Art | Theory | Criticism | Politics

OCTOBER

6

$4.00/Fall 1978

Published by The MIT Press
for The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies

OCTOBER

OCTOBER is published quarterly
by the MIT Press for the
Institute for Architecture
and Urban Studies.
Subscriptions: $14 for one year,
$26.00 for two years.
Institutions: $20 per year.
Foreign subscriptions, including
Canada: $16.60 for one year,
$31.00 for two years.
Address subscriptions to
OCTOBER, c/o MIT Press,
28 Carleton Street,
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142.

Manuscripts, accompanied by stamped,
self-addressed envelopes, should be
sent to OCTOBER,
8 West 40th St., New York, 10018.
No responsibility is assumed
for loss or injury of manuscripts.
OCTOBER is set in Baskerville
and printed by
Wickersham Printing Company, Inc.
OCTOBER does not reflect
the views of the IAUS
OCTOBER is the property of its
editors, who are wholly responsible
for its contents.

ER

6

OCTAVIO ARMAND, a Cuban poet, lives in New York, where he publishes the literary magazine *Escandalar.*

SAMUEL BECKETT's television play . . . *but the clouds* . . . is one of the five texts designated "Ends" in the collection *Ends and Odds,* although it was too recently completed to be included in the Grove Press edition of that volume, released in 1976. The illustrations published here are from a videotape of the 1977 German production of the work (Südfunks, Stuttgart) directed by Beckett.

TOM BISHOP is Florence Gould Professor of French Literature at New York University. He has written extensively on Beckett's work and edited, with Raymond Federman, the special Beckett issue of *Cahier de l'Herne,* Paris, 1976.

MICHAEL E. BROWN teaches sociology at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. His most recent book, with Amy Goldin, is *Collective Behavior.*

HOLLIS FRAMPTON, noted both as filmmaker and as critic and theoretician of film and photography, publishes here his first works of fiction.

JULIA KRISTEVA, a member of the editorial board of *Tel Quel,* has written extensively on the theoretical interrelationship of psychoanalysis and linguistics. Her published volumes include *Recherches pour une sémanalyse, La révolution du langage poétique,* and *Polylogue.* The essay here translated by TOM GORA and ALICE JARDINE, both on the staff of *Semiotext(e),* was delivered as a lecture at La Maison Française at New York University during the period of residence referred to in "The U.S. Now."

MARCELIN PLEYNET, the poet, essayist, and founding editor of *Tel Quel,* has gained wide attention in the past several years for his art criticism. He is the author of a study of Lautréamont and two books of criticism, *L'enseignement de la peinture* and *Art et litérature.* His published volumes of verse include *Comme* and *Stanze.*

PHILIPPE SOLLERS, a founding editor of *Tel Quel,* has been at work for the past several years on a text entitled *Paradis,* which represents a culmination of his development as both theoretician and prose writer. His critical works include *L'écriture et l'expérience des limites* and *Sur le matérialisme.* More recent publications include *Délivrance,* dialogues with Maurice Clevel, and a series of talks with Edgar Faure, referred to in ANNETTE MICHELSON's commentary on "The U.S. Now."

The U.S. Now: A Conversation

JULIA KRISTEVA, MARCELIN PLEYNET, and PHILIPPE SOLLERS

translated by PHOEBE COHEN

Pleynet: Since none of us but Julia has previously written and published about a visit to the United States, perhaps she could begin by telling us how she sees her text, "From Ithaca to New York," reprinted in *Polylogue.* How does she see it today, after several more visits to New York and the United States?

Kristeva: I feel that my view of the United States isn't completely French and may consequently appear too idiosyncratic. I actually went to the United States with almost the same desire for discovery and change of surroundings that took me from Bulgaria to Paris ten years ago. I had increasingly the impression that what was happening in France—due to developments of terminal Gaullism on the one hand and to the rise of forces of the so-called masses or petit-bourgeois masses on the other—was making the history of the European continent predictable. So that if one's interest was rather the breaks within history, culture, and time, one had to change continents. I tried as well to make this change through an interest in China, understood as an anarchist outbreak within Marxism. But the trip to China made me finally understand that this was instead a reissue, somewhat revised perhaps, but a reissue nonetheless, of the same Stalinist or Marxist-Stalinist model. It was therefore curiosity and the desire for some other solution to the impasse of the West that took me twice to the United States and once again for a third and longer stay. It was a "journey," but not necessarily "to the end of night," that is, not necessarily with an apocalyptic or desperate vision. It was more a trip in an attempt to understand, perhaps also with a particular and subjective perspective.

Two things struck me during my first brief visits, and these impressions were intensified during the semester I spent at Columbia University. First, I think that American capitalism—which everyone agrees is the most advanced and most totalizing in the world today—far from undergoing a crisis (and it was during crisis periods, notably the Yom Kippur War, the energy crisis, the Watergate crisis, and the crisis of the last presidential election) is a system of permanent salvage, of

patching up of crisis. I'm not speaking pejoratively, but want rather to convey a sense of the most livable possibility of survival. I seemed to perceive in the economic and political logic of America a new manner of dealing with Law, with increasingly brutal economic and political constraints, inevitable in any society, and even more so in a technocratic system. The question is to know "how to deal with" these economic or political constraints. In both Western and Eastern Europe, perhaps as the result of a certain religious tradition or a tradition of statism, these constraints are "dealt with" by the opposition of their antitheses. But to invert Spinoza's phrase, every negation is, as everyone knows, a definition. An opposing position is therefore determined by what is being opposed. Two antithetical systems are thus set up, but they internalize and reflect each other's qualities: on the one hand, a government, the conservative and established System; and on the other hand, an opposition with the same inherent statist, collectivist, and totalitarian defects. This situation has culminated in the twentieth-century dramas of fascism and Stalinism, which, like a superannuated domestic couple, are mutually implicated. In America, it seems to me, opposition to constraint is not single, unique, and centralized, it is *polyvalent*. The polyvalence progressively weakens the law but doesn't attack it directly.

It can be said that this polyvalence, that is, the multiplicity of social, ethnic, cultural, sexual groups, of discourse—in brief, the multiplicity of economic, cultural, political, artistic, etc. subdivisions—ends up "ghettoizing" the opposition, since for each opposition there is an enclave in which it can stagnate. This type of system can generate enormous difficulties and considerable repression. But it has a positive aspect as well: the system doesn't develop paranoia; it avoids the confrontation of two laws, each one sure of itself but fascinating and internalizing the other.

The second striking particularity of the United States which seems interesting in relation to European culture and society is the place of artistic practice. This is by definition a marginal place, as in every society. But this marginality is also polyvalent. There are many more "aesthetic" experiments and more variety than in Europe. There are many more pockets for painting, music, dance, etc. Obviously this numerical factor is significant only in terms of the special nature of these aesthetic practices.

They are nonverbal. The Americans seem to me to excel today, and to pursue everything in the area of gesture, color, and sound very deeply, very extensively, and much more radically than is done in Europe. I attended several exhibitions or performances, both of the recognized avant-garde and the underground in the lofts of lower Manhattan, which attract many young people. I felt as though I were in the catacombs of the early Christians. This metaphor means first that there's a passionate search, a feeling of discovery, even if it sometimes involves discovering the bicycle a century later, because one senses the passage of Surrealism or of Artaud in these discoveries. But it's done with a great deal of passion and commitment. It's a metaphor nevertheless because this American art doesn't

exactly correspond to the historical reality I'm referring to. For the origin lies not in the Word, at any rate not this particular origin. They know not what they do; they don't commit themselves to what they're doing verbally, that is consciously and analytically, in the naive sense of analysis. Their verbal expression doesn't correspond to what's done in gesture, color, and sound.

This noncorrespondence produces two results. On the one hand, there is interest in all the more-or-less avant-garde or modernist European forms of discourse, including philosophy and the social sciences. I felt, particularly in my teaching, that though I was using a specialized language, I was speaking to people who knew what it was about, even though they found it difficult. It corresponded to a life experience, pictorial, gestural, or sexual. Thus, despite naiveté, the American audience gives the European intellectual the impression that there is something he can do on the other side of the Atlantic. He can articulate the unspoken, with all the implications of an analysand's speech into a void, which returns little but a dim presence and the punctuations of sounds, colors, and gestures. I find it very stimulating for an intellectual endeavor; it was, in any case, for mine.

The second result of radical practices being nonverbal is that there's no great American literature today, apart from a few exceptions, of English origin, nostalgically oriented towards a Kafkaesque Jewish humor. American literature may be Cage, perhaps Bob Wilson, or—why not?—Wolfson's *The Schizo and Language,* therefore something which opens the word to the unspeakable, with the risks of psychosis this opening implies.

In fact the American culture that interests me (in its own way not Catholic, more Protestant, and therefore interesting to the ethnologist that one becomes on another continent) is the one that confronts psychosis and challenges it. I believe this is the fundamental problem for twentieth-century culture, and it will only become accentuated here in Catholic Western Europe, forcing us to think of other forms. They may not necessarily be the American ones, but I'm certain that these new forms can't develop in ignorance of the response that America has given to crises of identity and rationality.

The American sense of time also deserves discussion, the American notion of history which challenges the linearity of our contemporary history. European societies obviously have an evolutionary perspective; since there are elections there will be changes in historical cycles. I believe the late nineteenth-century historical view has never been more influential, even though on some levels of philosophy and in some areas of research it's contested. We've had the bourgeoisie. Now it's going to be "socialism" and "progress." Well, I believe that American time short-circuits this evolutionist vision because it entails a split history. On the one hand, there is in fact the evolutionism shaped by the development of relationships of production and reproduction. This evolutionism has, on the other hand, a conjunction of varying temporalities as its underlying base. Since this country is made up of emigrants (Jews, English, French, central Europeans, Blacks, Indians,

etc.), different individual ways of experiencing time and history are intertwined. The linearity dictated by the economic development seems never completely to correspond to this religious and cultural base. This noncorrespondence produces explosions challenging both the belief in evolution and faith in a progress which nevertheless exists. This faith does, however, exist—all the more so since, through the development of economic and cultural exchanges, American thought and culture is influenced by European culture and, in particular, by Marxism. One sometimes feels that a Marxist discourse of the sort familiar to us in the 1950s is returning in the American university. And, in a way, it's logical. The two great powers inevitably influence each other. In Russia this produces Bukovsky, and in America, the Marxist academic—these exchanges are not of the same order. However, even in these communicating vessels, I believe this linear rationality and overly dogmatic Marxism is confined to a limited milieu, because of the split American temporality mentioned before. The cultural, technical, and religious base is so diverse and so violent that the falsity of linear evolutionism and the gratifying populism of dogmatic Marxism can't seem to spread successfully.

I was, finally, very much aware of the problem of the intellectuals. The United States provides, as it were, no status to the intellectual such as exists in Europe, where it probably derives from a sort of clergy, if we go back very far, but essentially from the French Revolution's idea of the intellectual as an intermediary between intellectual discourse and the political parties. One can deplore the absence of this type of intellectual in the United States, since it means that ideas there are confined to universities or to areas set aside for them, but don't seem to reach a class which is political. A very sharp cleavage exists; the intellectuals, with the exception of the Marxists, don't have ideas which can become political in practice. The academic intellectual is characterized by positivism. He doesn't see himself as entrusted with a political mission, and when he does, it's under the auspices of Marxism, a recent fashion, a return of that which was repressed under McCarthyism.

This sort of American intellectual, in his very limitations, brings out several problems in the European intellectual's belief in politics or politics itself. Now particularly, due to a permanent political guilt, European intellectuals are abandoning their specificity and transforming every debate into an intellectual witch-hunt, into local cafe chitchat, forcing every discussion into the narrow confines of electoral politics.

The limitations of the intellectual's role in the United States, which I consider unsatisfactory, thus helps to point up some of the problems in the overexpansion of the European "intellectual vocation," which is finally turning against that very function and destroying it.

Pleynet: I feel that the American situation is always more changeable and complex than one assumes when one tries to understand it. Don't you think that precisely the relationship between the American intellectual and political classes

involves links and exchanges of a different order from those we have in France, of a totally different order and therefore far from insignificant? I'm thinking particularly of the fact that the American intellectual class, the leading professors, are for the most part specialists. Universities turn out specialists, and very frequently the relationship between the intellectual and political classes involves this type of specialization, which is totally unknown here. That is, here intellectuals are called upon to promote ideas; they can't produce real, objective knowledge and take action on reality. It seems to me that when the political class in the United States calls upon intellectuals—and it does so constantly—it calls upon them as specialists, which implies completely different intellectual and political functions. One ought to be able to examine this from a European point of view!

Kristeva: The intellectual's role is defined differently here. The intellectual you're describing is in fact the technician, the specialist in foreign affairs, the Sinologist or economist, etc. That does exist, and this kind of collaboration between the government and the intellectuals would be the actual equivalent of a student at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration or a Polytechnician working for the French government. But in the United States the intellectual doesn't function as a purveyor of ideas, a go-between involved with the masses, the media, the political parties, and scholarship, as in Europe. Another example of the research/politics separation in the United States, this time from the Left: a scholar in linguistics can develop the most Cartesian ideas in scholarship, but when he becomes politically engaged, he doesn't work for the government in a technical capacity, but commits himself to the Left. He even considers himself an anarchist, although that doesn't affect his ideas. Whereas the European intellectual, at least in recent years, will try to question his own theory if his political practice already diverges from certain types of rationality. We've seen notions of truth, knowledge, identity, etc. challenged as a result of sociopolitical experience. In the United States, on the contrary, I believe that ideas of Truth, Law, the University have remained sacrosanct. They are still the law and the laws stop there. If they're nevertheless weaker than here it's because there are so many of them. It's not because they're attacked head-on and examined in depth as, for example, would be done in France by an intellectual shaken up by May '68. It's because they're multiplied. It's another way, not necessarily more radical with respect to thought, but more efficient with respect to society as a whole. This system thus leaves a place for European intellectuals, with their radicalism.

Sollers: Can one hypothesize about the future of psychoanalysis in the United States?

Kristeva: I don't want to hypothesize, I can only state my impressions of the current situation.

I will say a few words about psychoanalysis since you've asked the question. I believe that psychoanalysis has simply failed over there. What does that mean? It

has become normative, and the different psychoanalytical sects I could observe and listen to—even if they're now becoming interdisciplinary and beginning to pay more attention to sociology than psychoanalysis, to linguistics more than to psychoanalysis, etc.—are dominated by classical, scientific, and superegotistic rationalism, when they aren't spiritualist. I wonder if psychoanalysis hasn't escaped them because of Protestantism on the one hand and, on the other hand, because they have no language—because English, in America, is a code. Can psychoanalysis be implanted in a code? It's a shame, in fact a great disaster, the "plague" Freud said. And one wonders whether this failure doesn't prepare the way for certain paths which go beyond psychoanalysis. Obviously there's no "beyond" if there hasn't already been psychoanalysis; it can't be crossed without first being entered. But the explosion of pornography, the varieties of mysticism, the proliferation of trans-psychotic aesthetic experiments, etc., while troubling, while they may be a complete cul-de-sac, may also be ways of dealing with sublimation in a different manner than psychoanalysis—which produces its own churches and problems, as we've all too frequently seen.

Sollers: The United States is 1776—something apart from the Jacobin model of the French Revolution. If we look at what was happening in the nineteenth century, if we go back to Baudelaire's important text on Edgar Poe, it's clear that the adventure of thought, the literary adventure, the adventure of the American avant-garde then was not so different from what was to affect all of Europe: the discovery or manifestation of a particularly critical "abnormal" subjectivity. But it would be rejected by the American progressive, positivist nineteenth century, in full expansion. Now, what happened in the twentieth century with the First and Second World Wars? Strangely, we saw a completely spectacular grafting of the different subjective liberations which had erupted in Europe between the wars, and which appeared in Europe as dissidence or marginality. I see the main graft at the time of the Second World War, in the withdrawal and exile of eccentric European personalities to the United States. Let's call it the grafting of the European avant-garde onto the United States, even though the problem is complex, involving Schoenberg and a great many others. In my view it's very important and we must return to it. Let's also say it was the grafting of Surrealism onto the United States during the war.

It seems to me that this grafting is the source of what we call American art. Like it or not, the very rapid development of an American art, in both painting and gesture, results from this, from an atmosphere bordering on something like the materialization of an unconscious which might have been experienced in Europe.

I think this situation was rapid, explosive, and went unperceived in Europe, in France, before, say, the 1960s. We had the cold war, a kind of politico-military planetary freeze, and gradually, around 1960, this memory grafted onto the United States resurfaced, thereafter posing a question for Europe. Now the problem is

whether the seminal elements exported by fascism and Stalinism to the United States can be reexamined in the light of what may emerge in Europe as the archeology of our twentieth-century History. And here again we face some crucial questions: the question of Freud in 1909; the introduction of Jungian ideas; the multivalent resistance of religious attitudes which, despite their decentralizing and polymorphic aspect, remain resistant. And what do American intellectuals and academics now accept as the archeology of the history of this graft indirectly made upon them and presupposing a loss somewhere? That is, what interests them as philosophy, as theory of language, or as a method of interpretation? And what is their concern with the in-depth understanding of the great avant-garde phenomena of the twentieth century, in Joyce, for example, Artaud, or whomever you wish? That's my question. We're now at a very important turning point, so that this possibility of creative nonverbalization, this passage through color, sound, gesture, etc. based on an absence of verbalization, makes it imperative to ask one question: Why this gap in verbalization? Is it still productive? It has been, but does it continue to be? And who's going to be able to begin to speak within it, or not to?

Kristeva: It's difficult to make an indictment. That's not our purpose. We ought to see what we're looking for in them. It's not so much "why do they do this and don't do that," it's "why do they interest us." Isn't it because they make an appeal to us by their gap in verbalization? And you feel you're being addressed, not elected, perhaps, but you feel you're addressed when facing this void.

Sollers: In questioning the meaning of this graft one refers to a displaced memory. We live among the ruins of Stalinism and fascism, among the ruins of a Europe ravaged by them.

Kristeva: I agree completely. As to the graft, it unquestionably took place, but it produced something entirely different from what was to be expected. They took Artaud and Duchamp and produced Pollock, which couldn't have happened in either France or Moscow, so that there's something specific and interesting in America. They may be getting bogged down now when they take anything and everything from Parisian intellectual cuisine, but there's no mainstream in their choice. Insofar as there are institutions, they're tempted to choose what is valued in French institutions, and it becomes outmoded in the analagous American institution. A philosopher who's in fashion at the Ecole Normale will be in fashion at Yale for two years, and that will upset his colleagues. But these things get lost in such a variety that in the end they don't involve the same dictatorship of styles as in Paris. And then they borrow from intellectual masters to make ideologies as ephemeral as they are unrecognizable. An immense machine produces waste matter from the discourse of the West. The waste may generate new energy. But for the moment I see this energy only in sounds, colors, and gestures,

not words. If something other than waste can be produced on the verbal level, it must be produced in a round trip. I believe it's important not to exalt New York or diminish it but to see what's good about the exchange, to convey the pleasure of the round trip. New York and Paris are specific places; we shouldn't denigrate one by comparison with the other. The way in which one illuminates the other may obviate problems which are too great.

Pleynet: I obviously believe our view isn't a French view, nor is it an American view either; it isn't a national view. I'm very much interested in the fact that the exile of artists and intellectuals to the United States is not only that of the Surrealists; I mean it's not only the exile of the French, it's the exile of all of Europe. It's the exile of Austria, Germany, Italy, France, and it's also the exile of certain English intellectuals. I think something extremely significant is happening in that respect, at least for me.

It's certainly no accident that those who were chased out of Europe by Stalinist and Hitlerian fascism and those who were chased out of other parts of the world by dictatorial regimes found a place in the United States. I think one might try to explain how that was possible.

There are obviously several points to raise. First, as a state and a country, the United States is actually completely new, composed of many ethnic groups and languages. This multiplicity keeps the form of the state from developing the repressive structures it can have elsewhere in the world. I don't mean that the American state isn't repressive; I mean that its form is constantly eroded and divided in the various roles it must take on. That is, everyone knows that there are more Poles in Chicago than in Warsaw; that the Chinese colony in the United States is enormous; that in New York, Jews occupy an important place in artistic and intellectual milieus and even in politics; that around the Village, the Italian colony is very important; and that politically, all these different European, extra-American references must survive and find a place. It's in this context that what I would be tempted to define as modern art can survive. I know that when I first went to the United States in 1966, I came from a French situation which seemed completely closed and blocked from a cultural point of view. That is, it was academic, or at best attempting to struggle not with its real history, the history of the twentieth century, but with a completely academic cultural anachronism. And when I arrived in the United States I saw that what was happening there corresponded to an experience of modernity that Europe didn't suspect at all then.

Kristeva: It didn't permit it for political reasons?

Pleynet: It didn't permit it for many reasons. It didn't permit it for political reasons, for historical reasons; if one considers Europe until 1960, it was both economically and intellectually ruined. If I think about what was becoming most alive around 1955, let's say in literature, in Europe, I would be forced to say the

New Novel. It's obvious that if I situate the New Novel in the history of modern culture, it's something progressive in 1955, something completely reactive to an academic fabric established in France after the war. There are economic reasons, political reasons, precise historical reasons, and precise cultural reasons for that.

Sollers: In that connection one musn't forget that propaganda internalized from different European fascisms from the 1930s on had an enormous effect in preparing the violently anti-modern climate—a modernity which the United States could represent at the time. One has only to reexamine the texts, the declarations of everything then that professed to be ever more French, ever more traditional, ever more anti-jazz, anti-whatever-you-wish, anti-black. One must also keep in mind the close alliance and the osmosis between Stalinism and fascism regarding anything that could be considered, once again, degenerate, cosmopolitan, Jewish, etc. One thing Europeans don't realize, underestimate in their biography, and evaluate very badly within themselves: the extent to which they have internalized and countersigned these archaisms—to begin with, from their families more or less, and later, from the social fabric iteslf. Even if these people wrongly think they haven't swallowed the values of fascism and Stalinism, they have totally ingested them; they have assimilated them bodily. I can attest that, for a French intellectual, the discovery of jazz after the war at the age of 14, for example, or blond tobacco—something that came practically from another planet since we were born under the yoke of the Germans, of Pétain, and the yoke of the castrated Pétainist body as it continues to function in French society with its castrated Stalinist alter-ego—this particular postwar flavor, this particular sensuality. . . . Again, I stick to the trumpet of Armstrong or Miles Davis . . . jazz was a determining factor in my decision to write . . . the spirituals. . . . And afterwards, what did we know? We witnessed the attempt to resume this constant effect of anti-modern propaganda in Europe. That is, we've all lost a great deal of time raising problems about world revolution, the unification of thought relative to this revolution, and with interminable debates on socialism. Is it more barbarous? Is it less so here? Will it be still less so there? And it continues. Surely it's obvious that European intellectuals misjudge the possibility that a completely different planet can exist on the basis of the underground, nonphilosophic, non-Greek history which was grafted there and began to flicker in their biography from the 1960s on. The truth is that many felt guilty, and still feel guilty, about moving in the "American" direction. Caught in their language . . . inherited centralist pretension . . . clannishness, factionalism . . . "social" worries . . . terror or sanctity of knowledge . . . still and always somnambulistic "Communist-partyism," etc.

Kristeva: The cold war in culture has lasted a long time.

Sollers: The "cold war," in fact, is a war which doesn't necessarily take the hard, visible forms one might suspect. It's a fabric of propaganda and constant

resistance organized by generations who wished at any price to hide or justify the nationalist or "socialist" cancer and their fascist or populist-Stalinist stupidity. They wanted, and continue to want, to impose their artisanal, occultish-small-town weakness—the remains, in France, for example, of the result of decomposition of "erudition" into profoundly regressive provincial irrationalism. European intellectuals, with but a few exceptions, have failed to grasp the new *rhythm* of the planet as it developed in the USA. They were philosophers, rationalists, Mediterraneans, dissertation humanists, Aristotelian-Platonists, post-Proustians, aphorists, shameful Zhdanovites, refurbished Stendahlians, children of the Third Republic—academicized, universitized, standardized. In short, very much behind the Germans or the Russians *in exile. Arcane 17* doesn't bring back *anything* from the United States, and Céline would have done better, after the *Voyage,* to remain in New York. Duchamp should have brought Artaud there by force; we wouldn't be reduced to reading exegeses of what happened at Rodez, etc. I mean that everything great in Europe had to be delirious, to struggle under the weight of atrocious misunderstandings, as Poe had done before, over there . . . there was Joyce's inhuman sangfroid. Perhaps one had to be Irish. . . .

Kristeva: It still seems difficult to be on the Left and to be interested in American culture; one is suspect. The "cold war" of the superstructures isn't over. American friends have given me Simone de Beauvoir's trip as an example of it. She went to look for the exploited workers and the slums she had read about in a novel. She was told that this didn't exist any longer, but she didn't believe it. She wanted to be present, to visit, etc. There's a conventional picture of America which isn't always false, but which can hide the forest.

Pleynet: My perception of America and—to return to what Julia was saying before—my perception of China is based on a certain type of relationship with language; I'd define it as determined by what one could generally call art. That is, during the trip to China I constantly experienced two things: what I would call the discourse on China, within China moreover; and what I, as poet and writer, could perceive of the flashes and vestiges of the life of another culture, another language. For the United States it's similar. What finally interests me is the way I can experience things as more compelling, more alive, riskier, and more intense there than elsewhere. If you start with the acknowledgment that the French artist has internalized Pétainism—and it's really undeniable—in my view it's grounded in a subjective economy in which, in a way, art is shocking. In Europe, art, modern art, is completely intolerable. Modern art is intolerable because it's a luxury, because it's not destined for the masses; it supports no system, nation, or law other than its very own. And I think that's seen in modern art, in extremely significant symptoms that could actually be called "wandering"; during the twentieth century there's a wandering of artists and intellectuals throughout the world. And that symptom begins to make sense and to create a vision. When one

arrives in the United States one wanders a great deal, with a liberty found absolutely nowhere else, simply because, as you were saying, discourse is multiple, its subjects are multiple. You can always leave a milieu, abandon a discourse to enter another. The resulting impression is one of waste, of useless expense, marginality, all of which are always extremely positive for artistic creation, for the life of language and ideas. . .

Kristeva: . . . as a foreigner, for this may not be so for many people who live there. If it's true that a person of the twentieth century can exist honestly only as a foreigner, then America provides us with an example. Those who are established can exist there as in any form of Pétainist regime—and a Middle-Western Pétainism certainly does exist.

Pleynet: In that connection I think you don't get anywhere through generalities, but through our relationship to the real, through concrete practice, which is itself foreign. I must say, as a poet, I feel just as foreign in France.

Kristeva: I'd be curious to know how you saw this country in terms of *Paradis.* How did the United States contribute to your writing of a text like that?

Sollers: The fact that I myself was "more apace" with my writing than usual. In France, in Europe, I always feel my language is ahead of me; it gets less "bored" than I do. New York, from this point of view, means a change of vistas, a completely different syntax, shiftover from horizontal to the vertical. In Paris, for example, you have to follow a flatter prose, syllogistic and adaptive. What struck me in New York was the information stacked up on the ocean. I don't feel "ocean" or "river." The very clear sky, the flashing architecture, the gaps "in negative space" in the air, the cold water sweeping away the electronic jumble. There's an obviously strong sense of nonmeaning you decode in details . . . it's not "expanding," not going anywhere, it's starting from minute elements with a slap of the brain, a blast of water. I rediscovered my preference for Bordeaux, Amsterdam, London, Venice to the thousandth power . . . New Rochelle . . . stimulation of energy, while here you must always excuse yourself if you're a little too rhythmic. Here I often tell myself that *Paradis* is "too much"; there it's obviously not enough, never enough, accumulation and expense . . . it makes you modest. Modest in relation to everything that could still be said. Nothing is said, always too much inhibition, too much false modesty . . . much more liberty, it's simple, many fewer cops, in uniform or plain clothes. Less entrenched, less oriented, less centered, less identified . . . land of foreigners as one is oneself—or ought to be—in relation to all language. As *Paradis* is an ensemble of limits of discourse set to music, a mixture of populations of sentences . . . I don't particularly write in French but in "translation." OK, I felt silently at home, that's it.

Pleynet: Don't you think we've been talking around the problem of redefining a place for the artist and intellectual—if indeed there is a place—which would be neither what they want to establish in France or the one you see in the United States.

Kristeva: We begin from the experience of dissident intellectuals. To speak of this America means making one more sign indicating the difference and the multiplicity each feels in his experience, but in no way soliciting identification with a model.

Pleynet: I've been thinking about that. I'm not so interested in general ideas, but I was thinking about that when Sollers raised the question of psychoanalysis in the United States and in France, or when you referred to the absence of literature in the United States. . .

Kristeva: That may be wrong. . .

Pleynet: No, I don't think it's wrong, not in that way, in any case. I thought your comments about the development of particularly silent arts rather than verbal ones were absolutely true; American psychoanalysis was rather regressive in a certain way; literature seemed very anachronistic compared to both the great cultural and literary phenomena of the twentieth century and to what can happen in France today. And at the same time I was thinking that the forms taken by this nonassimilation of psychoanalysis, of discourse, or modern languages in the United States were, for the moment, extremely anarchic and rather difficult to define. (These forms, moreover, seem to me to be most often located in a quasi-religious area.) But they offer, at the same time, experiments from which no conclusions could have been, or can yet be drawn. We don't know whether these experiments may not lead to a completely surprising modernity tomorrow. In any case, for me now they are experiments rich in potentiality and meaning.

Sollers: For me, a tolerable society is one where the impasse of sexuality is the most visible. The impasse of sexuality is never more visible than in the United States. Everywhere else the great art of the exercise of power consists of hiding the impasse of sexuality as much as possible. In the United States, through multiple channels, through this effervescence, you clearly see the same old sexual problems. They range from the perfectly traditional little puritan family to desperate efforts to explore the limits of perversion or of psychosis involving an impossible relation to perversion. You get a spectacle of the impasse of sexuality. This spectacle immediately produces religious substitutions aimed at warding it off. This sexual problem or impasse certainly coexists with different forms of religion. I don't think any American can picture the reason for this situation. This society experiences this problem, demonstrating it, while others enjoy demonstrating it as

little as possible and behaving as though there were some way out of it. America, as a country, lives at the edge of the new Reason and can't realize it.

Kristeva: Doesn't that mean a deep pessimism as to the sexual relationship? It's plausible in literature. If you don't have "formal" experiments which delve into the word toward its nonbeing—and derive fresh impulses in that way—you do have a common discourse haunted by the demonic. It's produced not only Faulkner, but also that writer in many respects so American: Céline. The New York subway is *London Bridge* plus the "emotional subway" of Céline. A certain experience of fragmentation and of the sexual impasse is spoken and enacted in reality. "Literature" seems weak in the face of this urban, social space which is already apocalystic literature. The United States is a supermodern society which leaves great areas where reality becomes the real, as in the Middle Ages or the Orient.

Sollers: Outside the United States we generally hear stupidities aimed at concealing sexual stupidity. In the United States you hear a great many overtly sexual stupidities. I prefer hearing sexual stupidities to those which try to conceal sexual stupidity. (I don't know if I'm making myself clearly understood.) Perhaps it's just a foreigner's fleeting impression but since it did strike me I'll mention it. It's very obvious that in American society, signifiers of money and sexual signifiers have a presence, a capacity for repetition, far greater than elsewhere. There's certainly a link, a deep connection, between sexual ideas and exposing the banknote, making the banknote a meaningful signifier. I tried to explain that by saying there was an American ideology, contrary to general opinion; it's fundamentally an exposed matriarchy. It's completely visible; as I see it, it's actually linked to the banknote, to its reverse and front sides, if I may put it that way. Once this is said, the result is a very hesitant stand on sexual difference.

Kristeva: Yes, but I'm going to play devil's advocate . . . because the unconscious becomes currency and circulates, it's therefore far less sacrosanct than the holy Catholic mother.

Pleynet: There are extremely different kinds of repression. There's surely the Catholic, and the Protestant in a certain way, and I'd say that the Protestant gives me the feeling of being more religious now than the Catholic. You get the feeling that repression in the United States now seems closer to the religious than in Europe; religion isn't so much denied in the United States, even among the intellectuals—much, much less so than it is in Europe.

Sollers: . . . and with good reason.

Pleynet: And for me, in this situation, this business of the relationship between sexuality and currency seems rather to declare something completely and obvi-

ously true (like all truths), wholly understandable, and which may function effectively when it finally becomes conscious.

Sollers: Certainly, I said it was positive, it demonstrated the limit of the social phenomenon itself, and that's where it can best be observed. You asked me what that has to do with *Paradis*, assuming that *Paradis* is the systematic description of all expressible limits, of the fact that, after all, you always write from the immeasurable weakness of wanting to be read someday by someone—which is absurd. Well, assuming that this is actually an effort to describe all possible limits of statements—whether in the form of parody, comedy, or in serious form—it's clear that this is best represented in the American society of today, of which we experience only an archaic subgroup. When we say, and correctly so, that socialism is unsuccessful capitalism, we may get bogged down and fail to see society as an adventure that's both complex and absurd. We can wonder why this self-justification of society and the existence of the species can't be perceived critically from the United States. I have this rapid view, but I believe they have a real block in not perceiving gratuitousness. By gratuitousness I mean the moment where some aspect of the sexual difference would be touched in depth and where a banknote could thereby be destroyed because it no longer meant anything then. This doesn't mean that they don't do apparently gratuitous things.

Kristeva: There's a belief in nongratuitousness best shown, although weakly, by the profusion of religions.

Sollers: Religious elements perceptible in the United States are particularly weak. I mean you do see that the different sorts of religious, "mystic" cathexes are pretty flat, as to consistency of experience or of articulation.

Kristeva: Do they seem weak to you because they're not illuminated by criticism, because they're presented as they are, with reference only to the texts?

Sollers: No, I find them weak in that they have no language, as it were, no relief, no deep, subjective penetration. This is where I immediately see something parodistic and naive. You don't transcend Catholicism that easily.

Kristeva: But aren't you asking statistically large groups to have an experience of language which is available to only a few? Is middle-class American spiritualism any more inane than the Auvergnats at church and at the healer? And even the modern spiritualism which is coming back here can be considered an American graft . . . this spiritualism also remains extremely naive.

Sollers: My remarks were insidiously directed towards the American mother. This raises a question that's important if you want to assess the involvement of

intellectuals and artists in the nonverbal, as we've said. That remains, as everywhere no doubt, infantile and exhibitionistic.

Pleynet: Don't you think that this naiveté and the simplicity of the legislative structure in the United States, and in a way the fact that these subjective and objective structures are so simple—don't you think that this is what allows for the place of marginality? Structures that are so simple and classic cannot control the entire social body; they allow part of it to keep control and autonomy. This autonomous, noninstitutionalized sector will produce interesting developments, though not necessarily the *most* interesting ones.

