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OCTOBER

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Cover photograph: Robert Rauschenberg. Allegory. *1959–60.*

JAMES BENNING's *Grand Opera*, released last year, is the fourth and final film in a series which begins with *8 1/2 × 11* (1974) and continues with *11 × 14* (1976) and *One-Way Boogie-Woogie* (1977). He holds degrees in mathematics and fine arts from the University of Wisconsin and has taught film and video at various universities.

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ROBERT MORRIS is currently preparing a catalogue raisonné of his art, which, in addition, will collect his extensive theoretical writings. The first volume will appear later this year through Harper and Row.

Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim*

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH, ROSALIND KRAUSS,
and ANNETTE MICHELSON

Michelson: Rosalind and I come to a direct experience of the work of Joseph Beuys somewhat late. From what I know of developments in Germany over the last twenty years I have the feeling that this work, which has had an extraordinary dissemination throughout Europe, must already have encountered a fairly coherent questioning and analysis, conceivably by German Marxists. Is that so? Are we not likely to rehearse many of the questions and reservations that the work has already elicited in German critical literature?

Buchloh: I think we must distinguish between two confrontations. One is an art-historical or art-critical reception of the work; the other, political criticism. A third, which I think we can immediately discard, is the more conservative criticism that the work encountered very early on, then decreasingly so with Beuys's success. But to my knowledge the first of these is virtually nonexistent. The reason is that art criticism in Germany—as far as the contemporary arts are concerned—has, with only two or three exceptions, simply not been developed.

Krauss: So the critical response has been solely journalistic, a media response to Beuys, to his having made an impression in a wider artistic arena, having made a comeback for German art. Would that characterize the German press's relation to Beuys's work?

Buchloh: Yes, absolutely. The major critical figures in Germany who have written about Beuys—and they are the exceptions to whom I was referring . . .

Michelson: Could you name them?

* This conversation took place on January 5 and was occasioned by the first major showing of the work of Joseph Beuys to be organized by an American museum. The exhibition, with an accompanying catalogue by Caroline Tisdall, was held at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, from November 1, 1979 to January 2, 1980.

Buchloh: Yes, there are two critics of contemporary art in Germany that one can take seriously: one is Laszlo Glozer; the other, Dieter Köpplin, who is actually Swiss. They have written about Beuys over the past ten years; yet in every case that I know, they have been very favorable, very supportive. And these are the better qualified voices. The rest of the critics have joined . . .

Krauss: . . . in a kind of hysterical eulogy.

Buchloh: Yes, a totally uncritical, almost hysterical eulogy, which has increased with the years. The reception of Beuys is phenomenal. It began around 1967–68—amazingly enough it took all that time—and then it happened like an explosion. Everyone jumped on the bandwagon and contributed his little eulogy to the general praise.

Michelson: What you have said so far is certainly confirmed by Caroline Tisdall's catalogue text. On the other hand, the catalogue also contains at least one interesting testimony to the interest of Beuys's work for a major German writer, Peter Handke. Handke apparently attended a performance of Beuys's *Iphigenie/Titus Andronicus* and was deeply impressed by it. He accounts for the interest essentially by the way in which the performance solicits both distancing and participation, and stimulates an effort at intellection on the part of the spectator.

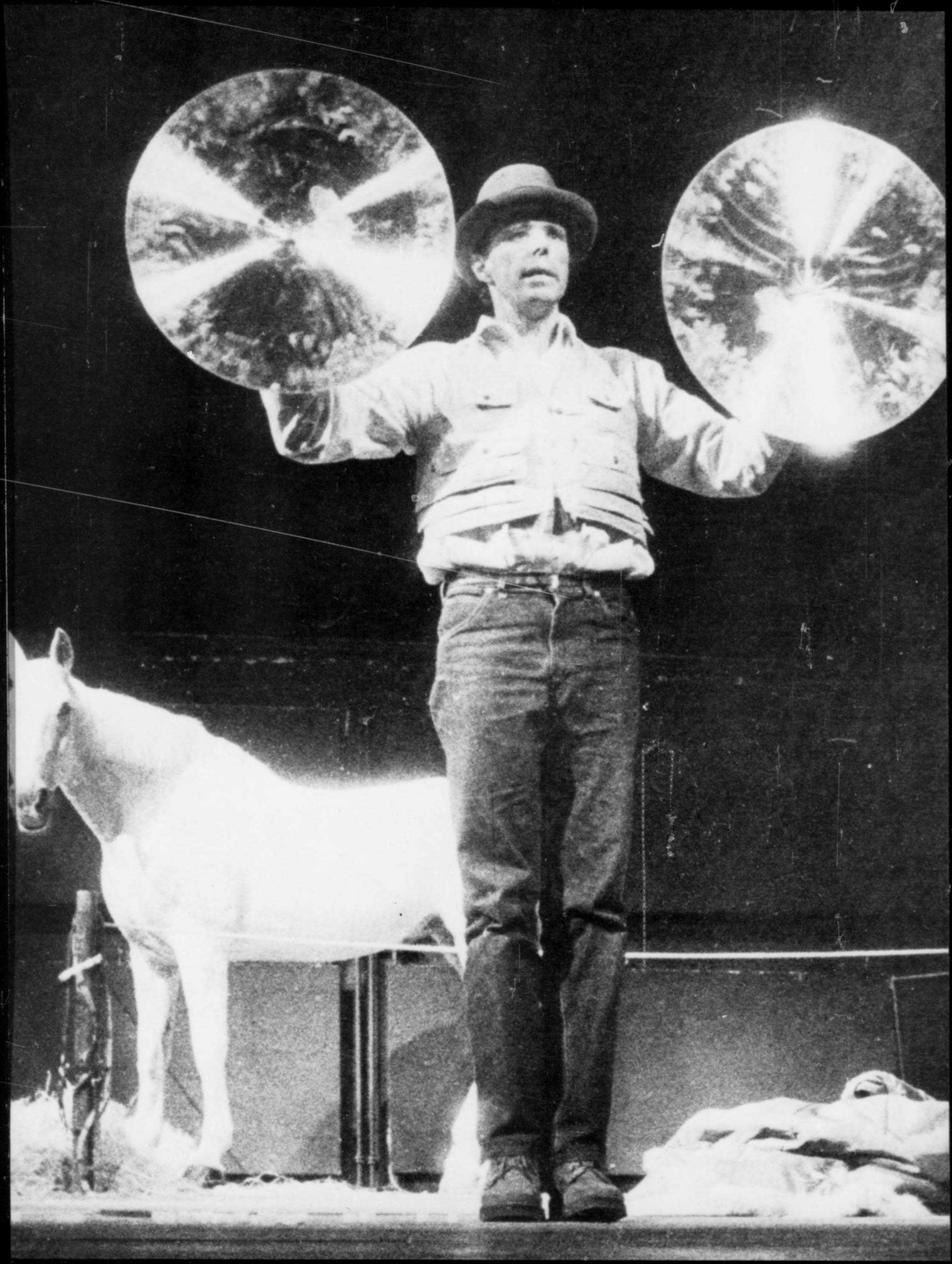
Buchloh: But he looks at it in conventional theatrical terms. Handke unfortunately does not know anything about the visual arts; that is obvious from what he says about Beuys, as well as from other statements.

Michelson: That may be so, but what that means is—and I don't think this is a very unexpected conclusion—that one must regard this work as more than a group of objects for exhibition. Certainly the work solicits attention in a number of ways and on a number of levels.

Krauss: The question about Beuys's work as theater, and therefore as something implicitly removed from the kind of criticism applied to works of art, and instead relocated within not only the sphere of theater but also that of an exemplary life-style—that is something about which Beuys has been very insistent.

Buchloh: In that respect the work has definitely received criticism. That was the other pole of the distinction I was about to make. In the late sixties, when Beuys emerged as a major cult figure during the student revolution in Germany, people did question whether or not he could be considered a political ally—and when I say people I mean the students and theoreticians who were working very seriously on political issues. I was then living in Berlin, and to everyone I knew there it was absolutely clear that Beuys's activity and intellectual position could be understood

Joseph Beuys. Iphigenie/Titus Andronicus. *1969.*



only in terms of aesthetic ideology. No one who was really involved in political issues took him seriously at all.

Beuys tried desperately to enter the political discussion in the late sixties, and successfully so by engaging in activities within the Düsseldorf Academy. He fought for the proposal to have an open academy. In fact he generated considerable enthusiasm and engagement among students at the academy; he had a large group of disciples who tried to change the conditions there. But still one would have to question the validity and pragmatics of his political proposals. They represent a utopian position. His claim that everyone should have access, that there should be no selection process—those issues have some interest; but in relation to the more general political concerns of the student movement there was no possible association. At that time Beuys never questioned the economic structure. When he started out, and even still, he rejected Marxist theory and philosophy altogether and claimed as a major philosophic antecedent Rudolph Steiner. And that should give us something to . . .

Michelson: It's an enormous clue. I want to return to that and to pursue the genesis of his political direction. But first, although Beuys may have been isolated from the political student movements, he was of course allied with the Fluxus group. If you look at Allen Kaprow's *Assemblage, Environments, & Happenings* there is a score composed by Wolf Vostell for a happening called *Citirama I,* which is extremely political. It consists essentially of directives for actions to be carried out by the participants in the happening, and those participants can be any reader. It involves the contemplation of twenty-six ruined spaces in Cologne. This was performed in 1961, but I imagine it dates further back. In any case, Beuys did have contact with at least one member of the group and probably others who manifested in their work a concern with the political implications of that landscape.

Krauss: But this doesn't show up in Beuys's work.

Michelson: That's right, and that's the question I'm asking, because there is another work by Beuys dated 1966 and entitled *Eurasia.* It is described as a happening or performance involving a symbolic fusion of East and West, a symbolic fusion manifested in terms of crossed figures. And then there is the protest of the hare. That is to say, the components, some kind of sketch of a political statement, are there in 1966. What do you have to say about that?

Buchloh: In the early sixties he was acting voluntarily as a fairly efficient organizer of Fluxus activities in Germany. He was a key figure in helping George Maciunas stage Fluxus events in Düsseldorf and elsewhere. That was a task that he handled successfully, and it had its merits. But when the Fluxus group was confronted

with Beuys's own activities in the famous happening at the Düsseldorf Academy in 1963, they were quite astonished. I remember a recent conversation with Emmet Williams in which he described their shock at finding themselves aligned with this kind of activity. They were simply incapable of making heads or tails of what Beuys was trying to do.

Krauss: They couldn't see any way of integrating it?

Michelson: You're talking about the Americans?

Buchloh: Yes. They nevertheless saw themselves welcomed and supported; Beuys helped them set up and perform, as he did for Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris. That is an example of Beuys's fictitious autobiography. He refers to the meeting he had with Rainer and Morris in Düsseldorf in 1962 as the beginning of a friendship. I've talked with Yvonne about it, and she said Beuys was very helpful, that it was terrific to talk with him, but it's a bit exaggerated to call it the beginning of a friendship because she's never seen him since. There are numerous attempts to construct a private mythology, which I find really distasteful.

Michelson: Well, that is standard procedure in the art world. How many chronologies of artists' lives include, "1940, met Kandinsky; 1950, became associated with Arp"? And you know that it was just a drink at the Deux Magots or perhaps a game of chess somewhere, but never repeated, or maybe repeated only on a chance meeting fifteen years later. That is a convention of art-world historiography.

Buchloh: One should look at the kind of work Beuys was doing before he encountered the Fluxus artists in the early sixties. He had come out of—and we can't really blame him for this—a conventional, conservative, academic education. He had studied with Mataré, an honest, authentic sculptor who had survived the Nazi period without being too corrupted, but who was a conservative sculptor committed to . . .

Michelson: Pollock is known as the pupil of Thomas Hart Benton . . .

Buchloh: . . . Catholic church decoration, and so was Beuys. Beuys's early work, strongly under the influence of Mataré, is the most traditional sculpture conceivable for the times. As I said, one can't really blame him, because that was quite simply the situation of postwar Germany, where one faced an extraordinary lack of information. So there is an abrupt break at the point when he is first confronted with the kind of information provided by the Fluxus group. You can see that it caused an immense leap forward in his own activities, which is perfectly acceptable as long as one tries to be honest about the facts instead of falsifying one's background as he does.

Krauss: Do you mind a slight digression, since we're on the subject of Beuys's mythology, his falsified background? A digression to the plane crash? I love the plane crash. No one can look at those photographs of the crash in the Crimea without bursting into laughter, because it is, of course, highly unlikely that Beuys or anyone else, the Tartars included, would have had a camera.

Michelson: Has he ever been challenged on that?

Buchloh: No, not that I know of. I'm fairly familiar with the Beuys literature, and I'm surprised that no one ever questioned that.

Krauss: Aside from the extraordinarily naive attempt to document this event—the notion that it must somehow be documented is itself rather interesting—is there any other reason to believe that the crash is a fiction?

Buchloh: Certainly all the material that he produces as proof of the experience is very doubtful. The photographic documents are completely contradictory. His own statements are contradictory, to say the least. When he talks about the Tartars having found him after the crash; when he talks about his copilot wearing a seatbelt and therefore having been atomized, while he, having not worn a seatbelt because he believes in freedom of movement . . .

Michelson: I also love the part about his familiarity with the terrain, although without a map.

Buchloh: He also speaks of the Tartars as recognizing him as being not German but one of *them.* He quotes them as saying, "Du nix njemcky, du Tatar"—you are a Tartar. That is what I call his construction of a myth of origin. And I think it is worthwhile to consider that construction, the motivation to include that myth in the work-biography. You might reiterate that this is standard practice in twentieth-century art, but the creation of the artist-hero is, at least in part, dependent upon the artist's willingness to contribute to that myth. There is a certain amount of information that supports that in many cases; but in the case of Beuys it is a deliberately planned, systematic setup that has been propounded in recent years.

Krauss: Would you say that the Tartar fable has to do with his placing himself outside a German context? Of establishing a margin in which to operate which is not really German?

Buchloh: For what other reason would he introduce that fiction into the work context? What else, if not the necessity to cover, idealize, or adorn an experience which, if limited to historical accuracy, would not be particularly heroic?

Krauss: What I find compelling about it is that in structure it reflects certain Christian myths, such as the fall on the road to Damascus, a falling to earth and being reborn.

Michelson: Given this notion of rebirth, the first object in the exhibition is, interestingly enough, the bathtub in which presumably he was bathed as a child, whether it is supposed to be the actual one, that is to say, a relic, or . . .

Buchloh: That is never clarified.



Joseph Beuys. Bathtub. *1960.*

Michelson: And he goes on to speak of the trauma of birth, the notion of salvation—that whole constellation of ideas he's inscribed within the biography and the exhibition. It is a mythic construction that is extremely intricate, and it has indeed had considerable success. However critical one's view of it may be, it does display an immense resourcefulness, a kind of consistency within inconsistency, and endurance. I would not want to underestimate the skills required for the elaboration and perpetuation of that myth. So I wonder whether, instead of simply condemning, one might not consider this phenomenon as symptomatic. There are a number of things that follow from this mythopoetic process. And shouldn't we also look at the philosophical and ideological figures invoked in this work? For example, in an "action" of the seventies, having to do with the organization of the Free International University, texts from St. John of the Cross, Plato, St. Augustine, and—naturally—Rudolph Steiner were read. If you look at Steiner again, it becomes very interesting. I was struck, at the Guggenheim exhibition, by the opening items that looked like pressed flowers. Someone said to me, "It's a very German-looking exhibition," and I said, "What does that mean?" Well, what it meant to me was that here was a retrospective exhibition which opens with what look like pressed flowers, the sort of thing a respectable German nature lover would make at home after he had finished his nature hike.

Buchloh: That would have been done in 1890.

Michelson: Yes, and still until the War, at least.

Buchloh: The First or Second?

Michelson: The Second. One knew former inmates of concentration camps who, as soon as they had gained the requisite sixty pounds, went mountain climbing. The nature cult is very strong, although by now it is probably much attenuated; yet it existed at least until the Second World War. Now, we know Steiner begins as a Goethean, the editor of Goethe's scientific writings and proponent of a philosophy of the organic, of a cosmology, a systemics of nature. If Beuys's work is interesting, that is because it is a rehearsal of things very familiar to us; it is essentially an elaborate system of intellectual *bricolage.* Nature, industry, love, money—all those high-minded notions and sacred substances. And then, on the other hand, the charming, naive, touching fascination with electricity—his notion of the battery, for example. When I came home from the exhibition, I looked up in a couple of books something about the history of our knowledge of electricity. Beuys stops around 1830, I would say, just after Faraday.

Buchloh: Linnaeus is one of his other great heroes.

Michelson: Yes, of course. Take his proposal of the stag's antlers as the outward

manifestation of the circulatory system, and the social and economic systems as other circulatory systems. There's something engaging and charming about these efforts.

Buchloh: What is the charm?

Michelson: There's something about the construction of intellectual systems, of intellectual *bricolage,* on any level that has charm—Beuys as a kind of intellectual Facteur Cheval or Grandma Moses. Freud understood the aesthetic aspects of conceptual systems.

Krauss: But the enormous public success of Beuys makes the charm problematic and in fact rather appalling.

Michelson: But I think we have to consider what that success is.

Krauss: Okay. What is interesting about this myth of rebirth is that it takes place on non-German soil, and is then rehearsed through a relationship to a historical past. What get assembled are bits and pieces of European history which are never localized in relationship to the rise of the modern state. That is, they have to do with a vague history of the Teutonic past; it is a history having much more to do with a system of feudal relationships than those which would be applicable in any way to the development of modern Germany, or the modern world in general. There is a series of displacements. The rebirth didn't take place in Germany; that history is somehow displaced. And therefore presumably one of the reasons this mythic creature is so compelling to the German imagination is that he presents a way of considering the past without having to consider it as one's *own* past, never in relationship to an immediate past or any specific present.

Michelson: I entirely agree with you about that. But I also want to consider the more specifically localized issues which he sometimes addresses. For example, the project for that ultimate transvaluation of values which is the redefinition of money is extraordinary as an ahistorical conception of the cash nexus. There is something about the system-building which functions as the support for the production of objects; that is, there must be an interesting point of intersection between the system of organic substances and that of industry, electricity, etc.

Buchloh: I would say that that is crucial, and I'm amazed that no one has criticized him for that. Historical thought on any level—whether general historical thought, art-historical thought, any attempt to acknowledge the specific conditions of a historical situation—is rejected by Beuys altogether. The history of post-Second-World-War Germany, which is Beuys's own historical situation; the history of an emerging, economically powerful society; the histories of specific art forms—all of these are ignored, falsified, or mythified.

Michelson: I think that is so, and, to return to what I previously said, I cannot imagine that the kind of criticism that exists in Germany, particularly that of Marxists, would not have stressed the total ahistoricity of this man's views.

Krauss: But maybe we're going to have to imagine just that.

Michelson: Is that really so?

Buchloh: Absolutely, yes.

Michelson: Even in the catalogue, Tisdall says—although she obviously can't handle this—that Beuys met with opposition from the communists and Marxists; he met with criticism, although she isn't specific, because she's involved in a hagiographical enterprise.

Buchloh: But so far as I know she considers herself to be, if not a Marxist, certainly a politically conscious critic. As you may know, she has been a critic for the Manchester *Guardian.* She has held rather explicit political positions on numerous occasions. But it seems that her involvement with Beuys has mitigated her political thought entirely, because reading her catalogue essay would convince anyone that she has no sense whatever of history. As you say, she's involved with a hagiography of this individual.

Michelson: At first glance Beuys seems to be someone who plays a role in Germany analogous to that of Cage, and not Duchamp, obviously with many great differences.

Buchloh: I would strongly oppose any alignment of Beuys with either Duchamp or Cage. I don't think that they can be compared at all. Neither Duchamp nor Cage consistently created that kind of myth. For Duchamp, it was a matter of private life after the official conclusion of his art production, at which time he was mythologized by the public. Duchamp never made his work benefit from fictitious aspects of his biography.

Michelson: But Cage is perhaps another matter. All during the 1960s and early 1970s the group around Cage was involved in a very explicit articulation of the transcendentalist origins of Cagean ideology. I vividly remember a conversation I had with Jasper Johns in 1967 or '68, in which I pointed out to him, as he proposed to "solve the problem of the Harlem ghetto" by the redistribution of wealth through the systematic application of chance, that to an actual inhabitant of Harlem it looked very much as if chance were already operative.

Buchloh: Absolutely. And similarly, one might argue with regard to Beuys that he

has never acknowledged the historians, theoreticians, intellectuals who have worked to solve political problems, certainly more so than those involved in aesthetic practice. He has never considered Habermas, for example, nor any of the other social philosophers and historians who have grown out of the Frankfurt School—Haug, Negt, Brückner—which would be an obvious thing to do if one were seriously concerned with political problems.

Michelson: It seems very understandable to me that he would not. There is an extraordinary disquisition in the catalogue texts on the notion of time. What struck me was the attempt to integrate temporality within the Beuysian cosmology, which requires a gesture that I think can only be described as pataphysical: for example, his observation that Einstein somehow had to be transcended. What I think needs to be considered, therefore, is not how Beuys confronts the work of Habermas and the Frankfurt School, but how Beuys's work can be confronted by the forms and categories proposed by Habermas. One would see, for example, the contradictions involving university work and the mythopoetic process as another strategy of legitimization by the German middle class.

Buchloh: I would be reluctant to align him with that class because there is the evidence that the conservative middle class of the late fifties and sixties rejected Beuys altogether. That is equally true for the academic art historians and art institutions. So during the sixties Beuys was playing the avant-garde role of the outcast. Since the late sixties there has been a dramatic shift in Beuys's reception, going so far as his reception by the Chancellor.

Krauss: But the chronology you're sketching needs additional information. To my knowledge the German middle class did not become interested in collecting contemporary art until the late sixties. When we in this country realized that pop art had made a tremendous impression on the German art public, it was a much discussed phenomenon, and that was in the late sixties. But until then, though there may have been an interest in modernism among certain German collectors, it was not a widespread cultural phenomenon, not until the success of pop art.

Buchloh: Amazingly enough one of the strongest early supporters of Beuys was Karl Ströher. In 1968 he bought in its entirety the first museum show of Beuys's work, at the Museum Mönchen-Gladbach. And at the same time he was about to establish the most comprehensive German collection of pop art.

Krauss: The reason I raised that is that the growth of Beuys's career does coincide with a reborn attention, on the part of a wider German audience, to art as a vehicle of cultural experience.

Michelson: May I remind you of the context in which this part of our conversation

began? I said a moment ago that Beuys might not make use of Habermas, but that we can make use of Habermas in thinking about Beuys, to which you replied that during the sixties Beuys was working outside the system.

Buchloh: Certainly he was treated as an outsider, and he considered himself one. The shift in Beuys's fortunes in the late sixties connects with the general acknowledgement of economic achievement. There was a young middle class that had just come into its own, and which provided support for this kind of art. I don't think it's farfetched to say that this new middle class represents a new consciousness, a self-assurance, a complacency that finds its equivalent in the myth of the personality proposed by Beuys's work. This class did not align itself with the German intellectual activity of the sixties that provided the theoretical basis for a new politicization. There is, therefore, a specific connection between Beuys's ideological position and the expectations of the new art public for an artist-hero who will provide the images for a new cultural identity. Freud discusses the imposition of cultural identity through the art product.

Krauss: Beuys's position that everyone is an artist is a populist, anti-elitist stance which would presumably be somewhat offensive to that middle class.

Buchloh: No, because that's not dangerous to say; it's an obsolete surrealist statement. It is, in any case, a quotation from Lautréamont, and at this time it's an insignificant, empty gesture, because it lacks any historical precision. It's a position of no relevance, no political consequence.

Michelson: What is certainly striking as you consider that statement and others in the catalogue and as you look at the objects in the exhibition is the sense of a rehearsal not only of a surrealist program, but of a surrealist inventory—the silent gramophone, the felt-covered piano. . . . Beuys is involved again and again with this kind of refabrication.

Buchloh: Which can be explained in part by the fact that there was no reception of dada and surrealism in Germany.

Michelson: That cannot have been true. Surrealism is perhaps another matter, but I doubt you can say that of dada.

Buchloh: I said reception. There is a time lag due to fascism and the war. The fifties and to some extent the sixties were strongly determined by a necessity to rediscover, or even to discover for the first time, the impact of those positions.

Krauss: It is another instance of Beuys's strategy of displacement.

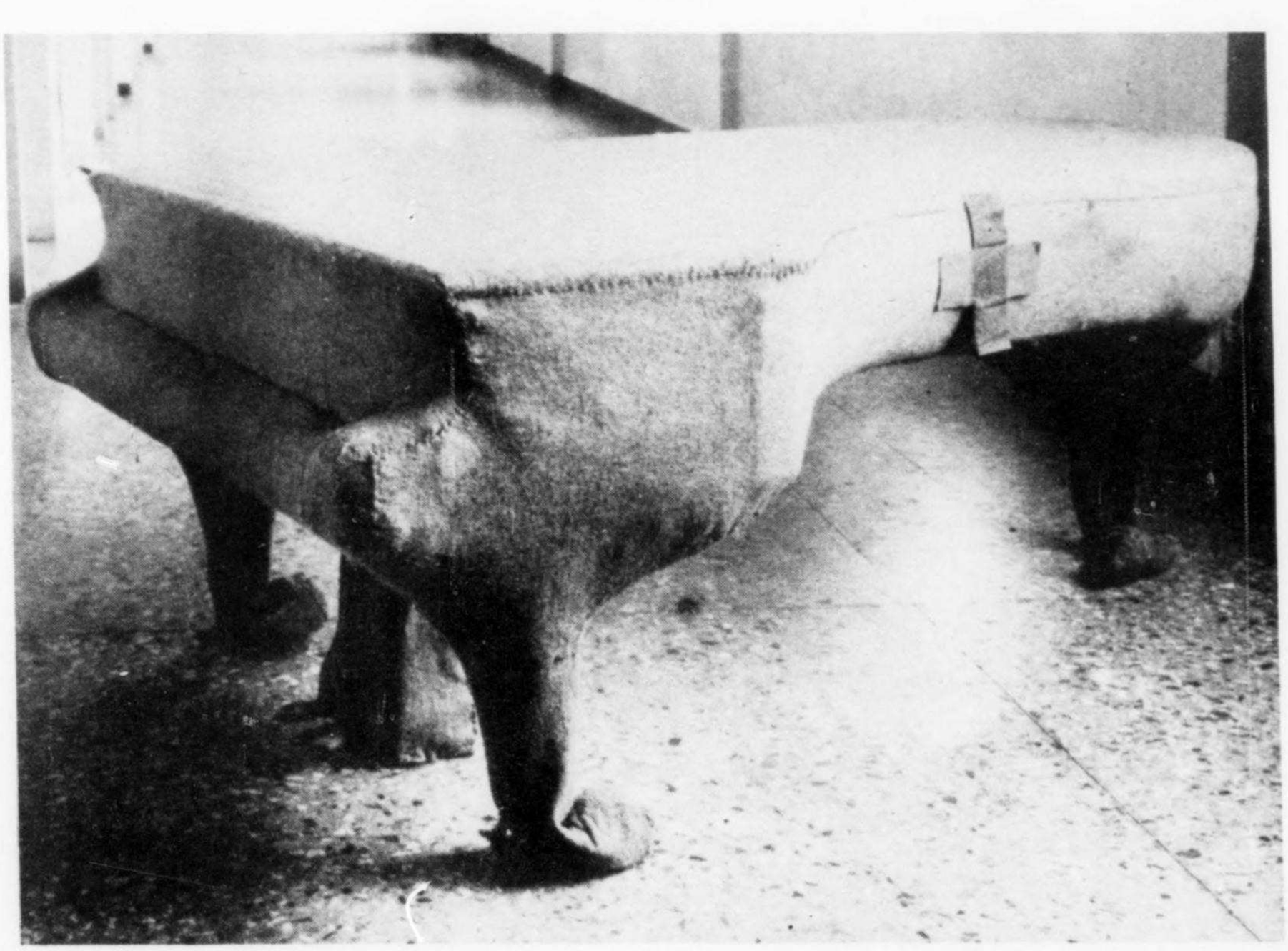
Michelson: What exactly do you mean by displacement in these instances?

Krauss: Reality is constantly recontextualized so that it is not recognizable for what it is.

Michelson: But it's recognizable to anyone with a historical sense.

Krauss: That's just what I mean. I see Beuys's work as leveling any kind of historical sense by means of this constant strategy.

Michelson: There's an example of this—let's call it displacement—which I find particularly amusing. I return to the performance of *Iphigenie/ Titus Andronicus,* which involved the simultaneous recital of excerpts from two texts. One was Goethe's *Iphigenie,* selected by Beuys as an idealist text in counterpoint with, and contradistinction to, what he calls the realist text by Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus.* A lot of other things are going on as well, and what might first occur to one is the insistence upon simultaneity that became so important an aspect of performance work here during the sixties with Cage and Cunningham. But the description of this evoked for me, instead, von Hofmannsthal's libretto for



Joseph Beuys. Infiltration-Homogen for Grand Piano. *1966.*

Adriadne auf Naxos. There, in the first scene, the talented young composer is presenting an opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, to a totally philistine patron, who has also commissioned a comedy and fireworks to follow. And the young hero finds himself constrained by the patron's miserly insensitivity, so that his drama must be performed simultaneously with the other, secular play. Von Hofmannsthal is, of course, addressing a trenchant criticism to a system of production and patronage. Now, when Beuys undertakes to perform his "idealist" and "realist" texts in concert, he is enacting, as avant-garde practice and as an exercise in the transvaluation of values, the fable of philistinism created a half-century before.

Krauss: That is certainly the kind of thing I've been talking about, and the kind of thing I assume Benjamin meant when he said, "Why do we have to deal with this as a trenchant or interesting idea of Beuys's when it's been kicking around in avant-garde aesthetics for a hundred years?" Everywhere in Beuys's work you come up against the sense that . . .

Michelson: You've been there before.

Buchloh: At least once. Sometimes I'm not sure whether he's simply a fool or a very shrewd trickster, or perhaps he's a mixture of both. The rejection of art-historical information that conditions his work is either intelligent or foolish. His displacement of actual history, his unawareness of operating within a specific context, fulfilling specific interests, serving particular ends for the new German bourgeoisie must be evaluated in a different way. Here the trickster is apparent. He is very aware of public relations and marketing strategies. He handles perfectly the highly differentiated marketing system of the art world. So there is another level of displacement: you simply cannot perform the role of the savior at the same time that you are operating within a highly calculated economic system. All of these factors would need separate analysis, but they are consistent with regard to the strategy of displacement.

Krauss: Perhaps we can understand why Beuys would appeal to the German middle class, the new professional class you've described, but how do we account for his impact in *this* country at this particular moment?

Buchloh: I would think that the interest in promoting this particular figure now must be to set the scene for the coming decade in such a way that the role of the artist will be established as that of a unique individual operating within an avant-garde tradition and opposing the bourgeois class. As we know, this is by now a fairly obsolete conception of the artist.

Krauss: But it is a conception which you think the art establishment now has an interest in perpetuating?

Buchloh: Absolutely, more so now than ever.

Krauss: But we also seem to be entering a period of voraciousness, of avidity to collect anything: teaspoons, postcards, feathers, file cabinets, anything. In that sense there seems to be a conflict—although I'm sure it can be resolved—between the need for an artist-hero and the need to give value to everything, whether or not it is created by the unique genius.

Michelson: I think that, in a situation such as that of the present, attitudes are simply not consistent and that what you say is true. It is an ultimate manifestation of what I think Habermas called postauratic art; so I'm wondering if the idea of a restoration of aura to the work of art is not central to the launching of Beuys.

Buchloh: In that sense he's a truly crucial figure.

Krauss: So the revival of the expressionist ethos is that? I'm really interested in understanding this.

Michelson: I'm not sure that I understand it, but I do wonder whether that is not involved. Remember that we were talking before about the way in which Beuys is involved with the construction of meaning. One's first experience of the Beuys exhibition is that one is almost helpless without the explanations supplied by the artist; the complex symbolic quasi-system simply necessitates guidance, instruction, the key, the code. So that at every point Beuys will say, "I have components *x*, *y*, and *z*; *x* indicates such; *y* suggests such, *z* evokes such." Somehow the exact symbolic relations between things are never specified, defined, or charted for you.

Krauss: They're simply asserted.

Buchloh: The construction of meaning for Beuys depends upon the construction of belief. I think that is very crucial, because again Beuys is not aware of how problematic meaning has become. If you look only at the twentieth-century tradition, and if you further restrict yourself to the visual arts, you will find that virtually every serious work has focused on the problematics of meaning. That is certainly one of the key features of Duchamp's work, for example. If Beuys's model of physics does not go beyond 1830, neither does his model of meaning.

Krauss: I would say that it dates to considerably before that. By the seventeeth century, French grammar and logic had developed a notion of meaning that was a little more sophisticated than that of Beuys. But I think this is an aspect of what's happening in the visual arts now. There seems to be a simple-minded notion that meaning can simply be ascribed to an object by fiat. The childishness of it, the naiveté, is on a par with the ignorance with which art is generally being received.

Joseph Beuys. Felt Objects. *1964–67. (Above.)* Honey Pump. *1977. (Below.) (Installation photos: Joseph Beuys Exhibition, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.)*

Michelson: I'd like to ask one other related question. Beuys seems in some way to be reenacting a rite of passage from a traditional, artisanal society to an industrial one; the *Honey Pump* seems a crystallization of *that* circulation. Perhaps this passage is also connected with the auratic. The student movement, schooled in Marcuse, was involved in the critical rejection of the classical Western relationship to nature, that of domination, mastery. Could it not be that a generation impelled by that critique would be particularly susceptible to the revival of the peasantlike, artisanal values projected through Beuys's work? To me, this is not a question of auratic art alone, but of a whole range of values and relationships of our culture and its economy.

Buchloh: Beuys certainly had a strong following among those people, particularly at the Düsseldorf Academy. He had dozens of most obedient, docile followers, true believers.

Michelson: Might it mean that he will now acquire a large following in this country, where there is a much more organized, larger parapolitical movement founded on ecological concerns.

Buchloh: I don't think so. The younger artists in Germany—and that is, after all, the context in which Beuys must be seen primarily—reject Beuys as a paternalistic figure. And they also reject his work. They judge his politics within the perspective of his art-political activities. In this area he is very vulnerable. For example, when it was proposed that Daniel Buren teach at the Düsseldorf Academy, Beuys, even though no longer affiliated with the academy, intrigued behind the scenes to prevent the appointment. I think that is the kind of politics that really counts.

Michelson: In contesting that appointment, what was he fighting?

Buchloh: He tried to disqualify Buren as an artist, arguing that Buren had nothing to offer the students and that his work was totally unimportant. Fortunately he was not successful. But I think it is a very interesting example of what politics actually means to Beuys. And as for his understanding of art, his favorite artists now are the new expressionist painters. They are of so little importance that I don't want to name them, but Beuys supports them.

Krauss: Is it very important for young artists to have his support?

Buchloh: I think it no longer is. It was for a period of time during the early seventies. At that time, having come out of his classes, having affiliated oneself with that tradition, was regarded as important. But as I said, the younger generation detests the institutionalization of Beuys. With regard to the Guggenheim's decision to mount this exhibition, I think there are many other possible choices more interesting to the North American public than an exhibition of an artist of the fifties. Beuys is, after all, a fifties figure.

Michelson: But wouldn't Beuys's work be central to our understanding of the general situation in Germany now? Or do you really consider this work to be peripheral?

Buchloh: I think it is peripheral. If one wants to understand German art of the past twenty years, one would have to understand the dilemma of the postwar situation.

Michelson: And you don't see Beuys as embodying that dilemma?

Buchloh: Yes, he does embody that dilemma. But he's not a key figure for understanding German art of the sixties and seventies. If you wish to understand the work of Richter or Blinky Palermo, of Hanne Darboven, or the Bechers, you don't have to know about Beuys; and even less so if you wish to understand the younger generation at work now.

Michelson: Then you would say that Beuys's work instantiates rather than assumes the difficulties, the contraditions of its time.

Buchloh: Yes, absolutely.

Joseph Beuys. Eurasia. *1966.*


DIVISION THE CROSS
EUR IA
GRAD FIL WINKEL: 32°
GRAD FET WINKEL: 27°
TEMPERATUR CEL IS: 42°

Sound and Stills from *Grand Opera*

JAMES BENNING

3. "Hello, Richard, this is Amy. I just got here and there's been an explosion and a man's lying on the floor and I think he's dead. No, he doesn't look drunk he looks dead. Well what should I do I'm frightened. No, I don't want to do that. Could you come over? Please."

5. *(Use background of shot to foretell future image.)*
Reach down and haul out a number that'll last forever
Go away by yourself when they all get together
Run down that line to sweet infinity

Let them think you died in '51
When it all blew up in the noon-day sun
Just a shrapnel-riddled grade-school memory
Just like me
A shrapnel-riddled grade-school memory

6. *(Use running text to suggest off-screen space, film time, and lack of random access: a five-minute-long sentence. Change speed of crawling text.)*

7. *(Foreshadowing of image: use narrative device as formal device. Cross-referencing image & image.)*
rain

8. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode. And a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

9. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. After two planes pass it will explode, and a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

10. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode, and a mushroom-shaped cloud will cover the city."

Grand Opera

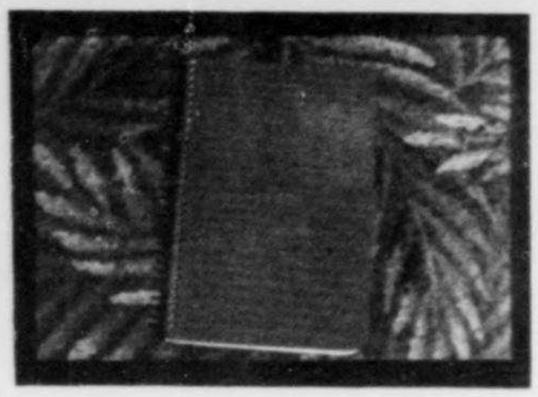
An Historical Romance

1

1978

2

3



4



5

As a young boy he first came to this very spot early in 1951 with a note book filled only with numbers, actually it contained only one number and more precisely was filled with thousands of digits approximating that one number so precious to him and so necessary and fundamental to mathematicians from almost the beginn-

6a

mathematicians from almost the beginning of counting, an irrational number without end that cannot be expressed as the quotient of two integers filled his book of green pages from beginning to end because that number is a non-repeating decimal consisting of digits extending to infinity, a transcendental number, but of course his note book even with the red

b

decimal consisting of digits extending to infinity, a transcendental number, but of course his note book even with the red covers scribbled full could only hold a countable amount of digits, and on his first encounter with this very spot where the grass was yellowing from a recent drought he was reading from cover to red cover dizits that he computed by summ-

c

the grass was yellowing from a recent drought he was reading from cover to red cover digits that he computed by summing two intricate series, a most impressive feat considering he was only eight at the time, and as he read he looked away for an instant toward the skyline while mouthing the digits and never saw the

d

mouthing the digits and never saw the brown structure on the far right that would unexplainably explode, a structure he would many years later describe as being ominous with a great potential for violence, a rather strange description for something he never saw while looking up with those digits still on his lips, but rather saw for the first time an

e

with those digits still on his lips, but rather saw for the first time an undefinable object, it would happen repeatedly over the years, floating through the air at an extremely slow speed almost as if motionless but turning, which he first described as the skeleton of a large dinosaur with glowing white bones,

f

he first described as the skeleton of a large dinosaur with glowing white bones, twisting slowly through space at an undeterminable distance, later being compared to the color of Mt. Rushmore when lit by artifical light, thinking at one moment it was close enough to touch and at the very next, a change in time so minute,

g

the very next, a change in time so minute he believed it to be immeasurable, an occurrence that would bewilder him whenever he would try to justify it to others, for example he was extremely confused as two planes flew overhead explaining this phenomenon to a very young child who had just mastered the alphabet, seeming far beyond the moon

h

plaining this phenomenon to a very young child who had just mastered the alphabet, seeming far beyond the moon which was visable that very day but behind him where a flag suspended vertically with the union to the north over an east-west street gently wavered as he faced the mysterious object twisting and tur-

i

ning, appearing to be on top of him one moment and light years away the very next, so without noticing the exploding brown structere in confusion or out of near madness he returned to reading the digits over and over trying to commit them to memory and forget what he had just seen.

