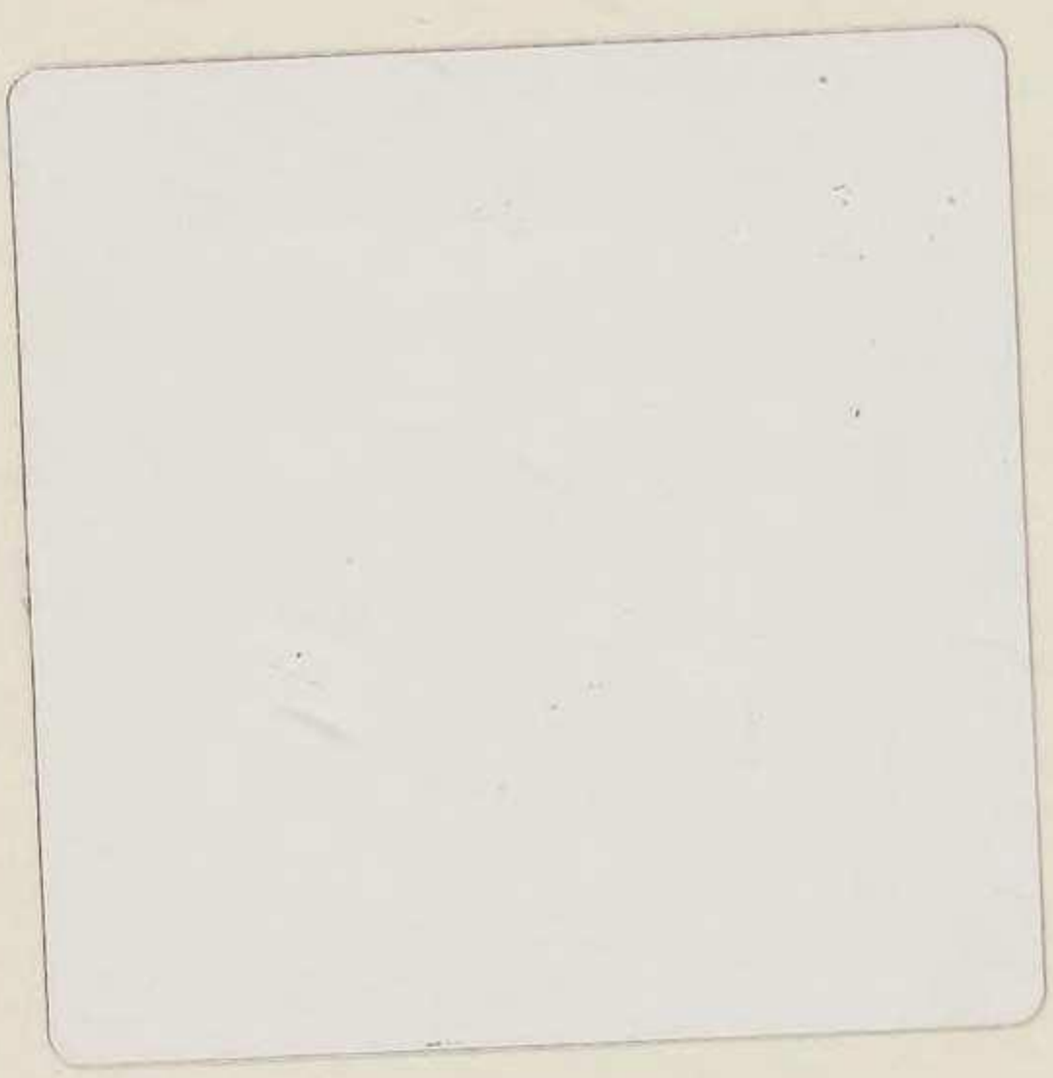


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IMMANENCE AND CONTRADICTION

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe

Best known as a painter, JEREMY GILBERT-ROLFE has been publishing criticism since the early nineteen-seventies. A founding editor of *October*, his writing has also appeared in all the major American art magazines and in journals such as *Res* and *Tri-Quarterly*. A British subject, Mr. Gilbert-Rolfe has lived in the United States since 1968. He is currently a member of the faculty of the California Institute of the Arts, where he teaches painting and critical theory.

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Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe

IMMANENCE AND CONTRADICTION

Recent Essays on the Artistic Device

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Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe

IMMANENCE AND CONTRADICTION.
RECENT ESSAYS ON THE ARTISTIC DEVICE

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PREFACE:
ART AS INTEGRITY

> *"Even as light displays both itself and darkness, so is truth a standard both of itself and of falsity."*
>
> — Spinoza

A vital criticism must disclose both the art it affirms and the stupor that threatens to eclipse the sense of form itself. Lucid materialist, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe is involved with devotion to a resistant medium, unlike those who think they commit art upon a variety of logical procedures. He does not think of art as a game, nor does he think criticism will stop in some principle of hope. In an age of irreconcilable values, he does not want to scotch-tape an historical eclecticism, nor has he chosen a sepulchral purism. A critic of lesser pluralisms, and such false periodizations as post-modernism, he is emphatically attached to the complexity or plurality of signs.

Gilbert-Rolfe has the tenacity to live with and through a negation. He avoids the sentimentality of much polemic, since he is so capable of the microscopic and macroscopic scrutiny that counts. Like Pound, he knows that "Make it new" is a quotation, but a worldly fear prevails that the inferior will drive out the good in an age characterised by regression. His critique descends like a lighting-bolt upon a bolt.

This is a book of "profane illumination" in a dark time. Gilbert-Rolfe has affirmed the anti-canonic masters, has learned from both Roman Jakobson and Meyer Schapiro, and has connected them with a tradition of restlessness. We see his audacity in that he is also a practitioner, but like Barnet Newman he has not avoided explicit passion or the corollary commitments. He is not deceived into thinking that acting-out in art is action or that the lesser ironies are liberty. His criticism is enraged by the pretended populism and

naturalism about him. Like Walter Benjamin, he speaks with the grammar of authority and with the sensual particularism of an adult unentranced by dogma.

Intransigently attached to the continuing adventure of good abstract painting, though one must note his underlining of innovation in a variety of media, Gilbert-Rolfe has set himself against "conformism," which he has wittily called the dominant style of today's allegedly open culture. One might contrast his ardent sense of color with the blindness of our chief aesthetic bureaucrats. The elegiac here is his theme of what has been abandoned in commercial wars. It is as if this man, like Levi-Strauss, read the *18th Brumaire* before the writing of any essay. He does not want a reverie on style or a pastoral reductionism that leads to photographs of photographs. It is his style of obligation and tension that gives no comfort to the false permissions of the era. He chooses, where others have abdicated their rights to an eye and a mind.

David Shapiro
January, 1983

INTRODUCTION

The essays collected here were, with one or two exceptions, written nearly ten years ago.* The situation in the visual arts then was a little different than it has subsequently become.

For one thing it was at that time considered problematic (to say the least) for a work of visual art to exhibit representational characteristics. I recall when the earliest essay in the present collection, that on Joel Shapiro, was submitted for publication, the then editor of the magazine in which it appeared was extremely skeptical, being of the opinion that for the most part it consisted of nothing but "little toys." Similarly I remember a critic who has since become renowned (or notorious) for her alleged engagement with "advanced ideas" screaming, during a conversation about the linguistic model, that she hated semiotics. Neither of those people would claim to have similar opinions now, so I suppose that the least one could say about the events of the intervening years is that they have clarified the situation for some of those who, but a few years ago, found their relationship to art and its context to be less than satisfactorily resolved.

While it is true, though, that the immediate present exhibits a generally more pluralist attitude to the form and content of the visual arts, and uses more sophisticated language to do so, two things are equally clear: that the pluralism so oft invoked is usually wholly dubious and in fact prescriptive in its self-proclaimed catholicism (for more on which see the most recent essay published here), and that the kinds of questions raised by the art of the sixties and early seventies were not so much answered and surpassed as they were sloughed aside in favour of other, in fact more traditionally literary (i.e., symbolist), ones.

Sloughed aside or not, those questions continue to be relevant,

because they are questions about the meaning of complexity. While it may be arguable whether complexity is inherently worthwhile or significant, its importance for an artistic tradition which depends so heavily, as the art of this century does, on that penchant for the complicated which was nineteenth-century naturalism, cannot be denied. Contemporary art 'depends' on nineteenth-century naturalism to the extent that it continues to be indebted to the latter's internalizing, within an otherwise generally analytic or pseudo-scientific process, of the lived uncertainty of perception. The Cézanne described by Merleau-Ponty in "Cézanne's Doubt" is such a naturalist (the closest literary equivalent for whom is probably Flaubert) in whose work the perceptual is experienced as a persistent contradictory force which clarifies the concurrent expansion of the knowable even as it subverts it. The complexity of Cézanne is literally that of a landscape made out of mutually exclusive perspectives.

However, while the legacy of nineteenth-century naturalism may be an inevitable complexity, it is equally true that the world as a whole has, in this century and particularly, it seems, since the Second World War, generally sought to evade the complex. In the popular culture of the West, for example, this evasion has culminated in a music which is infinitely less subtle than the Black or White folk music from which it derives. Or, similarly, in political life outside the West the complexity carefully examined and presented by Karl Marx ("All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force...") has been bowdlerized out of existence in the interests of prolonging, rather then transforming, the pre-industrial patriarchisms which characterized Third World societies (and also Russia) before their exposure to the exigencies of modern life. This is true to such a degree that it is possible to describe Third World Communism as a mechanism which keeps its subjects from confronting the modern world rather more effectively than it prepares them for it. It is then possible to say that the questions, and the kind of questioning, for which the art of the sixties and early seventies was responsible are in many respects out of step with contemporary sensibility and that that may be one of the reasons

why public taste has, in the very recent past, seemed to shift so dramatically to an art of crude symbolic juxtaposition. But even if that is so it is also the case that the same conditions produced minimalism and its associated tendencies as produced those tendencies and phenomena which seem contradictory to it, and in each such instance of contradiction the one may therefore be seen to have an acute dialectical relevence to the other.

The essays reprinted here tend to concentrate on just a few of the contradictions enunciated by and immanent in certain works, and bodies of work. Insofar as they contain anything at all like a common theme they are consistent in that they proceed from a conviction that technique is the most active determinant and generator of meaning in the work of art. Technique is that in which the historical and the psychological are inextricably combined, the work of art being at once a defamiliarization of the state of the artistic device at a particular moment (a declaration of what is credible and what is not) and, simultaneously, and of course unavoidably, an embodiment and record of a series of involuntary acts.

It is as an historical object that the work of art is most accountable and also most mysterious. We can account for the appeal of the Iambic pentameter, for instance, by appealing to its correspondence with an aspect of human physiology, and physical rhythm, but any such de-mystification of the device in no way diminishes its effect. Its continuing appeal is testimony to its ability to transcend its own clarification while being enhanced by it. It is because the work of art is thus enhanced that I see no necessity for attributing any sort of "ahistorical" quality to any aspect of the work or of one's experience of it, always providing that it is recognized that the historical contains much that is by definition not "of history" — like walking, say. So that looking or listening are by definition not entirely explicable through recourse to a purely historical terminology. To take the argument one stage further, it seems important to recognize that that which is not immediately "of history" must have an effect on our interpretation of that which clearly is, so that a thorough historical accounting for any work will also be an argument which tells us something about the limits of history itself.

The artistic device constantly establishes those limits not only in its

reliance on perception, which is to say in part on the physiological, but quite often too in its employment of properties which are primordial while being recognizably symbolic, as with for example pre-Christian uses of the cruciform as a sign for verticality. Joseph Masheck has written extensively on the cruciform and its explicit and implicit role in Western art, and in those essays — as, similarly, in a study like Starobinsky's *Les Mots sous les mots* — one is reminded of the artistic device's character, and this is of course also true of the word as such, as something which is used as it were unthinkingly (just as one sees involuntarily so too one understands one's own language without thinking about it) but which in fact has a history as source and vehicle of meaning which appears to be longer than human memory.

Painting especially, like poetry, is an art where it is easy, although wrong, to see technique as everything. Certainly what happens in a painting is likely to be dependent upon, if not the product of, its technical realization. It is a truism to say that the artistic device ultimately points to something other than itself. It is more to the point to consider what happens when it does so. In the nineteenth-century painting became an elaborate apparatus designed to deal adequately with what were correctly understood to be changes in people's perception of everyday life. Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergères* or the late paintings of Cézanne, in vastly different ways, point to the complexity of literate perception, i.e., of perception which is well aware of its dependence on and use of convention.

In critizing artistic convention, in offering one use of convention as opposed to another, nineteenth-century painting put forward, or acted out, a new attitude towards the world. I am not sure that one would say quite the same thing about the great art of this century. Two of the twentieth-century's most persistently influential tendencies, Surrealism and the contemporaneous art of the Russian Avant-Garde, did indeed make precisely that claim. However, both movements differ from the major achievements of nineteenth-century (visual) art in being primarily concerned with manipulations of the artistic device which are anti-naturalist and, as such, less concerned with investigating or rediscovering perception than with radically undermining preconceived notions of discursive-

ness and coherence. How radical remains a sharply contested issue, although in my opinion not a real one. Recalling Straub's dismissal of American Independent Cinema with the opinion that any idiot can deconstruct narrative, and that it's a question of from what position the criticism is being undertaken, one might challenge the radicalism of either tendency in similar terms, to the effect that incoherence may well be an alternative to coherence but is hardly a clarification of it. In the same vein different opinions exist on the question of whether it is not the case that the most elaborate and profound products of either Surrealism or of the Russian Avant-Garde of the second and third decades of this century are also the most traditional: that, as seems to me to be the case, the most substantial products of the Surrealist movement (an essentially literary one in any case) are the novels of Bréton, the least convincing the major works of Duchamp; or that Rodchenko's sculpture is similarly far more deeply moving (and, in that, intellectually demanding) than his rather tiresome expeditions into photography or his programmatic assault on painting.

More or less all of the contemporary American art which I have written about is art which can be shown to be indebted to both the Russian Avant-Garde and to Surrealism, and in every case (whether it be Marden or Benglis, Smithson or Ryman) it is the reforms in one's sense of the artistic device carried out by the earlier tendencies that are influential in the work of these more recent artists, and in every case these are seen *as* reforms and not as the kinds of radical tranformations their original protagonists imagined them to be. Smithson is the best example of this. Smithson's career consists in large part in returning to the themes of nineteenth-century American naturalism by way of some of the procedures of both Surrealism and of Russian Constructivism and Cubo-Futurism. The grand theme remains the nineteenth-century one of nature and its (dialectically contradictory) relationship to man and culture. The procedures employed involve mechanisms of de-personalization dependent on both Constructivism's penchant for industrial process and on Duchamp's notion of the Ready-Made. The point being not that Smithson represents some sort of retreat from the heady aspirations of a more innocent time, but rather that

in being dependent on those precedents he both acknowledges their fundamental and inescapable importance while, in locating them within what may now be seen as a tradition in order that he can use them at all, thereby reduces, as it were *de facto,* their claims to a kind of culminatory significance. One might say that the history of earlier twentieth-century art had been a history of putatively final acts and endeavors, a rhetoric of conclusion. To see it as a rhetoric, rather than an actuality, has been one of the achievments of post-war American art.

The burden of which position is, however, a morass of contradictoriness which has made much of that art anathematic to those who want to see things in simple or straightforward or ordinarily logical terms. This can't be helped and, I think, just confirms the profundity of the art in question. It is, in most cases, an art of sedimentation, of immanent significance, because it is an art predicated on the recognition that signs are elaborate and complex before they are made, an art of contradiction because it deals with a coherence which is materialist and modern in its articulation of a necessary incompatibility between the ingredients of any thought, sensation, fact or event. In the essays collected here I have tried to show how it is that this variety of late-Modernist work works, and in that to suggest why it is that we should take so seriously, as a model for thought itself, art which works like that.

* ART AS STYLE/STYLE AS ART, *etc.*, was first published in *Tri-Quarterly 52* (Fall 1981, Special Issue on Freedom in Amercian Art and Culture), and before that was given as a public lecture to the Foundation for Art Resources in Los Angeles, 22 April 1981; a shorter version of MATISSE THE REPRESENTATIONAL ARTIST appeared in *Artforum* (December 1978); COLOR AS METAPHOR, *Res I,* 2 (Autumn 1981) was first delivered as part of a panel discussion on "Color as Metaphor" at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in San Francisco, 26 February 1981; APPRECIATING RYMAN, *Arts* (November 1975); A MYSTERY STORY first appeared, in a significantly altered form, as BRICE MARDEN'S PAINTING, *Artforum* (October 1974); GRAVITY'S RAINBOW AND THE SPIRAL JETTY, *October* I, 1, 2, & 3 (Fall 1976 and Spring and Summer 1977); ROBERT GROSVENOR'S SCULPTURE (AND ROBERT SMITHSON'S CRITICAL IMAGINATION) was first published, in a massively diluted version, as ROBERT GROSVENOR: SPECIFIC CLARITY, *Art in America* (March-April 1976); DOUGLAS HEUBLER'S RECENT WORK, *Artforum* (February 1974); CARL ANDRE, review *Artforum* (May 1974); COMMODITY AND CONTRADICTION, *etc., October* I, 2 (Spring 1977); ROBERT MORRIS *etc., Artforum* (September 1974); LINDA BENGLIS *etc.*, review, *Artforum* (March 1974); JOEL SHAPIRO, as JOEL SHAPIRO, WORKS IN PROGRESS, *Artforum* (November 1973); GODARD *etc.*, was hitherto unpublished.

ART AS STYLE/STYLE AS ART, AND THE PROBLEM WITH THAT

The time has long since passed when one could talk of art as style in a straightforward sense. Those aging followers of Irwin Panofsky who continue, by and large, to be the most able practitioners of the discipline of art history can make sense of one another when they talk about the style of Venetian painting in the sixteenth century, but by the time one gets to the Impressionists one already finds the punctiliously-minded substituting the less precise word *manner* for style, because the notion of style has to do with an attitude to subject matter.

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, that is to say, by the time of the Impressionists, the possibility of an interest in the symbolic identity of a depicted subject, an interest in the relationship between that which is depicted and the way in which it is depicted, had receded in the face of other possibilities, which themselves derived from a wholly modern preoccupation with vision itself. The traditional notion of style, that which makes it possible for us to see the neo-Classical — or, say, the minatures of the Persian court at Herat — as representing views of the world, articulated and expressed in their treatment of specific and generally known literary themes, disappears at about the same time, and for precisely the same reasons, as it becomes impossible for one to talk of any kind of art, whether it be painting or poetry or drama, as being allegorical in the sense that allegory was available to Giorgione in the *Tempesta*, or tragic in the sense that tragedy was a mode available to Shakespeare in, for example, *Hamlet*. As the French scholar Jean Paris has observed, by the time of Cézanne art had turned away from the classical notion of an interpretive, symbolic, system of communicability, in the interests of a more visually oriented and thus non-interpretive, or at least very differently interpretive, attitude to

aesthetic experience. One no longer reads pictures in the way that one reads words, as a series of signs each equipped with an arbitrarily derived capacity for signification (an arbitrariness basic to the operation of language, which is implicit in the fact that quite different sounding words can mean the same thing, can have the same signified, in different languages, as with, for example, *hund, chien,* dog). Similarly, a character such as a shepherd in a painting by a sixteenth-century Venetian like Giorgione functions as a sign with a conventionally assigned meaning. In Giorgione's case, a meaning located within the terms of reference of allegorical discourse, allegory being the retelling of an already familiar story in a way which relates the story to specific contemporary events. It is as such that Giorgione analogizes the shepherd's hair to the disorder of the leaves on the tree, in that underlining the shepherd's role as a representative of Nature. In such an art as this, then, style is a matter of reconciling or approximating a series of visual preferences — always, in the visual arts, preferences for or against the sensual possibilities offered by sight itself — with or to thematics that are, in general, already redolent with ascribed meaning.

No such opportunity for speculation is offered in the case of, say, a painting by Paul Cézanne of his gardener. Even allowing for Cézanne's love of Courbet and all that that implies with regard to the question of the nobility of labor and themes of that sort, only the most wildly imaginative pedant would want to suppose that Cézanne's gardener functioned in relation to a clearly and generally understood set of thematics in the manner that Giorgione's shepherd does. If we want to talk about Cézanne's *style*, then, we have to recognize that it is a quite different kind of notion than that with which stylistics had been associated in the more distant past. Style is no longer that which reconciles the visual with the literary idea, not least because the symbolic resources of Classical tradition had, by the end of the nineteenth century, apparently become inadequate to the task of representing the world, of encompassing the actual experience of life as it *is* in the modern age. If one wants to talk about style in Cézanne, one very quickly comes to realize that one is talking about something which might just as well be described as technique. That it is in the technique that something like a view of

the world is to be found. And that the subject matter of an art such as Cézanne's, which is indeed open to interpretation in a variety of ways, is so private in derivation as in fact to make the relationship between subject and pictorial technique almost describable, in terms of the way meaning is communicated by the work as a whole, as exactly the opposite in Cézanne as it is for Giorgione.

Now why have I gone to such lengths to establish such an obvious point? I'm sure everybody knows that there's a fundamental difference between Giorgione and Cézanne. But I am not sure that everybody is prepared to consider the implications of that fundamental difference. I am in fact of the opinion that much of what is problematic about the art of the immediate present is a consequence of what I can only describe as a neurotic and regressive flight from historical reality. A kind of childish willfulness which wants to behave as if, in a sense, Cézanne and all that sort of thing never existed.

Or, more precisely and also more ominously, as if it doesn't matter whether Cézanne and all that ever existed. A kind of adolescent lust for the apocalyptic which, as it were embarassed by the complexity implicit in the modern, attempts to clear the air by squeaking energetically that painting is dead — painting being, with poetry, *the* form within which modernism was evolved during the last century and subsequently — or by announcing, at great and incoherent length and in atrocious prose, that a variety of younger artists manifestly fascinated with popular culture, and entirely indifferent to art or its traditions in any elaborate sense whatsoever, are in fact providing us with works of allegorical significance.

What is problematic about the art of the 1980's is problematic because it is a consequence of a kind of refusal to recognize the kinds of differences I described above. We are suffering, it seems to me, from a kind of discomfort with modernism which I suspect to be an exact parallel of the embarassment which we feel for such mixed blessings as our imperialist past. In short, for the great triumphs of the nineteenth century, of which modernism was one. It is that discomfort which calls forth the kind of wishful thinking that is inherent in such misty and nice-sounding ideas as "post-industrialism" or "postmodernism." Along with which, as I shall

now say, come a lot of other assumptions which are equally preposterous and equally popular. One of which would be that we live at a moment in which there is nothing like a dominant style or mode, in what might be called a pluralist epoch. To the contrary, I think that in regard to what is currently most popular in art we have to say that there is, notwithstanding all my reservations about using the word at all, something like a dominant style in the art of the immediate present. And that style or mode or approach is one of conformism. Of conformity to consumerism, itself an idea lurking in the popular image of art history as a kind of supermarket of styles from which the artist selects the one most suitable to his or her special interests. A conformism wholly consumerist in its delight in the idiosyncratic, exhibiting as it does a kind of liturgical dependence on and celebration of what Freud described as the narcissism of small differences which is nowadays manipulated as an alternative to genuine individuality. This is the sense in which Clement Greenberg was I think quite right, as is very rare for him, when he said a couple of years ago that the postmodernists represent a far more serious threat to art then the old-fashioned philistines ever did. To get closer to the nature of this awful dilemma one must consider, for a moment longer, this tempting idea, or ingenuous belief, that we live at a time characterized by an apparent plurality of styles, which plurality is supposedly reinforced or otherwise articulated by a pluralist critical method.

In regard to critical method, however, one thing that one feels obliged to say about pluralism is that there isn't really very much of it around. The idea that there should be a critical attitude which would permit one to respond to many different kinds of things, sensations, and ideas which one encounters in the real world of transitive action, tends to strike one as at once a good idea but simultaneously as a kind of utopian delusion, perhaps a hangover from the 1960's. At any rate as an idea which rarely finds a counterpart in physical or historical reality. An idea, moreover, which is too often flaunted by people who actually behave in precisely the opposite manner. Pluralism, in other words, is another one of those conditions, like democracy, which everyone would *like* to exist but whose existence is in fact forever in doubt, not least

because of the behavior of those who are pleased to call themselves democrats.

A genuine pluralism would, to repeat myself, be one which could respond to different kinds of art in a manner appropriate to each. Meyer Schapiro might be said to represent such an aspiration. His collection of essays on modern art, published by Braziller, leads the reader from one artist to another in a manner which is indeed responsive to the intrinsics of each particular ambition. Whether that ambition be one in whose greatness we can readily acquiesce, Courbet's, for example, or Cézanne's or Mondrian's, or whether it be an endeavor of a lesser kind, for example, Seurat's or Chagall's. And here, by the way, is the problem with pluralism — or one problem with pluralism when that pluralism is genuine. Pluralism goes against the grain. It's a good idea but there's also something vaguely incredible about being as enthusiastic about Chagall as one might be about Cézanne or Courbet. And when an authentic pluralist like Schapiro goes so far as to suggest that, in his own way, Chagall *is* as interesting as Cézanne, one is alarmed and incredulous. Because Chagall obviously isn't as good as Cézanne and no amount of seeing the good in everything can, ultimately, subvert our sense of the significance of this fact.

Even an authentic pluralism, then — and I think that in describing Schapiro as an authentic pluralist one also defines and describes him as the greatest living scholar of the artistic device — runs the risk of flirting with an unrealistic or utopian notion of fairness or egalitarianism. Of not being able to place ambitious works in context. Of not *comparing* them with one another, even by implication, when comparing things and tastes is what we actually do at every level and at every moment in art as in life.

I don't mean that when looking at a Vermeer one thinks of Rembrandt, or any such comparativist fancy as that. I do mean that one's sense of Vermeer is enhanced by realizing that he's as good as Rembrandt, or vice versa, and that that realization has significance for one's idea of what art itself might be.

Be all that as it may however, whatever problems may be said to be inherent in a genuinely pluralistic approach like Schapiro's, these are not the problems which one associates with pluralism as we most

often encounter it today. Pluralism is in fashion in American art and criticism at present, and the problem with this is that the pluralism in question is not in fact very pluralistic. On the contrary it tends to be harshly prescriptive, cheerfully commiting the very crimes against which it likes to warn us. The kinds of pluralism which one sees most often in art magazines, and in the policies of museums, have in common a bias against certain kinds of art, and of art criticism, so strong as to give to pluralism as we currently encounter it the air of a repressive dogma.

In part this confusion derives from what is perceived in America as the problem of Formalism, which expression is rarely used to refer to the work of actual Formalists — people like Roman Jakobson or Viktor Schklovsky, or more recently someone like Tzvetan Todorov — but is, rather, reserved to refer exclusively to the attitude enunciated by Clement Greenberg and his circle. In this way American pluralists are able to delude themselves into believing that in demonstrating the inadequacies of Greenberg's method, or lack of method, they have somehow demonstrated the inadequacies of the formalist approach as such. This delusion would in itself be quite harmless except that, as is the case with delusions, it leads to others which are more pernicious. Here, for example, is where the prescriptiveness of most contemporary pluralism becomes apparent. Contemporary pluralism is monolithically united in its distaste for modernism, to which it has in consequence attached an extremely arguable and oversimplified identity. Pluralists seem to me to be united in a belief that modernism was or is a tendency or movement or series of movements characterized by a reductivist attitude to the art work which was or is itself occasioned by a preoccupation with a "purity" of the means of expression or communication. Anyone, however, who actually looks at any modernist work from Manet to Matisse will in fact note that the experience is an extremely complex one which might be said to concentrate on a purity of expression in order to depict and manipulate the manifest *im*purity of vision itself. There's nothing reductive about it, and one is therefore led to ask why anyone should think there is, or should want to think so.

One explanation, I think, is that the pluralist approach is very often one which in practice is employed to thinly disguise what is properly

described as a genuine discomfort with art itself. All too frequently pluralism provides a mask for people who would rather talk about anything they can find which is about art but is not art as such. Rather than look at American painting of the fifties, they would prefer to fulminate sanctimoniously about its alleged appropriation by the United States Information Agency, an appropriation which is, according to such historically-minded moralists, thereby presumed to have irreversibly altered whatever meaning the work in question might have originally had. I wasn't surprised when a veritable spate of articles appeared, some years ago, on the question of whether permitting their works to be shown in American embassies during the McCarthy period made the Abstract Expressionist cold-warriors by default. I was merely surprised that the question was generally considered to be a real one. Perhaps I shouldn't have been. That kind of guilt by association has come to be characteristic of one of the most popular variants of pluralism as we know it. It is, of course, a problem also encountered in the world at large at present.

Another, related, branch of contemporary pluralism wants to believe that art itself is conveniently dead and therefore exists only as an apparatus which may make possible the defamiliarization, and thus the reconsideration, of general historical and personal — personal in the sense of psychological — themes. This variety of pluralist thought seems to derive its prejudices and methodology from Duchamp. Specifically it is an attitude indebted to the extremely old-fashioned attitude to subject matter advanced by Duchamp in his attack on retinal painting (i.e., on painting which was said to appeal to the eye rather than the mind), and to Duchamp's notion of the ready-made. From these two ideas, which themselves might be seen as manifestations of a kind of disgust with aesthetic experience as such, have come all sorts of allegedly pluralistic approaches to art which share the conceit that if one treats the space of an art gallery, or, more recently, the space of painting itself, as a kind of ready-made, one may thereby represent information from some other source — whether that source be Quine's philosophy or the world of rock and roll — and, by so doing, in some way make a comment on it and on the institution, on art and

art history, at the same time.
Personally, I think such an attitude is nonsensical. As is the pervasive moralism of much that calls itself pluralist, a moralism which often overlooks the perhaps unfortunate extent to which art can in fact be made by people with extremely unpleasant ideas out of which they nonetheless make successful works, as is the case, for example, with the novels of Ferdinand Céline or Virginia Woolf.
To sum up, as I see it pluralism is a good idea which is most often encountered as an apparent permissiveness which in practice amounts to a flight from serious pleasure. Works of art provide pleasure through being involuntary experiences, in the sense that seeing, like breathing, is involuntary, into which we enter voluntarily, although not without prejudice. Pleasure, as Roland Barthes pointed out to great effect, is that which subverts the tyranny of the historical. Certainly, then, one would *not* expect art to conform to some historical theory. Especially not to one as crude as Duchamp's. Art contradicts life in an elaborate sense, the sense in which Jakobson described poetic form as being that which is *un*like the form of ordinary speech. And one might recall in this same connection that Walter Benjamin denounced dada and expressionism because of their foundation in psychologicalistic communicability rather than in the manipulation of language for itself which he identifies with the poetry of Mallarmé. It is an observation germane, it seems to me, to our own time. As, also, is Stevens' aphorism to the effect that poetry is never personal. The problems of pluralism as we most often encounter it are problems defined by an eclectic interest in everything but art, an apparent hedonism which is in fact severely repressive, and manifest in an inability to manipulate, in art or in criticism, a sufficiently delicate and complex idea of what one experiences when one actually looks at a work of art. Indeed one might say, as I have already implied, that the problem with art and art criticism at the moment is a problem caused by, or at least apparent in, a flight from complexity which is no more or less than a flight from art as such. Or perhaps one should say from art as it has been and can be. The problem, after all, is, as we have seen, often no longer even perceived as an artistic one. Unlike, say, Minimalism or Postimpressionism, much recent art is said to have

"little to do with nature and less with expectations of art [sic]," being rather concerned instead to "manipulate and outwit social systems." And as such it may also be said to seek an ultimate repression: the displacement by the nonartistic of artistic experience. In such a scheme art is subsumed into that which it cannot be, an unmediated extension of social life. A ritually complete subordination of pleasure to business which begins and ends with acquiescence in the dominant culture's approximation of Eros to the death instinct.

Which returns us to the question of art and style because, in the course of this general flight from the possibility of an art of high ambition one has seen the progressive development of a most pernicious confusion regarding art's relationship to life. As I've suggested, we seem to be passing through a moment when art itself has become a direct adjunct of the narcissistic consumerism which is characteristic of life as it is in the real world. We are, it seems, in danger of being inundated — or perhaps a better word would be suffocated — by an art as simple in structure as are popular music or television melodrama and as simplistic in its acquiescence in the assumptions which govern everyday life. An art of the personal, an art, that is to say, of the diaristic, of autobiography, of trinkets and scraps of soliloquy which, taken together, are supposed to reveal or communicate something generally affective. Such an art sees life as a collection of possessions, and as Walter Benjamin observed fifty years ago such an art is quintessentially bourgeois in that it encapsulates middle-class privatism and possessivness. It's not that our civilization is capable of producing an art which is *not* bourgeois, why indeed should we want to? But rather that we do expect art to provide us with some distance on ways of thinking that we otherwise take for granted. The pleasure provided by art includes the experience of being taken by surprise, most especially that experience which one associates with the greatest works of art, the recognition that there are no surprises. Instead of providing us with that kind of pleasure, too much of the art of the early 1980's offers only a dull rehearsal of popular assumptions. The narcissism of consumer society encourages a belief in the inherent worth of private experience which results in a cult of the personal which goes so far as

to invent worth in the most solipsistic phenomena, to an extent which invokes Freud's comment on Surrealism, with regard to which he said that he didn't know much about art but he was quite sure it didn't have anything to do with anybody's dreams.

It is only reasonable to want to know why and how we arrived at this state of affairs in which anybody who actually likes art runs the risk of being gouged by boredom every time he or she ventures into a museum or gallery exhibiting contemporary art. I have, in what I've said so far, suggested that our current plight is a consequence of a misunderstanding which has become a repression. Actually not so much a misunderstanding, perhaps, as a misappropriation, of, as I've suggested, Duchamp's notion of the ready-made and of his essentially late-symbolist attack on the notion of art as a visual rather than literary endeavor. Mattei Calinescu has described how Andy Warhol converted Duchamp's notion of the ready-made from a device which could demystify a phony reverence for art history by pointing to the way in which museums tend to convert everything they contain into art, into a device which turns that perception into an assumption, and is thus able to treat, for example, the space of painting as a repository for various droll references to the iconology of the dominant culture. Of course it's amusing to think of soup cans or the electric chair or Chairman Mao's face as all being objects of delectation eminently consumable when converted into art (I shall not comment here on the possibility that the latter two are thus ritually emptied of their more threatening implications) but it is an amusement which ultimately has very little to do with art. Instead, it's a substitute for art. Instead of a bundle of ordered sensations, mutually referential and of course also invocative of experience and sensation *outside* the work, one is confronted with an image familiar from another context and supposedly invested with a new significance by being relocated into a milieu for which it was not originally intended.

Such an approach has been popular with various sectors of the art community since Warhol initiated it, and he can by no means be said to be the most unrewarding practioner of it. Indeed, until very recently with the current spate of sophomoric relocation into the space of painting of various icons of eroticism and violence drawn

from the mass media, the silliest applications of the ready-made were to be found in what was — often misleadingly — called Conceptual Art. Consider the case of the organization named Art and Language, which I've already mentioned in conjunction with the mass media trendies of the immediate present. Art and Language, a cult which was most active in the earlier years of the last decade, proceeded on the absurd assumption that by interjecting into the "art context" — by which it meant the social context, that is to say, art galleries and museums — ideas which derived from quite different spheres of human endeavor, like philosophy and anthropology, the nature of our relationship to art would somehow be demystified, which is to say, revealed for what it really is. So this strange and surly group would, in the interests of an apparent loathing for both art and language, fill the galleries and little magazines with madly irrelevant passages on meaning by philosophers of the logical-positivist persuasion, and torment the public at large with tedious disquisitions on how art is distributed within capitalism, and a number of related questions about which every single living person already knows all there is to know. It's a short step, as I've said, from treating the space of the art world as a ready-made in that manner to treating the space of a painting itself as a ready-made. And in both cases the problematics of the endeavor are contained in that which the theory of the ready-made leaves out. Duchamp demystified the museum, perhaps even a reverence for history. But not the space of painting (or sculpture) itself. On the contrary, his work implies that there's nothing there *to* demystify. And of course there is.

What is missing from too much of the art of the present is a recognition of the role that artistic tradition plays in the development and determination of meaning. And it's missing because the notion of the ready-made has been turned into a cliché which permits the artist to ignore tradition by ignoring the question of the complexity of works of art. Art is about feeling, but about feeling at a level of the supra-personal, which is precisely why works of art are, as T.S. Eliot put it, meetings between tradition and the individual talent in which tradition provides talent with the means to articulate experience at a level that transcends the local or literal or merely personal.

Thematics, or the selection of this or that image or this or that way of working or of presentation, are no substitute for the manipulation of the artistic device itself. Complexity, in other words, is not a matter of thematics but of execution: one can see a play and say, "Oh God, another manipulation of the revenge theme." But that play might be *Hamlet*.

This argument was rehearsed at the beginning of the century and has been with us ever since. I do not propose to resolve it but only to bring it, in some respects, up to date. What I've said is that we are surrounded by a great deal of art which isn't actually interested in art. And which is furthermore in a most dubious relationship to what it *does* seem to be interested in. Art and Language didn't demystify the gallery system, they just found a new material that would, in fact, be bought instead of art. And similarly, most of the art that claims to be using material drawn from the mass media, from the shorthand eroticism of the marketplace, in order to criticize it is doing nothing of the kind. Finally, the problem of an art that is indifferent to tradition is the problem of the *wünderkinder*: once the *wünder* is gone, only the *kinder* is left. And art is an adult affair. Art as style, style as art? The immediate problems of contemporary art derive from the belief that the bundle of prejudices and preferences that determine the style in which we live can provide a substitute for art itself.

MATISSE THE REPRESENTATIONAL ARTIST

> *"I shall be guided by a sentence on the first page of your letter. You write: 'Panorama and traces, flâneur and arcades, modernism and the unchanging, without a theoretical interpretation — is that a material which can patiently await decipherment?' The understandable impatience with which you searched the manuscript for a definite* signalement [*characterization*] *has, in my opinion, led you astray from it in some important respects . . . "*
>
> — *Letter from Walter Benjamin to Theodor Adorno.* [1]

Watteau, Delacroix, Cézanne, Matisse: four names which to me stand for — along with much that does not unite them — the development of a particular use of color. For the first and last of this quartet that use of color becomes grand and decorative through a delight in the frivolous, if not the trivial, as it does too in some of the works of Delacroix; in Cézanne its role is, of course, more sober. Decorative art is relaxing, an idea that has a bad name at present, not least because many critics — better to call them adversaries — of culture seem to believe that any art which is not shrill and discomforting, if only through tedium, is thereby politically and morally compromised. The reverse is closer to the truth. If art is capable of telling us anything at all about ourselves it can only be said to do so by way of its capacity to manipulate the terms of the sensory and spiritual life of its own time. To depict something is to some extent to acquiesce in it and its contradictions. Which is, I think, the thrust of Baudelaire's observations on the artist's relationship to modern life, the sentiment whose explication led Benjamin to that method of enquiry which — as the letter shows —frustrated Adorno precisely because of its suitability to its

[1] Walter Benjamin, Letter to Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor, London, New Left Books, 1977.

subject. Matisse's work similarly resists characterization, and does so largely because of a comparable acquiescence, itself in part the content of the painting's delight in the frivolous.

Frivolity assumes the exercise of charm, with (things being as they are in Western society) a concommitant degree of sexual arousal. I make this point with a special sense of what Poussin might have meant when — and it is all he has to say on the subject — he described color as offering "allurements" for "persuading the eyes"; and one ought also to acknowledge that it is in this sense that the decorative is a willful violation of anything like a Platonic view of art — which returns us to the moralistic carping mentioned above. Decorativeness in art, like sex appeal, is to a considerable extent a function of fashion — of the persistent defamiliarization of the unchanging performed by the wish to locate and name the immediate present. The fashionable is artifice, a convention valued for its timeliness — intermittently even the 'natural' can serve such an end, but when it does so it becomes transformed. One is reminded (and, as always, with the telling expression "this year's model" in mind) of Wilde's claim that he once saw a milliner's advertisement on a Paris bus which recommended that "with this hat, the mouth should be worn slightly open." Woman as decoration is the other side of the coin that has Woman as inspiration on its obverse. This is, assuredly, a coinage which many want to see as having become inflated beyond the point of recovery. But that's their problem: archetypes may be subject to infinite reform, but hardly to abolition. Arguing to the contrary seems bound to lead to serious misunderstanding, especially where an artist such as Matisse is concerned, since such a view — which is, to be sure, the currently popular one[2] — seems bound to miss the point of the art's acquiescence in reality.

Which is to say that Matisse's reality is one familiar to us all, the everyday reality of the modern world, in which decorativeness and

[2] In general, criticism has tried to see Matisse as a genius of an almost unselfconscious technique, thus exercising the problematic in the work while seeming to preserve the pleasure which accompanies it, and simultaneously surrendering to the version of himself which Matisse chose to promote. Matisse suffers especially from that variety of contemporary historicism which draws strength from a too enthusiastically literal reading of Barthes' "Myth Today," *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang, New York, 1976.

sex appeal are like one another to the extent that they are as it were interchangeable. Matisse's women are generalized and blank. They radiate a charm unmarred by idiosyncracy, or, rather, like Titian's young men, they are individuals considered within the framework of a type. Their immediate antecedents are paintings like Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* or Monet's *Camille*, in which women define modernity by being able to represent it both at the iconic (i.e., abstract) level and the sensuous, as the object of a naturalistic attention intent on suspending iconicity in order to rediscover it in the tangible. But, for the purposes of this brief note at least, it may be more useful to think of Matisse's technique in the context of the three painters named in my first sentence, and to think of his indebtedness to a way of painting derived from the procedure developed by Watteau in order to properly respond to the delicately allegorical subject matter which was his, works which connected powerful people to their claims to power, or which "simply" represent the court's notions of grace through studying human incarnations of that idea.

Watteau's work is populated by charming people who celebrate, but by virtue of the disinterestedness which formality brings to their demeanor, also negate their involvement with that authority of which they are a part but also a dependent. Personalities who are represented through conjugations of flesh and fabric and of that which they are not: Watteau's people are often in natural settings, from which they are set apart by the colors of themselves and their clothing and the colors of leaves and water, although it is these last which set the tone of this artist's major works, compositions in which motion and gesture persistently undermine solidity and density.

Delacroix's use for Watteau (and through his Cézanne's) are given in his journal:

> Here in my room I have under my eyes the small repetition of the *Trajan* and the *Christ at Cavalry* . . . The little Watteau which I have placed beside the two has once more completed for me the demonstration of the advantages of light backgrounds. In the *Christ*, the planes of the ground, especially those in the distance, almost mingle with the dark places in the figures. The most general rule is

always to have backgrounds of a half-tint that shall be light, less so than the flesh, naturally, but calculated in such a fashion that dark accessories, such as clothing, beards and hair, shall stand out as dark, so as to give accent to foreground objects. That is one very remarkable thing about the Watteau; there are even several parts which have the same values as the background behind each; thus the stockings, the gray or yellowish etc., get contrast with the earth only through the parts, here and there, which are slightly darker.
One would need other pictures by Watteau in order to study the artful means by which he gets his effect.
In my Watteau, the trees of the background, although of a distant plane, are extremely light: there is not a single tone in them, any more the tombs, to compete in even a slight degree with the vigor of those in the foreground. Indeed a lack of connection results from this, and it jars on me when I compare it with my *Trajan*; each little figure is isolated, and one sees all too clearly that it was painted in a leisurely way, independent of its neighbors. [3]

What jars Delacroix is also that which appeals to him: discontinuity combined within the same work with an identification of figure —"subject" — with background (quite the opposite of discontinuity), these two aspects of Watteau's work being seen as principles of pictorial construction. A contradiction resolved by Cézanne in his last years through applying Delacroix's water-color technique to his own work. Watteau's effect on Delacroix is seen most clearly in his drawings of the female nude, and what we see there is the Watteau of tinted drawings (like *Nude on a Sofa*) rather than the painter of elaborate allegorical reconciliations of eroticism and authority (administering fashion as one aspect of society as a whole) — such as the *Embarkation for Cythera* — to which works the more casual and schematic ones are, however, indebted in every sense. Perhaps, then, it need not escape our attention that the theme of discontinuity and its opposite in composition are inseparable, in Watteau and Delacroix and also in Cézanne and Matisse, from an erotic subject. (The eroticism of Watteau, Delacroix, and Matisse seems self-evident; for its presence in Cézanne one need only turn to

[3] Eugene Delacroix, *The Journal of Eugene Delacroix*, (trans. Walter Pach), New York, Viking Press, 1972, p. 624.

Meyer Schapiro's famous essay on sublimated eroticism in the late still-lifes.) [4]

It is that inseparability which concerns me here. Having claimed that the erotic plays such a role in Matisse's art, I should want to suggest that it is one which makes it no more possible to separate his technique from its subject than it would be in the case of Watteau. The point may be obvious in a general way, but it seems important to draw conclusions *vis à vis* that eroticism's implications in particular.

The most particular implication being that Matisse's portrayal of women obliges one to recognize that his painting is in some essential sense *representational* — to an extent which may in itself explain his own reticence or evasiveness regarding this aspect of his achievement.

In considering his work in this light one may observe something about twentieth-century life which one might otherwise (intentionally or even, conceivably, unintentionally) miss. Also, and by no means at the least of all, one may at the same time come to some understanding of the problem that Matisse must pose for the abstract painter. As to Matisse's own evasiveness on the subject, this is perhaps to be expected, or is at least typical of major artists where fundamental questions about their work are concerned. It can, however, be exasperating. The man persisted in describing his work in terms of color and line alone. Yet, confronted with the work itself, no one could deny the difference between flesh, flowers, fabric. Those who do engage in such a denial are of course all around us, painting oversized homages to Matisse that, crippled by taking him at face value, look like nothing so much as the kind of diagrams art historians like to impose on paintings to show how they work, filled in with a version of the master's color. Such works are the saddest and most convincing demonstration of Matisse's commitment to the representational we have.

* * *

As we know, the sphere of life which once seemed to be ruled by the

[4] Meyer Schapiro, "The Apples of Cézanne, an essay on the meaning of Still Life (1968)" *Modern Art,* New York, George Braziller, Inc., 1978, pp. 1-38.

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law of similarity used to be much larger. It was the microcosm and the macrocosm, to give but one version of the many found by the experience of similarity over the course of history. It can still be maintained today that the cases in which people consciously perceive similarities in everyday life are a minute segment of those countless cases unconsciously determined by similarity. The similarities which one perceives consciously, for instance in faces, are, when compared to the countless similarities perceived unconsciously or not at all, like the enormous underwater mass of an iceberg in comparison to the small tip which one sees projecting above the waves.

— Walter Benjamin, *Doctrine of the Similar.* [5]

I had to get away from imitation, even of light. One can provoke light by the invention of flats, as with the harmonies of music. I used color as a means of expressing my emotion and not as a transcription of nature. I use the simplest colors. I don't transform them myself, it is the relationships which take charge of them. It is only a matter of enhancing the differences, of revealing them. Nothing prevents composition with a few colors, like music which is built on only seven notes.

It is enough to invent signs. When you have a real feeling for nature, you can create signs which are equivalents to both the artist and the spectator.

— Henri Matisse, *The Path of Color.* [6]

From time immemorial, a mimetic faculty has been conceded some influence on language. That occurred, however, without foundation and without giving any serious consideration to the meaning, or even the history, of a mimetic faculty. In the main, such consideration remained closely bound to the commonplace, sensuous area of similarity. Mimetic behavior was at least granted a place in the origin of language as the onomatopoeic element. But if, as is obvious to perceptive people, language is not an agreed upon system of signs, then the attempt to approach language will always have to reach back to a consideration of how these signs are given in their crudest and most primitive form in the onomatopoeic mode of explication. The question is: how can this onomatopoeic mode of explication be

[5] Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar (1933)," trans. Knut Tarnowski, *New German Critique*, 17, Spring 1979, p. 65.

[6] Henri Matisse, "The Path of Color, 1947," in Jack D. Flam, *Matisee on Art*, New York, Phaidon, 1973, p. 116.

elaborated, and how can it be adapted to clearer insights?

— Walter Benjamin, *Ibid.* [7]

The human face has always interested me . . . In looking at [faces] I do not perform any psychological interpretation, but I am struck by their individual and profound expression . . . they probably retain my attention through their expressive individuality and through an interest that is entirely of a plastic nature.

The driving force which leads me throughout the execution of a portrait depends on the initial shock of contemplating a face.

. . . Each figure has its own rhythm and it is this rhythm which creates the likeness. In the West the most characteristic portraits are found in Germany: Holbein, Dürer, and Lucas Cranach. They play with assymmetry, the dissimilarities of faces, as opposed to the Southerners who usually tend to consolidate everything into a regular type, a symmetrical structure.

I believe, however, that the essential expression of a work depends almost entirely on the projection of the feeling of the artist in relation to his model rather than the organic accuracy of the model . . . .

The almost unconscious transcription of the meaning of the model is the initial act of every work of art . . . The painter should come to his model with no preconceived ideas. Everything should come to him in the same way that in a landscape all the scents of the countryside come to him: the smell of the earth, the flowers linked to the play of clouds, the movement of trees, and the different sounds of the countryside.

— Henri Matisse, *Portraits.* [8]

Indeed, there may not be a single one of the higher human functions which is not decisively co-determined by the mimetic faculty. This faculty, however, has a history, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically. . . A child not only plays at being a grocer or a teacher, but also at being a windmill or a train. The question which matters, however, is the following: what does a human being actually gain by this training in mimetic attitudes?

— Walter Benjamin, *Ibid.* [9]

7 Benjamin, *ibid.* p. 59.
8 Matisse, "Portraits (1959)," op. cit., p. 151.
9 Benjamin, *ibid.* p. 65

Matisse's paintings trap the spectator in an alternation between oblique and direct address that, in its use of representation, thereby leads one towards a conscious involvement with the necessity of repression in art appreciation. This repression, becoming in itself a property of the art (by conversion into sublimation), strives to be partial rather than total: it is repression in the interests of distance and analogy, *i.e.*, of maintaining a distance that makes the analogy possible.

