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OCTOBER

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MICHEL FOUCAULT was professor of History and Systems of Thought at the Collège de France. At the time of his recent death, he was engaged in the writing of a history of sexuality which was to have consisted of six volumes. Volumes II, *L'usage des plaisirs* (Gallimard) and III, *Les aveux de la chair* (Gallimard) have been translated by Robert Hurley and will be published by Pantheon.

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Erotics*

MICHEL FOUCAULT

translated by ROBERT HURLEY

A Problematical Relation

The use of pleasures in the relationship with boys was a theme of anxiety for Greek thought—which is paradoxical in a society that is believed to have "tolerated" what we call "homosexuality." But perhaps it would be just as well if we avoided those two terms here.

As a matter of fact, the notion of homosexuality is plainly inadequate as a means of referring to an experience, forms of valuation, and a system of categorization so different from ours. The Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices, two radically different types of behavior. The dividing lines did not follow that kind of boundary. What distinguished a moderate, self-possessed man from one given to pleasures was, from the viewpoint of ethics, much more important than what differentiated, among themselves, the categories of pleasures that invited the greatest devotion. To have loose morals was to be incapable of resisting either women or boys, without its being any more serious than that. When he portrays the tyrannical man—that is, one "in whose soul dwells the tyrant Eros who directs everything"[1]—Plato shows him from two equivalent angles, so that what we see in both instances is contempt for the most fundamental obligations and subjection to the rule of pleasure: "Do you think he would sacrifice his long beloved and irreplaceable mother for a recently acquired mistress whom he can do without, or, for the sake of a young boy recently become dear to him, sacrifice his aged and irreplaceable father, his oldest friend, beat him, and make his parents slaves of those others if he brought them under the same roof?"[2] When Alcibiades was censured for his debauchery, it was not for the former kind in contradistinction to the latter, it was, as Bion the Borysthenite put it, "that in his adolescence he drew away the

* This essay is chapter four of Foucault's *L'usage des plaisirs: Histoire de la sexualité* (Vol. II), Paris, Gallimard, 1984. The English translation will appear this fall as *The Uses of Pleasure. Volume II of the History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Pantheon Books.

1. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis, Hackette, 1974, IX, 573 d.
2. *Ibid.*, IX, 574 b-c.

husbands from their wives, and as a young man the wives from their husbands."[3]

Conversely, if one wanted to show that a man was self-controlled, it was said of him—as Plato said concerning Iccus of Tarentum[4]—that he was able to abstain from relations with boys and women alike; and according to Xenophon, the advantage that Cyrus saw in relying on eunuchs for court service was that they were incapable of offending the honor of either women or boys.[5] So it seemed to people that of these two inclinations one was not more likely than the other, and the two could easily coexist in the same individual.

Were the Greeks bisexual, then? Yes, if we mean by this that a Greek could, simultaneously or in turn, be enamored of a boy or a girl, that a married man could have *paidika*, that it was common for a male to change to a preference for women after "boy-loving" inclinations in his youth. But if we wish to turn our attention to the way in which the Greeks conceived of this dual practice, we need to take note of the fact that they did not recognize two kinds of "desire," two different or competing "drives," each claiming a share of men's hearts or appetites. We can talk about their "bisexuality," thinking of the free choice they allowed themselves between the two sexes, but for them this option was not referred to a dual, ambivalent, and "bisexual" structure of desire. To their way of thinking, what made it possible to desire a man or a woman was simply the appetite that nature had implanted in man's heart for "beautiful" human beings, whatever their sex might be.[6]

True, one finds in Pausanias's speech[7] a theory of two loves, the second of which—Urania, the heavenly love—is directed exclusively to boys. But the distinction that is made is not between a heterosexual love and a homosexual love; Pausanias draws the dividing line between "the love which the baser sort of men feel"—its object is both women and boys, it only looks to the act itself (*to diaprattesthai*)—and the more ancient, nobler, and more reasonable love that is drawn to what has the most vigor and intelligence, which obviously can only mean the male sex. Xenophon's *Symposium* shows very well that the choice between girls and boys in no way relates to the distinction between two tendencies or to the opposition between two forms of desire. The dinner is given by Callias in honor of the very young Autolycus whom he is enamored of; the boy's beauty is so striking that he draws looks from all the guests as "the sudden glow of a light at night draws all eyes to itself"; "there was not one . . . who did not feel

3. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks, London, Cambridge, Mass., Loeb Classical Library, IV, 7, 49.
4. Plato, *Laws*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle, New York, Basic, VIII, 840 a.
5. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, trans. Walter Miller, London, Cambridge, Loeb Classical Library, VII, 5.
6. On this point cf. K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 60–63.
7. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton, London, Penguin Classics, 1980, 181 b-d.

his soul strangely stirred by the boy."[8] Now, among the participants, several were engaged or married, like Nicaratus—who felt a love for his wife that she reciprocated, in the play of Eros and Anteros—or Critobulus, who was nonetheless still of an age to have suitors and male lovers.[9] Further, Critobulus tells of his love for Cleinias, a boy he has met at school and, in a comic joust with Socrates, he matches his own beauty against that of the latter. The contest prize is to be a kiss from a boy and one from a girl: the boy and girl belong to a Syracusan who has taught them a dance whose graceful charm and acrobatic movements are the delight of everyone present. He has also taught them to mime the loves of Dionysus and Ariadne; and the guests, who have just heard Socrates say what true love for boys should be, all feel extremely "excited" (*anaptoromenoi*) on seeing this "Dionysus truly handsome" and this Ariadne truly fair "exchanging real kisses"; one can tell from the lover's vows pronounced by the young acrobats that they "are now permitted to satisfy their long cherished desires."[10] So many different incitements to love put everyone in the mood for pleasure: at the end of the *Symposium*, some ride off on their horses to reunite with their wives, while Callias and Socrates leave to rejoin the handsome Autolycus. At this banquet where they felt a common enchantment with the beauty of a girl or the charm of boys, men of various ages kindled the appetite for pleasure or serious love, love which some would look for in women, others in young men.

To be sure, the preference for boys or girls was easily recognized as a character trait: men could be distinguished by the pleasure they were most fond of;[11] a matter of taste that could lend itself to humorous treatment, not a matter of topology involving the individual's very nature, the truth of his desire, nor the natural legitimacy of his predilection. People did not have the notion of two distinct appetites allotted to different individuals or at odds with each other in the same soul; rather, they saw two ways of enjoying one's pleasure, one of which was more suited to certain individuals or certain periods of existence. The enjoyment of boys and the enjoyment of women did not constitute two classificatory categories between which individuals could be distributed; a man who preferred *paidika* did not think of himself as being "different" compared to those who pursued women.

As for the notions of "tolerance" or "intolerance," they too would be completely inadequate to account for the complexity of the phenomena we are considering. To love boys was a "free" practice in the sense that it was not only permitted by the laws (except in particular circumstances), it was accepted by opinion. Moreover, it found solid support in different (military or educational)

8. Xenophon, *Symposium*, ed. Samuel Ross Winans, Boston, J. Allyn, 1881, I, 9.
9. *Ibid.*, II, 3.
10. *Ibid.*, IX, 5–6.
11. Cf. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1964, VII, 4. 7.

institutions. It had religious guarantees in rites and festivals where the protection of the divine powers was invoked on its behalf.[12] And finally, it was a cultural practice that enjoyed the prestige of a whole literature that sang of it and a body of reflection that vouched for its excellence. Mixed in with all this, however, there were some quite different attitudes: a contempt for young men who were too "easy," or too self-interested; a disqualification of effeminate men, who were so often mocked by Aristophanes and the comic authors.[13] A disallowance of certain shameful behaviors, such as that of the catamites, which Callicles could not bear to talk about despite his boldness and plainness of speech, and which he saw as the proof that not every pleasure could be good and honorable.[14] Indeed it seems that this practice—though it was common and accepted—was surrounded by a diversity of judgments, that it was subjected to an interplay of positive and negative appraisals so complex as to make the ethics that governed it difficult to decipher. And there was a clear awareness of this complexity at the time; at least, that is what emerges from the passage in Pausanias's speech where he shows how hard it is to know if people in Athens are favorable or hostile to that form of love. On the one hand, it was accepted so well—better still: it was valued so highly—that certain kinds of behavior on the part of male lovers were honored which were judged to be folly or dishonesty on the part of anyone else: the prayers, the entreaties, the stubborn wooings, all their false vows. But on the other hand, one noted the care fathers took to protect their sons from love affairs, how they demanded that tutors prevent them from occurring, and one heard boys' comrades teasing each other for accepting such relationships.[15]

Simple linear schemas do not enable us to understand the singular kind of attention which people of the fourth century gave to the love of boys. We need to take up the question afresh, using other terms than those of "tolerance" towards "homosexuality." And instead of trying to determine the extent to which the latter was free in ancient Greece (as if we were dealing with an unvarying experience uniformly subtending mechanisms of repression that change in the course of time), it would be more worthwhile to ask how and in what form the pleasure enjoyed between men was problematical. How did people think of it in relation to themselves? What specific questions did it raise and what debate was it brought into? In short, given that it was a widespread practice, and the laws in no way condemned it, and its attraction was commonly

12. Cf. Félix Buffière, *Éros adolescent: la pédérastie dans la Grèce antique*, Paris, Belles Lettres, 1980, pp. 90–91.
13. For example, Cleisthenes in the *Acharnians* or Agathon in the *Thesmophoriazusae*.
14. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Terence Irwin, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, 494 e: "Socrates: The life of the catamites isn't that strange and shameful and wretched? Or will you dare to say that these people are happy if they have what they need without restrictions? Callicles: Aren't you ashamed to lead the discussion to such things, Socrates?"
15. Plato, *Symposium*, 182a–183d.

recognized, why was it the object of a special—and especially intense—moral preoccupation? So much so that it was invested with values, imperatives, demands, rules, advice, and exhortations that were as numerous as they were emphatic and singular.

To put things in a very schematic way: we tend nowadays to think that practices aimed at pleasure, when they are carried out between two partners of the same sex, are governed by a desire whose structure is particular; but we agree—if we are "tolerant"—that this is not a reason to refer them to a moral standard, to say nothing of a legislation, different from the one that is shared by all. We focus our questioning on the singularity of a desire that is not directed towards the other sex; and at the same time, we affirm that this type of relations should not be assigned a lesser value, nor given a special status. Now, it seems that the Greeks thought very differently about these things: they believed that the same desire attached to anything that was desirable—boy or girl—subject to the condition that the appetite was nobler that inclined towards what was more beautiful and more honorable; but they also thought that this desire called for a particular mode of behavior when it made a place for itself in a relationship between two male individuals. The Greeks could not imagine that a man might need a different nature—an "other" nature—in order to love a man; but they were inclined to think that the pleasures one enjoyed in such a relationship ought to be given an ethical form different from the one that was required when it came to loving a woman. In this sort of relation, the pleasures did not reveal an alien nature in the person who experienced them; but their use demanded a special stylistics.

And it is a fact that male loves were the object, in Greek culture, of a whole agitated production of ideas, observations, and discussions concerning the forms they should take or the value one might attribute to them. It would be less than adequate if we only saw in this discursive activity the immediate and spontaneous representation of a free practice that chanced to express itself naturally in this fashion, as if all that was needed for a behavior to become a domain of inquiry or a focus of theoretical and moral concerns was that it not be prohibited. But we would be just as remiss if we assumed that these texts were only an attempt to clothe the love one could direct to boys in an honorable justification: such an undertaking would presuppose condemnations or disqualifications which in fact were declared much later. Rather, we must try to learn how and why this practice gave rise to an extraordinarily complex problematization.

Very little remains of what Greek philosophers wrote on the subject of love and on the subject of *that* love in particular. The idea that one can justifiably form concerning these reflections and their general thematics is bound to be rather uncertain considering that such a limited number of texts have been preserved; moreover, nearly all these belong to the Socratic-Platonic

tradition, while we do not have, for example, the works which Diogenes Laertius mentions, by Antisthenes, Diogenes the Cynic, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Zeno, and Crantor. Nevertheless, the speeches that are more or less ironically reported by Plato can give us some notion of what was at issue in these reflections and debates on love.

I.

The first thing to note is that the philosophical and moral reflections concerning love did not cover the whole field of sexual relations. Attention was focused for the most part on a "privileged" relationship—a problem area, an object of special concern: this was a relationship that implied an age difference and, connected with it, a certain difference of status. The relationship that concerned people, that they discussed and reflected upon, was not the one that joined together two mature adult males or two schoolboys of the same age; it was the relationship that developed between two men (and nothing prevented them from both being young and rather near in age to one another) who were considered as belonging to two distinct age groups and in which one was still quite young, had not finished his education, and had not attained his definitive status.[16] It is the existence of this disparity that marked the relationship with which philosophers and moralists concerned themselves. This special attention should not lead us to draw hasty conclusions about either the sexual behavior of the Greeks or about the details of their tastes (even though there is evidence from many areas of their culture that very young men were both represented and recognized as highly desirable erotic objects). We must not imagine in any case that only this type of relation was practiced; one finds many references to male love relationships that did not conform to this schema and did not include this "age differential." We would be just as mistaken to suppose that, though practiced, these other forms of relations were frowned upon and regarded as unseemly. Relations between young boys were deemed completely natural and in keeping with their condition.[17] On the other hand, people could mention as a special case—without censure—an abiding love relationship between two men who were well past adolescence.[18] Doubtless for reasons having to do, as

16. While the texts often refer to the difference of age and status, it should be noted that the real age that is given for the partners tends to "float" (cf. Buffière, pp. 605–607). Further, we see characters who play the role of lover in relation to others: e.g., Critobulus in Xenophon's *Symposium* where he tells of his love for Cleinias, whom he has met at school and who is a very young man like himself. (Regarding these two boys and their very slight age difference, cf. Plato, *Euthydemus*, 271 b.)

17. In the *Charmides*, Plato describes the arrival of a youth whom everyone fastened their eyes upon, adults *and* boys, "down to the very smallest" (154c).

18. There was the long cited example of Euripedes who still loved Agathon when the latter was already a man in his prime. Buffière (p. 613, note 33) notes in this connection an anecdote told by Aclian.

we shall see, with the polar opposition of activity and passivity, an opposition regarded as necessary, relations between two grown men were more apt to be an object of criticism and irony. Passivity was always disliked and for an adult to be suspected of it was especially serious. But whether these relations met with easy acceptance or tended to be suspect, the important thing for the moment is to see that they were not an object of moral solicitude or of a very great theoretical interest. Without being ignored or nonexistent, they did not belong to the domain of active and intense problematization. The attention and concern was concentrated on relations in which one can tell that much was at stake: relations that could be established between an older male who had finished his education—and who was expected to play the socially, morally, and sexually active role—and a younger one, who had not yet achieved his definitive status and who was in need of assistance, advice, and support. This disparity was at the heart of the relationship; in fact, it was what made it valuable and conceivable. Because of it, the relationship was considered in a positive light, made a subject of reflection; and where it was not apparent, people sought to discover it. Thus, one liked to talk about the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus, trying to determine what differentiated them from one another and which of the two had precedence over the other (since Homer's text was ambiguous on this point).[19] A male relationship gave rise to a theoretical and moral interest when it was based on a rather pronounced difference on either side of the threshold separating adolescence from manhood.

II.

It does not appear that the privilege accorded to this particular type of relation can be attributed solely to the pedagogical concerns of moralists and philosophers. We are in the habit of seeing a close connection between the Greek love of boys and Greek educational practice and philosophical instruction. The story of Socrates invites this, as does the way in which the love of boys was constantly portrayed in antiquity. In reality, a very large context contributed to the valorization and elaboration of the relationship between men and adolescents. The philosophical reflection that took it as a theme actually had its roots in practices that were widespread, accepted, and relatively complex. Unlike other sexual relations, it seems—or in any case, more than they—the relations that united man and boy across a certain age and status threshold that separated them were the object of a sort of ritualization which by imposing certain rules on them gave them form, value, and interest. Even before they

19. Homer gave one the advantage of birth, the other the advantage of age; one was stronger, the other more intelligent (*Illiad*, XI, 786). On the discussion about their respective roles, cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 180 a–b; Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 143.

were taken up by philosophical reflection, these relations were already the pretext for a whole social game.

"Courtship" practices had formed around them. Doubtless these practices did not have the complexity found in other arts of loving such as those that would be developed in the Middle Ages. But by the same token, they were something quite different from the formalities that one observed in order to qualify for the hand of a young lady. They defined a whole set of conventional and appropriate behaviors, making this relation a culturally and morally overloaded domain. These practices—the reality of which has been amply documented by K. J. Dover[20]—defined the mutual behavior and the respective strategies that both partners should observe in order to give their relations a "beautiful" form; that is, one that was aesthetically and morally valuable. They determined the role of the *erastes* and that of the *eromenos*. The first was in a position of initiative, he was the suitor, and this gave him rights and obligations; he was expected to show his ardor, and to restrain it; he had gifts to make, services to render; he had functions to exercise with regard to the *eromenos*; and all this entitled him to expect a just reward. The other partner, the one who was loved and courted, had to be careful not to yield too easily; he also had to keep from accepting too many tokens of love, and from granting his favors heedlessly and out of self-interest, without testing the worth of his partner; he must also show gratitude for what the lover had done for him. Now, this courtship practice alone shows very well that the sexual relation between man and boy did not "go without saying": it had to be accompanied with conventions, rules of conduct, ways of going about it, with a whole game of delays and obstacles designed to put off the moment of closure and to integrate it into a series of subsidiary activities and relations. In other words, while this type of relation was fully accepted, it was not a matter of "indifference." One would be missing the essential thing if one regarded all these precautions that were taken and the interest that was shown merely as proof that this love was freely engaged in; it would be to ignore the distinction that was made between this sexual behavior and all the others whose recommended modalities were of little concern. All these preoccupations make it clear that pleasure relations between men and adolescent boys already constituted a delicate factor in society, an area so sensitive that one could not fail to be concerned about the conduct of participants on both sides.

III.

But we may note at once a considerable difference in comparison with that other focus of interest and inquiry, matrimonial life: in the case of relations between men and boys, we are dealing with a game that was "open," at least up to a certain point.

20. Dover, pp. 87–97.

Open "spatially." In Economics and the art of the household, we saw a binary spatial structure where the spaces of the two marriage partners were carefully distinguished (the exterior for the husband, the interior for the wife, the men's quarters on one side, the women's on the other). With boys, the game unfolded in a very different space: a common space, at least from the time when they had reached a certain age—the space of the street and the gathering places, with some strategically important points (such as the gymnasium); but a space in which everyone moved about freely,[21] so that one had to pursue a boy, chase after him, watch for him in those places where he might pass and catch hold of him where he happened to be; it was a theme of ironic complaint on the part of lovers, that they were obliged to haunt the gymnasium, go hunting with the *eromenos*, and pant alongside him in exercises which they were no longer in any condition to do.

But, more important, the game was also open in that one could not exercise any statutory authority over the boy, that is, as long as he was not slave-born: he was free in his choices, in what he accepted or rejected, in his preferences or his decisions. In order to get from him something that he always had the right to refuse, one had to be able to persuade him; anyone who wished to remain his favorite had, in his eyes, to outshine such rivals as might present themselves, and for this it was necessary to highlight one's achievements, one's qualities, or one's presents; but the decision was the boy's alone to make: in this game that one had initiated, one was never sure of winning. And yet, this was the very thing that made it interesting. Nothing illustrates this better than the charming complaint of Hiero the tyrant, as reported by Xenophon.[22] Being a tyrant, he explains, does not make things pleasant either in regard to a wife or in regard to a boy. For a tyrant cannot help but take a wife from an inferior family, thus losing all the advantages of marrying into a family "of greater wealth and influence." As for the boy—and Hiero is enamored of Daïlochus—the fact of having despotic power at one's disposal raises other obstacles; the favors which Hiero would like so much to obtain, he would like the boy to give them out of friendship and of his own accord; but "to take them from him by force," he would sooner desire "to do himself an injury." To take something from one's enemy against his will is the greatest of pleasures; but when it comes to the favors of boys, the sweetest are those that are freely granted. For example, what a pleasure it is to "exchange looks, how pleasant his questions and answers; how very pleasant and ravishing are the struggles and bickerings. But to take advantage of a favorite against his will seems to me more like brigandage than love."

21. In the schools, this freedom was supervised and limited. Cf. what Aeschines says about the schools and the precautions the schoolmaster had to take, in *Against Timarchus*, 9–10. On the meetings places, cf. Buffière, pp. 561 ff.
22. Xenophon, *Hiero*, I.

In the case of marriage, the problematization of sexual pleasures and of the practices associated with them was carried out on the basis of the statutory relation that empowered the husband to govern the wife, other individuals, the estate, and the household; the essential question concerned the moderation that needed to be shown in exercising power. In the case of the relationship with boys, the ethics of pleasures would have to bring into play—across age differences—subtle strategies that would make allowance for the other's freedom, his ability to refuse, and his required consent.

IV.

In this problematization of relationships with adolescent boys, the question of timing was important, but it was raised in a singular fashion; what mattered was not, as in Dietetics, the opportune moment for the act, nor, as in Economics, the continual maintenance of a relational structure; rather, it was the difficult question of precarious time and fugitive passage. It was expressed in different ways—as a problem of "limit" first of all: what was the age limit after which a boy ought to be considered too old to be an honorable partner in a love relation? At what age was it no longer good for him to accept this role, nor for his lover to want to assign it to him? This involved the familiar casuistry of the signs of manhood. These were supposed to mark a threshold, one that was all the more intangible in theory as it must have very often been crossed in practice and as it offered the possibility of finding fault with those who had done so. As we know, the first beard was believed to be that fateful mark, and it was said that the razor that shaved it must sever the ties of love.[23] In any case, one should note that people criticized not only boys who were willing to play a role that no longer corresponded to their virility, but also the men who frequented overaged boys.[24] The Stoics were criticized for keeping their lovers too long—up to the age of twenty-eight—but the argument they gave, which was more or less an extension of that given by Pausanias in the *Symposium* (he held that in order to make sure that men only became attached to youths of merit, the law should prohibit relations with boys that were too young),[25] shows that this limit was less a universal rule than a subject of debate that permitted a variety of solutions.

This attention to the period of adolescence and its boundaries no doubt helped to increase people's sensitivity to the juvenile body, to its special beauty, and to the different signs of its development; the adolescent physique became the object of a kind of cultural valorization that was quite pronounced. That the male body might be beautiful, well beyond its first bloom, was something

23. Plato, *Protagoras*, 309 a.
24. Cf. the criticism of Meno in Xenophon, *Anabasis*, II, 6. 28.
25. Plato, *Symposium*, 181 d–e.

that the Greeks were not blind to nor inclined to forget; classical figure sculpture paid more attention to the adult body; and it is recalled in Xenophon's *Symposium* that in choosing garland-bearers for Athena, they were careful to select the most beautiful old men.[26] But in the sphere of sexual ethics, it was the juvenile body with its peculiar charm that was regularly suggested as the "right object" of pleasure. And it would be a mistake to think that its traits were valued because of what it shared with feminine beauty. It was appreciated in itself or in its juxtaposition with the signs and guarantees of a developing virility. Strength, endurance, and spirit also formed part of this beauty; hence it was good in fact if exercises, gymnastics, competitions, and hunting expeditions reinforced these qualities, guaranteeing that this gracefulness would not degenerate into softness and effeminization.[27] The feminine ambiguity that would be perceived later (and already in the course of antiquity, even) as a component—more exactly, as the secret cause—of the adolescent's beauty, was, in the classical period, more a thing from which the boy needed to protect himself and be protected. Among the Greeks there was a whole moral aesthetics of the boy's body; it told of his personal merit and of that of the love one felt for him. Virility as a physical mark should be absent from it; but it should be present as a precocious form and as a promise of future behavior: already to conduct oneself as the man one has not yet become.

But this sensibility was also connected with feelings of anxiety in the face of those rapid changes and the nearness of their completion; by a sense of the fleeting character of that beauty and of its legitimate desirability; and by fear, the double fear so often expressed in the lover, of seeing his beloved lose his charm, and in the beloved, of seeing his lover turn away from him. And the question that was then posed concerned the possible conversion—an ethically necessary and socially useful one—of the bond of love (doomed to disappear) into a relation of friendship, of *philia*. The latter differed from the love relation, out of which it would ideally and sometimes actually be formed: it was lasting, having no other limit than life itself; and it obliterated the dissymmetries that were implied in the erotic relation between man and adolescent. It was one of the frequent themes in moral reflection on this type of relation, that they needed to rid themselves of their precariousness: a precariousness that was due to the inconstancy of the partners, and that was a consequence of the boy's growing older and thereby losing his charm; but it was also a precept, since it was not good to love a boy who was past a certain age, just as it was not good for him to allow himself to be loved. This precariousness could be avoided only if, in the

26. Xenophon, *Symposium*, IV, 17.

27. On the opposition between the sturdy boy and the weakling, see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 239 c–d, and *The Lovers*. Regarding the erotic value of the masculine boy and the evolution of taste towards a more effeminate physique, perhaps already under way in the fourth century, cf. Dover, pp. 69–73. In any case, the notion that the charm of a young boy was connected with a femininity that inhabited him would become a common theme later.

fervor of love, *philia*, friendship, already began to develop: *philia*, that is, an affinity of character and mode of life, a sharing of thoughts and existence, mutual benevolence. The beginning of this cultivation of indestructible friendship in the love relation is what Xenophon is describing when he portrays two lovers who look into each other's faces, converse, confide in one another, rejoice together or feel a common distress over successes and failures, and look after each other: "It is by conducting themselves thus that men continue to love their mutual affection and enjoy it down to old age."[28]

V.

On a very general level, this inquiry concerning relationships with boys took the form of a reflection on love. This fact should not lead us to conclude that for the Greeks eros had no place except in this type of relation, and that it could not play a part in relations with a woman: eros could unite human beings no matter what their sex happened to be; in Xenophon, one can see that Niceratus and his wife are joined together by the ties of Eros and Anteros.[29] Eros was not necessarily "homosexual," nor was it exclusive of marriage; and the marriage tie did not differ from the relation with boys by being incompatible with love's intensity and reciprocity. The difference was elsewhere. Matrimonial morality, and more precisely the sexual ethics of the married man, did not depend on the existence of an erotic relation in order to constitute itself and define its rules (although it was quite possible for this kind of bond to exist between marriage partners). On the other hand, when it was a matter of determining what use they might make of their pleasures within the relationship, then the reference to eros became necessary; the problematization of their relationship belonged to an "Erotics." This was because in the case of two spouses, marital status, management of the *oikos*, and maintenance of the lineage could create standards of behavior, define the rules of that behavior, and determine the forms of the requisite moderation. But in the case of a man or boy who were in a position of reciprocal independence and between whom there was no institutional constraint, but rather an open game (with preferences, choices, freedom of movement, uncertain outcome), the principle of regulation of behaviors was to be sought in the relation itself, in the nature of the attraction that drew them towards one another, and in the mutual attachment that connected them. Hence the problematization would be carried out in the form of a

28. Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII, 18. This whole passage of Socrates' speech (VIII, 13) is a good illustration of the anxiety that was felt in view of the precariousness of male love relationships and of the role that the permanence of friendship was supposed to play in the scheme of things.
29. *Ibid.*, VIII, 3.

reflection on the relation itself: an inquiry that was both theoretical about love and prescriptive about the way one lived.

But in actual fact, this art of loving was intended for two classes of individuals. To be sure, the wife and her behavior were not completely absent from reflection on Economics; but she was placed under his exclusive authority and while it was right that she be respected in her privileges, this was in so far as she proved worthy of respect, the important thing being that the head of a family remain master of himself. The boy, on the other hand, could be expected to maintain the reserve that was appropriate at that age; with his possible refusals (dreaded but honorable) and his eventual acceptances (desired but likely to be suspect), he constituted an independent center vis-à-vis the lover. And this Erotics would have to be deployed from one fixed point of this elliptic configuration to the other. In Economics and Dietetics the voluntary moderation of the man was mainly based on his relation to himself; in Erotics, the game was more complicated; it implied self-mastery on the part of the lover; it also implied an ability on the part of the beloved to establish a relation of domination over himself; and lastly, it implied a relationship between their two moderations, expressed in their deliberate choice of one another. One can even note a certain tendency to privilege the boy's point of view. The questions that were raised had to do with his conduct in particular, and it was to him that one offered observations, advice, and precepts: as if it were important above all to constitute an Erotics of the loved object, or at least, of the loved object in so far as he had to form himself as a subject of ethical behavior; this is in fact what becomes apparent in a text like the eulogy of Epicrates, attributed to Demosthenes.

A Boy's Honor

In comparison with the two great *Symposiums*, Plato's and Xenophon's, and with the *Phaedrus*, Demosthenes' *Erotic Essay* looks rather mediocre. A formulaic speech, it is both the encomium of a young man and an exhortation addressed to him. This was in fact the traditional function of encomia, and the function that Xenophon alludes to in the *Symposium*: "in the very act of flattering Callias, you are educating him to conform to the ideal."[30] Praise and lesson at the same time, therefore. But despite the banality of the themes and their treatment—a kind of insipid Platonism—it is possible to discover a few traits that were characteristic of other discourses on love and of the way in which the question of "pleasures" was posed within them.

30. Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII, 12. On the relationship between eulogy and precept, cf. also Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I, 9.

I.

One preoccupation animates the entire text. It finds expression in a vocabulary that refers constantly to honor and shame. Throughout the speech it is a question of *aischunē*, that shame which is both the dishonor with which one can be branded, and the feeling that causes one to turn away from it; it is a question of that which is ugly and shameful (*aischron*), in contrast to that which is fine, or both fine and honorable. Much is said, too, about that which results in blame and contempt (*oneidos*, *epitimē*), as opposed to that which brings honor and leads to a good reputation (*endoxos entimos*). In any case, Epicrates' admirer states his objective from the very start of the *Erotic Essay*: may this praise bring honor to his beloved, and not shame, as sometimes happens when eulogies are delivered by indiscreet suitors.[31] And he returns again and again to this concern: it is important that the young man should remember that because of his birth and standing, the least negligence where honor is at stake may well cover him with shame; he must always keep in mind the example of those who, by being vigilant, have managed to preserve their honor in the course of their relationship;[32] he must take care not to "dishonor his natural qualities" and not to disappoint the hopes of those who are proud of him.[33]

The behavior of young men thus appears to have been a domain that was especially sensitive to the division between what was shameful and what was proper, between what reflected credit and what brought dishonor. It was this question that preoccupied those who chose to reflect on young men, on the love that was manifested for them and the conduct they needed to exhibit. Pausanias, in Plato's *Symposium*, calls attention to the diversity of morals and customs having to do with boys. He points out what is considered "disgraceful" or "good" in Elis, in Sparta, in Thebes, in Ionia, or in areas under Persian rule, and lastly, in Athens.[34] And Phaedrus recalls the principle that should be one's guide in the love of young men as well as in life in general: "shame at what is disgraceful and ambition for what is noble; without these feelings neither a state nor an individual can accomplish anything great or fine."[35] But it should be remarked that this question was not confined to a few exacting moralists. A young man's behavior, his honor, and his disgrace were also the object of much social curiosity; people paid attention to it, spoke about it, remembered it. For example, in order to attack Timarchus, Aeschines had no qualms about rehashing the gossip that may have gone round many years previously, when his adversary

31. Demosthenes, *The Erotic Essay*, trans. N. W. and N. J. Dewitt, London, Cambridge, Mass., Loeb Classical Library, 1.
32. *Ibid.*, 5.
33. *Ibid.*, 53. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (I, 9) shows the importance of the categories of *kalon* and *aischron* in speeches of praise.
34. Plato, *Symposium*, 182 a–d.
35. *Ibid.*, 178 d.

was still a very young man.[36] Moreover, the *Erotic Essay* shows very well in passing just what sort of distrustful solicitude a boy could quite naturally be subjected to by his entourage; people watched him, spied on him, remarked on his demeanor and his relations; vicious tongues were active around him; spiteful people were ready to blame him if he showed arrogance or conceit; but they were quick to criticize him if he was too gracious.[37] Naturally, one cannot help but think about what the situation of girls in other societies must have been when—the age for marriage being much earlier for women—their premarital conduct became an important moral and social concern, of itself and for their families.

II.

But in regard to the Greek boy, the importance of his honor did not concern—as it would later in the case of the European girl—his future marriage: rather, it related to his status, his eventual place in the city. Of course, there is abundant evidence that boys of dubious reputation could exercise the highest political functions; but there is also evidence that this very thing could be held against them—without counting the substantial judicial consequences that certain kinds of misconduct might produce: the Timarchus affair makes this clear. The author of the *Erotic Essay* points it out to the young Epicrates; part of his future, including the rank he will be able to occupy in the city, depends this very day on the manner, honorable or not, in which he conducts himself: considering that the city cannot call upon just anyone, it will have to take account of established reputations;[38] and the man who scoffs at good advice will be punished all his life for his blindness. Two things are necessary, therefore: to mind one's own conduct when one is still very young, but also to look after the honor of younger men, when one has grown older.

This transition age when the young man was so desirable and his honor so fragile thus constituted a trial period: a time when his worth was tested, in the sense that it had to be formed, exercised, and measured all at the same time. A few lines at the end of the text point up the test-like characteristics which the boy's behavior assumed in this period of his life. In exhorting Epicrates, the author of the encomium reminds him that he will be put to the test (*agōn*), and that the debate will be a *dokimasie*:[39] this was the word that designated the examination upon whose completion young men were enrolled among the ephebi or citizens, were admitted to certain magistracies. The young man's conduct owed its importance and the attention that everyone needed to give it, to the fact that everyone saw it as a qualifying test. The text says this plainly, moreover: "I

36. Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 39–73.
37. Demosthenes, 17–19.
38. *Ibid.*, 55.
39. *Ibid.*, 53.

think . . . that the city will appoint you to be in charge of some department of her business, and in proportion as your natural gifts are more conspicuous, it will judge you worthy of greater responsibilities and will the sooner desire to make trial of your abilities."[40]

III.

What exactly was being tested? And with respect to what type of behavior was Epicrates supposed to draw the line between that which was honorable and that which was disgraceful? The test pertained to the familiar points of Greek education: the demeanor of the body (carefully avoid *rhathumia*, that sluggishness which was always a defamatory sign); one's gaze (in which *aidos*, dignity, could be read), one's way of talking (don't take the easy option of silence, but be able to mix serious talk with casual talk); and the quality of one's acquaintances.

But it was especially in the sphere of amorous conduct that the distinction between what was honorable and what was shameful operated. On this point, we may note first of all that the author—and this is what makes the text both a eulogy of love and praise of a young man—criticizes the opinion that would tie a boy's honor to the systematic rejection of suitors; doubtless certain lovers defile the relation itself (*lumainesthai tōi pragmati*);[41] but one should not put them in the same class as those admirers who show moderation. The text does not draw the boundary line of honor between those who spurn their suitors and those who accept them. For a Greek youth, to be pursued by would-be lovers was obviously not a dishonor; it was rather the visible mark of his qualities; the number of admirers could be an object of legitimate pride, and sometimes an object of vainglory. But to accept the love relation, to enter the game (even if one did not exactly play the game the lover proposed) was not considered to be a disgrace either. The man who praises Epicrates explains to him that being beautiful and being loved constitute a double stroke of fortune (*eutuchia*);[42] it only remains for him to make the right use (*orthōs chrēsthai*) of it. It is this point that the text emphasizes and makes a "point of honor," so to speak: these things (*ta pragmata*) are not, in themselves and absolutely, good or bad; they vary according to who practices them (*para tous chrōmenous*).[43] It is "use" that determines their moral value, according to a principle that one sees often formulated elsewhere; in any case, we find quite similar expressions in the *Symposium*: "The truth of the matter I believe to be this. There is, as I stated at first, no absolute right and wrong in love, but everything depends upon the circum-

40. *Ibid.*, 55.
41. *Ibid.*, 3.
42. *Ibid.*, 5.
43. *Ibid.*, 4.

stances: to yield to a bad man in a bad way is wrong, but to yield to a worthy man in a right way is right."[44]

Now, as for knowing precisely how the distribution of honor is to be carried out in the love relation, one must admit that the text is extremely elliptical. While it does offer specifics regarding what Epicrates should do or has done in order to exercise his body and develop his courage, or to acquire the philosophical knowledge that he will need, nothing is said concerning what is acceptable or objectionable in physical relations. One thing is clear: not everything should be refused (the young man "grants his favors"), but not everything should be consented to: "Not one finds himself disappointed of favours from you which it is just and fair to ask, but no one is permitted even to hope for such liberties as lead to shame. So great is the latitude your discreetness permits to those who have the best intentions; so great is the discouragement it presents to those who would fling off restraint."[45] The moderation—the *sōphrosunē*—that is one of the major qualities required of boys clearly implies a discrimination in physical contacts. But it is not possible to infer from this text the acts and gestures that honor would compel one to refuse. It should be noted that in the *Phaedrus* the lack of precision is almost as great, even though the theme is developed more fully. Throughout the first two speeches on the advisability of yielding to a lover or a nonlover, and in the great fable of the soul as a team with its restive steed and its obedient steed, Plato's text shows that the question of what constitutes "honorable" practice is crucial: and yet, the acts are never designated except by expressions like "to gratify" or "to grant one's favors" (*charizesthai*), "to do the thing" (*diaprattesthai*), "to derive the greatest possible pleasure from the beloved," "to obtain what one wants" (*pleithesthai*), "to enjoy" (*apolauesthai*). A reticence inherent in this type of discourse? Without doubt, the Greeks would have found it improper that someone would call by name, in a set speech, things that were only vaguely alluded to even in polemics and law court addresses. One imagines, too, that it was hardly necessary to insist on distinctions that were common knowledge: everyone must have known what it was honorable or shameful for a boy to consent to. But we may also recall an observation that was made in our discussion of Dietetics and Economics, where it became apparent that moral reflection was less concerned with specifying the codes to be respected and the list of acts that were permitted and prohibited than it was concerned with characterizing the type of attitude, of relationship with oneself that was required.

44. Plato, *Symposium*, 183 d; cf. also 181 a.
45. Demosthenes, 20.

IV.

Actually, while the text does not indicate the practical forms that are to be respected and the physical boundaries that are not to be crossed, it does at least designate the general principle that determines the way to conduct oneself in these matters. The entire eulogy of Epicrates refers to an agonistic context where the worth and brilliance of the young man must affirm itself through his superiority over others. Let us quickly review these motifs that were so frequent in set speeches: The individual being eulogized is greater than the praise that one offers him, and the words risk being less beautiful than the one to whom they are addressed;[46] or the boy surpasses all others in physical and moral qualities;[47] not only his gifts but his conversation places him above all others;[48] among all the exercises in which one can excel, he has chosen the most noble, the most rewarding;[49] his soul is prepared for "the rivalries of ambition"; and not content to distinguish himself by one quality, he combines "all the qualities of which a man might justly feel proud."[50]

However, the merit of Epicrates is not just in this abundance of qualities that enable him to outstrip all his rivals and bring glory to his parents;[51] it also consists in the fact that with respect to all those who approach him he always maintains his eminent worth; he does not allow himself to be dominated by any of them; they all want to draw him into their intimacy—the word *sunētheia* has both the general meaning of living together and the specific meaning of sexual relations;[52] but he surpasses them in such a way, he gains such an ascendancy over them they derive all their pleasure from the friendship they feel for him.[53] By not yielding, not submitting, remaining the strongest, triumphing over suitors and lovers through one's resistance, one's firmness, one's moderation (*sōphrosunē*)—the young man proves his excellence in the sphere of love relations.

Given this general indication, must we imagine a precise code based on the analogy—so familiar to the Greeks—between positions in the social field (with the difference between "the first ones" and the others, the great who rule and those who obey, the masters and the servants) and the form of sexual relations (with dominant and subordinate positions, active and passive roles, penetration carried out by the man and undergone by his partner)? To say that one must not yield, not let others get the best of one, not accept a subordinate position where one would get the worst of it, is doubtless to exclude or advise

46. *Ibid.*, 7, 33, 16.
47. *Ibid.*, 8, 14.
48. *Ibid.*, 21.
49. *Ibid.*, 30.
50. *Ibid.*, 30.
51. *Ibid.*, 31.
52. *Ibid.*, 17.
53. *Ibid.*, 17.

against sexual practices that would be humiliating for the boy, putting him in a position of inferiority.[54]

But it is likely that the principle of honor and maintenance of "superiority" refers—beyond a few precise prescriptions—to a kind of general style: it was not good (especially in the eyes of public opinion) for a boy to behave "passively," to let himself be manipulated and dominated, to yield without resistance, to become an obliging partner in the sensual pleasures of the other, to indulge his whims, and to offer his body to whomever it pleased and however it pleased them, out of weakness, lust, or self-interest. This was what dishonored boys who accepted the first comer, who showed off unscrupulously, who passed from hand to hand, who granted everything to the highest bidder. This was what Epicrates did not and would not do, mindful as he was of the opinion people had of him, of the rank he would have to hold, and of the useful relations he might enter into.