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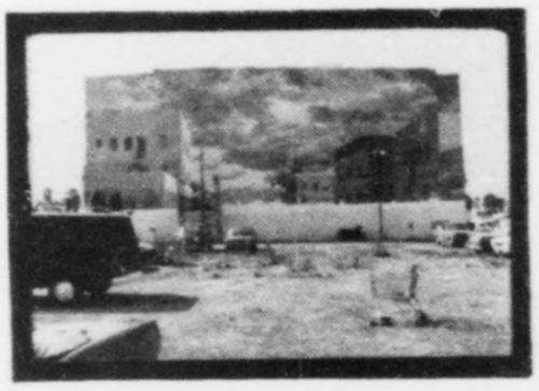
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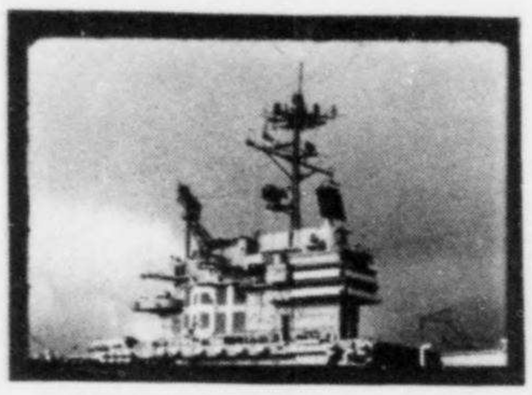
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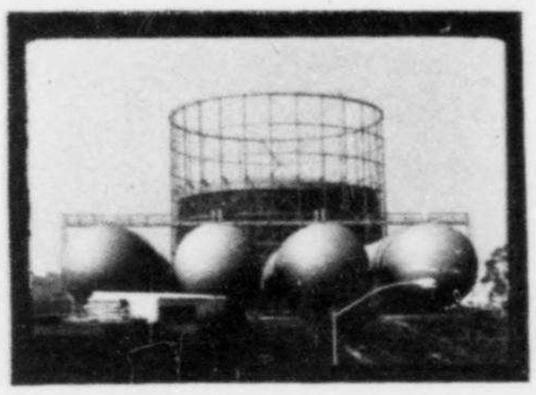
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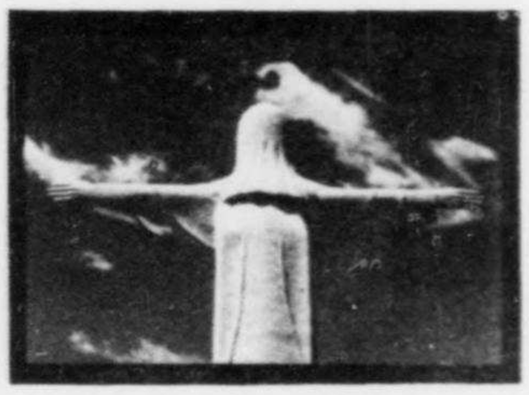
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19a



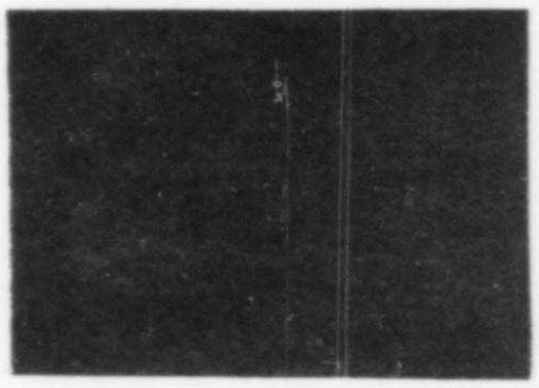
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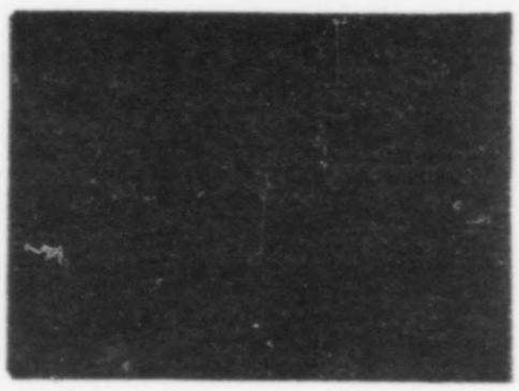
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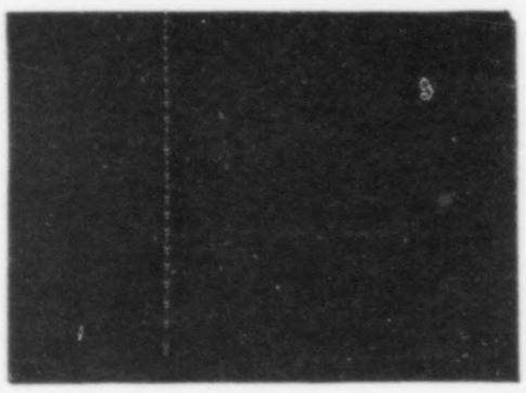
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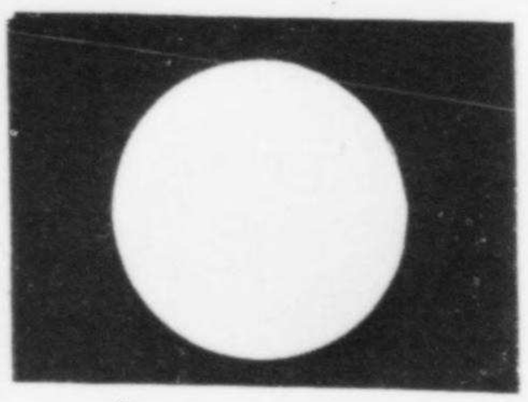
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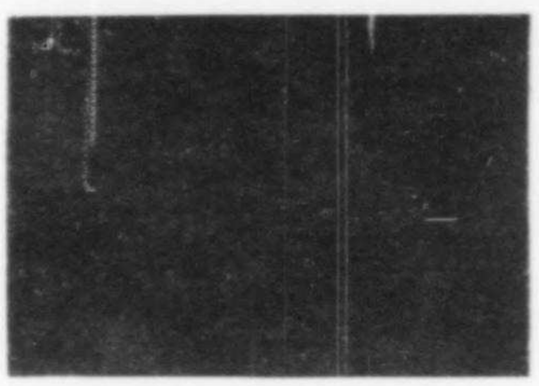
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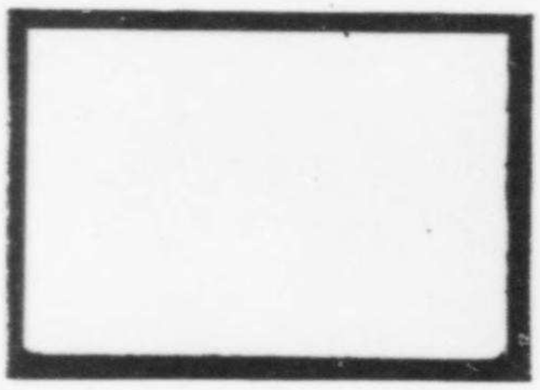
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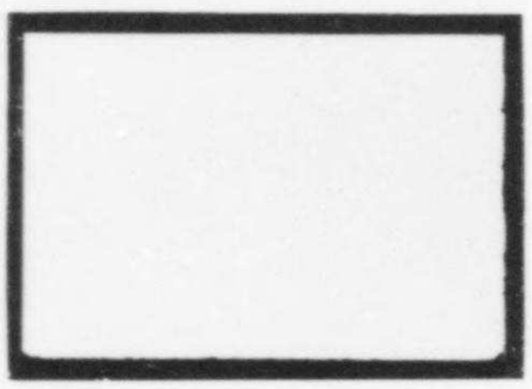
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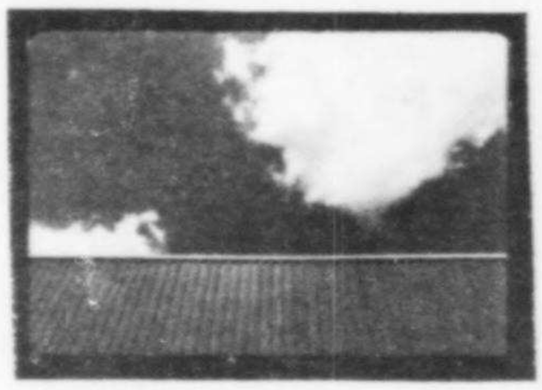
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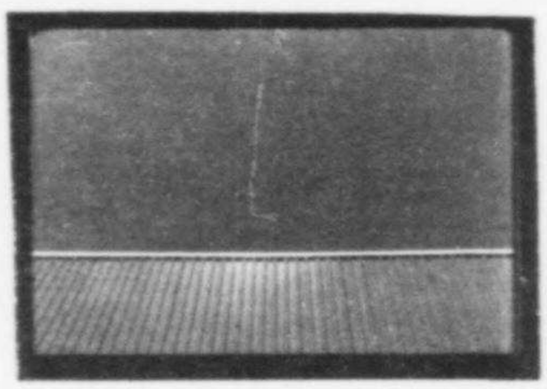
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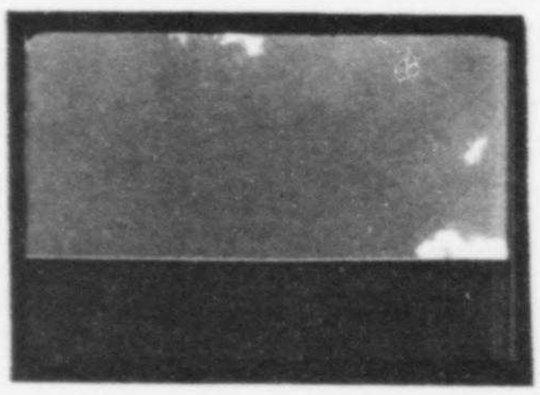
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21a



b



c



22

23a

b

c

d

11. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode, and a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

12–15. *(Art/War/Industry/Religion.)*

16. *(Answer Brakhage on silent film with sound film.)*
"... and what happened really is that the visual development that I had progressed so much more rapidly that very quickly even with all this training and concern and everything ... my ability to work with meaningful sound was left very far behind the ability with vision ... and then I began noticing sounds were holding films back, then I began noticing how they're holding most films back, or as it's used commercially, they're blinding the viewer to some extent, so films look very much better than they are. That it's hard ... there is a distraction between the ears and the eyes and the ears will always take it actually. The eyes don't really have it in this case, because in this society at least we're very, very oriented to hearing and not very creative visually. So it was really that I began seeing how sound distracts from vision and also I was not able to keep the creativity of the sound that I might use consonant with the development of vision. So sounds were gradually slipping into being illustrative. And at that point it suddenly occurred to me that film did not have to have a sound track. The fact that we have the technical possibilities doesn't mean you have to use it. And so I guess most of my work since then has been silent, and I'm not against sound films though, I rather think of it as grand opera."

17. "Good evening. We're a group called *Grand Opera*. We'd like to play a little tune for you entitled 'Now Place the Number Fourteen on the Umbrella.' ... Thank you very much."

19. *(Use China girls [history of films] with history of pi.)*
"An approximation equivalent to the familiar 3.1416 dates from before 200 A.D. In the sixteenth century, after the invention of decimals, the calculation of pi was carried out to 35 places by Ludolph Van Cellen."

20. *(Alternate groups of black and white frames; let the first 35 decimals of pi define group size: flicker film:* 3.14159265358979323846264338327950288 . . . .*)*

$$\frac{2}{\Pi} = \frac{1}{2}\quad\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}\quad\frac{1}{2}\quad\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}\quad\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}\quad\frac{1}{2}\quad\cdots$$

21. *(Use two sounds to sync with two light sources within the same image; connect sound and light.)*
two factory sounds

22. "OK, let's go."
"A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V . . . Da, what do you do after that? I can't remember."
"Start again."
"No, I won't."

23. *(Reedit the United States of America. Use one second from each shot; cross the U.S. in 99 seconds. Distance as a function of time:* d = rt.*)*

skwēk
NBC New York
prove it Chevrolet
Ron Lundy
Paulene Kael of the
make me feel
stăt′ĭk
fooling
Richard Valeriani
Saigon's last
a dead racoon
trŭk
singing in the
laaaaa
and high quality
says the US Secre . . .
woooooo
snow and blowing snow
wī′pərs
skwēk
loving
old mountain home
shout amen somebody
all
colors of
black employee
trŭk
dōr
give 30,000
working
another country
I got more
the Federal govern . . .

kärs
from Chicago
Lee Sherwood Show
Bob Pitman
your
Patty Hearst
America
well right
a choker knot
Da Nang
ahhhhh
with drugs and
la la la la la
a tax cut
drĭngk′ĭng
St. Louis teachers
in Houston, Texas
I'm going
public shooting
the love of God
kär
hī′wā
rodeo cowboy
carry on
tōōn′ĭng
Kansas
are we gonna tell
drive on in there
thŭn′der
laxatives not
government property
34 to 29
milo four-o

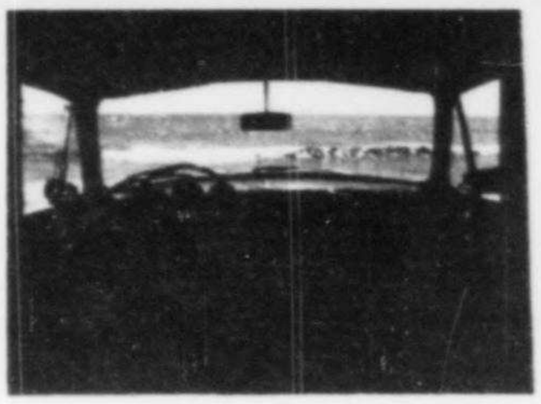
kär
in the Springtime
the bargain store
sweet and soft
Durango, Colorado
on my own
kär
toi′lĭt
hallow be thy name
Americans drawing
original stars
kär
Spanish
roughly two-thirds
myōō′zĭk
Arizona game and
âr′plān
just a dollar
Saigon may fall
wī′pərs
of cocaine
call and I'll come
kär
from a gun shot
wīnd
myōō′zĭk
mathematician
Padre's 4
perfume
feel
in Laurel Canyon
Paul Harvey
ō′shən

24. *(Make reference to colors of the rainbow: wavelength of color compared to wavelength of sound. Use sound* [*sine wave*] *with Snow.* Electromagnetic radiation with a wave length in the range from about 390mμ to 770mμ that may be perceived by the unaided, normal human eye—Roy G. Biv: red door, orange roof, yellow sign, green truck, blue nylon, indigo door, violet roof.)

25. *(A performance for one: life as a function of time. Go to same place once a week from shortest day of year to longest. Measure self against constant and variables. Edit each shot two frames longer as days get longer:* December 22, 1977–June 21, 1978.)
Ambiance.

26. *(Find images to relate to language* [*spoken or printed word*] *used in film. Example: U-haul truck "twisting and turning" in sky.)*

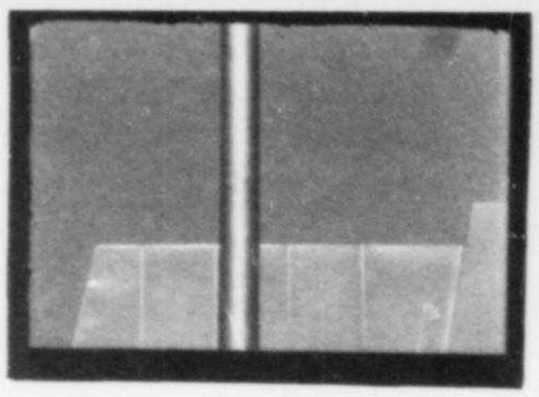
27. *(Truncated text as image: then use sound to read off-screen words. True sound/image relationship. Use text on white wall for flattened space; have person walk between words and wall as depth cue; have person paint wall black to reduce depth cue presence and flatten space once again; use soap opera during painting.)*
"Honey, I'm so very, very sorry."
"Oh . . . No more pregnancies . . . no more babies. It's hard to believe. Well I guess you know it just . . . it's something I'm going to have to learn to . . . live with."
"I'm going to do everything I can to help you . . ."
"It's a blow for you too."
"Sweetheart, the most important thing is that you came through this all right . . . that you're getting well . . . and that you're going to be home soon."
"Donald, you're so sweet to me. I didn't think it would happen this time . . . I didn't think I'd lose the baby. I mean I was a little frightened, you know, when I first found out I was pregnant because of the last pregnancy . . . but Dr. Melser, I mean, said, you know, everything was going fine . . . there was no reason for anything . . . to go wrong . . . no reason . . . for me to have a miscarriage . . . but I did."
"The fall . . ."
"I know."
"Honey, I blame myself for that. I saw how upset you were. I shouldn't have let myself get so angry. I should have been there to stop your falling."
"Why didn't you? Oh, why did you let me fall?"
"Honey, I couldn't feel worse about this than I do already."
"Oh Donald, I'm sorry. I'm sorry . . . I didn't say that to make you feel bad . . . it's just that I need you . . . to take care of me."
"I am going to take care of you. I'm going to take good care of you."
"I need that."



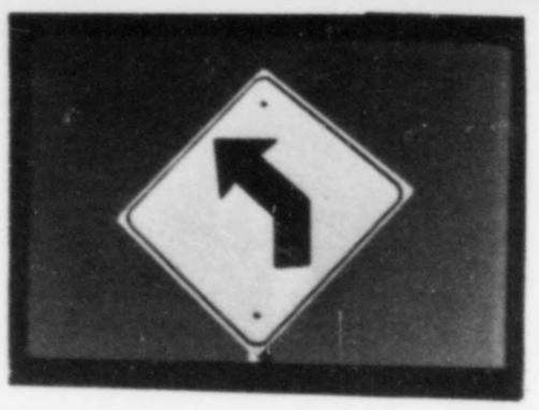
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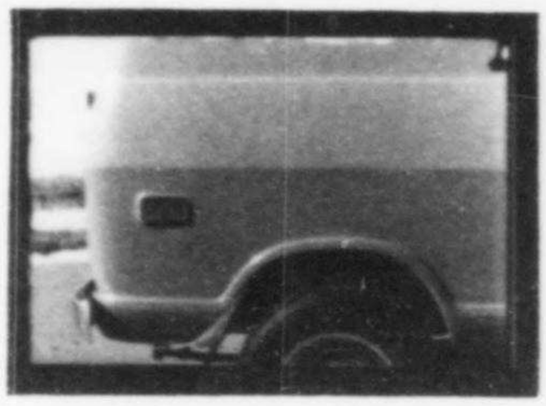
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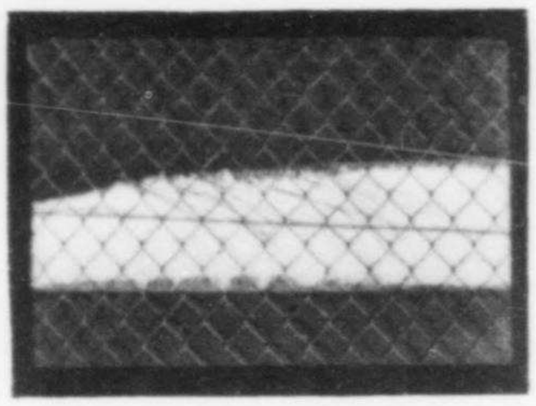
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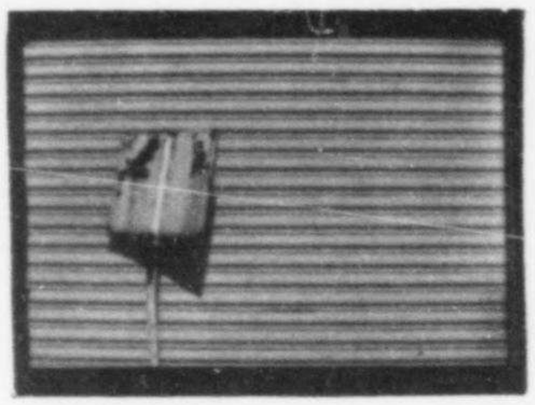
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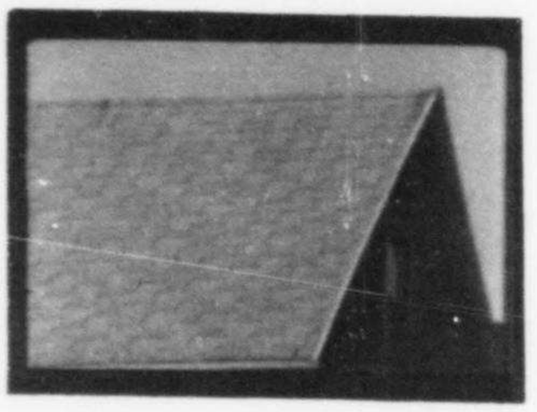
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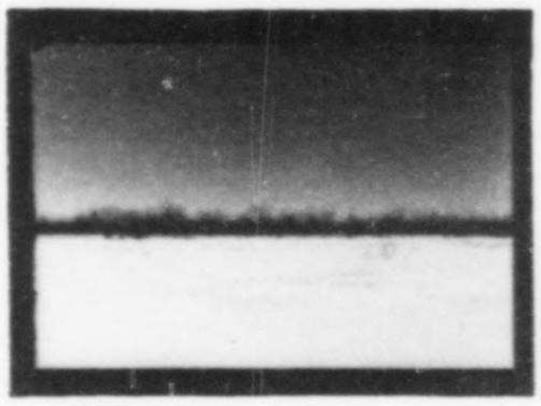
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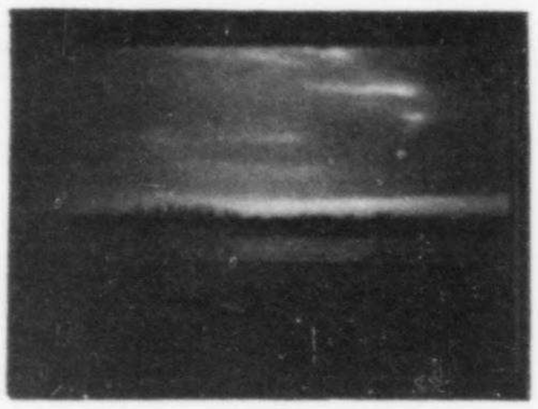
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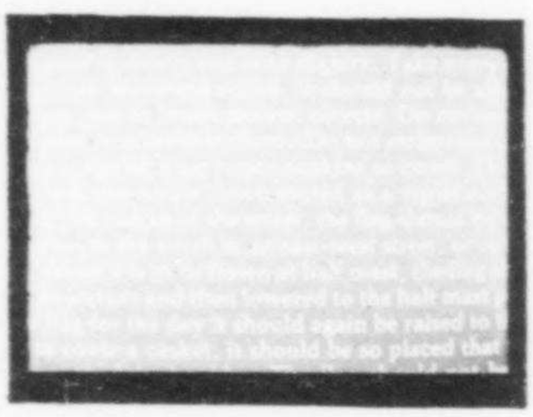
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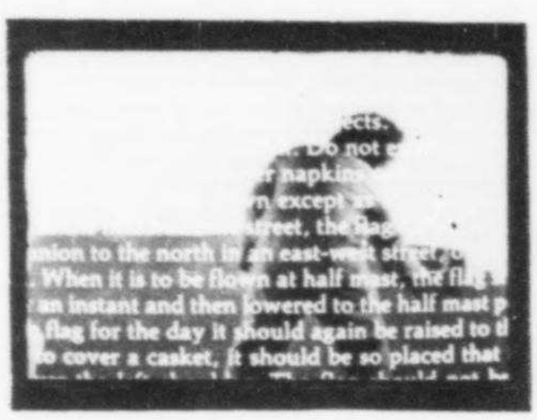
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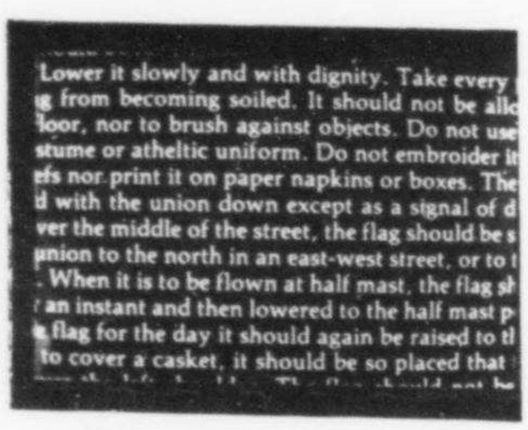
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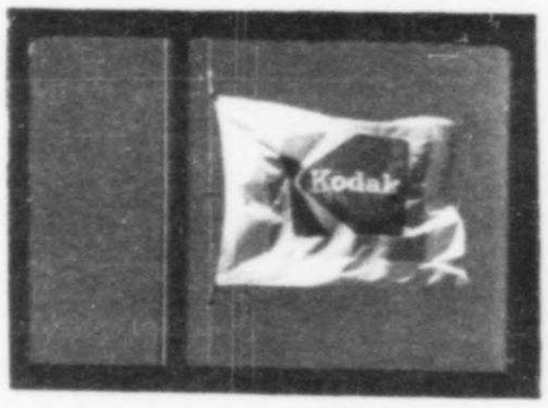
27a



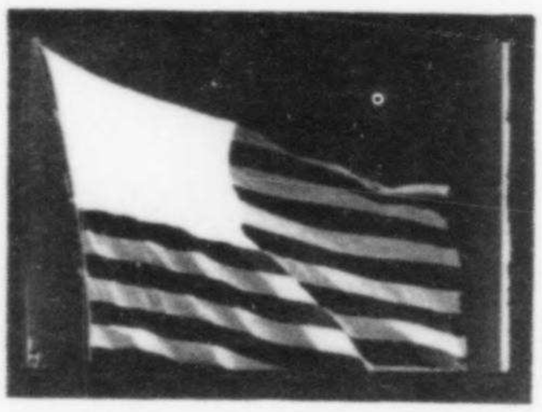
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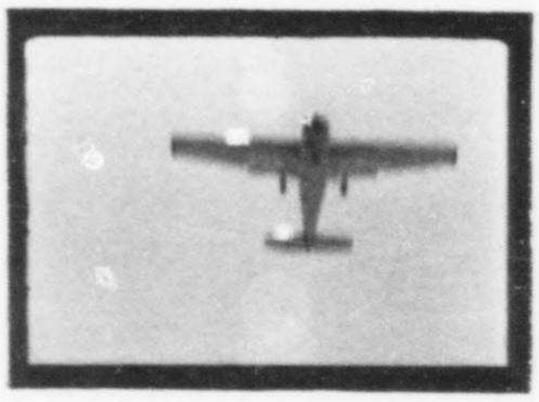
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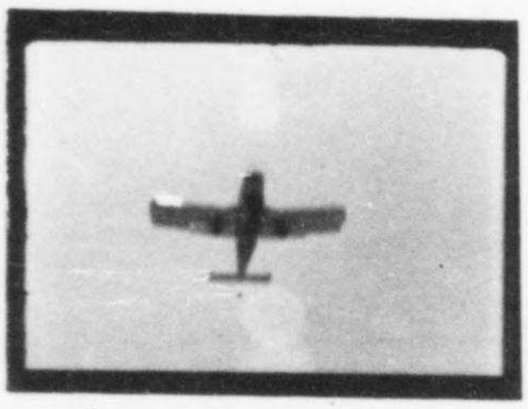
28



29



30a



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31



32



33



34

Respect your flag and render it the courtesies to which it is entitled. The National flag should be raised and lowered by hand. Do not raise the flag while it

is furled. Low every precaution to
prevent the flag lowed to touch the
ground or flo se the flag as a por-
tion of a costu er it upon cushions or
handkerchiefs The flag should never
be displayed dire distress.
When displayed ov e suspended ver-
tically with the u the east in a
north/south street should be hoisted
to the peak for position; but before
lowering the fl peak. When the
flag is used to the union is at
the head and ov be lowered into the

grave or allowed to touch the ground. Remember, the National flag is our banner of hope for the land of the free and the home of the brave.

"What would you say about detergents you didn't use? Here's what Judy Aherson said about Oxydol: Oxydol is an old product. Could Mrs. Aherson change her mind? We gave her Oxydol in an unmarked box. She doesn't know because we talked about so many. In two weeks she'll bring back a tough-to-clean white item."

31. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode, and a mushroom-shaped cloud will cover the city."

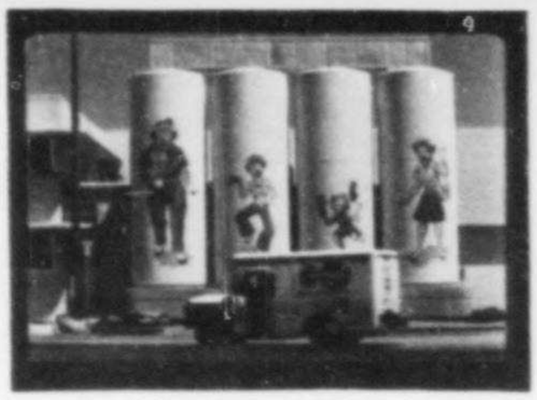
32. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode, and a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

33. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode. And a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

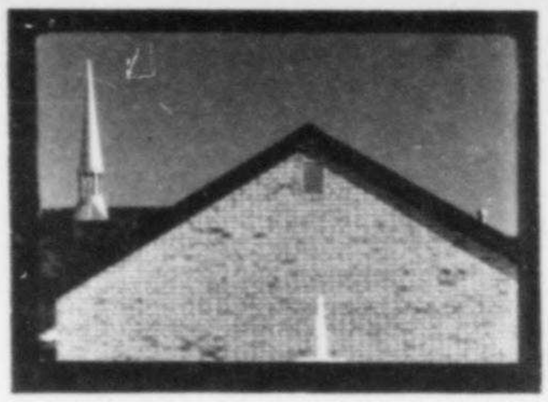
34. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. After two planes pass it will explode, and then a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

37. *(Vertical and horizontal redundancy.)*

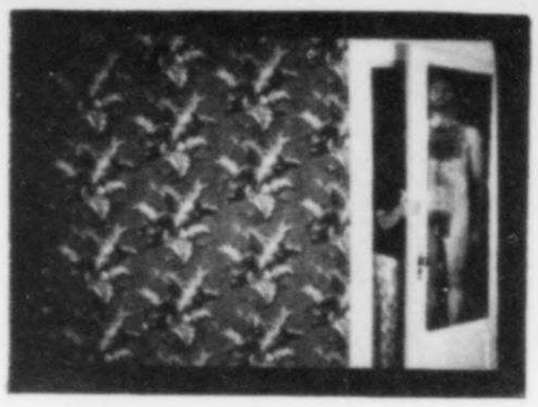
38. "I'm sorry. In 1761 Johann Lambert showed that pi is an irrational number. Thirty-three years later Adrien Marie Legendre made the proof a rigorous one. Then Ferdinand Lindemann proved pi cannot be expressed as the roots of algebraic equations with rational coefficients."



35



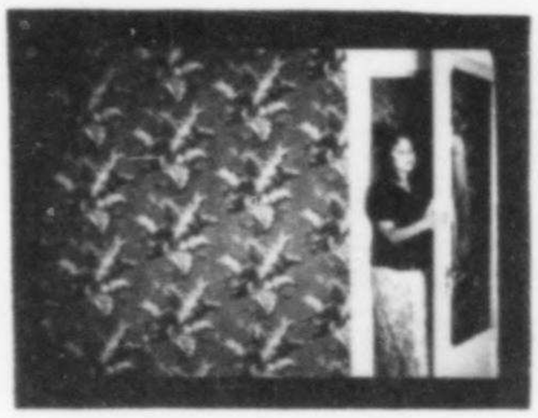
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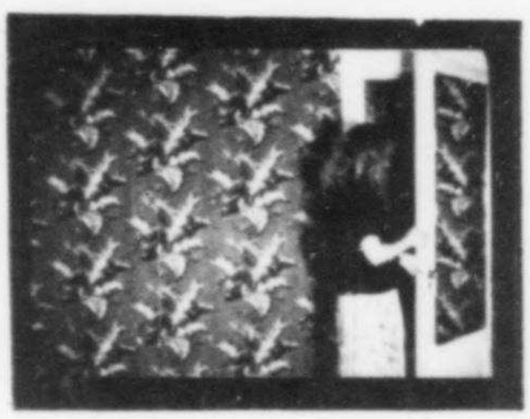
37a



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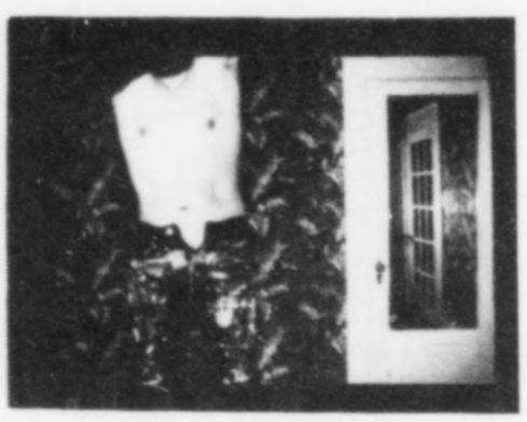
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38a



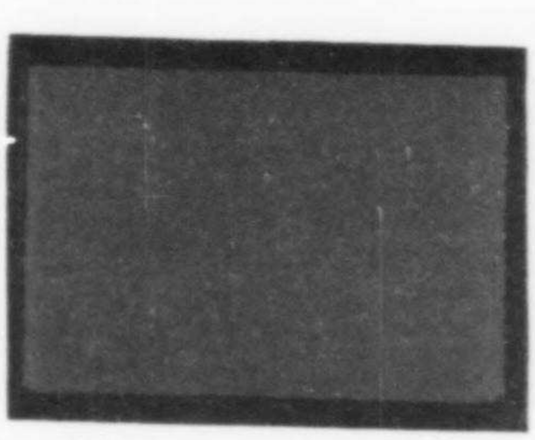
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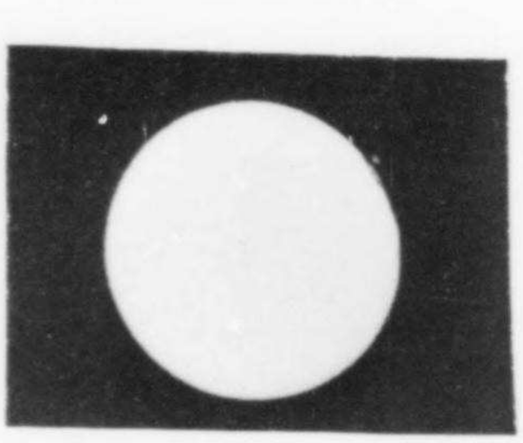
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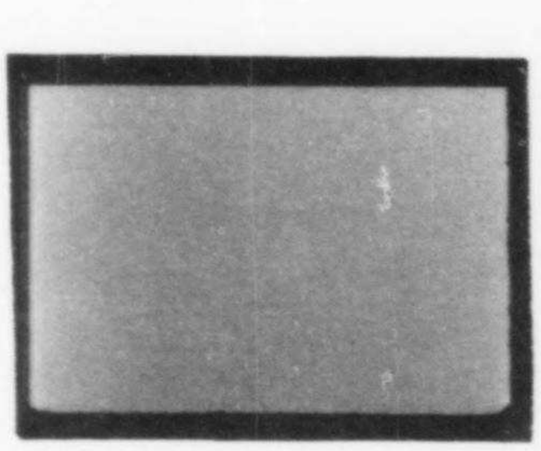
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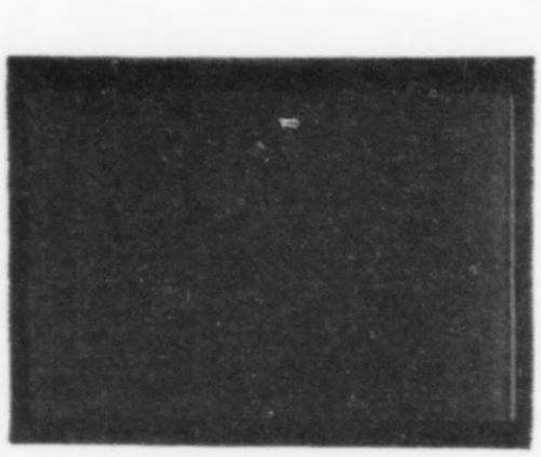
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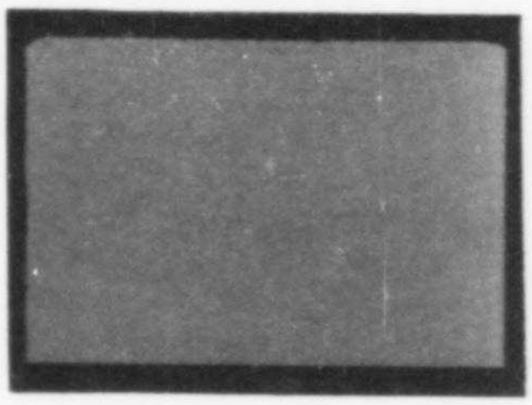
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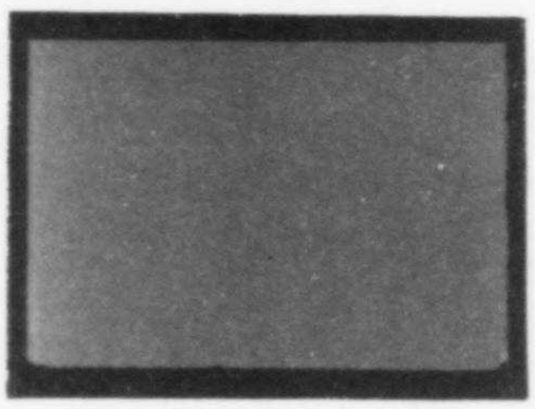
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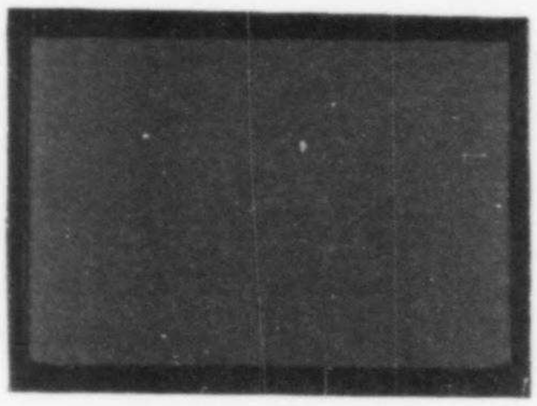
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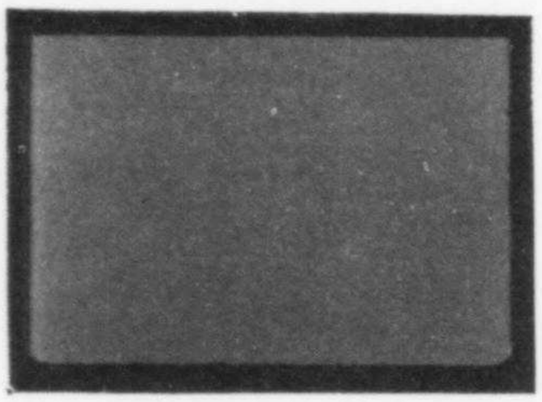
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39. *(Use ten colors from the rainbow to represent digits from 0, 1, . . . 9; let the first 100 digits of pi define a color flicker film.)*
3.14159265358979323846264338327950288419716939937510582097494459230781640
628620899862803482534217067 9 . . .

