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OCTOBER

34

Viktor Shklovsky

*On Poetry and Trans-Sense
Language*

Kazimir Malevich

*Chapters from an Artist's
Autobiography*

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*The "Primitive" Unconscious of
Modern Art*

Homi K. Bhabha

Sly Civility

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An Interview with Bill Viola

\$6.00/Fall 1985

Published by the MIT Press

OCTOBER

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OCTOBER (ISSN 0162-2870) (ISBN 0-262-75184-4) is published quarterly by the MIT Press.

Subscriptions: individuals \$20.00; institutions \$49.00; students and retired \$18.00. Foreign subscriptions outside USA and Canada add \$4.00 for surface mail or \$18.00 for air mail. Prices subject to change without notice.

Address subscriptions to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 28 Carleton Street, Cambridge, MA 02142. Manuscripts, accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope, should be sent to OCTOBER, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003. No responsibility is assumed for loss or injury.

Second class postage paid at Boston, MA, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: send address changes to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 28 Carleton Street, Cambridge, MA 02142.

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*Cover photo: Guillaume Apollinaire's library, Paris,
with Yombe or Woyo fetish figure.*

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KAZIMIR MALEVICH (1878-1935), the Russian suprematist painter, writes here of the early years of his career which he began under the influence of neoprimitivism, cubism, and futurism. He was also a theorist, author of many major essays on suprematism, as well as a teacher and founder of the important student group, Unovis (Affirmers of the New Art).

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VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY (1893-1984), member of OPOYAZ (Society for the Study of Poetic Language) and the Moscow Linguistic Circle, was a Russian formalist writer and an apologist for the futurist poets. The essay published here has never been included in any anthology of Russian formalist writings.

On Poetry and
Trans-Sense¹ Language*

VIKTOR SHKLOVSKY

translated by GERALD JANECEK and PETER MAYER

If at a marvelous special moment
In your long-mute soul you happen to discover
A still unknown and virginal wellspring
Full of simple and sweet sounds,
Do not listen intently to them, nor give yourself up to them,
Draw the veil of forgetfulness over them:
Through measured verse and icy words
You will never convey their meaning.

— Lermontov²

Certain thoughts without words grew in the poet's soul and can be clarified
neither into an image nor a concept.

Oh if only one could express
One's soul without words.

— Fet³

* This essay originally appeared as "O poezii i zaumnom yazyke," in *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo yazyka*, I (Petrograd, 1916), pp. 1-15 and, in the new orthography, in *Poetika: Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo yazyka*, I (Petrograd, 1916), pp. 13-26. The versions differ only in orthography and a few details of punctuation. [From this point, asterisks mark Shklovsky's own footnotes, as they did in the original. The numbered footnotes have been provided by the translators.]

1. *Zaum'* = *za* + *um*, *za* = beyond, across, through, trans-; *um* = mind, intelligence (noun). Vladimir Markov in his *The Longer Poems of Velimir Khlebnikov* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1962), p. 202, suggests the translations "transmental," "transsense," and "metalogical." "Translogical" and "metalogical" have been rejected because the mind (*um*) does not necessarily function logically. "Transmental" would appear to be the most literal translation, but "trans-sense" has echoes of "transcend" and matches expressions like "nonsense" and "common sense." For a more detailed discussion of *zaum'*, see E. K. Beaujour, "Zaum," *Dada/Surrealism* (Lubbock, Texas), No. 2, 1972, pp. 13-18; and D. Mickiewicz, "Semantic Functions in *Zaum'*," *Russian Literature* XV (1984), pp. 363-464.

2. Mikhail Yur'evich Lermontov (1814-1841), Romantic poet; second stanza of the poem "Ne ver' sebe" (1839).

3. Afanasy Fet (Shenshin) (1820-1892), lyric poet; last lines of the poem "Kak moshki zaryoyu" (1844).

Wordlessly but in sounds, that is what the poet is talking about. And it is not in the sounds of music,⁴ nor in the sounds that musical notation represents, but in the sounds of speech, in those sounds from which not melodies but words are composed, since we have before us the confessions and the longing of word-creators faced with the making of a verbal product.

Thought and speech cannot keep up with what an inspired man experiences, therefore the artist is free to express himself not only in ordinary language (concepts), but in a personal language (a creator is individual), a language which has no precise meaning (which is not ossified), which is trans-sensible, *zaumnyi*. Ordinary language restricts, free language allows freer expression (e.g., *Go, osneg, Kayt*, etc.).⁵ Words die, the world is always young. The artist has seen the world anew and, like Adam, gives to everything its name. The lily is wonderful, but the word *lily*⁶ is ugly, it is worn out and "raped." So I name the lily *euy* and the original purity is restored.

Verse unwittingly gives us a series of vowels and consonants. These series are inviolable. It is better to replace words with something else close not in sense but in sound⁷ (*lyki-myki-kika*).*

People have written or tried to write "poems" in this trans-sense language, for example:

4. Fauré (1845-1924), for instance, wrote vocal *Songs without Words*, Opus 17 (1863). These were later orchestrated. The best-known *Songs without Words* (1832-45) are, of course, those of Mendelssohn (1809-1847), but these are not vocal.

5. These trans-sense words are slightly misquoted in the Shklovsky article. They are originally from a *zaum'* poem by Kruchonykh which reads: GO OSNEG KAYD/M R BATUL'BA/SINU AE KSEL/VER TUM' DAKH/GIZ (*Union of Youth*, III, 1913).

6. *Liliya* in Russian.

7. Some more recent examples: *Mots d'heures gousse rames* = (Mother Goose Rhymes), a hilarious collection; Zukovsky's "surface" translation of Catullus; Ernest Jandl's *Mai hart liebt zapchen* (= My heart leaps up); a sentence in Kingsley Amis's *I Want It Now*: "Arcane standard Hannah More, Armageddon pierced staff" (when read with a Texan drawl comes out as "I can't stand it anymore, I'm a-getting pissed off"). Also the old saw: "Wheel oil beef hooked," alternately "Whale oil beef hooked" (= Well I'll be fucked!)

As for ancient examples: the *rebus* (= a pun made visible) appears in most cultures and is an important mechanism in many nonalphabetical scripts such as ancient Egyptian (slightly alphabetical) or Chinese. Other examples of rebuses appear in "canting arms" in heraldry as in those of *Berlin* and *Berne*, both of which depict a bear. *Ber-* and *Bär-* ("bear") are homophones in German.

* A. Kruchonykh, "Declaration of the Word as Such" (1913).⁸

8. Aleksei Eliseevich Kruchonykh (1886-1968), prolific futurist poet and theoretician. The "Declaration" has been reprinted in V. Markov, *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov* (Munich, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967), pp. 63-64. As Markov points out there, the Cyrillic letter *y* (English *u*) was chosen because it resembles a lily in shape.

Dyr bul shyl
Ubeshchur.⁹

— Kruchonykh

Or:

This? Not?

The pine-needles go *shu-shu*
Anna-Maria, Liza, — no?

This? — Lake?

Lulla, lolla, lalla-lu

Liza, lolla, lulla-li

The pine-needles go *shu, shu,*
ti-i-i, ti-i-u-u.

The Forest, — Lake?

This?

Oh, Anna, Maria, Liza,
Hey-tara!

Tere — dere — dere . . . Hu!

Khole-kule-neee.

Lake?-Forest?

Tio-i

vi-i . . . u.

— Guro, *The Three*¹⁰

These poems and the whole theory of trans-sense language made a great impression and in their time even caused an immediate literary scandal. The public, which feels obliged to see that art is not damaged by artists, greeted these poems with curses, while the critics, who examined them in the light of science and democracy, rejected them, grieving at the abyss, the *nihil*, to which Russian literature had come. There was also much talk of charlatanism. The furor is over, the "extras" have gone home, the critics have written their feuilletons, and the time has come to try to understand this phenomenon.

Some people assert that they can best express their emotion by a particular sound-language which often has no definite meaning but acts outside of or sep-

9. Once again misquoted by Shklovsky. The poem in its entirety reads: *Dir bul shshyl/ ubeshchur/ skum/ vy so bu/ r l ez* (A. Kruchonykh, *Pomada*, 1913). This is perhaps the most famous *zaum'* poem, often quoted and, more often than not, misquoted. A number of Shklovsky's quotations are to some extent inaccurate. Unless there is some reason to present both variants, the text will be corrected according to the source and the footnote will read: "corrected."

10. Elena Guro (1877-1913), poet, writer, artist. "Finlyandiya," *Troe*, 1914, corrected.

arately from meaning, immediately upon the emotions of people around. The following question arises: is this means of expressing emotions peculiar only to this group of people, or is it a general phenomenon of language which has not yet been clearly understood?

First of all, we meet the phenomenon of the choice of particular sounds in poems written in "ordinary" language. By this choice the poet strives to heighten the suggestivity of his work and thus demonstrates that the sounds of language as such¹¹ possess special power. I quote Vyacheslav Ivanov's opinion of Pushkin's poem *The Gypsies* [published complete, 1824] from the viewpoint of sound:

The phonetics of this melodic poem show both a predilection for the vowel sound *u* now muffled and pensive, receding into the distant past, now colorful and wild, now sultry and evocatively melancholy; the dark color of this sound is either prominent in the rhyme or is strengthened by the nuances of the vowel combinations and consonantal alliteration around it; and the entire sound-painting that was already vaguely and instinctively felt by Pushkin's contemporaries made a powerful contribution toward establishing their opinion about the particularly magical melodiousness of the new work which amazed even those who had so recently been ecstatic about the nightingale trills, burbling, and the whole watery music of the song about the gardens of Bakhchisaray.*

Grinman, in the magazine *Voice and Speech*,¹³ writes about the gloominess of the *u*-sound and the joyfulness of the *a*-sound. In general, testimonies as to the gloom of the *u*-sound are very definite with almost all observers.

The possibility of such an emotional effect of words becomes more comprehensible when we consider the fact that some sounds, for example, vowels, evoke in us the impression or image of something gloomy or sullen; such are the vowels *o* and above all *u* in which the resonating spaces in the mouth amplify the lower overtones; other sounds evoke a wholly different sensation, lighter, more obvious, more open; such are *i* and *e*, in which the resonating spaces amplify the higher overtones (Kiterman, "The Emotional Sense of the Word," *Journal of the Ministry of Public Instruction*, January 1909, Part XIX, Section II, pp. 166-167).¹⁴

11. Concerning "sounds as such," see also below (fn. 19), "sounds in themselves." The use of "as such" is a direct quotation of Kant's *an sich*. The influence of German thought on Russian formalism, though considerable, was mostly unacknowledged except by antiformalists.

* Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Among the Stars*, p. 148.¹²

12. Ivanov (1866-1949), symbolist poet. *Po zvezdam* (St. Petersburg, Ory, 1909).

13. It has not been possible to locate the journal *Golos i rech'*.

14. B. P. Kiterman, "Emotsional'nyi smysl slova," source, date, and issue corrected.

In his examination of the same phenomenon in French, Grammont (*Le vers français*, 1913)¹⁵ concluded that each sound evokes its specific emotions or range of emotions. In K. Bal'mont's *Poetry as Sorcery* (Moscow, 1916),¹⁶ many examples are given of such a selection of sounds to gain the effect of particular emotions. Obviously the value of the given works is determined to a higher degree by these emotions. "The work of art," Goethe writes, "makes us exultant or delighted by that very aspect which is too elusive for our conscious understanding. The powerful effect of the artistically beautiful depends upon this and not on the parts which can be completely analysed."¹⁷

Thus the meaning of "meaningless" speech for the poet is explained.¹⁸

There is speech whose meaning
Is dark or without importance,
But to listen to it is impossible
Without agitation . . .¹⁹

Micawber refreshed his hearing again with a collection of words which was ridiculous and unnecessary. This, however, was not only characteristic of him alone. During my life, I have noticed this passion for unnecessary words in many people. It is a sort of general rule on all ceremonious occasions and on it depends the greater part of all legal and formal writing and the equivalent forms of speech. In

15. Maurice Grammont, *Le vers français, ses moyens d'expression, son harmonie*, 2nd ed., Paris, Librairie H. Champion, 1913, esp. Part II. A Russian translation by Vladimir B. Shklovsky of pp. 195-207 of Grammont's book appeared in the same volume as the 1916 edition of the present article, pp. 51-60.

