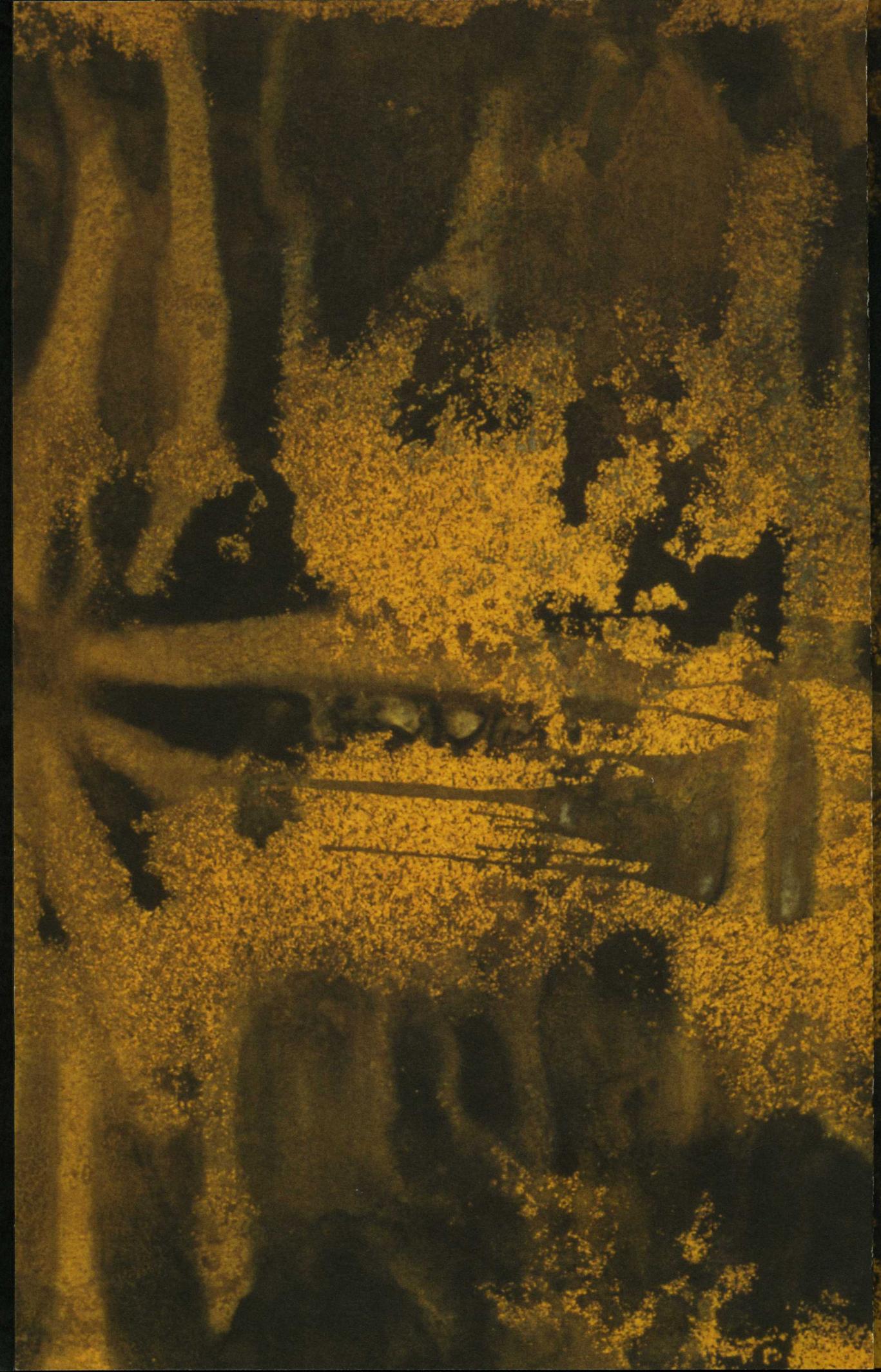
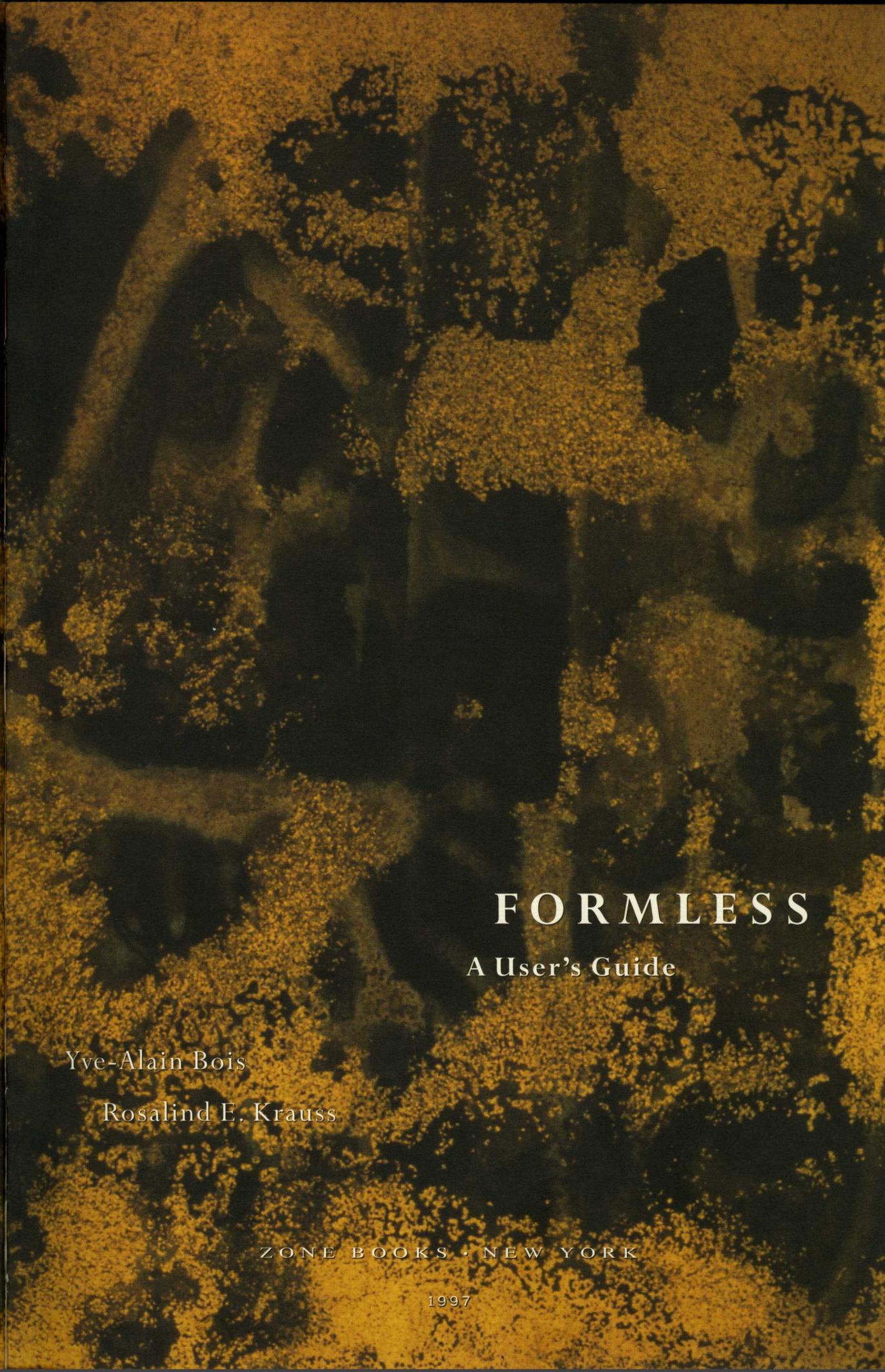


FORMLESS

A User's Guide





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Yve-Alain Bois

Rosalind E. Krauss

ZONE BOOKS · NEW YORK

1997

© 1997 Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss

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Informe

Un dictionnaire commencerait à partir du moment où il ne donnerait plus le sens mais les besognes des mots. Ainsi *informe* n'est pas seulement un adjectif ayant tel sens mais un terme servant à déclasser, exigeant généralement que chaque chose ait sa forme. Ce qu'il désigne n'a ses droits dans aucun sens et se fait écraser partout comme une araignée ou un ver de terre. Il faudrait en effet, pour que les hommes académiques soient contents, que l'univers prenne forme. La philosophie entière n'a pas d'autre but: il s'agit de donner une redingote à ce qui est, une redingote mathématique. Par contre affirmer que l'univers ne ressemble à rien et n'est qu'*informe* revient à dire que l'univers est quelque chose comme une araignée ou un crachat.

Formless

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.

— Georges Bataille¹



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Page 1

Robert Rauschenberg,
Untitled (Gold Painting)
(detail), 1953.

Gold and silver leaf on
fabric, newspaper, paint,
wood, paper, glue, and nails
on wood, in wood and glass
frame, 10½ x 11½ x 1¾
inches.

© 1997 Robert
Rauschenberg / Licensed by
VAGA, New York.

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Andy Warhol,
Oxidation Painting (detail),
1978.

Mixed media and copper
metallic paint on canvas,
78 x 204½ inches.
Private Collection.

© 1997 Andy Warhol
Foundation of the Visual
Arts / ARS, New York.

Pages 4-5

Lucio Fontana,
Ceramica spaziale (detail),
1949.

Polychrome ceramic,
23½ x 25½ x 23½ inches.
Musée National d'Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Page 6

Kazuo Shiraga,
Untitled (detail), 1957.

Oil, watercolor, india ink on
paper mounted on canvas,
71½ x 95½ inches.

Musée National d'Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Preface

Formless: A User's Guide has been in germination since the early 1980s, when it became clear to its authors that certain artistic practices with which Georges Bataille's name had never been associated – the sculpture of Alberto Giacometti from the late 1920s and early 1930s on the one hand and the repertory of surrealist photography on the other – could only be characterized adequately through the operations of Bataille's *informe*.¹ Thereafter the operational, performative “force” of the “formless” revealed itself as necessary to the understanding of other practices: a significant but overlooked part of the work of Lucio Fontana, for example, or the reception of Jackson Pollock in the 1960s, whether that be enacted via Andy Warhol's *Dance Diagrams*, Cy Twombly's graffiti, Robert Morris's felt pieces, or Ed Ruscha's *Liquid Words*.²

As this field of relevance began to grow, it became clear to us that an exhibition bringing together the various effects of this formless impulse could itself have a kind of operational force, since it could not only demonstrate the power of the conceptual tool, but would also pick apart certain categories that seemed to us increasingly useless – even as they had become increasingly contentious – namely, “form” and “content.” The only cultural institution to welcome our project, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, was in the process of inaugurating a series of “signed” exhibitions. Evincing the belief that modernism itself has meant that exhibitions, even the most neutral sounding ones, like monographic overviews (a one-person retrospective, the presentation of clearly established movements), always take a position, are always driven by argument, the Centre Pompidou decided to stage these “arguments” and allow their authors to be clearly seen.

Thus it was that the catalogue for this exhibition – *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi*, May 21 to August 26, 1996 – was conceived from the outset as a book with a coherent proposition to develop, not

only about modern art's past (the onset of the formless within modernist practice: Arp, Duchamp, Picasso), but also modern art's contemporary reception (the repression of certain careers or certain parts of famous oeuvres) and even, possibly, modern art's future. For having asked us to make this "book" and the exhibition that supported it, we are extremely grateful to François Barré, then the president of the Centre Pompidou, and Daniel Soutif, its director of cultural development. The exhibition itself could not have taken place without Germain Viatte, the director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, chief curator and generous collaborator, and Sara Renaud, our extraordinary assistant. The original catalogue, brilliantly designed by Susannah Shannon and Jérôme Saint-Loubert Bié, recorded the exhibition itself.

But the "argument" concerning formlessness – its history and its destiny – is not tied to an exhibition, however exhilarating. Thus we are extremely grateful to Zone's editors, Jonathan Crary, Michel Feher, Sanford Kwinter, and Ramona Naddaff, for the opportunity to transpose our proposition to book form, where the contours of our discussion take on, we hope, greater independence and definition. For the design of this new vehicle we are indebted to Bruce Mau and, for its editing, to Meighan Gale and Don McMahon. To this entire new team we extend our deepest thanks.

INTRODUCTION

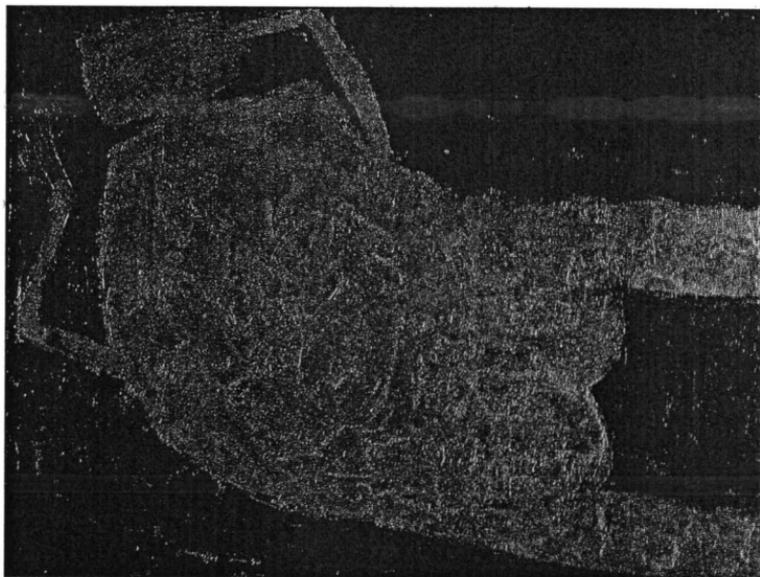


Figure 1.
Jean Dubuffet,
Olympia, 1950.
Oil on canvas,
35 x 45 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.

The Use Value of “Formless”

Yve-Alain Bois

Perhaps Edouard Manet's *Olympia* is not the “first” modernist painting, that honor having been customarily reserved for his *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. But, as Georges Bataille writes, it is at least “the first masterpiece before which the crowd fairly lost all control of itself,” and this unprecedented scandal would henceforth give it the impact of a radical break.¹

As Françoise Cachin points out in her essay on *Olympia* included in the catalogue to the 1983 Manet retrospective in Paris and New York, “the prevailing reactions to this painting have always been of two kinds. The formal reaction responds to technical, painterly values, the novelties they offer, the pleasures they afford. . . . The other reaction, widely represented by the critics of the day, in horror or derision, emphasizes subject matter.”² The first reading was articulated in 1867, by Emile Zola: “For you, a picture is but an opportunity for analysis. You wanted a nude, and you took Olympia, the first to come along; you wanted bright luminous patches, and the bouquet served; you wanted black patches, and you added a black woman and a black cat.”³ This was not the first time that such a stance had been defended (Zola's argument repeats, more or less, Charles Baudelaire's position four years earlier in relation to Eugène Delacroix), but it was the first time it was credible. It remained so for a long time, and in certain respects it still is; it is the reading that makes Manet “the first modernist painter.”⁴ The other reading is iconographic: with reason, it criticizes the myopia of a Clement Greenberg seeing nothing in Manet's canvases but “the frankness with which they declare the flat surfaces on which they were painted,” and above all it ponders the identity of the motif itself (luxury courtesan or two-bit streetwalker?) and its sources (from Titian and Goya to pornographic photography).

Whether form or content – the old metaphysical opposition seems almost unavoidable in the literature about Manet and about

Olympia in particular. There are exceptions, but they are generally ignored by specialists.⁵ On the whole, Cachin's succinct accounting is all too true.

There is a strange integer in this accounting, however: Bataille is put on the formalist side of the ledger, among those who privilege the painterly aspect of the work. At first glance, this is not surprising, given that Bataille repeats the phrase about "the crisis of subject matter" more than once: Manet tightens the noose around eloquence; reduces painting to silence; erases the text that undergirds it, by taking the subject as nothing but "the mere *pretext* for the painting itself."⁶ However, on closer inspection, it is not exactly Bataille who is speaking here, but rather André Malraux, whom he paraphrases after having quoted him with regard to Manet's *The Execution of Maximilian* (1868–69). (Malraux had quipped that Manet's canvas "is Goya's *Shootings of May Third* [1812] minus what the latter picture signifies."⁷) Bataille seems to agree, but he adds his own twist:

On the face of it death, coldly, methodically, dealt out by a firing squad, precludes an indifferent treatment; such a subject is nothing if not charged with meaning for each one of us. But Manet approaches it with an almost callous indifference that the spectator, surprisingly enough, shares to the full. Maximilian reminds us of a tooth deadened by novocain.... Manet posed some of his models in the attitude of dying, some in the attitude of killing, but all more or less casually, as if they were about to "buy a bunch of radishes."⁸

The "tooth deadened by novocain," "a bunch of radishes" – nothing could be more trivial. Bataille conceives of the semantic deflation of the picture as less a simple absence than as a violence, a desublimatory act of aggression (even though he does not mention Manet's often declared disgust for history painting, the most "noble" genre of the time). The analysis of this picture comes in Bataille's text before that of *Olympia*, to which he devotes an entire chapter, but the tone is already established: Manet's indifference is not a simple retreat into the ivory tower of "purely formal experiment," it is an attack.

"*Olympia* is the negation of... mythical Olympus," Bataille declared.⁹ But this is so not only because Manet flouts the decorum of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (a low blow that, as T.J. Clark points out, went practically unnoticed at the time), nor because Manet painted a woman who is obviously a prostitute (the theme of the courtesan, even naked, Clark again remarks, was not absent from *Pompier* painting).¹⁰ Furthermore, Bataille is severely critical of Paul Valéry's sonorous phrases about "the ultimate in impurity" and the

“bestial Vestal to absolute nudity” that cast the character of *Olympia* as a pure type, the ideal representative of an established genre. If the *Olympia* caused a scandal, Bataille argues, it was because by means of it Manet refused the various ideological and formal codes regulating the depiction of the nude, whether erotic, mythological, or even realistic (Courbet didn’t like it). Manet’s subject is not located “anywhere,” Bataille says, “neither in the drab world of naturalistic prose nor in that, typified by Couture, of absurd academic fictions”; and it is in this rootlessness, far from Valéry’s clichés, that *Olympia*’s particularity is to be found (and thus the inadmissible, because undecipherable, quality of its sexuality).¹¹

For Bataille it is this uprooting, which he also calls a slippage, that is Manet’s “secret”: the true goal of his art is to “disappoint expectation.” He sees this uprooting, too, in *The Execution of Maximilian*, *Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, and *The Music in the Tuileries* (1882): “In each, instead of the theatrical forms expected of him, Manet offered up the starkness of ‘what we see.’ And each time it so happened that the public’s frustrated expectation only redoubled the effect of shocked surprise produced by the picture.” Whence, finally, Bataille’s suspicion of the modernist reading: “Malraux is perhaps open to blame for not having stressed the magic workings of the strange, half-hidden operation to which I refer. He grasped the decisive steps taken by Manet, with whom modern painting and its indifference to the subject begin, but he fails to bring out the basic contrast between Manet’s attitude and the indifference of the Impressionists towards the subject. He fails to define what gives *Olympia* . . . its value as an operation.”¹² So it is neither the “form” nor the “content” that interests Bataille, but the operation that displaces both of these terms.

In this operation of slippage we see a version of what Bataille calls the *informe* (formless). Not with the idea, of course, of making Manet a precursor (though it is worth noting that critics of the time characterized *Olympia*’s body – which some likened to a rotting corpse – as “formless”),¹³ and even less in hopes of delineating a genealogy of the term, as one might do with the history of an idea; but precisely because it is an *operation* (which is to say, neither a theme, nor a substance, nor a concept) and that to this end it participates in the general movement of Bataille’s thought, which he liked to call “scatology” or “heterology” (and of which historically the *informe* constitutes the first operation specified in his writings). Perhaps Bataille knew Jean Dubuffet’s *Olympia* (1950) (figure 1), flattened like a pancake, slid under a steamroller, perhaps this painting gave him the idea of slippage (a slide toward lowness, of course). He could not have known the *Olympia* (see figure 47) – even more imperative in its slippage – that Cy Twombly painted

in 1957 (two years after the appearance of Bataille's book on Manet, five years before his death), and had he known it, he would not have had the means to appreciate the force of its outrage: the surface of the picture scarred with graffiti, the body surfacing under the blow of an obscenity (see "Olympia" below). Yet what difference does this make? Bataille's tastes in art are not in question here. Rather, with regard to the *informe*, it is a matter instead of locating certain operations that brush modernism against the grain, and of doing so without countering modernism's formal certainties by means of the more reassuring and naive certainties of meaning. On the contrary, these operations split off from modernism, insulting the very opposition of form and content – which is itself formal, arising as it does from a binary logic – declaring it null and void.

Bataille devoted an article to the *informe* in the "critical dictionary" published in *Documents*: fifteen lines immediately following two longer entries on spittle ("Crachat-âme" by Marcel Griaule and "L'Eau à la bouche" by Michel Leiris) and one called "Debauche" (also by Leiris). The contrast between the effect of Bataille's simple paragraph, so notorious today, and its apparent modesty (it appeared at the end of a column, toward the end of the last issue of the journal's first year, and was in no way highlighted) makes its context worth exploring.

Documents' "dictionary" remains one of the most effective of Bataille's acts of sabotage against the academic world and the spirit of system. This sabotage derived its effectiveness from the contrast between the formal ruse – the very use of the "dictionary form," that is, one of the most obvious and conventional markers of the idea of totality – and the effect of surprise. The whole of Bataille's writing rests on such apparent non sequiturs (which he calls "ink spots" or "quacks" in his essay "The Language of Flowers," which gave André Breton heartburn): "bunch of radishes," "the tooth deadened by novocain," in all his texts we find these rude belches, the virulence of which owes much to irony. The "dictionary" accumulates them, functioning, so to speak, as one big quack: nothing stirred up Bataille's blasphemous energy more than the definition of words, which he called their "mathematical frock coats."

This "dictionary" is not much of one (or just enough to seem like a dictionary when one begins to read it, over the course of the various issues): it is incomplete, not because Bataille stopped editing the magazine at the end of 1930, but because it was never thought of as a possible totality (moreover, the articles do not appear in alphabetical order); it is written in several voices (there are three different entries under "Eye" and under "Metamorphosis," for example); it does not rule out redundancy. The most mem-

orable example of redundant entries are the two articles entitled "Man," published in two consecutive issues. Exceptionally, these texts consist of imported quotations: the first, anonymous, from the very official *Journal des Débats*, reports the calculations of "an eminent English chemist" who establishes "in a precise manner what man is made of and what his chemical value is"; the second, from a fanatical vegetarian, a certain Sir William Earnshaw Cooper, who is entirely caught up in an arithmetical compulsion to quantify the "blood guilt of Christendom" by adding up the daily massacre of animals on which it feeds.¹⁴ Science is only useful if it drivels.

That Bataille chose to treat the heading "Man" by means of this ridiculous hiccup tells a lot about his strategy to undermine. It is humanism above all that he is after, and thus all systems (he loves revolution for the revolt, not for the utopia of its realization). The very choice of terms for the articles of this "dictionary" fully plays on absurdity, as if some belated dadaist had pulled words from a hat (the fifth issue of 1929 includes entries such as "Camel," "Cults," "Man," "Unhappiness," "Dust," "Reptiles," "Talkie"; subsequent issues sport entries such as "Slaughterhouse," "Factory Chimney," "Shellfish," "Metamorphosis"); alphabetical arbitrariness is replaced by a mess that nothing seems to justify. Of course, that is only a feint, and the jumble of fragments is nothing if not calculated; it is not by chance, as Denis Hollier has shown, that the first article of the "dictionary" should be devoted to architecture ("expression of the true nature of societies," symbol of authority, privileged metaphor of metaphysics). For "an attack on architecture," Bataille writes in that article, "is necessarily, as it were, an attack on man."¹⁵ Neither is it an accident that this article should be followed by one (written by Carl Einstein) on the nightingale, that "sign of eternal optimism," that cliché of the animal-turned-pet and of bourgeois sentimentality. First, Einstein states the law that regulates all dictionaries ("Words are, for the most part, petrifications that elicit mechanical reactions in us"), after which he both demonstrates and deconstructs this mechanism by listing the banalities woven around the nightingale. What matters is not the nightingale as such, but the repression at work in the allegories in which it is forced to participate: "Nightingale can be replaced: (a) by rose, (b) by breasts, but never by legs, because the nightingale's role is precisely to avoid designating this aspect. The nightingale belongs to the inventory of bourgeois diversions, by which we try to suggest the indecent while skirting it."¹⁶ The tone is henceforth given: as its double aim, the *Documents* "dictionary" will attempt to reveal the "legs" under the skirts of any allegory whatever and to signal those words that have not yet been opened to allegory, such as "spittle."

In fact, the article *Leiris* devotes to spit makes the desublima-

tory nature of the dictionary clear: following upon Freud's tracing of the origin of the idea of beauty and of aesthetic feeling to man's mounting disgust for the double function of his organs, and then to the subsequent repression and sublimation (see "Base Materialism" below), Leiris made spittle into "scandal itself, since it lowers the mouth – the visible sign of intelligence – to the level of the most shameful organs." Leiris writes, "Given the identical source of language and spittle, any philosophical discourse can legitimately be figured by the incongruous image of a spluttering orator." To this end, "through its inconsistency, its indefinite contours, and then the relative imprecision of its color, and its humidity," spit is "the very symbol of the formless [*informe*], of the unverifiable, of the non-hierarchized."¹⁷ Leiris goes a bit far and stretches the force of his quack somewhat thin by making it serve too many ends:¹⁸ he gives consistency to the inconsistency of spit, and he gives it symbolic value (which is exactly what Bataille avoids doing). Nonetheless, *informe* as a word is launched.¹⁹

At the bottom of the same page and echoing it ("affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *informe* [formless] amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit"), Bataille's famously economical paragraph contrasts with Leiris's hyperbole. As Hollier remarks, within the *Documents* "dictionary" the entry "*informe*" is "given the job generally granted the article 'Dictionary' itself" (one thinks here of the article "Encyclopedia" in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*), namely, that it has a programmatic function (the program here being to scuttle the very idea of program and the self-assurance of reason).²⁰ And it's in the "*informe*" article that Bataille quite specifically states the task that he is assigning his "dictionary" (not to give the meaning but the jobs of words). Thus he refuses to define "*informe*": "It is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down [*déclasser*] in the world." It is not so much a stable motif to which we can refer, a symbolizable theme, a given quality, as it is a term allowing one to operate a declassification, in the double sense of lowering and of taxonomic disorder. Nothing in and of itself, the formless has only an operational existence: it is a performative, like obscene words, the violence of which derives less from semantics than from the very act of their delivery (see "*Jeu Lugubre*" below). The formless is an operation.

Thus, here we will not attempt to define the formless. Of course, the trappings of art history will give a semblance of "frock coats to what is" (we do not try to imitate Bataille, and our dictionary respects the order of the alphabet). But we nonetheless intend to put the formless to work, not only to map certain trajectories, or

Figure 2

Claes Oldenburg

Sculpture in the Form of a

Fried Egg, 1966

Sewn canvas, 108 inches

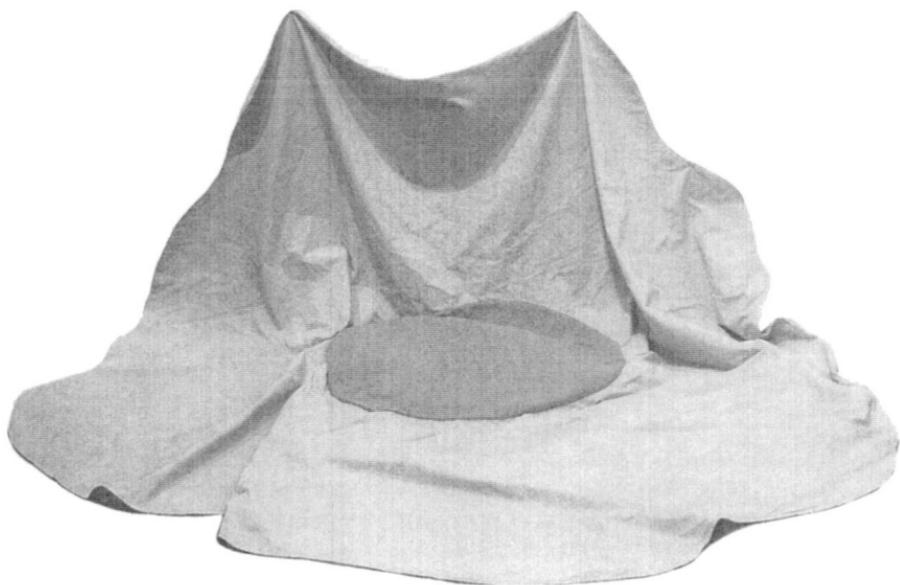
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Museum of Contemporary

Art, Chicago, gift of William

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Courtesy of the artist



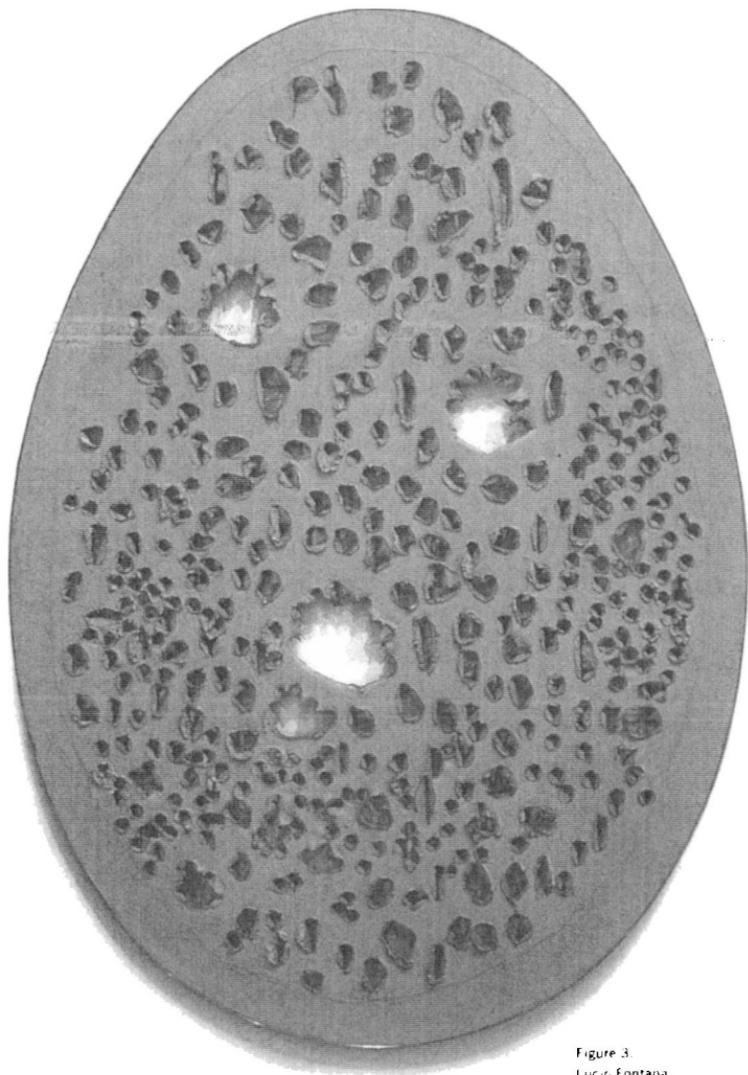
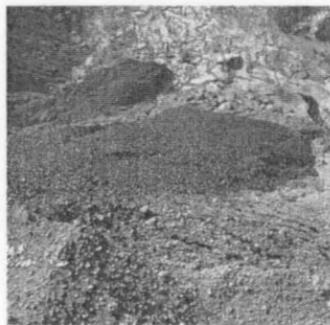


Figure 3.
Lucio Fontana.
*Concetto spaziale, Fine di
Dio*, 1963.
Oil on pink canvas with
holes, 70 x 48 inches.
Musée National d'Art
Moderne, CCI Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

slippages, but in some small way to “perform” them. To show, for example, that Jackson Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five* (1947) (see figure 28) can be read as a fried egg (even though it’s one by Claes Oldenburg [figure 2]) or that a work by Jean Fautrier owes more of its pathos to its falsity than to its professed expressionism (which is to say that it is kitsch in the same way that the snake-skin shoes the artist sported at the opening of his show “Les Otages” or the pink color of a Lucio Fontana *Fine di Dio* are [figure 3]).²¹ Our project is to redeal modernism’s cards – not to bury it and conduct the manic mourning to which a certain type of “post-modernism” has devoted itself for many years now, but to see to it that the unity of modernism, as constituted through the opposition of formalism and iconology, will be fissured from within and that certain works will no longer be read as they were before. (One will not forget the fried egg when faced with a Pollock, for example.) Bataille wrote of Manet: “To break up the subject and re-establish it on a different basis is not to neglect the subject; so it is in a sacrifice, which takes liberties with the victim and even kills it, but cannot be said to neglect it.”²² It is this type of alteration that we want both to describe and to attempt, an alteration that has nothing to do with the morphological or semantic registers of any particular object, but rather with the interpretive grid, the structure that has long permitted us to assimilate these registers. Still speaking of Manet, Bataille adds, “No painter more heavily invested the subject, not with meaning, but with that which goes beyond and is more significant than meaning.”²³

To practice sacrifice and dismemberment requires some kind of organization (no one was more methodical than Sade, whose “use value” Bataille wanted to recover; and, as we have noted, the supreme disorder of the *Documents* “dictionary” camouflages a carefully premeditated strategy). The works in the exhibition *L’Informe: Mode d’emploi* were grouped according to four different vectors within which we discover, starting from Bataille, the mark of the formless. This division into four operations (which for purposes of brevity will be termed “horizontality,” “base materialism,” “pulse,” and “entropy”) presupposes a type of classification, but this classification is porous (the “categories” are not airtight, and the exhibition’s very first work – Robert Smithson’s *Asphalt Rundown* [1969] [figure 4] – echoed *Glue Pour* [1969], a very similar work by the same artist, located at the very end of the exhibition). Moreover, the function of this “classification” is to declassify the larger unities that are the very stuff of art history: style, theme, chronology, and, finally, oeuvre as the total body of an artist’s work.

A word on the way these unities are suspended. First, our casual treatment of *style* (notably, of the “isms,” whose cataloguing



punctuated the whole history of modernism) allows for the flagrant diversity of each of our sections (hence the “fried egg” aspect of some of our groupings): Robert Rauschenberg and Dubuffet end up under the same rubric, as do Jacques Villeglé and Gordon Matta-Clark. *Theme* turns out to be more tenacious (thematization is a danger that dogs all nonmonographic presentations: nothing would be easier than to imagine something like “the formless in art,” on the same pattern as “the dog in art” or “the pastoral landscape”); our vigilance in this regard explains certain exclusions. For example, *Artist’s Shit* (1961) by Piero Manzoni was absent from the section devoted to “base materialism,” since the risk was too great that, despite ourselves, we would end up promoting a fetishization of excrement – something very foreign to Bataille’s thought. Simi-

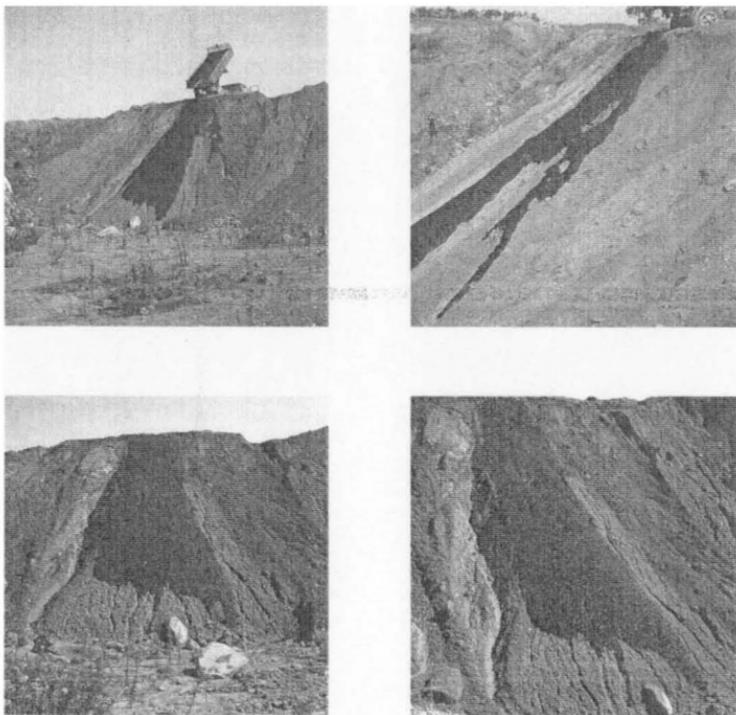


Figure 4.
Robert Smithson,
Asphalt Rundown, Rome,
1969.
Color photograph,
12 x 12 inches each.
Estate of Robert Smithson,
courtesy John Weber
Gallery.

larly, the fashion of the last few years for the “abject” in art (bodily fluids and other objects of disgust) was ignored (on this point, see Rosalind Krauss’s “Conclusion: The Destiny of the *Informe*,” below). In the context of the exhibition contemporary practice was represented in each of our four sections by a work that seemed to us to exceed the thematic horizon within which “abjection” is enclosed at present (a floor piece by Mike Kelley closed the section on “horizontality,” several large mildew photographs by Cindy Sherman in the section devoted to “base materialism,” a film by James Coleman figured in the “pulse” section, and Allan McCollum’s multiple casts of dinosaur tracks in the last part of the show devoted to “entropy”). Aside from these exceptions and a handful of others, the majority of the works considered cover a period span-

ning from the late 1920s to the mid 1970s. But that does not mean that *chronology* was not also manhandled: Marcel Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages* of 1913-14 was not far from a "liquid word" by Edward Ruscha (see figure 41) of 1969 and an Andy Warhol *Oxidation* (see figure 31) of 1978; a Picasso sand relief of 1930 encountered a black monochrome by Rauschenberg (see figure 18) dating from 1951; a torn-paper collage by Jean Arp (see figure 66), also from 1930, shared a wall with a 1959 collage by Cy Twombly. Finally, the unity of the *oeuvre*, that guarantee of the artist's identity, offers the least resistance to the formless's transversal power. Thus we took the liberty of editing shamelessly, totally ignoring Fontana's "slashes" and the tachiste paintings of Wols – which is to say, what they are best known for – while retaining Fontana's gold, his colored stones, and his sparkles and Wols's photographs. In some cases, this curatorial incision left wounds: just as Salvador Dalí, swearing allegiance to Breton, refused to allow Bataille to reproduce *Jeu lugubre* with his commentary on the painting in *Documents*, so Carl Andre was opposed to our presenting the photographs Hollis Frampton took of his preminimalist, scatological series of cement works.²⁴ Furthermore, just as the "categories" we locate are porous (such that certain objects could have been included in several of them), a particular artist, working in various veins, could be found sporting different "frock coats" (Pollock, Oldenburg, and Robert Morris all appeared in the "horizontalality" section, but Pollock was also to be found in "base materialism," Morris in "pulsation," and Oldenburg in "entropy").

This volatile taxonomy thus allowed us a certain number of categorical ruptures: certain key works of modernism were withdrawn from the official discourse on the modernist period (the most flagrant case is that of Pollock); certain works by modernist totems, such as Pablo Picasso, which had previously been considered minor were foregrounded; certain artists marginalized by the modernist master narrative, such as David Medalla or the members of the Gutai group, suddenly seemed decisive. Finally: there was no question of exhaustiveness. There are large numbers of works we would have liked to but were unable to include for various reasons. (Within entropy, for example, we had thought of Allan Kaprow and Dieter Rot – but how could we have presented a happening without casting it in concrete? We had thought, too, about the tireless activity of the Fluxus group – but how could we have shown an infinite overproduction without instantly betraying and limiting it?)

As I said before, the formless designates an ensemble of operations by means of which modernism is here grasped against the

grain. Modernism, that is the "mainstream" evoked by the history books — the most coherent version of which is Clement Greenberg's, but there are others — is seen as progressing in a straight line from Manet to abstract expressionism and beyond. The modernist interpretation of modern art, which is an extraction that dares not speak its name, partakes above all in an ontological project: once art was liberated from the constraints of representation, it had to justify its existence as the search for its own essence. Manet's "indifference," far from being read as the perverse slippage that Bataille saw in it, is instead understood as painting's first step toward autonomy and the self-revelation of its essence. This ontological enterprise rests on a certain number of postulates and exclusions: The first postulate is that visual art, especially painting, addresses itself uniquely to the sense of sight. This idea was contemporaneous with impressionism and also with the beginnings of art history as a "scientific" discipline (it was a central premise of Adolf von Hildebrand's and Konrad Fiedler's writings, which in turn inspired Heinrich Wölfflin's *The Principles of Art History* of 1915). The "tactile" that art history addresses is only the visual representation of tactility: matter does not exist for it except as informed, made over into form. The exclusion that proceeds from this (though it was stated even before the postulate of pure vision, going back to the distinction Gotthold Lessing made in his *Laocöon* [1766] between the arts of time and those of space) bears on the temporality within the visual and on the body of the perceiving subject: pictures reveal themselves in an instant and are addressed only to the eye of the viewer. The modernist ontology's third postulate, based on a repression analyzed by Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and above all in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), is this: being "purely visual," art is addressed to the subject as an erect being, far from the horizontal axis that governs the life of animals. Even if one no longer speaks of painting as a "window opened onto the world," the modernist picture is still conceived as a vertical section that presupposes the viewer's having forgotten that his or her feet are in the dirt. Art, according to this view, is a sublimatory activity that separates the perceiver from his or her body. It is a synthesizing activity as well: fending off any intrusion from the base, it gathers the perceiver together around the core of its ideal unity, which is why the artist is to conceive each work as a bounded whole (from Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse to Piet Mondrian and Pollock, the modernist measure of an artist's accomplishment is precisely his ability to unify a canvas), and aesthetic pleasure is indexed to this formal plenitude. And this formal plenitude is also a semantic plenitude, since, contrary to what the antimodernist iconologists (who confuse reference and

signification) constantly urge, the call for formal autonomy was never made without being glorified simultaneously as the royal road, even as the only road, toward the pure revelation of meaning (Kasimir Malevich and Mondrian, for example, say that they want above all to paint the absolute). In short (fourth postulate), the modernist ontology requires an artwork to have a beginning and an end, and holds that all apparent disorder is necessarily reabsorbed in the very fact of being bounded.

Certainly, these postulates and exclusions are myths (one need only look at the production of all the great artists of modernity in order to realize that they never wholly conformed to these precepts, and even the most self-assured modernist discourse must admit some exceptions). But these are foundational myths: their solidarity seals the coherence of modernism as an interpretive grid. The four operations that we have retained in the name of the formless (horizontality, base materialism, pulse, and entropy) respond item for item to these modernist claims. These operations each constituting the object of an entry in our dictionary below, I would like to make brief mention here of the use we made of these four in the original organization of the exhibition *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi* and in the selection of its objects.

1) We began with *horizontality*, since there the operational nature of the *informe* is the most obvious. ("Horizontality," which is a state of being, imperfectly captures the dynamic nature of the operation. It would be more accurate if long-winded to say "lowering from the vertical to the horizontal" or "horizontalization.") The rotation implied by this lowering is one of the strategies put to work in the most insistent way by Bataille (it governs many texts in *Documents*, such as the entries "Bouche" [Mouth] and "Le gros orteil" [The Big Toe] in the "critical dictionary," and also his whole dossier on "the pineal eye," published posthumously): man is proud of being erect (and of having thus emerged from the animal state, the biological mouth-anus axis of which is horizontal), but this pride is founded on a repression. Vertical, man has no other biological sense than to stare at the sun and thus burn his eyes or to contemplate his feet in the mud: his present architecture, by means of which his horizontal gaze traverses a vertical visual field, is a travesty (see "Gestalt" below).

However, we should note that the vertical-horizontal opposition is not entirely circumscribed by the hierarchical relations (which Bataille seeks to invert all the better to denounce) between man and animal. Another modernist version of this opposition singles out human symbolic practices; it is this version of the vertical-horizontal opposition that Bataille's operation reveals to be repressive. On the heels of the impressionists' exaltation of "pure

vision," a crisis, traditionally pin-pointed in the work of Paul Cézanne, shook the visual arts. It suddenly became clear that the strict demarcation between the realms of the "purely visible" (the verticality of the visual field) and the carnal (the space that our bodies occupy) – a demarcation theorized since the Renaissance by means of the conception of painting as a "window opened onto the world" – was a fiction. In Cézanne's work – for example *Still Life with Plaster Cupid* (c. 1892) in the Courtauld, where the floor plane is verticalized outrageously, the objects are ready to slide from their position, to dislodge themselves and roll onto our feet: the line of demarcation between the wall and the ground is erased,

(Two remarks in passing: first, it might seem surprising that the strict division of the visible and the carnal should have been airtight for so long, since sculpture supposedly played on both terms of the opposition; but Western sculpture up to Rodin, if not always frontal, was at least "pictorial" – that is, it ceaselessly mapped the carnal order onto the plane of the visible. Second, it has been noted that Valéry, in *Degas Dance Drawing* [1936], spoke of the formless with regard to the verticalization of the ground in certain works by Edgar Degas: but with Degas it was a bird's-eye view that was at issue – a dancer sketched from a balcony; a woman crouching in her bath, drawn from the perspective of a man standing over her. Whatever the novelty of this point of view – whose principal function, according to Valéry, was to redistribute reflected light, whatever the deformation to which the motif was subjected as a consequence [Valéry says of the shape of a dancer seen from above that she "project[s] her shape against the plane of the stage; just as we see a crab on the beach"] – this in no way troubles the unity of the represented scene.²⁵ Neither eccentricity of the point of view nor deformation concerns the formless as we understand it according to Bataille.)

Painting landscapes at Horta de Ebro in 1909, Picasso found himself confronted by the same "giving way" that marks Cézanne's canvases, and it was shortly thereafter that Picasso transformed his painting into a kind of writing, thus repressing the irruption of the carnal and the danger it then posed to art. He covered over, one might say, the impossible caesura between the visible (vertical) and the bodily (horizontal) by another vertical-horizontal opposition, one which eludes the menace (animality) of the carnal entirely. Painting's vertical section and completely covered surface were always opposed to the horizontal and diagrammatic space of writing (with a few exceptions man reads seated at a table, especially since the invention of printing), but Picasso annulled that antinomy by a 90-degree pivoting (this is the radical gesture of his *Still Life with Chair Caning* of 1912, a canvas that asks to be read as the

horizontal plane of a café table, seen from above): for him, the picture became a system structured by arbitrary signs; henceforth, his canvas became a written page. Cubist semiology allowed one to turn the Cézannesque cave-in to the profit of form (no longer a matter of figures or of perspectival space, but of structure). Modernism owes much to this brilliant conjuring trick.²⁶

Marcel Duchamp was a pitiless sleuth (which is why, for example, he was to be Greenberg's *bête noire*): he immediately put his finger on this semiological repression. His *Three Standard Stoppages* knocks one of the most arbitrary systems of the sign there is (the metric system) off its pedestal to show that once submitted to gravity, once lowered into the contingent world of things and bodies, the sign does not hold water: it dissolves as an (iterable) sign and regresses toward singularity. After that, one has to wait almost twenty years for Alberto Giacometti (during the brief time that he was close to Bataille and participated in the *Documents* "group," since after 1935 his work would celebrate verticality) to reintroduce horizontalization as an operative in art (cubist semiology would no longer be the target, rather the structure of the monument and the idealism that undergirds it): the sculpture became its own base, and that base was low.²⁷

Duchamp's and Giacometti's experiments had no successors. It was the rotation to which Pollock submitted verticality that shook art up in an irreversible way. He was not the first to paint with the canvas lying flat, but he was the first to underscore the horizontality of the support as the essential element of his work process (there is no vertical runoff, the isomorphic space of his paintings is not oriented to the erect body of the human observer). By abandoning the paintbrush and thus the anatomical connection that made it an extension of his hand, Pollock delegated a part of his process to matter itself. His traces took form through a combination of gesture and gravity and both would vary according to the viscosity of the pigment.

This radical break in pictorial practice, this new orientation, was either ignored at the time by Greenberg's modernist reading, according to which Pollock's "drip paintings" are "mirages" wherein matter has been atomized by some kind of illusion of "pure visuality," or thematized by the existentialist pathos of Harold Rosenberg, who could see in Pollock's canvases nothing but the trace of an event the result of which was of little importance (Rosenberg was struck more by the bare canvas — an "arena for action" — than by the finished works, which he avoided describing). It was the artists (Morris, Warhol, the Gutai group, to name a few) who revealed the importance of horizontalization in Pollock's work — and even criticized him for having abandoned it too soon (for example, Eva

Hesse's *Seven Poles* [1970], totems collapsing onto the floor, is a direct critique of Pollock's *Blue Poles* [1952] and its oriented space).

2) *Base materialism* is the principal weapon in the battle Bataille wanted to wage against idealism. He sought to vanquish the fetishizing (or ontologizing) of matter, which is what he believed materialist thinkers did. "Most materialists," Bataille wrote, "despite wanting to eliminate all spiritual entities, ended up describing an order of things whose hierarchical relations mark it out as specifically idealist. They have situated dead matter at the summit of a conventional hierarchy of diverse types of facts, without realizing that in this way they have submitted to an obsession with an *ideal* form of matter, with a form which approaches closer than any other to that which matter *should be*."²⁸ Most materialism, Bataille argued, even and above all dialectical materialism, is basically idealist.²⁹ The type of matter Bataille wants to speak about is what we have no idea of, what makes no sense, what "has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm."³⁰ Matter cannot be reabsorbed by the image (the concept of image presupposes a possible distinction between form and matter, and it is this distinction, insofar as it is an abstraction, that the operation of the formless tries to collapse). Bataille's "matter" is shit or laughter or an obscene word or madness: whatever cuts all discussion short, whatever reason cannot drap with a "mathe-

Figure 5.
Alberto Burri,
Combustione Plastica,
1964.
Burned plastic,
59¼ x 99 inches.
Musée National d'Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

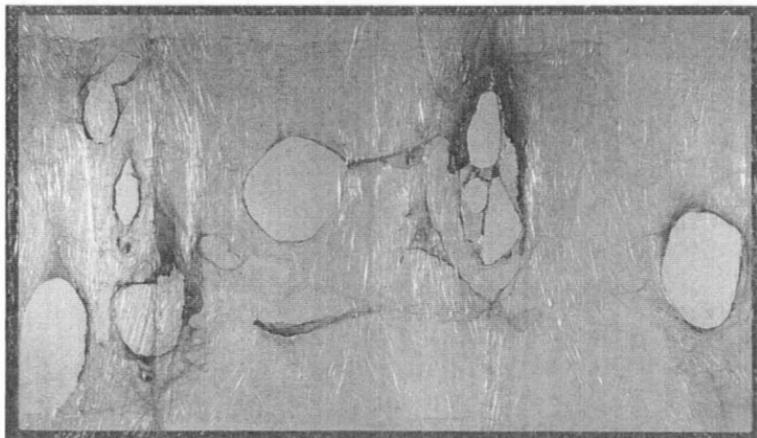




Figure 6.
Robert Rauschenberg,
*Dirt Painting (for John
Cage)*, 1953.
Dirt and mold in wood box,
15½ x 16 x 2½ inches.
© 1997 Robert
Rauschenberg / Licensed by
VAGA, New York.

matical frock coat,” whatever does not lend itself to any metaphorical displacement, whatever does not allow itself to be in-formed. According to Bataille, matter is seductive waste, appealing to what is most infantile in us, since the blow it strikes is devolutionary, regressive, low (see “Abattoir,” “*Jeu Lugubre*,” “Kitsch,” and “Ray Guns” below).

The scatological dimension of base materialism (in the sense in which Bataille used the word “scatology,” namely, “the science of what is wholly other”) is at the heart of a certain number of practices that the modernist discourse can only exclude from its Pantheon (for example, the sanded reliefs that Picasso made in the late 1920s) or else map onto an expressionist model (the representation of horror is invoked in Fautrier’s case in order to mask the kitsch aspect of color – or rather of the separation between color and texture – in his work). The materialism of Rauschenberg’s early work and the burned plastic of Alberto Burri’s (figure 5), the bad taste of Fontana or Manzoni, operates without ironic distance (or at least strains to do without it). The mud in Rauschenberg’s *Dirt Painting* (1953) (figure 6) is not depicted mud.

3) *Pulse* is not part of Bataille’s vocabulary, and only by extrapolation does it figure among our categories here. (By analogy, one

Figure 7.

Robert Rauschenberg,
Untitled (Gold Painting),
1953.

Gold and silver leaf on
fabric, newspaper, paint,
wood, paper, glue, and nails
on wood in wood and glass
frame, 10½ x 11½ x 1¾
inches.

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Rauschenberg / Licensed by
VAGA, New York.



could say: just as horizontality and base materialism contradict the myths of human erectness and “pure visuality,” so pulsation attacks the modernist exclusion of temporality from the visual field.) This exclusion, as I have said, began with Lessing. However, Lessing considered time and movement solely as narrative and directed toward an ending; pulsation, by contrast, involves an endless beat that punctures the disembodied self-closure of pure visuality and incites an irruption of the carnal.

Duchamp, once again, was the first to assault this aspect of modernist repression. As he had done with cubist semiology, he attacked the fortress at the very point where it believed itself to be best protected – in this case, via the bias of physiological optics, that is, the science of vision. Duchamp, who denounced painting for everything about it that was “retinal,” showed in fact that it is only so for those who ignore what, in the very functioning of the retina, hooks directly into the body. By means of a short circuit, he plugs the “purely optical” into the libidinal: indeed many commentators have remarked that the disks of his “precision optics,” or *Rotoreliefs* (see figure 43), once in motion, engage the spectator in a kind of visual equivalent of coitus. No image of the body is necessary to produce this intrusion of desire: the pulse alone sexualizes the gaze (see “*Moteur!*” below).³¹

Following Duchamp, Giacometti furthers this irruption of the libidinal in the visual field by means of a simple beat – with the throbbing “movement” of his *Suspended Ball* (1930–31) (see figure 48). Here reference to physiological optics is suppressed, but the associations of erotic drives released by the pendulum become polymorphous: in the vacillations of the pendulum’s swing, each element of this sexualized machine continually changes sexual identity. The pulse puts into action an infinite permutation that, as in Bataille’s *The Story of the Eye* (1928), annuls metaphor through metaphoric excess (see “Part Object” below).

What we call pulsation, then, is distinct from mere movement (even though the common link between several works in the “Pulse” section of the exhibition was precisely that biokinetic aspect of the pulse, from David Medalla’s *Bubble Machine* [1964–94] to Pol Bury’s *2270 Points blancs* [1965] [see figure 63], from Jean Dupuy’s *Heartbeats Dust* [1968–90] to Jean Tinguely’s *Metaphor* [1959], from the “flicker films” by Peter Kubelka and Paul Sharits or the early videos of Bruce Nauman in the sixties to Richard Serra’s *Hand Catching Lead* [1971]). Once the unified visual field is agitated by a shake-up that irremediably punctures the screen of its formality and populates it with organs, there is “pulsation.” Sometimes the spectator is panicked or struck by nausea when, confronting Robert Morris’s *Footnote to the Bride* (1961) (see figure 65), one notices

Figure 8.
Robert Morris,
Untitled (Threadwaste),
1968.
Threadwaste, copper,
mirrors, felt, and coal.
© 1997 Robert Morris/
ARS, New York.



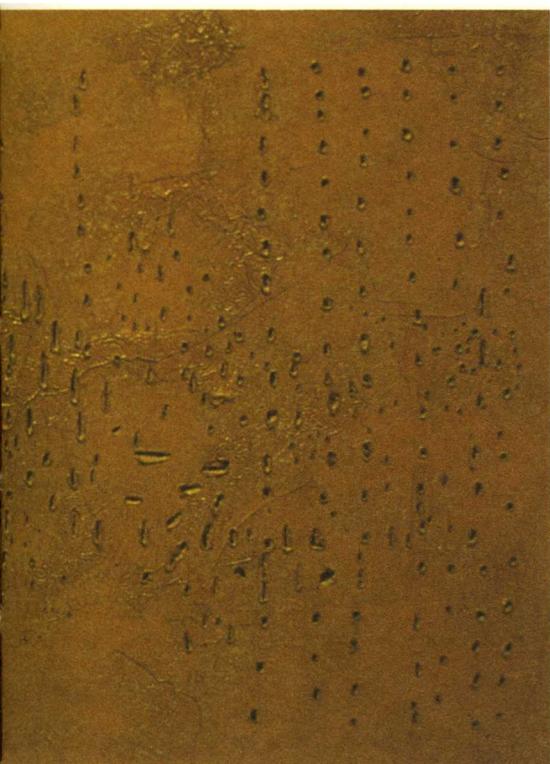


that the sculpture's flesh-colored membrane is ever so slowly swelling, propelled by an unknown mechanism, to become, for an instant, a kind of breast. But this type of release, employing what Freud calls the uncanny (*Unheimlich*) (see "Uncanny" below), does not necessarily need motion as such: the same beat agitates the photographs of Man Ray, Jacques-André Boiffard, Brassai, and Hans Bellmer, and the same fragmentation of the body (itself temporarily folded and unfolded) disturbs the surrealists' "exquisite corpses."

4) Nor is *entropy* (meaning the constant and irreversible degradation of energy in every system, a degradation that leads to a continually increasing state of disorder and of nondifferentiation within matter) taken from Bataille's vocabulary. (He would have preferred "expenditure," which does not cover the same field and might even seem to be entropy's opposite. Bataille used the classical example of entropy – the inevitable cooling down of the solar system – against the grain: the sun expends extravagantly, forcing us into overproduction and waste in order to maintain even a fragile balance. Entropy is a negative movement: it presupposes an

Figure 9.
Lucio Fontana,
Concetto Spaziale, 1960.
Oil on canvas with holes,
59 x 59 inches.
Private Collection, Paris.

Figure 10.
Claes Oldenburg,
Green Beans, 1964.
18 sections of vinyl and
painted formica,
2 x 11¾ x 5 inches.
Museum of Contemporary
Art, Chicago, gift of William
J. Hokin. Courtesy of the
artist.



INTRODUCTION

initial order and a deterioration of that order. Expenditure, on the contrary, is the regulation, through excess, of an initial disorder and such regulation is never successful because always insufficient – hence the bidding war unleashed.)

We might even think that the project of *Documents* was basically anti-entropic. This cooling down of words into clichés, which Carl Einstein stigmatized from the beginning of the “critical dictionary,” is precisely what information theory (taking off from the strict usage of the word in thermodynamics) designates as entropy

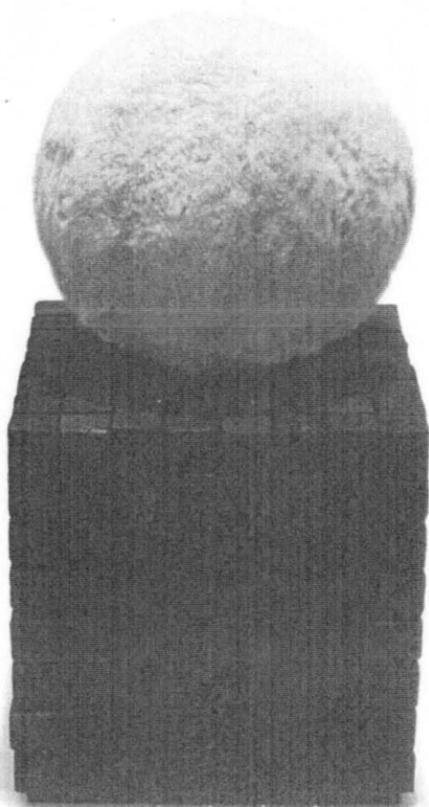


Figure 11.
Piero Manzoni,
Achrome, 1961.
Burned wood and rabbit
skin, 18 inch diameter,
18½ x 18½ x 18½ inch base
Herning Museum, Denmark
© 1997 Estate of Piero
Manzoni / Licensed by
VAGA, New York.

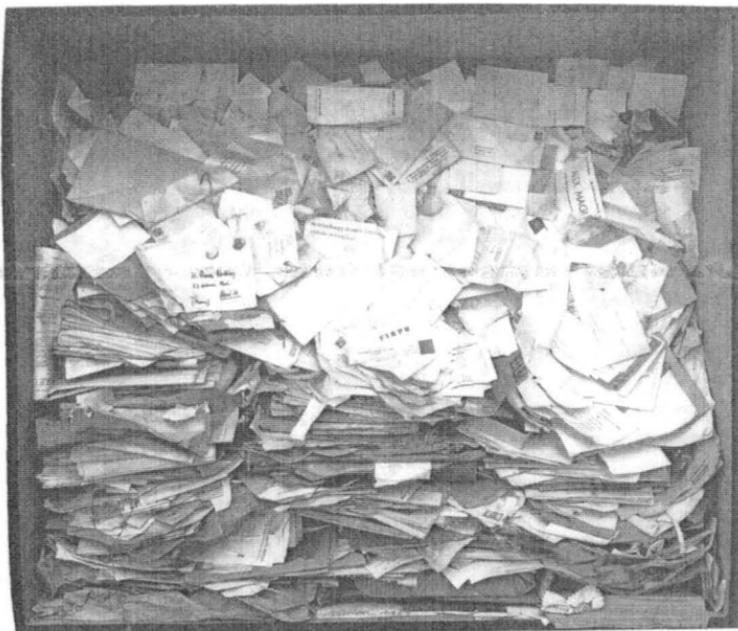


Figure 12.
Arman,
L'Affaire du courrier,
1961–62.
Three months of Pierre
Restany's mail: paper,
wood, and Plexiglas.
47 x 55 x 15½ inches.
Private Collection, Paris.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.

(see “Liquid Words” below).³² But Bataille’s fascination with rot and waste, with the decomposition of everything, which finds expression in almost every one of his texts, shows well enough that the entropic freeze, whether or not he wanted to keep it at bay in his writing, was an essential operation for him, all the more violent in that it was inevitable and its effectiveness depended on no one’s will.

In “Figure Humaine” (Human Face), published in the “dictionary” of *Documents*, Bataille uncustomarily praised “contemporary science” for having situated the origin of the universe in the condition of the improbable (a crossed-out sentence in the manuscript, where he referred to Lazare Carnot with regard to the notion of improbability,³³ reveals that he was reacting to Hans Reichenbach’s

“Crise de la causalité” [Crisis of Causality], which had been published in the preceding issue of *Documents*, wherein Reichenbach claimed that the second law of thermodynamics, based on Carnot’s discovery about mechanical heat loss – and defining entropy – “is in fact nothing but a statistical principle”⁴⁴). And then there is the “critical dictionary’s” article “Poussière” (Dust), which concludes with an entropic nightmare: “One day or another, given its persistence . . . dust will probably begin to gain the upper hand over the servants, pouring immense amounts of rubbish into abandoned buildings and deserted stockyards: and, at that distant epoch, nothing will remain to ward off night terrors, in the absence of which we have become such great bookkeepers.”⁴⁵ Or read Leiris’s article “Debauche,” which in the “dictionary” comes just before the paragraph on the *informe* and is illustrated by a photograph of the frozen Seine, on which debris has accumulated. At first sight, Leiris seems to be calling for a social cataclysm that could crack the glacier in which we are frozen. But the only result he sees in this future revolt is nihilism: the fate of this deluge was “having first broken up what was hostile and alien to itself, and then destroyed itself by being changed into ephemeral vapor – that of having annihilated *absolutely everything*.”⁴⁶

Entropy attracted artists well before the 1960s, when Robert Smithson made it his motto, and many took it up after him (see “Liquid Words,” “Quality,” “Ray Guns,” “Sweats of the Hippo,” “Threshold,” “Water Closet,” and “Zone” below). In the hands of these artists, entropy operates in various ways: by degradation (Raoul Ubac’s or Gordon Matta-Clark’s *brûlages* [figures 57 and 58]), by redundancy (the casts of Bruce Nauman [figure 69], Arp, Picasso, McCollum), by accumulation, infinite profusion (Arman’s trash cans [figure 12], Oldenburg’s *Ray Guns* [figure 54], McCollum’s dinosaur tracks [figure 70]), by inversion (Manzoni’s *Socle du monde*, Smithson’s upturned trees [figure 53]), by tearing (Arp’s or Twombly’s torn papers or Serra’s *Tearing Lead* [figure 67], or Morris’s felt tangles [figure 13]) by lack of elasticity (Serra’s rolled-lead plates, or Giovanni Anselmo’s *Torsione* [figure 42]), by the invasion of “noise” into the message (Dubuffet’s *Messages* [figure 56], Raymond Hains’s or Villeglé’s lacerated posters [figure 55], Duchamp’s *Dust Breeding*), by wear and tear (the oil slicks on the vacant parking lots photographed by Ruscha [figure 74]), but also by under-usage or nonconsumption (the urban no-man’s-lands photographed by Ruscha, the interstitial spaces bought at auction by Matta-Clark [figure 73], or the buttered-on vaseline of Mel Bochner’s photographs [see pp. 299, 300–301]). Entropy is a sinking, a spoiling, but perhaps also an irrecoverable waste. The first entropic artist was Giambattista Piranesi, about whom Henry-Charles Puech (the

Figure 13.
Robert Morris,
Untitled, 1967-68.
Black felt, ¼ inch thick.
Dimensions variable.
The Museum of Modern
Art, New York.
Gift of Philip Johnson.
© 1997 Robert Morris / ARS,
New York.



historian of Manichaeism to whom Bataille refers in "Le Bas matérialisme et la gnose" [Base Materialism and Gnosticism]) says:

[Beginning with Piranesi], man is definitively overrun by what he creates and what little by little boundlessly destroys him. The obsessional idea of construction, the ordering of stones or of machines, these human triumphs! carried to an extreme, open an infinite vista of nightmares and of multiplied punishments wrought by the automatic law of the vaults, the pillars, the stairways, a multiplication there is no reason to stop (totality, form existing only on a human scale, man is outstripped by the very need for representation that has unleashed this crushing force).³⁷

In the same way that Sade is open to two different uses (Freud as well), or so Bataille insisted in his ongoing dispute with Breton (see "Base Materialism," and "Cadaver" below), there are two possible uses of the formless. (There are even, as Denis Hollier has shown with regard to the divergence of positions between the ethnologists and Bataille in the very bosom of the *Documents* group, two possible uses of "use value": a shoe serves for walking, but for the fetishist it serves the satisfaction of his sexual drives.³⁸) We could treat the *informe* as a pure object of historical research, tracing its origins in *Documents*, noting its occurrences there; this work would be useful and, like all those interested in Bataille's thought, we have not neglected it. But such an approach would run the risk of transforming the formless into a figure, of stabilizing it. That risk is perhaps unavoidable, but, in putting the formless to work in areas far from its place of origin, in displacing it in order to sift modernist production by means of its sieve, we wanted to start it shaking—which is to say, to shake it up.