To say that repression here becomes an aspect of the art is to return to the earlier point regarding decorativeness and its use of charm as a key to relaxation. Sublimated repression disperses arousal into a more urbane satisfaction with how well things go together — the complete suffusion of the whole by that which is recognizably pleasant. It is here that one may begin to talk about Matisse's use of line and color, but it is also here that one must take note of the historical fact that that use of color and line is, during and after the 1920s, always *chic*, precisely in the couturier's sense of the word.

Matisse's paintings of the twenties, thirties and forties depicting women in interiors were hung — and in many cases still hang — in just such interiors (if not the very same ones) as those which appear in the works themselves. They are, in this, wholly bourgeois heirs to Watteau's pastorales: they engage the chosen — and represented —*milieux* and taste of the class which consumes them. This is not the kind of direct relationship which might be said to exist between Matisse and Delacroix's North African paintings, for example. It is, rather, the inadvertent but "inevitable" product of Matisse's decorativeness.

A painting from 1948 provides a good — if, in its generalization of the woman, extreme — instance of all that I've stated so far. Called, typically, *Plum Blossoms, Green Background*, it shows a woman dressed in red, sitting at a table which is also covered in red. On the table are the plum blossoms of the title, and behind them and the woman is the green background. The extremes of foreground and background are reconciled by the use of blue, a color that also emerges just in front of the woman, where it serves to propel toward us the flowers behind which she sits, while attracting to itself the gray receptacles that surround it. The plum blossoms are to the left

of this group. They interact with the green background next to where the woman is sitting, she on one side of the picture's vertical axis and the plum blossoms on the other. We are led to the woman's face by a pyramid of yellow pears, denoting solidity in the pears and its opposite in the flower petals. The face itself stares out, literally, featurelessly. The face appeals, through representation, to the similarly soft, but solid pears; it is opposed, as the pears are opposed by the flower petals, by the ceramic hardness of the vase in which the plum blossoms stand.

It is when one sees the point of this diagonal tension between the near-middleground (the vase) and the far-middleground (the face) that one becomes aware of the drama at the heart of this painting. And there too that one is brought, as it were in the same breath, into as inescapable confrontation with Matisse's dependence on representation, with the fact that it is relevant for us to recognize the vase as a vase and the face as a face in order that we may be moved by the subsumption of the qualities of both into paint, a relocation which is not a complete transformation.

People like to talk about Matisse's use of "paint as paint." It is perhaps reasonable to do so, but only if one is prepared to admit to the role of the subject in that use rather than denying or evading it. Matisse brings to paint, as to that which he paints, the "gentle brutality" recommended by Baudelaire. There is, in short, a parallelism between his subject and its mode of depiction. One recognizes not only the face as a face but also the face as similar and dissimilar to the vase: the one identifies the other through the allusion of both similarity and difference, imitating the other but not becoming it. That mutual definition is best described as operating through displacement, the one suggesting the other by taking its place. This is not only consistent with the compositional identification — through displacement — of the woman's face on one side of the pictorial axis with the plum blossoms on the other, an identification underlined by their both being projected against the green background, but is generated by the same structural predeliction: a desire to "transcribe the meaning of the model" in terms not of "imitation, even of light" but of "signs which are equivalents to both the artist and the spectator." In Matisse, generalization —

abstraction — does not remove one from the empirical world so much as it does the reverse. "Paint as paint" is that which makes possible "the projection of the feeling of the artist in relation to his model" by quite literally providing — not actually as paint considered as paint but instead as paint considered in the context of painting, *i.e.*, as pictorial convention — a medium within which things may be comfortably adjusted to one another, made to fit together by eliminating all about them which is not mutually informative while not reducing their specific identities. And which can do so because it is indeed the technique itself, the comfortable matter-of-factness with which Matisse paints — his straightforward representation of relationships of which he "doesn't take charge" —which provides a surface rhythm that itself points to the content of the painting as, not paradoxically, the subject of and key to the mode of execution. Paint, in other words, is that which can onomatopoeically deal with feeling otherwise represented, within the picture, through abstraction. John Johnston and I have described the manner in which modern works of art characteristically use simple signs — indexical and iconic — as constituents in more complex — symbolic — wholes. [10] Such is the relationship between Matisse's paintings and what they depict. That succinct delicacy which causes Matisse to simplify drawing and use simple colors is itself the subject of the work because of, not despite, its own implicit eroticism. Matisse's technique is an analog, a reconstruction, of the experience of satisfaction at its most generalized. That is the extent to which its use of the erotic to stand for feeling itself makes it a part, and also a critique, of modern life — not because other ages haven't used the erotic to stand for feeling as supra-individual feeling, *i.e.*, feeling as the content of art, but because when they did it didn't come out looking like Matisse.

I have suggested in passing that Matisse has been the source of much bad abstract painting. Needless to say, I am not using the adjective "bad" as it is often used today, with enthusiasm, but employ it in its more traditional form, to denote failure which is inadvertent. Typically, such work fails because it attempts — as I

[10] See below, p. 150.

have also already suggested — to separate Matisse's technique from its subject, and in so doing succeeding only in making Matisse's work less complex than it is. Such posturing after the "look" of Matisse might fairly be described as a signifier which doesn't want to know its signified, a flight from representation which amounts to a flight from coherence. But I should also venture that Matisse has been an important source for the best contemporary abstract painting as well. By the best I mean the work of Ryman and Stella and one or two others. In the work of these artists one is always engaged in a series of displacements — beginning with that of the viewer's space by the space of the work in terms which persistently identify the literal with the abstract — the consciousness of which always leads one to analogize pictorial experience — one's sense of "paint as paint" — with experiences which are, to use an apt if anachronistic expression, more worldly.

Experiences which are neither other-worldly nor wholly apart from the world at its most mundane. The profound grasp of "life as it is" which is evident in the white paintings of Robert Ryman or in Frank Stella's constructions made out of materials familiar from the world at large but manipulated in terms of a wholly artistic conventionality, is indebted to Matisse not only in recognizable detail but in the larger sense that Ryman's and Stella's paintings confront a sensibility of which they are a part and which, that being the case, they cannot confront wholly consciously. Such works acquiesce in their historical moment in order to know it by acting it out as convention, literally to capture its rhythm, passing beyond the transitoriness of the historical by contextualizing the historical itself within the artistic device — whose own historicity thus becomes manifest. Theirs is an onomatopoeic use of artistic conventionality quite directly like that already identified, above, with Matisse and with modern art in general, and also one consistent with the urge towards that form of mimesis found by Benjamin to be a naturalistic proclivity resident in that most abstract system of representation, language itself. Paintings like Ryman's and Stella's reconstitute Matisse's interests, obviously, by not looking like Matisse, but instead, by maintaining his passionate interest in the promise of an authentic and communicable feeling held out by that elaborate contrivance which is

pictorial convention. The disappearance of the figure was, to be sure, a concommitant of Abstract Expressionism; but as a cultural necessity it is a disappearance perhaps most elaborately symptomized here in the blankness of Matisse's woman's face.

COLOR AS METAPHOR

In most (Western) painting of the past two centuries, or so it seems to me, color works more like a simile than a metaphor. [1] The point is not entirely pedantic, because the difference in degree between a metaphor and a simile is also a difference that allows, in the case of a simile but not a metaphor, ambiguity to creep into the relationship between the thing and that with which it is being identified. While metaphor suggests an unambiguous relationship between image and idea, simile is likely to propose an arguable and problematic one, because saying that something is like something else rather than actually being that other thing permits each of the sides of the comparison to retain its individual identity. Metaphor, on the other hand, seems to be so dependent on unambiguity that, in literature, its employment frequently seems to oblige the author to qualify, to make the metaphor's use conditional — as when Shakespeare has Maecenas deliver the following lines: "If beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle the heart of Anthony, Octavia is a blessed lottery to him." In modern painting color doesn't seem to work in an analogous way. Having long since lost its symbolic function, no longer standing for qualities associated with ideas and values as it mostly did in medieval art and still does in some of the art of many non-Western parts of the world, color becomes a pictorial ingredient that typically does not communicate a specific meaning and is read as ambiguous. In part the difference is one between an art that is like language, in which metaphor is possible because paintings are made up of symbols of agreed-upon meaning, and one that is not. Which is to say that when painting decided to become primarily visual it surrendered the capacity to be metaphorical. However, this apparent

[1] An earlier version of this paper was originally delivered as part of a panel discussion on "Color as Metaphor" at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in San Francisco on February 26, 1981.

incompatability between the visual and the lingustic, which provided a basis for much of Merleau-Ponty's writing and to which Jean Paris, Lyotard, and a horde of others have subsequently returned, does not so much mark a disjunction between visual and verbal art but, rather, as it turns out, signals a renewed convergence. [2] Because, and this has been said better by many others, as the visual arts forsook metaphor in favor of the ambiguity of the visual, so too literature, and in particular poetry, abandoned metaphorical clarity for an ambiguous use of simile, which is ambiguous precisely because it is apprehended as a visual image. When, for example, Mallarmé, in his remembrance poem for Verlaine, conjures up a rock that seems to be given the character of a cloud, the combination of these quite contradictory sensations is only possible through an appeal to both as visually mediated in a quite literal sense. The sense in which a drawing of a cloud could quite easily look like one of a rock. They are visually similar, and it is as such that they can be combined into one image.

It is in this visual emphasis that modernist poetry is, as Jakobson has described it to be, antimetaphorical by nature. And so it is, then, against a background of general modernist tendency — rather than as something peculiar to painting and as such an aspect of the medium sharply distinguishing the pictorial from the other arts — that I should want to talk about color as that lesser form of metaphor, which is simile. Before I actually try to do this, let me interject one last statement about metaphor itself as an element in painting. Every attempt to use color as metaphor (in the sense of symbol of agreed-upon attribution) in modern art, whether it be Moreau's, or Mondrian's, or Malevich's, or the Surrealists', confirms the unavailability of the metaphorical to pictorialism insofar as the metaphorical content intended by the artist never communicates itself to us as we look at the picture and, because of that, strikes us, when we do find out about it, only as a kind of aberrant footnote to our experience of the painting itself. What Malevich, for example, has to say about the role of color in the lives of individuals has virtually nothing to do with one's experience of

[2] In regard to what I have to say here, see in particular Jean Paris, *Painting and Linguistics*, p. 10. Pittsburgh, 1975.

Malevich's paintings, except that the kinds of colors he uses confirms his commitment to the industrial and urban as opposed to the natural and agrarian; and even that is wholly arguable.

This interjection does in fact coincide with the main point I wish to make: that color's function in painting is implicitly ambiguous because of the impurity of visual experience itself, and that it is this impurity which gives to color its role as the provider of what one might call uncontrollable similarities. Another reference to Malevich, albeit a rather roundabout demonstration of what I mean in that it is a statement about drawing rather than color, may illuminate what I have just said. In a typically exuberant concatenation, Malevich lists a number of things that according to him all mean the same thing as visual experiences. I am referring to his claim that the forms of a railway engine, automobile, airplane, armoured car, bullet, gun, cannon are all different but equally all provide a similar "dynamic sensation." [3] Many of us might see this list as a progression from the relatively peaceful to the positively threatening, which by no means amounts to a series of objects linked by consistency of association of any sort whatsoever. Yet there is an obvious sense in which Malevich is correct, in that any of these objects can indeed invoke some kind of experience of the dynamic.

By the same token, and this is to me the more important point, any allegedly nonrepresentational drawing of streamlined or dynamic shapes or forms might suggest any of the objects on Malevich's list, and that is the sense in which the visual denies any kind of purity to itself and rather insists on reminding us of experiences quite outside those actually presented. Such reminiscence isn't metaphorical, since it doesn't attribute specific identity from one thing to another, but it does draw attention to similarity in such a way as to make it impossible to concentrate on the work in question as an exclusively visual, that is, wholly present, phenomenon.

This seems even more true of color than of drawing, because one never sees a color without having seen it before. For that reason alone all color, in any painting, is likely to draw one's attention to something other than the work at hand. Within the work, it is also

[3] Kazimir S. Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915-1933*, p. 139. Trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, ed. Troels Anderson. New York, 1971.

that which attributes similar surfaces to quite different kinds of things, rendering the separateness of their identities ambiguous and thereby imputing to them an otherwise unlikely affinity. Think, for a moment, of Matisse's paintings.

In more than one painting by Matisse, color and whiteness are used to represent a space at once quite naturalistic, reminiscent of the kind of light nature provides, and at the same time strikingly artificial, in a sense of being dependent on both visual habit and pictorial convention. An interior space will be constructed out of a diagonal row of colors — pink, green, yellow; this opposed by a use of white to unite the foreground with the middleground and with an extreme background, the sky outside the window. In a painting like this, color contributes to one's reading of the painting as one made in natural light, but it is at the same time manifestly not any particular color actually seen in that light. Rather, it is a generalization permitting one to attribute daylight to the scene while enjoying the painting for its apparently simple (or as the Victorians would say, "artless") manipulation of pictorial convention — of devices like simple repetition as a way of constructing one of the diagonal axes of the space, while opposing that axis with one in which colors don't recur but which instead is made up of the progression pink, its complement green, and yellow, a color that jumps forward and is therefore placed farther away, to end one's progression into the space while simultaneously undermining one's sense of that space's measurable depth. Such a painting is quite extensively dependent on an audience who already has some sense of what kind of light is being depicted. One could go so far as to say that it depends on an audience equipped with the idea or belief that Mediterranean light is pleasurable. It's dependent on that idea because it is that idea which the painting alludes to rather than recreating, or imitating, the light itself. Matisse in his own writings is prone to describe the tendency to generalize, which is fundamental to his work, as a making of signs. [4] One might say he uses color in a way to make it capable of signaling natural light while retaining a sufficient arbitrary, conventional identity so that it can with equal credibility

[4] Matisse: "The importance of an artist is to be measured by the number of new signs he has introduced into the language of art." In Jack Flam, *Matisse On Art*, New York, 1973, p. 95.

perform wholly *un*natural analogies elsewhere in the interests of composition, like making the gray of a hard surface such as a window frame the same as the suit the Matisse is wearing in the reflection in the mirror.

Color in Matisse can combine such naturally contradictory functions because of its persistently elusive character, its capacity to suggest that which it doesn't actually resemble. Color used in this way, surely not atypical within modernism, is so dependent on pictorial convention and on memory as to make the actual visual impact of the painting, its "presentness", of almost secondary significance. This is the sense in which color in nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting is used in a manner that paradoxically subverts the purity of the visual while retaining, and in that redefining, the priority for pictorial communicability of spatial depiction, of the simultaneity of visual perception. It is also the sense in which one would want to argue that there is nothing reductive in modernism's quest for what its protagonists have been pleased to call a purity of the means of expression. The space of a painting like an interior by Matisse is made out of devices read and interpreted as conventional signs for remembered experiences, and which are at the same time sufficiently generalized so as to be able to suggest satisfying, though in life inconceivable, affinities between dissimilar but contextually related material.

That context, the space of the painting, implies but does not reenact the totality and continuity that our senses attribute to space itself. On the contrary, it seems obliged to deny them in order to represent them. One may say that modern painting emphasizes the visual *in order* to undermine it through a structure untidily made up of similarities within the picture, which themselves rely for a larger coherence on reminiscence, association, and interpretation of the context of the generalizations that together provide one with a sense of the abstraction as a whole. To this extent Cézanne was speaking literally when he claimed to have "written in painting what had never been written, and turned it into painting once and for all."[5] In pursuing the content of the generalizations Matisse employs, one

[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *Sense and Non-Sense* trans. Herbert L. and Patricia A. Dreyfus. Evanston, IL, 1964, p. 17.

would certainly want to consider the frequent employment of the iconicity of colors and the curious subversion of that quality which ensues, as, for example, in many portraits of the twenties and thirties where cosmetic colors, colors one associates with surfaces, are used in such a way as to themselves provide the painting's central theme. That theme is one of a happy reconciliation between pleasurable surfaces and the equally pleasurable light that contains them. A theme, then, which might be described as one of contradiction and reconciliation of color's function as a reminder of the pleasurable associations that go with seeing the colors of clothes and makeup and so on, with a corresponding, but quite differently derived, pleasure provided by the same color's approximation of itself to the quality of natural light of an especially delightful sort. Such paintings demand to be interpreted in a manner permitting the rough bundles of simile out of which such works are made to present themselves with something comparable to the kind of lucidity now only available to the interpreter of the neater groups of metaphorical symbols making up the art of other periods and other civilizations than ours.

Of course I have no idea as to how such an interpretation could or should proceed, beyond the very general remarks made here, and should probably agree with those who have argued that such a task was ultimately fanciful and utopian. If it is such, however, it is also an obligation placed on art criticism and appreciation by modern art. Not least, incidentally, by painting since Matisse. A recent painting by Stella, for example, while certainly using the ambiguity of color to subvert and reconstitute the space literally occupied by the work, does so through a use of colors and shapes that immediately remind us of things outside the work, in everyday life and in art history. The inevitability of such a use of color is perhaps contained in that other aspect of one's apprehension of such works, the sense in which they are complicated before they're made, by the decisions implicit in the actual devices out of which they are and aren't constructed. The sense in which modernist, and by all means postmodernist, works are explicitly historical objects.

Color, then, continues to provide painting with a complexity made possible by an ambiguity at once only accessible to vision while serving, in its ability to furnish similarities, to undermine the

immediacy of the visual. Such complexity is, as usual, not a matter of thematics but of execution — as I've said elsewhere, one might describe a play as just another manipulation of the revenge theme and that play might also be *Hamlet*. The same is true of painting. A familiar space, let alone an exhausted form, might provide the theme, but it is what is brought to that theme, what references are attached to it, which will make the work expressive and communicative. Or, indeed, what references are withheld or withdrawn. In either case we are obliged to make sense of a visual experience through what we might want to see as a cloud of distractions, but which are nonetheless themselves inconveniently intrinsic to that which we can only call the meaning of the work, if that meaning is, as it must be, something discernible as a consequence of our total experience of the work of art.

APPRECIATING RYMAN

With Robert Ryman's painting one is obliged to consciously include the pictorial object as a whole — that is to say, as a thing — within the scope of one's response to it as art. For Ryman, the experience of seeing a Rothko for the first time was salutary; Rothko, Ryman explained to me, presented painting in a naked state.

Another way of saying this might be that Rothko painted around the edge of the canvas, incorporating the whole object into the block of space conjured up by the color. I think it's fairly well established that Rothko was the first American artist to do so, thereby — whatever the original motives — emphasizing the conventionality of the space customarily identified with any rectangle made out of art materials and hung on a wall. In extending the surface around the edges of the stretcher — a move which suggests an equation of the space of painting not only with the abstract rectangle delimited by the perimeter of the object's face, but also with the covering of the object itself or *as such,* i.e., as material — Rothko introduced a level of complication into the manipulation of pictorial convention which has remained a procedural preoccupation for those who have followed and which was implicit in his generation's abolition of the frame. Throughout much of the history of pictorialism, and particularly of easel painting, the frame served as an intricate and distracting passage from the banal space of the wall to the privileged space of the picture, a continuum achieved through the substitution of the abstract for the literally present, of what's in it for what it actually is. The frame distinguished that which was art from that which was not by announcing the beginning and end of representation, not infrequently by way of temporarily distracting the viewer with its own artistic content. So it is that the frame vanishes with the impulse to represent, and similarly it is because of the final disappearance of the frame in America in the 1940's that one is

tempted to say that the wall, or more properly the transition from the painting to the wall and back — the conditions under which the work is seen, and with regard to which the spectator locates his or herself — must be the beginning and end of the artist's technical concern, for Ryman as well as for those with whose work his invites comparison: Bochner, Marden, Stella, and, for reasons discussed elsewhere, Johns. [1]

Ryman, who was born in Nashville in 1930, is slightly older than the first three of these artists and the same age as the last. That his elucidation — deconstruction — of pictorial morphology should call to mind some aspects of theirs is, in itself, hardly surprising. The use here of the word "morphology" is intentional. When one talks about a serious artist, one is talking about a reverence for process, a devotion to a morphology which is at once physically specific and wholly conventional.[2] When one looks at a Ryman, the act of looking (looking taking on in part the transitiveness of reading) recurs through empathy with the act of making, both the polarities of a transaction at the center of which is oneself. This, by the way, is what makes Ryman, and the others I've mentioned, such thoroughly *traditional* artists. They return us to the tautology latent in the notion of the ritual mark; to a self-reflexivity achieved through the agency of the impersonal. It's enough to make one think that the interest in Jung said to be prevalent among Rothko's peers may well have been an assertion — albeit involuntary — of the inescapability of the conventional, there psychologized into the idea of archetype, and that the search for the primordiality so central to the ambition of that generation may only be said to be legible as art when considered as sublimation.

Ryman settled in New York in 1952, the year of his first encounter with a painting by Rothko. The earliest paintings of Ryman's discussed here were made in a period which started about five years later — 1957-61. *Untitled* (1957), PLATE 1, is a small, almost square

1 See "A Mystery Story" and "Robert Morris, the Complication of Exhaustion"; also Carlo Huber's catalogue essay for the Ryman show at the Basel Museum (June — August 1975).

2 This is why the seminal text for two of the most fruitful critical tendencies of the century— Russian Formalism and French Structuralism (anthropological dialectics applied to the art object) — has been V.I. Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*.

painting made with gouache on paper. A thick surface covers the entire support (the paper), except for a narrow and uneven gap at the bottom. At the top left there are two shapes, one squarish and aligned with the left-hand side of the picture, the other more long than high and adjacent to the top. Both are brushed on, and both suggest an interaction with the white surface that makes one read their final state as the result of a protracted adjustment — the little bit of paint one can see at the bottom right, the traces peeking through above the squarish mark and to the right and below the long one. At this point, one might, noting this procedure, mention Kline as well as Rothko. More important, though, than the question of influences, is the disposition of these dark marks which introduce one to the picture by tempting one to read it from the top left, like a page of writing. Another painting, *Untitled* (1958), carries the dark marks around the side, identifying the top left of the object with the top left of the rectangle, while at the same time distinguishing the two by not making the marks continuous with one another. Also, although the work accommodates its edge to the conventional grammar which traditionally is considered the province of surface alone, it nonetheless denies that edge the material intensity of the surface. The sides retain, in other words, their function as areas of transition.

Untitled (1958), PLATE 2, is an atypical Ryman. Usually his paintings are not vertically oriented; most often they are square. The square frustrates the tendency, already noted, to read Ryman's paintings as one would read lines of writing. That this has become more rather than less true as time's gone by is indicated by a more recent painting like *York* (1973), PLATE 3, which is made up of rows of brushmarks. Like many, perhaps all artists, Ryman's career has proceeded through a series of returns to simple themes clearly established in the early work. (Simple inasmuch as, to paraphrase Joyce, it is art's business to depict the obvious.)

Two such themes emerge in the paintings of 1957-61, and their significance is to some extent indicated by Ryman's use of his signature at the time. According to Ryman, it is used as a means of introducing the linear element into the work. It points both to the inclination to associate linearity in painting with the linearity of

texts, and also to the question of using that linear element as a device which restates that which is otherwise communicated by the disposition of the work as a whole. In *Untitled* (1958), the signature is large, centered at the bottom of the piece. Its thickness makes it read as a reemergence, and as a definitive reordering, of the thick surface of the top part of the work. In another painting of the same period the signature floats within the field, following, not the edge of the stretcher, but rather the diagonal inclination of one of the brushstrokes which builds the surface. In yet another piece, a tissue-paper collage made in 1959, the signature appears twice in the lower right, diagonally opposed to a square shape at the top left. At the center of the picture, which is square, is a horizontal white mark enclosed in a loosely-drawn rectangle. Here, as before, a predisposition toward a horizontally oriented sense of ordering is both invoked and countered — figuratively and literally — at the center of the work. One notes that in Ryman, horizontality is often countered, as it is here, by small adjustments which contain and mollify it by returning one to the symmetry of the square format: the small vertical line, for example, mounted, like the signatures, on a separate piece of paper at the top of the work, and the downward curving mark on the right prevent the white shape in the middle from beginning a progression which could lead over the righthand edge, by deflecting one's glance downward toward the signatures which, stacked as they are, rise up to meet it.

Other paintings of the period seem to deny much of what I've said to be characteristic of Ryman's work. Another untitled painting from 1958, for instance, has the number 58 at the bottom left, facing a dark horizontal line at the upper right, a substitution — bearing in mind Meyer Schapiro's distinction between diagonal movements which read quickly in our culture because they read from top left to bottom right, and ones which don't because they contradict that semiotic norm — of a diagonal that climbs upward for one analogous to the downward tumble of a page of prose. [3] But here too writing (in this case, numbers) is used to reconstitute one's sense of the whole.

[3] For further discussion of the culturally adduced significance of diagonality, and also of the frame, see Meyer Schapiro: "On some problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs." *Semiotica*, 1, 3 (Mouton: The Hague, 1969).

Looking upwards from the 58, one is led into the picture, at the upper left, by a diagonal brushmark aimed toward the middle of the bottom of the painting. Looking to the right of the 58, at the bottom right-hand corner, one finds an organization of the surface which is the opposite of that found at the top left. Instead of diagonals, the bottom right is built out of crosshatched horizontal and vertical strokes. The axis between the 58 and the dark horizontal at the top brackets the extremities present in the surface and these are thus presented as physical antinomies that introduce and end the work through an appeal to one's sense of the difference between two kinds of material — and therefore perceptual and conventional — disposition. Considering what's been said about reading these objects from top left to bottom right while remaining aware of the square's potential for frustrating this kind of encounter with the piece, I'd refer to one other work of Ryman's and note that pulling the bottom right-hand corner of *Stretched Drawing* (1963) out of line with the bottom edge cannot be regarded as a detail that is accidental or unimportant, but rather must be understood as one which is structurally necessary and rhetorically succinct.

In Ryman's work an emphasis on the center has often seemed to compensate for a perimeter that has been rendered indeterminate through the application of paint, or for an edge that was indeterminate in the first place because the work was unstretched. An example of this is the small untitled painting of 1961, PLATE 4, in which a column of horizontal marks turns into a stack of signatures toward the bottom, that is, at the point where one begins the transition to the outside, rendering irregular the passage from art to not-art. In another, more recent piece, *Untitled* (1970), a square of painted fiberglass is placed at the center of three overlapping sheets of tissue paper, thus constructing what was referred to as a paper frame, a zone of flimsiness marking off the hard fiberglass core from the comparably solid wall.

Despite the thematic persistence indicated by such juxtapositions as this — between two works separated by nine years — I think one may detect, at the beginning of the sixties, something of a shift in Ryman's attitude toward the center. This was well under way before 1960 but in that decade it seems to have reached a new stage of

clarification as a consequence of acquiring a greater freedom of address where color was concerned.

> What counts most with colors are relationships. Thanks to them and them alone a drawing can be intensely colored without there being any need for actual color.
>
> *Henri Matisse*

Paradoxically but hardly ironically, this was a freedom that followed from the complete elimination of colored paint. When learning to paint Ryman was deeply moved by Matisse, not by what he painted but by the way he did it, which Ryman referred to as the sureness with which Matisse worked. Ryman's paintings slow one down by making one think about such things as the intensity of a mark or accumulation of marks, and of differences as vast as that between a cooler as opposed to a warmer white. These material recognitions, about which Merleau-Ponty observed that a blue on a piece of cloth is something quite different from the same blue when it's in the sky (as they also echo Rothko's assertion that three feet of red is redder than one), bring one back to the conventionality of it all, and, in doing so, to the unfathomability of that which is well known. Ryman said he gave up using colored paint after a period in which he would start painting with colors but then covered them with white paint anyway, because they got in the way of what was going on on the surface. At the same time, there is no painting of Ryman's which does not present one with an experience of color, and make one think again about painting's dependence on it; color in Ryman's work is relative and immanent, responsive to its support and to its support's support, the wall and the room it and the wall share.

A fairly large (65" x 65") painting from 1960, *Untitled #13*, provides some insight into this. The larger part of the work is filled with a thickly but consistently brushed area of paint, behind which, at the right of this area, one sees the canvas in a vertical band that is narrower at the top than at the bottom, where the impasto surface "ends". The other third of the work is a very smoothly painted completely filled shape, with no canvas showing. The introduction of the canvas within the picture provides for an interval between the two painted areas which is very similar — materially identical to

and, of course, physically continuous with — the gap between the surface of the painting and the wall, the stretcher's edge. So the transition from one part of the painting to another within the perimeter of the surface occurs in a way that underlines the continuity between inside and outside otherwise implied in the interaction between the work and the wall; a continuity which differentiates, identifying the work as specific and the wall as anonymous and interchangeable, a conventionalized void in front of which the painting locates itself.

That the rough surface of *Untitled #13* should command twice as much space as the part that is smooth leads one to what has so far only been hinted at here, that Ryman's art is one of proportion, so that one might want to say — in Rothko's shadow — the two-thirds of rough is as white as one third of smooth (while the unpainted canvas certainly recalls Matisse's advice to leave some space around the colors to let them breathe). The shift in attitude toward the center I've attributed to Ryman's work of the early sixties and since might be described as a recognition that the center's dislocation is inevitable once color is liberated as it is here, which also makes one newly aware of the relationship between pictorial conventionality and human perception and cognition, specifically of the latter's attribution of different properties to the left and the right sides of what one sees. *Untitled #13* is an irreversible picture; to hang it upside down would be to render it unintelligible. The thick paint brings one into the work; the smooth column on the right acts as a full stop. This is not to question the simultaneity of the painting, but it is to say that its parts interact but are not interchangeable. Its synchronicity is predicated on its physical situation.

Often displaced by alternation, but maintained by the square, the center seems always to be inextricably involved in the idea of transition in Ryman's work. An untitled painting from 1961 prepares one for the perimeter by placing an internal boundary of blurred paint between the clearly distinct brushmarks that extend over most of the surface and the unpainted canvas at the perimeter, a very narrow edge which, however, extends over the sides and back to the wall. The blurred paint is a rehearsal or an echo of the stretcher, the first transition from inside to outside, or *vice versa*. It is interesting

to note that just as Ryman reserves material intensity for the surface as opposed to the sides of the work, so too the surface is here a place in which things melt together toward the periphery while clarity is restored toward the middle. Sharp oppositions between the angles of brushmarks around the center become gradual convergences between similar angles as one approaches the edge. This use of the brushmark as a device which identifies transition (the edge) and focus (the center) is familiar from elsewhere. It's characteristic of late Cézanne, where it was developed in response to Poussin's advice to the effect that the whole problem of painting is one of making the foreground and background connect convincingly to the middle-ground.

Ryman has never given up the option of internal subdivision, as a painting like *Surface Veil #2* (1970), PLATE 5, shows. But the paintings of the last fifteen years, as they contain tactility in the interests of more gradual changes which heighten one's sense of the color involved, have for the most part been ones which structure the experience of looking through an appeal to oppositions between —rather than within — things. In 1965 Ryman made a pair of square paintings which hang side by side. Quite large, about five feet, one was painted with oil paint and the other with enamel: two disparate surfaces with identical supports, an alternation of light-absorbent white and a white that's light-reflective, which is also the difference between a white that looks the same from wherever one is standing and one which does not.

The work grants anonymity to the wall and therefore to the spectator, because the specificity of the work makes the viewer's position in regard to it not uncertain — although it is by definition an unknown — but speculative and unavoidably mobile. The works which have gone furthest toward a literal convergence with the wall, such as *Wall Painting, Latex and Enamel* (1973), are in a sense also those which go farthest toward obliging one to concentrate on physical difference and location. Stretched canvases, such as *York* or *Allied* (1966), which are painted Windsor White, the coldest white available in oil and the one Ryman prefers, force attention onto the process in a slightly different way. *Allied*, as it presents one with a slowly developed surface that stops just short of the edge,

completes the circle initiated by Rothko's extension of the surface over it. The stretcher is an object which contains its surface.
Mallarmé refers to the white of the page as a void that gives relief from the intensity signified by the blackness of print. Ryman's paintings remind one that a painting is a space hung on a wall, a void interpenetrating a void. The transition from one to another is the passage from the determined to the indeterminate, from the identifiable to the imponderable, from an institution, replete with an historically accumulated body of terms and customs, to ourselves. I haven't dealt here with the enormous range of materials Ryman has employed during the past eighteen years, nor have I said anything about the fact that his work encompasses a much wider range of scale than does that of most contemporary artists. Both are aspects of a recognition that what makes art is not a particular material but an intensification of feeling generated through and by an ideational system, in Ryman's case, pictorialism. As I write, Ryman is putting the finishing touches to the centerpiece of his 1975 New York show at the John Weber Gallery, an 8-by-24 foot free-standing wall, PLATE 6. This shouldn't be thought of as a final convergence of the conceptual space of painting with the physical realm of architecture, but rather as one more convergence made possible through identifying the material continuity between the two. That, surely, is the point. Ryman's painting evokes the sentiment recently expressed at the New York Film Festival by Jean-Marie Straub: "Art thrives on contradiction." Contradiction provides the dialectic that makes it possible to see.

A MYSTERY STORY

"[It] is only the pure idea that has meaning. Everything else has everything else."

— Barnett Newman[1]

"Anyone who saw me at work would think I was only interested in questions of form."

— Bertolt Brecht[2]

"*Morphology*: . . . 1b: The features comprised in the form and structure of an organism or any of its parts 2a: a study and description of a word formation in a language including inflection, derivation, and compounding b: the system of word forming elements and processes in a language 3a: a study of structure or form b: STRUCTURE, FORM . . . "

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1971 Ed.).

In the seven years between *Nebraska* (1966), PLATE 7, and the *Grove Group* (1973), Brice Marden established and explored a set of conditions through which to regenerate painting. For me — and Marden has indicated that this is his opinion too — the works that make up the *Grove Group* series are the first that fully realize the goal implicit in those of the preceding years: a reconciliation of the colors of landscape with a post-Johnsian insistence on the painting's identity as a conventional — social — object that functions as a cultural sign of a certain sort. [3]

That, I think, is what his work is about. Marden has effected a

[1] Barnett Newman, *The Ideographic Picture*, (New York, Betty Parson's Gallery, 1947).

[2] Bertold Brecht, "Against George Lukacs," translated and reprinted in the *New Left Review* (London), March-April 1974.

[3] I discussed Johns' demystification of the painting as a cultural sign, and elaborated on what I mean by the materialism of contemporary art, in the essay on Robert Morris reprinted in this volume. The present text is self-explanatory, but a terse summary of what I said there may still not be out of place. I said that Johns brought painting into the literal space of the viewer

reconciliation of aspects of pictorial experience which seem mutually exclusive to anyone whose sensibility has been educated by the Minimal and post-Minimal American sculpture of the last decade. Marden's work is both an extension and a contradiction of the critical biases of that collective effort. Considered as such, his work gives one a new look at Johns and at the generation of American artists who've been inspired by him. Marden — like Stella, who is two years older than he and to my mind the painter closest to him — is a decidedly *a*typical representative of that generation. And, as I shall try to show here, Marden's atypicality has resulted in an analysis of pictorial morphology that clarifies Johns' restatement of the Duchampian proposition as it synthetically reunites the art of the present — post-Cubist, post-Surrealist, post-Hiroshima, post-Vietnam — with the nineteenth-century French modernism against which Duchamp launched his awesome and incontrovertible critique. If one compares Manet's *In the Conservatory* (1879), PLATE 8, with the still from Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) that Marden used in an advertisement for a show in 1972, one witnesses a transition from an ambiguous obliqueness to an analogously ambiguous directness. The figures in the Manet occupy the space of a conservatory, itself an example — poised as it is between the inside and the out of doors — of the tentative containment of the natural by the cultured. One is in no doubt that the man and the woman are in communication with one another, yet it is also clear that they are oriented toward us, and that this prevents them from being completely engrossed in themselves. They are torn between looking at us and looking at one another, and the viewer is similarly — reciprocally — torn between an experience of the pictorial space as a self-referential system — cut off from the space of its audience — and the contrary implication that it is addressed to the world outside itself.

In the Godard still, Anna Karina (Natacha von Braun) and Eddie Constantine (Lemmy Caution) share a space and address us

by identifying it with the space of things. He made the space of painting contain a real coat hanger. Instead of a repository of inspired intuition, the transcendentalism of Abstract Expressionist gesture, the painting became a thing made out of paint and wood and canvas —informed by labor and located in time. About materialism, I simply made the point that Paz makes in *Alternating Current* (New York, 1971), that our materialism is relative to that of the past.

directly. Here, though, the door, which serves a function like that of the bench in the Manet, physically unites the two but, as it does so, completely isolates them from one another. The price of direct address is mutual isolation, and outside the door is the darkness of a hallway rather than the sunlight of the conservatory. Independence replaces interdependence as directness takes the place of the indirect. A new ambiguity has grown from the old, a new opacity has arrived on the back of an endeavor committed to a heightened explicitness. One is shut off from Karina and Constantine by the screen as they are shut off from one another, and also united, by the door. The blurred discontinuity between foreground and middle-ground — the woman's space and the space behind the bench, from which the man leans into hers —in the Manet, which reciprocates with, and qualifies, the viewer's distantiation from the work, has been replaced in Godard by a complete discontinuity that structures one's response through a more overt reflexiveness. Constantine and Karina are united in our perception through their physical separation; they connect through being distinct. The still is invested with a mystery that comes from explicitness, the apparent paradox of a developed materialism: it is the physical connection between things that keeps them distinct and isolated from one another. Marden's work is founded on that realization, with interesting consequences for our view of the present situation and its background.

For instance, it's because of Marden that it's possible to compare Manet with Smithson, in a way that doesn't discount or distort — except in the Heisenbergian sense that all description distorts — the negative dialectics that govern the intervening ninety years or so of art history. I feel that his comparison, to which I'll return in a while, is one that helps to get at Marden's importance. He emerged at a moment when painting itself seemed to many an activity of questionable purpose. However, moments pass, and are constantly redefined by what survives and succeeds them. One attribute of genius is that it illuminates those products of genius which — emanating from other, even superficially contradictory sources — are its contemporaries. Smithson and Marden were both born in 1938. In art as in life, only the comparison of equals turns up

subjects of real interest.
To appreciate Marden is to recognize that, as Victor Shklovsky said, in "Art as Technique," [4] art is primarily a means of defamiliarization, less concerned to invent than to slow down, or concentrate, the audience's perception of the familiar. In discussing contemporary art it seems appropriate to substitute the term "morphology" for "technique" because the morphological carries with it a sense of derivation that the manipulation of a technique need not. By "deconstruction" I mean an articulation that lays bare the terms of its relationship to us, in an attempt to make its structure reciprocal with the form that our perception takes. Through deconstruction Marden defamiliarizes the work of his contemporaries and the cultural history he shares with them.
Johns' defamiliarization of painting resulted in an increased awareness of its status as an institution devoted to the production of objects. Marden is involved in a separation of surface and support—in the course of clarifying the terms in which they're interdependant — that seems at first incompatible with Johns' articulation of the painting as thing. If Johns has aimed at a demystification of conventionality in which Newman's "pure idea" is replaced with the notion of the "specific object," Marden's further deconstruction of that object is in a sense highly ambivalent about what Johns has done. And this is why I'd want to say that Marden relates to Johns synthetically rather than as a surrogate, and as I'm going to attempt to explain here, engages in a complication of the object's morphology that reopens it to the possibility of self — or internal — contradiction, of a surface which both informs and erodes one's sense of its support.
In its substitution of ambiguity for the specific, Marden's is a deconstruction of the pictorial object which implies that contemporary events have in general been motivated by an impulse first observable in what Hegel called the Romantic arts, painting and poetry. Thinking about what an adequate description of Marden's work would be has made me newly aware that in Romanticism's reform or subversion of the Classical there is a kind of syntax that is

[4] See Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1917) in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, (University of Nebraska: 1965) edited and translated by L.T. Lemon and M.J. Rees, p. 7.

apparently not available to those arts — in particular, to architecture— more completely identified with the Italian Renaissance. Painting and poetry seem to possess an innate capacity for the juxtaposition of signifier and signified that confirms the ideological and historical priority of the Classical, but is also denied to it.

Marden draws one's attention to this through a dialectic in which Johns and Stella provide the means for a defamiliarization of Cézanne and Manet and the tradition — concretized in the painting of Spain and the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and anticipated in the meeting between oil paint and the Italian Renaissance that resulted in the pictorial style of Giovanni Bellini and his student Titian — to which those giants of the age of the bourgeoisie addressed their art. Marden reminds one that painting's is an institutional history in which a technology (oil paint and the transportable canvas) forged under the gloomy skies of northern Europe, in an atmosphere of nascent capitalism, persisted for several hundred years in uneasy tension with a Classicist pictorialism — the Idealist imperative contained in the tautology of monocular perspective — that had its origins in a social situtation dominated by a medieval church and bathed in the infinitely clear light of the Adriatic. Marden's art, to me, is a coherent reassertion of the implicit Romanticism of the materialist aesthetic which underlies the most ambitious art of the present day.

In developing this point, which I feel I must do in order to describe what happens when one looks at Marden's work, I'll draw on two reviews I wrote earlier this year (1974). [5] I am also indebted to a highly informative essay by Roberta Smith which dealt with his progress up to and including the *Grove Group*. [6] Mine is for the most part concerned with what I think is a point of view determined by the *Grove Group* and the work he's made since.

★ ★ ★

"Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience. Unitary forms do not reduce relationships. They order them. If the predominant, hieratic nature of the unitary form

5 *Artforum*, May & June, 1974.

6 Roberta Smith, "Brice Marden's Painting," *Arts Magazine*, May/June 1973.

> functions as a constant, all those particularizing relations of scale, proportion, etc., are not thereby canceled. Rather they are bound more coherently and indivisibly together." — Robert Morris [7]

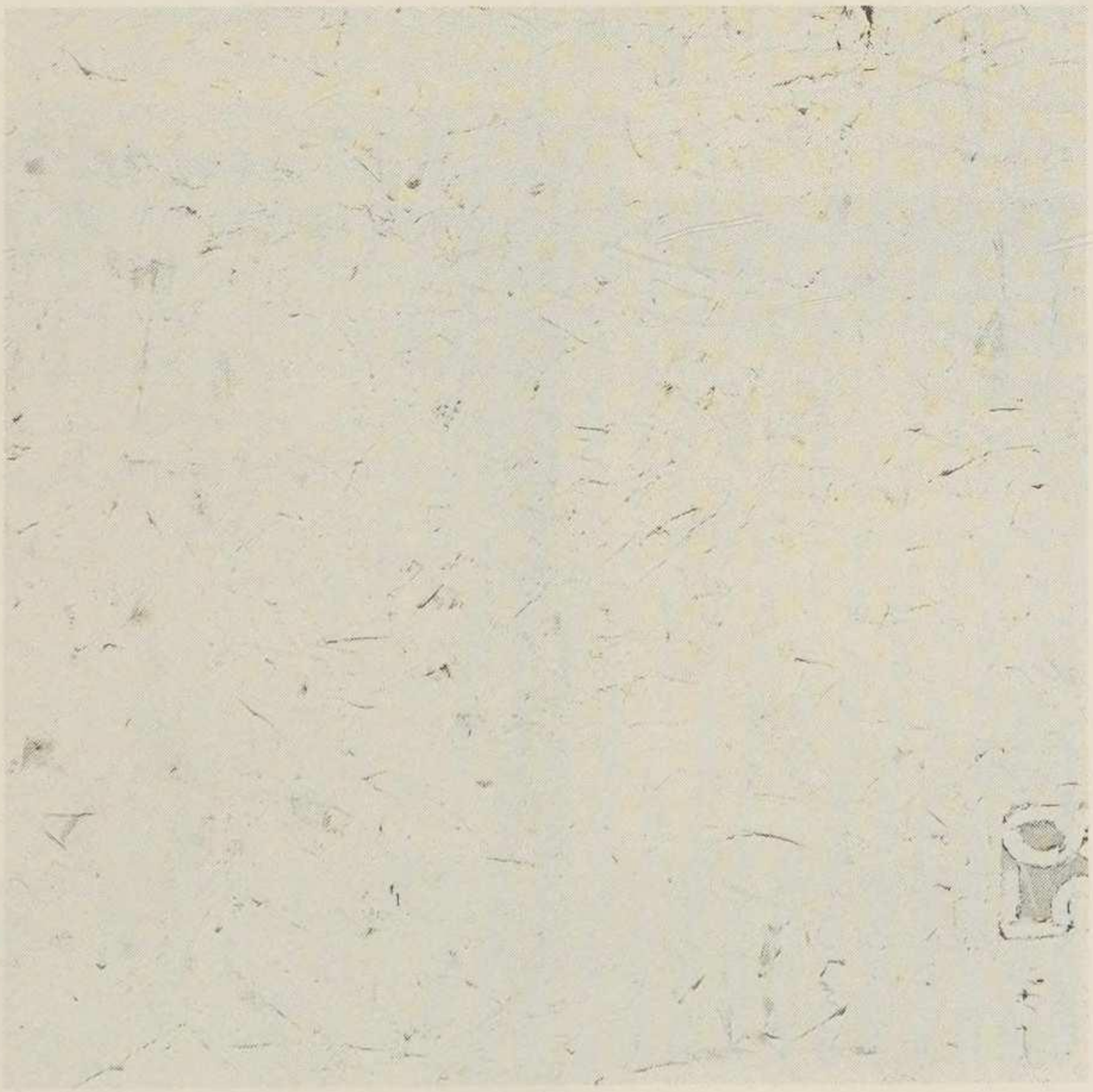
Marden began to identify a single color with a single stretcher around 1964-65. For a while he painted one-color paintings, like *Nebraska*, and then in 1967 made the *Back* series. These seven paintings, ranging in color from greyish to fleshy and all the same size (69" x 45") seem to have summed up, for him, the previous couple of years' experience with the relationship of color to a specific shape. It was now possible to extend the literalization of the object's — and therefore, the institution's — conventional terminology that he had begun, and Marden started to make first two- and then three-color paintings, PLATE 9. The application of a single, naturalistically ambiguous, color to one object became the basis of an attempt to make separate, but physically and experientially united — stretchers communicate the abstract taxonomy of landscape -- foreground, middleground, and background, although (as Godard said about the related topic of whether a narrative must have a beginning, a middle and an end) not necessarily in that order.

In the last eighteen months or so, Marden has developed new interests that follow from the information subsumed in the *Grove Group*. Perhaps one could say that the fleshy end of the naturalistic spectrum proposed by the *Back* series has re-emerged in his recent three-color vertical paintings, where the color's associations with landscape have been adjusted to something more directly reminiscent of the human figure, and where the stretcher has become narrower rather than wider than the space occupied by the viewer. Out of these he seems, at present, to be deriving what is for him an unprecedented interest in working with color in which hue is increasingly independent of value.

Throughout these developments, which represent the first ten years of his public career, Marden has addressed himself to the problem of working with a pictorial space that doesn't deny its function as a subdivision of real space. Marden's paintings manipulate the space one shares with them, rather than an abstract — conventionally

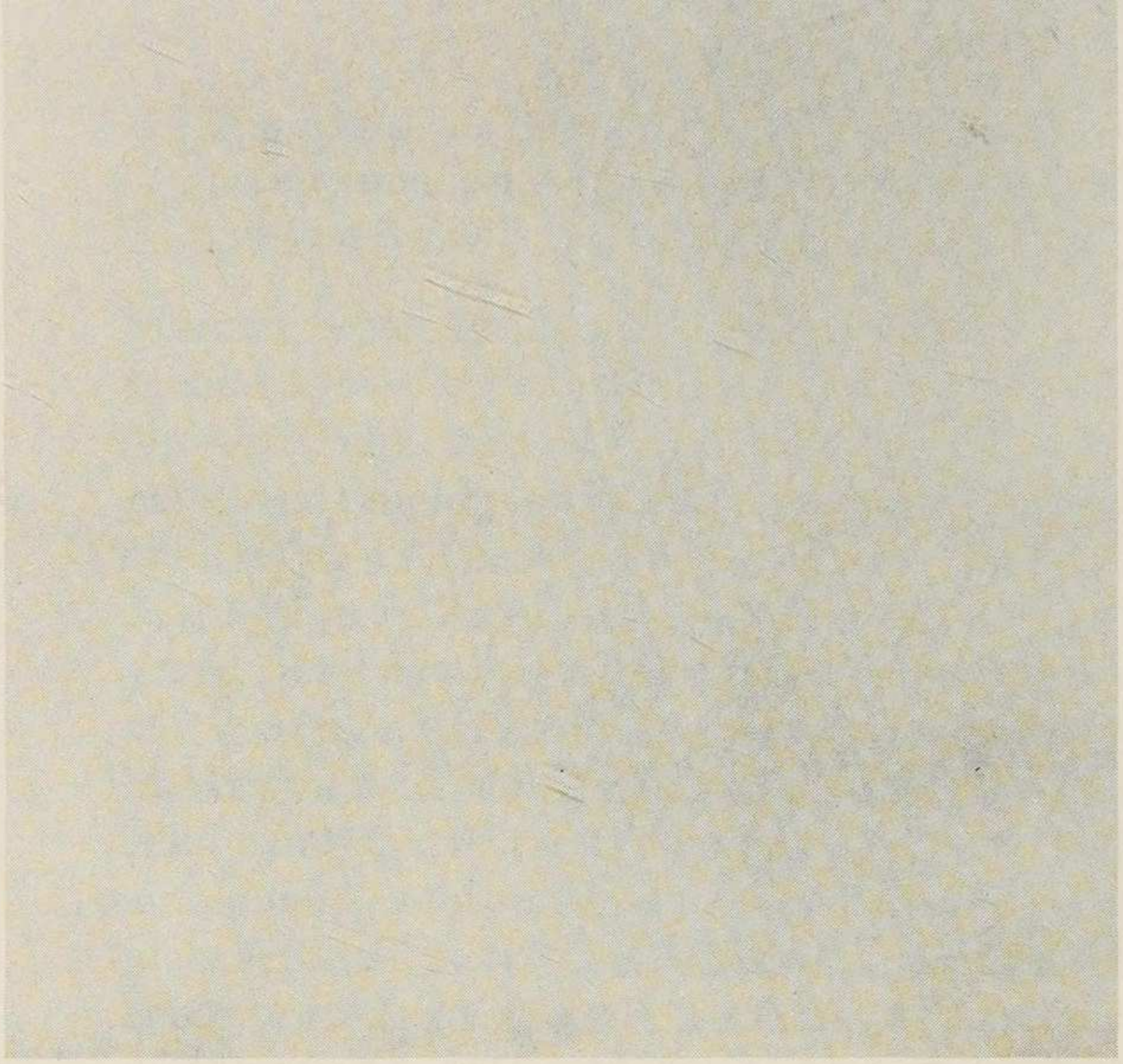
[7] Robert Morris: "Notes on Scuplture," *Art Forum*, April 1966.