16. Bal'mont (1867-1943), Russian symbolist poet. *Poeziya kak volshebstvo*, 1st ed., Moscow, Skorpion, 1915, repr. Lechworth-Herts, Prideaux Press, 1973.

17. This quotation appears to be a free translation into Russian of the opening sentence of "Über Laokoön" (*Propyläen* I, i, 1798), which has been rendered more precisely in English as: "A true work of art will always have something of infinity in it to our minds, as well as a work of nature. We contemplate it, we perceive and relish its beauties, it makes an impression, but it cannot be thoroughly understood, nor its essence nor its merit be clearly defined by words" (John Gage, *Goethe on Art*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p. 78).

18. For a survey of theory and experiments on sound symbolism and synaesthesia, see Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1979, pp. 177-221. Shklovsky's argument that speech sounds are meaningful (as such) is a direct attack on that dogma of Saussurean linguistics that the linguistic sign is arbitrary. Many great poets are ranged on Shklovsky's side against Saussure, e.g., Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Claudel, and Sitwell. Readers may be interested to read Edith Sitwell's analysis of poems using what William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (New York, Noonday, 1955, pp. 11 ff) and others term "the doctrine of pure sound." See Sitwell's *A Poet's Notebook* (Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1950, esp. pp. 177-183) and her commentaries in her *The Atlantic Book of British and American Poetry* (Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1958). There are even some linguists on Shklovsky's side, notably Jakobson, Marchand, Bolinger, and a few others.

19. Lermontov (1840): "Est' rechi — znachen'e/Temno il' nichtozhno,/No im bez volnen'ya/Vnimat' nevozmozhno."

reading and pronouncing these words, people especially enjoy themselves when they come across a whole series of sonorous words expressing one and the same concept, e.g., "I wish, demand and desire" or "I leave behind, bequeath and make over," etc. We speak of the difficulty of language, yet ourselves subject it to torture (Dickens, *David Copperfield*, Vol. III).²⁰

In this extract, naturally, only Dickens's observation and not his attitude toward it interests us. The novelist would probably be surprised to learn that the use of a whole series of euphonious words expressing one and the same concept was a sort of general law of oratorical speech not only in England, but even in ancient Greece and Rome (compare Zelinsky's "On artistic prose and its destiny").²¹

The fact that emotions can be evoked by the sound and articulation of words proves the existence of words which Wundt called *Lautbilder* (sound-pictures).²² Under this term Wundt groups words which express not an acoustic, but rather an optical or other notion, but in such a way that between this notion and the choice of sounds of onomatopoeic words a certain correspondence is felt. In German, for example, *timmeln torkeln* (to stagger) and in Russian *karakuli* (badly written, smudged words).²³

Previously, such words would have been explained thus: after the pictorial elements of words disappeared, the meaning of words became linked solely to their sounds; finally this gave the words their sensual tonality.* But Wundt

20. Ch. 52. Shklovsky's version is very different from Dickens's original which reads thus: "Again, Mr. Micawber had a relish in this formal piling up of words, which, however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not at all peculiar to him. I have observed it, in the course of my life, in numbers of men. It seems to me to be a general rule. In the taking of legal oaths, for instance, desponents seem to enjoy themselves mightily when they come to several good words in succession, for the expression of one idea; as, that they utterly detest, abominate, and abjure, or so forth; and the old anathemas were made relishing on the same principle. We talk about the tyranny of words, but we tyrannise over them too; we are fond of having a large superfluous establishment of words to wait upon us on great occasions; we think it looks important, and sounds well."

21. Faddey Frantsevich Zelinsky, "Khudozhestvennaya proza i eyo sud'ba," *Vestnik Evropy*, Vol. VI, November 1898, pp. 64-119.

22. The inherent synaesthesia of the expression *Lautbilder* reminds us that the German dada sound poet Raoul Hausmann described his words as optophonetic and patented an optophone. Hausmann was writing at the time Shklovsky published the present article.

23. *Kara* = black in Turkish and Mongolian. *Karakuli* is a loan word in Russian.

* F. F. Zelinsky's experiment is interesting: it gives another explanation for the origin of sound-pictures. "And then I'll *tilisnu* you with a knife on the throat," Dostoevsky's fellow camp inmate says in *Notes from the House of the Dead* [1860], II, Ch. 4. Is there a similarity between the articulatory movement of the word *tilisnut'* and the movement of a knife sliding over and cutting into the human body? No, but this articulatory motion describes as well as possible every instinctive state of the facial muscles during the specific feeling of pain in the nerves experienced by us when we imagine a knife sliding along the skin (but not stuck into the body); the lips are rigidly drawn apart, the throat constricted, the teeth gritted; this permits the use of only the vowel *i* and

principally explains the phenomenon thus: that in the pronunciation of these words the organs of speech make equivalent movements. This way of looking at the matter fits in well with Wundt's overall description of language; apparently he is trying to draw this phenomenon closer to gestural language which he analyses in a chapter of his *Ethnopsychology (Völkerpsychologie)*;²⁷ but this interpretation hardly explains the entire phenomenon. Perhaps the extracts quoted below will cast a slightly different light on the question. We have literary evidence which does not merely give examples of sound-pictures but also allows us, as it were, to be present at their creation. It appears to us that the closest neighbors to onomatopoetic words are "words" without concept and content that serve to express pure emotion, that is, words which cannot be said to exhibit any imitative articulation, for there is nothing to imitate, but only a concatenation of sounds and emotion — of a movement in which the hearer participates sympathetically by reproducing a certain mute tensing of the speech organs. As examples I offer: "I stopped and stared at her face to face, and on the spot a name came to me I'd never heard before, a name with a smooth, nervous sound:

the tongue consonants *t, l, s*, whereby the selection of them and not of the voiced sounds *d, r, z*, involves a certain sound-imitating element. Consequently, Zelinsky defines sound-pictures as words whose articulation requires the general mimicry²⁴ of the face in order for these words to express the feeling evoked (F. Zelinsky, "Wilhelm Wundt and the Psychology of Language" [1901], *Iz zhizni idey*, Vol. II, St. Petersburg, 1911, pp. 185-186).

It is also interesting to compare Wundt's *Lautbilder* with what Zhukovsky, in describing Krylov's²⁵ fables, calls a painting in sounds themselves (V. A. Zhukovsky, *Collected Works*, Vol. V, p. 341, Glazunov edition).²⁶

24. On internal gestural mimicry as a determinant of the sounds making up particular words, see Sir Richard Paget, *Human Speech*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1930 and various works by A. Jóhannesson, esp. *Origin of Language*, Reykjavik, H. F. Leiftur, 1949. See also Peter Mayer, "Speech as mime and gesture," *Kroklok* 3 (1972), pp. 65-68; and his "letter-forms as an articulatory notation," *Open Letter* 5 (1984), pp. 40-50.

25. I. A. Krylov (1769-1844), fabulist.

26. Zhukovsky (1783-1852), poet, "O basne i basnyakh Krylova" (1809), *Sobranie sochineniy v 4tt.*, Moscow-Leningrad, GIKhL, 1959-1960, IV, p. 416, referring to the disturbing of the governmental swamp depicted in the words here underlined: *Chto khodenem poshlo tryasinno gosudarstvo.*

27. Wilhelm Max Wundt (1832-1920), German psychologist and physiologist, *Völkerpsychologie. Eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte*, Leipzig, W. Engelmann, 1900-09), Vol. 1 (Die Sprache, 1900); Ch. 3, IV, 1. contains the passage referred to above by Shklovsky, but the first German word is misspelled; it is either *bummeln* (to stroll, bum around) or *wimmeln* (to swarm). Shklovsky's *timmeln* may well have been based on a similar passage in Zelinsky's article on Wundt (see Shklovsky's footnote above). Zelinsky has *tummeln, torkeln, wimmeln* (p. 181), but the first word is not found in Wundt. The fact that it is an actual German word (to put in motion) may have caused Zelinsky not to notice the mistake. Shklovsky's garbling of Zelinsky's mistake and his borrowing of the latter's Russian examples (*karakuli, tilisnut'*) suggest that Shklovsky's source on Wundt is the Zelinsky article and that he did not consult Wundt's work directly.

Wundt's later work, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, Leipzig, A. Kroner, 1912 (Eng. trans. E. L. Schaub, *Elements of Folk Psychology*, New York, Macmillan, 1916) also contains a section on this topic, Ch. II, 5.

Ylayali" (Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*, Shipovnik, p. 21).²⁸ There is an interesting equivalent to this word in Russian poetry:

A special name
I gave my love to caress her:
An irresponsible creation
Of my child-like tenderness:
Far from evident meaning,
For me it is the symbol
Of feelings for which I found
No expression in languages.

— Baratynsky²⁹

There is also a very characteristic passage in V. Rozanov (*Solitaria*, p. 81):

Brandelyas' (in Buturlin's trial) — that is very good. Above all what a sound . . . there is something definite in the sound. To me it increasingly seems that all literary persons are "Brandelyasy." What is good about this word is that it expresses nothing in itself. And precisely because of this characteristic it has a particular harmony with literature. "After the Merovingian Period that of the Brandelyasy began," a future Ilovaysky will say; I think it will be good.³⁰

But people need words not only to express thoughts, not only to replace one word with another, or to make into a name so that it can be tied to some purpose or other; people need words quite apart from meaning. Thus Satin (M. Gorky's *Lower Depths*, Act I), who was sick of all human words, says "*Sikambr*" and remembers that when he was a machinist he loved various words.³¹ In his latest work *Out in the World* (*Chronicle*, March, 1916, p. II), Gorky returns to this phenomenon:

"— The things they write, the rascallions! Like slapping you in the face for no good reason. *Gervassi!* What the hell do I want with *Gervassi?* *Umbraculum!*"

The strange words and unfamiliar names stuck annoyingly in my memory, making my tongue itch to repeat them, as though sounding them would reveal their meaning.³²

28. Eng. trans. by Robert Bly, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967, p. 14.

29. E. A. Baratynsky (1800–1844), poet of the Pushkin Pleiad: "Svoenravnoe prozvan'e" (1834).

30. V. V. Rozanov (1856–1919), writer, philosopher, and critic, *Uedinyonnoe*, St. Petersburg, 1911; also *Izbrannoe*, Munich, A. Neimanis, 1970, p. 25. "Brandelyas," a non-Russian surname (Eng. Brandylace?); D. Ilovaysky, a popular historian.

31. Maksim Gorky (1868–1936), novelist, playwright. *Lower Depths* was first produced by the Moscow Art Theatre in 1902.

32. *V lyudyakh*, Ch. 5; Eng. trans. from A. Yarmoiinsky, *The Autobiography of Maxim Gorky*, New York, Collier, 1962, p. 284.

Valentin, in Goncharov's sketches, *The Servants of the Old Days* (Marx edition, Vol. 12, pp. 170-177), offers the reader incomprehensible poems and lovingly writes down completely incomprehensible words in a notebook where he puts those with similar sounds next to each other: "constitution and prostitution," "infernal and eternal," "numizmat and kastrat" (numismatist and castrato), not ever wanting to know their meaning, but only putting them together because they sound the same, just as precious stones or cloth are arranged according to their color.