BASE MATERIALISM

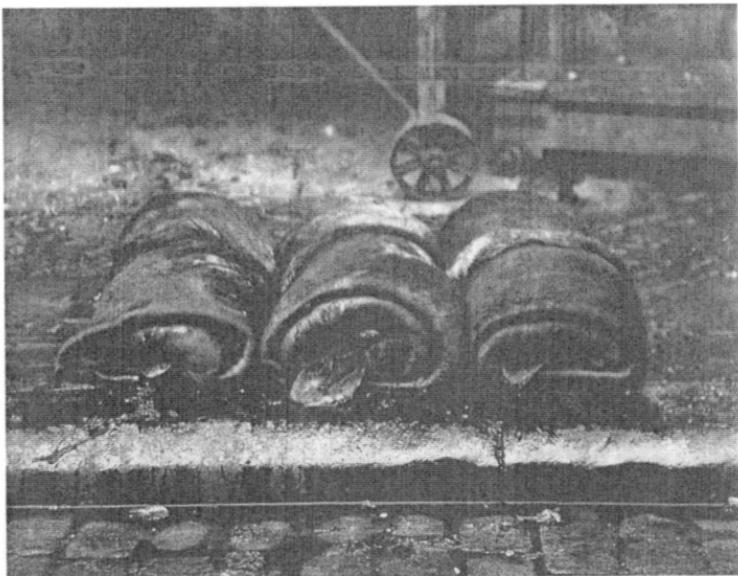


Figure 14.
Eli Lotar,
Aux abattoirs de la Villette,
1929.
Silver print.
Musée National d'Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

A

Abattoir

Yve-Alain Bois

The three Eli Lotar photographs with which Bataille illustrates his article "Abattoir" (Slaughterhouse) in the *Documents* "critical dictionary" form a kind of climax, within the journal, of the iconography of horror.¹ Cruelty and sacrifice, terror and death are often enough broached in articles there (beginning with Bataille's essay, in the second issue of *Documents*, on the illuminated manuscript of *The Apocalypse of Saint Sever*), but no other image appearing in the journal is as realistically macabre as these photographs taken at La Villette in the company of André Masson — except perhaps, in the penultimate issue, the nearly illegible reproduction (from *X Marks the Spot*) of a crude montage of press photos depicting the brutality of gang warfare in Chicago. "It seems that the desire to see is stronger than horror or disgust," Bataille remarked in relation to this book.²

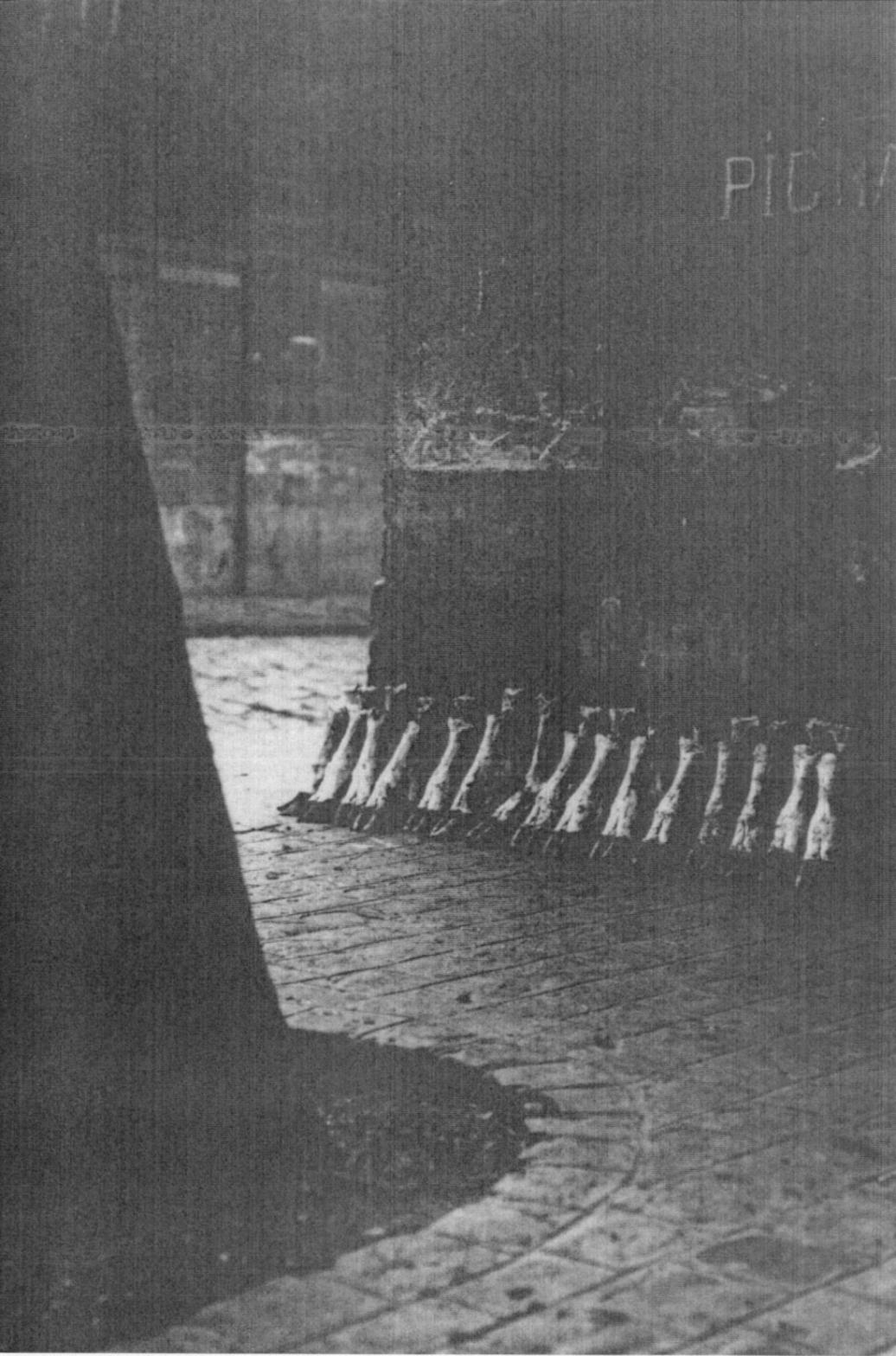
For his own part, however, he refused to cater to this voyeurism in *Documents* (only much later — in 1961, in *Les Larmes d'Eros* — did he publish the famous photograph of a young Chinese hacked to pieces *alive*, which his psychoanalyst, Dr. Adrien Borel, had given him in 1925).³ It is possible that self-censorship played a role in this reserve (after all, the editorial life of *Documents* depended on the continuing support of a publisher), but that is somewhat doubtful: Bataille did not even reproduce the shot of the sliced eye from *Un Chien andalou* to which he refers, while other journals did not hold back (for example, *Cahiers d'Art*, the much more conformist magazine, to which he directed readers who wished to see the picture) — and he suppressed the image even though it would have compellingly supported his argument ("How can one not appreciate the extent of horror's fascination, and that it alone is sufficient to shatter everything that stifles us").⁴ Even when it is a matter of depicting the shrunken heads of the Javaro Indians, the iconographic violence in *Documents* is mediated, distanced through

representation: ethnographic or artistic phenomena are displayed there, not raw images from daily life (the only image related to a crime story is the ridiculous photograph of the “Crépin murderer,” his head swathed in an absurd gauze bonnet of bandages after a failed attempt at suicide, in the course of which he shot off his mouth and nose).⁵ Certainly this violence, as mediated as it might be by art or culture, is not without impact: the full-page detail of the Roman soldier rummaging with his bare hand in the gaping chest of a man he has just decapitated, isolated within a painting by Antoine Caron, to which Michel Leiris devotes a stunning article, is all the more arresting for having been taken from a sixteenth-century mannerist work. But it is somewhat the exception. What strikes one, for example, in the naive drawing of an Aztec human sacrifice that is taken from one of the Vatican Codices and used to illustrate a text by Roger Hervé is as much the curly blond hair of the Spanish victims as the blood that spurts from their chests.⁶

Because art is the intermediary through which horror (amply distilled in the texts) is permitted to surface visually in the journal, one might question why Bataille did not choose to illustrate his article “Abattoir” with one of his friend André Masson’s paintings on the theme of the butcher – a theme Masson had begun to explore – such as his *L’Éguarisseur* (Carcass Cutter) (1928), which had been reproduced in an earlier issue of *Documents*.⁷ But perhaps violence is not a theme here, rather the question of its repression. We might argue that there is a simple chiasmus: to speak of violence, one displays it the way culture (even “primitive” culture) treats it; to speak of its occultation, one shows it raw. This argument might hold true if Lotar’s photographs corresponded to Bataille’s text; but at first glance they seem to contradict it. The article, which is very short, begins by stating a postulate: “The slaughterhouse is linked to religion insofar as the temples of bygone eras (not to mention those of the Hindus in our own day) served two purposes: they were used both for prayer and for killing. The result (and this judgment is confirmed by the chaotic aspect of present-day slaughterhouses) was certainly a disturbing convergence of the mythic mysteries and the lugubrious grandeur typical of those places in which blood flows.” There is nothing like this in Lotar’s reportage: nothing to do with the bloody sacrifice of men or animals to which Bataille will return in the journal (for example, with regard to the cult of Kali), no “chaos.”⁸ On the contrary, the photographs exhibit nothing that is not extremely orderly, and it is the banality of this very order that is sinister. The first of Lotar’s photographs shows a double row of cows’ feet carefully propped against an exterior wall (figure 15); the second proffers a heap which turns out upon examination to be a rolled-up animal hide that has been dragged along

Figure 15.
Eli Lotar,
Aux abattoirs de la Villette
1929.
From *Documents* 1 (1929)
no. 6
Silver print.
Musée National d’Art
Moderne–CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

PICHA



the ground in front of a door as though to clean the passageway, leaving a dark swath of blood behind it; the third, a bird's-eye view, is the only one to show the place in action (butchers working quickly [they are slightly blurred] around several slaughtered animals). The horror is flat, without melodrama.

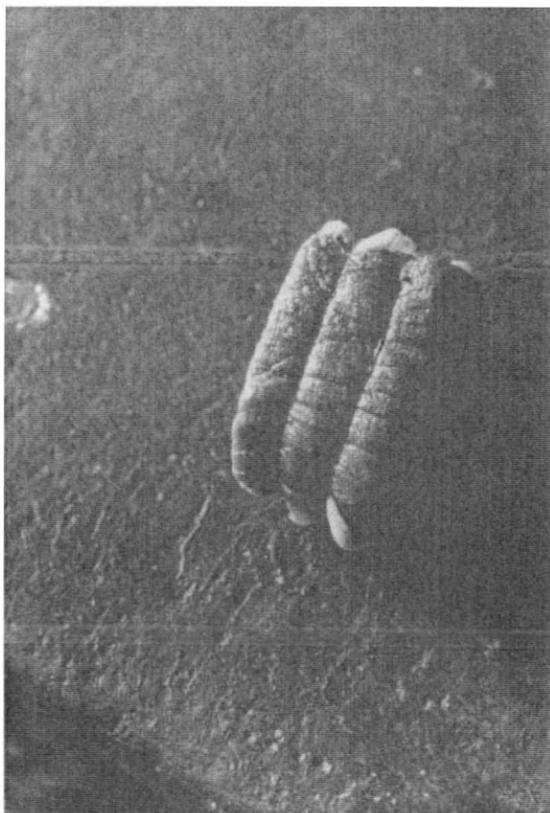
But the lie that Lotar's photographs give to Bataille's article is not one, in fact, for his text is not an expression of concern for the animals slaughtered in a meat factory. (Similarly, in the "critical dictionary's" entry "Man" in the preceding issue of *Documents*, it was not in the spirit of the animal rights movement that Bataille cited, with obvious pleasure, Sir William Earnshaw Cooper's frenzied calculations of the accumulating amount of blood on which Christendom sustains itself daily.) The second part of Bataille's text helps us understand his counterintuitive use of photography here: "In our time . . . the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a plague-ridden ship." A paragraph follows on the effects of this curse by means of which "good folk" are led "to vegetate as far from the slaughterhouse as possible, to exile themselves, out of propriety, to a flabby world in which nothing fearful remains and in which, subject to the ineradicable obsession of shame, they are reduced to eating cheese." In other words, it is not violence as such that interests Bataille, but its civilized scotomization that structures it as otherness, as heterogeneous disorder: to put it into quarantine with "an unhealthy need of cleanliness, with cantankerous pettiness and boredom," even within the very precinct of the slaughterhouse itself, is to participate in a project of sublimation (of homogenization), and it is to this sublimatory activity that he wants to address himself. To show the visual equivalent of the squealing pigs that one butchers (the same pigs that Bataille imagines squealing in front of Dali's *Le Jeu lugubre*) would be a sure way of denying that such a repression had in fact occurred.⁹ There is no "lugubrious grandeur" in these photographs by Lotar; they have nothing to do with the bullfight — or, to put it another way, they present only the bullfight one deserves. To show violence purely and simply would be a way of incorporating it; it is more effective to underscore how it is evacuated (whence the laconic image of the ignoble little pile of cow hide in front of the slaughterhouse door).

But there is more: no repression is ever totally achieved, no shield hermetically protects against the sneaky return of the excluded. In vain does the vegetarian's cheese appear anodine; it stinks, like one's feet. (It is not by chance that the famous text "The Big Toe," illustrated by Jacques-André Boiffard's three no less famous photographs of the relevant body part, appear in the same issue of *Documents* "Slaughterhouse." Nor is it by chance that the last photograph reproduced in this issue, of the bare legs of caba-

ret dancers whose bodies are masked by a theatrical curtain in the process of being lowered, recalls the rows of cows' feet by Lotar, and that Bataille speaks of window display [*étalage*] in relation to the Folies-Bergère [the sadomasochistic nature of "amusement" and of "distraction" is a theme that recurs often in the review].¹⁰)

What is at issue in "Slaughterhouse," "The Big Toe," and most of Bataille's texts at the time of *Documents* is the "double use" of everything. There is an elevated use, consecrated by metaphysical idealism and rational humanism, and there is a low use. There are two uses for the mouth (speaking, a noble one, is opposed to spitting, vomiting, or screaming), two uses of Sade, two uses for temples, two uses of Greece, two uses for "Extinct America" (we might refer to the spectacular sacrifices by the Aztecs or, on the contrary, to the bureaucratic empire of the Incas where "everything was planned ahead in an airless existence").¹¹ There are even two uses for the slaughterhouse (we could refer to it to speak about horror or to take note of its repression). Everything splits into two, but this division is not symmetrical (there is no simple separation of sides by means of a vertical axis), it is dynamic (the line of division is horizontal): the low implicates the high in its own fall. It is the low use, its imperious affirmation, that fells the hot-air balloons of the ideal with one malevolent blow.

To say that the slaughterhouse derives from the temple is also to say that the temple can be as sordid as the slaughterhouse and that religion only has meaning as something bloody (it is always so at the beginning but sooner or later ends up repressing this constitutive feature: "God rapidly and almost entirely loses his terrifying features, his appearance as a decomposing cadaver, in order to become, at the final stage of degradation, the simple [paternal] sign of universal homogeneity"¹²). As many critics have noted, another "critical dictionary" entry, "Museum," is a pendant to "Slaughterhouse." In that text, Bataille is just as Manichaeic: "According to the *Grande Encyclopédie*," he begins, "the first museum in the modern sense of the word (that is to say, the first public collection) would seem to have been founded on July 27, 1793, in France, by the Convention. The origin of the modern museum would thus be linked to the development of the guillotine." Bataille then suggests, with characteristic irony, that as the museum developed, its visitors themselves became the museum's true contents, and he ends the essay with an attack on aesthetic contemplation as narcissistic self-celebration: "The museum is the colossal mirror in which man finally contemplates himself from all sides, finds himself literally admirable, and abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in all the art journals" (an expression of ecstasy that the *Documents* reader would thus have had the right to expect but which he would find



no trace of in the review).¹³ We should resist the temptation to read these sentences by Bataille as a presage of the unforgettable phrase uttered several years later by Walter Benjamin ("There is no document of culture that is not at the same time a record of barbarism"¹⁴), since this would be to push Bataille's thought toward Marxism, with which he was engaged only very briefly (just after the end of the *Documents* adventure, roughly from 1932 to 1939),

Figure 16.
Wols.
Untitled, n.d.
Silver print, 9¼ x 7 inches.
Kunsthaus, Zurich, gift of Dr.
Elfriede Schulze-Battmann.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.

always maintaining his distance.¹⁵ Bataille was less interested in class struggle than in de-classing, and barbarism was something to which Bataille appealed with all his might. No Marxist could have penned the following sentences: "Without a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them, terrifying ruptures of what had seemed to be immutable, the fall into stinking filth of what had been elevated – without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality."¹⁶

Those lines are taken from "La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade" (The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade), which was published only posthumously and constitute Bataille's reply to the diatribe launched against him by André Breton in *The Second Manifesto of Surrealism*.¹⁷ They are echoed in one of Bataille's last articles in *Documents*: his commentary on a reactionary article by Emmanuel Berl against the increasing grip of psychoanalysis on artistic and literary production.¹⁸ Bataille rails even further against those (the surrealists) who lay claim to psychoanalysis and who, "trying to escape its consequences, take refuge in the most mysterious unconscious (although Freud wanted nothing more than to bring everything to light by rigorously eliminating the least mystery retained by the unconscious)." They make nothing, says, Bataille, but "cheese," or "dessert," or poetry, all of which comes down to the same thing ("I don't think I have hated anything as much as poetry," he remarked in one of the many drafts of his reply to Breton).¹⁹ The reign of the cheese or dessert unconscious is over, it amuses no one any longer: "The reduction of repression and the relative elimination of symbolism are obviously not favorable to a literature of decadent aesthetes, wholly deprived even of a possibility of contact with the lower social levels." And "as it is out of the question to put psychoanalysis on the trash heap," Bataille continues, "it would be better to pass to another type of exercise." And what type of exercise might this be? There were only two possible answers for Bataille at this time: the social revolution (we are approaching the end of *Documents* and the relatively brief period during which Bataille would explore the political field), and, more important perhaps, another use of Freud. For there is also a double use for psychoanalysis: the use it is put to by the literary explorers of the unconscious, who visit it as tourists and, sampling from it as from a reservoir of metaphors, amuse themselves by imitating delirium; and the use it is put to by the analysts. There are those who trans- pose, mimicking the displacements and condensations at work in dreams, and there are those who are altered by psychoanalysis (later,

Bataille would refer to his own psychoanalysis in terms of alteration, not cure).²⁰ There are those who see in the psychoanalytic text nothing but a gold mine of symbols and those who, on the contrary, read it as a war machine directed against symbolization. For Bataille, the surrealists' poetic dream practice is "the most degrading escapism," in the sense that it signals a clear submission to the law: "The elements of a dream or a hallucination are transpositions; the poetic use of the dream comes down to the celebration of unconscious censorship, which is to say, of secretive shame and cowardice."²¹

Against *transposition* (attacked in a bitter tone in the last article he published in *Documents*, "L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions" [The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions]), Bataille opts for *alteration*, and indeed he valorizes the "reduction of repression" as an alteration toward the base: "A return to reality does not imply any new acceptances, but means that one is seduced in a base manner, without transposition and to the point of screaming, eyes open wide; opening them wide, then, before a big toe."²² Psychoanalysis is an enterprise of demystification, it obeys this watchword: "It is first of all a question of *altering* what one has at hand"; it makes ink blots on the ego-ideal.²³

"Alteration" is a word with a double use ("the term *alteration* has the double interest of expressing a partial decomposition analogous to that of corpses and at the same time the passage to a perfectly heterogeneous state corresponding to what the Protestant Professor Otto calls the *wholly other*, which is to say, the sacred, realized by example in a ghost").²⁴ But above all the word designates the low blow carried out against words themselves when one underscores their double use, a double use most often repressed but sometimes confirmed by the dictionary when two opposed meanings are united in the same term. As Denis Hollier remarks, Bataille had read Freud's study of this question and could only have been struck by certain of Freud's examples ("In Latin, '*altus*' means both 'high' and 'deep,' '*sacer*,' 'sacred' and 'accursed'"²⁵). Even more, perhaps, Bataille would have rejoiced in Freud's acknowledgment, beginning with his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, of the organic origins of this alternating redoubling – the double function of organs that "serve two masters at the same time," notably the penis, and the role played by the repression of this conjunction in the development of civilization as of the human subject, not to mention aesthetic sublimation.²⁶ Even if Bataille's references to Freud are few and the use he makes of psychoanalysis is unorthodox, he finds a model there for the operation of lowering that he wants to conduct on "everything one has at hand" (on everything that is presented as "elevated" or ideal, that is). Freud is not

named in "Le Gros orteil" (The Big Toe), perhaps the most strident example of alteration to which Bataille submits man (the text pronounces an axiom to which the definitive proof was only recently furnished by paleontology, namely, that "the big toe is the most *human* part of the human body"), but one can read this blazing firebrand as a Freudian pastiche: "Whatever the role played in the erection [the vertical position] by his foot, man, who has a light head, in other words a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things, sees it as spit, on the pretext that he has this foot in the mud."²⁷ Freud would insist on the sublimatory function of repression in the formation of the ego; Bataille will drive in the nail of desublimation; there is nothing more human than this blob of spit that man despises; man . . . is this blob of spit. Whence, as well, the heuristic implication of human sacrifice, which does not differ all that much from the spectacle of the slaughterhouse: if one considers as secondary "the use of the sacrificial mechanism for various ends, such as propitiation or expiation," one is driven to retain "the elementary fact of the radical *alteration* of the person" and to see that "the victim struck down in a pool of blood, the torn-off finger, eye, or ear, do not appreciably differ from vomited food" – nor from the contemptible, bloody roll of hide in Lotar's photograph.²⁸ This alteration produces the *wholly other*, to wit, the sacred, according to the definition by Otto that Bataille would conserve all his life. But the sacred is only another name for what one rejects as excremental.

(See "Base Materialism," "Dialectic," and "*Jeu Lugubre*.")

B

Base Materialism

Yve-Alain Bois

In "La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade" (The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade), a text written in response to Breton's *Second Surrealist Manifesto*, Bataille would give his own enterprise (his "project against projects") the name "heterology." The text is not precisely dated, but it was most likely written at the same time or slightly after Bataille wrote his final articles for *Documents*, notably "La

Mutilation sacrificielle et l'oreille coupée de Vincent Van Gogh" (Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh), where the term "heterogeneous" made its first appearance (auto-mutilation and sacrifice, among other actions, are qualified there as having "the power to liberate heterogeneous elements and to break the habitual homogeneity of the individual").¹ The formulation of heterology thus coincided with the end of *Documents*, but one should not conclude from this that its practice was absent from the journal. On the contrary, in many respects *Documents* was the testing ground for heterology, and the cessation of its publication was synchronous with the fine-tuning of this notion. Of course, the fate of *Documents* was similar to that of other avant-garde magazines (the publisher, Georges Wildenstein, tiring of his plaything, got bored with paying for the broken crockery), but it is possible that Bataille himself forced the rupture. "L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions" (The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions), the last text he published there (in the same issue, and in the same vein as the essay "on" Van Gogh), signals in fact an admission of failure, the failure of art as heterogeneous radicality, which is to say, as nonassimilable: "The works of the greatest modern painters [Picasso?] belong if you will to the history of art, even perhaps to the most brilliant period of this history, but we should obviously feel sorry for someone who does not have a stock of infinitely more obsessional images to live off of." Or again: "We enter the art gallery as though into a pharmacy, looking for remedies nicely packaged for admissible illnesses."² Whatever its outrages, art is the prisoner of its ancient cathartic function and thus, despite everything, it remains an agent of social order: it is at the service of "homogeneity."

Heterology, Bataille writes, is the "science of what is entirely other." He specifies, "The term agiology would perhaps be more precise, but one would have to catch the double meaning of *agios* (analogous to the double meaning of *sacer*), *soiled* as well as *holy*. But it is above all the term scatology (the science of excrement) that retains in the present circumstances (the specialization of the sacred) an incontestable expressive value as the doublet of an abstract term such as *heterology*."³ Even though Bataille finally gave up the term "scatology," which he liked for its "concrete" aspect, as he said in a note, one should be careful about the way the sacred appears here: Bataille quickly realized that the "sacred" lends itself to confusion (because of its "specialization" in the "present context"). By "sacred" he means what is "wholly other," which is thus excluded as such, everything which is wholly other and treated as a foreign body: "The notion of the (heterogeneous) foreign body permits one to note the elementary subjective identity between

types of excrement (sperm, menstrual blood, urine, fecal matter) and everything that can be seen as sacred, divine, or marvelous."⁴ God is only sacred on the same basis as shit. Thus there is no connection whatever between Bataille's sense of the sacred and Breton's contemporaneous reappropriation of the marvelous. Bataille is clear about this in even the very first texts he published in *Documents*, before he had elaborated the idea of heterology: "The time has come, when employing the word *materialism*, to assign to it the meaning of a direct interpretation, *excluding all idealism*, of raw phenomena, and not of a system founded on the fragmentary elements of an ideological analysis elaborated under the sign of religious ties."⁵

In *Documents*, materialism as Bataille understands it – *base materialism* – is the prefiguration of heterology. But heterology has the advantage of itself signaling rejection; while materialism must "exclude all idealism" (which is a far more complicated job than it might seem), "heterogeneity" designates from the outset what is excluded by idealism (by the *ego*, capitalism, organized religion, and so on). But above all, the term "heterology" has no philosophical antecedents with which it might be confused, while base materialism must measure itself against a long tradition (that is, the base materialist must struggle against what one would call "high" materialism). Everything splits into two, even materialism.

Base materialism (of which the *informe* is the most concrete manifestation) has the job of de-class(ify)ing, which is to say, simultaneously lowering and liberating from all ontological prisons, from any "*devoir être*" (role model). It is principally a matter of de-classing matter, of extracting it from the philosophical clutches of classical materialism, which is nothing but idealism in disguise: "Most materialists... have situated dead matter at the summit of a conventional hierarchy of diverse types of facts, without realizing that in this way they have submitted to an obsession with an *ideal* form of matter, with a form that approaches closer than any other to that which matter *should be*."⁶ This "should be" is a mode of "homological" appropriation; it presupposes a standard or normative measure. On the contrary, the formless matter that base materialism claims for itself resembles nothing, especially not what it should be, refusing to let itself be assimilated to any concept whatever, to any abstraction whatever. For base materialism, nature produces only unique monsters: there are no deviants in nature because there is nothing but deviation.⁷ Ideas are prisons; the idea of "human nature" is the largest of the prisons: in "each man, an animal" is "locked up... like a convict."⁸

The question is where to find a support on which to construct this base materialism, "a materialism not implying an ontology, not

implying that matter is the thing-in-itself?" or, from whom to learn to submit one's being and one's reason "to what is *lower*, to what can never serve in any case to ape a given authority?" Certainly not from dialectical materialism, which had "as its starting point, at least as much as ontological materialism, absolute idealism in its Hegelian form." But from the Gnostics, for example, whose dualist philosophy, the Manichaean division of everything, represents one of the most ancient forms of the lowering sought by Bataille ("it was a question of disconcerting the human spirit and idealism before something base, to the extent that one recognized the helplessness of superior principles").⁹ Bataille also refers to a certain "present-day materialism." What is he thinking of? Of psychoanalysis, as the reader of *Documents* would have realized in the course of reading Bataille's article "Materialism," which had been published several months earlier in the journal's "critical dictionary": "Materialism can be seen as a senile idealism to the extent that it is not immediately founded upon psychological or social facts and not [*sic*] upon abstractions, such as artificially isolated physical phenomena. Thus it is from Freud... that a representation of matter must be taken."¹⁰

It is not possible to explore here, in detail, Bataille's completely idiosyncratic reading of Freud (but see, among other articles in this volume, "Abattoir," "*Jeu lugubre*," "Isotropy," and "Conclusion: The Destiny of the *Informe*"). However, it is significant to note that Bataille's reading is rigorously antithetical to Breton's, in large part because Bataille, unlike Breton, had actually undergone psychoanalysis (from 1925 to 1929), which played an important role in freeing him from writer's block. Thus, he knew "that it is not enough to *explain* to a neurotic the complexes that are controlling his unhealthy behavior, they must also be made *sensible*."¹¹ Freud saw the repression of the sexual drives (and the sublimation that follows from it) as the principal force operating in the formation of the ego, in human society in general, and in neurosis (which in this sense is opposed to psychosis). Bataille tries to think the reverse: Could one succeed in "reducing" repression without becoming crazy? A partial "lifting" is of course possible; such is perversion. But Bataille further asks: Can there be a perversion without symbolic "transposition"?¹²

"The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions," with which Bataille closes *Documents*, can be read as a commentary on Freud's essay "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Eroticism" (1917), in which Freud refines the ideas presented in one of his earlier texts, "Character and Anal Eroticism" (1908).¹³ In these articles Freud analyzes the famous symbolic transposition of excrement into gold and establishes the relation between retention

and defecation (or, in the vocabulary Bataille adopts at this point, between "appropriation" and "excretion"). In trying to get at the origin and development of a perversion, Freud was led down the path of base materialism (the need to be clean is a "transposition" of the desire to be dirty and covered with excrement; it is a "reaction formation" against the anal-erotic drive, as is avarice, for example). Bataille wants to push this even further; he wants to think that there could be a world without transposition. "The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions" is a condemnation of art (art is nothing but another layer of transposition, an illusion, a sublimation) and thus, to a certain extent, a condemnation of the two-year-long attempt carried on in *Documents* to link certain out-of-bounds artistic practices directly to ethnographic phenomena (which is to say, to social elements arising from supposedly less repressed cultures).¹⁴ But Bataille, alluding to fetishism, indicates what could be a nonsublimated relation to art: "I defy any collector whatever to love a painting as much as a fetishist loves a shoe."¹⁵ Shortly thereafter Bataille refused to consider the relation between gold and excrement as a simple displacement. In "La Notion de dépense" (The Notion of Expenditure), his major theoretical text of 1933, from which almost all of his later work developed, Bataille modifies the psychoanalytical interpretation of jewels: the jewel is associated with excrement not only by contrast; they share a condition of pure loss (the jewel is economic waste by definition). The jewel, shit, and the fetish are all on the level of sumptuary expenditure.¹⁶

Fetishism is a perverse form of symbolic transposition (for Freud, the fetish is an imaginary substitute for the absent maternal phallus). Furthermore, all consumption of art is at least in part fetishistic, but this is repressed (the exceptions are pathological and in recent years have tended toward a negative form of expression: the iconoclast's hatred that issues in slashing a Rembrandt or a Barnett Newman). Bataille was not advocating the spread of fetishistic behavior in the museum (we might wonder what he would have thought of the viewer who destroyed the original version of Eva Hesse's *Accession II* by climbing into it). But, in trying to think perversion as heterogeneous practice, he implicitly raised the question of what a fetishism without transposition would be. It is precisely this possibility that Michel Leiris saw in the work Giacometti was doing at the time of *Documents*:

Worshippers of those frail ghosts that are our moral, logical, and social imperatives, we thus attach ourselves to a transposed fetishism, the counterfeit of the one that deeply animates us, and this bad fetishism absorbs the largest part of our activity, leaving almost no place for true fetishism, the only kind that is really worthy, because altogether

self-conscious and therefore independent of any deception. In the world of art it is scarcely possible to find objects (sculptures or paintings) capable of responding in some way to the requirements of this true fetishism.¹⁷

This “fetishist” Giacometti was to have a brief career: after 1935 his work would definitively change character. At about the same moment (between 1926 and 1932) Picasso was also tempted by excremental nontransposition, but neither Bataille nor Leiris were aware of this (see “Figure” below). The banner would not be taken up by other artists until the postwar period; and there again, shackled as Bataille and Leiris were in relation to the visual arts by a figurative aesthetic much closer to that of surrealism than they were aware, neither had any way of paying the slightest attention to this phenomenon.

In fact, heterological fetishism put in its first reappearance after World War II in the form of an attack against the figure (an attack by means of concreteness, the absolute contrary to a rush toward the higher realms at the hands of abstraction: like abstraction, but also like metaphor or theme, the figure is a transposition). Beginning with a kind of kitsch and a practice of sculptural polychromy that were relatively tame at the outset of his career, Lucio Fontana arrived at the scatological around 1949. A comparison between two of his sculptures allows one to locate rather precisely the moment at which his work definitively tipped toward the low. Fontana's *Sculptura nera* (1947), whose original painted plaster version no longer exists, is a kind of crown made of balls of matter, vertically positioned like one of those flaming hoops that circus animals are forced to jump through. At the center a vaguely anthropomorphic, vertical excrescence emerges. The crown still bounds a space (frames it, gives it form), like a stage on which something is about to happen. This holdover of anthropomorphism and narrative is wholly voided in Fontana's *Ceramica spaziale* (1949) (figure 17), a mess of blackened matter – gleaming and iridescent, with an agitated surface – which seems to have fallen there on the ground like a massive turd. The general form is cubic, but this cube seems to have been chewed, ingested, and regurgitated. Geometry (form, the Platonic idea) is not suppressed but mapped onto what until then it had had the task of “suppressing by overcoming” (*aufheben*, to use the Hegelian verb): to wit, matter. No dialectical synthesis, but the simple interjection of an obscenity into the aesthetic house of cards. Although he would be most famous for his “slashed” monochrome canvases, where the iconoclastic gesture has been “transposed” into an inscription of an overly refined elegance, much of Fontana's later work – his sculpture, his pierced paint-

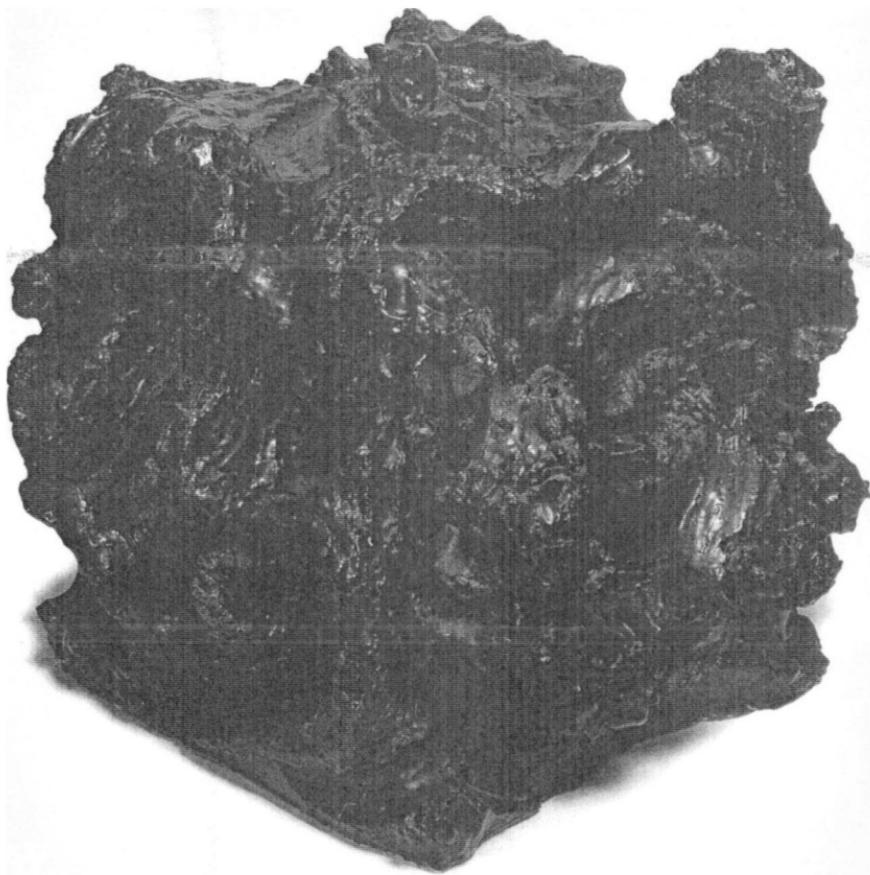


Figure 17.
Lucio Fontana,
Ceramica spaziale, 1949.
Polychrome ceramic,
23½ x 25¼ x 23½ inches.
Musée National d'Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.

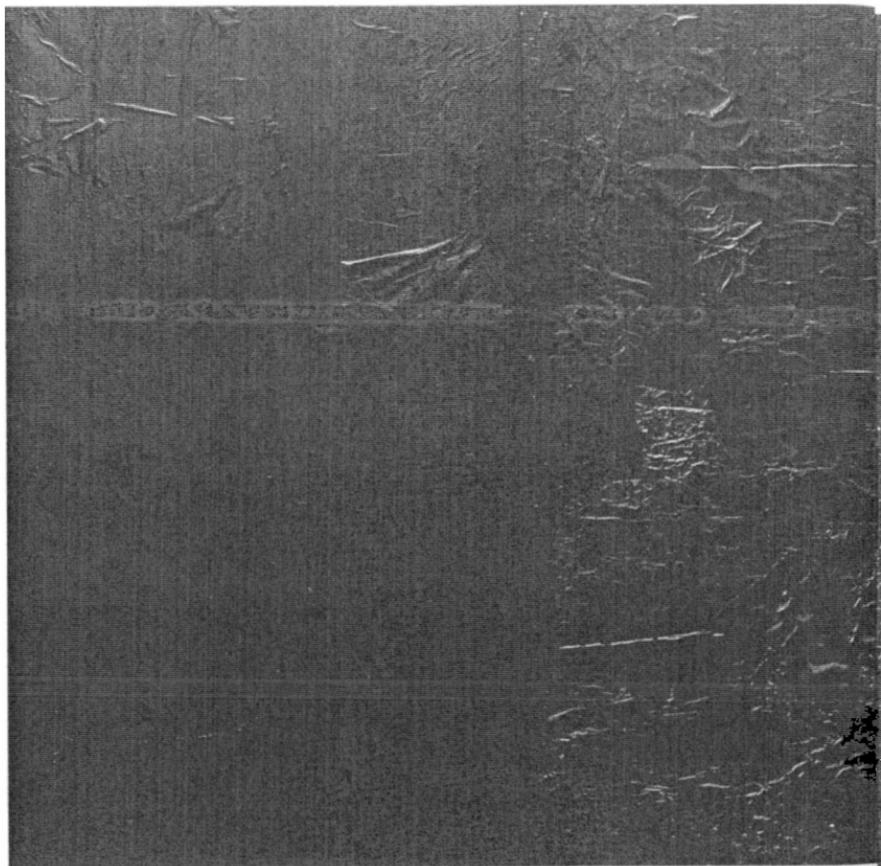
ings, his canvases gessoed with a repulsive icing before being punctured – shares a love for the excremental that puts them on the side of the “true fetishism” Leiris had spoken of.

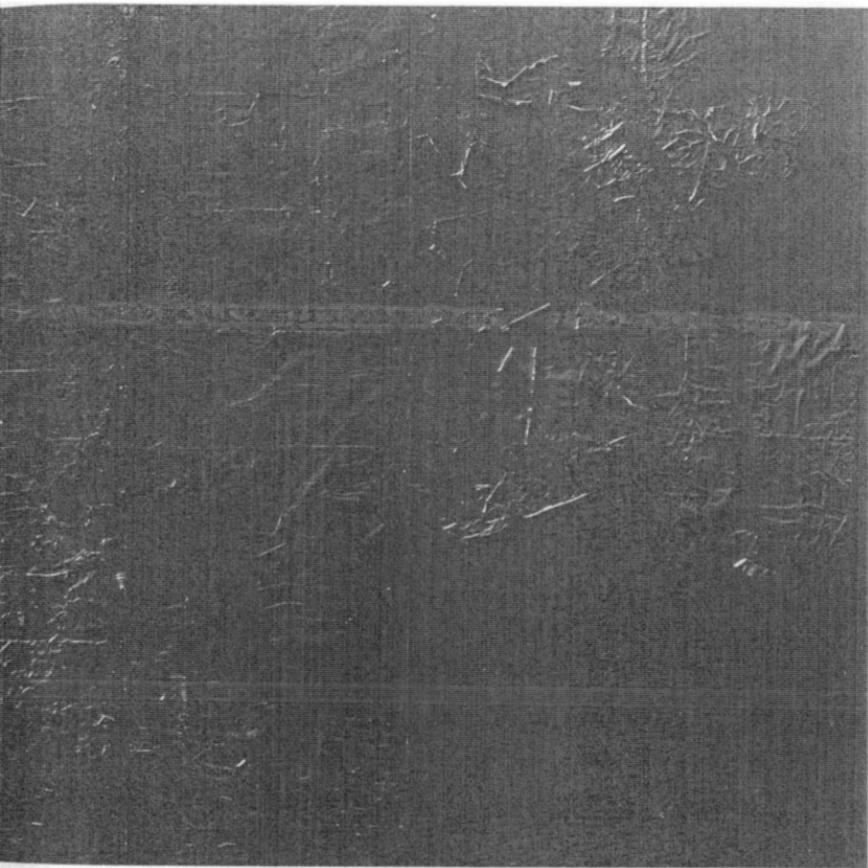
At this time Fontana was the leader of a little movement (which included Alberto Burri and Piero Manzoni) in Italy. In the early 1950s, Burri, having briefly exploited a pauperist vein with his assemblages of burlap bags (an inevitable allusion to the many beggars who populated postwar Italy), began to burn his materials. With his attack on wooden siding, connotations of poverty continued to emerge (slums, makeshift shelters), but they evaporated at the beginning of the sixties once Burri turned to plastic, the very material of the “reconstruction” (its spread in Europe coincided with the Marshall Plan) but also the very type of nonassimilable waste (figure 5). Demolishing the myth of plastic as infinitely transposable substance, as alchemical miracle, by burning it, Burri presents it as “wholly other.”¹⁸ Burri did not retain this love of disgust as such for very long: the melted holes of his *Combustioni* soon turned into configurations whose sexual imagery was all too readable, and his work lost its interest after this overloaded metaphorization of the burn, signaling a replacement of “true fetishism” by “transposed fetishism.” Given this rather sorry about-face, it is likely that Burri was not fully aware of what he had achieved in his burned plastics and that the idea of using this material came to him from Piero Manzoni, a younger artist who worked as early as 1960–61 with rather repulsive (to the European sensibility of the time) industrial materials, such as polystyrofoam and fiberglass – not to mention fake fur.

Manzoni, bursting with frenetic activity (he died at thirty, yet left a very large oeuvre), had the luck to find himself an alter ego, an artist whom he soon felt he had to attack without mercy, namely, Yves Klein, whose own career was no less fleeting. Ambition played a large part in Manzoni’s ceaseless torpedoing of his rival (as in a Western, Manzoni seemed to be warning Klein that there was only room for one of them in the world), and Klein’s precisely stated, ultra-idealist aesthetic helped Manzoni position himself as Klein’s opposite. It was as though Manzoni were saying to Klein, “You want to exhibit gold; I will exhibit shit; you want to pump up the artistic ego with your monochromes and your immateriality; I will put the artist’s breath in red balloons that I will burst.” All Manzoni’s gestures, from his *Achromes* on (beginning with the very decision to purge color), are to be read as so many responses to Klein’s work. At first, in the *Achromes* covered with kaolin (white clay used for porcelain), one can only detect admiration, but from 1960 on, which is to say once industrial materials begin to be employed as such, the parodic animosity knows no limits.

In another context (beginning in 1951, several years before Klein even appeared on the scene), Robert Rauschenberg explored the materiological vein of the monochrome with his black paintings. Were these works conceived as an attack on Rauschenberg's revered professor at Black Mountain College, Josef Albers, and his passion for the "interaction of colors"? Or were they rather an attack on the abstract-expressionist gesture? Partly both no doubt, but even more perhaps the black paintings canceled the fascination for the void and for "dematerialization," both of which had motivated the white monochromes that Rauschenberg himself had made several months earlier. While the white paintings are matte and stripped of all texture (all the more since the artist would recoat them when they became dirty), the black paintings exude materiality. In the large polyptych of 1951 (figure 18), the only extant large-scale work from this first series, sheets of crumpled newspaper are drowned in the shiny enamel paint that covers the surface of the painting, giving the impression that it has been dipped in fresh tar. Sometimes the paint peels, notably in a somewhat later series (1952-53): the shiny black enamel tears off in shreds, revealing that its support is a mass of newspapers. No fragment is opposed to any other in these pictures, no side relates to another: there is no "structure," no figure, a minimum of composition, which was generally left to chance. The painting is a whole, like the fecal cube by Fontana, an undifferentiated piece of matter. In hindsight, Rauschenberg's *Gold Paintings* (1953) (figure 7), where gold leaf (and sometimes a bit of silver) covers sheets of newspaper and other detritus, seem to be a prescient critique of Yves Klein's *Monogolds*: rubbing shoulders with other paintings made of mud or other ignoble materials, verging on kitsch, they give the precious metal's excremental value back. Rauschenberg's paintings in dirt or dust (for example, the extraordinary *Dirt Painting* [1953] covered with mold) confirm the adage that Freud quotes in English (where does it come from?) in "Character and Anal Erotism": "Dirt is matter in the wrong place."¹⁹ From 1951 until his first *Combine Paintings* (1955), Rauschenberg's work is one big celebration of nondialectical, inarticulable waste.

A little later (but independently) Dubuffet would also make mud paintings and gold or silver paintings (the *Matériologies* from late 1959 and 1960 [figure 45], the least figurative of Dubuffet's works and thus, perhaps, the only ones within his entire oeuvre to approach the "true fetishism" at issue here). For a long time Dubuffet had wanted to find a means of "rehabilitating mud" (a command he had issued in 1946). Unlike Rauschenberg, however, he could not stop himself from "transposing" somewhat: his mud is fake (it is made of papier-mâché and mastic). His "rehabilitation" quickly became decorative, which was no accident (since rehab-





B

Figure 18
Robert Rauschenberg,
Untitled, 1951.
Oil and newspaper on
canvas, 18 x 171 inches
(4 panels).
© 1997 Robert
Rauschenberg / Licensed by
VAGA, New York.

itation is uplifting, not lowering). To hold onto the low as low is not an easy thing, and one could apply to Dubuffet a remark Leiris jotted in his diary when *Documents* was in full throttle: "At present, there is no means of making something pass as ugly or repulsive. Even shit is pretty."²⁰

Perhaps this is what Bernard Réquichot felt when he wrote to the dealer he and Dubuffet had in common: "How I would like to bring several mountains into the gallery. To serve as a backdrop for Dubuffet."²¹ To swallow up false mud by a mound of real mud, to muddy painting as such. In fact, if Dubuffet transformed mud into painting (a transposition in the direction of the high), Réquichot transformed painting into mud in his *Reliquaires*.²² In 1930, reviewing a show of collages (whose catalogue's preface was Louis Aragon's famous essay "Defiance to Painting"), Carl Einstein complained about the postcubist bastardization of collage, seeing it "in danger of sinking into the fakery of petit-bourgeois decoration."²³ He insults Aragon slightly, yet without reproaching him for having left the glue out of his discussion (it is "not an essential characteristic," the surrealist poet had written, "a pair of scissors and some paper, that is the only palette necessary"²⁴). Of all *Documents*'s regular contributors, Einstein was perhaps the least inclined to follow Bataille to the end, down the slope of base materialism (and it is wrong to try to assimilate their positions²⁴). It is thus hardly surprising that this suppression of glue – the gluey reverse side of the figure that sticks it to the paper, the way roots are a hidden aspect of the flower – escaped him. But it would be naive to believe that Bataille would have noticed it either: there again, the limitations of his figurative aesthetic would have prevented him. Réquichot retained from collage *nothing but* the glue, and after having just read and analyzed "The Big Toe," Roland Barthes wrote:

The fundamental form of repugnance is agglomeration; it is not gratuitously, for mere technical experimentation, that Réquichot turns to collage; his collages are not decorative, they do not juxtapose, they conglomerate, extending over huge surfaces, thickening into volumes; in a word, their truth is etymological, they take literally the *colle*, the glue at the origin of their name; what they produce is the glutinous, alimentary paste, luxuriant and nauseating, where outlining, cutting-out – i.e., nomination – are done away with.²⁵

(See "Abattoir," "Figure," "Isotropy," "Jeu Lugubre," and "Part Object.")

C

Cadaver

Rosalind E. Krauss

In their group declaration in support of Charlie Chaplin, "Hands Off Love," the surrealists insisted that "in this whole matter it so happens that Charlot is simply and solely the defender of love."¹ As might have been expected, their enthusiasm turns on Chaplin's decision to override bourgeois morality with his own commitment to a higher order of values, in which his love for a woman other than his wife is expressed through the term they translate as *merveilleuse*, their approval couched as "that woman who is like a flash of fire, the 'wonderful' one, whose face from now on eclipses the sky for you."²

That the marvelous, love, and chance should all braid around one another in this paean to Chaplin's spirit of revolt — "Love sudden and immediate, before all else the great, irresistible summons"³ — makes this text entirely representative of Breton's notion of the revolutionary force available to surrealism through its appeal to Eros. Indeed, for Breton, many parts of the movement's early apparatus — its bureau of research intended to collect and publish the texts of dreams, its courting of free association through the techniques of automatic writing and drawing, and the playing of surrealist games of chance, its nocturnal urban wandering and visits to flea markets (which the situationists would later call the *dérive*) — were devices to release the power of unconscious drives, which Breton understood almost entirely as libido. If, as recent scholars have begun to argue, Breton's analysis of the marvelous has as much, or more, to do with the death drive as with the pleasure principle, if his ideas of objective chance are marked by the uncanny, and thus the domain of dread rather than that of erotic desire, if *Nadja* is less the love story Breton seems to think it is and more a tale about the return of the repressed, all of this must stand as a revision of Breton's own account of the movement in terms of the centrality of love.⁴

Thus there is a certain irony to be found in the embrace of the term *cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse) as the collective name for the various games of chance to which the group turned as a way of outwitting the rational mind and gaining access to the unconscious.

For this rubric – taken from the first sentence produced by a surrealist version of the party game “Consequences,” in which a sentence is written collectively by adding phrases to a piece of paper on which the previous contributions have been folded away from view, in this case producing “the exquisite corpse will drink the new wine”⁵ – summons up death into the orbit of that space in which Breton would least want to welcome it.

And indeed the struggle between eros and death, between chance as the unbridled upsurge of endless possibility and chance as the ultimate version of determination and control (what Aristotle would speak of as one form of causality, namely, the automaton), can be seen figured here in the very objects to which this name – corpse – was applied. For if there is a quality of anarchic freedom and explosive creativity in the exotic hybrids produced by the graphic versions of this technique or in the hyperbolic images spun by its verbal practice, it has surely escaped no one that the syntax of these creations is highly determined. The folds that mark each participant’s contribution off from the other correspond roughly to the sentence structure (of French) – subject, verb, object, modifier – on the one hand, and to the anatomical distribution of the human body into legs, torso, arms, head, on the other. And indeed, it might be argued, that with such a dependence on the figure’s (or the sentence’s) structure, it is *form* and thus reason, or consciousness, that rules over the “exquisite corpse.”

But at least as interesting as the persistence of the figural within this production is the struggle between the two conceptions of chance that are put in play by the “exquisite corpse,” conceptions to which two names, Breton and Bataille, must be attached. Since for all that Breton considered chance an open, ever exfoliating field of possibility brought occasionally into focus by the force of desire, Bataille was more interested in the *jeu lugubre* (lugubrious game), in which a structure rules absolutely over any apparent play of happenstance, a structure of recurrence and compulsion that “automates” and programs the field in relation to death. Indeed, while Breton saw the mainstay of surrealist creativity in the poetic image understood as the random coming together of two disparate linguistic elements, Bataille wrote entirely against the grain of the poetic and, as Barthes demonstrated in his analysis of Bataille’s *L’Histoire de l’oeil*, the startling quality of his writing comes from a kind of programmatic crossing of a grid of associations in which nothing is left to chance (see “*Jeu Lugubre*” below).⁶

In this context it would seem more than circumstantial that the very word *cadavre* would articulate the extreme conflict between these two men at the end of the 1920s: the one, surrealism’s absolute leader; the other, an alternative to whom many disaffected

a Gentleman," the large, centrally placed, doctored photograph that produces *Un Cadavre's* visual impact – of Breton as Christ, stolid in his coat and tie, his eyes closed, his famously leonine head surmounted by a crown of thorns – obviously reflects Bataille's analysis more than any of the other signatories, most of whom were more interested in calling Breton a "cop." For this image collapses two of Breton's enterprises onto one another to create a complex but continuous condemnation. On the one hand there is Breton's own 1924 broadside, *Un Cadavre*, launched after Anatole France's death, from which the accusation "Now that he's dead, we should prevent that man from leaving any dust behind him" ["Il ne faut plus que mort cet homme fasse de la poussière."] is taken and used as a caption in the present instance. On the other hand there is the famous group portrait of the surrealists ranged around René Magritte's painting *Je ne vois pas la nue cachée dans la forêt* (1929), all of them with their eyes closed, as if in dream, published in *La Révolution surréaliste* (no. 12 [1929]), from which Breton's own image is extracted and used as the cover illustration.

The Christ with whom Bataille is now identifying Breton is the very embodiment of what Bataille had contemptuously called "the simple (paternal) sign of universal homogeneity," which is to say, a cadaver that has passed beyond a state of rot into dust, having thus lost the lesson in doubleness and hence heterogeneity that the sacrificial rites of more terrifying forms of religion can still deliver. And it is this same trafficking in the homogeneous that Bataille would accuse Breton of in "The Play of Transpositions," his text on surrealism's play with psychoanalytic ideas of the unconscious and dream work, an unconscious, oneiric force shackled by Breton to the service of poetry, which itself serves the religious cause of an idealism that seeks to elevate and sublimate language (see "Abattoir" above).

But Bataille cautions, in his text, that he is not unmasking Breton as a priest and surrealism as a crypto-religion simply out of disgust; instead he says it is for "technical" reasons. Religion, he remarks, served in the past to hold out the idea of an afterlife in which the trials of this one would be redeemed, a kind of mythical resolution of the castration complex by a benevolent God Father. At present, however, because it is clear that only politics will bring about a change in man's condition, Breton tries to pass himself off as a revolutionary. And it is this confidence game, played out through a kind of mystificatory misuse of the domains of otherness – whether that of the cadaver or the unconscious – that Bataille is determined to denounce: "A false little man, who has collapsed with boredom in his absurd 'treasure troves,' that's good for religion, good enough for little geldings, for little poets, for little mystical runts. But

nothing will be overthrown with a big soft belly, with a library pack of dreams.”²⁵

There is another aspect of this image which should be noted, however, one which brings it into line with Bataille’s repeated heterological strategy, connecting it further with the unpublished “La Valeur d’usage de D.A.F. de Sade” (Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade) written the same year. The associations of Breton’s visage with that of Christ’s moves in the current of Breton’s own most self-aggrandizing and narcissistic posture as proudly leonine, his hair an energetic crown (what Bataille will later call Breton’s “Icarian posture”). But the article “Le Lion châtré” will associate this lion’s head not with nobility but with the very image of castration, the mangy lion, his hair not a magnificent aureole but a flea-bitten mane, the expression for which Bataille gives as “spittle head” (*tête à crachats*). Thus the very reach for grandeur – for Godhead – is what will castrate Breton, and unmask him as low. This image is the scatological gesture to perfection.

(See “*Jeu lugubre*” and “Uncanny.”)

D

Dialectic

Yve-Alain Bois

One must not confuse dialectics with scission (the division of everything in two, each having its high and its low part). The respective engines of these two operations might run on the same fuel – to wit, negativity – but the dialectic is geared toward a final reconciliation, toward the concord of absolute knowledge, while scission, on the contrary, always tries, by means of a low blow that attacks reason itself, to make the assimilation of the two opposites impossible. Scission is the basis of heterology as “the science of the wholly other” (not only through scission does heterogeneity dissociate itself from homogeneity, but the heterogeneous itself is divided into two: there is a high heterogeneous – God, for example – and a low, excremental one). The dialectic, for its part, aims only to reinforce homology: homology is simultaneously its foundation, its point of departure, and its point of arrival.

This argument depends on what we understand by “dialectics.” For Bataille and his contemporaries, the word inevitably evoked Hegel. Much ink has been spilled on the question of Bataille’s relation to Hegel; the critical consensus would seem to be that Bataille was fundamentally anti-Hegelian (or, as Denis Hollier puts it, that he was “only ever Hegelian out of a taste for contradiction”).

Bataille’s relationship to Hegel might be summarized as follows: Bataille published his first attacks on the Hegelian dialectic in *Documents*, without knowing much about it (above all with the view to criticizing surrealism, Breton in particular, who made constant reference to it). Beginning in 1931 – after the demise of *Documents* – and until 1934, Bataille participated in the activities of the Cercle Communiste Démocratique assembled around Boris Souvarine. Immersing himself in the works of Marx and Hegel, Bataille wrote a text, with Raymond Queneau, for the group’s journal *La Critique Sociale*, entitled “Critique des fondements de la dialectique hégélienne” (Critique of the Foundation of Hegelian Dialectics), which appeared in 1932. In this critique, Bataille mostly examined dialectical materialism’s use of Hegel. From 1933 to 1939, Bataille attended Alexandre Kojève’s lectures on Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Mind* at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, lectures that would “break, crush, kill him ten times over,” and from which he and Queneau left “suffocating, skewered.”² From this period on, with Kojève as mediator, Bataille maintained an alternately intense and relaxed, careless and anguished dialogue with Hegel.

But if Hegel ceaselessly grew in his estimation, it was as his chosen adversary, his *bête noire*. Even when Bataille was an assiduous student of Kojève’s, he did not hesitate to write (in January 1937): “Insofar as fascism values a philosophical source, it is attached to Hegel and not to Nietzsche.”³ One year later, after having tried unsuccessfully to interest Kojève in the activities of the College of Sociology, he wrote: “Hegelian phenomenology represents the mind as essentially homogeneous. On this point, recent data on which I rely [“French sociology,” to wit the work of Marcel Mauss, and psychoanalysis] agree in establishing a formal heterogeneity among different regions of the mind.” A little further on, Bataille continues: “Among the various objects of Hegelian description, negativity remains without a doubt a representation that is simultaneously rich, violent, and charged with a great expressive value. But the negativity I will speak about is of another nature.” (He then makes a reference to laughter and to sexual activity, before expounding on the sacred as “wholly other”).⁴

Bataille is not Hegelian; but is he dialectical? (More precisely, is he so at the time of *Documents* or a little later, when he develops the notion of heterology?) We think not, and there lies one of

our two fundamental disagreements with Georges Didi-Huberman's *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Bataille* (for the second disagreement, see "Figure" below). Leaning on the fact that the term "dialectic" makes an unremarked-upon appearance in a text by Bataille for *Documents* (and, to my knowledge, as far as Bataille's own contributions to the journal are concerned, only in this one: "Les Ecartés de la nature" [The Deviations of Nature]), Didi-Huberman incessantly makes the thinking of the *informe* into a dialectics—a dialectics aimed at the assumption of a third term, with the Hegelian synthesis neatly replaced by "the symptom."⁵

"The *informe*," "base materialism," "heterology," and "division into two" are to our minds all terms that imply the exclusion of the third term. This dualist mode of thought refuses to resolve contradictions (whence Bataille's interest in Gnostic Manichaeism and his radical incompatibility with Hegel, despite the fascination he may have had for the philosopher who, as Kojève remarked, "does not like dualism"⁶). This mode of thought sets a movement of asymmetrical division to work, separating high from low and, through its asymmetry, implying a fall from high to low. In "Le Cheval académique" (The Academic Horse), the first long text Bataille published in *Documents*, scission is still a bit static, a kind of oscillating alternation, since the two elements (high and low) are not concomitant (sometimes the noble horse, sometimes monsters, the one excluding the others).⁷ It's in "Le Gros Orteil" (The Big Toe) that the operation of division really starts to shake things up: "With their feet in mud but their heads more or less in light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will permanently elevate them, never to return, into pure space. Human life entails, in fact, a fury at seeing that it necessarily implies a back and forth movement from refuse to the ideal, and from the ideal to refuse—a fury that is easily directed against an organ as *base* as the foot."⁸ To read into this back and forth movement something like a dialectic at work (by overemphasizing, for example, the phrase "from refuse to the ideal") would be quite simply to ignore the motif of rage: those who suffer from corns on their feet do not like to be constantly reminded that even if one can freely idealize, sublimate, and transpose, one is still dealing with mud and rot. Even further, man's ideal of elevation is itself the cause of his fall. Bataille makes this point in "Soleil pourri" (Rotten Sun), which appeared one issue after "The Deviations of Nature": Icarus fell because he wanted to get too close to the sun. He did not take into account the sun's division in two; he only wanted to see the *elevated* sun, without considering its base combustion—the error that all those who have the presumptuousness to look at the sun directly commit in their turn. Bataille writes, "In practice the scrutinized sun can be iden-

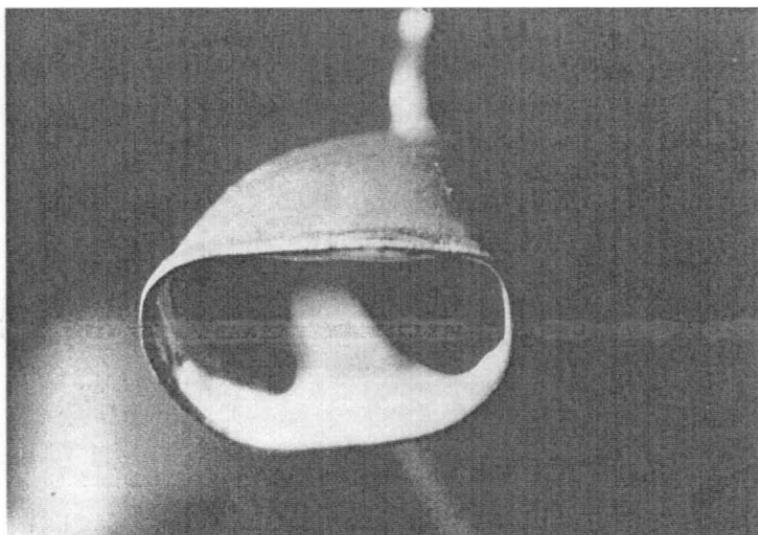


Figure 20.
Gnostic intaglio, photographed by Jacques-André Boiffard.
From *Documents 2* (1930), no. 1.

tified with a mental ejaculation, foam on the lips, and an epileptic crisis. In the same way that the preceding sun (the one not looked at) is perfectly beautiful, the one that is scrutinized can be considered horribly ugly.⁹ There is no dialectic in the fall; rather the desire for elevation partakes of the death drive. (Even sublimation in scientific work is not immune: Gustav Fechner, to whom Freud refers in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," became half mad and blind from having stared at the sun too much in the course of his research on retinal afterimages.¹⁰)

For Bataille, there is no third term, but rather an "alternating rhythm" of homology and heterology, of appropriation and excretion. Each time that the homogeneous raises its head and reconstitutes itself (which it never stops doing since society coheres only by means of its cement), the job of the *informe*, base materialism, and scission is to decapitate it. What is at stake is the very possibility of a nondialectical materialism: matter is heterogeneous; it is what cannot be tamed by any concept. In "La Notion de dépense" (The Notion of Expenditure) of 1933, Bataille calls matter the "non-logical difference that represents in relation to the economy of the universe what *crime* represents in relation to the law."¹¹ One might believe that this transgression of the law leads back to the dialectic. Not at all: the law (the common measure) simply masks the fact that there are only crimes – or, as Bataille notes in "The Deviations of Nature," that there are only deviations.

In that essay, the term "dialectic" indeed appears (and more than once). This exception might be explained by the reference at the end of the article to a lecture that Sergei Eisenstein had just given at the Sorbonne (though one should not overlook the caveat that Bataille appends to it: "Without broaching here the question of the metaphysical foundations of any given dialectic [emphasis added], one can affirm that the determination of a dialectical development of facts as *concrete* as visible forms would be literally overwhelming"¹²). Didi-Huberman, exploring the Eisenstein-Bataille connection in depth, came back with a pearl that had escaped the critical literature on Eisenstein: two issues after the publication of "The Deviations of Nature," *Documents* published a sequence of stills from Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929) – the film whose planned screening at the end of his lecture at the Sorbonne was interdicted by the police (the two-page sequence of images is prefaced briefly by Georges Henri Rivière, then introduced with a short text by Robert Desnos beginning with "To render concrete!", a phrase that recurs several times in Desnos's text).¹³ Stimulated by this find, Didi-Huberman went on to trace many other ties between Bataille and the Russian director – including the one, noted long before by Barthes, between the often "fetishistic" use of close-ups in



Eisenstein's films and Bataille's text on the big toe (Didi-Huberman pursues this affinity by adding to the dossier the Boiffard photographs used to illustrate that *Documents* article).¹⁴ But while Barthes (and, following him, many *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers) used Bataille's text to underscore what, in Eisenstein's films, contradicted – or at least formed a counterpoint to – formal dialectics and revolutionary semantics (that is, to the “obvious” meaning), Didi-Huberman gives the comparison a rigorously inverse role: Bataille's interest in Eisenstein would provide the providential proof that, like the Russian filmmaker, he is a dialectician first and foremost. Thanks to Georges Henri Rivière, we know that Eisenstein himself chose the stills and arranged their layout for *Documents*: had it been Bataille who had made the selection, it is unlikely that it would have been similar. I imagine him instead choosing *The General Line's* famous close-up of the cream separator (figure 21), wherein the mouth of the machine, pointed toward the viewer, allows one to see several drops of milk pearling its opening just before the ejaculation. As Pascal Bonitzer noted, “these first drops of ‘milk’ trembling on the mouth of the separator provoke,

Figure 21.
Sergei Eisenstein,
The General Line, 1929.

in Eisenstein's very explicit editing, an effect of ecstatic liberation, of orgasm, only by the dialectical linkage of fragments that, isolated... are above all anguishing, clearly referring to castration anxiety and to the part object."¹⁵ Eisenstein did not like isolated stills, as Jay Leyda informs us,¹⁶ precisely because in them the dialectic – which is to say, meaning – can collapse.

(See "Base Materialism," "Figure," "*Jeu Lugubre*," "Uncanny," and "Conclusion: The Destiny of the *Informe*.")

E

Entropy

Rosalind E. Krauss

Roger Caillois's example of entropy is simple: hot and cold water mixing together to settle into a uniformly tepid blandness.¹ Robert Smithson's is only somewhat more complex. To explain entropy he asks his reader to imagine a sandbox filled on one side with white sand and on the other with black.² A little boy begins to run around the enclosure in a clockwise direction, kicking up the sand as he goes and mixing together dark grains with light. He is then told to reverse his course and run counterclockwise. This will certainly do nothing to undo the movement toward uniformity and re-sort the two colors into separate fields. As his legs continue to churn, the process of entropy will, irreversibly, only progress and deepen.

Although both these meditations on the second law of thermodynamics were conceived at more or less the same time – Caillois's *La Dissymétrie* (Dissymmetry) was first presented as a lecture in 1970; Smithson's "Monuments of Passaic" was written in 1967 – Caillois's argument reaches back to his earliest, brilliant essays from *Minotaure*, which were published in the 1930s. *Méduse et Cie* (Medusa & Co.), his 1960 book on the phenomenon of animal mimicry which expanded the ideas of his 1935 "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," works on some of the same material that now concerns him in relation to entropy, namely, the dissymmetry between left and right that runs right back from the rightward spiraling of the galaxies, through the superior dexterity of the right

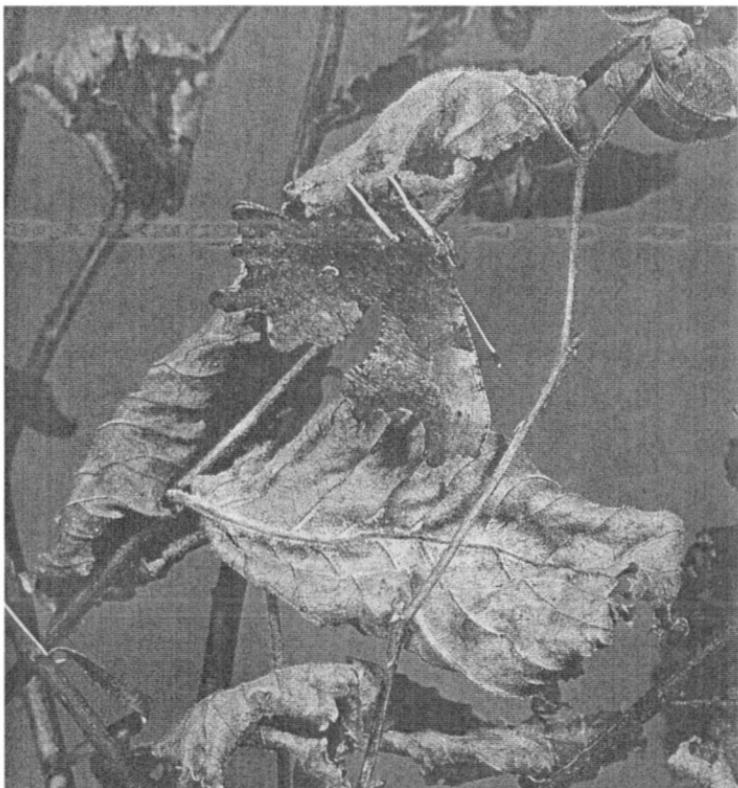


Figure 22.
Butterfly, "Robert
le Diable."
From Roger Caillois,
Mimétisme animal (1963).

side of humans, down to the preference for the right half of the nucleic chain in the chemical compounds that make up life.⁴

This bridge to the subject of mimicry, plus the nature of the two examples, particularly Smithson's, could give the impression that entropy's import is particularly acute for visual analysis and most especially for that which concerns modernist painting. For the image of the erasure of the sandbox's division between white and black seems to rhyme very nicely with the photographs from *Minotaure* of insects so perfectly imitating the patterns of their habitats as to vanish completely into the uniformity of one continuous texture. And this in turn suggests that what is at issue is the question of boundary or contour, which is to say, of the distinction between figure and ground.

Indeed, in Caillois's early essay, the boundary condition is precisely what breaks down in what he describes as a form of insectoid psychosis, when the animal is unable to keep the distinction between itself and its leafy milieu intact (figure 22). Caillois compares this condition to that reported by schizophrenics who feel themselves dispossessed and even devoured by the space around them. In the grip of this, he writes, "The individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever of space. He feels himself becoming space. . . . He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is 'the convulsive possession.'"⁴

The steady erosion of figure-ground distinction, which ties the schizophrenic to what has been termed the "subjective detumescence" of the animal gripped by mimicry,⁵ might indeed seem to blend imperceptibly into that clamor for the erasure of distinctions that characterized the world of avant-garde practice, such as the call for the collapse of the barrier "separating art from life." But more specifically, since the mimicry example apparently addresses the *visual* condition of figure-ground, it would seem to resonate with the ambition internal to "high modernism" to conceive a spatial condition unique to the perceptual modality specific to the arts of *vision*, one that would cancel all separations of figures from their surrounding spaces or backgrounds to produce a continuum unimaginable for our earthly bodies to traverse, but into which we as *viewers* might easily slide – or glide – in an effortless, soaring, purely *optical* movement.⁶

And "purity" is, indeed, the operative word in this ideological drive toward a visualist, or "optical," dimension. For in sloughing off the inevitable separations of space as we normally experience it, in which objects stand apart from one another and space is discontinuous with them, this new optical continuum would be the

result of what one school would call *sublation* – as figure and ground achieve a new and higher synthesis – and another *sublimation*, since the purified space would, in dispensing with bodies, rid itself as well of all the drives to which bodies are lamentably prone, erotic and otherwise. As both “sublation” and “sublimation” would indicate, furthermore, this act of purification is understood as formal progress, rather than the reverse: as a process of moving visual form closer to *eidos*; of visual form divested of its natural accoutrements and rendered into pure idea.

So it is important to note that the models Smithson actually built, whether in his early sculpture or his writings, were determinedly antivisualist. For him the intellectual challenge posed by entropy was temporal rather than spatial, which is why he liked the geological metaphor, the idea of a spatial site ravaged by billions of years of upheaval, which have resulted in the stratifications of the geological “clock.” Describing such a site, he writes: “Syncline (downward) and anticline (upward) outcroppings and the asymmetrical cave-ins caused minor swoons and vertigos. The brittleness of the site seemed to swarm around one, causing a sense of displacement.”⁷

And when he initially conceived of a sculptural model of this crystalline world, it was in the form of *Enantiomorphic Chambers* (1964), a work made up of facing mirrors positioned in such a way that the viewer placed between them – instead of being multiplied infinitely in the crossfire of reflections – would both disappear from the space ricocheting between the canted, facing planes and observe the trajectory of his or her gaze bifurcate into multiple, unsynthesizable vanishing points. It is not just the viewer’s body that cannot occupy this space, then, it is the beholder’s visual logic as well; *Chambers* explores what must be called a kind of “structural blindness.”

