

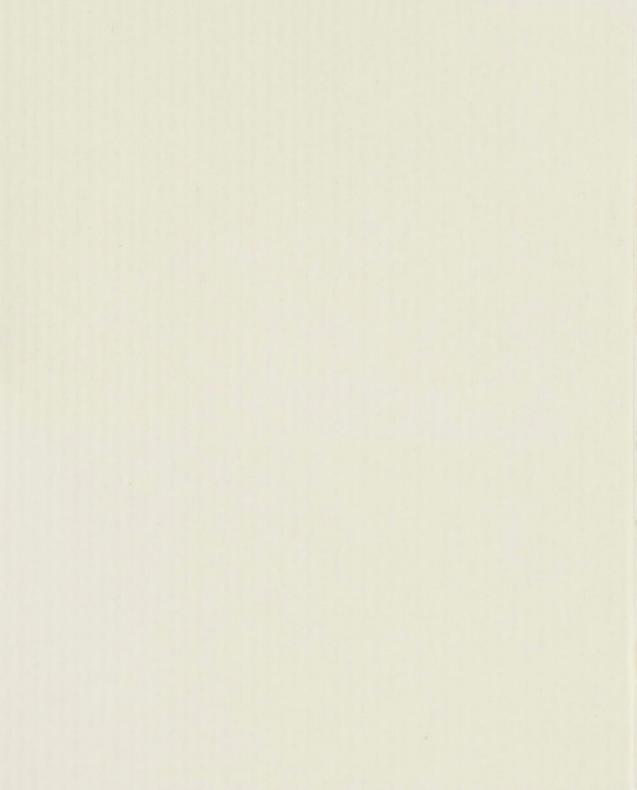
DÉFINITIONS DE LA CULTURE VISUELLE II

UTOPIES MODERNISTES —
POSTFORMALISME ET PURETÉ DE LA VISION

DEFINITIONS OF VISUAL CULTURE II

MODERNIST UTOPIAS —
POSTFORMALISM AND PURE VISUALITY





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UTOPIES MODERNISTES — POSTFORMALISME
ET PURETÉ DE LA VISION

DEFINITIONS OF VISUAL CULTURE II,

MODERNIST UTOPIAS — POSTFORMALISM

AND PURE VISUALITY

Actes du colloque tenu au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal les 9 et 10 décembre 1995 Définitions de la culture visuelle II. Utopies modernistes — Postformalisme et pureté de la vision

Definitions of Visual Culture II, Modernist Utopias — Postformalism and Pure Visuality

Actes du colloque tenu au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal les 9 et 10 décembre 1995

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Nul n'échappe à la nécessaire communication des consciences. La forme souveraine de la vie, en art comme ailleurs, est la coexistence. Le monde de l'art, comme l'univers tout entier, a soif de communion, de correspondance et de vie sociale. Pour l'artiste comme pour chacun, comme pour le Musée, la présence d'autrui est toujours corrélative à sa propre présence au monde.

MARCEL BRISEBOIS
Directeur

Avant-propos

LUCETTE BOUCHARD

Directrice de l'éducation et de la documentation

Les 10 et 11 décembre 1995 se tenait au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal le colloque *Utopies modernistes. Postformalisme et pureté de la vision.* Deuxième événement de la série *Définitions de la culture visuelle*, ce colloque faisait suite à celui tenu en mars 1993 intitulé *Revoir la New Art History.* Alors que la première rencontre réunissait principalement des théoriciens britanniques, *Utopies modernistes* a présenté des penseurs américains qui avaient pris position face aux théories formalistes ayant cours aux États-Unis durant les années cinquante.

La réalisation de ce colloque posait un défi de taille à notre équipe. Tout d'abord, les succès répétés de nos colloques ne devaient pas s'estomper. Le public nombreux et fidèle ne serait pas déçu. Non seulement nous fallait-il répondre aux besoins que nous avions suscités, mais encore devions-nous renouveler, surprendre. Il n'y avait aucun doute dans notre esprit : autant la forme que le contenu se devaient d'être époustouflants!

Quant à la forme, l'expérience nous avait déjà appris l'importance d'un espace confortable, la nécessité des traductions simultanées, le grand intérêt pour les participants de recevoir une documentation scientifique rigoureuse. La qualité du contenu était assurée dès le moment où les Buchloh, Burgin, Cubitt, de Duve, Dubreuil-Blondin, Greenberg, Huyssen, Jay, Kelly, Krauss, Mitchell, Piper et Stafford avaient accepté l'invitation du Musée à venir livrer les résultats de leurs plus récentes recherches. Signalons qu'au grand regret de tous, Adrian Piper, au dernier moment, n'a pu venir à Montréal¹. Comme tout événement du genre, la rencontre elle-même recelait quelques surprises, tant dans les propos des conférenciers que dans les échanges entre ceux-ci et avec l'auditoire.

La publication de ce quatrième numéro de la collection Conférences et Colloques s'inscrit dans le prolongement du colloque Utopies modernistes — Postformalisme et pureté de la vision. On y lira les textes présentés lors du colloque par Victor Burgin, Sean Cubitt, Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, Reesa Greenberg,

Martin Jay, Mary Kelly et Barbara Maria Stafford. Adrian Piper collabore aussi à la publication avec un autre texte relié à la thématique du colloque. S'y trouvent aussi les textes de Christine Bernier et de Susan Douglas, qui ont agi comme modératrices. Christine Bernier, conceptrice du colloque, signe le texte d'introduction.

Quant aux communications données par Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Thierry de Duve, Andreas Huyssen, Rosalind Krauss, W.J.T. Mitchell et les modérateur et modératrice Hal Foster et Janine Marchessault, elles ont été minutieusement enregistrées, tout comme les échanges qui s'ensuivirent. Ces archives sont disponibles pour consultation à la Médiathèque du Musée.

Par les colloques et par la publication de leurs actes, le Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal entend affirmer haut et fort son existence comme lieu de savoir consacré à ses publics, des publics diversifiés. Le Musée remercie les auteurs, qui ont non seulement contribué au succès du colloque *Utopies modernistes* — *Postformalisme et pureté de la vision*, mais ont aussi généreusement permis la publication de leurs textes. Enfin, le Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal salue la présence et la participation des quelque neuf cents personnes inscrites au colloque et leur dédie cet ouvrage.

^{1.} Adrian Piper, dont le propos nous paraît essentiel au thème discuté, aura donné sa conférence au Musée le 16 octobre 1996.

Introduction

DÉFINITIONS DE LA CULTURE VISUELLE II. UTOPIES MODERNISTES — POSTFORMALISME ET PURETÉ DE LA VISION

CHRISTINE BERNIER

Responsable du Service de l'éducation au Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Christine Bernier détient une maîtrise en histoire de l'art à l'Université de Montréal, où elle prépare un doctorat en littérature comparée. Sa thèse porte sur la muséification de la culture et sur les pratiques artistiques contemporaines. Organisatrice du colloque L'image de la mort et de la série Définitions de la culture visuelle (colloques Revoir la New Art History et Utopies modernistes — Postformalisme et pureté de la vision), elle a écrit à titre d'auteure invitée pour différentes expositions et a collaboré à plusieurs revues d'art et de littérature.

Christine Bernier, Head of the Education Department at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, holds a master's degree in art history from the Université de Montréal, where she is currently completing a doctorate in comparative literature. Her thesis focuses on the "museumization" of culture and on contemporary artistic practices. She was responsible for organizing the symposium *The Image of Death* and the series Definitions of Visual Culture (symposia entitled The New Art History – Revisted and Modernist Utopias – Postformalism and Pure Visuality). She has also served as guest author for several exhibitions and has contributed to a number of art and literary journals.

Et cela parce que la peinture hollandaise ne s'est jamais constituée comme une tradition qui progresse. Elle n'a pas produit une histoire dans le sens où la peinture le fit en Italie. Avoir une histoire dans ce sens italien est une exception pour l'art et non point la règle. La plupart des traditions artistiques correspondent à ce qui persiste et se maintient dans la culture, et non pas à ce qui change. Je ne propose donc pas d'étudier l'histoire de la peinture hollandaise, mais la culture visuelle hollandaise — pour reprendre l'expression de Michæl Baxandall.

Svetlana Alpers¹

Le présent ouvrage propose au lecteur quelques définitions de la culture visuelle contemporaine. Il ne s'agit pas de «découvrir» de nouvelles théories. Il ne s'agit pas davantage de se positionner à l'avant-garde d'une cohorte de penseurs qui verraient déjà, avant tous les autres, ce qu'il est en train d'advenir de nous, de notre culture, en prophétisant le «futur» de l'art. Cette publication s'inscrit dans une certaine actualité de l'activité intellectuelle dans la mesure où elle nous incite à relire d'un œil critique des textes que nous pensions connaître et à voir autrement des œuvres dont on avait intégré certaines interprétations prescrites par des théories influentes.

Avec nostalgie, parfois, nous nous sentons aujourd'hui très loin d'un certain confort que procurait l'avant-gardisme, à l'époque où la poursuite d'un inépuisable nouveau, toujours virtuellement sur le point d'être découvert, pouvait constituer un but valable. Déjà, face aux certitudes utopiques du progrès et de la découverte, le domaine des sciences pures reconnaît avoir rendu les armes : «Les scientifiques ont renoncé depuis longtemps à l'idée d'une vérité qui serait l'image exacte d'une réalité qui attendrait simplement d'être dévoilée².» Dans le champ qui nous préoccupe, celui de la culture, notons que David Ross, il y a presque dix ans, posait aussi en termes clairs la question problématique de la découverte et de l'avant-garde en art :

Quelle est la fonction et quel est le but de l'activité avant-gardiste à l'intérieur d'une culture postmoderne? Si la pratique avant-gardiste existe encore, peut-elle fonctionner de manière autonome, ou doit-elle être engagée ou reliée à une position idéologique identifiable? Est-ce que l'état précaire de la condition sociale et économique internationale est reflété dans la perception de ce qui peut être considéré aujourd'hui comme une avant-garde véritable³?

Je précise à dessein que ce problème a surgi avant le début des années 90, pour insister sur le fait que la question ne peut plus être cernée à l'intérieur du registre de la découverte du nouveau. La difficulté à laquelle nous sommes maintenant confrontés réside plutôt dans la vitesse à laquelle surgissent aujourd'hui des différences dont on ne sait pas vraiment si elle doivent être définies comme des «nouveautés» — ni s'il

est pertinent, le cas échéant, de les étudier comme telles. Ainsi, nous nous retrouvons, paradoxalement, à la fois soucieux d'approfondir notre réflexion sur l'œuvre et avides de suivre le rythme de la vie culturelle actuelle.

La véritable actualité de ces textes se situe donc dans l'urgence et la nécessité de penser malgré l'accélération. Ou, plus précisément, d'avoir recours à des notions contradictoires comme l'accélération et la réflexion pour examiner la culture et l'art actuels.

UTOPIES, AUJOURD'HUI ENCORE

Le titre du colloque, *Utopies modernistes* — *Postformalisme et pureté de la vision*, laisse entendre que nous aurions dépassé l'époque du modernisme et de ses utopies. Cela est vrai, en un sens, puisque la mort proclamée des «grands récits» et des idéologies s'y rattachant nous laisse aux prises avec certaines questions problématiques. Comme le disait Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin dans une entrevue accordée au journal *Le Devoir* lors du colloque, il y a actuellement un vide : «Les utopies du modernisme étaient reliées à des récits de libération et elles sont toutes mortes avec les grands projets de société⁴.» Cela est très important, puisque ce vide, lorsque nous l'associons aux questions qui nous préoccupent, est souvent identifié à la difficulté de l'art à répondre à certaines nécessités (d'ordre social, politique ou esthétique). C'est alors, bien sûr, que resurgit le problème du manque de critères en matière d'appréciation de l'œuvre d'art. Ce n'est pas une coïncidence si Catherine Millet, en décrivant ce phénomène, parle des *espaces utopiques de l'art* :

Le désarroi actuel devant la difficulté à fonder de nouveaux critères, avant d'être l'écho de l'éclectisme des œuvres postmodernes, est bien sûr la conséquence des valeurs contradictoires avancées par la modernité elle-même. [...] À la limite, chaque œuvre prétend fonder les critères selon lesquels elle doit être regardée, ce qui, en fait, depuis un certain temps déjà, autorise précisément le critique d'art à ne pas s'appuyer exclusivement sur ces critères pour porter son jugement, mais à prendre en compte aussi le processus de différenciation par lequel ils ont été forgés⁵.

Je n'irai pas, ici, jusqu'à parler de la fin de l'art ni même de celle de l'institution. C'est d'ailleurs avec prudence que je propose l'expression d'*utopies modernistes*. Car si nous pouvons identifier certaines utopies propres à la pensée moderniste (ce que nous verrons dans les textes qui suivent), il serait déjà imprudent, comme nous le rappelle Andreas Huyssen, d'avancer l'idée de la fin des utopies — ou de la fin de l'art :

La pensée utopique, ainsi que l'art, a toujours survécu à ses enterrements prématurés et, à certains moments, a démontré des résurrections spectaculaires à partir des non-lieux, des lieux perdus sur la carte de la vie sociale et culturelle. La survie et la renaissance, le désir d'annihiler la mort, la recherche d'une autre vie, ont toujours compté parmi les plus inflexibles pulsions ayant contribué à garder vivante l'utopie dans l'adversité. Au cours de notre siècle, le discours sur la fin de l'utopie est aussi endémique pour l'imagination utopique que ses visions d'un autre monde, celles d'autres temps ou d'autres états d'esprit.

La pensée utopique a survécu aux déclarations de son obsolescence dans le *Manifeste* communiste, elle a survécu à sa déperdition dans le marxisme scientifique et au cours du XX^e siècle elle a ressurgi, triomphale, dans le marxisme lui-même, entre autres dans les travaux de Block et d'Adorno, Benjamin et Marcuse. Elle a aussi survécu aux avertissements de Karl Mannheim dans *Ideologie und Utopie*, qui se lit aujourd'hui comme une anticipation de la posthistoire⁶.

Prudence, donc. Nous pouvons même nous demander s'il ne faut pas revoir la connotation péjorative rattachée au mot «utopie» à travers les multiples interprétations auxquelles ce terme donne lieu. Ainsi, dans un texte sur Hannah Arendt⁷, Janine Marchessault situe le centre utopique de la théorie sociale de Arendt dans l'imagination, qui permet à la pensée d'élargir les frontières de l'expérience physique, de poser des jugements sur le monde et de prendre des décisions concrètes à propos de significations, illusoires ou non. L'imagination stimule la création de réalités nouvelles, l'expression de la différence et du désaccord, de la compréhension réciproque et de la solidarité. Selon Marchessault, c'est précisément cet aspect particulier du travail de Arendt, c'est-à-dire son désir de situer l'action en relation avec une vision du passé et du futur, qui offre de riches possibilités à une politique de l'identité qui a reconnu les nécessités d'une coalition⁸. Afin de mettre en évidence la relation entre la temporalité de l'action communicative de Arendt et la fonction de l'imagination, Marchessault termine son commentaire avec une description de l'utopie selon Louis Marin :

Dans le schème kantien, l'utopie n'est pas une image ou une représentation. Elle n'appartient pas à une idéologie définie. C'est le monogramme de l'art de la pure fiction sur toutes ces limites et frontières que dessine la pensée humaine afin d'atteindre un savoir partagé par plusieurs êtres humains; qu'inscrit et déplace l'humain afin de devenir un pouvoir collectif et de s'accomplir dans l'action (...). L'utopie est le potentiel infini des figures historiques (...) l'utopie est la figure plurielle du travail infini de la limite ou de la frontière dans l'histoire⁹.

MODERNISME - SANS LE «POST»

Ces précautions étant prises, il faut bien reconnaître toutefois que nous nous devons de constater l'effritement des critères pour apprécier l'art et en même temps admettre que les institutions culturelles sont décrites par les chercheurs qui s'en préoccupent comme étant en crise. L'idée de réfléchir sur un thème comme les *Utopies modernistes* implique que nous devions nous pencher sur les questions du postformalisme et de la pureté de la vision, d'abord parce qu'une telle démarche nous fournit un bon moyen de voir où nous en sommes aujourd'hui face à notre culture visuelle; plusieurs parlent de postmodernisme pour la définir, tandis que d'autres trouvent le terme insatisfaisant, notamment parce qu'il demeure indéfinissable.

La meilleure voie possible dans ce contexte consiste, à ce qu'il nous semble, à examiner certaines théories modernistes, certaines attitudes, certaines manières de voir le monde. Nous parlons de théories qui ont eu cours depuis le début de la grande période dite moderniste (soit la fin du XVIII^e siècle) mais aussi de positions qui datent des années 50. Si donc nous étudions certains de ces discours pour voir pourquoi et comment ils n'arrivent plus à nous satisfaire aujourd'hui et pourquoi ils ne sont pas applicables à de nouvelles pratiques culturelles (l'utilisation de l'image électronique ne serait qu'un exemple), peut-être alors pourrons-nous faire un pas et mieux comprendre où nous en sommes — que cela s'appelle postmodernisme, postformalisme, poststructuralisme, etc. Pour que notre champ d'investigation ne soit ni trop vaste ni trop vague, nous avons choisi le «postformalisme», qui présente l'avantage de proposer une relecture de théories précises, tout au moins dans le domaine des arts visuels.

LE SORT FAIT PAR LE «POSTFORMALISME» À LA PURETÉ DE LA VISION

Dans le champ des arts visuels, précisément, une des caractéristiques proclamées des productions modernistes fut le travail sur la surface du tableau. Ainsi, l'histoire de la modernité aurait coïncidé avec une libération toujours plus grande de la peinture. Depuis la Renaissance italienne, celle-ci aurait acquis une autonomie face aux autres arts et serait devenue, à proprement parler, une «chose» visuelle. L'autoréférentialité de l'œuvre a donc été associée à la pureté de la vision, idée véhiculée de manière catégorique dans les années 50 par les théories formalistes de Clement Greenberg. Aujourd'hui, plusieurs auteurs se penchent sur cette pureté visuelle pour en dégager le caractère utopique et, dans un contexte contemporain qu'on peut qualifier de postformaliste, les œuvres sont vues comme mettant à profit des sens autres que la vision. C'est maintenant cet aspect du modernisme que nous

aimerions examiner, pour mesurer l'écart entre les théories «modernistes/formalistes» et les actuelles pratiques discursives et artistiques dites postformalistes et postmodernistes. Quant à la peinture qualifiée de formaliste, il ne s'agit évidemment pas de dire que le temps d'une telle pratique est passé mais plutôt de voir comment on regarde, avec notre sensibilité actuelle, une telle peinture; comment notre perception est informée par d'autres attitudes qui la complexifient et l'enrichissent. Ce qui importe maintenant, c'est d'examiner notre rapport à l'idée d'une «pureté de la vision».

Les esthétiques modernistes ont traditionnellement été considérées comme le triomphe d'une visualité pure en rapport exclusif avec les questions formelles d'optique. L'instance la plus autoritaire et influente défendant cette position fut le critique américain Clement Greenberg, qui a purgé le travail de Cézanne des dimensions corporelles et multisensorielles que Merleau-Ponty avait célébrées dans sa peinture. [...]

Si l'histoire tout entière devait se résumer à la version formaliste greenbergienne selon laquelle le modernisme a privilégié la vision, nous serions confrontés au paradoxe suivant : le discours antivisuel du XX^c siècle irait absolument à l'encontre de la pratique artistique dominante de la même époque. En rejetant le discours de Greenberg, qui rendait la substance entièrement optique, elles [certaines critiques] ont explicitement remis en question ce que Krauss appelle «la fétichisation moderniste de la vue». Elles ont plutôt mis l'accent sur la pulsion pour réinstaurer le corps vivant, qui est évident, selon la lecture de Merleau-Ponty, tant chez les impressionnistes que chez Cézanne. Dans sa forme extrême, cette historiographie révisionniste de l'art, elle-même influencée par le discours antivisuel français contemporain, a tenté d'opposer le corps et l'œil, produisant ainsi un projet extrêmement paradoxal pour la peinture¹⁰.

Dans son livre intitulé *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay démontre comment la vision, qui fut longtemps considérée comme «le plus noble des sens», aurait été soumise, de manière croissante, à un vigoureux examen critique par un grand nombre de penseurs. Ces auteurs, qu'on retrouverait surtout dans la France du XX^e siècle, auraient déprécié la vision et remis en question sa prédominance dans la culture occidentale, non seulement en exprimant leurs doutes sur sa prétendue supériorité en tant que voie d'accès à la connaissance, mais aussi en dénonçant son rôle actif dans l'oppression politique et sociale.

Ainsi, alors qu'il est beaucoup question, depuis quelque temps déjà, d'un postmodernisme aussi obsédant que difficile à cerner dans les pratiques discursives et artistiques, il nous a semblé nécessaire de revoir ce qu'a pu être le modernisme et d'examiner comment nous arrivons actuellement à le définir.

RÉPONSE À ANDREAS HUYSSEN, REESA GREENBERG ET BARBARA MARIA STAFFORD

Dans cet ouvrage, certaines interventions sont commentées par les modérateurs des tables rondes du colloque. J'ajouterai donc à cette introduction quelques notes sur les conférences de Andreas Huyssen, Reesa Greenberg et Barbara Maria Stafford, à titre de modératrice de leur table ronde. Situons d'abord ces trois conférences dans le contexte de l'événement.

Le matin, Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin nous a présenté Michæl Fried, un ardent défenseur des théories formalistes. Ensuite, Martin Jay nous a montré comment s'est organisée une réaction contre l'oculocentrisme, c'est-à-dire l'hégémonie de la vision comme moyen d'accès à la connaissance. On a ainsi remis en question la pureté de la vision, mais aussi la supériorité de la vision elle-même.

Dans l'après-midi, avec Huyssen, Greenberg et Stafford, il était plutôt question d'examiner ce qu'il advient de l'œuvre quand on remet en question certaines «utopies modernistes», plus particulièrement en relation avec la *localisation* actuelle de l'objet visuel. Les conférenciers se sont proposé entre autres de démasquer des théories et visions que nous considérons comme naturelles, ainsi que certaines caractéristiques de l'œuvre qui sont perçues comme intrinsèques à l'image ou au monument, mais qui relèvent en fait de définitions qu'on leur a accordées à un moment donné.

Andreas Huyssen nous parlait du monumental¹¹. Spécialiste des questions de mémoire dans notre culture, il s'intéresse au lieux qui marquent la mémoire, aux espaces qui travaillent avec la temporalité; il a donc, bien sûr, écrit sur les musées. Dans le cadre du colloque, il a examiné le monument commémoratif — et cette catégorie esthétique qu'est le monumental — sous ses angles spatiaux et temporels.

Barbara Maria Stafford nous a aussi amené à réfléchir à la localisation de l'objet visuel (celle de l'image en particulier), en proposant un parcours qui partait du cabinet de curiosités et passait par le musée moderniste pour aboutir à l'autoroute électronique et à la navigation sur le réseau Internet¹². Barbara Maria Stafford, préoccupée des questions pédagogiques reliées à l'image comme moyen d'accès à la connaissance, préconisait non pas de revenir à l'oculocentrisme moderniste, mais de proposer de nouvelles manières d'utiliser les images à des fins positives. Ce sera le rôle du nouvel imagiste, dont elle nous a présenté le caractère urgent et nécessaire.

Le travail de Reesa Greenberg est au cœur des préoccupations actuelles sur la localisation des œuvres dans les musées, et plus spécifiquement sur la signification de l'accrochage dans une exposition. Dans sa communication intitulée *La rhétorique de l'arrangement : voir, c'est croire*, Reesa Greenberg pose une question précise : «Quand on introduit la "différence" dans l'utopie muséale moderniste et monolinéaire,

avec ses éclairages homogènes et ses murs uniformément blancs, s'agit-il d'un geste utopique et postmoderniste, d'une visualisation de moments historiques ou d'un nouveau décor¹³?»

Ces trois interventions nous ont permis de constater que la localisation de l'objet ou de l'image implique la reconnaissance de sa dématérialisation (Huyssen, Stafford). Il deviendrait nécessaire, aujourd'hui, de reconnaître et de favoriser le provisoire (Huyssen) et l'hétérogénéité d'un ensemble (Greenberg, Stafford). Nous avons ainsi eu l'occasion de voir et d'entendre comment, dans la localisation de l'objet visuel, notre culture actuelle peut se situer très loin de certains principes typiquement modernistes. Si certains sont à l'œuvre depuis le XVIII^e siècle, d'autres se sont imposés il y a à peine 40 ans. Mais tous, encore, et souvent à notre insu, fournissent les résidus de systèmes de pensée qui construisent notre vision du monde.

- 1. Svetlana Alpers, L'art de dépeindre. La peinture hollandaise au XVII' siècle, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. 25.
 - 2. Extrait de l'allocution de René Simard, recteur de l'Université de Montréal, prononcée lors de la collation des grades de mai 1995, et citée dans Les Diplômés, n° 387, automne 1995, p. 21. On remarquera l'insistance sur le fait que ce renoncement est assumé «depuis longtemps». Mais dans le domaine des sciences de la santé, ce type d'affirmation coïncide avec la croissance accélérée du pouvoir du lobby de la médication: les compagnies pharmaceutiques sont plus que jamais axées sur la performance dans la découverte (voir à ce sujet l'article récent de Greg Critser, «Oh, How Happy We Will Be. Pills, Paradise and the Profits of the Drugs Companies» dans Harper's, New York, juin 1996, pp. 39-48). L'attitude qui consiste à reléguer au passé la question du résultat n'est propre qu'au champ théorique et ne trouve évidemment aucun écho dans le champ de l'application. Cela marque un écart important entre la théorie et la pratique au sein de certaines disciplines. Ces idées ne peuvent toutefois être développées ici et devront faire l'objet de discussions supplémentaires sur le rapport qu'entretiennent l'art et le corps physique (perçu comme sain ou malade).
 - 3. David A. Ross, "Preface", Utopia Post Utopia, (catalogue d'exposition), The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1988, p. 8 (traduction libre).
 - 4. Voir Jennifer Couëlle, «Remettre à l'heure les pendules du modernisme», Le Devoir, Montréal, samedi 19 décembre 1995, pp. A1, A3.
 - 5. Catherine Millet, «L'écoute critique», Art Press, numéro spécial De l'objet à l'œuvre, les espaces utopiques de l'art, hors-série n° 15, 1994, pp. 8-9.
 - 6. Andreas Huyssen, Twiligth Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia, New York et Londres, Routledge, 1995, p. 85 (traduction libre).
 - 7. Janine Marchessault, «On Hannah Arendt: "Thinking In My Identity Where Actually I Am Not"», Toronto, *Public*, n° 12 (thème de ce numéro: *Utopia*), 1995, pp. 14-27.
 - 8. On relit de plus en plus les textes que nous a laissés Hannah Arendt il y a 20 ans. Cette philosophie du politique nous a proposé une lecture très critique du totalitarisme. Selon Arendt, un système idéologique serait nécessairement totalitaire.
 - 9. Louis Marin, cité par Janine Marchessault, op.cit., p. 27 (traduction libre).
 - 10. Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought, Berkeley, Los Angeles et Londres, University of California Press, 1993, p. 160 (traduction libre).
 - 11. Andreas Huyssen, Monumental Seductions.
 - 12. Barbara Maria Stafford, The New Imagist: Visual Expertise in a Transdisciplinary Multimedia Society.
- 13. Reesa Greenberg, Rhetoric by Arrangement: Seeing is Believing.



LA SCÈNE DE LA PEINTURE APRÈS L'ÉBLOUISSEMENT FORMALISTE LE CAS MICHAEL FRIED

NICOLE DUBREUIL-BLONDIN

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LE THÉÂTRE DE L'ABSORBEMENT

L'événement se passait il y a quelques années, à l'École des Hautes Études en sciences sociales de Paris, dans le cadre d'un séminaire conjoint donné par Hubert Damisch et par le regretté Louis Marin. Je devais à l'un de mes anciens étudiants en art américain, inscrit à ce séminaire et rencontré fortuitement à la Bibliothèque nationale, de m'avoir signalé la venue de Michæl Fried à titre de conférencier invité. Je m'étais précipitée non pas tant pour voir l'homme, dont les textes sur l'art contemporain m'étaient depuis longtemps familiers, que pour entendre ce qu'un ancien champion de la color-field painting pouvait bien trouver à dire à propos du féminin chez Courbet¹! J'avais des raisons personnelles d'observer cette étonnante trajectoire à rebours, puisque des nécessités d'ordre académique m'incitaient aussi, après une première spécialisation en art abstrait, à développer des cours et des recherches sur le XIX° siècle.

Quiconque ayant fréquenté les maisons françaises d'enseignement supérieur sait à quel point leurs installations laissent à désirer. Je fus cependant un peu surprise, en pénétrant dans le local du séminaire, de trouver ce grand personnage, l'invité de toute évidence, affairé à déplacer les meubles selon une stratégie qui m'échappa au début : la configuration des tables apparaissait comme une sorte de compromis entre la salle de classe traditionnelle et la salle de travail en petits groupes, prenant vaguement la forme d'un «U» qui donnait sur un espace dégagé où se trouvaient un écran de projection et une chaise. On imagine aisément la suite. Fried préparait une démonstration *live* des concepts d'incorporation (*embodiment*) et d'absorbement (*absorption*) qui caractérisent, selon lui, l'essentiel de la démarche de Courbet et le portent à se représenter dans les figures de ses tableaux².

Je me le remémore, penché vers la surface lumineuse de l'écran et mimant, par une reprise des gestes du peintre assis devant sa toile, un impossible transfert de son propre corps dans cette image sans substance que constituait la projection des *Cribleuses* (1853-1854). Je n'avais pas encore réalisé, trop préoccupée que j'étais par l'apparente distance entre les objets d'analyse, que Michæl Fried l'historien d'art s'inscrivait dans la plus parfaite continuité avec Michæl Fried le critique et qu'il menait d'anciennes batailles sur un nouveau terrain. De l'avoir vu «en chair et en os» abandonner, le temps d'une démonstration passionnée, la sociabilité requise par le séminaire au profit d'une contemplation médusée de l'écran, m'apparaît aujourd'hui symptomatique du type de modernisme impénitent qui caractérise la position friedienne sur la scène de l'historiographie postformaliste. C'est pourquoi je propose que l'on examine brièvement (je serais tentée de dire pendant qu'il a le dos tourné!) comment Fried II remet en scène le travail de Fried I³ et maintient, par une sorte de

poussée archéologique aux sources du modernisme, les engagements qui avaient été siens durant les années soixante.

Étant donnée la problématique retenue pour le présent colloque, l'exercice peut présenter quelque intérêt. Il nous amène en effet de l'aire critique du formalisme américain vers l'un des grands champs de l'histoire de l'art — celui du XIX° siècle français — à s'être montré particulièrement réceptif à l'ensemble des bouleversements qui ont marqué la discipline depuis maintenant quelques décennies. Cette période d'élaboration du projet moderniste semble attirer tout ce qui se réclame d'une nouvelle approche critique des productions visuelles : l'histoire sociale et l'histoire féministe de l'art, pour ne nommer que ces deux tendances particulièrement marquantes dans les pratiques anglo-américaines, s'y sont depuis longtemps illustrées, traçant la voie aux plus récentes cultural studies. Si l'on devait identifier la conséquence la plus manifeste des révisions en cours, il faudrait sans doute signaler la prolifération actuelle des discours sur le corps, peut-être comme activité compensatoire, peut-être comme stratégie de revanche, face à cette visibilité désincarnée qu'avait fini par nous imposer le modernisme triomphant⁴. C'est sur ce terrain que se démarque la position de Fried. Celui qu'une observation attentive de l'abstraction la plus radicale de son temps avait entraîné aux discriminations fines de purs effets optiques, celui dont le discours argumentatif se trouvait régulièrement ponctué de l'expression «To my eye...», s'adonnait à son tour à une sorte de jonglerie avec les dispositifs corporels. La réflexion qui suit voudrait cependant montrer que les corps mis en scène par Fried exécutent des scénarios bien particuliers et qu'ils paraissent offrir de curieux prolégomènes à la visibilité sans entraves recherchée par les modernes.