Goncharov was able to generalize the phenomenon which he had observed. He said:

I have seen how simple people can be moved to tears by holy books in Church Slavonic although they understand nothing or only understand "other words" like my Valentin. I remember how sailors on a ship listened to such a book for hours without moving, constantly gazing at the reader's mouth³³ if only he read sonorously and with feeling (Goncharov, *Ibid.*).³⁴

Even more indicative is the completely pathological success of word combinations when they have been torn out of a forgotten context and have lost their original or even their entire meaning, such as the often-quoted question: *Et ta soeur* (And your sister). Similar epidemic oral habits which have come about by the attractive magic of total nonsense are called *des scies* (catch-phrases).³⁵

The extract just quoted was taken from the newspaper *Contemporary Word* (August 27, 1913, a report from Paris about the genre theater), and also speaks of the widespread craze for meaningless songs³⁶ experienced in Paris that summer. These were succeeded by a fashion for almost totally meaningless "Negro songs." In Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*, the author in a delirious state discovers the word *Kuboa* and is fascinated that it is unstable and has no precise meaning. "I had discovered the word myself," he says, "and I was perfectly within my rights to let it mean whatever I wanted it to, for that matter. So far as I knew, I had not yet committed myself . . ." (pp. 77-78).³⁷

Prince Vyazemsky writes that in his childhood he liked reading wine-cellar catalogues and was fascinated by euphonious names. He particularly liked the

33. There is growing evidence that even people with perfect hearing lip-read. The perception of speech is to a small but important extent audiovisual. See Mayer (1984), p. 49.

34. Ivan A. Goncharov (1812-1891), novelist, author of *Oblomov*. *Slugi starogo veka* (1888), I: Valentin.

35. *Des scies*, given in Roman script in the Russian text, is misspelled as *seies*.

36. Cf. "scat" singing and later bebop; nonesuch words still continue to feature in pop lyrics. "Scat" from "scatty" (= crazy)?

37. Bly trans., p. 79.

name of one kind of wine, *Lacrima Christi*; this sound appealed to his poetic soul.³⁸ And in general we know from many poets of the past of their sensations of the sound aspect of words which evoked in them a particular feeling and a particular understanding of these words independent of the words' objective meaning (J. Baudouin de Courtenay, "Opinions," supplement to the newspaper *The Day* [*Den'*], No. 7, February 20, 1914).³⁹ But this peculiarity is not only the privilege of poets. The nonpoet can also revel in and get drunk on meaningless sounds. V. Korolenko, for example, describes one of his German lessons at secondary school in Rovno.

"*Dem gelb-ro-then pa-pa-ga-a-ai-en*" [the yellow-red parrot],⁴⁰ said Lototsky, drawing the words out. And so, Nominative: *Der gelb-rothe Papagai*. Genitive: *des gelb-rothen-Pa-pa-ga-ai-en*. In Lototsky's voice there were certain jumpy notes. He began scanning, obviously enjoying the rhythm of the melody. He associated the dative with the timbre of the schoolmaster's ingratiating voice blending with the melodic murmur of the whole class: *Dem gelb-ro-then Pa-pa-ga-a-ai-en*. Lototsky's face bore an expression like that of a tomcat being tickled behind the ear. He threw his head back, his large nose pointed to the ceiling, his thin wide mouth opened like that of an amorous frog croaking. The plural was scanned like thunder—a real orgy of scansion. Dozens of voices cut the yellow-red parrot into slices, threw it into the air, stretched it, swung it, lifting it up to high notes, letting it fall to low ones. . . . Lototsky's voice had long since stopped, his head resting on the back-rest of his teacher's chair and only his white hand with its dazzling white cuff struck the air with a pencil held between two fingers beating time. The class was as if possessed; the pupils aped the schoolmaster, threw back their heads like him, bent, swayed, made faces. . . . And suddenly . . . scarcely had the last syllable of the last case died away as if cut off, when there was, as if by magic, a total change in the class. The schoolmaster sat on the rostrum, once again erect, stern, and his glance darted along the benches like light-

38. Prince P. A. Vyazemsky (1792–1878), "Avtobiograficheskoe vvedenie," *Polnoe Sobranie Sochineniy*, Petersburg, M. M. Stasyulevich, 1878, Vol. 1, p. v.

39. This article, "Slovo i 'slovo'" (A Word and a "Word"), has been reprinted in I. A. Boduen de Kurtene, *Izbrannye trudy po obshchemu yazykoznaniyu*, II, Moscow, ANSSSR, 1963, pp. 240–242. Boudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929), the great Polish linguist, was Shklovsky's professor for a time at the University of Petrograd. See Shklovsky's memoirs, *Zhili-byli*, Moscow, Sovetsky pisatel', 1966, pp. 94–101.

40. Here and below, Shklovsky's citation of the German differs from that in standard editions of V. G. Korolenko (1853–1921), *Istoriya moego sovremennika*, Vol. I, Ch. 20, which first appeared in 1908. The original has: *Der gelb-rothe Papa-gei*, *Der gelb-rothe Pa-pa-gei*, *Des gelb-roten Pa-pa-ga-a-eis* . . . and *Dem . . . gelb . . . ro . . . ten . . . Pa-pa-ga-a-ei* . . . These mistakes would seem to indicate Shklovsky's inadequate knowledge of German, rather than typesetting inaccuracy.

ning flashes. The pupils were as if turned into stone. . . . And again they continued studying under firm "discipline" until Lototsky came across a yellow-red parrot or some other hypnotic word. In some instinctive way the pupils worked out a whole system which shepherded the teacher toward words of that kind.

—Korolenko, *The History of My Contemporary*,
in *Collected Works*, Marx, Vol. 7, p. 1551

I do not consider this example to be exceptional. I consider it parallel to the famous verses for exceptions to rules in Latin, which for centuries have been a notable feature of schools where the classics are taught. Here is what F. F. Zelinsky writes about them. Naturally I am not trying to make a parallel between the revered professor and the schoolmaster Lototsky. Zelinsky writes:

I myself used them (the verses) when I was a teacher of the first-year class; I remember how the artificial combinations of clever words and energetic rhymes caused a healthy, childish laughter among my pupils, particularly if at the end of the lesson I got them to chorus the rhymed rules; and because I think a healthy sense of humor is essential "vitkul"⁴¹ (as the doctors say) when teaching young classes, these finales then became for them a cheerful game of its own.

—F. F. Zelinsky, *From the Life
of Ideas*, p. 31⁴²

Unfortunately, Zelinsky tells us nothing about his experience in the pronunciation of these "artificial combinations" of words. The words *metall* (metal) and *zhupel* (a spook), apart from their meaning, by their very sound seemed frightening to the merchant's wife in the comedy by Ostrovsky.⁴³ In Chekhov's tale "The Peasants" [Ch. III], the old women wept in the church when the priest pronounced the words *ashche* [Church Slavonic for "if"] and *dondezhe* [till]; the particular choice of these words as a signal to start weeping can only be due to the sound aspect. James Sully (*Studies of Childhood*)⁴⁴ includes many interesting examples of "trans-sense speech" among children. I will not quote them due to lack of space and also because I consider the playful verse pre-fables of our own

41. Zelinsky's original has *vegikulom* (Lat. *vehiculum*) for Shklovsky's *vitkulom*, which is a meaningless word.

42. Zelinsky, "Obrazovatel'noe znachenie antichnosti," *Iz zhizni idej: Nauchno-popularnye stat'i*, Vol. II, St. Petersburg, Tip. M. M. Stasyulevicha, 1905, p. 30.

43. This example is taken from Kiterman, p. 174. A. N. Ostrovsky (1823-1886), dramatist. The reference is to Ostrovsky's play *Bad Days* (*Tyazhyolye dni*, 1863), Act II, Scene 2.

44. Second edition, London, Longmans & Co., 1905, esp. Ch. V. Also mentioned by Konovalov (see note 48), p. 189, where Russian trans. is referred to: *Ocherki po psikhologii detstva*, tr. Grombakh, Moscow, 1901.

children more interesting for a Russian reader; they are also interesting because of their mass nature and because these pre-fables are preserved in oral transmission, travel from region to region, and provide a complete analogy to literary works. As examples I quote:

Pero (name of the game)

Pero

Ugo

Tero

Pyato

Soto

Ivo

Sivo

Dub

Krest

(Vyatsk district)

Pen

(Five)

(Hundred)

(Willow)

Gray

Oak

Cross

Pervinchiki

Druginchiki

Na Bozhey Ruse

Na popovoy polose

Prelo

Grelo

Osinovo

Poleno

Chivil doska

Dara-shepyoshka

Toncha-poncha

Pinevicha

Rus-knes'

Vylez

(Vyatsk district)

(First ones)

(Friends)

In God's Russia

On the priest's land

It smelled

It warmed

An aspen

Log

(Twitter) board

(gift — whisper-care)

(thin — donut)

(Russian prince)

Crawled out

Bubikoni

Ne chem goni

Zlatom myotom

Pod polyotom

Chyorny palets

Vyydi za pech'

Rus-kvas

Shishel, vyshel

Von poshol

(Vladimir district)

(Bell/pretzel)-horses

Nothing to drive with

With golden (thrower)

Under the flight

A black finger

Go out behind the stove

Russian kvas

(Bumped), went out

Went away

<i>Pera, era</i>	
Chukha, lukha	(Sneeze)
Pyati, soti	(Five, hundred)
Sivi, ili	(Gray), or
Pen'	Tree stump
(Tula district)	

I am quoting from E. A. Pokrovsky, *Children's Games, Principally Russian* (Moscow, 1887, pp. 54-56).⁴⁵

I now turn to an extract from *My Childhood* by M. Gorky (long and therefore unsuitable for direct quotation) where he shows how in the boy's memory a poem is simultaneously stored in two ways: as words and also as what I call patches of sound. The verse goes like this:

Bolshaya doroga, pryamaya doroga	Big street, straight street
Prostora ne malo beryosh' ty u Boga.	Not a little space you take from God.
Tebya ne rovnyali topor i lopata,	You haven't been flattened by pick and shovel,
Myagka ty kopytu i pyl'yu bogata.	Soft are you to hoof and rich in dust.

His version went like this:

Doroga, dvuroga, tvorog, nedoroga	Street, two-horned, curds, inexpensive
Kopyta, popyto, koryto . . .	Hoofs, tested, trough . . .

The boy greatly loved the magical verses when they had lost all meaning. Unbeknownst to himself, he simultaneously remembered the original verses, too (*My Childhood*, pp. 223 ff).⁴⁶

45. All but the second example are found on page 57 of Pokrovsky. The second is on page 55. Citation corrected. Nonesuch words have not been translated; distorted forms with a fairly clear meaning are translated in parentheses.

46. The quotations are from Ch. 10. Boy's version corrected. "Beginning with the age of two, every child becomes for a short period of time a linguistic genius. Later, beginning at the age of five to six, this talent begins to fade." K. Chukovsky, *From Two to Five*, trans. M. Morton, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1963, p. 7. Chukovsky called nonsense poems by little children *ekikiki*, e.g., Kossi minie, kossi koi, /Lieba kussi, lieba koi, /Kossi baba, kossi koe, /Kussi paki, kussi moi, /Ioka kuku, shibka koi, /Lieba kusiai, shibka koi, /Koka kusiai, shibka koi (p. 148). The transcription of the poem has been corrected according to the 7th ed., *Ot dvukh do pyati*, Moscow, Gos. Izd, Det. Lit., 1963, p. 362.

On children's verbal art see R. Jakobson and L. Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language*, Bloomington & London, Indiana University Press, 1979, pp. 217-220. Peter Mayer has made similar observations in the case of visual poetry in the 5-10 year age range.

Compare F. Batyushkov's article "Battle with the Word" in *Journal of the Ministry of Public Instruction*, February 1900.⁴⁷

The formulae of exorcism the world over are often written in such languages, for example, what the Greeks called phylacteries, known as "*ta Ephesia grammata* (magical letters on the crown, belt and pedestal of the statue of the Diana of Ephesus), consisted of puzzling words (*aenigmatodes*): *askion, kataskion, liz, tetras, damnameneus, aesia* (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromat. lib. V, cap. VIII*)," quoted according to Konovalov, p. 191.⁴⁸

The facts cited above make the existence of a trans-sensible language certain, and it exists not only in a pure form, i.e., as certain meaningless word combinations, but mainly in a covert state, like rhyme in ancient poetry, actually there but not clearly recognized.

