 1 (June 1958), p. 1.

7

Jacques de la Villeglé, "Léo Malet," in *Urbi et orbi,* p. 149.

Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art, 1956–1966

> If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it.[1]
>
> My work has no future at all. I know that. A few years. Of course my things will mean nothing.[2]
> —*Andy Warhol*

A calling card on a scroll of light green tissue paper, designed by Andy Warhol and mailed to clients, patrons, and advertising and design agencies in about 1955, depicts a circus *artiste* holding a giant rose. Her tightly cropped costume reveals a body tattooed with over forty corporate logos and brand names, such as Armstrong Tires, Wheaties, Dow Chemicals, Pepsodent, Hunt's Tomato Catsup (which would literally pop up again as a three-dimensional can in Warhol's *Index*

First published in *Andy Warhol,* exh. cat., ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), pp. 39–61.

Andy Warhol, *Untitled,* c. 1955. Offset lithograph on tissue, 29 × 11 in (73.7 × 27.9 cm). © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

Book in 1967), and Chanel No. 5 and the Mobil logo, both of which would resurface fully thirty years later in his portfolio of silkscreen prints titled *Ads*.[3] The *artiste*'s face bears a single tattoo, ennobling her doll-like features with a laurel wreath wound around the majuscule L for *Lincoln* (the car). Across the lower part of the costume an inscription in the *faux naif* script that had already endeared its author to his clients (admen and women and "art" directors) states simply: *Andy Warhol Murry Hell 3-0555,* the artist's telephone number while he lived at 242 Lexington Avenue.[4]

Even at the beginning of his various careers, Warhol literally "embodied" the paradox of Modernist art: to be suspended between high art's haughty isolation (in transcendence, in resistance, in critical negativity) and the pervasive debris of corporate domination; or, as Theodor Adorno put it, "to have a history at all while under the spell of the eternal repetition of mass production." This constitutes the fundamental dialectic within the Modernist artist's role. Its origins in Romanticism and its imminent disappearance are invoked in Warhol's ironic reference to the *saltimbanque* muse and her corporate tattoos.

That this dialectic might originate in two types of collective consumption has been recently suggested:

> With the aid of ideal types two distinct consumer styles may be seen emerging in the 1880's and the 1890's: an elitist type and a democratic one. For all their differences in detail, many, if not most, of the experiments in consumer models of those decades fall into one or the other of these categories. Both the elitist and the democratic consumers rebelled against the shortcomings of mass and bourgeois styles of consumption, but in seeking an alternative they moved in opposite directions. Elitist consumers considered themselves a new type of aristocracy, one not of birth but of spirit—superior individuals who would forge a personal mode of consumption far above the banalities of the everyday. Democratic consumers sought to make consumption more equal and participatory. They wanted to rescue everyday consumption from banality by raising it to the level of a political and social statement.[5]

It will remain a mystery, however, whether Warhol attempted to reconcile these contradictions in his own life by changing his professional identity from "commercial artist" to "fine artist" in 1960.[6] By 1959 Warhol had become very successful in the field of advertising design, earning an average annual salary of $65,000, accompanied by almost annual Art Directors' medals and other awards of professional recognition. As usual, Warhol's own later commentaries on commercial art and his motives for abandoning it are designed as a field of *blagues* that seem to address the impertinence of his interviewers' (and by implication the viewers' and readers') inquisitiveness, rather than the question itself.

In another kind of *blague,* by about 1954 Warhol had already expressed his ambitions in the world of high art: in order to distinguish himself within the mundane world of commercial design he (fraudulently) claimed success in the realm of fine art, which he would only attain ten years later. In a folder produced around 1955 as a promotional gift for one of his clients, *Vanity Fair,* Warhol declared "Happy Butterfly Day." A discreet gold-stamped text inside informs us that "This Vanity Fair Butterfly Folder was designed for your desk by Andy Warhol, whose paintings are exhibited in many leading museums and contemporary galleries."[7] This reference to the museum as the ultimate institution of validation comes full circle thirty years later in a rather different situation but for similar purposes. Toward the end of his career Warhol had successfully integrated the two halves of the dialectic of consumption, his existence between the department store and the museum (what he once called his "favorite places to go to"). The *1986 Christmas Book of the Neiman Marcus Stores* offers a portrait session with Andy Warhol for $35,000:

> Become a legend with Andy Warhol . . . You'll meet the Premier Pop artist in his studio for a private sitting. Mr. Warhol will create an acrylic on canvas portrait of you in the tradition of his museum quality pieces.[8]

By contrast, on the occasion of his actual debut in the world of high art, his appearance in the special section of "Young Talent USA" in *Art in America* in 1962, Warhol (equally fraudulently) introduces himself as "self taught."[9] Warhol's in-

verted bluffs (of the commercial world with fine art legitimacy, the high art world with brutish innocence) indicate more than a shrewd reading of the disposition of commercial artists to be eternally in awe and envy of the museum culture they have failed to enter by producing mass cultural debris. Or, for that matter, its complementary formation, the disposition of the high art connoisseur to be eternally shocked into submission by anyone who claims to have truly broken the rules of high art's tightly determined and controlled discursive game. Such strategically brilliant *blagues* encode the avant-garde's communication with its bourgeois audience (this was most aptly practiced by Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and Marcel Duchamp and brought up to late twentieth-century standards by Warhol). They indicate Warhol's early awareness of the rapidly changing relationships between the two spheres of visual representation and the drastic changes of the artist's role and audience's expectations at the beginning of the 1950s. He seems to have understood early on that it was the task of a new generation of artists to recognize and publicly acknowledge that the conditions which had allowed the formation of the Abstract Expressionist aesthetic, with its Romantic notions of heroic resistance and transcendental critique, had actually been surpassed by the massive reorganization of society in the postwar period. In Perry Anderson's account,

> It was the Second World War . . . which cut off the vitality of modernism. After 1945, the old semi-aristocratic or agrarian order and its appurtenances were finished in every country. Bourgeois democracy was finally universalized. With that, certain critical links with a precapitalist past were snapped. At the same time, Fordism arrived in force. Mass production and mass consumption transformed the West European economies along North American lines. There could no longer be the smallest doubt as to what kind of society this technology would consolidate: an oppressively stable, monolithically industrial, capitalist civilization was now in place.[10]

This new civilization would create conditions in which mass culture and high art would be forced into an increasingly tight embrace, eventually leading

to the integration of the sphere of high art into that of the culture industry. But this fusion would not merely imply a transformation of the artist's role and changing cultural practices or affect images and objects and their services and functions inside society. The real triumph of mass culture over high culture would eventually take place—quite unexpectedly, for most artists and critics—in the fetishization of the concept of high art in the larger apparatus of late twentieth-century ideology. Allan Kaprow, one of the more articulate members of that new generation of postwar artists, grasped this transformation of the artistic role a few years later:

> It is said that if a man hits bottom there is only one direction to go and that is up. In one way this has happened, for if the artist was in hell in 1946, now he is in business. . . . There is a chance that the modern "visionary" is even more of a cliché than his counterpart, the "conformist," and that neither is true.[11]

As his calling card suggested, Warhol was uniquely qualified to promote the shift from visionary to conformist and to participate in this transition from "hell" to business: after all, his education at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, where he graduated in 1949, had not been a traditional fine arts studio education and had provided him with a depoliticized and technocratically oriented American version of the Bauhaus curriculum, as it spread in the postwar years from László Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus in Chicago to other American art institutions.[12]

In fact, in early interviews with Andy Warhol one can still find traces of the populist Modernist credo that seems to have motivated him (and Pop art in general). Both aspects—production and reception—seem to have concerned him. In a little-known interview from the mid-sixties he remarked:

> Factory is as good a name as any. A factory is where you build things. This is where I make or *build* my work. In my art work, hand painting would take much too long and anyway that's not the age we live

> in. Mechanical means are *today,* and using them I can get more art to more people. Art should be for everyone.[13]

Addressing the question of audiences for his work, he said in 1967 in one of his most important interviews:

> Pop art is for everyone. I don't think art should be only for the select few, I think it should be for the mass of American people and they usually accept art anyway.[14]

One of the first corporate art sponsors and one of the major supporters of Moholy-Nagy's work in Chicago, as well as a fervent advocate of the industrialization of Modernist aesthetics in the United States, was Walter Paepcke, president of the Container Corporation of America. He had, prematurely, anticipated in 1946 that mass culture and high art could be reconciled in a radically commercialized Bauhaus venture. But in his vision, as in that of many others, the reconciliation was purged of all political and ideological implications concerning artistic intervention in collective social progress. The cognitive and perceptual devices of modernity simply would have to be deployed for the development of a new commodity aesthetic (product design, packaging, and advertising). The fabrication of that aesthetic would, in fact, become one of the most powerful and important industries in postwar America and Europe, without, however, resolving the contradictions of Modernism. Here are the words of the "visionary" from the business side:

> During the last century in particular, the Machine Age with its mass production procedures has seemingly required specializations which have brought about an unfortunate divergence in work and philosophy of the individual producer and the artist. Yet artists and business men, today as formerly, fundamentally have much in common and can contribute the more to society as they come to complement their talents. Each has within him the undying desire to create, to contribute something to the world, to leave his mark upon society.[15]

Thirty years later this dogged entrepreneurial vision found its farcical echo in Warhol's triumphant proclamation of diffidence. Warhol had replaced the last remnants of an aesthetic of transcendence or critical resistance by an aesthetic of ruthless affirmation:

> Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in Business is the most fascinating kind of art.[16]

The triumph of mass culture over traditional concepts of aesthetic transcendence and critical resistance would produce two new types of "cultural" personalities. The first was constituted by the ever-increasing number of admen who would become passionate collectors of avant-garde art (in order to embrace the "creativity" that would perpetually escape them, and in order to possess privately what they would systematically destroy by their own "work" in the public sphere). The second type comprised hundreds of artists relegated to commercial work, such as one James Harvey, who, according to *Time Magazine,*

> draws his inspiration from religion and landscapes. . . . At nights he works hard on muscular abstract paintings that show in Manhattan's Graham Gallery. But eight hours a day, to make a living, he labors as a commercial artist.[17]

When Harvey, who had designed the Brillo box in the early 1960s, encountered his design on 120 wooden simulacra made by Warhol (or his assistants) for his second show at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1964, he could only deflect his sense of a profound crisis of artistic standards by threatening Warhol with a sort of paternity suit concerning the originality of the box's design. Warhol, by contrast, was fairly well prepared to reconcile the contradictions emerging from the collapse of high culture into the culture industry and to

Andy Warhol, *Brillo Box,* 1964. Silkscreen ink on wood, 17 × 17 × 14 in. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Dorothy Zeidman. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

participate in it with all the skills and techniques of the commercial artist. He had freed himself early on from outmoded concepts of originality and authorship and had developed a sense of the necessity for collaboration and a Brechtian understanding of the commonality of "ideas," from which, traditionally, only the specialized and condensed talent of the artist as unique and singular creator had been exempted.[18]

Commercial Folklore

Warhol seems to have lived through every stage of the mass culture/high art paradox, from its original division through its eventual fusion, in his easy transition from one role to the other. In his early career as a commercial artist he featured all the debased and exhausted qualities of the "artistic" that art directors and admen adored: the whimsical and the witty, the wicked and the *faux naïf,* precisely those qualities that Warhol's *artiste* had advertised in the promotional calling card from "Murry Hell." One of the fountains for such a realm of unbridled artistic pleasure before or beyond mechanization was the aristocratically refined preindustrial charm of Rococo and Neoclassical drawing. These styles appear profusely in Warhol's early work—as had been the case in 1920s Art Deco advertising, packaging, and book illustration. The other resource of non-commercial charm was that particular variety of (American) folk art with which dozens of artists in the American context since Elie Nadelman had identified, at least as collectors. After all, the folk art object, with its peculiar form of an already extinct creativity, seemed to mirror the disappearance of the traditional type of artistic creativity these artists now had to face themselves. Warhol's success as a commercial designer depended in part on this "artistic" performance, on his delivery of a certain notion of creativity that appeared all the more rarefied in a milieu whose every professional impulse is geared to increase the efficacy of commodification and to eradicate subjectivity in the realm of public (and private) experience. With the condescending love of the collector of extinct specimens, Warhol introduced precisely those practices (false naiveté, the charm of the uneducated and un-

skilled, preindustrial *bricolage,* his illiterate mother) into the most advanced and most sophisticated milieu of professional alienation: advertising design.

That Warhol was fully aware of this paradox is evident in a famous early interview with Gene R. Swenson, where he reveals the extent to which he had internalized the lessons of John Cage and transposed them into everyday experience:

> It's hard to be creative and it's hard also not to think what you do is creative or hard not to be called creative because everybody is always talking about that and individuality. Everybody's always being creative. And it's so funny when you say things aren't, like the shoe I would draw for an advertisement was called a "creation" but the drawing of it was not. But I guess I believe in both ways. . . . I was getting paid for it, and I did anything they told me to do. . . . I'd have to invent and now I don't; after all that "correction" those commercial drawings would have feelings, they would have a style. The attitude of those who hired me had feeling or something to it; they knew what they wanted, they insisted, sometimes they got very emotional. The process of doing work in commercial art was machine-like, but the attitude had feeling to it.[19]

By contrast, Warhol's successful debut as an artist in the sphere of high art—and here the paradox becomes fully apparent—depended precisely on his capacity to erase from his paintings and drawings more completely than any of his peers (Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, in particular) the traces of the handmade, of artistry and creativity, of expression and invention. What appeared to be cynical "copies" of commercial art early in 1960 had to scandalize expectations (and self-deceptions) at the climax of the reception of Abstract Expressionism. Those "copies" would shock all the more since the public's eyes were unfamiliar with or had conveniently disavowed the work of Francis Picabia's mechanical period, for example, or the larger implications of Marcel Duchamp's readymades.

The notorious anecdote in which Warhol showed two versions of a painting depicting a Coca-Cola bottle to his friend Emile de Antonio in 1962—one gesturally dramatic, carrying the legacy of Abstract Expressionism, the other cold and diagrammatic, making the claims of the readymade in the domain of painting—attests to Warhol's uncanny ability to produce according to the needs and demands of the moment (and to his technical skills to perform these tasks). Yet it also betrays a brief instance of hesitation in Warhol's calculation of how far he could really go with the breakdown of local painterly conventions and the infusion of commercial design devices in order to make his entry into the New York high art world. After all, as late as July 1962, what was to have been Warhol's first New York exhibition, arranged with the prestigious Martha Jackson gallery, had been canceled with the following explanation:

> As this gallery is devoted to artists of an earlier generation, I now feel I must take a stand to support their continuing efforts rather than confuse issues here by beginning to show contemporary Dada. . . . The introduction of your paintings has already had very bad repercussions for us. This is a good sign, as far as your work and your statement as an artist are concerned. Furthermore, I like you and your work. But from a business and gallery standpoint, we want to take a stand elsewhere. Therefore, I suggest to you that we cancel the exhibition we had planned for December 1962.[20]

Apparent lack of painterly resolution, often misread as parodic mockery of Abstract Expressionism, is persistent throughout Warhol's early work between 1960 and 1962. He painted in a loose gesturally expressive manner images derived from close-up details of comic strips and advertisement fragments.[21] De Antonio (identified in Warhol's and others' recollections as a "Marxist") gave him the right advice (and so did the dealer Ivan Karp, who also saw both paintings): destroy the Abstract Expressionist Coca-Cola bottle and keep the "cold" diagrammatic one.[22]

What is most obvious in these early hand-painted logotypes and diagrams (especially in instances when Warhol kept both versions, as in *Storm Door I* [1960]

Andy Warhol, *Coca-Cola,* 1960. Oil and wax crayon on canvas, 72 × 54 in (182.9 × 137.2 cm). Dia Art Foundation, New York. Courtesy The Menil Collection, Houston. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

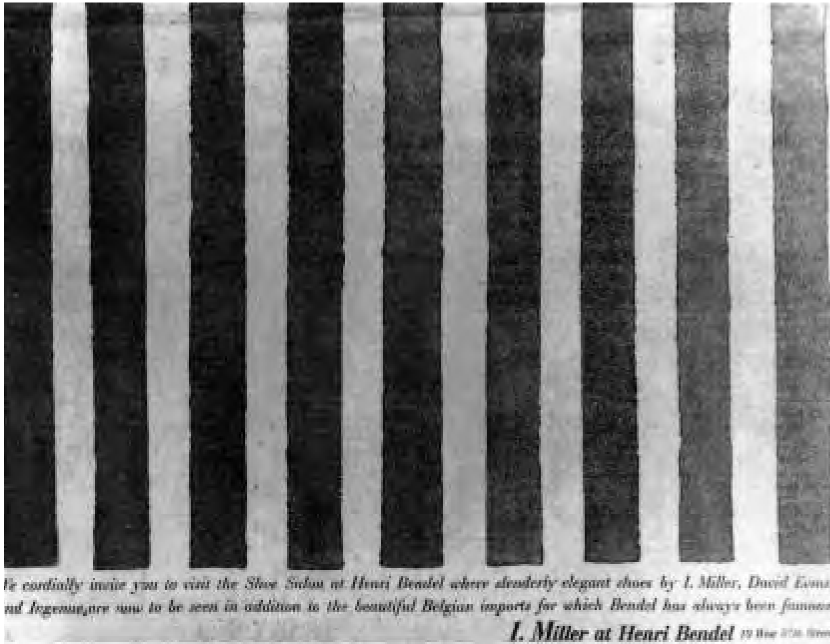
Andy Warhol, *Large Coca-Cola,* 1962. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 82 × 57 in (208.3 × 144.8 cm). Collection: Elizabeth and Michael Rea. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

and *Storm Door II* [1961], or *Before and After I, II, III*) is that Warhol's expertise and skills as a commercial artist qualified him for this diagrammatic design of the new painting in the same way that his traditional artistic inclinations had once qualified him for his success in the world of commercial design. It has been argued frequently that there is very little continuity between Warhol's "commercial" and Warhol's "high" art.[23] But a more extensive study of Warhol's advertising design suggests that the key features of his work of the early sixties are prefigured in the refined arsenal and manual competence of the graphic designer: extreme close-up fragments and details, stark graphic constrasts and silhouetting of forms, schematic simplification and, most important, rigorous serial composition.

The sense of composing depicted objects and arranging display surfaces in serially structured grids emerges after all from the seriality that constitutes the very "nature" of the commodity: its *object status,* its *design,* and its *display.* Such seriality had become the major structural formation of object perception in the twentieth century, determining aesthetic projects as different as those of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin on the one hand and Busby Berkeley on the other. Amédée Ozenfant had rightfully included serial commodity display in his *Foundations of Modern Art* in 1928. And by the mid-1950s the serial grid composition had regained the prominence it had already acquired in the 1920s: Ellsworth Kelly's serial arrangement of monochrome panels, such as *Colors for a Large Wall* (1951), and Johns's *Gray Alphabets* (1956), prefigure the central strategy of Warhol's compositional principle, as do, somewhat later the serially structured arrangements of readymade objects by Arman.

Of course, the opposite is also true: Warhol's real affinity for and unusual familiarity (for a commercial artist) with the advanced avant-garde practices of the mid-1950s inspired his advertising designs and imbued them with a *risqué* stylishness that the average commercial artist, lacking a real understanding of the formal and strategic complexity of the work of avant-garde artists, would have been unable to conceive. Two outstanding examples from Warhol's 1956 campaigns for I. Miller Shoes in the *New York Times* confirm that Warhol had already grasped the full range of the painterly strategies of Johns and Rauschenberg—in

Jasper Johns, *Gray Alphabets,* 1960. Graphite pencil and graphite wash on paper, 89.5 × 62.9 cm. Collection Jean-Christophe Castelli, New York. Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, Paris. Photo: Augustin Dumage.



Andy Warhol, I. Miller advertisement, *The New York Times,* 1956. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

Andy Warhol, I. Miller advertisement, *The New York Times,* 1956. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

particular those aspects that would soon determine his own pictorial production. The first one features the careful overall regularization of a nonrelational composition (as in the obvious example of Johns's *Flag* paintings after 1954), a strategy that was soon mechanically debased in Warhol's hands and depleted of all of Johns's culinary painterly differentiation. The second ad shows the influence of Rauschenberg's direct imprinting techniques and persistent use of indexical mark-making (based on his collaboration with John Cage on the *Automobile Tire Print* in 1951), a method soon to be voided by Warhol of even the last remnants of expressivity and the decorative artistry that it had gradually regained in Rauschenberg's work of the later 1950s.

The Rituals of Paintings

By the end of the 1950s Warhol, both commercially competent and artistically canny, was singularly prepared to effect the transformation of the artist's role in postwar America. This transformation of an aesthetic practice of transcendental negation into one of tautological affirmation is perhaps best articulated by John Cage's famous dictum of 1961 in *Silence:* "Our poetry now is the realization that we possess nothing. Anything therefore is a delight (since we do not possess it . . .)."

The fact that this transformation would concretize itself as well in dismantling the traditional format of easel painting had already been predicted in 1958 by Allan Kaprow in "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," which functioned as a manifesto for the new generation of American artists after Abstract Expressionism:

> Pollock's near destruction of this tradition [of easel painting] may well be a return to the point where art was more actively involved in ritual, magic and life than we have known it in our recent past. If so, it is an exceedingly important step, and in its superior way, offers a solution to the complaints of those who would have us put a bit of life into art. But what do we do now? There are two alternatives. One is to continue in this vein. . . . The other is to give up the making of paintings entirely.[24]

Robert Rauschenberg, *Automobile Tire Print,* 1951. Monoprint on paper (mounted on canvas), 16½ × 264½ in. Collection: Robert Rauschenberg. Photo: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Courtesy of the artist.

