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Film Reviews from *Sur*

JORGE LUIS BORGES

translated by GLORIA WALDMAN and RONALD CHRIST

Films

Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff. *Germany, 1931. Director: Fedor Ozep. Script: Victor Triva, Leonhard Frank, Fedor Ozep, from the novel by Fedor Dostoevski. Photography: Friedl Behn-Grund. Terra.*

City Lights. *U.S.A., 1930. Director, producer, script: Charles Chaplin. Photography: Rollie Totheroh, Gordon Pollock, Mark Marklatt. United Artists.*

Morocco. *U.S.A., 1930. Director: Josef von Sternberg. Script: Jules Furthman, from the play "Amy Jolly" by Benno Vigny. Photography: Lee Gàrmes. Paramount.*

I am writing my opinion about some recent films.

The best, considerably outdistancing the others: *Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff* (Filmreich). Without visible discomfort, its director, Ozep, has avoided the proclaimed and established errors of German films—lugubrious symbolism, tautology or meaningless repetition of equivalent images, obscenity, a propensity for teratology, and satanism—without falling into the still less resplendent errors of the Soviet school: the absolute omission of characters, the mere photographic anthology, the clumsy seductions of the Committee. (I will not even mention the French: until now their one and only desire has been not to seem like the Americans—a risk, I assure them, that they do not run.)

I am not familiar with the spacious novel from which this film was excavated—a fortunate fault that has allowed me to enjoy it without the continual temptation to superimpose the present film on the remembered reading in order to see if they coincide. So, with immaculate disregard for its irreverent desecrations and its spotless fidelities—both unimportant—the present film is extremely powerful. Its reality, although purely hallucinatory, without either subordination or cohesion, is no less overpowering than the reality of Josef von Sternberg's *The Docks of New York*. Its presentation of a frank, genuine joy after a murder is one

Fedor Ozep. Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff. *1931*.

of its high points. The photography—one shot of the approaching dawn, one of monumental billiard balls waiting for the collision, another of Smerdiakov's clerical hand withdrawing the money—is excellent in both conception and execution.

I pass on to another film. Charlie Chaplin's film, mysteriously entitled *City Lights*, has received the unconditional applause of all our critics. The truth is that its published acclaim is more a proof of our telegraphic and postal service than a personal, presumptuous act. Who would dare to overlook the fact that Charlie Chaplin is one of the stable gods in the mythology of our time, a colleague of the still nightmares of Chirico, of the ardent machine guns of Scarface Al, of the finite, although unlimited universe of the summital shoulders of Greta Garbo, of the glassed-in eyes of Ghandi? Who did not know beforehand that Chaplin's most

recent *comédie larmoyante* was astonishing? In reality—in what I believe is reality—this much-seen film from the splendid creator and hero of *The Gold Rush* is no more than a weak anthology of small mishaps imposed on a sentimental story. One of these episodes is new; another, like that of the professional joy of the garbage man confronting the providential (and subsequently fake) elephant that provides him with a dose of raison d'être, is a facsimile of the incident with the Trojan garbage man and the false Greek horse in the neglected film *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*.

More general objections can also be alleged against *City Lights*. Its lack of reality is only comparable to its lack—just as exasperating—of unreality. There are true-to-life pictures—*For the Defence, Street of Chance, The Crowd,* even *The Broadway Melody*—and there are willfully unrealistic pictures: the very individualistic ones of Borsage, those of Harry Langdon, Buster Keaton, and Eisenstein. Chaplin's early escapades correspond to the second variety, undoubtedly supported by superficial photography; by the ghostly speed of the action; by the actors' false moustaches, foolish artificial beards, mussed wigs, and ominous greatcoats. *City Lights* does not achieve that unreality and it remains unconvincing. Except for the luminous blind woman, who has the extraordinary characteristic of being beautiful, and with the exception of Charlie himself, always so disguised and slight, all of his characters are recklessly normal. His ramshackle argument belongs to the diffuse connecting technique of twenty years ago. Archaism and anachronism are also literary modes, I know; but their deliberate handling is different from their unfortunate perpetration. I relinquish my hope—too often fulfilled—of not being right.

Weariness is also noticeable in Sternberg's *Morocco,* if only to a degree less powerful and suicidal. The tense photography, the exquisite organization, the oblique and yet sufficient method of *Underworld* have been replaced here by the mere accumulation of extras, by the broad brushstrokes of local color. In his desire to express Morocco, Sternberg did not conceive of a less brutal medium than the overworked counterfeiting of a Moorish city in the Hollywood suburbs, with the extravagance of burnooses and fountains and tall guttural muezzins who precede the dawn and the camels with sun. On the other hand, its general argument is good and its clear resolution in the desert, back at the starting point once again, is that of our first *Martín Fierro,* or of the novel *Sanin* by the Russian Arzibashef. *Morocco* can be viewed sympathetically, but not with the intellectual pleasure that one gets from the first viewing (and even the second viewing) of earlier works by Sternberg. Not with the valid intellectual pleasure produced by that heroic film *Dragnet*.

Sur no. 3 (Winter 1931)

Street Scene

Street Scene. *U.S.A., 1931. Director: King Vidor. Script: Elmer Rice. Photography: George Barnes. Production: Samuel Goldwyn. United Artists.*

The Russians discovered that the oblique shot (and, consequently, the deformed shot) of a bottle, a bull's neck, or a column was of greater plastic value than Hollywood's thousand and one extras, quickly gotten up as Assyrians and then shuffled into total confusion by Cecil B. DeMille. They also discovered that the conventions of the Midwest—the merits of accusation and spying, the lasting happiness of marriage, the untouchable purity of prostitutes, the finishing uppercut dealt by a sober young man—could be exchanged for others no less admirable. (Thus, in one of the loftiest Soviet films, a battleship bombards the overstocked port of Odessa at close range, with no casualty other than some marble lions. This harmless marksmanship is occasioned by a virtuous, extremist battleship.)

Such discoveries were proposed to a world saturated to the point of disgust with the emanations of Hollywood. The world respected these discoveries and stretched its gratitude to the point of pretending that Soviet cinema had wiped out American cinema forever. (Those were the years when Alexander Block announced, in the characteristic tone of Walt Whitman, that the Russians were Scythians.) The world forgot or tried to forget that the greatest virtue of Russian film was its interruption of a continuous, Californian regimen. It was forgotten that one could contrast some good or excellent passions (*Ivan the Terrible, Battleship Potemkin*, maybe *October*) to a vast and complex literature, practiced with happy fulfillment in all the genres from the incomparable comic (Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Langdon) to the pure inventions of fantasy: the mythology of Krazy Kat and of Bimbo . . . Alarm at the Russians grew; Hollywood reformed or enriched some of its photographic habits, and did not bother itself greatly.

King Vidor did. I am speaking of the uneven director of works as memorable as *Halelujah* and such unnecessary and trivial ones as *Billy the Kid*, that shameful chronicling of twenty murders (not counting Mexicans) committed by the famous fighter of Arizona, a film made with no other merit than the accumulation of panoramic takes and the methodical elimination of close-ups in order to suggest the desert. His most recent work, *Street Scene*, adapted from the comedy of the same name by the ex-expressionist Elmer Rice, is inspired by the simple, negative desire not to look "standard." It has an unsatisfactory minimum of argument. It has a hero who is virtuous but under the influence of a thug. It has a romantic couple, but any civil or religious union is forbidden to them. It has a glorious, excessive Italian—larger than life—who is evidently responsible for all the comedy in the piece, a man whose limitless unreality also rubs off on his normal colleagues. It has characters who seem true to life; it has others who are in

masquerade. Basically, it is not a realistic work; it is the repression or frustration of a romantic work.

Two great scenes elevate the film: the one of a dawn where the splendid course of the night is epitomized in music; that of the murder, which is indirectly presented to us in the tumult and tempest of the faces.

Excellent actors and photography.

Sur no. 5 (Summer 1932)

The Informer

The Informer. *U.S.A., 1935. Director: John Ford. Script: Dudley Nichols, after the novel by Liam O'Flaherty. Photography: Joseph H. August. RKO-Radio.*

I do not know the popular novel from which this film was taken: a fortunate fault that has allowed me to follow it without the continual temptation to superimpose the present showing on the recalled reading in order to test for coincidences. I have followed it. I judge it one of the best films that this past year has offered us. I judge it too memorable not to provoke a discussion and not to merit a reproach. Various reproaches, really, since it has run the beautiful risk of being entirely satisfactory and, for two or three reasons, has not been.

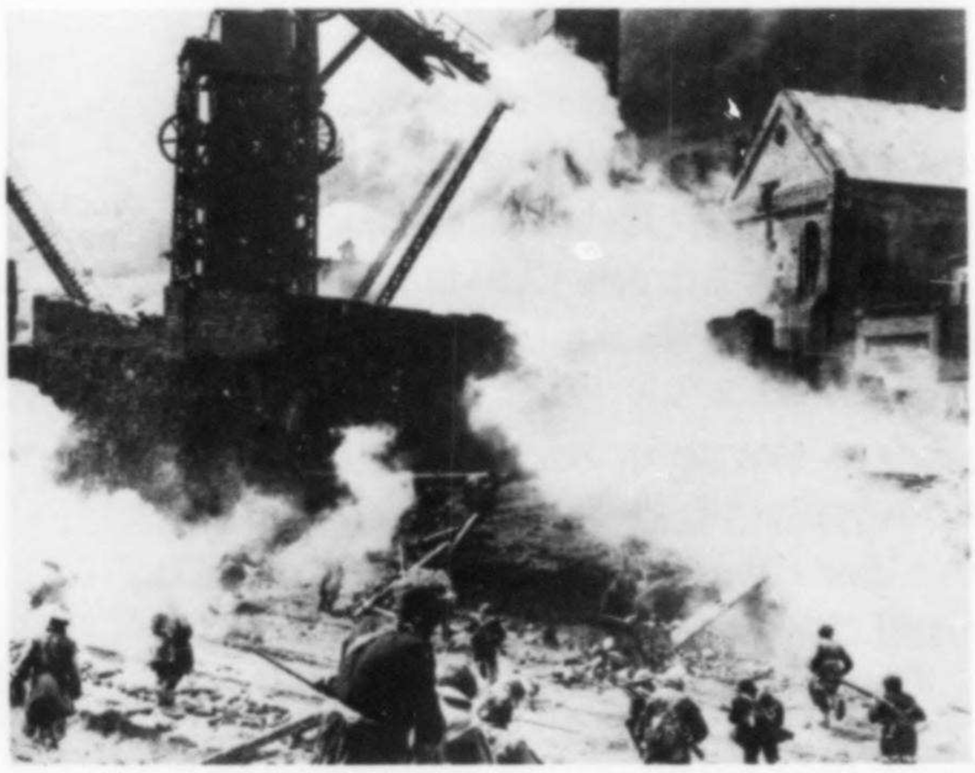
The first is the excessive motivation for the hero's actions. I understand that what they are after is verisimilitude, but film directors—and novelists—are in the habit of forgetting that many justifications (and many circumstantial details) are counterproductive. Reality is not vague, but our general perception of reality is; and here lies the danger in overjustifying actions or in inventing numerous details. In the particular case that I am considering—the man who suddenly becomes Judas, the man who denounces his friend to the machine guns of the police as well as to the scourge of death—the erotic motive that is evoked seems, in some ways, to diminish the felony and its heinous miracle. Infamy committed for amusement, for the mere brutality of infamy, would have been more artistically impressive. I also think that it would have been more accurate. (An excellent film, which is undone by the excessive psychologizing of the motives, is Marcel L'Herbier's *Le Bonheur*.)

Clearly, the plurality of motives in itself does not seem bad to me. I admire the scene where the informer squanders his Judas money because of his triple need to confuse; to bribe the dreadful friends, who are perhaps his judges and will finally be his executioners; and to see himself free of those bank notes that dishonor him.

Another weakness of *The Informer* is that of its beginning and its end. The opening episode seems false. In part, that is due to the too typical, too *European* (in the Californian sense of that word) street that is presented to us. It is undeniable that a street in Dublin is not absolutely equivalent to a street in San Francisco, but it looks more like such a street—in order for both to be authentic—than like an obvious sham, overstocked and weighed down with local color. More than universal similarities, local differences seem to have made a greater impression on Hollywood: there is no American director, confronted with the imaginary problem of showing a railroad crossing in Spain or an uncultivated field in Austro-Hungary, who does not solve it by means of a special reconstruction, whose only merit has to be the ostentation of its expense. As for the ending, I find fault with it for another reason. That the audience is moved by the horrifying fate of the informer seems good to me; that the director of the film is moved and gives him over to a sentimental death with Catholic church windows and organ music seems to me less admirable.

In this film, the merits are less subtle than the faults and do not require emphasizing. Nevertheless, I want one very powerful touch to stand out: the last grating of his nails on the cornice and the disappearance of his hand when the dangling man is machine-gunned and falls to the ground. Of the three tragic unities, two have been observed: the unities of action and time; the neglect of the third, that of place, cannot be a cause for complaint. By its very nature, cinematography seems to reject that third norm and requires continuous displacements. (The dangers of dogmatism: the admirable memory of *Payment Deferred*—divine justice—alerts me to the mistake of generalizing. In that film, the fact that everything takes place in one house, almost in one single room, is a fundamental virtue of the tragedy.)

Sur no. 11 (August 1935)

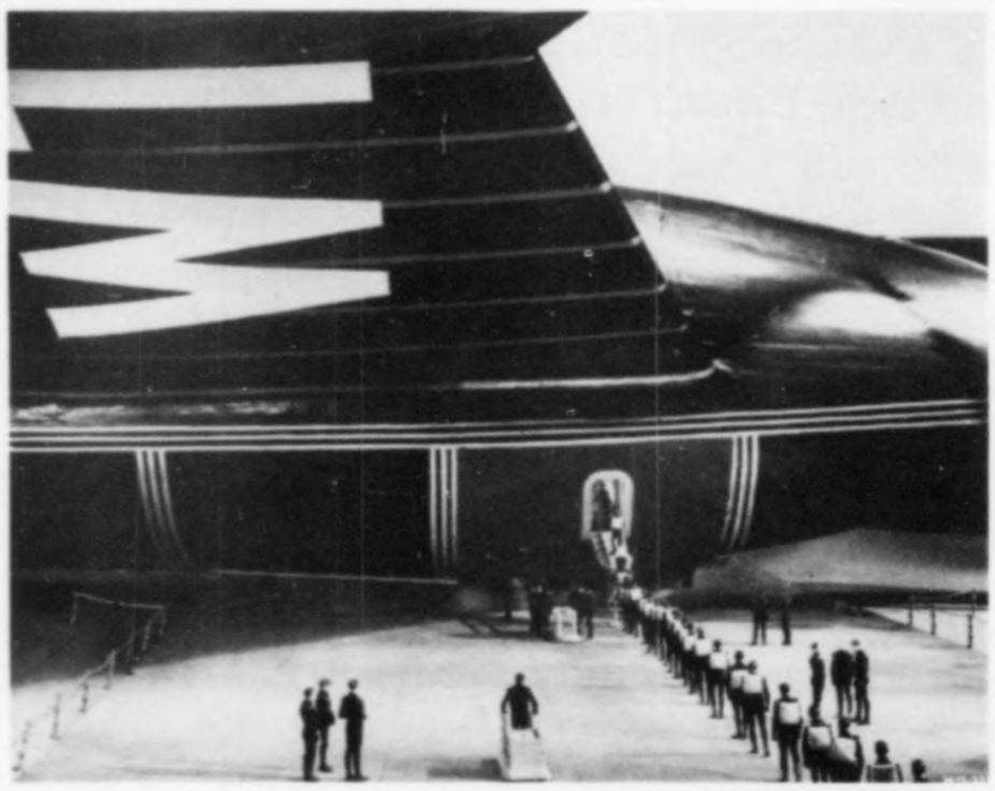


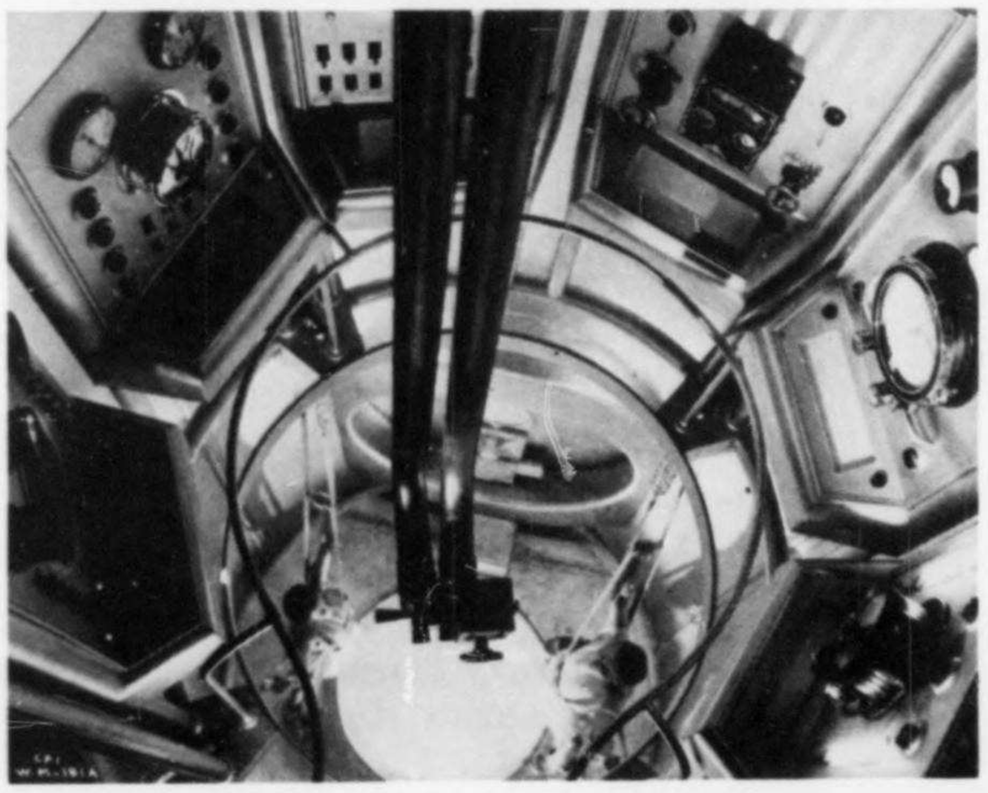
Wells the Visionary

Things to Come. *England, 1936. Director: William Cameron Menzies. Script: H. G. Wells, after his novel* The Shape of Things to Come. *Photography: Georges Perinal. Producer: Alexander Korda. London Film Productions.*

The author of *The Invisible Man, The First Men in the Moon, The Time Machine,* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*—I have cited his best novels, which are certainly not his most recent—has published the detailed text of his recent film, *Things to Come,* in a book of 140 pages. Did he do this, perhaps, in order to disassociate himself a little from that film? In order not to be held responsible for the whole of it? The suspicion is not illegitimate. For the time being, there is an initial chapter of instructions which justifies or tolerates that suspicion. It is written there that the men of the future will not be rigged up as telephone poles nor will they appear to be escapees from an electrical operating room nor will they run from one place to another encased in luminous suits made of cellophane, in glass jars, or in aluminum boilers: "I want Oswald Cabal," Wells writes, "to look like a fine gentleman, not a padded lunatic or an armoured gladiator . . . no nightmare stuff, no jazz. Human affairs in that more organized world will not be hurried, they will not be crowded, there will be more leisure, more dignity. Things, structures, in general, will be greater, yes, but they will not be monstrous."[1] Unfortunately, the grandiose film that we have seen—"grandiose" in the

1. Borges translates from *Things to Come, A Film by H. G. Wells* (New York, 1935). Typically—as his next sentences playfully emphasize—he is quite free with his source. For example, the book is 155 pages long, not 140; the name Oswald Cabal does not appear in the first clause that Borges quotes; the phrase he renders with an initial capital letter as "Nada de jazz ni de artifactos pesadilla" derives from a sentence in Wells that reads: "But, remember, fine clothes, please; not nightmare stuff, not jazz"; the second and third sentences are not contiguous on page xii.—Trans.





William Cameron Menzies. Things to Come. *1936.*

worst sense of that bad word—has very little to do with these intentions. True, there are not a lot of cellophane boilers, aluminum neckties, padded gladiators, or mad men shining in their panoply; but the overall effect (much more important than the details) is "of nightmare stuff." I am not referring to the first part, where the monstrosity is deliberate; I am referring to the last, where order ought to contrast with the bloody jumble of the first, but which not only does not contrast but, rather, exceeds the first in hideousness. Wells starts out by showing us the terrors of the immediate future, visited with plagues and bombardments; this exposition is very effective. (I recall a clear sky darkened and stained by airplanes as obscene and pestilential as locusts.) Then—I will tell it in the author's words—"the film broadens out to display the grandiose spectacle of a reconstructed world." That "broadening out" is rather unfortunate; the heaven of Alexander Korda and Wells, like that of so many other eschatologists and scenographers, is not very different from their hell, and it is even less charming.

Another comparison: the book's memorable lines do not correspond—can not correspond—to the film's memorable moments. On page 19, Wells writes that "A rapid succession of flashes evoke the confused inadequate efficiency of our world."[2] As could be foreseen, the contrast of the words "confusion" and "efficiency" (not to mention the judgment in the epithet "inadequate") has not been translated into images. On page 56, Wells says of the masked aviator, Cabal, "He stands out against the sky, a tall portent."[3] The sentence is beautiful; its photographic version is not. (Even if it had been, it could never have corresponded to the sentence since the arts of rhetoric and cinema—oh, classic ghost of Efraim Lessing!—are absolutely incomparable.) On the other hand, there are successful sequences which owe nothing at all to the indications of the text.

Tyrants offend Wells but laboratories please him, hence his forecasts that scientists will join together in order to unite a world wrecked by tyrants. Thus far, reality does not resemble his prophecy: in 1936, almost all the tyrants' power derives from their control of technology. Wells reveres chauffeurs and aviators; the tyrannical occupation of Abyssinia was the work of aviators and chauffeurs—and the fear, perhaps a bit mythological, of Hitler's depraved laboratories.

I have found fault with the film's second half; I insist on praising the first, with its wholesome effect for those people who still imagine war as a romantic cavalcade or a chance for wonderful picnics and free tourism.

Sur no. 26 (November 1936)

2. Borges distorts the English text in order to make its opening mesh with his own syntax; his translation omits the phrase "multitudinousness, the hurry and" which follows the word "evoke" in Wells's text. (Characteristically, Borges's suppression gives greater force to the subsequent oxymoron.) The quotation comes from page 3, not 19. On page 19, however, there is a sentence with an opening similar to the one on page 3.—Trans.

3. The sentence that Borges translates is on page 51, not 50, and while his translation is quite faithful, he refers to Cabal as "enmascarado" without explaining that the mask in question is a futuristic gas mask.—Trans.

Two Films

Sabotage. *England, 1936. Director: Alfred Hitchcock. Script: Charles Bennett, after "The Secret Agent," the novela by Joseph Conrad adapted by Alma Reville. Dialogue: Ian Hay, Helen Simpson, E. V. H. Emmett. Photography: Bernard Knowles. Producers: Michael Balcon, Ivor Montagu. Gaumont British.*

Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina. *Argentina, 1937. Director, script: Manuel Romero. Photography: Francisco Mugica. Lumiton.*

I have seen two films on consecutive nights. The first—in both senses of the word—"is inspired by Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*." The director himself asserts that. I have to confess that without him I would have hit upon the connection he points out but not on the respiratory and divine verb *inspire*. Skillful photography, clumsy cinematography—those are dispassionate judgments that this most recent film by Alfred Hitchcock "inspires" in me. As for Joseph Conrad . . . It is indisputable that, setting aside various deformations, the story of the film *Sabotage* (1936) coincides with the facts in the story of *The Secret Agent* (1907); it is also indisputable that the actions narrated by Conrad have a psychological value—*only* have a psychological value. Conrad proposes to our understanding the destiny and character of Mr. Verloc, a lazy, fat, and sentimental man who comes to "crime" by the process of confusion and fear; Hitchcock prefers to translate him into an inscrutable Slavo-Germanic devil. An almost prophetic passage in *The Secret Agent* invalidates and refutes that translation: "But there was also about him an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the practice of his handicraft however dishonestly exercised: the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling halls and disorderly houses; to private detectives and inquiry agents; to drink sellers and, I should say, to the sellers of invigorating electric belts and to the inventors of patent medicines. But of that last I am not sure, not having carried my investigations so far into the depths. For all I know, the expression of these last may be perfectly diabolic. I shouldn't be surprised. What I want to affirm is that Mr. Verloc's expression was by no means diabolic."[4] Hitchcock has chosen to spurn that warning. I do not deplore his strange infidelity; I deplore the petty task in which he has engaged himself. Conrad gives us a complete understanding of a man who causes the death of a child; Hitchcock dedicates his art (and the slanting, sorrowful eyes of Sylvia Sidney) to making that death move us. The undertaking of the one was intellectual; that of the other is barely sentimental. That is not all: the film—oh

4. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, New York, 1907. Borges's translation is accurate except for the omission of the initial conjunction and of the entire phrase following "there was" up to "the common to men. . . ."—Trans.

consummating, insipid horror—adds an amorous episode whose protagonists, no less chaste than enamoured, are the martyred Mrs. Verloc and a dapper, graceful detective, disguised as a greengrocer.

The other film is informatively called *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* (The Boys of Yesteryear Did Not Use Hair Tonic). (There are informative titles that are beautiful: *The General Died at Dawn.*) This film—*Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina*—is unquestionably one of the best Argentine films that I have seen, which is to say, one of the worst films in the world. The dialogue is totally incredible. The characters—doctors, toughs, and bullies of 1906—speak and live as a function of their difference from the people of 1937. They have no existence beyond that of local color and the color of time. There is a fistfight and another fight with knives. The actors neither know how to play patty cake nor how to box, which dims those spectacles a bit.

The theme—the "moral nihilism" or the progressive going soft of Buenos Aires—is, definitely, attractive. The film's director wastes it. The hero, who ought to be emblematic of the old virtues—and of the old incredulity—is a citizen of Buenos Aires who has already been Italianized, a man completely susceptible to the shameful motives of apocryphal patriotism and the sentimental tango.

Sur no. 31 (April 1937)

An Overwhelming Film

Citizen Kane. *U.S.A., 1941. Director, producer: Orson Welles. Script: Orson Welles, Herman J. Mankiewicz. Photography: Gregg Toland. RKO Pictures.*

Citizen Kane (whose title in Argentina is "The Citizen") has at least two arguments. The first, of an almost banal imbecility, wants to bribe the applause of the very unobservant. It can be formulated in this way: a vain millionaire accumulates statues, orchards, palaces, swimming pools, diamonds, cars, libraries, men and women. Like an earlier collector (whose observations are traditionally attributed to the Holy Ghost), he discovers that these miscellanies and plethoras are vanity of vanities and that all is vanity. At the moment of his death, he yearns for one single thing in the universe: a fittingly humble sled he played with as a child! The second argument is far superior. It links Koheleth to the memory of another nihilist: Franz Kafka. The theme (at once metaphysical and detective-fictional, at once psychological and allegorical) is the investigation of the secret soul of a man through the works he has made, the words he has spoken, the many destinies he has smashed. The procedure is that of Joseph Conrad in *Chance* (1914) and of the beautiful film *The Power and the Glory*: a rhapsody of

heterogeneous scenes, not in chronological order. Overwhelmingly, infinitely, Orson Welles shows fragments of the life of the man, Charles Foster Kane, and invites us to combine them and to reconstruct them. The film teems with the forms of multiplicity, of incongruity: the first scenes record the treasures accumulated by Kane; in one of the last scenes, a poor woman, gaudy and suffering, plays with an enormous jigsaw puzzle on the floor of a palace that is also a museum. At the end, we understand that the fragments are not governed by a secret unity: the detested Charles Foster Kane is a simulacrum, a chaos of appearances. (A possible corollary, foreseen by David Hume, by Ernst Mach, and by our Macedonio Fernandez: no man knows who he is; no man is anyone.) In one of Chesterton's stories—"The Head of Caesar," I think—the hero observes that nothing is so frightening as a labyrinth without a center. This film is precisely that labyrinth.

We all know that a party, a palace, a great undertaking, a lunch for writers and journalists, an atmosphere of frank and spontaneous friendship are essentially horrible. *Citizen Kane* is the first film that shows these things with some awareness of this truth.

Orson Welles, Citizen Kane. *1941*.

In general, the film's execution is worthy of the vast argument. There are shots with admirable depth, shots whose farthest planes (as in the paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites) are no less precise and minute than the closest.

Nevertheless, I dare to guess that *Citizen Kane* will endure as certain of the films by Griffith or by Pudovkin have "endured"—films whose historical value no one denies but which no one is resigned to seeing again. *Citizen Kane* suffers from gigantism, from pedantry, from tediousness. It is not intelligent, it is genial: in the most nocturnal and Germanic sense of that bad word.