Kristeva: There's nothing to indicate that everything there is right. I wonder about the distress I feel in the face of this weakness and naiveté. You begin by judging it, and then you wonder if this naiveté is not precisely a way of showing the inanity of sexual relationships, the emptiness of these relationships, and the lack of deep convictions.

Sollers: I think that what you're presenting as a conscience of humanity, and therefore as a sort of lucidity, is actually resistance. One shouldn't be in such a hurry to say "there is no sexual relationship." That can be the form used by someone who's defending himself against what he might eventually discover through an illusion. Sometimes you learn more from an illusion than from knowing in advance that something leads nowhere.

There is thus the solid and very strong impulse to exhibitionism, to experience the exhibitionist act, situated between the levels of religious discourse, which I call weak, and of sexual discourse, which I call naive. Between these two poles a tremendously exhibitionistic discourse emerges as a form of sublimation. But we seem to agree that it's also characterized by a kind of aphasia, a form of relative aphasia. These are discourses of exhibitionism which aren't subject to explication through verbal articulation and which, therefore, escape judgment in language. It's a very interesting phenomenon, but it clearly points to a lack of perspective on this exposure as a form of spectacle. That certainly doesn't mean that the spectacle isn't interesting.

Kristeva: We're making two types of observations, one analytic and one sociological. On the analytic level, it's obvious that this lack of verbalization can be resistance. The proof lies in its silence, in its expenditure of exuberant activity. In this society people are always on the move, getting from one place to another, working. Skyscrapers are constructed, satellites are built, they are ceaselessly rising, and all crises are digested. There's a kind of immediacy of action which can also be psychotic (hence the violence, the murders). Doesn't this weakened verbalization open other ways towards *other sublimations*? Although originating in European thought and society, America really raises problems for our religions and our sense of reason in just those areas which are critical for us here—and her answers may be different.

The Agony of the French Left

ANNETTE MICHELSON

> Our historical poverty served to create an enormous discrepancy between ideological premises and the social results achieved through the intelligentsia's efforts. Thus it became the historical calling of the Russian intelligentsia to use watches for hammering nails into walls. . . . Throughout our history its role as ideological standard-bearer was connected with the country's political life not through the class which it wanted to serve but merely through the "idea" of that class. So it was with the first Marxist circles amongst us. Only very gradually did the spirit become flesh.
>
> Leon Trotsky
> *Concerning the Intelligentsia*

Once again America receives the ambivalent homage that the French periodically extend toward the disquieting state of affairs sensed as The Face of the Future. The fascinated gaze and critical stance of that ambivalence are currently those of a group of prominent intellectuals who have matured under the Fifth Republic. *Tel Quel*, the journal from which the preceding conversation originates, was founded under the Gaullist regime, extended its project and its readership during its Pompidolian epilogue, and survives under the right-wing coalition that now sustains the liberalism of Giscard d'Estaing. *Tel Quel*'s project—the political articulation of a theory of semiosis grounded in Mallarméan aesthetics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Althusserian Marxism—has been transmuted through a fifteen-year period of reversals and revisions. Their erratic trajectory describes, in hyperbolic form, the course of the French Left, caught between Maoist aspiration and the tenacious Stalinism of the French Communist party. Alienated, in that tension, from the working class, from a militant rank and file, *Tel Quel* has now discovered those poles to have been identical. Having seceded from Stalinism and Maoism, *Tel Quel* now breaks with Marxism, preserving nonetheless a certain steady centralist reflex, that of the dialogue with power, as demonstrated by Sollers's published interviews with Edgar Faure.

The Conversation on the United States published in this issue of *October* was held in the spring of 1977. This was a season of expectation at the start of an electoral campaign that promised the return to power, after more than thirty years, of communists united with socialists in support of a common program. The date of the second and final electoral round was to coincide, almost to the day, with the tenth anniversary of the student-led political action which had culminated in the uprising of May 1968. Yet even before the split in the autumn of 1977 between the parties led by Marchais and Mitterand, it had become apparent that to a considerable number of the intellectual Left—and to this group in particular—the prospect of the long postponed and now imminent victory was no longer a seductive one. And this in the context of the revival of Spanish Marxism, the implementation of the Italian Historic Compromise, and the spread of the social democratic tendencies known generally as Eurocommunism.

May 1978 has now sedately come and gone, and a right-wing majority, aided and secured by the division of the Left, has tightened its hold on France's economy and social institutions. No one now foresees, with anything like the stubborn euphoria or quiet desperation of this last year, a Left victory for the presidential election of 1981. One cannot even name with any confidence the likely candidate of the Socialist party.

It is evident from the views put forward in this exchange and from the flood of statements, interviews, and manifestos in the Parisian daily press that *Tel Quel*, fearful of Left domination of the superstructure, prefers the cultural permissiveness of a regime whose policy of economic austerity will, in any case, continue to be paid for by the working class. To such a view, socialism may indeed appear, as to Sollers, "unsuccessful capitalism." The alternative and classical view, fully supported by historical evidence, is that fascism is, rather, capitalism's mode of attempted solution to its inner contradictions. The fullest comprehension of Sollers's claim and of the abdication inherent in it require some knowledge of the restless course of Parisian intellectual life and its recent folklore. It is facilitated, however, by the speaker's sense that "we lost a great deal of time raising problems about world revolution, the unification of thought relative to this revolution, and with interminable debates on socialism."

Turn now, from this confession, to Kristeva's observation that "one sometimes feels that a Marxist discourse familiar to us in the 1950s is returning in the American university." How interesting, but how fearful, the effect of symmetry; how arresting the dialectic of transatlantic exchange, sustained over three decades of inviolate asynchrony! For Sollers has just revived the discourse of our own mid-century, that time when an American Left, suffering the trauma of Stalinism, succumbed to the imperatives of the cold war, thus ratifying a general hysteria and its "conversions." To evoke the 1950s in this country is to summon up remembrance of McCarthyism and to rehearse the arguments for "the end of ideology," to chronicle the demoralization and corruption of an intellectual community—and of the university in particular. That chronicle, initiated a decade ago by

Christopher Lasch, has still to be completed. A rereading of Lasch in the light of the present French situation has prognostic value:

> . . . the cold-war intellectuals revealed themselves as servants of bureaucratic power; and it was not altogether surprising, years later, to find that the relation of intellectuals to power was even closer than it had seemed at the time. The history of the fifties had already shown that intellectuals were unusually sensitive to their interests as a group and that they defined those interests in such a way as to make them fully compatible with the interests of the state. . . . The modern state, among other things, is an engine of propaganda, alternately manufacturing crises and claiming to be the only instrument that can effectively deal with them. This propaganda, in order to be successful, demands the cooperation of writers, teachers, and artists not as paid propagandists or state-censored time-servers but as "free" intellectuals capable of policing their own jurisdictions and of enforcing acceptable standards of responsibility within the various intellectual professions.
>
> A system like this presupposes two things: a high degree of professional consciousness among intellectuals, and general economic affluence which frees the patrons of intellectual life from the need to account for the money they spend on culture. Once these conditions exist, as they have existed in the United States for some time, intellectuals can be trusted to censor themselves, and crude "political" influence over intellectual life comes to seem passé.[1]

The preconditions for the relation of intellectuals to state power described by Lasch now exist in France; they have, in fact, been confirmed by the recent elections. Further, economic affluence there is confined to that bourgeoisie from which France exclusively recruits its intellectuals. Without a constant and rigorous examination of the intelligentsia's role in the historical process, without a reexamination and critique of its own recent past, without some historically grounded theorization of its practice, the classical traps are unavoidable. That tradition of critical assessment is lacking. It is this lack that gives to Trotsky's analysis of the generation of prerevolutionary Russian intellectuals its terrible present pertinence in France.

How is one to account for the wonderment of present revelation, itself part of a massive postponement of self-criticism, a syndrome so general that accusations of bad faith are trivial? The major determinant factors are several and complex. Two, in particular, may help us to clarify the interest and anomalousness of this conversation. The first derives from the extraordinary power of a Communist party apparatus, which emerged from the war with the prestige and authority it

1. Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1969, pp. 94–5.

had gained during the Resistance and has maintained through its dominance of France's principal labor union, the CGT. And this in a country traditionally hospitable to members of the Left opposition. But despite the presence of those members, despite, as well, the efforts of men such as Claude Lefort, or the articulate activity of such a group as *Socialisme ou Barbarie,* the concrete presence of a centralist party within French syndicalism served to insulate the Left. It promoted the kind of resistance to inferences of Stalinist corruption and bureaucracy that found expression in Sartre's celebrated injunction against "driving Billancourt to despair." This categorical imperative barred access to precisely those sources of critical analysis that might have inflected the political development of intellectuals coming to maturity in the 1960s. The Left opposition was reduced by the party apparatus to an utter marginality, modified only by the developments of 1968. It is therefore not surprising that we find, in Rudolf Bahro's analysis of the syndrome of "existing socialism" in Eastern Europe, a text both symmetrical to that of Lasch and quite as pertinent.

> The established apparatus identifies its rule, seemingly accredited by history, with the Marxist idea, the idea of communism. In this way, it simply makes all the old socialist aspirations a joke for the masses. From the Elbe to the Amur, it daily feeds the desire for the restoration of at least some of the old conditions. It is characteristic of the rapid ideological decay in the East European countries since the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 that the greater part of the opposition elements now find themselves thrown back to purely liberal-democratic demands, to a campaign for human rights—a position, in other words, that is not just the broadest but also the flattest, the most unconstructive, so far as its content goes.[2]

And in like manner, Sollers, the author of *On Materialism,* together with his Althusserian colleagues, now joins with Raymond Aron and the group of *Normalien* pop heroes known as *les nouveaux philosophes* in the signing of protests and petitions supporting right of dissent in the name of "human rights."

The second determinant factor in this series of striking reversals is a function of the very project of a journal such as *Tel Quel,* itself the manifestation of a larger situation, that of intellectuals within the polity and economy of contemporary France. The postwar decline of France's dominance of artistic practice has entailed the replacement of that practice by an almost overwhelmingly theoretical production. For a generation preoccupied with the notion of theory *as* practice and with the "unification of thought relative to . . . revolution," the articulation of that "practice" as essentially modernist in its aesthetic implications has involved an abstraction of the historical process. This unification is posited neither in actual

2. Rudolf Bahro, "The Alternative in Eastern Europe," *New Left Review,* no. 106 (November–December 1977), 6.

practice nor in the concrete historical moment, but as a moment of fulfillment whose dimension is *eschatological.* (It is, by the way, for this reason that the intensifying preoccupation with psychoanalysis in France is promising, for the etiological dimension of cathexis forces consideration of the temporal and social conditions of the individual. It is also true, of course, that Kristeva is more concerned with etiology than the author of *Paradis,* as is evident from her text published elsewhere in this issue.) It is that eschatological dimension that one recognizes, once again, behind the hammering of nails with watches and in the sustained apathy with respect to concrete social action and economic issues. The single most interesting recent occurrence in the context of Soviet dissidence is the development of an autonomous movement within the Soviet working class and its attempt to constitute an independent union. This event, recently reported in the European press, has implications that are epoch-making. It has, however, at the time of this writing, not yet elicited comment by the articulate milieu with which we are here concerned.

All of these factors form the context within which the rediscovery of America must be understood. *Tel Quel*'s most interesting and effective strategy has been the manner in which it has construed the foreign culture as a critical instrument applied to local contradictions.[3] America's constitutional federalism, which so strongly if partially determines the cultural multivalence and nonlinearity so much admired, is overlooked by our French friends; and the new "change of continents" takes its place as another episode in that critique of the French bourgeoisie which had sustained, from afar, the fascination with China. One element is missing still from that critique, and that is the role of theoretical production itself and of the producers.

Certainly, the view of America interests, stimulates, amuses. One can counter, at almost every point, the observations and speculations with historical evidence or antithetical conclusions. One may observe that the discovery of jazz by the French bourgeoisie of the early 1920s did not forestall, for a second, the installation of the Pétainist regime. One may suggest that Jungian revisionism was far more explicitly operative in the formation of Pollock and Newman, among others, than one would wish. Or that Richard Foreman's syncretic assimilation of idealist and para-religious notions to his theatrical discipline involves a radical contradiction at the heart of his enterprise. To argue such points singly would be to adduce cumulative evidence of the radical tensions within all artistic practice in this country, and of the manner in which contradictions may be fruitful.

American painting and its criticism, to take an example of special interest to Pleynet and Sollers, have been inflected by the successive projects and methodological options of existentialism, phenomenology, gestalt theory, structural analysis,

3. The journal's fairly steady advocacy of the poetry of Pound, Olson, Ashbery; of the painting of De Kooning, Pollock, Rothko; of the theory and practice of Cage and Cunningham is significant in this respect, among others.

and more recently by semiological inquiry. (The welcome extended to semiotics in the field of cinema studies has been particularly intense, a welcome extended to the techniques of formalization which confer respectability upon a new and vulnerable discipline.) The Gaullist enterprise known as *le rayonnement de la culture française* has been sustained by successive ministries of culture in precisely that exportation of French theoretical practice which has entirely replaced her traditional export of artistic production. To a French culture now overwhelmingly academic, the response from our own academy, as from our artists, has been general and warm. It is, however, the hypertrophy of the theoretical function in a once artistically productive culture and the operations of a dominantly theorizing elite within its economy which constitute a central problem to be explored by that elite in Giscardian France.

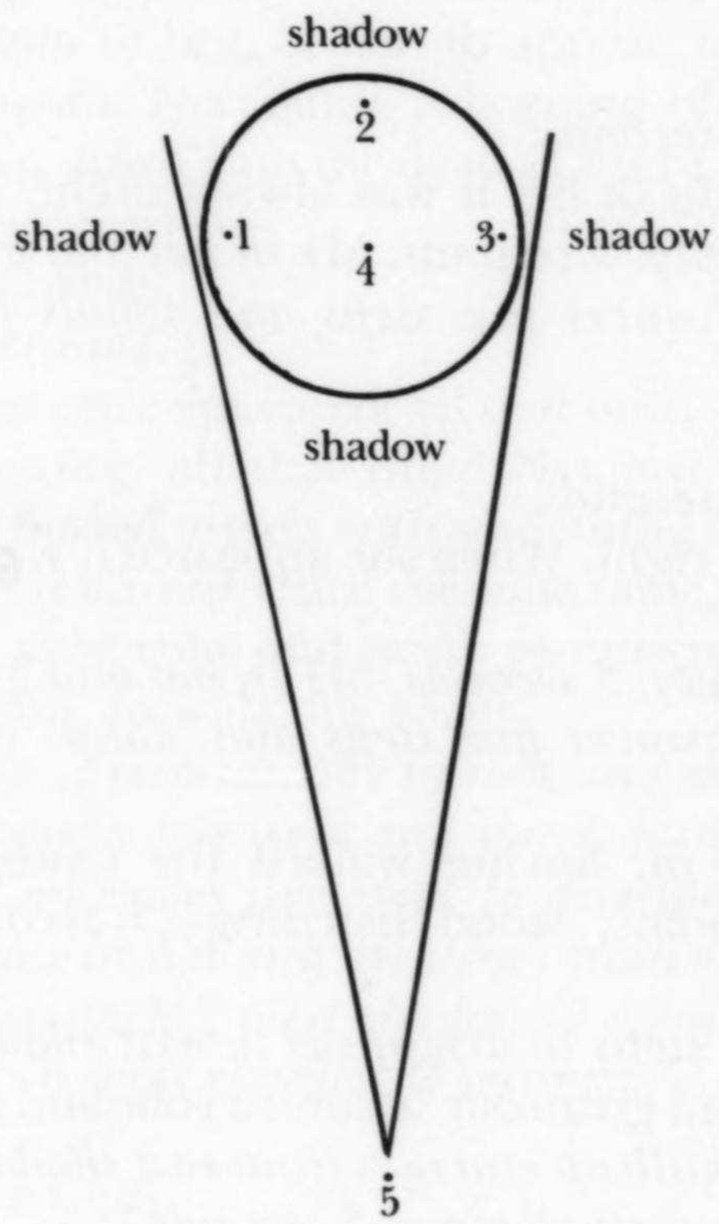
S

8

SA

. . . but the clouds . . .
A Play for Television

SAMUEL BECKETT



Set: circular, about 5 m. diameter, surrounded by deep shadow.

Lighting: a gradual lightening from dark periphery to maximum light at center.

1. West, roads.
2. North, sanctum.
3. East, closet.
4. Standing position.
5. Camera.

M Near shot from behind of man sitting on invisible stool bowed over invisible table. Light grey robe and skullcap. Dark ground. Same shot throughout.

M1 M in set. Hat and greatcoat dark, robe and skullcap light.

W Close-up of woman's face reduced as far as possible to eyes and mouth. Same shot throughout.

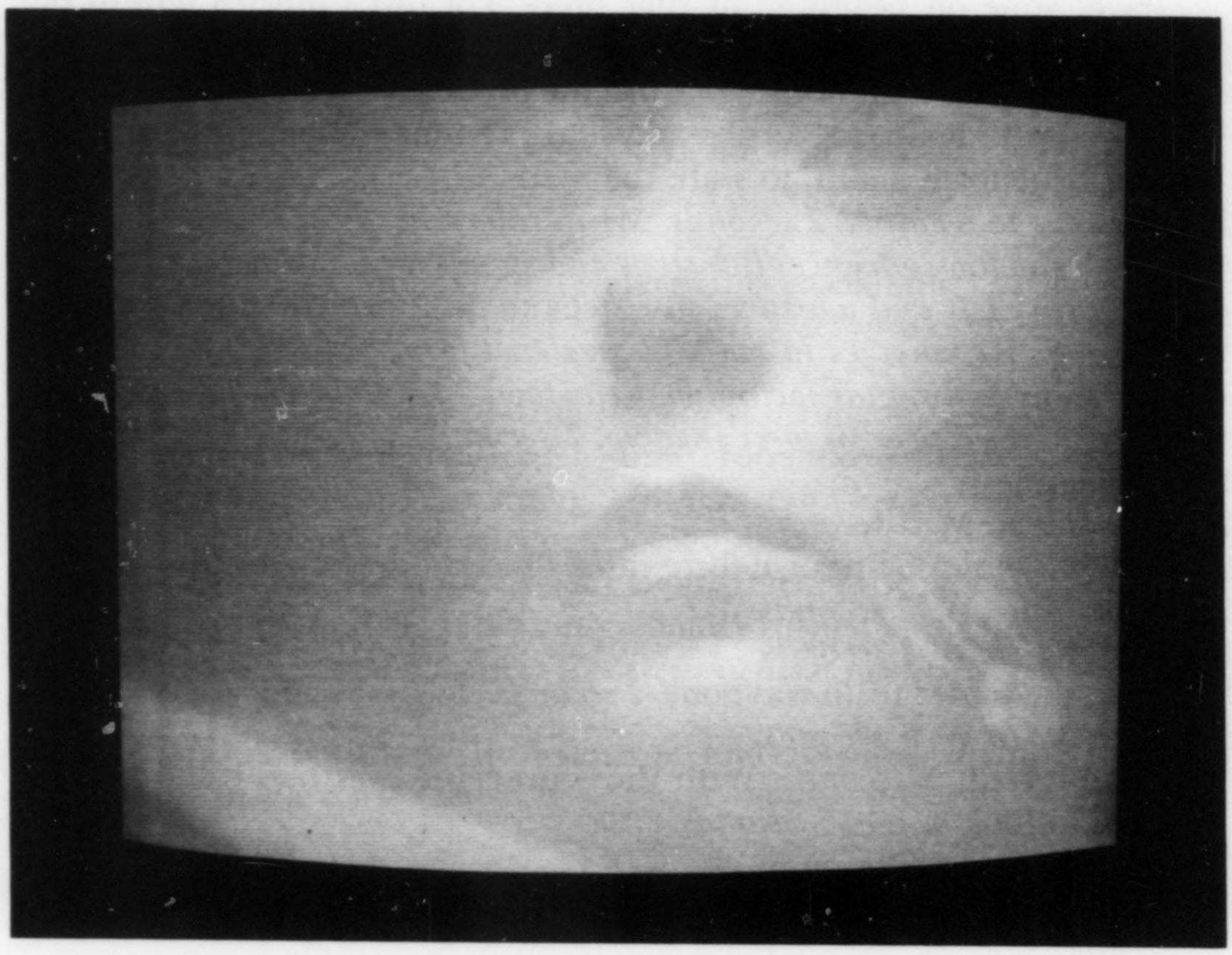
S Long shot of set empty or with M1. Same shot throughout.

V M's voice.

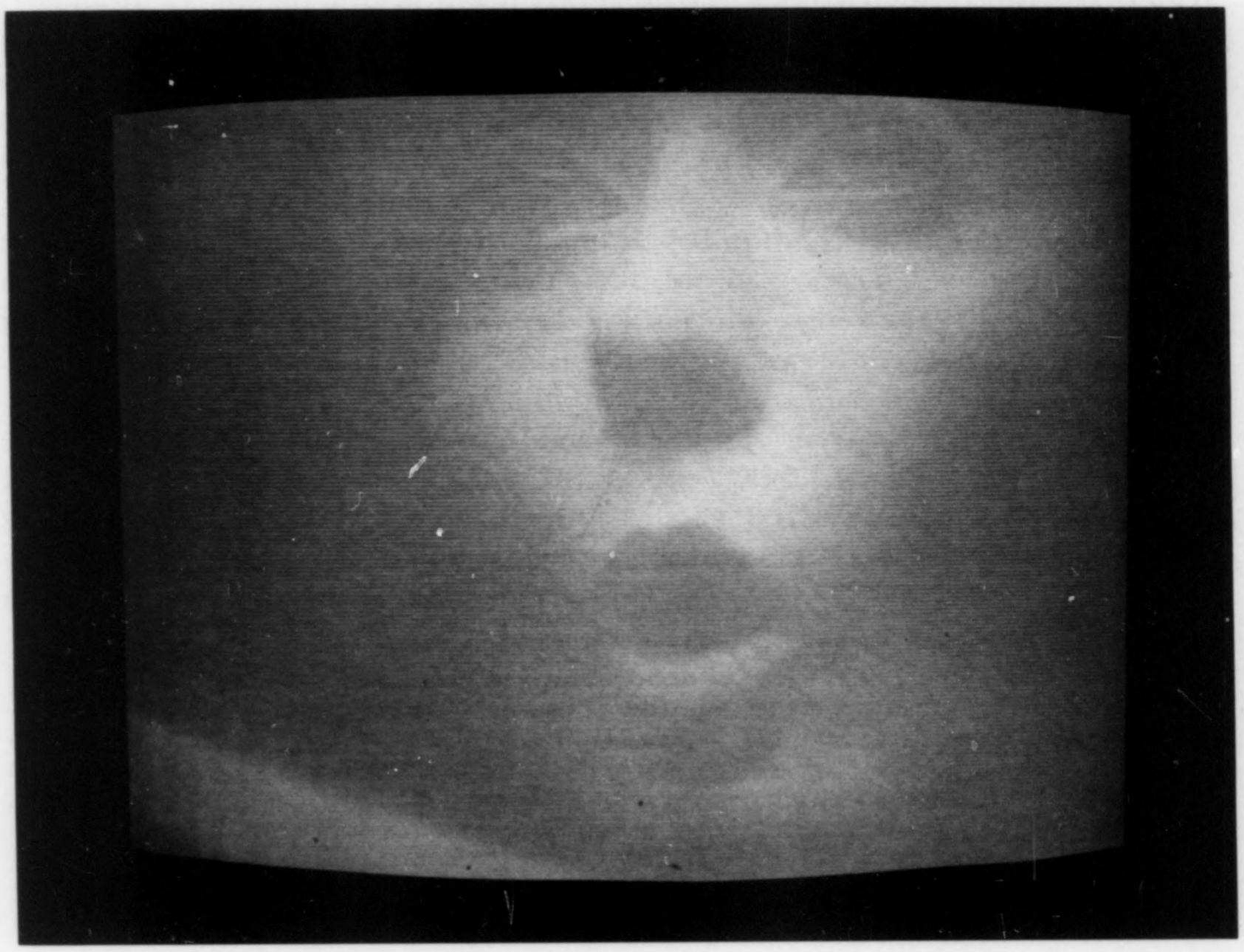
1. *Dark. 5 seconds.*
2. *Fade up to* M. *5 seconds.*
3. V: When I thought of her it was always night. I came in——
4. *Dissolve to* S *empty. 5 seconds.* M1 *in hat and greatcoat emerges from west shadow, advances five steps and stands facing east shadow. 2 seconds.*
5. V: No——
6. *Dissolve to* M. *2 seconds.*
7. V: No, that is not right. When she appeared it was always night. I came in——
8. *Dissolve to* S *empty. 5 seconds.* M1 *in hat and greatcoat emerges from west shadow, advances five steps and stands facing east shadow. 5 seconds.*
9. V: Right. Came in, having walked the roads since break of day, brought night home, stood listening (*5 seconds*), finally went to closet——
10. M1 *advances five steps to disappear in east shadow. 2 seconds.*
11. V: Shed my hat and greatcoat, assumed robe and skull, reappeared——
12. M1 *in robe and skullcap emerges from east shadow, advances five steps and stands facing west shadow. 5 seconds.*
13. V: Reappeared and stood as before, only facing the other way, exhibiting the other outline (*5 seconds*), finally turned and vanished——
14. M1 *turns right and advances five steps to disappear in north shadow. 5 seconds.*
15. V: Vanished within my little sanctum and crouched, where none could see me, in the dark.

16. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
17. V: Let us now make sure we have got it right.
18. *Dissolve to* S *empty. 2 seconds.* M1 *in hat and greatcoat emerges from west shadow, advances five steps and stands facing east shadow. 2 seconds. He advances five steps to disappear in east shadow. 2 seconds. He emerges in robe and skullcap from east shadow, advances five steps and stands facing west shadow. 2 seconds. He turns right and advances five steps to disappear in north shadow. 2 seconds.*
19. V: Right.
20. *Dissolve to* M. *2 seconds.*
21. V: Then crouching there, in my little sanctum, in the dark, where none could see me, I began to beg, of her, to appear, to me. Such had long been my use and wont. No sound, a begging of the mind, to her, to appear, to me. Deep down into the dead of night, until I wearied, and ceased. Or of course until——
22. *Dissolve to* W. *2 seconds.*
23. *Dissolve to* M. *2 seconds.*
24. V: For had she never once appeared, all that time, would I have, could I have, gone on begging, all that time? Not just vanished within my little sanctum and busied myself with something else, or with nothing, busied myself with nothing? Until the time came, with break of day, to issue forth again, shed robe and skull, resume my hat and greatcoat, and issue forth again, to walk the roads.
25. *Dissolve to* S *empty. 2 seconds.* M1 *in robe and skullcap emerges from north shadow, advances five steps and stands facing camera. 2 seconds. He turns left and advances five steps to disappear in east shadow. 2 seconds. He emerges in hat and greatcoat from east shadow, advances five steps and stands facing west shadow. 2 seconds. He advances five steps to disappear in west shadow. 2 seconds.*
26. V: Right.
27. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
28. V: Let us now distinguish three cases. One: she appeared and——
29. *Dissolve to* W. *2 seconds.*
30. *Dissolve to* M. *2 seconds.*
31. V: In the same breath was gone. *2 seconds.* Two: she appeared and——
32. *Dissolve to* W. *5 seconds.*
33. V: Lingered. *5 seconds.* With those unseeing eyes I so begged when alive to look at me. *5 seconds.*
34. *Dissolve to* M. *2 seconds.*

35. V: Three: she appeared and——
36. *Dissolve to* W. *5 seconds.*
37. V: After a moment——
38. W*'s lips move, uttering inaudibly:* ". . . clouds . . . but the clouds . . . of the sky . . . ," V *murmuring, synchronous with lips:* ". . . but the clouds . . ." *Lips cease. 5 seconds.*
39. V: Right.
40. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
41. V: Let us now run through it again.
42. *Dissolve to* S *empty. 2 seconds.* M1 *in hat and greatcoat emerges from west shadow, advances five steps and stands facing east shadow. 2 seconds. He advances five steps to disappear in east shadow. 2 seconds. He emerges in robe and skullcap from east shadow, advances five steps and stands facing west shadow. 2 seconds. He turns right and advances five steps to disappear in north shadow. 2 seconds.*
43. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
44. *Dissolve to* W. *2 seconds.*
45. *Dissolve to* M. *2 seconds.*



46. *Dissolve to* W. *5 seconds.*
47. V: Look at me. *5 seconds.*
48. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
49. *Dissolve to* W. *2 seconds.* W*'s lips move, uttering inaudibly:* ". . . clouds . . . but the clouds . . . of the sky . . . ," V *murmuring, synchronous with lips:* ". . . but the clouds . . ." *Lips cease. 5 seconds.*
50. V: Speak to me. *5 seconds.*
51. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
52. V: Right. There was of course a fourth case, or case nought, as I pleased to call it, by far the commonest, in the proportion say of nine hundred and ninety-nine to one, or nine hundred and ninety-eight to two, when I begged in vain, deep down into the dead of night, until I wearied, and ceased, and busied myself with something else, more . . . rewarding, such as . . . such as . . . cube roots, for example, or with nothing, busied myself with nothing, that MINE, until the time came, with break of day, to issue forth again, void my little sanctum, shed robe and skull, resume my hat and greatcoat, and issue forth again, to walk the roads. (*Pause.*) The back roads.



53. *Dissolves to* S *empty. 2 seconds.* M1 *in robe and skullcap emerges from north shadow, advances five steps and stands facing camera. 2 seconds. He turns left and advances five steps to disappear in east shadow. 2 seconds. He emerges in hat and greatcoat from east shadow, advances five steps and stands facing west shadow. 2 seconds. He advances five steps to disappear in west shadow. 2 seconds.*
54. V: Right.
55. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
56. *Dissolve to* W. *5 seconds.*
57. V: ". . . but the clouds of the sky . . . when the horizon fades . . . or a bird's sleepy cry . . . among the deepening shades . . ." *5 seconds.*
58. *Dissolve to* M. *5 seconds.*
59. *Fade out on* M.
60. *Dark. 5 seconds.*

The Loneliest Monologues: Beckett's Theater in the Seventies

TOM BISHOP

When *Endgame* was produced in 1955, critics who had considered *Waiting for Godot* the ultimate in minimal theater were startled and quickly proclaimed that Beckett could go no further, that this was as far as theater could go. Beyond lay silence. Of course, a few years later, *Happy Days* made *Endgame* seem like a realistic, fully-fleshed play by comparison, and again pronouncements were heard that this, now, was the ultimate frontier of drama. Similarly, *Molloy* appeared as the ne plus ultra of fiction . . . but *The Unnamable* was more extreme, *How It Is* even more so, and all appear linear and relatively approachable compared to such later prose texts as *The Lost Ones*, *Lessness*, and *Ping*. Somehow, Beckett has always managed to push his medium further, whether it be fiction, theater, television, or radio, refining, paring away all conceivable—and even some inconceivable—excess, coming ever closer to pure essence.

The process of perpetual purification is clearly evident in Beckett's most recent dramatic works, those written and staged in the 1970s and published under a typically Beckettian title, characteristic for its concision as well as for its modesty: *Ends and Odds*.[1] It is a spare volume; the eight works that comprise the American edition total 128 pages while the nine works in the later English edition come to 104 pages.

The five dramatic works that make up "Ends" were all written (in English) and performed during the 1970s. Unlike the "Odds" which are retained at the stage of sketches (Beckett terms them "Roughs"), they are consequential plays; one of them, *Not I*, ranks among the most dazzling of Beckett's entire output. Each of the five has but a single character visible (although . . . *but the clouds* . . . does

1. The U.S. edition was published by Grove Press in 1976. It contains four "Ends"—*Not I*, *That Time*, and *Footfalls*, written for the stage, and *Ghost Trio*, written for television—and four "Odds" entitled simply *Theatre I*, *Theatre II*, *Radio I*, and *Radio II*. The English edition, published by Faber and Faber in 1977, contains all the above plus a later television piece, . . . *but the clouds* . . . , published in this issue of *October*. The "Odds" were all written in French during the sixties and published in the original French in the seventies, either in the review *Minuit* or in the *Cahier de l'Herne* devoted to Beckett (*Beckett*, ed. Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman, Paris, Edition de l'Herne, 1976). Since the "Odds" were all written in the 1960s, they will not be dealt with in this article, which concerns itself with Beckett's theater pieces of the current decade.

visualize the memory of a second person); four are monologues; and the fifth, *Footfalls*, while boasting two separate voices, might also be construed as a monologue. All five could be thought of—or at least, could be thought of *also*—as taking place within the confines of the mind. They may well be termed "the loneliest monologues" because never before has the speaking voice in Beckett's theater (or anyone else's, for that matter) been so isolated, so helpless. Within the remarkable thematic consistency of Beckett's entire creative output, these five works not only link thematically to earlier writings, but particularly clear parallels may be drawn to past dramatic pieces such as *Happy Days, Krapp's Last Tape, Play, All That Fall, Eh Joe,* and *Embers.* In each case, the main character (and in *Play* all three characters) is confronted by his past in an essentially painful and even tragic confrontation that brings out his abandonment.

What is new now is an even *more* radical technique than before, a greater sense of abstraction, and a forced focusing of our total attention on a minimal quantity of visible matter: a mere mouth in *Not I*; a head in *That Time*; a woman pacing nine steps, back and forth, in *Footfalls*, with only her feet half-clearly lit in an overall dim lighting pattern; a single male figure in a simple room in *Ghost Trio*, seen in a faint light that Beckett describes as "shades of grey"; and a nondescript penumbral space in . . . *but the clouds*. . . . Nothing to distract the single character in each case from the painful confrontation with memory and with his own reality. In each play, we discern a related probing quality, a perpetual interrogation undertaken either by a light source, a voice, or both, an insistent interrogation that allows the protagonist no respite in the pursuit of the ultimate purpose, that is, the acceptance or the articulation of "how it is." Given the inquisitorial quality of the light source, it is no accident, that *That Time* and *Footfalls* were staged both in London (at the Royal Court) and in the U.S. (at the Arena Stage in Washington and at the Manhattan Theater Club in New York) on a triple bill with *Play*, that earlier work in which Beckett had described the compelling role of the spotlight as a "solicitation." He had even described the light in *Play* as the "unique inquisitor" and the three characters as its "victims." The same dialectic of being-seen/existing implicit in *Play* is at the basis of Beckett's only cinematographic venture, *Film*, in which the character (played by Buster Keaton) is split in two—the eye or camera lens and the object—the object fleeing from perception, the eye/lens pursuing, perceiving. As Beckett says in the work's preface, *Film* illustrates and is explicated by Berkeley's fundamental formula, *esse est percipi*, to be is to be perceived.