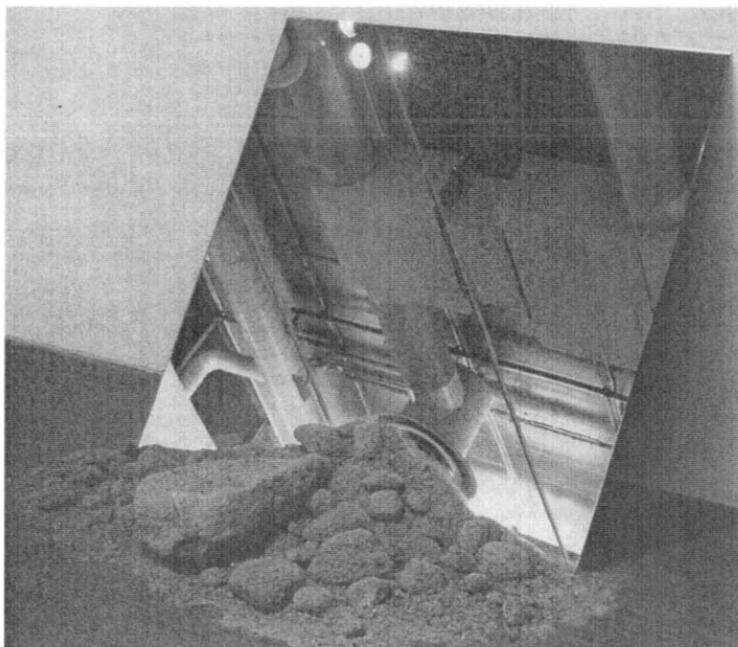
Another model for this vertiginous (anti-)visual field – antivisual because it logically erases any beholder – was the simulacral condition of the mirror itself, the mirror with which Smithson ends his tour of “the monuments of Passaic”: “I walked down a parking lot that covered the old railroad tracks which at one time ran through the middle of Passaic. That monumental parking lot divided the city in half, turning it into a mirror and a reflection – but the mirror kept changing places with the reflection. One never knew what side of the mirror one was on. There was nothing *interesting* or even strange about that flat monument, yet it echoed a kind of cliché idea of infinity.”⁸

When Plato introduces the notion of the simulacrum in *The Sophist*, he describes it as a copy that, though identical, has paradoxically become nonresemblant. Since all earthly objects are

themselves copies of *forms*, it is not the fact of being a copy that is simulacral, but that of being an *untrue*, nonresemblant copy. In Christian doctrine, humanity is made in God's image, but, having fallen into sin, no longer resembles Him. Christian revelation itself provides a guide through which the individual subject can map its way through a thicket of false replicas and back to the inner truth that would secure resemblance. But in *The Sophist*, Plato imagines the possibility of a mapless world, in which there would be no way to measure, no way to tell the difference between the true copy and the simulacrum, and thus "what side of the mirror one was on."⁹

This is why, for Smithson, entropy was less a condition of boundaries surmounted within a visualist space mastered by a transcendental subject than a function of a structural blindness brought on by a kind of simulacral riddle that perplexingly has no place in space at all (figure 23). Unsurprisingly, for Caillois as well, it is the

Figure 23.
Robert Smithson,
Slant Piece, 1969.
Mirror and rock salt.
Allen Memorial Art
Museum, Oberlin College,
Ohio, gift of the Buckeye
trust in memory of Ruth S.
Roush, 1980.



simulacral puzzle that is at the heart of his interest in mimicry. Caillois tells the story of the praying mantis, the ultimate mimetic animal, who not only folds itself into a stalk-like immobility through which it becomes visually indistinguishable from the branches on which it sits, but outrunning the visual in this domain, uses the strategy of playing dead as its main line of defense against predators. Indeed, so deep is the imitative reflex ingrained in this creature that it can, when decapitated and thus truly dead, continue to mime the functions of life, such as hunting for food, building a nest, even laying eggs, all the way up to the ultimate form of its preservation of life: "playing dead." And like Smithson's mirror of Passaic, it is this intellectual vista into the abyss of the undecidable-into-infinity that fixates Caillois on the praying mantis: this most spectacular model of the simulacrum performed as death imitating life imitating death.¹⁰

If subjectivity is born through reflexiveness, through the possibility of consciousness folding back on itself to take cognizance of itself in the "I think," it is the merely repetitive possibility of the reflex that undoes the subject, depriving the statement's "thinking" of its *ego*. Such is the case of the praying mantis, for which the automatism of "playing dead," which can occur from the vantage of either death or life, makes it possible to imagine the impossible statement "I am dead" to be projected within this situation. This utterance, which no person can truly pronounce from the horizon of its occurrence, but which the mantis exemplifies, demonstrates the way the simulacral condition is coupled with a radical desubjectivization. For in the case in point, the "am dead" is true; but either way, alive or dead, the "I" is not possible.

"I am seeing" is the analogous statement at the level of visual form. Reflexive modernism wants to cancel the naturalism in the field of the object in order to bring about a newly heightened sense of the subject, a form that creates the illusion that it is nothing except the fact that "I am seeing [it]." The entropic, simulacral move, however, is to float the field of seeing in the absence of the subject; it wants to show that in the *automatism* of infinite repetition, the disappearance of the first person is the mechanism that triggers formlessness.

(See "Liquid Words," "Threshole," and "Zone.")

F

Figure

Yve-Alain Bois

"Affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *informe* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit," Bataille wrote in the famous article "Informe," an entry in the *Documents* "critical dictionary." The sentence seems contradictory: on the one hand there is the equation "resembles nothing = *informe*"; on the other, a vague resemblance is indicated: "something like..."

There are two ways of reading this double proposition. Ours is to connect it to a previous one, occurring two sentences earlier in the text: "Whatever it [the *informe*] designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm." The *informe* is what must be crushed (or spat out), because it has no right in any sense, because it does not make any sense, and because that in itself is unbearable to reason. The *informe* is the unassimilable waste that Bataille would shortly designate as the very object of heterology. To say that the universe is *informe* is to say that it makes no sense and thus that it should be crushed like a spider or expectorated like mucous. Bataille's double proposition is thus not contradictory, the "something like" not referring to a resemblance but to an operation; the spit or the crushed spider are not themes (even though it is evident that Bataille chose them as examples because, besides their character as reject, they escape from geometry, the idea, morphology). Metaphor, figure, theme, morphology, meaning — everything that resembles something, everything that is gathered into the unity of a concept — that is what the *informe* operation crushes, sets aside with an irreverent wink: this is nothing but rubbish.

The second interpretation of Bataille's double proposition, from which we radically differ, puts the accent on the "something like," isolates it and thus reads it as metaphor. This is Georges Didi-Huberman's reading, set forth in his book *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir selon Georges Bataille*. An investigation of resemblance has been at the heart of Didi-Huberman's work for some time (he would cheerfully admit, I think, that this is his basic preoccupation), and in pursuing that investigation he became interested in

the texts and images Bataille published in *Documents*. The careful examination to which Didi-Huberman submitted the visual material published in Bataille's journal is very rich (comparisons with the contemporary surrealist magazines, unexpected relationships drawn between the images appearing in a single issue or linking one issue to another, the counterpoint between text and image), but, in our view, his basic hypothesis is false. Generating the oxymoron "*ressemblance informe*" (formless resemblance), Didi-Huberman reintroduces wholesale everything the concept of *informe*, such as we understand it, wants to get rid of. The theoretical project of *Documents* becomes "an anthropology of resemblance and of cruelty"; "the movement of the *informe*" is declared to be shaking things up "once the 'human face' is decomposed and resemblances 'shriek'"; the *informe* is presented as a "rhythmic condition of form"; the "concrete" matter so dear to Bataille becomes "concrete, which is to say *figural*."¹ Thematic unities reappear (the eye, or drowning, for example); morphology becomes an essential category; metaphor, since resemblance is the major preoccupation of the book, is a general operator within it.²

"The *informe* would thus specify a certain power that forms have to deform themselves constantly, to pass quickly from the like to the unlike," Didi-Huberman writes; and in so doing the *informe* is thus neatly mapped onto the idea of deformation.³ Accordingly, the slightest alteration to the human anatomy, in a painting for example, would be said to participate in the formless — which comes down to saying that modern figurative art, in its quasi-totality, would be swept up into such a definition. This also implies that the term *informe* would cover so enlarged a realm as to no longer have any bite. This is the risk one runs in wanting to measure the formless against resemblance or unlikeness at any price, instead of being aware that "resembles nothing" is neither to be unlike something in particular, nor to resemble something that turns out to be nothing.

Having said that, the interpretation given by Didi-Huberman, against which I am arguing here (and which goes against everything that the present project is trying to demonstrate), is not entirely out of the blue. In fact, it is paradoxically more or less Bataille's own, once he sets himself to "applying" the idea of the *informe* to the art of his day. Just as the texts in which Freud "applies" psychoanalysis to art are much less interesting, with regard to art itself, than certain essays (including purely clinical accounts) where art isn't even mentioned, so Bataille's writings in *Documents* about modern art are less advanced, particularly with regard to the *informe*, than his essays on any other subject. And Bataille was not alone, in this respect, among *Documents*'s contributors: the journal's entire staff, as diverse as it was, suffered from the same limi-

tation. One could define this limitation as figurative, or (to accept Didi-Huberman's argument by inverting it) one could speak of a limitation due to one's being haunted by resemblance.

A perfect example is provided by the *Documents*'s special issue devoted to Picasso. In "Recent Canvases by Picasso," a heavily illustrated article that appeared in the preceding issue, Michel Leiris had set the tone. He observed that it is very hard to write about Picasso (most of the texts in the special issue are pure chitchat); that it is impossible to avoid "the hymns of the Initiates when faced with the Master" (Leiris says that one should speak of Picasso in another way but instantly disobeys this rule, as do all the other contributors to this very pious special issue); that one must take issue with the surrealist interpretation of Picasso (the flight from reality, the Marvelous, the dream, the symbol); and that one must instead insist on Picasso's realism, in that he "digs into," "mines," and "pushes" reality "to its last barricades" because he "knows better than anyone the exact weight of things, the measure of their value, their materiality."⁴

All this, accompanied by the obligatory paeans to the protean character of Picasso, is repeated with different variations in the special issue. The choice of illustrations is not particularly surprising (one has the feeling of flipping through *Cahiers d'art*), except for two illegible scrawls, ink splotches from which a vague silhouette emerges (a bit like in a Fautrier), each simply captioned "album page" but nowhere discussed.⁵ The texts are alternately ordinary and grandiloquent, lazy and pretentious (the distinction Carl Einstein tries to draw between Picasso and Hegel is no slouch in this genre), but taken as a whole rather bland.⁶

The only essay to rise above this hodgepodge is Bataille's "Soleil pourri" (Rotten Sun). Though brief, it only addresses Picasso at the very end (the text introduces into *Documents* the idea – dear to Bataille – of the division of the sun into two, the star "that was shining at the moment of Icarus's elevation, and the one that melted the wax, causing failure and a screaming fall when Icarus got too close"). Bataille voices his doubt about the possibility of applying such a dichotomy to painting (although he does not hesitate applying it to anything else in the journal; it is the very movement of "base materialism" to divide anything whatever in two): "it would be *a priori* ridiculous to try to determine the precise equivalents of such movements in an activity as complex as painting." But, he adds, "It is nevertheless possible to say that academic painting more or less corresponded to an elevation – without excess – of the spirit. In contemporary painting, however, the search for that which most ruptures elevation, and for a blinding brilliance, has a share in the elaboration or decomposition of forms, though this is, in

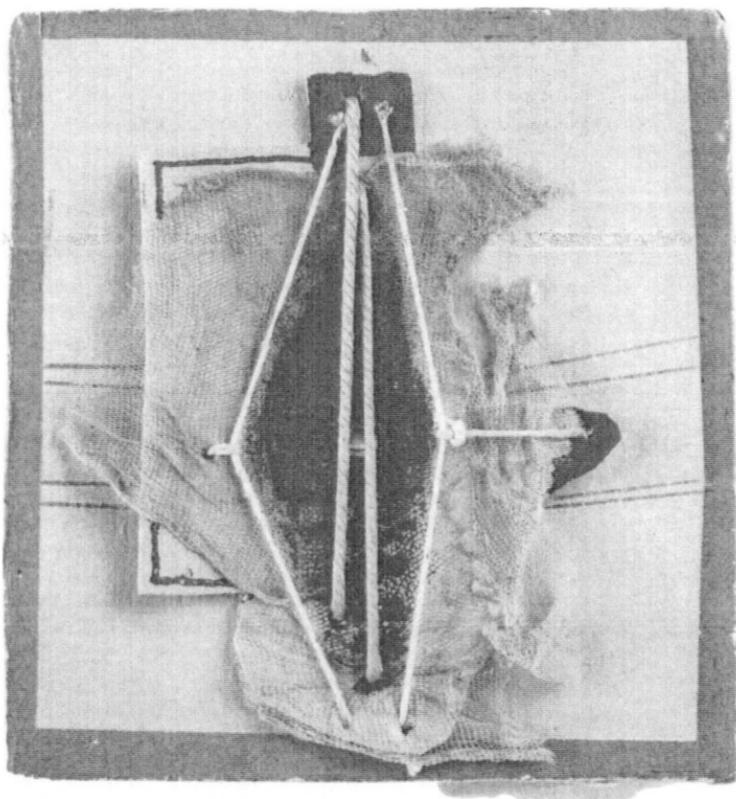
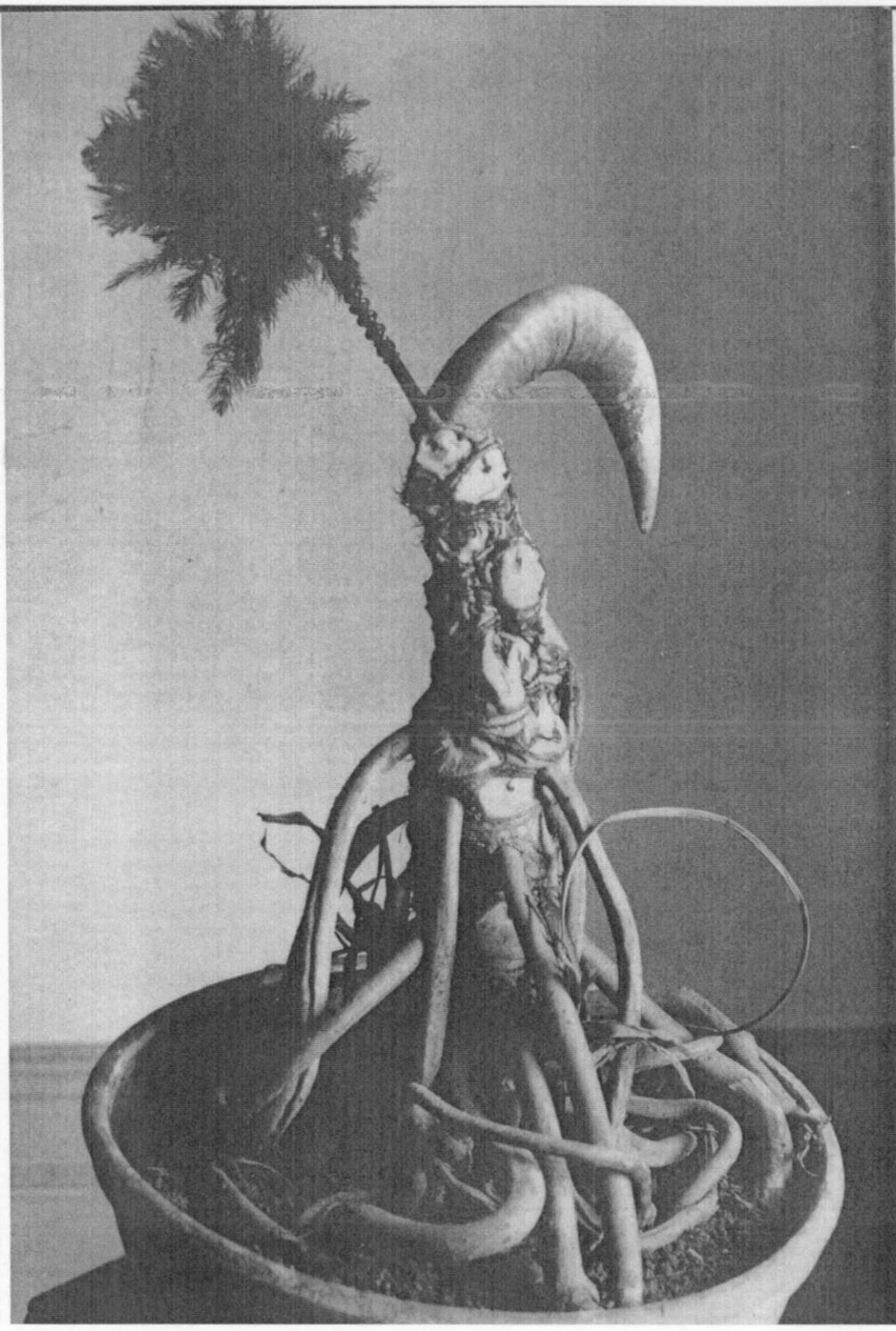


Figure 24.
Pablo Picasso,
Guitare, May 1926.
String, cloth, and painted
cardboard, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 inches.
Musée Picasso, Paris.
© 1997 Estate of Pablo
Picasso/ARS, New York.

ever so small a degree, only noticeable in the paintings of Picasso."⁷

The "in ever so small a degree" is important: Bataille has relatively little confidence in art (*Documents* drew to a close with an acknowledgment of failure, with a condemnation of art as an ineluctably idealist form of "transposition"). Furthermore, Bataille saw art's trajectory as a kind of dizzying fall through an excess of elevation: art is access to the "wholly other" by means of what Denis Hollier would later call "high transgression."⁸ But what of "base transgression," of a fall toward the low through which the *informe* drags down what it de-classes? For Bataille, art, even Picasso's, is unable to partake of low transgression.

However, Picasso had in fact explored this possibility in an (admittedly exceptional) series of works, roughly contemporary with *Documents*. Yet we find nothing in the magazine that relates to these works: nothing on the little "constructions" made of rags in 1926 (figure 24), nor on the large *Guitare* from the same year, outlined in nails and skewered, its fleshy color evoking painful associations with mutilation or skin grafts. *Documents* makes no comment either, despite the mortuary smell that emanates from them, on Picasso's little sand reliefs from 1930: the remains of disaster sanded over and left gray as dust. And even though *Documents* was no longer being published when Picasso (ca. 1931) made the incongruously extraordinary, ephemeral assemblage, photographed by Brassai and composed of the tentacle-like roots of some decapitated plant, a feather duster, and a bull's horn (figure 25), one might expect Bataille to have celebrated it in another venue, so much does it seem to illustrate his "impossible and fantastic vision of roots swarming under the surface of the soil, nauseating and naked like vermin."⁹ Nor did *Documents* take any notice of the little *Figure* of the same moment, a vaguely anthropomorphic sculpture, it is true (though the title is not Picasso's), where a tangle of iron suffocates two metal struts. Now — extraordinary cat's cradle — it is the very high priest of "transposition," the one whom *Documents* had condemned for the "cooptation" to which he submitted Picasso's work since the birth of surrealism, it is André Breton who became the great advocate of these objects — the same Breton whom Bataille had so irritated by his article on "Le Langage des fleurs" (The Language of Flowers), from which the above-quoted phrase on the roots is taken. Breton's enthusiasm for these works is all the more startling in that he was even more enslaved to a figurative aesthetic of "deformation" than Bataille. It is doubtless a bidding war that we see here. Breton's article appeared in the first issue of *Minotaure* (a journal whose name had been suggested by Bataille), which was published after *Documents* folded. With Bataille having closed the final issue of his magazine by declaring the impotence of art,



Breton decided to “do a Bataille number” – decided to put the accent on the “base materialist” side of Picasso that Bataille had chosen to overlook. It is true that Breton, in immediately placing himself under the wing of Hegelian dialectics, inverted what Bataille understood to be at work in the very notion of “base materialism”; nevertheless, the bidding war harbored several surprises.

Breton had ended *The Second Surrealist Manifesto* with a diatribe against Bataille: he took offense at Bataille’s attacks against Hegel, at his use of Sade, at his “antidialectical materialism.” In addition to “The Language of Flowers,” Bataille’s “Figure Humaine” (Human Face) had enraged him. Breton had been particularly irritated by the parallel Bataille drew between the place “of the *ego* in the metaphysical whole” and “that of a fly on the nose of the orator.”¹⁰ The manifesto then elaborates on the fly (with quotations from Lautréamont) and finally declares: “The only reason we are going on at such length about flies is that Mr. Bataille loves flies. Not we: we love the miters of old evocators, the miters of pure linen to whose front point was affixed a blade of gold and upon which flies did not settle, because they had been purified to keep them away.”¹¹ The opposition could not be more marked (the “pure linen” as opposed to the fly specks), to which Bataille might have had the fun of retorting: “If you had really read your Freud, you would know that it’s a fine line between gold and shit.”

Yet Breton reports in his *Minotaure* article:

Among the many pictures and objects that Picasso showed me that day . . . there was a small unfinished painting . . . the center of which contained simply a large impasted lump. After checking that it was dry, Picasso explained to me that this painting was meant to represent a piece of excrement, as, indeed, would become quite evident once he had placed the relevant flies in position. He only deplored the necessity of using paint for want of a suitably durable genuine dried excrement, and regretted especially the lack of one of those particularly inimitable turds that he sometimes noticed in the county at the time of year when children eat cherries without bothering to spit out the stones.

Breton does not stop there; he is too aware of the very Bataillan (antitranspositional) character of this passage. His next sentence is intended as a refutation of the heterological thesis concerning unassimilable waste (the excremental “wholly other,” which is also the sacred): “The predilection for such cherry stones in this situation seems to me, I must say, to provide the most objective proof possible of the very particular interest that the relationship between the unassimilated and the assimilated should arouse: a relationship

Figure 25.

Brassaï.

Le Plumeau et la corne

(sculpture by Picasso).

1933.

Silver print, 9 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches.

Madame Brassai Collection.

Paris.

whose variations, in terms of the benefit to mankind, may well be considered the essential motivating force of artistic creation." The peroration that follows, also directed against Bataille (and more particularly against "L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions" [The Modern Spirit and the Game of Transpositions], the very text in which Bataille signals a certain failure of art), marks a return to idealization, to the symbolization characteristic of surrealism: "Any slight and passing repugnance that might have been aroused by this solitary lump around which the painter had not yet started to weave his magic was more than exorcised by such considerations. I even caught myself visualizing the shiny, brand-new flies which Picasso would conjure up."¹²

Despite this final pirouette through which Breton erases what he had just written, so as to make Picasso into the genius of transfiguration (and thus yet again, of the Marvelous), Breton has nonetheless agreed for a moment to put his nose in the manure. He would seem to be ready to countersign Jacques Lacan's famous dictum (doubtless indebted to Bataille): "We have to get our colors where they're to be found, that is to say, in the shit."¹³ Thus there was indeed a fleeting trespass onto Bataille's territory. It would have been wonderful to see how the latter would have reacted, how he would have pointed out that even when Breton manages to interest himself in fly specks, he cannot stop himself from recurring to the "pure linen" of "artistic creation," to the "magic" that allows one to "exorcise . . . repugnance." Finally, one hopes that Bataille would have picked up on Breton's documentation of the excremental vein in Picasso's recent production and begun to reconsider the role that "base transgression" played in Picasso's work. But no. In the brief and hostile review he published of *Minotaure's* first issue, the frustrated Bataille restricted himself to calling attention to the "very beautiful reproductions of sculptures and drawings by Picasso" and declaring: "André Breton's article on Picasso adds nothing to the essay by the same author collected in *Surrealism and Painting*"¹⁴ — a claim that is obviously false.

(See "Base Materialism," "Dialectic," "Gestalt," and "*Jeu Lugubre*.")

HORIZONTALITY



Figure 26.
Michelangelo Caravaggio.
Narcissus. 1596-97.
Oil on canvas.
44 x 36 1/4 inches.
Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

G

Gestalt

Rosalind E. Krauss

Here is an apparent contradiction. The Gestalt psychologists speak of perceptual space as "anisotropic," which is to say, fundamentally nonsymmetrical. Unlike the space of the physicist, the phenomenologist's ether is heavier at the bottom than it is at the top, denser in back of objects than it is in front of them, and different on the right side than on the left. Made, then, in the self-image of the human subject—subject to gravitation, ventrally sighted, dextrally favored—perceptual space is in this sense a projection of that subject, returning the perceiver's own potential image as though in an invisible mirror.

But the Gestalt psychologists also speak of this same experiential space as fundamentally centered, and thus deeply symmetrical, since radial symmetry, rotating in all directions around a point, is the most complete form of spatial balance. And indeed when the psychologist goes on to speak of the Gestalt itself, the figure which is sensed as well-built, as most securely hanging together, as guided by the rules of "good form" to constitute a whole rather than a shapeless mass of inchoate fragments, it will be symmetry and particularly center that will ballast these rules. For no matter how riven the body is, between up and down, front and back, and right and left, and thus how unequal the spatial coordinates, it is the centering of the conscious subject through the experience of the Gestalt itself as centrally organized image that is continually mapped onto this perceptual field.

Writing his essay on the mirror stage in 1936, at the height of Gestalt psychology's influence, Jacques Lacan seized on this model of the Gestalt's "good form" as securing the centered subject, which is to say, of being the first instance for the infant of finding in visual space a figure of coherence, balance, and wholeness which will model the possibility of subjective stability and will thus serve to prefigure the "I". Arguing that "this *Gestalt*—whose pregnancy¹

should be regarded as bound up with the species, though its motor style remains scarcely recognizable – by these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating distination...”²² Lacan accepts the Gestaltists’ terms for the permanence of the image (“these two aspects,” namely, that it be bounded and symmetrical) and only adds that the mechanism of identification – insofar as the image is necessarily external to the subject because seen in a mirror – will ultimately be alienating.

What Lacan does not mention, however, is that that image, as seen in the mirror, will also be upright. There might of course be confusion about this since, if the anthropologist in us imagines an origin for this mirror “scene,” set not within modern-day domestic spaces but at some chronologically remote origin of the species, we would imagine the child – Narcissus-like – bent over the reflective surface of a pool of water, finding the source of his *imago* spread on a horizontal field. Indeed, Lacan’s own intense fascination, in the 1970s, with the Palazzo Barberini’s painting of Narcissus by Caravaggio (figure 26), in which a beautiful, rustically clad boy kneels at the edge of a pond, his bent head and arms forming a continuous arch echoed exactly by the glassy reflection, might seem to confirm this site of the image as a horizontal plane. This would, however, overlook the configuration of the image wrought by the painting itself, in which the reflection redoubles the crouching body to turn it into an elegantly elongated oval, and the symmetry of the composition wheels around the central point established by the figure’s projecting knee. It is the painting itself, then, that converts the actual bodily position into a visual Gestalt, thereby dramatizing that for the subject of vision, the subject who is using the image to stabilize his own ego around a center of consciousness, all images – whether seen on a horizontal plane or not – will enter the space of his or her imagination as upright: aligned with the verticality of that viewer’s own body.

Within this reasoning about perceptual logic, “seeing” bifurcates into two distinct functions: with the vision of animals focused on the horizontal ground on which they and their prey both travel, a vision that is therefore, in certain ways, merely an extension of the sense of touch; but with the sightedness of mankind recharacterized as “beholding.” Qualified by its acknowledgment of the distance that separates the “beholder” from his object, the gap built into the human perceptual relation is what provides a space for all those varieties of vision which separate man from animals: contemplation, wonder, scientific inquiry, disinterestedness, aesthetic pleasure. And in turn, the distance built into the very mechanism of beholding is a function of the upright posture with its dissocia-

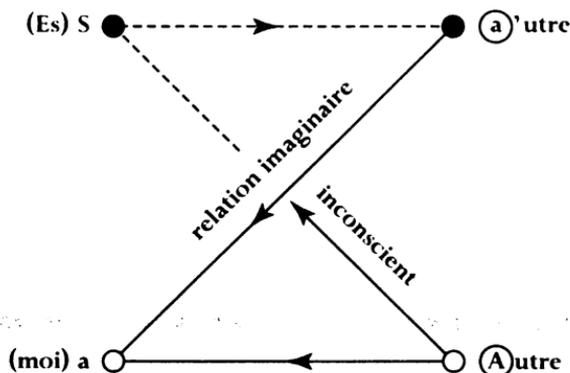


Figure 27
L-Schema from Jacques
Lacan, *Ecrits* (1966)

tion of vision from the horizontality of the ground. "We are able to behold things in a plane perpendicular to the direction of our gaze," the psychologists wrote, "i.e., in the plane of fronto-parallel *Prägnanz* and of transparent distance."¹ The "beheld" image will thus be vertically oriented within the visual field, since it will be experienced as "fronto-parallel" to the viewer's upright body.

The consequences of this verticality had been spelled out by Freud as early as his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and again in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), in which he also speaks of the restructuring of unconscious processes as a consequence of man's "erecting himself from the earth."² The imbrication of animal vision not only with touch but even more with smell, intimately tied seeing and sexuality. But as a result of man's newly won vertical posture, the localized sensory relation to the sexual organs is permitted an added visual dimension, since now "its interest can be shifted away from the genitals on to the shape of the body as a whole."³ This dimension, a function of the experience of the Gestalt (shape ... as a whole), Freud then describes as "sublimation," a diversion of libinal energy away from its original erotic goals to refocus it "in the direction of art."

This intersection of visual form (Gestalt) and psychoanalysis is given yet another twist in the Lacanian conception of the way the mirrorlike Imaginary acts as an important relay for the linguistic dimension he calls "Symbolic." In Lacan's L-Schema (figure 27), the relationship between the Symbolic site of the unconscious –

also termed "the Other" – and the ego is figured through a double arrow, one pointing directly at the pole of the ego, the other looping its way through the other corners of the diagram and thus traversing the Imaginary before it reaches this ego or "I." The first arrow diagrams the sense in which the subject's meanings arise not from himself as their source but in the chain of signifiers that structure the field of the Symbolic and, by substituting themselves for him, produce him as their function. In this sense, the subject of the Symbolic is himself fragmented and dispersed, caught up in a system of displacements. But the second arrow, which threads the unit of the sign through the Imaginary process, indicates the way in which meaning itself is relayed to the subject (now reconstituted as ego) via the Gestalt, which is to say, by means of a state of hanging-togetherness, or unity, with which he himself identifies. The Imaginary, that is, continues to play a part in the Symbolic's meaning-effect, insofar as the Gestalt provides the illusion that meaning itself is, first, resolvable, unifiable, univocal, *one*; and, second, a reflection of the subject, as in a mirror, thus belonging to the subject, arising from him.

And if, to move this relation between Symbolic and Imaginary even one step further Lacan names the master signifier in the linguistic chain "the *phallus*," this is not simply because the phallus (as mark of sexual difference) operates the pure differentiability that is necessary to section off one signifier from another in the linguistic chain, but also because the very generation of meaning interpellates the subject into its system through the mirrored relay of phallic-unity-as-Gestalt-as-cognitive unity. In this sense we could say that Lacan widens the field of the Gestalt from vision to signification, spreading its net to the phallic "one" as meaning/being.

No such connection would have surprised Bataille less. For the logic set up by his little "Informe" bombshell tied formlessness not only to a visual field in which the world refuses to take on the unity of a set of Gestalts, resembling instead the inchoateness of the blob of spit or the crushed spider, but located it at the same time within the cognitive categories through which meaning is built. And in the word he uses for the obstruction of those categories – *déclasser* – he adds the necessary revectoring that must accompany the work of formlessness, since folded into this word is not only the idea of stripping off the "mathematical frock coats" of the categories, but also that of lowering these integers – whether visual or cognitive – from their upright position as vertical Gestalts, by knocking them off their pedestals of form, and thus bringing them down in the world.

(See "Horizontality" and "Isotropy.")

H

Horizontality

Rosalind E. Krauss

It is several weeks before May Day, 1936, in a big loft facing onto Union Square, in New York City. David Siqueiros, Mexican revolutionary, Communist, and major mural painter, is directing a large group of young artists in the construction of banners and floats for the upcoming parade. Among these are two of the younger Pollock brothers, Jackson and Sande. The atmosphere is very different from The Art Students League, where Jackson Pollock had spent several years in the painting classes of Thomas Hart Benton. For Siqueiros's talk, endlessly political, is a loud and energetic harangue against easel painting. Canvas and oils are the outworn conventions of a dying bourgeois culture, he exults. "Down with the stick with hairs on its end," he commands.¹

And true to his position, the paintbrush is far less in evidence during the preparations than is the spraygun, since many of the banners are made by placing stencils onto stretches of material laid on the studio floor and spraying color around them to produce superimpositions of negative silhouettes. In the formerly industrial space of this loft there are no easels to be seen, and gradually the floor becomes a strange palimpsest of sprayed color and dribbled commercial enamel as the banners are created and then removed, to be mounted onto the supports that will thrust them high into the air: the images and messages of world union.

At this moment in the mid 1930s, then, Siqueiros's signal to Jackson Pollock was strangely mixed. The floor had become a production site that was set in direct opposition to the vertical axis of the easel of the artist's studio, or the wall of the bourgeois apartment, or the high-cultural ideals of the museum. But the product of this horizontal site was cultural nonetheless in that it continued to be a representation — the inevitable verticality of its Gestalt left entirely intact. Siqueiros had preached a lecture against "culture," but he had continued to consolidate culture's ally in the form of the sublimated field of the image.

That the horizontal plane might be understood as an axis at variance with the vertical orientation of the canvas was a position Walter Benjamin had already sketched in the late teens, when he

theorized a distinction between drawing and painting. "We should speak of two cuts through the world's substance," he wrote, "the longitudinal cut of painting, and the transversal cut of certain graphic productions. The longitudinal cut seems to be that of representation, of a certain way it encloses things; the transversal cut is symbolic, it encloses signs."² More than half a century later a similar opposition between vertical and horizontal fields would be elaborated by Leo Steinberg, similar in that here, too, pictorial representation, with its alliance with the space around us and thus with something Steinberg abbreviated as "nature," was contrasted with the field of written signs, or what he analogized to printers' forms, or *flatbeds*, in which lines of type cast in lead are set, their necessary horizontality already forecasting the reader's orientation to the printed page.³ The horizontal cast of this kind of imagery – horizontal despite any particular position in which it might be encountered (as Benjamin wrote, it is "the internal meaning" that remains horizontal) – Steinberg related to what he called the "flat-bed picture plane," and he aligned this new conception of the horizontally laden canvas with "culture."

In the early 1940s Pollock had experimented with automatic writing along with other New York painters, such as Robert Motherwell, William Baziotis, and Matta, in a collective effort to make contact with what was then being deemed the most important force in man's world: the unconscious. It was not just the surrealists, now residing in New York, who were addressing this force, but also important local figures, ones who were especially close to Pollock, such as John Graham. But Pollock's experiments with automatic writing – elaborated as a kind of numerological and alphabetic doodling – done at the scale of important pictures, such as *Stenographic Figure* (1942), carried with them a doubly disappointing message. If the unconscious was a force at war with "culture" (seen as a form of libidinal energy that could only produce a civilization shackled – in Freud's terms – by its own "discontents"), then the field of writing, itself fully programmed as cultural, cannot track this force. Second, the painting made clear, written signs set within a pictorial field cannot not hold out against the fronto-parallel organization of the Gestalt, with its drive to verticalize everything as image, to align everything in accordance with the viewer's upright body. Not only were the stenographic doodles in Pollock's picture made in the image of culture rather than that of the unconscious, but – rising into the field of the vertical – they were also recast in the image of *form*.

In the name of the unconscious, Pollock wished to strike against form, and thus against the axis of the human body. But equally in the name of the unconscious, Pollock needed to strike against cul-

ture. And the move he went on to make in the opening days of 1947, circling back somehow to the logic of the loft on Union Square, was to sweep the horizontal field of writing off the table that made it a surrogate for "culture," and dump it – as so much trash – onto the floor of Siqueiros's anticultural revolt. The floor, Pollock's work seemed to propose, in being below culture, was out of the axis of the body, and thus also below form.

It was thus in January 1947 that Pollock first lowered a vertical painting covered with the totemlike figures he had been painting in the previous months onto the floor of his studio and defaced their vertical bodies with an interlaced dribble of thinned paint. But this gesture quickly gave way to a new logic: one need not literally deface the image of a body in order to attack the verticality of the axis the body shares with culture; it was enough to attack the axis itself to undermine the two together.

That Pollock was intent on asking his viewers to see the newly invented idiom of his "drip pictures" via the site within which they had been made – the horizontality of the floor onto which the vertical had been *lowered* – becomes clear in a work like *Full Fathom Five* (1947) (figure 28), the dripped and encrusted surface of which bears nails, buttons, keys, tacks, coins, matches, and cigarette butts. This heterogeneity of trash which Pollock dumped onto the painting in the course of its execution testifies not merely to "the internal meaning" of the work's horizontality but also to the "bassesse" of this condition.

The debris of *Full Fathom Five* could be thought to have been rescued somehow and resublimated by the elegance of its very literary title, coming as it does from the famous lines of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes: / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange." And indeed it is the extraordinary literariness of most of the titles in this first group of 1947 drip pictures – titles such as *Sea Change*, *Reflections of the Big Dipper*, *Galaxy*, *Watery Paths*, and *Vortex* – that collectively tend to mask the import of lowness encoded onto Pollock's assumption of the horizontal. Since none of these titles were Pollock's own, however, but were instead the contributions of Ralph Manheim, a neighbor to Pollock's relative isolation in Springs, Long Island, and the translator of Thomas Mann, the pretensions to "literature" are easily explained. But what the titles all capture nonetheless, if not the intentions to lowness, is the viewer's new relation to the canvas as though it were a field onto which he or she were looking *down*. What is unmistakable, the titles suggest, is that the axis of the image has changed.

But beyond the titles and the trash, it was Pollock's mark that



testified to the horizontal import of the drip pictures, an "internal meaning" they would retain even after they had been lifted off the ground on which they had been made and onto the wall on which they would be viewed. Dripped and flung from sticks or disfigured paintbrushes, the mark was composed of thinned oil or commercial enamel that would lace over the supine canvas surfaces, now increasingly left unprimed. This meant that, in places, the poured line would leach out into the weave of the canvas like a viscous, oily stain, while in others the filaments would sit high and ropey on top of one another, and in still others the paint would puddle up and dry unevenly, its crusty surface pulling into scummy-looking scabs. What would never occur in a Pollock made between 1947 and 1950 would be the kind of "runoff" so characteristic of the other abstract expressionist painters, from Arshile Gorky to Willem de Kooning to Robert Motherwell – the vertical spills and drips that declared the original site of the painting to have been the upright of easel or wall.

The power of Pollock's mark as index meant that it continued to bear witness to the horizontal's resistance to the vertical and that it was the *material* condition of this testimony – the oily, scabby, shiny, ropey qualities of the self-evidently horizontal mark – that would pit itself against the visual formation of the Gestalt, thus securing the condition of the work as *formless*. It makes no difference that the most prestigious reception of Pollock's work in the years succeeding his death would read past this mark, repressing its implications by a series of complicated recodings that turned the metallic paint into transcendental fields and the ropey networks into hovering, luminous clouds, thereby attempting to resublimatize the mark, to lift it into the field of form. The mark itself not only sits there on the surface of the works for anyone to read, but its subversive intent was perceived by a whole series of artists who felt authorized in their own interpretation of Pollock's art by the series of photographs Hans Namuth had taken in 1950 of Pollock working, photographs that underscored the issue of horizontality and its operational import for what Robert Morris would come to term "anti-form."

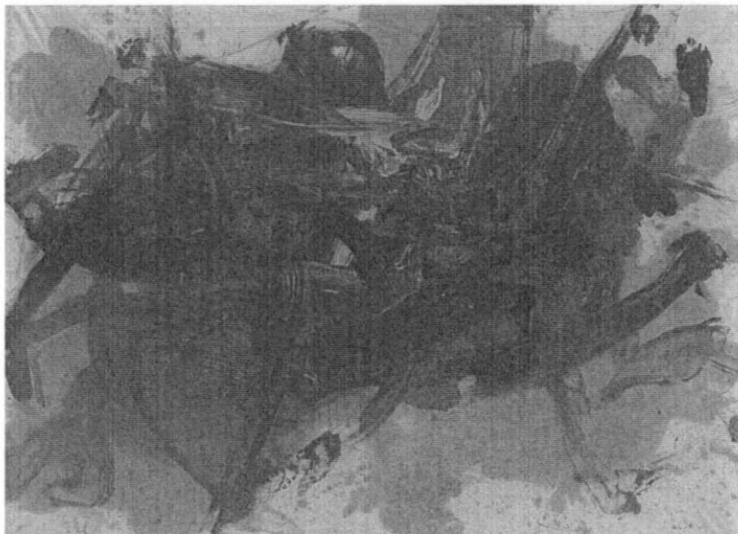
The operational character of Morris's thinking turned on the distinction he made between the "well-built" and the unconstructed, the former being everything man has fashioned to resist the dispersive force of gravity – including, in the field of art, the stretchers that support canvas, the armatures that hold up clay, and all the other rigid materials, from marble to bronze, that are deployed. A function of the well-built, *form* is thus vertical because it can resist gravity; what yields to gravity, then, is *anti-form*. Thus for Morris it was not the thematics of trash or mess or tangle – all

Figure 28.
Jackson Pollock,
Full Fathom Five, 1947.
Oil on canvas with nails,
tacks, buttons, key, coins,
cigarettes, matches, etc..
50 1/4 x 30 3/4 inches.
The Museum of Modern
Art, New York. Gift of Peggy
Guggenheim.
© 1997 Pollock-Krasner
Foundation / ARS, New York.

of which are images of something in their own way – that was pertinent to anti-form, but the operations that would make the force of gravity apparent as it pulled form apart: “random piling, loose stacking, hanging.”⁴

Accordingly Morris himself conducted certain of his first experiments in anti-form as a kind of retracing of Pollock’s own steps. Morris spread immense stretches of felt onto the floor of his studio and cut a linear pattern into their surfaces. The pattern meant that as long as the material remained on the floor the work would appear to organize itself in relation to image, to Gestalt, to *form*. But Morris would then raise these felts onto the wall, suspending them from hooks, so that gravity would pull apart their surfaces into gaps of disturbing irregularity (see figure 13). Now scattered, the pattern would disappear; instead, the gaps would become the index of the horizontal vector understood as a force constantly active within the vertical field – a force that had been put in play in a move to disable the very formation of form.

Figure 29.
Kazuo Shiraga,
Untitled, 1957.
Oil, watercolor, india ink on
paper mounted on canvas,
71½ x 95½ inches.
Musée National d’Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.



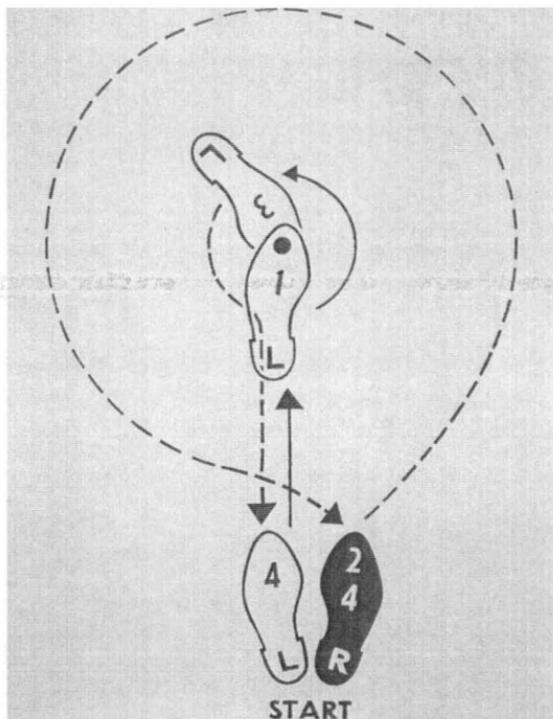


Figure 30.
 Andy Warhol,
Dance Diagram, 1962.
 Acrylic on canvas,
 72 x 54 inches.
 Onnasch Collection, Berlin.
 © 1997 Andy Warhol
 Foundation of the Visual
 Arts / ARS, New York.

Andy Warhol had yet another response to the self-evident horizontality of Pollock's paintings – one which began in 1961 with Warhol's decision to transform himself from commercial artist to avant-garde painter. Stretching blank canvas in front of his doorway so that visitors would walk over it, Warhol set out to experiment with the message encoded in both his paintings and his photographs. Like the Gutai artist, Kazuo Shiraga (figure 29), it was the mark interpreted as footprint that interested Warhol, who pushed this as well in the direction of those critics who spoke of Pollock's painting as the registration of a kind of choreography. By 1962 Warhol would translate this into his *Dance Diagrams* (figure 30). He was careful to install these paintings prone on the floor (both in their first exhibition at the Stable Gallery and in one of his ear-



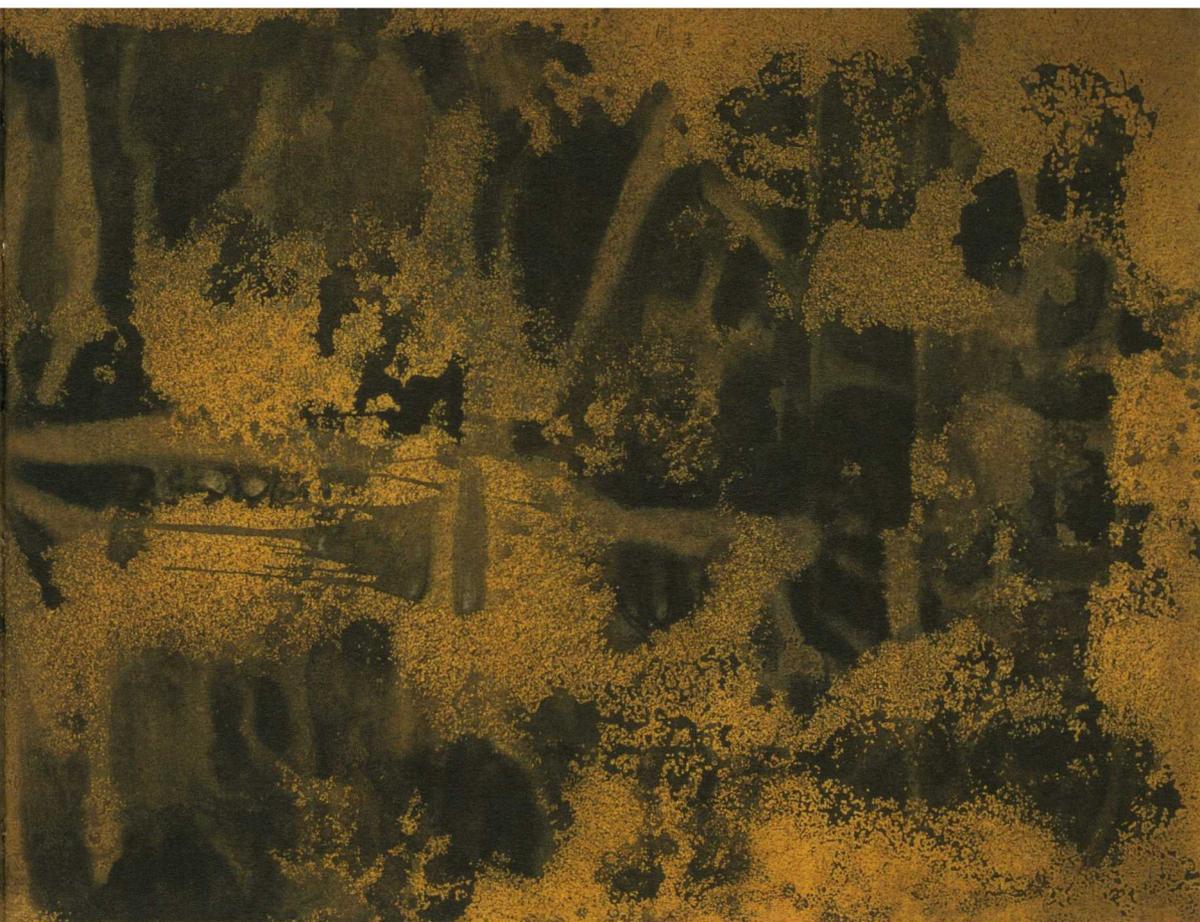


Figure 31.
Andy Warhol,
Oxidation Painting, 1978.
Mixed media and copper
metallic paint on canvas,
78 x 204½ inches.
Private Collection.
© 1997 Andy Warhol
Foundation of the Visual
Arts/ARS, New York.

liest major exhibitions, in 1965) because it was only from this position that these works could expand past the cultural associations of the diagram to the kitsch content of the mass-cultural experience they represented, and because it hooked this aspect back into the *bassesse* of Pollock's mark.

But Warhol's most transgressive reading of this *bassesse* was the scatological one, in which the gesture that a standing man makes by spilling liquid onto a horizontal ground is simply decoded as urination. Whether Warhol conducted this reading in 1961 in the small group of "piss paintings" he claimed to have made at that time is hard to determine since the only trace of those works is the one "reproduced" in an avant-garde journal in 1976, the same year that Warhol embarked on his series called *Oxidation* (figure 31).⁵ These mammoth canvases, covered in metallic paint, were indeed made by inviting friends to pee on their surfaces, the uric acid creating the whorls and halations of what can often resemble the action painter's gesture. And one of the inescapable connotations of the *Oxidation* pictures is that the machismo that surrounded action painting – the legendary womanizing and boozing and fighting of its artist-“heros” – was now being recoded. For Warhol's “urinary” reading of Pollock's mark was insisting that the verticality of the phallic dimension was itself being riven from within to rotate into the axis of a homoerotic challenge.

Indeed, the interconnection between the Gestalt and the phallos had been part of Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage since the 1950s. A series of later analyses generated by French and Anglo-American feminism – from Luce Irigaray and Raymond Bellour to Laura Mulvey and Stephen Heath – would also argue that the vertical is what is at stake in this connection.⁶ The elaboration of fetishism in relation to popular culture, particularly film, increasingly became the site of such analysis, with the visual Gestalt of the projected female body being the phallic symptom of the viewer's castration anxiety: simultaneously the proof of sexual difference *and* the site of its denial, since the woman's body, frozen and remade into the elegant Gestalt of wholeness, would thereby be “rephallicized” through the reassuring action of *form*.

It is in relation to this discourse about the vertical import not of high culture but, from its place within film theory, of mass culture that Cindy Sherman's work needs to be read. Since Sherman's medium has always been the photographic sites of mass-cultural experience – from the film still, to the centerfold, to the backlit advertising panel – within which the image of woman is suspended, she has had to examine this phallic condition of the fetish. But the fact that she has examined it from within the discursive space that leads back to Pollock, the discursive space that had been examin-

ing the operational power of the *informe* within the American avant-garde (to name only her own immediate context) for over three decades, has meant that Sherman is not merely interested in repeating the structures of the fetish but in subverting them. It further means that one of her most powerful weapons in this process is the rotation of the image out of the axis of the vertical and onto the horizontal of the *informe*.

(See "Gestalt," "Liquid Words," and "Conclusion: The Destiny of the *Informe*.")

I

Isotropy

Rosalind E. Krauss

We dream in images, Freud said. When the unconscious takes over, under the cover of sleep, we "regress"; we develop backward, retracing those paths that had led us up to the higher orders of cognitive power in the manipulation of words or symbols, back down toward an earlier, preverbal world of image-objects.

And yet, the vocation of the dream is the expression of a wish, the formulation — no matter how repressed, or censored — of a desire. Wishes cannot be manifested outside the domain of language, beyond the predication of "wanting" and a desiring subject to predicate it. Thus, argues Jean-François Lyotard, if the dream is imagelike, it is not because it has rid itself of language but because it has forced language into the world of image-objects, making it *spatial*.¹

To illustrate this spatialization, he offers the example of the piece of paper which has been crumpled so that the writing which had spread itself out along its formerly extended surface is now wadded together in a compressed lump. Within the folds and wrinkles of this lump, formerly dispersed parts of speech now make contact as certain words go into hiding behind others. Preceding this process, however, another spatial activity had already occurred, as certain parts of the paper were preselected to resist the general compression, making sure that those fragments would remain intelligible.

Lyotard asks us to imagine a banner that bears the inscription, in two lines, "Révolution / d'Octobre." The wind is blowing in such a way that, in the first line, only "Rév...on" can be seen, and, in the second, "d'O...r." Freud calls the activity which determines that these letters rather than others will surface, "displacement." While the action that brings the letters into a unity, allowing them to be reinterpreted – for example, as "révons d'or" (let's dream of gold) – thereby connecting this new constellation with the fantasy that lies at the core of the dream, he had called "condensation." But both processes operate topologically on a spatial field: to reorganize it formally, to reconfigure it, to reproduce it as pattern. The result is like the rhymes in a poem that pull dispersed lines back into another form of association, or like rhythmic relations that metrically organize music or speech. All of these, Lyotard insists, are figurative, formal relations, and all of them imply a spatialization of the discursive material of desire.

The synchronic domain of space and form would seem to imply that the dream – and thus the work of the unconscious – is open to a structural account, for structure is after all what reconstitutes the successive, diachronic field of speech or narrative into the formal dimension of the diagram, the table, the graph. It is this that allows the structuralist to examine the relations between units, each held in place by the grid that maps it into an isotropic space of regulated and equal parts through which to observe the play of identities and differences. And indeed Freud's own analysis of the fantasies that form the structural core of a dream or the stuff of compulsive behavior is often cast as a kind of structural analysis of the fantasy's linguistic material. For, like the structuralist, Freud had to take the surface elements of the narrative and demonstrate the way these are the transformations of an invisible matrix, or order, which his own analysis had reconstructed as though he were an archaeologist reconstructing a vanished city from its scattered remains.

Lyotard pursued this notion of a structuralist Freud, even though in the end he would overturn it. But the structuralist analogy was useful to him, and to us, in seeing the role of form – and ultimately of the *formless* – within the unconscious. Accordingly, Lyotard examined one such fantasy, the compulsively repeated erotic daydream of one of Freud's patients: the fantasy expressed as "a child is being beaten." He shows that Freud performs something like a structuralist's distributional analysis in order both to show that the fantasy is the result of several narrative stages and to reveal the relation between these stages (figure 32).² For the fantasy's earliest form as reported by the patient – "the father beats a child (and I am watching)" – had subsequently changed into its final form ("a child is being beaten"), by which time the narrative had switched

Traits Phases	Type of agent	Type of victim	Position of the subject	"Content" of the drive	With regard to pleasure
I	father	child masc. or fem.	spectator	sadistic	genital excitation
II	father	subject	victim	masochistic	genital excitation
III	adult	male children	spectator	masochistic disguised as sadistic	genital excitation

Figure 32
Diagram from Jean-
François Lyotard,
Discours - Figure (1971).

from active to passive voice and the identity of the father and the patient herself (as watcher) had been muffled to the point of disappearance. It is by means of this analysis that Freud recovers what he reasons must have been an intermediary phase between the first and last stages of the fantasy: a transformational phase that not only changed active to passive but also gave the narrative its perversely erotic spin. Retaining the earliest characters, this phase altered their relation into: "I am being beaten by the father."

Freud proceeds to ponder the psychic meaning of this retreat from action. The activity of the first phase is Oedipal and genital, he reasons, as the child identifies with her father. If it is replaced, this is because repression and guilt not only transport the child into the role of victim (to take the place of the "other" child) but operate on the drive regressively, moving it backward from genital to anal. It is this subsequent anality, expressed as masochism, that then eroticizes the fantasy, since the logic of the earlier, sadistic stage was this: if the father beat the other child it was because the father did not love her, loving the patient instead. But now the drive in its regressed form is able to disconnect libidinal pleasure

from a genital content and reconstitute it as anal, so that loving and beating combine. "Owing to regression," Freud writes, the patient's description of the daydream "is turned into 'My father is beating me (I am being beaten by my father)'. This being beaten is now a meeting-place between the sense of guilt and sexual love. *It is not only the punishment for the forbidden genital relation, but also the regressive substitute for it*, and from this latter source it derives the libidinal excitation which is from this time forward attached to it."¹

What Lyotard remarks in this "but also" – with its logic of ambivalence – is that it characterizes every feature of the fantasy, as all of them share the same simultaneous holding of two contradictory positions in which a beating is not only punishment for guilt *but also* a source of pleasure. Here again, we could say, the unconscious is structured in terms of simultaneity, since Freud is careful to explain that in the relation between the three levels of the fantasy, one stage does not progress beyond and thus supersede or replace another. Instead, the meanings of all the stages remain suspended within it, in the form of a "but also."

Yet just here, in this persistence of the condition of the "but also," do we feel the difference between structuralism's grid and the spatial "logic" of the unconscious. For the structuralist schema, with its laws of opposition, demands that things be held distinct from one another and that the rule of noncontradiction be in force. The work of the unconscious, however, does not recognize this law. It knows nothing of the either/or: the idea that two opposites cannot hold true at the same time. Thus the unconscious not only courts the transformation of everything into its opposite but holds both of these things together, at once.

A further divergence between the structuralist's system and the unconscious figure – which Lyotard calls the "matrix" – is that while both share the properties of synchrony and invisibility, the invisibility conceived by structuralism is that of a virtual order working within the system to produce its intelligibility: the system as a producer of meaning. But the matrix's invisibility, on the other hand, is a function of the repressive work of mutating everything into its opposite, thereby undermining the productive work of structure. The elements of the matrix, Lyotard argues, do not form a system but a block: "If the matrix is invisible, it is not because it arises from the intelligible, but because it resides in a space that is beyond the intelligible, is in radical rupture with the rules of *opposition*; we can already see that this property of unconscious space, which is also that of the libidinal body, is to have many places in one place, and to block together what is logically incompatible. This is the secret of the figural: the transgression

of the constitutive intervals of discourse and the transgression of the constitutive distances of representation."⁴

This work of the matrix is then to overlay contradiction and to create the simultaneity of logically incompatible situations. Thus it is at total variance with the transparently self-explanatory structuralist grid. It blocks together active and passive, genital and anal, sadism and masochism, and, in "a child is being beaten," watching and being watched. This, then, is the matrix figure's "work," the peculiarities of its "structure": "the statements one can project as layered within it that organize the goal (to beat), the source (the anal zone), and the object (the father) of one sentence are in their turn condensed into a single product formula – 'a child is being beaten' – whose apparent coherence allows the psychic life to contain in a single manifold a multiplicity of logically incompatible 'sentences.' These do not form a system but a block. Thus

Figure 33.
Man Ray.
Hat, 1933.
Silver print, 6 1/4 x 5 1/2 inches.
Private Collection, Geneva.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP / Man Ray Trust,
Paris.



the drive to be and to have the father is simultaneous; and the investment is both genital-phallic and sadistic-anal.⁵

The destruction of difference, the work here of the matrix figure, is the destruction of form. This is what Roger Caillois saw when he reasoned that the animal that cannot separate itself from its background, cannot keep either its shape or the form of its own identity intact. This is how the surrealist photographers joined him as they attacked form by literally melting the image (Uzac's *brûlages*) or by embracing the fetish's blurring of sexual difference (Bellmer's *poupées*, Man Ray's "hats" [figure 33]).

The formless, however, is not just an erasure of form but an operation to undo form, and thus a process of generating "bad form." And the matrix figure displays this in its own paradoxical condition. For while it is made up of totally unstable and changing parts, it is the vehicle of compulsive repetition and thus must be able to secure its own identity, its own sameness over time. To do this it must have a form, yet the difficulty of thinking of this producer of disorder and disruption as a form is obvious. "How in general," Lyotard asks, "can that which is form also be transgression? How can what is deviation, derogation, deconstruction be at the same time form?"⁶ The answer he finds is in the evidence of a form that is not good form, not a good Gestalt. Rather, "it is a form in which desire remains caught, *form caught by transgression*; but it is also the, at least potential, *transgression of form*."⁷

And this form-which-is-also-the-transgression-of-form is given in the very action of Freud's matrix figure: it is the action to *beat*, which codes the pulsation of pleasure, but the pulse as well, of death, as when Lacan writes of the Wolf Man's terror at the sight of the twitching shudder of butterfly wings: "This is why the butterfly may . . . inspire in him the phobic terror of recognizing that the beating of little wings is not so very far from the beating of causation, of the primal stripe marking his being for the first time with the grid of desire."⁸

To *beat* is thus not only the "form" of recurrence, of repetition, but also the "bad form" of the matrix: the vehicle of undoing form, of transporting the temporal into the heart of the figural, and requalifying it as the inverse of form, which is to say, *formless*.

(See "Gestalt," "'Moteur!,'" "Part Object," "Pulsation," and "Uncanny.")

J

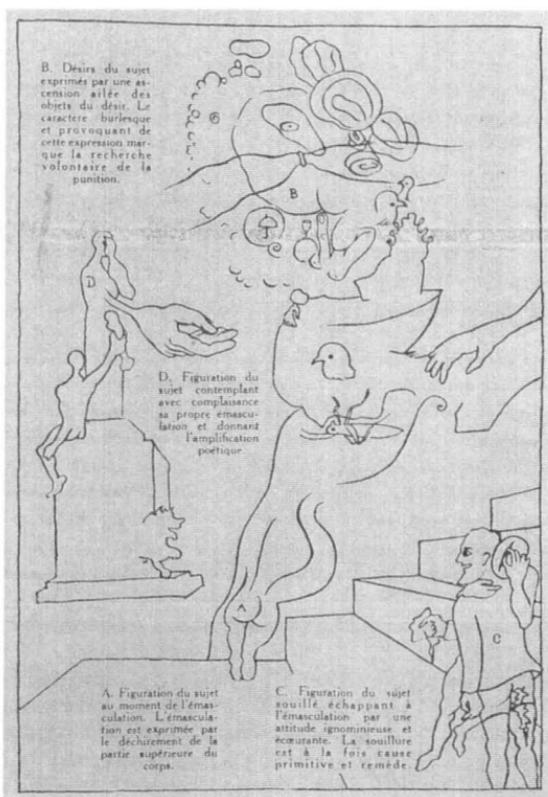
Jeu Lugubre

Rosalind E. Krauss

Close to the beginning of *The Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, André Breton lets go with the expletive "SHIT." Reacting against those who were viewing the forced departures (which could also be described as defections) of former surrealists from the ranks of the movement as simply a matter of personalities or gossip rather than a question of highest principle, Breton underlines this dismissive vocable.¹

But *shit* is indeed at the center of what Breton would accuse Bataille of by the end of the manifesto, where he sums up his rage in the characterization of his enemy as an "excrement-philosopher."² For he sees Bataille's use (and in Breton's eyes, misunderstanding) of the image with which he ends his essay "Le Langage des fleurs" (The Language of Flowers)—that of Sade in prison, having roses brought to him so that he could scatter their petals in a shit-filled latrine—as yet another example of Bataille's scatological obsessions, his desire to "wallow in impurities." Had he read Bataille's essay "Le Jeu lugubre," whose publication crossed that of his own *Manifesto*, since both appeared in December 1929 (Bataille's in *Documents*, no. 7, and Breton's in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 13), and in which the entire analysis turns on the shit that soils the underpants of the little man standing in the painting's lower right corner, he would have been even more enraged. But in any case he had already acted to ward off Bataille's encroachment on the territory of Salvador Dalí, Breton's newest recruit to the movement. His own catalogue essay for Dalí's November exhibition at the Goemans Gallery had already sneered at those who might focus on this detail in Dalí's picture, and he had intervened to make sure that Dalí would refuse Bataille permission to reproduce the painting with the essay in *Documents* built around its analysis.³

The schematic rendering of the painting that Bataille was thus forced to resort to is, in a certain sense, one of those brilliant inventions born of necessity (figure 34). Breaking down the continuity of the picture's surface, the schema allows Bataille to map the interaction of four elements that he goes on to call "the Contradictory Representations of the Subject." Announcing that this analysis is



part of an unpublished essay on the inferiority (or castration) complex, Bataille wants to show Dalí dispersing the subject of castration over the four points of the painting in a continuous movement of reciprocal forces. For desire is described here as releasing both the provocative behavior that will draw castrating punishment down upon itself and the pleasure taken in this very mutilation. Virility is thus understood not as that which escapes all restraint,

Figure 34.
Diagram of Salvador Dalí's
Jeu lugubre (1929), as
published in *Documents 1*
(1929), no. 7.

but that which finds fulfillment in the punishment it dares to provoke. In this way, mapping the soiling of the figure at point C of his diagram as a "stain" that "is both original cause and remedy," Bataille relates this psychoanalytic chart to the other ideas about a perverse, nonsublimatory "negation of the negation" (what we might call the "undoing of the negation") that he had been pursuing in his essays in *Documents*.

For the stain that Bataille had called attention to in his earlier essay "The Language of Flowers," in which pollen becomes a trace that "dirties" the petals of the flower, is also a (Bataillan) negation of the negation. It is a refusal to deny the seductiveness of flowers – of their smell, their fleshy, tactile associations, their flamboyant color – by means of negations that see flowers functioning in the arena of love only as a set of substitutions or displacements for what is actually (rationally) at stake, whether that be the notion of fertility or the idea of erotic feeling that demands the whole person as its object (or its "support") rather than merely the sexual organs. In negating, or undoing this negation, Bataille insists on staying with the very image of the flower, on fixating on it in terms of the very stain it bears, the stain of its own almost instant putrescence as its movement upward toward the light decrees at the very same time that it will hideously wither and fall. "For flowers do not age honestly like leaves," Bataille writes, "which lose nothing of their beauty, even after they have died; flowers wither like old and overly made-up dowagers, and they die ridiculously on stems that seemed to carry them to the clouds."⁴ The negation of the negation thus works against dismissing the amorous properties of flowers as so much popular and naive misconception, and instead insists that flowers are seductive (but *basely* so) because they are *stained*, a staining that is another form of what Bataille thought of as the scatological.

The scatological is thus fundamentally linked to an operation – the (perverse) negation of the negation – rather than to a substance, whether that be pollen or shit. But this operation needs to be further analyzed to see how it yields results that link it to the scatological rather than, as in the Hegelian operation of the dialectic, to the sublational or the sublimatory.

One way of describing Hegelian synthesis – or the third term, which both cancels and preserves an initial negation, lifting it onto a higher, more general and powerful register – is to speak of *neutralization*. A difference, or opposition, is "neutralized" by a third term that "sublates" that difference. Take the linguistic opposition *young/old*, for example, in which polar ends of the age spectrum are placed in contrast (figure 35). This opposition is said to be "neutralized" by the term "old" – as in the expression "five years

And they also remark that this same term can further act to neutralize the neutralization, producing an even higher synthesis, as when "old" (as in age) converts itself into agelessness or chronological indeterminacy – "as old as the hills" – or when "man" becomes "human" or "mankind" and no longer refers to individuals, regardless of sex, but to a genus regardless of individuals.

What the structural linguists have uncovered are the hierarchies that lie at the heart of every "neutralization," such that we are never just speaking of an oppositional pair but of a relation of privilege and power between terms: the unmarked term already germinating with the potential to rise toward higher orders of generalization, of abstraction. This indeed is why Bataille wants the reader of "The Language of Flowers" to remain with the *real presence* of things, "thinking" by means of this obstinate fact rather than with the abstractions provided by words or concepts, and seeing how "the *appearance* would introduce the decisive values of things" – uncovering, that is, the hierarchies of privilege and power that operate our relationships with everything that is.

A refusal to "neutralize" that is simultaneously a revelation of the hierarchies that operate at the very core of Western thought sounds familiar to a poststructuralist generation that is by now accustomed to refer to such a move as "deconstruction." Thus it is "deconstructive" not to leave neutralizations alone, and instead to attack them by insisting that the "marked," or disprivileged, term of the initial pair be used in the "higher" position – for example, by insisting on using "she" as the inclusive, generalizing pronominal reference. But it is also to give the disprivileged term a further "explosive" capacity within the system, revealing the subversive capacities of the unmarked, as when the concept of *grammaratology*, for example, acts to undo the neutralization of speech in *logos*.

Not only has the debt that deconstructive analysis owes to Bataille been freely acknowledged by Jacques Derrida,⁵ but Derrida has as well analyzed Bataille's own moves to attack the Hegelian operations of neutralization. Thus writing of Bataille's notion of Sovereignty, which though it seems to resemble Hegel's concept of Lordship, is not about the triumph and institution of meaning but the possibility of its "transgressive relationship to nonmeaning," Derrida says:

The sovereign operation [of Bataille] is not content with neutralizing the classical operations *in discourse*; in the major form of experience it transgresses the law or prohibitions that form a system with discourse, *and even with the work of neutralization*. . . . Further, the destruction of discourse is not simply an erasing neutralization. It multiplies

words, precipitates them one against the other, engulfs them too, in an endless and baseless substitution whose only rule is the sovereign affirmation of the play outside meaning. Not a reserve or a withdrawal, not the infinite murmur of a blank speech erasing the traces of classical discourse, but a kind of potlatch of signs that burns, consumes, and wastes words in the gay affirmation of death: a sacrifice and a challenge.⁶

The operations of the scatological are, like those of deconstruction, performative: they *do something* to neutralization; they *lower it*. Or rather they produce the low, the base, as having always already been part of the high, as the stain it carries within it. In his study of Bataille, Denis Hollier examines this methodical strategy of scatology, saying that one of its operations is to search for the dirty word, the word that will not only elude the world of concepts, or ideas, but will attack as well the order and propriety of that world. Accordingly he writes:

Figure 36.
Cy Twombly,
Panorama, 1955.
Oil-based house paint, wax
crayon, and chalk paint on
canvas, 100 x 134 inches
Private Collection.



If a metaphor always refers to a *proper* name, restricting in advance the field of its transpositions, scatological deconstruction of this sublimating process is produced by contact with an untransposable unspeakable: the search for the *dirty name* is a conclusive component of this tactic. The dirty word is a word exposing its impropriety, but, rather than doing it by moving toward some desired proper name, it exposes what is not proper and unclean about the proper name, exposing the transposition every name, by itself, is already, the transposition betraying the unspeakable, that which cannot be named.⁷

If graffiti is the dirtying of the clean wall, it is also, most frequently an obscenity, either in the form of a body lowered to nothing but its genitals, or in the form of the dirty word, as the improper name of the sexual organs. The operational quality of graffiti was, indeed, what attracted Bataille to it.

And the scatological as an operation also appears in the way graffiti has entered the field of modernist art. Whether in the form of Duchamp's mustaches penned on the Mona Lisa or the lacerations carried out on posters preserved by the *afficheistes*, the destructive, performative character of graffiti is to be felt, as it acts against the high, neutralized, cultural form to lower it.

It is also brilliantly there in the opening two decades of Cy Twombly's art, as he recoded Jackson Pollock's linear skein, to read now as the gouged and scored surface of the graffiti-laden wall, thereby lowering its associations with the "purity" of abstract art (figure 36). But the performative, operational logic of scatology also comes to operate in Twombly's work on the clean and proper idea of the whole body, as it increasingly finds itself disseminated across the surfaces of the canvases of the late 1950s and early '60s in a scatter of part objects and scrawled genitalia (figure 37), and even on the clean and proper idea of the proper name. Graffiti, indeed, comes to act on the words Twombly writes on his pictures, words which, disembodied by the violence of scatological writing ("Mars," for example, divided into "M / ARS" — "art" in Latin, but "arse" in English), begin to yield up the obscenity within them, as the rose petal yields up its stain.⁸ The beauty of Twombly's surfaces, we could say, invokes the "language of flowers" as it also initiates the lugubrious game.

(See "Base Materialism," "Cadaver," "Dialectic," and "Olympia.")



Figure 37.
Cy Twombly,
Untitled (Roma), 1961.
Oil paint, oil-based house
paint, wax crayon, and lead
pencil on canvas,
100¾ x 121 inches.
Private Collection.

K

Kitsch

Yve-Alain Bois

The point from which Clement Greenberg's critical work was launched, as stated in his first published text, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), was the dialectical opposition of modernism and kitsch, the latter defined somewhat mildly as an "ersatz culture" generated by the industrial revolution. Kitsch is thus a commercial substitute produced by capitalism in order to fill the void left by the marginalization of aristocratic culture and the destruction pure and simple of artisanal local traditions by urbanization and mandatory literacy. Fully sharing in the type of universality proper to the commodity form, kitsch's spread is infinite. In the face of this rapaciousness, the role of the modernist avant-garde is one of pure resistance: even though the avant-garde constantly runs in the face of tradition, it keeps that tradition alive by ceaselessly reconfiguring it through a genealogical throwback (Manet by recalling Goya, Picasso by recasting Cézanne, and so on) and by wrenching it loose from the tentacle-like grip of deadening commodification. For Greenberg, the avant-garde is not a mole undermining the foundations of high culture; it is an angel come to rescue this same culture from its kitsch temptation at the very moment when the bourgeoisie for which it was destined is in the process of disappearing as a class (to be replaced by the shapeless, transient mass of the petit-bourgeoisie).