In spite of Kaprow's acumen, the essay was marred by two fundamental misunderstandings. The first was the idea that the hegemony of Abstract Expressionism had come to an end because Pollock "had destroyed painting"[25] and because of the vulgarization of the Abstract Expressionist style by its second-generation imitators. This assumption suggests—as historians and critics have argued since—that merely a stylistic rebellion against New York School painting and its academicization was the major motivating force in the formation of Pop art.[26] This stylistic argument, descriptive at best, mistakes the effects for the cause, and it can be most easily refuted by remembering two historical facts. First, that painters such as Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt were only recognized as late as the mid-1960s and that at the same time Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko continued to work with ever-increasing visibility and success. If anything, by the mid-1960s their work (and most certainly Pollock's) had achieved an almost mythic status, representing aesthetic and ethical standards that seemed, however, lost in the present and unattainable for the future. Second, the younger generation of New York School artists, from Johns and Rauschenberg to Claes Oldenburg and Warhol, continually emphasized—both in their works and their statements—their affiliation with, and veneration of, the legacy of Abstract Expressionism, while paradoxically emphasizing the impossibility to achieve that generation's transcendental artistic aspirations and standards.

The second (and major) misconception in Kaprow's essay becomes evident in the contradictory remarks on the revitalization of the artistic ritual and the simultaneous disappearance of easel painting. Kaprow conceives of the ritualistic dimension of aesthetic experience (what Walter Benjamin had called the "parasitical dependence of art upon magic and ritual") as a stable, transhistorical, universally accessible condition that could be reconstituted at all times by merely altering exhausted stylistic means and obsolete artistic procedures. Kaprow's ideas of 1958 are to a certain extent comparable to Benjamin's thoughts of the twenties, when the latter developed the notion of a participatory aesthetic in the context of his discussion of Dadaism. Yet Kaprow speaks with an astonishing naiveté about the historical possibility of a new participatory aesthetic emerging out of Pollock's work:

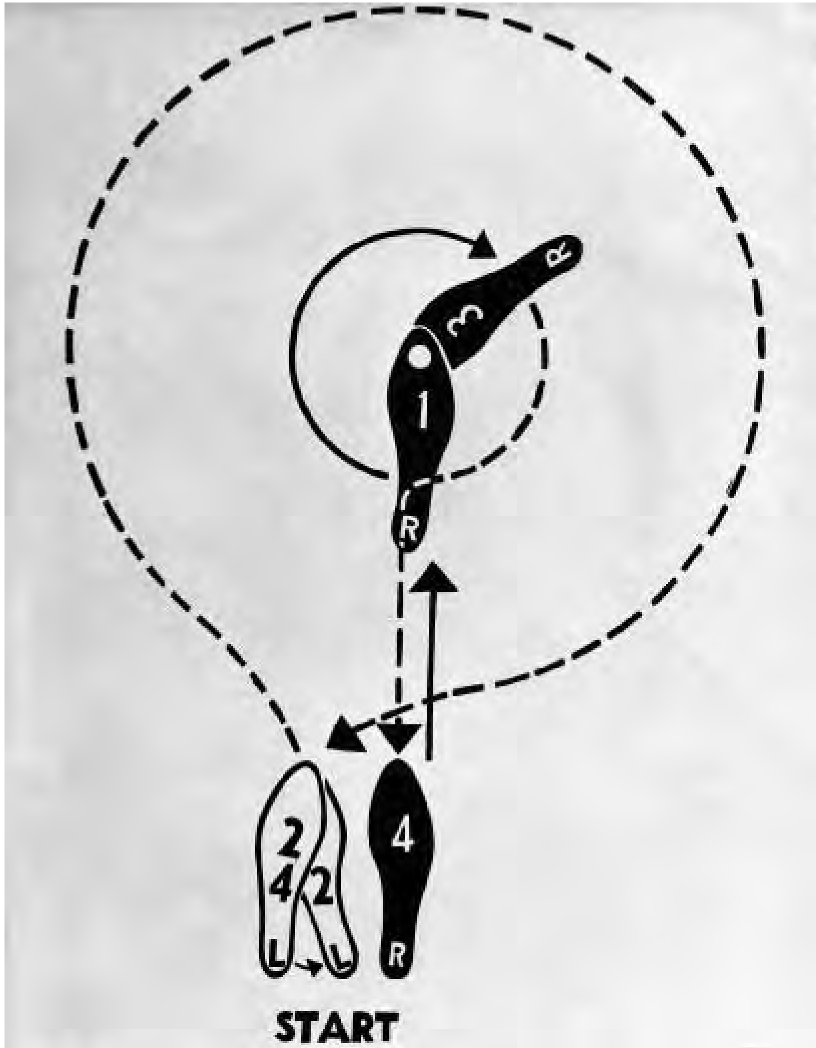
> But what I believe *is* clearly discernible is that the *entire* painting comes out at the participant (I shall call him that, rather than observer) right into the room. . . . In the present case the "picture" has moved so far out that the canvas is no longer a reference point. Hence, although up on the wall, these marks surround us as they did the painter at work, so strict a correspondence has there been achieved between his impulse and the resultant art.[27]

In fact, what *did* occur in the formation of Pop art in general and Warhol's work in particular, was just the opposite of Kaprow's emphatic prophecy: the "destruction" of painting, as initiated by Pollock, was accelerated and extended to comprise as well the destruction of *the last vestiges of the ritual* in aesthetic experience itself. Warhol came closer than anybody since Duchamp (in the Western European and American avant-garde at least) "to give up the making of painting entirely." What is more, Warhol's "paintings" eventually opposed aspirations toward a new aesthetic of participation (as it had been preached and practiced by Cage, Rauschenberg, and Kaprow) by degrading precisely those notions to the level of absolute farce.

Tango, for example, was the title of one of Johns's crucial monochromatic and participatory paintings in 1955, embodying Cage's concept of participation in its invitation to the viewer to wind up the painting's built-in music box. Johns explicitly stated that such a participatory concept motivated his work at the time:

> I wanted to suggest a physical relationship to the pictures that was active. In the *Targets* one could stand back or one might go very close and lift the lids and shut them. In *Tango* to wind the key and hear the sound, you had to stand relatively close to the painting, too close to see the outside shape of the picture.[28]

Seven years after Johns's *Tango* and four years after Kaprow's prophetic text, Andy Warhol produced two groups of diagrammatic paintings, the series of *Dance Diagrams* (e.g., *Fox Trot* and *Tango,* 1962) and the series of five *Do It Yourself* (1962)



Andy Warhol, *Dance Diagram,* 1961. Oil on canvas, 183 × 137 cm. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

Andy Warhol, *Do It Yourself,* 1962. Oil on canvas, 70 × 54 in. Collection: Dr. Peter Ludwig. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Eric Pollitzer. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

paintings (and a number of related drawings). These works seem to have been conceived in direct response to the idea (and the impossibility) of renewing the concept of participatory aesthetics—if not in direct response to Johns's and Rauschenberg's paintings or as a rebuttal to the euphoric optimism of Kaprow's "manifesto."

Both the *Dance Diagrams* and the *Do It Yourself* paintings inscribe the viewer literally, almost physically into the plane of visual representation in what one might call a "bodily synecdoche"—a heroic tradition of twentieth-century avant-garde practice intended to instigate active identification between the reader/viewer and the representation, and to replace the passive contemplative mode of aesthetic experience by an active participatory one. However, this tradition had, in the meantime, become one of the key strategies—if not the principal one—of advertising design itself, soliciting viewers' active participation as *consumption*.

Accordingly, in Warhol's work, the diagrams that seem to entice the viewer's feet literally to step onto the *Dance Diagram* paintings and that seem to engage the viewer's hands to fill in the *Do It Yourself* paintings are frivolously transferred onto the pictorial plane of high art from the domains of popular entertainment (referencing rituals that were themselves already camp and slightly defunct). What is more, they seem to suggest that if "participatory aesthetics" remained at so infantile a level as to invite participants to wind up a music box, clap their hands, or hide an object (as suggested in some works by Johns and Rauschenberg, who had spoken admiringly of "Pollock's dance"), one might just as well shift from the strategic games of high art to those *real rituals of participation* within which mass culture contains and controls its audiences.

This dialogic relationship of the *Dance Diagram* paintings with Kaprow's essay and the status of participatory aesthetics was made even more explicit in Warhol's rather peculiar decision to present these paintings in their first public installation horizontally on the floor, making the display an essential element of the painting's reading.[29] Simulating the function of actual diagrams of dance steps, the diagram/paintings not only increased the facetious invitation to the viewer to participate in a trivial ritual of mass culture but literally parodied the

Andy Warhol, *Dance Diagram,* Installation view, retrospective exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, 1965. Courtesy The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

position of the painting in Pollock's notorious method of working horizontally on the floor of his studio. It had been described in Harold Rosenberg's famous essay "The American Action Painters" in 1952 and reverberated through Kaprow's manifesto as well:

> At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act—rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. . . . The image would be the result of this encounter.[30]

The destruction of the painterly legacy of Jackson Pollock and the critique of a remedial reconstruction of aesthetic experience as participatory ritual would resurface in Warhol's work once again almost twenty years later. Precisely at the moment of the rise of Neo-Expressionism Warhol delivered one of his last *coups* to an increasingly voracious high culture industry desperately trying to revitalize the expressionist paradigm and its failed promises. His series of *Oxidation* paintings of 1978, whose monochrome surfaces were coated with metallic bronze paint striated and spotted with the expressively gestural oxidizing marks of the author's (or his assistants') urination onto the canvas, brought full circle the critique begun in the *Dance Diagrams*.

The Monochrome

The *Dance Diagrams* of 1962 contain two other important aspects of Warhol's work, which, along with serial grid composition, became the central strategies of his entire painterly production: mechanically reproduced readymade imagery and monochromatic color schemes. Warhol's adoption of the modernist tradition of monochrome painting, frequently concealed in metallic monochrome sections of the paintings or blatant in separate panels (the "blanks" as he called them, with a typically derogatory understatement), aligns his painterly work of

the early 1960s in yet another way with some of the key concerns emerging from New York School painting at that time.

Pollock had made industrial aluminum paint notorious when he included it in his key paintings of the late 1940s, such as *Lucifer* (1947), *Lavender Mist* (1950), and *White Light* (1954). The material's industrial derivation had generated a visual "scandal" while its (relative) light reflectivity concretized the viewer's optical relationship to painting's matter in a literalist, almost mechanical manner. Warhol deployed the same industrial enamel, and his use of aluminum paint was only be the beginning of a long involvement with "immateriality," both of light reflectivity and of "empty" monochrome surfaces. Evolving from the various stages of gold and silver *Marilyns* in 1962, followed by the series of silver *Elvis* paintings and numerous other images silkscreened on silver panels throughout 1963 and 1964 (*Silver Marlon, Tunafish Disaster, Thirteen Most Wanted Men*), Warhol produced the first diptych paintings with large monochrome panels in 1963 (*Mustard Race Riot* and *Blue Electric Chair*), the first monochrome metallic diptychs in 1964 (*Round Jackies*), and the silver *Liz* diptych in 1965.

As was the case with the *Dance Diagrams* and the *Do It Yourself* series, the monochrome diptychs devalued the discovery of the pictorial void and thus inverted one of Modernism's most sacred pictorial strategies that had originated in symbolist sources. Upon its appearance in the twentieth century it had been hailed by Wassily Kandinsky in the following terms:

> I always find it advantageous in each work to leave an empty space;
> it has to do with not imposing. Don't you think that in this there rests
> an eternal law—but it's a law for tomorrow.[31]

That "empty space," as Kandinsky's 1911 statement clearly indicates, was conceived of as yet another strategy of negating aesthetic imposition, functioning as a spatial *suture* allowing the viewer a relationship of mutual interdependence with the "open" artistic construct. The empty space functioned equally as a space of hermetic *resistance,* rejecting ideological meaning assigned to painting as well as the false comforts of convenient readings. It was certainly with those aspirations

that the monochrome strategy had been deployed by both Newman and Reinhardt throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s, imbuing their monochrome paintings (and the strategy itself), paradoxically, with a renewed sense of transcendental sanctity reminiscent of its Symbolist origins. On the other hand, like all other Modernist strategies of reduction, the monochrome easily approached the very threshold where sacrality inadvertently turned into absolute triviality, either as the result of incompetent execution of such a device of apparently supreme simplicity, or of exhausting a strategy by endless repetition, or as an effect of the artists' and viewers' growing doubts about a strategy whose promises and pretenses had become increasingly incompatible with its actual physical and material object status and their functions.[32]

Once again, it was Kaprow who in 1964 articulated the emerging sense of a paradigmatic crisis of the monochrome. He cited "the blank canvas" among those critical acts in which the earlier elitist hermeticism and the metaphysical claims of monochromy now had to be revised:

> Pursuit of the idea of "best" becomes then (insidiously) avoidance of the idea of "worst" and Value is defeated by paradox. Its most poignant expressions have been the blank canvas, the motionless dance, the silent music, the empty page of poetry. On the edge of such an abyss all that is left to do is *act*.[33]

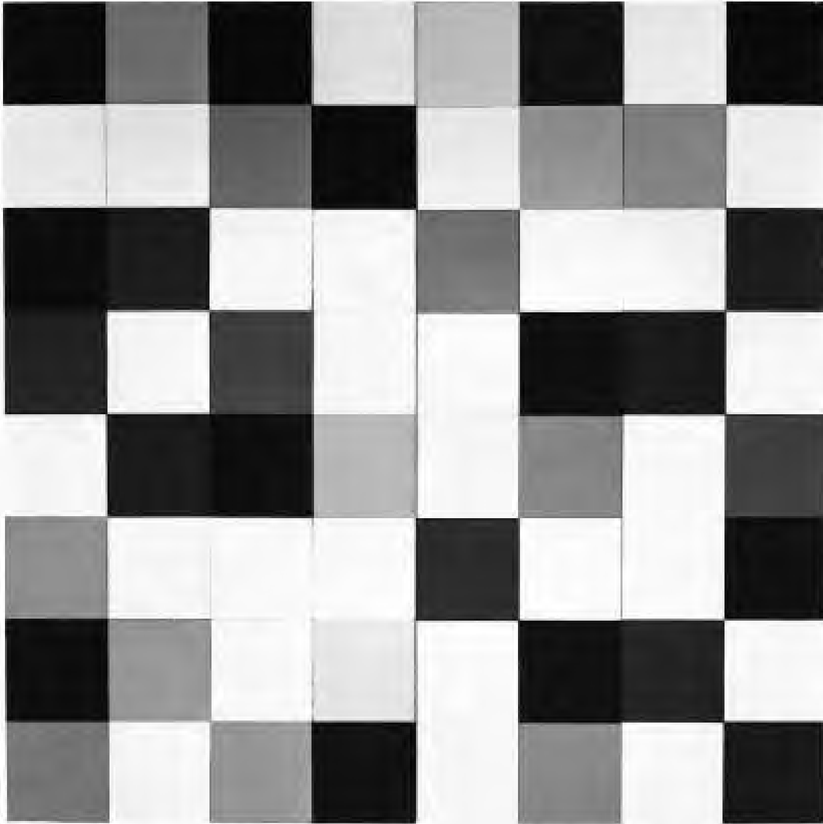
The process of a critical reevaluation of that tradition had begun in the American context in Rauschenberg's early *White Paintings* (1951) and would find its climax (along with the official termination of Warhol's painterly production) in the *Silver Clouds,* the Mylar pillows, identified by Warhol as "paintings"—inflated with helium, floating through (and supposedly out of) the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1966.[34] Shortly before, Warhol announced publicly that he had abandoned painting once and for all. It would seem to have led him to Kaprow's envisioned "action," except that Warhol's more skeptical evaluation of the available options for cultural practice would prove Kaprow's prophecies once again to be falsely optimistic.

Thus the monochrome field and the light reflective surface, seemingly emptied of all manufactured visual incident, had become one of the central concerns of the neo-avantgarde artists of the early to mid-1950s, evident not only in Rauschenberg's work but equally in the work of Kelly and Johns (and a few years later in that of Frank Stella), and in the work of their European contemporaries Lucio Fontana and Yves Klein. Rauschenberg, for one, had done a series in 1953 of small square collages with gold and silver leaf, which he exhibited at the Stable Gallery that year, and he continued through 1956 to use the crumpled foil on roughly textured fabric, a combination that eliminated drawing and gesture and, instead, generated surface and textural incident exclusively from the material's inherent qualities and procedural capacities. Stella, before engaging in his series of large aluminum paintings in 1960 (the square paintings *Averroes* and *Avicenna,* for example), had already produced a group of smaller square paintings in 1959 (such as *Jill*), which were covered with geometrically ordered, highly reflective metallic tape (as opposed to Rauschenberg's randomly broken and erratically reflecting foil surfaces).

Warhol explicitly stated that this legacy of monochrome paintings of the early to mid-1950s influenced his own decision to paint monochrome panels in the early 1960s:

> I always liked Ellsworth's work, and that's why I always painted a blank canvas. I loved that blank canvas thing and I wished I had stuck with the idea of just painting the same painting like the soup can and never painting another painting. When someone wanted one, you would just do another one. Does anybody do that now? Anyway, you do the same painting whether it looks different or not.[35]

In spite of Warhol's typically diffident remarks about the historical references for his use of monochrome panels, his flippancy clearly also indicates his awareness of the distance that separated his conception of the monochrome from Kelly's. In his own deployment of monochromy in the early 1960s, Warhol recognized that not a single strategy of Modernist reduction and radical negation



Ellsworth Kelly, *Colors for a Large Wall,* 1951. Oil on canvas, mounted on sixty-four wood panels; overall 94¼ in × 94½ in (239.3 × 239.9 cm). Collection: The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist.

could escape its ultimate fate of enhancing painting's status as object and commodity, the elimination of any and all metaphysical residue of the device (be it in Neo-plasticist, Abstract Expressionist or, as it was identified, hard edge and color field painting of the 1950s). It seems possible, therefore, to argue that Warhol's earliest paintings explicitly inscribed themselves into that venerable legacy. Paintings such as *Yellow Close Cover before Striking* (1962) or *Red Close Cover before Striking* (1962) perform the same critical inversion with regard to the color field legacy and the work of Newman as the *Dance Diagrams* and the *Do It Yourself* paintings do to the legacy of Jackson Pollock.

Once again, what makes Warhol's negation of that legacy compelling is the fact that he articulates the loss of the paradigm as an inexorable necessity, not as an individual assault on a venerated pictorial tradition. Contaminating the elusive hermeticism of the monochrome with the vulgarity of the most trivial of commonplaces (in this case the diagrammatic detail of the flint strip of a matchbook cover) makes Warhol's work perform the task of that erasure all the more convincingly. As had been the case with his assault on the ritualistic legacy of Abstract Expressionism, Warhol knew early on that this process would eventually dismantle more than just the strategy of the monochrome itself. He realized that any implementation of the monochrome would at this point inevitably lead to a different spatial definition (not to say dissipation) of painting in general, removing it from any traditional conception of a painting as a substantial, unified, integrated planar object whose value and authenticity lie as much in its status as a uniquely crafted object as in its modes of display and the readings ensuing from these linguistic and institutional conventions.[36] In a little-known interview from 1965 Warhol commented:

> You see, for every large painting I do, I paint a blank canvas, the same background color. The two are designed to hang together however the owner wants. He can hang it right beside the painting or across the room or above or below it. . . . It just makes them bigger and mainly makes them cost more. *Liz Taylor,* for instance, three feet by three feet, in any color you like, with the blank costs $1600.–. Signed of course.[37]

Readymade Imagery

Warhol's "found" representations and their diagrammatic nature departed from the paradox that the more spontaneous the pictorial mark had become in Pollock's work (supposedly increasing the veracity and immediacy of gestural expression), the more it had acquired the traits of depersonalized mechanization. Painterly execution since Pollock, therefore, seemed to have shifted between the ritualistic performance of painting (to which Rosenberg's and Kaprow's readings had aspired) and the recognition that his painting had thrived on a profoundly anti-painterly impulse. This promise of a mechanistic anonymity within the process of pictorial mark making, however, not only seemed to imply the eventual "destruction" of painting proper (as Kaprow had anticipated as well) but had also brought it (much less dramatically) into historical proximity with the post-cubist devices of anti-painterly strategies and readymade imagery (a proximity which Pollock himself had reached in works such as *Out of the Web* (*Number 7*), 1949, or *Cut Out,* 1949). If that anti-artistic and anti-authorial promise (and the rediscovery of that promise's historical antecedents) had perhaps not yet been fulfilled in Pollock's own work, then it had certainly become foregrounded with ever-increasing urgency in the responses that Pollock's work had provoked in Rauschenberg's and Johns's painting of the early to mid-1950s. Rauschenberg, for example, had made this evident as early as 1948–1949 in his *Female Figure* (*Blueprint*), where he rediscovered one of the conventions of readymade imagery—the immediate (indexical) imprint of the photogram or Rayogram—and introduced it into New York School painting.[38] He challenged traditional concepts of authorial authenticity and sublime expressivity in his collaboration with John Cage in 1951 on the *Automobile Tire Print,* in his *Erased de Kooning Drawing* in 1953 and, most programmatically of course, in his major assault on painterly presence in the seemingly devalidating and repetitious *Factum I* and *Factum II* in 1957. Johns, perhaps even more programmatically, had reestablished these parameters not only in his direct-casting methods, which he had derived from Duchamp, but equally so in his stenciled, collaged, and encaustic paintings since 1954.[39]

Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil, *Female Figure* (*Blueprint*), c. 1950. Monoprint: exposed blueprint paper. 105 × 36 in (266.7 × 91.4 cm). Collection Robert Rauschenberg, New York.