Much prevents trans-sensible language from appearing overtly; a *Kubooa* rarely appears. But it seems to me that verse also often appears in the poet's soul in the form of sound patches not formed into words. Sometimes the patch approaches, sometimes it recedes, then finally it becomes clear and coincides with a sonorous word.⁴⁹ The poet does not decide to speak a "trans-sensible word"; usually the trans-sensibility conceals itself under the mask of some often-deceptive apparent content so that poets themselves have to admit that they do not understand the content of their own verses. We have such admissions from Calderón, Byron, and Blok.⁵⁰ We must believe Sully Prudhomme when he says

47. "V bor'be so slovom," *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*, Part 327, pp. 209-228.

48. D. Konovalov, *Religiozny ekstaz v russkom sektanstve*, Sergiev Posad, Tip. Sv. Tr. Sergievoy Lavry, 1908. Corrected to conform with Konovalov. He gives the Greek words in Greek script, while Shklovsky used Roman script.

49. Shklovsky in his "Literature and Cinematography" was later (1923) to write: "A line of verse quite often appears in the poet's mind as a definite patch of sound not yet verbalized. Alexander Blok used to tell me about this phenomenon as he had observed it in himself" (*Dissonant Voices in Soviet Literature*, tr. M. Hayward and P. Blake, New York, Harper & Row, 1964, p. 24). Mayakovsky in "How Verses Are Made" wrote: "I walk, swinging my arms, and mumbling still almost wordlessly; now, I slow down so as not to interrupt my mumbling; now, I mumble more rapidly to keep in tune with my steps. So the rhythm is trimmed and shaped, for it is the basis of all poetry and runs through it like a roar. Gradually, out of this roar, one starts to pick out separate words. . . . The first word to emerge is usually the main word—the word which characterizes the meaning of the verse or the word which is to be rhymed" (*Mayakovsky and His Circle*, ed. and trans. by Lily Feiler, New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1972, p. 128; also *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, Moscow, GIKhL, 1959, XII, pp. 100-101). Osip Mandelstam had similar methods. He too related walking to composing, which was a process of converting "a ringing in the ears" into "a silent mouthing, then into whispering, then the Inner music" became units of meaning. See N. Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope, A Memoir*, London, Collins, 1971, Ch. 39: "Moving Lips."

Russian poets tend to produce and declaim their work in a more oral way than we do. It is unusual in our culture to see poets recite from memory; we give poetry readings.

50. The original statements by these poets have proved difficult to establish. F. Batyushkov's article refers to an article by A. Gornfel'd, "Muki slova" (*Sbornik Russkogo bogatstva*, 1899), which seems to be the source not only for Shklovsky's phrase which we have translated below as "suffering over words," and the reference to the Sully Prudhomme poem, but also for the reference to

that nobody has read his own real verse.⁵¹ The complaints of the poets about their suffering over words must often be understood as the measure of their struggle with the word: poets do not complain about the impossibility of mediating concepts or images with words, but they do complain about the impossibility of mediating sensations and spiritual experiences with words. And not for nothing do they complain that they cannot mediate *sounds* with words, mediate with icy words the overflowing wellspring of sweet and simple sounds. In all probability it turns out much as with choosing rhymes. Saltykov-Shchedrin, a man not very competent in poetry, but otherwise certainly an observant person, described a young poet searching for a rhyme with *obraz* (image) and finding only the word *nobraz*.⁵²

Nobraz did not fit and became an *idée fixe* of the poet; but if by the remotest chance it could have been given some meaning, it would actually have suited the poem and would not have looked any worse than many other words. Some evidence that words in a poem are not chosen for their meaning nor for their rhythm, but for their sound is given by the Japanese *tanka*. In a *tanka*, usually at

Byron. There Gornfel'd quotes Pushkin as saying "Byron could not explain certain of his lines" (reprint of the article in *Muki slova*, Moscow-Leningrad, Gosizdat, 1927, p. 30; Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, Moscow, ANSSSR, 1962-66, VII, p. 56). Neither Gornfel'd nor the Pushkin edition indicate Pushkin's source of information. The most likely source is Stanza V, Canto IV from Byron's *Don Juan*:

Some have accused me of a strange design
 Against the creed and morals of the land,
 And trace it in this poem every line:
 I don't pretend that I quite understand
 My own meaning when I would be *very* fine;
 But the fact is that I have nothing planned,
 Unless it were to be a moment merry,
 A novel word in my vocabulary.

Willis W. Pratt, in his *Byron's Don Juan*, Vol. IV, *Notes on the Variorum Edition*, 2nd ed., Austin, University of Texas Press, 1971, p. 106, gives two other references: Thomas Medwin, *Conversations of Lord Byron at Pisa*, London, H. Colburn, 1824, p. 244: "I asked Lord Byron the meaning of a passage in 'The Prophecy of Dante.' He laughed and said: 'I suppose I had some meaning when I wrote it: I believe I understood it then.'" Also, letter to Hobhouse, June 8, 1820, in P. Quennell, *Byron: A Self-Portrait*, II, London, John Murray, 1950, p. 516.

Blok's statement may come from a private conversation with Shklovsky, see note 49.

A passage in Calderón could not be located. A three-volume collection of Calderón's works in Russian translation by K. Bal'mont (*Sochineniya*, Moscow, Vol. I, 1900, Vol. II, 1902, Vol. III) was published but could not be consulted.

51. R. F. A. Sully Prudhomme (1839-1907), French poet; poem "Au lecteur" (1865): "Quand je vous livre mon poème, / Mon cœur ne le reconnaît plus: / Le meilleur demeure en moi-même, / Mes vrais vers ne seront pas lus." Shklovsky's source is F. Batyuskov (p. 219), who paraphrases it from yet another source.

52. M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826-1889) satiricist, novelist. Reference is to the story "For Children" (*Dlya detskogo vozrasta*) from the collection *Innocent Stories* (*Nevinnyye rasskazy*, 1863).

the beginning, there is a word unrelated to the content but which harmonizes with the "main" word in the poem. For example, at the beginning of a Russian poem about the moon (*luna*), according to this principle one could put the word *lono* (bosom or lap). This shows that words in poetry are selected in the following way: one homonym is replaced by another in order to express the inner sound-language prescribed ahead of time, rather than one synonym being replaced by another in order to express the nuances of a concept. Thus it is perhaps possible to understand the statements of poets when they say that poems appear or mature in their minds as music (Schiller).⁵³ In this I think that poets have fallen victim to a lack of precise terminology. There is no word for inner sound-language, and when one wants to speak about it, the term *music* turns up as a description of certain sounds which are not words; in this particular case not yet words, because they eventually emerge in a wordlike manner. Among contemporary poets, O. Mandelstam has written about this:

Remain foam, Aphrodite,
And return word into music.⁵⁴

The perception of a poem usually also precedes from the perception of its primal sound-picture. Everybody knows how deafly we apprehend the context of even apparently comprehensible poems. On this ground very indicative cases sometimes occur. For example, in a Pushkin edition instead of "Zaveshan byl tenisty vkhod"⁵⁵ (The shaded entry was curtained), "Zaveshan breg tenistykh vod" (The bank of the shaded water was curtained) had been printed (due to an unreadable manuscript); this led to total meaninglessness but remained calmly unnoticed in edition after edition and was only by chance found by a manuscript scholar. The reason is that in this passage although the sense was distorted the sound was not.

As we have already mentioned, trans-sensible language rarely appears in pure form. But there are exceptions. Such an exception is to be found in trans-sensible language among mystical sects. Here what helped was that the sectaries identified trans-sense language with glossolalia,⁵⁶ with the gift of tongues, which according to the *Acts of the Apostles* they received on the Fiftieth

53. Letter to Goethe, March 18, 1796: "With me the conception has at first no definite or clear object; this comes later. A certain musical state of mind precedes it, and this, in me, is only then followed by the poetic idea" (*Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*, trans. by L. Dora Schmitz, London, George Bell and Sons, 1877, I, p. 154).

54. O. E. Mandelstam (1892-1940), "Silentium" (1910), *Collected Works*, Washington, Inter-Language Literary Associates, 1967, Vol. 1, p. 9.

55. Pushkin's free translation of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, Canto XXIII, Ott. 106.

56. On glossolalia, see Jakobson and Waugh, pp. 211-215.

Day (Pentecost). * Thanks to this they had no shame about trans-sense language; they were proud of it and wrote down examples of it. There are many examples in D. G. Konovalov's wonderful book *Religious Ecstasy in Russian Mystical Sects* (Sergiev Posad, 1908, pp. 159-193) where the question of the glosses in the sense of the types of such manifestations of religious ecstasy is exhaustively discussed. The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is extraordinarily widespread and may be said to be universal among mystical sects. I quote the flagellant Sergei Osipov (eighteenth century) as an example (from Konovalov's book):

rentre fente rente fintrifunt
nodar lisentrant nokhontrofint.⁵⁸

I quote the first lines of a transcription of speaking in tongues by his contemporary Varlaam Shishkov:

nasontos lesontos furt lis
natrufuntru natrisinfur. . . .⁵⁹

It is interesting to compare these sounds with the transcriptions of speaking in tongues of the Irvingite Sect which appeared in Scotland around 1830:

Hippo-gerosto hippo booros senoote
Foorime oorin hoopoo tanto noostin
Noorastin niparos hipanos bantos boorin
O Pinitos eleiastino halimungitos dantitu
Hampootine farimi aristos ekrampos⁶⁰

The woman sectary who uttered these words was convinced that this was the language of the inhabitants of a South Pacific island.

Such phenomena have recently been observed in Christiania (Oslo).

* "Glosses" are tongues heard in congregations in the Apostles' time. The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 14) says of sermons in "tongues" that nobody understands them, that their speech is incomprehensible, as Irenaeus of Lyons has written (D. G. Konovalov, *Religious Ecstasy in Russian Mystical Sects*, p. 175).⁵⁷

57. Konovalov (p. 175): "In church we hear," says St. Irenaeus of Lyons, "many brothers who have prophetic gifts and *through the Spirit speak in all possible languages* (pantodapais lalounton dia tou pneumatos glossais), for the common good they bring into the open the deepest (secrets) of people and elucidate God's mysteries" (St. Irenaei, *Adversus haereses*, lib. V, c. VI, I)."

58. Konovalov, p. 167, corrected.

59. *Ibid.*; corrected. From the same page Konovalov Shishkov is also quoted by Kruchonykh, and with considerably greater accuracy, in *Explodity and Three* (both 1913), see V. Markov, *Russian Futurism*, pp. 61-67.

60. Konovalov, p. 179, corrected. The source given there is: Schwarz, review of the book: Köhler, *Het irvingisme* (Theologische Studien und Kritiken, 1877, S. 369). Both this quotation and the next are in the Latin alphabet in Konovalov and Shklovsky.

Here is an example of glossolalia by the German Pastor Paul; for him the gift of speaking in tongues was the fulfillment of his most fervent desire (he had seen cases of speaking in tongues and felt an overwhelming wish for the gift); on the night of the 15th to the 16th of September 1907, there were involuntary movements in his speech organs and vocal apparatus which caused sounds. Paul wrote them down and I quote some lines:

Schua ea, schua ea
o tschi biro ti ra rea
akki lungo ta ri fungo
u li bara ti ra tungo
latschi bungo ti tu ta.⁶¹

In the enjoyment of meaningless trans-sense language the articulatory aspect of speech is undeniably important. It may even be that in general the greater part of the pleasure in poetry is to be found in the articulations in the original dance of the speech organs.⁶² (See Kiterman's article in the *Journal of the Ministry of Public Instruction*, 1909).⁶³ Yuri Ozarovsky remarks in his book *The Music of the Living Word* that the timbre of the voice is dependent on mimicry,⁶⁴ and if one goes further than he did and relates to his remark James's thesis that each emotion is the result of some bodily state (a sinking heart is the cause of fear, and tears are the cause of sorrow),⁶⁵ one might say that the impression which the timbre of the voice summons up in us may be explained thus: when we hear, we reproduce the mimicry of the speaker and therefore we experience his emotions. F. Zelinsky in an extract we have already quoted mentions the significance of reproducing the mimicry of the speaker in the perception of *Lautbilder* (sound-pictures) (*tilisnut*).