Greenberg was not the only one to base his aesthetic on the opposition between kitsch and modernism and to endow the latter with a redemptive role. Contemporaneously, Theodor Adorno had begun to elaborate his own version of this same paradigm, which he would refine throughout the rest of his life, up to his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* (under the name of "the culture industry," kitsch quickly became his major target). But Adorno was much more pessimistic than Greenberg. If Adorno was never ready to admit that the culture industry itself could ever have a liberating function (this is what was at issue in his polemic against Walter Benjamin on the subject of "mechanical reproduction"), he was even less prone to believe that the elitism of high culture, even given new life by the ferment of the avant-garde, could totally

immunize it against the leveling effect of capitalism. "It is useless to try and draw a fine line here between what constitutes true aesthetic fiction and what is merely sentimental rubbish (kitsch). Kitsch is like a poisonous substance that is mixed in with art. Discharging that poison is one of the most difficult tasks art faces at the present time," he wrote in *Aesthetic Theory*.¹

It might seem strange that, in an enterprise whose aim was that of leveling and bringing things down in the world, Bataille did not use the notion of kitsch in *Documents* (or any other term denoting bad taste), nor did he try to show how what this concept applies to is "like a poisonous substance that is mixed in with art." The most obvious, institutional explanation for this should not be overlooked. However radical the magazine, whatever the indulgence of its backer (Wildenstein) with regard to its outrages, art had to remain a protected territory for it (art was, after all, the life blood of the journal).

But this timidity with regard to art was not only institutional. It is not only to its publisher, Wildenstein, that we owe the articles on Delacroix, Cézanne, Manet, Seurat, Corot, Ingres, and so on. These texts participate in this "genealogical throwback" to tradition that I mentioned before as typically modernist. In fact, the modernist paradigm is restaged in its major outlines throughout the course of *Documents*: it is not Manet who gets the blame, but what oppressed him – the kitsch of *pompier* art (*Reveil de Diane* by Jules Lefebvre) and its champions (Théophile Gautier and Jules Clarette).² It is not Picasso's Ingresque and sugary "retour à l'ordre" pastiches that were under attack, but the clownish stupidity of Camille Mauclair condemning him (*Documents*' editors even invited Mauclair to submit an essay all the better to ridicule him). The only violence permitted (in relation to the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, for example, the other magazine published by Wildenstein), was that of unconditionally siding with the "moderns." In short, even if they had had the means (that is, the capacity to see it), it would not have been possible for Bataille and his friends to proclaim the kitsch aspect of the work of André Masson, Jacques Lipchitz, Juan Gris, or a flash-in-the-pan like Gaston-Louis Roux.

Moreover, there was to be relatively little about the culture industry's products in the pages of *Documents*. The reason for this is quite simple: the only possible attitude at the time, or rather the only to have been briefly imagined by Bataille and company, was that of "elevating" such objects – thus of sublimating them, even if ironically, and even if this "elevation" aimed at contaminating the upper levels (the musical numbers of the Folies-Bergère, for example, were analyzed by Georges Henri Rivière in terms of religion³). As can be imagined, this tack was very restricted in the

flow of the magazine (a few notices about Hollywood films, or *Fantomas*): *Documents* was not there to redeem anything (that is one of the main differences between it and the surrealist aesthetic, with its taste for the Marvelous). Robert Desnos's text on the public monuments of Paris is one of the rare exploitations (via humorous glorification) of kitsch vulgarity ("Why should it be that advertising, which has endowed the modern world with so many unexpected creatures, has yet to have entered the domain of statuary: advertising, whose billboards bestow such grandeur on the landscape and whose presence accentuates the majesty of mountains, meadows, oceans. I would like a Cadum baby in porphyry rising from a marble basin ... or the little Meunier Chocolate girl in granite and ivory, leaning against the walls"⁴).

This lack of interest on Bataille's part in the idea of kitsch undoubtedly arose from the position of mastery (irony) and the clear taxonomy that it presupposes and against which it plays. The statue raised to the Cadum baby can only be appreciated ironically: it makes fun of the decorousness of taste and denies that there is an ontological split between the monument (eternal) and advertising (ephemeral); but one can only take ironic pleasure in it if one is confident in the solidity of one's own taste. One enjoys kitsch only from a distance (nothing is kitsch in itself: for an object to be perceived as kitsch, a distanced, mediated gaze must be directed toward it). In short, kitsch is dialectical: one only has access to it by knowing to the very tips of one's fingers what it attacks, to wit, modernism.

However, many artists have tried to force the lock of this dialectical opposition between modernism and kitsch, and to invent an "immediate" (unmediated) kitsch, a first-degree, nonironic kitsch. The job is not so simple, since a kitsch object cannot be consciously produced. Their strategy was not that of reappropriation but of precipitation (in the quasi-chemical sense) of the "poison" from out of the very being of art. To achieve this, it was first necessary for them to attend to kitsch without irony (thus no posture of mastery); they had to produce kitsch (therefore unconsciously, or almost, or at least without distance).

Lucio Fontana was immersed in kitsch culture since childhood (his father was a "commercial" sculptor who specialized in funerary monuments; his own youthful works were art deco sculptures) and he never severed these links (up to the end, he fulfilled every official or commercial commission, from movie theater interiors to cathedral doors to jewelry). His first original works, around 1930, were polychrome sculptures, thus violating a taboo that had been in place at least since Johann Winckelmann (there were several exceptions in modern art before Fontana – Gauguin's ceram-

ics, Picasso's series of absinthe glasses, Katarzyna Kobro's constructions, Calder's mobiles – but each time it was a question of testing the respective limits of sculpture and painting in relation to each other, which was the least of Fontana's concerns). But more than engaging with modernist experimentation, Fontana's polychrome sculptures recalled the statuary and decorative objects of the Second Empire where the simultaneous use of many materials surreptitiously reintroduced polychromy. But while this academic kitsch worshiped finish and ultimately used color to cover over the materiality of sculpture, Fontana made color's intrusion into sculpture a rude noise disturbing the homogeneous harmony advocated by aesthetic discourse. Polychromy was glorified by him throughout the 1930s, as that which is heterogeneous to the modernist system of sculpture. Later, after a passage through what could be called a sculptural scatology (but kitsch, culture of the gutter, of trash, is itself scatological), he would explore this same channel (the quack of bad taste) in the pictorial register: by means of fake gems glued to his canvases (figure 38) (1951–56), sparkles or acidic colors (candy pink, for example) in the *Fine di Dio* series (1963–64) (figure 3), gold grounds in certain punctured paintings, and the culinary accent placed on creamy pigment, treated like frosting on a cake.

Figure 38.
Lucio Fontana,
Concetto spaziale, 1956.
Mixed media on canvas,
33½ x 49¼ inches.
Civico Museo d'Arte
Contemporanea, Milan.





Figure 39.
Jean Fautrier,
I'm Falling in Love, 1957.
Oil on paper mounted on
canvas, 35 x 45¾ inches.
Private Collection.
© 1997 ARS, New York/
ADAGP, Paris.

Jean Fautrier, as well, made good use of one of the cardinal aspects of kitsch, namely its “fakeness” (all kitsch is phoney). From the time of his *Otages* series, begun in 1943, he separated texture (using white paste and, later, gesso) and color (applying a thin layer of powdered pastel) (figure 39). The first is excremental, the second, tarty. “It is part rose petal, part Camembert spread,” Francis Ponge remarked as early as 1946, which is to say that Fautrier is not far from Bataille’s mythical Sade “who had the most beautiful roses brought to him only to pluck off their petals and toss them into a ditch filled with liquid manure.”⁵ And for Fautrier, this painful disjunction would justify the act of painting the horror indicated in the pictures’ title (Nazi torture), a horror that was still at hand at the time of the Liberation.

Like Fontana, Fautrier took no distance from kitsch: the idea of his “Multiple Originals” (a true oxymoron) – “pictures produced in an edition of 300,” from which he expected a big financial return – is the simple transposition of the texture/color disjunction into the domain of reproduction. The text written by Fautrier for the first exhibition of his “Multiple Originals” is moreover a true

hymn to the culture industry: "In any case, as long as painting will limit itself exclusively to a stale technique, exhausted by four centuries – *oil paint* – it will lead to a precious object whose magic has ceased to move us – *the unique work* – with all the disgust it already elicits, for us, at its sacred and ephemeral touch; the work that, through its rarity, pushes against the forward-moving tide of an industrial culture; by its rarity, leads to this sort of historical demonstration – *the museum* – where it displays itself in a void."⁶ The movement of kitsch makes everything turn to disgust: personal touch, through which (beginning with impressionism) modernism thought it possible to outstrip the culture industry, itself becomes rotten. Whether that "touch" is imitated ("Multiple Originals") or brandished as the sign of originality ("unique work"), it is henceforth false, given over to spectacle. Warhol, having worked in commercial art and advertising (he began as a fashion illustrator, originally specializing in drawing shoes), wanted to be a professional poisoner and perhaps more than any other painter of this century would contribute to undermining the authority and originality of the autographic touch. Between his mercenary work and his "art," he always flamboyantly placed an equal sign. Hence the huge canvases of shoes, sprinkled with diamond dust (akin to the sparkles in Fontana's *Fine di Dio*), which he would make toward the end of his life, might be seen as so many homages to Fautrier, Fautrier who sported – for the opening of his *Otages* exhibition – snakeskin shoes.

There are other, even more unexpected examples to which one could turn. One example is the recent work of François Rouan, which throws off the shackles born of the success of his 1960s *Tressages* by offering their gaudy counterfeit, made by imitating them, by representing their actual, material interlace, their over-and-under, as if this were seen in a mirror. The Old Masters used mirrors to "verify" a scene, to confirm its form; for them the mirror functioned as a kind of control, as that which "positions objects, affirms their boundaries, reinforces their presence."⁷ Parodying this technique of control, Rouan uses the mirror against the grain of the modernist implication of his earlier tressages – which had been to force the surface open and thereby produce a sense of the material density of the support – engendering a strangely glassy surface, as though it were nothing now but varnish. While the effect is the exact opposite of Fautrier's move of disjoining color and texture, Rouan's new manner nonetheless joins hands with his predecessor's attack on the academicization of modernist "good taste" – even his own.

The disjunction between color and texture that Fautrier made increasingly obvious use of, or the cream with which Fontana iced

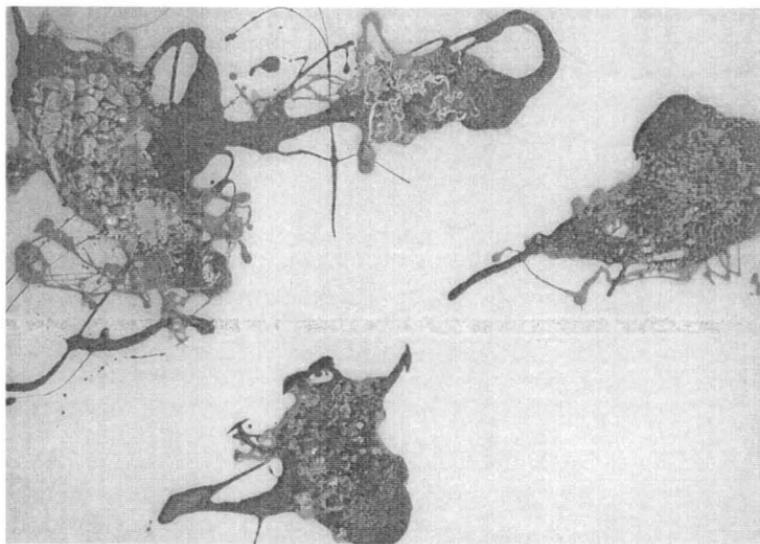
**K**

Figure 40.
Jackson Pollock,
Untitled, 1950.
Oil, enamel, and pebbles on
wood, 21¼ x 29½ inches.
Private Collection.
© 1997 Pollock-Krasner
Foundation / ARS, New York.

his canvases, forces us to look once again at the assimilated production of modernist high culture (for example, Monet's practice of laboriously adding color to his previously textured grounds⁸ or Courbet's technique of spreading paint with a knife): first-degree kitsch turns against modernism and shows that, from the start, it was never truly a stranger. And the contagion spreads not simply backward, but in every direction: Fontana's fake gems (figure 38) make us read the little painting (figure 40) Jackson Pollock gave Hans Namuth in 1951 to thank him for the film he had just made of Pollock at work, as kitsch. And suddenly the so-called failures by Pollock at the end of his life (*Blue Poles* and *Convergence*, for example, with their wet drools of color running into each other, red turning pink in the fields of white, orange blending tactilely into aluminum paint) recover their aggressive bite as deliberately vulgar refutations of Greenberg's interpretation of Pollock's earlier works as "purely optical." But already in the more classical "drip pictures," the metallic paint that Greenberg compared to the gold of Byzantine mosaics and lauded as "optical mirage" could be read, on the contrary, as a disavowal of modernist sublimation

and its dogma of pure visuality: it could already seem repulsive there, made to prevent the spectator from entering into an illusory world.⁹

In this reading of it, kitsch does not go with the grain of the culture industry: making us see Monet's *Waterlilies* as so many "Multiple Originals," for example, undermines modernism's certainty by detecting in it the poison that had always been there.

(See "Base Materialism," "No to ... the *Informel*," and "X Marks the Spot.")

L

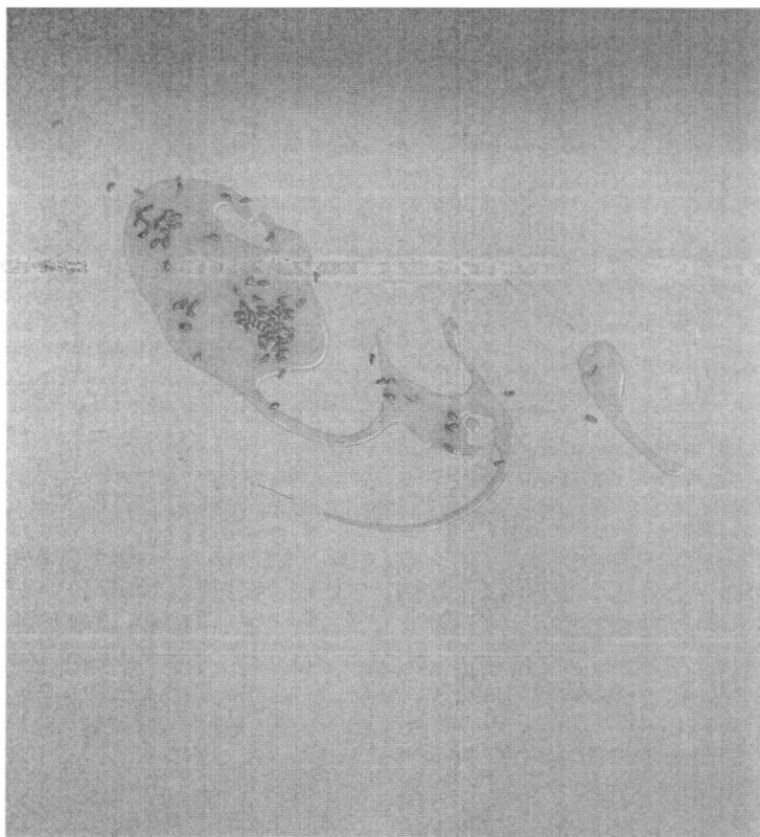
Liquid Words

Yve-Alain Bois

The essence of language is to be articulated. Such articulations can be as smooth as one wishes; they are no less divisive for all that. In order for language to function, signs must be isolable one from the other (otherwise they would not be repeatable). At every level (phonetic, semantic, syntactic, and so on) language has its own laws of combination and continuity, but its primary material is constructed of irreducible atoms (phonemes for spoken language, and for written, signs whose nature varies according to the system in question: in alphabetical writing, for example, the distinctive unit is the letter). Whoever says "articulation" always says, in the final instance, "divisibility into minimal units": the *articulus* is the particle. Language is a hierarchical combination of bits.

Liquid, on the contrary (except on the molecular level), is indivisible (of course one can divide up a certain quantity of liquid into different containers, but it remains identical to itself in each of its parts).

Thus, properly speaking, there cannot be liquid words (we only speak of a flow of language and of liquid consonants metaphorically), except in terms of the brief moment at which they have just been penned and the ink is not yet dry. It is just such a moment that Edward Ruscha's series of paintings titled *Liquid Words* (figure 41) makes us think of, except that, in *trompe-l'oeil*, these paintings represent an imaginary inverse process: not the drying out of



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Figure 41.
Edward Ruscha,
Eye, 1969.
Oil on canvas,
60 x 54 inches.
The Oakland Museum of
California, Art Guild
and NEA.

words that have just been written, but the melting of the letters, their more or less slow fusion toward a state of indifferentiation.

But the improbable short-circuit between language and liquidity that Ruscha proposes also concerns another opposition, carrying with it a considerable historical sedimentation, that of writing and painting. For centuries, at least since the invention of the printing press, these have been phenomenologically perpendicular to one another (we read a book on a table but look at a picture on a wall). Picasso's cubist collages first shook up this order of things deliberately (for him it was a matter of turning his painting into a form of writing). On closer inspection, however, we see that the cubist transformation of the picture into a table covered over the collapse—increasingly visible since Cézanne—of the airtight division between the visual field (vertical and transversal) and the space of the body (horizontal and “low,” even, animal); Picasso made the picture the tablet on which one writes in order not to make it into the table on which one eats (see above, “Introduction: The Use Value of *Formless*”). After several attempts were made to level art's verticality, none producing any immediate progeny (Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages*, for example, or certain sculptures from Giacometti's surrealist period), Jackson Pollock, refusing cubism's semiological solution to the danger of a carnal corruption of “pure visuality,” reopened the break that Picasso had plugged: he began to paint on the ground, to walk on his pictures, to make gravity itself an agent of his process of inscription. The role played by this horizontalization in the rupture Pollock introduced in the history of painting was immediately repressed by Clement Greenberg's modernist interpretation (according to which Pollock's pictures contributed to an “optical mirage”). But in the 1960s certain artists—for example, Robert Morris and Andy Warhol—recognized it and refused to believe that the true destiny of Pollock's “drip paintings” was in the misty stained canvases of Morris Louis and his followers (see “Horizontalität,” above). Edward Ruscha was among these disbelievers; interestingly, his *Liquid Words* appeared just following the 1967 Pollock retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.¹ Not only does he take up Pollock's tactile horizontality (and the pouring gesture that produced it) on his own terms, but he maps this onto writing, producing a movement that is precisely the reverse of cubism's. Picasso had thought it possible to escape the body by means of a semiological horizontalization, but Ruscha pronounces this escape route impassable and he submits words to gravity.

Or rather, he *shows* them as if there were made of nameless, more or less viscous and oily spreading liquids. The puddle that results from the yielding to gravity is, to be sure, a depicted motif

here (it is, in fact, falsely simulated: the *trompe l'oeil* is both very effective – there is no perceptible texture – and negated by the total impermeability between the fake, floating landscape of the background and the sticky letters crushed against it). One might say that, in comparison to Warhol or Morris, who were contemporaneously engaging in processes that involved an actual yielding to gravity (this is above all what they took from Pollock), Ruscha's *Liquid Words* are more conservative. But this would overlook the linguistic issue at stake. They are signaling the repressed materiality of an idealized code, and even if it means pulling out the old apparatus of mimesis, the act of reembodying the word, of staging this linguistic body at the point of vanishing, it is not necessarily the worst way to take the chatter of language down a peg or two.

Moreover, the substance of letters is not always "represented" in Ruscha's work: those paintings that engage with words accentuate what, in language, exceeds speech's communicative function – that is, everything that makes it into matter, everything that escapes idealization. With Ruscha, the "palpable aspect of signs," which Roman Jakobson made the object of the poetic function, becomes a negative force, a low blow: Ruscha gives voice to stuttering (several works carry the single inscription "lisp"); paints inaudible alliterations (such as the redoubled letters of *Hollywood Dream Bubble Popped* [1976]); shows the unbridgeable gap between the sound of words and the silence of writing (a gap whose very repression, as Jacques Derrida demonstrated in *Of Grammatology* – which was published in 1967, precisely when Ruscha was taking the meltdown of language as his motif – is the underpinning of the logocentrism of Western metaphysics). The material of inscription, ink or pigment, which is, in principle, perfectly indifferent to the communicative function, irrupts in a grotesque and tempestuous manner in his works on paper (he uses everything from axle grease and caquiar to those liquids whose permutation Bataille discussed in his *Story of the Eye*: egg yolk, milk, sperm, urine, and so on). And even when Ruscha only pictures the materiality of words, a certain baseness arrives to disturb the distancing achieved by the means of representation. His *Liquid Words*, as the little pieces of food that settle in the puddles indicate, are vomitted words – reminding us that, like so many other parts of the human body, the mouth has a double function (in *Documents* Michel Leiris noted that this organ of eloquence, "the visible sign of intelligence," also serves to spit; the same "base materialism" animates Ruscha's work).

Besides horizontality and "base materialism," *Liquid Words* brings a third operation into play, namely entropy, since the liquification to which Ruscha submits the words is also a liquidation of their meaning. These works are, at the level of language, equivalent

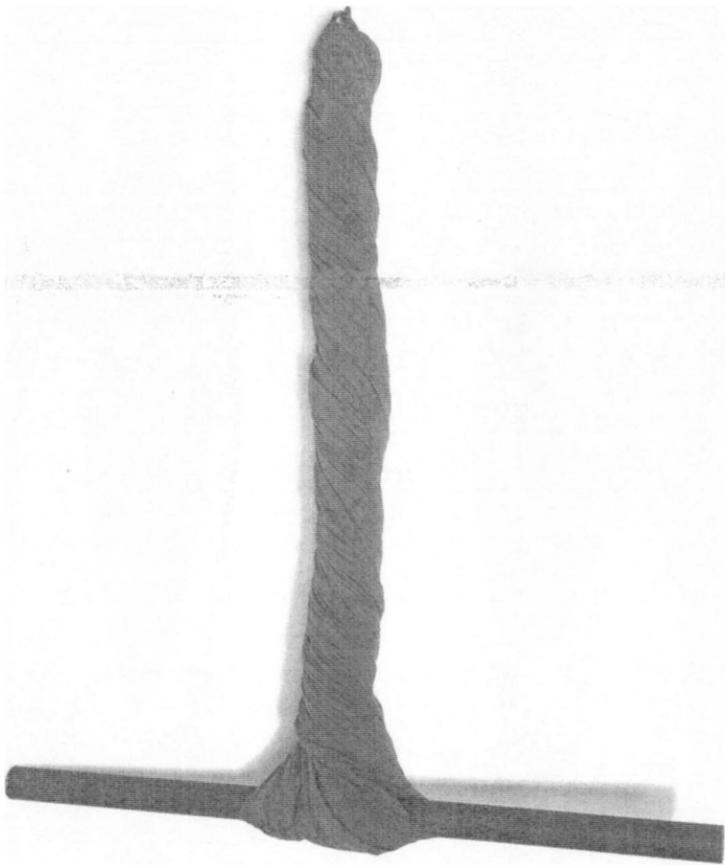


Figure 42.
Giovanni Anselmo,
Torsione, 1967-68.
Metal and cloth.
90½ x 73¼ x 11¼ inches.
Courtesy Sonnabend
Collection.

to the spills that Robert Smithson executed slightly later (*Asphalt Rundown* [1969] [figure 4] and *Glue Pour* [1969] for example), spills that directly related to Pollock's art. (Smithson, for whom entropy was the key concept and who spoke of it in almost every one of his texts, never hid his debt to Ruscha, particularly to his books, which are discussed below, in "Zone.")¹ Ruscha is preoccupied by the becoming inarticulate of words, but also by all forms of erosion to which language is victim (for example, the devitalization words suffer when they turn into clichés), and by the inevitable and irreversible nature of this process. His liquid words have no relation to the "illegible" scribbles of which modern art has supplied so many variations (perhaps the best known are Henri Michaux's calligraphies): for while the latter are like Rorschach tests inducing the viewer to project linguistic meanings onto them and thus to rearticulate them, Ruscha's *Liquid Words* leave no role to our imagination other than to complete the work of decomposition.

Liquid, even when it is sticky or consists of paste, is not elastic. (Jacques Tati treated this idea in one of the most nostalgic scenes in *M. Hulot's Holiday* [1953], in which the hero, fascinated by the slow stretching of the taffy that hangs from a pushcart, watches as it is—repeatedly—just about to fall to the ground. He is subjected to this "torture" up to the moment that the candy seller catches the taffy—over and over—just in time.) Liquid does not rebound, never moves into reverse.

Entropic irreversibility struck Smithson deeply, and of all his works, his "spills" are the ones that show this most clearly. Other artists, at the same moment, were engaged with nonelasticity as well, trying to exploit it in the very universe of solids. Richard Serra, in his first lead works (1968), uses the malleability of that metal: the only possible future for his rolled sheets of lead is not to unroll but to compact. It is true that lead's plasticity makes it a metal close to the liquid state (on a scale of liquidity, it would fall between mercury and a pure solid such as steel). In this period as well, Giovanni Anselmo practiced an even more effective entropic devitalization on the elasticity of bodies. One could say that the twisted cloth of his *Torsione* (1967–68) (figure 42) is held like a spring ready to release itself from the wall against which the slung metal bar pins it, but that is an illusion. No untwisting is to be feared when the work is taken down: the spring is broken, its tension slowly sapped by time.

(See "Base Materialism," "Entropy," "Horizontality," and "Zone.")

PULSE

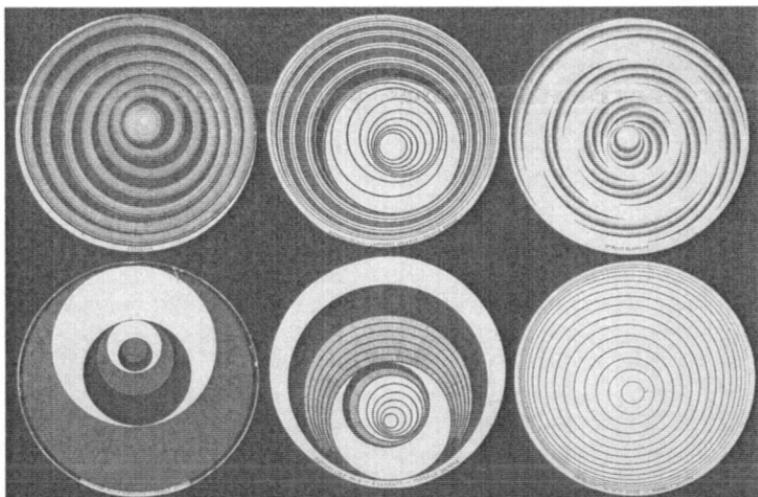


Figure 43.
Marcel Duchamp.
Rotoreliefs. 1935.
6 Cardboard disks, printed
by offset lithography.
7 1/4 inches diameter
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.

M

“Moteur!”

Rosalind E. Krauss

Is that what Duchamp called out to Man Ray as they began filming *Anémic Cinéma* (1925)? “Moteur!” says the French film director, to which the cameraman responds, “on tourne,” “rolling.” The fly-wheel of the camera is supposed to send the film – with its sequence of individual frames – through the gate at a constant speed, one calculated to create the illusion of continuous motion, as an image’s lingering on the retina (its “persistence,” as the physiologists say) causes that image to fuse visually with the next to appear.

But the continuity of movement in which the filmmaker and film viewer both delight – the onrush of the train into the station, for example, or the glide of the dancer across the stage – is both acknowledged by *Anémic Cinéma* and contravened. For Duchamp does not show us the fluidity of the jumper lifting off the ground to clear the hurdle in a motion that passes from one point through space and time to another. Instead he has us fixate on an object that, though it turns, turns in place. It is as though he had asked us, the film’s viewers, to stare at a revolving propeller blade, or the spinning spokes of a bicycle wheel turning but going nowhere, mounted, for instance, on a stationary stool.

It would not be true to say, however, that this turning produces the total “antimovie,” a film whose illusion works paradoxically to produce nothing but the perception of a static plane. The turning discs on which we focus, in *Anémic Cinéma*, are printed with a variety of spirals: lines of words gyrating nautilus-like inward toward the center, alternating with eccentrically organized visual patterns. It is these latter, the visual spirals, that define the film’s attitude to motion. For as they turn, they create the illusion of a rounded form burgeoning outward toward the viewer – a projecting, slightly trembling mound, which, as soon as it reaches its full extent, suddenly begins to turn inward on itself, burrowing backward into its own support, becoming concavity, pocket, sack. Swelling and

retreating, the spiral transforms the forward thrust of action into the hiccup of repetition, and the continuity of motion into the syncopated rhythm of a pulse or beat.

With its utterly immobile, fixed frame, within which this pulsating motion occurs, *Anémic Cinéma* is a kind of hybrid object, somewhere between film and painting, the initiator (like Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's *Light Space Modulator* [1923–30]) of a whole development that would come to be known as kinetic art. But to see this work – as well as those Duchamp elaborated out of it, such as the *Rotoreliefs* (1935) (figure 43) – as making up a new genre is to miss its significance for the field of painting from which it was spawned, as Duchamp moved from oil on canvas, to pigment and lead on glass, to the work he collectively called "*oculisme de précision*," and signed "Rose Sélavy." Each move in this sequence is a critique of the one before it, all of them having as their target the certainties and theories of a developing modernist art, an art which, no matter how radical its forms might be, was tying itself ever more securely to the traditional categories of painting first, and then sculpture.

So if *Anémic Cinéma* is a film, the target it seems to have in mind is nonetheless painting – or rather modernist, abstract painting, painting whose avowed project was the formal organization and mastery of the chaos and happenstance of visual appearance, the revelation of the rules of form beneath the clutter of perceived reality. An early version of these rules was pronounced in 1890 by Maurice Denis, according to which, before being anything else (such as the depiction of a battle horse or a nude), a painting needed to declare itself, he said, as a plane surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order. Although it would be refined and elaborated, this basic rule held steady over the entire course of modernist painting, for, if adhered to, it guaranteed that the ordered, planar surface would present itself as the analogue to the cognitive unity that underlies visual perception.

Refusing the successive waves of spatial recession made possible by representational painting, the flatness of the surface would thus announce that visual experience takes place in a condition of simultaneity, each part of the field synchronous with every other, not presented to experience as a succession of narrative or temporal facts like those of music or literature. And further, the "order" assumed by this assembly of shapes – an order that aligns them simultaneously with each other and with the master "shape" of the canvas plane, in its own instantaneously felt cohesion – displays the kind of totalizing clarity, or "hanging-togetherness," that the Gestalt psychologists would call "*prägnanz*," or "good form." And by this they meant not only that a perceiver grasps the wholeness

of a form all at once, but that, once perceived, its *prägnanz* exists in a continuously renewed experience of immediacy, as though what Husserl called the "now effect" of the first time perpetuated itself in a form that was not temporal at all.¹ And it would be modernist painting's ambition, we might say, to expose the laws of this synchronously elaborated visual coherence.

This is the situation – what we might call the modernist campaign for visual mastery – into which Duchamp, the precision oculist, enters. Having called himself, after all, some kind of doctor, his "oculism" will hold up the modernist concern for visual purity to a gentle kind of mockery. For the throb of his revolving discs, pulsing as they do with erotic suggestiveness, opens the very concept of visual autonomy – of a form of experience that is wholly and purely optical, owing nothing to time – to the invasion of a sense of dense, corporeal pressure. Not simply because as the spirals swell and deflate they suggest a succession of organs, breast turning into eye turning into belly turning into womb, or even the pulse of erotic friction. But because the pulse itself, in its diastolic repetitiveness, associates itself with the density of nervous tissue, with its temporality of feedback, of response time, of retention and protension, of the fact that, without this temporal wave, no experience at all, visual or otherwise, could happen.

To tie visibility to the body, then, is to render it "impure," an impurity that *Anémic Cinéma* sends skidding along the circuitry of the whole organism in the kind of permanently delayed satisfaction we connect with desire. What seems to drive the repetitive pulse of one organ dissolving into the image of another is a sense of the erosion of good form, an experience of *prägnanz* in the grip of the devolutionary forces of a throb that disrupts the laws of form, that overwhelms them, that scatters them. And it is here that Duchamp invents the pulse as one of the operations of the *formless*, the pulse that brings the news that we "see" with our bodies.

Duchamp extended his own attack on the modernist myth of visual purity into other works, such as *Étant donnés . . .* (1945–66), which, although they continue to insist that we "see" with the body, no longer employ a strategy directly linked either to the pulse or the *formless*.² But other artists, who experienced Duchamp in the context of postwar American modernism and formulated their own critique of the "visualist" agenda, began to use the pulse to destabilize "good form."

One example is the early video work of Bruce Nauman, which, like *Anémic Cinéma*, exploits repetitive movement within a fixed frame to work the devolutionary pressure of the pulse effect against the stable image of the human body. In *Bouncing in the Corner II* (1969), for example, the artist's torso, viewed in medium close-up,

keeps propelling itself off the corner of the studio and toward the camera and then slamming backward into the walls again. As this motion repeats, the torso begins to follow the path of Duchamp's printed spirals, taking on the character of a body part separated off from the rest of Nauman's person – now appearing as a beating heart, now as an expanding and contracting lung, now as a sexual organ. This pulsatile effect is also at work in *Lip Synch* (1969), in which the lower part of the artist's face is seen upside-down in close-up, saying "lip synch" over and over, the movements of the mouth doubly defamiliarized by being both out of synch with the sound track and visually inverted, thus devolving into "beat." And once again, the whole person is transmuted into "part object," which in turn dissolves from one organic association to another, each as unstable as the next.

At first glance Richard Serra's film *Hand Catching Lead* (1971), though its movement is pulsatile – again a fixed frame, within which a hand is seen opening and closing in an effort to catch the scraps of lead that keep falling into the space of the image (sometimes missing their prey, at other times catching it only to open immediately and let it drop out of the frame) – seems to have more to do, formally, with the tradition of the "flicker film" (a genre characterized by its use of rapidly alternating black and white frames, and seeking both to develop an "abstract" film idiom and to harken back to the beginning days of cinema, when the primitive technology of the medium caused the image to jerk or "flicker") than with the legacy of *Anémic Cinéma*. Like so many other artists in New York in the 1960s, Serra was a regular at Anthology Film Archives, where a repertory of experimental films was continually cycled for the gathering of minimalists, process and conceptual artists, composers, and dancers who assembled there most evenings. Old films (by Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Jean Epstein, and G.W. Pabst, for example) as well as contemporary works (by Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Peter Kubelka) were shown at AFA, and they revealed formal concerns with camera movement, framing, editing, and so on to a growing audience of film connoisseurs.

Out of this milieu a movement arose in the 1960s, which was sometimes characterized as "structuralist" filmmaking. The filmmakers in this movement sought to reduce cinematic experience to the most basic components of its material and phenomenological supports, whether this meant making the movie screen itself palpable, or rendering visible the film frame as physical support – with all its sprocket holes, projector burns, scratches, and tears – or making the trajectory of vision shared by camera, projector, and spectator the subject of a single constructive act, and so on.³ Within this movement, the flicker film, initiated by Kubelka (*Arnulf Rainer*

[1960]), was further developed by Paul Sharits, first as an imageless fluctuation of pure color (*Ray Gun Virus* [1966])⁴ and then as a visual pulsation into which flashes of recognizable imagery burst (*N:O:T:H:I:N:G* and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G* [both 1968]). And indeed it is this trajectory, from what could be thought of as a relative visual or structuralist "purity" to the corporeal dimension of seeing that is ultimately at stake in the flicker medium, that Sharits's development enacts. For in *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*, flashes of automutilation (a young man holding scissors up to his own tongue), of attacks on the human eye (the reference to Dalí and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien andalou* [1929] is unmistakable), and of coitus are yielded up by the incessant pulse of the flicker. Far from seeming like a regression from abstract film back to realism, the flicker's structural operation to dismantle the stability of the image-as-such (by cutting into the filmic illusion and giving the viewer the sense that he or she is actually seeing the frames passing through the projector's gate) seems rather to be an act of violence (against the "Gestalt"), violence that can then be inhabited by a set of bodily correlatives, whether sexual or dismembering.

With this in mind, Serra's *Hand Catching Lead* can be seen as a demonstration of his own determination to invade the fixed image of stable sculpture with the counterimage of "process," of something continually in the act of making and unmaking itself. Further, he not only uses pulsation in this operation but also ties this to a sense in which gravity, pulling against form's ability to hold itself intact by staying erect, continually propelling the fall of lead through the frame, mimes the activity of the strip of film passing downward through the gate of camera or projector. Further, through the manifestation of the artist's flexing hand, which opens and closes around a prey it either captures or misses, Serra's film performs the same violence against the Gestalt of the human body as Nauman's and Sharits's works do, the same opening onto the part object and its logic.

(See "Pulse" and "Very Slow.")

N

No to... the *Informel*

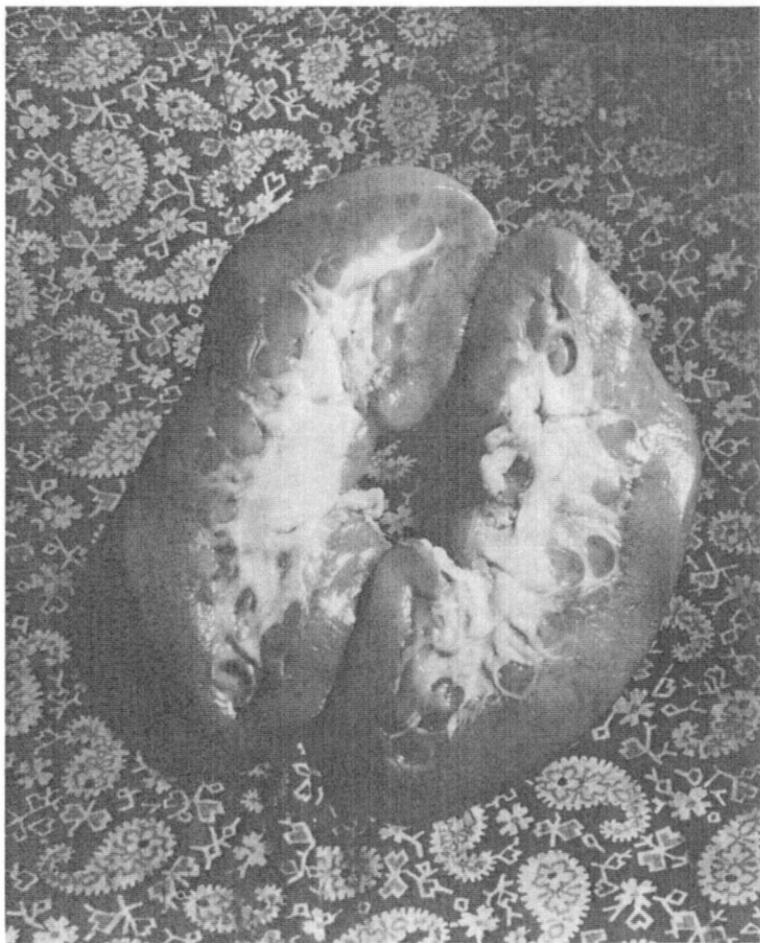
Yve-Alain Bois

The critical literature contemporary with what is called *art informel* is generally deplorable, full of packaged generalities and metaphorical goo, sticky with adjectival and metaphorical superfluity, puffed up with rhetorical noise and wind, and, above all, lacking even the slightest attempt at historical analysis.¹ Even when the tone lowers a notch and the lyrical transports are set aside by a less pompous writer, the outcome is just as confused. Look at the opening sentence of Jean Paulhan's (eulogistic) *L'Art informel*, published in 1962: "Informel painting appears on a certain day in the year 1910: it is when Braque and Picasso start to make portraits, and no sensible person could make out the eyes, nose, or head."² Braque and Picasso... *informel* artists? Paulhan's next sentence is of the same stamp, naming even Theo van Doesburg among the precursors to this genre. Needless to say, there is nothing to be gotten from this mess of pontification typical of the man of letters who has given himself license to write on something about which he has not the slightest idea.

And yet, and yet. Quite unawares, Paulhan put his finger on the very thing that situates *art informel* at the opposite pole from the *informe*: "Why have we used *informel* for a kind of painting that strikes us first by the strangeness of its shapes, by the mystery of its forms? The word was coined by Michel Tapié, for the drawings of Bryen. However, one of the young painters of the school – [Robert] Lapoujade – intelligently suggests calling it rather: *formal*. But we should not demand too much from a name; it is already wonderful that this one evokes – even if by antithesis – the thing in question."³ For Robert Lapoujade was right, and if the writers who poured out their hearts on the subject of the *informel* for a good twenty years had done their homework and demanded a little more from words, the term in question would have been dropped as soon as it was proposed.

That Fautrier was often cited as one of the three pioneers of *art informel* (with Dubuffet and Wols) did not prevent him from sowing a bit of taxonomical confusion into the critical lexicon, for he viewed this label with horror and held that the literature on the

Figure 44.
Wols,
Untitled, n.d.
Silver print, 9 1/2 x 7 inches.
Private Collection,
Fribourg.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.



subject, "written in the well-known drugstore style," was devoid of the slightest interest.⁴ And he was not alone in protesting. Wols died in September 1951, just before the wave of this writing began to gather force, but Dubuffet wrote an outraged letter to Michel Tapié after receiving a copy of Tapié's *Un Art autre*, the very drugstorelike book/manifesto that launched *informel* as a movement in 1952: "I refuse as strongly as possible to join forces with all that. I subscribe to nothing this book supports."⁵

The word *informel* is self-evidently badly chosen, and its greatest wrong is to look so much like the word *informe*, even though the latter's field of reference is diametrically opposed to the former's. But what do Fautrier, Wols, and Dubuffet have to do with either of these concepts? There are three possible answers to that question.

First, one might argue that, despite these artists' own feelings on the subject, Fautrier, Dubuffet, and Wols are the only true *informel* artists. Their antipathy to the term (on Fautrier's and Dubuffet's part), so this argument goes, arose out of their distaste for Tapié's bloated prose (a disgust that was not all that immediate, one should note) and their desire to dissociate themselves from the huge gang of painters who followed in their wake and who were often characterized as "*tachistes*" or "*abstraites lyriques*." This answer is not ours.

Second, one might argue that the art of these three painters is not *informel* but *informe* and that only the aforementioned "gang" merits the label *informel*. The plausibility of this answer is reinforced by the friendship and collaboration between Fautrier and Bataille (Fautrier illustrated Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* in 1945 and *L'Alleluiah* in 1947). Nevertheless, we do not subscribe to this view either.

Third, one might argue that Fautrier, Wols, and Dubuffet are indeed *informel* artists (perhaps even the only painters of that school who count); nonetheless, there is a part of their production that puts the *informe* operations into play. That is our stance.

Fautrier partakes of the *informe* when, in his late period, the kitsch disjunction between color and facture casts a retrospective shadow of suspicion on the "authenticity" of personal touch, which, ever since impressionism, was held to be the very antidote... to the kitsch of the culture industry (figure 39). It is not Wols's painting but his lesser-known photography (figures 16 and 44), that connects with the *informe*, its "base materialism" being very close to that of the Lotar photographs Bataille published in *Documents* (figure 14). Finally, Dubuffet's materialism only opens onto the conceptual absence necessary to the *informe* ("whatever it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere like a spider or an earthworm") when it does not call up any figurative associations (in his *Materiologies*, for example [fig-

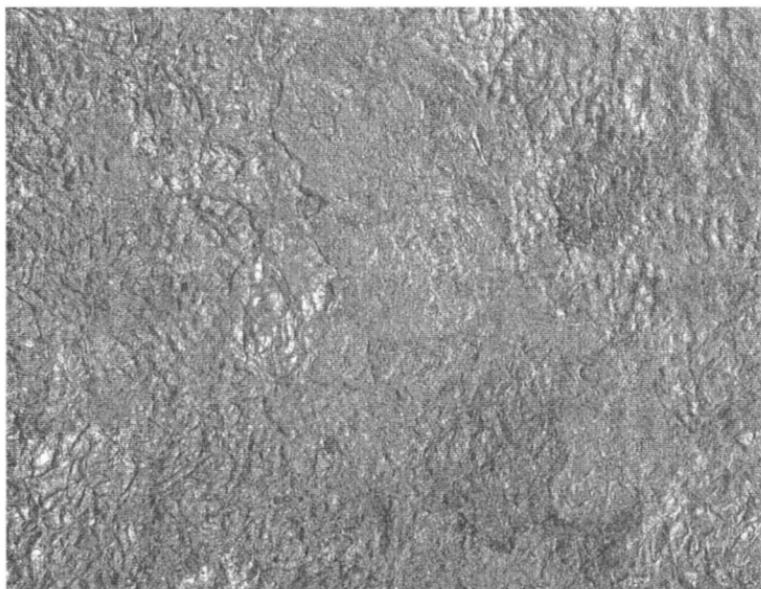


Figure 45.
Jean Dubuffet,
La Vie interne du minéral,
1959–60.
Silver foil on wood,
38¼ x 51¼ inches.
Private Collection.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.

ure 45]) or when the exalted waste is not presented as recuperable (as in his limited series *Messages* [figure 56]).

The whole of Dubuffet's production, with the few exceptions just mentioned, states more clearly than any other artist's work what the *informel* is about, namely, that it is an art of informing, an art that insists on the emergence of the human figure. From his earliest writings on, Dubuffet has always been concerned with the "mechanism of references" which alone brings colors to life, and the common ground of the things we perceive, namely, "their belonging to the world of man."⁶ "Every surface wants to be diversified," Dubuffet writes in his "Notes pour les fins-lettrés" (Notes for the Well-Lettered) (1946), a demand which his later painted and graphic work scrupulously obeys (aside from, once again, cer-

tain of the *Materiologies* and *Texturologies* from the end of the 1950s). "Starting off from the *informe*" (the phrase used as the heading of the first paragraph of "Notes pour les fins-lettrés"), one ends up with the image: all Dubuffet's sculptures made out of sponges, roots, and other found materials are the most obvious manifestation of this process. Needless to say, the "*informe*" Dubuffet speaks of here has no relation to what, along with Bataille, we mean by this term. Dubuffet's usage is, rather, akin to something Valéry had addressed. Valéry — as so many writers (including Paulhan) would do later in the context of the *art informel* discussion — made a connection between the landscape studies that Degas made "*indoors*, heaping bits of coke borrowed from his stove, as models," and the hoary remark by Leonardo da Vinci about discovering unexpected figures in the peeling patches of old walls.⁷

If the literature on the *informel* is a projective literature, it is because it concerns an art of projection (Dubuffet's *Texturologies* and *Materiologies* only escape this process despite their author: as for him, he prefers to recall to the viewers that these works are to be read as "earth seen from above," with all the connotations of "native land" that this implies⁸). Whence the innumerable relations drawn at the time between *informel* painting and micro- or macro-photography (relations that were, as further confirmation of the projective aims of these artists, not always displeasing to the painters).⁹ Whence also, as Dubuffet relates, the importance of the act of titling, which thus becomes the most striking confirmation of the logocentric principle: there is only named meaning.¹⁰ Whence, finally, contrary to what Tapié and Stéphane Lupasco claim, the deeply anti-entropic nature of *art informel*, since it is always a matter of going from the nondifferentiated to the differentiated.¹¹

All this is clear in Dubuffet's case, for the good reason that he never hid his profound lack of interest in abstraction. But the same logic is at work in all the *informel* painters, which explains the compulsive adjectival hyperbole of those who have had to write about this art. As Georges Mathieu put it, "Up to now, a thing being given, a sign was invented for it. Henceforth, a sign being given, it will be viable and by means of this truly a sign if it finds its incarnation."¹²

To find a philosophical defense of *art informel*, one must turn to Sartre. More than his late texts on Lapoujade (1961) and Wols (1963) or his essay on André Masson (first published in 1960, but probably written in the late 1940s), one should read the last chapter of *L'Imaginaire* (*The Psychology of Imagination*), published three years before his famous diatribe against Bataille, "Un nouveau mystique" (1943). Sartre begins by refuting the idea that the artist *realizes* an idea or image on his canvas that had previously been in his

mind: "this leads us to believe that there occurred a transition from the imaginary to the real. But this is in no way true. That which is real, we must not fail to note, are the results of the brushstrokes, the stickiness of the canvas, its grain, the polish spread over the colors." But, Sartre adds, "all this does not constitute the object of aesthetic appreciation." We might think that we are poles apart from the attitude of a Dubuffet, for example. But that is not so. Even if Dubuffet had always focused the viewer's attention on the materials he employed, it was never a matter of considering them in themselves. And so Sartre continues: "The painting should then be conceived as a material thing *visited* from time to time (every time that the spectator assumes the imaginative attitude) by an unreal which is precisely *the painted [depicted] object*." Even an abstract picture is not perceived as a *real object*: aesthetically, only the "unreal objects" that the "imaginative consciousness" projects onto it exist.¹¹ We are right at the heart of what Bataille calls (in order to criticize it in the most virulent way possible) "the play of transpositions."

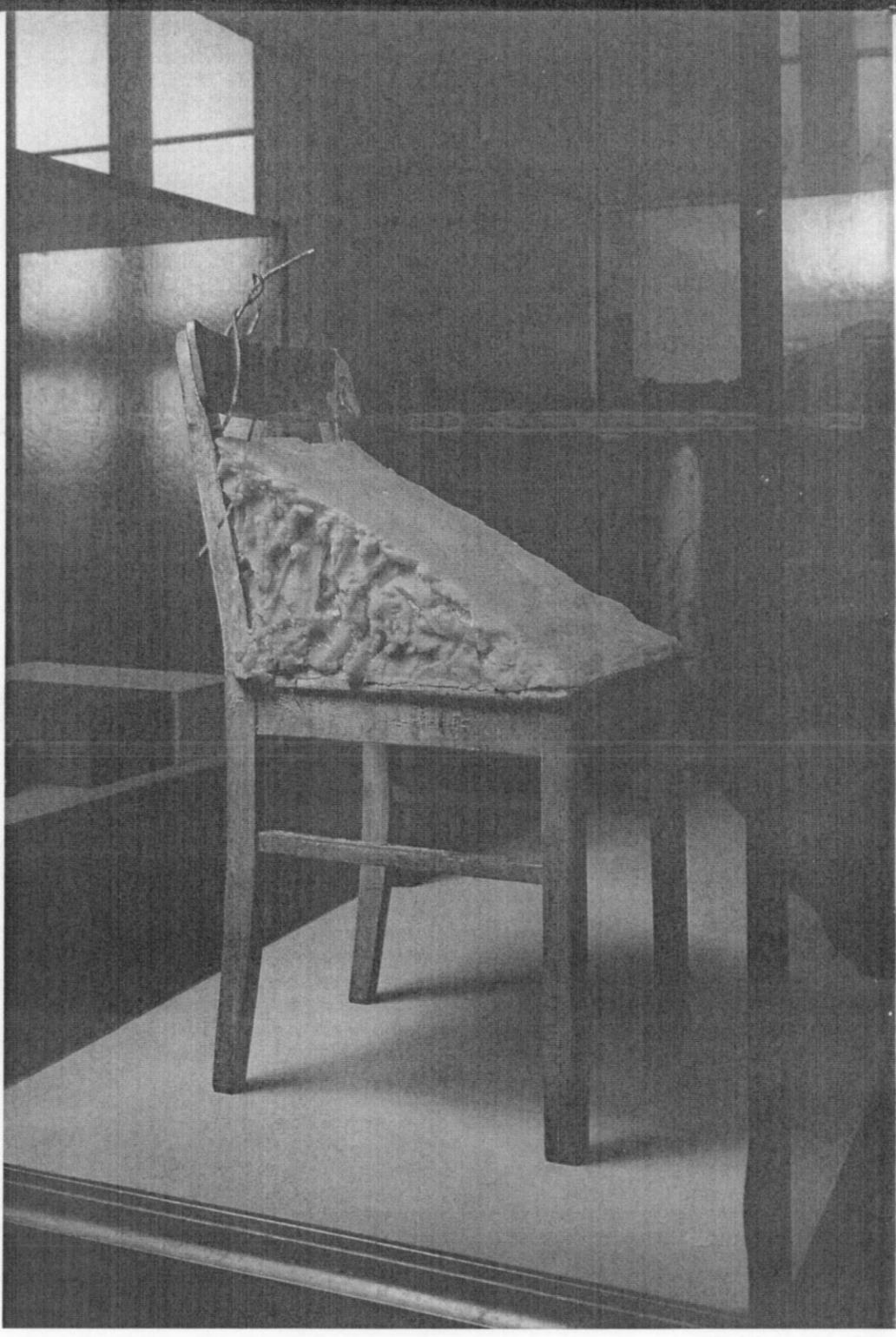
(See "Base Materialism," "Kitsch," "Sweats of the Hippo," and "Zone.")

N

No to . . . Joseph Beuys

Rosalind E. Krauss

Laughing about the pun it incarnated, since German for chair (*Stuhl*) is also the polite term for shit (stool), Beuys was happy to give an excremental spin to his celebrated sculpture *Fat Chair* (1964) (figure 46): "I placed [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 willpower. . . . '[S]hit' . . . , too, is a used and mineralized material with chaotic character, reflected in the cross-section of fat."¹ He was also eager to place his preferred materials—wax, felt, fat, a thick brown paint with which he coated many of his assemblages, musty old objects he gathered together as so much detritus—at the service of a set



of performance rituals, so that they would function as the remains of so many acts of communion, the relics of so many elaborated rites. Carrying his felt-wrapped walking stick or his shapeless knapsack, or huddled beneath a felt blanket next to a pacing coyote, he thus took on a succession of roles: of shaman, of wandering Jew, of scapegoat, of martyr.

All of this – the scatological nature of the materials, the insistence on the sacred – might strike one as textbook Bataille, especially since Beuys's various allegories of the sacred tended to join high and low to articulate the sacrificial figure as an exemplary being catapulted from his position as sovereign into an identification with the lowest of his social subjects.² Beuys himself projected this dual identity in one of his last works, *Palazzo Regale* (1985), a funerary monument organized as an allegorized double self-portrait in which the paraphernalia of the tramp or beggar are laid out in one glass-walled sarcophagus and the regalia of the king or emperor in the other.

In the course of analyzing *Palazzo Regale*, Thierry de Duve speaks of Beuys as reflecting, in all their variety, the denizens of that fabled land from which the personality of the romantic artist was thought to have sprung, the land in which the outcast rises above the heads of the philistines, where love redeems the lost and dying, and where the only true nobility is that of talent, the land that came to be called "la bohème."³ Because the modernist artist was thought of as emerging from this country, as the harbinger of a form of life not territorialized by the social divisions created by industrialization, and thus as the incarnation of the almost unthinkable condition of nonalienated labor, the early modern avant-garde had projected utopian visions from this very place of marginalization. And Beuys, eager to promote his own aestheticized version of a postcapitalist utopia – what he called a "social sculpture" – worked specifically to transcend the character of the bohemian into that of the proletarian, the figure whom Marx had cast as both the subject and object of history, who would rise from the ashes of capitalism as the controller of his own labor power, producing his own being as value. Collapsing these two figures – bohemian and proletarian – together, Beuys came up with the redemptive phrase, "Each man is an artist," thus recasting each specific act of labor – the nurse at her station, the digger in the ditch – as creative and thus an act of sculpting, just as he proclaimed every spoken word an element in the same great collective work.

If, however, Marx was repelled by Bohemia – not the mythical one of Murger, but the real one of the lumpen proletariat – it was because these motley figures, gathering in the interstices of the great social divide between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, had

Figure 46.
Joseph Beuys,
Fat Chair, 1964
Wood and felt
Private Collection
© 1997 ARS, New York /
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

dropped out of the system of representation on which both class identification and class struggle depended. Representing nothing, they were thus a scandal for the logic of history.⁴

Yet, it was for this very same reason – that they had been able to void the economy of *representation* – that the lumpen proletariat fascinated Bataille. For the *informe* is of course grounded on the wreckage of representation, of assimilating everything to form. In the articles he wrote after 1934 for *La Critique sociale*, Bataille explored the subversive work – the transgression from below, the (in *his* terms) scatology – of the lumpen, seeing it as something that could not be assimilated within rule-regulated, representative society, the society of the “homogeneous.” On the contrary, what interested Bataille was the fact that homogeneous society, anxious to submit everything to the laws of efficiency and thus to recycle all its products, nonetheless produces waste that it cannot assimilate – excremental waste that builds up as a heterogeneous threat.⁵

It is Beuys’s drive toward a totalized system in which everything is recuperated by the “social sculpture” that we see the fault lines opening up between his idea of the excremental or the heterogeneous and that of Bataille’s. Added to Beuys’s belief in total assimilation (“Every man is an artist”; every speech act is a sculpture) there is his interpretation of the shamanistic figure as the one who reveals the form always already locked within the chaos of matter, who therefore informs matter. Speaking of his use of fat as dramatizing this work of form giving, of *Gestaltung*, Beuys said, “In this way I could transform the character of this fat from a chaotic and unsettled state to a very solid condition of form . . . [with] a geometrical context as its end.”⁶ And, indeed, Beuys’s allegorical use of substances, and his constant insinuation of his own body into a network of myth, was devoted to this idea of breathing *logos* into his materials, so that by assuming form they would also be resurrected as meaning.

Beuys’s notion of total recuperation connected to a system from which nothing escapes being impressed into the service of meaning is thus involved in an idea of the sacred that is as far away as possible from that of Bataille’s. Beuys’s expressionism, his mythico-religious drive, found echoes in many other practices in postwar Europe, most prominently those of Hermann Nitsch, who dominated the Vienna Aktionismus group with his own performances of a redemptive version of sacrificial self-mutilation. As should be more than clear by now, the *formless* is inimical to this drive toward the transcendental, which always tries to recuperate the excremental, or the sacrificial fall, by remaking it as *theme*.

(See “Figure” and “Conclusion: The Destiny of the *Informe*.”)

O

Olympia

Rosalind E. Krauss

And if Cy Twombly's *Olympia* said, as everyone had always thought, "Olympia" and "morte," would those two words – in the suggestiveness of their interaction and in the setting forth of the proper name – have undermined the work of the graffiti mark as scatological (figure 47)? Would they have succeeded, that is, in sublimating the image? Would they have clothed the name in a resplendent nakedness, all the more beautiful in that it is wholly imaginary? Would they have made this pockmarked wall over into a funerary monument, an *Et in Arcadia Ego* erected at the threshold of the postmodern?

The narrative suggestions of the dead Olympia, or of the death of Olympia, open up the scarred and desecrated surface of the painting from the back, as it were, excavating a space within or beyond it, a space into which we pass imaginatively as onto a stage. It is a stage inhabited by ghosts – the long-departed gods of classical mythology and, even closer to us, the dead figure of Manet's painting, the one that inaugurated the whole history of a modernist ambition itself now curiously liquidated, declared a myth. It is as if that utopian drive to close off the illusionistic or virtual space of painting, to challenge the falsehood of the depicted third dimension, to constitute the true work (and thus the truth of the work) in terms of the pure simultaneity of its two-dimensional surface and the immediacy and directness with which that surface is given to vision – it is as if all that could be compromised in the split second of pronouncing, or inscribing, a proper name. One says "Olympia" and a multitude of narratives spring up around the word, each one succeeding in securing for itself a little room on the imaginary stage in which to exist.

But Twombly does not say "Olympia." He says, "fuck." "Fuck Olympia." He says it sotto voce, which is why, perhaps, no one had ever noticed it; yet there it is, in the lower center, just preceding and almost abutting the inscription of her name.¹ "Fuck Olympia."

Scatological, debasing, performative, "Fuck Olympia" is also concerted to play with the axis that links this command to its



viewer/reader, the axis that aims directly at the receiver of the command, making him or her the target of its deictic act of pointing. For just as there is a slippage in this imperative – with “fuck Olympia” now concerning the woman (goddess or prostitute), now concerning the painting (Manet’s, and by implication an entire tradition’s) – there is also a constant play set up in the implications of the deictic connection.

If it is the woman who is in question, Twombly’s painting rehearses the whole trajectory of modernism, with its beginnings in the erotics of a traditional, classical relation to the image that Manet’s *Olympia* itself had acted to transform. “Fuck Olympia” is, we might say, the form through which Manet’s painting stripped away the veils of denial and self-deception under which the thrill of libinal possession was carried on in the name of disinterested pleasure and ideal beauty. For, curiously, this admission, executed by the exchange of glances which transforms goddess into prostitute and viewer into client, has the effect as well of transmuting the perceptual field. It is as if the veil that falls away also – and by that very fact – enshrouds. So that the space of painting is con-

Figure 47.
Cy Twombly,
Olympia, 1957.
House paint, crayon,
and pencil on canvas.
78 3/4 x 104 1/2 inches.
Private Collection.

verted from one that had always accepted and confirmed an imaginary plenitude – through which the visual and the bodily formed a single continuum – to one that, in dissembling no longer, changes the medium of address. Now declaring openly the givens of the pictorial medium – the flatness of its surface and the specificity of its connection as visual *only* – the work transmutes the corporeal into a uniquely optical dimension that renders it “pure.”

But Twombly’s directive has multiple readings, in which other substitutions are forced to take place, and through which the optical itself is, if not replaced, subverted. Another “fuck Olympia,” one that castigates, denigrates, dismisses Manet’s painting, shrugs off its inaugural character and, in a burst of irritation, opens its positivism to a permanent question. And it is by means of this question that the third word, “*morte*,” takes on less a funerary, commemorative meaning than a violent one.

Two analyses vie for our attention here. One concerns the nature of this uniquely optical, modernist space – the one announced by Manet’s *Olympia* – which Twombly’s utterance, in its most negative inflection, operates to cancel. The other involves the dimensions of that cancellation, its structure and its operative force. But both analyses turn on a progressively redefined notion of axial connection, one that plays successive changes on what we might call the “realist” projective diagram of classical perspective, wherein the visual array gathers up all the strands of its separate parts to coordinate them as beams of light that are sent, arrowlike, to converge at a single point in the viewer’s eye. The modernist change is to swivel this arrow ninety degrees, so that what was perpendicular to our plane of vision – retreating away from it in successive waves back into the distance – now lies entirely parallel to that plane, in a wash of simultaneous display.

We might say that the result of this rotation is the loss of a single viewpoint; that, in creating this synchrony of a now abstracted visual field, modernist painting has impossibly generalized and diffused the place of the viewer. But the various paradigms that generations of such modernists invented – the grids, the nested squares, the monochromes, the figures *en abyme* – were not simply meant to bring figure and ground into an absolute parity, so that space being everywhere simultaneous would be everywhere transparent to itself. Those paradigms were also intended reflexively, as the very image of what could be called the cognitive moment, in which consciousness both grasps the preconditions of the visual as pure synchrony and internalizes this intuition as its own. Consciousness is, in this sense, both the frame of this intuition and its contents, both its figure and its ground. So that, if the formerly realist point of view is, indeed, generalized over this surface, it

is because it is lifted up within in it – canceled and at the same time preserved – for it has become a vision everywhere the same because everywhere open to itself, transparent to itself, the very picture of a purely homogeneous plenum in which nothing is hidden anywhere.

It is this idea of homogeneity, however, that the next quarter-turn of the arrow would challenge. For, as the visual axis rotated once again, realigning itself anew with a perpendicular address toward the canvas, it would do so in the performative mode, as a reconstitution of the subject of enunciation, as the one who says “I.” “Fuck Olympia” it will say, as it deposits its mark on the surface, like the λ that cancels, in a great big hiss of negation.

This negation is given the specific form of graffiti within Twombly’s visual vocabulary. And indeed graffiti is one of the variations of the trace which Bataille analyzed in his 1930 text on the collective production called “primitivism,” the production that ties together the first marks squiggled on the cave walls from twenty-five thousand years ago and the random traces made by contemporary children as they drag their dirty fingers along walls or doors for the destructive pleasure of leaving a mark. The occasion for Bataille’s text was the publication of a theory that resemblance is born from such destruction. Its author, G.-H. Luquet, theorizes that these first gestures arise from “a mechanical affirmation of their authors’ personality,” a kind of stamp or seal of the marker’s tentative presence. But from one affirmation . . . to another, the random squiggles rapidly become a kind of projective test, within which the neophyte artist, Rorschachlike, begins to “recognize” likenesses. And such visual projection soon leads to construction, as the draftsman launches into a more controlled and purposeful repetition of the initial pattern, now making lines parallel, now drawing with a single finger, now adding details – horns, say, or beaks – to secure the identity of a semishapeless silhouette. This mastery of resemblance is progressive, although Luquet’s secondary thesis claims that, with children and so-called primitive peoples, such mastery is arrested at a conceptual phase, never to attain the perceptual realism of developed Western painting.

If, however, Bataille pounces on the fact that the paleolithic data do not fit this theory, since the fabulously detailed and nuanced animals from the caves parade a full-blown perceptual realism, while the representations of the human figures remain curiously *informe*, it is not to refute Luquet’s “beginning” but rather to reinterpret it. The initial desire to destroy or deface the surface, Bataille calls “alteration,” relishing the fact that this word is bifurcated from within, since its definition, he argues, points in opposite directions simultaneously: both downward, to the decomposition

of matter (as in a corpse), and upward, to its transcendence (as in the passage to an altered, sacred state, as for example, a ghost). And the internal contradiction of the word is a perfect fit, as it were, for the deed it names, in which making a mark will be born out of a pure joy in destruction, a sadism that strikes simultaneously against the support of the mark and against its maker. For if the reindeer and the bison evolve toward resemblance and the human form does not, it is because the very production of the marker's seal, insofar as it is a registration of his self, projected out onto the world as a kind of lacerating shadow cast on its surface, carries the logic of the mirror image as always undergirded by aggression. Bataille's other word for this logic is "automutilation."

It is this automutilative condition that Derrida located in the very structure of the trace. This is the trace that, cutting even as it marks, is the engine of heterogeneity, the instigator of *différance*. Derrida has said of this form, "It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the *pure* movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is différance*. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude."³ Unity, the unity of the sign, is thus preceded by multiplicity, or at least by the formal conditions of separation, of division, of deferral, which underlie the sign as its very ground of possibility. And this prior condition, intervening like a knife to cut into the indivisibility of presence – the presence of the subject to himself, or of meaning to itself – is understood to be a form of violence. For if to make a mark is already to leave one's mark, it is already to allow the outside of an event to invade its inside; for it cannot be conceived without "the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present."⁴ This marking, then, as it cuts the marker away from himself, "cannot be thought outside of the horizon of intersubjective violence"⁴ and is thus, as Derrida writes, "the constitution of a free subject in the violent movement of its own effacement and its own bondage."⁵

It is this "effacement" and "bondage" that are staged by the cancellation of *Olympia*, a cancellation that, while it seems to restore the subject and its relation to an object, restores it only to produce that subject as permanently asymptotic, a subject who can never experience him or herself as synchronous with the field that is either marked or read – the field to which he or she is present only as a displaced term. Thus it is that the automutilative structure of marking will, as well, elicit the word "*morte*," the thematic inscription within Twombly's *Olympia*, of its own logic of erasure and self-effacement.

The violent separation of the self from itself connects the mark

logically, then, to automutilation on the one hand, and to anonymity on the other. And if nothing demonstrates this character of the mark better than graffiti, Twombly was not the only postwar artist to exploit it. The work of the *décollagistes*, in performing a strange marriage between graffiti and the readymade, ties the anonymous condition of mass-produced consumer goods (and the apparatus of their advertising) to a violent act of effacement that, in its actual anonymity, having been made by unknown vandals against the public billboards on the streets of Paris – but also, as we have seen, in the very logic of its structure as mark – is a form of self-effacement. For artists such as François Dufrêne, Raymond Hains, and Jacques Villeglé to have preserved these clandestine “acts” as works (figure 55) was to have entered into the logic of automutilation and to have accepted the anonymity that accompanies the lash of the mark as the precondition of their own relation to the conditions of making.

(See “*Jeu lugubre*,” “Ray Guns,” and “Zone.”)

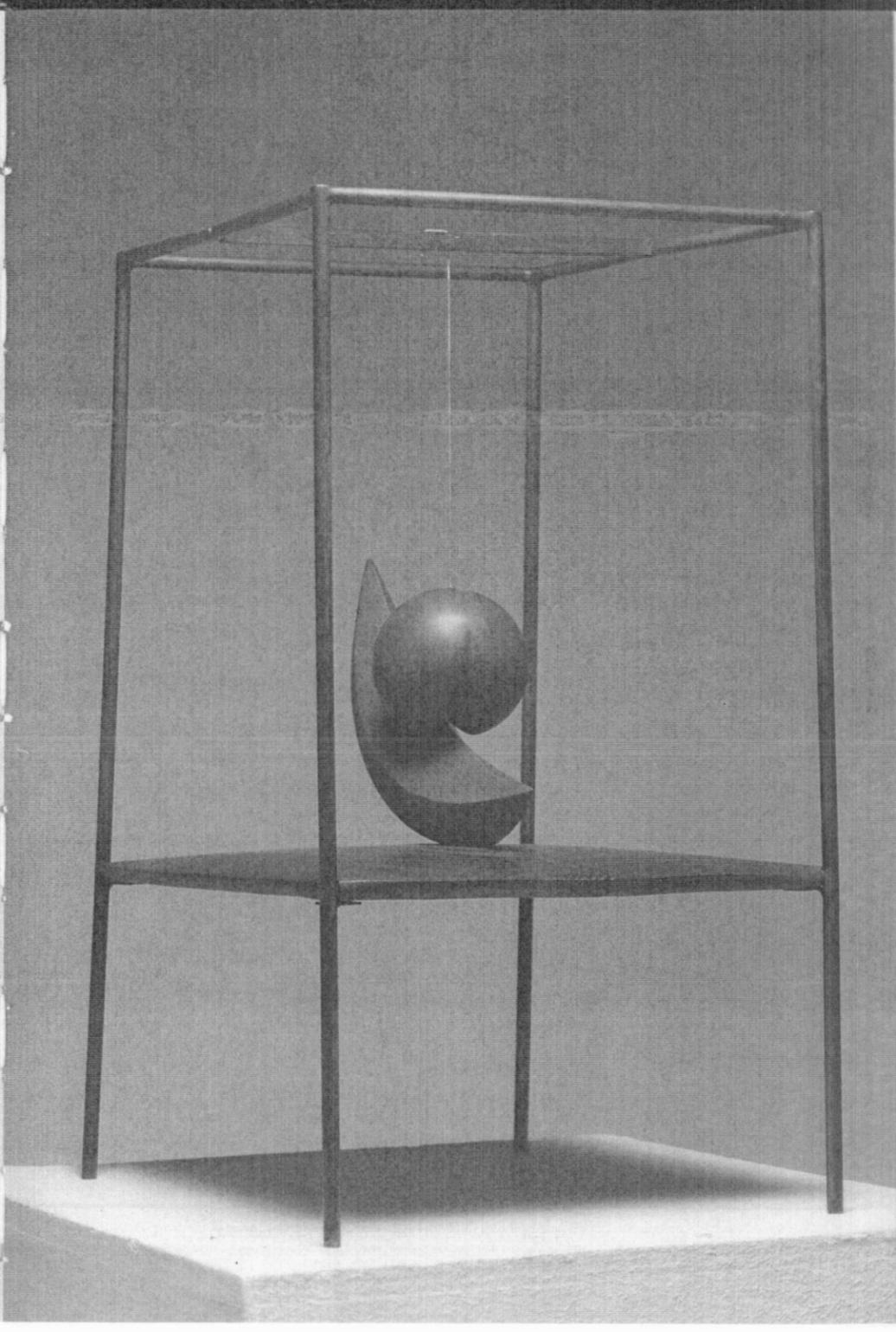
P

Part Object

Rosalind E. Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois

Never quite as overt as the fight between Breton and Bataille over the right to Dalí's *Le Jeu lugubre*, the “right” to Giacometti's art was nonetheless another point of contention between surrealist orthodoxy and its heterodox opposition. A full year before Breton had been alerted to the existence of his work, Giacometti had entered the pages of *Documents*, shepherded by his friend Michel Leiris.¹ But then came the exhibition of *Suspended Ball* (figure 48) in the fall of 1930, greeted by Breton and the other surrealists with an instant feeling of stupefaction. There, suspended above the crescent shape of a recumbent wedge, a sphere with a cleft removed from its underside hung like a kind of pendulum, the two forms brought close enough to appear almost to be touching – indeed, almost to be caressing. “Now, everyone who has seen this object function,” Maurice Nadeau reported, “has felt a violent and indefinable emotion doubtless having some relation with unconscious sexual desires.