One should, therefore, realize that Warhol's apparently scandalous radical mechanization of pictorial mark-making drew, in fact, on a fully developed tradition, a tradition that comprised work by the key figures of New York Dada (Man Ray's Rayograms and Picabia's engineering diagrams from his mechanical period) as well as Rauschenberg's and Johns's work of the early to mid-1950s, when readymade imagery and indexical procedures were rediscovered and inscribed into the legacy of New York School painting. In light of this range of previously established techniques to apply and repeat mechanically produced pictorial marks, the frequently posed question of whether it was Rauschenberg or Warhol who first used the silkscreen process in painting is utterly moot.

Warhol's mechanization, at first timid and unresolved and still adhering to the manual gesture, developed gradually (and then rapidly) from 1960 to 1962. He went from the hand-painted diagrams through the rubber stamps and stencil paintings in 1961–1962 to the first fully silkscreened canvases of Troy Donohue, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis Presley, which were shown—along with *Dance Diagram* (*Tango*)—in his first New York exhibition.

The historical difficulty Rauschenberg and Johns had to overcome was that the preeminence of Abstract Expressionist painting—with its definitions of mark-making as expressive gestural abstraction—had not only completely obliterated the readymade imagery and mechanical drawing procedures of Dadaism but had also required that, in order to be "seen" or "legible" at all in 1954, they had to conform to the locally dominant painterly conventions. Hence, they engaged in *pictorializing* the radically anti-pictorial legacy of Dadaism. Clearly, Rauschenberg's development of his own pictorial *bricolage* technique, applied in his first dye-transfer drawings, such as *Cage* (1958) or *Mona Lisa* (1958), and employed in the monumental cycle of *Thirty-Four Drawings for Dante's Inferno* (1959–1960), had successfully fused both the increasingly dominant presence of mass cultural imagery with high art and the inherited idiom of Dada collage with the conventions of expressive gestural abstraction. Clearly, therefore, Rauschenberg appeared to audiences in the 1950s as the enigmatic genius of a new age.

What Warhol had to consider in 1962 was whether he, too, like his older peers, had to remain to some degree within the pictorial format and framework

in order to avoid the failure of reception that some of Rauschenberg's own more radical *non-pictorial* works had encountered, or whether his efforts to depictorialize Johns and Rauschenberg could go as far as the more consequential work of artists such as Kaprow and Robert Watts, or the European Nouveaux Réalistes such as Arman. After 1959, these artists abandoned all gestures of compromise with New York School pictorialism in order to reconstitute radical readymade strategies; and like their Fluxus colleagues they would ultimately fail to generate interest among a New York audience avidly awaiting the next delivery of pictorial products that could be packaged in collections and exhibitions.[40]

By contrast, Warhol seems to have felt reluctant about an outright commitment to mechanical representation and readymade objects (as had already been evident in his paintings from the beginning of his career). As late as 1966 he considered it still necessary to defend his silkscreen technique against the commonly held suspicion that mechanical procedures and readymade objects were ultimately unartistic and fraudulent: "In my art work, hand painting would take much too long and anyway that's not the age we live in. Mechanical means are *today.* . . . Silkscreen work is as honest a method as any, including hand painting."[41]

But Warhol's solution, arrived at in 1962, responded to all these problems: in his painting he isolated, singularized, and centralized the representation in the manner of a Duchampian readymade (and in the manner of Johns's *Flags* and *Targets*) and extracted it thereby from the tiresome affiliation of collage aesthetics and the nagging accusation of neo-Dada that had been leveled against his older peers. Simultaneously, this strategy, with its increased emphasis on the mere photographic image and its crude and infinite reproduceability, further eroded the painterly legacy of the New York School and eliminated all traces of the compromises that Rauschenberg had had to make with that legacy. Warhol's photographic silkscreens of single images and the serial repetition of single images eliminated the ambiguity between expressive gesture and mechanical mark, from which Rauschenberg's work had drawn its tension (and its relative conventionality). Also, the centralized readymade image eliminated the relational composition, which had functioned as the spatial matrix of Rauschenberg's relatively traditional pictorial and temporal narrative. Yet, while it seemed to be a radical breakthrough, the photographic

silkscreen procedure and the compositional strategies of singularization and serial repetition allowed Warhol to remain within the boundaries of the pictorial framework, a condition of compromise upon which he would always insist.

Warhol's adaptation of Rauschenberg's methods of mechanical image transfer (dye or silkscreen) subjected these techniques to numerous critical transformations. First of all, and most obviously, Warhol deprived his paintings of the infinite wealth of associative play and simultaneous multiple references that Rauschenberg's traditional collage aesthetic had still offered to the viewer. By contrast, Warhol's image design (whether in its emblematic single-unit structure or in its repetition of a single unit) extinguishes all poetic resources and prohibits the viewer's free association of the pictorial elements, imposing instead a confrontational restriction. In a very literal manner Warhol's singularized images become hermetic: secluded from all other images or stifled by their own repetition, they can no longer generate "meaning" and "narration" in the manner of Rauschenberg's larger syntactic assemblages. Paradoxically, this restriction and hermeticism of the semantically isolated image was at first generally experienced as the effect of absolute banality and boredom, or else as an attitude of divine indifference, or, worse yet, as an affirmation of consumer culture. It operated, in fact, as the rejection of conventional demands upon the artistic object to provide the plenitude of iconic representation. Warhol negates those demands for a pictorial narrative with the same degree of asceticism with which Duchamp had negated them in his readymades.

This restriction to the single iconic image/repetition finds its procedural complement in Warhol's strategy to purge all remnants of painterliness from Rauschenberg's expressively compromised photographic images and to confront the viewer with a factual silkscreen reproduction of the photographic image (as in the *Elvis* series, the *Disaster Series,* and the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men,* for example). In these paintings the silkscreened photographic imprint remains the only trace of the pictorial manufacturing process, and this technique once again assaults one of the central tenets of the Modernist legacy—forcing those eager to rediscover medium-specific painterliness, individuality, and uniqueness of the painterly mark to detect it in the accidental slippages and flaws of a casually executed silkscreen process. In the following statement, a fervent admirer of Clement Greenberg's

painterly norms, when confronted with Warhol's work, makes a grotesque attempt to regain discursive control and tries to accommodate the blows the Modernist painterly aesthetic had received from Warhol's propositions:

> He [Warhol] can in fact now be seen as the sensitive master of a wide variety of surface incident, and a major effect of the experience of looking at his paintings is an unusually immediate awareness of the two-dimensional fact of their painted surfaces. . . . Both factors underline the reality of the paint itself as a deposit on the surface, quite apart from its interdependence with the image it supports.[42]

When paint is, in fact, added manually (as in many of the *Marilyn* and the *Liz* portraits), it is applied in such a vapid manner, detached from gesture as expression as much as it is dislocated from contour as depiction (both features would become the hallmarks of Warhol's later portrait work), that it increases rather than contradicts the laconic mechanicity of the enterprise.

Extracting the photographic image from its painterly ambiguity not only foregrounded the mechanical nature of the reproduction but also emphasized the lapidary factual (rather than "artistic" or "poetical") information of the image, a quality that seems to have been much more surprising and scandalous to viewers in the early 1960s than it is now. Even a critic who in the early 1960s was unusually well acquainted with Duchamp and the Dada legacy seems to have been deceived by the apparent crudity of Pop art's factual imagery:

> I find his images offensive; I am annoyed to have to see in a gallery what I'm forced to look at in the supermarket. I go to the gallery to get away from the supermarket, not to repeat the experience.[43]

COMMON ICONOGRAPHY

Warhol's dialogue with Rauschenberg's work finds its parallel in his critical revisions of the legacy of Jasper Johns. If the emblematic centrality of the single im-

age and the all-over serial-grid composition were the key compositional devices Warhol derived from Johns's *Targets* and *Flags, Alphabets* and *Numbers,* then he certainly insisted on counteracting the strangely neutral and universal character of Johns's icons with explicit mass cultural imagery instantly recognizable as the *real* common denominators of collective perceptual experience. In spite of their commonality, Johns's *Alphabets, Numbers, Targets,* and *Flags* suddenly looked arcane and hermetic, and appeared to represent objects remote from everyday experience. By responding to paintings like Johns's *Flag on Orange Field* with his emblematic *Gold Marilyn,* Warhol made Johns's work seem to be safely entrenched in a protected zone of high art hegemony. By contrast, his own mass cultural iconography of consumption and the portraits of collective scopic prostitution appeared more specific, more concretely American than the American flag itself, perhaps in the way that Edouard Manet's *Olympia* had appeared more concretely Parisian to the French bourgeois in 1863 than Eugène Delacroix's *Liberté.*

Warhol's drastically different painterly execution (the chintzy monochrome canvas surface, brushed with cheap gold paint and enhanced with a single, crudely superimposed, silkscreened photograph, in opposition to Johns's well-crafted painterly quietism) positioned these paintings within an uncomfortable proximity to mass cultural glamour and crass vulgarity, where their high art status seemed to disintegrate (if it were not for the irrepressible intimation that Warhol's paintings would soon be redeemed as the masterpieces to herald an era of high art's own final industrialization).

Several questions remain concerning the status and functions of the photographic imagery silkscreened by Warhol onto his canvases, questions that have been completely obliterated by the sensational effects of Warhol's iconography of spectacle and consumer culture. In fact, one could say that most of the literature on Warhol (and Pop) has merely reiterated the clichés of iconographic reading since the mid-1960s.

The first of these questions concerns the degree to which the sexualization of the commodity and the commodification of sexuality had already attracted artists since the early to mid-1950s. British Pop, in particular, had thrived on juxtapositions of commodity imagery with (semi-pornographic) movie star imagery,

and had fused the language of vulgar gossip magazines with that of the idiocy of advertising copy (the most notable examples are Eduardo Paolozzi's *I Was a Rich Man's Plaything* [1947] and Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* [1956]). But it is also in Rauschenberg's work of the mid- to late 1950s that we can we find the germination of that particular iconography and the methods for its display. Warhol's iconography was prefigured not only by the numerous references to mass cultural consumption in Rauschenberg's work of the 1950s (e.g., *Coca-Cola Plan,* 1958) but also by Rauschenberg's frequent use of pinup imagery, his serially repeated gossip-column newsprint image of Gloria Vanderbilt in *Gloria* (1956), or his use of an FBI "wanted" poster in *Hymnal* (1955).

Rather than search for the iconographic sources of Warhol's work, however, it seems more important to recognize the actual degree to which postwar consumer culture was a pervasive presence. It appears to have dawned on artists of that decade that images and objects of consumer culture had irreversibly invaded and taken total control of visual representation and public experience. The following exhibition review from 1960 not only indicates that awareness in the work of other artists working at the same time, it also delivers an astonishingly complete and detailed account of the images that Warhol subsequently chose as the key figures of his iconographic program:

> The show, called "Les Lions" (Boris Lurie, *Images of Life,* March Gallery, New York, May-June 1960), exciting disturbing nightmares of painting, montages cut out of magazines and newspapers, images of our life held together on canvases with paint . . . *atom bomb tests* [italics mine] and green Salem Cigarette ads . . . Home-Made Southern Style Instant Frozen Less Work For You *Tomato Juice.* Obsessively repeated throughout the paintings, girls . . . *Marylin,* Brigitte, *Liz* and Jayne, the sweet and sticky narcotics that dull the pain. . . . *Life* magazine taken to its final ultimate absurd and frightening conclusion, pain and death given no more space and attention than pictures of Elsa Maxwell's latest party. And all of us spectators

> at our own death, hovering over it all in narcotized detachment, bored as gods with *The Bomb,* yawning over The Election, coming to a stop at last only to linger over the tender dream photos of *Marilyn.* (And they call it Life).[44]

How common the concern for these images actually was at the end of the 1950s and how plausible and necessary Warhol's iconographic choices were becomes even more evident when looking once again at Kaprow's prophetic essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock." In the last two paragraphs Kaprow predicts almost literally a number of Warhol's actual iconographic types (or, did Kaprow read these types off the same Rauschenberg paintings Warhol internalized?):

> Not only will these bold creators show us as if for the first time the world we have always had about us, but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard of happenings and events found in garbage cans, *police files,* hotel lobbies, seen in *store windows* and on the streets, and sensed in dreams and *horrible accidents.* . . . The young artist of today need no longer say "I am a painter" or "a poet" or "a dancer." All of life will be open to him. He will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. He will not try to make them extraordinary. Only their meaning will be stated. But out of nothing he will devise the extraordinary, and then maybe nothingness as well. People will be delighted, or horrified, critics will be confused or amused, but these, I am sure, will be the alchemies of the 1960's.[45]

In 1963 Warhol juxtaposed the most famous (and common) photographic images of glamorous stars with the most anonymous (and cruel) images of everyday life: photojournalists' coolly "detached" images of car accidents (culled from an archive of photographs rejected by the daily papers for their unbearable detail). In the following year Warhol constructed another, equally dialectic pair of photographic practices: the police mug shots from the FBI "wanted" posters that made up his *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* were complemented by the pedestrian

look of the photo-booth picture found in his earliest series of self-portraits, which thereafter ran parallel to his representations of both fame and disaster.[46]

Warhol thus grouped together photographic conventions that regulate collective scopic compulsions: looking at the Other (in endless envy at fame and fortune and in sadistic secrecy at catastrophe) and the perpetually vanishing Self (in futile tokens and substitutes). He articulated this dialectic of the photographic image as social representation with astonishing programmatic clarity:

> My death series was divided into two parts, the first one famous deaths and the second one people nobody ever heard of. . . . It's not that I feel sorry for them, it's just that people go by and it doesn't really matter to them that someone unknown was killed. . . . I still care about people but it would be much easier not to care, it's too hard to care.[47]

In a later interview, in 1972, Warhol described the dialectic of Self and Other in his images of death in terms that would seem to confirm, after all, that an early knowledge of Bertolt Brecht had left marks on the self-declared indifferent cynic:

> Actually you know it wasn't the idea of accidents and things like that, it's just something about, well it all started with buttons, I always wanted to know who invented buttons and then I thought of all the people who worked on the pyramids and then all those, I just always sort of wondered whatever happened to them why aren't they along, so I always thought, well it would be easier to do a painting of people who died in car crashes because sometimes you know, you never know who they are. . . . The people that you know they want to do things and they never do things and they disappear so quickly, and then they're killed or something like that you know, nobody knows about them so I thought well maybe I'll do a painting about a person which you don't know about or something like that.[48]

Early in 1964 Warhol used a found photo-booth autoportrait as the poster to announce his second solo exhibition in New York. It seems that his simultaneous attraction to both the anonymous mugshot and the photo-booth portrait originated in the automatic photograph's achievement of destroying the last remnants of specialized artistic vision. Paradoxically, while denying the validity of manual or artisanal skill and technical expertise, the photo-booth picture concretized—in whatever grotesque substitute—the historical need for the collective to be pictorially "represented," and made that instant representation universally accessible. In the automatic portraits of the photo-booth the "author" of the picture had finally become a machine (Warhol's frequently stated aspiration).

The systematic devalidation of the hierarchies of representational functions and techniques finds a corresponding statement in his announcement of the future abolition of the hierarchy of subjects worthy of being depicted in his most famous dictum that "in the future everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes" (and it was only logical that Warhol sent his first patrons who commissioned their portraits to the photo-booth, as the accounts of Ethel Scull and Holly Solomon testify).

When Warhol constructed images of Marilyn Monroe, Liz Taylor, Elvis Presley, and the tragi-comic conditions of their glamour, the lasting fascination of these paintings originates not in the continuing myth of these figures but rather in the fact that Warhol constructed their image from the perspective of the tragic condition of those who consume the star's image in scopic cults:

> I made my earliest films using for several hours just one actor on the screen doing the same thing: eating or sleeping or smoking: I did this because people usually just go to the movies to see only the star, to eat him up, so here at last is a chance to look only at the star for as long as you like no matter what he does and to eat him up all you want to. It was also easier to make.[49]

This dialectic of spectacle culture and collective compulsion, revealing in every image that glamour is only the stunning reflex of the scopic fixation of the collective, permeates Warhol's entire oeuvre. It culminates in his films, which

operate *in the movie theatre* at each instant of their vastly expanded viewing time as a deconstruction of the audience's participation in that compulsion, while they operate *on the screen* as instances of collective enablement, grotesque and deranged as the agents of that enablement might appear in the uncensored, unstructured, decentralized, and rambling performances and monologues of individuals who have not been trained in the professional delivery of the scopic goods (Warhol's "superstars" are, in this sense, "superrealists" in Apollinaire's sense of the term). Again, Warhol declared the intentions of his real-time film projects with his usual clarity:

> Well this way I can catch people being themselves instead of setting up a scene and shooting it and letting people act out parts that were written because it's better to act out naturally than act like someone else because you really get a better picture of people being themselves instead of trying to act like they're themselves.[50]

The subversive humor of Warhol's reversal of representational hierarchies culminated (and was erased accordingly) in his execution of a commission he had received with several other Pop artists from architect Philip Johnson in 1964 to decorate the facade of the New York State Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. It was for this occasion that the collection of diptychs of the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* was originally conceived and produced, and it comes as no surprise that Warhol's *realistic* sabotage of a state's governmental desire to represent itself *officially* to the world was censored by then-Governor Rockefeller under the pretext of legal difficulties.[51] When Warhol was notified of the decision that his paintings had to be removed, he instantly initiated a *comedic* reversal of high and low and offered to replace the pictures of the thieves by pictures of one of the chiefs (World's Fair director and park commissioner Robert Moses, under whose legal authority the pavilion was placed)—a proposal that was also rejected. Warhol, with laconic detachment, settled for the most "obvious" solution, to cover the paintings with a coat of silver aluminum paint and let them speak of having been silenced into abstract monochromy.

Andy Warhol, *The Thirteen Most Wanted Men,* 1964. New York World's Fair, New York State Pavilion, 1964–1965. Silkscreen oil on masonite. 48 × 39⅜ in each. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Photo: Eric Pollitzer. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

Serial Breakdown and Display

Repeated discussions of Warhol's Pop iconography and, even more, his work's subsequent pictorialization[52] have detached the work from Warhol's intricate reflection on the status and substance of the painterly object and have virtually ignored his efforts to incorporate exhibition context and display strategies into the conception of his painting. Features that were aggressively anti-pictorial in their impulse, and evidently among Warhol's primary concerns in the early exhibitions, have been obliterated in the process of his work's acculturation. This is true of his notorious debut exhibition at Irving Blum's Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1962, as well as his second exhibition at that gallery a year later; it is also true of numerous proposals (most often rejected by curators and dealers) for some of the subsequent exhibitions from 1963 to 1966. On the one hand, the installation of the thirty-two paintings at the Ferus Gallery was determined by the number of varieties of Campbell's Soup available at that time (Warhol actually used a list of Campbell's products to check off the flavors he had already painted). Thus, the number of objects in the first presentation of Warhol's work was determined by the apparently random and external factor of a product line and its variations. (What other latent systems, one should ask on this occasion, normally determine the number of high art objects in an exhibition?) On the other hand, the paintings' *mode of display* was as crucial as the principle of serial repetition and their commercial, readymade iconography. Standing on small white shelves running along the perimeter of the gallery in the way that display shelves for consumer goods would normally function in a store,[53] the paintings were nevertheless appended to the wall in the way pictures would be traditionally installed in a gallery. Finally, there is the inevitable dimension of Warhol's own biography, inserted into these paintings (and it is not important whether the remark is truthful or yet another *blague*), explaining why he chose the Campbell's Soup image:

> Because I used to drink it. I used to have the same lunch every day, for twenty years, I guess, the same thing over and over again. Someone said my life has dominated me; I liked that idea.[54]

Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans,* 1962. Installation view at Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles. © 2000 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York.

All three factors anchor the work in distinct framing systems that effect its reading beyond the merely iconographic "scandal" of Pop imagery for which it became mostly known. What has been misread as provocative banality is, in fact, the specificity of the paintings' reified existence, which ruins the traditional expectation of an aesthetic object's universal legibility. Warhol's work abolishes that claim with the same vehemence with which those systems of everyday determination abolish the experience of subjectivity.

Yet at the same time, these paintings are imbued with an eerie concreteness and corporeality, which had distinguished Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* just a year before. But Warhol differs here—as in his relationship to Johns's imagery—in that he transferred the universality of corporeal experience onto the paradoxical level of mass cultural specificity (not "natural" bodily production, such as in Manzoni's cans of human excrement, but rather product consumption forms the material base of physical experience).

The absurdity of the aesthetic decision-making process as subjective act becomes all the more obvious in the infinite variation of the same (e.g., the details of the soup labels' design and information). It is precisely in this exact imitation of minute variations and in the paintings' exact obedience to the officially available range of products that the series of Campbell's Soup paintings goes far beyond what has been perceived as a mere iconographic scandal. Inevitably, the Campbell's Soup series of 1962 and its installation recall a crucial moment of neo-avantgarde history when seriality, monochromy, and mode of display had broken down the unified and unique character of the easel painting: Yves Klein's installation of eleven identical blue monochrome paintings in the Galleria Apollinaire in Milan in 1957 (repeated a few months later in Paris). Commenting on his exhibition, Klein said:

> All of these blue propositions, all alike in appearance, were recognized by the public as quite different from one another. The *amateur* passed from one to another as he liked and penetrated, in a state of instantaneous contemplation, into the worlds of the blue. . . . The most sensational observation was that of the "buyers." Each selected

> out of the . . . pictures that one that was his, and each paid the asking price. The prices were all different of course.[55]

Klein's installation (along with his commentary on it) reveals both the degree of similarity between his attitude and Warhol's serial breakdown of Modernist painting, and the radical difference between the two propositions, separated by five years. While Klein's high culture conservatism clearly was intended to create a paradox, paralleling that of painting's simultaneous commodity form and its desperately renewed metaphysical aspirations, Warhol's position of relentless affirmation canceled any such aspirations and liquidated the metaphysical dimension of the Modernist legacy by rigorously subjecting each painting to the framing device of an identical product-image and price.