$$\frac{\Pi}{2} = \frac{2}{1}\ \frac{2}{3}\ \frac{4}{3}\ \frac{4}{5}\ \frac{6}{5}\ \frac{6}{7}\ \frac{8}{7}\ \cdots$$

40. This film is not about you. It's about its maker.

41. *(Performance for one: within one month period revisit all the houses in which you ever lived. Measure past with present. Time/ life measure. Sound over: stories. Use language to cross-reference images elsewhere in film. Tell stories into tape recorder, transcribe, and have alter ego read them [use a woman's voice].)*

41b. "I lived in this house for sixteen straight years. In 1951 we got our first TV and put it in the alcove where the tree went at Christmas time. My father worked at home drawing plans in the back room and tried to invent things in the basement. Sometimes he would take a break from work and play solitaire while watching soap operas on TV. He never watched the same story but would rather watch different stories as if they were one. He would have been a great mathematician. Other times he would go to the local tavern. He liked to talk about fishing. Once he told me he was going to paint all the chrome on

c. "our car black because cars are just for . . . in a women's dorm where I did the breakfast dishes. All the women would bring their trays to an opening in the wall and shove them towards me. I could never see their faces or their feet. I got to know them by their breasts and stomachs and asses. I think I could even recognize them on the street. There was a guy who worked the same shift with me. He liked one of the women. He never said anything about it but I could tell. He'd always try to wash her dishes. She had oatmeal almost every morning. I think sometimes he would even taste it. Once he blew smoke from his cigarette out the dish opening and it straddled her body. She turned and walked away leaving a hole in the smoke

d. "where her body was. It was stupid . . . married this was our first apartment. We painted all the rooms before moving in. On the second day of painting I went to a bar and got some beer and hamburgers to go. We sat on the dining room floor in the smell of paint and ate the burgers and drank the beer. The place looked very nice. I remember quite clearly. Especially the smell. We fucked on the floor and I kicked over a bottle of beer that rolled across the room and hit against the radiator. The apartment was on the second floor. The dining room window is the one farthest to the right. An old couple lived downstairs

e. "who managed . . . lived down the street from me. He was a hill kid about eighteen. He would visit and wanted to know about San Francisco. He had dropped out of school. Once he threw a tantrum and started to break up things in his father's house. His mother was dead. He spent the night in jail. Later he got caught breaking into a house where he killed a dog with his hands to stop it from barking. The Johnsons lived in the hills behind the town with eight kids. The first time I met them they served me canned peaches from a jar that was half rotten. The stores

f. "in the town were mostly . . . lived across the tracks behind my house. Their house is gone now like most of the houses. May was Cliff's daughter. He had gotten her pregnant but she lost the baby. He had been in jail for 25 years. One Sunday morning they came over still drunk from the night before. He began to sing and play the harmonica. May pulled her dress over her head exposing the scars on her body. They drank and danced and sang until they passed out in the corner. When I moved away I found a man dead behind our house. I told Cliff and he ran and hid.

g. "He was afraid they'd pin it . . . stumbled upon the cow. She was lying on her side moaning. A still-born calf was half inside her. Half out. I ran towards her not knowing what to do. I grabbed the dead calf and pulled. The cow moaned louder. The calf was stuck but finally came loose. It smelled like the dead stuff dogs roll in. I pulled the calf out and put my arms around the cows neck. She tried to get up but was too weak. Some of her hide was worn away from trying to stand. Two days later I shot her through the head. There were about forty cows on the

h. "farm. Each spring they would give . . . a dog named Morgan. He would walk over the furniture like a cat, but he was a coon hound. He hated the city and needed to run. Every Saturday for about a year I would take him to the country. To the same place. It was a nice time watching the seasons change. He would run for hours and then sleep on the floor of the truck on the way home. Sometimes he would run so hard he would cough up blood. He always knew when it was time to leave and would hide. One time when I was looking for him I saw something in the sky. It was twisting and turning, but then it just disappeared and Morgan was by my side. I think he saw it too. We got in the truck and

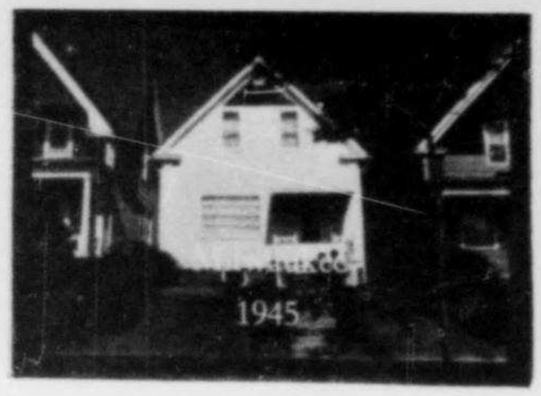
i. "drove home. Morgan slept . . . late one night. It was about two in the morning. I was very tired and as I crossed the river on a fallen tree I slipped and went through the ice. It was very cold. I was surprised the ice didn't hold. I panicked. Everything went in reverse. The snow was black. The sky was white with a black moon. I remember a warm feeling coming over me. I wanted to let go and slip under the ice. It was very peaceful. Then I was inside the cabin. I got a fire going and got my wet clothes off. I thought I had frostbitten my hands but instead they were bleeding. The tips of my fingers were filled with wood splinters from the tree. I can't remember getting back . . .



41a



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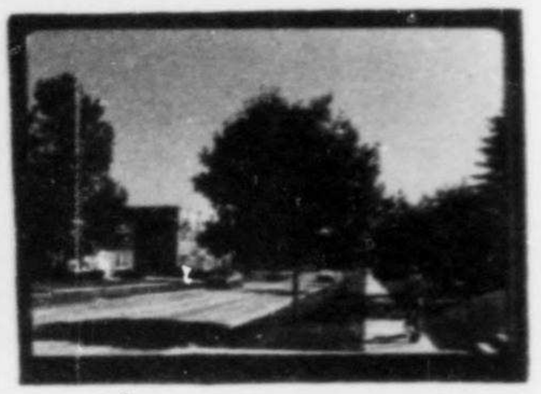
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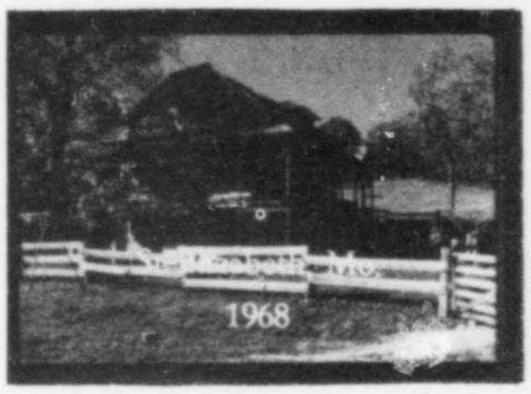
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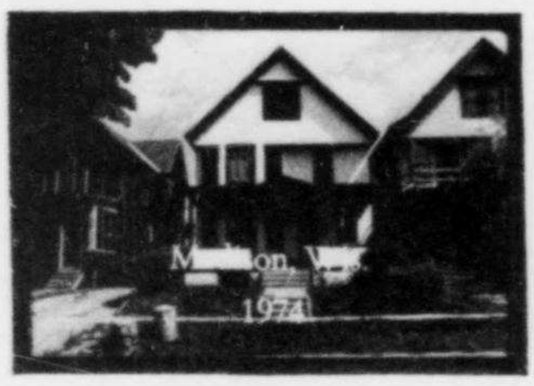
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j. "daughter was born while I lived at this house. I later separated from my wife. My father died while my wife was pregnant. Our dog's name was York. Named after the state I lived in last. Morgan had been named after the movie. It was on TV the night he was born. I gave him away two years earlier to the hill family with eight kids. Their youngest daughter pulled her cap over her face when she saw me. She told me she liked to go coon hunting. When my wife and I separated we gave York away. He bit our daughter once. It left a scar on the left side of her nose.

k. "She tried to take his food . . . got pregnant here. We had a small room in the back with a mattress on the floor. We were both working here for the summer and still had our other house. Later we took a trip across the country sleeping in the back of our pickup. We didn't know she was pregnant at the time. When we got home I found that my father was dying of cancer. Later our daughter was born. Our dog York bit her when she tried to take his food away. It left a small scar on the left

l. "side of her nose. Today she has a guinea pig named . . . ate at Dolly's every day for over a year. Bar-b-q ribs was my favorite. So was their cream pie. It was just around the corner. One night I met an ex-convict. He got in an argument with someone from the same prison. Then someone asked him what he was in for and he jumped across the table and grabbed at the person and then caught himself and sat down. He kept looking out the door. Another time I yodeled with another woman. The waitresses were old in their sixties and the cook was a lady in her seventies. They sweated from the heat from the kitchen and sometimes looked like they might die any minute. I'm sure people have died in

m. "Dolly's although I never . . . painting my mother's house. She still lives in the house I grew up in. One night I went to the bar my father used to go to. It is now a young-people's hangout. I met a woman who I went to grade school with. We started to drink and got very drunk. She also was staying with her parents. When the bar closed we didn't have a room to go to so I walked her home. When we got to her parent's house we started to kiss on the porch. After a while she began to suck my cock. I accidentally hit the doorbell with my elbow and her mother answered

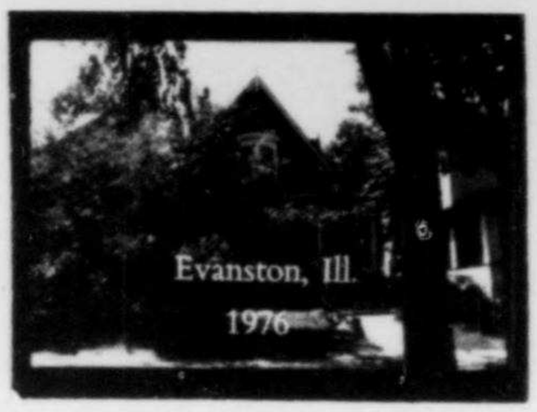
n. "the door. I said I guess I'll be going now. I never saw . . . was around the time I cooked a steak dinner for everyone in the house. I don't cook very often. I eat out a lot. Mostly in places like Dolly's. Anyway we were driving back home when he told me she was in love with me. I pulled off to the side of the road in complete surprise. After that things got very confused. For the first time in my life I ended up with someone really hating me. It wasn't her. We became just friends after a short affair but the man she was living with. Since then I met him at a film at the Walker Art Center where we decided we were both assholes but after a few drinks we reversed that decision and blamed it . . .



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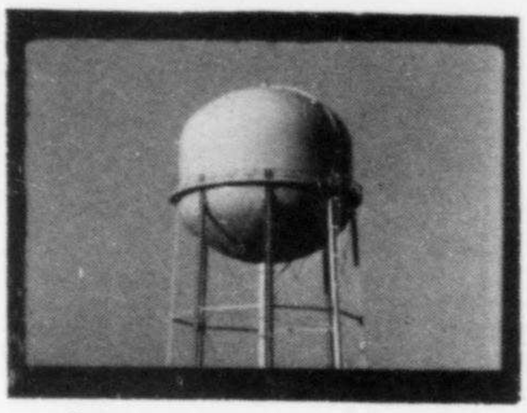
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42



43a



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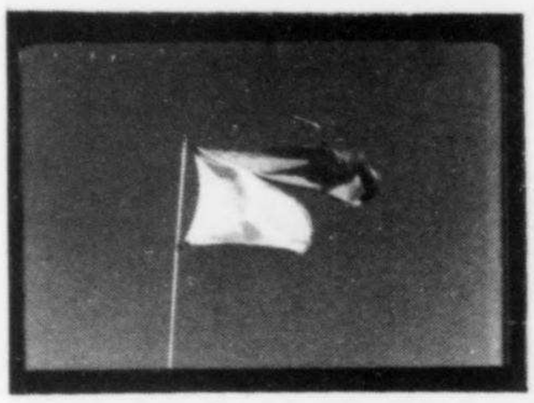
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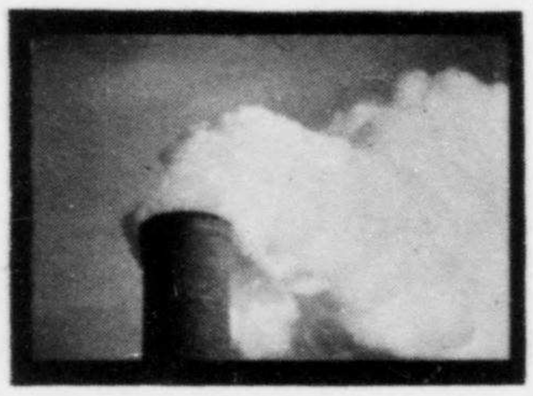
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o. "shot for *One Way Boogie Woogie* that was frustrated by too many cars on the street so I quit and started home. I pulled into a gas station and just as I reached for the door handle to get out I noticed these four guys in suits, two at each door and they wouldn't let me out. They asked my name. They told me I was seen around the First Street foundries taking pictures and that I better not come back or they'd call the police. They thought I was a political radical that was going to blow up one of their factories. I asked them if they came to that conclusion because of the way I looked and they said no and I said come on look at me I look like a god damn bum and they said oh I guess your . . .

p. "best friend is black. The woman I'm in love with is a lesbian and in high school I was the captain of the basketball team, he told me. I said I couldn't help. I was living in Oklahoma filming oil wells and explosions."

Musical accompaniment for the above sequence:

a. Billie Holiday
b. Bill Hailey and the Comets
c. Lambert, Hendricks, & Ross
d. Beatles
e. Jimi Hendrix
f. Simon and Garfunkel
g. The Band
h. Jefferson Airplane
i. Fraser & de Bolt
j. John Prine
k. The Rolling Stones
l. Joni Mitchell
m. Leonard Cohen
n. Bob Dylan
o. Patti Smith
p. CCMC

42. "A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, L, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z.
This is for P. Adams Sitney."

45. *(June 21, 1978.)*

46. *(December 22, 1977.)*

47. (Theories of universal gravitation, terrestrial mechanics, and color, the invention of differential calculus/Brownian motion and the photoelectric effect, theory of atomic spectra, and the theories of special and general relativity.)

48. *(Rent Big Board sign, use history of pi on electric sign, frame at top—opposite of subtitles. Language competes with image: history of pi vs. narrative with pie. Sound over—history of potato famine—to compete with electric sign: can you hear and read at the same time? Can you read and see at the same time? Can you see and hear at the same time? Connect sound over with actor in pie narrative: change sound over to sound coming from actor. At what point does this happen? Post-sync sound of two interacting characters. Record voices of two people who have never met; yet they talk/interact with each other in film.)*

Time is 7:53
About 225 BC Archimedes approximated the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter as between 3 1/7 and 3 10/71. An approximation equivalent to the familiar 3.1416 dates from before 200 AD. In 1853 Daniel Shanks computed pi to 607 decimal places:
3.14159265358979323846264338327950288419716939937510582097494459230781640
62862089986280348253421170679821480865132823066470938446095505822317253 5
94081284811174502841027019385211055596446229489549303819644288109756659 3
34461284756482337867831652712019091456485669234603486104543266482133936 0
72602491412737245870066063155881748815209209628292540917153643678925903 6
00113305305488204665213841469519145116094330572703657595919530921861173 8
19326117931051185480744623799627495673518857527249812279381830119491298 3
36733624405666430860213950160924480772309436205530966202755693979869502 2
24749962060749703041236688619951
Time is 7:56
In May of 1945 D. F. Ferguson found Shanks incorrect after the first 527 decimals. Shanks committed two errors. The first occurred in the evaluation of the inverse of 497 times 5 to the 497 power in the 531 decimal place. Ferguson found the value to be 008048289738430583 50 while Shanks carelessly omitted a zero 00848289738430583501. The second Shanks error was the omission of 1/5 to the 29 power divided by 29 from the series for the arc tangent of 1/5 in the 569 decimal term.
Time is 7:59
In April of 1947 John W. Wrench and Levi Smith corrected pi after 527 decimals:
4946395224737190702179860943702770539217176293176752384674818467669405 1320005681. Pi to 10 decimal places is sufficient accuracy to permit computing the circumference of a sphere the size of the earth with an error of less than 1/8 inch. To 40 decimals pi would give the circumference of the entire visible universe with an error imperceptible even with an electron microscope. Thus some say these extensive calculations have no practical value.
Time is 8:01

"Anyway, the potato famine of Ireland which occurred in the 1847 to 1850 but we simply have forgotten about it now. It's such an important event you know of natural disaster that occurred then but almost one million people died during the famine and one million immigrated and most of them died in a ship they were so weak. They were so diseased that they were actually starving to death that even when they got off the ship they died and it was an incredible disaster that happened then and the irony was that some kind of . . . the disease itself was very strange because . . . the crop came through with some kind of infection that went right through from the leaves into the roots. So when the people dug the potatoes they thought they had the crop but when they put the potatoes in their hands the potatoes were completely empty. There was just the shell itself and this was the only product the only thing that they had to feed on you know and there was some

kind of disease infection that actually went through from the leaves down to the roots. So the people or the peasants themselves expected to have the crop but when they dug the potatoes they had the potatoes but there was nothing inside the potato just the skin. The disease itself was called the Dud Spud. Oh watch out damn it!

"Look out you crazy son of a bitch!

"Watch out! . . . and that was it fooled the people. They thought they had the products, they had the potatoes but at the end when they touched, they picked the potatoes in their hands and they took them it simply was dust. There was nothing inside the potatoes you see and they were really almost forced to immigrate not only to America, they went to New Zealand, Canada, they went to Australia, they went all over the world, any place they could possibly find; a place to survive to work and to exist and to live and we have just simply have forgotten those terrible events you know, those political and natural disasters with politics involved, and it was a very difficult situation for the people for themselves and I just wanted to reemphasize what I said before, those terrible events that happened you know less than a hundred years ago.

"Lord, we are nothing without you as you sustain us with your mercy, receive our prayers and offerings. We ask this through Christ our Lord . . . the Lord be with you, lift up your heart. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. Father all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord . . ."

49. "Can't you see that I'm no good without you?"

50. "Before you, high on the lofty face of Mt. Rushmore, the likenesses of four American presidents are carved in ageless granite as a memorial to America's first century and a quarter as a nation. The memorial is decidedly American in its conception, in its magnitude, and in its meaning. It serves to remind all Americans of this country's noble achievements of the past, and the hope a democratic society offers for the future. The sculpture is approximately one thousand four hundred feet from the visitor's center and about four hundred feet above the viewing terrace. The heads measure sixty feet from the chin to the top of the head, each nose is twenty feet long, each mouth eighteen feet wide, and the eyes are eleven feet across. The sculptor with rare discernment transmitted to the carved faces of these four Americans the high ideals, the calm judgment, the resolute courage that are the qualities of great statesmen. Qualities that drive men of vision on to high endeavors, that compel men to scale the heights of unparalleled achievement. These values express themselves in the love of freedom, compassion for humanity, a willingness to sacrifice life and possessions to achieve noble aims. These are the intangibles that live in the hearts of great men."

51. *(Dallas, Texas.)*

52. *(Use quotes from filmmakers' films.)*
"Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode, and a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

53. *(A container for fortuitous events:*

3	4	1	2
1	2	3	4
2	1	4	3
4	3	2	1

Use number square to order Snow, Rainer, Frampton, and Landow.)

54. *(Destroy a palindrome.)*
"Keep your eye on the brown structure. After two planes pass it will explode, and then a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

55. *(Zorn's Lemmas.)*
"Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode. And a mushroom cloud will cover the city."

56. Coca-cola, Coca-cola
Things go better with Coca-cola
Things go better with Coke
Life is much more fun when you're refreshed
And Coke refreshes you best
Its the refreshingest

Food goes better with
Fun goes better with
You go better with Coke
The real live one puts extra fun
In you and everything you do
So things go better with Coca-cola
Things go better with Coke.

59. *(Reuse the sound from Mt. Rushmore with the Statue of Liberty. Take perfectly recorded announcer's voice, add echo and outdoor presence: expose manipulation of sound track, but blatant manipulation remains subtle. Why?)*
"Before you, high on the lofty face of Mt. Rushmore, the likenesses of four American presidents are carved in ageless granite as a memorial to America's first century and a quarter as a nation. The memorial is decidedly American in its



52



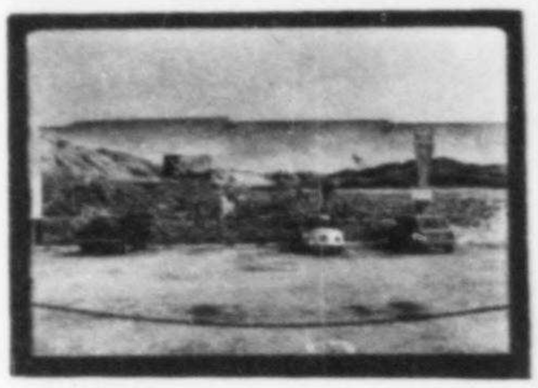
53



54



55



56



57a



b



c



d



e



58



59



60a



b



c



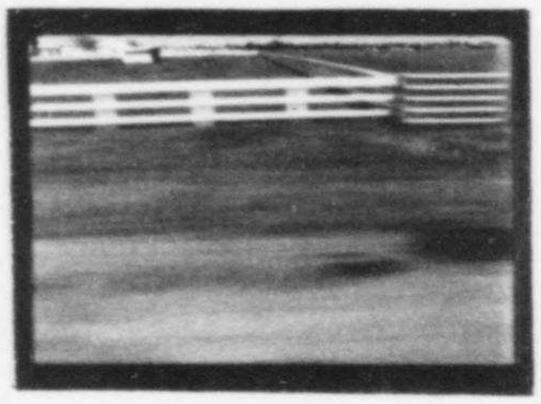
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e



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61a



b



62a



b



c



d

conception, in its magnitude, and in its meaning. It serves to remind all Americans of this country's noble achievements of the past, and the hope a democratic society offers for the future. The sculpture is approximately one thousand four hundred feet from the visitor's center and about four hundred feet above the viewing terrace. The heads measure sixty feet from the chin to the top of the head, each nose is twenty feet long, each mouth eighteen feet wide, and the eyes are eleven feet across. The sculptor with rare discernment transmitted to the carved faces of these four Americans the high ideals, the calm judgment, the resolute courage that are the qualities of great statesmen. Qualities that drive men of vision on to high endeavors, that compel men to scale the heights of unparalleled achievement. These values express themselves in the love of freedom, compassion for humanity, a willingness to sacrifice life and possessions to achieve noble aims. These are the intangibles that live in the hearts of great men."

60. *(Use soap opera out of context; wild sound that becomes sync puts things back in context. Use camera like traditional narrative, like TV.)*
"I've been so worried about you Joyce."
"Were you?"
"You know I was."
"No, Ralph, I don't know. You didn't come to see me."
"But I couldn't. Don was here all the time. I came here as much as I could. Joyce, if I came any more, well, Donald might have gotten suspicious."
"Yes, you were always afraid of that."
"Now come on, you know I had to be careful."
"You're too careful, Ralph, at the wrong time. Why did you say no to me when I came to you and asked you to marry me?"
"There was no other answer I could have given you."
"You could have said yes. You asked me once to leave my husband and to marry you before."
"Joyce, things were very different then."
"Oh, I believed you. You didn't mean it."
"Yes. I did mean it at the time."
"Then why, why didn't you say yes to me when I was ready?"
"Joyce, I couldn't. We didn't love each other."
"We didn't? Can you speak for me?"
"Well, I certainly thought . . ."
"You certainly thought, what you're saying is that you didn't love me."
"And you didn't love me either, you know that, you as much as told me that."
"Words, just words."
"I also was thinking about your husband."
"Yes, so concerned for Donald, more concerned about him than you were about me."

"Oh no, no, but I did feel I owed him a great deal. You know he saved my life in that car accident."
"Yes, Ralph, I know. You have reminded me of that enough. Do you realize what you gave up for him. Your baby. My baby. Your saying no to me is what caused me to have my miscarriage."
"I would do anything if that hadn't happened."
"But it did happen. I'm not accusing you, I'm just stating a fact. And now I'm going to state another fact. I'll never forgive you."
"Joyce."
"And if you don't get out of here right this minute, I'll scream. And I mean it. And I'm going to get even with you."

62. "In 1853 Daniel Shanks computed pi by hand to 607 decimal places. Ninety-two years later D. F. Ferguson found Shanks incorrect after the first 527 decimals."

63. *(Choose ten scenes from* One Way Boogie Woogie, *let each chosen scene represent a digit from 0, 1, . . . 9, and reedit in 20 frame lengths to the* trst *527 digits of pi: destroy old narrative and introduce new juxtapositions of color, sound, and texture. Controlled randomness: new music.)*

$$\frac{4}{\Pi} = 1 + \cfrac{1}{2 + \cfrac{9}{2 + \cfrac{25}{2 + \ldots}}}$$

65. "Keep your eye on the brown structure. After two planes pass it will explode . . .

Wait a minute. Let's go back to a certain

edolpxe lliw ti ssap senalp

key word. There it is: structure. Now that's what I want

owt retfA .erutcurts structure. structure.

included in this film. It's too important a concept to be

structure. structure. structure. structure.

taken for granted. I mean, if it weren't for structure,

structure. structure. structure. structure.

salvation won't be necessary.

structure. structure. structure. structure.

structure. structure. structure."

66. *(Use "real" argument, record neighbors: they keep me up every night. Use with Frampton as* Critical Mass: *contrast with soap operas.)*

"Keep your eye
Keep your eye on the brown
Keep your eye on the brown structure.
Keep your eye on the brown structure.
Keep your eye on the brown structure.
on the brown structure.
structure.
Two planes
Two planes will pass
Two planes will pass overhead.
Two planes will pass overhead.
Two planes will pass overhead.
will pass overhead.
overhead. It will
It will explode.
It will explode.
It will explode. And
It will explode. And a mushroom
explode. And a mushroom cloud will
And a mushroom cloud will cover the city.
And a mushroom cloud will cover the city.
mushroom cloud will cover the city.
cloud will cover the city.
cover the city.
city."

"Come on, Jesus Christ, I didn't even look at Debby . . ."
"That's right."
"And I wasn't even interested in Debby."
"But it's your fault though, isn't it? You think what you have to say . . ."
"In other words, you want to be with me or you don't."
"Let me finish, you don't let me finish."
"What I want to say, there's only one or the other, you know what I'm saying?"
"Well, you're not giving me much choice."
"No, I'm not giving you much choice."
"I know you're not."
"There's only two choices . . ."
"No there's not . . ."
"Either yes or no."
"Because you never let me finish what I say."
"Just answer yes or no."
"First you cut me off then you say either yes or no."
"That's it."

"You don't even let me finish what I want to say ever."
"What do you want to say?"
"That's right."
"OK, what do you want to say?"
"Are you going to cut me off again?"
"No, I'm not going to say a goddamn word. I'm just going to sit here and let you ramble on and on and on."
"I'm not going . . ."
"Now how do you like it?"
"Listen, Jane, we got nothing going anymore period, you know what I'm saying?"
"You said it right there, David, you already got an attitude, well fuck it, I don't know what you're talking about anymore."
"What do you mean, I'm not talking about that, I'm trying to explain something like two adults."
"I know, what's the use of even going on talking about it."
"What I'm trying to say is if both of us could just sit down and straighten it out. You understand what I'm talking about?"

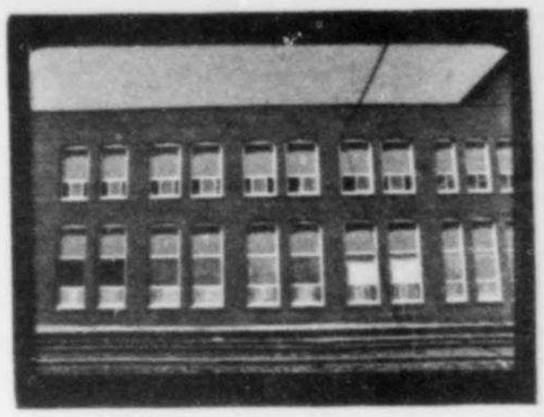
67. "~~Keep your eye on the brown structure~~.
~~Two planes will pass overhead~~.
~~It will explode~~,
~~and a mushroom cloud will cover the city~~."

68. *(20Hz to 20kHz.)*
"Keep your eye on the brown structure. Two planes will pass overhead. It will explode, and a mushroom-shaped cloud will cover the city . . . . . ytic eht revoc lliw duolc depahs-moorhsum a dna edolpxe lliw tI .daehrevo ssap lliw senalp owT .erutcurts nworb eht no eye rouy peeK"

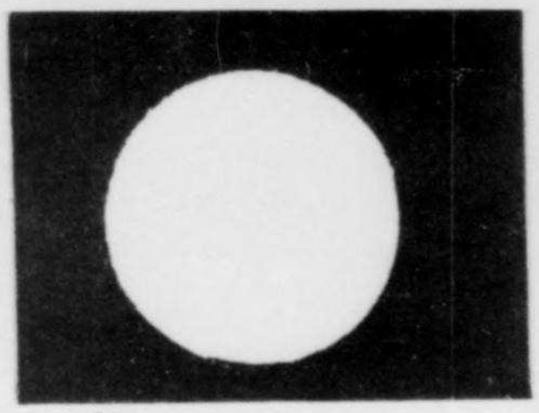
69. *(Make a film around this shot.* Start here. *Build narrative to this ending.* But don't end here.)

70. In 1961 Daniel Shanks and John W. Wrench, Jr., using a computer, successfully derived pi to 100,000 decimal places in 8 hours and 43 minutes.

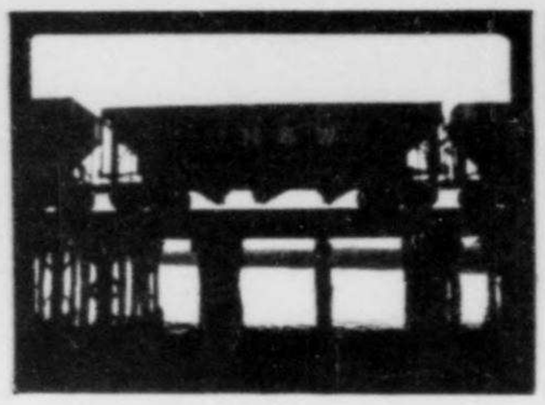
$$\frac{\Pi}{4} = 1 - \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{5} - \frac{1}{7} + \frac{1}{9} - \ldots$$



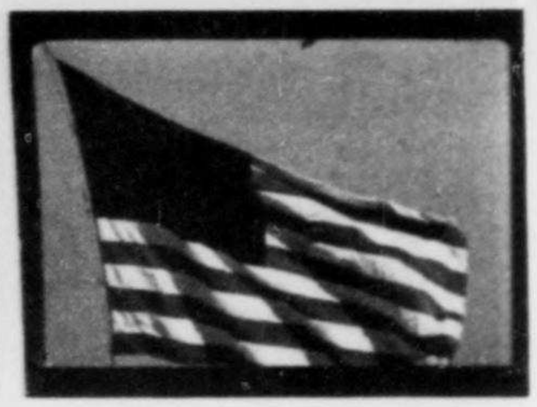
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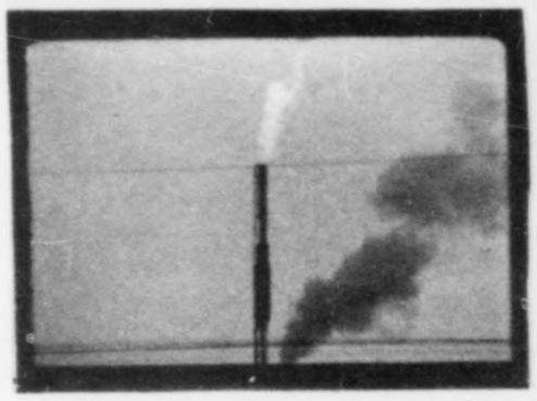
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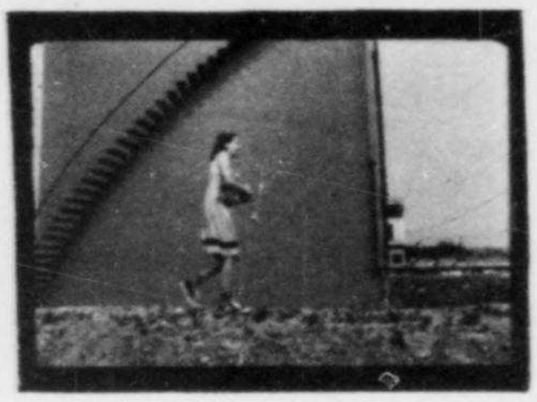
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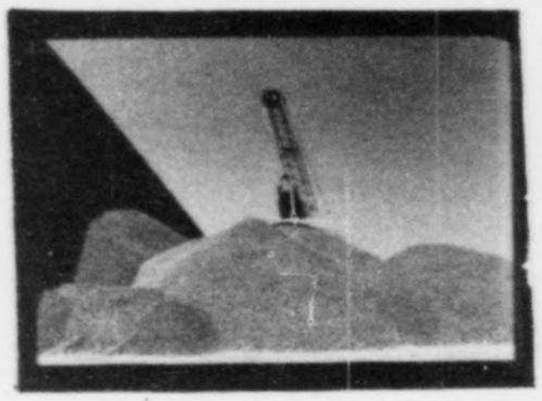
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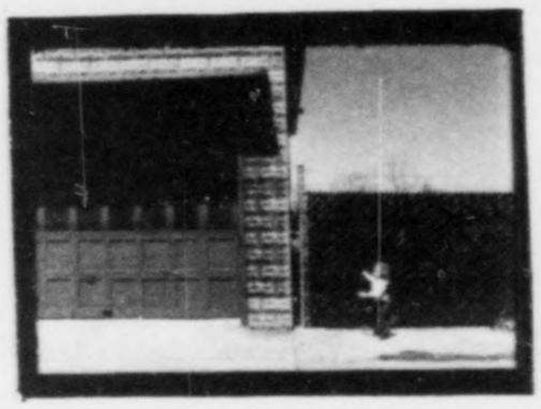
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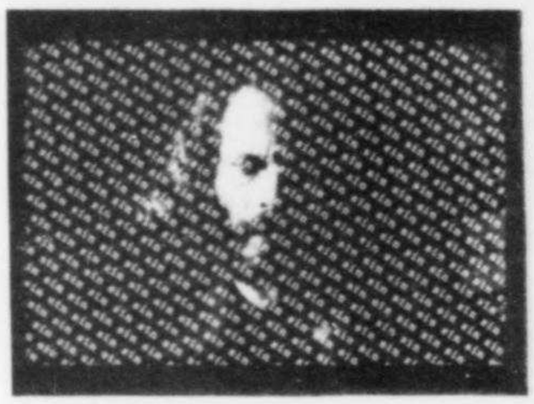
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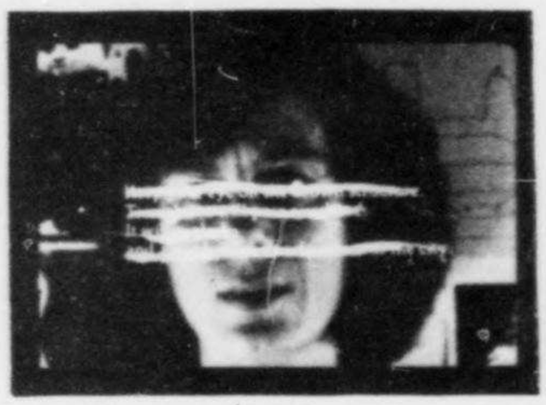
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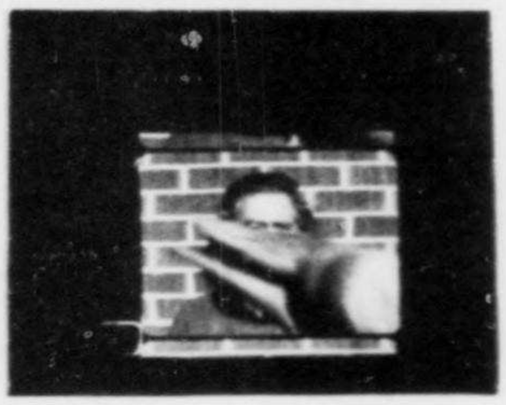
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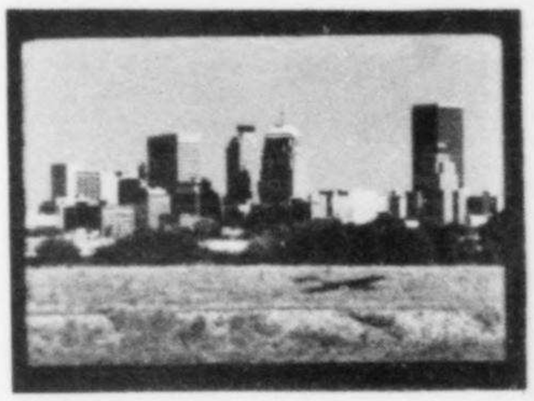
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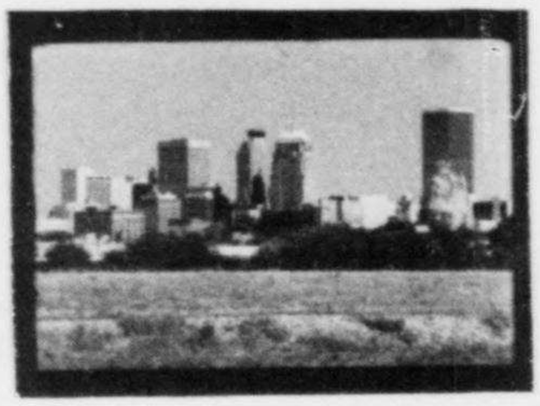
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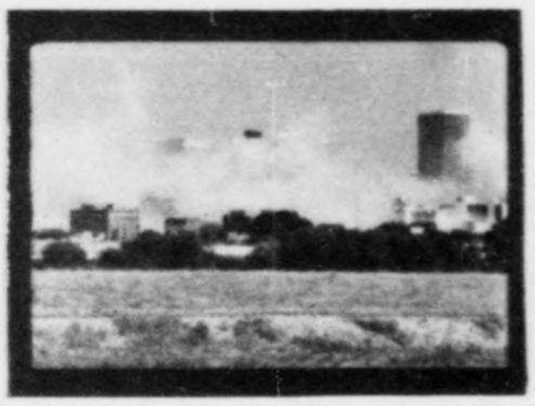
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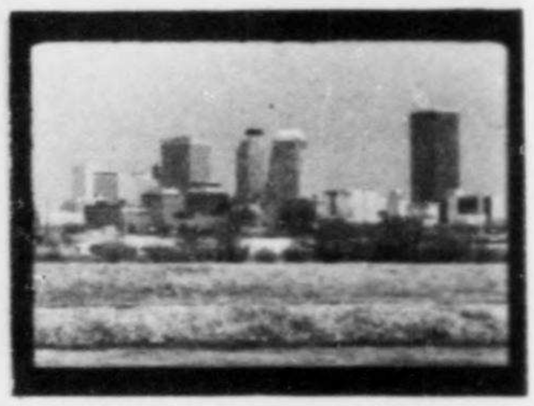
69a



b



c



d



70a



b



c



d

ARDIRE MAGNANIMO, E GENEROSO.