LA CHRONOLOGIE D'UNE COUPURE

Ceux pour lesquels cette histoire est déjà trop familière m'excuseront de reprendre, sur un mode très succinct et pour le bénéfice général, la chronologie d'un déplacement effectué sous le signe de la coupure. À partir de 1960 et jusqu'à 1970, Michæl Fried s'affirme comme une présence constante et de plus en plus en vue dans le champ de l'art américain contemporain. Sa participation à la tendance critique qui se développe autour de Clement Greenberg et qui va constituer un discours dominant au début de la décennie, son alignement sur les étoiles montantes de l'abstraction chromatique, tout cela, joint à la situation d'hégémonie politique et culturelle dont bénéficient les États-Unis à l'époque, explique largement la conviction exprimée par Fried d'être partie intégrante d'une forme de nécessité historique. Le critique-théoricien défend une peinture essentiellement vouée à l'exploration de sa propre spécificité et dont le défi majeur consiste à se réaliser comme pure expansion colorée selon des stratégies formelles (entendre ici syntaxiques) en perpétuel renouvellement.

Les choses commencent déjà à se gâter en 1965, au moment où Fried publie le catalogue de son exposition Three American Painters⁵. L'art minimal vient en effet d'apparaître sur la scène, inaugurant une série de ruptures dont la tradition de critique moderniste «à la Fried» ne va pas se remettre. La nouvelle tendance, en plus de proposer un éclatement des genres menant à une véritable démotion de la peinture, mise sur la condition d'objet de l'œuvre, sur les modalités de sa présentation et sur l'implication du spectateur dans ce dispositif. Fried a souligné à quelques reprises l'importance des articles de 1966 et 1967 dans lesquels il adopte le parti de l'abstraction contre la montée du littéralisme⁶. Cette démarche devait culminer avec l'article «Art and Objecthood⁷», où l'auteur dénonce cette sorte de mal absolu que constitue le renoncement à l'autonomie du médium et l'ouverture de l'œuvre à son contexte, une situation périlleuse que l'auteur stigmatise du terme de «théâtralité». Même si cet article, dont le déroulement laborieux porte la trace d'un profond malaise, n'est pas le dernier texte que Fried ait consacré à l'art de son temps, il est difficile de ne pas le considérer comme une sorte d'adieu à la scène contemporaine. Un des rares artistes à tenir encore une place significative, dans les quelques études sur l'abstraction que produit l'auteur jusqu'au début des années soixante-dix, est le sculpteur Anthony Caro, comme si de déplacer temporairement ses intérêts vers un médium tridimensionnel allait donner une dernière chance à Fried de combattre l'art minimal sur son propre terrain.

C'est durant cette période où s'estompe la figure du critique qu'émerge celle de Michæl Fried historien d'art, essentiellement préoccupé des enjeux de la peinture française depuis Chardin jusqu'à Manet, un artiste que Greenberg et lui-même reconnaissent comme le terminus a quo de l'attitude moderniste. Une attention toute particulière portée à la tradition réaliste, sanctionnée par la parution du livre sur Courbet (1990) et accompagnée d'un détour américain chez Thomas Eakins et Stephen Crane (1987)⁸, aurait pu nous faire croire à un changement complet de cap pour celui qui s'était fait un ardent défenseur de l'abstraction. Nous savons déjà qu'il n'en est rien, Absorption and Theatricality nous l'annonçait dès 1980 : les travaux de Fried jusqu'à ce jour constituent la chronique d'un long conflit de la peinture avec la théâtralité, suivant les modalités les plus diverses qui vont du rejet du spectateur à son assimilation fantasmée dans l'espace de représentation⁹. On ne peut s'empêcher de songer, devant la force de persuasion qui se dégage des textes, que cette entreprise de réévaluation du passé a entre autres fonctions celle d'appliquer un baume sur les malheurs du présent.

L'impulsion antithéâtrale qui porterait la peinture à neutraliser la menace constituée par le spectateur trouve son corollaire, pour Fried, dans une opération de repliement du médium sur lui-même, ce qui fait prendre à la notion de réalisme des

connotations inattendues. Au moment où ils paraissent annoncer, en déployant leurs thématiques de choc, un besoin de prise directe sur le monde et un goût pour les faits concrets, les tableaux de Courbet ou de Eakins viseraient une autre réalité, dont les aspects tout aussi tangibles ne peuvent émerger, dans la représentation, que sous le déguisement de la métaphore et de l'allégorie: il s'agit du scénario de leur propre production convoquant un ensemble d'agents matériels qui vont du corps peignant aux instruments de travail et au support de l'image. Alors que le moment réaliste donne à d'autres interprètes, notamment aux tenants de l'histoire sociale, l'occasion d'une impérative poussée vers le contexte, Fried se concentre toujours sur une rhétorique de la peinture à propos de la peinture dont il s'oblige, aujourd'hui comme hier, à examiner les modalités historiques d'énonciation 10. (Il faut noter ici qu'il n'est pas le seul à travailler dans cette optique. Une certaine tradition française, celle qui s'est établie à l'École des Hautes Études en sciences sociales, par exemple, insiste beaucoup sur cette capacité que possède la peinture à s'instaurer en théorie de sa propre pratique, et ceci depuis l'avènement du tableau de chevalet¹¹. Il se peut d'autre part que cette approche fasse écho à l'une des formes les plus convenues de l'autoréférence littéraire — l'écriture habitée, voire hantée par la scène de l'écriture —, ce qui explique la facilité avec laquelle Fried a pu jumeler son essai sur les procédés compositionnels du peintre Eakins avec une analyse des stratégies textuelles de Crane).

LES YEUX AU CORPS

Voilà donc un ensemble de corps dont les activités — dans le cas qui nous concerne, il serait tout aussi juste de dire les états — ne font pas que se conformer aux rôles imposés par les sujets des tableaux et par les conventions des genres qu'ils tentent bien souvent de bousculer. Ce à quoi ils sont affectés, du moins dans l'optique de Fried, aurait plutôt rapport avec le fantasme de la production de l'œuvre et avec sa reprise obstinée dans l'espace de représentation. Les modalités de cette projection peuvent varier considérablement : par rapport à la formule «Courbet», la formule «Eakins» suppose moins un investissement direct du corps peignant dans les figures du tableau qu'un détour par la figure originaire d'un père traçant des calligraphies que le travail pictural du fils tenterait de subsumer¹². Les conséquences restent toutefois les mêmes. Les corps mis en scène par la tradition réaliste paraissent souffrir d'un curieux déclin de la vision, dans laquelle Fried croit reconnaître le besoin de l'œuvre d'affirmer son autonomie et de préserver son authenticité.

Les regards baissés, détournés, voilés, absents, le plus souvent estompés dans la pénombre de quelque clair-obscur quand ils ne sont pas carrément escamotés derrière des paupières closes, abondent dans les tableaux analysés par Fried où ils auraient pour corrélat de rendre les corps à leur propre présence. L'opération se trouverait facilitée par un ensemble de dispositions physiques et psychiques, qui vont de l'attention absorbée à une suite d'états de quasi-conscience: les corps rêveurs, somnolents, endormis, voire agonisants se révélant davantage propices à retrouver leurs plus profonds automatismes que les corps en pleine activité, mobilisés par le monde extérieur¹³. Le peintre se trouverait bien sûr partie prenante de la situation, comme ce Courbet maugréant de travailler «à l'aveuglette» à sa gigantesque toile de L'Enterrement (1849-1850), à cause de la position d'extrême proximité imposée par les dimensions de l'œuvre, à l'étroit dans l'atelier d'Ornans. Même phénomène pour le spectateur que le tableau indifférent abandonne aux abords d'une fosse sombre, s'ouvrant dans une représentation dont le centre s'est évidé. Cette conviction de ne rien voir a pour motif exemplaire le petit garçon des *Cribleuses*, penché sur la béance noire du tarare comme un amateur d'estampes de Daumier incliné vers ses cartons (avec cette différence significative que le regard du premier semble plonger dans le néant).

Affligés par une perte ou par une déficience de la vision, en proie à un absorbement qui peut les mener jusqu'à la paralysie, les corps qui fascinent Fried nous entraînent loin de ces figures glorieuses, dominant leur destin et participant à une sociabilité bien réglée, que la tradition nous proposait. À ce chapitre de la «déhéroïsation» des corps, le discours de Fried rejoint celui de la majorité des interprètes intéressés aujourd'hui par le XIX° siècle et se montrant sensibles à l'évidence des tableaux. Cette période de crise des grands genres, qui suspend les procédés narratifs et compositionnels les mieux établis, va finir par orchestrer la disparition de la figure qui se résorbe simultanément dans le décor de la représentation et dans la surface du tableau. Les corps fragmentés, décentrés, défigurés, vidés peu à peu de leur substance et traités comme des mannequins ou des machines traversant la peinture du second XIX° siècle, n'en finissent plus de solliciter l'attention des exégètes qui les considèrent comme les plus éloquents symptômes des changements en train de s'effectuer au sein du corps social.

Dans ce contexte, la position de Fried continue toutefois de se distinguer par sa fixation sur une problématique de l'aveuglement comme voie d'accès privilégiée au scénario de production de l'œuvre. Les pratiques récentes de l'histoire de l'art se sont en effet préoccupées davantage, me semble-t-il, de cette complexe économie des regards qui vient trahir, au cœur du dispositif pictural, l'articulation de rapports de pouvoir. C'est qu'elles ont choisi de considérer des corps sociaux, au rang desquels il faut inclure le corps du peintre et celui du spectateur, plutôt que de s'en remettre à une certaine phénoménologie du corps, comme le fait Fried, d'une hauteur toute phénoménologique. Les corps mis en scène par la peinture apparaissent aujourd'hui traversés et informés par un vaste ensemble de discours d'époque, représentations

visuelles ou textuelles d'ordres divers, qui permettent d'entendre leur résonance idéologique. Avec cette conséquence que le traitement de l'œuvre en tant que production culturelle donne lieu, depuis quelques décennies, à une sorte de «panopticisme» débridé que n'aurait pas désavoué le XIX^e siècle lui-même.

Dans cette conjoncture, Fried pratique ce que d'aucuns voudront qualifier d'aveuglement délibéré ou, à tout le moins, de rétrécissement de l'angle de vue. Il ne s'oblige pas seulement à cette expérience longue et attentive des œuvres qui avait fait partie de son apprentissage de critique; c'est en opérant dans cette sorte de circuit fermé constitué par l'ensemble de la production d'un artiste qu'il arrive à mettre à jour la fiction qui la hante de se penser en se faisant (on pourrait dire autrement, en paraphrasant Fried, qu'il arrive à lire l'allégorie du pictural dans la peinture). Le travail de l'interprète a ici pour conséquence inévitable de resserrer la cohérence interne de l'œuvre là où l'histoire traditionnelle et les nouvelles histoires de l'art croient repérer des facteurs de disjonction (les tensions entre un Courbet romantique et un Courbet réaliste, de même qu'entre un Courbet impliqué politiquement et un Courbet désengagé, n'ont plus leur raison d'être dans le scénario concu par Fried; il en va de même pour Eakins, un peintre qui aurait trouvé son accomplissement bien avant les portraits de la maturité auxquels s'attache en général sa fortune critique). Quant au positionnement de la peinture dans l'histoire, entendons ici l'histoire qui permet de décliner les modes spécifiques de résistance et d'ajustement du médium à son incontournable théâtralité, c'est en activant la chronique d'un développement interne, où continuent de s'entrecroiser les tableaux disposés en séries (depuis Chardin jusqu'à Manet...), que Fried parvient à l'établir.

Le mouvement d'implosion méthodologique, qui permet à l'historien de chercher la signification d'une œuvre dans son principe de cohérence interne, continue de nous proposer la peinture comme le site par excellence de l'utopie, ce «non-lieu» où devraient s'opérer toutes les réconciliations, à commencer par celle du sujet avec lui-même. On y trouverait ce sentiment ultime de plénitude qui vient transcender tous les particularismes d'une expérience se déroulant dans le temps. Cette plénitude, qui se trouvait désignée hier par le concept de «presentness¹⁴», peut prendre aujourd'hui diverses voies. Chez Courbet, il s'agirait d'un véritable phénomène de «naturalisation» par lequel l'artiste arrive à se disséminer sans conflits dans un ensemble socialement hétérogène de corps en représentation, y compris des corps féminins se prêtant de toute évidence au jeu. Cette faculté d'absorbement all-over, Fried en trouve une justification d'époque dans la théorie du philosophe Ravaisson selon lequel l'habitude (entendre ici l'acte de peindre dans sa dimension semi-automatique que Courbet projette dans les personnages de ses tableaux) assure «la fluxion dynamique de la Volonté à la Nature¹5». Même préoccupation pour

Eakins, dont la démarche passe toutefois par la résolution d'un conflit œdipien. Fried nous rappelle que la figure paternelle du chirurgien Gross, auquel le peintre se trouva symboliquement appelé à s'identifier, prônait la collaboration de la science avec les processus naturels de guérison¹⁶.

L'AGRESSION

L'utopie fantasmée s'expose toutefois à de cruelles épreuves. Courbet sait qu'il ne franchira jamais concrètement la frontière de l'image; Eakins n'arrivera pas à fusionner l'espace horizontal du dessin avec la verticalité de la peinture. Le scénario de production ne peut en effet affleurer, au cœur de la représentation réaliste, que sous le signe de la contradiction. Cette situation donne lieu à des images d'agression qui tour à tour fascinent et repoussent le spectateur. Alors que le pinceau se fait scalpel, fusil, épée, le pigment s'est investi de la couleur du sang. Le rouge, aux nuances duquel Fried s'intéresse d'une manière obsessionnelle à la quasi-exclusion de toutes les autres couleurs, semble agir sur lui avec toute la force d'impact du *punctum* barthésien. Il est ce substrat matériel doublement sublimé, hier par la pure visibilité, aujourd'hui par le motif figuratif, qui risque à tout moment de ramener la peinture à son statut d'objet. Et l'on sait quel genre de menace peut exercer ce statut pour Fried! C'est pourquoi, afin d'éviter de se compromettre avec un spectateur, l'ultime tableau réaliste serait celui qui parviendrait à rendre intolérable le fait d'être regardé.

Voir rouge, comme en un éblouissement sublime, avant de sombrer dans l'aveuglement. La violence expressive de cette couleur est telle, pour Fried, qu'une simple chemise écarlate animant une scène de chasse produit la force d'une explosion capable de rejeter le spectateur hors de l'espace de représentation. Cette remarque concernant le *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting for Rail* (1876) de Thomas Eakins¹⁷ nous amène à une dernière image dans laquelle, à son insu semble-t-il, Fried II s'est remis en présence de Fried I. Nous sommes dans un nouvelle de Stephen Crane, intitulée *The Monster*. Le nègre Henry Johnson, cocher de la famille Trescott, vient de se lancer dans la résidence en flammes pour sauver le jeune fils de la maison. Le voici à la porte du laboratoire aménagé par le docteur Trescott, un laboratoire livré lui aussi à l'incendie:

...when Johnson finally makes his way there he discovers not only that that room too is on fire but that the doctor's chemicals are exploding in fantastic hues and forms... The room was like a garden in the region where might be burning flowers. Flames of violet, crimson, green, blue, orange, and purple were blooming everywhere. There was one blaze that was precisely the hue of a delicate coral. In another place was a mass that lay merely in phosphorescent inaction like a pile of emeralds. But all these marvels were to be seen dimly through clouds of heaving, turning, deadly smoke.

Après s'être arrêté sur le seuil, Johnson se précipite à travers la pièce avec le jeune garçon dans ses bras; juste à ce moment, survient une explosion qui le jette à terre où il gît sur le dos, le visage tourné vers le plafond :

Johnson had fallen with his head at the base of an old-fashioned desk. There was a row of jars upon the top of this desk. For the most part, there were silent amidst this rioting, but there was one which seemed to hold a scintillant and writhing serpent. Suddenly the glass splintered, and a ruby-red snakelike thing poured its thick lenght out upon the top of the old desk. It coiled and hesitated, and then began to swim a langourous way down the mahogany slant. At the angle it waved its sizzling molten head to and fro over the closed eyes of the man beneath it. Then, in a moment, with mystic impulse, it moved again, and the red snake flew directly down into Johnson's upturned face¹⁸.

À partir de ce moment, Johnson n'est pas seulement défiguré : on sent qu'il sera abandonné, expulsé de la famille et du récit à cause de l'horreur que son absence de visage inspire à la communauté.

On dira sans doute que je fais de la surinterprétation et que c'est là une fâcheuse conséquence d'avoir trop fréquenté les textes de Michæl Fried. Il m'a pourtant semblé retrouver, conjugués dans cet épisode que Fried lui-même a retenu à de tout autres fins, quelques éléments significatifs pour conclure la présente réflexion. Le spectacle de l'incendie du laboratoire convoque en effet simultanément, les placant dans un rapport de causalité, des motifs liés à Fried I et à Fried II : une sorte de pyrotechnie visuelle dans laquelle il est difficile de ne pas reconnaître la peinture du champ coloré, notamment la série des Florals ou des Unferleds de Morris Louis, a pour résultat de «produire» un corps terrassé, privé de la vue. Pour Fried, il s'agit là d'une version particulièrement dramatique d'un scénario de production faisant irruption dans le récit. Le visage placé en position horizontale sert en effet de métaphore à la page de travail que viendra défigurer (subsumer) l'écriture sous la forme du «writhing (writing) serpent», une autre menace rouge à hanter la scène autoréférentielle. Ce repli utopique — parce qu'ultimement impossible — de l'œuvre sur ses propres moyens s'exerce, une fois encore, au détriment du corps politique et l'on imagine ce que la théorie post-coloniale aurait à penser de ce visage de «Noir» transformé en feuille «blanche» par la vertu d'un autosacrifice. Johnson aura pourtant la consolation d'avoir été le héros d'un moment, puisqu'il a réussi à sauver le fils Trescott. Cela nous laisse avec la question de juger si l'obstination de Fried à défendre la spécificité et l'opacité de la peinture, qui fait de lui, à l'occasion, une victime sacrificielle sur la scène du postmodernisme, ne comporte pas sa propre forme de courage.

- Tel était, en substance, le titre annoncé. Le contenu de l'exposé correspondait à la problématique développée au chapitre six de l'importante monographie que Fried a consacrée au peintre français: Gourbet's Realism, Chicago et Londres, The University of Chicago Press, 1990.
 - 2. Le phénomène, d'abord expérimenté avec les autoportraits, se généralise à tout un ensemble de personnages en représentation auxquels l'artiste prête les postures, les gestes et les tensions de son propre corps peignant.
 - 3. Cette formulation renvoie à un article antérieur où se trouvent examinées, en termes plus généraux et à l'aide d'autres exemples, les relations entre Fried critique et Fried historien d'art. Voir Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, «Michæl Fried I et II.», *Trois*, vol. 8, n° 3, printemps-été 1993, p. 71-91.
 - 4. Ces études, trop nombreuses et trop disséminées pour faire ici l'objet d'une recension, participent sans aucun doute à l'élaboration de l'histoire «après Foucault» en ce qu'elles s'intéressent au régime des représentations du XIX° siècle.
- 5. Michæl Fried, Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 21 avril-30 mai 1965.
- 6. Ces textes traitent entre autres de la relation de la forme peinte à la forme du cadre. Il s'agit de «Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings», Artforum, vol. 5, n° 3, nov. 1966; *Jules Olitski*, introduction du catalogue de l'exposition de ses œuvres à la Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C., avril-juin 1967; «Ronald Davis: Surface and Illusion», *Artforum*, vol. 5, n° 8, avril 1967.
- 7. Michæl Fried, «Art and Objecthood», Artforum, vol. 5, été 1967, p. 12-23; repris dans Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology, ss la dir. de Gregory Battcock, New York, Dutton, 1968, p. 116-147.
- 8. Michæl Fried, Realism, Writing and Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane, Chicago et Londres, The University of Chigago Press, 1987.
- 9. Michæl Fried, Absorption and Theatricality: Painting & Beholder in the Age of Diderot, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980. Qu'ils mettent en scène des personnages proprement absorbés, comme on en rencontre dans les tableaux de Chardin, ou livrés à un paroxysme d'agitation, comme dans les compositions dramatiques élaborées par Greuze, le résultat revient au même: les figures en représentation incarnent le refus de la peinture elle-même d'entretenir la moindre connivence avec le spectateur.
- 10. Car il ne s'agit pas pour autant de conférer au médium une sorte d'essence irréductible et intemporelle. Fried s'explique longuement, dans «Art and Objecthood», sur ce point de divergence majeur entre sa position et celle de Greeenberg. Voir aussi, à ce sujet, ses échanges avec Rosalind Krauss et Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, «Theories of Art After Minimalism and Pop», dans *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, ss la dir. de Hal Foster, Dia Art Foundation, Seattle, Bay Press, 1981.
- 11. On pense ici aux travaux de Hubert Damisch, notamment à L'origine de la perspective, Paris, Flammarion, 1987.
- 12. Ce professeur d'écritures nous est présenté, penché sur son parchemin, dans un tableau de 1917 intitulé *The Writing Master.* Plusieurs tableaux du peintre Eakins, dont la scène de chirurgie intitulée *The Gross Clinic* (1875), reprennent des variations de ce motif qui place l'espace du dessin (c'est-à-dire le positionnement des objets et des surfaces en perspective) sous le contrôle de la loi du père.
- 13. Dans Les Paysans de Flagey (1850-1855), Courbet a même conçu un porc dont les oreilles rabattues sur les yeux empêchent l'animal de prendre contact avec le spectateur (Courbet's Realism, op. cit., p. 145).
- 14. Selon le véritable acte de foi qui clôt l'argumentation de «Art and Objecthood» : «Presentness is grace.»
- 15. Dans Courbet's Realism, op. cir., p. 182-184. La lecture que nous propose Fried du tableau Les Demoisellles des bords de la Seine (1856-1857) est révélatrice de la position tout à fait particulière adoptée par l'historien. Ces filles vulgaires et trop parées, que des messieurs ont entraînées dans une partie de campagne, apparaissent à plusieurs comme une contamination du décor naturel par la nouvelle sociabilité parisienne. Pour Fried, cependant, ces figures manifestent une volonté de fusion avec la nature dans laquelle on reconnaît la volonté du peintre de faire corps avec son tableau.
- 16. Realism, Writing and Disfiguration ..., op. cit., p. 6.
- 17. Eod. op., p. 72.
- 18. Cité par Fried, eod. op., p. 94, 95.

RETURNING THE GAZE: THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO THE FRENCH CRITIQUE OF OCULARCENTRISM

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Let me ask you to accept on faith what I lack time to demonstrate now, but have tried to spell out in a recent book entitled *Downcast Eyes*, 1 namely, that a wide variety of French thinkers and artists in this century have been conducting, often with little or no explicit acknowledgment of each other's work, a ruthless critique of the domination of vision in Western culture. Their challenge to what can be called the ocularcentrism of that tradition has taken many different forms, ranging from Bergson's analysis of the spatialization of time to Bataille's celebration of the blinding sun and the acephalic body, from Sartre's depiction of the sado-masochism of "the look" to Lacan's disparagement of the ego produced by the "mirror stage," from Foucault's strictures against panoptic surveillance to Debord's critique of the society of the spectacle, from Barthes's linkage of photography and death to Metz's excoriation of the scopic regime of the cinema, and from Irigaray's outrage at the privileging of the visual in patriarchy to Levinas's claim that ethics is thwarted by a visually grounded ontology. Even an early defender of the figural as opposed to the discursive like Lyotard could finally identify the postmodernism that he came to champion with the sublime foreclosure of the visual.

Although there are many nuances in the work of these and other figures of comparable importance who might be added to the list, the cumulative effect of their interrogation of the eye has been a radical challenge to the conventional wisdom that sight is the noblest of the senses. Instead, its hegemonic status in Western culture has been blamed for everything from an inadequate philosophy and idolatrous religion to a pernicious politics and impoverished æsthetics. Often some other sense, usually touch or hearing, or the essentially non-visual realm of language has been offered as an antidote to sight's domination. Although at times attempts have been made to rescue a less problematic version of visual experience, most of the thinkers whose ideas I traced in *Downcast Eyes* would agree with Lacan when he wrote: "The eye may be prophylatic, but it cannot be beneficent — it is maleficent. In the Bible and even in the New Testament, there is no good eye, but there are evil eyes all over the place."²

In the recent American appropriation of French thought, the critique of ocularcentrism has, I want to argue, struck a particularly respondent chord. Paradoxically, what has been called the new "pictorial turn" or "visual turn" in cultural studies has been fueled in large measure by the reception of ideas from the anti-ocularcentric discourse developed most notably in France. As a result, it has often been accompanied by a hostility or at least wariness towards its subject matter, which seems very different from that generally celebratory mood accompanying the previous "linguistic turn."

There have, to be sure, been influences from elsewhere: for example Heidegger's trenchant analysis of the "age of the world picture" and Gadamer's defence of the

hermeneutic ear over the scientific eye. Domestic traditions have played their part as well, as shown by the importance of John Dewey's pragmatist critique of the "spectator theory of knowledge," recently revived by Richard Rorty in his widely read *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.⁴ American psychologists of visual experience like J. J. Gibson also produced important work that had a potential impact beyond their narrow discipline.⁵ And the media theories of Marshall McLuhan and Walter J. Ong, which caused an intense, if short-lived, flurry of excitement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, must also be acknowledged as preparing the ground.⁶

But it was not really until the wave of translations and interpretations of post-1968 French theory washed over the American intellectual scene that a sustained, nuanced and still by no means exhausted discussion of the dangers of privileging the eye — or at least certain dominant regimes of visuality — gained centre stage. Even when the original political momentum of the reception was largely spent, many of its elements remained potent in the debates over postmodernism — and its counterenlightenment dangers — that began in earnest in the early 1980s. Journals like October, Camera Obscura, Visual Anthropology Review and Screen — the last although British, having a wide following in America — helped plant the French-inspired suspicion of the visual at the very centre of contemporary cultural debate. As a result, to borrow the title of a recent collection, modernity and the hegemony of vision have come to seem inextricably, and for some, ominously, intertwined.⁷

In fact, the variety and range of the American reception of the French critique of that hegemony has been so great that easy generalizations about its contours and tensions are hard to provide. Rather than attempt, therefore, what might be called an Icarian or synoptic overview of the entire field, let me focus on only a few salient landmarks within the discourse surrounding the visual arts in the hope of illuminating some of the effects of the recontextualization of the anti-ocularcentric polemic on our side of the Atlantic. In particular, I want to examine developments in recent art history and criticism, which are themselves now in danger of being absorbed into a larger and more amorphous realm of inquiry called visual studies in part because of the importation of ideas about ocularcentrism from France.

As has been widely remarked, the centre of gravity of modernism in the visual arts shifted from Paris to New York in the years after 1945, when Abstract Expressionism emerged as the dominant school at the cutting-edge of artistic innovation. Whether or not, as Serge Guilbaut has provocatively contended, this shift was tantamout to a theft based on the calculated Cold War strategy of purging art of any political implications, it certainly meant purifying the visual of any apparently extraneous interference, such as a narrative, didactic or anecdotal function, and imbuing it instead with a claim to universal value in itself.8 Although anxieties about the com-

modification or functionalization of the visual object can be detected as early as the nineteenth century, when the invention of replicable photographs seemed to threaten æsthetic autonomy,⁹ it was only in postwar modernism that the strategy of resisting such incursions by essentializing the opticality of the medium came its own.

Here the influential criticism of Clement Greenberg, himself a recently disillusioned Trotskyist rapidly shedding his political past, was pivotal in elevating what he called the "purity" of the optical to the defining characteristic of modern art. For Greenberg, genuine avant-garde art should have no truck with the commodified kitsch of mass art, nor should it register the resistant materiality of its supporting media. Pure visuality meant the presence of atemporal, essential form, the old Platonic dream now paradoxically realized — or at least ever more closely manifested — in the world of visual appearance on the flat surface of a canvas. Greenberg's was thus a modernism reminiscent of the strictly self-referential formalism of earlier critics like Roger Fry and Clive Bell, but now for the first time successfully elevated to a position of cultural hegemony. His standards could be applied not only to define genuine art, but also to decide qualitatively between its good and bad exemplars.

Along with this argument for visual purity went a banishment of movements like Surrealism, which Greenberg called a "reactionary tendency" because it attempted to "restore 'outside' subject matter," 13 such as the unconscious. Others like Dada were also not worth taking seriously because of their radical anti-formalism and hostility to the differentiated institution of art in general and painting in particular. Only pure opticality detached from any external inference — whether political, economic, psychological or even the materiality of media and the artist's own body - met the highest standard of æsthetic achievement for Greenberg and those he influenced. The defence of photography as high art made by important critics like the Museum of Modern Art's John Szarkowski in the 1960s, to take one prominent example, followed virtually the same line of argument.¹⁴ So too did the critique of debased theatricality in art, its degeneration into spectacles for an audience instead of absolute self-contained presentness, vigorously made by Michæl Fried in his celebrated essay "Art and Objecthood" of 1967. 15 Although later Fried vigorously tried to put some distance between his argument and that of Greenberg, which he claimed had been too ahistorically essentialist and based on a privileging of pure opticality he had not himself embraced, 16 he was widely considered his ally at the time.

The Greenbergian consensus began, however, to unravel in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the introduction of new art movements difficult to accommodate in his terms, notably Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptualism, a growing politicization of the art world, which found his Cold War liberal universalism jejune, and most important for our purposes, a new openness to theory from abroad, especially

from France.¹⁷ Although it would be an unwarranted exaggeration to attribute developments in American art primarily to the influence of that theory, it would also be wrong to see the theory as nothing but a post facto justification for changes that were happening on the purely practical level. For, as Daniel Herwitz has recently emphasized, virtually from the beginning avant-garde art was developed in intense dialogue with the theories that explained and legitimated it.¹⁸ The result was often, to borrow the title of Joseph Kosuth's 1969 conceptualist manifesto, the production of "art after philosophy." ¹⁹

Put schematically, the new movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s shifted the ground away from the postwar consensus in the following ways. Mocking his belief in standards of artistic quality, Pop Art undermined Greenberg's rigid distinction between high and low, provocatively blurring the difference between commodity and disinterested æsthetic experience. Minimalism — like the performance art and happenings that also came into their own during this period — restored the temporal and corporeal dimensions of æsthetic experience, in defiance of Greenberg's stress on atemporal visual presence and Fried's excoriation of theatricality. Ocnceptualism increasingly substituted de-materialized ideas or at least language about art for visual presence, impure discursivity for pure opticality. All of these movements, moreover, in one way or another reflected the art world's growing politicization, which encouraged a skeptical reflexivity about the institutions of art — museums, galleries, the art market, etc. — and their relation to larger social forces in place of an internal reflexivity about æsthetic form or the characteristics of the medium itself.

The theories — in most cases French — that were marshalled to explicate and legitimate all of these changes can be usefully divided into three categories, which help us to see the overdetermined nature of the onslaught against the idea of high modernist pure opticality: those that stress the importance of language as opposed to perception, those that emphasize the forgotten role of the (often sexualized) body, and those that stress the political implications of certain visual practices. In reality, of course, many of the arguments in each of these categories were combined by different thinkers in a variety of ways, whose intricacies cannot be adequately reproduced in a survey as quick as this one.