The serial breakdown of the painterly object and its repetition within the display were not just a topical idea for his first exhibition; they constituted a crucial aesthetic strategy. In 1968 Warhol was approached by Mario Amaya to install his first European retrospective exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. Warhol suggested installing the series of thirty-two *Campbell's Soup* paintings throughout all the spaces allocated for his show, to make them the exclusive subject of the "retrospective." Amaya refused this proposal just as the curators at the Whitney Museum in New York in 1970 refused Warhol's proposal to install only *Flower* paintings or *Cow Wallpaper* (glued backward onto the exhibition walls) as the sole contents of his retrospective exhibition at that institution.[56]

For his second exhibition at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1963 (the first one seems to have been at best a *succès de scandale,* judging by the fact that none of the paintings, offered at $300.00 each, were sold), Warhol suggested once again a "monographic" exhibition, the recently produced series of single and multiple *Elvis* images, silkscreened on large monochrome silver surfaces. In fact, he apparently suggested that the "paintings" should be installed as a "continuous surround," and he shipped a single continuous roll of canvas containing the silkscreened images to Los Angeles.[57]

As in his first installation in Los Angeles, this proposition threatened the boundaries of painting as an individually defined and complete pictorial unit. But

now it not only subverted what remained of that status via serial repetition, but destroyed it altogether by the sheer spatial expansion of serial repetition. What had been a real difficulty for Pollock, the crucial decision of how and where to determine the size and the cut of the expanded field of painterly action—or, as Harold Rosenberg put it, to cross over into the production of "apocalyptic wallpaper"—had become a major threat for Abstract Expressionist painting. In expanding the canvas into architectural dimensions, Warhol now embraced this threat in a deliberate transgression of those sacred pictorial limits that ultimately only confine the commodity.

It was utterly logical that soon thereafter Warhol would conceive an installation of actual wallpaper for his supposedly final exhibition as a "painter" at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1966—wallpaper imprinted with the by now notorious (then utterly bland) image of a cow, that animal whose reputation it is to have a particularly vapid and fixed gaze. Juxtaposed with the *Cow Wallpaper* was Warhol's series of floating silver "pillows," the *Silver Clouds,* which moved through the gallery, animated by air and the viewers' body movements. Rumor has it that Warhol said of the *Cows,* "This is all of us." But the decor would not have needed that statement to make its point: all of Modernism's most radical and utopian promises (to evolve from pictorial plane through sculptural object to architectural space, to shift the viewer from iconic representation to the self-reflexive, the indexical sign, and the tactile mode of participation, to abandon the confines of the private viewing mode of the easel painting in favor of the space of simultaneous collective perception) are annihilated in this farcical sacking of the Modernist legacy, the gracefully atopian *finale* of the first ten years of Warhol's art.

Until 1966, Warhol's art (as opposed to his films) thus oscillated constantly between an extreme challenge to the status and credibility of painting and a continued deployment of strictly pictorial means, operating within the narrowly defined framework of pictorial conventions. Inevitably, the question arises (and it has been asked again and again) whether or why Warhol never crossed the threshold into the actual conception (or, rather reconstitution) of the readymade. Except for the occasional joke campaign, such as signing actual Campbell's Soup cans, Warhol never used the three dimensional readymade object in its unaltered

industrial state, as a raw object of consumption. Yet at the same time he went further than any of his Pop art peers (not, however, as far as many of his peers in the Fluxus context) to challenge traditional assumptions about the uniqueness, authenticity, and authorship of the pictorial object, the very foundations upon which high modernist art had rested until Duchamp defined the readymade in 1917, and upon which the reconstruction of Modernism had rested in the New York School context until the arrival of Warhol in 1962.

Again and again, Warhol tantalized collectors, curators, and art dealers by generating doubts about the authenticity and authorship of his work. He succeeded temporarily in destabilizing his own market:

> I made multiple color silkscreen painting—like my comic strip technique. Why don't you ask my assistant Gerard Malanga some questions? He did a lot of my paintings.[58]

Two explanations, contradicting each other to some extent, seem appropriate. The first is that Warhol emerged from a local tradition of artists who had distinguished themselves by pictorializing the Dada legacy in their critical engagement with the heroic tradition of the New York School. And it was to the power and success of Johns and Rauschenberg that Warhol aspired in the early 1960s, not to the increasing marginalization that awaited artistic practices that had abandoned picture production (such as Happenings and Fluxus, for example). The critical distance that Warhol wanted to insert between himself and his two major predecessors had to occur first of all within the means of painting (rather than by abandoning painting abruptly in favor of "pure" readymades). Warhol, therefore, had to work through the last phases of the pictorialization begun by Rauschenberg and Johns and go to the threshold of painting's abolition—a consequence that would soon emerge, mediated to a considerable degree by Warhol's work, in the context of Minimal and Conceptual art.

The second explanation is more speculative. It assumes that the reason Warhol was so deeply involved with the pictorial medium, the autonomy of aesthetic conventions, and the stability of artistic categories inherent in that medium

was that he had learned gradually to accept the relative conventionality of his audience and of the institutional control and valorization of that medium. Therefore, he decided not to transgress these conservative limitations inherent in painterly practice and refrained from acquiring (or reconstituting) the status of the unaltered readymade in any of his works until 1966. Perhaps it was Warhol's skeptical and opportunistic positivism (to anticipate that all radical gestures within the framework of an institutionalized and industrialized high art production would inevitably and ultimately generate marketable artistic objects, would end up as mere "pictures" in a gallery, merely legitimizing the institutional and discursive conventions from which they emerged) that allowed him to avoid the mistakes inherent in Duchamp's radical proposition of the readymade. Duchamp had, in fact, been oblivious to both the false radicality of the readymade and the problem of its inevitable aestheticization. One of the rare comments Duchamp actually made about Warhol's work seems to indicate that he himself understood that implication, after all, when looking at Warhol's work: "What interests us is the *concept* that wants to put fifty Campbell Soup cans on a canvas."[59]

Reception

The recognition of Warhol's ingenuity and radicality obviously depended to a considerable degree on the historical limitations of his original audiences: in fact, his strategies could appear scandalous only in the face of the New York School climate of the late 1950s and that generation's general indifference, most often fused with aggressive contempt—as exemplified by Clement Greenberg—for the Dada and Duchamp legacy. By contrast, Warhol's interventions in the aesthetics of the early sixties seemed fully plausible and necessary to a viewer aware of the implications of the Dada legacy, in terms of that movement's continual emphasis on and reflection of the symbiotic ties between artistic production and commodity aesthetics.

Warhol's "scandalous" assaults on the status and the "substance" of pictorial representation were motivated by the rapidly dwindling options of credible artistic production (a fact that became more and more apparent as the conven-

tions of Modernism and avant-garde practice were finally rediscovered), and even more so by the increasing pressure that the accelerated development of the culture industry exerted now on the traditionally exempt spaces of marginal artistic deviance.

Iconography and *blague,* production procedure and modes of distribution and display in Warhol's work mimetically internalize and repeat the violence of these changing conditions. His paintings vanish as artistic objects to the same degree that the option to sustain deviance and dissent disappears within a rigorously organized system of immediate commercial and ideological recuperation.

But of course, as had been the case with Duchamp and Dada before, these practices celebrated the destruction of the author and the aura, of aesthetic substance and artistic skill, while at the same time they recognized in that destruction an irretrievable loss. Yet within this moment of absolute loss, Warhol uncovered the historical opportunity to redefine (aesthetic) experience. To understand the radicality of Warhol's gesture, both with regard to the historical legacies of Duchamp and Dada as well as with regard to the immediately preceding and contemporary artistic environment of the Cage legacy, does not minimize his achievements at all.

Quite the contrary: the ambition to make him an all-American Pop artist belittles Warhol's historical scope as much as it underrates the universality of the conditions of experience determining Warhol's work. As early as 1963 Henry Geldzahler described the reasons for this universality with the breathtaking frankness of the imperialist victor:

> After the heroic years of Abstract Expressionism a younger generation of artists is working in a new American regionalism, but this time because of the mass media, the regionalism is nationwide, and even exportable to Europe, for we have carefully prepared and reconstructed Europe in our own image since 1945 so that two kinds of American imagery, Kline, Pollock, de Kooning on the one hand, and the Pop artists on the other, are becoming comprehensible abroad.[60]

In European countries of advanced capitalist culture Warhol's work was adamantly embraced (at first in West Germany in particular, but subsequently also in France and Italy), as a kind of high culture version of the preceding and subsequent low culture cults of all things American. It seems that these cult forms celebrated with masochistic folly the subjection to the massive destruction that the commodity production of late capitalism held in store for the postwar European countries. Inevitably, Warhol's work acquired the suggestiveness of prophetic foresight.

It cannot surprise us, therefore, to find the key collectors of Warhol's work in Europe: first the West German scalp cosmetics industrialist Ströher, followed by the chocolate tycoon Ludwig, and most recently by the Saatchi admen in London. It seems that they recognize *their* identity as well in Warhol's work and perceive that identity as culturally legitimized. While they are instrumental in inflicting those conditions of enforced consumption that Warhol's work seems passively to condone as "our universal nature," it still seems that they are mistaken in reading his postures and his artifacts as an affirmative celebration of theirs.

Warhol has unified within his constructs the views of both the victors and the victims of the late twentieth century. The former's ruthless diffidence and calculated detachment allow the continuation of enterprise without ever being called upon in terms of its socio-political or ecological responsibility. Consumers, embodying the "all-round reduced personality," can celebrate in Warhol's work their proper status of having been erased as subjects. Regulated as they are by the eternally repetitive gestures of alienated production and consumption, they are barred—as are Warhol's paintings—from access to a dimension of critical resistance.

Notes

1

Andy Warhol, quoted in Gretchen Berg, "Andy: My True Story," *Los Angeles Free Press,* March 17, 1967, n.p. (reprinted from *East Village Other*).

2

Andy Warhol, quoted in Gregory McDonald, "Built in Obsolescence: Art by Andy Warhol," *Boston Globe,* October 23, 1966, p. 17.

3

See Andy Warhol's *Index Book* (New York: Random House, 1967). It appears in the midst of photographs taken at the factory, among Mott's, Heinz, and Campbell's products as an exceptional and lonely variation on the eternal repetition of the same logotypes and brands in Warhol's art of the time. Chanel No. 5 and Mobil each became the subject of a plate in Warhol's late and nostalgic recollection of advertisement styles and history in his portfolio *Ads*. See *Andy Warhol Prints* (*A Catalogue Raisonné*), ed. Frayda Feldman and Jörg Schellmann (New York: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Edition Schellmann, and Abbeville Press, 1985), pp. 106–107.

4

Patrick Smith has suggested that the script is actually the handwriting of Andy Warhol's mother and that Warhol even had a rubber stamp made to replicate his mother's naive handwriting and signature at all times. See Patrick S. Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), p. 32.

Punning his phone number at 242 Lexington Avenue in Murray Hill seems to have been a consistent joke in Warhol's auto-promotional advertisements. In 1954, he published an ad in *Ergo,* a cooperative brochure by a group of freelance commercial artists, listing his exchange as "Mury Heel." See Andreas Brown, *Andy Warhol: His Early Works 1947–1959* (New York: Gotham Book Mart, 1971), p. 14.

5

Rosalind H. Williams, *Dream Worlds* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 67; quoted in Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 12.

6

This role change was not, of course, as abrupt as that. It appears that Warhol continued to work as a commercial designer at least as late as 1962, despite his new nomenclature.

7

Andy Warhol, "Happy Butterfly Day," published by *Vanity Fair,* circa 1955. The Archives of Andy Warhol, New York.

8

See Trevor Fairbrother, "Warhol Meets Sargent at Whitney," *Arts Magazine* 61 (February 1987), pp. 64–71.

9

"I adore America and these are some comments on it. My image is a statement of the symbols of the harsh, impersonal products and brash materialistic objects on which America is built today. It is a projection of everything that can be bought and sold, the practical but impermanent

symbols that sustain us." Andy Warhol, "Artist's Comment," *Art in America* 50, no. 1, special issue "New Talent USA" (1962), p. 42.

This statement appeared underneath a reproduction of Andy Warhol's painting *Storm Door* (1960), which was for some reason included in the "prints and drawings" section of this "New Talent USA" issue, curated by Zachary Scott, an actor and collector of contemporary prints. The size is indicated as 36 × 34 inches (as opposed to the painting's actual size of 46 × 42 1/8 inches), which makes one wonder whether the curator's desire to include Warhol in this section required some tampering with both medium and size to make the work suitable for this category, since both its iconography and pictorial execution most likely would have made its inclusion in the painting section impossible.

10

Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," *New Left Review* 144 (March–April 1984), p. 106.

11

Allan Kaprow, "Should the Artist Become a Man of the World?" *Art News* 63, no. 6 (October 1964), p. 34.

12

Nan Rosenthal has recently discussed the details of that curriculum at the Carnegie Institute of Technology and its profound influence on Warhol in a paper delivered at the Andy Warhol symposium, organized by the Dia Art Foundation in New York in April 1988. See Nan Rosenthal, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Warhol as Art Director," in *The Work of Andy Warhol,* ed. Garry Garrels, Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture, no. 3 (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), pp. 34–51.

Previously, Patrick S. Smith had argued for a comparison between Warhol's mechanization of fine art production methods and the ideas taught by Moholy-Nagy at the Chicago Bauhaus (the Institute of Design) and in his writings, in particular *The New Vision* (1930). Apparently, this book was well known to Warhol and discussed extensively by him and his friends in the late forties. See Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art,* pp. 110–112 and notes 191–205.

13

Interview with Andy Warhol by Douglas Arango, "Underground Films: Art or Naughty Movies," *Movie TV Secrets* (June 1967), n.p.

14

Gretchen Berg, interview with Andy Warhol, "Nothing to Lose," *Cahiers du Cinéma in English* 10 (May 1967), pp. 38–43.

In 1971, with ironic distance, he would say: "If I remember correctly, I felt that if everyone couldn't afford a painting the printed poster would be available . . .". See Gerard Malanga,

"A Conversation with Andy Warhol," *Print Collector's Newsletter* 1, no. 6 (January–February 1971), pp. 125–127.

Claes Oldenburg made the same argument for the radically democratic and anti-elitist conceptions motivating Pop art: "I think it would be great if you had an art that could appeal to everybody." See Bruce Glaser, "Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Warhol: A Discussion," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), pp. 20–24.

It is astonishing that one of Pop art's early critical opponents (and subsequent convert) refused to acknowledge the egalitarian potential of Pop art from the beginning (and, in retrospect, it turns out that her skepticism was wholly justified). In her review of Lawrence Alloway's 1963 exhibition *Six Painters and the Object* at the Guggenheim Museum, Barbara Rose wrote: "In the past when an artist like Courbet or van Gogh appropriated material from popular culture, it was with the intent of reaching a larger public—in fact of producing a kind of elevated popular art. *Pop art in America had no such intention; it was made for the same exclusive and limited public as abstract art*" (italics mine). See Barbara Rose, "Pop Art at the Guggenheim," *Art International* 2, no. 1 (1963), p. 20.

15

Walter P. Paepcke, "Art in Industry," in *Modern Art in Advertising* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1946), n.p.

16

Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (*from A to B and Back Again*) (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), p. 92.

17

See "Boxing Match," *Time,* May 15, 1964, p. 86.

18

Warhol was notorious for consciously employing other people's "ideas" and he was alternately candid and coy about this supposed absence of "originality": "I always get my ideas from people. Sometimes I change the idea to suit a certain project I'm working on at the time. Sometimes I don't change the idea. Or, sometimes I don't use the idea right away, but may remember it and use it for something later on. I love ideas." (Malanga, "A Conversation with Andy Warhol," pp. 125–127.)

19

Gene R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters" (Part I), *Art News* (November 1963), pp. 24–27, 60–63.

20

Martha Jackson, letter to Andy Warhol, July 20, 1962; the Estate of Andy Warhol, New York.

21

A similar stylistic hesitation can be found in the early work of Roy Lichtenstein, who, in the late 1950s, was going through the transition from being an Abstract Expressionist painter to a painter deploying readymade imagery and readymade (commercial) techniques of pictorial execution. This led to Andy Warhol's surprise discovery that he had not been the only one to use the iconography of comic strips in his newly defined work. What was worse for Warhol was that Leo Castelli believed at that time that his gallery should show only one artist using this type of imagery. Lichtenstein remembers that surprising encounter: "I saw Andy's work at Leo Castelli's about the same time I brought mine in, about the spring of 1961. . . . Of course, I was amazed to see Andy's work because he was doing cartoons of Nancy and Dick Tracy and they were very similar to mine." Glaser, "Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Warhol: A Discussion," p. 22.

22

Emile de Antonio's original commentary has been reported in two versions: "One of these is crap. The other is remarkable—it's our society, it's who we are, it's absolutely beautiful and naked, and you ought to destroy the first and show the second." See Jesse Kornbluth, "Andy," *New York,* March 9, 1987, p. 42. The other version confirms the assumption that there was a moment of real hesitation in Warhol's early work. It reads:

> One day he put up two huge paintings of Coke bottles. Two different ones. One was, I could say, an early Pop Art piece of major importance. It was just a big black-and-white Coke bottle. The other was the same thing except it was surrounded by Abstract Expressionist hatches and crosses. And I said to Andy, "Why did you do two of these? One of them is so clearly your own. And the second is just kind of ridiculous because it's not anything. It's part Abstract Expressionism and part whatever you're doing." And the first one was (the only) one that was any good. The other thing—God only knows what it is. And, I think that helped Andy make up his mind as to—you know: that was almost the birth of Pop. Andy did it.

See Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art,* p. 97.

Typically, Warhol followed this advice only partially: he exhibited the "cold" version at his first New York exhibition (in a group show) at the Stable Gallery in 1962 but he did not destroy the other version. It is reproduced in Rainer Crone's early catalogue raisonné as number 3 on page 83. See Rainer Crone, *Andy Warhol* (New York, 1970).

23

Most recently, for example, in Carter Ratcliff, *Andy Warhol* (New York, 1983): "Though Warhol has never changed his personal style, he did abandon commercial art as decisively as he possibly could. The line between his first and second careers is astoundingly sharp" (p. 17).

24

Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News* 57, no. 6 (October 1958), p. 56.

25

Ibid.

26

For an early example of this argument, emphasizing the desire for stylistic alteration as the main motivation in the development of Pop art, see Robert Rosenblum, "Pop and Non-Pop: An Essay in Distinction," *Art and Literature* 5 (Summer 1965), pp. 80–93. For the same argument in the context of an early discussion of Warhol's work, see Alan Solomon's introduction to the catalogue of the Andy Warhol exhibition in 1966 at the ICA, Boston: "In a broader sense, I suppose the prevalence of cool passivity can be explained as part of the reaction to abstract expressionism, since the present attitude is the polar opposite of the action painting idea of kinetic self-expression (This has a great deal to do with Warhol's attitudes toward style and performance . . .)" (n.p.). For a more recent example proving the persistence of this simplistic argument of stylistic innovation, see Ratcliff, *Andy Warhol,* p. 7.

27

Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," p. 56.

28

See Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1978), p. 30.

Andrew Forge described this new collaborative aesthetic in the context of Rauschenberg's work in terms that equally deemphasize visuality: "The idea of collaboration with others has preoccupied him endlessly, both through the medium of his own work and in an open situation in which no single person dominates. In *Black Market* (a 1961 combine painting) he invited the onlooker to exchange small objects with the combine and to leave messages." See Andrew Forge, *Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1972), p. 15.

29

According to Eleanor Ward, *Dance Diagram* (*Tango*) had been included in Warhol's first New York one-person exhibition at her Stable Gallery in 1962 and installed on the floor. See Ward's recollection of that exhibition in *The Autobiography & Sex Life of Andy Warhol,* ed. John Wilcock (New York: Other Scenes, 1971), n.p.

Subsequently, *Dance Diagram* (*Fox Trot*) was installed in a horizontal position in Sidney Janis's exhibition *The New Realists* in November 1962, and again in Warhol's first "retrospective" exhibition in 1965 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. It was a particularly Warholian irony, even if unintended, that the attendance at the exhibition's opening was so massive that all the paintings (not just those on the floor) had to be removed from the exhibition for the duration of the preview.

30

Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," *Art News* 51, no. 5 (December 1952), pp. 22–23, 48–50.

31

Quoted in Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), p. 17.

32

Such a moment of the "breakdown" of the strategy of the monochrome (and perhaps an indication of the generally increasing doubts about the paradigm's continued validity) is poignantly described by Michael Fried in a 1962 review of an exhibition of Newman's work, which he published—as historical chance would have it—side by side with his review of Warhol's first New York exhibition:

> From the start—which I take to be the late forties—his art was conceived in terms of its absolute essentials, flat colour and a rectilinearity derived from the shape of the canvas, and the earliest paintings on view have a simplicity which is pretty near irreducible.
>
> . . . When the equilibrium is not in itself so intrinsically compelling and the handling of the paint is kept adamant the result is that the painting tends not to hold the eye: the spectator's gaze keeps bouncing off, no matter how hard he tries to keep it fixed on the painting. (I'm thinking now most of all of the vertical painting divided into unequal halves of ochre yellow and white dated 1962 in the current show, in which the colours themselves, unlike the warm fields of blue that are perhaps Newman's most effective element—have no inherent depth to them and end up erecting *a kind of hand-ball court wall for the eye*) [italics mine].