The Structure of Allegorical Desire

JOEL FINEMAN

μῆνιν αειδε, θεα, Πηληϊάδεω 'Αχιλῆος

My title should be read backwards and forwards, its *of* taken as objective and subjective genitive. On the one hand, I am concerned with the ways allegories begin and with the ends towards which they tend. In general, this is the problem of allegorical narrative, primarily a temporal issue regarding the way allegories linearly unfold, but also, as has often been pointed out, a symbolic progress that lends itself to spatial projection, as when the Temple translates the Labyrinth or the music of the spheres sounds the order of the stars. On the other hand, I am concerned with a specifically allegorical desire, a desire *for* allegory, that is implicit in the idea of structure itself, and explicit in criticism that directs itself towards the structurality of literature. This is not only to say that the notion of structure, especially of literary structure, presupposes the same system of multiply articulated levels as does that of allegory, but also that the possibility of such coherently polysemic significance originates out of the same intention, what I call desire, as does allegorical narrative.

I speak of desire in deference to the thematics of allegory and to describe the self-propelling, digressive impulse of allegorical movement, for example, the way the meandering *Canterbury Tales* begins by setting the scene and establishing the atmosphere in which folk properly "longen" to go on pilgrimages, that longing being motivation for each pilgrim's journey to Canterbury, but also the way the tales themselves set off towards the equally sacred center of their own allegorical space. I therefore psychoanalytically assume that the movement of allegory, like the dreamwork, enacts a wish that determines its progress—and the dream-vision is, of course, a characteristic framing and opening device of allegory, a way of situating allegory in the *mise en abyme* opened up by the variety of cognate accusatives that dream a dream, or see a sight, or tell a tale. On the other hand, with this reference to psychoanalysis I mean also to suggest that analysis itself, the critical response to allegory, rehearses the same wish and therefore embarks upon the same pilgrimage, so that psychoanalysis, especially structural psychoanalysis, by which today we are obliged to mean Lacan, is not simply the analysis, but the extension and conclusion of the classic allegorical tradition from which it derives—which is why psychoanalysis so readily assimilates the great archetypes of allegorical imagery into its discourse: the labyrinths, the depths, the navels, the psychomachian hydraulics.

I want to argue that there is for literary criticism a historical importance in the fact that psychoanalysis founds its scientificity on the hermeneutic circle traced by its own desire to know, as in the dream that begins psychoanalysis, Freud's dream of Irma's injection, whose wish is that its own interpretation be correct.[1] If psychoanalysis is the prevailing paradigm for critical inquiry today, it is precisely because *The Interpretation of Dreams* in this way develops itself as the dream, and therefore the desire, of interpretation itself. But in thus basing itself on its own critical reflection, desire becomes in psychoanalysis, as in allegory, both a theme and a structuring principle, and its psychology, its theory of the human, thus becomes, in the words of another and famously ambiguous genitive, the allegory of love, while its metapsychology, its theory of itself, becomes the allegory of allegory. I am concerned with the logic, presumably the psycho-logic—etymologically, the logos of the soul—that in our literary tradition links allegory, interpretation, and desire each to each, and with what happens to interpretation when its desire is no longer controllable by a figure.

That there should be formal reciprocity between allegory and its criticism is not surprising. Theoretical discussions of allegory regularly begin by lamenting the breadth of the term and relating its compass to the habit of mind that, as it is irritatedly put, sees allegory everywhere. Thus generalized, allegory rapidly acquires the status of trope of tropes, representative of the figurality of all language, the distance between signifier and signified, and, correlatively, the response to allegory becomes representative of critical activity per se. As Northrop Frye says, 'It is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery,"[2] as indeed Frye's comment demonstrates, in its presumption of global, archetypal structure, which is already allegoricization whatever purely literary claims he may make for it. Often, allegory will internalize this critical mood that it evokes, and this is what gives it its characteristically didactic and sententious tone. This tendency on the part of allegory to read itself, for its theme to dominate its narrative, or, as Frye says, to prescribe the direction of its commentary, suggests the formal or phenomenological affinities of the genre with criticism.

More historically, we can note that allegory seems regularly to surface in critical or polemical atmospheres, when for political or metaphysical reasons there is something that cannot be said. Plutarch is generally instanced as the first to substitute *ἀλληγορια* for the more usual *ὑπόνοια* and he does so in the double context of defending poetry and demythologizing the gods.[3] In this he picks up the

1. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (hereafter cited as *S.E.*), ed. James Strachey, London, Hogarth Press, 1959, 4, pp. 105–121.
2. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 89.
3. See Jean Pépin, *Mythe et Allégorie: Les origines Grecques et les contestations Judéo-Chrétiennes*, Paris, Aubier, 1958, pp. 87–88.

protoallegorical tradition of euhemerism that goes back to the third century B.C., or to Plato, or beyond that to the Pythagoreans, and whose importance for literary theory is not so much its dismantling of the pagan pantheon as, rather, the defensively recuperative intention it displays towards authoritative texts whose literalism has failed. The dignity of Apollo is deflated but the prestige of Homer preserved when the licentious intrigues of the gods are reinterpreted as philosophic, naturalistic, or scientific parables.

This deployment of allegory in the service of established literary tradition, a way of reviving prior literary authorities by making them new through critical revision—e.g., *Ovid moralisée*—forms the basis of Edwin Honig's theory of allegorical conception,[4] which has itself been forcefully revived and redeveloped in Harold Bloom's more psychoanalytical (allegorical?) *Anxiety of Influence.* It is as though allegory were precisely that mode which makes up for the distance, or heals the gap, between the present and a disappearing past which, without interpretation, would be otherwise irretrievable and foreclosed, as, for example, the pseudohieroglyphology of Horapollo, whose magic, hermetic graphesis was developed just at that moment when the legibility of hieroglyphs was lost.[5]

With the Patristics these allegoricizing perspectives and purposes turn into the dogma that lies at the base of all medieval and Renaissance critical theory. Again allegory is directed to critical and polemical ends, and again the motive for allegory emerges out of recuperative originology. The Old Testament is revived when interpreted as typologically predictive of the New, and the Gospels themselves receive the benefit of spiritualizing exegesis when the apocalypse they prophesy is indefinitely deferred. This is the major strain of allegoricizing sensibility in our tradition: the second- and third-century legacy on which the four- or three-fold medieval schemes will depend. Allegory becomes, for literature as for theology, a vivifying archaeology of occulted origins and a promissory eschatology of postponed ends—all this in the service of an essentially pietistic cosmology devoted to the corroboration of divinely ordered space and time, precisely the two matrices against which, as Erich Auerbach showed, the connotative nuances of figure, formal and chronic, develop.[6]

That allegory should organize itself with reference to these spatial and temporal axes, that, as it were, it should embody *figura,* follows directly from the linguistic structure attributed to the figure by classic rhetorical theory. The standard formulation, of course, is Quintilian's, which characterizes allegory as what happens when a single metaphor is introduced in continuous series. For grave Quintilian this is more often than not a defect, an excess of metaphor likely

4. Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory,* Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1959.
5. Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar; being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs,* 3rd ed., London, Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 10–11.
6. Erich Auerbach, "Figura," *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature,* trans. Ralph Manheim, Meridian, 1959, pp. 11–76.

to lead to enigma. But whether avoided as a vice of style or assiduously "invented" for the sake of decorous amplification, allegory will be defined up through the Renaissance as the temporal extension of trope. As such, the procedure of allegory, and the relations that obtain between its spatial and temporal projections, are strictly circumscribed. Metaphor is the initial equivocating insight into the system of doubly articulated correspondences and proportions upon which depends the analogizing logic of any troping proposition. As the shepherd to his flock, so the pilot to his boat, the king to his realm, the priest to his congregation, the husband to his wife, the stomach to the body—metaphor will select from such a system of hierarchically arranged ratios (logoi) the particular similarity that, as Aristotle puts it, it chooses to see in differences. Developed at length, in narrative succession, the continued metaphor will maintain the rigor of the original conceit by appealing to the over-all structure that governs each term in the series, with the result that narrative logic directs itself towards introducing the fox, the tempest, the cuckold, or the canker as specifically structural predetermined consequences of the first metaphorization.

Thus there are allegories that are primarily perpendicular, concerned more with structure than with temporal extenson, as, say, illustrations of Fortune's wheel, or Fludd's famous diagram of the great chain of being. On the other hand, there is allegory that is primarily horizontal, such as picaresque or quest narrative where figurativ structure is only casually and allusively appended to the circuit of adventures throu h time. Finally, of course, there are allegories that blend both axes together in relatively equal proportions, as in *The Canterbury Tales*, where each figurative tale advances the story of the pilgrimage as a whole. Whatever the prevailing orientation of any particular allegory, however—up and down through the declensions of structure, or laterally developed through narrative time—it will be successful as allegory only to the extent that it can suggest the authenticity with which the two coordinating poles bespeak each other, with structure plausibly unfolded in time, and narrative persuasively upholding the distinctions and equivalences described by structure. In Roman Jakobson's linguistic formula, which here simply picks up classic rhetorical theory (along with the awkward metaphoricity of the definition of metaphor itself), allegory would be the poetical projection of the metaphoric axis onto the metonymic, where metaphor is understood as the synchronic system of differences that constitutes the order of language (*langue*), and metonymy the diachronic principle of combination and connection by means of which structure is actualized in time in speech (*parole*).[7] (Taleus: "Continued *metonymia* is also allegory").[8] And while Jakobson goes on to associate metaphor with verse and romanticism, as opposed to metonymy,

7. Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics," *The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss*, eds. R. and F. DeGeorge, New York, Anchor, 1972, p. 95.
8. Taleus, *Rhetorica* (1548), cited in Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth Century Rhetoric*, New York, Barnes and Noble, 1968, p. 121.

which he identifies with realism and prose, allegory would cut across and subtend all such stylistic categorizations, being equally possible in either verse or prose, and quite capable of transforming the most objective naturalism into the most subjective expressionism, or the most determined realism into the most surrealistically ornamental baroque.

Thus defined, allegory fully deserves the generalization that renders it representative of language employed for literary ends, and at the same time we can see why for contemporary structuralism allegory would be the figure of speech par excellence. No other figure so readily lays itself out on the grid constructed out of the hypothesized intersection of paradigmatic synchrony and syntagmatic diachrony, which is to say that no other figure so immediately instances the definition of linguistic structure that was developed by Jakobson out of Saussure and the Russian formalists, and that has since been applied to all the so-called sciences of man, from anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) to semiotics (Barthes) to psychoanalysis (Lacan).

Several paradoxes, however, or apparent paradoxes, follow from this curiously pure structurality possessed by allegory, though taken singly none is at odds with our basic literary intuitions. On the one hand, as does structuralism itself, allegory begins with structure, thinks itself through it, regardless of whether its literary realizations orient themselves perpendicularly or horizontally, i.e., as primarily metaphoric or primarily metonymic. At each point of its progress, allegory will select its signifying elements from the system of binary oppositions that are provided by what Jakobson would call the metaphoric code, i.e., the structure, and as a result allegory will inevitably reenforce the structurality of that structure, regardless of how it manipulates the elements themselves. For Jakobson and for allegory, "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination,"[9] and so it is always the structure of metaphor that is projected onto the sequence of metonymy, not the other way around, which is why allegory is always a hierarchicizing mode, indicative of timeless order, however subversively intended its contents might be. This is why allegory is "the courtly figure," as Puttenham called it,[10] an inherently political and therefore religious trope, not because it flatters tactfully, but because in deferring to structure it insinuates the power of structure, giving off what we can call the structural effect. So too, this is what leads a theoretician like Angus Fletcher to analogize the rhythm of allegory to that of obsessional neurosis: it is a formal rather than a thematic aspect of the figure, deriving directly from the structure that in-forms its movement.[11]

On the other hand, if allegorical themes are in a sense emptied of their

9. Jakobson, p. 95.
10. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), facsimile edition, Kent, Kent State University Press, 1970, p. 196.
11. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1964, pp. 279–303.

content by the structure that governs them, if the particular signifiers of allegory become vehicles of a larger structural story which they carry but in which they play no part, they are at the same time ostentatiously foregrounded by the very structurality that becomes immanent in them. There is no clearer example of this than that of rhyme, which is precisely the poetic feature with which Jakobson illustrated his definition of the poetical as the superimposition of structural similarity on syntagmatic continuity. With rhyme we do indeed have "equivalence in sound, projected into the sequence,"[12] such that the principle of equivalent selection does indeed govern syntax; and the resulting literary effect is exactly that we hear the sound of the sound rather than the meaning of the meaning. The same holds for the other metrical and intonational means of marking poetic periods as isochronic, all of which render "the time of the speech flow experienced."[13] Thus, if before we saw signifiers lose their content when they were subsumed in a metaphoric structure to which they only obliquely referred, we here see them lose that content once again when they stagily embody that structure in sequential movement. We hear the sounds but not the sense when the signifiers, graded as similarity superinduced on continuity, point to themselves as signifers rather than to what they signify: poetic sense is exchanged for poetic sensuousness when the palpability and texture of the *signans* takes precedence over and even, as in doggerel, occludes the *signatum* altogether. Allegory would thus be exemplary of Jakobson's purely poetic function, namely, that message which, charged with reflexive poeticality, stresses itself as merely message. But this leaves us with the paradox that allegory, which we normally think of as the most didactic and abstractly moral-mongering of poetic figures, is at the same time the most empty and concrete: on the one hand, a structure of differential oppositions abstracted from its constituent units, on the other, a clamor of signifiers signifying nothing but themselves. Remembering the sententiousness of allegory, we are entitled to ask whether with such a structuralist description the thematic has not been "structured" out of court.

The paradox is, of course, only an apparent one, but I draw it out in this way so as to point to a real difficulty in structuralist poetics: namely, that in order to maintain any thematic meaning at all, structuralism, like allegory, must assume a meaningful connection between metaphoric and metonymic poles. That meaning is either what permits the two to join or the consequence of their juncture. What this means in practice is that Jakobson will pick up the tradition of Pope and Hopkins, or, for that matter, Wimsatt, and argue that sound is echo to sense. Jakobson does not, of course, intend the naive claim that there are different phonemes for different qualities—the notorious murmuring of innumerable bees—though he does accept studies which support Mallarmé's discriminations of

12. Jakobson, p. 109.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

dark and light vowels. Rather, Jakobson wants to say that the structure of poetic sounds functions in relation to the structure of its poetic signifieds as a kind of Peircean index, a little like that to which it points, or, in negatively contrapuntal fashion, conspicuously, but equally indicatively, unlike. In pointing to themselves, therefore, as in rhyme, the sounds thus also point beyond themselves to the structure of their signifieds. The same goes for the signifieds themselves, which at a semantic and thematic level are again a structure of signifiers pointing both to themselves and to a structure of signifiers beyond themselves, all of them, alone or together, eventually pointing to the structure of language itself. This is the essentially Hegelian assumption that lies behind Jakobson's claim that "The history of a system is in turn also a system,"[14] i.e., that historical diachrony, the evolution of a language, reacts structurally upon the synchronic linguistic code. Once the signifier's relation to the signified, i.e., the sign as a whole, is in this way understood to be relatively motivated, rather than utterly arbitrary as in Saussure, it is possible to make the sign itself into an index pointing to the structure it embodies and supports. Thus all the levels of allegory, up through and including the thematic, will display themselves and each other with resoundingly poetic and emphatically structural effect.[15]

But this harmonious, now Leibnitzian structure, depending as it does on an utter idealization of the structure of the sign, occurs at a significant cost. "The supremacy of poetic function over referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous."[16] What this typically unbending aphorism means is that in a structuralist poem every signifier will be simultaneously metaphor and metonymy. Jakobson's example is the girl in the Russian folk tale who comes to be symbolized by the willow under which she walks. Ever after in the poem, girl and tree are metaphors each of the other by virtue of their metonymic intersection, just as the sequential movement of the poem is conditioned by their metaphoric equivalence. In classical rhetoric we would call this a synecdoche: the girl is represented by the tree or it by she in that one possesses the other. But in Jakobson's terms what we have is a metaphoric metonymy and a metonymic metaphor, and the result, not surprisingly, is allegory:

> Similarity superimposed on contiguity imparts to poetry its thoroughgoing symbolic, multiplex, polysemantic essence which is beau-

14. Jurii Tynianov and Roman Jakobson, "Problems in the Study of Language and Literature," *The Structuralists,* p. 82.

15. Similarly, because messages about the code are selected from the code, Lacan denies the possibility of a radical concept of metalanguage: "There is the relation here of the system to its own constitution as a signifier, which would seem to be relevant to the question of metalanguage and which, in my opinion, will demonstrate the impropriety of that notion if it is intended to define differentiated elements in language." (Jacques Lacan, "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," *Ecrits,* trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1977, p. 185).

16. Jakobson, p. 112.

> tifully suggested by Goethe's "Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis" (Anything transient is but a likeness). Said more technically, anything sequent is a simile. In poetry where similarity is superinduced upon contiguity, any metonymy is slightly metaphorical and any metaphor has a metonymic tint.[17]

Undoubtedly, poems, and allegories in particular, work this way; the question is, how can structuralism work this way? What does it mean for a metonymy to be slightly metaphorical, and what is this "tint" that makes a metaphor a little metonymic? If structuralism is the diacritical science because it begins with the difference around which binary oppositions assemble, what happens to its scientific status when its own most fundamental opposites, metaphor and metonymy, are from the very beginning already implicated one in the other, the difference between them collapsed for the sake of hierarchicized, structured, "symbolic, multiplex," allegorical meaning. If these seem merely abstract and theoretical issues, we can reformulate them again in terms of our original literary problem: how does time get into structure and structure into time; how does allegory begin, and why does it continue?

For reasons that will become clearer later, I want to illustrate the problem with the opening of *The Canterbury Tales*, which is an instance of the poetical whose structurality has never been questioned, and where the allegorical relationship of space and time is a straightforwardly thematic as well as a formal issue. This is the case in several ways, but for our purposes most importantly so with regard to the opening months and seasons description, which is the stylized convention by means of which the *Prologue* places itself squarely in a tradition of allegorical beginning. This months and seasons description is a long-established convention immediately evocative of and convenient to cosmological and metaphysical invention, a way of alluding through allegorical structure to the mysterious order of the cosmos and the position of God as unmoved mover within it. Here the *Prologue* can rely on a tradition that goes back to Lucretius and to Ovid and to Vergilian eclogue, and that is thoroughly alive and popular throughout the middle ages, whether in manuscript decoration, cathedral ornament, or various scientifically and philosophically inclined compendia. The details and history of this convention need not concern us now, save to the extent that they allow us to refer with some certainty to the explicitly allegorical intentions of *The Canterbury Tales* and to remark that here, as with any deployment of a convention within a literary tradition, we have precisely the joining of paradigm and syntagm by means of which a literary text will position itself within the structurality of literature as a whole (with the text presenting itself as either like or unlike others in the conventional paradigm—for Jakobson this would be the literary code, a structure of generic oppositions—at the same time as it actualizes the paradigm in

17. *Ibid*, p. 111.

the temporality of literary history, though whether Chaucer's *parole* is here intended ironically remains an open question).

It is with reference to the complex tradition of allegorical literature and to the poem's burden of cosmological, theological, and scientific speculation, that we enter the work. And it is within this context that we discover in the *Prologue*'s first two lines, with the piercing of March by April, the metaphoric metonymy that for Jakobson constitutes the specifically poetic effect. That is, when April with its sweet showers pierces the drought of March, we have the code of the months, or more precisely the system of oppositions that makes up the code, translated directly into consecutive sequence, such that the binary oppositions between the months, rainy April versus dry March—but, of course, within the tradition there are other oppositions at stake besides the merely meteorological—are projected systematically onto the continuous progress of the months through the year: after March, then April, in a progression that completes and corroborates itself only when the entirety of the monthly paradigm unfolds itself through the temporal totality, or what we should here properly call the syntagm, of the year. Inevitably—and for the author of a treatise on the astrolabe, tautologically—this is picked up by the surrounding or encapsulating astrological references, which tell us again that we are in the first month, April, because the Ram has run through half his course and therefore, as with April and March, that the paradigmatic zodiacal opposition of Aries and Taurus is directly translatable onto, or as, the sequence of metonymy unrolled by celestial rotation.

All this is a rather complicated way of saying what for a competent reader should presumably go without saying; but for the sake of argument let us assume that the initial structural disposition of these first few images is then systematically repeated in the pattern of images that the poem develops throughout its opening few lines, so that the series of oppositions which we might summarize as wet and dry, up and down, sky and earth, male and female, fecundity and sterility, pagan and Christian, inside and outside, near and far, health and illness—all function structurally in relation to each other and to themselves as kinds of mirror images, indices, of the first metaphorico-metonymic structuring introduced by the intersection of March and April—each of them graded as structure superinduced on sequence. Let us even assume that the same thing happens metrically, so that the ictus on the unstressed position that we get in April is structurally related to the stress on the stressed position that we get with "March," and that this in turn sets up a stress structure of rhythmic and intonational patterning that the poem will reserve for specifically metaphorico-metonymic emphasis—e.g., ". . . with his shóurĕs soote/ Thĕ dróughte. . . ." Let us also assume—again only for the sake of argument and in pursuit of the ideal structural analysis—that the themes introduced by our now hypothetically structuralized *Prologue* imagery are in turn developed in the tales themselves, and that this enlargement proceeds with the same structural determinations as are sketched out in the first few lines, so that the implicit hierarchy presumed in the order of months is what finally lies behind the

social hierarchy into which the pilgrims fit, from the Knight on down to the Miller (as well as the dictional hierarchy that governs the manner in which each tale is decorously related), and that the primacy of male April to female March is the structural source not only of the patriarchal orientation of the marriage tales, but also of presumptively analogous arrangements of cosmological and literary order that the tales regularly, allegorically ally with this—as, say, in The Wife of Bath's prologue and tale, where familial, sexual, theological, and literary "authorities" are all developed in terms of the hierarchicized sexuality already built into the piercing of March by the potent, engendering liquidity of April. Finally, so as to complete this imaginary, exhaustively structural analysis, let us assume that the relation of April to March, developed as structure superinduced on sequence, also describes the most general literary features of *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole, so that, in the same way that Jakobson's metaphorized metonymies point both to themselves as signifiers and to the structure of signifieds from which they derive, so too do we have in little with April-March a prototypical enactment of the procedure by means of which Chaucer characteristically manages to distance his text from its own textuality—whether in the way the tales comment upon each other by reference to their common frame, or the way they point to themselves by stepping out of themselves, as with the Pardoner's claims for his own rhetoric, or, in that culminating instance of self-reflection so dear to dialectical Chaucerians, the way the narrator's tale of Sir Thopas lapses into the allegorical prose of the *Tale of Melibee,* accomplishing thereby an instance of mirroring self-mockery surpassed only by the absolute duplicity of the *Retraction* itself, where Chaucer either turns Pardoner or steps out of literature altogether, but in either case piously and conventionally defers to the only moral imperatives that his allegorical system allows him in the first place.

Having now assumed so much—and I realize that to suggest the possibility or the shape of a completely successful, all-encompassing structural analysis of *The Canterbury Tales* is to assume a great deal—we are now entitled to ask in what way this structure accounts for the poeticality of the text. In what sense can our hypothesized structure explain either the pleasure or the meaning taken from, or generated by, a text organized by the projection of metaphoric equivalence onto metonymic succession? The poem tells us that when the sweet showers of April pierce the drought of March to the root, when Zephyrus inspires the crops in every woodland with his sweet breath, when small birds begin to make melody, "*thanne* longen folk to goon on pilgrimages." How does the structuring of the first few lines that we have now assumed manage to generate, or to justify, or to explain this longing? How does it entice a reader further into the poem, leading him on through and into its sequencing? How is structure extended, "longed," into time? In the terms of my title, how does the structure of the poem yield its allegorical desire?

For an answer, I turn to another famous essay by Jakobson in which he applies the procedures of structural analysis to phonemic patterning, and where

he develops the theory of distinctive phonetic features, which remains the greatest achievement of structural linguistics, recognized as such even by linguists with entirely different theoretical perspectives.[18] We should say in advance that it is because of Jakobson's theoretical success with phonemes, a conceptualization that reduces the infinity of humanly producible sounds to a few significant phonological oppositions, that structural linguistics has become the prestigious model for disciplines whose fields are only marginally, or at least not obviously, related to language per se. All of them readily pay the price of analogizing their subject matter to language in exchange for the rigorous structurality that Jakobson's method provides.

In principle, then—and my account will be perfunctory paraphrase—Jakobson begins with Saussurean diacriticality, the thesis that we perceive positivities as systems of differences rather than as simple existents whose being immediately imposes itself upon our senses. We hear the structured differences between phonemes rather than the phonemes themselves, as we know from the fact that what is a significant sound to a speaker of one language may not even be heard by the speaker of another. For each language, then, Jakobson proposes that a system of binary phonological oppositions may be constructed whose systematicity can account for all the potentially significant sounds that can be produced within the language. This will be the phonological code of the *langue* that is actualized in metonymic *parole*. These systems naturally vary from language to language, depending on the phonological structure of each, but what concerns us now are features that, because of the structure of the human mouth, are universal phonological facts. Here, then, like a Ramist proposing his initial dichotomization, Jakobson applies structuralist methodology and searches out what would be the maximum binary opposition of which the mouth is capable, which he discovers in the first syllable, contrast of consonant and vowel, transcribed as /pa/. The constituents of this utterance, vocalic /a/ and the voiceless labial stop /p/, represent absolute phonological difference in the mouth: viz., with /p/ the buccal tract is closed at the front whereas in /a/ the tract is opened at the end as wide as possible. As a labial stop, /p/ exists for but a moment and requires a minimun of energy for its articulation; in contrast, /a/ is a continual voicing of sound and requires maximum energy. Where /p/ is the stopping of sound, /a/ is pure vocality. For all these diacritical reasons, /pa/ is plausibly identified as the largest binary opposition the mouth can articulate and as such, from a structuralist perspective, is conceptually the first syllable. This theoretical claim is in turn supported by studies in language acquisition and aphasia which report that /pa/ is both the first utterance children learn and the last that aphasics lose—striking empirical corroboration of Jakobson's structuralist claim that language begins

18. Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, "Phonemic Patterning," *Fundamentals of Language*, The Hague, Mouton, 1971, pp. 50–66.

and ends with the combination of vocalic /a/ with voiceless labial stop /p/ in the primal utterance /pa/.

The hypothesis is clearly ingenious, and if we assimilate voiceless /p/ to its twin labial stop, voiced /b/, sound and sense begin in Jakobson's sense to cohere structurally, as, for example, when we call the infant incapable of speech a *baby*, or when the Greeks call foreigners whose speech is strange *barbaroi* because they *babble*, as at the Tower of *Babel*, or when we begin our alpha-bets by joining *a* to *b*.[19] But /pa/ is only the beginning of a system. In order to build a structure at least two sets of oppositions are required so as to construct a series of proportions and logoi that can be actualized in speech. Thus Jakobson and the infant must identify a second binary opposition, structurally opposable to the first, so as to specify a paradigmatic code, and this they do by introducing the nasal consonant /m/. With the acquisition of /m/, the pure differentiality that was first presented by /pa/ is, as it were, plugged up, recuperated. As a nasal consonant, a continuant sound, /m/ combines the vocality of /a/ with the positionality of /p/ at the front of the mouth. As a little of one and a little of the other, /m/ is a kind of average or collapse or juncture of the original opposition, just as metaphor and metonymy seemed to collapse in Jakobson's theory. And once /m/ is articulated as a distinctive feature in its own right, we have the diacritical material with which to establish a structure of phonological sound: /p/ and /m/ being both opposed to /a/, while /p/ and /m/ are also opposed to each other. As Jakobson puts it: "Before there appeared the consonantal opposition nasal/oral, consonant was distinguished from vowel as closed tract from open tract. Once the nasal consonant has been opposed to the oral as presence to absence of the open tract, the contrast consonant/vowel is revalued as presence vs. absence of a closed tract."[20]

Again, there is striking cross-cultural empirical support for Jakobson's claim. In nearly every natural language that has been observed, some variation of *papa* and *mama* or their reversal, as in *abba* and *ema*, are the familiar terms for father and mother.[21] But what I am concerned with now, quite apart from whatever empirical power Jakobson's insight might possess, is how the first two terms of this series, /pa/ and /ma/, develop themselves as a structure. We remember that it is only with the introduction of the second opposition adduced by /ma/ that we can say we have a system. At that point, each term in the series can be seen as diacritically significant with respect to its opposition to another term in

19. We are justified in thus assimilating /p/ with /b/ because at this stage the distinction between voiced and voiceless has not yet been made. "As the distinction voiced/voiceless has not yet been made, the first consonant may be shifting and sometimes indistinct, varying between types of /b/ and types of /p/, but still within a distinct 'family of sounds.'" (R.M. Jones, *System in Child Language*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1970, II, p. 85). The collation shows itself in the orthography for the sounds.

20. Jakobson and Halle, p. 51.

21. Roman Jakobson, "Why 'Mama' and 'Papa'?" *Selected Writings*, The Hague, Mouton, 1962, I, pp. 538–45.

the structure. Until then, however, /pa/, insofar as it signifies anything, signifies only the sheer diacriticality through which the system as a whole is thought. But this original differential determination is thereupon lost, retroactively effaced, when the introduction of /ma/ "revalues" the first *valueless* contrast consonant/vowel, or silence/sound, i.e., /pa/, as "presence vs. absence of a closed tract." In other words, /pa/ loses its original status as mark of pure diacriticality when it is promoted to the level of significant signifier within the system as a whole. This new significant /pa/ is utterly unrelated to the first simply diacritical /pa/ that it replaces, or, as Derrida would say, that it places under erasure. And it is precisely this occultation of the original /pa/, now structurally unspeakable because revalued as something else entirely, that allows the system to function as a structure in the first place. In short, the structure of significant sounds must erase the original marking of diacriticality upon which it depends and from which it emerges in order to signify anything at all. In a formulation whose resonance with contemporary literary criticism will be embarrassingly obvious, there is buried in the structurality of any structure the ghostly origin of that structure, because the origin will be structurally determined as a ghost, a palpably absent origin, by virtue of the very structurality it fathers. Every structure must begin with such an effacing, retroactive revaluation of its beginning, with such a murder of its diacritical source, just as Freud said when he identified the origin of human culture in the murder of the father, the primal /pa/, who lives on only in and as the guilty memory responsible for the structure of society.[22]

Turning back now to the opening of *The Canterbury Tales*—which it will now be clear I selected precisely because there in the intersection of *Ap*ril and *Ma*rch we have also the juncture of /pa/ and /ma/—we can answer the question of how an allegory begins and why it continues. What we can say is that with its poeticality defined as structure superinduced upon metonymy, allegory initiates and continually revivifies its own desire, a desire born of its own structuring. Every metaphor is always a little metonymic because in order to have a metaphor there must be a structure, and where there is a structure there is already piety and nostalgia for the lost origin through which the structure is thought. Every metaphor is a metonymy of its own origin, its structure thrust into time by its very structurality. With the piercing of March by April, then, the allegorical structure thus enunciated has already lost its center and thereby discovered a project: to recover the loss dis-covered by the structure of language and of literature. In thematic terms, this journey back to a foreclosed origin writes itself out as a pilgrimage to the sacred founding shrine, made such by murder, that is the motive of its movement. In terms of literary response, the structuring of the text holds out the promise of a meaning that it will also perpetually defer, an image of hermeneutic totality martyred and consecrated by and as the poetical. This is the

22. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo, S.E.*, 13, pp. 141–46.

formal destiny of every allegory insofar as allegory is definable as continued metaphor. Distanced at the beginning from its source, allegory will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory.[23]

Perhaps this is one reason why, as Angus Fletcher has remarked, allegory seems by its nature to be incompletable, never quite fulfilling its grand design.[24] So too, this explains the formal affinity of allegory with obsessional neurosis, which, as Freud develops it in the case of the Wolf Man, derives precisely from such a search for lost origins, epitomized in the consequences of the primal scene, which answers the child's question of where he came from with a diacritical solution which he cannot accept, and which his neurosis thereupon represses and denies. But this would in turn suggest the affinity of psychoanalysis not only with obsessionality, but also with allegory.[25] For the theoretical concern of the Wolf Man case, argued out in the context of a polemic with Jung, is precisely to determine whether the scene of parental intercourse, the piercing of /ma/ by /pa/, observed by the Wolf Man was indeed a primal scene or instead a primal fantasy. And when Freud, relying on a hypothesis of universal, cross-cultural phylogenetic inheritance, tells us that it is a matter of indifference whether we choose to regard it as either, we may well wonder whether the theory of the primal scene, which is in some sense at the center of every psychoanalysis, is not itself the theoretical primal fantasy of psychoanalysis, a theoretical origin that the theoretical structure of Freud's thought obliges him to displace to the recesses of mythic history.[26]

23. I am concerned here with the way literary structures are thought, and so feel no obligation to restrict my argument to cases which explicitly instance Jakobson's phonological thesis. Nevertheless, in the course of writing this essay I have enjoyed collecting concrete examples, as in the first line of the *Iliad*, from which I take my epigraph, where the wrathful Μη is joined to the stress on Πη in the first syllable of Lacan's and Achilles's Name of the Father. With regard to the pastoral tradition I focus on in the essay, from Chaucer's *Prologue* through Eliot, we should think of Marvell's *The Garden*, which opens with another Pa-Ma—"How vainly men themselves amaze/To win the palm, the oak, or bays"—and tells another nostalgic story of Eden lost through diacriticality: "Two paradises 'twere in one/To live in paradise alone." But there are also examples from the novel, e.g., *The Charterhouse of Parma* (*Parme*), or *Mansfield Park*, or "Stately, plump, *Buck Mu*lligan," or, my favorite, because its three syllables sum up Lacan's theory of the acquisition of language through the castration of the paternal metaphor: *Moby Dick*.

24. Fletcher, pp. 174–80.

25. The issue of Freud's and psychoanalytic obsessionality is a subject for another essay. It takes the hermeneutic form of attempting to plug up gaps. The culminating moment of Freud's analysis of the obsessional Rat Man comes when Freud's interpretation *participates* in the Rat Man's deepest homosexual fantasies: "Was he perhaps thinking of impalement? 'No, not that; . . . the criminal was tied up . . .'—he expressed himself so indistinctly that I could not immediately guess in what position—' . . . a pot was turned upside down on his buttocks . . . some *rats* were put into it . . . and they . . .'—he had again got up, and was showing every sign of horror and resistance—'bored their way in . . .'—Into his anus, I helped him out." ("Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," *S.E.*, 10, p. 166). Professor Murray Schwartz suggested this reading of the Rat Man to me. I would say that we can follow out the same language and desire not only in Freud's biography, but in psychoanalytic theory and metatheory, a phenomenological sodomy.

26. "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," *S.E.*, 17, p. 97: "I should myself be glad to know

The question becomes perhaps more urgent when we recall the theoretical status of what for Freudian metapsychology is its own maximum binary opposition, namely, the instinct theory with its dualism of Eros and Death. For to the extent that these two instincts are different, it is only insofar as the recuperative, unifying impulses of Eros are provoked as response to the differentiating impulses of death, a /ma/ to the thanatotic /pa/. And even before this, death itself is already conceived by Freud as such a dualism, extended into time as the compulsive, obsessive repetition of its own diacriticality, i.e., the repetition compulsion, which is the vicious Freudian metonym of the metaphoricity of death. Is it any wonder, then, that for evidence of all of this Freud can in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* but point to another piece of allegorical literature, to Plato's story of Aristophanes' story of divinely diacriticalized hermaphrodites, yet another case where desire originates in and as the loss of structure. And it is by no means accidental that Freud develops these same Aristophanic themes elsewhere, as in the allegory of his gender theory, with its unending quest by both hetero-sexes for the castrated phallus, powerful only in the division it teaches in its loss.[27] And so too with psychoanalytic interpretation, which completes itself only when it points mutely to that

> . . . passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure . . . a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.[28]

Does this mean, then, that psychoanalysis as a science is "mere" allegory? Does the fact that the exposition of Freud's theory of the psyche acts out its own theorization mean that psychoanalysis is but a symptomatic instance of its own thwarted desire to know: a neurotic epistemophilia at the end of a bankrupt tradition of philosophy? It is thanks to Lacan that we can see in this theoretical self-reflection of psychoanalysis, mirror of Freud's original analysis of himself, both the historical necessity and the scientific validity of psychoanalytic allegorici-

whether the primal scene in my patient's case was a phantasy or a real experience, but taking other similar cases into account, I must admit that the answer to this question is not in fact a matter of very great importance."

27. In "The Dissolution of The Oedipus Complex," "The Infantile Genital Organization," and "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," *S.E.*, 19.

28. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *S.E.*, 5, p. 525. See also 4, p. 111n.

the unconscious as the "discourse of the Other" (let us note, a direct translation of the etymology of allegory: ἀλλος, other; ἀγορεύω, to speak), he establishes psychoanalysis as precisely that science whose concern is the split in the subject occasioned by the subject's accession to language. If psychoanalysis has discovered anything, it is precisely this loss of the self to the self that we vaguely refer to when we speak of the function of the unconscious. And what Lacan has taught us, in a series of blindingly lucid formulations still defensively resisted by the psychoanalytic establishment, is that in the same way that *The Canterbury Tales* is divided and directed when it enters language, so too is the psyche when it learns to speak.[29] This famous Lacanian barring of the subject—the loss of being that comes from re-presenting oneself in language as a meaning, correlative with the formation of the unconscious and the onset of desire, the construction of the Oedipal subject, and the acquisition of a place in the cultural order through the recognition of the Name of the Father—is what makes the psyche a critical allegory of itself, and what justifies psychoanalysis as the allegory of that allegory. It is in search of the meaning of this division of the subject through the dialectics of desire occasioned by the structurality of the logos that psychoanalysis finds its own epistemological project and its own initiatory desire.

If, then, the structure of Freud's thought, as it develops, becomes immanent as theme, if Freud's theory repeatedly valorizes those very images of loss which make his conceptual representations possible in the first place, this is to say no more than that Freud's hermeneutics are at one with the object of their inquiry. This is not the internalist fallacy: rather, it is the way psychoanalysis realizes itself as practice. For psychoanalysis is no empty theory; it is instead the operative science of the unconscious, and the unconscious is precisely that part of the self lost to the self by its articulation, just as Freud's theory embodies itself only through its endless, questing theoretical self-deconstruction. Or so the heroic, allegorical example of Freud and the rigorously figurative style of Lacan persuasively suggest.

This is to see in psychoanalytic structure and in psychoanalytic structuralism the conclusion of a search for wisdom that has motivated Western philosophy from its very beginning. In the declension of theoretical speculation about the order of order that begins as ontology, cosmology, theology, and that, starting with the Renaissance, is internalized in the sciences of man as anthropology, sociology, psychology, there occurs a completing or a breaking of the hermeneu-

29. These themes run through all of Lacan's work. In *Ecrits*, see "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," "The Signification of the Phallus," and "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious." With regard to the occultation induced by metaphor, see especially Lacan's formulas for metaphor and metonymy in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud." See also my own "Gnosis and the Piety of Metaphor: The Gospel of Truth," forthcoming in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Studies in the History of Religion*, ed. Bentley Layton, Leiden, Brill, 1980.

tic circle when psychology, defining the psyche as an effect of the logos, is itself transformed, in Kenneth Burke's phrase, into logology.[30] This is the Heideggerean theme straightforwardly developed in Lacan's thought. And, of course, it is precisely against this appeal to the order of order and the meaning of meaning that Derrida has directed his critique of Lacan, seeing in such a psychoanalysis nothing but the inherited aftereffects of Western logocentric metaphysics, where the phallus is the castrating, fascistic transcendental signified that condemns man's desire to a forever unsatisfying nostalgia for the lost origin of a chimerical golden age.[31] As an alternative, as we now all know, Derrida proposes instead a metaphysics and a psychoanalysis of difference itself, *la différance* of both structure and time, to be comprehended by a philosophy *avant la lettre*, before structure, before logos: in short, a philosophy of the effacing and trace of prelinguistic, diacritical /pa/.

But as Derrida is well aware, and as he repeatedly reminds the most enthusiastic Derrideans, this return to structuralist first principles can occur only *after* the structural fact, for it is only *in* structure that the origin and its loss emerges. The sign is always thought through difference, but it is always eventually thought out to the signifying conclusion that erases the difference upon which it depends, which is why "difference cannot be thought without the trace."[32] Thus, if Lacan is logocentric, it is because he characterizes the first logocentric lapse through which *différance* itself will be thematized and conceived, so that any criticism of Lacan will already have committed the Lacanian lapse. This accounts for the positivist illusion that there are things before differences, but it also explains the intrinsic belatedness of every deconstruction.[33]

This is also why any of the so-called post-structuralist critiques of structuralism, including Derrida's, must be seen as mere aftereffects of structuralism. They are already defined, by the criticism implicit in their *post* and in their hyphen, as the allegorical response to a metaphor of structure and a structure of metaphor in which they are already implicated and by which they are already implied. Whether the origin is perpetually displaced by Derridean *différance*, or whether it is

30. Kenneth Burke, "Terministic Screens," *Language as Symbolic Action*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1966, p. 47, and *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1970.

31. Jacques Derrida, "The Purveyor of Truth," *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975), 31–113.

32. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 57.

33. For this reason, I think it is a mistake to assimilate Derrida and Lacan each to the other, and to see in the critical practice of both an equivalent response to textuality, e.g., Gayatri Spivak, "The Letter as Cutting Edge," *Yale French Studies*, 55/56, pp. 208–226; Barbara Johnson, "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida," *Yale French Studies*, 55/56, pp. 457–505. This is to reduce the historical importance that their confrontation represents both for psychoanalysis and for philosophy. Derrida is very much son to Lacan's father, which is why he attempts the critical parricide of "Purveyor of Truth" or *Positions*. In this sense, Derrida is quite right to characterize the Lacanian enterprise in terms of a dated and passé Hegelian project. On the other hand, in accord with the Freudian paradigm, Derrida's philosophical success only makes the mortified Lacan that much more authoritative.

historically located and crystallized by Girard's catastrophe of "no-difference" whatsoever, the thematic valorization of origin as loss survives.[34] And post-structuralism therefore gains its prestige only insofar as it thus pro-longs itself as the critical metonymy of the structuralist metaphor.

We must therefore stress again the sense in which the scientific thematization of structure that we find in psychoanalysis spells an end to the tradition of literary allegory as we have known it since first-century Alexandria. For when psychoanalysis itself turns into allegory, criticism for the first time in our tradition must admit to the irrecuperable distance between itself and its object. Having consciously formulated the allegory of its own desire, criticism must awaken from its dream of interpretation to a daylight where desire is but the memory of the night's desire. We have posited it as a law of literary form that the diacriticality effaced by literary structure emerges as theme in the register of loss. Our example has been the way pilgrimage is thematized in *The Canterbury Tales*, but we might have illustrated the point with any of a wide variety of texts. We may posit it as a second law that profoundly self-conscious texts eventually realize their responsibility for the loss upon which their literariness depends, and that when this happens this responsibility is itself thematized as sin. From silence to difference to loss to sin—and sometimes, in texts whose literary integrity is absolute, through sin back to silence once again, as in the *Retraction* with which *The Canterbury Tales* concludes. These laws of literary form also apply to the structure of literary history, whether we consider the development of an individual author or the evolution of a literary genre.

But this leaves open a way for poetry and for the history of poetry to remain literary even in their silence, whereas criticism ceases to be criticism when it turns mute. Because the things of poetry are words, poetry can, in a way that criticism cannot, conclude itself when it cannot continue. When poetry can find no new words with which to maintain the meaning of its longing, it can lapse into significant literary silence, thereby pro-longing its desire ad infinitum. But criticism, whose things are not words but the meanings of words, meanings forever foreclosed by words, will find in silence only the impetus for further speech and further longing, which it will thereupon thematize as its own responsibility for the loss of meaning. Where a poem can be closed poetically even by a gesture of self-abandon, criticism, dis-covering the futility of its pro-ject, can only go on and on, frustratingly repeating its own frustration, increasingly obsessed with its own sense of sin—unless, of course, in the psychoanalytic sense, it projects its own critical unhappiness onto literature, whose self-deconstruction would then be understood as criticism.[35]

34. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1977.
35. See, for example, Gayatri Spivak: "I would like to suggest the possibility of conceiving poetry in

Thus it is that when the tradition of English pastoral that begins with Chaucer's *Prologue* finds its own conclusion, it remains literary even in its self-disgust. And Eliot, drawing the thematic structure of the genre to its absurdly melancholic, ultimate reduction, can still articulate a meaning pre-dicative of yet more poetic desire:

> April is the cruelest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.

Eliot, with his habit of making a beginning out of ends, can imagine that the gap in landscape poetry that his poem proleptically prepares will become a significant silence in a perpetually meaningful literary tradition that will forever feed meaning back into his *Wasteland.* In contrast, Freud, whose Judaic thematizations of guilt and sin, as in *Civilization and Its Discontents,* are at least as forceful and serious as any of Eliot's Anglican regrets, can do no more than continue to repeat his themes with increasingly phlegmatic and precisely nuanced resignation, as in the fragment with which his corpus movingly concludes, prophetically and self-reflectively entitled "The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence."[36] This is the insight into self-division and sin that psychoanalysis leaves as legacy to contemporary critical thought, which continues to repeat Freud's themes, though perhaps without the rigor of Freud's resignation. Here I refer to that note of eschatological salvation that sounds so strangely in current literary discourse, as when Girard looks forward to a revivification of difference through sacralizing violence, or when Derrida, telling us it is not a question of choosing, includes himself amongst those who "turn their eyes away in the face of

a totally opposite way to a common understanding that would see poetic language as that in which sign and sense are identical, as in music, as that which tends to maintain the distance between the sign and its semantic meaning. To support my argument, I will have recourse to the notion of allegory." (Gayatri Spivak, "Allégorie et historie de la poésie: Hypothèse de Travail," *Poétique,* 8 (1971), p. 427). In effect, I am suggesting that we are still entitled to retain the idea of the book, the poem, the artifact, as opposed to the infinite, indefinite, unbounded extension of what nowadays is called textuality. Thus I also maintain the validity of the distinction between literature and its criticism, though, in accord with my argument above, this distinction would only have become operative relatively recently with the conclusion of psychoanalytic hermeneutics. What distinguishes the literary from the critical is that the logocentric book or poem can effect the closure of representation precisely because it can structure silence into its discourse, just as language does with the combination of consonant and vowel. The result is a polysemic, structured literary universe. If contemporary criticism can do this, it chooses not to, and thus maintains itself only as the inconclusive textuality that it attributes to literature. I realize that Derrida would characterize the distinction between structure and time that structuralism proposes as dependent upon, in Heidegger's phrase, a "vulgar concept of time" (see *Grammatology,* p. 72). My concern, however, is with how these concepts have functioned and continue to function as decisively powerful metaphors in the Western literary critical tradition, regardless of how philosophically untenable they may have been for all these thousands of years.

36. *S.E.,* 23, pp. 275–278. The essay takes up the "rift in the ego which never heals but which increases as time goes on" (p. 276). Freud's illustrative example is castration disavowal.

the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the non-species, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity."[37]

It would seem by the rules of the endgame Beckett wrote in *Waiting for Godot* that contemporary thought here turns pastoral nostalgia for a golden age into the brute expectations of a sentimental apocalypticism. But we will wait forever for the rough beast to slouch its way to Bethlehem; so too, for a philosophy or a literary criticism of what the thunder said: DA.[38]

37. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1970, p. 265. If Girard is the theoretician of an unthinkable sacred Origin, and Derrida the philosopher of an indefinitely deferred Origin, then Foucault, with his inexplicable transitions between *epistemic* frames, is, despite his disclaimers, the post-structuralist of missing middles. And Foucault shares post-structuralist millenarianism: "In attempting to uncover the deepest strata of Western culture, I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet." (Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, Vintage, 1970, p. xxiv.)

38. See Lacan, "Function and Field of Speech and Language," *Ecrits*, esp. pp. 106–107.

The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism*

CRAIG OWENS

> *Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.*
> *—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"*

I.

In a review of Robert Smithson's collected writings, published in this journal in Fall 1979, I proposed that Smithson's "genius" was an allegorical one, involved in the liquidation of an aesthetic tradition which he perceived as more or less ruined. To impute an allegorical motive to contemporary art is to venture into proscribed territory, for allegory has been condemned for nearly two centuries as aesthetic aberration, the antithesis of art. In *Aesthetic* Croce refers to it as "science, or art aping science"; Borges once called it an "aesthetic error." Although he surely remains one of the most allegorical of contemporary writers, Borges nevertheless regards allegory as an outmoded, exhausted device, a matter of *historical* but certainly not critical interest. Allegories appear in fact to represent for him the distance between the present and an irrecoverable past:

> I know that at one time the allegorical art was considered quite charming . . . and is now intolerable. We feel that, besides being intolerable, it is stupid and frivolous. Neither Dante, who told the story of his passion in the *Vita nuova;* nor the Roman Boethius, writing his *De consolatione* in the tower of Pavia, in the shadow of his executioner's sword, would have understood our feeling. How can I explain that difference in outlook without simply appealing to the principle of changing tastes?[1]

* This is the first of two essays devoted to allegorical apsects of contemporary art. After a schematic survey of the impact of allegory on recent art, I proceed to the theoretical issues which it raises. In a second essay I plan to extend these observations through readings of specific works in which an allegorical impulse seems paramount.

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "From Allegories to Novels," *Other Inquisitions,* New York, Simon and Schuster, 1964, pp. 155–56.

This statement is doubly paradoxical, for not only does it contradict the allegorical nature of Borges's own fiction, it also denies allegory what is most proper to it: its capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear. Allegory first emerged in response to a similar sense of estrangement from tradition; throughout its history it has functioned in the gap between a present and a past which, without allegorical reinterpretation, might have remained foreclosed. A conviction of the remoteness of the past, and a desire to redeem it for the present—these are its two most fundamental impulses. They account for its role in psychoanalytic inquiry, as well as its significance for Walter Benjamin, the only twentieth-century critic to treat the subject without prejudice, philosophically.[2] Yet they fail to explain why allegory's *aesthetic* potential should appear to have been exhausted long ago; nor do they enable us to locate the historical breach at which allegory itself receded into the depths of history.

Inquiry into the origins of the modern attitude toward allegory might appear as "stupid and frivolous" as its topic were it not for the fact that an unmistakably allegorical impulse has begun to reassert itself in various aspects of contemporary culture: in the Benjamin revival, for example, or in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence.* Allegory is also manifest in the historical revivalism that today characterizes architectural practice, and in the revisionist stance of much recent art-historical discourse: T. J. Clark, for example, treating mid-nineteenth-century painting as political "allegory." In what follows, I want to focus this reemergence through its impact on both the practice and the criticism of the visual arts. There are, as always, important precedents to be accounted for: Duchamp identified both the "instantaneous state of Rest" and the "extra rapid exposure," that is, the photographic aspects,[3] of the *Large Glass* as "allegorical appearance"; *Allegory* is also the title of one of Rauschenberg's most ambitious combine paintings from the fifties. Consideration of such works must be postponed, however, for their importance becomes apparent only after the suppression of allegory by modern theory has been fully acknowledged.

In order to recognize allegory in its contemporary manifestations, we first require a general idea of what it in fact is, or rather what it *represents,* since allegory is an attitude as well as a technique, a perception as well as a procedure. Let us say for the moment that allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another; the Old Testament, for example, becomes allegorical when it is read as a prefiguration of the New. This provisional description—which is not a definition—accounts for both allegory's origin in commentary and exegesis, as

2. On allegory and psychoanalysis, see Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire," in this issue. Benjamin's observations on allegory are to be found in the concluding chapter of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (trans. John Osborne, London, NLB, 1977, henceforth referred to as GTD). On Benjamin, see pp. 84–85.

3. See Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October,* 3 (Spring 1977), 68–81.

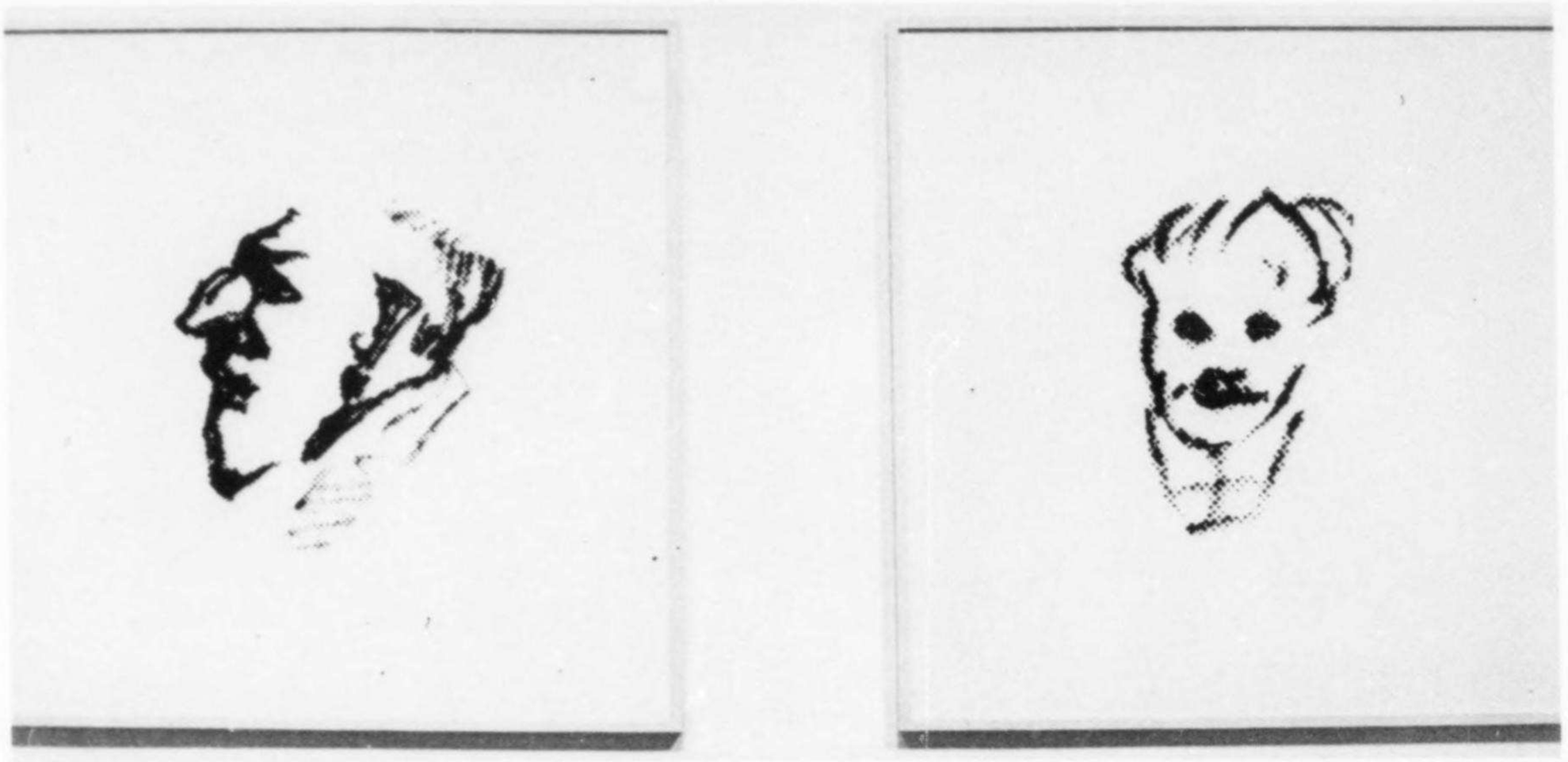
well as its continued affinity with them: as Northrop Frye indicates, the allegorical work tends to prescribe the direction of its own commentary. It is this metatextual aspect that is invoked whenever allegory is attacked as interpretation merely appended *post facto* to a work, a rhetorical ornament or flourish. Still, as Frye contends, "genuine allegory is a structural element in literature; it has to be there, and cannot be added by critical interpretation alone."[4] In allegorical structure, then, one text is *read through* another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest. (It is from here that a reading of Borges's allegorism might be launched, with "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" or several of the *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, where the text is posited by its own commentary.)

Conceived in this way, allegory becomes the model of all commentary, all critique, insofar as these are involved in rewriting a primary text in terms of its figural meaning. I am interested, however, in what occurs when this relationship takes place *within* works of art, when it describes their structure. Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (*allos* = other + *agoreuei* = to speak). He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured; allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather, he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement. This is why allegory is condemned, but it is also the source of its theoretical significance.

The first link between allegory and contemporary art may now be made: with the appropriation of images that occurs in the works of Troy Brauntuch, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo . . .—artists who generate images through the reproduction of other images. The appropriated image may be a film still, a photograph, a drawing; it is often itself already a reproduction. However, the manipulations to which these artists subject such images work to empty them of their resonance, their significance, their authoritative claim to meaning. Through Brauntuch's enlargements, for example, Hitler's drawings, or those of concentration camp victims, exhibited without captions, become resolutely opaque:

> Every operation to which Brauntuch subjects these pictures represents the duration of a fascinated, perplexed gaze, whose desire is that they disclose their secrets; but the result is only to make the pictures all the more picturelike, to fix forever in an elegant object our *distance from the history* that produced these images. *That distance is all these pictures signify.*[5]

4. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, New York, Atheneum, 1969, p. 54.
5. Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October*, 8 (Spring 1979), 85, italics added.



Troy Brauntuch. Untitled (detail of three-panel work). 1979.

Brauntuch's is thus that melancholy gaze which Benjamin identified with the allegorical temperament:

> If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power. That is to say it is now quite incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own; such significance as it has, it acquires from the allegorist. He places it within it, and stands behind it; not in a psychological but in an ontological sense.[6]

Brauntuch's images simultaneously proffer and defer a promise of meaning; they both solicit and frustrate our desire that the image be directly transparent to its signification. As a result, they appear strangely incomplete—fragments or runes which must be *deciphered.*

Allegory is consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete—an affinity which finds its most comprehensive expression in the ruin, which Benjamin identified as the allegorical emblem par excellence. Here the works of man are reabsorbed into the landscape; ruins thus stand for history as an irreversible process of dissolution and decay, a progressive distancing from origin:

> In allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape. Everything about history

6. Benjamin, GTD, p. 183–84.

> that, from the very beginning, had been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head. And although such a thing lacks all 'symbolic' freedom of expression, all classical proportion, all humanity—nevertheless, this is the form in which man's subjection to nature is most obvious and it significantly gives rise to not only the enigmatic question of the nature of human existence as such, but also of the biographical historicity of the individual. This is the heart of the allegorical way of seeing. . . .[7]

With the allegorical cult of the ruin, a second link between allegory and contemporary art emerges: in site specificity, the work which appears to have merged physically into its setting, to be embedded in the place where we encounter it. The site-specific work often aspires to a prehistoric monumentality; Stonehenge and the Nazca lines are taken as prototypes. Its "content" is frequently mythical, as that of the *Spiral Jetty*, whose form was derived from a local myth of a whirlpool at the bottom of the Great Salt Lake; in this way Smithson exemplifies the tendency to engage in a *reading* of the site, in terms not only of its topographical specifics but also of its psychological resonances. Work and site thus stand in a dialectical relationship. (When the site-specific work is conceived in terms of land reclamation, and installed in an abandoned mine or quarry, then its "defensively recuperative" motive becomes self-evident.)

Site-specific works are impermanent, installed in particular locations for a limited duration, their impermanence providing the measure of their circumstantiality. Yet they are rarely dismantled but simply abandoned to nature; Smithson consistently acknowledged as part of his works the forces which erode and eventually reclaim them for nature. In this, the site-specific work becomes an emblem of transience, the ephemerality of all phenomena; it is the memento mori of the twentieth century. Because of its impermanence, moreover, the work is frequently preserved only in photographs. This fact is crucial, for it suggests the allegorical potential of photography. "An appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory."[8] And photography, we might add. As an allegorical art, then, photography would represent our desire to fix the transitory, the ephemeral, in a stable and stabilizing image. In the photographs of Atget and Walker Evans, insofar as they self-consciously preserve that which threatens to disappear, that desire becomes the *subject* of the image. If their photographs are allegorical, however, it is because what they offer is only a fragment, and thus affirms its own arbitrariness and contingency.[9]

7. *Ibid.*, p. 666.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
9. "Neither Evans nor Atget presumes to put us in touch with a pure reality, a thing in itself; their cropping always affirms its own arbitrariness and contingency. And the world they characteristically picture is a world *already made over into a meaning* that precedes the photograph; a meaning inscribed

We should therefore also be prepared to encounter an allegorical motive in photomontage, for it is the "common practice" of allegory "to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal."[10] This method of construction led Angus Fletcher to liken allegorical structure to obsessional neurosis[11]; and the obsessiveness of the works of Sol LeWitt, say, or Hanne Darboven suggests that they too may fall within the compass of the allegorical. Here we encounter yet a third link between allegory and contemporary art: in strategies of accumulation, the paratactic work composed by the simple placement of "one thing after another"—Carl Andre's *Lever* or Trisha Brown's *Primary Accumulation*. One paradigm for the allegorical work is the mathematical progression:

> If a mathematician sees the numbers 1, 3, 6, 11, 20, he would recognize that the "meaning" of this progression can be recast into the algebraic language of the formula: X plus 2^x, with certain restrictions on X. What would be a random sequence to an inexperienced person appears to the mathematician a meaningful sequence. Notice that the progression can go on ad infinitum. This parallels the situation in almost all allegories. They have no inherent "organic" limit of magnitude. Many are unfinished like *The Castle* and *The Trial* of Kafka.[12]

Allegory concerns itself, then, with the projection—either spatial or temporal or both—of structure as sequence; the result, however, is not dynamic, but static, ritualistic, repetitive. It is thus the epitome of counter-narrative, for it arrests narrative in place, substituting a principle of syntagmatic disjunction for one of diegetic combination. In this way allegory superinduces a vertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events. The work of Andre, Brown, LeWitt, Darboven, and others, involved as it is with the externalization of logical procedure, its projection as a spatiotemporal experience, also solicits treatment in terms of allegory.

This projection of structure as sequence recalls the fact that, in rhetoric, allegory is traditionally defined as a single metaphor introduced in continuous series. If this definition is recast in structuralist terms, then allegory is revealed to be the projection of the metaphoric axis of language onto its metonymic dimension. Roman Jakobson defined this projection of metaphor onto metonymy as the "poetic function," and he went on to associate metaphor with poetry and romanticism, and metonymy with prose and realism. Allegory, however, impli-

by work, by use, as inhabitation, as artifact. Their pictures are *signs representing signs*, integers in implicit chains of signification that come to rest only in major systems of social meaning: codes of households, streets, public places." Alan Trachtenberg, "Walker Evans's *Message from the Interior:* A Reading," *October*, 11 (Winter 1979), 12, italics added.

10. Benjamin, GTD, p. 178.

11. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1964, pp. 279–303.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 174.



Hanne Darboven. Milieu 80: Heute. *1979.*

cates *both* metaphor and metonymy; it therefore tends to "cut across and subtend all such stylistic categorizations, being equally possible in either verse or prose, and quite capable of transforming the most objective naturalism into the most subjective expressionism, or the most determined realism into the most surrealistically ornamental baroque."[13] This blatant disregard for aesthetic categories is nowhere more apparent than in the reciprocity which allegory proposes between the visual and the verbal: words are often treated as purely visual phenomena, while visual images are offered as script to be deciphered. It was this aspect of allegory that Schopenhauer criticized when he wrote:

> If the desire for fame is firmly and permanently rooted in a man's mind . . . and if he now stands before the *Genius of Fame* [by Annibale Caracci] with its laurel crowns, then his whole mind is thus excited, and his powers are called into activity. But the same thing would also happen if he suddenly saw the word "fame" in large clear letters on the wall.[14]

As much as this may recall the linguistic conceits of conceptual artists Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner, whose work is in fact conceived as large, clear letters on the wall, what it in fact reveals is the essentially pictogrammatical nature of the allegorical work. In allegory, the image is a hieroglyph; an allegory is a rebus—writing composed of concrete images.[15] Thus we should also seek

13. Fineman, p. 51. "Thus there are allegories that are primarily perpendicular, concerned more with structure than with temporal extension. . . . On the other hand, there is allegory that is primarily horizontal. . . . Finally, of course, there are allegories that blend both axes together in relatively equal proportions. . . . Whatever the prevailing orientation of any particular allegory, however—up and down through the declensions of structure, or laterally developed through narrative time—it will be successful as allegory only to the extent that it can suggest the authenticity with which the two coordinating poles bespeak each other, with structure plausibly unfolded in time, and narrative persuasively upholding the distinctions and equivalences described by structure." (p. 50).

14. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, I, 50. Quoted in Benjamin, GTD, p. 162.

15. This aspect of allegory may be traced to the efforts of humanist scholars to decipher hieroglyphs: "In their attempts they adopted the method of a pseudo-epigraphical *corpus* written at the end of the second, or possibly even the fourth century A.D., the *Hieroglyphica* of Horapollon. Their subject . . . consists entirely of the so-called symbolic or enigmatic hieroglyphs, mere pictorial signs, such as were presented to the hierogrammatist, aside from the ordinary phonetic signs, in the context of religious instruction, as the ultimate stage in a mystical philosophy of nature. The obelisks were approached with memories of this reading in mind, and a misunderstanding thus became the basis of the rich and infinitely widespread form of expression. For the scholars proceeded from the allegorical exegesis of Egyptian hieroglyphs, in which historical and cultic data were replaced by natural-philosophical, moral, and mystical commonplaces, to the extension of this new kind of writing. The books of iconology were produced, which not only developed the phrases of this writing, and translated whole sentences 'word for word by special pictorial signs', but frequently took the form of lexica. 'Under the leadership of the artist-scholar, Albertus, the humanists thus began to write with concrete images (*rebus*) instead of letters; the word "rebus" thus originated on the basis of the enigmatic hieroglyphs, and medallions, columns, triumphal arches, and all the conceivable artistic objects produced by the Renaissance, were covered with such enigmatic devices.'" Benjamin, GTD, pp. 168–69. (Benjamin's quotations are drawn from Karl Giehlow's monumental study *Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance.*)

allegory in contemporary works which deliberately follow a discursive model: Rauschenberg's *Rebus*, or Twombly's series after the allegorical poet Spenser.

This confusion of the verbal and the visual is however but one aspect of allegory's hopeless confusion of all aesthetic mediums and stylistic categories (hopeless, that is, according to any partitioning of the aesthetic field on essentialist grounds). The allegorical work is synthetic; it crosses aesthetic boundaries. This confusion of genre, anticipated by Duchamp, reappears today in hybridization, in eclectic works which ostentatiously combine previously distinct art mediums.

Appropriation, site specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, hybridization—these diverse strategies characterize much of the art of the present and distinguish it from its modernist predecessors. They also form a whole when seen in relation to allegory, suggesting that postmodernist art may in fact be identified by a single, coherent impulse, and that criticism will remain incapable of accounting for that impulse as long as it continues to think of allegory as aesthetic error. We are therefore obliged to return to our initial questions: When was allegory first proscribed, and for what reasons?



Cy Twombly. Epithalamion II. *1976*.

The critical suppression of allegory is one legacy of romantic art theory that was inherited uncritically by modernism. Twentieth-century allegories—Kafka's, for example, or Borges's own—are rarely *called* allegories, but parables or fables; by the middle of the nineteenth century, however, Poe—who was not himself immune to allegory—could already accuse Hawthorne of "allegorizing," of appending moral tags to otherwise innocent tales. The history of modernist painting is begun with Manet and not Courbet, who persisted in painting "real allegories." Even the most supportive of Courbet's contemporaries (Prudhon and Champfleury) were perplexed by his allegorical bent; one was either a realist *or* an allegorist, they insisted, meaning that one was either modernist or historicist.

In the visual arts, it was in large measure allegory's association with history painting that prepared for its demise. From the Revolution on, it had been enlisted in the service of historicism to produce image upon image of the present *in terms of* the classical past. This relationship was expressed not only superficially, in details of costume and physiognomy, but also structurally, through a radical condensation of narrative into a single, emblematic instant—significantly, Barthes calls it a hieroglyph[16]—in which the past, present, and future, that is, the *historical* meaning, of the depicted action might be read. This is of course the doctrine of the most pregnant moment, and it dominated artistic practice during the first half of the nineteenth century. Syntagmatic or narrative associations were compressed in order to compel a vertical reading of (allegorical) correspondences. Events were thus lifted out of a continuum; as a result, history could be recovered only through what Benjamin has called "a tiger's leap into the past":

> Thus to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It evoked ancient Rome the way fashion evokes costumes of the past. Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past.[17]

Although for Baudelaire this allegorical interpenetration of modernity and classical antiquity possessed no small theoretical significance, the attitude of the avant-garde which emerged at mid-century into an atmosphere rife with historicism was succinctly expressed by Prudhon, writing of David's *Leonidas at Thermopyle:*

> Shall one say . . . that it is neither Leonidas and the Spartans, nor the Greeks and Persians who one should see in this great composition; that

16. Roland Barthes, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 73.
17. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken, 1969, p. 255.

> it is the enthusiasm of '92 which the painter had in view and Republican France saved from the Coalition? But why this allegory? What need to pass through Thermopyle and go backward twenty-three centuries to reach the heart of Frenchmen? Had we no heroes, no victories of our own?[18]

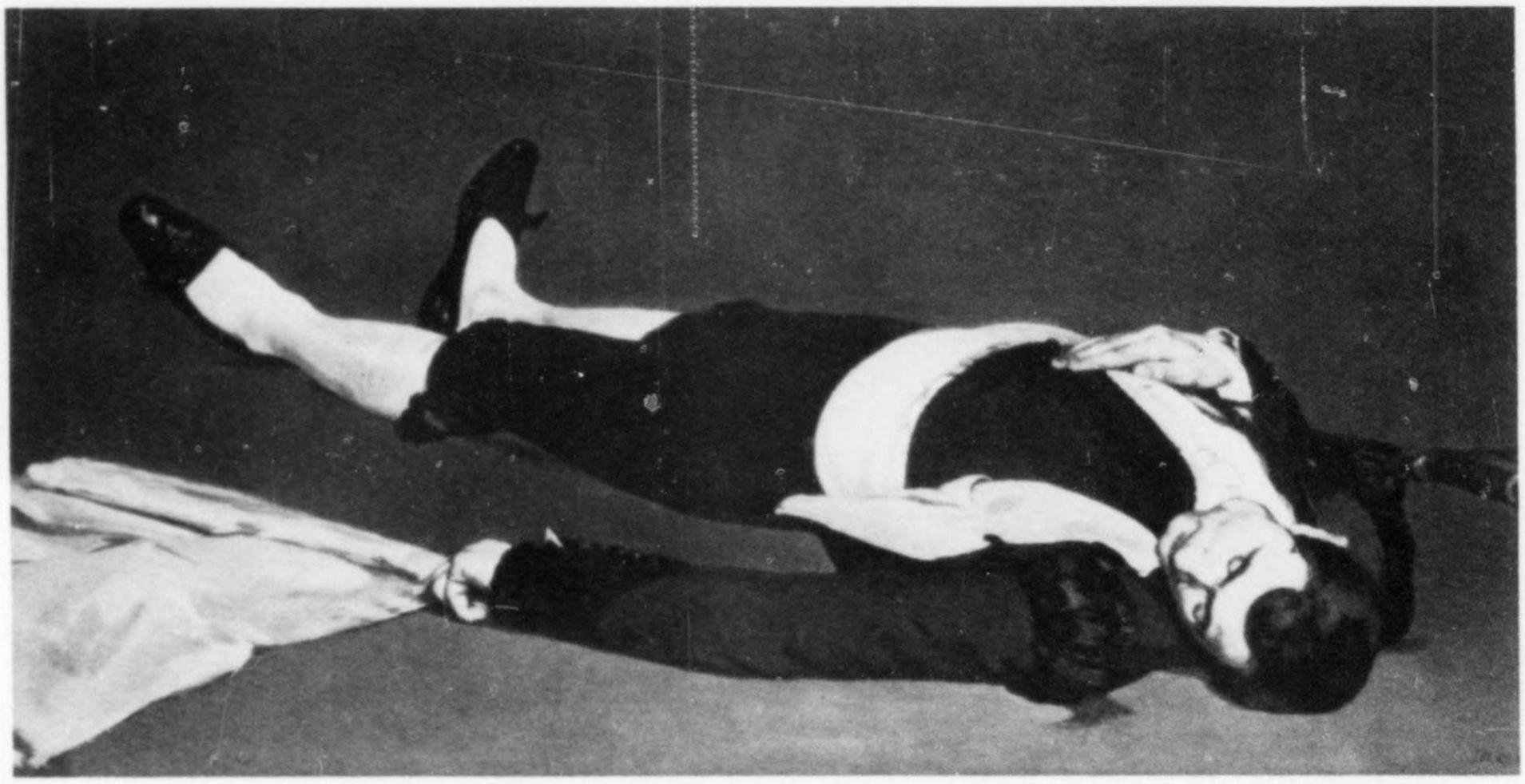
So that by the time Courbet attempted to rescue allegory for modernity, the line which separated them had been clearly drawn, and allegory, conceived as antithetical to the modernist credo *Il faut être de son temps*, was condemned, along with history painting, to a marginal, purely historical existence.

Baudelaire, however, with whom that motto is most closely associated, never condemned allegory; in his first published work, the *Salon of 1845*, he defended it against the "pundits of the press": "How could one hope . . . to make them understand that allegory is one of the noblest branches of art?"[19] The poet's endorsement of allegory is only apparently paradoxical, for it was the relationship of antiquity to modernity that provided the basis for his theory of modern art, and allegory that provided its form. Jules Lemaître, writing in 1895, described the "specifically Baudelairean" as the "constant combination of two opposite modes of reaction . . . a past and a present mode"; Claudel observed that the poet combined the style of Racine with that of a Second Empire journalist.[20] We are offered a glimpse into the theoretical underpinnings of this amalgamation of the present and the past in the chapter "On the Heroism of Modern Life" from the *Salon of 1846*, and again in "The Painter of Modern Life," where modernity is defined as "the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable."[21] If the modern artist was exhorted to concentrate on the ephemeral, however, it was *because* it was ephemeral, that is, it threatened to disappear without a trace. Baudelaire conceived modern art at least in part as the rescuing of modernity for eternity.

In "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Benjamin emphasizes this aspect of Baudelaire's project, linking it with Maxime Du Camp's monumental study, *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* (significantly, Du Camp is best known today for his photographs of ruins);

> It suddenly occurred to the man who had travelled widely in the Orient, who was acquainted with the deserts whose sand is the dust of the dead,

18. Quoted in George Boas, "Courbet and His Critics," *Courbet in Perspective*, ed. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1977, p. 48.
19. Charles Baudelaire, "Salon of 1845," *Art in Paris 1845–1862*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne, New York, Phaidon, 1965, p. 14.
20. Cited in Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (henceforth: B), trans. Harry Zohn, London, NLB, 1973, p. 100. Lemaître's remark appears on p. 94 of the same text.
21. Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P. E. Charvet, Baltimore, Penguin, 1972, p. 403.