Figure 48
 Alberto Giacometti,
Suspended Ball, 1930–31.
 Wood and metal,
 24 x 14 1/2 x 14 inches.
 Musée National d'Art
 Moderne-CCI, Centre
 Georges Pompidou, Paris.
 © 1997 ARS, New York /
 ADAGP, Paris



This emotion has nothing to do with satisfaction, rather with irritation, the kind provoked by the disturbing perception of a *lack*.²

Giacometti's passage into the apparatus of the surrealist movement was rapidly effected after that. An image of *Suspended Ball* was not only published by 1931, in the third issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, along with the artist's sketches for "objets mobiles et muets," but the sculpture had spawned a minipractice of surrealist objects, such as Dalí's *Objet scatologique à fonctionnement symbolique*, accompanied by Dalí's own theorization of the "surrealist object." Such objects, he stated, as the precipitates of erotic fantasies that had broken free of the repression and censorship of rational thought, would inevitably bear testimony to unconscious desire as a form of sexual perversion. Thus, even while acknowledging the importance of Giacometti's example, Dalí nonetheless cautioned that *Suspended Ball* was still unfortunately ruled by the "means proper to sculpture." He argued, "The objects of symbolic function leave no place for formal concerns. They depend only on the amorous imagination of everyone and are extraplastic."³ What then follows, in Dalí's text, is a series of examples of such objects — one by Breton, another by Gala Eluard, the last by himself — which become increasingly elaborate and filled with peculiar incident, such as the pubic hair, pornographic photograph, sugar cube, glass of milk, and shoe that his own object drives into presumed erotic conjunction.

Yet precisely because of the "extraplastic" nature of the relation between the elements — the fact that neither the connection between them as shapes, nor the character of the motion that would bring them into contact, is perspicuous — the "functioning" of all the objects Dalí presents (with the exception of Giacometti's) depends on a set of explanations, making them seem like the illustrations of so many absent texts. And it is in this tension between the "formal concerns" Giacometti is accused of and Dalí's own conviction that the baseness of unconscious desire demands an expression that must be "extraplastic" that one can locate a struggle over the nature of the *informe*.

Indeed, it is this kind of tension that Roland Barthes seems to have in mind when he rejects a thematic or "extraplastic" reading of Bataille's 1926 pornographic novel *Histoire de l'oeil* (*The Story of the Eye*), no matter how filled the book might be with the precipitates of perverse fantasy and unleashed sexual imagination, to insist instead on a specifically *structuralist* account of the book. The story, Barthes declares, is not that of a set of characters and their exploits, but of an object — the eye — whose characteristics yield the *combinatoire* from which the textual fabric is woven, both at the level of its language and in the dimension of its events. For the grid this

object produces is constructed from an axis of shapes (the chain of globular forms that links eye to sun to egg to testicles) and an axis of fluids (a series of liquids that mutates from tears to yolk to semen). It is the crossing of these two axes at their multiple points, Barthes argues, that produces the precise images with which Bataille operates—such as when the sun, metaphorized as eye and yolk, is described as “flaccid luminosity”—and gives rise to the phrase “the urinary liquefaction of the sky.” In describing Bataille’s book as a kind of structuralist machine, Barthes is, on the one hand, clearly opposing its strategy to the surrealist idea of chance, with the poetic image defined as the result of a fortuitous encounter. Just as, on the other hand, he is describing the book’s narrative as a system for striking against the very possibilities of meaning. For the action of the grid is not only to set up the factitiousness of every term (the fact that none could have a point of origin in the real world and thus none could serve as the story’s privileged term, the one that provides it with its ultimate sense); it is also to declare each term as sexually impossible, the result of a continual collapse of sexual difference, as the grid works to produce the eye as a kind of round phallus. “He thus leaves no other recourse,” Barthes writes, “than to consider, in *Histoire de l’oeil*, a perfectly spherical metaphor: each of the terms is always the signifier of another (no term is a simple signified), without our ever being able to stop the chain.”⁴

The operational nature of Barthes’s analysis is thus clear. This machine to collapse a possible, distinct sexual identity is at one and the same time a system constructed within the definition of the *informe*: a procedure to strip away categories and to undo the very terms of meaning/being.

Barthes’s analysis is no less pertinent to Giacometti’s sculpture. *Suspended Ball* is also a “machine,” whose pendular movement is, like Bataille’s circular grid, constantly creating points of contact that just as continually produce images of the “impossible.” For the perfect sexual ambivalence of each of the elements in Giacometti’s sculpture—in which the labial form of the wedge is stridently phallic and the active, presumably masculine element of the work, in its cloven roundness, is yieldingly vaginal—is made to enter into the same migration that occurs in *The Story of the Eye*, with one element sent mutating into the next. Thus the ball swinging over the blade of the wedge is also permuted into the image of an eye (*Un Chien andalou* is not far off), while the erotic reading of this contact also suggests phallus and buttocks.

Thus, while Dali might deplore the “formal concerns” of *Suspended Ball*, it seems more enlightening to call these operational, with every pendular swing of the structure reconstituting the object’s “parts”; and while Dali might call for the illustration of

perverse fantasies, it seems more accurate to view the constantly shifting identity of organs, or "part objects," brought about by the systematic relationship between movement and permutation as in fact a mechanism to resist meaning, to attack the illustrative or the thematic.

However, to acknowledge Giacometti's recourse here to the image of the part object might seem to reinvest this strategy with just the kind of narrative Barthes's structuralist analysis of *The Story of the Eye* warns against. After all, one might argue, in the psychoanalytic work of Melanie Klein, from which the idea of the part object derives, these organs – the breast, the penis, the womb, and so on – only detach themselves from the larger matrix of the maternal body to produce the complex scenarios of the "paranoid" or "depressive position" through which the infant enacts its desire for and frustrated rage against the global figure of the mother for whom these objects stand. Thus no matter how compelling the Kleinian image of the complete instability of the human form might be – as the infant splits the breast into a good and bad object, ingesting one and rejecting the other, only to feel both threatened by what has entered its body to persecute it and at the same time in desperate need of making amends to the very organ it has cannibalized out of love – the goal of Klein's theory is ultimately to make part objects into the agents of intersubjective relations, and thus players in a drama between persons, not between indefinable, protean organs.

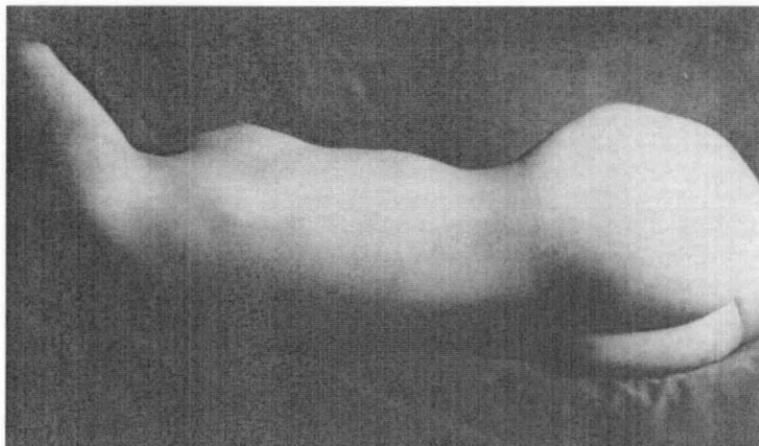
This is the argument that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offered against Melanie Klein even as they gladly adopted her theory of the part object for their own attack, in *Anti-Oedipus*, on the production of meaning. For they thought of these objects in the way Barthes had described Bataille's chains of signifiers: as a sequence of connections between the parts of a machine, the goal of which, for the infant, is to receive a flow of energy (the mouth attaches to the breast in order to ingest a stream of milk) and to retransmit it, the particular part object changing its very nature in the course of its function: from reception machine at one point of connection to transmission machine at the other. The unconscious, they argued, is totally unaware of persons as such – from which it follows that part objects are not representations of parental figures: they are parts of desiring machines.⁵

This idea of organ life as impersonal but permutational, with a simple operation (like Giacometti's swing of the pendulum) enacting the change, as well as the reversal of this change, and thus the utter instability of meaning/being, spread throughout much of the production that surrounded Bataille's magazine *Documents* at the end of the 1920s and the new review, *Minotaure* (whose name he

suggested), at the beginning of the 1930s. One of the operations common to various photographers associated with these reviews was the simple but efficient practice of rotating the human body, so that a mere change in axis from vertical to horizontal would transmute whole into part, high (the Gestalt) into low (the sexual organ), human into base (the animal). This is the strategy Brassai carries out on the form of a female nude in the opening issue of *Minotaure*, for example, where in one image rotation transmutes the female torso into phallus (figure 49), or in another a change of axis supplants breasts and rib cage with the image of the beast. It is also the strategy Man Ray uses in the photograph he called *Anatomies* (1930), where the violently upended head of the sitter, seen from below, replaces the figure's face with nothing but the erected thrust of the neck ending in the distended underside of the chin.

And this latter photograph, in which the human is suddenly replaced by the animal, immediately recalls to mind the sardonic image from Bataille's "Pineal Eye." There, in opposition to the idea of the civilizing change of axis that lifted man off the horizontal plane of his animal condition to set him erect on his two feet and thereby to initiate the long process of education and sublimation, Bataille interposes the image of another form of verticality: this

Figure 49.
Brassai,
Nu 115, 1932-33.
Silver print,
7¼ x 11¼ inches.
Madame Brassai Collection,
Paris.

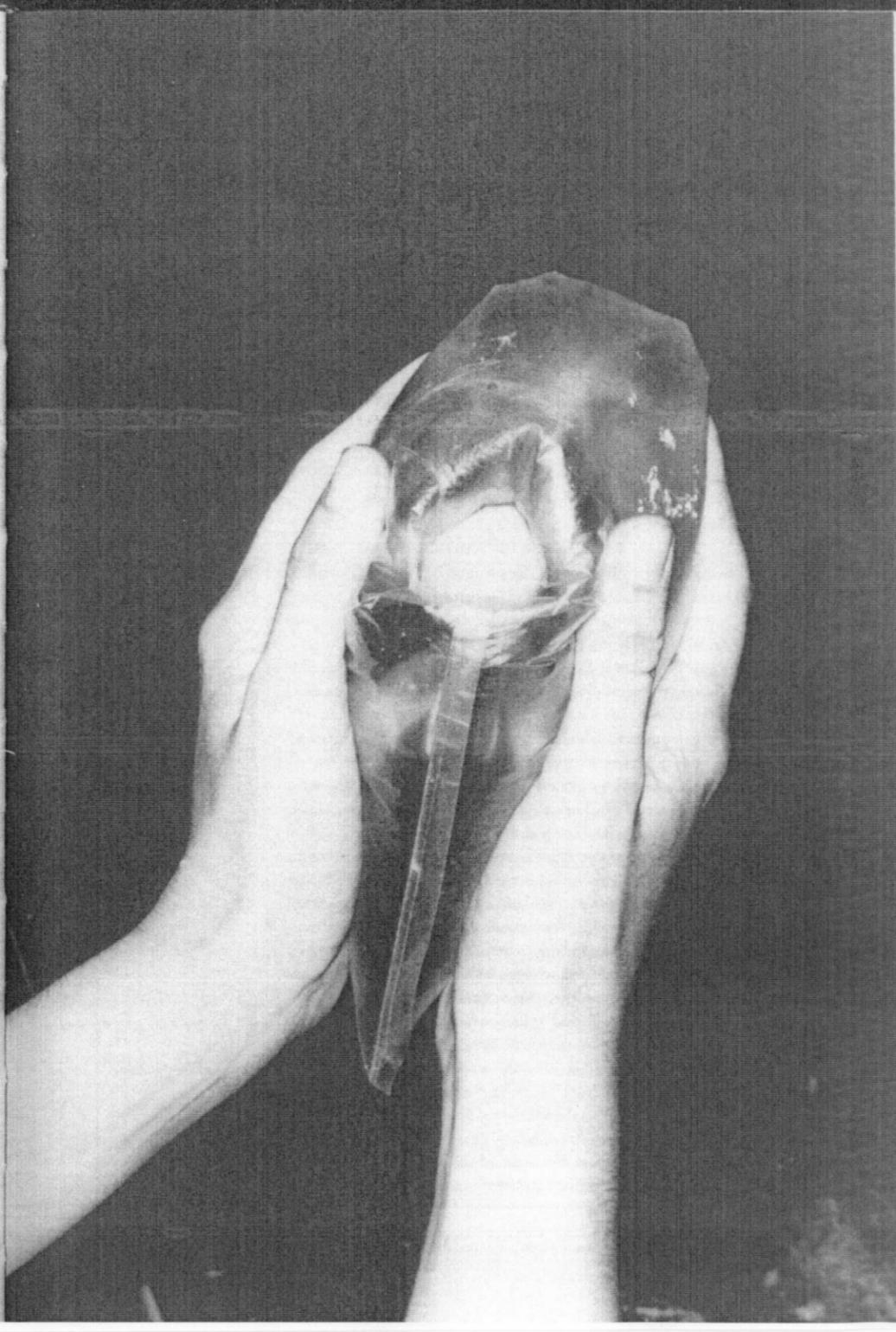


one obscene. This is the verticalization of the monkey whose newly found upright posture merely produces the effect that its anus is ever more strikingly visible. "In the course of the progression towards uprightiness that goes from the quadruped to *Homo erectus*, the ignominious look of the animal increases until it reaches horrifying proportions, from the pretty lemur, scarcely baroque, who still moves along the horizontal plane, up to the gorilla," Bataille writes. And, in this case, verticality "in no way signifies a regression from original bestiality but a liberation of anal forces – lubricious, absolutely disgusting – of which man is only the contradictory expression."⁶

Another example of anatomical redistribution, or "round phallicism," is furnished by the work of Lygia Clark, particularly her series of "propositions," dating from 1966–68, and given the overall title *Nostalgia of the Body* ("proposition" is the term the artist substituted for "work of art," since what was at issue in these works was not a function of any quality of the object itself – which was either a readymade or something simple enough for anyone to refabricate – but resided instead in the object's manipulation). Of course, as such a title clearly signals, the point of departure for this series was an investigation of a phenomenological sort (itself evolving from earlier work, such as *Beasts* [1960–64], geometrical "sculptures" made of sheets of aluminum hinged together so that the "viewer" is forced into an unpredictable wrestling match once he or she handles them, or again her *Caminhando* (Trailing) (1964) (figure 68), where the accent is placed on the temporality and irreversibility of the action to the detriment of its result, which is, each time, destroyed (see "Water Closet" below). The primary aim was always to find the means, by sensory – above all, tactile – shocks, to liberate the body from its prison by making it accessible "to consciousness" (a catch-22, since "consciousness" precisely constitutes the boundaries that maintain the closed body).⁷ But this project for a phenomenological awakening very quickly turned into its opposite: the dismantling of the whole body into so many part objects.

Three "propositions" from 1966 are exemplary in this regard. The first, titled *Dialogue*, and conceived in collaboration with Hélio Oiticica, refers back to Clark's beginnings, specifically in the neo-concretist movement that was directly opposed to the scientism of Max Bill's concrete art, which was very current in Brazil during the 1950s. *Dialogue* explores what the bodily "use value" might be of a Möbius strip, the topological figure that Bill had celebrated in so many polished granite monuments. While Bill was interested in the Möbius strip as a form that is simultaneously complex and essentialized, *Dialogue* takes it as the "material" of a

Figure 50.
Lygia Clark.
Air and Stone, 1967.
Silver print.



sensory defamiliarization. Two participants are needed, each passing a hand into one of the two loops of the strip (made of slightly elasticized cloth): the hands, back-to-back, can touch, eventually twisting the strip until they are able to clasp, but their movement is neither wholly free nor wholly controllable, and soon the visual and tactile sensations seem to part company. If the "dialogue" is continued long enough, a moment comes where the impression is born that the hands are carrying out a kind of autonomous dance and that, in their false symmetry, they are separated from the body.

Air and Stone (1967) (figure 50) arose from an event in the life of the artist, whose broken wrist had for a long time been "wrapped in a sort of cast that had to be kept warm" (to this end her hand was bandaged in a plastic bag kept airtight by an elastic band): "One day, I stripped off the plastic bag, inflated it in closing it with the elastic, and, taking a little stone, I tried to hold it aloft, by pressing the bag with my two hands on one of the points of this air bag, then I let it sink, thus miming a giving birth that was very disturbing."⁸ But the disturbing aspect does not stop with the image of giving birth: there again, one quickly sees that it is difficult to control the pressure of the fingers on the plastic bag inflated with warm air, a pressure whose slightest shift sets the precariously balanced stone to shaking, and by turns to sinking or surfacing. On the one hand (the tactile aspect), the skin of the hand, redoubled by the plastic skin that molds it, becomes a kind of autonomous organ; on the other (the visual aspect), the stone's movement of protention/retraction, the plastic bag's swelling or deflation, its corner's pointedness or curvaciousness, clearly refers to the sexual act, without one's being able at any moment to assign a specific role (or sex) to any of the elements put into contact.

One of the simplest "propositions" of this series, called *Breathe with Me*, employs a "rubber tube used by underwater divers for breathing": "When one sutures by pinching together the two ends of the tube, transformed in this way into a circular ring, and one stretches it, there is a suffocating sound of breathing that is very disturbing," the artist writes, adding, "The first time I heard this sighing sound, the consciousness of my breathing obsessed me during many stifling hours."⁹ And again, as Guy Brett notes, we have "the sensation of taking out our own lung and working it like any other object."¹⁰

The phenomenological "becoming aware" of the body has turned into the uncanny as analyzed by Freud: the production of the double, the *membra disjecta*, the fantasy of suffocation tied to the fear of being buried alive (the ultimate in uncanniness for many people, Freud remarks), and the split into two of the ego,

which no longer gathers its organs together but looks at them as though from outside.¹¹

(See "Pulse," "Uncanny," and "Very Slow.")

P

Pulse

Rosalind E. Krauss

I have constantly stressed the *pulsative* function, as it were, of the unconscious.

— Jacques Lacan¹

The flicker film was invented to stop time, to disable the afterimage's perceptual mechanism by means of which the visual "persistence" of information contained in one film frame would bleed into the next, creating the illusion of an uninterrupted flow of movement. This stoppage, the reasoning went, would make it possible to look past the illusion and actually "see" the basic unit of film, the real support of the medium: the single frame.

But though the rapid-fire alternation of black and white, or black and image frames, can break the flow of motion, it cannot turn off the afterimage, which is produced by the viewer all the same. This phenomenon is even heightened, one might say, by the fact that the afterimage — projecting itself onto the visually "empty" spaces provided by the "flicker's" intermittancies of black leader — now has a place to exist within which it can be experienced as the ghostly counterpart to the passages of filmic representation. What we "see" in those interstitial spaces is not the material surface of the "frame," nor the abstract condition of the cinematic "field," but the bodily production of our own nervous systems, the rhythmic beat of the neural network's feedback, of its "retention" and "pro-
 tention," as the nerve tissue retains and releases its impressions.

This, indeed, is what James Coleman's *Box (ahhareturnabout)* (1977) (figure 51) takes as the complex of material on which to work. For this filmed boxing match, cut into short bursts of three to ten frames, interrupted by equally short spurts of black, is turned into a pulsing movement that both breaks apart and flows together



over those breaks; which is to say, Coleman's film emphasizes movement itself as a form of repetition, of beats that are separated by intervals of absolute extinction, even while the urgency of the rhythm promises the return of another and another. The gestures of the boxers, and thus of the representational field of the work – which is spun out of a few minutes of found footage of the Gene Tunney–Jack Dempsey return fight of 1927 – would seem to embody this rhythm, with their repeated jabs and feints, and their always threatened dive into oblivion. Further, this field of visual representation is doubled aurally by a voice-over that emphasizes both the drive of repetition (“go on, go on,” “again, again,” “return, return”) and the ever-waiting possibility of the onset of nothingness (“break it, break it,” “stop, s-t-o-p i-t,” “regressive, to win, or to die”).

Figure 51.
James Coleman,
Box (ahhareturnabout),
1977.
Projected images, 16 mm
film, black and white film,
synchronized sound.
Courtesy of the artist.

The fact, however, that the viewer's own body, in the guise of its perceptual system and the projected afterimages it is automatically "contributing" to the filmic fabric, is also being woven into the work means that *Box*'s subject-matter is somehow displaced away from the representational plane of the sporting event and into the rhythmic field of two sets of beats or pulses: the viewer's and the boxers'. As it also means that the frequent projections of the sound of breathing – expressed in the sound track as "ah/ah," "aha/ah," "p-a-m/p-u-m" – is giving voice not just to the boxers' bodily rhythms but to those of the viewer as well.

Indeed, it is in the interest of determining the nature of this rhythm that the representational "content" of *Box* gains its special pertinence here. For in the percussiveness of its beat, the garishness of its lighting, and the shock of its portrayal of black-gloved fists punching into white, yielding flesh – a shock that is echoed in the viewer's own body by the luminous explosions of the afterimage – the boxing match acts to produce the feeling tone, or affect, of this rhythm, and to qualify it as *violent*. Which is to say that *Box* is not "about" the violence of the sport of boxing but, rather, that the image of this brutal sport is "about" the violence of repetition and its structure of "the beat," felt as a set of explosive endings always abruptly propelled into motion again.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud questioned whether repetition should be considered as the throb of eros or should instead be seen as something that lies beyond pleasure, threatening it with violence – something that must therefore be identified with death. Coming to this question after hearing the repeated dreams of trauma victims, Freud began to theorize the structure through which a patient is doomed to the compulsive repetition of an event, particularly an event which, far from being pleasurable, is an extreme source of anxiety and terror. If this is so, he reasoned, it is because the event was one that the subject both witnessed and was absent from; which is to say that it happened to a subject who was, peculiarly, not *there*.

Writing in 1919 about traumas suffered in trench warfare, Freud was also in the midst of thinking about repetition as evidenced by his patient the "Wolf Man." In the latter case study ("From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" [1918]), in trying to explain the Wolf Man's simultaneous presence and absence from the traumatic event, Freud hypothesized a "primal scene": an infantile vision of the parents' sexual intercourse which the patient, too young to be able to understand it, had somehow "missed," even though he was its witness, thus dooming him in later life to replay this scene again and again, although each time it would be the same, since, as on the first occasion, he would always be either too early or too late.

The trauma victims Freud studied had too been taken by surprise, since their shock had "happened" to them when they were unprepared. Their condition of thus having "missed" the occurrence by not having had time to armor themselves against it meant that it had passed deeply into the inner reaches of their unconscious without having been registered consciously. Thus, they too, in an effort finally to prepare themselves for the event, so as to witness at last what they had both experienced and missed, are doomed to repeat it and relive the anxiety of their own paradoxical absence.

If we read the trauma, then, as a form of being witness to one's own absence, we see that it gives rise to one of those impossible sentences that cannot be said, and meant, by a living subject. We have seen this in the example of animal mimicry – as when the praying mantis configures the statement "I am dead" – through which the animal can no longer sustain itself as subject.³ And we feel it again in the trauma in which the first-person account of the witness is voided by his own absence from the event he most deeply "experienced." This, then, is the rhythm of shock: the upsurge of extreme violence to the organism, which prefigures its extinction even while it compels repetition to infinity.

This is the rhythm that Lyotard approaches in his analysis of Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten" in which the condition for repetition – formal identity and regularity – must somehow be vested in a matrix object whose aim is to collapse such regularities and smash such identities in its own drive toward "bad form."⁴ The beat itself, composed of both extinction and repetition, is the form of this "bad form." It is the violence lying in wait for form, as it is the form of violence.

Within "high art," form is constructed so as to ward off the violence of this beat, to achieve the permanence of the configuration, its imperviousness to assault. It was to this end that Enlightenment philosophy theorized a distinction between spatial and temporal arts, specifying that these two domains were to be held separate from one another.⁴ From the point of view of this classicizing perspective, if the pulse were to enter painting at all, it could only be through the highly controlled and mediated rhythms of formal proportion, so that, as in the Golden Section, geometry would take up and purify the effects of repetition.

It is, on the contrary, through the lowest and most vulgar cultural forms that the visual is daily invaded by the pulsatile: the blinking lights of neon signs; the "flip books" through which the visual inert is propelled into the suggestive obscene; the strobe effects of pinball machines and video games – and all of this undergirded by the insistent beat of rock music surging through car stereos or leaking voicelessly through portable headsets.

That the beat surges upward, from low to high, is encoded by Coleman's use of a boxing match that records the industrialization of sport. But as much as we might want to thematize this choice,⁵ its importance within the context of the *formless* is its vector, which is to say its reaching upward toward the sublimated condition of form in order to undo that order, and to desublimite that vision through the shock effect of the beat.

(See "Entropy," "Horizontalty," "Isotropy," "'Moteur!'," "Part Object," "Uncanny," and "Very Slow.")

1994. The University of Chicago Press. 2003. The University of Chicago Press. 2004. The University of Chicago Press. 2005. The University of Chicago Press. 2006. The University of Chicago Press. 2007. The University of Chicago Press. 2008. The University of Chicago Press. 2009. The University of Chicago Press. 2010. The University of Chicago Press. 2011. The University of Chicago Press. 2012. The University of Chicago Press. 2013. The University of Chicago Press. 2014. The University of Chicago Press. 2015. The University of Chicago Press. 2016. The University of Chicago Press. 2017. The University of Chicago Press. 2018. The University of Chicago Press. 2019. The University of Chicago Press. 2020. The University of Chicago Press. 2021. The University of Chicago Press. 2022. The University of Chicago Press. 2023. The University of Chicago Press. 2024. The University of Chicago Press. 2025. The University of Chicago Press.

ENTROPY

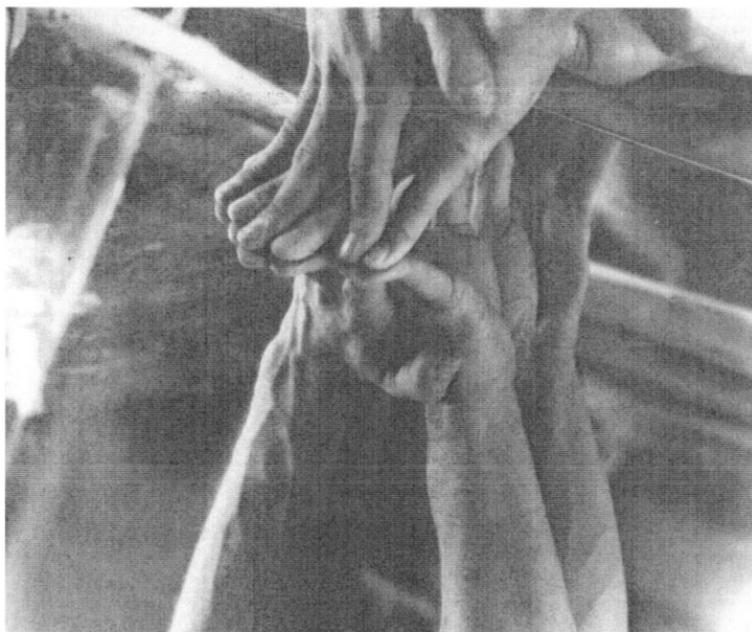


Figure 52.
Bruce Nauman,
Finger Touch with Mirrors
(from the portfolio *Eleven
Color Photographs*),
1966–67.
Chromogenic color print.
19 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.
Museum of Contemporary
Art, Chicago, Gerald S.
Elliott Collection. Photo
© MCA, Chicago by
Joe Ziolkowski.
© 1997 Bruce Nauman /
ARS. New York.

Q

Qualities (Without)

Yve-Alain Bois

"To turn an object upside-down is to deprive it of its meaning." Maurice Merleau-Ponty notes in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. And the example he gives is particularly convincing (try it and see!):

If someone is lying on a bed, and I look at him from the head of the bed, the face is for a moment normal. It is true that the features are in a way disarranged, and I have some difficulty in realizing that the smile is a smile, but I feel that I could, if I wanted, walk around the bed, and I seem to see through the eyes of a spectator standing at the foot of the bed. If the spectacle is protracted, it suddenly changes its appearance: the face takes on an utterly unnatural aspect, its expressions become terrifying, and the eyelashes and eyebrows assume an air of materiality such as I have never seen in them. For the first time I really see the inverted face as if this were its "natural" position: in front of me I have a pointed, hairless head with a red, teeth-filled orifice in the forehead and, where the mouth ought to be, two moving orbs edged with glistening hairs and underlined with stiff brushes.¹

Why would this be? Because our perception is oriented (and oriented in relation to our upright posture): Merleau-Ponty took this idea from Gestalt psychology. But why the tragic tone? Because here it is a question of the human face: the panic comes from the fact that the narcissistic imago of the perceiver has been attacked.

But doesn't this failure of specular identification, a sort of demonstration by negative example of the formative function of the mirror stage, as isolated by Lacan, have its comic aspects as well? The upended face, of which Merleau-Ponty speaks, is also that of a grotesque clown: the panic that overcomes the philosopher could just as well have led to laughter. And this, moreover, is what inevitably happens when the reversal involves neither the human face nor the whole body.

"We should like to know what the ego would be in a world in which no one had any idea of mirror symmetry," Lacan wonders, a world, for instance (to refer to the famous example used by Kant), in which the noncongruence of the left and right hands would go unnoticed.⁷ What happens when noncongruence is itself inverted, as in Hans Bellmer's photographs of hands crossing back-to-back (1934)? Or when the hands (or the mirror) are pivoted into the horizontal plane, as in Bruce Nauman's *Finger Touch No. 1* and *Finger Touch with Mirrors* (1966-67) (figure 52)? Nothing less than a "psychasthenic" loss of the subject, a burlesque return to animality, a leaking away into the nondifferentiated.⁸

And if the overturned object does not belong to our own bodies? It becomes a kind of black hole in our perception, reminding us that our self-assurance, insofar as it rests only on the solidity of our legs, is in fact rather precarious. Perhaps this is what Robert Smithson wanted to show with his *Upside-Down Trees* (1969) (figure 53); he says that flies were attracted to them by their riddlelike character:

Flies would come and go from all over to look at the upside-down trees, and peer at them with their compound eyes. What the fly sees is "something a little worse than a newspaper photograph as it would look to us under a magnifying glass." (See *Animals Without Backbones*, Ralph Buchsbaum.) The "trees" are dedicated to the flies.... They are all welcome to walk on the roots with their sticky, padded feet, in order to get a close look. *Why should flies be without art?*⁹

Smithson's flies are ludicrous. They have more to do with that visual quack landing "on the nose of the orator" to which Bataille alludes in his article "The Human Face" (much to Breton's disgust) than with those dead ones photographed in close-up by Boiffard and illustrating "L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions" (The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions), Bataille's darkly pessimistic essay published in the final issue of *Documents*.

The flies are ludicrous, but nonetheless they signal the limited character of our human world. Moreover, Smithson makes immediate allusion to the geographic inversion that these "upside-down trees" presuppose: "Perhaps they are dislocated 'North and South poles' marking peripheral places, polar regions of the mind fixed in mundane matter – poles that have slipped from the geographical moorings of the world's axis. Central points that evade being central."¹⁰ The upside-down tree is a sadistic reply to the habitual childish question, What would happen if a tunnel to the other side of the earth were dug below my feet? The world loses its center; that is, it has no meaning or direction (we are lost there) because

its imaginary seat is inverted – as Piero Manzoni had demonstrated in 1961 with his *Socle du monde*.

Without consciousness of “mirror symmetry” the subject would dissolve into space, and the world, anthropocentric for the Gestalt-oriented human, would be stripped of its qualities, made characterless, isotropic. We would lose our marbles there: signs themselves would become empty, flat; there would be smoke without fire. Even the most immediate elements of communication, the index or indices, for example, would no longer point to anything. In a world with no differentiation of “regions within space,” to put it as Kant did, imprints would become illegible. For the world to lose

Figure 53.
Robert Smithson,
Second Upside-Down Tree,
Captiva Island, 1969.
Color photograph,
14 x 14 inches.
Estate of Robert Smithson,
courtesy John Weber
Gallery.



its meaning, it is enough to turn it inside-out like a glove, to invert the full and the empty. Bruce Nauman's *Platform Made Up of the Space between Two Rectilinear Boxes on the Floor* (1966), or even *Space Under My Steel Chair in Düsseldorf* (1965-68) (figure 69), signals the indecipherable character of the cast as such: only the caption (itself comic) tells us what has been cast. The same "What's that?" could be uttered before the plaster casts of crumpled paper that Picasso made in 1934 (shortly before Caillois's essays on animal mimicry and psychasthenia appeared),⁶ or faced with Jean Arp's bronze *Relief Following the Torn Papers* (1930), or with Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf* (1950). The upside-down face became hideous for Merleau-Ponty because, as a phenomenologist, he was sworn to uphold the anthropocentric idea of the world: once we abandon this, everything, even the organs of the human body, can be redoubled by prosthetic appendage. No more transpositions, no more metaphors: "The earth is base, the world is world."⁷

(See "Entropy," "Gestalt," "Water Closet," and "X Marks the Spot.")

R

Ray Guns

Yve-Alain Bois

Trash collection is the business of public sanitation; recycling, the very height of capitalist alchemy, turns everything into grist for commodification's mill. But it is also a strategy of aesthetic sublimation that, according to Thomas Crow, is internal to modernism (he has analyzed the cyclical aspect of this in terms of the incorporation of the "low" by the "high").¹ In this matter of artistic recycling, the work of Dubuffet and of pop art represents two examples from the two extremes of a huge gamut of possibilities.

Dubuffet tried to "rehabilitate dirt," as he said himself in 1946. After listing the materials in the *Hautes Pâtes* shown in his "Mirobolus, Macadam & Cie" exhibition ("very vulgar and cost-free substances such as coal, asphalt, or even dirt") — materials whose shock effect at the time we now find surprising — Dubuffet wrote: "In the name of what — except perhaps the coefficient of rarity — does man deck himself out in necklaces of pearls and not

of spider webs, in fox furs and not in fox innards? In the name of what, I want to know? Don't dirt, trash, and filth, which are man's companions during his whole lifetime, deserve to be dearer to him, and shouldn't he pay them the compliment of making a monument to their beauty?"²

Pop art, which is perhaps more nostalgic than it seems, takes the inversion covertly carried out by the capitalist economy as its starting point: commodity itself (and the kitsch of the culture industry) is the contemporary cast-off, and it is this very throw-away that pop art seeks to redeem.

Claes Oldenburg started off from Dubuffet (along with Celine, this was the major reference of his early work), and he ended up with pop. Between these two points of his itinerary came the invention of the "ray gun." It first put in a timid appearance, in the scrap heap of Oldenburg's first exhibition, "The Street" (January to March 1960), among the torn silhouettes pinned to the walls and hanging from the ceiling, and took the form of notes that the visitor could read. These notes are Dubuffet "applied" to the urban theme: "The city is a landscape worth enjoying – damn necessary if you live in the city. Dirt has depth and beauty. I love soot and scorching. From all this can come a positive as well as a negative meaning."³ Given the fact that it is urban, the trash is a little less aestheticized than in Dubuffet's work. The silhouettes were cut out, with a blowtorch, from material gathered in the street (lots of corrugated cardboard, and newspapers), and the Judson Gallery itself – where a series of "happenings" also took place – became a kind of trash can: the ground was littered with detritus of all kinds; bums hung out there. But it was still an aestheticization of trash (which was even more obvious in the second exhibition of "The Street," at the Reuben Gallery two months later, made from the rarefied residues of the first show).

Secluded in the country after these two exhibitions, Oldenburg drew this lesson from them: "A refuse lot in the city is worth all the art stores in the world."⁴ At this point he began seriously elaborating the figure of the ray gun, while he was preparing the objects he would soon sell intermittently between 1961 and 1963 in his studio-shop "The Store" – ostensibly slapdash and oversized "replicas" made of cloth soaked in plaster and garishly colored, of perishable foodstuffs, or of tiny objects of contemporary mass consumption.

The two projects were related (The Store was even placed under the rubric Ray Gun Manufacturing Company, as indicated in the poster announcing its opening): their essential stake, the question of recycling. The Store's idea took off from the premise that all avant-gardist daring is assimilable, recuperable by middle-class cul-

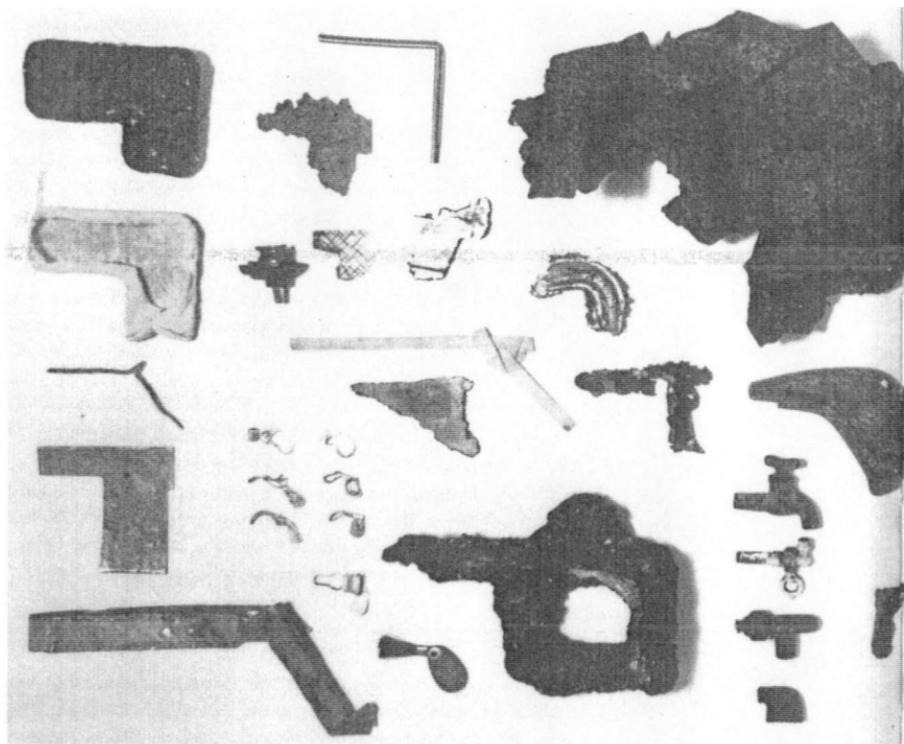




Figure 54.
Claes Oldenburg,
*Mouse Museum / Ray Gun
Wing*, 1977.
Mixed media;
Museum Moderner Kunst,
Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna.

ture ("The bourgeois scheme is that they wish to be disturbed from time to time, they like that, but then they envelop you, and that little bit is over, and they are ready for the next"⁵). The projected solution to this dilemma: skip over the illusory stage in which art pretends to escape commodification. Art objects "are displayed in galleries, but that is not the place for them. A store would be better (Store – place full of objects). Museum in b. [bourgeois] concept equals store in mine."⁶ The Store would thus function like any other, each piece sold being immediately replaced on the shelves by another, often made on the spot (but this is not to say that the prices, even though modest, would be those of the corner grocery: it was not a matter of "democratizing" art, but of avoiding the detour of its aesthetic sublimation). "Store is cloaca; defecation is passage," Oldenburg wrote.⁷

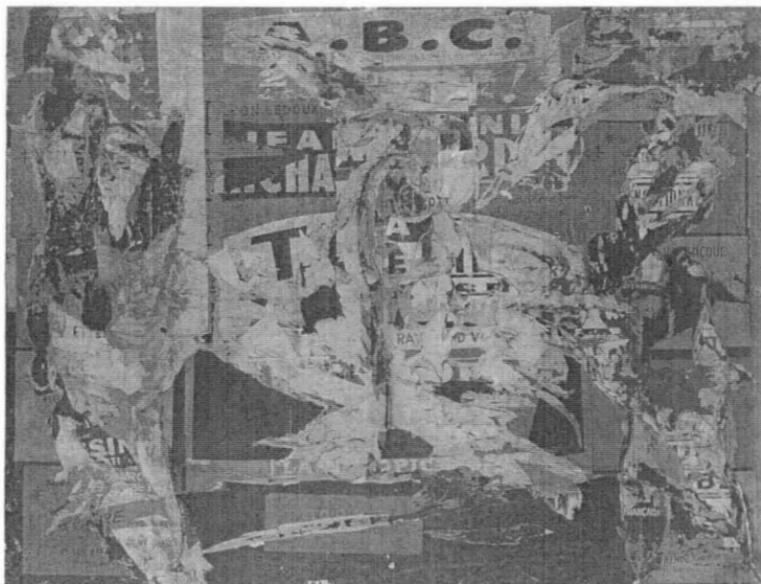
The solution was provisional, and Oldenburg knew very well that the objects he sold in his store would end up in a museum; and it is from that end that the ray gun attacks the problem of recycling. At the outset (in "The Street" show), it was a question of a parodic science-fiction toy, whose image Oldenburg took over by simplifying it. But he quickly saw that it took little to make a ray gun: any right angle would suffice, even blunted, even barely perceptible. The ray gun is the "universal angle": "Examples: Legs, Sevens, Pistols, Arms, Phalli-simple Ray Guns. Double Ray Guns: Cross, Airplanes. Absurd Ray Guns: Ice Cream Sodas. Complex Ray Guns: Chairs, Beds."⁸ Mondrian didn't need to reduce everything to the right angle: almost everything is already a right angle. During the time The Store was open, Oldenburg made huge numbers of ray guns (in plaster, in papier mâché, in all kinds of materials, in fact), but he soon saw that he didn't even need to *make* them: the world is full of ray guns. All one has to do is stoop to gather them from the sidewalks (the ray gun is an essentially urban piece of trash: Oldenburg produced their anagram as Nug Yar: New York). Even better: he did not even need to collect them himself; he could ask his friends to bring them to him (he accepted or refused a find, based on purely subjective criteria). Finally, there are all the ray guns one cannot move – splotches on the ground, holes in the wall, torn posters – but which one might photograph. The "inventory" is potentially infinite. And what should be done with this invasive tide? Put it in the museum.

But what museum would want such a proliferation of objects (objects signifying, for all that, nothing but their very proliferation)? Only a simulacrum of a museum could be imagined. The idea for one emerged in 1965 but would not be achieved until 1972, for Documenta V, in Kassel, Germany. A selection of ray guns (figure 54) was presented in a special wing of Oldenburg's

Mouse Museum (a kind of giant Duchampian *Boîte en valise*, whose ground plan was in the schematic shape of Mickey Mouse's head—a "Double Ray Gun," it should be remarked in passing)⁹ and decorously classified in various vitrines according to whether they had been made by the artist, simply altered by him, made by others, or only found (without being altered). The *Mouse Museum* was reconstructed in 1979. Since then, ray guns have once again been piling up on the shelves of Oldenburg's studio.

But Oldenburg was not the only one to have cruised the city's trash cans. In France, beginning in 1949, this practice had been pursued by the *décollagistes*. Oldenburg was countering abstract expressionism's pathos (which had become purely rhetorical); for their part, the *décollagistes* (Raymond Haïns, Jacques Villeglé [figure 55], and François Dufrêne, to name a prominent few) weighed in against *art informel* and its metaphysical pretensions. But they were also turning against what had, in its own day, been one of the most radical modernist inventions, and which had since

Figure 55.
Jacques Villeglé,
ABC, 1959.
Torn posters mounted on
canvas, 59 1/4 x 74 1/4 inches.
Musée National d'Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.



become rather anodine (as early as 1930, Carl Einstein had noted in *Documents*: "There was a time when collage played the part of the acid thrower, [when it was] a means of defense against the happy chance of virtuosity. Today it has degenerated into easy riddles and is in danger of lapsing into the fakery of petit-bourgeois decoration"¹⁰). No need for virtuosity, no need for glue, it is enough to strip off posters from the hoardings where they have accumulated, themselves already partially lacerated by anonymous vandals. This is important (it constitutes the difference between the position of the French *décollagistes* and that of the Italian, Mimmo Rotella, who wanted the privilege of being the sole lacerator for himself):¹¹ the stripped-off poster is only fragmentarily legible, at best. Moreover, we are not dealing with one poster but a veritable mattress of posters, myriad skins whose identity has been destroyed by irregular tearing (carried out over time): the strata merge into one another; the lettering grafts together; the words cannibalize one another; information is little by little reduced to undifferentiated noise. The *décollages* are like Arman's *Poubelles* (particularly effective when they showed that nothing would remain from linguistic exchange but a little pile, as in *L'Affaire du courrier* of 1962 [figure 12]): they declare that all activity, but above all human communication, finishes up as uniform cinders.

This type of entropic deliquescence of language had been exploited by Dubuffet in 1944, in his exceptional series *Messages*, which were made on newspaper (figure 56), imitating the little notes that one tacks to a friend's door when he or she is not home. But even if it is with difficulty, one can still recover enough linguistic matter (and even sentences) from these scribbled snatches to be able to imagine various scenarios ("I will wait for you until 8:00 Come back," "The key is under the shutter Wait for me," "That will teach you"). Nothing of the sort from the *décollagistes* (who probably did not know these relatively obscure works by Dubuffet and could not bear the rest of his production). With them entropy is even redoubled, since the advertising poster belongs to "noise" even before being attacked: torn, it simply becomes a more ridiculously evident vanity. As for Dufrené, he only bothers to show its reverse side: it's six of one, half a dozen of the other.

(See "Kitsch," "Liquid Words," "Water Closet," and "Zone.")



Figure 56.
Jean Dubuffet,
Six Messages, 1944.
India ink and gouache
on newspaper,
25½ x 22½ inches.
Musée des Arts Décoratifs,
Paris.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.

S

Sweats of the Hippo

Yve-Alain Bois

Were we only to flip casually through *Documents*, the first text Bataille published there, "Le Cheval académique" (Academic Horse), which thus functions in the journal as a kind of manifesto, presents itself as a simple study in comparative numismatics. An example of Ancient Greek money is shown in relation to its deforming, Gaulish imitations. But as soon as we really start to read the text, things heat up a bit. In it, with a Manichaeism whose excessiveness he insists on, Bataille is opposing two worlds: the noble one of Greek antiquity and the savage one of the barbarian ancestors of the French. The former takes the horse as its emblem ("one of the most accomplished expressions of the *idea*, with the same claims, for example, as Platonic philosophy or the architecture of the Acropolis"); the latter chooses hideous monsters. Bataille compares these fantastic creatures to spiders (pre-saging the famous image from the paragraph on the *informe*), to gorillas (another of our ancestors, more distant in time), and to hippopotamuses.

The hippopotamus had little chance of being known by the Gauls (Bataille does not say that their coins represent it but that their imaginary monsters displayed "an obscure resemblance" to it, "insulting the correctness of the academic animal, the horse among others," in the same way as it does¹). Why the hippo (to which Bataille refers twice in the article)? He could, for example, have chosen the camel, whose aspect "reveals, at the same time as the profound absurdity of animal nature, the cataclysmic and fallen nature of that absurdity and stupidity," as he would express it somewhat later in *Documents*.² The answer is simple: linguistically speaking, the huge mammal is the grotesque version of the all-too-dignified *hippos* – its caricature.

The hippo is fat; it sweats; it is in danger of melting – as, occasionally, are paintings.

At the end of March 1944, Dubuffet gave Jean Paulhan one of his recent pictures as a gift. Several days later it began to melt. If we are to believe Michel Tapié, who reported the episode two years later, embellishing it as he did so, Dubuffet was "hugely" amused

"by these adventures, which he characterized as hippo sweats."³ In fact, the painter wasn't all that happy, for the painting kept "melting," due to the untested materials he was then employing (asphalt, for example). Two years later, and despite all his precautions, yet another gift to Paulhan had begun to sweat:

I am very alarmed by this hematidrosis phenomenon concerning the *Homme des murailles*. I had carefully chosen a painting about which nothing of the like could be expected, and this painting was the only one that seemed to me ... completely reliable. Nothing more alarming than these oozings, which stain anything placed under the picture in the dirtiest manner. I am astounded. And with great unease I imagine what the other pictures are doing (those which are not reliable). I ask Germaine to forgive me. Perhaps it is the heat of the stove that has set off some ingredient forming the composition of the encrustations? I think nonetheless that one could rehang the painting in the vertical position and nothing similar would recur. Otherwise, I will take it back and cure it of its wish to run, by heating it with a soldering torch for example, so that everything that wants to run could do so once and for all.⁴

Despite the playful tone (and the ritual excuses to Mrs. Paulhan for the mess in her living room), we feel the artist's alarm: What would he do if all his highly encrusted (*haute pâte*) canvases began to ooze? We can imagine the effect that this news would have on his collectors. Later, Claes Oldenburg wished that such a catastrophe would strike the hanging sculptures he had sold in *The Store*: "Perhaps, I have imagined, since most of the pieces were made at about the same moment, with what later proved to be insufficient thickness of wire, they will all drop at once, all over the world."⁵ Nothing like this for Dubuffet (which is why his work partakes only exceptionally of the *formless*): in his case, despite all his materialogical research, the painting most frequently remains an "academic horse."

Melting is an entropic process par excellence, and perhaps this is one of the reasons Bataille was so interested in the Icarus myth. As Edward Ruscha showed with his "Liquid Words," melting means falling into indifference. Liquid is precisely what is always everywhere the same. And it is toward just such a uniformity, as Michel Leiris reports it, that Joan Miró was also aiming in his so-called portraits of 1929: they expressed "this liquefaction, this implacable evaporation of structures ... this flaccid leaking away of substance that makes everything – us, our ideas, and the ambience in which we live – like jellyfish or octopi."⁶

It was only a matter of depicted fusion there, but what happens

A
GOLD LEAFED PHOTO-FRIED XMASS TREE

§ BEST LATED
WISHES

GORDON



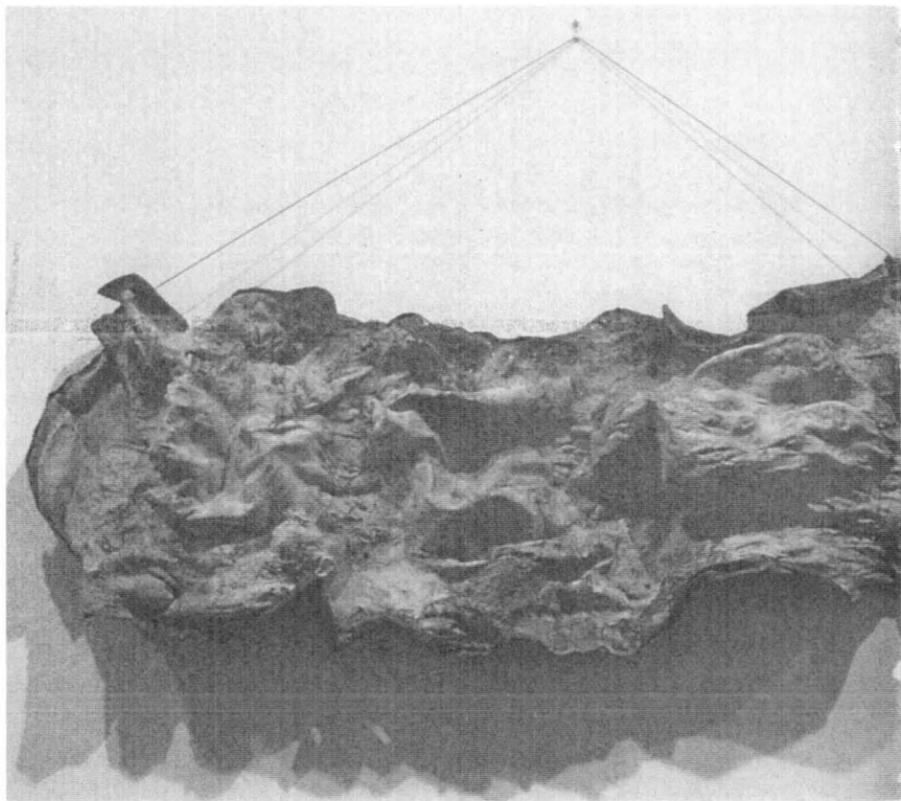
when this becomes the very process of the work? The same thing, but more clearly and more immediately, without the distance of representation, since the very materiality of the work is engaged.

To make his “*brûlages*” (1939), Raoul Ubac submitted the photographic emulsion of the negative to the heat of a little hot plate: the images literally liquefied, just like the melted glass from Mont Pelé, which doubtlessly had fascinated him (this deformed object, the result of a volcanic eruption, was one of the mascots of the surrealist group with which he was associated). Exactly thirty years later, Gordon Matta-Clark fried positive prints with some gold leaf, which melted in the pan and fused with the photographic emulsion (figure 57). (He sent his *Photo-Fries* as Christmas presents, one of which went to Robert Smithson.) After this first experiment, Matta-Clark made a whole series of works having fusion as their principle: one type, often carrying the title *Glass Plant* (1971) (figure 58), magnifies the action of the Mont Pelé eruption by transforming collected beer or soda bottles into repulsive ingots; another type had agar (the gelatin one gets from algae) as its base, which he cooked in large sheets with many different substances (yeast,

Figure 57.
Gordon Matta-Clark,
Photo-fry, 1969.
Cardboard and burned photograph, 1 x 5 x 3¾ inches.
Jane Crawford Collection,
Weston, Connecticut.

Figure 58.
Gordon Matta-Clark,
Glass Plant, 1971.
Melted glass.
Jane Crawford Collection,
Weston, Connecticut.





sugar, concentrated milk, vegetable juice, chicken bouillon, sperm oil), then mixed with yet other substances (mold cultures, trash gathered in the street, and so on), and left it to dry. There is only one object left from this latter series, *Land of Milk and Honey* (1969) (figure 59), a kind of false, contorted, topographical relief; but these agar-based works were initially shown as a group, when their organic materials were still in a state of chemical mutation.⁷ The installation of these ephemeral works, thin reliefs suspended in space by a network of ropes, was called *Museum*: a museum dedicated to the glory of the picture-as-hippopotamus.

(See "Dialectic," "Entropy," and "Liquid Words.")

Figure 59.
Gordon Matta-Clark,
Land of Milk and Honey,
1969.
Agar, milk, and honey,
21¼ x 57¼ x 6½ inches.
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam.



T

Threshold

Yve-Alain Bois

The first entry in the *Documents* "critical dictionary," signed by Bataille, is "Architecture." In *Against Architecture*, Denis Hollier carefully explores the implications of this beginning as well as the ramifications of the architectural theme for Bataille: philosophy's preferred metaphor (even marking the origins of art, for Hegel, the philosopher Bataille fought most against throughout his life), architecture is another name for system itself, for the regulation of the plan. Every monument is a monument of social order, a call to order issued to inspire fear ("The fall of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of things. This mass movement is difficult to explain otherwise than by popular hostility toward the monuments which are their veritable masters"). Architecture is the human ideal, the superego. Consequently, "an attack on architecture... is necessarily, as it were, an attack on man."

Bataille does not, however, develop this latter idea. He inverts the poles of the metaphor. What he targets is not so much man's image within architecture as architecture's within man: whether it be the man of authority ("prelates, magistrates, admirals") or man serving authority, architecture functions for man as an imaginary projection: he does his best to make himself into an "architectural composition" ("Man would seem to represent merely an intermediary stage within the morphological development between monkeys and tall buildings"). According to Bataille, one of the greatest achievements of modern painters (Picasso?) was to have attacked such a generalized petrification. He conceives of their aggressive assaults against human anatomy as "a path . . . [that] opens up toward bestial monstrosity, as if there were no other way of escaping the architectural straitjacket."¹

At first it seems strange that Bataille gave up so quickly on the initial vein of his thought (the charge against architecture is in fact a charge against man, that is, against the project) in order to pursue the rather traditional line of anatomical deformation in modern painting, but one that chimes with what one might call his aesthetic limitations (which, moreover, are those of the whole *Documents* group): burdened by a figurative conception of art, he did not conceive of a more ambitious aesthetic violation than that of launching a low blow against the human form.

On two occasions, however, Bataille would illustrate one of his texts in *Documents* with an image attesting to the vulnerability of architecture: the first photograph, accompanying the "dictionary" entry "Cheminée d'usine" (Factory Chimney) and published without any other commentary than its caption, shows "The collapse of a chimney stack, 60 meters [200 feet] high, in a London suburb"; the second, directly corresponding to a passage in the entry "Espace," shows the "Collapse of a prison in Columbus, Ohio" ("Obviously," Bataille had written on the preceding page, "it will never enter anybody's head to lock the professors up in prison to teach them what space is [the day, for example, the walls collapse before the bars of their dungeons]").² But there again the figurative limitation just mentioned keeps him from pursuing his architectural incursion any further: just as he does not see how art could strike harder against man than to alter his morphology, so he has difficulty surpassing the old anthropomorphic metaphor. Rather than reassessing Vitruvius, he prefers to abort and go on to something else.³

It was only about fifteen years later, perhaps with the image from *Documents* in mind ("the project is the prison I wish to escape from"), that Bataille reintroduced architecture as the metaphor not of the human figure but of the idealism of man's project: "Har-

mony, like the project, throws time into the outside: its principle is the repetition through which 'all that is possible' is made eternal. The ideal is architecture, or sculpture, immobilizing harmony, guaranteeing the duration of motifs whose essence is the annulment of time."⁴

Thus the dream of architecture, among other things, is to escape entropy. This dream may be illusory on its face; but this is something that must be demonstrated nonetheless – which is to say that one must "exit the domain of the project by means of a project."⁵ Such, precisely, would become the program of Robert Smithson (who was not unaware of Bataille⁶) and, in a different way, Gordon Matta-Clark.

The literature on the centrality of the concept of entropy for Smithson is vast, and this is not the place to rehearse it; it is enough to know that it is the pivot around which his work turns, in all its diversity.⁷ From his first published text, "Entropy and the New Monuments" (1966), to an interview conducted just before his death, "Entropy Made Visible" (1973), Smithson spoke often of entropy as the repressed condition of architecture (he was always scathing about the naïveté of architects who believe themselves able to control the world). However, it was only very late (and fleetingly) that he became interested in architecture as a material for his work (perhaps because he believed that, given suburban sprawl on the one hand and the proliferation of glass skyscrapers on the other, the repression of entropy would end up becoming completely self-evident?).

This interest began as something of a schoolboy joke: traveling in Mexico in 1969 (a trip that gave rise to his famous "mirror displacements in the Yucatán"), Smithson brought back not photographs of the ruins of the "Vanished America" cherished by Bataille, but views of a ramshackle hotel in the process of partial renovation, where he had stayed in Palenque (it was above all the concurrence in the same building of reconstruction and signs of decrepitude – since the natural ravages were accentuated by the activity of the masons – that interested him). A few years later, the "private joke" became public: to an assembly of architecture students who came to hear him speak of the famous Mayan ruins in the Yucatán, Smithson delivered a meticulous (parodic) analysis of the hotel.⁸

But between the trip to Mexico and the lecture, indicating how determinative the Palenque experience had been for him, Smithson attacked architecture head-on. The first project, *Island of the Dismantled Building* (or *Island of Broken Concrete*) (1970), conceived for a deserted island in Vancouver Bay, was abandoned because of opposition by local residents and ecologists (to create a ruin deliberately, without the slightest economic justification, as pure loss,

was too much!).” Several projects of the same type immediately followed, of which only the *Partially Buried Woodshed* was realized (on the campus of Kent State University, in Ohio, in January 1970). Projected as a follow-up to *Glue Pour* and *Asphalt Rundown* (figure 4) (in the beginning it was to be simply the unloading of mud onto an inclined field at the university, made impossible, however, by frost), *Partially Buried Woodshed* is a “nonmonument” to the process Smithson calls “de-architecturization”: a dump truck poured earth onto the roof of an old woodshed to the point where its ridge beam cracked.¹⁰ Architecture is the material, and entropy is the instrument (in the same sense that gravity served Pollock as instrument): Smithson merely accentuates this.

Yet, whatever his will to make the force of entropy constantly manifest, in a certain way Smithson resists it. He freezes the de-architecturization of *Partially Buried Woodshed* (the contract conveying this work to the university stipulated that everything remain in the same condition; the university’s art department was charged with “maintaining” the work), just as he would have built a higher platform for his *Spiral Jetty* (1970) had he known that the Great Salt Lake would completely submerge it.¹¹ To condemn his work to entropic destruction, to accept completely that it be left to collapse into nondifferentiation, would have been to opt for its invisibility and thus to participate in the very repression he wanted to lift.

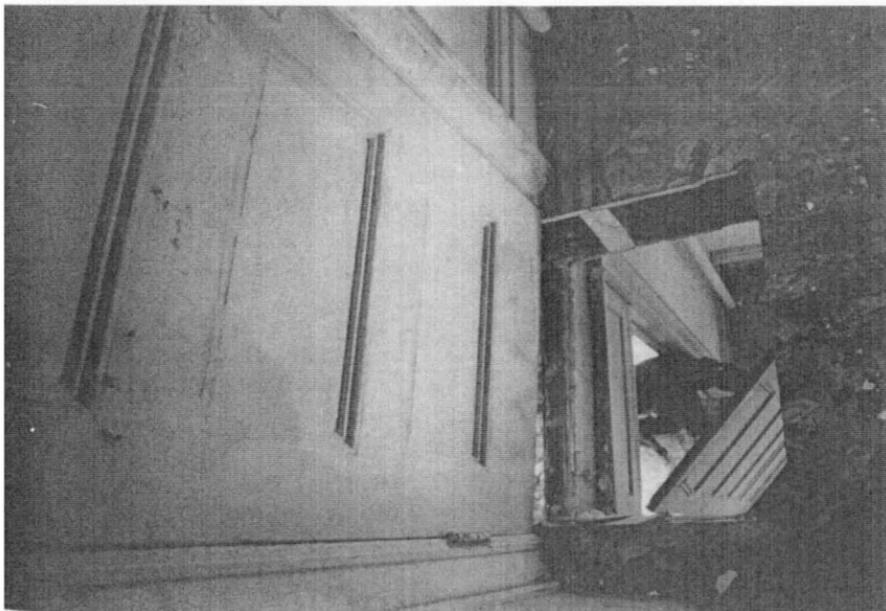
This is the fundamental difference between Smithson and Gordon Matta-Clark. It should be stated, of course, that Matta-Clark began his work in emulation of Smithson. About to complete his architectural training at Cornell University, Matta-Clark met the older artist in 1969, at the time of the “Earth Art” exhibition, the general theme of which was site specificity (Smithson executed *Mirror Displacement*, *Cayuga Salt Mine Project*, comprising eight different works, including *Slant* [figure 23] and *Closed Mirror Square*). Smithson quickly became something of a mentor for Matta-Clark (a relationship acknowledged a few months later by the delivery of a *Photo-Fry* as a Christmas “greeting”), who rapidly absorbed Smithson’s ideas on entropy. However, while architecture represented only a passing interest for Smithson, Matta-Clark had accounts to settle with it (he left Cornell with a degree, but was disgusted), and he was not going to stop at half-measures.

This was not so much a matter of attacking buildings themselves – it was not fundamentally their structure he wanted to get at (the ruptured roof beam of *Partially Buried Woodshed* was not enough for him) – as of striking at the social function of architecture. Indeed, he only worked on buildings slated for demolition. Of course, he had few other choices (his only act against a build-

ing in use, and it was no accident that it was the Institute for Urban Studies in New York – where some of his former professors worked – was instantly censored¹²), and he was not absolutely opposed to the idea (probably because it was utterly unfeasible) of cutting into “inhabited or in any case still usable spaces” (“it would change your perceptions for a while”).¹³ But it was essential to his project that the buildings he transformed be urban waste marked for early destruction (“the reason for going to abandoned buildings in the first place,” he said, “was a fairly deeply rooted preoccupation with that condition; maybe not so much because I can do anything about it, but because of its predominance in the urbanscape or the urban condition”¹⁴).

Even before he took to actual buildings, Matta-Clark considered waste as architecture: in 1970 he built a wall from trash mixed with plaster and tar (*Garbage Wall*, which served as a set for a performance before being dismantled and thrown in a Dumpster); in 1971, another wall, the construction of which was shot for his film *Fire Boy*, was built out of trash massed under the Brooklyn Bridge

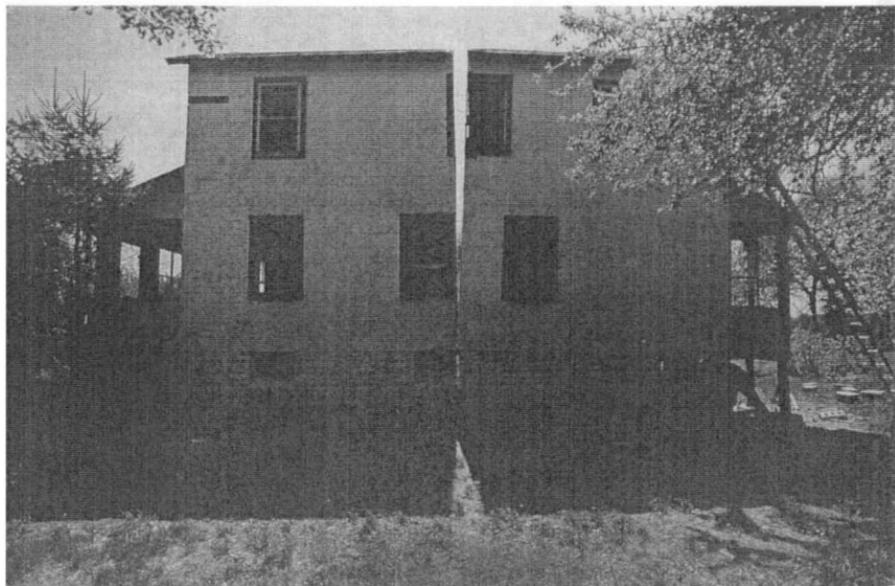
Figure 60.
Gordon Matta-Clark,
Threshole—Bronx Floors:
Double Doors, 1973.
Silver print, 4¼ x 5½ inches
each.
Jane Crawford Collection,
Weston, Connecticut.



and held together by a chain-link fence; in 1972, a whole house was constructed in a trash bin, or rather a trash bin transformed into *Open House*.

His first "anarchitectural" piece – to use one of his favorite expressions – plays on the linguistic equation architecture = waste. This was *Threshole* (1973) (figure 60). Under this generic term Matta-Clark designed a certain number of cutouts resulting in the removal of the thresholds of apartments in abandoned buildings in the Bronx, often on several floors, opening the gloomy spaces to light. (*Threshole* is also a trash hole, a cloacal opening like that of the Paris sewers he filmed in 1977, in *Sous-Sol de Paris*).¹⁵ Following this rather dangerous first move (since Matta-Clark had no authorization to do this and, among other things, risked being attacked in these deserted places), the artist abandoned his practice as urban guerrilla. This was not out of fear of the risk but because he did not want to limit himself to gnawing away at interior spaces that would remain invisible from the street, and because he wanted to change scale, and, with all official permits in place

Figure 61.
Gordon Matta-Clark,
Splitting, New Jersey, 1974.
Color photograph mounted
on wood, 40¼ x 60¼ inches.
Yvon Lambert Collection,
Paris.



(not always without difficulty), to attack the building as a whole, as an object in crisis. From the elegant simplicity of *Splitting* in 1974 (figure 61) (a suburban house split vertically in two), or the laconism of *Bingo* in the same year (another suburban house whose rectangular facade was divided into nine rectangles lifted away one by one, leaving only the central rectangle, which stayed in place like an absurd survivor of some cataclysm); to the formalism of *Day's End* in 1975 (saillike silhouettes cut out from the ribbed metal walls, roof, and floor of an immense warehouse on the docks of New York); to the allusion to optics contained in *Conical Intersect*, also in 1975 (a periscope bored through two neighboring houses – the last survivors before the construction of the nullity called *Quartier de l'Horloge* in the center of Paris – and pointing onto the Centre Pompidou, then in the process of construction); and up to the last Piranesiesque cutouts in an office building in Anvers (*Office Baroque*, 1977) or in neighboring houses in Chicago (*Circus-Caribbean Orange*, 1978); the negative spaces that Matta-Clark pierced into architecture are ever more complex and ever more visually, but also kinesthetically, stunning. To visit his final works was to be seized by vertigo, as one suddenly realized that one could not differentiate between the vertical section and the horizontal plan (a perceptual nondifferentiation particularly dangerous in a piece of Swiss cheese full of holes reflecting one into the other and in all directions), as if in order to learn “what space is,” it was first necessary that we lose our grip as erect beings.

But the unnerving beauty of the spaces created by Matta-Clark's perforations should not make one forget the critical dimension of his project (the error committed by all the architecture students for whom he is now a cult figure). Matta-Clark considered architecture a clownish and pretentious enterprise, and he would have been particularly enraged at having become a model, enraged to see his provisional disruptions of buildings stylized under the label of “deconstructionism” in the architectural projects of certain of his former professors at Cornell. If the architect takes himself for a sculptor, he masks his own role in capitalist society, which is to build rabbit warrens to the order of real estate developers. There was a sovereign contempt in Matta-Clark's attitude toward architects: What I do, you could never achieve, since that presupposes accepting ephemerality, whereas you believe yourselves to be building for eternity. But architecture has only one destiny, and that is, sooner or later, to go down the chute, because it is waste. His own project was to underscore this state of things, not to transcend it.

(See “Zone.”)

U

Uncanny

Rosalind E. Krauss

Roland Barthes opens his curiously first-person account of the nature of photography with a story. "One day," he says, "I happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor.'"¹

Initially, it seems that this experience of astonishment, which Barthes tells us he could not induce anyone else to share, derives from the evidentiary quality of the photograph, and thus its indexical character of being the trace of a real event to which it now testifies. And indeed, a page later, Barthes emphasizes the mode of pointing performed by the photograph by comparing it to an infant, gesturing with its finger and saying "Ta! Da! Ça!"—in a barely articulate indication of the real that Barthes makes rhyme with the Zen *tathata*: "the fact of being this, of being thus, of being so; *tat* means *that* in Sanskrit."