With the American reception of what became known as Structuralism in the late 1960s, identified primarily with Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and the early Barthes, came a powerful imperative to conceptualize all cultural production in terms of language and textuality. That is, everything could be treated as a sign system based on arbitrary, diacritical signifiers, whose ability to convey significance could be uncoupled from their referential, mimetic function. In visual terms, it thus now seemed possible to "read" rather than simply look at pictures, movies, architecture,

photographs and sculpture. As the British artist and critic Victor Burgin — since transplanted to America — put it in 1976, "the ideological resistance, in the name of the 'purity' of the *Image*, to the consideration of linguistic matter within and across the photograph is no more or less well founded than that which met the coming of sound in the cinema."²¹

A salient example of the new openness to language from a critic whose other work we will encounter again shortly can be found in Rosalind Krauss's 1978 essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." Krauss provocatively identified certain modern and even more so postmodernist works as negativities rather than positivities, defined by their relationship to what they were not, that is, landscape or architecture. By then reversing these negative terms and relating them in a quaternary field of multiple contradictions, Krauss was able to situate contemporary sculpture in a discursive rather than purely visual context. "The logic of the space of postmodernist practice," she concluded, "is no longer organized around the definition of a given medium on the grounds of its material, or, for that matter, the perception of the material. It is organized instead through the universe of terms that are felt to be in opposition within a cultural situation." ²³

When more so-called post-structuralist versions of language, especially those identified with deconstruction, became available to American critics, the neatness of such diagrams became less compelling,²⁴ but the textual interference with pure opticality was, if anything, strengthened. Thus, for example, W.J.T. Mitchell in his widely admired *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* of 1986 would write that

Derrida's answer to the question, "What is an image?" would undoubtedly be "Nothing but another kind of writing, a kind of graphic sign that dissembles itself as a direct transcript of that which it represents, or of the way things look, or of what they essentially are." This sort of suspicion of the image seems only appropriate in a time when the very view from one's window, much less the scenes played out in everyday life and in the various media of representation, seem to require constant interpretative vigilance.²⁵

Although at times, the textual threatened to replace the optical entirely in the reception of structuralist and even post-structuralist modes of thought, more often the result was their mutual problematization. Here a new appreciation for the experiments in verbal and visual punning conducted by the Surrealists emerged, as evidenced by the enthusiastic reception of Foucault's essay on Magritte, *This is Not a Pipe*, when it was translated in 1983.²⁶ Combined with the powerful impact of his strictures against panopticism and the medical gaze, Foucault's homage to Magritte's "non-affirmative painting" provided new ammunition in the campaign to disrupt

pure opticality through the introduction of discursivity. Comparable lessons were drawn from Lyotard's *Discours, Figure*, still not fully translated, but an evident influence on such widely read works as *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* of 1983 by the art historian Norman Bryson, a transplanted Englishman who taught at the University of Rochester and is now at Harvard.²⁷

Bryson's influential book, which was one of several by him in the 1980s showing an evident debt to French thinkers like Lyotard and Lacan, ²⁸ also lamented the suppression of corporeality in the dominant tradition of viewing in the West from the Renaissance through modernism. In what Bryson called the "Founding Perception" of that tradition, "the gaze of the painter arrests the flux of phenomena, contemplates the visual field from a vantage-point outside the mobility of duration, in an eternal moment of disclosed presence; while in the moment of viewing, the viewing subject unites his gaze with the Founding Perception, in a perfect recreation of that first epiphany."²⁹ In both cases, what is lost is the deictic location of the glancing eye — or more correctly, both eyes — in the body, a body moving temporally through a concrete spatial location rather than somehow suspended above it in an eternal present. Merleau-Ponty's celebrated critique of disincarnated God's eye views and defence of pre-objective experience also could be adduced to support a temporalized rather than static notion of formal abstraction, as Krauss was to argue when she introduced Richard Serra's work to a Parisian audience in 1983.³⁰

What is also suppressed in the elevation of opticality to an ideal realm above the temporal body, Bryson — following Lyotard rather than Merleau-Ponty —, added, is the power of the desire coursing through the experience of sight.³¹ Ocular desire, ever since at least the time of Augustine, has troubled those who want to privilege sight as the noblest of the senses, for it seems to undermine the disinte restedness of pure contemplation. In the French anti-ocularcentric discourse, it is precisely the inevitability of such impure desiring that undermines the claims of the eye to be dispassionate, cold and above the fray.

Often this has meant exploring the complicated links between the fetishism of the image and specifically male desire, an exploration carried out in the French feminist critique of visuality most explicit in the work of Irigaray. Not only has this critique had its echœs in Anglo-American film criticism, beginning with Laura Mulvey's now classic essay of 1975 on the male gaze,³² but it has also played a role in the turn against Greenberg's reading of modernism. Witness again Victor Burgin, who argued in 1984 that "structurally, fetishism is a matter of separation, segregation, isolation; it's a matter of petrification, ossification, glaciation; it's a matter of idealization, mystification, adoration. Greenbergian modernism was an apotheosis of fetishism in the visual arts in the modern period."³³

So too an awareness of the body as a site of suffering as well as pleasure, of abjection in Julia Kristeva's sense as well as beautiful form, helped call into question the hegemony of the dispassionate eye. As the artist Mary Kelly noted in 1981, "The art of the 'real body' does not pertain to the truth of a visible form, but refers back to its essential content: the irreducible, irrefutable experience of *pain*." Kelly's sensitivity to bodily pain clearly reflected her feminist concerns, especially her resistance to the objectification of women's bodies. A more general theoretical recovery of the desiring body and the suffering body, both of the artist and the beholder, in the post-Greenbergian climate can, however, be most clearly traced to a new appreciation of two French figures from the traditions of Dada Surrealism, who had been scorned by the exponents of Abstract Expressionism: Marcel Duchamp and Georges Bataille.³⁵

The extraordinary American reception of Duchamp, himself of course a longtime resident in the United States, has been the object of considerable scholarly interest, culminating — at least for the moment — in Amelia Jones's ambitious feminist study, Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp, Jerrold Seigel's bold attempt to unite life and work in The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp, Dalia Judavitz's imaginative Unpacking Duchamp, and the recent issue of October devoted to "The Duchamp Effect."36 Although the explosive impact of his Nude Descending a Staircase at the legendary New York Armory Show of 1913 was not entirely forgotten, it was Duchamp's later, very different work that gained centre stage in the 1960s. No history of the origins of many movements of the period, including the neo-Dada of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, the conceptualism of Joseph Kosuth, the minimalism of Robert Morris, and the pop art of Andy Warhol, can ignore his importance. In more general terms, Duchamp's readymades, aggressively "indifferent" to their instrinsic æsthetic value, have been recognized as a powerful challenge to the differentiated institution of art, the traditional privileging of cultivated æsthetic taste, the modernist distinction between high and low, and even the fetish of originality in Western art as a whole. His self-parodic foregrounding of the artist's constructed persona has been praised for effacing the boundary between artwork and performance art, and sometimes blamed for allowing their complete transformation into marketable commodities (e.g. the Warhol phenomenon). And his campy disruption of his own gender identity — Duchamp photographed in drag or signing his works as Rrose Sélavy, among other pseudonyms — has been credited with inspiring the postmodernist assault on modernist assumptions about male creativity, exemplified by the macho posturing of many of the abstract expressionists and their supporters, as well as the modernist figuring of mass culture in misogynist terms as an inferior realm of "feminine" entertainment.³⁷

But it is perhaps Duchamp's celebrated disdain for what he called "retinal art," the art of pure opticality and visual appearance, that has most earned him a place in

the pantheon of current American critics of ocularcentrism. Here both his apparent withdrawal from the art scene to play chess in the 1920s (his last oil painting was Tu m' done in 1918) and the surprising discovery after his death in 1968 that he was all the while preparing the shocking installation or "sculpture-construction" known as Étant donnés (Being Given) now at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, have combined to make him the leading critic of the voyeuristic assumptions of conventional painting, perspectival realist as well as abstract and two-dimensional. Indeed, he has been enlisted as a weapon in the battle against the society of the spectacle as a whole, even if Debord and Situationists themselves had thought his attempt merely to abolish art, rather than both abolish and realize it, was flawed.³⁸

Duchamp also presented a challenge to the Greenbergian defence of pure opticality by directing attention away from the essence of specific arts, visual or otherwise, to the general, sensually abstracted category of "art" as such. As Thierry de Duve recently pointed out, Duchamp foregrounded what Foucault was to call the "enuciative" capacity of language, its ability to make performative statements rather than merely describe what already exists. Although he performatively designated visually accessible objects as art — some of the readymades can, in fact, be looked at and appreciated in formal terms — it was the act of designating that was crucial, as evidenced by his indifference to the found or fabricated quality of the objects themselves. This generalization of the act of æsthetic fiat with no attention to the differences among the arts was a key instance of what Michæl Fried had damned as "theatricality" in "Art and Objecthood."

What made Duchamp so powerful a resource for those who wanted to challenge the Greenbergian paradigm was not only his subversion of received notions of æsthetic value, not only, that is, his intellectual stimulus to conceptualism, but also his restoration of the desiring body in much of his work. Duchamp's erotic preoccupations, evident, for example, in the undulating optical discs he dubbed "rotoreliefs" or the "Large Glass" (also called *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*), initially invited reductive psychological explanations. But more recently, they have been the stimulus to a very different set of questions, which deal with the interference produced by the intervention of repetitive and unfulfilled desire into the space of the seemingly plenitudinous visual object. Lyotard's 1977 *Les Transformateurs Duchamp* had already addressed some of the same issues, but in America, it was Rosalind Krauss and her collaborators at the journal *October* who most insistently explored their implications.⁴¹

Krauss's role in the dissemination and elaboration of post-Greenbergian ideas has been central, so much so that Amelia Jones could turn her into "a sort of institutional author-function whose influence on this level has been vast." Although a

considerably more personal reading of Krauss's animus towards Greenberg, who had been her teacher in the 1960s, is invited by the bitter evocation of his baleful presence in her recent book *The Optical Unconscious*, it is clear that one of the reasons for their falling out concerns a radical difference in their appreciations of Duchamp. ⁴³ As Krauss recalled, "what Clem detests in Duchamp's art is its pressure towards desublimation. 'Leveling' he calls it. The attempt to erase distinctions between art and non-art, between the absolute gratuitousness of form and the commodity. The strategy, in short, of the readymade."

As early as 1977 and her Passages in Modern Sculpture, Krauss was already finding much to admire in Duchamp's challenge to a welter of traditional assumptions about art as sublimation, including those that informed the Greenbergian defence of high modernism. She approvingly acknowledged his debt to the writer Raymond Roussel's demolition of the idea that works of art expressed a creator's interiority by acting as "a transparent pane — a window through which the psychological spaces of viewer and creator are open onto each other."45 Duchamp's radical anti-psychologism, his denial that works reveal the artist's soul or even his intentions, Krauss compared to the anti-subjectivism of both the minimalist artists of the 1970s and the "new novelists" of the same era: "It is no accident that the work of [Robert] Morris and [Richard] Serra was being made at the time when novelists in France were declaring: 'I do not write. I am written'."46 In all these cases, the art object was situated in a discursive field rather than understood as a self-sufficient visual presence. For Krauss, the trajectory of contemporary sculpture from Rodin to Robert Smithson increasingly brought to the fore precisely the theatricality and temporality the "passages" mentioned in her title — that Greenbergian purists like Fried had tried so hard to banish.

The temporality introduced by Duchamp, she later claimed,⁴⁷ was that of a blinking eye rather than the fixating stare of the modernist artist/beholder. Anticipating Derrida's famous deconstruction of Husserl's reliance on the instantaneity of the *Augenblick*, Duchamp's work showed that even a blink has duration. And when the blink is repeated, it reveals what Krauss called, in still another essay on this theme, the "im/pulse to see," which expressed the rhythms of erotic desire and its frustration. Now her reading of Duchamp admitted a psychological dimension, but one that revealed a divided, partly formless rather than unified and expressive subject. It was the unstoppable beat repetitively coursing through that disunified subject, she charged, that "modernism had solemnly legislated out of the visual domain, asserting a separation of the senses that will always mean that the temporal can never disrupt the visual from within, but only assault it from a position that is necessarily outside, external, eccentric." ⁴⁸

Moreover, the moment when the eye was closed could be understood as providing a screen on which the non-plenitudinous, heterogeneous signs of what Derrida called écriture could be projected. Here the figurality of which Lyotard had written in Discours, Figure was crossed by discursivity, but both were internal to vision rather than one within and the other without. In still another way, Krauss contended, the purity of visual experience was undermined by the blink of the eye. Like the interruption experienced by the voyeur suddenly caught looking through a keyhole, so trenchantly described in Sartre's Being and Nothingness, the body intervened to subvert the illusion of pure, disincarnated sight. Instead, a chiasmic intertwining of viewer and viewed, of the subject and object of the gaze, ensued, which mobilized specular processes of projection and identification.

A similar sensitivity to the ways in which temporality and the body disrupted the ideology of visual presence was evident in Krauss's celebration of Surrealist photography, so long maligned as impure gimmickry by advocates of modernist formalism.⁴⁹ Here she employed Derrida's notion of spacing to explain the ways in which internal deferral and doubling subvert seemingly unified individual prints.⁵⁰ The result, she argued, was a visual heterogeneity that presents what is seen as always already discursively coded, as, in fact, a kind of disseminating *écriture* in the complicated sense of that word introduced by deconstruction.

Even non-Surrealist photography could be understood to deny the visual plenitude, the formal self-sufficiency, assumed by the high modernist defence of the medium. Here the comparison Duchamp once made between his readymades and snapshots was telling, Krauss argued, because it suggested that the photographs also needed some textual supplementation to become fully meaningful. That is, snapshots were empty signifiers, wrested from any narrative coherence and produced by the indexical trace, the brute physical residue, of the objects they reproduced. As a consequence, they needed captions to make them meaningful.

Whether like *écriture* and thus internally coded in heterogeneous ways or like uncoded indices and thus in need of a supplementary text to give them meaning, photographs could be understood to challenge the ideology of pure visual presence promulgated by Greenberg and his followers. In much of the art of the 1970s, including that which seemed an extension of Abstract Expressionism, Krauss detected the impact of the photograph in precisely this fashion: "Its visual and formal effect," she wrote of one example, "was that of captioning: of bowing to the implied necessity to add a surfeit of written information to the depleted power of the painted sign." ⁵¹

It was not, however, until the introduction of even more explicitly antiocularcentric, anti-sublimating arguments from Bataille in her work of the 1980s that Krauss was able to demonstrate how depleted that power actually was.⁵² Krauss first evoked the author of the scandalous pornographic novel Histoire de l'œil in her 1983 essay "No More Play," published in a Museum of Modern Art collection on Primitivism in 20th Century Art and reprinted in her enormously influential collection The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. 53 Bataille's violent fantasies of enucleation and the metaphoric displacement of the eye by other objects like the sun, eggs and testicles work, she recognized, to deprivilege vision in general and formal clarity in particular. His introduction of the word informe in the Surrealist journal Documents in the 1930s indicated a challenge to the formalist bias of high modernism, indeed to any notion of vertical hierarchy as opposed to horizontal leveling. The word denoted, according to Krauss, "what alteration produces, the reduction of meaning or value, not by contradiction — which would be dialectical but by putrefaction: the puncturing of the limits around the term, the reduction to the sameness of the cadaver — which is transgressive."54 Here the body as base, unformed materiality, a materiality always susceptible to corruption, mutilation and decay, was pitted against the elevated, sublimated, timeless body of formal perfection in traditional Western art. Here a "hard" primitivism of transgression and expenditure replaced the "soft" primitivism of æstheticized visual form. Here the alleged superiority of the spiritualizing, formalizing head over the materializing, grotesque body, an acephalic body whose tangled innards mimic the obscurity of the labyrinth, is undone.

Perhaps the high watermark of Krauss's adoption of the anti-ocularcentric rhetoric emanating from France came in the 1986 issue of *October* dedicated to Bataille, to which she contributed an essay with the straightforward title "Antivision." ⁵⁵ Bemoaning what she called the "modernist fetishization of sight," ⁵⁶ whose effects she disappointedly detected in Bataille's late book on Manet, Krauss celebrated his earlier embrace of the values of darkness, blindness and dazzlement in the obscurity of the caves at Lascaux or the labyrinth of the Minotaur. Her essay ended by eagerly anticipating the effects of rereading modernism in antivisual terms, such as "informe, acéphale, bassesse, automutilation and blindness":

It is not clear what an alternative view of the history of recent art — one operated through Bataille's disruption of the prerogatives of a visual system — would yield. It is my assumption that in gesturing toward another set of data, in suggesting another group of reasons, another description of the goals of representation, another ground for the very activity of art, its yield will be tremendous.⁵⁷

Ultimately, the simple binary implications of pro- and anti-vision seems to have proven too restrictive for Krauss, whose most recent book borrowed Walter Benjamin's notion of the "optical unconscious" and gave it a Lacanian spin to suggest a split *within* vision itself.⁵⁸ Although in some of her earlier work, she had adopted

ideas about the fractured nature of the visual field developed by Lacan in his *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Krauss now was also able to draw on the research of Jonathan Crary, whose *Techniques of the Observer*, published in 1990, demonstrated the importance of the nineteenth-century recovery of physiological optics, the workings of the actual two eyes in the human body, in overturning the dominant model of vision based on the disembodied workings of a camera obscura.⁵⁹

Crary's own debts to Krauss in return and the French critique of ocularcentrism are evident in this remarkable study, but he went beyond her in teasing out the explicitly political implications of his material. 60 Situating the modernist rejection of perspectivalist realism in an earlier and more widespread shift in the status of observation, which he dates as early as the 1820s, Crary argued that it was less of a liberation than has been supposed. The new protocols of the observer seemed to allow the body to come back, but actually only permitted the two eyes to return, while still keeping the other senses, especially touch, at bay. "This autonomization of sight, occurring in many different domains," Crary concludes, "was a historical condition for the rebuilding of an observer fitted for the tasks of 'spectacular' consumption." 61

Unlike earlier Greenbergian celebrants of modernist visuality, who saw in itsemancipation from previous perspectival regimes a genuine liberation, Crary had absorbed enough of the French distrust of all scopic regimes to recognize the insidious implications of high modernist optical purity. Among the many French theoreticians he cites, including Deleuze, Lyotard, Lacan, Bataille and Baudrillard, two in particular stand out for their impact on the political significance Crary wrests from his story: Foucault and Debord. As mentioned above, the allegedly sinister political implications of ocularcentrism were often an important source of the American interest in its subversion, complementing the fascination with language and the body. *Techniques of the Observer* deliberately combines Foucault's celebrated critique of surveillance in the the carceral society of panopticism with Debord's attack on the Spectacle, a combination that neither French theorist would have been likely to find felicitous.

For Crary, however, both regimes of visual power have worked in tandem to rationalize vision in the service of the status quo:

Almost simultaneous with this final dissolution of a transcendent foundation for vision emerges a plurality of means to recode the activity of the eye, to regiment it, to heighten its productivity and to prevent its distraction. Thus the imperatives of capitalist modernization, while demolishing the field of classical vision, generated techniques for imposing visual attentiveness, rationalizing sensation, and managing perception. They were disciplinary techniques that required a notion of visual

experience as instrumental, modifiable, and essentially abstract, and that never allowed a real world to acquire solidity or permanence.⁶²

Once again, the modernist visual regime, which a generation ago during the postwar era seemed emblematic of emancipation from extraneous constraints, is damned as itself a subtle form of discipline and regimentation, somehow complicitous with the imperatives of capitalist rationalization. Although the alternative strategy of evoking the desublimating effects of Lyotard's sublime or Bataille's *informe* has itself recently been questioned by another member of the *October* circle, Hal Foster, in his new book on Surrealism and the uncanny, *Compulsive Beauty*, ⁶³ it is clear that for anyone who has absorbed the last twenty or so years of French theory in America, there can be no turning back.

Not surprisingly, the most vociferous champions of high modernism in 1990s America, at least in the visual arts, often turn out to be outspokenly conservative figures like Hilton Kramer and Roger Kimball, whose distaste for French theory goes along with their hatred of anything that questions literary canons or subverts the distinction between high and low culture, thus threatening the traditional value hierarchies they so doggedly defend. Although Paris has not yet stolen back the idea of modern art from New York, or rather recovered its place as the dominant locus of contemporary artistic creation, the infiltration of French theory, in particular its critique of ocularcentrism, has been a powerful weapon in the dismantling of the critical consensus that made the theft seem worth the effort in the first place. What French artists may not have been able to bring about, French theory seems to have ultimately accomplished: the dissolution of the triumphalist reading of modern art as the realization of æsthetic truth in the context of political freedom. We now see things differently on our side of the Atlantic, if indeed we feel able to see anything very clearly at all.

- Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
 - Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), pp. 118-119.
 - 3. W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," Artforum (March, 1992).
 - 4. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). See also his *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972-1980* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), especially Chapter 3, "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey."
 - 5. J. J. Gibson, The Perception of the Visual World (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).
- 6. Their importance for the French debate is addressed by Andreas Huyssen, "In the Shadow of McLuhan: Jean Baudrillard's Theory of Simulation," Assemblage, 10 (1990). In general, however, McLuhan and Ong rarely find their way into the French theorizing I have examined.
- 7. David Michæl Levin, ed., Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- 8. Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- 9. For a discussion, see Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning," Endgame (Boston, 1990), p. 35.
- 10. Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture: Critical Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 171. Greenberg went so far as to argue that even modern sculpture had lost its tactile associations to become almost purely visual (p. 142).
- 11. It also has often been compared with the defence of high modernism by Theodor W. Adorno. Adorno's "debate" with Walter Benjamin over the implications of mass culture became available for appropriation by Americans only in the early 1970s. Benjamin's sympathy for the emancipatory potential in mass culture was pitted against the apparent elitism of Adorno and used to reinforce the new anti-Greenbergian consensus. Here too differing attitudes towards Surrealism, which Benjamin generally supported and Adorno disdained, played a role. For a recent defence of Breton, which explicitly draws on Benjamin's debts to Surrealism, see Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- 12. In "After Abstract Expressionism," in *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970*, ed., Henry Geldzahler (New York: Dutton, 1969), he argued that the ultimate source of value in art is the artist's "conception" that dictates the essentializing reduction (p. 369).
- 13. Ibid., p. 7. More recently, the repressed debt of abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock to the automatism of Surrealism has been recalled. See, for example, Peter Wollen, Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth-Century Culture (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 91.
- 14. For a comparison of Greenberg and Szarkowski, see Victor Burgin, The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 66ff.
- 15. Michæl Fried, "Art and Objecthood," Artforum (1967).
- 16. See his "How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark," Critical Inquiry, 9, 1 (September, 1982) and his interventions in the discussion "Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop," in Discussions in Contemporary Culture, I, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), p. 71f. In fact, in his series of later works on the dynamic of theatricality and absorption, Fried seems to privilege an almost tactile immersion of the painter's and the beholder's bodies in the canvas over the distance of a disinterested spectator. Or more precisely, he acknowledges an irreducible tension between the two impulses, which never allows one to triumph over the other for very long. For a reading of Fried that foregrounds his distance from an ahistorical attempt to find painting's optical essence and appreciates his debt to Derrida, see Stephen W. Melville, Philosophy Beside Itself: On Deconstruction and Modernism (Minneapolis, 1986).
- 17. There were, of course, other developments, such as the reintroduction of figural, often neo-expressionist painting by German artists like Baselitz, Kiefer and Penck, which challenged the Greenbergian paradigm from another angle. For a debate over its significance, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," and

- Donald B. Kuspit, "Flak from the 'Radicals': The American Case Against German Painting," in Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brian Wallis (Boston: Godine, 1984).
- 18. Daniel Herwitz, Making Theory/Constructing Art: On the Authority of the Avant-Garde (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- 19. Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," in Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990, ed., Gabriele Guercio (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).
- 20. The celebrated attack on minimalism as theatrical by Michæl Fried in "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, 5, 10 (Summer, 1967) was directed precisely at the restoration of temporality. For a typical post-Greenbergian response to Fried on this issue, see Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October*, 8 (Spring, 1979).
- 21. Burgin, The End of Art Theory, p. 21. The essay from which this citation comes, "Modernism in the Work of Art," was originally a talk given in 1976.
- 22. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1978), in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).
- 23. Ibid., p. 289.
- 24. Krauss herself was taken to task for being too beholden to an ahistorical structuralist logic and not sensitive enough to rhetorical, institutional and ideological questions by Craig Owens in "Analysis Logical and Ideological" (1985), reprinted in his *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, eds., Scott Bryson et al. (Berkeley, 1992), pp. 268-283.
- 25. W.J.T. Mitchell, Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology (Chicago: University of Chicago, Press, 1986).
- 26. Michel Foucault, This is Not a Pipe, trans. and ed., James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
- 27. Norman Bryson, Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. Bryson, to be sure, was skeptical of the earlier structuralist turn, sardonically commenting that "the misfortune of the French is not to have translated Wittgenstein; instead, they read Saussure" (p. 77). But he uses Derrida, Barthes and Lacan to buttress his larger argument.
- 28. Norman Bryson, Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Regime (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
- 29. Bryson, Vision and Painting, p. 94.
- 30. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Richard Serra, A Translation," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985). Discussing Serra's 1970-72 sculpture *Shift*, Krauss interprets it as a tacit realization of the arguments of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*.
- 31. The absence of a strong psychoanalytic component in Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the body meant that he lacked an appreciation of the effects of desire in the visual field. His phenomenology could thus be important for Michæl Fried as well as the minimalists. For a debate over who got him right, see "Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop," pp. 72-73. Denying that he ever privileged pure opticality, Fried argues that it was in fact minimalism that carried the Greenbergian reduction to an extreme of literalness rather than contesting it.
- 32. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen, 16, 3 (1975).
- 33. Burgin, "Tea with Madeleine," The End of Art Theory, p. 106. This essay first appeared in Wedge in 1984.
- 34. Mary Kelly, "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism," in Wallis, ed., Art After Modernism, p. 96. This essay first appeared in Screen in 1981. For a discussion of Kristeva's general importance for the recent interest in abject art, see my essay "Abjection Overruled," Salmagundi, 103 (Summer, 1994).
- 35. Fried, for example, admitted, "Yes, I was aware of Duchamp; he just doesn't interest me a lot." "Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop," p. 80.
- 36. Amelia Jones, Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

- 1994); Jerrold Seigel, The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation and the Self in Modern Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Dalia Judavitz, Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and "The Duchamp Effect," October, 70 (Fall, 1994).
- 37. See in particular Andreas Huyssen's influential essay, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1986).
- 38. See, for example, Guy Debord's complaint in his 1956 "Methods of Detournement": "Since the negation of the bourgeois conception of art and artistic genius has become pretty much old hat, [Duchamp's] drawing of a mustache on the *Mona Lisa* is no more interesting than the original version of the painting." *The Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans., Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 9.
- 39. Thierry de Duve, "Echoes of the Readymade: Critique of Pure Modernism," October, 70 (Fall, 1994), p. 65f.
- 40. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," p. 142.
- 41. Krauss acknowledged in her 1990 essay "The Blink of an Eye," that "Lyotard has been alone, as far as I know, in pushing this notion of the carnality of vision deep into the heart of Duchamp's production, which is to say, onto the very surface, of the Large Glass." The States of "Theory," History, Art, and Critical Discourse, ed., David Carroll (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 182. Krauss's involvement with French theory and art criticism was deepened by her discussions with the group around the journal Macula, which published from 1976 to 1982, and included Yve-Alain Bois and Jean Clay. Along with Hubert Damisch, they are acknowledged in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths.
- 42. Jones, Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp, p. 56.
- 43. Rosalind E. Krauss, The Optical Unconscious (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), for example on p. 309.
- 44. Ibid, p. 142.
- 45. Rosalind E. Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), p. 76.
- 46. Ibid., p. 270.
- 47. Krauss, "The Blink of an Eye," p. 176.
- 48. Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Im/pulse to See," in Vision and Visuality, ed., Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. 63.
- 49. With Jane Livingston, Krauss curated a very influential show of Surrealist art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington in 1985 entitled L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985).
- 50. See in particular, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. For more recent evidence of the general impact of Derrida's ruminations on vision, see Peter Brunette and David Wills, eds., *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture* (Cambridge, 1994).
- 51. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, p. 219. Here she is referring specifically to a work of Marcia Hafif, but her point is a more general one.
- 52. Krauss had the advantage of a close relationship with the foremost Bataille scholar, Denis Hollier, who soon became a major figure at *October*.
- 53. Rosalind E. Krauss, "No More Play," in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: The Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984); reprinted in her *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, from which the following citations come.
- 54. Ibid., p. 64.
- 55. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Antivision," October, 36 (Spring, 1986).
- 56. Ibid., p. 147.
- 57. Ibid., p. 154.
- 58. Krauss notes that whereas Benjamin uses the term to imply the expansion of visual experience through new technologies like the camera, she wants to stress its implication of something that normally remains below the threshold of consciousness. "If it can be spoken of at all as externalized within the visual field," she writes, "this is because a

group of disparate artists have so constructed it there, constructing it as a projection of the way that human vision can be thought to be less than a master of all it surveys, in conflict as it is with what is internal to the organism that houses it." *The Optical Unconscious*, pp. 179-180.

- 59. Jonathan Crary, Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990). His argument was already presented in his contribution to the Vision and Visuality conference at the Dia Art Foundation in 1988, "Modernizing Vision."
- 60. Other figures connected with October, most notably Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, also contributed to the political critique of Greenbergian high modernism. Buchloh championed artists like Michæl Asher, Marcel Broodthærs, Hans Haacke and Daniel Buren, who intensified the Duchampian subversion of the institutions of art. Issues of power, gender and sexuality were also foregrounded in the work of the one-time October collaborator Craig Owens, who acknowledged a strong debt to Foucault in particular. One of his major complaints against Michæl Fried's mourning the end of modernism concerned in fact the absence of any discussion of power. See his 1982 Art in America essay "Representation, Appropriation, and Power," reprinted in Beyond Recognition.
- 61. Ibid, p. 19.
- 62. Ibid., p. 24.
- 63. Hal Foster, Compulsive Beauty (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), Chapter 8.

SPECIFIC OBJECTS: A RESPONSE TO NICOLE DUBREUIL-BLONDIN AND MARTIN JAY

SUSAN DOUGLAS

Professeur au Département d'arts visuels de l'Université d'Ottawa, Susan Douglas travaille sur les questions reliées à la culture visuelle et à l'art canadien contemporain. Elle collabore régulièrement à *Parachute* ainsi qu'à d'autres revues spécialisées, où elle a écrit sur les résonances politiques des représentations de pratiques S/M, sur les concepts de ruine et de fragment dans l'œuvre d'Andres Serrano, ainsi que sur les questions de technologie et de modernisme dans l'art dit «primitif». Elle est présentement commissaire invitée pour une exposition intitulée *Les Occupantes*, qui explorera les interfaces entre l'espace muséal et l'espace domestique.

Susan Douglas is an art historian and cultural critic and Professor of Art History at the University of Ottawa. She has written on issues relating to visual culture and contemporary Canadian art. Her frequent contributions to *Parachute* and other art journals focus on questions of identity, the body and visualism. In recent essays she has explored the political resonance of representations of S/M practices, the concept of the ruin or fragment in the work of Andres Serrano and issues concerning technology and modernism in so-called "primitive" art. Her current curatorial project is the site-specific exhibition *Les Occupantes*, which explores the interface between domestic and museum space.

I want to thank you both for situating more precisely the terms of the engagement between modernism and the visual field. Nicole Dubreuil-Blondin, confirming my suspicion that just beyond Fried's seemingly non-canonical postformalism lies a envigorated and far from abandoned "triumphant modernism," I think, has introduced to the discussion the necessary vocabulary of an ascending and descending formalism that, as a modality of thought and mechanism of interpretation for visual culture has been destined, by writers such as Martin Jay and others present here today, to be problematized and found wanting. The double-figure of Fried I and II, the critic and the art historian, is particularly suggestive. It suggests a field of determinations — the boundaries and frontiers that make up discourses — collecting as one form of a practice of reception: for Fried, then, the notion of æsthetic judgment as a series of questions and their response whose emancipatory potential and disruptive force is fixed in relation to a pre-existing mechanism of representation: a performance for which W.I.T. Mitchell affords the irresistible image of the ventriloquist. With Dubreuil-Blondin, Mitchell helps me to locate the tension between modernism's pure form and issues of power that operate within given texts to produce the effect of discursive transparency, or naturalization. This purity of the æsthetic, and high art, to which Fried addresses himself and which Dubreuil-Blondin so eloquently exposes, is what attaches her presentation to Martin Jay's.

Martin Jay in turn provides us with the opportunity to consider how the encounter between formalism and contemporary critical theory might be mediated. If the experience of the æsthetic can be said historically to have been (provisionally) closed by the hegemonic function of pure visibility — the purity of the optical to which Jay refers and which, via Greenberg, becomes the defining characteristic of modern art — then its disruption, in the form of a series of necessary and theoretical interventions upon dominant traditions of viewing, opens up and celebrates the possibilities of an alternate awareness, be it an awareness brought in by shifting sensory registers (the faculty of smell, for example, rather than sight), by restoring the fleshly body, or by thinking through the conjunctures of language and/or ocular desire. What these papers share, then, is a critical vocabulary whose application, if not necessarily its conscious intent, is political in the sense that it poses a fundamental challenge to received knowledge.

By way of a reponse I want to extend the vocabulary of these important and introductory critiques of the hegemonic gaze of modernism for a general audience, mindful that, in order to do so, I will have to simplify what are indeed rich and complex debates and critiques almost beyond the recognition of the theorists who have generated them, some of whom are present today. My apologies to them in advance for any omissions and all overly reductive reformulations on my part. My point,

however, is to begin to establish for the audience a critical language with which they are perhaps unfamiliar and by means of which a more fruitful discussion might be engaged further along. The images before you, both of works by René Magritte, are intended to "ground" what might otherwise be a very abstract discussion.