I would just like to mention again briefly the role which the author of *The Erotic Essay* has philosophy play in this safeguarding of honor and these contests of superiority by which the boy is invited to test himself in a manner that befits his age. This philosophy, whose content is not specified apart from a reference to the Socratic theme of *epimeleia heautou*, "care of the self,"[55] and to the necessity, also Socratic, of combining knowledge and exercise (*epistēmē—meletē*)—this philosophy is not presented as a guide for leading a different life, nor for abstaining from all the pleasures. It is invoked by Demosthenes as an indispensable complement of the other tests: "Reflect that . . . of all things the most irrational is to be ambitious for wealth, bodily strength, and such things, and for their sake to submit to many tests . . . but not to aim at the improvement of the mind, which has supervision over all other powers."[56] What philosophy can show, in fact, is how to become "stronger than oneself" and when one has become so, it also enables one to prevail over others. It is by nature a leadership principle since it alone is capable of directing thought: "Of the powers residing in human beings we shall find that thought leads all the rest and that philosophy alone is capable of directing it rightly and training it."[57] It is clear that philosophy is an asset that is necessary for the young man's wise conduct; not however in order to guide him towards another form of life, but to enable him to exercise self-mastery and to triumph over others in the difficult game of ordeals to be undergone and honor to be safeguarded.

The entire *Erotic Essay* revolves, as we see, around the problem of this twofold superiority over oneself and over others in that difficult phase when the

54. On the importance of not being dominated and on the misgivings that were felt apropos of sodomy and passive fellation in homosexual relations, cf. Dover, pp. 100–109.
55. Demosthenes, 39–43.
56. *Ibid.*, 38.
57. *Ibid.*, 37.

boy's youth and beauty attract one man after the other, each trying to "get the best" of him. In Dietetics it was mainly a question of mastery over oneself and over the violence of a perilous act; in Economics it was a question of the control that one had to exercise over oneself in the practice of the authority that one exercised over one's wife. Here, where Erotics takes the boy's point of view, the problem is to see how the boy is going to be able to achieve self-mastery in not yielding to others. The point at issue is not the sense of measure that one brings to one's own power, but the best way to measure one's strength against the power of others while ensuring one's own mastery over self. In this regard, a brief narration that appears in the middle of the speech acquires a symbolic value. It is a commonplace account of a chariot race, but a direct relation is established between the little sports drama that is reported and the public test which the young man undergoes in his behavior with his suitors. We see Epicrates driving his team (a likely reference to the *Phaedrus*); he is on the verge of defeat, his chariot is about to be smashed to pieces by an opposing team; the crowd, despite the taste it ordinarily has for accidents, cheers for the hero, while he, "stronger even than the vigor of this team, manages to win the victory over the most favored of his rivals."[58]

This prosaic address to Epicrates is certainly not one of the highest forms of Greek reflection on love. But in its very banality it does bring out some important aspects of "the Greek problem of boys." The young man—between the end of childhood and the age when he attained manly status—constituted a delicate and difficult factor for Greek ethics and Greek thought. His youth with its particular beauty (to which every man was believed to be naturally sensitive) and the status which would be his (and for which, with the help and protection of his entourage, he must prepare himself) formed a "strategic" point around which a complex game was required; his honor—which depended in part on the use he made of his body and which would also partly determine his future role and reputation—was an important stake in the game. For him, there was a test in all this, one which demanded diligence and training; there was also, for others, an occasion for care and concern. At the very end of his eulogy of Epicrates, the author declares that the life of the boy, his *bios*, must be a "common" work; and, as if it were a matter of a work of art to be finished, he urges all who know Epicrates to give this future figure "the greatest possible brilliance."

Later, in European culture, girls or married women, with their behavior, their beauty, and their feelings, were to become themes of special concern; a new art of courting them, a literature that was basically romantic in form, an exacting morality that was attentive to the integrity of their bodies and the solidity of their matrimonial commitment—all this would draw curiosities and

58. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

desires around them. No matter what inferior position may have been reserved for them in the family or in society, there would be an accentuation, a valorization, of the "problem" of women. Their nature, their conduct, the feelings they inspired or experienced, the permitted or forbidden relationship that one might have with them were to become themes of reflection, knowledge, analysis, and prescription. It seems clear, on the other hand, that in classical Greece the problematization was more active in regard to boys, maintaining an intense moral concern around their fragile beauty, their corporal honor, their ethical judgment and the training it required. What is historically singular is not that the Greeks found pleasure in boys, nor even that they accepted this pleasure as legitimate, it is that this acceptance of pleasure was not simple, and that it gave rise to a whole cultural elaboration. In broad terms, what is important to grasp here is not why the Greeks had a fondness for boys but why they had a "pederasty"; that is, why they elaborated a courtship practice, a moral reflection, and—as we shall see—a philosophical asceticism, around that fondness.

The Object of Pleasure

In order to understand how the use of the *aphrodisia* was problematized in reflection on the love of boys, we have to recall a principle which is doubtless not peculiar to Greek culture, but which assumed considerable importance within it and exercised a decisive authority in its moral valuations. I am referring to the principle of isomorphism between sexual relations and social relations. What this means is that sexual relations—always conceived in terms of the model act of penetration, assuming a polarity that opposed activity and passivity—were seen as being of the same type as the relationship between a superior and a subordinate, an individual who dominates and one who is dominated, one who commands and one who complies, one who vanquishes and one who is vanquished. Pleasure practices were conceptualized using the same categories as those in the field of social rivalries and hierarchies: an analogous agonistic structure, analogous oppositions and differentiations, analogous values attributed to the respective roles of the partners. And this suggests that in sexual behavior there was one role that was intrinsically honorable and valorized without question: the one that consisted in being active, in dominating, in penetrating, in asserting one's superiority.

This principle has several consequences relating to the status of those who were supposed to be the passive partners in this activity. Slaves were at the master's disposition of course: their condition made them sexual objects and this was taken for granted; so much so that people could be astonished that the same law would forbid the rape of slaves and that of children. In order to explain this anomaly, Aeschines submits that the aim was to show, by prohibiting violence even in the case of slaves, what a serious thing it was when directed at children of good birth. As for the woman's passivity, it did denote an inferiority

of nature and condition; but there was no reason to criticize it as a behavior, precisely because she was in conformity with what nature intended and with what the law prescribed. On the other hand, everything in the way of sexual behavior that might cause a free man—to say nothing of someone who by birth, fortune, and prestige, held or should hold one of the first ranks among men—to bear the marks of inferiority, submission to domination and acceptance of servitude, could only be considered as shameful: a shame that was even greater if he offered himself as the obliging object of another's pleasure.

Now, in a game regulated according to such principles, the position of the (freeborn) boy was difficult. To be sure, he was still in an "inferior" position in the sense that he was a long way from benefiting from the rights and powers that would be his when he attained the full enjoyment of his status. And yet, his place was not assimilable to that of a slave, nor to that of woman. This was true even in the context of the household and the family. A passage from Aristotle's *Politics* makes this clear. Discussing the authority relations and forms of government that are appropriate for the family, Aristotle defines the position of the slave, of the wife, and of the (male) child in relation to the head of the family. Governing slaves, Aristotle says, is not like governing free beings; to govern a wife is to exercise a "political" authority in which relations are permanently unequal; in contrast, the governing of children can be called "royal" because it is based "on affection and seniority."[59] Indeed, the deliberative faculty is lacking in the slave; it is present in the woman, but she doesn't exercise the decision-making function in her house; in the boy, the deficiency relates only to his incomplete development. And while the moral education of women is important, seeing that they constitute half the free population, that of male children is more so, for it concerns future citizens who will participate in the government of the city.[60] We can see therefore that the specific nature of the boy's position, the particular form of his dependence, and the manner in which he is to be treated, even in the space where the considerable power of the patriarch is exercised, were marked by the status that would be his in future years.

The same held true up to a point in the game of sexual relations. Among the various legitimate "objects," the boy occupied a special position. He was definitely not a forbidden object; at Athens, certain laws protected free children (from adults who at least for a time did not have the right to go into the schools, from slaves who incurred the death penalty if they tried corrupting them, and from their fathers or tutors who were punished if they prostituted them);[61] but nothing prevented or prohibited an adolescent from being the openly recognized sexual partner of a man. Yet, there was a sort of intrinsic difficulty in this role:

59. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 5, 1259 a–b.
60. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 5, 1260 b.
61. Cf. the laws cited by Aeschines in *Against Timarchus*, 9–18.

something that simultaneously made it hard to define clearly and specify exactly what the role implied in the sexual relation, and nonetheless drew attention to this point and made people attach much importance and value to what should or should not occur in that regard. All this constituted something of a blind spot and a point of overvaluation. The role of the boy was a focus of a good deal of uncertainty combined with an intense interest.

Aeschines, in *Against Timarchus*, makes use of a law that is very interesting in itself because it concerns the effects of civic and political disqualification that a man's sexual misconduct—"prostitution" in the precise sense—could entail in that it would prohibit him from subsequently "becoming one of the nine archons or discharging the office of priest or acting as an advocate for the state." An individual who had prostituted himself was debarred from holding any magistracy in the city or abroad, be it elective or conferred by lot. He could not serve as a herald or ambassador, nor become a prosecutor of ambassadors or a paid slanderer. Further, he could not address the Council or the Assembly, even though he were "the most eloquent orator in Athens."[62] Hence this law made male prostitution an instance of *atīmia*—of public disgrace—that excluded a citizen from certain responsibilities.[63] But the way in which Aeschines conducts his prosecution, and tries through a strictly juridical discussion to compromise his adversary, points up the relation of incompatibility—ethical as much as legal—that was recognized as existing between certain sexual roles assumed by boys and certain social roles assumed by adults.

Aeschines' legal argumentation, which is based on Timarchus's "bad conduct" as alleged via rumors, gossip, and testimony, consists in going back and finding certain factors that constitute prostitution (number of partners, indiscrimination, payment for services) whereas others are lacking (he hadn't been registered as a prostitute and he hadn't stayed in a house). When he was young and good looking, he passed through many hands, and not always honorable ones since he is known to have lived with a man of servile status and in the house of a notorious lecher who surrounded himself with singers and zither players; he received gifts, he was kept, he took part in the excesses of his protectors; he is known to have been with Cedonides, Autocleides, Thersandrus, Misgolas, Anticles, Pittalacus, and Hegesandrus. Thus it is not possible to say simply that he has had many relationships (*hetairēkōs*), but that he has "prostituted" himself (*peporneumenos*): "For the man who practises this thing with one person, and practises it for pay, seems to me to be liable to precisely this charge."[64]

62. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
63. Dover, (pp. 19–20) points out that what was punishable was not prostitution itself; rather it was the fact of violating the disqualifications that resulted from having been a prostitute.
64. Aeschines, 52.

But the accusation also operates on a moral level that makes it possible not only to establish the crime, but to compromise the adversary politically and in general. Perhaps Timarchus is not formally a professional prostitute, but he is definitely not one of those respectable men who make no secret of their taste for male loves and who maintain honorable relations with free boys, relations that are valuable to the young partner: Aeschines acknowledges that he is partial to this kind of love. He describes Timarchus as a man who in the course of his youth placed himself and showed himself to everyone, in the inferior and humiliating position of a pleasure object for others; he wanted this role, he sought it, took pleasure in it, and profited from it. And this is what Aeschines would have his audience see as morally and politically incompatible with civic responsibilities and the exercise of political power. A man who has been marked by this role which he was pleased to assume in his youth would not now be able to play, without provoking indignation, the role of a man who is over others in the city, who provides them with friends, counsels them in their decisions, leads them and represents them. What was hard for Athenians to accept—and this is the feeling that Aeschines tries to play upon in the speech against Timarchus—was not that they might be governed by someone who loved boys, or who as a youth was loved by a man; but that they might come under the authority of a leader who once identified with the role of pleasure object for others.

It is this feeling, moreover, that Aristophanes had appealed to so often in his comedies; the point of mockery and the thing that was meant to be scandalous was that these orators, these leaders who were followed and loved, these citizens who sought to seduce the people in order to rule over them, such as Cleon or Agyrrhius, were also individuals who had consented and still consented to play the role of passive, obliging objects. And Aristophanes spoke ironically of an Athenian democracy where one's chances of being heard in the Assembly were greater the more one had a taste for pleasures of this sort.[65] In the same way and the same spirit, Diogenes made fun of Demosthenes and the morals he had while pretending to be the leader (*dēmagōgos*) of the Athenian people.[66] When one played the role of subordinate partner in the game of pleasure relations, one could not be truly dominant in the game of civic and political activity.

The extent to which these criticisms and satires may have been justified in reality matters little. There is at least one thing that they show clearly by their mere existence; namely, the difficulty caused, in this society that accepted sexual relations between men, by the juxtaposition of an ethos of male superiority and a conception of all sexual intercourse in terms of the schema of penetration and male domination. The consequence of this was that on the one hand the

65. Aristophanes, *Knights*, v. 428 ff. *Assemblywomen*, v. 112 ff. Cf. Buffière, pp. 185–186.
66. Diogenes Laertius, VI, 34.

"active" and dominant role was always assigned positive values, but on the other hand it was necessary to attribute to one of the partners in the sexual act the passive, dominated, and inferior position. And while this was no problem when it involved a woman or a slave, the case was altered when it involved a man. It is doubtless the existence of this difficulty that explains both the silence in which this relationship between adults was actually enveloped, and the noisy disqualification of those who broke this silence by declaring their acceptance, or rather, their preference for this "subordinate" role. It was also in view of this difficulty that all the attention was concentrated on the relationship between men and boys, since in this case one of the two partners, owing to his youth and to the fact that he had not yet attained manly status, could be—for a period which everyone knew to be brief—an admissible object of pleasure. But while the boy, because of his peculiar charm, could be a prey which men might pursue without causing a scandal or a problem, one had to keep in mind that the day would come when he would have to be a man, to exercise powers and responsibilities, so that obviously he could then no longer be an object of pleasure—but then, to what extent could he *have been* such an object?

Hence the problem that could be called the "antinomy of the boy" in the Greek ethics of *aphrodisia*. On the one hand, young men were recognized as objects of pleasure—and even as the only honorable and legitimate objects among the possible male partners of men: no one would ever reproach a man for loving a boy, for desiring and enjoying him, provided that the laws and proprieties were respected. But on the other hand, the boy, whose youth must be a training for manhood, could not and must not identify with that role. He could not of his own accord, in his own eyes, and for his own sake, be that object of pleasure, even though the man was quite naturally fond of appointing him as an object of pleasure. In short, to delight in and be a subject of pleasure with a boy did not cause a problem for the Greeks; but to be an object of pleasure and to acknowledge oneself as such constituted a major difficulty for the boy. The relationship that he was expected to establish with himself in order to become a free man, master of himself, and capable of prevailing over others was at variance with a form of relationship in which he would be an object of pleasure for another. This noncoincidence was ethically necessary.

Such a difference explains certain characteristic features of the Greeks' reflection on the love of boys.

In the first place, there was an oscillation—enigmatic for us—concerning the natural or "unnatural" character of that type of love. On one side, it was taken for granted that the attraction to boys was natural in just the same way as all movement that carried one in the direction of the beautiful was natural. And yet, it is not unusual to find the assertion that relations between men, or more generally, between two individuals of the same sex, is *para phusin*, beside nature. Of course one can infer that these two views indicate two different attitudes, one favorable and the other hostile to that kind of love. But the very

possibility of these two opinions was probably owing to the fact that while people deemed it quite natural that one might find pleasure with a boy, it was much harder to accept as natural that which made a boy an object of pleasure. So that one could take exception to the very act that was carried out between two male individuals on the grounds that it was *para phusin*—because it *feminized* one of the partners whereas the desire that one could have for beauty was nevertheless regarded as natural. The cynics were not against the love of boys, even though they heaped sarcasm on all those boys whose passivity caused them to accept being estranged from their own nature, thus becoming "worse than they were."[67] As for Plato, there is no reason to suppose that, having been a believer in male love as a youth, he later "got wise" to the extent that he condemned it as being a relationship "contrary to nature." It should be noted, rather, that at the beginning of the *Laws*, when he draws a contrast between relations with women as an element of nature, and relations between men (or between women) as an effect of incontinence (*akrasia*), he is referring to the act of copulation itself (provided for by nature) and he is thinking of institutions that are likely to promote or on the other hand pervert citizens' morals.[68] Similarly, in the passage from Book VIII where he foresees the need—and the difficulty—of a law concerning sexual relations, the arguments he puts forward have to do with the harmfulness of "using" men and boys "like females" in sexual intercourse (*mixis aphrodisiōn*): in the one seduced, how might a "courageous, manly disposition (*to tēs andreias ethos*) be formed? And in the seducer, what would nurture "the offspring of the idea of a moderate man"? "Everyone blames the softness of the one who gives in to the pleasures and is incapable of mastering them," and "reproves the resemblance in image of the one who undertakes the imitation of the female."[69]

The problem of considering the boy as an object of pleasure was also manifested by a noticeable reticence on several points. There was a reluctance to evoke directly and in so many words the role of the boy in sexual intercourse: sometimes quite general expressions are employed, such as "to do the thing" (*diaprattesthai to pragma*);[70] other times the "thing" is designated by the very impossibility of naming it;[71] or again—and this is what says most about the problem posed by the relation—people resorted to metaphorical terms that were "agonistic" or political: "to yield," to "submit" (*hupēretein*), "to render a service" (*therapeuein*, *hupourgein*).[72]

67. *Ibid.*, VI, 2, 59 (cf. also 54 and 46).
68. Plato, *Laws*, I, 636 b–c.
69. *Ibid.*, VIII, 836 c–d. In the *Phaedrus*, the physical form of the relation where the man behaves like a "four-footed beast" is said to be "unnatural" (250 e).
70. Or *diaprettesthai*, cf. *Phaedrus*, 256 c.
71. Xenophon, *Symposium*, IV, 15.
72. Xenophon, *Hiero*, I and VII; of Plato, *Symposium*, 184 c–d. See Dover, pp. 44–45.

But there was also a reluctance to concede that the boy might experience pleasure. This "denial" should be interpreted both as the affirmation that such a pleasure could not exist and as the prescription that it ought not to be experienced. Having to explain why love so often turns into hatred when it is mediated by physical relations, Socrates, in Xenophon's *Symposium*, speaks of the unpleasant feelings that may arise in a youth because of his relationship (*homilein*) with an aging man. But he immediately adds as a general principle: "A youth does not share in the pleasure of the intercourse as a woman does, but looks on, sober, at another in love's intoxication."[73] Between the man and the boy, there is not—there cannot and should not be—a community of pleasure. The author of the *Problems* admits the possibility only for a few individuals and only in the case of an anatomical irregularity. And no one was more severely criticized than boys who showed by their willingness to yield, by their many relationships, or by their dress, their makeup, their adornments, or their perfumes that they might enjoy playing that role.

Which does not mean, however, that when the boy happened to give in, he had to do it coldly somehow. On the contrary, he was supposed to yield only if he had feelings of admiration, gratitude, or affection for his lover, which made him want to please the latter. The verb *charizesthai* was commonly employed in order to indicate the fact that the boy "complied" and "granted his favors."[74] The word does suggest that there was something other than a simple "surrender" by the beloved to the lover; the youth "granted his favors" through a movement that yielded to a desire and a demand on the part of the other, but was not of the same nature. It was a response; it was not the sharing of a sensation. The boy was not supposed to experience a physical pleasure; he was not even supposed quite to take pleasure in the man's pleasure; he was supposed to feel pleased about giving pleasure to the other, provided he yielded when he should; that is, not too hastily, nor too reluctantly either.

Sexual relations thus demanded particular behaviors on the part of both partners. A consequence of the fact that the boy could not identify with the part he had to play; he was supposed to refuse, resist, flee, escape.[75] He was also supposed to make his consent, if he finally gave it, subject to conditions relating to the man to whom he yielded (his merit, his status, his virtue) and to the benefit he could expect to gain from him (a benefit that was rather shameful if it was only a question of money, but honorable if it involved training for manhood, social connections for the future, or a lasting friendship). And in fact it was benefits of this kind that the lover was supposed to be able to provide, in addition to the customary gifts which depended more on status considerations (and whose importance and value varied with the condition of the partners). So

73. Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII, 21.
74. Plato, *Symposium*, 184 e.
75. *Ibid.*, 184 a.

that the sexual act, in the relation between a man and a boy, needed to be taken up in a game of refusals, evasions, and escapes that tended to postpone it as long as possible, but also in a process of exchanges that determined the right time and the right conditions for it to take place.

Thus, the boy was expected to give—out of kindness and hence not for his own pleasure—something which his partner sought with a view to the pleasure he would enjoy; but the partner could not rightfully ask for it without a matching offer of presents, services, promises, and commitments that were altogether different in nature from the "gift" that was made to him. Which explains that tendency which was so visibly marked in Greek reflection on the love of boys: how was this relation to be integrated into a larger whole and enabled to transform itself into another type of relationship, a stable relationship where physical relations would no longer be important and where the two partners would be able to share the same feelings and the same possessions? The love of boys could not be morally honorable unless it comprised (as a result of the reasonable gifts and services of the lover and the reserved compliance of the beloved) the elements that would form the basis of a transformation of this love into a definitive and socially valuable tie, that of *philia*.

One would be quite mistaken to think that since the Greeks did not prohibit this kind of relationship, they did not worry about its implications. It "interested" them more than any other sexual relation and there is every indication that they were anxious about it. But we can say that in a thinking such as ours, the relationship between two individuals of the same sex is questioned primarily from the viewpoint of the subject of desire: how can it be that in a man a desire forms whose object is another man? And we know very well that it is in a certain structuration of this desire (in its ambivalence, or in what it lacks) that the rudiments of an answer will be sought. The preoccupation of the Greeks, on the other hand, did not concern the desire that might incline an individual to this kind of relationship, nor did it concern the subject of this desire; their anxiety was focused on the object of pleasure, or more precisely, on that object in so far as he would have to become in turn the master in the pleasure that was enjoyed with others and in the power that was exercised over oneself.

It was here, at this point of problematization (how to make the object of pleasure into a subject who was in control of his pleasures), that philosophical erotics, or in any case Socratic-Platonic reflection on love, was to take its point of departure.

Corpus Delicti*

ROSALIND KRAUSS

The smoker puts the last touch to his work
he seeks unity between himself and the landscape

—André Breton[1]

A prominent surrealist painter, writing in 1933, imagines the following scene:

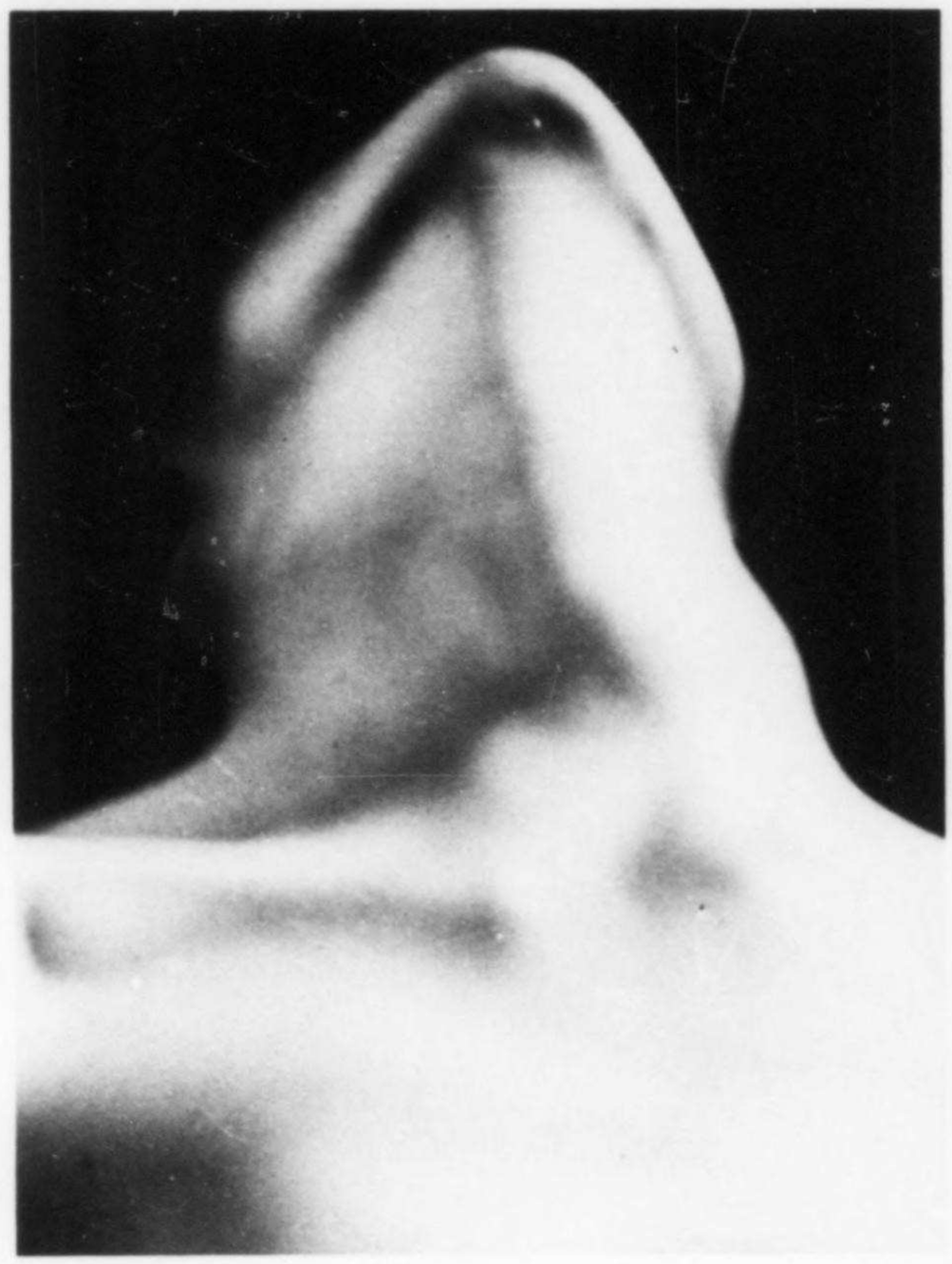
A man is staring dreamily at a luminous point, thinking it a star, only rudely to awaken when he realizes it is merely the tip of a burning cigarette. This man is then told that the cigarette end is in fact the only visible point of an immense "psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic object," knowledge, our writer assures us, that will instantly cause that banal point of burning ash to "recover all its irrational glamour, and its most incontestable and dizzying powers of seduction."

These objects—psycho, atmospheric, and anamorphic—we have already been told, are complex reconstructions, made in the dark, of an original object, chosen in the dark from among many others. The reconstruction, allowed to drop (still in the dark) from a ninety-foot height, to render it unrecognizable even if able to be seen, is then photographed. Still without being looked at, this photograph is then sunk into a molten cube of metal which hardens around it. This reproduced shadow of an unseen shadow, in the vise of its now inert case, our writer will subsequently refer to as *informe*, unformed.

Our writer, who can only be Salvador Dali, goes on to imagine the story he will tell his now-rapt listener, about the history of this particular object, whose burning tip only can be seen. This history, of extreme complexity, will persuade the listener beyond a shadow of a doubt that among other elements buried in the object are "two authentic skulls—those of Richard Wagner and of Ludwig II of Bavaria. And," Dali adds, "it will be demonstrated that it is these two skulls, softened up by a special process, that the cigarette is smoking." The

* A version of this essay will appear in Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour fou: Surrealism and Photography*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1985.

1. "Le fumeur met la dernière main à son travail/ Il cherche l'unité de lui-même avec le paysage," from "Le soleil en laisse," *Claire de Terre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1966.



glamour of rot and decay going up in smoke, is as we shall see, the very essence of the *informe*.

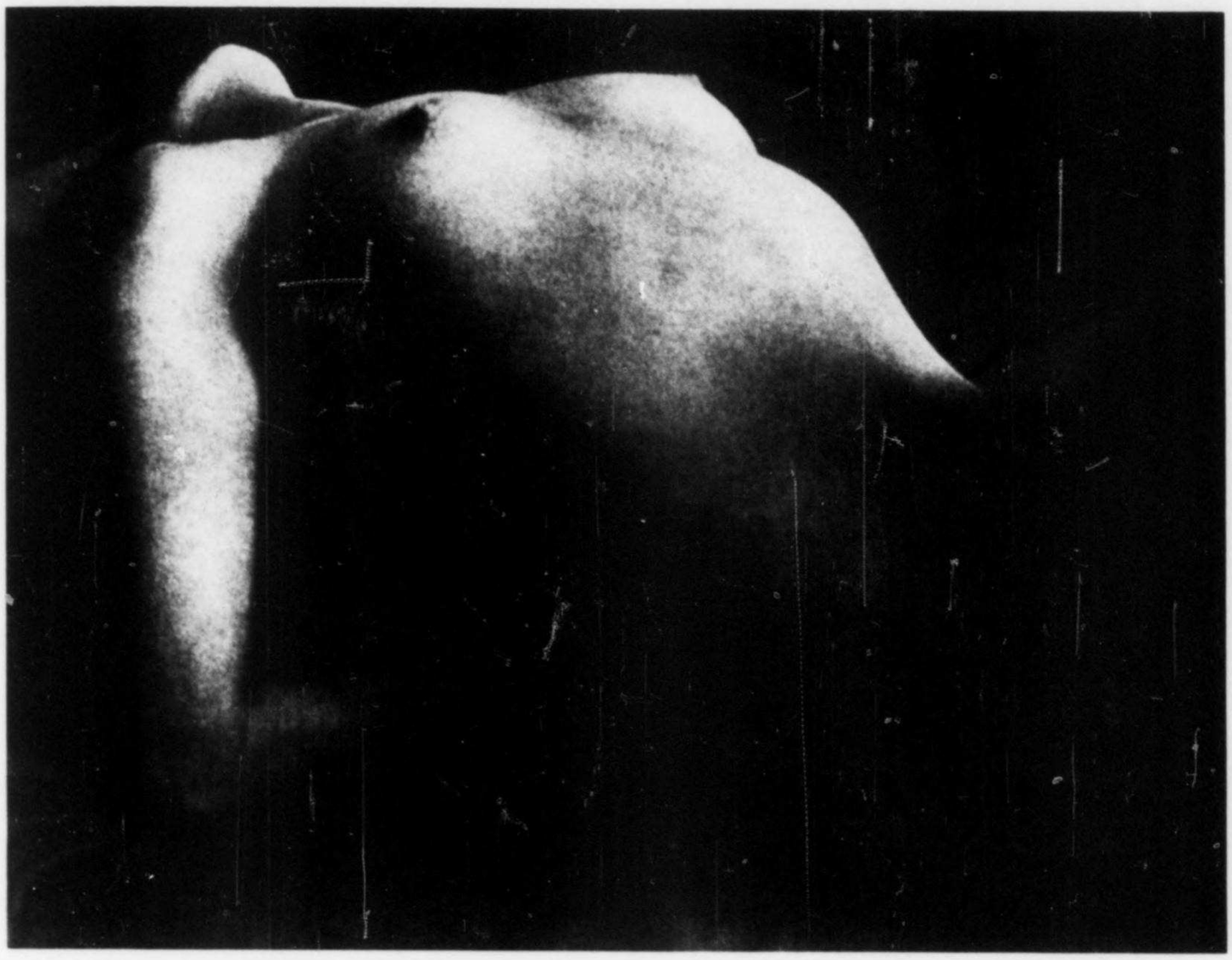
Dali closes his text with the assertion, "The tip of this cigarette cannot but burn with a brilliance more lyrical in human eyes than the airy twinkle of the clearest and most distant star."[2]

Ten years earlier Man Ray had made the following image: a strange construction rises from the bottom edge of a photograph, pyramiding towards the top of its frame. The tip of the pyramid is a cigarette, its ash just kissing the edge of the sheet, its other end clenched in the teeth of a barely-seen mouth at the apex of this construction's human base. For we are able to read as the support for the cigarette a face rotated 180 degrees, its humanness hardly recognizable from this position, the mass of falling hair that fills the bottom half of the frame, a swirling, formless field.

With the dispassionate economy of only two moves—rotation and close-up—*Head, New York*, 1923, produces the image of the *informe*. Made just before the "Surrealist Manifesto" fired the starting shots of André Breton's revolution (but not before the movement's "*époque des sommeils*"),[3] May Ray's image could

2. Salvador Dali, "Objets psycho-atmosphériques-anamorphiques," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, No. 5 (May 1933), 45–48.

3. The "*époque des sommeils*" is often used to refer to the years 1922 and 1923 as the group around André Breton began to experiment with automatic writing, the recording of dreams, and hypnotically induced trances.



Far left: Man Ray. Head, New York. *1923.*
Left: Man Ray. Anatomy. *1930.*
Brassaï. Untitled. *1933.*

nonetheless have occupied the page in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* that carried Dali's text, hardly unusual for the photographer whose work was instantly to be fully integrated into the full range of surrealist literary spaces. From 1924 Man Ray was treated as a kind of staff photographer for *La Révolution surréaliste*, contributing six images to its first issue. After turning over to his assistant Jacques-André Boiffard the illustration of Breton's *Nadja*, Man Ray went on to contribute images to Breton's *L'Amour fou*, to make photographs that would be chosen by Tristan Tzara to electrify his text on the "Automatism of Taste," or to set up shots of phantoms to illustrate a 1934 Dali essay on "Aerodynamic Apparitions."

But *Head, New York* is not just an isolated case in Man Ray's work, a lucky coincidence that Dali could have found and used but, as chance would have it, did not. Its strategies are repeated within the scope of Man Ray's photographic output, defamiliarizing the human body, redrafting the map of what we would have thought the most familiar of terrains. *Anatomy* is another such image, with similar, unsettling effects. Once again human flesh pyramids to the top of the page, but here there is no inverted head, no reassuring eyes

and nose, however strangely sited. In *Anatomy* we stare at the underside of a violently up-ended chin, our eyes sliding along the muscularity of a distended neck rendered nonetheless weirdly gelatinous by the image's lighting and contour, producing the apparition on this page of something puffily reptilian, like the belly and head of a frog. No eyes and nose, just this point where the head should be.

The surrealist photographers were masters of the *informe*, which could be produced, as Man Ray had seen, by a simple rotation and consequent disorientation of the body. This is how Boiffard performed it in his poignant nude for *Documents*, or how one finds it in the extraordinary image by Brassaï that was chosen to open the essay "*Variétés du corps human*," in *Minotaure*.[4] There the *Anatomy* strategy is chosen, the camera looking steeply up at the recumbent form to catch, or to fabricate, or is it to imagine?, the nude body revealed as beast. For the lighting, which plunges the hips and thighs of the figure into shadowed obscurity, and the angle of vision, which forces the head out of sight behind the upper torso and shoulders, combine to image the face of an unknown animal: the protuberant breasts suggesting the horny tufts of the forehead; the luminous torso and upper arm, doubling as face and ear.

In describing, as I have, this process of seeing *as if*—the breasts seen as if horns, the arm as if ear—I might seem merely to be saying that the photographers operating within the circuit of surrealism adopted just that predilection for metaphor of an extravagant and unexpectedly irrational kind that was so dear to the surrealist poets and so tirelessly described in the various tracts issued by the movement. And further, since the enthusiastic discovery of the poetic bestiary of Lautréamont's Maldoror, the exploration of the thought of man-as-animal had become a commonplace of surrealism. But that would be to ignore the precise conduct of this *as if*—its achievement through the syntax of the camera's hold on its object, its inversion of the body, its angling from below, its radical foreshortening and cropping, so that this particular experience of the human-as-if-beast occurs through a specifically spatial device: one that suggests the dizziness to which Dali refers; one that propels the image into the realm of the vertiginous; one that is a demonstration of falling. The body cannot be seen as human, because it has fallen into the condition of the animal.

There is a device, then, that produces this image, a device that the camera makes simple: turn the body, or the lens; rotate the human figure into the figure of fall. The camera automates this process, makes it mechanical; a button is pushed and the fall is the rest.

Yet it is here that one feels a tiny rupture beginning to appear within the calm theoretical surface of surrealist practice. For the surrealist metaphor—beauty imaged as the strange yoking of the umbrella and the sewing machine—is

4. Maurice Raynal, "Variétés du corps humain," *Minotaure*, No. 1 (February 1933), 41.

Jacques-André Boiffard. Untitled. *1930.*

an *as if* specifically produced by chance. It comes automatically, descending on the passive, expectant poet who waits for his dreams, his doodles, his fantasies to bring him the outlandish similes of his unconscious desires. The aleatory, the happenstance, the dictum of "objective chance" had been laid down and repeated by André Breton. So that this photographic mechanization of the production of the image is indeed a break, if ever so small, with the poetics of the movement. And, we might be prompted to ask, is this little rift that we glimpse here not the tip of something larger, more fundamental, like that cigarette ash that had signaled the immense construction of the psycho-anamorphic object, *informe* and inert, that lies beneath it?

Inside the domain of the photographic image, the rift in question enacts a struggle that went on outside, among the surrealists during the last half of the 1920s and into the early '30s. This is a struggle that has been told only glancingly in the historical accounts of the movement, accounts that have almost universally been given from the point of view of surrealism's leader, the man who has been called its "arbiter" or its "magus."[5] Thus anything that André Breton banished from the center of the movement, symbolically called at the outset surrealism's "Centrale," was expelled into a darkness that became, in the eyes of history, a kind of oblivion.[6] André Masson had been so dismissed, and Robert Desnos.[7] But they were eventually recalled to the center to function once more as the unquestioned players in the surrealist drama. Jacques-André Boiffard, once the secretary of the Centrale, had departed to this marginal position not to reappear in any history of the movement until the late 1970s.[8]

The excommunication of Masson and Desnos which was proclaimed in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* merely articulated the break that these two figures, among many others, had already had with Breton, a break that had led to their defection to the camp of dissatisfied or "dissident surrealists" who, though no longer playing on Breton's team, still thought of themselves as in the same game. Gravitating around Georges Bataille and his magazine *Documents*, these renegades associated themselves with the enemy leader, but not one who contested the movement as such. Bataille was careful to characterize himself as surrealism's "old enemy from within." And it is to Bataille, not to Breton, that

5. Two of the standard works on Breton are so subtitled: Anna Balakian, *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1971; and Clifford Browder, *André Breton, Arbiter of Surrealism*, Geneva, Droz, 1967.

6. The first number of *La Révolution Surréaliste* announced the opening of Le Bureau Central de Recherches Surréalistes, giving its address as 15, rue de Grenelle. The cover photomontage for this number pictures the surrealists assembled there.

7. Among many others they were publicly expelled in the "Second Manifeste du Surréalisme," *La Révolution Surréaliste*, No. 12 (December 1929), pp. 1–17; translated in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1969.

8. See Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1978, pp. 228 ff.

Dali owed the word *informe* with the particular, anamorphic spin. Further, it was Bataille who developed the concept of *bassesse* to imply a mechanism for its achievement, through an axial rotation from vertical to horizontal, through, that is, the mechanics of fall.