But when Barthes reproduces this opening, by introducing the second half of his book with a parallel story, one in which he discovers the "true" likeness of his recently deceased mother in a photograph of her taken when she was five years old, we realize that the story's import must be expanded. Photography is not simply being described here as testimony (the one medium that can compel belief in the fact that its referent really existed); rather, photography is now being reoriented toward death. Barthes's second story concerns an ineluctable connection between the (past) facticity of photography's referent and a future in which this referent will no longer exist, so that to the calm statement "this has been" must be added another, more lacerating report, reading, "this is going to die." "By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist)," Barthes writes, "the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."²

To photography's capacity to "prick" its viewer with this news

of death ("All those young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents of Death"³), Barthes gives the name *punctum*. And it is in the light of the wound that each photograph is capable of inflicting that Barthes's one reference to Lacan, made almost in passing at the very outset, as he is discussing the *thatness* of the photograph and the child's pointing, takes on new meaning. For there Barthes had employed Lacan's use of *tuché* as another term for the photograph's condition as "the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This*." With *tuché*, then, which he qualifies as "the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real," Barthes can indicate not just the brute fact of its testimony but can also address what in the photograph resists the activity of the symbolic, or the code, staying instead at the level of the "nothing-to-say."⁴ Having explained that "what I can name cannot really prick me,"⁵ and having cycled through the various ways in which photography has been "tamed" by being made to speak — overlaid by the symbolic systems of sociology, of history, of technical mastery, of aesthetics — Barthes lodges his own argument nonetheless in the wildness of the *punctum* and its situation beyond speech. So that if *punctum* and *tuché* connect, they do so as two parallel vocabularies — Barthes's and Lacan's — with which to register the traumatic nature of an encounter with a nonsymbolizable Real, a Real that addresses us with the news of our own death about which there is nothing to say.⁶

There is, however, a third term that could be overlaid on these two, one that would point to yet another vocabulary in which to map much the same terrain. This term is *uncanny*, and it is in fact evoked by Barthes in the final image of *Camera Lucida*, where photography's traumatic, nonsymbolizable condition is unleashed by the filmed sequence of a man dancing with an automaton, so that the last impression Barthes gives us of photography as hallucination, as madness, as the occasion for a depthless pity in the face of the evidence of death, is not delivered by a photograph but by a mechanical doll. Barthes thus arrives at the end of his book at an allusion to the domain of E.T.A. Hoffmann and the doll Olympia and the madness in the story "The Sandman," which Freud analyzed in his essay "The Uncanny," written in 1919, the same year as "A Child Is Being Beaten" and at a year's remove from his case study of the Wolf Man (1918) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). He arrives, that is to say, in the territory of the repetition compulsion and the death drive and the way the various avatars of the uncanny are configurations of these effects.

Perhaps it is Hans Bellmer's *Poupée*, itself a photographic project, that ranges most obviously over the domain that Freud organ-

izes in "The Uncanny." (Bellmer's project itself had been triggered by a performance of *The Tales of Hoffmann*.) For the choice of the doll exploits the uncanniness of the automaton, which Freud described as a double of living beings which is nonetheless dead. Indeed the whole of Freud's text turns on examples of cases of doubling in which likeness is simulacral in that the relation between the copy and the original is that of a false resemblance, for while the two might seem alike to outward appearances, there is a fundamental dissimilarity at their core.⁷ Accordingly, Freud's examples of uncanny doubling range from the apparent twinning of the *doppelgänger*, to mirror images, to epileptic fits, to the origin of spirits of the dead (or Shades) in man's own cast shadow. For the feeling of uncanniness, Freud argues, stems from the recognition that these doubles are at one and the same time the extreme opposite of oneself and yet the same as oneself, which is to say both alive and dead.

If the doll itself comes from this repertory of the uncanny, Bellmer's work on it elaborates the idea of doubling as a formal resource, beginning with his very construction of a doll that is itself split and doubled, since it is frequently arranged by Bellmer as a double pair of legs joined together at the hip and then organized into symmetrical patterns. This redoubled mechanical double he then embeds photographically, sometimes relying on the "straight" print to deliver the disquieting effect of the image coded as unreal, but at other times exploiting the technical possibilities of photography, such as multiple exposure or superimposition. It is in this formal condition of the double that the *Poupée* produces itself as an image of fissioning multiplication — doubles redoubled and doubled again — and at the same time as a kind of shadow cast by a profound absence (figure 62).

Thus the doll is able to encode the dynamic at the heart of the uncanny, which Freud describes in terms of two sources of terror: the first related to the magical thinking of both children and tribal societies; the second related to castration anxiety. In both, something that was once attached to the subject's own body and was invested with tremendous power and prestige has now separated itself from the subject and turns around with life-threatening ferocity, as in the case of one's own cast shadow that "returns" as a shade and thus an emissary of death. The structure of the uncanny turns, then, on a strangeness that grips what was once most familiar, thereby producing the double as simulacral, as it also takes the form of repetition, of the inevitability of return.

Within Bellmer's photographic theater, the uncanny is cast most frequently as a drama of castration anxiety, in which doubling is symptomatic of the dream work's effort to protect the threatened

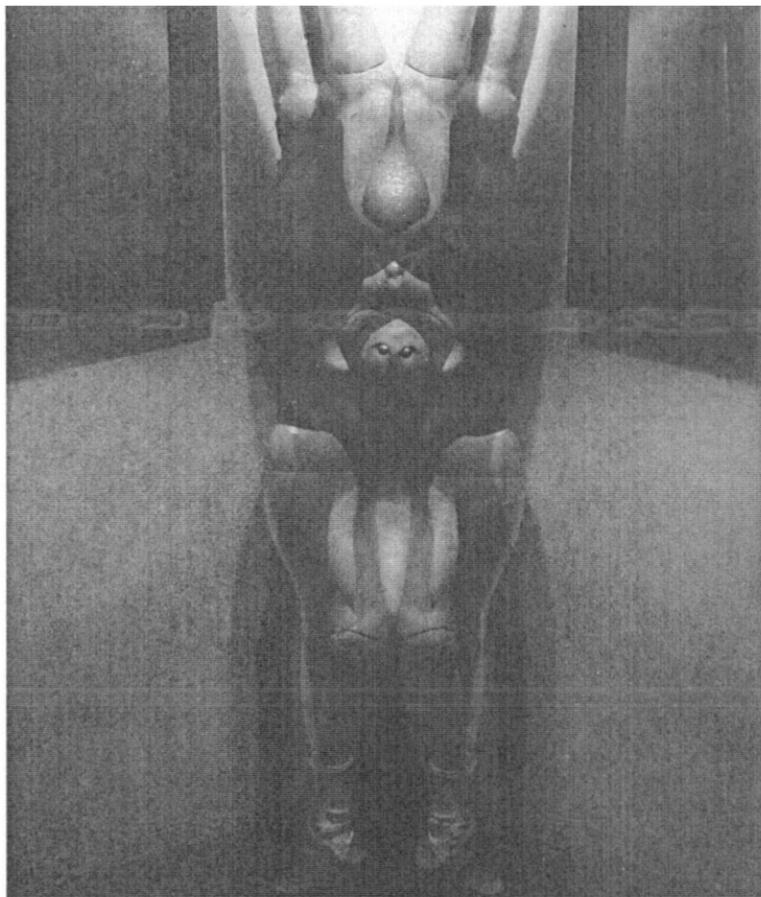


Figure 62.
Hans Bellmer,
L'Idole, 1937.
Tinted silver print,
5½ x 5½ inches.
Bihl Bellmer Collection.
Courtesy Editions
Filipacchi-Sonodip.

phallus by representing it through what Freud describes as the multiplication or doubling of the genital symbol. Indeed the dream effect is staged by Bellmer as he makes the uncanny *Poupée* appear within the entirely familiar spaces of our domestic interiors — lounging in the stairwell, poised in the kitchen cupboard, spread-eagle on the unmade bed — but always cast, within this dream space, as phallic. Frequently deprived of arms and thus reduced to nothing but the swells and bulges of a pneumatic torso, the doll is the very figure of tumescence; or, two sets of legs stuck end-to-end and flanking a tree, she is rigidly erectile. But in this very pairing that is also a multiplication, a pairing of the pair, one encounters the dreamer's strategy of doubling. As he tries to protect the threatened phallus from danger by elaborating more and more instances of its symbolic proxy, the dreamer produces — although transformed — the very image of what he fears: the phallus as separated off from his body, as detached, as castrated. Freud would later identify this as the Medusa effect, where the decapitated head is surrounded by snakes, which, "however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror. This is a conformation of the technical rule according to which a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration."⁸

To produce the image of what one fears, in order to protect oneself from what one fears — this is the strategic achievement of anxiety, which arms the subject, in advance, against the onslaught of trauma, the blow that takes one by surprise. As we have seen, this is the way *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) would recast the propositions of "The Uncanny," in terms of the life and death of the organism, and speak of the trauma as a blow that penetrates the protective armor of consciousness, piercing its outer shield, wounding it by this effect of stabbing, of the *punctum*, the *tuché*.

Within the repertory of surrealist photography there are many images that, like Bellmer's, conjure the effects of the trauma or the wound. One of them, taken by Man Ray — in it the dancer's body is both rigidly still (mirroring the dreamer's own petrification) and in the process, Medusa-like, of endlessly bifurcating — was chosen by Breton for inclusion in *L'Amour fou*, to produce the figure of "*l'explosant fixe*," one of the avatars of his category of the Marvelous. Another, produced by Raoul Ubac to illustrate Pierre Mabille's essay on mirrors published in *Minotaure* (1938), relates to the mirror's role within religion and myth as the site of the return of the dead, the place awaiting the appearance of ghosts. And indeed, this image, in its conflation of the lovely face of the woman with the deformations of the surface of the mirror, produces an uncanny experience of the double. It could be a portrait

of Nadja, and Breton opens his eponymous novel by posing the question of the ghost: "Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I 'haunt.'"⁹

To speak of Breton in this connection is to return us once more to the question of *tuché* and its relation to the wound. For this word (taken by Lacan from Aristotle's discussion as to whether accident or luck can be included in the forms of causality) relates Breton's notion of "objective chance" to Lacan's coupling of *tuché* and *automaton*, which is to say, to the problem of whether and how mere accident may be seen as linked to determinate cause. Since repetition always occurs within psychoanalysis under the sign of happenstance, Lacan is particularly interested in the forms in which the wholly determined return — organized as the compulsion to repeat — will nonetheless cast themselves as "chance." He is interested, that is, in the moment when the seemingly accidental encounter, masking the causality of the automaton, will arise to address the subject, wounding him.

The effect of wound, of *punctum*, is what differentiates this idea of *tuché* from Breton's "objective chance," which, while it identifies Nadja with a spectral, magical figure, identifies chance with the working out of desire and therefore sets it in the service of love and of a voluntarist relation to reality. In this connection *tuché* is far more related to the *automaton* structure of Bataille's *The Story of the Eye*, and its mechanistic structure produces encounters that are specifically configured as wounding: the relations not of love but of death.

(See "Entropy," "Isotropy," "Part Object," "Pulsation," and "Very Slow.")

V

Very Slow

Yve-Alain Bois

You are standing in front of a Pol Bury *Punctuation*, one of those composed of a multitude of white points, each marking the end of a length of wire emerging from a little hole pierced in a wooden panel, for example *2270 Points blancs* (figure 63), of 1965. Suddenly something seems to have budged. Yes, something has moved, or rather, barely trembled, but you do not know where. Yet you have a vague idea of the area of disturbance – just as though, wherever the relief might be positioned before you, the impression of movement had only registered in your peripheral vision. You want to get it into direct focus, and you concentrate your attention on the presumed place of the tremor you have just missed. Just when you begin to doubt yourself, since nothing seems to be happening (“Did I really see something move?”), your “peripheral” vision alerts you a second time. Persisting, you stumble at last on one of the specific agitators. But no sooner pinned down (or rather, no sooner the needle in the haystack having been found), you lose track of the rebellious point. Moreover you are never sure of having seen clearly, of having put your finger on it (there are so many points). The only infallible means would be to fix your gaze on one point and wait for it to move, but you soon realize how absurd such a strategy is, recognizing the improbability of success. You cannot make any very grand conclusions: yes, there is movement, but you have to admit that you can never grasp it in its entirety. If your gaze happens to fall on a point or a group of points in motion, that in no way prevents other parts of the surface from being activated as well – not without your knowing it, but without your being able to describe it.

In his *Punctuations*, Bury is working on one aspect of the “allover” composition that had been repressed by the modernist interpretation of it, according to which the all-over functioned above all as a means of homogenizing the pictorial surface; this repressed aspect concerns the sense in which such an expanse exceeds the frontal visual field and addresses itself instead to the persistence of animal capabilities in our visual perception, to what still ties us to the workings of the fly. Curiously, cinema has rarely exploited this possibility of the decentering of our gaze (a notable exception is the

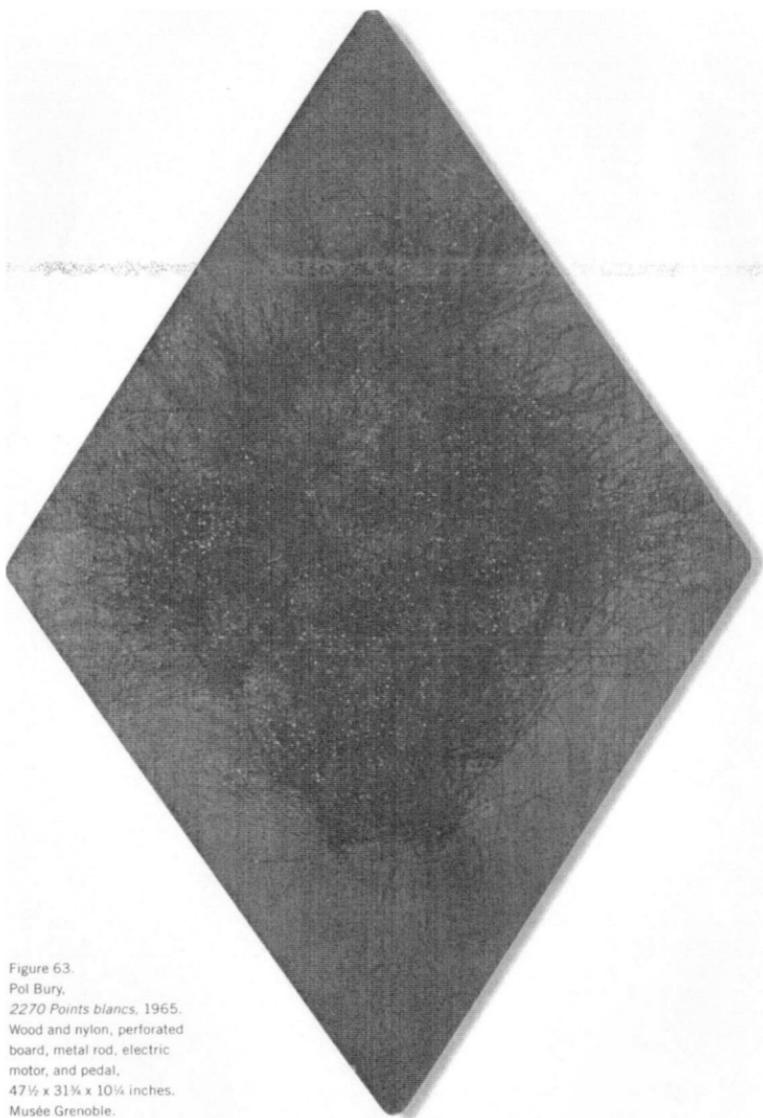
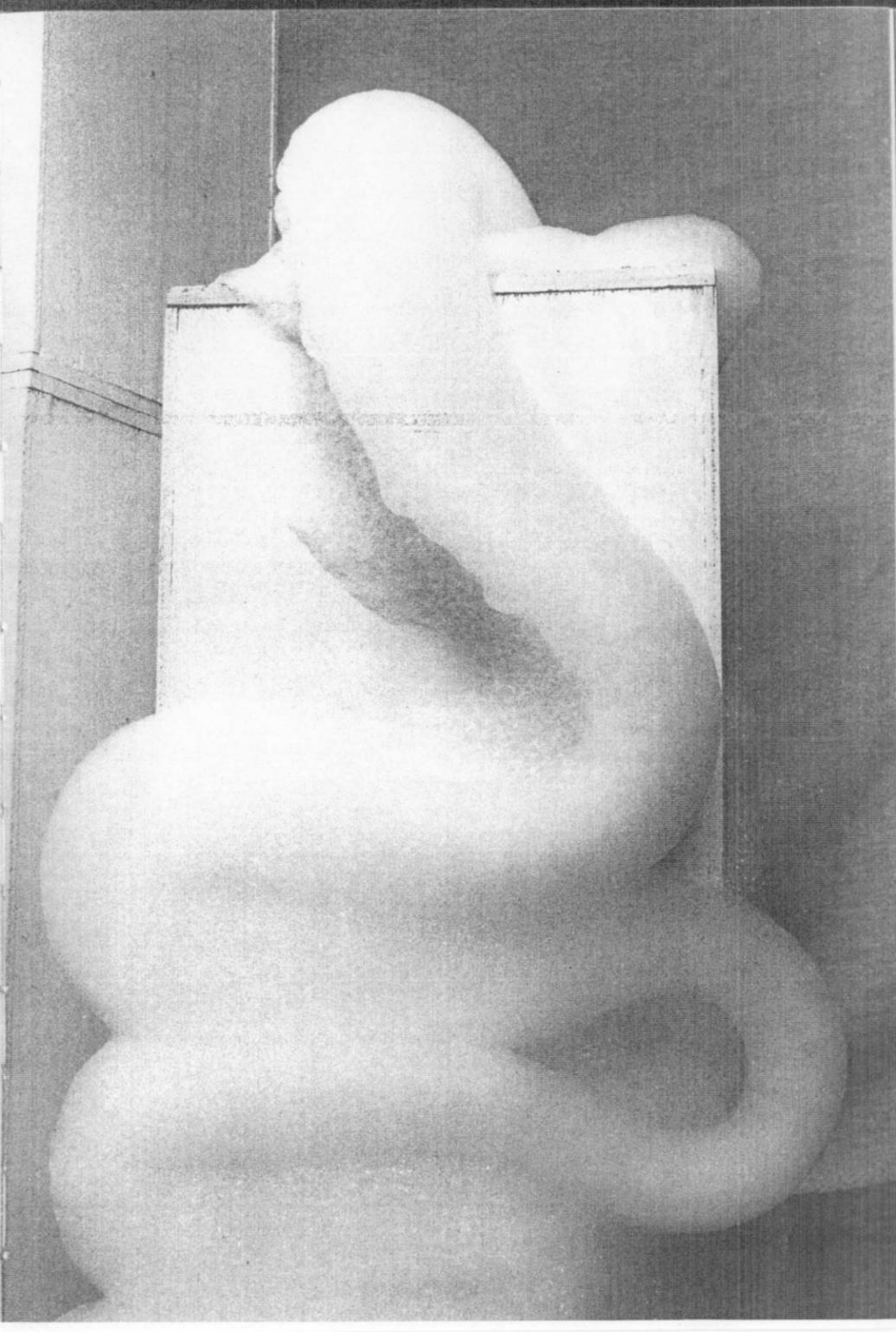


Figure 63.
Pol Bury,
2270 Points blancs, 1965.
Wood and nylon, perforated
board, metal rod, electric
motor, and pedal,
47½ x 31¼ x 10¼ inches.
Musée Grenoble.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP, Paris.

long sequence in a restaurant at the end of Jacques Tati's *Playtime* [1967]). The reason for this is the same reason that cinema is increasingly averse to dead time: like the all-over, dead time is privative; it is a mark of suspension in the diegetic flow (of action, of narrative), just as the over-all marks the suspension of the figure. Documentary, the least narrative film genre, has long made slow motion one of its favorite instruments, especially for nature subjects (Jean Painlevé, from whom had Bataille asked for photographs of shellfish for *Documents*, used this a lot), but such a use of slow motion cannot be said to create dead time: on the contrary, the documentary filmmaker slows the image so that we may see an event better (as in those televised flashbacks that immediately analyze a beautiful soccer shot or a spectacular tennis point, even while the players are regaining their balance). Dead time only triumphs in experimental (noncommercial) films: for example, in the shorts Fluxus made with a camera able to film two hundred times faster than normal, thus achieving a kind of limit in the domain of slow motion (perhaps the most interesting of these is Fluxfilm No. 9, *Eyeblink* (1966), in which Yoko Ono's wink is long awaited and then incredibly attenuated¹). Or, in the first films by Warhol — such as *Sleep* and *Empire* — which dilate real time, since nothing happens, except from the fly's point of view.

These Warhol films provide a good point of access to Bury's strategy in that they achieve their effect less from the slowness of the motion (*Empire* and *Sleep* are both shot at 28 frames per second but projected at 16 frames per second) than from an eventlessness so extreme that the continuity of time ends by being suspended within perception. It is this perceptual suspension that Bury exploits in his work: "Between stasis and mobility, a certain slowness makes us discover a field of actions, where the eye stops being able to track the course of an object. Given that a ball moves from A to B... the memory we have of its point of departure is a function of the slowness with which it enacts its trajectory. If this slowness is extreme, our eye, our memory loses the recollection of A."² But with Bury this slowness operates in conjunction with intermittancy (he would later expand the length of dead time up to twenty seconds when he noticed that viewers, alerted by the press or by an earlier experience with his work, expected to see something move³). In the *Punctuations*, in fact, the movement itself is not particularly slow; it is rather very short, a spasmodic flicker of one or several tiny particles among so many other similar ones. The threshold of imperceptibility rather than slowness itself is what interests Bury, and interruption is one of his means (in describing his work, he adopts the pose of a lecturer who falls asleep several times during a sentence: "given that what moves... is more

Figure 64.
David Medalla,
Cloud Canyons, 1964
Motor, wood boxes, soap
dimensions unknown



or less ... more perceivable than what is motionless ... what is imperceptible is by extension more immobile ... this movement of the imperceptible between the moving and the immobile ... this moment of the imperceptible where what moves has already stopped ... where the end begins where the beginning ends ..."⁴).

In the *Bubble Machines* that David Medalla started to make in 1964, for example *Cloud Canyons* (figure 64), intermittance is replaced by an aleatory differentiation of speeds which dislocates the mechanical source of the movement even more than Bury's work does (with the Medalla, one quickly forgets the motor – an air pump – while the mechanism would become increasingly marked in Bury's work). The bubble machine's soapy expansion grows very slowly, but this continuous flow is syncopated by the gentle, barely audible bursting of bubbles, or punctuated by the sudden *plop* made as the overflowing mass of foam hits the floor.

In Robert Morris's *Footnote to the Bride* (1961) (figure 65), an homage to Marcel Duchamp, the perceptual threshold of extreme slowness as such is underscored by a kind of trauma. The center of a flesh-colored rubber membrane is pushed very slowly from behind outward toward the viewer. At a certain moment, if the spectator stands in front of the (somewhat repulsive) empty surface long enough, he or she will become aware that its form has changed. The operation itself will not have been perceived, but suddenly the cumulative effect will be apparent, as Morris plays on the contradiction between continuous process and the retroactive shock it produces, on the lag between cause and effect.

In all these cases – tied to intermittance with Bury, to rhythmic differences with Medalla, to the sudden discovery of a cumulative effect with Morris – extreme slowness gives rise to a feeling of the uncanny. Or rather, to one of the two types articulated by Freud: not that related to the return of repressed infantile complexes, but that related to "primitive beliefs" that have been "surmounted" – to wit, animism. It is the hesitation of Bury's white points,⁵ or of the regular flow and irregular fall of Medalla's foam, or of Morris's sudden presence of something that was already there that disturbs the boundary separating the animate from the inanimate, the organic from the inorganic, the dead from the living, "for, as we have learnt," Freud says, "that feeling cannot arise unless there is a conflict of judgement as to whether things which have been 'surmounted' and are regarded as incredible may not, after all, be possible."⁶ This animistic moment of perception is very short, but it is not for all that less vertiginous.

(See "Part Object," "Uncanny," "'Moteur!'," "Pulse.")

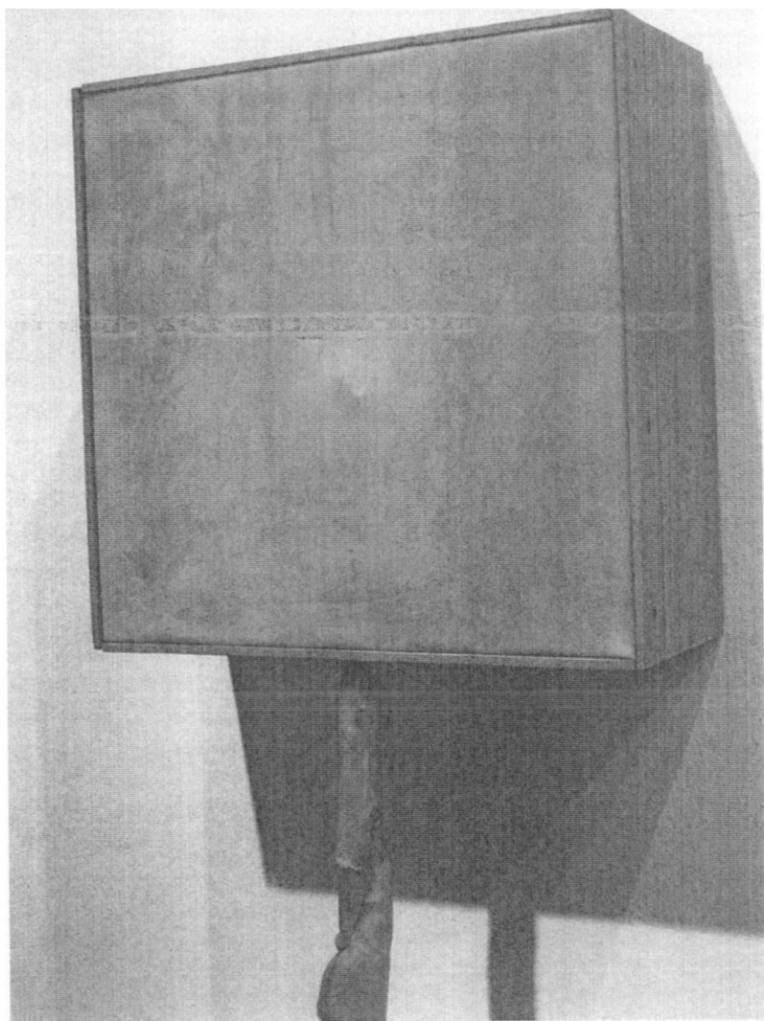


Figure 65.
Robert Morris,
Footnote to the Bride,
1961.
Wood, rubber, and motor.
10 x 24 x 24 inches.
© 1997 Robert Morris /
ARS, New York.

W

Water Closet

Yve-Alain Bois

Nothing could be more surprising, in reading *Literature and Evil*, than Bataille's very critical attitude toward Jean Genet, an author whose entire output should, as Jacques Derrida has remarked, have brought these two sensibilities together.¹ Not only is he insensitive to Genet's prose ("his tales are interesting, but not *enthralling*. There is nothing colder, less moving, under the glittering parade of words, than the famous passage in which Genet recounts Harcamone's death"), but he assimilates the "splendor" of the style, in the passage in question, to "Aragon's feats in the early days of surrealism – the same verbal facility, the same recourse to devices which shock"² that he had so vilified in the case of André Breton and his friends at the time of *Documents*.

We could see the mark of a certain frustration in this, since Bataille is reviewing Sartre's *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, a book in which he is mentioned in terms similar to those used by Breton in *The Second Surrealist Manifesto* ("Bataille tortures himself 'upon occasion': the rest of the time he is a librarian"³). When Bataille compares the beauty of the "famous" passage from Genet's *Miracle of the Rose* to that "of jewels, too elaborate and in a coldly bad taste," Bataille, annoyed, could only have been signaling to Sartre that he was wrong about the merchandise, that it is fake ("I'm not the one who's the real phony, he is": one is always someone else's kitsch). But this would be to overlook the fact that what Bataille now called Genet's "baroquism" had appealed to him several years earlier and that Genet's "bad taste" had seemed an effective tactic ("without the indefensible vulgarity of all this, the scandal would not come together and the defiance would not have this liberating quality"⁴).

In fact, if Bataille is actually replying to Sartre in *Literature and Evil*, it is by pretending to make an "alliance with him."⁵ He begins by taking up Sartre's argument ("Sartre himself noted a curious difficulty at the basis of Genet's work. Genet, the writer, has neither the power to communicate with his readers nor the intention of doing so. His work almost denies the reader"), then he continues by saying that Sartre did not carry this argument to its conclusion

(namely, "that in these conditions the work was incomplete. It was a replacement, half way from the *major* communication at which literature aims").⁶ But this is a pose assumed at Genet's expense; for what Bataille means by "communication" has little to do with what that word means for Sartre (Bataille's usage elsewhere had been the object of an acid criticism in "Un Nouveau mystique" [A New Mystic], the review Sartre published in 1943 of *L'Expérience intérieure*). In fact, it is almost the exact reverse. Bataille even admits as much a little earlier in the text: "Communication, in my sense of the word, is never stronger than when communication, in the weak sense, the sense of profane language or, as Sartre says, of prose which makes us and the others appear penetrable, fails and becomes the equivalent of darkness."⁷ "Strong communication" (which Bataille says, a bit further on, is the same as what he calls "sovereignty") is not accessible through the language of common usage. The vernacular language is founded on the identity of terms to themselves – i.e., a term's synonymy with its own definition – that of "Good" and "Evil," for example, and above all that of "the ego," while the sovereignty Bataille speaks of concerns those moments of pure loss (laughter, ecstasy, tears, sexual pleasure) when identity abolishes itself.

The human being is dissolved in "strong communication," by opening a tear in himself through which he loses "a part of his own being to the profit of the communal being," as Bataille expresses it in the lecture that, on July 4, 1939, brought the College of Sociology to a close. Bataille takes as his first example physical love ("No communication is more profound; two creatures are lost in a convulsion that binds them together. But they communicate only by losing a portion of themselves. The communication binds them only through wounds where their unity, their integrity disperse in the heat of excitement"), then he broadens his definition of communication as loss to different social phenomena (initiations, sacrifices, festivals).⁸ In fact, the underlying model here is the famous study by Roger Caillois, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire" (Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia), that had so struck Bataille several years earlier (this essay, published in 1935, was itself strongly indebted to Bataille's "Notion of Expenditure," published in 1933), and it is to Caillois above all that this lecture was addressed. Indeed, Caillois should have participated in this session of the college, but he canceled at the last moment: having departed suddenly for Buenos Aires, he left a text that Bataille refused to read in his absence, since it marked a profound disagreement that could not have been aired without being discussed. It is as if, with a delay, and under the pressure of a rupture through which all the compromises and misunderstandings were being brought to light, Bataille

were reproaching Caillois for having recoiled from the consequences of his own entropic interpretation of the phenomenon of mimicry as “depersonalization by assimilation to space.”⁹ In connecting animal mimicry and “legendary psychasthenia,” the expression the psychiatrist Pierre Janet used to designate problems in spatial perception from which certain schizophrenic patients suffer,¹⁰ Caillois has of course attacked the anthropocentrism of Western metaphysics by breaching the alleged frontier between man and animal. But, as Denis Hollier remarks, he nonetheless begins his essay with “an argument for distinction” without which the will to power of the intellectual would not be able to exert itself (“distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge, and so on – all of them, in short, distinctions in which valid considerations must demonstrate a keen awareness and the demand for resolution”¹¹). So Caillois wanted to look at the “tear in being” from the outside; that is what Bataille indirectly reproaches him for.

And it is the same reproach he makes to Genet: in maintaining a “glass partition” between himself and us, Genet refuses to lose himself.¹² Even more, he cannot help but consolidate, even in its inversion, the identity he wanted to annihilate. Refusing to consider the prohibition (that is, his relation to the world and to us), he is committed to failure; he is prisoner of the dialectic: “What is vile is glorified, but Evil becomes pointless. . . . In other words, Evil becomes a duty, just as Good does.”¹³

What would Bataille’s astonishment have been had he been able to read Genet’s “Ce qui est resté d’un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes” (What Remains of a Rembrandt Torn into Little Regular Squares and Flushed Down the Toilet), which was published in 1967 (after Bataille’s death)?¹⁴ The text consists of two fragments of a book on Rembrandt on which Genet had worked for some years, a huge manuscript that he had torn up and thrown “in the toilet” in 1964, taking a vow, which he only broke much later, never to write again.¹⁵ The text is organized in two columns. The right-hand one, narrow and in italics, concerns Rembrandt properly speaking. (The text would not have been out of place in *Documents* almost forty years earlier. Genet writes of Rembrandt, for instance: “It is from the moment when he depersonalizes his models, when he strips all identifiable qualities from objects, that he gives to both the most weight, the greatest reality. . . . He presents himself in his mania for smearing, mad for color, losing the pretense to superiority and the hypocrisy of the simulators. This can be felt in the late pictures. But it was necessary that Rembrandt recognize and accept himself as a being of flesh – did I say of flesh? – of meat, of blubber, of blood, of tears,

of sweat, of shit, of intelligence and tenderness, of still other things, to infinity, but none denying the others, or better, each saluting the others."¹⁶ The second column, larger, gives the key to this reading of Rembrandt through the axis of the *informe*. In it, Genet describes at some length a kind of epiphany, experienced in a train in 1953, that profoundly shook his relation to writing (he had already alluded to this in "L'atelier d'Alberto Giacometti" (The Studio of Giacometti [1957]): "One day in a train compartment, while looking at the traveler seated across from me, I had the revelation that every man is *worth* every other," and this sudden knowledge brought with it a "methodical disintegration." By chance his glance crossed that of the rather ugly passenger who had just raised his eyes from his newspaper (or rather, as Genet puts it, "my glance . . . melted into his"): "What I experienced I could translate only in these terms: I was flowing out of my body and through my eyes into the traveler's at the same time as he was flowing into mine. . . . [O]nce the accidents – in this case repellent – of his appearance were put aside, this man concealed and then let me discover what made him identical to me. (I wrote that sentence first, but I corrected it with this one, more exact and more devastating: I knew I was identical to this man.)"¹⁷ The identity of the self is canceled in this revelation. The self is disseminated, since if all men equal one another, "each man is every other man." "No man was my brother: each man was myself, but temporarily isolated in his individual skin."¹⁸

Genet's attitude is, of course, different from Bataille's, notably in that this entropic dissolution, which the author of *On Nietzsche* would no doubt have lived joyously, seemed to Genet a tragedy ("Soon nothing will count"), a crack announcing the end of all erotic investigation, since that is only possible by supposing that "each being has its individuality, that it is irreducible, and that physical form accounts for this."¹⁹ But what is important to us here is that, doubtlessly without Genet's knowing it, his epiphany on the train connects with Bataille's thought about communication, whereon he writes: "Essentially all beings are only one. They repel each other at the same time that they are one. And in this movement – which is their essence – the fundamental identity is annulled."²⁰

Even if he sometimes signed his books Lord Auch, Bataille did not tear up the manuscripts he was unhappy with, much less throw them down the toilet (except, perhaps, the manuscript for a book called *W.C.*²¹). Certain artists, however, wondered what would remain of a work if it were torn up, or rather what would remain of the concept of the work of art if the very act of tearing (an essentially entropic process: irreversible, reducing everything to sameness) were to be the sole technique.

In a text directed against the interest in entropy in recent art (the book, dating from 1971, had its sights fixed on Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol, among others), Rudolf Arnheim quotes from Jean Arp's memoirs:

Around 1930 I did my first *papiers déchirés*. A human opus now struck me as being inferior even to disconnected work, as being totally removed from life. Everything is approximate, even less than approximate, for if you peer more sharply and closely, even the most perfect painting is a filthy, wart-infested approximation, a dried-up pap, a desolate landscape of lunar craters. What arrogance is concealed in perfection. Why strive for accuracy and purity if they can never be attained? I now welcomed the decomposition that always sets in once a work is ended. A dirty man puts his dirty finger on a subtle detail in a painting to point it out. That place is now marked with sweat and grease. He bursts into enthusiasm and the painting is sprayed with saliva. A delicate picture on paper, a watercolor is thus lost. Dust and insects are also efficient destroyers. Light makes colors fade. Sunshine and warmth create blisters, loosen the paper, leave cracks in the paint and make it chip. Moisture creates mildew. The work decomposes and dies. Now, the death of a painting no longer devastated me. I had come to terms with its ephemerality and its death, and included them in the painting. Death, however, grew and devoured the painting and life. This decomposition ought to have been followed by the negation of all action. Form had turned into formlessness, the finite into infinity, the individual into totality.²²

Few artists will so clearly tie entropic dissolution to the debacle of the *formless*, but obviously this is not why Arnheim, one of the few remaining stalwarts of Gestalt psychology, quotes this text. Rather, he is excited by its conclusion, where Arp explains how, faced with the example of Sophie Taeuber's work, he abandoned this direction in his work to rediscover "clarity." Arp's torn papers (figure 66), those from the beginning at least (ca. 1932–34), mark his work with the seal of a violence he would quickly abandon and to which he would never return. The crisis over, he platitudinously gushes: "I believe, even more than I did in my youth, that a return to an essential order, to a harmony, is necessary to save the world from endless bedlam."²³ A burst of applause from the Gestalt Man.

Others took up tearing where Arp had left it: Cy Twombly, for instance, in a series of collages where bits of crumpled paper, the fallout from who knows what disaster, coagulate on the page; Richard Serra, who begins to tear a sheet of lead on the ground and then leaves his act interrupted in a sort of *et cetera* that invites us to continue it mentally (figure 67); Christian Bonnefoi, who,



Figure 66.
Jean Arp,
Papiers déchirés, 1933.
Collage on paper,
10 3/4 x 7 3/4 inches.
Öffentliche Kunst-
sammlung Basel,
Kupferstichkabinett, gift of
Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach.
© 1997 ARS, New York/
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

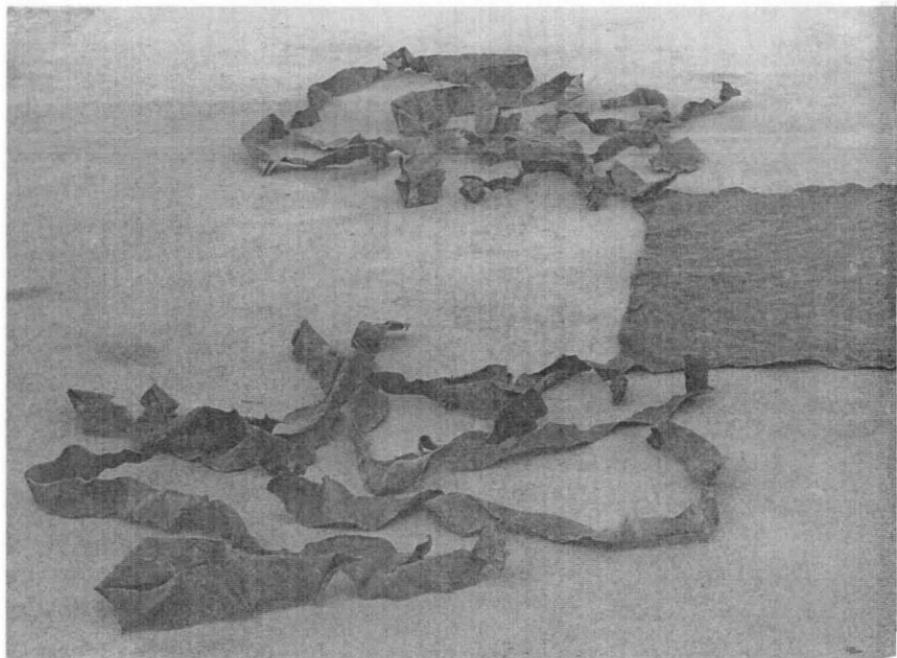
beginning in 1979, in a series of works titled *Babel*, tears the layers of pigments on his canvas into shards, to the point where all identities – the over and the under, the before and the after – are confused.

The most radical, however, was undoubtedly Lygia Clark, who found a response, very close to Bataille's, to the question of knowing "what remains of a work torn in little bits thrown into the

toilet." Properly speaking, it is not an issue of tearing or of work, but of the tearing up of the concept of work. It is a question of an experience that made everything as upsetting for the artist as the encounter on the train had been for Genet. It is a "proposition," as she says, that dates from 1964 and that she called *Caminhando* (Trailing) (figure 68). The point of departure is a Möbius strip, that cardinal image of topology which had been exploited in sculpture by Max Bill. (It should be noted that Max Bill had a number of followers in Brazil, and it was against them that Lygia Clark and her friends launched neo-concretism in 1959.) Anyone can make a *Trailing*, beginning with a paper Möbius strip:

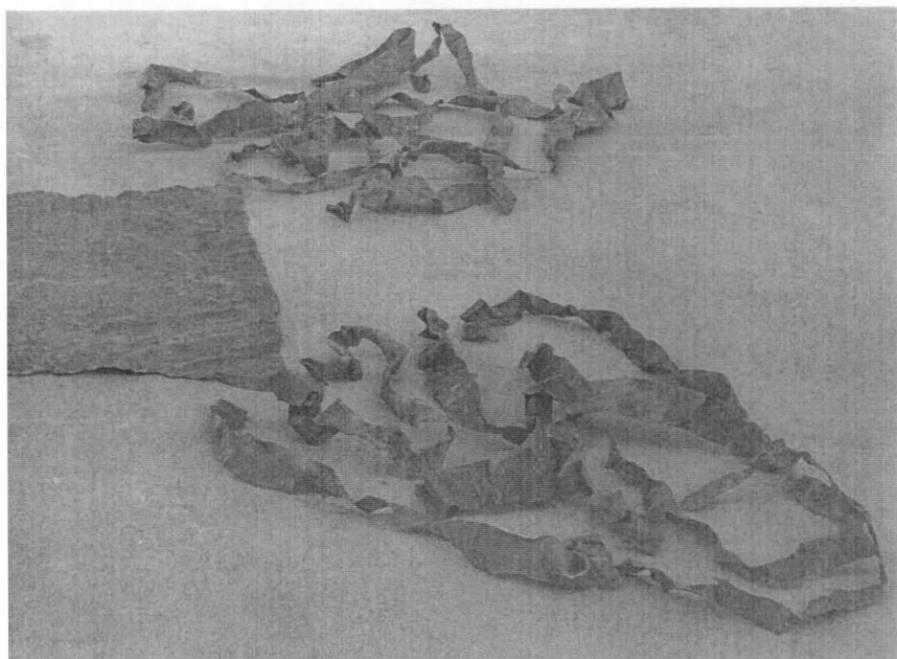
Then take a pair of scissors, stick one point into the surface and cut continuously along the length of the strip. Take care not to converge with the preexisting cut – which will cause the band to separate into

Figure 67.
Richard Serra
*Tearing Lead from 1.00 to
1:47, 1968.*
Torn sheet of lead,
118 x 106 inches.
Musée National d'Art
Moderne-CCI, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris.
© 1997 Richard Serra / ARS,
New York.



two pieces. When you have gone the circuit of the strip, it's up to you whether to cut to the left or to the right of the cut you've already made. This idea of choice is capital. The special meaning of this experience is in the act of doing it. The work is your act alone. To the extent that you cut the strip, it refines and redoubles itself into interlacings. At the end the path is so narrow that you can't open it further. It's the end of the trail.²⁴

Nothing is left on the floor but a pile of paper spaghetti that one can put in the trash (so as not to plug up the W.C.). The act of "trailing" marks one of those moments of "strong communication" dear to Bataille. ("At the outset, the *Trailing* is only a potentiality. You are going to form, you and it, a unique, total, existential reality. No more separation between subject and object. It's an embrace, a fusion.") "There is *nothing before, nothing after.*" Nothing, if not



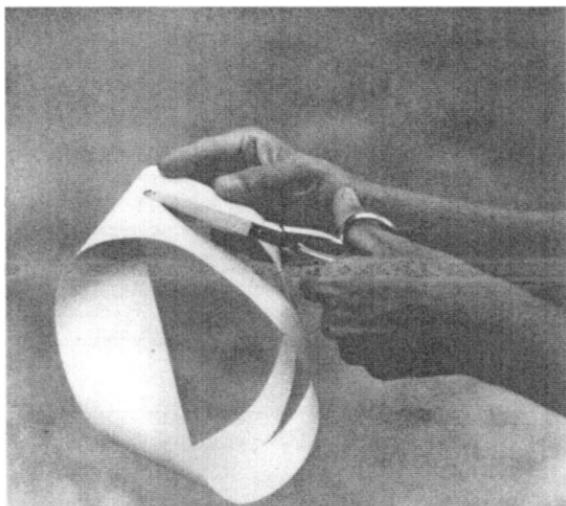


Figure 68.
Lygia Clark,
Caminhando (Trailing),
1964.
Paper, variable dimensions.



a certain consciousness of time and the beauty of its irremediable loss. As with Genet's epiphany, a train trip played a role in this discovery, but this time retroactively, as confirmation: "The *Trailing* only took on meaning for me once, crossing the countryside by train, I experienced each fragment of the landscape as a temporal totality, a totality *in the process of forming*, of producing itself before my eyes, in the immanence of the moment."²⁵ The absence of the work is sometimes ecstatic.

(See "Entropy," "Qualities [Without]," and "Sweats of the Hippo.")

X

X Marks the Spot

Rosalind E. Krauss

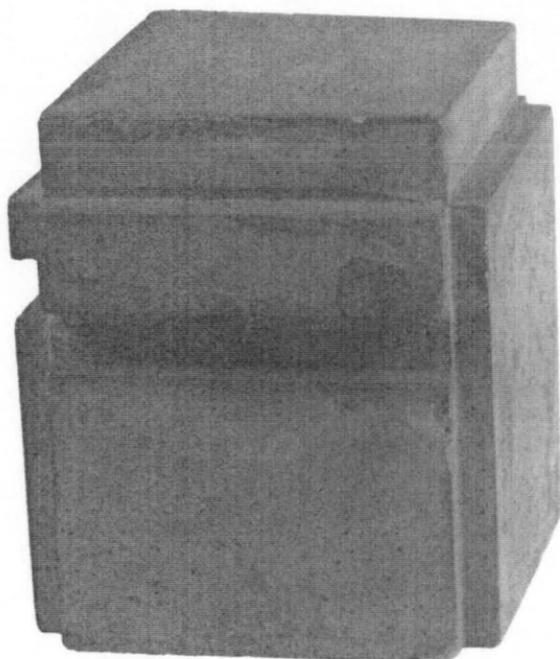
In 1965 Bruce Nauman made a plaster cast of the space under his chair. Perhaps it was late in the year, after Donald Judd's "Specific Objects" essay had appeared, or perhaps earlier, for example in February, in response to Judd's review of Robert Morris's Green Gallery exhibition, or in October, after Barbara Rose had published "ABC Art," her own bid to theorize minimalism.¹ In any event, Nauman's cast, taking the by-then recognizable shape of a minimalist sculpture, whether by Morris or Tony Smith, or Judd himself, was more or less cubic, grayish in color, simple in texture — which made it no less the complete antiminimalist object. (See figure 69.)

Several years later, when the tide against minimalism had turned and the attack on minimalism's industrial metaphor — its conviction in the well-built object, its display of rational tectonics and material strength — was in full swing, this reaction would move under the banner of "anti-form," which is to say a set of strategies to shatter the constructed object and disperse its fragments.² But Nauman's cast, which he repeated the following year in two other forays — *Shelf Sinking into the Wall with Copper-Painted Plaster Casts of the Spaces Underneath* (1966) and *Platform Made up of the Space between Two Rectilinear Boxes on the Floor* (1966) — acting well before anti-form, does not take this route of explosion, or dismemberment, or dissemination. It does not open the closed form of the fabricated object to release its material components from the

corset of their construction, to turn them over to the forces of nature – gravity, wind, erosion – which would give them quite another articulation, one cast in the shadow of natural processes of change. Rather, it takes the path of implosion or congealing, and the thing to which it submits this stranglehold of immobility is not matter, but what vehiculates and subtends it: space itself.

Nauman's attack, far more deadly than anti-form – because it is about a cooling from which nothing will be able to extricate itself in the guise of whatever articulation – is an attack made in the very name of death, or to use another term, entropy. And for this reason, the ambiguity that grips these residues of Nauman's casts of interstitial space – the sense, that is, that they are object-like, but that, without the title attached to them like an absurd label, one has no idea what they *are*, even of what general species of object they might belong to – seems particularly fitting. It is as

Figure 69.
Bruce Nauman,
Space Under My Steel Chair
in Düsseldorf, 1965–68.
Steel, 17 ¼ x 15 ½ x 14 ½
inches.
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo.
© 1997 Bruce Nauman /
ARS, New York.



though the congealing of space into this rigidly entropic condition also strips it of any means of being "like" anything. The constant utilitarian character of minimalist objects – they are "like" boxes, benches, portals, and so on – along with the more evocative turn of process works, continued to operate under the condition of form which is that, having an identity, it be meaningful. What Nauman's casts force us to realize is that the ultimate character of entropy is that it congeal the possibilities of meaning as well. Which is to say that this conception of entropy, as a force that sucks out all the intervals between points of space, not only understands the "Brownian movement" of molecular agitation as slowed to a stop, but also imagines the eradication of those distances that regulate the grid of oppositions, or differences, necessary to the production of meaning.

Although he himself never pushed his own concerns with entropy into the actual making of casts, Robert Smithson had always considered casting as a way of theorizing entropy, since he had written about the earth's crust as itself a giant cast, the testament to wave after wave of cataclysmic forces compressing and congealing life and all the spatial intervals necessary to sustain it. Quoting Darwin's remark that "Nothing can appear more lifeless than the chaos of rocks," Smithson treasured the geological record as a "landslide of maps," the charts and texts of the inexorable process of cooling and death.³ For each rock, each lithic band is the evidence of whole forests, whole species that have decayed – "dying by the millions" – and under the pressure of this process have become a form of frozen eternity. In a movingly poetic text, "Strata: A Geophotographic Fiction," Smithson attempted to prize apart these layers of compression, alternating blocks of writing with strips of photographs showing the fossil record trapped within the magma of the rock, as the demonstrative presentation of wave after wave – Cambrian, Silurian, Devonian, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic – of wreckage.

Smithson realized, of course, that the very act of textualizing this material was one of building spatiality back into it, of producing those oppositions and differences necessary to open the surface to the intelligibility of reading and the organization of form. He quoted the paleontologist Edwin Colbert, who said: "Unless the information gained from the collecting and preparing of fossils is made available through the printed page, assemblage specimens is [sic] essentially a pile of meaningless junk."⁴ It was the conflict between the "junk" and the "text" that seemed to fascinate him.

If fossils are nature's form of casting, the turn taken in art-world concerns in the 1970s and 1980s led away from Smithson's atten-

tion to the natural, by moving deeper into the terrain of industrial culture, which minimalism had been exploring from the outset, although by now this had become a kind of minimalism crossed with pop art. For the concern was no longer with the tectonics of industrial production, but with its logic, which is that of serialization, the multiple, and replication. And although casting is a paradigm of any process of reduplication, of spinning out masses of copies from a single matrix or mold, it was the photographic rather than the cast form of the duplicate that increasingly took hold of the art world's imagination. For the photograph brought with it the simulacral notion of the mirage, of a reality that had been engulfed within its own technology of imitation, a fall into a hall of mirrors, a disappearance into a labyrinth in which original and copy are indistinguishable. The photograph seemed capable of raising the problem of reality in the grip of what Jean Baudrillard would call "the mirror of production" in a way that the mere cast could not.

Itself emerging from this culture of the multiple, Allan McCollum's work was, however, not to move along this photographic construal of simulacra. Rather it was to cycle back to the issue of casting by entering into a relation with the very most classical enunciation of the matrix or original as a kind of ontological ideal from which all existent objects are modeled. This *eidos*, or form, could also be thought of as the genus that contains within itself — as a kind of ideal repertory — the "footprint" for all actualizations of its form of life into species.

Proceeding, then, to an exploration of the generic, McCollum's work became an ironic rewriting of modernist art's own attempts to reduce individual media — painting, sculpture, photography, and so on — to their very essence as genres, or aesthetic norms. However, anti-formal to its very marrow, McCollum's reduction was not to an abstract condition — flatness, say, or opticality — but to a generic type ("painting" as a blank canvas with a frame around it; "sculpture" as a kitsch bauble, a shape meant for mass production) that could serve as the model from which to generate potentially endless numbers of copies. It was thus the industrialization of the *eidos* that interested him, as he struck a kind of blow against the reproductive as natural or ideal (the constant reclaiming of species "identity") and presented it instead as a force of proliferation of the same, a kind of silting up of the space of difference into an undifferentiable, entropic continuum. In this sense, proliferation, as the endlessly compulsive spinning out of "different" examples, came full circle in the 1980s to join hands with the 1960s effacement of difference, as McCollum's nightmare of mass production began to reinvent Smithson's fantasy of mass extinction, thus bring-

ing about a convergence of the two over the importance of the fossil record.

If the fossil as the “natural copy” fascinates McCollum, this is because it brings the generic – in the form of the industrialization of *eidos* – into collision with the biological genus, realized through the fossil in the form of its own genetic eradication, marked only by the mold of one or more of its members left in passing. The production of dinosaur tracks is a particularly interesting example of the natural cast, one that had fascinated Smithson as well, at the time of his “Geophotographic Fiction.”⁵ Such tracks are made by the heavy animal’s having walked through mud-covered peat bogs, leaving large negative depressions that were filled in by the mud, which eventually hardened into solid rock “casts” of the footprints while the peat around these tracks reduced into coal. In the Utah sites these were revealed as the coal was removed from around them, leaving the footprints to protrude from the roof of the mine (figure 70).

The specificity of these casts as evidence, their testimony to the passage at a particular time and place of the movement of a now-vanished animal, would seem of course to give them a particularity that is far away from McCollum’s earlier practice of the cast

Figure 70.
Allan McCollum,
*Natural Copies from
the Coal Mines of
Central Utah*, 1994–95.
Enamel on polymer rein-
forced gypsum, variable
dimensions.
Courtesy John Weber
Gallery.



as a form of the “generic,” that endlessly proliferating series of increasingly meaningless signs. Working against the grain of the multiple, these casts would seem instead to have the character of something absolutely unique, something that had existed in a specific place, and to which this object mutely points: “X Marks the Spot,” as the title of a book on criminal deaths, reviewed briefly by Bataille,⁶ put it – the trace of an utterly contingent “this.”

If, however, McCollum’s impulse is to treat these “trace fossil” footprints as though they were readymades and to parade them both as burgeoning sets of multiples and as the gaudily colored items from the most kitsch of souvenir shops – thus industrializing not just the generic but also the genetic – this is not simply from an irreverence for the idea of primal life. It is, rather, to go back to the kind of content that Nauman had built into his casts of particular spaces – which understood the very specificity of the trace itself (the “this”) as a form of entropy, a congealing of the paradigm. Once more it is to join the proliferation enabled by the mold or matrix to the *X* that congeals the very possibility of space even as it marks the spot.

(See “Qualities [Without],” and “Yo-Yo.”)

Y

Yo-Yo

Rosalind E. Krauss

We could see it as the relatively sophisticated, commercially produced equivalent of the little object Freud’s infant grandson made famous, as he threw the spool onto his cot to make it disappear behind the bedclothes and then pulled on the string attached to it to draw it back into view, the first gesture accompanied by a mournful “fo-o-ort” and the second by a joyous “da!”¹ And the yo-yo is servicable in this connection in yet another dimension, since its very name cycles around the field of linguistic principles that the “fort/da” instrument articulates.

For yo-yo belongs to a whole series of childish terms – the very earliest being “mama” and “papa,” and subsequent ones being “caca” and “peepee” – in which the wild sound of infantile bab-

bling is suddenly articulated, or spaced, or cut out, not just into perceptible rhythmic regularity but into the freestanding condition of the signifier, through the act of repetition. For it is repetition that doubles back on the first sound to mark it as deliberately phonemic by the very fact of being repeatable. Thus, as Roman Jakobson says, the basis for the transition from wild sound production to verbal behavior is, precisely, reduplication, since it is the repetition of the first sound by the second that serves to signal "that the uttered sounds do not represent a babble, but a senseful, semantic entity." Thus, for Jakobson, it is duplication that is "linguistic essence," since it transforms sounds to phonemes by marking, or re-marking them, by establishing that they "are to be recognizable, distinguishable, identifiable; and in accordance with these requirements, they must be deliberately repeatable."³

"Fort/da" is not, however, one of these redoubled vocables, although the game played by means of it – in both its verbal and mechanical guise – did involve constant repetition. "Fort/da" is, instead, a game of rhythmic separation and reconnection, in which something disappears from sight and is recognized again, both disappearance and return accompanied by language that penetrates this activity almost to the point of becoming its support. For Freud articulates the "fort/da" as allowing for the rise of linguistic representation in the negation of the object (throwing it away while simultaneously producing a substitute for it in the form of a verbal sign: "fort") and in the separation of the field of the represented (the sign, the fantasy image) from that of the real ("da!"). Indeed, it is in this founding act of negativity that Freud locates the intellectual feat on which language as well as culture in general would be instituted.

And many linguists agree with him. For if Freud claims that all denial – every "no" or every "fort" – nevertheless necessitates the positive presentation of the object to consciousness (since "Negation is a way of taking notice of the repressed"⁴), he is describing the fact that in the order of language negation is not simply expulsion but is, first, admission, since, as linguists like Emile Benveniste would say, language "must explicitly pose in order to suppress," or "a judgment of non-existence necessarily has the formal status as well of a judgment of existence."⁵ Benveniste continues: "Don't we see here that the linguistic factor is decisive in this complex process and that negation is in a certain way constitutive of the denied contents? ... The subject's discourse can multiply denials, but not abolish the fundamental property of language, which is to imply that something corresponds to what is stated, something and not 'nothing.'"⁶

Negation and verbal representation are thus articulated onto one

another, and Freud ends his essay with this celebrated statement: "The accomplishment of the function of judgment is rendered possible in the first instance because the constitution of the symbol of negation has permitted thought a first degree of independence in relation to the consequence of repression and at the same time from the coercion of the pleasure principle."⁷

But if yo-yo seems to tie into the fort/da's linguistic structure more through its own mechanical enactment of negation and return than through its linguistic doubling, it was to be Julia Kristeva's argument that negativity and rhythm are necessary to one another in the constitution of the speaking subject, so that in her view fort/da and yo-yo would indeed map onto each other, and in all their dimensions. This is because Kristeva, anxious to forge a connection between the somatic and the psychic (and thus ultimately, the symbolic), sees the pulsatile beat of the drives as the bridge between the body's flexion – the spasmodic movement of the glottal or anal sphincters, for example – and the repetition necessary to language's fundamental spacing, or articulation. It is from this beat that Kristeva sets up what she calls a "chora": "The *chora*, as rupture and articulations (rhythm) precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality. The *chora* is not a sign nor is it a signifier. It is, however, generated in order to attain to this signifying position. It underlies figuration."⁸ And to this *chora* she gives the value of the semiotic: "The semiotic is articulated by flow and marks: facilitation, energy transfers, the cutting up of the corporeal and the social continuum as well as that of signifying material, the establishment of a distinctiveness and its ordering in a pulsating *chora*, in a rhythmic but nonexpressive totality."⁹

Now if Kristeva invokes the term "chora" here, it is not to echo that part of Plato's definition in the *Timaeus* that portrays the *chora* as amorphous, but the part that sees it as maternal: being the matrix, the nurse, the becoming-imprinted.¹⁰ For the rhythmic body is also that of the maternal support to which the nursing infant continues to be connected until what Kristeva calls a "semiotic break" is performed, which, in separating the infant from the mother's body, institutes the first big rejection, and thus the ground for the child's "no," the no on which intellectual negation will be constructed.¹¹ The rhythmic maternal (yo-yo) thus combines with negation's rupture (yo/yo) to produce the speaking subject – a subject who is (if Benveniste is right in claiming that we cannot speak about nothing) the semantic subject as well.

And it is in just this sense that yo-yo is incompatible with everything that the operation "pulse" or "beat" attempts to demonstrate about the work of the *formless*. For "pulse" does not open onto the rhythmic work that Kristeva describes, as that rhythm puts in place

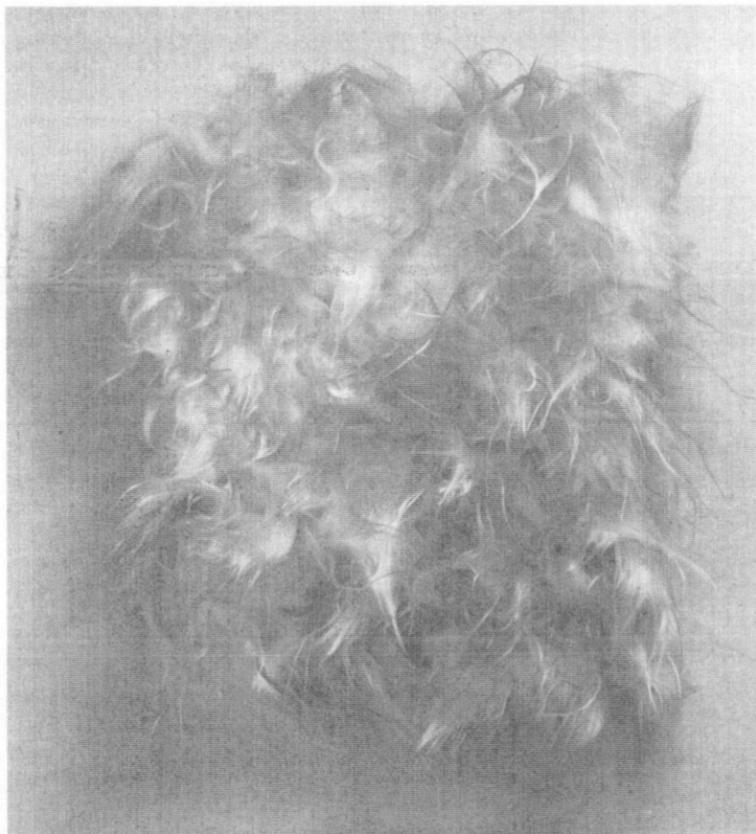


Figure 71.
Piero Manzoni,
Nuage (Achrome), 1962.
Glass string, polystyrene,
linen, 51½ x 43¼ x 11¼
inches.
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo.
© 1997 Estate of Piero
Manzoni / Licensed by
VAGA, New York.

both the stability of form and the fullness of meaning. Indeed, far from representing the rhythmic alternation of the pleasure principle's + and -, the pulsation of the "beat" turns around the death drive's condition of shock, of "bad form," of a repetition always undergirded by the rupture of total extinction, and thus a rhythm of + and 0.

In this sense it is important to distinguish between Jean-François Lyotard's sense of matrix, which is generative of bad form, and Kristeva's very different matrix, which is rhythmic, maternal, productive; since the first does the work of the *formless* while the latter is given over to form.¹²

Within the field of artistic practice, various challenges to the positive, productive, maternal idea of the matrix have been organized, none perhaps so lethally effective as the production of the "achrome" as ultimately developed by Manzoni (figure 71). For the achrome was Manzoni's version of monochrome painting carried out by taking the world's materials - pleated cloth, pebbles, bread rolls - and covering them over with a uniform coating of kaolin, thereby producing a strange combination of abstraction (the monochrome painting) and readymade (anything massed onto the picture plane). This productive strategy, insofar as it employs a clay coating, obviously equates matter (and its proliferation) with *mater* (or earth, and its fecundity). But increasingly, after 1961, Manzoni identifies proliferation with unnatural materials, in fact with toxic industrial products such as Styrofoam or glass wool. So that, in what would seem like an invocation of the matrix in the placenta-like or cushioning surfaces of works like the *Nuages*, there is in fact the entirely antimaternal implication of the overproduction of artificial, nonbiodegradable matter, which can only proliferate as waste.

(See "Isotropy," "Liquid Words," "'Moteur!'," "Pulse," and "X Marks the Spot.")

Z

Zone

Yve-Alain Bois

Bataille conceived of a kind of thermodynamics in reverse. In his view, because the sun's energy is in a state of superfluity, we are condemned to an ever-increasing overproduction, and it is this cosmic imbalance that is at the root of the cyclical character of certain regulatory mechanisms – such as war – that are activated by a buildup of unspent energy (war, an unproductive expenditure, represents the sudden release of surplus energy at the point where the pressure has become too great, like steam escaping through the safety valve of a pressure cooker). This model, which Bataille began to formulate in "La Notion de dépense" (The Notion of Expenditure) (1933), and which he would further elaborate in *The Accursed Share* (1949), seems at first glance to depend on a law totally contrary to that of entropy. Yet the outcome Bataille has in mind would be every bit as eschatological as Carnot's prediction of the progressive cooling-down of the solar system.

Of course, Bataille is supremely optimistic. Aware that, if we keep traveling down the same road in our race against the overproduction of energy, humanity will one day condemn itself (a fortiori if we set the solution of war aside, as increasingly endangering our survival), he sees nothing less than a radical change of attitude that would force man to accede to sovereignty (voluntary renunciation of usefulness and of the accumulation of riches; propagation of nonproductive expenditures). He does not, however, exclude the possibility of failure.

At the time of *Documents*, in any case, such optimism was unwarranted, and Bataille was not exactly envisioning the possibility of such a liberation. Rather, he was musing about an inevitable, perfectly entropic, corollary of overproduction: namely, the noncompactible accumulation of unassimilable waste. Using dust as its emblem, he begins by noting the repression to which this waste production is subject: "The storytellers have not realized that Sleeping Beauty would have awoken covered with a thick layer of dust. . . . Meanwhile dismal sheets of dust constantly invade earthly habitations and uniformly defile them." He then alludes to the Sisyphean battle of the "cleaning ladies," armed each morning with their

Figure 72
Man Ray,
New York (*Transatlantic*),
1920
Silver print,
9¼ x 6¼ inches.
Giorgio Marconi Collection,
Milan.
© 1997 ARS, New York /
ADAGP / Man Ray Trust,
Paris.



leather dusters and their vacuum cleaners to combat this daily tide. Finally, he concludes that the battle is uneven and hopeless: "One day or another, given its persistence . . . dust will probably begin to gain the upper hand over the servants, pouring immense amounts of rubbish into abandoned buildings and deserted dockyards."¹

One of the inscriptions of time (whose irreversibility is demonstrated by the law of entropy), dust is, semiologically speaking, an index. In this it is like photography, but its trace is of duration. Duchamp put his finger on this indexical quality quite precisely, when he let dust accumulate in layers of differing thicknesses (and thus different durations) on his *Large Glass* (1915–23) in order to obtain degrees of transparency and of varied colors once a fixative was applied. (*Elevage de poussière* [1920], the photograph he had Man Ray take at that point, is an index of an index.²) Ashes occupy the same indexical plane, or more precisely, cigarette ash (in that the implied duration is relatively standardized, since cigarettes, unlike pipes or cigars, burn steadily once lit (the cigarette is a fire with little variation). Perhaps this is what Man Ray was thinking, at almost the same moment (in 1920), when he photographed the contents of an ashtray dumped onto the floor and called the image *New York* (figure 72), which, along with a map of Paris, he fashioned into a collage entitled *Transatlantic* (in which the city became an ashtray overflowing with butts). As for Duchamp, in order to mark the entropic irreversibility of time, he photographed cigarettes stripped of their paper skins, to make the cover of a book by Georges Hugnet called *La Septième Face du dé* (The Seventh Side of the Die): an unusable die would mark the stoppage of the calendar, just as the cigarettes would become unsmokable.

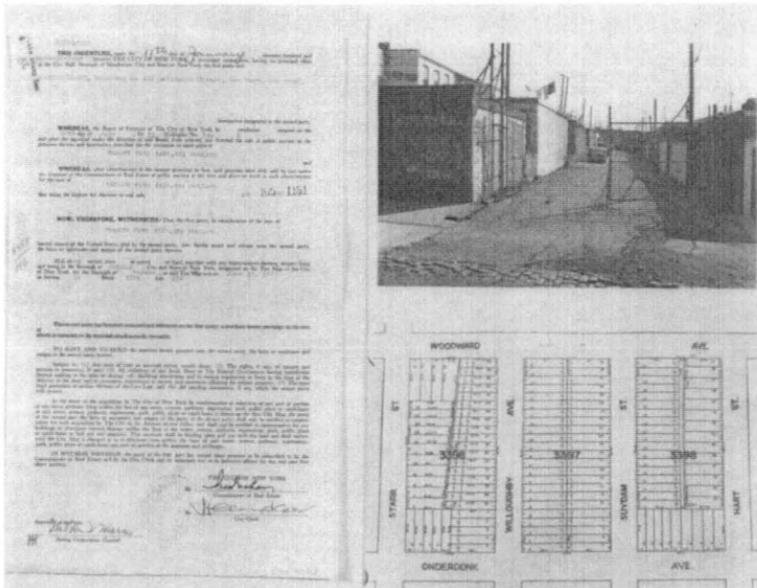
But dust, Bataille also says, pours immense amounts of rubbish ("*immenses décombres*") into "abandoned buildings, deserted dockyards," which is to say, the area called the "zone" in French. It would even seem that dust's irreversible invasion must end by chasing "the servants" away and emptying all "earthly habitations" of their occupants, transforming them into "deserted dockyards" (dust in the zone: there again you have a double index). On an urban scale, the zone is what dust is on the scale of the single dwelling: it is the waste that inevitably accompanies production (which is necessarily, according to Bataille, overproduction).

As an organism, the city always tries, of course, to combat entropic proliferation at the same time that it generates it; as a capitalist enterprise, the city always invents new means of recycling waste. In one of his most devastating books, *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970), Ed Ruscha reproduces, without comment, twenty-five photographs of empty lots within the (very flaccid, as we know) urban fabric of Los Angeles. Each brandishes a For Sale sign, and although

the lots are likely to have been sold by now, and thus been reintegrated into the circuit of production, some are full of brambles, the temporal index of a real estate market that was "soft" when the photograph was taken. These plots are, if temporarily, negative spaces (and some remain so for a very long time, especially if the hemorrhaging spreads to neighboring lots, but in any case they will be replaced by others). The zone would thus seem assimilable, yet, Hydra-like, always renews itself; and it is necessary that it grow: the present turning of the planet into a mammoth trash can is the sad confirmation of this prognosis. (Robert Smithson, relying on the work of the economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, doubted the efficacy of ecological recycling: it is, he said, "like looking for needles in haystacks."³)

Figure 73.
Gordon Matta-Clark,
*Reality Properties: Park
Estates*, 1973.
Silver prints, notarized
deed, and maps, variable
dimensions.
Jane Crawford Collection,
Weston, Connecticut.

