Richard Misrach, *Playboy #38 (Warhol)*, 1989–91.

THE RETURN OF THE REAL

In my reading of critical models in art and theory since 1960 I have stressed the minimalist genealogy of the neo-avant-garde. For the most part, artists and critics in this genealogy remained skeptical of realism and illusionism. In this way they continued the war of abstraction against representation by other means. As noted in chapter 2, minimalists like Donald Judd saw traces of realism in abstraction too, in the optical illusionism of its pictorial spaces, and expunged these last vestiges of the old order of idealist composition—an enthusiasm that led them to abandon painting altogether.[1] Significantly, this anti-illusionist posture was retained by many artists and critics involved in conceptual, institution-critical, body, performance, site-specific, feminist, and appropriation art. Even if realism and illusionism meant additional things in the 1970s and 1980s—the problematic pleasures of Hollywood cinema, for example, or the ideological blandishments of mass culture—they remained *bad* things.

Yet another trajectory of art since 1960 was committed to realism and/or illusionism: some pop art, most superrealism (also known as photorealism), some appropriation art. Often displaced by the minimalist genealogy in the critical literature (if not in the marketplace), this pop genealogy takes on new interest today, for it complicates the reductive notions of realism and illusionism

advanced by the minimalist genealogy—and in a way that illuminates contemporary reworkings of these categories as well. Our two basic models of representation miss the point of this pop genealogy almost entirely: that images are attached to referents, to iconographic themes or real things in the world, or, alternatively, that all images can do is represent other images, that all forms of representation (including realism) are auto-referential codes. Most accounts of postwar art based in photography divide somewhere along this line: the image as referential *or* as simulacral. This reductive either/or constrains such readings of this art, especially in the case of pop—a thesis that I will test initially against the "Death in America" images of Andy Warhol from the early 1960s, images that inaugurate the pop genealogy.[2]

It is no surprise that the *simulacral* reading of Warholian pop is advanced by critics associated with poststructuralism, for whom Warhol is pop and, more importantly, for whom the notion of the simulacral, crucial to the poststructuralist critique of representation, sometimes seems to depend on the example of Warhol as pop. "What pop art wants," Roland Barthes writes in "That Old Thing, Art" (1980), "is to desymbolize the object," to release the image from any deep meaning into simulacral surface.[3] In this process the author is also released: "The pop artist does not stand *behind* his work," Barthes continues, "and he himself has no depth: he is merely the surface of his pictures, no signified, no intention, anywhere."[4] With variations this simulacral reading of Warhol is performed by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean Baudrillard, for whom referential depth and subjective interiority are also victims of the sheer superficiality of pop. In "Pop—An Art of Consumption?" (1970), Baudrillard agrees that the object in pop "loses its symbolic meaning, its age-old anthropomorphic status"; but where Barthes and the others see an avant-gardist disruption of representation, Baudrillard sees an "end of subversion," a "total integration" of the art work into the political economy of the commodity-sign.[5]

The *referential* view of Warholian pop is advanced by critics and historians who tie the work to different themes: the worlds of fashion, celebrity, gay culture, the Warhol Factory, and so on. Its most intelligent version is presented by Thomas Crow, who, in "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early War-

Andy Warhol, *National Velvet*, 1963.

hol" (1987), disputes the simulacral account of Warhol that the images are indis-criminate and the artist impassive. Underneath the glamorous surface of commodity fetishes and media stars Crow finds "the reality of suffering and death"; the tragedies of Marilyn, Liz, and Jackie in particular are said to prompt "straightforward expressions of feeling."[6] Here Crow finds not only a referential object *for* Warhol but an empathetic subject *in* Warhol, and here he locates the criticality *of* Warhol—not in an attack on "that old thing art" (as Barthes would have it) through an embrace of the simulacral commodity-sign (as Baudrillard would have it), but rather in an exposé of "complacent consumption" through "the brutal fact" of accident and mortality.[7] In this way Crow pushes Warhol beyond humanist sentiment to political engagement. "He was attracted to the open sores in American political life," Crow writes in a reading of the electric-chair images as agitprop against the death penalty and of the race-riot images as a testimonial for civil rights. "Far from a pure play of the signifier liberated from reference," Warhol belongs to the popular American tradition of "truth telling."[8]

This reading of Warhol as empathetic, even engagé, is a projection, but no more than the superficial, impassive Warhol, even though this projection was his own: "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it."[9] Both camps make the Warhol they need, or get the Warhol they deserve; no doubt we all do. And neither projection is wrong. I find them equally persuasive. But they cannot both be right . . . or can they? Can we read the "Death in America" images as referential *and* simulacral, connected *and* disconnected, affective *and* affectless, critical *and* complacent? I think we must, and we can if we read them in a third way, in terms of *traumatic realism*.[10]

TRAUMATIC REALISM

One way to develop this notion is through the famous motto of the Warholian persona: "I want to be a machine."[11] Usually this statement is taken to confirm the blankness of artist and art alike, but it may point less to a blank subject than

to a shocked one, who takes on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defense against this shock: I am a machine too, I make (or consume) serial product-images too, I give as good (or as bad) as I get.[12] "Someone said my life has dominated me," Warhol told the critic Gene Swenson in a celebrated inter-view of 1963. "I liked that idea."[13] Here Warhol has just confessed to the same lunch every day for the past twenty years (what else but Campbell's soup?). In context, then, the two statements read as a preemptive embrace of the compul-sion to repeat put into play by a society of serial production and consumption. If you can't beat it, Warhol suggests, join it. More, if you enter it totally, you might expose it; that is, you might reveal its automatism, even its autism, through your own excessive example. Used strategically in dada, this capitalist nihilism was performed ambiguously by Warhol, and, as we saw in chapter 4, many artists have played it out since.[14] (Of course this is a performance: there is a subject "behind" this figure of nonsubjectivity that presents it *as* a figure; otherwise the shocked subject is an oxymoron, for there is no subject self-present in shock, let alone in trauma. Yet the fascination of Warhol is that one is never certain about this subject behind: is anybody home, inside the automaton?)

These notions of shocked subjectivity and compulsive repetition reposi-tion the role of *repetition* in the Warholian persona and images. "I like boring things" is another famous motto of this quasi-autistic persona. "I like things to be exactly the same over and over again."[15] In *POPism* (1980) Warhol glosses this embrace of boredom, repetition, domination: "I don't want it to be essen-tially the same—I want it to be *exactly* the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel."[16] Here repetition is both a draining of significance and a defending against affect, and this strategy guided Warhol as early as the 1963 interview: "When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect."[17] Clearly this is one function of repetition, at least as understood by Freud: to repeat a traumatic event (in actions, in dreams, in images) in order to integrate it into a psychic economy, a symbolic order. But the Warhol repetitions are not restorative in this way; they are not about a

mastery of trauma. More than a patient release from the object in mourning, they suggest an obsessive fixation on the object in melancholy. Think of all the *Marilyns* alone, of the cropping, coloring, crimping of these images: as Warhol works over this image of love, a melancholic "wish-psychosis" seems in play.[18] But this analysis is not quite right either. For one thing the Warhol repetitions not only *reproduce* traumatic effects; they also *produce* them. Somehow in these repetitions, then, several contradictory things occur at the same time: a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it.

Here I should make explicit the theoretical model I have implicated so far. In the early 1960s Jacques Lacan was concerned to define the real in terms of trauma. Titled "The Unconscious and Repetition," this seminar was roughly contemporaneous with the "Death in America" images (it ran in early 1964).[19] But unlike the theory of simulacra in Baudrillard and company, the theory of trauma in Lacan is not influenced by pop. It is, however, informed by surrealism, which here has its deferred effect on Lacan, an early associate of the surrealists, and below I will intimate that pop is related to surrealism as a traumatic realism (certainly my reading of Warhol is a surrealist one). In this seminar Lacan defines the traumatic as a missed encounter with the real. As missed, the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it *must* be repeated. "*Wiederholen*," Lacan writes in etymological reference to Freud on repetition, "is not *Reproduzieren*" (50); repetition is not reproduction. This can stand as an epitome of my argument too: repetition in Warhol is not reproduction in the sense of representation (of a referent) or simulation (of a pure image, a detached signifier). Rather, repetition serves to *screen* the real understood as traumatic. But this very need also *points* to the real, and at this point the real *ruptures* the screen of repetition. It is a rupture less in the world than in the subject—between the perception and the consciousness of a subject *touched* by an image. In an allusion to Aristotle on accidental causality, Lacan calls this traumatic point the *tuché;* in *Camera Lucida* (1980) Barthes calls it the *punctum*.[20] "It is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me," Barthes writes. "It is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless

Andy Warhol, *White Burning Car III*, 1963.

already there." "It is acute yet muffled, it cries out in silence. Odd contradiction: a floating flash."[21] This confusion about the location of the rupture, *tuché*, or *punctum* is a confusion of subject and world, inside and outside. It is an aspect of trauma; indeed, it may be this confusion that *is* traumatic. ("Where is Your Rupture?," Warhol asks in a 1960 painting based on a newspaper advertisement, with several arrows aimed at the crotch of a female torso.)

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes is concerned with straight photographs, so he locates the *punctum* in details of content. This is rarely the case in Warhol. Yet there is a *punctum* for me (Barthes stipulates that it is a personal effect) in the indifference of the passerby in *White Burning Car III* (1963). This indifference to the crash victim impaled on the telephone pole is bad enough, but its repetition is *galling*, and this points to the general operation of the *punctum* in Warhol. It works less through content than through technique, especially through the "floating flashes" of the silkscreen process, the slipping and streaking, blanching and blanking, repeating and coloring of the images. To take another instance, a *punctum* arises for me not from the slumped woman in the top image in *Ambulance Disaster* (1963) but from the obscene tear that effaces her head in the bottom image. In both instances, just as the *punctum* in Gerhard Richter lies less in details than in the pervasive blurring of the image, so the *punctum* in Warhol lies less in details than in this repetitive "popping" of the image.[22]

These pops, such as a slipping of register or a washing in color, serve as visual equivalents of our missed encounters with the real. "What is repeated," Lacan writes, "is always something that occurs . . . *as if by chance*" (54). So it is with these pops: they seem accidental, but they also appear repetitive, automatic, even technological (the relation between accident and technology, crucial to the discourse of shock, is a great Warhol subject).[23] In this way he elaborates on our optical unconscious, a term introduced by Walter Benjamin to describe the subliminal effects of modern image technologies. Benjamin developed this notion in the early 1930s, in response to photography and film; Warhol updates it thirty years later, in response to the postwar society of the spectacle, of mass media and commodity-signs.[24] In these early images we see what it looks like to dream in the age of television, *Life*, and *Time*—or rather
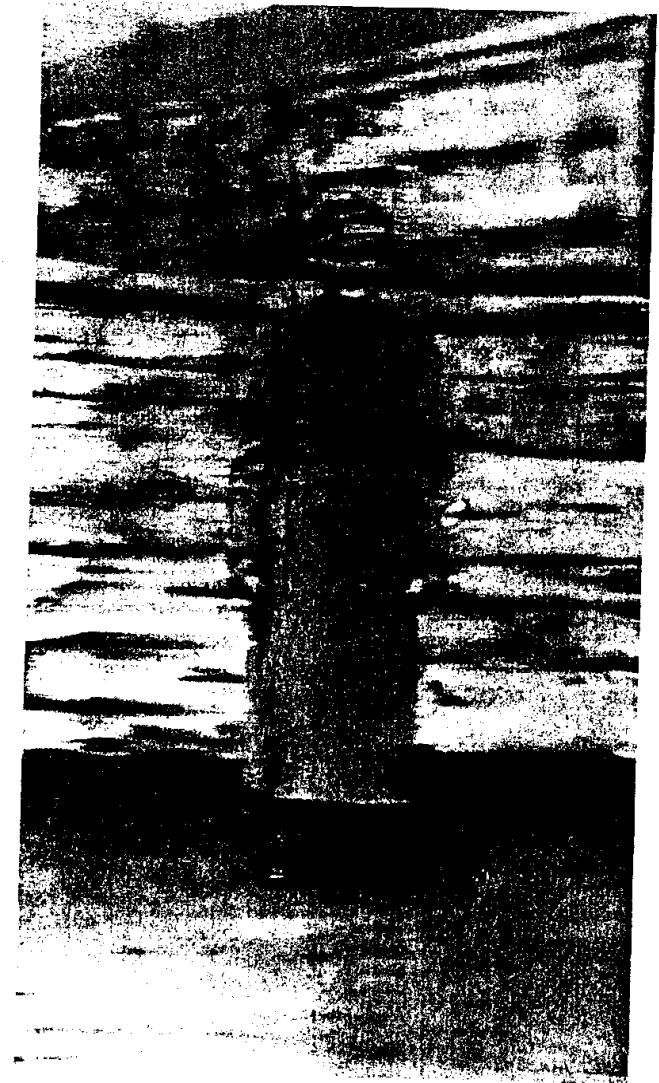
Gerhard Richter, *Uncle Rudi*, 1965.

what it looks like to nightmare as shock victims who prepare for disasters that have already come, for Warhol selects moments when this spectacle cracks (the JFK assassination, the Monroe suicide, racist attacks, car wrecks), but cracks only to expand.

Thus the *punctum* in Warhol is not strictly private or public.[25] Nor is the content trivial: a white woman slumped from a wrecked ambulance, or a black man attacked by a police dog, is a shock. But, again, this first order of shock is screened by the repetition of the image, even though this repetition may also produce a second order of trauma, here at the level of technique, where the *punctum* breaks through the screen and allows the real to poke through.[26] The real, Lacan puns, is *troumatic*, and I noted that the tear in *Ambulance Disaster* is such a hole (*trou*) for me, though what loss is figured there I cannot say. Through these pokes or pops we seem almost to touch the real, which the repetition of the images at once distances and rushes toward us. (Sometimes the coloring of the images has this strange double effect as well.)[27]

In this way different kinds of repetition are in play in Warhol: repetitions that fix on the traumatic real, that screen it, that produce it. And this multiplicity makes for the paradox not only of images that are both affective and affectless, but also of viewers that are neither integrated (which is the ideal of most modern aesthetics: the subject composed in contemplation) nor dissolved (which is the effect of much popular culture: the subject given over to the schizo intensities of the commodity-sign). "I never fall apart," Warhol remarked in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975), "because I never fall together."[28] Such is the subject-effect of his work as well, and it resonates in art that elaborates on pop: again, in some superrealism, some appropriation art, and some contemporary work involved in illusionism—a category, like realism, that it invites us to rethink.

TRAUMATIC ILLUSIONISM

In his 1964 seminar on the real Lacan distinguishes between *Wiederholung* and *Wiederkehr.* The first is the repetition of the repressed as symptom or signifier,
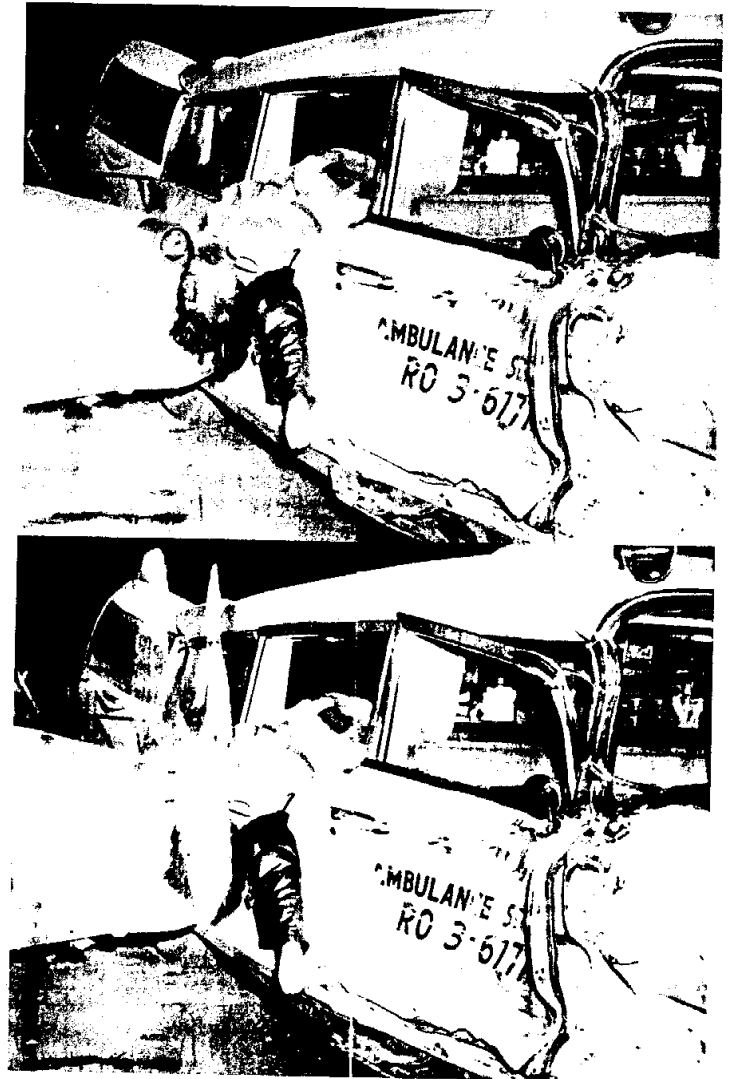

Andy Warhol, *Ambulance Disaster*, 1963.

which Lacan terms the *automaton,* also in allusion to Aristotle. The second is the return discussed above: the return of a traumatic encounter with the real, a thing that resists the symbolic, that is not a signifer at all, which again Lacan calls the *tuché*. The first, the repetition of the symptom, can contain or screen the second, the return of the traumatic real, which thus exists beyond the *automaton* of the symptoms, beyond "the insistence of the signs" (53–54), indeed beyond the pleasure principle.[29] Above I related these two kinds of recurrence to the two sorts of repetition in the Warholian image: a repeating of an image to screen a traumatic real, which is nonetheless returned, accidently and/or obliquely, in this very screening. Here I will venture a further analogy in relation to superrealist art: sometimes its illusionism is so excessive as to appear anxious—anxious to cover up a *troumatic* real—but this anxiety cannot help but indicate this real as well.[30] Such analogies between psychoanalytic discourse and visual art are worth little if nothing mediates the two, but here both the theory and the art relate repetition and the real to visuality and the gaze.

Roughly contemporaneous with the spread of pop and the rise of superrealism, the Lacan seminar on the gaze follows the seminar on the real; it is much cited but little understood. There may be a male gaze, and capitalist spectacle is oriented to a masculinist subject, but such arguments are not supported by *this* seminar of Lacan, for whom the gaze is not embodied in a subject, at least not in the first instance. To an extent like Jean-Paul Sartre, Lacan distinguishes between the look (or the eye) and the gaze, and to an extent like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, he locates this gaze *in the world*.[31] As with language in Lacan, then, so with the gaze: it *preexists* the subject, who, "looked at from all sides," is but a "stain" in "the spectacle of the world" (72, 75). Thus positioned, the subject tends to feel the gaze as a threat, as if it queried him or her; and so it is, according to Lacan, that "the gaze, *qua objet a,* may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration" (77).

More than Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, then, Lacan challenges the old privilege of the subject in sight and self-consciousness (the *I see myself seeing myself* that grounds the phenomenological subject) as well as the old mastery of the subject in representation ("this *belong to me* aspect of representations, so

reminiscent of property," that empowers the Cartesian subject [81]). Lacan mortifies this subject in the famous anecdote of the sardine can that, afloat on the sea and aglint in the sun, seems to look at the young Lacan in the fishing boat "at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated" (95). Thus seen as (s)he sees, pictured as (s)he pictures, the Lacanian subject is fixed in a double position, and this leads Lacan to superimpose on the usual cone of vision that emanates from the subject another cone that emanates *from the object,* at the point of light, which he calls the gaze.

The first cone is familiar from Renaissance treatises on perspective: the subject is addressed as the master of the object arrayed and focused as an image for him or her positioned at a geometral point of viewing. But, Lacan adds immediately, "I am not simply that punctiform being located at the geometral point from which the perspective is grasped. No doubt, in the depths of my eye, the picture is painted. The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I, I am in the picture" (96).[32] That is, the subject is also under the regard of the object, photographed by its light, pictured by its gaze: thus the superimposition of the two cones, with the object also at the point of the light (the gaze), the subject also at the point of the picture, and the image also in line with the screen.
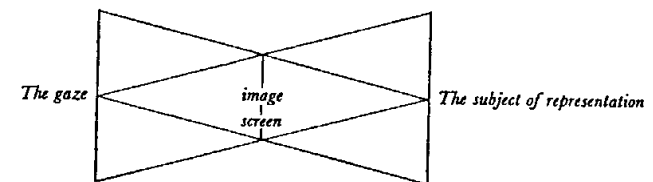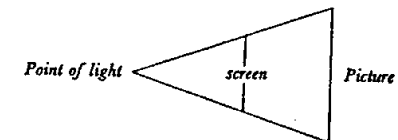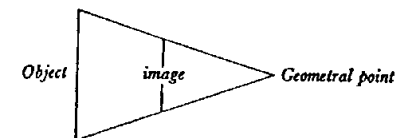
The meaning of this last term is obscure. I understand it to refer to the cultural reserve of which each image is one instance. Call it the conventions of art, the schemata of representation, the codes of visual culture, this screen *mediates* the object-gaze *for* the subject, but it also *protects* the subject *from* this object-gaze. That is, it captures the gaze, "pulsatile, dazzling and spread out" (89), and *tames* it in an image.[33] This last formulation is crucial. For Lacan animals are caught in the gaze of the world; they are only on display there. Humans are not so reduced to this "imaginary capture" (103), for we have access to the symbolic—in this case to the screen as the site of picture making and viewing, where we can manipulate and moderate the gaze. "Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze," Lacan states. "The screen is here the locus of mediation" (107). In this way the screen allows the subject, at the point of the picture, to behold the object, at the point of light. Otherwise it would be impossible, for to see without this screen would be to be blinded by the gaze or touched by the real.