Sur no. 83 (August 1941)

Two Films

Now Voyager. *U.S.A., 1942. Director: Irving Rapper. Script: Casey Robinson, after the novela by Olive Higgins Prouty. Photography: Sol Polito. Producer: Hal B. Wallis. Warner Brothers.*

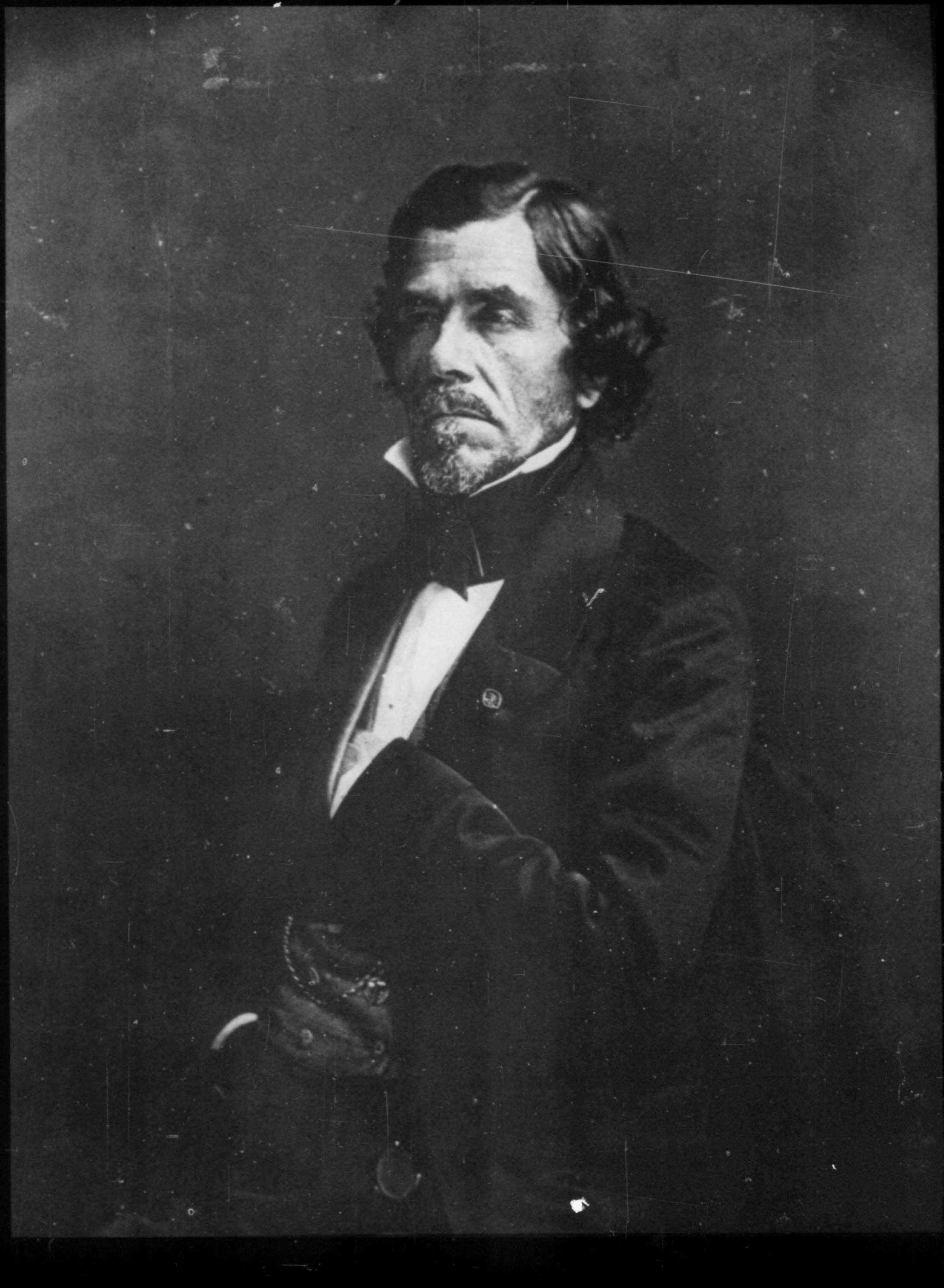
Nightmare. *U.S.A., 1942. Director: Tim Whelan. Script: Dwight Taylor, from an idea by Philip MacDonald. Photography: Georges Barnes. Producer: Dwight Taylor. Universal Pictures.*

They say that the doctrine of the transmigration of souls and of circular time or the Eternal Return were inspired by paramnesia, by a disturbing and sudden impression of having already lived the present moment. In Buenos Aires, at 6:30 p.m. and at 10:45 p.m., there is not a single movie-goer, however forgetful he might be, who does not know that impression. For many years, Hollywood, like the Greek tragedians, has stuck, in effect, to ten or twelve arguments: the aviator who, by means of a convenient catastrophe, dies in order to save the friend whom his wife loves; the deceitful typist who does not refuse the gifts of furs, apartments, tiaras, and cars but who slaps or kills the giver when he "goes too far"; the unspeakable and renowned reporter who seeks the friendship of a gangster with the sole motive of betraying him and making him die on the gallows . . . The latest victim of this disconcerting asceticism is Miss Bette Davis. They have made her act out this romance: a woman, weighed down by a pair of spectacles and a tyrannical mother, considers herself insipid and ugly; a psychiatrist (Claude Rains) persuades her to vacation among palm trees, to practice tennis, to visit Brazil, to take off the spectacles, to change dressmakers. The five-part treatment works: the captain of the ship bringing her home repeats with obvious truthfulness that not one of the other women on board has had Miss Davis's success. Before this endorsement, a niece, previously formidable in her sarcasm, now sobbingly

begs forgiveness. Then the film's bold thesis spreads throughout the most distant moviehouses: *Disfigured, Miss Davis is less beautiful.* The deformed comedy that I have summarized is called *Now Voyager*; it was directed by a certain Irving Rapper, who, quite possibly, is not an imbecil. Unfortunately, this is how they degrade the heroine of *The Little Foxes, The Letter, Of Human Bondage.*

Less ambitious and more tolerable is the film *Nightmare.* It begins as a detective film; it does not delay in lapsing into an irresponsible adventure film. It suffers from all the defects of both genres; it has the sole virtue of not belonging to the *genre ennuyeux.* Its argument is one of those that has surprised every spectator hundreds of times: the duel of a straightforward girl and an average man with the all-powerful and malicious society that was China before the war and now is the Gestapo or the international spies of the Third Reich. Two purposes spur the unfortunate directors of such films: the first is to show that the Orientals (or the Prussians) combine the perfection of evil with the perfections of intelligence and treachery; the second, to show that there is no man of good will who does not succeed in outwitting them. Inevitably, these incompatible propositions cancel each other. Various and impending dangers threaten the heroine and hero. These perils turn out to be imaginary and ineffectual since the spectators know very well that the film has to last for an hour—a famous fact that guarantees the heroes a longevity or immortality of sixty minutes. Another convention that invalidates pictures of this kind is the superhuman courage of the protagonists; it is announced to them that they are going to die, and they smile. The audience smiles too.

Sur no. 103 (April 1943)



Reading Delacroix's *Journal*

HUBERT DAMISCH

translated by RICHARD MILLER

To someone reading Delacroix's *Journal*, whether for the first time or returning to it after twenty years, as I have just done, I suggest the following experiment: read it not by dipping into it casually, but as it should be read, from start to finish (perhaps this pertains even more to a second reading, as we shall see). Allow the text to unfold, page by page, not seeking out the high points, even though this may mean that, accustomed as we may think we are nowadays to compact labyrinths of analytical language and its literary equivalents, Proustian or otherwise, you will occasionally find yourself marking time along the thin thread of memory the author was trying to stretch throughout his days. (But is this not, after all, the law of the genre, the essence of any so-called intimate journal, no matter what kind of intimacy it makes public?) Then, having progressed fairly far beyond the "early journal," interrupt the reading to contemplate some of the photographs of Delacroix that are available to us. I emphasize photographs, not portraits painted or drawn by friends, nor one of his self-portraits. Photographs, with all the "reality" that process implies. And to begin with, the famous 1842 daguerreotype, which, compared to the later, carefully posed portrait by Nadar, looks like a picture for an identity card (owing perhaps to the somewhat raffish appearance the painter has assumed, down to the striped shawl—or rather, scarf—he sports with a bit too much distinction. Théophile Gautier spoke more nobly of "a physiognomy of a shy, strange, exotic, almost disturbing beauty: one might say an Indian maharajah who had received a polished education in Calcutta"). Photographs, then—and there are others: for example, the seemingly candid one taken by Légé and Bergeron, or the more posed one taken by Pierre Petit, both of which date from 1862, a year before the painter's death—as if the occasion had been seized upon because of that proximity.

For my part, the experience causes some distress, even a kind of discomfort, not to say uneasiness, if I am to trust a resistance that repetition of the experiment has not managed to dispel. I should like to know if this reaction is peculiar to me, having to do with the very special and contradictory, if not conflicting, relationship I have always had, for as long as I have been interested in painting, with

Nadar. Eugène Delacroix. *1858*.

Delacroix's painting (the *Journal* is another matter: the text is not at all *disturbing*, and I know few with which I have felt so immediately attuned). As though I were expecting some counterproof that would allow me to decide that this is a general question: would it be different with Gide or Kafka? That remains *to be seen*.

The adaptation of some famous novel to the screen can cause the same kind of distress: No, the actor doesn't look right for the part; I didn't envisage Fabrice or Humbert Humbert that way. And yet here, once again, the medium is so powerful that such overly vivid counterparts *must* constrain, to a greater or lesser degree, my reading. For did I see Fabrice, H. H., when I was reading the *Charterhouse of Parma* or *Lolita* (and Delacroix in his *Journal*)? My "deception" (in the sense of some trickery lurking in the background) is clearly caused less, in this case, by some error with regard to the person, than by a surreptitious sliding from one register of the Imaginary to another through an excess of focus (not to mention the framing imposed by the camera). Thus, an uneasiness analogous to that uneasiness which creeps into memory because of the datum offered by a photograph, whether of someone who has passed away or whom one has *lost sight of*; or by the reproduction of a picture: how can that image screen memory to the point that memory is obliterated and the image takes its place? How, if not that the image, the photographic reproduction, filters, condenses, and fixes a henceforth easily manoeuverable fact that memory now need only store, as a computer stores a tape or a perforated card? Recollection, when it does not pass through the medium of an image, does not have this consistency, drawn as it is out of the vast drift of memory (of which Bergson held the Imaginary to be the reverse side).

But reading? If reading is in a way like dreaming, if it entails the creation of fragments of images and thoughts, then it is essential to the operation of the text and its inscription in memory, if not in the Imaginary, that such images and thoughts not take on a set contour too quickly, but that on the contrary they preserve a certain *vagueness*—to use Delacroix's vocabulary—something of the sketch, the draft. And as for the descriptions we read in books, these might in the end be aimed merely at confusing or misleading the imagination, taking it to the threshold of the image (*picture* might be a better word) and leaving it there in suspense. In the same way that the painter on occasion will not shrink from overtly exciting the viewer's libido the better to involve him in the painting, in its deepest illusion ("Our arts are nothing but temptations to passion. All those naked women in pictures. . . "). This experience is banal, obviously, but I owe its revelation to Delacroix, to the time when, as a child, I was taken to the museum for the first time and was able to contemplate, with deep emotion, the *Massacre at Chios* and *The Death of Sardanapalus*. Today, when I look at *The Algerian Women*, I am acutely aware of what my extreme pleasure owes, by displacement, to that childhood experience. To the point that it colors, by condensation (all the elements are present: women in a hermetically sealed room, hangings and carpets, porcelain tiles, the coiled earring—a "point of light" as Delacroix would say—

which is also the soft spot of the picture), my memory of some painting by Vermeer, to which I am tempted to compare it.

Delacroix's *Journal* partakes of this same kind of deception: the deception of desire, but also of memory, of imagination. Much has been written about the forms and status of the intimate journal as a literary genre and on the contradiction set up by the relationship between the project or fiction of a *private* composition and its publication, whether intended by the author or not. Delacroix's *Journal* participates in this contradiction: "What I most want is not to lose sight of the fact that I am writing for myself alone; so I shall tell the truth, I hope." This formula is typical of a painter, appealing as it does to sight as a recognized authority. But we also have the evident paradox of a view that is so perfectly solipsistic that it seems to exclude any possibility of shifting from one point of view to another, and at the outset from the subject to the vanishing point. Unless the author assumes the allocutory mode ("Enough of *Don Quixote* and things unworthy of you. Meditate deeply before painting and think only of Dante"). The reader, however, has no other way of escaping that isolated "I" than to catch it in its own trap, or to flush it out by regarding the text as a document. Let us say at the outset that the truth and sincerity after which the young Delacroix strove (he was twenty-four when he first undertook "the oft-planned project of keeping a journal") are in no way confessional, which implies that someone is listening. Therefore it is all the more meaningful that specialists regard the successive editions of the *Journal* above all as an opportunity to try to shed light on some of the secrets, not to mention mysteries, that can be glimpsed here and there: mystery of birth (was Delacroix really the son of the man he referred to somewhat over-emphatically as his "worthy" or—in his *Correspondence*—his "admirable and respectable" father?); love affairs that were supposed to be secret, although in a way almost everything on this subject is revealed in the *Journal*. For if Delacroix was a man with desires and considerable ardor, at least in his youth (even though, as we shall see, certain "fiascos" upset him), he systematically avoided passionate love ("Unhappy creature! And what if I should conceive a real passion for a woman!"). Where intimate journals are concerned, indiscretion is the rule. And it is up to the reader to supplement the author when the latter shows too much restraint.

It is precisely as some calculated indiscretion, but not of the same order as in a detective story, that I regard the experiment I was talking about: the interruption of the reading of the *Journal* at a certain point to call photography to bear witness. Certainly I can invent reasons for the resistance that experiment gave rise to in my case: for example, I may have been displeased by the author's appearance, above all his type, half art student, half academician, too much like those elements that I don't much appreciate in his painting. But beyond that reaction, which is not exclusively the result of good faith, it seems to me that such resistance is also due to less trivial motives, that it has a wider meaning and import. In fact, it appears that the photograph, by imposing a displacement of perspective, intrudes in order to break the circle in which we are quite willingly caught.

Reading the intimate journal of a writer gives us the illusion that we are reaching the man behind the author. In the case of Delacroix's *Journal*, that illusion is intensified by the fact that this is not a writer's journal, but that of an artist, of a man who has produced not only writing, but painting. Painters' journals are more precious not only because there are fewer of them, but above all, as Delacroix notes, because in a painting *the author is not present*. Not, at least, as the writer is in his books, the orator in his speeches. A linguist would say that in painting it is not possible to separate the subject of the utterance from the utterance itself. However, a painting is not a discursive act, and that holds true even though Delacroix's work is all too bound up with literature. In this connection it is symptomatic that French contains only the term *spectateur* to refer to the addressee, unless he is reduced to an "amateur." A painting exhibits itself, offers itself to vision, to perception in a way that immediately contradicts the structures of speech, its modalities. The brushstroke, which is said to be the mark of subjectivity in painting, communicates only the trace of some activity. Question: in painting, what would be the equivalent of an interrogative proposition, a negative, a first-person utterance (the question of the self-portrait)?

A painter's journal admits us into the presence of an author of works from which he is absent and that are like stops along an itinerary, the key to which we expect the text to give us; through it the spectator escapes having to make his own way through painting without being conducted by the author, following the thread of his discourse, his narrative. The temptation is great, therefore, greater than with a writer's journal, to make the author into an object of desire—at the risk, as Barthes points out, of coming to prefer the person to his work. But the man whose path we follow through Delacroix's *Journal*, enjoying its intimacy, appears only in the first person, without being, seemingly, aware of his Self. ("I am a man. Who is this *I*? What is a *man*?"—this written the day following Géricault's death). A person, if you will, but a person who appears primarily in grammatical form, as the subject of a discourse who, by intending to be private, deprives himself of relationship to another, a relationship which nevertheless constitutes all discourse: the other who is necessarily not there, who will always be absent, since he can only appear and intervene in the third person, unlike the *Correspondence*, which the *Journal* frequently and no less symptomatically resembles from time to time ("One of the greatest sorrows is never to be known and sensed whole by one single man; and when I think of that, I believe that that must be life's greatest blow: this inevitable solitude to which the heart is condemned"). Whence the fascinating, and fascinated, symmetry set up, through the journal form, between the status of the author and that of the reader: the author writing, or pretending to write, for himself alone; the reader for whom the convention provides the advantage of being allowed access to an unshared intimacy, while his desire is increased by the narcissistic position in which his object seems to reveal himself.

We know that Freud regarded cats, and children, as symbols of total narcissism, as well as fantasmatic objects of desire. Baudelaire believed that there was something feline about Delacroix: "The tiger, alert for its prey, has less light in its eyes, its muscles quiver less significantly, than our great painter when his whole soul was concentrated on some idea or desirous of capturing some dream." (The *Journal* does not tell us whether Delacroix associated cats with dogs and children, which he regarded as "episodic creatures.") Baudelaire also felt himself transported by the "over-all color" of Delacroix's paintings (or was it by the tropical temperature he tells us prevailed in his studio?) to some "intertropical" landscape.

The reader of the *Journal* does not experience these transports, in which the exoticism (another form of a wished-for otherness) that Delacroix continually sought in his painting plays so large a part. He is no less prey to the Imaginary, to a fantasm of desire. And that is why he feels uncomfortable, if my own experience is to be trusted, when confronted with the reality forced upon him by the photograph when it intrudes into his desire. An intrusion that affects me like an indiscretion, as well as an unbearable injury to the memory of the *Journal*'s author. And it is not so much that the image (I am thinking of the 1842 daguerreotype) doesn't fit what Delacroix tells us about his "physical meagreness" (and Baudelaire: "He was all energy, but it was a nervous energy, and energy of the will, for physically he was frail and delicate"). In this connection, the 1862 photograph by Légé and Bergeron showing us a fragile, almost worn-out man would better fulfil my expectations. When I speak of the author's memory, I mean to imply no fidelity, not to mention celebration, but merely the concern to conserve what to my mind the—immense—value of Delacroix's *Journal* represents, even more, perhaps, than his painting: a—senseless—desire for memory, the desire that alone could realize the idea of a painting that, like a dream, would be the "memory of another life."

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Having set out to investigate the role assigned to Delacroix by Providence and the "special function" he was to perform in the historical development of painting—a project, we should note in passing, that involved a whole philosophy of painting and its history and which not surprisingly came to nothing—Baudelaire somewhat cautiously comes up with the word *mnemotechnics*: "Delacroix's work sometimes seems to me to be a kind of mnemotechnics of the grandeur and passion of universal man." Where grandeur is concerned, we learn from the *Journal* that the young Delacroix sought to act as a memorialist and to make a connection between his own glory and his concern for that of others: "I have strived, or rather, my energy has strived, in another direction: I shall be the

herald for those who will do great things." Fine, but the age was not propitious, that century whose pettiness and vulgarity, whose lack of the *ideal*, is constantly being denounced in the *Journal*. Nevertheless, the youth feels a "desire for the painting of the century" and to "paint great pictures," a desire that makes him cast his thoughts back to the life of Napoleon, "teeming with motifs," which seems to him to have been the "epic of our century for all the arts." There are also more obscure heroes, no less deserving of a herald: Captain Roquebert, who had himself nailed to a plank and cast overboard, arms and legs shot off: "*A subject to be handed down, a great name to be rescued from oblivion.*"

Were it not for this note in the *Journal*, Roquebert's name would have vanished from men's minds. As for the "subject," we shall never know the events that led to the brave captain's destruction, his reduction, if I may be permitted the term, to such extremities: the *Journal* tells us nothing more about it than the painting would have, had Delacroix followed through with this project. Napoleon is another matter: the subject did not require transmission, the name did not need to be rescued from oblivion. The temper of the times—we are in 1824—would have tended rather to the reverse, to attempt to eradicate his memory. That did not unduly hamper Delacroix: and, indeed, aside from the *Massacre* and *Liberty on the Barricades*, we do not find him overly preoccupied with the history of his century. If he employed mnemotechnics, it was primarily for internal use. The early journal in fact shows him constantly troubled by his *defective memory*: "My memory fails me so badly day by day that I am no longer in command of anything, neither the past, which I forget, nor scarcely of the present, when I am almost always so busy with one thing that I lose sight of, or fear losing sight of, what I should be doing, nor even of the future, since I am never confident that I haven't already planned something. . . . A man without memory doesn't know what he can count on, everything betrays him." And things don't seem to have improved later on.

Thus, the *Journal* served as a memorandum—primarily for painting. From the first day, he relies upon it to remind him of ideas he has had, at his brother's in the country, about what he wanted to do "to keep busy" once he was back in Paris, and the ideas he has had about "subjects for pictures." Until the end, the year before his death, we can find in the *Journal* lists of "subjects," often simply titles, sometimes accompanied by a brief description of the scene or an indication of some vein to be explored ("Do a few subjects on the Inquisition"). But there are also plans for studies ("I must absolutely set myself to drawing horses. Go to a stable every morning") and for reading ("Re-read *Jerusalem*"); there are technical notes ("Paint with short, small brushes. Avoid oil washes"; until his study of Rubens revealed the advantages of a brush that more quickly gave the "impression of finish," where "brushstrokes leave marks that are impossible to conceal"); and there are abundant notes dealing with the correct mixing of colors, the simultaneous building up of halftones, with glazes, with preparing backgrounds, with organizing a palette (the most striking example undoubtedly being the notes made in January 1853 for a "Spanish picture"); and, finally, the register of his output

that includes, as an appetizing annex, the unique example of a "log" for a picture, the *Massacre at Chios*, about which the *Journal* reveals all the adjustments and successive changes of direction made during the weeks and months Delacroix worked on it.

A memorandum, then, and perhaps more: a concerted artifice, the material substitute for faulty memory by a man who expected the daily exercise of writing if only a few lines in his diary to help him retain something of the events or ideas he noted down in it. A man who saw his journal-keeping as his only sure hold on his life, his past, his history. In April 1824, a year after his first return to the task he had abandoned after a few weeks, Delacroix takes stock:

> I have just skimmed through the foregoing. It seems to me that I am still master of the days I have written down, even though they are gone. But those that the paper omits to mention are as if they had never been. Into what shadows am I plunged? Must a pitiful, fragile piece of paper, because of my human failing, be the only monument to my existence I possess? The future is completely dark. The past that no longer exists, the same. I pity myself for having to have to rely on this, but why must I always be roused to indignation by my failings? Can I spend a day without sleeping, without eating? That takes care of the body. But my mind and the history of my soul—all that will then be wiped out because I am unwilling to owe what I manage to retain of it to some obligation to write it down. On the contrary, it's a good thing, being forced to have a small task that must be performed each day. A set occupation at fixed times in a life gives order to all the rest of that life: everything begins to revolve around it. By conserving the memory of my experiences, I can see doubly: the past will return. The future will always be there.

Thirty years later (seven years after returning to his journal, this time for good), we have the same litany: "It seems to me that these hastily written trifles are all that is left me of my life as it slips away. My defective memory makes them needful to me."

It might be objected that all this is extremely banal, and that, among the motives brought forth to justify keeping a private journal, the desire to arrest the flow of time is among the most common. And the same goes for the notion of making that daily exercise the tool of some moral reform ("I will grow better for it. This paper will reproach me for my vacillations"). In this connection, it should be noted that despite his stated purpose of writing only for himself, the first pages of the *Journal* reveal that its author did not easily adapt to the solitude that gave rise to that decision. He begins the *Journal* at his brother's, on September 3rd, 1822. It takes him two days to recall that that was the anniversary of his mother's death (had he forgotten?) and to turn his mind to it in terms that amply demonstrate the limits of his "truthful" undertaking: "May her shade be present when I write here and may nothing herein make her blush for her son!" On

September 12th, a conversation with his brother about their father impels him to state his principles: "Think of your father and overcome your vacillations." The next month, on October 22nd, he appeals to the Supreme Judge: "Oh, if you can believe with all the forces of your being in this God who invented duty, your irresolutions will be made firm." Three days later, the *Journal* breaks off without any warning. When Delacroix returns to it in April 1823, after a six-month hiatus, there will be no more question of God, nor of his "worthy" father, his "beloved" mother. The only tribunal before which he will henceforth feel he must render an accounting, his only recourse against his lapses of memory, is now the paper which he makes the depository of the aspirations of his superego: "Today I made several good resolutions. May this paper, at least, if not my memory, reproach me should I forget them."

Like memory, the *Journal* has its "lapses." If we include the first hiatus I mentioned (which we know corresponded to a particularly agitated period in the painter's life, his affair with the mistress of his friend Soulier, who was away from Paris at the time, Delacroix's return to the *Journal* coinciding with the return of the temporarily absent third party), what Joubin calls the *journal de jeunesse* covers a little more than two years, from 1822 to 1824. The "mature journal" is of another order of importance, since it stretches from January 1847 virtually until the painter's death. The twenty-two-year interval (longer than the actual *Journal*) separating these two very unequal sections has its own eloquence. As does the fact that on that day in January 1847 when Delacroix, returning from a long stroll across Paris, opened a new notebook; he says nothing at all about the journal of his youth or about all the years that must therefore exist "as if they had never been." What is more, he again obeys the implicit rule of the genre, which holds that no one sets out to keep a journal without some attempt at self-justification. This time, it is not a matter of moral reform, of struggling against dissipation and vulgar distractions, of no longer *vacillating*. Delacroix has gone beyond that: he has taken his own side so thoroughly that he now plans to *take pleasure above all in the self*: "It's a voluptuousness of mind, a combination of calmness and ardor that the passions cannot provide."[1] From the notebook he has acquired that very day, he expects no more than a supplementary *jouissance* that will be due solely

1. The *Correspondance* makes no mystery of the fact that Delacroix regarded his masculine friendships as a kind of rampart against the encroachments of the opposite sex. "Is this not like the letter of a mistress to her lover, or vice-versa?" (to J. B. Pierret, October 20, 1820; *Correspondance générale*, Paris, 1967, I, p. 91). "We'll jerk off furiously, won't we, rather than allow one of those pretty feet, truly so charming, so suggestive, of one of those skirted monsters to cross our thresholds" (to Charles Soulier, 1829; *Lettres intimes*, Paris, 1954, p. 168). If the *Soulier* (slipper) is intended to shoe the foot, Delacroix, in his desire for erotic autarchy, goes on to dream of dildoes: "This very night, I dreamt that she [George Sand] gave me as a gift a tiny hand made of some charming substance like flesh, but not flesh at all . . . this hand responded to pressure, it was in a word endowed with feeling, and there I stayed with the hand of my dream. When I awoke, I thought to myself how useful a toy like that would be when traveling" (to Madame de Forget, August 4, 1848; *Correspondance*, II, pp. 354–355).

to the operation of memory: "May I henceforth often take stock of my impressions! I will often find herein those benefits to be gained by jotting down one's impressions and examining them thoroughly by recalling them."

This motif was introduced in the early journal, which from the outset proceeded under the aegis of memory and its varied play: "Although today I am happy, I no longer feel as I did yesterday evening." There follows a description of that evening, delicious hours passed sitting on the bench before his brother's house. Delacroix examines a few "strokes" of Michelangelo, and the sight of that "great drawing" moves him and disposes him to "favorable emotions." He hears the voice of Lisette, the maid he had tried to kiss two days before. A remembrance he already knows will not haunt him in any passionate way, but that will remain like a flower in his path and in his memory. Including the very sound of that voice, reminding him of a young English girl "whose memory is beginning to fade." He was unable to resist consecrating the memory of that evening, that pleasure, in his album with a drawing of the simple view he had enjoyed while seated on that bench where he had felt such well-being. But that was only a beginning, and the exercise would have no meaning were it not further pursued: "I hope to go as deeply as I can into my ideas and my former blisses. But in God's name, I must go on!"

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Thus, we must see the *Journal* as something more than a document whose gaps can be filled in by the *Correspondence*, and be aware, while reading it, of the movement of a memory seeking not only to reassure itself by confiding to paper the ideas that it fears will escape it, but which is, moreover, perhaps aspiring to the impossible. In it, Delacroix reveals himself haunted by the plan of a mnemotechnics (the word is very apt) that will augment the operation of perception and develop it, amplify it, deepen it, so that memory will be equal to the *impression*, although memory—as Freud noted—never yields anything but more or less faded souvenirs, more or less lacking, if compared to actual perceptions, any sensual quality, cleansed of the least affect. However, if perceptions retain nothing of the modifications to which they are submitted, if perception is itself without memory, how can we hope to fix the sensation, not to mention the affects, that accompany it? When he attempts this in his journal, the young Delacroix laments, "Forgetfulness of the sensual enjoyments to which every incident gives rise, for a vivid imagination, is instantaneous. As I write, my thoughts escape me. A spiritual sloth, a laziness of the mind, its weakness worse than the slowness of the pen or the insufficiency of language." For if keeping a register of his thoughts as well as his feelings, of his sensual pleasures, is difficult (unless it is merely a detailed accounting, as in the early journal: "Today Emilie. *Due chiavature. . . ossia una prima, poi una . . . 5 fr.*"), it was not, at least in Delacroix's, a *literary* problem. In 1853, when he began to make notes for a study

of Poussin, he remarked that he "did not experience, far from it, the same difficulty in writing that [he] found in painting [his] pictures." "This fiendish craft demands a greater application than I am used to devoting to painting, and yet I write with great ease."

Does this mean that for Delacroix language represented the natural vehicle for thought, as it did for memory, and that he should be included among those "jacks of all trades" he mocked in his youth: those painters who hold forth at the Academy, thinking themselves poets, logicians, orators?[2] In his early letters he is more concerned with words and rhymes than with lines and colors, taking the trouble despite the idleness of vacation to do a bit of Latin and to translate Dante or Shakespeare. And as for the journal of 1824, it is touched with an intense yearning for poetry, *poetry that is like memory regained*: "It's torture to feel and to imagine so much, when the memory lets it evaporate away bit by bit. How I should like to be a poet! Everything would be an inspiration to me. Attempting to struggle against my recalcitrant memory—might not that be a way to create poetry? For what is my status? I imagine. Thus it is mere laziness with regard to digging out and recapturing the idea that escapes me."

"What is an idea one has had and then no longer has?" Valéry was to ask—or was it Alain? Delacroix soon became aware that the worst thing was not to allow the idea to escape, but not to recapture the productive desire it may once have aroused. Thus it was not enough to gather ideas into "bundles," nor to amass subjects in order to take them out of storage when there was a picture to be painted: inspiration might fail to show up. Again, the young Delacroix would be tempted to seek a remedy for this lack of desire that is the "death of genius" in poetry: "I believe and have thought elsewhere that it would be an excellent thing to warm up by making up verses, rhymed or unrhymed, on some subject in order to help oneself to turn with passion to painting. By growing accustomed to putting all my ideas into verse, I will realize them, easily, or in my fashion. I must try to do that for *Chios*." It matters little whether these verses are good or bad: such is the economics of desire he calls Inspiration that Delacroix even observes that his mind is never more alert than when he is seeing or reading a second-rate production on some subject that attracts him. However, there are other stimulants: music, primarily (and we learn in the *Journal* as well as from the *Correspondence* that Delacroix too came very close to having a violin: It's not every day one has the opportunity to paint in the organ loft of Saint-Sulpice).

"What a life! . . . Instead of thinking about my own affairs, I think only of Rubens or Mozart: for a week now I have been preoccupied with the memory of some tune or picture." That the author of *Don Giovanni*, that "masterpiece of romanticism (in 1785)" vied for a place in his mind with the "Homer of painting" is an indication that he expected this great "voluptuousness of the imagination"

2. To Félix Guillemardet, October 23, 1818; *Lettres intimes*, p. 52.

to do more than merely keep him awake ("I fall asleep as soon as I lack stimulants") or inspire him with "great thoughts." Delacroix would cure himself of his youthful impatience only by learning to derive better benefit from the *difference among the arts* and from the opportunity the "artist's life" offered of playing simultaneously on several keyboards, moving from one register to another. Difference among the arts, or better, *gradation*, with all the effects produced by interaction, interchange, transfer, conversion. It was with Delacroix in mind that Baudelaire made his diagnosis of his century's spiritual condition—"the arts aspire, if not to supplement each other, at least reciprocally to lend each other new energies." Such cooperation tended to competition, as evidenced by "the impish spirit of rivalry with the written word" that inhabited that *jack of all trades*.