Not I is the most stunning dramatically of Beckett's theater pieces in the seventies. This short bravura piece of pronominal conflict, of rejection, isolation, and loneliness will likely come to be considered as one of Beckett's absolute theatrical masterpieces, along with *Waiting for Godot, Endgame*, and perhaps one or two others. Like so many of Beckett's works, and especially *Krapp's Last Tape, The Unnamable, Play*, and *How It Is*, it is conceived within his typical double polarity of the search for self and the attempts of language to state, to tell,

to describe—two poles which fuse into one since it is always through language that the self seeks itself, and it is always language which fails to coincide precisely with the reality sought, leaving the individual vanquished but unyielding in his determination to continue. In *Not I*, the self and the voice are identified in the closest possible manner through the single character, represented on stage simply by a mouth: a mouth which talks relentlessly and at a dizzying pace throughout the twenty minutes of performance, beginning before the play starts, continuing after it has ended, anguished, tormented, often practically unintelligible because of its breakneck delivery. This woman's mouth is the only thing visible on stage, with the exception of a barely distinguishable hooded figure across stage, the Auditor who listens and makes several mute gestures.[2] In its total isolation in the blackness, the starkly spotlighted red mouth spews forth a frenzied discourse that both reflects on the "person" in her desperate search for self (however difficult it may be to imagine a person around the mouth) and the abstract concept of language saying, seeking, lying, continuing to say, seek, lie.

The substance of what the voice relates is at once linear in its directness and complexly involved, full of resonances and shadings. On its most immediate level, the monologue refers to the life story of a woman now seventy years old, prematurely born and abandoned in early childhood. She has suffered greatly and she suffers still; her existence has always spelled insignificance and emptiness, and her skull reverberates with a constant, terrible buzzing. But, although she had spent most of her life silent, she is now possessed by a steady stream of speech, by a veritable logorrhea, incapable of *not* speaking, incapable of not trying to tell how it was or, more precisely (as she qualifies), how it has been.

The mouth's voice talks in the third person singular: "she," "her." It is interrupted at times by an interlocutor unheard by us (undoubtedly the faint figure of the Auditor) who seeks—and gets—some rectification in the narration. However, five times the Voice is driven to an anguished denial, culminating in the frenzied cry ". . . what! . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . ."[3] The "not I" of the title is never spoken, but clearly the protagonist is being urged to acknowledge that the story she is telling actually concerns herself and not some fictional being. Frantically the Voice rejects all notions of shifting its tale to the first person singular, even though it accepts other changes proposed by the inaudible Auditor. "Vehement refusal to relinquish third person," states Beckett in an explicative note (p. 14). At every refusal, at every ". . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . ." the hooded figure is seen raising its arms, then letting them fall back against the body,

2. Both the Paris stage production with Madeleine Renaud and a BBC television production with Billie Whitelaw (who had also acted in the London stage production) dispensed with the Auditor for technical reasons, which were different in each case. The television version, concentrating entirely on a tight close-up of a mouth, undoubtedly could not include the Auditor. His absence, though, is a distinct loss in both cases.

3. Samuel Beckett, *Ends and Odds*, New York, Grove Press, 1976, pp. 15, 18, 21, 22, 23. All further references to *Not I*, as well as to *That Time*, *Footfalls*, and *Ghost Trio* will be to this edition and will be indicated by page references in the text.

each time less perceptibly, a movement of resignation or perhaps exasperation that decreases in insistance. The fifth and last time, the figure makes no more gesture at all.

The Voice's unwillingness to identify with the story is sharply punctuated by the irony of that story: the Voice explains that the woman (third person) of its tale heard words, a voice, "steady stream," (p. 18) which she did not recognize as being her own until she "finally had to admit . . . to herself . . . could be none other . . . than her own." Eventually "she began trying to delude herself . . . it was not hers at all" but at last had "to give up . . . admit hers alone . . . her voice alone" (pp. 18–9). Thus, while the Voice explores its dilemma, it does so through the interposition of an imaginary third person in a *construction en abyme*, a microcosm used to keep it from coming to terms with the obvious need to identify with its own story. The fictional character has no choice but to accept its identification with the tale *it* tells; perhaps the Voice will be forced to accept itself before long, as the paradigm of its own fiction might lead to believe. Near the end of the play, after the last rejection of the first person singular, the Voice adds "no matter" and continues with what might indicate an acceptance of the inevitable: "keep on . . . hit on it in the end" (p. 23).

Ever since *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's characters have had the habit of telling stories in order to avoid having to use the first person—that all-too-painful coming face to face with their own reality. Vladimir and Estragon, as well as Hamm in *Endgame*, readily resort to this delaying action in order to make time go by; but it is the characters in the novels who really rely on this sort of tactic fully and with extraordinary skill. The novels abound in creatures imagined by the narrators as alter egos; they succeed in holding center stage for a while before being denounced as mere myths and exploding like balloons blown up excessively: Macmann, Mahood, Moran, Worm, Pim, Bom, etc. are all fabrications of the first-person-singular voice, that subjective consciousness which invents factitious incarnations the better to avoid itself. The subsequent revelation that these contrived characters are mere fictions generates anguish but does not definitively stifle the creative act which touches on the very essence of life. The paradox of this despair linked to so tenacious a strength is stated most forcibly in the celebrated concluding lines of *The Unnamable:* "you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me. . ."[4]

Beyond the story told in *Not I* is the telling itself, the compulsion to speak, the inability *not* to speak, the search for self coupled with the evading of that self. To seek oneself but at all costs not to find oneself. "Can't go on" proclaims the mouth before acquiescing "so on" (p. 21). When the Voice invents, the Auditor seems to correct it and force it to change its story, very much like the frantic dialectic of the concluding pages of *How It Is*. "What? . . . not that? . . . nothing to

4. Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Three Novels*, New York, Grove Press, 1965, p. 414.

do with that? . . . all right . . . think of something else . . . not that either? . . . all right . . . something else again . . . so on . . . hit on it in the end" (p. 22). The need to speak paired with the impossibility of speaking: the Beckettian predicament par excellence.

If the spectator can determine that the Voice is desperately avoiding the need to identify itself with its own story, to admit that it *is* its own story and that it should therefore say "I," he can only conjecture as to its reasons for retaining the fiction of the third person. The rejected epiphany could imply one or more of several levels of significance: for instance the refusal to accept one's own reality; the final, unresolved review of a desolate life on the verge of ending; perhaps the dynamics of the psychoanalytic process wherein the patient/Voice struggles against the persevering coaxing of the analyst/Auditor to recognize her own authenticity.

But we are far less concerned with the temptation to decipher than with the direct spell cast by the tension of the dramatic movement itself—a circular movement, as so often in Beckett's works, skirting the central focus of self-revelation (no . . . no! . . . she!), but in smaller and smaller circles which imply impending convergence with that feared central point, self-exposure. The anguish, the desperation of the Voice, its fear and suffering reach us through fragmented, agonized phrases, beyond any need to "understand."

Another link between *Not I* and the mainstream of Beckett's writings concerns the biting irony and cynicism that ties suffering to the notion of guilt. Vague but insistent references to sin and repentance filter down throughout the play: "that notion of punishment . . . for some sin or other . . . or for the lot . . . or no particular reason . . . for its own sake . . . thing she understood perfectly. . ." (p. 16). One is reminded of a dialogue between Vladimir and Estragon: "Suppose we repented./ Repented what?/ Oh . . . We wouldn't have to go into details./ Our being born?"[5] In *Not I*, guilt is felt in the same manner as in *Waiting for Godot*, intuitively, and punishment seems to be meted out in the same arbitrary way. As to God, the very mention of him provokes the Voice's only laughter: "brought up as she had been to believe . . . with the other waifs . . . in a merciful . . . (*brief laugh*) . . . God . . . (*good laugh*)" (p. 16). We are reminded of Hamm's reference to God: "The bastard! He doesn't exist!"[6] From birth—the first words of the play are ". . . out . . . into this world . . ." (p. 14)—until the present of performance, throughout seventy years of a painful existence, it has all been merely a cruel practical joke. There is, there has been nothing, no substance, no becoming aware, no happiness, no respite, nothing but the constant buzzing in her head, nothing but guilt, torment, and the attempt to describe it all: "something that would tell how it had been . . . how she had lived . . . lived on and on . . . guilty or not. . ." (p. 21). If God exists, He is playing us for fools.

5. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, New York, Grove Press, 1954, p. 8.
6. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, New York, Grove Press, 1958, p. 55.

That Time is, spiritually, a companion piece to *Not I*, cut out of the same cloth (as Beckett put it) but inverted, like a glove turned inside out. The visible element this time is a man's head—"Old white face," the stage direction reads, "long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread" (p. 28). Located ten feet above the stage, the head appears to be floating in nothingness, creating a hypnotic effect on the spectator, for, like the mouth in *Not I*, the head is brighly lit and stands out starkly in the otherwise total darkness. Unlike the mouth, though, the head of *That Time* does not speak; instead, its own voice speaks to it, surrounding it in three distinct pitches—three voices that talk about "that time," three separate times, weaving a fabric of memory out of the crucial moments of the past.

One voice recalls a childhood experience, a building in ruins in which the protagonist had concealed himself as a child and to which he had returned as an adult, only to find everything changed. The second voice relates his seeking refuge one winter's day in a lifeless museum, surrounded by "portraits of the dead," and the ensuing, sudden coming face to face with himself. The third radiantly recalls an early love, pure, ethereal, total. This third voice, surprisingly, speaks the most lyrical, the sunniest passages Beckett has ever written, more elegiac than the punting scene in *Krapp's Last Tape*—a play with many resemblances to *That Time*. In the recent play, the evocation of former happiness is radiant, with no lurking shadows:

> on the stone together in the sun on the stone at the edge of the little wood and as far as eye could see the wheat turning yellow vowing every now and then you loved each other just a murmur not touching or anything of that nature you one end of the stone she the other long low stone like millstone no looks just there together on the stone in the sun with the little wood behind gazing at the wheat or eyes closed all still no sign of life not a soul abroad no sound (p. 29)

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, the one tape to which Krapp comes back again and again contains the following evocation:

> Sun blazing down, bit of a breeze, water nice and lively. . . . We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down, sighing, before the stem! (*Pause.*) I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently up and down, and from side to side.[7]

The text from *Krapp's Last Tape* is as lyrical as the one from *That Time*, but tainted with bitterness, with the impossibility of love. Krapp's lyrical recollection also contains this glimpse of defeat: "I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes" (p. 22). The idyllic

7. Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape*, New York, Grove Press, 1960, pp. 22–3. Further quotations from the play will be indicated by page references in the text.

interlude had been destined for failure right from the start; on the other hand, in *That Time* the happy evocation remains entirely intact . . . and proves eventually to be disappointing only in relationship to the present, that is to say, in relationship to the time of the play's action. With or without some reservation, the two texts are rare for Beckett, but prove that he *can* imagine and portray real tenderness directly, without the usual interference of the deforming prism of his cutting irony. Some of his poems—especially from the 1940s—share a similar mood.

Like Krapp, however, the protagonist of *That Time* is also cynical with respect to his past, beyond any sentimental memory. Krapp had managed to get rid of that ancient penchant for happiness with one cutting comment that destroyed everything: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway" (p. 24). Similarly, the third voice of *That Time* corrects itself through corrosive doubt: ". . . hard to believe harder and harder to believe you ever told anyone you loved them or anyone you. . ." (p. 31). The happy remembrance becomes quasi-mythical, then disappears altogether, engulfed in a whole ludicrous lifetime.

But it is the second voice that speaks from the deepest recesses. Like the Voice in *Not I*, it evokes the snares of self-identification: ". . . did you ever say I to yourself in your life come on now . . . could you ever say I to yourself in your life. . ." (p. 31); or again, this anguish-ridden memory that describes the flight from self to the point of forgetting the self:

> when you started not knowing who you were from Adam trying how that would work for a change not knowing who you were from Adam no notion who it was saying what you were saying whose skull you were clapped up in whose moan had you the way you were was that the time or was that another time there alone with the portraits of the dead black with dirt and antiquity and the dates on the frames in case you might get the century wrong not believing it could be you will they put you out in the rain at closing time (p. 32)

And the same voice is the last one heard in the play, casting the man's entire existence into soon-to-come oblivion: ". . . come and gone come and gone no one come and gone in no time gone in no time" (p. 37). The silent, suspended head, which had done nothing more throughout the play than breathe audibly at times and open and close its eyes occasionally, now smiles (a toothless smile for preference, Beckett specifies) as the light fades and the curtain closes on this man's annihilation, his absorption into nothingness. The smile undoubtedly marks his satisfaction that it's almost finished—the profound aspiration toward nothingness of Beckett's characters since Didi and Gogo, Hamm and Clov.

It is interesting to note the strict organization Beckett has imposed on his play, not merely in the systematic but nonsymetrical alternation of the three

voices, but also by using a common structural element for each of the three narratives that speak of the past, namely stones:

> Voice A: . . . that time on the stone the child on the stone where none ever came (p. 34)
>
> Voice B: on the stone together in the sun on the stone at the edge of the little wood. . . (p. 29)
>
> Voice C: . . . you found a seat marble slab and sat down to rest and dry off. . . (p. 29)

Each time, the point of reference is a stone on which the man had sat down at some moment in his past; it is from the departure point of this nexus of related memories that the three voices reach him, bringing a real interior cohesion to the drama.

In contrast to the single, stark focus of vision in *Not I* and *That Time*, May, the middle-aged but already old-looking woman in *Footfalls* walks incessantly up and down the stage, nine steps and back again, pausing only rarely before resuming her compulsive path. She talks to her aging, infirm mother whose voice we hear without ever seeing her. The mother may be in the next room or merely in the daughter's mind. May has taken tender care of her to the exclusion of any life of her own: she has not even been outdoors since childhood. May washes her mother, dresses her wounds, gives her injections, prays with her and for her.

Relegated deliberately or by circumstances to the role of support for her mother, May has had no life of her own. She is surprised to learn that she herself is only forty years old; "So little" she asks, to which the Mother's voice answers: "I'm afraid so" (p. 44) undoubtedly underlining thereby the fact that she still has a long time to go in what Beckett has called elsewhere "this . . . thing."[8] The Mother pleads with her daughter to free herself from the tyranny of memory: "Will you never have done? . . . Will you never have done . . . revolving it all? . . . It all . . . In your poor mind . . . It all . . . It all" (p. 44). Then she asks her forgiveness for having brought her into the world—that most unforgivable of all sins in the Beckettian universe. Molloy had put it sarcastically: "My mother. I don't think too harshly of her. I know she did all she could not to have me, except of course the one thing, and if she never succeeded in getting me unstuck, it was fate that earmarked me for less compassionate sewers."[9] The first of the three movements of this brief dramatic work ends on a note of regret. May resumes her pacing as the light fades.

Second movement: only the Mother's voice can be heard, evoking in rapid strokes May's youth; only the sound of her steps imparts a sense of reality to May. It is her only sign of life, her heartbeat, her breathing. Indeed, her footfall is every

8. Beckett, *Endgame*, p. 45.
9. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Three Novels*, p. 18.

bit as regular, as rhythmic, as the heart or respiration. The Voice declares that May speaks when she thinks no one can hear her—it is then that she tells how it was: "Still speak? Yes, some nights she does, when she fancies none can hear . . . Tells how it was . . . Tries to tell how it was . . . It all . . . It all" (p. 46).

Now, after a second fade out of lights, begins the third and last movement of *Footfalls*. This time, it is May who speaks, who tries to say how it was, but who does so through the interposition of a third person like the Mouth in *Not I*. She relates a story which resembles her own, but which concerns another woman, named Amy (an anagram of May) who herself takes care of her mother. This mother, like May's mother, asks her daughter: "Will you never have done? . . . Will you never have done . . . revolving it all? . . . It all . . . In your poor mind . . . It all . . . It all" (p. 48). The third person narration fails to resolve Amy's dilemma, just as the third person in *Not I* could not manage to convince the Mouth to identity with *its* story. The schism continues. The light fades, May disappears, all is darkness, and the play ends.

Hermetic and elusive though *Footfalls* may be in the reading, it is mysteriously powerful in performance. The elusiveness and oppresiveness of memory become painfully tangible in the dreary loneliness of the woman, counterpointed by her constant, rhythmic pacing. Noting that May is no longer there at the end, Billie Whitelaw (who created the role) asked Beckett during rehearsals (Beckett directed *Footfalls* for the original London production) whether May had committed suicide. "No," Beckett replied, "she is simply not there."[10]

Like all Beckett's works written especially for television, *Ghost Trio* contains very precise technical directions. Every shot is carefully prescribed as to duration, distance, angle, etc. In other words, Beckett's script includes everything needed for the television production, each element being carefully conceived and described. This is not the work of a television amateur; Beckett has had considerable television experience by now. But then, even his first work for the home screen, *Eh Joe*, was already perfectly calculated and orchestrated from a technical point of view.

The title, *Ghost Trio*, stems from Beethoven's 5th Piano Trio, entitled "The Ghost," whose Largo serves as musical reinforcement for the play—reinforcement and not background, for the music becomes an integral part of the theatrical entity. The play is divided into three parts, labeled Pre-action, Action and Reaction. The "trio" consists of the Voice of a woman (whom we do not see), a man who can be seen (but who does not speak), and a child that appears near the end only to disappear again after 15 or 20 seconds without having spoken a word. The single voice of *Ghost Trio* does not evoke memories, as is the case in so many other dramatic pieces by Beckett; rather, it accompanies and comments on the movements of the camera in an objective, uncommitted manner. For instance, it says things like "The familiar chamber" while the camera *shows* the room in which

10. As related in Michael Davie's "Notebook," in *The Observer Review*, May 2, 1976, 36.

the action (if one may use the term) takes place—an austere room with only a door, a window, and a bed. "On the right the indispensable door," says the Voice as it plays the role of guide and commentator on a quick camera pan around the room. "Floor" utters the Voice as we *see* a close-up of a rectangle of the floor, followed by: "Having seen that specimen of floor you have seen it all" (p. 55). And so on, for the wall, the window, the door, the bed. Finally we hear: "Sole sign of life a seated figure" (p. 57) and we see the man, seated. End of Part I, Pre-action.

When at the beginning of Part II (Action) the Voice announces enigmatically and for no apparent reason "He will now think he hears her" (p. 58) the man seems to hear something at the door, at the window, near the bed. But after going around the room a second time, he still hears nothing. In the third part (Reaction), the Voice is no longer heard at all. The man sets a cassette on a chair which he had held in his hand up to then, takes in the room once again. There is a knock at the door, a little boy dressed in a black slicker appears, shakes his head twice, turns around, and vanishes. The music increases in volume; there is a final close-up; end of play. Throughout the three parts of *Ghost Trio,* the man's behavior is unsettled and indecisive.

Of all Beckett's recent works, this one is the most elliptical, the most ambiguous. The fact that the Voice is limited to being a guide results in the spectator's remaining outside; we never enter the man's consciousness and the best we can do is to guess at the functioning of his memory . . . and with few guideposts at that. Twice the Voice puts us on the track by saying: "He will now think he hears her" (pp. 58, 60). This statement, multiplied by the man's perturbed comportment, allows us to imagine a distant but tenacious remembrance of a woman, and to associate the cassette with that remembrance. But in fact, such a possible narrative line is created by us out of the scattered bits and pieces at our disposal. As to the boy, is he another fragment of the man's memory? His son, for instance, or himself as a boy? We have no way of knowing for sure; we remain in a dim landscape and with particularly ambiguous signifiers. Our manner of confronting this text is made all the more complex by the surprising attitude of the Voice at the very beginning of *Ghost Trio.* It addresses us in a very practical, businesslike tone: "Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly. . . . Good evening. Mine is a faint voice. Kindly tune accordingly . . . It will not be raised, nor lowered, whatever happens" (p. 55).

Beckett's most recent play, . . . *but the clouds* . . . , also written for television, is less enigmatic and more recognizably "Beckettian." Like in all the "Ends," we are in the realm of memory and involved with familiar themes: the passage of time, the recollection of an earlier happiness. This review of the past takes the form of a calm reassessment, singularly lacking in the anguish that marked *Not I* and the irony and cynicism typical of earlier bouts with memory, such as *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Eh Joe.* With *That Time, Footfalls, Ghost Trio,* and . . . *but the clouds* . . . , Beckett seems to have achieved a sense of detachment that allows him to adopt a stance of sympathetic objectivity.

The title of the work stems from Yeats's 1927 poem, "The Tower," which itself looks backward at the experience of a lifetime. The poem ends on a note of quiet resignation, of things being put into ultimate perspective. In quoting the last lines, Beckett stresses the serene, poetic vision where earlier he had dwelled on the absurd and on suffering: ". . . but the clouds of the sky . . . when the horizon fades . . . or a bird's sleepy cry . . . among the deepening shades. . ."[11] When . . . *but the clouds* . . . was performed for German television, Beckett agreed to include the last fifteen lines of the Yeats poem (in translation, of course) rather than just the last four, on the theory that Yeats was not so well known in Germany. In fact, the inclusion of the last two stanzas of "The Tower" as spoken by the Voice helps all but the most avid reader of Yeats to focus more clearly on the spirit of this final ordering of sensations and thoughts:

> Now shall I make my soul,
> Compelling it to study
> In a learned school
> Till the wreck of body,
>
> Slow decay of blood,
> Testy delirium
> Or dull decrepitude,
>
> Or what worse evil come—
> The death of friends, or death
> Of every brilliant eye
> That made a catch in the breath—
> Seem but the clouds of the sky
> When the horizon fades,
> Or a bird's sleepy cry
> Among the deepening shades.

The quiet gravity of this Olympian tone is all the more remarkable for Beckett when we think that these are the last sounds of "Ends," that group of plays that had begun with the most thoroughly frenzied discourse of Beckett's entire theatrical output, the Mouth in *Not I*: ". . . out . . . into this world . . . this world . . . tiny little thing . . . before its time. . ." (p. 14). From the agony of birth, through the fury of life, to the stoic acceptance of death following an ultimate recapitulation—these are the markers of the life cycle as well as of the collective movement of the five dramas of "Ends."

Technically, . . . *but the clouds* . . . is fascinating in its very simplicity. Its components could not be simpler: a single set consisting of a circular spot of light surrounded by impenetrable darkness, one voice (a man's), and three different

11. References to . . . *but the clouds* . . . are to the text published in this issue of *October*.

shots—a long shot of the set, either empty or with the Man entering, pausing, or exiting; a medium shot of the Man, head in arm, apparently lost in reflexion or recollection; a close-up of a Woman's face. These minimal devices are used to narrate a bare minimum of action: a male voice remembers a woman, or, to put it more precisely, remembers remembering a woman and describes *how* and *when* he used to remember her. His description is visualized; he "enters" (that is, enters the field of light), pauses, goes off to change his clothes, reappears, pauses, disappears to the rear into what is called his "sanctum," then reappears and goes through the reverse steps. Within the "sanctum" he tries to remember her, begs her to appear to him. In response to his entreaties, four results might ensue: a) she might appear and then disappear; b) she might appear, linger, then disappear; c) she might appear, speak (and we see the woman mouth the phrase "but the clouds"), then disappear; d) not appear at all—this latter being by far the most frequent. This recitation of events by the Voice and its visual evocation (which for us takes the shape of the images brought to us by the screen) is checked perpetually, tested, examined for veracity. Finally, as the Woman's face is seen, the Voice speaks the lines from "The Tower." The image shifts finally to the Man in his pensive pose before fading out.

As it had been in his other television plays, Beckett's technical domination of the medium is startling. He attains a brilliant utilization of television sound and image with an economy of means that never ceases to amaze. His directions are minutely precise with respect to each angle, the duration of every shot, the volume of sounds. In the German version, *Nur Noch Gewölk*, which Beckett directed himself for Südfunks Stuttgart, he added the precision of his directorial talent to achieve a stunning unity of tone.

If . . . *but the clouds* . . . deals with the thematics of memory, lost love, and youth with a matter-of-factness that avoids both the caustic and self-pity, the familiar theme of writing, of saying how it was, reappears also in a less frantic manner. Beckett's characters have always struggled with the paradox of the need to speak and the impossibility of speaking. The life-long quest of his protagonists is to find a means of describing their own experience (". . . you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin. . ."[12]), but the attempt is doomed to perpetual failure (". . . I let them say their say, my words not said by me, me that word, that word they say, but say in vain."[13]) That frustration gave rise in the past to the most anguished utterances, beginning with that most lapidary sentence in *Texts for Nothing*, "Name, no, nothing is namable, tell, no, nothing can be told, what then, I don't know, I shouldn't have begun."[14] In *Cascando*, the Voice pantingly pursues its story, never catching up with it, never really telling it: "—story . . . if you could finish it

12. Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 414.
13. Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, in *Stories and Texts for Nothing*, New York, Grove Press, 1968, p. 128.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

. . . you could rest . . . you could sleep . . . not before . . . oh I know . . . the ones I've finished . . . thousands and one . . . all I ever did . . . in my life . . . with my life . . . saying to myself . . . finish this one . . . it's the right one . . . then rest . . . then sleep . . . no more stories . . . no more words . . . and finished it . . . and not the right one . . . couldn't rest . . . straight away another. . ." [15] The narrator of *How It Is* is horror-struck at the end of his delirious monologue that he has not managed to tell his story, has not managed to say "how it is" and the Voice in *Not I* gropes desperately (as we have noted) for the words that would finally allow it to be silent: "what? . . . not that? . . . nothing to do with that? . . . nothing she could tell . . . try something else . . . think of something else . . . not that either . . . all right . . . something else again . . . so on . . . hit on it in the end. . ." (p. 22).

The Voice in . . . *but the clouds* . . . is also concerned with the necessity and the difficulty of telling one's story accurately but there is no torment in its self-questioning. "When I thought of her it was always night," begins the Voice, then corrects itself: "When she appeared it was always night." And, after testing that hypothesis visually, it concludes, simply, "Right." Later, it again tests its own veracity and forces itself to review its own memory (which we see as television image): "Let us now make sure we have got it right," and "Let us now run through it again." Each of these run-throughs, as well as other unannounced ones, are concluded with the same "Right." Clearly, in this very recent piece, the past traps of the writing process are less apparent. The story *can* be told, but it is not "the" story, it is only one of the stories. Still, the fact that Beckett concentrates on what *is* possible in . . . *but the clouds* . . . rather than on the impossible, together with the serenity of the vision itself, is significant. John Calder, Beckett's publisher in England, speaks of a recent "equanimity reminiscent of Cicero and Goethe . . . a mellow acceptance of the inevitable. . ." [16] The brief quotation from Yeats is indicative of the change in spirit and could well serve as a *mise en abyme* of the tranquility discernible in the last four dramatic works.

If the mood of most of the "Ends" marks, then, a new departure perhaps, blending enduring thematic material with a new-found resignation, the problematics of the theatricality of these five brief works also mark a departure. From the outset, beginning with *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, Beckett had obviously opted for nonrealistic theatrical conventions; since then, he has pushed his anti-realism ever further. Yet, what characterizes the theatricality of most of his works before the seventies is their metaphoric representation of the human condition: Gogo and Didi's wait, their empty setting, and even their tree; the room in which Hamm and Clov endure the ending of their end; the mound of earth in which Winnie is buried up to her hips in Act I of *Happy Days*, and up to her neck in Act II; even the massive funeral urns from which only the three heads emerge in

15. Samuel Beckett, *Cascando*, New York, Grove Press, n.d., p. 9.
16. John Calder, "'The lively arts': three plays by Samuel Beckett on BBC 2, 17 April 1977," *Journal of Beckett Studies*, no. 2 (Summer 1977), 120.

Play—these powerful stage images depended on and brought out the metaphoricity of the characters and of their situation. At more or less the same period, we find, corresponding to that theatrical use of metaphor, the recourse to metaphor in the prose texts, for instance in *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*, and *How It Is*. But as of the early 1950s, in *Texts for Nothing*, Beckett had set out on the road to abstraction, to a demetaphorization which was to become increasingly dominant. *The Lost Ones* still retains a certain metaphoric framework, but *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *Lessness*, *Enough*, and "For to End Yet Again," among others, dispense almost entirely with the metaphoric.

The recent plays are similarly the result of extreme abstraction, of a fragmentation of narrative line, and of a depersonalisation of character, which, in the cases of *Not I* and *That Time*, permits a reduction of the visible theatrical material to a mere mouth, a floating head, leaving no so-called realistic element which might give rise to a metaphoric interpretation. And if it remains true that we can still deal metaphorically with the situation of the mouth, for instance—or rather, with the situation of the woman whose mouth we see and whose voice we hear—this transposition to the level of metaphor is entirely attributable to the text and no longer at all to the presence on stage of some identifiable visual element. In Beckett's theater in the seventies, everything is reduced to the relationships existing between consciousness and the voice, relationships which concern identity, memory, and problems of language, or rather, the metalinguistic functions of language. These thematic materials have always been present in Beckett, but now they are exploited in a rigorously nonfigurative fashion, and the fragmented dramatic action remains interiorized.

Some radio and television plays had already paved the way to abstraction several years ago, notably *Cascando*, *Words and Music*, and *Eh Joe*. Now, everything focuses on the discourse of a speaking person who speaks himself, of a listening person who is spoken by his voice or by that of another speaking person, or, in the case of *Footfalls*, by a combination of the two. The proof of Beckett's prodigious talent as a dramatist is that he succeeds in rendering theatrical in the best sense of the word—that is, *not* in the sense of a realistic or representational theater—fictional elements that are so tenuous as not even to be imaginable in a nontheatrical text, except in one of Beckett's own nontheatrical texts.

Yet, when speaking of anti-realistic theater in relation to Beckett, one refers only to theatrical conventions. Beckett's theater is diametrically opposed to the conventions that form the mainstay of realistic theater, namely the fourth-wall convention so dear to Ibsen and which, mutatis mutandis, still dominates a sizable segment of what can be termed traditional theater. His new plays are even more anti-realistic than most of today's anti-realistic theater, and more anti-realistic than his own theater of previous decades. But for all of that, if one leaves aside the matter of theatrical conventions and the aesthetic which determines the way a theater piece presents itself to the spectator, Beckett is in fact a realistic author to the extent that whatever is present on stage, up to and including what is most

abstract, retains a direct link with our experience of life, beyond any metaphor. Beckett can be thought of as realistic in the same sense that the word applies to, say, Robbe-Grillet. The three voices emanating from three perspectives of the past that converge on the floating head and devastate it, in *That Time*, are directly recognizable for each of us without our having to try to conjure up a "real" picture of a head isolated in space. This persistence, this obsession of memory is a "real" truth, directly comprehensible, and not merely the metaphor of a reality. In ... *but the clouds* ..., the need to remember the woman, the difficulty in remembering her, create a tension of memory that is also true. Similarly, the torrential flow of words of the Mouth in *Not I*, in its multiple stratagems to avoid its own reality at all costs, is but a poetic and dramatic intensification of a phenomenon we recognize readily, even in ourselves if we look carefully.

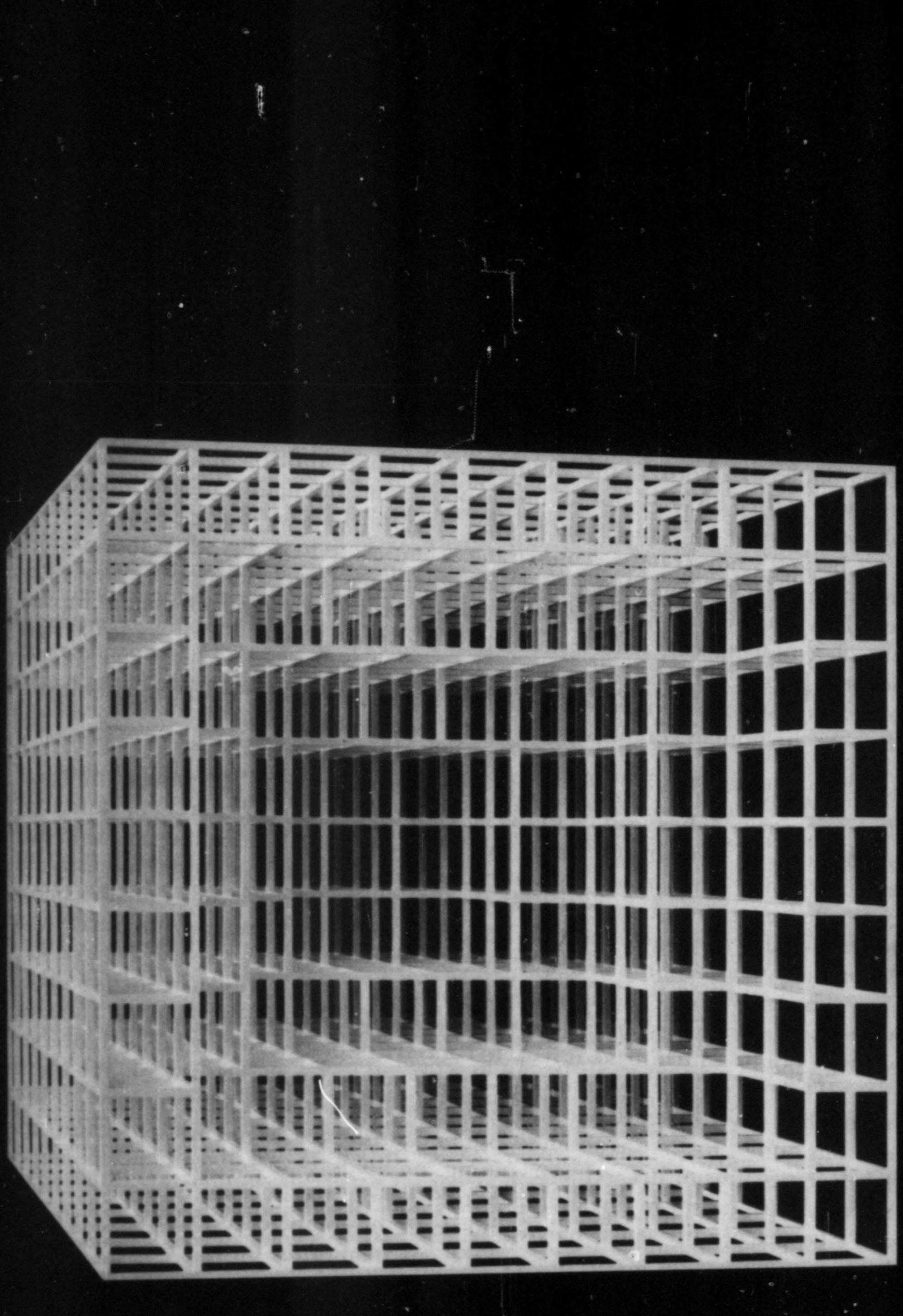
Beckett's novels have a comparable relationship to reality; they, too, plunge us into a special, bizarre universe which doesn't resemble "our world." Nevertheless, how often do we find some woman seen on a street, some old man glimpsed out of a moving car, who seem to have stepped straight out of some Beckett fiction! These characters from his fiction—often grotesque, painful to contemplate, almost dehumanized—are not merely metaphors of the human condition; they *are* the human condition; they really exist in life, in our lives.