Thus, even as the gaze may trap the subject, the subject may tame the gaze. This is the function of the screen: to negotiate a *laying down* of the gaze as in a laying down of a weapon. Note the atavistic tropes of preying and taming, battling and negotiating; both gaze and subject are given strange agencies, and they are positioned in paranoid ways.[34] Indeed, Lacan imagines the gaze not only as maleficent but as violent, a force that can arrest, even kill, if it is not disarmed first.[35] Thus, when urgent, picture making is apotropaic: its gestures arrest this arresting of the gaze before the fact. When "Apollonian" (101), picture making is placating: its perfections pacify the gaze, "relax" the viewer from its grip (this Nietzschean term again projects the gaze as Dionysian, full of desire and death). Such is aesthetic contemplation according to Lacan: some art may attempt a *trompe-l'oeil*, a tricking of the eye, but all art aspires to a *dompte-regard*, a taming of the gaze.

Below I will suggest that some contemporary work refuses this age-old mandate to pacify the gaze, to unite the imaginary and the symbolic against the real. *It is as if this art wanted the gaze to shine, the object to stand, the real to exist, in all the glory (or the horror) of its pulsatile desire, or at least to evoke this sublime condition.*

To this end it moves not only to attack the image but to tear at the screen, or to suggest that it is already torn. For the moment, however, I want to remain with the categories of *trompe-l'oeil* and *dompte-regard*, for some post-pop art develops illusionist trickings and tamings in ways that are distinct from realism not only in the old referential sense but in the traumatic sense outlined above.[36]

In his seminar on the gaze Lacan retells the classical tale of the *trompe-l'oeil* contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasios. Zeuxis paints grapes in a way that lures birds, but Parrhasios paints a veil in a way that deceives Zeuxis, who asks to see what lies behind the veil and concedes the contest in embarrassment. For Lacan the story concerns the difference between the imaginary captures of *lured* animal and *deceived* human. Verisimilitude may have little to do with either capture: what looks like grapes to one species may not to another; the important thing is the appropriate sign for each. More significant here, the animal is lured in relation to the surface, whereas the human is deceived in relation to *what lies behind*. And behind the picture, for Lacan, is the gaze, the object, the real, with which "the painter as creator . . . sets up a dialogue" (112–13). Thus a perfect illusion is not possible, and, even if it were possible it would not answer the question of the real, which always remains, behind and beyond, to lure us. This is so because the real cannot be represented; indeed, it is defined as such, as the negative of the symbolic, a missed encounter, a lost object (the little bit of the subject lost to the subject, the *objet a*). "This other thing [behind the picture and beyond the pleasure principle] is the *petit a*, around which there revolves a combat of which *trompe-l'oeil* is the soul" (112).

As an art of the *trompe-l'oeil*, superrealism is also involved in this combat, but superrealism is more than a tricking of the eye. It is a subterfuge *against* the real, an art pledged not only to pacify the real but to seal it behind surfaces, to embalm it in appearances. (Of course this is not its self-understanding: superrealism seeks to deliver the reality of appearance. But to do so, I want to suggest, is to delay the real—or, again, to seal it.) Superrealism attempts this sealing in three ways at least. The first is to represent apparent reality as a coded *sign*. Often manifestly based on a photograph or a postcard, this superrealism shows the real as already absorbed into the symbolic (as in the early work of Malcolm

Morley). The second is to reproduce apparent reality as a fluid *surface*. More illusionist than the first, this superrealism *derealizes* the real with simulacral effects (related to the pop paintings of James Rosenquist, this category includes Audrey Flack and Don Eddy among others). The third is to represent apparent reality as a visual *conundrum* with reflections and refractions of many sorts. In this superrealism, which partakes of the first two, the structuring of the visual is strained to the point of implosion, of collapse onto the viewer. In front of these paintings one may feel under the gaze, looked at from many sides: thus the impossible double perspective that Richard Estes contrives in *Union Square* (1985), which converges *on* us more than extends *from* us, or his equally impossible *Double Self-Portrait* (1976), in which we look at a diner window in complete perplexity as to what is inside and what is outside, what is in front of us and what is behind. If *Union Square* pressures a Renaissance paradigm of linear perspective like *The Ideal City*, *Double Self-Portrait* pressures a baroque paradigm of pictorial reflexivity like *Las Meninas* (it is no surprise that, in the move to use lines and surfaces to tie up and smother the real, superrealists would turn to the baroque intricacies of such artists as Velazquez).

In these paintings Estes transports his historical models to a commercial strip and a storefront in New York; and indeed, as with pop, it is difficult to imagine superrealism apart from the tangled lines and lurid surfaces of capitalist spectacle: the narcissistic seduction of shop windows, the luscious sheen of sports cars—in short, the sex appeal of the commodity-sign, with the commodity feminized and the feminine commodified in a way that, even more than pop, superrealism celebrates rather than questions. As reproduced in this art, these lines and surfaces often distend, fold back, and so flatten pictorial depth. But do they have the same effect on *psychic* depth? In a comparison of pop and superrealism with surrealism Fredric Jameson has claimed as much:

> We need only juxtapose the mannequin, as a [surrealist] symbol,
> with the photographic objects of pop art, the Campbell's soup can,
> the pictures of Marilyn Monroe, or with the visual curiosities of op
> art; we need only exchange, for that environment of small work-
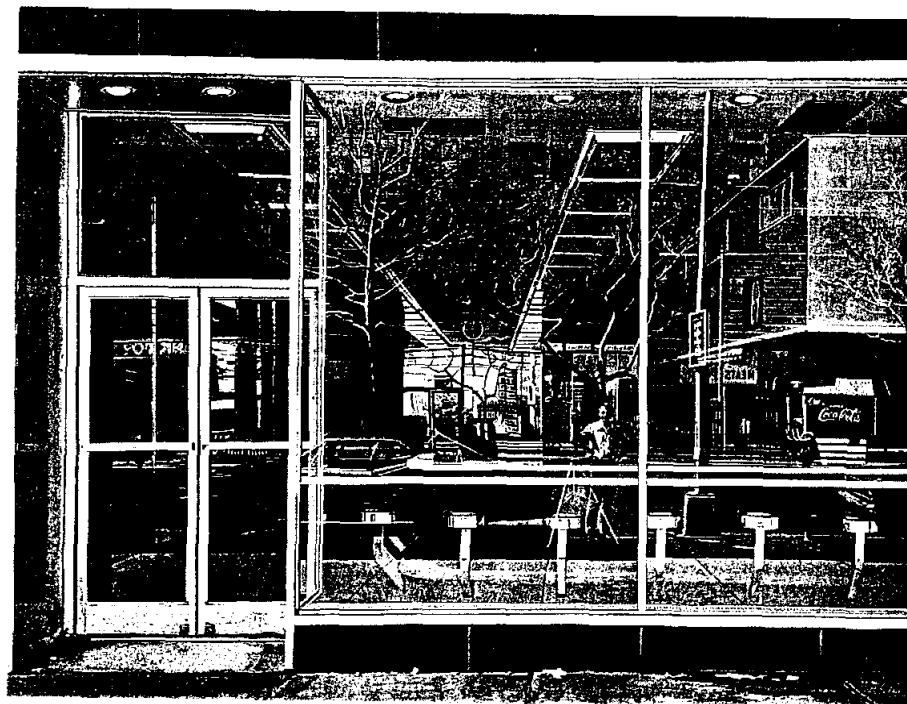
Richard Estes, *Double Self-Portrait*, 1976.

shops and store counters, for the *marché aux puces* and the stalls in
the streets, the gasoline stations along American superhighways, the
glossy photographs in the magazines, or the cellophane paradise of
an American drugstore, in order to realize that the objects of surre-
alism are gone without a trace. Henceforth, in what we may now
call postindustrial capitalism, the products with which we are fur-
nished are utterly without depth: their plastic content is totally in-
capable of serving as a conductor of psychic energy.[37]

Here Jameson marks a shift in production and consumption that affects art and
subjectivity as well, but is it a "historical *break* of an unexpectedly absolute
kind"?[38] These old objects may be displaced (already for the surrealists they
were attractively outmoded), but they are not gone without a trace. Certainly
the *subjects* related to these objects have not disappeared; the epochs of the sub-
ject, let alone of the unconscious, are not so punctual.[39] In short, superrealism
retains a subterranean connection to surrealism in the subjective register, and
not only because both play on sexual and commodity fetishisms.

Georges Bataille once remarked that his kind of surrealism involved the
sub more than the *sur*, the materialist low more than the idealist high (which he
associated with André Breton).[40] My kind of surrealism involves the *sub* more
than the *sur* too, but in the sense of the real that lies below, which this surrealism
seeks to tap, to let erupt, as if by chance (which again is the mode of appearance
of repetition).[41] Superrealism is also involved with this real that lies below, but
as a *super*realism it is concerned to stay on top of it, to keep it down. Unlike
surrealism, then, it wants to conceal more than to reveal this real; thus it lays
down its layers of signs and surfaces drawn from the commodity world not only
against representational depth but also against the traumatic real. Yet this anx-
ious move to smooth over this real points to it nonetheless; superrealism remains
an art of "the eye as made desperate by the gaze" (116), and the desperation
shows. As a result its illusion fails not only as a tricking of the eye but as a
taming of the gaze, a protecting against the traumatic real. That is, it fails *not* to
remind us of the real, and in this way it is traumatic too: a *traumatic illusionism*.

THE RETURN OF THE REAL

If the real is repressed in superrealism, it also returns there, and this return
disrupts the superrealist surface of signs. Yet as this disruption is inadvertent, so
is the little disturbance of capitalist spectacle that it may effect. This disturbance
is not so inadvertent in appropriation art, which, especially in the simulacral
version associated with Richard Prince, can resemble superrealism with its sur-
feit of signs, fluidity of surfaces, and enveloping of the viewer. Yet the differ-
ences between the two are more important than the similarities. Both arts use
photography, but superrealism exploits some photographic values (like illu-
sionism) in the interests of painting and excludes others (like reproducibility)
not in these interests, indeed that threaten such painterly values as the unique
image. Appropriation art, on the other hand, uses photographic reproducibility
in a questioning of painterly uniqueness, as in the early copies of modernist
masters by Sherrie Levine. At the same time, it either pushes photographic
illusionism to an implosive point, as in the early rephotographs of Prince, or
turns round on this illusionism to question the documentary truth of the photo-
graph, the referential value of representation, as in the early photo-texts of Bar-
bara Kruger. Thus the vaunted critique of representation in this postmodernist
art: a critique of artistic categories and documentary genres, of media myths
and sexual stereotypes.

So, too, the two arts position the viewer differently: in its elaboration of
illusion superrealism invites the viewer to revel almost schizophrenically in its
surfaces, whereas in its exposure of illusion appropriation art asks the viewer to
look through its surfaces critically. Yet sometimes the two cross here, as when
appropriation art envelops the viewer in a superrealist way.[42] More importantly,
the two approach one another in this respect: in superrealism reality is presented
as overwhelmed by appearance, while in appropriation art it is presented as
constructed in representation. (Thus, for instance, the Marlboro images of
Prince picture the reality of North American nature through the myth of the
cowboy West.) This constructionist vision of reality is the basic position of post-
modernist art, at least in its poststructuralist guise, and it is paralleled by the

basic position of feminist art, at least in its psychoanalytic guise: that the subject is dictated by the symbolic order. Taken together, these two positions have led many artists to focus on the image-screen (I refer again to the Lacanian diagram of visuality), often to the neglect of the real on the one side and sometimes to the neglect of the subject on the other. Thus, in the early copies of Levine for example, the image-screen is almost all there is; it is not much troubled by the real nor much altered by the subject (artist and viewer are given little agency in this work).

Yet the relation of appropriation art to the image-screen is not so simple: it can be critical of the screen, even hostile to it, and fascinated by it, almost enamored of it. And sometimes this ambivalence suggests the real; that is, as appropriation art works to expose the illusions of representation, it can poke through the image-screen. Consider the sunset images of Prince, which are rephotographs of vacation advertisements from magazines, familiar pictures of young lovers and cute kids on the beach, with the sun and the sea offered as so many commodities. Prince manipulates the superrealist look of these ads to the point that they are *derealized* in the sense of appearance but *realized* in the sense of desire. In several images a man thrusts a woman out of the water, but the flesh of each appears burned—as if in an erotic passion that is also a fatal irradiation. Here the *imaginary* pleasure of the vacation scenes goes bad, becomes obscene, displaced by a *real* ecstasy of desire shot through with death, a *jouissance* that lurks behind the pleasure principle of the ad image, indeed of the image-screen in general.[43]

This shift in conception—from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma—may be definitive in contemporary art, let alone in contemporary theory, fiction, and film. For with this shift in conception has come a shift in practice, which I want to graph here, again in relation to the Lacanian diagram of visuality, as a shift in focus from the image-screen to the object-gaze. This shift can be traced in the work of Cindy Sherman, who has done as much any artist to prepare it. Indeed, if we divide her work into three rough groups, it seems to move across the three main positions of the Lacanian diagram.
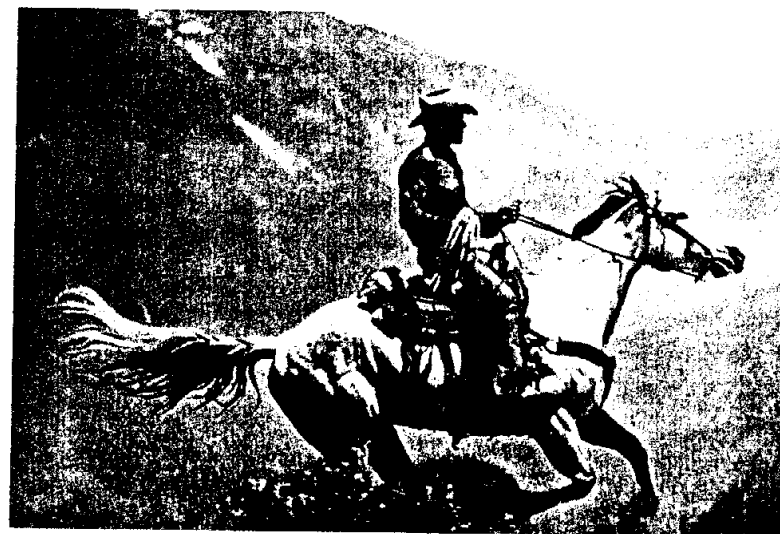
Richard Prince, *Untitled* (sunset), 1981.

Richard Prince, *Untitled* (cowboy), 1989.

In the early work of 1975–82, from the film stills through the rear projections to the centerfolds and the color tests, Sherman evokes the subject under the gaze, the subject-as-picture, which is also the principal site of other feminist work in early appropriation art. Her subjects see, of course, but they are much more *seen*, captured by the gaze. Often, in the film stills and the centerfolds, this gaze seems to come from another subject, with whom the viewer may be implicated; sometimes, in the rear projections, it seems to come from the spectacle of the world. Yet often, too, this gaze seems to come from within. Here Sherman shows her female subjects as self-surveyed, not in phenomenological immanence (*I see myself seeing myself*) but in psychological estrangement (*I am not what I imagined myself to be*). Thus in the distance between the made-up young woman and her mirrored face in *Untitled Film Still #2* (1977), Sherman captures the gap between imagined and actual body images that yawns in each of us, the gap of (mis)recognition where fashion and entertainment industries operate every day and night.

In the middle work of 1987–90, from the fashion photographs through the fairy-tale illustrations and the art-history portraits to the disaster pictures, Sherman moves to the image-screen, to its repertoire of representations. (I speak of focus only: she addresses the image-screen in the early work too, and the subject-as-picture hardly disappears in this middle work.) The fashion and art-history series take up two files from the image-screen that have affected self-fashionings, present and past, profoundly. Here Sherman parodies vanguard design with a long runway of fashion victims, and pillories art history with a long gallery of butt-ugly aristocrats (in ersatz Renaissance, baroque, rococo, and neoclassical types, with allusions to Raphael, Caravaggio, Fragonard, and Ingres). The play turns perverse when, in some fashion photographs, the gap between imagined and actual body images becomes psychotic (one or two sitters seem to have no ego awareness at all) and when, in some art-history photographs, deidealization is pushed to the point of desublimation: with scarred sacks for breasts and funky carbuncles for noses, these bodies break down the upright lines of proper representation, indeed of proper subjecthood.[44]

This turn to the grotesque is marked in the fairy-tale and disaster images,

some of which show horrific accidents of birth and freaks of nature (a young woman with a pig snout, a doll with the head of a dirty old man). Here, as often in horror movies and bedtime stories alike, horror means, first and foremost, horror of maternity, of the maternal body made strange, even repulsive, in repression. This body is the primary site of the *abject* as well, a category of (non)being defined by Julia Kristeva as neither subject nor object, but before one is the former (before full separation from the mother) or after one is the latter (as a corpse given over to objecthood).[45] These extreme conditions are suggested by some disaster scenes, suffused as they are with signifiers of menstrual blood and sexual discharge, vomit and shit, decay and death. Such images evoke the body turned inside out, the subject literally abjected, thrown out. But they also evoke the outside turned in, the subject-as-picture invaded by the object-gaze (e.g., *Untitled #153*). At this point some images pass beyond the abject, which is often tied to substances and meanings, not only toward the *informe*, a condition described by Bataille where significant form dissolves because the fundamental distinction between figure and ground, self and other, is lost, but also toward the *obscene*, where the object-gaze is presented *as if there were no scene to stage it, no frame of representation to contain it, no screen*.[46]

This is the domain of the work after 1991 as well, the civil war and sex pictures, which are punctuated by close-ups of simulated damaged and/or dead body parts and sexual and/or excretory body parts respectively. Sometimes the screen seems so torn that the object-gaze not only invades the subject-as-picture but overwhelms it. And in a few disaster and civil war images we sense what it is to occupy the impossible third position in the Lacanian diagram, to behold the pulsatile gaze, even to touch the obscene object, without a screen for protection. In one image (*Untitled #190*) Sherman gives this evil eye a horrific visage of its own.

In this scheme of things the impulse to erode the subject and to tear at the screen has driven Sherman from the early work, where the subject is caught in the gaze, through the middle work, where it is invaded by the gaze, to the recent work, where it is obliterated by the gaze, only to return as disjunct doll parts. But this double attack on subject and screen is not hers alone; it occurs
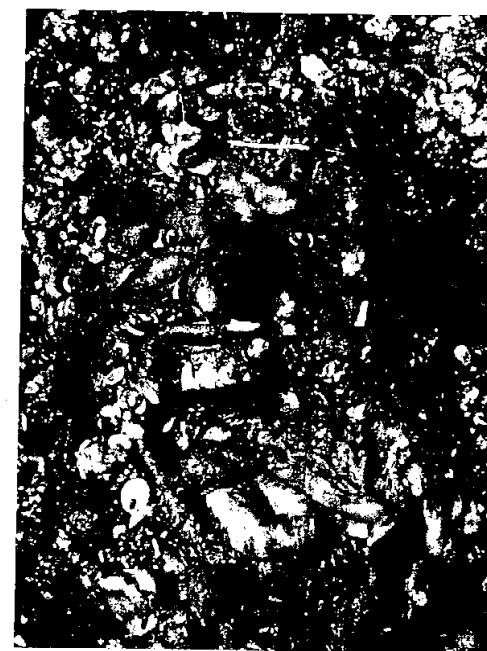
Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #2*, 1977.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #153*, 1985.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #183*, 1988.

Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #190*, 1989.

on several fronts in contemporary art, where it is waged, almost openly, in the service of the real.

This work evokes the real in different ways; I will begin with two approaches that bear on illusionism. The first involves an illusionism practiced less in pictures than with objects (if it looks back to superrealism, then, it is to the figures of Duane Hanson and John de Andrea). This art does intentionally what some superrealist and appropriation art did inadvertently, which is to push illusionism to the point of the real. Here illusionism is employed not to cover up the real with simulacral surfaces but to *uncover* it in uncanny things, which are often put into performances as well. To this end some artists estrange everyday objects related to the body (as with the sealed urinals and stretched sinks by Robert Gober, the table of still-life objects that refuse to be still by Charles Ray, and the quasi-athletic apparatuses developed as performance props by Matthew Barney). Other artists estrange childhood objects that return from the past, often distorted in scale or proportion, with a touch of the eerie (as in the little trucks or massive rats of Katarina Fritsch) or the pathetic (as in the Salvation Army stuffed animals of Mike Kelley), of the melancholic (as in the dead sparrows with knitted coats by Annette Messager) or the monstrous (as in the crib become a psychotic cage by Gober). Yet, however provocative, this illusionist approach to the real can lapse into a coded surrealism.