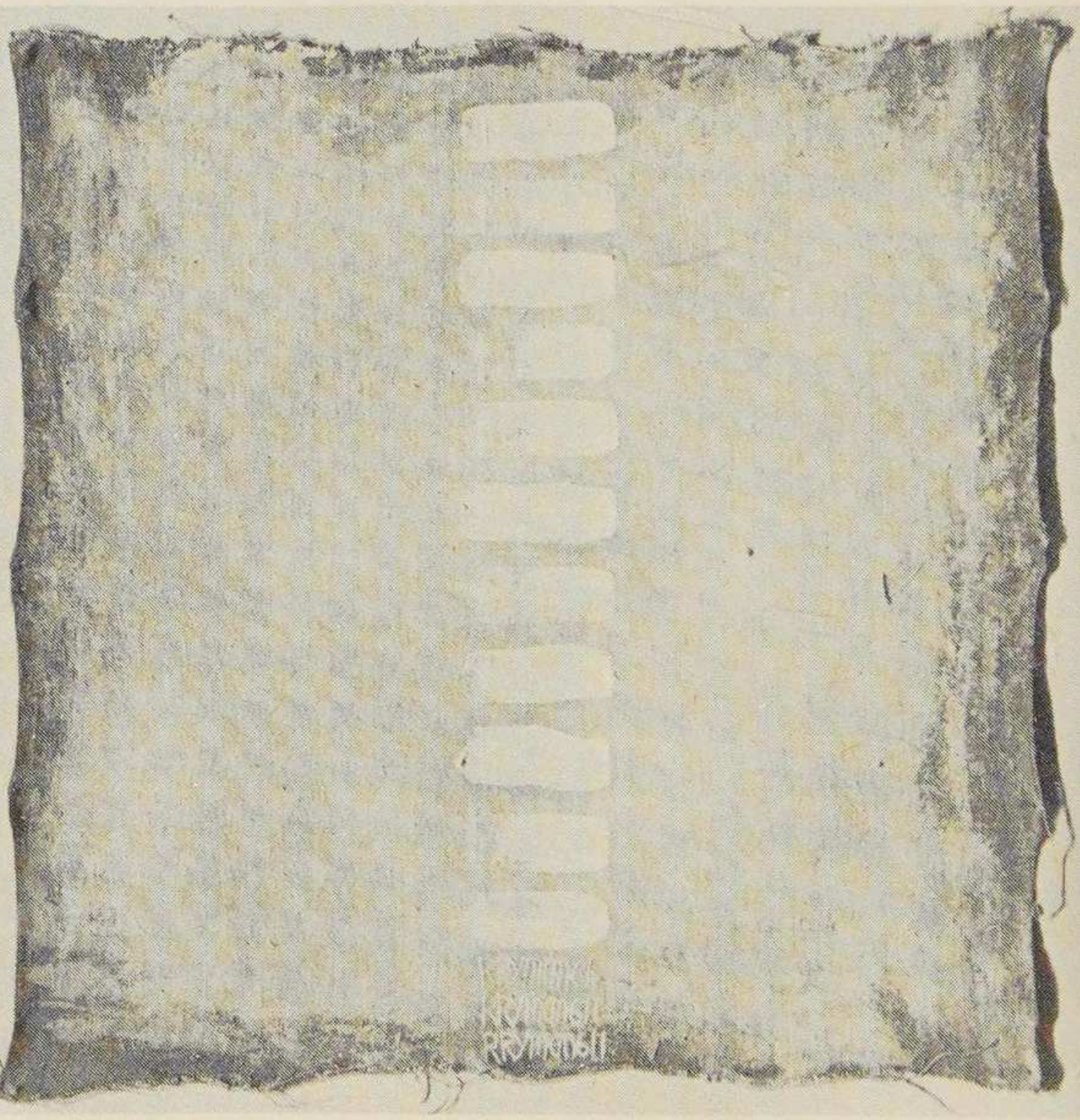


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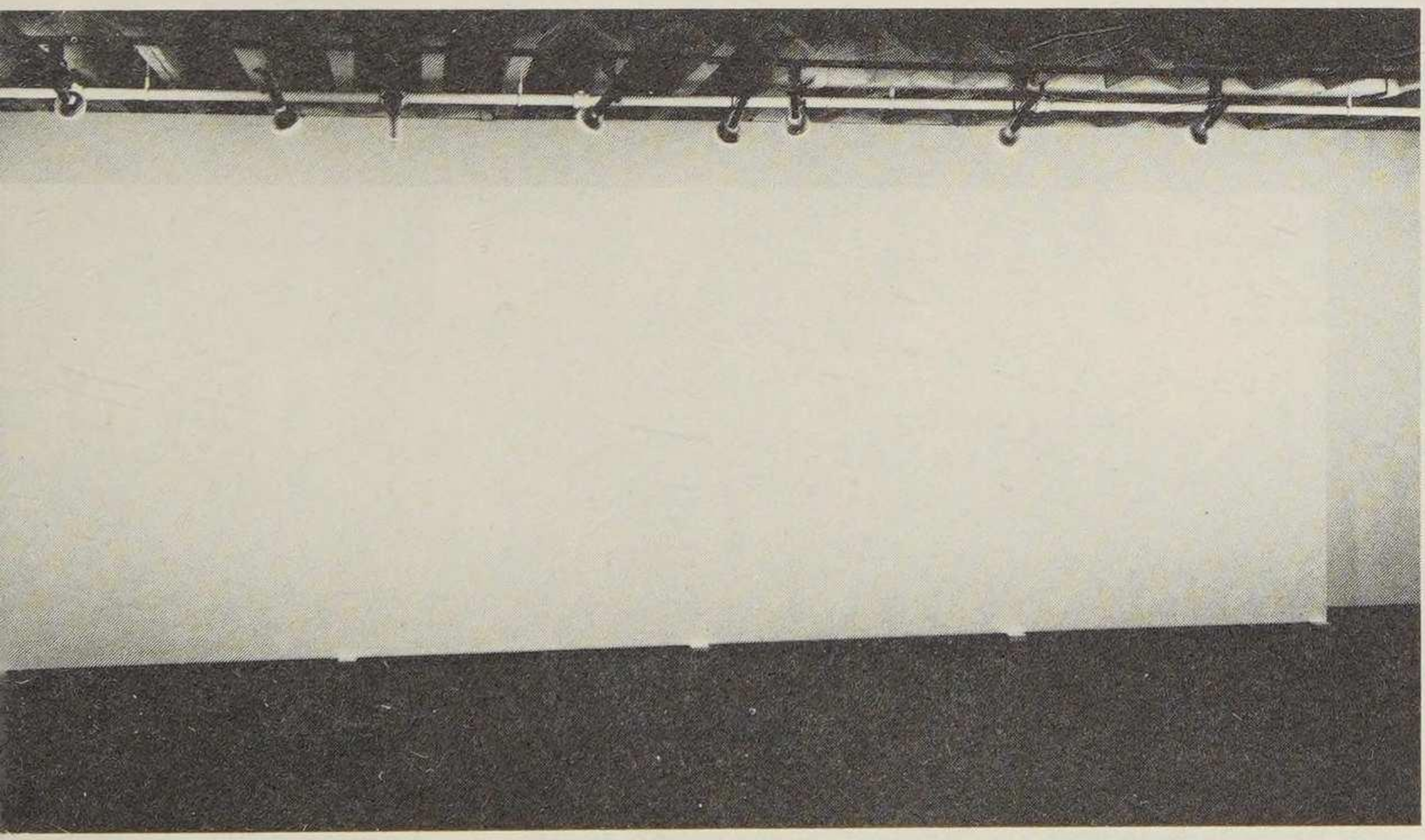
bert Ryman, *Untitled*, 1957. Gouache on paper, 7⅞"x8⅛".



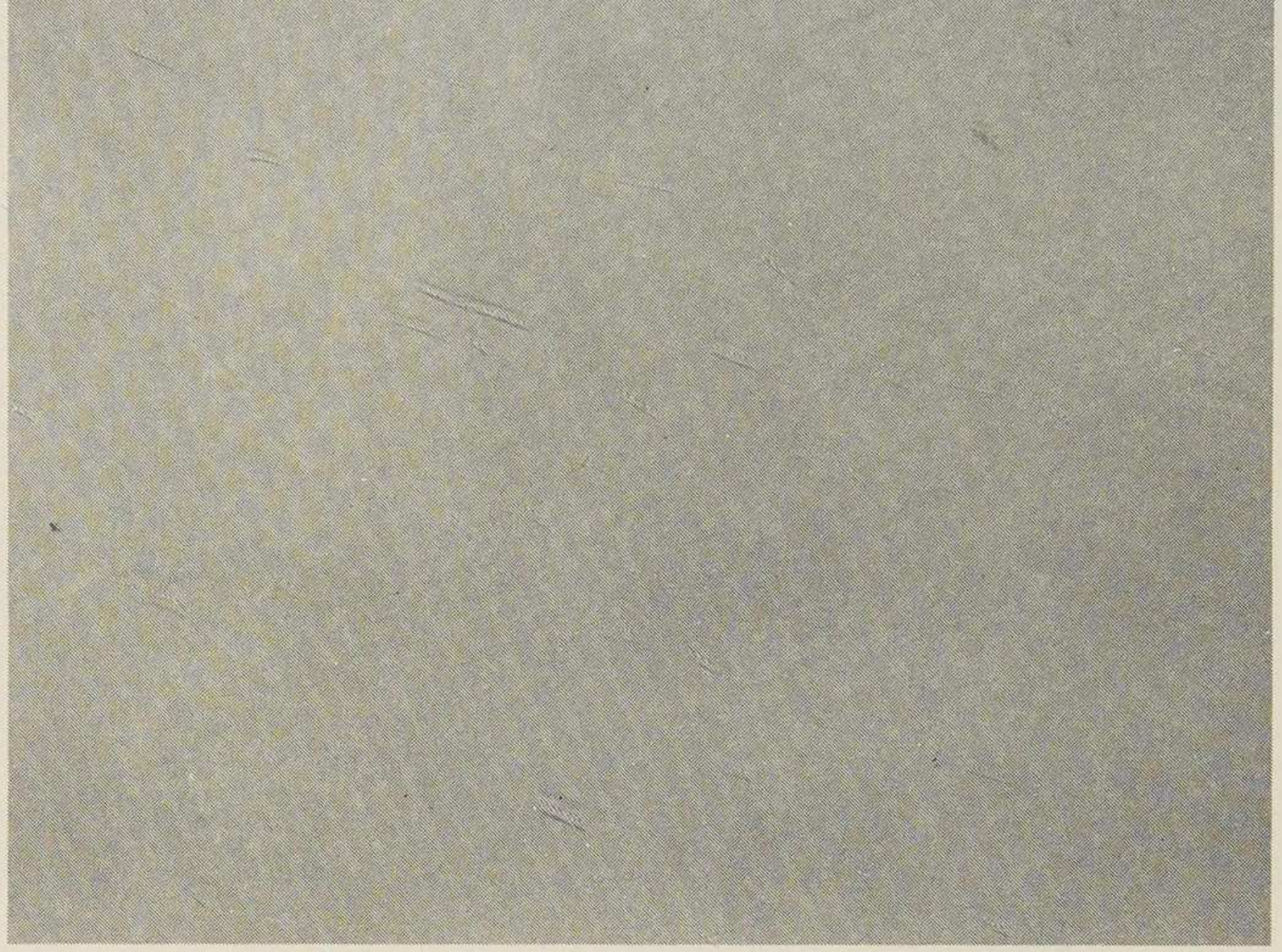
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ert Ryman, *Surface Veil #2*, 1971. Oil on cotton, 144"x144".

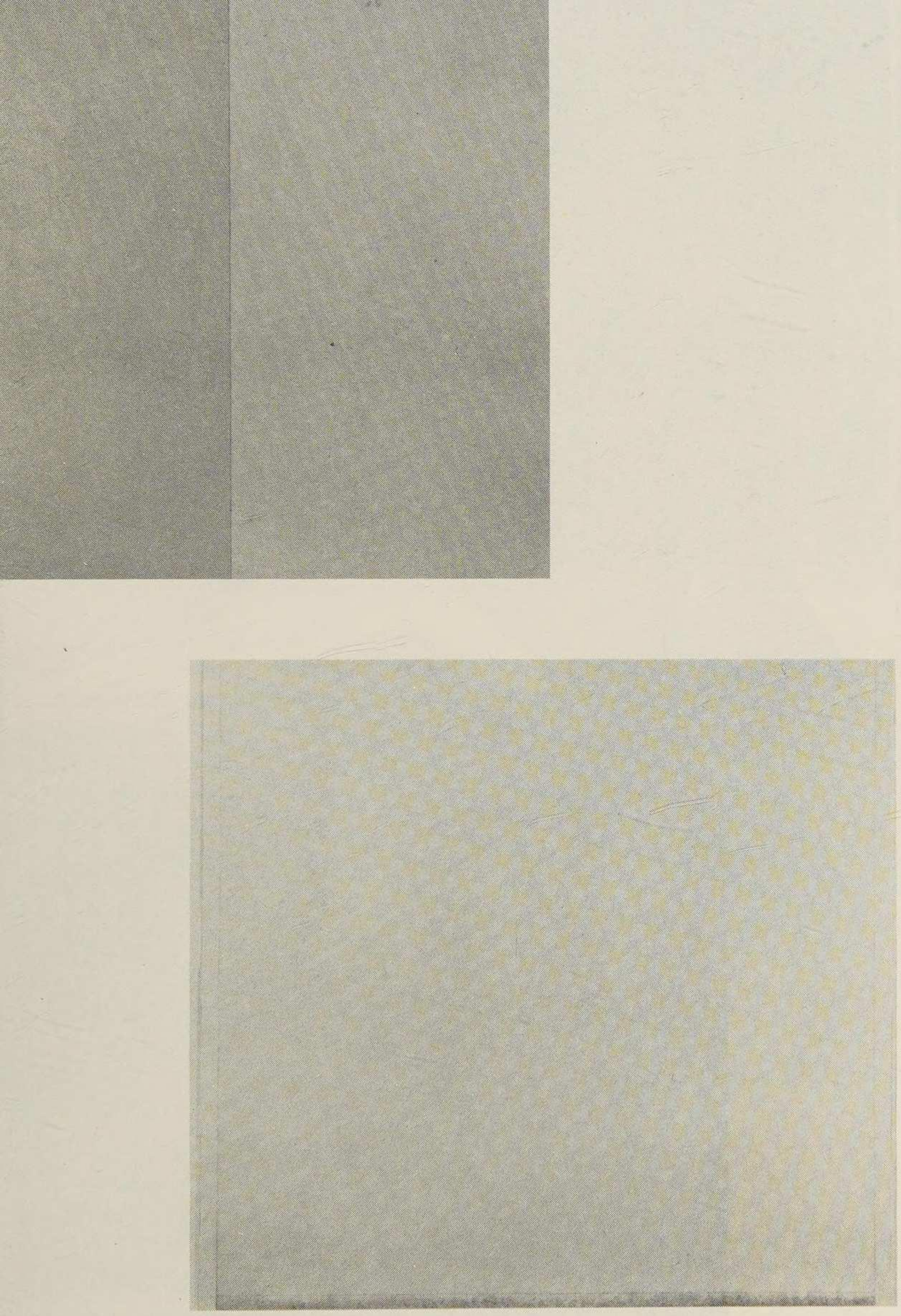


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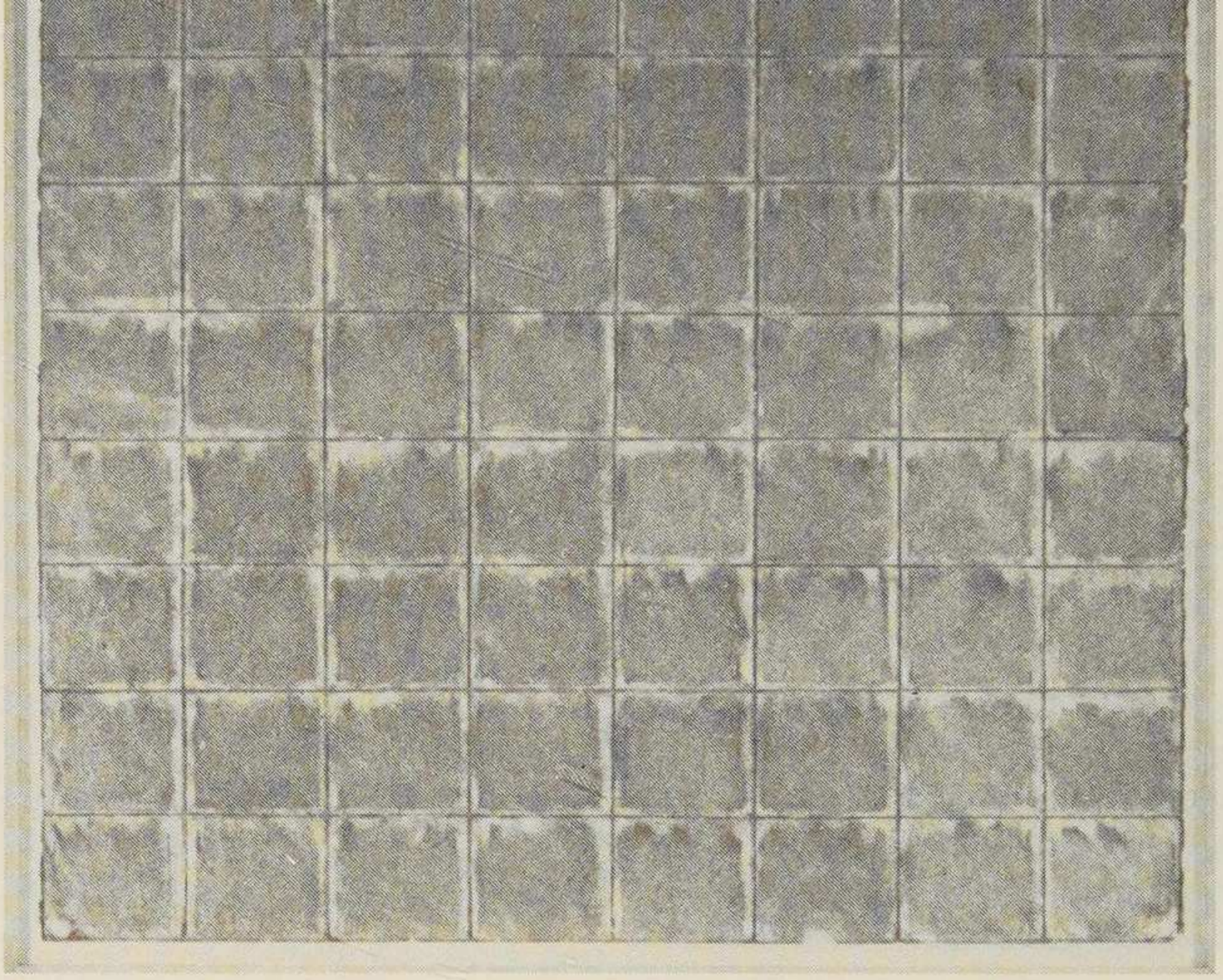


7. Brice Marden, *Nebraska*, 1966. Oil on canvas, 58"x72".



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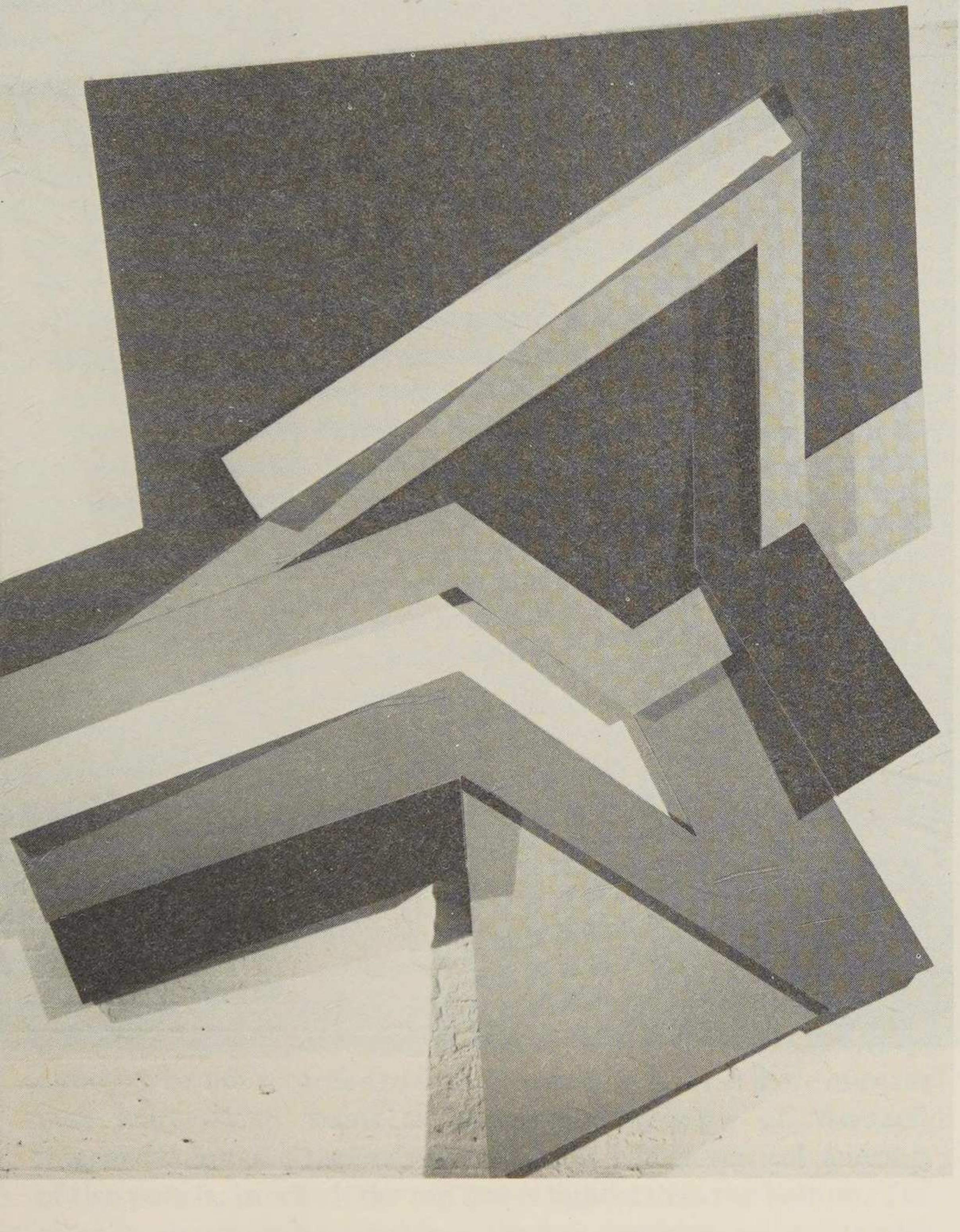
Marden, *Toward Brindisi*, 1972. Oil and wax on canvas, 72"x72".



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11. Brice Marden, *Untitled*, 1964-65. Charcoal and graphite on paper, 20"x22".



pictorial — spatial continuum that's perceived as discontinuous with one's own. This, as I've suggested, is what connects Marden's work to Johns', from which it seems distinguished by his use of color. Marden makes the painting's skin exist in a way which informs the support without becoming a property of it. Marden's attitude to the material construction of the surface, like his sense of color, is an indication of the depth of his feeling for Cézanne. And it's his interest in paint as a material that undermines an awareness of its own physicality — through the ambiguous spatiality of color — that, as it singles Marden out from the historical and theoretical milieu he otherwise inhabits, also allows him to bring together Cézanne and Johns. Through Marden's apparent tolerance of the self-contradictory — color as stuff and as space — one sees both Johns and Cézanne as makers of pictorial objects in which there is a special significance in presenting the surface as a product of explicitly methodical labor, for which the stretched canvas acts as a prior support, literally and abstractly.

As John Coplans has observed, the separateness of Cézanne's brushmarks — in the paintings and water colors he made in Provence, toward the end of his life — means that his work is accessible from any point on the surface of the painting. [8] Cézanne himself is said to have advised painters to look for the perspective of each object individually, and drew with a bluish-grey wash that contributes to the overall tone of the picture as well as modifying the contours and determining composition in response to local color. There is a painting of Marden's that belongs with the *Grove Group*, although he has returned to it and worked on it some more over the past year, which seems to me a good example of Marden's internalization of Cézanne's use of tonality. It's a vertical painting, of two panels, in which the top one is lighter than the bottom. The color is almost indescribable, a fleeting combination of greenish colors that — in each canvas — approach an optical grey. It is this common tendency towards tonality that is the product of color working against itself —against chromatic purity — that unites the upper and lower parts of the painting. It is, to me, quite like one of

[8] John Coplans, *Cézanne's Watercolors*, Pasadena County Art Museum, 1964.

Cézanne's more frontal studies of Mont St. Victoire, where the opposition between ground and sky is established by the horizon, which divides the canvas, and across which colors respond to one another as they do across the gap between the stretchers in Marden's piece. In Cézanne, the mountain rises above the horizon to schematically unite ground and sky — the measurable and the infinite — while in Marden the two panels are simply adjacent objects, painted together.

Marden substitutes the edge of the stretcher for local perspective, and the color of separate panels for local value and hue. That's how he manages to apply Cézanne's compositional procedure to the subdivision of real rather than abstract space. His achievement, in this regard, seems to follow from something fundamental about Cézanne's technique, which ensures that the growth of the abstraction within the pictorial space is paralleled by an equally dramatic change in the object that bears it — that every little dab of translucent pigment, every adjustment of drawing or color, is an addition to a surface that one reads as a crust on its way to completion. Cézanne made the surface's potential independence as a physically distinct part of the pictorial object coincide with a sense of its conceptual realization. His paintings depict a methodology in which an open-ended unity — the inseparability of surface and support during the work's production — is on the way to being replaced by a synthetic relationship between the skin and that which it is manifestly intended to replace as the work nears completion— the gessoed stretcher, which anticipates labor and prescribes the format in which it will occur. Once surface and support are experienced as mutually intact, as they are not in Cézanne, what began as an addition to the support has become its antithesis. Cézanne's resistance to finishing work is, in this, an acknowledgement that synthesis is itself by definition speculative and provisional. As with his use of color, and in a manner consistent with it, Marden's taken the dialectic implied in Cézanne's technique to be a characteristic of the pictorial object which can be utilised in the clarification of its physical morphology. Reminiscent of the encaustic that Johns uses, the mixture of oil and wax Marden paints with allows him to manipulate a surface that replaces its support

while remaining physically dependent on it, materially distinct but conceptually inseparable.

Another two-panel painting from the *Grove Group*, this one horizontal, suggests the kind of co-terminality between individual spaces that I associated earlier with Manet's *In the Conservatory*. But while the space of the individual and the space of landscape provide the parameters for Marden's use of naturalistic color, one must turn to his earlier work — in which this motivation is implicit rather than overt — to see how he has been able to harness that spatiality to the demands of deconstruction. *Nebraska* is an object with a skin that one has no difficulty reading as an accumulation of labor that has involved the methodical suppression of gesture. This is made clear by a narrow band along the painting's bottom edge, where splotches and drips gathered while the rest of the surface was being worked on. This band has continued to be a feature of all of Marden's paintings except for those in which the panels are joined together vertically, where it would distract from the interaction between colors. It gives to his paintings the look of a window with the blind drawn down most of the way, a blind shuts out deep space and turns the window into a useless object, and I'm tempted to say that it provides the paradigm for the defamiliarization of naturalistic space in which Marden is engaged.

Be that as it may, something like the band is to be found as the bottom of Johns' *Tango* (1955), which is quite possibly where its origins lie. But the band not only represents the Johnsian deconstruction of the individual within the syntax of the institution. It also depicts, through a deconstruction Johns made possible, the passage from underpainting to final skin that is frozen — presented in a state of unintended diogesis — in the unfinished paintings of Cézanne. As such, the band is at the center of Marden's synthetic equation of the picture's internal development (the traditional concern of technique) with the structure of the painting as a cultural object — the morphology of the thing considered as an extension of the physical world.

A drawing from the same year as *Nebraska*, *Untitled* (1966), PLATE 10, is revealing in its implication that Marden arrived at the unpainted band by thinking of it as a positive element in a reconstituted

pictorialism that manipulates an object in terms derived from an abstract taxonomy. In this drawing the band appears at the bottom of an otherwise empty sheet of white paper, which suggests that the surface as a whole should be seen as a space whose apparent depth is qualified by materiality as it is also controlled diagrammatically by the specification of the rectangle's bottom limit. *Untitled* (1966) presents the band as both a ground plane and as an assertion of physicality, which makes it possible for the pictorial space of drawing to act as a model for the articulation of the pictorial object as a thing in real space. *Nebraska* is a realization of that model, and it demonstrates the mutual exclusiveness of drawing and painting in Marden's methodology. The band, the only material presence in the drawing, occurs in the pictorial object only as an area in which the manipulation of materials does not take place. This is the first step on the way to what later becomes a wholesale identification of line with the space of the support.

The color of *Nebraska* is recessive, spatially ambiguous but not yet as active in this respect as it will become in Marden's later work. Its affinities to landscape coloration are apparent, but one's eye isn't pulled back into the space of the object with the intensity that it is in later paintings. At this stage, I think, Marden's concern to find a way in which color could work as a part of a pictorial object — rather than as a constituent of a surface conscious of its support only as an abstraction — hadn't reached a point where he could be as adventurous as he has been since. In *Nebraska*, one sees Marden restraining color in order to focus on a newly discovered objectness. The painting presents one with tensions that — because of their unfamiliarity, the traditional suppression of one by the other — Marden can not yet allow to be equal. Instead, their conventional relationship is seen to be reversed. At that time, Marden was as close to Johns as he has ever been in his attempt to reduce the spatial ambiguity of the naturalistic color he employs in the interest of physical specificity.

From the vantage point provided by *Nebraska*, one has little difficulty in analogising Johns' demystification of Abstract Expressionist gesturalism — the myth of privileged intuition — with Cézanne's wish to bring Impressionism under the constraints of

Classical order. So it is significant that, although I've connected Marden's sense of color with Cézanne and Manet, it may also be accounted for through his stated interest in the color of the Minimalist sculpture of Morris and Andre — the two artists whose extensions of Johns' institutional deconstruction have resulted in a clarification of sculptural morphology, through temporality on the one hand (Morris), and an unprecedented emphasis on materiality on the other (Andre), that Johns' work doesn't in itself anticipate. This, I think, lends credibility to my point that Marden has projected into the contemporary situation the conditions for a deconstruction that can reunite the present with its pre-Duchampian past. A work like *Dylan: Karina* (1969), a large two-panel painting of colors made out of similar ingredients — greyish-blue and bluish-grey — recalls Morris' presentation of the same object in two states, while Marden's use of color as something that exerts pressure on a real space also has direct affinities with Andre's creation of a "column of air" above the work achieved through concentration on the materiality of steel. [9]

Over the last eight years the surface of Marden's paintings has become a repository of labor capable of sustaining more and more decisions about color in each case, with the result that there have been more and more splotches and drips to fill the band. As the band has come to be less in evidence, the physical separation between surface and support that it schematically communicates has been increasingly identified with — or transferred to — an ever more materially insistent and spatially complex skin. Since *Nebraska*, Marden has elaborated the idea of physical interaction contained in the band in order to make the pictorial object provoke a disruption of one's perception of real space that is predicated on an increasingly ambiguous use of color which qualifies the physical explicitness of its support. The primacy of color has been maintained and

[9] I've discussed Morris' relation to Johns in the essay referred to above (f.3). I think it's also worth mentioning, in view of the connections made here, that Andre —unlike Marden — has been directly involved with Stella over the years. He lists, for example, two years study with Stella in his resume on gallery notes. In an interview of a few years ago, Andre said:

> "I don't think of [my sculpture] as being flat at all. I think, in a sense, that each piece supports a column of air that extends to the top of the atmosphere," (*Artforum*, June, 1970).

reasserted through attention to its physical context.

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> "A new theory of physics can be proved because calculations connect the idea or meaning of it with standards of measurement already common to all men. It is not enough for a painter like Cézanne, an artist, or a philosopher to create and express an idea; they must also awaken the experiences which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others. A successful work has the strange power to teach its own lesson. The reader or spectator who follows the clues of the book or painting, by setting up stepping stones and rebounding from side to side guided by the obscure clarity of a particular style, will end by discovering what the artist wanted to communicate. The painter can do no more than construct an image; he must wait for this image to come to life for other people. When it does, the work of art will have united these separate lives; it will no longer exist in only one of them like a stubborn dream or a persistent delirium, nor will it exist only in space as a colored piece of canvas. It will dwell undivided in several minds, with a claim on every possible mind like a perennial acquisition."
>
> — Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" [10]

Marden had been in New York for about three years by 1966, the date of *Nebraska* and his first one-man show. After a faintly eccentric education — Florida Southern, Boston University, and Yale graduate school — he had moved to the city where, in 1964, the opportunity to study Johns at length was presented to him in the form of a job as a guard at the Jewish Museum's retrospective exhibition of the latter's work. After that he went to Paris for a while, came back and, somewhere during that time, decided to eliminate the grid with which he had been working up until then. Or rather, to relocate it. A drawing from the period, *Untitled*(1964-65), PLATE 11, shows the grid being first displaced, in order to allow for the band, and then modified by a surface that's still contained by line but is spatially convergent with it. In this drawing Marden anticipated his

[10] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt" in *Sense and Non-Sense*, (Northwestern University Press, 1964), translated by H.L. & P.A. Dreyfus, pp. 19-20.

subsequent identification of the grid not — as is traditionally the case — as an abstraction that replaces one's awareness of the stretcher, but as a literal extension of it. Having identified the grid with the physiognomy of an object that exists in the world, Marden was free to make linearity into an exclusive property of the stretcher as the surface became more completely the province of color — the implication of the slightly later drawing just discussed (where white paper stands for the painted surface, and the drawn band for the absence of paint), is to create an inversion of the pictorial object's morphology which establishes drawing as that which color and surface cannot address. At this time Marden also developed the painting technique he has used since, of oil and wax applied with a brush and smoothed down with a knife while it is hot, and then — with increasing ease as the years have passed — scraped off and re-worked again and again. It is a matter of historical fact, then, that the elimination of the grid in Marden's work coincided with the adoption of a method of applying color which completely transformed the object by the addition of a surface that's independent of its support in terms of materials and procedure.

Thinking about Marden's relocation of the grid — and this is why I have not brought it up before now — leads to the question of his work's relationship to Frank Stella's, through which he seemed to have approached Johns' work in the period before the Jewish Museum show. Manet and Cézanne and the tradition to which their work refers had begun to engage Marden's attention while he was a student, as had the work of those American artists of the fifties who employed spatially expansive color — Kelly, Kline, Newman, Rothko. But it's to Stella that Marden's earliest work seems most directly addressed, and if one can say that *Untitled*, (1962-63), PLATE 12, a little drawing made around the time of his arrival in New York — is responsive to a painting like Stella's *Die Fahne Hoch* (1959), with which it shares a quadrivial division of surface, then one can also say that the relationship between the two artists has been one of shared concerns and antithetical solutions from the start.

Stella's indebtedness to Johns is common knowledge, as is his regard for Velasquez. In view of this it's fair to say that, in responding to Stella's work at the outset of his public career,

Marden responded to an attempt at synthesis similar to that which he was about to undertake himself. And, if one compares the directions the two have taken since, one sees that Marden's has been an attempt to make the surface a vehicle for optical recession that's perceived as being in tension with its support, while Stella's developed a literalization of pictorialism that's more directly continuous with Johns' in its eschewal of spatial ambiguity, and which treats surface and support as simultaneously accessible manifestations of one another. *Untitled* (1962-63) is a 14" x 18" sheet of paper divided into four rectangles. Two, diametrically opposed, are filled with compressed charcoal that Marden rubbed on with —by the looks of it — his fingers. *Die Fahne Hoch* employs a similarly quadrivial division but subdivides the rectangle through line rather than surface, to the extent that a linear schema embraces the morphology of the object — the bands of paint are as thick as the stretcher, a literalization made explicit by the painting's four notched corners.

Marden, too, has used deep (2½") stretchers from early on, and said some years ago that he thought of his paintings as shaped canvases, by which he meant that he'd always seen the rectangle as an internally complex *object*. But if Stella defamiliarizes the pictorial object through an insistent banality (the interposition of everyday materials between the viewer and the work, with associations from the world at large that affect one's experience of the piece as do those of the flag in Johns' paintings of it) Marden does the reverse. From the black paintings to *Lúnna Wolá III*, PLATE 13, Stella's defamiliarization of painting has employed everyday or utilitarian materials. In contrast, Marden's is an analysis of the institution that's predicated on a highly conservative, almost precious, regard for materials associated with painting alone. The color on the front of a painting like *Join* (1973) hovers within the object with an effect quite unlike the literal and iconographic presence of Stella's felt and masonite. *Join* pulls one into the space of the object without — as Stella's paintings do — contextualizing the institution through putting it in tension with every kind of surface except painting's. It may be that Marden assumes the achievement of that contextualization, as Stella's work began by assuming that the institution's demystification

through a preliminary level of content at its most vernacular — familiarly accessible — had already been achieved by Johns' *American Flag*. Marden is able to make the pictorial object maintain a different set of oppositions than it does for Stella because his work entered the debate on institutional morphology at a different stage, as Stella entered at a different point than Johns.

Accordingly, if one looks at Stella's *Lunná Wolá III* from the side instead of the front, one sees the alternation of hard and soft materials — the layering of wood and cardboard at the core of the object — as something that proceeds from the stretcher on out as it also characterizes the eye's passage across the surface. One's sense that Stella's engagement with linearity has led him to an analysis of the object that is concerned to make its skeleton the focus of attention, is confirmed in this, and it is this physical continuity between surface and support which provides the metaphorical basis for the interaction between the everyday and pictorialism's organizational — institutional — syntax which I'd describe as an important part of his work's content. *Lunná Wolá III* approaches the Art Deco look of old cinemas in order to concentrate one's attention on the material conditions through which a painting might transcend the cultural vernacular of which it is itself a subdivision and a sign while maintaining a connection with — all — other perceivable objects.

Marden's use of oil paint and bees' wax and canvas and wood precludes an evocation of the everyday such as Stella's, and is in comparison a retreat into the institution, to what looks like the epistemological security of another kind of customariness. In his paintings one is led back into the object, and also into confrontation with a newly achieved deconstruction of institutional syntax at the zero degree. One does look at the sides of Marden's paintings, and sees there the layering that records the work's development in a way that — as Stella suggests the systemic character of the surface at the object's core — reciprocates with the information contained in the band. But one really wants to look at the back.

Which is to say that a highly conservative regard for the institution's grammar leads to work that makes one think the conventionally unthinkable. If one turns one of Marden's paintings over, one sees

the consequences of his concentration on surface rather than line, and on color that's ambiguous rather than specific. In Marden's deconstruction of the pictorial object linearity does not bracket the whole endeavor but, instead, is made into the literal support for a skin which is both a manifestation of its skeleton and that which obscures and transforms it. *Join* is an unusual Marden in that its panels aren't all the same size, and it is this unequal distribution of colors that shift considerably in value and hue which determines the painting's effect on the viewer's space. But if one does look at the stretcher one sees something very like the shallow space present in Marden's drawings.

This is the sense in which Marden, as he's developed his ability with color, has maintained the independence of surface from support by making drawing's traditional role as the pictorial space's infra-structure analogous to the literal function of the stretcher in the pictorial object. While Stella uses line to penetrate the object, so that drawing and color — surface and support — may be simultaneously perceived, Marden implies that they must, finally, be mutually exclusive, and presents them as unable to share the same subjective space. Marden has made the grid a property of internal structure mediated by surface while Stella — who, drawing on graph paper, treats it as a readymade like felt and masonite — has used it as an agent of externalization. In a Marden painting, the stretcher is read as immanent in the surface but not accessible in its original state. Instead, the support is rediscovered through color that draws one into the shallow space behind the surface and invests the pictorial object with an ambiguity — or, as Marden might prefer to say, a "shiftingness" — that subverts its specificity as a thing. As he buries the support — the literally measurable —with color that is a property of a materially explicit surface, Marden moves toward something like the paradox noted earlier in the Godard still, the possibility that secrecy is an inevitable product of a determined quest for explicitness.

* * *

Geoffrey Hartman has noted that de Saussure talks about a kind of

poetry that's generated by a collection of sacred words.[11] Such words are secretly distributed throughout the developed grammar of that poetry, and because of that appear there as an anagrammatic motivation for the text. The secret content of a public communicability.
As Rosalind Krauss has remarked in reference to Stella, who began his career with cross-shaped paintings like *Die Fahne Hoch* and *Curay* (1960), there is a rather unavoidable — a paradox that in this case follows from a pun — anagram buried in the history of the pictorial object in this culture. [12] If painting began in Siena, with an altar piece that was hung on the wall instead of being positioned on the floor, then it was initiated by an equation of an object with a suspended — crucified — figure. One might add that, in the northern Renaissance, this equation soon became a way of making the portable canvas independent of architectural constraints.
This, I think, is the sense in which the history of painting as a social institution is also the history of the decline and transformation of Renaissance Idealism. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the portable canvas is made into a conceptual apparatus that can communicate independently of its situtation in a particular space. Physical discontinuity with architectual support, the difference between painting on canvas and working in fresco, led in its turn to a pictorial syntax — such as Rembrandt's — in which figures don't stand in one unified space but are rather presented each in her or his perspectival continuum. Painting seems to leave its architectural niche — to preclude the syntactical priority of any institution other than itself — at the same time as northern Europe, the locus of its technological refinement, sets out to oppose the established church. Subsequently it became identified with Romanticism's emphasis on the natural and diachronic, which it seems to have anticipated in its tacit denial of synchronic and Ideal relationship between the painting and its architectural context. Which brings us back to Hegel.

11. See Geoffrey Hartman, "Structuralism, the Anglo-American Adventure," in his *Beyond Formalism* (Yale: 1970).

12 Rosalind Krauss has anticipated my themes touched on here. Her discussion of the anagram in connection with Stella appears in "Sense and Sensibility," *Artforum*, (Nov. 1973), and there is a discussion of the same painter that juxtaposes him with Godard in her essay "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary," (*Artforum*, Nov. 1971).

In Stella, the anagram is restored to operational credibility — is demystified — through the agency of the banal, as Joyce restated Homer through Bloom and Daedalus. But beyond that, it is an anagram which suggests a zero degree of architectural mediation — the cross — between the figure and landscape, and that is, I think, why Hegel called painting a Romantic art.

And it is also the reason why I want to briefly compare Marden with Smithson, whose elimination of the architectural in the interests of a direct confrontation with landscape seems wholly Romantic, and, in its use of temporality skewered by the symbol for entropy, also reminds me of Cézanne's employment of classical composition to defamiliarize the natural. I have described Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1971) as a juxtaposition of signifier and signified. And it occurs to me that it is a juxtaposition that modifies de Saussure's original prescription — from which my use of the term derives — in a way that is absolutely dependent on the capacity to undermine ideal relationships that I have said to be an inherited characteristic of the pictorial object. Saussure — in talking about the relationship between words and the things they represent — says that the name for a thing must not be such that it resembles the shape of the thing it denotes. That the word "horse" is discursively useful because its shape and sound is unlike the presence of a real horse, and therefore evokes it only abstractly. The idea is distinguished from the reality it calls to mind by an explicit artificiality, which reduces the uncontrollable allusiveness possessed by things in the world and thereby makes them schematically manipulable. They become elements in discourse rather than things in themselves. [13]

But while it may be true that logical language aspires to the arbitrariness of mathematical signs, it seems to me that the language of poetry — Hegel's other Romantic art — does not, and that there is here an analogy with painting's use of physical suspension. Poetic language seems to waver between the arbitrary signification described by Saussure and its opposite, onomatopoeia. This is illustrated very clearly, I think, in the French poetry of the late nineteenth century. In the work of Mallarmé and Verlaine it is

[13] See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (N.Y.: 1959) translated by Wade Baskin.

apparent as a conscious ambition, and it is as such that its terminology is paralleled most closely in the last major work by Manet, Mallarmé's friend.

Mallarmé wrote poetry in which the demands of a strict metricality — located in syllabic distribution and the duration of lines —competes with a naturalistic descriptiveness that equates things with states of mind. His *Letter to Whistler* is such a poem.[14] Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bérgères* (1881) seems related to Mallarmé's methodology insofar as its pictorial structure is not completely transposed into an internal cohesiveness like that imposed by the Classical grid and monocular perspective. Compositionally the work is a square with a vertical strip (about half as wide as the square) added to its right side. The painting's artificiality, the means by which it obliges one to consciously decipher it — to treat the work as a thing that has information mapped onto it — is stressed by the disjunction between the perspective in which the barmaid stands and the point of view depicted in the vertical strip at the right — to her left — where there's the reflection of a man one understands to be as it were between oneself and her. Or — the interpretation I prefer — to be oneself. The man in the background of *In the Conservatory* has moved out of the work and become fused with the identity of the viewer who is at the same time hypothetically put in the position of the artist — the reflection is Manet's. The *Bar at the Folies-Bérgères* is a paradigmatic expression of the complication of perception by direct address — especially when seen in diachronic tension with the slightly earlier, less direct, *In the Conservatory* — and its theme is self-contradiction. In it, two perspectival systems schematically depict a single situtation, but, in opposition to the anti-illusionism that that schematization implies, one is not only encouraged to identify with the reflected figure, but the barmaid herself seems to

14 For example, the following lines:

"Tourbilion de mouseline ou
Fureur eparses en ecumes
Que souleve par son genou
Celle meme dont nous vecumes
. . . "

("A whirlwind of muslin or rage scattered in the foam, which she by whom we live raises with her knee . . . "). From *Mallarmé*, edited and translated by Anthony Hartley, (London, 1965), p.80.

be the same size as she would be if she were a real woman standing behind a real bar. The schematic — abstract — and the naturalistic — onomatopoeic — are made to converge. The signifier is closely identified with that which it signifies in terms that invite one to regard the space of the painting as an extension of the space in which one stands. That is the sense in which Manet's erosion of the abstract by the onomatopoeic seems to me similar to Smithson's juxtaposition of the symbol for entropy with the conditions for its own entropic deterioration. In *The Book, Spiritual Instrument,* Mallarmé wrote:

> "A proposition emanating from myself — if variously quoted to my praise or blame — I lay claim to it together with all those which will throng here — asserts in a succinct manner that everything in the world exists to end in a book."[15]

Smithson perhaps implied, in works like the *Spiral Jetty* and in essays like the "Monuments of Passaic," that the world exists to end in a sculpture. As makers of cultural signs, he and Marden appear to represent two sides of the same — entropically preoccupied, Romantic — coin. In one, the ideated or cultured — the spiral — is subject to constant erosion by nature, which it signifies. In the other, the onomatopoeic conversion of the natural — the colors of landscape — into the syntax of a recently demystified pictorialism, undermines the certainty of an otherwise specific object.

Smithson's concentration on the natural led to geological excavations and the pre-historic, while Marden's reliance on a technical (or technological) signification that's inherited and limited (a conventionalised epistemology) presents painting as an institution that's entirely historical, an instrument of, and circumscribed by, culture. To me, Marden's work lends point to Johns' reassertion of Duchamp through painting rather than sculpture. Marden's insistence on the viability of the pictorial object has clarified the historical argument behind post-Minimalism by default. In resisting the move toward "de-materialization" that followed Johns, Marden has provoked a renewed sense of continuity with the nineteenth-century modernism that made Duchamp's epistemological reform

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

possible, and which depended on the situational independence — within architecture or ordinary language — of the pictorial object and the poem.

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> "A newspaper remains the starting point; literature empties itself into it according to our desire.
> Now —
> Folding is, with regard to the large printed leaf, an almost religious sign: which is not as striking as its packing together, in thickness, offering, indeed, the soul's minute tomb."
>
> *The Book, Spiritual Instrument* [16]

Mallarmé got at the institutional basis of literature itself by talking about newspapers, the most banal of literary instruments. In the same passage he locates the basis of syntax in the relief from the blackness of ink provided by the whiteness of paper. In most respects widely divergent artists, Cézanne, Manet, Mallarmé and Verlaine seem united in the view that artistic communicability occurs through making the work converge with the world of things, that art's status as an object — even more than its apparent motivation in a particular psychology — determines whether and how it will be intelligible to us. If materialism is that which refuses to give absolute priority to either object or idea, preferring to find itself somewhere between the two — in the uncertain space occupied by people and historical events — then it is in the nineteenth century that one first comes upon a consciously materialist art. And also when the mystery story is invented. Duchamp's further reform of modernism involved a withdrawal of conventional motivation which identified the pure Idea with the space of institutions and customs, social and therefore linguistics. Irony creeps in everywhere. The woman behind the bar in Manet's painting is his girlfriend; the picture suggests a pun on the notion of co-terminality which anticipates Surrealism's equation of aesthetic with erotic experience. The banal, a urinal, an American flag, felt

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

and masonite, is persistently employed to connect the work with the world.

Irony and banality defamiliarize inherited ideas by subjecting them to the kind of critique one ordinarily extends to people and things. One is left with what's credible. A recent drawing of Marden's, from the *Homage to Art* series, has a reproduction of a Zurbaran crucifixion next to a rectangle that seems to suck out the color from the Spanish painting in order to re-state it as a slab of suspended, spatially ambiguious, material. Another pairs *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* with a black square. An abstract continuum has become a physical thing, materially accountable perhaps, but still recessive, intensive, mysterious. One might say that the epigram, the instrument of an aestheticism founded in scepticism rather than belief, has collapsed the anagrammatic.