The five "Ends" vary greatly in modulation, but all possess unusual dramatic power. They lead us to the heart of the human experience, of suffering, of memory, of lives insufficiently lived. But the plays are neither strident nor overpowering. They reach us more delicately, through a quiet intensity, a controlled structure, and ever-so-much tenderness, like the most exquisite chamber music. Their imagery has been compared to the stark and moving purity of a Japanese garden, and the image is apt.

They may not be the ultimate monologues, not the ultimate reduction to the very essence of things, but these voices speak to us from the loneliest recesses, vantage points which make it hard to conceive of places still further, still deeper.

While a spirit of resignation has made its way in Beckett's work, the tragic vision has nevertheless tended to turn more somber in recent times, with less obvious humor to serve as antidote. But he continues to defend himself against the label of pessimism; his weltanschauung, he holds, is merely realism. He wrote recently: "If pessimism is a judgment to the effect that ill outweighs good, then I can't be taxed with same, having no desire or competence to judge. I simply happen to have come across more of the one than of the other."[17]

17. Letter to the author.



Sol LeW
by 43 1/2

LeWitt in Progress

ROSALIND KRAUSS

> The process of "algebrization," the over-automatization of an object, permits the greatest economy of perceptive effort. Either objects are assigned only one proper feature—a number, for example—or else they function as though by formula and do not even appear in cognition.
>
> Victor Shklovsky
> "Art as Technique"

Consider the following three documents: The first is an article entitled "Sol LeWitt—The Look of Thought," by the critic Donald Kuspit. The second is a book-length essay called *Progress in Art* by the artist and writer Suzi Gablik. The third is the critic Lucy Lippard's contribution to the catalogue for the LeWitt retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art.

Taken together these essays put forward a set of claims, addressed initially to the work of a specific artist, but extended to the larger context of abstract art in general, or at least to the abstract art of LeWitt's generation. What these claims amount to is a declaration of the mission and achievement of this abstraction. It is, they collectively assert, to serve as triumphant illustration of the powers of human reason. And, we might ask, what else could Conceptual Art be?

Kuspit signals this grand theme with the title of his essay. "The Look of Thought" is what stares back at us from the modular structures, the openwork lattices, the serial progressions of LeWitt's sculputure. Thought, in Kuspit's terms, is deductive, inferential, axiomatic. It is a process of finding within the manifold of experience a central, organizing principle; it is the activity of a transcendental ego.

"In LeWitt," Kuspit writes, "there is no optical induction; there is only deduction by rules, which have an axiomatic validity however much the work created by their execution has a tentative, inconsequential look." And, he continues, "rationalistic, deterministic abstract art links up with a larger Western tradition, apparent in both classical antiquity and the Renaissance, *viz.*, the

Sol LeWitt. Floor Piece #4. *1976. Painted wood, 43 1/4 by 43 1/2 by 43 1/4 inches.*

pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means. This tradition is profoundly humanistic in import, for it involves the deification of the human mind by reason of its mathematical prowess."[1]

The specific work in which Kuspit sees this deification of the human mind in operation is called *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974). It is a modular structure composed of 122 units, each a member of a finite series, the series ordered in terms of a numerical progression. Throughout the series the "cube" as such is given only inferentially, initially by providing the least possible information (three edges set perpendicular to one another), and then progressively supplying more of the missing edges, ending with the greatest possible information (eleven edges). Each of the modules in the series is eight inches on a side; each is painted white; and the 122 skeletal structures are assembled on a vast platform.

"The viewer," Kuspit informs us, "completed the incomplete cubes by mentally supplying the missing edges, and experienced the tension between the literally unfinished and the mentally finished cubes—between what Kant would call the phenomenal cube and the idea of the cube."[2]

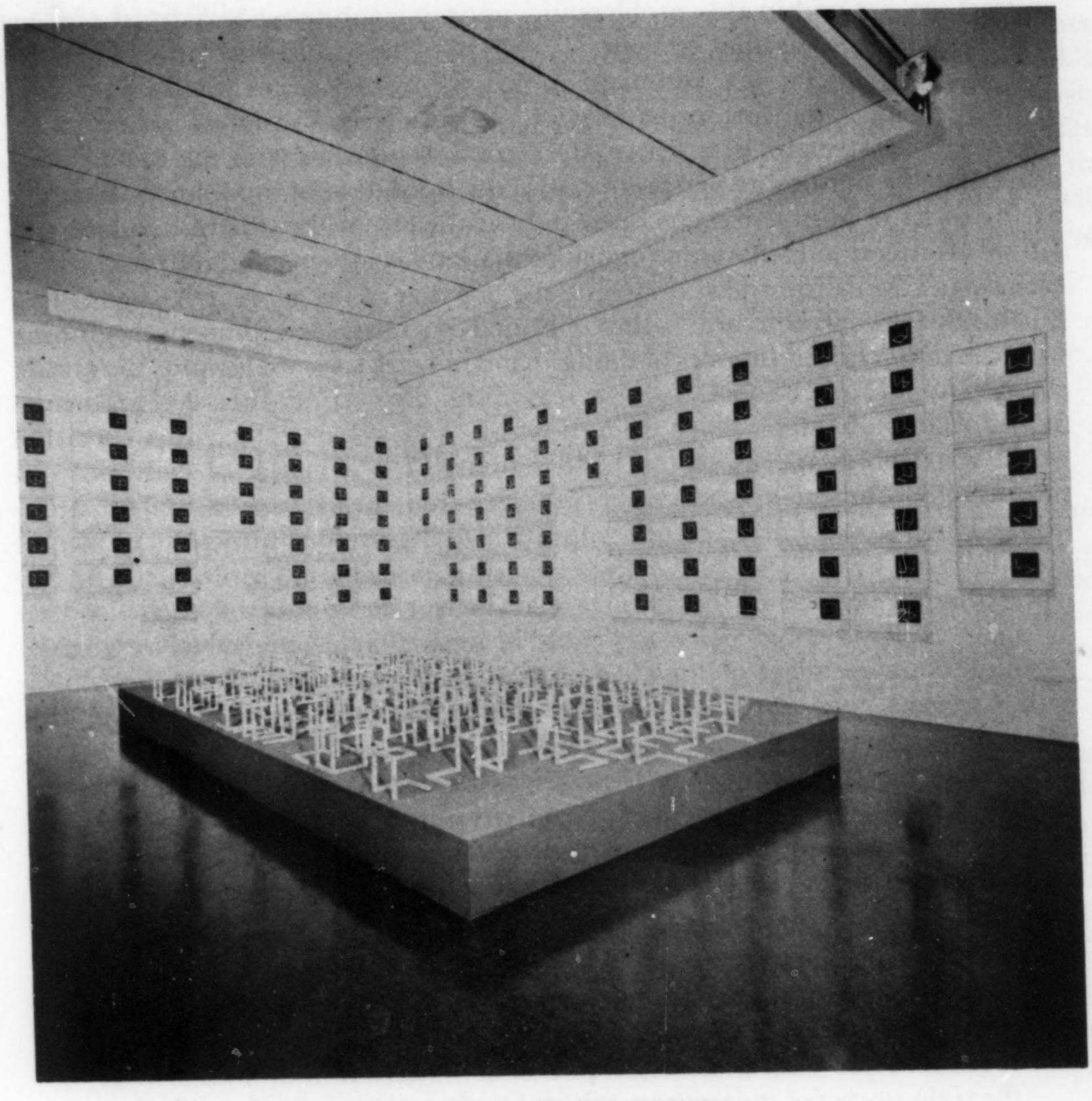
For almost no writer who deals with LeWitt is there any question that these geometric emblems are the illustration of Mind, the demonstration of rationalism itself. "At times," one critic writes, "the most elaborate of these constructions resemble translations of complete philosophical systems into a purely formal language. If anyone could perceive the structural beauty of, say, Descartes's or Kant's treatises and then go on to recreate them as exclusively visual metaphor, it is surely LeWitt."[3]

There may of course be readers of this kind of criticism who balk at statements of this sort. They may find it strange that in the last quarter of the twentieth century there should have arisen an art dedicated to a triumphant Cartesianism, that when almost everything else in our cultural experience has instructed us about the necessity of abandonning the fantasy of the transcendental subject, LeWitt should be capable of reassuring us about its powers.

> For if I see myself putting to sea, and the long hours without landfall, I do not see the return, the tossing on the breakers, and I do not hear the frail keel grating on the shore. I took advantage of being at the seaside to lay in a store of sucking-stones. They were pebbles but I call them stones. Yes, on this occasion I laid in a considerable store. I distributed them equally among my four pockets, and sucked them turn and turn about.[4]

But the power of human reason has captured the imagination of a number of contemporary writers on art, for whom abstraction is necessarily the outcome of

1. Donald Kuspit, "Sol LeWitt: The Look of Thought," *Art in America*, LXIII (September-October 1975), 48.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
3. Robert Rosenblum, in *Sol LeWitt*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, p. 14.
4. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, New York, Grove Press, 1965, p. 69. All subsequent extracted passages appear on pp. 69–72.



Sol LeWitt. 122 Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes. *1974. 122 structures, painted wood, each 8 by 8 by 8 inches; base, 182 plywood squares, each 2 by 12 by 12 inches; 131 pen and ink drawings and photographs. (Installation, Museum of Modern Art, New York.)*

the triumphant progress of rationality. It is instructive, therefore, to think about the claims that are made for LeWitt in the context of a broader argument about the nature of abstraction. Suzi Galik's *Progress in Art*, for example, views the entire range of the world's visual culture as a problem in cognitive development. And abstract art, set within this problematic, appears as the necessary fruits of some kind of world intellectual growth.

Put very briefly, her argument is that the history of art divides into three distinct periods, the first consisting of all visual representation prior to the discovery of systematic perspective, the second, beginning with the Renaissance, defined by the mastery of perspective, and the third, that of modernism, heralded by the onset of abstraction. As one might gather from the title of her book, the arthor's contention is that these divisions mark off stages in a radical progression, each stage outmoding and superseding the one that came before it. The model for this idea of "progress in art" is that of human cognitive development, beginning with the most childlike modes of thought and moving forward towards the greater complexity of operational, formal reasoning. Projecting this developmental model of the individual, taken from the work of Piaget, onto the entire corpus of world art, Gablik speaks of the history of styles as a matter of "advance"—a process of "evolution" towards stages of increasingly higher intellectual organization. "The history of art exemplifies fundamental patterned principles of mental growth," she writes.[5] Thus the Renaissance superseded all previous forms of representation because of the axiomatic, deductive nature of perspective, so that the space of the phenomenal world could be understood as unified by a system of coordinates independent of "raw" perception. But the modern period (beginning with Cubism) cognitively outdistances the Renaissance by withdrawing this power of coordination from the real world entirely. In so doing it demonstrates the independence of all deductive or logical systems from the process of observation. In Gablik's view the achievement of abstract art is its freedom from the demands of perceptual reality and its amibition to demonstrate what Piaget has termed the "formal-operational stage" of human thinking.

> This raised a problem which I first solved in the following way. I had say sixteen stones, four in each of my four pockets these being the two pockets of my trousers and the two pockets of my greatcoat. Taking a stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, and putting it in my mouth, I replaced it in the right pocket of my greatcoat by a stone from the right pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my greatcoat, which I replaced by the stone which was in my mouth, as soon as I had finished sucking it.

It is not surprising that LeWitt's defenders would find much to admire in the thesis of *Progress in Art*. For an argument that draws a direct parallel between

5. Suzi Gablik, *Progress in Art*, New York, Rizzoli, p. 147.

Piaget's "genetic epistemology" and the course of several millenia of aesthetic endeavor necessarily places artists of LeWitt's generation at the "formal-operational stage" of development, as manipulators of a propositional logic far "in advance" of anything that has come before it. Indeed, Lucy Lippard, in her essay for the Museum of Modern Art catalogue on LeWitt, claims that Gablik's description of this type of thinking applies most securely to the work of this artist. "It is only LeWitt's 'reflective abstraction,'" Lippard maintains, "that fully fits into these theories, only his work that can be said to articulate 'the moment in artistic thinking when a structure opens to questioning and reorganizes itself according to a new meaning *which is nevertheless the meaning of the same structure*, but taken to a new level of complexity.'"[6]

> Thus there were still four stones in each of my four pockets, but not quite the same stones. And when the desire to suck took hold of me again, I drew again on the right pocket of my greatcoat, certain of not taking the same stone as the last time. And while I sucked it I rearranged the other stones in the way I have just described. And so on.

In speaking of Lippard and Kuspit as defenders of LeWitt's work I do not mean to imply that anyone who disputes their view of it is automatically a detractor. Rather I am focusing on a particular type of defense. It is one that undoubtedly finds its rhetorical force and psychological energy in reaction to the hostility that is generally directed at work like LeWitt's. This hostility is rather muted inside the self-immured space of the art world, where LeWitt is considered a contemporary master, but outside those walls it is extremely pronounced. LeWitt's white lattices, serially disposed or not, are viewed by the audience of a wider culture as baffling and meaningless. For after all, what could they possible represent? To which the answer comes, as outlined above: they are representations of Mind. Freed at last from making pictures of things in the world, the artist is depicting the cognitive moment as such.

> But this solution did not satisfy me fully. For it did not escape me that, by an extraordinary hazard, the four stones circulating thus might always be the same four. In which case, far from sucking the sixteen stones turn and turn about, I was really only sucking four, always the same, turn and turn about.

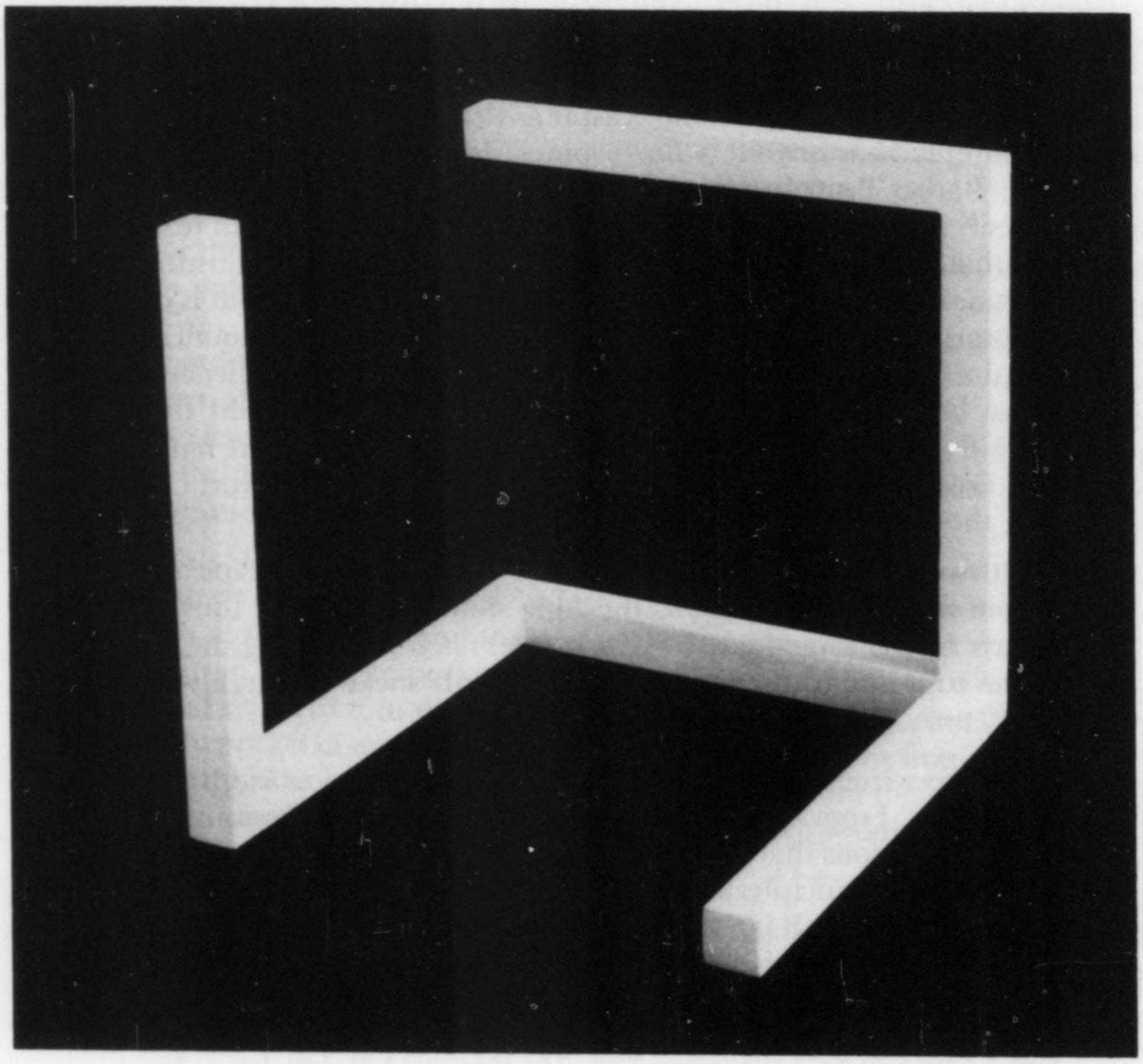
For these writers the cognitive moment has a particular form, assumes a particular shape. From the references to Descartes and the allusions to Euclidean diagrams, it is obvious that the form it takes is a kind of centering of thought—the discovery of a root principle, an axiom by which all the variables of a given system might be accounted for. It is the moment of grasping the idea or theorem that both generates the system and also explains it. Seen as being interior to the system, and constituting the very ground of its unity, the center is also visualized as being

6. Lucy Lippard, in *Sol LeWitt*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, p. 27.

above or outside it. Hence Kuspit's wish to link the idea of pure intelligibility, which he sees as the goal of LeWitt's art, with the notion of transcendence.

> For no matter how I caused the stone to circulate, I always ran the same risk. It was obvious that by increasing the number of my pockets I was bound to increase my chances of enjoying my stones in the way I planned, that is to say one after the other until their number was exhausted. Had I had eight pockets, for example, instead of the four I did have, then even the most diabolical hazard could not have prevented me from sucking at least eight of my sixteen stones, turn and turn about. The truth is I should have needed sixteen pockets in order to be quite easy in my mind.

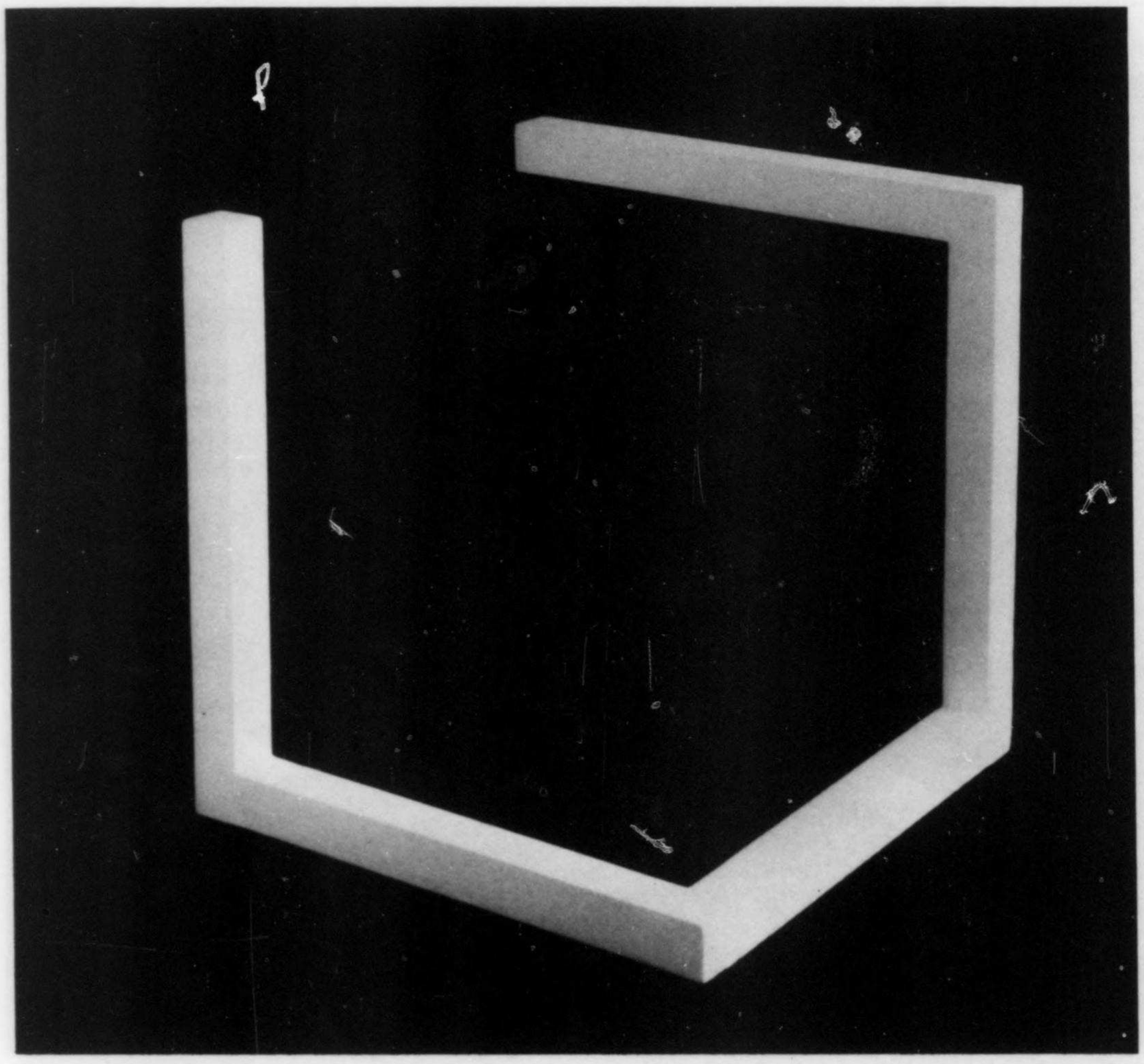
But in stating the conditions by which abstract art might be freed from the obligation to picture the world, this kind of critical argument merely substitutes a



new obligation. Abstract art is no longer tested by the faithfulness by which it transcribes appearances; it is now to be tested by its transparency to a different model. Visual reality no longer has a privileged status with relation to the work of art, no longer forms the text which the art is to illustrate. Now it is logic that constitutes the "text"; and the space onto which the art is now to open, the model it is to "picture" and by which it is to be tested is Mind.

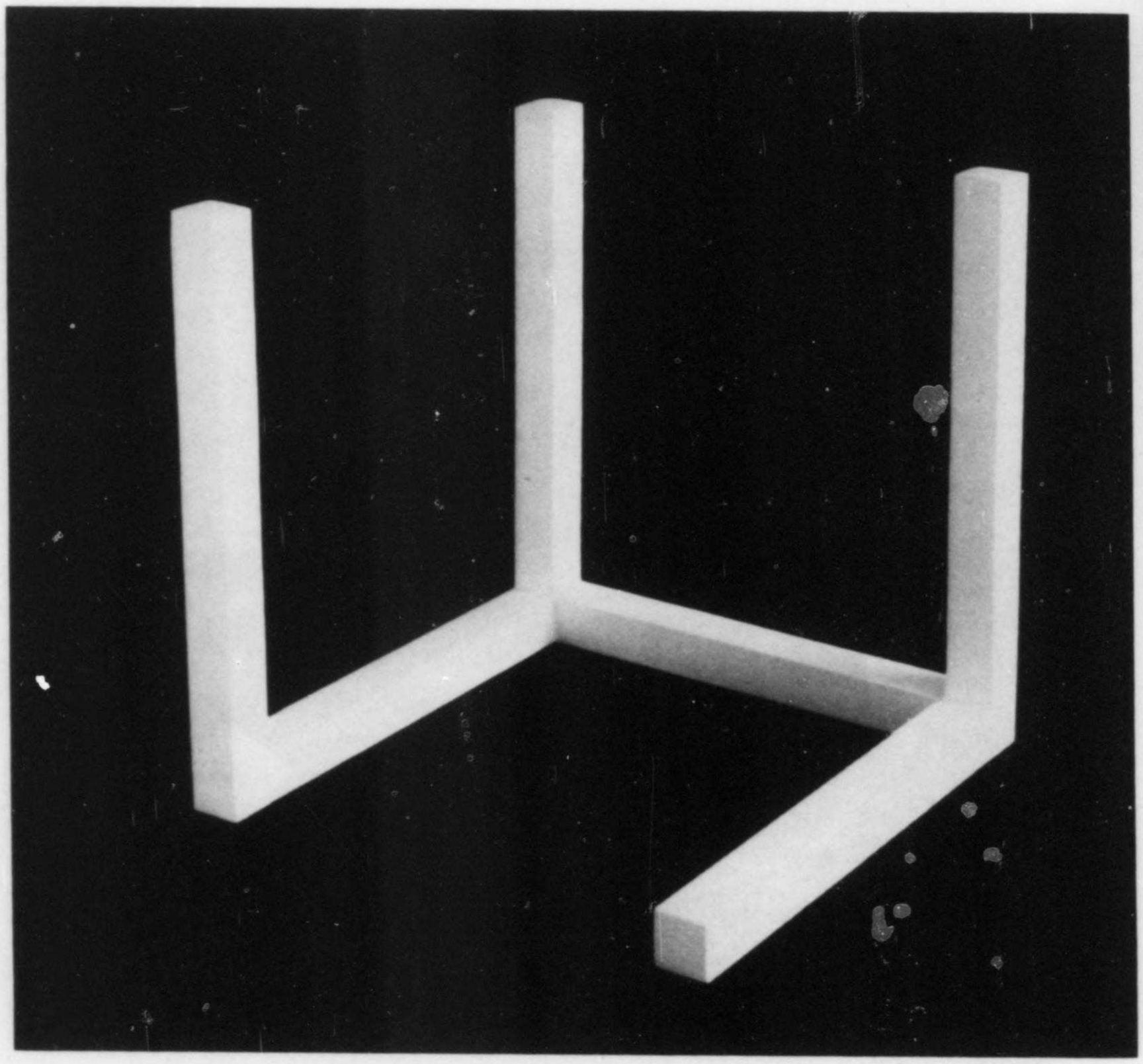
LeWitt's art would, of course, fail this test. His math is far too simple; his solutions are far too inelegant; the formal conditions of his work are far too scattered and obsessional to produce anything like the diagram of human reason these writers seem to call for.

> And for a long time I could see no other conclusion than this, that short of having sixteen pockets, each with its stone, I could never reach the goal I had set myself, short of an extraordinary hazard. And if at a pitch I could double the number of my pockets, were it only by dividing each

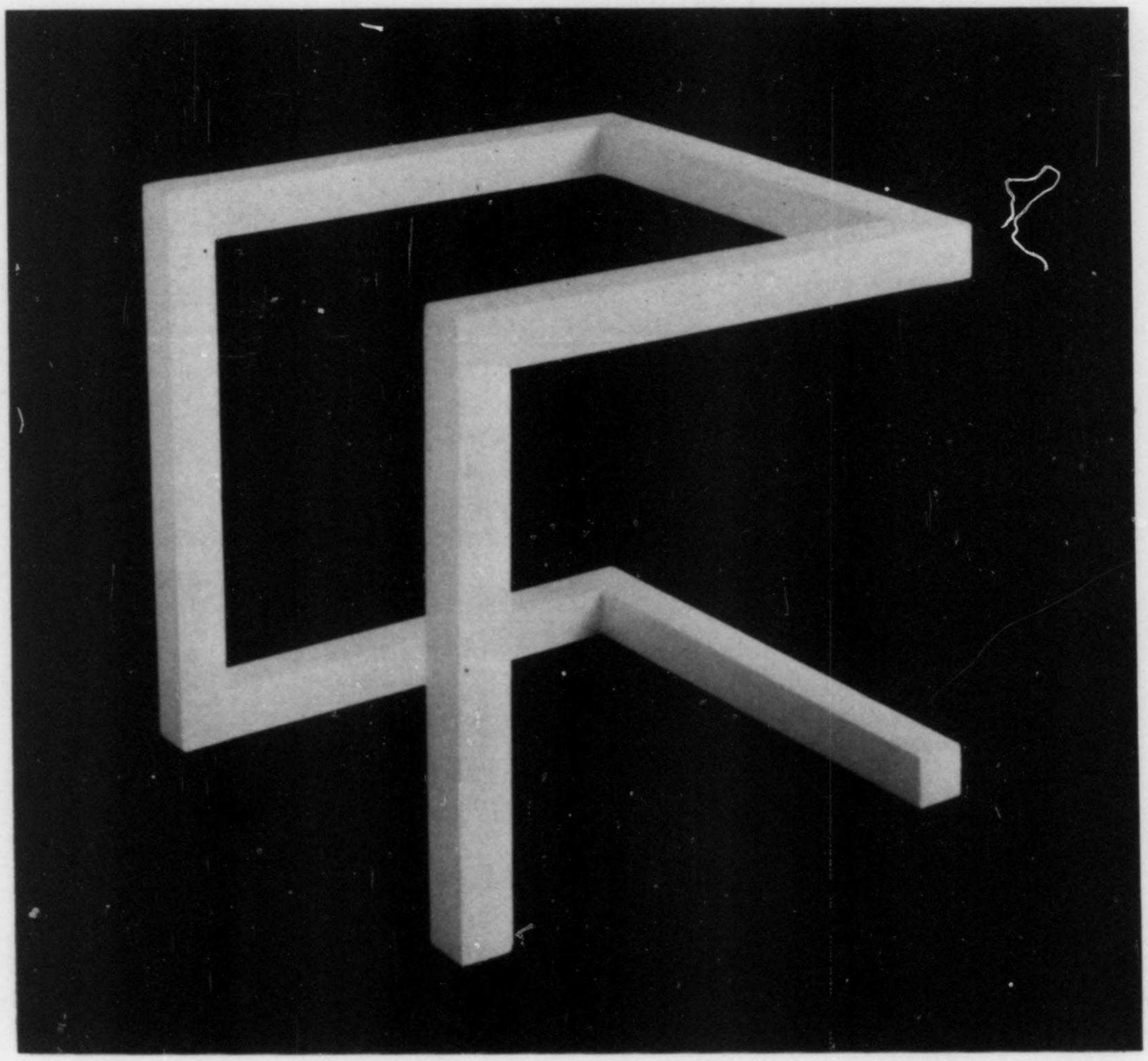


pocket in two, with the help of a few safety-pins let us say, to quadruple them seemed to be more than I could manage. And I did not feel inclined to take all that trouble for a half-measure. For I was beginning to lose all sense of measure, after all this wrestling and wrangling, and to say, All or nothing.

Like most of LeWitt's work, *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* provides one with an experience that is obsessional in kind. On the vast platform, too splayed to be taken in at a glance, the 122 neat little fragmented frames, all meticulously painted white, sit in regimented but meaningless lines, the demonstration of a kind of mad obstinacy. Quite unlike the diagrams in Euclid, where the axiomatic relationships are stated but once and the variety of possible applications left to the reader; or unlike the algebraic expression of the expansion



of a given series, where the formulaic is used precisely to foreclose the working out of every term in the series, LeWitt's work insistently applies its generative principle in each of its possible cases. The experience of the work goes exactly counter to "the look of thought," particularly if thought is understood as classical expressions of logic. For such expressions, whether diagramatic or symbolic, are precisely about the capacity to abbreviate, to adumbrate, to condense, to be able to imply an expansion with only the first two or three terms, to cover vast arithmetic spaces with a few ellipsis points, to use, in short, the notion of *etcetera*. The babble of a LeWitt serial expansion has nothing of the economy of the mathematician's language. It has the loquaciousness of the speech of children or of the very old, in that its refusal to summarize, to use the single example that would imply the whole, is like those feverish accounts of events composed of a string of almost identical details, connected by "and."



> And while I gazed thus at my stones, revolving interminable martingales all equally defective, and crushing handfulls of sand, so that the sand ran through my fingers and fell back on the strand, yes, while thus I lulled my mind and part of my body, one day suddenly it dawned on the former, dimly, that I might perhaps achieve my purpose without increasing the number of my pockets, or reducing the number of my stones, but simply by sacrificing the principle of trim.

But it is not entirely like those examples. For garrulousness, babble, the spasmodic hiccup of repetitious detail, have about them a quality of randomness, disorganization, a lack of system. And LeWitt's outpouring of example, his piling up of instance, is riddled with system, shot through with order. There is, in *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes*, as they say, a method in this madness. For what we find is the "system" of compulsion, of the obsessional's unwavering ritual, with its precision, its neatness, its finicky exactitude, covering over an abyss of irrationality. It is in that sense design without reason, design spinning out of control. The obsessional's solutions to problems strike us as mad, not because the solutions are wrong, but because in the setting of the problem itself there is a strange short-circuit in the lines of necessity.

> Now I am willing to believe, indeed I firmly believe, that other solutions to this problem might have been found, and indeed may still be found, no less sound, but much more elegant, than the one I shall now describe, if I can. And I believe too that had I been a little more insistent, a little more resistant, I could have found them myself. But I was tired, but I was tired, and I contented myself ingloriously with the first solution that was a solution, to this problem.

LeWitt once explained, "If I do a wall drawing, I have to have the plan written on the wall or label because it aids the understanding of the idea. If I just had lines on the wall, no one would know that there are ten thousand lines within a certain space, so I have two kinds of form—the lines, and the explanation of the lines. Then there is the idea, which is always unstated."[7] The lines are raw phenomena for which the label is not an explanation in the sense of a reason or an interpretation, but an explanation in the sense of a documentary narrative or commentary, like a guide's telling his listener how high this particular redwood is, or how many years it took the Colorado River to cut the Grand Canyon. The label is the document of persistence, of invention dancing over the pit of non-necessity. And then, as LeWitt was fond of saying, "there is the idea, which is always unstated."

Sometimes, however, LeWitt did state the "idea." For instance in 1969 he was to have an exhibition in Nova Scotia, and for this occasion he mailed the

7. Lippard, p. 24.

directions for the work, along with the kind of articulation that never appears on the wall-label: "A work that uses the idea of error, a work that uses the idea of infinity; a work that is subversive, a work that is not original. . . ."[8] These "ideas" exist on an entirely different order than that of the mathematical, the deductive, the axiomatic. If one uses the "idea of error" to generate a work, one has done something quite different from illustrating an order that is ideated or Ideal, the order LeWitt's critics keep insisting on associating with his art.