Breton undoubtedly feared the lure of Bataille on the young poets, painters, and photographers who had left the Centrale for this strange periphery. He thus prevented Dali from allowing the painting *Le Jeu lugubre* to be reproduced in *Documents* to accompany Bataille's analysis of it, forcing Bataille to resort to presenting the painting by means of a diagram.[9] Short-lived, *Documents* only ran for the two years 1929 and 1930. But Bataille's impact on surrealist thinking—on the production of images that do not decorate, but rather *structure* the basic mechanisms of thought—resurfaced in 1933 in the very name for *Minotaure*, a magazine that operated as a surrealist vehicle. Bataille's title, "*minotaure*," was also Bataille's concept, for as we shall see this man/beast blindly wandering the labyrinth into which he has fallen, dizzy, disoriented,

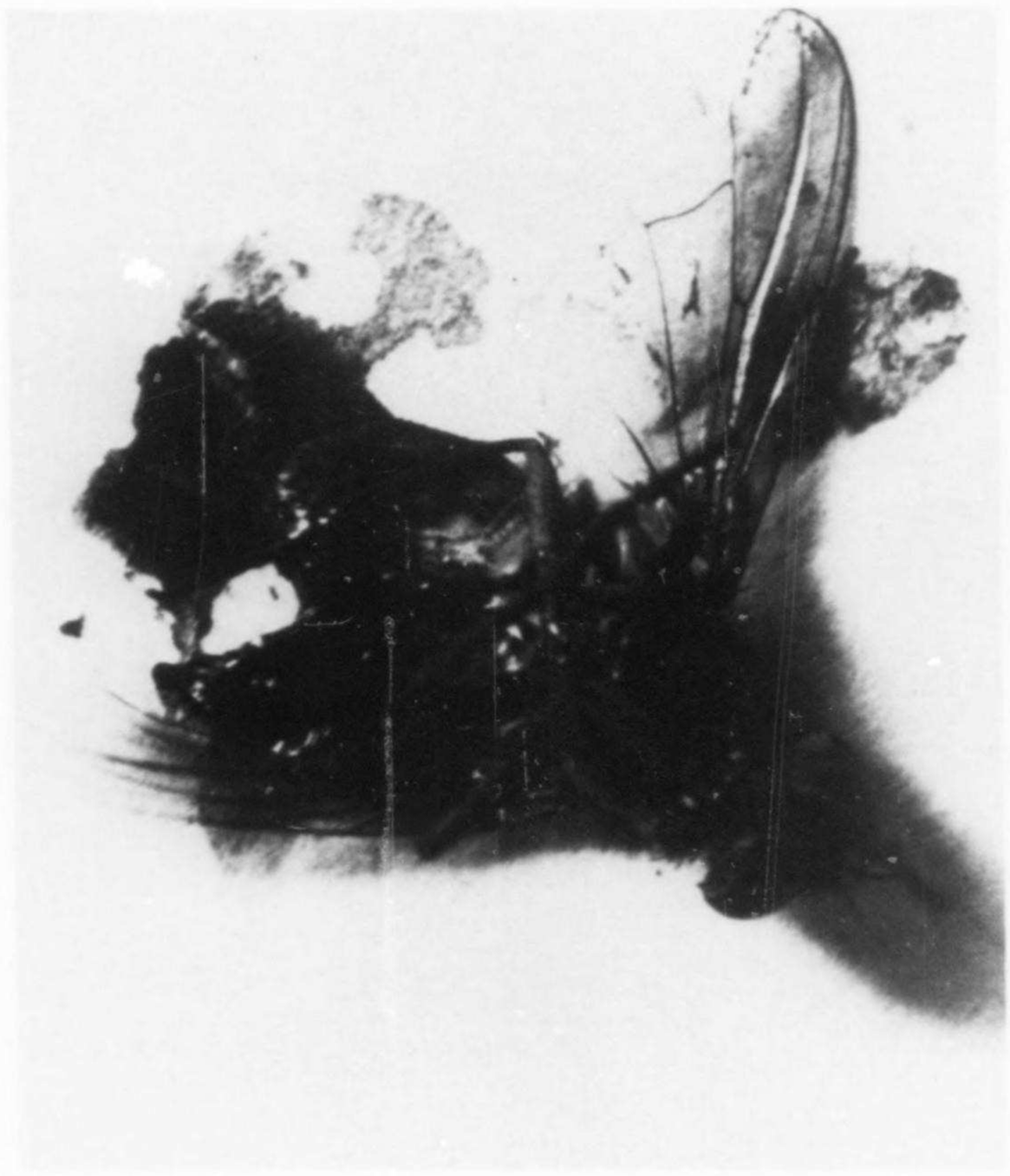
9. Georges Bataille, "Le 'Jeu lugubre,'" *Documents*, No. 7 (December 1929), 297–302. The incident is discussed in Ades, p. 240.

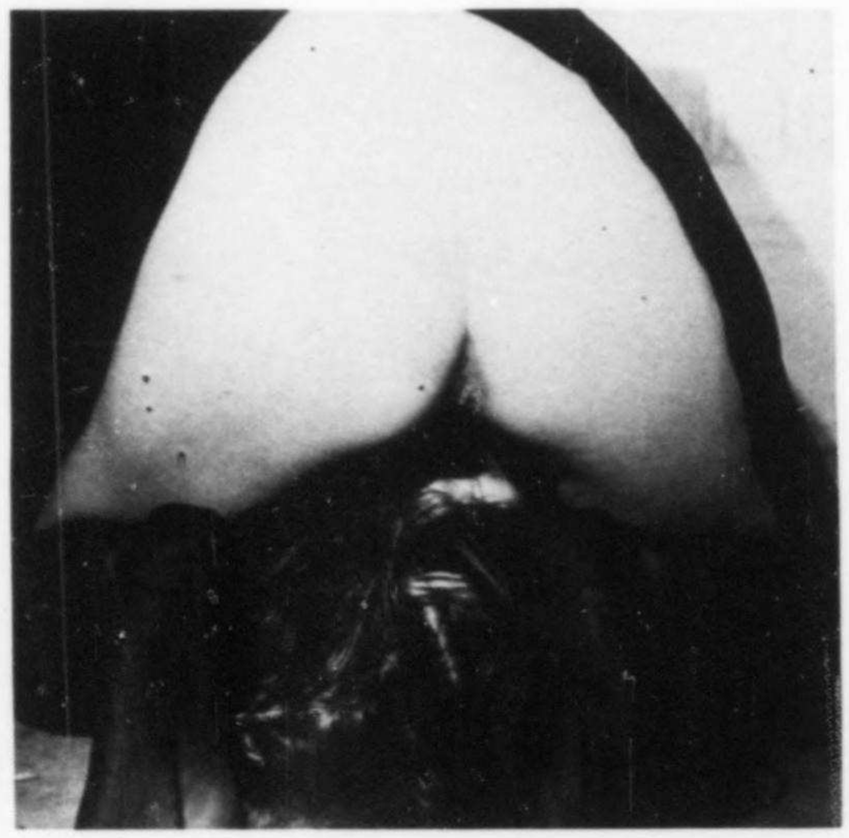
Man Ray. Minotaur. *1934*.

having lost his seat of reason—his head—this creature is another avatar of the *informe*.[10]

If I am stressing this convergence (if only by proxy) of Bataille and Breton in the pages of *Minotaure*, this is because we are not used to reading surrealist production through the grid of Bataille's thought and on those very grounds we might be tempted to disallow such images a status as "surreal." But *Minotaure*'s imprimatur conveyed to them the movement's stamp, securing membership for Hans Bellmer's *Poupées*, for example, beyond any doubt that might be raised about the propriety of this association for the man who illustrated in both graphic and photographic form Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*, a book excoriated by Breton as obscene.[11]

10. For a discussion of Bataille, the Minotaur, and the figure of the labyrinth, see Denis Hollier, *La Prise de la Concorde*, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, pp. 109–133. See as well, my "Alberto Giacometti," "*Primitivism*" *in 20th Century Art*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1984, pp. 523–524.
11. Hans Bellmer, "Poupée. Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée," *Minotaure*, no. 6 (Winter 1935), pp. 30–31. Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* was published in 1928 under the pseudonym Lord Auch. Bellmer provided etchings for a subsequent publication in 1940. The photographs that can be identified as relating to specific scenes from Bataille's novel (Simone's first seduction of the narrator as she sits in a plate of milk; Simone riding naked on a bicycle; etc.) have been dated from the mid-1940s. See *Hans Bellmer, Photographe*, Paris, Filipacchi, 1983, p. 148, cat. no. 129.





Jacques-André Boiffard. Untitled. *1930.*

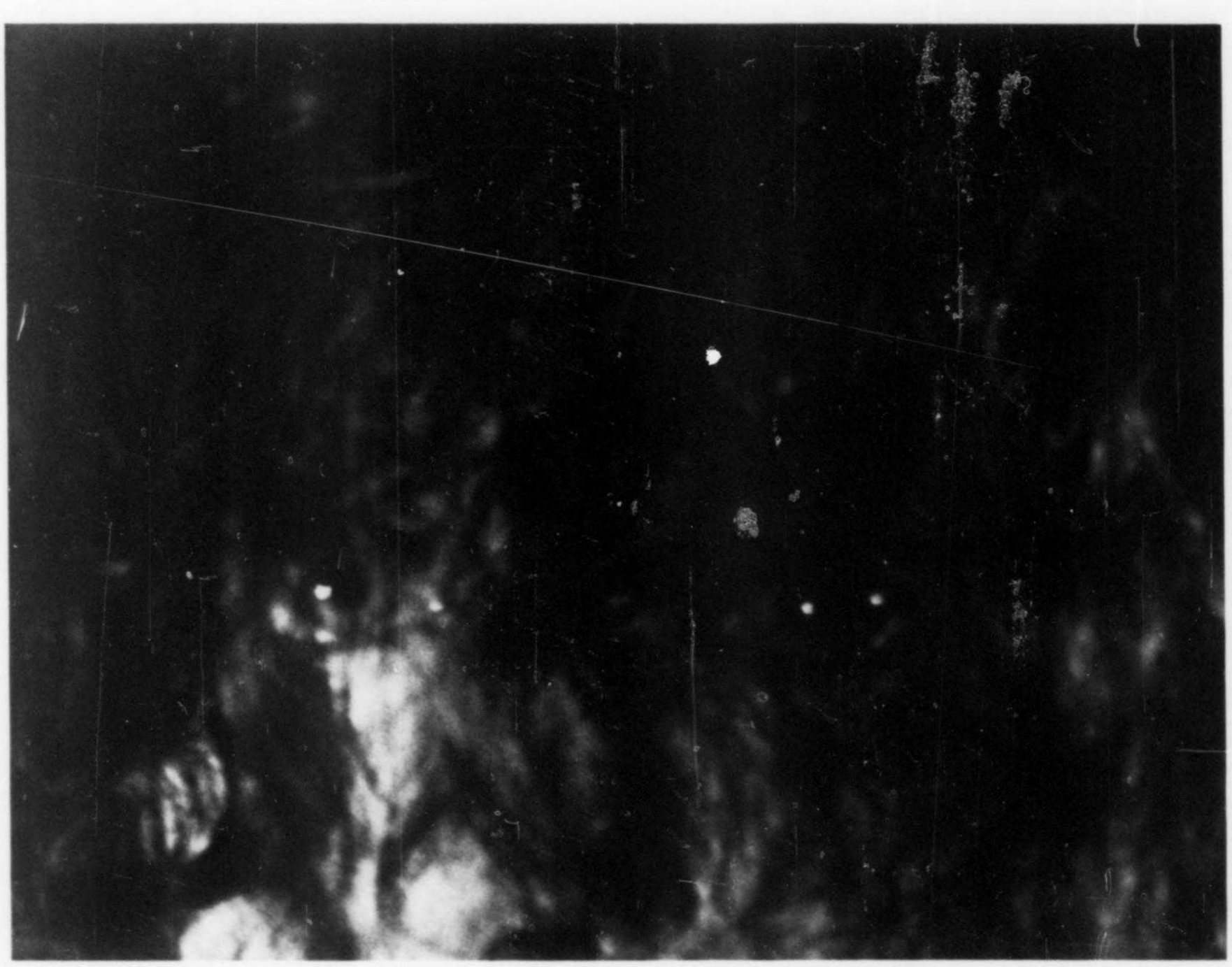
Hans Bellmer. Untitled. *1946.*

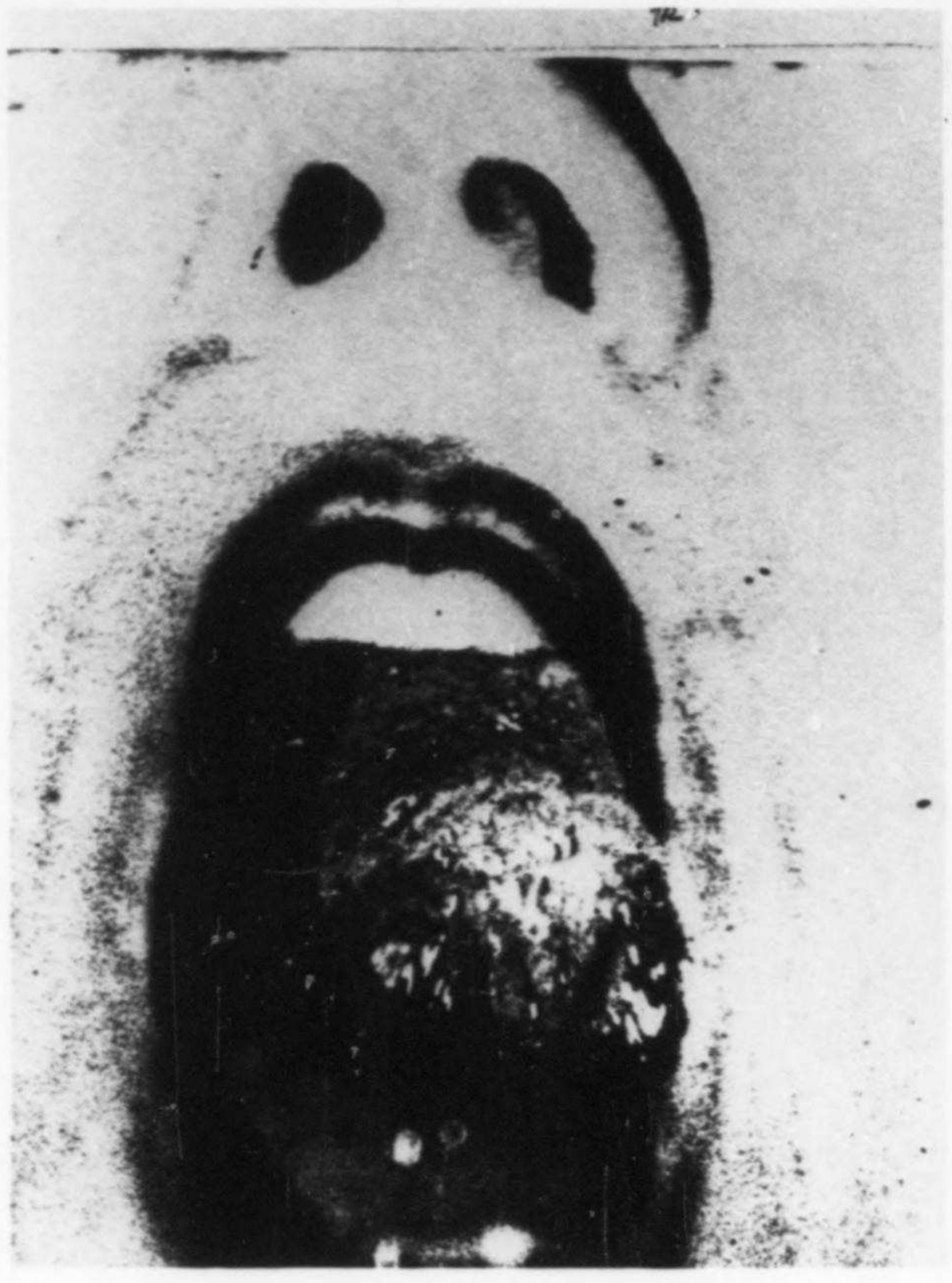
Opposite page:
Jacques-André Boiffard. Untitled. *1930.*

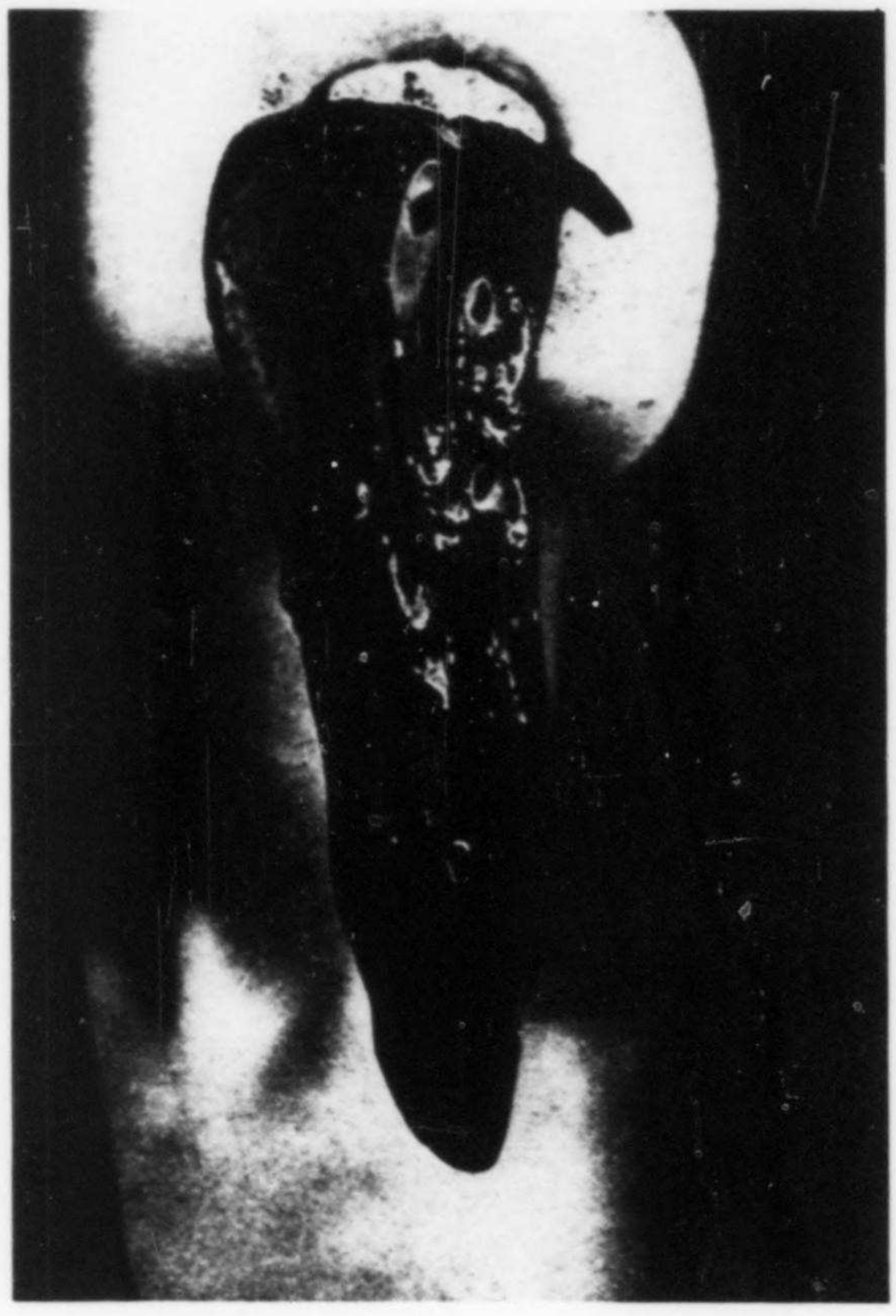
Informe, Bataille's term, has been pronounced by Dali, and will possibly illumine the procedures of a whole list of photographers, beginning with Man Ray, continuing to Boiffard and Brassaï, and going on to Ubac, Bellmer, Tabard, Parry, or Dora Maar. What, however, is the meaning of *informe*?

For Bataille *informe* is the category that would allow all categories to be unthought. His entry for it in the "Dictionary" in *Documents* likens it to *crachat* or spittle, noxious in its physical formlessness, providing thereby a simile that would figure forth the noxious, conceptual implications of *informe*: for this term is meant to allow one to think the removal of all those boundaries by which concepts organize reality, dividing it up into little packages of sense, limiting it by giving it what Bataille calls "mathematical frock-coats," a phrase that points both to the abstractness of concepts and to the prissiness with which they are meant to constrain.[12] Allergic to the notion of definitions, then, Bataille does not give *informe* a meaning; rather he posits for it a job: to undo formal categories, to deny that each thing has its "proper" form, to imagine meaning as gone shapeless, as though it were a spider or an earthworm crushed underfoot. This notion of *informe* does not propose a higher, more transcendent meaning,

12. Georges Bataille, "Informe," *Documents*, No. 7 (December 1929), p. 382.



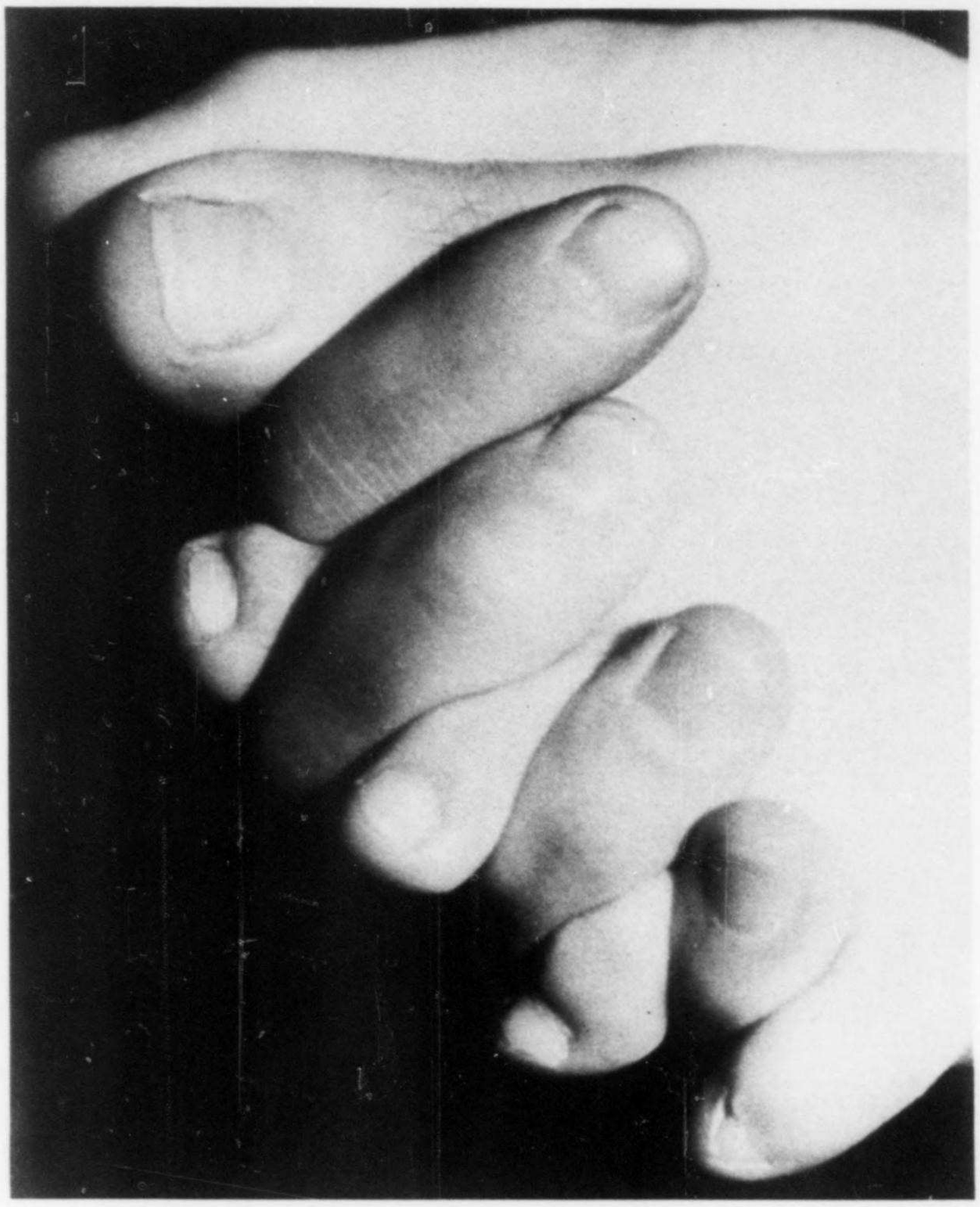




through a dialectical movement of thought. The boundaries of terms are not imagined by Bataille as transcended, but merely as transgressed or broken, producing formlessness through deliquescence, putrifaction, decay.

Or can formlessness be produced as well by mechanical means, such as the turning of a camera or a body 180 degrees? Bataille's substitution of the idea of a dictionary as a giver of meanings, by an idea of it as a giver of tasks, heralds the active, aggressive tenor of his thought, separating it from that expectantly passive attitude of Breton's availability to chance. The idea that one could construct a machine to make something happen, a machine that would leave nothing to chance but the working out of detail, operates in Bataille's novel *Histoire de l'oeil*. There, as Roland Barthes has demonstrated, Bataille devises a combinatory mechanism for associating two strings of images—one generated by associations with the shape of the eye (eye/egg/testicles), the other by associations with its status as a container of fluid (tears/yolk/semen)—to write its perversely spectacular story.[13] In much the same way Dali's paranoid-critical method was also intended as a device. He described his strategy for simulating delirium as a machine for generating an active, aggressive assault on reality.[14]

13. Roland Barthes, "La métaphore de l'oeil," *Critique*, No. 195-6 (1963), p. 772.
14. The prologue of Dali's "Interprétation Paranoïaque-critique de l'Image obsédante 'L'Angélus' de Millet" (*Minotaure*, No. 1 [1933]) is titled, "New General Considerations on the



Far left: Jacques-André Boiffard. Mouth. *1929.*

Left: Raoul Ubac. Irrational Image. *1935.*

This page: Jacques-André Boiffard. Untitled. *1929.*

Another of these mechanisms or devices was the rotation of the very axis "proper" to man—his verticality, a station that defines him by separating his upright posture from that of the beasts—onto the opposing, horizontal axis. This operation, productive of *bassesse*, is the one most closely linked to the photographic practice we have been discussing. Two of the texts which explore this rotation into baseness, "The Big Toe," and "Mouth," were illustrated with photographs by Boiffard.[15] In the essay "Mouth" where the issue of rotation is most explicit, Bataille contrasts the mouth/eye axis of the human face with the

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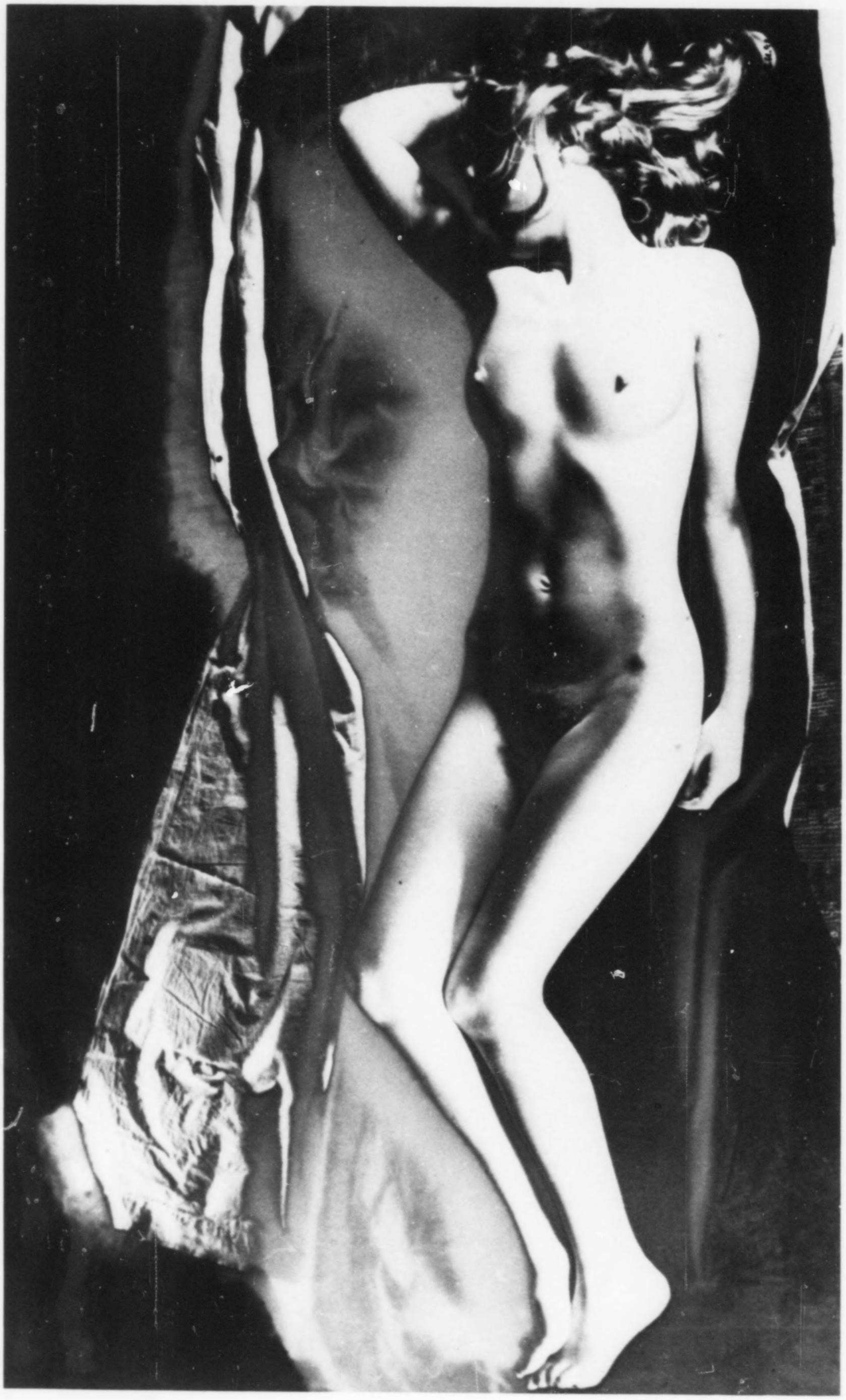
Mechanism of the Paranoid Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View." The image from the Dali/Buñuel film *Un Chien andalu* of a razor slicing through the open eye of a woman enacts this sense of aggression. Bellmer also devises a "machine" for assaulting the familiar terrain of the body: "Onto the photograph of a nude, set an unframed mirror at a perpendicular angle, and constantly maintaining the 90 degree angle, progressively rotate it, such that the symmetrical halves of the visible ensemble diminish or enlarge according to a slow and regular evolution. . . . Whether, through this entrance of the mirror and its movement, it is a question of the whipcord that spins the top or the expressive reflex of the organism, we grasp the same law: opposition is necessary for things to exist and for a third reality to come into being." Bellmer, "Notes sur la jointure à boule," *Hans Bellmer*, Paris, Cnacarchives, Centre Nationale d'Art Contemporain, 1971, p. 27.

15. Bataille, "Le Gros orteil," *Documents*, I, No. 6 (November 1929), pp. 297–302; and Bataille, "Bouche," *Documents*, II, No. 5 (1930), p. 299.



mouth/anus axis of the four-legged animal. The former, linked to man's verticality, and his possession of speech, defines the mouth in terms of man's expressive powers. The latter, a function of the animal's horizontality, understands the mouth as the leading element of the system of catching, killing, and ingesting prey, for which the anus is the terminal point. But to insist, beyond this simple polarity, that at its greatest moments of pleasure or pain, the human mouth's expression is not spiritual, but animal, is to reorganize the orientation of the human structure and conceptually to rotate the axis of loftiness onto the axis of material existence. With this act of Bataille's, mouth and anus are conflated. Boiffard's photograph for this essay is a woman's open mouth, wet with saliva, its tongue an amorphous blur. A few years later Raoul Ubac would, in effect, recreate this image when he pictured a woman's head and neck, the head cropped just above her mouth from which depends a long, organic but at first indeterminate object which, upon inspection, turns out to be a piece of liver. The poster-manifesto *Affichez vos poèmes/Affichez vos images* (1935) was the occasion for this work.

Ubac's participation in the creation of a photographic formlessness linked to the depiction of the human body was as persistent and as concentrated as Boiffard's or Man Ray's ever was. But except for his *Sleeping Nude*, axial rotation was not the device to which he resorted. Instead, he often explored the technical infrastructure of the photographic process, submitting the image of the body to assaults of a chemical and optical kind. *La Nébuleuse* was achieved by attacking the emulsion on the negative image of a standing woman with the heat of a small burner. The resultant melting, which ripples and contorts the field of the photo, is often related in the scholarly and critical literature to automatism: the creation of suggestive imagery through the operations of chance.[16] But the title of this work supposes the disintegration rather than the creation of form, and the procedure whose trace suggests the workings of fire is a device for producing this formlessness.

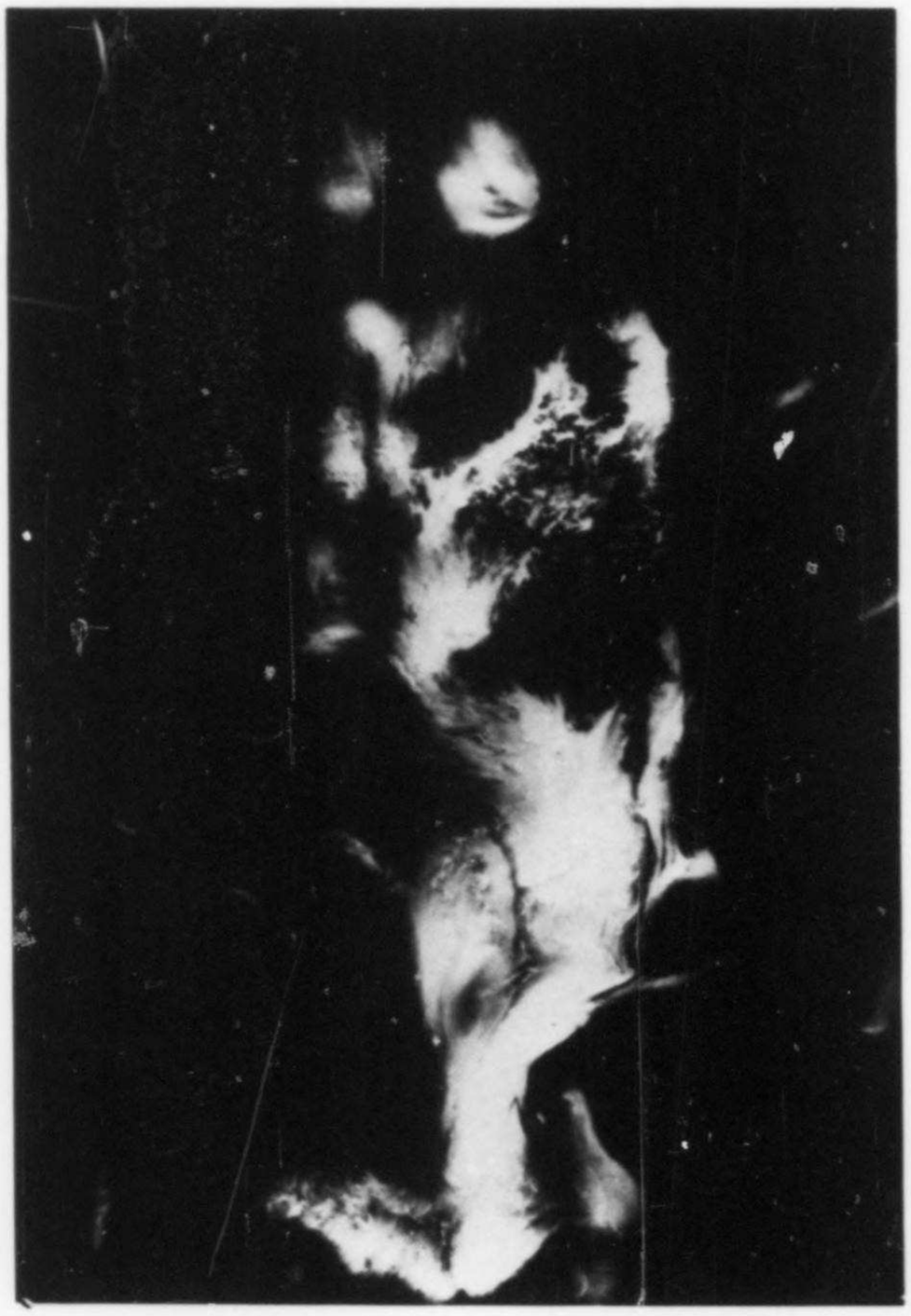
Ubac's optical assaults on the body took place over a long series of ambitious, complex photomontages which he worked out in the late 1930s. Under the generic title *Le Combat des Penthésilées*, these images are the results of successive attacks of solarization. In a first stage a montage would be produced, grouping together various shots of the same nude. This image would then be rephotographed and solarized, the resultant positive becoming a new element to be recombined, through montage, with other fragments, and then to be both rephotographed and resolarized. Solarization, which bares the light-sensitive

16. This is how it is characterized, for example, by Nancy Hall-Duncan, *Photographic Surrealism*, Cleveland, The New Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1979, p. 8. Eduard Jaguer does not, however, link brûlage to techniques of the immediate past so much as he sees in it an avatar of the *informel* pictorial preoccupations of the 1940s. See Eduard Jaguer, *Les Mystères de la chambre noire*, Paris, Flammarion, 1982, p. 118.

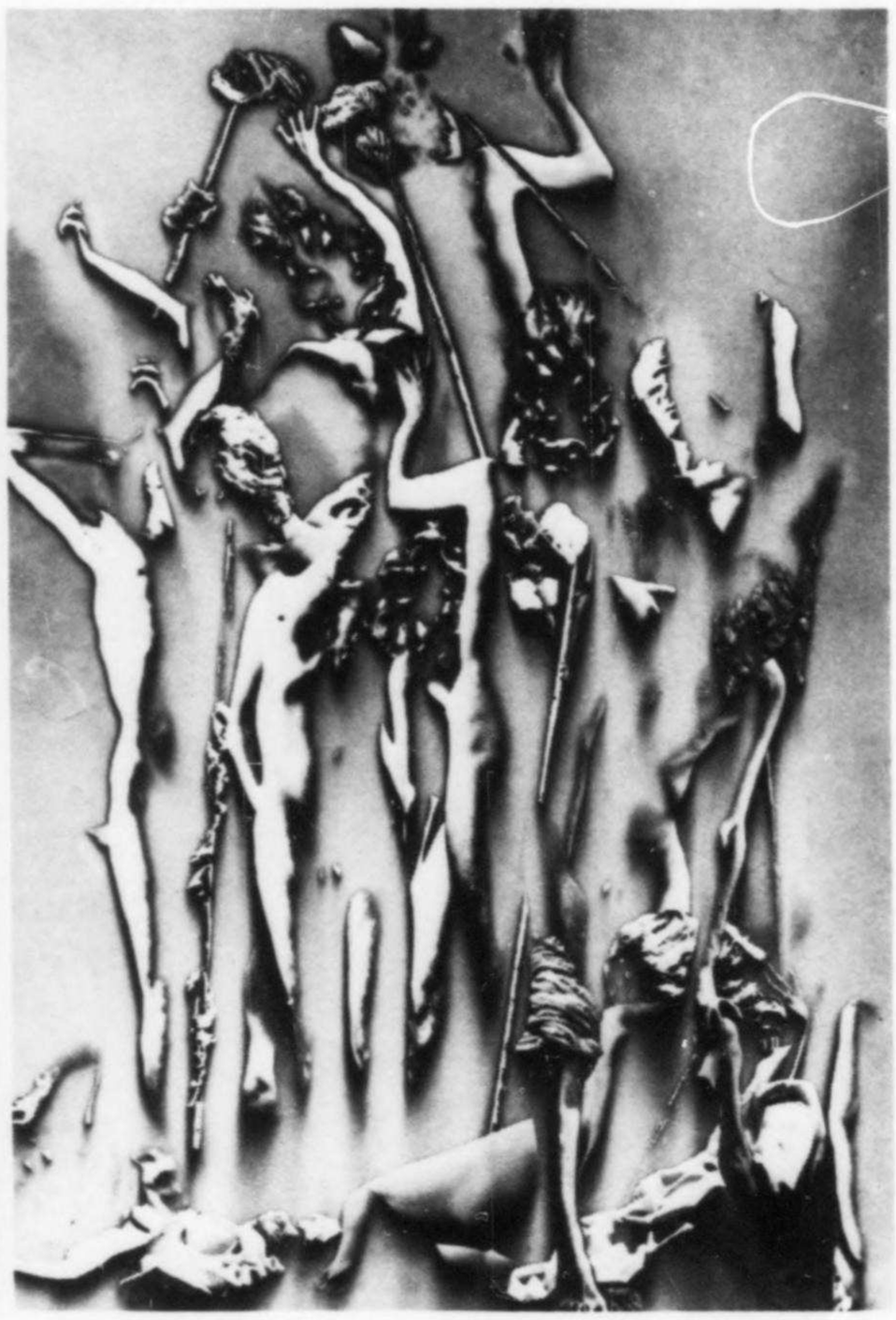
Raoul Ubac. Sleeping Nude. *1939.*

paper of an eventual positive print to a moment's reexposure during the printing process, opens the darkest areas of the positive image—usually those very shadows that define the edges of solid objects—to what will later read as a kind of optical corrosion. A mode of producing a simultaneous positive/negative, solarization most frequently reads as the optical reorganization of the contours of objects. Reversing and exaggerating the light/dark relationships at this precise registration of the envelope of form, solarization is a process that can obviously be put to the service of the *informe*. In the most extreme of this work Ubac pushes his procedure towards the representation of a violent deliquescence of matter as light operates on the boundaries of a body that in turn gives way to this depicted invasion of space.

Indeed, one of the ways we can generalize the whole of what we have been seeing so far is that a variety of photographic methods have been exploited to produce an image of the invasion of space: of bodies dizzily yielding to the force of gravity; of bodies in the grip of a distorting perspective; of bodies decapitated by the projection of shadow; of bodies eaten away by either heat or light. We might say, following the usual formulae for explaining the surrealist image,



Raoul Ubac. La Nébuleuse. *1939.*



Raoul Ubac. Battle of the Amazons. *1939.*

that this consumption of matter by a kind of spatial ether is a representation of the overturning of reality by those psychic states so courted by the poets and painters of the movement: reverie, ecstasy, dream. But while some of these images would support that reading—Dali's *Le Phénomène de l'extase*, Man Ray's work for *Facile*, or his ironically titled *Le Primat de la matière sur la pensée*, for example, or Ubac's *Ophelia*—others, clearly do not. They do not seem to depict bodies seized from within, and transformed, but rather bodies assaulted from without. So that we are tempted to say that if there is a psychological condition onto which these images open, it may not be found in the usual catalogue of surrealist experiences.