61. Konovalov, p. 186, corrected. Konovalov's source: Emile Lombard, "Faits récents de glossolalie," *Archive de psychologie*, 1908, février, t. VII, No. 27, pp. 302-303.

62. Shklovsky in his *Literature and Cinematography* was later to write: "Perhaps in a primitive poem we are dealing not so much with an ejaculation as with an articulated gesture, a sort of ballet of the speech organs. Even in modern poetry, the act of speaking it may have, in varying degrees, the same sensuous effect on us—'the sweetness of the verse on the lips' . . ." (p. 24).

63. That is, Kiterman (citation in text corrected), see esp. pp. 165-166.

64. Yu. E. Ozarovski, *Muzyka zhivogo slova. Osnovy russkogo khudozhestvennogo chteniya*, St. Petersburg, Izd. O. M. Popovoy, 1914, pp. 115-117.

65. William James (1842-1910), American psychologist, philosopher. *Psychology. Briefer Course*, New York, H. Holt & Co., 1891: "My theory . . . is that *the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*. Common-sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep, we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order is incorrect, that the one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble because we are sorry, angry, or fearful . . ." (pp. 375-376). Russian trans. by Lapshin (1905, 5th ed.) mentioned by Konovalov, p. 185.

Well known are the facts which prove that when we perceive a foreign language or any utterance we silently imitate with our own speech organs the requisite movements for the enunciation of a given sound.⁶⁶ Perhaps these movements have some still uninvestigated close connection with the emotions evoked by speech sounds and by trans-sense language in particular. It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of speaking in tongues by sectaries begins with involuntary movements of the vocal apparatus.⁶⁷

I think that we can content ourselves with the examples we have given. But I will quote one more (which I have found in Mel'nikov-Pechersky's *On the Mountains*, Vol. 3, p. 132).⁶⁸ This example of glossolalia is interesting because it shows the close similarity between children's songs and types of sectarian speaking in tongues. It starts as a children's song and has a "trans-sense" finale:

Ten', ten', poteten',	Shadows, shadows, shashadows,
Vyshe goroda pleten'	Higher than the city the fence is
Sadis', galka, na pleten'!	Sit down, jackdaw, on the fence!
Galki khokhlushi—	Jackdaws with headdresses are—
Spasennie dushi,	Saved souls
Vorob'i proroki—	The sparrow-prophets—
Shli po doroge,	Walked along the streets,
Nashli oni knigu.	Found they a book.
Chto' v toy knige?	What is in that book?

The text of the sectaries:

A pisano tamo:
 "Savishrai samo,
 Kapilasta gandrya,
 Daranata shantra
 Sunkara purusha
 Moya deva, Lusha"⁶⁹

And there it is written:

My maiden, Lusha"

66. This is the "motor" theory of speech perception. It has since gone out of fashion among psychologists and audiologists.

67. See George Pilkington, *The Doctrine of Particular Providence* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1836, pp. 224-225) for a detailed description of an Irvingite woman's muscle spasms prior to enunciation. Also Konovalov, pp. 237-239.

68. P. I. Mel'nikov-Pechersky, *Na gorakh* (1875-1878), Pt. 3, Ch. 4.

69. *Ibid.*, corrected. Evidently quoted by Shklovsky from Konovalov (pp. 167-168) where the last line reads: *Mayya diva lucha* following M.-P.'s footnote variant. Shklovsky had: *May ya diva lucha*. Mel'nikov-Pechersky comments: "Only God's People understood that by the lips of the saint the Spirit had declared that Lusha was His maiden . . . Thus others called her Luker'yushka and from that time on they all began to call her that. They firmly believed that Lusha would be 'the golden chosen vessel of the Spirit.'"

The text of the continuation of the children's version of the song:

Zyuzyuka, zyuzyuka,	Lisper, lisper,
Kuda nam katit'sya?	Where should we go?
Vdol' po dorozhke. ⁷⁰	Down along the street.

All these types have one thing in common: these sounds strive to be language. So their authors consider them to be some sort of foreign language: Polynesian, Indian, Latin, French, and most often the language of Jerusalem. It is also interesting that futurist authors of trans-sense poems affirmed that they understood all languages simultaneously and even tried to write Hebrew.⁷¹ It seems to me that there is a certain sincerity in this, for they themselves momentarily believed that the words of a strange language, wonderfully learned, were being formed by their pens.⁷²

Whether this is the case or not, one thing is certain: trans-sensible sound language strives to be language.

But to what extent can one give this phenomenon the name "language"? That naturally depends upon the definition we give to the concept "word." If we lay down the condition for the word-as-such that it must serve to designate its concept, that it must in general be meaningful, then trans-sense language has to be excluded as something external to language. But it is not all that is excluded; the facts we have cited make one wonder whether words in language which are not obviously trans-sense or simply in poetic language in general have meaning or whether this opinion is only a fiction and the result of our inattention. In any case, in banning trans-sense language from our speech we do not thereby ban it from poetry as well. Now poetry is created and—what is more important—perceived not just in terms of word-concepts. I quote an interesting extract from an article by K. Chukovsky about the Russian futurists. It concerns V. Khlebnikov's poem "Bobeobi pelis' guby/Veeomi pelis' vzory," etc.⁷³ (Bobeobs the lips were singing/Veeoms the glances were singing, etc.):

It is written in the measure of *Hiawatha* and the *Kalevala*. So if we enjoy reading Longfellow's:

70. *Ibid.*

71. Shklovsky is referring to A. Kruchonykh's *Explodity* (Vzorval'), 1913-1914, in which he announces, "On April 27 at three o'clock in the afternoon I at one moment mastered all languages to perfection. I now publish my poems in Japanese, Spanish, and Hebrew." See Gerald Janecek, *The Look of Russian Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 95 and figs. 75-76.

72. Compare previous spiritualist and subsequent surrealist automatic writing.

73. V. V. Khlebnikov (1885-1922), one of the founders of Russian futurism, probably the greatest poet among them. Poem is of 1912, corrected citation. See V. Markov, M. Sparks, *Modern Russian Poetry* (Indianapolis-New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), pp. 328-329 for full poem and translation.

Came the Choctaws and Shoshonies and Blackfeet,
 Came the Pawnees and Omawhas,
 Came the Camanches,
 Came the Mandans and Dacotahs,
 Came the Hurons and Ojibways⁷⁴

When then do the *bobeobs* and *veeoms* make us laugh? In what way are the *Choctaws* any better than the *bobeobs*? Here we have a gourmand's feast of exotically strange-sounding words. To the Russian ear *bobeobs* are as "trans-sensible" as Choctaws, Shoshonies, or as *gzi-gzi-gzeo*.⁷⁵ And when Pushkin writes:

From Rushchuk to ancient Smyrna
 From Trabezond to Tulchea⁷⁶

has he not definitely used the enchanted harmony of trans-sensibly sounding words? (K. Chukovsky, "Provisional Chrestomathy of Types of Futurist Poetry," *Shipovnik*, Book 22, p. 144.)⁷⁷

It is even possible that the word is the adopted child of poetry. This for example is the opinion of A. N. Veselovsky.⁷⁸ And it even seems clear that it is impossible either to call poetry a manifestation of language or language a manifestation of poetry.

Another question: will there be a time when genuinely artistic works are written in trans-sense language? Will it then be a special, generally recognized kind of literature? Who knows? If so, it would be a continuation of the differentiation of art forms. One thing can be said: many literary phenomena have had such a destiny; many first appeared in the works of the ecstasies; thus rhyme appeared clearly in the annunciations of Ignatius of Antioch:

74. Translation cited by Chukovsky is the famous one by Ivan Bunin (1896) which slightly shuffles Longfellow's text and reads: *Shli Choktosy i Komanchi/ Shli Shoshony i Omogi/ Shli Gurony i Medeny/ Delavery i Mochoki*.

75. A later line from the Khlebnikov poem, corrected.

76. From "Stambul gyaury nynche slavyat" (1830), Pushkin, III, 194-195.

77. Republished in K. Chukovsky, *Sobranie sochineniy v 6 tt.*, Moscow, Izd. Khud. lit., 1969, Vol. 6, pp. 240-259, under the title "Obraztsy futurliteratury." See pp. 245-246 for the quoted passage.

78. A. N. Veselovsky (1838-1906), literary historian: "In the oldest combination [of music, dance, and words] the guiding role went to rhythm, which consequently normed melody and the poetic text which developed along with it. The role of the last element could be considered in the beginning the most modest: it consisted of exclamations, expressions of emotions, a few meaningless, contentless words, the bearers of the beat and the melody. From this kernel a text with content developed in the slow course of history; thus even in the primeval word the emotional element of the voice and movement (gesture) supported the contental element, which inadequately expressed the impression of the object; a more complete expression would result with the development of the sentence" (*Istoricheskaya poetika*, Leningrad, Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1940, pp. 200-201; originally serialized in 1894-1898).

Choris tou episkopou meden poieite
 ten sarka umon os naon theon tereite
 ten enosin agapate,
 tous merismous pheugete,
 mimetai ginesthe Iesou Christou
 os kai aoutos tou Patros autou.⁷⁹

Religious ecstasy has already predicted the appearance of new forms. The history of literature consists in poets canonizing⁸⁰ and introducing into literature new forms which had long been the common property of poetic thinking about language.

D. G. Konovalov shows that in recent years there have been increasing manifestations of glossolalia (p. 187). At the same time trans-sense songs have been the rage in Paris. But most characteristic is the enthusiasm of the symbolists for the sound-aspect of the word (the works of Andrei Bely, Vyascheslav Ivanov, the articles of Bal'mont⁸¹), which almost coincided in time with the beginnings of the futurists who posed the problem even more sharply.

And perhaps J. Słowacki's prophecy will some day be fulfilled: "There will come a time in verse when poets will be interested only in sounds."⁸²

79. *Epist. ad Philad.* c. 7, corrected to conform to Konovalov, p. 251, where it is cited in the Greek alphabet. Shklovsky used the Roman.

80. "Canonizing," a typical Shklovsky term, is discussed in Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, The Hague, Mouton, 1965, pp. 259 ff.

81. Symbolist poets for whom musicality was of particular importance; their key theoretical works are: A. Bely (1880-1934), *Simvolizm*, Moscow, Musaget, 1910, esp. "Magiya slov," pp. 429-453; Vyacheslav Ivanov (1868-1949), *Po zvezdam*, St. Petersburg, Ory, 1909, and *Borozdy i mezhi*, Moscow, Musaget, 1916; Konstantin Bal'mont (1867-1943), *Poeziya kak volshebstvo*, Moscow, Skorpion, 1915.

82. Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), Polish Romantic poet and dramatist. Professor Fizman of Indiana University provided the following information: The quotation is not strictly a translation; it is rather a paraphrase of a sentence from Juliusz Słowacki's *Raptularz* (partly a diary but mostly a notebook). The text in Polish reads as follows: "Po wielkiej liczbie dziś muzyków, kiedyś wielka liczba będzie harmonistów poetycznych, piszących wiersze tylko dla dźwięku- aż pójdą wyżej . . ." (Juliusz Słowacki, *Dzieła*, ed. Juliana Krzyżanowski, vol. X, Wrocław, Ossolineum, 1949, p. 550).