Sometimes the entropic buildup is less spectacular; sometimes the waste is clean. Nonetheless, it threatens the urban map, and the city always tries to eliminate it. New York City's auctioning off of mostly unusable, interstitial spaces, at twenty-five dollars a



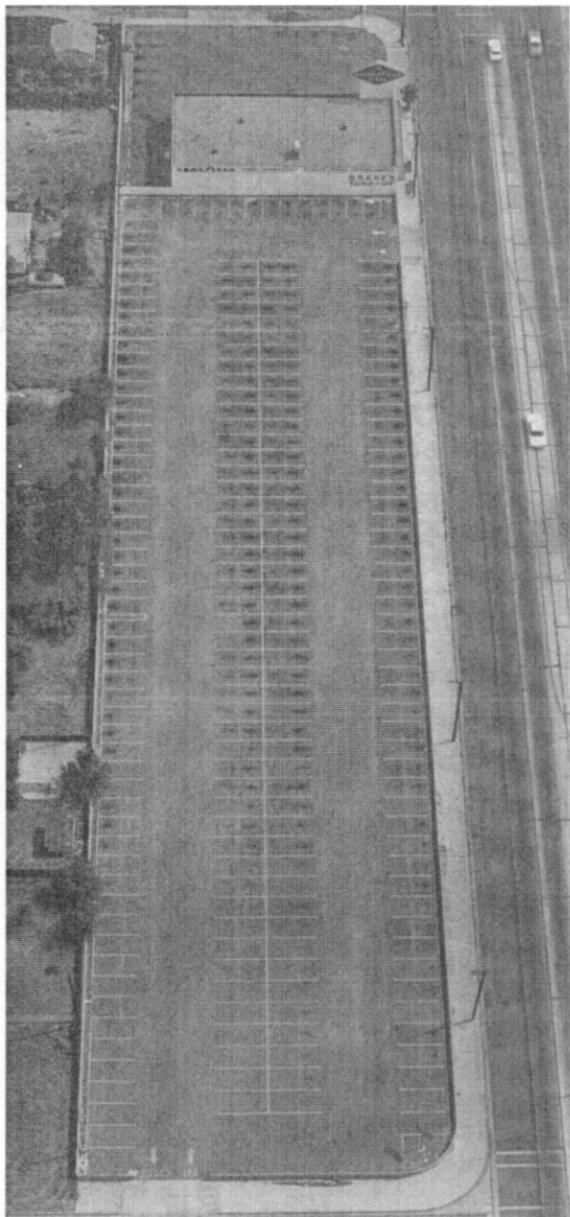
piece, is one of the most unusual examples of this battle lost in advance (to return dead zones to commercial circulation is to try to prevent the invasion of dust).

At the time when he had just begun to make his holes in condemned buildings, Gordon Matta-Clark had the insight that these parcels for auction were economic voids, holes he did not even need to pierce, and he became a buyer – not to join in the battle against entropy (quite the contrary), but to demonstrate its repressed manifestations in the urban context. He documented his acquisitions of panels, one to a plot, showing the title of the property, the map of the area, and photographs: “They were a group of fifteen micro-parcels of land in Queens, left-over properties from an architect’s drawing. One or two of the prize ones were a foot strip down somebody’s driveway and a foot of sidewalk. And the others were curbstone and gutter space. What I basically wanted to do was to designate spaces that wouldn’t be seen and certainly not occupied.”⁴ *That wouldn’t be seen*, not so much because they would be inaccessible (although this was true in some cases⁵), but because they had no use value whatever and only a purely nominal exchange value: these are fake commodities, fake real estate properties (the title of the work, perhaps the most conceptual piece Matta-Clark ever did, is *Reality Properties: Fake Estates* [1973] [figure 73], which puns on the fact that reality is an archaic term for real estate). The parcels did not interest Matta-Clark unless they had no economic value whatever.

Of course the zone itself is visible (even though we prefer to block it from sight), but not the turning-into-the-zone: we only see the zone once it is in place, just as we do not see dust until it has settled. The society of use produces multitudes of these remainders that are imperceptible until the point of no return has been reached (again, duration is always implied). Take the example of outdoor parking lots: it took Ruscha’s photographing thirty or so of them from a helicopter one Sunday, when they were empty, for one to notice that they are a mighty sewer, a machine for the production of oil spots (*Thirty-Four Parking Lots*, 1967 [figure 74]). Of course, from time to time (precisely when the point of no return is about to be reached), parking lots are given a new coat of asphalt, but the spots always reform and inevitably win, for the battle against the invader is a losing one (perhaps this is what the Fluxus “performance” – during which a group of friends vigorously cleaned a piece of sidewalk on Fifth Avenue, with sponges, brooms, and scouring pads – wanted to show⁶).

Ruscha is the great census taker of these little nothings that eat away at the city, and he sees the city itself as dust, as a mounting tide of nondifferentiation (the galloping spread of suburbia proves

Figure 74.
Edward Ruscha,
Thirty-Four Parking Lots,
1967.
Book.



him right). He takes urban dust as the greasy version of a “cleaner” evil that is characteristic of advanced capitalism and its mass media, namely, entropy as defined by information theory (the informational content of a message is in inverse proportion to its entropy). This theory, whose effects are pervasive in all of Ruscha’s pictorial production, notably his word paintings, designates everything that hinders or is useless to the transmission of the message as “noise”; and, by extension, everything that has no informational content, everything that is repeated, predictable, redundant – all of that is nothing but dust. In this sense, the city itself, as a megalopolis, has become pure noise, pure zone.

Robert Smithson went to look for the zone in the great industrial suburbs of New Jersey. “Completely controlled by” his Instamatic, he discovered many “ruins in reverse, that is – all the new construction that would eventually be built,” returning with photographs of ridiculous “monuments” (for example, “concrete abutments that supported the shoulders of a new highway in the process of being built”).⁷ But he need not have gone so far. Even though Ruscha’s first book, *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1963) – one for each letter of the alphabet – covers a rather great distance, depicting the gas stations (photographed deadpan from the opposite side of the road) that he encountered between Oklahoma City and Los Angeles, he stayed mostly within one urban perimeter (Los Angeles) for his subsequent “monument” hunts. In *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966) – a book that struck Smithson very forcefully⁸ – Ruscha exhaustively shows, in a “panorama” form composed of sixty-two accordion-folded pages, every building on the most famous stretch of Sunset Boulevard. (One can “read” the book in both directions, since the two sides of the boulevard symmetrically oppose one another on each page, one right side up, the other upside down: at one end number 8100 is reflected in 8101; at the other, number 9176 corresponds to 9171, although of course this almost perfect correspondence of even and odd numbers is rare in the book.) It should be said that Ruscha photographed more than buildings – his book also includes pictures of street intersections, lawns, and cars whose drivers are rarely seen – since his intention was to make a complete inventory. No effort was made, however, to mask the discontinuity of the recording process: the photographic joins are crude, a way of showing that the very technique of information – the discontinuous “bit” – necessarily produces a certain quotient of entropy. In other books, Ruscha abandons the principle of exhaustiveness and concentrates instead on a building type (as in *Some Los Angeles Apartments* [1965] and *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* [1968]), or even on Los Angeles’ surprisingly diverse population of palm trees (in *A Few Palm Trees* [1971]). Ruscha always

presents his subjects with the same uniformity, the same anonymous quality, but without the somewhat denunciatory tone that we find in, say, Dan Graham's *Homes for America*, a survey of prefab housing developments "designed to be thrown away,"⁹ and without the sort of perverse admiration that Robert Venturi has for Levittown and Las Vegas. Ruscha's work simply elicits a recognition of the same (even his books, for the most part, use the same format and identical typeface), a recognition of the same as nothing. Speaking of the Sunset Strip, which he photographed at noon to accentuate its desolate quality, Ruscha writes: "All I was after was that store-front plane. It's like a Western town in a way. A store-front plane of a Western town is just paper, and everything behind is just nothing."¹⁰ Hollywood, the beehive of the media at the center of Los Angeles, needs no help imagining ghost towns full of dust.

(See "Liquid Words" and "Threshold.")

CONCLUSION



Figure 75.
Cindy Sherman,
Untitled #87, 1981.
Color photograph,
24 x 48 inches.
Courtesy Metro Pictures.

The Destiny of the *Informe*

Rosalind E. Krauss

During the time the exhibition *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi* was in its planning stage at the Centre Georges Pompidou, a potentially competing project was announced by another Parisian institution under the title "From the *Informe* to the Abject,"¹ a title that clearly implies the belief that, if the *informe* has a destiny that reaches beyond its conceptualization in the 1920s to find its fulfillment and completion within contemporary artistic production, it is in the domain of what is now understood as "abjection."

Museum protocol being what it is, however, this latecomer was withdrawn and the project with seniority was retained in the form of the exhibition for which these texts served as one section of the catalogue. And yet, that other, unrealized project might nonetheless continue to function in terms of an implicit protest against seniority understood in a wider and more injurious sense of the term: that of supporting the old against the new, of scanting current practice in favor of historical precedents, and, thereby, of failing to acknowledge what the other project takes to be the case, namely, that the reason for the currency of present-day interest in the concept of the *formless* is to be found in the insistent spread of "abjection" as an expressive mode.

For indeed, this spread is easy enough to document within the cultural manifestations of the last several years. To name only some very recent ones, two respected spokesmen for contemporary art — David Sylvester and Robert Rosenblum — participating in *Artforum's* annual survey of the best and worst exhibitions held in 1995, elevated Gilbert & Georges's "Naked Shit Pictures" to the top of their lists, comparing this mammoth installation to Renaissance frescoes "in which the settings for the groupings of nude figures were not the usual columns and arches but structures erected from enlargements of turds," thereby producing in their viewers a supposed rush "from the scatological to the eschatological."² Another example

would be the Centre Pompidou's own *femininmasculin* exhibition (1995), with its heavy complement of artists associated with American and English "abject art" – Kiki Smith, Robert Gober, Mike Kelley, Sue Williams, Nancy Spero, Gilbert & George, and in matriarchal place of honor, Louise Bourgeois – and its emphasis on contemporary production's fixation not simply on sexual organs but on all bodily orifices and their secretions (hence a strong showing of urinal-related art and fecal imagery, as in the work of Paul-Armond Gette, Noritoshi Hirakawa, Jean-Michel Othoniel, and Helen Chadwick).¹

Perhaps, indeed, it is the occurrence of this latter exhibition and the fact that it and *L'Informe: Mode d'emploi* shared certain artists (Marcel Duchamp, Jean Fautrier, Cy Twombly, Claes Oldenburg, Mike Kelley, Robert Morris) – though not the same type of work by any of them – and in rare instances even shared the same objects (Giacometti's *Suspended Ball*, Man Ray's *Anatomies*, Eva Hesse's *Accession*), that forces us to be explicit on the subject of abjection and to state why and in what way it must be differentiated in the strongest possible terms from the project of the *formless*.

The sacralization of the desired object submits desire to the law of contradictory injunctions for which the model (the pole of attraction) that he imitates is at the same time what constitutes the obstacle to his satisfaction (the pole of repulsion).

– Denis Hollier, *Le Collège de Sociologie*⁴

We do not deny, of course, that Bataille himself employed the term "abjection," particularly in a group of unpublished texts from the mid-to-late 1930s under the title "Abjection et les formes misérables" (Abjection and the Forms of the Miserable).⁵ Nor do we overlook the fact that, insofar as these texts identify social abjection with a violent exclusionary force operating within the modern state – a force that strips the laboring masses of their human dignity and reproduces them as dehumanized social waste (its dregs, its refuse) – they map the activity of abjection onto that of heterogeneity, which Bataille had developed elsewhere as another form of what a system cannot assimilate but must reject as excremental.⁶ And further, it is not to ignore the fact that, at around the same time, Bataille was devising still another model of social cohesion under the rubric "Attraction and Repulsion," according to which what is taken to be the most forceful centripetal pull of society is a power not of attraction but of repulsion, with the sacred core now a function of those very things that had before been classed as "abject."⁷

It is this Durkheimian project, linking the sacred to horrific powers of impurity, that Julia Kristeva would take over from Bataille in her own development of a theory of abjection some fifty years later.⁸ Interestingly, it is Kristeva's use of the term, not Bataille's, that has been influential in the recent theorization of this concept in relation to contemporary artistic practice.

That this should be the case goes beyond the mere fact that Bataille's unpublished texts on abjection were relatively unknown, whereas Kristeva's *The Powers of Horror*, disseminated in translation, was widely available. Kristeva's theorization of the abject had a very different starting point from Bataille's, one that was not primarily social – for all its chapters based on the anthropology of Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger*⁹ – but part philosophical and part psychoanalytic. For the question Kristeva had been posing since *Revolution in Poetic Language* had been how to conceive the connection between subject and object, whether the subject is the psyche and the object is the soma, or the subject is a conscious being and the object, its world. If those questions had previously been pursued mainly within a Lacano-Freudian context, they had also been elaborated within a Hegelian problematic, giving the passage from the subject to its object – understood as the work of *negation* – an overlay of diagrammatic abstraction.

Whether for reasons of schematic completeness, or, as has also been suggested, because the avant-garde's "revolution" could be posed in poetic language not just from the left (Artaud) but from the extreme, fascist right (Céline) – a phenomenon itself seeming to demand from Kristeva's system of semiotic expressiveness a further explanation of how this could be so – *The Powers of Horror* now turned to a model articulated around the arrested passage from subject to object, *negation* functioning here like a kind of bone stuck in the throat. The abject would thus be this intermediary position – neither subject nor object – for which the psychiatric term "borderline" would prove to be extremely useful. And, indeed, "borderline" came increasingly to function as a form of explanation for a condition understood as the inability of a child to separate itself from its mother, so that, caught up within a suffocating, clinging maternal lining, the mucous-membranous shroud of bodily odors and substances, the child's losing battle for autonomy is performed as a kind of mimicry of the impassibility of the body's own frontier, with freedom coming only delusively as the convulsive, retching evacuation of one's own insides, and thus an abjection of oneself.

The abject-as-intermediary is, in this account, thus a matter of both uncrossable boundaries and undifferentiable substances, which is to say a subject position that seems to cancel the very subject it is operating to locate, and an object relation from which

the definability of the object (and thus its objecthood) disappears. In this, Kristeva's conception of the abject is curiously congruent with Sartre's characterization of the *visqueux* (slimy), a condition of matter that is neither liquid nor solid, but somewhere midway between the two. A slow drag against the fluidity of liquid ("Sliminess is the agony of water," Sartre writes), this flaccid ooze may have some of the qualities of a solid ("a dawning triumph of the solid over the liquid"), but it does not have the resistance of solids; instead, as it clings stickily to the fingers, sucking at them, compromising them, it is "docile."¹⁰ Solids, Sartre reasons, are like tools; they can be taken up and put down again, having served their purpose. But the slimy, in the form of the gagging suction of a leechlike past that will not release its grip, seems to contain its own form of possessiveness. It is, Sartre writes, "the revenge of the In-itself."¹¹

Coming as it does from Sartre's project to ground psychoanalysis in a phenomenology of the object, the concern here to grasp forms of matter as ontological conditions ("Quality as a Revelation of Being") ultimately relates the metaphysical purport of sliminess to the way the autonomous subject is compromised by this substance, which Sartre relentlessly characterizes as feminine – yielding, clinging, sweet, passive, possessive – producing yet one more parallel with the analysis Kristeva would come to produce.¹² For the ontological condition here, analyzed as a function of substances, has as its psychic component a threat to autonomy and self-definition due to the suffocating nearness of the mother.

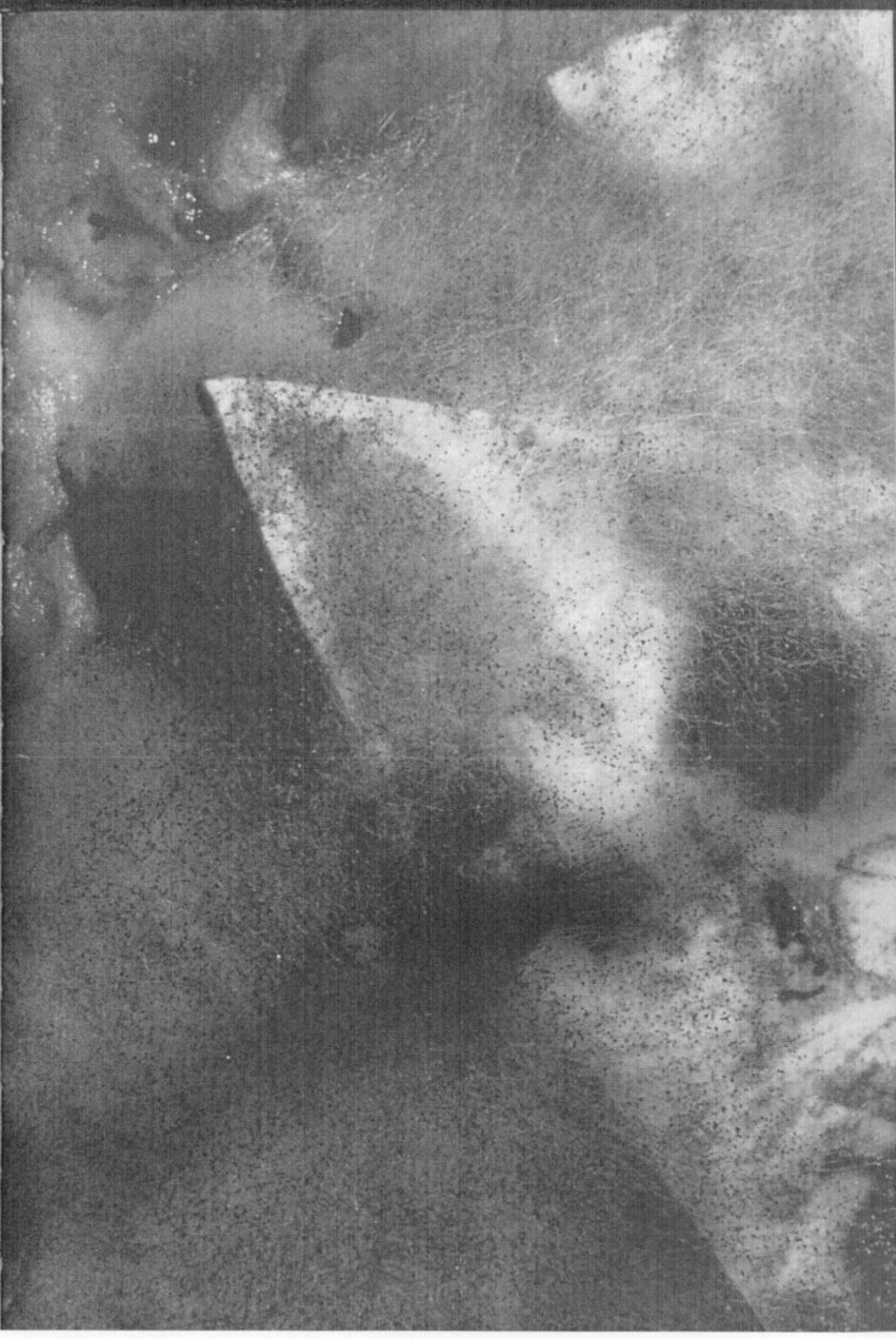
Quality is the whole of being unveiling itself within
the limitation of the there is.

– Jean-Paul Sartre¹³

The abject, understood as this undifferentiable maternal lining – a kind of feminine sublime, albeit composed of the infinite unspeakableness of bodily disgust: of blood, of excreta, of mucous membranes – is ultimately cast, within the theorization of abject art, as multiple forms of the wound. Because, whether or not the feminine subject is actually at stake in a given work, it is the character of being wounded, victimized, traumatized, marginalized, that is seen as what is at play within this domain.

Accordingly, "abjection" is the term that Laura Mulvey uses to describe Cindy Sherman's series made in the late 1980s, sometimes referred to as the "bulimia" pictures.¹⁴ Tracing Sherman's development over the preceding decade from a form of masquerade, in which women assume a range of stereotypical guises that they wear as so many glittering veils, to this moment where the veil is finally dropped, Mulvey sees Sherman's progression as a steadily growing

Figure 76.
Cindy Sherman.
Untitled #236, 1987-91
Color photograph.
90 x 60 inches
Courtesy Metro Pictures.



refusal of the role of fetish object. The cosmetic facades that fit over the heroines of the early work, like so many glossy carapaces of perfection, were organized, like the fetish itself, as a monument to lack, as a cover-up for the fact that the castrated woman's body is the site of the "wound."

From the hardened outside – all image – of the film stills, to the idea of the feminine interior as limp, moist, formless, of the erotic reveries of the centerfold pictures (figure 75), to the parodic fashion plates that Sherman made in the early 1980s, and then the horrific fairy-tale illustrations from about the same time, Sherman is seen by Mulvey as playing on this inside/outside topography of the woman's being, in which nothing can be imagined behind the cosmetic facade but a monstrous otherness, the wounded interior that results from the blow of a phantasmatic castration. Sherman, she says, is exploring this "iconography of misogyny," one that women themselves identify with not only in adopting the cosmetics of the masquerade but in pathologically attempting to expunge the physical marks of their own femininity: "The images of decaying food and vomit raise the specter of the anorexic girl," she writes, "who tragically acts out the fashion fetish of the female as an eviscerated, cosmetic and artificial construction designed to ward off the 'otherness' hidden in the 'interior.'"¹⁵

But it is in the body's final disappearance into the spread of waste and detritus (figure 76), in the work of the late 1980s, that "the topography of exterior/interior is exhausted," since "these traces represent the end of the road, the secret stuff of bodily fluids that the cosmetic is designed to conceal."¹⁶ With the removal of this final veil and the direct, unblinking confrontation of the wound – "the disgust of sexual detritus, decaying food, vomit, slime, menstrual blood, hair" – the fetish now fails and with it the very possibility of meaning that the mark of the phallic signifier puts into play: "Cindy Sherman traces the abyss or morass that overwhelms the defetishized body, deprived of the fetish's semiotic, reduced to being 'unspeakable' and devoid of significance."¹⁷

Certainly it can be claimed that Sherman's work, insofar as it had early on made a compact with the procedures (operational, structural) of the *formless*, had for some time been investigating ways of attacking "the fetish's semiotic," by dealing a low blow to the processes of *form*. One of these, begun with the elongated format of the centerfold series but continued into later groups organized around a plunging viewpoint, turned on the *horizontalization* of the picture, an operation carried out at the level of the signifiers of the image (format, point-of-view), far more than on its signifieds.¹⁸ For if the woman-as-fetish is to function, it must be not just as a perfect Gestalt, a whole body from the outlines of which

nothing is “missing,” but as a vertical one as well—the orientation that the Gestalt always assumes in the imaginary field, mirroring as it does the viewer’s own bodily dimension. Indeed it is this verticality, itself a signifier, that allows the “phallic signifier” to map itself onto the image-form, functioning thereafter in tandem to produce cognitive unity; the Gestalt as a unified whole guaranteeing that the mobility of the signifier will come to rest in a meaning, itself cut out as the unit of the signified. In attacking verticality, Sherman’s work thus operates equally against the linked conditions of form, of which the woman-as-fetish is one of a set of homologous terms.

Figure 77.
Cindy Sherman,
Untitled #205, 1989.
Color photograph,
61½ x 48½ inches.
Courtesy Metro Pictures.

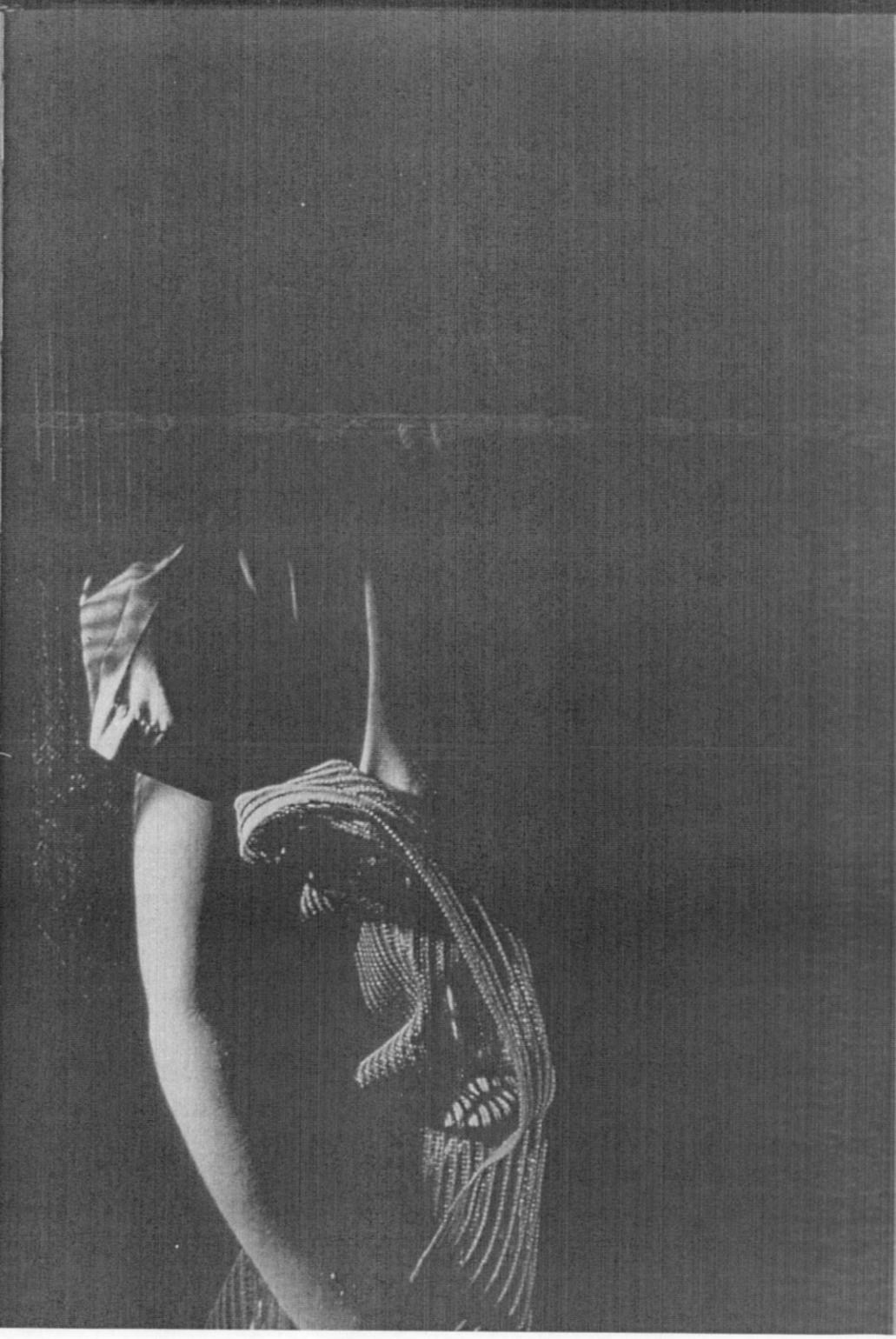
That her work with the horizontal need not configure itself through a literalization of formlessness—pictured as chaotic scat-



ter, or detritus, or disgusting substances—is clear from the series she produced of “Old Master” portraits, where the horizontal is played out as the work of gravity, pulling on the prosthetic devices attached to the bodies of the sitters, and thus disaggregating the formal wholes that high art holds together as within so many concentric frames (figure 77). But here one must also note that the pull from “high” to “low” is not to be read as the revenge of the values of mass culture, since it is clear from Sherman’s work that nothing operates to maintain the links between verticality, the Gestalt, the Phallus, and the woman-as-fetish so insistently as the forms of commercial culture, whether film, television, or advertising. So “low” is not low art as opposed to museum culture, since both are part of the system of form. Low is, instead, “lower-than-low,” a principle that, as we have seen, was central to Bataille.

Yet another signifier of the /formless/ with which Sherman has worked could be summarized as wild light, or gleams: a kind of luminous dispersal that is not unlike what Lacan describes as Gaze, which he says “always participates in the ambiguity of the jewel.”¹⁹ This scattered light, which sometimes takes the form of abrupt highlights on bits of flesh or fabric popping out of an opaquely undifferentiated darkness, or at other times a use of backlighting that makes of the figure’s hair a burning aureole around the invisible remains of the face, acts to prevent the coalescence of the Gestalt (figure 78). In so doing, it also disrupts the operation of the model by which subject and object are put into reciprocity as two poles of unification: the unified ego at one end and its object at the other. Lacan had called this model “geometral” and had identified its rules of perspective with the assumptions grounding the Cartesian subject. But the Gaze, as an irradiant surround, comes at the subject from all sides, producing the subject now as a *stain* rather than a *cogito*, a stain that maps itself, like one of Caillois’s mimetic insects, onto the world’s “picture,” spreading into it, getting lost in it, becoming a function of it, like so much camouflage. As luminous but dispersive, this Gaze thus works against the Gestalt, against form. It is in this sense that to be “in the picture” within this alternative model is not to feel interpellated by society’s *meaning*, is not to feel, that is, whole; it is to feel dispersed, subject to a picture organized not by form but by formlessness. The desire awakened by the impossibility of occupying all those multiple points of the luminous projection of the Gaze is a desire that founds the subject in the realization of a point of view that is withheld, one(s) that he or she cannot occupy. And it is the very fragmentation of that “point” of view that prevents this invisible, unlocatable gaze from being the site of coherence, meaning, unity, Gestalt, *eidos*. Desire is thus not mapped here as the desire for form, and thus

Figure 78
Cindy Sherman,
Untitled #110, 1982.
Color photograph,
45¼ x 30 inches.
Courtesy Metro Pictures



for sublimation (the vertical, the Gestalt, the law); desire is modeled in terms of a transgression against form. It is the force invested in desublimation.

Throughout the late 1980s Sherman continued to figure this field of the unlocatable Gaze by means of gleams and wild light, often married to the /horizontal/ signifier in a combined drive toward the desublimation of the image. Whether this is the gleam of metal grating, or the dull glow of an imageless television set, or the refractive surface of water sparkling upward to meet the downwardly focused view of the spectator, the stabbing beams of the multiple points of light produce not the beautiful of sublimation but the formless pulsation of desire.

Thus these supports for the formless – the /horizontal/, the /gleams and reflections/ – had long been operating within Sherman's work to attack the smooth functioning of what Mulvey names "the fetish's semiotic"; they had been pitting themselves against meaning in the service of the "unspeakable." And this is to say that they had also been working against another avatar of /verticality/ and phallic wholeness: namely, the veil, standing as a substitute for or a marker of the place of truth – and that "truth" is, in the system of the fetish, that the woman is castrated.

It is for this reason that the interpretive move Mulvey makes when she speaks of the "disgust" pictures as dropping the veil, and to which, citing Kristeva, she gives the label "abjection," produces the uncanny sense of a return of the repressed. For it is a return, in the place of the "unspeakable," of a "truth" that is spoken again and again, the truth that is the master signified of a system of meaning for which the wound is feminine, the truth that the woman is wounded. Mulvey herself writes that "although both sexes are subject to abjection, it is women who can explore and analyze the phenomenon with greater equanimity, as it is the female body that has come, not exclusively but predominantly, to represent the shudder aroused by liquidity and decay."²⁰ Thus when this interpretive structure of "abjection" finally has us lifting the veil to strip away the system of the fetish, what it shows us beneath it is another veil, another signified: the wound as woman.

The wound on which much of "abject art" is founded is thus produced in advance as semantic, as it thematizes the marginalized, the traumatized, the wounded, as an essence that is feminine by nature and deliquescent by substance. The critique of this procedure was written over two decades ago, of course, in Derrida's attack on the surreptitious slipping of the "effect of *signification* in general" – the signified – over what had purported to be the purely differential operations of the signifier in Lacan's analysis of the circulation of the marker-of-difference in Poe's story "The

Purloined Letter." For there, too, the operations of unveiling work to produce truth in an act of finding that always finds itself, since the truth is the fetish-veil of the castrated woman: "It is woman, a place unveiled as that of the lack of the penis, as the truth of the phallus, i.e., of castration. The truth of the purloined letter is the truth itself, its meaning is meaning, its law is law, the contract of truth with itself in the logos."²¹

That the reconsolidation of Sherman's images around the semantics of the wound acts contrary to their most radical and productive resources, which are themselves running in strong countercurrent to the constellation form/meaning, is to be seen in an operational understanding of her work. Which is to say that "abjection," in producing a thematics of essences and substances, stands in absolute contradiction to the idea of the *formless*.

In history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life.

— Karl Marx, as quoted by Bataille in an epigraph to

"The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *sur*"²²

What would it be, however, to think "abjection" apart from the objects of disgust — the filth, the rot, the vermin, the corpses — that Bataille himself enumerates, after all, in his own treatment of the subject? Well, as Bataille also shows us, it would be a matter of thinking the concept operationally, as a process of "alteration," in which there are no essentialized or fixed terms, but only energies within a force field, energies that, for example, operate on the very words that mark the poles of that field in such a way as to make them incapable of holding fast the terms of any opposition. So that, just as the word *sacer* already undermines the place of the sacred by revealing the damned within the very term for the holy, the designation for that part of the social field that has sunk into abjection — the word *misérables* — had started off as a term of pity ("the wretched"), but then, caught up in a rage of revulsion, became a curse ("wretches!").²³

Bataille is interested in this splitting apart of meaning from within, since, as we know, all acts of fission produce waste — the sun's very brightness, for example, piling up an unassimilable, excremental slag. And it is the inevitable waste of the meaning system, the stuff that is no longer recyclable by the great processes of assimilation, whether intellectual (as in science or philosophy) or social (as in the operations of the state), that Bataille wants to explore by means of his own procedure, which he names "theoretical heterology." The meaning systems, he argues, are devoted to the rationalization of social or conceptual space, to the process of homogenization, in order to support the orderly fabrication, con-

sumption, and conservation of products. "But the intellectual process automatically limits itself," he says, "by producing of its own accord its own waste products, thus liberating in a disordered way the heterogeneous excremental element. Heterology is restricted to taking up again, consciously and resolutely, this terminal process which up until now has been seen as the abortion and the shame of human thought."²⁴

In describing the heterogenous product as "excremental," Bataille leads us to imagine that heterology will concentrate — as one of its related terms, *scatology*, would indicate — on what is untouchably low. And yet Bataille will also point out that, if the lowest parts of society have become untouchable (abject) through wretchedness, the very summit of that same society is also separated out as untouchable, as kings and popes are precipitated out of the top of the homogeneous structure to form that very exception of which the rule is the product, but from which the sovereign himself is exempt. Sovereignty and the sacred are thus also the unassimilable forms of heterogeneity that the homogeneous forces of lawlike equivalence and representation must create.

It is precisely in the way that these two ends of the spectrum can be brought around to meet each other in a circle that short-circuits the system of rules and regulated oppositions that Bataille sees heterology producing the scandal of thought. At certain times he maps this in the psychosexual domain as a paradoxical notion of castration that is just the opposite of a loss of manliness, since, as the mark of the child's challenge to the heights of the father's power, it becomes the very emblem — in all its bloody lowness — of virility. At other times he constructs this as a politics of the lumpen, which is to say a thought about the consequences of homogeneous society's having forceably excluded a mass of the population from the processes of representation to the point where it can no longer think itself as a class. Indeed the lumpen proletariat, which Marx identifies in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as "the scum, offal, refuse of all classes," is what falls outside the dialectical opposition between the high of the bourgeoisie and low of the proletariat:

Alongside decayed *roués* with dubious means of subsistence and dubious origin, alongside ruined and reckless cast-offs of the *bourgeoisie*, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley-slaves, swindlers, impostors, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, bamboozlers, gamblers, *maquereaux*, brothel keepers, porters, literary hacks, organ-grinders, ragpickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars — in short the whole amorphous disintegrated mass of flotsam and jetsam the French call *la bohème*.²⁵

For Marx, the scandal of Louis Bonaparte, surrounded by this trash, was the emergence of something lower than low, that represented nothing, going to the top. But Bataille saw something powerful emerging from this scandal of the nonrepresentational. As Denis Hollier has written:

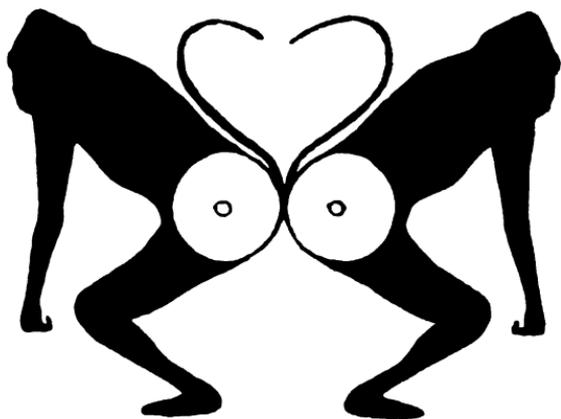
The shift of Bataille's writing in the direction of politics is itself a heterological gesture. But it is heterological only on condition that it follow the subversive route (the old mole's route), that is, on condition that it be addressed to a proletariat defined by its total and unopposed exclusion (its "abjection") from the balanced system of social exchange. The proletariat, therefore, would be expelled yet, just the same, still not constitute a general equivalent or represent the society that does the expelling. It is to the Lumpenproletariat, the nonrepresentative waste product, that Bataille's political texts refer. The shift toward a political ground is useless as a transgression of the rules of literary activity unless it is backed up with political scatology.²⁶

When, as in his essay "Abjection," Bataille brings the political and the psychosexual together, it is to demonstrate the scandal of the identification between the two heterological, untouchable elements: the very high and the lower-than-low. It is to describe, that is, the collapse into a single couplet of anality and sadism, as the sovereign assumes his role as sacrificial and thus projects himself into the place of the victim, so that what is at the top (within the structure of the anal-sadistic) is the lower-than-low.

I think [people] see the manufactured object, by virtue of its "untouched" quality, as a perfect object. And as it is the model for the craft object – rather than something that predated it – all craft objects become failures in respect to it. I'm interested in objects that try to play up that schism – between the idealized notion behind the object and the failure of the object to attain that.

– Mike Kelley²⁷

If Mike Kelley has been embraced as the key example of "abjection" as a mode of artistic practice, his work has not been placed in relation to Bataille,²⁸ except to locate Kelley as an "excremental artist," in tandem with Breton's sneering epithet for Bataille as an "excremental philosopher."²⁹ When it is evoked, the scatological is simply traced in the work's preoccupation with excrement both as bodily waste and as the traces of infantile use that stain the stuffed toy



animals which have been a major part of Kelley's "production" since 1987. And both of these cast scatology in the familiar terms of "abject art," as gender (the handmade toy a manifestation of woman's work) and degradation (the body's substances as filth) are joined in what is seen as an art of failure, an aesthetic of the low.

But Kelley himself has said, "I have a problem with the terms 'high' and 'low.'" The term "low," he explains, seems to refer to an absolute, rather than a process; and so he prefers to invoke the concept of repression.⁴⁰

That Kelley's notions of repression, and of the challenge to repressive forces through the structural operations of the lower-than-low, not only coincide with Bataille's but directly invoke them is evidenced in various places in his work. For example, Kelley included Bataille's portrait in *Pay for Your Pleasure* (1988), and Bataille's influence is obvious in *Monkey Island* (1982–83), particularly its poster *Ass Insect* (figure 79), in which symmetrically linked monkey profiles generate the image of leering eyes from the animals' paired anuses, in a direct allusion to the role of the monkey in the series of "Pineal Eye" texts, as well as "La Jesuve."⁴¹

But as Hollier has insisted, Bataille's discussion of the monkey's roseate anus, blooming in the midst of its black backside and displacing interest from the face downward, is not conducted in the service of the obscene *thing*, but in the interests of the "jésuvian" process, in some places described as the castration complex, in others, that of Icarus's challenge to the sun, a process of a movement

Figure 79
Mike Kelley
Ass Insect, 1982–83
From *Monkey Island*
Symmetrical Sets

upward as a defiance of the top that, in its very ridiculousness, becomes powerfully attractive, attractive *because* repellant, high because lower-than-low (see "Part Object" above).³² And in still other places, Bataille's discussion turns to the forces of exclusion in the social field and takes the path of Marx's "old mole," which, Bataille says, "begins in the bowels of the earth, as in the materialist bowels of proletarians."³³

So it is not surprising that Kelley should have made a work called *Lumpenprolet* (1991), which, with its slightly smaller version, *Riddle of the Sphinx* (1992) (figure 80), stages the jésuvian process, and does so precisely because the "low" occurs here not as a substance (excrement) or as a theme (abjection understood as gender and degradation),³⁴ but as the functional factor in an operation.³⁵ To secure its condition as *function*, the "lumps" in these two works are generalized as invasive conditions, erupting within the horizontal field of the work.

Figure 80.

Mike Kelley,

Riddle of the Sphinx, 1992.

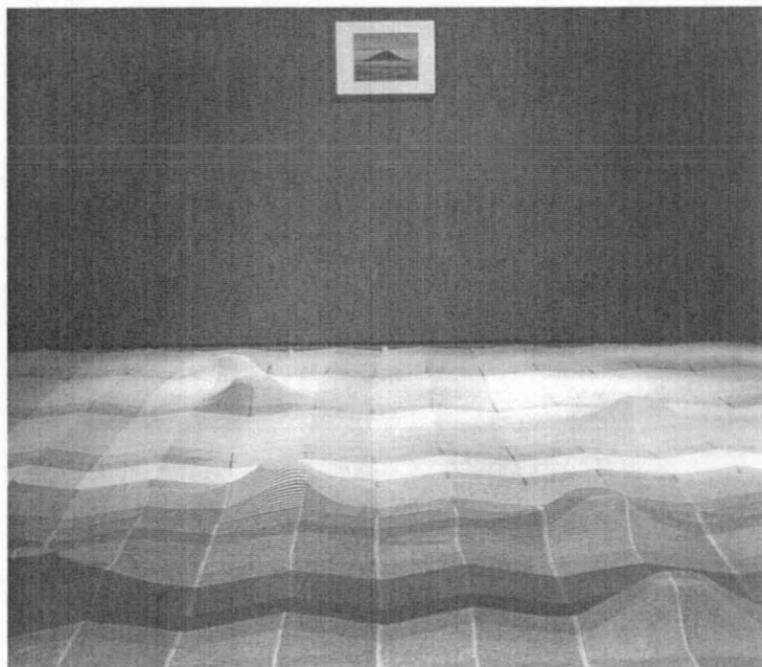
String, found objects, and

color photograph.

360 x 156 inches.

Courtesy the artist and

Metro Pictures.





Since that field itself is an afghan, spread ruglike on the floor, it seems to begin by fixing the pole of lowness within a stable opposition of high/low, and thus operating as a positional absolute. But beneath it is the lower-than-low, which, though we can imagine these obscure lumps to be anything we want – the stuffed animals of the works called *Arena*, for instance, in which these dirty, handcrafted toys sit on crocheted blankets like so many soiled underbellies of elite culture; or, to use the German word for turd, the *lumpf* like objects that appear in some of Kelley's drawings – they owe their capacity for subversion in Bataille's sense (which is to say, the operation of transgression from beneath) to their very indeterminacy. It is this indeterminacy that is both *productive* and a *result* of their being *below* the surface, not part of a visible space, but

Figure 81.
Mike Kelley,
*Craft Morphology Flow
Chart*, 1991.
114 homemade dolls, vari-
ous dimensions; 60 black
and white photographs,
14 x 11 inches each; 1
acrylic on paper drawing
60 x 83½ inches; 13 fold-
ing tables, 29 x 72 x 30
inches, 20 folding tables,
32 x 35 x 35 inches.
Courtesy Metro Pictures.

jettisoned into the heterological position of nonlogical difference.

Thus if abjection is to be invoked in relation to Kelley, it must be done (as with Sherman) in a far more operational way than is current in discourse of the art world, with its insistence on themes and substances.¹⁶ And no one makes this clearer than Kelley himself, as, for instance, in the work called *Craft Morphology Flow Chart* (1991) (figure 81), in which sixty found, handmade stuffed animals are laid out on thirty-two tables in an arrangement reminiscent of the one evoked by Foucault in the preface to *The Order of Things*: some are grouped according to pattern (stripes), some according to texture (loops), some according to size, others according to no perceptible similarity at all, still others – becoming a category of the “unique” – into a grouping of one. And to reinforce the crazed taxonomic drift of this process of organization, each doll is photographed separately lying next to a ruler, thereby producing it as an “individual” within a statistical set that is being established by means of measurement in order – as in some weird riff on physical anthropology – to produce a norm.

All the operations of statistics – from intelligence tests, to police activities such as fingerprinting, to medical record keeping, to political census taking – form the conditions of social control that Foucault would call “discipline” and Bataille would identify with the words “assimilation” and “homogeneity.” But Bataille and Foucault diverge in relation to the results of this process, which Foucault links to the very constitution of the “individual” within societies of control. For Foucault this individual is shaped by the forces of normalization, of which statistics is the procedural tool; whereas, for Bataille, things are slightly more complicated, given the fact that assimilation cannot work without producing its own waste, thus opening up the very category of the “normal” from within.

How this might occur is sketched in Bataille’s short essay “The Deviations of Nature,” in which he provides a demonstration of statistical averaging in the field of the visual.¹⁷ After a brief discussion of freaks, nature’s own “inversion” or negation of the processes of homogeneity within species – “deviations,” as he says, “for which nature is incontestably responsible” – Bataille turns to the composite photographs produced in the late nineteenth century by Francis Galton. Here superimpositions of normal specimens – twenty ordinary faces, say, or a series of heads portrayed on Roman coins – may yield a single, perfected shape, an averaging that might end up, as Bataille points out, with the Hermes of Praxiteles: “If one photographs a large number of similarly sized but differently shaped pebbles, it is impossible to obtain anything other than a sphere: in other words, a geometric figure. It is enough

to note that a common measure necessarily approaches the regularity of geometric figures." Lowering classicism's Platonic ideal in this way to the "norm" and placing beauty "at the mercy" of the common measure, Bataille makes his next, scatological move. If the making of the average produces the "ideal," it must also generate its own waste, and that over the very field of the formerly homogeneous. For "each individual form escapes this common measure and is, to a certain degree, a monster." The inevitable production of the monstrous, or the heterogeneous, by the very same process that is constructed to exclude the nongeneralizable, this is the force that creates nonlogical difference out of the categories that are constructed to manage difference logically.¹⁸

The other word to which Bataille turned to evoke this process of "deviance" was *informe*, a de-classing in every sense of the term: in the separations between space and time (pulse); in the systems of spatial mapping (horizontalization, the production of the lower-than-low); in the qualifications of matter (base materialism); in the structural order of systems (entropy). As this entire project has worked to demonstrate, these processes marked out by the *formless* are not assimilable to what the art world currently understands as abjection. Furthermore, it is our position that the *formless* has its own legacy to fulfill, its own destiny – which is partly that of liberating our thinking from the semantic, the servitude to the semantics, to which abject art seems so thoroughly indentured. The present project is only one chapter in that continuation.

NOTES

Notes

1. *Visions of Excess*, p. 31. All references to Georges Bataille's work refer first to the French text, then to its English translation, when available. We have modified the translations whenever necessary but do not indicate such in the pertaining footnotes (this goes for translated texts by other French writers as well, particularly those published in *Documents*).

The French edition used is Bataille's *Oeuvres complètes*, published in 12 volumes by Gallimard, Paris, between 1970 and 1988 (vols. 1 and 2: 1970; 3 and 4: 1971; 5 and 6: 1973; 7 and 8: 1976; 9: 1979; 10: 1987; 11 and 12, 1988).

The most commonly used translations, which we shall cite throughout in abbreviated form, are:

Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. and trans. Allan Stockl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

Encyclopaedia Acephalica (London: Atlas Press, 1995) (which comprises *Documents*' complete "critical dictionary"), ed. Alastair Brotchie, trans. Iain White, with additional translations by Dominic Faccini, Annette Michelson, and John Harman.

The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1953-73), is referred to in abbreviated form.

Denis Hollier's *La Prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), on which we relied so much, is also given abbreviated references. We refer to its English translation by Betsy Wing, *Against Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

Finally, Bataille's journal, *Documents* (1929-30), was reprinted in a facsimile edition (which retained the original pagination) (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1991).

PREFACE

1. See Rosalind Krauss, "Giacometti," in William Rubin, ed., *Primitivism and 20th-Century Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984); reprinted in *The*

Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). See also Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," *October*, no. 33 (summer 1985); reprinted in Krauss and Jane Livingston, *Surrealism and Photography* (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1986).

2. See Yve-Alain Bois, "Fontana's Base Materialism," *Art in America* (April 1989); Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), chap. 6; Bois, "THERMOMETERS SHOULD LAST Forever," in *Edward Ruscha: Romance with Liquids, Paintings, 1966-1969* (New York: Gagosian and Rizzoli, 1993).

INTRODUCTION

1. Georges Bataille, *Manet* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), p. 16; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 116. Marie Elbé had published in *Documents*, under the title "Manet and the Criticism of His Time," an anthology of inanities that had been written about his pictures, particularly *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and *Olympia* (*Documents 2* [1930], no. 2, pp. 84-90).

2. Françoise Cachin, entry for *Olympia* in *Manet 1832-83*, trans. Ernst Van Haagen and Juliet Wilson Boreau (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), p. 176.

3. Emile Zola, "Une Nouvelle manière en peinture, Édouard Manet" (1867), cited by Cachin, in *ibid.*

4. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 86. In his critique of Greenberg's position, Leo Steinberg refers to *The Work and Life of Eugène Delacroix*, in which Baudelaire stigmatizes as "executioner" or "rake" — depending on whether it is a question of the "limbs of a flayed martyr" or of the "body of a swooning nymph" — all viewers who would invest in the subject matter of Delacroix's pictures (Baudelaire writes: "a well drawn figure fills you with a pleasure that is quite alien to the theme. Voluptuous or terrible, this figure owes its charm solely to the arabesque that it describes in space"). See Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 64.

5. Three notable exceptions: the long essay by Michael Fried, "Manet's Sources: Aspects of His Art, 1859-1865," which takes up an entire issue of *Artforum* (March 1969), reprinted in Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 23-135, notes pp. 467-508; the study by Jean Clay, "Ointments, Makeup, Pollen," *October*, no. 27 (winter 1983), pp. 3-44; and the book by T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985), which contains a long chapter on *Olympia*. Clay, who is very attentive to all the perversions and ruptures of tone in Manet's work, clearly (and often) declares his debt to Bataille. Clark makes only one reference to Bataille, in a footnote (pp. 137-39), where he remarks that Bataille's position has little to do with the traditional modernist interpretation and implies that in certain ways (notably in the sense that for both of them *Olympia* doesn't share in any of the established stereotypes) it is rather close to his own. As for Fried, he

claims that Manet is the first modernist painter in a much more fundamental way than Greenberg argues: according to him, Manet combines different sources (Spanish, Italian, Dutch, and French schools) and different genres (in the case of *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, landscape, still life, nude, genre scene) in a single painting in order to invent a new category synthesizing all these divisions, a category that would be Painting itself (see, particularly, p. 505, n. 224). Fried's Manet is the founder of an ontological unity; thus, he is the polar opposite of Bataille's.

6. Bataille, *Manet*, p. 48; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 133.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 45; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 131.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 48; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 133.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 66; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 145.

10. On these points, see Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, pp. 94 and 111ff.

11. Bataille, *Manet*, pp. 62–63; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, pp. 141–42. In a very similar way T.J. Clark analyzes the scandal that would envelop *Olympia*: the figure does not correctly support her role as courtesan and defies the conventions of the nude, even the erotic type: she is not submissive, her hand is not a fig-leaf (she is phallic). See Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, pp. 131–46.

12. Bataille, *Manet*, pp. 76–78; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 151. In the review of a series of works on impressionism that he published in *Critique* in 1956 (one year after the Manet book), Bataille returns to this question, undoubtedly to avoid a possible misunderstanding: "Manet would certainly have protested if one had seen in his picture the trace of an intellectual preoccupation. However, it is precisely in this, in a less marked indifference to subject matter [than that of the impressionists], or rather in an opening to these unexpected interests, generating a disruption in the conventional system, that he excels" ("L'Impressionisme," reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 12, p. 375).

Finally, the operation of "slippage" has disfiguring powers: with regard to the *Portrait of Georges Moore* (1882–83), Bataille writes, "Perhaps never has the human face been treated as a still life more convincingly than here" (*Manet*, p. 113). In the same vein, Clay speaks of the "Gorgon" aspect of certain portraits of Berthe Morisot, painted as if "after death" ("Ointments, Makeup, Pollen," p. 24).

13. See Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, pp. 92 and 97. And when, in an effort to lessen the scandal, the painting was dispatched to the top of the wall by the Salon officials, critics began to see it as a "spider on the ceiling" (*ibid.*, p. 85).

14. The first entry on man appears in *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 4, p. 215, an issue that contains Bataille's important text "Human Face." The second entry appears in the following issue (*Documents* 1 [1929], no. 5, p. 275). According to the *Journal des Débats*, here are the results of Dr. Maye's calculations: "The bodily fat in a normally constituted man would suffice to manufacture seven cakes of toilet-soap. Enough iron is found in the organism to make a medium-sized nail, and sugar to sweeten a cup of coffee. The phosphorous would provide 2,200 matches. The magnesium would furnish the light needed to take a photograph. In addition, a little potassium and sulphur but in an unusable quantity. These different raw materials, costed at current prices, represent an approximate sum of 25 francs." As for the quotation from Sir William (which must be read in its

entirety to capture its full effect), it participates in the same delirium of accountancy: "A calculation based on very modest figures shows the quantity of blood shed each year in the slaughterhouses of Chicago is more than sufficient to float five transatlantic liners" (trans. Ian White in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, pp. 56–58).

15. Bataille, "Architecture," *Documents 1* (critical dictionary), (1929), no. 2, p. 117 (reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 172. Trans. Dominic Faccini, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, pp. 35–36). See Hollier, *Against Architecture*, particularly the first two parts, "Hegelian Edifice" and "Architectural Metaphor," pp. 3–56 (pp. 45–56 are devoted to the *Documents* article "Architecture").

16. Carl Einstein, "Rossignol" (Nightingale), in *Documents 1* (critical dictionary), (1929), no. 2, pp. 117–18; trans. Dominic Faccini, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 80.

17. Michel Leiris, "Crachat: l'eau à la bouche" (Spittle: Mouth water), *Documents 1* (critical dictionary), (1929), no. 7, pp. 381–82; trans. Dominic Faccini, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 80.

18. Leiris's essay continues and ends as follows: "It is the limp and sticky stumbling block shattering more efficiently than any stone all undertakings that presuppose man to be something – something other than a flabby, bald animal, something other than the spittle of a raving demiurge, roaring with laughter at having expectorated such a larva: a comical tadpole puffing itself up into meat inflated by a demigod" (*Documents 1* [1929], no. 7, p. 382; *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 80).

19. The word in fact appears in the first issue of *Documents*, under Bataille's pen, in the text "Le Cheval académique" (The Academic Horse) – a manifesto disguised as a comparative study of the antique coins of Greece and Gaul (*Documents 1* [1929], no. 1, p. 31) – and, as Georges Didi-Huberman notes, in the caption of one of the illustrations accompanying this text (see Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995, p. 199).

20. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 29–30.

21. We owe the information on Fautrier's shoes to Jean Dubuffet. In a letter to Jean Paulhan undoubtedly written the day after the opening of the "Otages" exhibition, he reports that his wife finds that "Fautrier's paintings are such a perfect extension of him; she speaks of his bad taste (his snake-skin shoes were very noticed yesterday; his flame-colored stationary, his purple ink, etc.)" (letter published in *Jean Fautrier*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée d'art moderne, 1989, p. 22).

22. Bataille, *Manet*, p. 95; vol. 9, p. 157.

23. *Ibid.*

24. The pretext Carl Andre gave is that these sculptures are not "representative" of his work in general. He was not, however, opposed to their being reproduced in the catalogue for his first retrospective, at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague in 1969, nor in the very beautiful book he published with Hollis Frampton, Benjamin Buchloh (ed.), *12 Dialogues 1962–1963* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981).

25. Paul Valéry, "Du Sol et de l'informe," in *Degas Danse Dessin* (1936), translated as "The Ground and the Formless" by David Paul in *Degas Manet Morisot*, Bollingen Series XLV, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry* (New York: Pantheon, 1960), p. 42. Hubert Damisch, with reference to Dubuffet, refers several times to this text by Valéry (see, for example, the essays reprinted in *Fenêtre jaune cadmium* [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984], pp. 111, 118, 139), and more recently Georges Didi-Huberman quotes it at length without commentary in *La Ressemblance informe*, p. 141.

26. On this point, particularly on Cézanne and the landscapes painted at Horta, see Rosalind Krauss, "The Motivation of the Sign," in William Rubin and Lynn Zelevansky, eds., *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium* (New York: Museum of Modern Art), 1992, pp. 261-86, particularly pp. 265-70. See also, in the same volume, Yve-Alain Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," pp. 169-208, particularly pp. 186-87 and the related notes.

27. On this point, see Rosalind Krauss, "No More Play" (1984), reprinted in Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 43-85.

28. Georges Bataille, "Matérialisme" (Materialism), *Documents 1* ("critical dictionary"), (1929), no. 3, p. 170; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 179; trans. John Harman, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 58.

29. "It is nevertheless remarkable that the only kind of materialism that up to now in its development has escaped systematic abstraction, namely dialectical materialism, had as its starting point, at least as much as ontological materialism, absolute idealism in its Hegelian form" (Bataille, "Le bas matérialisme et la gnose" [Base Materialism and Gnosticism], in *Documents 2* [1930], no. 1, p. 2; *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 220; *Visions of Excess*, p. 45).

30. Bataille, "Informe," in *Documents 1* (critical dictionary) (1929), no. 7, p. 382 (reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 217; *Visions of Excess*, p. 31).

31. For a much longer discussion of Duchamp, particularly on his parasitical use of physiological optics, see Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), chap. 3, pp. 95-146.

32. See as well the entry "Esthète" (Aesthete) from the "critical dictionary," written by Bataille, which is largely a denunciation of the cliché: "aging is the same for a trite expression as for a system of carburation" (*Documents 2* [1930], no. 4, p. 235; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 236; trans. Iain White, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 43). The article on Piranesi, discussed below, appears in the same issue.

33. Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 184, n.1.

34. Hans Reichenbach, "Crise de la causalité" (Crisis of Causality), *Documents 1* (1929), no. 2, p. 107. Reichenbach: "According to this principle, molecular mixtures tend toward a state of equilibrium in intermixing according to the law of probability." The critical dictionary's articles "Architecture" and "Rossignol" appear in the same issue.

35. Bataille, "Poussière" (Dust), *Documents 1* (1929), no. 5, p. 278; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 197; trans. Iain White, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 43.

36. Michel Leiris, "Débâcle," *Documents 1* (1929), no. 7, p. 382; trans. Iain White, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 42.

37. Henry-Charles Puech, "Les 'Prisons' de Jean-Baptiste Piranesi," *Documents 2* (1930), no. 4, p. 204. Thinking in particular of his *Pianta di ampio magnifico collegio* and of the famous plan of the *Campo Marzio dell'antica Roma*, Manfredo Tafuri would characterize Piranesi's work as "an architectural banquet of nausea, an empty dictionary created by an excess of visual noise" (Tafuri, "The Wicked Architect": G.B. Piranesi, Heterotopia, and the Voyage," in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987], p. 35).

38. Denis Hollier, "La Valeur d'usage de l'impossible," preface to the reprint of *Documents* by Editions Jean-Michel Place, pp. vii-xxxix; translated as "The Use Value of the Impossible," *October*, no. 60 (spring 1992), pp. 3-24.

ABATTOIR

1. Georges Bataille, "Abattoir" (Slaughterhouse), *Documents 1* (critical dictionary) (1929), no. 6, pp. 328-30; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 205; trans. Annette Michelson, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, pp. 72-73.

2. Bataille, "X Marks the Spot," *Documents 2* (1930), no. 7, p. 438; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 256. I am grateful to Laurie Monahan, who is writing a dissertation on Masson, for the information concerning the painter's participation in Lotar's trip to La Vilette.

3. See Bataille, *Les Larmes d'Eros* (Paris: Jean-Louis Pauvert, 1961), pp. 324 and 237-39; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 10, pp. 626-27.

4. Bataille, "Oeil - Friandise Cannibale" (Eye - Cannibal Delicacy), *Documents 1* (critical dictionary) (1929), no. 4, p. 216; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 188; trans. John Harman, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 166, n. 3.

5. The photograph of Crépin illustrates the critical dictionary article "Malheur" (Unhappiness), written by Bataille, in *Documents 1* (1929), no. 5, p. 277. The shrunken heads are reproduced as illustrations for an article by Ralph von Koenigswald, "Têtes et Crânes" (Heads and Skulls), in *Documents 2* (1930), no. 6, pp. 352-58. The text is a little unsavory ("A little after death, and even more rapidly in hot countries than in ours, the cruel process of decomposition of the corpse begins"), but even if one must agree with Georges Didi-Huberman that certain of the illustrations "offer a vision geared to horrify all normal readers of the *Gazette des beaux-arts*," they belong to the well-regulated genre of the ethnographic document, which is underscored by the inclusion of a photograph bearing the caption "Head of an Obese Woman (Central Europe)." To the violence of the Other, the West can only oppose its surplus of fat. (See Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visual selon Georges Bataille* [Paris: Macula, 1995], pp. 105-11).

6. Michel Leiris, "Une Peinture d'Antoine Caron" (A Painting by Antoine Caron), *Documents 1* (1929), no. 6, pp. 348-55; Roger Hervé, "Sacrifices humains du Centre-Amérique" (Human Sacrifices from Central America), *Documents 2* (1930), no. 4, pp. 205-13. In both cases there is a stressed split between the described horror and the depicted horror: even the atrocious scene by Caron.

because mythological, cannot equal in horror the human sacrifice to which, according to the text Leiris is consulting, Catherine de Medici resorted in the course of a session of black magic.

7. *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 2, p. 103.

8. See Bataille, "Kali," *Documents* 2 (critical dictionary) (1930), no. 6, p. 368; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 243–44; trans. Iain White, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, pp. 54–55. Didi-Huberman relates the texts to one another (*La Ressemblance*, p. 73); I would do so rather to contrast them.

9. In "Le Massacre des porcs" (The Slaughter of the Pigs), published in the last issue of *Documents* (vol. 2 [1930], no. 9), Zdenko Reich deplors the disappearance of a rite observed in Rome until the sixteenth century. The text is illustrated with a photograph that documents the vivacity of this rite in New Guinea (but there is no Grand Guignolesque horror here: a row of pig carcasses evenly lined up on the grass in front of a group of bucolic, nude men and women).

10. The word Bataille uses in speaking of the Folies-Bergère row of legs – *étalage* – obviously recalls *étal*, the butcher's stall. See "L'Usine à Folies aux Folies-Bergère" (1929), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 120. This article was undoubtedly written for, though not published in, *Documents*. On this pun and its photographic equivalent, see Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance*, p. 71.

11. Bataille, "L'Amérique disparue" (Extinct America) (1929), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 153; trans. Annette Michelson, in *October*, no. 36 (fall 1986), p. 3. On this theme of the division into two, see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 47–50 and 77.

12. Bataille, "La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade" (1930), *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 61; translated as "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade" in *Visions of Excess*, p. 96.

13. Bataille, "Musée" (Museum), *Documents* 2 (critical dictionary) (1930), no. 4, p. 330; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 240–41; trans. Annette Michelson, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 64. On the symmetrical relation between these two texts, see Hollier, "Bloody Sundays," preface to *Against Architecture*, pp. ix–xxiii.

14. Walter Benjamin, "Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian" (1937), in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 359. Benjamin took up this sentence again in his last text, the famous "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940).

15. For further information on the period during which Bataille put his talents to the service of the antifascist struggle (his participation in Boris Souvarin's *La Critique sociale* [1932–34], his important role at the center of the group *Contre-Attaque* [1935–36], the publication of his new journal *Acéphale* [1936–39]), see the documentation collected and edited by Marina Galetti, in *Georges Bataille, Contre-attaques: Gli anni della militanza antifascista (1932–1939)* (Rome: Edizioni Associate, 1995).

16. Bataille, "La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade," *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 67; *Visions of Excess*, p. 101.

17. Breton's attack on Bataille appears in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen

R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), pp. 180–86. Among other things, Breton calls Bataille an “excrement-philosopher” (p. 185).

18. Bataille, “Emmanuel Berl – *Conformismes freudiens*” (Emmanuel Berl – *Freudian Conformisms*), *Documents 2* (1930), no. 5, pp. 310–11; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 241–42.

19. Bataille, note relative to the polemic with Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 421.

20. Bataille associates Michel Leiris (who was also analyzed by Adrien Borel) with the “alteration” he sustained in the cure. See “Attraction and Repulsion II: The Social Structure” (1938), reprinted in Denis Hollier, ed., *Le Collège de Sociologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 161; trans. Betsy Wing in Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology 1937–39* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 120. (Bataille’s original wording, “profondément altérés” and “altération,” has unfortunately been translated as “profoundly affected” and “tampering.”) On the double use of Freud, see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 107–109.

21. Bataille, “Dali hurle avec Sade” (Dali Screams with Sade), first version of “Jeu lugubre,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 113.

22. Bataille, “Le Gros Orteil” (The Big Toe), *Documents 1* (1929), no. 6, p. 302; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 204; *Visions of Excess*, p. 23.

23. Bataille, “L’Art primitif” (Primitive Art), *Documents 2* (1930), no. 7, p. 396; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 252.

24. *Ibid.*, *Documents*, p. 397; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 251.

25. Sigmund Freud, “The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words” (1910), *Standard Edition* (1957), vol. 11, p. 159. See Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p. 132, and Rosalind Krauss, “No More Play,” in *Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p. 54.

26. The expression “to serve two masters” is taken from Freud’s text “The Psycho-analytic View of Psychogenic Disturbance of Vision” (1910), *Standard Edition*, vol. 11, p. 216. On the repression of the double function of organs and the formative role that Freud attributes to it, see Hubert Damisch, *The Judgment of Paris*, trans. John Goodman (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1996), chap. 2, pp. 13–38. In the same book, Damisch underscores the wilfully shocking aspect of Freud’s remark, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that the idea that man’s life has a “goal” is a pure product of “human pride” (*ibid.*, p. 4), a remark that must have appealed to Bataille.

27. Bataille, “Le Gros Orteil” (The Big Toe), *Documents 1* (1929), no. 6, p. 297; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 200; *Visions of Excess*, p. 20.

28. Bataille, “La Mutation sacrificielle et l’oreille coupée de Vincent Van Gogh” (Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh), *Documents 2* (1930), no. 8, p. 19; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 269; *Visions of Excess*, p. 70.

BASE MATERIALISM

1. Georges Bataille, “La Mutilation sacrificielle et l’oreille coupée de Vincent Van Gogh” (Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh), in

Documents 2 (1930), no. 8, p. 19; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 269; *Visions of Excess*, p. 70.

2. Bataille, "L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions" (The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions), in *Documents* 1 (1930), no. 8, pp. 49–50; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 271 and 273. A little later, at the time of the College of Sociology, Bataille would express his "disappointment" in art to Alexandre Kojève: "A work of art answers by evading or, to the extent that it gives a lasting answer, it answers no specific situation. It answers worst of all to the end situation, when evading is no longer possible (when the moment of truth arrives)" (trans. Betsy Wing in Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology 1937–39* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], p. 91).

3. Bataille, "La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade" (The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 61–62; *Visions of Excess*, p. 102.

4. *Ibid.*, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 59; *Visions of Excess*, p. 94. For a list of what heterology accounts for, see the second paragraph of the chapter "Appropriation and Excretion" in *ibid.*, and the notes published in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 433–34.

5. Bataille, "Matérialisme," in *Documents* ("critical dictionary"), no. 3 (1929), p. 170; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 180; trans. John Harman, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 58.

6. *Ibid.* Surrealism is targeted directly: with its utopianism and the importance it gives to metaphor (all metaphor is based on a common measure, an identity), surrealism is the perpetual bard of the "devoir être." See "La 'Vieille Taupé' et le préfixe sur dans les mots surhomme et surréaliste" (The "Old Mole" and the Prefix sur in *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surréaliste*) (1931), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 106; *Visions of Excess*, pp. 41–42. On the notion of "devoir être," see Denis Hollier, "The Use Value of the Impossible," *October*, no. 60 (spring 1992), p. 23.

7. See Bataille, "Les Ecarts de la nature" (Deviations of Nature), in *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 2, p. 79–83; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 228–30; *Visions of Excess*, pp. 53–56. On "common measure," see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p. 187.

8. Bataille, "Métamorphose – Animaux sauvages" (Metamorphosis – Wild Animals), in *Documents* ("critical dictionary"), no. 6 (1929), p. 329; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 208–209; trans. Annette Michelson, in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 60. This article appeared in the same issue as "Slaughterhouse." On this major theme of human animality in Bataille, see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 92–94, and Francis Marmande, "Puerta de la carne – Bestialité de Bataille," in *Georges Bataille après tout*, ed. Denis Hollier (Paris: Belin, 1995), pp. 283–92.

9. These last quotations are taken from Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," in *Documents* 1 (1930), no. 1, pp. 2, 6, and 8; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 220 and 225; *Visions of Excess*, pp. 45, 49, 50–51. On the Gnostics, see Denis Hollier, "La Nuit américaine," *Poétique*, no. 22 (1975), pp. 227–43, as well as the bibliographic details in Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995), pp. 215–16.

10. Bataille, "Matérialisme," in *Documents*, no. 3, (1929), p. 170; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 179–80; *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 58.

11. Bataille, "Attraction and Repulsion II: Social Structure" (1938), in *The College of Sociology*, p. 115.

12. On all of this, see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 98-114.

13. Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Erotism," in *Standard Edition* (1959), vol. 9, pp. 167-75; "On Transformations of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism," *Standard Edition* (1955), vol. 17, pp. 125-33. Rather than "Transformations of Instinct," the translation "Transpositions of Drive" seems closer to Freud's *Triebumsetzungen*.

14. As many critics have remarked, a certain ethnological naiveté dominates Bataille's texts at the time. A particularly striking example is provided by the conclusion of "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade": "All organizations that have ecstasy and frenzy as their goal (the spectacular death of animals, partial tortures, orgiastic dances, etc.) will have no reason to disappear when a heterological conception of human life is substituted for the primitive conception; they can only transform themselves while they spread, under the violent impetus of a moral doctrine of white origin, taught to blacks by all those whites who have become aware of the abominable inhibitions paralyzing their race's communities. It is only starting from this collusion of European scientific theory with black practice that institutions can develop which will serve as the final outlets (with no other limitations than those of human strength) for the urges required today by worldwide society's fiery and bloody Revolution" (*Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 69; *Visions of Excess*, p. 102). On the role of ethnography in *Documents*, see Denis Hollier, "The Use Value of the Impossible," *passim*, as well as James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism" (1981), reprinted in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 117-51. See also the memoirs of Alfred Métraux, "Rencontre avec les ethnologues," in *Critique*, no. 195-96 (August-September 1963), pp. 677-84.

15. Bataille, "L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions" (The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions), pp. 50-51; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 273.

16. Bataille, "La Notion de dépense," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 305-306; *Visions of Excess*, p. 119. Bataille had already related jewels to "heterogeneity" in "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 58; *Visions of Excess*, p. 94.