The second approach runs opposite to the first but to the same end: it rejects illusionism, indeed any sublimation of the object-gaze, in an attempt to evoke the real as such. This is the primary realm of abject art, which is drawn to the broken boundaries of the violated body. Often, as in the aggressive-depressive sculpture of Kiki Smith, this body is maternal, and it serves as the medium of an ambivalent child subject who damages and restores it in turn: in *Trough* (1990), for example, this body lies sectioned, an empty vessel, while in *Womb* (1986) it seems a solid object, almost autonomous, even autogenetic.[47] Often, too, the body appears as a direct double of the violated subject, whose parts are displayed as residues of violence and/or traces of trauma: the booted legs by Gober that extend, up or down, as if cut at the wall, sometimes with

the thighs planted with candles or the butt tattooed with music, are thus humiliated (often in a hilarious way). The strange ambition of this second approach is to tease out the trauma of the subject, with the apparent calculation that, if its lost *objet a* cannot be reclaimed, at least the wound that it left behind can be probed (in the Greek *trauma* means "wound").[48] However, this approach has its dangers too, for the probing of the wound can lapse into a coded expressionism (as in the expressive desublimation of the diaristic art of Sue Williams and others) or a coded realism (as in the bohemian romance of the photography *verité* of Larry Clark, Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson, and others). And yet this very problem can be provocative, for it raises the question, crucial to abject art, of the possibility of an *obscene* representation—that is, of a representation *without* a scene that stages the object for the viewer. Might this be one difference between the *obscene*, where the object, without a scene, comes too close to the viewer, and the *pornographic*, where the object is staged for the viewer who is thus distanced enough to be its voyeur?[49]

THE ARTIFICE OF ABJECTION

According to the canonical definition of Kristeva, the abject is what I must get rid of *in order to be an I* (but what is this primordial I that expels in the first place?). It is a fantasmatic substance not only alien to the subject but intimate with it—too much so in fact, and this overproximity produces panic in the subject. In this way the abject touches on the fragility of our boundaries, the fragility of the spatial distinction between our insides and outsides as well as of the temporal passage between the maternal body (again the privileged realm of the abject) and the paternal law. Both spatially and temporally, then, abjection is a condition in which subjecthood is troubled, "where meaning collapses"; hence its attraction for avant-garde artists who want to disturb these orderings of subject and society alike.[50]
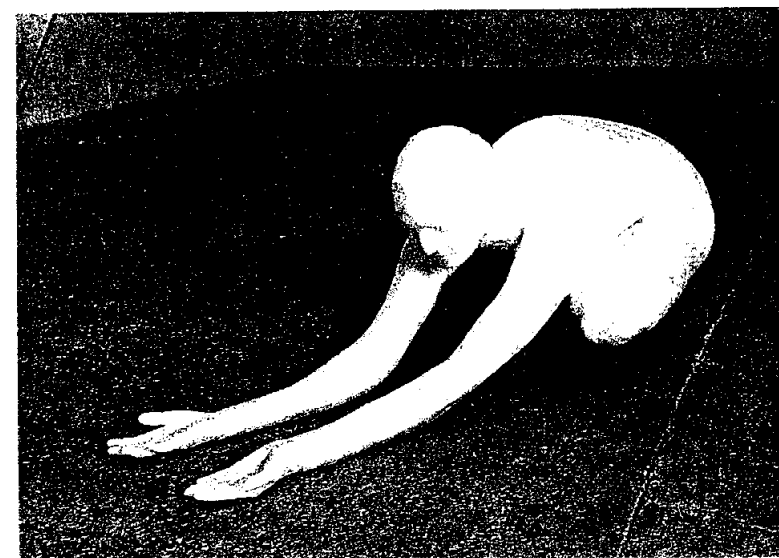
This only skims the surface of the abject, crucial as it is to the construction of subjectivity, racist, homophobic, and otherwise.[51] Here I will note only the ambiguities of the notion, for the cultural-political valence of abject art depends

Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 1990.
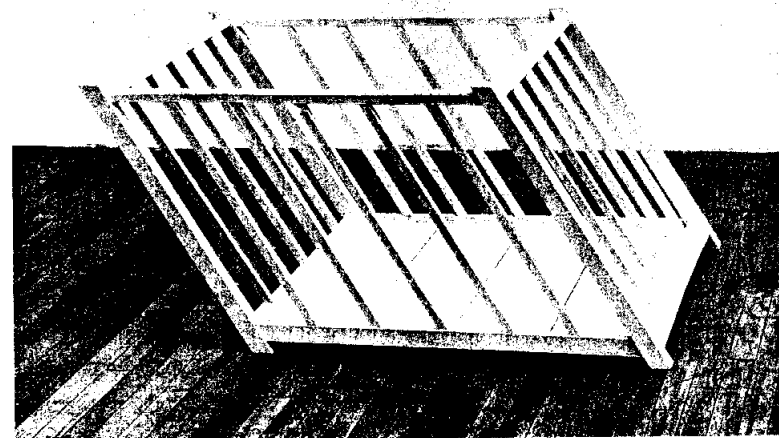
Robert Gober, *Slanted Playpen*, 1987.

Kiki Smith, *Untitled*, 1992.

on these ambiguities, on how they are decided (or not). Some are familiar by now. Can the abject be represented at all? If it is opposed *to* culture, can it be exposed *in* culture? If it is unconscious, can it made conscious and remain abject? In other words, can there be a *conscientious abjection,* or is this all there can be? Can abject art ever escape an instrumental, indeed moralistic, use of the abject? (In a sense this is the other part of the question: can there be an evocation of the obscene that is *not* pornographic?)

The crucial ambiguity in Kristeva is her slippage between the operation *to abject* and the condition *to be abject.* Again, to abject is to expel, to separate; to be abject, on the other hand, is to be repulsive, stuck, subject enough only to feel this subjecthood at risk.[52] For Kristeva the operation *to abject* is fundamental to the maintenance of subject and society alike, while the condition *to be abject* is corrosive of both formations. Is the abject, then, disruptive of subjective and social orders *or* somehow foundational of them, a crisis in these orders *or* somehow a confirmation of them? If a subject or a society abjects the alien within, is abjection not a regulatory operation? (In other words, might abjection be to regulation what transgression is to taboo? "Transgression does not deny the taboo," runs the famous formulation of Bataille, "but transcends and completes it.")[53] Or can the *condition* of abjection be mimed in a way that calls out, in order to disturb, the *operation* of abjection?

In modernist writing, Kristeva views abjection as conservative, even defensive. "Edged with the sublime," the abject tests the limits of sublimation, but even writers like Louis-Ferdinand Céline sublimate the abject, purify it. Whether or not one agrees with this account, Kristeva does intimate a cultural shift toward the present. "In a world in which the Other has collapsed," she states enigmatically, the task of the artist is no longer to sublimate the abject, to elevate it, but to plumb the abject, to fathom "the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression."[54] In a world in which the Other has collapsed: Kristeva implies a crisis in the paternal law that underwrites the social order.[55] In terms of the visuality outlined here, this implies a crisis in the image-screen as well, and some artists do attack it, whereas others, under the assumption that it is torn, probe behind it for the obscene object-gaze of the real. Meanwhile,

in terms of the abject, still other artists explore the repressing of the maternal body said to underlie the symbolic order; that is, they exploit the disruptive effects of its material and/or metaphorical rem(a)inders.

Here the condition of image-screen and symbolic order alike is all-important; locally the valence of abject art depends on it. If it is deemed intact, the attack on the image-screen might retain a transgressive value. However, if it is deemed torn, such transgression might be beside the point, and this old vocation of the avant-garde might be at an end. But there is a third option as well, and that is to reformulate this vocation, *to rethink transgression not as a rupture produced by a heroic avant-garde outside the symbolic order but as a fracture traced by a strategic avant-garde within the order.*[56] In this view the goal of the avant-garde is not to break with this order absolutely (this old dream is dispelled), but to expose it in crisis, to register its points not only of break*down* but of break*through,* the new possibilities that such a crisis might open up.

For the most part, however, abject art has tended in two other directions. As suggested, the first is to identify with the abject, to approach it somehow — to probe the wound of trauma, to touch the obscene object-gaze of the real. The second is to represent the condition of abjection in order to provoke its operation — to catch abjection in the act, to make it reflexive, even repellent in its own right. Yet this mimesis may also reconfirm a given abjection. Just as the old transgressive surrealist once called out for the priestly police, so an abject artist (like Andres Serrano) may call out for an evangelical senator (like Jesse Helms), who is allowed, in effect, to complete the work negatively. Moreover, as left and right may agree on the social representatives of the abject, they may shore each other up in a public exchange of disgust, and this spectacle may inadvertently support the normativity of image-screen and symbolic order alike.

These strategies in abject art are thus problematic, as they were over sixty years ago in surrealism. Surrealism was also drawn to the abject in a testing of sublimation; indeed, it claimed as its own the point where desublimatory impulses confront sublimatory imperatives.[57] Yet it was at this point too that surrealism broke down, split into the two principal factions headed by Breton and Bataille. According to Breton, Bataille was an "excrement-philosopher" who

Andres Serrano, *Piss Christ*, 1987.

refused to rise above big toes, mere matter, sheer shit, to raise the low to the high.[58] For Bataille in turn, Breton was a "juvenile victim" involved in an Oedipal game, an "Icarian pose" assumed less to undo the law than to provoke its punishment: for all his confessions of desire, he was as committed to sublimation as the next aesthete.[59] Elsewhere Bataille termed this aesthetic *le jeu des transpositions* (the game of substitutions), and in a celebrated aphorism he dismissed it as no match for the power of perversions: "I defy any amateur of painting to love a picture as much as a fetishist loves a shoe."[60]

I recall this old opposition for its perspective on abject art. In a sense Breton and Bataille were both right, at least about each other. Often Breton and company did act like juvenile victims who provoked the paternal law *as if to ensure that it was still there*—at best in a neurotic plea for punishment, at worst in a paranoid demand for order. And this Icarian pose is assumed by contemporary artists and writers almost too eager to talk dirty in the museum, almost too ready to be tweaked by Hilton Kramer or spanked by Jesse Helms. On the other hand, the Bataillean ideal—to opt for the smelly shoe over the beautiful picture, to be fixed in perversion or stuck in abjection—is also adopted by contemporary artists and writers discontent not only with the refinements of sublimation but with the displacements of desire. Is this, then, the option that the artifice of abjection offers us—Oedipal naughtiness or infantile perversion? To act dirty with the secret wish to be spanked, or to wallow in shit with the secret faith that the most defiled might reverse into the most sacred, the most perverse into the most potent?

In the abject testing of the symbolic order a general division of labor has developed according to gender: the artists who probe the maternal body repressed by the paternal law tend to be women (e.g., Kiki Smith, Maureen Connor, Rona Pondick, Mona Hayt), while the artists who assume an infantilist position to mock the paternal law tend to be men (e.g., Mike Kelley, John Miller, Paul McCarthy, Nayland Blake).[61] This mimesis of regression is pronounced in contemporary art, but it has many precedents. Infantilist personae dominated dada and neo-dada: the anarchic child in Hugo Ball and Claes Oldenburg, for example, or the autistic subject in "Dadamax" Ernst and Warhol.[62]

Yet related figures appeared in reactionary art as well: all the clowns, puppets, and the like in neo-figurative painting of the late 1920s and early 1930s and in neo-expressionist painting of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Thus the political valence of this mimetic regression is not stable. In the terms of Peter Sloterdijk discussed in chapter 4, it can be *kynical,* whereby individual degradation is pushed to the point of social indictment, or *cynical,* whereby the subject accepts this degradation for protection and/or profit. The principal avatar of contemporary infantilism is the obscene clown that appears in Bruce Nauman, Kelley, McCarthy, Blake, and others; a hybrid figure, it seems both kynical and cynical, part psychotic inmate, part circus performer.

As these examples suggest, infantilist personae tend to perform at times of cultural-political reaction, as ciphers of alienation and reification.[63] Yet these figures of regression can also be figures of perversion, that is, of *père-version,* of a turning from the father that is a twisting of his law. In the early 1990s this defiance was manifested in a general flaunting of shit (or shit substitute: the real thing was rarely found). Of course Freud understood the disposition to order essential to civilization as a reaction against anal eroticism, and in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) he imagined an origin myth involving a related repression that turns on the erection of man from all fours to two feet. With this change in posture, according to Freud, came a revolution in sense: smell was degraded and sight privileged, the anal repressed and the genital pronounced. The rest is literally history: with his genitals exposed, man was retuned to a sexual frequency that was continuous, not periodic, and he learned shame; and this coming together of sex and shame impelled him to seek a wife, to form a family, to found a civilization, to boldly go where no man had gone before. Heterosexist as this zany tale is, it does reveal how civilization is conceived in normative terms—not only as a general renunciation and sublimation of instincts but as a specific reaction against anal eroticism that implies a specific abjection of homosexuality.[64]

In this light the shit movement in contemporary art may intend a symbolic reversal of this first step into civilization, of the repression of the anal and the olfactory. As such it may also intend a symbolic reversal of the phallic visuality of the erect body as the primary model of traditional painting and sculp-

ture—the human figure as both subject and frame of representation in Western art. This double defiance of visual sublimation and vertical form is a strong subcurrent in twentieth-century art (which might be subtitled "Visuality and Its Discontents"),[65] and it is sometimes expressed in a flaunting of anal eroticism. "Anal eroticism finds a narcissistic application in the production of defiance," Freud wrote in his 1917 essay on the subject—in avant-gardist defiance too, one might add, from the chocolate grinders of Duchamp through the cans of *merde* of Piero Manzoni, to the mounds of shit substitute of John Miller.[66] These different gestures have different valences. In contemporary art anal-erotic defiance is often self-conscious, even self-parodic: not only does it test the anally repressive authority of traditional museum culture (which is in part an Oedipal projection), but it also mocks the anally erotic narcissism of the vanguard rebel-artist. "Let's Talk About Disobeying" reads one banner emblazoned with a cookie jar by Mike Kelley. "Pants-shitter and Proud of It" reads another that derides the self-congratulation of the institutionally incontinent. ("Jerk Off Too," this rebel-nerd adds, as if to complete his taunting of civilization according to Freud.)[67]

This defiance can be pathetic, but, again, it can also be perverse, a twisting of the paternal law of difference—sexual and generational, ethnic and social. This perversion is often performed through a mimetic regression to an anal world where given differences might be transformed.[68] Such is the fictive space that artists like Kelley and Miller set up for critical play. In *Dick/Jane* (1991) Miller stains a blonde, blue-eyed doll brown and buries her neck-deep in shit substitute. Familiar from the old primer, Dick and Jane taught several generations of North American kids how to read—and how to read sexual difference. However, in the Miller version the Jane is turned into a Dick, and the phallic composite is plunged into an anal mound. Like the stroke in the title, the difference between male and female is transgressed, erased and underscored at once, as is the difference between white and black. In short, Miller creates an anal world that tests the terms of symbolic difference.[69]

Kelley also places his creatures in an anal world. "We interconnect everything, set up a field," says the bunny to the teddy in *Theory, Garbage, Stuffed Animals, Christ* (1991), "so there is no longer any differentiation."[70] He too

John Miller, *Dick/Jane,* 1991.

Mike Kelley, *Nostalgic Depiction of the Innocence of Childhood,* 1990, detail.

explores this space where symbols are not stable, where "the concepts *faeces* (money, gift), *baby* and *penis* are ill-distinguished from one another and are easily interchangeable."[71] And he too does so less to celebrate mere indistinction than to trouble symbolic difference. *Lumpen*, the German word for "rag" that gives us *Lumpensammler* (the ragpicker that so interested Baudelaire) and *Lumpenprole-tariat* (the mass too ragged to form a class of its own that so interested Marx—"the scum, the leavings, the refuse of all classes"),[72] is a crucial word in the Kelley lexicon, which he develops as a third term, like the obscene, between the *informe* and the abject. In a sense he does what Bataille urges: he thinks materialism through "psychological or social facts."[73] The result is an art of lumpen forms (dingy toy animals stitched together in ugly masses, dirty throw rugs laid over nasty shapes), lumpen subjects (pictures of dirt and trash), and lumpen personae (dysfunctional men that build weird devices ordered from obscure catalogues in basements and backyards). Most of these things resist formal shaping, let alone cultural sublimating or social redeeming. Insofar as it has a social referent then, the *Lumpen* of Kelley (unlike the *Lumpen* of Louis Bonaparte, Hitler, or Mussolini) resists molding, much less mobilizing. But does this indifference constitute a politics?

Often in the cult of abjection to which abject art is related (the cult of slackers and losers, grunge and Generation X), this posture of indifference expressed little more than a fatigue with the politics of difference (social, sexual, ethnic). Sometimes, however, it intimated a more fundamental fatigue: a strange drive to indistinction, a paradoxical desire to be desireless, to be done with it all, a call of regression beyond the infantile to the inorganic.[74] In a 1937 text crucial to the Lacanian discussion of the gaze, Roger Caillois, another associate of the Bataillean surrealists, considers this drive to indistinction in terms of visuality—specifically in terms of the assimilation of insects into space through mimicry.[75] Here, Caillois argues, there is no question of agency (like protective adaptation), let alone of subjecthood (these organisms are "dispossessed of [this] privilege"), a condition that he can only liken, in the human realm, to extreme schizophrenia:

To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis [consumption of bacteria]. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, 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 in space. He 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."[76]

The breaching of the body, the gaze devouring the subject, the subject becoming the space, the state of just similarity: these conditions are evoked in recent art—in images by Sherman and others, in objects by Smith and others. It recalls the perverse ideal of the beautiful, redefined in terms of the sublime, advanced in surrealism: a convulsive possession of the subject given over to a deathly *jouissance.*

If this convulsive possession can be related to contemporary culture, it must be split into its constituent parts: on the one hand an ecstasy in the imagined breakdown of the image-screen and/or the symbolic order; on the other hand a horror at this fantasmatic event followed by a despair about it. Some early definitions of postmodernism evoked this *ecstatic* structure of feeling, sometimes in analogy with schizophrenia. Indeed, for Fredric Jameson the primary symptom of postmodernism is a schizophrenic breakdown in language and temporality that provokes a compensatory investment in the image and the instant.[77] And many artists did explore simulacral intensities and ahistorical pastiches in the 1980s. In recent intimations of postmodernism, however, the *melancholic* structure of feeling dominates, and sometimes, as in Kristeva, it too is associated with a symbolic order in crisis. Here artists are drawn not to the highs of the simulacral image but to the lows of the depressive object. If some high modernists sought to transcend the referential figure and some early postmodernists to delight in the sheer image, some later postmodernists want to possess the real thing.

Today this bipolar postmodernism is pushed toward a qualitative change: many artists seem driven by an ambition to inhabit a place of total affect *and* to be drained of affect altogether, to possess the obscene vitality of the wound *and* to occupy the radical nihility of the corpse. This oscillation suggests the dynamic of psychic shock parried by protective shield that Freud developed in his discussion of the death drive and Walter Benjamin elaborated in his discussion of Baudelairean modernism—but now pushed well beyond the pleasure principle. Pure affect, no affect: *It hurts, I can't feel anything.*[78]

Why this fascination with trauma, this envy of abjection, today? To be sure, motives exist within art and theory. As suggested, there is dissatisfaction with the textualist model of culture as well as the conventionalist view of reality—as if the real, repressed in poststructuralist postmodernism, had returned as traumatic. Then, too, there is disillusionment with the celebration of desire as an open passport of a mobile subject—as if the real, dismissed by a performative postmodernism, were marshaled against the imaginary world of a fantasy captured by consumerism. But there are strong forces at work elsewhere as well: despair about the persistent AIDS crisis, invasive disease and death, systemic poverty and crime, the destroyed welfare state, indeed the broken social contract (as the rich opt out in revolution from the top and the poor are dropped out in immiseration from the bottom). The articulation of these different forces is difficult, yet together they drive the contemporary concern with trauma and abjection.

One result is this: for many in contemporary culture truth resides in the traumatic or abject subject, in the diseased or damaged body. To be sure, this body is the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary testimonials against power. But there are dangers with this siting of truth, such as the restriction of our political imaginary to two camps, the abjectors and the abjected, and the assumption that in order not to be counted among sexists and racists one must become the phobic object of such subjects. If there is a subject of history for the cult of abjection at all, it is not the Worker, the Woman, or the Person of Color, but the Corpse. This is not only a politics of difference pushed to indifference; it is a politics of alterity pushed to nihility.[79] "Everything
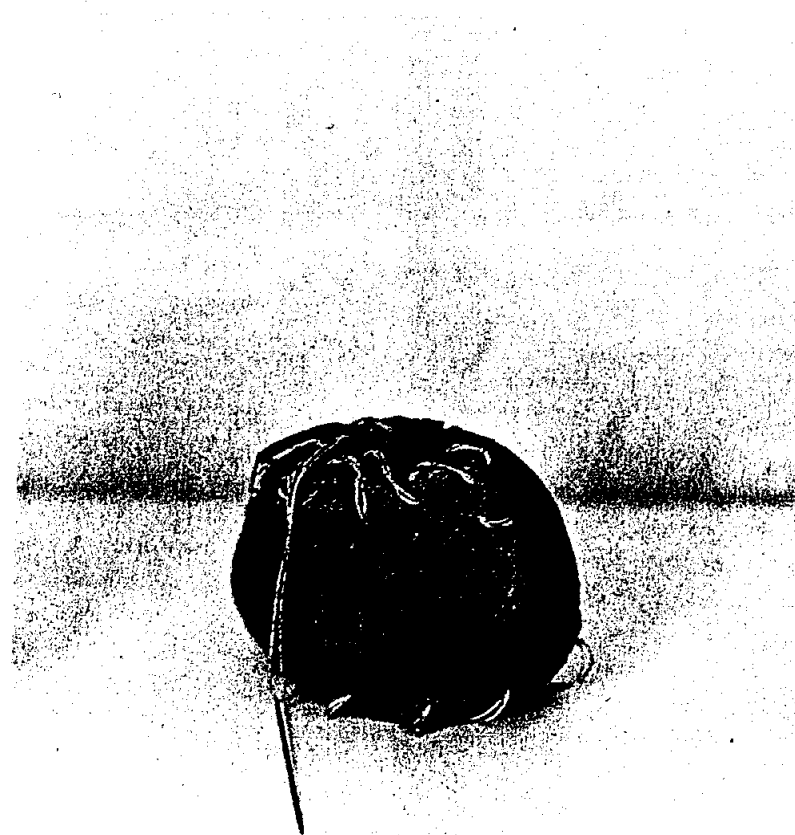
Zoe Leonard, *Sewn Fruit (in memory of David W.),* 1993.

goes dead," says the Kelley teddy. "Like us," responds the bunny.[80] Yet is this point of nihility the epitome of impoverishment, where power cannot penetrate, or a place from which power emanates in a new form? Is abjection a refusal of power, its ruse, or its reinvention?[81] Finally, is abjection a space-time beyond redemption, or the fastest route for contemporary rogue-saints to grace?