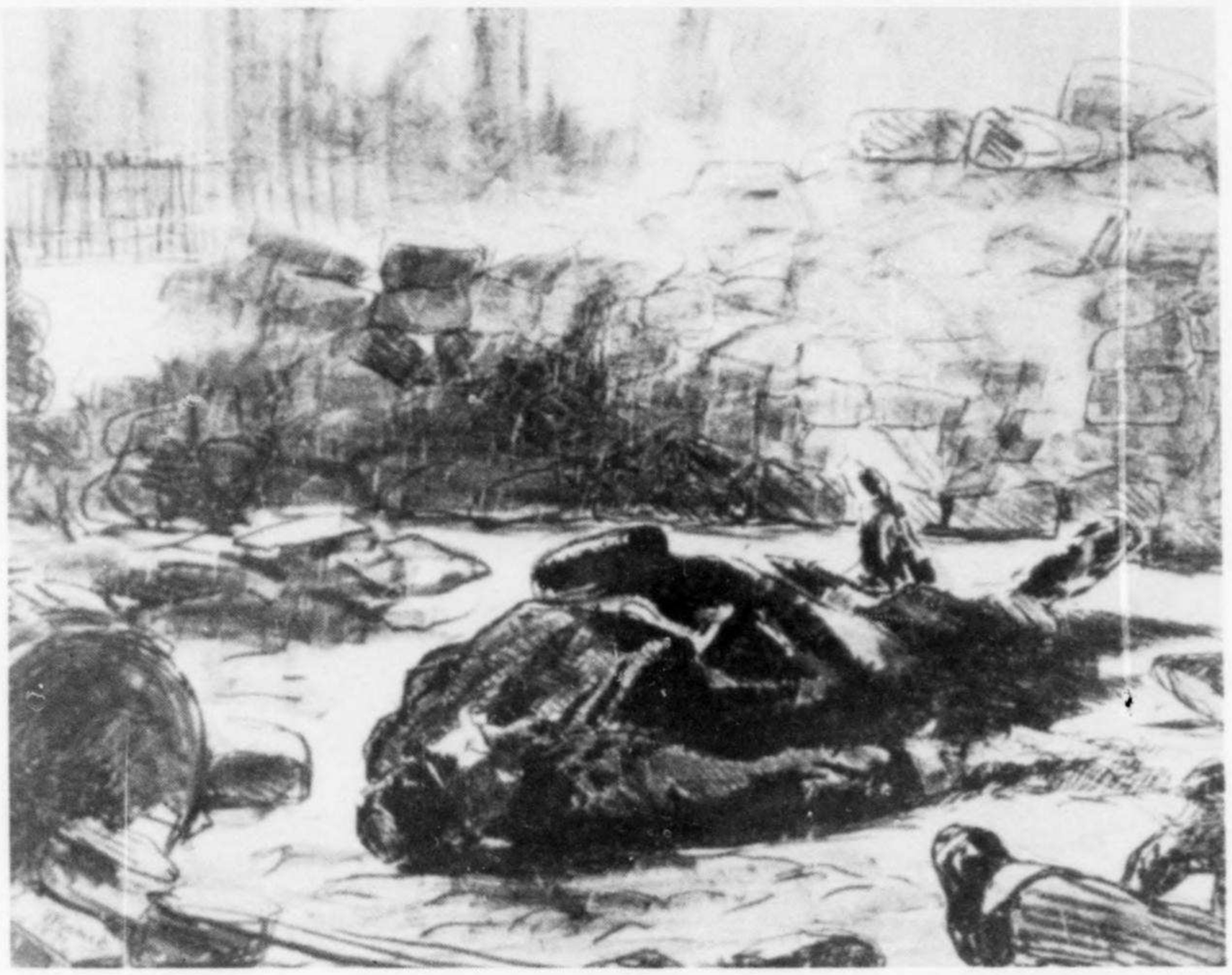


Edouard Manet. The Dead Toreador. *1864*.

> that this city, too, whose bustle was all around him, would have to die some day, the way so many capitals had died. It occurred to him how extraordinarily interesting an accurate description of Athens at the time of Pericles, Carthage at the time of Barca, Alexandria at the time of the Ptolemies, and Rome at the time of the Caesars would be to us today. . . . In a flash of inspiration, of the kind that occasionally brings one an extraordinary subject, he resolved to write the kind of book about Paris that the historians of antiquity failed to write about their cities.[22]

For Benjamin, Baudelaire is motivated by an identical impulse, which explains his attraction to Charles Meyron's allegorical engravings of Paris, which "brought out the ancient face of the city without abandoning one cobblestone."[23] In Meyron's views, the antique and the modern were superimposed, and from the will to preserve the traces of something that was dead, or about to die, emerged allegory: in a caption the renovated Pont Neuf, for example, is transformed into a memento mori.[24]

22. Paul Bourget, "Discours académique du 13 juin 1895. Succession à Maxime Du Camp," *L'anthologie de l'Académie française*. Quoted in Benjamin, B, p. 86.
23. Benjamin, B, p. 87.
24. Benjamin quotes the caption; in translation it reads: "Here lies the exact likeness of the old Pont Neuf, all recaulked like new in accordance with a recent ordinance. O learned physicians and skilful surgeons, why not do with us as was done with this stone bridge." (p. 88).



Edouard Manet. Civil War. *1871.*

Benjamin's primary insight—"Baudelaire's genius, which drew its nourishment from melancholy, was an allegorical one"[25]—effectively situates an allegorical impulse at the origin of modernism in the arts and thus suggests the previously foreclosed possibility of an alternate reading of modernist works, a reading in which their allegorical dimension would be fully acknowledged. Manet's manipulation of historical sources, for example, is inconceivable without allegory; was it not a supremely allegorical gesture to reproduce in 1871 the *Dead Torreador* as a wounded Communard, or to transpose the firing squad from the *Execution of Maximillian* to the Paris barricades? And does not collage, or the manipulation and consequent transformation of highly significant fragments, also exploit the atomizing, disjunctive principle which lies at the heart of allegory? These examples suggest that, in practice at least, modernism and allegory are *not* antithetical, that it is in theory alone that the allegorical impulse has been repressed. It is thus to theory that we must turn if we are to grasp the full implications of allegory's recent return.

25. Walter Benjamin, "Paris—the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," B, p. 170.



Maxime Du Camp. Thebes: Gournah, Statue of Memnon. *1850*.

II.

Near the beginning of "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger introduces two terms which define the "conceptual frame" within which the work of art is conventionally located by aesthetic thought:

> The art work is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than the mere thing itself is, *allo agoreuei.* The work makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art something other is brought together with the thing that is made. To bring together is, in Greek, *sumballein.* The work is a symbol.[26]

By imputing an allegorical dimension to every work of art, the philosopher appears to repeat the error, regularly lamented by commentators, of generalizing the term *allegory* to such an extent that it becomes meaningless. Yet in this passage Heidegger is only reciting the litanies of philosophical aesthetics in order to prepare for their dissolution. The point is ironic, and it should be remembered that irony itself is regularly enlisted as a variant of the allegorical; that words can be used to signify their opposites is in itself a fundamentally allegorical perception.

Allegory and symbol—like all conceptual pairs, the two are far from evenly matched. In modern aesthetics, allegory is regularly subordinated to the symbol, which represents the supposedly indissoluble unity of form and substance which characterizes the work of art as pure presence. Although this definition of the art work as informed matter is, we know, as old as aesthetics itself, it was revived with a sense of renewed urgency by romantic art theory, where it provided the basis for the philosophical condemnation of allegory. According to Coleridge, "The Symbolical cannot, perhaps, be better defined in distinction from the Allegorical, than that it is always itself *a part of* that, of the whole of which it is the representative."[27] The symbol is a synecdoche, a part representing the whole. This definition is possible, however, if and only if the relationship of the whole to its parts be conceived in a particular manner. This is the theory of expressive causality analyzed by Althusser in *Reading Capital*:

> [The Leibnitzian concept of expression] presupposes in principle that the whole in question be reducible to an *inner essence,* of which the elements of the whole are then no more than the phenomenal forms of expression, the inner principle of the essence being present at each point in the whole, such that at each moment it is possible to write the

26. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York, Harper & Row, 1971, pp. 19–20.
27. *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism,* ed. Thomas Middelton Raysor, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1936, p. 99.

> immediately adequate equation: *such and such an element . . . = the inner essence of the whole.* [italics added] Here was a model which made it possible to think the effectivity of the whole on each of its elements, but if this category—inner essence/outer phenomenon—was to be applicable everywhere and at every moment to each of the phenomena arising in the totality in question, it presupposed that the whole had a certain nature, precisely the nature of a 'spiritual' whole in which each element was expressive of the entire totality as a 'pars totalis.'[28]

Coleridge's is thus an expressive theory of the symbol, the presentational union of "inner essence" and outward expression, which are in fact revealed to be identical. For essence is nothing but that element of the whole which has been hypostasized as its essence. The theory of expression thus proceeds in a circle: while designed to explain the effectivity of the whole on its constituent elements, it is nevertheless those elements themselves which react upon the whole, permitting us to conceive the latter in terms of its "essence." In Coleridge, then, the symbol is precisely that part of the whole to which it may be reduced. The symbol does not represent essence; it *is* essence.

On the basis of this identification, the symbol becomes the very emblem of artistic *intuition:* "Of utmost importance to our present subject is this point, that the latter (the allegory) cannot be other than spoken consciously; whereas in the former (the symbol) it is very possible that the general truth represented may be working unconsciously in the writer's mind during the construction of the symbol."[29] The symbol is thus a motivated sign; in fact, it represents linguistic motivation as such. For this reason de Saussure substituted the term *sign* for *symbol,* for the latter is "never wholly arbitrary; it is not empty, for there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified."[30] If the

28. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital,* trans. Ben Brewster, London, NLB, 1970, pp. 186–87.

29. Coleridge, p. 99. This passage should be compared with Goethe's famous condemnation of allegory: "It makes a great difference whether the poet starts with a universal idea and then looks for suitable particulars, or beholds the universal *in* the particular. The former method produces allegory, where the particular has status merely as an instance, an example of the universal. The latter, by contrast, is what reveals poetry in its true nature: it speaks forth a particular without independently thinking of or referring to a universal, but in grasping the particular in its living character *it implicitly apprehends the universal along with it.*" Quoted in Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1968, p. 54, italics added. This recalls Borges's view of allegory: "The allegory is a fable of abstractions, as the novel is a fable of individuals. The abstractions are personified; therefore in every allegory there is something of the novel. The individuals proposed by novelists aspire to be generic (Dupin is Reason, Don Segundo Sombra is the Gaucho); an allegorical element inheres in novels." (p. 157).

30. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics,* trans. Wade Baskin, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1966, p. 68.

symbol is a motivated sign, then allegory, conceived as its antithesis, will be identified as the domain of the arbitrary, the conventional, the unmotivated.

This association of the symbol with aesthetic intuition, and allegory with convention, was inherited uncritically by modern aesthetics; thus Croce in *Aesthetic:*

> Now if the symbol be conceived as inseparable from the artistic intuition, it is a synonym for the intuition itself, which always has an ideal character. There is no double bottom to art, but one only; in art all is symbolical because all is ideal. But if the symbol be conceived as separable—if the symbol can be on one side, and on the other the thing symbolized, we fall back into the intellectualist error: the so-called symbol is the exposition of an abstract concept, an allegory; it is science, or art aping science. But we must also be just towards the allegorical. Sometimes it is altogether harmless. Given the *Gerusalemme liberata,* the allegory was imagined afterwards; given the *Adone* of Marino, the poet of the lascivious afterwards insinuated that it was written to show how "immoderate indulgence ends in pain"; given a statue of a beautiful woman, the sculptor can attach a label to the statue saying that it represents *Clemency* or *Goodness.* This allegory that arrives attached to a finished work *post festum* does not change the work of art. What is it then? It is an expression externally added to another expression.[31]

In the name of "justice," then, and in order to preserve the intuitive character of every work of art, including the allegorical, allegory is conceived as a *supplement,* "an expression externally added to another expression." Here we recognize that permanent strategy of Western art theory which excludes from the work everything which challenges its determination as the unity of "form" and "content."[32] Conceived as something added or superadded to the work after the fact, allegory will consequently be detachable from it. In this way modernism can recuperate allegorical works for itself, on the condition that what makes them allegorical be overlooked or ignored. Allegorical meaning does indeed appear supplementary; we can appreciate Bellini's *Allegory of Fortune,* for example, or read *Pilgrim's Progress* as Coleridge recommended, without regard for their iconographic significance. Rosemond Tuve describes the viewer's "experience of a genre picture—or so he had thought it—turning into . . . [an] allegory before his eyes, by something he learns (usually about the history and thence the deeper

31. Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic,* trans. Douglas Ainslie, New York, Noonday, 1966, pp. 34–35.

32. This is what sanctioned Kant's exclusion, in the *Critique of Judgment,* of color, drapery, framing . . . as ornament merely appended to the work of art and not intrinsic parts of it. See Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," *October,* 9 (Summer 1979), 3–40, as well as my afterword, "Detachment/ from the *parergon,*" 42–49.

significance of the image.)"[33] Allegory *is* extravagant, an expenditure of surplus value; it is always *in excess*. Croce found it "monstrous" precisely because it encodes two contents within one form.[34] Still, the allegorical supplement is not only an addition, but also a replacement. It takes the place of an earlier meaning, which is thereby either effaced or obscured. Because allegory usurps its object it comports within itself a danger, the possibility of perversion: that what is "merely appended" to the work of art be mistaken for its "essence." Hence the vehemence with which modern aesthetics—formalist aesthetics in particular—rails against the allegorical supplement, for it challenges the security of the foundations upon which aesthetics is erected.

If allegory is identified as a supplement, then it is also aligned with writing, insofar as writing is conceived as supplementary to speech. It is of course within the same philosophic tradition which subordinates writing to speech that allegory is subordinated to the symbol. It might be demonstrated, from another perspective, that the suppression of allegory is identical with the suppression of writing. For allegory, whether visual or verbal, is essentially a form of script—this is the basis for Walter Benjamin's treatment of it in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: "At one stroke the profound vision of allegory transforms things and works into stirring writing."[35]

Benjamin's theory of allegory, which proceeds from the perception that "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else,"[36] defies summary. Given its centrality to this essay, however, a few words concerning it are in order. Within Benjamin's oeuvre, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, composed in 1924-25 and published in 1928, stands as a seminal work; in it are assembled the themes that will preoccupy him throughout his career: progress as the eternal return of the catastrophe; criticism as redemptive intervention into the past; the theoretical value of the concrete, the disparate, the discontinuous; his treatment of phenomena as script to be deciphered. This book thus reads like a prospectus for all of Benjamin's subsequent critical activity. As Anson Rabinbach observes in his introduction to the recent issue of *New German Critique* devoted to Benjamin, "His writing forces us to think in correspondences, to proceed through allegorical images rather than through expository prose."[37] The book on baroque tragedy thus throws into relief the essentially allegorical nature of all of Benjamin's work—the "Paris Arcades" project, for example, where the urban landscape was to be treated as a sedimentation in depth of layers of meaning which would gradually be unearthed. For Benjamin, *inter*pretation is dis*in-ter*ment.

33. Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 26.
34. Cited in Borges, p. 155.
35. Benjamin, GTD, p. 176.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
37. Anson Rabinbach, "Critique and Commentary/Alchemy and Chemistry," *New German Critique*, 17 (Spring 1979), 3.

The Origin of German Tragic Drama is a treatise on critical method; it traces not only the origin of baroque tragedy, but also of the critical disapprobation to which it has been subject. Benjamin examines in detail the romantic theory of the symbol; by exposing its theological origins, he prepares for its supersedure:

> The unity of the material and the transcendental object, which constitutes the paradox of the theological symbol, is distorted into a relationship between appearance and essence. The introduction of this distorted conception of the symbol into aesthetics was a romantic and destructive extravagance which preceded the desolation of modern art criticism. As a symbolic construct it is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole. The idea of the unlimited immanence of the moral world in the world of beauty is derived from the theosophical aesthetics of the romantics. But the foundations of this idea were laid long before.[38]

In its stead, Benjamin places the (graphic) sign, which represents the distance between an object and its significance, the progressive erosion of meaning, the absence of transcendence from within. Through this critical maneuver he is able to penetrate the veil which had obscured the achievement of the baroque, to appreciate fully its theoretical significance. But it also enables him to liberate writing from its traditional dependency on speech. In allegory, then, "written language and sound confront each other in tense polarity. . . . The division between signifying written language and intoxicating spoken language opens up a gulf in the solid massif of verbal meaning and forces the gaze into the depths of language."[39]

We encounter an echo of this passage in Robert Smithson's appeal for both an allegorical practice and an allegorical criticism of the visual arts in his text "A Sedimentation of Mind: Earth Projects":

> The names of minerals and the minerals themselves do not differ from each other, because at the bottom of both the material and the print is the beginning of an abysmal number of fissures. Words and rocks contain a language that follows a syntax of splits and ruptures. Look at any *word* long enough and you will see it open up into a series of faults, into a terrain of particles each containing its own void. . . .
>
> Poe's *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym* seems to me excellent art criticism and prototype for rigorous "non-site" investigations. . . . His descriptions of chasms and holes seem to verge on proposals for "earthwords."

38. Benjamin, GTD, p. 160.
39. Ibid., p. 201.

> The shapes of the chasms themselves become "verbal roots" that spell out the difference between darkness and light.[40]

Smithson refers to the alphabetic chasms described at the conclusion of Poe's novel; in a "Note" appended to the text, the novelist unravels their allegorical significance, which "has beyond doubt escaped the attention of Mr. Poe."[41] Geological formations are transformed by commentary into articulate script. Significantly, Poe gives no indication as to how these ciphers, Ethiopian, Arabic, and Egyptian in origin, are to be pronounced; they are purely graphic facts. It was here, where Poe's text doubles back on itself to provide its own commentary, that Smithson caught a glimpse of his own enterprise. And in that act of self-recognition there is embedded a challenge to both art and criticism, a challenge which may now be squarely faced. But that is the subject of another essay.

40. Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of Mind: Earth Projects," *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt, New York, New York University Press, 1979, pp. 87–88. On Smithson's allegorism see my review in *October*, 10 (Fall 1979), 121–30.
41. Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym . . .*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1960, p. 197.



Robert Smithson. Broken Circle, *Emmen, Holland. 1971.*

Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation*

ROBERT MORRIS

"Maybe only God can make a tree, but only that shovel, Big Muskie, can make a hole like this."

—anonymous strip miner

The issue of art's potential involvement in land reclamation can only be focused through a perspective on the history, conflicts, and confusion involved in that admittedly broad cluster of topics related to land abuse: technology, mining, governmental policy and regulations, ecological concerns, and public opinion. For some time there has been public concern over the effects of constantly accelerating programs for the extraction of nonrenewable resources from the land. Adverse effects on the environment range from the aesthetic to the toxic. Leaving aside for a moment the aesthetic effects, mining operations for natural resources have threatened the following: loss of topsoil; wind and water erosion; landslides; elimination of wildlife; acid, toxic, or mineralized water pollution; sedimentation; floods; loss of water table; destruction of man-made property from the effects of some of the above, plus those of blasting; other socially related degradations such as local economic losses, poisoning of livestock, etc.

With these various degradations to the environment, three basic types of mining operations have been associated: deep mining and two types of surface mining, open pit and strip. Surface mining, especially stripping operations, has the worst environmental consequences. With recent technological developments of mining equipment such as large augers and gigantic shovels and drag lines like the Gem of Egypt and the Big Muskie (the latter having a scoop capacity of over 200 cubic yards, over 300 tons), stripping has become the dominant mining operation, especially in the extraction of coal. In the immediate future, the surface mining of coal will increase enormously. Even though in the United States the ratio is 8 to 1 in favor of deep reserves (355 billion tons versus 45 billion tons), between 1966 and 1971 the number of surface mines roughly doubled, while the number of deep mines dropped by more than one half. The reason for the shift is

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economic: the average cost per ton for surface-mined coal is $7.69, as opposed to $10.61 for deep-mined coal.[1]

Given the present energy policies of the nation there can be no doubt that surface mining to produce coal- and hydrocarbon-based energy sources will continue to accelerate. Whether ecological warnings about the effects of an $88-billion crash program for synthetic fuels will in any way check the program remains to be seen. There has of course been discussion about how and what should be done to offset the adverse effects of mining the land, but no one has yet proposed even vague ideas for a nonlocal reclamation program that would reverse the greenhouse effect (a predicted global consequence of a crash synthetic-fuels policy).

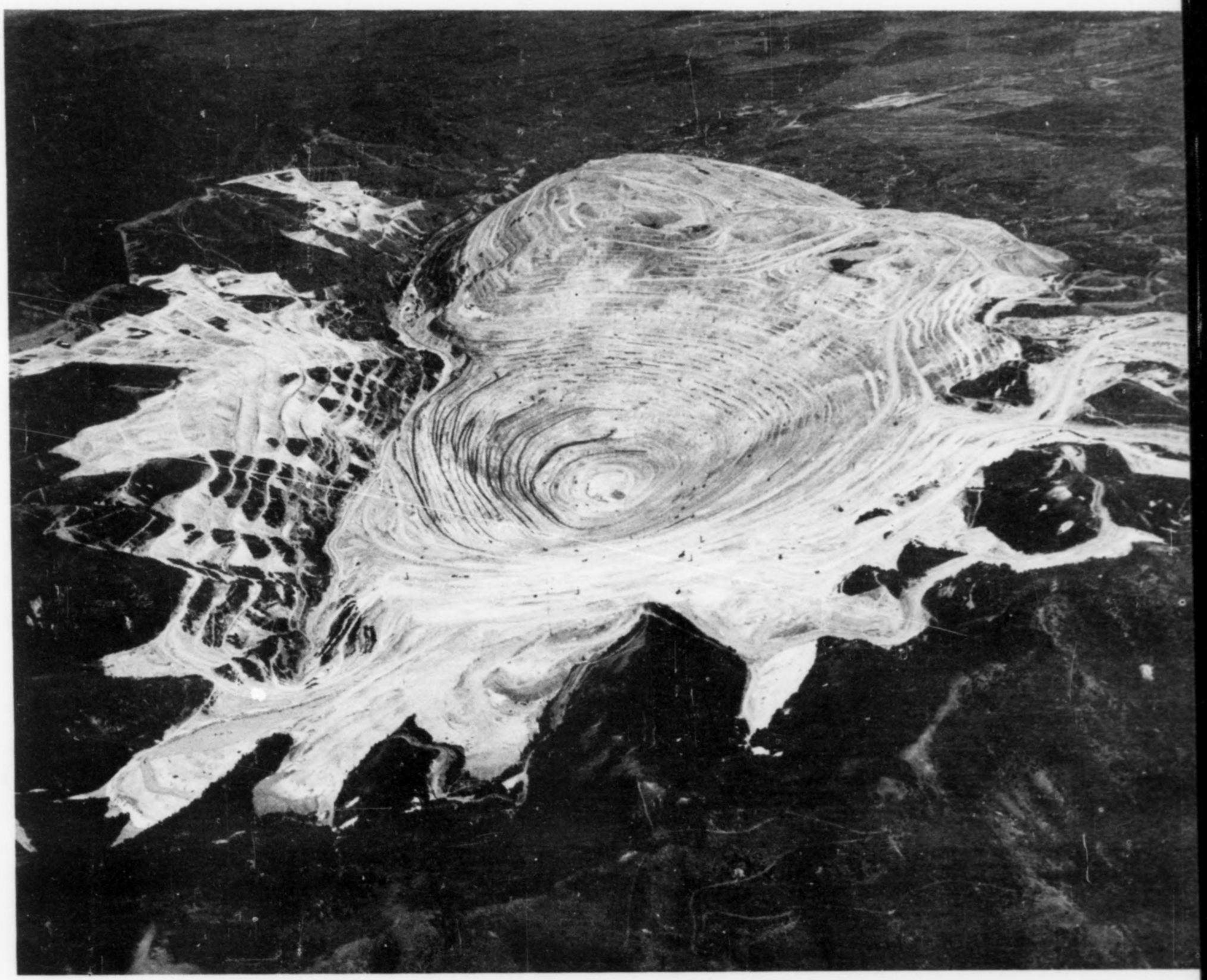
Reclamation itself has been a heated topic in terms of the criteria to be applied, how it should be enforced, and, when implemented, its effectiveness. Aesthetics has also been very much an issue; a large section of the public objects to the way surface mining affects the look of the land. A general definition for reclamation has been debated for some time. The Senate's 1973 proposed bill, S.425, stated that "reclamation means the process of restoring a mined area affected by a mining operation to its original or other similarly appropriate condition, considering past and possible future uses of the area and the surrounding topography and taking into account environmental, economic, and social conditions. . . ."[2] Even this generalized definition was, however, strongly objected to by such mining executives as John B. M. Place, President and Chief Executive of the Anaconda Company, when in 1973 he testified before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs:

> It is not financially or physically possible to meet these requirements. We estimate that to fill Anaconda's three open pits in Butte, Montana; Yerington, Nevada; and Twin Buttes, Arizona would cost $3 billion to $4 billion. To fill Kennecott's Bingham Pit in Utah, the nation's largest copper mine,[3] would require an estimated $7 billion and 66 years' time to complete at the rate of 400,000 tons per day. These few large open-pit mines must be recognized as permanent uses of the land, involving a permanent reshaping of the land they occupy.

1. Data presented by Louise Dunlap of the Environmental Policy Center before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, March 1973. U.S. Government Printing Office, "Regulations of Surface Mining Operations," p. 900.
2. Bill S.425, introduced by Senators Jackson, Buckley, Mansfield, Metcalf, and Moss, January 18, 1973, pp. 4–5.
3. This mine "expanded to engulf the entire town at Bingham Canyon, whose population was formerly 10,000. A few lone protestors objected to the demise of the town on the ground that there should be no form of private corporation, no matter how big, powerful enough to liquidate a government, no matter how small. But the mining company ultimately prevailed." William O. Douglas, *The Three Hundred Year War*, New York, Random House, 1972, p. 122.

Obviously, any implementation of reclamation as required by a bill such as S.425 would never be undertaken with respect to these gigantic open-pit hard-rock mining sites. Yet while such sites are vast, they are far outnumbered by strip-mining operations. Stripping entails an entirely different kind of excavation and does not result in the vast terraced cavity of an open-pit hard-rock mine. The operation involves removing the overlying earth (called the overburden) from the coal seam, extracting the coal, and repiling the earth. The topographical result is an area of long rows of spoil material which end at the "high wall," or last cut.

Aerial view of Bingham Canyon open-pit copper mine, Utah. (Kennecott Copper Corporation photograph by Don Green.)



Since at present it is the most extensive mining operation, stripping has raised the most discussion as to how land should be reclaimed. Well over 200 billion acres in the United States have been mined. As of 1973, an additional 4,650 acres per week were being mined; current figures would be higher.

The larger operators generally claim to be pursuing an active reclamation program. Peabody Coal Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Kennecott Copper, began operations at Black Mesa, Arizona in the 1960s. Leased from the Navajo and Hopi Indian tribes, 400 acres a year are to be mined for 35 years. According to Edwin R. Phelps, President of Peabody Coal:

> Grading and reclamation follow close behind the active mining operations. We will restore vegetation to the land. We are seeding not only native grasses but are experimenting with other species which have succeeded in our arid Colorado mines. These may furnish better forage for the sheep which are the Indian's main source of income. We are also seeding legumes to add nitrogen to the soil. We want—and we expect—to make the land more useful than it was originally.[4]

But these declared reclamation activities have not been visible to such residents of Black Mesa as Ted Yazzie, who noted:

> It's terrible when they work. Since they started, people began to change. The air began to change. It is something we have not known before. The plants seem to have no life. When the wind blows our way, the coal dust covers the whole ground, the food, the animals, the hogans, the water. The dust is dirty, it is black. The sun rises, it is gray. The sun sets, yet it is still gray. I imagine the night is gray.[5]

Associated with Black Mesa are large power plants which burn the coal to generate power for Las Vegas and the Los Angeles basin. Six plants will eventually be built. One existing plant, located at Four Corners, produces 2,075 megawatts of power and "more emissions of sulfur and nitrogen oxides than are released in Los Angeles and New York City combined, plus huge quantities of particulate filth, and no one knows how much mercury and radioactive trace elements." Astronauts in space can observe the pollution plume at Four Corners as "the only evidence of man's presence in the Southwest."[6]

On August 3, 1977, President Carter signed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. The law states:

> The Congress finds and declares that because of the diversity in terrain,

4. Statement of Edwin R. Phelps, President, Peabody Coal Company, before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, March 14, 1973. "Regulations of Surface Mining Operations," p. 480.
5. Suzanne Gordon, *Black Mesa, the Angel of Death*, The John Day Company, 1973, p. 47.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

> climate, biologic, chemical and other physical conditions in areas subject to mining operations, the primary governmental responsibility for developing, authorizing, issuing, and enforcing regulations for surface mining and reclamation operations subject to this act should rest with the state.

Local state legislation is, however, varied in its criteria, stringency, penalties, and enforcement. In some Eastern states fines for failing to reclaim the land are so nominal that miners prefer to pay them and ignore reclamation. In Western states laws are often vague, leaving much discretion to the mines. "In Wyoming, the coal operators are required to seal exposed seams with plant cover only 'when practical'; there are no penalties for failing to do so. The Montana statute speaks in terms of returning the land to 'useful production,' but never defines useful production."[7] William O. Douglas has gone so far as to say that "so-called restorations of strip-mining sites are largely public relations facades," and that the acid drainage from such sites defies efforts to reclaim the earth.[8] Some believe that if a truly stringent reclamation program were to be enforced, underground mining would be cheaper than strip mining. But as the mines are now operated, strip mining has a three-to-one cost advantage, with worker productivity running five to one.

For over a century the mining of nonrenewable resources, especially coal, has had adverse effects on the environment. In 1842 a report from a commission of inquiry noted:

> When cholera prevailed in that district [Tranent, in Scotland] some of the patients suffered very much indeed from want of water, and so great was the privation, that on occasion people went into the ploughed fields and gathered rain water which collected in depressions in the ground, and actually in the prints made by horses' feet. Tranent was formerly well-supplied with water of excellent quality by a spring above the village, which flows through a sand bed. The water flows into Tranent at its head . . . and is received into about ten wells, distributed throughout the village. The people supply themselves at these wells when they contain water. When the supply is small, the water pours in a very small stream only. . . . I have seen women fighting for water. The wells are sometimes frequented throughout the whole night. It was generally believed by the population that this stoppage of water was owing to its stream being diverted into a coal-pit which was sunk in the sand-bed above Tranent.[9]

7. Douglas, p. 118.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
9. Quoted in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "A Critique of Political Ecology," in *Political Ecology*, eds. Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway, New York, Times Books, 1979, p. 379.

The coal-mining industry has been but one example of environmental degradation resulting from industrial operations. Perhaps it has been singled out by environmentalists because its effects are so visible. But in a deeper structural way all present-day extensive industrial operations parallel the mining industry in four ways: (1) the ever-accelerating use of natural resources, most of them non-renewable; (2) an acceleration made possible by technological advances; (3) a rationale for these accelerating operations cast in terms of increasing public demand; (4) serious environmental disturbances resulting directly or indirectly from the particular operation.

In 1868 a German biologist coined the term *ecology* to designate the totality of relations between an animal species and its environment. Only later, when it began to include that species of animal, man, would the term become controversial. In this country, the Benthamite concerns of mid-nineteenth-century England were extended and emphasized by the conservationist policies of Theodore Roosevelt, who wanted a strong central system for controlling the development of natural resources. But ironically, the great "trust buster" usually sided with big business in establishing such controls because he felt they were the most efficient means available. Out of this efficiency the rationale of big business working within government for control of water, grazing lands, timber, and mineral resources became established and entrenched. Today that viewpoint is under attack; environmentalists argue for small enterprise being protected by federal bureaucracy. We are now at a point of unresolved debate concerning the extent to which natural resources are to be socialized, "and whether and to what extent the resources are to be handled by the federal, state, or local level(s)."[10]

Behind the conservationist/industrialist conflict is industry's ever-accelerating demand for new materials. In order to account for this acceleration of demand it is necessary to appreciate certain basics about how technology has changed industrial practice, especially since World War II. Since the end of World War II the population of the United States has roughly doubled. Total production, however, as measured by the GNP, increased 126% between 1946 and 1971. Per capita production has taken an immense leap, far outstripping the rise in population.[11] It is the increased use of synthetics that lies behind almost every increase in demand for natural resources. Plastics, artificial fertilizers, fabrics, pesticides, etc., require vast increases in chemical and energy production for their manufacture. Synthetics are also associated with huge increases in pollution, sometimes at the manufacturing level of disposal of by-products (plastics) and sometimes at the level of application (fertilizers). It is, of course, the intensified application of technology that has made possible the production of artificial or synthetic products. And it is the structural nature of technological application

10. Cockburn and Ridgeway, p. 9.
11. Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle*, New York, Knopf, 1971, p. 138.

that is intrinsically hostile to the problem of ecology. Galbraith is illuminating on this point:

> Technology means the systematic application of scientific or other organized knowledge to practical tasks. Its most important consequence, at least for the purpose of economics, is in forcing the division and subdivision of any such task into its component parts. Thus, and only thus, can organized knowledge be brought to bear on performance. Specifically, there is no way that organized knowledge can be brought to bear on production of an automobile as a whole or even on the manufacture of a body or chassis. It can only be applied if the task is so subdivided that it begins to be coterminous with some established area of scientific or engineering knowledge. Though metallurgical knowledge cannot be applied to the manufacture of the whole vehicle, it can be used in the design of the cooling system or the engine block. While knowledge of mechanical engineering cannot be brought to bear on the manufacture of the vehicle, it can be applied to the machining of the crankshaft. While chemistry cannot be applied to the composition of the car as a whole, it can be used to decide on the composition of the finish or trim. . . . Nearly all of the consequences of technology, and much of the shape of modern industry, derive from this need to divide and subdivide tasks.[12]

The structural feature of technological application is one of fragmentation; that of ecological thinking is, of course, the opposite. The very nature of the ecological concept is to consider any system as a whole. An $88-billion technological crash program to produce synthetic fuels within ten years might succeed, but from within its technological compartment it has no responsibility to address the consequences of lowering the water table in the process, or of leading to a CO_2 greenhouse effect. Endless examples have been cited of the harmful side effects of every technologically induced increase in production involving nonrenewable resources; a fairly concise and inclusive listing has been articulated by Enzensberger and is worth quoting:

> Industrialization leads to an uncontrolled growth in world population. Simultaneously the material needs of that population increase. Even given an enormous expansion in industrial production, the chances of satisfying human needs deteriorate per capita.
>
> The industrial process has up to now been nourished from sources of energy which are not in the main self-renewing; among these are fossil fuels as well as supplies of fissile material like uranium. In a determin-

12. Quoted in Commoner, p. 184.

able space of time these supplies will be exhausted; their replacement through what are basically new sources of energy (such as atomic fusion) is theoretically conceivable, but not yet practically realizable.

The industrial process is also dependent on the employment of mineral raw materials—above all metals—which are not self-renewing either; their exploitation is advancing so rapidly that the exhaustion of deposits can be foreseen.

Water requirements of the industrial process have reached a point where they can no longer be satisfied by the natural circulation of water. As a result, the reserves of water in the ground are being attacked; this must lead to disturbances in the present cycle of evaporation and precipitation and to climatic changes. The only possible solution is the de-salination of sea water; but this is so energy-intensive that it would accelerate the process described above.

A further limiting factor is the production of foodstuffs. Neither the area of land suitable for cultivation nor the yield per acre can be arbitrarily increased. Attempts to increase the productivity of farming lead, beyond a certain point, to new ecological imbalances—e.g., erosion, pollution through poisonous substances, reductions in genetic variability. The production of food from the sea comes up against ecological limits of another kind.

A further factor—but only one factor among a number of others—is the notorious "pollution of the earth." This category is misleading insofar as it presupposes a "clean" world. This has naturally never existed and is moreover ecologically neither conceivable nor desirable. What is actually meant are disequilibriums and dysfunctionings of all kinds in the metabolism between nature and human society occurring as the unintentional side effects of the industrial process. The polycausal linking of these effects is of unimaginable complexity. Poisoning caused by harmful substances—physiological damage from pesticides, radioactive isotopes, detergents, pharmaceutical preparations, food additives, artificial manures, trace quantities of lead and mercury, fluoride, carcinogens, gene mutants, and a vast quantity of other substances are only another facet of the same question. The changes in the atmosphere and in the resources of land and water traceable to metabolic causes such as production of smog, changes in climate, irreversible changes to rivers and lakes, and oceanographic changes must also be taken into account.

> Scientific research into yet another factor does not appear to have got beyond the preliminary stages. There are no established critical quantifications of what is called "psychic pollution." Under this heading come: increasing exposure to excessive noise and other irritants, the physical effects of overpopulation, as well as other stress factors which are difficult to locate.
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> A final critical limit is presented by "thermal pollution." The laws of thermodynamics show that, even in principle, this limit cannot be crossed. Heat is emitted by all processes involving the conversion of energy. The consequences for the global supply of heat have not been made sufficiently clear.[13]

Listing of the consequences of industrialization, or understanding of technology as industry's means, or tracing of the history of environmental degradation since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution—none of these factors in itself explains the incredible acceleration in per capita production and consumption that is so out of proportion with the population increase. For this explanation one must turn to the social values which underlie the demand for such production.

The overwhelming emphasis in the industrialized corporate capitalist state is on the production and consumption of commodities. This production/consumption cycle takes not only more and more natural resources, but ever more energy to transform raw materials into commodities. So long as the production and distribution of these commodities is administered from above by corporate interest, they will be constantly proliferating. For production is driven by the profit motive, even while rationalized as serving public needs—needs induced by relentless advertising in every medium. As socialism, or the organization of production by the producers for the sake of positive social values rather than through increased commodity production for profit, is nowhere on the horizon, appeals to the citizen consumer to conserve and in general to modify his behavior with regard to consumption is, as Enzensberger has pointed out, "not only useless but cynical. To ask the individual wage earner to differentiate between his 'real' and his 'artificial' needs is to mistake his real situation. Both are so closely connected that they constitute a relationship which is subjectively and objectively indivisible. Hunger for commodities, in all its blindness, is a product of the production of commodities."[14] Since the scale of commodity ownership, production, and consumption prevails as the index of well-being in this country, it is in fact identified with the "free way of life." And here we confront an ideology and life-style so entrenched in the fabric of American existence, so much an expected

13. Enzensberger, p. 373.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

right, that it is difficult to imagine anything short of the inevitable coming disaster of shortages turning people's minds and values in another direction. Given the prevailing consumer ideology, the machines will not stop until there is nothing more to put into the hoppers. Then what? Riots? Class wars for survival?

A less pessimistic view of the uses and consequences of technology is, of course, held by some. A benign and hopeful view maintains that "anything that is possible within the laws of physics can be achieved by sufficiently advanced technology."[15] Intergalactic colonies to mine resources on the planets in a future when "it will not be meaningful to distinguish between machines and biological forms,"[16] are envisioned. "The general conclusion is that technology could extend the lifetime of intelligent organization billions of times longer than that of cosmic organization."[17] Such a point of view assumes, perhaps naively, that "once it is realized that all activity and organization depend on minimizing the increases in entropy, then the uncontrolled dissipation of energy resources will stop. This is already happening on Earth, and its importance will grow with time."[18] Many do not share the optimism of this statement. Those eons ahead when the stars have long since died, but organized intelligences continue to flourish by capturing and growing black holes as gravitational energy sources, will indeed have made our present concerns look primeval. But that doesn't lessen the present crisis, and the present crisis is thoroughgoing and pervasive. The problems of pollution, diminishing resources and scarcities, inflation and unemployment, and the high cost of energy are not only not going to diminish in the near future, but they are, as Barry Commoner has pointed out, interlocking, mutually reinforcing, and accelerating. They will persist so long as two things endure: the present outmoded and unworkable set of government institutions and the economic order of capitalism. The latter, unaided by even the most feeble of ideological oppositions, is showing unheralded but unmistakable signs of collapse.[19]

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15. Paul Davies, *The Runaway Universe*, New York, Harper and Row, 1978, p. 173.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
19. See Barry Commoner, "Capital Crisis," *The Poverty of Power*, New York, Knopf, 1976, pp. 221–49.