To the right, the fixed, monocular and hegemonic gaze of modernism that comes to be involved in a description of the world as a reflection of the world of reality. It suggests an institutionalized ocularcentrism; in other words, it might be read as referring to the internalization of the technologies of sight as the foundation of experience. Sight, then, as the dominant sense, and monocular vision, coincident with the illusory standpoint of projective representations of space in western art, as emblematic of a rational, distancing, scientific and subordinating gaze, the eye of a disinterested, objective logic and pure form, the top-down gaze of the Foucauldian panopticon. This image then represents the "elevated, timeless body of formal perfection," that is the gaze, the dominant formation that Jay has described as central to "the scopic regime of modernity."

By contrast, the image on the left signifies its opposite: the expanded gaze of contemporary visual experience, an embodied as opposed to disembodied looking, the historical condition of representation as opposed to the transcendental signification imposed by recourse to atemporal, essentialized form, etc., and the provocative and blurring glance of contemporary visual production. In short, these images are richly suggestive in evoking first, the co-extensiveness of the eye and the mind constituted by modernism as an imagistic reflex; second, in situating the incarnated, yet at times still monocular, looking of current cultural theory.

My interpretation is necessarily incomplete, provisional, and requires nuance. Yet, understood in relation to the papers we've just heard and in the context of this conference, what these images trope is a broader spectrum of art historical inquiries that have emerged over the last two decades to define questions of visibility in meaningful new ways and in relation to social and historical bodies. Touching on cultural studies, literary criticism, philosophy and history, the interrogation of visual culture has been explored with special prominence in art history in relation to visual modernism. Visualism engages representation in two important formations: one, as it is represented in and constructed by works of art; the other, through the artwork's address to the viewer, that is to say, in the object's intersection with the social formation of gender, class, race, and/or sexuality. Involving an examination of the confrontation and dialogue between æsthetics and social theory as well as questions of interpretation and theoretical models of the reception of art, visualism explores the historicity of vision at the same time as examining the visuality of differing art practices.

Vision and visuality are central terms to a meditation on the incarnated gaze such as that which is being proposed here. First coined in 1988 by Hal Foster, the rubric "vision and visuality" embraces a social and historical conjunction "between the mechanisms of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations" (Foster: p. ix); in other words, it refers to sight as perceptual phenomenon and sight as optical fact. An oblique look at visual subcultures, it has also been referred to in anthropological circles as "visualism" (Taylor) due to its coincidence with what Martin Jay has termed, as I noted earlier, the "scopic regimes of modernity" (1988). In recent critiques, the field of vision and visuality, itself a problematization of visual presence, has been positioned relative to abjection as standing for authoritarianism itself.1 Even so, although the terrain of the visual must be acknowledged as fraught, for cultural critics, Rosalind Krauss's "antivision," Norman Bryson's "anamorphosis," and Christine Buci-Glucksmann's "la folie du voir" and "le regard baroque," to name just a few interventions in this ever growing field, variously represent an investigation into the genealogy of visual insurgence and social repression, sublimation, rupture, dislocation and excess.

It is difficult to characterize the history of vision and visuality in a few lines. Aspects of its institutional formation as a disciplinary field can be traced in the writing of a wide range of artists and writers in both Europe and the U.S. Loosely constellating as a formation of the New Art History and therefore taking up, to varying degrees, aspects of social history, anthropology, cultural studies, feminism, psychoanalysis, semiotics and queer studies, vision and visuality, and with it questions of representation and perception, is manifest as a concern in the work of thinkers as different as Jonathan Crary, Svetlana Alpers, Griselda Pollock, W.J.T. Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose, Victor Burgin, Laura Mulvey and Michæl Baxandall. There are hosts of others I might also name. Western visuality is cited by Bryson and Mieke Bal, for example, in relation to semiotics, by Michæl Fried, couched in phenomenology, and it is located in its connection to deconstruction by Jacques Derrida, to instantiate only a few examples. Some, if not all, of these authors' projects have been impacted by the philosophical texts of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Baudrillard and Alphonso Lingis, by Fredric Jameson's critical theory, and by the contributions of scholars such as Andrea Nye and Barbara Maria Stafford, again, to name just some. In another set of theoretical developments that focus around identity, difference, location, power, representation and discourse, it marks the social formations and representational practices of alterity as the idea of sex, race and gender difference (see, for example, the work of Mary Kelly, Mary Ann Doane, bell hooks, Richard Dyer, Kobena Mercer). And, in still another context, within a generalized logic of representation that has been called the "logistics of the image,"

the history of the regimes of the visual is also cast as a site for the technologies of perception (I am thinking here of David Michæl Levin and Paul Virilio, for example.)

Debates engaging vision and visuality have taken place across the pages of journals as varied as Screen, Block, Art History, Oxford Art Journal, Representations, New Formations and Semiotica, at numerous disciplinary and institutional sites, and at multi-, pan- and interdisciplinary fora, conferences and symposia such as this one. Its history has been most extensively rendered by Jay. Locating its practice along an axis running from Renaissance "perspectivalism" to Derridean "blindness" (1988; 1994), in Jay's narrative, as in the work of others already mentioned, the problematic of perspective and of a totalizing, hegemonic epistemology are intimately conjoined.

The interrogation of vision is the questioning of a dominant paradigm of knowledge at the same time as it is the questioning of sight as the dominant sense. In terms of culture, one of its multiple points of reference is the Cartesian division of mind and body which established a hierarchy for knowledge and instituted sight as dominant among the faculties (Jay); in discursive terms it has been seen to align itself with phallocentrism by certain feminist academics (see Wright) and with a set of relations of domination and submission by postcolonial critics and others as well (e.g. Bhabha, Foster, Trinh, Lacan). In addition, the faculty of observation is critical to the textualization of the subject into an object in anthropological accounts (see Clifford, Marcus, Townsend-Gault). In terms of the visual arts, it has been variously described as a condition of representation in its formation as the projective description of spatial relations upon the picture plane (Berger, Jay, et alia) and as the condition of possibility for the cinematic apparatus (e.g. Metz, Mulvey, de Lauretis). Most recently it nominates the reflection or embodiment of alternate scopic practices and discursive positionalities. Donald Preziozi, for example, rethinks the art historical canon in relation to anamorphism as a metaphor. In her most recent work, Krauss embraces the visual as a critical terrain for the circulation of wild and potentially catastrophic effects (1994). In short, vision and visuality is an ever expanding and rapidly changing field that cuts across and inflects the dialectic of modernism and postmodernism. It conjoins literary traditions, cultural phenomena and contemporary art practices in ever fugitive, contingent and stimulating new ways.

All of this to say, then, that the question of modernism and the gaze involves the location of a particular response in relation to the viewer and is concerned with a politics of reading. Crucially, it seems to me, it situates the experiential in relation to the text, at the same time that it thinks the connections between the presumed objectivity and framing power of vision and the art object as a "self-sufficient visual presence" (Jay, p.19). It is perhaps this blurring of boundaries, the enmeshedness of the visual field as it were, that articulates for me the most productive tensions in theories of

vision and visuality, and yet in a certain way, it is absent from your texts. It brings me to my question to you both: What has emerged centrally from your texts is that the visual is bound up with issues of language and sexuality, is mobilized by "specular processes of projection and identification" and involves the intertwining of viewer and viewed. The subversive potential of your texts is clear. And yet, in your formulations of the dissolution of the modern, questions of the specificity of race, sex, gender and class are noticeably absent. Nicole, could you pinpoint more closely the specificities of the socio-historical spectator in Fried's dispositif, and Martin, could you extend the terms of your discussion further to take account of the postcolonial destabilization of visual authority?

1. See Simon Taylor, "The Phobic Object: Abjection in Contemporary Art", in Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993).

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RHETORIC BY ARRANGEMENT: SEEING IS BELIEVING'

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This paper is dedicated to two Montréal scholars whose work has been instrumental in the formation of my ideas about museum display. For many years, Jennifer Fisher's research on display rhetorics, a haptic mode of apprehension and the importance of agency, as well as Johanne Lamoureux's ideas about time, site specificity and decor when interpreting exhibitions have been two of my main sources for stimulating and transformative concepts with regard to exhibition structure, meaning and potential.

Once upon a time
In the land of museums
Pictures were hung all in a row
Round and round each room they would go
The spaces between them just so
Nothing above, nothing below
Not too high, nor too low
It made a very impressive show
So much so
That this system did grow and grow and grow
Until the day some began to say
NO.

Most museums still display Twentieth Century wall art by arranging works in a unilinear fashion on a white surface with enough space between each object to suggest its discreteness but not so much that the possibility of connection with work to either side can be entirely ignored. The system is employed with both large and small works, regardless of medium. It is also found in non-museum settings such as commercial galleries, institutions of various kinds and homes. The presence of what has become the dominant modernist mode of display over a range of presentation sites is now a simplified and mutually reinforcing means of designating particular objects "art" as well as a vehicle through which the viewer's bodily and mental processes in relation to the act of seeing are codified, often much to the relief of both institution and individual.

As the recent literature on exhibitions has documented, throughout the twentieth century, artists have consistently offered alternate visions in displaying wall work,² in particular the cluster hang. Although there has been a concerted effort to reconstruct or approximate historical non-monolinear hangs (the Suprematist exhibition, Los Angeles, 1982-1983; the twenty-two-foot scale model of the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition designed by Frank Gehry in the 1991 Degenerate Art exhibition), these, like their predecessors, are usually isolated, ephemeral events, most often confined to temporary exhibitions and, as such, still not an integral part of the

display vocabulary in museums when hanging twentieth century works over a longer term. The same is true of the emergence of the cluster hang by artists since the 1970s. Their work may be part of a temporary exhibition or constitute a special project but, in most instances, is limited in duration. The cluster hang, then, is and is not part of the display rhetoric of today's museums when showing contemporary art.

This paper examines the implications, ideologies and idiosyncrasies of the coexistence of what might be deemed, in political terms, conflicting constructs of the museum Utopia or, using a psychological model, dissociational disorders of the museum psyche resulting from amnesia, repression and trauma by loosely comparing and contrasting, in a methodology indebted to Heinrich Wölfflin, the monolinear and cluster hang in particular, especially when used to display contemporary art. Stylistically, the paper has been written in different and seemingly unrelated ways to echo the existence and disjuncture of multiple display modalities within the same analytic, academic or architectural space.

The decision to present a paper using different forms of language, in Québec, so soon after the October 30, 1995 Referendum asking whether Québec should separate from Canada, is more than an æsthetic attempt to embody the linguistic differences and dialectics of prose and poetic paradigms of language and meaning, or modernist and postmodernist modes of linguistic manipulation, or gendered differences between verbal constructions identified as masculine and feminine, or the experiential distances between spoken and written languages.

Using at least two tongues³ in today's presentation embodies my personal and political history as a multilingual, Canadian, Jewish, female living in Montréal, one committed to a federalist rather than a separatist vision of Utopia, both in the museum and the country known as Canada. My position as a Federalist became entrenched in the spring of 1965 after finding and holding a ticking bomb placed, symbolically, under the throne of the statue of Queen Victoria outside McGill University's Royal Victoria College, not half a mile from here on Sherbrooke Street. The bomb left by the RNL (the Rassemblement pour la Libération du Québec) was timed to explode ten minutes later and designed to kill over 200 young women who were gathering a few metres away. It is this episode that turned me into a pacifist, a historian of forgotten narratives and a seeker of non-violent and non-racist ways of accommodating difference.

I use language, the vehicle in Québec for identifying and defining difference, as a metaphor to discuss "difference" in the territory of the museum, well aware that my manner of manipulating language reiterates the obfuscation in the referendum question posed to Québec voters⁴ and equally aware that territorial language in the museum and the country functions as a mask for fear, anger and denial of painful

issues, both personal and political, that emerge on all sides when attempting to accommodate or integrate "difference." The lack of linguistic resolution in the paper and the probability of misunderstanding resembles the lack of resolution and resistances in both provinces, that of the museum and Québec, and, of course, myself. Misunderstandings are bound to be augmented for those who hear these words translated if for no other reason than that the lengthy sentences designed to simulate endless monolinear hangs, and the performative elements of rhythm, tone, inflection, syntax, word play and rhyme, inevitably cannot compute or be interwoven. This too parallels the museum experience of those unfamiliar with either its languages or the subtleties of museological discourses. In all instances, the use of language is a political act.

Giles Waterfield, in mapping a typology and chronology of picture hanging in Britain, describes a movement from the Eighteenth Century Decorative or Picturesque Hang, associated with aristocratic collections and their emphasis on the visual principles of display, to the Eighteenth Century Historical Hang, which highlights geography, chronology and the art object as specimen, to the Cluttered or Salon Hang, which maximizes space found in temporary exhibitions and some public collections, to the single, sequential row of pictures on light-coloured walls favoured by a more scientific approach to the study of art on the part of scholars and institutions after the mid-nineteenth century.7 Although Waterfield mentions the importance of the æsthetic views of artists such as Whistler on the shift to the monolinear, evenly spaced hang, he does not discuss the meaning of this form of display as integral to the work of certain artists. For example, Martha Ward and John House8 respectively have suggested that Claude Monet used the monolinear hang with his series paintings to distinguish them for marketing and æsthetic purposes from the cluttered, all-over, floor to ceiling, wall to wall, Salon presentations of his day and, perhaps more importantly, to emphasize the sense of passing time in his pictures of cathedrals or haystacks by having viewers move along a chronologically arranged sequence, thereby constructing a situation in which there is a bodily reenactment, in abbreviated form, of the developmental model of time visually portrayed and frontally displayed. Today, we have become so habituated to the institutional visual representation of twentieth-century history, that of either an individual artist, or a school or a movement or a time period, through the device of the sequential, and by definition, evolutionary hang, that we tend to minimize its use and signification when chosen by artists as a mode of display. We also tend to minimize its construction of the viewer's introjection of and interpellation by the meanings of the display.

Let's put all the work in a single line That way we design an historical spine We can also define The difference between what's yours and what's mine What's crude and what's fine What's lewd and divine The line
Is how we refine
What we've accrued
How we've construed
what's viewed and reviewed
It's a way to denote
How we vote
Sometimes there's a feud
About what's in and what's out
But usually there is little doubt
Some shout as a way to reroute
Others redesign how they align.

In both cluster and salon-style hanging, works are spread over the surface of a wall, covering it entirely or partially, ordered in an arrangement that is neither strictly linear nor sequential nor at a single eye level. These are painterly as opposed to linear modes, dependent on masses rather than line, and strong contrasts of light and dark. Borders become erased, contours blurred and objects absorbed into a totality.

As practiced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, salon-style hanging was based on hierarchies of genre, size and medium, and involved an implicit jockeying for position in which single works, usually the largest, were meant to stand out. It was a highly competitive form, predicated on survival by the fittest⁹ as compared to a presentation of only the fittest, which constitutes the monolinear hang. In the late 1980s and 90s, there is a return to a salon-style presentation, particularly in recent rehangings and refurbishings of museum, nineteenth-century, permanent-collection painting galleries, as for example in the National Gallery of Scotland or at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This use of the Salon hang is linked, either affirmatively or as a critique, to historical revisionism and occurs, not uncoincidentally, at a time when there is a concerted effort to assert the validity, if not supremacy, of painting in the contemporary art world.¹⁰ In one reading, both salon-style rehangs and the championing of contemporary painting can be seen as two sides of the same conservative coin.

By contrast, cluster hanging as used by artists from the 1970s on in presenting their own work or as a curatorial tactic is neither historical in impetus nor hierarchic. Cluster hanging is intended to emphasize and promote similarities and interconnections rather than differences between disparate works. It is relational, more akin to a

closed system with internally formulated connections and meanings, a system more associated with artists than institutions, a system that attempts to remove work from the market value ascribed to an individual item and to place work in meaningful relationship to other work.

The emergence of this interdependent rather than isolating mode of display corresponds with the postmodernist use of systems models in, for example, medicine when conceptualizing the immune system; in psychology with Object Relations and family systems therapy; in economics with the construction of interconnected Third World production and First World consumption patterns; and in computer technology with its hardware/software interface. Systemic models such as these tend to be holistic rather than individualistic; motile rather than static; complementary rather than oppositional; relativistic rather than categorical; focussed on the now rather than the future. Clustering, then, is a system conceived as fundamentally different in content to the single and singular narratives that have become so embedded in interpretations of most monolinear, modernist hangs of contemporary work. Instead of advocating the party *line*, cluster hanging is a *party* line.

Almost as an after-image, the contemporary cluster hang *is* linked to a historical past still visible in pre-Twentieth Century or Decorative Arts museum galleries, a linkage which simultaneously can be construed as an argument for the validity of non- or pre-modernist display rhetorics and a disavowal of the contemporaneous dominance of large-scale wall paintings and their display as singular entities. By the same token, cluster hanging is indebted to contemporaneous presentational modes which are not part of the dominant display æsthetic: to the scatter art of Pop Art displays; to seemingly more informal wall treatments in non-museum spaces such as bars or homes; to installation art with its contained, interrelated disposition of parts and envelopment of the spectator;¹¹ to Minimal art with its insistence on temporality as essential to the construction of meaning;¹² to the Conceptualist grid format of the seventies which prompted the close reading of similar constituent parts within a given piece; and to page layouts using a montage of visual images to articulate ideas (in particular John Berger's 1972 *Ways of Seeing*), all of which invite a different mode of constructing, apprehending and interpreting work than single sequencing.

There tends to be a decidedly didactic, oppositional or transformational stance attached to the choice of the cluster hang when it is used by contemporary artists and artist-curators. Their use of the cluster hang is often the signifier of the work of art as an avant-garde exhibition or the exhibition as a work of avant-garde art. When used by curators to make statements other than those related to historical verisimilitude, the cluster hang is seen as suspect, an imposition of meaning and/or co-optation. Curators, whether they wish to or not, are expected to conform and not to engage in overt artistic acts of display.

When a system has reached its point of stress
It is usually in a mess
It tends to obsess
And at times regress
It is only with undue distress
That it begins to accommodate another's YES.

Joseph Beuys' 1963 exhibition of his works in the Grimm collection, in their stable, is an early example of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* æsthetic so characteristic of the cluster hang as well as the cluster hang's indebtedness to installation art of the period. ¹⁴ Beuys juxtaposed groups of framed images resting on the floor and leaning against the wall with others lying on tables or placed in vitrines or on the walls. The seeming haphazardness, clutter, informality and ephemerality of Beuys' installation is diametrically opposed to the sense of order and fixity characteristic of most exhibitions of his time. If one were to characterize Beuys' "gallery gesture," to use Brian O'Doherty's term, ¹⁵ according to culturally ascribed gender traits, the irregular disposition, anti-heroic "personal clutter," "hand-touch sensibility," and "diaristic indulgence," to borrow from Carolee Schneeman's descriptors, qualify as feminine. ¹⁶

This radical undermining of the status quo where traditional patriarchal exhibition values of structured placement and rational order are replaced with random clustering characterizes the display æsthetic adopted by artists like Ree Morton and Annette Messager to underscore differences in masculine and feminine sensibilities, differences all the more apparent in exhibitions of their work in museum contexts. In Morton's 1977 museum retrospective, the seemingly arbitrary, irregular and varied wall treatment of elements of vastly different sizes and media contrasts with the geometric regularity of the surrounding architecture, 17 creating a tension between two very different æsthetic visions within the rooms in which the work was shown as well as with other rooms in the museum where the monolinear hang was used. Messager, at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1989, in Mes petites effigies, sculptures africaines, Histoires de musée, clustered randomly placed stuffed toys above coloured-penciled text on the walls of vitrines containing African sculpture to visualize the theoretical and arbitrary linkage of the primitive with the feminine and the childish and vice versa. In other wall works of the eighties such as Mes væux (1989), Messager suspended black-framed close-ups of body parts and fragments of text in coloured pencil from long pieces of string with knots in them, sometimes individually in an uneven, loose pattern, sometimes densely overlapping each other so that her acts of framing, labelling and hanging become simultaneously fetishistic and iconoclastic. Beuys, Morton and Messager use a similar genre of display both as the mode of articulating difference with patriarchal, modernist, monolinear museum

norms of arranging wall work and as the means of constructing a different relational structure amongst the various components of what they are presenting for view.

More recently, Barbara Steinman used a cluster hang in conjunction with computerized components to construct an aleatory temporality of illumination germane to the meanings of Signs, a work made in 1992 for the opening exhibition, Pour la suite du Monde, of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Inspired partially by Québec's Bill 101 limiting the use of languages other than French in outdoor settings, Signs can be read as a system in which meaning, always dependent on time and place, appears, disappears and reconfigures. The bilingual word "Silence" imprinted on the piece's sixty identical parts flashes on and off in sporadic and momentary patterns, creating what Johanne Lamoureux identifies as "visual noise." Signs can be read as a gentle, if not ironic, denouncement of laws felt, by those who are silenced, to be unjust, if not a visual plea for something other than silence on the part of national and international bodies who view such silencing as potentially dangerous to the survival of minority cultures. 18 In looking at the work, one's attention is directed and diverted to the sign(s) that are lit, thereby making it impossible to visually grasp the piece, or the silences, in their entirety in any single moment. The lack of physical distance between the 18-foot wall on which the work was first exhibited and the window wall opposite, a total of 12 feet, compounded the difficulty, exacerbating the disorientation of attempting to follow what was happening and constructing a kinesthetic sense of constriction commensurate with the content of the piece.

Breaking or exaggerating a singular attention span and a singular mode of bodily apprehension are key features of the cluster hang. Instead of the comfort of knowing how to look and how to perform, viewers must constantly adjust and readjust their focal points and corporeal positions in relation to the displayed corpus. The customary, absorptive dyad of mutual regard, ¹⁹ or the reciprocal gaze between viewer and work and the stationary points this form of viewing experience entails, may be part of the apprehension of the cluster hang, but it is only one component of engaging with the work, usually involving a close reading of a part of the overall display or an adjustment to accommodate viewing works of different sizes hung together as an ensemble. With total wall installations, the viewer stops and starts, moves closer and moves back, as well as along, the eyes lifting and falling, shifting back and forth, gazing, glancing and tracking the surface. ²⁰ This active realignment of vision and body when viewing the cluster hang is an analogue for the intellectual and emotional realignments that the content of cluster hangs seems to demand.

Examples like Joseph Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable* (1991) with its presentation of works from the collection of the Brooklyn Museum that were considered immoral and censored at some point in history but are now accepted as part of the

canon, or Chuck Close's 1991 exhibition at MoMA, *Head On: The Modern Portrait*, a heterogeneous display of portraits in the collection of a museum internally divided along media lines, suggest a continuum of use with the cluster hang ranging from the politics of æsthetics to the æsthetics of politics.²¹ The presence or absence of accompanying text and its extent (plentiful in the Kosuth, non-existent in the Close) often function as an index of the political projections of the presentation, variating the viewing experiences even further by demanding yet other forms of visual and bodily engagement, forms which go well beyond "pure visuality" to situate a display within the postformalist discourse of the exhibition as a text of identity politics.

As separate exhibitionary projects, the Kosuth and the Close need an actual or implied contextual surround to function as the "interventions" they purport or are made out to be. The same is true of exhibitions within exhibitions such as the presentation of Fluxus work within the 1992 Pop Art exhibition at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts, or Group Material's 1987 Castle project at Documenta where a group exhibition within a group exhibition demonstrated by contrasting example the ideological underpinnings of their host structures, offering visions of a very different exhibitionary Utopia. These mini-museums both collide and collude with the territory they occupy.

Each identity
Has a propensity
To a certain density.
All are distinct.
Even if given their own precinct
They are inextricably linked.

In today's museums, the co-presence of the monolinear and cluster hang, each in rooms of their own or intermingled with other forms of display, none overtly acknowledging the existence of the other, constructs fragmented and unresolved visual experiences where all attempts at synthesis are left to viewers. By dissociating its different modes of display, the museum may seem to be accommodating different discourses without being partisan when, in fact, it may be fostering nothing more than (de)politicized decor.²³

In a galleria progressiva layout, the internal display dissociations or, to use a linguistic model, punctuations, unfold rhythmically for the viewer and one can walk through aware of constantly shifting display æsthetics. By contrast, in *Pour la suite du Monde*, for example, the galleria progressiva was combined with the "room of one's own" or anthological format which served to heighten the dissociations because, when in a given room, viewers could lose sight of others with different display forms. This was especially true of those rooms entered through dark curtains. While these

differences might be construed as contingent to differences between mounting exhibitions where chronological continuity or a comprehensive view is sought and exhibitions where respect for the integrity of very diverse modes of production is considered desirable, in an institution with flexible walls, choices about how to display work are constantly being made. Should museums wish to abandon certain fictions about their identities, they must be willing to acknowledge and accept the meanings of their multiple presentational personalities. The degree to which choices about display are conscious determines a museum's relation to the histories it presents and its relationship to its viewers.

There are various ways to theorize the co-existence of different display styles and their effects on viewers in today's museums. Stephen Bann, when speaking of multiple display modes in large survey museums such as The Metropolitan, suggests that the "pœtics" of the modern museum is the alternation of two strategies of display, the metonymic and the synecdochical, and that "the automatic way in which the ordinary museum-gœr shifts between these two modes implies... the ironic museum, in which we oscillate between the different varieties of imaginative projection that are required." Douglas Ord uses Gilles Deleuze's concept of "the disjunctive synthesis" between different works in an exhibition or between different exhibitions in the same museum to explain how meaning can be produced by the meeting of two dissimilar events co-existing on the same plane. Both the oscillation of the "ironic" museum and the "disjunctive" museum experience disrupt what Carol Duncan has described as the absorption of the ritualistic performative nature of most museum visits. The disjunctive synthesis, however, implies agency on the part of installers and viewers in the construction of meaning that the ironic position does not.

An equally useful model for describing the positive aspects of the presence of and encounter with disparate display modes in the museum are D. W. Winnicott's theories of transitional objects and his formulation of potential space as a zone of play between inner and outer realities.²⁷ Jean Randolph has extended Winnicott's theories to readings of art with her own concept of art as an "amenable object" functioning "as a semi-illusory, half-real device with which a person defines and redefines the external and a relationship to it." She describes the art encounter as "a collegial interaction, in which the viewer contributes equally to meaning and interpretation... rather than a relationship in which the artwork is an authority and the audience is a voyeur." Both her concepts can be applied to display rhetorics as well.²⁹ What Winnicott and Randolph offer is a reading of different display modalities as relational and potential within the play or creative space of the museum.

Seeing, experiencing and accepting the existence of different realities within the safe space of the museum may be the beginning of learning to accept the validity of

different, co-existing realities outside the museum. Seeing, experiencing and accepting the shifts in dominance that occur over time between temporary and permanent display forms,³⁰ hegemonic and oppositional systems of arrangement, or normative and experimental patterns of presentation can constitute what amounts to a "Quiet Revolution."³¹ Setting up new museums in the belief or hope that problems of difference or an unhappy relationship to the past will disappear or be resolved is indeed Utopic. Working out new, postformalist arrangements that can accommodate, with dignity, "minority cultures" in existing structures may not result in pure visuality but it does ensure that, at the very least, there is a space for neutrality.

The desire for separation Often comes from desperation It is a form of compensation A response to aggravation An alternative to capitulation Or ex-communication The desire for separation Is also an invitation For the reformulation Of affiliation It can be the inspiration For the regeneration And reformation Of an existing constellation It needn't necessarily end the aspiration For the perpetuation Of the museum or a nation.

The belief that less is more
Has been seen before
In a nation
It's called co-habitation
Without it there is usually war
In the museum
It can be seen
As a way to dream
And maybe more

- 1. This paper was first presented at Modernist Utopias: Postformalism and Pure Visuality, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, December 9, 1995. It was constructed as a site-specific performance piece. The text, as given, is presented here with the addition of relevant footnotes but not the accompanying slides. Criticism of the piece as orally presented centred on the "opportunism" of using the occasion to make a political statement. The decision to do so was based on the author's belief that art and life are not separate or distinct.
 - 2. See Germano Celant, Ambiente/Arte dal Futurismo alla Body Art, Venice, 1977, for a well documented pictorial history. An abbreviated version appeared as "A Visual Machine: Art Installation and its Modern Archetypes" in the Documenta 7 catalogue, vol. 2, Kassel, 1982, xiii-xii, reprinted in Reesa Greenberg et al., Thinking About Exhibitions (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 371-386. See also Stationen der Moderne: Die Bedeutenden Kunstaustellungen des 20 Jahrhunderts in Deutschland, Berlin, 1988, Bernd Kluser and Katherina Hegewisch, eds., Die Kunst der Austellung: Eine Dokumentation dreissig examplarischen Kunstaustellungen dieses Jahrhunderts, Frankfurt, 1991, and Bruce Altshuler, The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century, New York, 1994.
- 3. My use of the word tongues in this context relates to Johanne Lamoureux's exhibition about contemporary Québec art and language, Seeing in Tongues: A Narrative of Language and Visual Arts in Quebec, Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belken Art Gallery, University of British Columbia), 1995.
- 4. The question on the ballot, in English, read "Do you agree that Québec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new Economic and Political Partnership, within the scope of the Bill respecting the future of Québec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?"
- 5. Johanne Lamoureux, "French Kiss from a No Man's Land: Translating the Art of Québec," *Arts Magazine* (February 1991), pp. 48-54, and "La Statistique canadienne: A State Ethics," *Parachute* 60, (October, November, December, 1990, pp. 49-52.
- 6. Fredric Jameson, in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), pp.111-125, uses Lacan's model of schizophrenia, "the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of language" (p.118) to define it as "the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers" (p.119). Temporality for Lacan is also an effect of language. The schizophrenic does not know language in a temporal sense. What I would argue is that a sense of temporality need not be lost when seeing different display modes and that, even if there is no resolution, meaning can occur. The use of unrelated display modes can be likened to an identity disorder that may or may not be pathological, depending on the degree of consciousness. My thanks to Jim Drobnik, who reminded me about the pertinence of Jameson's argument and the need to distinguish mine.
- 7. "Picture Hanging and Gallery Decoration, in "Palaces Of Art: Art Galleries in Great Britain, 1790-1990 (London: Dulwich Picture Galleries, 1991), pp. 48-65.
- 8. Martha Ward, "Impressionist Installations and Private Exhibitions," *The Art Bulletin* (December 1991), pp. 599-622, and John House, "Times Cycles," *Art in America* (October 1992), pp. 126-135, 161.
- 9. See John Gage, Colour in Turner: Pætry and Truth (London: Studio Vista, 1969), pp. 168-169, for a discussion of Turner's strategies on varnishing days to ensure visual dominance in group exhibitions.
- 10. An argument can be made for salon rehangs being more historically accurate in the presentation of pictures. While this may be true, the timing of such endeavours suggests they are far more than recontextualizations.
- 11. See Johanne Lamoureux, "Exhibitionitis: A Contemporary Museum Ailment," in Chris Dercon, ed., *Theatergarden Bestarium: The Garden as Theater as Museum* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 114-127, for a discussion of the shift in installation art from an emphasis on site specificity to a focus on self-referentiality.
- 12. See Michæl Fried's classic and controversial essay "Art and Objecthood," in Gregory Battcock, Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1968), pp. 116-147.
- 13. Anne Rohimer, in discussing the work of Broodthærs, Buren, Asher and Graham, differentiates between a work of art *in* an exhibition and a work of art *an* exhibition. See "Reevaluating the Object of Collecting and Display," *Art Bulletin* 77:1(March 1995), p. 22.
- 14. A detailed description can be found in Hans van der Grinten, "Joseph Beuys 'Stallaustellung' Fluxus 1963 in Kranenburg," in Die Kunst der Austellung: Eine Dokumentation dreissig exaplarischer Kunstausstellungen dieses Jahrhunderts,

Bernd Klüser and Katherina Hegewisch, eds. (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1991), pp. 172-177.