Much of both the early and the mature *Journal* is occupied with a discussion of the comparative merits of literature and the "silent arts." As early as 1824, Delacroix was planning a "mémoire" on painting that would deal with the "difference of the arts among themselves." Thus music, as it differs from painting: "In music, form carries the substance; in painting the reverse." From Madame de Staël and *Corinne* he felt obliged to note that both music and painting are situated above thought, "in limbo." He soon became aware, however, of the approximate, even dangerous, implications of that formula. Literature's inability to render a precise notion of a symphony or a picture, the residue of memory that escapes verbal description, clearly demonstrates "the limits the arts set up amongst themselves in their domain." So that, full as he was of the experience of his trip to Morocco, he explicitly contradicted the motive of his *Journal*: When traveling, it was better to amass drawings than written notes ("You bring back souvenirs that are interesting in a way quite different than a journal, in which you attempt to put down each day your sensations before each site, each object").[3] Which is not to say that painting or drawing—not to mention music—do not also have to do with *thought*. "Learn to draw and you will have your thoughts at the tip of your pencil as the writer does at the tip of his pen."[4] As for painting: "When I have painted a fine picture, I have not written a thought. That's what they say. How simple-minded they are! They deprive painting of all its advantages."

On this point, and on the "advantages" of his art, Delacroix was to remain firm. Far from consigning painting to something beyond thought, he was on the contrary always to attempt to penetrate ever deeper into painting's roots in thought and thereby make painting a retracing back to its own sources, if not beyond. In 1854, when he was trying to convince himself that he must abandon "vagueness," and that attempting to finish a painting was not necessarily going to spoil it, he nevertheless still recognized the merits of the sketch vis-à-vis the

3. "De l'enseignement du dessin," *Revue des Deux-mondes*, September 1850; reprinted in *Oeuvres littéraires*, I, *Etudes esthétiques*, Paris, 1927, p. 12.
4. *Ibid.*

thought behind the picture: whereas in literature the "indication" or "rough draft" was impossible, in painting *the rough draft of a thought* does produce an effect, the more so in that "with great artists, the sketch is not some dream, some confused cloud" but "a fixed point," that "pure expression" to which "they have great difficulty returning during the execution—drawn-out or swift—of a work." Delacroix attempted to express that difference in what we might call formalist terms: "Music must be like literature, and I believe that this difference between the plastic arts and the other arts comes about because the latter develop the idea only *successively*. On the other hand, four lines can embody for the mind all the expression of a pictorial composition." And it is one of the surest advantages of painting that a picture can straightaway be seized in its entirety and one can then look away, whereas the reader or listener is constrained in his reading, his listening. So much greater is the power of painting, although it has but a moment, that it *concentrates the effect* ("Such is the perfection of that art, whose aim is to create a simultaneous effect. If painting produced its effects as does literature, which is nothing but a series of successive pictures, there would be some reason for emphasizing the detail").

We can, of course, call this a somewhat limited notion of the powers of writing, of the extent of its domain; not to mention the fact that a whole area of literature, and particularly modern literature, contradicts this supposed impossibility of its being a sketch, a draft, in the sense Delacroix uses the terms, not to mention reconstituting the nascent original thought. It is obvious that Delacroix was the prisoner of his education. An education that ensured all who benefited from it, men or women, of an unparalleled mastery of oral or written expression: so that this painter could think of literature as "everyone's art," an art learned "unawares." "We spend our life exercising—unbeknownst to ourselves—the art of expressing our ideas in words. . . . Thus, a superior man always writes well, particularly when treating of things he knows well. That is why women can write as well as the greatest men." Such mastery was not without its drawbacks, however, which imposed a strictly linear mode of thought: the difficulty arose from "working in one particular dimension," without losing the thread and without omitting all that, *in that dimension*, must be included. Whence the needed "argument" and Delacroix's dream of writing short articles on the first thing that came to mind, in the style of Addison's *Spectator*, the literary equivalent of those "little pictures" he claimed he was no good at, but which he did so well, seeing that the painter stuck closely to his drafts and treated them as sketches, without attempting to *finish* them: the spectator's imagination is thus more easily captivated because he is given the illusion that it is up to him to complete the idea.

*

Thought must be at work in the picture and the picture must reveal it at the very moment of its generation. (Delacroix painstakingly informs his reader of the

"adjustments" and the hazards of drying: what is a thought whose hieroglyphs happen to be imprinted in an originally liquid medium that can be worked directly on the canvas, one that has a tendency to run, that one can watch as it dries?). Along with the notion of a faulty memory that cannot be repaired, this is one of the *Journal*'s most frequently recurring motifs, and undoubtedly the most *intimate*. The feeling we get as we read of having access not so much to the painter's intimate life, but to that of painting itself—this feeling plays a large part in the pleasure we derive from that reading. Delacroix's desire to teach his reader to read painting *from within* is embodied in certain passages in the *Journal*. The writing has no other power—a power few critics have attained—than what it derives from painting: Delacroix has analyzed, criticized, and understood the paintings of past masters with his brush in hand. And each time the *Journal* treats of painting, it is the painter who speaks: a man who may have no memory, but who never allows himself to lose sight of the fact that "the art of the painter has a more intimate place in man's heart because it seems more material."

Language may well have a special status among systems of signs; the fact that it alone seems able to interpret other systems while also having the capacity to interpret itself is, however, an insufficient basis on which to construct a hierarchy of the arts. For everything depends on what is understood here by *interpret*. The *Journal*'s clearest lesson is that there are other ways of interpreting, other ways of analyzing, and other ways of describing than those imposed by language ("With a brush I can make everyone feel what I have seen, and a description will show nothing"). Delacroix's mastery of language, his case of writing, his vision of literature, all contributed to convince him of the specificity of an art that seemed to be difficult in other ways, but that demanded less "argument." Especially since that difficulty was one he intended and had systematically sought out, having only contempt for that facility which comes from talent, made even more false by being made obvious. A talent having nothing to do with craft, which is acquired only to make matter difficult to handle, the better to force it to obey the ends of painting and the thought behind it. ("The great thing is to avoid that infernal convenience of the brush. Rather make the material as hard to work as marble. That would be completely new.")

The young Delacroix expected that the paper on which he planned to note down, day by day, his impressions, would reproach him for his vacillations, so strong was the need for some solid course of conduct for an artist beginning his career at a time when French society had barely recovered from the collapse of the Empire. For someone reading the *Journal* today, attention is drawn to those vacillations, their logical progression becoming evident only upon a second reading. And that is why this text must be read from start to finish as one lengthy, exacting work, the text—despite its twenty-two-year gap—of an entire life. Here I am not talking about vacillations with regard to the painter's craft: vacillations concerning the goals painting can attempt to achieve in an age not notable for its grandeur (here, the problem of "small pictures" vis-à-vis "grandeur," which is

more than a matter of size); vacillations over the means (we can see Delacroix tempted by the quickness of execution demanded by fresco, but always allowing himself to be seduced by the opportunities oil provides fór starting over); vacillations over the use of color (the progressive elimination of black and the "honest dirt" that delighted him at the time of the *Massacre*); vacillations in his feelings about draftsmanship (this, he was always to maintain, was the foremost thing in painting, despite the fact that in 1824 he thought it was the starting point, and that thirty years later, in line with Cézanne's notions, he felt that the height of artistry was to consider it last, "contrary to custom"); vacillation about the theme of execution (in which a semiotics of painting would have helped with regard to everything touching upon the relationship between competence and performance: execution being supposed always to contain an element of improvisation, the painter to "discover by doing," and a whole lifetime not enough to learn the craft); vacillation about the *idea* (the same Delacroix who fanatically drew up lists of subjects coming to the conclusion, late in life, that painting could do very well without them).

Rather, vacillation, first and foremost, on the theme of memory, whose periodic recurrence gives the *Journal* a concrete unity. How could it be otherwise, if it is true that the operation of painting is analogous to that of memory, has so many affinities with it? To the point that Delacroix was able on several occasions to compare the "kind of idealization" proper to memory to the "effect of great works of the imagination." If, for example, one wishes to judge the unity of a picture, one must in its absence rely on one's memory of it. If the greatest problem for the painter is to manage to suppress the details that nevertheless create the painting's texture and somehow to return in its execution to the primal idea, to the earliest sketch in which the details are subordinate to the broad outlines of the composition, the work of memory takes the same path. Memory, which is said to erase contour as time smooths over paintings and erases the rough patches, makes the brushstrokes retreat and retains of a scene or a face only the sign, but one so well struck, of so necessary a connection, that the unexpected recollection of a detail is enough to bring about anamnesis.

If painting has anything to do with memory, it is also because it is an exercise that can be carried out only by constant reference to the past. Supposing that something like a history of painting does exist, the simultaneously attentive and critical examination that painters devote to the works of their predecessors, even more than to those of their contemporaries, is what gives that history its most immediate impetus. Against which we have the tradition that holds that everything consecrated by history is acceptable, even the questionable aspects of great talents ("These pious imbeciles [Ingres and his followers] who stupidly copy the mistakes of the painter from Urbino and enshrine them as sublimely beautiful"). The paradox that makes the artist, necessarily turned towards the past, able nevertheless to be innovative is resolved if we agree that the innovator must first be someone who refuses to look at painting through another's eyes: for Delacroix,

genius consisted not so much in having new ideas than in being obsessed by the notion that "what has already been said has not yet been said properly."

In his eyes, what was true for music also held good for painting: "One appreciates above all by means of memory." The degree to which the status of the work of art has been altered by the recent emergence of techniques of mechanical reproduction has been examined at length. But not enough thought has been given to the effect it might have had on the public's relationship to painting, or painters' to their art, in that era that covers the greater part of what we call art history, in which the amateur, the critic, and the artists themselves were all reduced to relying on their memories, with the occasional aid of a few notes or sketches. For a long time, engraved reproductions were able to create an illusion because of their wide distribution. But Delacroix was utterly revolted by such "mechanical art" that "sates us with masterpieces without satisfying us," although he was among the first to grasp the interest of the daguerreotype. And he devoted the same attention to photographs of his own pictures as he did to those of Rubens exhibited in the Rue Vivienne: "The defects, no longer saved by handling and color, show up more clearly."

It would seem that the same would hold true for engraving, "whatever the quality of the style." But it is precisely the *absence* of style that appears to have struck him in the information the daguerreotype offered; in photography, the lack of color and execution were accompanied by a harsh objectivity. Whether analyzing from memory, brush in hand, a Rubens seen the day before or working on a subject from nature, he soon came to view photography as a kind of reference, if not a model. "Let a man of genius employ a daguerreotype in the proper manner and he will attain heights undreamed of by us," he noted in 1853 after a session during which he had compared Marcantonio Raimondi's engravings with photographs of nude models. But what do "reference" and "model" mean? And *for whom*?

Delacroix dabbled in various types of photography. He used it, as we have seen, to cast another eye on his pictures. He had his portrait taken; in 1853 again, having to choose from several photographs, he asked that only a profile portrait be kept.[5] Three years earlier, he had been more categorical: "If we examine daguerreotype portraits, not one out of a hundred is bearable."[6] He experimented with the *cliché-verre*, as had Corot, engraving directly onto the sensitized plate; he also took a few photographs of nudes, the best known of which is like a satire of Ingres's *Baigneuses* in its *platitude*. For a man who had sought in his youth "an entirely new painting that would be tantamount to copying nature," the discovery of photography must have been a real trial. "How I regret that such an admirable invention has arrived so late; I say that with regard to myself!"[7] For as a mere

5. To Th. Silvestre, December 26, 1853; *Correspondance*, III, p. 185.
6. "De l'enseignement du dessin," p. 18.
7. To M. Constant Dutilleux, March 7, 1854, *Correspondance*, III, p. 196.

copy, the daguerreotype went far beyond expedients based on Alberti's velum or Dürer's glass, which at the time of their discovery were considered sufficient to settle the matter of teaching drawing. "The daguerreotype is more than a copy, it is the mirror of the object, certain details that are almost always overlooked in drawings from nature assume enormous, characteristic importance, thereby introducing the artist to the complete knowledge of structure."[8] "It is the palpable demonstration of nature's true design, of which we have never had but quite imperfect notions."[9]

Although the invention (or should we say *discovery*? The same question arises, for the same reasons, with regard to perspective) of photography profoundly transformed art to the point of altering some of the boundaries between the various arts, this was not because it destroyed painting's aspirations to being an exact imitation of nature. On that score, Delacroix had long before pledged his faith: imitation is meaningless unless it is intended to please the imagination, the greatest accomplishment being the introduction into the "idealized" work of something painstakingly drawn from the model ("You have then harmonized the irreconcilable: in a way, it is like introducing reality into the world of dream"). Delacroix saw photography principally as a means of getting around certain problems: problems of perspective, to be precise; but also problems created by the indiscreet presence of the model. The early journal is very precise with regard to the desire that can seize the painter while he is painting and that disappears at the crucial moment ("Laure here. Went on with the portrait. It's strange that having desired her throughout the sitting, when we began—actually fairly swiftly—it was not quite the same; I had to take time to get my bearings"). Far from following in his "worthy" brother's footsteps ("Oh, what a disgrace! I couldn't!"), Delacroix in his own way verified Sartre's profound dictum that one cannot both find a woman beautiful and desire her at the same time. If he confined himself to "doing horses," that discipline also held surprises: "Yesterday, I went with Champmartin to study dead horses; I almost went with him to a b. . . . Men don't know what to desire."

Can a painter find a woman beautiful and want to paint her? And what does that wish have to do with desire ("Laure brought me a lovely sixteen-year-old, Adeline, tall, well-formed, with a charming head. I will paint her portrait and vow to . . . "). "Nature" is so constraining that exact imitation, supposing that notion to have any meaning, can only be *cold*, as it should be: doesn't Delacroix even *suffer* for his model to the point that he often finds it preferable to paint, if I may use the term, after the act, relying on his memory to eliminate details, to idealize. The function of painting is such that a sketch from nature will seem unbearable compared to its copy made from memory, like a corrected proof, closer to the

8. "De l'enseignement du dessin," p. 16.
9. To M. C. Dutilleux.

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"ideal." Not to mention the fact that only someone capable of drawing from memory will be able to *compose.*[10] But however much the eye keeps strictly to the model, however detatched it may be, it cannot be objective: despite ourselves, it corrects the deformities of nature, the excesses of a rigorous viewing. "It already performs the task of an intelligent artist."[11] Whereas the lens of the camera allows us to see everything the eye refuses to perceive, what it rejects, and first of all the vulgarity that impinges upon it (the photographs taken by Delacroix bear witness to this). Photography thus approaches painting obliquely, on the bias, just as repressed material reaches consciousness when triggered, most often, by some insignificant detail. Thus the censure with which some have condemned photography, unsparing as it is of every detail.[12] But if painting is somehow basically linked with anamnesis, then "the lesson the daguerreotype can teach a man who paints from memory" will be even more invaluable, although not everyone can profit from it: "It requires a great deal of experience to derive the proper benefit from it."[13]

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"How I adore painting! Merely the memory of certain pictures gives me a piercing sensation that affects my whole being, even when I am not looking at them, like all those rare and interesting memories that arise now and then from the depths of one's life, especially from one's earliest years." Painting is a matter of memory, to the point that the quantum of affect with which the memory of a painting is charged can be comparable to that produced by a childhood memory—painting, in its effects, equaling remembrance. In this connection, Delacroix's complaints about his faulty memory have a false ring. If such indeed is the power of painting, its efficacy, what interest can these "scribbled trifles" he busily stores up in his diary have for the painter? Are they really all of his life that is available to him?

Far from providing a remedy, his journal-keeping seems to indicate, from a reading of Delacroix's own, that the stated intention to write daily lay at the origin of the trouble he describes, which is thereby reduced to a mere effect of discourse. If the painter does not succeed in setting down anything about his delights and his feelings on paper, it is not due to any mental sloth. The resistance is somewhere else, on a different level; it is constitutive, linked to the very conditions of the

10. "De l'enseignement du dessin," pp. 16–17.
11. *Ibid.*
12. "Imagine the following interesting scene that might occur, if you like, around the bed of a dying woman: render, capture if possible, this grouping in a photograph; it will be totally ruined. That is because, depending upon your imagination, the scene will appear more or less beautiful, you will be somehow a poet within that scene in which you are an actor; you will see only what is interesting, whereas the instrument will have recorded everything" (*Journal*, October 12, 1853).
13. "De l'enseignement du dessin," p. 16.

exercise of language: "When one takes up one's pen to describe objects that are so expressive [he is referring to the paintings of Decamps], one clearly senses one's inability to give any notion of them in that way, the limits of the arts vis-à-vis each other. There is a kind of ill humor against oneself that is created by the inability to fix one's memories, which are still just as vivid in the mind after one's imperfect description of them with the help of words." *Description stops at memory*: but then where is the defect of memory if not in language itself, which claims it retains what it is not designed to fix? And from where does this powerlessness arise if not from the *blindness* that is the very condition of language, as it is in principle that of the particular kind of writing we call "literature" and, to a lesser degree, of reading itself? To blame it on a deficiency of language is to refuse to recognize that language can function only in and based upon its difference from other means of expression, beginning with those addressed to the eye and the visual imagination.

In this connection, the inability may also apply to painting, since it may claim to ignore the boundaries that separate it from speech, the difference that creates the opportunity for *rivalry* between them. So that the hypothesis I have just advanced might be formulated in another way: *what if it were painting itself that*—at the time Delacroix was writing or painting—*had lost its memory*? The *Journal* would then be the continuous narrative of that problem, a narrative that only a "jack of all trades," a man whose abilities led him to function in two different elements alternatively, could have planned, albeit unconsciously. Indeed, there is nothing to indicate that Delacroix ever made the connection between the difficulty he experienced in retaining something of the history of his thoughts and feelings, his impressions, and the state of painting at the time. And yet, for someone who considered that "all the great problems of art were solved in the sixteenth century," the bad habits of painting in his own time could only be due to a kind of amnesia: "The human mind knows how to conserve nothing. Traditions are worthless. The great man eclipsed, everything is over with him." He would blame this failure on the century and its mediocrity, seeing for it no remedy other than a kind of historical "uplift," in the Hegelian sense of *Aufhebung*, something entirely different from the nostalgic regressions in which his contemporaries indulged. His work was limited by the fact that he was incapable of recognizing explicitly what was beginning to emerge: nothing less than a relationship of man with his past that would no longer owe anything to classical forms of memory.

The *Journal* gives many signs of this underlying contradiction. I will cite only two: The same man who so enjoyed indulging in profoundly moving memories of childhood recalls, when he evokes his father, some of the signs of courage that made him "notable," rather than trying to recall some family scene buried deep within himself. And as for the loss of the 1848 diary in a cab, I can only hazard the remark that it appears to have been a "slip" in the psychological sense, the sort of *lapsus* that provides grist for analysis. The man who in 1830 painted himself firing on the barricades obviously had his unconscious reasons for

preferring that 1848 remain "as if it had never been."[14] A letter dated in June describes him standing guard at Champrosay and participating in the arrest of several of the rioting "blackguards."[15] Did Delacroix feel deep down that such a "subject" did not deserve to be passed on, and that the notion of freedom to which he had finally rallied was decidedly lacking in panache for someone who wanted to be a "history painter"?

But what has painting to do with heroism? What has it to do with politics? What has it, for that matter, to do with morality (although Delacroix, as befits a man who keeps a journal, found it easy to pose as a moralist. But that was the better to resist, on behalf of man's "native passion," the invasion of politics: "Moralists, philosophers, I mean the real ones like Marcus Aurelius and Christ, considering it solely in its human aspects, never mentioned politics. . . . Disease, death, poverty, grief, are eternal and will torment mankind no matter what the regime: its form, democracy or monarchy, has nothing to do with it"). But if we ask what it has to do with history, and with one's own in the first instance, the urgency will be more evident: the urgency, as Merleau-Ponty has noted, that is inherent in the painter's occupation and which supersedes all other urgencies, to the point, it would seem, of exempting it from the responsibilities of a writer, a philosopher, a *speaking* man.[16] And indeed, what was more urgent during the era in which Delacroix was painting, writing, what is more urgent today, than to limit the claims historical discourse makes to organize and control the memory of men, to denounce its constitutional blindness?

Along with the lists of possible subjects for pictures, which smack of the archive, the *Journal* contains a number of notes that refer to quite another register of memory. The daughter of his cousin the colonel: "I had a keen desire to preserve the impression of her Italian features, and especially the clear complexion . . . the purity of forms, that is, that firmness and tautness of the skin that belong only to a virgin. It is a precious memory to be stored up for painting, but I can already sense it fading." But how to fix that memory, other than to paint it (in 1823 photography was not yet on the horizon)? On this point, the mature journal testifies to a decisive advance: Delacroix had learned to note down an effect by analyzing it in pictorial terms. Thus his observation in an omnibus of the halftones of the bay horses, black horses with their glistening coats: "They must be massed, like the rest, in a local tonality that will be somewhere between lustrous

14. "*Malo periculosum libertatem quam quietum servitium*. The Latin means: I prefer liberty fraught with danger to a peaceful servitude. But, alas, I have come to the opposite opinion, feeling above all that such liberty purchased in the thick of the battle is not true liberty at all, which consists in coming and going in peace, in thinking, above all in dining when one likes, and many other advantages that political agitations do not take into consideration" (To George Sand, May 28, 1848, *Correspondance*, p. 350).

15. "The police lent their assistance in taking them to Corbeil or somewhere, in chains and unable to do any harm" (To Madame de Forget, June 2, 1848, *Correspondance*, II, pp. 352–353).

16. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'oeil et l'esprit*, Paris, 1964.

and warm-colored tones. In this preparation, a warm, transparent glaze will work the change from shadowed to reflecting surface, and for the highlights of this same halftonality the reflected highlights can be done in light, cool tones."

As strictly technical as this note seems, it manages to stir in me, as a picture or photograph might, a whole archaic depth, like the one revealed to me several years ago by a childhood memory reported by Michel Leiris in *La Règle du jeu* involving the sounds of the horse cars that passed in the early morning along the same Rue Michel-Ange where I was born and where I myself had lived for a long time, when it was already filled with automobiles. (The name *Michel-Ange* obviously played a part in this association, with its ringing and suddenly stilled sonority, as did perhaps the distant clacking of wooden shoes on the cobblestones.) I am reminded here of certain pictures by Bonnard or the Italian futurists more than of Rubens or Géricault, as well as of that photograph by Stieglitz that so enchanted Barthes,[17] showing carriages drawn up at a stand in snowy New York (if I recall correctly, one can even see the steam of the horses' breath). As though, from the effect Delacroix is describing, I gained above all the distant memory he awakens of the presence, the movement, the odor of horses in the city. As though one of the functions of art, and one of its motivating forces, were to work to develop the bases of a memory that is somehow intersubjective: a memory that would not provide men with a continuous history or with conventional recollections, but which would call forth in them their most intimate experiences, albeit fragmentary and unpredictable.

As we have seen, Delacroix believed that exchange and communication from subject to subject, if not from unconscious to unconscious, are possible in painting, and that they operate through the most "material" aspect of that art. Almost as though the kind of *tangible* emotions painting creates could only be experienced by those in whom the sight of a picture is capable of awakening, even more than the desire to paint, the impulse to smear, to manipulate color. Thus, we see the memory of a picture by (purportedly) Velázquez, the study of which at first gave him the preposterous notion that its style was similar to that of Michelangelo, come to obsess Delacroix to the point that finally he had only "the desire to spread good rich thick color onto a red or brown canvas." Painting, however, if more intimate in man's heart because more material, nevertheless requires a great deal of knowledge, knowledge that extends to the smallest detail. The effect of highlights on bay horses, the lovely ruddy brown flesh tone noted on the return from a walk to Augerville ("dark *chrome yellow* and a violet tone of *brown and white lacquer*"), such details, as Delacroix made so clear, create the warp of the painting, they are not details the painter can eliminate as he concentrates interest and returns as he works to the primary idea that will represent the picture's "fixed point." It is from such details, even more than from its composition, that painting derives its anamnesic power. To achieve that,

17. Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire*, Paris, 1980, p. 35.

however, the painter must manage to transcribe the "impression" onto the canvas, he must dig it out and amplify it by noting it and, *remembering it,* increase its effect by his own methods.

In his 1857 journal Delacroix noted this remark by Rossini: "I can glimpse something more, but I shan't do it. Were I to find a young man of genius, I could set him on a completely new path, and poor Rossini would be totally eclipsed"—are we to believe that the painter took this personally? Paul Signac attempted to see Delacroix as the precursor of impressionism, not to mention postimpressionism, either "divisionist" or "pointilist." And, in fact, the *Journal* abounds in analyses of the effect of color, not only in terms of mixture (the mixture that creates *locality*) and superposition, but of the opposition—juxtaposition—of hues, contrasted, laid flat, according to the principle Delacroix defined as reflected halftone (the bay horses!), that gives the "true tone, the tone that recreates the value that is part of the object and makes it exist." It is not the increasingly marked preference that he would later reveal for white backgrounds instead of the traditional red or brown ones, or his tendency towards a more transparent, *flattened* painting, that lay bare his procedures. That is not essential; equally decisive is the sentence in the *Journal* that tells us that painting should not and cannot claim to literal truth, but that its whole operation results in producing *equivalents.* A sentence that Cézanne himself might have written and that is echoed by his distinction between the optical or *colored* sensations produced in the eye and the *coloring* sensations that signify them on the canvas.[18]

And there is more. When Delacroix speaks of objects "that seem to a particular part of your intelligence to be the thing itself" as being like a "solid bridge the imagination crosses to penetrate into the mysterious, profound sensation for which forms are in some way the hieroglyph," must we not realize that he was proceeding towards a definition of a painting that would recognize only that thought which is intertwined with—again in Cézanne's words—"the very roots of being, at the impalpable source of sensations"? The notion of the *hieroglyph* represents a radical break with the classical theory of painting, which was explicitly—one need only read Alberti[19]—based on the model of phonetic writing: "A hieroglyph . . . but communicating in quite another way than a cold representation, that is, the same as a piece of type: a sublime art, in this sense, if we compare it to that in which the painting reaches the mind only with the help of letters set out in some conventional order; a much more complex art, if you will, because the character is nothing and the thought seemingly everything." Not to

18. Paul Cézanne, *Correspondance,* Paris, 1937, pp. 268, 269, 276.

19. "I want young people who are starting out to paint today to observe what writing teachers do. They begin by teaching the forms of the letters, which the Ancients called elements; then they teach syllables; and finally the forming of words. May our students follow that rule in learning to paint. And first, may they learn to draw the contours of surfaces correctly, and let them practice that as though it were the prime element of painting" (Leone Battista Alberti, *Della Pittura,* Book III). In this connection, see my *Théorie du nuage, Pour une histoire de la peinture,* Paris, Seuil, 1972, p. 159 ff.

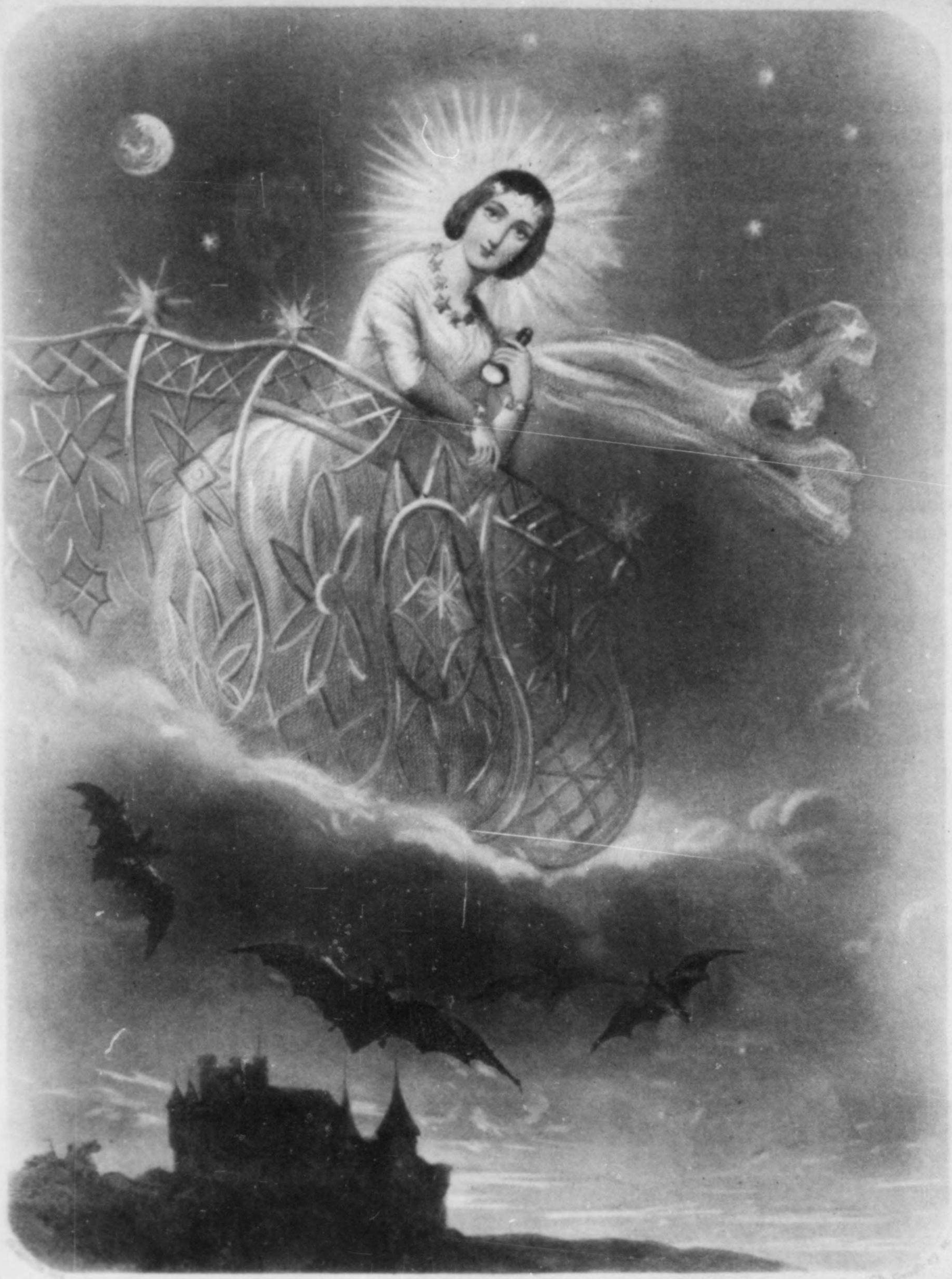
mention the fact that better than anything else the hieroglyph takes into account the illusion of a painting, like that of a dream, in which one is immediately caught up without knowing its language, and that one feels able to interpret like a drawing whose substance (I am speaking of painting, not dreams) is actually, in both the real and the figurative sense, characterized by its *color*. Paradoxically, this is an art of memory: What could be more paradoxical than a hieroglyph that embodies a sensation that eludes perception in such a way that only memory can recognize it, but on the condition that it enters memory backwards, and takes the unconscious by surprise. ("Such impressions produced by the arts on sensitive constitutions are an odd mystery: confused impressions if we attempt to describe them; all strength and clarity if we reexperience them solely through memory. I firmly believe that we always put something of ourselves into these feelings that seem to arise from some striking objects. Such works probably please me so much because they respond to feelings that I have; and when, although dissimilar, they give me the same degree of pleasure, it is because I am rediscovering the source of the kind of effect they produce within myself.")