Prends garde: à jouer au
fantôme, on le devient.

Roger Caillois opens the article "Mimétisme et Psychasthénie Légendaire" —his curious contribution to a 1935 issue of *Minotaure*—with the above cau-

Raoul Ubac. Battle of the Amazons. *1939.*

tion, a warning that the fate of playing at chimeras may be that of becoming one.[17]

During the opening years of *Minotaure*, Caillois published two long essays, the first on the praying mantis, the second on the biological phenomenon of mimicry. These early forays into a kind of socio-biology of consciousness were written out of the belief that insects and humans partake of "the same nature," thus eradicating the boundaries that are thought to establish a distinct, or properly *human* nature.[18]

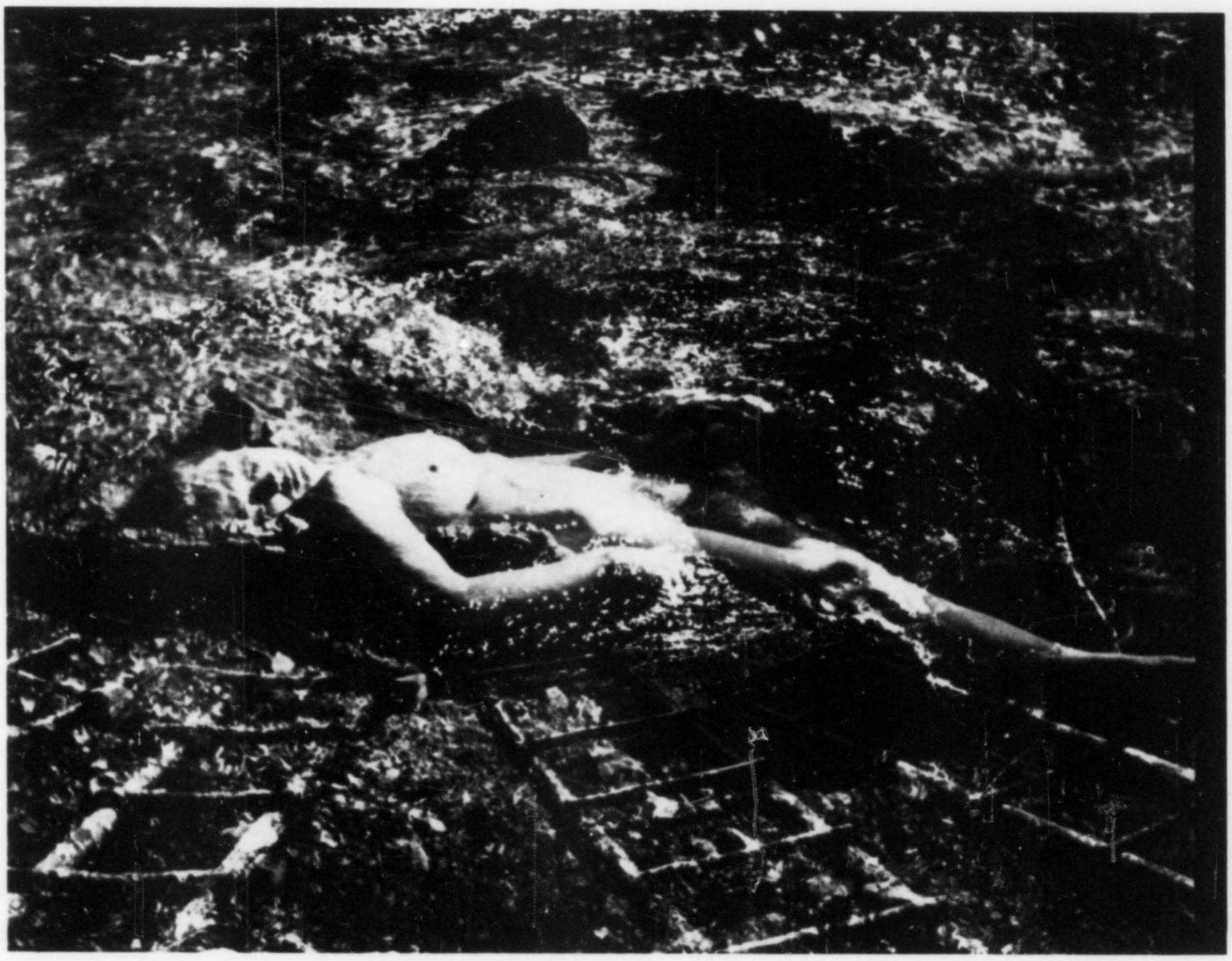
Because of the ubiquity of the image of the praying mantis within both poetic and pictorial surrealism, Caillois's discussion of the grip of this insect on

17. Roger Caillois, "Mimétisme et Psychasthénie Légendaire," *Minotaure*, No. 7 (June 1935), 5.
18. Caillois, "La Mante réligieuse," *Minotaure*, no. 5 (May 1934), pp. 23–26.

This page: Salvador Dali. Le phénomène de l'extase. *1933.*

Opposite above: Man Ray. Le Primat de la matière sur la pensée. *1931.*

Opposite below: Raoul Ubac. Ophelia. *1938.*



human imagination has entered the literature on the thematics of the movement.[19] The female mantis's sexual practices—in certain species its consumption of its mate after or even during the act of copulation—and its voracity, made it the perfect symbol of the phallic mother, fascinating, petrifying, castrating. In this guise the mantis swarms over surrealist work of the 1930s; in the paintings of Masson and Dali, in the sculptures of Giacometti, in the collages of Ernst. It appears as well in another guise in one of the rare instances of Hans Bellmer's sculptural production, where his *Machine Gunneress in a State of Grace* (1937) depicts the insect in that aspect, also described by Caillois, of androidlike automation. In fact it is Caillois's conclusion that it is in this opening onto the imaginative possibility of the robot, the automaton, the nonsentient, mechanical imitation of life, that the mantis's link to the fantasm of human sexuality is to be found. And it is just this aspect that connects his discussion of the mantis with his subsequent exploration of mimicry, for the mantis comes most stunningly to resemble a machine when, even decapitated, it can continue to function, and thus to mime life. "Which is to say," Caillois writes, "that in the absence of all centers of representation and of voluntary action, it can walk, regain its balance, have coitus, lay eggs, build a cocoon, and, what is most astonishing, in the face of danger can fall into a fake, cadaverous immobility. I am expressing in this indirect manner what language can scarcely picture, or reason assimilate, namely, that dead, the mantis can simulate death."[20]

Caillois's essay on mimicry had extraordinary resonance within the psychoanalytic circles developing in Paris in the 1930s. Jacques Lacan, for example, continued to express his debt to this text, particularly in his working out of the concept of the "mirror stage" and its effect on the formation of the human subject, a principle he first presented publicly in 1936, though he did not publish it until 1949.[21] With this connection, and its explicit attention to the operations of doubling, of the replication of a conscious subject by his pictured duplicate, we might already realize that in some kind of general way this issue of mimicry opens onto surrealist photography's persistent exploration of the double as a structural principle: simultaneously formal and thematic. But in relation to the images we have been discussing, with their depiction of a curious invasion of the body by space, Caillois's treatment of mimicry has a rather more specific pertinence.

19. See William Pressly, "The Praying Mantis in Surrealist Art," *Art Bulletin*, LV (December 1973), pp. 600–615.
20. Caillois, "La Mante réligieuse," p. 26.
21. Jacques Lacan, "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," *Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, pp. 93–100; in English as Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, pp. 1–7. Lacan cites Caillois's importance, p. 96 in the French edition and p. 3 in the English.

Most of the scientific explanations for animal mimicry relate it to adaptive behavior. The insect takes on the coloration, the shape, the patterning of its environment, it is argued, in order to fool either its predator or its prey. But the adaptation hypothesis founders on two counts, Caillois shows. First, the fusion of the insect with its environment can and often does work against survival, as when the animal is mistakenly eaten by its own kind or cannot be perceived by members of its species for purposes of mating. Second, this phenomenon which functions exclusively in the register of the visual, is largely irrelevant to animal hunting—a matter of smell and of motion. The specific visuality of mimicry can be shown, Caillois attests, to be more than just the projection that human observers, with their quite different systems of perception, make upon this field of natural pattern. Mimicry seems to be a function of the visual experience of the insect itself, as when, for example, camouflage behavior in certain species is suspended either at night or when the ocular antennae are cut.

Tying mimicry to the animal's own perception of space, Caillois then hypothesizes that this phenomenon is in fact a kind of insectoid psychosis—the psychasthenia of his title referring to Pierre Janet's psychiatric notion of a catastrophic drop in the level of psychic energy, a loss of ego substance, or what one writer has called a kind of "subjective detumescence."[22] The life of any organism depends on the possibility of its maintaining its own distinctness, a boundary within which it is contained, the terms of what we could call its self-possession. Mimicry, Caillois argues, is the loss of this possession, because the animal that merges with its setting becomes dispossessed, derealized, as though yielding to a temptation exercised on it by the vast outsideness of space itself, a temptation to fusion. Lest it seem too bizarre to apply psychological concepts to this occurrence, Caillois reminds his readers of the terms of primitive, sympathetic magic, in which an illness is conceived of as a possession of the patient by some external force, one which dispossesses the victim from his own person, one which can be combatted by drawing it off from the patient through the mimicry performed by the shaman in a rite of repossession.

There is an obvious connection between this text, appearing in the review that bore as its title one of Bataille's favorite figures, and the concerns that we have been tracing under the condition *informe*. For what could be more formless than this spasm of nature in which boundaries are indeed broken and distinctions truly blurred? Likening the responses of schizophrenic subjects to the phenomenon of animal mimicry, Caillois writes, "Space seems for these dispossessed souls to be a devouring force . . . it ends by replacing them. The body then desolidifies with his thoughts, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever of space. He feels himself becoming space. . . . He is

22. Denis Hollier, "Mimesis and Castration, 1937," *October*, no. 31 (Winter 1985), pp. 3–16.

alike, not like something but simply *like*. And he invents spaces of which he is 'the convulsive possession.'"[23]

And, indeed, it is this aspect of reality that is explored by Ubac's 1938 photograph of the surrealist mannequin constructed by Masson, in which the caged head of the female, her prey in her mouth, evokes the mantis. For in Ubac's terms this mantis, which possesses, is simultaneously possessed by the mesh of space, an effect that is to be found as well in Boiffard's image of the woman/spider (1931). If the effect of mimicry is the inscription of space on the body of an organism, then this is, of course, the theme of one of the very first photographs ever to be published by the movement: Man Ray's *Retour à la raison* of the first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* where the nude torso of a woman is shown as if submitting to the possession by space, an image that Man Ray was to return to several times throughout the 1920s, most lyrically in a triptych of Lee Miller before a window.

Now this inscription of the body by space, this operation through which the seeing subject is defined as a projection, a being-seen, corresponds to that very moment in Caillois's argument where he examines the subjectivity of vision. For Caillois moves to a rather different level in his analysis when he defines the nature of this breakdown in the organism's relation to space as a structural problem in the field of representation. As Caillois describes it:

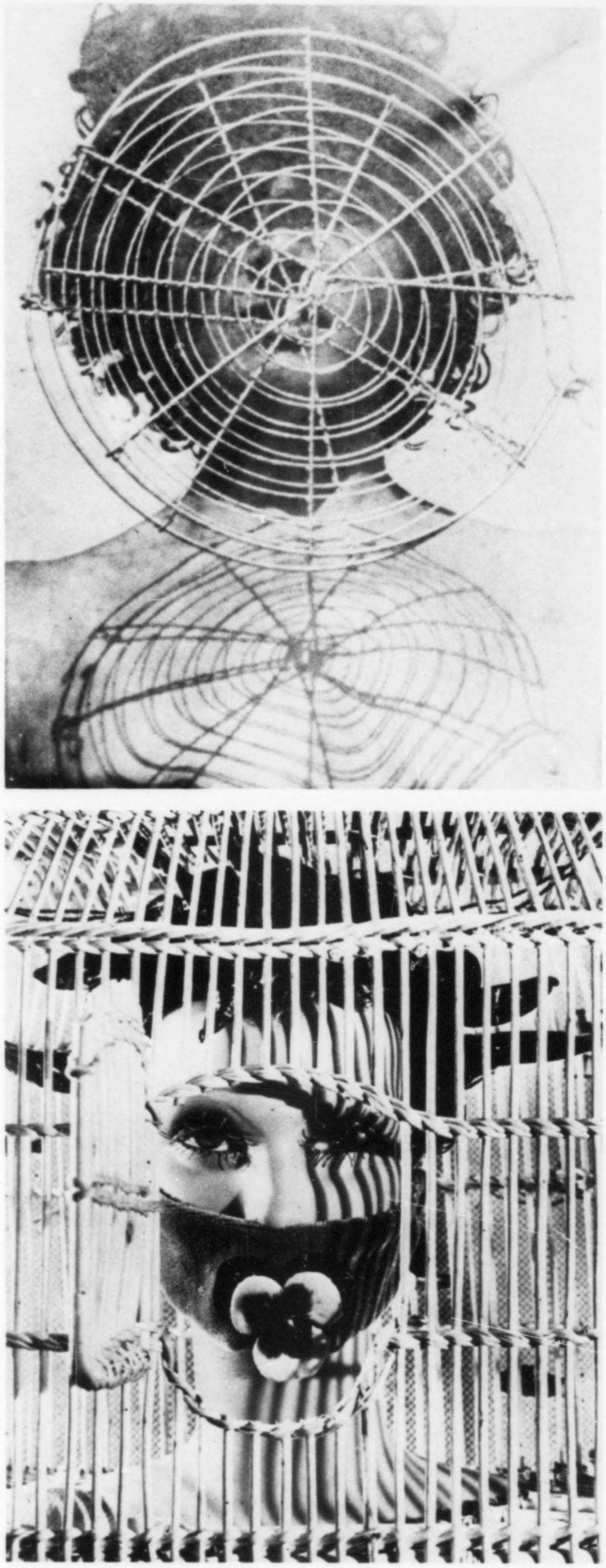
> Space is inextricably both perceived and represented. From this point of view it is a double dihedron, changing at each moment in size and situation: *a dihedron* [*or figure constructed of two intersecting planes*] *of action* the horizontal plane of which is formed by the ground and the vertical plane by the man himself who walks and who, because of this, carries the dihedral relation along with him; and *a dihedron of representation* determined by the same horizontal plane as before (but represented and not perceived), intersected vertically at the distance where an object appears. It is with represented space that the drama becomes clear: for the living being, the organism, is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but is one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and, in the strongest sense of the term, *no longer knows where to put itself*.[24]

A diagram in one of Lacan's later seminars depicts this double dihedral

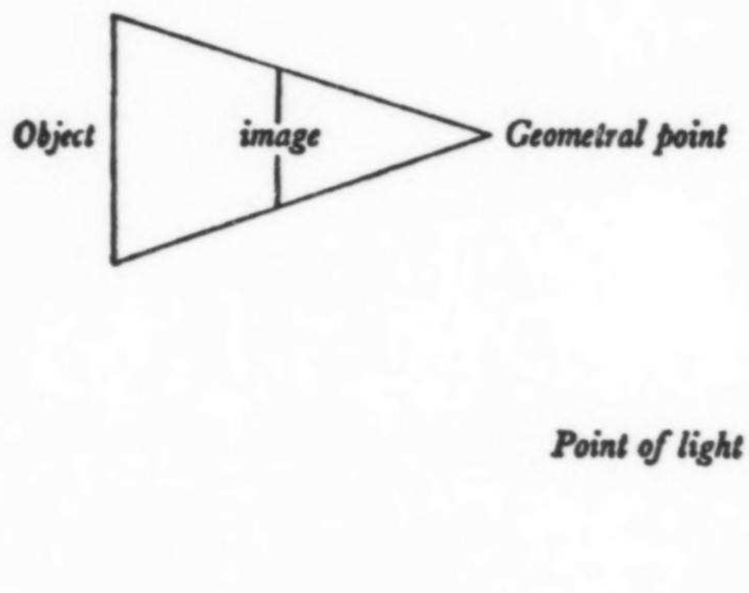
23. Caillois, "Mimétisme," pp. 8–9.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Jacques-André Boiffard. Untitled. *1929.*

Raoul Ubac. Mannequin. *1937.*



effect, although with a different set of figures.[25] Using two opposing triangles, Lacan constructs, first, the usual visual pyramid of perspective projection—with the viewer's eye stationed at the apex and the object he sees deployed along the field that makes up the triangle's base—a pyramid that locates the viewer at Caillois's "origin of the coordinates" and therefore represents the perceptual half of the double dihedron. It is in terms of the second triangle that Lacan plots Caillois's dihedron of representation. For in this figure, the occupant of the apex of the triangle is not a sentient being but a point of light—irradiant, emanating from space at large—and the base plane of the triangle is now indicated "picture." It is along this plane that the perceiving organism occurs, although no longer as the privileged point from which reality is constructed, but as Caillois's "one point among others," a figure in a picture for which it is



not viewer but viewed. Significantly, this relationship in which the subject occurs only as alienated from himself—for he is defined or inscribed as a *being-seen* without, however, being able to see either his viewer or his own figure in the viewer's picture—is the one that Lacan constructs as the domain of the essentially visual. For here, where the field of the "picture" separates off from the geometric, ultimately tactile conception of perspectival space, Lacan finds the terms of an irresolvable and perpetual tension, and it is here that he is able to diagram the "scopic drive," to elaborate, that is, the dynamics of a specifically visual dimension, within which the subject is dispossessed.

The peculiar conception of the visual that Caillois depicted and Lacan was to go on to develop (most immediately in his theory of the mirror stage) both coincides with the primacy that modernist art gave to pure visuality and conflicts with the utopian conclusions that the theorists of modernism drew from this idea of optical power. For their notions did not support the modernist

25. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1981, p. 91.

idea of sensuous mastery, with each sense liberated into the purity of its own experience; the visuality Lacan and Caillois were describing was a mastery from without, imposed on the subject who is trapped in a cat's cradle of representation, caught in a hall of mirrors, lost in a labyrinth.

Nothing is more available to photography than this labyrinthine doubling, this play of reflection. Characterized as being itself a mirror (the "mirror with a memory"), the camera nonetheless enacts Caillois's double dihedron. For there is a fundamental schism between the subject that perceives and the image that looks back at him, because that image, in which he is captured, is seen from the vantage of another.

The photograph that Ubac took to accompany Pierre Mabille's article

Man Ray. Retour à la raison. *1923.*

"Mirrors"—published in *Minotaure* in 1938 as a kind of popularization of Lacan's theories of the mirror stage—is a stunning demonstration of the disarticulation of the self by means of its mirrored double. In brilliant sunlight a woman's face is seen in a mirror whose state of decay returns her image to her strangely altered, transformed. Her eyes, her forehead, part of her hair, obscured as though by shadow, are in fact corroded and dispersed through the very agency of reflection. So that this subject who sees is a subject who, in being simultaneously "seen," is entered as "picture" onto the mirror's surface. And in this very moment of inscription, as in a doubling reminiscent of Caillois's theory of mimicry, one discovers an image of the *informe*, the crumbling of boundaries, the invasion of space.

It is here, in relation to a concern with the subject's mirroring, that one locates the participation by Maurice Tabard with the concerns of the movement, in that brief period—1929–1931—during which he used photomontage to explore the essential double-sidedness of the photographic support. For what is unique to photography, shared by no other image-making process, is the transparency of the photographic negative, the information on which, though reversed left and right, is fully intelligible from both front and back.[26] In this fundamental condition of reversal Tabard located the fusion of the image with its flipped, mirrored double.

Continually recombining and repeating an extremely limited vocabulary of elements, Tabard chose two types of objects with which he created two independent series. The first, composed of elements like ladders, cane-backed chairs, or tennis rackets, entered the image to function as representations of the negative itself. Objects which are themselves double-sided and gridlike, they became in Tabard's hands, the figures of the infrastructure of the photographic screen in its ideal condition of reversibility.

It was against this first series that Tabard then introduced the human figure through a doubling that would call attention to the body's own reversibility, the two-sidedness of its profiles, the paired doubleness of hands and arms and breasts. But unlike a grid, the human body is not identical from one side to the other. Though symmetrical, it is, like reality itself, imbedded in the question of aspect, of bodies perceived in space. The identity between the right and left hand is always mediated by the fact of mirror reversal.

In the most brilliant of Tabard's photomontages these two factors are simultaneously made visible: reversibility and mirror reversal, constantly working together to reinflect the naive notion of the mirror-with-a-memory. For Tabard's mirror is double dihedral; there one discovers a picture of the sub-

26. It could be argued that stained glass is yet another medium that is reversible. Yet the same information is not intelligible from the back of the glass as that applied to its front.

Raoul Ubac. Portrait in a Mirror. *1938.*

ject wedged onto the paper-thin plane of reversibility, simultaneously a front and a back, a subject that looks out from the point at which it exists, and a subject that is dispossessed within its very being by the fact of being seen.

Tabard's transformation of the subject is, in this sense, the result of a simple manipulation: the flipping of the negative. This process is both as structurally tied to the procedures of photography as the other strategies we have seen—rotation and solarization—and, for all that Tabard's images are layered and complex, as fundamentally efficient. It is thus, no more than Ubac's *brûlages*, or his optical meltings, not a matter here of automatism, of an openness to chance. The premeditation evident in Tabard's choice of elements, the linking of the double series to form a combinatory mechanism, the use of a single operator to produce his transformations: all of this is reminiscent of the operations we have been reading through the grid of those linked concepts which at this moment combine to redefine the visual—Bataille's *informe*, Caillois's mimicry, Lacan's "picture."

In most of this work Tabard builds the *idea* of the mirror into the image

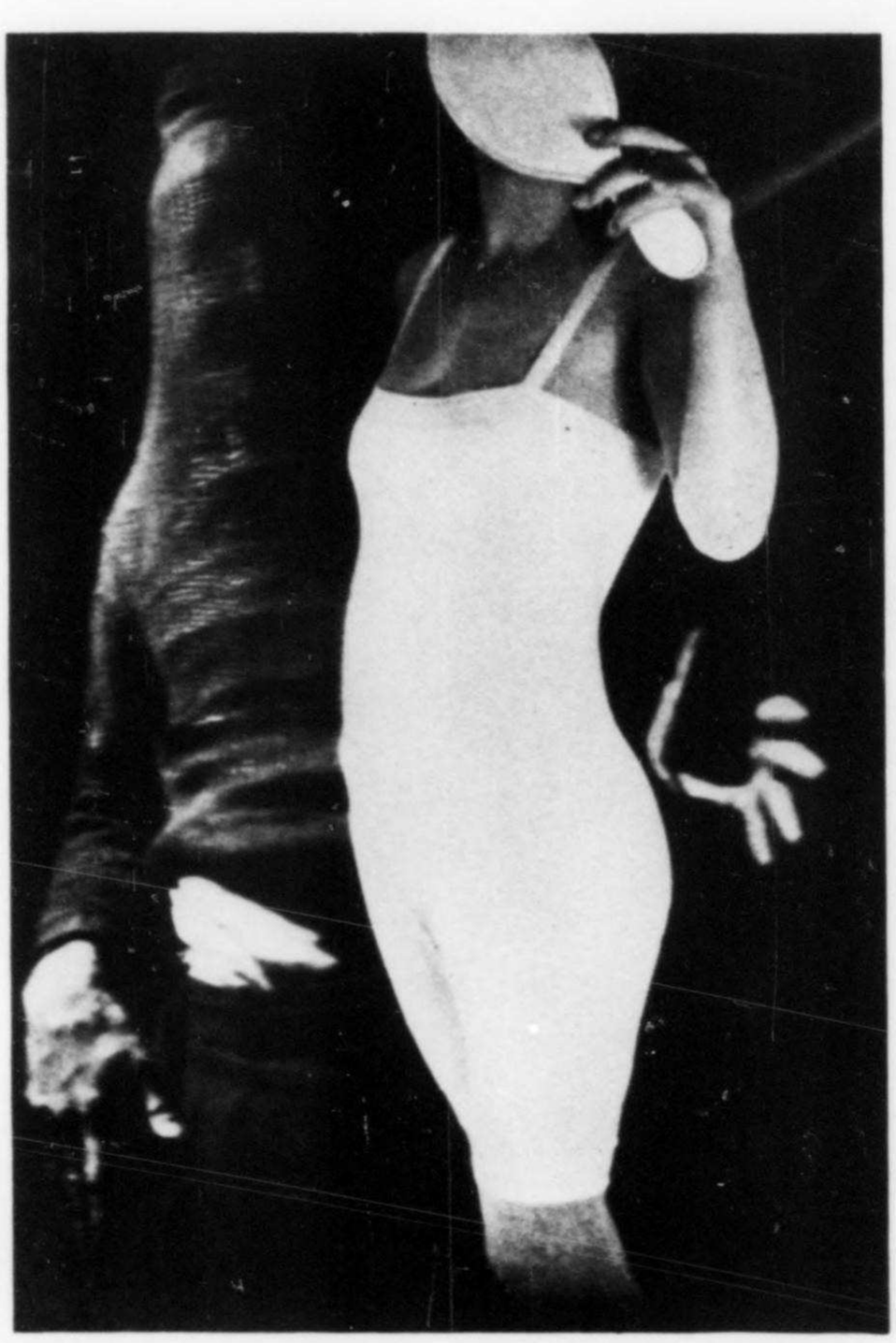
Maurice Tabard. Untitled. *1929.*

Maurice Tabard. Untitled. *1929.*

through a kind of structural operation; but in the montage that is perhaps his most famous—the photograph chosen by *Foto-Auge*—the issue takes another form.[27] For in *Hand and Woman* a looking glass is explicitly present, a hand mirror held by the woman in such a way that it both obliterates her face and seems to call into being the shadowy, threatening, faceless, male presence behind her—as though it were his image, on the other side of hers, as its obverse, that the mirror reflected. This location of the mirror in the register of dread irresistibly calls to mind another text within the psychoanalytic corpus dear to the surrealists. In its linking of the experience of the double to a sense of menace, the work seems to open onto the terrain of Freud's "uncanny," particularly that moment where he ties the uncanniness triggered by the idea of the doppelgänger to the primitive fear of mirrors. Referring to Otto Rank's study of this phenomenon, Freud writes:

> He has gone into the connections the "double" has with reflections in

27. Franz Roh, *Foto-Auge*, Stuttgart, Akademischer Verlag, 1929, no. 44.



Maurice Tabard. Hand and Woman. *1929.*

> mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the astonishing evolution of this idea. For the "double" was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an "energetic denial of the power of death," as Rank says; and probably the "immortal" soul was the first "double" of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of the genital symbol. . . . Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind the double takes on a different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death.[28]

This double, this first narcissistic projection, is thus thought primitively through the agency of all doubles: shadows cast by the body as well as the body's mirrored reflections. The shadow is the earliest form through which the soul is imagined. Projecting the persistence of the bodiless self after death in the form of a "shade," the shadow is also for many cultures the form in which the souls of the dead return, to haunt or take possession of the living. And indeed, in Tabard's image of threatened possession, the facelessness of the male figure, the blackness of his disguise—made all the more emphatic in contrast to the woman's white shift—projects him through the condition of the shade. But in the Ubac *Portrait in a Mirror*, too, the possibility of reading the obliterating condition of the mirror as an effect of shadow, brings the full thrust of the "uncanny" into this image—although it must be added that superstitious belief projects the polished surfaces of mirrors, also, as the medium for the return of the dead.[29] The extraordinary woman who stares at us from the depths of Ubac's mirror, the lower half of her face youthful and lovely, the upper portion distorted and sightless, could be an image of that famous character who pushes André Breton to rewrite the question, "Who am I?" in the form, "Whom do I haunt?"[30]

28. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–74, XVII, pp. 234–235. See also, Otto Rank, *The Double*, trans. Harry Tucker, Jr., Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1971.
29. Rank, pp. 62–63.
30. *Nadja* opens, "Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I 'haunt.'" André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Grove Press, 1960.

Together, it would seem, both *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou* perform a strange kind of gloss on the "Uncanny." For in these accounts that develop during the decade 1928–1937, Breton's notion of objective chance is generated from the web of accident and circumstance of which Nadja seems to have foreknowledge and to which Breton feels himself eventually to gain admittance through the agency of desire. Breton's insistence on the patterns of significance that underlie and control the operations of chance takes on a strange resonance when read against Freud's analysis of coincidence. The uncanniness that seems to surround certain repetitions of names, or numbers, or concatenations of objects within one's everyday life, "forces upon us," Freud acknowledges, "the idea of something fateful and unescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of 'chance' only." The temptation to ascribe a secret meaning to what seems like the obstinate recurrence of a number, for example, leads people, Freud attests, frequently to read into these repetitions the language of fate.[31]

In Freud's argument this ascription of meaning to happenstance and this assumption of powers of clairvoyance (offhandedly referred to by his patients as their "'presentiments' which 'usually' come true") can be understood as the reassertion within adult life of more psychologically primitive states, namely those related to the "omnipotence of thoughts" and to belief in animism.[32] All those bonds which children and tribal man create between themselves and everything around them in order to gain mastery over an all-too-threatening and inchoate environment, are first given visual form by the image of the self projected onto the external world in the form of one's shadow or one's reflection. And then, through mechanisms of projection, these doubles—invented to master and sustain the individual—become the possessors of supernatural power and turn against him.

The experience of "convulsive beauty," of something that shakes the subject's self-possession, bringing exhaltation through a kind of shock—an "explosante-fixe"—the experience of the manifestations of Breton's objective chance cannot but be illuminated by what Freud means by the uncanny, where shock mixed with the sudden appearance of fate engulfs the subject:

> Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe, which was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings, and by the narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes (such as the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, the magical practices based upon this belief, the carefully proportioned distribution

31. Freud, "The Uncanny," p. 237.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

> of magical powers or "manna" among various outside persons and things), as well as by all those other figments of the imagination with which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to withstand the inexorable laws of reality. It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us as "uncanny" fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression.[33]

The collapse of the distinction between imagination and reality—an effect devoutly wished by surrealism, but one which Freud analyzes as the primitive belief in magic—animism, narcissistic omnipotence, all are potential triggers of that metaphysical shudder which is the uncanny. For they represent the breakthrough into consciousness of earlier states of being, and in this breakthrough, itself the evidence of a compulsion to repeat, the subject is stabbed, wounded by the experience of death.

> *As Spectator I wanted to explore photography*
> *not as a question (a theme) but as a wound.*
>
> —Roland Barthes

The fear of a wound to the eye, and the revelation that the beautiful girl Olympia is in fact a doll/automaton, combine in E. T. A. Hoffman's story "The Sandman" as Freud's first example of the uncanny. The frequent sense of the eeriness of waxwork figures, artificial dolls, and automata, can be laid to the way these objects trigger "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate." This confusion between the animate and the inanimate, is an instance of that class of the uncanny that we have already followed, involving a regression to animistic thinking and its confusion of boundaries. To the effect produced by dolls, one could add, Freud acknowledges, the uncanny effect of epileptic seizures and the manifestations of insanity, "because these excite in the spectator the feeling that automatic, mechanical processes are at work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of animation."[34]

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 240–241.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

Man Ray. Explosante-fixe. *1934.*

But Freud's reading of "The Sandman" and its extreme effect of uncanniness turns not simply on the doll's ambiguous presence, but on her dismemberment within the story, a dismemberment through which she is deprived of her eyes. For, in this regard she becomes a figure for the second class of the uncanny, which arises from the surfacing of another order of infantile experience: that of the complexes, specifically here, the fear of castration.

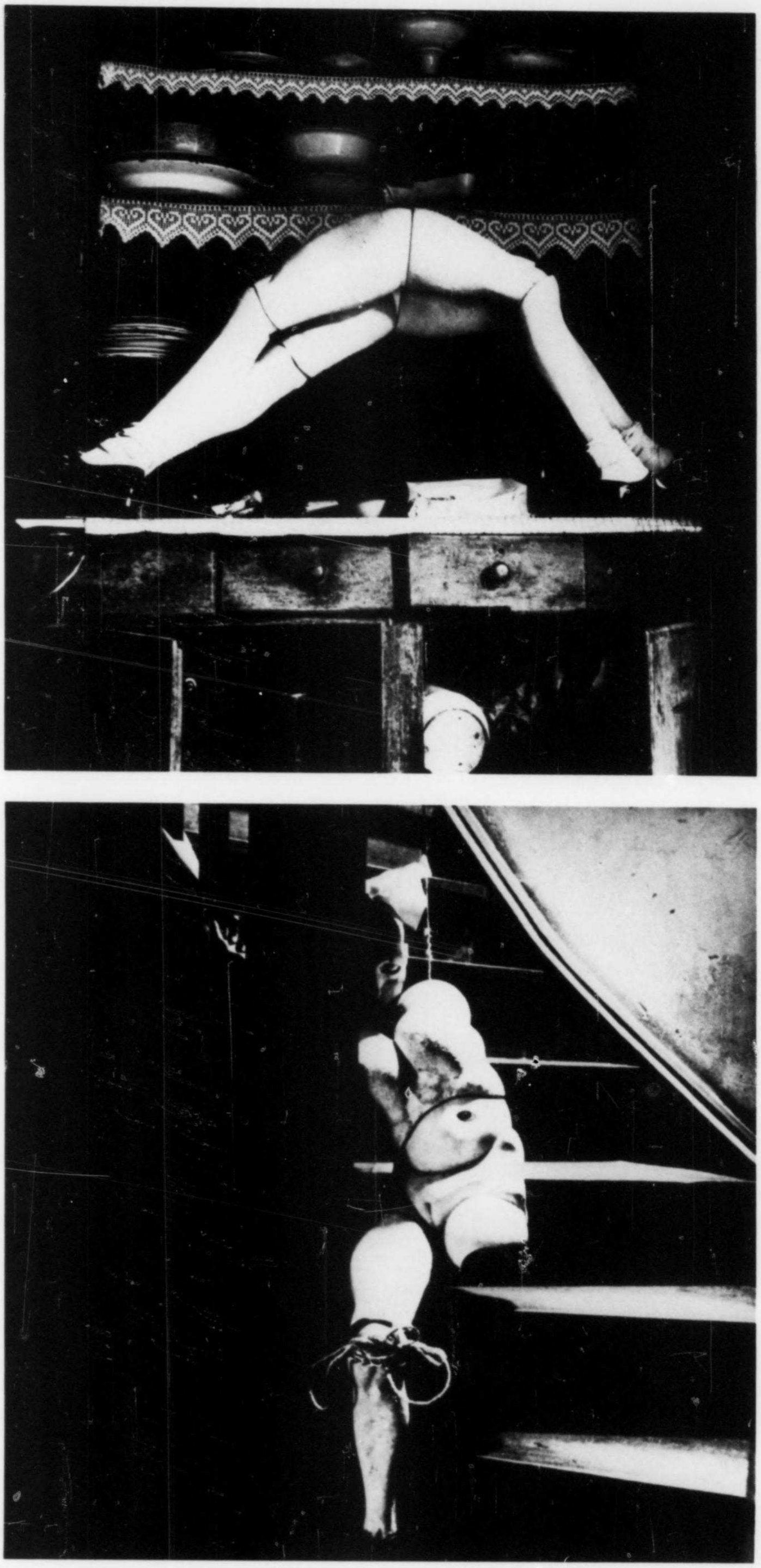
Hans Bellmer recounts that in 1932 he saw *The Tales of Hoffmann*—the first act of which focuses on the Coppelia/Olympia story derived from "The Sandman"—and it was this that triggered his first *Poupée*. This entire series, an endless acting out of the process of construction and dismemberment, or perhaps the more exact characterization would be construction *as* dismemberment, could not be more effectively glossed than by Freud's analysis of "The Sandman." For the *Poupées*—the first series of which were constructed in 1933 and published in *Minotaure* in 1934, while the second series, *Le Jeu de Poupée*, was finished by 1936 but not published until 1949—stage endless *tableaux vivants* of the figure of castration. Yet there is another section from "The Uncanny" that is important for reading Bellmer's *Poupée*: in the passage already cited with regard to the double, we find an analysis of its place in dreams. For the invention of the protective strategy of doubling, Freud writes, finds its way into the language of dreams to operate there on the subject of castration by representing it through the multiplication or doubling of "the genital symbol."

In Bellmer's manipulation of this cycle, everything is concerted to produce the experience of the imaginary space of dream, of fantasy, of projection. Not only does the obsessional reinvention of an always-the-same creature—continually recontrived, compulsively repositioned within the hideously banal space of kitchen, stairwell, parlor—give one the narrative experience of fantasy, with its endless elaboration of the same; but the quality of the image with its hand-tinted, weirdly "technicolor" glow, and the sense that though it is in focus, one can never quite see it clearly, combine to create both the aura and the frustration that are part of the visuality of the imaginary.

Within this dream-space the doll herself is phallic. Sometimes, deprived of arms, but endowed with a kind of limitless pneumatic potential to swell and bulge with smaller protuberances, she seems the very figure of tumescence. At other times, she is composed of fragmented members of the doll's body, often doubled pairs of legs stuck end-to-end, to produce the image of rigidity: the erectile doll. But in this very pairing that is also a multiplication, a pairing of the pair, one meets the dreamer's strategy of doubling. As he tries to protect the threatened phallus from danger by elaborating more and more instances of its

Hans Bellmer. La Poupée. *1938.*

Hans Bellmer. La Poupée. *1938.*



symbolic proxy, the dreamer produces—although transformed—the very image of what he fears. This is what Freud would later identify as the Medusa effect where the decapitated, castrated head is surrounded by snakes, which "however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror. This is a confirmation of the technical rule according to which a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration."[35]

To produce the image of what one fears, in order to protect oneself from what one fears—this is the strategic achievement of anxiety, which arms the subject, in advance, against the onslaught of trauma, the blow that takes one by surprise. This analysis through which *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* recasts the propositions of "The Uncanny" in terms of the life and death of the organism, speaks of the trauma as a blow that penetrates the protective armor of consciousness, piercing its outer shield, wounding it by this effect of stabbing.