> But not to go over the heartbreaking stages through which I passed before I came to it, here it is, in all its hideousness. All (all!) that was necessary was to put for example, to begin with, six stones in the right pocket of my greatcoat, or supply-pocket, five in the right pocket of my trousers, and five in the left pocket of my trousers, that makes the lot, twice five ten plus six sixteen, and none, for none remained, in the left pocket of my greatcoat, which for the time being remained empty, empty of stones that is, for its usual contents remained, as well as occasional objects. For where do you think I had my vegetable knife, my silver, my horn and the other things that I have not yet named, perhaps shall never name.

LeWitt did indeed write about ideas and how he wished to relate them to his work, when he declared that "the idea becomes a Machine that makes the art."[9] He also seemed to be addressing himself to an order superior to the merely visual when he used the word "conceptual" to characterize his work in two manifesto-like pronouncements he published in the late 1960s. And once the term was put in play, "conceptual art" was like a ball that the art-world immediately ran with, driving deep into the territory of Idealism. No Pythagorean dream was too exalted for this art not to be able to reflect it as visual metaphor, as diagramatic manifestations of the Real.

But LeWitt's "ideas" are not generally to be found in that high place. The kind of idea he inevitably uses is subversive, addressing itself to the purposelessness of purpose, to the spinning gears of a machine disconnected from reason. Robert Smithson spoke of this when he wrote, "LeWitt is concerned with ennervating 'concepts' of paradox. Everything LeWitt thinks, writes, or has made is inconsistent and contradictory. The 'original idea' of his art is lost in a mess of drawings, figurings, and other ideas. Nothing is where it seems to be. His concepts are prisons devoid of reason."[10] LeWitt spoke of it also when he wrote, "Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically."[11] The consequence of obeying this direction, and LeWitt's art does obey it, is to arrive at the opposite of

8. *Ibid.*
9. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum*, V (June 1967), 80.
10. Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," *Art International*, March 1968, 21.
11. Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *Art-Language*, no. 1 (May 1969), 11.

Idealism. It is to achieve an absurd Nominalism—as we saw in *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes.*

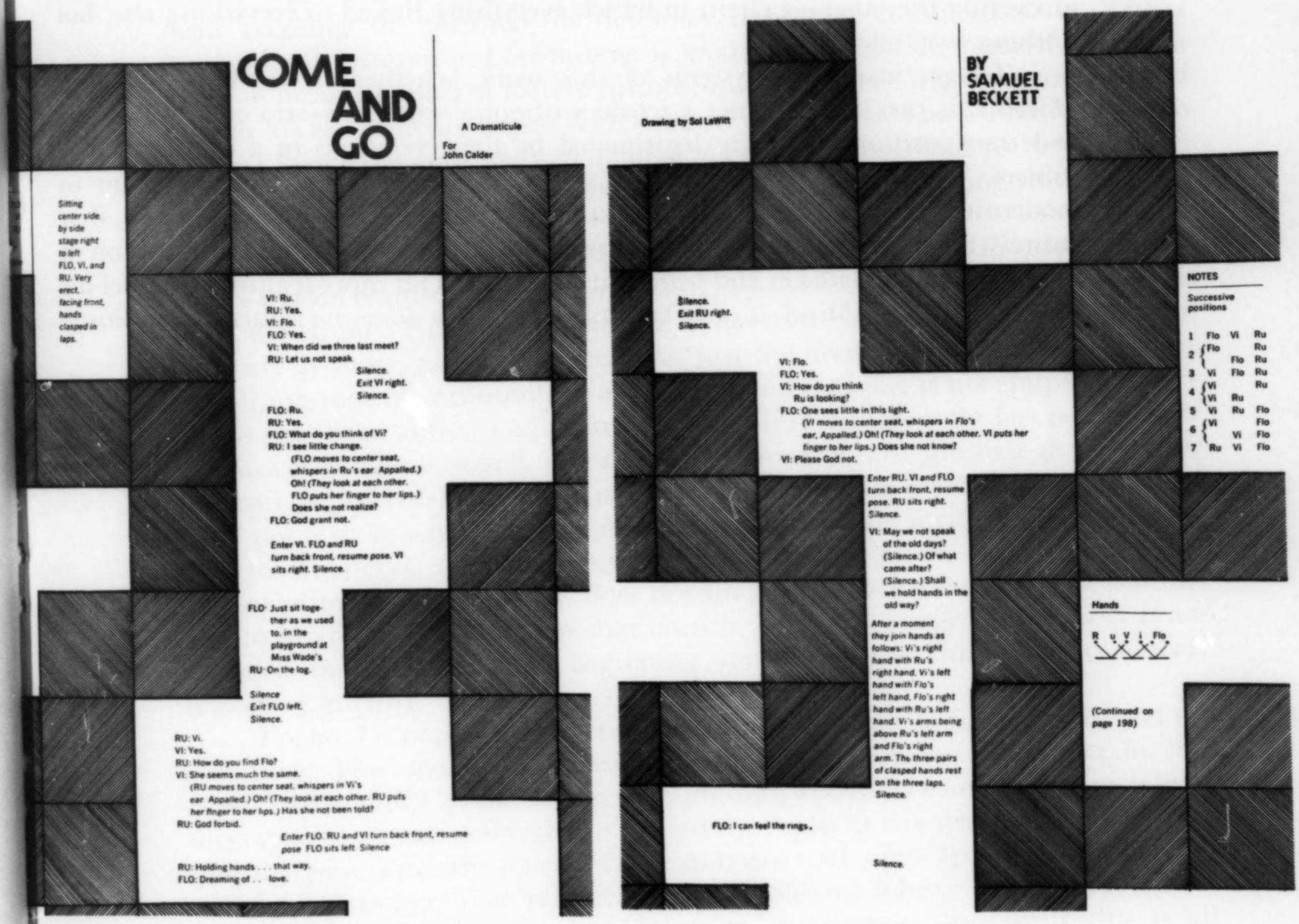
> Good. Now I can begin to suck. Watch me closely. I take a stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, suck it, stop sucking it, put it in the left pocket of my greatcoat, the empty one (of stones). I take a second stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, suck it, put it in the left pocket of my greatcoat. And so on until the right pocket of my greatcoat is empty (apart from its usual and casual contents) and the six stones I have just sucked, one after the other, are all in the left pocket of my greatcoat.

The aesthetic manipulations of an absurdist nominalism are hardly new with LeWitt. They appear everywhere throughout the production of Minimalism, beginning in the very early '60s, and are of course to be found in the literature most venerated by that group of sculptors and painters: the literature of the *nouveau roman* and of Samuel Beckett. To speak of what LeWitt shares expressively with his generation is not to diminish his art; rather it is to help locate the real territory of its meaning.

It is an absurdist Nominalism, for instance, that flattens the narrator's voice in *Jealousy,* as we are told of a grove of bannana trees through the painstaking, persistent, sadistic description of its individual rows. The effect is of course to drive attention away from the grove of trees and back to the voice and its obsession to count.

> Pausing then, and concentrating, so as not to make a balls of it, I transfer to the right pocket of my greatcoat, in which there are no stones left, the five stones in the right pocket of my trousers, which I replace by the five stones in the left pocket of my trousers, which I replace by the six stones in the left pocket of my greatcoat. At this stage then the left pocket of my greatcoat is again empty of stones, while the right pocket of my greatcoat is again supplied, and in the right way, that is to say with other stones than those I have just sucked. These other stones I then begin to suck, one after the other, and to transfer as I go along to the left pocket of my greatcoat, being absolutely certain, as far as one can be in an affair of this kind, that I am not sucking the same stones as a moment before, but others.

And the passage from *Molloy* about the sucking stones is one of many possible instances from Beckett in which the gears of rationcination proceed to spin in an extraordinary performance of "thinking," where it is clear that the object of this "thought" is entirely contained within the brilliance of the routine. It is like music-hall performers doing a spectacular turn, switching hats from one head to the other at lightning speed. No one thinks of the hat as an idea: it is



l LeWitt. Come and Go. *Drawing for play by muel Beckett,* Harper's Bazaar, *April 1969. Pen and k, 18 by 22 1/4 inches.*

simply a pretext for a display of skill—as is the "problem" of the stones. It is the ironical presence of the false "problem" that gives to this outburst of skill its special emotional tenor, its sense of its own absolute detachment from a world of purpose and necessity, its sense of being suspended before the immense spectacle of the irrational.

For LeWitt's generation a false and pious rationality was seen uniformly as the enemy of art. Judd spoke of his own kind of order as being "just one thing after another." Morris and Smithson spoke of the joy of destruction. For this generation the mode of expression became the deadpan, the fixed stare, the uninflected repetitious speech. Or rather, the correlatives for these modes were invented in the object-world of sculpture. It was an extraordinary decade in which objects proliferated in a seemingly endless and obsessional chain, each one answering the other—a chain in which everything linked to everything else, but nothing was referential.

To get inside the systems of this work, whether LeWitt's or Judd's or Morris's, is precisely to enter a world without a center, a world of substitutions and transpositions nowhere legitimated by the revelations of a transcendental subject. This is the strength of this work, its seriousness, and its claim to modernity. To give accounts of this kind of art that misconstrue its content, that entirely misplace the ground of its operations, is to invent a false justification of the work which traduces and betrays it. Aporia is a far more legitimate model for LeWitt's art than Mind, if only because aporia is a *dilemma* rather than a *thing*.

Society Against the State: The Fullness of the Primitive

MICHAEL E. BROWN

Modern anthropology, we are told, has become a science. Yet its very subject—the study of "Others"—has nonetheless remained a source of embarrassment coloring the writings of the most important ethnologists. In *Tristes Tropiques*, for instance, Lévi-Strauss is anxious to dissociate himself from that agent of an untroubled, a merely curious, interest in the Other: the tourist. And though his first sentence begins with denunciation: "Travel and travellers are two things I loathe," it ends with an admission of complicity: "and yet here I am, all set to tell the story of my expeditions. But at least I've taken a long while to make up my mind to it. . . ."

Lévi-Strauss acknowledges his identity as traveller. *Tristes Tropiques* begins with a section entitled "destinations," and ends with one called "the return." It is from the dread of this complicity, of a discipline somehow compromised in advance, by more, as we shall see, than just the necessary act of travel, that the moralizing tone of anthropology arises. *Tristes Tropiques* is not simply the story of this particular author's adventure. Though it is written in the first person, the *I* is transcendental; it stands beyond the relations of struggle that the narrative recounts. It proceeds in the force of its denunciation from impression to point and from point to lesson. The book is, like so much of the literature of ethnology, didactic and hence suspicious—suspicious of both the reader and of other works the reader might encounter. It does not simply embrace the reader, but assumes him to be committed to a view that must be corrected, purged. The reader is not assumed innocent, like the beginning student or the child, but as already immersed in error.

Tristes Tropiques attempts to correct beliefs about Indians, Brazil, and the primitive. The opening confession about travel prepares the reader for the administration of a lesson. It does so by arguing a possibly common origin, and by displaying a certain ambivalence toward the reader as any reader. One can be the traveller who is not the tourist. One can begin with open eyes, waiting for what will appear rather than pouncing, like a photographer, upon a prey whose photogenic properties are already known in advance. And while this is all promised, it is the tourist, the false scientist that is the possibility in the reader that Lévi-Strauss addresses.

Yet it is not only the reader who is assumed to be in error. The suspicion displayed by works of anthropology is ultimately collegial. Even Stanley Diamond, whose opening sentence in *In Search of the Primitive* is "Civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home," begins his field report with a false confession: "From the beginning it was a star-crossed field trip. In August of 1959, accompanied by my wife and daughters. . . ." Here again is a new beginning that denies that another's is a real beginning:

> Lévi-Strauss admits to the relative poverty of his own ethnographic experience. His field work has been episodic and can be counted in months, rather than years; he has never lived in any primitive or archaic society for an extended period of time.

Thus, though Diamond's work constantly indicates its origin in the internal critique of Western capitalism, it nevertheless reproduces the pathos and suspicion that is the anthropologist's lot and method. Not Lévi-Strauss, but the poverty of experience, the lack of contact, is Diamond's target in this passage. Here, time is the dimension along which Lévi-Strauss suddenly appears with the false traveller and outside of society. It might just as well be presence of mind, depth of appreciation, interest, or space.

This method and the specific distrust it aims to clarify may stem from the anthropologist's special situation. It is not that the ethnologist deals with the concrete and so must constantly guard against empirical error, nor is it that he addresses the most complex concerns of social science. Rather, the discipline has always been the province of adventurers, missionaries, conquerers, and others whose work blends the political and the aesthetic within the continually invented traditions of the false society of the nation-state. And because it is taught among the sciences, and like them must be concerned for its reputation, the fact that it has always borne the home country's self-righteousness becomes an additional burden.

The anthropological field report (and this is, as always, the military sense of "field" and the businessman's sense of "report") aims at the completeness of texts, at both singularity and repeatability. It presumes to know an Other. Like all self-conscious pedagogic acts, it aims to conquer. In this intention the field report appears as Legend. Unlike Myth, which lives only in new and collective tellings, Legend is external to the social. It is something to be written, preserved, stored; it aspires to a perfection intolerable to praxis.

The innocence displayed in the field report, the Legend that confronts the reader with the discoverer's confidence, and the collegiality of the polemic that insists upon the relation of the report to a more general commentary on civilization itself, form the basis for the surprise that is the reader's inevitable predicament. Together, they turn what is obvious into a topic, thereby establishing debate as the medium of knowledge. It is obvious that the traveller carries a flag and that the possibility of travel has exploitation as its theme. The topic that surprises is

the temptation this traveller has to know others as less. The contemporary field report reckons with this temptation. To that extent, it reckons within a political discourse the terms of whose application and final direction can be displayed but not controlled.

Power and nature have always been the primal figures of anthropology. Therefore, its study begins with the fundamental distinction it finally and self-consciously demonstrates, that between the higher and lower. The reality to which the work testifies is not the concrete society studied but the territorial boundary that segregates "civil society" from the nature, human and otherwise, that lies beyond. With regard to boundary, a fundamental, informing fact that can only be challenged or obliterated by the laws that maps summarize, theory is essentially the knowledge of the Other, of a difference that is utterly secure and must serve as both beginning and end.

Thus, anthropology begins with a certainty of Otherness, a beyond to which one can point, a difference that can, in principle, be charted. This difference, which is enacted in the practice of citizenship before it is the object of the specialist's discourse, leaves the scientist with a choice: Either the display of difference invites reconciliation or it entails the calculation, manipulation, or management of unbridgeable distance. Either the quality of the Other, and hence one's self, is at stake or one is engaged in quantification and technical analysis. But the control of distance is, in the order of knowledge, subsidiary to judgment and possible reconciliation. Analysis must already have decided, in its application, that the "we" and the "they" can be brought into line, that difference can be overcome or at least overlooked. And it is territory that dictates the parameters of this decision. Crossing the boundary already places the burden upon the Other. Consequently, field reports either tell how others are like us such that some mediation of the conflict becomes necessary—learning their language, publishing their literature, exchanging personnel and goods, engaging in negotiations—or they display difference for the sake of the home society's self-justification.

In the case of the former, politics is implicated as a matter of State. In the case of the latter, politics is strictly internal and the text constitutes an apology for the home country's sociopolitical and economic order. Such an apology is, however, covert and usually appears as general theory illustrated with facts. This deception is not founded in the self-consciousness of the author, but in the structure of the object itself. The field report deals with specific others as instances of Otherness constituted by boundary, by all that is beyond the territorial bounds of the home country. It therefore provides an account that assumes but does not demonstrate the home country's contemporary order. This apology does not, then, appear as ideology. It might even appear as self-criticism or self-reproach. The Other's world may provide a glimpse of what civilization could be but for historical contaminations of speech, work, and organization. In such a case one learns of the nobility of the Other, but only in the abstract, as a pure praxis. The Other need not be cultivated or acknowledged—worked with—or even permitted to live.

In a world in which capital has denied the permanence of boundary, and labor is no longer the individuated productive effort of persons, territory has become an issue for the contemporary theory of society. Likewise, in a world in which conquest has shifted to the realm of economy, and where both knowledge and power are increasingly registered as technique, it has become necessary to distinguish the nation-state from society. And because of these shifts, the tension between the factual reference of anthropological writing and the writing itself has become overpowering. This tension goes back to that first recognition of the primitive with which both anthropology and the clarification of modern capitalism began.

Anthropology, particularly political anthropology, operates within the strategies and obligations of the contemporary discourses of power. Its truth lies in the trouble it makes rather than in the new facts it discloses. Criticizing civilization's total movement into the archaic world of the savage, anthropology intends to complete the critique of capitalist industrialization that begins in labor's struggle. It thereby reproduces, however, the very image of total community at home that was suspect before the anthropologist bought a ticket, assembled equipment and personnel, and raised pen to paper. The original suspicion, preceding anthropology, existing within the public discourse that science joins but does not initiate, is the suspicion of the nation-state itself. It is the suspicion that the home country is not a society but a division in which rule is external and participation compulsory: it is the suspicion that there are classes. And it is only with the acknowledgement of this suspicion, and the division that "society" hides, that we can begin to understand the origin of the fundamental categories of the science. In other words, *one already knows to look for the Savage before one discovers it.* One knows to look before one finds not because there is always someone beyond one's own world, but because the perfection of an already familiar type is always readily available. Anything, any cue, can indicate the image so long as that which bears the cue can be read outside the observer's own context: the perfection of aging appears in the small shifts of the flesh, that of the criminal in the single deed.

What, then, establishes the familiarity of the Savage? What distinction must already have been made before the representation of others becomes sufficiently unproblematic to allow for the simple recording of visits to strange places to constitute discoveries?

One can begin to answer this question by noticing the distinction, fundamental to Western philosophy and political and social economy, between purpose and activity, plan and execution, knowledge and application, work and interest, labor and capital. It is with regard to this distinction—at once ideological, theoretical, and practical—that Western social science finds the axis along which it locates all instances of the human for purposes of comparison and socialization. This axis is defined by the poles "rationality" (the idealization of decision in the interest of the private accumulation of wealth) and "primitive" (the idealization of

activity without purpose, predictable only with regard to external factors—rules, orders, etc.). The primitive includes all those elements of human association that neoclassical economics found dangerous to the market because not determined by monetary interest: family and regional loyalties, religion, interest in one's work rather than the sale of one's labor power, affection for those with whom one must bargain. The primitive marks the limits of the ideal market and the ideal State, and it establishes for theory a category of the human that is absolutely unassimilable, absolutely beyond the evolution of society in the direction of increased rationality, and absolutely before and against the State. In the early nineteenth century, this primitive referred to "the dangerous classes." In the twentieth, it refers to noninstitutional behavior, informal organization, particularism, collective behavior, and deviance.

The Savage is, then, an adequate representation of a primitive already familiar in the West. It represents those who are beneath society, before the State, those whose activity is without purpose and are therefore obsessed, compelled, or simply instrumental. The exoticism of the native is an illusion, exotic goods a distraction. Costume, artifact, attitude, and behavior are the marks borne by the native which draw attention away from the fact that the observer is bound to find indices of strangeness in order that the category *Savage* be applied without implicating its political origins. The marks called exotic draw attention beyond the bounds of territory just as does travel itself. The credibility of the field report lies, to a large extent, in its deployment of such marks so that this travel appears to be unlike any other travel, so that it is an event in the political economy of discovery.

The search for the primitive is the transformation of a domestic category into a wild one. The Other is domesticated in terms of its very wildness, while the domestic category is suppressed in its very appropriation as the knowledge of the utterly Other, against whom can be asserted, with a security assured by memory's failure, the societal unity that the State has always proclaimed. The contradictions are cast out as one feature of the mystification of exploitation that is the culture of the West.

Still, within this anthropological critique of Western civilization, so limited by its foundations, suspicion eventually turns more clearly against itself. To have begun with the dominance of capital and the State is not necessarily to end with it. Moreover, the mystification of exploitation upon which the distinction between rationality and the primitive is predicated is no longer secure. As the nation-state and its sociopolitical forms give way to world economy, the Savage loses its representational force. On the one hand, the construction of new nations through anti-colonial struggle and the increasing compartmentalization and territorial specialization of economic operations—interdependence within a world capitalist market—have reduced the distinctiveness of the exotic's marks. The political force of the Other supersedes its zoological and anthropological curiosity. But so does its commercial force. What had been found is now manufactured and takes its

place among the other indices of the pluralism of cultures that have been tentatively reconstituted as a world society by the rules of the world market. On the other hand, the search for cheap and weakly organized labor has given rise to a new consciousness of race and a new racial politics aware of literature's role in the justification of exploitation and oppression.

It is within these practices that Otherness, which remains the distinctive object of anthropology, and the suspicion of knowing Otherness, which remains the core of anthropological methodology, are transformed. And it is within these practices that knowledge is turned back upon itself, and hence upon its setting; it is in this way that the anti-critique that poses a challenge by wrestling with its own security becomes critique.

A recent book by Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*,[1] affords a glimpse of this ambivalently radical possibility for an anthropology that would still insist on its distinctiveness as a field of study. The title itself brings into critical juxtaposition the notion of human association and its history and the restrictive notion of rationalized domination. Clastres wishes to show the reason and creativity of the Brazilian Indians, at what he calls "the level of the group," as no less, and perhaps more, than the reason and creativity of the societies of the industrial West. He treats the orders of the Indian societies as the realization of a project, namely, the negation of precisely that which the West takes for granted: the State against the society it constitutes, the location of the political within a coercively sustained relation of command and obedience. In this way, Clastres not only condemns the modern understanding and use of the Savage, but shows the historical specificity and tension of the Western State. Such is his dual answer to the question with which his book begins: "Can serious questions regarding power be asked?" It is not the Indians who are the issue, but we who know them as our primitive.

Clastres grants that "the social cannot be conceived without the political. In other words, there are no societies without power" (p. 15). But that power need not be based upon coercion. The Indian societies demonstrate this by insisting, as a matter of societal practice, on a power founded in the association of equals rather than applied to society. From this Clastres concludes that "the political can be conceived apart from violence," that all societies are political whether or not they are State societies, that the model of political life that requires coercion reflects Western ethnocentrism rather than science. This model can therefore have no privileged application in political anthropology and cannot be used as a standard for grading societies according to degrees of "development." The political is "at the heart of the social," and this is where one must begin in order to define power.

Clastres interrogates the world not from the standpoint of its possible manageability, but from that of a critical interest in self-understanding within the

1. Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley and Abe Stein, New York, Urizen Books, 1977.

more general critique of domination. It is in the light of this project that one must interpret his initial claim that anthropology has substituted opinion for science. At face value, he seems to say that political anthropology has expressed bias and distorted fact, in contrast with science, which is beyond bias and protected from distortion through the application of scientific method. However, the overall thrust of his book, its exhaustion of various types of argument, its continual return to themes that arise from the critique of conquest and domination, and the very selection of topics, testify to the irony with which he uses the term *scientific*. When he speaks of the scientific failures of anthropology, he is not advocating positive science, but attacking, on its own terrain, the terms of anthropology's self-deception. The Indians exist for Clastres primarily because the Western comprehension and treatment of them has so clearly revealed that deception. The Indians are not First. Clastres indicates, however ambivalently, that to know Others is always to make representations. It is, he says, the order of the savage "against which looms the shape of political power in our own culture" (p. 3).

What is accomplished by knowing Others as primitive and hence subject to mechanism? What is accomplished by knowing Others as creative and hence acting in reason? It is, at the least, to know one's own world as an undertaking, as a possible Other. To ask a serious question about power is, ultimately, to show the reason for power as we know it, practice it, and are constituted by it. Clastres formulates this project, but he fails to go beyond the clarification and elaboration of its statement.

Nevertheless, he has intervened in a familiar political discourse by challenging one of its most fundamental recommendations, namely, that the State is "a compulsory association with a territorial basis. . . . The claim of the modern state to monpolize the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous organization."[2] The force of Clastres's argument lies in his refusal to accept that the absence of this State is identical with the prehistory of society, that it is the primary condition of the failure of primitive communities to develop an internal principle of historical development. Clastres's method differs from that of *Tristes Tropiques*, where the falsely innocent was already trapped and the truly innocent displayed at all turns. For Clastres, innocence is not the issue. He begins within the categories he wishes to challenge, as Marx began within the category of the commodity, and undermines them in their very use. In the process, he systematically reconstructs Indian society in such a way that reason, rather than need and rule, appears as its foundation. From categories "in complete accord with the objectives of white colonization" (p. 38), he moves to categories that challenge the basis of the colonizing societies.

One can agree with Clastres only if one acknowledges that the political does not necessarily rest upon a relation of command and obedience. Then one must be able to locate power even where it appears to be absent. In the particular case in

2. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons, New York, Free Press, 1947, p. 156.

point, one must show that the lack of powers of enforcement in the Brazilian societies does not imply a lack of power in the institution of chieftainship, that the absence of hierarchy is not the absence of coordination. On the other hand, equality does not, in itself, allow us to speak of society, the political, or history. One must find difference. Thus, Clastres's reconstruction of Indian society, his replacement of need and rule by reason, insists upon difference as that society's foundation. But that difference is not internal to the society itself, a difference of control or rank; rather, it is the difference between society and the State. The history of the Indian societies is that of their struggle against a State upon which their capacity to struggle, and therefore to be a society, nevertheless depends. Kinship and work—divisions of lineage and labor—are two of the constitutive divisions that haunt this project. For the Indians, the cooperative work in the rejection of authority never forgets its origins; it is self-conscious, reflexive. It preserves one difference—that found in working together—against another—the externality of the State. Clastres attempts to show that the relationship between the social and the political is a relationship between subject and mediation, is constructed by collective work, is produced rather than simply realized—is creative rather than mechanical—, is constantly chosen, and is constituted against the possibility of the external State.

Two procedures are involved in this. First, it must be shown that several peculiar features of chieftainship—the existence of certain chiefly advantages and disadvantages, the lack of sanctioning authority, and the obligation of the chief to speak without the right to be heard or the power to demand a hearing—are founded in reason rather than domination, custom, or mechanism. Second, it must appear that the relation of the political to the social represents a commitment and a history.

Clastres proposes to implement these procedures by taking the Indians seriously. This is the way in which he finds reason in action. This intention to appreciate is what separates his book from the literature in which the Indian societies appear as less. His first task is, then, to treat that literature as having proposed to take the Indians seriously and failed. This he does on the basis of evidence and the analysis of data that show the inapplicability of the classical conception of the primitive to the Brazilian societies, in particular those features of the primitive that leave no room for reason: subsistence economy, simple organization, isolation, predictable superstructure.[3] The image that these features

3. At one point, Clastres argues persuasively, on the basis of historical demography, contemporary ethnography, and early accounts of village life, military expeditions, and population movements, that the present sparseness of the population is not due to the continual regulation of populations of primitive communities by nature, but the result of a historical decline occasioned by the European invasion. Thus, his review of the evidence supports the conclusion that pre-Columbian America contained as many as eighty million people. The precipitous decline in the sixteenth century represents, then, the loss of one-fourth of the world's population. Present-day Indian societies are thus not instances of the historically resistent primitive but simply what remains.

rationalize is life governed by need and rule. It is an image coordinate with the classical images of the child, the Jew, the woman, and the schizophrenic.

But even if one successfully argues against the justifications for classifying the Indians as primitive, it is necessary to establish the reason and the creativity of the concrete practices of those societies. In beginning with chieftainship, Clastres again establishes his problem in its most immediately accessible form and in terms of the categories and expectations that he wishes to displace. One begins with the chief because he is higher. The paradox of the chief whose power lacks authority is predicated, then, upon an uncritical expectation. To find reason in this is, thus, not only to resolve the paradox but to challenge the expectation upon which it is based.

The chief arbitrates. He disposes of his goods. He speaks. He is polygamous. Taken simultaneously, what do these features of chieftainship reveal about power? First, they indicate that the chief is in a paradoxical relation with the institutions of society, in particular with the fundamental exchanges of goods, women, and words. For example, the chief is the orator; he must speak, but no one need listen. He speaks beyond the exchange of words. "The chief's discourse recalls, by its solitude, the speech of a poet for whom words are values before they are signs" (p. 37). The chief must also give of his goods until they are gone. This obligation, again, marks a lack of reciprocity at the level of material economy, for his gifts elicit no response. Nor are his wives the result of an exchange. The gift of women does not repay the chief's words or goods. Clastres concludes that it is "meant to sanction the social status of the holder of a responsibility established for the purpose of not being exercised" (p. 31). Two things follow from this: Power is not an event in time, an accomplishment, but a feature of structure. And, based as it is "on the good will of the group" (p. 28), power enjoys a singular relation with the elements of social exchange, with society. In fact, "the one called chief is the man in whom the exchange of women, words, and goods shatters" (p. 35). The political negates the social by denying exchange at the level of the group, and the social negates the political by isolating it and depriving it of authority.

But why is there power at all? Clastres acknowledges that the chief performs certain functions, but power is not the result of the need for coordination as such. Power, like nature, is prior to society. It expresses difference but does not resolve it. Society thus "apprehends power as the very resurgence of nature" (p. 31) and therefore nullifies it in its exercise. The chief is "the group's prisoner" (p. 36). The exchange of signs becomes the holding of pure values, making difference visible at the heart of the social.

The Indian societies are residential communities composed of a number of extended families. The chief intervenes at the level of their interaction and with regard to the terms by which they assert their identity. But he makes peace by persuasion only.

> Thus the social structure of the group and the structure of its power are seen to ratify, attract, and complete one another . . . it is because there is

> a central institution, a principal leader expressing the real existence of the community . . . that the community can permit itself . . . a certain *quantum* of centrifugal force that is actualized in each group's tendency to preserve its individuality (p. 47).

Equilibrium is a constant accomplishment rather than a state or an adaptation to nature. It is societies at work, reasoning together. "In the last analysis, the forces 'working' on these primitive societies aim, directly or indirectly, at securing an equilibrium that is constantly endangered" (p. 58) by the existence of components whose identity must nevertheless be maintained. It is in this sense that the Indian societies are not without history.

Because power displays a tension between society as a whole and difference, the problematic of power is reproduced at the level of the group in institutions other than chieftainship. And it is language and representation that discloses the tension. Torture, the technology of initiation, marks the body of each individual with the law. "Primitive law, cruelly taught, is a prohibition of inequality that each person will remember. Being the very substance of the group, primitive law becomes the substance of the individual, a personal willingness to fulfill all the law" (p. 156). The law is, therefore, not external to society; but the cruelly taught injunction shows that it might be.

Similarly, Clastres finds that "what makes the Indians laugh" is the tale of power gone wrong. The Shaman, feared in life, appears in the tale as determined and incompetent. His missions go awry; his desires contaminate his duty. Here, in speech, is the refusal of a difference that life enforces. And so it is, with the terms reversed, for song. The Guayaki hunter sings at night of his exploits, his courage, his accomplishments. But this hymn to the self is a denial of the interdependence that in fact exists among the hunters. No hunter may eat of his own kill; rather, all are united in consumption. In this union the sexes, distinct in their practices and signs, are brought together. The women, those of the basket, and the men, those of the bow, conjoin in the difference between consumption and production. There is, in this complex of song, practice, and representation the continual confrontation of difference with unity, and unity is always achieved against the possibility of difference. One lives only through the mediation of others, yet that mediation is refused in language. This desire to escape destiny is an opposition to society, but not in the interest of a State. The refusal of society is the refusal of State. It is a rejection of the dialectic of society and State from within the dialectic of individual and society.

The relation of power to speech is common to societies both with and without a State. But "if in societies with a State speech is power's right, in societies without a State speech is power's duty" (p. 130). For the Indians, the chief's power is not *what* he says but *that* he speaks. And similarly, the "power" of the individual appears only in speech. Clastres concludes that "primitive society is the place where separate power is refused, because the society itself, and not the chief, is the real locus of power" (p. 131).

Clastres, then, establishes the concrete historicity of the Western polity and its discourse of power. But in so doing he also shows that the extreme difference presented by the archaic does not indicate that there is nothing there. The Indian societies are not primitive in the sense that that term has come to mean for us. The Indians are not full with need and rule; nor are their collectivities immature, prehistoric, mechanical. "The history of peoples without history is the history of their struggle against the State" (pp. 185–6). This is their reason. "What the Savages exhibit is the continual effort to prevent chiefs from being chiefs, the refusal of unification, the endeavor to exorcise the One, the State" (p. 185).

The fundamental problem of this analysis is that in criticizing the notion of the primitive for the sake of a basic critique of Western capitalism, in establishing for political anthropology a relationship between knowledge and interest, Clastres has inadvertently reconstituted the primitive and thus lost the critical force of his inquiry. But this is not simply his *error. Society Against the State* reflects, as a whole, upon the presumed originality and independence of anthropology itself. It is no surprise that, having begun with boundaries and Otherness, Clastres's text returns to them in the end. Indian societies are not what we had thought them to be, but they are still Other. And moreover, we—the West as a totality—face the Indians, cruelly, graciously, or academically, but still as *we*. It does not matter that Clastres's primitive now appears as the better. Though it has taken on a moral character, the distance between us and them remains.

There is, on the other hand, no doubt that Clastres has, in his critique of political anthropology, placed the Western polity in historical perspective. Nor is his model of socialism, although not constructed in relation to the history of capitalism, simply a romance with the archaic, an idealization of the Savage. He has shown how it is possible to have society without the oppressive externalities of the State but nevertheless founded in reason.

Clastres has not, however, abolished the fundamental distinction between the rational and the primitive that, as we have seen, marks Western social science as ethnocentric at its core. He has simply reversed the order of value and used the distinction for a critical rather than an ideological purpose. The Indians reproach the West's ethnocentrism, its coercion, its exploitation. But they do so from the vast distance constituted by boundaries. But how have the Indians come to be selected for study? How have they come to fit so nicely into the category of the primitive? How has the problem of the Other come about? These are the decisive questions, and it is only by raising them that Clastres can deliver on the promise of critique. The Indians constructed by Clastres are still incomprehensible to us. Their reason is beyond us; indeed, his critique implies that reason in general is beyond us. This externalization of reason leaves the problem of unreason in the home country untouched, and the origin of the primitive remains entirely problematic. In fact reason, being external, assumes the status of the State that Clastres had hoped to call into question. It is Clastres himself who affirms the external, the difference, the standpoint of the judge beyond society and the law.

What, then, is this category of the primitive that Clastres has constructed behind his own back? What does it conceal? He proposed to displace the image of the isolated, desperate, illiterate, autistic Savage, particularly the traces of that image that abide within contemporary anthropology. This he did by answering each claim with evidence: The conditions normally thought to restrict reason do not apply; the range of Indian thought is considerable; Indian societies produce surplus; their linguistic practices indicate societal memory; their chief's lack of authority does not constitute the lack of power. Still, one could answer that the image remains intact. What his evidence has shown is only that the primitives are more complex than one had thought, just as the study of other species has shown that their lives are more social than had been presumed.