Perhaps Delacroix had glimpsed "something else," a new direction for painting. Yet he remained prisoner to a form of painting, a "thing of the past," of which he felt he managed to retain nothing save its repetition in memory. As François Rouan said to me, Delacroix's *technical* misfortune (and one need only see the condition of many of his paintings today) was his belief that he could aim for the *effect* of "great" painting without employing its means: thereby conforming, whatever he may have said, to a method of production that posited the destruction of traditional craft while establishing another notion of the functioning of works, their economy, their effectiveness. Didn't Delacroix expect photography, which was truly the product of his time, to enable him to eliminate, almost mechanically, certain difficulties inherent in the painter's craft? So that the uneasiness the *Journal* reveals may in the end be only one symptom among others of the actual over-all decline the painter experienced in his work, and that no "art of memory," in the sense that term has in classical rhetoric, could have resolved. There being no remedy other than a reliance on the unconscious and on a mnemotechnique based on qualitative association much more than on discursive progression. And in passing I might observe that it was in the countryside rather than in the city, that "infamous Paris" that was nevertheless so necessary to him, that Delacroix—and the impressionists after him, not to mention Proust himself—would first make the discovery: "That strong odor of the woods, how penetrating it is, and how it immediately awakens graceful and pure memories, memories of one's earliest youth, and the feelings that reside deep within the soul. . . . How often this sight of greenery and this delicious odor of the woods have aroused those memories that are the refuge, the holy of holies where one takes sanctuary."

We should not be surprised that this anamnesis, which I define, for convenience, as Proustian, should have been sketched out by a painter, since painting

necessarily acts at the pivot between the two systems, perceptive and mnemonic, and not without feeding the fantasy of a consciousness in which memory and quality would no longer be mutually exclusive but would, on the contrary, go together, mutually reinforce each other, on condition that memory detach itself from language. Whatever his avowed predilection for the arts he referred to as "silent," Delacroix was—like everyone and undoubtedly more so than the majority of his colleagues—a man of language, a great deal of language, and not about to change. Whence his *Journal*, whose continuation in 1847 after twenty-two years of silent immersion in painting is the more significant in that the "fragility" that was his lot seems henceforth to have been focused at the very site of verbal emission, in the organ of phonation. So that when he caught the laryngitis that was to carry him off, Delacroix had to abstain from speech on doctors' orders—something he seems to have had great difficulty in doing. It was this same fragile throat that forced him always to wear a scarf or shawl: the 1842 daguerreotype reveals the advantage the dandy in him managed to make of an article of clothing—a mere cravat—in the choice of which "poor Jenny" was regularly involved. The more I look at this photograph, taken at a time when Delacroix himself found daguerreotype portraits unbearable, the more heartbreaking I find it. As heartbreaking as the autumn light when summer has gone, and which seems to retain—for the last time?—something of its color. As heartbreaking as photography, whose entire operation convinces us that what we refer to as the "subject" in every sense of the word can be reduced to a simulacrum doomed to fade. As heartbreaking as painting can be when it begins to crackle or when the bitumen begins to seep through the color to the surface and all the profundity of the image, all its *depth*,[20] appears for what it is: a surface effect, no thicker than a membrane of color laid over the canvas, and that will not withstand the ravages of time.

20. "What *is* painting, after all, in its most literal sense? The imitation of depth on a flat surface. Before creating poetry with paint, one must have learned to give depth to objects" ("De l'enseignement du dessin," p. 14).



L'ÉTOILE DU SOIR

Nebula, The Powdered Sugar Princess

JOSEPH CORNELL

The following is a typographic version of six handwritten pages of notes which are among the Joseph Cornell Papers at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a gift of Mrs. Betty C. Benton. Idiosyncrasies of spelling and abbreviation have been preserved.

Princess
Nebula, the Powdered Sugar

Ballet

A young ballerina refuses to get into

her costume & dance "Sylpides"

for the 10,000th time. ~~and as a result~~.

The ballet master flies into a rage,con-

spires with a magician to turn her into

a real Sylphide ~~for good~~ and send her
such
into a strange world that she will

immed. repent.

Grandville. L'Etoile du Soir. *(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Lincoln Kirstein.)*

The action begins with the trans-
the
formed ballerina floating into ~~an~~
kind of world
~~atmosphere of~~ that one sees thru

the microscopic/Floating cells

magnified to gigantic propor.

Strange forms floats past the ballerina
naively
& she^expresses her terror ~~thru~~

by ~~a sequence of~~ panto. The ballerina

is not able to dance as tho she were still

on earth but she uses all the steps

in her repertoire that look graceful

as well as her wings & arms, as tho
could both
she were flying or swimming. ~~In~~ -

~~stead~~ Gradually she becomes less frightened
environment
& as her mood changes, her ~~surroundings~~

also changes. The shapes now seem more
but
human, more friendly ^still fantastic,

~~however, &~~ quaintly humo^rous like

the world of Grandville & the ballerina
her new world There
becomes enamoured of ~~it~~. ~~She sees~~ float~~ing~~
her
past ~~the distance~~ the etherial forms of

Tag. Carlotta Grisi etc. ~~all of~~

Tag~~lion~~ childhood remembrances are ~~all~~
evoked by ~~the~~ some of the shapes &
she has now fallen in love with everything.
~~She descends to the floor of the~~ ———.

Nebula, or the Powdered Sugar Princess
~~NEBULA~~ ~~poudreuse~~

Ballet ~~nebuleuse~~ neigeux aëréan sous-marin pyrotechnique
three tableaux will employ ~~adapt~~
Ballet in ~~one act~~ in which the ballerina

all the steps in her repertoire which appear
with her
graceful ~~to c a~~ ~~swimming or~~ floating &

neigeux ~~aerean~~ swimming movements.
celestial lighting

~~Light~~ blue Music - ~~valse lente~~ "La Plus que Lente",
valse, of Debussy.

sous ma

pale green lighting Eric Satie's piano pieces descriptive
of underwater life. a Debus

~~Sirènes (with woman's off stage chorus~~
Cathédrale engloutie
aëréan Debussy's "Nuages" Poissons d'or
Ravel Jardin F ma mère l'oye
nocturne neigeux - The Princess floats & dances
as
mid blue in adoration to the falling snow ^ her
in ectasy welcome
La arms continuously open~~ing~~ ^ to ~~receive~~
voie Lactée its falling shower.
Sous marine in ~~pale~~ green lighting the set

resembles more of a glorified fairy
syl
aquarium & the wings of the

Princess now ressemble the fins

of a strangely beatfl diaphonous

fish. ————Luminous lights
dark green glow
in the ^ depths of ~~the dark~~ ~~flash~~ &

~~glow~~ flash like

shooting stars
at the end the princess stands

on a balcony like the illust

in Gs. "Les Etoiles" & looking

straight into the camera

~~blows a kiss at the~~

solemnly blows a kiss

to the audience & then presses

her hands over her heart. The

balcony fades out then slowly

the princess, gazing longingly
adoringly
& ~~passionately~~ into the eyes of the

audience. Only the deep blue of

the skies remains as the stars also

gradually fade out

3 (cam) in the distance. The

outlines connections the various

constellations appear & disappear.

The bal. seems perf. at home with

the heavenly bodies. ~~Towards~~ At the

end she stands on a balcony

exactly the engraving in Grand's

"Les Etoiles" and, looking straight

into the camera, solemnly &

adoringly blows a kiss to the
Striving
audience. Trying to control the
at the point
emotion that is overcoming her

as she bids her adieux she bites

her lip & presses her hands

against ~~over~~ her heart still gazing

longlingly at the audience as

the balcony fades out then very slowly

~~all the ballerina except her~~

~~head & chevelure~~ ~~the stars~~.

~~The the stars~~

~~lovely~~

~~the bal until only her~~ the ballerina

~~until only~~

~~her glowing eyes remain & slowly~~

~~fade.out~~

Music Debussy's "Nuages"

The ~~delicacy of the~~ final tableau

must be handled with extreme

delicacy to prevent it from becoming

over sentimental or ludicrous.

#2 Sous-marine --- green background

Debussy's "Poissons d'or" Cathedral

Eric Satie's piano pieces descriptive of

under sea life.

In the green light the set res. a

sea garden

~~glorified aquarium~~ + the sylphide

of the

wings now ressemble the fins of a

strangely beatiful diaphonous fish.

who

The ballerina wears a phosphorescent

tiara. ~~shade of~~ luminous shapes glow

& flesh in the dark ~~green~~ depths

Her hands ~~are~~ remain folded in

her lap while her feet execute ~~of~~
with the
a perpetual entre chat which

fins propel her thru the water.

~~Strange~~ & wonderful undersea forms
fantastic
(Nereus girdles, sea weed,etc)

float past the bal as she weaves

in & out the strange coral

growth etc. etc.

#3 mid blue background

Aeréan - "La voie Lactée"

Floating thru
the ~~clouds & stars~~
starry night

Among the clouds

~~The ballerina is floating like has become~~

~~a constellation~~ the stars in her
tutu
~~dress~~, one or two in her chevelure

& one in her forehead have transformed

into a constellation. Clouds of fantastic

shape ressembling ~~horses~~, swans,fish

ballerinas float by. Meteors flash by

not influenced by Walt D. "Fantasia"

<u>which I have not seen yet</u> <u>to be filmed in Technicolor</u>

Ballet — The Princess Nebula

neigeux — Ballet in three tableaux in which the ballerina

Sous-marine — will employ all the steps in her repertoire which ap-

aëréan — pear graceful with her floating & swimming movets.

pyrotechniq

The following outline should be adapted

to a complete cinematic treatment;

like the Walt Disney films. (P.S. not infl.)

No#1. Neigeux - Celestial blue background

(Lento & dreamy) Music - valse, "La P.que L."of Debussy

The Princess floats & dances in adoration

to the falling snow as her arms

continuously open in ecstasy to welcome

its falling & drifting clouds of flakes.

Include close-ups of the ~~features of the~~

Princess' pantomime with the snow

melting & glistening on her features

shoulders & chevelure etc. Include close-ups

~~of her~~ features as the

~~of the wonderful~~ shapes ~~which~~ float by

strange

~~the princess~~

Silently, by Means of a Flashing Light

THOMAS LAWSON

In his celebrated essay "Ballets," Mallarmé writes of the de-individualization of the dancer as she takes part in the dance, becoming nothing more than a cipher in the spatial and temporal text of the choreography:

> . . . the ballerina is not a girl dancing . . . considering the juxtaposition of these group motifs, she is not a girl, but rather a metaphor which symbolises some elemental aspect of earthly form: sword, cup, flower, etc., and . . . she does not dance but rather, with miraculous lunges and abbreviations, writing with her body, she suggests things which the written work could express only in several paragraphs of dialogue or descriptive prose.[1]

In "Enchanted Wanderer," Cornell writes disparagingly of the "barren wastes of the talking pictures," praising Hedy Lamarr for her ability to recall the evocative language of silence, manifest only in gesture. He continues:

> At the end of *Come Live With Me* the picture suddenly becomes luminously beautiful and imaginative with its nocturnal atmosphere and incandescence of fireflies, flashlights, and an aura of tone as rich as the silver screen can yield. Her arms and her shoulders always covered, our gaze is held to her features, where her eyes glow dark against a pale skin and her earrings gleam white against black hair. Her tenderness finds a counterpart in the summer night. In a world of shadow and subdued light she moves, clothed in a white silk robe trimmed with dark fur, against white walls. Through the window fireflies are seen in the distance twinkling in woods and pasture. There is a long shot (as from the ceiling) of her enfolded in white covers; her eyes glisten in the semi-darkness like the fireflies. . . . A closer shot shows her against the whiteness of the pillows, while a still closer one shows an expression of

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Ballets," in *Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters*, trans. Branford Cook, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956, p. 62.

Hedy Lamarr in Come Live With Me. *1941.*

> ineffable tenderness as, for purposes of plot, she presses and intermittently lights a flashlight against her cheek, as though her features were revealed by slow-motion lighting.[2]

What these two passages have in common is an attitude towards performance, an attitude profoundly at odds with conventional dramatic theory. Traditionally, stage performers are required to project a presence, to leave an imprint of personality on the characters represented on stage, and so bring these characters to life. In thinking about performance at the fringes of legitimate theater, however, Mallarmé observed that dancers and mimes are successful to the degree that they do not do this. They must appear essentially vacant, passive carriers of another's script. They must not reveal any hint of personality, but rather remain mysteriously aloof, iconic. It was one of the significant discoveries of the surrealists that the performers of silent cinema share this characteristic. Cornell's short essay, with its typical mix of nostalgic dis-ease and aggressive avant-gardism, participates in the surrealist discourse while echoing the Mallarméan thesis from which that discourse sprung, finding in a star of the talking

2. Joseph Cornell, "Enchanted Wanderer: Excerpt from a Journey Album for Hedy Lamarr," *View*, series 1, no. 9–10 (December 1941–January 1942), 3.

pictures an actor who does not act, but simply moves, suggesting more through her movements than could ever be said in a Hollywood movie.

Perhaps more consistently than any other kind of performance art, film creates its illusion through the arrangement of fragments. Scenes are devised and shot without regard to their place in the final product, but only according to expediency. As a result each scene appears meaningless by itself, and only gains meaning when cut into other scenes, mounted within a temporal framework. It is the editing, the choreography of scenes, which promotes meaning; the individual scenes remain as vacant as Mallarmé's dancer. Attention is focused instead on the relationship between scenes, the repetitions, the rhythm of the camera, the patterning of the lights, the manipulation of narrative flow.

It was this fragmented quality which interested the surrealists, and which they tried to enhance by affecting distracted viewing habits such as walking in and out of movie houses at random, irrespective of program. With great perspicacity they had noticed a connection between film, and indeed all photographic imagery, and collage, the new technique recently introduced to painting by Picasso and Braque, and sought to exploit it.

For, whatever the intentions of the cubist pioneers, collage has a tremendous potential for disjunction. Collage, simply understood, is the technique of adding foreign materials to the surface of a painting or drawing. As a formal invention it has proved of limited value, tending too often to encourage banal decorative effects. Conceptually however, its introduction into the field of representation proved devastating. Insisting by its very nature upon the incompatibility of reality and illusion in the work of art, it initially stimulated the development of nonobjective painting, the idealist dream of twentieth-century artists to create a perfectly unified, self-contained, self-referential art, which could no longer be understood as an imitation but only as a real thing. All the while, however, the element of collage, which had made the dream possible, worked as a double agent, betraying that ideal, inserting the nagging grain of doubt which would render it not only unattainable, but morally suspect. Collage is disruptive, it disturbs the tranquility of a given order by presenting, in plain view, a scrap of something else, a fragment which insinuates limitless and arbitrary possibilities.

Photography shares this characteristic, for it too deals in fragments. The camera can only record pieces of information, but does so with such convincing clarity as to make these pieces seem complete. It is only after seeing many photographs that we begin to doubt their veracity and understand that we are being shown the world in a very controlled way. Film, as an extension of photography, magnifies the effect. Every filmmaker constructs his own world of representations which to the naive viewer may seem totally convincing. But this world is constantly undermined from within by the fragmentary, collagelike nature of film itself. Individual shots come apart from the narrative, simultaneously betraying the film's structure and highlighting accidental details in a way which often contradicts the intentions of the filmmaker.

A distinction must be made here, a clarification of terms. I am not discussing montage, but collage. Montage is a technical term which describes the ordering of shots within a sequence to gain a desired effect. I am using collage in a vaguer sense to stand for something larger. Movies are made with certain intentions: stories are told, characters developed, lessons learned. But these intentions only account for part of the appeal movies exert; more potent is the ease with which they penetrate more deeply into our mental lives, making contact with knowledge all too often repressed in daily life. By appropriating and broadening the method of collage, a method with remarkable similarities in approach and potential to that of psychoanalysis, the surrealists were able to approach an understanding of this mechanism, an understanding which gives their work the significance it holds for us today.

*

After leaving Phillips Academy at Andover in 1921, but before committing himself fully to the life of an artist, Cornell developed two passionate interests—symbolist literature and a growing collection of ephemera and memorabilia concerning the famous ballerinas and divas of the nineteenth century, a collection which grew naturally to include the numerous stars and starlets of Hollywood. There can be no doubt that the one passion gave validity to the other, nor that both were of great significance to the development of his art. It was the collection of pamphlets, photographs, and short films which was to have the most direct impact on that development, for it provided a bottomless well of related images from which he was to make his reconstructions of a past he did not know. But it was not just as a fecund source of material that the collection is to be understood as important to the growth of Cornell's art; more pertinent is the simple fact that he was a collector.

A collector has a passion for order, one that he can discover in obscure corners, but it is a passion that is constantly denied by the sheer multiplicity of things. Focusing his attention on one kind of thing, he can afford to revel in seeming chaos, knowing (hoping) that at some point, when his collection of artifacts, and their individual histories, has been absorbed in his memory, he will be able to re-collect a new and more profound history. Ever looking forward to that moment of synthesis when the metaphorical chains which give the collection its coherence lock into place with the metonymy of its completion, he is trapped in a mechanism of frustrated desire. The individual items begin to lose their importance as the idea of the collection takes over; they come to be seen merely as fragments, fragments rebuilding an edifice which can never reach completion. That Cornell's collection was a largely photographic one can only have intensified this fragmentary quality.

It was as a collector that Cornell first came to understand art, not as an art collector, but as a collector of these incomplete memories. It was as a collector that

he was prepared for the first waves of surrealism to reach the United States in the late twenties, and it was only then that he began the process of editorial synthesis that was to make collection the first step towards the creation of the work that we know today. His earliest known works, clearly derivative of Max Ernst, are small collages which use old engravings to create gently provocative versions of Lautréamont's famous juxtaposition. His first exhibited work (shown at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932) included these collages and what was in effect a miniature environment, a display case of bits and pieces—glass bells, thimbles balanced on needles, uncoiled watch springs in little sewing boxes, bisque angels, and so forth. Already there is evidence of that airless space of the later boxes, an interior space, a collector's space, a space for reverie.

It was not, however, until the end of the thirties that he finally developed a complex body of work inspired by a variety of performers, and the subject of his collection became integrated into his art. All his energies seem to have been engaged in the enterprise, for it was during this time that he indulged his eccentric knowledge of nineteenth-century dance as a regular contributor to the magazine *Dance Index*, while also publishing short essays and collaged page displays in *View*, such as the one excerpted at the beginning of this essay.

In the midst of this activity, in 1940, Cornell embarked on a series collectively entitled *Homages to the Romantic Ballet*. Most of the works in this series are miniature in scale, but there is one comparatively large, major work, *Taglioni's Jewel Casket*, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A sturdy wooden box with a hinged lid, it opens to reveal a plush, velvet-lined interior. The tray of this jewelry box contains no jewels, however, but an extremely orderly array of simulated ice cubes which can be lifted to expose slivers of crystal and rhinestone lying loosely on the mirrored surface of the bottom. Across the center of the lid interior hangs a crystal necklace partially framing an inset inscription. This inscription reads:

> On a moonlit night in the winter of 1835 the carriage of Marie Taglioni was halted by a Russian highwayman and that enchanting creature commanded to dance for the audience of one upon a panther's skin spread over the snow beneath the stars. From this actuality arose the legend that to keep alive the memory of this adventure so precious to her, Taglioni formed the habit of placing a piece of artificial ice in her jewel casket or dressing table where, melting among the sparkling stones, there was evoked a hint of the atmosphere of the starlit heavens over the ice-covered landscape.

The extraordinary thing about this object is that in it the artist mimics exactly the tactics of his subject, but to evoke in memory not an event but an image, a picture which, like that of Hedy Lamarr, is understood in terms of black and white. The dancer is certainly not there; there is nothing in the box to recall her but the formalized repetition of her gesture. The anonymous voice of the text

describes her only as "the enchanting creature." And yet she does seem present, not as an individual, but as a symbol of fleeting beauty and intense pleasure. This presence comes not from any perception or projection of personality, but simply from the syncopation of repetition, the repetition of forms within the work and the repetition of themes within the series as a whole. This use of repetition, which is one of the most conspicuous features of Cornell's work, is a device which can only work through the operation of memory.

By its very nature memory is fragmentary, crying out for completion. Everything is seen as part of something else, for behind the operation of memory is the repressed recollection of a happier state when the self and the world were still perceived as one. It is a commonplace of psychoanalysis that as cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood tell a truth that reason would deny. Memory imbues fantasy with content, and it was this content which most interested the surrealists.

The *Homages to the Romantic Ballet* address the evocative powers of recollection, attempt to arrest the fleeting moments of the past in the frozen gestures of the chosen ballerinas. Again and again the works return to the notion of the metaphoric transparency of the dancer, a transparency often enough made literal in the work with its reliance on photographic effects—from simple negative/positive manipulations to the more sophisticated play of slow fades and dissolves in the films.

*

In 1936 Cornell worked with Julien Levy on the design and publication of a small anthology of surrealist writings. It contained a selection of manifestoes by Levy himself and by Breton; translations of the poetry of Eluard, Tzara, and others; and reproductions of surrealist paintings, sculptures, and photographs. The largest section however, was devoted to cinema, for Levy was of the opinion that cinema was the perfect medium for surrealist expression. This section contained, along with an essay by Levy, the screenplay by Buñuel and Dali for *Un Chien Andalou* and an unrealized screenplay by Cornell, called *Monsieur Phot*.

Monsieur Phot is an ambitious script, calling for more technical ability than Cornell could have possessed or hired at that time. A film in sound, the voices of the actors were to be silent. It was to be shot in black and white, with sequences of color at climactic moments. It was, above all, to be an editor's film, pieced together like a temporal collage. This radical editing allows Cornell to dramatically manipulate perceptual habits. There are sudden shifts in scale, bursts of color, and inexplicable metamorphoses, as the protagonist, a photographer, tries to capture the visual world within the frame of his camera lens.[3]

3. For an extended reading of *Monsieur Phot* and *Rose Hobart*, to which my own is indebted, see Annette Michelson, "Rose Hobart and Monsieur Phot: Early Films from Utopia Parkway," *Artforum*, vol. XI, no. 10 (June 1973), 47-57.

Joseph Cornell. Tamara Toumanova. *1941.*

Such an ambition recalls a passage in Levy's article on cinema in the surrealism book, a passage which seems to describe *Monsieur Phot* while predicting *Rose Hobart*.

> Thoughts and dreams almost universally operate as a sequence of moving images, usually in monochrome, with occasional flashes of color, captions, and sound; not to mention the tricks so accessible to the camera such as superimposed concepts and the double exposure, flashbacks of memory, and tentative forecasts into the future. It is never the plot of such a film that should receive attention, but rather the wealth of innuendo which accompanies each action and which forms an emotional pattern far richer than that of the usual straight story to which our logical mind is accustomed.[4]

Rose Hobart was first screened at the Julien Levy Gallery on an evening in December 1937. It is a collage film made up mostly of cuts from *East of Borneo*, a Columbia Pictures release directed by George Melford in 1931 and starring Rose Hobart. Some of the additional footage—the storm-tossed palm trees, an eclipse of the sun, a pebble dropping in a shallow pool, and a burning candle—come from some other, as yet unidentified source. Cornell removed the sound track from the original movie and replaced it with Latin American dance music on tape. He also tinted his final print blue. The silence of the performers and this dusty blue coloring—the *azur* of Mallarmé—give the short film the air of reverie. Everything seems slightly out of focus; our perception of time and space is thrown off balance.

In reediting *East of Borneo* Cornell dispenses with the narrative, reversing the order of scenes and repeating those he chooses to be of central importance. The action of the Hollywood production, which seems so comic today, is based on a populist understanding of Freudian psychology. It is a movie about seduction, and the image chosen to represent the Sultan's lust is the volcano he proudly displays as his "ancestor." In the end it is this volcano which erupts to destroy the jungle palace when Rose, fighting off her seducer, fatally shoots him with her elegant little automatic. Cornell takes this rather crude expression of sexuality and turns it into a refined erotic fantasy.

The movement of his film suggests that he returned to the idea expressed in the scenario for *Monsieur Phot* that the action should be carried out "as in a ballet." *Rose Hobart* consists for the most part of sequences featuring the actress on her own, moving gracefully through different sets and wearing different costumes. She is often contemplative, sometimes tense and apprehensive. She talks seriously to someone beyond the frame, or smiles politely as she is courted by the Sultan.

Just as the boxes dedicated to ballerinas and divas center on the untouchable

4. Julien Levy, *Surrealism*, New York, Black Sun Press, 1936, p. 65.

Joseph Cornell. Rose Hobart. *1937.*

quality of the performer, so this film presents us with a figure who must remain out of reach if she is to retain her ability to represent a fantasy. The structural principle informing the film, as in most of Cornell's work, is that of repetition. He returns again and again to the same group of images, bringing the relationship between them into sharper focus at the expense of the images themselves. For although repetition works as a function of memory, it is paradoxically true that it is easier to remember a sequence of events if it is situated within a narrative. As a result, the sequences in *Rose Hobart* lose their individuality, pointing instead to a latent meaning not manifest in a catalogue of the discrete elements. As she moves around the twilight space of the film, strangely silent, paying no attention to the raucous music on the sound track, Rose Hobart becomes almost invisible. Like Mallarmé's dancer, she is not herself, but a symbol, a carrier of a message outside of herself.[5]

5. These themes are discussed at greater length in my forthcoming doctoral dissertation on Cornell.

The working notes for a film treatment, which appear to date from 1940,[6] are, of course, directly related to the romantic ballet series, but also stand in a close relation to the thematics of the film work, those of *Rose Hobart* in particular. The sole protagonist is a dancer, but she is isolated from her usual place, the stage, with its expectations of narrative, and presented within an abstract, fantastic space which is purely cinematic. It is a space which affords the illusion of freedom while all the time representing a far greater degree of control than a stage choreographer could ever exert. *Nebula* is a lightweight piece, one which Cornell himself presumably found wanting. Its interest to us, however, lies in its unfinished state, for this allows us a clandestine look at the artist's working method in the hope that some secret might thus be revealed.

What is revealed is perhaps less a secret than a confirmation, for we discover that Cornell, in working on a piece, would take an idea, or a facet of an idea already familiar to him, and concentrate on reordering it, refining it. Often enough the original impulse seems to have been banal—in this case a children's story cliché, colored perhaps by too intimate a knowledge of Disney productions—but this banality of inspiration, this rather tedious fascination with matters "marvelous" or "magical," is exactly what gives his work the power it undoubtedly has. For in the slow process of editing the original idea Cornell marries an acute formal sense to an ability to build a vertiginous crescendo of allusions, allusions to his own work, that of other artists, and to a range of ideas of wider currency in the culture of the time, finally transcending his point of origin in a complex allegorical structure.

Like so much of Cornell's work, *Nebula* is a network of hints and suggestions, a mental collage in which the dynamics of connection and disconnection are of more significance than the actual images themselves. Like perfume, they are there simply to attract our attention, to present one set of expectations which are slowly disfigured by the multiplicity of cross-referencing intrusions. This unraveling of layers of meaning, once started, is never-ending, and as it progresses it becomes more and more dangerous. The more successful the work of interpretation, the more seductive the work becomes, until the whole enterprise becomes meaningless, circling in on itself in mimicry of the perverse eroticism of the art.

Reading the script one notices how quickly the narrative excuse is dropped, replaced by the repetition of action and of camera movements. A counterpoint is

6. These working notes are among the Joseph Cornell Papers at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, a gift of Mrs. Betty C. Benton. They can be found at the New York office of the Archives on microfilm roll 1058, frames 325 and following. The six handwritten pages are undated, but their contents would suggest the period 1939–42, when Cornell was most actively involved with dance images. Two further pieces of circumstantial evidence aid the more precise dating of the work: One is a similar sheet of paper, dated 1940 and written in a similar handwriting (Cornell's handwriting changed drastically as he grew older), on which Cornell recorded attending the ballet with his mother and a visit backstage with Tamara Toumanova. The second clue is Cornell's denial that he was influenced by Walt Disney's *Fantasia*, released also in 1940.

built up between these elements, between the movements of the dancer as she moves across the screen and the movement of the camera as it moves across her body, moving in closer. This counterpoint is a flirtatious one. Like Rose Hobart, like Marie Taglioni on that fateful night, Nebula dances for an audience of one, the spectator. The spectator's privilege as voyeur is underscored by those impossibly romantic environments against which the dancer and camera move—the falling snow, the deep sea, the night sky—flickering backdrops like the eidetic images projected against the eyelids in a daydream. The dancer is a fantasy figure and, as is made clear in the final fade as she blows a kiss at the spectator while looking adoringly at him, the fantasy is erotic. But Nebula is not really there, and even her image soon fades. The treatment suggests an erotic cinema, but since it is cinema, the suggestion cannot be fulfilled.

Nor is this simply the frustration of distance, for one's attention is constantly being diverted. Even here, in such a short and abandoned effort, the allusiveness of Cornell's art, his desire forever to make connections, is apparent. Reading the treatment, one is constantly reminded of elements in other works. One remembers, for example, sequences of dance and images of the night sky in the trilogy he began to make just before *Rose Hobart*, rather crude, funny images with a bawdy vitality. Or again, the closing sequence, which calls for the dancer to be placed on a balcony as she seduces the spectator from afar, seems an echo of the close of *Rose Hobart*, as Rose leans over a parapet, watching ripples in a pool.

Nor were Cornell's references solely to his own work. In subtitling that final section not simply *The Milky Way* but *La Voie Lactée*, it is possible that he is drawing attention to the notes Marcel Duchamp published in *The Green Box* as a guide to his *Large Glass*, notes which identify the sexual aura of the bride as "La Voie Lactée (the cinematic blossoming)." Throughout Cornell's aborted script there are references which insistently point back to this parallel consideration of the mechanics of frustrated desire: not only the epiphany of delay, the hopelessness of repetition, the unbearable poignancy of a film image which can arouse desire but not fulfill it—not only these, but also the more direct recollection suggested by the pictures of Cornell's dancer ecstatically welcoming the falling snow into her arms, flirting with shooting stars and, across an impassable divide, the spectator.