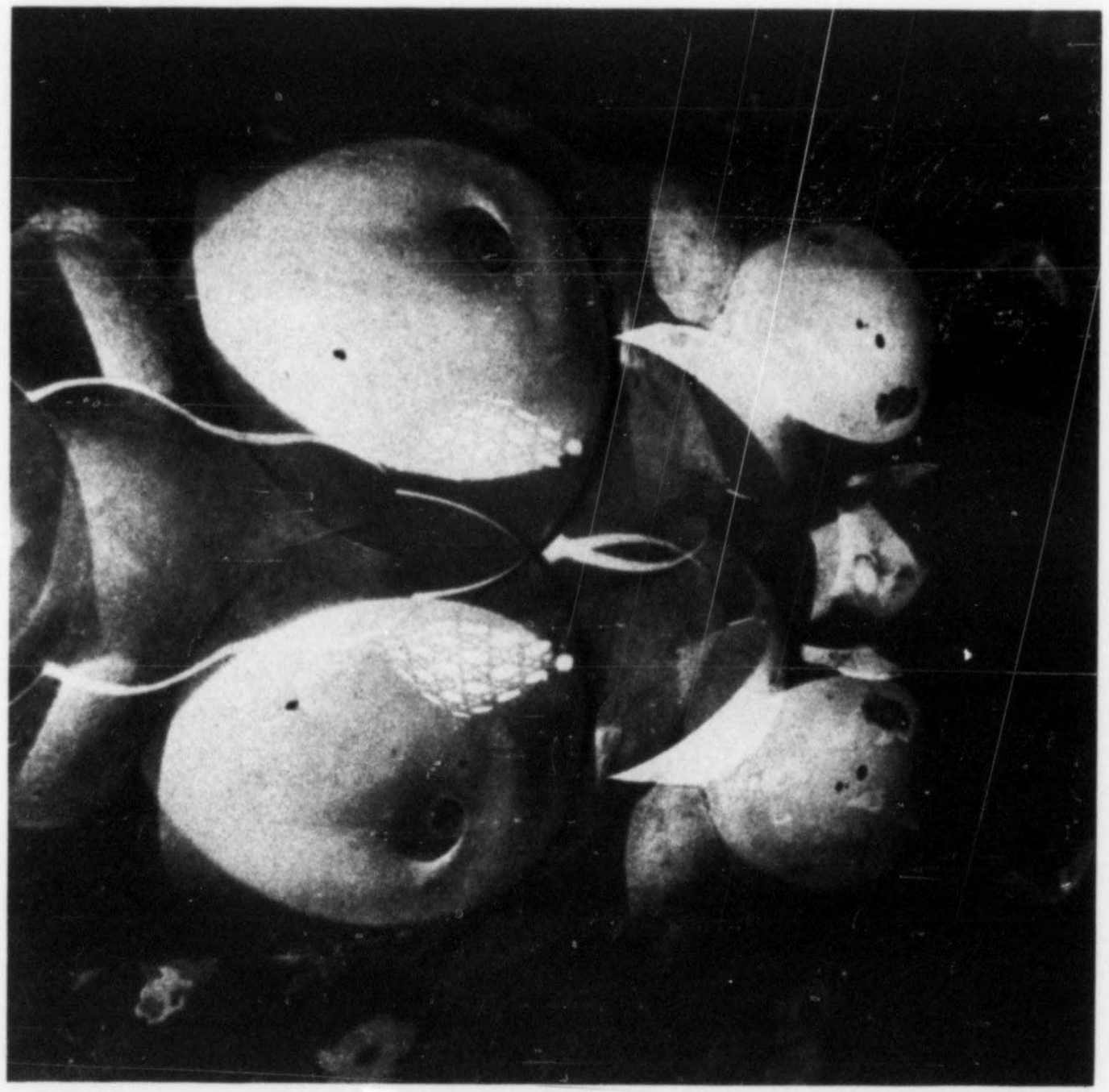
Bellmer's connection of the doll, the wound, the double, the photograph, in a series in which each one stands in symbolic relation to the other, develops a logic that prefigures, in each of its parameters, the analysis that Barthes was to make four decades later in *Camera Lucida*. For this work, too, is an elaboration of the uncanny—of the photographic effects of the uncanny—announced with the very first words of his text: "One day, quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor.'"[36]

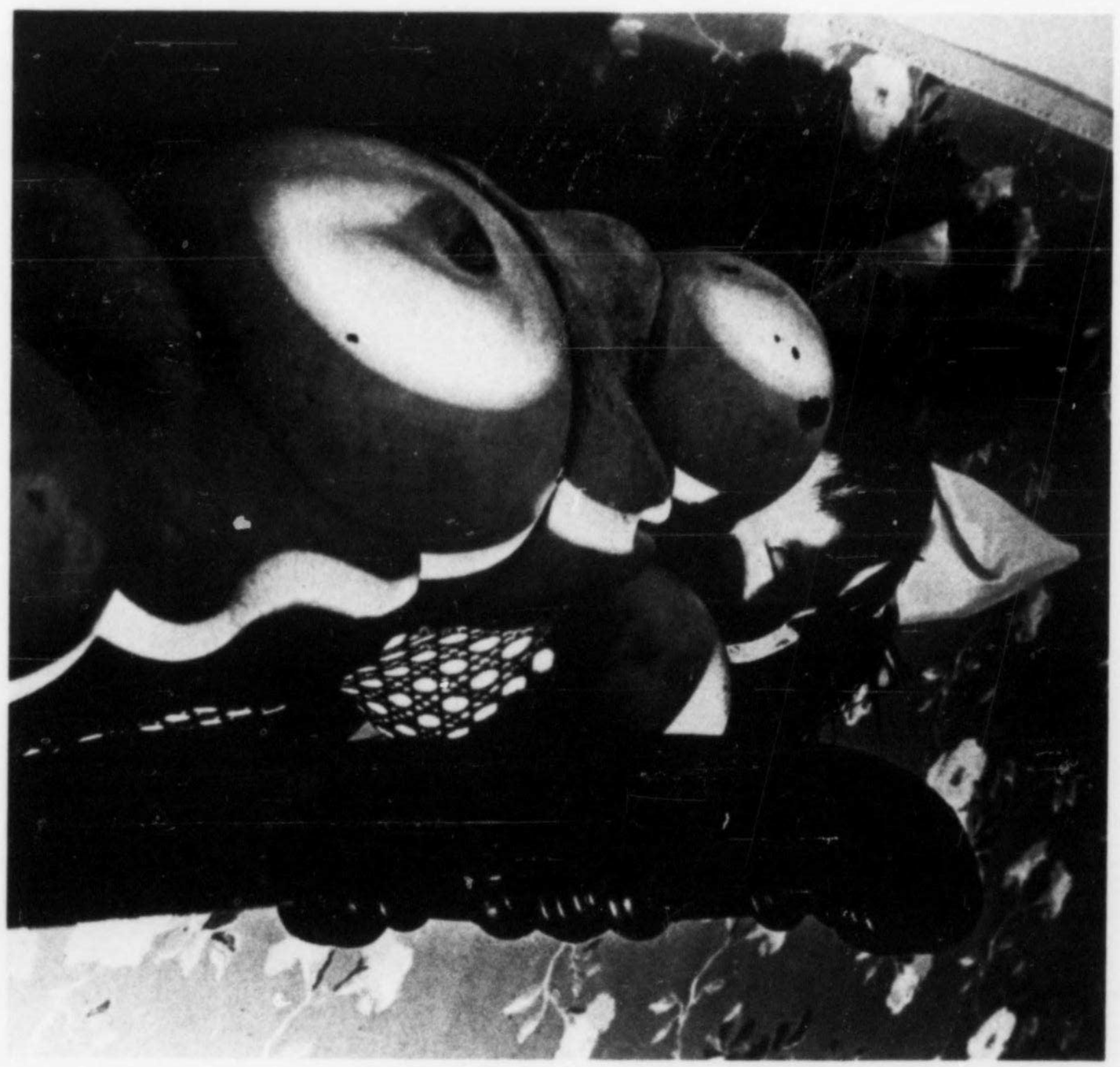
The story that Barthes recounts in his book starts with this moment of shock, which, he tells us, he could not share with others, for they seemed to understand neither its nature nor its power on him. Alone with this sensation of unease, he eventually forgot about it. After that, he says, "My interest in Photography took a more cultural turn." Which meant he began to think photography analytically, by constructing a difference between the general, human interest that photographs elicit: the "*studium*"; and the kind of detail they may or may not contain, which punctures that generality, rupturing or lacerating it, and thus pricking or bruising the spectator: the "*punctum*." Over half the course of his book is devoted to his attempt to articulate the nature of this *punctum*, this photographic detail that arrests his attention, that pricks it.

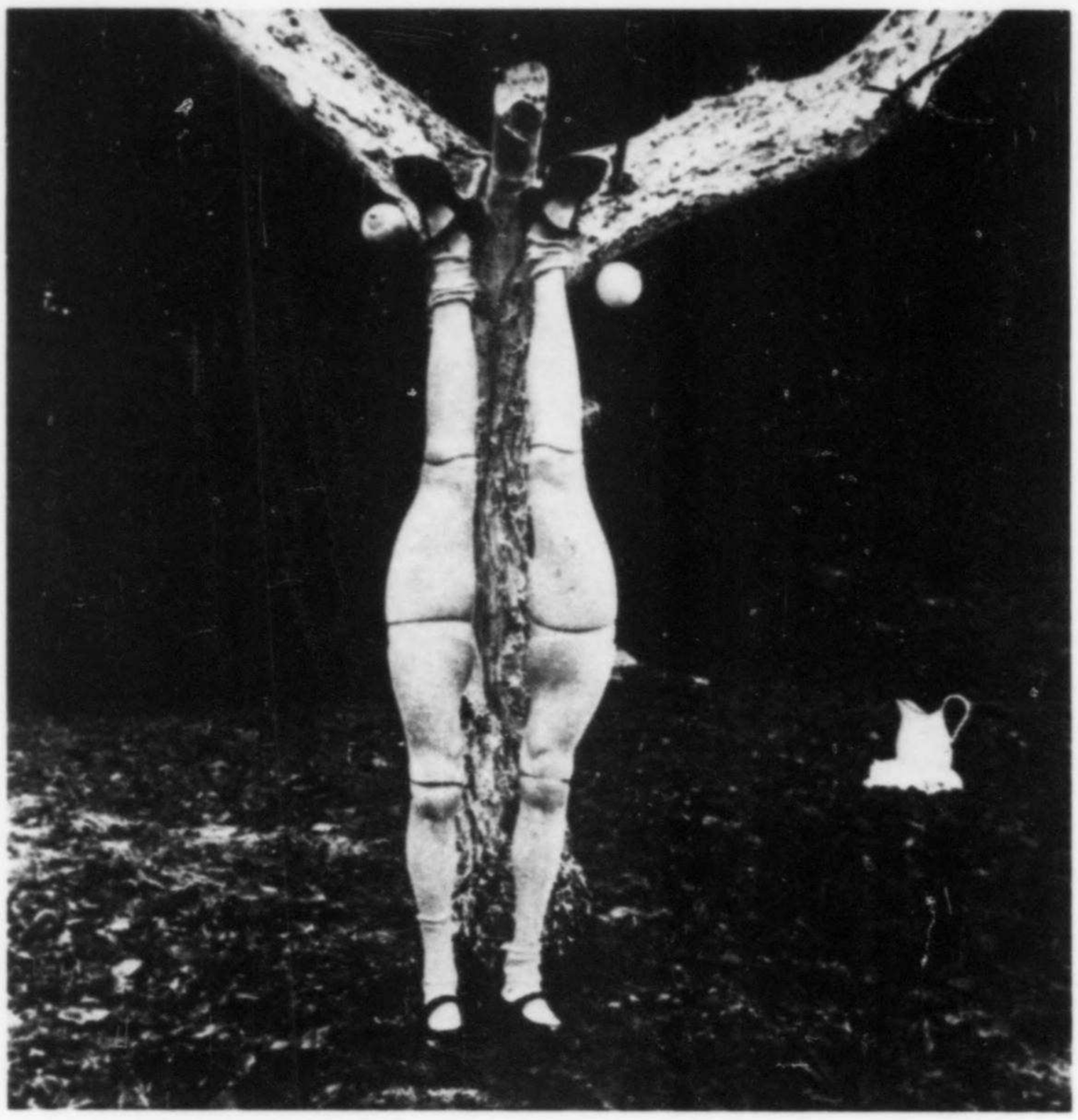
35. Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," *S.E.*, XVIII, p. 273.
36. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981, p. 3.

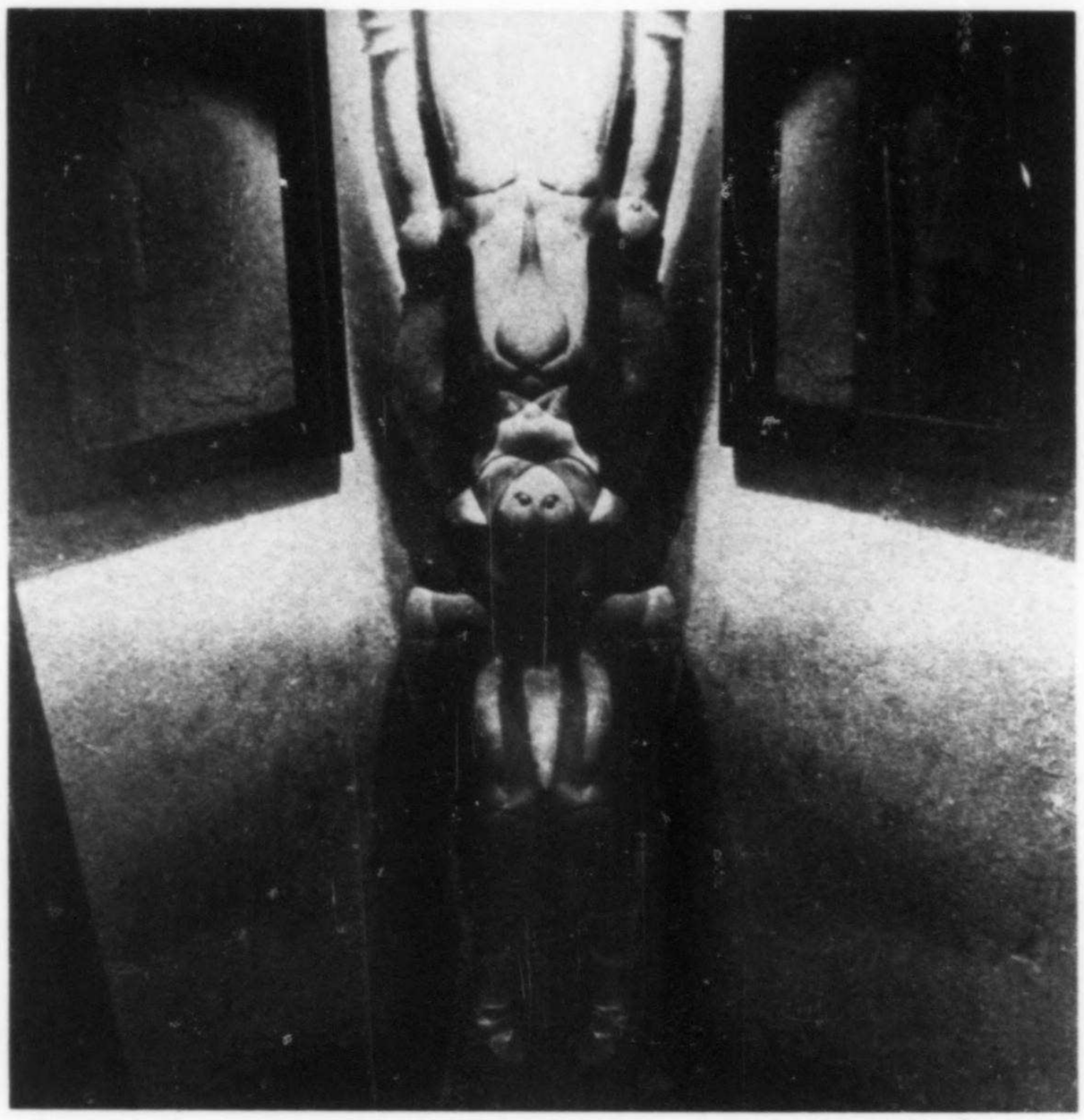
Hans Bellmer. La Poupée. *1938.*

Hans Bellmer. La Poupée. *1938.*









Hans Bellmer. La Poupée. *1936.*

Hans Bellmer. L'Idole. *1937.*

Barthes's scholarly narrative is then broken by a rather different construction of the *punctum*, one which connects it to the kind of sudden fright that punctures the organism's defenses or to the shudder of fatefulness that is the uncanny. For the *punctum* now is used for the experience of seeing a ghost. Barthes begins to tell about looking through an album of photographs after the death of his mother, and, miraculously, finding her essential image in a photograph of her as a child. Once more there is the shock that was delivered by the image of Jerome Bonaparte, only now more radical and wounding as he confronts the *being* of his mother as a *being-past* established by the very medium that recorded her as a being-who-was-going-to-die. And Barthes realizes that the scandalous effect of photography is the certainty of the "that-has-been" that attaches itself to the image, a certainty which the *punctum*—"the real *punctum* of the photograph [that] is Time"—decodes as the image of mortality itself: "By giving me that absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."[37]

> *The appeal to our emotions . . . is largely due to the quality of authenticity in the photograph. The spectator accepts its authority and, in viewing it, perforce believes he would have seen that scene or object exactly so if he had been there.*[38]
>
> —Edward Weston

The revelation that *Camera Lucida* recounts centers on the one photograph the book does not reproduce because, as Barthes says of this image, "It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture . . . at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound."[39] The science of photography that Barthes founds here is, then, "the impossible science of the unique being," the paradox of "the truth—for me." The grip of photography's vaunted objectivity is loosened here, and photography's "authenticity" is redefined.

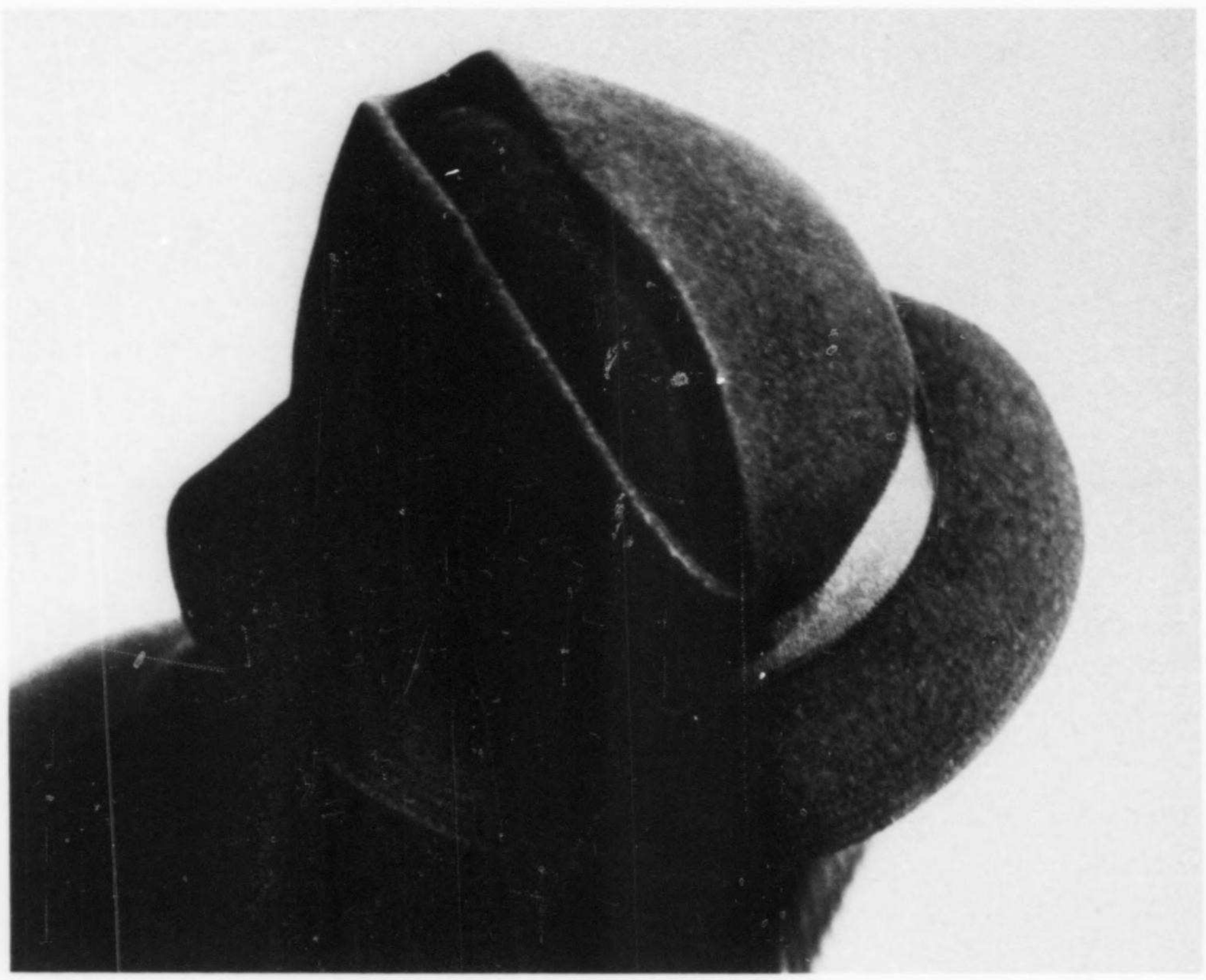
But the whole of this century's photographic aesthetics, the nature of the

37. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
38. Edward Weston, "Techniques of Photographic Art," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1941, as cited in Hollis Frampton, "Impromptus on Edward Weston: Everything in Its Place," *October*, No. 5 (Summer 1978), p. 64.
39. Barthes, p. 73.

photographic image is such, as Edward Weston admonishes, "that it cannot survive corrective handwork."[40] Which is one way of saying that the supposed authority of the photograph is in its truth-value, in the objectivity of its *objectif* (or lens), in the "straightness" with which it views the world. The code of Straight Photography discourages to the greatest degree any tampering with the image. Barthe's subjectivism, in which the photograph exists as a construct—fabricated "for me"—is a scandal for the aesthetics of Straight Photography, as is all photographic activity that resorts to construction: to darkroom manipulation, to the manipulation of scissors and paste, to any contrivance which would seem to construct "the real." For how can it be real, if it is fabricated?

This is the same scandal that surrealist photography has long-since delivered, and continues to deliver, to the congregation of Straight Photography. For surrealist photography is contrived to the highest degree, and that even when it is not involved in actual superimpositions, or solarizations, or double exposures, or what have you. Contrivance we could say is what insures

40. Frampton, p. 49.

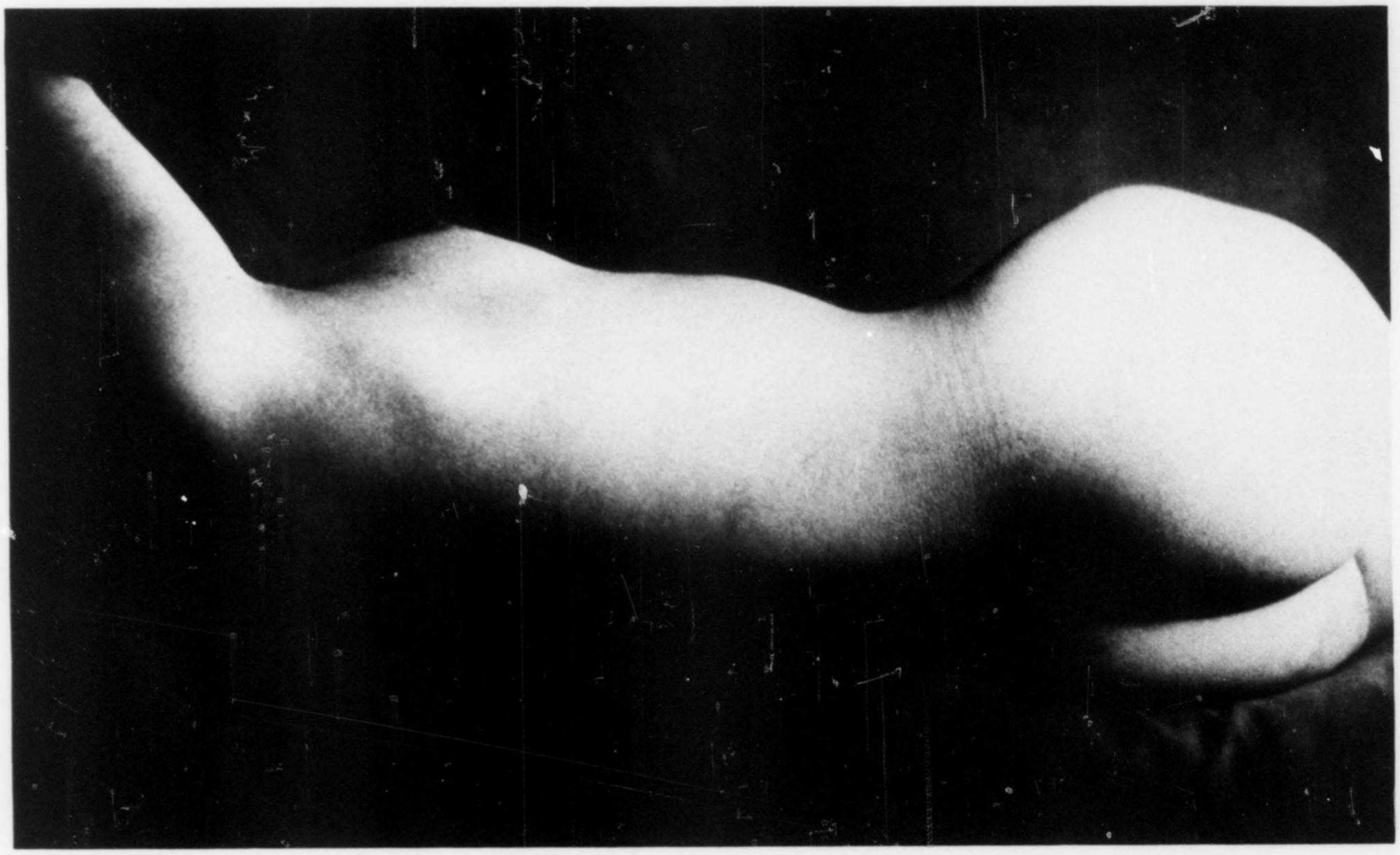


Man Ray. Untitled. *1935*.

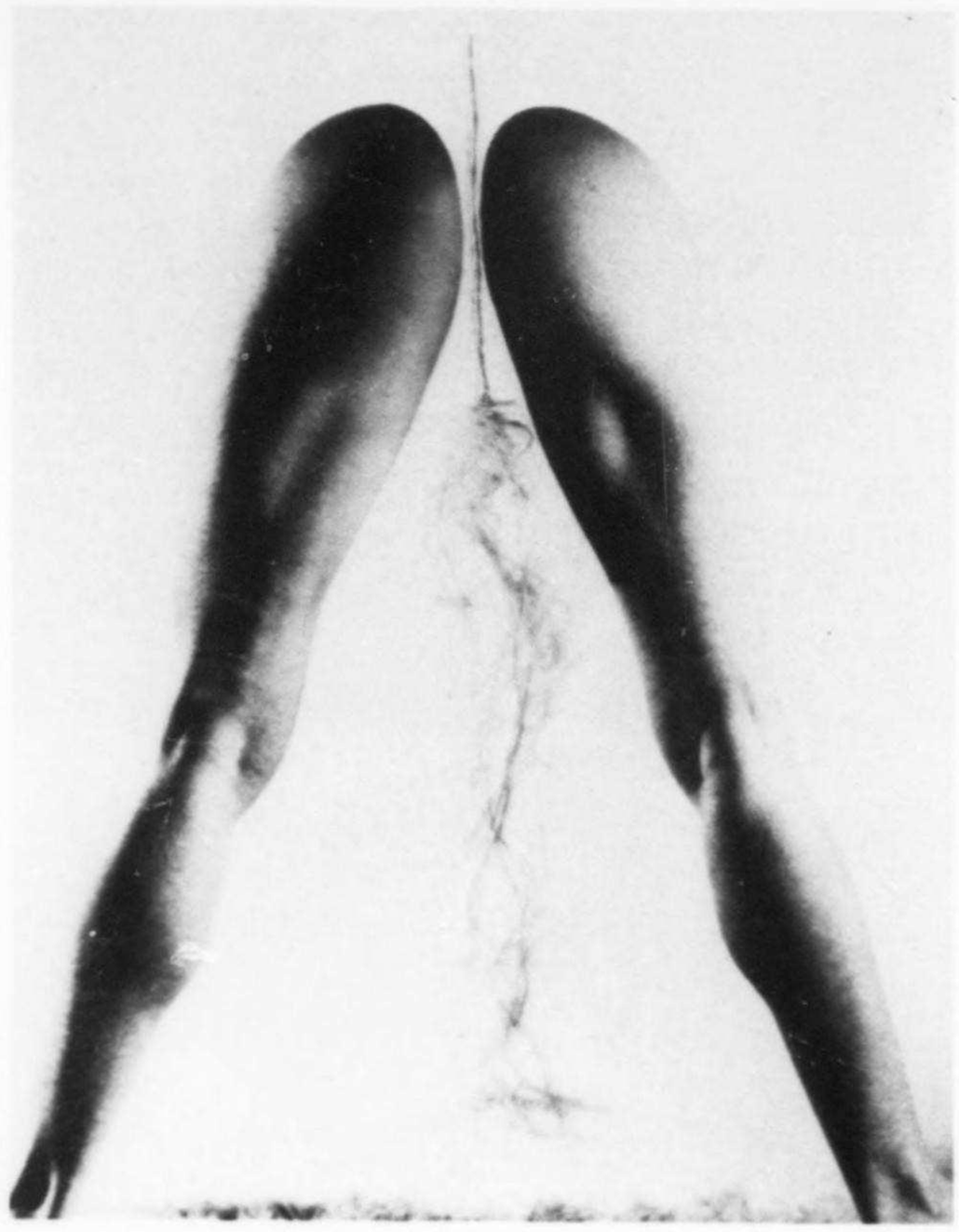
that a photograph will seem surrealist: why Man Ray's *Anatomy* is so, for example, even in the absence of any darkroom manipulation. For surrealist photography does not admit of the natural, as opposed to the cultural or made. And so all of what it looks at is seen as if already, and always, constructed, through a strange transposition of this thing into a different register. We see the object by means of an act of displacement, defined through a gesture of substitution. The object, "straight" or manipulated, is always manipulated, and thus always appears as a fetish. It is this fetishization of reality that is the scandal.

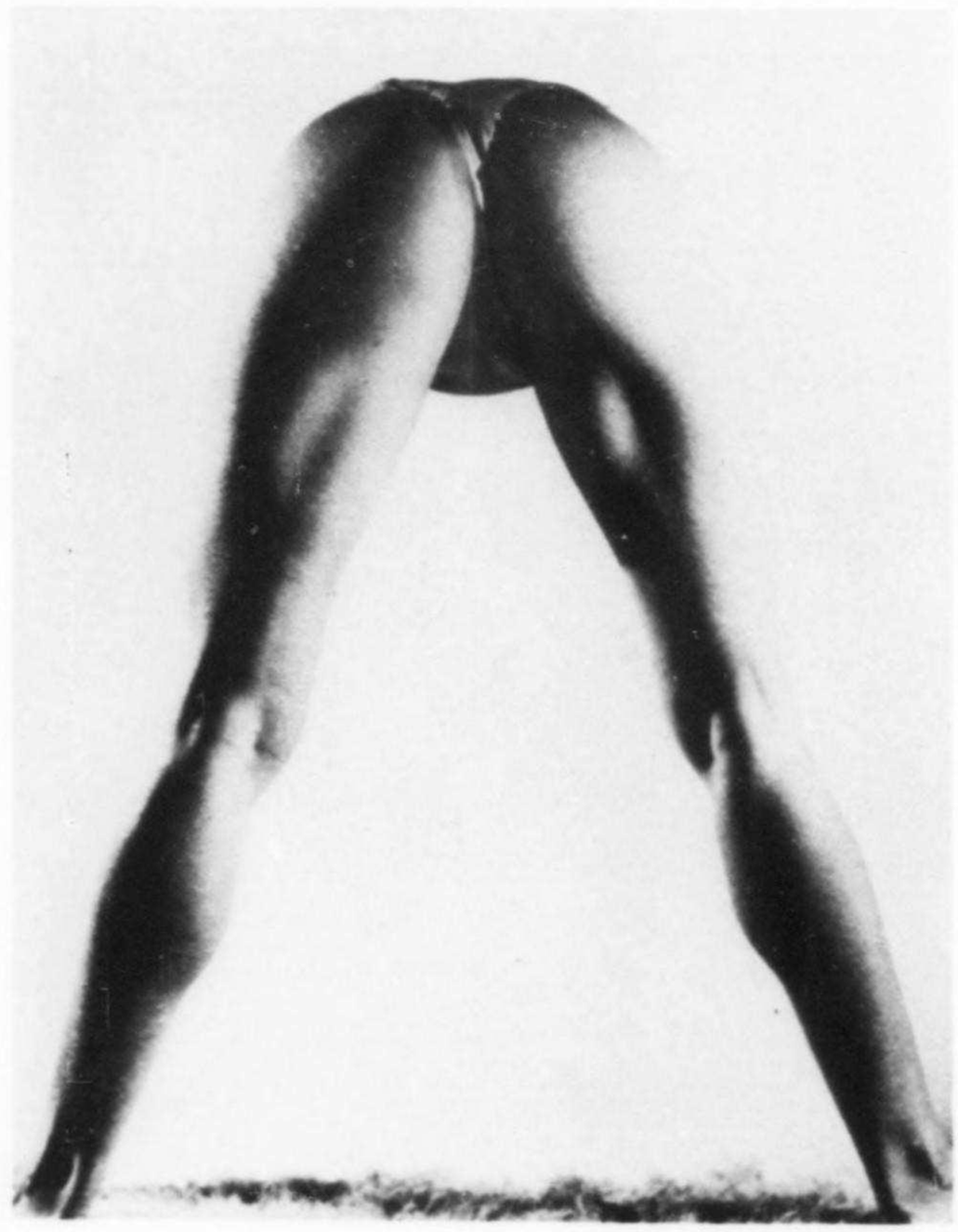
A direct enunciation of this principle occurs in both Tristan Tzara's essay in *Minotaure*—"*D'un certain automatisme du gout*"—and Man Ray's photographs used to illustrate it.[41] Analyzing fashion as the unconscious construction of a changing set of signs for the erogenous zones of the body, Tzara's text goes on to define fashion as a system for rewriting the sexual organs in the register of a peculiar displacement of sexual identity—the fashions of 1933 having decreed that women wear hats that create representations of female genitalia *in the form of* masculine garb, namely, the split-crown fedora (and that effect heightened

41. Tristan Tzara, "D'un certain automatisme du gout," *Minotaure*, No. 3 (1933), pp. 81–85.



Brassaï. Untitled. *1933*.





even further, Tzara points out, by the additions of ornament in the form of such male attire as bow ties, garters, and so forth). In the images he created for this essay Man Ray puts this precise construction in place. One of his photographs, for example, produces the image of collapsed sexual identity as the hat's rounded expression of the head beneath it articulates both male and female organs at once. Only one other image in the surrealist photographic canon puts this collapse of sexual difference quite so directly: Brassaï's 1933 *Nude* where the female body and the male organ have become each the sign for the other.

If fetishism is this substitute of the unnatural for the natural, its logic turns on the refusal to accept sexual difference. "To put it plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego—we know why."[42] And the fetish-as-substitute is not only a denial of sexual difference, it also often bears the imprint of its institution within a moment of arrest that occurs within the visual register. "When the fetish comes to life," Freud writes, "some process has been suddenly interrupted . . . what is possibly the last impression received before the uncanny traumatic one is preserved as a fetish . . . the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic." This blow that stops time, and decrees that on the site of its arrest there be built the sexually indeterminant substitute of the fetish, this blow occurs in the realm of the visual, which now becomes the theater for the endless rehearsals of a fabricated vision. Freud's first example of the fetish—the famous "shine on the nose"—in its chain of substitutions that are further complicated through a displacement of language (as the English "glance at the nose" was transposed into German as *Glanz* [*or shine*] *auf der nase*), demonstrates the visual component of this institution: a moment of sight which fabricates the real.

Surrealism can be said to have explored this possibility of a sexuality that is not grounded in an idea of human nature, or the natural, but is instead, woven of fantasy and representation, fabricated. One hears this most distinctly during that famous collective mapping of the terrain of the sexual act, at the rue Fontaine in 1928, when Aragon imperiously interrupts Breton's strictures on the unnaturalness of this or that practice with, "I wish to signal that for the first time in the course of this discussion the word 'pathological' has been put in play. That seems to imply on the part of some of us an idea of normalcy. I wish to take a stand against this idea."[43]

Surrealism's having taken the love act and its object—woman—as its central, obsessional subject, it must be seen that in much of surrealist practice woman, in being a "shine on the nose," is nowhere in nature. Having dissolved the natural in which "normalcy" can be grounded, surrealism was at least

42. Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," *S.E.*, XXI, p. 152–153.
43. "Recherches sur la sexualité, *La Révolution Surréaliste*, No. 11 (March 1928), p. 37.

potentially open to the dissolving of distinctions that Bataille insisted was the job of the *informe*. Gender, at the heart of the surrealist project was one of these categories. If within surrealist poetry /woman/ was constantly in construction, then at certain moments that project could at least prefigure a next step, in which a reading is opened onto deconstruction. It is for this reason that the frequent characterizations of surrealism as antifeminist seem to me to be mistaken.[44]

Within surrealist photographic practice, too, /woman/ was in construction, for she is there as well the obsessional subject. And since the vehicle through which she is figured is itself manifestly constructed, /woman/ and /photograph/ become figures for each other's condition: ambivalent, blurred, indistinct, and lacking in, to use Edward Weston's word, authority.

The nature of the authority that Weston and Straight Photography claim is grounded in the sharply focused image, its resolution a figure of the unity of what the spectator sees, a wholeness which in turn founds the spectator himself as a unified subject. That subject, armed with a vision that plunges deep into reality and, through the agency of the photograph, given the illusion of mastery over it, seems to find unbearable a photography that effaces categories and in their place erects the fetish, the *informe*, the uncanny.

There are, of course, other projects to rethink photography. And thus to return to *Camera Lucida*, we should note the ending that Barthes gives to this mythic tale of the science of photography. The night that he found the photograph of his mother, Barthes tells us, he saw a movie in which there was an automaton, whose dancing with the hero stirred in Barthes pangs of love that he linked to the madness he associated with his newly organized feelings about photography: "a new form of hallucination. . . . a mad image, chafed by reality." The automaton, the double of life who is death, is a figure for the wound that every photograph has the power to deliver, for each one is also a double and a death: "All those young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents of Death. . . . Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites, photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. Life/Death: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the intitial pose from the final print."[45]

That simple click is what Breton had called the *explosante-fixe* and that combination of madness and love, released by the doll and by the essence of photography, which Barthes describes as a "gone mad" and an instance of "*la vérité folle*" is, in its uncanniness, its convulsiveness, a kind of *amour fou*.

44. This is maintained, for example, in Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et sexualité*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971.
45. Barthes, p. 92.

Bataille's Tomb: A Halloween Story

DENIS HOLLIER

translated by RICHARD MILLER*

So? Grave-diggers are honest guys, unionized of course, maybe even communists.

—Sartre, "What is Literature?"
Situations, II

Even the best-intentioned of posthumous tributes cannot avoid obeisance to the rituals of necrophilia. Thus I shall use the date and place of our present meeting, as well as its pious motive, as a pretext for introducing my subject: at a barely respectful distance from Vézelay, where Georges Bataille was buried twenty years ago today, I shall speak of Bataille's grave.[1]

Not of the grave in which he has since been resting, beneath a stone I do not remember ever having seen, but, rather, of the monument he seems to have borne unceasingly, untiringly, unremittingly, within himself as his inalienable mark. The grave upon which it might be said he was determined to write if, indeed, it was not the grave pitfall that was to swallow up all foundations, all bases, all subjects. Writing enters upon it at peril of its peace of mind, at peril of having nothing upon which to rest, to lean. Not so much Bataille's grave, then, as Bataille's grave within Bataille. Note the labyrinthine insinuation: intended to suggest that by withdrawing into a text that it cannot manage to contain, this grave is therefore never susceptible to being completely sealed up. It cannot contain its contents: there has been no death when the tomb defies localization. Here a cryptological dimension enters in, deters thematic inventory. In it, death does not guarantee any dust-to-dust repose, any regression to inorganic matter. On the contrary; it is the mortal coil that has no rest, that loses firmness, that defaults. In the tomb the earth withdraws its support.

* [Translator's note: *Tombe*, *tombeau*, *tomber*—grave, tomb, to fall, tumble, come down, abate, and so on—the verbal acrobatics an attempt to render all of the various meanings, tacit and overt, that resound whenever any of these words occurs in the text would demand are beyond the capabilities of translation. I would therefore invite readers, in so far as possible, to bear the connotations in mind whenever the text refers to the necrophiliac or the grave.]

1. This text was written for a conference organized by J. M. Rey at the Maison de la Culture, Auxerre (France), on 19 and 20 June 1982, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Bataille's death on the eve of the summer solstice. Twenty years earlier, I was planting impatiens when I heard it through an open window announced on the news.

Burial is a committing to an abyss into which the earth tumbles as the entombment takes place. Playing upon the sounds of various words—"to fall," "to collapse," "tomb," "grave"—words that in French share the same root sound—*tomb*—the first poem of *Tombeau* [*Monument*], which opens *L'archangélique*, reads: "Je tombe dans l'immensité / qui tombe en elle-même" ["I fall into the vastness / that crumbles into itself"].[2]

(Bataille's tone can always be recognized by the muted timbre of a humor that plays upon this macabre crypt as upon a drum. And, in fact, few writers have been so seduced, captivated, and—literally—inspired by their own corpse. We can easily, for example, imagine that when, in 1929 during his first quarrel with the leader of the surrealists, Bataille entitled his pamphlet against Breton *Un cadavre* [*A Corpse*], that title (apart from its citational irony) hid feelings of greater tenderness—and perhaps even jealousy—than its addressee could have suspected. Breton would otherwise certainly have found room for Bataille in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir*. He had, however, plenty of excuses. In particular, he was unaware of all the draft open letters in which, during the same period, Bataille was preparing to throw his own remains in his face: I'm writing to you from a far country, he wrote, from "that region where one can at last take a deep sniff of one's own cadaver," the region where one is forced "to develop one's humor by pawning one's very corpse."[3]

In texts to which Bataille paid an attention rare for its period, Freud attempted to contrast the libido—in other words, sexual energy—with what he called the death instinct. We are familiar with the fascinating mazes that that attempt was to lay out for psychoanalytic speculation. Yet in Bataille the libido, fundamentally necrophiliac, appears without exception as the most pressing manifestation of the death instinct: the only thing more powerful than death is the love of death. Among the first illustrations to be printed in *Les larmes d'Eros* [The Tears of Eros] was that of a prehistoric figurine that could be seen either as a naked female body or as an erect phallus. We might conceive as a matrix or emblem for Bataille's reflections on eroticism a somehow inverted "plastic pun": it would equate the female sex organs and the tomb in which bodies bereft of life are laid. Deep in the Lascaux caves we realize that man's grave is also the cradle of mankind. A kind of telluric incest is symbolically being enacted through fantasies of sexual inhumation. "Je tombe dans l'immensité / qui tombe en elle-même" ["I fall into the vastness / that crumbles into itself"], in the words of the first poem in *Tombeau*. And, a few lines further on: "Aimer c'est aimer mourir" ["To love is to love to die"]. In 1929, *Le langage des fleurs* [*The Lan-*

2. Georges Bataille, *L'archangélique* (1944), *Oeuvres complètes* (henceforth *O.C.*), III, 1971, p. 74. Cf. also the poem "L'Orestie" in *L'Impossible*: "J'entendis tomber la terre/ . . . /je tombai/le champ aussi tomba/un sanglot infini le champ et moi/tombèrent" ["I heard the earth fall/ . . . /I fell/the field also let fall/an infinite tear the field and I/falling. . . ." (*Ibid.*, p. 207).
3. Bataille, "Je sais trop bien . . . ," *O.C.*, II, pp. 87 and 88. Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* appeared in 1939.

guage of Flowers] had already described as a "sickening banality" the proposition "that love has the smell of death" ["que l'amour a l'odeur de la mort"].[4]

The Smell of Death

At first sight nothing could be more like the schematics of taboo and transgression than the Don Juan legend, particularly with the ending according to which the impenitent violator of so many taboos risks his life in one final potlatch in defiance of the Comendador. A source of heat (pleasure, sex), a source of cold (legality, death): both in their coexistence and in their incompatibility Don Juan and the Comendador personify the nonsynthetic linkage of the taboo-transgression system upon which Bataille's thinking is constructed. If eroticism is indeed "the acceptance of life even unto death," nothing better illustrates that definition than the stand taken by Don Juan, who refuses, on the pretext that he may be at the brink of death, to repent having lived his life, that irreproachable life that even death itself cannot bring him to repent.