- 15. Brian O'Doherty "The Gallery as Gesture," Art Forum (December 1981), pp. 26-34, reprinted in Greenberg et al., ibid., pp. 321-340.
- 16. These words are taken from Schneeman's super 8 film, Kitch's Last Meal, tape 2, 1973-74. See Carolee Schneeman, More Than Meatjoy (New York: Documentext, 1979), pp. 238-239.
- 17. For a brief discussion of the difficulties in installing Morton's work because of insufficient pictorial or verbal data see Lesley Johnstone, "Installation: The Invention of Context", in *Aurora Borealis* (Montréal: Centre international d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1985), p. 51.
- 18. See Johanne Lamoureux, ibid., pp. 72-75, and Cahier: propos et projets for the exhibition Pour la suite du Monde, Gilles Godmer and Réal Lussier, eds. (Montréal: Museé d'art contemporain, 1992), p. 54, for further discussion of Signs.
- 19. Michæl Fried discusses absorption in relation to eighteenth-century painting. See his Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).
- 20. Norman Bryson has written extensively on the difference between the gaze and the glance. See his Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 133-162. Eliso Vron and Martine Levasseur have analyzed four different forms of pedestrian trajectories through exhibitions and linked these to different modes of apprehension in Ethnographie de l'exposition: l'espace, le corps et le sens, Paris, 1989.
- 21. Françoise Forster-Hahn's title "The Politics of Display or the Display of Politics" is equally apt for describing the phenomenon. See *Art Bulletin* (June 1995), pp. 174-179.
- 22. For an extensive discussion of Group Material's installation tactics see David Deitcher, "Social Aesthetics," in *Democracy: A Project by Group Material*, Brian Wallis, ed. (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), pp. 13-46.
- 23. For a discussion of the exhibition-as-decor and the exhibition-as-concept, see Johanne Lamoureux, "Exhibitionitis: A Contemporary Museum Ailment," pp. 114-127. For a discussion of dissociation as a tool to interpret history, see Lloyd deMause, "History as a Dissociative Disorder," MV (April 1995), pp. 10-22.
- 24. "Pœtics of the Museum: Lenoir and Du Sommerard," in *The Clothing of Clio*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1984), p. 91.
- 25. See Ord's Coincidences (unpub. ms., 1995) where he analyzes one such disjunctive synthesis occurring from the juxtaposition of two exhibitions at the Musée d'art contemporain. For more on disjunctive synthesis see Gilles Deleuze, Logique du sens (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969), translated as The Logic of Sense. I wish to thank Douglas Ord for drawing my attention to how Deleuze's theory could function in relationship to exhibitions.
- 26. "The Art Museum as Ritual," Art Bulletin (March 1995), pp. 10-13. See also C. Duncan, Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums, London and New York, 1995 and C. Duncan and Alan Wallach "The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual," Marxist Perspectives 4 (Winter 1978), pp. 28-51 and idem., "The Universal Survey Museum," Art History 111 (1980), pp. 447-69.
- 27. See his Playing and Reality (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971).
- 28. Influencing Machines (Toronto: YYZ, 1984). Reprinted in Psychoanalysis and Synchronized Swimming (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1991), p. 52. See also her The Amenable Object, ibid., pp. 21-35, for an application of Object Relations Theory to art and technology.
- 29. For a detailed discussion of display rhetorics and agency in the reception of art, see Jennifer Fisher, "Aesthetic Contingencies: Relational Enactments in Display Culture," (Ph.D. dissertation, Concordia University, 1995, unpub.).
- 30. For a discussion of the relation between temporary and permanent exhibitions, see Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (Spring 1988), pp. 73-102, reprinted in Greenberg et al., ibid., pp. 81-112.
- 31. Linda Nochlin's essay on the absence of destruction within museums after the French and Russian revolutions suggests that museums are sanctioned as potential spaces for the creation of meaning. See "Museums and radicals: A history of emergencies," *Art in America* (July-August 1971), pp. 26-39.



THE NEW IMAGIST: VISUAL EXPERTISE IN A TRANSDISCIPLINARY MULTIMEDIA SOCIETY

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I am haunted by the dissolution of familiar things, categories, structures. What first attracted me to art history was the magical materialization of thought occurring in riveting objects, beautiful paintings, enigmatic assemblages, cinematic performances. Today, our heightened perception of instrumentalized artifice, of ubiquitous technological mediation — extending into the inner reaches of the body and encouraging travels into alternate sensory realms — has left viewers both excited and uneasy. Our awareness of ever more sophisticated interventions, without knowing precisely who is producing them and how the effects are produced, has resulted in wishful expectation for, and boundless cynicism concerning, the media re-engineering of actions, feelings, events. In this polarized atmosphere of elation and suspicion all forms of visual presentation, including those skilfully wrought and beguiling substances called works of art, are liable to being interpreted as passive entertainment, fraudulent advertisement, or, as in the case of aggressive television, incitements to real-life violence¹.

This essay argues that if you take any media problem and push it far enough, it becomes an image problem. In light of current debates over how digital information can be organized, interpreted and taught, we need to go beyond conventional art, architectural or design history. Such sweeping reappraisals of mission and perspective can be summed up by a paradox: we have to shape a disciplined, transdisciplinary imaging field. Both specialization and area, this unifying terrain would embrace former regions belonging to the humanities, biological, physical and social sciences. With an eye to my conclusion, I suggest we must define the new imagist — an expert who does not yet exist — in order to help anticipate, illuminate, interconnect unsuspected visualization issues arising across the spectrum and accompanying the global pictorialization of knowledge.

This future imagist faces a daunting task, not just because these are difficult intellectual challenges but because the sensory modalities conveying the messages are frequently considered contaminating, or worse, mindless. The current enthusiasm for immersive environments, involving chance manœuvres and a set of variables, is a case in point. The craze for hypersimulation tends to exaggerate the instability of all forms of exhibition without taking into account important differences among media. The unreflective tendency to collapse illusion into virtuality, and sapient beholders into potentially unethical "users," unduly emphasizes anonymous automatism and invisible manipulation. Display does not necessarily entail deceit, nor is looking the same as empty watching.

As swift multidimensional give and take, graphically spurred interactivity especially embodies a wonderfully dynamic operation tailored to breaking out of linear one-way constructions of data flow. Yet this back and forth motion between machine

and user also has its limitations, carrying overtones of the provocation and reaction to a stimulus. Even with a flexible instructional format, where students are co-creators of the computed experience, the result is only as creditable as the person. Interactivity still begs the crucial question of how individuals become genuine pluralists, supple thinkers who demand a breadth of meanings, alternative approaches, and are capable of multifaceted analyses to reach complex decisions. In shaping a new catalytic field, I believe we must confront the dilemma of how to teach the creation and comprehension of intelligent imagery in a post-lens culture. What kinds of perceptual understanding and specialized skills should the public possess to make informed judgments once they have tapped into bottomless image, sound and text databases? Not all linkages are equally appropriate nor are all selections valid for a specific set of circumstances. Despite the rhetoric of computerized exchange, the real world is a messy place where even people living together do not always occupy the same society or share uniform beliefs and traditions.

Machine euphoria, spurred by on-line pedagogy, network collaboration, the promise of wider access to emergent global infrastructures, has obscured this fundamentally cognitive and emotional aspect of human choice. As several states (Maine, Utah, Virginia) hurry to establish an electronic college to replace brick and mortar campuses, the troubling focus remains on EDNET equipment, not on preparing discriminating viewers. While recognizing the crucial value of a convergent web spun of video, voice and text for reaching otherwise inaccessible students, I am concerned about depersonalized distance learning. The art of seeing and conceiving is more than just "a guy's arm on a TV screen," to quote Robert A. Bryan, former provost at the University of Florida.² Ironically, then, at the moment when very different kinds of images have become morphed into generic simulations or digital recombinants, the very institutions that used to assume responsibility for demonstrating their intelligent design are being volatilized. University walls, enfolding outmoded compartmentalized programs, no longer appear solid. They, too, have become porous, thinned by cyberspace.

This is not Rousseauian nostalgia. Nor do I yearn for lost organic worlds and vanishing concreteness. Rather, these reflections return us to the core of my topic. How are past and present technologies of presentation to be reconciled? Or, is historical inquiry into the varieties of display, like the Yanamamo Indians of the Amazon Basin, doomed to extinction? In the postmodern era of degravitation, disconnectedness and disembodiment, how might visualization as an innovative, integrating or bridging field spanning the arts, humanities and sciences be imagined? The explosion of multimedia — that unstable collage of video, audio, text and graphics collected within an electronic interface³ — raises serious questions concerning the

kinds of training needed to navigate meaningfully through a blurred and fluid informatic realm. Should we speak of a multimedia designer, a digital culture-creator, a cyberæstheticist, an applied visualist, an experimental connectivist, a synthesiologist, a pragmagist [combining pragmatism with imagist]? As yet there is no adequate term or concept for what humanists and scientists must become, or for the transmedial medium in which we must develop proficiency. Such gropings towards appropriate nomenclature demonstrate the *intellectual* difficulty of seizing the almost magical ways in which telecommunication technologies have transformed our very consciousness.

This remarkable proliferation of nameless phenomena and category-evading patterns indicates larger educational, epistemological and societal uncertainties. Think, for example, how talk about only one modality of expression seems old-fashioned in the face of enchanted worlds conjured by video games. CD-ROM effortlessly weaves together picture, music and narrative into an alternate universe where everything is simultaneously serious and amusing. Similarly, expertise, with its connotation of directed or unilateral focus, requires rejustification at a time when advanced computing artfully mixes animations and stills to produce ever more "realistic" effects. By extension, solitary scholarship is open to charges of anachronism in an era extolling collaboration — an interaction itself hard to define. Even data, with its evocation of chunk-like content, dissolves as it becomes relayed through the EtherNet. Monolithic-sounding information fragments in the process of being subsumed or hooked up into microchip-driven systems.

Ambiguous apparatus, paradoxical presentations, tattered taxonomies, unspecialized specialists, then, all point to inevitable personal and institutional upheavals. The inability to classify equivocal artificial phenomena sets in relief a pressing question. What sorts of practical skills should every citizen possess to ethically and intelligently use, analyze and disseminate digital apparitions? In the transdisciplinary epoch, what committee or program will assume the obligation to the public good to teach the different ways a wide range of visual materials are produced so that the consumers can discern their reliability? Not surprisingly, journalists are wrestling with similar issues of accountability⁵ because news today is routinely gathered, selected and distributed electronically. Imagists must also struggle to codify principles and practices that would reintroduce an awareness of craft, tangibility and physicality into a society growing accustomed to seamless spectacle. Getting beyond feeling adrift in phantasmagoria entails demonstrating how graphics have been put together.

But artists, architects, designers, art historians, need to redesign the image of images not just because of the spread of ghostly media or the precipitous undoing

of geographically located institutions. The concepts on which time-honoured disciplines and many professions have been based are in crisis, I believe, because of a deeper stereotype. In spite of their prevalence, images in western culture continue to retain the low cognitive and moral status initially accorded them by Plato. The advent of the University of Illinois's virtual reality "Cave," where computer-fired projectors located behind walls and ceiling throw images on the surfaces of an empty room,6 can only entrench the perception of all appearances as purveyors of sensory delusion. It remains an unexamined irony of the current drive to visualize everything that images continue to be discussed, in both the academic and the life-world, primarily as by-products of a simulating and stimulating technology. It is to the intelligence of imagery, largely ignored in the public debates over mass media and the decline of alphanumerical literacy, then, that I now wish to turn. Images do conceptual work in a wide range of processes ranging from medical teaching tools, like the National Library of Medicine's "electronic cadaver," to the multitude of icons enhancing computer-based dictionaries and encyclopedias. More basically, pictures constitute the stuff of memory, the way in which the brain internally displays thoughts to itself.

The graphic capacity to give vivid shape to abstractions illuminates some major implications of how we currently envision information. While it is common to remark on the generation of quantities of data as a result of the computer revolution, the fact that there are actually two sorts of information has not received serious intellectual attention. One type lends itself to integration, the other to linkage. This is an important distinction. The difference between systematically merging, i.e. collapsing individual characteristics, processes or media, and connecting separate entities into inventive arrangements, has far-reaching repercussions. These range from how we conceptualize the interdisciplinary convergences occurring in our colleges and universities, to so-called "one-step shopping" for health care services, to the seamless editing of videotapes offered as evidence in personal injury and criminal trials, to the inlaid look of Mosaic and CompuServ browsers. The two, very different, kinds of impact become clear when we visualize discrete bits, pieces or categories of things whose operations have become amalgamated, and so covert. Contrast this blend to an assemblage whose man-made gatherings remain overt, and thus available for public scrutiny.

These dual attitudes towards the meaning-making powers of visual presentation can best be understood through an art-historical contrast. It is helpful, I think, to imagine these antithetical views of information as opposite approaches to collecting and collections. The history of images, then, is indispensable for recognizing the cognitive potential of multimedia displays. Turning, first, to the disjunctive jumble

stored in an eighteenth-century cabinet of curiosities, the modern viewer is struck by the intensely interactive demands it places on the visitor. Not unlike facing the sophisticated icons on a Macintosh monitor or the engaging animations in Nintendo's Mario Brothers games, here, too, compelling relationships must be discovered among incongruous objects. Selections have to be made and communal sense distilled from figural messages. Cryptic juxtapositions of paintings, statuary, medals, coins, minerals, fossils — extraordinary materials housed with the most ordinary — were crowded into boxes, shelves, drawers. When unlocked, the chest exhibited a heap of singularities. Eccentricities beckoned the viewer to explore in search of some greater bond that might join such improbabilities together. The metaphor of travelling among strangers is apt because the compartmentalized setting makes even the familiar appear unfamiliar. And, in spite of intrusive borders, the beholder senses that such extravagantly disparate objects must somehow also be connected. Reminiscent of confronting a vast and perplexing database, the sight of so many conflicting wonders arouses a desire to enter the labyrinth to try and complete the construction.

Looking back from the perspective of the computer era, the artifacts in a Wunderkammer seem less physical phenomena and more material links permitting the beholder to retrieve complicated personal and cultural associations. Looking forward from the Enlightenment world of apparently miscellaneous pleasures, we discern that scraps of wood, stone or metal, religious relics, ancient shards, exotic fetishes, miniature portraits, small engravings, pages torn from a sketchbook, are the distant ancestors of today's sophisticated software. Resembling the New Groller Multimedia Encyclopedia and Microsoft's Encarts, the cabinet of curiosities featured hundreds of icons, alluring apparatus, a multitude of mirrors, maps, charts, drawings, instruments, all framed, set apart, and yet asking to be unified in a moment of transporting insight. Such monumental poetic armoires also anticipate the diminutive universes of a Joseph Cornell box, filled with ritualized glasses, discarded cigarette papers, Victorian greeting cards.7 Curiosities, assemblages and PC menus, then, foster striking encounters. They are magical conjuring devices impelling the observer to navigate among enigmatic, co-present riddles attractively distributed within an information-rich geography. Treasure chests, mysterious pharmacies, precious packets, allusive hypertext, function as springboards for the imagination, stimulating it to jump to unexpected correspondences, to leap to unpredictable combinations.

Much as today's students select an icon by touching a keyboard or manipulating a mouse, eighteenth-century beholders of polymathic diversity mentally "clicked" on a theatrical roster of automata, watchworks and decorative arts accumulated in a fantastic case. This performative gesture of extending oneself intellectually, psychologically and emotionally outward to a strange "other" served to bridge the gap

between known and unknown experiences. Whether roaming cyberspace or wandering through a densely material collection, according to this interactive view, we remain the producers and directors of knowledge. Nuggets of visual data endlessly and enticingly summon us to collaborate in their restaging.

Such simultaneously entertaining and educational presentations were eventually overwhelmed by textual and systematic approaches to learning. Kaleidoscopic layouts, emphasizing the perceiver's obligation to organize and reorganize cultural or natural remains, appeared to critical late eighteenth-century eyes as unmanaged clutter. The combinatorial æsthetics of collage were supplanted by the cool, linear logic governing the modern museum. Chronological arrangements of historical material, their separation into distinctive genres and isolated media, discouraged the viewer from making his or her own connections. Epochs gradually blended into one another, styles smoothly evolved as centuries marched forward to merge with the present. Passive spectatorship was encouraged since the system governing exhibition was both pre-established and concealed from the general public's sight. Coalescence, then, represents a second, lulling, approach to information. Consolidation glosses over gaps, disguises the holes in our knowledge to convey a standardized picture of happenings. The viewer shifts from participatory observation to receptive watching. Rather than encountering puzzling, attention-arresting structures, she absorbs "facts" about them. Instead of being delightfully invited to make patterns, manifestations are effortlessly absorbed.

To capture this opposition by means of a contemporary analogy, contrast the friendly iconic revelations of the Macintosh with the abstruse intellectualism of the MS-DOS compatible computer. In the latter, the operator is always reminded of the implacable machine code driving the system because the program is so taxing. Yet, maddeningly, this text remains hidden from sight and aloof from ordinary comprehension. In the former, mistakes are cheerfully tolerated; the user always gets another chance. Like the personal decisions confronting the visitor to an enchanting cabinet of curiosities, the Mac player selects from a magical miscellany. Abruptly juxtaposed, colourful icons recall the mechanical dolls, finely crafted metalwork and natural specimens with which the eighteenth-century beholder conjured. Alluring and mutable shapes counter the hermeneutic rigidity of MS-DOS and the closed classifications of museum labels. In both the electronic and the material milieu, objects are easily re-purposed in multiple, open-ended and personal ways.

By way of tying past issues more closely to those of the present, I want to return to my earlier suggestion that serious intellectual implications accompany either description of information. In particular, the unexamined and quite common opinion of visual presentation as *intrinsically* coalescent or morphed is, I believe, responsible for giving images their bad reputation. I have been arguing that there is a special danger with media that converge graphically because they carry a message devised by an unseen someone or invisible something. Here we are putting our finger on a much deeper and older problem. Covert blending, in contradistinction to overt mixing, reinforces the more generalized suspicion that images are inherently tricking or duplicitous by nature. During the pre-modern era, fraudulence and corruption tarnished the image of images precisely at those times when they became identified primarily with one kind of information. As I demonstrated in Artful Science, it is not accidental that those historical moments also coincided with delusion-producing developments in optical technology. Seamlessly integrated formats prevented the spectator, then and now, from perceiving how combinations had been artificially contrived or from contributing to their construction.

Given the welter of electronic media and the pull of virtuality, the imagist of the twenty-first century will have to force homogeneous data to exhibit its heterogeneity. I think one of our chief professional duties will be to induce merged information to behave as if it were linked. Non-stop transmissions can be slowed down to the level of comprehension, just as erased decisions can be rearticulated. The repudiated flesh of cyberspace can be reincarnated through tangible gestures reminding viewers that their actions, not microchips, bring content into existence. In short, compressive delivery systems challenge us to make bodies step out of boxes. Who better than artists, architects, designers and historians of all aspects of the visual to demonstrate the masked sutures existing in all patched-together modes of communication? But we cannot handle this conglomerate alone. Nor are these old terms, concepts and specializations adequate to the realities of a digital microcosm. The information highway is an immense cabinet of curiosities, a crammed mosaic of disparate technologies and services joining computers, telephones, fax machines, high-definition televisions and space satellites into a global communications net. Given the sheer quantity and complexity of displayable data, knowing how to make appropriate choices will depend upon astute collaboration among equals across many fields.8

I am suggesting we must also forge an interconnective model of the practice of interaction itself. True collaboration is more than emerging victorious in a clash of power among competing interest groups. Nor is it parcelling out narrower and narrower tasks to more and more consultants in the era of "dejobbing." Striving for coherent results extends beyond embracing the like-minded to engage broad constituencies. Combined research must cross venerable and entrenched divides such as those currently separating the arts, humanities and sciences. Like well-designed multimedia, the synthesizing process is a coherent means for learning contributing to a common purpose, one that respects various expertises and does not consolidate them into an indistinguishable mass falsified under a reductive rubric.

Too often what goes under the name of joint projects or mutual ventures is simply a vindication of established hierarchies. These vertical arrangements have led, in universities, to a canonization of literacy as a set of master skills tacitly wrapped up in reading and writing. Imaging's consequent loss of cognitive and cultural stature impedes any serious discussion of their thoughtful, revelatory and *positive* role in our society. By reengaging with the human condition, that is, by returning to the material consequences of passive watching or active looking in this world, we can put vision back into visual experience.⁹ In order to creatively work with others, we will have to wrestle with why we have allowed ourselves and our objects of study to become so severely compromised. Trying to figure out how to coordinate, connect, or intelligently and effectively collaborate, will be the new frontier, not just for data but for scholars.

- Andy Meisler, "TV Getting a Closer Look as a Contributor to Real Violence," New York Times, December 14, 1984, pp. A1, A13.
 - 2. Goldie Blumenstyck, "Networks to the Rescue?" Chronicle of Higher Education, December 14, 1994, p. A21.
 - 3. Chad J. Kainz, Multimedia Basics (Chicago: Multimedia and Visualization Center, 1994), p. 3.
 - 4. Even the Getty Center's five national conferences (dating back to 1987), reflecting deeply on the future of arts education in light of technology, have not addressed this specific problem. See, "The Arts. Central to Education and School Reform," The Getty Center for Education in the Arts 14 (Winter 1994-1995), pp.10-12.
 - 5. Richard P. Cunningham, "Journalism: Toward an Accountable Profession," in *The Public Duties of the Professions. A Hastings Center Report Special Supplement* (February 1987), p. 15.
 - David L. Wilson, "A Key for Entering Virtual Worlds," Chronicle of Higher Education, November 16, 1994, pp. A19, A21.
 - 7. David Porter, "Assembling a Poet and Her Poems: Convergent Limit-Works of Joseph Cornell and Emily Dickinson," Word & Image 10 (July-September 1994), p. 208.
 - 8. Note that three federal agencies have joined in an effort to integrate science and humanities studies at the undergraduate level. NSF, NEH and FIPSE are making awards as part of an initiative entitled "Leadership Opportunity and Science and Humanities Education."
 - 9. Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon. Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993), p. 10, similarly argues for the efficacy of images, but through their sheer beauty.



MIMING THE MASTER: BOY-THINGS, BAD GIRLS AND FEMMES VITALES

MARY KELLY

Mary Kelly est artiste et directrice du programme de studio (Independent Study Program) au Whitney Museum of American Art à New York. Elle s'intéresse plus particulièrement à la question du féminisme dans les théories et pratiques artistiques actuelles, ainsi qu'au modernisme. Auteur de «Reviewing modernist criticism» (The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984) et de «On representation, sexuality and sameness» (Screen, 1987). Parmi les catalogues et livres édités sur son travail d'artiste, mentionnons Interim (The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York et The Fruitmarket Gallery, Édimbourg) et Post-partum Document (Routledge, 1983). Son prochain ouvrage à paraître chez MIT Press en 1996 s'intitule Imaging Desire.

Artist, writer and pioneering figure in conceptual art informed by feminism, Mary Kelly is the Director of Studio at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Independent Study Program. Her large-scale, project oriented installations, Post-partum Document (also published in book form by Routledge, 1983), Interim and Gloria Patri have been exhibited to great critical acclaim and academic scrutiny in the U.K., the United States and internationally. Her essays have been published in journals such as Screen and in the anthology Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation (New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984) and will be collected in Imaging Desire soon to be published by the MIT Press.

When it comes to sexuality and images, the theoretical imagination has been captured for the most part by the lure of masquerade. Work informed by psychoanalytic theory in particular has followed the shiny surface of that concept through the maze of women's objectification, constructions of the feminine and strategies of resistance to prevailing visual codes. More recently, it has illumined the issue of masculinity as well, but the focus remains on what is obviously signifiable of that identity as iconic sign. Falling outside this formulation, taken for granted but not present to be looked at, is the problem of masculinity's imbrication with relations of power. The events of the Persian Gulf War, especially the presence of women in the military (not to mention my own inclination to wear a professional "uniform" of another kind), have prompted me to side-step the masquerade and take up instead the notion of masculinity as display. Finally in light of Lacan's significant omission of the "female animal" from his discussion of the topic, I have found it a compelling alternative.¹

According to Lacan: "In the case of display, usually on the part of the male animal, or in the case of grimacing swelling by which the animal enters the play of combat in the form of intimidation, the being gives of himself, or receives from the other, something that is like a mask, a double, an envelope, a thrown off skin, thrown-off in order to cover the frame of a shield."

One of the implications of Lacan's statement, as I see it, is that the psychic trajectories of display and masquerade are not symmetrical. What transforms an expression of virility into a relation of "having" rather than "being" seems to involve a complex disappearing act. This, perhaps, explains why the signs and insignia of domination are so elusive.

Both concepts — masquerade and display — are implicated in the broader discussion of mimicry which, according to Lacan, is an activity employed in three dimensions: travesty, camouflage and intimidation.³ In the first form, which places emphasis on the sexual aim, masculine and feminine identities are mediated through "something like a mask." Revolving around a relation to the phallic term, the masquerade pretends to be "lacking"; "le parade" or virile display professes to be replete. The subject wants to be loved for what he is not, hence the travesty as Lacan sees it: there is no sexual relation. In both instances, the function of the mask is that of a lure. But, while the masquerade in all its effects can be attributed in some way to that function, the display cannot. It is also shaped in the dimensions of camouflage and intimidation which give the mask a different force — that of the double, the protective envelope, the thrown-off skin. Thrown off precisely to cover the vulnerability of being seen.

CAMOUFLAGE

Lacan describes the effect of mimicry in the strictly technical sense as *camouflage*: "It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled — exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare." The soldiers' appearance is, in fact, strikingly non-mimetic. They do not look like anything; a shapelessness inserting itself into the landscape; nothing in particular becoming mottled in the general scheme of things, hoping to go undetected in the light. This is not a matter of adaptation, as Lacan insists, but a process of inscription. In an effort to escape being trapped by the gaze, the subject inscribes himself in the picture in the manner of a "stain." Inevitably he is caught in the field of vision and fractured, split between what he thinks he is and what he shows the Other. Still, there are different ways of becoming a picture: a stain is not a lure. The spectacle lures the Other into looking behind the veil by creating the desire to see something. But the stain tricks him into thinking there is nothing there to see.

"What I am doing is no greater or less than the man who is flying next to me," says Major Marie Rossi to a CNN reporter in January 1992. Standing in the desert dressed in camouflage and becoming mottled against a background of institutionalized male dominance, she insinuates that national defence is sex-blind. The first tactic of camouflage is to become invisible — not unseen, but seen to be the same. For the camera she is a shimmering surface in the distance, not quite a picture, but an impression made in advance. She is wearing a uniform; exactly, the parts made uniform, none greater than the whole. To achieve this, her individuating corporeality, her body, must be obliterated. Klaus Theweleit writes: "What the troop machine produces is itself as a totality that places the individual soldier in a new set of relations to other bodies: itself as a combination of innumerable identically polished components."

That psychic disruption which is sexuality and which the body implies, must be denied. Object choice of any kind is strictly off-limits, but, of course, it is still on their minds. And, the soldier (fe)male is a continual reminder. The prefix signals an alarming addition to the ranks; a remainder of "affect" invading the consummate order of military command.

She is, however, not Private, but Major Rossi. This is the second manœuvre of camouflage and the one which links it inextricably to the display; that is, the specific form of visibility conferred by rank. Authority accrues or is diminished according to her place within a coded hierarchy. Power is presented through the absence of conspicuous effects. Virility is disembodied, but discernible as gesture, voice,

intonation, insinuation or silence. Theweleit again: "The troop also produces an expression; of determinations, strength, precision; of strict order, of straight lines and rectangles, an expression of battle and of a specific masculinity."

The expression of masculinity as order imposes a curious displacement of desire. What the soldier cathects, above all, is the abstract order of the law itself. And what is repressed returns in similar guise, that is, as a form of linguistic contagion. Judith Butler has observed that, in the military context, an utterance can become the equivalent of an act. To say, "I am homosexual" establishes an identity which in turn is equated with a conduct.9 The imaginary scene of verbal seduction might express the interlocutor's unconscious wish, but provokes instead a reaction-formation: "perverse" desire can be caught like a disease, transferred through speech. Hence, the juridical solution: Don't ask, don't tell. But renunciation, as Freud points out, preserves the wish by reproducing it as prohibited desire. Similarly, Theweleit suggests that even in peacetime the troop machine has a border to defend, "it compresses inward toward its own interior," which in the current situation means policing the sexual conduct of its components, and "war offers temporarily, an opportunity for discharge." 10 An army paratrooper, having taken her first Iraqi prisoner of war, wrote to her mother from the Persian Gulf describing it as "the most exciting thing since sex I've done."11

Furthermore, Theweleit concludes, "the surplus value produced by the troop is a code that consolidates other totality formations between men, such as the nation." The nation, like gender, has a psychic border, and a "display" of nationalism can also fail to cover the frame of a shield that has lost not only its economic metal but also its diplomatic sheen. This seems to have been exactly the case for the United States during the onset of the conflict with Iraq, leaving the President with only one "manly" option — force. Thus, in a case of grimacing, swelling and swearing "Cut it off and kill it," a nation entered the play of combat in the specific form of intimidation called Desert Storm.

INTIMIDATION

Threatening ejaculations and gestures as thrown-off skins cover the body's vulnerable interior with an imaginary carapace. "The ego," Freud maintains "is first and foremost a bodily ego, it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface." This is, I think, what Lacan has in mind when he calls display a form of *intimidation*: gestures of virility deployed not only in the service of the sexual aim, but also as the ego's defence against annihilation. From Freud's point of view, within the perception-consciousness system, the ego takes sides with the object to resist

the id. However, "the libidinal subject," as Lacan reformulates it, "interacts, not with his environment, but with his orifices." ¹⁴ In the schema of narcissistic identification, the ego takes sides against the object and the body's orifices are subjected to control by means of a libidinal cathexis of the body as image. In its earliest formation, then, the imago vacillates wildly between the body as gestalt and the corps morcelé. The drive for self-mastery is continually thwarted by an incoordination that takes on existential proportions. In Some Reflections on the Ego, Lacan states:

It is the gap separating man from nature that determines his lack of relationship to nature and begets his narcissistic shield with its nacreous covering on which is painted the world from which he is forever cut off, but this same structure is also the sight where his own milieu is grafted on to him, i.e., the society of his fellow men.¹⁵

In this formulation, I see a crucial intersection between the ontological question of "man" and the ethical issue of social transformation. Display as a form of intimidation is grounded in the founding moment of the subject as his "narcissistic shield," yet virile display as the specific "sight" of masculinity is "grafted on to him" in the same move. The shield bears the impress of "society," etched on to its phantasmatic surface through the operations of the ego ideal. This, I believe, also opens the concept of display to a symptomatic reading, that is, to a definition of the particular pathology of masculinity that prevails in a circumstance like war. Although I do not mean to say that the historical reality of war is reducible to psychological explanation. Rather my interest resides in the historical overdetermination of the symptom and the problem it poses for feminism at the present time.

To return, then, to Major Rossi, whose literal carapace was a Chinook Chopper, it was not invulnerable and her death has become an ignominious testimony to equal access. Metaphorically, it is suggestive of the intimate relationship between man and the machine — "Its mechanical defects and breakdowns often parallel his own neurotic symptoms," observes Lacan. "Its emotional significance for him comes from the fact that it exteriorizes the protective shell of his ego, as well as the failure of his virility." In Major Rossi's case, the failure of virility was not determined by her gender, but by the intimidating display of technology itself. The aura of digitized control, distant from the scene of battle, dehumanized, presented the individual soldier of the Gulf War, unlike the proto-fascist *Freikorps* of the thirties, as so many unpolished components in their archaic armor who were made to appear imperfect and ambivalent in relation to the role of mastery.

The military facade throws "strength" into high relief as a defining attribute of masculinity; not simply physical, but moral strength with its emphasis on achievement. Lieut. Col. Rhonda Cornum, for example, is described as an Army

flight surgeon, helicopter pilot, biochemistry Ph.D., paratrooper, Persian Gulf prisoner of war, Purple Heart recipient, and conservator of heterosexual norms — wife and mother. When captured, she had only one regret: No time to swallow her wedding ring. No weakness there. Two broken arms, a wrecked knee, bullet wounds in her shoulder: war is an occasion to display the self-punishing, self-sacrificing symptoms of a "strong ego" like trophies.¹⁷

Combat, in a sense, materializes the ego's tendency to build itself up by opposition, displacing its alienation on to the other. Jacqueline Rose points out that "...paranoid impulses don't just project onto reality as delusion; they affect reality and become a component of it." And regarding the Gulf War she adds, "the problem for Bush was that, having called up the image of Hussein as utter monstrosity, he had to go to war." While the immediate impact of the conflict may have blurred the distinction between fantasy and reality, the after-effects brought it into focus again. First, there was a certain irony attached to the deployment of force in an international context of increasing demilitarization. Secondly, the escalation of electronically regulated warfare was experienced in fact as a loss of control by soldiers in the field. Finally, the problem of women and gays and lesbians in the military — having called up the image of *that* "utter monstrosity," the institution's hegemonic status would never be the same.