Once again, in the rhyming cross-currents of Cornell's art, we are reminded of something else, a beginning and an end, a reverie of Hedy Lamarr, virginally white, making some obscure but instantly understood appeal, silently, by means of a flashing light. Over and over we find ourselves on this same, limitless spiral of frustrated interpretation. The work is a tease, a discourse of contraries, a semblance of one thing, the insinuation of something else. Cornell assumes the disguise of innocence, the too sweet insistence on mystery and magic, but, by inserting a seemingly endless array of disconnected fragments and allusions, he gives his production the undercurrent of troubled sexuality.

As an artist he is obsessed, obsessed with a need to know and possess the past,

to take refuge there. But his obsession is so overwhelming that it undermines that wish. The more greedily he hoards his pictures, and treasures the connections between them, the more pictures and connections he must acknowledge (dancers, starlets, birds, butterflies, seashells . . . the catalogue of props is immense). Seeking the assurance of completion, he discovers an unsuspected uncertainty; he discovers that there is no end, that another rhyme, another allusion can always be added. The pathos of Cornell's enterprise is to be found in these transcendent combinations, this innundation of meaning with meaning.

The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America

Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of the "Vital Center" [1]

SERGE GUILBAUT

translated by THOMAS REPENSEK

We now know that the traditional make-up of the avant-garde was revitalized in the United States after the Second World War. In the unprecedented economic boom of the war years, the same strategies that had become familiar to a jaded Parisian bourgeoisie were skillfully deployed, confronted as they were with a new bourgeois public recently instructed in the principles of modern art.

Between 1939 and 1948 Clement Greenberg developed a formalist theory of modern art which he would juxtapose with the notion of the avant-garde, in order to create a structure which, like that of Baudelaire or Apollinaire, would play an aggressive, dominant role on the international scene.

The evolution of Greenbergian formalism during its formative period from 1939 to 1948 cannot be understood without analyzing the circumstances in which Greenberg attempted to extract from the various ideological and aesthetic positions existing at the end of the war an analytical system that would create a specifically American art, distinct from other contemporary tendencies, and international in import.

When we speak about Greenbergian formalism, we are speaking about a theory that was somewhat flexible as it began clearly to define its position within the new social and aesthetic order that was taking shape during and after the war; only later would it solidify into dogma. We are also speaking about its relationship to the powerful Marxist movement of the 1930s, to the crisis of Marxism, and finally to the complete disintegration of Marxism in the 1940s—a close relationship clearly visible from the writings and ideological positions of Greenberg and the abstract expressionists during the movement's development. Greenbergian formalism was born from those Stalinist-Trotskyite ideological battles, the disillusionment of the American Left, and the de-Marxification of the New York intelligentsia.

1. This article is a revised, expanded version of a paper delivered at the Conference on Art History and Theory: Aspects of American Formalism, Montreal, October 1979. A longer version will appear in the soon-to-be-published Conference Papers.

The first question we should ask is this: given the Popular Front's hostility to abstraction, how was it possible for Pollock, an engaged artist and stalwart member of the American Communist party who marched with his colleagues on the First of May, to become in such a short period of time an avant-garde artist caught in the labyrinth of modern formalist painting, as Hans Namuth's photographs so clearly reveal? How was abstract-expressionist painting, avowedly apolitical, able to represent the new conservative liberalism which was on the ascendant? The cover of the 1962 edition of Arthur M. Schlesinger's celebrated best-seller *The Vital Center*, originally published in 1949, perfectly depicted this surprising alliance. The book—read as gospel by those who rejected fascism and communism in favor of the powerful rule of an aggressive Americanism developed during the war—has a cover design that reveals more than any text. The "vital center" (the intermediate liberal position between two totalitarian extremes) is represented by a red Barnett Newman-like bar, an authoritarian male axis erected against an expressively free abstract ground reminiscent of Kline's or de Kooning's brushwork. This symbolic contradiction represented the paradox contained in avant-garde art, which attempted to preserve freedom of critical expression (the artists of that generation had not forgotten the Depression years of their youth) within the conservative American system. The fact that abstract expressionism was used as an emblem of this new conservatism meant that the values articulated by the avant-garde were in accord with those of the progressive liberal ideology—a contradiction which the European avant-garde was slow to understand.

Since the history of Greenbergian formalism and that of the American avant-garde parallel rather closely the de-Marxification of the New York intelligentsia, I will attempt to trace the evolution and transformation of what we call radical thought in the United States—a position that was often difficult to hold, but which did allow some people to pass in good conscience, with a certain amount of adjustment, from revolutionary consciousness in 1937 to rightist liberalism in 1948.

De-Marxification really began in 1937 when a large number of intellectuals, confronted with the mediocrity of the political and aesthetic options offered by the Popular Front, became Trotskyites. Greenberg, allied for a time with Dwight MacDonald and *Partisan Review* in its Trotskyite period (1937–1939),[2] located the origin of the American avant-garde venture in a Trotskyite context: "Some day it will have to be told how anti-Stalinism which started out more or less as Trotskyism turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way heroically for

2. James Burkhart Gilbert believes that *Partisan Review*'s interest in Trotskyism grew from the disappointment most intellectuals felt over the American Communist party's alliance with the liberal wing of the Popular Front. "But in the long run it meant the beginning of a piecemeal rejection of Marxism itself. For Rahv and Phillips, Trotskyism was simultaneously a critique of the Soviet Union and a restatement of fundamental Marxism, because the practical politics of the Trotskyist movement had little attraction for them" (J. B. Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, p. 159).

what was to come."[3] When the importance of the Popular Front, its voraciousness and success are taken into account, it is hardly surprising that Trotskyism attracted a certain number of intellectuals. The American Communist party's alliance with liberalism disillusioned those who sought a radical change of the political system that had been responsible for the Depression. This alliance prepared the stage for revolution.

Until 1939, Marxist intellectuals were in the majority in the United States; according to Daniel Aaron, this was the simplest, most reasonable thing to be:

> You could be for every kind of social reform, for the Soviet Union, for the Communist party—for everything and anything that was at one time radical, rebellious, subversive, revolutionary and downright quixotic—and in so doing you were on the side of all the political angels of the day. . . . This is the only period in all the world's history when you could be at one and the same time an ardent revolutionary and an arch-conservative backed by the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union.[4]

It was the art historian Meyer Schapiro who initiated the shift. In 1937, abandoning the rhetoric of the Popular Front as well as the revolutionary language used in his article "Social Bases of Art," in which he emphasized the importance of the alliance between the artist and the proletariat,[5] he crossed over to the Trotskyite opposition. He published in *Marxist Quarterly* his celebrated article "Nature of Abstract Art,"[6] important not only for its intelligent refutation of Alfred Barr's formalist essay "Cubism and Abstract Art,"[7] but also for the displacement of the ideology of his earlier writing, a displacement that would subsequently enable the Left to accept artistic experimentation, which the Communist Popular Front vigorously opposed.

If in 1936, in "Social Bases of Art," Schapiro guaranteed the artist's place in the revolutionary process through his alliance with the proletariat, in 1937, in "Nature of Abstract Art," he became pessimistic, cutting the artist off from any revolutionary hope whatsoever. For Schapiro, even abstract art, which Alfred Barr and others persistently segregated from social reality in a closed, independent system, had its roots in its own conditions of production. The abstract artist, he claimed, believing in the illusion of liberty, was unable to understand the

3. Clement Greenberg, "The Late 30's in New York," *Art and Culture*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1961, p. 230.
4. Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left*, New York, Avon, 1961, p. 287.
5. Meyer Schapiro, "Social Bases of Art," *First American Artist's Congress*, New York, 1936, pp. 31–37.
6. Meyer Schapiro, "Nature of Abstract Art," *Marxist Quarterly*, January/February 1937, pp. 77–98; comment by Delmore Schwartz in *Marxist Quarterly*, April/June 1937, pp. 305–310, and Schapiro's reply, pp. 310–314.
7. Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1936.

complexity and precariousness of his own position, nor could he grasp the implications of what he was doing. By attacking abstract art in this way, by destroying the illusory notion of the artist's independence, and by insisting on the relationships that link abstract art with the society that produces it, Schapiro implied that abstraction had a larger signification than that attributed to it by the formalists.

Schapiro's was a two-edged sword: while it destroyed Alfred Barr's illusion of independence, it also shattered the Communist critique of abstract art as an ivory tower isolated from society. The notion of the nonindependence of abstract art totally disarmed both camps. Leftist painters who rejected "pure art" but who were also disheartened by the Communist aesthetic, saw the "negative" ideological formulation provided by abstract art as a positive force, a way out. It was easy for the Communists to reject art that was cut off from reality, isolated in its ivory tower. But if, as Schapiro claimed, abstract art was part of the social fabric, if it reacted to conflicts and contradictions, then it was theoretically possible to use an abstract language to express a critical social consciousness. In this way, the use of abstraction as critical language answered a pressing need articulated by *Partisan Review* and *Marxist Quarterly*: the independence of the artist vis-à-vis political parties and totalitarian ideologies. An opening had been made that would develop (in 1938 with Breton-Trotsky, in 1939 with Greenberg, in 1944 with Motherwell)[8] into the concept of a critical, avant-garde abstract art. The "Nature of Abstract Art" relaxed the rigid opposition of idealist formalism and social realism, allowing for the reevaluation of abstraction. For American painters tired of their role as propagandizing illustrators, this article was a deliverance, and it conferred unassailable prestige on the author in anti-Stalinist artistic circles. Schapiro remained in the minority, however, in spite of his alignment with J. T. Farrell, who also attacked the vulgar Marxism and the aesthetic of the Popular Front in his "Note on Literary Criticism."[9]

In December 1937, *Partisan Review* published a letter from Trotsky in which he analyzed the catastrophic position of the American artist who, he claimed, could better himself, caught as he was in the bourgeois stranglehold of mediocrity, only through a thorough political analysis of society. He continued:

> Art, which is the most complex part of culture, the most sensitive and at the same time the least protected, suffers most from the decline and decay of Bourgeois society. To find a solution to this impasse through art itself is impossible. It is a crisis which concerns all culture, beginning at its economic base and ending in the highest spheres of

8. Leon Trotsky, "Art and Politics," *Partisan Review*, August/September, 1938, p. 310; Diego Rivera and André Breton, "Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art," *Partisan Review*, Fall 1938, pp. 49–53; Robert Motherwell, "The Modern Painter's World," *Dyn*, November 1944, pp. 9–14.
9. J. T. Farrell, *A Note on Literary Criticism*, New York, Vanguard, 1936.

> ideology. Art can neither escape the crisis nor partition itself off. Art cannot save itself. It will rot away inevitably—as Grecian art rotted beneath the ruins of a culture founded on slavery—unless present day society is able to rebuild itself. This task is essentially revolutionary in character. For these reasons the function of art in our epoch is determined by its relation to the revolution.[10]

Inspired by this letter, by Schapiro's article, and by an article published in *Partisan Review* in the fall of 1938 by Rivera and Breton, Greenberg, who for the moment was allied with Trotskyism, wrote "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" for *Partisan Review* in 1939.[11]

Trotsky and Breton's analysis, like Greenberg's, blamed cultural crisis on the decadence of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and placed its solution in the hands of the independent artist; yet they maintained a revolutionary optimism that Greenberg lacked. For Trotsky, the artist should be free of partisanship but not politics. Greenberg's solution, however, abandoned this critical position, as well as what Trotsky called eclectic action, in favor of a unique solution: the modernist avant-garde.[12] In fact, in making the transition from the political to the artistic avant-garde, Greenberg believed that only the latter could preserve the quality of culture against the overwhelming influence of kitsch by enabling culture to continue to progress. Greenberg did not conceive of this cultural crisis as a conclusion, as had been the case during the preceding decade, that is, as the death of a bourgeois culture being replaced by a proletarian one, but as the beginning of a new era contingent on the death of a proletarian culture destroyed in its infancy by the Communist alliance with the Popular Front, which *Partisan Review* had documented. As this crisis swiftly took on larger proportions, absorbing the ideals of the modern artist, the formation of an avant-garde seemed to be the only solution, the only thing able to prevent complete disintegration. Yet it ignored the revolutionary aspirations that had burned so brightly only a few years before. After the moral failure of the Communist party and the incompetence of the Trotskyites, many artists recognized the need for a frankly realistic, nonrevolutionary solution. Appealing to a concept of the avant-garde, with which Greenberg was certainly familiar, allowed for a defense of "quality," throwing back into gear the progressive process brought to a standstill in academic

10. Trotsky, "Art and Politics," p. 4. In spite of Trotsky's article, which was translated by Dwight MacDonald, the magazine's relationship with the movement remained unencumbered. In fact, Trotsky distrusted the avant-garde publication which he accused of timidity in its attack on Stalinism and turned down several invitations to write for the magazine (Gilbert, p. 200).

11. Greenberg's article in fact developed Trotsky's ideas on the relationship between art and the bourgeoisie, with certain departures from the original that weakened its revolutionary content.

12. Trotsky agreed with Breton that any artistic school was valid (his "eclecticism") that recognized a revolutionary imperative; see Trotsky's letter to Breton, October 27, 1938, quoted in Arturo Schwarz, *Breton/Trotsky*, Paris, 10/18, 1977, p. 129.

immobility—even if it meant abandoning the political struggle in order to create a conservative force to rescue a foundering bourgeois culture.

Greenberg believed that the most serious threat to culture came from academic immobility, the Alexandrianism characteristic of kitsch. During that period the power structure was able to use kitsch easily for propaganda purposes. According to Greenberg, modern avant-garde art was less susceptible to absorbtion, not, as Trotsky believed, because it was too critical, but on the contrary because it was "innocent," therefore less likely to allow a propagandistic message to be implanted in its folds. Continuing Trotsky's defense of a critical art "remaining faithful to itself," Greenberg insisted on the critical endeavor of the avant-garde, but a critique that was directed inward, to the work itself, its medium, as the determining condition of quality. Against the menacing background of the Second World War, it seemed unrealistic to Greenberg to attempt to act simultaneously on both a political and cultural front. Protecting Western culture meant saving the furniture.

"Avant-Garde and Kitsch" was thus an important step in the process of de-Marxification of the American intelligentsia that had begun around 1936. The article appeared in the nick of time to rescue the intellectual wandering in the dark. After passing through a Trotskyite period of its own, *Partisan Review* emphasized the importance of the intellectual at the expense of the working class. It became preoccupied with the formation of an international intellectual elite to the extent that it sometimes became oblivious to politics itself:[13]

> To the editor of the *Partisan Review* the events of 1936 and 1937 cast fundamental doubts on the integrity of communism. This process was first evident in their reassertion of the theoretical purity of Marxism through their temporary identification with Trotskyism. But in the long run it meant the beginning of a piecemeal rejection of Marxism itself.[14]

Greenberg's article should be understood in this context. The delicate balance between art and politics which Trotsky, Breton, and Schapiro tried to preserve in their writings, is absent in Greenberg. Although preserving certain analytical procedures and a Marxist vocabulary, Greenberg established a theoretical basis for an elitist modernism, which certain artists had been thinking about since 1936, especially those associated with the American Abstract Artists group, who were also interested in Trotskyism and European culture.[15]

13. Malcolm Cowley and Trotsky for once agreed to withhold support from the magazine, believing it had lost sight of the Marxist struggle.
14. Gilbert, p. 158.
15. Many members of American Abstract Artists were sympathetic to Trotskyism but looked to Paris for an aesthetic standard; Rosalind Bengelsdorf interviewed by the author, February 12, 1978, New York.

"Avant Garde and Kitsch" formalized, defined, and rationalized an intellectual position that was adopted by many artists who failed fully to understand it. Extremely disappointing as it was to anyone seeking a revolutionary solution to the crisis, the article gave renewed hope to artists. By using kitsch as a target, as a symbol of the totalitarian authority to which it was allied and by which it was exploited, Greenberg made it possible for the artist to act. By opposing mass culture on an artistic level, the artist was able to have the illusion of battling the degraded structures of power with elitist weapons. Greenberg's position was rooted in Trotskyism, but it resulted in a total withdrawal from the political strategies adopted during the Depression: he appealed to socialism to rescue a dying culture by continuing tradition. "Today we no longer look towards socialism for a new culture—as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now."[16] The transformation functioned perfectly, and for many years Greenberg's article was used to mark the beginning of the American pictorial renaissance, restored to a preeminent position. The old formula for the avant-garde, as was expected, was a complete success.

The appearance of "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" coincided with two events that threw into question the integrity of the Soviet Union—the German-Soviet alliance and the invasion of Finland by the Soviet Union—and which produced a radical shift in alliances among Greenberg's literary friends and the contributors to *Partisan Review*. After the pact, many intellectuals attempted to return to politics. But the optimism which some maintained even after the alliance was announced evaporated with the Soviet invasion of Finland. Meyer Schapiro could not have chosen a better time to interrupt the self-satisfied purrings of the Communist-dominated American Artist's Congress and create a split in the movement. He and some thirty artist colleagues, in the minority because of their attempt to censure the Soviet Union, realized the importance of distancing themselves from an organization so closely linked not only to Stalinism, but also the social aesthetic of the Popular Front.

And so the Federation of American Painters and Sculptors was born, a nonpolitical association that would play an important part in the creation of the avant-garde after the war, and from which would come many of the first-generation painters of abstract expressionism (Gottlieb, Rothko, Poussette-Dart). After the disillusion of 1939 and in spite of a slight rise in the fortunes of the Popular Front after Germany attacked Russia in June of 1941, the relationship of the artist to the masses was no longer the central concern of major painters and intellectuals, as it had been during the 1930s. With the disappearance of the structures of political action and the dismantling of the Works Progress Administration programs, there was a shift in interest away from society back to the

16. Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review*, Fall 1939, p. 49.

individual. As the private sector reemerged from the long years of the Depression, the artist was faced with the unhappy task of finding a public and convincing them of the value of his work. After 1940 artists employed an individual idiom whose roots were nevertheless thoroughly embedded in social appearance. The relationship of the artist to the public was still central, but the object had changed. Whereas the artist had previously addressed himself to the masses through social programs like the WPA, with the reopening of the private sector he addressed an elite through the "universal." By rediscovering alienation, the artist began to see an end to his anonymity, as Ad Reinhardt explained, "Toward the late '30s a real fear of anonymity developed and most painters were reluctant to join a group for fear of being labeled or submerged."[17]

The period between 1940 and 1945 was crucial for the United States. Not only had it defeated fascism, it was in the midst of the greatest economic boom in its history, was becoming aware of its new political power, and, related to this new position, and through the influence of European artists, it was witnessing a renewal of interest in modern art. Since the beginning of the war, the United States had become the defender of civilization, of Western culture, against the barbarism of fascism. As Marcelin Pleynet has said, fascism eliminated only one kind of culture: modernism.[18] In the United States the modernism rejected by fascism was confounded with a broader, more abstract definition of culture. Thus the American press unwittingly defended the concept of modernity and modern art, which had previously encountered such extreme resistance in the United States. As if through a secret door or by mistake, modernism slipped into the national consciousness. The war did more to establish modern culture in the United States than all the efforts of *Partisan Review* during the preceding years.

Nineteen forty-three was a particularly crucial year, for quietly, without shock, the United States passed from complete isolationism to the most utopian internationalism of that year's best-seller, *One World* by Wendell Wilkie.[19] Prospects for the internationalization of American culture generated a sense of optimism that silenced the anticapitalist criticism of some of its foremost artists. In fact, artists who, in the best tradition of the avant-garde, organized an exhibition of rejected work in January 1943, clearly expressed this new point of

17. Ad Reinhardt, interviewed by F. Celentano, September 2, 1955, for *The Origins and Development of Abstract Expressionism in the U.S.*, unpublished thesis, New York, 1957, p. xi.

18. See Marcelin Pleynet, "Pour une politique culturelle préliminaire," in *Art et Idéologies*, Université de St. Etienne, C.I.E.R.E.C., 1978, pp. 90–92.

19. Nineteen forty-three was the year of internationalism in the United States. Although occurring slowly, the change was a radical one. The entire political spectrum supported United States involvement in world affairs. Henry Luce, speaking for the right, published his celebrated article "The American Century" in *Life* magazine in 1941, in which he called on the American people vigorously to seize world leadership. The century to come, he said, could be the American century as the nineteenth had been that of England and France. Conservatives approved this new direction in the MacKinac resolution. See Wendell Wilkie's best-seller, *One World*, New York, 1943.

view. In his catalogue introduction Barnett Newman revealed a new notion of the modern American artist:[20]

> We have come together as American modern artists because we feel the need to present to the public a body of art that will adequately reflect the new America that is taking place today and the kind of America that will, it is hoped, become the cultural center of the world. This exhibition is a first step to free the artist from the stifling control of an outmoded politics. For art in America is still the plaything of politicians. Isolationist art still dominates the American scene. Regionalism still holds the reins of America's artistic future. It is high time we cleared the cultural atmosphere of America. We artists, therefore, conscious of the dangers that beset our country and our art can no longer remain silent.[21]

This rejection of politics, which had been reassimilated by the propagandistic art of the 1930s, was, according to Newman, necessary to the realization of international modernism. His manifest interest in internationalism thus aligned him—in spite of the illusory antagonism he maintained in order to preserve the adversary image of the avant-garde—with the majority of the public and of political institutions.

The United States emerged from the war a victorious, powerful, and confident country. The American public's infatuation with art steadily increased under the influence of the media. Artists strengthened by contact with European colleagues, yet relieved by their departures, possessed new confidence, and art historians and museums were ready to devote themselves to a new national art. All that was needed was a network of galleries to promote and profit from this new awareness. By 1943 the movement had begun; in March of that year the Mortimer Brandt Gallery, which dealt in old masters, opened a wing for experimental art, headed by Betty Parsons, to satisfy the market's demand for modernity.[22] In April 1945, Sam Kootz opened his gallery. And in February 1946, Charles Egan, who had been at Ferargil, opened a gallery of modern art, followed in September by Parsons, who opened her own gallery with the artists Peggy Guggenheim left behind when she returned to Europe (Rothko, Hofmann, Pollock, Reinhardt, Stamos, Still, Newman). Everything was prepared to enter the postwar years confidently.

20. Catalogue introduction to the First Exhibition of Modern American Artists at Riverside Museum, January 1943. This exhibition was intended as an alternative to the gigantic one organized by the Communist-dominated Artists for Victory. Newman's appeal for an apolitical art was in fact a political act since it attacked the involvement of the Communist artist in the war effort. Newman was joined by M. Avery, B. Brown, G. Constant, A. Gottlieb, B. Green, G. Green, J. Graham, L. Krasner, B. Margo, M. Rothko, and others.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Betty Parsons, interviewed by the author, New York, February 16, 1978.

The optimism of the art world contrasted sharply with the difficulties of the Left in identifying itself in the nation that emerged from the war. In fact, as the newly powerful middle-class worked to safeguard the privileges it had won during the economic boom, expectations of revolution, even dissidence, began to fade among the Communist party Left. And the disillusions of the postwar period (the international conferences, the Truman administration, the Iron Curtain) did nothing to ease their anxiety. What began as a de-Marxification of the extreme Left during the war, turned into a total de-politicization when the alternatives became clear: Truman's America or the Soviet Union. Dwight MacDonald accurately summarized the desperate position of the radical Left: "In terms of 'practical' political politics we are living in an age which consistently presents us with impossible alternatives. . . . It is no longer possible for the individual to relate himself to world politics. . . . Now the clearer one's insight, the more numbed one becomes."[23]

Rejected by traditional political structures, the radical intellectual after 1939 drifted from the usual channels of political discourse into isolation, and, utterly powerless, surrendered, refused to speak. Between 1946 and 1948, while political discussion grew heated in the debate over the Marshall Plan, the Soviet threat, and the presidential election in which Henry Wallace and the Communists again played an important part, a humanist abstract art began to appear that imitated the art of Paris and soon began to appear in all the galleries. Greenberg considered this new academicism[24] a serious threat, saying in 1945:

> We are in danger of having a new kind of official art foisted on us—official "modern" art. It is being done by well intentioned people like the Pepsi-cola company who fail to realize that to be for something uncritically does more harm in the end than being against it. For while official art, when it was thoroughly academic, furnished at least a sort of challenge, official "modern" art of this type will confuse, discourage and dissuade the true creator.[25]

During that period of anxious renewal, art and American society needed an infusion of new life, not the static pessimism of academicism. Toward that end Greenberg began to formulate in his weekly articles for the *Nation*[26] a critical system based on characteristics which he defined as typically American, and which were supposed to differentiate American from French art. This system was to revive modern American art, infuse it with a new life by identifying an essential

23. Dwight MacDonald, "Truman's Doctrine, Abroad and at Home," May 1947, published in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, New York, World Publishing, 1963, p. 191.
24. The abstract art fashionable at the time (R. Gwathmey, P. Burlin, J. de Martini) borrowed classical themes and modernized or "Picassoized" them.
25. Greenberg, *Nation*, April 1947.
26. Greenberg's articles were published by the *Nation* through the late 1940s.

formalism that could not be applied to the pale imitations of the School of Paris turned out by the American Abstract Artists. Greenberg's first attempt at differentiation occurred in an article about Pollock and Dubuffet. The prize went to the American because

> Pollock, like Dubuffet, tends to handle his canvas with an over-all evenness; but at this moment he seems capable of more variety than the French artist, and able to work with riskier elements. . . . Dubuffet's sophistication enables him to "package" his canvases more skilfully and pleasingly and achieve greater instantaneous unity, but Pollock, I feel, has more to say in the end and is, fundamentally, and almost because he lacks equal charm, the more original. Pollock has gone beyond the state where he needs to make his poetry explicit in ideographs.[27]

> He [Pollock] is American and rougher and more brutal, but he is also completer. In any case he is certainly less conservative, less of an easel painter in the traditional sense than Dubuffet.[28]

Greenberg emphasized the greater vitality, virility, and brutality of the American artist. He was developing an ideology that would transform the provincialism of American art into internationalism by replacing the Parisian standards that had until then defined the notion of quality in art (grace, craft, finish) with American ones (violence, spontaneity, incompleteness).[29] Brutality and vulgarity were signs of the direct, uncorrupted communication that contemporary life demanded. American art became the trustee of this new age.

On March 8, 1947, Greenberg stated that new American painting ought to be modern, urbane, casual, and detached, in order to achieve control and composure. It should not allow itself to become enmeshed in the absurdity of daily political and social events. That was the fault of American art, he said, for it had never been able to restrain itself from articulating some sort of message, describing, speaking, telling a story:

> In the face of current events painting feels, apparently, that it must be epic poetry, it must be theatre, it must be an atomic bomb, it must be the rights of man. But the greatest painter of our time, Matisse, preeminently demonstrated the sincerity and penetration that go with the kind of greatness particular to twentieth century painting by saying that he wanted his art to be an armchair for the tired business man.[30]

27. Greenberg, "Art," *Nation*, February 1, 1947, pp. 138–139.
28. *Ibid.*
29. For an analysis of the ideology of this position see S. Guilbaut, "Création et développement d'une Avant-Garde: New-York 1946–1951," *Histoire et critique des arts*, "Les Avant-Gardes," July 1978, pp. 29–48.
30. Greenberg, "Art," *Nation*, March 8, 1947, p. 284.

For Greenberg, painting could be important only if it made up its mind to return to its ivory tower, which the previous decade had so avidly attempted to destroy. This position of detachment followed naturally from his earlier critical works (1939), and from many artists' fears of participating in the virulent political propaganda of the early years of the Cold War. It was this integration that Greenberg attempted to circumvent through a reinterpretation of modernist detachment—a difficult undertaking for artists rooted in the tradition of the 1930s who had so ruthlessly been made a part of the social fabric. The central concern of avant-garde artists like Rothko and Still was to save their pictorial message from distortion: "The familiar identity of things had to be pulverized in order to destroy the finite associations with which our society increasingly enshrouds every aspect of our environment."[31]

Rothko tried to purge his art of any sign that could convey a precise image, for fear of being assimilated by society. Still went so far as to refuse at various times to exhibit his paintings publicly because he was afraid critics would deform or obliterate the content embedded in his abstract forms. In a particularly violent letter to Betty Parsons in 1948, he said:

> Please—and this is important, show them [my paintings] only to those who may have some insight into the values involved, and allow no one to write about them. NO ONE. My contempt for the intelligence of the scribblers I have read is so complete that I cannot tolerate their imbecilities, particularly when they attempt to deal with my canvases. Men like Soby, Greenberg, Barr, etc. . . . are to be categorically rejected. And I no longer want them shown to the public at large, either singly or in group.[32]

The work of many avant-garde artists, in particular Pollock, de Kooning, Rothko, and Still, seemed to become a kind of un-writing, an art of effacement, of erasure, a discourse which in its articulation tried to negate itself, to be reabsorbed. There was a morbid fear of the expressive image that threatened to regiment, to petrify painting once again. Confronted with the atomic terror in 1946, Dwight MacDonald analyzed in the same way the impossibility of expression that characterizes the modern age, thus imputing meaning to the avant-garde's silence. "Naturalism is no longer adequate," he wrote, "either esthetically or morally, to cope with the modern horror."[33]

Descriptions of nuclear destruction had become an obscenity, for to describe it was to accept it, to make a show of it, to represent it. The modern artist therefore had to avoid two dangers: assimilation of the message by political propaganda,

31. M. Rothko, *Possibilities*, No. 1, Winter 1947/48, p. 84.
32. Clifford Still, letter to Betty Parsons, March 20, 1948, Archives of American Art, Betty Parsons papers, N 68–72.
33. Dwight MacDonald, October 1946, published in *Memoirs*, "Looking at the War," p. 180.

and the terrible representation of a world that was beyond reach, unrepresentable. Abstraction, individualism, and originality seemed to be the best weapons against society's voracious assimilative appetite.

In March 1948, when none of the work being shown in New York reflected in any way Greenberg's position, he announced in his article "The Decline of Cubism," published in *Partisan Review*, that American art had definitively broken with Paris and that it had finally become essential to the vitality of Western culture. This declaration of faith assumed the decline of Parisian cubism, he said, because the forces that had given it birth had emigrated to the United States.