It was revealed to me that those things are good which yet are corrupted which neither if they were supremely good nor unless they were good could be corrupted.

—*James Joyce,* Ulysses

The production of art works in this late industrial age has for the most part been circumscribed and structured by the commodity market. Beyond this, most artistic careers follow the contours of a consumer-oriented market: a style is established within which yearly variations occur. These variations do not threaten the style's identity but change subsequent production enough to make it identifiably new. Such a pattern then comes to be seen as natural and value-free rather than a condition of art distribution and sales. Strictures for change under different social conditions might emphasize disjunctive change, or no change at all. The modes for all change, or nonchange, in production, including art, may be limited to three: static, incremental, and disjunctive. But that one or more do in fact exist in every culture seems apparent. A given rate change for art production provides a context and coherence beyond a strictly economic referent: it provides the infrastructure for the culture's art history. Beyond this, the mode of art paralleling commodity production with its basic style/yearly variation yields good as well as bad art. While this has proven obviously more economically sound for artists than either the static or disjunctive modes, it is probably safe to say that the disjunctive, when effective, for whatever reasons, has been granted greater cultural value, either in terms of individuals or movements. (It has been suggested that there may be something genetic in both risk-taking and its approval.[20]) The disjunctive condition itself often ushers in the mode of commodity production in which incremental variations are practiced by "second-generation" artists. Today the description of this phenomenon often polarizes "innovators" into one camp and those who produce "quality" items into the other.

It is interesting to examine site-specific works in the light of these modes. As they have been produced for the last ten to fifteen years, whatever disjunctive threshold they might once have had has long since been passed. On the other hand, site-specific works can hardly be described as commodity production items. They seem to assume the role of a service function rather than that of object production. Yet the majority of those artists showing a sustained interest in site-specific work—in either realized or proposed projects—conform to the "established style/variation" mode characteristic of commodity object production. This is not surprising: the constraining parameter for change mediates cultural production in general.

While site-specific works have been produced now for over a decade, their

20. David Barash, *The Whisperings Within,* New York, Harper and Row, 1979, p. 59.

sponsorship has been erratic and the budgets generally below what is required for truly ambitious works. There has certainly been no one source of sponsorship: various museums, private individuals, international exhibitions, local communities—these and others have from time to time made site works possible, but often just barely. The works sponsored have more often than not been temporary. But now on the horizon there is potential for widespread sponsorship of outdoor earth and site-specific works. Local, state, federal, and industrial funding is on tap. The key that fits the lock to the bank is "land reclamation." Art functioning as land reclamation has a potential sponsorship in millions of dollars and a possible location over hundreds of thousands of acres throughout the country.

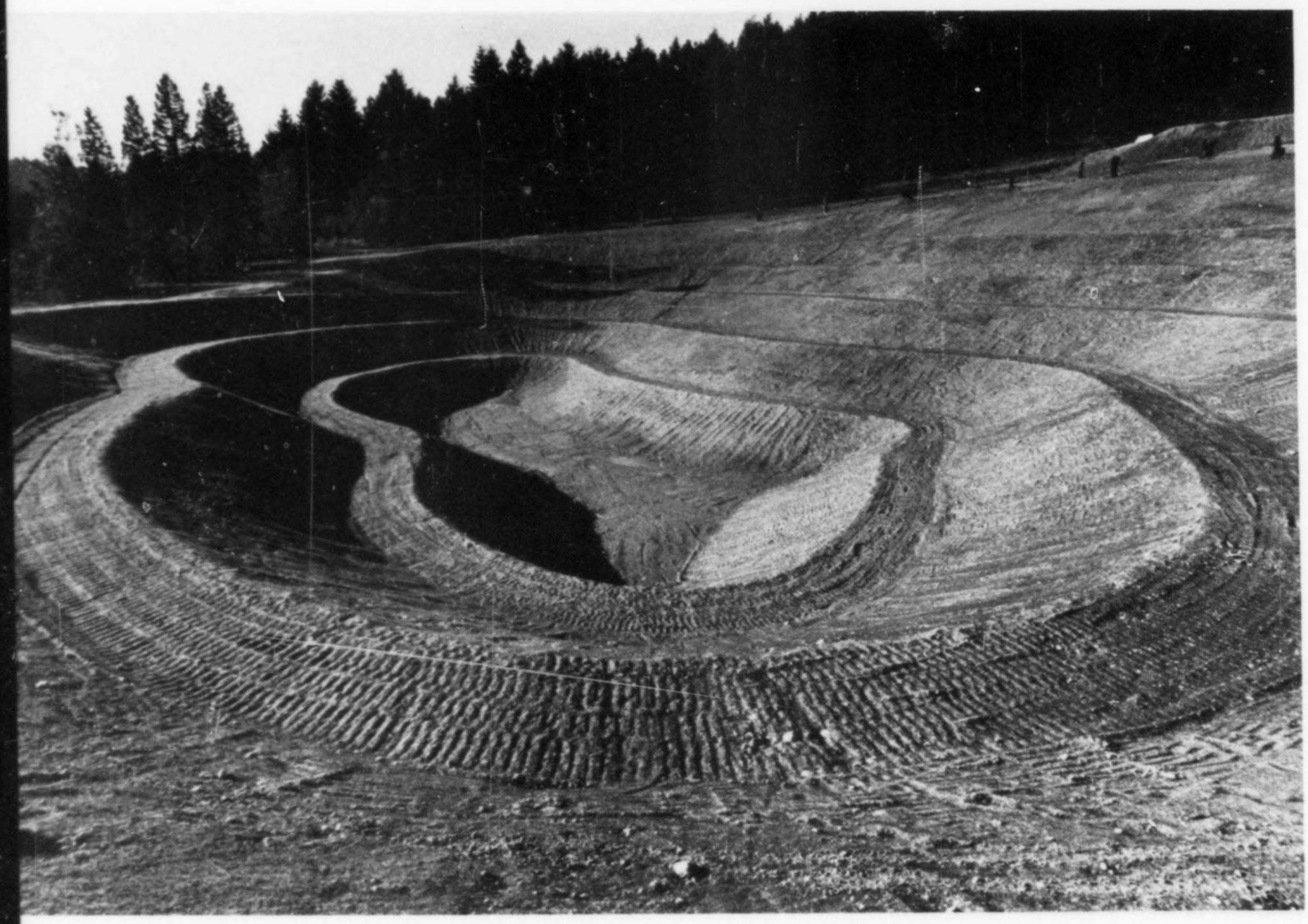
A number of issues, or perhaps pseudo- or nonissues, are raised by this possible ménage-à-trois between art, government, and industry. One of these is not an issue, and that is the objection to art's "serving" as land reclamation, that it would somehow lose its "freedom" in so doing. Art has always served. Sometimes the service has been more visible—service to a patron, or to a governmental propaganda campaign. Sometimes the service is less visible, as when art meshes with and reinforces commodity consumption or remains "abstract" while fulfilling a government commission. Context can also be read as service; it binds the political load of any work of art. In a deeper way, however, context is content. The issue of art as land reclamation is of course blurred by appeals by industry to the "public need" for more natural resources, and thus more mines and environmental entropy which need cleaning up. While minerals have been mined and used since the end of the Stone Age, the present-day escalation of mineral requirements and the energy needed for accelerating production is not so much an index of public need as of corporate administration. In a complex society, where everything is interconnected, it is not possible to decide which commodity, therefore which technology, therefore which resource, therefore which mine is essential and therefore worthy of reclamation. It might then seem that to practice art as land reclamation is to promote the continuing acceleration of the resource-energy-commodity-consumption cycle, since reclamation—defined aesthetically, economically, geophysically—functions to make acceptable original acts of resource extraction.

Insofar as site works participate in art as land reclamation, they would seem to have no choice but to serve a public-relations function for mining interests in particular and the accelerating technological-consumerist program in general. Participation, however, would seem to be no different from exhibition in any art gallery, which ipso facto participates in the commodity structure. None of the historical monumental works known today would have been made if the artists had refused to work (many, of course, had no option to refuse) because of either questionable sponsorship or disagreement with the ends to which the art was used. It is an illusion that artists have ever had anything to say about the functions of their works.

While my project at Johnson Pit No. 30 in King County, Washington is to my knowledge the first instance of the hiring of an artist to produce art billed as land reclamation, the idea is far from new.[21] The coal industry has in fact given the aesthetics of reclamation some attention: "While esthetics is a frequent subject of discussion among reclamation officials, regulatory agencies, and environmentalists, esthetic quality and the criteria and standards by which it is evaluated seem to be one of the least understood facets of surface mining."[22] The *Coal Age Operating Handbook of Surface Mining* notes a research effort (source of funding not given) centered at the University of Massachusetts involving the engineering firm of Skelly and Loy and two University of Massachusetts faculty members, Robert Mallary, a designer and sculptor, and Ervin Zube, who deals with the "psychology of landscape assessment."[23] While the overwhelming local feeling regarding reclamation, according to this research effort, is to "return it to the previous contour," in Appalachia one of the prevailing surface mining techniques involves the removal of the tops of mountains. The major thrust of the group's "systems approach" is aimed at dealing with reclamation which retains the flattened mountains of such sites. The research group notes with no trace of irony that "operators at mountain top removal mine sites are tending to favor this flat-top approach."[24] (Why wouldn't they, since it would be virtually impossible to rebuild the tops of mountains?) The group has proposed such striking aesthetic formulations as the following: "Leav[ing] a few strategically located portions of the site untouched and unmined."[25] Such approaches are obviously nothing but coal-mining public relations.

What would *not* function as public relations, since any aesthetic effort made during or after mining operations functions to make the operations more acceptable to the public? Such aesthetic efforts are incapable of signaling any protest against the escalating use of nonrenewable minerals and energy sources. What, one wonders, could be done for the Kennecott Bingham site, the ultimate site-specific work of such raging, ambiguous energy, so redolent with formal power and social threat, that no existing earthwork should even be compared to it? It should stand unregenerate as a powerful monument to a one-day nonexistent resource. Other sites come to mind as well: those in Butte, Montana; the abandoned quarry at Marble, Colorado; some of the Vermont granite quarries; and a few of the deep-shaft coal and diamond mines qualify as significant

21. I have had discussions with West Virginia mining interests about art projects on mined land. See also *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt, New York, New York University Press, 1979, pp. 220–21.
22. Nicholas P. Chironis, *Coal Age Operating Handbook of Surface Mining*, New York, Coal Age Mining Information Services, 1978, p. 278.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 281.



Robert Morris. Untitled. 1979. (Two Views.) (Commissioned by King County Arts Commission, Washington.)

monuments of the twentieth century. Are their implications any less sinister than those of the Great Pyramids? All great monuments celebrate the leading faith of the age—or, in retrospect, the prevailing idiocy. In one form or another technology has produced the monuments of the twentieth century: the mines, the rocket assembly buildings so vast that weather forms inside, the Four Corners Power Complex, the dams of the '30s, the linear and circular accelerators of the '50s and '60s, the radiotelescope arrays of the '60s and '70s, and soon, the tunnel complex for the new MX missile. All these structures are testimony to faith in science and technology, the practice of which has brought the world to a point of crisis which nobody knows how to resolve. Art's greatest efforts are by comparison very definitely epiphenomena. Until now there could be no comparison. But the terms



change when the U.S. Bureau of Mines contributes to an artist's reclaiming the land.[26] Art must then stand accused of contributing its energy to forces which are patently, cumulatively destructive.

Or is art beyond good and evil? It can and does flourish in the worst moral climates. Perhaps because it is amoral it can deal with all manner of social extremes. It is an enterprise whose nature invites the investigation of extremes. Art erodes whatever seeks to contain and use it and inevitably seeps into the most contrary recesses, touches the most repressed nerve, finds and sustains the contradictory without effort. Art has always been a very destructive force, the best exam-

26. The U.S. Bureau of Mines contributed $39,000 for my project in King County, Washington.

ple being its capacity constantly to self-destruct, as in the sinking of modernism once it became a set of established rules that rationalized a procedure, a life-style. Art has always been dependent upon and served one set of forces or another with little regard for the morality of those forces (pharaoh, pope, nobility, capitalism). It makes little difference what forces make use of art. Art is always propaganda—for someone. History, which is always *someone's* history, invariably attempts to neutralize art (according to someone's history, Speer was a better artist than Géricault). Artists who deeply believe in social causes most often make the worst art.

If the only rule is that art must use what uses it, then one should not be put off by the generally high level of idiocy, politics, and propaganda attached to public monuments—especially if one is in the business of erecting them. Should the government/industry sponsorship of art as land reclamation be enthusiastically welcomed by artists? Every large strip mine could support an artist in residence.[27] Flattened mountain tops await the aesthetic touch. Dank and noxious acres of spoil piles cry out for some redeeming sculptural shape. Bottomless industrial pits yawn for creative filling—or deepening. There must be crews out there, straining and tense in the seats of their D-8 caterpillars, waiting for that confident artist to stride over the ravaged ground and give the command, "Gentlemen, start your engines, and let us definitively conclude the twentieth century."

27. Smithson envisioned the possibility of the artist acting as a "mediator" between ecological and industrial interests. While it is still conceivable that art works as land reclamation might achieve ecological approval and the support of a harassed coal industry (and even eager governmental money), the notion of "mediation" loses all meaning in this situation. Given the known consequences of present industrial energy resources policies, it would seem that art's cooperation could only function to disguise and abet misguided and disastrous policies.

Interview with Hollis Frampton: The Early Years*

SCOTT MacDONALD

MacDonald: Your early films were made quite a while ago. Is it hard for you to talk about them?

Frampton: Well, I like my own early films more than I like a lot of other peoples'.

MacDonald: In a couple of places you've said that *Manual of Arms* is the first film you will publicly admit to having made. That suggests there are films you don't publicly admit to, or don't want to distribute.

Frampton: There were earlier things, only one of which will ever conceivably turn up again. The others are lost. I started making films in 1962, but I wasn't prolific. It was expensive to do. There were three long films and a short one before *Process Red,* which is the earliest finished film I now distribute. The first was called *Ten Mile Poem*—ghastly stuff. It was shot in Brooklyn from the Myrtle Avenue elevated, which has since been torn down. The film was in motion the whole time. It ran from the heart of downtown Brooklyn out to Metropolitan Avenue on the border of Queens. It was probably about twenty-five minutes—rather long—and was shot over a period of three or four months on Saturdays and Sundays. I filmed out the side window, perpendicular to the travel of the train, with moderate telephoto lenses, so that unless a backyard suddenly opened on vistas of laundry, the contents of the frame tended to wipe out, to become abstract, to flatten. The film was in color, silent, and was projected until it dropped dead.

A second film was shot in Fort Green Park, again in Brooklyn, not because I lived there, but because at that time I was seeing a great deal of Carl Andre, who

* This interview was recorded in three sessions during fall 1976 and winter 1977, transcribed and edited in 1979, and checked for accuracy by Frampton in January 1980. Frampton's later films are discussed in two other interviews by MacDonald, "Interview with Hollis Frampton: *Zorns Lemma,*" *Quarterly Review of Film Studies,* 4 (Winter 1979), 23–37; "Interview with Hollis Frampton: *Hapax Legomena,*" *Film Culture,* 67–68–69 (1979), 158–80.

lived half a block away. In the park there was a great set of stairs that went down from the square court in which the Prison Ship Martyrs' Monument stands. The stairs dropped through a dozen levels down to Myrtle Avenue. The film I made there was called *A Running Man.* It was elaborate to do because I couldn't get anybody else to operate the camera, and I couldn't get anybody else to run. I would laboriously set up a shot, put the self-timer on, and do my own running. It was a landscape film which was held together as a picaresque by an unidentified man who ran through the shots, who might appear anywhere in the space, go through it in some way, and exit—all at full tilt. It was about twenty-five minutes long, and ended in a laborious and jerky parody of the Odessa Steps which was probably as fragmented as the Eisenstein sequence, but used just the one runner, who ran up and down the steps, appeared and disappeared, was seen in multiple superimposition, and so on. It was a piece of work in which I was learning, specifically, about the ways in which film can relate different spaces to each other, or one subset of those ways. It was supposed to be serious, but the effect was ineffably comical: the indefatigable poker-faced runner concentrating so hard, because, of course, there wasn't film to waste. That one got projected to death, too.

Then, in 1964, a huge film in black and white negative, all clouds and skies which dissolved from one to another (the superimpositions were done in camera); phrases—typewritten "poetic" phrases—were superimposed. The phrases appeared in different places in the frame. I had it printed on color positive stock—all in Mallarmé azure—a monochrome blue film, very long, fifty minutes. Then I lost the print on the subway and couldn't afford another; and the negative got wiped out, along with a lot of other stuff, in one of those events that seem to happen only to young artists: pipes burst, things get drenched, and so forth. I was quite fond of it, but that's okay.

Finally, there was a very tiny film, in three shots and less than a minute long, called *Obelisk Ampersand Encounter.* First, a slow, very shaky pan down Cleopatra's Needle outside the Metropolitan Museum. Then, in a brief black space on the screen, a male voice that I had clipped out of a junk movie said "And." Then a second image: in a lunchtime crowd on Third Avenue, two people—two friends of mine that I had bribed to do it—collided violently with each other and then went on their way. That was all. My first sound film. Well, I was so dumb in 1965 that I took the material to Movielab to have it printed. They lost my original. I went back to get it, and the counterman said, "We lost it." Very bland. I said, "What do you mean, you lost it?" And the guy answered, "That little piece of shit couldn't be worth very much anyway." So with tears, genuine tears, running down my fresh young cheeks, I departed, never to return to Movielab. So, that's the earlier-than-early work; before that you drift back into still photography, and before *that,* the tail end of infatuations with poetry and painting. All four films were extremely tentative, to put it gently.

I had been aware that there was such a thing as avant-garde film from Cinema-16 days and from film societies in school, where we rented Cocteau's

Orpheus, but I had absolutely no sense, in 1962–63–64, that there was a film scene. I went to screenings, but a lot of what I saw seemed as though it wasn't going anywhere. With the exception of Brakhage, and of Breer (whose work was not seen), there was very little. There were people around such as Charles Boultenhouse, who made films occasionally. They were pseudonarratives with tormented protagonists who expressed themselves by breaking glass with their hands. Pretty boring, I thought.

At that time I was, nominally, a still photographer. There were only one or two places in New York that showed photography. Norbert Kleber had a little gallery, the Underground, in his front hall on 10th Street (Duane Michals first showed there); and there was another place on 10th Street east of Third Avenue which showed photographs. But nobody was particularly interested.

In the late fifties, still photography was still locked in the grip of the 8 × 10-view-camera-F-64 school that included people like Weston and Strand, and which had become massively academicized. It had produced such entities as Ansel Adams and Minor White. There was an enormous stasis; photography was obviously something only old masters did. It produced a stasis in me, too, because to a degree I identified with it and got myself up a tree that I was never quite able to climb down, until I completely got out of it. Actually, I still do photography periodically.

It may be worthwhile to recall that, from when I got to New York in 1958 until deep into the sixties, there were big doin's afoot in art. Those big doin's had almost exclusively to do with painting and sculpture—and, to a much lesser extent, with performance and dance. Most of the people who started to make films in a serious way around the time I did had matured artistically in some other terrain. There was no hearing for anyone in either still photography or film. It's hard now for newcomers to realize how heroic Mekas's efforts were. It was possible to disagree with him, to scream at him, to feel at any given moment that he was full of shit, but his faith and persistence were the only game in town for years. Jonas not only scrounged screening spaces, he picked up the tab personally and went around and begged people to put up money. It was astonishing.

That's not so long ago, either. I remember when somebody finally got a job *teaching* film. Gregory Markoupolos was hired in Chicago for a year, for a quite princely eight grand; that was maybe twelve years ago. Markoupolos, it was said, pretty much played Genius in Residence, and at the end of the year the appointment wasn't renewed. The general feeling was that he'd blown it for everybody. Of course, there were other jobs. I worked in film labs; but heaven knows what other people did to stay alive. Ken Jacobs used to go down to the Fulton fish market and find old fish. Brakhage told me he tried to get a job making pizza! It was a very unpromising situation.

MacDonald: You mentioned that *Process Red* is the first finished film in distribution. How did you get into using multiple modes of presentation? In *Process Red*

there is red-tinted imagery of hands doing things, black and white imagery of activities on a street, photographic frames of solid white and red, as well as a variety of kinds of direct manipulation of the film.

Frampton: Maybe I can answer the question better if I recontextualize it. Once upon a time, it was felt to be important that, in any given work, there be a unity of decorum. A work might not look the same all the time, or be the same all the way through, but one general way of making the thing, or one look that it had, should be in evidence. The first modernist art that seized me—during my adolescence—was modern English poetry. One of the striking things about *The Wasteland,* that apparently made it unintelligible at first, is that it tends to shift decorum in every line. Of course, the possibility that a poem could look a different way in every consecutive line turned out to be a tremendously powerful tool for composition. By shifting decorum, a work could also shift place, time, semantic context; it could drag in whole cultures by the bootstraps. It might be reasonable to trace this tendency in Eliot, Pound, and, indeed, even in Joyce (*Ulysses* is, among other things, an essay about shifts in decorum) to the symbolists. So I was coming from there, and, indeed, from a much more general cultural context, part of which had recognized as an option violent shifts in decorum.

Much as we think about painting in the fifties and sixties as having been highly decorous, plenty of work was not. A given painting or group of paintings by Pollock or by Stella might be in the same decorum, but a great deal of the force of Rauschenberg's work depended on violent ruptures in decorum. De Kooning did newsprint transfer. Lay a piece of printed pictorial material down on the paint and peel it off; the solvent of the paint will strip the ink away. Critical effort was expended on turning those into abstract pictorial elements. They weren't. They were illusionist ruptures in the decorum. I remember a series of paintings that Hans Hofmann showed at the end of the fifties or the beginning of the sixties at the Sam Kootz Gallery, which were very loosely painted in dark transparent color, and were, for the most part, quite typical of the tendency of action painting to generate deep spaces automatically through semitransparent layers which recede endlessly behind one another. But then, right on the surface, palpably on the surface, I recall primary-color, hard-edged rectangles with strong impasto, which very clearly had been put on with masking tape. They were extremely indecorous spaces.

I certainly was not the first person to physically torture the surface of film, although I may have done it with a larger vocabulary than some, nor was I the first to use open frames of pure color or even to use color monochrome or to mix color and black and white. I may have forced all of them together a little more brutally than others. All I had to lose was the look of its being *recognizably* a film, which seemed to me to be utterly expendable. While there was interesting work being done at that time, there was no contemporary work that I felt had an absolute claim on my attention.

Something analogous to what I felt about film was happening in sculpture and in dance during the same period. By the mid-sixties, sculpture had been, for all practical purposes, a dead issue for at least a century. That is to say, it had consisted of a series of careers that stood as isolated monuments. Somebody who was my age or half a generation younger and felt a calling to do sculpture could look back at what? At Rodin, at Brancusi, at David Smith; at a certain amount of constructivist work, very little of which was available; at occasional masterpieces by bandits who darted out of painting, raided sculpture (as they did film, for a long time), and returned to the fortress of painting; and at such unclassifiable nonesuches as Duchamp. That was it. The only continuous sculptural "tradition," the only kind of "sculpture" that had been continuously made for at least 100 years, was the bronze statue in the park, not excluding Balto. Since there was no sculptural tradition that had an absolute claim on anyone's attention, very suddenly an extraordinary variety of things *were* made. Since they were enterprises that had to do with mass and volume, categorically they belonged to sculpture.

Dance was not too different. There had been something called modern dance that had acquired a vocabulary of its own, a fixed decorum—the bare foot and "floor work" and so forth, that extends from the epigones of Graham and Limon to Twyla Tharp, who extends and embroiders balletic diction, or a balletic-and-"modern" diction. That, too, did not seem to constitute a claim. I remember the first thing I ever saw Yvonne Rainer do. It was in some loft; was it Brooklyn? I don't remember. There were not many people—a small, word-of-mouth crowd. She did a piece called *Three Satie Spoons*, solo dances to *Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear*. In the middle of it she started making *noises*: little mewing sounds, squeaks, bleats. I was electrified, because it was totally disjunctive within the situation. There she was in a black leotard, doing something that *looked like* a dance. There was music. And then she did something that seemed to have nothing to do with dance; and there was the momentary question, is she going crazy? Is this the moment? Are we witnessing it? Are *we* going crazy? Dance had been mute. The vocal capability of the dancer had been put beyond the pale. No mouth, or at most, the fixed mannequin smile of the ballerina. That brief performance of Yvonne's was totally memorable for me, not so much because of the choreography, or the music, or the skill of that young person. What was memorable was a violent disruption of, a transgression against, the culturally expected, that had been introduced into the very heart of the thing. What was important was not that she made the specific noises that she did, but that that single gesture broke open the whole decorum of dance. But again, what did she have to lose?

I made most of *Process Red* in about a week, and then I fussed with the poor thing for a year. I just couldn't leave it alone. Matisse remarked that every painting needs two people: one to paint it and the other to cut off the painter's hands when it is finished. As old as I was (I was thirty years old), I still had that kind of relation to *Process Red*. I kept cutting back into it, fiddling with it, caressing it. Finally I just stopped, because I had other things to do.

MacDonald: Two other films that you did in 1966—*Manual of Arms* and *Information*—are very different from *Process Red.* A question about the procedure you used in *Manual of Arms*: Had you decided in advance to use fourteen people whom you knew well, and had you thought out ways in which you could capture some crucial aspects of them; or was it more spontaneous?

Frampton: I established a set of conditions within which, nominally, anything that happened would suit me fine. What I had in mind was a series of portraits, but portraits that had to do with the kinesics of the people involved, the way they disposed themselves in a space under very limiting conditions. There was a plain backdrop, one light with a little bounce fill, and a stool. The rule was that you didn't have to sit on the stool, but you had to stay near it. You could do anything you wanted to, or you could leave the space at any time you wanted to, at which moment the filming would stop. That was it. The gestures that I made with the camera and in editing had to do with my understanding of the people involved. Michael Snow comes out a prestidigitator and in the end advertises his *Walking Woman.* Some people I perceived as physically more active and aggressive. Lee Lozano, with whom I was living at the time, talked a blue streak from morning to night. She talked, as most people do, at once to reveal and obscure herself. Her portrait is part of the time her face, and part of the time her shadow.

The film has the look of a New York loft, a certain overlay of gritty, claustrophobic funk that permeated that whole period. It's also a formalist's snapshot album. Those people were friends of mine during a fairly interesting time. We were all lepers, "out-of-it," or what have you, with the possible exception of Larry Poons. I looked at it recently and found it rather touching.

MacDonald: It's very personal.

Frampton: It is, and more openly so than I hoped at the time. I used a severely defined and restricted set of conditions within which improvisations, sheer accidents, indeterminacies, could take place and later, during the editing, be dealt with in second-generation meditation.

MacDonald: The same general approach seems to be true of *Information,* where you decide in advance on a single light bulb, raw stock, and a camera, and then see what you can do with them. Most of the imagery is comparatively complex, despite the simplicity of the means. Were you doing a lot of superimposition in the camera?

Frampton: All the superimposition was done in the camera, at three distances. There were about two takes at each distance. It was highly edited, to break up my characteristic random gestures and make it gesturally more compact. Of course, by the time I had finished performing all manner of rotations and inversions on

the order of shots, it came out looking more like uncut footage than the uncut footage did.

Information was intended as half of a collaboration with Twyla Tharp, who was then at the very beginning of her career. That collaboration never took place. I had thought to project the film into the performance space and use it as a lighting system. Since the light beams are narrow, the projected light itself became an artifact, particularly if there were a little smoke in the room. In fact, Twyla did use the film as part of a piece. She had it projected *across* the stage, from the wings, so that one saw the columns of light fluctuating. She asked a lot of people to come and smoke, so that they could see it. It was done only one time.

MacDonald: You made *States* twice—once in 1967 and again in 1970. Could you talk about the changes? Why did you revise that particular film?

Frampton: The revision resulted from a problem with the smoke. The first time I shot *States*, I made the smoke in one of the ways it's conventionally made in the movies, with ammonium chloride, sal ammoniac. If you put a dish of ammonia and a dish of hydrochloric acid next to each other, the hydrogen chloride and ammonia meet in mid-air, combine chemically, and produce a salt in the form of a powdery mist. I used the rising convection currents from four candles to carry the two gasses up in the air and photographed the result against a black background. Well, it did make smoke: four thin, tremulous streamers of smoke which divided the screen into 5 vertical intervals. In a short segment, alongside the salt or milk which are the materials for the other two "states," it tended to be invisible. That troubled me because I wanted the "states" to have equal visual density. Finally, I reshot the smoke, thinking I would cut the thing apart and put the new smoke imagery in. I took my trusty hot plate—veteran of another film—and vaporized ammonium chloride on it. That worked just fine; I had vigorous, swirling smoke, but the scale was marred: the smoke looked closer and overpowered the other two. I had to completely remake the film, using the first version as a recipe. The material was reshot in 1970, and I didn't finish recutting it until 1972. I loathed it; it was one of the most grinding, tedious jobs I've ever done in my life. I was so disgusted that I sent the new original to the lab, asked my timer to look at the print when it was done and tell me if it looked okay, and had it sent directly to the Film-Makers' Coop. I did not see the new version of *States* until about six weeks ago when I screened it as part of a course on my own work. Now I think it looks pretty good; I'm sorry I didn't look at it sooner.

MacDonald: The way you interweave the different states to create a variety of rhythms has always struck me as rather musical. It reminds me sometimes of the Michael Snow piece *W in the D.* Did you have music in mind when you made *States*?

Frampton: I think it goes a little bit deeper than that. *States* was done "by the numbers"; it was one of the few times that I've made a real score, or graphic notation. There's a collision in *States*: three natural substances—all of which happen to be white—are filmed in such a way that their identity tends to be confused and disappear. While I was looking for a way to order that material, I thought about the intellectual artifice of number series and, yet, the manner in which they tend to recur in nature. One particularly interesting series is called the Fibonacci series, in which each term is the sum of the previous two: start with 1 and, having thought of nothing better, write 1 again, add them and get 2. Add 1 and 2 and get 3, 2 and 3 and get 5, then 8, 13, 21, and so forth. The terms get big very fast. The series may be plotted linearly, but if you plot it in other ways, it produces interesting consequences. If you plot Fibonacci numbers as a spiral, you derive the natural spiral of the chambered nautilus. If you plot them as a rising curve on both negative and positive sides of the y axis and drop perpendiculars to x, then for any given negative and positive pair of quantities in the series you get a rectangle that has the proportions of 1 by $1 + \sqrt{5}/2$ the legendary Golden Section rectangle, which is found not only in ancient architecture, but in nature: in the proportions of the entire system of a tree or the Vitruvian man with arms outstretched, for instance.

One problem with Fibonacci numbers is that the series is insufficiently dense: if you say you will put an image at frame 1, frame 2, frame 3, frame 5 and so forth, pretty quickly you have an image out around frame 1000. To avoid this problem, I took not only the original Fibonacci series, but its first four harmonics. That is, I multiplied each of the numbers by 1, 2, 3 and 4, which in musical terms would give you the fundamental, the octave, the twelfth, and the second octave. Then, in a field 1000 seconds (or 24,000 frames) long, I allocated 3 different centers—1/4, 1/2, and 3/4 of the way through that 24,000-frame time line—for gas, liquid, and solid imagery to spread out from in both directions. The nice thing about the series is that it's not very symmetrical, which means that the states tended not to overlap each other.

So, while on one hand I had no particular piece of music, nor indeed music itself, in mind, I did use primitive procedures which are typical of music. The Pythagoreans, after all, derived all the tones in the untempered scale from multiplications and divisions of the frequencies of the fundamental tones. That kind of thing wasn't being done in film, but during the sixties there were musicians who were remanipulating the harmonic series in various ways. I'm thinking about LaMonte Young and, most especially, Tony Conrad, who has somehow been typed as the maker of *The Flicker*, period. Conrad did a series of pieces that involved extremely complex relations among tones. For instance, he might take a fundamental tone, calculate its 149th harmonic (which would be beyond the audible), divide it by a sufficiently large number to bring it down into the range of an instrument, and produce a frequency that was distinctly untempered with relation to the rest of the scale, but which still had a fixed relationship

to a fundamental tone. Playing the fundamental tone against the new frequency produced complex shifting different tones. That kind of activity has been considered perfectly legitimate and straightforward in music, but for some reason has been considered overintellectual, or something like that, for film.

MacDonald: In the interview you did with Michael Snow for *Film Culture* you describe how you made *Heterodyne.*[1] Your procedure for that film reminds me very much of what you've been saying about *States.* In *Heterodyne* you developed a series of forty frequencies.

Frampton: Yes, that's what they are.

MacDonald: Did you know in advance where those forty frequencies would overlap, or did you discover *Heterodyne* as you went along?

Frampton: Heterodyne was based on prime numbers, each of which is used as a fundamental frequency. Primes are divisible only by themselves and 1, which means that they only interfere where they share equal multiples, and that's fairly rare. In the whole span of *Heterodyne* it happened only once and, in that instance, I left the event out. Did I know what the rhythms were going to be like? Well, as I typically do, I made several models and projected them until I found one that behaved the way I wanted it to. I wanted a sparse, tenuous structure that would *produce* fairly regular clumps of distinct activity, but would not have a regular shape.

MacDonald: In both *Heterodyne* and *States* you seem very conscious of darkness as a positive element which a filmmaker can use, as opposed to a state where nothing is on the screen. When you made those two films, were you conscious of using darkness this way?

Frampton: Yes. There are problems which can be dealt with by annihilation. I don't see why, just because you *can* be seeing something all the time, you *must* be seeing something all the time. I've called these passages silences; in doing so, I indicate a debt to Cage. Cage proposed that just because you could be hearing something all the time, didn't mean that you had to be. That struck me as a strategic option in film. In any case, because film stock is not truly opaque, you are always seeing something, the outline of the frame at least, and that itself is an enormous cultural icon: it tells you where the image would be if there were one. I am, as I think many filmmakers are, as preoccupied by the film frame as painting has been at various times by the limits of its support. Of course, the film frame is

1. "Hollis Frampton Interviewed by Michael Snow," *Film Culture,* 48–49 (1970), 6–12.

not malleable. There are only a few ways in which it can be manipulated: you can mask, or matte, or you can do the sorts of things that Paul Sharits has done in putting frames side by side or on top of each other, which expands the film frame but gives you all the problems of the painting frame in return. On the other hand, the time of the thing is malleable, and if you have twenty-four projected options per second, one of those options must be to project nothing.

MacDonald: I've always been struck with how much happens in *Heterodyne,* given the fact that if you hold the film up, the number of frames which are filled in seems relatively small.

Frampton: Once again, the real protagonist, the "first struggler," is the spectator, who is always trying to retrieve why it was the last event looked the way it did, and to anticipate when the next one will come and what it will look like. Given the sense that there are rules, even if those rules are chance, the enterprise that you're involved in, in watching the thing, tends to make it replete. When discrete events do come, of course, they can be quite complex, brief as they are. At that time, I was, once more, listening quite a bit to Webern's music, which is full of clustering of events within spaces—both "horizontal" spaces or silences, and "vertical" spaces in which a very brief clump of sonic events will cross four and one-half octaves and five instrumental tone colors, with very large empty harmonic spaces in between. If you listen to a Mozart symphony with about half an ear, you can kid yourself that you're following its drift. With Webern it's an all-or-nothing situation. You have to concentrate to find the music. In a tiny way, *Heterodyne* imitates some of Webern's strategies. If you pause in the middle of *Heterodyne* to eat your popcorn, you may miss a whole events cluster. In musical terms the timbral possibilities available to *Heterodyne* are, let's say, a triangle, a wood block, and a cymbal: it's a miniscule vocabulary. I was trying to get my filmmaking procedures back to some level where I felt I could be responsible for them. Webern once complained that people asked him why he didn't use an orchestra, when a voice and an instrument created problems so complex and possibilities so rich that they could occupy him for a lifetime. The same could be said even for *Heterodyne*'s few variables. Paul Sharits uses, mostly, frames of unmodulated color, and he has a distinguished body of work.

MacDonald: The issue of the audience's having to give a more concentrated look at *Heterodyne* leads me to *Maxwell's Demon,* where a different kind of activity on the part of the audience is demanded. The film is made up of two kinds of things: the man doing Canadian Air Force exercises; and those one-second passages of color frames and single-frame images of ocean waves. The more closely one looks at the latter, the more one can see specific elements that are not visible at projection speed. Even multiple viewings of the film would not necessarily reveal that the one-second passages are organized into six different color units and that the single

frames of the ocean are added in a series going from no frames of ocean to all frames of ocean. Do you assume that the viewer will project the film *and* examine it on the rewind? Also, how did you decide on an organization for adding the ocean frames?

Frampton: I have tended to assume a culturally "normal" spectator situation, in which film is seen in a darkened room: the image is in front of you, the projector behind you, and so forth. Because I made this film a frame at a time as physical material, though, there are tiny events that are only fully apparent when you reexamine it as a filmstrip. *Maxwell's Demon* moves from relatively little activity to relatively great activity. The activities of the exercising man, which I took from an instructional film on Canadian Air Force exercises I'd bought for a buck on Canal Street, are graded to change from prone inertness to relatively violent scissoring movements. The one-second units perform a counting operation which follows the same general line: they go from less active to more active, but within the frame. The six colors are, of course, the six additive and subtractive primaries. James Clerk Maxwell was responsible for the observation that the impression of any color may be synthesized with only three monochrome colors—red, green, and blue—of which cyan, magenta, and yellow are the subtractive complements (or white light *minus* red, *minus* green, *minus* blue). The six form a six-part wheel, which I exhibit in one second, four frames at a clip. Four frames is long enough to get a clear view of something.

The six parts may be understood as a six-bit binary number. There are 2^6, or sixty-four, possibilities for organizing two kinds of things in groups of six. That in its turn was suggested by sixty-five fragments of athletic action that presumably would have sixty-four spaces between them. It turned out that I had miscounted; there are only sixty-three spaces, and one six-bit binary number is missing. Such things break my heart, but there's nothing to do about them. The film maps sixty-four unique states for one second, which systematically pass from blank color to fully replete frames. In fact, all those segments were shot in the same place at the same time. I single-framed the ocean—with six filters and a white card to put in front of the lens—to a score, an extremely simple one. It was animated "on location," so to speak. I did have to wait around a long time to get a sea gull in that one blue frame. The sound track parallels the water imagery; it also changes from silence to a continuous one second buzz, the buzz of sprocket holes. I used 8mm sprocket-hole buzz because the pitch is an octave higher than 16mm, and the higher pitch reproduces better on most sound systems. I had seen *Ray Gun Virus* by that time, and the sound seemed weak to me.