"Sameness" is exactly that intractable quality of authority which places the burden of authentication on the other. The military institution is only the most obvious instance of an all-pervasive, but less conspicuous display of virility. Take, for example, the typical EOE ad encouraging women, minorities and the disabled to apply: the unspoken term (white able-bodied male) assumes a relation of power in which the infinitely variable and hence vulnerable majority are "feminized."

I would argue, finally, that display, as a defensive strategy of the ego, attempts to maintain a distance from the objectifying function of the gaze and project instead the idealizing agency of identification. Beyond the specular dimension of the shield, it supports the subject's narcissistic relation to an ideal; how he makes himself lovable in the eyes of the Other, *he* being the appropriate designation here, since, as Catherine Millot points out, it is the object of desire and not the object of love that is feminine. ¹⁹ And the ideal, insofar as it is shaped within the gendered order of the symbolic, is masculine.

Of course, to assume a position of authority does not mean it is internalized as such. At least, for the subject to sustain that illusion of unity, to take his own ego as the ideal, would induce a dysfunctional form of megalomania rather than a discourse of mastery. Even though the conditions of subordination may be socially discernible, their psychic consequences are less certain.

Clearly, a masculine or feminine position is not synonymous with the category man or woman. Indeed, the subject is not commensurate with any fixed identity as

such. Behind the mask, what is discovered is not the truth of sexuality but its opacity. Lure or shield, both disclose no more than the specific modes of that failure. Nevertheless, considered in another way, as an enactment of difference within a designated site or status, the display internalizes and encodes the structures of power and dominance as masculine. I am not suggesting there is a hegemonic form of masculinity to be exposed, yet something seems to ruin the act when it is staged by women.

HYBRID

When Homi Bhabha describes hybridity as an effect of uncertainty that afflicts the discourse of power, he is referring specifically to the English book and its colonial appropriation. But I also find the term useful in thinking about the way power is afflicted by the uncertainty of gender when women appropriate the familiar symbols of male authority by adopting the display. This displacement of value from symbol to sign Bhabha says distinguishes the operations of the hybrid from those of the fetish and endows it with a certain legacy of resistance. Yet the fetish is neither good nor bad and the hybrid, in my view, is not always subversive. In particular, the "gender hybrid" can serve to legitimate as well as disrupt the dominant discourse or to institutionalize the marginal and, through a process of disavowal, can be reconfigured as a fetish.

In a display of political authority that has now become a caricature, Margaret Thatcher lowered her voice, tailored her clothes and projected an image of control unparalleled by any of her male counterparts. She inscribed herself into the political picture of the conservative party with a calculated conformity, but the camouflage was less than perfect. "People are more conscious of me being a woman than I am," she complained.²² The facts of gender, imposed, internalized as an effect of the interpolation: Look, a woman! "Iron Lady," ironic mask, at once revealing and denying an "itself" behind it. "Hybridity," explains Bhabha, "represents that ambivalent 'turn' of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification."23 "In practice as sentimental as a black widow," remarked a BBC commentator, turning Thatcher into a spectre of terrifying uncertainty and in a sense. a hybrid; but her exorbitance was neither disruptive nor transformational.²⁴ Revelling in the Falklands victory, prodding Bush to go to war with Iraq, taking an aggressive stance on capital punishment, she unsettled the feminist assumption that women are not violent. By combining the rationality of law and order with a stereotype of gender, Rose argues, "Thatcher presented a femininity which does not serve to neutralize violence, but allows for its legitimation."25

Alternatively, attempting to avoid gender stereotypes when she was questioned by the New York Times about her political aims and her sexual orientation, Patricia Ireland, the president of the National Organization for Women said: "I'm a hybrid." Although she probably meant to convey the idea of something "new," I was intrigued by the article's description of the "dichotomy" of her image. At one moment, she was "... leading a counter protest outside the abortion clinic... jostled and spat upon by Operation Rescue." At another, "... every hair in place, she attended a seminar of constitutional lawyers ... parsing the intricacies of abortion law."26 What constitutes the effect of uncertainty here is neither the problem of her gender, nor of her object choice, but the problematic of political representation for feminism. The disavowed, jostled and spat upon protester reenters the official discourse of jurisprudence parsing intricacies as an advocate of women's rights and estranges the basis of its authority, that is, the rules that determine who can speak, about what and for whom. Her presence, even with every hair in place, marks an absence in the established order of things. And her statement exerts a pressure, not adversarial but solicitous the desire to be considered.

"As soon as I desire," writes Fanon, "I am asking to be considered."²⁷ It is the desire not to be desired, not to be "sealed into thingness," but to be recognized that prompts the self-effacing strategy of camouflage. The Sunday Times describes an artist "dressed casually in a lavender T-shirt and faded black dungarees, her make-up-less face framed by frizzy gray hair" recalling her desire: "To be a painter meant, I thought that I could never get married or have a family. It was like going into a convent."²⁸ To paint a picture, first it is necessary to become one; to become mottled, in this case, against the gender-biased background of abstract painting in the fifties. But it is a familiar insinuation beyond periodization. Desire requires a sacrifice. To be considered, "I turned myself into an asexual gnome," she confessed, writing herself back over, but not exactly on the line of what is called the avant-garde — those practices which privilege the sexual economy of masculinity, and moreover, privilege sexuality itself as their central and most subversive theme. An imperfect double, her horsexe traced over his per(e)version; she attempts to erase difference, while he appropriates hers.

Recall, for example, André Breton's encounter with Nadja's visionary madness, Marcel Duchamp's cryptic invention of an alter ego, Rrose Selavy, or Andy Warhol's Drella, the crossbred (Dracula-Cinderella) persona of his novel a. "The artist" has already positioned himself on the side of the heterogeneous and the unsaid, the insane, the outrageous and the perverse, then named it after her. To be a "woman artist" and to be signified as such is like a double negative. Of course as Susan Suleiman conjectures, being "doubly marginal" she could conceive of herself as "totally

avant-garde."²⁹ She could trace her passion for the masquerade back to the maternal body; to pleasure which is forbidden, but not perverse. Through the trajectory of the castration complex, the subject is ejected into a domain of symbolic obstacles which inevitably turn around the Name-of-the-Father. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel comments: "The pervert is trying to free himself from the paternal universe."³⁰ He creates chaos in an effort to erode difference once it is in place. *She*, on the other hand, in making an alliance with the mother, would be returned to the Signifier of the Real Other and to the realm of lost objects. For me, there is an irresistible analogy here, one concerning the fate of work informed by feminism in the recent past.

The Œdipal dramas of art history are staged between fathers and sons across the body of the mother. To resolve the ambivalence of his active and passive wishes, the son is faced with a dilemma: Should he kill the father or seduce him. But what of the daughter? She is also given the father's name which positions her as his potential rival. This event, however, takes a significant turn. It has been customary, within many cultures, to assign a forename which displaces the symbolic meaning of the paternal metaphor by changing it into a sign of her difference, her disinheritance. Consequently, among women artists and writers there has been a long and honourable tradition of pseudonyms, initials and enigmatic agnomina; disguises which, in their curious mimicry, afflict the patronym with uncertainty. In her catalogue an artist writes: "I guess I had the desire to be somebody different, to reinvent myself. I first picked the name Alex arbitrarily from a person in a movie as a nice, androgynous nickname." 31

Once again, I find the invocation of an "outside sex" symptomatic. Perhaps it is not enough for a woman to internalize her paternal imago in the form of an ego ideal. She must also present a self-image which instates her fully and centrally within the father's jurisdiction. For she cannot break the law, or revise the canon, from a place outside of it. Ingest his name and status first, *then* spit it out. Yet her participation in the totem meal is contingent on a disavowal of the mother. And that is her dilemma.

My interest here is not in the clinical picture of that conflict, but in the artistic strategies that "work through" the psychic resistance to, and the specific social imposition of, æsthetic rules. Considered as a discursive system, rather than a history of designated movements, the avant-garde could be said to construct the category of creative subjectivity as essentially transgressive and metaphorically feminine. In this respect, it cuts across the discourses of both modernism and postmodernism, appearing as a divergence from the norm when it poses as oppositional practice, but converging with it on the issue of originality.³² In fact the notion of transgression constitutes one of the foremost rules of recognition for originality within the

institution of Fine Art; so much so that the creative subject, presumed to be male, could be said to assume the masquerade of transgressive femininity as a form of virile display. The same scenario applies to the daughter too, who must not be dutiful, that would let the mask slip, reveal her disguise. The masculine ideal she incorporates effectively returns her own image to her, as in a mirror, inverted. The double fraud of "being-as-having." To pull that off, she must resolve her Œdipal dilemma, then subvert it, create chaos, erode difference, be "perverse": in other words, be "bad."

Grimacing, swelling or "spilling and spewing, exhorting, insulting, cajoling, cheering and cursing," in the words of Marcia Tucker, artists (mostly women and a few good men) entered the play of combat in the form of an exhibition with the appropriate and timely title, Bad Girls.33 It opened in New York in January 1994 simultaneously with its "independent sister" in Los Angeles, Bad Girls West, the coincidental Bad Girls show in London and two mainstream films of the same name. The exhibition was complex and extensive and my treatment here will be schematic. But, precisely because of its extent — there were over one hundred participants — and its complexity — there were two sites (one of which divided the presentation of work into Parts I and II, and both of which included video programs, a zine and souvenirs) the exhibition as a system privileged curatorial authorship in terms of reading, or making sense of, its unwieldy imaged discourse. This is signalled by the genre — it is a theme show, and developed through conventions of presentation such as wall text and other forms of visual or audio aids that signify access to curatorial intention. The exhibition's spatial and temporal organization also emphasizes spectatorial engagement and above all, entertainment. Finally, curatorial intentionality is consolidated in the catalogue of which, in contrast to the dispersal of visual events, there is significantly only one version and in it, both curators celebrate the undutiful daughter's coming of age. Their stated aim is to appropriate the avant-garde's tradition of transgression for their own. In effect, they have abandoned the discrete camouflage - leather jackets, no make-up and no-nonsense of artists who hoped to "pass" by denying sexual difference as well as the feminist masquerade that dutifully reassigned it by representing "woman." Instead, they have adopted a form of intimidation. "Bad girls aren't polite, they're aggressive," writes Tucker, "they curse, rant, rave and make fun of and mimic whomever and whatever they want, themselves included."34

Mimicry as an artistic strategy can expose the visual codes that constitute the canon to ridicule. Yet, it also discloses the psyche's defensive posture in the act of doubling: the thrown-off skin; thrown off to cover the frame of a shield, to protect the artist from the enfeebling effects of her gender. In this intricate rendition of display, a woman mimics a man who masquerades as a woman to prove his virility. Or, translated into zine-speak: A girl thing being a boy thing being a girl thing in order to be a bad thing.³⁵

As an institutional practice, the exhibition is anti-traditional, but not necessarily oppositional. The curators stress that not everyone included in it is a feminist, but they are unconditionally and without exception "bad." "Not only do these artists disobey explicit commandments enjoined by the fathers and handed down through the mother's complicity," claims Marcia Tanner, "they ignore the entire myth of male hegemony, of paternal lawgivers in art and everywhere else." In this, they have upheld the avant-garde's central and most sacred convention: art as transgression for its own sake. The aim is not simply to subvert the law by proposing a different order, but to *pervert* it by opposing all order, entirely and everywhere.

As the expression of a curatorial desire, the exhibition asks the artist to imagine herself free of the paternal universe, suggesting that she has already shaped herself within it — an identification so complete, a mime so perfect, *he* would want to be like her. "They've freed themselves with such spiritual irreverence, such conviction and assurance, that male artists are now imitating them." Of course, "they," fabricated by the curatorial imagination, are not synonymous with the checklist of artists whose statements and practices never quite concur with the given theme. Probably, the most productive reading takes place in the gap between them. But what I want to take up, in a more general way, is the implication of the *diatext* (exhibition and catalogue combined) as double; that is, the avant-garde imago and its bad girl double. In the gap produced between the historicity of misbehaviour and its repetition by the other, a dislocation, but not a shift, of power is visualized or, more accurately *visualizes*.

The exhibition presents a vertiginous diversity of media and dimensions, but the visual rhetoric collides on a single tack: the joke. It ranges in complexity from parody and appropriation to slapstick, innuendo and pun. Above all, there is one image that, for me, encapsulates this rhetoric and the particular kind of spectatorship the exhibition endorses. It is an untitled, black and white, gelatin silver print by Coreen Simpson, conventionally realist in that it appears to record a chance event, but unusual in the subject and object positions it constructs. In the photograph, two women divide the frame. One, her more-than-full figure enhanced by a tight knit dress, conjures an image of excess. The other, svelte shape and demure attire, implies restraint. Yet the picture elicits an instant eruption of laughter because it construes "just the opposite" meaning. The pivotal point of this reversal is the oblique glance of the woman of an exiguous type at the voluminous posterior of the other.³⁹ She is caught looking, exposed in a moment of shock and disgust; her pretensions, her desire to please, her susceptibility laid bare for all to see. She is out of control, off balance. In fact, she is falling out of the frame and destabilizing its symmetry while the carnivalesque figure takes charge. She is placed firmly in the frame, the light pulling her into the foreground, her stance an expression of composure and confidence. But this does not mean she becomes the object of identification for the viewer. In the background, there is a rather obscure, but crucial outline of a man with his back to the camera, signifying that the male gaze is, in a sense, excluded from the picture. A woman, in the position of spectator, takes his place outside the frame. The joke is told for her pleasure at the expense of both subjects in the photograph — one as an object of ridicule and the other as spectacle. Situated in the masculine pose psychically, she then realigns herself with the image of transgressive femininity. The fact that she chooses the bad girl thing, rather than being assigned to it, is empowering; but the photograph's division of the frame is indicative of the kind of partition the exhibition imposes on its audience. Indeed the resolution of the image, its intelligibility and tendency to closure produces a form of enjoyment specific to the joke: either you get it or you don't. It is significantly different from the prevailing notion of the avant-garde text as the instigation of a difficult pleasure, one in which, as Barthes suggests, the subject struggles with meaning and is lost.⁴⁰

Tucker's interpretation of avant-garde textuality has very little to do with its historical manifestations in art and literature. Linking it instead with Carnival's symbolic inversion, she claims that the role of the avant-garde has been to "turn things upside down." Carnival occasions have always been officially sanctioned by the dominant culture. It is permitted to break the law within its own limits; to turn things upside down for a day. As events they are extravagant yet self-contained, usually indifferent to an organizational politic, but that does not mean they are without political significance. Carnival festivities make fun of those of a higher status, Tucker claims, "bringing them down to size." Hence the exhibition's emphasis on humour as a tactic of intimidation is undertaken, in the end, as a display of mastery.

In contrast, the avant-garde's relation to the law is not one of inversion, which implies a separation from one order and the naming of another, but of perversion, that is, the suppression of structure and division. This is not to say that heterogeneity as an æsthetic stance cannot be institutionalized. Indeed, it has become a defining feature of "high art." What interests me is the way the authority of the institutional discourse is unsettled when a willful misreading (such as Tucker's) is mapped on to its surface. The spontaneous objections to the exhibition — there are too many artists, it all looks alike, why only women — articulate in negative the silent assumptions of scarcity, originality and a certain gender, making visible what is present but not seen because it is taken for granted as the precondition for, and the truth of, all great art. As Bhabha comments in another context, "the display of hybridity — its peculiar 'replication' — terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery." On the one hand the exhibition, it seems to me, is exactly this, a ruse

of recognition. The title itself, *Bad Girls*, traced back, written over the "avant-garde" (bad boys known simply as "good artists") produces a surplus — too visible, too literal, too desiring. For this reason it results in a deficit, that is to say, the title inscribes a lack into the insignia of "greatness" by turning transgression into a sign of sexual difference.

At the same time, the uncertainty this project generated in the art world was not indicative of its reception elsewhere. Within the entertainment sector, it fell into place without a ruffle, largely because the bad girl was mistaken for her more familiar and commodifiable double, the *femme vitale*.

FETISH

Infused with desire according to the logic of fantasy, rather than the dictates of the object, a fetish is said to be both unpredictable and obstinate. Yet, inevitably, its imaginary form is filtered through regimes of visibility which leave a culturally specific residue on the enchanted thing. In other words, fetishism's incantation of the sexual crisis is historically inflected. Since the Gulf War, for example, there have been innumerable images of women in uniform, provocatively posed with machine guns or tanks, as well as a prolific genre of thrillers which feature the ingenue murderess. Although what I find most intriguing is the sedate variation on this theme which has been proffered by the fashion trade.

In August 1992, Anne Klein launched My Uniform. Double-breasted suit, slicked back hair, the model is composed within a flank of smiling firemen. Their identical white shirts and black ties forge an alliance with the corporate image of men in suits who are remarkably unmemorable and, for exactly that reason, strategically positioned as those for whom the "others" will perform, will explain, will ask to be considered. But their array of shiny buttons and, above all, badges welds another kind of union. They are objects, as Genet phrases it, "in which the quality of males is violently concentrated," not the silent insignia of power, but the specular display of rank. 44 Inserted into that picture, her uniform appears to be much more than a stain.

Bhabha maintains that in the fetishistic ritual the object changes, while its meaning remains the same. It must substitute for the missing phallus and register difference at the same time. But with the hybrid object, the semblance of the authoritative symbol is retained while its meaning changes; that is, it comes to signify a certain process of distortion. For instance, the Anne Klein image gives the appearance of retaining some aspects of male authority associated with the uniform — the model's absence of jewelry, of exposed body parts or exaggerated posture. But against the imposing backdrop of emblazoned masculinity, that meaning fades. The

distortion of her symbolic presence turns precisely on her absence of rank. Note the Chief Fireman's white cap; it becomes the key signifier of that order from which she is excluded, signalling her return to the site of sexual difference. This displacement is in fact so severe that the ambivalence it generates overturns the significance of her image as a hybrid and becomes once again the fetish for which meaning always remains the same.

What My Uniform has in common with the bad girl phenomena — the film by design and the exhibition by default — is the neutralization of a social conflict that threatens the imperatives of heterosexuality and gender hierarchy. The clothes, gestures and role-playing that dominate the representation simply present a new configuration of phallic attributes, at once disguising and reinscribing the women's lack. For the hypothetical male fetishist, the script might be: If women are equal to men, that is, not castrated; then I will be castrated. Yet I can see she is different from the others, so I am safe.

To some extent, the demand for equality by women in the military may be regressive, particularly when it is presented as the "right to kill," but in another way, it provides a seductive image of empowerment. After all, when Rhonda Cornum dons the uniform, she does get it right. As George Sand said, "to avoid being noticed when dressed as a man, one must already be accustomed to avoiding notice when dressed as a woman." The desire to identify with the masculine imago is incited by the thrill of passing. But the portrayal of Cornum as a hybrid combination of gung-ho militarism and motherhood is also an occasion for ambivalence and, perhaps, another scene of disavowal. For the hypothetical female fetishist the script might be: If women are not equal to men, that is castrated, then I am castrated. Yet, I can see she is not like other women, so I am safe.

For the woman, display provides a form of protection against her social subordination, but it is also problematic. In the case of display, not only, as Lacan says, on the part of the male animal, but also the "female animal," entering the play of combat means covering her vulnerability with a peculiar psychic armor, one that separates her, finally, from other women. While a certain form of precocious femininity has been exorcised, and I would not want to re-valorize it here, women may have overidentified with the kind of agency ascribed to men. In effect, the internalization of that ideal has supported the unconscious alignment of the feminine with derogation and abjection. In the historical perspective of sexual politics, Joan Riviere's influential observation of the woman's crisis has been reversed. Now it seems that "manliness" is her defence, and on her narcissistic shield, the icons of hysterics have been painted over with the emblems of the master. To address that critically would mean acknowledging that one of feminism's monumental paradigms, the masquerade, has shifted.

- This article extends, in another way, issues which I originally addressed in the form of an exhibition. See Gloria
 Patri (catalogue), Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, and Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery,
 Wesleyan University, 1992.
 - Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 107.
 - 3. Ibid., p. 99. In defining three types of mimetic activity, Lacan follows Roger Caillois's analysis in *Meduse et Compagnie*. See also Roger Callois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *October* 31 (Winter 1984).
 - 4. Jacques Lacan, "God and the Jouissance of Woman," in *Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982).
 - 5. Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, p. 99.
- 6. Anna Quindlen, "Women in Combat," New York Times, January 8, 1992.
- 7. Klaus Theweleit, Male Fantasies. Volume 2, Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 155.
- 8. Ibid.
- 9. Judith Butler, lecture and discussion at the Whitney Independent Study Program, New York, March 4, 1994.
- 10. Klaus Theweleit, op. cit, p. 155.
- 11. Linda Bird Francke, "A Different War Story," New York Times Book Review. August 10, 1992.
- 12. Klaus Theweleit, op. cit. p. 155.
- 13. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and The Id* (1923), The Standard Edition, Volume XIX, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), p. 26.
- 14. Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," paper read to the British Psycho-Analytical Society, May 2, 1951, published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, London, 1953, p. 11.
- 15. Ibid., p. 14.
- 16. Ibid., p. 15.
- 17. Rhonda Cornum, *She Went to War*, subtitled: "The inspiring true story of a mother who went to war, as told to Peter Copeland" (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1992). My emphasis here is on what has been written about her, not on her own comments, which are thoughtful and at times even critical of the Gulf War.
- 18. Jacqueline Rose, Why War? Psychoanalysis. Politics, and the Return to Melanie Klein (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 29.
- 19. Catherine Millot, "The Feminine Superego" (1984), trans. Ben Brewster, in *The Woman in Question*, eds. Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie (London and New York: Verso, 1990), pp. 294-306.
- 20. See Kaja Silverman's discussion of reflexive masochism in "White Skin, Brown Masks: The Double Mimesis or with Lawrence of Arabia," *Differences*, issue on Masculinity, 1:3 (1989), Brown University, Providence.
- 21. Homi Bhahba, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," in *Race. Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 174.
- 22. Kenneth Harris, Margaret Thatcher Talks to the "Observer," published as a separate booklet, January, 1979. Cited in Jacqueline Rose, Why War?, p. 65.
- 23. Homi Bhahba, op. cit., p. 174.
- 24. John Nott, interviewed on BBC Panorama, 300 Days, January 4, 1988. Cited in Jacqueline Rose, Wby War?, p. 65.
- 25. Jacqueline Rose, Why War?, p. 59.
- 26. Jane Gross, "Does She Speak for Today's Women?", New York Times Magazine, March 1, 1992.

- 27. Franz Fanon, Black Skin, White Mask (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 218.
- 28. Deborah Solomon, "Celebrating Paint," New York Times Magazine, March 31, 1991. She is quoting the artist Elizabeth Murray.
- 29. Susan Suleiman makes this comment in the context of discussing *The Ravishment of Lol V Stein* by Marguerite Duras, in *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 16.
- 30. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, "Perversion and the Universal Law," International Review of Psychoanalysis 10:293 (1983), p. 299.
- 31. Alexis Smith, exhibition brochure/checklist, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, November 21, 1991 March 1, 1992.
- 32. My limited concern here is with the critical apparatus that constructs an artist/author for the work of art and the gender bias that implies. This may sound in some respects similar to Poggioli's emphasis on the psychological "residues" that underpin the ideological "formulas" of the avant-garde, but in my view, this is no more problematic than a historical analysis such as Burger's. See Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant-garde (1962), trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1968), and Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant-garde (1974), trans. Michæl Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). In both accounts, it is not the object the discourse constructs, i.e. ideology in the first case (expressed as activism, antagonism, nihilism and agonism), and the socio-political history of the work of art in the second (periodized as the autonomy of art in bourgeois culture of the late eighteenth century, the æstheticism of form as content in the mid to late nineteenth, and the critique of both suppositions by the historical avant-garde of the early twentieth), but the conclusions they draw from their respective analyses which effectively cancel out any transformative potential for the discourses/practices of the neo-avant-gardes. Hal Foster takes up this point critically in "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?", October 70 (Fall 1994), pp. 5-32. Yet all the arguments, including Foster's, seem to ignore the fact that authorial subjects are divided ethnically, socially, sexually and the effects of these divisions inevitably disrupt in unexpected ways which, I think, often undercut the relevance of evaluative projects as such.
- 33. Bad Girls, an exhibition organized by Marcia Tucker at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, Part I: January 14 February 27, 1994, Part II: March 5 April 10, 1994. Bad Girls West, an independent sister exhibition organized by guest curator Marcia Tanner for the UCLA Wight Art Gallery, Los Angeles, January 25 March 20, 1994.
- 34. Marcia Tucker, "The Attack of The Giant Ninja Mutant Barbies," *Bad Girls* (catalogue), New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 20.
- 35. In conversation with zine artist Tammy Ræ Carland, Los Angeles, 1994.
- 36. Marcia Tanner, "Mother Laughed: The Bad Girl's Avant-Garde," Bad Girls (catalogue), p. 77.
- 37. Ibid.
- 38. Mary Kelly, "Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism," Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, ed. Brian Wallis, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and D. R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., Boston, 1984. See section on "Exhibition and System," pp. 99-103.
- 39. Compare Mary Ann Doane's analysis of "Un Regard Oblique" by Robert Doisneau, in which the male subject gazes obliquely at the female nude in complicity with the spectator at the expense of the older woman who is centrally framed in the picture and becomes, in that exchange, the butt of the joke. Mary Ann Doane, Femmes Fatales; Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 28-31.
- 40. The implication here is that the notion of transgression as a process that disrupts the systematic order of language is the dominant theme within the discourse of avant-gardism and that the institutional question has been, in a sense, more marginal. In this respect, Barthes's distinction is exemplary: "Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values,

memories, brings to crisis his relation with language." Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of The Text* (1973), trans. Richard Miller (New York: Noonday Press, 1989), p. 14.

- 41. Marcia Tucker, op. cit. p. 24.
- 42. Ibid., p. 28. Tucker bases her comments on Peter Stallybrass and Allan White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).
- 43. Homi Bhahba, op. cit., p. 176.
- 44. Jean Genet, The Thief's Journal (1947), trans. B. Frechtman (England: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967).
- 45. Homi Bhahba, op. cit., p. 176.
- 46. George Sand, *Histoire de Ma Vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). Cited by Jan Matlock in "Masquerading Women, Pathologized Men: Cross-Dressing, Fetishism and the Theory of Perversion," in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. eds. Emily Apter, William Pietz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 47. Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade" (1929), in Formations of Fantasy, eds. Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35-44.



SOUND: THE DISTANCES

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Charles Olson's pœm "The Distances" contains the lines, "O love who places all where each is, as they are, for every moment/ yield/ to this man/ that the impossible distance/ be healed" (Olson 1966: 222). Perhaps because he was, of all the American modernists, the one who most profoundly understood the æsthetic of the typewriter, Olson overlooked the modality of love in which this wonderful feat, and more, can be enacted. Perhaps because, geographically inspired, being was for him the very idea of place, the space of becoming that is sound was remote from him, and this despite the famous magnitude of his own voice. Though I'll not return to this metaphoric structure, still the principle of sound as a mode of love, and one that soothes and blurs the metaphysical but still agonizing separations of being, underpins the exploration that follows.

QUIET, PLEASE!

You could, of course, begin with a sociology of quiet in the art gallery and museum. And, especially in this company, it is impossible not to commence with the hegemony of the visual. But I want to make my first step the silence of the art object. In a certain, still important, still persuasive modernist æsthetic, the painting or sculpture achieves its apogee as art not in its materiality as paint, stone, but in the purity of perception it engenders or makes possible: the remaking of vision in a new, and in some sense a redeemed mode. Such an æsthetic fires the concept of the "æsthetic emotion," a heightening of perception that acts as both necessary cause and ultimate reason of the artwork in Clive Bell or in Ezra Pound. In different ways, a similar and equally inveigling æsthetic, traversed by existential Catholicism, informs the major realist film-theoretical works of Bazin (1967; 1971; 1973; 1991). About the making of art and its just appreciation there wells a clarity of perception which is ultimately redemptive, no less of the soul than of reality. In this perspective, the allure of art is indistinguishable from its dematerialization, an appreciation not, as in Greenberg's best writing, of its physicality, but precisely of that "significant form," in Bell's phrase, that transcends the matter by which it is conveyed. The difficulty of that step beyond materiality by which materiality is to be remade is the theme of the last drafts and fragments of The Cantos, as it is, I have heard said, of Beethoven's last quartets. The same thesis, in a more humdrum way, underlies the theory that the study of literature should be the study of "texts," of that which persists, despite philological and interpretative differences in, say, the Bible which, even across translations, is Sacred Writ.

A DIGRESSION HURRYING BACK TO THE MAIN THEME

I want to say that in this talk, the word "text" refers to the choice of writing as a medium, as when we distinguish between image and text. For a writer, what has been so illuminating about Victor Burgin's work is the sudden intelligence of portraying letter as image: something as tangible, and physical, as profoundly visual as the image, both like and unlike the calligraphic paintings of the Welsh poet David Jones. Text is a visual medium: but we have to learn to see it visually, against the grain of an education system which not only separates text and voice, but dematerializes text itself, and demotes the histories of orthography, printing, typefaces, paper and binding to the unscrubbed cellar of antiquarianism. Having so winnowed out significant form from the chaff of books and words, pigment, wood, stone, it is possible to commence that long, eerie slide into a ghostly separation of content and form, form and reference, the ideal of the message and the material of the real. Hence, of course, producing, in the division of the mundane from the mental, the very problem which the æsthetic emotion exists to overcome.

This, then, is a place to start: the silence of the traditional artwork is not only a product of the centrality of vision, but has to do with the dematerialized appreciation of it which, from Kantian disinterest to poststructural immaterialism, bestrides æsthetic education. There is a sense in which music itself has undergone the same silencing, in the endeavour to capture in the purity of pattern in, say, Bach's Art of the Fugue, an extra-sensuous algorithmic purity to transcend the smuttiness of the mere vibrations of air and ear. A movingly honest presentation of this approach appears in Steven Holzman's Digital Mantras, in which he discusses the æsthetics behind his development of algorithms allowing him to program a computer to produce music entirely in the style of such systemic composers as Schönberg and Webern.

Pursuing this line of research, he arrived, by 1994, at the production of music generated directly from machine code, the basal language of which programming codes and human-computer interfaces are epiphenomenal expressions. Tracing the origins of this algorithmic approach to the twelve-tone row, but also to Kandinsky's art and theory, Chomskyan universal grammars and research into artificial intelligence, he argues that "Visual art, music, mathematics, mantra, numbers and form are all investigations of structure. They may aim to discover structures that reflect the fundamental structures of the cosmos. But there may also be a mystical purpose, such as the objective of attaining a higher state of consciousness through this process of discovery" (Holzman 1994: 290). Holzman here expresses a great deal more than the familiar, easy spiritualism of computer nerds. Unembarrassed by the veneer of empiricism that covers the humanities, he cheerfully unearths the authorial positions

of the founders of modern music and abstract art — there really is room for more scholarship on the seminal role of Rudolf Steiner in European modernism.

Holzman's turn to algorithmic functions in computing is more than a Greenbergian self-reflexive investigation of the medium. That kind of work does exist, in the mathematically evolved images of Karl Simms at Thinking Machines, and in William Latham's virtual sculptures at IBM UK. His method is more like that of the hypercube: a search, through structure, for a dimensionality which exists only as a function of structure. In the hypercube, the fourth dimension can be inferred from the three-dimensional model here sketched as a two-dimensional lattice from which the third can be extrapolated. It is peculiar to this research that he takes not "meaningful," front-end behaviour, but such occluded activities as self-diagnostic runs, as source-code for his new aural art. Here the machine is at its most autonomous from human purposes and human logics, a systems structure at its most discrete. As such, it could as easily be expressed in a line-scanned image as in sound, save that its temporality maps more isomorphically onto the durational structures of music.

But despite his protestations to the contrary, Holzman's solution to the expression/structure relation rematerializes the work of music. Mainstream information theory, curiously enough for so ostensibly scientific and materialist an approach, denies the medium any more than a "black box" role in communications, where the key roles are played by sender, message and receiver. Holzman's rewriting of machine code into soundscapes renders back to the machine medium the autonomy of its own materiality, leaving structure to be inferred as a hermeneutic act performed by the listener when confronted with an almost inaudibly swift clatter. To select note/not-note as the auditory expression of the opening and closing of electronic logic gates, while it derives from standard industry practice, is significantly different from its expression as ones and zeros, or illuminated and darkened pixels. It possesses the materiality of the arbitrary, of this particular sound rather than that. Though it begins in a logic of dematerialization, it returns to one of matter, and one which, for all its alien sonorities, intimates a genuinely democratic interface between machine and human sensoria.