And yet at the same time, it seems that Don Juan must until the end remain unaware of the Hegelian injunction Bataille set as an epigraph to *Madame Edwarda*, demanding that the mind have the strength to "uphold the work of death." On the contrary, for him, approbation of life until death excludes any collaboration with the forces of death. He approves unto death a life that disapproves of death. This probably explains the relatively minor interest Bataille's thinking devotes to this heroic and traditional model of Western male sexuality. For example, it is significant that in a work entitled *L'érotisme* [*Eroticism*] Don Juan's name never once comes up. Instead, we have Sade. And not only because Don Juan was not a writer, although obviously that fact in a way has to do with the Don-Juanish ignorance of what Bataille calls the "pleasure paradox." Only literature can experience the pleasure of pleading guilty.

Considered in and of himself, independently of the characters to which the legend links him, the classic Don Juan is a healthy human being who is not really particularly perverse; immoderate, yes, but certainly not vicious. This conqueror is first a conquistador, far more a man of action than a man of desire, or even pleasure. In this character dedicated to the positive Blanchot has rightly discerned "a myth of the modern era": "a proud hero, a swordsman, a man of courage, a man who infuses the night with brilliance and the day with dash." In a challenging essay Roger Laporte attributed the Don's power of seduction to the impersonal factor in the desire that possesses him: in this view Don Juan is the embodiment of desire *per se*, a somehow subjectless desire, a desire even he cannot manage to feel in the first person, on his own behalf, one

4. Bataille, *Le langage des fleurs*, *Documents*, No. 3, June 1929 (*O.C.*, I, 1970, p. 176).

he cannot make his own—a desire that, in possessing him, dispossesses, deprives him of himself. A desire that has gained control of his voice, that sings through him, indifferent to his view of it. As Kierkegaard had already suggested, "Don Juan does not seduce, but he desires, and this desire has a seductive effect." And Laporte: "He is not a person, but rather an impersonal seductive power."[5] This passionate Don Giovanni, who is made to forget what he is saying by the music, is not Bataille's. It is true that, according to *L'érotisme*, desire causes a breakdown in identity, is an experience that transgresses personal barriers, the inhuman plethora of life overriding in a movement of impersonal expansion the falsehood of individual discontinuity and separate existence. Nothing like that happens, however, with Don Giovanni, who always manages to preserve his dignity: perhaps he does not mean what he sings, but he nonetheless knows what he wants.

And what do we really know, for that matter, about his sex life? The fact that he is, first of all, a character on the stage makes operative from the very outset social imperatives of decency that severely limit the depiction of his amorous exploits. It has been noted that in both Molière's play and Mozart's opera none of his attempts at seduction works out to his advantage. With even greater reason we are given no details about what takes place when he is lucky enough to achieve success. Here, however, the concern for propriety implicit in the scenic code is not the only thing involved. Rather, it would appear that the logic of the character must preclude of itself any allusion to the type of scene in which the erotic novel has come to specialize. With regard to the women he has seduced the legend retains only the number—it is silent with regard to quality. This unbridled collector does not linger over fleeting joys. He is modern because he is in a hurry: pleasure is fleeting. As with a woman, Bataille writes, the possible forces us to go all the way with him. Don Juan is certainly not the man for furtive pleasures, for indirect, equivocal acts of possession. But can one, so to speak, go all the way at one go? This zealot of the natural must have women—women and more women—but only women. Yet as a good atheist, indifferent to the supernatural, to superstitions, he never links his pleasure with their pleasure. Indeed, he has modestly decided that after she has once slept with him, a woman remains the same. Besides, is the man who cannot conceive possessing the same body more than once seeking even his own pleasure? Such a sorry redundancy would, in the first instance, upset his entire accounting system. And having two at the same time would pose a similar bookkeeping problem. As would possessing one women (and even more, two) in the company of one or more fellow rakes. No one can keep the accounts straight during such orgies. He wants them all, but for himself alone and one at a time. The economics of his desire, which could not be more distributive, does not linger

5. Roger Laporte, "Don Giovanni: un homme sans nom," in *Quinze variations sur un thème autobiographique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1975, p. 182.

over details. It does not count organs, only individuals. One entry each. Nothing could be less perverse: the number is not added to the account of some polymorphous desire but to that of a monomaniacal supernormality.

As for necrophilia, it goes without saying that there is not the slightest trace of it in any of his attributes. He shouts, "*Vivan le femmine*": and, in fact, he wants them very much alive. His libido, exuberant but diurnal, is totally put off by anything it finds repulsive. The paradox of pleasure, that is, that feminine attractions can repulse, does not affect this partisan of the principle of identity who, in the classic way, calls a spade a spade. For him, the sexual organs do not figure among the "forbidden horrors" that constitute, as Bataille said at the Collège de Sociologie, the "sacred" nucleus of a communication whose basis is some "reciprocal repulsion." We know the degree to which Don Juan is susceptible to the *odor di femmina*. To say that "love has the smell of death," to assign to sexuality the region where one "gets a deep sniff of one's own cadaver," are for this gentleman only tiresome errors of taste. Bataille quotes the passage of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in which Pilar instructs Robert Jordan how to recognize the smell of death: she tells him to imagine a mixture of "the wet earth, the dead flowers, and the doings of that night."[6] Don Juan's sense of smell is totally unaffected by the concoctions of such macabre chemistry. To the end, his libido will remain impervious to any infiltrations of the death impulse. It stubbornly persists in ignoring it, it evades it even when it is alongside, always deaf to the Sirens of Thanatos. He is not the man to fantasize the metaphorical equivalent of a grave for any female sexual organ—and, above all, not his own eventual grave. He is obviously too healthy for funereal images to hamper his desire, or, for that matter, to excite it. Although he has a stomach strong enough to enable him to sit down to table in a graveyard, there is nothing about that setting in itself that particularly whets his appetite. He is not spicing up a pleasure that would otherwise be too bland for the palate of a decadent roué. What Bataille calls "joy in the face of death" is not part of his makeup. Under the title *Tableau de l'amour macabre* [*Survey of Macabre Love*], the Sadologist Maurice Heine compiled a medico-legal anthology of sex crimes;[7] Seville's libertine does not figure in it. Hamlet-Yorick affections are not his kind of thing: there is no Don Juan of the Cemetery, and certainly none of the morgue. Unexpected or not, the Baudelairean charm of the pink and black gem leaves him cold. Obviously we can say that in more than one meaning of the term Don Juan's desire provokes, challenges the Comendador. The con-

6. This episode in Hemingway's novel (in the French translation of D. Kotchoubey) was published by Bataille in *L'Espagne libre*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1945. It is entitled "L'odeur de la mort" ["The Smell of Death"].

See also the lecture given on January 22, 1938 ("Attraction et répulsion") by Bataille at the Collège de Sociologie (*Le Collège de sociologie*, D. H., ed., Paris, Gallimard, 1979, p. 206.

7. Bataille had planned to publish it in the series "*Acéphale*" in 1938. Cf. the letter cited in the notes, *O.C.*, I, p. 674.

trary, however, is not true: the Comendador does not provoke the slightest desire in him. Horror and desire never encroach upon each other. In most versions of the legend quite separate areas are set apart for what Don Juan views as objects of desire and objects of horror. His women and the Comendador never meet. The attraction of the color pink is far removed from the repulsive color black.

But what does transgression entail if it shows no interest at all in the forbidden? It is just here, according to Bataille, that Don Juan as a character fails to live up to his legend. And indeed, every critic has viewed the Comendador, rather than Don Juan himself, as the pivotal figure in that legend.[8] Everything occurs as though, accoutred in his own legend of whose scope he himself is unaware, Don Juan were to the very end blind to what makes him interesting. This kind of decentralization of the hero vis-à-vis his legend probably lies at the basis of the diffidence we can discern in Bataille's position in one of the rare instances in which he considers the figure of the noble libertine in his works.

This occurs in a chapter of *La souveraineté* [*Sovereignty*], a posthumous work that was intended to be the second volume of *La part maudite* [*The Devil's Share*], entitled "Nietzsche and Don Juan."[9] Bataille begins by contrasting the Nietzschean experience and Don Juanism. Don Juan's attitude is presented at the outset as that of a rationalist libertine, free of superstitious scruples, who actively bases his conduct upon the linked principles of pleasure and reality. For pleasure there are women. As for reality, his positive nature dispenses him from experiencing "the terror most people feel of the dead": a dead man is nothing more than a dead man, and when he encounters the Comendador, Don Juan jokingly extends an invitation to him. When the statue accepts his invitation, however, that initial attitude changes. His playful, disrespectful irony hardens into defiance: the ultimate punishment will fall upon Don Juan without having wrung from him the least sign of what a Hegelian would call "recognition." Death, the absolute master, may have the last word, but he will not compel Don Juan, even when the latter is reduced to impotence, to subscribe to it. At that moment, which occurs beyond the principles of pleasure and reality, we come very close to a Nietzschean attitude: "Don Juan's awareness," Bataille writes, "certain that hell will swallow him up and unbending, is in my eyes comparable to the mastered terror, one which will never cease to terrify, that Nietzsche links to the certainty of the death of God." And, in an earlier version of the same passage: "When it rises above the aridity of libertinism Don Juan's

8. Cf. the latest, *Le Mythe de Don Juan* (Paris, Armand Colin, 1978) by Jean Rousset. The author excludes Casanova and Lovelace's heroes from his study: "They did not fight against death."

9. Bataille, "Nietzsche et Don Juan" (*La souveraineté*, IV, II, 4) in *O.C.*, VIII, p. 433. Here Bataille is reworking an earlier article ("Nietzsche et Thomas Mann," *Synthèses*, No. 60, May 1951), republished in an appendix of the same volume of *O.C.* (pp. 481 ff.).

attitude resembles that of Nietzsche. I am tempted to compare Don Juan's condition when he realizes hell will swallow him up and still refuses to bend, to the terror Nietzsche associates with the revelation that God himself is dead." The comparison, however, stops there. For, along with his terror at the death of God, the Nietzschean madman accuses himself of being responsible for it; he pleads guilty to the empty bench vacated by his own mad presumption. There is nothing of that in Don Juan: until the end, he refuses to acknowledge the sentence passed upon him. This, Bataille writes, "overwhelms him *from without*. Whereas moral demands constantly weigh upon Nietzsche *from within*."

In fact, Don Juan ignores both the paradox and the higher stakes: an amoralist rather than an immoralist (in textbook terms), he does not presume to be the "enemy from within" of the moral law. Deprived of inner experience of the forbidden, he is insensitive to the morbid glory of the guilty, even the impenitently guilty. He has been viewed as the embodiment of militant atheism, but his is a natural atheism, a wholly human atheism untainted by any satanism, unscorched by any hellfire. A celebrated sentence in *L'érotisme* [*Eroticism*] holds that transgression differs from the "return to nature": "it lifts the ban without abolishing it." Don Juan's desire, however, is not aroused by the delectable promise of forbidden fruits: because it is a fruit, it is not forbidden. *Eritis sicut homines* could stand as the motto for this kind of harvesting. Thus we shall not see him saying black masses in what Klossowski, in reference to Bataille, was to call the Church of the Death of God. Lacking all connection with the religious experience, his sexuality bypasses both the straits of atheology and those of transgression.

Here, the lines entitled "*Le bleu du ciel*" ["*Blue of Noon*"] that introduce the section of *L'expérience intérieure* [*The Inner Experience*], are apropos: "I am amazed and repelled by all the futile—psychological—chitchat about 'Don Juanism.' In my more naïve opinion, Don Juan is nothing but a personification of carousal, of pleasurable orgy, denying and divinely surmounting all obstacles." At the turn of the century there were endless arguments over whether Don Juan was homosexual or impotent, whether he hated women or whether, rather, he loved them more than they deserved. Against those attempts to blacken the character, Bataille posits a reading that he himself describes as more "naïve," that of a Don Juan free of either complexes or complexity. Yet are those really the right words? For example, we may be brought up short by his "divinely," commandeered from the vocabulary of the supernatural. We may also wonder whether, in the theory of eroticism Bataille is developing, there is really room for a mere carouse, for an orgy that is merely "pleasurable," without complications, an orgy that is also naïve, completely natural and founded simply upon a "return to nature," one, especially, untainted by any religious effluxes of sacrifice. Even more strange, this appeal on behalf of a rosy sexuality concludes a brief analysis of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in which from the

rake's entire progress Bataille paradoxically singles out only those episodes in which he confronts the dead. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the apparition of the Commendatore, a moment of horror unadulterated by desire, of horror devoid of any attraction, illustrates what Bataille himself understands by a "pleasurable orgy." For Don Giovanni, who plays only one stop at a time, the apparition quite simply has nothing at all to do with an orgy. Thus the statement about Don Juanism, following the examples given, is surprising. It is almost as though, notwithstanding the appeal for naiveté, Don Giovanni doesn't really interest Bataille, does not grab his attention until the women (since the logic of their various movements excludes their—the women and the ghost—meeting) have abandoned the stage to the Commendatore. Don Giovanni himself—who in fact thinks solely of women—may indeed be too "naïve" to be interested in the Commendatore. As for Bataille, it is clear that his interest in Don Giovanni begins with the Commendatore. Put another way, the Commendatore interests Bataille *in* Don Giovanni. Indeed, in the section of *La souveraineté* mentioned earlier, he notes in this regard: "Don Juan's libertinism goes beyond the delight created by the sexual taboo: the character of the 'seducer' has derived its greatest charm from the infraction of the law that ensures the dead the horror-stricken respect of the living."

Could Bataille have more clearly enunciated the fact that, in his eyes, the Commendatore is the basis of the "seducer's" seduction? that he is unreservedly seduced by Don Giovanni only when the Don, having abandoned his monomaniacal obsession with the *odor di femmina*, flares his nostrils—undoubtedly as aquiver as those of Michelet in his "water closet"—over his own corpse? However, perhaps here we should go a step further.

The Pink and the Black

> *If, to suggest desire, the color pink requires a contrasting black, would that black be black enough if we had not first thirsted for purity? if,* despite ourselves, *our dream had not become tarnished?*
>
> —Bataille, "Proust,"
> *La Littérature et le mal*

Histoire de l'oeil [*The Story of the Eye*], Bataille's 1927 erotic novel, sports the colors of Lola de Valence. From the second page on they occur in connection with Simone, who will henceforward make them her own. Above all, however, they haunt the final episodes of the tale, which take place in Spain where the young heroes, after the death of Marcelle, find it easier "to avoid the inconve-

nience of a police investigation." How well we can understand them! Across the border Sir Stephen awaits them, ultrarich and prepared to finance their continued excesses. We catch up with them in Madrid. On May 7, 1922, in the Plaza de Toros, they witness (at the same time as Hemingway) the death of Granero, a matador killed during a corrida after his eye had been impaled by a bull's horn.[10] A deadly ballet on a bicolor theme: the animal (a "black monster"), its head lowered, penetrates the folds of the "pink cape." The final accident leaves the trio sunstruck and stunned, and the memory of it will still haunt them in the following chapter, in which they have left Madrid for the southern sensuality of Seville, Don Juan's native town. Without naming the "gem" (a quite obvious one) to which they refer, I would draw attention to the mention, between quotation marks, of the colors "pink and black" in the first lines of this eleventh chapter. In their own way they set the scene for the most scabrous episode of the novel (a novel that is, as a matter of fact, more a pink and black "romance" than a true thriller or "black" horror story) and, for that matter, in all of Bataille's work. For our purposes only the setting is important: the scene takes place in the very church in which, as Sir Stephen informs his young associates, the real Don Juan is purportedly buried. In front of the entrance a plaque indicates "the grave of the founder of the church, said by the guides to have been Don Juan".[11] To my knowledge, this is Don Juan's first appearance in any text by Bataille. Its significance cannot be overestimated: in addition to adding some touristic color, the selection of Seville and, in Seville itself, of the church of La Caridad, is obviously intended to place the final scene of the novel, in the most explicit possible way, under the protection of the local hero, a setting that was soon to be further emphasized by the fictitious datum ("Seville, 1940") Bataille inserted in the second edition, which was illustrated with Bellmer's drawings. It is striking that when Don Juan makes his entrance in Bataille's work he has been dead and buried for years.

Some ten years after *Histoire de l'oeil* Bataille returns to the grave a second time. The setting is no longer a church, yet Bataille states: "we are wildly religious." The surroundings do remain Spanish, although the geographical referents are vaguer (they do not indicate Seville, in any event). In fact, the opening text of *Acéphale* ("*La conjuration sacrée*") ["The Sacred Oath"] is dated "Tossa": in the spring of 1936 Bataille went there to meet André Masson, the illustrator of the review that was then in the process of being put together. And

10. In the section of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* Bataille was to publish in 1945 under the title "L'odeur de la mort" (cf. *supra*, note 6), Pilar tells Robert Jordan that on that day, May 2, 1922, as they were going to the arena together, Blanquet had smelled on Granero an odor presaging his death, *obscoena*: of ill omen.

11. Cf. Leo Weinstein, *The Metamorphosis of Don Juan* (Palo Alto, California, Stanford University Press, 1959), which, in Chapter IX, gives all the necessary details concerning the life of the "true" Don Juan. He is in fact buried under the porch of the church of La Caridad in his natal city and had caused the following to be carved onto the gravestone: "Here lie the bones and ashes of the worst man who ever lived."

it was while gazing at (meditating on) the figures of the acephalic anthropoid the painter had created to serve as the magazine's emblem that *Don Giovanni* was put on the turntable. Suddenly, out of the unexpected conjunction of Mozart's music and Masson's figure a new, phantasmagorical composition emerged that Bataille immediately recognized. "At that moment," he notes, "I saw the intruder created by those two equally wild obsessions turn into '*Le tombeau de Don Juan*' ['The Tomb of Don Juan']." Not Don Juan himself (because he would not give up his head) but, rather, his tomb. We note that in the *Acéphale* manifesto this grave accompanies a glorious state of exaltation that recalls—all things of course being equal—the frenzy that seizes the characters in *Histoire de l'oeil* when they find themselves in its vicinity. No sooner is it evoked than this grave manages to dissipate all of the reservations Bataille had had, in other circumstances, with regard to the Burlador himself. More seductive dead than alive, death has enabled him to overcome the aridity of rationalistic debauchery. The *Acéphale* project as a whole was inspired by an activist Nietzscheanism: thus, we are free to regard Don Juan's being replaced by his own tomb as a prefiguration of what was later, in *La souveraineté*, to be described as Don Juan's being overtaken by Nietzsche. The designation of the Acephalic character as an "intruder" would also tend to support our regarding him as an avatar of the Comendador.

An odd jamming effect, a strange role confusion, makes it generally difficult to single out in Bataille's work the attributes assigned by the traditional legend to Don Juan and the Comendador. At decisive moments the characters even seem to change roles. Don Juan appears when we might have expected the Comendador. When Simone learns that she is walking on the rake's grave she is overcome by a spasm in which she desecrates the stone in a fit incontinent hilarity. In *Histoire de l'oeil* the scene in La Caridad is the rigorous, but inverted, equivalent of the scene that, in canonical versions of the legend, occurs in the cemetery: here, however, the grave is not that of the Comendador; Don Juan has taken the cadaver's place.

This contamination of both characters, the kind of revolving-door effect that replaces one with the other, has its consequences. The couple created by Don Juan and the Comendador corresponds fairly roughly, as we have seen, to the taboo-transgression apparatus at the generative nucleus of Bataille's thought. In it, Don Juan personifies festivity, impenitent expenditure. Inversely, the Comendador is the one who sees that the taboos are respected, who punishes the transgressors, who stands on obligations: he represents the world of the reliable, of work, thrift, health. We should examine the implications of a displacement that assigns the role of the Comendador to Don Juan, that sets transgression in the place of duty: in Bataille, Don Juan occupies the position the Comendador normally occupies vis-à-vis Don Juan. What happens to the Comendador once Don Juan has taken his place? At what cost has the latter

allowed himself to be swayed by the death instinct? Does he willingly allow himself to be turned into the object of a necrophiliac interest?

Bataille's Don Juan, in fact, oscillates between the two positions to which legend has shown him to be the most allergic: if he isn't dead, he's a necrophiliac. For he is not merely the character whose grave induces the characters in *Histoire de l'oeil* to act out their fantasies; the entire textual linkage to "blue of noon" makes him the object of a necrophilia that is completely contrary to his legend. This body of work, which goes back to the years 1934–1935, includes, in addition to the novel, the series of aphorisms of the same title.[12] Presenting the latter in *L'expérience intérieure*, Bataille was to propose what he called his "naïve" vision of a Don Juan embodying "carousal" and "enjoyable orgy." *Le Bleu du ciel* has quite rightly been called "Bataille's *Don Juan*."[13] It is nonetheless difficult to see anything at all festive or pleasurable about his hero, the sombre Troppmann. Of all Bataille's characters he is the one who is haunted by the most irremissible, the most melancholic of necrophilias. In talking about Manet's *Olympia* (the picture that, even more than the same painter's *Lola de Valence*, evokes the Baudelairean pink and black gem, a picture of a pallor and almost deathlike redolence that shocked its first spectators), Bataille was to speak of painting's treating of the female nude as a still life. Nothing better answers to the urges of Troppmann, who on two occasions manifests a taste for corpses that forces his mistresses into a shocking degree of cooperation. It is in the grandiose final scene, however, that his necrophilia reaches its peak: Troppmann, his impotence exorcised at last, makes love with Dirty in the mud of the cemetery in Trier, among the dank tombs. The very data adds piquancy to the event: the scene takes place on All Hallow's Day (the Day of the Dead), November 1, 1934.[14] Here, the metaphorical crypt is made as overt as possible: "Beneath that belly," he notes, "the earth was open like a grave; her naked belly opened to me like a new-dug grave." We recall *Le tombeau*: "Je tombe dans l'immensité / qui tombe en elle-même" ["I fall into the vastness / that crumbles into itself."] Falling into the grave, the interment of this endless fall deprives him of substantive rest.

12. Bataille, *Le bleu du ciel*, published in *Minotaure* (No. 8, June 1936), accompanied by a poem by André Masson, who had also illustrated both pieces. Dated August 1934, this *Bleu du ciel*, which has nothing to do with the novel of the same title, was reprinted in *L'expérience intérieure* (*O.C.*, V, p. 92).

13. Jeffrey Mehlman, "Ruse de Rivoli: Politics and Deconstruction," MLN, October 1976, p. 1065.

14. Bataille here confuses All Hallow's Day and the Day of the Dead: "We arrived at Trier one Sunday morning (the first of November)," he writes, in the chapter entitled "The Day of the Dead" (*Le bleu du ciel*, *O.C.*, III, p. 479).

Leo Weinstein, *op, cit.*, Chapter XI, notes that the performance of Torilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* on the following day (November 2) is a tradition throughout the Hispanic world. Cf. Bataille's posthumous (but dated in the 1930s) text entitled "Calaveras" (*O.C.*, II, p. 409): "In the Mexican festivals Don Juan is also present (as a skeleton)."

Laure's book, *Ecrits, fragments, lettres* (edited by J. Peignot, U.G.E., 10/18, 1978), con-

Fabrics

I was certain I was going to find Emmanuel Kant, he was waiting for me on the other side of the door. I opened it and, to my surprise, I found myself face to face with emptiness.

—Bataille, *L'Abbé C*

In *Le bleu du ciel* [*Blue of Noon*] Troppmann is never explicitly described as an avatar of Don Juan. Or, rather (the narrative is in the first person), he never describes himself as such, never expressly identifies himself with Don Juan. That identification is nonetheless made, however, if only as a countereffect of the various occurrences in the course of which the Comendador is cited or brought up. On several occasions Troppmann has an opportunity to send him an invitation or recalls having done so.

He does so for the first time in the very short "Part One" of the novel. One of the aphorisms of which it consists makes a singularly cryptic reference to an event that we know occurred ("really": in Bataille's own life and not only in his hero's) during the night of July 24–25, 1934, in the Italian town of Trento.[15] Apart from this elliptical reference, two factors in the scene stand out: the first introduces a homosexual note (Bataille speaks of "two elderly pederasts twirling as they danced"); as for the second, it in fact is the mention of the Comendador, informing us that in the middle of the night he burst into the hotel room to which the narrator had invited him (oozing "a substance more fearsome than blood") to participate in a dismal orgy.

The second mention of the "stone guest" occurs during a conversation between Troppmann and Lazare. Seized by a need to confide that he himself is the first to find odd, Troppmann confesses the complexities of his emotional and sexual life to the "dirty virgin" of the extreme left. He tells her, in particular, of his latest Viennese disappointments: of his necrophiliac obsessions, of his impotence, of the departure of Dirty, who left him alone in the Austrian capital. Then, heartsick, he had decided to return to his hotel. A summer storm

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cludes with a "Recapitulatif" in which Bataille makes a day-by-day reconstruction of his comings and goings between June and November 1934 (as "Les présages," *O.C.*, II, pp. 266 ff., does for May 1935, the month in which, in Barcelona, Bataille finished writing *Le bleu du ciel*). He left Paris on the evening of the 30th of October, arrived in Trier on the morning of the first. Under 2 November, he notes: "Shopping in the morning in Trier. then dep[arture] at 10:36 Moselle. 12 Koblenz Lunch Eisbeim and coffee 3:45 sailboat on the Rhine cemeteries asters and candles 6 o'clock Frankfurt Romer. dinner Börsenkeller. 5:52 Edith leaves for Heidelberg" (*op. cit.*, p. 374).

15. Cf. Bataille's calendar mentioned above, which indicates the date July 24, 1934: "Arrive at MC. find L. at 8, leave for 30 arr[ive] Trento around 11, stroll along the Adige return hot[el] Bologna. Telephone" (*op. cit.*, p. 368; MC = Mezzo-corona; L = Laure, 30 = Trente (Trent or Trento, Italy).

had been about to break, and in order to let some air into his room he had opened the window at the very moment that a long banner had come partly detached from its pole and was flapping above the street. "You know the story of the cloth covering the supper table when Don Juan arrives?" Troppmann asks. Lazare: "What does that have to do with your story?" "Nothing, except that the cloth was black."

A bit further on, Paris is the setting for a similar episode. Troppmann is sick. He is unable to go out. Xénie comes to care for him, and he seizes the opportunity to draw her into his necrophiliac scenarios. However, at the sight of the open window he is overcome with anxiety, with a sudden vertigo: "All at once a twisted shadow fell from the sunlit sky. It flapped against the window-frame. . . . In my dazed condition I thought that the person I called the 'Comendador' had arrived. He came every time I invited him."

In fact, Troppmann's fever had been making him hallucinate. Someone on the floor above had been shaking a rug out of the window. In *Le bleu du ciel*, in which he is mentioned so frequently, the Comendador never appears in person, in the flesh, outside quotation marks. He is only mentioned. The Other never makes an appearance: the Comendador stubbornly refuses to make any visible response to an appeal to which, nevertheless, he never fails to reply. Who is the Comendador? From out of the depths of his impersonal polymorphism he confines himself to sending a series of lieutenants who enable him to avoid having to reveal his identity, to leave his crypt. We must forgo any light's being shed upon him. "The language of flowers" evoked "the fantastic and impossible vision of the roots." That of the Comendador has the same attributes. In this sense his position is rigorously identical to that of the Archons who, according to the tenets of Gnosticism, "were supposed to reveal" the absence of light.[16] We are forced to wonder about the nature of the order implied by the imperative quality of his title: what does the Comendador command? At this point, however, we can discern his primary effect: he conceals the sun, soils its clarity, "dims" its purity, its transparency. ("As though a stream of ink had flowed through the clouds"; "a cloud of soot darkened the sky"; "huge black insects appeared in the blue sky with a noise like a whirlwind"; "the funerary marble was alive, here and there it was *hairy*.") One of the Comendador's peculiarities is a kind of heterogeneous filth: the opaque nucleus of a black hole, a blind spot. His is the furnace in which the solar disc is eaten up, sinks (burns black). A calcified heliotropic matrix, he opens what Derrida has called white mythology.

So it was nothing but a rug. And its whiplike noise evokes the sound made by the Viennese banner, also black. This rug and this banner, however, which remind Troppmann of the black cloth that covers the table at which Don Juan awaits the Comendador, also reminds the reader of *Histoire de l'oeil* of a

16. Bataille, "Le bas matérialisme et la gnose," *Documents*, 1930, No. 1 (*O.C.*, I, p. 223).

story of an earlier piece of fabric, the one that serves as a back-cloth at the beginning of the novel in the chapter entitled "Une tache de soleil" ["A spot of sun"]. It evokes an identical "apparition," albeit in this case it is its exact photographic negative. In *Le bleu du ciel* it is a band of black cloth that scores the sun like a spasm or hiccough of light: a whiplash eclipse. *Histoire de l'oeil* has the opposite: day-for-night,[17] the luminosity of a white, damp sheet rends the black night, flapping in the gusting storm wind. How long must we continue to differentiate between window and grave, especially when neither can be closed? "Coïncidences" ["Coincidences"], published at the end of *Histoire de l'oeil*, links this sheet to a memory involving the figure of an actual "ghost," of a Comendador. Bataille connects it to his fear when ten years before, on a nighttime stroll, his older brother had pretended to be a ghost and had emerged from the ruins of a château wrapped in a white sheet. There is, however, one major difference between this white sheet against a black background and the black fabrics that flap against a white background in *Le bleu du ciel*. It holds true throughout both novels. And it is political.

In fact, the banner that inspires Troppmann's terror in Vienna has nothing to do with the randy holiday spirit described in "Coïncidences." We learn that it was hung "in honor of the death of Dollfuss." The Austrian Chancellor was assassinated on July 25, 1934 (a day before Troppmann's arrival in the capital), the victim of an attempted Nazi putsch whose failure—which allowed for a relative, albeit short-term, respite—nonetheless presaged the most sombre future. And this intrusion of contemporary politics into the fabric of the novel, the insertion of this tragic reality into the text, is no isolated event. With the exception of the London scenes of the "Introduction," every episode in *Le bleu du ciel*, after its fashion, employs this device. In Paris, for example, Troppmann frequents extreme-left circles. And the Spanish section of the novel takes place in Barcelona at the time of the Catalonian insurrection of October 1934: now, the *emocion* is created by the revolution, not by the bullfight. (Indeed, nothing in the uncommitted eroticism of *Histoire de l'oeil* tells us that Spain was still a monarchy in 1922). As for the last section of *Le bleu du ciel* ("Le jour des morts" ["All Hallows' Day"]), Germany is depicted as having been aggressively Nazi for the past two years or more. What happens to the various characters in the novel, and to Troppmann in particular, is never foreign to a setting that is much more than mere backdrop. Is it a *roman engagé*—a novel of political commitment? The term implies an optimism that is out of place in such a sombre landscape: there can be no commitment without hope. But yes, it is a political novel.

Nothing is more foreign to Bataille's style than an overt politicization of the sexual. The concurrence of political and erotic motives in *Le bleu du ciel* is

17. Concerning the day-for-night effect in Bataille, see my "La nuit américaine," *Poétique*, No. 22, 1975.

therefore all the more remarkable. Without ever being intermingled, they intertwine, they repeat each other, each in a way understudies the other, becomes the other's double, its accompaniment, almost its echo. For whom does the bell toll? Interment is in the air in 1934. And the funeral of Dollfuss is not an isolated event. In the aftermath of the Day of the Long Knives there was no need to wonder whom history, that impacable Comendador, was preparing to welcome with open arms. Nonetheless, even if the "bad omens" that appear in the "blue sky" of the novel are primarily political, we must not overlook the Latin word which names them: *obscoena*. The obscene forebodes the worst. On the novel's final page the fanfare being performed by the musicians of the *Hitlerjugend* creates a spectacle the narrator describes as "obscene." Can we say that that epithet describes a mere political reaction? Nor is it merely sexual: the reciprocal incompatibility of Troppmann and Lazare obviously illustrates the fact that the sexual and the political are too allergic to each other to communicate, to intermingle. It is illustrated, however, against the background of the narrowest coexistence, against the background of a continguity that is almost ineluctable: strangely contemporary, strangers and contemporaries. Their sharing is at once necessary and undecidable. Indeed, the same simultaneity exists between the Comendador's two decisive appearances—the nighttime episode in Trento and Dollfuss's murder occur during the same twenty-four-hour period from 24 to 25 July. In other words, at the very moment that the Comendador, in his "sexual" avatar, bursts into the hotel room, across the Austro-Italian frontier the murder of one of the last representatives of democracy in Central Europe is making imminent the arrival on the scene of what could be described as his "political" version.[18] It is then that Leporello begins to tremble.

18. Bataille's calendar (cf. note 14) makes no mention of a stop in Vienna. Bataille left Paris for Innsbruck, where he spent the night of July 20. Three days later, the 23rd, he is in Italy, and, after a night in Bolzano, he is in Trento on the 24th (the day after Dollfuss's assassination in Vienna). From the 24th to the 30th he was at various locations in the area (Molveno, Andalo, the Dolomites). He left on the 30th (or perhaps the 29th) and arrived in Innsbruck on the 31st: ("Lunch Innsbruck, arrived station money. black banners"). From there, three days later, he left for Zurich (August 4) and Paris, where he arrived on the 5th.

It is probably the "black banners" of Innsbruck that in the novel become the black banner in Vienna. Bataille's arrival in Innsbruck, however, was six days after Dollfuss's murder; whereas Troppmann arrived in Vienna on the day after the assassination, in other words (according to Bataille's calendar) the day after the night in Trento as well.

It should be recalled that, first, in the novel the events of the "First Part" (the night in Trento) are evoked with no mention of either site or date. There is nothing to indicate that they occur in Italy. Nor are they in any way connected with the rest of the narrative. The only connection is the recurrence of the name of the Comendador. Indeed, when Troppmann and Dirty arrive in Vienna, they are not (like Bataille and Laure) coming from Italy, but from Prüm, a small German village near Trier. It should also be borne in mind, secondly, that according to Bataille's calendar the episodes in Trento (in August) and Trier (November) took place in the company of different women, Laure in the first instance, Edith in the second.

The same simultaneity prevails in the two versions of impotence depicted in *Le bleu du ciel*: Troppmann's sexual impotence and the political impotence a series of bad omens forces the labor movement to face. The two versions of necrophilia also enter in: that of Troppmann, sexual in nature, is in fact echoed by the political version advanced by Lazare. This "bird of ill-omen," as he calls her, wastes her energies on behalf of a socialism of despair, works solely towards her own defeat. We know that Simone Weil, who served as a model for the character, joined the Communist Democratic Circle at the same time as Bataille. In a brief note dating from that period Bataille summed up her positions: "S. W. appears to be impelled to play the role of depicting the impasses of socialism and of seeking her demise in some street brawl or penitentiary."[19] Lazare too prefers dead ends to avenues. Troppmann goes so far as to suspect her of having entered into a contract with death. She excludes all considerations of usefulness or feasibility from the political activities in which she engages. "If the working class has had it," he asks her wonderingly, "why are you socialists?" Lazare's necrophilia allows her, however, to feel comfortable with socialism only because socialism itself is facing what will become a dead-end situation. She belongs to the labor movement because she sees it as condemned to "an implacable and sterile death." Because it already has one foot in the grave. It is on the brink of "burying itself." But, according to Bataille, it is just such stubbornness *in extremis* that enables the revolutionary conscience to elevate itself to the level of political Don Juanism.

All the political texts written by Bataille in this period (which was also the most intensely politicized period of his life) take as given the imminent victory of a fascism in which it is tempting to discern a Comendador figure[20]. They do not try to avoid that inevitability or to delay its arrival. The only thing with which they are concerned is a definition of the attitude proper to a true revolutionary in the face of the ineluctable unfolding of events. This is the point at which Don Juan breaks off his solidarity with Leporello. In 1934 Bataille planned to write a book on *Le fascisme en France* [*Fascism in France*]. The rioting on the Place de la Concorde on February 6 had struck him as one of the worst of omens, and his detailed account of the succeeding days ("En attendant la grève générale" ["Waiting for the General Strike"]) stresses the close connection between the events in Paris and the recent installation of Nazi power in Germany, as well as with the threats of civil war in Spain and Austria: the international configuration creates "a dead-end situation": "On all sides, in a world

19. Bataille, *O.C.*, II, p. 435 (note, page 173). Bataille's calendar indicates that in Innsbruck he had received, on August 4, the day of his departure, a letter from S. W. Once back in Paris, he saw her on the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th (*op. cit.*, p. 370).
20. This identification was put forward by Jeffrey Mehlman (*op. cit.*, p. 1065) and Ann Smock ("Politics and Eroticism in *Le bleu du ciel*," *Semiotext(e)*, No. 5, 1976).

that will soon become unlivable, the fascist grip is tightening."[21] Yet at the same time he views this "lack of a way out" as a unique opportunity being offered the revolutionary conscience to take on a Don Juanesque dimension, in other words, as an opportunity for a despairing Marxism, suddenly permeable to the tragic, to accede to what Bataille was shortly to term joy in the face of death. "The Problem of the State," in 1933, described the labor movements that were soon, in "the three servile societies" (Germany, Italy, and Russia), to come under the control of "the most imperious masters to which they had ever been subjected." Obviously such a disorientation can only give rise to anxiety, but anxiety will henceforth be the revolutionary emotion *par excellence*, the troubled acme of revolt, infinitely more revolutionary, indeed, than any strategy or any optimistic plan. The revolutionary is the person who is not deterred by ignorance about the future. On the edge of the grave, facing the absolute master, the Don dismisses Leporello from his service. "Just as it happens in any condition of *angst*, the revolutionary conscience is freed and enlarged by the awareness of possible death."[22] For his part, Don Juan does not recoil at the approach of death.

True, Bataille's Don Juan has feelings for the Comendador that can never be subsumed into mere hostility. Necrophilia implies all kinds of good feelings towards the dead. If he extends an invitation to him (as Troppmann does in Trento), it is out of a defiant gesture obviously reminiscent of the potlatch, but it is also because of all the libidinal elements that are present in aggression. In addition, the thanatophiliac twist Bataille gives to Don Juan's character cannot be exerted without creating decisive changes in the figure of the Comendador. The traditional version of the legend entrusts to the latter the announcement that the party is over: the time of reckoning has come, the time to salvage what can be salvaged, to atone for what cannot. He urges the sinner at last to take his errors seriously, to repent before paying. There is none of this in Bataille's Comendador, who, to begin with, is always a participant in the festivities. Of course one could imagine that, without him, Don Juan's orgies would be pleasant ones. We must nevertheless note that none of them proceeds without him, without his making heard his tragic note: he is the incarnation of a kind of misfortune, but an orgiastic one. Thus, far from representing morality, the firm hand of the law, far from intervening to collect what is owed, he always incites to expenditure, he raises the stakes in the debauch and, acting as an *agent provocateur*, impels Don Juan to transgress, initiates him into the uneasy pleasures of amorous criminality. We do not see him collect his tithe of pleasure. On the contrary, at his approach a kind of state of urgency is created

21. Bataille, "En attendant la grève générale," *O.C.*, II, p. 262. The events in *Le bleu du ciel* occur just ten months following this crisis, to which the novel, oddly enough, makes no reference at all.
22. Bataille, "Le problème de l'Etat," *La critique sociale*, No. 9, September 1933 (*O.C.*, I, p. 334).

in which transgression assumes the force of law, in which expenditure becomes the prime imperative: he establishes the terrorism of bliss.