See Michael Fried, "New York Letter," *Art International* 6, no. 10 (December 1962), p. 57.

That the monochrome aspects in Newman's work were subject to a more general reflection in the early sixties was also indicated by Jim Dine's rather unsuccessful parody *Big Black*

Zipper from 1962 (the Sonnabend Collection, Baltimore Museum of Art). Another example is the crisis that resulted from Rothko's refusal to supply his meditative monochrome panels to Seagram corporate dining room.

33

Kaprow, "Should the Artist Become a Man of the World?" p. 34.

34

Allan Solomon made the connection between the monochrome paintings and the floating pillows already in 1966, albeit in the rather foggy and evasive language of an enthusiastic critic:

> When Warhol made the *Clouds* which are floating plastic sculpture, he called them paintings, because he thought of filling them with helium and sending them out of the window, never to return. "That would be the end of painting," he said, as serious as not. (He also likes the idea of plain surfaces as ultimate art. Many of his paintings have matching bare panels which he feels increase their beauty appreciably.)

Allan Solomon, *Andy Warhol* (Boston: ICA, 1966), n.p.

A year later Warhol described the project in more concise terms: "I didn't want to paint anymore so I thought that the way to finish off painting for me would be to have a painting that floats, so I invented the floating silver rectangles that you fill up with helium and let out of your windows" (Berg, "Nothing to Lose," p. 43).

Later Warhol remembered that it was already on the occasion of his exhibition at the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in Paris, where he had installed the *Flower* paintings on the recently designed *Cow Wallpaper,* that he decided to declare publicly the end of painting (or at least his involvement with it): "I was having so much fun in Paris that I decided it was the place to make the announcement I'd been thinking about making for months: I was going to retire from painting. Art just wasn't fun for me anymore." Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 113.

It seems noteworthy that while Warhol considered it appropriate to emphasize ironically that "Paris was the place to make the announcement," some American critics have not been able to acknowledge that Warhol's declaration of "silence" inscribed him in a Rimbaud/Duchamp tradition of self-imposed refusal of artistic production. Thus, Carter Ratcliff, for example, identifies it as a "Garboesque" decision (Ratcliff, *Andy Warhol,* p. 7).

Ten years after his first declaration, Warhol (after having taken up painting again) still struggled with the problem (or the pose?): "I get so tired of painting. I've been trying to give

it up all the time, if we could just make a living out of movies or the newspaper business, or something. It's so boring, painting the same picture over and over." Andy Warhol, interviewed by Glenn O'Brien, *High Times* 24 (August 1977), p. 21.

35

Barry Blinderman, "Modern Myths: An Interview with Andy Warhol," *Arts Magazine* 56 (October 1981), pp. 144–147; reprinted in Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords 2* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 16.

36

One could refer to the complexity of Warhol's critical reflection on *all* of the implications of Modernist pictorial conventions, and his actual decision to foreground these in his rather unusual display propositions, in order to point out—if it were not already so obvious—how tame and conservative by comparison so-called Neo-Geo and the Neo-Conceptualist artists are in their simple-minded and opportunistic "painting and sculpture" mentality, disguised behind the facade of Postmodernist pretenses and the hyping of theory.

37

Roger Vaughan, "Superpop, or a Night at the Factory" (interview with Andy Warhol), *New York Herald Tribune,* August 8, 1965. Ironically, as a member of the staff of the Leo Castelli Gallery recalls, many collectors left the blank panels behind when acquiring a diptych by Warhol at that time.

38

One of Rauschenberg's *Blueprints* was shown in the exhibition *Abstraction in Photography* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, May-July 1951, and was listed in the catalogue as *Blueprint: Photogram for Mural Decoration.* An article on Rauschenberg's photograms/blueprints titled "Speaking of Pictures" was published in *Life* magazine, April 19, 1951. See also Lawrence Alloway, "Rauschenberg's Development," in *Robert Rauschenberg* (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 1976), pp. 16, 63.

39

The complex relationship between Warhol and his slightly older peer, Robert Rauschenberg (born 1925), and his slightly younger but considerably more established peer, Jasper Johns (born 1930), remains somewhat elusive. Apparently, Warhol's ambition to be recognized by these two artists was frustrated on several occasions, as Emile de Antonio has reported, for two reasons: first, because Warhol's background as a *real* commercial artist disqualified him in the eyes of these artists who, if they had to make money, would decorate Bonwit Teller windows under a pseudonym; and second, it seems, they sensed that Warhol's work was outflanking theirs. Warhol later reflected on their relationship in a reconstructed conversation with his friend

Emile de Antonio, who Warhol said remarked: "You're too swish, and that upsets them. . . . You are a commercial artist, which really bugs them because when they do commercial art—windows and other jobs I find them—they do it just 'to survive.' They won't even use their real names. Whereas you've won prizes! You're famous for it" (*POPism,* pp. 11–12).

As de Antonio remembers directly: "Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns didn't want to meet Andy at the beginning. . . . Andy was too effeminate for Bob and Jap. . . . I think his openly commercial work made them nervous. . . . They also, I think, were suspicious of what Andy was doing—his serious work—because it had obvious debts to both of them in a funny way." See Patrick Smith, interview with Emile de Antonio, in Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films,* pp. 294–295.

Leo Castelli remembers Warhol visiting his gallery in 1958 as "a great admirer of Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and he even bought a drawing, a good one, a light bulb drawing of Jasper Johns." See Leo Castelli, interviewed by David Bailey, in *Andy Warhol: Transcript of David Bailey's ATV Documentary* (London: Bailey Litchfield/Mathews Miller Dunbar, 1972), n.p. See also Ann Hindry, "Andy Warhol: Quelques grands témoins: Sidney Janis, Leo Castelli, Robert Rosenblum, Clement Greenberg" (interview with Leo Castelli), in *Artstudio* 8 (1988), p. 115.

Recognition by his peers seems to have occurred after all, since in the mid-1960s both Johns and Rauschenberg became owners of one or more paintings by Warhol.

40

For example, both Kaprow and Robert Watts were already absent from Sidney Janis's crucial exhibition *The New Realists* in 1962. Their absence is explained in Sidney Janis's preface to the catalogue as a function of to "limitations of space." See Sidney Janis, "On the Theme of the Exhibition," *The New Realists* (New York: Sidney Janis Gallery, 1962), n.p.

41

Arango, "Underground Films."

42

Richard Morphet, "Andy Warhol," in *Andy Warhol* (London: Tate Gallery, 1971), p. 6. Another, equally desperate attempt to detach Warhol's iconography from the reading of his work in order to force it back into the discursive strictures of (Greenbergian) Modernism was made on the occasion of Warhol's exhibition at the Stable Gallery in 1962 by Donald Judd:

> The subject matter is a cause for both blame and excessive praise. Actually it is not very interesting to think about the reasons, since it is easy to imagine Warhol's paintings without such subject matter, simply as "overall" paintings of

> repeated elements. The novelty and the absurdity of the repeated images of Marilyn Monroe, Troy Donahue and Coca Cola bottles is not great. . . . The gist of this is that Warhol's work is able but general. It certainly has possibilities, but it is so far not exceptional. It should be considered as it is, as should anyone's, and not be harmed or aided by being part of a supposed movement, "pop," "O.K.," neo-Dada or New Realist or whatever it is.

See Donald Judd, "Andy Warhol," *Arts Magazine* (January 1963); reprinted in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 70.

43

Barbara Rose, "Pop Art at the Guggenheim," *Art International* 7, no. 5 (May 1963), pp. 20–22. (It is not quite clear from the article whether Rose makes this statement about Warhol or Lichtenstein, but in any case it indicates the intense shock of factuality that the new mass cultural iconography of Pop art provided even to well prepared eyes.)

In 1962 Sidney Janis identified the artists in his exhibition *The New Realists* as "Factualists," and distinguished them from Rauschenberg and others who are "less factual than they are poetic or expressionist" (See Janis, *The New Realists*.)

In his review of Warhol's movie *Chelsea Girls,* Andrew Sarris would recognize this "factualist" quality in Warhol's work and go as far as comparing Warhol's film to one of the key works in the history of documentary film: "The *Chelsea Girls* is actually closer to *Nanook of the North* than to *The Knack.* It is as *documentary* that the *Chelsea Girls* achieves its greatest distinctions." See Andrew Sarris, "The Sub-New York Sensibility," *Cahiers du Cinéma* (May 1967), p. 43.

44

Bill Manville, "Boris Lurie, March Gallery, Images of Life," *The Village Voice,* June 16, 1960 (italics mine).

45

Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," p. 57 (italics mine).

46

It should be remembered that the identification of the artist with the criminal is one of the key topoi of modernity since Baudelaire, and that the heroicization of the criminal would certainly have been familiar to Warhol from his reading of Jean Genet, to whom he referred occasionally. Of course, the conflation of the artist with the police mug shot is also a direct quotation from Duchamp, who had combined the portrait of the artist with that of the "most wanted"

poster in his rectified readymade *Wanted $ 2000.–Reward* in 1923. Duchamp included this readymade in his *Boîte en Valise* in 1941 (of which several copies were later in Warhol's collection), and also used the image quite appropriately for the poster of his first American retrospective exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963. Warhol attended the opening of that exhibition and it is quite likely that the poster triggered Warhol's *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* in 1964, as well as the "mug shot" self-portrait he used for the announcement and poster of his exhibition at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1964. In addition, as Patrick Smith has pointed out, Rauschenberg had used an FBI "wanted" poster in his painting *Hymnal* in 1955.

The use of the photo-booth strip leads directly back to the work of Jasper Johns, who had used just such a portrait of an unidentified man in his painting *Flag above White with Collage* in 1955, and had used photo-booth strips for self-portraits in his paintings *Souvenir I* and *Souvenir II* in 1964.

For his design of the cover of *Time* magazine in 1965, Warhol used a whole series of photo-booth pictures, and there are still dozens of photo-booth strips of Warhol and his friends in the Warhol archives (as there are dozens of photo-booth strips in most everybody's archive of typical sixties memorabilia).

47

Andy Warhol, quoted in Peter Gidal, *Andy Warhol: Films and Paintings* (London and New York: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 38.

48

Andy Warhol: Transcript, n.p.

The statement about the anonymous people who built the pyramids is, of course, an (unconscious) quotation from Bertolt Brecht's famous poem "Questions from a Worker Who Reads." An early argument for a profound influence of Brecht's work on Warhol was made by Rainer Crone in his monograph *Andy Warhol* (New York: Prager, 1970), both on the grounds of speculation and on the evidence of one reference by Warhol to Brecht in his early interview with Gene Swenson.

More recently Patrick Smith has anxiously attempted to detach Warhol from this political affiliation on the grounds of totally unconvincing "memories" by early acquaintances of Warhol who were interviewed by Smith. See Patrick Smith, interview with Bert Greene, "Theatre 12 and Broadway," in *Warhol: Conversations about the Artist* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 41; see also Smith's dissertation, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films,* pp. 78 ff.

49

Berg, "Nothing to Lose," p. 40. In this regard, Michael Fried's brillant review of Andy Warhol's first New York exhibition has been proven wrong, since it is not the parasitic dependence of

Warhol's images on mass cultural myths but the work's participation in the subject's (continuing) mass cultural experience that animates it:

> An art like Warhol's is necessarily parasitic upon the myths of its time, and indirectly therefore upon the machinery of fame and publicity that market these myths; and it is not at all unlikely that these myths that move us will be unintelligible (or at best starkly dated) to generations that follow. This is said not to denigrate Warhol's work but to characterize it and the risks it runs—and, I admit, to register an advance protest against the advent of a generation that will not be as moved by Warhol's beautiful, vulgar, heart breaking icons of Marilyn Monroe as I am.

Michael Fried, "New York Letter," *Art International* 6, no. 10 (December 1962), p. 57.

50

Andy Warhol, "Notes on My Epic," interview with unidentified interviewer, in *Andy Warhol's Index Book* (New York: Random House, 1967), n.p.

51

The argument was that some of the criminals depicted in the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* had already received fair trial and that their images from the posters could therefore no longer be publicly displayed. The anecdote inevitably brings to mind the famous erasure by an older member of the Rockefeller family of another important New York mural painting. Apparently, Philip Johnson's decision to censor Warhol's second proposal as well caused a considerable strain on their relationship: "And then he proposed to show a portrait of Robert Moses instead of the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*? Yes, that's right . . . since he was the boss of the World Fair, but I prohibited that. . . . Andy and I had a quarrel at that time, even though he is one of my favorite artists." See Crone, *Warhol,* p. 30.

52

The first step was, as usual, to convince Warhol that each work had to be signed individually by him (no longer by his mother, for example, as in his days as a commercial artist), in spite of the fact that he had originally considered it to be crucial to *abstain* from signing his work: "People just won't buy things that are unsigned. . . . It's so silly. I really don't believe in signing my work. Anyone could do the things that I am doing and I don't feel they should be signed." Quoted in Vaughan, "Superpop or a Night at the Factory," p. 7.

53

As early as 1961 or 1962, Claes Oldenburg had conceived of the production and the presentation of his work as a "store display" in his installation *The Store*. In 1964 a major exhibition of

Pop art was organized and displayed as *The Supermarket* at the Paul Bianchini Gallery in New York.

54

Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?" p. 26.

55

This is not to suggest that Warhol necessarily knew about Klein's exhibition; quite the opposite. The parallel indicates, as with the Manzoni work, to what extent these gestures originated in an inescapable external determination of artistic production. However, one should note that Yves Klein had an exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York in April 1961 and in May and June of the same year at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, both titled *Yves le monochrome.* Warhol was certainly interested in Klein's work at a later point in his life when he acquired two paintings by Klein in the mid-seventies.

For an extensive discussion of Klein's project and his own comments on this exhibition see Nan Rosenthal's excellent essay "Assisted Levitation: The Art of Yves Klein," in *Yves Klein* (Houston and New York: Rice University, 1982), pp. 91–135.

56

For a detailed discussion of Warhol's constant reflection on framing conditions, institutional conventions, and exhibition formats, see Charles F. Stuckey, "Andy Warhol's Painted Faces," *Art in America* (May 1980), pp. 102–111. My remarks are indebted to this essay in many ways, and indebted as well to a presentation by Charles F. Stuckey at the Andy Warhol symposium at the Dia Art Foundation in New York in April 1988.

57

See John Coplans, "Andy Warhol and Elvis Presley," *Studio International* (February 1971), pp. 49–56. There are slightly conflicting opinions about who made the decision to stretch the canvas on stretchers after all: Coplans suggests that it was Warhol who sent the stretchers prefabricated to size from New York (which doesn't seem to make a lot of sense); Wolfgang Siano, in his essay "Die Kunst Andy Warhol's im Verhältnis zur Öffentlichkeit," in *Andy Warhol,* ed. Erika Billeter (Bern, 1971), suggests (without giving his source) that it was originally Warhol's intention to install the canvas roll continuously along the perimeter of the gallery walls and that it was the decision of Irving Blum to divide the canvas roll into segments and stretch them as paintings. More recently, Gerard Malanga has voiced doubts that a roll of that size could have been screened continuously in the space available in the Factory at that time.

58

See Nat Finkelstein, "Inside Andy Warhol," *Cavalier Magazine* (September 1966), p. 88.

As late as 1971 Warhol still disputed curators' and collectors' insistence on the stability of artistic categories (and thereby weakened his work in terms of institutional valorization and investment value): "I suppose you could call the paintings prints, but the material used for the paintings was canvas. . . . Anyone can do them." See Malanga, "Conversation with Andy Warhol," p. 127. Even after he resumed painting in 1968 he disseminated rumors that the new paintings were, in fact, executed by his long-time friend Brigid Polk. As she stated in *Time* magazine (October 17, 1969). "Andy? I've been doing it all for the last year and a half, two years. Andy doesn't do art anymore. He's bored with it. I did all his new soup cans."

Starting in the mid-1970s, quite appropriately for both the general situation of a return to traditional forms of easel painting and his own complacent opportunism, Warhol recanted those rumors, but not, however, without turning the screw once again. Answering the question whether collectors had actually called him and tried to return their paintings after Polk's statement, Warhol said: "Yes, but I really do all the paintings. We were just being funny. If there are any fakes around I can tell. . . . The modern way would be to do it like that, but I do them all myself." See Blinderman, "Modern Myths: An Interview," pp. 144–147.

Warhol adopts a similar attitude in a series of photographs that were used as endpapers for Carter Ratcliff's monograph, in which Warhol, staring into the camera (or out at the collector), displays the original tools and traces of his martyrium of painting.

59

Quoted in Gidal, *Andy Warhol,* p. 27. According to both Teeny Duchamp and John Cage, Marcel Duchamp was apparently quite fond of Warhol's work (which does not really come as a surprise): see David Bailey's interviews with Teeny Duchamp and John Cage, in *Andy Warhol: Transcript,* n.p.

60

Henry Geldzahler, in "A Symposium on Pop Art" (ed. Peter Selz), *Arts Magazine* (April 1963), pp. 18 ff. Ten years later Geldzahler addressed the question of the European success of Pop art once again, slightly toned down, but no less imperialist in attitude, and certainly confused about the course of historical development:

> And the question is, why would Germany be particularly interested in this American phenomenon? And the reason goes back, I think, to a remark that Gertrude Stein made quite early in the twentieth century, which is that America is the oldest country in the world because it entered the twentieth century first. And the point really is that the Germans, in their postwar boom, got into a

> mood that America was in in the twenties, and Andy essentializes the American concentration on overabundance of commercial objects.

The fact is, of course, that the "mood that America was in in the twenties" had been the mood that the Europeans had been in the twenties as well, and which had generated Dadaism, the very artistic legacy at the origin of Pop art.

Robert Watts: Animate Objects, Inanimate Subjects

> In order to make life's reified conditions dance once again, one has to play them their own tune.
> —*Karl Marx*

> Art and music, when anthropocentric, seem trivial and lacking in urgency to me. We live in a world where there are things as well as people . . . life goes on very well without me.
> —*John Cage*

> One can imagine an audience environment where the audience becomes the sole activator and responds to itself.
> —*Robert Watts*

The history of Fluxus activities confronts us with a complex question that has remained largely unreflected in the study of postwar visual culture. How do we

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address the phenomena of aesthetic desubjectivization, and their multiple, often outright oppositional, historical determinations and artistic ambitions?

One could start out, for example, by situating Fluxus in a complementary position between two central critiques of subjective intentionality and Cartesian self-determination: the Marxist critique (and hypostasis of the end) of the bourgeois subject, articulated from the prospect of a future classless society; and the critique of authorship in Marcel Duchamp. Or one could contemplate Fluxus within the historically more precise and topical framework of T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectics of Enlightenment,* as one more example of the conditions of cultural practice after the war. Adorno and Horkheimer recognized in 1947 that Auschwitz would have to be considered as the irreversible historical moment in which all traditional forms and concepts of bourgeois subjectivity had been annihilated. These subject conditions left behind by fascism (and therefore the conditions of cultural production at large) merged almost seamlessly—at least in the mind of these authors—with the newly reinforced demands of the culture industry, whose project they believed to be the ideological and political erasure of the self-conceiving and self-determining subject.

One could think of the writings of Samuel Beckett as a primary cultural example within which the epistemological critique of traditional subjectivity was fused with the recognition of the historically determined destruction of the subject. His failed dramatic agents would notoriously pronounce sentences like "I cant go on, I will go on." And it is certainly not accidental that Beckett, who would become central to the theorization of literature (and the possibilities of culture at large) in Adorno's work, would also become formative in the articulation of a profound skepticism of the historically available functions of visual culture from Jasper Johns onward.

Beckett's theatrical counterpart, the work of Bertolt Brecht, and its postwar reception could be considered as a second and opposite example of such a crucial fusion of epistemic subject critiques from the earlier part of the twentieth century with a critique of subjectivity arising from the aftermath of the Second World War. Brecht's pre- and postwar work attempted to develop new models of textual and theatrical audience participation that anticipated the postbourgeois

subject on the level of reading and theatrical perception. According to Brecht, spectatorial consciousness was now to be raised in preparation for the future political self-determination brought about by the revolutionary and collectivist politics of an educated working class.

Brecht's theory of the epic theater with its strategies of estrangement effects, self-reflexivity, and audience participation would become central—as was the case with Beckett's theater—to the theoretical formulation of postwar author/subject critiques, in particular the one developed by Roland Barthes in the late 1950s, culminating in his "The Death of the Author" in 1967. But the impact of Brecht also led to other, less conspicuous identifications with his particular version of a Marxist theory of posttraditional identity, as for example in the leftist dimensions of the Fluxus projects. These were voiced in George Maciunas's explicit invocation of the Marxist aesthetics of the LEF group in his famous letter to Tomas Schmit:

> Fluxus objectives are social (not aesthetic). Ideologically they relate to those of the LEF group in 1929 in the Soviet Union and they aim at the gradual elimination of the fine arts. Therefore, Fluxus is strictly against the art object as a disfunctional commodity whose only purpose is to be sold and to support the artist. At best it can have a temporary pedagogical function and clarify how superfluous art is and how superfluous ultimately it is itself. . . . Secondly, Fluxus is against art as a medium and vehicle for the artist's ego; the applied arts must express objective problems which have to be solved, not the artist's individuality or ego. Therefore, Fluxus has a tendency toward the spirit of the collective, toward anonymity and anti-individualism.[1]

A third model of desubjectivization that enters artistic production in the early to mid-1950s is of course John Cage's. To counteract the culture industry's advanced and seemingly irresistible forms of control and domination, Cage would have recourse to earlier critiques of subjectivity that had been legitimized by religious and mythical practices. Thus, C. G. Jung's remythification of

psychoanalysis and Daisetz Suzuki's Westernized forms of Zen Buddhism seemed to provide Cage with functional countermodels to an emerging totality of reification.