I would like this exposition to figure as an exemplar of the way in which a deconstructive logic of ideal form is itself auto-deconstructive. The silence of the visual artwork is not an inherent quality of visuality, but a function of its constitution as message, just as the silence of music arises from listening to melody rather than instrumentation. Greenberg's great achievement was to give some matter back to art, and thereby to give a kind of autonomy to the viewer as much as to the work: both Stockhausen and Cage, in very different ways, have struggled to render back to music, through new modes of listening and new structural principles, a sense of

sound's materiality. That same step, by renewing the confrontation of auditor and vibration, gives to the act of listening a materiality which it had lost.

Christian Metz identified the issue in an essay originally published in 1975, in which he argues that

if I have distinctly and consciously heard a "lapping" or a "whistling," I only have the feeling of a first identification, of a still incomplete recognition. This impression disappears only when I recognize that it was the lapping of a river, or the whistling of the wind in the trees: in s[h]ort, the recognition of a sound leads directly to the question: "A sound of what?" (Metz 1980: 25).

The paradox is resolvable with the aid of a semiotic *deus ex-machina*, sound's metacoding in language, a position which has the great benefit of lending sound perception a socially constructed dimension. Hearing is far from pure; and, as Metz concludes:

We find ourselves quite far, you could say, from the "adverse spectacle" of subject and object, from the cosmological as well as existential (or at least transcendental) "there is" in which phenomenology wanted to place our presence in objects, and the presence of objects in us. I am not so sure, or else this "distance" is only along certain axes, and does not imply a complete rupture of the horizon (Ibid: 31-32).

There is a pressure, in listening, not to hear the sound but the name of the sound, to infer from it its source, or to impute to it a certain semantic function, but not to hear what it is in itself, save only in a preliminary moment of hearing, after which we can identify what is making the sound and say to ourselves, "Now I understand," by displacing the act of hearing onto the act of sound production. Such an operation is intimately imbricated in the structure of being, both illuminated and fostered by phenomenology, as the opposition between subject and object. For Metz, this remains a sociological phenomenon which, nonetheless, has the status of a datum, and has yet to escape the parameters of identity thinking.

In his *Traité des objets musicaux*, the composer Pierre Schæffer argues for the autonomy of a phase of hearing prior even to Metz's "first identification," a "reduced listening" which avoids both a causal definition and affectual/semantic description by focusing on the acoustic qualities of the sound in itself. In his commentary on Schæffer, Michel Chion explains that "Perception is not a purely individual phenomenon ... it is in this objectivity-born-of-inter-subjectivity that reduced listening, as Schæffer defined it, should be situated" (Chion 1994: 29). What you listen out for in reduced listening is precisely what is shared: what anyone can hear, quite apart from their interpretations. This profoundly unnatural mode of listening gives rise to a

distinctive sharpening of the aural sensorium, and one which, in Schæffer's typology, evolves a specifically sculptural vocabulary of textures, masses and velocities. Moreover, dependent as it is in practice on hearing *exactly* the same sound in *exactly* the same acoustic environment, it is particularly applicable to recorded sound, though clearly a trained ear — Olivier Messiæn's annotations of bird song come to mind — will be able to respond to the most ephemeral of environmental sounds. And finally, its Greenbergian attention to the fabric of the medium, the thing itself, rather than inferred ideas about its making or its reception, allows us — at last — to turn from the causes of silence towards what a sound object might be, and what sound artists have to offer the utopianism of accelerated modernity. Not least among these qualities will be the identification of what can be shared in the perception of sound as mass, texture, velocity.

SONIC ARCHITECTURE VERSUS THE CARTESIAN HEADSET

Microrhythms and microtonalities, even nanorhythms, nanotonalities, characterize some of the most acousmatic of contemporary musics, as in this near-random selection from an otherwise unexcerptable interview with Stockhausen, describing the *Aries* section of his enormous work *Sirius*.

In the end one doesn't take in anything except a single sound of a certain density, similar to a murmuring. By following the opposite tendency, on the other hand, that of a gradual rallentando, the melodies take on form again, the sounds gradually become clearer. The melodic outline is set out clearly with its rhythms, its sound-frequencies and its intervallic content. At this point begins the redimensionalizing of the sounds, which contract and shrink. The melody becomes condensed and compressed, as if a giant was reduced to the size of a dwarf. You return again to the perception of no more than a unique, solitary sound, while the rhythm proceeds on its way, a tenacious survivor locked up in a single line (Tannenbaum 1987: 53).

Stockhausen goes on to describe similar processes occurring with the rhythm and its progressive annihilation, after which nothing is left but pure timbre, from which the work is reconstructed. In other pieces, he has taken live samples of radio transmissions and disassembled them into musical spaces. One dimension at least of this work is to unpack the narrowness of that instrumental listening which still dominates Western aural art. It is as if, in order to taste sweetness, we would have to understand the political economy and biochemistry of sugar. Stockhausen asserts the brute fact of sound as aural perception. As musician, he is concerned with the making of sound, with the material practice of making, but is happy to locate their origins in

the aleatic, or in the discrete logic of sound composition, freed of reference to melody, harmony, counterpoint or the traditional goals of music making. Like Holzman's autonomous machines, Stockhausen's autonomous sounds are explorable because they are both of and not of the human world.

Because, after all, we do not, and it is impossible to, distinguish between the vibration of the air, the vibration of the eardrum and the bones (the feet, are sensitive receptors, especially of bass notes, the collarbone of more airborne sounds), and the neurobiological events which, in consort, provide us with the mental event of sound perception: because these biophysical events brook no boundaries, sound events permeate a space without respect to the sacrosanctity of the epidermis in Western philosophy. Moreover, just as the eye is a source of light (cf. Crary 1988; Brakhage 1963), but far more so, the body is a source of sound: pounding of the pulse, whooshing of the bloodstream, the high whine of the central nervous system, a source exploited to the maximum in Stellarc's performances. In this sense, then, there is no possibility of absolute silence. Nor is it possible to distinguish the discretion of sound source from sound perception. And finally, what is of interest to reduced listening, to recapitulate Chion's point, is what is neither rationally decipherable about its origin, nor what is socially constructed, as meaning or affect, as "individual," but what remains of a sound stripped down to what is shared in any perception of it. In this sense, the practice orients us towards a physiological solidarity of hearing prior to the sociality of naming as metacode, or affective response as sociological.

Stockhausen's practice further introduces, through its manipulations of recorded sound, the inscaping of sound events in reduced listening, revealing that even the imaginable purity of the event as a moment of being is a product of complex interactions and fluid becomings. Sound, unlike images, cannot be imagined as "still" (and I am unsure of the stillness even of photographs): it is temporal, and as Rick Altman points out, even in recorded form, unstable: "Not only do I hear the fabulous acoustics of the Cleveland Orchestra's home concert hall, but at the same time I have to put up with the less than ideal acoustics of my own living room. Every sound I hear is thus double, marked both by the specific circumstances of recording and by the particularities of the reproduction situation" (Altman 1992: 27). Altman is generally careful to avoid, despite the slip over "ideal acoustics," any suggestion that what we have here is distortion. There is no deviation from some ideal sound event, which could exist only in the dematerialized world of imaginary sounds which, while satisfactory in certain thought experiments, has the great demerit of not existing.

Perhaps the only aural scape which approaches the purity of the ideal is provided by headphones. There is an illuminating anecdote to tell here, concerning a major

retrospective of European video installations in Cologne a few years ago. A curatorial problem with having more than one or two installations in a show is that their sound spaces tend to overlap, producing an unmanageable cacophony in the transition zones between them. The organizers' solution was to equip visitors with infra-red activated headsets, which would pick up the sound from a given installation as you walked into range of its miniature transmitter. It was not just the abruptness of the transition which offended some of the exhibiting artists, but the translation of an architectural into a punctual space. Transmitted through air, sound occupies and creates an environment: transmitted directly to the ear, with whatever purity of reproduction, that space is reduced to an optimal (and imaginary) point midway between the ears: the Cartesian image of a central control point in the brain in which, hierarchically, all perceptions attain consciousness (cf. Dennett 1991: 104-111 and passim).

Such a Cartesian soundscape, constructed as a technology in which aural perspective is focussed around an imagined central point of the brain, not only returns us to a residual dualism of mind over sensorium, not only reduces the experience of sound from a bodily to a purely auricular event, but also remodels the sound space as individuated. If Altman is correct, each act of listening is dependent on the immediate acoustic environment, and susceptible to minuscule changes in the sound-absorbing qualities of humidity, bodies, fabrics and the sympathetic vibrations and echoes of furniture and decor. So every playback event is unique, open to the serendipity of an environment inhabited by changing acoustics and additional sound sources. To move through the acoustic environment of a video installation is then to alter it. The Cartesian headset, in its pursuit of an imagined ideality of reproduction, deprives the auditor of the fundamental sociality of sound, less here sculptural, and to do with the making of space, than architectural, and engaged in inhabiting it. Recorded sound is then, to coin Le Corbusier's phrase, a machine for living in.

NOISES OFF

Sound media then may be addressed as physical and social: it must be approaching truism to add that they are temporal. Sounds, even the slightest and most minutely perceived, occupy time by dint of their existence as vibration. In some unimaginably still night, windless and waveless, a pin drops into soft mud: a tiny plop in the well of silence. But what you experience here is not just the sound, and the time of its perception, but the time it takes a sound to cover the space between you and it, and in the aftermath of perception, as silence reforms itself about it, and you wait for a repetition or continuation, a third time. These times (I think there are others) constitute a form of distance, a term I use to suggest the commingling of time and space. The times of sound are also the elements of its geography.

Recording functions as a messenger: we experience in it simultaneous proximity and removal. We can speak of such sounds as distant: in them space is experienced as duration. It is a quality exploited in the messenger function in Aristotelian drama, and in the construction of auditory off-screen space in cinema, when a sound is used to connect scenes distant from one another in time and space: I'm thinking of the gunshot that rings out on the soundtrack as Denzel Washington and Spike Lee play at cops and robbers in the woods in Tom Fleischman's sound design for Malcolm X (Spike Lee, 1992). These are moments in which aural and visual are separated from one another by a causality which, however, binds them back together over another space, that of the auditorium. In such moments, sound becomes most truly a medium, a distance intervening between an event and its perception, and as such throws itself open to style, the enemy, in Cocteau's bon mot, of journalism, the discourse of truth. Here, in information terms, sound becomes noise.

But then it is in the nature of sound, whether it is conveying information about a world already known, acting as the vehicle for pattern and structure independent of its voicings, or merely doubling up the preexisting certainties of a verbal metacode, to be redundant. That is precisely what allows the possibility of sound's autonomy, but also that which returns it to us as a human environment, and in changing it from mere vehicle to material medium, resituates it in the distances between — and within — people. Both live sound (same time, same space) and mediated sound (different time and/or different space) are transmitted, in the sense of the word's Latin root: sent across even the intimate space of the sound of one's own voice heard through the bones and fibres of the skull. In transmission, sound is internally differentiated as spatio-temporal distance, whether in production or perception, by the central fact of its mediation. As so often in modern communciations, distribution pre-occupies the space between makers and audiences. This centrality of mediation is what needs restoring to information theory, but also to the disembodying theses of hermeneutic and semiotic traditions.

The obverse of the absence of ideal sound, then, is that all sound is always already distorted. The addition (or supplement: cf. Doane 1980) of transmission forever alters what it is to speak. We can no longer make a sound exclusively in the present, or "here," in a single place. For us, in a world after radio and recording, sound is always already distant, temporally and spatially disjunct from the metaphysical presence of the voice to the self. The Cartesian headset is the narcissistic, anti-utopian response of technicized sound to this crisis of identity, the "Be here now" of a hyperindividuated subjectivity upon which depend the systematization of power and the Stalinism of the market economy. The question must then emerge: what might a utopian soundscape be like?

VIRTUAL GEOGRAPHY: NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Sound in the audiovisual media then creates diegetic spaces, but also forms architectures of social space in the playback scene, and a virtual geography of transmission through time and space, both as recording and as broadcast. To observe that sound has the capacity to subvert the binary opposition of image/sound is, however, merely to catch up theoretically with what has been the case at least since Dick Lester's Beatles films and Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, 1969): that sound, increasingly in neo-classical film, belongs to the affirmation of diegesis over narration. But to celebrate this resistance æsthetic is to delight in the diegetic strategies of Warner Bros.' relaunch of Batman as a raft of consumer products. Resistance always presumes the dominant it seeks to undermine. Nonetheless, the virtual geographies of infotainment transnationals are suggestive of certain pulls toward one kind of future — or another.

Certainly, utopian soundscapes cannot be divorced from the other senses: one thinks here less of the totalitarianism of Albert Speer's Nuremburg or rock stadium light shows, and more of the sonic theatre of Sun Ra, of Iannis Xenakis's architectures of sound and light, or the ambient music for architectural spaces developed during the 1970s by Brian Eno. Perhaps David Toop (1995) is right, and what distinguishes the open structures of these strategies from the closures of pomp and circumstance is their lack of resolution, their antipathy to the narrative structures of melodic composition, and their concern for constant intermeshing and fluidity. But more fundamental still is the elimination from such sensory architectures of an active picturing of the future. Utopia, as we remind ourselves so constantly, is "no place," and the future's one overriding attribute is that it does not exist. Bloch and Adorno's late interview (Bloch and Adorno, 1988) makes a first defining gesture: utopianism as the hope for the future must be free of content. To define the future is to plan it, to condemn it to being a continuation of the present; indeed, to condemn it to being. What Albert Speer and Jean-Michel Jarre have in common is a mapping of the future, closing down possibilities, assured that utopia will be like today, only more so. This is enacted as control over the sound environment, made possible by a combination of massive amplification and wall-of-sound techniques that leave no space between notes or frequencies for a sociable intervention. The pursuit, in the stadium, is for a magical recovery of liveness through the star system: the assurance, overguaranteed by amplification and video screens, of the actual presence of an increasingly mediated central figure. But like the sham democracy of political party conventions, we are invited along not to collaborate but to acclaim; not to orchestrate but to be orchestrated; not to join in the creation of the future but to be here now, despite the crystalline clarity of the logic of spectacle — that the here and the now are mediated out of existence.

Rendered portable, stadium rock functions as pure defence against the depradation of the audiosphere. An automobile consumes an enormous proportion of its blazing fossil fuels just to make an ugly and unnecessary din: sound as byproduct, sound as pollutant, as an exercise in power: stadium rock on the in-car stereo is a necessary defence against this devastation. Annihilating distance by taking its own soundscape with it, another Cartesian headset, the tourist soundworld of the car is a narcissistic involution of individualism. Not just anecological but anti-ecological, it denies diversity in denying the possibility of hearing anything else. Privatized noise-making, at its pinnacle on the road, is not just asocial but anti-social. Reduced to pseudo-spectacle, the management of personal audio space becomes the denial of the present as much as of the future; condemns itself to the indefinite extension of a moment that always began just a moment before.

Utopian elements of the existing soundscape would then depend upon its negative relation to time and space, planning and administration, centralization, pseudo-democracy, the one-way flows of actually-existing globalization, the Free Market and its supposedly iron laws. What is to be prized, as the condition out of which utopia might evolve, is the chaotic, the convivial, the open. If the utopian is always the negative of what is, then it will be not just socially constructed, but socially constructable, not merely diverse but diversifying. It is sound as a geography of the radically democratic, radically global: like Hildegard Westerkamp's "soundwalks," in which she records urban and wilderness soundscapes direct to radio. "Most radio," she notes,

engages in relentless broadcasting, a unidirectional flow of information and energy which contradicts the notion of ecology. What would happen if we could turn that around, and make radio listen before imposing its voice like an alien into a new environment?... Can radio be such a place of acceptance, a listening presence, a place of listening? Is it possible to create radio that listens, that in turn encourages us to listen to, and hear, ourselves? (Westerkamp 1994: 94).

RADIO REALISM AND DIGITAL DREAMS

Nature is dead: at least in the sense of a domain definable over against the human and artificial. The human universe is decreasingly comprehensible as artifice and nature, human and natural. The crisis of "reality" is not a crisis of representation but a crisis in the destructuring of reality as an opposition between us and it. We are

no longer then faced with the opportunity for a realism based in representation, because representation is founded in the difference between human and natural. Sound realism in particular cannot emerge from imitative strategies. If art is to maintain its Bazinian destiny of revealing reality, it can no longer do so by preserving or recording the environment, but only by designing it. The new realist problematic then concerns not the philosophy of representation, but the ethics of design. As the disprized quadrant of the cultural galaxy, sound has been freer than most to pursue its own logics, and for Jacques Attali that has given it the unique position of running ahead of those other semi-autonomous discourses that surround it — ahead of science, politics, the economy (Attali 1985: 133-148). In this sense, as design, sound arts have acted to predict, to exist as the past of a future which has yet to become. Insofar as it approaches realism, then, sound's referent is not-yet existent: hence its ephemerality; hence the impossibility of freeze-framing a sound, even in digital recording.

To try to imagine the future of sound is an endlessly negative task. We talk — I talk — about sounds as if they were discrete entities. It is an æsthetic justly critiqued by Douglas Kahn:

The main avant-garde strategy in music from Russolo through Cage quite evidently relied upon notions of noise and worldly sound as "extramusical"; what was outside musical materiality was then brought back into the fold in order to rejuvenate musical practice. This strategy was, of course, exhausted at the point when no audible sound existed outside music. But for a sound to be "musicalized" in this strategy, it had to conform materially to ideas of sonicity, that is, ideas of a sound stripped of its associative attributes, a minimally coded sound existing in close proximity to "pure" perception and distant from the continuing effects of the world (Kahn 1992: 3).

No doubt: Kahn singles out a process through which the musical avant-garde has appropriated the worldly for the musical, through a process in which sounds are intially separated from one another and from the world, severed from the struggle and the rapture of the everyday, in order to partake in a purified, rarefied praxis of patterning and ordering. I think it is possible to argue *contra*: that to hear sounds in this way is to mishear, to hear *as*, but not to hear in the sense of reduced listening. Yet this descent into the aural as a disjunct and to that extent dematerialized arena is not essentially an æstheticization of the political quotidian: it functions æsthetically as an-æsthetic, and politically as negation of the political, but more than this, as a *positive* antipathy to the extant, a pre-echo of the not-yet.

The escape from the mundane achieved by a discipline of reduced listening frees sound from the requirements of metacoding, whether that be through language or

music. It frees sound too from the functional-instrumental demands of semantic listening. But if such listening can learn from music, it will be through an understanding that no sound exists alone, but each is articulated with all other sounds, perhaps as bourgeois music, in its revolutionary moment before the ossification of Brahms, articulated an equality which would be so thoroughly betrayed in the hour at which it turned from aspiration to celebration. The true revolution of the twentieth century's music came not from Schönberg or Cage but from the gramophone: from a recording that immediately doubled the amount of sound in the world.

In Friedrich Kittler's analysis of the emergent modernity of 1900, "the ersatz sensuality of Pœtry could be replaced, not by nature, but by technology. The gramophone empties out words by bypassing their imaginary aspect (signifieds) for their real aspects (the physiology of the voice)" (Kittler 1990: 245-246). The bodiless "soul" of Romanticism was rendered material, and its recording autonomous and uncontrolled. Most of us remember the eerieness of hearing our own voices recorded for the first time: the Edisonian imagination of the speaking soul is mocked by the strangeness of your voice heard for the first time through the air (the Wizard of Menlo Park, of course, was seriously hearing-impaired). Recording too allowed the speeding up and, even more significantly, the slowing down of voices, the reduction of articulate speech to the throbbing of the throat, an inscription. The failing of this avenue has lain in its approximation to writing, just as its achievement was to break the stranglehold of the book as sole repository of stored data. But its destiny has lain elsewhere, in the digital recording studio available for any desktop, in which the voice, once recorded, becomes the passive matter for an active transformation. It is a kind of therapy.

To take what is most internal, the voice, the Russian bass described by Barthes — a "something which is directly the cantor's body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilage... as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings" (Barthes 1977: 181-182) — and to lay it on the operating table for cosmetic surgery: this is an act of sensuous terror, the more so as the cantor's body and your ears share a single movement. The arithmetic coding of the voice — or any sound — gives it the status not of death, but of a dead language, like Latin, defence-less against every schoolboy's scalpel. To add reverb, attack and sparkle; to conform the singer to the sung, and to the fashionable brilliance; to optimize, and so to draw the voice into the magnetic centre of the ideal. Or: to abandon the century-old dream of authenticity, and to revel in the artifice. In either case, what it is to listen has to be rethought, but perhaps not radically. There is the erotic of listening, the ecstasy of hearing the bubble of song in the lung, and the more secret mysticism of hearing and

repeatedly hearing the bursting bubble. And there is the relation one might enter into with one's own voice, treated, heightened, made available for such ministrations. From vocal music we can learn the permeability of bodies, the shared skin of singing and hearing. What is at stake in this talking cure is not the Freudian, individuated unconscious, but a social unconscious actively produced in the endlessness of radio — "Radio," says Bachelard, "must find a way of bringing 'unconsciousnesses' into communication" (Bachelard 1993: 219) — and recording. After sound, with the aid of recording, has moved its camp into the materiality of music, and in so doing perhaps described a certain threshold at which we now stand, where human once stood over against machine, it remains for digital sound to unpack the remaining field of representation. That is the place in which individual stands over against individual, the unimaginable, and no longer private, sonorous ecstasy of the dissolution of self.

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BARTHES'S DISCRETION

VICTOR BURGIN

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Film has finally attracted its own Muse. Her name is Insomnia. Hollis Frampton¹
That which love worst endures, discretion.
John Donne²

In La Paresse, Jean-Luc Godard's fifteen minute contribution to the film Sept péchés capitaux,³ Eddie Constantine plays an actor in B-movies who turns down an offer of sex from an ambitious young starlet. The reason he refuses, he tells her, is that he cannot bear the thought of — afterwards — having to get dressed all over again. In a note on this short film, Alain Bergala observes: "Eddie Constantine marvelously embodies that very special state given by an immense lassitude, an apparent inertia which is in fact a state of great porosity to the strangeness of the world, a mixture of torpor, of loss of reality and of a somewhat hallucinatory vivacity of sensations... Godard speaks to us of this very special way of being in the world, on the edge of sleep..."4 That such a somnolently receptive attitude might be the basic condition of all cinematic spectatorship was first suggested in a special issue of the journal Communications devoted to "Psychoanalysis and cinema." Published in 1975, the issue has five photograms on its cover — arranged vertically, in the manner of a film-strip. The top and bottom frames are both from the same film, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. They show the face of the somnambulist Cesare — first with eyes staring open, then with eyes closed. To look quickly from one frame to the other produces a rudimentary animation — Cesare appears to blink. The image of the cinema audience as waking somnambulists, blinking as they emerge from the auditorium into the light, may be found in more than one of the essays in this issue of Communications. Christian Metz, for example, writes that "spectators, on leaving, brutally expelled from the black interior of the cinema into the vivid and unkind light of the lobby, sometimes have the bewildered face... of people just waking up. Leaving the cinema is a bit like getting out of bed: not always easy..."5 Metz notes that the subject who has fallen prey to the "filmic state," feels "as if numb" (engourdi). Roland Barthes describes his own feelings "On leaving the cinema" in much the same terms. He feels "a little numb (engourdi), a little awkward, chilly, in brief sleepy: he is sleepy, that's what he thinks; his body has become something soporific, soft, peaceful: limp as a sleeping cat."

Barthes's short essay of 1975, "En sortant du cinéma," may be read as a reprise of his essay of 1973, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein." The theme of "representation" — defined as a structure which guarantees the imaginary capture of a subject by an object — is central to both essays, but is developed differently in each. The earlier essay points to an irresolvable problem in any politically inspired attempt to free the spectator from the grasp of the spectacle from within the spectacle itself. Barthes

acknowledges that the "tableau," the "epic scene," the "shot," all work against narrative mimesis and identification. Framing the mutely eloquent "social gest," the tableau may produce the effect of "distancing" (Verfremdung). The spell is broken, the spectator's eyes are opened — but onto what? "In the long run," Barthes observes, "it is the Law of the Party which cuts out the epic scene, the filmic shot; it is this Law which looks, frames, enunciates."9 It takes a "fetishist subject," Barthes writes, to "cut out the tableau" from the diagesis. He cites a lengthy passage from Diderot's defense of the tableau, which concludes: "A painting made up of a large number of figures thrown at random on to the canvas... no more deserves to be called a true composition than scattered studies of legs, nose and eyes... deserve to be called a portrait or even a human figure." Barthes comments that it is this transcendental figure, "which receives the full fetishistic load."10 But Diderot's unification of a "body in pieces" within the bounds of a "figure" might as well be assimilated to Lacan's account of the mirror stage as to Freud's account of fetishism. In his later paper, Barthes writes: "I stick my nose, to the point of squashing it, to the mirror of the screen, to this imaginary 'other' with whom I narcissistically identify myself." To pass from Barthes's earlier paper to the later one is to watch a scene of fetishistic fascination cede prominence to one of narcissistic identification — but as if in a filmic cross-dissolve, where neither scene may yet be clearly distinguished from the other. What remains in focus, in both the 1973 and the 1975 essay, is the question of the autonomy of the subject of civil society in modern, media-saturated democracies. But whereas Barthes's essay "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" explicitly takes up the question of how to awaken the hypnotized subject of this society of the spectacle, "En sortant du cinéma" implicitly raises the question of whether somnolence itself may not be the spectator's best defence before the spectacle of the Law.

As much as he may go to the cinema to see this or that movie, Barthes confesses, he also goes for the darkness of the auditorium. The necessary precondition for the projection of a film is also "the colour of a diffuse eroticism." Barthes remarks on the postures of the spectators in the darkness, often with their coats or legs draped over the seat in front of them, their bodies sliding down into their seats as if they were in bed. For Barthes, such attitudes of idle "availability" represent what he calls the "modern eroticism" peculiar to the big city. He notes how the light from the projector, in piercing the darkness, not only provides a keyhole for the spectator's eye, but also turns that same spectator into an object of specular fascination, as the beam "illuminates — from the back, from an angle — a head of hair, a face." Just as Metz speaks of "l'état filmique" of the spectator, so Barthes posits a fundamental "situation de cinéma." But whereas Metz speaks of this torpidly receptive state as produced by a visit to the cinema, for Barthes it is a precondition of the visit.

He writes: "The darkness of the movie theatre is prefigured by the 'twilight reverie' (preliminary to hypnosis, according to Breuer-Freud) which precedes this darkness and leads the subject, from street to street, from poster to poster, finally to engulf him in a dark cube, anonymous, indifferent, where must be produced this festival of affects we call a film." 12 While watching the film, he writes: "It is necessary for me to be in the story (the vraisemblable requires it), but it is also necessary for me to be elsewhere: an imaginary slightly unstuck (décollé), that is what, as a scrupulous fetishist... I require of the film and of the situation where I go to look for it."13 Barthes unsticks himself from the screen by allowing his attention to peel away, to "take off," to "get high." 14 His act of ideological resistance — for all that it proceeds from an ethical attitude — takes the route of pleasure, rather than denial. He responds to the fetishistic and ideologically suspect visual pleasure of narrative cinema not by resisting the perversion, but by doubling it. Barthes suggests a culturally dissident way of going to the cinema other than "armed by the discourse of counter-ideology"; it is "in allowing oneself to be fascinated two times: by the image and by what surrounds it, as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which looks, lost in the close mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize, not the image, but precisely that which exceeds it: the grain of the sound, the theatre itself, the darkness, the obscure mass of other bodies, the rays of light, the entrance, the exit: in brief, to distance myself, 'unstick,' I complicate a 'relation' by a 'situation."15

We leave the movie theatre, Barthes suggests, only to reenter an other cinema, that of civil society. He writes: "The historical subject, like the spectator in the cinema I am imagining, is also stuck to ideological discourse... the Ideological would be at bottom the Imaginary of a time, the Cinema of a society... it even has its photograms: the stereotypes with which it articulates its discourse..."16 These remarks suggest the question: "What relation, if any, have the means by which Barthes 'unsticks' himself from the Imaginary in the movie theatre to the situation of the historical subject glued to the Ideological in society?" It might appear that Barthes "distracts" himself from the film, by behaving in the cinema much as he might when in the street. In its early history, cinema was more often integrated into everyday urban flânerie than it is today. For example, in a chapter appropriately entitled "Streetwalking around Plato's Cave," Giuliana Bruno has described the peripatetic forms of spectatorship — and their attendant erotics — that accompanied the introduction of cinema to Italy in the closing years of the nineteenth century, most explicit in the practice of projecting films in the open-air of Naple's main shopping arcade.17 Or again, we may recall the later practice of André Breton and Jacques Vaché, who would visit as many cinemas in Nantes as they could within the space of a single afternoon — entering and leaving with no regard for any narrative

development other than that of their own dérive. Today, our everyday passage through the "Cinema" outside the movie theatre takes us through television, advertising and glossy magazines. These are the arts which are today appreciated — like architecture, in Benjamin's description — "in a state of distraction." However, the distraction which typically accompanies an evening's television viewing — answering telephone calls, fixing drinks, chatting, "zapping," flipping through newspapers and magazines, and so on - has nothing to do with the distance Barthes finds in the movie theatre. When watching television, Barthes remarks, anonymity is lost, the surrounding bodies are too few. Worst of all, "the darkness is erased," and we are "condemned to the Family." As a consequence of all this, "the eroticism of the place is foreclosed."18 In an essay about a Paris dance-hall, Barthes writes: "I admit to being incapable of interesting myself in the beauty of a place, if there are no people in it... and reciprocally, to discover the interest of a face, a silhouette, an item of dress, to savour an encounter, I need the place of this discovery, also, to have its interest and its savour."19 This simultaneity of fascination by both people and place, he remarks later, amounts to "that which one calls Festival, and which is quite different from Distraction."20 We may recall that Barthes refers to the film, as a "festival of affects." He goes to the cinema, he says, only in the evening. The city at night is a form of organization of general darkness, and Barthes sees the darkness of the cinema as a particular form of organization of the darkness of the city at large. The movie auditorium, he says, condenses the "modern eroticism" of the big city. It is as if what Barthes calls "the eroticism of the place" were a modern equivalent of the eighteenthcentury genius loci, the "genius of the place." Like the attendant Spirit, the erotic effect may be unpredictably fleeting in its appearances. In Le Plaisir du Texte, Barthes writes: "It is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so well stated, which is erotic... the staging of an appearance-disappearance."21 The eroticism that may accompany what Barthes calls "the Cinema of a society," like the "dancing ray of the projector" of which he speaks, flickers. Baudelaire chose precisely this term to describe the pleasures of the crowded city street, speaking of "the flickering grace of all the elements of life."22 The photograms of Barthes's biphasic Cinema — his festival for two bodies, narcissistic and perverse — appear abruptly, detaching themselves from the phenomenal flux in the manner of the fragment of which he speaks in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes — in, "a yawning (bâillement) of desire." 23 If desire "yawns," it may have more than a little to do with the alert torpidity of the somnambulist, or of someone on their way home to bed.

In a passage in "Soirées de Paris," Barthes recounts flickering chance encounters during his walk home at the end of an evening spent in cafés — as if reversing the itinerary, "from street to street, from poster to poster," he describes as leading him to

the cinema. In the rue Vavin he crosses the path of a beautiful and elegant young woman, who trails behind her "a delicate scent of muguet." On a column in the rue Guynemer he comes across a film poster, with the names of two actresses — Jane Birkin and Catherine Spaak - printed in huge letters (as if, Barthes remarks, the names alone were "incontestable bait"). In front of a house in the rue de Vaugirard there appears "an attractive silhouette of a boy."24 The film poster clearly may represent what Barthes calls a "photogram" of the Ideological. Along with other forms of publicity, film posters mainly show stereotypical individuals and objects, in stereotypical relations and situations. In Mythologies, and subsequent texts, Barthes gave us the means to demystify and dismantle such "rhetoric of the image" in terms of counter-ideological analyses - Marxism, semiology. In "En sortant du cinéma," Barthes uses a Lacanian vocabulary. In these terms, what constitutes the Imaginary exceeds what an ordinary taxonomy of objects of daily use may classify as "images." The "beautiful woman" and the "attractive boy" not only have their counterparts in actual film posters, they may serve as living photograms — idéologèmes — in Barthes' s Cinema of society. In "En sortant du cinéma," Barthes asks, in passing: "Do we not have a dual relation to the common place (lieu commun): narcissistic and maternal?25 The woman trails behind her "a scent of muguet." In France, by long tradition, sprigs of muguet — a small, white, bell-shaped flower — are sold on the streets on the first day of May. Small children - raised in their mother's shadow - learn the division of common time through such traditions. This woman who casts the shadow of time itself might be assimilated to the maternal side of that "dual relation" which Barthes invokes. The "attractive silhouette" of the boy - whose fugitive character elicits what Benjamin called "love at last sight" (prompted by Baudelaire's verses À une passante) — might be assimilated to the other, narcissistic, side.