This is the kind of thing that seems to be brought into play during the night in Trento, in so far as we are able to pierce the cryptic referentiality of the indications provided. If the "phantom" or the "corpse" of the *vecchio infatuato* did appear in the hotel room in the dead of night, it was not to put an end to the orgy in progress but to participate in it, to draw it with him into the depths of the grave for all eternity.[23] Perhaps an intruder, but not therefore an undesirable one, in Bataille's work the Comendador is in that ambivalent zone of interest where attraction is not distinguished from repulsion, where the horrible is equally desirable, sometimes even desirable because horrible.

Nowhere is this question better posed than in *L'histoire de rats* [*Story of the Rats*], a story in which the principal narrator (Dianus) explicitly compares himself to Don Juan, and, upon several occasions, mentions a Comendador who turns out to be the father, not (as in the legend) of the woman to whom he is married, but of the one he desires. Freud drew a connection between the incest taboo and the origins of exogamy and the sensual avarice of the primitive father unwilling to share any of the women belonging to him. Whereas in the legend the Comendador intervenes to restore respect for the (exogamic) law of marriage, the character in *L'histoire de rats*—like the father in *Totem and Taboo*—will go to any lengths to prevent another man from laying hands on his daughter. Indeed, a senile and bestial version of polymorphous perversity, he accumulates all the vices, for in addition to his incestuous relationship with his daughter the narrator also terms his relationship with his gamekeeper, Edron, a "friendship against nature." Yet all that still does not prevent the person forbidden (under penalty of death) access to his daughter from evidencing towards him feelings that, although not devoid of elements of anxiety and even horror, are nevertheless finally not merely negative. As when Dianus notes in his journal: "I never abandoned hope of shaking the Comendador's stone hand."[24]

In contrast to *Histoire de l'oeil, L'histoire de rats* does not end with an orgy catalyzed by Don Juan's grave. The father dies, and thus a real commander

23. Bataille's calendar contains no decipherable reference to the traumatic anecdote. We may wonder about the identity of the "man from Andalo" mentioned on the 28th (when Bataille had gone to Andalo on the 25th). Further, to what does this entry, dated the 30th (was he still in Trento) refer: "sacrifices and 2 burials"? Other questions: what did the Italian press have to say about Dollfuss's assassination? Did Bataille read it? In addition, what made Bataille and Laure choose Trento, once he had joined up with her in Austria? Was it to celebrate the great Counter-Reformation Council?

The association of the name of the city of Trento with macabre lubricity was to recur to an even greater degree upon Bataille's use of it on two later occasions. Once, when he signed *Le petit* with the pseudonym Louis Trente (*O.C.*, III, p. 33). A second time when he wanted to entitle a collection of obscene poetry *La tombe de Louis XXX* (XXX = 30 = *trente* = Trento) (*O.C.*, IV, p. 151). Published in 1943, *Le petit* bears the false date 1934, claiming the same vintage as the events of Trent.

24. Bataille, *L'impossible* (*O.C.*, III, p. 166).

ends up as the corpse at the moment of Dianus's encounter with the daughter. Here, Don Juan is no longer the object of some necrophilic taste. He has himself become a necrophile. The Comendador becomes a part of his desire when he admits his goal of shaking his stone hand. The scenario of Bataille's Don Juan thus entails two decisive alterations: the Comendador's sexualization and Don Juan's necrophilia. The Comendador is the one who, as a dead person, is placed by Don Juan's desire in the position of primary seducer. It is no longer enough, therefore, to say that the Comendador gives his seduction to the "seducer." He now appears as the person who has always already seduced the seducer, the person who first initiated, aroused, his desire: the Comendador is Don Juan's Don Juan, the primal tempter who predisposes his libido to necrophilia.

The quasi-simultaneity of the excesses of the night in Trento and the assassination of Dollfuss has led to an identification of the political version of Bataille's Comendador with the fascistic state structures that were being put into place in those days in a growing number of European nations and that were beginning to threaten France, both from within and from without. What implications does this have for the attraction to the Comendador his Don Juan rarely fails to feel? Should this interest in the Comendador lead us to posit a sympathy for fascism?

In denouncing the shortcomings of the legendary Don Juan, Bataille regretted above all that he should persist until the end in being hostile to and outside of a law that will thus crush him "from without." This is because he is incapable of recognizing the Comendador, because he is not equal to what happens to him and, thus, his experience will continue to be of the minor character from which only Nietzsche's experience is able to escape. If we view his Comendador as a fascist figure, then the same is true for Bataille's. For even if there were suspicions that Bataille's antifascism in 1933–1934 (the period in which he was collaborating on *La critique sociale* and writing *Le bleu du ciel*) was a preparation for the "superfascism" of which he was to be accused at the time of *Contre-Attaque* and the Collège de Sociologie, it is nonetheless obvious that a fascist victory, *per se*, even when experienced as ineluctable, was still something totally foreign to the wishes of Bataille who, in any event, never claimed any responsibility for it. A fascist Comendador would be an undesirable one.

The Grave of Karl Marx

One day this living world will pullulate in my dead mouth.

—Bataille, *L'Histoire de l'érotisme,*
Part Three, III, 2

Bataille's Comendador? We must now call that expression into question. We must examine its aptness. If there were such a thing as Bataille's own Comendador would he not be too appropriate to remain truly a Comendador for Bataille? To what extent can he be annihilated by a Comendador who would belong to him? Moreover, can we say that the Comendador is truly desirable? Bataille says that it is "in spite of ourselves" that black dims our dream of purity. Without it, however, we could not have such a dream. What is this black—a black we do not desire but yet without which we cannot desire? Do we desire them "in spite of ourselves," with a desire that is at once absentminded and stronger than us, a desire totally free from any attraction? There is no hypocrisy in this duplicity, no double game. Bataille, who insists that black betrays our desire for purity "in spite of ourselves," simultaneously reproaches Don Juan for being overcome by the Comendador "from without." It is in this same blank space or border that the debate between war and revolution between Troppmann and Lazare takes place. (What is a civil war? Up to what point can one hold the difference between the enemy from within and the enemy from without?) Bataille was to qualify as "inner experience" that experience that dislocates any value of interiority, intimacy, self-awareness. In like manner the encounter between Don Juan and the Comendador lays out a space within which the opposition between interior and exterior, inside and outside, ceases to be valid. It is as though, as soon as the Comendador has become a part of Don Juan's desire, Don Juan must become a stranger to his own desire. Maintaining that Bataille kept himself apart from fascism cannot exclude the fact that fascism might well have provided him with a few highly desirable Comendadors.

Do not misunderstand me: my intention here is not to show at any price that Bataille's Comendador could have been incarnate in some fascist figure. Nor the opposite. My intent is not to cleanse Bataille of the suspicion of having on occasion flirted with or even "made up to" that system—which he considered the most imperative—of political organization. Rather, I would suggest that in his case such a flirtation[25] was in line with a pattern that, although occasionally

25. This point still calls for clarification. Biographical information that is still (or in the future) inaccessible is required. Here I would merely mention the planned journal mentioned by Dominique Rabourdin in the introduction to the posthumous volume pieces by Jean Bernier entitled *L'amour de Laure* (Paris, Flammarion, 1978, p. 48). Drieu la Rochelle was to have been the editor-in-chief, Charles Peignot the business manager, Colette Peignot the assistant editor (was

connected with a fascistic referent, nevertheless lies at the very heart of socialist or Marxist, dialectics. Within the production relationships that make up capitalism, this pattern assigns to the bourgeoisie the role of a sorcerer's apprentice. Don Juan does not know what he is setting in motion when he issues his invitation to the Comendador: he will be brought down by the "feedback" of his insolence. It is to a similar "bringing down" that the bourgeoisie exposes itself through its broadening of the wage-earning class: unintentionally, it is challenging the proletarian Comendador who—from within or from without?—must inevitably annihilate it. "The bourgeoisie," wrote Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*, "is like the sorcerer who finds himself unable to exorcise the infernal forces he has summoned up." And he continues: "Not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that will kill it; it has also produced the men who will employ those weapons—the modern workers, the *proletariat*." And since the keynote here is necrophilism, we can repeat the proverbial version in which that theorem is popularly couched: "what the bourgeoisie produces, above all, are its own gravediggers."

Bataille reproaches the legendary Don Juan with failing to realize that the Comendador is right. The same reproach cannot be leveled against Troppmann. Which makes it also clear that he does not plead guilty before fascism. He has selected as his judges the workers and militants of the revolutionary movements that represent them. During the Barcelona uprising, for example, he admits to having "a guilty conscience towards the workers," regrets not being "on the same side as the strikers," remaining, in the midst of the disturbances, "a rich Frenchman in Catalonia for his pleasure." With the workers, but *from outside*: the friend from without. Similarly, it is with Lazare, the extreme-left militant, that he allows himself to feel shame because of his tanned, too-carefully tended hands, his light-colored, too properly cared-for clothing. Ashamed of them, but also afraid for them: they are too clean to be *where* they are, clean with a heterogenous, inappropriate, cleanliness. Along this line of thought he explicitly associates Lazare's character with the black cloth laid for the stone guest. Troppmann's Don-Juanism is not directed towards fascism; it is the Don-Juanism of a necrophiliac and masochistic bourgeois who is already in the name of truth and justice a subscriber to the cause of the proletarian gravediggers. In this connection, we recall that the only proletarian in the book, the elevator boy at the Savoy who witnesses the nauseating repercussions of the ex-

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she already called Laure? was she already Bataille's mistress or still Bernier's?). On the editorial board: Bataille, Bernier, etc. Later, Bataille was to refer, with lukewarm approval, to the hypothesis of Soviet Nietzscheanism suggested by Drieu la Rochelle in *Socialisme fasciste* ("Nietzsche et les fascistes," *Acéphale*, No. 2 [January 1937]; *O.C.*, I, p. 451). Information furnished by Roger Caillois, who saw Drieu fairly frequently in the classroom of the Collège de Sociologie. When he assumed the direction of the *N.R.F.* in 1940, Drieu wrote to Bataille to ask him to participate.

cesses of Dirty and Troppmann, is throughout the novel's first scene designated by the expression "the gravedigger": bluntly, quite as if there were no need for any explanation. The scene occurs in London, that is, at a barely respectful distance from Marx's grave, as will be noted later, at the other end of the narrative, when the same couple, Dirty and Troppmann, return to the city after having celebrated the day of the dead (after their fashion) in the Trier cemetery. Whereupon Troppmann says, "I was thinking of little Karl Marx and of the beard he had later, when he grew up: and now he's underground, near London." We must imagine the Comendador as bearded, or at least hairy. So goes the course of *Le bleu du ciel*: from London where he died to the graveyard in Trier where he was born, the Comendador emerges from Marx's grave. Indeed, a few years earlier, in "La 'vieille taupe' et le préfixe 'sur'" ["Old Mole," "super" or "over"] (sporting, as an epigraph, a Marxist proverb along the same lines: "In history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life"), "Marx's point of departure" had already been rooted in the recesses of a similar crypt: "in the bowels of the earth." In addition, we can also imagine the Comendador as being muddy. Or: Dirty.

After the 1930s, once the fascist threat had faded, the general project reflected in the posthumous work, *La souveraineté*, confirms this Marxist version of the Comendador. This, one recalls, is the book in which Bataille sketches out the parallel between the Don and Nietzsche mentioned earlier. Who, in fact, would be Nietzsche's Comendador, the Comendador who crushes him "from within"? If we follow the overall development of this unfinished work, it seems that he must be identified with Stalin (whose death had occurred while Bataille was writing the book), with communism, or with "Soviet man."

"The Comendador," Bataille writes, "wins only if his murderer recognizes him as being in possession of the truth." The Comendador had to first be killed by Don Juan in order to enable that service to be rendered in turn to him. The same holds true for the proletariat: Bataille's Marxism may be a version of what he calls love for a mortal being. Were Troppmann to agree to postpone examination of the post-revolutionary problems that obsess him, it is quite possible that the revolution, too, might prepare for itself a less sombre future. The responsibility of Troppmann and his ilk for the death of the proletariat does not, however, solve everything. It must also be made clear that the proletariat has reason to be dead, that it is dead because it has reason: that its demise is not the result of Troppmann's errors but also of its own truth. Hegel says that "upholding the work of death is what demands the greatest strength." Bataille paraphrases: the life of the spirit is not to be frightened by Hegel. Indeed, the future of the proletariat is to be the realization of what Hegel's dead voice has foretold. As an orthodox disciple of Kojève, Bataille took the concept of the end of history literally: if the class struggle is inherent in man's humanity, man will die as soon as he ceases to oppose himself, as soon as he does without differing or difference. The birth of Soviet man is another name for the

death of man. In a chapter whose title opens the door to strange casuistic subtleties ("The sovereignty of Soviet man linked to a sovereign renunciation of sovereignty"), Bataille was to go so far as to identify that fate with that of "the king who voluntarily allows himself to be put to death by those whose king he was."[26] *Eritis sicut Dianus*. The death of the proletariat is not simply due to Troppmann's inadvertences, it is also proper to the vocation of the proletariat. For Bataille, who generally sided with communism without ever becoming a Communist, the emergence of Soviet man (*homo sovieticus*) represents the impersonal triumph of an entropic rationality that subjects what is to the equivalency principle, that lacks the strength to make distinctions, that has only the strength to demolish them. Death, not as an extravagant allowance, but as a homeostatic unbinding: as though death itself had ceased being alive, as though death itself were dead and life no longer worth the trouble not only of being lived but of being died.

"The attitude of the communists," Bataille wrote, "is the major position anticommunism can only counter by adopting a meaningless line." Unlike the Don Juan of the legend, Bataille thus acknowledges the truth of his Comendador. He expects from him, however, no recognition in return (otherwise, would he still be the Comendador?). It is not a question, therefore, of his opposing Marxism, but of his taunting it. Faced with the greater reason of Marxism, anticommunism can only maintain the validity of a lesser rationality. It is not a question of justifying oneself to Marxism, however, even less of being right against it, but, rather, of attaining through it a major culpability. Communism is necessary to Bataille's Don-Juanism because it alone enables a misdeed to reach "majority," it is the condition for what Blanchot was later, and in another context, to call a "major" indecency.

The stakes in this debate with the proletarian Comendador involve the relationships between literature and communism. The last section of *La souveraineté* is entitled "The Literary World and Communism." With regard to literature, it is a question principally of Nietzsche ("Nietzsche in the light of Marxism"). But *La littérature et le mal* [*Literature and Evil*] was to return to these problems within the framework of Bataille's discussion of the Sartrean theses of literary commitment, *engagement*. The basic proposition recognizes that only action has rights. But literature's goal is not practical truth. Hence, its only problem is knowing vis-à-vis whom it is willing to be guilty.

Communism, he states, has introduced "into the conscience of the most sensitive men" a new kind of cruel and rending choice "between what they love and what they stand for."[27] Here he is talking about communist or sympathizing intellectuals, generous men open to the rights of others and animated by a desire for justice, men who reject a defense of the values their bourgeois origins

26. Bataille, *La souveraineté*, II, IV, 6 (*O.C.*, VIII, p. 359).
27. *Ibid.*, III, 1, I, p. 365.

have instilled in them (a "picture," a "poem," a "passion," an "excessive joy"), deeply persuaded in advance as they are that "values which would look out of place next to a mine shaft are not worthy of being defended." These intellectuals, nevertheless, do not adopt as their own the values (working-class values) they defend. Whence, precisely, the painful schism between their principles and their tastes. Not so much because the latter are objectively indefensible, but because they would lose all their savor were they to be defended. Other bourgeois, more avaricious, withered into anxiety-filled selfishness, would like to transform their class values into universal values. For Bataille's communist intellectual the contrary is true: the proletarization of the universal finally frees him from the necessity of defending himself against the singular nature of his tastes. Not that he is innocent, but that he no longer forbids himself being guilty. Communism enables literature, finally, not to blame itself for being guilty.

"Until now I have been talking about Nietzsche, and I shall now speak of Kafka." A few lines after that statement of intent, the manuscript of *La souveraineté* breaks off. The announced treatment of Kafka was to appear in *La littérature et le mal.*[28] In the chapter of that collection devoted to the author of *The Trial* (or, rather, of *The Judgment*) Bataille reconsiders the question posed by a communist magazine at the time of the Liberation: "Should we burn Kafka?" We are reminded of Don Juan's death; the flames rise up on all sides, the Comendador causes him to fall into the fiery furnace of hell. From what, however, does Don Juan burn? Or Kafka? The dilemma recalls what has been quoted as his last words, when he is supposed to have told his physician, "Doctor, if you don't kill me, you're a murderer." The mystic dies of not dying. As for Kafka, he already burned to burn. His only problem concerned the origin of the flames. Would they come from within or from without? He called for fire, but he did not want to tend it himself. Would the Communists have responded to his last wishes better than did Max Brod, whose friendship forced him to draw a fire line? whose fidelity led him to betrayal? We can suppose so, if we give full weight to the conclusion of the Kafka chapter of *La littérature et le mal*: "The adult, if he gives a major significance to childish things, if he practices literature with the feeling of reaching the ultimate value, has no place in communist society." Indeed, according to Bataille, it is for this perverse and paradoxical reason that communist society, better than any other, would have answered to the secret desires of a writer like Kafka.

All of which is in more or less direct opposition to the Sartrean concept of status [*situation*]: one does not create one by writing. Or, put another way, literature needs communist society because it is the only one in which it can

28. The manuscript of *La souveraineté* was written around 1953. The study of Kafka that was to conclude the work had been published earlier: "Franz Kafka devant la critique communiste," *Critique*, No. 41, October 1950. When Bataille decided not to finish *La souveraineté* he included that study in *La littérature et le mal,* 1957 (*O.C.*, 1957; IX, pp. 271 ff).

escape having a status, the only society in which it is guaranteed never to have a status, in which it must renounce ever entering into the promised land. This debate lends unity to the collection of studies that make up *La littérature et le mal*. Literature, which is childhood recaptured, must at the same time plead guilty. For example, Bataille was to say of Baudelaire that "he chose to err, like a child." For, by being recaptured this childhood is henceforth lost, its innocence despoiled, it is condemned to perdition precisely because willed, chosen: deflowered. Literature identifies itself with that guilty childhood we might describe as a "major" childhood: it wastes no time defending itself. Indeed, the essential thing is that his demand for guilt in front of the Comendador be free of repentance. Such pleasures are indefensible, and the writer is the first to condemn what makes life enjoyable for him. He condemns, however, without renouncing: guilty but impenitent. Obviously, all of Bataille's analysis is based on a metaphor. Kafka never personally had anything to do with communism. Bataille, however, considers that his dealings with the paternal world constitute an adequate allegory of the trial to which literature subjects itself in the communist world. Kafka, he wrote, "was unwilling to stand up against a father who was withdrawing from him the possibilities for living."[29]

The Left Is Being Beaten

The superego is like a rat, lewd, cruel . . .

—Laplanche, *L'Angoisse* [*Anxiety*]

Bataille's earliest socio-political references are wholly consonant with an Oedipal model whose simplicity surprises us today: he flatly identifies the status of the proletariat within the capitalist system with that of a son whose father refuses to recognize and satisfy the desires that consume him. The resumé of the issue of *Contre-Attaque* Bataille was to edit with Bernier on "Family Life" begins with this equation: "The basis of social morality in a capitalist régime is the morality imposed by parents upon children."[30] And, in a draft of "La notion de dépense" ["The Idea of Expenditure"]: "The contradiction between common social perceptions and the true needs of society overwhelmingly recalls the narrowness of judgment that makes the father oppose the satisfaction of his son's needs."[31] We must stress that here we are talking about a good

29. Bataille, "Kafka," *La littérature et le mal*, *O.C.*, IX, p. 277.
30. Bernier and Bataille, "La vie de famille," in *Les Cahiers de Contre-Attaque*, 1935 (*O.C.*, I, p. 388).
31. Bataille, "Le paradoxe de l'utilité absolue," *O.C.*, II, p. 150 (and, even more clearly: "Les propositions contenues ici . . . ," *ibid.*, p. 76).

father, a father who does not oppose his son's "real" needs, who does whatever he can, in particular, to satisfy those that are related to his good, to his future. The only needs to which he turns a deaf ear are his fantasy needs, those that entail an unproductive expenditure. Precisely because he is good, such a father will be opposed only to what "inflames" his son, to things about which the son is "heated." Against a young, hot-blooded Don Juan, therefore, looms a dried-up old man: the class struggle prolongs the Oedipal conflict that sets age groups against each other. Revolutionary insurrection must be viewed as a collective version of parricide. Just as the son's sexuality is contained by the superego, which interiorizes paternal authority, proletarian energy is repressed by the paternalism of bourgeois power.

This homology gives rise to an identification, barely metaphorical, of the working class with the sexual organs. We encounter it, *inter alia*, in *L'anus solaire* [*The Solar Anus*]: "To the bourgeois, communist workers appear to be as ugly and as dirty as hairy as sexual parts or lower members."[32] Many of Bataille's political stands during this period, indeed, are based on a schematics—otherwise relatively traditional—in which the industrial proletariat is the crucible for some primary, unbridled energy. Bataille takes care to express his solidarity with the proletariat but his verbal support for the workers' struggles is not, in this sense, inspired by a concern for social justice or economic rationality. It is always a question of libidinal commitment. The proletariat being the incarnation of a nonrepressed sexuality, a kind of free obscenity, the individual who wants to escape from the bourgeois regime of castration finds himself of necessity compelled to join its ranks. Two propositions of "La 'vieille taupe' et le préfixe 'sur'" formulate the dual movement of such a strategy: the first states that "it is impossible to betray one's class through friendship for the proletariat"; the second, that "any noncastrated and domesticated intellectual activity is, owing to the force of circumstances, linked to the uprising of the lower social strata that is taking place today."[33]

In Bataille, therefore, the class struggle sets a proletarian and infantile sexuality in opposition to a desexualized capitalist maturity, or even: a sexuality viewed as an end in itself against a sexuality viewed as a means: the genitalization of adult sexuality, thereby transforming it into a productive expenditure, ends in its desexualization. This Oedipal schematics, however, is a surface effect that is quickly worn out, demolished. Bataille no doubt never totally abandoned the fantasy of a sexualized proletariat or, rather, that of an oversexualized *Lumpenproletariat*: in 1948, he continued to structure his reflections—

32. Bataille, *L'anus solaire*, 1931 (*O.C.*, I, p. 86). The proletariat is a kind of capitalist pubescence, the pilous system of capital. For the Freudo-Marxism being sketched out here, there is no need to make fellow travellers, advancing hand in hand, out of Marx and Freud. One would be rather more inclined to imagine Freud's hand in Marx's beard.
33. Bataille, "La 'vieille taupe' et le préfixe 'sur' dans les mots 'surhomme' et 'surréalisme,'" *O.C.*, II, pp. 100 and 94.

inspired by the Kinsey Report—on the linkages between the criminal underworld and sexuality.[34] What was to change, on the other hand, was the position such sexualization was to give the proletariat in the Oedipal scheme: no longer that of the son, but that of the father. Instead of representing the untamed child of the former schematics, the proletariat now formed a kind of prodigal father, an Ubuesque and lubricious Comendador claiming a monopoly on transgression. It should be borne in mind that the article on Kafka was to make a connection between the communist world and the paternal sphere. At the heart of that article is an examination of *The Judgment*, a narrative of Kafka in which the hero's name is George B.: the father depicted therein is not as upright as the identification with communism might lead us to think.

In 1927, at the time he was writing *Histoire de l'oeil* and *L'anus solaire*, and the period of his psychoanalysis with Adrien Borel, Bataille noted down a dream and added some associated afterthoughts:

> In the street, in front of the house we lived in in Rheims. I am on a bicycle, cobblestone street, streetcar tracks, very difficult for the bicycle, a cobblestone street and no notion of which way to go, right or left. More and more streetcar tracks. I brush against a streetcar but there is no accident. I want to get to the place where after a corner there is a street with a smooth surface but now it is probably too late and the wonderful smooth street one can turn onto and on which one can go faster is now cobblestoned as well. Indeed when I turn, the road is not like it used to be, it is being rebuilt but in so doing it has been transformed into a wide trench studded with very deep ⎽⎺⎽. I perceive these solid supports but more and more I see them shift their forms first as if made of the curved staves of empty wooden barrels to be filled with earth and then more and more disassembled barrels to be erected. It goes on as follows—wine-cellar workers extremely virile and rough and even horribly *black* come to set up the high, thin unsteady barrel. At that moment it turns pitch dark: I walk around in the garb of an American gentleman. To erect the barrel it is necessary to pull on thick ropes black with soot on which animals have been hung, like enormous atrocious rats by their tails, rats that threaten to bite, but they have to be killed. To their great delight the cellar workers are in contact with these filthy objects that they catch hold of with pleasure but the American visitor in his suit risks getting dirty and being bitten and he is pretty disgusted and even frightened. Nevertheless he holds his own with difficulty against

34. Bataille, "La révolution sexuelle et le Rapport Kinsey," *Critique*, No. 26, July 1948, and No. 27, August 1948 (reprinted in *L'érotisme* under the title "Kinsey, la pègre et le travail," Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1957).

> the slimy and bloody fish or the rats that are dead but threaten him at face level.[35]

The layout of this dream espouses without transposition the bipolar schematics of the class struggle: the proletariat figures prominently in it as underground laborer, part gravedigger, part "old mole." The men could be miners. In the Mallarméan "conflict," the workers are engaged in digging earthworks, as professional excavators. Here, they belong to the kind more prevalent in Rheims, wine-cellar workers. With the difference, however, that contrary to what happens in Mallarmé's prose poem, this dream contains no explicit aggression. The dreamer is not called dung. Yet he nonetheless feels himself threatened by the mere presence of the laborers. The dream does not tell us (nor does the dreamer) whether that threat is or is not desired. However, if the laborers in the dream—according to the analogy of *L'anus solaire*—do represent the lower, dirty, and hairy parts of society, the dream reveals Bataille's awareness, whether conscious or not, of the risks of dirtying himself through contact with them. For that matter, it is not overly difficult to recognize in this visiting "American gentleman" fearful for the cleanliness of his suit, a prefiguration of Troppmann, who in *Le bleu du ciel* is shown to be ashamed of the light-colored suit he is wearing in the middle of the revolution. But what is a suit?—in French it is a *complet*, a "complete," a whole. And what *can* happen to whatever bears that name?

The importance and evidence of these socio-political problematics in Bataille's narration of his dream make all the more surprising their total absence from the associations he later noted down. Here, the pattern of the class struggle is passed over in silence and replaced, without a single word of explanation, by an Oedipal problem. The "wine-cellar laborers" are not even mentioned: in their stead, as though nothing had happened, we have a figure Bataille calls "my father." For example, he notes: "Upon awakening, I associated horror at the rats with the memory of my father punishing me in the form of a bloody toad being pecked by a vulture (my father)." We know that the "Coincidences" of *Histoire de l'oeil*, contemporary with this dream narrative, sketch a picture of his father that portrays him as an astonishingly sorrowful, obscene, repulsive figure, a tragic grotesque with a touch of grandeur. It is in that portrait that we ought probably to seek the most likely operator of a substitution all the more surprising in that, as has been shown, the most explicit of the Oedipal schematics advanced by Bataille at this same period inevitably assign the filial role in the conflict to the proletariat. As it happens, in fact, Bataille's father was blind. For that reason, he lived in a darkness as impenetrable as the one to which their underground work condemns those "old

35. Bataille, *Rêve*, *O.C.*, II, p. 9.

moles" the wine-cellar laborers. Need it be added that that blindness also has a sexual dimension, because—in his fantasy at least—Bataille attributes to it a sexual origin. "Nevertheless," he adds, "unlike the majority of male babies who are in love with their mother, I, for my part, was in love with this father."

Yet this sexualization of the father figure does not rob it of any of its moral authority, its imposing character. On the contrary, its obscenity only makes his imperious qualities more virulent. This Comendador is an executive power who does not shrink from "reproving." About what does the dreamer feel guilty? We note that Bataille has nothing to say about the misdeed this reproof purports to punish. Does it have something to do with the suit? But in what sense can a suit be guilty of being clean? We quickly get the impression that this imperious creature is strict in reproof because, quite simply, it happens to suit it to do so. The lesson he teaches, or so it seems, is not so much designed for the son's improvement as it is for the executor's sadistic pleasure. The paternal action no longer quells, through violence, the child's sexuality but, on the contrary, stamps the child with the violence of its own sexuality. The dreamer obviously already feels himself threatened by the ("atrocious") rats touched by the cellar workers. Yet the acme of horror is not reached until the moment when "joy" (the joy before the rats) appears on their faces, and the "great pleasure" ("You see, that's what I need—huge rats," said Proust) these "extremely virile and rough" proletarians feel when handling such living filth. The young bourgeois in his spotless suit is terrorized by the bliss of the Comendador he desires: guilty because of his pleasure, guilty too for his pleasure.

Bataille returns to the scenario of the Oedipus complex in "The Foundations of Hegelian Dialectics." The whole thing begins with the son's conceiving a desire for his father's death. He seeks the disappearance of the repressive figure he accuses of barring his way to the satisfaction of his own desires. Such referential aggressiveness, however, is only the first stage in a process that culminates in the son's realization of the truth of his desire. He will soon discover that in reality it is for himself he desires the death he began by wishing onto another. Don Juan must begin by killing the Comendador if he truly wants the ghost to annihilate him in return. The decisive vicissitude of instincts consists in the turning back of the aggressive impulse as it reverts to its source, surges back onto its subject. "At the same time" as the son desires his father's death, Bataille wrote, such aggressive wishes have "their repercussion on the person of the son himself, who seeks to draw down castration upon himself, as the backlash of his desires for death."[36] The complete periplus is not over until the moment of castrating bliss: if Bataille's Oedipus, classically, entails the father's death, it is not because the son wants to arrange for his exclusive

36. Bataille and R. Queneau, "La critique des fondements de la dialectique hégélienne," *La critique sociale*, No. 3, October 1931 (*O.C.*, I, p. 656).

possession of the mother, it is because only a dead father can inflict upon him the punishment he desires.

We know how Freud derives the (masculine) fantasy "father beats me" from a primitive fantasy "father loves me," via a degenitalizing sado-anal regression. Through that regression, according to Freud, punishment is no longer merely "the punishment resulting from the prohibited genital relationship, but also the regressive substitute for that relationship itself." A child is being beaten. The punishment involved in such a fantasy, an indissoluble mixture of eroticism and guilt, rests on the anachronism of a pleasure whose surprising logic excludes any differentiation between pleasure and its punishment, between the punishment and its pleasure. Punishment ceases to be referential at the moment it has no justification other than to punish the pleasure it produces. It punishes a pleasure that would not exist without it. Bataille does not go into the reason why, in his dream, his father is punishing him. The most impenitent sinners, of course, are those who have committed no sins, the guilty whose only fault is the pleasure they take in the punishment meted out to them.

Thus, at the dark heart of this general economy and of the notion of expenditure, we have a story of rats in which a father subjects his son to an act of sexual and incestuous rape. This motif could be followed up in several directions, for we are dealing with the author of *Ma mère* [*My Mother*]. Suffice it here to recall the extent to which he breaks with the simple Oedipal nature of the first pattern. Bataille, as we remember, exhorted the bourgeois intellectual to side with the proletariat in order to escape the castration regime that prevails in its class of origin. In the final schematics, positions and movements are not different, but embody rigorously inverse motivations. If the bourgeois intellectual still tends toward the proletariat, it is no longer to escape castration. On the contrary, it is to anticipate it: he desires it. Yet it is also because castration now no longer incurs punishment for some anterior sexuality, that it constitutes the ordeal through which the body is introduced to the regime of sexuality. And hence the proletariat, instead of embodying a sexuality exercised in total ignorance of castration, now constitutes the imperative and obscene agent that will sexualize the bourgeois man in his suit, the "complete man," via a glorious act of castration.

Annie Leclerc Writing a Letter, with Vermeer

JANE GALLOP

In 1981 *Critical Inquiry*, one of the elite American journals of literary criticism and theory, published a feminist issue, edited by Elizabeth Abel. That issue whose title is "Writing and Sexual Difference" betokens a feminist criticism that is interested not only in feminist social, political, and psychological issues, but also in "writing," which is to say in literary issues. I first delivered the present paper at a colloquium entitled "The Poetics of Gender" which was the eighth in a series of Poetics Colloquia. That colloquium bespeaks the same moment in the history of feminist literary criticism. We might in fact line up "poetics" with "writing" and "gender" with "sexual difference." Yet there is also a specific resonance in Abel's title. "Writing and Sexual Difference" is a revision of Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, likewise published by the University of Chicago Press. If "Writing and Sexual Difference" is a feminist revision of Derrida's title, then what is marked is not only feminism's entrance on the stage of high literary theory, but that this entrance occurs through the play of something translated from the French.

Things from the French had already fully penetrated American literary theoretical discussion and had already insinuated themselves into American feminist criticism in a way that, I believe, made possible a feminist issue of *Critical Inquiry*, a certain coming together of literary theory and feminism, of poetics and gender. Conversely the *colloque* which had always been on *la poétique*, which until recently had been conducted in French, not only proceeded in English but had among its speakers a good number of critics from English departments. The new intercourse between literary theory and feminism seems to be concomitant with a permeation of the boundaries separating French and English departments.

"Writing and Sexual Difference" is thus in fact the scene of a double translation: from literary-philosophical terms—"Writing and Difference"—into sexual-feminist ones, as well as from French into English. *L'écriture et la différence* becomes *Writing and Sexual Difference*. And yet the two moves may be not simply

coincidental but more deeply entwined, one with the other. In English, perhaps the most immediate association to the locution *la différence* is the French expression *Vive la différence*!, by which we understand that *the* difference, for the French, is sexual difference, and by which we imagine that the French have a peculiarly affirmative and sexy relation to that difference.

In the Fall of 1982, the University of Chicago Press republished the feminist issue of *Critical Inquiry* as a book, including—along with the original essay—the "critical responses" that had appeared in a later *Critical Inquiry* as well as two other feminist articles that had been in the journal but outside the special issue. The book, likewise entitled *Writing and Sexual Difference*, is arguably the best anthology of feminist literary criticism to date, comprised of theoretically sophisticated and yet plainly forceful essays from some of our best feminist critics. Since all the essays in the book were already in the journal and remain unchanged, in some way the most exciting thing about the book when it appeared was the cover, which added a new "text" to the volume, one more striking and more "readable" than most covers.

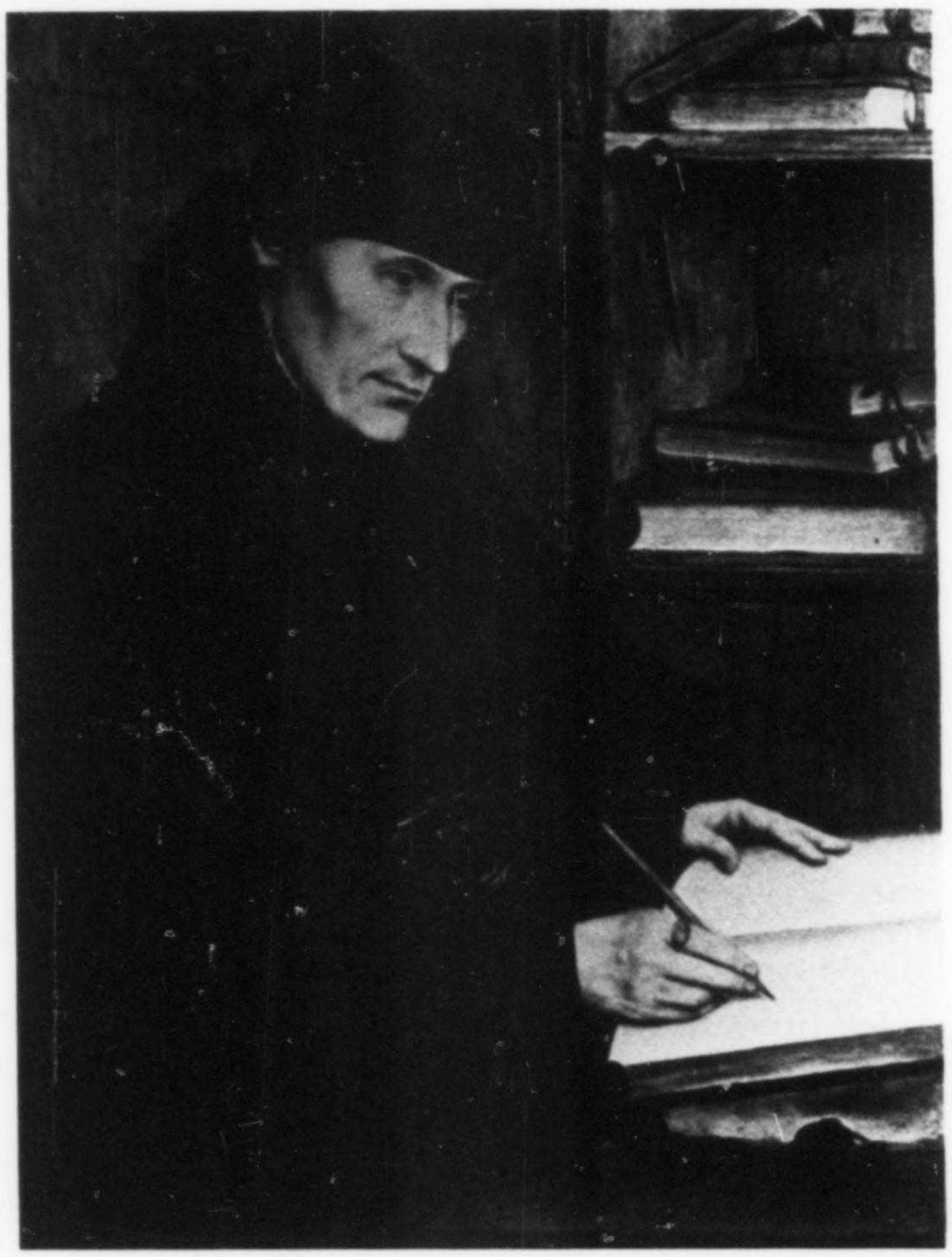
The color is one of my personal favorites: a color which I, perhaps incorrectly, call mauve, one of those colors whose name in English is still in French. Almost pink: that color which is one of our markers of sexual difference and which, unlike its diacritical partner blue, remains—way past the nursery—marked as feminine. If blue, outside the infantile realm, is no longer a particularly masculine color, might not that relate to the phallocentrism which in our culture (as well as in most if not all others) raises the masculine to the universal human, beyond gender, so that the feminine alone must bear the burden of sexual difference? Pink then becomes *the* color of sexual difference, carrying alone within it the diacritical distinction pink/blue. Sexual difference itself becomes feminine, so that *L'écriture et la différence* might glide into *l'écriture féminine*.

But, as I said, the cover of Abel's anthology is not quite pink but rather mauve. Not the blatant little-girl color, unseemly in its explicit, infantile femininity but a stylish, sophisticated version of that color, one that bespeaks not the messy, carnal world of the nursery but high culture, high feminine culture, the realms of interior decoration and *haute couture*, and also, of course, things from the French, as suggested by the word "mauve." The color suggests that this is a feminine book, but a highly cultured one, the feminine, bodily realm of the nursery sublimated through the mediation of Paris.

We may indeed be able to judge this book by its color, but I actually want to draw your attention to the two black and white images on the cover. They are both pictures of people writing: on the front a woman, on the back a man. Together they compose a particularly well-articulated illustration of "writing and sexual difference." The woman is writing a letter; the man a book. Women write letters—personal, intimate, in relation; men write books—universal,

Writing and Sexual Difference

Edited by Elizabeth Abel



Back cover photograph, Writing and Sexual Difference.
Quentin Metsys, Erasmo da Rotterdam.

public, in general circulation. The man in the picture is in fact Erasmus, father of our humanist tradition; the woman without a name. In the man's background: books. The woman sits against floral wallpaper, echoed in reverse by her patterned dress. Feminine Culture: interior decoration and clothes. Black and white, the writing of flowers. The woman's face is completely smooth; no sense of bones beneath that surface. The man's face is hewn and angular; the skeleton structures his flesh. Perhaps most significantly, the man holds pen to paper and his pen is echoed by the scissors hanging there (on the bookshelves), likewise aiming its sharp point at the smooth white paper. The scissors bring out the incisiveness, penetration, violence of the pen. I would hesitate to associate that threatening point with masculine sexuality—I would not want to jump to a phallic conclusion—were it not so tempting here in proximity to the image of the penless woman literally licking the paper.

Or maybe kissing. In any case, her relation to the paper is not mediated through an instrument but is direct oral contact. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have suggested that in the masculine tradition the text is a woman, the pen a penis, and writing understood as coitus. In the picture of the woman, her face is as white and smooth as the paper, so that when she brings it to her mouth, like embraces like. Is *écriture féminine* lesbian cunnilingus?