Suzuki's own description of Zen Buddhism[2] articulates the oscillation between a rigorous affirmation of the state of things and that affirmation's critique of transcendendality and critical political thought. At the same time, that principle's circular, almost tautological structure suggests an eternal return of and to the same, albeit with a slight, but passively described, distancing effect. It is not surprising, then, that nonrational ordering schemes (such as the deployment of the *I Ching*), aleatory compositional principles, and chance operations, introduced into Western neo-avantgarde culture by Cage, should now be received as the almost exclusively valid method for the structural or compositional organization of musical, visual, or textual materials. This new doxa is pronounced for example in Allan Kaprow's now famous essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" or in George Brecht's manifesto-like text "Chance Imagery."[3]

To be embedded in reification and to return to it with a sense of a compensatory suspension is of course one way to describe certain Fluxus and Happening activities as well. One articulation occurs in the game or the gag, and the ludic principle would now be proposed once again as the only means of access to a ritual of transgression.[4] Another is the Happening model of social participation that never transcends anything but the totality of inertia and instrumentalization that determines everybody's everyday life. A lesser-known but poignant example within that tradition is perhaps a proposal by Robert Watts in 1966, called *Cloud Sounds,* employing the movement of clouds as the generator of a sound composition:

> I would like to be able to reach into the clouds and get cloud sound, so since I am not able to do that I have to do something else. In fact, what the cloud piece does is that it goes back to all these early experiments I did with randomness. . . . I assume that clouds coming by the camera are random . . . so that's a random trigger for the sounds, so I'll get a random composition out of it. And I am inter-

> ested in the fact that I don't have to compose any sounds. The clouds are going to do the composing and I don't have to be involved. It's like being a composer without being a composer . . . which I like.[5]

Under the impact of Cage's theories and his mediation of the legacies of Marcel Duchamp, the ready-made object (cultural or natural, as in the above proposition) would now be conceived as an exchangeable factor that could inhabit multiple object positions, functioning either as a textual, a musical, or a visual structure (or any combination thereof). Or it would replace these categories and genre conventions altogether by a dramatic enactment of an often minimal and highly ascetic totality of sounds, texts, gestures, and objects, which George Brecht had defined as an "event."

In an ever-expanding universe—not of textuality, such as had been the situation of Mallarmé at the beginning of poetic modernity, but of incessant object production and reification which would increasingly permeate every aspect and every second of the perceptual interactions of everyday life—Fluxus would now bring about a multiplicity of hybrid situations where the object could take on the role of the object, or that of poetic textuality or that of the musical score or that of the performative and the theatrical gesture.

One other consequence and variation of Duchamp's and Cage's approach to desubjectivization is of course the cultural attempt to embrace reification outright, to make it—like advertisement—the matter of a myth of double positivity. Culture then naturalizes the apparent inescapability of an ever-increasing totality of reification and of fetishization in a strategy of cool and affirmative dandyism. The climax of this aesthetics of indifference and of pure affirmation would of course be reached by Pop art and Andy Warhol.

Beyond the extent to which it partakes in the Duchamp/Cage legacy, Fluxus runs in many ways parallel to certain aspects of this affirmative agenda of Pop art: first of all in that it would radically deny any viability of the remnants of the modernist aesthetic. Like Duchamp's readymade earlier (a model that these artists explicitly quoted as their most important predecessor), Fluxus refused to conceive of the work of art as being anything but fully identified with the

conditions of the industrially produced multiplied object and the economic order of exchange value produced by commodities. Therefore, even the last aspirations for an aesthetic sphere of relative autonomy, for a trace of medium specificity, or for those conventions of artisanal production that had been based on acquired skills, were now to be purged from all artistic activities.

Contemplating the work of Robert Watts more than forty years after he decided to abandon painting in 1957,[6] in favor of a type of object and event production that would soon associate him with the members of the Fluxus movement, confronts us with a set of new art historical tasks. First of all, we have to consider the diffcult and delayed reception that his works have had by comparison to the simultaneous extraordinary, almost global success of some of the key figures of Pop art (in particular artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg who were either colleagues, friends, or peers in joint or parallel ventures and exhibitions with Watts). A second task would be to clarify the increments of a scale sliding between a *refusal* and a *failure* to communicate, within those artistic practices that were invented by Watts and his Fluxus colleagues.

One explanation for the relative illegibility of Watts's work may be his decision to construct objects that at times seemed (then and now) too esoteric, too opaque, too eccentric, operating too far outside of the conventions and parameters of the post-Duchampian readymade aesthetic. Furthermore, the work often appears to have been too radical in its opposition to the newly emerging fusions of neo-avantgarde art and the culture industry to succeed in the generally available institutions of discursive and economic mediation. Rather than assuming access to a relatively autonomous sphere (e.g., the essential separateness of poetry and literature from the conditions of alienated speech or sheer collective aphasia), Fluxus positioned all of its diverse approaches and activities at the very epicenter of advanced forms of reification. It was this radical conception that made Fluxus practically illegible to the majority of its contemporaneous and present audiences.

Or, by posing the question in reverse, we could wonder how best to describe the thresholds where those artists of the Pop art movement who apparently conceived and constructed their work within a frame of a relatively easy legibility (all too easy at times, as it seems now) failed precisely to resist altogether, since

they assumed that the traditional distribution forms of the work of art, the relative stability and specificity of its genres, and, most erroneously of all perhaps, the relative autonomy of the aesthetic sphere could still be taken for granted. By comparing the work of Claes Oldenburg at the moment of *Store Days* and the *Ray Gun* collection (1961–1962) with Watts's works of the same time, one could illustrate these differences and recognize to what degree these initially parallel projects of Pop art and Fluxus would thereafter increasingly diverge.

In 1962, Oldenburg's work was still engaged in many of the same issues as Watts's and the Fluxus artists': the transformation of the distribution form of the work of art, the dismantling of genre traditions, the critique of the museum institution, the change of audiences and audience address. Only a few years later, however, Lichtenstein and Oldenburg seem to have decided no longer to challenge the specificity of the discursive sphere of artistic production, and to reaffirm instead the continuing validity of the traditional genres of painting and sculpture.

By comparison, Watts's work, starting in 1957, even if it could still be associated in its initial phases with various aspects of the collage and assemblage tradition as it had been resuscitated in postwar American art, would develop in a manner remarkably different from the work of his major American predecessors and peers. Watts would soon—initially in close collaboration with George Brecht—give the conventions of the readymade and the *objet trouvé* a radically new articulation.

While the fascination with the object's condition of "obsolescence" and the sudden eruption of its ludic potential would remain a crucial strategy to negate the totalizing demands of the commodity culture and the totalitarian demands of the culture industry of the 1950s and 1960s, Watts and the Fluxus artists realized that—in particular now that obsolescence was planned—everyday life had been permeated by an object production whose massiveness and ubiquity could never have been anticipated in the twenties. Undoubtedly, the aspirations that the Surrealists (and Joseph Cornell in their wake) could still have invested in the principle of obsolescence had by now rapidly withered away.

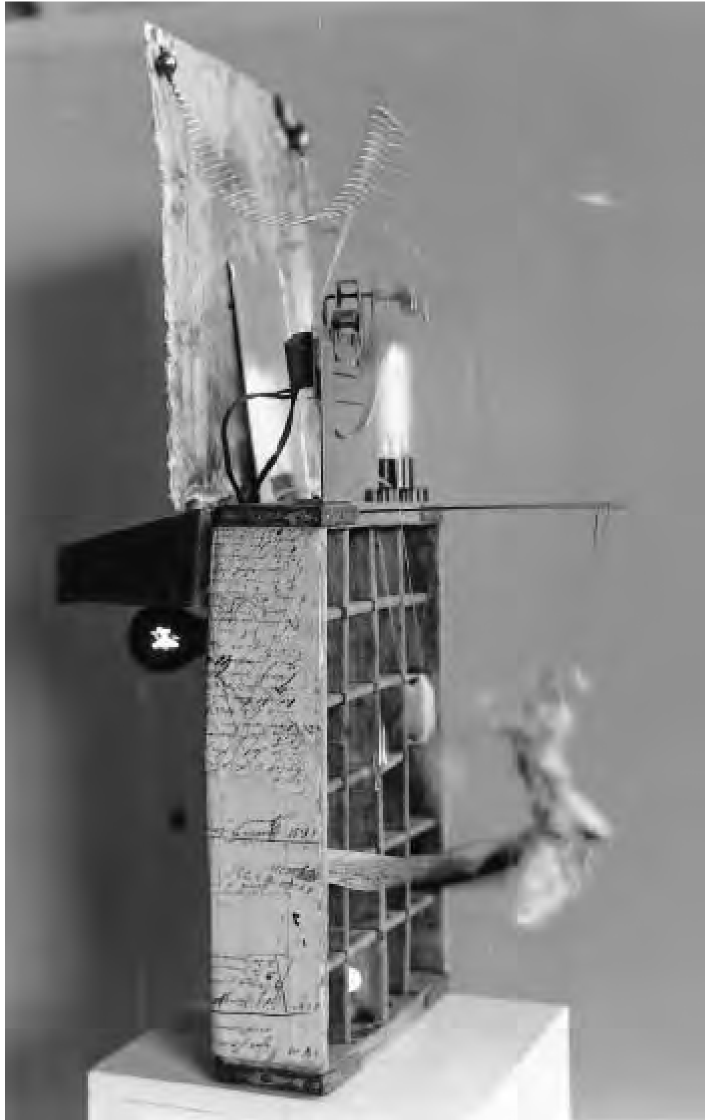
Thus, in distinct differentiation from Cornell, with whom both Watts and Brecht were involved in an intense dialogic relationship,[7] Watts moved away first

of all from the contemplative passivity that Cornell's boxes had instilled in their viewers. Watts's constructions no longer solicit the spectator's desire for obsolescence in the industrially produced object in order to uncover a space of potential exemption from the universal rule of instrumentalization and use.

The other major figure and immediate predecessor for Watts's transformation of the assemblage aesthetic was of course Robert Rauschenberg, whose works of the late fifties and early sixties (such as *Coca Cola Plan* of 1958 or *Black Market* of 1961), with their emphasis on the object's performative potential, could be seen as leading immediately to Brecht's and Watts's conception of the "event structure" of objects. This structure would unfold a new participatory relationship that could no longer be conceived of as merely "spectatorial" but would be defined as one of performative enactment, one where object and subject would suddenly appear as equal actors yet its performative dimension would mysteriously defy all traditional criteria of theatricality.

Objects in Watts's work and in Fluxus inhabit a peculiar intersection between the ludic and the reified. They are situated between the allegory of the work's industrial derivation and the redefinition of the distribution form on the one hand and the actual performance of seemingly senseless, anti-instrumentalized tasks and activities on the other.[8] "Events" and performative objects promised at least to transform the symbolic organization of object relationships, if not to reorganize the actually existing conditions of social exchange and communication.

Watts's *Pony Express* from 1960 is a typical example in which both traditions, that of Cornell and that of Rauschenberg, seem to have been recorded and exorcised at the same time. On the one hand, the work still functions as a passive memorial shrine in the manner of Cornell in which objects come to life and signify, if for no other reason than by their mere spatial and temporal arrest and the effects of contextual transposition. On the other hand, Watts emphatically foregrounds the accumulation of objects over the mere mapping of the painterly surface by the grid structure of the found crate. By collapsing these framing and display devices with with their immanent painterly "contents"—still in the manner of a Rauschenberg combine painting—and by adding a number of kinetic, mechanical, and electrical elements to the construction in order to separate it



Robert Watts, *Pony Express,* 1960 (shown with light illuminated and kinetics in operation). Motorized construction with electric lights, wooden box, miscellaneous printed material; 34 × 15 × 20 in. Collection: Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Photo courtesy of Robert Watts Studio Archive, New York.

from its obvious assemblage predecessors, *Pony Express* traces the inevitable transformation from pictorial surface to object construction, and triggers the transition to the future condition of the work as event structure.

Watts's assemblage *Goya's Box* (1958) exemplifies at an earlier moment these changes from the legacy of Cornell and Rauschenberg to that of a newly emerging Fluxus aesthetic. Here, object and presentational frame have changed as much as they will change the spectatorial relationship itself. First of all, in spite of its similarity to a box, the "shrine" is here disassembled into a serial alignment of display surfaces that suspend their iconic objects like scientific specimens prepared for microscopic inspection. Second, the juxtaposition of diverse objects that generated Cornell's almost mechanical poetry still seems to operate here, though in a highly distilled version: four postage stamps and two labels, identifying their images of a set of stamped concentric circles simply as "right" and "wrong" (the set of concentric circles seems reminiscent of a perceptual teaching device with which central perspectival vision and spatial recession could be illustrated).

This new ascetic type of assemblage, scaling down the display from a multitude of heterogeneous objects to a relatively homogeneous small set, from seemingly infinite compositional constellations to a small segment of an almost didactic display, will become one of the crucial features of Watts's work as much as of the object works of the Fluxus artists. This reductivism of assemblage objects parallels the singularization of photographic image constellations in the rewriting of photomontage aesthetics from Rauschenberg to Warhol.

And while the postage stamps as central images in *Goya's Box* seem to link both Watts's iconography and his object choices still to the Cornell tradition, in their formal isolation they generate a different reading altogether: as a result of the juxtaposition of postage stamp and historical masterpiece (Francisco de Goya's *La Maia desnueda* and James McNeill Whistler's *Portrait of His Mother,* among others), they alternate between the nostalgic *objets trouvés* suspended between the sheets of glass and works of art on exhibit in the museum display case, imbuing *Goya's Box* with the enigmatic quality of a miniature portable museum, fully illuminated from within.

Thus, if Watts's choice of postage stamps at first appears merely a mockery of the museum, upon longer contemplation *Goya's Box* generates a gradual collapse of those rigid disciplinary divisions, the discursive and institutional dimensions within which the work of art had been traditionally constructed and contained outside of other circuits of social meaning production: the pedagogical, the didactic, the historical. Suddenly awoken from its perennial slumber and its aesthetic strictures and expelled into an instability and fluidity, shifting back and forth between a lucid toy and a ludic institution, the work of art that is *Goya's Box* is transformed into an enigmatic hybrid: in fact, it follows the exact laws that now determine the consumption of all objects, high and low, in everyday life, at large: fetishization and spectacularization.

Undoubtedly, the stamps' farcical parallelism to the status of the work of art—a secular miniature carrying an assigned minuscule monetary value; the rarefied object of the desire of collectors—would have made it one of Watts's favorite *objets trouvés* (if we can actually still call them that).[9] But those aspects that make stamps an "event structure," the fact that they function as an operative sign, as a legally binding token to guarantee the public circulation of (mostly) written goods, would have motivated Watts even more to select these strangely innocuous items to become central in many of his subsequent works as well.

This apparently eccentric insertion of a variety of objects and activities into preestablished circuits of social distribution (the legal-administrative system as in Watts's attempt to obtain a patent on the word "Pop," the postal system as in his attempt to circulate his own stamp designs, the monetary system in his attempt to redesign the dollar bill) derives not only from a sly and slightly critical commentary on the relativity of privilege and economic interest governing the distribution forms established within the institution of high art, but more importantly from an affirmation of the actually existing, still functional systems of social exchange and communication (outside of the apparatus of neo-avantgarde culture and the systems of the culture industry) in which the performative and the participatory structure of the event could be activated.

In this light it becomes slightly more plausible that Watts and Fluxus should have been so intrigued by the residual forms of public services and systems. They

Robert Watts, *Goya's Box,* 1958. Plexiglas, wood, electric light, postage stamps, and printed matter, $6 \times 3\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{1}{4}$ in. Stamps of Goya's *Maja,* Whistler's *Mother,* and the U.S. "Mail Train." Collection: The Newark Museum; Photo courtesy of Robert Watts Studio Archive, New York.

considered them as found spaces and circuits for the noncommercial forms of social exchange, spaces and communicative circuits that can still operate outside of the sphere of a rigorously controlled commercial culture where no gratuitous exchange at all can take place any longer. Or, in a somewhat complementary formation, this observation would also explain why Watts and Maciunas were so infatuated with setting up mock mail order businesses and commercial catalogues: they were not only attempting to transform the distribution form of the work of art according to prevailing standards of late capitalist commodification but also mimetically embracing the seemingly unalterable and increasingly invasive conditions of consumer culture.

One could thus argue that Watts's heightened sense of the necessity to make the viewer actively participate in the event structure of the work—even if only in the banal and benign forms of social exchange and public communication—resulted first of all from insight into the consequences of collectively enforced consumption. Even if it had not improved linguistic or political competence, compulsive consumption had increased object competence to such a degree that neither the object magic of the Surrealists nor the melancholia of Cornell could claim any artistic credibility any longer. But this dialectic of a participatory competence of object experience and a simultaneously intensified subjection to the object in the process of fetishization would be even more pronounced in Watts's variation of the modernist model of tactile and perceptual participation.

This model of perceptual participation had been embodied—since Juan Gris's insertion of mirror fragments into Cubist painting—in a work's pictorial or sculptural play on the dialectics between the optical and the haptic. The mirror reflection intensified the object's tactile dimension by extending it into the realm of the purely perceptual, in an analogy to the process of fetishization which objectified vision and made objects optical.

Transparency, translucence, sheen, shine, and reflection are clearly some of the perceptual conditions that Watts's work is engaging (or of which he makes his spectators aware as the inescapable strictures within which vision in commodity culture is contained). If these are the criteria of an aesthetic of the surface, rather than an aesthetic of substance, structure, or form that had dominated sculptural

thought throughout most of the twentieth century, it should be evident that they are of course also the perceptual conditions of the experience of the fetish. Freud illustrated the etiology of fetishism as a peculiar visual dynamic between the deflection of the gaze from the site of castration and the reflection of an intensified presence of a substitutional object with his famous anecdote about a patient who linked sexual excitation to a peculiar encounter with a love object's shine on the nose ("der Glanz auf der Nase"). This duality could also be identified as one of the central artistic strategies of Watts's enigmatic object production.

This becomes evident, for example, when Watts attempts to naturalize his deeply cultural fascination with light-reflective surfaces (such as chrome) or the seduction of translucency or extreme transparency of other newly invented industrial plastics:

> There are times when chrome is almost black, strange as it seems. In certain light conditions, it doesn't shine. It's like my favorite bird out there, the indigo bunting, that has no color unless sunlight is refracting from the feathers. Without sunlight it turns a steel gray. It doesn't have any color of its own. It has a potential for color. So it's been difficult for me to try to recall the initial impulse to do something in chrome. But the first thing was one egg in an eggcup with a spoon. I guess that's the egg coming back again. It got started with an egg. That was the time I was collecting eggs in birds nests.[10]

To what extent transformations occur in the sculptural aesthetic of the twentieth century would become evident if one compares the emergence of an aesthetic of the surface with more traditional forms of an aesthetic of material substance, structure, and procedural form. We are speaking of course of the work of Constantin Brancusi, where one of the central sculptural conflicts of the twentieth century is articulated for the first time in an almost programmatic manner: the realization that the commodity fetish and all of its inherent perceptual inflictions will drastically displace and irreversibly alter all earlier conditions of object experience.

Robert Watts, *New Light on West Africa,* 1976. Five figures from series; chrome and silver plate castings on hydrocal and cast metal. Robert Watts Estate; Photo courtesy of Robert Watts Studio Archive, New York.

It is this condition first of all that generates the peculiar hybridity of Brancusi's perceptual machines which oscillate between all the previous and all the contemporary object conditions, from the emphasis on the artisanal bonds to nature to the denatured surface aesthetic of polished machinic parts, from the unique, craft-engendered object to the serialized part object. In all of his work, the bodily and the perceptual registers that sculpture addresses are permeated by the emerging condition of the fetish, appearing as the new law governing the making and the seeing of sculptural objects in advanced industrial commodity production.

Watts's updated vision and version of fetishization is unrecognizable at first precisely because it turns out to be the kind of fetishism that is presently the most common, like those forms of advanced fetishization in advertisement and product design that, to increase fragmentation and particularity in order to seduce, seem to have to separate the skin from the body like the peel from the fruit. Watts's choice of materials seems to be determined in many instances precisely by this new type of visuality, a condition where the gaze itself is both fetishized and the fetishizing activity.

Watts's *Chest of Moles* is one such example where the mingling of bodily fragmentation and compulsive proximity has become the central strategy to accelerate the effects of fetishization innately given within the photographic image. By laminating the photograph onto translucent pieces of Plexiglas, Watts's "images" now have become tangible three-dimensional objects in which the reification of the gaze as much as that of its objects seems to have attained an irreversible fusion. This liminal density is matched of course by the sometimes almost medical proximity with which Watts now fragments the body. In its gesture of derision the work anticipates with uncanny congruence the actually emerging conditions in everyday visual culture, where the close-up movements of advertisement make even those differences and spaces of what Duchamp famously called the space of the *inframince*[11] a voided zone of desire and open it thereby for the exploration of a possible product substitution.