Across artistic, theoretical, and popular cultures (in SoHo, at Yale, on *Oprah*) there is a tendency to redefine experience, individual and historical, in terms of trauma. On the one hand, in art and theory, trauma discourse continues the poststructuralist critique of the subject by other means, for again, in a psychoanalytic register, there is no subject of trauma; the position is evacuated, and in this sense the critique of the subject is most radical here. On the other hand, in popular culture, trauma is treated as an event that guarantees the subject, and in this psychologistic register the subject, however disturbed, rushes back as witness, testifier, survivor. Here is indeed a traumatic subject, and it has absolute authority, for one cannot challenge the trauma of another: one can only believe it, even identify with it, or not. *In trauma discourse, then, the subject is evacuated and elevated at once.* And in this way trauma discourse magically resolves two contradictory imperatives in culture today: deconstructive analyses and identity politics. This strange rebirth of the author, this paradoxical condition of absentee authority, is a significant turn in contemporary art, criticism, and cultural politics. Here the return of the real converges with the return of the referential, and to this point I now turn.[82]
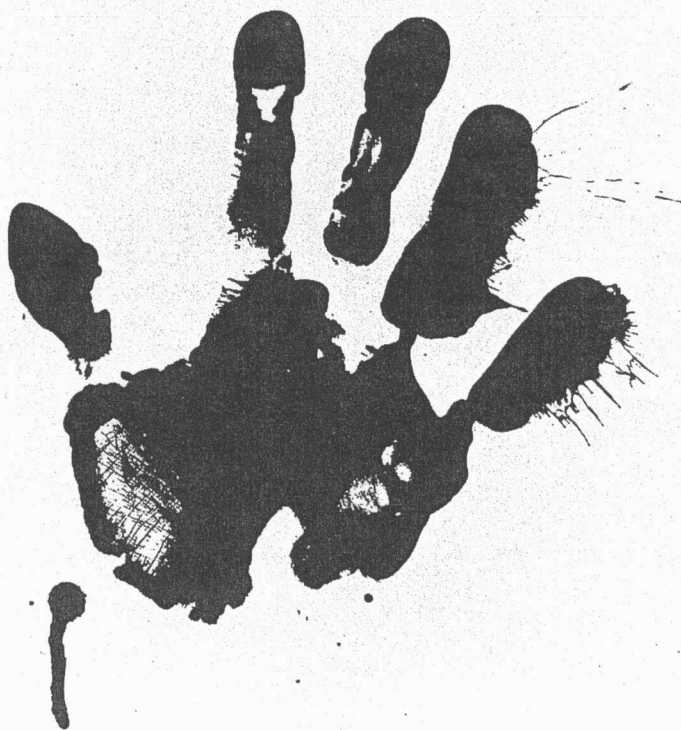
Gran Fury, ACT-UP poster, 1988.

The Artist as Ethnographer

One of the most important interventions in the relation between artistic authority and cultural politics is "The Author as Producer" by Walter Benjamin, first presented as a lecture in April 1934 at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris. There, under the influence of the epic theater of Bertolt Brecht and the factographic experiments of Soviet writers like Sergei Tretiakov, Benjamin called on the artist on the left "to side with the proletariat."[1] In Paris in 1934 this call was not radical; the approach, however, was. For Benjamin urged the "advanced" artist to intervene, like the revolutionary worker, in the means of artistic production—to change the "technique" of traditional media, to transform the "apparatus" of bourgeois culture. A correct "tendency" was not enough; that was to assume a place "beside the proletariat." And "what kind of place is that?" Benjamin asked in lines that still scathe. "That of a benefactor, of an ideological patron—an impossible place."

Several oppositions govern this famous argument. Behind the privileging of "technique" over "theme" and "position" over "tendency" lies an implicit privileging of productivism over *proletkult,* two rival movements in the early Soviet Union. Productivism worked to develop a new proletarian culture through an extension of constructivist formal experiments into actual industrial

production; in this way it sought to *overthrow* bourgeois art and culture altogether. No less committed politically, *proletkult* worked to develop a proletarian culture in the more traditional sense of the word; it sought to *surpass* bourgeois art and culture. For Benjamin this was not enough: again implicitly, he charged movements like *proletkult* with an ideological patronage that positioned the worker as passive other.[2] However difficult, the solidarity with producers that counted for Benjamin was solidarity in material practice, not in artistic theme or political attitude alone.

A glance at this text reveals that two oppositions that still plague the reception of art—aesthetic quality versus political relevance, form versus content—were "familiar and unfruitful" as long ago as 1934. Benjamin sought to overcome these oppositions in *representation* through the third term of *production,* but neither opposition has disappeared. In the early 1980s some artists and critics returned to "Author as Producer" to work through contemporary versions of these antitheses (e.g., theory versus activism).[3] This reading of Benjamin thus differed from his reception in the late 1970s; in a retracing of his own trajectory, allegorical disruptions of image and text were pushed toward cultural-political interventions. As Benjamin had responded to the aestheticization of politics under fascism, so these artists and critics responded to the capitalization of culture and privatization of society under Reagan, Thatcher, Kohl, and company—even as these transformations made such intervention more difficult. Indeed, when this intervention was not restricted to the art apparatus alone, its strategies were more situationist than productivist—that is, more concerned with reinscriptions of given representations.[4]

This is not to say that symbolic actions were not effective; many were, especially in the middle to late 1980s, around the AIDS crisis, abortion rights, and apartheid (I think of projects by ACT-UP artist groups, posters by Barbara Kruger, projections by Krzysztof Wodiczko). But they are not my subject here. Rather, I want to suggest that a new paradigm structurally similar to the old "Author as Producer" model has emerged in advanced art on the left: *the artist as ethnographer.*

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF ALTERITY

In this new paradigm the object of contestation remains in large part the bourgeois-capitalist institution of art (the museum, the academy, the market, and the media), its exclusionary definitions of art and artist, identity and community. But the subject of association has changed: it is the cultural and/or ethnic other in whose name the committed artist most often struggles. However subtle it may seem, this shift from a subject defined in terms of *economic relation* to one defined in terms of *cultural identity* is significant, and I will comment further on it below. Here, however, the parallels between these two paradigms must be traced, for some assumptions of the old producer model persist, sometimes problematically, in the new ethnographer paradigm. First is the assumption that the site of political transformation is the site of artistic transformation as well, and that political vanguards *locate* artistic vanguards and, under certain circumstances, substitute for them. (This myth is basic to leftist accounts of modern art: it idealizes Jacques Louis David in the French Revolution, Gustave Courbet in the Paris Commune, Vladimir Tatlin in the Russian Revolution, and so on.)[5]

Second is the assumption that this site is always *elsewhere,* in the field of the other—in the producer model, with the social other, the exploited proletariat; in the ethnographer paradigm, with the cultural other, the oppressed postcolonial, subaltern, or subcultural—and that this elsewhere, this outside, is the Archimedean point from which the dominant culture will be transformed or at least *subverted.* Third is the assumption that if the invoked artist is *not* perceived as socially and/or culturally other, he or she has but limited access to this transformative alterity, and that if he or she *is* perceived as other, he or she has automatic access to it. Taken together, these three assumptions may lead to a less desired point of connection with the Benjaminian account of the author as producer: the danger, for the artist as ethnographer, of "ideological patronage."[6]

This danger may stem from the assumed split in identity between the author and the worker or the artist and the other, but it may also arise in the very identification (or, to use the old language, commitment) undertaken to

overcome this split. For example, the *proletkult* author might be a mere fellow traveler of the worker not because of any essential difference in identity but because identification with the worker alienates the worker, confirms rather than closes the gap between the two through a reductive, idealistic, or otherwise misbegotten representation. (This othering in identification, in representation, concerns Benjamin about *proletkult*.) A related othering may occur with the artist as ethnographer vis-à-vis the cultural other. Certainly the danger of ideological patronage is no less for the artist identified as other than for the author identified as proletarian. In fact this danger may deepen then, for the artist may be asked to assume the roles of native and informant as well as ethnographer. In short, identity is not the same as identification, and the apparent simplicities of the first should not be substituted for the actual complications of the second.

A strict Marxist might question the informant/ethnographer paradigm in art because it displaces the problematic of class and capitalist exploitation with that of race and colonialist oppression, or, more simply, because it displaces the social with the cultural or the anthropological. A strict poststructuralist might question this paradigm for the opposite reason: because it does not displace the producer problematic enough, because it tends to preserve its structure of the political—to retain the notion of a *subject* of history, to define this position in terms of *truth,* and to locate this truth in terms of *alterity* (again, this is the politics of the other, first projected, then appropriated, that interests me here).

From this poststructuralist perspective the ethnographer paradigm, like the producer model, fails to reflect on its *realist assumption:* that the other, here postcolonial, there proletarian, is somehow in reality, in truth, not in ideology, because he or she is socially oppressed, politically transformative, and/or materially productive. (For example, in 1957 Roland Barthes, who later became the foremost critic of the realist assumption, wrote: "There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things, metalanguage is referred to a language-object, and myth is impossible. This is why revolutionary

language proper cannot be mythical."[7] Often this realist assumption is compounded by a *primitivist fantasy:* that the other, usually assumed to be of color, has special access to primary psychic and social processes from which the white subject is somehow blocked—a fantasy that is as fundamental to primitivist modernisms as the realist assumption is to productivist modernisms. In some contexts both myths are effective, even necessary: the realist assumption to claim the truth of one political position or the reality of one social oppression, and the primitivist fantasy to challenge repressive conventions of sexuality and aesthetics. Yet the automatic coding of apparent difference as manifest identity and of otherness as outsideness must be questioned. For not only might this coding essentialize identity, but it might also restrict the identification so important to cultural affiliation and political alliance (identification is not always ideological patronage).

There are two important precedents of the ethnographer paradigm in contemporary art where the primitivist fantasy is most active: the dissident surrealism associated with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the *négritude* movement associated with Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In different ways both movements connected the transgressive potential of the unconscious with the radical alterity of the cultural other. Thus Bataille related self-destructive drives in the unconscious to sacrificial expenditures in other cultures, while Senghor opposed an emotionality fundamental to African cultures to a rationality fundamental to European traditions.[9] However disruptive in context, these primitivist associations came to limit both movements. Dissident surrealism may have explored cultural otherness, but only in part to indulge in a ritual of self-othering (the classic instance is *L'Afrique fantôme,* the "self-ethnography" performed by Leiris on the French ethnographic-museological mission from Dakar to Djibouti in 1931).[10] So, too, the *négritude* movement may have revalued cultural otherness, but only in part to be constrained by this second nature, by its essentialist stereotypes of blackness, emotionality, African versus European, and so on (these problems were first articulated by Frantz Fanon and later developed by Wole Soyinka and others).[11]

Renée Green, *Import/Export Funk Office*, 1992, detail.
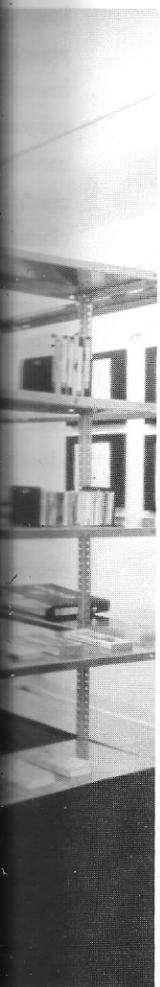
In quasi-anthropological art today the primitivist association of unconscious and other rarely exists in these ways. Sometimes the fantasy is taken up as such, critically, as in *Seen* (1990) by Renée Green, where the viewer is placed before two European fantasms of excessive African (American) female sexuality, the mid-nineteenth-century Hottentot Venus (represented by an autopsy) and the early-twentieth-century jazz dancer Josephine Baker (photographed in a famous nude pose), or in *Vanilla Nightmares* (1986) by Adrian Piper, where the racialist fantasms invoked in *New York Times* fashion advertisements become so many black specters to delight and terrify white consumers. Yet sometimes, too, the primitivist fantasy becomes absorbed into the realist assumption, so that now *the other* is held to be *dans le vrai*. This primitivist version of the realist assumption, this siting of political truth in a projected other or outside, has problematic effects beyond the automatic coding of identity vis-à-vis alterity noted above. First, this outside is not other in any simple sense. Second, this siting of politics as outside and other, as transcendental opposition, may distract from a politics of here and now, of immanent contestation.

First is the problem of the *projection* of this outside-other. In *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (1983) Johannes Fabian argues that anthropology was founded on a mythical mapping of time onto space based on two presumptions: "1. Time is immanent to, hence coextensive with, the world (or nature, or the universe, depending on the argument); 2. Relationships between parts of the world (in the widest sense of both natural and sociocultural entities) can be understood as temporal relations. Dispersal in space reflects directly, which is not to say simply or in obvious ways, sequence in Time."[12] With space and time thus mapped onto one another, "over there" became "back then," and the most remote (as measured from some Greenwich Mean of European Civilization) became the most primitive. This mapping of the primitive was manifestly racist: in the Western white imaginary its site was always dark. It remains tenacious, however, because it is fundamental to narratives of history-as-development and civilization-as-hierarchy. These nineteenth-century narratives are residual in discourses like psychoanalysis and disciplines like art history, which still often assume a connection between the (ontogenetic) development

of the individual and the (phylogenetic) development of the species (as in human civilization, world art, and so on). In this association the primitive is first projected by the Western white subject as a primal stage in *cultural* history and then reabsorbed as a primal stage in *individual* history. (Thus in *Totem and Taboo* [1913], with its subtitle "Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics," Freud presents the primitive as "a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development.")[13] Again, this association of the primitive and the prehistoric and/or the pre-Oedipal, the other and the unconscious, *is* the primitivist fantasy. However revalued by Freud, where we neurotics may also be savage, or by Bataille and Leiris or Senghor and Césaire, where such otherness is the best part of us, this fantasy is not deconstructed. *And to the extent that the primitivist fantasy is not disarticulated, to the extent that the other remains conflated with the unconscious, explorations of alterity to this day will "other" the self in old ways in which the other remains the foil of the self (however troubled this self may be in the process) more than "selve" the other in new ways in which difference is allowed, even appreciated (perhaps through a recognition of an alterity in the self). In* this sense, too, the primitivist fantasy may live on in quasi-anthropological art.

Then there is the problem of the *politics* of this outside-other. Today in our global economy the assumption of a pure outside is almost impossible. This is not to totalize our world system prematurely, but to specify both resistance and innovation as immanent relations rather than transcendental events. Long ago Fanon saw an inadvertent confirmation of European culture in the oppositional logic of the *négritude* movement, but only recently have postcolonial artists and critics pushed practice and theory from binary structures of otherness to relational models of difference, from discrete space-times to mixed border zones.[14]

This move was difficult because it runs counter to the old politics of alterity. Basic to much modernism, this appropriation of the other persists in much postmodernism. In *The Myth of the Other* (1978) Italian philosopher Franco Rella argues that theorists as diverse as Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari idealize the other as the negation of the same—with deleterious effects on cultural politics. This work often assumes dominant definitions of the

negative and/or the deviant even as it moves to revalue them.[15] So, too, it often allows rhetorical reversals of dominant definitions to stand for politics as such. More generally, this idealization of otherness tends to follow a temporal line in which one group is privileged as the new subject of history, only to be displaced by another, a chronology that may collapse not only different differences (social, ethnic, sexual, and so on) but also different positions within each difference.[16] The result is a politics that may *consume* its historical subjects before they become historically effective.

This Hegelianism of the other is not only active in modernism and postmodernism; it may be structural to the modern subject. In a celebrated passage in *The Order of Things* (1966) Michel Foucault argues that this subject, this modern man that emerges in the nineteenth century, differs from the classical subject of Cartesian and Kantian philosophies because he seeks his truth in the *unthought*—the unconscious and the other (this is the philosophical basis of the primitivist crossing of the two). "An unveiling of the nonconscious," Foucault writes, "is the truth of all the sciences of man," and this is why such unveilings as psychoanalysis and anthropology are the most privileged of modern discourses.[17] In this light the othering of the self, past and present, is only a partial challenge to the modern subject, for this othering also buttresses the self through romantic opposition, conserves the self through dialectical appropriation, extends the self through surrealist exploration, prolongs the self through poststructuralist troubling, and so on.[18] Just as the *elaboration* of psychoanalysis and anthropology was fundamental to modern discourses (modernist art included), so the *critique* of these human sciences is crucial to postmodern discourses (postmodernist art included); as I suggested in chapter 1, the two are in a relation of deferred action. Yet this critique, which is a critique of the subject, is still centered on the subject, and *it still centers the subject.*[19] In *The Savage Mind* (1962) Claude Lévi-Strauss predicts that man will be *dissolved* in the structural-linguistic refashioning of the human sciences.[20] At the end of *The Order of Things* Foucault reiterates this famous prediction with his bold image of man "erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea." Intentionally or not, might the psychoanalytic-anthropological turn in contemporary practice and theory work

to *restore* this figure? Have we not slipped back into what Foucault calls "our anthropological sleep?"[21]

No doubt the othering of the self is crucial to critical practices in anthropology, art, and politics; at least in conjunctures such as the surrealist one, the use of anthropology as auto-analysis (as in Leiris) or social critique (as in Bataille) is culturally transgressive, even politically significant. But clearly too there are dangers. For then as now self-othering can flip into self-absorption, in which the project of an "ethnographic self-fashioning" becomes the practice of a narcissistic self-refurbishing.[22] To be sure, reflexivity can disturb automatic assumptions about subject-positions, but it can also promote a masquerade of this disturbance: a vogue for traumatic confessional in theory that is sometimes sensibility criticism come again, or a vogue for pseudo-ethnographic reports in art that are sometimes disguised travelogues from the world art market. Who in the academy or the art world has not witnessed these testimonies of the new empathetic intellectual or these *flâneries* of the new nomadic artist?[23]

ART AND THEORY IN THE AGE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES

What has happened here? What misrecognitions have passed between anthropology and art and other discourses? One can point to a virtual theater of projections and reflections over the last two decades at least. First some critics of anthropology developed a kind of artist envy (the enthusiasm of James Clifford for the intercultural collages of "ethnographic surrealism" is an influential instance).[24] In this envy the artist became a paragon of formal reflexivity, a self-aware reader of *culture understood as text*. But is the artist the exemplar here, or is this figure not a projection of an ideal ego of the anthropologist: the anthropologist as collagist, semiologist, avant-gardist?[25] In other words, might this artist envy be a self-idealization in which the anthropologist is remade as an artistic interpreter of the cultural text? Rarely does this projection stop there in the new anthropology or, for that matter, in cultural studies or in new historicism. Often it extends to the object of these studies, the cultural other, who is also reconfigured to reflect an ideal image of the anthropologist, critic, or historian.

This projection is hardly new to anthropology: some classics of the discipline presented entire cultures as collective artists or read them as aesthetic patterns of symbolic practices (*Patterns of Culture* by Ruth Benedict [1934] is only one example). But at least the old anthropology projected openly; the new anthropology persists in these projections, only it deems them critical, even deconstructive.

Of course the new anthropology understands culture differently, as text, which is to say that its projection onto other cultures is as textualist as it is aestheticist. This textual model is supposed to challenge "ethnographic authority" through "discursive paradigms of dialogue and polyphony."[26] However, long ago in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1972) Pierre Bourdieu questioned the structuralist version of this textual model because it reduced "social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely, to decoding operations" and so rendered the ethnographic reader *more* authoritative, not less.[27] Indeed, this "ideology of the text," this recoding of practice as discourse, persists in the new anthropology as well as in quasi-anthropological art, as it does in cultural studies and new historicism, despite the contextualist ambitions that also drive these methods.[28]

Recently the old artist envy among anthropologists has turned the other way: a new ethnographer envy consumes many artists and critics. If anthropologists wanted to exploit the textual model in cultural interpretation, these artists and critics aspire to fieldwork in which theory and practice seem to be reconciled. Often they draw indirectly on basic principles of the participant-observer tradition, among which Clifford notes a critical focus on a particular institution and a narrative tense that favors "the ethnographic present."[29] Yet these borrowings are only signs of the ethnographic turn in contemporary art and criticism. What *drives* it?

There are many engagements of the other in twentieth-century art, most of which are primitivist, bound up in the politics of alterity: in surrealism, where the other is figured expressly in terms of the unconscious; in the *art brut* of Jean Dubuffet, where the other represents a redemptive anti-civilizational resource; in abstract expressionism, where the other stands for the primal exem-

plar of all artists; and variously in art in the 1960s and 1970s (the allusion to prehistoric art in some earthworks, the art world as anthropological site in some conceptual and institution-critical art, the invention of archaeological sites and anthropological civilizations by Anne and Patrick Poirier, Charles Simonds, many others).[30] So what distinguishes the present turn, apart from its relative self-consciousness about ethnographic method? First, as we have seen, anthropology is prized as the science of *alterity;* in this regard it is, along with psychoanalysis, the lingua franca of artistic practice and critical discourse alike. Second, it is the discipline that takes *culture* as its object, and this expanded field of reference is the domain of postmodernist practice and theory (thus also the attraction to cultural studies and, to a lesser extent, new historicism). Third, ethnography is considered *contextual,* the often automatic demand for which contemporary artists and critics share with other practitioners today, many of whom aspire to fieldwork in the everyday. Fourth, anthropology is thought to arbitrate the *interdisciplinary,* another often rote value in contemporary art and criticism. Fifth, the recent *self-critique* of anthropology renders it attractive, for it promises a reflexivity of the ethnographer at the center even as it preserves a romanticism of the other at the margins. For all these reasons rogue investigations of anthropology, like queer critiques of psychoanalysis, possess vanguard status: it is along these lines that the critical edge is felt to cut most incisively.

Yet the ethnographic turn is clinched by another factor, which involves the double inheritance of anthropology. In *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) Marshall Sahlins argues that two epistemologies have long divided the discipline: one stresses symbolic logic, with the social understood mostly in terms of exchange systems; the other privileges practical reason, with the social understood mostly in terms of material culture.[31] In this light anthropology *already* participates in the two contradictory models that dominate contemporary art and criticism: on the one hand, in the old ideology of the text, the linguistic turn in the 1960s that reconfigured the social as symbolic order and/or cultural system and advanced "the dissolution of man," "the death of the author," and so on; and, on the other hand, in the recent longing for the referent, the turn to context and identity that opposes the old text paradigms and subject

critiques. *With a turn to this split discourse of anthropology, artists and critics can resolve these contradictory models magically: they can take up the guises of cultural semiologist and contextual fieldworker, they can continue and condemn critical theory, they can relativize and recenter the subject, all at the same time.* In our current state of artistic-theoretical ambivalences and cultural-political impasses, anthropology is the compromise discourse of choice.[32]

Again, this ethnographer envy is shared by many critics, especially in cultural studies and new historicism, who assume the role of ethnographer usually in disguised form: the cultural-studies ethnographer dressed down as a fellow fan (for reasons of political solidarity, but with great social anxiety); the new-historicist ethnographer dressed up as a master archivist (for reasons of scholarly respectability, but with great professional arrogance). First some anthropologists adapted textual methods from literary criticism in order to reformulate culture as text; then some literary critics adapted ethnographic methods in order to reformulate texts as cultures writ small. And these exchanges have accounted for much interdisciplinary work in the recent past.[33] But there are two problems with this theater of projections and reflections, the first methodological, the second ethical. If both textual and ethnographic turns depended on a single discourse, how truly *inter*disciplinary can the results be? If cultural studies and new historicism often smuggle in an ethnographic model (when not a sociological one), might it be "the *common theoretical ideology* that silently inhabits the 'consciousness' of all these specialists . . . oscillating between a vague spiritualism and a technocratic positivism"?[34] The second problem, broached above, is more serious. When the other is admired as playful in representation, subversive of gender, and so on, might it be a projection of the anthropologist, artist, critic, or historian? In this case an ideal practice might be projected onto the field of the other, which is then asked to reflect it as if it were not only authentically indigenous but innovatively political.