MacDonald: In the Film-Makers' Coop catalogue you mention that *Snowblind* proposes analogies for three perceptual modes and three historic montage styles. I think I understand the three perceptual modes—if they are perception while in motion, while light is changing, or while refocusing—but what montage styles are you referring to?

Frampton: The problem was to reconstruct an object which subsists in deep space and is ambiguous: specifically, a sculpture called "Blind" that Mike Snow showed at the Poindexter Gallery in 1967. In classic film editing, there are at least three strategies for reconstructing a deep-space object: one is to look at it and go around it; another is to pass through it; and another is to retrieve the object by retrieving an interaction of something else with it. The third is the most obvious. The last section of the film, where Mike gradually walks out of the piece in that "cubistified" way, is an obvious parody of the typical Eisensteinian gesture of intercutting the same action three or four times from three or four different points of view. I don't think I meant anything more than that. The next time there's a Coop catalogue, if there ever is another one, I'm going to withdraw all those statements. There's a compulsion to write something, but you don't really want to spill the jelly beans, so you try to offer clues. I'm not convinced that it's helpful.

MacDonald: When you made *Carrots and Peas,* did you assume that viewers would become actively engaged with the film—in a physical sense—and listen to the soundtrack in reverse? I've assumed that once the quick alterations of the carrots and peas imagery at the beginning of the film are over, after viewers have stared at the single, unchanging image for several minutes, you mean for them to grow increasingly aware that the soundtrack may be English in reverse, and curious enough to find out. Am I correct?

Frampton: It's always done, though I must say I did not expect that would happen when I made it.

MacDonald: That's a big surprise to me. Since the sound *is* English and since, specifically, it's someone talking about the Canadian Air Force exercises, I've assumed a connection between exercise as good health, the bowl of vegetables, and an active viewer.

Frampton: Oh, that's nice! For the life of me I never would have thought of it. I thought of the film as a set of ironies upon the form of the art history slide lecture. *Carrots and Peas* goes through its little vocabulary of images; the language is there as a kind of empty sign of the distraction of the lecturing voice which, if you're actually looking at the images, goes in one ear and out the other. Of course, the first time anybody ever looked at the film out of my control, they immediately ran the track backwards. Although *Carrots and Peas* amuses me, it's not one of my favorite films. It's rather gorgeous to look at, all those reds and greens, which seem—if you just let them blur slightly—like a certain kind of all-over painting. The final tableau tends to look like a Poons of a slightly later period.

I'm fond of taking potshots at painting. As much as I love *some* paintings, as who does not, nevertheless the *making* of paintings is an activity about as arbitrary and ordinary as any I can think of. I find it amazing that it was so hugely

cathected at a certain time, since it's fundamentally no more remarkable and interesting than scribbling words on pieces of paper or gluing strips of film together. At the time I made *Carrots and Peas,* I was perennially exasperated by the endless salivation over painting just *because* it was painting. That seems to have subsided in recent years.[2] Painting is in such sorry shape now that I wish there were something to salivate over.

Transposed to film, the slide lecture becomes an instructional film. I think that instructional films are often astounding, especially if you turn off the sound. They can be crazed. They're meant to be dense and parsimonious and to transmit large amounts of knowledge very quickly. There's a link between track and picture, and if they're deprived of each other and you have to depend on the intelligibility of only one, it can become something rich and strange. The film I call *Works and Days* was about how to plant a Victory Garden. The sound was a friendly British voice saying, "You do this," and "You do that." I saw it from a different point of view, which was suggested by things that were going on in dance in the work of Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, Simone Forti. They had spent some time developing a choreography of prose gesture, rather than a specialized choreography of movements that you only make when you're dancing. Yvonne had made works that were task oriented—carrying things and so forth. When I saw *Works and Days,* I saw it as a work of choreography, with the rectangle of the garden as a stage and two plain people, costumed as British gardeners, doing astounding formal steps. The gesture of using their feet to put the dirt in over the potatoes and tramp it down was pure Yvonne Rainer. At a time when dance films were—as they always are—an absolute horror, I had found on Canal Street a great dance film which only became that when it had its sound track cut off.

MacDonald: You were speaking of painting a while ago. *Lemon* is dedicated to Robert Huot in a very pronounced way.

Frampton: I'll tell you why it's dedicated to Bob Huot. There are two reasons. One is that it's a film that points towards painting. The light first reveals the form as a sculptural entity and then devours it, transforms it into a graphic sign. Second, at the time that film was made, Huot had started to read *Ulysses,* and having no other warning about it, was reading it as he would any other work of prose fiction. *Ulysses* is funny enough, but I have other interests in it, and at one point I was talking with Bob about a precritical procedure that had been fruitful for *Ulysses* as it might not be for work of different kinds: a statistical study. You can get grants to

2. This naive remark preceded, by a couple of years, the regression of some critical practice to an "oracular" strategy, which proposes to resacralize painting by announcing what the 1980s *will have* shown: that painting, unique among *all* modes of human production, is an entirely self-justifying activity. Meanwhile, here below in the damp savannahs of contingency and contradiction, the voices of film and its companions betray inflections hoarse and odd.—H.F., 1980.

do such things because they keep eighty-eight grad students working at dumb but marginally sustaining jobs for a year. In this case, it was instructive. One thing discovered about *Ulysses* was that there is an inordinately large number of *hapax legomena,* words that are used in the book only once. Thousands. "Lemon" is a word that occurs only once—as the first word in a section that begins, "Lemon platt . . ."—and I cited that to Bob, along with a few other examples. It created some speculation about how the book was made. Bob said, "Wait a minute, it sounds as though Joyce wrote down a set of words that he was going to use only once; he wrote *lemon,* then the word after *lemon* and the word before *lemon.*" It amused me because it was a painter's way of imagining how a literary work might be made. You make a little green thing up here and you make a big red thing down there, and then you put something next to the green thing, and something around the red thing until this incessant process of occult balance and fabrication of relations has created centers which spread out and meet each other. Since the film was about a painterly conundrum, and because Huot and I had had a memorable conversation about the word *lemon,* I decided to dedicate it to him.

MacDonald: The moving light is the only variable?

Frampton: Yes.

MacDonald: And it was moved in a rather pulsing way?

Frampton: That was a problem. It would have been nice to make some kind of clockwork mechanism, but I didn't have one. I put the light on a wire tether, which was kept taut so it would stay at a constant distance, and filmed at slightly fast speed. I didn't have an electric motor. I had the seventeen and one-half foot spring-wind Bolex to work with. The light was moved manually, the camera wound between takes, and the light moved back slightly. The manual movement, and the lap dissolves which join the takes together, show. At the time, I would rather have had it be a continuous take. Now, I don't mind so much. The image goes out of register at the dissolves and then restabilizes, as though it had dematerialized ever so slightly. There are five such lap dissolves; I remember squirming over the extra twenty bucks. Choosing the lemon, of course, was very important. I spent half an hour feeling up all these lemons, looking for the one that would be most breastlike, most splendidly citroid. Finally, the produce manager came over and watched me for a while, wondering if I had a lemon fetish. I bought half a dozen to cover myself.

MacDonald: You've compared *Prince Rupert's Drops* to a phenekistoscope.

Frampton: It's more than a comparison. A painter named Bill Copley decided to

publish a box magazine. Instead of getting a printed magazine, the subscriber got a box full of goodies. There were contributions by various hands: some moiré sets printed on plastic slips (I think Gerald Oster was implicated in that, which dates the project); LaMonte Young made a tape which involved bowing a gong—part of the *Dreams and Journeys of the Tortoise.* At first, I thought I would put in a film loop, but film loops have to be projected, so I decided to make a phenekistoscope, a protocinematic piece. It's a disk with pictures around the edge, which you view in a mirror through slots between the pictures. In their day phenekistoscopes were hand-painted "philosophical toys." They always used cyclic actions—sheep jumping over fences endlessly, children rolling hoops, and so forth. I did not know that in the early nineties someone in France—I conveniently forget his name—had used one of Muybridge's horse sequences to make a photographic phenekistoscope. I thought I was making the first photographic one.

I filmed two actions. The film frames were enlarged and cut into radial pie segments. I used a magenta overlay for the lollipop and basketball, so that the black and white hand bounced a red ball and the black and white mouth licked a red lollipop. I filmed with a metronome to guide the action, so that each movement would be a second long. They went out in the box and that was that. Then I got interested in the footage that was left over. There's something mildly paradoxical about an apparent loop being, in fact, a film document of the actions of performers behaving as if they were in a film loop. For a while, the licking of the lollipop looks as though it could be a loop, but finally, licking a lollipop once per second becomes a gagging thing to do: the mouth doesn't want to do it; the rhythm becomes irregular, and the loop appearance of it begins to break down. It's clearer that there's variation in the bouncing of the ball, because it's very hard to bounce a basketball with perfect uniformity.

The nonloop of the lollipop licking was then looped through three print generations so that it changes parity and acquires grain. It begins to look "antique." I used two generations of the ball bouncing. I was interested in the simple way that these procedures mapped film upon performance, rather than performance upon film. It reminds me of the time when the Kuleshov school had no footage and the actors leapt from one point to another, attempting to perform in the way film montage behaved, to perform "cuts." I felt that *Prince Rupert's Drops* was in the spirit of an experiment of the Kuleshov era. The film presents two rhythmic actions in such a way that the viewer is faced with a problem of separating the performance, the pretext, from what film itself was doing and was capable of doing. I wonder if you like it.

MacDonald: I must admit I don't.

Frampton: I like it for its abrasiveness. The title *Prince Rupert's Drops* refers to a demonstration done in physics classrooms. Prince Rupert's drops are little tear-shaped droplets of glass, about the size of a pea. They're made by dropping molten

glass into liquid air. The glass is shock-cooled in a state of violent molecular agitation, so that while the drops look stable, they are in fact under extreme stress. The standard physics demonstration involves taking a tweezers and breaking off the little end of the droplet, at which point it vanishes. The stresses then go out of balance and simply shatter the droplet into very fine dust. A cinematic image can have that same quality. It appears to be a solid, believable entity in the form in which we see it, but if we *think* of it differently, it changes beyond recognition, vanishes entirely.

MacDonald: One of the things that puzzles me about *Prince Rupert's Drops* is that we see three shots of lollipop licking, each of which is also reversed, while we see only two shots, each reversed, of bouncing the basketball.

Frampton: It's that way because bouncing the ball seemed to deteriorate as a believable act more quickly; it took on the appearance of a film loop sooner than the lollipop licking did. It is very apparent that the second repetition seems to present the identical act of bouncing the basketball, but with the left hand instead of the right, which is palpably not possible. There's a certain cumulative trouble in watching oneself watching a highly repetitive, stupid act in two or three very slightly different guises, but that's exactly what I'm interested in: the moment when one begins to watch oneself watching the thing. Is that why Stan Brakhage unconditionally detests *Prince Rupert's Drops*? He hates it so much he can't even remember its name. He alludes to it once every couple of years, and every time he does so, he thinks up an even more outlandish name for it. The last time he thought it was called *Mulberry Street*. Don't ask me why.

MacDonald: Surface Tension seems different from earlier films in the sense that it uses formally a variety of modes of communication. Later films seem to have more in common with it than earlier films. When you made *Surface Tension*, did you feel you were breaking into a new area?

Frampton: Definitely. Everything before that had been, in one way or another, single-image or single-mode stuff. *Surface Tension* represented a new level of ambition for me. In *Surface Tension* I felt that I was going out on a limb—most especially by letting language back into it. It came very, very quickly. I had the image material for quite some time, and the German voice track, which was simply a digest of what Kasper Koenig had said about his project for a three-part film during the two and a half or three hours when I had pixilated him and his ineffable digital clock.

MacDonald: Is it his voice?

Frampton: Yes. I went back a year later and had him record it again. He still had

his project firmly in mind, so the recording was done in one pass. I had also transcribed it in outline from memory for the titles, so there are discrepancies between what is said in the German and what the titles say, particularly as regards the lengths of the three parts that Koenig talks about.

MacDonald: I assume that part of your intent was to combine a series of connections between the man talking in the pixilation, the language on the sound track in the second section, and the titles in the third with other elements that are never joined in any specific sense. Is that right?

Frampton: There's at least an imaginable kind of causal connection between the three chunks of superimposed material—two of which are sound, one graphic.

MacDonald: I see the connection between the German sound in the second section and the titles, but how does the telephone sound fit in?

Frampton: The telephone got in there as a piece of stark realism. While Kasper and I were first filming, his girlfriend was continually trying to phone him. He had agreed to do the thing nonstop and was, as a result, very uncomfortable, the more so because a telephone *must* be answered. I became interested in that sound, which communicates nothing except that there is a message waiting. I had thought about using that sound even before I began to think about incorporating Kasper's description of his three-part film. At the time I filmed him I did not have a three-part film in mind. Initially, I thought that it might amount to no more than a portrait. Kasper was proud of his digital clock—there weren't that many of them around at the time. He was living in an extremely austere, virtually empty loft with the digital clock and a whole closet full of On Karawa paintings. The telephone was "from nature" but like most truly synchronous sound was perceived as disjunct. So, there is a putative relationship, at least, between the ringing and what Kasper has to say. The telephone does stop ringing, after all, and one then hears a voice.

MacDonald: I've always assumed that the connection was between the visual body language of the first part, the sound track of the second part, and the titles in the third.

Frampton: In the first section Kasper is certainly communicating a great deal besides his plan for a film, including a lot of discomfort at being pinned in that window in a contractual relationship. In any case, I had two blocks of image material: the first very emphatic of gesture and of the passage of time; a second which was much more emphatic of a passage through space. Before I settled on the goldfish as the third, I made a different image: an extreme slow-motion image of a woman on a trampoline, from very low, against the sky; her body came floating up

into the blue empty screen and then settled back down again. I still have that stuff somewhere, and I'll make use of it one of these days. It was overpowering.

MacDonald: It had never occurred to me until a moment ago that the various levels in each section correlate to each other. The walk from Brooklyn Bridge to Central Park is a process of physically joining two spaces, just as the flow of language is. In the third part there's an encapsulation of reality both in words and in the tank.

Frampton: The words are in the frame as the fish is in the tank; both are limited to a very shallow depth. There's always a fundamental problem of making a *useful* set of limits for a work. Up to a relatively short time ago that set of limits was, by convention, a narrative. Except in Hollywood at its very droopiest, no one, I think, ever pretended that the story was the whole point. The presence of a narrative amounted to a kind of visual control structure, so that if the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and manner put it in Paris in 1902, in color, then—without a lot of complicated manipulation—you had set outside the limits of the film the pyramids of Egypt in 1928, in black and white. At the same time, having set limits of linear causality and implied time, you were quite free to explore space and its attributes. Narrative films have organized the surface of the screen in a rich variety of ways. As narrative begins to collapse, I find it striking that film tends more and more towards single images or small image clusters. There's a tendency to control the total shape of the film by drastically circumscribing the spaces that one is likely to see, as well as—in a number of very important cases—to delimit drastically the temporality that one is likely to encounter. One reason that people seeing Brakhage's films for the first time can find them confusing is that the films may be made only of a single complex image—a single space explored in a very complicated way—or a limited cluster of images which appear not to have been made in any linear time. In the films that suggest narrative, that have some of *that* kind of control structure, there's more visual variety; whereas in the films that behave like a suspended instant, there tends to be considerably less variety. Much the same thing is true of my own work. In *Zorns Lemma,* for instance, or certain of the films in *Magellan,* where there is a temporal, or causal, control structure, the imagery tends to be more complex. On the other hand, where there is a decided suspension of time, the imagery becomes more narrow in its range. The four films in *Solaria Magelani,* for instance, are all made within limited individual spaces which, however, are woefully difficult to retrieve. It's impossible to retrieve the set of calisthenics, or one entire cow and its behavior, or the method for butchering beef cattle, or the processes of rolling and fabricating steel ingots, from those films.

Getting back to *Surface Tension,* it's a film that has at the surface level extremely heteroclite imagery, simple though it is. The problem in putting it together was to find some kind of control structure that would hold it together, that nevertheless was not a direct or obvious narrative. Up to *Surface Tension* the

control structures that I had used were linear in one sense or another, like the purely rhythmic control in *States* that allows three different strands of images to coinhabit the time and space of the film. *Surface Tension* was the first time I attempted to make a control structure that would work in two ways; that is to say, when there was no connection horizontally, there was the possibility of supplying a connection vertically, in terms of what was seen or heard simultaneously rather than what had just been seen or heard or was anticipated. The problem of understanding such a film is in discovering the control pattern, which instead of being nominally straightforward, as it is in a flat declarative narrative account of something, meanders.

When I began to think about using sound, it struck me as a surrealist arena, one within which the secret connections among things would be more likely to demonstrate themselves. As I understand it, one of the important elements, perhaps *the* important element, of the surrealist and symbolist heritage is that, once released from the constraint of "making sense," words actually construct or manufacture sense before our very eyes. Clearly, the sense which is made has to do with the way that the words are related to each other *fundamentally*. Symbolist poetry began an attempt to discover the inherent control structures within language, just as action painting was, at least in part, an attempt to discover the inherent control structures within painting. The experiments suggest that these inherent control structures are so rich, massive, and powerful that one bebins to understand why people began to white poems "about" things and to paint pictures "of" things—as an effort to limit the choice among those control structures and their actions, to whittle painting down to intelligibility or a small set of intelligibilities. Well, film inherits all of that. By the time it came to me, it had inherited all those cultural constraints which were intended to protect artist and spectator alike from looking through the word into the abysmal intricacy of language or, putting it another way, to make possible a kind of naive "use" of an enormous structure.

All right, back to *Surface Tension*: no sooner had I put things together that looked to be quite disjunct than they immediately began to suggest, and then to enforce, internal resonances that were far more interesting and far more complicated than sensical combinations of images. I was starting to reenact a drama that's been reenacted many times. My favorite example is Dali and Buñuel's assertion that the selection and order of the images in *An Andalusian Dog* were made on the single principle that they should make no sense whatever. Now, of course, any college junior can undertake a fairly straightforward analysis of *An Andalusian Dog* as a witty, troublesome, short narrative which leaves a few questions up in the air, but not very many. The film now seems haunted by the suggestion that it contains a retrievable narrative, and that suggestion holds one. By 1943 the implicit narrative was so much the only visible part of *An Andalusian Dog* that it got misappropriated in a film like *Meshes of the Afternoon,* which really does look like a story—a little bit science-fictional, and a little bit overladen

with American-brand Freudianism, and one step away from an academicism, that of Prague's version of the VGIK. At that point it becomes possible, and probably necessary, to reassert once more some of the ambitions that originally produced *An Andalusian Dog*, that is, to begin once more to put together things that have no immediately obvious connection with each other. It will be ten years in the fall since *Surface Tension* was made, and it begins to look oddly intelligible; and a film that, ten years earlier still, probably looked very jagged indeed—*Window Water Baby Moving*—now seems as smooth as butter and suggests much more of the time in which it was made than of the manner in which it was intended to be received. It looks more like a home movie than like any great innovation in formal method, and one tailored to some of the cozier domestic sentiments of early sixties liberalism.

MacDonald: I'm very curious about *Palindrome*, which is a film I love very much.

Frampton: You, me, and a couple of gateposts.

MacDonald: You've mentioned that the imagery in the film was created by chemically treating filmstock.

Frampton: Let me be explicit. At the time the material for *Palindrome* was collected, I was working in a lab where professionals brought in sheets and rolls of film for processing. All the processing was done by automatic machinery. The waste at both ends of the rolls, where the machine's clips had been attached, was cut off and tossed into the wastebasket. The physical deformation caused by the clips, and the erratic way in which the clips let in chemicals to work on the emulsion, produced images. It struck me that by far the most interesting images produced by the process went into the wastebasket. The dull ones were put in boxes and sent back to the customers. I began to collect the waste images and mount them as slides. There was something there, a modulated image that could be decoded as having illusionist content, volume. They just didn't resemble anything specific. The set I chose for *Palindrome* tended towards the biomorphic. They resembled action painting, too, in the sense that while much is made of the emphasis on two-dimensional surface, one can decode de Kooning's paintings or Pollock's or Kline's as containing perspective indicators In time, I started thinking about using them in a film. It was my second attempt—the first was *Heterodyne*—to make a film that did not proceed from photographed footage.

MacDonald: When I studied *Palindrome* closely last summer, one thing that intrigued me—and after a while began to drive me a little crazy—was that, while it seems to be one of the most completely ordered films I've ever looked at, no matter how many webs of order I deciphered, I still felt as though I was missing the fundamental structure of the whole thing. The general palindromic structure is

clear, but in the Coop catalogue you mention that there are "12 variations on each of 40 congruent phrases." I was never able to decipher those, nor was I able—even on a rewind—to figure out any pattern at all in the arrangement of the individual images from one segment to the next. In *Heterodyne*, if you attach yourself to one specific visual event and look at that film on a rewind, you can find its pattern. In this film, either I can't or the pattern is so complex that there's no use in trying.

Frampton: It's probably not important. I started by generating a short roll of images that primed the pump. Forty phrases of twenty-four single frames were generated by animation. Then a set of variations was made at the lab, which produced the following: an image of the original roll (color, single layer); a continuous tone, black and white version; a black and white negative; and a color negative. Other sets were produced by printing the original roll superimposed on itself, so that the blocks of image fall on top of each other, but so that we see the images first to last on one level, last to first on the other. A color positive, color negative, black and white positive, and black and white negative were made in that way. Then came a set made from the black and white; on the forward pass, the original was printed through a yellow filter, and on the reverse pass, through blue; and another done the same way, except with magenta and green filters. Those generated rolls were intercut with each other, interwoven around the center point.

Well, why do all that? What is important is not the minute specification of what was done, because other things could have been done. Two general things: first, the palindromicity of the film is local as well as global; and second, it does have a certain diction that's small enough to be recognizable. We begin to recognize, very quickly, images that we've seen before under a different guise; and after a few viewings we develop a sense of where we are at any given moment in the progress of the film. When that last brainlike hemisphere appears, upside down and backwards, there's the clear sense, even the first time through, that we are at the end of it. It doesn't have a beginning, middle, and end in the developmental sense. It is immediately the way it's going to be all the time. Nevertheless, it does develop a certain contour of expectation.

At the time I made *Palindrome* I was, as I periodically do, giving thought to serial music. Procedurally, the film is flatfootedly Webernian. One of Webern's mature procedures was to make a *generative* row—often it was a hexachord, in which the last six notes are the retrograde inversion of the first six—and then manipulating that row rigorously (though I don't think Webern was adverse to "cheating" here and there). In this music, one is very quickly aware that some definite set of principles is making the piece sound as it does, and a lot of the energy that goes into hearing it is an attempt to figure out those principles. Unless one spends a long time with the score, and sometimes not then, one can never quite get back the full set of rules. There's always a certain tension, a certain malaise in listening: one listens with a double effort, a double concentration because it seems at once an oddly willful, mutable music, and yet at the same time

it is not the willfulness of a composer, of an artist, that one is hearing, but the generative power of the set of rules, whose consequences are being systematically worked out. That fascinates me.

MacDonald: Artificial Light repeats the same group of shots twenty times, presenting them in a different way each time. Two basic questions: What led you to combine the imagery of a group of artists sitting around and the moon? And how were the twenty variations determined?

Frampton: An old custom in Western art forms, a doctrine, dictates that what shall be said and the manner in which it is said shall mutually reflect each other, shall be in accord. It's a doctrine that is sustained, unvarnished, in Eisenstein's exposition of montage. Surrealism and dada, of course, offered major challenges to that doctrine on a number of fronts—more notably, I think, in performance, poetry, and, particularly, collage than in film, simply because there really never was a continuous body of surrealist and dada film. In *Artificial Light* I proposed to take the surrealist recommendations on disjunction and automatism fairly literally. We start with a fragment of film made in a particular time and place as a kind of cinematic doodle. That fragment sat on the shelf for three years. The zoom on the moon came from a sixty-second black and white TV spot advertising an expensive battery-powered kid's robot. It's very hard to throw away a three-foot zoom on the moon; especially if it was obviously made from a still on an animation stand. There was the question of the manners in which the photographic material itself might be obscured, mutilated, rendered invisible. The most elementary is turning the filmstrip upside down and running it backwards. Others were more complex. As usual, it turned out to be unexpectedly laborious to do. The one bonanza in the whole proceeding came when I was aching for a way to get the film finished, to extricate myself from it. Walking down 42nd Street, passing the Commodore Hotel—behold!—I saw lying before me on the sidewalk a piece of 16mm film a foot long. Believe it or not, it was a close-up of the surface of the moon! At that moment the film was finished. Having zoomed the moon during a whole set of disjunctions, I had found the montage piece that provided a final point of *convergence*. I ran home and spliced it in, and the film was done.

In a sense, there's nothing in the film that is not "found": the original situation itself—the young artists sitting around laughing, talking, and drinking wine—is one of those perfect cliché givens, a standard pretext. Two pieces of material were actually found. The forms of obliteration that were practiced amount to a cookbook of things to do to a piece of film. I had been teaching a beginning course at Hunter College. We had very little to work with. In particular, we were cameraless, so the students had to work with either leader or found footage. It constituted a laboratory which quickly reproduced the inventory of ways in which a piece of film may be defaced, some of which have considerable histories. I'm thinking about the dime store "color" photography that was done

when I was a kid, which consisted in hand-tinting a black and white photograph with oil colors. Everybody's hair came out either dark brown, reddish brown, or yellow; all eyes tended to be blue; all lips, red.

MacDonald: Are you referring to the loop with the brownish tint?

Frampton: No, the sepia-toned one has its own antecedents: childhood memories of forties movies in which Lena Horne and the Mills Brothers were always in sepia tones—black people were brown; white people, grey.

MacDonald: A couple of specific questions about a couple of the passes. There's one where you black out every frame but one every once in a while. The intervals between the frames vary just slightly, from about twenty-one frames to twenty-four or twenty-five frames. Why that variation?

Frampton: It's a cheat. It is intended to look regular and in general it does. When we look at film a frame at a time, especially if there's much motion, we quickly find that most frames do not look like stills at all. Typically, they're extremely blurred. Unless we select carefully, a blow-up will be illegible. The variation in intervals resulted from my attempt to find, within narrow temporal limits, a frame that would be optically intelligible.

MacDonald: There's another pass where every two seconds you insert a yellowish, goldish image which is not optically intelligible.

Frampton: That's a color-negative image of a man operating a bulldozer. During the two seconds that follow it one is diverted from seeing the original loop by wondering what the hell it was that intruded. There's too much in the bulldozer image to be reconstructed, and it's not set off—embedded in black or what have you. I can see the image, but then I know it's there.

MacDonald: In the loop where you erase the faces, at what point in the process did you erase?

Frampton: I was confining myself to extremely simple means. Although it is not widely known, ordinary undiluted Clorox strips the emulsion off film. I used cotton swabs and five-percent sodium hypochlorite. Doing it that way, instead of scratching it off, presents the resulting ovular blobs as entities rather than abrasions.

MacDonald: What about the sixteenth loop; it's brownish, with black highlights.

Frampton: It was done very crudely with a horrible little processing machine

which accepts a hundred-foot roll of film. You crank the film back and forth in the solutions. It's not a good processing machine; it's also *very* boring to use. The dye was coupling slowly, the silver was washing out slowly; at a certain point, I just stopped. The marks of the process were left in.

MacDonald: What about the order in which the loops are presented?

Frampton: I don't have much to say about it. I tried to order them in such a way that the film would be isotropic—so that one was, at any given time, equally likely to see color, or physical obliteration, or optical manipulation. I didn't want it to "progress" from a bunch of one thing to a bunch of another thing to a bunch of a third. I suppose the term that has to be used is "intuitive," although that's an indelibly sloppy word which I dislike immensely. When people say they did something intuitively, it means that they didn't think about it. They did what they liked to do, or what they did automatically, like picking their noses. It's a totally irresponsible thing for an artist to say. On the other hand, simply attempting to keep an apparent progression from developing was probably a better control than assigning them each a number and taking the numbers out of a hat. As always happens with the very elementary uses of chance operations, that would have produced "clumps."

MacDonald: I like very much that the last pass is the basic black and white loop. It looks so nice after all the previous renditions. It's so easy to forget now how good black and white film is to look at.

Frampton: God, does anybody work in black and white any more? Even I don't. First generation nitrate prints are of astounding delicacy. Everything we have from the old black and white age is struck from tenth generation masters. As a result, everyone's notion of what black and white cinematography looks like has become entirely corrupted.

Roland Barthes 1916–1980

ANNETTE MICHELSON

Le frisson d'une disparition y courût.
—Mallarmé, "Villiers de l'Isle-Adam"

Barthes's work, incessant through three decades, is at an end. Retracing its advance, one charts a sinuous course; one passes from zero degree to neutral, from a transparency of language to that "ethical" category whose recovery promised redemption from the weight and fixity of sense he came to find oppressive. In this trajectory there is a clear and high utopian moment, that of Barthes's encounter with the play of signs, the system he named Japan.

This culture, unlike that of China and in radical contradistinction to our own, offered itself in artifice and candor to the avid, patient reader as text. Its high artifice was, in fact, assessed and cherished as the warranty of its candor. Barthes's project had begun in the discovery of the ways in which the West generated sign systems while at the same time shamefacedly effacing their proliferation. His implacable critique of bourgeois culture, its masking of presuppositions as nature, found in Japan the supremely salutary counter-example. Customs, rituals, techniques, and games acknowledged within the fabric of daily existence the arbitrary character of the sign, its work, its omnipresence. And this recognition was in turn the ground of freedom from the constraints, from reference to an ultimate signified hypostatized as "God, Science, Reason, Law." The play of the text that was Japan, articulated in the fluidity and lightness of "the empty sign," produced that quiver, shudder, or thrill of meaning to which Barthes referred with increasing frequency. In *The Empire of Signs* he moved with ease and with delight. One sensed therefore, this last year or two, that the man preoccupied with Proust, "no longer wanting to travel—no, not even to Japan," had indeed completed a large segment of his course. And *La Chambre claire*, the meditation on photography written in memory of his mother and in homage to Sartre's phenomenology of the imagination, gives us the sense of a movement's harmonic resolution.

The central "crossroad" of his work was, however, as Barthes, speaking in third person, put it, the theater: "There was no single text of his, in fact, which did not treat of a certain theater, and the spectacle is the universal category through whose forms the world is seen." And so it was that the young scholar, a founding and working member of the Classical Theater Group, became in the 1950s the exegete, the trenchant defender of Brecht's dramaturgy, engaged in the critique of the theater of identification and catharsis, in the attack upon unity and the unities, upon the language, forms, and institutions of a theater in hostage to a discredited bourgeoisie. The relentless force and implacable precision of the early work, the dramatic reviews, feuilltons, essays, and polemical exchanges which appeared throughout the 1950s, stood as a cumulative provocation which produced by 1963 the rage over his *Racine*. A censorious academy exploded at the temerity with

which language spoke of language, "opening the paths of unforeseeable stages, the infinite play of mirrors." It was the formalization of that metadiscourse, as in *S/Z* and *Le Système de la mode*, which completed the discomfiture of an academy now exhausted.

Barthes ended, as we know, as the colleague of Foucault, Boulez, and Lévi-Strauss within the Collège de France. To the crowd of auditors amassed beneath the dais piled with tape recorders he offered the digressions and excursuses to which he recently inclined, in the hope that "the speaking and the listening that will be interwoven here will resemble the comings and goings of a child playing beside his mother, leaving her, returning to bring her a pebble, a piece of string, and thereby tracing around a calm center a whole locus of play within which the pebble, the string come to matter less than the enthusiastic giving of them." (One thinks of Newton saying, in old age, "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy, playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding another pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.") And Barthes went on to say, "When the child behaves in this way, he in fact describes the comings and goings of desire, which he endlessly presents and represents."

Sign, text, desire—it is at their specified point of intersection, the "crossroad of the theater," that I locate a particular sense of present implication in Barthes's project and in the general sense of loss. I recognize in his reading of Japan, and more precisely in his decoding of the theater of Bunraku, the structures, economy, and aspect of artistic practices that are central and vivid within our culture. Bunraku's distribution of marionette, manipulator, and speaker, its establishment of action and gesture as disjunct, its severing of gesture from speech, its replacement of emotional flow through reading, its flattening of motive—these are qualities immediately and intimately familiar to us. For Barthes, Bunraku alone dissolved, with a radicality surpassing that of Brecht, the antinomy of animate/inanimate, thus revealing the material ground of theater, replacing interiority with labor. The consequent clarity, subtlety, and address that he found in Bunraku evoked for him theology's "ancient dream of the glorified body," but within a theater from which the specter of divinity had been exorcised.

It is this economy, disjunction, clarity, this declarative mode and exorcism that we recognize in the art of performance, that of Foreman, Rainer, Sherman, Anderson, Cunningham, and Brown among others, which has come in the past two decades to seem paradigmatic in its directness of address, its valorization of work, its freedom of signification, its force as a fully secular form. Considering the theater as the scene of Barthes's abiding desire, one thinks as well of his comment upon the remark of an unnamed linguist to the effect that each of us speaks but a single phrase which only death can interrupt. To which Barthes added, "This sends a quiver of poetry through all of knowledge." A quiver of poetry, of meaning, of disappearance.

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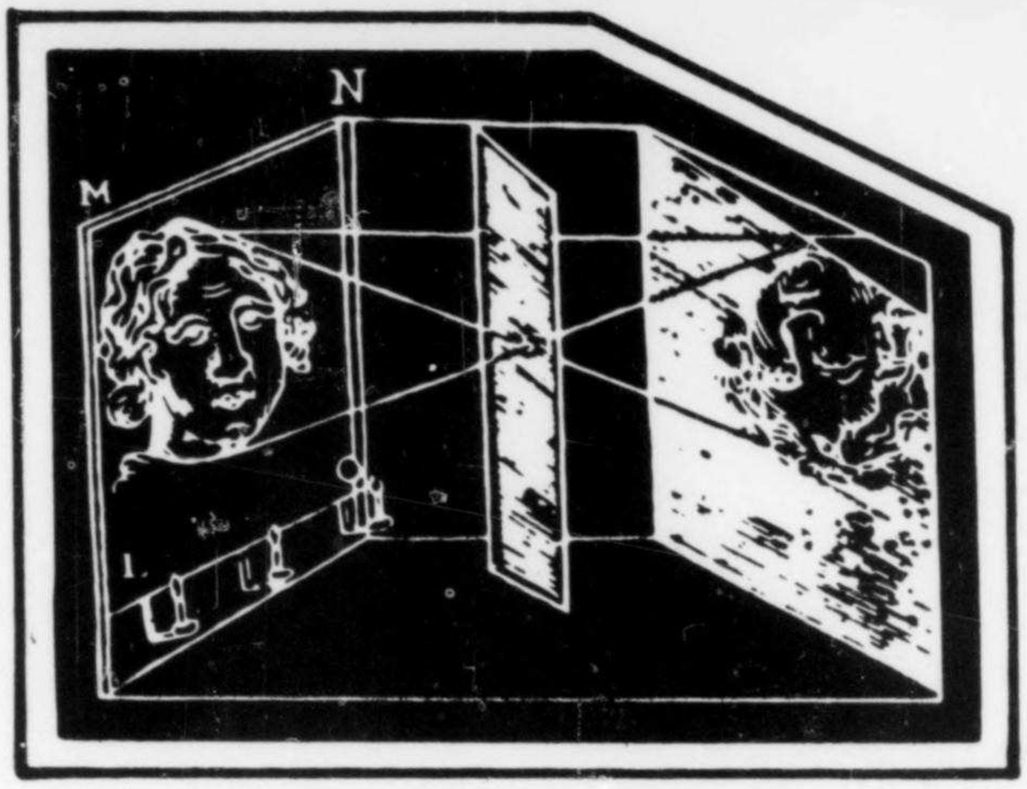
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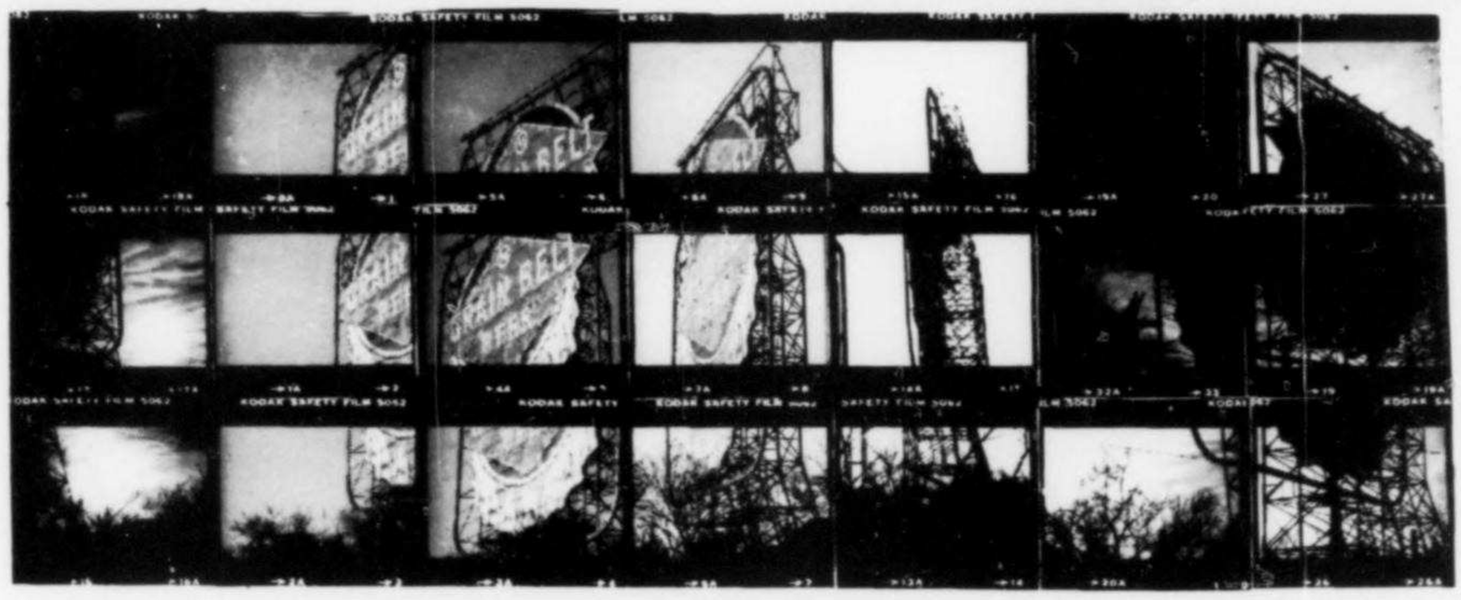
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