The fact that Greenberg launched his attack when he did was not unrelated to certain political events and to the prewar atmosphere that had existed in New York since January of that year.[34] The threat of a Third World War was openly discussed in the press; and the importance accorded by the government to the passage of the European Recovery Plan reinforced the idea that Europe—France and Italy—was about to topple into the Soviet camp. What would become of Western civilization? Under these circumstances, Greenberg's article seemed to rescue the cultural future of the West:[35]

> If artists as great as Picasso, Braque and Leger have declined so grievously, it can only be because the general social premises that used to guarantee their functioning have disappeared in Europe. And when one sees, on the other hand, how much the level of American art has risen in the last five years, with the emergence of new talents so full of energy and content as Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, David Smith—then the conclusion forces itself, much to our own surprise, that the main premises of Western art have at least migrated to the United States, along with the center of gravity of industrial production and political power.[36]

New York's independence from an enfeebled, faction-ridden Paris, threatened by communism from within and without, was in Greenberg's eyes necessary

34. His article had an explosive effect since it was the first time an American art critic had given pride of place to American art. There were some who were shocked and angered by it. G. L. K. Morris, a modern painter of the cubist school, former Trotskyite and Communist party supporter, violently attacked Greenberg's position in the pages of his magazine. He went on to accuse American critics in general of being unable to interpret the secrets of modern art: "This approach—completely irresponsible as to accuracy or taste—has been with us so long that we might say that it amounts to a tradition." He ironically attacked Greenberg's thesis for being unfounded: "It would have been rewarding if Greenberg had indicated in *what ways* the works of our losers have declined since the 30's." Working in the tradition of Picasso, Morris was unable to accept the untimely, surprising demise of cubism ("Morris on Critics and Greenberg: A Communication," *Partisan Review*, pp. 681–684; Greenberg's reply, 686–687).

35. For a more detailed analysis of how events in Europe were understood by the American public, see Richard M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism*, New York, Schocken Books, 1974, pp. 293–306.

36. Greenberg, "The Decline of Cubism," *Partisan Review*, March 1948, p. 369.

if modern culture was to survive. Softened by many struggles and too much success, the Parisian avant-garde survived only with difficulty. Only the virility of an art like Pollock's, its brutality, ruggedness, and individualism, could revitalize modern culture, traditionally represented by Paris, and effeminized by too much praise. By dealing only with abstract-expressionist art, Greenberg's formal analysis offered a theory of art that finally brought "international" over to the American side.

For the first time an important critic had been aggressive, confident, and devoted enough to American art to openly defy the supremacy of Parisian art and to replace it on an international scale with the art of Pollock and the New York School. Greenberg dispensed with the Parisian avant-garde and placed New York at the center of world culture. From then on the United States held all the winning cards in its struggle with communism: the atomic bomb, a powerful economy, a strong army, and now artistic supremacy—the cultural superiority that had been missing.

After 1949 and Truman's victory, the proclamation of the Fair Deal, and the publication of Schlesinger's *Vital Center*, traditional liberal democratic pluralism was a thing of the past. Henry Wallace disappeared from the political scene, the Communist party lost its momentum and even at times ventured outside the law. Victorious liberalism, ideologically refashioned by Schlesinger, barricaded itself behind an elementary anticommunism, centered on the notion of freedom. Aesthetic pluralism was also rejected in favor of a unique, powerful, abstract, purely American modern art, as demonstrated by Sam Kootz's refusal to show the French-influenced modern painters Brown and Holty.[37] Individualism would become the basis for all American art that wanted to represent the new era—confident and uneasy at the same time. Artistic freedom and experimentation became central to abstract-expressionist art.[38]

In May 1948, René d'Harnoncourt presented a paper before the annual meeting of the American Federation of Art in which he explored the notion of individuality, explaining why—his words were carefully chosen for May 1948—no collective art could come to terms with the age. Freedom of individual expression, independent of any other consideration, was the basis of our culture and deserved protection and even encouragement when confronted with cultures that were collectivist and authoritarian.

37. When Kootz reopened his gallery in 1949 with a show entitled "The Intrasubjectives," Brown and Holty were no longer with him. The artists shown included Baziotes, de Kooning, Gorky, Gottlieb, Graves, Hofmann, Motherwell, Pollock, Reinhardt, Rothko, Tobey, and Tomlin. It was clear what had happened: artists who worked in the tradition of the School of Paris were no longer welcome. In 1950 and 1951, Kootz disposed of Holty and Brown's work, making a killing by selling the paintings at discount prices in the Bargain Basement of the Gimbels department store chain. It was the end of a certain way of thinking about painting. The avant-garde jettisoned its past once and for all.

38. The ideology of individualism would be codified in 1952 by Harold Rosenberg in his well-known article "The American Action Painters," *Art News*, December 1952.

> The art of the twentieth century has no collective style, not because it has divorced itself from contemporary society but because it is part of it. And here we are with our hard-earned new freedom. Walls are crumbling all around us and we are terrified by the endless vistas and the responsibility of an infinite choice. It is this terror of the new freedom which removed the familiar signposts from the roads that makes many of us wish to turn the clock back and recover the security of yesterday's dogma. The totalitarian state established in the image of the past is one reflection of this terror of the new freedom.[39]

The solution to the problems created by such alienation was, according to d'Harnoncourt, an abstract accord between society and the individual:

> It can be solved only by an order which reconciles the freedom of the individual with the welfare of society and replaces yesterday's image of one unified civilization by a pattern in which many elements, while retaining their own individual qualities, join to form a new entity. . . . The perfecting of this new order would unquestionably tax our abilities to the very limit, but would give us a society enriched beyond belief by the full development of the individual for the sake of the whole. I believe a good name for such a society is democracy, and I also believe that modern art in its infinite variety and ceaseless exploration is its foremost symbol.[40]

In this text we have, perhaps for the first time, the ideology of the avant-garde aligned with postwar liberalism—the reconciliation of the ideology forged by Rothko and Newman, Greenberg and Rosenberg (individuality, risk, the new frontier) with the liberal ideology as Schlesinger defined it in *Vital Center*: a new radicalism.

To better understand the relationship between the avant-garde and the complicated Cold-War ideology, we should consider what Schlesinger had to say about the new liberalism. By studying this seminal text we can understand why, without the avant-garde painter's being aware of it, his work was accepted and utilized to represent liberal American values, first nationally (in the museum), then internationally (at the Venice Biennale), and finally as anti-Soviet propaganda in Berlin in 1951. How, in short, an art whose stubborn will to remain apolitical became, for that very reason, a powerful instrument of propaganda. In 1951, for art to be politicized it had to be apolitical.

The new liberalism was identified with the avant-garde not only because that kind of painting was identifiable in modern internationalist terms (also perceived

39. René d'Harnoncourt, "Challenge and Promise: Modern Art and Society," *Art News*, November 1949, p. 252.
40. *Ibid.*

as uniquely American), but also because the values represented in the pictorial work were especially cherished during the Cold War (the notion of individualism and risk essential to the artist to achieve complete freedom of expression). The element of risk that was central to the ideology of the avant-garde, was also central to the ideology of *Vital Center*.[41] Risk, as defined by the avant-garde and formulated in their work as a necessary condition for freedom of expression, was what distinguished a free society from a totalitarian one, according to Schlesinger: "The eternal awareness of choice can drive the weak to the point where the simplest decision becomes a nightmare. Most men prefer to flee choice, to flee anxiety, to flee freedom."[42] In the modern world, which brutally stifles the individual, the artist becomes a rampart, an example of will against the uniformity of totalitarian society. In this way the individualism of abstract expressionism allowed the avant-garde to define and occupy a unique position on the artistic front. The avant-garde appropriated a coherent, definable, consumable image that reflected rather accurately the objectives and aspirations of a newly powerful, liberal, internationalist America. This juxtaposition of political and artistic images was possible because both groups consciously or unconsciously repressed aspects of their ideology in order to ally themselves with the ideology of the other. Contradictions were passed over in silence.

It was ironic but not contradictory that in a society as fixed in a right-of-center position as the United States, and where intellectual repression was strongly felt,[43] abstract expressionism was for many people an expression of freedom: freedom to create controversial works, freedom symbolized by action and gesture, by the expression of the artist apparently freed from all restraints. It was an essential existential liberty that was defended by the moderns (Barr, Soby, Greenberg, Rosenberg) against the attacks of the humanist liberals (Devree, Jewell) and the conservatives (Dondero, Taylor), serving to present the internal struggle to those outside as proof of the inherent liberty of the American system, as opposed to the restrictions imposed on the artist by the Soviet system. Freedom was the symbol most enthusiastically promoted by the new liberalism during the Cold War.[44]

Expressionism became the expression of the difference between a free society and totalitarianism; it represented an essential aspect of liberal society: its

41. See discussion in "Artist's Session at Studio 35" in *Modern Artists in America*, ed. Motherwell, Reinhardt, Wittenborn, Schultz, New York, 1951, pp. 9-23.
42. Arthur Schlesinger, *The Vital Center, Our Purposes and Perils on the Tightrope of American Liberalism*, Cambridge, Riverside Press, 1949, p. 52.
43. We should recall that at that time the power of the various anticommunist committees was on the rise (HUAC, the Attorney General's list) and that attempts were made to bar persons with Marxist leanings from university positions. Sidney Hook, himself a former Marxist, was one of the most vocal critics; see "Communism and the Intellectuals," *The American Mercury*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 302 (February 1949), 133-144.
44. See Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," *Artforum*, May 1973, pp. 42-54.

aggressiveness and ability to generate controversy that in the final analysis posed no threat. Once again Schlesinger leads us through the labyrinth of liberal ideology:

> It is threatening to turn us all into frightened conformists; and conformity can lead only to stagnation. We need courageous men to help us recapture a sense of the indispensability of dissent, and we need dissent if we are to make up our minds equably and intelligently.[45]

While Pollock's drip paintings offended both the Left and the Right as well as the middle class, they revitalized and strengthened the new liberalism.[46] Pollock became its hero and around him a sort of school developed, for which he became the catalyst, the one who, as de Kooning put it, broke the ice. He became its symbol. But his success and the success of the other abstract-expressionist artists was also the bitter defeat of being powerless to prevent their art from being assimilated into the political struggle.

The trap that the modern American artist wanted to avoid, as we've seen, was the image, the "statement." Distrusting the traditional idiom, he wanted to warp the trace of what he wanted to express, consciously attempt to erase, to void the readable, to censure himself. In a certain way he wanted to write about the impossibility of description. In doing this, he rejected two things, the aesthetic of the Popular Front and the traditional American aesthetic, which reflected the political isolationism of an earlier era. The access to modernism that Greenberg had theoretically achieved elevated the art of the avant-garde to a position of international importance, but in so doing integrated it into the imperialist machine of the Museum of Modern Art.[47]

So it was that the progressively disillusioned avant-garde, although theoretically in opposition to the Truman administration, aligned itself, often unconsciously, with the majority, which after 1948 moved dangerously toward the right. Greenberg followed this development with the painters, and was its catalyst. By analyzing the political aspect of American art, he defined the ideological, formal vantage point from which the avant-garde would have to assert itself if it intended to survive the ascendency of the new American middle class. To do so it was forced to suppress what many first generation artists had defended against the sterility of American abstract art: emotional content, social commentary, the discourse that

45. Schlesinger, *Vital Center*, p. 208.
46. The new liberalism accepted and even welcomed the revitalizing influence of a certain level of nonconformity and rebellion. This was the system's strength, which Schlesinger clearly explains in his book. Political ideology and the ideology of the avant-garde were united: "And there is a 'clear and present danger' that anti-communist feeling will boil over into a vicious and unconstitutional attack on nonconformists in general and thereby endanger the sources of our democratic strength" (p. 210).
47. See Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, XII (June 1974), 39–41.

avant-garde artists intended in their work, and which Meyer Schapiro had articulated.

Ironically, it was that constant rebellion against political exploitation and the stubborn determination to save Western culture by Americanizing it that led the avant-garde, after killing the father (Paris), to topple into the once disgraced arms of the mother country.

The Significance of Literature: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

JOEL FINEMAN

Man, poor, awkward, reliable, necessary man belongs to a sex that has been rational for millions and millions of years. He can't help himself. It is in his race. The History of Women is very different. We have always been picturesque protests against the mere existence of common sense. We saw its dangers from the first.

—A Woman of No Importance

What I am outlining here summarizes portions of a longer essay I have been writing on Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. For the most part, I will forego discussion of the play and focus on the way in which Wilde's farce precisely figures the problem of "The Self in Writing."[1] You will perhaps recall that Jack-Ernest, the hero of the play, discovers the unity of his duplicity when he learns that as an infant he was quite literally exchanged for writing in the cloakroom of Victoria Station, his absent-minded governess having substituted for his person the manuscript of a three-volume novel which is described as being "of more than usually repulsive sentimentality." As a result, because Jack-Ernest is in this way so uniquely and definitively committed to literature, with literature thus registered as his alter-ego, he is one of those few selfs or subjects whose very existence, as it is given to us, is specifically literary, an ego-ideal of literature, as it were, whose form is so intimately immanent in his content as to collapse the distinction between a name and that which it bespeaks, and whose temporal destiny is so harmoniously organic a whole as to make it a matter of natural fact that his end be in his beginning—for Ernest is indeed, as Lady Bracknell puts it,

1. This paper was delivered at the 1979 convention of the Modern Language Association, at one of the several panels associated with the forum on "The Self in Writing." The essay on *The Importance of Being Earnest* has now grown into a chapter on Wilde which will take its place in a projected book on literary names. The notes have been added for this publication.

paraphrasing traditional definitions of allegory, one whose origins are in a terminus.

Yet if Jack-Ernest is thus an ideal image of the relation of the self to writing, he is nevertheless himself a piece of literature, and therefore but a literary representation of the self's relation to literature, a fiction, therefore, if not necessarily a farce, and for this reason not to be trusted. This is the difficulty, I take it, that our forum has been established to address, recognizing that while the self and writing are surely implicated each in the other, perhaps even reciprocally constitutive each *of* the other, they are so in a way that at the same time undermines the integrity and the stability of both. This we can see even in the delicate phrasing of our forum's title, where the vagueness of the preposition, the problematic and diffusive metaphoricity of its innocuous "in"—"The Self *in* Writing"—testifies to the fact that the Self *and* Writing, as literal categories with their own propriety, can only be linked together in a figural discourse, which, even as it is spoken, calls the specificity and the literality of its terms into question. Strictly speaking, of course, "The Self in Writing" is an impossible locution, for in writing we do not find the self but, at best, only its representation, and it is only because *in* literature, in a literary mode, we characteristically, if illegitimately, rush to collate a word both with its sense and with its referent that we are, even momentarily, tempted to forget or to suspend the originary and intrinsic difference between, on the one hand, the self who reads, and, on the other, the literary revision of that self who is read.

This is to insist upon the fact that the self's relation to literature is not itself a literary relation, and that only a sentimental and literary reading will obsessively identify a thing with its word, a signified with its signifier, or the self with its literary image. This is also to avoid simplistic dialectical accounts of the act of reading—either identificatory or implicative—whose mechanical symmetries programmatically reduce the self to its idealization: the so-called "ideal reader" of whom we hear a great deal of late. Instead, this is to recognize that if we are to speak of the relation of the self to the writing in which it finds itself written, or, stylizing this familiar topos, if we are to speak of the relation of the self to the language in which it finds itself bespoken, then we must do so in terms of a critical discourse that registers the disjunction and the discrepancy between being and meaning, thing and word, and which therefore locates the self who is committed to language in its experience of the slippage between its immediate presence to itself and its mediated representation of itself in a symbolic system. Moreover, since Being, to be thought, must be thought as Meaning, even this self-presence of the self to itself will emerge only in retrospect as loss, with the self discovering itself in its own meaningful aftermath, just as Being can only be spoken in its own effacement, as Heidegger—not Derrida—has taught us.[2]

2. See, for example, *The Question of Being*, or "The Temporality of Discourse" in

As is well known, it is thanks to the patient, painstaking, and rigorous labors of the tradition of psychoanalysis—a tradition that begins with Freud and which probably concludes with Lacan—that we possess a theoretical vocabulary sufficiently supple to capture this subject born in the split between self-presence and the representation of self. The insights of this tradition, however perfunctorily and schematically I refer to them here, are what enable us to situate the self of "The Self in Writing" in the metaphorical *in* whose very figurality is what allows us to articulate the problem in the first place, which is to say, in the same displacing place that Wilde—whose play will thematize this very problem of the place of the subject—places *Being*, midway between the import of *Importance* and a specifically literary pun on *Earnest*—the importance of *being Earnest*—as though the indeterminacy of meaning in turn determined *Being* as its own rueful double entendre.

What I should like to do here, however, recognizing, with some regret, that both the theory and the vocabulary of this psychoanalytic tradition are for many people both irritating and opaque, is translate its discourse into the more accessible and familiar terms of what today we will parochially call the Anglo-American speculative tradition. To that end, in an effort to sketch out the necessary contours of any psychoanalysis of what we can now identify as the "subject of literature," I would like to rehearse a rather well known paradox of logical reference, first formulated in 1908 by Kurt Grelling, but of interest to philosophy from Russell at least through Quine.

Being and Time (IV,68,d). Derrida's project is effectively to apply Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics to Heidegger himself (e.g., "Ousia and Grammè: A Note to a Footnote in *Being and Time*," in *Phenomenology in Perspective*, ed. F. J. Smith, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1970; also, "The Ends of Man," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30, No. 1 (1969), also in *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris, Minuit, 1972), so as to show that even Heidegger repeats, rather than revises, traditional metaphysical assumptions. For this reason, Derrida argues, even Heidegger's being must be put under further erasure as part of an ongoing, ever-vigilant, vaguely messianic, deconstructive Puritanism. There is no doubt that Derrida makes this point persuasively; the question is whether this measures a blindness or an insight on Heidegger's part, for what is important to Heidegger is the specificity of his history of Western philosophical speculation. What for Derrida is the mark of Heidegger's failure is also a measure, or so Heidegger would no doubt respond, of *necessary* metaphysical limits, a determination of the way it is and is not, or, more modestly and historically, the way it has always been and seems still to be. I am here assuming, following Derrida himself, that it is one of Western metaphysics' special and perennial pleasures to have itself deconstructed, and that for this reason we must register Derrida's always already predetermined *différence* within the horizon of its always eventual determinate recuperation. This is not a static balance: it has a direction, from pre-beginning to end, and this directionality also has its obvious metaphysical—not to mention its more obvious psychological—consequences.

The paradox itself is relatively straightforward. Let us say, says the paradox, that there is a set of words that describe themselves. For example, *polysyllabic*, the word, is itself polysyllabic, *short* is itself short, and *English* is itself English, an English word. Let us call such self-descriptive words autological, because they speak about themselves. In addition, let us further say that there is another set of words that do not describe themselves. For example, *monosyllabic*, the word, is not itself monosyllabic, *long* is not itself long, *French* is not itself French. Let us now agree to call this second set of words heterological, because these are words that speak about things besides themselves—allegorical words, because they speak about the Other (*allos*, other; *agoreuein*, to speak), a *logos* of the *heteros*, or, in Lacan's phrase, a discourse of the Other. Having stipulated these two sets, the autological and the heterological, the question then emerges: is the word *heterological* itself autological or heterological? And here we discover the paradox, for simply asking the question forces upon us the odd conclusion that if *heterological*, the word, is itself heterological, then it is autological, whereas, in some kind of contrast, if it is autological, then it is heterological. That is to say, given the definitions and a classical system of logic, the heterological can only be what it is on condition that it is what it is not, and it can only be what it is not on condition that it is what it is.

Thus formulated, the paradox possesses both an elegance and a banality, and in proportions that rather directly correspond to the brittle yet mandarin tenor and texture we associate with Wilde's farce. So too, the paradox very neatly summarizes the plot of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, since Ernest will himself be earnest only when he isn't, just as he will not be earnest only when he is. This paradoxical alternation and oscillation of the subject, a phenomenon to which the play gives the general label Bunburyism, but which Lacan would call *auto-différence*, is resolved at the end of the play when Ernest consults the book of the name of the fathers and discovers that his name "naturally is Ernest," and that therefore to his surprise, "all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth."[3] Were there time, we would want at this point to conduct both a phonological and a phenomenological analysis so as to explain why all the names of the fathers in the list that Ernest reads begin with the name of the mother, "Ma"—Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff—and we would want also to know why this enumeration of nasal consonants not only spells an end to the labial phonemics of *Bunbury*, but also marks the moment when denomination lapses into description, when use turns into mention, and when Truth itself arrives after the fact to validate what it succeeds.[4] Even putting these important

3. See "Le clivage du sujet et son identification," *Scilicet*, Nos. 2,3, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1970, p. 127. Note that the fracture is imaginary, not symbolic.

4. I have elsewhere argued that the first phonemes, labial /papa/ or /baba/ and nasal /mama/, are acquired in accordance with a structure that determines specific literary themes. See "The Structure of Allegorical Desire," *October*, 12 (Spring 1980), 47–66. This

questions to the side, however, we can see that the intention of the farce is to resolve the paradox of autology and heterology by enacting it through to its absurd reduction, to the point, that is, where Ernest becomes, literally becomes, his name.

Again, we might want to take this revival of the tradition of Paracelsian signatures, this coordination of signifier and signified, as indicative of the literary *per se*. But we can do so only if we recognize the specific twist or trope that literature gives to this semiotics of correspondence. For Ernest only becomes earnest when he recognizes in the heterology of words the paradoxical representationality of language, and thus discovers *in* the difference between a name and its thing the paradoxical difference *between* himself and his name. Ernest therefore inherits his name only to the extent that its significance is restricted or promoted to its nominality, only to the extent, that is to say, that it becomes a signifier of itself *as* a signifier, not a signified. This is indeed a paradigm of literary language, of language that calls attention to itself as language, just as the pun on *Earnest* in the title possesses its literary effect precisely because it *doesn't* mean its double-meaning and thereby forces us to register the word as just a word, significant of just itself, with no meaning beyond its palpability as a signifier. This is also why Wilde's play or farce on names is itself so important, for we may say that the special propriety of a proper name with respect to common nouns corresponds precisely to the specialized charge of literature with respect to so-called ordinary language—"so-called" because there could no more be an ordinary language without its fictive complement than there could be a natural language bereft of its fantasy of the propriety of proper names.[5]

"Pa/Ma" model phonologically instantiates what Heidegger describes more generally in terms of the question whose asking renders metaphysics possible: "In the service of thought we are trying precisely to penetrate the source from which the essence of thinking is determined, namely *alētheia* and *physis*, being as unconcealment, the very thing that has been lost by 'logic'" (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. R. Manheim, New York, Anchor Books, 1961, p. 102). In the same way that Heidegger's *alētheia* is forsworn by *logos*, the babbling /papa/ through which speech is thought is irrevocably lost at the first moment of its meaningful articulation. So too, as Heidegger predicts, the hidden unconcealment of truth always reemerges in literature as death, farcically so in *The Importance of Being Earnest*: "Bunbury is dead. . . . The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died." This has ramifications for the metaphorics of literary sexuality, a point to which I refer briefly above.

5. I am assuming here Jakobson's "structuralist" definition of the literary function as that message which stresses itself as merely message, and I am assimilating this, for reasons discussed in the next footnote, to proper names, for these are nominal only because they stress their nominality. The opposition of meaningful words to meaningless proper nouns is therefore one instance of a more general system of opposition in *The Importance of Being Earnest* that manages consistently to juxtapose the serious against the trivial in such

Yet if this is a small-scale model, however general, of the literary, of language which stresses its literality, its letters, it is of course profoundly unlike the kind of ordinary language that philosophy, as opposed to literature, would instead prefer to speak—which is why where literature depends upon the paradox of heterology—philosophy instead prohibits it, with the notion of "metalanguage," which keeps the orders of reference in their hierarchical place. Logicians are of course entitled to introduce whatever constraints might be required to

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a way as to destabilize the integrity of meaningful binary antithesis. This is an obvious theme of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which Wilde subtitled *A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* so as to make the very fact of farce a problem for whatever might be understood to be its opposite. In this way, by mentioning itself, Wilde's theme defends its own expression by referring the formal force of farce to an ongoing repetition internal to itself. This is, as it were, the asymptotic height of farce, which, because it is the genre that, as Marx suggested, imitates or repeats tragedy, is therefore the genre whose literary self-consciousness is formally most acute because thematically most empty.

The generic point is important because it shows us in what sense Wilde took his play seriously. For Aristotle, as for the serious literary tradition that succeeds him, tragedy is the imitation of a logically unified action, with the result that the hero of tragedy, his character subjected to his destiny, becomes a subjectivity as unified as the action he enacts. Hence Oedipus, whether Sophocles' or Aristotle's or Freud's, and the necessity historically attaching to the coherence of his person. It is this unity that makes tragedy, for Aristotle, the most important (and therefore the most "philosophical," see *Poetics*, chs. 9 and 26) of literary genres, just as this unity explains why, for Aristotle, Oedipus is both the perfect tragic object and the perfect tragic subject. In contrast, farce presents itself as the imitation of tragic imitation, as the action of imitation rather than an imitation of action, and the result of this double doubling is that the unifying logic of tragedy, which depends on imitation, is put into question by its own duplication. This sounds paradoxical, but it simply characterizes (1) the literary function as Jakobson describes it theoretically, i.e., the essential structural feature of literature, its recursive reflexivity, (2) the actual historical practice of a literary tradition that unfolds towards increasingly self-conscious forms and themes, i.e., the mocking mechanism, usually mimetic, by means of which literature regularly revives itself by calling attention to its conventions, for example, the way *The Importance of Being Earnest* (as do most of Wilde's plays) parodies what were in Wilde's theater established proprieties of stock and pointed melodrama (the crossed lovers, the bastard child, the discovery of origins that predetermine ends). On the one hand, this explains why farce is, again according to the tradition, of all poetic genres least important, for where tragedy is serious because it imitates something, farce is trivial because it imitates imitation (literature or literariness), which is nothing. (This is the case even if another principle of aesthetic meaning is substituted for imitation, for any notion of importance will be undone when it remarks itself.) But this is also why, on the other hand, because his play makes fun *of* tragedy, the farcically divided Jack-Ernest constitutes the most serious possible critique of Aristotle's tragically unified Oedipus, which explains why a critical tradition dominated by Aristotle and by Oedipus finds nothing funny in the play's humor—Shaw, for example, who hated the play because he thought its wit was unimportant, or,

maintain the coherence of their artificial systems, but this remains a merely logical, not a psychological, necessity, which is why Lacan, recognizing the fact that a subject of discourse might at any moment stumble into heterology, says that there is no such thing as "metalanguage."[6] This is not the place to make the point in any detail, but I would want to argue that philosophy of language has always been autological, and that this can be precisely documented by tracing its attitude towards proper names, from *The Cratylus*, where a name will imitate its thing,

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more generally, the way the play is labeled marginal *because* the perfect farce.

As serious tragedy to trivial farce, so philosophy to literature, and for the same reasons. We know that this is historically the case if we recall that Plato condemns sophistic rhetoric for the way it mimes philosophy, or the way Plato objects to literature for being but an imitation of a more substantial truth. Again the same problem: if any given tragedy might be a perfect farce, how does philosophy defend itself from what would be its perfect imitation, for example Gorgias's parody of Parmenides, which "proves" through nominal negative existentials that "nothing exists." In this paper, therefore, I am not simply assuming that Wilde's farce reenacts, or represents within a literary mode, the traditional quarrel of literature with philosophy. More specifically, I am arguing, first, that Wilde's play on names, the play's thematic matter, is the objectification of its parodic manner; second, that it is by a commitment to the propriety of names that philosophy has historically defended itself against the possibility that it is its own dissimulation—a weak defense, given the historical failure, to this day, of the philosophy of proper names. Gorgias's onto-logical name-play is what makes rhetoric a *necessary* mockery of philosophy (as Gorgias describes it in one of the few surviving fragments)—"to destroy an opponent's seriousness by laughter and his laughter by seriousness"—just as it is the earnestness of "Earnest" that makes Wilde's "philosophy of the trivial" serious (as Wilde described it in an interview just prior to the play's premiere):

> What sort of play are we to expect?
>
> It is exquisitely trivial, a delicate bubble of fancy and it has its philosophy.
>
> Its philosophy?
>
> That we should treat all the trivial things of life seriously, and all the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality.

The relevant contemporary example is Derrida's parody, iteration, citation, quotation of Searle's defense of Austin (see "Limited Inc," *Glyph*, 2, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Derrida not only makes fun of Searle's speech act theory and its notion of "copyrightable" proper names (for naively supposing some innocent principle of difference with which to distinguish a serious legitimate utterance from its nonserious illegitimate repetition); he also "proves" the point by making fun—a serious joke about corporeal anonymity—of "Searle-Sarl's" name itself.

6. See "D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose," in *Ecrits*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1966, p. 538. See also, Jacques-Alain Miller, "U ou 'Il n'y a pas de meta-langage,'" *Ornicar?*, 5 (1975–1976), 67–72.

through the epoch of representation, where a name will uncomplicatedly point to its thing, through Russell and Frege, where the immediate relation of a word to its referent is replaced by the equally immediate relation of a word to its sense, through to speech act theory, where a word uncomplicatedly reflects its speaker's intention. Of late, there are signs that this realism of nominalism has begun to lose its philosophical prestige, for example, Saul Kripke's devastating critique of Searle's theory of nominality, a critique whose account of reference constitutes the exact inverse of Derrida's equally devastating critique of Searle's hypothesis of expressable intention. On the assumption that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, it seems possible that continental and Anglo-American philosophy might eventually meet in the course of these complementary examinations of the propriety or impropriety of names. Leaving these relatively recent indications to the side, however, we may say that the perennial philosophical dream of true language, of language that always means what it says, stands in marked contrast to literary language which can never mean what it says because it never means anything except the fact that it is saying something that it does not mean.[7]

This traditional difference is worth developing, for it allows us to define the

7. Gwendolen and Cecily both give voice to this philosophical-philological, idealist dream of a true word: "My ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence." Or, "You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love someone whose name was Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence." Here we can only briefly allude to the complications that make this confidence problematic. The traditional account of names—as formulated, for example, in Mill—is that a proper name has a denotation but not a connotation, in contrast to common nouns which have both. This is a muted version of Socrates' original philosophical desire for a language, whose words would necessarily metaphysically correspond with things, a language, as it were, where words literally *are* the things they speak, for example the way *R*, as Socrates says in *The Cratylus*, is the letter of motion. The history of philosophy of names—from Aristotle's *Categories* on, through Stoic grammar, through medieval sign theory (via the incipient nominalism of Abelard, the modified realism of Aquinas, the straightforward nominalism of Ockham)—is a continual attempt somehow to nourish and to satisfy this initial philosophical desire for true language (for a truth *of* language, an *etymos* of *logos*) by lowering the ontological stakes to something merely nominal, for example, Mill's denotation theory where names merely indicate the things that formerly they were. The covert metaphysical assumptions embedded even in so modest a claim as Mill's were brought out by Frege and Russell in their well-known criticisms of denotation theory, first, with the instance of negative existentials, where there is no referent to which a name might point (Odysseus, golden mountains, etc.), second, with the instance of identity propositions, which give off information even though the names they contain share the same referent (e.g., "The Morning Star is the Evening Star," "Cicero is Tully"—these being the traditional examples, as though philosophy can only think the problem under the aegis of the queen of desire, Venus, and the king of rhetoric, Cicero). For these reasons, lest language call things into being simply by denominating them, Frege and Russell, in

self of "The Self in Writing" as both the cause and the consequence of the paradox subtending the autological and the heterological. That is to say, the self becomes the difference between a discourse of things and a discourse of words, a subject situated midway between the subject of philosophy and the subject of literature, between ordinary and extraordinary language, in short, again, between *Importance* and *Earnest*. Where philosophy self-importantly commits itself to autology so as to make of language a transparent vehicle for the signifieds of which it speaks, literature, in contrast, "Earnestly" forswears signifieds altogether for the sake of the heterological materiality of its signifiers. The self between them constitutes the necessity of their difference, so that the ancient quarrel between philosophy and literature thus takes place over the body of the self in writing, with philosophy wanting to do with its signifieds what literature wants to do with its signifiers, and with the self in writing testifying to the fact that neither can do either. A signifier, says Lacan, is what represents a subject to another signifier. Literature and philosophy are thus the signifiers of each other, names, in this sense, whose "sense," or let us say significance, is what their readers are.