In part this is a projection of my own, and the application of new and old ethnographic methods has illuminated much. But it has also obliterated much in the field of the other, and in its name. This is the opposite of a critique of ethnographic authority, indeed the opposite of ethnographic method, at least

as I understand them. And this "impossible place," as Benjamin called it long ago, is a common occupation of many anthropologists, artists, critics, and historians.

## THE SITING OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The ethnographic turn in contemporary art is also driven by developments within the minimalist genealogy of art over the last thirty-five years. These developments constitute a sequence of investigations: first of the material constituents of the art medium, then of its spatial conditions of perception, and then of the corporeal bases of this perception—shifts marked in minimalist art in the early 1960s through conceptual, performance, body, and site-specific art in the early 1970s. Soon the institution of art could no longer be described only in spatial terms (studio, gallery, museum, and so on); it was also a discursive network of different practices and institutions, other subjectivities and communities. Nor could the observer of art be delimited only in phenomenological terms; he or she was also a social subject defined in language and marked by difference (economic, ethnic, sexual, and so on). Of course the breakdown of restrictive definitions of art and artist, identity and community, was also pressured by social movements (civil rights, various feminisms, queer politics, multiculturalism) as well as theoretical developments (the convergence of feminism, psychoanalysis, and film theory; the recovery of Antonio Gramsci and the development of cultural studies in Britain; the applications of Louis Althusser, Lacan, and Foucault, especially in the British journal *Screen;* the development of postcolonial discourse with Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and others; and so on). Thus did art pass into the expanded field of culture that anthropology is thought to survey.

These developments also constitute a series of shifts in the *siting* of art: from the surface of the medium to the space of the museum, from institutional frames to discursive networks, to the point where many artists and critics treat conditions like desire or disease, AIDS or homelessness, as sites for art.[35] Along with this figure of siting has come the analogy of *mapping.* In an important

moment Robert Smithson and others pushed this cartographic operation to a geological extreme that transformed the siting of art dramatically. Yet this siting had limits too: it could be recouped by gallery and museum, it played to the myth of the redemptive artist (a very traditional site), and so on. Otherwise mapping in recent art has tended toward the sociological and the anthropological, to the point where an ethnographic mapping of an institution or a community is a primary form of site-specific art today.

Sociological mapping is implicit in some conceptual art, sometimes in a parodic way, from the laconic recording of *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* by Ed Ruscha (1963) to the quixotic project of Douglas Huebler to photograph every human being (*Variable Piece: 70*). An important example here is *Homes for America* by Dan Graham, a report (published in a 1966–67 *Arts* magazine) of modular repetitions in a tract-housing development that reframes minimalist structures as found objects in a technocratic suburb. Sociological mapping is more explicit in much institutional critique, especially in the work of Hans Haacke, from the polls and profiles of gallery and museumgoers and the exposés of real-estate moguls in New York (1969–73) through the pedigrees of masterpiece collectors (1974–75) to the investigations of arrangements among museums, corporations, and governments. However, while this work questions social authority incisively, it does not reflect on sociological authority.

This is less true of work that examines the authority arrogated in documentary modes of representation. In a videotape like *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1976) and in a photo-text like *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–75), Martha Rosler belies the apparent objectivity of medical statistics regarding the female body and of sociological descriptions concerning the destitute alcoholic. Recently she has also pushed this critical use of documentary modes toward the geopolitical concerns that have long driven the work of Allan Sekula. In a cycle of three photo-text sequences in particular, Sekula traces the connections between German borders and Cold War politics (*Sketch for a Geography Lesson,* 1983), a mining industry and a financial institution (*Canadian Notes,* 1986), and maritime space and global economics (*Fish Story,*
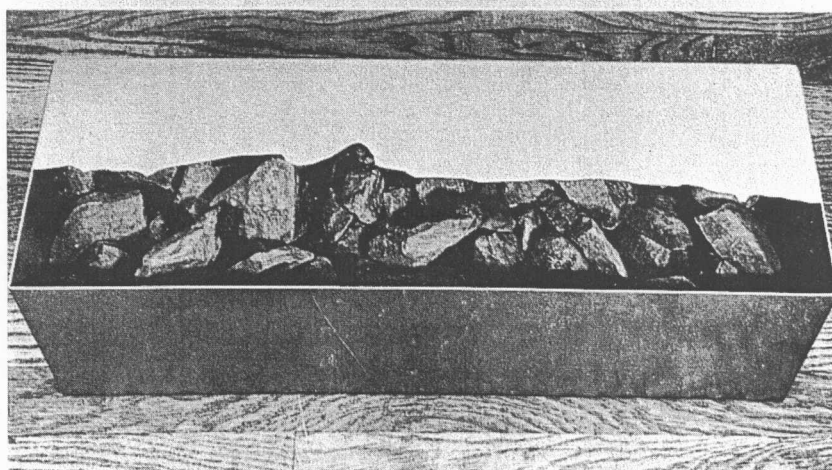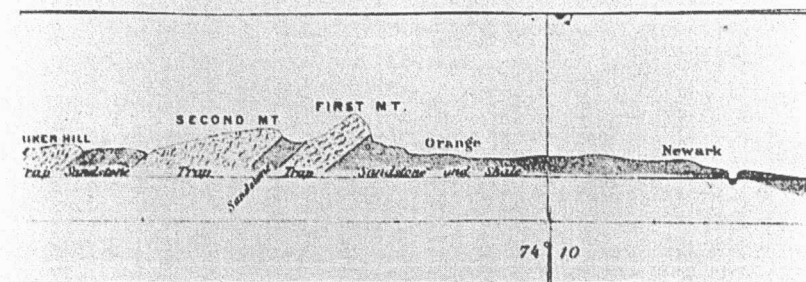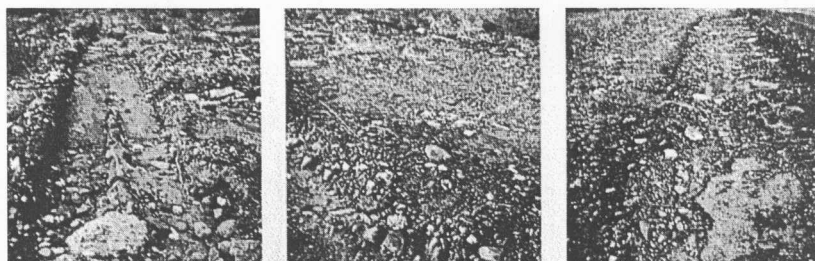
Robert Smithson, *Six Stops on a Section,* 1968, photo, map, bin.

Each block of houses is a self-contained sequence — there is no development — selected from the possible acceptable arrangements. As an example, if a section was to contain eight houses of which four model types were to be used, any of these permutational possibilities could be used:

AABBCCDD	ABCDABCD
AABBDDCC	ABDCABDC
AACCBBDD	ACBDACBD
AACCDDBB	ACDBACDB
AADDCCBB	ADBCADBC
AADDBBCC	ADCBADCB
BBAACCDD	BADCBADC
BBAADDCC	BACDBACD
BBCCAADD	BCADBCAD
BBCCDDAA	BCDABCDA
BBDDAACC	BDACBDAC
BBDDCCAA	BDCABDCA
CCAABBDD	CABDCABD
CCAADDBB	CADBCADB
CCBBDDAA	CBADCBAD
CCBBAADD	CBDACBDA
CCDDAABB	CDABCDAB
CCDDBBAA	CDBACDBA
DDAABBCC	DACBDACB
DDAACCBB	DABCDABC
DDBBAACC	DBACDBAC
DDBBCCAA	DBCADBCA
DDCCAABB	DCABDCAB
DDCCBBAA	DCBADCBA

The eight color variables were equally distributed among the house exteriors. The first buyers were more likely to have obtained their first choice in color. Family units had to make a choice based on the available colors which also took account of both husband and wife's likes and dislikes. Adult male and female color likes and dislikes were compared in a survey of the homeowners:

'LIKE'

Female	Male
Skyway Blue	Skyway Blue
Lawn Green	Colonial Red
Nickle	Patio White
Colonial Red	Yellow Chiffon
Yellow Chiffon	Lawn Green
Patio White	Nickle
Moonstone Grey	Fawn
Fawn	Moonstone Grey

'DISLIKE'

Female	Male
Patio White	Lawn Green
Fawn	Colonial Red
Colonial Red	Patio White
Moonstone Grey	Moonstone Grey
Yellow Chiffon	Fawn
Lawn Green	Yellow Chiffon
Skyway Blue	Nickle
Nickle	Skyway Blue

ground-level. 'Two Home Home'. Jersey City, N.J.   *interiors hallways (front view). Bayonne, N.J.*
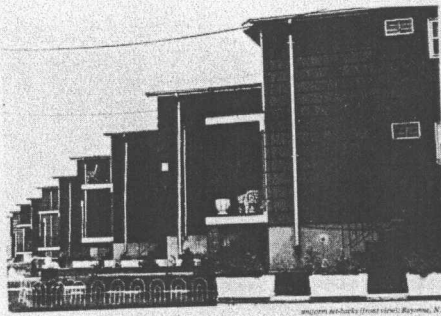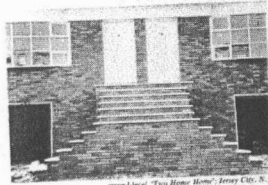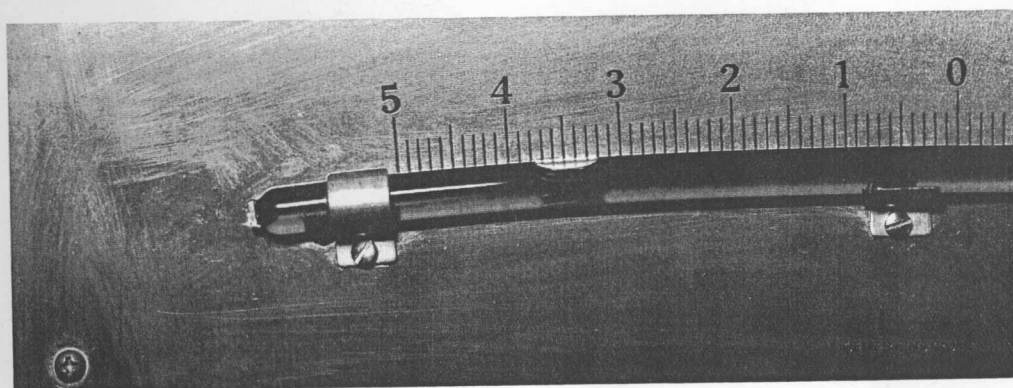
Dan Graham, *Homes for America*, 1966, detail of layout.

```
   lush    wino    rubbydub
          inebriate
                  alcoholic
   barrelhouse bum
```

Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, 1975, detail.

Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, 1995, details of panorama and inclinometer in the mid-Atlantic.

1995). With these "imaginary and material geographies of the advanced capitalist world," he sketches a "cognitive map" of our global order. Yet, with his perspectival shifts in narrative and image, Sekula is as reflexive as any new anthropologist about the hubris of this ethnographic project.[36]

An awareness of sociological presumptions and anthropological complications also guides the feminist mappings of artists like Mary Kelly and Silvia Kolbowski. Thus in *Interim* (1984–89) Kelly registers personal and political positions within the feminist movement through a polyphonic mix of images and voices. In effect, she represents the movement as a kinship system in which she participates as an indigenous ethnographer of art, theory, teaching, activism, friendship, family, mentorship, aging. In various reframings of institutional definitions of art Kolbowski also takes up ethnographic mapping reflexively. In projects like *Enlarged from the Catalogue* (1987–88), she proposes a feminist ethnography of the cultural authority at work in art exhibitions, catalogues, reviews, and the like.[37]

Such reflexivity is essential, for, as Bourdieu warned, ethnographic mapping is predisposed to a Cartesian opposition that leads the observer to abstract the culture of study. Such mapping may thus confirm rather than contest the authority of mapper over site in a way that reduces the desired exchange of dialogical fieldwork.[38] In his mappings of other cultures Lothar Baumgarten is sometimes charged with such arrogance. In several works over the last two decades he has inscribed the names of indigenous societies of North and South America, often imposed by explorers and ethnographers alike, in such settings as the neoclassical dome of the Museum Fredericianum in Kassel (Germany) in 1982 and the modernist spiral of the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1993. Yet rather than ethnographic trophies, these names return, almost as distorted signs of the repressed, to challenge the mappings of the West: in the neoclassical dome as if to declare that the other face of Old World Enlightenment is New World Conquest, and in the Frank Lloyd Wright spiral as if to demand a new globe without narratives of modern and primitive or hierarchies of North and South, a different map in which the framer is also framed, plunged

190

in a parallax in a way that complicates the old anthropological oppositions of an us-here-and-now versus a them-there-and-then.[39]

Yet the Baumgarten example points to another complication: these ethnographic mappings are often commissioned. Just as appropriation art in the 1980s became an aesthetic genre, even a media spectacle, so new site-specific work often seems a museum event in which the institution *imports* critique, whether as a show of tolerance or for the purpose of inoculation (against a critique undertaken by the institution, within the institution). Of course this position within the museum may be necessary to such ethnographic mappings, especially if they purport to be deconstructive: just as appropriation art, in order to engage media spectacle, had to participate in it, so new site-specific work, in order to remap the museum or to reconfigure its audience, must operate inside it. This argument holds for the most incisive of these projects, such as *Mining the Museum* by Fred Wilson and *Aren't They Lovely?* by Andrea Fraser (both 1992).

In *Mining the Museum,* sponsored by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Baltimore, Wilson acted as an archaeologist of the Maryland Historical Society. First he explored its collection (an initial "mining"). Then he reclaimed representations evocative of histories, mostly African-American, not often displayed as historical (a second "mining"). Finally he reframed still other representations that have long arrogated the right to history (for example, in an exhibit labeled "Metalwork 1793–1880," he placed a pair of slave manacles—a third "mining" that exploded the given representation). In so doing Wilson also served as an ethnographer of African-American communities lost, repressed, or otherwise displaced in such institutions. Andrea Fraser performed a different archaeology of museum archives and ethnography of museum cultures. In *Aren't They Lovely?* she reopened a private bequest to the art museum at the University of California at Berkeley in order to investigate how the heterogeneous domestic objects of a specific class member (from eyeglasses to Renoirs) are sublimated into the homogenous public culture of a general art museum. Here Fraser addressed institutional *sublimation,* whereas Wilson focused on institutional *repression.* Nonetheless, both artists play with museology first to expose and then to
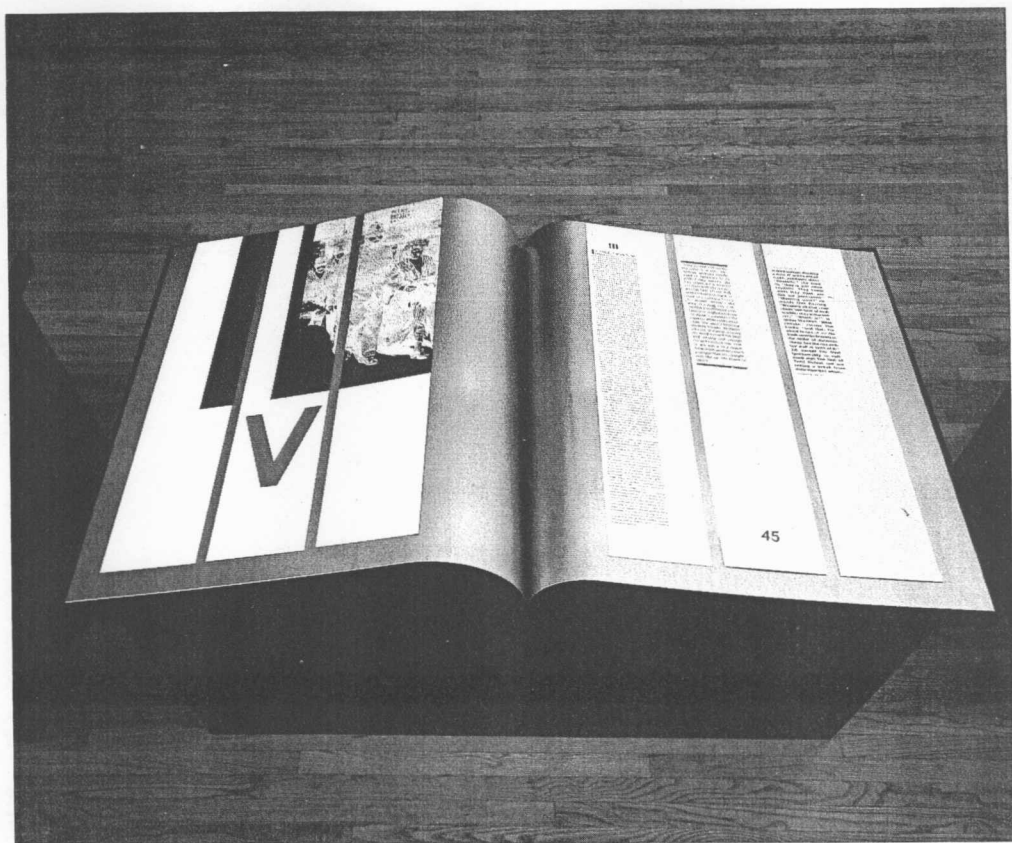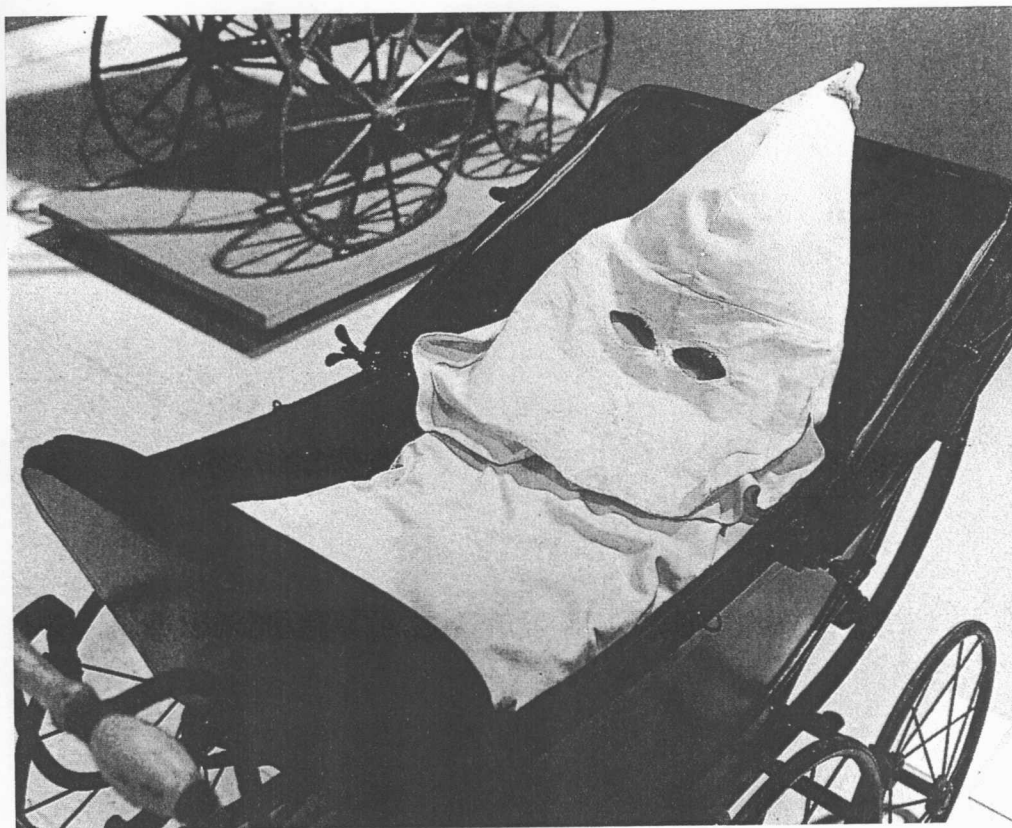
Mary Kelly, *Historia*, 1989, detail of section III.

Silvia Kolbowski, *Enlarged from the Catalogue, February 1990,* detail.
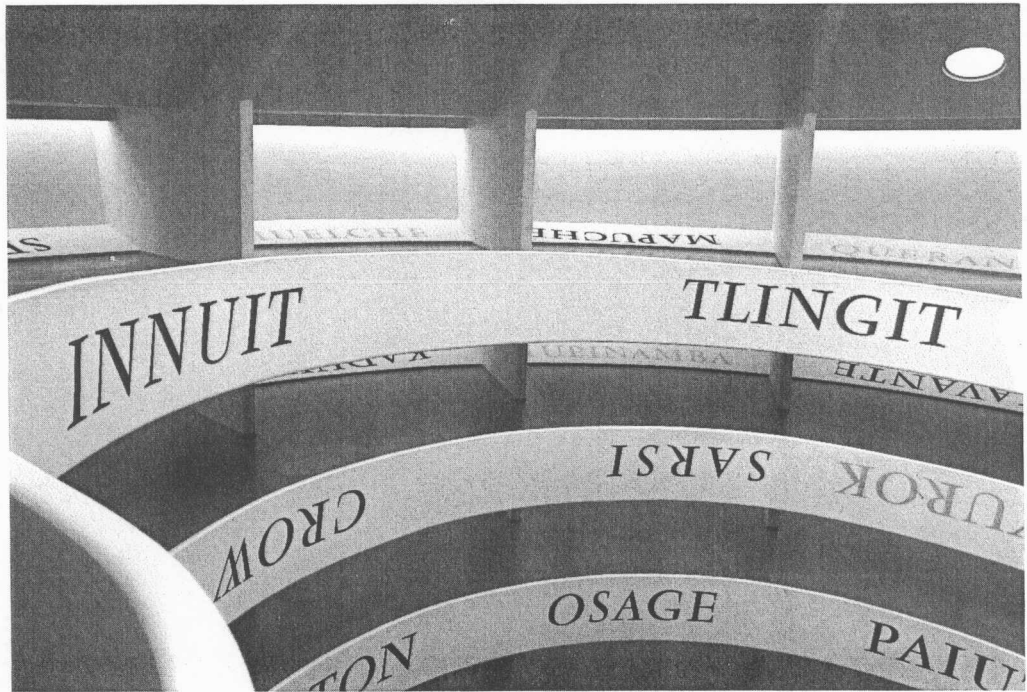
Lothar Baumgarten, *America Invention,* 1993, detail, The Guggenheim Museum.

Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum,* 1992, details of carriage and KKK hood, Maryland Historical Society.

reframe the institutional codings of art and artifacts—how objects are translated into historical evidence and/or cultural exempla, invested with value, and cathected by viewers.

However, for all the insight of such projects, the deconstructive-ethnographic approach can become a gambit, an insider game that renders the institution not more open and public but more hermetic and narcissistic, a place for initiates only where a contemptuous criticality is rehearsed. So, too, as we saw in chapter 4, the ambiguity of deconstructive positioning, at once inside and outside the institution, can lapse into the duplicity of cynical reason in which artist and institution have it both ways—retain the social status of art and entertain the moral purity of critique, the one a complement or compensation for the other.

These are dangers of site-specific work inside the institution; others arise when this work is sponsored outside the institution, often in collaboration with local groups. Consider the example of "Project Unité," a commission of forty or so installations for the Unité d'Habitation in Firminy (France) during the summer of 1993. Here the quasi-anthropological paradigm operated on two levels: first, indirectly, in that this dilapidated housing project designed by Le Corbusier was treated as an ethnographic site (has such modern architecture become exotic in this way?); and then, directly, in that its largely immigrant community was offered to the artists for ethnographic engagement. One project suggests the pitfalls of such an arrangement. Here the neo-conceptual team Clegg & Guttmann asked the Unité residents to contribute casettes for a disco-theque, which were then edited, compiled, and displayed according to apartment and floor in a model of the building as a whole. Lured by collaboration, the inhabitants loaned these cultural proxies, only to have them turned into anthropological exhibits. And the artists did not question the ethnographic authority, indeed the sociological condescension, involved in this facilitated self-representation.

This is typical of the quasi-anthropological scenario. Few principles of the ethnographic participant-observer are observed, let alone critiqued, and only limited engagement of the community is effected. Almost naturally the

project strays from collaboration to self-fashioning, from a decentering of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in neo-primitivist guise. Of course this is not always the case: many artists have used these opportunities to collaborate with communities innovatively, to recover suppressed histories that are sited in particular ways, that are accessed by some more effectively than others. And symbolically this new site-specific work can reoccupy lost cultural spaces and propose historical counter-memories. (I think of the signs posted by Edgar Heap of Birds that reclaim Native American land in Oklahoma and elsewhere, and of the projects developed by collectives like Repo History that point to suppressed histories beneath official commemorations in New York and elsewhere.) Nevertheless, *the quasi-anthropological role set up for the artist can promote a presuming as much as a questioning of ethnographic authority, an evasion as often as an extension of institutional critique.*

At Firminy the ethnographic model was used to animate an old site, but it can also be used to develop a new one. The local and the everyday are thought to resist economic development, yet they can also attract it, for such development needs the local and the everyday even as it erodes these qualities, renders them siteless. In this case site-specific work can be exploited to make these nonspaces seem specific again, to redress them as grounded places, not abstract spaces, in historical and/or cultural terms.[40] Killed as culture, the local and the everyday can be revived as simulacrum, a "theme" for a park or a "history" in a mall, and site-specific work can be drawn into this zombification of the local and the everyday, this Disney version of the site-specific. Tabooed in postmodernist art, values like authenticity, originality, and singularity can return as properties of sites that artists are asked to define or to embellish. There is nothing wrong with this return per se, but sponsors may regard these properties precisely as sited values to develop.[41]

Art institutions may also use site-specific work for economic development, social outreach, and art tourism, and at a time of privatization this is assumed necessary, even natural. In "Culture in Action," a 1993 public art program of Sculpture Chicago, eight projects were sited throughout the city. Led by artists like Daniel Martinez, Mark Dion, and Kate Ericson and Mel Zeigler,

these collaborations did serve "as an urban laboratory to involve diverse audiences in the creation of innovative public art projects."[42] But they could not but also serve as public-relations probes for the corporations and agencies that supported them. Another instance of this ambiguous public service is the yearly designation of a "Cultural Capital of Europe." In Antwerp, the capital for 1993, several site-specific works were again commissioned. Here the artists explored lost histories more than engaged present communities, in keeping with the motto of the show: "On taking a normal situation and retranslating it into overlapping and multiple readings of conditions past and present." Borrowed from Gordon Matta-Clark, a pioneer of site-specific work, this motto mixes the metaphors of site-mapping and situationist *détournement* (defined long ago by Guy Debord as "the reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new ensemble").[43] Yet here again impressive site-specific projects were also turned into tourist sites, and situationist disruption was reconciled with cultural-political promotion.

In these cases the institution may shadow the work that it otherwise highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star. This is not a conspiracy, nor is it cooption pure and simple; nevertheless, it can detour the artist more than reconfigure the site.[44] Just as the *proletkult* author according to Benjamin sought to stand in the reality of the proletariat, only in part to sit in the place of the patron, so the ethnographic artist may collaborate with a sited community, only to have this work redirected to other ends. Often artist and community are linked through an identitarian reduction of both, the apparent authenticity of the one invoked to guarantee that of the other, in a way that threatens to collapse new site-specific work into identity politics *tout court*.[45] As the artist stands *in* the identity of a sited community, he or she may be asked to stand *for* this identity, to represent it institutionally. In this case the artist is primitivized, indeed anthropologized, in turn: here is your community, the institution says in effect, embodied in your artist, now on display.

For the most part the relevant artists are aware of these complications, and sometimes they foreground them. In many performances James Luna has acted out the stereotypes of the Native American in white culture (the orna-

mental warrior, the ritualistic shaman, the drunken Indian, the museum object). In so doing he invites these popular primitivisms to parody them, to force them back on his audience explosively. Jimmie Durham also pressures these primitivisms to the point of critical explosion, of utter bombast, especially in a work like *Self-Portrait* (1988), a figure that plays on the wooden chief of smoke-shop lore with an absurdist text of popular fantasies regarding the Indian male body. In his hybrid works Durham mixes ritualistic and found objects in a way that is preemptively auto-primitivist and wryly anti-categorical. These pseudo-primitive fetishes and pseudo-ethnographic artifacts resist further primitivizing and anthropologizing through a parodic "trickstering" of these very processes. All such strategies—a parody of primitivisms, a reversal of ethnographic roles, a preemptive playing-dead, a plurality of practices—disturb a dominant culture that depends on strict stereotypes, stable lines of authority, and humanist reanimations and museological resurrections of many sorts.[46]

DISCIPLINARY MEMORY AND CRITICAL DISTANCE

I want to elaborate two points in conclusion, the first to do with the siting of contemporary art, the second with the function of reflexivity within it. I suggested above that many artists treat conditions like desire or disease as sites for work. In this way they work *horizontally,* in a synchronic movement from social issue to issue, from political debate to debate, more than *vertically,* in a diachronic engagement with the disciplinary forms of a given genre or medium. Apart from the general shift (noted in chapter 2) from formalist "quality" to neo-avant-garde "interest," there are several markers of this move from medium-specific to discourse-specific practice. In "Other Criteria" (1968) Leo Steinberg saw a turn, in early Rauschenberg combines, from a vertical model of picture-as-window to the horizontal model of picture-as-text, from a "natural" paradigm of image as framed landscape to a "cultural" paradigm of image as informational network, which he regarded as inaugural of postmodernist art making.[47] Yet this shift from vertical to horizontal remained operational at best; its social dimension was not developed until pop. "Its acceptance
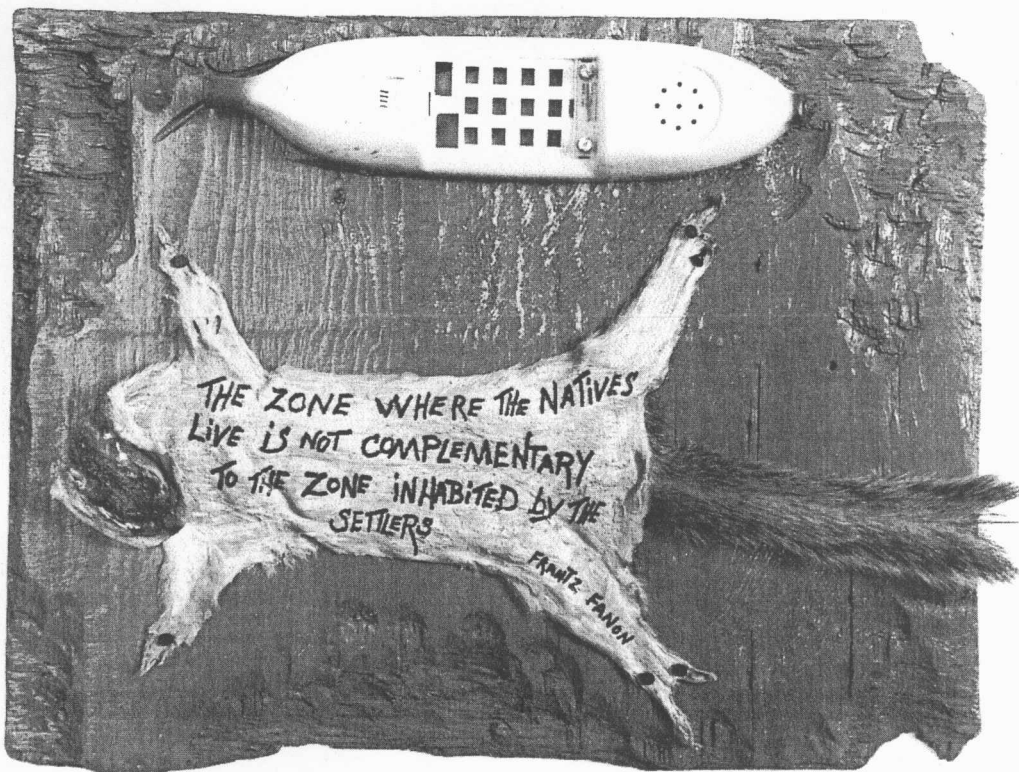
Jimmie Durham, *Often Durham Employs . . .* , 1980s.

Edgar Heap of Birds, *Native Hosts,* 1988, detail, City Hall Park, New York.

of the mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is," Lawrence Alloway predicted long ago in "The Long Front of Culture" (1958). "Rather than frozen in layers in a pyramid," pop placed art "within a continuum" of culture.[48] Thus, if Rauschenberg and company sought other criteria than the formalist terms of medium-specific modernism, so pop repositioned the engagement with high art along the long front of culture. This horizontal expansion of artistic expression and cultural value is furthered, critically and not, in quasi-anthropological art and cultural studies alike.

A few effects of this expansion might be stressed. First, the shift to a horizontal way of working is consistent with the ethnographic turn in art and criticism: one selects a site, enters its culture and learns its language, conceives and presents a project, only to move to the next site where the cycle is repeated. Second, this shift follows a spatial logic: one not only maps a site but also works in terms of topics, frames, and so on (which may or may not point to a general privileging of space over time in postmodern discourse).[49] Now in the postmodernist rupture, associated in chapter 1 with a return to the historical avant-garde, the horizontal, spatial axis still intersected the vertical, temporal axis. In order to extend aesthetic space, artists delved into historical time, and returned past models to the present in a way that opened new sites for work. The two axes were in tension, but it was a productive tension; ideally coordinated, the two moved forward together, with past and present in parallax. Today, as artists follow horizontal lines of working, the vertical lines sometimes appear to be lost.

This horizontal way of working demands that artists and critics be familiar not only with the structure of each culture well enough to map it, but also with its history well enough to narrate it. Thus if one wishes to work on AIDS, one must understand not only the discursive *breadth* but also the historical *depth* of AIDS representations. To coordinate both axes of several such discourses is an enormous burden. And here the traditionalist caution about the horizontal way of working—that new discursive connections may blur old disciplinary memories—must be considered, if only to be countered. Implicit in the charge is that this move has rendered contemporary art dangerously political. Indeed, this image of art is dominant in general culture, with all the calls to purify art of politics

altogether. These calls are obviously self-contradictory, yet they too must be considered in order to be countered.[50]

My second point concerns the reflexivity of contemporary art. I have stressed that reflexivity is needed to protect against an over-identification with the other (through commitment, self-othering, and so on) that may compromise this otherness. Paradoxically, as Benjamin implied long ago, this over-identification may alienate the other further if it does not allow for the othering already at work in representation. In the face of these dangers—of too little or too much distance—I have advocated parallactic work that attempts to frame the framer as he or she frames the other. This is one way to negotiate the contradictory status of otherness as given and constructed, real and fantasmatic.[51] This framing can be as simple as a caption to a photograph, as in The Bowery project by Rosler, or a reversal of a name, as in the signs of Heap of Birds or Baumgarten. Yet such reframing is not sufficient alone. Again, reflexivity can lead to a hermeticism, even a narcissism, in which the other is obscured, the self pronounced; it can also lead to a refusal of engagement altogether. *And what does critical distance guarantee?* Has this notion become somewhat mythical, *a*critical, a form of magical protection, a purity ritual of its own? Is such distance still desirable, let alone possible?

Perhaps not, but a reductive over-identification with the other is not desirable either. Far worse, however, is a murderous disidentification from the other. Today the cultural politics of left and right seem stuck at this impasse.[52] To a great extent the left over-identifies with the other as victim, which locks it into a hierarchy of suffering whereby the wretched can do little wrong. To a much greater extent the right disidentifies from the other, which it blames as victim, and exploits this disidentification to build political solidarity through fantasmatic fear and loathing. Faced with this impasse, critical distance might not be such a bad idea after all. It is to this question that I turn in the final chapter.

Whatever Happened to Postmodernism?

Whatever happened to postmodernism? Not long ago it seemed a grand notion. For Jean-François Lyotard postmodernism marked an end to master narratives that made modernity appear synonymous with progress (the march of reason, the accumulation of wealth, the advance of technology, the emancipation of workers, and so on), while for Fredric Jameson postmodernism prompted a renewed Marxist narrative of different stages of modern culture related to different modes of capitalist production.[1] Meanwhile, for critics committed to advanced art, it signaled a move to break with an exhausted model of modernist art that focused on formal refinements to the neglect of historical determinations and social transformations alike.

Thus even within the left, especially within the left, postmodernism was a disputed notion. Yet not long ago there was a sense of a loose alliance, even a common project, particularly in opposition to rightist positions, which ranged from old attacks on modernism in toto as the source of all evil in our hedonistic society to new defenses of particular modernisms that had become official, indeed traditional, the modernisms of the museum and the academy.[2] For this position postmodernism was "the revenge of the philistines" (the happy phrase of Hilton Kramer), the vulgar kitsch of media hucksters, lower classes, and inferior peoples, a new barbarism to be shunned, like multiculturalism, at all costs.

I supported a postmodernism that contested this reactionary cultural politics and advocated artistic practices not only critical of institutional modernism but suggestive of alternative forms—of new ways to practice culture and politics. And we did not lose. In a sense a worse thing happened: treated as a fashion, postmodernism became *démodé*.

The notion was not only emptied by the media; again, it was disputed within the left, often with good reason. Despite its *adieu* to master narratives, the Lyotardian version of postmodernism was sometimes taken as the latest proper name of the West, now melancholically obsessed with its postcolonial decline (or the premature reports thereof). So, too, despite its focus on capitalist fragmentation, the Jamesonian version of postmodernism was sometimes considered too totalizing, not sensitive enough to cultural differences of many sorts. Finally, the art-critical version of postmodernism was sometimes seen to seal modernism in the formalist mold that we wanted to break. In the process the notion became incorrect as well as banal.

But should we surrender it? Apart from the fact that the left has already conceded too much in this war, the notion may still possess explanatory, even critical power. Consider the influential model of postmodernism developed by Jameson over the last decade. He adapts the long-wave theory of economic cycles elaborated by the economist Ernest Mandel, according to which the capitalist West has passed through four fifty-year periods since the late eighteenth century (roughly twenty-five years each of expansion and stagnation): the Industrial Revolution (until the political crises of 1848) marked by the spread of handcrafted steam engines, followed by three further technological epochs— the first (until the 1890s) marked by the spread of machined steam engines; the second (until World War II) marked by the spread of electric and combustion engines; and the third marked by the spread of machined electronic and nuclear systems.[3] Mandel relates these technological developments to economic stages: from market capitalism to monopoly capitalism around the last fin de siècle, to multinational capitalism in our millennial moment. Jameson in turn relates these economic stages to cultural paradigms: the worldview of much realist art and literature incited by the individualism encouraged by market capitalism; the

abstraction of much high-modernist art and literature in response to the alienation of bureaucratic life under monopoly capitalism; and the pastiche of much postmodernist practice (in art, architecture, fiction, film, fashion, food) as a sign of the dispersed borders, the mixed spaces, of multinational capitalism. His model is not as mechanical as my précis makes it sound: Jameson stresses that these developments are uneven, that each period is a palimpsest of emergent and residual forms, that clean breaks do not occur. Nevertheless, his narrative is often condemned as too grand, as if capital were a great reaper that swept up everything in its path. For my purposes it is too spatial, not sensitive enough to the different speeds as well as the mixed spaces of postmodern society, to the deferred action as well as the incessant expansion of capitalist culture.[4]

As in chapter 1, I borrow the notion of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) from Freud, for whom subjectivity, never set once and for all, is structured as a relay of anticipations and reconstructions of events that may become traumatic through this very relay. I believe modernism and postmodernism are constituted in an analogous way, in deferred action, as a continual process of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts.[5] Each epoch dreams the next, as Walter Benjamin once remarked, but in so doing it revises the one before it. There is no simple *now*: every present is nonsynchronous, a mix of different times; thus there is no timely transition between the modern and the postmodern. In a sense each comes like sex(uality), too early or too late, and our consciousness of each is premature or after the fact.[6] In this regard modernism and postmodernism must be seen together, *in parallax* (technically, the angle of displacement of an object caused by the movement of its observer), by which I mean that our framings of the two depend on our position in the present *and* that this position is defined in such framings.

This notion is abstract, so let me apply it in one reading of the never-complete passage to the postmodern. Rather than adapt the cumbersome Mandelian scheme of four fifty-year periods, I will focus on three moments thirty years apart within the twentieth century: the middle 1930s, which I take to be the culmination of high modernism; the middle 1960s, which mark the full advent of postmodernism; and the middle 1990s. I will treat these moments in

a discursive sense, to see how historical shifts may be registered in theoretical texts—which will thus serve as both objects and instruments of my history. This idiosyncratic narrative will not address art directly; instead, in addition to the relation of technology and culture (which tends to be privileged in these accounts), I will trace crucial shifts in Western conceptions of the individual subject and the cultural other.

My reason for this focus is simple. The quintessential question of modernity concerned identity: in the famous query of Paul Gauguin, *Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?* As we saw in chapter 6, answers often came through an appeal to otherness, either to the unconscious or to the cultural other. Many high modernists felt truth was located there: hence the significance of psychoanalysis and the profusion of primitivisms throughout this century. Indeed, many high modernists conflated these two natural preserves, the unconscious and the cultural other, while some postmodernists argue that they are acculturated in advanced capitalism.[7] In short, the discourses of the unconscious and the cultural other, psychoanalysis and anthropology, are the privileged modern discourses because they speak to identity in these terms. In doing so they may also register more seismographically than any other discourses the epistemological changes that demarcate the postmodern.

Each moment at issue here represents a significant shift in discourses on the subject, the cultural other, and technology. In the middle 1930s Jacques Lacan was concerned with the formation of the ego, especially in the first version of "The Mirror Stage." Claude Lévi-Strauss was involved in the Brazilian fieldwork that revealed the mythological sophistication of "the savage mind." And Walter Benjamin was concerned with the cultural ramifications of modern technologies in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." By the middle 1960s each of these discourses had changed dramatically. The death of the humanist subject, not its formation, was considered variously by Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes (whose signal texts on the topic swirl around the revolts of 1968). So, too, the cultural other, inspired by the liberation wars of the 1950s, had begun

to talk back—to be heard for the first time—most incisively in the rewriting of master-slave dialectic in Hegel and Marx by Frantz Fanon, whose *The Wretched of the Earth* was published in 1961. Meanwhile, the penetration of media into psychic structures and social relations had reached a new level, which was seen in two complementary ways: fatalistically by Guy Debord as an intensity of reification in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and ecstatically by Marshall McLuhan as an "extension of man" in *Understanding Media* (1964).