17. Michel Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," *Documents 1* (1929), no. 4, p. 209. On the relations between Giacometti and the *Documents* group, see Rosalind Krauss, "No More Play" (1984), reprinted in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). One should add to the dossier on Giacometti's "fetishism" the opening of his reply to a questionnaire sent out by Breton and Eluard and published in *Minotaure* in 1933: "Can you say what was the most important encounter of your life?: A white string in a puddle of cold, liquid tar ..." (in Alberto Giacometti, *Ecrits*, ed. Michel Leiris and Jacques Dupin [Paris: Hermann, 1990]), p. 15. See also "Part Object," above.

18. On the mythology of plastic, see Roland Barthes, "Plastic," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 [1957]), pp. 97-99.

19. Freud, "Character and Anal Erotism," pp. 172-73.

20. Michel Leiris, *Journal, 1922-1989* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 154.
21. *Les Écrits de Bernard Réquichot*, ed. Marcel Billot (Brussels: La Connaissance, 1973), p. 116.
22. Carl Einstein, "Exposition de collages (Galerie Goemans)," in *Documents*, no. 4 (1930), p. 244.
23. Louis Aragon, "La Peinture au défi" (1930), reprinted in *Les Collages* (Paris: Hermann, 1965), pp. 42 and 63.
24. This assimilation is repeatedly made by Didi-Huberman throughout his book (*La Ressemblance informelle*). In a fragment of the first version of "Le Surréalisme au jour le jour" (Surrealism day by day), entitled "La Publication 'd'Un Cadavre'" and not reprinted in the *Oeuvres complètes*, Bataille describes *Documents* as a "journal that, though my function was only that of 'general secretary,' I actually directed in accord with Georges Henri Rivière . . . and against the official director, the German poet Carl Einstein." Quoted by Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: la mort à l'oeuvre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 148, n. 1.
25. Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 211. Barthes's analysis of Bataille's "Big Toe" is called "Outcomes of the Text" in Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

CADAVER

1. *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 9-10 (Oct. 1, 1927), p. 5. There were thirty-two signatures to the essay, among them Breton's, of course, as well as those of Arp, Boiffard, Robert Desnos, Eluard, Max Ernst, Leiris, Pierre Naville, Jacques Prévert, and Raymond Queneau.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. This revisionary reading is the core of Hal Foster's *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993). My own analysis of Breton's novel *Nadja* (1963) and the concept of "objective chance" in terms of the uncanny and castration begins in "Corpus Delicti," in Krauss and Livingston, *L'Amour fou* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986); and continues in the discussion of the automaton and the death drive in Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).
5. In the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (1938), the *cadavre exquis* is defined as: "Game of folded paper that consists in having a sentence or a drawing composed by several persons, each ignorant of the preceding collaboration." The example that has become a classic and gave its name to the game is the first sentence obtained by those means: "The exquisite - corpse - will drink - the new - wine." This first production occurred in the summer of 1925 at the house shared by Jacques Prévert, Yves Tanguy, and Benjmain Péret, where collective games were conducted with the participation of the rest of the group. For examples see, "Le Dialogue en 1928," in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 11 (March 15, 1928).
6. Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 239-48.

7. Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 218.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

DIALECTIC

1. Denis Hollier, *La Prise de la Concorde*, p. 167 (the quoted phrase is not found in the English translation, *Against Architecture*). On the relations between Bataille and Hegel, see among others: Michel Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" (1963), reprinted in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. and trans. Donald Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 29–52; Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy – a Hegelianism without Reserve" (1967), reprinted in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 251–77; Hollier, "Le dispositif Hegel/Nietzsche dans la bibliothèque de Bataille," in *L'ARC* (special issue on Hegel), no. 38 (1969), pp. 35–47; Rodolphe Gasché, "L'avortion de la pensée," in *L'ARC* (special issue on Bataille), no. 42 (1971), pp. 11–28; Hollier, "De l'au-delà de Hegel à l'absence de Nietzsche," in Philippe Solliers, ed., *Bataille* (Paris: U.G.E., 1973), pp. 75–96.

2. See the notes on *Sur Nietzsche* published in Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 416. See also the recollections of Queneau, in "Premières confrontations avec Hegel," *Critique* no. 195–96 (August–September 1963), pp. 694–700.

3. Bataille, "Nietzsche et les fascistes" (Nietzsche and the Fascists) (1937), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 454; *Visions of Excess*, p. 186.

4. Bataille, lecture of February 5, 1938, at the College of Sociology, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, pp. 323–24; trans. Betsy Wing in Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology 1937–39* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 117. See also Bataille's correspondance with Kojève and the dossier assembled by Hollier in *Le Collège de Sociologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), pp. 61–82.

5. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995). The third section of the book is devoted to this dialectical reading of Bataille. Let's look at how the new "third term" (the *symptom*) is called on to function: reading (pp. 337–38) the article "Bouche" (Mouth) from the *Documents* "critical dictionary" (trans. John Harman in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, pp. 63–65), Didi-Huberman distinguishes three consecutive moments: moment *A*, or the "thesis," where Bataille positions the mouth as "the prow of animals"; moment *B*, or the "antithesis," concerning the mouth of "civilized men"; and moment *C*, or the "symptom," namely, the development, which constitutes the essay's main point, of the mouth's bestiality "on important occasions" of human life. In other words, Didi-Huberman acts as if Bataille posits, on the one hand, the animal mouth and, on the other, the human mouth and, finally, its synthesis, the animalo-human mouth. However, looking at this more closely, the "thesis" (*A*) is part of the "symptom" (*C*). That is, Bataille must first make sure that what he means by "the animal mouth" is clear – that it is a prow – in order for his main statement (that on certain occasions the human mouth reveals itself as being animal) to make sense. Thus there are only two stages: the thesis (if one insists on retaining the vocabulary of the dialectic), which corresponds to Didi-Huberman's *B* (the mouth of the civilized "as beautiful as a safe") and

the antithesis, which corresponds to C (Bataille phrases this second moment: "However, the violent meaning of the mouth is conserved in a latent state; it suddenly regains the upper hand" in the important occasions of human life [fury, terror, terrible pain], when "the overwhelmed individual throws back his head while frenetically stretching his neck so that the mouth becomes, as far as possible, a prolongation of the spinal column, in other words, it assumes the position it normally occupies in the constitution of animals.") It is indeed as antithesis, denial, "the return of the repressed," that Didi-Huberman speaks a little further on (p. 340) of "the symptom," confirming by this, contrary to what he writes everywhere else, that there is no third term. On the two-stage functioning of Bataille's engine of scission, see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 46–51.

6. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 153; cited by Hollier in *The College of Sociology*, p. 88.

7. "All the reversals that seem to belong properly to human life would only be one of the aspects of the alternating revolt, a strict oscillation arising with the movements of anger and, if one arbitrarily and imaginatively collapses the long duration of the successions of revolutions, beating and foaming like a wave on a stormy day" (Bataille, "Le Cheval académique" [The Academic Horse], *Documents 1* [1929], no. 1, p. 21; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 163).

8. Bataille, "Le Gros Orteil" (The Big Toe), *Documents 1* (1929), no. 6, p. 297; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 200–201; *Visions of Excess*, pp. 20–21.

9. Bataille, "Soleil pourri" (Rotten Sun), *Documents 2* (1930), no. 3, pp. 173–74; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 231; *Visions of Excess*, p. 57.

10. Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), in *Standard Edition* (1955), vol. 18, pp. 8–10. On Fechner (who, among other things, developed a psychological interpretation of entropy in the work to which Freud alludes), see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 141ff. Ernest Jones published a text by Siegfried Bernfeld and Sergei Feitelberg entitled "The Principle of Entropy and the Death Instinct," followed by a commentary from Reginald Kapp, in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* (which was directed by Freud) (1931), vol. 12, pp. 61–86. My thanks to Pamela Lee and Matthew Simms for this reference.

11. Bataille, "La Notion de dépense" (The Notion of Expenditure) (1933), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 319; *Visions of Excess*, p. 129.

12. Bataille, "Les Ecartés de la nature" (The Deviations of Nature), *Documents 2* (1930), no. 2, p. 82; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 230; *Visions of Excess*, p. 56.

13. Georges Henri Rivière, Sergei M. Eisenstein, and Robert Desnos, "La Ligne générale," *Documents 2* (1930), no. 4, pp. 217–21. Between Bataille's "The Deviations of Nature" and this Eisenstein file, *Documents* published an issue wholly devoted to Picasso, containing "Rotten Sun."

14. Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance*, pp. 285–333. See Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning" (from *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 1970), reprinted in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 52–58.

15. Pascal Bonitzer, "Le Gros Orteil," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 232 (October 1971), p. 14.

16. On this point, see Sylvie Pierre, "Éléments pour une théorie du photogramme," in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, nos. 226–27 (Eisenstein special issue) (January–February 1971), p. 77.

ENTROPY

1. Roger Caillois, *La Dissymétrie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).
2. Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," *Artforum* (December 1967); reprinted in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 68–74.
3. Caillois's argument in *La Dissymétrie*, however, is that this break with symmetry is anti-entropic, producing the imbalance that allows for the break to occur between inorganic life, which is strictly crystalline and symmetrical in structure, and organic life.
4. Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shepley, *October*, no. 31 (winter 1984), p. 30.
5. Denis Hollier, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," in *October*, no. 31 (winter 1985), pp. 3–16.
6. A key text here is Clement Greenberg's "Modernist Painting" (1960), in which he describes this opticality: "The Old Masters created an illusion of space in depth that one could imagine oneself walking into, but the analogous illusion created by the Modernist painter can only be seen into; can be traveled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye" (Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], p. 90).
7. Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum* (September 1968); reprinted in *Collected Writings*, pp. 110–11.
8. Smithson, *Collected Writings*, p. 73.
9. See Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," in *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 253–65.
10. Caillois, "La Mante religieuse," *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934).

FIGURE

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995), pp. 307, 357, 267, 299.
2. On the eye, see *ibid.*, pp. 74–81 (which should be compared notably with the nonthematic reading Roland Barthes proposed in 1963 for *The Story of the Eye*; on drowning (which allows Didi-Huberman to relate the essay on the Apocalypse of Saint Sever to the one on "X Marks the Spot"), see *ibid.*, pp. 153–54. On morphology (even though it is a description of procedures ["the erosion of boundaries, the inversion of genres... travesty, predatory behavior"]), see *ibid.*, p. 88. On metaphor, see *ibid.*, *passim*.
3. This sentence ends with a corrective where the author seems at first sight to qualify this assimilation of the formless to deformation:

to quickly pass from the like to the unlike, and more precisely – for it had sufficed to say *deformation* to name all of that – to engage the human form in this process so exactly described by Bataille with regard to Aztec sacrifice: a process in which form *opens itself*, “refutes itself,” and reveals itself at the same time; where form is *crushed*, entering into the most complete unlikeness to itself; where form *coagulates*, as though the unlike had just touched, masked, invaded the like; and where form, in this way undone, ends up *being incorporated* to the form of the referent – to the form it disfigures but doesn’t revoke – monstrously (magically, the ethnologist would say) to invade it through contact or devouring. (Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance*, p. 135.)

But the text goes on with a new (implicit) appeal to deformation: “the Bataillian formless thus designates nothing else than what we have aimed at by the expression transgressive resemblances or *resemblances by means of excess*, this constant contact capable of imposing *the very power of unlikeness* on all form” (*ibid.*). The formless is explicitly mapped onto deformation again, at *ibid.*, p. 251, n. 1 (with a reference to an article by Pierre Fédida) and p. 364.

4. Michel Leiris, “Toiles récentes de Picasso” (Recent Canvases by Picasso), *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 2, pp. 57–70.

5. *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 3, “Hommage à Picasso,” pp. 117 and 178.

6. The surrealists had an easy time criticizing the issue: “Picasso resists all the stupidities of an issue specially devoted to him,” René Crevel wrote in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* no. 1 (1930), p. 12.

7. Bataille, “Soleil Pourri” (Rotten Sun), *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 3, p. 174; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 232; *Visions of Excess*, p. 58.

8. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p. 132ff.

9. Bataille, “Le Langage des fleurs” (The Language of Flowers), *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 3, p. 163; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 177; *Visions of Excess*, p. 13.

10. Bataille, “Figure humaine” (Human Face), *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 4, p. 196; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 183; trans. Annette Michelson in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 102.

11. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 184.

12. Breton, “Picasso in his Element” (1933), in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Icon, 1972), p. 114.

13. Jacques Lacan, “What Is a Painting,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978 [1973]), p. 117.

14. Bataille, “Minotaure” (*La Critique sociale*, 1933), reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 336.

GESTALT

1. The term *Prägnanz* is used here in accord with its meaning within Gestalt psychology: the clarity of a structure due to its simplicity, its ability to cohere as shape, its character as “good form.”

2. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" (1949), in *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 2.
3. See Erwin Straus, "Born to See, Bound to Behold: Reflections on the Function of Upright Posture in the Aesthetic Attitude" (1963), in *The Philosophy of the Body*, ed. Stuart Spicker (New York: Quadrangle, 1970), pp. 334–59.
4. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), *Standard Edition*, vol. 21, pp. 99–100.
5. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *Standard Edition*, vol. 7, pp. 156–57.

HORIZONTALITY

1. For an account of Pollock's participation in Siqueiros's studio, see Steven Naifer and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Harper/Collins, 1989), pp. 284–90.
2. Walter Benjamin, "Peinture et graphisme," *La Part de l'oeil*, no. 6 (1990), p. 13.
3. Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).
4. Robert Morris, "Anti-Form" (1968), and "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making" (1970), both reprinted in *Continuous Project. Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 41–46 and 71–93.
5. See *The Unmuzzled Ox 4* (1976), no. 2, pp. 44–45.
6. For an overview of this work, see my essay "Dans cette affaire de point de vue, pouvons-nous compter plus loin que 'un'?" in *Féminin/Masculin: Le Sexe de l'art* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995), pp. 312–21.

ISOTROPY

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours/Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971). The following analysis comes from the chapter "Le Travail du rêve ne pense pas," pp. 239–70.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 332. This is from the chapter titled "Discours, digure, l'utopie du fantasme," pp. 327–54.
3. Sigmund Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten" (1919), *Standard Edition*, vol. 17, pp. 177–204.
4. Lyotard, *Discours/Figure*, p. 339.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 338–39.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 350.
8. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 76.

JEU LUGUBRE

1. In *The Second Manifesto*, Breton links this reaction to the preparation of the special issue of *Variétés* – "Le Surréalisme en 1929" – which he and Aragon had prepared in June. Though he does not refer to this, he had called a meeting

of the movement to discuss the issue, only to encounter the resistance of those former surrealists such as Masson, Desnos, Limbour, Boiffard, and Vitrac, who were now grouped around Bataille and *Documents*.

2. André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 185.

3. At the same time Breton forced Dali to refuse permission to *La Revue du cinéma* to publish the scenario of *Un Chien andalou* in its November issue, since that magazine was being edited by Desnos, Ribemont-Dessaignes, and Soupault.

4. Bataille, "Le Langage des fleurs" (The Language of Flowers), *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 3, p. 163; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 176; *Visions of Excess*, p. 12.

5. In the course of describing the role of the heterological within his own theoretical development, Derrida refers to Bataille's ideas about a materialism in which matter is kept outside of a structure of oppositions, and adds this footnote: "Here I permit myself to recall that the texts to which you have referred (particularly 'La double séance,' 'La dissémination,' 'La mythologies blanche,' but also 'La pharmacie de Platon' and several others) are situated *explicitly* in relation to Bataille, and also explicitly propose a reading of Bataille" (*Positions* [1972], trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], pp. 105-106).

6. Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve" (1967), in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 274.

7. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 105-106.

8. See Rosalind Krauss, "Le Cours de latin," *Cahiers du musée*, no. 53 (autumn 1995), pp. 5-24.

KITSCH

1. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 340.

2. See Marie Elbé, "Manet et la critique de son temps" (Manet and the Criticism of His Time), *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 2, pp. 84-90. The saccharine Jules Lefebvre is reproduced on p. 90.

3. Georges Henri Rivière, "Religion et 'Folies-Bergère,'" *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 4, p. 240; trans., *October*, no. 60 (spring 1992), pp. 49-50.

4. Robert Desnos, "Pygmalion et le Sphinx," *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 1, p. 36. In the same issue Michel Leiris published the article "Hygiène" in the "critical dictionary," in which he protested again the expanding grip of cleanliness in contemporary life: "The workers' sole ambition is now to have a bathroom.... And, since there are no crimes, errors or weaknesses other than against sacrosanct hygiene... everybody will soon be moral, thanks to Cadum soap" ("Hygiène," *ibid.*, p. 44; trans. Iain White, in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 53).

5. Francis Ponge, "Note sur les Otages, peintures de Fautrier" (1945), reprinted in *l'Atelier contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 41. Georges Bataille, "Le Langage des fleurs" (The Language of Flowers), *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 5, p. 164; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 178; *Visions of Excess*, p. 14. The image of Sade leaning over a latrine would enrage Breton (see "Cadaver" above).

6. Cited by Rainer Michael Mason in his catalogue raisonné of the prints of Fautrier, *Jean Fautrier: Les Estampes* (Geneva: Cabinet des estampes, Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1986), p. 155. I wish to thank Rachel Perry, to whom I owe this citation, for having called my attention to the "Multiple Originals." The enterprise began with Fautrier's collaboration in the production of textured "replicas" of canvases by modern masters via a hybrid technique blending lithography, photography, and stenciling (applied to Braque, Derain, Dufy, Gris, Klee, Picasso, Signac, Vlaminck, followed by Cézanne, Manet, Monet, Renoir, and Sisley). The "Multiple Originals" followed shortly. Even though Fautrier speaks of paintings "produced in an edition of 300" (in fact, no edition went beyond thirty copies), as Mason points out, it was a matter of "prints touched up by hand in a painterly way and backed with canvas mounted onto a stretcher."

7. Denis Hollier, "Chutes," in *François Rouan* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Musée d'art moderne de la Communauté Urbaine de Lille, 1995), p. 61. "Look into [the mirror], and you will see the outlines of the thing more easily," Filarete advised Renaissance painters. Cited by Hubert Damisch in *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 63, as cited by Hollier, in *ibid*.

8. On this point, see Robert Herbert, "Method and Meaning in Monet," *Art in America*, September 1979, pp. 901-908.

9. Greenberg had at first been very critical of Pollock's use of metallic paint; it was not until he had drawn what he called the "Byzantine parallel" that he could give it a positive value. On this, see Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 248. (Stella, on the other hand, Krauss notes, was seduced by the aluminum paint precisely because of its repulsive quality.) For an interpretation not only of Pollock, but also of the whole of American abstract expressionism, in terms of vulgarity, see Tim Clark, "In Defense of Abstract Expressionism," *October*, no. 69 (spring 1994), pp. 23-48.

LIQUID WORDS

1. The first work in the *Liquid Words* series, *Annie. Poured from Maple Syrup* (1966), was made before the Pollock retrospective, but I have argued elsewhere that this canvas is an exception (the graphic inscription is a very well known logo from the comics; the letters, scarcely "gnawed," seem less on the verge of dissolving than reforming; the represented liquid is named in the title). All the other works in this series came after the Pollock retrospective. For more on this issue and on Ruscha's work in general, see my "THERMOMETERS SHOULD LAST Forever" in Raymond Foyle, ed., *Edward Ruscha: Romance with Liquids* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), pp. 8-38.

2. Michel Leiris, "Crachat - L'eau à la bouche" (Spittle - Mouth Water), *Documents 1* (critical dictionary) (1929), no. 7, p. 382; trans. Dominic Faccini in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 80.

3. In "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" (1968), he refers to Ruscha's *Royal Road Test* (1967), made in collaboration with Mason Williams, "thrower," and Patrick Blackwell, photographer (Robert Smithson, *The Collected*

Writings, ed. Jack Flam [Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996], p. 83). This book – one of the rare ones to have a narrative content (it is a mini-serial novel describing the throwing of a typewriter out the window of a Buick going ninety miles an hour on a highway across the Nevada desert) – is a parody of scientific or forensic inquiry. First the executors of the test are photographed (driver, “thrower,” and photographer), then the object (typewriter), and then the place; subsequently, photos document the effects of the test (a long shot of the debris scattered on the ground, a measurement of the length separating the first debris from the last, close-ups of each piece of debris); finally, photos of the driver (Ruscha) and of the “thrower” examining the test results. The last image of the book shows the carcass of the machine on the ground and the shadows cast by the three executors, one of them in the process of taking the photograph.

If Smithson was a great admirer of Ruscha’s books (which his own photographic work demonstrates to be the case), this was so because his own way of thinking was very close to that of the California artist. *A Heap of Language*, for example, a kind of calligram whose verbal matter is a series of words relating to language (“language,” “phraseology,” “speech,” “tongue,” and so on) and whose form is a heap, was drawn by Smithson in 1966, before Ruscha had begun the *Liquid Words* series.

“MOTEUR!”

1. In his *Speech and Phenomena* (trans. David Allison [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973]), Jacques Derrida analyzes Edmund Husserl’s need to reduce visual experience to a *stigmé*, or infinitely contracted point, which Husserl also calls a “blink of the instant” (*im selben Augenblick*). See my discussion of this in relation to Duchamp’s “*oculisme de précision*,” in *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), chap. 3.

2. Positioning its viewer at the peephole of a door through which the spread-eagle body of a nude can be seen, presented through the intensely realistic form of the three-dimensional diorama, *Etant donnés* . . . stages visibility as a species of voyeurism and thus insists on the bodily dimension of this act of looking, whether by invoking the erotic desire driving the gaze or the embarrassment of being caught in the act of looking. In either case Duchamp’s critique transforms the space of exhibition (in this case, the museum), formerly understood as a public domain through which “disinterested” gazes open onto a plurality of works that they judge but do not desire, gazes which, since they represent the universality of aesthetic taste, are assumed to be transparent to one another. It is this ideal of visual and spatial “purity” that *Etant donnés* . . . blocks by the opacity of the desiring body.

3. See P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), and the special film issue of *Artforum* (September 1971), which was edited by Annette Michelson.

4. Tony Conrad’s *The Flicker* was also made in 1966.

NO... TO INFORMEL

1. For a comical sampling of this literature one might read the survey published in the February, March, April, and May 1964 issues of *Preuves* (twenty-five replies to the journal's questionnaire, plus five letters to the editor published afterward, one of which was from Georges Mathieu). The point of departure for these essays was an effusive text by Yves Bonnefoy titled "Dualité de l'art d'aujourd'hui" (which had appeared in the annual journal *Art de France*, vol. 2 [1962], pp. 281-96). Bonnefoy's essay was filled with sentences such as: "The work wants to be nothing more than a means, like prayer, to revive and make a forgotten transcendence well up in us" (p. 282). Very few art critics protested against this new alliance between art and the sacred; when the texts published by *Preuves* did refer to Bonnefoy's essay, they generally treated it with respect (often, as in the case of Jean Cassou's contribution, they even outstripped it in religiosity), and if they ignored it, they did so, apparently, not in the interests of lucidity but to help themselves to a syrup of the same brand (Stéphane Lupasco, for example, produced the phrase "art appears as soul itself"). There are a few exceptions, such as Clement Greenberg, who, having wandered into this business, directly transposed onto the Parisian scene the critique of the academicization of abstract expressionism which he had for several years been expatiating on in New York.

2. Jean Paulhan, *L'Art informel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 7.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

4. See Jean Fautrier, "Parallèles sur l'informel" (1958), reprinted in *Jean Fautrier*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989), p. 14.

5. Jean Dubuffet, letter of December 21, 1952, to Michel Tapié, in Hubert Damisch, ed., *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), vol. 2, p. 308.

6. On "the mechanism of references," see Jean Dubuffet, "Notes pour les fins-lettrés," in *Prospectus aux amateurs de tout genre*, vol. 1, p. 70. We could compare the following passage to Bataille's text on the language of flowers: "The rose doubtlessly has its own virtues but it has more to do with the artichoke or any old shrub, that is, no matter what herb or lettuce, than with the celluloid rose.... For from the rose to the grasses, but also from the grasses to the soil or the stone, there is a continuity, something in common, which is existence, substance, belonging to the world of man, which forms a great, continuous soup that has the same taste throughout (the taste of man)" (*ibid.*, pp. 68-69). Dubuffet humanizes the rose in recalling its modest origins and in opposing it in a vitalist fashion to plastic (whose repugnant, dead quality would to the contrary be underscored by Alberto Burri).

7. Paul Valéry, "Du Sol et de l'informe," in *Degas Danse Dessin* (1936), translated as "The Ground and the Formless" by David Paul in *Degas Manet Morisot*, Bollingen Series XLV, vol. 12 of the *Collected Works of Paul Valéry* (New York: Pantheon, 1960), p. 43. We should note that for Fautrier this book, "remarkably agreeable to read because fictionalized... teaches us absolutely nothing" (from an undated letter to Jean Paulhan, published in the catalogue for the exhibition

Jean Paulhan à travers ses peintres, Grand Palais, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1974, p. 84).

8. See Dubuffet, "Topographies, texturologies" (1955), reprinted in *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, vol. 2, pp. 154-56. On "the forgotten native soil," see "Notes pour les fins-lettrés," *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 55.

9. In Dubuffet's case, we might read his warm letter of thanks to a certain Dr. Oscar Forel for having brought out a book of photographs of tree bark. Dubuffet was not a dupe though; as he says to another correspondent, this type of work results from the influence of painting on photography rather than the other way around. See *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, vol. 2, pp. 470-71.

10. See, for example, the long letter addressed to Noël Arnaud, of April 23, 1961, describing the importance of the mechanism of recognition and of the titling procedure for the series of lithographs called *Les Phénomènes* (the graphic works by Dubuffet closest to his *Materiologies*), in *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, vol. 2, pp. 474-75.

11. See Stéphane Lupasco, *Science et art abstrait* (Paris: Julliard, 1963), *passim*. For a more serious examination of this question, see Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Caucogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989 [1962]), esp. chap. 4, which is devoted to *art informel*.

12. Georges Mathieu, "Note sur le poétique et le signifiant" (1951), in *Au-delà du tachisme* (Paris: Julliard, 1963), p. 163. The same position may be found in Paulhan, *L'Art informel*, pp. 10-11.

13. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Washington Square Press, 1948 [1940]), p. 247. We should recall that Dubuffet read *Nausea* enthusiastically and at one point identified himself with existentialism: "I have not yet clearly conceived what existentialism actually is. . . . Nonetheless I feel so and in any case declare myself warmly existentialist" (letter to Jean Paulhan, summer 1946, in *Jean Paulhan à travers ses peintres*, p. 98).

NO . . . TO JOSEPH BEUYS

1. Götz Adriani et al., *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works* (Woodbury, N.Y., 1979), p. 72, as cited by Benjamin Buchloh, in "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum*, no. 18 (January 1980), p. 39.

2. See Bataille, "La Structure psychologique du fascisme" (The Psychological Structure of Fascism), *La Critique sociale*, no. 10 (Nov. 1933), pp. 159-65 and no. 11, March 1934; pp. 205-11; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 339-71; *Visions of Excess*, pp. 137-60.

3. Thierry de Duve, "Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the Proletarians," *October*, no. 45 (summer 1988).

4. See the discussion in "Conclusion: The Destiny of the *Informe*."

5. See the discussion on pp. 245-47 of this volume, with special reference to the discussion in Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 124-25.

6. Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, *Joseph Beuys, Is It about a Bicycle?* (Paris: Verona, 1985), pp. 91-93, as cited in Eric Michaud, "The Ends of Art according to Beuys," *October*, no. 45 (summer 1988), p. 39.

OLYMPIA

1. Kirk Varnedoe points this out in a footnote to his catalogue text in his *Cy Twombly* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), p. 62, n. 121.
2. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 62.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

PART OBJECT

1. Michel Leiris's essay on Giacometti appeared in *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 4, pp. 209-14.
2. Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 204.
3. Salvador Dalí, "Objets surréalistes," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 3 (December 1931), p. 16.
4. Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye" (1963), in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 242.
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 47.
6. Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 32; *Visions of Excess*, pp. 87-88. For a discussion of this passage, and the concept of the "jésuvien" eruption, see Denis Hollier, "Autour de livres que Bataille n'a pas écrits," *La Part de l'Œil*, no. 10 (1994), p. 31.
7. See Lygia Clark, "L'Art, c'est le corps," *Preuves*, no. 13 (1973), p. 142.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Guy Brett, "Lygia Clark," *Third Text* 1, no. 1 (autumn 1987), p. 84.
11. Perhaps it was to exorcize these demons that Clark imagined a whole series of comic dialogues between one part of the body and another ("Nose to mouth: climb up a bit onto me, my little pet; in this position, it's a no-no"). But quickly the animism that is at the root of the uncanny turns these little burlesque fables into castration anxiety and toward death ("Head to neck: if you are cut, I will fall"). These unpublished notes date from the beginning of the 1970s. At the time the artist was very interested in the work of Georg Groddeck (particularly the essay "Du Ventre humain et de son âme," published in *La Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse*, no. 3 [spring 1971]) and in the work of Melanie Klein.

PULSE

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 43.
2. See "Entropy," above.
3. See "Isotropy," above.
4. Gotthold Lessing, *Laocöon*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Noonday Press, 1957).

5. Benjamin Buchloh offers an important reading of Coleman's overall project, from the mid 1970s to the present, in which the fragmented and destabilized subject of contemporary industrialized culture, acknowledged by much of post-war art, is nonetheless treated as the grounds for an attempt at remembering. This implies that, after the shattering of the subject articulated by the continuing "shocks" of the alternating explosions of image and afterimage, there is a rebuilding or resuturing of the subject around cultural memory, for which the theme of boxing is important in the Irish context. See Benjamin Buchloh, "Memory Lessons and History Tableaux: Coleman's Archeology of Spectacle," in Lynn Cook, ed., *James Coleman* (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1995), pp. 47-69.

QUALITIES (WITHOUT)

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962 [1945]), p. 252.

2. Jacques Lacan, "De Nos Antécédents," *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 71. Lacan's essay alludes to Kant, the ultimate "papa philosopher," to use Bataille's expression. See his article "Space" in the "critical dictionary," in *Documents 2* (1930), no. 1, p. 41; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 227; trans. Iain White, in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 75.

3. See Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shepley, *October*, no. 31 (winter 1984). For more on this text, see "Entropy," and "Water Closet," above.

4. Robert Smithson, "Incidents of Mirror Travels in the Yucatan" (1969), in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 129.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Caillois speaks briefly there of the morphological mimicry (not only the visual) of certain animal species as a sort of relief photography: "[it] could then be, after the fashion of chromatic mimicry, an actual photography, but of the form and the relief, a photography on the level of the object and not on that of the image, a reproduction in three-dimensional space with solids and voids: sculpture-photography, or better teleplasty, if one strips the word of any metapsychical content" ("Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," p. 23).

7. Georges Bataille, "La 'Vieille taupe' et le préfixe *sur* dans les mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*" (The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surréaliste*) (a text replying to Breton's *Second Surrealist Manifesto*), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 107; *Visions of Excess*, p. 43. On this sentence and the manner in which, despite appearances, it contradicts the principle of identity, see Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 104ff.

RAY GUNS

1. Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts" (1983), in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 3-37.

2. Jean Dubuffet, "L'Auteur répond à quelques objections," reprinted in *Prospectus et tous écrits suivants*, vol. 2, ed. Hubert Damisch (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), pp. 61–62. This text was first published in the catalogue of the exhibition "Mirobolus, Macadam & Cie, Hautes Pâtes," at the Galerie René Drouin in 1946, then republished many times, notably under the title "Réhabilitation de la boue."

3. Claes Oldenburg, as cited by Barbara Rose in *Claes Oldenburg* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), p. 46.

4. *Ibid.*, notes dated "Provincetown, 1960," p. 191.

5. Claes Oldenburg, notes from 1961, in *Store Days* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), p. 8.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Cited in Rose, *Claes Oldenburg*, p. 33. The list of prices can be found in Oldenburg, *Store Days*, pp. 31–34. Items were rarely under \$100, even going up to \$899.95 (mimicking the retailer's avoidance of round numbers).

8. Claes Oldenburg, notes dated "New York, 1961," reprinted in Coosje van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing* (Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 1979), p. 24.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

10. Carl Einstein, "Exposition de Collages (Galerie Goemans)," *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 4, p. 244.

11. On this point, as on the movement as a whole, see Benjamin Buchloh, "From Detail to Fragment – Décollage Affichiste," in *Décollage: Les Affichistes* (New York: Zabriskie Gallery, 1990), p. 7.

SWEATS OF THE HIPPO

1. Georges Bataille, "Le Cheval académique" (The Academic Horse), *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 1, pp. 27–31; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 159–63.

2. Bataille, "Chameau" (Camel), *Documents* 1 (critical dictionary) (1929), no. 5, p. 275; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 194; trans. Iain White, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 38.

3. Michel Tapié, *Mirobolus, Macadam & Cie: Hautes Pâtes de Jean Dubuffet* (Paris: Galerie Drouin, 1946), p. 28. I am grateful to Rachel Perry for having called my attention to this text and for much of what concerns Dubuffet here.

4. Jean Dubuffet, letter to Jean Paulhan, dated January 15, 1946, published in *Jean Paulhan à travers ses peintres* (exhibition catalogue) (Paris: Grand Palais, Editions des musées nationaux, 1974), p. 96.

5. Oldenburg, notes dated 1968, in Barbara Rose, *Claes Oldenburg* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), p. 194.

6. Michel Leiris, "Joan Miró," *Documents* 1 (1929), no. 5, p. 264. Georges Didi-Huberman relates this text to a brief review of an Arp exhibition, published two issues later, where Leiris writes that this artist "makes his forms buckle and, systematically, making everything almost alike, overwhelms illusory classifications and the very scale of created things" (*Documents* 1 [1929], no. 7, p. 340). See Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*

(Paris: Macula, 1995), pp. 146–47. That everything becomes like everything else is entropy itself: the works by Arp soon attain this (they are “almost” there, I eiris says), for a brief moment, with his crumpled and torn papers (see “Water Closet,” above).

7. One could relate Matta-Clark’s interest in mold to Oldenburg’s self-portraits in Jell-O from 1966, which were soon covered in mold and thrown in the garbage. And we should also refer to the sculptures made of stale porridge (“emitting a faint but sickly smell and ... the color of cheese”) and of other perishable materials with which Schwitters peopled the temporary Merzbau he installed in the cabin of a camp in which he was imprisoned, as a German citizen, on his arrival in England in 1940 (Fred Uhlman, cited by John Elderfield, in *Kurt Schwitters* [New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985], p. 205). There were already perishable elements in the Hannover Merzbau. Moreover, all the firsthand reports of this first Merzbau insist on the fact that it did not stop growing, like a cancer that invaded the architectural space little by little, as Schwitters added new elements to it daily: entropic invasion par excellence. I thank Lauri Firstenberg (on Oldenburg) and Tim Rohan (on Schwitters) for having drawn my attention to these rotting works.

THRESHOLD

1. Georges Bataille, “Architecture,” *Documents 1* (critical dictionary) (1929), no. 2, p. 117; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 171–72; trans. Dominic Faccini, *October* 60; reprinted in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, pp. 35–36.

2. Bataille, “Espace” (*Space*), *Documents 2* (1930), no. 1, pp. 41–42; trans. Iain White in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 77. For the photograph of the collapsing chimney stack, see *Documents 1* (1929), no. 6, p. 329.

3. For a reading that insists to the contrary on the anthropomorphic character of the two images used by Bataille, and which seems to make Bataille’s “morphological” approach, here seen as a limitation, one of the strong points of his thought, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995), pp. 66–67, 81–89.

4. Bataille, *L’Expérience intérieure* (1943); *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 5, quotations from pp. 70–73; trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, *Inner Experience* (Stony Brook: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 56 (translation slightly modified). On this passage, see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 45–46.

5. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 46 (translation slightly modified).

6. The translation of *L’Érotisme* (*Death and Sensuality* [1969]) was in his library, and it is more than probable that his remarks on the relations between waste and pleasure originated there. See the interview “Entropy Made Visible” (1973), in Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 303. For the presence of Bataille’s book in Smithson’s library, see the eponymous catalogue to the exhibition “Robert Smithson: Le Paysage entropique” (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), p. 256.

7. *Robert Smithson: Le Paysage entropique* is the most recent work devoted to

this question. Among the other texts, one finds the excellent development by James Lingwood, "The Entropologist," pp. 29–36.

8. On this lecture, see Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 164–65, and Robert A. Sobieszek, *Robert Smithson. Photo Words* (Los Angeles and Albuquerque: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and University of New Mexico Press, 1993), pp. 36–37.

9. This project was itself a substitute for *Island of Broken Glass*, canceled at the last moment by the Canadian authorities (and there again under the pressure from the ecology movement). On this, see Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, pp. 185–86.

10. *Partially Buried Woodshed* would become a "monument" several months after its realization, when the Ohio National Guard killed four students at Kent State during a demonstration against the invasion of Cambodia: even nonmonumentality is ephemeral.

11. See Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, p. 191 (for *Partially Buried Woodshed*), and pp. 196–97 (for *Spiral Jetty*).

12. Invited to take part in an exhibition organized by the institute, Matta-Clark knocked out the windows and in their place hung photographs of buildings (whose windows had been broken) in the Bronx. From the outset he had a very hostile attitude toward the exhibition (learning that Richard Meier, Charles Gwathmey, and Michael Graves were going to participate, he said, "Those are the guys I studied with at Cornell.... I hate what they represent"). Furious, the institute's director, Peter Eisenman, who had also taught at Cornell when Matta-Clark was there, and whose recent architecture is in large measure a luxurious recycling of the latter's "anarchitecture," had the panes of glass replaced in several hours and withdrew the photographs from the exhibition. On this episode, see the testimony of Andrew MacNair in the catalogue *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985), p. 96, and Marianne Brouwer's essay "Laying Bare," which traces a parallel between Matta-Clark and Bataille, in *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Marseille: Editions des Musées de Marseille, 1993), pp. 363–65.

13. Gordon Matta-Clark, interview with Liza Bear on *Splitting*, in *Avalanche* (December 1974); reprinted in *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Musées de Marseille), p. 375. A little further in the same interview Matta-Clark himself declares the impossibility of this wish, saying, "It would be interesting to make changes in a place that people still lived in... to take, perhaps, a very conventional notion of a living space and alter it beyond use" (p. 376).

14. Matta-Clark, interview with Judith Russi Kirshner in *ibid.*, p. 389.

15. It is possible that Matta-Clark started by addressing the issue of the threshold for symbolic reasons: the threshold is one of the rare places to carry a strong semantic load even in the most banal of architecture; to make a hole in it, by the very fact of materially suppressing it, is to underscore its apothropaic function (on the threshold – and its modern substitute, the doormat – see the "critical dictionary" entry "Seuil" by Marcel Griaule, in *Documents* 2 [1930], no. 2, p. 103; trans. Iain White in *Encyclopaedia Aesthetica*, pp. 83–84). Whatever the reason, Matta-Clark did not continue in this figurative vein: on the contrary, his perfora-

tions tended toward an increasingly insistent debierarchicization of the architectural elements.

UNCANNY

1. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
6. "I am the reference of every photograph," Barthes writes, "and this is what generates my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is it that I am alive *here and now*?" (*ibid.*, p. 84).
7. See the reference to Delcuze on Plato and the simulacrum, in "Entropy," above.
8. Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in *Standard Edition*, vol. 18, p. 273.
9. André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 11.

VERY SLOW

1. Yoko Ono was very interested in the fly's point of view: her short *Fly* (1970) is a film in close-up of the peregrinations of a fly on the nude body of a woman.
2. Pol Bury, "Le Temps dilaté" (1964), reprinted in *Les Horribles Mouvements de l'immobilité* (Paris: Editions Carmen Martinez, 1977), p. 116.
3. See Rosemarie Pakhle, *Pol Bury* (Dortmund and Brussels: Museum am Ostwall et Crédit Commercial, 1994), p. 44.
4. Pol Bury, "La Boule et le trou" (1960), reprinted in *Les Horribles Mouvements*, pp. 51-52.
5. "Was Newton sensible to this hesitation of the apple falling in the void[?] ... [N]onetheless between the point of fall and the apple there was ... a moment where both hesitated ... this imperceptible static moment" (Pol Bury, "La Boule et le trou," p. 58).
6. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919), in *The Standard Edition* (1955), vol. 17, p. 250.

WATER CLOSET

1. See Jacques Derrida, *Glas* (1974), trans. John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), pp. 216-29.
2. Georges Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Marion Boyers, 1985 [1957]), p. 193.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Braziller, 1963), p. 277. In *The Second Manifesto* Breton had also sneered at Bataille's job as librarian. (André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996], p. 186.)

4. Bataille, "D'Un Caractère sacré des criminels" (1949); *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 11, pp. 468-70.
5. Derrida speaks of "an alliance, not easily explicable, with Sartre" (*Glas*, p. 217).
6. Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, p. 188.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
8. Bataille, "The College of Sociology" (1939), in *The College of Sociology*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 337; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 369-70. On the circumstances surrounding this last lecture, see Denis Hollier, *Le Collège de Sociologie*, 2d ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), pp. 817-38.
9. The first version of Caillois's "Mimesis et psychasthénie légendaire" (Mimesis and Legendary Psychasthenia), as it appeared in *Minotaure* (no. 7, June 1935), did not directly refer to the second principle of thermodynamics explicitly mentioned in the final version of 1938 in *Le Mythe et l'homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972): "In fact, we touch here on this fundamental law of the universe that Carnot's principle notably brings to vivid light: the world tends towards uniformity" (p. 115).
10. "To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other sides of his senses, feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar. And he invents spaces of which he is 'the convulsive possession'" (Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. William Rodarmor, *October*, no. 31 [winter 1984], p. 30).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 17. On this text, see Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," *October*, no. 33 (summer 1985). See also Denis Hollier, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," *October*, no. 31 (winter 1986), pp. 3-15.
12. Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, p. 198.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
14. Jean Genet, "Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes," presumably written in the mid 1950s, reprinted in Genet, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp. 21-31.
15. See Edmund White, *Genet: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 472.
16. Genet, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 28.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-24. This passage is translated in White, *Genet*, p. 401.
18. Genet, *Oeuvres complètes*, pp. 26-27.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
20. Bataille, *Sur Nietzsche* (1945); *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, pp. 87-88; *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boone (New York: Paragon House, 1992), p. 72. Genet's text, in its entirety, would surely have met Bataille's approval: we encounter the slaughterhouses of Les Halles, where Genet thinks he has found "the equivalence" he speaks of (that of every man) "in the fixed eye, but not without a gaze, of the decapitated heads of sheep, piled in pyramids on the sidewalk" (Genet, *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 25).

21. On this manuscript, written before *Histoire de l'oeil* (*The Story of the Eye*), a chapter of which seems to have escaped destruction and to have been used as the introduction to his novel *Le Bleu du ciel* (*Blue of Noon*) (see Hollier, *Against Architecture*, pp. 117, 130). "Auch" is an abbreviation for *aux chiottes*, that is, "down the toilet."

22. Quoted from *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays, Memories*, ed. Marcel Jean (New York: Viking, 1969), pp. 246–47; cited in Rudolf Arnheim, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 54. Arnheim's book is dedicated to the memory of Wolfgang Köhler, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology. We should note that Arp, just before beginning his series of torn papers, was rather close to the *Documents* group. The review published two articles on his work (one by Carl Einstein in 1930, in its last issue, and a brief review by Michel Leiris—in *Documents* 1 [1929], no. 6, pp. 340–42—wherein one can easily compare the tone with that of the souvenir text by Arp himself). See Arnheim, pp. 53–54.

23. Jean Arp, *Arp on Arp*, p. 246.

24. Lygia Clark, "Nostalgia of the Body," *October*, no. 69 (summer 1994), p. 99.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100.

X MARKS THE SPOT

1. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook* 7 (1965); Judd, "Reviews," *Arts* (February 1965); Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," *Art in America* (October 1965).

2. Robert Morris, "Anti-Form," *Artforum*, vol. 6 (April 1968), pp. 33–35; reprinted in *Continuous Project, Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

3. Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 75–77.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Not only does Smithson reproduce a photograph of dinosaur tracks (found on the Connecticut River in Massachusetts) in his "Geophotographic" text (*ibid.*, p. 129), but he also made a work related to the idea of footprints, by photographing an array of dog tracks around a puddle of water in Bergen Hill, New Jersey. Called *Dog Tracks* (1969), the paw prints, with their overlapping and indeterminacy, symbolized for him the way his sites constituted "open sequences." See Robert Hobbes, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 117–19.

6. Bataille, "X Marks the Spot," *Documents* 2 (1930), no. 8, pp. 437–38; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 257–57.

Yo-Yo

1. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in *Standard Edition*, vol. 18, pp. 7–64.

2. Roman Jakobson, "Why Mama and Papa?," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1962), pp. 538–45.

3. *Ibid.*
4. Freud, "Negation" (1925). *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, pp. 235-39.
5. Emile Benveniste, "Language in Freudian Theory," in *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 73.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Freud, "Negation," p. 239. Italics mine.
8. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984 [1972]), p. 26.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
10. Kristeva writes: "Neither model nor copy, the chora precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm. We must restore this motility's gestural and vocal play... on the level of the socialized body in order to remove motility from ontology and amorphousness where Plato confines it in an apparent attempt to conceal it from Democritean rhythm. The theory of the subject proposed by the theory of the unconscious will allow us to read in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which significance is constituted. Plato himself leads us to such a process when he calls this receptacle or chora nourishing and maternal" (*ibid.*, p. 26).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
12. For Lyotard on the matrix, see "Isotropy," above.

ZONE

1. Georges Bataille, "Poussière" (Dust), *Documents 1* (1929), no. 5 (critical dictionary), p. 278; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 196; trans. Iain White in *Encyclopaedia Aesthetica*, pp. 42-43 (translation slightly modified). In the same issue, the second article of the critical dictionary, "Homme" (Man), appeared (see the introduction above, "The Use Value of *Informe*"): What would Bataille not have added had he known that dust is in large part constituted of human exfoliations? In the following issue of *Documents* the famous text on the "big toe" appeared.

2. "To raise dust on Dust-glasses... Differences - to be worked out" (Marcel Duchamp, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, notes published in a limited edition in 1934; reprinted in *Salt Seller*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson [New York: Oxford University Press, 1973], p. 53). Henri-Pierre Roché reports that close to the *Le Grand verre*, as it rested on a table and was covered with variously thick layers of dust, was a sign in Duchamp's studio that read "Dust breeding. To be respected" (Henri-Pierre Roché, *Victor* [Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977], p. 65).

3. Robert Smithson, "Entropy Made Visible" (1973), in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 302.

4. Gordon Matta-Clark, interview with Liza Bear, *Avalanche* (December 1974), p. 34; reprinted in the exhibition catalogue *Gordon Matta-Clark* (Marseille: Editions de Musées de Marseille, 1993), p. 373.

5. "When I bought those properties at the New York City Auction, the description of them that always excited me the most was 'inaccessible'" (*Gordon Matta-Clark* [Musées de Marseilles], p. 373). One wonders, then, what the documentary photograph on the corresponding panel would have consisted of.
6. Hi Red Center, "Street Cleaning Event" (1966). See Tomas Kellien, *Fluxus* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), pp. 64-65. I thank Ethel Bonn for having alerted me to this performance.
7. Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967), in *Collected Writings*, pp. 68-74.
8. In "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" (1968) (in *ibid.*, p. 91), Smithson alludes to Ruscha's book in a section titled "Spectral Suburbs," in which the suburbs are described as an "immense negative entity of formlessness" that "displaces the center which is the city and invades the country." The interpretation of the suburbs as the overflow of "formless masses of urban residue," taken from Lewis Mumford, greatly impressed Guy Debord, who comments on it in *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. Debord touches briefly on parking lots, whose proliferation, as we saw, also struck Ruscha.
9. Dan Graham, "Homes for America," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 41 (December 1966-January 1967); reprinted in *Rock My Religion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 14-21. On this project (and its relation to Ruscha's work), see Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," in *October*, no. 55 (winter 1990). In "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" (*Collected Writings*), Smithson made the connection between *Every Building on Sunset Strip* and Graham's project.
10. Edward Ruscha, cited in David Bourdon, "Ruscha as Publisher (or All Booked Up)," *Art News* (April 1972), p. 34.

CONCLUSION

1. This project was initiated by Claude Gintz for the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.
2. See "Exhibitions," *Artforum*, vol. 34 (December 1995), pp. 62-63.
3. The long-standing concern with "abjection" in the American context begins with a Whitney Museum exhibition in 1992 called "Dirt and Domesticity: Constructions of the Feminine," followed by another, one year later, called "Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art."
4. Denis Hollier, *Le Collège de Sociologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 122.
5. Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 217-21.
6. See Bataille, "La Valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade" (The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 54-69; *Visions of Excess*, pp. 91-102.
7. Talks at the Collège de Sociologie (January 22, February 5, and February 19, 1938), untitled manuscripts, Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 307-48; and *The College of Sociology: 1937-1939*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 103-24.
8. Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

9. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966).
10. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), pp. 774, 776.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 777.
12. "Slime is the revenge of the In-itself. A sickly-sweet, feminine revenge which will be symbolized on another level by the quality 'sugary'" (*ibid.*).
13. *Ibid.*, p. 769.
14. Laura Mulvey, "A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The World of Cindy Sherman," *New Left Review*, no. 188 (July/August 1991).
15. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
17. *Ibid.*
18. This discussion of the work on the signifier and the operations against form is elaborated in Rosalind Krauss, *Cindy Sherman: 1975-1993* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), *passim*.
19. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 96.
20. Mulvey, "A Phantasmagoria," p. 148.
21. Jacques Derrida, *The Postcard*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 439.
22. Bataille, "La 'Vieille taupe' et le préfixe *sur* dans les mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*" (The "Old Mole" and the Prefix *Sur* in the words *Surhomme* [Superman] and *Surréaliste*), *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 32; *Visions of Excess*, p. 32.
23. Bataille, "L'Abjection et les formes misérables," in *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 218.
24. Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, p. 97.
25. Karl Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, in *Werke*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1960), p. 161; as cited in Jeffrey Mehlman, *Revolution and Repetition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 13.
26. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, p. 125.
27. Mike Kelley and Julie Sylvester, "Talking Failure," *Parkett* 31 (1992), p. 100.
28. An exception is Pamela Lee's excellent essay "Mike Kelley's Name Dropping," *Word and Image* 11 (July-September 1995), no. 3, pp. 300-19.
29. Laurie Palmer, "Review: Mike Kelley," *Artforum* (September 1988).
30. Kelley and Sylvester, "Talking Failure," p. 103.
31. Lee, "Mike Kelley's Name Dropping," p. 303.
32. This structure is discussed in Hollier, *Against Architecture*, in the section on "The Pineal Eye," pp. 115-29; see also Hollier, "Auteur de livres que Bataille n'a pas écrit," *La Part de l'oeil*, no. 10 (1994).
33. Bataille, "La 'Vieille taupe' et le préfixe *sur*..." (The "Old Mole" and the Prefix *sur*...), *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 97; *Visions of Excess*, p. 35.
34. This is the burden of Elizabeth Sussman's introductory essay in *Mike Kelley: Catholic Tastes* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), pp. 27-29.

35. Hal Foster first pointed out to me the consistency of the connection Kelley's work makes between the political and scatological dimensions of the "lump." See his discussion in "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic" (*October*, no. 78 [summer 1996]), where he characterizes Kelley's use of "lumpen" as "a third term between the informe (of Bataille) and the abject (of Kristeva)."

36. The exception here is Hal Foster, who has mapped so-called abject art (but this of course includes Sherman and Kelley) far more complexly and operationally than any account to date, in *ibid.*

37. Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 228–30.

38. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, pp. 280–85, 297, for a very different reading of Bataille's use of Galton. According to Didi-Huberman, Bataille did not see the statistical process as dogged by its own negation, as an unconscious but productive counter-current, but rather as needing its negation to come from another practice entirely, to wit, Eisenstein's principles of montage.

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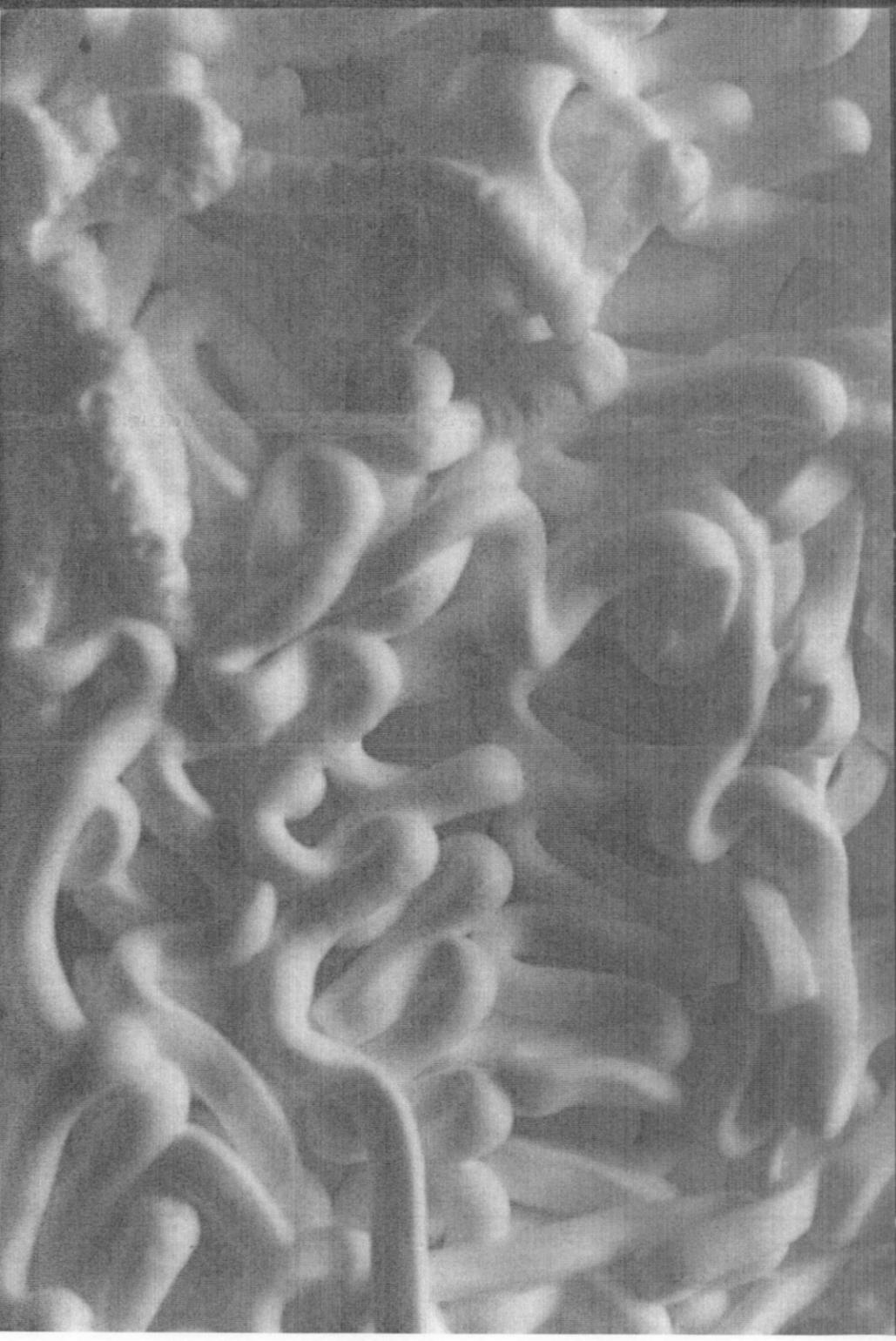
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Mel Bochner
Opacity (shaving cream)
(detail), 1968.
Color photograph,
12¼ x 19 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

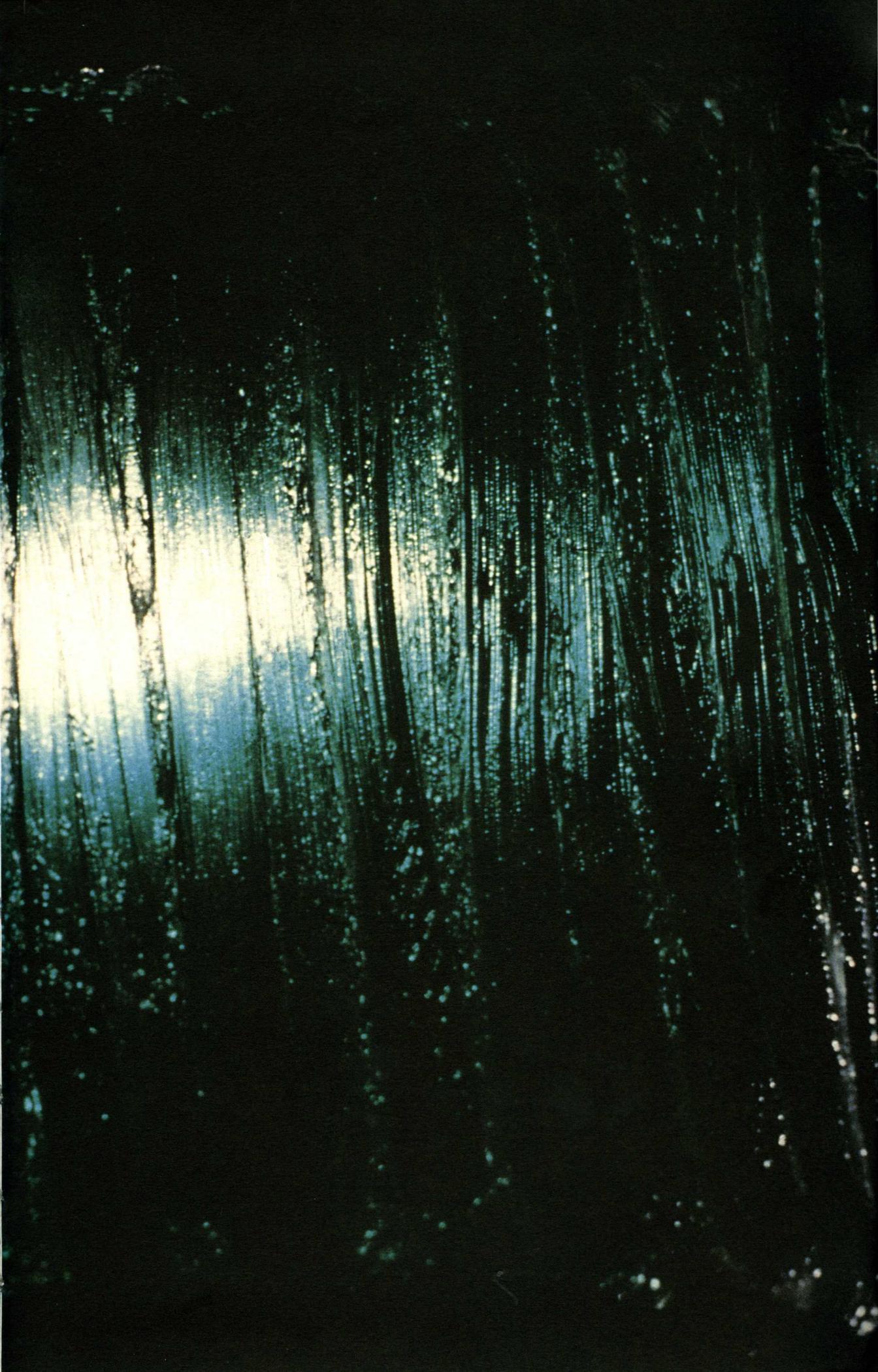
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Mel Bochner
Transparency (vaseline)
(detail), 1968.
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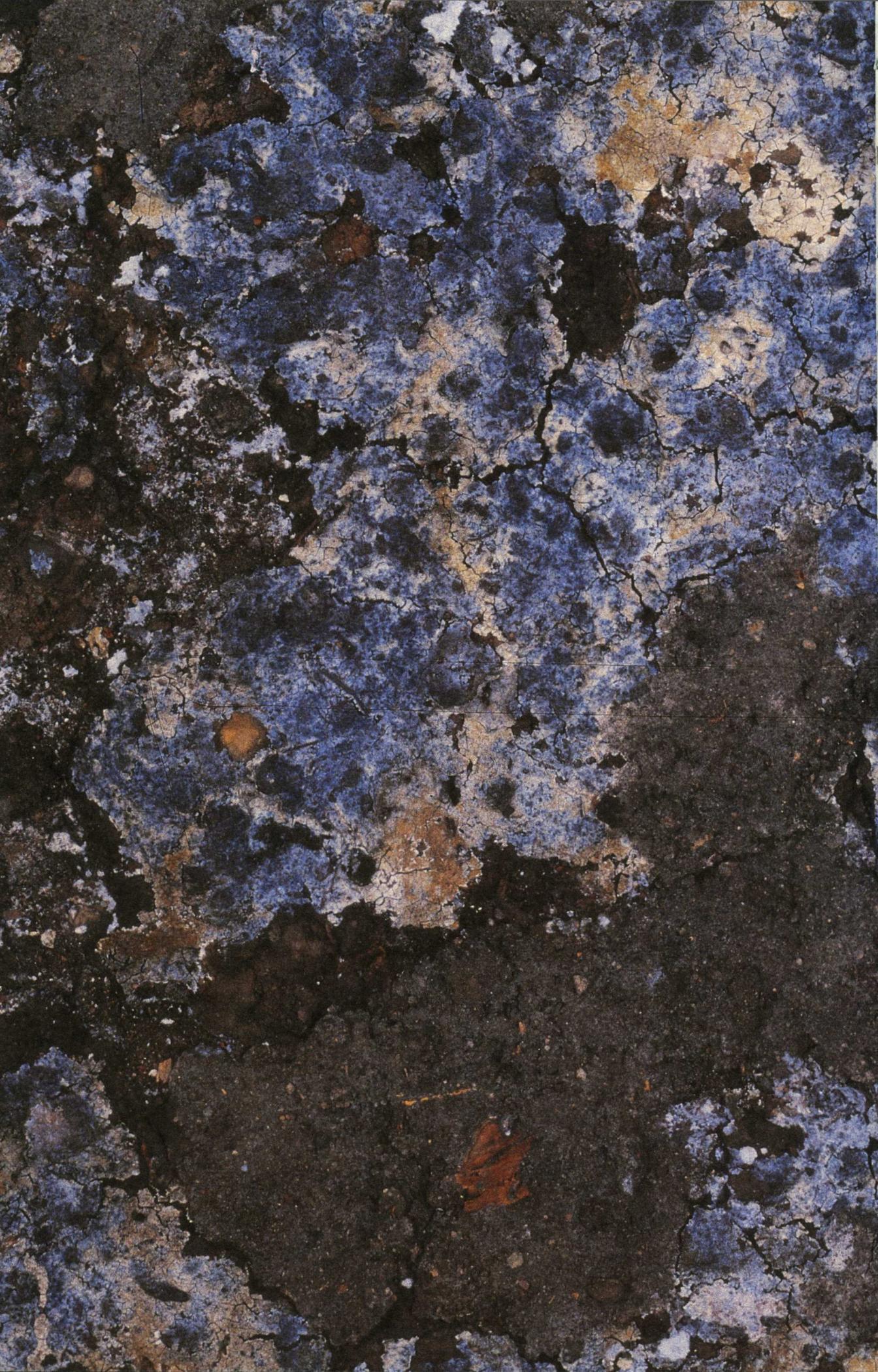
Pages 302-303
Robert Rauschenberg,
*Dirt Painting (for John
Cage)* (detail), 1953.
Dirt and mold in wood box,
15½ x 16 x 2½ inches.
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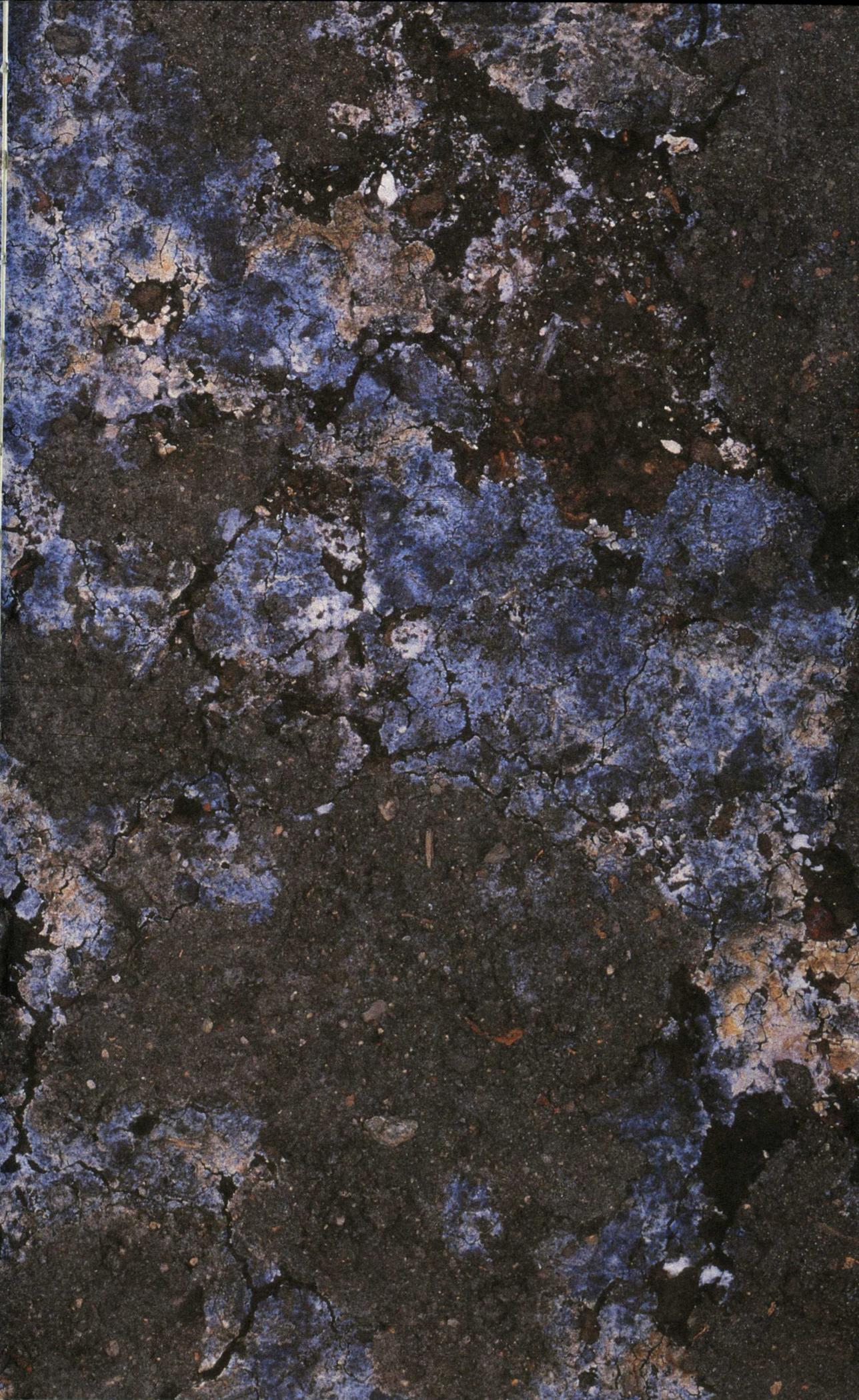
Page 304
Cindy Sherman,
Untitled #236 (detail),
1987-91.
Color photograph,
90 x 60 inches.
Courtesy Metro Pictures.

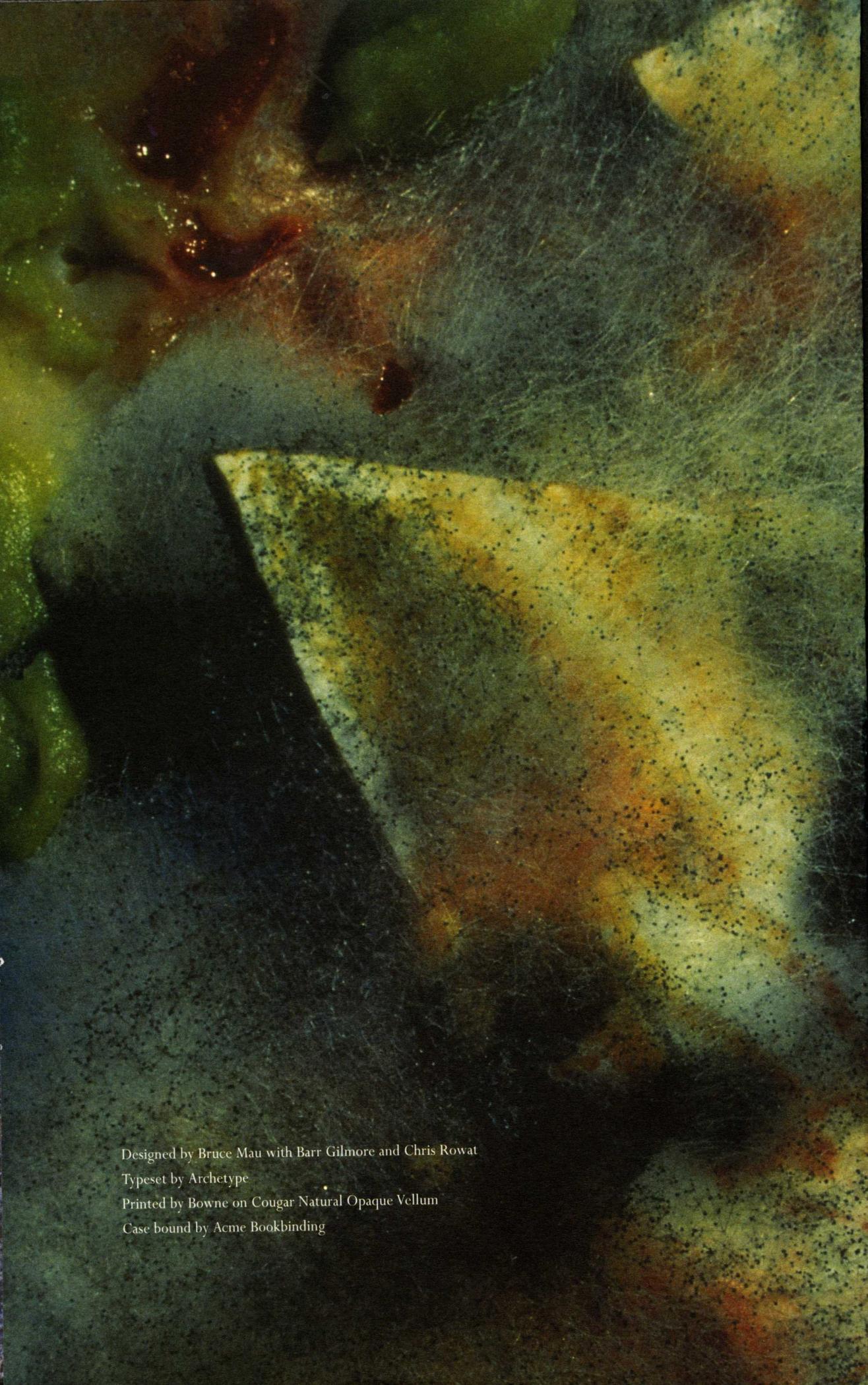












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