Clastres has addressed indices of the primitive, but not the image or even the concept. What is this image beyond its indices? It is the utterly full, the complete. The primitive is that which is full of impulse and rule, that which lacks room for creative work. The subsidiary images of this fullness abound, and they are, as Foucault has said, consistently found in connection with discipline, control, and the possibility of disorder. The primitive consumes, is gratified or not, acts always in the midst of obsession or need, and repeats itself again and again. Here is the dance that is utterly expressive, that pushes energy to the limits of the skin, the ritual that compels a total accord, the work that lacks all but a glimmer of relfection, the artifact that has its precise place in the totalizing tabular order of the primitive's world. This primitive is not simply the reduced, the urgent, the restricted—all categories of data. It is, rather, the utterly full, and it is that which remains when the evidence is finally debated.

Clastres has reconstituted the primitive as the very fullness of reason. In taking the Indians seriously, he has made them serious. No element is problematic; no moment unaccountable. There is no release from sense. Consequently, one cannot find one's self among them. They remain unimaginable, or merely imaginable. In the opening passage of the book, Clastres points out that to find power everywhere is not to find it at all. But the same can be said for reason: to find it in every moment of action is to leave no room for its identification and hence its value. He has provided us with a scenario, with a reproducible coherence; but it is itself mechanical, beyond practice.

It is not that Clastres has written in the form of Legend; he has, instead, written about a Legend; his Indians are strictly Legendary. They are reasonable both in fact and in principle. In this they are not the old traveller's primitives. But they are still replete with a definite fullness. What now becomes exotic is dignity, seriousness, rather than habit and artifact. The strangeness of the Indian remains, not as the strangeness of the foreign, which allows for learning, but as the strangeness of another order of being. This radical disconnection that Clastres displays is at the level of daily life, where action is not simply reasonable but problematic. As a result, one does not learn about reason but about the Indians. One does not learn how reason is a problem in the home country, how it is

connected with interest, what bearing it has on comprehending society from the standpoint of class struggle, how it relates to domination. One learns nothing of one's self.

But this had to be the case. Clastres began with anthropology, with the objectivity of the boundary and the Other. To achieve the radicalism of his aims, he would first have had to draw attention to the weakness of his own categories. However, that would have reduced the practical force of his argument, of its capacity to challenge beliefs about the primitive that serve the interests of conquest and domination. Clastres's method requires the construction of types, and thus the exaggeration of boundaries, identities, and names. Religion, family, production, consumption are not simply analytic terms for Clastres. They locate the real.

Finally, Clastres adopted an unnecessarily restrictive definition of "taking the Indians seriously," one that could not but reproduce the very image he had hoped to displace. As a result, his method can only produce an appreciation for the plight of the Indians and their mission. But it cannot produce an appreciation for them so that knowing them is a condition of knowing ourselves. Knowing others is an act of appropriation. This does not mean that we should not know others as Clastres does. It simply means that we cannot know them both in this way and, at the same time, know them in their spontaneity, creativity, and internal incomprehensibility, as we know ourselves. It means that we cannot truly appreciate them, which is what Clastres wants us to do, and what we must do if we are to find in his analysis the kernel of a genuine critique of Western capitalism.[4]

The primitive originates what the class-dominated society knows as its distinctive danger. It is the representation of all those features of life that the market cannot tolerate. It refers to those who are wild in the face of disipline, beneath administration, govered by the crowd, given to affections for concrete others or objects, and concentrated in need. It refers to the negation of "free labor" and therefore of the market itself. But it is a danger that theory and conquest have displaced beyond capitalism's boundaries. In the very externality of its sign—the Savage—the concept suppresses its origin and its significance for critque. In falling prey to this suppression, Clastres has left us with the sense of an error discovered and corrected, and with a model that abstractly demonstrates the possibility of communism. This is a real contribution, but it leaves us too far from history and ourselves.

4. To have already identified institution or action is either to have found something that one already knows as an instance of reason or mechanism, something about which this ambiguity is already established, or it is to have found something that one already knows is typically an occasion for reason to do its work. This might be something decisively strange. Clastres fills his account with articles that are strange, articles whose very strangeness is what we already know to be an invitation to reason.

Robert Morris. Untitled. *1975–6. (Installation, Sonnabend Gallery, New York.)*

Robert Morris: Mirage, Reflection (A Small Tribute to Vision)

OCTAVIO ARMAND

translated by CAROL MAIER

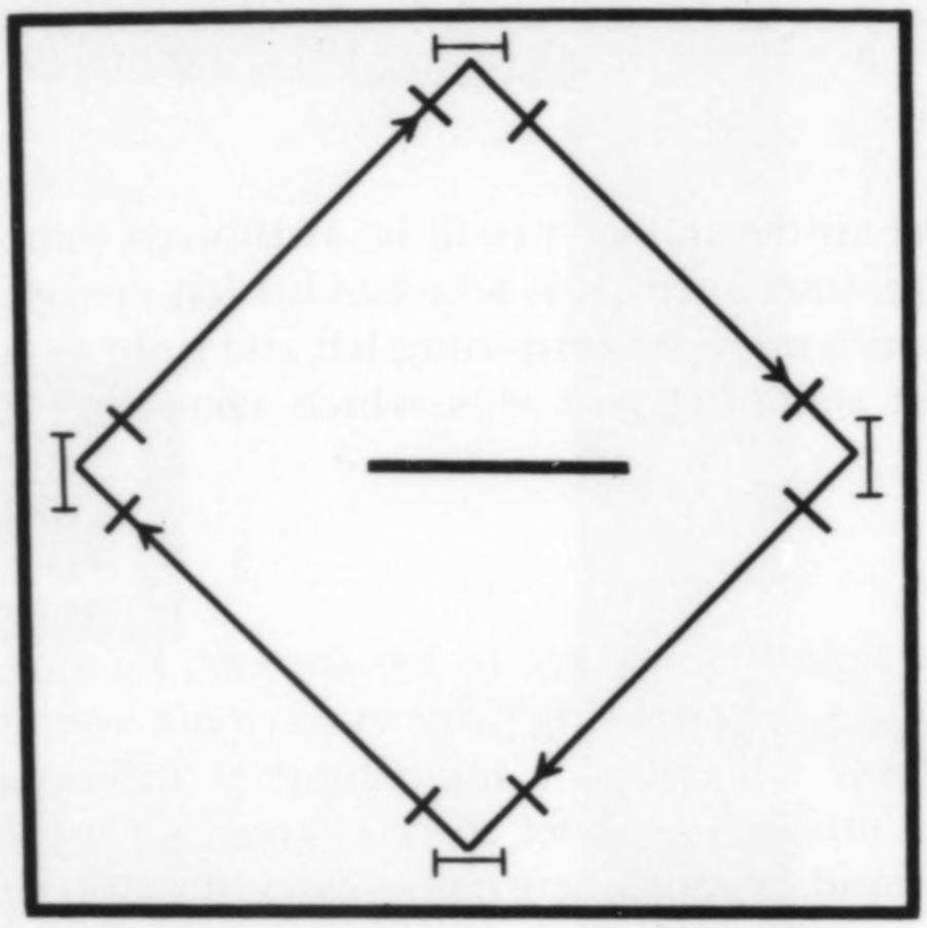
> And this effect in the mirror would be as though someone who was looking at you, someone that is who has his left eye opposite to your right, were as by a miracle transposing left and right as is the case with letters used in stamping and wax which takes the impress of the cornelian.
>
> Leonardo da Vinci
> *Optics*

1. Sight is constantly straining to see the eye. Because the eye is always absent from what it sees. The missing piece in the space assembled by vision. The mirror is thus defined indirectly. A nonredundant definition: indicate what's necessary to what's missing in order to be claimed by incompletion. Naming would be useless: a fraud. Because mere names can not pull relations out of the air. Names arise from over-representation: contrast, conclusion.

2. Starting with the eye, a definition of the mirror excludes all nonessentials. It even excludes the mirror, which is the *eye observed*. The mirror is in the eye. Velázquez suggests all this in *Las Meninas*. Duchamp suggests it in *Etant Donnés*. So does Robert Morris in an environmental sculpture from the series *Sight Line Pieces* exhibited in New York City (Sonnabend Gallery, May 1976).

3. A photographic reproduction of the assemblage would be impossible. As a function, a movement, it can not be *explained* but must be experienced. Perspective as spectacle, apogee. The work: an act initiated/repeated by vision.

I will attempt a description. A large room not completely divided by a wall (= axis) which occupies the center, permitting circulation: squaring the circle and vice-versa. Four mirrors (⟝⟞) and eight metal frames (/). A symmetrical arrangement: by looking (→) at a mirror from any one of the frames, everything but the viewer is reflected in that mirror and successively in all the others. The mirror as a negation of the mirror. The eye erasing the eye. A mirror to get lost in, like Alice. A devastating application of the principle that Leonardo sets forth in *Acoustics:* "The note of the echo is cast back to the ear after it has struck, just as the images of objects strike the mirror and are thence reflected to the eye. And in the same way as these images fall from the object to the mirror and from the mirror to the eye at equal angles, so the note of the echo will strike and rebound within the hollow where it has first struck, at equal angles to the ear."



4. "The mirror is the master of painters." This phrase—conclusion—is Leonardo da Vinci's. Tradition recalls another phrase—another conclusion—which is no less emphatic although very different. "The image should stand out from the painting." It is well known that Velázquez did not forget Pacheco's advice. In *Las Meninas* the image stands apart from the painting. But it is suggested, as a reflection, in the mirror that occupies the center of the canvas. The image, then, is outside the painting and at its center. A mirror draws and suggests

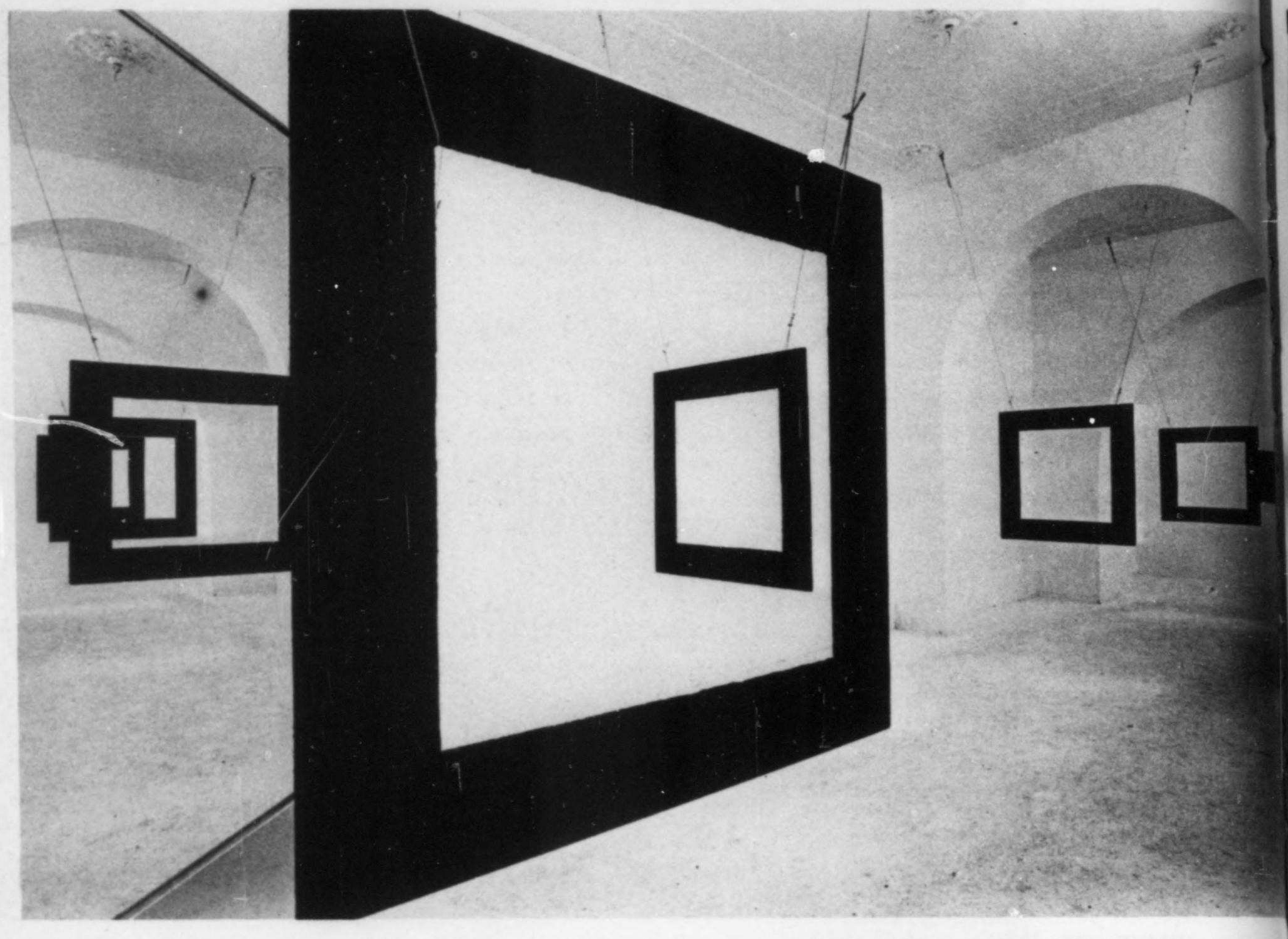
what the artist suggests without showing. The mirror is an accomplice to a negation at the same time it is the negation of that negation. A dialectic of surfaces. Circle. Da Vinci concludes that the mirror is the master of painters. The master of Velázquez recommends that *the image stand out from the painting* and his disciple resolves the enigmatic negation of the mirror by placing a mirror (= the image) in the center of his painting. Morris *breaks this mirror* with his assemblage. Because in effect the image is outside not one but two (and then eight) frames which are also outside the image which in fact is not in any of the four mirrors. Morris sums up and exhausts two phrases (and two phases), two conclusions, putting eight frames around four mirrors and an image which is unreciprocated vision going in circles. To circle: hand down/over surfaces. A theory of surfaces against contemplation.

5. Trompe l'oeil/Renaissance perspective elevated to absurdity. Not the famous hall of mirrors in an amusement park. There form is exalted, deformed, exaggerated as it watches itself. Teratology in cahoots with an indiscrete narcissism. In Robert Morris's hall of mirrors, vision looks in vain for its reflection; form wants to see itself multiplied, exaggerated, and it feels cheated in one mirror after another, reduced to a disquieting absence. Vision activates a circular visualization. The eye is a sixth sense: two eyes times four mirrors equals zero. Because it all comes to an exorcism of vision.

6. The mirrors: an unconvincing symmetry. Not a rhetoric of vision but a metaphor. What's more: an ellipsis. Rebounding/repeating, the eye collaborates in its systematic revocation. The mirrors are eyelids: closed in vision. A glance is not returned: there is a sweeping eradication of appearance and amazement. Glass eyelids. Don't be caught looking. Narcissus again and again.

7. Beyond the eye vision breaks down. Dies in its own useless, catastrophic apogee. Exteriorized: terrorized. Morris is not a Trojan. His four mirrors, the hooves of a horse *invisible in its most absolute visibility*. His tribute to vision is an optic strategy: a trap. A tempting, playful Medusa, you need a mirror to see his mirrors. It's best to close your eyes tightly or use a cleverly oblique glance, as when you (don't) watch a dangerous eclipse. Because, in these mirrors, the sun tends to be absolute: to see oneself seen = to go blind. Because here the sun tends to be totalitarian and we can't sustain our vision. Not in four mirrors. Not even in one. We witness nothing more than our own exclusion. Withoug belonging to us, the mirrors are our only authentic (?) vision.

8. From Descartes's *Dioptric:* "First, because it is the soul that sees, and not the eye, and because the soul sees immediately only by the intervention of the brain, whence it happens that madmen and sleepers often see, or think that they see, diverse objects which are not yet before their eyes. . ."

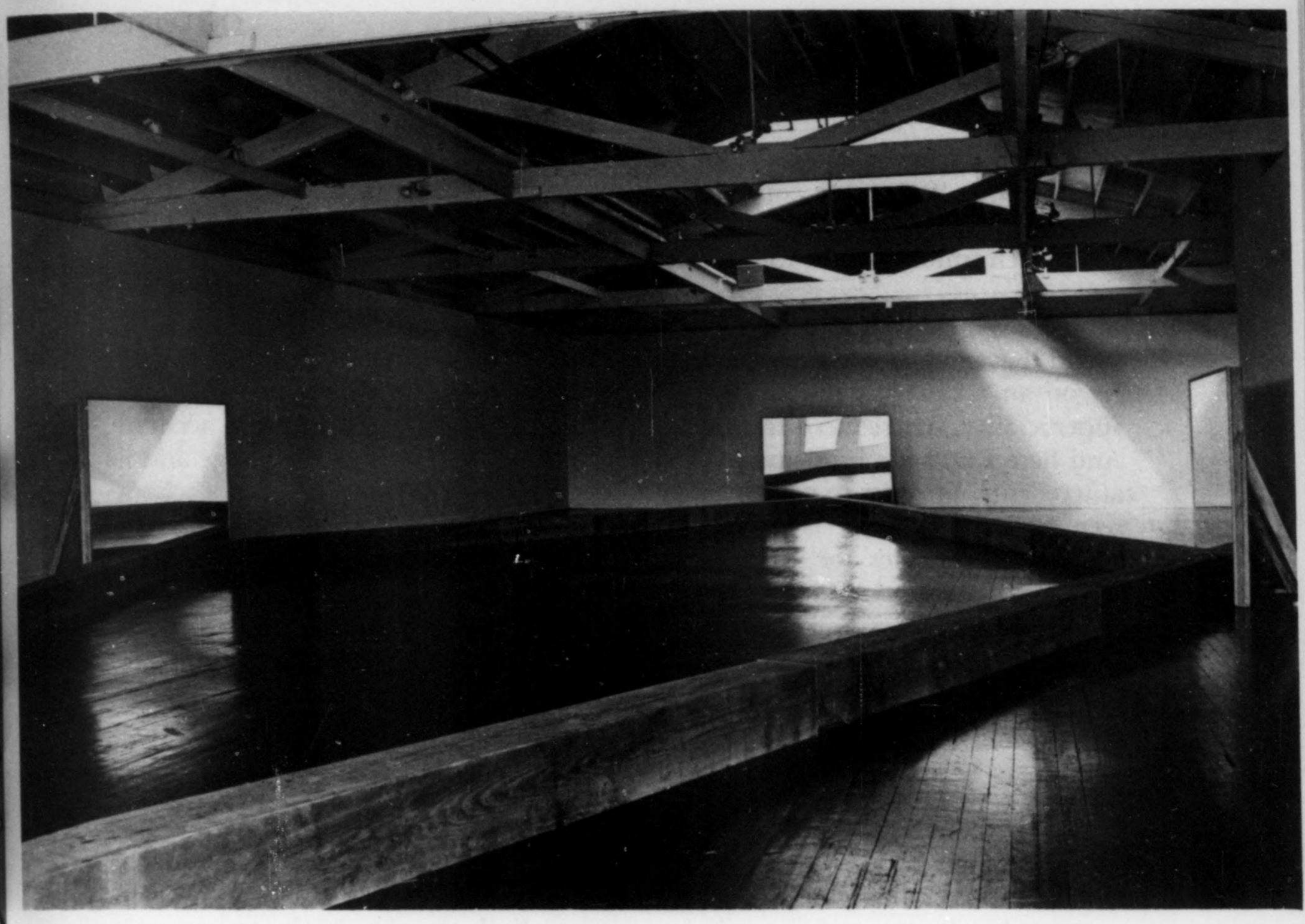


Robert Morris. Untitled. *1975. (Installation*
D'Alessandro-Ferranti Gallery, Rome.)

Robert Mo
Center for

9. Escher: everything's form. Cage: everything's sound. Morris: everything's eye but the eye. We arrive at the necessary satanic disorder of our senses not by losing our way on a map but by getting lost in a mirror. A paradox times four. Not an existential distraction: a presence dimmed/dispersed. A question of redundant precision. It's not form that the mirror brutalizes or exaggerates but the mirror itself, and thanks to that hara-kiri of reflected surfaces, vision is more seductive when it tries futilely to see itself, withdrawing, retracting with every attempt at self-affirmation.

10. In *Un Chien Andalou* there is a scene that is doubly difficult for memory. Difficult to remember because it's chilling. Difficult to forget because it's so accurate. A man (who is a man (who is an actor (who is the co-director) slices an eye. Vision is viewed: a screen emptied onto the screen. Morris's project is no less ambitious than Buñuel's although—paradoxical as it may seem when dealing with an even more exacting excess of visibility—it turns out to be less obvious and much less disturbing. Morris tries to slice vision. His mirrors are blades.



Robert Morris. Untitled. *1977. (Installation, Portland Center for the Visual Arts.)*

11. The mirrors in Morris's exhibit empty our eyes. Disoriented, but also paralyzed, we try to reorganize the world, to be at its hub in line with the venerable habits of our egoism. We are indisputably Westerners. But for a few seconds, in which a simultaneity of spaces seems to erase time and duration, we have become—have been made—surprising and surprised works of art. The *voyeurs* are statues and they give in to the strangeness of a vision which is their own but above all another's. A vision at once empty and analytical, hostile. Curiosity as a reversible phenomenon. We verify that, in essence, being a statue is not having eyes. Immobility is logical, mathematical: a consequence. The statue, sentinel of an eternally defeated world.

12. What does this absence of eyes mean? We could resort to banality: mirror as castration. Anagnorisis, sphinx, Oedipus: the classicism of guilt. But there is no recognition achieved in these mirrors; it is frustrated by the impossibility of vision: the more we look the less of ourselves we see. If there is guilt it is entirely gratuitious or it deals with a presentiment that does not demand clarification.

Guilt without recognition. What's more, a generalized, trivial guilt. The victim defines himself through complicity with another victim in a world withdrawn from sacrifice: immolation is immoral. Hall of mirrors: metaphor of a vicious circle. Perception/persuasion as artful optometry.

13. An exhibitionism of guilt. An exhibit of exhibitionism. The tragedy of a world that neither feels nor understands tragedy, that—by insisting from complicity on an art every day more superficial—finally receives the tribute of its own superficiality. Art reduced to optical laws that deny vision. Absurd but accurate. And here I find the fundamental difference between Morris's assemblage and its antecedents. In order to perceive this difference of visibility on the part of what is seen, we rely on objects as *variations* and on a minimal but discriminating bibliography. Notes for a museum of vision. For example, there are excellent *versions*—to say studies or interpretations would not sufficiently distinguish between those pages and many others—of two works already mentioned in this context. Of *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things* by Michel Foucault. Of *Etant Donnés* in *Apariencia desnuda* by Octavio Paz. Variations and versions: orbits tenaciously out of orbit which contribute to a necessary phenomenology of vision.

14. In Egyptian mythology the world springs from the eye, which confers reality on the world. Open, it creates day; closed it creates night. But the eye as epistemology is no less vulnerable than other systems of logic. This is well known by statues and the blind. It is suggested with sufficient sagacity by certain tormented and/or tormenting tributes to vision. Each one of us begins to suspect it when we look for ourselves in surfaces either too profound or too superficial. Highly polished surfaces that disquiet by proclaiming, multiplying, denying us. Perplexity, laughter, irritation are symptoms of an inner bristling: the eye's urge to monumentalize exhibits us face forward but forces us to look askance.

Mind over Matter

HOLLIS FRAMPTON

(. . . pour les six inconnus . . .)

1. That Sometime Did Me Seek

PICTURE A SHAPE within a mass of living rock, as of one seated, facing forward, eyes peering, hands extended and cramped as if to grasp at two points (a third of its circumference apart) an imaginary wheel.

DO NOT FORGET the generous equation that rules certain lines of finite ambition:

X↑N+A↓$1*X↑(N−1)+A↓$2*X↑(N−2)+ . . . +A↓$(N−1)*X↑$PRI+A↓$N*X=F,

where F amounts to nothing. We shall calculate the first order only, and plot for small positive values of X.

HE BEGINS WITH A FEAR of tunnels. By degrees he revises this conviction, augments it, castigates it, until he is afraid to enter tunnels. As he matures, and the eventuation of every worst case seems progressively more and more likely, he achieves a further refinement: he is afraid to pass through tunnels. Finally, he finds elegant a regimen wholly organized around a need to avoid tunnels. Accordingly, in old age, he devotes himself to seeking out tunnels, but only in order to put them behind him as swiftly as possible, accelerating precipitously as he goes into the dark.

AT LAST, UNWITTINGLY, on a bright April afternoon in Clear Creek Canyon, he passes through a final tunnel. Moments later, entering yet another at terminal velocity, he sees a darkness unrelieved by any radiant vanishing point. Supposing this particular tunnel to be endless, or else that it must end abruptly on an invisible, flat, blind, solid face, he utters within his mind, for the first time, an unspecified desire to be, yes, absolutely elsewhere. Thus discharged in one

indivisible instant, the accumulated force of six decades of evasion cascades, avalanches, cataracts, *simultaneously* destroys his body, and replicates it, at a more than sufficient lateral displacement.

PRODIGIOUSLY, EVERY VIBRATION that has cooperated in his physical person interlaces perfectly within a seam of basalt inside the buttress of an arrogant young mountain. From this moment he perceives nothing . . . not even that he does not perceive. Alive, for a time, as he has ever been, he dies from a defect of the imagination in the end.

> [*Given certain foregoing rigors, it is asserted that they share among themselves, and with none other, a peculiar property, namely that each, unaided, may tessellate a plane of infinite extent, requiring for this task nothing more memorable than vigorous and perfect replication, indefinitely sustained. That every plane of the world is not, by now, fully populated by one or another suggests a failure of desire, or a delapidation of opportunity, or that something eats them; or else, a nearly complete fracture, loss, dereliction of habitable (that is, conceivable) planes, such that most of them expired from loneliness before the sun coalesced. Mercilessly wanting any gift for*[106] *boredom,*[107] *they*[108] *may*[109] *simply*[110] *have*[111] . . .]

2. Stalking on Naked Foot

SUPPOSE A SHAPELESS gown of some soft, sheer fabric that covers a torso softer still. Suppose a further confusion: that the stuff half hides, along a smooth curve extending from the iliac crest to the spinal insertion of the lowermost rib, a stripe of coarse fur, alternately banded orange and black.

DO NOT FORGET the brief proud equation:

$$V = e^3,$$

which we shall solve for a pair of small positive values of e, each slightly larger than the other, plotting isometrically.

SHE THOUGHT SHE had finished her education in England. She came home to the plantation above Trincomalee. After the party she went for a tipsy stroll in the moonlight. In the warm evening, she removed her clothing, silently tossing away

each garment along the garden path. The tiger, after due contemplation, devoured her, carefully, to the last scrap and the last drop. There was no pain at all, then. After a flushed, vertiginous period, she found herself reconstituted, entire, within the tiger's magnificent body, point upon point . . . except for a few points that caused her no particular embarrassment but occasioned, in her host, a certain brute puzzlement. She experienced superb pleasures, exquisite pleasures, glorious pleasures.

SHE WAYLAID A SIX year old boy by the village well and ate most of him, and then lapped up the unspilt water in his pail for good measure. She followed the musk of a tigress in heat, and mated with her two dozen times in one afternoon, savagely tasting the dry hair at her nape. She attacked a hunting rajah, clawing her way up the elephant's side toward his palanquin till a smart British captain opened her left flank with a rifleshot. Her host hid, moaned, licked, panted while she tried to retch from the agony of it. The wound healed to a pink, wide, voluptuous scar. She was captured.

IN HER CAGE in Regent's Park, she paced for long years the pattern of an hourglass; let out, during high Summer, into a moated lawn, she patrolled a space no larger, inscribing her twisted sign of endlessness on the grass. She slept a great deal, and lived on horseflesh, tepid water, and a gruel that encouraged worms. One night, in a delusion, the tiger, bored and senescent, disintricated itself and crawled away. In the morning, their keeper found a dead tiger, its gaze rigidly averted, beside a sleeping woman curled in the damp immensity of her own mane. She was pale, and quite naked. There were uncertainties, to be sure, surrounding these three creatures. For one of them, all amazement had come to an end; and for another, astonishment had only begun.

> [. . . *drifted into terminal exasperation when living matter first demonstrated its notorious tendency to imitate whatever it is not. Once in a while, the moist perennial breath of consciousness rehydrates a few shriveled specimens. (Some have argued that it is always* the same one; *but two or more of each have occasionally been seen sharing common boundaries, and even mentality cannot remain beside itself for long.) I, myself . . . by design, and at a perfectly appropriate age . . . resuscitated a good number of figures of the third kind, inscribed within circles. Now I am seven times as old, and the delight of that moment persists, undiminished: I sustain it by constructing*[217] *another,*[218] *from*[219] *time*[220] *to*[221] *time.*[222]]

3. Within My Chamber

ASSUME AN INTERSECTION (hot wires raging behind cheap optics) of roughly collimated beams, refracted or rereflected by lacquered steel and specular nickel, diffracted in a fine rain, crossing and recrossing upon a corpse, supine on the drenched pavement, bloodless, hardly disarrayed. Two yards away, a driver still gapes through the accidental star in his windshield at a steaming knot of metal that was recently an automobile. A pair of bewildered ambulance attendants, along with twice as many sweating policemen, have tried, for nearly an hour . . . with no success at all . . . to lift the inert body to a stretcher.

DO NOT FORGET the inventory of powerful and delicate methods for performing a variety of operations upon such matrices as:

$$A = \begin{vmatrix} N & N & N & N \\ N & N & N & N \\ N & N & N & N \\ N & N & N & N \\ N & N & N & N \\ N & N & N & N \end{vmatrix} \quad \text{and,} \quad B = \begin{vmatrix} \alpha & \beta & \gamma & \delta \\ \epsilon & \zeta & \eta & \theta \\ \iota & \kappa & \lambda & \mu \\ \nu & \xi & o & \pi \\ \rho & \sigma & \tau & \upsilon \\ \phi & \chi & \psi & \omega \end{vmatrix},$$

where N=0, and $\alpha, \beta, \gamma \ldots \omega > 0$, from which we shall select only two of the simplest, satisfying ourselves in the calculation of (A+B) and (A*B); we must hesitate (until a less sociable moment comes) to dwell on the graphic consequences of this act.

PRONOUNCED DEAD on arrival. Male, caucasian or eurasian, between thirty-five and fifty years of age. Clothing new, evidently worn less than a single day. The deceased affected no ornamentation, and carried no papers, money, or any other personal items whatever. Police report indicates nothing found within a radius of 100 yards. Length 1 meter 65 centimeters. Absolute mass, stripped, 720 kilograms exactly: about thirty-one times predicted value for physique. Very mild contusion of left thorax with partial fracture of three lowermost ribs, associated with collision impact. No identifying marks or scars of any sort, internal or external, either surgical or traumatic in origin. A rare instance of featureless skin, totally hairless (excepting the head, axillae and pubis) and congenitally lacking friction ridges on hands and feet: this man left no fingerprints. Slight degenerative calcification in the minor bones of both ankles, but metatarsal arches surprisingly undeformed. All chemistries within normal limits, without sign of alcoholic or other toxemia. Gastrointestinal tract empty. The only perfect set of teeth I have ever seen during several decades as a practitioner in forensic medicine.

AN UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCE precludes customary documentation in this case: photographic staff has mislaid or misfiled gross external records, and reports inability to retrieve them after the most diligent search. I would note a subjective impression: this person was so remarkably nondescript that I have had trouble remembering the face even while examining it. And I can recollect thousands.

THE LIST COMPRISES some 5,040 items, and it is complete. Of these, one is jejune, and three more are also explicable. If my hypothesis is correct, acquisition dates may be approximated through microscopic assay of the fibrous connective tissue that progressively encysted each object. (In any case, the histological evidence is now obliterated.) By this reckoning, the oldest is a pair of souvenir cufflinks (paste set in brass) found, badly corroded, in the pleural space just beneath the Position of Carina. Thereafter, following a hiatus of years, the collection acquires immediate distinction. Each single thing is exquisite, beyond price, and crafted throughout in platinum, gold, palladium, iridium, or the most durable of precious stones. The largest is a *ting* of the early Chou, weighing 4,096 grams, long missing from the Ostasiatiska Sammlingarna in Stockholm, which enclosed the pericardium; the smallest, a Thracian tableau of the Graces carved in high relief from a single emerald the size of a bean, was lodged in the right sphenoid sinus. A ruby-encrusted Renaissance lady's dagger, lost from the Vatican, lay horizontally on the left side in the ninth intercostal space, while a Cellini bishop guarded the prostate. But not all are outright works of art. The frames of Jeremy Bentham's spectacles straddled a renal vein; and I found the tiny porcelain dish (soon to be returned to the Panthéon in Paris) into which the Curies distilled the first trace of radium, nestled behind a tonsil. The reader is invited to consult the exhibits for further details. If this investigation has occasioned a most unusual collaboration between theoretical pathologists and art historians, I am nonetheless obliged to state that no one has offered a reasonable explanation for the physical presence of such a vast inventory at its implanted sites. The nameless deceased was, in a word, a walking museum.

WORTHLESS DIAGNOSTICS REMAIN to be accounted for. Rings of glass fragments imbedded in either iris (radiographs are appended) have recently been recognized by S. Gobind, an assistant in this laboratory, from police photographs made at the scene, as reproductions *in miniature* of the shattered headlights of the vehicle involved; an aluminum ignition key, which the operator had been unable to produce, was discovered within the medulla oblongata, in a position indicating severe respiratory disruption at the highest level. Therefore, cause of death was certified to be ingestion, by unknown means, of a foreign substance. A determination of suicide was urged and returned. Legal counsel then brought an unprecedented motion: that the hospital be awarded salvage rights in the remains. Consequently, there is to be a spectacular series of auctions. Only today, armed guards conveyed those artifacts found within the cranium, from the morgue to the gallery, in a strongbox. Since it was very heavy, they took turns carrying it.

[. . . Of the three kinds, the first (or least) displays the most numerous qualities; but all of these are trivial, possibly excepting one cunning resemblance or recollection. Several of them taken together, such that each lies adjacent to two others, with each contributing one vertex to a common indivisibility, make one of the third kind. Moreover, some of the first kind, arranged so that each is adjacent to three others, describe a volume, the number of whose faces is the same as the number of edges (or corners) belonging to a figure of the second kind; and two such volumes, placed precisely face to face, describe yet[328] another,[329] the[330] number[331] of[332] whose[333]. . .]