What has changed in these three discourses since then? In a sense the death of the subject is dead in turn: the subject has returned in the cultural politics of different subjectivities, sexualities, and ethnicities, sometimes in old humanist guise, often in contrary forms—fundamentalist, hybrid, or (as suggested in chapter 5) "traumatic." Meanwhile, at a time when first, second, and third worlds are no longer distinct (if they ever were), anthropology is critical of its protocols regarding the cultural other, and postcolonial imbrications have complicated anticolonial confrontations. Finally, even as our society remains one of spectacular images as outlined by Debord, it has become one of electronic discipline—or, if one prefers the technophilic version in the spirit of McLuhan, one of electronic freedom, of the new possibilities of cyberspace, virtual reality, and the like. My purpose is not to prove that one position is right, the other wrong, nor to assert that one moment is modern, the next postmodern, for again these events do not develop evenly or break cleanly. Instead each theory speaks of changes in its present, but only indirectly, in reconstruction of past moments when these changes are said to have begun, and in anticipation of future moments when these changes are projected to be complete: thus the deferred action, the double movement, of modern and postmodern times.[8]

VICISSITUDES OF THE SUBJECT

First I will consider the discourse on the subject over these three moments, and here as elsewhere I will cite only landmark texts. In "The Mirror Stage" Lacan

argues that our ego is first formed in a primordial apprehension of our body in a mirror (though any reflection will do), an anticipatory image of corporeal unity that as infants we do not yet possess. This image founds our ego in this infantile moment as imaginary, that is, as locked in an identification that is also an alienation. For at the very moment that we see our self in the mirror we see this self as image, as other; moreover, it is usually confirmed by another other— the adult in whose presence the recognition is made. Importantly Lacan suggests that this imaginary unity of the mirror stage produces a retroactive fantasy of a prior stage when our body was still in pieces, a fantasy of a chaotic body, fragmentary and fluid, given over to drives that always threaten to overwhelm us, a fantasy that haunts us for the rest of our life—all those pressured moments when one feels about to *shatter*. In a sense our ego is pledged first and foremost against the return of this body in pieces; this threat turns the ego into an armor (a term Lacan uses) to be deployed aggressively against the chaotic world within *and* without—but especially without, against all others who seem to represent this chaos. (This is why Lacan questions the value of a strong ego, which most of us in ego culture take for granted.)[9]

Lacan does not specify his theory of the subject as historical, and certainly it is not limited to one period. However, this armored and aggressive subject is not just any being across history and culture: it is the modern subject as paranoid, even fascistic. Ghosted in his theory is a contemporary history of which fascism is the extreme symptom: a history of world war and military mutilation, of industrial discipline and mechanistic fragmentation, of mercenary murder and political terror. In relation to such events the modern subject becomes armored—against otherness within (sexuality, the unconscious) and otherness without (for the fascist this can mean Jews, Communists, gays, women), all figures of this fear of the body in pieces come again, of the body given over to the fragmentary and the fluid. Has this fascistic reaction returned? Did it ever go away? Does it rest within us all? (Is this why artists, then as now, resist it with an artifice of abjection?) Or is to ask such questions to repeat the error made by Lacan—that is, to render the fascistic subject too general, too *normal?*[10]

What happens to this theory in the 1960s when the death of the humanist subject is proclaimed? This is a moment of very different historical forces and intellectual imperatives. In Paris it is the twilight of structuralism, of the linguistic paradigm in which cultural activity (the myths of Indian groups for Lévi-Strauss, the structure of the unconscious for Lacan, the modes of Paris fashions for Barthes, and so on) is recoded as language. As noted in chapter 6, this linguistic recoding allows Foucault to announce in 1966 the erasure of man, the great riddle of modernity, "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[11] This recoding also permits Barthes to declare in 1968 the toppling of the author, the great protagonist of humanist-modernist culture, into the play of signs of the text (which henceforth displaces the work as the paradigm of art). Yet the figure under attack here is not only the author-artist of humanist-modernist traditions; it is also the authoritarian personality of fascist structures, the paranoid figure who compels singular speech and forbids promiscuous signification (after all this is the 1960s, the days of rage against all such authoritarian institutions). It is an attack on the fascistic subject as indirectly imagined by Lacan, an attack also made with the very forces that this subject most fears: sexuality and the unconscious, desire and the drives, the *jouissance* (the privileged term of French theory during this time) that shatters the subject, that surrenders it to the fragmentary and the fluid.[12]

These forces were often celebrated, mostly in order to challenge the fascistic subject, a challenge made programmatic by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972).[13] They appeal to schizophrenia not only to disrupt the armored fascistic subject but to exceed the rapacious capitalist one as well. Yet this appeal is dangerous, for if the fascistic subject is threatened by schizophrenic fragments and flows, the capitalist subject may thrive on such disruptions. Indeed, according to Deleuze and Guattari, only extreme schizophrenia is more schizophrenic than capital, more given over to decodings of fixed subjects and structures. In this light, what dispersed the subject in the 1960s, what disrupted its institutions, was a revolutionary force, indeed a whole congeries of conflictual forces (ex-colonial, civil-rights, feminist, student), but a revolutionary force

released by capital—for what is more radical than capital when it comes to old subjects and structures that stand in its way?

However tendentiously, this argument might be extended to the recent return of the subject, by which I mean the partial recognition of new and ignored subjectivities in the 1990s. On the one hand, the *content* of this recognition reveals that the subject pronounced dead in the 1960s was a particular one that only pretended to be universal, only presumed to speak for everyone else. On the other hand, the *context* of this recognition, brazenly defined by George Bush as the New World Order, suggests that these different subjectivities must be seen in relation to the dynamic of capital, its reification and fragmentation of fixed positions. Thus, if we celebrate hybridity and heterogeneity, we must remember that they are also privileged terms of advanced capitalism, that social multiculturalism coexists with economic multinationalism. In the New World Order difference is an object of consumption too, as mega-corporations like Coca-Cola (We are the World) and Benetton (United Colors) know well.[14]

Such a vision does not totalize, for no order, capitalist or otherwise, can control all the forces that it releases. Rather, as Marx and Foucault variously suggest, a regime of power also prepares its resistance, calls it into being, in ways that cannot always be recouped. This is true too of the release of different subjectivities, sexual and ethnic, in the New World Order. Yet these forces need not be articulated progressively, and they may provoke reactive, even atavistic responses—though to blame these forces for such reactions is truly to blame the victims (an ethical position that, perversely, reactionary figures want to arrogate as well).

VISIONS OF THE OTHER

Let me shift now to the second discourse that may register the never-complete passage to the postmodern: the discourse on the cultural other. Here again I will highlight only three moments. The first, the middle 1930s in Western Europe, can be illuminated by a stark juxtaposition. In 1931 a massive exhibition concerning the French colonies was held in Paris, to which the surrealists (rep-

resented by Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, and Yves Tanguy) responded with a little anti-imperialist show titled "The Truth about the Colonies." These artists not only appreciated tribal art for its formal and expressive values, as cubists and expressionists had done before them; they also attended to its political ramifications in the present. Indeed, they constructed a chiasmic identification with the modern legatees of this art who were made to disappear in its Western appropriation. On the one hand, the surrealists argued that these oppressed colonials were like exploited workers in the West, to be supported in similar ways (a placard at the show quoted Marx: "a people that oppresses others does not know to be free"). On the other hand, the surrealists announced that they too were primitives, that, as moderns given over to object desire, they too were fetishists (one exhibit of folkloric figurines was labeled "European fetishes"). In effect, they transvalued the revaluation of fetishism performed in the analyses of commodity and sexual fetishisms. If Marx and Freud used the perversion as a critique of modern European subjects, the surrealists took it as a compliment: they embraced the alterity of the fetishist for its disruptive potential, again through an association of the cultural other and the unconscious. (In this regard the surrealist subject is other to the fascistic subject as imagined by Lacan.)[15]

Yet, as noted in chapter 6, this association remained primitivist: that is, it depended on a racialist analogy between "primitive" peoples and primal stages of psychosexual life.[16] And it served a disastrous purpose in the very different cultural politics of the Nazis. By 1937 the Nazis had produced the infamous exhibitions on "degenerate" art, literature, and music that condemned all modernisms—but especially ones that connected the cultural other and the unconscious, here the arts of "the primitive," the child, and the insane, in order to deploy the disruptive alterity of these alien figures. An ideal to the surrealists, this primitivist fantasm threatened the Nazi subject, who also associated it with Jews and Communists, for this fantasm represented the degenerate forces that endangered its armored identity—again, both from within and from without. Thus, if the surrealists embraced the primitive, the fascists abjected it, aggressed against it. For the surrealists the primitive could not be close enough; for the fascists it was always too close. In the middle 1930s, then, a time of reaction at

home and revolt in the colonies, the question of the other for the European, on the left as well as on the right, was one of *correct distance*.

I borrow this ambiguous term (with its hint of disdain) from the cultural critic Catherine Clément, who notes that, at the very moment that Lacan delivered the paper on the mirror stage near Nazi Germany, Lévi-Strauss was in the Amazon at work on "the ethnological equivalent of the mirror stage": "In both cases the question involved is one of correct distance."[17] What this means in the case of Lacan is fairly clear, for the mirror stage concerns the negotiation of a proper distance between the fledgling ego and its image as well as between the infant and its caretaker. Yet what might it mean for Lévi-Strauss? A first response is also fairly clear: it too concerns the negotiation of a proper distance, here a triangulation among the anthropological participant-observer, the home culture, and the culture of study.[18] But what might correct distance mean specifically for Lévi-Strauss in the middle 1930s, a friend (like Lacan) of the surrealists, a Jew who departed Europe on the verge of fascism? For this anthropologist, who has done much to critique the category of race, to reenvision "the savage mind" as logical and the modern mind as mythical, the fascist extreme of disidentification from the other was disastrous, but the surrealist tendency to over-identification might also be dangerous. For while the first destroyed difference brutally, the second was perhaps too eager to appropriate difference, to assume it, to become it somehow. A certain distance from the other was necessary. (Did Lévi-Strauss sense this danger not only in the psychological primitivisms of surrealist art, but also in the anthropological experiments of the Collège de Sociologie?)[19]

Twenty years later, with the publication of *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), his memoir of the time, Lévi-Strauss reframed this question of correct distance. The primary threat to the other was no longer from fascism but from "monoculture," that is, from the encroachment of the capitalist West on the rest of the world. (At one point he envisions entire Polynesian islands turned into aircraft carriers, and whole areas of Asia and Africa become dingy suburbs and shantytowns.)[20] This fatalistic vision of an exotic world on the wane, which locates its authenticity in a precontact past, is problematic, especially as this remorse about

Pamphlet for "Degenerate 'Art,'" Nazi exhibition of modernist art, 1937, with *The]
Man* (1912) by Otto Freundlich on the cover.

the pure other lost over there can flip into a reaction against the dirty other found right here.[21] Yet it is consistent with the liberal discussion of the cultural other into the 1960s and beyond.

No doubt amid the liberation wars from Algeria to Vietnam, this discussion was a cruel farce to this other, belated in its concern after decades of colonialist violence. How could one speak, Frantz Fanon might ask, of correct distance when this violence was inscribed on the bodies and psyches of colonized and colonizer alike? Yet correct distance does concern Fanon in a text like "On National Culture," first delivered to the second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959.[22] There, again in a rewriting of the master-slave dialectic, he distinguishes three phases in the renewal of national cultures. The first occurs when the native intellectual assimilates the culture of the colonial power. The second begins when this intellectual is called back to native traditions, which he or she tends to treat exotically (socially removed as he or she often is), as so many "mummified fragments" of a folklorish past. Finally, the third begins when this intellectual, now a participant in a popular struggle, helps to forge a new national identity in active resistance to the colonial power and in a contemporary recoding of the native traditions. Here, too, the question is one of correct distance, but it is reversed, asked by the other: how to negotiate a distance not only from the colonial power but from the nativist past? How to renew a national culture that is neither neocolonial nor auto-primitivist? How to leave behind "the obscene narcissism" of Europe "where they are never done talking of Man" and not fall into the triumphal separatism of racialist reaction?[23]

What has happened to this problematic of distance since then? To call our own world postcolonial is to mask the persistence of colonial and neocolonial relations; it is also to ignore that, just as there was always a first world in every third world, there was always a third world in every first world.[24] Yet the *recognition* of this lack of distance is postcolonial, indeed postmodern, at least to the degree that the modern world was often imagined in terms of spatial oppositions not only of culture and nature, city and country, but also of metropolitan core and imperial periphery, the West and the Rest. Today, at least in economies retooled as post-Fordist, these spaces do not orient much, and these poles have

imploded somewhat—which is not to say that power hierarchies have folded, only that they are transformed. However, for my analysis here the question is: how are these worldly shifts registered in recent theory? Derridean deconstruction is pledged to the undoing of such oppositions as they inform Western thought, and Foucauldean archaeology is founded on the refusal of such foundations. Do these poststructuralisms elaborate the events of the postcolonial and the postmodern critically? Or do they serve as ruses whereby these events are sublimated, displaced, or otherwise defused? Or do they somehow do both?

In the modern world the cultural other, confronted in the course of empire, provoked a crisis in Western identity, which some avant-gardes addressed through the symbolic construct of primitivism, the fetishistic recognition-and-disavowal of this otherness. But this resolution was also a repression, and the other has returned at the very moment of its supposed eclipse: delayed by the moderns, its return has become the postmodern event. In a sense the modern incorporation of this otherness allowed for its postmodern eruption as *difference*. This may be what poststructuralism thinks, between the lines, as when Derrida proclaims the end of any "original or transcendental signified . . . outside a system of differences."[25] Yet this address remained precisely between the lines: for the most part poststructuralism failed to answer the Fanonian demand for recognition, and it continued to project the other as an outside, as a space of ideological escape from Western rationality. Thus all the epistemological exoticisms—neo-orientalist oases and neo-primitivist resorts—that appear in the poststructuralist landscape: the Chinese script in Derrida that "interrupts" Western logocentrism, the Chinese encyclopedia in Foucault that confounds the Western order of things, the Chinese women that lure Kristeva with alternative identifications, the Japan of Barthes that represents "the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems,"[26] the other space of nomadism that for Deleuze and Guattari cuts across capitalist territoriality, the other society of symbolic exchange that for Baudrillard haunts our own order of commodity exchange, and so on. Yet if poststructuralism did not find a correct distance, at least it problematized the positing of difference as opposition, the opposing of inside to outside, subject to other. This critique

is extended in postcolonial discourse as well as in gay and lesbian studies, and poststructuralism has proved most productive there over the last decade (the work of Homi Bhabha on the deferral of modernity beyond the West is especially pertinent to my discussion).[27] In this regard poststructuralism cannot be dismissed as the latest proper name of the West any more than postmodernism can be.

FANTASIES OF TECHNOLOGY

I turn finally to the third discourse, the impact of technology on Western culture as thought in the middle 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s, and here again I will argue that, even as one moment leads to the next, this next comprehends the one before. Thus what Guy Debord sees in the spectacle of the 1960s are the technological transformations that Walter Benjamin anticipated in the 1930s; and what cyberpunk writers extrapolate in the 1990s are the cybernetic extensions that Marshall McLuhan predicted in the 1960s. In the discourse on technology the terms attached to these moments project an ideological totality: the age of mechanical reproduction in the 1930s, the age of cybernetic revolution in the 1960s, and the age of technoscience or technoculture in the 1990s (in which research and development, or culture and technology, cannot be separated). The same is true of the narratives that attend these terms, as in the supposed passage from an industrial or Fordist society to a postindustrial or post-Fordist one. For I agree with Mandel that the postindustrial signals not the supercession of industrialization so much as its extension, and I agree with Jameson that the postmodern announces not the end of modernization so much as its apogee.[28] Here, however, I will stay with the ideologeme of distance raised in the discourse on the cultural other, for it is central to the discourse on technology as well.

At the moment of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935–36) mechanical reproduction was a cultural dominant; indeed, given that radio was pervasive, sound film ascendant, and television conceived, "technical reproducibility" is the more accurate term (for the translation of the title as well).[29] In this essay Benjamin argues that such reproducibility withers the aura of art, its uniqueness, authenticity, authority, *distance,* and that this withering "emancipates" art from its ritualistic bases, "brings things 'closer'" to the masses.[30] For Benjamin this eclipse of distance has liberatory potential, as it allows culture to become more collective. But it also has ideological potential, as it permits politics to become more spectacular. Socialism or fascism? Benjamin asks in the most dramatic ultimatum in modernist criticism. Yet by 1936 this alternative could not hold, that is, if the socialist referent includes the Soviet Union of Stalin, who had condemned avant-garde culture four years before and would conspire with Hitler (in the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact) three years later. In short, by 1936 the aestheticization of politics had overtaken the politicization of art. In 1944, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer linked the total culture of Nazi Germany to the culture industry of the United States. And in 1967, in *The Society of the Spectacle,* Debord argued that the spectacle dominated the consumerist West. Finally, in 1988, in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle,* published a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall, he pronounced the spectacle integrated West and East.

In Benjamin the withering of aura, the loss of distance, impacts on the body as well as on the image: the two cannot be separated. Here he makes a double analogy between the painter and the magician, and the cameraman and the surgeon: whereas the first two maintain a "natural distance" from the motif to paint or the body to heal, the second two "penetrate deeply into its web."[31] The new visual technologies are "surgical": they reveal the world in new representations, shock the observer into new perceptions. For Benjamin this "optical unconscious" renders the subject both more critical *and* more distracted (such is his great hope for cinema), and he insists on this paradox as a dialectic. Yet here again this dialectic was difficult to maintain. Already in 1931 Ernst Jünger had argued that technology was "intertwined with our nerves" in a way that subsumed criticality and distraction within "a second, colder consciousness."[32] And not much later, in 1947, Heidegger announced that distance and closeness were folded into "a uniformity in which everything is neither far nor near."[33] By the middle 1960s the Benjaminian dialectic had split in such discourses

on technology as Debord on spectacle and McLuhan on media. Implicitly, whereas Debord develops Benjamin on the image, McLuhan elaborates Benjamin on the body. However, both regard critical distance as doomed. For Debord spectacle subsumes criticality under distraction, and the dialectic of distance and closeness becomes an opposition of real separations concealed by imaginary unities (the modern myths according to Barthes: utopian images of the commodity, the middle class, the nation and so on).[34] On the one hand, external distance is eliminated in spectacle, as peripheral spectators are connected to central images. On the other hand, external distance is reproduced as internal distance, for this very connection to central images separates spectators serially—leaves them alone in spectacular fantasy.[35] This serial separation underwrites all the social separations of class, race, and gender (Debord is concerned only with the first).

Out of similar symptoms McLuhan arrives at a different diagnosis. As in the spectacle of Debord, so in "the global village" of McLuhan: distance, spatial as well as critical, is eclipsed. But rather than separation, McLuhan sees "retribalization," and rather than criticality lost, he sees distraction transvalued.[36] Oblivious to Benjamin, McLuhan develops related ideas, often only to invert them. For McLuhan new technologies do not penetrate the body "surgically" so much as they extend it "electrically." Yet like Benjamin he sees this operation as double: technology is both an excessive stimulus, a shock to the body, *and* a protective shield against such stimulus-shock, with the stimulus converted into the shield (which then invites more stimulus, and so on). Conceived by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), this screening of shock is crucial to the Benjaminian dialectic of criticality and distraction. But in McLuhan this dialectic flies apart into an opposition impossible to reconcile. "We have put our central nervous systems outside us in electric technology," he remarks more than once.[37] Yet sometimes McLuhan sees this extension as an ecstatic body become electric, wired to the world, and sometimes as a "suicidal autoamputation, as if the central nervous system could no longer depend on the physical organs to be protective buffers against the slings and arrows of outrageous mechanism."[38]

With these contradictory tropes of extension and amputation, McLuhan remains within *the logic of technology as prosthesis*—as a divine supplement to the body that threatens a demonic mutilation, or a glorious phallicization of the body that presupposes an horrific castration.[39] Operative in different modernisms, this logic presumes both a male body and a split subject, a subject in lack (indeed, in McLuhan the subject remains a Hamlet wounded by slings and arrows). The question here becomes: have we exceeded this logic today? The feminist model of the cyborg advanced by Donna Haraway attests that the interface of human and machine need not be imagined in terms of castration fears and fetish fantasies. "The cyborg is a creature in a postgender world," Haraway writes in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985), and it lives the human-machine interface as a condition of "fruitful couplings" rather than as a trauma of lost unity and present splitting.[40] But the question for the cyborg is: what remains of subjectivity, at least as defined by psychoanalysis? The marvelous cyborg is no less mythical than the Oedipal subject, and at least the Oedipal subject *is* a subject—a construct that helps one to understand fears and fantasies regarding technology (among other things).[41] These fears and fantasies have not diminished; on the contrary, they have become more extreme, *more effective*, in proportion to the dis/connection advanced in the logic of the prosthesis. Is our media world one of generous interaction, as benign as an ATM withdrawal or an Internet inquiry, or one of invasive discipline, each of us a "dividual" electronically tracked, genetically traced, not as a policy of a maleficent Big Brother but as a matter of quotidian administration?[42] Is our media world one of a cyberspace that renders bodies immaterial, or one in which bodies, not transcended at all, are marked, often violently, according to racial, sexual, and social differences?[43] Clearly it is both at once, and *this new intensity of dis/connection is postmodern.*

I can convey this postmodern dis/connection only anecdotally. With the sacrificed students in Beijing and the racial riots in Los Angeles, the murderous war in the Persian Gulf and the ethnic bloodbath in Bosnia, the bombing in Oklahoma City and the trial of O. J. Simpson, we have become *wired* to spectacular events. This wiring connects and disconnects us simultaneously, renders

us both psychotechnologically immediate to events and geopolitically remote from them; in this way it subsumes both the imaginary effects of spectacle in Debord and the nervous networking of media in McLuhan. Such dis/connection is hardly new (think of the Kennedy assassinations, the Munich Terror Olympics, the Challenger explosion), but it has reached a new level of oxymoronic pain-and-pleasure. Such was the CNN Effect of the Gulf War for me: repelled by the politics, I was riveted by the images, by a psycho-techno-thrill that locked me in, as smart bomb and spectator are locked in as one. A thrill of techno-mastery (my mere human perception become a super machine vision, able to see what it destroys and to destroy what it sees), but also a thrill of an imaginary dispersal of my own body, of my own subjecthood.[44] Of course, when the screens of the smart bombs went dark, *my* body did not explode. On the contrary, it was bolstered: in a classic fascistic trope, my body, my subjecthood, was affirmed in the destruction of other bodies. In this techno-sublime, then, there is a partial return of a fascistic subjecthood, which occurs at the level of the mass too, for such events are massively mediated, and they produce a psychic collectivity—a psychic nation, as it were, that is also defined against cultural otherness both within and without.[45]

QUESTIONS OF DISTANCE

These are only some of the splittings that occur with a new intensity today: a spatiotemporal splitting, the paradox of immediacy produced through mediation; a moral splitting, the paradox of disgust undercut by fascination, or of sympathy undercut by sadism; and a splitting of the body image, the ecstasy of dispersal rescued by armoring, or the fantasy of disembodiment dispelled by abjection. If a postmodern subject can be posited at all, it is made and unmade in such splittings. Is it any wonder that this subject is often dysfunctional, suspended between obscene proximity and spectacular separation? Is it any wonder that when it does function it is often on automatic, given over to fetishistic responses, to partial recognitions syncopated with complete disavowals: I know about AIDS, but I cannot get it; I know sexists and racists, but I am not one; I

know what the New World Order is, but my paranoia embraces it anyway. (Incidentally, paranoia informs all three discourses at issue here across all three moments—the middle 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s. Indeed, it might be the concept to connect them most effectively—if that is not too paranoid a claim!)[46]

As we saw in chapter 4, this fetishistic structure of recognition-and-disavowal (*I know but nevertheless*) is typical of cynical reason. Cynical reason does not cancel so much as relinquish agency—as if agency were a small price to pay for the shield that cynicism might provide, for the immunity that ambivalence might secure. Yet this is not a necessary condition, and the splittings of the subject need not render one politically dysfunctional. Consider again such spectacles of the last decade as the Clarence Thomas hearing, the Rodney King case, and the Simpson trial. These dramas involved extreme violations and difficult contradictions of difference—racial, sexual, and social. As such they were events of deep divisions, but they were also events around which impossible identifications became possible. Of course nothing guarantees these identifications: they can be negative, politically reactionary and socially destructive (in the 1990s rightist disidentifications have overwhelmed leftist over-identifications). Here too we confront the question of correct distance.