Marden's work reminds one of Brecht's desire to engage the audience in argument. Instead of identifying with the characters as if they were real people, Brecht wanted the spectator to view the protagonists as representatives of positions in a debate. One is not meant to forget that one is looking at a play. But, in its attempt to re-open to credibility the institutions in which it occurs, deconstruction leads to an art obligatorily ambivalent toward its own suggestion that, lodged in a common culture, all institutions are metacriticisms of all others. Art — a victim of its own sophistication — increasingly makes us aware of the destructiveness of the analytic, that the search for credibility is inclined to dismember that which it seeks to preserve. Baudelaire tells Manet, by way of compliment, that he will not be the first in the decline of his art. The epistemological demystification of the institutions yields R. Mutt. A sculptural enterprise concerned with a synchronic disinterral of pre-history finds a format in entropy, the final expression of simultaneity as a diachronically accomplished exhaustion. A concern with restoring to pictorialism that capacity for ambiguity which distinguishes open-ended speculation from tautology leads to the title Marden gave to his published sketchbook for 1973, *Suicide Notes*. Recalling Balfour's remark about Churchill, that: "Winston's written an enormous book about himself and called it *The World Crisis*," one might observe that *Suicide Notes* would be an apt title

for any analysis of a culture that preceeded through one of its own institutions. Another advertisement for a Marden show featured Maillol's monument to Cézanne.

The argument that Marden's work presents is intentionally open-ended and consciously self-contradictory. Awkwardness is built into a matrix otherwise closed off by its own elegance: Marden's sense of proportion provides a support that blurs the work's relationship to human scale, in the same way that the band — like the whiteness in Mallarmé's book — provides relief from the absolute suppression of accident and idiosyncracy elsewhere on the surface. Robert Pincus-Witten is right to suggest that Marden's continuing commitment to the pictorial object is symptomatic of a sensibility reluctant to place ultimate faith in that which is merely known.

One drawing in particular from *Suicide Notes* interests me here. Like the dullness of surface he insists upon, the oddness of Marden's sense of proportion blurs the specificity of the object. This as it were prepares the object for its fragile reaffirmation through color. As with Manet, co-terminality with one of Marden's paintings is both an explication of the works relationship to the world and an invitation to imagine a greater uncertainty in the connections between things. I've said that Marden's paintings look a little like windows, and one of the drawings in *Suicide Notes* is titled *Window for Jean-Luc Godard and Anna Karina*, but the one I want to talk about looks more like an elongated door. And this shift from one simile to another parallels Marden's interest, in the work he has made since the *Grove Group*, in moving from the space of landscape to the space of the figure.

Actually, the drawing looks a bit like a door standing ajar (because of the gap on the right) — and also — (because the rectangle is opened at the bottom) a bit like a standing figure. A fusion of a figure with a space in a wall that is consistent with his juxtaposition of signifier and signified. The drawing illuminates the thinking behind a recent painting like *Standing Figure*, and it's the cross-hatching in the middle that initiates a feeling of anthropomorphism because it establishes the densest part of the rectangle as the place where the figure's torso would be.

This correlates with one's sense of the cross-hatching as a model for the subsequent accumulation of a colored surface, because in the drawing one sees that it is this explicitly manufactured void — a space impenetrable but of apparent depth — which disengages that part of the drawing from the ground plane suggested by the openness at the bottom of the page. For Marden, direct confrontation with the viewer seems to mean that the work must be responsive to the ground plane it shares with its spectator, as is the woman in the *Bar at the Folies-Bérgères*. Stella's oblique presentation of the picture's core in *Lunna Wola III* goes hand in hand with a fragmentation of surface that's very like the exaggeration of planes that occurs if one looks up at a standing or suspended figure. In this sense, he juxtaposes the anagram with contemporary banality in a way that assures the priority of a conventionalized spiritual elevation. Marden buries the support — as Smithson removed all trace of the mechanical equipment he used — in order to bring about a direct, rather than an oblique, confrontation with the deconstructed anagram. *Standing Figure* has the regularity of a figure viewed from straight on rather than below, it occupies a person's space through a modulated verticality not unlike our experience of one another. Color reconstitutes the notion of suspension in this piece, as in all his work, and provides a weightlessness that appears to exert pressure on the wall, into the object. In paintings like this, objects that correspond to human size, Marden has made landscape color affect the space around the object because of its manifest effect on the space within it. This, to me, recalls the continuity between psychology and physiognomy, between the voice and face which hides and reveals an interior space, that one attributes to ordinary perception.

With these paintings, the series of reconciliations established in the first work he exhibited, and in a way fully realized in the *Grove Group*, have begun to generate new interests; the metaphysics of pure color have begun to emerge out of a decade-long involvement with the institution's physical morphology. If the color at the middle of *Standing Figure* suggests the solidity of a torso and the beautifully indeterminate greenish-grey in the bottom panel the blurred and provisional connection that legs have with the ground

when one's looking at somebody's face, then the top stretcher, as it comes closest to pure color, suggests the clarity of the intellect and of ideation. An intellect aware of its connections with the world. Marden has recently started to make paintings which use colors like pure red and yellow, PLATE 14, which will inevitably cause comparison with Barnett Newman's articulation of the Romantic notion of the sublime. Newman towers over American painting and sculpture, and it is appropriate that Marden should invite comparison with him. But I shall say little about this here because, at the time of writing, none of these paintings is complete. Only that he is, like the sculptors who are his contemporaries, already related to Newman through the physically achieved verticality of his work, and that this way of working — an identification of the pure idea with physical methodology that I've described as a reconciliation of Johns with Cézanne — has always been directed to a deconstruction of the sublime. Marden differs from Newman in his insistence that metaphysics be immanent in the physical. In his case the sublime is to be found not within monumental scale but in the endlessly discoverable parameters of human size, the ultimately impenetrable space of the well-known.

Marden's is an articulation of institutional morphology that begins and ends with color's inherent independence of gravity. He defamiliarizes that weightlessness by making it push onto a physical thing, an object which is syntactically informed by cinematic addition rather than architectural subdivision. Surface and support are as separate as the object and the wall on which it hangs. As pressure is exerted in the former our assumptions about the space in which we stand are disturbed and dislocated, and thereby re-ordered. Marden has been compared to Ellsworth Kelly, who has also used more than one stretcher. But that is for the most part a misleading analogy; Kelly is concerned with an idea of composition whereby balance refers to subdivision in an object where surface is identified with support as fresco is welded to a wall. In Kelly, the space of color is entirely conceptual and abstract. In Marden, it denotes things, and also brings them together.

Color unites his paintings as, in film, editing brings together ontologically distinct shots. It is never specific but always precise.

The dislocation it engenders is far reaching, causing a new effort on our part, a reorientation to a space that effects our own because it's continuous with it. Like the thickness of Mallarmé's book the space of a Marden is a physical volume that one recognizes as that which conceals and is therefore able to reveal anew. One remembers that Zurbaran lived in a country economically enmeshed with northern Europe and ideologically centered on Rome, an opposition that embraces the institutional history of painting up to that time. As if to invite comparison with that contemporary novel which discovers America in its — primarily nineteenth-century — European past, the *Grove Group* series was painted in Greece, where the Ideal clarity of the Adriatic is a naturalistic fact of life.

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> "You have good stretchers, good paint, good canvas and everthing's just great."
>
> — Brice Marden, (in conversation, 1974.)

Brecht made his remark about appearing to be only interested in formal questions in the course of a lengthy reply to George Lukacs, a Communist intellectual who had railed against the avant-garde's propensity for innovation. Lukacs is to be remembered for his rejection of Joyce, in favor of the psychological development of fictional characters that was — for him — the central achievement of nineteenth-century "realism." A little later, the American essayist Warshow denounced Eisenstein for his films' lack of concern for individuals, and did so in terms that shed light on Lukacs' popularity in the western world. More recently still, Stella was admonished for his works' "anti-humanism", in the course of a plea for "limited intentionalism" in art criticism. And at present one can still find academics and buffs earnestly engaged in rediscovering Godard's early films in order to beat him over the head with them for subsequently abandoning the cinema of heroes.

In short, throughout our century there's been a consistent demand that advanced thinking bear the stamp of liberal orthodoxy. It is a position indicative of a reluctance to accept art — or anything else — on its own terms, of an insistence that there be a necessary

discontinuity between the physical and the metaphysical, which is expressed in the subjection of all phenomena to an *a priori* morality. If one insists that all important decisions have already been made, it's easier and more satisfying to anticipate than to describe. And for this reason it is in practice the anti-formalists who regularly treat art as an affair of the "merely formal." Theirs is an attempt, tinged with pathos, to contain art by making of it no more than a mechanism through which received wisdom may be ritually confirmed. Art itself communicates a different lesson, that significance is the product of brilliant synthetic minds, not of good thoughts. In its concern to depict the ambiguity of things in the world, *serious* ambition prefers the compromised and provisional measurability of facts to the illusionary certainty of belief, the uncertainty of the material rather than the security of myth. Brice Marden's is such an ambition.

GRAVITY'S RAINBOW AND THE SPIRAL JETTY

The result of a protracted collaboration between John Johnston and myself, this essay is dedicated to those students at Princeton with whom we had the pleasure of conducting a seminar on the subject in the Spring of 1975 — JG-R

" . . . He had no real grasp of the opposites, 'The act of injuring and the act of being injured are joined in the behavior of the whole injury.' Speaker and spoken-of, master and slave, virgin and seducer, each pair most conveniently coupled and inseparable — the last refuge of the incorrigibly lazy, Mexico, is just this sort of ying-yang rubbish. One avoids all manner of unpleasant lab work that way, but what has one *said*?"

"I don't want to get into a religious argument with you," absence of sleep has made Mexico more cranky today than usual, "but I wonder if you people aren't a bit too — well, strong, on the virtues of analysis. I mean, once you've taken it all apart, fine, I'll be the first to applaud your industry. But other than a lot of bits and pieces lying about, what have *you* said?"

It isn't the sort of argument Pointsman relishes either. But he glances sharply at this young anarchist in his red scarf. "Pavlov believed that the ideal, the end we all struggle toward in science, is the true mechanical explanation. He was realistic enough not to expect it in his lifetime. Or in several lifetimes more. But his faith ultimately lay in a pure physiological basis for the life of the psyche. No effect without cause, and a clear chain of linkages."

"It's not my forte, of course," Mexico honestly wishing not to offend the man, but really, "but there's a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go. That for science to carry on at all, it must look for a less narrow, a less . . . sterile set of assumptions. The next great breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle."

"No — not 'strike off'. Regress. You're thirty years old, man. There are no 'other angles'. There is only forward — *into it* — or backward."

Mexico watches the wind tugging at the skirts of Pointsman's coat. A gull goes screaming away sidewise along the frozen berm. The chalk cliffs rear up above, cold and serene as death. Early barbarians of Europe who ventured close enough to this coast saw these white barriers through the mist, and knew then where their dead had been taken to.

Gravity's Rainbow [1]

The objects dicussed here, a novel and a piece of sculpture of landscape architecture, are made in such a way that those who wish to experience them are encouraged to compare the historical and the archaic. Joyce and Mallarmé effected such a comparison by striking, in their careful choice of words, reverberations which make the experience of reading them an occasion for the consideration of that past which, in being pre-historical, is conventionally perceived as the provider of *a*historical themes. For this reason one turns towards these writers for theory and practice which may, through a manipulation that attempts to be literal, i.e. uninterpretative, in its bias, illuminate *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty*, PLATES 15 and 16.

This is to say that *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* are modernist works whose complexity derives from a straightforward manipulation of technique, and it is this that this essay seeks to explore. Both Smithson and Pynchon seem to locate their efforts in the space bounded, in the above passage, by the phrases "taken it all apart" and "taken to"; between empiricism's destructive knowledge and an awareness of proclivities that cannot be fully known —it would be better to say fully felt — but which nonetheless remain a pervasive feature of the landscape, physical facts like any others but sedimented, etymologically and archaeologically, within the geologies of words and things.

Saussure's notion of an anagrammatic basis for language — the subject of a monograph by the Swiss scholar Jean Starobinski[2] —

1 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, New York, Viking, 1973, pp. 88-9.
2 Jean Starobinski, *Les Mots sous les mots*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971.

which led the nineteenth-century linguist to say that he tended to suspect that any given sentence contained all the anagrams in the world, is relevant here, as also, is Mallarmé's theme of whiteness — an emptiness which structures meaning — and his suggestion that art breaks through the bubble of the present by articulating the terms the latter provides. That going "forward — *into it*" is inseparable from going "backward":

> I prefer, faced with aggression, to respond that some of my contemporaries don't know how to read —
> Except a newspaper; that, to be sure, has the advantage of not threatening to interrupt the chorus of their preoccupations —
> To read —
> This practise —
> Which affords to the page the ability to support its own ingenuousness against the whiteness which inaugurates it, even to overlook the heading that speaks too loudly: and, as chance is ordered, word by word, through scattered and minimal breaks, whiteness enters, indefatigably, previously gratuitous but now specific, establishing that there is nothing beyond as it confirms that silence with itself —
> Emptiness, which, confronted with an attentiveness adequate by virtue of its transparence, bisects itself as it were into two kinds of candor, each of them nascent proofs of the Idea —
> Beneath the text a tune or song directs the reading from here to there by way of a motif borne on invisible devices and appendages.

This passage brings Mallarmé's *Quant au Livre* (1895), to which we shall refer several times in the pages that follow, to a close. After taking note of the customary charge of unreadability, it proceeds to briskly summarize the intrinsic assumptions and situational circumstance of every ambitious work of art that's come since. A literary critic, Scott Simmons, has already noted the striking similarity, in both substance and syntax, of the Pulitzer Prize committee's comments on *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973 and those of the critic employed by the London *Times* on the first edition of *Ulysses*: the syntax was utterly dull and may be left aside; the substance was that both books are unnecessarily obscene and gratuitously hard to read, a direct confirmation of Mallarmé's

suspicion. [3] That combination of greed and impatience which Baudelaire warned against as an avidity always active in public taste has continuously been met with manipulations of the commonplace that it can't stand. Ordinary language defamiliarized, simple acts which displace. Considered as a tactic of this sort — a perverse displacement intended to mystify —Smithson's choice of the Great Salt Lake as a site for the *Spiral Jetty* would seem exemplary; and indeed he was critically taken to task for the work's physical inaccessibility. But to think of it in that way would be as misleading as thinking of *Gravity's Rainbow* — as some have — as a novel which surrenders to a Puritan view of apocalypse. The *Spiral Jetty's* location, like Mallarmé's choice of words, is internally generated, making of sculpture an intersection with a specific bit of landscape and its contents, which include a Red Indian legend that places a whirlpool at the bottom of the body of water in which Smithson's work is located. It is the kind of internal generation which makes it an apt subject for comparison with Pynchon's novel, as we shall see. Also like Mallarmé, both works have a structure which is based on a consistent digression, a digressiveness which always leads one to a reconsideration of one's starting point — an obligation to reread responsible for the imputation of unreadability — and which does not preclude the machinations of chance. Smithson's spiral offers a platform every part of which echoes the curve that runs throughout but is identical with no other part, like the perspectival shift from object to object characteristic of Cézanne's grid. The flexibility of Cézanne's grid, its capacity for digressiveness, comes from an attentiveness to the example provided by the earlier painter Poussin not unlike Mallarmé's preference for the Alexandrine, a poetic structure understood as one which was decadent at birth, and insofar as Cézanne's and Mallarmé's choices seem in this sense directly analogous, they ought probably to be thought of in the light of Saussure's description of classical poetry as an art of combination, an ensemble designed to conserve and transform. In *Gravity's Rainbow* digression becomes the whole through an approach to

[3] Scott Simmons, "Gravity's Rainbow Described," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, XVI, No.2 (1974).

writing which, again as in Cézanne, unifies all data by insisting on a model which substitutes redistribution for climax.

It is the entropy model that provides the terms for this substitution, since, in both artists' work, entropy — the tendency of closed systems to move toward energy loss and disorder — is constantly evoked in order that it may in its turn be reversed or frustrated, through opening up the 'system' to a larger, more encompassing, system or set of systems. In Pynchon's first story, "Lowlands" (1959), a group of characters spiral through a landscape — a garbage dump — at the center of which another, more vital, world is literally unearthed.

Another closed system is the world of the paranoid, a system predicated on the belief that each signifier has only one possible signified, so that what Jacques Lacan would call the barrier of signification is a prohibition of alternative signifieds that might, if acknowledged, act against the entropy initiated by the one-to-one relationship. The physics model itself, developed during the latter part of the last century in a language supposedly purged of ambiguity, immediately began to admit more than one possible signified. The equation that describes entropy as a closed system, discovered simultaneously but independently in Germany and America by, respectively, Ludwig Boltzmann and Willard Gibbs, was subsequently found also to be the exact equation in information theory for the amount of information made available (contained) by that same system. By applying statistical analysis to physics Boltzmann and Gibbs spelled the end of Newtonian ideas of order through the elaboration of notions which concern the extent to which answers that one may give to questions about one set of systems become probable among a larger set of systems.

Given the corollation between the entropy model and the determination of quantities of informational content in a specific system, it is perhaps odd that a critic like Simmons should want to say that *Gravity's Rainbow* isn't about entropy because it's about Freud. [4] *Gravity's Rainbow* is indeed about Freud, and manages to internalize the Freud of *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930)

[4] Simmons.

precisely because of its use of the idea of entropy to neutralize death's pathos. To propose, in other words, a paradigm that Freud himself seemed to feel might be necessary but which he said psychoanalysis had, as it were instinctively, shunned:

> The assumption of the existence of an instinct of death or destruction has met with resistance even in analytic circles; I am aware that there is a frequent inclination rather to ascribe whatever is dangerous and hostile in love to an original bipolarity in its own nature . . . I know that in sadism and masochism we have always seen before us manifestations of the destructive instinct (directed outwards and inwards) strongly alloyed with eroticism; but I can no longer understand how we can have overlooked the ubiquity of non-erotic aggressivity and destructiveness and can have failed to give it its due place in our interpretation of life. [5]

The entropy model occurs most emphatically in the work of both artists as an acknowledgement of an irreversibility which, like the life of a language, produces history as much as it is a product of it. Saussure's proposition that the signifier *pre*cedes its signified — proposing a relationship which, if not the reverse of cause-and-effect, is quite unlike it — is in this sense a search for *invariants*. This search for properties which remain constant under changing conditions in turn links his speculation to Freud's and both to the exactly scientific project of Boltzmann and Gibbs, of which the author of *Civilization and its Discontents* need not be presumed to have been unaware: "In the last century the search for linguistic invariants began in parallel with the growth of the application of invariance in the exact sciences. Historians of mathematics aver that the whole importance of the concept of invariance was grasped only when it was supported by the theory of general relativity. This observation is equally applicable to the history of linguistics. It is verily symptomatic that the same year, 1916, marked the appearance of both Einstein's *Foundations of the General Theory of Relativity* and Saussure's *Cours* with its insistence (indeed revolutionary in its consequences) on the purely relative character of the linguistic

[5] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, New York, Norton, 1960, p. 66ff.

components . . .”[6]

Decay is constructed into the *Spiral Jetty* as a condition of the premise that the signifier's preceding the signified is dependent on the notion of invariance. In the Jetty's construction the landscape is redistributed but no new material is added. Then the conversion of the landscape into art was an entirely historical process which barely interrupted nature, whose inexorability is thereby confirmed by the work. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the signifier is made to precede signification at a number of levels, most obviously in the Pavlovian conditioning of Slothrop, the novel's American hero, who as a child has been, or is said to have been, conditioned to have an erection immediately before he hears a loud bang.

The entropy model, a reliance on digression, and the idea of the signifier preceding the signified, are the three features which seem to connect the Mallarméan modernism of these two works to one's associations with the archaic, most especially to the trappings of epic form. *Beowulf*, the closest thing to an epic in English, proceeds through digression,[7] while the name itself, in designating a monster-slayer, means 'to be monster.' Digression allows the epic to anticipate large events in small ones, and is itself therefore a structural feature at one with the kind of preceding of the signified that occurs with Beowulf's name. As for entropy, perhaps we can say that the model provided by the second law of thermodynamics is a means by which modernism substitutes the idea of omnipresence for unacceptable notions of omniscience, an artistic accounting for that which Freud said he'd tended to avoid, and for which the epic had a name long since fallen into disrepute:

> It stands to reason that the actual chronicle of the archaic ages is full of 'barbaric' events. What such migrations as those of the Cimmerians, of the Mongols, of the Peoples of the Sea achieved in the way of destruction and dispersal is beyond our imagination. One calls this the primitive way of life, and blithely conjectures extermination in the biological sense, forgetting what biology has to say of real

[6] Roman Jakobson, “The Kazan School of Polish Linguistics,” *Selected Writings*, Vol. II, The Hague, Mouton, 1971, p. 427.

[7] See Adrien Bonjour, *Digression in Beowulf*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1965, and Eric Auerback, *Mimesis*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, Chapter 1.

conflicts among animal tribes. It is only man, more especially modern man, who knows the art of total kill, the quick and the slow. But archaic cultures devoid of history but steeped in myth, did not find in events the surprise of the *fait accompli*, stunning and shattering to the mind in the way Auschwitz is to us. Mythical experience has its own ways of meeting catastrophe. Men were able to see things nobly. Narration becomes epic.

The great epic of the Fall of the Nibelungen mirrors in its own way the invasion of Attila and his Huns, the 'scourge of God.' Official history might counter the Mongol hordes with the Roman victory of the Catalaunic fields, but the Attila of legend, chief of Gog and Magog, remains more imposing, even as he passes silently out of the scene, than Jenghiz or Tamerlane with their historic conquests and pyramids of skulls. He has little to act, he is the typical emperor of myth. Like Theodoric, like Arthur, like Kai Khusrau, he is the unmoved chess king around whom the figures move. The Nibelungen story shows how mythical thought dealt with the crisis. It is Nemesis who destroys the German warriors at the last. Attila, 'king Etzel,' suffers in his turn, without losing the authority of the conqueror. His child dies at the hands of Hagen, last of the sinful brood who is cut down as a captive by his infuriated mother, destroyed in turn by Hildebrand, reconciled to the conqueror, who brings the drama to a catharsis. Attila the Hun and Theodoric the Goth, are left to weep together the death of great heroes. No hatred, no terror left, except at the working of Fate.[8]

A number of themes pertinent to this essay are introduced in this passage, which is from Giorgio de Santillana and Herta von Dechend's *Hamlet's Mill*. For one thing, it brings us back to that excavation of the extra-historical which was identified with Joyce and Mallarmé in this essay's first paragraph. We shall return to this as we come to the specifically historical background of the works at hand, and say that history and myth are not opposites but rather, as de Santillana's book suggests, exist in a relationship in which one kind of account obscures another, and calls its victim ahistorical as it does so. We shall say that the reconciliation between historical enemies undertaken in the *Nibelungen* — and echoed in the fact that

[8] Giorgio de Santillana and Herta von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill*, Boston, Gambit Inc., 1961, p. 355ff.

for a very long time the rest of the world has referred to the Germans as "Huns" — has direct affinities with the tautological endeavor that we intend to identify with *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty*. In both, it may be important to note, there is a bringing together of Indo-European and Ural-Alteic content. In regard to things which exist both mythically and historically, like national character, we shall say that in superimposing a map of America onto that of Europe — which is what we think he does — Pynchon reminds us that Tacitus, in the *Germania*, described a people who preferred to live in rather scattered communities, coming together to undertake political decisions in huge conventions, and who identified freedom with the ownership of property and each man's right to bear arms. At this point it is also pertinent to note Jakobson's observation that "It was Saussure who, in his notes on the *Nibelungen*, perspicaciously advocated the semiotic interpretation of myths: 'It is true that as one goes deeply into things, one sees in this region, as in the parent region of linguistics, that all incongruities of thought come from the lack of consideration as to what is identity — or marks of identity — when we approach a non-existent being like the *word*, or the *mythical person*, or a *letter of the alphabet*, which are only different forms of the SIGN, in its philisophical sense.' " [9]

In the way that Saussure's theory of an anagrammatic substructure comes to resemble Mallarmé's tune or song beneath the text, it may be admissable to say that what Mallarmé referred to as a "bisection into two kinds of candor" became for Freud — who of course responds immediately to the deficiency he identified in his own thinking — what he calls the struggle between Eros and Death, a conflict he chooses to describe in epic terms: "And it is this battle of the giants that our nursemaids try to appease with their lullaby about heaven." [10]

Pynchon and Smithson's references to the archaic are made possible through a devout regard for the banal. The newspaper, the factual, becomes mysterious but not concealed as it is employed as an agent of the ordinary that can make the work intersect with historical

[9] Jakobson, *Main Trends in the Science of Language,* New York, Harper and Row, 1970, p. 34.

[10] Freud, p.69.

space. This is where *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* are seen to respond most explicitly to the two traditions at whose convergence they are seen to lie. These are a European involvement with opposing the mundane to the fantastic — Mallarmé observing the structure of narrative in the fact that a newspaper's pages, blown by the wind, successively obscure one another, a defamiliarization of the text's continuity with its support that we shall want to relate here to the Surrealism of Duchamp on the one hand and of Breton on the other — and an Anglo-American passion for the ordinary encapsulated in Pynchon's demonstrable regard for the writing of Henry Adams, and Smithson's overt respect for that author's near-contemporary, Frederick Law Olmsted, who built Central Park in New York and Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Adams and Olmstead should come first, because *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* are American works, and their use for the two kinds of Surrealism to which we just referred seems predicated on that.

Like *Gravity's Rainbow, The Education of Henry Adams* takes place largely outside the United States — although not nearly so completely as does the novel — and is similarly concerned with science. Chapter 25 of the *Education* is the first instance of the application of the term entropy to any theory of history. Much has been written about Pynchon's use of paranoia, and we have already suggested one sense in which entropy may be said to provide a model for that state. It is in Adams that one finds the bare bones of Pynchon's attitude to paranoia, and this too touches on other things which have already been said here: "[T]he man of science must have been sleepy indeed who did not jump from his chair when, in 1898, Mme. Curie threw on his desk the metaphysical bomb she called radium. There remained no hole to hide in. Even metaphysics swept back over science with the green water of the deep sea ocean and no one could longer hope to bar out the unknowable, for the unknowable was known."[11]

In Pynchon's prose the positivism of *The Education of Henry Adams* has long since been converted into something else. In an episode in V involving two characters who will reappear in *Gravity's Rainbow*,

[11] Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1961, p. 452.

Weissman (Blicero) and Mondaugen, a message that seems to have originated in atmospheric disturbance comes over the air and is decoded as Wittgenstein's "The world is all that the case is."[12] One would want to say that the relationship between Pynchon and Adams was like that between neo-positivism and positivism — between Wittgenstein's sense that science could advance only by accounting for the limits inherent in its own methodology and Compte's belief in science's limitless capacity for explanation — but to do so would be to run the risk of caricaturing the earlier writer, of presenting the difference between the two as one like that between Pointsman and Mexico in the passage with which we began. There is more to Adams than that, and likewise more to Pynchon's internalizing of his thinking. There is, for example, a description in the *Education* of a train journey to London, of entering a tunnel and of "a violent contrast between this dense, smoky, impenetrable darkness, and the soft green charm that one glided into, as one emerged — the revelation of an unknown society of the pit — made a boy uncomfortable, though he had no idea that Karl Marx was standing there waiting for him, and that sooner or later that process of education would have to deal with Karl Marx much more than with Professor Bowen of Harvard College or his Satanic free-trade majesty John Stuart Mill." [13]

What Pynchon gets from Adams, more than anything else, is a way of describing a materialist skeleton found just beneath the crudely idealist skin of everyday life. Their writing shares the assumption that social thinking will provide itself with scientific metaphors and that clear thinking will depend on recognizing the appeal and the flaws of that metaphoricality. In both, the possibility that metaphor will usher in a repetition of the metaphysical obscurantism against which science sets itself is anticipated by a persistent use of metonymy, and it is through the latter, a banal alternation of commonplaces, that metaphoricality is both held in check and allowed full rein. One is struck, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as it unfolds to

[12] Thomas Pynchon, *V*, New York, Bantam, 1964, p. 259. Pynchon gives a literal translation of this sentence from the *Tractatus*, usually it appears in English as "The world is all that is the case."

[13] Adams, p. 72.

replace the quest for the grail with a search for a secret called just that, the *S Gërat*, at the ease with which the language of science bears the burden of the literary; and it is this which returns one to Mallarmé's book, in which art and history would meet.

For Mallarmé, for Adams, for Pynchon and for Smithson, coherence depends on an image of quantifiability that qualifies reference to the infinite — that uses metonymy to control metaphor —and, in doing so, presents an alternative tradition to that of well-entrenched anthropocentricities — to those tattered strands of Idealism which attribute to anthropocentrism a metaphoricality that provides direct access to infinity. As he comes to the end of his book, Adams announces his "Dynamic Theory of History," of which he says: "A dynamic theory, assigning attractive forces to opposing bodies in proportion to the laws of mass, takes for granted that the forces of nature capture man." [14] One may compare this not, for the moment, with Pynchon, but with a remark of Smithson's: "You will always be faced with limits of some kind. I think that actually it's not so much expanding into infinity, it's that you are really expanding in terms of a finite situation."[15]

Smithson rejected the materials habitually used by sculptors because they had already been processed, acculturated. Steel, he said, was already exhausted by its manipulation at the foundry before it got to the artist. [16] His career — cut short by his death in an airplane crash — reached its stride when he began to make work which, as it recorded a given geographical location, simultaneously pointed to the conventional neutrality of the art object; to the idealism of the frame. These were the *Site: Nonsite* pieces, in which photographs of and detritus from a particular spot were brought into an art gallery and displayed. These precede the *Spiral Jetty* and anticipate its juxtaposition of signifier and signified, its use of materials which will erode at the same pace as their context instead of ritualistically denying the ravages of time, which is what

[14] Ibid., p. 475.

[15] Robert Smithson, Interview by Anthony Robbins, *Art News,* LXVII (February 1969), p. 50.

[16] Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum,* XII (February, 1973), p. 63.

Smithson saw other monumental sculpture as doing. The *Site: Nonsite* pieces, in the clarity of the opposition on which they're based, anticipate the opposition proposed by the *Spiral Jetty* in this way: the places they depict became the content of art as information about them was taken elsewhere. In this they anticipate the *Jetty's* inscription onto its landscape of an image of reflexiveness dependent on the withdrawal of conventionalized atemporality, and this withdrawal becomes that which provides one with the experience of information drawn in. The *Jetty* was built with the help of earth moving machines and trucks, a process dutifully recorded in the film *The Spiral Jetty*, which Smithson referred to as an "industrial film." The sculpture juts out from the shore to form its spiral, continuous with the bank but distinct from it, all traces of its production erased, its origins therefore preserved only in the self-evident fact that nothing but a human agency could be responsible for the redistribution that has given these rocks and dirt a shape isomorphically reminiscent of the direction taken by the growth of the salt crystals which accumulate below its water line.

Thus the *Spiral Jetty* complicates the dialectic postulated by the *Site: Nonsite* opposition by identifying the frame with that which it frames. In a similar way the polarities on which Pynchon built his fiction at the beginning of his career are made, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, to be generative of a new level of complication. We shall eventually want to say that one ends up with a model that's quadratic, literature which imitates language and, in that, invokes Mallarmé's remark: "Science, having found a confirmation of itself in language, must now discover a CONFIRMATION of language." [17]

In "Entropy", published fifteen years ago, Pynchon used the entropy model as the armature of a story about two apartments. A party roars on in the one below, constantly receiving new arrivals, while upstairs a WASP aesthete named Callisto resists input of any sort. His tropical birds and plants depend on an equilibrium quite independent of the weather outside. An equation is drawn between the self-sufficiency of the party downstairs — its capacity to maintain an input that will keep it going — and the maintenance of

[17] Quoted by Jakobson, *Main Trends in the Science of Language*, p. 7.

Callisto's hermetic world above. The party downstairs continues because the host, who is called Mulligan as his party is also an expansive social and ethnic mix, resists the temptation to withdraw into a cupboard to sleep. Callisto's world ends when his mistress puts her hand through a window, letting in the cold night air, a larger system into which the smaller one dissipates.

Like the collapse into each other of the site and the nonsite, landscape and frame, in *Spiral Jetty*, polarities which were held apart in "Entropy" have become properties differently pervasive in *Gravity's Rainbow*. To give the most obvious example, one is told more about Slothrop than about anyone else in the novel. In that sense he is its most thoroughly developed character. But by the end of the book Slothrop is literally the most insubstantial figure it contains, to the extent that only his friend Seaman Bodine can actually identify him as a physical presence: "He's looking straight at Slothrop (being one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any kind of integral creature any more. Most of the others gave up long ago trying to hold him together, even as a concept — 'Its just got too remote' 's what they usually say.)" [18]

Writing on the *Spiral Jetty*, Smithson makes a list, entitled "Dialectic of Site and Nonsite":

	Site	*Nonsite*
1.	Open limits.	Closed limits.
2.	A series of Points.	An Array of Matter.
3.	Outer Coordinates.	Inner Coordinates.
4.	Subtraction.	Addition.
5.	Indeterminate Certainty.	Determinate Certainty.
6.	Scattered Information.	Contained Information.
7.	Reflection.	Mirror.
8.	Edge.	Center.
9.	Some Place (Physical).	No Place (Abstract).
10.	Many.	One.

Range of Convergence

The range of convergence between Site and Nonsite consists of a

18. *Gravity's Rainbow*, p. 740.

> course of hazards, a double path made up of signs, photographs and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at once. Both sides are present and absent at the same time. [19]

This could reasonably serve as a key to *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose prose makes reference to, and is itself built upon, the mandala shape, a circle containing or contained by a cross, a juxtaposition of open and closed limits. As to the second opposition on Smithson's list, an interesting essay on mathematics in Pynchon shows how he uses the mathematical concept of a singular point or singularity to structure the novel, to provide a first layer of text beneath the text:

> The two most obvious (and related) differentiating mathematical characteristics of a singular point are the indeterminacy of the function's first derivative at the point (a condition which is sometimes represented by the symbol for infinity, ∞) and the fact that an infinite number of tangents to the curve can be drawn at a singular point. These mathematical characteristics have metaphorical import in Pynchon's use of the singular point image. A singularity is a point which, though an element of the function like other points, nevertheless possesses a property (the indeterminacy of the first derivative) that makes it strange: one cannot tell the point is different from the rest until one tries to take the first derivative of the function there. Likewise, the characteristic that an infinite number of tangents to the curve can be constructed at a singular point gives it a potential for an infinity that other points of the function do not possess. In the novel's terms the implications of these mathematical conditions would be that at a 'singular' point in a character's experience his (or her) life would be indeterminate (not determined or controlled) and would partake of an infinity or eternity beyond the material world . . . [20]

In equations of motion the first derivative — which is in calculus the first transformed version of the equation with which one began — measures rate of change. At 'singular points' the rate of change can't be measured (because, like dividing by zero, it yields infinity), and therefore it specifies a moment or place of transition which can't

[19] Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," *Arts of the Environment*, ed. G. Kepes, New York, 1972, p. 231.

[20] L. J. Ozier, "Mathematics in *Gravity's Rainbow*," Twentieth Century Literature, XXI, No. 2 (1975), p. 209.

be quantified, although the context in which it occurs can be. In *Gravity's Rainbow* a transition from silk stocking to skin causes other images to be proposed as singularities:

> Consider cathedral spires, holy minarets, the crunch of trainwheels over the points as you watch peeling away the track you didn't take . . . mountain peaks rising sharply to heaven, such as those to be noted at scenic Berchtesgaden . . . the edges of steel razors, always holding potent mystery . . . rose thorns that prick us by surprise . . . even, according to the Russian mathematician Friedman, the infinitely dense point from which the present Universe expanded . . . In each case, the change from point to no-point carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in flight. .[21]

According to L.J. Ozier, the author of that essay, such singular points are "unknowable" but can be indicated mathematically. Inherent in them is the "idea of transformation from one world order to another or from one state of being into another" within a quantifiably known context, and it is in these terms that they contribute, within the novel, to a "pattern of imagery that reveals coherence where there appears to be dissolution." [22]
This is an example of what is meant by qualifying an image of infinity through an image of quantifiability, where the latter becomes that through which order is discerned within an "array of matter" containing putative associations with the infinite.
In both Pynchon's and Smithson's work, then, complication develops within a model whose limits — since it is taken from science — are always presented tautologically, as an equation of which "Both sides are present or absent at the same time." The difference between the early work and the later is in both cases one which follows from developing the internal elasticity of the tautology, its maturation into a more fluid context of transitionality, a denser "range of convergences." Pynchon's novel is divided into four sections, four protagonists are wholly preoccupied with the

21 *Gravity's Rainbow*, p. 369.
22 Ozier, p. 194.

search, and the book begins with a quote from Werner von Braun — already obliquely introduced here — to the effect that science doesn't know death but only redistribution. This is how one is persuaded to see both works as a series of strategies designed to allow "nature to capture man," and to do so in terms of a bifurcation consistent with Smithson's observation, in response to a definition of nature as that which was not made by man, that there was something problematic about a definition which put man outside of nature.

The other side of that coin whose first face is the scientific spirit is the liberal imagination, and Adams and Olmsted are as much representatives of the one as of the other. Which raises another set of questions about Smithson's and Pynchon's relationship to them. The observation about the singular point's connection — within the terms of a quantifiable model of indeterminacy — to the infinite becomes especially suggestive when, in an essay on Olmsted, Smithson opposes Burke's ideas on the Sublime to Hegelian Idealism, identifying them instead with what we've called an Anglo-American regard for the ordinary. The Price and Gilpin he mentions were English landscape artists, of whom Smithson says: "Inherent in the theories of Price and Gilpin, and in Olmsted's response to them, are the beginings of a dialectic of the landscape. Burke's notion of 'beautiful' and 'sublime' functions as a *thesis* of smoothness, gentle curves, and delicacy of nature, and as an *antithesis* of terror, solitude, and the vastness of nature, both of which are rooted in the real world, rather than in an Hegelian Ideal. Price and Gilpin provide a *synthesis* with their formulation of the 'picturesque' which is on close examination related to chance and change in the material order of nature." [23]

Burke himself said, "Whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analagous to terror, is a source of the sublime." By and large this notion of the Sublime, a regard for the extraordinary signification offered by the ordinary, which is still functioning when Adams, in his description of a railway journey, introduces the image of an unknown society of

[23] Robert Smithson, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape," *Artforum*, XII (February, 1973), p. 63.

the pit (not to mention the prescience of his attribution of the word 'Satanic' to John Stuart Mill) has now fallen into bankruptcy. Where the ordinary once revealed the extraordinary, the ordinary is nowadays more often seen only as a pathway not to a banality which reveals but only to one that confirms a certain clearly established hierarchy of concerns. Anglo-American delight in the mundane has been dulled. Thus, despite all evidence to the contrary, Smithson is without qualification labelled a 'Romantic' artist (without lapsing into Empiricism one might say that if the liberal intelligentsia were to take its vacations elsewhere than in Vermont, where the countryside invites empathy with Wordsworth, much of the criticism written in America in recent years might have taken a different direction . . .) while Pynchon has if anything suffered more harshly still, because in his case a blunted taste for ordinariness has led to active misrepresentation of his novel's intersection with fact. This misrepresentation has, by and large, been consistent. Pynchon's use of the banal and the quantifiable has led to one reading after another that represses the book's most obvious subject matter in the interests of a manipulation of metaphor whose poverty invests the world with Romantic Pathos. A Pathos which conceives of itself as a long complaint about the defeat of the liberal imagination by the scientific spirit. This is an affair of class rather than individual despair — although its protagonists would deny the distinction — and it is on that level that Pynchon's novel resists appropriation by an ideology which, undaunted — determined to see itself as the end of the world — has insisted on describing his work as apocalyptic when it is clearly directed towards frustrating just such a reading. That ideology is enshrined in the words of a British agent in a novel by John le Carré, who, with Evelyn Waugh, is one of the few popular writers to make a measurable contribution to *Gravity's Rainbow's* prose. Here, the fulminations of Le Carré's agent follow two passages from Adams that cast light on the involvement with Germany which, in Pynchon as in historical fact, brackets Anglo-American thinking, gives direction to its liberalism, and therefore identifies the nature of its sense of pathos:

> Even the typical grumbler Carlyle, who cast doubts on the real capacities of the middle class, and who at times thought himself

eccentric, found friendship and alliances in Boston — still more in Concord. The system had proved so successful that even Germany wanted to try it, and Italy yearned for it. England's middle-class government was the ideal of human progress. [24]

The middle class had the power, and held its coal and iron well in hand, but the satirists and the idealists seized the press, and as they were agreed that the Second Empire was a disgrace to France and a danger to England, they turned to Germany because at that moment Germany was neither economical nor military, and a hundred years behind western Europe in the simplicity of its standard. German thought, method, honesty, and even taste, became the standards of scholarship. Goethe was raised to the rank of Shakespeare — Kant ranked as a law-giver above Plato. All serious scholars were obliged to become German, for German thought was revolutionizing criticism. [25]

"Both we and the Germans have been through democracy, and no one's given us credit for it. Like shaving. No one *thanks* you for shaving, no one *thanks* you for democracy. Now we've come out the other side. Democracy was only possible under a class system, that's why: it was an indulgence granted by the privileged. We haven't time for it anymore: a flash of light between feudalism and automation, and now it's gone." [26]

In Breton's *Arcane 17*, written during the Second World War — with a postscript added in 1947 — there's the line: "The military dictatorship surely found it advantageous to follow the destruction, more meticulous each day, of semantic value, the sort of destruction to which the most obscene and cynically venal journalism was predisposed." The north pole and star appear in *Arcane 17*, as does the Rock of Percé. [27] In Nordic-Teutonic myth, the world was created as a mountain which grew out of a mist, an image reminiscent of how an amino-acid was first produced in a laboratory, out of ammonia gasses shot through with electricity, in Berkeley in

[24] Adams, p. 33.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 61.
[26] John Le Carré, *A Small Town in Germany*, New York, Dell, 1975, p. 124.
[27] See Anna Balakain, *André Breton*, New York, Oxford, 1972, p. 192-3, for further comment on this aspect of Breton's iconography.

1950. Lying off the Canadian coast, the Rock of Percé appears and disappears in the varying light and mist. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the closest Slothrop ever gets to obtaining the *S Gërat* is when he's in the vincinity of Kap Arkona, the Baltic Mount Olympus, at the northern tip of the Island of Rügen. Rügen itself is replete with pagan associations that are Balto-Slavic as well as Nordic-Teutonic. Kap Arkona and the Rock of Percé serve roughly the same function, which supports our feeling that Pynchon is responsive to the Surrealist example in ways that are not so immediately obvious. As is, for example, the fact that *Gravity's Rainbow* begins with an individual's dream and ends with a dream that is collective.

Perhaps more important, though, than textual figuration of this sort, for either Smithson or Pynchon, is their dependence on general assumptions about the relationship between the art object and the world, which, developments of Mallarmé's premises though they are, were first enunciated by Breton, who describes art as engaged in a metonymy wherein it can only "oscillate between the awareness of its inviolable autonomy and that of its utter dependence." [28] It is this metonymy, which proposed to allow the public and the private to flow into the same space, to bring the dream into an active relationship with daily life, which is of interest here.

Painting and sculpture in America absorbed Surrealism, and were thoroughly changed by it, as a consequence of the Second World War. Smithson's art would be inconceivable without the precedent of Duchamp. *Site: Nonsite* is but a short step from R. Mutt's *Fountain*. It is nonetheless worth noting that American artists have by and large insisted on denying a debt to Surrealism.

However, in literature the denial was much worse, as if everybody who wrote darted off to points pastoral the minute the first emigré Surrealist disembarked. While the first sentence in *Gravity's Rainbow* — "A screaming comes across the sky" — is a quote from Hemingway, its ending owes little to American writing: "The screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent. The film has broken, or a projector bulb had burned out. It is difficult even for us, old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?) to tell which

28 André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1974, p. 155.

before the darkness swept in. It may have been a human figure, dreaming of an early evening in each great capital luminous enough to tell him he will never die, coming outside to wish on the first star. But it was *not a star*, it was falling, a bright angel of death. And in the darkening and awful expanse of screen something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see . . . it is now a closeup of a face, a face we all know —" [29]

In the twentieth century, Mallarmé's whiteness is the whiteness of the screen.

In this closing sequence — a few more lines and the book's over — Pynchon addresses the reader directly for more than a brief aside, as he does nowhere else in the novel. It is a final emerging of the present tense, which is made, throughout his writing, to combine fluently with the varieties of past tenses, so that there is casual but persistent recognition of the sense in which reading is an act in which one is connected to an object situated in the present by its reader but in the past by virtue of its having been written, that past becoming therefore the subject of the act of writing. Nothing in *Gravity's Rainbow* exists as background; all information is transitive, none is privileged. The novel's virtual exclusion of the reader until the last page is a function of its premise that the reader is immanent in the object scrutinized, but severed from it by its identity as a transcription. For the Surrealists, cinema was an agency capable of re-structuring literature through attributing to images an equal status implicitly frustrated by verbal denotation, where their relative importance was an already thoroughly learnt linguistic — social — habit, and it is in the interests of an analogous process of equalization that cinematic devices bear the burden of the works' concern with geographical specificity and retrieval in Pynchon's fiction and also in the film of the *Spiral Jetty*.

This specificity and retrieval will concern us more fully in the next section, where we shall investigate Pynchon's use of limits derived from a map of America to structure the field of action in *Gravity's Rainbow*. [30] Also, one ought not to introduce the question of retrieval

[29] *Gravity's Rainbow*, p. 760.

[30] The map of America is transferred to that of Europe through corollations like the fact that the southern tip of the Axis was Tripoli, whose latitude is the same as Florida's. At the very

without noting that both the works considered here deal with landscapes which came under the influence of Christian Europe at the same time, that as late as 1545 Georg Sabinus, rector of the University of Königsberg, described in a letter to his Cardinal:

> . . . a savage race of men, a rustic one under the northern star,
> which as yet has no knowledge of true religion:
> but it worships as dieties bluish snakes,
> and performs unspeakable rites by slaughtering a ram.[31]

Breton's constant references to himself as a man of the North will be said to refer, in part at least, to the recognition that in Europe the North is a gateway to the most recently pre-Christian past. In a similar sense we shall say that Pynchon's choice of the Baltic shore and points immediately south for most of what happens in *Gravity's Rainbow* needs to be compared with Joyce's interest in Bérard's studies of the extent to which the Homeric epics are built on a Phoenician base which the Greeks adopted wholesale, not even bothering to change the names of seaports as they did so, so that place names in Homer are of islands constantly visited by Carthaginian sailors but never by Greeks. Old Prussian, a Balto-Slavic language wiped out by German with a completeness which rivals the disappearance of most American Indian languages, may even be a more thoroughly excoriated tongue than those indigenous to the Americas, and both these extinctions have occurred in exactly the same amount of time. These are items of collective recall — dreaming, as Pynchon has the character Katje Borgesius dream about her Dutch ancestor's participation in the extermination of the Dodos — which *Gravity's Rainbow* excavates through a continuity and structure which finally comes to take on an explicitly cinematic form.

The film of the *Spiral Jetty* uses montage to equate earth-movers

center of America is Decatur, Nebraska — 42.05°N, 96.04°W — and it is mention of this town on page 665 of the novel, amidst a welter of North German ones in the vicinity of the Luneberg Heath, that gives the key to the gridding which has taken place; Decatur is where the United States keeps its chief stock of nuclear weapons in readiness for that Magic Moment.

[31] Jaan Puhvel, "The Baltic Pantheon," *Baltic Literature and Linguistics,* eds. A. Ziedonis, J. Puhvel, R. Silbajoris, and M. Valgemae, Ohio, Association For the Advancement of Baltic Studies, Inc., 1973, p. 105.

with dinosaurs — a comparison which Smithson also made in writing "The Monuments of Passaic" [32] — and to comment upon the already noted affinity between the upward spiralling of crystal formations and the shape of the sculpture. This is an isomorphism which Smithson identifies elsewhere with the spiral formed by a reel of film, and with regard to the filming itself: "For my film (a film is a spiral made up of frames) I would have myself filmed from a helicopter (from the Greek *helix helikos* meaning spiral) directly overhead in order to get the scale in terms of erratic steps." [33]

Gravity's Rainbow proceeds entirely through such erratic steps, which point, in their apparent discontinuity, as in cinematic montage, to other affinities which otherwise lock disparate images together. As in montage, those affinities emerge within the paradoxical context of a continuity founded on a dialectic of disjunction. Carrying over from one sequence to another involves an opposition rather than a mimicry between the two. On page 359 of *Gravity's Rainbow* one comes to the end of a chapter which has been dealing with an event in the past of Tchitcherine, Slothrop's Russian counterpart:

> Tchitcherine will reach the Kirghiz light, but not his birth. He is no aqyn, and his heart will never be ready. He will see it just before dawn. He will spend 12 hours then, face-up in the desert, a prehistoric city greater than Babylon lying in stifled mineral sleep a kilometer below his back, as the shadow of the tall rock, rising to a point, dances west to east and Dzaqyp Qulan tends him, anxious as child and doll, and drying loam laces the necks of the two horses . . .

Shortly after this the chapter ends and another begins. In its second paragraph one meets Slothrop, who at this point in the book's 'present' is in Berlin in the summer of 1945:

> So here he is, under the trees in summer leaf, in flower, many of them blasted horizontal into chips and splinters — fine dust from the bridle paths rising in the sunrays by itself, ghosts of horses still taking their early morning turns through the peacetime park. Up all night and thirsty, Slothrop lies on his stomach and slurps up water, just an

[32] Robert Smithson, "The Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum*, VI (December, 1967), p. 49.
[33] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," p. 226.

old saddle tramp at the water hole here . . . Fool . . .(Author's elisions.) [34]

This description of Slothrop as a saddletramp — substituting the wild west for Asia — completes an identification with Tchitcherine initiated by the mention of "ghosts of horses" and established by the American's lying on his face drinking water while the Russian lay on his back in the sun. It is a use of posture to unite different spaces in such a way that their contents reinforce one another and which works, like film, primarily through visual images with regard to which the text claims a broad if not absolute freedom of access. This capacity for moving from one state to another, the Surrealist ambition of placing shots — memories— of the inside next to traces of the outside, is the ability which has persistently been restored to literature through cinematic example; a point amplified rather than undermined by such examples as the beginning of *Bleak House*, which moves one around a series of places in a way that must be reminiscent of film for a modern reader. One might also note here that Saussure's preferred term for the opposition of vocal statics and dynamics was *kinematics.* [35]

Not surprizingly, it is in Joyce that one finds the literary antecedent for the type of continuity employed by Pynchon. The first fact we learn about Leopold Bloom is his liking for the inner organs of beasts and fowl: "most of all he liked the grilled mutton kidneys which gave to his palate a fine twang of faintly scented urine." (*Ulysses,* p. 55) Which makes us remember Stephen's reflection of a few pages before: "death I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead." (p. 51)

With the question of how transitions are handled in these works — of their dependence on cinematic example or analogy — we are returned to others raised here so far. According to Mallarmé, it is through gaps in the surface that organization and therefore the most crucial level of signification emerge: the work's transitions are the work.