4. Her Arms Long and Small

PROJECT, IMAGE FREE, in something more opaque than darkness, a human voice, a persuasive, modulated female alto speaking, to the inner ear alone, from some epicenter in the network of impenetrable determinacies out of eyeshot, breathing those very intimacies always left unsaid in the breathless moments of intimacy, patiently, with the prodigious craft of one who must do all with a single instrument, but most arousing in its annihilation of that same absence its presence wantonly invokes, announced by the ringing of a bell, nocturnally, for a year.

DO NOT FORGET that a determinant of order n is a number D formed of n^2 numbers a_{ij} (elements) set into a square table composed of n rows and n columns as follows:

$$D = \begin{vmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & a_{13} & \dots & a_{1n} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & a_{23} & \dots & a_{2n} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & a_{33} & \dots & a_{3n} \\ \dots & \dots & \dots & \dots & \dots \\ a_{n1} & a_{n2} & a_{n3} & \dots & a_{nn} \end{vmatrix} = \Sigma\,(-1)^{k} \times a_{1\alpha}\, a_{2\beta} \dots a_{n\nu},$$

where the sum is extended over all possible n! permutations $\alpha, \beta, \dots, \nu$ (2) of the numbers 1,2, . . . ,n; the sign "+" or "−" before each summand is the same as that of $(-1)^k$, where k is the number of inversions in the corresponding permutation. Setting calculation aside, we dare to expect (without knowing exactly why!) that this definition, or perhaps another growing from it, can comfort us in our present

misery and grief; or, better yet, that we may get from it some warmth during such a calamity as we can only foresee.

HE LIVED INCONSPICUOUSLY, then, his resources allowing him to do whatever he pleased, but very little else. The tireless daylight sustained his obscurity: after sixteen years, the author of *Reflections on Goldbach's Theorem* and *Concerning Inelegant Proofs*, still in retreat from the sorrow he had brought to his beloved science, recoiled again as he planned its reconstruction. Every afternoon, he sat at a kitchen table he had hauled into the shade of a primitive lime tree, and added a paragraph or so to *Principles of Simultaneity*, working with methodical discipline toward that moment when there should be nothing left for him to do. When the limes ripened, he revised his manuscript, annually mixing astringent juice with quinine and gin. Among themselves, his neighbors called him *el Chicharon*, and imagined that he dined on armadillo; alone in his workroom, he called his small digital computer *el Salvador*. On shelves alongside it, popular accounts of natural catastrophes inundated the accustomed Mallarmé and Babbage. Sleep beguiled him with dreams of diving in clear water. One night, fathoms down, his cool wet telephone rang and rang. On the anniversary of that moment, when it did not, he waited, grimaced, waited, and then uncorked the unmistakable champagne. Finally, in a spasm of irony, he uncradled the handset . . . and heard, for the first time, a question and a cry.

A CONTINENT AWAY, the superintendent accepted the bribe with a smirk. A dozen businesses had gone bankrupt here. The telephone depended from a cable as long as the room: she paced while she talked. The receiver dangled from its helical cord; listening, he heard his own dog bark, at home. Sandals, a thin cornflower jumpsuit, and a single light undergarment . . . clothing appropriate to this vile weather . . . were tossed on a chair; cigarettes and a lone key lay on the desk. In a canvas bag, he found a pear, a scrap of quadrille-ruled paper bearing, on opposite sides in a large hand, the words "GET LOVELACE" and his own telephone number, another key, a copy (in blackletter) of David Hilbert's address to the Vienna Congress in 1900, overpowered by massive scholia in red ink, two pencils, and a sheaf of notes and equations. It was as she had said.

SPECIALIZING IN TIME, he had treated space as a contingent subset. She knew better; for better or worse, she had tested her knowledge. Now her thought and its sensations, conducted almost at the speed of light, shared with uncountable messages a space reconstituted from second to second; her body, no more than a trace impurity in the immense copper web, sustained its life in switch closures and fluctuating voltages. The cause of their present desperation lay in a bedevilment of novice algebraists: an error in the sign of a single quantity. To extricate her, they must reverse all other signs, repolarizing sacred physical constants.

HE CORRUPTED ANATOMISTS, cartographers and electricians, mapping her locations from Klickitat to the Outer Banks, from the Santa Ynez to Truro. For those tired and angry intervals when all was lost between them but affection, he risked indictment as a criminal nuisance, prattling sweet nothings to exchanges in Moline, Illinois or Coeur d'Alene, Idaho or Silver Plume, Colorado. The procedure strained his grasp of topology, and warmed the cockles of his heart.

HER FEARLESS EXPERIMENT transformed her: a creature of probability had become a child of algorithm. Nevertheless, one fine evening, after long calculation, he got her number. A voice in the dark, impossibly near at last, answered: "Hello?".

> *[. . . faces is the same as the number of sides (or angles) belonging to a figure of the third kind. Nevertheless, it is not true that the surfaces of this last volume, unfolded upon a plane in any manner that pleases you, will compose a figure of the third kind, even though both are made up of the same number of figures of the first kind; for this may only be done in one certain way. Several figures of the second kind, so arranged that each lies adjacent to four others, describe a volume, the number of whose faces is the same as the number of edges[439] (or[440] vertices[441]) belonging[442] to[443] a[444] . . .]*

5. How Like You This?

THINK OF A FRAME house in Saskatchewan, demolished as by a meteor. Think that there is something liquid, unspeakable, red within its wreckage.

DO NOT FORGET the tractrix, remote cousin of the catenary, governed by the equation:

X = A*(AR COSH(A/Y))±SQRT(A↑2−Y↑2); or by:
X = A*LN(A±SQRT(A↑2−Y↑ 2))/Y±SQRT(A↑2−Y↑2),

which we shall calculate and plot only for positive values of X and Y, keeping a prudent distance as Y, decreasing in magnitude, nears zero.

WE WILL FIND him newly extrapolated through a momentary discontinuity in a sheet of aluminum of compound curvature. We will understand the metal to be the skin of an aircraft that will fly onward, bearing a cargo of strangers unseen through the glacial sky.

WE WILL DISCOVER the formal cause of his predicament in mutual desire uncomprehended. He will fall, a shriek erased from his mouth faster than he can propagate it by a gale outblowing its own whistle. Air more solid than ice will glaze his senses, will strip and freeze and flay him, will grind away his features, will erode him to a rough, tattered prism of clenched meat, will preserve him against a certain convergence.

WE WILL LEAVE him, interrupted in his insensible plunge, an infinitesimal distance from an asphalt shingled roof. (He had been a young man whose orbit, vague or disintegrating, centered for an interval upon a young woman who, in most respects, might as well have been himself. He had become a courier, in something like the diplomatic service. On his incessant trajectories he came to presume, listlessly enough, that he might have lived differently. This midnight, bound for the West, he will recall, with distinct, gathering pressure, a woman, who, at that moment, lies asleep, six miles beneath him, lusting, in a dream, for satisfactions she is about to approach more closely than she will ever know, dismembering him in her remembrance.)

> [. . . *figure of the third kind. By raising the number two to a power of that same number of faces, and disposing just so many figures of the second kind in a grid whose ranks and files are of identical magnitudes, we shall compose a little terrain for playing games when we tire of reading. Furthermore, should we examine that volume, enclosed by figures of the second kind, from a vantage such that our line of sight traverses a pair of vertices as far removed from one another as the solid will allow, then the apparent boundary of that volume will amount to a single figure of*[550] *the*[551] *third*[552] *kind;*[553] *and*[554] *that*[555] . . .]

6. Newfangleness

RECONCILE THESE ANTAGONISMS: The oestrus of a dry season in Rangoon, and a dilation of old brandy in Vienna. Pungent chicken cooked with its own guts, and escargots with *vin gris.* Dried pyrethrum and rampant lilac. An inkblot on a knuckle, and a lapis cabachon. A repellant lotion, and a remnant of ambergris. The faint whisper of a kerosene lantern, and the subaudible drone of a carbon filament. An insectile whine at twilight, and a streetcar rumbling at dawn. Sussurus of a racing pen, and a rustling of defended thighs. A forked, magenta tongue that hears, and a pierced, ivory ear that tastes. Diamond scales tiling a

serpent's hood, and lozenges in a mullioned window. Its momentary posture, and a thesis of Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*. Its characteristic markings, and a keepsake lorgnette. A droplet of toxin, and a tear of distraction. Accidental stains in the margin of a page, and faint punctures near the ulnar nerve. Breath released in satisfaction at the anticipated expulsion of a precipitate, and breath indrawn in confusion at the unexpected miscarriage of a response. One who writes and one who reads.

DO NOT FORGET the canonical form of the equation:

$$((X\uparrow 2/A\uparrow 2)-(Y\uparrow 2/B\uparrow 2))-1=0,$$

whose sentiments, descriptive of the hyperbola, may also be stated in a more complex fashion where A, B and T are real; thus:

X=(((E↑T)*((A+B*$IM)/2))+(E↑-T)*((A-B*$IM)/2)))-Y*$IM; and:
Y=((((E↑T)*((A+B*$IM)/2))+(E↑-T)*((A-B*$IM)/2)))-X)/$IM.

We shall calculate for many values—exaggerated, typical, contemptible—in our accustomed effort to retrieve those boundaries within which we may hope to plot them upon an imaginable surface; neither shall we omit to feel a delicious agitation as we consider again those distant regions in the space of thought where asymptotes rejoin to embrace what once drew from Euclid a rare, wan smile.

THAT ONE WAS CELEBRATED, before gravure, for an interminable concatenation of falsehoods about ruined architecture, lethal geography and ritual mutilation, but exotic or poisonous wildlife was privileged to decorate a prose hospitable to vivid circumstance. Sooner or later, she departed this life while passing through Customs. On the evening in question, confounded by citronella and enchanted by a description of its own choreography, the cobra, glands at the ready, dissolved into thin air: went transparent as a boiled onion, its venom formulated, and vanished on cue like a popping bubble.

THIS ONE IS SPARED her parent's defects and merits, except for a gullible synaesthesia of the tactile. Unwilling to expend her remittance for the luxury of hysteria, she chooses laudanum . . . and finds it dull. Shortly before sunrise, smarting from an ill-advised assignation, she takes to her library, and spitefully lapses into believing everything she reads. She is rescued by our bizarre (but unequivocal) diagnosis, confirmed, next Winter, when the desiccated beast itself turns up behind a credenza. During her convalescence, despite chronic ennervation and recurrent anoxia, she delivers herself of *Schlangendichtung*, a small visionary folio of drypoints and villanelles, and otherwise diverts her companions in the invention of encouraging new pastimes.

[. . . *figure will seem to be made up of a triad of pairs of figures of the first kind, with each pair fused along its adjacency into a rhombus, which is nothing but a figure of the second kind gone weak in the knees from long standing. Figures of the third kind may never be persuaded to contain volumes. But when we take a number of them that is the same as the number of sides (or corners) of each, and arrange them so that each adjoins just two others, we find that we have enclosed yet another such figure: exactly, completely, congruently. It is my*[661] *favorite.*[662] *It*[663] *does*[664] *not*[665] *exist.*[666]]

7. I Wonder What She Hath Deserved

COMPARE THESE COLORS: a powdery azure, brushed with scorched fat, and a cyanotic custard, scummed with dichroic lemon. They are identical . . . but separated, at the alleged horizon, by a band of stale mist, within which, or beyond which, an escort of battle cruisers surrounds us on every side. The deck of our barge, big as a meadow, of the hue and texture of a baby, is punctuated by the prisoners' nondescript shelters. Somewhere beneath us, a thermonuclear device that may be armed and exploded by remote control is our only warden. Daily, at noon, our parcel of food descends by parachute; we rip and knot the tough cords and pastel silk into canopies, trapezes, parasols, and a burlesque of bridal finery. There has been no rain for thirty-six days. The stern rail is crusted with shit and vomit. Below the Plimsoll Line, slowly, something pumps or throbs. We are becalmed.

DO NOT FORGET the corkscrew, which should always be used to open winebottles, and from whose noblest import, as it were . . . suspended in the pure void, I might add . . . they derive the system of equations:

```
X = A*COS(S/SQRT(A↑2+B↑2)); and:
Y = A*SIN(S/SQRT(A↑2+B↑2)); and:
Z = B*S/SQRT(A↑2+B↑2).
```

These purport to depict the thing ascending toward us, twisting counterclockwise as it comes, while we calculate (assuming that our stamina holds out) for conservative values of X and Y, and an appalling list of values for Z. All this, it would seem, is supposed to go on forever; or, at least, as long as their insouciant energy suffices to the production of real, finite quantities like A, B, S and so forth, not to mention cosines, sines and so forth.

THE COLONY SEEMS more distant, now, than the panopticon we were offered as an alternative. I have five friends, here; or, rather, there are that many personages with whom I have engaged in behavior that I, at least, do not consider hostile. None of them can talk. Two are confined, by a kind of stocks clamped around their strange heads, in barrels set flush with the deck. One has a skull shaped like a bowling pin, and drinks milk through a hose, and whistles; the other is a churning mouth, pointed at the zenith, crammed with hundreds of dirty molars, from which dangles a weak, achondroplastic frame. The eyes are like those of a calf; it groans happily when stew is poured into it. In order that they shall not drown, I siphon off their excreta. They do not object. Nearby, a pair of midget twins squats, sips tea, plays chess with men of chalk and jet, squeals and giggles. Brother and sister, they are otherwise identical; their immense, didactic genitals, and her breasts, tinted copies from Maillol, are the envy of us all. But their red umbrella, a careless display of the prerogatives of former wealth, has bred ineradicable distrust. Finally, a pudgy woman in middle life prowls incessantly, stumbling, cursing and slapping the cloud of greenbottles that follows her everywhere but dares not land. Her flesh and uniform look like varnished zinc; a soiled placard bears the legend: "The Filthy Nurse."

I HAVE NOT MENTIONED our cargo: a small box, or casket, bolted or welded amidships, made of quartz and bronze. By night it is lit, blindingly, from underneath. Inside, there is nothing more than a double handful of greyish pellets. They are all that is left of the brain of René Descartes, exhumed on the suspicion that it might still contain the germ of a truly complex thought. The outcome of this inquisition is still to be revealed; but the transportation of that relic is the secret motive of our voyage.

ASLEEP, I STOLE an unremarked helicopter and flew away. Spiralling upward, I saw that our great ocean was no more than Chesapeake Bay. I swooped along the Mall, from the Washington Monument to the Hill, swerved to the left over the Library of Congress, and headed for Maryland. Under a willow, on a hill, a girl waited for me, in a gown that left visible (against the sky) only her hands and face. A picnic was spread of bread and chicken, *quiche* and radishes, wine and butter. At first, she administered a test, showing pictures for me to name. I failed in everything. Days later, I understood that what you have read was a play on the words of the name of a woman I hardly knew, for whom I felt nothing.

Paris/San Francisco/Ponce
1976–8

Place Names*

JULIA KRISTEVA

translated by TOM GORA and ALICE JARDINE

Infantine Language, Infantile Language

Twice in the last few centuries, when Western reason perceived that its status as servant to Meaning was a penitential condition from which it wanted to escape, it declared itself haunted by *childhood.* Rousseau and Freud. Two crises of classical and positivistic rationality, heralded two revolutions: one in political economy (seeking its status in Marx), the other in the speaking subject (articulated today by modern literature's disruption of the Christian Word). Before Sade and Soljhenitsyn, who write of "jouissance"[1] and horror, analytic discourse provided itself with a privileged foil, a knot of life and language (of the species and society)—the child.

It was as if Reason were suddenly neither satisfied simply to accept, by confronting texts, its restraining bonds, nor to force meaning by writing the speaking being's identity as fiction; it was forced, instead, to face reproduction of the species (the boundary between "nature" and "culture") and the varied attitudes towards it. Thus exceeded by a *heterogeneous element* (biology: life) and

* "Place Names" was first published as "Noms de Lieu" in *Tel Quel,* 68 (Winter 1976); it appeared in a revised version, from which this translation is taken, in *Polylogue,* Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1977, 467-91.

1. *Jouissance* is a French word which means "a pleasure which is tasted fully," or "the action of using or implementing something, drawing out of it the satisfaction of which it is capable" (*Robert*). In contemporary critical usage, however, the full breadth of the term's significance comes into play: "The French have a vocabulary of eroticism, an amorous discourse which smells neither of the laboratory nor of the sewer, which just—attentively, scrupulously—puts the fact. In English, we have either the coarse or the clinical, and by tradition our words for our pleasure, even for the intimate parts of our bodies where we may take those pleasures, come awkwardly when they come at all. So that if we wish to speak of the kind of pleasure we take—the supreme pleasure, say, associated with sexuality at its most abrupt and ruthless pitch—we lack *jouissance* and *jouir . . .*" (Richard Howard, Introduction to Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text,* trans. Richard Miller, New York, Hill and Wang, 1975, p. v). Richard Howard thus defends Richard Miller's translation of the term as "bliss." We have decided not to attempt to infuse the English word "bliss" with this "surplus of meaning"—an attempt which is awkward at best and misleading at worst—not to "invent" a tradition and development that the French word *experienced* but that the English word must suddenly *acquire.* Rather, we shall use the French word as an English neologism and allow it to carry into English its specificity from the French.—trans.

by a *third party* (displacement of *I/you* communication by *him*[*her*]: the child), this particular questioning alerts the speaker to the fact that he is not whole, but it does so in a manner completely different from the obsessional's unhappy consciousness, ceaselessly signifying that he is subject to death. For if death is Other, life is a third, and this signification relentlessly affirmed by the child may unsettle the speaker's paranoiac enclosure. Without this advent of the real (imposed by the child but blocked by the myth of the child), one belief still persists: either men and women exist in and for the romantic or surrealist exchange of ideas or sex; or sublimation can occur with nothing left over, with the instinctual drive committing itself totally (as in Existentialism) to the Life-Work or to History, when it does not nourish perversion as the definitive guarantor of order.

Two thousand years ago, the child Jesus came to circumvent these two impasses, but having become a rite, like all rites, he quickly became the stopgap measure. A whole history—Christianity. Unearthing childbirth from beneath kinship structures, whose subjective and political effects are traced in the Bible, Christianity may have touched upon Judaism's attraction to obsessional and paranoid confinement. At the same time, it gave a place to women—not necessarily a symbolic progress but certainly a biological and social necessity. By celebrating Man in the child, that is, by making the child a universal fetish, however, Christianity foreclosed the possibility that had nonetheless been perceived of breaking religion's circle—the last possibility, just the same. For where life and discourse become entwined, the destiny of subjects in the chain of civilizations is controlled. Today, the pill and the Pope know this indeed.

The discovery of the Freudian unconscious severs the always possible umbilication of Man in the child, and the notion of "infantile sexuality" allows for the examination, not of he who does not speak (*in-fans*) but of that within the speaker which does not yet speak or which will always remain unsaid, unnamable within the interstices of speech. It is true that the child gives support to the fundamental premises of Freudian thought (the theory of instinctual drives, rejection-negativity, the emergence of symbolism, the stages marked by Oedipus, etc.). He was, however, by Freud's own admission, the locus of an "error" that we are going to attempt to read more closely. It is an unavoidable error for any thought that allows itself to be taken in by the inextricable alternative of "cause" and "effect," as Freud rarely did; compared with which, Freud's "errors" have the advantage of showing this thought to be rooted in the eternal return of parent/child: "Am I parent or child, cause or effect, chicken or egg?" To ascertain perhaps, that the child is a myth (Oedipal) told by parents to their parents, without which there would be nothing but children, that is, Oedipi unbeknownst to themselves. Were the Greeks, who talked among themselves of having been children, the most lucid parents of history? This might have permitted them to circumscribe aggression (infantine, thereafter termed Oedipal) in order to proceed towards *law* in the *City*.

Let us recall a few facts. Freud married in 1886 and had six children (three

girls and three boys) between 1887 and 1895. During this period, he finished his neurological research, published his findings on aphasia and infantile paralysis (1891), and began his research on hysteria, through hypnosis at first, leading to the publication in 1895, with Breuer, of *Studies on Hysteria.* That same year marked the birth of Anna (whose analytical research would essentially center around childhood), the end of the family's reproductive cycle, and the beginning of Freud's friendship with Fliess. Soon thereafter, Freud began his self-analysis in relation to this friendship whose homosexual tenor he would later emphasize. The word *psychoanalysis* appeared one year later, in 1896. Yet, it was only after the death of his father in 1897 that Freud wrote the first psychoanalytic work, leading him away from the substantialism, medicine, and catharsis that were still evident in *Studies on Hysteria*; *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1897 which situates him within the field of signifying articulations, was published in 1898.

At this moment, Freud initiated a change in the conception of what he had thought to be the *cause* of hysteria: parental seduction.[2] First Supposition: hysteria is set off by parental seduction during childhood. Freud defended this theory until 1897, the year of his father's death, suggesting that Jacob Freud must have seduced him (letter to Fliess, May 31, 1897), and recognizing that his eldest daughter, Mathilde, was probably the object of his attempts at seduction (letter to Fliess, September 21, 1897, one month before his father's death).[3] Second Supposition: this seduction was only a hysterical fantasy merging with a paranoiac attitude serving as a screen for infantine autoeroticism. Thus, the conception of an essentially autoerotic infantile sexuality emerged. Third Supposition: Freud also allowed for the child's genital desires and moved towards the conception of Oedipus. Although this occurred in the last years of the century, the written evidence of this position did not emerge until 1905 (*Sexuality in the Neuroses*) and 1906 (*Three Essays*).

Between the first supposition (the parent seduces the child and leads him to neurosis) and the second (the seducer is the autoerotic and polymorphous perverse child), two events occurred: Freud had no more children and his father died. The reversal of his position towards the parent/child relationship (the child becoming the agent of seduction), thus parallel to these events, appears dramatically in two subsequent texts: *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (1914) and *An Autobiographical Study* (1925). Here, Freud terms parental seduction an "erroneous idea" which could have been "fatal to the young science."[4] The distress provoked by the discovery of this mistaken path was so great that he, "like Breuer, almost gave up analysis." Why did he nevertheless continue? The explanation is succinct, to say the least: "Perhaps I persevered only because I no

2. Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, New York, Basic Books, 1953, I, p. 263.
3. The "seduction" is perhaps directed towards Fliess, through the children as intermediaries (the young Sigmund and Mathilde); notice that Freud changes position in mid-route (from seduced to seducer; from son to father) while the object of seduction changes sex (from boy to girl). This should be added to the dossier of the Freud-Fliess analysis.
4. *Standard Edition*, XIV, p. 17.

longer had any choice and could not then begin again at anything else. At last came the reflection that, after all, one had no right to despair because one has been deceived in one's expectations; one must revise those expectations."[5]

A recognition of an ending ("one cannot begin again": to have children?), a statement of desperation (the father is dead: no more seducer?), and a recovery of mastery ("one does not have the right": to abandon the father, no longer to be father, to abdicate paternity?). This reading seems to be supported by a subsequent text, *An Autobiographical Study* (1925): "When, however, I was at last obliged to recognize that these scenes of seduction had never taken place . . . I was for some time completely at a loss [from 1897 to 1900 approximately] . . . I had in fact stumbled for the first time upon the *Oedipus complex* [as yet in its disguise of fantasy]."[6] Could the discovery of the Oedipus complex, and thereby, of infantile sexuality, and thus, the beginning of the modern conception of the child, have been produced through an inverted Oedipal process? Could the "Oedipus complex" be the discourse of mourning for his father's death? As neurosis is the negative of perversion, could that discourse represent, in like manner, the negative of the guilt experienced by the son, forced by the signifier to supplant his father? The Freudian conception of the child would thus provide the base for paternal discourse, the solid foundation for the paternal function, and, consequently, the insurance, both present and ultimate, of socialization. This may be a paternal vision of childhood and thus a limited one; it is, however, lucidly presented to support the inevitability of the symbolic and/or social code. It is, therefore, an ethical, Biblical vision.

Thus, after having fathered six children *in eight years,* loving them as a presumably devoted father, having recognized himself as the possible seducer of his daughter but also as the victim of his father's seduction, "one can no longer begin again." In addition to this statement of conclusion, of disillusionment with respect to the hysterical body, the libido as substance, "seductive eroticism"—is it a statement of sexual impass?—came his father's death and Freud's feelings of guilt towards him (No the seducer cannot be my father, the seducer is me, the child of this father; then, I am also a father [of Mathilde]; therefore, the seducer can only be the child), accompanied by the desire to take his place, to assume the paternal, moral function ("one has no right to despair because one has been deceived in one's expectations" writes Freud). The father is dead, long live the father that *I* am: there *where it (id) was, shall I (ego) come to be.*[7] The "child" is what *remains* of this becoming, the result of subtracting the utterance of guilt from the utterance of mastery. ". . . seduction during childhood retained a certain share, though a humbler one, in the aetiology of neuroses. But the seducers turned out as a rule to have been older children."[8] Thus, we arrive at the construction of

5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, XX, p. 34.
7. *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden.*
8. *Standard Edition,* XX, pp. 34–5.

this configuration: child-parent, seducing child, always already older, born into the world with compound instinctual drives, erogenous zones, and even genital desires. With the end of the reproductive cycle and his father's death, Freud's self-analysis led him to this telescoping of father and child, resulting in . . . Oedipus: "I had in fact stumbled for the first time upon the Oedipus complex. . . . "[9]

The child-parent or the parent-child, thus given to analytical practice, joins cause and effect, origin and becoming, space and time, to produce that specific twist of psychoanalytic discourse which brings to mind the Heraclitan **αἰὼν** (*aiôn*): at once cyclical time and space where the Greek thinker saw at play . . . the poet, who alone possesses the discourse of a child giving birth (to a father?).[10] Instinctuality is simultaneously revealed as innate and hereditary, but, within the Freudian framework, it is already protected from substantialist interpretations. For although the child enters the world with polymorphous instinctual drives, they conflict with repression, the latter producing multiple variations in the fixations of the libido ("subjective structures"). It follows that neurosis—or the speaking subject—can never be grasped at the level of instinctual drive, or on the basis of a child at the zero degree of symbolism, but rather always through a narrative "texture," that is, a texture of language and phantasm: "It was only after the introduction [within the infantine instinctual experience] of this element of hysterical phantasies [the parental seduction fantasy] that the *texture* of the neurosis and its relation to the patient's life became intelligible."[11]

This dismantling of the Christian-Rousseauist myth of childhood, however, is accompanied by a problematical endorsement. Projected onto the supposed space of childhood, and therefore universalized, are traits particular to adult discourse; the child is endowed with what is dictated by the adult memory, always distorted to begin with; the myth of human continuity (from child to parent, the Same) persists. In like manner, the function of the familial context in the *precocious* formation of the child (before puberty, before Oedipus, but also before the "mirror stage") tends to be minimized. This is only too evident not only in ego-centered currents of child psychology, but also in that psychoanalytic practice which posits the subject as beginning with the "mirror stage." The most important debates and innovations in psychoanalysis are consequently and necessarily organized around this knot. The point is the heterogeneity between the signifying-libidinal organization in infancy (the "semiotic"—*le sémiotique*[12]) and

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Heraclitus*, 52: **Αἰών παῖζ ἐστι παίζων, πεσσεύων** *Aiôn pais esti paizôn, pesseuôn*—"Life is a newborn who bears, who plays" (from the Wissmann-Bollack French translation, *Héraclite ou la séparation*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1972). *Paizon* **παίζων**, the present participle of the verb *to play*, used with *pesseuon* **πεσσεύων** (pushing pawns) can only be redundant, as the standard translation shows; the authors allow themselves to differentiate between these signifiers in order to break this redundance and to reveal an etymological meaning of *paizon*: "making a child, engendering, bearing children."

11. "Sexuality in the Neuroses," *Standard Edition*, VII, p. 274 (emphasis added).

12. *Le sémiotique*—to be distinguished from *la sémiotique*, the science of signs. Kristeva conceives of meaning not as a sign system, but as a signifying process. Within this process, and in order to take

the "symbolic" functioning of the speaker following language acquisition and the consequent parental identifications. On the other hand, and at the same time, this precocious, presymbolic organization is grasped by the adult only as regression—jouissance or schizophrenic psychosis. Thus, the difficulty, the impossibility of this attempt to gain access to childhood: the real stakes of the discourse on childhood within Western thought involve a confrontation between thought and what it is not, a wandering at the limits of the thinkable. Outside of poetic practice (the thinking of a dissipated language, a Heraclitan horizon, a reinvention of materialism), the analytical solutions to this problem (this Freudian "*error*") always remain problematic: Jung's impasse with its archetypal configurations of libidinal substance extracted from sexuality and subjugated to the archaic mother; the empiricist precision of Melanie Klein's "partial objects"; and the later effort of Winnicott and his followers to posit within the "potential space" between mother and nursing infant a libido without instinctual drive, therefore without object, goal, or time—all remain particular characteristics of the adult speaker's libido; the desiring machines of schizos without signifiers. Finally, in a new and radical way which nevertheless remains totalized within the Name of the Father (as in Lacan), the extraction of the unnamable of childhood and its position within the *real*, impossible and inevitably persistent within the real-imaginary-symbolic triad.

As opposed to this speculation, *transfer*, however, seems to indicate that the modality of significance that Winnicott calls the "pre-objective libido"[13] (therefore, not the Freudian "libido"), which can be detected in the nonspeaking child, persists beneath the secondary repression imposed with language acquisition and through Oedipus, in all speaking beings as their psychotic grounding or as their capacity for jouissance, sometimes characterized as aesthetic jouissance. This modality is arranged and articulated from its beginnings (which follow us to the end as a space become permanent time) by *the solutions which modern parents have discovered for the sexual inanity that the child represents to them.* The hysteric child probably becomes a victim of paranoia when he attributes his neurosis to parental seduction. But, through the seduction myth, he sees himself as being umbilicated by instinctual drive (even before desire) to this object of love

into account the speaking subject as a process, that is, as a unity and as the transition to zero of this unity, Kristeva distinguishes between two modalities of signification: the semiotic and the symbolic. *Le sémiotique* is that area of negation where unity is preceded by the impulses which create it; it is the primary organization (in Freudian terms) of instinctual drives by rhythms, intonations, and primary processes. Genetically found in the first echolalias of infants, it functions in all adult discourse as a supplementary register to that of *le symbolique*, the functioning of the sign and predication.—trans.

13. "Libido" devoid of object or goal, a paradoxical state of facilitation. Thus prior to the constitution of the subject, object, and sign. We note the ideological and feminizing anthropomorphizations of Winnicott's argument: the object's existence presupposes "separation" and "doing" and is defined as the "male element" of sexuality; the object's uncertainty (the "transitional object," to which we shall return later) in which "identity requires so little mental structure" emerges from "being" whose "foundation . . . can be laid from the birth date" and which, contrary to the male element programmed by frustration, is susceptible to mutilation and is defined as the "female element" (D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, New York, Basic Books, 1971, p. 80).

extolled by his parents in their denial of the sexual nonrelation which the child's coming punctuates.

Freud's "error," however, has still not troubled linguistics, which remains universal and Cartesian in its study of individual "languages," phenomenological in its approach to "discourse." "Infantine language"—a theoretical mirage—has become for psycholinguistics the privileged ground where the contradictions and impasses of linguistic rationality are attested. Some see in "infantine language" an empirical demonstration of generative grammar's pertinence (the deep structure exists because it functions as such in the child). Others posit a difference between the language and logic of children, on the one hand, and of adults, on the other. In trying to describe the first, they use categories and even simple models (always more or less taken from generative grammar) emanating from the latter. This leads, in the first case, to the use of infantine language as an illustration of theory, amputated, of course, but necessarily completed through maturation. The result, in the second case, is a floundering in empiricism, for no conception of the Subject other than a logical, Cartesian one is provided to support the differences which presumably appear in the child's logic or syntax. The presyntactic phases of infantine *semiosis* remain outside of this investigation; but also excluded are all semantic latencies due to sexual and familial differences which integrate or short-circuit themselves differently each time within the syntactic repression constituting the grid of any language as universal system, and which become manifest in either syntactic liberties or lexical variations of infantine discourse.[14]

It might, on the other hand, be possible to posit as "object" of analysis not "infantine language," but rather "infantile language" in the sense that Freud speaks of infantile sexuality—a telescoping of parent and child. We would then be concerned with the attentiveness which the adult, through his still infantile sexuality, is able to perceive in the discourse of a child (boy or girl) but which refers him to that level where his "own" language never totally rationalizes or normativizes itself according to Cartesian linguistics, but where it always remains an "infantile language." Thus, an analytical attentiveness to language, within the dual relationship of the transfer between adult and child; an analysis, through phantasmic or mythical contents (which have been until now the sole object of psychoanalysis and child psychology), of the "minimal" components of language (phonic, lexical, and syntactic operations; logico-syntactic categories). The child therefore becomes the real from which we begin our analysis, through minimal components, of how our (any) language is *infantile.*

This particular attentiveness to the psychoanalytic conditions which constitute language structures solicits a probably *transferential,* or more precisely, *maternal* attitude towards the child. Cannot the history of post-Freudian child

14. Cf. "Psycholinguistique et grammaire générative" in *Langages,* 16 (December 1969), and "Apprentissage de la syntaxe chez l'enfant" in *Langue Française,* 27 (September 1975), which also includes an interesting article by Christine Leroy on presyntactic intonation. For a historical survey of the principal linguistic works on infantine language, cf. Aaron Bar-Adon and Werner F. Leopold, eds., *Child Language, a Book of Readings,* New York, Prentice Hall, 1971.

psychology, including the heights represented by the work of Spitz and Winnicott, be summarized as a passage from the paternal Freudian attentiveness to a maternal attention? Even considering all of the advances and setbacks which this phantasmic aspect induces in men and women analysts?

For a woman, the arrival of a child breaks the autoerotic circle of the pregnant woman (whose jouissance is reminiscent of the Saint who fuses with her God, inaccessible and yet consubstantial with her instinctual drive in passion) and brings about the, for a woman, difficult account of a relationship with another: with an "object" and with love. Is it not true that a woman is a being for whom the One, and therefore the Other, are not taken for granted? And that to reach this constantly altered One, on the symbolic-thetic level which requires castration and object, she must tear herself from the daughter-mother symbiosis, must renounce the undifferentiated community of women and recognize only the symbolic and the father at the same time? It is precisely the child who, for a *mother* (as opposed to a *genetrix*) constitutes an *access* (an *excess*) towards the Other. He is the removal of what was only a graft during pregnancy: an *alter ego* capable (or not) of replacing a maternal narcissism henceforth integrated within a "being for him." Neither for itself, nor in itself, but for him. The mother of a son (henceforth the generic "infant" no longer exists) is an *existant* confronted with a *being-for-him*. The mother of a daughter replays in reverse the encounter with her mother: differentiation or leveling of existants, perception of oneness or paranoid homologation fantasized as primordial substance. In both cases, the well-known relationship with an object—which exists only as object of love—is founded only as a relationship with the third person: neither *I* nor *you* within a relationship of identification or covetousness, but *he(she)*. Love is a stand-in for narcissism in the third person, external to the act of discursive communication. Hence, "God is love": it is for this very reason that he does not exist, except to be imagined as child for a woman. Here again is the genius of Christianity.