Raptularz as a whole was published from the autograph for the first time by Henryk Biegeleisen under the title "Pamiętnik Juliusza Słowackiego" in *Biblioteka Dzieł Wyborowych*, 1901, and for the second time, more accurately, in Juliusz Słowacki *Dzieła*, ed. Bronisław Gubrynowicz and Wiktor Hahn, Vol. X, Lwów, Ossolineum, 1909.

Chapters from an Artist's Autobiography*

KAZIMIR MALEVICH

translated by ALAN UPCHURCH

The circumstances in which my childhood was spent were the following: my father worked at sugar-beet factories which are usually built out in the sticks, far from any city, large or small. The sugar-beet plantations were large. A lot of manpower, provided by peasants, mostly, was needed to run these plantations.

Peasants, young and old, worked on these plantations almost all summer and fall. As a future artist, I feasted my eyes upon the fields and the "colored" workers who weeded or dug up the beetroot.

Platoons of girls in colorful clothes moved in rows across the whole field. It was a war. The troops in colorful dresses struggled with weeds, liberating the beetroot from unwanted overgrowths. I loved to look at these fields in the morning when the sun was not yet high, and the larks would soar upwards in song, and the storks, trilling, would dive after frogs, and the kites, circling high above, would spy out small birds and mice.

The sugar plantations stretched as far as the eye could see, blending into the distant horizon, sloping down to the small cornfields, or running up the hills, engulfing towns and villages in their fields, covered with the monotonous texture of green plants. In order to supply a single factory with sugar beet, no less than twenty thousand *desyatinas*¹ of beets had to be planted, and a thousand people sent out to work these fields.

It was in villages like these, situated amidst the beauties of nature and landscape, that my childhood was spent.

The other part of the factory recalled some fortress in which people worked day and night, obeying the merciless summons of factory whistles. People stood in the factories, bound by time to some apparatus or machine: twelve hours in the steam, the stench of gas and filth. I remember my father standing in front

* Malevich's autobiography was published in *The Russian Avant-Garde*, Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1976.

1. *Desyatina*—a land measure equal to 2.7 acres. (Trans.)

of a large apparatus. It was beautiful with many pieces of glass of various sizes. They formed little windowpanes through which you could look inside and watch the sugar syrup boiling. There were several shiny taps by each windowpane, a thermometer, and on a small desk, many little pieces of glass for testing and measuring the degree of crystallization of the sugar. My father would stand for hours turning the taps, looking in the windowpanes, and from time to time would release the sugary liquid onto a piece of glass and carefully examine it under the light to check the size of the forming crystal.

All the workers there carefully followed the movements of their machine, as though following the movements of a predatory animal. And at the same time, they had to keep a sharp eye on themselves and their own movements. A false move threatened either death or being crippled for life. To a small boy like me, these machines always looked like predatory beasts. I looked at them as one would look at wild, merciless beasts who always seem to be watching to catch a false move by their enslaver so they can knock him down or tear him to pieces. The huge flywheels and belts startled me with their movements and shapes. Several machines were enclosed by iron bars and looked like dogs behind a fence. Others, less dangerous, were not fenced in.

The people who worked at the factory had their own small houses where they lived with their families. These houses were occupied mostly by the people who were highly skilled; the rest lived in barracks.

The factory people made up the second society, the one in which I lived, but I didn't like this society. Their life was one of constant labor, day and night. The peasants would sleep all night and go to the fields in the morning where they worked in the open air, surrounded by the beauties of nature, lit by the morning and afternoon sun, and by the golden evening. Their labor spilled over into songs, and you could hear them, in particular, when large parties of girls and young men were on their way home.

*

I preferred the peasant children for friends, considering them always free among the fields, the meadows and forests and with the horses, sheep and pigs.

I didn't like the factory children, their clothes or their way of life. They always wore shoes and socks in which they couldn't climb trees or jump into the river after frogs. The country children always wore simple, canvas clothing which was comfortable for doing anything. I also liked peasant clothes because they were colorful and had designs, and because everyone sewed his own clothes however he wanted. One wove them, embroidered and dyed them oneself.

The main thing that separated the factory workers and peasants for me was drawing. The former didn't draw, didn't know how to paint their houses, didn't engage in what I'd now call art. All peasants did.

*

Even though I was just a small boy, all kinds of contrasts and comparisons came into my head.

I thought: "What makes Father want to get up at night when everyone else is sleeping and go work, or go to bed when everything else is living and breathing the air of the fields, the meadows, the woods, the gardens. . . ."

Peasants aren't afraid of any whistles. The sun gently calls them to work with its rays and the sun calls them to bed, hiding its rays behind the globe. The sun I always considered as something great and more pleasant than whistles. I loved the heat of its rays more than the smelly heat of the factory. . . . I also loved the moon very much, and it always seemed to me to be competing with the sun, making the nights very beautiful, doing this better than lamps and candles could. It kept many young people from sleeping, including me, although I was not yet a young man. I loved the moon. When everyone else in the house had gone to sleep, I would always open the curtains to look at the moon and the reflection of the window on the floor or on the bed. The singing of girls and boys would reach my window. I listened with great pleasure, studying the Ukrainian sky against which stars burned like candles. For the Ukrainian sky is dark, dark like nowhere in Russia.

*

I liked the peasants' food and often ate at their houses, even though we had the same things at home. Theirs tasted better. In the barracks they ate sauerkraut, cabbage soup and kasha with beef fat (instead of lard), and cracklings mixed with kasha. The smell of cabbage soup filled the barracks and even the streets. The peasants ate pure fat with garlic and Ukrainian borscht made from fresh vegetables (beet stock, beans, potatoes, beets), sour cream and fried cakes, onion knishes, polenta with milk or butter, fermented milk with potatoes, and so on.

In the winter, when the factory people worked day and night, the peasants would weave marvelous materials, sew clothes; the girls would sew and embroider, sing songs, dance, and the boys would play fiddles. In the morning, whoever needed to would go into Kamanets-Podolsk or Yampol to the market.

There was none of this with the factory people. I quite disliked that. Sometimes I would run to the factory with my brother to eat sugared candy, but then I'd become convinced that honey was better, tastier. This comparison gave me the idea that honey could replace sugar and then there wouldn't be any need for factories, for working day and night. Bees would bring the honey, one grandfather to watch over the bees, and that's it!

I wasn't against setting up apiaries in all the fields where the beetroot

grew. Oh, those wonderful grandfathers! They knew everything about bees, and when they talked, you listened.

*

I always envied the peasant boys who lived, it seemed to me, in complete freedom, amidst nature. They tended horses, rode into the night, and shepherded large herds of pigs which they rode home at night, mounted on top and holding onto their ears. The squealing pigs would tear along, faster than horses, raising a huge cloud of dust along the country road.

*

Often I would fall out with the peasant boys. In spite of all my sympathies with them, they still considered me a factory kid. They always seemed on the verge of giving me a good thrashing, but occasionally accepted me into their company. Sometimes I'd find myself in a state of disfavor, left alone, which I didn't like. I didn't like the factory boys. Because of their suits, they couldn't climb trees or run in the swampy meadows. I, on the other hand, could never be found close to home. Bored with being by myself, I'd go to a neighbor boy's house and talk him into going to the woods.

Not a single kite could escape my eye, not a single crow, spying out baby chicks. I always carried a bow and arrows with me, and they were always ready to pierce the body of a kite or crow. I was an inveterate hunter.

Once I became so angry with the factory kids that I declared war on them. I hired myself an army of peasant boys, paying them each a piece of refined sugar. I pinched a whole package, fifty-four pieces, from the cupboard. This pound supplied an army of fifty-four men. If the war were to last two or three days, then I would have to pay each a piece of sugar a day. We prepared for war. We made bows from hoops meant for the sugar barrels, and stockpiled arrows made from bog-rush (river reeds) with tar tips. Each warrior was to have no less than seventy arrows. The factory kids weren't sleeping either, they, too, were making preparations. The evening before the battle, we had already started shooting, one by one, factory boys passing by. The battle lasted all day, till we bumped off the factory boys from behind a fence, sneaking up to their rear from between the woodpiles. It ended with my arrow hitting the leader of the factory boys in the eye, and his flying past me. We shot at each other point-blank.

It was hot work. That evening at home, they took my pants down and papa laid down the law. I suffered this disgrace, although in my heart I remained a hero.

*

The village, as I said earlier, engaged in art (at the time, I hadn't heard of such a word). Or rather, it's more accurate to say that it made things that I liked very much. These things contained the whole mystery of my sympathies with the peasants. I watched with great excitement how the peasants made wall paintings, and would help them smear the floors of their huts with clay and make designs on the stove. The peasant women were excellent at drawing roosters, horses, and flowers. The paints were all prepared on the spot from various clays and dyes. I tried to transport this culture onto the stoves in my own house, but it didn't work. I was told I was just making a mess on the stove. In turn came fences, barn walls, and so forth.

*

The peasants' entire way of life attracted me strongly. I decided that I'd never live and work in factories. And I'd never go to school. I thought that the peasants' life was wonderful, that they had everything they needed, that they had no need of factories or learning how to read. They made everything for themselves, even paint. They also had honey and so there was no need to boil sugar. One grandfather collected a lot of honey, sitting all summer in the apiary of a flower garden and looking after the bees. Any peasant who had a grandfather had bees. Everyone had a garden and pears. Oh, the pears, and apples, and plums, and cherries! I loved cherry dumplings with sour cream and honey.

I imitated the peasants' entire way of life. I smeared garlic on crusts of bread, ate fat with my fingers, ran barefoot and didn't recognize shoes. Peasants always struck me as clean and well dressed. I recall weddings at which the bride and her friends were some colorfully decorated tribe, in costumes of colorful woolen fabrics, ribbons plaited into braids and headdresses, leather boots on copper and iron horseshoes, boot-tops embroidered with designs. The groom and his friends wore gray sheepskin hats, blue pants, or rather, wide trousers which required no less than sixteen arshins of material, a white embroidered shirt and a wide red wool belt.

The bride walked through all the streets of the village with her friends, singing. She made low bows to anyone she passed in the street, bowing three times.

It was against this background that my feelings for art developed.

*

All the sugar factories in those days came into contact once a year with Kiev. A large fair was held yearly in Kiev, to which merchants came from everywhere. The sugar factory managers or their representatives would also go to contract and hire various specialists in sugar refining. Therefore in the

dormitory the fair was called "the contracts." My father also went to these contracts as a highly skilled sugar refiner, and he took me with him. Thus I got to know the city and its life, and also the art which was displayed in the shop windows of the stationery stores.

I wasn't much interested in the fair, although it was splendid. My father would go off on his business and I would run from store to store, looking for hours at pictures. Thus, little by little, Kiev became a new environment influencing my psyche and revealed to me a new existence, that of art.

At that time, I didn't understand anything, didn't debate questions of Kievan art and the art of the village, but perceived them both purely emotionally, with pleasant excitement and a great desire to draw the very same pictures myself. I didn't know that schools existed where they taught drawing and painting, but thought that these pictures, too, were painted the same way peasants painted flowers, horses and roosters, without any kind of formal training or education.

But I sensed that there was a difference between Kievan art and village art. One picture on display made a strong impression on me. In Kievan art, everything depicted was very lifelike and natural. The picture which fascinated me was of a young girl sitting on a bench and peeling a potato. I was struck by the lifelikeness of the potato and the peelings, which lay like ribbons on the bench next to an incomparably drawn pot. This picture was a revelation for me, and I remember it to this day. I was strongly moved by its technique of expression. To be able to draw a picture like that was my desire, but I continued drawing horses in the primitive spirit of the peasant women, who all knew how to draw flowers and paint murals. Art belonged more to them than to men.

*

With each year I improved in this activity and grew more and more strongly drawn to Kiev. The colorful brick houses, the hills, the Dnieper, the distant horizon and steamships. Its whole life affected me more and more. The peasant girls would cross the Dnieper in canoes, carrying butter, milk and sour cream, covering the shores and streets of Kiev, and giving it a special color.