In both cases a redistributive model mimics but at the same time

[34] *Gravity's Rainbow,* p. 359ff.

[35] Roman Jakobson, "The Kazan School of Polish Linguistics," p. 421.

mocks pathetic notions of death, perhaps endorsing Iris Murdock's remark that "only the greatest art invigorates without consoling." Certainly neither work is responsive to the demand, usually advanced under the banner of humanism, that art bear testimony to the adequacy of a liberal sensibility. Rather, they tend to show how the assumptions of that sensibility have long been demolished by the application of its own procedures. And it is in this sense, at the level of implicit ideology, that *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* testify to liberalism's defeat at the hands of science, in that they are rendered incomprehensible — or, worse, misleadingly clear — by the attribution to them of Romantic intent, or of a preoccupation with erotic destructiveness which precludes the antithesis of a non-erotic sense of death offered by Freud. Benjamin said that "Comfort isolates; on the other hand it brings those enjoying it closer to mechanization." [36] It would seem that this proximity is felt as a subversion of the very comfort it is meant to promote. A comfort which has historically been assured by liberalism's possession of a scientific approach compatible with an individualism which forgets to admit that the individuals concerned are by definition privileged, in the way that the laboratory provides the empirical method with an Ideal continuum wherein data exists to confirm predictions about its own behavior. Liberalism is that doctrine which uses the exigencies of scientific method to conceal the nature of the relationship between the one and the many as it occurs not in an Ideal, hermetic, universe, but in the world at large. The world in which we in fact live is an environment not closed by tautology but rather torn asunder by contradictions which science itself has unearthed.

Without losing sight of Freud's metonymy of Eros and Thanatos, it is now time to further consider the dialectic between the present and its past. This oppostion, which in both the *Spiral Jetty* and *Gravity's Rainbow* is dependent on a specific sense of place, returns us to the question of modernism's relationship to the disinterestedness of the epic, and the notion, originally Saussure's, of the signifier preceding the signified. Those are the coordinates of the investigation which

[36] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism,* London, NLB, 1973, p. 131.

will concern us for the rest of this essay, bringing us back to Breton — as well as to Joyce and Mallarmé — and introducing that definitive critique of empiricism's secret pathos, Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.*

> About one mile north of the oil seeps I selected my site. Irregular beds of limestone dip gently eastward, massive deposits of black basalt are broken over the peninsula, giving the region a shattered appearance. It is one of few places on the lake where the water comes right up to the mainland. Under shallow pinkish water is a network of mud cracks supporting the jig-saw puzzle that composes the salt flats. As I looked at the site, it reverberated out to the horizons only to suggest an immobile cyclone while flickering light made the entire landscape appear to quake. A dormant earthquake spread into the fluttering stillness, into a spinning sensation without movement. This site was a rotary that enclosed itself in an immense roundness. From that gyrating space emerged the possibility of the Spiral Jetty. No idea, no concepts, no systems, no structures, no abstractions would hold themselves together in the actuality of that evidence. My dialectics of site and nonsite whirled into an indeterminate state, where solid and liquid lost themselves in each other. It was as if the mainland oscillated with waves and pulsations, and the lake remained rock still. The shore of the lake became the edge of the sun, a boiling curve, an explosion rising into a fiery prominence. Matter collapsing into the lake mirrored in the shape of a spiral. No sense wondering about classifications and categories, there were none. [37]

> But if I'm riding through it, the Real Text, right now, if this is it . . . or if I passed it today somewhere in the devastation of Hamburg, breathing the ash dust, missing it completely . . . if what the IG built on this site were not at *all* the final shape of it, but only an arrangement of fetishes, come-ons to call down special tools in the form of 8th AF bombers *yes* the "Allied" planes all would have been, ultimately, IG built, by way of Director Krupp, through his English interlocks — the bombing was the exact industrial process of conversion, each release of energy placed exactly in space and time, each shock wave plotted in advance to bring *precisely tonight's wreck* into being thus decoding the Text, thus coding, recoding, decoding the holy Text . . . If it is in working order, what is it meant to do? The

[37] Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," p. 223.

engineers who built it as a refinery never knew there were any final steps to be taken. Their design was "finalized," and they could forget it. [38]

* * *

Science and History are the Muses of our time.[39]

When the Nazis came to power, Leonard and Stark, both Nobel prizewinners, maintained that there were two types of physical science: An Aryan, empirical science which is true and fruitful, and a Jewish, theoretical science which is subversive and nonsensical. [40]

P.S. If you or Sargent can pickup any handbook *cheap* of Freemasonry or any ragged, dirty, smudged, torn, defiled, effaced, dogeared, coverless, undated, anonymous misprinted book on mathematics, or algebra or trig. or Eucl. from a cart for 1d or at most 2¼d tant mieux. J.J. [41]

The type of literature that, in accordance with the tenets of commitment but also with the demands of philistine moralism, exists for man, betrays him by traducing that which alone could help him: But any literature which therefore concludes that it can be a law unto itself, and exist only for itself, degenerates into ideology no less . . . Even in the most sublimated work of art there is a hidden 'it should be otherwise'. When a work is merely itself and no other thing, as in a pure pseudo-scientific construction, it becomes bad art — literally pre-artistic. The moment of true volition, however, is mediated through nothing other than the form of the work, whose crystallization becomes an analogy of that other condition which should be. As eminently constructed and produced objects, works of art, even literary ones, point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life. This mediation is not a compromise between commitment and autonomy, nor a sort of mixture of advanced formal elements with an intellectual content inspired by genuinely or

38 *Gravity's Rainbow*, p. 529ff.

39 Gustave Flaubert, quoted by Robert Smithson, in "The Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," *Art International*, XII (March 1968), p. 24.

40 A. E. E. McKenzie, *The Major Achievements of Science,* New York, Simon and Schuster, 1969, p. 312.

41 Richard Ellman, ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce,* New York, Viking, 1975, p. 279.

> supposedly progressive politics. The content of works of art is never the amount of intellect pumped into them: if anything it is the opposite. Nevertheless, an emphasis on autonomous works is itself socio-political in nature. [42]

At the time of writing, the *Spiral Jetty* is entirely submerged, the water level of the lake having risen to an unusual height which it is expected to maintain for some time. The integration of the space of convention — of sculpture — into that of nature has been accelerated by the latter in a way that sounds like a humorous exaggeration of the weathering process always expected and planned for in works made for exterior installation. Weathering is the combined result, mostly, of exposure to the sun and rain. The *Spiral Jetty* is getting special treatment, which consists of being covered by a giant lens.

Built to register physical change rather than to proffer an image of time's denial, the *Jetty* is an object which, in accordance with Mallarmé's example, requires more than one reading — the recognition of more than one process of bifurcation. It is a work whose success depends on its being a structure whose legibility may only be improved — illuminated by complication — by the intervention of the technically unpredictable or unanticipated. (Not that the submersion of the *Jetty* was entirely unforeseen; it wasn't. But still it's clear that what happens to the piece in the way of salt encrustations and the like in even the foreseeable future is about as far away from the predictability of the effects of weathering on, say, a work made out of *Cor-Ten* steel, as you could get and still have an object.)

One rereading the work encourages is of a kind that analogizes the experience of contemplating — focusing on — a landscape with the act of thinking historically. This is the subject of the present section of this essay, in which we are going to elaborate the suggestion, which we think is implicit in what's gone before, that *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* are stridently apolitical — uncommitted — works which demand a response that it is proper to call

[42] Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," trans. Francis-McDonagh, *New Left Review*, nos. 87-8, (September-December 1974), p. 89.

ideological.
They are, indeed, "eminently constructed and produced objects," whose apolitical character resides most obviously in their allegience to the (traditionally modernist) dictum that art depicts rather than instructs. That is to say, *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* seem to coincide with Adorno's hypothesis insofar as they suggest that art clarifies the everyday, locates the *status quo*, by pointing to the extent to which the contradictions that define life-as-it-is are also the stuff out of which the individual makes sense of intuited notions of value. That it is in things-as-they-are that the statement "it should be otherwise," is given it's most succinct expression, and that to repress that expression is one of the daily tasks of common sense and social intercourse in general.
Gravity's Rainbow and the *Spiral Jetty* depend on an ordering —the spiral, the mandala —which survives the disintegration and transformation it envelops. Their dialectic of constancy and mutation is one that invokes an ideological response because it is manipulated in a way in which neither side of the formula contains anything that could reasonably be called value-free. An incidental price paid for the lucidity of that insistence is a refusal to point hopefully towards the future, any future, in the course of presenting a digressive interaction between the present and the possiblity of contrasting it with its past. And doing so through a procedure in which one doesn't lose sight of the fact that the terms involved are on both sides qualified by their point of origin.
Both works, in being concerned with retrieval — with what it is to use something that's received as a device through which to review the terms of its reception — take a fundamentally different attitude to their material than André Breton did in his prose fiction work *Arcane 17*, with which *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* have been, in another respect, compared here. Breton, in identifying the disintegration of language with authoritarian ideology, retains the possibility of maintaining a stand against it at the personal level. This is, explicitly and implicitly, not the case for either Pynchon or Smithson. Breton, having said that the military dictatorship must be pleased to note their success in attenuating semantic value, goes on to describe this decline in terms of the failure of ideas to sustain a

general applicability: "And ideas, through which man attempts to maintain a definite relationship with other men, these ideas could be preserved no longer: ruins again, only facades remained standing, the surrounds of the tower of Babel. The words which designated them, such as law, justice, liberty, had taken on meanings which were localized, contradictory." [43] Repression, sublimation, are entirely institutional affairs; they are clearly understood for what they are: "The local newspapers, which relate the news of Europe in a style that is docilely apocalyptic, abound moreover in information which their presentation on a full page renders dissonant . . . alternating with items of a sybilline aspect. All this constitutes, in an admittedly limpid air, a screen of protection against the madness of the hour . . ." [44] In *Arcane 17* escape, or at least clarification of the situation at large and personal revelation with regard to one's relation to that and to one's destiny, is to be obtained through love. Breton's desire, in 1935, to promote "dialectical-materialism as a general theory of knowledge." [45] seems, over the succeeding decade and during the course of his wartime exile, to have mutated into a postulate whereby insight consists in noting the capacity that Eros has for keeping up a stand-off with Thanatos.

It isn't a question of whether Breton became less of a materialist during that time. But it is to the point that, insofar as all materialism is by definition a criticism of Idealism — or of itself for being idealist — his notion of it as a "general theory of knowledge" seems to have stopped short of imagining that the personal might be wholly interpenetrated by the impersonal. Breton, or at least the Breton of *Arcane 17*, isn't prepared to conceive of the individual participating in the disintegration he sees in the world around him. For Breton, ideas may lose their applicability but free-will doesn't lose its meaning. Individual salvation therefore involves most of all re-suscitation of ideas, through which a world may be reborn, even if that world is to be resurrected as a kind of solipsism, an elaborate attribution of coherence to the tower of Babel.

[43] André Breton, *Arcane 17,* Paris, Union générale d'éditions, 1965, p. 76.
[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
[45] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1969, p. 237.

In this sense collapse, and the retrieval of significance in the midst of collapse, occurs as a very different kind of process in *Arcane 17* than in *Gravity's Rainbow* or the *Spiral Jetty*. Certainly the differences may be partly accounted for in terms of the change in climate between the 1940s and the very recent past. When Adorno wrote his text on commitment he felt it possible to say, without qualification, that the "curmudgeons whom no bombs could destroy" were motivated in their assault on advanced art by a fear of enjoyment which reflected a "petit-bourgeois hatred of sex." Perhaps though, in a capitalist society where sexual liberation is an accepted cliché — a sign of good taste — it might be more useful to talk less of a hatred of sex than of its displacement. In American letters no stand-off is possible between Eros and Thanatos because this is the country where Freud is used to suppress Marx.

In Pynchon's novel hatred of sex is displaced metaphorically into a technological pun, the book is after all an American novel concerned with the search for a "black instrument" of dangerous potential. But that displacement is more than a humorous equating of Protestantism's repression of the individual with that lurking fear of the capacities of an imported preterite which has also been a definitive social fact in American life. (Pynchon's only published piece of non-fiction is "Journey into the Mind of Watts." [46]) It is also a device that promotes the absolute domination of the impersonal on which *Gravity's Rainbow's* plot depends. *Gravity's Rainbow* depicts a situation in which the individual's participation, as a transitive agent, in a process experienced as destructive, is inevitable, and that what this means is that only destructive change is conceivable. Technology, in that imagined scheme, is sublimation. Sublimation, that is, within and without. Technology contains its own message, but this is by no means exclusively the property of the Other, as Breton denotes it. As the product and the producer of its culture, technology might be seen to announce that circumscription of the individual in the interests of the many which Freud describes (therein expressing, from some points of view, his compatibility with Marx). For Pynchon and Smithson, technology exists to

[46] *New York Times Magazine,* (June 12, 1966), p. 34.

preclude recall. Always both co-opted and at the same time uncontrollable, technology is defined by its failures, which are what provide respite from its dominance and, simultaneously, offer the possibility of placing the culture which it produces into some larger context, albeit one which is the product of, is perceived through, that same culture's language. Unlike Breton, Pynchon and Smithson tend to present a world in which ideas like 'Justice' might never have existed. Instead they suggest that it's better to think in terms of one kind of justice and another, in short that local meanings might be more useful than universal ones. In this their position is truly the inverse of Breton's and this inversion may be expressed in the following way. *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* suggest that the solipsistic coherence that is for Breton a means through which the individual might make sense of the world is in actuality experienced as an as it were 'institutional solipsism' through which given cultures impose a certain sense on that world to which their own technology is a response. For Smithson and Pynchon technology is industrial capitalism, whose domination remains unquestioned in their depiction of things-as-they-are. But that depiction proceeds in accordance with an implied maxim that might be paraphrased as follows: things generate ideas and it is in the ruins of things that one finds the limits of those ideas, as well as a sense of what it is to go beyond their limits; further, ruins represent the demise of a system of sublimation which became indefensible at the same rate that it achieved sophistication:

> . . . a wind Tchitcherine will never remember. Any more than he can now connect this raw jumble of forty alkaloids with the cut, faceted, polished, and foiled molecules that salesman Wimpe showed him once upon a time, one by one, and told the histories of . . .
> "Oneirine, and Methoneirine. Variations reported by Laszlo Jamf in the ACS Journal, year before last. Jamf was on loan again, this time as a chemist, to the Americans, whose National Research Council had begun a massive program to explore the morphine molecule and its possibilities — a Ten-Year Plan, coinciding, most oddly, with the classic study of large molecules being carried on by Carother's of du Pont, the Great Synthesist. Connection? Of course there's one. But

we don't talk about it. NRC is synthesizing new molecule's every day, most of them from pieces of the morphine molecule. Du Pont is stringing together groups such as amides into long chains. The two programs seem to be complementary, don't they? The American vice of modular repetition, combined with what is perhaps our basic search: to find something that can kill intense pain without causing addiction.

"Results have not been encouraging. We seem up against a dilemma built into Nature, much like the Heisenberg situation. There is nearly complete parallelism between analgesia and addiction. The more pain it takes away, the more we desire it. It appears we can't have one property without the other, any more than a particle physicist can specify position without suffering an uncertainty as to the particle's velocity —"

"I could have told you that. But why —"

"*Why*. My dear captain. *Why*?"

"The money, Wimpe. To pour funds down the latrine on such a hopeless search —"

A man to man touch then on his buttoned epaulet. A middle-aged smile full of Weltschmertz. "Trade-off, Tchitcherine," whispers the salesman. "A question of balancing priorities. Research people come cheap enough, and even an IG may be allowed to dream, to hope against hope . . . think of what it would mean to find such a drug — to abolish pain rationally, without the extra cost of addiction. A *surplus* cost — surely there is something in Marx and Engels," soothe the customer, "to cover this. A demand like 'addiction,' having nothing to do with real pain, real economic needs, unrelated to production or labor . . . we need fewer of these unknowns, not more. We know how to produce real pain. Wars, obviously. . . machines in the factories, industrial accidents, automobiles built to be unsafe, poisons in food, water and even air — these are quantities tied directly to the economy. We know them, and we can control them. But 'addiction'? What do we know of that? Fog and phantoms. No two experts will even agree on how to define the word. 'Compulsion'? Who is not compelled? 'Tolerance'? 'Dependence'? What do they mean? All we have are the thousand dim, academic theories. A rational economy cannot depend on psychological quirks. We could not *plan* . . . "

What premonition has begun to throb in Tchitcherine's right knee? What direct conversion between pain and gold?

"Are you really this evil or is it just an act? Are you really trafficking in pain?"
"Doctors traffick in pain and no one would dream of criticizing their noble calling. Yet let the Verbindungsman but reach for the latch on his case, and you all start to scream and run. Well — you won't find many addicts among us. The medical profession is full of them, but we salesmen believe in real pain, real deliverance — we are knights in the service of that Ideal. It must be real, for the purposes of our market. Otherwise my employer — and our little chemical cartel is the model for the very structure of nations — becomes lost in illusion and dream, and one day vanishes into chaos. Your own employer as well."
"My 'employer' is the Soviet State."
"Yes?" Wimpe did say "*is* the model," not "will be." Surprising they could have got this far, if indeed they did — being of such different persuasions and all. Wimpe, however, being far more cynical, would have been able to admit more of the truth before starting to feel uncomfortable. His patience with Tchitcherine's Red Army version of economics may have been wide enough. They did part amiably. Wimpe was reassigned to the United States (Chemnyco of New York) shortly after Hitler became Chancellor. Tchitcherine's connection, according to the garrison gossip, ceased then, forever. [47]

. . . There's a word called entropy. These are like kind of entropic situations that hold themselves together. It's like the Spiral Jetty is physical enough to be able to withstand all these climate changes, yet it's intimately involved with those climate changes and natural disturbances. That's why I'm not really interested in conceptual art because that seems to avoid physical mass. You're left mainly with an idea. Somehow to have something physical that generates ideas is more interesting to me than just an idea that might generate something physical . . . Conceptual art is a kind of reduced object down to a notion of ideas that leads to idealism. An idealism is a kind of spiritualism and that never seems to work out . . . Lévi-Strauss suggested that they change the word anthropology to entropology, meaning highly developed structures in a state of disintegration. I think that's part of the attraction of people going to visit obsolete civilizations. They get a gratification

47 *Gravity's Rainbow*, pp. 348-9.

from the collapse of these things . . . [48]

Smithson's sense of disintegration seems, in fact, to be directly indebted to that of Lévi-Strauss. Particularly to the Lévi-Strauss of *Tristes Tropiques*, where culture is described as an entropic enterprise defined by the elaborateness of the decay produced by the complexity of its social organization. (It seems odd, in this connection, that the obligation always to see social and linguistic situtations through their achievement of disintegration, while refraining from the pejoration implicit in having to describe things in such terms, which is, obviously, a primary thesis of the great anthropologist's, shouldn't be reflected or acknowledged in *Arcane 17*, given the wartime friendship of Breton and Lévi-Strauss.) Complexity, in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty*, is a consequence of their committing what is referred to in the above conversation between two character's in Pynchon's novel as "the American sin of modular repetition."

We have said that in both works it is repetition that permits and qualifies the occurrence of its opposite, accumulation. Accumulation, that is, in the sense of the development and proliferation of signification. The construction of the *Spiral Jetty* — its use of one truck load of dirt and rocks after another to reach the center of a spiral, combined with its not being really a 'true' (*i.e.*, geometrically progressive) spiral, since its curvature has been adjusted so that the gap between water and *Jetty* remains more or less constantly metonymic as one reads across the piece — is clearly consistent with an aesthetic of non-climactic repetition. It proposes an aesthetic structure which gets its spectator from one place to the other without signaling catharsis, but also without seeming to make the beginning and the end of the process *interchangeable*. This theme, of a demystified sculpture built on the premise of "one thing after another," had been elaborated throughout the decade before the construction of the *Jetty* by such sculptors as Carl Andre and Donald Judd. And in thinking about this aspect of the structure of the *Jetty* it seems worthwhile to note that the antecedents for it in Smithson's own work include, beside the *Site: Nonsite* pieces

[48] Robert Smithson, in S. Pettena, "Interview", *Domus,* (November 1972), pp. 21-2.

already discussed, a series of glass ziggurats that may be said to have something to do with the development of modularity already undertaken by those two artists.

Andre's sculpture often consists of a series of superficially identical — same size and shape — units placed in a row; Judd's of a line of boxes mounted along or up a wall or on the floor. Smithson's ziggurats are made out of layers of glass of equal thickness, identically shaped, which decline in size towards the top by an amount equal on all four sides to the thickness of the glass. As in the *Jetty*, each part has a synecdotal relationship to the whole. It's a model of accumulation in which lateral and vertical extension are made synonymous, insofar as they are both functions of the repetition of the same measurement.

This notion, of an equivalence between horizontal and vertical extension, has a well-established history in modernist thinking. One need go no further that Alan Tate on John Donne [49] —*i.e.*, one doesn't have to look beyond what is known as the Anglo-American school of moderism — to see it applied in terms of an *extensive* control of *intensive* signification; and this seems to be the premise in Smithson's thinking too. Modular repetition at the surface level is taken to imply an equal — accumulative but non-hierarchical — arrangement, in terms of their legibility, of layers of sedimentation which that surface order makes accessible. One is back to Cézanne's grid, here, to modular repetition's attribution of equality to different depths or spaces.

The following two series of examples of modular repetition in *Gravity's Rainbow* show how different thematic recurrences, returned to every hundred pages or so, transmit, within themselves, the parabolic journey of the plot as a whole. They also spell out quite fully the novel's concern with Thanatos as opposed to Eros, with, that is, the "ubiquity of non-erotic aggressivity and destructiveness," which Pynchon identifies with technology, the "destructive instinct" which we customarily associate with civilization.

On page 20, Slothrop is introduced — his existence has already been noted but this is his first appearance — as one of several technicians

[49] Alan Tate, "Tension in Poetry," *Essays of Four Decades,* New York, William Morrow, 1970.

called in to look at a site where a rocket has just fallen. On page 120, Slothrop's seduction of Darlene, Mrs. Bloat the candy-store owner's daughter, comes to fruition as "the rocket's rush comes swelling, elevated express down, away into ringing silence. Outside glass has been breaking, long, dissonant symbols up the street." In the last sentence of the passage we are told that Slothrop is being watched: "And who's that, through the crack in the orange shade, breathing carefully? Watching? And where, keepers of maps, specialist at surveillance, would you say the next one will fall?" On page 223, during a conversation between Slothrop and Katje Bourgesius, a (Dutch) double agent, there is the following passage, in which Thanatos parallels Eros and is seen to invite the individual's participation by both dominating the latter and adopting its terminology:

> She was pleased, once, to think of a peacock, courting, fanning his tail platform, scarlet, orange, iridescent green . . . there were Germans, even SS troops, who called the rocket Der Pfau. 'Pfau Zwei.' Ascending, programmed in a ritual love . . . at Brennschluss it is done — the Rocket's purely feminine counterpart, the zero point at the center of its target, has submitted. All the rest will happen according to laws of ballistics. The rocket is helpless in it. Something else has taken over. Something beyond what was designed in.
> Katje has understood the great airless arc as a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet and herself, and Those who use her — over its peak and down, plunging, burning, toward a terminal orgasm . . . which is certainly nothing she can tell Slothrop.

While on page 320, following a summary description of Christianity as a religion of death, there is the song "Sold on Suicide," which comes in the middle of a conversation between Enzian, leader of the Schwartzkommando, and his adjutant Joseph Ombindi of Hanover. The Schwartzkommando is a unit composed of Blacks, which British Military Intelligence thought they had invented to arouse German public opinion but which turns out early in the novel to have existed in practice: Hereros trained in rocketry who are involved in the same quest that occupies Slothrop and Tchitcherine. These men are, however, the only ones explicitly seeking to commi

tribal suicide. At the bottom of that page, Enzian's companion says to him: " 'Ahh, do I see your cock growing, Nguarorerue? . . . no, no perhaps you are only thinking of someone you loved, somewhere, long ago . . . back in Südwest, eh?' To allow the tribal past to disperse, all memories ought to be public record, there's no point in preserving history with that Final Zero to look forward to . . . "

And two pages later (p.322) comes the following:

But we, Zone-Hereros, under the earth, how long will we wait in this north, this locus of death? Is it to be reborn? or have we really been buried for the last time, buried facing north like all the rest of our dead, and like all the holy cattle ever sacrificed to the ancestors. North is death's region. There may be no gods, but there is a pattern: names by themselves may have no magic, but the *act* of naming, the physical utterance, obeys the pattern. Nordhausen means dwellings in the north. The Rocket had to be produced out of a place called Nordhausen. The town adjoining was named Bleicheröde as a validation, a bit of redundancy so that the message would not be lost. The history of the old Hereros is one of lost messages. It began in mythical times, when the sly hare who nests in the Moon brought death among men, instead of the Moon's true message. The true message has never come. Perhaps the Rocket is meant to take us there someday, and then Moon will tell us its truth at last. There are those down in the Erdschweinhöhle, younger ones who've only known white autumn-prone Europe, who believe that Moon is their destiny. But older ones can remember that Moon, like Ndjambi Karanga, is both the bringer of evil and its avenger . . .
And Enzian's found the name Bleicheröde close enough to "Blicker," the nickname the early Germans gave to Death. They saw him white: bleaching and blankness. The name was later latinized to "Dominus Blicero." Weisman, enchanted, took it as his SS code name.

On page 420, during an episode dealing with the rocket technician Pökler and his daughter (who is kept away from him by his superiors so that during his periodic visits with her he doesn't know if this year's 'daughter' is in fact the one he saw last), one is reintroduced to the question of the hopelessness of recall, of surveillance like that cast upon Slothrop on page 120, and of personal — in this case

actually incestuous — sublimation which is manipulated from outside:

> A number of uncertainties shifted then for Pökler and locked into sense. To his shame, his first feeling was pride. He hadn't known he was so vital to the program. Even in this initial moment, he was seeing it from Their side — every quirk goes into the dossier, gambler, foot-fetishist or soccer fan, it's all important, it can all be used. Right now we have to keep them happy, or at least neutralize the foci of their unhappiness. You may not understand what their work really is, not at the level of the data, but you're an administrator after all, a leader, your job is to get results . . . Pökler, now, has mentioned a "daughter." Yes, yes we know it's disgusting, one never can tell what they have locked up in there with those equations, but we must all put off our judgments for now, there'll be time after the war to get back to the Pöklers and their dirty little secrets.

On page 520 one comes to the quote on the Real Text which has already appeared in this essay, it occurs during an episode that again deals with Enzian, and together with the paragraphs that surround it rephrases the main assumptions of the novel as a whole. The third paragraph on page 521 resurrects the idea of a planetary ambition invoked by Katje Bourgesius on page 223:

> We have to look for power sources here, and distribution networks we were never taught, routes of power our teachers never imagined, or were encouraged to avoid . . . we have to find meters whose scales are unknown in the world, draw our own schematics, getting feedback, making connections, reducing the error, trying to learn the real function . . . zeroing in on what incalculable plot? Up here, on the surface, coal-tars, hydrogenation, synthesis were always phony, dummy functions to hide the real, *the planetary mission* yes perhaps centuries in the unrolling . . . this ruinous plant, waiting for its Kabbalists and new alchemists to discover the Key, teach the mysteries to others . . .

Katje Bourgesius appears also on page 620, but it may be more appropriate to insert page 624 into the succession we're considering here. On page 624 Slothrop comes across graffiti announcing his own

presence in a place he's never visited before, and adds to it a sign which is a drawing of the mandala, of the layout of an Herero village, and, as he comes to realize, a view of the A4 rocket viewed from below . . . "By which time he had become tuned to other fourfold expressions — variations of Frans van der Groov's cosmic windmill — swastikas, gymnastic symbols FFFF in a circle symmetrically upside down and backward, Frisch Fromm Frölich Frei over neat doorways in quiet streets, and crossroads, where you can sit and listen in to traffic from the other Side, hearing about the future (no serial time over there: events are all there in the same eternal moment and so certain messages don't always 'make sense' back here: they lack historical structure, they sound fanciful, or insane)." On page 720, man's commitment to destructiveness is explained:

> . . . human consciousness, that poor cripple, that doomed and deformed thing, is about to be born. This is the world just before men. Too violently pitched alive in constant flow ever to be seen by men directly. They are meant only to look at it dead, in still strata, transputrified to oil or coal. Alive, it was a threat: it was Titans, was an overpeaking of life so clangorous and mad, such a green corona about Earth's body that some spoiler *had* to be brought in before it blew the creation apart. So we, the crippled keepers, were sent out to multiply, to have dominion. God's spoilers. Us. Counter-revolutionaries. *It is our mission to promote death.* The way we kill, the way we die, being unique among the Creatures. It was something we had to work on, historically and personally. To build from scratch up to its present status as reaction, nearly as strong as life, holding down the green uprising. But only nearly as strong.

Two pages later Blicero, during a speech on death, describes it as Europe's gift to the world:

> "America *was* the edge of the World. A message for Europe, continent-sized, inescapable. Europe had found the site for its Kingdom of Death, that special Death the West had invented. Savages had their waste regions, Kalaharis, lakes so misty they could not see the other side. But Europe had gone deeper — into obsession, addiction, away from all the savage innocences. America was a gift from the invisible powers, a way of returning. But Europe refused it.

It wasn't Europe's Original Sin — the latest name for that is Modern Analysis — but it happens that Subsequent Sin is harder to atone for. "In Africa, Asia, Amerindia, Oceania, Europe came and established its order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered. In time the death-colonies grew strong enough to break away. But the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death, the structure of it, kept on. Now we are in the last phase. American Death has come to occupy Europe. It has learned empire from its old metropolis. But now we have *only* the structure left us, none of the great rainbow plumes, no fittings of gold, no epic marches over alkali seas. The savages of other continents, corrupted but still resisting in the name of life, have gone on despite everything . . . while Death and Europe are separate as ever, their love still unconsummated. Death only rules here. It has never, in love, become *one with* . . . "

Another episodic strand runs through pages numbered in the sixties which acts contrapuntally to the one running through those numbered in the low twenties. One might go so far as to analogize it to moving from the inside of a spiral outwards as opposed to moving in from without. Blicero's speech is the end of the progression numbered through the twenties — the book has 760 pages in all —while the first sentence on page 60 is: "Death has come in the pantry door: stands watching them, iron and patient, with a look that says *try to tickle me*." On page 166, death is identified with the basic ingredients of industrialism — coal and steel — and with the Protestant preterite, those who've been passed over: " 'Consider coal and steel. There is a place where they meet. The interface between coal and steel is coal-tar. Imagine coal, down in the earth, dead black, no light, the very substance of death. Death ancient, prehistoric, species *we will never see again*. Growing older, blacker, deeper, in layers of perpetual night. Above ground, the steel rolls out fiery, bright. But to make steel, the coal tars, darker and heavier, must be taken from the original coal. Earth's excrement, purged out for the ennoblement of shining steel. Passed over.' "

This analogizing of coal tars — the source of such staples of modern life as the aspirin — with preterition continues. On page 260 there is mention of synthetics and of one Max Schweiter, who is connected with Psychochemie AG, and whom Slothrop asks for information

about Imoplex G, an "erectile plastic" developed at Blicero's behest. It's through the metaphorical identification of coal tar with preterition that technology's tendency to "favor death" (p.261) becomes, for the novel as a whole, a way of accounting for everybody's involvement in that same technology.

A hundred pages later than that (p.361) geology's anticipation of a social reality (and one notes that that reality is concretized not in the fact of sedimentation but in the process which uncovers and transforms it), is developed into an *historical* preceding of signified by signifier. We learn that the Schwartzkommando's badge is like that worn by von Trotha's troops in the brutal suppression of the Herero uprising of 1904. Again it is a circle, with one letter at the center and four above, below, and at either side of it, representing the five positions of the A4 rocket's launching switch. The German-Herero relationship has become what one might call a literary tautology. Entirely conversant with German science, the Hereros see in it their own mythic iconography; which in *its* turn might suggest an even earlier case of anticipatory signification. Because it is a product — or at least a direct consequence — of German industry —in both senses of the word — the Herero's determination to commit tribal suicide brings us back to the question of considering "the behavior of the whole injury." A tribal project is formulated by way of and because of science, but it's conceived as a project entirely justified by local mythopoesis, and the compatibility of the two is a consequence of their sharing a vocabulary at what's been called the Planetary level. The reference at a parallel point in the series of pages in the twenties to the Moon as both the bringer of evil and its avenger (p.322, see above) is mythopoeically succinct not only for the Hereros but, through recurrent references to European female deities such as in the passage which follows, for everyone else in the novel too. [50] In *Gravity's Rainbow* planetary ambition is founded at the convergence of pre-Christian myth — the Hereros before colonization are described on page 321 as "one of the last

[50]. In regard to which it is pleasant to note that the Adorno essay cited above ends with the following: "Paul Klee too belongs to any debate about committed and autonomous art: for his work, *écriture par excellence*, had roots in literature and would not have been what it was without them — or if it had not consumed them. During the first world war or shortly after,

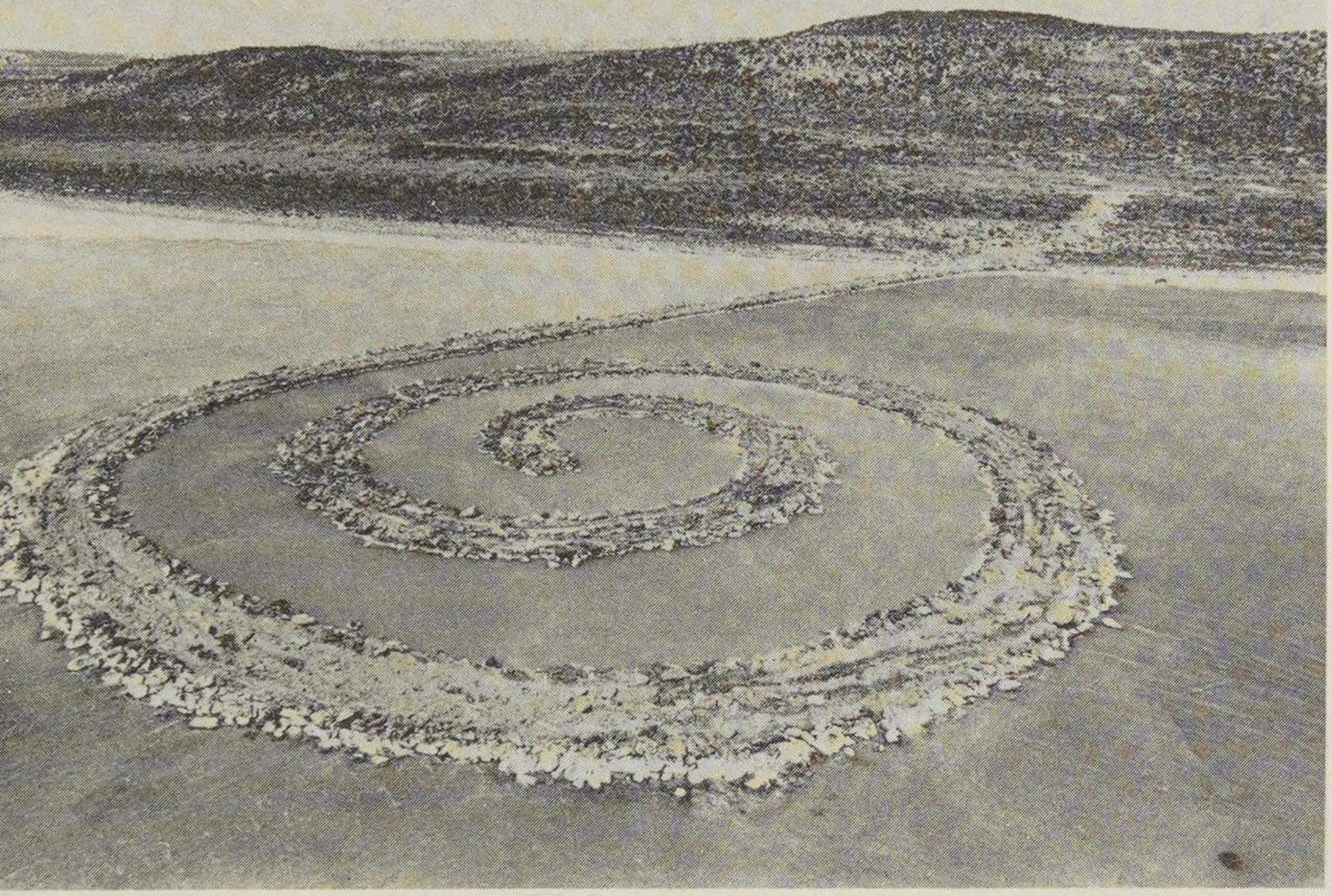
pockets of Pre-Christian Oneness left on the planet" — and scientific, *i.e.*, universal law.

The Hereros' pursuit of suicide represents a reading of a text of which they are a part. It is written in scientific language and, because of that, understood through groping back to terms which precede but anticipate its own. In an adjacent passage (p.364) the idea of sin, and the sense in which the novel is an inversion of Christian literary models such as the *Mort d' Arthur*, is most clearly enunciated. The world is seen to proceed not through values but through things, not talismans but instruments. Yet, as we've said, this isn't an attribution of any kind of neutrality:

> Slothrop's dumb idling heart sez: The Scharzgerät is no Grail, Ace, that's not what the G in Imoplex G stands for. And you are no knightly hero. The best you can compare with is Tannhäuser, the Singing Nincompoop — you've been under one mountain at Nordhausen, been known to sing a song or two with uke accompaniment, and don'tcha feel you're in a sucking marshland of sin out here, Slothrop? maybe not the same thing William Slothrop, vomiting a good part of 1630 away over the side of that *Arbella*, meant when he said "sin" . . . But what you've done is put yourself on somebody else's voyage — some Frau Holda, some Venus in some mountain — playing her, its, game . . . you know that in some irreducible way it's an evil game. You play because you have nothing better to do, but that doesn't make it right. And where is the Pope whose staff's gonna bloom for you?

Another hundred pages and a lack of choice or enthusiasm similar to Slothrop's is said to have surrounded the birth of the rocket. On page 464 Thanatz, one of the maddest characters in the book (whose name surely has its origins in the word Thanatos and who, elsewhere recommending, that if Sado-Masochism could be instituted at the family level the state would wither away, thus collapsing into his own persona precisely the confusion between

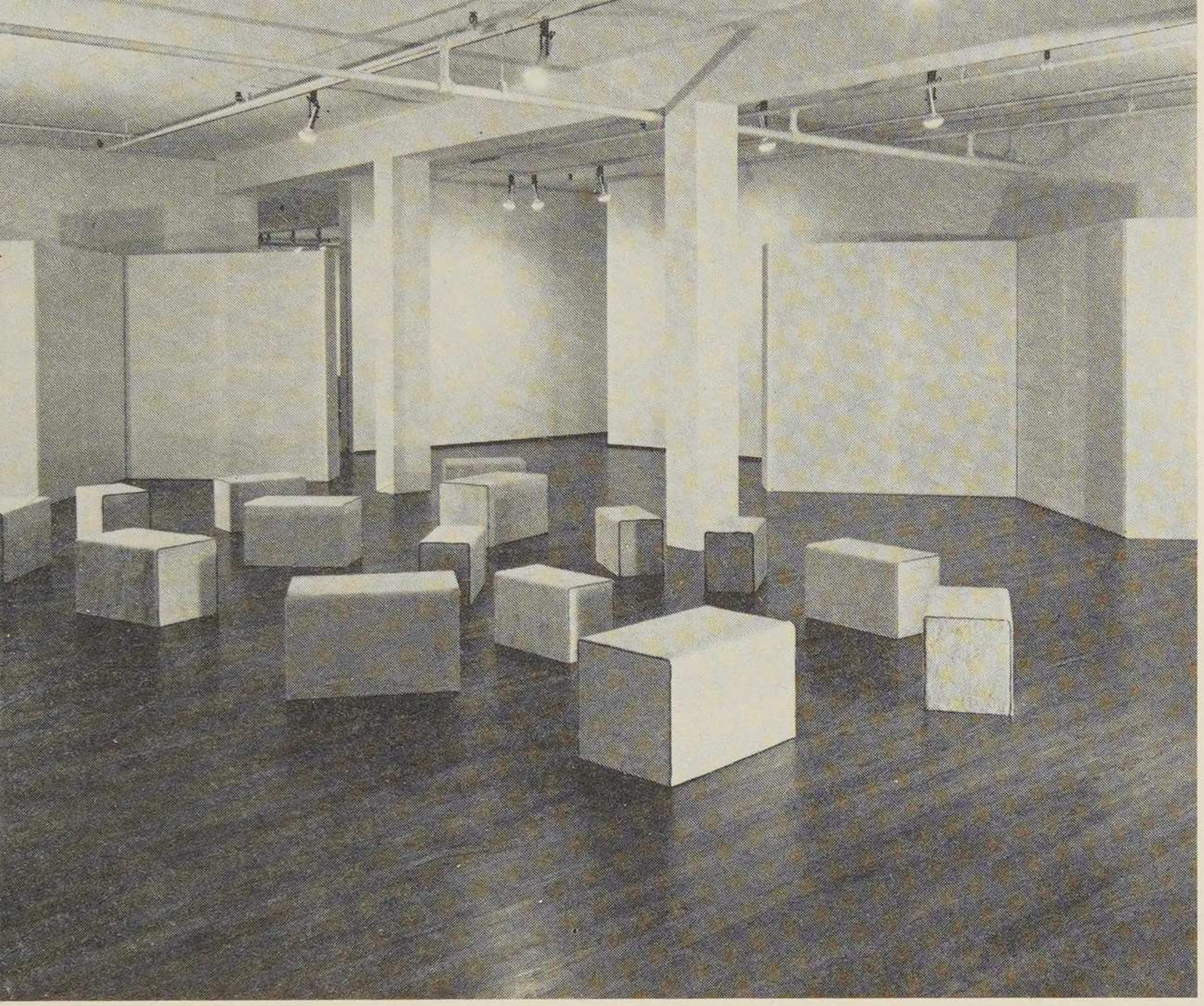
Klee drew cartoons of Kaiser Wilhelm as an inhuman iron-eater. Later, in 1920, these became — the development can be shown quite clearly — the *Angelus Novus,* the machine angel, who, though he no longer bears any emblem of caricature or commitment, flies far beyond both. The machine angel's enigmatic eyes force the onlooker to try to decide whether he is announcing the culmination of disaster or salvation hidden within it. But, as Walter Benjamin, who owned the drawing, said, he is the angel who does not give but takes."



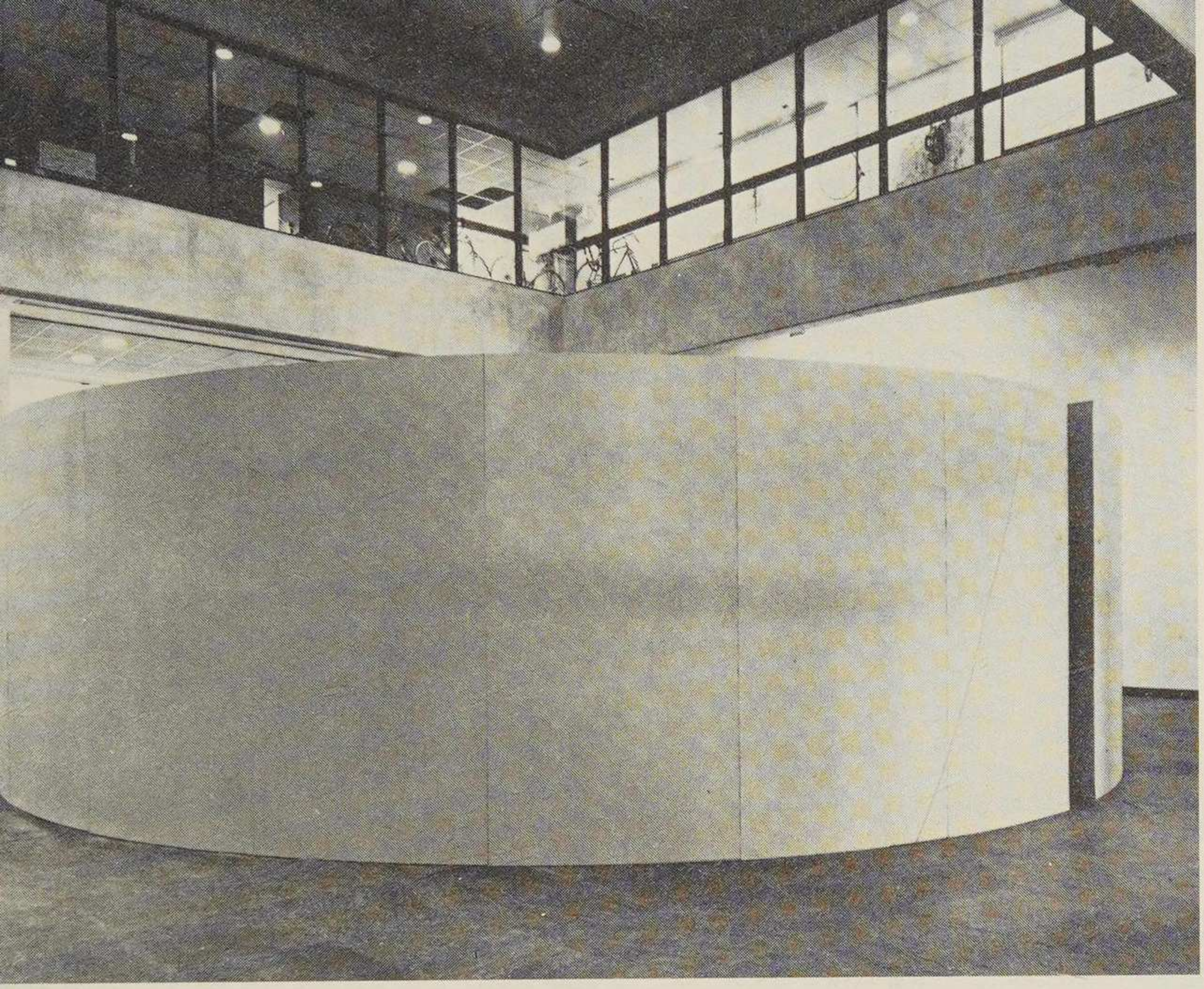


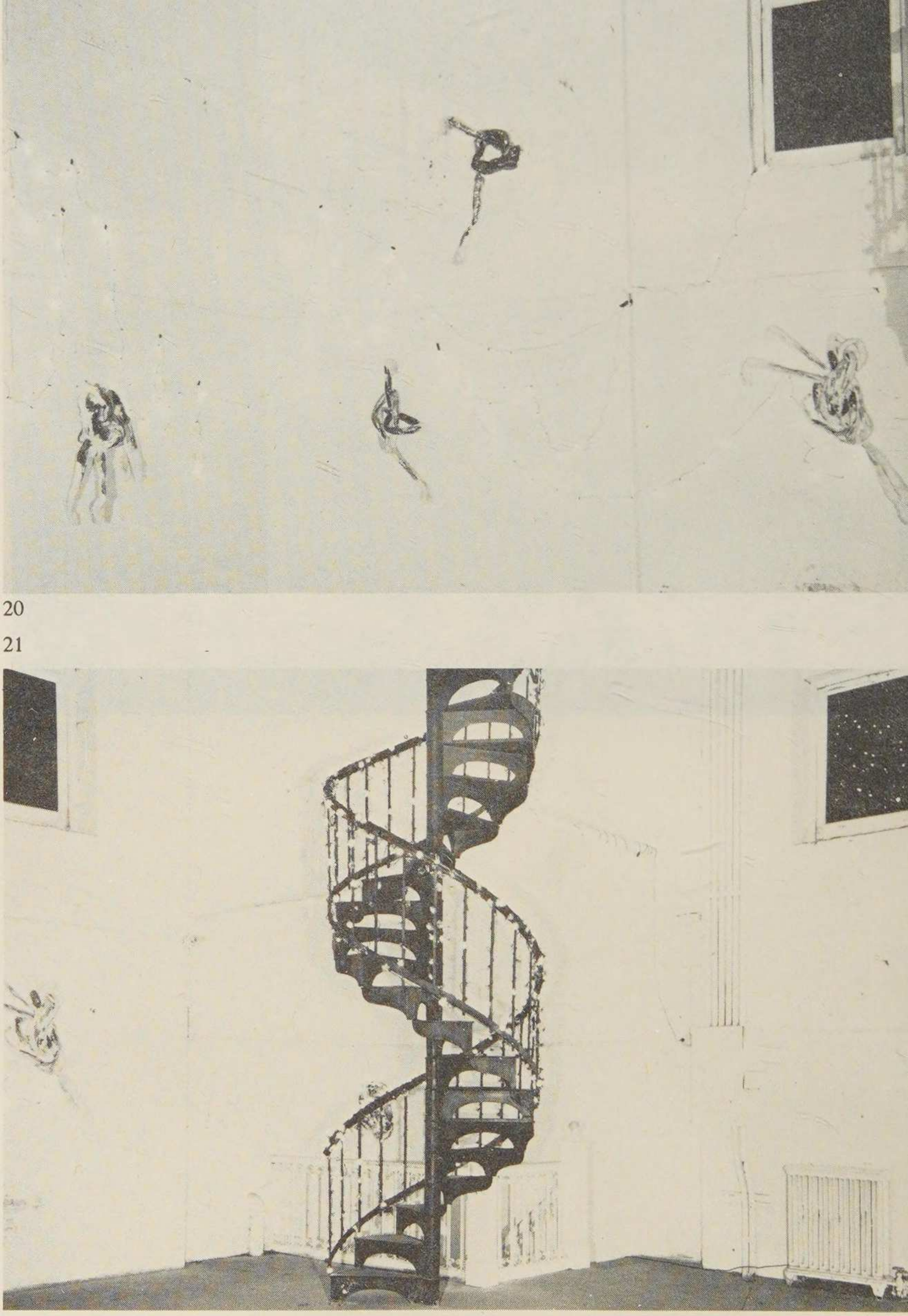
R Smithson
April 1970

Maneuver sun into Center from Helicopter





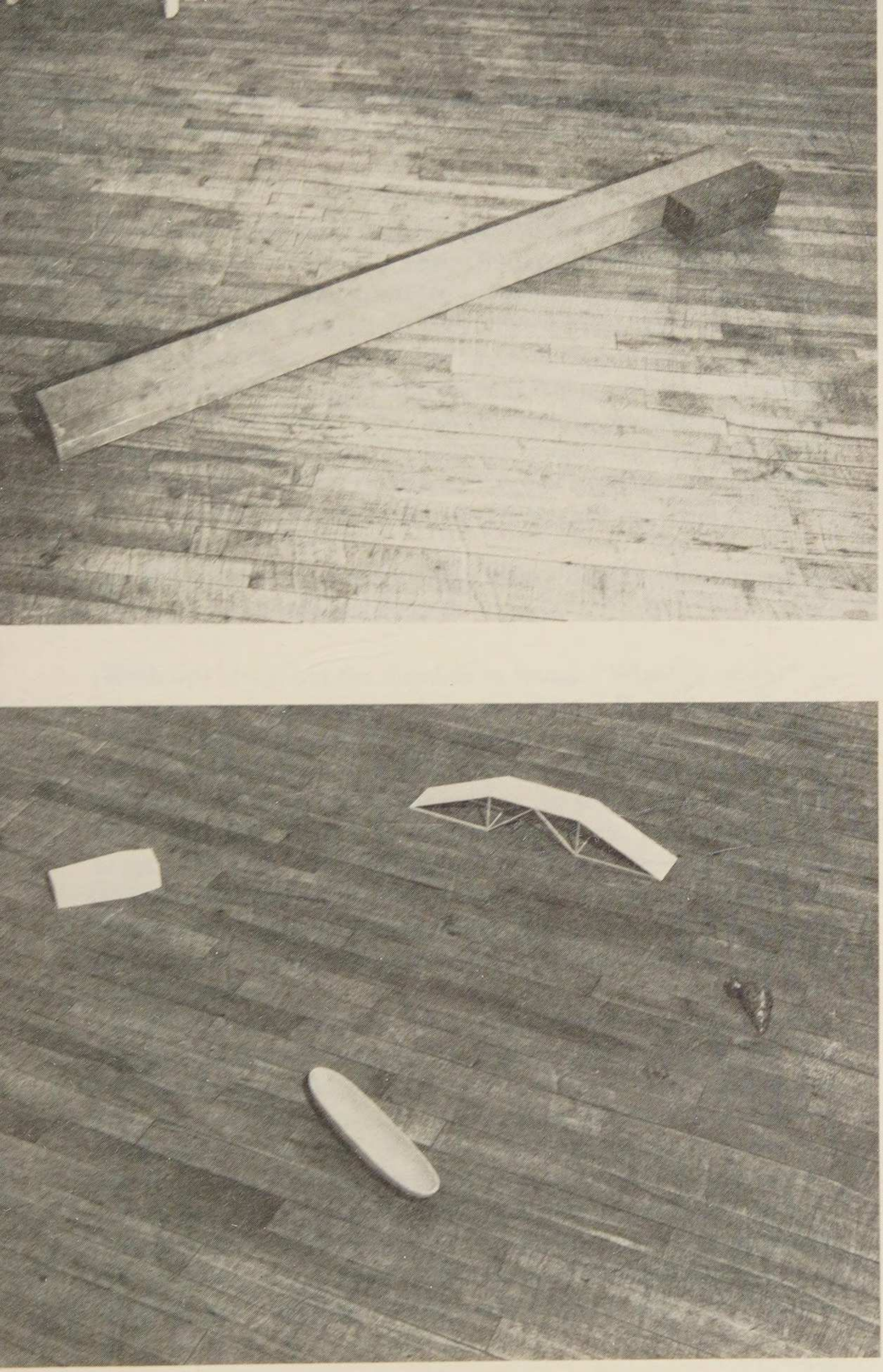




20

21

20. Linda Benglis, *Installation at the Clocktower*, 1973. Knots with tinsel and colored lights (partial view).



el Shapiro, *75 lbs.*, 1970. Magnesium and iron, 4"x 73¼"x8".

el Shapiro, *Untitled*, 1972. Bridge: balsa wood, 3"x 20¼"x3"; boat: balsa wood,

erotic and non-erotic destructiveness, and the inevitability of that confusion, which Freud invoked), describes the rocket's development as follows:

> There is no problem steering him onto the subject of the rocket — "I think of the A4," sez he, "as a baby Jesus, with endless committees of Herods out to destroy it in infancy — Prussians, some of whom in their innermost hearts still felt artillery to be a dangerous innovation. If you'd been out there . . . inside the first minute, you saw, you grew docile under its . . . it really did possess a Max Weber charisma . . . some joyful — and *deeply* irrrational — force the state bureaucracy could never routinize, against which it could not prevail . . . they did resist it, but they also allowed it to happen. We can't imagine anyone *choosing* a role like that. But every year, somehow, their numbers grow."