In different ways this question is the very riddle of the subject regarding its body image, its cultural others, and its technological prostheses. It is also the very riddle of the subject regarding its critical theory, which is usually thought to depend on an intellectual distance from its object. As we have seen in modernist and postmodernist narratives alike, this distance is often presented as lost or doomed. In *One-Way Street* (1928) Benjamin offers one version of this eclipse under the sign "This Space for Rent":

> Fools lament the decay of criticism. For its day is long past. Criticism is a matter of correct distancing. It was at home in a world where perspectives and prospects counted and where it was still possible to take a standpoint. Now things press too closely on human society.[47]

This is the topos of the loss of auratic distance developed in the Artwork essay (1935–36), for Benjamin locates this pressing in advertisements and films, which "abolish the space where contemplation moved."[48] Significant for me is the *visuality* of this problematic. In the Artwork essay Benjamin borrows an important opposition in art history between the optical and the tactile (developed by Alois Riegl in *The Late Roman Art Industry* [1901] and other works).[49] In Benjamin the value of these two terms is not fixed: in *One-Way Street* the tactile presses out critical distance, while in the Artwork essay the critical is reinvented in terms of tactile shock (both dada and cinema possess "a tacile quality" that "hits the spectator like a bullet").[50] Benjamin is no less ambivalent about the related value of distance: *One-Way Street* laments its loss, while the Artwork essay welcomes it. Yet, again, what interests me is the notion that "perspectives and prospects" underwrite critical distance.

This notion recalls a central text in art history, *Studies in Iconology* (1939), published by Erwin Panofsky three years after the Artwork essay. In his introduction Panofsky is concerned with the foundational question of the discipline, the renaissance of classical antiquity, and he too posits correct perspective as the precondition of critical history:

> For the medieval mind, classical antiquity was too far removed and at the same time too strongly present to be conceived as an historical phenomenon. . . . Just as it was impossible for the Middle Ages to elaborate the modern system of perspective, which is based on the realization of a fixed distance between the eye and the object, and thus enables the artist to build up comprehensive and consistent images of visible things; just as impossible was it for them to evolve the modern idea of history, which is based on the realization of an intellectual distance between the present and the past, and thus enables the scholar to build up comprehensive and consistent concepts of bygone periods.[51]

Too far, too close; the imperative of proper perspective; the analogy between pictorial and spatial constructs: Benjamin rejects this epistemology as historicist

a year later in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940).[52] One can justify Panofsky: he offered a different (almost Benjaminian) rendering of perspective fifteen years before in *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1924–25); he is concerned here with a pedagogical methodology capable of academic confirmation and replication; and so on. Nevertheless, he does present perspective as a true seeing, and he does figure history as a scientific retrospect.

Today this epistemology is impossible to retain, but the questions of correct distance and critical history have hardly disappeared. This book began with a question about critical history: what allows for a critical recovery of a past practice? How can we understand the insistence of these historical returns? Panofsky answered with "an intellectual distance between the present and the past." I have advanced a model of deferred action, a relay of anticipation and reconstruction. This book concludes here with a question about correct distance. Panofsky responded with a claim of perspectival truth. I have advanced a model of parallactic framing that attempts to keep our present projections in view as well. "A historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary," Benjamin wrote at the end of his life. "Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one."[53]

Critical distance cannot be foregone *and* it must be rethought; it does little good to lament or to celebrate its putative passing. Often the lamenters project a mythical moment of true criticality, while the celebrants see critical distance as instrumental mastery in disguise.[54] However, this suspicion of distance does touch critical theory at a sensitive point, which is the relation between critical distance and social distinction.[55] In *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) Nietzsche intimates that two contrary impulses are at work in all critical judgment: a "noble" will to distinction or a "base" reflex of resentment. At one point he asserts that the difference between the noble and the base (in ethical-political terms) depends on the distance between the high and the low (in social-spatial terms): "It was only this *pathos of distance* that authorized them [the noble] to create values and name them—what was utility to them?"[56] In effect, Nietzsche poses the question of whether criticism can ever be free of distinctions on the noble side and resentments on the base side.[57]

Etymologically, to criticize is to judge or to decide, and I doubt if any artist, critic, theorist, or historian can ever escape value judgments. We can, however, make value judgments that, in Nietzschean terms, are not only reactive but active—and, in non-Nietzschean terms, not only distinctive but useful. Otherwise critical theory may come to deserve the bad name with which it is often branded today.

toward an ecstatic shattering that is also a traumatic breaking; both are obsessed with figures of the stigma and the stain.

79

To question this indifference is not to dismiss a noncommunitarian politics, a possibility explored in both cultural criticism (e.g., Leo Bersani) and political theory (e.g., Jean-Luc Nancy).

80

Kelley, quoted in Sussman, ed., *Catholic Tastes*, 86.

81

"Self-divestiture in these artists is also a renunciation of cultural authority," Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit write of Samuel Beckett, Mark Rothko, and Alain Resnais in *Arts of Impoverishment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Yet then they ask: "Might there, however, be a 'power' in such impotence?" If so, shouldn't it be questioned in turn?

82

A few supplemental comments: (1) If there is, as some have remarked, an autobiographical turn in art and criticism, it is often a paradoxical genre, for again, per trauma, there may be no "self" there. (2) Just as the depressive is doubled by the aggressive, so the traumatized can turn hostile, and the violated can violate in turn. (3) The reaction against poststructuralism, the return of the real, also expresses a nostalgia for universal categories of being and experience. The paradox is that this rebirth of humanism would occur in the register of the traumatic. (4) At moments in this chapter I have allowed trauma and abjection to touch, as they do in the culture, even though they are distinct theoretically, developed in different lines of psychoanalysis.

6

THE ARTIST AS ETHNOGRAPHER

1

Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 220–38. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent Benjamin references are to this text.

2

Benjamin explicitly charges only two movements, activism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (new objectivity): the first, associated with writers like Heinrich Mann and Alexander Döblin, supplies

the bourgeois apparatus with revolutionary themes, while the second, associated with the photographer Albert Renger-Patzsch, serves "to renew from within—that is, fashionably—the world as it is." Indeed, Benjamin continues in terms relevant today, this photography turns "even abject poverty . . . into an object of enjoyment."

3

See, for example, Benjamin Buchloh, "Since Realism there was . . . (on the current conditions of factographic art)," in Marcia Tucker, ed., *Art & Ideology* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984). Buchloh discusses the work of Allan Sekula and Fred Lonidier in particular.

4

"Author as Producer" arose out of the unique high-modernist conjuncture of artistic innovation, socialist revolution, and technological transformation, and even then Benjamin was late; Stalin had condemned avant-garde culture (productivism above all) by 1932, an event that must inflect any reading of this text. Today the high-modernist triangulation is long gone: there is no socialist revolution in the traditional sense, and technological transformation has only displaced artists and critics further from the dominant mode of production. In short, productivist strategies are hardly adequate alone.

Vestiges of productivism remain in postwar art and theory, first in the proletarian guise adopted by sculptors from David Smith to Richard Serra, and then in the production rhetoric of post-studio art and textual theory (e.g., *Tel Quel* in France). By the early 1970s, however, critiques of productivism emerged; Jean Baudrillard argued that the means of representation had become as important as the means of production (see chapter 4, note 50). This led to a situationist turn in cultural intervention (of media, site, address, and so on), now followed, I will suggest here, by an ethnographic turn. (I trace the productivist legacy in "Some Uses and Abuses of Russian Constructivism," in Richard Andrews, ed., *Art into Life* [New York: Rizzoli, 1990].)

5

To call it a myth is not to say that it is *never* true but to question whether it is *always* true—and to ask whether it might obscure other articulations of the political and the artistic. In a sense the substitution of politics for art now displaces the substitution of theory for politics.

6

This danger should be distinguished from "the indignity of speaking for others." In a 1983 "imaginary interview" with this title Craig Owens called on artists to go beyond the productivist problematic to "challenge the activity of representation itself'" (in William

Olander, ed., *Art and Social Change* [Oberlin: Oberlin College, 1983]). Despite the poststructuralist language here, "the indignity of speaking for others" presents representation as literal displacement. This taboo pervaded the North American cultural left in the 1980s, where it effected a censorious silence as much as an alternative speech.

7

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 146. Not only is revolutionary language mythical too (here it is also masculinist), but this very notion of language, which falls between the productivist and the performative, is almost magical: language here confers reality, conjures it up.

8

The primitivist fantasy may also operate in productivist modernisms, at least to the extent that the proletariat is often seen as primitive in this sense too, both negatively (the mass as primal horde) and positively (the proletariat as tribal collective).

9

For example, see Bataille, "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933), in *Visions of Excess*, ed. and trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), and Senghor, *Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie et Malagache d'Expression Française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948).

10

James Clifford describes the Leiris text as "self-ethnography" in *The Predicamant of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 170.

11

See Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness," in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), and Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

12

Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 11–12. For a discussion of related mappings in art history see my "The Writing on the Wall," in Michael Govan, ed., *Lothar Baumgarten, America: Invention* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1993).

13

Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950), 1. This strange association of the savage and the neurotic—indeed, of the primitive, the insane, and the child—was so fundamental to high modernism as to seem natural. Its disarticulation would expose several myths.

14

A new danger has arisen here, however: an aestheticizing, indeed a fetishizing, of signs of the hybrid and spaces of the in-between. Both not only privilege the mixed but, more problematically, presuppose a prior distinction or even purity.

15

See Franco Rella, *The Myth of the Other*, trans. Nelson Moe (Washington: Maisonneuve Press, 1994), especially 27–28. One can counter that this revaluing (e.g., of "black" or "queer") is part of any politics of representation. See Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in Kobena Mercer, ed., *Black Film, Black Cinema* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1988).

16

For example, the *négritude* movement associated colonized and proletariat as objects of oppression and reification (see Césaire, *Discourse of Colonialism* [Paris, 1955]), a political *affiliation* that prepared a political *appropriation*. In "Black Orpheus," his preface to the Senghor anthology (cited in note 9), Sartre wrote: "At once the subjective, existential, ethnic idea of *negritude* 'passes,' as Hegel puts it, into the objective, positive, exact idea of *proletariat*. . . . In fact, negritude appears as the minor term of a dialectical progression" (xl). To which Fanon responded: "I had been robbed of my last chance. . . . And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, preexisting, waiting for me . . . waiting for that turn of history" (*Black Skin*, 133–34).

17

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 364. I return to this unveiling in chapter 7.

18

Paradoxically, this preservation of the self may also be effected through a *moral masochism* in the politics of alterity, which Nietzsche attacked in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887) as the *ressentiment* at work in the master-slave dialectic. As Anson Rabinbach suggested to me, Sartre exhibits this masochism in his famous preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* where, as if in response to the charge of dialectical appropriation (see note 16), he now states that decolonialization is "the end of the dialectic" (1961; trans. Constance Farrington [New York: Grove Press, 1968], 31). Sartre then trumps the Fanonian argument that colonization has also dehumanized the colonizer with a masochistic call to redouble the redemptive vengeance of the colonized. Is this moral masochism a disguised version of "ideological patronage"? Is it resentment to a second degree, a position of power in the pretense of its surrender? Is it another way to maintain the centrality of the subject through the other?

19

On psychoanalysis in this regard see Mikkel Borch-Jabobsen, *The Freudian Subject,* trans. Catherine Porter (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1988). I am also indebted here to Mark Seltzer, "Serial Killers, I and II," in *Differences* (1993) and *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1995).

20

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 247. This is his claim against the Sartrean dialectic.

21

See Foucault, *The Order of Things,* 340–43. "'Anthropologization' is the great internal threat to knowledge in our day" (348). But then this restoration may be what quasi-anthropological art intends; certainly it is effected in some cultural studies. *The Order of Things* concludes with the image of man washed away; *Crusoe's Footprints,* Patrick Bantlinger's overview of cultural studies, concludes with his prints in the sand (New York: Routledge, 1990). This multiplicity of *men* may not disturb the category of *man.*

22

Clifford develops the notion of "ethnographic self-fashioning" in *The Predicament of Culture,* in large part from Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). This suggests a commonality between new anthropology and new historicism, more on which below.

23

In "World Tour," a series of installations in different sites, Renée Green performs this nomadism of the artist reflexively. On the one hand, she works over traces of the African diaspora; on the other hand, she makes an art tour (her "World Tour" T-shirt plays on the model of the rock concert).

24

In *The Predicament of Culture* Clifford extends this notion to ethnography in general: "Is not every ethnographer something of a surrealist, a reinventor and reshuffler of realities?" (147). Some have questioned how reciprocal art and anthropology were in the surrealist milieu. See Jean Jamin, "L'ethnographie mode d'inemploi. De quelques rapports de l'ethnologie avec le malaise dans la civilisation," in J. Hainard and R. Kaehr, eds., *Le mal et la douleur* (Neuchâtel: Musée d'ethnographie, 1986); and Denis Hollier, "The Use-Value of the Impossible," *October* 60 (Spring 1992).

25

Not unique to the new anthropology, this artist envy is evident in the rhetorical analysis of historical discourse initiated in the 1960s. "There have been no significant attempts," Hayden

White writes in "The Burden of History" (1966), "at surrealistic, expressionistic, or existentialist historiography in this century (except by novelists and poets themselves), for all of the vaunted 'artistry' of the historians of modern times" (*Tropics of Discourse* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978], 43). Clifford Geertz put "textual" anthropology on the map in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

26

Clifford: "Interpretive anthropology, by viewing cultures as assemblages of texts . . . has contributed significantly to the defamiliarization of ethnographic authority" (*The Predicament of Culture,* 41).

27

Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1. Granted, the "discursive paradigms" of the new anthropology are different—poststructuralist rather than structuralist, dialogical rather than decoding. But a Bahktinian orchestration of informant voices does not void ethnographic authority. In "Banality in Cultural Studies," Meaghan Morris comments: "Once 'the people' are both a source of authority for a text and a figure of its own critical activity, the populist enterprise is not only circular but (like most empirical sociology) narcissistic in structure" (in Patricia Mellencamp, ed., *The Logics of Television* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990], 23).

28

See Fredric Jameson, *Ideologies of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). As Jameson notes, the first textualist move was needed to loosen anthropology from its positivist traditions. In "New Historicism: A Comment" Hayden White points to a "referential fallacy" (related to my "realist assumption") and a "textualist fallacy" (related to my "textualist projection"): "Whence the charge that New Historicism is reductionist in a double sense: it reduces the social to the status of a function of the cultural, and then further reduces the cultural to the status of a text" (in H. Aram Veeser, ed., *The New Historicism* [New York: Routledge, 1989], 294).

29

See Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture,* 30–32. "The ethnographic present" is passé in anthropology.

30

For this aspect of conceptual art see Joseph Kosuth, "The Artist as Anthropologist," *The Fox* 1 (1975).

31

Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). This critique was written in the heyday of poststructuralism, and Sahlins, then close to Jean Baudrillard, favored (linguistic) symbolic logic over (Marxian) practical reason. "There is no material logic apart from the practical interest," Sahlins writes, "and the practical interest of man in production is symbolically constituted" (207). "In Western culture," he continues, "the economic is the main site of symbolic production. For us the production of goods is at the same time the privileged mode of symbolic production and transmission. The uniqueness of bourgeois society consists not in the fact that the economic system escapes symbolic determination, but that the economic symbolism is structurally determining" (211).

32

The role of ethnographer also allows the critic to recoup an ambivalent position between academic and other subcultures as critical, especially when the alternatives seem limited to academic irrelevance or subcultural affirmation.

33

These exchanges are not trivial at a time when enrollments are counted closely—and when some administrators advocate a return to old disciplines, while others seek to recoup interdisciplinary ventures as cost-effective programs. Incidentally, these exchanges seem governed by a used-car principle of discourse: when one discipline wears out a paradigm ("text" in literary criticism, "culture" in anthropology), it trades it in, passes it on.

34

Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Ideology of the Scientists & Other Essays* (London: Verso, 1990), 97. The ethnographic turn in cultural studies and new historicism is rarely questioned. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), a foundational text of new historicism, Stephen Greenblatt is explicit: "I have attempted instead [of literary criticism] to practice a more cultural or anthropological criticism—if by 'anthropological' here we think of interpretive studies of culture by Geertz, James Boon, Mary Douglas, Jean Duvignaud, Paul Rabinow, Victor Turner, and others." Such criticism sees "literature as a part of the system of signs that constitute a given culture" (4). Yet this seems a methodological circle: textual criticism approaches anthropological interpretation, but only because its new object, culture, is reformulated as text.

For Stuart Hall British cultural studies at the Birmingham Centre developed from literary to cultural to ideological criticism, with a "much broader, 'anthropological' definition" of culture as the result (quoted in Brantlinger, *Crusoe's Footprints*, 64). This turn was also basic to North American cultural studies. For Janice Radway the Birmingham Centre along

with American studies programs prompted the move from a "literary-moral definition of culture to an anthropological one." Also important was reader-response criticism, which prepared the "ethnographies of reading" of cultural studies proper (*Reading the Romance* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991], 3–4). Here again an ethnographic basis is acknowledged but not questioned. The new anthropology does question ethnographic assumptions, of course, but *its* assumptions are rarely questioned, at least when taken up in cultural studies and new historicism.

35

Thus, for example, John Lindell, a member of the Gran Fury artist collective, has stated: "In terms of my own work, homosexual desire is a site and the gay world at large is a site. Again I'm trying to loosen up the notion of a physical site: a site may be a group of people, a community" ("Roundtable On Site-Specificity," *Documents* 4/5 [Spring 1994]: 18).

36

For Martha Rosler, see especially *3 Works* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1981); and for Allan Sekula see *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973–1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1984) and *Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995). For Fredric Jameson on cognitive mapping see *Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), passim.

37

For Mary Kelly see *Interim* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990); and for Silvia Kolbowski see *XI Projects* (New York: Border Editions, 1993). Many other artists either question documentary representations and/or draw on ethnographic mappings (Susan Hiller, Leandro Katz, Elaine Reichek . . .). For one overview see Arnd Schneider, "The Art Diviners," *Anthropology Today* 9, no. 2 (April 1993).

38

See Bourdieu, *Outline for a Theory of Practice*, 2.

39

On these oppositions see Fabian, *Time and the Other*, and on Baumgarten see my "The Writing on the Wall" in Govan, ed., *Lothar Baumgarten, America: Invention*.

40

See the remarks of Miwon Kwon in "Roundtable on Site-Specificity." Again, a redemptive logic governs much site-specific work, from the reclamation projects of Smithson onward.

41

A recent instance was "The 42nd Street Art Project," a joint venture of an arts organization, a design firm, and the 42nd Street Development Project. Here again there were individual

works of aesthetic and/or critical invention. Nonetheless, art, graphics, and fashion were deployed to improve the image of a notorious piece of real estate slated for redevelopment.

42

"Culture in Action" pamphlet (Chicago: Sculpture Chicago, 1993); also see Mary Jane Jacob et al., *Culture in Action* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

43

Guy Debord, "Detournement as Negation and Prelude," *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3 [December 1959], reprinted in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 55.

44

Put glibly, if the 1970s was the decade of the theorist and the 1980s the decade of the dealer, the 1990s may be the decade of the itinerant curator who gathers nomadic artists at different sites. With the art market crash in 1987 and the political controversies thereafter (Robert Mapplethorpe, "obscene" performance art, Andres Serrano . . .), support for contemporary art declined in the United States. Funding was also redirected to regional institutions, which often imported metropolitan artists nonetheless, as did European institutions where funding remained relatively high. Thus the rise of the migrant ethnographic artist.

45

See the remarks of Miwon Kwon and Renée Green in "Roundtable on Site-Specificity."

46

On trickstering see Jean Fisher, *Jimmie Durham* (New York: Exit Art, 1989); on playing dead see Miwon Kwon, "Postmortem Strategies," *Documents* 3 (Summer 1993). Again, postcolonial discourse now tends to fetishize personae like the trickster and places like the in-between.

I have focused on Native American artists, but others use these strategies as well. In a 1993 performance at Art in General (New York) Rikrit Tiravanija invited viewers to dance to the sound track of *The King and I* in a parody of popular stereotypes (in this case of Southeast Asian culture) as well as a reversal of ethnographic roles. In *Import/Export Funk Office* (1992) Renée Green also reversed ethnographic roles when she questioned the German critic Dietrich Dietrichsen about hip-hop culture.

47

See Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 82–91.

48

Lawrence Alloway, "The Long Front of Culture" (1959), in Brian Wallis, ed., *This is Tomorrow Today: The Independent Group and British Pop* (New York: P.S. 1, 1987), 31.

49

This claim is made by critics like Fredric Jameson and developed by urban geographers like David Harvey and Edward Soja. I return to it in chapter 7.

50

A similar reaction against art burdened by politics occurred in the late 1930s with the rise of American formalism. Only today this reaction does not require the time of a generation: it can occur within the span of a Whitney Biennial, as suggested by its swing from political engagement in 1993 to stylish irrelevance in 1995. So, too, the old formalism sought to sublimate political renovation in artistic innovation; the contemporary version does not even attempt this.

51

For example, "race" is a historical construct, but this knowledge does not remove its material effects. As a fetishistic object, knowledge of "race" does not vanquish belief (indeed enjoyment) in it; they exist side by side, even or especially among the enlightened.

52

It is this impasse that prompted the cult of abjection mentioned in chapter 5. On the one hand, this cult is fatigued with the left politics of difference and dubious about its communitarian sentiments. On the other hand, it refuses the right politics of disidentification and sides with the wretched against the reactionary.

7
___

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO POSTMODERNISM?

1

See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). The slippage between "modernity," "modern culture," and "modernist art" is notorious in discussions of postmodernism.

2

The range here is from Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), a foundational text of neoconservatism, to Hilton Kramer, *The Revenge of the Philistines* (New York: Free Press, 1985).