My father wasn't especially pleased with my attraction to art. He knew that there existed such a thing as artists who painted pictures, but he would never talk about this subject. He still intended me to follow the same line that he had. Father told me that the artist's life was bad and that a great many of them wound up in jail, something he didn't want for his son.

My mother also engaged in various kinds of needlework and lacemaking. I learned this art from her and also embroidered and did needlepoint.

*

I was twelve years old. I was already, you could say, a master artist since I prepared my own watercolor paints and made my own brushes. I was already quite good at drawing horses in different ways, with landscapes and people, and painted them, naturally, in arbitrary colors. I wasn't alone; I had already found a colleague, and the two of us drew pictures of every possible subject.

We were living at the time in the small town of Belopolye in the Kharkov province, where I found a drawing partner who was very much devoted to art. My friend was in the know about making paints before I was. He had flat stones on which he ground his paints. The paints were made not only from various kinds of dirt and clay, but also from certain powders, from which we made both watercolors and oil paints. But we didn't give preference to oil paints and settled on watercolors. The work went on. One fine day, my friend came running to my house out of breath, called me to come out and whispered:

—I heard my uncle tell my aunt that they've sent for the most famous artists in Petersburg to come paint icons in the church.

This excited us tremendously, for we had never before seen living artists. We followed every conversation of our elders about the arrival of the artists, and to this end my friend would go secretly every day to his uncle's house.

The time came, and three artists really did arrive! The church parishioners were also a little excited by this event, not so much by the artists as the carrying-out of repairs and the collecting of money. But we were interested only in the artists. To get into the church and watch how these famous artists worked—we very much wanted to do this. And all our thoughts were concentrated in this direction, day and night! We had already examined the church window to see where it was possible to crawl through. As a longtime resident of Belopolye, it was my friend's job to find out where they would be living and working. But he didn't want to ask his uncle; for some reason it was a secret. We went out to the main street in town. We walked secretly—I along one side of the street, glancing at the more or less suspicious looking faces, and he along the other. That's how we hunted for the artists. We figured they were bound to come to the main street to take a stroll, like all the townspeople did. Any out-of-towner was immediately apparent in Belopolye. We walked from morning till evening. We stood outside the main bakery and the butcher's shop, but to our dismay, we kept seeing only familiar faces: going into the bakery, the butcher's, or on the street. There were no outsiders to be seen. For some reason we conducted all these searches in secret, letting on to no one and keeping quiet at home. How much simpler it would have been to go to the church and ask the sexton about the artists!

After our failure on the main street, we started walking along all the town's streets, but at last we started lying in wait around the church itself. We kept watch together, taking turns for lunch. But then we changed this method. Fearing that one might see them before the other, we stocked up on rations and sat

together in front of the church from morning till evening. There was no sign of any artists.

We went to his uncle's. My friend pretended he had come to visit his aunt and introduced me to her. She asked: "Whose is he?" He answered: "He's visiting from Parkhomovka" (the village where the sugar factory was). We hung around his aunt for a long time and couldn't think of how to ask his uncle about the artists. His aunt brought out a piece of fat and bread for each of us. We moved over to some logs and started eating. Then we went home; neither his aunt nor uncle had said anything about the artists. And the artists, meanwhile, were already in Belopolye. A few more days went by the same way. One hot evening when we were coming back from swimming, we suddenly noticed some boys and girls standing around a house on the shortest street in Belopolye and peering into the window. We also went up to it, and what did we see? On the walls of the room, hanging on "rags" (as we called them), were painted heads of boys, girls and cows drinking water. The artists were walking around the room. There were three of them. We stared at them as if they were the most fantastic rarity. We were startled by their long hair and strange shirts.

That night we slept poorly, waiting for morning so we could go to the house where the artists were staying. In the morning, while everyone else was still sleeping, I slipped out of the house and ran straight to the observation post as fast as I could. When I got there, my friend was already waiting. No one came out. We stood at some distance so as not to call attention to ourselves, even though we weren't bothering anyone. Cows were driven past, the sun came up, but the artists didn't appear. At last the window opened and an artist peered out at the street. We walked away, pretending to be interested in the gardens. An hour later, the gate opened and the artists stood before our very eyes. They had boxes on straps slung over their shoulders, umbrellas and other incomprehensible things. They were wearing shirts. Blue pants and boots. The artists walked out of town, and we followed behind them. In the fields stood mills, rye sprang up and there were oak trees in the distance. We walked through the rye where we couldn't be seen, and wherever there was wheat, we crawled.

Upon reaching the mill, the artists settled in, took out their boxes, opened up their umbrellas and started to paint.

We studied everything with the closest possible attention, not allowing a single detail to slip away from us. We wanted to see what they did and how. We crawled as cautiously as possible, on our stomachs, holding our breath. We were able to crawl up very close. We saw colored tubes from which they squeezed paint, which was extremely interesting. On the "rag" appeared the sun, the mill, and so forth.

Our excitement knew no bounds. We crawled around for two hours. The artists stopped working and headed off to the mill to eat breakfast. They talked to each other in Russian and laughed. Taking advantage of the moment, we left, still crawling, came out of the rye and took to our heels with all our might.

The artists were a shock of such magnitude that my friend started to consider running away with them to Petersburg as soon as they had finished their work in the church. But since we were subject to our parents, and our parents were subject to other circumstances of life, at the very most interesting moment in my friend's and my life, these circumstances prevented us from working out our plan for running away to Petersburg. My father moved our family to the Volchok Sugar Factory in the Chernigov district, twenty versts from the city of Konotop. Engineers at this factory would see and praise my work, and suggest to my father that he send me to art school. At that time, I was copying pictures from the magazine *Niva*. I pestered my father and he wrote an application to the Moscow Art School (so the engineers said). But instead of mailing it, he dropped that application into his desk and announced to me three months later that the school had no more room.

*

Ever since Belopolye, tubes, palettes, brushes, umbrellas, folding chairs had given me no peace of mind. I was sixteen, and it seemed I had already painted everything—cows, horses, people—that the artists in magazines drew. On my sixteenth birthday, my mother took me to Kiev where she bought me everything the storekeeper told her I needed.

I was living at the time in the city of Konotop. Oh, the whole glorious city of Konotop glistened with fat! At the markets and by the train station, behind long rows of tables, sat women who were called *salnitsas*² and smelled of garlic. On the tables there were piles of various kinds of fat, smoked and nonsmoked with nice rinds, rings of Cracow sausage stuffed with big pieces of meat and pork fat, blood sausage, buckwheat puddings with an unusual aroma that gnawed at all the iron in a man; there was ham also with fat around the edges, rolls of round *salniks* and round little sausages with gristle. The *salnitsas* themselves glistened in their greasy clothes in which the sun's rays were reflected, and they smelled of garlic.

I'd buy a ring of sausage for five kopecks, break it into pieces and eat it at the market like everyone did. I didn't even look at the lamb which was one-and-a-half kopecks a pound, or at the beef. Pork was my favorite dish and also fish, especially dried sea roach, two kopecks for a large piece with a red, fatty spine and caviar. I loved to eat pork and fish with white bread. Or to buy from the *salnitsa* a small piglet for forty kopecks, roasted with a red skin drenched in grease. The fried skin would crunch on the teeth, and I'd eat the whole thing without letting my parents know.

I grew up with this Ukrainian fat and garlic in Konotop. But this was the

2. *Salnitsa*—a neologism from the word *salnik*, a thick buckwheat porridge with mutton fat; thus, a *salnitsa* is a *salnik*-vendor. (Trans.)

very pleasant side of Konotop. Its other characteristic features were an impassable swamp when it rained, and unbelievable dust in dry periods. Whenever some old man would ride by in a cart, he would raise such a cloud of dust that you couldn't see either the horses or the houses. It was said that once when Catherine the Second had had the fortune to pass through this glorious town, her horses sank and drowned in the swampy streets. From that time on, supposedly, the town came to be called Konotop.³ As always in these towns, the main street was called Nevsky Prospect. On both sides of this street planks were laid down in case of rain. Whenever the black dirt would dissolve into mud an arshin deep, people would walk along these planks. Sows would lie in the street itself suckling piglets, slopping around in the mud or digging through the garbage which spilled out from the courtyards onto Nevsky Prospect.

I lived far from the Prospect in a very nice little Ukrainian house surrounded by a garden.

I painted my first picture, *Moonlit Night* [*Lunnaya Noch*]. I painted mostly according to my impressions, as I had done in Belopolye. I couldn't paint at all from life, even though when I bought my paints, the far-sighted salesman threw in a book by Professor Iennike, I believe, which explained how to paint portraits and landscapes. According to Iennike, in order to paint a portrait, you needed to put in fifty-four "body" colors, and in a landscape no fewer "grassy" ones. I couldn't make sense of all these colors and just painted however the Lord wanted me to. I painted according to my impressions, and chose whatever colors corresponded to my impressions of what I had seen.

Moonlit Night was my first painting on canvas, measuring three-quarters of an arshin. It was a landscape with a river, rocks, and a moored canoe. I was told that the reflection of the moonbeams in the picture was very lifelike. This picture made a big impression on all my friends. One of my friends possessed a commercial streak and suggested I display this work in a stationery shop on Nevsky, but I was opposed to this and terribly overmodest. My mood was strange: I was ashamed, you could say, to show the work that I had done with such satisfaction. But on one occasion my friend took my *Moonlit Night* without my permission. The storekeeper was struck by this picture. He gladly took it, as my friend related, and immediately displayed it in the store window. I too went to look at my first exhibition, but I was afraid of being recognized as the author. Office workers would stop and look and look. . . . The picture didn't stay there long; it was bought for five roubles. For that I could eat a ring of sausage a day for a whole month. My finances increased strongly and the storekeeper asked me to bring him another *Moonlit Night*, only one with a windmill. But I painted a different picture, twice the size, depicting a small grove with storks. It, too, was sold.

3. Literally, "Horse Swamp." (Trans.)

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Time passed, I went to Kiev and met Pimonenko. His pictures made a great impression on me. He showed me his painting *The Hopak* [*Gopak*].⁴ I was staggered by everything I saw in his studio. There were many easels with pictures depicting the life of the Ukraine.

I showed him my work, by this time nature studies. I entered the Kiev Art School. But circumstances forced me to move to the city of Kursk. Kursk, of course, isn't Kiev, but it was still a city. That was in 1896. I was already a bit of an experienced painter. The city of Kursk would occupy a large part of my future biography.

My work in Kursk developed under the influence of the "Itinerants" [*Peredvizhniki*], Shishkin and Repin, whom I knew through reproductions. Nature became for me the reality which had to be captured with complete accuracy in my sketches.

With the transfer of the Moscow-Kursk Railway Administration to Kursk, there came with the workers a certain accountant, a great lover of painting, who had studied with the renowned Ukrainian master, Murashko, in Chernigov, I believe. He was Valentin Loboda. We became friends. Soon there appeared another art lover, Fyodor Yakovlevsky, and also Mamotin. Loboda talked the manager of the railroad into letting us use one of the administration building's rooms for drawing during off hours. We immediately formed a circle of art lovers. We then sent off to the Moscow Art School for various aids, plaster figures, anatomies, busts of Venus, David, and others. We drew with great enthusiasm, and kept drawing till we had achieved the full illusion of the plaster representation. Then we moved on to nature.

Shortly after, our camp was visited by yet another genuine artist who reeked of the Academy of Arts. He was Lev Kvachevsky. He had been a student at the Academy of Arts in the landscape painting class. So how was it that he wound up in Kursk instead of the Academy in Petersburg? It later came to light that he had gone to the Crimea to do some sketches and had met a beautiful young girl there. And, well, he got married! You can't go to the Academy with a wife, there's no money; but the parents, as they say, had hands and set him up as an official in the Excise Duty Administration. And from there he had received a post in Kursk as an Excise Supervisor in the Speransky Alcohol Refinery. The place was suitable and always lively. The apartment, the heating, the lighting were free, all we needed was a little to eat and drink. Kvachevsky's apartment was at that time the gathering place for artists and officials. There were some very interesting characters among them. Art was talked about a lot; we discussed our work, criticized each other severely. The atmosphere was always cheerful and merry, regardless of whether or not there was any money.