On page 563 the anticipation of signified by signifier announced on page 361 is conclusively elaborated:

> [Slothrop] brings out the mandala he found. "What's it mean?"
> Andreas sets it on the ground, turns it till the K points northwest. "Klar," touching each letter, "Entlüftung, these are the female letters. North letters. In our villages the women lived in huts on the northern half of the circle, the men on the south. The village itself was a mandala. Klar is fertilization and birth, Entlüftung is the breath, the soul. Zündung and Vorstufe are the male signs, the activities, fire and preparation or building. And in the center, here, Haupstufe. It is the pen where we kept the sacred cattle. The souls of the ancestors. All the same here. Birth, soul, fire, building. Male and female together.
> The four fins of the Rocket made a cross, another mandala. Number one pointed the way it would fly. Two for pitch, three for yaw and roll, four for pitch. Each opposite pair of vanes worked together, and moved in opposites senses. Opposites together. You can see how we might feel it speak to us, even if we don't set one up on its fins and worship it. But it was waiting for us when we came north to Germany so long ago . . . even confused and uprooted as we were then, we *knew* that our destiny was tied up with its own. That we had been passed over by von Trotha's army so that we could find the Aggregat."
> Slothrop gives him the mandala. He hopes it will work like the

> mantra that Enzian told him once, mba-kayere (I am passed over), mba-kayere . . .

And on pages 660-61 the themes developed at the begining of this series of episodes surface in an image of the conversion of nature into death which explicitly links the psychology of an individual —Katje Bourgesius, who is speaking to Enzian — with a transformation which goes beyond Eros:

> "How can my story be sadder than that?" Shameless girl, she isn't humoring him, she's actually flirting with him now, any technique her crepe-paper and spider italics young ladyhood ever taught her, to keep from having to move into his blackness. Understand it isn't *his* blackness, but her own — an inadmissable darkness she is making believe for the moment is Enzian's, something beyond even the center of Pan's grove, something not pastoral at all, but of the city, a set of ways in which the natural forces are turned aside, stepped down, rectified or bled to ground and come out very like the malignant dead: the Qlippoth that Weissman has "transcended," souls whose journey across was so bad they lost all their kindness back in the blue lightning (the long sea-furrows of it rippling), and turned to imbecile killers and jokers, making unintelligible honks in the emptiness, sinewed and stripped thin as rats — a city-darkness that is her own, a textured darkness in which flows go in all directions, and nothing begins, and nothing ends. But as time passes things get louder there. It is shaking itself into her consciousness.

Finally, on page 760, the last words of the book are:

> . . . or, if song must find you, here's one They never taught anyone to sing, a hymn by William Slothrop, centuries forgotten and out of print, sung to a simple and pleasant air of the period. Follow the bouncing ball:
>
> There is a Hand to turn the time,
> Though thy Glass today be run,
> Till the Light that hath brought the Towers low
> Find the last poor Pret'rite one . . .
> Till the Riders sleep by ev'ry road,
> All through our crippl'd Zone,
> With a face on ev'ry mountainside,

And a soul in ev'ry stone . . .
Now everybody —

It is, then, possible to think of *Gravity's Rainbow* as a series of recurrences ordered quite straightforwardly into a physical mass. It is the banality of this ordering which is under consideration here because, as Adorno says, it is that which defines the socio-political nature of the work's autonomy.

The book is mapped on to the landscape of Europe in order that it may propose an identification of the U.S. with that same area. One may think of this as a series of juxtapositions onto Eurasia of the map of America, so that, for example, if one draws a rectangle which contains the U.S. and places this onto a map of Europe so that Berlin is in the top left, the easternmost extent of Tchitcherine's sojourn on the Kirghiz steppes would be at the bottom right. Within this restriction of the action of the novel to a surface equal to that of America's, images are in case after case intensified by their convergence with historical or linguistic fact. One notes that Germany is almost exactly above South West Africa, and that both Trotha and Herero may be words which have behind them early German words for the God of the Christians. [51] That the Frau Holde referred to on page 364 is a Germanic goddess identified specifically with north Germany. [52] That 'Enzian' was the name given by the Germans to the anti-aircraft rocket they were trying to develop at the end of the war. And that Nordhausen and Bleicherode are indeed the names of the two places where the rocket was designed and tested. [53]

[51] See Philippe Wolff, *Western Languages A. D. 100-1500,* trans. Frances Partridge, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1971, p. 94ff. The early German words in question are "*truht* (a troop of free fighting men, and tending to represent God as a war leader, freely followed by the faithful)" and "*hêrro* (the most recent, since there is no corresponding English word) based on *hêr,* venerably old . . ."

[52] Cf.: "*Holde, Holle, Hulda, Hulle,* or *Holl.* A Germanic goddess, especially of the Suevi, Hessians, and Thuringians, appearing in many manifestations. Early she was a sky goddess, often to be seen riding on the wind. Snow was said to be feathers from her bed, detached as she was making it up. Often in her wild rides through the sky she is accompanied by a procession of witchlike creatures. Women suspected of witchcraft were said to 'ride with Holde' . . . ." *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1972, p. 500.

[53] Brian Ford, *German Secret Weapons,* New York, Ballantine Books, 1969, p. 148.

Signification proliferates, then, through constantly reminding the reader of the facts as they are and were, of oppositions which mutually illuminate, including geographical identification which unearths curious coincidences. When Tchitcherine is engaged in teaching the Kirghiz the New Turkic Alphabet — part of Stalin's solution to the nationalities 'problem' — the locale is described as being like the wild west, and it so happens that the Kirghiz were surpressed — and at the same time nicknamed the "black Kirghiz" — at the same time that the plains Indians were being wiped out here; in latitude the area is dead level with the Dakotas. In *Gravity's Rainbow* literariness renews one's acquaintance with facts, to which the fiction has a relationship which can hardly be called arbitrary, and from which it ultimately seems to want to claim no genuine independence. The text is instead an encounter with the possibility that the work of the artist is of clarification rather than invention, in the sense that invention is no more, or less, than the manipulation of literary devices in order that proclivities inherent in the language with which the book is written may be more fully felt, or felt anew. For both Pynchon and Smithson, artistic production is concerned to displace and reorder material. Never, as Smithson said, is it undertaken to manipulate ideas in a way that is independent of things. The *Spiral Jetty* marks, and in that marking reconstitutes, content already identified with its location. Smithson knew that for the South-West Indians the spiral (the conch shell) represents the whirlwind and the word. And also that although science has found no evidence to support the legend of a whirlpool at the bottom of the lake, the last person who claimed to have seen it died within living memory. Bearing in mind Pynchon's "Soul in ev'ry stone," it's worth considering Smithson on Poe:

> Poe's narrative of A. Gordon Pym seems to me excellent art criticism as a prototype for rigorous "non-site" investigations. "Nothing worth mentioning occurred for the next twenty-four hours except that, in examining the ground to the eastward of the fluid chasm, we found two triangular holes of great depth, and also with black granite sides." His description of chasms and holes seem to verge on proposals for "earth words." The shapes of the chasms themselves become "verbal roots" that spell out the difference between darkness

> and light. Poe ends his mental image with the sentence — "I have graven it within the hills and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock." [54]

Smithson is responding to the fact that in an editorial "Note" appended to the *Narrative* Poe 'reads' the shapes of the landscape as hieroglyphs of which the etymologies are Ethiopian, Arabian and Egyptian, root words. [55]

Pynchon's and Smithson's use of the spiral and the mandala might be described as the adoption and development of a peripheral form which defamiliarizes a language conditioned by Christianity. Both are devices that, to adopt a phrase of Braudel's, set the short view against the long. In Pynchon's case, the scientific against the mythical, which are thereby made to converge. On page 100 of *Gravity's Rainbow* the mandala is described as "the ancient sun wheel from which tradition says the swastika was broken by the early Christians, to disguise their outlaw symbol." On pages 412-13, where Kekulé's dream of the serpent with its tail in its mouth is invoked — "Kekulé went looking among the molecules of the time for the hidden shapes he knew were there" — the mandala is identified with the tetravalency of carbons. As for the spiral, Pierre Gaudibert has this to say:

[54] Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," *Artforum,* VII (September, 1968), p. 49.

[55] In another Poe piece, "The Journal of Julius Rodman," the writer pauses in awe before certain stratifications of rock along the embankment of the Missouri River, and wonders whether they were produced by geological upheaval or architectural design; to him they seem more like works of art than of nature. It is passages such as these, as well as his more overt interest in social situations and particularities of the landscape (such as the whirlpool) that signify through semantic, etymological, or iconographical association, which make of Poe more than a source of passing relevance here. His *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* also contains several striking figural anticipations of *Gravity's Rainbow*. In an introductory essay to the paperback edition (New York, Hill and Wang, p. XIV), Sidney Kaplan cites such elements as "the black rock that marked the North Pole *(Rupes nigra et altissima* Mercator labels it on his map of 1569); the hollow earth of Captain Symmes; the Antarctic Utopia of the Perfect Whites" as basic to Poe's construction of the *Narrative*. Not only is the novel generated out of Black/White, North/South oppositional pairs, but in its final pages the narrator disappears into a blinding white veil of light reminiscent of the screen at the end of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Not a face, but a figure looming from behind the veil, brings Poe's *Narrative* to its conclusion: "But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow."

> Finally the spiral remains the model and the symbol of every vital force, of every deployment of generative energy, of every primordial vibration, of every fecundity, in short, of the fundamental structure of every becoming (energy, life, consciousness, spirit). As the spiral motif allows us to visualize in a simplified manner the order of change, symmetry within asymmetry, the dynamic equilibrium at the center of perpetual disequilibrium, it is applied to multiple forms of becoming, birth as decline, life as death, progress as decadence, evolution as involution. Even more strange — and which makes it especially deserving of deeper investigation — the spiral is also found in a number of traditional teachings as well as in the Hegelian and Marxist dialectic, which utilizes the notion of "development in a spiral," although it assumes a relatively marginal importance in orthodox Christian symbolism. [56]

Smithson and Pynchon both refer, the sculptor in the film of the *Spiral Jetty* and the novelist on page 321 of *Gravity's Rainbow*, to the world before the continents drifted apart. Their works are no less, and no more, than affective speculations on material sedimented into signs. There is little in either work which doesn't lead one into, below the surface of, physical reality. This is the sense in which our perception of them is of autonomous works prepared to depict things-as-they-are, the state of the language and its landscape. One last example will serve to illustrate this aspect of their autonomy. Smithson's reference to Indian iconography has a parallel in the word Pynchon invented for the pig hero, a folk-ritual figure whose mantle Slothrop wears for a while. Pynchon gives this character the name Plechazunga, an unusual word for modern German in that there are few words in that language with the sound 'Ple'. There is, however, a root for it in one of the languages German replaced. 'Plechazunga' is a combination of an old Balto-Slavic word for tearing or peeling — plèk — and the modern German word for tongue (*die zunge*), so the name means 'torn tongue', and in it suppressed and suppressor stand side by side and also inverted, in that the verb is provided by the language that is now extinct. [57]

[56] Pierre Gaudibert, "Spirale et Temps," in *Spiralen & Progressionen,* ed. Jean-Christophe and Max Wechsler, Lucerne, Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1975, n. p.
[57] Philip Scherer, "Germanic-Baltic-Slavic Etyma," *Supplement to Language*, XVII, (January-March, 1941), p. 28.

One recalls Karl Kraus: "The closer you look at a word, the greater the distance from which it stares back at you." And this is the sense in which the attitude toward artistic conventionality taken by these works must be said to be the opposite of idealist hermeticism. Their autonomy has little to do with psychologizing appropriations of the sublime which would have it that the art work provides a model for a sense of self that 'transcends' history, a closed environment in which an idea of 'purity' may continue to fester in self-congratulatory splendor. In that they stand opposed to that thinking which would separate thinking from things, the individual from history, science from ideology, *Gravity's Rainbow* from the *Spiral Jetty* confirm, superficially curious though the comparison may seem, Lenin's earlier assault on that version of science which would take thought out of the world: "Yesterday's limit to our knowledge of the infinitesimal particles of matter has disappeared, hence — concludes the idealist philosopher — matter has disappeared (but thought remains). Every physicist and every engineer knows that electricity is (material) motion, but nobody knows clearly *what* is moving, hence — concludes the idealist philosopher — we can dupe the philosophically uneducated with the seductively 'economical' proposition: let us *conceive* motion *without matter*." [58]

The motion inextricably part of the material world in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* is that process which governs coherence and identifies credibility for us. In the conclusion to this essay we shall attempt to pursue the putative comparability which has concerned us thus far to the end of establishing that what is experienced in *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* is a contemporary view of the tension between language as product and producer of the world in which we live. In the course of doing that, we shall say that these works are ultimately comparable because they propose similar attitudes to the technical problem of transition, and that it is this which thereby becomes the basis for something like a world-view. That is the — only — sense in which these works ought to be described as representative of a generation's attitude towards the artistic conventionality it inherits. It is, again, the sense in which

[58] V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism,* Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1972, p. 340.

the successful work of art shows one where one stands by refraining from recommending an alternative position.

> The operation which consists of reconciling the possible with the impossible accurately illustrates the word 'impossible' itself. And yet literature *exists*; that is its greatest paradox. [59]

* * *

> What is certain is that the immediacy, the retrievability of different tongues in the speech act of the polyglot is, in crucial part, a function of the environment. Different social settings, different locations strongly modify the sense of linguistic priority. [60]

Viktor Shklovsky's observation that art consists of the rediscovery and development of peripheral forms seems to apply to *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* as it does also to Joyce's *Ulysses* and to such events in the recent history of American painting and sculpture as Newman's and Pollock's involvement with (different varieties of) American Indian art. [61] Shklovsky's speculation has been confirmed by the art that's come after as much as by the works of the past on which the original remark relied. Moreover, the development of the peripheral as a structural device has — as one would expect — continued to undergo mutations which underscore its indispensibility to, or rather inextricability from, a certain kind of artistic ambition, an ambition which it's fair to say identifies a tradition. Perhaps it is as a consequence of this continual development of attitudes to the manipulation of peripherality that Joyce's use of the vernacular and the domestic to defamiliarize Homer, or Pollock's of sand painting to reconstitute the pictorialism which had previously been most fully realized in Paris, seems from the vantage point of the mid-seventies qualitatively different from the use of the peripheral found in the work of Smithson or Pynchon. (It might be objected that we are too inclined to define as 'peripheral' that which is simply different. Our reply would be that this is precisely what the term means when one is looking at anything, and that it is in this way that things and events are made to be read as peripheral when they occur

[59] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* trans. Richard Howard, Cleveland, The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973, p. 175.
[60] George Steiner, *After Babel,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 291.
[61] Viktor Shklovsky, *Sentimental Journey,* trans. Richard Sheldon, Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1970, p. 180.

in works of art.) In *Gravity's Rainbow* or the *Spiral Jetty* the peripheral, introduced as that which is on the fringes of culture — linguistically and historically, as in Pynchon's use of Balto-Slavic and of the Kirghiz, or Smithson's use of Utah and of American Indian lore and iconography — seems to make itself felt as such in order that its marginality may be experienced as the reverse. The peripheral becomes the main route or routes of access to the work, a function of that digression which has been said in the earlier parts of this essay to provide the novel and the sculpture with their continuity. And because of our experience of that mutation of the device to which we've just referred — in that we share an historical and empathic space with *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* that we don't with the great works of the 1920s or 50s — this seems to be a continuity which had achieved an 'unprecedented' relationship between the outside and the inside of the art object; a renewed interpenetration of the rhetorical and narrative levels of the work. That is to say, a relationship in which the latter seems both more relative — in the sense of being more mobile — in its position *vis à vis* the former, and also more thoroughly buried by it. Whether this is a symptom of the 'Americaness' of these works is for the reader to ponder. He or she isn't necessarily committed to anything — certainly not to what has been usefully termed the Affective Fallacy, [62] since representation in the sense of signifying an as it were *anthropological* order is not at issue — by noting that America itself is an entity recently on the fringes of European culture but now at its center.

In any case, it makes little sense, then, to say of *Gravity's Rainbow* or the *Spiral Jetty* that such and such lies at the center of either work, since, as we have also attempted to establish in this essay, a concommitant of their reliance on digression is that anything either work contains is as much at its center as anything else. Further, they are committed to the digressiveness shown by Auerbach to be the paradigmatic armature of the epic form in a manner which invokes the qualifications made on that form in and by the age of cinema. Epics are built out of discreet parts of an accumulating whole. The

62 W. K. Wimsatt and Munroe Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," *The Verbal Icon,* New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1954, pp. 21-39.

kind of mutual discretion found in the works under discussion has behind it that cinematic influence which Benjamin perceived as having an effect on the theater of Bertolt Brecht: "The forms of epic theater correspond to the new technical forms — cinema and radio . . . In film, the theory has become more and more accepted that the audience should be able to 'come in' at any point, that complicated plot developments should be avoided and that each part, besides the value it has for the whole, should also possess its own episodic value." [63]

What is interesting here is not so much the question of being able to 'come in' at any point — we should prefer to think of this capacity, which we have noted as an attribute of Cézanne's use of the grid as an aspect of cinematic structure anticipated by the development of anti-hierarchical ways of ordering the art object which defined the modernist enterprise in general by the end of the last century — but rather the impetus given by the example of film to manipulations of the device which result in ever greater separations between episodes. This is the sense in which *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* seem in one way or another to achieve an 'unprecedented' kind of articulation. One respect in which Pynchon's novel differs from *Ulysses* is that the encyclopaedic properties of the more recent work are predicated upon a visual descriptiveness which is more likely, while it reinforces literary interiority, to cause continuity to be effected through the memory of the preceding visual description. This too has already been mentioned. Freedom of movement in *Gravity's Rainbow* is deeply indebted to the freedom of movement provided by the shot in cinema. When transitions become especially rapid and complex — as in the sequence which begins by talking about cathedral spires and proceeds through a series of visually comparable convergences which include the clasping of a stocking by a suspender belt and the Brenschluss point — their fluency is provided by the reinforcement given to the act of reading by cinematic practice, notably in a way which if anything points to the semiotic density of any visual image and in doing so imputes that same multiplicity of reference to the language which summoned it

[63] Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* trans. Anna Bostock, London, NLB, 1973, p. 6.

up. The disjunctiveness upon which *Gravity's Rainbow*'s transitions rely is similar to what Joyce does by placing quite different kinds of prose next to one another — a device which Pynchon too employs in and for itself — which makes it possible to say that where Pynchon differs from Joyce is where he reconstitutes the latter's ambition. [64] It is in its assumptions about allusiveness, it's communication of a potential for expansion into multi-dimensionality of any message whatsoever, that *Gravity's Rainbow* identifies itself with the ambition of *Ulysses* as it simultaneously distances itself historically by recognizing and employing the priority of cinema in the sensibility of its own time.

Techniques of transition are important to this discussion because it is in them that one recognizes the text functioning so as to ensure that to move from one episode to another is to maintain a relationship between disparate states whose legibility depends on an

[64] Edward Mendelson's essay, "Gravity's Encyclopaedia," which appeared as this last part of our own study was going to press, confirms from a different perspective several of the points made here. His effort to account for the salient features of *Gravity's Rainbow* by examining it in terms of a special genre — the encyclopaedic narrative — leads him to compare Pynchon and Joyce at some length, particularly in their attitude to language, their use of models based on the family (Joyce) and paranoia (Pynchon), and their assumptions about what is important in the depiction of character.

Most relevant here is Mendelson's assertion that the novel's ideological and thematic center lies in the Kirghiz episode, because it clearly depicts a situation in which history is shaping language most directly: "For the Kirghiz people, before the arrival of Tchitcherine and his bureaucracy, language 'was purely speech, gesture, touch . . . and even an Arabic script to replace'. (p. 338) With the introduction of the New Turkic Alphabet, or NTA, various divisions of labor and authority now organize and articulate themselves over the buried strata of the local folk culture. Unlike the language of Joyce's 'Oxen of the Sun,' the NTA does not develop according to an organic model but is shaped deliberately by the forces of government, forces which are themselves ultimately directed and initiated by the cartels which organize the book's secular world. If Joyce's 'Oxen of the Sun' chapter in *Ulysses* offers a linguistic history modelled on embryology and concerned mainly with the history of literary styles and their relationship to social convention, then, according to Mendelson, *Gravity's Rainbow*, by demonstrating how changes in language are politically motivated, may be said to assert the nonavailability of that organic model. For Mendelson, this has all the consequences of a 'Fall': "All the book's efforts at truth-telling, all its thrusts at the increase of freedom through the revelation of necessity, are *infected* by the inevitable fact that the book itself must use a language that is, unavoidably, a system shaped by the very powers and orders that it hopes to reveal. Language can never be liberated from lies. One cannot speak outside of language, and one cannot directly speak the truth from within it — this in not only the reflective sense proclaimed by recent critical theory, but in a political sense as well. To separate oneself from language, in an attempt to be free from its imposed order, is to enter a world of chaos and vacancy. This tragic realization is at the ideological center as well as on the stylistic surface of the book." Mendelson's essay appears in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon,* ed. George Levine and David Levereny, Boston, Little Brown & Co., 1976.

experience of displacement. It is there, as we shall shortly explain, that one sees in them a particular treatment of the theme of repression as a characteristic of language. *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* are polyglot enterprises which, acknowledging their own intersection with history as things of a certain kind, make a specifiable use of the history they inherit. In presenting the work itself as a generative device — in a manner responsive to Mallarmé's example of the successive exclusion by one of all other pages as a model for reading — *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* invite an analysis which, as Starobinski says of Saussure's, "is oriented not towards a generative psychic faculty (the imagination) but towards antecedent verbal and historical fact." [65]

> One . . . realizes that there are some signs that seem better adapted to the expression of abstract correlations (like *symbols*) and others that would appear to be more useful in direct reference to states of the world, *icons* or *indices*, which are more immediately involved in the direct mentioning of actual objects. [66]

To talk of a sign which acts as a generative device being a consequence of "antecedent verbal and historical fact" is hardly to lapse into intentionalism of any sort, since we see that whether anagrammatic reconstitution takes place consciously or unconsciously the effect, inasmuch as the result is a work of art dependent on the redistribution of some 'hidden' order, is the same in either case. However, the Russian scholar Vyacheslav Ivanov, in contradistinction to Saussure's claim that he knew of no employment of anagrammatic generation in which the artist was aware of the original meaning of the device he or she was engaged in redeploying, has offered an historical observation regarding a conscious use of it that seems relevant to the work of Smithson and Pynchon. Through the example of Sergei Eisenstein, it sets the scene for the modernist practice of unveiling — as it were 'de-anagrammizing' — the work:

> The degree of conscious understanding of one's own poetical devices varies within the epoch and the personality. It might be supposed

[65] Jean Starobinski, *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.
[66] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976, p. 157.

that the critical periods (such as the beginning of the Renaissance and the 20th century) could make it possible to develop fullest consciousness of one's own poetics, as might be shown by the example of the great Russian writer Andrei Belyi, who was one of the founders of modern poetics and of the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, whose theoretical legacy remains the source of inspiration for recent studies of the art . . . if one accepts Lévi-Strauss's idea about the influence of the attitude of the society preventing the poet from understanding his own devices it might be supposed that the epoch of spiritual and aesthetic revolt makes this social pressure less important. Thus the whole position of art . . . in the 20th century might be connected with the sudden rise of poetics studied also by poets and artists themselves — as geometrical studies of perspective and other foundations of visual arts were made possible for Dürer and Leonardo by the spiritual atmosphere of the Renaissance. The society that suppresses the free will for self-recognition is hostile to the exact science of art. It is by no means accidental that a man of genius such as Eisenstein felt inclined to go through the complete investigation of his own creative process as well as his own psychology (as shown by his diaries). Practically he was a man without an unconscious, if the latter might be understood as a function of social censorship (in Freud's sense) then the absence of a border between the conscious and the unconscious is typical of such Renaissance-type persons as Leonardo and Eisenstein . . . [67]

In common with Eisenstein's, works such as *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* posit not only an author without an unconscious which is hidden — from him- or herself and the rest of the world — but also the idea of mankind itself as being without a concealed unconscious. The modernist work, consistent with Lacan's description of language as the external force which brings the unconscious into being, is made preëminently out of the public, the archetypal, the known, in short out of the materials which define the consciousness of the group. By virtue of their antecedence, the verbal and historical facts involved are primarily public rather than private significations. This is the sense in which Ivanov's description

[67] Vyacheslav V. Ivanov, "Growth of the Theoretical Framework of Modern Poetics," *Current Trends in Linguistics, XII, Linguistics and Adjacent Arts and Sciences,* ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, The Hague, Mouton, 1972, p. 838.

of Eisenstein is a picture of modernism itself at work:

> Eisenstein's interest in myths and rituals as cues to the archetypes that he studied in his last aesthetic works (that remain unpublished) was connected with his conception of the 'Grundproblem' of the art. The 'main problem' consisted in the necessity of the conflict of at least two evolutionary levels in the structure of each work of art. According to Eisenstein's theory . . . the authentic form should be based on lower archaic levels cognate to those reflected in myths, rituals, symbols of the unconscious, *etc.*; at the same time it is possible to use art to express modern intellectual conceptions . . . His conception of the 'Grundproblem' was connected with the diachronically motivated understanding of the role of regressive movements in art and in history. [68]

Pynchon's use of the mandala, Smithson's of the spiral, as devices which generate the text that is our reading of them, determine, as we have said, the internal relationships of each piece through the same device which identifies its relationship to the world. Because they have associated meanings which antedate the works — in *Gravity's Rainbow*, associations which are enumerated within the narrative itself — the mandala and the spiral mark the interaction between the reader or viewer and the novel or sculpture in such a way as to ensure the recognition that the generation of signification occurs not so much within the work as between it and its audience; to this extent the narrative level takes it shape from the rhetorical.

In addition, to the extent that the shape of its content has literally been prescribed, the 'unveiled anagram' is a device which robs the work of any pretensions to autonomy. On the other hand, in that prescription is the ability to achieve a 'complete' interaction between the shaping device and that which it shapes. The ending of *Gravity's Rainbow* achieves resolution within the work by addressing the reader directly, as to come to the 'end' of the *Spiral Jetty* is to be placed at the very center of the work.

What is involved in this use of the mandala and the spiral may not be as strict an invariant order as that which Saussure found in Latin poetry. But, as the passages from Ivanov might be taken to suggest, that which binds poetics — through metaphor — close to the workings of language, may be more generally, or otherwise, so of the

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 848.

other arts. In any event it remains the case that the most ambitious works of twentieth-century art have taken their inspiration from a dilemma hitherto discussed here in rather different terms but quintessentially the subject of models of language, the paradox that tells us that language cannot be described from outside, in terms it did not itself provide. One need only add that works like Smithson's and Pynchon's make it very apparent that to recognize an anagram is not to know it, that what provides order simultaneously signals the obscurity of its origin. It seems unlikely that any artist's grasp of the anagram he or she employs could be shown to be different in anything but degree from the ignorance which disenchanted Saussure with his study of it.

All that in the work which has to do with change is referred to the anagram in its role as an invariant metonymically connected to details of the whole. Since the device *is* the work — a square painting is a painted square and also a painting of a square — it is, further, an invariant which is only immanent when a detail of the whole is being ingested. This provisional absence allows the structuring device to penetrate detail while maintaining its difference from it, which is important insofar as it is this which guarantees an experience of the work which is dialectic. The spiralling growth of salt crystals is contextualized, as are the myth of the whirlpool and the representational potential of the conch shell, by the *Jetty* itself, a fourth expression of the shape that links these three, and the mechanism which is none of them but gives back to them their mutual allusiveness.

The anagram is then that which, in accordance with Ivanov's description of Eisenstein's proposals, permits the introduction of contemporary thinking into that milieu of allusion. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, as we noted above, the implications and also the working of that juxtaposition are represented within the narrative itself, as, for example, when Slothrop is described as:

> . . . trying to dope out the trajectory of arrow-stable trajectories, or tracing nearly with the end of his nose some German circuit schematic whose resistors look like coils, and the coils like resistors — "What bizarre shit," once he got hep to it, "why would they go and switch it around like that? Trying to camouflage it, or what?"

"Recall your ancient German runes," suggests Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck, who is from the Foreign Office P.I.D. and speaks 33 languages including English with a strong Oxonian blither to it.
"My what?"
"Oh," lips compressing, some kind of brain nausea here, "that coil symbol there happens to be very like the Old Norse rune for 'S', *sôl,* which means 'sun'. The Old High German name for it is *sigil*.
"Funny way to draw that *sun,*" it seems to Slothrop.
"Indeed. The Goths, much earlier, had used a circle with a dot in the center. This broken line evidently dates from a time of discontinuities, tribal fragmenting perhaps, alienation — whatever's analagous, in a social sense, to the development of an independent ego by the very young child, you see . . ." [69]

What we are suggesting, albeit hesitantly, in observing the role played by the overall shape of Smithson's sculpture, and our reproduction of the above passage from Pynchon's novel, is that these works are of a type in which, in the terms set by Umberto Eco's use of Peirce's categorization of signs into some that are symbolic and others that are iconic or indexical, the inside-outside relationship whose recognition constitutes our reading of the work is one in which the indexical structures the narrative level by constantly assuming a symbolic identity which connects it to the whole. This is to say that all indexical or iconic references to the concrete contain a dimension which places them in the realm of the abstract — the symbolic. This interchange between the indexical and the symbolic is in other words necessary because it is there that things mutate into principles, the particular into the pervasive. It is a necessity which suggests that *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* are works of a type which seeks to restore the notion of the sublime through techniques brought to fruition in its nineteenth-century heir, the fantastic.
Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as a literature based essentially on a hesitation provoked in the reader as to the nature of an uncanny event. In the conclusion to his study of the subject, after noting the relatively brief life of this literature — from the late eighteenth- to the late nineteenth-century — he provides a connection to his dis-

[69] *Gravity's Rainbow*, p. 206.

cussion of the transmutation of the fantastic on more recent fiction:

> The nineteenth century transpired, it is true, in a metaphysics of the real and the imaginary, and the literature of the fantastic is nothing but the bad conscience of the positivist era. But today, we can no longer believe in an immutable, external reality, nor in a literature which is merely the transcription of such a reality. The literature which has always asserted this other vision is doubtless one of the agencies of such a development. Fantastic literature itself — which on every page subverts linguistic categorizations — has received a fatal blow from these very categorizations. But this death, this suicide generates a new literature. [70]

Todorov takes the familiar example of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, in which a supernatural event, given in the first sentence, is gradually 'naturalized' in such a manner as to eliminate any possibility of either hesitation or astonishment; that is, the movement of the narrative is in effect one of adaptation to the unacceptable:

> What does such a narrative structure signify? In the fantastic, the uncanny or supernatural event was perceived against the background of what is considered normal and natural: the transgression of the laws of nature made us even more powerfully aware of them. In Kafka, the supernatural event no longer provokes hesitation, for the world described is entirely bizarre, abnormal as the very event to which it provides a background. We therefore find here (but in an inverted form) the problem of the literature of the fantastic — a literature which postulates the existence of the real, the natural, the normal, in order to attack it subsequently — but Kafka has managed to transcend this problem. He treats the irrational as though it were a part of a game: his entire world obeys an oneiric logic, if not indeed a nightmare one, which no longer has anything to do with the real. Even if a certain hesitation persists in the reader, it ceases to affect the character; and identification, as we have previously noted it, is no longer possible. The Kafkaesque narrative abandons what we said was the second condition of the fantastic and the one that more particularly characterizes the nineteenth-century example: the hesitation represented within the text. [71]

[70] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic, A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* trans. Richard Howard, Cleveland, The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973, p. 168.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

With Kafka, says Todorov, we are confronted with a *generalized fantastic* which swallows up the entire world of both book and reader. What in the world of the fantastic was an exception is now the rule. This a development which *Gravity's Rainbow* may be said both to assume and to complicate. The hesitation represented within the nineteenth-century novel has been replaced by devices of defamiliarization that — as we have remarked — insure that signification occurs between the work and its audience, thereby allowing the fiction to maintain a constant, metonymic interaction with the actual world. In contrast Kafka's seems essentially metaphoric. In Pynchon's novel the mechanisms of culture, made strange by the attribution of negative motivation — simultaneously triggering a collective memory which they inhibit or shunt off elsewhere — are depicted as part of an historical process which creates but also obscures the terms of its own unveiling. The uncanny event, from which the central movement of the narrative follows and which remains mysterious or inexplicable throughout while never seeming unacceptable, is the exact correspondence of Slothrop's sexual encounters and the spots in London hit by V-2s. By making Slothrop's personal past a product of the same technology that produced the rocket, making the former inextricable from the latter in his insistence on rendering personal history inextricable from the historical condition of the culture, Pynchon activates within fiction the institutional determinates of modern life, and it is this aspect of his fiction which encroaches upon and reveals those taboos which have replaced, in contemporary American fiction and poetry, the ones destroyed by the advent of psychoanalysis earlier in the century.

Todorov, although he notes the importance of Freud and psychoanalysis in general in regard to the elimination of the taboos which provided the themes of the Fantastic, is at no time actually obliged by his argument to refer to Freud's own essay on the uncanny. That document, which marks a crucial shift in thinking about the fantastic and supernatural in both literary and non-literary contexts, does however have a special relevance for the present discussion inasmuch as the three levels on which Freud's treatment of the subject proceeds correspond to three aspects of the ambition we've

attributed to *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty*.
First, Freud's essay begins as an attempt to account for a linguistic anomaly — the fact that in German *heimlich* (familiar, homely, and also secret) and its antonym *unheimlich* are synonymous across several shades of meaning — and assumes throughout very close ties between the workings of language and all psychic — including literary — processes. Derrida says that Freud is here responding to an undecidable ambivalence, "the game of the double, the endless interplay between the fantastic and the real" initiated by this correspondence. [72]
Second, Freud's attempt to provide a rational explanation for the appearance of the uncanny at the simplest empirical level leads him to postulate the re-emergence of a sedimented and archaic mental organization:

> It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic shape in primitive man, that none of us has traversed it without perceiving certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us as 'uncanny' fulfills the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. [73]

And third, Freud's definition of the uncanny as "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" [74] suggests a recursive movement similar to that which we have said is a characteristic of one's response to *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty*. Insofar as Freud describes the uncanny as the effect produced by the re-emergence of something familiar and long established in the mind which had become estranged through the process of repression, it is in his terms that *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* illustrate the sense in which the uncanny — a consequence of producing extraordinary signification by and through the ordinary — provides the conditions for a reconstitution of the sublime; nor does it escape our notice that

72 Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination,* Paris, Le Seuil, 1972, pp. 300-301.
73 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," *On Creativity and the Unconscious,* trans. Alix Strachey, New York, Harper, 1958, p. 148.
74 *Ibid.*, p. 123ff.

Freud describes the one and Burke the other in very similar terms.

> Memoirists describe the futurists making preperformance publicity strolls through town with painted faces and wearing strange, colorful costumes. Burliuk, for instance, in addition to a gilded nose, a raspberry coat, a powdered face, and a woman's lorgnette, had the inscription "I'm Burliuk" on his forehead. All three had radishes in their buttonholes. Street urchins would shout, "Are these Americans?" [75]

No tendency in twentieth-century art has been more dependent on the modernism of Paris, while thoroughly separated from it, than that made in Russia between (very roughly) 1900 and 1935, except for American art since Abstract Expressionism. Both have as a primary stimulus the wish to achieve a new — rediscovered — zero degree in the transaction between object and viewer (in the literature on the subject this is more often than not described as a zero degree *within* the object). Malevich's *White on White* and a painting by Robert Ryman are quite different except in this one respect. Both American and Russian art present this reductive ambition as a pathway to a matter-of-factness which will both preserve the work from preciousness and bring it closer to the world. Smithson called his cinematic documentation of the *Spiral Jetty* an "industrial film" and this attitude echoes, however distantly, the ambition expressed by Dziga Vertov.

In proposing, as we have said *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty* do, that the world speaks through the work — *i.e.*, by presenting the work as an instrument of retrieval — Smithson and Pynchon exhibit a commonality of ambition which is more Mallarméan than that of most of their contemporaries. Both attach importance to the organization of the work which invokes Mallarmé's sentiments when, referring to the letters of the alphabet as corresponding "like a subtle piano-key to an attitude of Mystery," he says:

> That is precisely what the modern requires: to look at himself in the mirror, commonplace as he is — waited upon by his obsequious

[75] Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism, A History,* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, p. 138.

ghost woven from the word ready for opportunities.
While, during the reign of language, it had first to be harmonized according to its origin, in order that some august meaning might be produced: in the line of verse, dispenser, organizer of the play of pages, master of the book. Whether its entireness appear visibly amid margins and white; or whether it be hidden — call it Prose — none-the-less it is itself if there remain some secret pursuit of music in the discretion of Speech. [76]

Unlike Russia for the Russian avant-garde, America offers themes of displacement different from those of the old world. America is a country of conquerors rather than inheritors, albeit conquerors as a consequence of exile. Pynchon's use of the town of Kinosha, whose population is almost entirely made up of people from countries absorbed at one point or other by the Axis, is of note here. American art has recurrently sought to activate itself through engaging its environment, and it is for that reason that its most successful products have been those which recognized why it was so essential to avoid Pathos.

The works which have been discussed here aspire most to the condition of language in their quadriviality — *langue* and *parole*, big Other and small other, in the work and the recipient — and in the persistent awareness of an immanent signification which that implies and on which it in fact depends. Jakobson has explained the necessity of the concept of the zero to any explanation of the differentiating function of language, [77] and in this connection one might want to say that Pynchon's titling of the first part of his novel "Beyond the Zero" ought to be taken literally in the same way that it has been said of Mallarmé: "It must not be forgotten that when Mallarmé used *hyperbolic* to designate the paradox of the work of art, he was playing with the double meaning of that word and making use of both its rhetorical and mathematical significance." [78]

Finally, the persistent use of *indices* and icons within the context of a

[76] Stephane Mallarmé, "Quant au Livre," *Mallarmé*, ed. and trans. Anthony Hartley, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 182ff.
[77] Roman Jakobson, "Implications of Language Universals for Linguistics," in *Universals of Language*, ed. Joseph H. Greenberg, Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1966, p. 270.
[78] Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, New York, Harper, 1971, p. 201.

transmutation through a symbolic form is itself a primary task of language as such. This is also an ideological question, in that, as Lucio Coletti has shown, a distinction analogous to that which lies between these two has been the subject of apparent confusion throughout the history of the dialectic, inasmuch as he shows that one cannot talk of a dialectic of things in the world, because: "Reality cannot contain dialectical contradictions but only real oppositions, conflicts between forces, relations of contrariety. The latter are *ohne Widerspruch, i.e., non-contradictory* oppositions, and not dialectical contradictions." Indexical signification cannot, then, present dialectical contradiction but only imply it. "On the other hand," Coletti goes on to say, "capitalist oppositions are, for Marx, dialectical contradictions and not real oppositions." [79] We have said that an analogous conviction of the presence of the symbol in the index characterizes *Gravity's Rainbow* and the *Spiral Jetty*.

[79] Lucio Coletti, "Marxism and the Dialectic," trans. John Matthews, *New Left Review* (Sept.-Oct., 1975), p. 14.

ROBERT GROSVENOR'S SCULPTURE (AND ROBERT SMITHSON'S CRITICAL IMAGINATION)

For something more than a decade — he first exhibited in New York in 1962 — Robert Grosvenor has been an artist with one foot in the limelight. The sculpture he's making now strikes one as particularly pertinent to art making at large because of the explicit materiality of his means, and because of the articulation of the opposition "ready-made: manipulated" that is basic to one's experience of it. But in discussing some of the implications of his recent work, I should like to make use of a comment made during an earlier stage of Grosvenor's career. He now feels ambivalent — to say the least — about the large, cantilevered, sculpture he made while a member of the Park Place group. In his more recent sculpture, Grosvenor's come a long way from the geometric monumentalism of that group and time. However, the following —from an essay written by Robert Smithson in 1966 — touches a vein that continues, I think, to be a significant feature of Grosvenor's work:

> "The Park Place group . . . exists in a space-time monastic order, where they research a cosmos modeled after Einstein. They have also permuted the 'models' of R. Buckminster Fuller's 'vectoral' geometry in the most astounding manner.
>
> "Fuller was told by certain scientists that the fourth dimension was 'ha-ha', in other words, that it is laughter. Perhaps it is. Laughter is in this sense a kind of entropic 'verbalisation'. How could artists translate this verbal entropy, that is 'ha-ha' into solid models? Some of the Park Place artists seem to be researching this 'curious' condition. The order and disorder of the fourth dimension could be set between laughter and crystal structure, as a device for unlimited speculation.
>
> "Let us now define the different types of Generalized Laughter, according to the six main crystal systems: the ordinary laugh is cubic

or square (Isometric), the chuckle is a triangle or pyramid (Tetragonol), the giggle is a hexagon or rhomboid (Hexagonal), the titter is prismatic (Orthorhombic), the snicker is oblique (Monochnic), the guffaw is asymmetric (Triclinic). To be sure this definition only scratches the surface, but I think it will do for the present. If we apply this 'ha-ha crystal' concept to the monumental models being produced by some of the artists in the Park Place group, we might begin to understand the fourth-dimensional nature of their work. From here on in, we must not think of Laughter as a laughing matter, but rather as the 'matter of laughs'. "

Apart from confirming Smithson's allegience to the most medieval and Pythagorean systems of categorization, this passage is useful in the present instance insofar as it reinforces one's sense that if Grosvenor's sculpture of the Park Place period proposed a set of concretized isomorphs — ideated, and therefore ideal, schematic representations that, in their solemn scientism, could stand for varieties of laughter — then his work now suggests the same theme in a way that is at once more essential and more general. More general, because each piece of Grosvenor's recent work provokes the whole gamut of responses, from irony (the chuckle?) to unreasoning joy (the guffaw?), that are bound up in an appreciation of paradox. And it's within paradox that Smithson's description — which equates mathematical logic with extra-grammatical expressions of pleasure — locates the possibility of a linguistic taxonomy of laughter. In another passage, written in 1972, Smithson also suggests an explanation for Grosvenor's move, after the abstraction of the Park Place period, toward an emphatic materiality. Smithson is in fact talking about his own work, but what he says bears on Grosvenor's development in that it indicates the sense in which a linguistic concern — laughter, which, when embodied in a material situation, is recognized as paradox — may develop into a concern with materiality which retains its original connection to language. This is the connection that I've characterized as — a paradox — both more general and, in its specificity, more essential: "Occult notions of 'concept' are in retreat from the physical world. Heaps of private information reduce art to hermeticism and fatuous metaphysics. Language should find itself in the physical world and

not end up locked in an idea in somebody's head . . . Art shows that have beginnings and ends are confined by unnecessary modes of *representation* both 'abstract' and 'realistic. '"

It's a short step from the art show to the art work, and this statement of Smithson's can be adapted without being distorted. In these terms, Grosvenor's development can be thought of as an adoption of physical emphasis undertaken in order to escape the confinement of abstract representation. By which I mean that Grosvenor's sculptures can no longer be considered as models for or of anything, which seems to confirm the suggestion that his progress has committed him to a rejection of idealist conventionality — of predigested illusionism. His work no longer belongs — except in a relationship that's negatively dialectical — to the traditional view of conceptualized space that linked the geometricism of the Park Place group to the use of geometry in the service of the ideal that, perhaps too readily, is customarily taken to be characteristic of the Italian Renaissance. Now, Grosvenor's sculptures are encountered as objects in real space. Quite specific, each piece bears the burden of the entire vocabulary to which it refers — and which, therefore, it may be said to *contain* — rather than serving as a single, partial, diagrammatic instance of a larger range of interests. Grosvenor's work has come to be about paradox in the fullest, most enjoyable, sense, through the substitution of an explicit materiality for the abstract space of geometry.

Which is why I call the work he's doing now more essentialist than his sculpture of the early and mid-sixties. It's the difference between a piece of wood and all the knowledge we have about wood, the difference between a fact and a universal category. I am aware that what I'm saying is arguable, that accepting the *essentialism* of Grosvenor's newer work depends on acceptance of the possibility of an "immanent" criticism that proceeds through observation which takes place in the physical world rather than in a context of ideation which doesn't feel ready to begin until the work's been thoroughly sealed off from its identity as a thing. But it seems important — to me —that Grosvenor's work of the Park Place period could have been made out of any material —structural constraints aside — while his more recent work depends on being made out of wood.

Grosvenor's concretization of the "matter of laughs," now that it's transformed into a literal rather than an abstract embodiment of an idea, has come to be an affair, to use a terminology originally introduced into the criticism of contemporary art by Robert Pincus-Witten, of ontological rather than epistemological location. Language, in Grosvenor's recent work, has achieved the status of an object.