Ecriture féminine: something else from the French. Not only do we supposedly naive Americans think of the French as having a particular appreciation for sexual difference, but in the slang of our personal ads we refer to oral sex itself as French just as we give the French credit for our most seriously sexual sort of kiss. This picture of the woman licking paper is made by Mary Cassatt, an American woman who like many of us went to Paris in pursuit of her art.

Ecriture féminine, not only feminine but somehow French, a switch from the phallic to the oral sexual paradigm. Hélène Cixous, foremost spokeswoman for *écriture féminine* does not disappoint this expectation. In her 1977 essay "La venue à l'écriture" (the second word is not *avenue* but *venue*, feminine past participle of the verb *venir*, to come—I translate the title of this as yet untranslated essay as "Coming to Writing"), in "La venue à l'écriture" Cixous writes: "Texts I ate them, I sucked them, I kissed them." "I caressed [my books]. Page by page, oh beloved, licked." Not only as a reader, but as a writer does she affirm the model of writing as oral love: "To write: to love, inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love. . . . Read-me, lick-me, write-me love."[1]

"La venue à l'écriture" appears in a book by the same title along with essays by two other women: "Le Corps dans l'écriture" ("The Body in Writing") by Madeleine Gagnon and "La Lettre d'amour" ("The Love Letter") by Annie Leclerc. Published in the 10/18 series "*Féminine Future*," a series directed by

1. Hélène Cixous, "La venue à l'écriture," in H. Cixous, M. Gagnon, A. Leclerc, *La venue à l'écriture*, Paris, Union Générale d'éditions, 1977, pp. 19, 30, 47–48.

Cixous and Catherine Clément, this 1977 volume clearly functions as an important intervention in the politicized discussion of women's writing. And as you can tell from the titles ("The Body in Writing," "The Love Letter"), the three essays, although diverse in many ways, share a continual grounding of writing in the erotic body.

Leclerc's text, "La Lettre d'amour," is in fact, in its own way, a love letter. It contains a second-person addressee, a woman with whom she has just passed a night of lovemaking and to whom, after the morning's parting, Leclerc now wishes to express her love. A lesbian love letter. But of course this is also not a letter but an essay published in a book. Leclerc wishes precisely to heal the split portrayed on the cover of "Writing and Sexual Difference": women write letters, men books.

Love letters have always been written from the body, in connection with love. Leclerc wants all writing to have that connection; she wants love to enter into general circulation, inscribed knowledge, rather than remaining private and secret. A longish quote: "So many love letters (*lettres d'amour*, literally letters of, but also from love), but so few writings, real text, literature, science of/from love. . . . We who were so clever, greedy and generous in . . . *billets* . . . to the beloved . . . we nonetheless let them say, the true and the false . . . if our writings were of/from love, they risked their subversion only across intimacy and discretion. It was up to us, not them, to be philosophers . . . we were the ones who remained in our body, we were in touch with love" (pp. 133–34). We women must continue to write from our loving bodies, but we must break "discretion" and "intimacy" and "risk that subversion" in public, in print, in general circulation. And so Leclerc writes a letter to her lover which is also "real text, literature, science of/from love," philosophy from the body. This would seem to foretell Derrida's project in *La Carte Postale*, published in 1980, three years after "La Lettre d'amour." Leclerc brings the love letter out of the closet and into the public domain.

Leclerc writes with excitement about the "extreme nudity" she experienced with her lover. She speaks of "dawn," of "birth," of "miracle" and one senses that this kind of love is a fresh discovery. In her book *Parole de femme*, published three years earlier, she seemed to write as a heterosexual; in that book the addressee is explicitly male. Only at one point in that earlier, heterosexual work does she mention homosexuality. She has just been affirming the pleasure of difference and then suddenly: "But no I don't spit on homosexual pleasures. I simply refuse to see in them the expression of a lack of sexual differentiation. . . . And what I love in woman is everything that makes her different from you. In truth I only love in the perspective of difference."[2] "But no," she begins, denying something that threatens assertion. For her, love is the celebration of difference, the encounter with difference, which risks sounding heterosexist,

2. Annie Leclerc, *Parole de femme*, Paris, Grasset, 1974, p. 80.

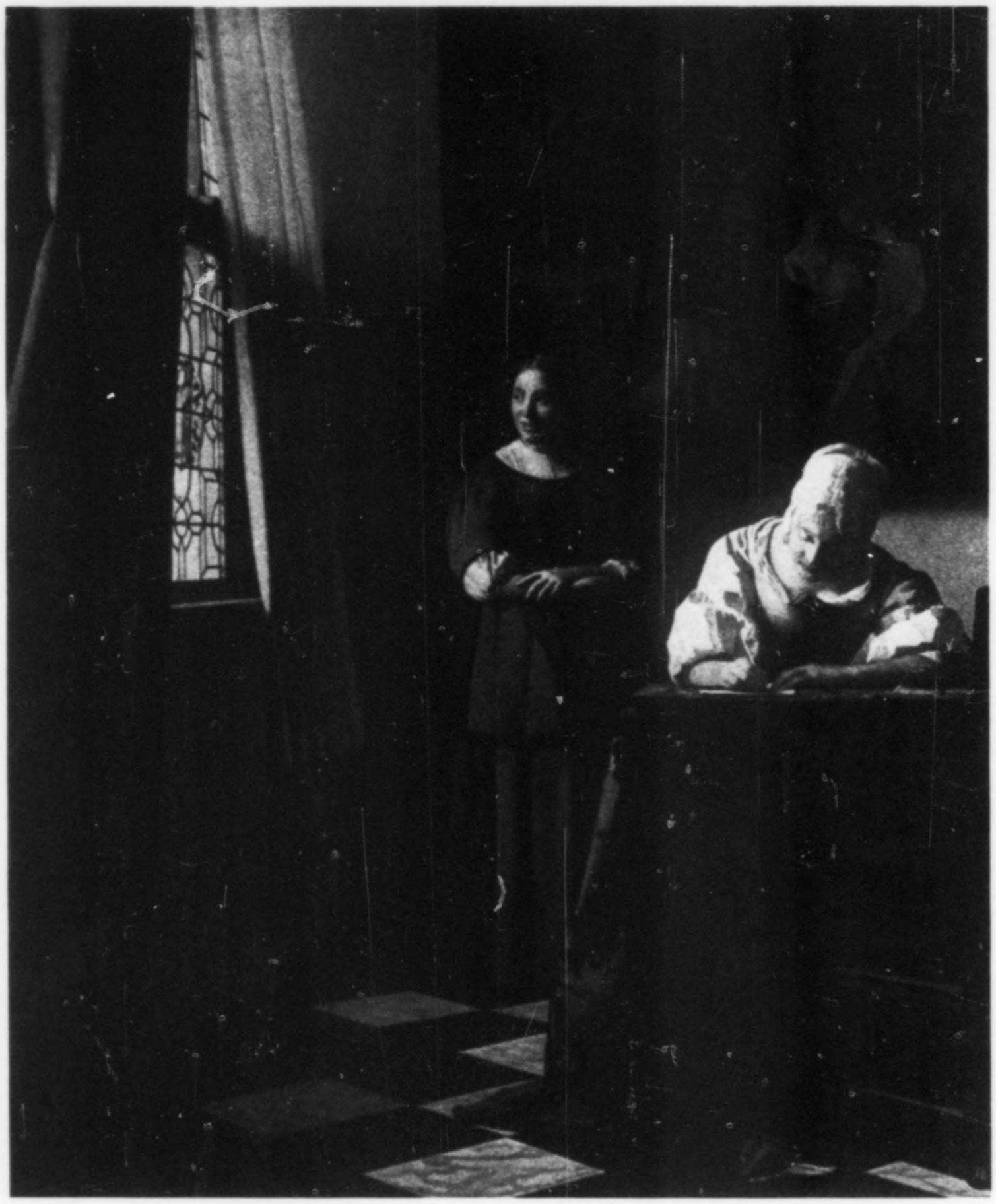
but she will not accept the notion that homosexuality is the pleasure of sameness. She wants to affirm difference in homosexuality, however much a contradiction in terms.

After the blatant heterosexuality of *Parole de femme*, we may be surprised that in "La lettre d'amour" Leclerc writes as a lesbian. But the quotation I just read prepares us for the particular quality of Leclerc's lesbianism, an acute sense of the otherness of the other woman. Leclerc's love letter is not an essentialistic affirmation of the universal, anatomically-based identity of all women. In its assertion of difference within lesbianism, it in fact recalls for me a crucial point Gayatri Spivak makes in her article "French Feminism in an International Frame": "However unfeasible and inefficient it may sound, I see no way to avoid insisting that there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? But who is the other woman?"[3]

Leclerc's "Love Letter" offers us a different image of woman writing. Whereas on the cover of "Writing and Sexual Difference," the difference was between man writing and woman writing, in Leclerc's picture women's writing takes its place in a tableau of the difference between women. Leclerc's picture? There is no illustration in the text, but the text is accompanied by a painting to which it continually refers. As she writes her lover, as she writes her text, she comments: "*Alors*, *voilà*, she is always near me this Lady Writing a Letter and her Maidservant." The phrase "Lady Writing a Letter and Her Maidservant" ["Dame Ecrivant une Lettre et sa Servante"] is capitalized, and is in fact one of the titles of a painting by Vermeer. I found it under a similar English title—"Lady Writing a Letter, with Her Maid"—but, in the volume I used, it was also listed under the simple title "The Letter."

Leclerc's text is, in fact, a meditation on, an explication of, this painting. Like Cassatt, Vermeer has portrayed a woman writing a letter. She is, however, not simply a woman, but a "Lady" (acutally, a *bourgeoise*) and with her is another woman, her servant. The difference between women is here, first of all, a difference of class. Yes, there is a tradition of women writing (writing letters at least), but the women are of a certain class: first the nobility, and then the bourgeoisie. There is a class of women who write and a class who serve those who write. Leclerc writes: "Admit finally that there is in this woman writing, a spoiled woman [*femme gâtée*] . . . a woman for whom the quill came into her fingers without her having to pluck it from the bird's wing" (pp. 138–139). Writing is not just a work of the spirit; there are material requisites. Labor must be done by another so that this woman can write. The labor has historical specificity, as does the scene: in 1667, the presumed date of the Vermeer, someone had to pluck a quill from a bird so a woman could write a

3. Gayatri Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame," *Yale French Studies* 62 (1981), p. 179.



Johannes Vermeer. Lady Writing a Letter, with Her Maid.

letter. Obviously this is no longer the case, and yet if Leclerc, three centuries later, writes with a reproduction of this painting in the background it is because something about that relation still holds. Women no longer need servants to write letters; but what about the sort of open letters, public love writings Leclerc would write, that we would write? We must know the women of another class whose labor we rely on so that we can write: the women who clean our houses, care for our children, type our manuscripts; cleaning women and secretaries, for example.

Annie Leclerc identifies with the *bourgeoise* writing and she loves this picture. In fact she says that "the bad reproduction" of it which is in her possession is "the only object for which . . . [she] has . . . an undying attachment, the only object that is nourishment for [her]" (pp. 117–118). Rather than a source of paralyzing guilt, this picture is tremendously enabling for her. She contemplates the difference between these women and rather than feeling guilt at the difference, rather than feeling pity, she feels desire. She writes: "I love the woman servant . . . oh no, not out of pity, not because I would take up the noble mantle of redressers of wrongs . . . but because I want to touch her, to take her hands, to bury my head in her chest, to smother her cheeks and neck with kisses" (p. 143). Leclerc's position is not the liberal sense that she ought to do something for this poor unfortunate woman. She sees this woman as beautiful, as having something she wants. Leclerc in fact explicitly and frequently identifies the maid with the woman to whom she is writing her love letter.

Of course there is a long phallic tradition of desire for those with less power and privilege (women, for example) and I cannot but wonder about the relation of Leclerc's desire to this tradition. Just as I cannot but be reminded of the romantic and essentially conservative tradition of the happy and beautiful folk, the earthy, free working class. This is certainly a problem. Although Leclerc explicitly associates liberation and joy with socialist revolution, there is, after all, a revolutionary romantic tradition of idealizing the working class. Despite these problems I have with Leclerc's desire for the maid (an erotic attraction to women of another class which I share, I should add), I think it valuable as a powerful account of just that sort of desire, a desire that is frequently hidden under the "mantle of redressers of wrongs." Perhaps this desire gets us no closer than liberal superiority to knowing who the other woman is, but in its explicitness in Leclerc's text it allows us to see more clearly what is usually suppressed, repressed, or sublimated in our relation to the other woman.

Traditionally the maid carries letters between the lady and her beloved, a tradition Vermeer clearly draws on. There is, in fact, a painting entitled "The Love Letter," the same title as Leclerc's text and she does briefly allude to it. The maid in another picture—entitled "Maid Holding Out a Letter to Her Mistress"—resembles the one in Leclerc's Vermeer. You may recognize this picture from the cover of Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory*.[4] The maid serves as go-between, her labor makes possible the love connection, but she is not its recipient. In Leclerc's revision of Vermeer, however, the lady not only would hand the letter to the maid, the maid would be its addressee.

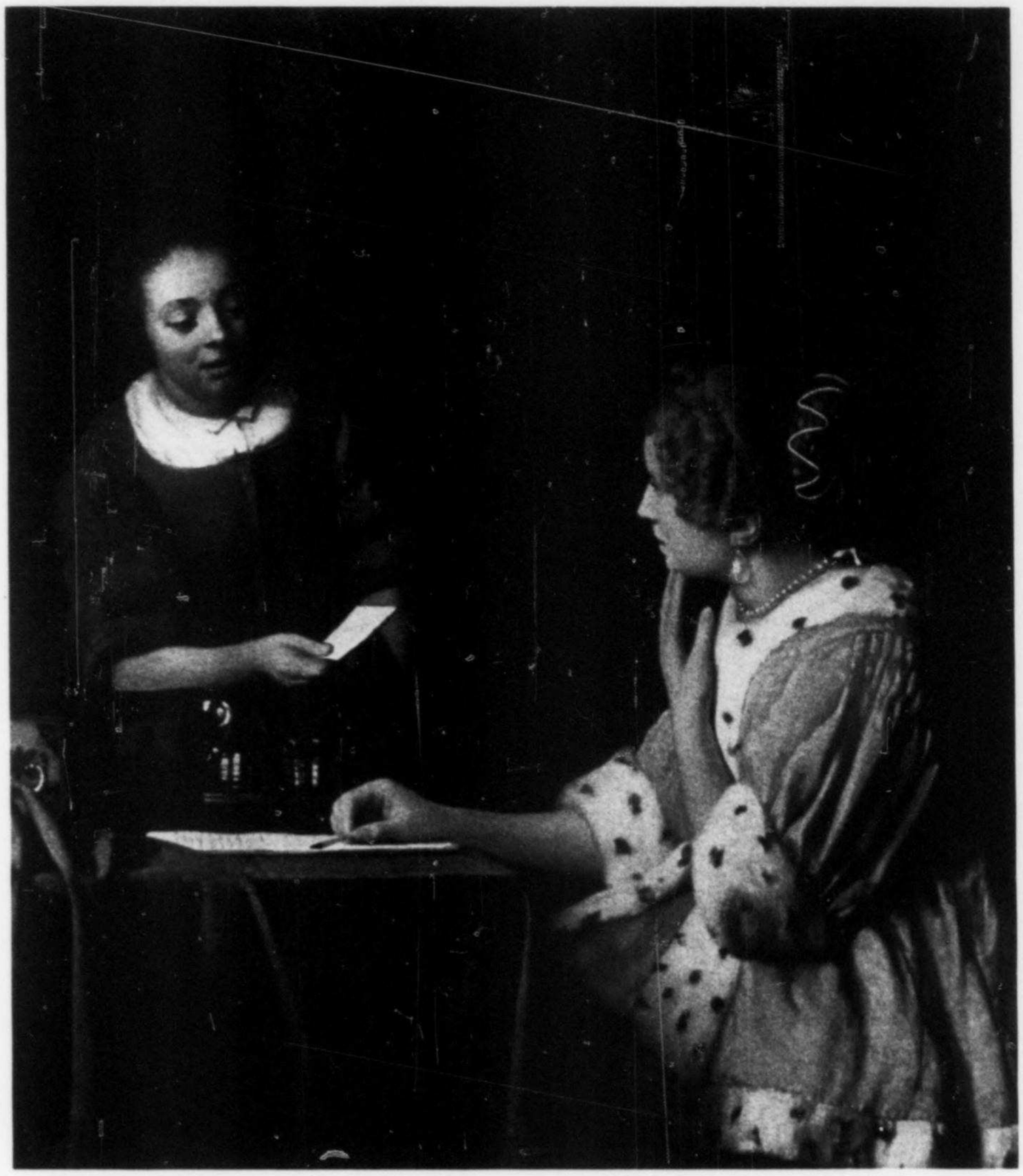
Not only do ladies give letters to maids but they receive letters from them

4. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983.

Johannes Vermeer. The Love Letter.

as well. In Leclerc's revision, Vermeer's maid (and the female lover with whom she is identified) is not only the addressee of her writing but also in a certain way its source. Leclerc writes to her lover: "Come . . . my tongue will die if yours doesn't come and bring its warm saliva. Come, I would like so much to tell you the secret that I have from the lady writing, who has it from her maidservant" (pp. 119–120). She cannot speak if her tongue dies. She wants to tell her lover something, but first she must get her lover's saliva. The interlocutor is also an enabling source of speech. Leclerc is writing a chain letter, which carries a secret to her lover, a secret she gets from Vermeer's lady who gets it from her maid. If what women write is not just love but knowledge, the source of the knowledge in "La Lettre d'amour" is not Leclerc the philosopher, not the educated, literate *bourgeoise*, but the maid.

And where does the maid get this knowledge? According to Leclerc, she



Johannes Vermeer. Maid Holding Out a Letter to Her Mistress.

"has it from the secret where women we are" ["*le secret où femmes nous sommes*"] (*Ibid.*). The maid gets it from the source, from the secret itself, from some secret feminine space where we are women, where we can be women, where we have been women. The "we" may refer to all women, but it is also specifically the writer and her beloved addressee. It is, for example, the secret space of their loving, that space of discretion and intimacy. But that means it is a space where in the present of writing "we" are not, since she must summon her lover ("Come, my tongue will die"). Likewise it is a space to which her access is twice mediated, by a Lady writing a love letter and by her Maid.

For Leclerc, as for most proponents of *écriture féminine*, women's writing springs from a secret well of immanent femininity. "The secret where women we are" is not even the more grammatically common and predictable "where we are women" ["*où nous sommes femmes*"]: which might imply that here we are

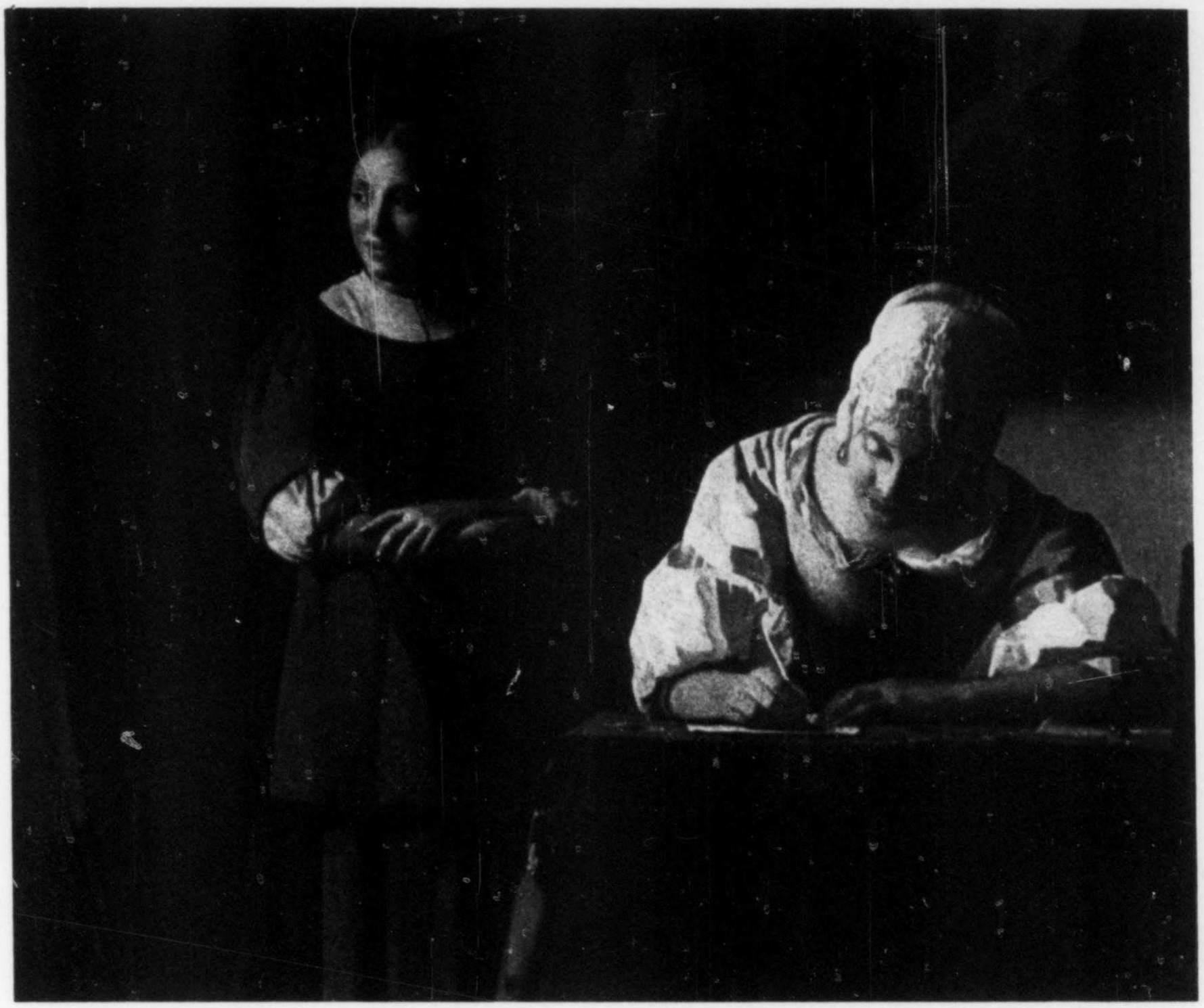
women, elsewhere we aren't. "The secret where women we are" ["*le secret où femmes nous sommes*"] is a space of being, pure and simple (*où nous sommes*), being without attribute. Yet the woman writing has only a mediated relation to that space of feminine being. She is divided from that secret, a division figured by the space between the lady writing and her maid. Leclerc's image of woman writing is an image of the rift between secret feminine knowledge—that is to say, pure feminine being—and writing. There is a space between *écriture* and *féminine*.

"From the woman servant to the woman writing," writes Leclerc, "an all-knowing plenitude is torn open" (p. 136). The woman servant stands in all-knowing plenitude. She is full, present, solid, round, and she knows. Moving from her to the writer, that fullness of knowledge is ruptured. For Leclerc the fullness and the split are morphologically represented in the two women's figures. "Here the curved and rounded arms, the warm and certain closure of the forearms, the hands tenderly linked . . . wedded . . . the splendid repose of a perfectly poised body" (*Ibid.*). The plenitude is figured by the closure of the forearms and hands. She describes the forearms as "tenderly linked . . . wedded" ["*épousés*"]. Her plenitude is an erotic self-sufficiency. I am reminded here of Luce Irigaray's description of female sexuality as two lips caressing each other[5] as well as of Sarah Kofman's characterization of the narcissistic woman.[6] The maid is narcissistically, pleasurably whole unto herself, hence her desirability.

And then the contrast with her mistress: "Here . . . the closure of the forearms . . . and there, in the foreground, but no longer central, as if displaced . . . leaning . . . and above all those disjoined arms, those separated hands . . . divorced, the left one still woman-servant, curved and mute, and the right one woman-mistress, as if distant from the body" (pp. 136–137). The woman writing is displaced, decentered, removed from the locus of being, like her right arm, her writing arm is removed from her body, from the curve of an embrace. The disjunction between maid and woman writing is repeated as the difference between the mistress's left and right arms. Unlike the maid's erotic self-sufficiency, wedded arms, the mistress's arms are "divorced," erotically bereft, divorced by the very act of writing. The rift in feminine plenitude is at once the space between maid and mistress (the separation of the two female lovers) and repeated as the disjuncture within the woman writer, who partakes of the maid's feminine knowledge but in writing forsakes the maid's mute and perfect curvature, the closure of self-embrace.

Although in her left hand she still partakes of feminine plenitude, "the right one [is] woman-mistress as if distant from the body . . . dare I say it,

5. Luce Irigaray, "Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un" in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Paris, Minuit, 1977. Translated by Claudia Reeder as "This Sex Which Is Not One" in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
6. Sarah Kofman, *L'énigme de la femme*, Paris, Galilée, 1980.



Johannes Vermeer. Lady Writing a Letter,
with Her Maid. *Detail.*

'virile'?" (*Ibid.*). The difference between front and back covers of "Writing and Sexual Difference" is in Leclerc's version a difference within the woman writing, embodied in the contrast between her two arms. The right arm, the writing arm, is for Leclerc "virile." Speaking no longer about Vermeer's *bourgeoise*, but now directly herself, she says: "If you only look at my . . . right hand, you'll see it at a distance from my body, you'll see it independent, abstract, male" (p. 137). In writing, she becomes masculinized—as she puts it, "it's as if I wanted to play the man in wanting to write" (*Ibid.*). Yet the difference between the maid and her is *not* the difference between feminine and masculine women. She is by no means fully masculine: it is only her right hand. Not masculine but split, both in touch with the maid's secret and abstracted from it.

She insists that, despite its masculinity, her right hand's "vocation is to formulate, to inscribe on the blank paper what in its shadow [her] wide and soft left hand whispers to it" (p. 138). In the painting, the lady's left hand is in the shadow (more discreet? more secretive?), her right is in the light. Leclerc describes her left hand as if it were a feminine object of desire: "my wide and soft left hand." Leclerc wants her right hand to copy down what the left hand knows. The mistress must write what the maidservant knows.

"She knows. She knows, the woman-servant who greets the babbling of sweet things in the light" (p. 122). The curtain is pulled open to let light in for the mistress's writing, but it is the maid who contentedly gazes into the light. And what she greets, whence the source of her knowledge, is "babbling" ["*balbutiement*"]. *Balbutiement* usually has negative connotations, except when used to describe the speech of infants, and then *balbutiement* can be used tenderly. The reception of the infant's tentative, wondrous efforts is precisely woman's work, domestic work. Leclerc explicitly and frequently identifies the maid with her mother. The women of another class who serve us recall the mother, recall her attentions to our material needs. The desire for the maid, along with the writer's resemblance to and difference from her must also be understood in terms of the mother. We need to understand how our relation to the mother colors our relation to women of the class who work for us.

Leclerc's ascription of knowledge to the maid can also be understood as an example of transference, in the psychoanalytic sense. It is not only that Leclerc transfers her relation to her mother (and her lover) onto the maid, but that the maid is for Leclerc "the subject presumed to know," which is Lacan's definition of transference. And as in the case of psychoanalysis proper the transference seems to depend upon the maid's silence, a silence which Leclerc often says hurts her. Leclerc writes: "She knows. . . . And me I want to tell you what she knows. But what she likewise does not say" [*"je veux te dire ce qu'elle sait. Mais ce qu'elle tait aussi"*] (*Ibid.*). The close resemblance between the verb for "knows" and the verb for "not to speak"—*"elle sait"* and *"elle tait"*—enforces a connection between the maid's feminine knowledge and her silence, a silence Leclerc sometimes reads as willful, a complacent unwillingness to speak which abashes Leclerc.

"Whence comes this difficult and delicious will which distinguishes me from her?" (*Ibid.*). The will to write, to write what the maid, the mother, the lover knows but keeps to herself, keeps secret, distinguishes the writer from the other woman. "Are we not, she and I, of the same flesh, same woman servant, woman serving under the same constraint of father, master and husband?" (*Ibid.*). Are not mother and daughter of the same flesh? Are not all women united in their common oppression? If the husband and master's constraint can be represented by the enclosure of the bourgeois household in which we find the two women, then it is the maidservant whose gaze goes outside, just as,

presumably, she will physically carry the letter outside the house. Leclerc writes: "Admit that there is in [the woman writing] an abnegation, a consent to the limits, an adequation to the walls of the house" (p. 139).

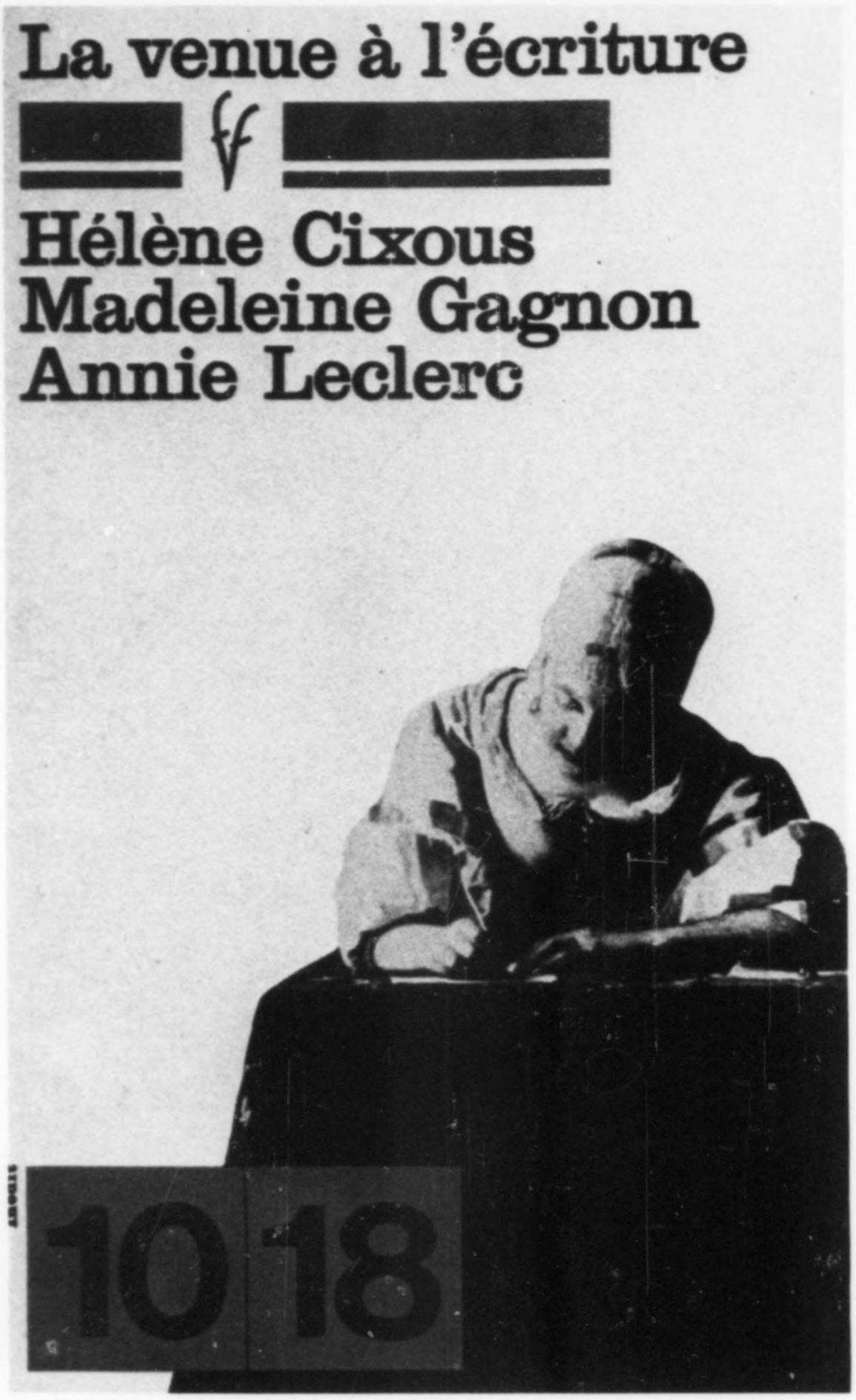
The two women are not the same. "How also to want this distance between us and which hurts me so?" Leclerc asks (p. 122). The distance between them hurts Leclerc. But if she loves this picture, if it is the only object to which she is truly attached, it is certainly because it gives her an image of what, in her writing, she is striving for: an acceptance of the distance as well as the proximity between women.

We may well doubt whether the other woman here is anything but a projection of a woman who would be truly immanently feminine, who would not be split like the writer. The real woman, the pure being-in-itself, is always the other woman. And we traditionally project greater integrity of being to those with less power and privilege. And even beyond this big question we might well wonder why a painting by that seventeenth-century man Vermeer would tell us anything we need to know about woman's writing?

These problems with Leclerc's text are undeniable. Yet what I would like to hold onto from Leclerc's identification with Vermeer's lady is the double image of the difference within *écriture féminine* in the hope of greater future understanding of the relation between these two rifts in an imaginary feminine and feminist plenitude. On the one hand the feminine psychological split: the internal division embodied in the figure of a right-handed writer who wishes to write precisely what only her left hand knows. On the other hand the feminist socio-economic rift: the simultaneous proximity and separation, resemblance and difference between the bourgeois woman writer and the other woman who may be our mother, lover, cleaning woman, or secretary. Further, understanding not in order to close the divide and reach the space of pure and simple feminine being (*le secret où femmes nous sommes*) but in order precisely to "want this distance between us," in order better to ask the necessarily double and no less urgent questions of feminism: "not merely who am I? But who is the other woman?"

*

After I read the above paper at "The Poetics of Gender" colloquium, another woman (Nancy Miller to be exact) showed me the cover of *La venue à l'écriture*, a cover I had never seen since I had worked with a bound library copy of the book. They have deleted the maidservant and left only the single woman writing: this on the cover of the very book wherein Leclerc fairly sings her love for the maid. Thanks to this cover, I realize that the problem of *écriture féminine* is not, as some would have it, its insistence on sexual difference at the expense of some universal humanity but rather, to my mind, its effacement of the



difference between women in view of some feminine essence—in this case, the literal effacement of class difference—so as to represent woman alone at her writing table.

The difference between women, the question of the other woman, the rifts in feminist plenitude are extremely difficult to confront and even more difficult to hold on to. The temptation to essentialize is powerful, not so much in our texts where difference is allowable, but on the cover, where we would like to encompass difference and get it all together. In our desire to make a book of it—a real book and not just letters—let us not forget the other woman.

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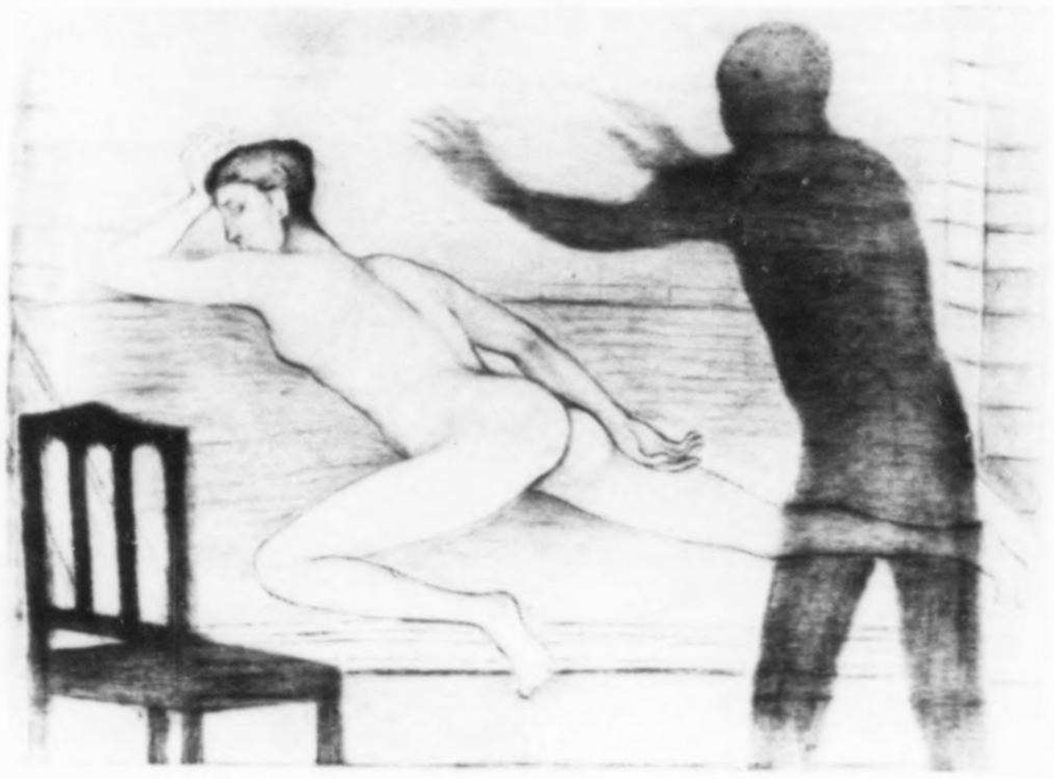

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Each time the artist works on a picture, whatever its "motif", this would be to mimic his invisible model (the demonic analogue of his own emotion), hence to seduce it by the "resemblance" of the simulacrum, and thus to circumscribe it by a figure whose aspect would act upon the viewer in the same way that the model acts upon the artist.

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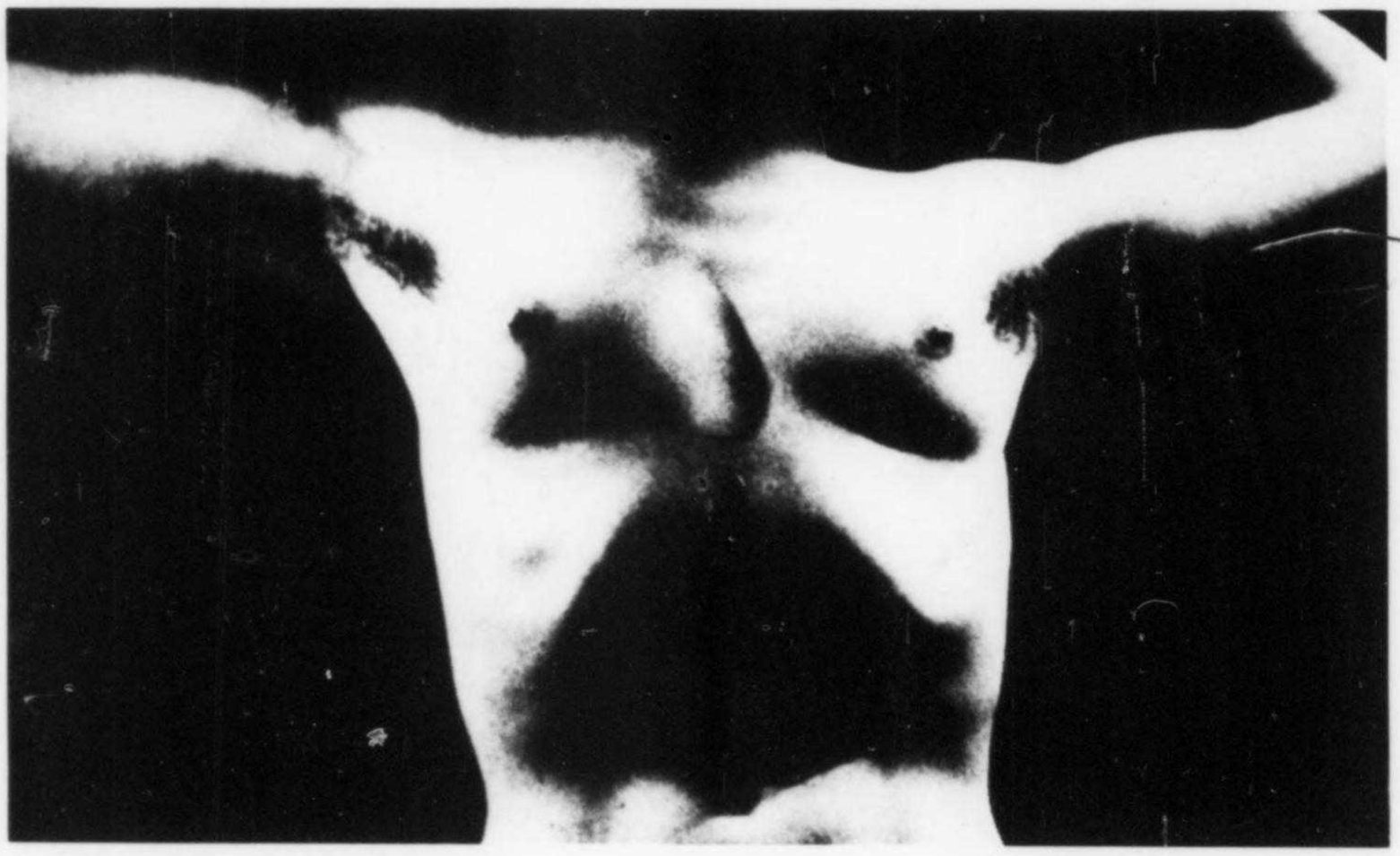

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