Situated thus, as both elision and bar between these two equally inhuman

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somewhat different ways, introduced between a name and its referent a third term which is its "sense," arguing that while a name must have a sense in order to refer, it need not have a referent in order to make sense. As a result, no longer the essence of things, names now will merely mean them; they are truncated definite descriptions, to use Russell's phrase, and so not really names at all, but abbreviated bundles of meaning which are only contingently related to a referent.

There are several difficulties with this account of names which understands them to refer by means of what and how they mean. (Neither does such an account eliminate metaphysics by transferring its claims to the register of meaning. Cf. Quine: "Meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and married to the word," in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 21.) First of all, it must be decided which aspects of nominal sense will be essential in determining a name's referent, for two people might well have entirely different senses of "Aristotle" and yet surely refer to the same person when they use his name (my "Aristotle" may only have written the *Poetics* whereas yours may have only tutored Alexander, and the real Aristotle might in fact have done neither). So too, there is an intuitive difficulty that comes of thinking names like *John* or *X* in fact possess a sense; this is to truncate description to a grotesque degree. These difficulties are not resolved even when the Russell-Frege account is "loosened up," as it is by Searle when, following Wittgenstein, he collates description and identification in a speech act theory of names. (See J. Searle, "Proper Names," *Mind*, 67 [1958]; see also the criticism of this in S. Kripke, "Naming and Necessity," in *Semantics of Natural Language*, eds., D. Davidson and G. Harman, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1972; also K. Donellan, "Speaking of Nothing," *The Philosophical Review*, 83 [1974]. Searle's essay should be read so as to notice the continuity subtending speculation about names in philosophy's *démarche* or retreat from ontology to psychology: first, names are the things to which they refer, then they imitate them, then they point to them, then they mean them, and then, in speech act theory, they "intend" them.) These difficulties, and others associated with them, have been much discussed in recent

desires, the self in writing finds his own human desire strictly circumscribed, a desire that we might characterize as a lusting of the autological for the heterological, a desire that leaves something to be desired. "My ideal has always been to love someone of the name of Ernest," but "Bunbury is dead." In psychoanalytic terms this would correspond to the transition from narcissistic to anaclitic object choice, or to the difference between the self before and after what psychoanalysis thematizes as his accession to speech. If we recall, though, that desire too is an effect of the language, that Eros is the consequence of Logos, then our paradox will produce the appropriate Freudian paradigm without recourse to the Freudian lexicon. For now, remembering their etymology, we may rechristen the autological as the autosexual, or rather, the homosexual, and we may equally revalue the

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Anglo-American philosophy of language, by, amongst others, Donellan, Putnam, and, most influentially, Kripke. There is a good introduction to the topic, with bibliography, in *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, ed. S. Schwartz, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977. We cannot here discuss the technical issues involved, which begin, primarily with the way names rigidly designate the same thing in all possible worlds (e.g., "The author of the *Iliad* might not have been born and might not have been the author of the Iliad" makes sense, but, substituting a name for the description, as in "Homer might not have been born and might not have been Homer" does not), but the force of this recent theory is to oblige philosophy, for the most part, to give up a strong sense theory of nominal reference. Instead, as a possible alternative, Kripke proposes to explain nominal reference by appealing to history, relating every use of every name to a series of hypothetical causal chains which reach back to every name's original moment of ostensive baptism. The consequences of Kripke's novel account are subtle and far-reaching, and they remain important even though, still more recently, their argument has itself run into difficulties. Here we must be content simply to allude to the problem, and to mention these two points relevant to our discussion above.

First, though Kripke can demonstrate that a name cannot have a sense in a strong way such that it determines its referent, he must still account for the information we receive in identity propositions. Here, as N. Salmon suggests, the only sense a name conveys is of itself as a name. See Salmon's review of L. Linsky's *Names and Descriptions*, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, 76, No. 8 (1979). This is why I feel justified in assimilating proper names to Jakobson's account of literariness.

Second, Kripke has recently discovered a paradox built into his theory of causal chains, for he imagines a situation in which a single origin legitimately produces a divided name. See "A Puzzle about Belief," in *Meaning and Use*, ed. A. Margalit, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1979. Kripke confesses himself unable to resolve the paradox even though it calls his entire account of proper names into question (and, as Putnam points out, the paradox also infects a theory of natural kinds; see Putnam's "Comment" on Kripke's puzzle, also in *Meaning and Use*). Kripke's puzzle is an inversion of Derrida's differentiated, reiterated origin, which is why I suggest in this paper that the two philosophers, though neither speaks to or of the other, share a common criticism of Searle, and also why I say that Anglo-American philosophy of language and continental phenomenology are now drawing together in their discovery of the impropriety of proper names. This is also why they both share an interest in the ontological status of the fictive. This is a point to be developed

heterological as the heterosexual. This leaves us with the psychoanalytic conclusion that the fundamental desire of the reader of literature is the desire of the homosexual for the heterosexual, or rather, substituting the appropriate figurative embodiments of these abstractions, the desire of the man to be sodomized by the woman. This is a specifically obsessional desire, but it is one that Freud luridly locates at the center of his three major case histories: Ratman, Wolfman, Schreber. This would also explain why the only word that ends up being naturally motivated in *The Importance of Being Earnest* is not *Earnest* but *Bunbury* itself, which was not only British slang for a male brothel, but is also a collection of signifiers that straightforwardly express their desire to bury in the bun.[8]

With this cryptographic reference to the death that we always find buried in

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elsewhere. The history of philosophy of names should, however, be of special interest to students of literature, for in many ways the progressive and increasingly dogmatic subordination by philosophy of nominal reference, first to extension, then to expression, then to intention, and finally to a historicity that postpones its temporality, in many ways parallels the development and eventual demise of an aesthetics of representation. That is to say, the perennial awkwardness philosophy discloses in the collation of word and thing is closely related to the uneasy relation our literary tradition regularly discovers when it connects literal to figurative literary meaning. So too, there is an obvious affinity between what are the topoi of a long philosophical meditation on names—e.g., the integrity of a clear-cut distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions, or the possibility of an overlap between *de dictu* intensional meanings and *de re* extensional truth values—and what are the corresponding chestnuts of hermeneutic concern—e.g., the relation of an autonomous text to its external context, or the imbrication of form with content, or medium with message. In this paper, however, I am more concerned with the difference, rather than the similarity, between philosophical and literary names, for this difference possesses a specificity of its own, and it can be identified, as I say above, with the significance (which is to be distinguished from the meaning) of literature. We assume (with De Man) that all literary texts share the same indeterminate meaning, but we further argue (with Lacan) that this indeterminacy of meaning in turn determines a specific literary significance.

8. Again we cannot develop the point adequately, but we would begin our psychoanalytic account with Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" (which concludes, by the way, with a reference to Wilde), and we would conclude it with Lacan's discovery that there is no such thing as woman. See "Aristotle et Freud: L'autre satisfaction," also "Dieu et la jouissance de la femme," in *Le Seminaire, Livre XX, Encore: 1972–1973*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1975. We thus assume, in traditional psychoanalytic fashion, that the subject of Western literature is male, that its object, which exists only as an effect which puts existence into question (in the same way that Wilde gives us *Being* flanked by punning), is female, and that its project is therefore the representation of desire. We deal here with the metaphorics of literary sexuality, with the way the male is historically a subject undone by its female sub-version. Hence our epigraph, or the way Wilde's farce repeats the erotic melodrama through which it is thought: "It is called *Lady Lancing* on the cover: but the real title is *The Importance of Being Earnest*," letter to George Alexander, October 1894, printed in *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. R. Hart-Davis, New York, Harcourt, Brace, and World,

the logos of desire we are very close to the impulse to death that Freud assimilated to the wanderings of Eros. There is no time to pursue this connection further, but I would like in conclusion at least to draw the moral. In our literature the heterological is the trope of the autological, just as the heterosexual is the trope of the homosexual, just as woman is the trope of man. This accounts, respectively, for the semiotics, the syntax, and the semantics of our literature. So too does it account for its ethics. Asked to summarize her novel, the novel whose loss is responsible for the subject of the play, Miss Prism, the governess, says, "The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means." So it does, but this embedding of the moral in a necessarily fictive register equally measures the cost of what we must therefore call the fiction of meaning, at least for so long as both the Self and Writing are accorded an authority that even Wilde's farce thus fails to deconstruct.[9]

1962, pp. 375–376. For a summary of the proposed *Lady Lancing*, a cuckoldry plot which Wilde describes as "A sheer flame of love between a man and a woman," see the letter to Alexander, August 1894, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 360–362.

9. Because the moral is imaginary it has that much more force. This speaks to an old psychoanalytic ambiguity, that the precursor of the super-ego is the ego-ideal. This raises a problem for Lacan's psychoanalytic topography, suggesting the possibility that Lacan's "Symbolic" is itself "Imaginary," the last lure of the "Imaginary." To discuss this problem properly we would necessarily consider a different literary genre: romance, which is not tragedy and is not farce, neither Oedipus nor his courtly derision.

The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism*

DOUGLAS CRIMP

> *It is a fetishistic, fundamentally anti-technical notion of* art *with which theorists of photography have tusseled for almost a century, without, of course, achieving the slightest result. For they sought nothing beyond acquiring credentials for the photographer from the judgment-seat which he had already overturned.*
> —Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography"

That photography had overturned the judgment-seat of art is a fact which the discourse of modernism found it necessary to repress, and so it seems that we may accurately say of postmodernism that it constitutes precisely the return of the repressed. Postmodernism can only be understood as a specific breach with modernism, with those institutions which are the preconditions for and which shape the discourse of modernism. These institutions can be named at the outset: first, the museum; then, art history; and finally, in a more complex sense, because modernism depends both upon its presence and upon its absence, photography. Postmodernism is about art's dispersal, its plurality, by which I certainly do not mean pluralism. Pluralism is, as we know, that fantasy that art is free, free of other discourses, institutions, free, above all, of history. And this fantasy of freedom can be maintained because every work of art is held to be absolutely unique and original. Against this pluralism of originals, I want to speak of the plurality of copies.

Nearly two years ago in an essay called "Pictures," in which I first found it useful to employ the term *postmodernism*, I attempted to sketch in a background to the work of a group of younger artists who were just beginning to exhibit in

* This paper was first presented at the colloquium "Performance and Multidisciplinarity: Postmodernism" sponsored by *Parachute* in Montreal, October 9–11, 1980.

New York.[1] I traced the genesis of their concerns to what had pejoratively been labeled the theatricality of minimal sculpture and the extensions of that theatrical position into the art of the seventies. I wrote at that time that the aesthetic mode that was exemplary during the seventies was performance, all those works that were constituted in a specific situation and for a specific duration; works for which it could be said literally that you had to be there; works, that is, which assumed the presence of a spectator in front of the work as the work took place, thereby privileging the spectator instead of the artist.

In my attempt to continue the logic of the development I was outlining, I came eventually to a stumbling block. What I wanted to explain was how to get from this condition of presence—the *being there* necessitated by performance—to that kind of presence that is possible only through the absence that we know to be the condition of representation. For what I was writing about was work which had taken on, after nearly a century of its repression, the question of representation. I effected that transition with a kind of fudge, an epigraph quotation suspended between two sections of the text. The quotation, taken from one of the ghost tales of Henry James, was a false tautology, which played on the double, indeed antithetical, meaning of the word *presence*: "The presence before him was a presence."

What I just said was a fudge was perhaps not really that, but rather the hint of something really crucial about the work I was describing, which I would like now to elaborate. In order to do so, I want to add a third definition to the word *presence*. To that notion of presence which is about *being there*, being in front of, and that notion of presence that Henry James uses in his ghost stories, the presence which is a ghost and therefore really an absence, the presence which is *not there*, I want to add the notion of presence as a kind of increment to being there, a ghostly aspect of presence that is its excess, its supplement. This notion of presence is what we mean when we say, for example, that Laurie Anderson is a performer with presence. We mean by such a statement not simply that she is there, in front of us, but that she is more than there, that in addition to being there, she has presence. And if we think of Laurie Anderson in this way, it may seem a bit odd, because Laurie Anderson's particular presence is effected through the use of reproductive technologies which really make her quite absent, or only there as the kind of presence that Henry James meant when he said, "The presence before him was a presence."

This is precisely the kind of presence that I attributed to the performances of Jack Goldstein, such as *Two Fencers*, and to which I would now add the performances of Robert Longo, such as *Surrender*. These performances were little else than presences, performed tableaux that were there in the spectator's space but which appeared ethereal, absent. They had that odd quality of holograms, very

1. Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October*, no. 8 (Spring 1979), 75–88.

Robert Longo. Surrender. *1979–80.*

vivid and detailed and present and at the same time ghostly, absent. Goldstein and Longo are artists whose work, together with that of a great number of their contemporaries, approaches the question of representation through photographic modes, particularly all those aspects of photography that have to do with reproduction, with copies, and copies of copies. The extraordinary presence of their work is effected through absence, through its unbridgeable distance from the original, from even the possibility of an original. Such presence is what I attribute to the kind of photographic activity I call postmodernist.

This quality of presence would seem to be just the opposite of what Walter Benjamin had in mind when he introduced into the language of criticism the notion of the aura. For the aura has to do with the presence of the original, with authenticity, with the unique existence of the work of art in the place in which it happens to be. It is that aspect of the work that can be put to the test of chemical analysis or of connoisseurship, that aspect which the discipline of art history, at least in its guise as *Kunstwissenschaft*, is able to prove or disprove, and that aspect, therefore, which either admits the work of art into, or banishes it from, the museum. For the museum has no truck with fakes or copies or reproductions. The presence of the artist in the work must be detectable; that is how the museum knows it has something authentic.

But it is this very authenticity, Benjamin tells us, that is inevitably depreciated through mechanical reproduction, diminished through the proliferation of copies. "That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art," is the way Benjamin put it.[2] But, of course, the aura is not a mechanistic concept as employed by Benjamin, but rather a historical one. It is not something a handmade work has that a mechanically-made work does not have. In Benjamin's view, certain photographs had an aura, while even a painting by Rembrandt loses its aura in the age of mechanical reproduction. The withering away of the aura, the dissociation of the work from the fabric of tradition, is an *inevitable* outcome of mechanical reproduction. This is something we have all experienced. We know, for example, the impossibility of experiencing the aura of such a picture as the *Mona Lisa* as we stand before it at the Louvre. Its aura has been utterly depleted by the thousands of times we've seen its reproduction, and no degree of concentration will restore its uniqueness for us.

It would seem, though, that if the withering away of the aura is an inevitable fact of our time, then equally inevitable are all those projects to recuperate it, to pretend that the original and the unique are still possible and desirable. And this is nowhere more apparent than in the field of photography itself, the very culprit of mechanical reproduction.

Benjamin granted a presence or aura to only a very limited number of photographs. These were photographs of the so-called primitive phase, the period

2. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, p. 221.

prior to photography's commercialization after the 1850s. He said, for example, that the people in these early photographs "had an aura about them, a medium which mingled with their manner of looking and gave them a plenitude and security."[3] This aura seemed to Benjamin to be a product of two things: the long exposure time during which the subjects grew, as it were, into the images; and the unique, unmediated relationship between the photographer who was "a technician of the latest school," and his sitter, who was "a member of a class on the ascendant, replete with an aura which penetrated to the very folds of his bourgeois overcoat or bow-tie."[4] The aura in these photographs, then, is not to be found in the presence of the photographer in the photograph in the way that the aura of a painting is determined by the presence of the painter's unmistakable hand in his picture. Rather it is the presence of the subject, of what is photographed, "the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character of the picture."[5] For Benjamin, then, the connoisseurship of photography is an activity diametrically opposed to the connoisseurship of painting: it means looking not for the hand of the artist but for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable intrusion of reality, the absolutely unique and even magical quality not of the artist but of his subject. And that is perhaps why it seemed to him so misguided that photographers began, after the commercialization of the medium, to simulate the lost aura through the application of techniques imitative of those of painting. His example was the gum bichromate process used in pictorial photography.

Although it may at first seem that Benjamin lamented the loss of the aura, the contrary is in fact true. Reproduction's "social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable," wrote Benjamin, "without its destructive, cathartic aspect, its liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage."[6] That was for him the greatness of Atget: "He initiated the liberation of the object from the aura, which is the most incontestable achievement of the recent school of photography."[7] "The remarkable thing about [Atget's] pictures . . . is their emptiness."[8]

This emptying operation, the depletion of the aura, the contestation of the uniqueness of the work of art, has been accelerated and intensified in the art of the past two decades. From the multiplication of silkscreened photographic images in the works of Rauschenberg and Warhol to the industrially manufactured, repetitively structured works of the minimal sculptors, everything in radical artistic practice seemed to conspire in that liquidation of traditional cultural values that

3. Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 1972), 18.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
6. Benjamin, "Work of Art," p. 221.
7. Benjamin, "Short History," p. 20.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Benjamin spoke of. And because the museum is that institution which was founded upon just those values, whose job it is to sustain those values, it has faced a crisis of considerable proportions. One symptom of that crisis is the way in which our museums, one after another, around 1970, abdicated their responsibility toward contemporary artistic practice and turned with nostalgia to the art that had previously been relegated to their storerooms. Revisionist art history soon began to be vindicated by "revelations" of the achievements of academic artists and minor figures of all kinds.

By the mid-1970s another, more serious symptom of the museum's crisis appeared, the one I have already mentioned: the various attempts to recuperate the auratic. These attempts are manifest in two, contradictory phenomena: the resurgence of expressionist painting and the triumph of photography-as-art. The museum has embraced both of these phenomena with equal enthusiasm, not to say voraciousness.

Little, I think, needs to be said about the return to a painting of personal expression. We see it everywhere we turn. The marketplace is glutted with it. It comes in all guises—pattern painting, new-image painting, neoconstructivism, neoexpressionism; it is pluralist to be sure. But within its individualism, this painting is utterly conformist on one point: its hatred of photography. Writing a manifesto-like text for the catalogue of her *American Painting: The Eighties*—that oracular exhibition staged in the fall of 1979 to demonstrate the miraculous resurrection of painting—Barbara Rose told us:

> The serious painters of the eighties are an extremely heterogeneous group—some abstract, some representational. But they are united on a sufficient number of critical issues that it is possible to isolate them as a group. They are, in the first place, dedicated to the preservation of painting as a transcendental high art, and an art of universal as opposed to local or topical significance. Their aesthetic, which synthesizes tactile with optical qualities, defines itself in conscious opposition to photography and all forms of mechanical reproduction which seek to deprive the art work of its unique "aura." It is, in fact, the enhancement of this aura, through a variety of means, that painting now self-consciously intends—either by emphasizing the artist's hand, or by creating highly individual visionary images that cannot be confused either with reality itself or with one another.[9]

That this kind of painting should so clearly see mechanical reproduction as the enemy is symptomatic of the profound threat to inherited ideas (the only ideas known to this painting) posed by the photographic activity of postmodernism. But in this case it is also symptomatic of a more limited and internecine threat: the one posed to painting when photography itself suddenly acquires an aura. Now

9. Barbara Rose, *American Painting: The Eighties*, Buffalo, Thoren-Sidney Press, 1979, n.p.

it's not only a question of ideology; now it's a real competition for the acquisition budget and wall space of the museum.

But how is it that photography has suddenly had conferred upon it an aura? How has the plenitude of copies been reduced to the scarcity of originals? And how do we know the authentic from its reproduction?[10]

Enter the connoisseur. But not the connoisseur of photography, of whom the type is Walter Benjamin, or, closer to us, Roland Barthes. Neither Benjamin's "spark of chance" nor Barthes's "third meaning" would guarantee photography's place in the museum. The connoisseur needed for this job is the old-fashioned art historian with his chemical analyses and, more importantly, his stylistic analyses. To authenticate photography requires all the machinery of art history and museology, with a few additions, and more than a few sleights of hand. To begin, there is, of course, the incontestable rarity of age, the vintage print. Certain techniques, paper types, and chemicals have passed out of use and thus the age of a print can easily be established. But this kind of certifiable rarity is not what interests me, nor its parallel in contemporary photographic practice, the limited edition. What interests me is the subjectivization of photography, the ways in which the connoisseurship of the photograph's "spark of chance" is converted into a connoisseurship of the photograph's style. For now, it seems, we can detect the photographer's hand after all, except of course that it is his eye, his unique vision. (Although it can also be his hand; one need only listen to the partisans of photographic subjectivity describe the mystical ritual performed by the photographer in his darkroom.)

I realize of course that in raising the question of subjectivity I am reviving the central debate in photography's aesthetic history, that between the straight and the manipulated print, or the many variations on that theme. But I do so here in order to point out that the recuperation of the aura for photography would in fact subsume under the banner of subjectivity *all* of photography, the photography whose source is the human mind and the photography whose source is the world around us, the most thoroughly manipulated photographic fictions and the most faithful transcriptions of the real, the directorial and the documentary, the mirrors and the windows, *Camera Work* in its infancy, *Life* in its heyday. But these are only the terms of style and mode of the agreed-upon spectrum of photography-as-art. The restoration of the aura, the consequent collecting and exhibiting, does not stop there. It is extended to the carte-de-visite, the fashion plate, the advertising shot, the anonymous snap or polaroid. At the origin of every one there is an Artist and therefore each can find its place on the spectrum of subjectivity. For it has long been a commonplace of art history that realism and expressionism are only matters of degree, matters, that is, of style.

The photographic activity of postmodernism operates, as we might expect,

10. The urgency of these questions first became clear to me as I read the editorial prepared by Annette Michelson for *October*, no. 5, A Special Issue on Photography (Summer 1978), 3–5.

in complicity with these modes of photography-as-art, but it does so only in order to subvert and exceed them. And it does so precisely in relation to the aura, not, however, to recuperate it, but to displace it, to show that it too is now only an aspect of the copy, not the original. A group of young artists working with photography have addressed photography's claims to originality, showing those claims for the fiction they are, showing photography to be always a *re*presentation, always-already-seen. Their images are purloined, confiscated, appropriated, *stolen*. In their work, the original cannot be located, is always deferred; even the self which might have generated an original is shown to be itself a copy.

In a characteristic gesture, Sherrie Levine begins a statement about her work with an anecdote that is very familiar:

> Since the door was only half closed, I got a jumbled view of my mother and father on the bed, one on top of the other. Mortified, hurt, horror-struck, I had the hateful sensation of having placed myself blindly and completely in unworthy hands. Instinctively and without effort, I divided myself, so to speak, into two persons, of whom one, the real, the genuine one, continued on her own account, while the other, a successful imitation of the first, was delegated to have relations with the world. My first self remains at a distance, impassive, ironical, and watching.[11]

Not only do we recognize this as a description of something we already know—the primal scene—but our recognition might extend even further to the Moravia novel from which it has been lifted. For Levine's autobiographical statement is only a string of quotations pilfered from others; and if we might think this a strange way of writing about one's own working methods, then perhaps we should turn to the work it describes.

At a recent exhibition, Levine showed six photographs of a nude youth. They were simply rephotographed from the famous series by Edward Weston of his young son Neil, available to Levine as a poster published by the Witkin Gallery. According to the copyright law, the images belong to Weston, or now to the Weston estate. I think, to be fair, however, we might just as well give them to Praxiteles, for if it is the *image* that can be owned, then surely these belong to classical sculpture, which would put them in the public domain. Levine has said that, when she showed her photographs to a friend, he remarked that they only made him want to see the originals. "Of course," she replied, "and the originals make you want to see that little boy, but when you see the boy, the art is gone." For the desire that is initiated by that representation does not come to closure around that little boy, is not at all satisfied by him. The desire of representation exists only insofar as it never be fulfilled, insofar as the original always be deferred. It is only in the absence of the original that representation may take place. And representa-

11. Sherrie Levine, unpublished statement, 1980.

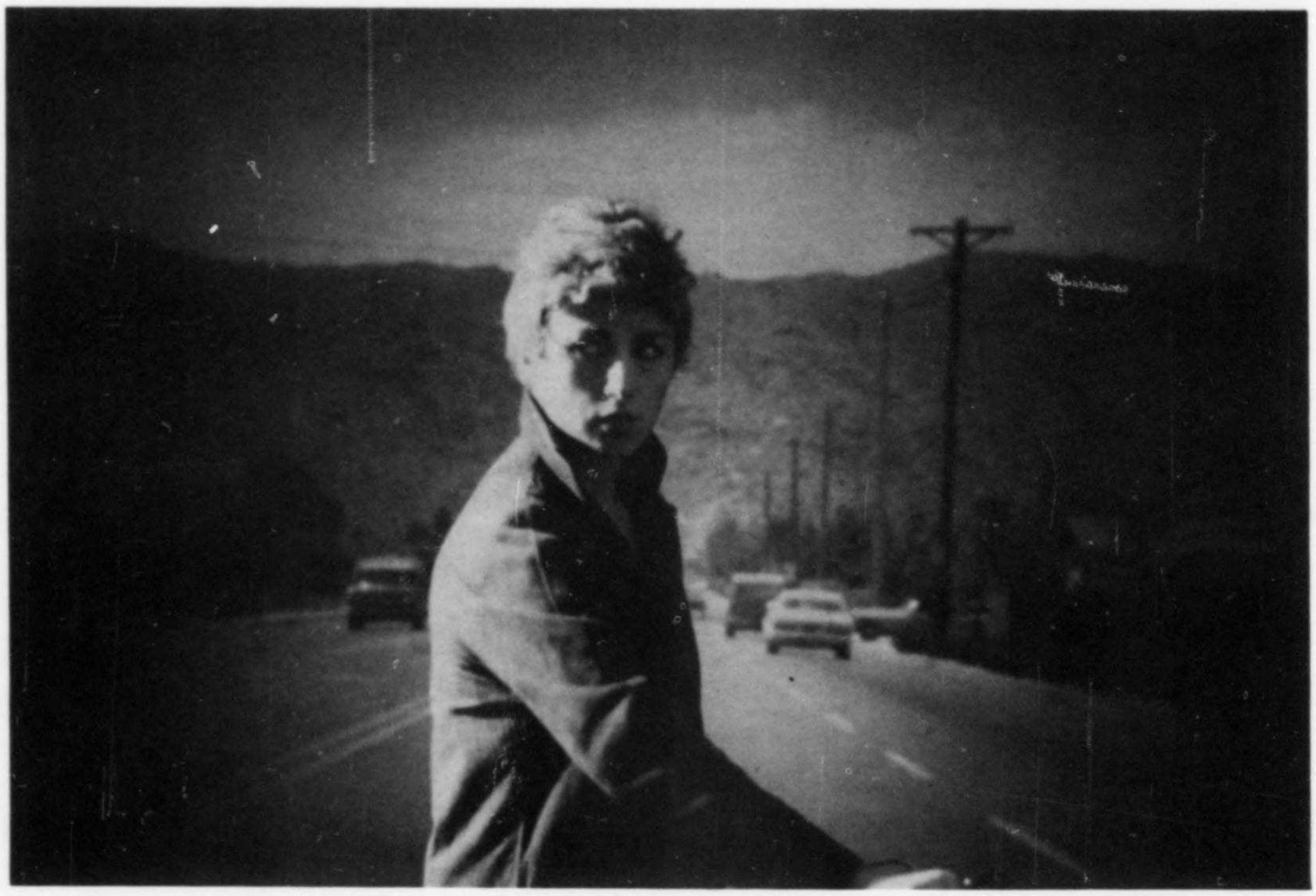
tion takes place because it is always already there in the world *as* representation. It was, of course, Weston himself who said that "the photograph must be visualized in full before the exposure is made." Levine has taken the master at his word and in so doing has shown him what he really meant. The a priori Weston had in mind was not really in his mind at all; it was in the world, and Weston only copied it.

This fact is perhaps even more crucial in those series by Levine where that a priori image is not so obviously confiscated from high culture—by which I intend both Weston and Praxiteles—but from the world itself, where nature poses as the antithesis of representation. Thus the images which Levine has cut out of books of photographs by Andreas Feininger and Elliot Porter show scenes of nature that are utterly familiar. They suggest that Roland Barthes's description of the tense of photography as the "having been there" be interpreted in a new way. The presence that such photographs have for us is the presence of déjà vu, nature as already having been seen, nature as representation.

If Levine's photographs occupy a place on that spectrum of photography-as-art, it would be at the farthest reaches of straight photography, not only because the photographs she appropriates operate within that mode but because she does not manipulate her photographs in any way; she merely, and literally, *takes* photographs. At the opposite end of that spectrum is the photography which is self-consciously composed, manipulated, fictionalized, the so-called directorial mode, in which we find such *auteurs* of photography as Duane Michaels and Les Krims. The strategy of this mode is to use the apparent veracity of photography against itself, creating one's fictions through the appearance of a seamless reality into which has been woven a narrative dimension. Cindy Sherman's photographs function within this mode, but only in order to expose an unwanted dimension of that fiction, for the fiction Sherman discloses is the fiction of the self. Her photographs show that the supposed autonomous and unitary self out of which those other "directors" would create their fictions is itself nothing other than a discontinuous series of representations, copies, fakes.

Sherman's photographs are all self-portraits in which she appears in disguise enacting a drama whose particulars are withheld. This ambiguity of narrative parallels the ambiguity of the self that is both actor in the narrative and creator of it. For though Sherman is literally self-created in these works, she is created in the image of already-known feminine stereotypes; her self is therefore understood as contingent upon the possibilities provided by the culture in which Sherman participates, not by some inner impulse. As such, her photographs reverse the terms of art and autobiography. They use art not to reveal the artist's true self, but to show the self as an imaginary construct. There is no real Cindy Sherman in these photographs; there are only the guises she assumes. And she does not create these guises; she simply chooses them in the way that any of us do. The pose of authorship is dispensed with not only through the mechanical means of making the image, but through the effacement of any continuous, essential persona or even recognizable visage in the scenes depicted.