Thus Watts is engaged with a status of objects where the condition of what was once corporeal has slipped fully into the axis of representation and where

Robert Watts, *Chest of Moles* (*Portrait of Pamela*), 1965. Photo-embedments in plastic, illuminated glass, and wood case, 17 × 13 × 7¾ in. Collection: Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Photo courtesy of Robert Watts Studio Archive, New York.

even those organic objects that might have retained their corporeal morphology and their "natural" presence by error, by default, or simply by neglect, are now subjected—at least in the cruelly anticipatory vision of the artist—to the same regime of design as are the objects of everyday seduction. Thus his *Lamb Chop Box* (1966), rather than presenting a sculptural object, confronts us with a strange tautological exercise in collapsing the boundaries between the frame (or the presentational device) and the object of presentation by displaying a prosthetic box made from wood and lamb fur in the shape of the object it supposedly contains as the sole object of presentation itself.

The peculiar mimeticism with which Fluxus in general and Watts in particular inscribe themselves within the commodity structure and its distribution forms seems to be at least partially based on a realist assumption, namely that the commodity form is historically—at least for the time being—not to be displaced from its hegemonic centrality in the structuring of all human relationships to subjects and objects alike. It is revealing, in this respect alone, to compare the attitude of the Soviet LEF artists invoked by Maciunas as exemplary for his definition of the social role of Fluxus artists and the actual attitudes of the Fluxus artists concerning the universal role of the commodity structure. The rise of consumer culture could still serve as a horizon of utopian expectations in the 1920s, especially in its architecture and design projects, and the avant-garde artists at that time could still associate the production of objects of consumption with the radical promise of an egalitarian distribution of goods. The artists of the 1950s, by contrast, at the moment of the most massive assault on traditional forms of object experience and at the height of the first postwar campaign to restructure subjectivity altogether according to the rules of consumption, could neither deride the omnipresence of the commodity as the singular object structure in the hope of destroying its grip (as the Dada artists still had done) nor share the anodyne aspirations of the socialist avant-gardes of the twenties.

The Fluxus artists recognized the commodity form as historically insurmountable, as a failed utopia whose sole dimension of promise (if any) would remain its intrinsically egalitarian element and its potential to establish a competence of object relations, in lieu of a linguistic or political competence of political self-

Installation of Robert Watts's *Neon Signature* series and table settings on grass carpet at Bianchini Gallery, New York, 1966. Photo courtesy of Robert Watts Studio Archive, New York.

Robert Watts, *Marcel Duchamp Signature,* 1965. Neon and Plexiglas. Collection: Gino di Maggio. Photo courtesy of Robert Watts Studio Archive, New York.

determination. Thus the relationships of Fluxus to commodity culture are both mimetic and polemical, performing gags on the totality of reification and enacting farces with minimally redeeming functions. Fluxus aspires neither to the open spaces of obsolescence nor to the radical transformation of everyday life, but rather to the ludic practices that open up sudden ruptures within that system's mesmerizing totality and numbing continuity.

It is one of the more enigmatic aspects of Watts's work and of Fluxus at large that these mutations of object relationships alter not only the dialectics of the readymade and the aesthetics of the found object, but more importantly perhaps, inasmuch as they are engaged with the exploration of the interaction of subjects and subjects and subjects and objects, those of the theater as well. If the readymade had denounced traditional forms of representation in favor of advanced forms of reification, emphasizing that their acceptance could be considered the sole source of a future subjectivity, Fluxus equally denounces traditional theater. Theater—at least in the culture of bourgeois subject formation—had always to some extent envisaged the possibilities of a free and self-determining subject. Even in its most advanced forms and practices in the postwar period, theater had remained ultimately the residue of an anthropocentric culture that failed to recognize the degree to which desubjectivization and the decentering of subjectivity now operated in tandem.

Within a regime where objects have taken control over the animation of everyday life, Fluxus, as a theater of advanced reification, enacts those conditions of collective object competence and of advanced desubjectivization. At the same time the object theater of Fluxus repositions subjectivity within those registers where it is collectively foiled and contained, encapsulated as it is within the experience of objects rather than that of subjects.

Notes

1

George Maciunas, letter to Tomas Schmit (January 1964), as reproduced in Jon Hendricks, *Fluxus Codex: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection* (New York: Abrams, 1988), p. 37. (Since

the letter seems to have been written by Maciunas in German, several English translations exist. This translation has been modified by the author.)

2

In his lecture at the Juilliard School in 1956, Cage described his encounter with Suzuki at Columbia University. Apparently Suzuki told his listeners that the only difference between an initiated Zen Buddhist's perception and a non-initiate's is that the initiate will look at a tree or a person "just the same but with [his] feet slightly off the ground." See John Cage, "Juilliard Lecture," in John Cage, *A Year from Monday* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), pp. 56ff.

3

Both essays seem to have had little if any benefit from their authors' encounter with John Cage at the New School for Social Research in 1957–1958, where they attended his famous seminars over several semesters. Kaprow claims to have written his essay on Pollock already in 1956 (even though it was published only two years later in *Art News* due to Tom Hess's initial reluctance to publish the piece), and Brecht states explicitly that his essay was written in 1957 before he attended Cage's lectures. Further evidence is the fact that for both essays it is Pollock who still represents the principle of aleatory composition, not Cage. What is important in this shift from Pollock to Cage is of course the understanding that Pollock's model of desubjectivization deploys a late Surrealist and ultimately Freudian conception of the ego-id opposition by taking recourse to a Nietzschean model of the liberating Dionysian forces of the unconscious. By contrast, with the rise of Cagean aesthetics, chance operations are associated with an insight into the exteriority of language as a system that preexists consciousness formation and intentional choices (aesthetic or otherwise).

Robert Watts did not attend Cage's courses at the New School, though it appears that he might have occasionally come along with his friends Brecht and Kaprow. The famous "manifesto" text signed by Brecht, Kaprow, and Watts, "Project in Multiple Dimensions" (dating from 1957–1958 and to all appearances written in large part by Kaprow, with the exception of the personal statements by Brecht and Watts), gives insight into the extraordinary impact of Cage's thought on these artists at that time.

4

The famous philosophical tract *Homo Ludens,* written and published by the Dutch philosopher Johan Huizinga in 1937, had been a cult text within late Surrealism and would become one again, after its republication in the late 1950s, among, for example, the Internationale Situationniste. I have not found any evidence, in the context of Fluxus, of the circulation of Huizinga's theorization of the human desire for games and play and their artistic advocacy. But the fact that a theory of games would reemerge as a cultural project at the very moment of an

ever-increasing instrumentalization of libidinal desire through consumer culture would appear worthy of further consideration.

5

Robert Watts, quoted in Letty Eisenhauer, “Bob Watts,” unpublished manuscript, pp. 6–7. Courtesy Robert Watts Studio Archive.

6

Robert Watts (1923–1988) received a first degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Louisville and served as an engineer in the United States Navy during World War II. Subsequently he studied at the Arts Students League in New York and earned a master's degree in art history at Columbia University in 1951, writing his thesis under the supervision of Paul Wingert on the subject of the masks of the Inuit people. In 1952 Watts began teaching at Rutgers University, first in the Department of Engineering and subsequently in the Department of Art, where he would remain for thirty years.

7

Thus when Brecht explicitly stated that he had nothing but disdain for nostalgia, we can assume that he was pointing to that aspect of Cornell's work.

8

It is not accidental, then, that such strange structures as the medical cabinet (for example in Watts's *Chest of Moles* or *Chest with Portrait,* or Brecht's various cabinets that seem to have served as medical cabinets in their former functions) would now serve as display cases for these hybrid objects.

9

But in spite of Watts's emphasis on humor, one should want to be careful before situating this structure merely in the register of the parodic. While postage stamps have been part of the iconography of *trompe-l'oeil* still life painting from the late nineteenth century onward (Peto and Harnett would be the obvious examples), and while they have of course been an integral element in collage work since Cubism and have acquired an even more pertinent presence in the work of Kurt Schwitters and Cornell, it is precisely in the distinction from these earlier usages that Watts once again has to be recognized.

10

Watts in an unpublished manuscript in the collection of Letty Eisenhauer. Courtesy Robert Watts Studio Archive.

11

Duchamp's concept of the *inframince* defined the invisible qualifications of objects or materials, conditions that were moreover part of a temporal process. One of the examples Duchamp provides to illustrate the concept is the withering sharpness of a razor blade.

The Posters of Lawrence Weiner

> Voilà les prospectus, les catalogues,
> Les affiches qui chantent tout haut
> Voilà la poésie et pour la prose, il y a les journaux.
> —*Guillaume Apollinaire*

In 1968, Lawrence Weiner's work replaced the linguistic conventions of painting with actual linguistic operations within the general field of representation, a field of which Modernist painting and sculpture had historically claimed only a minor fraction.

Subsequently, Weiner's work incorporated the supplementary functions of the discursive and the institutional apparatus, which had been traditionally operative within the artistic construct and had determined its reception and reading but had been repressed from the appearance of high art representations. This inversion of the traditional positions and functions of the "work" and its "supplements," and the inevitable effect of dissemination and dispersal of meaning

First published in *Lawrence Weiner: The Posters,* ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1986), pp. 169–174.

following that inversion, raise the question of how Weiner's linguistic operations actually relate to and compare with the plastic and visual conventions of painting and sculpture. Or whether it would be more appropriate to perceive these statements within the sole framework of writing in relation to poetic uses of language: after all, if his language were not to be read or perceived as poetry or literature, it would seem itself to assume—in the manifest absence of a central and substantial aesthetic construct—the status of the supplement and the secondary text, the commentary. Or, the next inevitable question provoked by Weiner's work: could the written word, in its concretion in the book, the catalogue, and the poster, possibly assume the status and the function of the work itself?[1]

To clarify this last question within the present context, we might cite an example from a different instant in history, when language emerged equally as a critical device within visual representation and a seeming threat to the autonomy of the visual construct. Thus, while in any discussion of Analytic Cubism it would ultimately be impossible to ignore the influence of Mallarmé, it would be equally unlikely to shift a discussion of the uses of language in Cubism from a formal, visual material reading to the poetological domain. This would be even more paradoxical since the work of language in representation and its opposition to the hegemony of the pictorial occurs historically precisely at the moment—as the epigraph by Apollinaire indicates—when the representational functions of poetic language itself begin to vanish. In Weiner's work, it is the function of language to contest the supremacy of the visual as constituting aesthetic experience, thus continuing the contestation of the hegemony of the "retinal principle," as Duchamp had called it.

Historically and typologically, the posters of Lawrence Weiner are situated at the intersection of various discursive and representational functions. While they accompanied his work from the very beginning, in 1965, as a mere *supplement* (a function they assume up to the present moment), they would—after 1968—become *one* of the presentational formats of the work itself, and one of the many different support functions and distribution forms of his art.

The support and distribution forms range from Weiner's early paintings and the sculptural work of the late 1960s to architectural installations (mural text

paintings), from the printed sentences in the books to the filmic representation of individuals acting out and articulating these very same sentences in movies and videotapes. Since these forms and procedures are not easily separated from "the work," here appears one of the more difficult philosophical problems of Weiner's "logocentrism": what is the work (the linguistic statement) and what differentiates it from the supporting supplements?

From the start, it should be emphasized that the posters assume neither a privileged nor a marginal position with regard to any of the other distribution forms or presentational formats in Weiner's work. In the same way that he foregrounded and abolished the distinction between the central, essential substance of the construct and its various supplements that facilitate or support its existence, there is also no longer any inherent hierarchical order differentiating these various presentational formats, in the manner in which painting, drawing, and print were traditionally organized according to their value and status within and outside of an artist's oeuvre.

As a result of their function in actually presenting "the work," however, Weiner's posters are inextricably linked with all other conventions of visual display: in high art, the pictorial, sculptural, and graphic devices traditionally deployed (e.g., in Modernist geometric reductivist abstraction) to materialize, install, and present the work of art. On the other hand, because the posters are mechanically reproduced representations, they relate to the conventions of commercial and mass cultural graphic and typographic design. In this manner, they inscribe themselves into all the conventions and functions that posters (those made by artists as well as the "merely" utilitarian ones) have assumed in the relatively short history of this format (its most prominent functions have been to advertise consumer objects and services or communicate political and ideological messages).

Weiner's posters establish a relationship of critical negation with the traditional practices of painting precisely because it is the written statement (on the surfaces of these posters or in the pages of the books) that replaced painting in Weiner's work in 1968. As a negation of painting conventions, however, the pictorial features continue to operate within the very conventions of display the poster/work employs. Therefore, in Weiner's posters, the graphic devices

(compositional and chromatic elements) are not primarily determined by conventions of graphic design and the typographical culture of avant-garde typography. They originate in a general reflection on the status, determining conditions, and functions of the artistic construct itself.

The Boundaries of Painting

It appears logical to address first the transformation of pictorial functions in Weiner's work. It is by extension appropriate that the first poster documented here (and also the first poster Weiner produced) announces an exhibition of his paintings at the Seth Siegelaub Gallery in New York, in 1965. This poster not only reminds us that Weiner's work originates, at least partially, in his reflection on painting, but, more generally, it also reminds us—given that Seth Siegelaub was to become the single most important organizer and promoter of the movement—that reflection on painting, in 1965, also formed the basis of what two years later would be called, appropriately or not, Conceptual art: that historical phase that spanned, roughly, the decade from 1965 to 1975, and with which Weiner's work is generally associated.[2]

In a retrospective discussion of an exhibition of paintings at the Seth Siegelaub Gallery in 1964, Weiner remembers his attitude toward painting at the time:

> Upon returning to New York, I tried to convey this loss of interest in the unique object and just deal with the idea of painting as such, which was a complete disaster. So I went through three or four years of doing paintings that I was purporting were not unique objects, they were just a visualization of what a painting should be. I showed one series in New York in '64, which was just paintings of propellers. It was a standard formula that I took off the television set. It seemed a very apt form to utilize for a painting and I painted them in different colors, different sizes, different materials and so on and so forth, and hung a show. It didn't work. It didn't work due to my misunderstanding of the problem of presentation, not to the public's not understanding me.[3]

Weiner's statement defines the parameters of his thoughts on painting in 1965, and conveys three central concerns:

1. The dialectical relationship between the distribution form of painting ("the unique object") and a conception of artistic meaning as an "essence" or a "substance" ("the idea of painting as such") that collides with those forms of meaning inherent in that distribution form.
2. The parallel relationship between the iconography of a painting ("just paintings of propellers" taken "off the television set") and the materials and procedures of pictorial production and their apparent and relative randomness ("different colors, different sizes, different materials and so on and so forth"). This relationship suspends the practice of painting between a general, mass cultural iconographic source (television) and the abolition of traditional means and methods of high art production.
3. The relationship between the aesthetic object's supposedly autonomous existence ("the idea of painting as such") and the reality of a painting's contingency and contextual determination, which affects the work upon its publication/exhibition ("the problem of presentation"), and during its reception by an audience ("the public's not understanding").

From the very beginning of his career, Weiner defined an aesthetic proposition as a *set of relations* or *differences,* comparable to the way a linguistic proposition had been defined as a set of variable functions and differences, since the first decade of the twentieth century when Ferdinand de Saussure made his famous observation that "in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms."[4]

Although these relations were subsequently described in Weiner's work and primarily defined in the terms of language, his work does not reflect on the relationships of language alone. Weiner's structural contextualization—even in his contradictory approach to painting—insists on a syntagmatic conception of

the work of art, denying its meaning as essence and substance, advocating contingency and contextuality of the visual construct's relations with its various support structures and its supplementary functions. Victor Burgin recently identified this approach as one of the most radical features of Conceptual art in general:

> What was radical in conceptual art . . . was the work it required—beyond the object—of recognizing, intervening within, realigning, reorganizing, these networks of differences in which the very definition of "art" and what it represents is constituted: the glimpse it allowed us of the possibility of the absence of "presence" and thus the possibility of change.[5]

Weiner's contextualization of the artistic construct gradually derived from a systematic reflection on the conditions of pictorial and sculptural perception as they had been developed in the context of Minimal art. Similar to the historical prefiguring of that critical analysis of representation which took place in Cubism and led to the syntagmatic definition in Duchamp's work, the Minimalist generation's rigorous pictorial reflection apparently developed from the confines of a traditional pictorial and sculptural aesthetic. Robert Morris articulated this discontent with an admirable succinctness, typical of that time: "The mode of painting has become antique. Specifically what is antique about it is the divisiveness of experience which marks on a flat surface elicit."[6]

Robert Barry, with whom Weiner exhibited on several occasions in the late 1960s, has described in detail how this departure from painting, and the consequent evolution of a syntagmatic aesthetic, occurred, and how the "conceptualization" of art emerged in the mid-1960s:

> A few years ago when I was painting it seemed that painting would look one way in one place and, because of lighting and other things, would look different in another place. Although it was the same object, it was another work of art. Then I made paintings which incorporated as part of their design the wall on which they hang. I

> finally gave up painting for the wire installations. Each wire installation was made to suit the place in which it was installed. They cannot be moved without being destroyed.[7]

If we assume that these were, in fact, the type of historical and theoretical questions on which Lawrence Weiner was reflecting in the mid-1960s, the actual conditions of painterly production that he confronted during that period should be considered. He has emphasized that the painters most relevant to him, in the early 1960s, were Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Robert Ryman.[8] It could be argued that the post-formalist analysis of painting practiced in the mid-1960s by these artists (or their logical conclusion of these formalist positions) merges with the discovery of the wide range of syntagmatic implications in Duchamp's legacy, laying, as it were, the foundations for Minimal aesthetics. Even though these artists transcend Greenberg's limited version of a formalist tradition and its idealist fallacies, a latent element of that legacy remains active in their reflections and their painterly practice.

Thus, for example, when Weiner refers to "painting as such" or a "decision which would lend unnecessary and unjustified weight to what amounts to *presentation*—and that has very little to do with the art,"[9] it appears possible (as some critics have argued) that even his quest for "the idea of painting as such" was still engaged in an empiro-critical investigation, similar to the tradition of the Modernist (Greenbergian) search for the "essence" of the medium.

And would not Weiner's second series of paintings (the rectangular removal paintings) affirm this speculation? These paintings seem to exaggerate—almost parodically—Greenberg's famous claim, made in 1962, that

> the irreducibility of pictorial art consists but in two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness. In other words, the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture: thus a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture—though not necessarily as a successful one.[10]

But one has only to read a little further in Weiner's description of the "idea of painting" to clarify this misunderstanding and to comprehend how different, indeed oppositional, his conception of painting is from Greenberg's reductivist and essentialist notions. Thus Weiner describes his second series of paintings, the *Removal* series, in the following terms:

> All I had to do to a canvas to make a painting was to take a rectangle, remove a rectangle from it, preferably from the corner, because that seemed the easiest way to do it, spray it for a certain period of time with paint, and then put a stripe on the top and a stripe on the bottom. And that sort of covered painting for myself. I would ask the person who was receiving it what color he wanted, what size he wanted, and how big a removal, as it didn't really matter. When the paintings were placed in an exhibition they were never insured for anything more than the value of the materials themselves.[11]

Summarily, these central concerns differentiate Weiner's definition of painting around 1965 from even the most radical instances of painterly production at that time: the reduction of painting to the simple process of mark-making (more precisely, to the negation of mark-making by the randomly determined removal); the deconstruction of the painting's privileged object status ("they were never insured for anything more than the value of the materials themselves"); the emphasis on the temporal and performative dimension of the production of the painting; and finally, the explicit incorporation of the viewer/receiver of the painting in the decision-making processes of color choice, mark-making, and size. It is certainly Weiner's uncompromising assault on the comforting pictorial and sculptural conventions that still determine the work of his Minimalist and post-Minimalist peers: this might explain the subsequent exclusion of his work from the canon of Minimal and post-Minimal aesthetics.

Yet numerous historical antecedents to this radical assault on the integrity and autonomy of the Modernist pictorial construct come to mind. For example, Weiner's argument for the randomness of paint application ("spray it for a certain

period of time with paint") links his work to a tradition of radical gestures that mechanize the process of painting by foregrounding its character as an aleatory procedure: from Rodchenko's suggestion of using house painters' rollers for the fabrication of paintings to Pollock's post-automatist mechanization of the painting procedure to Stella's emphasis on the anonymity of the formations and devices of his pictorial structures. In fact, numerous proposals by Weiner in the late 1960s (some of them published in his book *Statements,* 1968) continue to expand this emphasis on gestural rigor and procedural immediacy, as much as they focus on the physicality of painterly procedures and gravitational forces determining the process of execution.

Furthermore, Weiner's work frequently shifts the planes of production and pictorial reading from the vertically upright and spatially confined rectangle to an often unbounded plane of horizontal expansion. This plane is actually most often coextensive with the viewer's support plane, as in *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use* or *One Aerosol Can of Enamel Sprayed to Conclusion Directly upon the Floor,* or *An Amount of Paint Poured Directly upon the Floor and Allowed to Dry,* or *One Standard Dye Marker Thrown into the Sea.* This inversion of the pictorial reading order emerges out of the changing parameters of painting. It is significant, in this context, that many of Weiner's earlier works still allow both positions—the traditional installation of the surface (the work) in a vertical position on the wall or the installation of the same surface on the floor, as in *One Sheet of Plywood Secured to the Floor or Wall.* These changes were originally initiated, in the American context, by Pollock's shift of production plane and reading plane and his emphasis of the temporal and processual aspects of painting; but this development in Weiner's work transgressed, inevitably, the traditional threshold that had separated the category of painting from that of sculptural objects.