Another evening in Paris, Barthes follows a route which will eventually lead to the "dark cube" of a movie theatre. He first visits a gay bath house, then moves on to what seems to be some sort of brothel. Here, Barthes notes: "About to leave is a beautiful Moroccan who would really like to hook me (m'accrocher) and gives me a long look; he will wait in the dining room until I come down again, seems disappointed that I don't take him right away (vague rendez-vous for the following day). I leave feeling light, physically good...."

The image of Barthes on the stair, exchanging glances with the "beautiful Moroccan," reminds me of another image. Bergala's note on La Paresse is part of a Godard filmography in a special issue of Cahiers du Cinéma. A band of photograms runs horizontally along the bottom of each page of the filmography — less like a film strip than a comic strip, or photo roman. One of the images is from La Paresse. Eddie Constantine appears to have just descended a carpeted staircase, which winds up and out of frame behind him. He is immaculately dressed

in suit and tie, and is wearing a hat. He is looking at the starlet — who is standing close by him, dressed only in her underwear. Barthes traces Brecht's idea of the "social gest" to Diderot's concept of tableau. The tableau has a history prior to Diderot. In the mid-sixteenth century, Humanist scholars gave advice to painters in which two ideas were essential: first, the painter should depict human action in its morally most exemplary forms; secondly, as the "history painter" could show only a single moment from a moral fable, then that moment should be the peripateia — the "decisive moment" when all hangs in the balance.²⁷ The images of, respectively, Barthes and Constantine on the stair, both have something about them of a motif which appears throughout the history of Western European painting: "Hercules at the Crossroads." I ask to be excused comment on what, to a "counter-ideological discourse," is most obvious in both of these modern mises-en-scènes of choice — the inequitable distribution of material authority across the lines of, respectively, race and gender. My particular interest here is in what this image condenses of Bergala's description of Godard's film, and what, in turn, this description condenses of all of what Barthes has to say about "la situation de cinéma." The woman in the diagesis is making a spectacle of herself; in French, one might say "elle fait son cinéma." Constantine on the stair, much like Barthes on the stair, responds with, to repeat Bergala's words, "an apparent inertia which is in fact a state of great porosity to the strangeness of the world, a mixture of torpor, of loss of reality and of a somewhat hallucinatory vivacity of sensations."

The expression "hallucinatory vivacity" may remind us of Barthes's description of the photograph. The photograph, he says, represents "an anthropologically new object," in that it constitutes "a new form of hallucination: false at the level of perception, true at the level of time."28 The film, on the other hand, is "always the precise opposite of an hallucination; it is simply an illusion..."29 The film "can present the cultural signs of madness, [but] is never mad by nature."30 To the contrary, the photograph is an authentically "mad image, rubbed by the real."31 Nevertheless, the abrasion of image against real, which Barthes finds and values in photography, is at least structurally similar to his readiness, when in the cinema, "to be fascinated two times: by the image and by what surrounds it." In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, he writes: "The dream displeases me because one is entirely absorbed by it: the dream is monological; and the fantasy pleases me because it remains concomitant to the consciousness of reality (that of the place where I am); thus is created a double space, dislocated, spaced out..."32 These men on the stair are not sleepwalkers, but they are "spaced out." In "En sortant du cinéma," it is as if Barthes is urging a practice of spectatorship that will pull the filmic experience towards the side of fantasy. and away from the shore of the dream. Barthes's inclination to phenomenology leads

him to seek mutually exclusive "essences" of film and photography. But such oppositions fade as he steers closer to semiology and psychoanalysis. Barthes himself admits as much, even in one of his more "phenomenological" texts. On the first page of *La chambre claire*, he writes: "I declared that I liked Photography *against* the cinema — from which, however, I never managed to separate it."³³ Here then, is another site of abrasion: where photography touches cinema. Barthes' well-known interest in the film-still is often mentioned to exemplify his preference for the photograph over the film. The "photogram," however, is strictly *neither* photograph *nor* film. It is the material trace of that moment of arrest which establishes a space *between* the photograph *and* the film. In terms of Lacan's discussion of the gaze, to which Barthes explicitly gestures in "En sortant du cinéma," this time of arrest is that of the "lure."

The filmic image, says Barthes, is "a lure." He adds: "This word must be understood in the analytical sense."34 Lacan uses the word leurre with the full range of meanings it takes in French: "lure," "bait" and "decoy"; "allurement" and "enticement"; "trap," "delusion" and "deceit." The analytical sense which Lacan brings to it comes most specifically from what he makes of Roger Caillois's remarks on the "three functions of mimicry."35 In the animal and insect behaviours named by Caillois as travesty, camouflage and intimidation, Lacan says, "the being gives of itself, or it receives from the other, something which is mask, double, envelope, detached skin, detached to cover the frame of a shield."36 The frame from La Paresse depicts just such a meeting of masks — as beautiful as the chance encounter, on a staircase, of some undergarments with a business suit. "Without any doubt," Lacan remarks, "it is by the intermediary of masks that the masculine, the feminine, meet in the most pointed, the most ardent, way,"37 However, Lacan notes a difference between human behaviour and the behaviours described by Caillois: "Only the subject — the human subject, the subject of desire... is not, unlike the animal, entirely held by this imaginary capture. He takes his bearings in it (Il s'y repère). How? To the extent that he isolates the function of the screen, and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask, as being that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the place of mediation."38 Christian Vincent's film La Discrète is a story of seduction and betrayal set in modern-day Paris.³⁹ It takes its title, however, from a practice of the seventeenth century. Fashionable women of that period would wear a "beauty spot"— usually a dot of black taffeta — on their face. When worn on the forehead it was called a majestueuse, placed by the eye it was a passionnée, by the lips a galante, and on the chin a discrète. In eighteenth-century Venice, the moretta was one of only two masks worn at carnival time, and it was worn only by women. The moretta was held in position by means of a button gripped between the teeth — in order to speak, the woman had to unmask, to quite literally "reveal herself." Both practices exemplify (in one case, quite literally) a play with the mask in the field of the gaze. As in all play — productive of spacing, difference — meaning is created. A fascination beyond words is at the same time a potentially garrulous semiotic system. For the human animal, the lure is a place of passage between Imaginary and Symbolic, between the drive and the contractual regulation of sexuality. What flickers on the screen of the lure is the dance of Desire and the Law. Barthes emphasizes that the filmic image, which so often stages the scene of lure, is itself a lure. However, so, potentially, is any other image in the "Cinema of society." Barthes himself recognizes this in the very terms of his exasperation at the film poster he comes across in the rue Guynemer, the actresses' names printed large, "as if they were incontestable bait" (appâts). The look given by the actresses emerges from within an image-product of a visual cultural institution here, the cinema - of the Cinema of society. That is to say, the look emerges from within the gaze. Amongst the various functions of the gaze is the subjection of what Barthes calls the "historical subject." Lacan gives the example of the mural paintings which adorn the great hall of the Palace of the Doges, in Venice: "Who comes to these places? Those who form that which Retz calls the people. And what do the people see in these vast compositions? The gaze of those persons who — when they are not there, they the people — deliberate in this hall. Behind the painting, it is their gaze which is there."40 Today, the environment of images from what we call "the media" has taken the place and the function of those murals in the Palace of the Doges. Lacan does not mention it, but the paintings — like the products of the media today — would also have been an object of wonder and delight, of fascination, for those subjected to the authority of those who commissioned the images. The long history of the multiple forms of decoration and pageant in society demonstrates the inseparability of power from visible display: the element of hypnotic fascination in voluntary submission. However, such means of control are unstable, and the history of authority is also one of struggle for mastery of the "twilight reverie."

Lassitude, inertia, torpor; a body become soporific, soft, limp; a loss of reality, a porosity to the strangeness of the world, an hallucinatory vivacity of sensations. A "very special way of being in the world," known for centuries of Western Christianity as the condition of *acedia* — a state of mortal sin. In his book on the concept of *acedia* in medieval thought and literature, siegfried Wenzel traces the notion of the "sin of sloth" to the fourth Christian century, and the milieu of Egyptian desert monks who lived near Alexandria. For these monks, Acedia was the name of a demon with whom they frequently fought. A stealthy drowsiness would announce the arrival of the demon. There would then follow an assault of impressions, thoughts and feelings which could overwhelm devotional duty. Monks became melancholy, they found it difficult to remain in their cells and would wander out in search of the secular world

they had renounced. By the twelfth century, acedia — Sloth — was firmly established as one of the "seven deadly sins." Its most "modern" description, however, was given at the inception of the concept. Wenzel writes that, in the early Christian moral theology of Clement of Alexandria, acedia was judged to be the product of "affections of the irrational part of man's soul, which originate in sense impressions or in memory and are often accompanied by pleasure." In the soporific state of acedia, "reason is... subjected to the ebb and flow of affections, which tyrannize it and keep it in a state of turmoil — the master has become a slave." 42 Acedia, then, threatens the hierarchical order of things: the theocentric order of Christianity, certainly, but also the secular world order of Western capitalism which would succeed it. The religious education of the industrial proletariat continued to stress that "the devil finds work for idle hands." Common soldiers in imperialist armies, when neither fighting nor training, were put to such work as whitewashing lumps of coal. Fundamental to the instrumental logic of slave ownership was the category of the "lazy slave"; in the logic of the colonialist it was the "lazy native." Clearly, the threat of lassitude was less to production than to authority — whether that of God or Mammon. Lassitude can in fact be highly productive, but what it produces is insubordination and syndicalism, mutinies and revolutions. At this point, however, we may no longer distinguish between the corrosive consequences of lassitude and the products of a counter-ideological reason honed through leisure.

Until about the twelfth century, acedia was considered to be mainly a monastic vice, one which attacked those devoted to the contemplative life.⁴³ In "Soirées de Paris," Barthes confesses to his difficulty in remaining in his cell: "Always this difficulty in working in the afternoon," Barthes writes; "I went out around six-thirty, looking for adventure."44 It would not have surprised a desert monk to learn that Barthes wound up soliciting a male prostitute on the rue de Rennes, giving him money on the promise of a rendez-vous an hour later. "Naturally," Barthes writes, "he wasn't there." Barthes acknowledges how barely credible his action must seem, in exchanging money for such a promise. But he also recognizes that, whether or not he had gone to bed with this man, "at eight o'clock I would have found myself again at the same point in my life; and, as the simple contact of the eyes, of the promise, eroticises me, it is for this jouissance that I had paid."45 In this particular sector of the libidinal economy, sexual tension is perversely spent in the exchange not only of promises but of temporal location — here coined in a grammatical tense, the future anterior: "I shall have had." Constantine, spaced out, refuses sex with the starlet because he speaks to her from a different time: from the aftermath of the afterglow. Acedia is a complex vice. The fourth century treatises on spiritual life which established the concept of acedia also inaugurated the practice, followed in medieval handbooks, of identifying the "daughters" to whom this or that of the seven capital sins had given birth. Disobedience was only one of the daughters of Acedia; amongst the many others was Deferment.

Metz refers to the "novelistic film" as "a mill of images and sounds which overfeed our zones of shadow and irresponsibility."46 Barthes defers feeding — like a recalcitrant infant who turns from the breast in search of adjacent pleasures; even, or especially, those "not good for it." He asks: "Could there be, in the cinema itself (and in taking the word in its etymological profile), a possible jouissance of discretion?"47 In exercising his discretion, Barthes is at the same time at the discretion of something else. His presence in the cinema is impulsive. In Le Plaisir du Texte, he speaks of "that moment when my body goes to follow its own ideas - for my body does not have the same ideas as I do."48 The pressures of a "twilight reverie" impel Barthes "from street to street, from poster to poster," to immerse himself in darkness. Freud spoke of "somnambulistic certainty" to characterize the unerring confidence with which, under certain circumstances, a long-lost object is found. 49 All that is certain in our compulsion to repeat, however, is that the object will elude us. ("Naturally," Barthes writes, having kept the rendez-vous, "he wasn't there.") As to the source of our need to keep keeping, in Lacan's words, "an appointment... with a real that escapes us,"50 we are all in the dark. Clement of Alexandria found acedia to be the product of "affections of the irrational part of man's soul, which originate in sense impressions or in memory... often accompanied by pleasure." This psychoanalytic judgment avant la lettre suggests that "this special way of being in the world, on the edge of sleep" steers us closer to the shores of that "other locality" where Freud first took his bearings: "another space, another scene, the between perception and consciousness." 51 Between the spectator totally enthralled by the narrative, and the critic who sits analyzing shots, there is a continuum of degrees of alertness. Barthes, however, sliding down into his seat, adopts a posture towards the film which cannot be assigned to a simple position on a scale between enthrallment and vigilance. "I am hypnotized by a distance," he writes, "and this distance is not critical (intellectual); it is, if one can say this, an amorous distance." A jouissance of discretion. A pleasure in differences, distances. A tactful delight in heterogeneity: the "flickering grace of all the elements of life" that Baudelaire found on the streets of Paris, now revealed by the flickering light of the projector in the auditorium. The café-frequenting spectator's glass of Kir and dish of olives have given way to Coca-Cola and buttered pop-corn, but the society is no less utopian for that. In American cities, where "street life" so often gives way to "street death," the citizen is almost certainly safer in the movie theatre than at home, at work, or in prison. In a world riven by violent factional and fractional conflict, the cinema is peaceful. The cinema audience — a totally aleatory conglomeration of alterities — sleeps together in a space of finely judged proximities, a touching space.

On leaving the cinema, the Cinema of society we reenter today is a global cinema, where cultural and ideological differences come together in intimate electronic proximity. In this cinema, also, the image is a lure. Flickering on the hook is the alternative the mirror relation presents: narcissistic identification or aggressive rivalry. Here also, Barthes seems to suggest, we may defer taking the bait — but not in order to calculate a fine scale of "correct distances" between fusion and abjection. The distance which hypnotizes him, Barthes says, is not intellectual but "amorous." The territory of this distance is claimed in the name of Lassitude. Exercising a somnolent discretion, from within a state of great porosity to the strangeness of the world, Barthes embraces that daughter of Acedia whom we can only name — in the full sense of the word — Dissipation.

- Hollis Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses" (1971), in Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video; Texts 1968 - 1980 (Rochester, N.Y.: Visual Studies Workshop, 1983), p. 116.
 - 2. John Donne, "Loves diet," in The Complete Patry of John Donne (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 135.
 - 3. Jean-Luc Godard, *La Paresse*, episode of *Sept péchés capitaux*. (1961). Eddie Constantine (Eddie Constantine), Nicole Mirel (the Starlet). (Other episodes by Claude Chabrol, Édouard Molinaro, Jacques Demy, Roger Vadim, Philippe de Broca, Sylvain Dhomme.)
 - 4. Alain Bergala, note on La Paresse in Cahiers du Cinéma, Spécial Godard: trente ans depuis (Paris: 1990), p. 114.
 - 5. Christian Metz, "Le film de fiction et son spectateur," Communications, no. 23 (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 119.
 - 6. Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," Communications, no. 23 (Paris: Seuil, 1975), pp. 104-107.
 - 7. Ibid., p. 104.
- 8. Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein (1973)," in *Image Music Text*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 9. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
- 10. Ibid., pp. 71-72.
- 11. Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," p. 106.
- 12. *Ibid.*, p. 104. (Breuer and Freud refer to "the semi-hypnotic twilight state of day-dreaming, auto-hypnoses, and so on" *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* [London: Hogarth, 1955-74], vol. II, p. 11.)
- 13. Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," pp. 105-106.
- 14. Barthes plays on various senses of the verb "décoller," which can mean not only to "unstick" but also to "take off" (in the æronautical sense) and to "get high" (in the drug use sense).
- 15. Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," pp. 106-107.
- 16. Ibid., p. 106.
- 17. Giuliana Bruno, Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari (New Jersey: Princeton, 1993), Chapter 3.
- 18. Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," p. 105.

- 19. Roland Barthes, "Au Palace ce Soir," in Incidents (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 65.
- 20. Ibid., p. 68.
- 21. Roland Barthes, Le Plaisir du Texte (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 19.
- 22. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays (New York: Garland, 1978), p. 10.
- 23. Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 98.
- 24. Roland Barthes, Incidents, p. 86.
- 25. In French, a *lieu commun* is a platitude (cf. English: "commonplace"); at the same time, taken word for word, in may mean "common place," in the sense of "public space."
- 26. Roland Barthes, Incidents, p. 104.
- 27. See Victor Burgin, "Diderot, Barthes, Vertigo," in The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity (London: Macmillan, 1986).
- 28. Roland Barthes, La chambre claire (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 1980), p. 177.
- 29. Ibid., p. 181.
- 30. Ibid.
- 31. Ibid., p. 177.
- 32. Roland Barthes, Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, p. 90
- 33. Roland Barthes, La chambre claire, p. 13.
- 34. Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," p. 106.
- 35. Roger Caillois, Méduse et Cie (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 71 ff.
- 36. Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire, livre XI: Les quatres concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse (1964) (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 98.
- 37. Ibid., p. 99.
- 38. Ibid.
- 39. Christian Vincent, La Discrète (1990), with Fabrice Luchini and Judith Henry.
- 40. Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire, livre XI: Les quatres concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, p. 104.
- 41. Siegfried Wenzel, The Sin of Sloth: ACEDIA in Medieval Thought and Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1960).
- 42. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
- 43. Ibid., p. 35.
- 44. Roland Barthes, Incidents, p. 87.
- 45. Ibid.
- 46. Christian Metz, "Le film de fiction et son spectateur," Communications, no. 23 (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 112.
- 47. Roland Barthes, "En sortant du cinéma," p. 107.
- 48. Roland Barthes, Le Plaisir du Texte, p. 30.
- 49. Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. VI, pp. 140, 142, 150.
- 50. Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire, livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse, p. 53.
- 51. Ibid., p. 55.



THE LOGIC OF MODERNISM'

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There are four interrelated properties of Euroethnic art that are central to understanding the development of Modernism, and in particular the development of contemporary art in the United States within the last few decades: (1) its appropriative character, (2) its formalism, (3) its self-awareness, and (4) its commitment to social content. These four properties furnish strong conceptual and strategic continuities between the history of European art - Modernism in particular - and recent developments in American art with explicitly political subject matter. Relative to these lines of continuity, the peculiarly American variety of Modernism known as Greenbergian Formalism is an aberration. Characterized by its repudiation of content in general and explicitly political subject matter in particular, Greenbergian Formalism gained currency as an opportunistic ideological evasion of the threat of Cold War McCarthyite censorship and Red-baiting in the 1950s. To the extent that this ideological repudiation of political subject matter has prevailed in the international art context, American imperialism has succeeded in supplanting the longstanding European tradition of art as a medium of social engagement with a peculiarly pharmaceutical conception of art as soporific and analgesic.

By the appropriative character of Euroethnic art, I mean its tendency to draw on the art of non-Euroethnic cultures for inspiration. This may originate in the Early Italian Renaissance experience of drawing on the art of an alien, temporally remote culture — that of Hellenic Greece — for revitalization. The real lesson of the Renaissance, on this account, is not the rediscovery of perspective but rather the discovery of difference as a source of inspiration. Other early examples of the Euroethnic appetite for appropriation include the influence of Byzantine religious art in the paintings of Duccio or Cimabue; the Islamic and Hindu influences on the art of Giotto or Fra Angelico; more recently, the influences of Japanese art on Van Gogh, of Tahitian art on Gauguin, and of African art on Picasso; and more recently still, the influences of African-American Jazz on Mondrian and Stuart Davis, and of African-American Graffitti Art on Keith Haring and David Wojnarowicz. It is natural that a society that depends on colonized non-Euroethnic cultures for its land, labor and natural resources should do so for its aesthetic and cultural resources as well. But the impetus in the latter case is not necessarily imperialistic and exploitative. It may be instead a drive to self-transcendence of the limits of the socially prescribed Euroethnic self, by striving to incorporate the idiolects of the enigmatic Other within them. Here the aim of appropriation would not be to exploit deliberately the Other's aesthetic language, but to confound oneself by incorporating into works of art an aesthetic language one recognizes as largely opaque to one; as having a significance one recognizes as beyond one's ability fully to grasp. Viewed in this way, exploitation is an unintended side-effect - the consequence of ignorance and

insensitivity — of a project whose main intention is to escape those very cognitive limitations.

The formalism of Euroethnic art is a direct consequence of its appropriative character, since it is only where the content of a work is enigmatic, obscure, or disregarded that its formal properties outcompete it for salience. This reasoning presupposes that our primary cognitive concern as human beings, regardless of cultural context, is to discern meaning, and only secondarily to discern form; and that form itself is of interest to us only where it illuminates or enhances meaning. If this is so, then artists must first look at the art of an alien culture and acknowledge their failure to grasp its contextual meaning, before its formal properties can heighten their self-awareness of the formal properties of their own culture's art. So, for example, the treatment of space and structure by such artists as the Master of the Osservanza certainly could have occurred without an awareness of the similar treatment of space and structure in Classical Hindu painting. But without this awareness it could not have been deliberately isolated and refined as a unique style, since in that case there would have been no external source of salience by which to highlight and differentiate it from other such stylistic properties. Formalism as an aesthetic requires the cognitive deflection of content. And this, in turn, presupposes a prior encounter with work the content of which was impervious to cognitive penetration. That is, in order to learn to abstract from the content of a work, one must have previously experienced as cognitively inaccessible the content of a work. Whereas Euroethnic social scientists evade this experience by constructing and projecting expected utility-maximizing explanations for the visual symbologies of non-Euroethnic cultures, Euroethnic artists self-consciously embrace it in acts of formal appropriation.

The appropriative character and formalism of Euroethnic art are, then, intrinsically connected with its *self-awareness* (or self-consciousness). To recognize an alien cultural practice as different from one's own, and as inaccessible to understanding with respect to content, is implicitly to recognize one's own cultural practice as a cultural practice, with its own rules and constraints. This just is the awareness that one's cultural practice is merely one among many possible ones. And the recognition that alternative cultural practices are cognitively inaccessible just is the awareness that one's own furnish the only available conduit for interpretation of formal anomaly. So the cross-cultural appropriation of alien formal devices reminds one of one's subjectivity. Self-consciousness of this kind is a necessary condition of innovation.

The appropriativeness, formalism, and self-consciousness of European art functions to cast its *social content* into high relief. By rendering familiar and socially pregnant subject-matter in new, unusual or nontraditional ways, European art imbues it with added significance beyond the commonplace and with historical or

cultural perspective. Indeed, it is the rendering of familiar social content in a form that inspires, exalts, instructs or galvanizes one to action that makes the art of David, Delacroix, Géricault, Goya or Picasso such a transformative experience. The formalism of Euroethnic art has been traditionally interconnected with its social content, in that the challenge of European art has been to use formal devices in expressive and innovative ways that reawaken the viewer to the significance of the subject matter depicted. Here the project of appropriation is essential, since a precondition of perceiving or conceptualizing given subject matter differently is that the visual forms one sees actually be different, in some respect, than those one is accustomed to. That these visual forms must diverge from the traditions of one's visual culture in order to perform their expected social function requires that an artist self-consciously seek outside those familiar traditions, and import difference back into them. So the drive to innovation is embedded in the social function of Euroethnic art, and pre-dates its emergence as a market-driven commodity. And since the sources of innovation traditionally have been found in non-Euroethnic cultures whose visual content is cognitively opaque to Euroethnic eyes, innovation in Euroethnic art has usually meant self-conscious innovation of form.

In these ways, European Modernism is wholly consistent with the prior history of European art. Innovations of form do not dictate the sacrifice of social content in Picasso's Guernica any more than they did in Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe, or Goya's Desastres de la guerra. If formal innovation in Euroethnic art is indeed rooted in crosscultural appropriation, then the combination of formal innovation with social or political content can be read as an emblem of the artist's self-conscious cultural or affectional distance from her or his subject matter. By "distance" I mean not "emotional detachment," but rather "alienation": An artist who depicts social content in a nontraditional way expresses a self-consciously critical rather than unselfconsciously participatory or involved evaluational perspective toward it, whether positive or negative. In his depiction of Marat, David expresses a self-consciously distanced evaluational view of the French Revolution, as Matisse does of his spouse in his depictions of her, and Giacometti and de Kooning do of women in their depiction of them. It is because of this connection between formal innovation and self-conscious cultural alienation from one's subject matter that Euroethnic art has nourished the tradition of the visionary artist as culturally and socially marginal; as someone who not only is something of a social outcast, but self-consciously chooses to be one. The root of this tradition is to be found in the prior European tradition of cross-cultural appropriation.

Relative to this long tradition of combining social content with innovative form, European Modernism's American equivalent, Greenbergian Formalism, constituted a radical departure. From its status as the lynchpin of a work, social content —

and particularly explicitly political subject matter — was demoted by Greenbergian Formalism to irrelevance, as sullying the "purity" or impeding the "transcendence" of a work. If a "pure" work of art could have no content, then the artist could not express formally the self-consciously distanced critical stance toward content — issues, events, concepts, conditions — that had characterized earlier Euroethnic art. So the only stance an artist could legitimately take was an unselfconsciously involved, participatory one: In this scheme of things, the artist's role was to "engage" or "grapple" wordlessly with the formal and material properties of his (almost always a "his") medium, while the critic's role was to articulate the aesthetic rationale of the work thereby created. In abandoning content and abdicating the self-conscious stance to the critic, artists abandoned the responsibilities of conscious control over their creative efforts and their meaning. "Action painting," live from the Freudian unconscious, was all that was left to them.

How could the thematic fulcrum of European Modernism become so inessential in American Modernism? If the centrality of social content is a constant up through Picasso, Giacometti and de Kooning, as I have suggested, then "Post-Modernist" claims that an innate tendency to reductivism of content characterized the development of Modernism are defective. Such a radical shift in priorities cannot be explained as part of the internal logic of Modernism itself. Instead it is necessary to look at the external social and political conditions to which American Formalists were responding.

The ideological use of American art for Cold War propaganda purposes in the 1950s has been charted frequently.2 But the reaction to recent U.S. Government attempts to censor "politically sensitive" subject matter in contemporary American art naturally invites comparison specifically with Senator Joseph McCarthy's successful campaign of intimidation of left-wing artists and intellectuals as Communist sympathizers in the '50s. In such a climate, the rationalization that political content was incompatible with the "higher purpose" of art functioned as a form of selfcensorship among art professionals just as effectively then as it does now. As it does for us, it gave art professionals in the '50s a ready-made reason not to become politically engaged, not to fight back; not to notice the infiltration of the "white cube" by complex social and political realities, and not to try to come to terms with them in their creative work — i.e. not to work creatively with them as artists always had in the past. And it gave them a reason to relegate whatever political convictions and involvements they may have had to a corner of their lives in which they would not threaten anyone's professional opportunities. In short, the ideology of Greenbergian Formalism undergirded the threat of McCarthyism to render politically and socially impotent a powerful instrument of social change — visual culture — whose potential

government censors have always seen far more clearly than artists do; and rationalized that impotence to the castrati. The post-war American strategy of importing back to Europe the artistic embodiment of unselfconscious social ineffectuality under the guise of an extracted essence of critically sophisticated formal appropriation was perfectly suited to its Marshall Plan agenda of cultural and political imperialism.

Since the McCarthy era and the heyday of Greenbergian Formalism, American art has been restoring its social content through the back door. Minimalism's geometrical simplicity and formal reductiveness was an explicit repudiation of the abstract aesthetic theorizing projected onto art by formalist critics in the Greenbergian camp. Emphasizing the concrete, unique particularity of the specific object, its spatiotemporal immediacy and imperviousness to abstract critical speculation, Minimalism mounted an individualist attack on aesthetic stereotyping that echoed analogous attacks on race and gender stereotyping that first surfaced in the white American mainstream in the early 1960s. In so doing, Minimalism reasserted the primacy of the object itself as content of the work.

In the mid-'60s, Sol LeWitt further developed this notion of self-reflexive content: by insisting on the primacy of the idea of the work over its medium of realization, LeWitt created the context in which the cognitive content of a work could have priority over its perceptual form. And by using the permutation of s elected formal properties of an object - its sides, dimensions or geometrical shape — as a decision procedure for generating the final form of the work as a permutational system, LeWitt moved that system itself, and the idea of that system, into the foreground of the work as its self-reflexive subject matter. Here it is not only the object as a unique particular that has primacy, but that object as the locus and origin of the conceptual system it self-reflexively generates.

From there it was only a short step to Conceptual Art's insistence in the late '60s on the self-reflexive investigation of concepts and language themselves as the primary subject matter of art. And since self-consciousness is a special case of self-reflexivity, it was then an even shorter step to the self-conscious investigation of those very language users and art producers themselves as embedded participants in the social context: for Joseph Kosuth and the Art-Language group, this natural progression was from linguistic analysis of the concept of art to discursive Marxist critique of the means of art production; for Hans Haacke, it was from self-sustaining material systems to self-sustaining political systems; in my own work, it was from my body as a conceptually and spatiotemporally immediate art object to my person as a gendered and ethnically stereotyped art commodity. The re-emergence of self-consciously distanced, critical art with explicit social content in the early 1970s, then, was a natural outgrowth of the reaffirmation of content latent in Minimalism and the self-reflexive

subject-matter explicit in Conceptual Art. The cognitive and formal strategies of Minimalism, and their evolution in the work of Sol LeWitt and first-generation Conceptualists, re-established the link with European Modernism by restoring distanced self-awareness as a central value of artistic production — a self-awareness that is inevitably as social, cultural and political as it is formal in its purview.

Meanwhile, the repressive McCarthyite ideology of Greenbergian Formalism continues to gain adherents in post-Cold War Europe, where many thoughtful and intelligent art professionals are alarmingly eager to discard Europe's variegated social and historical traditions as sources of continuity and cultural memory, in favor of the American substitute. This substitute is, of course, willful amnesia: i.e. simply to deny that there is anything to remember or grasp that can't be resolved in a 22-minute sitcom or merchandised in a 30-second commercial. The erasure of content particularly political content — was a Madison Avenue inspiration long before it was a gleam in Clement Greenberg's eye. The continuing European susceptibility to 1950s American cultural imperialism is particularly regrettable in an historical period in which Europe's turbulent social, political and demographic changes offer such fertile conditions for artistic social engagement. Europe is now undergoing the same sustained assault from outside on its entrenched mythologies, conventions and social arrangements that mainstream white America did from the Civil Rights Movement, the Counter-Culture, Feminism, and Anti-Viet Nam protesters in the 1960s. As the United States has, Europe will need a period of sustained cultural processing of these events by its artistic communities in order to learn how best to represent these changes to itself. It would be unfortunate if European art professionals chose to follow America's lead again, in ideologically blindfolding the visual arts in this undertaking. The American habit of somnambulism about its criminal past is such that it took the American art world decades to reawaken the aesthetic vocabulary of social resistance and engagement narcotized by Greenbergian Formalism. In Europe, by contrast, this vocabulary is more deeply rooted in the artistic tradition of selfconscious criticality and more firmly buttressed by well-preserved artifacts of cultural memory. Let us hope it will be sufficient antidote against renewed American attempts to export yet one more "New World Order" for cross-cultural consumption.3

^{1.} Reprinted from Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume II: Selected Writings in Art Criticism 1967-1992 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996). © Adrian Piper 1992.

See, for example, Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," Artforum 11 (May 1973): 43-54; Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," Artforum 12 (June 1974): 39-41; Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of the Modern Art (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983).

^{3.} In thinking about these issues I have benefitted from conversations with Laura Cottingham, Bart de Baere, Charles Esche, Michael Lingner and Pier Luigi Tazzi.

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THE SAMUEL AND SAIDYE BRONFMAN



LE DEVOIR

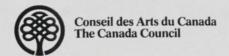


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