One can see what's involved in Grosvenor's current manipulation of paradox — which, if not a condition of all laughter, is a condition of laughter that's dependant on public explicability — if he's placed in a continuum that paradigmatically unites all contemporary art. The following, written by Annette Michelson to introduce a discussion of Yvonne Rainer's work, is pertinent in this respect:

> "There are, in the contemporary renewal of performance modes, two basic and diverging impulses which shape and animate its major innovations. The first, grounded in the idealist extensions of a Christian past, is mythopoeic in its aspiration, eclectic in its form, and constantly traversed by the dominant and polymorphic style which constitutes the most tenacious vestige of that past: expressionism. Its celebrants are: for theater, Artaud, Grotowski, for film Murnau and Brakhage, and for the dance, Wigman, Graham. The second, consistently secular in its commitment to objectification, proceeds from Cubism and Constructivism; its modes are analytic and its spokesmen are: for theater, Meyerhold and Brecht, for film, Eisenstein and Snow, for dance, Cunningham and Rainer."

Michelson's list can readily be extended to the other arts, and to do so is revealing. Grosvenor's work clearly belongs in the second of her two categories, but — in the same way that expressionism is implicit in Brecht — his membership of one side of the continuum suggests the necessity — or at any rate the inevitability — of the other.

The sculpture Grosvenor has made in the seventies requires the use of a lot of mechanical equipment: bulldozers, wrecking cranes, etc. It's this elaborate mediation of the ready-made object — the length of wood — that identifies Grosvenor's endeavor as one preoccupied with an analytic and impersonal approach to physicality. Instead of appearing gratuitous, as it might elsewhere, Grosvenor's use of

machinery is clearly obligatory — one couldn't break wood like that in any other way. The process employed, then, suggests an extraordinarily controlled use of violence, but in a way that concentrates one's attention on the transformational means employed, rather than on the individual psychology 'behind' them.
Grosvenor is present in his work, that is to say, not as a direct source of gesture, but in the act of selection; most of his pieces are the last of perhaps a half-dozen attempts to produce a partial break in one or more places on a given length and type of wood. It was when I was told this by Grosvenor that I began to think of his work as a continuation of the concern with the 'matter of laughs' attributed to him by Smithson. His work is ironic in that its impact, which suggests violence, thereby suggests an impulse that's expressionistic, gestural, redolent with the iconography of an individual consciousness. But because the work is the product of an empirically determined response to the wood as such, the suggestion of violence is, paradoxically, communicated through an institutional vocabulary which exists at some distance from direct (gestural, expressive) articulation on the part of the artist. That distance is what Grosvenor's attitude to the idea of the ready-made — which, as Robert Morris has observed, touches every aspect of contemporary art — seems to me to be about: the lengths of sawn wood that Grosvenor uses provide a context in which a strategy of, significantly, *partial* breakage concretizes the modification of institutional language by an individual voice.
This modification is not one which leads toward oppositions like those presented, for example, by a prop piece by Richard Serra or by sculpture like Mark di Suvero's. Both these artists, in quite different ways, make use of that sense of dislocation which goes with seeing things that appear to deny or control gravity. Grosvenor's work doesn't do that so much as it does something that's related but also I think a bit different. Gravity is made into a dominant property of the work, not through its denial, but through a process that could be more closely described as a search for reconciliation between the thrust of the piece of wood — considered as a combination of its self-evident weight, density, size and proportions — and the consequences of the procedure which turns it into sculpture. Once

he's broken the piece of wood, Grosvenor concentrates not — as, perhaps, one might expect — on the overall disposition of the work regarded as a volume, but on the surface cracks the wrecking process leaves. He refers to these cracks as "drawing", and it's on the basis of his feeling for them as drawing that he accepts or rejects the work. One can see, in a sculpture like *Untitled 1973* (hemlock) that the cracks signify a convergence between the process and the shape of the mass, and it's in this sense that the whole of the work is *immanent* in marks which are manifestations of surface stress. *Untitled 1973* (hemlock) suggests movement parallel to the floor as much as it depends — as all his work does — on a recognition of pressure downwards, of gravity, which is communicated by the massiveness of the wood. One can see that the cracks in the top and the sides of this piece have a kind of continuity which reunites, through distortion, the horizontal and the vertical. The extent to which the separateness — perceptually —of the planes has been obviated by subjecting the whole to severe stress is made apparent by the mutually complementary directionality of both. Distortion has reaffirmed that both horizontal and vertical are extensions of a common mass, has in fact *specified* them.

In this way Grosvenor's work relies, as Wilde said all art should, on the inseparability of surface and symbol. The effect of the "drawing", which identifies, for Grosvenor, the success or failure of a particular work, is to specify the piece of wood in a manner which assures that one's experience of it will depend less on its location than on its internal order. Grosvenor's drawings, such as *Untitled 1974*, demonstrate the programmatic nature of this act of specification, which concentrates attention within the work not by denying gravity — which connects the object to the world by bringing pressure to bear on the space the viewer shares with the work — but by allowing it full reign. In *Untitled 1974* the little bent line calls the question of its placement into mind only insofar as one's feeling for the space around it is seen to be dependant on the internal dislocation of the shape, to which one is drawn, and which makes the inequality of the spaces to its right and left a corollary of the disequilibrium between the larger part of the line, which slopes downwards to the left, and the part that's shorter and horizontal.

In a work such as *Untitled 1974* (wood, creosote), the specification achieved in a piece like *Untitled 1973* (hemlock) reaches a level of complexity which, as it substitutes the asymmetric for symmetry, signals a reconsideration of the concern with obliqueness present in the large sculptures of the Park Place period. It is then noteworthy that, as if in response to the complexity provided by its shape, and to the need for compression and fixed limits called for by the terms in which one interacts with Grosvenor's work of the last eight or so years, this piece is smaller than most of the things he makes, so that it returns one with a special intensity to the identification of internal complexity with physical reduction which runs through the work of this the most recent period of his career. Roman Jakobson once defined poetry as knowledge oriented towards eloquence. Grosvenor, and the others I have mentioned here, might reasonably be said to present art as clarity oriented toward elegance. As for laughter, the final word on this score — as is so often the case —should be given to Roland Barthes. In this passage from *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975) — in which I would substitute "art" and "art-making" for "literature" and "writing" — Barthes explains why enjoyment must be the artist's most serious concern:

> "All socio-ideological analyses agree on the *deceptive* nature of literature (which deprives them of a certain pertinence): the work is finally always written by a socially disappointed or powerless group, beyond the battle because of its historical, economic, political situation; literature is the expression of this disappointment. These analyses forget . . . the formidable underside of writing: bliss: bliss which can erupt, across the centuries, out of certain texts that were nonetheless written to the glory of the dreariest, the most sinister philosophy."

DOUGLAS HUEBLER'S RECENT WORK

Thomas Pynchon's novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, declares an ambition to make physics become metaphysics; Douglas Huebler's work is comparable to Pynchon's in a vital respect, which is that Huebler seems to want to make the "sociological" achieve an analogous transcendence. By this I mean that Huebler wants to make ways of documenting events stand for a larger paradigm, one that can contain enough of the conditions of experience in the real world to stand as a sort of model for ordinary language itself. In Huebler, sociology — events in the real world — becomes a sort of phenomenological linguistics — language in the real world. This happens via a procedure which in Huebler's recent work, of which *Duration Piece #7*, 1973, is a useful example, employs a metonymical structure to present an event in the real world, and, by doing so, illustrates the incompleteness — reflexiveness — of ordinary perceptual experience in a way that is newly clear. Huebler's work is about the "deconstruction" of the familiar.

Metonyms are alternates, in a relationship which is dialectic in that they imply one another, as black implies white. In James Boone's elegant example, a fork stands in metonymical relationship to a knife — while a sword relates to a knife metaphorically. One is tempted to say that, in traditionalist terms, Huebler seems long on metonym but short on metaphor. But there are good reasons why this should be so, as I shall try to suggest here.

Like all of Huebler's recent work, *Duration Piece #7* is based on the metonym "constant/variable". He gets an incredible range of conceptual diversity out of this continuum, and it is that range which, for me, confirms his importance. *Duration Piece #7* involves photographs of the Trevi Fountain (which is in Rome) taken at 30-second intervals, "in order to document specific changes in the relationship between two aspects of the water falling from the rocks

in one area at the base of the Fountain of Trevi." In this piece, which is rigorously controlled temporally but is spatially — compositionally — mutable, it is — I think — important that each part of the equation implies the condition of the other to some extent. The water moves but the rocks are static. The camera clicks at regular intervals but is free to move about, as long as it retains the two cascades of water within its field of vision. We are aware that the Trevi Fountain is a fixture while the people in front of it move in and out of the frame, and are situated, too, by the positioning of the camera. A complex series of pairings occurs across the continuum of "constant/variable" oppositions proposed by both the camera and its subject. Besides the fact that water seems to be in a relationship to the rocks that's similar to that of the camera's movements to the regularity with which shots are made, the regulation of the camera — the immutable temporal order of the photographic documentation — is also paired with the immutability of the fountain as an object, while pictorial emphasis in each shot is seen to depend on the spontaneous and unpredictable behaviour of the people caught in the camera's space.

The water itself is the subject of this piece because it's the water which provides the key to one's experience of the document as a whole. From shot to shot, the changes between the two cascades are tiny, and physically determined in a way that's characteristic of the whole work. In that, they represent a continuous process subject to specifiable — and constant — restraint, and remind one that the space available to the camera is both as fixed and as variable as the fountain's supply of water. This pairing of — in effect — pictorial order with the water's flow, responds to the pairing of the fountain's permanence as an object with the temporal regulation of the camera. Together, I think, these two pairs describe what happens in this piece: "deconstruction" achieved through the integration of documentary process with that which is documented.

Of his work, Huebler has said — in Ursula Meyer's *Conceptual Art* (New York, 1972, p.137) — that "Because [his] work is beyond direct perceptual experience, awareness of the work depends on a system of documentation . . . This documentation takes the form of photographs, maps, drawings, and descriptive language."

This interest in phenomena whose significance is latent but not fully apparent to direct perception is one that Huebler shares with artists as diverse as Mel Bochner and Joel Shapiro. If it isn't possible not to misconstrue Bochner's *Axiom of Indifference* without being aware of its terminological origins (it wasn't for me, anyway), then it's also clear that Huebler's claim for the intrinsic necessity of documentation in his work is made very succinctly in the effect that the 30-second interval between the shots in *Duration Piece #7* has on one's experience of the piece. If we didn't know that the interval was there the work would have a different meaning for us.

It seems worthwhile to ask why that should be so. I think it would mean that the scope of the reflexiveness — the interaction — between camera and subject would be eroded or reduced in the absence of a regular interval, because there would then be no temporal corollary in the process of documentation for the permanence of the fountain. Huebler seems to be interested in what I take to be a central formulation — almost a paradox — of ordinary language philosophy: that while we are bound to experience ourselves as constant in a world of variables, we're at the same time aware that our own sensibility is itself materially conditioned by events outside ourselves. We bring meaning to things, but things bring to us the shape not only of their own meaning but of meaning itself. Huebler's use of metonym is one that tries to achieve an equivalence between documentary procedure and that which is documented, in an attempt to locate both in the (linguistic) context whence their meaning — "reality" — is commonly derived. If you like, Huebler seeks to make his work internalize the conundrum posited by Lévi-Strauss, that man lives through myth, but myth also lives through man.

That Huebler's use of metonym must take a different form in response to different situtations — and should, therefore, be thought of as methodical rather than formulaic — can be seen if one compares *Duration Piece #107* with the one I've just been talking about, *Duration Piece #7*. In *Duration Piece #107* there is no physical constant comparable to that provided by the Trevi Fountain, and, consequently, the camera isn't used in the same arbitrarily constant way.

To make *Duration Piece #107* Huebler went to Regent Street (London) and made a series of pairs of photographs. First he'd photograph a mannequin in a store window, and then the first person he saw — on turning away from the window — who was the same sex as that represented by the mannequin. Here, there is no temporal constant comparable to that provided by the 30-second interval, and I think it's reasonable to say that that's because no image recurs — as the Trevi Fountain does — from photograph to photograph. Instead, in *Duration Piece #107*, the idea of a constant is entirely tied to procedure, where procedure is opportunist — which is to say, a matter of tactics. I suppose one might say that from *Duration Piece #7* to *Duration Piece #107* Huebler moves from an a priori constant to one that's a posteriori. And as one looks at the pairs that result, of harassed housewives and decaying men made contiguous with — literally — sex symbols, one begins to grasp some of the point of Huebler's preoccupation with metonym to the exclusion of metaphor. The point would be that metaphor is suggestive of an imposed meaning, is an affair of interpretation, and, in effect, of prescriptive value. Huebler's work relates to that philosophical enterprise which wants to talk about "value-neutral" propositions, to avoid associative meaning in pursuit of a descriptive model that might not be —ideologically — compromised by inherited attitudes to language. Such a concern — represented in art criticism most ambitiously (and hence most problematically) by the writing of Bruce Boice — is ultimately a reformist one. This is because it aims less at unpacking the notion of intuited judgement than at heightening consciousness of the materialist context — the options — within which intuition operates. Since intuition is by definition not measurable, we're obliged to stick with its manifestations in the physical world in the course of describing the implications of our own modes of response. The aim of Huebler's best work (and I haven't mentioned here that work of his which never seems to leave the plane of the sociological, like the book *Duration Piece #8*, which seems to me to consist entirely of the sort of in-groupy star fucking that characterizes the work of an artist like Arman) is to find a way of documenting in which that act of documentation preserves and accounts for the partial accessibility of

that which is documented. That is to say, the — or one — aim of this work is to make the concept of an event register the shape of the event itself, while retaining the arbitrary connection between signifier and signified which makes the documentation function as a sign in the first place. Whether or not it's conceivable that a concept can be as manipulable, as impartial, and as comprehensive as an event, is, of course, another matter. To try to make it so, however, stands as a very high ambition, one that offers a paradigmatic intent that would make it possible to describe the continuity from the private space of an individual psychology to the public space of the rest of the world — and, as from physics to metaphysics so, eventually from sociology to ideology — in terms that can locate experience elsewhere than in dichotomy.

CARL ANDRE

Carl Andre's new work, as one might expect, illustrates the problem implicit in the repetition of an idea. Andre's prominence has come from his identification of sculpture with the ground plane, which — as he made sculpture become an interaction between a specific materiality and an undifferentiated, though not unconsidered, real space — has put him in a position possibly analogous to Barnett Newman's some time ago. Andre is now, perhaps, confronted with the problem of maintaining a position based on an ultimate reduction. What some see as a problem with his new sculpture is that what Andre's work proposes as a phenomenological reduction of the experience of sculpture to its essential condition has for other artists — Serra foremost among them — been a starting point rather than an end. Andre's is a juxtaposition of signifier and signified that, concentrating on the former's materiality, is thereby able to do away with an internal order which must otherwise, by virtue of its intrinsicality, isolate the work from the space outside. The effect of this is to reintegrate the inside and outside, the space of the art with that containing space which is not art, by providing a material continuity between the two not unlike the ideational continuity between represented space and the space of the viewer provided, elsewhere, by orienting the perspectival system of a painting to its physical location. In their manipulation of the space outside the art by way of what's within it, a sculpture by Andre and a work like Signorelli's *Circumcision* are comparable manipulations of the artistic device at the rhetorical — as opposed to the narrative — level. And, thanks to Andre's achievement, other artists have been able to engage in work amounting to a reconstitution of sculptural complexity that makes Andre's concern with essentialism look almost superflous. Almost, but not quite.

Andre, I suspect, is about to come in for exactly the opposite

criticism traditionally levelled — in conversation rather than print — at Robert Morris. Morris is often said to have not stood still long enough at any stage in his career. Andre may be about to get shafted for not changing enough. Both criticisms are understandable and, in my opinion, both are wrong.

The prejudice is understandable, and equally clearly wrong, because nearly everyone is prone to some acquiescence in the prurient orthodoxy which has it that an artist is supposed to establish a 'style', *i.e.*, a product, and then make smaller or greater adjustments to it, within the limits set by a product consistency which preserves market confidence, until she or he dies. Actually, while it may seem likely that an artist's career will in fact typically encompass the working and re-working of an extremely narrow set of themes, that in itself may necessitate or even generate a wide variety of techniques, or ways of presenting and reconsidering the implications and possibilities of a salient and recurrent notion, perception, recognition or inspiration. Morris, for example, has never stayed long enough in one place, with regard to his use of materials, because his work isn't founded in a concern with materiality in the first place. Rather, the variety of materials he's used over the years seems to be about finding new ways to concentrate attention on a continuing theme — discussed elsewhere [1] — in much the same way that Godard moved from a hand-held camera to a heavier one as soon as the audience had become used to the earlier tool. Andre's work, in sharp contrast, has always been concerned with the visual behavior of sculpture's materiality — as in *37 Pieces of Work* (1969) — and the larger implications of that. The problem that Andre now faces isn't one of an inability or reluctance to change, but its opposite, the possibility that change will undermine the main thrust of the work, and turn it into a more traditonal enterprise.

Here, I find myself in agreement with Kenneth Baker: "The question is: where are we speaking from? That I take to be the ultimate issue of Andre's use of materials, his insertion of materials themselves into the cultural structure of presentation; what this calls

[1] See "Robert Morris: The Complication of Exhaustion."

for is a new sense of language as presentation." [2]

Andre now seems to speak from a position subtly different from that which he took in the past. Previously, my experience of his work has been one of a reduction to the base that connects the work to the ground in a way that identifies verticality exclusively with the sense of gravity and its consequences for visual perception. Asked about his 12 by 12 foot metal plates, back in 1970, Andre said: "I don't think of them as being flat at all, I think, in a sense, that each piece supports a column of air that extends to the top of the atmosphere." [3]

It's hard to think of these more recent pieces in this way, and they suffer for it. Andre has chosen to use the kind of presentation of separate elements that one finds in *Lever* (1966), but to make this arrangement refer to the wall as a vertical counter to the work's movement along the floor. The effect of this is to make the wall substitute for the "column of air" previously called to mind, which in turn does indeed make the sculpture become flat. Andre has shoved things up against the wall before, but this has never reduced the visceral impact of the metal as it does here. The metal doesn't seem to be the focus of attention anymore. Since all but one of the pieces in the show come straight out from the wall, one finds oneself oriented into a position from which one is looking along the work at the wall, an effect that suggests a kind of nascent pictorialism at odds with the physicality of the work. This, the use of the piece as a kind of transitional object that connects the ground plane to a distant wall, militates against the experience that one at first expects from the work, a levering action that would seem to "levitate" the wall by virtue of the feeling of density and weight communicated by the metal on the floor. However, when Andre uses the idea of the object as a transitional zone — he has himself referred to his sculptures as zones, come to think of it — between the wall and the floor in terms that are extremely explicit, as in *35 Cold Deck* (1974), it seems to make a great deal of sense. *35 Cold Deck* is made out of shiny steel that casts a reflection on the wall while it's itself extremely thin.

2 Kenneth Baker, "Reviews", *Artforum*, June, 1971 (Vol. IX, no. 10) p. 81.

3 Phyllis Tuchman, "An Interview with Carl Andre," *Artforum*, June, 1970 (Vol. VIII, no. 10) pp. 60-61.

In this work the thinness of the metal and the lightness of its color combine to give a sense of weightlessness apparently countered only by the surface area of the piece, so that it seems to be only its size that holds it to the floor. It's held down, that is to say, by drawing rather than materiality, by its perimeter rather than gravity. The "column of air" has been eliminated in order to produce a sculpture that strikes one as an inversion of Andre's characteristic way of working. The thinness of the piece identifies it with the floor — a consequence of having to see the surface area in terms of perimeter rather than edge — while the reflection connects it to the wall, so that the space between becomes the negative alternate of the positive, volumetric response to the weight of the piece one customarily expects to find there. Here, Andre's use of the wall is revelatory and almost moralistic, in its suggestion that the alternative to an emphatic physicality is a sculpture that evokes pictorialism. The negative space between the wall and the floor is the product of a reliance on steel's capacity to deny its own weight, to engage in a kind of illusionism that counters its own materiality. Still, one has to say that it's hard to see how much mileage Andre can get out of this kind of negative example. When all's said and done, it's most interesting only when put next to other works of his, and by itself constitutes a paradigm for the kind of sculptural illusionism to which his is by its nature opposed.

COMMODITY AND CONTRADICTION, OR, CONTRADICTION AS COMMODITY

The following is an exchange between Carl Andre and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, in the form of responses to previously agreed-upon questions. Instead of answering the questions, one-by-one, Andre wrote a short text, which we have printed as the second part of this document. The first part contains the original questions and Gilbert-Rolfe's responses, which Andre then annotated with his own reactions to Gilbert-Rolfe's statements.

What are the relations between art object and marketplace?

As a fetish,[1] the art object obviates the question of labor-value to the extent that there is an almost immediate recognition of its value in terms of exchange. No one buys an artist's labor, they buy instead an object which provides provocation or satisfaction of a kind they choose to subsidize and encourage. [2] (There is a difference between buying labor and subsidizing it, in that subsidies permit labor-value to remain unstated and variable.) The relationship between the art object and the marketplace seems to have undergone less fluctuation or transformation than that between other commodities and their place of exchange, possibly because of the fact that nowadays labor-value in the world at large is subsidized rather than priced. The price of an art object tends to be no more or less than what the market will bear, which is not the case with, for example, Boeing Aircraft, or the productivity of someone who works for the Post Office. [3] The art

[1] Andre: Are not all art objects in all cultures fetishes? Instead of attempting to prove that women have penises as in sexual fetishisms, does not the art object attempt to prove that we do not die, not of course through any pretension to 'immortality' but through a denial of mortality? The fetishism of commodities lies not in their physcial aspect but in their ready convertibility into unwithering (immortal) finance capital.

[2] Andre: Robert Barry — "The collector buys this object, but he pays for the next one."

[3] Andre: The exchange value of an art object is largely created through publicity-by-reproduction, while the production value of an art object is degraded exactly by frequency of

marketplace is, then, an anomaly of a certain sort: a social institution which is able to remain crudely capitalist because it is underwritten by those feudal notions of patronage —subsidies — which capitalism was supposed to have replaced. [4] In this, as the comparison with Boeing indicates, the artmarket is a paradoxical microcosm of the situation at large, in that Capitalism, as we know, survives by persistently and surreptitiously belying its own commitment to free competition through having to have recourse to that government patronage which maintains its shambling ediface.

Is it possible for artists and their art to exist in a capitalist society outside of capitalism?

One would suppose not. If you live in a forest and spend all your time chopping down trees you're still a woodsman. If you live there and pretend you're living on a plain you're a solipsist. Even a hermit has to eat, and therefore to live *in* a world that is physical to that degree.

Why would people desire that it should?

Because, apart from the understandable human desire to take no responsibility for certain of one's actions, in living amongst the contradictions of capitalism we still tend to cleave for security to the idealism which that economic system perpetuates. The notion that in order to see something one must isolate it from the world persists, and that isolation becomes a token which absolves the artist and the art from self-identification with that system with which they are in every observable sense involved. A commitment to the idea of eternal or universal values becomes in this regard an excuse for a guilty and coy indifference to the historical transformation of those values — of that system of signification — in a particular place or time, namely America at the moment when it's losing its grip on

reproduction. This does not apply to those arts unique to our time whose original and authentic production is reproduction. Film is the artform born fully proletarianized out of the factory system of the 19th Century.

[4] Andre: Since art in any purely material sense is nonproductive all art-making activities in all cultures *must* be subsidized. Of course the exact same thing is true of war-making which is the homosexually Utopian activity of men subsidized by the exaction of tribute from women kept in the bonds of sexism.

international politics and finance. It's slightly comic that artists, of all people, should want to be saints when it seems that saints have rarely been involved in the production of anything — notable exceptions like the poetry of John of the Cross aside— except their own martyrdom. [5]

Is it possible for artists to be responsible for the social, political, and economic destiny of their work?

The artist may be able to a limited extent to be responsible for the social destiny of the work he or she produces insofar as there may be the possibility of controlling where it's put. Its political destiny is an affair of interpretation and the artist can no more assume final responsibility for that than for any other aspect of its 'meaning'. To try is to lapse into intentionalism. As for its economic destiny, that is a matter of speculation which the artist can only control negatively and only when the object's desirability has been firmly established in the public's mind.

If possible, is it desirable?

It seems desirable in that it seems to be a direct extension of professional responsibility. How possible it is is another matter. For one thing the artist can only take responsibility as long as he or she is alive. After that, things show an inclination to go awry, as the posthumous careers of David Smith and Mark Rothko suggest. So one can see why some artists might choose to give up the ghost, as it were, in their own lifetime.

If responsible, to whom is the artist responsible?

I should prefer to say, to the values of a craft — a process of making and selecting — and to the task of making that craft intersect with contemporary life as it is felt and seen. This includes the responsibility of considering that the craft may have become atrophied or redundant. Certainly I can't think of any social group towards whom the artist can be said to be responsible in the sense of answerable. He or she might *feel* responsible to any given group, but

[5] Andre: And transfiguration.

it is hard to describe a situation in which the artist could be said to *be* responsible in the sense of fulfilling an obligation which either side of the exchange could define with a view to accounting for the product in terms of measurable gratification or self-recognition. Art is a response to an *unspoken* desire which it anticipates and fulfills *without warning*. Responsibility is, then, for me more a question of to what than to whom.

By whom do artists wish to be judged?

By other artists and by posterity, the existence of which all art assumes.

And by whom are they judged and what is the form of that judgement?

In practice they are seldom judged by other artists, who tend to be too busy encouraging their peers [6] to deliver much solid criticism. Art in this society is mostly judged by critics too timid to draw conclusions, too idle to develop a methodology which can question itself, and overwhelmingly committed to the view that the function of art is to gratify rather than to reveal; art in America is by and large judged by people neurotically determined to suspend judgement.

Answers in my disorder

"Those to whom the consciousness of history is denied are, like the innocent beasts of the field, condemned to the ceaseless reproduction of their present."

I. It is the genius of the bourgeoisie to be able to buy anything. That is, by offering money the capitalist ruling class creates exchange value where none existed before. There is the wonderfully true story of the advanced collector who bought the goldfish out of the artist's studio and then insisted on leaving the goldfish behind and obliging the artist to care for them as the collector's property.

[6] Andre: I wish this were so. The besetting vice of the proletariat under capitalism is envy and all the artists I know, especially myself, must constantly overcome the surge of displeasure which accompanies the realization that another artist may have added a truly authentic and autonomous utterance to the stock of the imagined world.

J.G.-R.: In this regard, Alan Tate once described the army as the organized adolescents of all ages. It occurs to me that the art world might be described as the unorganized adolescents of all ages.

The most farcical claim of the conceptualizing inkpissers is that their works are somehow antibourgeois because they do away with objects. In fact, doing away with objects and replacing them with such reifications of abstract relations to production as stockshares, contracts, liens, options, and paper money itself (which is nothing but the fetishization of the idea of exchange value severed from even the dream of production) is exactly the final triumphant form of the bourgeois revolution.

II. In the comedy of the denial of history, the failed American artist sitting alone in her studio surrounded by unsold, unbought weapons of her vision is subjectively and objectively the inheritor of Utopian capitalism. Where exchange value has not yet invaded, equity remains undivided. When the factory worker leaves the assembly line at the end of her workday, she takes nothing with her but an empty lunchpail and a packet of paper the value of which is determined by the private lucubrations of the autocephalic Federal Reserve Board. The living fire of the worker's labor has been stolen by Promethean capital.

When the capitalist leaves his office at the end of a hard day (and do not be fooled into believing that ruling successfully is anything but tedious, arduous, and almost totally consuming), he has the satisfaction of knowing he has met his payroll and thus severed the worker from any claim to the vision and destiny of her labor. What is more, at the end of the day the capitalist leaves nothing of his own behind him. He takes in his person his ownership of the worker's labor, his ownership of the tools of production (to which he has only the most tenuous dematerialized and conceptual relation), and he takes with him full ownership of all that has been produced materially and accumulated as capital and all that has been produced and distributed as exchange-value. The last delicious irony savored by the capitalist is his ownership through the Federal Reserve System of the paper money in the worker's wagepacket for which the workers must pay rent in the form of interest on the National Debt. The National Debt is owed to the capitalist by the worker who services it by paying taxes on her wages while the capitalist uses the collateral of the debt owed to him to create new finance capital in an

endlessly self-replicating chain of paper wealth. The capitalist pays the worker her wages in units of debt which, like the beer she drinks in her saloons, she can never own but only rent.

III. It is the sorrow and pity of America that historical consciousness either died here or was left off the cargo manifests of the bottoms that breasted this New Found Land. Perhaps that is why Liberty stands with her back to us holding up her futile light against the oilspilled seas of oblivion. Without a sense of history we cannot begin to imagine who we are. Instead of revolution emerging in the culture of history we have spectacle mired in the narcotizing ooze of publicity with no place to hide ourselves should we by chance come to some knowledge of our shame. As artists we have sold off inspiration to buy influence. As audience, to pay the fines for being entertained, we have traded in our capacity to be moved to anything other than applause for jokes that in another time were intended not to win our witless assent but to free our willing laughter. Because there is no historical consciousness in America except among the ruling class, there is no class consciousness in America except among the ruling class. Without class consciousness, there can be no socialism in America. Brave, reckless, beautiful souls live in the weather of a terrorist underground trying to swim like fish among the grains of the sands of a desert. In history there is nurture, in spectacle there is not even shelter. In publicity is perfect forgetfulness where decadism drives out even decadence and the Nineties are gay and the Twenties are roaring and the Sixties are swinging and the Seventies lie under the crossroads like a vampire waiting for us in our innocence to pluck the stake from out of its heart and return the silver bullet to the masked man.

EPILOGUE

We have always had the historical choice of either lying through or living through our contradictions. Now through the genius of the bourgeoisie we have the chance to market them.

ROBERT MORRIS: THE COMPLICATION OF EXHAUSTION

No one's mind is likely to have been changed by the exhibitions of Robert Morris' work that took place in New York and Philadelphia in the Spring of this year (1974). One interesting thing about Morris is that he seems to be an artist who, for many people, has remained extremely problematical even as he has achieved the status of a major contemporary artist. Which is, I think, symptomatic of the complexity of his ambition. To remain problematic is to maintain the capacity to provoke, and this Morris continues to do in a way that elaborates an earlier statement of his that: "Characteristic of a gestalt is that once it is established, all the information about it, *qua gestalt*, is exhausted." [1]

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The New York show was accompanied by a poster showing Morris dressed in sado-masochistic regalia, which has caused some displeasure. One might fairly describe it as guaranteed to do so, given the political-sexual atmosphere of the immediate present. But what's delightful about the poster is that it wasn't a gratuitous appendage to the show. Its thematic relationship to the work exhibited isn't that of a freely floating, apparently disconnected, part of the story put in to provide relief or contrapuntal emphasis, but of a prologue. In Richard Foreman's play *Pain (t)*, the word "painter" is shoved up a woman's behind, a metaphorical gesture that seems repulsive on several levels and because of that, obliges one to reconsider the entire set of conventions on which the play, and one's experience of it, rely. Morris' poster seems to me to be provocative in a manner analogous to that sequence of Foreman's. It

[1] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," reprinted in *Uber Kunst,* ed. G. de Vries, Köln, 1974, p. 192.

proposes an image that, by virtue of its negativism, concentrates attention on the theme of the show, which is about individual willfulness in the face of an extra-personal terminology. The poster is an ironic encapsulation of Morris' position in contemporary art, in that his career has been one that concentrates on the artist's identity as a performer within an institution of a certain sort. Such an implicitly heroic identity, Morris seems to say, can only be credibly maintained if it's capable of self-parody. Without that capacity one is left with a rhetoric that doesn't possess the ability to question itself. Entering one's consciousness at that point where the analytical vocabulary of art objects becomes blurred with the social vernacular of the art world (a collection of vaguely liberal people), Morris' poster serves as a mild reminder that it's the language with the most developed self-critical faculty which has the most subversive effect on the world at large.

All of Morris' recent work draws attention to the idea of individual performance, of a figure moving around in space, which makes it hard to decide whether the work occupies the space of sculpture or of the theater or dance. This confusion is an important one. Ultimately it's necessary to see Morris' work as sculpture, because only when one thinks of it as such does its use of temporality begin to make sense as an experience which goes beyond the illustrative. Just as necessary, though, is Morris' characteristic reluctance to completely subsume the theatrical within the terminology of sculpture because only through an apparent resistance to the subsumption of one by the other can he maintain a tension between the stability of the sculptural and the mutability of the performer's response to that stability.

I'm suggesting that we're asked to see the atemporality of sculpture as a background to the temporal development that is Morris' response to it. Morris' work is theatrical but not theater; theater depends more completely on sequential development, and on an internally generated disruption of that sequentiality. For instance, in Beckett — where the play disrupts theater's tendency toward the metaphorical through an insistent banality, so that one might say that Beckett defamiliarizes theatrical space through a manipulation of the emphatically inconsequential — the text is reinforced by the

space but not in tension with it. The space is simply an extension of the dialogue's banality, and it is perhaps for this reason that in an orthodox theatrical event such as a play by Beckett props are necessary in order to establish an air of paucity on the stage which would not be obtainable through their absence. I understand this to mean that theater always occupies real space only *nominally* (its props undertake a provisional transformation of the space that responds to the text) but is never *literally* situated in real space as sculpture may be. The space in which a Beckett play is performed is simply an extension of the dialogue's banality. The tension fundamental to the work lies elsewhere, within the dialogue, between the absurdity of the language used and its intrinsic logic.

This isn't anything like what happens in Morris' work, where the metaphorical propensity of words, and of the performer (the sense in which any figure standing in a space suggests a universal situation), is placed in tension with the specificity of a literal space, space that isn't an extension of the performance it contains but, rather, exists prior to it. This space, I have said, is the atemporal space of sculpture. The way in which Morris uses theatricality to erode, clarify, and manipulate sculpture's identity as an atemporal organization of real space, but not to replace sculpture with theatricality as such (as theater) becomes clear when one compares *Voice* PLATE 17, the most obviously theatrical of the works in the New York show, with the other things exhibited along with it. For the most part, in Morris' recent work, one's attention is occupied by the personal and perpetual accumulation of terminology depicted by the variety of the work, rather than by the manipulation of that terminology within a narrative order. For Morris, as for many others, "sculpture" is a readymade, a received epistemology, a set of terms that amounts to an institutional language.

This treatment of a medium as a readymade has been basic to American art at least since Johns' reconstitution, through a reassertion of the Duchampian example, of painting and sculpture's identity as species of cultural *signs*. [2] From this follows what is, to my

[2] To put a modified beer can into a gallery is the same as putting a real coat hanger into (onto) a painting, in that both put institutional (special, privileged) contexts into tension with outside objects. The presence of these objects in either of Johns' works provides the

mind, a confirmation of contemporary art's commitment to the development of an explicitly materialist aesthetics, an urge to identity art more and more closely with its support. [3]

And it is in this sense that Morris' view of sculpture as epistemological readymade is directly analogous, and indebted, to Johns' position on artistic conventionality. For Morris, one might say, sculpture is that which inhabits but also replaces real space (architectural or natural) and, while its appreciation customarily involves the spectator in movement around the work, is itself static and syntactically atemporal.

Theatricality may be put in tension with this received epistemology because the temporality of the theatrical is the logical corollary of the stability of sculptural space, as the undifferentiated space of the world at large is the corollary of the differentiated space of painting. At least, that seems to be the dialectic proposed or depicted by *Voice*, a work which suggests that, insofar as Morris' ambition takes off from Johns', it's a sophistication or refinement of it in that Morris

opportunity for a synthesis of the specific, differentiated syntax of artistic communicability with the undifferentiated space of the real world. In the course of this process, the art institution (painting and its support system) and the coat hanger, an inarticulate index of human dimensions superimposed on the special capacity for meaningfulness invested in pictorialism by tradition, achieve a kind of equivalence. The presence of ordinary objects within a context organized and presented as art demythologizes the institution, and turns it —and the products that rationalize and define it — into one kind of thing among things, because the extent to which the coat hanger can be seen as part of the picture is the extent to which the painting can itself be seen as a kind of object, at some level "like" the coat hanger, but also the vehicle for an accumulated and special coherence. For Johns, a painting can subsume the coat hanger (can identify its own space with the real space whence the coat hanger derives) only by first declaring that painting is reducible to a physically expressible conventionality, by saying it's a discipline whose terms are stretchers, canvas, pigment, and suspension on a wall. Those, the materially realizable aspects of the medium's morphology, are the terms in which Johns states the epistemology of painting in order that he may renew the discipline; those are some of the properties of painting that are *known*.

[3] Contemporary art's materialism has, I think, been well expressed by Octavio Paz (*Alternating Current*, New York, 1973):

> . . . The new materialism is to nineteenth-century materialism what Marx and Darwin were to eighteenth-century materialism. Our materialism is . . . mathematical, linguistic, mental. Strictly speaking, it is neither idealism nor materialism. It is not idealism because it reduces the idea to a combination of physiochemical stimuli and responses; it is not materialism because it regards matter as a system of communication; the phenomenon is a message or a relation between factors . . . The basic structure of these factors is no different from that of mathematical or verbal symbols: it is a system of relations. Before our era a Providence or a Logos reigned, a matter or a history perpetually tending toward more perfect forms; now, an unconscious thought, a mental mechanism guides and thinks us. A mathematical structure determines us — *signifies* us.

has gone further than Johns toward the development of oppositions which can be perceived as nearly equal, and in that can be seen to be contradictions which are not merely mirror images of one another. Temporality isn't subsumed within the atemporal, in Morris' work, as readily as the coat hanger is taken over by the painting as a whole in Johns'. I think the reason for this is that Morris employs oppositions which are logical rather than random. This is to say that Morris relocates the incidence of randomness in his work at a second level, where it clarifies an initial logicality, while Johns makes an experience of the arbitrary or the random the point of entry into his work. In Morris' case, temporality is experienced precisely as an immanent feature of the sculptural Gestalt, rather than as a feature of another reality superimposed on it. This makes it possible for Morris to depict the individual as an idiosyncratic concentration of institutional generality, and to present the art work as an explicit manipulation of the interchange between the two.

To experience *Voice* is to explore sculpture through the elaboration of the temporal at the expense of the atemporal. Sculptural atemporality is here reduced to a lowest common denominator, the level at which sculpture declares itself autonomous to the extent that it becomes no more than an institutional space that replaces its architectural context — one ritual space supplanting another, on which it nonetheless remains dependent. In *Voice*, four large amplification units are used to suggest a space that replaces or modifies the space of the gallery but is still contained by it. Shaped like the corners of a room, the amplifiers describe a rectangular enclosure whose corners are roughly coincidental with the centers of the gallery's walls. Within this rectangle, the audience sits on stools which come in four sizes and are covered with the same white cloth as the speaker system. Out of that speaker system, comes a kind of dramatic narrative.

Morris must have derived some pleasure from being able to identify the notion of the speaker as the source of a human voice with the word's vernacular meaning, as the name of an electronic tool. In *Voice* this pun is made to conjure up, with startling explicitness, the reflexiveness between the performer and the institution described here as the theme of this year's exhibitions and indeed of most of

Morris' career as a mature artist. *Voice* is a sculpture in which the audience stays still, experiencing the piece by remaining within it rather than moving around it. The audience's space is thereby completely identified with the space of the sculpture, a space which in this case is filled with recorded words, affected and disrupted by them. A space made subject to time by a discourse that emanates from the work itself and, as it does so, identifies the work as an index of spent time that involves its audience in a procedure close to, but not the same as, a literal re-creation of the artist's moves. It's not the same, because the audience isn't involved in the process of rejection and selection that engages the artist, but it is close to similarity in that it locates the audience within the work and makes viewing it into a perceptual performance that takes place within the sculptor's space and time in a manner reminiscent of the artist's role as a performer within a given terminology.

This latter effect is heightened by the realization that the space in which the audience sits is one that, through the agency of the recorded narration, thereby becomes the context for a frankly autobiographical document. The sound track, recorded on four channels (one to a speaker) is spoken by actors and heard in a pattern that moves irregularly around and across the space. Divided into four parts, the work is three-and-one-half hours long, which (surprisingly, given the conventional capacity for long works to suspend real time and substitute for it a temporality of their own, as is the case in music or epic drama) tends to emphasize *Voice's* location in real time, an emphasis which is in part a consequence of its occupation of real space, its identification with the space of the gallery.

So the division of the work into four occurs temporally as well as spatially (its sequential structure reinforces its physical rectangularity) and this division is developed further within the narration, in particular in the first and second parts. The first is called *The Four*, and identifies the four speakers with the four points of the compass. As with the interplay between the seats and the disposition of the speakers, this identification allows Morris to initiate one's experience of *Voice* with a series of references to spatial positioning and temporal order that reflexively identify the two through puns, or

near puns, based upon the play between specific location and generalized orientation on the compass, and between a speaker system and the narration it broadcasts, which is sometimes suggestive of a person moving around the room (when a single voice comes first from one speaker and then from another) and at other times of a space speaking (when more than one voice is broadcast simultaneously from more than one speaker). *Voice's* use of reflexivity, like that of other contemporary art concerned with an exegesis and exploitation of the interaction between temporality and simultaneity, consists in making either one of any pair of opposed phenomena descriptive of the whole they describe. That is what makes Morris' work dialectically articulate, and also what has made it possible for Morris to persist in the subdivision of an avowedly exhausted Gestalt. Or, to refer to an important essay on Morris which Annette Michelson wrote five years ago, of an "exhausted monolith": sculpture as a sign for grandiosity reduced by quantification, by a phenomenological reduction that allows for a continuing attentiveness, by, in other words, the subjection of a myth to the demands of a materialist imagination. [4]

The second part of *Voice* is called *They*, and is the only part not written by Morris. *They* consists of extracts from the work of Emil Kraepelin, who wrote on mental illness (with an especial regard for criminality) at the turn of the century. Kraepelin was the originator of a classification system of psychopathology on which all subsequent classifications are based. Two more facts gleaned from the Encyclopaedia Brittanica seem pertinent: "[Kraepelin] helped devise a series of tests by which he attempted to separate psychological activities into four components: perception, memory, association and motor functions"; and " . . . In addition [to six differentiated states of depression] he recognized four mixed states: depressed mania, agitated depression, depression with flight of ideas and partial inhibition. He finally concluded that these all belonged to a single manic-depressive entity."

The fragments of case histories used in *They* were in part chosen

[4] Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris: An Aesthetic of Transgression" (Catalogue essay), *Robert Morris,* Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., 1969. This essay, a definitive text, is also one of the first in which Morris' anti-idealism is clearly enunciated.

because they seemed to Morris to be the least theoretical of the contents of Kraepelin's notebooks. *They* is read by two actors, a man and a woman. One speaker is reserved for the passages read by the man's voice and the one that faces it is similarly reserved for the woman's. Each of the other two is used for the voices of both together. In the middle of a sentence the piece will move from both voices reading at once to the speaker whence comes the voice of the man or the woman alone. When the two are reading together, they read the personal pronoun for the opposite sex when it comes up: he says "she", she says "he". Some sentences are repeated, the final passage four times. Morris is able, in a redeployment of the quote reminiscent of Benjamin's in its unanticipated applicability, to make Kraepelin's observations phenomenally as well as thematically consistent with the work as a whole, as in the following passage:

> Sometimes they hear voices which have a metallic sound, they are resonant voices, organ voices, or as of a tuning fork. At other times the voices do not appear to them as sense perceptions at all; they are voices of conscience, voices which do not speak with words, voices of dead people, false voices, abortive voices.

The third part of *Voice* begins with a section called *Cold Oracle*, proceeds to one entitled *He/She*, and goes on to one called *Scar/Records*. The fourth part is a 67-minute monologue read by Mark Strand, who makes an appropriate and substantial contribution to the work by bringing it to a declamatory tone honed by his own experience as a poet who writes poetry meant to be read aloud.

The relationship between narrative and space, as the work proceeds towards the wholly univocal last part, maintains that metonymical reflexiveness which I've said is conceptually derived from the corollary relationship Morris develops between sculptural simultaneity and theatrical temporality. It is, I think, correct to say that what one might for want of a better word call the choreography of *Voice* reasserts the work's concentration on the reflexiveness between the individual and the institution. The first and third sections are made up of simultaneously played tracks that blur one another. As they bombard their audience from different corners of

the space, these passages assert an atemporal whole whose coherence is reduced by its own simultaneity. The second and fourth parts, which employ two known public performers, a psychologist and a poet, the studies of one and the voice of the other, are linear and propositionally articulate in comparison to the first and third. This is an apparition; no section of *Voice* is more "logical" than any other in its propositional continuity. The switches from one sound source to another aren't logical in this sense either, although neither are they in any sense randomly derived — basically a shift occurs at every line-change in Morris' typewritten notes. In all of this the use of Kraepelin seems signally apposite; it suggests with a particular succinctness that the elevated but strained rhetoric of the performer-hero has its origin in public knowledge, that the individual, as he's known and as he comes to know himself, is the product of an institutional vernacular that precedes him and provides the vocabulary that comes to be identified as his own.

* * *

That the idea of sculpture, its reduction to the conditions under which we can talk of it as an institution with an autonomous, or at least self-sufficient, morphology, provides an epistemological space in which an individual imagination can maneuver and find itself (and that it is the interaction between the two, rather than the subsumption of one by the other, which interests Morris) is further hinted at by the drawings of mazes which were also part of the New York show. These pieces clarify *Voice's* preoccupation with an immutable space, that of sculpture, realized through time. They aren't the kind of mazes that one can get lost in, they're a kind that leads one to a point at which one must turn around and come back. I went down to Philadelphia to see a maze, PLATE 18 and 19, that had been built. Quite coincidentally, I happened to be reading Gide on the train and came across the following passage, which describes a walk around a town in North Africa:

> She preceded me along the strange path, unlike any I have ever seen in other countries. Between two rather high walls it meanders almost

> lazily . . . it curves or doubles back altogether, and right at the start a bend bewilders us; there is no knowing where we have come from or where we are heading. [5]

From the railway station I went to the show and entered the maze. To be inside it is to be lost but not lost, to know that one can't take a wrong turning but not to know where one is in terms of the room in which the maze is situated. The walls are eight feet high and were meant to be sixteen (a shortage of money problem) so one cannot see over them. The passageway leads to a place just off the center of the maze, and then weaves around until it has described the entire 100-foot circle that is the maze's ground plan, at which time one is again at a point just off-center, next to the first place one arrived at although one doesn't have any way of knowing that, and from which one must then retrace one's steps in order to get out.

The passageway is narrow, one must squeeze past people coming the other way, which confirms and structures one's experience of the work as a concentration on performance constrained by context. As it leads one into and around and out of the space, the maze describes a configuration quite like that of a dance. But, just as atemporality is focused upon a progressive complication of temporality in *Voice*, so does the maze suggest dance through negative example. The freedom of movement characteristic of dance is undercut by a passageway 18" wide, and by one's inability to say where one is in terms of the overall space. The maze robs individual performance of the possibility of spontaneity, through the provision of a contextual stasis which dominates by being accessible only piece by piece rather than all at once. It proposes, to return to an earlier observation, an institutional space in which there is no opportunity for individual willfulness. Its direct ancestor is *Passageway* (1961), in which two curved walls, implying circles with radii of different lengths, converge, progressively squeezing out the space of the viewer until he or she can go no further.

* * *

[5] Andre Gide, *The Immoralist,* trans. Richard Howard, New York, 1970, p. 38.

No version of *Passageway* was shown this year, but other early works were included in the New York show and these indicate the way in which Morris has always thought of sculpture as a means with which to bracket an (implicit or explicit) temporality. Sculpture imposes a conventional simultaneity that doesn't deny movement (one generally has to walk around a sculpture, a procedure said here to be reversed and clarified by *Voice*) and that's what recommended it to Morris in the first place. *Columns* (1961), made soon after Morris came to settle permanently in New York and not long after he abandoned painting for sculpture, actually had its origin in theatrical performance. In its present state it consists of one column lying down and another standing (where the two are understood to be the same column in different states) which indicates how he has sought to make the potential for movement inherent in the experience of sculpture a feature of simultaneous presentation. Similarly, the two felt pieces pinned on the walls of the same room in the show offer a metonymic alternation of inwardness and outwardness by displaying the same thing in two states. In such pieces one is already confronted with a displacement of the temporal procedure that sculpture invokes. The passage from one column to the other, or from one felt piece to the other, is not around the space of the object but through one's perception of the possible limits of its physical disposition given the constraints of gravity. It's a passage through the inductively recognized possibilities of the abstract space of sculptural epistemology.

By extension, and this is the crux of the concern with a paradigmatic reflexiveness that Morris articulates, the Gestalt may be exhausted but by its exhaustion it becomes the object of continuous attention. An attention which is analogous to the artist's involvement with the Gestalt in that, like any performance, it can at some level conclude only arbitrarily. When *Voice* is over, it's over. It can't be recreated through recourse to the script, because one can't read several speeches simultaneously, although one can, up to a point, hear them that way. The maze absolutely dictates the order of one's perception of it, and it's a perception that requires one to remember, to continuously reconstruct information made available by the piece through time. One goes in and comes out, and the piece is situated in

the past by the fact of one's emergence from it.
The finger drawings that made up the fourth part of the New York show particularize this concern with the employment of memory in the subdivision of an atemporal Gestalt. They are made in a variety of ways, all of which have to do with time measured within the terms of simultaneous presentation of temporal process. Their concern with literal measurement and its documentation suggests an affinity with the work of Mel Bochner, but Morris used a blindfold in making them (which to some may be reminiscent of Valéry's assertion that the poet is a man with the courage to be lost in words, and which is also another example of Morris' indebtedness to Johns' resuscitation of Duchampian randomness) while one can't think of Bochner as other than an artist committed to working with his eyes open. The drawings involve strategies that defamiliarize the drawing's literal and pictorial space. They involve Morris (like the spectator walking through the maze) in a process in which he is asked to locate himself, to find his way around, in a space imperfectly remembered. One drawing especially seemed to essentialize his persistent concern with making simultaneity function as a temporal record. Starting at the top of a sheet of paper, blindfolded, he made horizontal marks with each of his hands. As these marks descend the sheet of paper they become longer, and this progressive increase in their length is thought of as an analog for lapsed time.
Elsewhere, [6] I wrote about Morris' *Light-Codex-Artifacts I* (1974), and described his superimposition of an autobiographical signifier (a map of the Aquarius constellation, Morris' astrological sign, made out of pushpins) onto a surface otherwise unresponsive to the image. I said that, as I looked at it, the work came to be reminiscent of Johns' in two ways. The surface came about in a way similar to the methods used the in finger drawings, a subdivision of the wall that had to do with temporal measurement, but which recalled Johns' *Devised Curve* in its use of a squeegee. The Aquarius constellation led me to think of Johns' dymaxion map. I suggested that I took the surface to stand for an institutional, impersonal space in that it's

6 *Artforum,* Summer, 1974.

derived from measuring the wall while the map's simply imposed (hung) on it. And I take that to stand for the individual willfulness that, I have suggested here, Morris poses as the antithesis of epistemological logic. That Johns should emerge on both sides of the opposition seems indicative of Morris' ability to propose a fully reflexive paradigm for the interaction with which he's been concerned throughout his career in New York. I should describe this as the interaction between the individual and the institution, where the individual is understood as a specific instance of a general publicness — a situation metaphoricized by Morris by opposing the artist to the sculptural epistemology he or she inherits. At the risk of boring the reader, I've made this point several times to unite a superficially disparate body of work. One final point remains to be made.