Corresponding to this breakdown of traditional categories, Weiner introduced a wide range of materials and procedures into his "pictorial and sculptural" production of the mid- to late 1960s, which broke away from the traditionally allowable and predetermined artistic materials. Thus, in terms of painting, Weiner's argument for the randomness of color choices and color relations, as well as his emphatic selection of industrial paint products (aerosol spray,

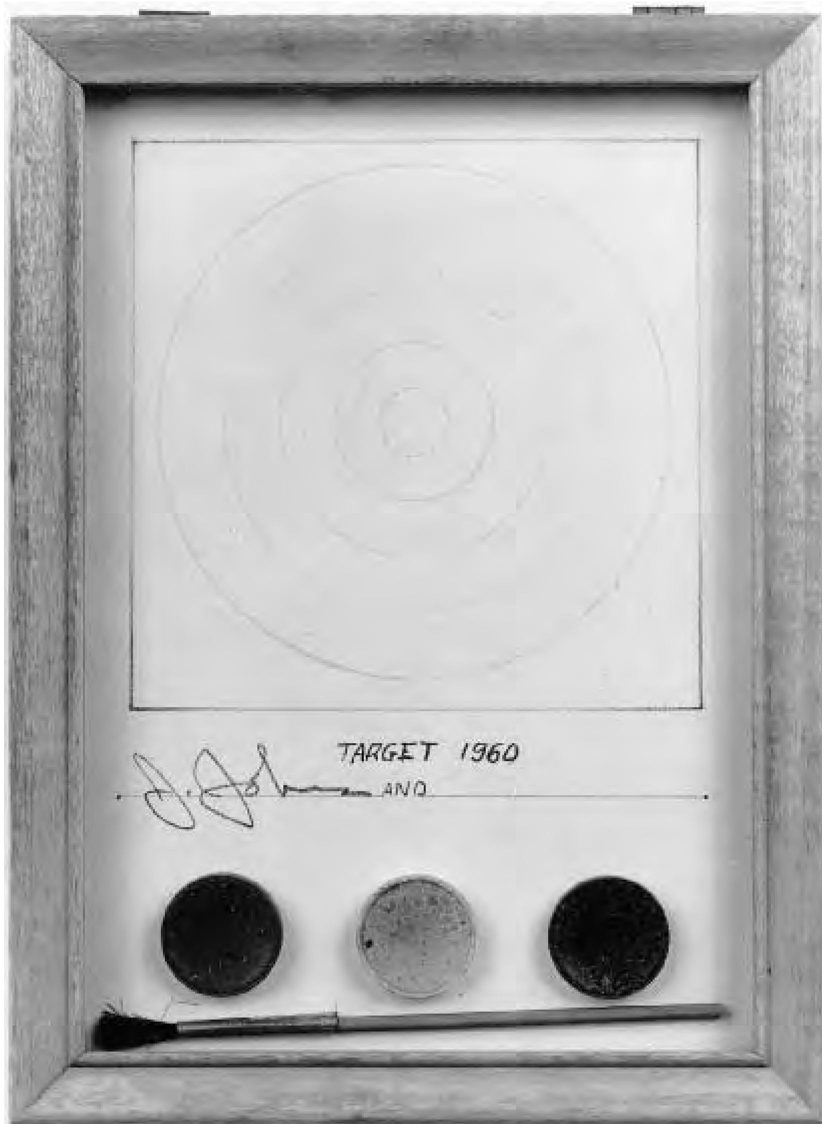
automobile lacquer, dye markers), emerges from that general historical context of the readymade, and, more specifically, from the instances of that tradition's reception and reemergence in New York School painting. Counteracting painting's sublime sacredness with a secular foregrounding of its production procedures and materials had been Pollock's intention when he introduced industrial lacquers and enamels into his paintings; but soon after, Rauschenberg would also expand that legacy and reaffirm its link with the chance dimension of newly discovered Dada strategies. Weiner's statement regarding the randomness of color choices reminds us of Rauschenberg's claim that he selected the colors in his paintings according to their availability in the hardware store: whatever paint lot was on sale would find its way into his paintings that day.

Weiner soon moved beyond this blind aleatory principle of mere random choice and defined the decision-making process as a collaborative act: now the receiver determined the conception of the painting itself—size, form, and format. Thus, all aesthetic decisions are secularized and stripped bare of all transcendental qualities.

Again, this emphatic renewal of Duchamp's assertion (that the "creative act" is always completed in the act of reception by the reader/viewer) had found its preparation and its explicit advocacy in works and statements of the key figures of Dada reception in the 1960s, Johns and Rauschenberg in particular.

This definition of the viewer as an indispensable collaborator in the production of the meaning of a work of art (or even the physical details of its morphology and structure) is exemplified by Jasper Johns's *Target* (1960), carrying the inscription "J. Johns and ________________". A set of watercolor disks in primary hues is encased with a brush and a pencil drawing of a target by Johns, inviting the viewer, it seems, to complete the work in the manner of a coloring book.[12]

Johns's title anticipates the rhetorical device of the ellipsis, which would soon thereafter become so important in Weiner's work. The ellipsis functions like the strategy of the removal itself: it functions simultaneously as a fragmentation prohibiting closure and perfection, and invites as well the participatory and collaborative responses from the perceiving subject. (It operates in Weiner's



Jasper Johns, *Target,* 1960. Pencil and mixed media on paper, 7¾ × 3¾ in. Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York. Photo: Jon Abbott.

elliptical statements in a manner comparable to that of the suture, the filmic device of generating viewer identification.)

In the case of Johns's work, several features generate the viewer's awareness of the collaborative nature of the construction of aesthetic meaning: the absence of information on the collaborator, the fragmentation of the manual process, the actual presence of the tools, whose productive performance has been arrested at the level of the readymade object.

Weiner's paintings expand this programmatic transformation of the contemplative mode of pictorial experience to a participatory mode. His strategy of removing material (instead of the traditional procedures of making a work by adding materials), and the resulting perceptual withdrawal, function like the rhetorical principle of the ellipsis (deployed initially as spatial fragmentation and, after 1968, as an infinite variation of the elliptical potential of language). In Weiner's work, all the elements that traditionally claimed an intact completeness are now fractured: from fragmentation of the integrity of the self-contained canvas rectangle by removal cuts, to the fracturing of the supposedly integral word by unconventional and illegitimate word and syllable breaks, such as those in *Statements*. Similarly, the production procedure is fractured: what was once the rounded closure of the pictorial "finish" or the totality of a gestural narrative (both supposedly following the imminent laws and necessities of the pictorial) is now transformed into a mere condition of exteriority—the whim and will of an outsider's (recipient's) decision or the determinations of a mechanical tool (such as the duration of a spray can's pressure and volume). Thus, the autonomous control of the artist over the "means and ends" of artistic production is now broken up into the manifest conditions of a collaboration, an interaction of *partiality* negating mythical *totality,* immanent and exterior determinant conditions in mutual fragmentation.

The Boundaries of Sculpture

In spite of his obvious background in painting, Weiner initially compared his work to sculpture (once he had abandoned painting). Later, he explicitly referred

to his work as "sculptures" (including the statements, the mechanically reproduced text in the books, the posters, and the hand-painted texts in installations). He establishes this critical comparison in 1969, when asked about his interest in the process of removal: "I'm not interested in the process. Whereas the idea of removal is just as—if not more—interesting than the intrusion of a fabricated object into space, as sculpture is."[13] While this proposition has been either contested (again, most obviously, primarily by sculptors) or simply ignored, it seems important to address Weiner's claim in order to clarify certain aspects and developments of his work and to identify the functions his posters fulfill in this context.

The deprivileging of traditional sculptural materials and production procedures was as crucial among all the strategies of advanced sculptural practices of the twentieth century as the dismantling of the privileged spatial order of sculpture. Once sculpture abandoned its hierarchical position on the pedestal and its internal hierarchical relationships, and once it assumed its position and function as "place" (as Carl Andre's work defined it in the mid-1960s), reflection on that definition's own boundaries had to evolve in the work of the subsequent generation. Thus, corresponding to the wide variety of materials commonly used by the sculptors of Minimal and post-Minimal art (mostly utilitarian construction and carpentry materials), Weiner's work from the late 1960s onward exhibited an equal range of seemingly mundane and task-oriented production procedures and performative methods, employed to produce a sculptural structure. Moreover, the sites where this experience of the sculptural construct could be situated and performed became equally varied in his work, ranging from domestic and institutional space (a rug in use, a driveway, a white display surface) to the threshold where the amorphous and undefinable vastness of spatial expanse is bound by abstract regulations and discursive (e.g., geographic) denominations (the borders between two countries, the Arctic Circle).[14]

It is not accidental that the sculptural sites chosen by the post-Minimal generation often effected an explicit distancing and dislocation from the centralizing and controlling power of the institutional and commercial spaces of the museum and the gallery (let alone that of the private home of the collector). This heroic dislocation led into seemingly undetermined and unbound spaces of

negation (the deserts, the Arctic, the moors, the non-sites of industrial wasteland) from which institutional, discursive, and commercial limitations seemingly could be at least contested, if not transcended.

This territorial shift clearly appeared, in certain cases, as a romantic flight from Modernist boundaries. But in Weiner's work, it is evident that this shift of sculptural sites was motivated by the explicit and programmatic contestation of the validity of the traditional institutional and discursive confines of art production and reception. Weiner understood (in the same way that Daniel Buren did) that mere spatial dislocation and physical expansion of boundaries of sculptural projects (as they were developed in the context of land art, for example) would not resolve the essentially Duchampian fallacy inherently operative in all of these attempts to transcend the boundaries of linguistic and institutional conventions. Reading and discursive valorization ultimately could take place only inside the institutional framework of the museum, where not only valorization but also cultural control and reincorporation of the supposedly disenfranchised art object would take place. That was the obvious dilemma betrayed by the "photographic documentation" of transcendental sculptural events (e.g., the work of the Land artists) once they returned home to the gallery and the museum.

Significantly, Weiner's works of that period never located themselves exclusively or primarily in those supposedly noninstitutional and nondiscursive spaces. He suggested and performed sculptural installations in both the seemingly "trivial" domain of the private domestic sphere of the collector's home and in the sublime and inaccessible vastness of an actual or imaginary uncultured and unconquered space, as well as on the most traditional of all institutional and discursive sites, the white wall.

Looking at Weiner's tendencies in 1968 from the perspective of the subsequent development and transformation of his work, one concludes that his choice to reduce his practice even further to "mere" textual definitions and linguistic statements was fully necessary and the inevitable conclusion of a logic operative within his thought, as well as in the reductivist and empiro-critical logic of the Modernist legacy at large. One could argue that Weiner's work from 1968–1969, in particular works such as *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use* or

Lawrence Weiner, *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use,* 1969. Collection Wolfgang Hahn, Köln.

Lawrence Weiner, *A 36″ by 36″ Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall,* 1969.

A 36″ × 36″ Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall (from the *Statements* period), would partake in and conclude that tradition of Modernist reductivist abstraction while at the same time establishing the foundation for a syntagmatic and contextual post-Modern aesthetic. Contingency and location, discursive format and distribution form, linguistic convention and plastic definition enter into a perpetually and mutually fracturing circuit. This prevents the work's closure and completeness as much as it challenges all readings of it based on concepts of authorship and ownership, dependent upon object form and commodity status—all modes of reading that privilege the visual and material aspects of a work over its conceptual basis. At the same time, Weiner's work insists on maintaining a dialectical (rather than establishing a tautological) relationship between the linguistic sign and the material referent.

In 1969, Joseph Kosuth described this development in Weiner's work in a precise testimony. He had already recognized the differences that would soon separate Weiner's work from the orthodox definition of Conceptual art, so closely guarded by Kosuth and the Art & Language group:

> Lawrence Weiner, who gave up painting in the spring of 1968, changed his notion of "place" (in an Andrean sense) from the context of the canvas (which could only be specific) to a context which was "general," yet all the while continuing his concern with specific materials and processes. It became obvious to him that if one is not concerned with "appearances" (which he wasn't and in this regard he preceded most of the anti-form artists) there was not only no need for the fabrication (such as in his studio) of his work, but, more important such fabrication would again invariably give his work's "place" a specific context. Thus by the summer of 1968 he decided to have his work exist only as a proposal in a notebook—that is, until a "reason" (museum, gallery or collector) or as he called them, a "receiver" necessitated his work to be made. It was in the late fall of the same year that Weiner went one step further in deciding that it didn't matter whether it was made or not. (I did not—and still do

> not—understand this last decision). Since I first met Weiner, he defended his position—quite alien to mine—of being a "Materialist."[15]

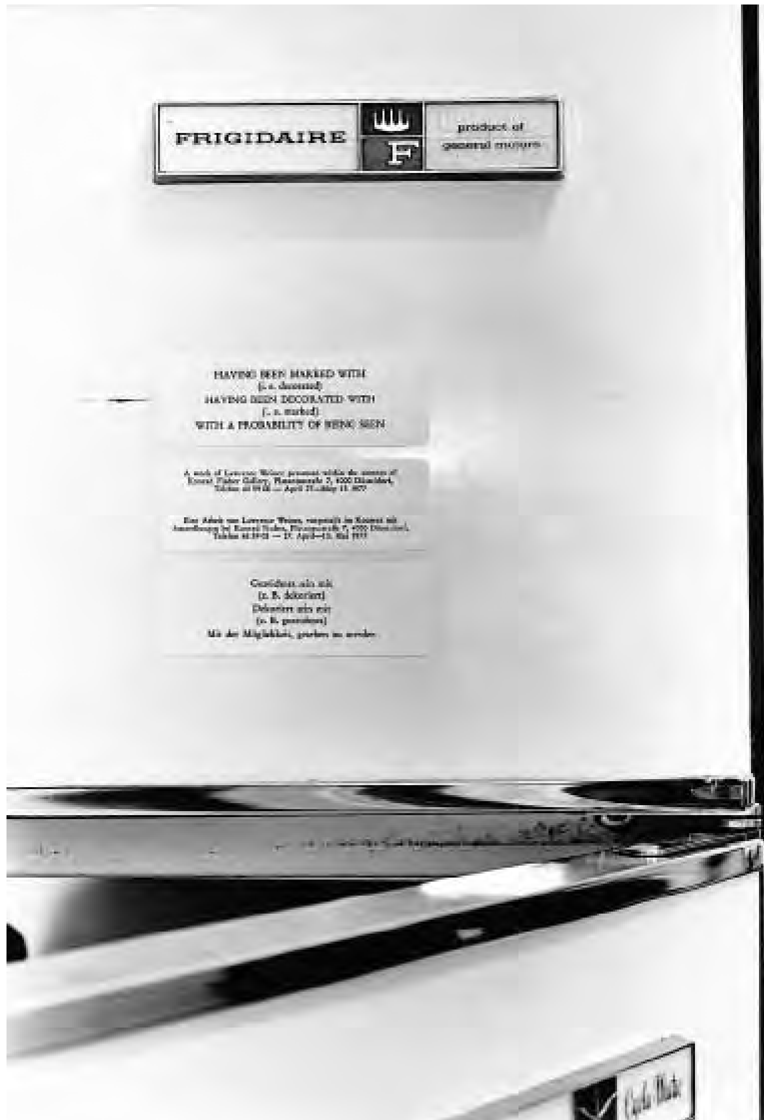
The Boundaries of the Text

It appears that the evolutionary logic of Weiner's work tended toward the elimination of all unnecessary material conventions of artistic production, as well as the privileged sites of presentation and reception, separating those as material devices from the "actual" work. Yet at the same time he juxtaposes the two elements, and constantly maintains the work and its multiple forms of potential presentation in an inextricable network of relationships.

Weiner's famous tripartite statement, which he calls the "declaration of intent" (published in Seth Siegelaub's catalogue for the exhibition *January 5–31, 1969*), could also be called the basic formula for the post-Modern aesthetic, since it defines relationships and conventions within which the production and reception of a work of art are potentially or actually constituted:

> 1. The artist may construct the piece
> 2. The piece may be fabricated
> 3. The piece need not be built
>
> Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

While the first two parts of the "declaration of intent" might have been perceived in the mid- to late 1960s as perfectly acceptable propositions (after all, since Warhol, it did not seem scandalous at all anymore to have works produced by others, and the Minimal sculptors even made factory production of their sculptures a standard procedure), it is the third part of the statement that caused a rupture between even the most advanced positions that had been previously defined.



Lawrence Weiner, *Having Been Marked with* (*i.e. Decorated*) *Having Been Decorated with* (*i.e. Marked*) *with a Probability of Being Seen,* 1977. Presented within the context of Konrad Fischer Gallery, Düsseldorf. Photo: Louise Lawler.

To argue that the conception of the work was one valid definition among all other potential realizations implied the proposition that a work's material definition and presentation would simply depend on the contingency of reception and ownership.

The last part of this statement functions analogously to Barthes's declaration of the "Death of the Author." It departs from the simple notion of a post-Duchampian collaborative aesthetic by shifting responsibility for the material appearance of an artistic construct, and its continued existence in the culture, from the author to a construction of meaning by the audience. Thus, Weiner destabilizes all fixity of meaning and all claims for a substance of the aesthetic that ostensibly resides in the material form of the artifact.

Notes

1

The first of the numerous books produced by Lawrence Weiner is *Statements* published by Seth Siegelaub in New York in 1968.

Even some of Weiner's most progressive peers of the late sixties, primarily the sculptors of the Minimal and post-Minimal generation, refuse up to this day to acknowledge the work's relevant implications for pictorial and sculptural reflection in general, yet they are willing to praise it for its highly "poetical" qualities. While Weiner's work inscribes itself as language/writing into the space of the visual it seems to provoke its immediate deflection into the realm of poetry, where the experience of a primary language (in Barthes's definition) is commonly expected. Simultaneously, the work tends to discourage if not disqualify efforts at secondary writing. Criticism and art historical writing concerning Weiner's work have remained sparse and, for the most part, dissatisfying.

Susan Heinemann, in what remains to date the best essay on Lawrence Weiner's work, made an attempt to clarify the distinction between poetical language and analytical philosophical language in this work. Even though Heinemann's comments are neither philosophically nor semiologically accurate or satisfying, we still consider hers an apt description of the qualities of Weiner's language/writing:

> . . . Weiner's use of language differs from that of Joseph Kosuth or the Art & Language group in its dependence on a direct reference to the physical properties of

> things. His statements are more factual than strictly analytic; their logic refers to an empirical construction of reality instead of purely abstract thought. His propositions are based on one's understanding of the behavior of materials and how that understanding is governed by the limitations of language. . . . To consider these words primarily as poetic evocations, linguistic analyses or philosophical speculations is to alter their deliberate designation as art, to shift the category which they are intended to inform.

Susan Heinemann, "Lawrence Weiner: Given the Context," *Artforum* (March 1975), pp. 33–37.

2

Even though the term "Conceptual art" is officially used by Sol LeWitt for the first time in his text "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" in the Summer 1967 issue of *Artforum,* claims have been made by several artists to have employed the term already in 1966, if not earlier.

3

Lawrence Weiner, interviewed by Willoughby Sharp, *Avalanche* (Spring 1972), p. 67.

It is informative to read the response to Weiner's early paintings articulated by one of the central figures of the Minimal generation, Donald Judd. Judd remained—understandably so—inside his own evaluation system and failed to recognize the threat to his own aesthetic emerging from these paintings, yet he seems to have been able to detect some kind of "quality" in them: "Weiner's paintings resemble Krushenick's a bit, especially those of a few years ago which were influenced by Matisse. . . . The areas and lines are done freely, surely, carelessly, though in a good way. The paintings work well. Weiner is able but isn't on his own yet." Donald Judd, "Lawrence Weiner (Siegelaub)," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 4 (1965), p. 64.

4

Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 120.

5

Victor Burgin, "The Absence of Presence: Conceptualism and Postmodernisms," in *The End of Art Theory* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1986), p. 29.

6

Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture: Notes and Non Sequiturs" (Part III), *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967), p. 25.

7

Robert Barry, interviewed by Arthur Rose, in "Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner," *Arts Magazine* (February 1969), pp. 22–23.

8

Lawrence Weiner, in an unpublished interview with the author in preparation for this essay. Weiner's concern for the "idea of painting" is reminiscent not only of Greenberg's "essence of the medium," but also of Duchamp's notorious statement, made in an interview with James Johnson Sweeney in 1946, that he "had decided to abandon the physical aspect of painting . . . I was interested in ideas." Or, as Duchamp argued on a different occasion: "All my work in the period before the Nude was visual painting. Then I came to the idea. I thought the ideatic formulation a way to get away from influences." The latter statement is introduced as an epigraph in Joseph Kosuth's essay "Art after Philosophy Part II," *Studio International* 178, no. 916 (November 1969), pp. 160–161.

9

Weiner, interviewed by Willoughby Sharp, p. 67.

10

Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *Art International* 6, no. 8 (1962).

11

Weiner, interviewed by Willoughby Sharp, p. 67.

12

This piece was first discussed with regard to its obvious relationship to Marcel Duchamp by Barbara Rose, in her essay "The Graphic Work of Jasper Johns" (Part II), *Artforum* (September 1970), pp. 65 ff. The work is in the collection of Ileana Sonnabend and is reproduced in the catalogue of that collection: *Selections from the Ileana and Michael Sonnabend Collection* (Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1985), p. 53.

13

Lawrence Weiner quoted in "Four Interviews," pp. 22–23. With comparable sentiments regarding the necessity of withdrawing and removing rather than adding objects in the course of artistic production, Douglas Huebler stated: "The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more. I prefer, simply, to state the existence of things in terms of time and/or place." In *January 5–31, 1969,* ed. Seth Siegelaub (New York, 1969), n.p.

14

A similar attitude is expressed by Lucy Lippard: "The kind of space dealt with by Weiner's art . . . is not the traditional *occupied* or conquered space in which an object exists." Lucy Lippard, "Art within the Arctic Circle," in *Changing* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1971), p. 286.

15

Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy" (part II), *Studio International* 178, no. 916 (September 1969), p. 160.

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