From this point on, for the mother—not for the genetrix—the child is an *analyzer*. He unleashes the anguish of the hysteric, an anguish often hidden, denied, or deferred in its paranoid paths towards others or towards the array of consumer goods. This anguish brings the mother to grips with castration—the well-known castration which "women" or genetrixes deny, because for them, the child is the stopper that fills, seals the community of the species, and allows for the usurpation of the father's place, even as that usurpation is denied. The death instinct is unearthed across its entire dramatic gamut extending from Lady MacBeth's fury to self-sacrifice, always for the same love object, the third person, the child. Within these meanderings where the analyzer leads his mother, the recognition of castration prevents murder, is its opposite, and opposes it. It is for this very reason that the mother analyzes where the genetrix fails (by blocking, with the "baby," any access to the symbolic through the fantasy of a substantialist fusion with that generative matter wherein mothers incorporate their children) and where the saint succeeds (when, in her passion for the symbolic, her own body

becomes the homologous, extolled sign of denial): she keeps open the enclosures where paranoiacs anchor themselves. Maternity knots and unknots paranoia—the ground of the hysteric.

It is evident that "neuro-psychological maturation" and language acquisition cannot be taken for granted under these conditions. The structures of any language no doubt inevitably carry the imprints of the mother-analyzer relationship. Which is enough to disconcert any linguistics.

Space Makes (for) Laughter

Current attempts to break open human subjectivation (to the extent that it is a subjection to meaning) by proposing in its place *spaces* (Borromean knots, rhizomes, morphology of catastrophes), of which the speaker would be merely a phenomenal actualization, may seem appealing. We must not forget, however, that these *formants* (even if their refinements lead only to the receivers' catharsis and they do not function as "models" of an object-referent) have their particular source in the "logical activity specifically linked to language."[15] Husserl's considerations on the spatial intuitions of the Greeks culminating in Euclid[16] have lost none of their epistemological force: the history of human *forming* is rooted in language as a system of propositions. No forming can transcend its origin—meaning as it is posited by that predication particular to language. If the metaphysical solidarity of "meaning," "origin," and "forming" is thus posited as the limit of any attempt at clarification (and therefore, of linguistics) and perhaps of all analysis (and therefore, of psychoanalysis), it still holds true that any spatial representation provided for within a universal language is necessarily subject to teleological reason, contrary to "romantic minds" attracted to the "mythico-magical."[17]

The history of the speaking being (spatially bound precisely because he speaks) is only spatial variation,[18] never surpassing the limits of the speaking/forming, but rather, dismissing it by means of a *praxis* or a techné. It is henceforth

15. "Here we must take into consideration the peculiar 'logical' activity which is tied specifically to language, as well as to the ideal cognitive structures that arise specifically within it" (Edmund Husserl, "The Origin of Geometry" in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970, p. 364).

16. "It is clear that the method of producing original idealities out of what is prescientifically given in the cultural world must have been written down and fixed in firm sentences prior to the existence of geometry" (*Ibid.*, p. 366). And further: "Every explication and every transition from making explicit to making self-evident (even perhaps in cases where one stops much too soon) is nothing other than historical disclosure; in itself, essentially, it is something historical (*ein Historiches*), and as such it bears, with essential necessity, the horizon of its history (*Historie*) within itself" (*Ibid.*, pp. 370–1). While "we can also say now that history is from the start nothing other than the vital movement of the coexistence and the interweaving of original formations and sedimentations of meaning" (*Ibid.*, p. 371).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 378.

18. Is it not true that the only (historical) events today, outside of murder (that is, war) are scientific events: the invention of spaces, from mathematics to astronomy?

clear that meaning's closure can never be questioned by another *space*, but only by a different *speaking*: another enunciation, another "literature." There exists, on the other hand, an epistemological bent towards elucidation which is not, as Husserl postulates, the "destiny" of the speaking being, but rather *one* of its practices, *one* variation of significance not limited to what is "universally intelligible"—madness and literature are its witnesses. If we remain with this tendency, we must choose between two directions: either we pursue the history of spaces (epistemologize), or we question what Husserl calls the "human forming." The second alternative inevitably merges with Freudian preoccupations; the analysis of the "origins" of forming/speaking follows the paths of the Freudian "error" mentioned above.

Any attentiveness to "infantile language" (as defined above) seems to be situated at that ambiguous point where psychoanalysis opens up the limits of phenomenological meaning by indicating its conditions of production and where phenomenology encloses the transferential dissolution of meaning as the latter presents itself in either demonstrative or simple "universally intelligible" terms.

To repeat the question that the infant-analyst puts to maternal attentiveness even before any mirror shows him any representation at all, before any language begins to code his "idealities": what becomes of the infant body's paradoxical *semiosis*, of this "semiotic *chora*,"[19] of this "space" before the sign, this archaic disposition of primary narcissism which the poet unearths to defy meaning's closure ("nothing will have taken place but the place" certainly, if not "at an altitude so far away that a place fuses with the beyond /. . ./ the sidereally successive blow of a whole account in formation . . .": Mallarmé).

Neither request nor desire, it is an invocation, an anaclisis[20]: a reminder by breath of a return to contact, warmth, food, that the newborn body addresses to a source of support, to a complement of maintenance which Spitz properly termed the "diatrophic mother."[21] A vocal and muscular contraction, a spasm of the glottis and motor system, responds to the absence of intrauterine life components. The voice is the vector of this call for help directed to a frustrated memory in order to assure, at first by breath and warmth, the survival of the ever premature human; this is undoubtedly significant in terms of the language which is soon articulated there. Every cry is psychologically and projectively described as a cry of distress, up to and including the first vocalizations which seem to be calls of distress: anaclises. The newborn body spends three months in these anaclitic "facilitations"[22] without any stabilization.

19. Cf. "La Chora sémiotique," in *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1974, pp. 23–30.
20. R. Spitz, "Autoeroticism re-examined," *Psychoanalytical Study of the Child*, XVII (1962), 292.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Frayage*—from the German *Bahnung*—is the term that Freud used in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* to express a breaking down or wearing away of resistance between neurones through repeated or continual flow. Thus, the *Standard Edition* translates *Bahnung* as "facilitation." Derrida focuses on the term in his essay "Freud et la scène de l'écriture" (*Ecriture et la différence*, Paris,

Faced with these anaclises, the adult—essentially the mother—offers a troubled welcome, a mobile receptacle, which embraces the invocation, follows its undulations, and eventually accents them by the sudden surge of anguish that the newborn analyzer's body produces in the analysand. From this time on, we must reckon with the mother's barely surmountable desire to maintain her newborn infant within the invocation: the supplement of the breast, important in itself, analyzer perhaps, but analyst deprived of any interpretation that might enclose the mother and child within the regression of primary masochism. This is the precise point of either the "optimal frustration" that Spitz requires of the mother towards the child, or of Winnicott's mysterious "good enough mother": they are called upon to break the primary narcissism in which the mother and child are bound, from *anaclisis* to *diatropism*, so that, with the advent of autoeroticism, and at the same time as representation and language, a relationship to the object is finally begun.

Before this acquisition becomes effective, however, and within this subtle slipping of primary narcissism into autoeroticism, the "good enough mother" with her "optimal frustration" scores a point: laughter.

It is perhaps sufficient that the mother know how to *respond to* and to *stop* the anaclisis for it to be posited, deposited, and fixed. This providing of an axis, a projection screen, a limit, a support for the infant's invocation is perhaps that part of the maternal function which depends on the paternal, probably best characterized by the *absence* and *refusal* encoded in presence itself. The maturation of the nervous system probably comes in addition to, and perhaps in some cases surpasses, the role of mobile support offered by the mother/father, although it is in turn influenced by it in other cases.

Orality, audition, vision: archaic modalities upon which the most precocious discretion emerges. The breast given and withdrawn; lamp light capturing the gaze; the intermittent sound of voices or music—these greet anaclisis (according to a temporal order probably programmed too by each particular disposition), hold it, and thus inhibit and absorb it in such a way that it is discharged and calmed through them: initial "defenses" against the agressivity of a (pseudo-) instinctual drive (without goal). Therefore, the breast, light, sound become a *there*: place, point, marker. The effect, while dramatic, is no longer calmness but laughter. The mark of an archaic point, the initiation into "space," the "chora," as primitive stability absorbing the anaclitic facilitation, produces laughter. There is not yet an outside, and these points that made the newborn laugh at about two and one-half months (after the hallucinatory laughter of the first weeks due to the satisfaction of immediate needs), are simply markers of something in the process of becoming stability. But neither external nor internal, neither outside nor inside,

Editions du Seuil, 1967), making this wearing away into a process of inscription, a form of notation, for which the psyche becomes the writing surface or the "writing pad." Kristeva uses the tero to describe the infantine anaclisis, "psychologically and projectively described as a cry of distress" which is gradually and ultimately absorbed into laughter and demonstrability; definitely compatible and complementary to Derrida's understanding.—trans.

these markers retain the anaclisis to the point of discharging only; they do not stop it. One might detect the inceptions of spaciality, as well as of *sublimation*.

But it is when these scattered and droll points project themselves—archaic synthesis—onto the stable support of the mother's face, the privileged receiver of laughter at about three months, that the narcissism of the initial mother-child symbiosis slips towards autoeroticism; here, the emergence of a body parcelled into erotisizable "objects" (essentially oral) comes to light. Oral eroticism, the smile towards the mother, and the first vocalizations are contemporaneous: Spitz's noted "first point of psychic organization"[23] is already one complex semiotic phenomenon presaged by others.

The originating sublimation, in most cases visual, brings us not only to the foundations of narcissism (specular gratification) but to the laughter sources of the imaginary. The imaginary takes over for infantine laughter: joy without words. Chronologically and logically long before the mirror stage (where the Same sees itself altered through the celebrated gap which constitutes it as representation, sign, and death[24]), the semiotic posits itself as a laughter space. During the period of indistinction between the "*same*" and "*other*," between the infant and mother, as well as between the "subject" and "object," while no space has yet been designated (it will be designated with and after the mirror: the sign), the semiotic *chora* that fixes and absorbs the motility of the anaclitic facilitations discharges and produces laughter.

Orality plays an essential role in this primary fixation-sublimation: appropriation of the breast, the so-called "paranoid" certainty of the nursing infant that he possesses the breast, and his ability to give it up after having had his fill. This does not obscure the importance of the anal "instinctual drive" from this period on: safe anal discharge, although as counterpart to this loss, the child incorporates the breast. Anal discharge with the considerable accompanying expenditure of muscular motility, combined with the satisfaction of incorporating the breast, probably favors the projection of the facilitation into this visible or audible point which stakes out space and produces laughter.

The simultaneity of laughter and the first vocalizations have long been recognized.[25] Moreover, the visual motility/fixation articulation as substratum of

23. R. Spitz, *The First Year of Life: A Psychoanalytic Study of Normal and Deviant Development of Object Relations*, New York, IUP, 1965. Some interesting developments in pediatrics and child psychology are discussed by L. Kreisler, M. Fain, and M. Solé in *L'Enfant et son corps*, Paris, PUF, 1974, and S. Lebovici and M. Soulé in *La Connaissance de l'enfant par la psychanalyse*, Paris, PUF, 1970.

24. Cf. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," in *Ecrits: A Selection Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan*, New York, W.W. Norton Co., 1977, pp. 1–7.

25. Darwin notes that after the first cries of suffering, laughter appears towards the third month, accompanied by imitation of sound, before the appearance of gestures expressing desires (at about one year) and finally intonations, all of which are archaic, preverbal modalities (Charles Darwin, "A Biological Sketch of an Infant," *Mind*, 2,285 [1877], 292–4). W. Wundt notes the dependence which we have mentioned between vocalization and vision; imitative articulation is determined by sounds heard as well as by sounds seen to be articulated, but there is a predominance of visual perception over acoustic perception in the initial stages, which might explain the precocity of labial and dental consonants (*Volkerpsychologie* [1900], 1911, I, pp. 314–9).

archaic semiotic spatiality as well as of laughter seems, moreover, to be borne out by the subsequent infantine laughter. We are also familiar with the infant's lack of a sense of humor (humor presupposes the superego and its sideration). But children laugh easily when motor tension is linked to vision (a caricature is a visualization of corporal distortion, of an extreme, exaggerated movement, or of an unmastered movement); when the body of the child is too rapidly set in motion by the adult (return to a motility defying its fixation, its space, its case); when a sudden stop follows a movement (someone stumbles or falls). The speed-continuity of movement and its breaks—punctuation of the discontinuous: an archaic topos which produces laughter and probably supports Bergson's psychology of laughter as well as Freud's witticisms. The *chora* is indeed a strange "space": the rapidity and the violence of the facilitations are localized at a point which absorbs them; they return in boomerang fashion to the invoking body, without, however, signifying it as separate; they stop there, deposit the jolt: laughter. Because it was limited, but not blocked, the rate of facilitation sheds fright and bursts into a jolt of laughter. Instability, "staggering blow," "a total account in formation." Permeable limit of laughter; or a barrier ending in serious depression—the child owes the choice to his mother. On the one hand, a hysterical mother defying her own mother through paternal identification; on the other, a mother subjugated to hers, indefinitely searching for symbolic recognition. Both determine from this "first point of psychic organization" two attitudes whose apogee lies in imaginative freedom on the one hand, and ritualistic obsession on the other.

Even subsequent modalities of laughter[26] seem to commemorate, from this archaic laughter-space, the ambivalence of facilitation (fright/peace, invocation/discharge, motility/stillness) as well as the permeability of the limit or point of fixation. A sense of humor seems to be built up, beginning with these semiotic supports, upon the parental prohibition of autoeroticism, or upon its removal within childhood situations where parental authority, or its substitute, is reduced. The superego recognizes the ego as faltering vis-à-vis inhibition, but, by a leap—broken movement, space—reconstitutes it as invulnerable and therefore laughing. The *personal* (ego, body) depends on or is constituted by a support (point of projection: lamp, mother, parents) which exceeds and dominates it, but which (without being definitively separated; neither barring nor blocking facilitation, even by its permissive distance) permits the body to rediscover itself, relaxed and free of anguish; the support dislodges it elsewhere, retaining nothing of it but light amusement. An inhibition is thus constituted for laughter, but as an *existant elsewhere*: fixed point, always there, but separate from the body which can, only under these conditions, constitute itself as "personal" and come to jouissance from a distance. Here we have the necessary condition which, avoiding inhibition by laughter, constitutes the semiotic and assures it incorporation into the symbolic. The preconditions for language acquisition are givens at this point;

26. Cf. E. Jacobsen, "The Child's Laughter," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, II, 1947.

their modulations entail the entire neurotic gamut of inhibitions and anguish that characterize the speaking being's destiny.

The distant point absorbing, differing,[27] and therefore, sublimating anguish, is the prototype of the *object* much as it is of the "personal": the body that drives out fear from a constant and distant point (the mother) can transpose these points onto that which, from an amorphous mass, henceforth becomes a territory of reference points, fixation points, and discharges: the autoerotic body, personal body.

In order, however, that this point of discharge may acquire another, different existence, one which will form a space, it must be repeated. Rhythm, a series of linked instances, is immanent to the *chora* prior to any signified spatiality; henceforth, *chora* and rhythm, space and time coexist. Laughter testifies to the fact that a point *took (a) place*: the space which supports it signifies time. Elsewhere, distant, permissive, always already in the past: such is the *chora* that the mother is called upon to produce with her child so that the semiotic may exist. In the same way, later, after the acquisition of language, the child's laughter is one of a past event: because an interdiction takes place, it is surmounted and relegated to the past, such that a weakened and masterable tracing represents it thereafter.

Infantile Space Names

Winnicott's "potential space,"[28] constructed by a "transitional object,"[29] furthers the conditions necessary for semiotic functioning and its passage into language acquisition.

One might, in agreement with M. A. K. Halliday,[30] say that prior to the appearance of a language that is, properly speaking, articulated, vocalizations with "linguistic" functions are used. Halliday calls these "meaning functions," but a recasting of Winnicott's positions in terms of language could supply a term that is more apt: "potential meaning functions." A potential meaning, then, supported in its analytic conditions by transitional objects, would be, somewhere between the ninth and sixteenth months, differentiated in a full range of functions, described in adult terms as instrumental, regulatory, interactive, personal, heuristic, and imaginative.[31] This "potential meaning" appears as sound in a variety of vocalizations (in varying but specific degrees, according to the child[32])

27. This differ*ant* facilitation of "instinctual drive" before the letter—has been considered, from a philosophical perspective, by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1977.

28. "I refer to the hypothetical area that exists (but cannot exist) between the baby and the object (mother or part of mother) during the phase of the repudiation of the object as not-me, that is, at the end of being merged in with the object" (Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. 107).

29. "The transitional object represents the mother's ability to present the world in such a way that the infant does not at first know that the object is not created by the infant" (*Ibid.*, p. 81).

30. M. A. K. Halliday, *Learning How to Mean: Explorations in the Development of Language*, London, Edward Arnold, 1975.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 18ff.

32. Cf. our "Contraintes rythmiques et langage poétique" in *Polylogue*, pp. 437–66.

which grow weaker, finally, and are reduced to a rising-falling intonation approximating that of the adult sentence.

According to Halliday, two new functions appear before the second year: the *pragmatic* function (a fusion of the instrumental and the regulatory functions) and the *mathetic* function (fusion of the personal and heuristic). These already imply a complex process of ideation and transformation of the "potential space," after the "mirror stage," into a signifiable space of representation. The child, *intervening* according to one of these functions, *observing* according to the other, codes them by intonation (rising in the first case, falling in the second) but, better still, by a gestural semiotics that is complex and difficult to describe.

While it is true that pseudo-morphemes and even pseudo-syntagms appear during this period, they remain holophrastic: they vocalize the latter, they designate the place or the object of enunciation (the "topic") whereas the motor or vocal gesture (intonation) takes the place of the predicate (the "comment").

We note that beginning with the "first point of psychic organization," the luminous reference point or the mother's face producing laughter parallel to the first vocalizations, the future-speaker comes to separate these points into *objects* (at first "transitional," then simply objects) and hereafter to add to them *not laughter*, but *phonation*—archetype of the morpheme, condensation of the sentence. As if *laughter, constitutive of space, becomes, with the help of maturation and repression, a "place name."*

This primitive naming is often an adverb of place, an anaphoric demonstrative, or more generally, a "topic" referring to an object either external or internal to the body proper and to the practical, immediate environment; observable in the first infantine verbalizations, it is always relative to a "space"—a *point*, which has become an *object* or *referent*.

Current research on the language of children between two and three years old[33] has indicated that fifty percent of the utterances of two-year-old children are of the type *that, that's a* plus *nominative syntagm*, the percentage falling to fifteen percent at the age of three to three and one-half years. The archaic appearance of demonstrative anaphorics is accompanied by other archaic phenomena which have their roots in the first attempts at vocalization and the echolalias accompanying the constitution of the semiotic *chora*: glottal sounds and accentuation (a play on intensity and frequencies of vowel sounds).

Psycholinguists are well aware that before the appearance of any more or less regular syntax, the infant produces utterances that are closer to the *topic-comment*

33. This research involves two groups of children: five children observed from age three months to three years, and five children observed from age two to three years. The results, statistically meager and solely applicable as hypotheses for future work, must be tested against analyses of a larger number of cases. Verbal exchanges are recorded during collective games where an individualized relationship potentially grows between the adult analyst and each of the children. The analysis also involves the regression that this play-attentiveness induces in the researchers and students as a prerequisite for the deciphering and interpretation of infantine-infantile discourse.

model than to the *subject-predicate* model.[34] Although admittedly the relevancy of the two syntactic models could be discussed indefinitely, we see in this phenomenon the recurrence of the spatial reference point which not only initiates the semiotic but also supports the first syntactic acquisitions.

It may be worth recalling the semantic functions of the demonstrative anaphorics which appear in the *topic* position in the utterances of fifty percent of young French-speaking children. As Damourette and Pichon point out, the demonstratives (*ce, cet, cette, celui, celui-ci, celui-là, eux*: from the Latin *ecce*) confer a determination emerging from a state of *presence* and *proximity*; but they also have an *inciting* value, thus addressing themselves to the subject of enunciation by way of the uttered signified (present in *ça*: "*ça, donnez-moy que j'aille acheter votre esclave,*" Molière, *L'Etourdi*, II, 6); the spatial function can become temporal ("*d'ici demain,*" "*en deçà,*" "*en ça*"); finally, they have a function which could be termed "metalinguistic" for they refer back to other signs in the utterance or context ("*il faut faire ci, il faut faire ça*"; "*un secret aussi gardé que celui gardé dans ce message*"; "*accepter, dans des circonstances comme celles actuelles, un pouvoir écrasant par son poids*"; or the pleonastic expression: "*c'est le prendre qu'elle veut*"). Finally, let us recall the position of Benveniste, for whom the deictic is the mark of *discourse* within the system of a particular *language*, meaning that it defines itself essentially through its use by enunciators. Thus, the demonstrative designates in modern French the enunciation rather than the utterance (a reference to the subject; a referral back to a place outside of discourse/referent), a sign (it carves out the signifying chain and refers to it metalinguistically), and itself (it can be auto-referential). All these functions together compose the demonstrative anaphoric into a complex "shifter," straddling several functions of language, producing a series of distancings from the enunciation with respect to the subject, the referent, signs, and itself. A veritable

34. On *topic-comment* interpretation of infantine syntax, see Jeffrey S. Gruber, "Topicalization in Child Language," in *Foundations of Language*, III (1967), 37–65; as well as Martin Braine, "The Ontogeny of English Phrase Structure," in *Language*, XXXIX (1961), 1–13; Braine notes that the first infantine utterances are determined by relationships of order falling into two categories (*pivot words* plus "X") which include pronouns, prepositions, and auxiliaries, and that children first learn *localization* of units before being able to associate them through a process of "Contextual generalization," into morphemic pairs and finally into normative syntax. Thomas G. Bever, Jerry A. Fodor, and William Wexsel, "Theoretical Notes on the Acquisition of Syntax: Critique of 'Contextual Generalization,'" in *Psychological Review*, 72 (1965), 476–82, criticize this position and stress the fact that positionality is only the result of innate grammatical classes: in the beginning would be classes, not places. Whatever the methodological and psychological interest of this discussion in its own right, we would like to point out that the spatiality supporting the semiotic function (which we pointed out above) is echoed, at the time of the symbolic, linguistic, functioning of the subject, in the fact that positionality determines the organization of the signifying chain itself. The semiotic *chora* or the potential space that, within the equivocal aspect of primary narcissism, played between fluid "terms" (I/other, inside/outside), are henceforth replaced by terms with precise positions which draw their logical and syntactic value from this very position. But is the genesis of the positionality of terms (here we are outlining a few of its psychoanalytic aspects) as conferring value, a supplementary argument in favor of this theory, to the detriment of the theory, currently and widely debated, of the universality of grammatical categories?

"catastrophe," in the sense of the morphological theories of catastrophes[35]: passage from one enunciative space to another. While it is true that the infantine utterances discussed here do not show all of these semantic latencies of demonstratives, probably they contain them unconsciously: the child lodges himself within a language, French, which has gathered these modalities of spatialization into one category—"catastrophe." These modalities remain immanent to any usage of the demonstrative, as in all languages, since it is true (as we have noted since the beginning of this article) that the archeology of *spatial naming* accompanies the development of autonomy of the *subjective unity*.

The discourse of a two-year-old girl demonstrated what we think to be the psychoanalytic thrust of the archaic naming of referential space by demonstratives. Each time she organized the space of the room in which we played together by demonstratives or deictics (*c'est, ici, là, haut, bas, ceci, cela*), she felt obliged to "analyze" this place (these places) thus fragmented, by giving them a person's name: "mama" or the mother's first name. Precocious and quite advanced in language acquisition, extremely attached to her father and, probably, impressed by her mother's new pregnancy, (most likely for all of these "reasons," and in opposition herself to her female interlocutor who could not help but remind her of her mother), the little girl established her "mama" in all the corners designated by these recently acquired spatial terms.

This discourse leads to the hypothesis (confirmed or disproved by other transferences) that spatial naming—including those already syntactically elaborated forms such as demonstratives and adverbs of place—retains the memory of the maternal impact already evoked within the constitution of semiotic rudiments. Given the frequency of *topic* demonstrative utterances beginning with the first grammatically constructed sentences, we could say that *the entry into syntax constitutes a first victory over the mother*, a still uncertain distancing of the mother, by the simple fact of naming (by the appearance of the *topic*, and more exactly, of the demonstrative *c'est*). The distance seems uncertain, for it is now that the child experiences pleasure in repeating utterances of this type, and that behavior of submission, humiliation, and victimization appears in relation to adults as well as to peers. It is as if a certain masochism appears, parallel to the introjection of an archaic mother, which the infant is not yet able to satisfactorily designate, name, or localize.

It is striking to note that later, at about three years, the composition of the most frequent utterances changes at the same time as the chief behavioral characteristic. The *topic* is, henceforth, less the anaphoric demonstrative *c'est* than a deictic *personal pronoun*, essentially *Moi je*. While seventeen percent of the two-year-old children's utterances exhibit this structure, the figure increases to thity-six percent of the three-year-old children's utterances. At the same time, we note the appearance of the possibility of *negating* the demonstrative: *pas ça, c'est pas*, a

35. Cf. J. Petitot, "Identité et catastrophe," delivered at the seminar of Claude Lévi-Strauss on *Identity*, January 1975.

game in which the children indulge with a pleasure leading to frequent glossalalias (*pas ça, c'est cassé, c'est à papa, pas cassé, c'est pas ça, c'est à papa,* etc.). At the same time that the father is evoked, *negation* and the designation of *protagonists of enunciation* (personal pronouns) become manifest. This explicit negativity, connoting an increase of independence within the symbolic and the capacity for an auto-designation ("*je*"—object of discourse), is supported by aggression. An often distinct "sadism," which could be interpreted as a devouring of the archaic mother, succeeds the preceding "masochism." Significantly, the generic demonstration (*ça c'est*) occurs less frequently at this age: only fifteen percent of *ça c'est* plus *nominative syntagm,* as opposed to fifty percent at two years old. The psychic investment of the child disengages itself from the *place* and refines the spatialization of the enunciation as well as the spatialization of the signifying chain itself. The well-known "bobin game," with its *fort-da* observed around the age of eighteen months, acquires, over a period of time, its linguistic realization at first by demonstrative or localizing utterances and finally by personal and negative utterances.

One could add to this archeology of naming (the spatial reference point, the demonstrative, the "topic," the individual person's name) and to the equivocal subject/object relationship which is its psychoanalytic aspect ("potential space," primary narcissism, autoeroticism, sado-masochism), the perplexed notions of logicians on the semantics of proper names. According to some logicians—Stuart Mill, for example—proper names have no signification (they denote but do not connote): they do not signify but designate a referent. For others like Russell, they are abbreviations of descriptions for a series, class, or system of particulars (even for a "cluster" of definitions), and are equivalent to demonstratives (*ceci, cela*). For Frege, on the contrary, the deictic does not yet designate an "object." We, however, see in the proper name a substantive of definite reference (therefore similar to the demonstrative) but of indefinite signification ("cognitive" as well as "emotive"), arising from an uncertain position of the speaking subject's identity and referring back to the preobjectal state of naming. The emergence of the personal designation and of the proper name in proximity to the deictics, and the semantic latencies (of the "potential space") of this period, are (and consequently, explain) the dynamic and the semantic ambiguity of proper names, their lack of precision in relation to the notion of identity, and their impact within unconscious and imaginary constructions.

As the *Logique* of Port Royal points out, *ceci* marks a "confused idea of the immediate thing," while allowing the mind to add ideas "excited by circumstances."[36] A presence, thus posited but confused, and an evocation of uncertain multiplicities would therefore explain why *this,* in its well-known evangelical usage, is at the same time Bread and Body of Christ: "This is my body." But the believers of the "Cartesian subject," the logicians of Port Royal, cannot rationalize the passage from one to the other under the same deictic *ceci* except through

36. A. Arnauld et P. Nicole, *Logique,* Paris, PUF, 1965, p. 101.

recourse to *time*: before *ceci* was bread, now *ceci* is my body. Reason is saved only at the expense of an obsessional shackling to time and similarly, at the expense of an effacement of "mystery" as bodily and/or nominal mutation under the same signifier (despite any precautions concerning theology in the *Logique).*

Could transsubstantiation (for it is a question of transsubstantiation: the child cannot help leading all of us, men and women, to it, because it is such a key fantasy of our reproductive desires) be an indelible thematization of this same fold between the "space" of need (for food, survival) and a symbolic space of designation (of the body proper)? Could it be a fold that the archeology of deictics summarizes, which is produced in all archaic designations of the mother, as well as in all experiences at the limits of corporal identity; that is, the identity of meaning and of presence?

Infantine language, if we need an "object" of study; infantile language, certainly: within our "adult" discourse these potential meanings and topological latencies are at work. We suggest that naming, always originating in a place (the *chora,* space, "topic," subject-predicate), is a *replacement* for what the speaker perceives as an archaic mother—a more or less victorious encounter, never really completed with her. By indicating, as precisely as possible, how the units and minimal operations of *any language* (and even more certainly, those of *discourse*) adopt, model, transform, and extend this pregnancy which still constitutes the ultimate limit of meaning in which, without analysis, transcendence takes root.

semiotexte

SCHIZO-CULTURE

VOLUME III Numbers 2 & 3

Kathy ACKER, Martine BARRAT, William BURROUGHS, John CAGE, L. F. CELINE, David COOPER, Gilles DELEUZE, Douglas DUNN, Richard FOREMAN, Michel FOUCAULT, John GIORNO, Phil GLASS, Jerzy GROTOWSKI, Félix GUATTARI, R. D. LAING, J. F. LYOTARD, Ülrike MEINHOF, Mary OVERLIE, Steve REICH, Ed SANDERS, Jack SMITH, Bob WILSON, and many others.

This collection will appear in two issues: Vol. III, Nos. 2 & 3.

BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

SAUSSURE'S ANAGRAMS. Vol. II, No. 1: $2.50

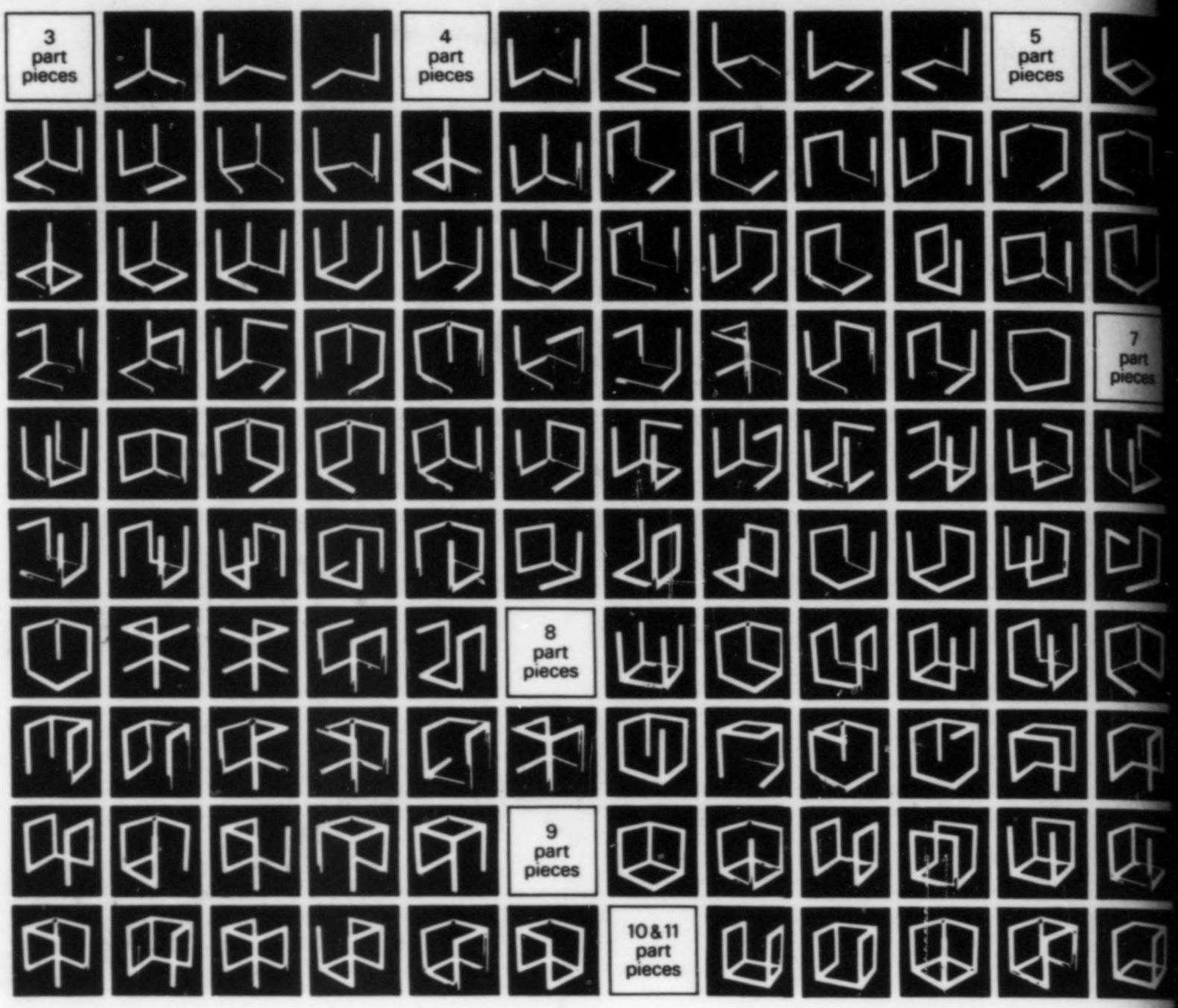
GEORGES BATAILLE. Vol. II, No. 2: $3.00

ANTI-OEDIPUS: Artaud, Deleuze, Guattari, Lyotard, etc. Vol. II, No. 3: $3.50

NIETZSCHE'S RETURN: Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault, Bataille, Derrida, etc. Vol. III, No. 1: $3.00

Individual Subscriptions: $7.50 per volume; **Institutions:** $18.00. Three issues comprise one volume. Add $2.00 per volume for surface mail outside the U.S. and Canada. Check should be made payable to *Semiotext(e), Inc.* Use International Money Orders if outside the U.S.

semiotexte
522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia Univ.
New York, New York 10027
(212) 280-3956



old

rt 3

ngs