To say that Morris opposes willfulness to an inherited terminology is to say that he's aware that creative thinking is negative thinking, a conscious denial and also a manipulation of an innate tendency towards entropy in all things. In thinking about his work, it seems necessary to conceive of the possibility of a complete triumph of the institution over the individual. Such an obliteration seems to be metaphorically enacted in Morris' work in those instances where the sculptural space completely overcomes the spectator. For example, in *Voice*, when the first and third parts are going on, one can't discriminate between tracks played simultaneously. Or, when one is in the maze, totally constrained by the passageway. In order to manipulate meaning, Morris' work seems to insist, one must constantly look for some way to distance oneself from it, to find an antithesis and, thereby, locate new meaning in synthesis. Institutions are both sources of meaning and implicitly mindless, and interact in the imagination of individuals as a matter of course. Take, for example, Susan Sontag: "[Dancing is] the opposite of what writing means. Having goals, pledging yourself to discomfort in the hope of saving your soul, has no meaning when you're out there on the floor. Thank God for dancing." [7]

Morris, who's never actually been a dancer, subjects sculpture to the temporal syntax of performance in order to bring it more fully into the space we ourselves inhabit. As such, as an experience materially

present rather than distanced by myth, sculpture becomes ours rather than history's. The space of the dance is the space of mortality but also of spontaneity, immediacy, the provisional and the pragmatic. By definition vulnerable to the subliminally motivated desire (solemnized daily in universities and artist's bars across at least two continents) to confuse the atemporal with the ahistorical, the space of sculpture has constantly to be rescued from the calcification of the Ideal.

[7] "Susan Sontag: After the First Decade," Interview with Chuck Ortleb, *Out*, April, 1974.

LINDA BENGLIS AT THE CLOCKTOWER

Benglis has told me that she has always thought of herself as an artist concerned with pictorial issues rather than as a sculptor. Her installation at the Clocktower (1974) confirms this, PLATES 20 and 21. It is of *Knots* that are basically white, with color added to them. Some of this color is paint, but most of it is glitter. The *Knots* are made, as usual, by dipping gauze that has been stretched over a wire mesh form into wet plaster, and then manipulating, tying, this form while the plaster dries. The glitter, applied after the *Knot's* set — after it's been tied into its final shape and dried — acts to identify color with planar positioning, making us read it in a manner analogous to the way in which we recognize the surface of a painting as the repository of coherence, for our experience of the pictorial object as a whole, and also as that which was added last. Furthermore, and not in contradiction, it is in terms of such an analogy that the glitter should be read as a function of the works' three-dimensionality. Because the installation used colored lights, of the kind found on Christmas trees, the glitter seemed more effective here than I had thought it to be in the past. The lights' color is similar to that of glitter, and, as the lights are strung about the walls, this affinity between the lights and the glitter drew one's attention to the interaction between the surface of each work and the graphic mass which supports it, by roughly paralleling that interaction through the effect of the colored lights on the wall which supported them as it also provided a context for the entire drama, or spectacle. This effect, of a real space converted into an ordered experience which is at first pictorial rather than sculptural, is reinforced by the emphatic verticality of each of the knots in conjuction with the wall. At the Clocktower that directionality was both reasserted and inflected — so as to lead the viewer from the pictorial verticality of each piece towards the sculptural (mass organized by surface)

reform of the architectural setting provided by the installation considered as a whole — by the lights which were strung up and down the spiral staircase running from the floor occupied by Benglis' work to and through the floor above. A spiralling verticality which, running through the installation, transfers one's attention from the dematerializing effect of color on surface to that transformation of mass of which color is also capable. To draw our attention, in this way, to the installation considered as a mass — a sculptural entity with an axis and an outer extremity — was also, and again by using the colored lights to provide a parallel analogy, to lead one toward that which is in the last analysis a most important component of our experience of each and any of Benglis' *Knots,* where the dematerializing effect of color is seen to be the consequence of, and also the antinomy to, that drawn mass which is the *Knot* itself: Benglis' work is in this sense properly understood as traditional *bas*-relief, the technical problems of which have to do with expanding and otherwise qualifying a sculpted shallow space through attention to surface.

The passage from one piece to the other, linked as they are — most of them anyway — by the colored lights, echoes the sense of narrative continuity, of a procedure that is cumulative and sequential, which each of the *Knots* conveys in itself.

Emily Wasserman, writing about Benglis' work (*Artforum*, December, 1971), suggested that Benglis had returned to Pollock, specifically to the "pre-historic," "Jungian," imagery of Pollock's pre-1947 paintings. The *Knots*, hard in the center and soft — malleable because unplastered — at their extremities, suggest Pollock in another way. The circumference of Benglis' arm forms the wire mesh that is the basis for the tubular lengths of material out of which the *Knots* are made. In this, Benglis' "physiological" presence in her work seems, at some level, reminiscent of the inevitable references to Pollock's arm in his paintings, of 1947-51. I am not suggesting that Benglis is in any sense repeating Pollock's career. Her work isn't, and never has been, of a kind that can be incorporated within the critical vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism. But it has always been responsive to that vocabulary in an explicit and significant way. She uses materials that suggest gesture

by virtue of their own material condition as did the plastic foam she employed in her earlier work. This reminds us that the art that has sought to replace Abstract Expressionism has relocated, rather than eliminated, gestural emphasis. To acknowledge that gesture may suggest itself in an act of material signification from which overt gesturality has been expunged, is to suggest that the development of American art over the last 25 years or so is a more complicated business than we are sometimes inclined to think. An "anti-expressionist" art may very well conjure up the specter of that to which it is opposed. Benglis, in implying that we inevitably read certain kinds of material configurations as gestural even when in fact — literally — they aren't, obliges us to reflect upon that complexity. That she can effect such provocation through the use of materials as intrinsically banal as glitter and Christmas-tree lights confirms — for me — that her work is the production of an extraordinary developed vision.

JOEL SHAPIRO

Joel Shapiro's work calls to mind the essay, "Film and the New Psychology," in which Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out that we are always aware of a cube's six sides even though we can never see more than three of them at once. Merleau-Ponty is getting at something with which we are familiar but that is hard to account for — and which provides him with the basic theme of much of his writing on art — namely, that far more then shape, color and texture falls within the scope of visual perception. This is to say that what is presented in visual experience is a complex of sensations ultimately bounded only by the limits of descriptive language itself, *i.e.*, by history and psychology.

Shapiro's art, like most of the art that currently grasps one's attention, expresses a desire to address itself to issues that are by definition the most elusive. These are issues that tend to be represented by properties "immanent" in the act of seeing but not describable as *essentially* visual. They are latent issues whose description precludes recourse to a critical vocabulary that openly identifies artistic ambition with the manipulation of a general range of optical phenomena, including color and materiality. And much of the art that seems to be the most interesting to me at the moment— and over the last decade — is art that explicitly precludes a primary concern with the purely visual, in order to concentrate on a more general morphological communicability, one that can link the artwork more directly to experience in the real world. It thereby locates the language of art within ordinary language in a way that clarifies their reciprocity.

Towards this end, a direct visual property, such as shape or color, is likely nowadays to be bypassed in favor of a concern with weight, for example. This is the case with a series of Shapiro's sculptures made two or three years ago, in which the shape of each piece corresponds

to the differences between the physical properties of its constituents. Each sculpture consists of two sections fabricated from different materials of equal weight. Of this series, *Untitled:75 lbs.* (1970), PLATE 22, is the one that Shapiro considers the most successful, as do I. It's made out of 75 pounds of magnesium and 75 pounds of lead. As Shapiro has said, "the lead almost levitates the magnesium." One cannot help but read — see — the lead as heavier than the magnesium, which is an indication of the extent to which material differences are able to function visually — to be apparent to the eye — in a way that goes beyond the "purely" (*i.e.*, exclusively) visual. *75 lbs.*, by using that which is quantitatively demonstrable about lead and magnesium, namely that one is a heavier metal than the other, convincingly suggests that what in each metal is measureable by other than visual means is also that which inflects our intuitive response to it as a thing seen.

Shapiro, incidentally, points out that this response depends upon maintaining immediately apparent limits. The least successful piece in this series is the one made of wood and iron, which identifies the work with a taxonomy of oppositions, beginning with the organic/manufactured. This distracts from the deceptively simple notion of same weight versus different mass on which the sculpture is predicated.

Shapiro's first exhibited works were wall hangings, which he now thinks suffered from a pressure he felt at the time (1968-69) to work on a large scale. *75 lbs.*, however, established the terms of Shapiro's relationship to other artists with a comparable interest in materiality. *75 lbs.* relates Shapiro's work to Richard Serra's, particularly to Serra's use of materiality in a work such as *Roll Bar*. Similarly to the lead's levitation of the magnesium in Shapiro's piece, *Roll Bar* turns the physical properties of heavy metal against themselves, depicting weightlessness in a context of explicit materiality. *75 lbs.* also connects Shapiro with Carl Andre's *Plains* of 1969, made of two different kinds of metal which similarly "levitated" one another to cause a rippling effect throughout the piece as a whole. But clearly there are sharp differences between Shapiro's sculpture and that of Serra and Andre. Shapiro resists working large, his bias is toward the small. And, in my opinion, Andre's *Plains* of 36 pieces of metal

draws attention less to weight than to material differences as the basis for a notion of extension, one in which alternation provides the only change encountered in a context of otherwise unvarying repetition. In contrast, Shapiro's images are not involved in repetition — at least not in a way that is motivated by an interest in the systematic.

These differences between Shapiro and other artists such as Serra or Andre should be understood as a consequence of his presiding concern with autobiography. All his work fits into a space that his physiognomy can contain. Often it is very small. And, frequently, too, his concern is with archetypal forms which involve — on the part of the artist as well as the viewer — a degree of attentiveness that is obsessive but not fetishistic. (Shapiro's work is not comparable, for instance, to that of Lucas Samaras.) His work is small because he is involved in a personal encoding that goes against Minimalism's extrapersonal bias but which is nonetheless similarly involved with the material independence of things. Other works further illuminate his relationship to the art with which I have suggested his asks to be compared. One is a small bird, PLATE 23. Shapiro spent two years in India, an experience that seems to have affected his feeling for animal forms. But the animal sculpture that he makes — usually out of wax — also throws light on his need to personally manipulate the materials he employs, to make them stand for his own activity in a way that is very direct. (The affinity between the boat and the coffin in this group so explicitly suggests biographical and psychological influences and intent as not to require comment.)

Shapiro's concern with reducing natural forms to the condition of an archetype obviates consideration of a distinction between the representational and the abstract. And, significantly, it tends to be the material emphasis of his work which makes it possible to ignore — to see as redundant — the questions posed by that distinction. The bridge, illustrated here, is an example of how this operates. Shapiro is attracted to rivers, to the sense of a continuum provided by running water. (Which may connect with the boat in a way that qualifies but doesn't necessarily contradict what I've just said about it.) The bridge came about, in part, because Shapiro lived

near the Brooklyn Bridge. He made it first out of balsa wood, in late 1971, and two years later machined it in metal. It is, he thinks, a key piece. I share this view because in the bridge one has the two sides of the attempt at synthesis which is Shapiro's. The bridge relates to Shapiro's personal experience but at the same time is, as an archetype, independent of that experience. Thus the bridge is an attempt to articulate Shapiro's experience through an archetypal reduction that is ultimately transcendental in ambition. That the bridge is (now) made out of metal is a function of what I am calling its archetypal independence. But it's also a function of the artist's desire to communicate that archetype through an artistic terminology physically continuous with the artist's original experience of the bridge as a thing, insofar as a symbolic construct of the idea and its vehicle — the sign and its presentation — were inseparable.

A key meaning in Shapiro's work is realized in his attitude to the archetype, because it is his fascination with seeing things as archetypes that allows him to transcend individual iconography while pursuing a personal motif. Shapiro seems to see the archetype as a coding device within which the personal can be made to converge with a particular image whose material and iconographic identity sets it apart from — makes it independent of — personally attributed meaning. This sounds like an attempt to reconcile meanings that are, by definition, mutually exclusive. That's just what I think it is.

Another work, a tiny chair, like the bridge, stands on the floor in the middle of a large open space. Both pieces are about projection — projection, on the part of the viewer, into the space of the work. Shapiro thinks of this work, and the bridge, as analogous to Serra's work — as related to an idea of the work as something that "reaches out" to the viewer. The difference in scale between Shapiro's work and that of the majority of American sculptors, is, then, perhaps describable as a rejection of sculpture which is impersonal, and that finds itself through being systematic and, if not necessarily larger than life, never less than life-sized. This would be the attitude of Minimalism as it is found in the work of Morris, Judd, Serra and Andre, for instance. Shapiro shares with these artists a concern to communicate through materiality, but to an end that, in contrast to

the impersonality of their work, is extremely personal because of its autobiographical connections.

But, while Shapiro's relationship to Minimalism is defined by his rejection of massive scale, this rejection is not as complete as it might at first seem. His commitment to materiality transforms his autobiographical intention into something that relates back to Minimalism directly, but which stands apart from Minimalism by virtue of its disconcerting elision of the undeniably impersonal (materiality as such) into the avowedly personal (Shapiro's auto-biographical intent).

Shapiro's chair, when seen *in situ* in the middle of a large space has an effect similar to that of Serra's piece *One Ton Prop*. Like Serra's piece, the chair seems to hold the floor down while simultaneously making the position of the floor itself very uncertain. In both works, one comes back to the idea of a sense of levitation generated by a visually communicated feeling of weight. Shapiro's rejection of Minimalist size, then, doesn't transform the Minimalist vocabulary as much as it relocates that vocabulary within a context of individual, rather than *supra*individual motivation. Shapiro's moti-vation can best be described in terms that are psychological (individually preoccupied) rather than historical (oriented toward and institutional — art-historical — explanation). Paradoxically enough it will, of course, be up to art history to determine whether such an art can achieve as much, in its own way, as that which, all similarities duly noted, it so explicitly seeks to negate.

GODARD: AFTER MARX, AFTER FREUD

"Justice Burger holds, vividly, that 'a "live" performance of a man and woman in a sexual embrace at high noon in Times Square' is not protected by the Constitution even though the couple might 'simultaneously engage in a valid political dialogue.' "

—John Leonard: *New York Times Book Review*, July 8th, 1973

"It was assumed by the disciples of Marx and Freud alike that man exists in one of two modes: the political and the pyschological. This division is a classic 'two horn'd cloven Fiction' of patriarchal thought. The women's movement of our generation is the first mass political and social movement to have seen the utter fallaciousness of this division, to look for new forms of social organization and human relationships which may begin to close it: to demand that we transform, not merely our institutions, but ourselves."

Adrienne Rich: *American Poetry Review*, May-June 1973

These statements both appeared after I had more or less finished writing the following note on Jean-Luc Godard. Horribly funny, Burger's remark is interesting only as a tacit admission of sex and politics' inevitable juxtaposition in social rhetoric, even the rhetoric of the Right. In contrast, what Adrienne Rich says seems to me to be important and true, but true in the way that political insight often is, which is to say, unfairly. As her own poetry makes very clear, art itself has long been a disciple of Marx and Freud, and from necessity rather than choice. Marx and Freud have provided the parameters of Modernism's varied attempts to depict the experience of living in the post-industrial world because the ambition to transform "ourselves" involves a willingness to fully acknowledge the character of that which we aim to transcend. Art became the disciple of Marx and Freud in response to a premise anticipated by the novel but developed independently within Marxism on the one hand and psychoanalysis on the other: that to ignore or deny any describable

feature of the historical system we believe ourselves to inhabit — and which we find desperately inadequate — is to stay trapped within it to an uncertain extent.

Avoiding that trap has been the philosophical motive of Godard's career. He has sought a context of transcendence arrived at through manipulating that investigatory language which, while almost unarguably inherently paternalistic, is also the most fully self-conscious discursive mode we have. He has altered cinema for us, and in that changed our lives while making an alternative unimaginable. His is a modification of the art of cinema as profound and irrevocable as is Jackson Pollock's of painting: each man obliges us to see his work as a thing in the real world. Pollock makes us realize that pictorial space, a space accessible to the eye alone, depends on the presence of paint and canvas. With an intensity unprecedented in the history of the medium we're required to recognize, to persistently remind ourselves of, the painting's identity as a combination of materials, in the course of transcending this same physicality. As for Godard, there are his own words: "You can see how hard it is to talk about movies; art is easy but criticism impossible on such a topic, which is nothing, whose head and tail are one and the same, which draws nearer to us and further away at the same time, and always physically, don't forget." [1]

Within the terms of a self-conscious physicality, Godard and Pollock provide an art of formal self-destruction, of a center which will not hold (can't be permitted to), of a reality parallel to, rather than reciprocal with, our own. A reality which is that of a specific medium more than it is a derivative of the perceptual clues provided by the space of the actual world in which we ourselves, and film as object, exist. Film and painting acquire an independence of real space in so far as either maintains its identity as a physical construction. This is a tautology rather than a paradox, since it is only by being explicit about its status as an object that a medium can assert the primacy of its own terminology over that of the world as an homogenous accumulation of sensuous signals, *i.e.*, a specific medium separates itself from general experience, which is a context

[1] See, Toby Mussman (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard* (N. Y., 1968), pp. 243-44.

in which different systems of communicability become undifferentiated through their juxtaposition, by being explicit about its own limits and therefore the conditions of its own internal articulation. This point is fundamental to what I shall have to say in the following paragraphs, but I do not wish to develop it further at this moment.

There are dissimilarities, too, between Pollock and Godard. One is that where Pollock had little more than three years as a major artist, Godard, so far, has had fourteen. A second, as important as the first is trivial, is that painting — and therefore Pollock's work — is not an art of ordinary language, and it is such an art that Godard has tried to make out of cinema. So, while it has been useful to invoke Pollock in introducing Godard, as a way of most readily establishing the scope and the order of the latter's ambition, we must look elsewhere for comparisions which will assist in more closely describing the shape of his work.

In an essay written in 1968, [2] Susan Sontag described Godard as conscious that cinema "unlike literature" doesn't exist as art "from the very start." This sounds like the expression of a fear that cinema, unlike the older arts, is somehow less able to separate itself from experience in general than is "literature"; and in that has difficulty in achieving the almost automatically obtained sense of credibility and manipulability, for both artist and audience, which comes from seeing the art work as separate from "life." Like any painting, a poem — however bad — still belongs to poetry more apparently than to ordinary speech; poetry involves a transformation of ordinary language which is by definition so complete as to make it seem unlikely that there might be instances in which one could be mistaken for the other. (Modern poets have seen this guaranteed ahistoricality as a challenge, revealing a discomfort which is a corollary to Godard's, a discomforture with the ease with which culturally digested forms maintain a sense of their own limits, but still a poem is more clearly poetry, throughout its entirety, than it's history or psychology.)

Cinema's identity is less assured. It's not so persistently clear (as one

[2] Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (N. Y., 1969), p. 153.

sits in front of the screen) to what specific kind of contextual transformation belongs film of a gate being shelled by sailors (the crew of Potempkin), when in one sense what is presented is literally false — they never hit one of the targets they aimed at — while in another — the revolution ultimately succeeded and the Potempkin incident is one of its myths — this passage in Eisenstein's film claims a place for itself in historical consciousness less as a lie than as a truth. Perhaps even Eisenstein believed it. In any case, the facts of what happened to the Black Sea Fleet in the aftermath of the Russian defeat by the Japanese at Port Arthur are now parallelled by the myth they engendered, and the two versions of the event are mutually informative without being corroborations of one another. Can we say they are equally real, or unreal, for us? Our version of the event will always be the turbulent result of the juxtaposition of the two; just as both will forever be subject to reshaping by changes in awareness of 1905 in general, and, to some extent and in a different way, of art in general too.

Here it seems appropriate to quote Roland Barthes: ". . . one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language . . . " [3] Except for such work as that of Paul Sharits, whose films concentrate on the object quality of film to the exclusion of its capacity to function as photographic record, cinema makes no implicit distinction between fact and fiction, whereas poetry is poetry while history is prose. Yeats' poem cannot be mistaken for a literal account of the Easter rising, but it would be harder to make the same kind of categorical remark about a film, (in fact Robert Flaherty saw *Potempkin* as just that, *i.e.*, as a literal rendition of the actual event). By the same token, a newspaper account might not be "art from the beginning," but that is not to say that it might not end up as art, without, in that, giving up its original function. Perhaps, then, it is with journalism and not poetry that film needs to be compared. Or, to put it differently, perhaps film's situation is one reminiscent of that which supposedly once obtained between, not poetry, but the novel and

[3] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (translation by Annette Lavers, N. Y., 1972), p. 110.

social life. One wonders whether the relationship between *War and Peace* and Napoleon's invasion is not of an ambiguity directly analogous to that between *Potempkin* and the sailors' mutiny. In a word, and to return to Godard's expressed concern, is it possible that in the nineteenth century it was the novel which was not art from the very first?

I think one may answer yes to this, by pointing to an example slightly earlier than Tolstoy's, the work of the author of *Middlemarch*, in which the modern novel as a developing embryo is seen at its most schematic. (And is in that seen very clearly as an attempt by history to turn reality into a speech which can support the demands of a new — *i.e.*, a revised — mythology.) As someone recently said, George Eliot was a novelist concerned first of all with documenting society, and it was out of this preoccupation that she developed what amounts to something like a new idea of aesthetic adequacy, *i.e.*, Eliot fashioned a formal idea out of a regard for psychological and economic (class) description. For me, Eliot's is an attempt to retain the uncertainty of thinking in the real world, the instability of language designed to account for what is partially seen — seen in the absence of either historical or 'ideal' perspective. She makes the experiential parameters of middle-class provincial life, 'life' as the experience of an individual's own individuality and as a combination of institutions and institutional changes, become the formal parameters of her writing in a way that doesn't involve denying their independence of one another at some earlier stage. Instead, in leaving the factual world to become fiction, Eliot's writing doesn't claim to abandon the partiality of analytic discourse, but develops by retaining the incompleteness characteristic of utilitarian — as opposed to poetic — language. Utilitarian language, whether that of a scientific discipline or of a conversation, is defined as such by its limitedness, its inability to propose for itself a meaning which is more or other than immediate and pragmatic. In juxtaposing more than one kind of description — seeming to propose the dialectic of individual psychology/institutional determinacy introduced above by Adrienne Rich — Eliot blurs the analytic usefulness of the terminologies she employs and in so doing invents an art of prose, an art that uses the language of discursive investigation but simul-

taneously one in which allegory and inquiry, fact and fiction, aren't rendered mutually exclusive by the demands of the form. [4]

If cinema seems to be like prose in that both speak in a language which is not necessarily artistic, then this is an affinity manifested in the physical nature of film, which, like reported speech, implicitly asks to be edited. Godard exploits this affinity in a way that, particularly from the vantage point provided by the American avant-garde cinema [5] at present, seems reminiscent of Eisenstein's ambivalence towards the illusionist cinema of D.W. Griffith on the one hand, and Dziga Vertov's cinema of deconstruction on the other. In his use of titles, Eisenstein drew attention to film's linguistic orientation, to the analogous relationship between the shot as the basic unit of film and the noun-verb combination as a basic unit of descriptive and expressive language (*e.g.*, the titles which both stand for and accompany Lenin's arrival in *October*), in a way which complicates, and in a sense erodes, the experience of film as something which is essentially visual. This is because it draws attention to the fact that in literate cultures language itself is experienced as accessible through being visual, in that its basic form

[4] In connection with what I have said about the novel in this paragraph, two statements from Richard Poirier's *Norman Mailer* (N. Y., 1972) seem to bear repeating here:

> "From the beginning Mailer had that 'historic sense,' to recall Eliot, 'which I may call nearly indispensable to nearly anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year' " (p. 46).
>
> "Mailer was later to rewrite a passage from Freud, and also one from Marx, showing that, by the substitution of words having to do with social structures for words having to do with psychic ones, it was possible to demonstrate the necessary but neglected similarity between them" (p. 69).

[5] The American avant-garde cinema is for me, at present, represented by the work of three film makers in particular: Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, and Michael Snow. These artists seem to me to be engaged in a formal enterprise of the most serious kind, having to do with an analytic manipulation of the cinematic process, physical and perceptual. This is not, however, the place for a discussion of Snow's *Central Region,* or Frampton's *Zorn's Lemma,* two of the most exciting films I've ever seen. Suffice to say that one would expect these film makers to reiterate against Godard the same charge that Vertov brought against Eisenstein, whom he accused of making films out of a literary skeleton with a cinematic skin. Also, while becoming conscious of the cinematic process was for Vertov a metaphorical act, in which deconstruction of the processes of dominant film — *i.e.*, of western commercial cinema and its codes — was intended to serve as a paradigm for the deconstruction of Soviet society itself, (that is, for a coming to consciousness which would be able to eliminate bourgeois modes of behaviour in the act of making them explicit) the American avant-garde is as explicitly apolitical as Hollywood. (The account of Vertov's ambitions for *Man with a Movie Camera* which I have just paraphrased originated with Noel Burch, in a lecture given at N.Y.U.)

is the written one. It is, I believe, the implicit self-approximation to the condition of verbal communication which is contained in film's physical identity that explains why Vertov saw the elimination of titles as imperative in realizing his masterpiece *Man with a Movie Camera*, while at the same time feeling no qualms about supplying it with musical accompaniment. The effect of the titles in *October*, while establishing the film's identity as a document, *i.e.*, something concrete which asks to be read, also has the effect of obscuring the specificity of the medium and in that attribute to cinema another aspect of the character of ordinary language, that which identifies the language we speak as one of which we can never be fully conscious, since it is a system which includes us within itself.

Bruno, in *le Petit Soldat*, takes one photograph of us (of the movie camera) during the scene in which he is photographing Veronica. This puts us in physical tension with events on the screen in a way which has more in common with Eisenstein's use of titles than with Vertov's shot of a movie camera trained on another which is filming it (through which we are seeing it), to the extent that in Godard's work as in Eisenstein's, identifying film's objectness doesn't preclude that screen with which we are physically co-present from also acting as the context for a manipulation of a taxonomy of oppositions which are not all *necessarily* cinematic. On the contrary, in maintaining our awareness that the experience of film is one that takes place in the physical world, Godard and Eisenstein emphasize the sense in which a film shot, like a word, exists at least potentially independently of the particular context in which we encounter it. In being contextualized, a shot or a word takes on a specifically transformed meaning but does not in that lose its extra-contextual significatory capacity, but rather, derives its transformation from that capacity to function as a signifier in the world at large: to call Buck Mulligan stately and plump is to call attention to the ordinarily presumptive incongruity of those adjectives, and it is by calling attention to their literal existence in this way — their identity in the real world — that Joyce establishes *Ulysses* as a work which has a direct and critical relationship to language *per se* (from, to be sure, the very beginning).

Noel Burch, [6] says of Eisenstein's ambition to make a film of *Capital*

that this would create a " . . . cinema of pure reflection, where the subject becomes the basis of an intellectual construct, which in turn is capable of engendering the overall form and even the texture of the film without being denatured or distorted." In the same paragraph he describes Godard's *Vivre sa Vivre* as "an unqualified success, owing to its dialectic of fiction and non-fiction." This suggests that Godard and Eisenstein both attribute to film the capacities of ordinary language, and in doing so imply a function for the acknowledgement of a film as a physical mediator similar to that of the preterite in (historical or fictional) prose. The preterite unites disparate events into a common discursive continuity just as Bruno, by taking our photograph, reminds us that the not necessarily cinematic oppositions articulated in *le Petit Soldat* have in common their presence on film: language set in the past historic tense, and filmed events at the time that we see them projected onto a screen, have in common that they are accessible for us by virtue of their manifest function as depictions of a time and space which is other than the time and space we occupy. Prose narrative and film are automatically about things which are past, in that both are contained by the present — out of contemporary events comes their ability to be read — while not being of the present or, unlike yesterday's events, at any measureable distance from it. A film or a novel has the appearance of a record, but records a time and space that is neither literally historical nor, unlike painting, music, or poetry, essentially *a*historical. Cinema and the novel don't set out to transcend actuality so much as they seem to trade on an ability to represent transcendence itself — the substitution of an intrinsically adequate universe of discourse which is the work's for that of the everyday — as an issue which is speculative and ambiguous. In this film and the novel seem to me to be unlike the arts of the Renaissance (leaving aside Walter Benjamin's admonition that we need to consider cinema's effect on more traditional forms) and closer to the condition of mythical language described above by Barthes: a descriptive language subject to transformation by history yet not

[6] Noel Burch, *Theory of Film Practice,* trans. by H. R. Lane (N. Y., 1973), p. 162.

simply historical. [7]

> "Speech always comes into play against a background of speech; it is always only a fold in the immense fabric of language."
> — Maurice Merleau-Ponty: "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" [8]

> "To give an accurate description of what has never occurred is not merely the proper occupation of the historian, but the inalienable privilege of any man of parts and culture."
> — Oscar Wilde: *Intentions*

Wilde also said that the difference between journalism and literature is that the one is unreadable and the other not read, and in the preface to *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, which articulates the basic premise of modernism, that "All art is at once surface and symbol," he delivers another aphorism which seems especially applicable to Godard: "No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved."

If film has an innate tendency to confuse itself with our experience of the world at large, in the way in which Flaherty was confused by *Potemkin*, then it makes sense that film makers of real ambition should have been men and women concerned more or less explicitly with the development of strategies in response to that tendency, which is a tendency towards unconsciousness. (Godard once replied to an interviewer with a statement he attributed to Hegel: "Liberty is the reality which consciousness accords itself . . . ")[9] Myth is ungovernable, and cinema's history is one of responses to that ungovernability. Myth may be reduced to the terms of historical discourse, or used as a compositional resource (Wilde again: "Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art"). In either instance myth's function as myth will be mitigated but not

[7] Barthes has of course discussed the function of the preterite at some length, in *Writing Degree Zero* (trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, Boston, 1970), and my use of the term is meant to rest on his. I have also drawn, here, on Stanley Cavell's discussion of film as something which is by definition present through being "not there." This may be found in his *The World Viewed,* (N.Y., 1971), a book that in other ways condescends toward the cinema, and is particularly hopeless in its treatment of Godard.

[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs,* trans. by R. C. McLeary (N. W. University Press, 1964), p. 42.

[9] Jean Collet, *Jean-Luc Godard*, trans. by Ciba Vaughan (N.Y., 1970), p. 87.

lost. We are back to Godard's fear concerning cinema's beginnings, and in that to his attitude to the shot. For it is the shot which summons up the ungovernability of myth in what it depicts, even as it presents itself as the means by which mythical language may be modified and transformed.

Godard: "And no one is influenced by Eisenstein, for no one has made a film like his." [10]

Rosalind Krauss posits for Eisenstein (in, specifically, the film *October*) a cinematic image (message) dependent on the alternating and opposing of "documentary" and "artificial" spaces. [11] Directly comparable to this is Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier's observation that: "Wavering between sociology and poetry, Godard's language finds it home ground when it seeks out both extremes . . ."[12] In both of these writers — as above in connection with Eliot — success is seen to reside in the manipulation of formal parameters which might be described as investing the medium with a kind of indeterminacy not available to a painting or a poem, either of which must be wholly "artificial" from the beginning to the end of our experience of it. In Eisenstein artifice responds to what is presented as literal documentation, and — even though the first shots in *October* are formalized, explicitly emptied of the limits of the specific space of actual places — we read such "artificial" spaces, as they recur throughout the film, as having an appearance that is derived from the character of physical reality, as the reordering of a natural given similar to our experience of, say, the reordering of landscape by way of classicist formulae in the painting of Poussin. In Godard, however, the opposite is true. In his films it is the sociological that occurs as the response to, or corollary of a situation manifestly artificial in origin. One that, as in *Tout va Bien*, or even in his contribution to *Far from Vietnam*, is very clear about its intention to start off as art.

One wouldn't want to make too much of this difference between Eisenstein and Godard, which is I think more a matter of degree

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[11] Rosalind E. Krauss, "Montage 'October': Dialectic of the Shot," *Artforum,* January, 1970.

[12] Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, "Form and Substance, or the Avatars of the Narrative," in *Focus on Godard,* edited by Royal S. Brown, (N. Y., 1972), p. 108.

than — as Burch seems to think [13] — of fundamental incompatability. But I do think it's an important difference in that it helps to explain why Godard's work seemed for so long to be in a way politically ambivalent, and how he achieved his more recent freedom to be politically committed through the manipulation of that ambivalence. (Wilde: "The well bred contradict one another, the wise contradict themselves.") Godard's ambivalence results from a loss of innocence not available to an earlier generation. He was born on December 3rd, 1930, by which time the Russian revolution had been thoroughly betrayed, and, as Bruno reminds us in one of the most quoted lines ever put into an actor's mouth, the second — and in a sense greater — betrayal of revolutionary idealism in twentieth-century history, the destruction of the Spanish republic, occurred while he was still a child. It is his awareness of this, more than any other single thing, that makes Godard our contemporary. As with the rest of us who grew up after Spain and after Hiroshima, Marxist-Leninism was never available to Godard, as it was to Eisenstein, as a positivistically unambiguous archetype which could unite and generate both film's structure and its "content." (Similarly, Freud could never provide Godard with an articulatory system as complete and inclusive as that which psychoanalysis had once seemed to provide for Breton.) Godard's aestheticism — more than superficially reminiscent of Wilde's as that is expressed in "The Soul of Man under Socialism" — had always been the result of necessity, a response to the compromised status of conventional Marxism, and in that an attempt to provide a potentially transcendental context for a new politics and a new psychology (which last was precisely the ambitions of the theatre of Meyerhold in which Eisenstein worked as a student, during the revolution). [14]

That speech of Bruno's deserves to be quoted so often, in a way, it represents the full scope of Godard's ambition:

[13] Burch, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-21.

[14] An interesting article by Alvin W. Gouldner, "Marxism and Mao," *Partisan Review* (Summer, 1973), p. 253, describes how Maoism sees the necessity for the revolution's eating its own children. Mao, Gouldner says, is aware that Marx and Engels, as the heirs of Western intellectual tradition, seek to perpetuate that tradition in their critique of it, and in that represent an internal contradiction:

"Maoism is the Marxism that recognizes — or better still sees without recognizing — that

" . . . Me, I'm lost unless I pretend to be lost. My argument is that everyone has an ideal, therefore there is something more important that everyone hasn't got. For example, I am sure that God doesn't have an ideal. There is a very, very beautiful saying. Whose is it? I think it was Lenin. 'Ethics are the aesthetics of the future.' I find that very beautiful and very moving as well. It reconciles the right and the left. What are they thinking of, the people of the right and left? Today, revolution, why bother? Once a reactionary government gets to power, it applies left-wing policies and vice-versa. Me, I win or lose, but I fight alone. Around 1930 young people had a revolution. For example, Malraux, Drieu la Rochelle, Aragon. We no longer have anything. They had the Spanish Civil War, we haven't even got our own war. Apart from ourselves, our own face and our own voice, we have nothing. But perhaps that is what is important, to come to recognize the sound of ones own voice . . . and the shape of ones own face."[15]

Godard counts, still, as a young artist. One forced into what is by now clearly recognizable as the second stage of his development by the pressures built up in his manipulation of those extremes of self-contradiction of which Ropars-Wuilleumier speaks and which Bruno, the rightist gunman who quotes Lenin, incorporates: Malraux, the leftist who became De Gaulle's cultural commissar; Drieu la Rochelle, the fascist intellectual who committed suicide when the Nazis were defeated; Aragon, the Surrealist Communist. The first stage ends with *Pierrot le Fou;* the shape of the second is anticipated in the transitional works *La Chinoise* and *Weekend*, and emerges as it were 'fully' in *One plus One,* which in my opinion is the most ambitious of all his films. This second period is still upon us; throughout both he has asked the question posed by Eliot, or, in the present day, Thomas Pynchon, while transforming it into the special context of physicality which is film. The question that lies at

there is no way forward for the revolution except through the death of Marxism; that the final limits on the revolution are those imposed by and built into Marxism itself; that these limits lay sedimented in the revolutionary intelligentsia, and in the university system that socially reproduces the intelligentsia. Maoism is the Marxism that was brought to the brink of understanding that one has to choose: either Marxism or the permanent revolution — but not both!"

In this sense Godard was a Maoist long before *La Chinoise.*

15. *Le Petit Soldat,* trans. by Nicholas Garnham (N. Y., 1967), pp. 78-79.

the root of prose fiction, which uses analytic language to describe what is literally — an unavoidable and informative pun — not there. In cinema, perhaps, this is the question's purest form: What kind of an experience is that provided by the presence on screen of Jane Fonda, when this is accompanied by —"followed" in the musical sense — Godard's verbal critique of her?

The question is about physical relationship, it seems to me. This piece of film provokes the audience into acknowledging its own space as, for example, the episode in Preston Sturges' *The Lady Eve* in which the screen becomes Barbara Stanwyck's hand mirror, containing Henry Fonda's reflection and accompanied by her analysis of what kind of a sucker he is, does not. This is because the source of the commentary (Godard) shares with the audience an absence from the space projected on to the screen, and this leads to what is involved in elaborating the question in a way which will (hopefully) provide more of a hint as to what is specifically Godard's achievement. As anybody reading this will rapidly come to realize, what I shall have to say now will be in large part a recapitulation of the main points I have already made. This is a familiar procedure reminiscent of Belloc's description of how he went about giving a lecture ("First I tell them what I'm going to tell them, then I tell them, then I tell them what I told them"), and I apologize for perpetuating a form hackneyed before the first world war. I shall compensate by leaving out the last of Belloc's three parts.

There is in Godard, whose art is one of discontinuities, at the same time what appears as an absolute belief in an essential fluidity which is film's, or, more precisely, sound film's. It's as if it were his awareness of a possible relationship (one in which neither loses to the other) between a continuous tape and a rapid succession of frames that allowed him to insist that the poetic and the banal can occupy the same space. (He is endlessly confirmed in this by the consequences of his technique. At the end of *le Petit Soldat*, Bruno steals down a street holding a gun, while not a single person he passes turns his or her head or responds in any other way. In this scene, only Michael Subor (Bruno) is an actor, the others didn't know they were in a movie; sociology is almost painfully immanent in this contrived situation.)

In *Breathless*, as in *Pierrot le Fou*, film's language is made to correspond to the voice of one man, the story's central figure. This is a device which makes for a continuity which is that of monologue; it will continue as long as there is breath in the speaker's body, and it is with his death that each of these films comes to an end.

Both *Breathless* and *Pierrot* are anticipated in their identifying the voice of the object — the film — with that of the major protagonist, who is in his turn literally identified with Godard, by a short fictional piece which he made in 1958, *Charlotte et son Jules*. There, the voice of the male lead, Jean-Paul Belmondo, is dubbed by Godard.

In the period that culminates in *Pierrot le Fou* Godard reinvented sound cinema by a series of acts which question the conventions of collaboration fundamental to Hollywood, to unconscious cinema. This he did by being increasingly excessive (Wilde: "Nothing succeeds like excess") *Breathless* is quite a simple movie, not in what it conjures up but in how much there is on the screen at any given time. It is indebted to the film sense of Samuel Fuller, who, by insisting on writing his own screenplays, was able to retain much of the visual complexity of the silent cinema in the course of making low budget films that rely heavily on a tight script. Fuller is properly described as a fascist, though an innocent one. In his films all protagonists tend to be tied to authority, to be fundamentally dependent on the state. His *Pick up on South Street* is particularly outrageous, and particularly successful, in this respect. In that film, all the criminals have a special relationship with the police (except for the foreign agents they are united against). The opening shots establish authority's as the comprehensive view, in that they have us watching the police watching Richard Widmark pick the purse of the woman they're trailing, who is an agent of Communism bearing microfilm. (In a typically disingenuous attempt to de-politicize the work, the dubbed version released in France substituted drugs and the Mafia for microfilm and Communism.)

In retaining Fuller's form, a continuity which proceeds through extreme visual dislocation held together by a narrative plot of a very straightforward kind, *Breathless* also retains, I believe explicitly, aspects of Fuller's content. That is, it acknowledges the sense in

which Fuller's is an authoritarian cinema. Thus, *Breathless* ends by courtesy of the police, through their shooting Poiccard (Belmondo). By *Pierrot,* however, the authorities have become impotent as has the authority of narrative, and one must blow oneself up if the thing is to get done at all. In Godard, simple narration is equated with simple authoritarianism, and it's through that equation that art and ideology ("sociology") become mutually informative. The kind of positivism which could once derive montage from Marx (or rather Hegel) being no longer available, the task of reinventing cinema becomes that of first achieving an ambivalence which will be able to acknowledge Hollywood's achievement even as it subverts the premises on which that achievement rests. Godard's ambivalence is an attempt to neutralize through acknowledgement the political and psychological predispositions of a received form. Sontag is right to call Godard's films Hollywood movies "partially erased" [16] (just as we might want to say that Eisenstein is Griffith's partially erased). *Le Petit Soldat* inverts Hollywood by making politics explicit and also uncertain (and neutralizes them by making Bruno fall in love with Veronica, who works for the other side). At the same time it acknowledges Hollywood's primacy in sound cinema by taking the form of a thriller, which is the main reason why Bruno must belong to the O.A.S. and not the F.L.N. In that, the politics of Hollywood are revealed for what they are: the politics of an innocent authoritarianism, of an idea of progression which proposes that cause and effect may occur in the absence of synthesis. Which is to say, in a way in which no antithesis intrudes on an awareness of itself. One can see why the thriller is so popular among the middle classes; it's the incarnation of the bourgeois mind, a mind which insists that a pragmatic response to specific motives occurs not as the result of a larger context of ideological motivation but in its place, as Nixon no doubt believes that "business ethics" are not the manifestation of an ideology but a substitute for one.

As I have said, however, by 1965 the authority of narrative — of a cumulative significance as the inevitable result of a necessarily sequential form (which prose and cinema both are) — has been

[16] Sontag, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

seriously undermined, and it is possible for Godard to make his last film in which cinema is imbued with the voice of an individual. *Pierrot* doesn't conclude inevitably, but from choice. In the apparently obtuse conjecturing of its hero (named Ferdinand, surely at least in part a reference to the only fascist litterateur of great genius, Louis-Ferdinand Celine), we are given, instead of a plot, the predispositions of a sensibility; one made manifest through Ferdinand's face and his handwriting. (Godard: "True cinema consists only in placing something before the camera.") [17] Merleau-Ponty tells us that, asked to match Leonardo's self-portrait with an example of his handwriting (chosen from an assortment of contemporaneous scripts), few people had any trouble doing so. This is a revelation about gestural communicability which Godard had used as an artistic device elsewhere, before *Pierrot*. (For example, in *les Carabiniers*, where the soldiers' letters home are real ones, written by members of Napoleon's army, of the Wermacht, etc.) Together with this quote from the philosopher, which serves as a complication of the Brechtian use of the actor as a person standing for a role, (a complication that, since Ferdinand's handwriting is Belmondo's amounts to an intensely dislocating juxtaposition of signifier and signified), *Pierrot* gives us other pieces of behaviour that confirm our impression of an individual already fully formed and opaque. We don't see him develop. We see him; and his final act of self-possession. *Pierrot*'s sound track is replete with extraneous noise, like our own thinking; intense visual detailing crowds the screen; we are in the twentieth century.

Godard: ". . . two shots in sequence are not successive. Which holds true for two shots that aren't in sequence. In this sense, you can say that *Pierrot* is not really a film. It is an attempt at cinema. And the cinema, by forcing reality to unfold itself, reminds us that we must attempt to live." [18] Our age being the period of decadence we assume it to be, we aim to sacrifice nothing in contemplating the loss of everything. Elsewhere, Sam Fuller and Charles Baudelaire might seem an impossible combination; in Godard, we are reminded of the

[17] Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[18] Mussman, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

impossibility, in our time, of their not being combined in the perception of individuals. That *Pierrot* — in which Fuller himself appears, as himself — should be the last of his movies to be "recited" by its "heroes," suggests to me that Godard has always recognized what I have already claimed to be true: that the Hollywood form is capable of, at most, political ambivalence. And that only in those directors who are prepared to make explicit the social/psychological underpinnings of commercial cinema in America; to embrace, willingly or willy-nilly, the self-contradictoriness of art under capitalism. Fuller: "I love confusion, I love conflict, I love argument . . . Even if you're right you have no right to impose your way of thinking on me." [19] And yet Fuller has never been able to make a movie which gave the reds an even break; his last project, abandoned in 1970, would have had as its heroes an American platoon in Vietnam. Its first forty minutes were said to have consisted of a single tracking shot, reminiscent — not to make too much of anything — of the work of Michael Snow, the only person I know of to have kept a shot going for a comparable length of time.

It is often the case in Samuel Beckett's writing that the present exists only as space in which to contemplate a fragmented and mostly irretrievable past. The present exists only hypothetically, by default; yet it is in, and therefore through, the present that recall occurs. I have already said that this is the condition of film, where the events depicted, like those described by Krapp, are recalled ones, projected into our present. What is present isn't any group of events in the real world, but one possible consequence of their mediation. In Godard, who saw in Fuller an analogy between a succession of frames and a continuous sound track (film's morphological identity) and a visually discontinuous image accompanied by a tight script (the ontological character of Fuller's movies), mediation is made to introduce an equivalence between things impossible in their original, unmediated, state. Godard's achievement resides in his identifying the difference between cinematic mediation and that of the other arts, for while a man and a

19 Nicholas Garnham, *Samuel Fuller* (N. Y., 1971), p. 158.

building occupy the same space only in (some) painting, and poetry informs actuality only by making it poetic, in cinema — as Ropars-Wuilleumier has stated — the poetic and the sociological can co-exist without losing their original identity. Film is a matter of presenting the conditions of synthesis but not of realizing it. That is left up to the audience, which is in this way not closed out of the work. In saying this we see how and why cinema has replaced architecture as the "technical" — to use the terminology of the Renaissance — art to whose condition other arts (primarily, painting and sculpture) aspire. Cinema implicitly celebrates modernism's indifference to any notion of ideal perfection; for Godard, cinematic ambition has meant the search for a structure which will make that implicit celebration explicit. That is why, in concluding, I want to say a few words about *One plus One*, in which the co-existence of the poetic and the sociological is rediscovered with a delicacy that alters the meaning this polarity previously had in his work, making it more and differently complex than before, obviating reference to individual psychology (Freud), or to any notion of historical inevitability (Marx), by an act of description which — in its self-subversion — hints at the necessity but also the inadequacy of either.

One plus One reminds us of shot thirty-nine in *Masculine Feminine*, which is a title shot accompanied by the sound of a hand gun being fired twice. The title reads: "The philosopher and the filmmaker share a certain attitude, a certain view of the world which is that of a generation." In *One plus One*, art and life — poetry and sociology — are made to occupy either end of an axis, and each is made to subvert itself even as, through the act of juxtaposition, it refers to the other. In this way, dialectic tensions are invoked which mirror one another while each is seen to be a microcosm of the whole enterprise, a miniature of the whole of which it is a part. On the one hand, Black Panthers acting out their political ambitions in a manner which parodies the seriousness of those intentions; on the other, the Rolling Stones, the embodiment of a social opiate (literally and metaphorically, as we're well aware), composing a song about the history of social violence. Here, cinema is no longer the voice of an individual, nor is it — as Eisenstein meant his films to be — a

concretization of an institutional ambition, but rather it is a context in which these two disparate events can occur. Which is to say, it stands for history as it is rather than as it should be, *i.e.*, it stands for the experience of living under capitalism, and that is why events depicted within it must parody themselves. (It doesn't escape us that for Godard it's the political language of blacks which has the best chance of supporting self-parody, with the implication that that of whites is not accessible to satire because it is, unbeknown to its proliferators, no more than self-parody in its original state; while the language of the student left, which up to a point stands outside of honky culture *per se*, seems to be seen by Godard — as by Barthes — as one which is in essence *a*ffective rather than *e*ffective. Perhaps for this reason, *Tout va Bien* seems to be a much more successful film than *la Chinoise*.)

Across the axis between the Stones and the Panthers — vertically, as it were — is thrown another, representing the material extremeties with which Godard works: at one end, interview (the sound track); at the other, graffiti in real locations (film). This simple quadrivial structure, in which film's morphological identity is put together with its specific, ontological, character (Godard is quoted in *Film Culture*, Spring '72, as saying: "This is a film about language, about the language of blacks and whites, because they don't use the same dictionaries"), reminds us of Matisse's insistence that our objective is, always, to achieve naiveté.

The coexistence of an event and its (her) critique is then made possible by the equal absence of both, by the fact that their simultaneity is the simultaneity of juxtaposed recordings projected into the real space which is our own. In this way Godard's cinema achieves the credibility, and also the uncertainty, of speech itself, while abandoning the pretense that what is manipulated in cinema is not, first and thereafter, film itself, a physical thing that is part of the real world. As such, its parameters are those of ordinary language, *i.e.*, Marx and Freud, and Godard reminds us that film's strength resides in its capacity to be impure and yet credible, as painting and poetry, for example, cannot; and that, because of this peculiar relationship we have to cinema, *La Region Centrale* is as implicitly political as *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, just as the most casual

conversation is necessarily about class and sex. The following slogan originated as graffiti on the walls of Paris, in May '68: "Art is dead. Godard couldn't do a thing to prevent its demise."

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