That aspect of our culture which is most thoroughly manipulative of the roles we play is, of course, mass advertising, whose photographic strategy is to disguise the directorial mode as a form of documentary. Richard Prince steals the most frank and banal of these images, which register, in the context of photography-as-art, as a kind of shock. But ultimately their rather brutal familiarity gives way to strangeness, as an unintended and unwanted dimension of fiction reinvades them. By isolating, enlarging, and juxtaposing fragments of commercial images, Prince points to their invasion by these ghosts of fiction. Focusing directly on the commodity fetish, using the master tool of commodity fetishism of our time, Prince's rephotographed photographs take on a Hitchcockian dimension: the commodity becomes a clue. It has, we might say, acquired an aura, only now it is a function not of presence but of absence, severed from an origin, from an originator, from authenticity. In our time, the aura has become only a presence, which is to say, a ghost.



Cindy Sherman. Untitled color photograph. 1980.

Richard Prince. Untitled color photographs (two from a series of four). 1978.

Jump over the Bauhaus

Avant-Garde Photography in Germany 1919–1939. *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, December 19, 1980–February 8, 1981. Catalogue by Van Deren Coke and Ute Eskildsen.*

ROSALIND KRAUSS

The very same tide that has turned against the spareness and purity of modern architecture, casting its forms and functions, like so many shards of discarded taste, out to sea, has lifted photography onto its swell to propel it forward, towards shore. There is a special irony in this. For, every bit as much as Bauhaus Design, *Foto-Kultur* was an invention of 1920s Germany, a parallel product of Weimar sensibility. The current exhibition *Avant-Garde Photography in Germany 1919–1939*, makes this relationship especially clear.

Indeed, one of its well-known images, Lux Feininger's photograph *Jump over the Bauhaus*, is emblematic of the partnership between a newly wrought camera culture and a newly aestheticized industrialism, a partnership forged by the German avant-garde for its assault on middle-class taste. In Feininger's image, two young men leap high in the air, stilled in mid-flight by a camera whose low angle projects the sleek white cubes of the distant Bauhaus buildings as so many children's blocks beneath their feet. The traces they are kicking over in the athleticism and freedom of their movement are those repressive strictures of an outworn culture: lugubrious clothes, mincing gaits, cluttered interiors, conventionalized gesture. And it is the camera's own freedom from gravity, its break with the decorum of a rigid horizon line, its capacity to lie on the ground and look up, or perch on a bridge and look down, to tilt, to fragment, to multiply—it is the discovery and exercise of this freedom that Feininger captures in his photograph and superimposes on the subjects' own image of liberation.

As it catches these two youths at the height of their leap, the camera is not only gravity-free, as they are, but fast, faster than they. Unlike the human eye, the blink of the camera's shutter seizes its visual prey and records, does not obscure. Thus László Moholy-Nagy begins his manifesto *Painting, Photography, Film* by quoting Helmholtz on the imperfections of the eyes that God made and extolling the vastly superior lenses produced by local craft. And he goes on, camera in hand, to describe "The New Vision."

The New Vision is the bedazzling close-up and enlargement of micro-reality, the stamen of a flower captured in a blow-up by Blossfeldt or Renger-Patzsch,

T. Lux Feininger. The Jump over the Bauhaus.

visually transformed into a Greek column glistening after rain. The New Vision is product fetishism, the object isolated in a beam of desire as lit by the advertising studios of Yva or Ringl and Pit. The New Vision is the liberation of eyesight from the horizon-line in the manner of Lux Feininger; or its freedom from the normal conditions of light and dark, as in the negative prints of his brother Andreas. The New Vision is the composite print of photo-monteurs such as John Heartfield, or Christian Schad, or Moholy himself, multiple exposures or sandwiched negatives that will open the single moment of reality to the memory trace, giving to the ordinary viewer the psychological penetration of Freud, the associative powers of Einstein. The New Vision is a greatly heightened capacity to isolate, to focus, and to frame, so that rows of consumer objects seem suddenly to parade diagonally across the print like so many members of a marching band.

This is not to imply that Germany of the 1920s had taken out an exclusive patent on advertising photography, for France was an obvious rival. Nor were Berlin or Bauhaus photographers the sole operators of photomontage or of photo-journalism. But The New Vision—which is to say, the experience of photo-culture as a necessary visual transformation of reality itself—was, it is fairly obvious, made-in-Germany. The terms of The New Vision were that the camera was a special instrument which could reveal what the naked eye could not see; namely, that everything was beautiful: *Die Welt ist Schön*, as Renger-Patzsch exulted.

Camera-seeing was thus a special order of perception; a second sight. It supplemented ordinary vision, extended it, made it more powerful. To mark its extreme importance for educating sensibilities to the *meaning* of the new century Walter Benjamin's "Short History of Photography" quotes Moholy: "'The illiterate of the future,' it has been said, 'will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph.'" And this comparison between seeing—camera-seeing, that is—and writing, a comparison that largely denigrates the latter, was not Moholy's alone. The wider German press voiced its enthusiastic agreement: "The photograph will be one of the most effective weapons against intellectualization," Johannes Molzahn declared in 1928, "against the mechanization of the spirit. Forget reading! See! That will be the motto of education. Forget reading! See! That will be the essential policy of newspapers."

As The New Vision was lifted onto the shoulders of the popular press its contradictions were brought into view. In that cry "Forget reading! See!" Bauhaus utopianism about a new language of form is pushed over the brink into proto-fascism. And in the public's enthusiastic assent to Renger-Patzsch's Beautiful World there begins to coalesce a vision of social hygiene. "Renger-Patzsch's pictures were viewed by the Germans as part of a larger order much beyond the subjects photographed," Van Deren Coke tells us in the catalogue to the exhibition. "The precise interrelatedness of parts became a symbol of the order many people felt would come to German society through advanced technology. . . . By

inference, those photographs aimed to evoke pride in the success of German ingenuity in manufacturing and marketing new products, and discourage any feeling of necessity to be individualistic and therefore disruptive." By 1927 Siegfried Kracauer was warning, "In order for history to be truthfully represented, the mere surface offered by the photograph must somehow be disrupted," a position held also by Bertold Brecht. And by 1929 the Bauhaus's own magazine was reacting against what it called "photo-inflation"—a result of the "jubilant glamorization of photography as the one and only happiness-bringing sensation of the day."

But aside from the sheer growth of photographic production, the startling increase in the amount of photography that made up the cultural landscape of the 1920s—with the rise of illustrated magazines, high-gloss advertising, and photo-journalism, not to mention the specifically postwar *embourgeoisement* of the movies—aside from this numerical upsurge, does "photo-inflation" really point to anything? Does it, that is, pick out something specific to The New Vision, something we can actually *see* in those images? Or is it simply saying "more is more"—and performing an act of sociological commentary rather than anything so precise as criticism of *this* particular school of photography? But then can we say of The New Vision that it represents a particular "school" of photography—or is it not, rather, just a position taken, an intuition about the whole range of purposes to which photography may be put in a modern age? And if this is true, was the left-wing intellectuals' phobic response to the sudden explosion of photo-culture not simply the other side of the coin of The New Vision's enthusiastic advocacy of it—with neither side referring to anything more specific than photography-in-general? Is there, finally, any one coherent vision in The New Vision?

The German photographic avant-garde is made up of some well-known figures—Moholy-Nagy, August Sander, Albert Renger-Patzsch, the Feiningers, Lotte Jacobi, Hans Bellmer—and others more obscure—Walter Peterhans, Florence Henri, Edmund Kesting, Hans Finsler. These names plus some forty-five more figure in the roster of the exhibition. The work represents an array of functions as well as formal and technical ambition. The functions range from form-and-light studies of solitary eggs (as Bauhaus design-class training), to academic art-school lessons in the ubiquity of classical images in nature (Blossfeldt), to studio portraiture, advertising shots, and newspaper documentary. The processes employed vary from the straight print to the full range of photographic manipulation—solarization, composite printing, negative printing, multiple exposure—to the cameraless photogram. And the interest in manipulation moves from the obvious political import of the industrial-landscape photomontages of Max Burchartz to the equally obvious Freudian messages—a "mother's" naked body superimposed on a snowy landscape where a small child is sledding—that Franz Roh injects into his. Given this astonishing visual variety, we can once again ask, is there anything that really synthesizes this work—anything that moves beyond rhetoric to give The New Vision *visual* substance?

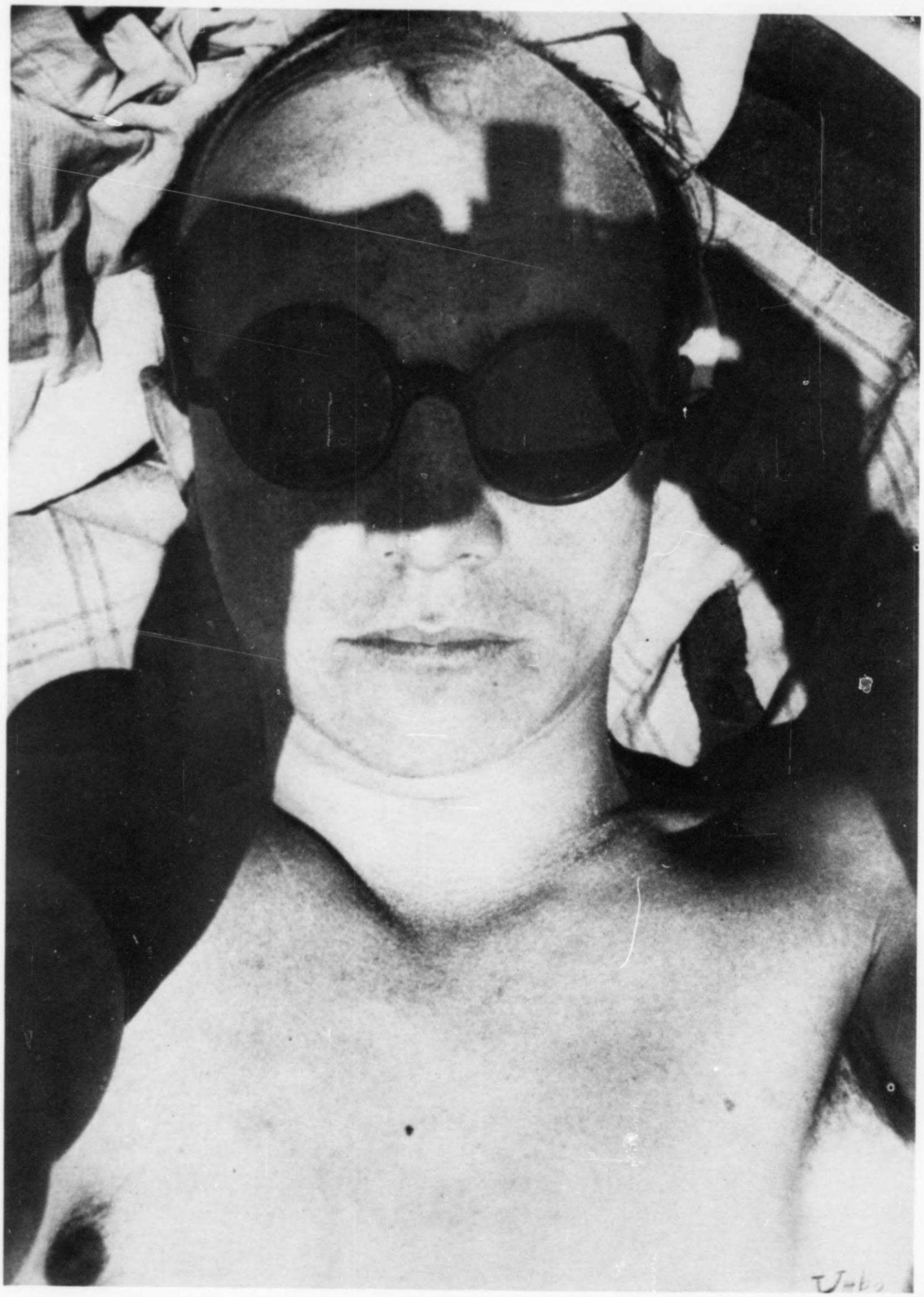
If we have to ask this question, it is because the organizers of the exhibition have not troubled themselves with it. In the grip of that kind of photographic history aligned with art historical revisionism, whose main impulse is archival—the rescue and retrieval of all photographic documents of no matter what level of quality or interest—the curators have been concerned with breadth, not concentration. Thus where other recent exhibitions of this same subject, organized in Europe, have limited the cast of characters who form the German avant-garde, Van Deren Coke has opened his doors to all possible contenders, with a consequent drastic lowering of the general level, loss of focus, and a necessary sharp reduction in the number of images with which some of the stronger members can be represented (Walter Peterhans, for example, is limited to three). But even if this exhibition is designed to obscure rather than raise the issue of a possible unified impulse that consistently informs this work visually or structurally, that need not discourage its viewers from posing the question.

In looking for the answer we might compare two images—both of them self-portraits—taken from two different wings of the German avant-garde. The first is by Umbo, who did commercial advertising work. The second is by Florence Henri, who had come to the Bauhaus from the atelier of Fernand Léger in Paris and who worked at photography as an unabashed formalist.

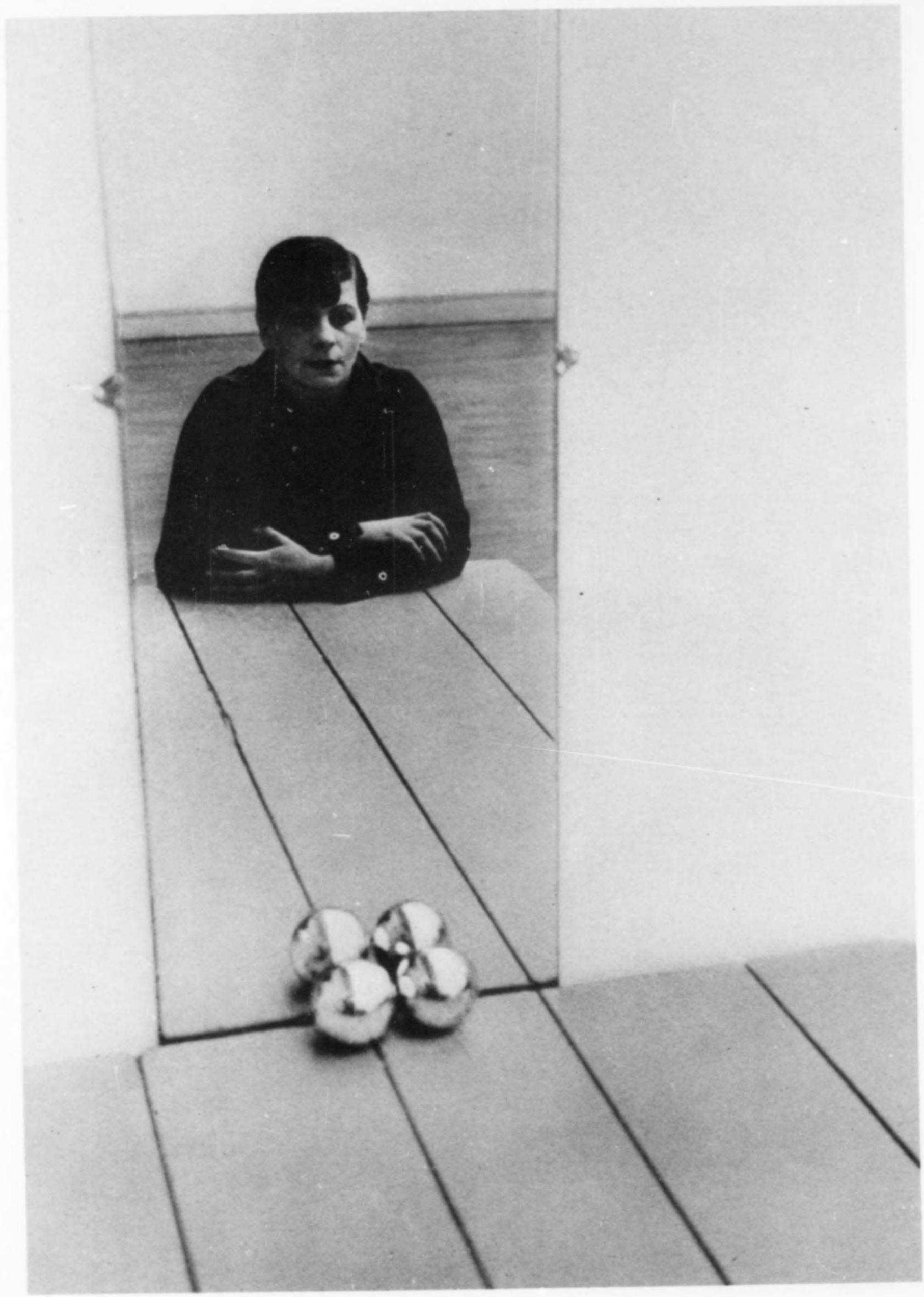
The Umbo self-portrait is "performed" while the photographer is lying on the beach. Looking into the sun, he holds a camera before him, arms-length away. We, of course, see the camera's view: the subject quite close up, but captured at a peculiar angle, with an extraordinary shadow cast, Lone-Ranger-mask-like, over his face. It is the shadow of the camera, of course, held by his outstretched arms, the shadow of the instrument of the portrait projected over the eyes of its subject.

The Florence Henri portrait exploits neither the striking angle of vision nor the vivid lighting of the Umbo. Her self-image is, rather, a small, dark shape in the middle-distance of a large expanse, as she sits at a table and stares at herself in a narrow, vertical mirror, her reflection held within the mirror's depths. Everything about the work is extremely formal, a matter of flat planes of wall and table, evenly lit and textureless, so that what reads is their geometry and the insistence and purity of their intersection, as though the subject's setting had become a constructivist sculpture. The subject places herself—or, more accurately her image—at a precise point within this construction, just as she places her one prop, a pair of chromed balls, at another precise point, to mark the seam in the photograph's field between reality and illusion. Within the ethos of Bauhaus design the gleaming chromed spheres can also be seen as emblems of abstract, formal purity, occupying an aesthetic space somewhere between Brancusi's *Birth of the World* and Max Bill's *Moebius Strip*. Yet, to read these objects as merely formal elements is to overlook the fact that they are not placed in a Bauhaus classroom but in a photograph of a woman, a photograph which dominates that woman by containing her image within a frame that is unmistakably phallic in shape.

Part of the camera's power is its capacity to sharpen and intensify attention



Umbo. Self-Portrait.



Florence Henri. Self-Portrait.

by tearing something out of the context of reality and presenting it in isolation. This is the power of framing; and framing is surely a central element in the photographic aesthetic, as the viewer of the image experiences the resultant visual evidence of the cutting edges, as it were, of the camera's lens. Responding to this fact of camera-seeing, photographers often insert, within the field of the photograph, emblems of the aperture of their picture-taking instrument—miniature representations of the "frame." Hence the photographer's fondness for windows and door jambs, for the edges of mirrors and walls.

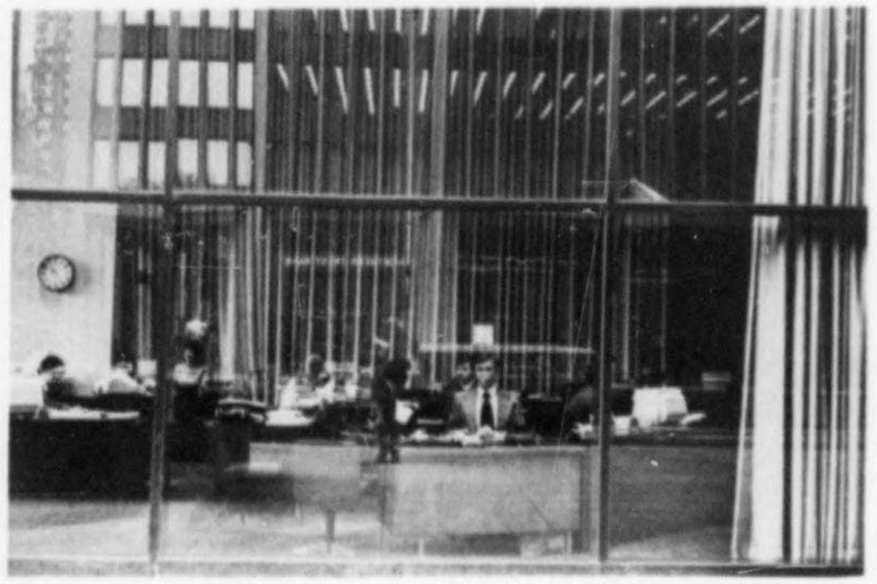
Florence Henri's self-portrait is marked, defined, shaped, by this kind of introjected frame: a frame from which the pretence of formal neutrality—"this is *just* a rectangle"—has been stripped. The frame is revealed as that which masters or dominates the image, and the phallic shape that Henri constructs for its symbol is completely continuous with the form that most of world culture has used for the expression of power and supremacy. Except that in this work the image of the phallic frame stands for a mechanical instrument, an inorganic apparatus: the camera.

It is this experience of the subject dominated through the shaping, controlling powers of the camera that forms the bridge between Florence Henri's and Umbo's self-portraits. Whatever their other differences, both perform the same act of inserting an image of the photographic instrument into the space of the picture. That instrument—that apparatus for seeing better, faster, more microscopically, further away, and under different conditions than the mere "unaided eye"—was understood, as we have seen, as a supplement to the human organ, a kind of prosthetic device to extend and amplify a deficient vision. The introjection, into the very field of the photograph, of the image of that extending, amplifying device for the mastery of reality is what is shared not only by these two works, but by the majority of objects produced by The New Vision. Thus what unites the various techniques and formal tropes of The New Vision's camera-seeing is the constant experience of the camera-seen. That is what lies beyond Moholy's rhetoric, actually to enter the frame of the image as visual testimony to a technological apparatus that has usurped nature.

Sometimes it is overt, as in the Umbo: the camera is simply there, represented by a cast-shadow whose relationship to the photographer's eyes involves the interesting ambiguity of all supplementary devices—namely, that which supplements also supplants; the very thing that extends, displaces as well. In Umbo's self-portrait the camera that literally expands his vision, allowing Umbo to see himself, also masks his eyes, nearly extinguishing them in shadow. But within the photography of The New Vision this image of the camera-as-supplement is often covert, which is the case with the Florence Henri. Or rather, it is experienced emblematically, through the internalized representation of the camera frame as an image of dominance and mastery: camera-seeing essentialized as a superior power of focus and selection from within the inchoate sprawl of the real.

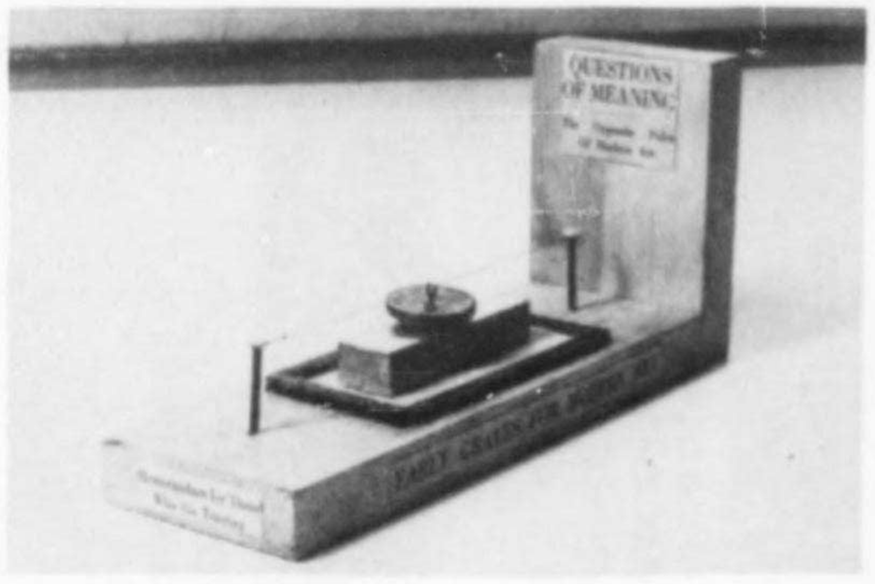
The New Vision is consistently marked by both an exuberance and a

subliminal (and sometimes not so subliminal) eroticism which issues from the very notion of the supplement—the extension that replaces and thereby fetishizes, the aid who comes to usurp. Visual experience is thereby immeasurably energized. But it is, at the same time, indelibly stamped with the symbols of power-as-domination. As with so much else in Weimar culture, The New Vision is utterly fascinating and perfectly ambiguous.



Dan Graham **Video-Architecture-Television**

Dan Graham is by now considered one of the major artistic figures who arose around 1965, representing the generation of artists whose work we have come to define as post-minimal and conceptual art. The works of Dan Graham collected in this volume give a complete overview of the last ten years of Graham's production using video as a functional tool in his sculptural installations, environmental concepts and performance activities, and the recent projects for cable TV stations. Also included are Graham's theoretical writings on video.



Carl Andre — Hollis Frampton **12 Dialogues 1962-1963**

This is the first publication of an unusual series of written dialogues exchanged between Carl Andre, the sculptor, and Hollis Frampton, the photographer, filmmaker and writer. The dialogues include critical analyses of Andre's sculptural and poetical works, and Frampton's photography, as well as a wide variety of historical and methodological problems in photography, painting, filmmaking, sculpture, poetry and music. The book is illustrated with a number of hitherto unpublished photographs by Hollis Frampton.

[1]Martha Rosler **THE BOWERY IN TWO INADEQUATE DESCRIPTIVE SYSTEMS**

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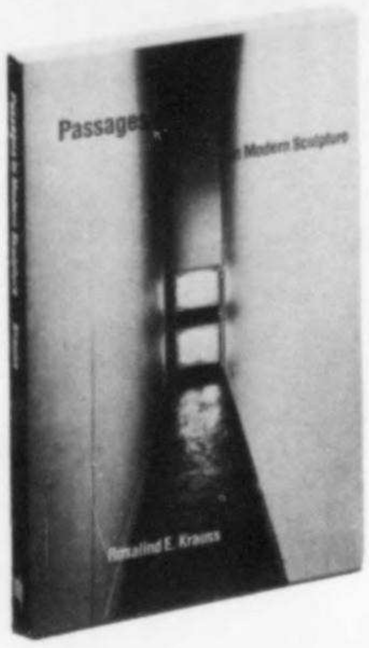

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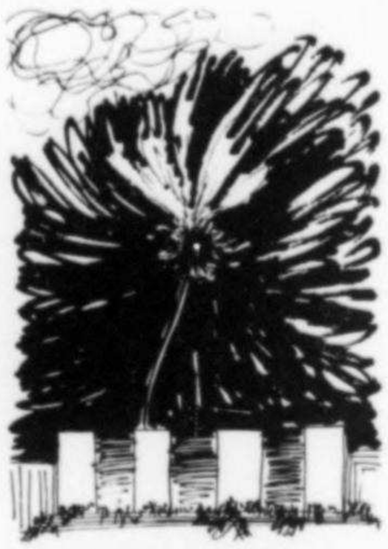

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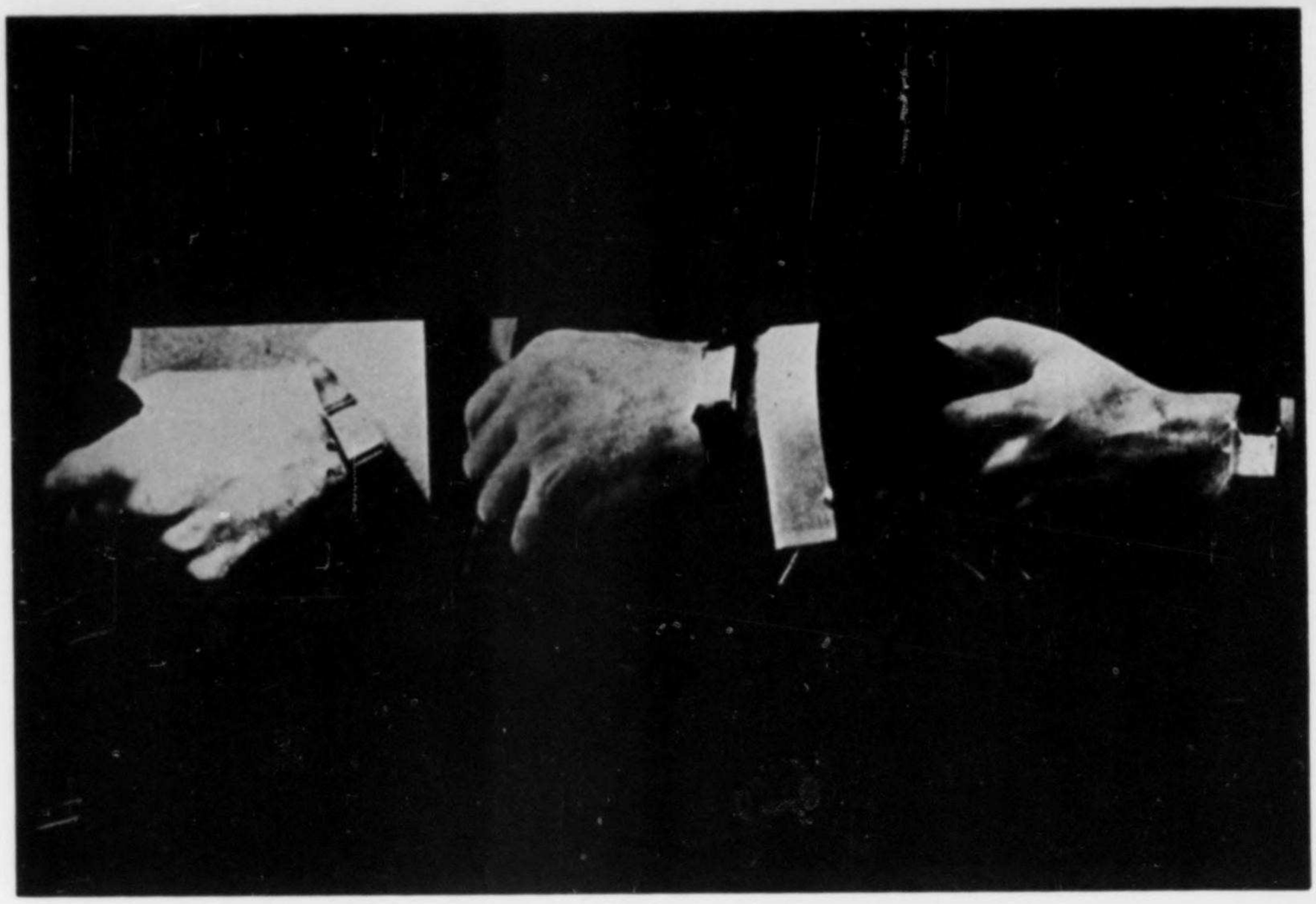

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