4. *Hopak*—a Ukrainian dance. (Trans.)

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In expanding our program, we discovered a truly talented artist, a student of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, Vladimir Golikov. His work had a very good effect on me. The freshness of his colors, their pleasant tone, their wide, generalized brushstroke excited my emotions like yeast in dough. I found an enormous difference between the work of Golikov and that of Kvachevsky, the two opposing schools of Moscow and Petersburg. Golikov's work always put me in a special mood; I felt the straight line of his painting, and therefore it was close to me in spirit. But he stood outside our circle and was lazy. I wanted to beat him, he was so impossibly lazy! He would always sit in his workshop like a hermit and think, pace, but work very little. This annoyed me tremendously: how could one be so talented at painting and not work all day?!

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Lev Kvachevsky was my very closest friend. We couldn't live without each other. We were united by a great desire to work and by our outdoor sketching sessions (the fact that he lived at an alcohol refinery was of no significance for our friendship). We had much in common in our personalities. One thing we could never agree on was the relationship of painting to life. I kept to a looser manner of drawing, while his was more painstaking. We'd walk thirty versts every day in summer, spring, and winter for our sketch sessions, arguing all the way. The arguments would stop as soon as we sat down to paint. We'd stop arguing when we sat down to eat. He always carried a flask with him: Speransky's nectar, as he called it, or heavenly drops, or Mary's tears. We'd discuss other matters when we ate, or reminisce about the Ukraine. He and I both were Ukrainians. We'd leave the house in the morning, carrying enough rations with us for the day. My daily portion consisted of a pound of fat, several pieces of garlic, a pound of smoked brisket and five or six French rolls. Boiled brisket with ribs and gristle is a pleasant taste. Kvachevsky was more delicate by nature; he'd take more ham, smoked sausage, Swiss cheese, ten eggs, homemade white bread, and, of course, his flask of heavenly drops. It was a pleasure to watch with what an appetite he ate. In the village, we'd also buy, for five kopecks, a pot of cold baked milk with thick cream and a yellow crust, which was more delicious than any pastry.

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He and I both loved nature, the fields, the forests, and we listened to the whole music of the fields, the birds and the local color. We cursed the time we had to waste earning money, he in the Excise Office, and I in the Technical

Service Department of the Moscow-Kursk Railway. Like him, I, too, was quite lucky. The supervisor of the Technical Department had nothing against sketching, he too loved art, and I enjoyed privileges (sometimes I postponed work until evening). I was also supported by the brother of the sculptor Beklemishev, the architect of the Technical Department who had designed the railway building, he, too, loved art, and I enjoyed privileges (sometimes I postponed work until evening). I was also supported by the brother of the sculptor Beklemishev, and I on the pretext that I loved art.

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We organized a Kursk Society of Art Lovers, began holding yearly exhibitions, invited artists from the capital, worked, developed artistic culture and grew ourselves. An outlook on art was forged in the city of Kursk. Against the dull backdrop of life in Kursk, our circle was a real volcano of artistic life. I adopted the most revolutionary point of view. Kvachevsky also changed his viewpoints not only on art, but on life as well. I took action through painting, but there stood beside me another friend, now known to the entire musical world as the outstanding composer Nikolai Roslavets. He took action through music. He was the only friend I had made in Konotop. Later, I will describe in detail all his activities and my own in Kursk. No matter how good things were in Kursk, no matter how close my friends were, like a wolf to the forest I was drawn to Moscow or Petersburg, where there could be found the true art to which I had been introduced by Golikov and Kvachevsky. Without these cities, no one would ever become an artist and would wind up in the provinces, unless he got married in the Crimea. Thoughts about these cities of art had tormented me for a long time. But these thoughts and longings got smashed on the basis of finances. But all the same, the longing was very strong and it led me to work in the Technical Department of the Administration of the Moscow-Kursk Railway. I saved my money, preparing my financial base. Finally, I was ready.

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My friends were troubled by my bold move, but their wives were extremely happy. I have to say that my friends' wives hated me because I was always taking their husbands away during any free time to go out sketching: therefore, they were never home. My friends would talk about all the difficulties and horrors of the city, but that didn't frighten me. I took account of my finances and figured I'd need enough for a full academic year, and so in the spring I went to Kursk to work. Then I went to Moscow; that was in 1904. I went as an impressionist who had taken part in exhibitions. In the spring, I went back to Kursk. In the fall I went again to Moscow where I fell in with a "commune." The commune was in Lefortovo.

The artists' commune occupied a house belonging to the artist V. Kurdyumov. Or rather, not relying on his talent, the artist V. Kurdyumov took for his dowry two houses when he got married. The house where the "communards" gathered was a spacious, two-storeyed, wooden house with twenty nice, bright rooms. Some thirty men made up the commune. Each was to pay seven roubles a month for his room.

It was in this commune that I, too, took up residence. By habit, I started to work immediately. I painted impressionistic pictures and sketches.

The company was merry, but hungry. I felt like a provincial among the communards from the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, promptly paid my money and shared in all the expenses. But the communards didn't fulfill any of their obligations to the owner of the house; no one even thought about paying him according to their agreement. But worst of all, no one even considered working. This demoralization had the opposite effect on me. I strained my every nerve more and more towards work. My whole financial base crumbled within two or three months, and I fell like a chicken into soup, completely unequipped for life in the big city. But I didn't give in to depression and I worked, studied art, went to the studio. In spite of my naturalistic leaning, of my feelings towards nature, I was strongly moved by icons. I felt some kinship and something splendid in them. I saw in them the entire Russian people with all their emotional creativeness. I'd then recall my childhood: the horses, flowers and roosters of the primitive murals and wood carvings. I sensed some bond between peasant art and icons: icon art is a high-cultural form of peasant art. I discovered in them the whole spiritual side of the "Peasant Age"; I came to understand the peasants through icons, saw their faces not as saints, but as ordinary people. And also the coloring and the attitude of the painter. I understood Botticelli and Cimabue. Cimabue was closer to me; he possessed the spirit I had sensed in peasants.

This was the third stage of my artistic transition. The first stage was when I switched over from the primitive representations of peasant art to the naturalist school, to Shishkin and Repin. This path was unexpectedly halted by a great moment, when, through painting, I stumbled upon an extraordinary phenomenon in my perception of nature. There stood before me among the trees a newly whitewashed house. It was a sunny day. The sky was cobalt-blue. One side of the house was in the shade and the other was lit by the sun. For the first time I saw the bright reflections of the blue sky, the pure, transparent tones. From then on I began working in bright, joyful, sunny paints. One of these sketches is in the Tretyakov Gallery (*The Garden [Sadik]*). I painted a great number of these sketches over the next few years. From that time on, I became an impressionist.

Icon Moscow overturned all my theories and led me to the third stage of development. Through icon art, I understood the emotional art of the peasants,

which I had loved earlier, but whose meaning I hadn't fully understood. In what way did this art overturn my striving for lifelikeness and the sciences— anatomy, perspective, the study of nature through the drawing of sketches? All of the Itinerants' convictions regarding nature and naturalism were overturned by the fact that the icon painters, who had achieved a great mastery of technique, conveyed meaning outside of spatial and linear perspective. They employed color and form on the basis of a purely emotional interpretation of theme. They painted without regard to any of the rules established by the classics and especially the academy of V. Makovsky and Repin. I distinctly pictured to myself the whole line from the great icon art to the horses and roosters of the murals, spinning wheels and costumes of peasant art. In precisely the same way, I could also see the other line of art which was called the art of the people of the highest strata, of the aristocrats and palaces. This was the art of antiquity and the Renaissance. "Itinerancy" I attributed to the middle layer of society, to the intelligentsia and to the revolutionary-minded strata. This whole line I also considered to be high, but it seemed to me that the Renaissance and ancient art was an art for the sake of beauty, while in "Itinerancy" I saw an art of propaganda and a denunciation of the authorities and social reality. Later I would proceed neither along the road of antiquity and the Renaissance, nor "Itinerancy." I remained on the side of peasant art and began painting in the primitive spirit. In the first period, I imitated icon painting. The second was purely a "labor" period: I drew peasants at work, harvesting, threshing. In the third period, I drew closer to the "suburban genre" (carpenters, gardeners, vacation spots, swimmers). The fourth period was the "city faces" (floor washers, maids, lackeys, servants).

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I'm going back a little, to the period of the commune and its way of life.

The commune was a true, hungry Bohemia. With my appetite, I looked like a real country boy. But fat and garlic didn't have to be bought every day. The commune collected money for soup bones which the artist Ivan Bokhan would go for. The butchers would ask him, "For dogs or humans?," which embarrassed him terribly. We made soup often. Sometimes the commune ate in the School's cafeteria. Lunch wasn't expensive, twelve kopecks: buckwheat porridge with butter or beef fat and borscht with meat.

This was the environment I worked in, you couldn't say peacefully, but still I worked. I was already dreaming about holding out until spring when I would go to Kursk and again earn money for the fall, draw sketches in the summer and eat like a human being once more.

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The Revolution of 1905. There was unrest and anxiety in the commune

as well; we began our own preparation to take to the streets. I remained at my bench (my easel) and continued painting. The tension mounted. Fedosya (the cook) was our main informant. She reported to us on the development of events along the line of the Black Hundred (the yardman was a friend of hers). Next to our commune there was a dormitory for students of some technical engineering college. Fedosya had contacts with the dormitory and the yardmen next door, who told her in confidence about all the horrors being planned by the Black Hundred ("Tonight they're supposed to carve up some students and who knows, they may come after you"). We started taking measures, moved around all the plaster casts, the huge David, all the Venuses, the benches and chairs, and began barricading the doors and windows. We ourselves went up to the top floor and blocked the way up. The owner of the house, the artist Kurdyumov, showed us a secret passage through which it was possible, in the event of an attack, to pass from one house to another and reach the street (the commune's house was in a courtyard).

My behavior started to annoy one of the members of the commune, the artist Antonov. A wonderful fellow, he scolded me for painting at a time when I should be taking to the streets. He was tall and lanky (whenever he picked up an ax, he had no room to swing because of his height). Reproaching me, he would sit on the floor with his legs tucked under him, drink vodka and gnaw on a soup bone with gristle and tendons. Waving his bone, he would appeal to me to come outside.

Tension mounted. Evening fell. We didn't light the fires. A student came to see us. I introduced myself to him. Kirill Shutko informed us of the progress of the Revolution. I headed into town along Tverskaya Street. At the corner of Leontyevsky Pereulok, I was surrounded by the Black Hundred. I was wearing a cap, an overcoat with a collar, a black shirt, and had long hair:

— Hold it, Socialist!

And several Finnish knives flashed. I calmly said:

— Hey! Anyone got a smoke?

And then I stunned them with their own familiar curse words. One of them produced a cigarette, I put it in my mouth, fished for a match, swore again and left (I wasn't a smoker).

I went back to Lefortovo, to the commune. The night was troubled; gunfire was heard. In the morning, the fighting began. Many of the "communards" disappeared. Antonov argued with me, took the ax he had been practicing with for battle, and went out into the street. He caught a cab and told the driver to take him to the Red Gates (to the barricades). Later we learned that he had been seized on the next street by policemen.

I got hold of a "bulldog" revolver and some bullets. It was a real war. I joined up with a group whose pockets were full of bullets and various types of revolvers. This group was also joined by some hunters. We headed for the Red Gates, where the battle was going on. They sent us back to the Sukharev Tower.

We were supposed to secure the Sukharev post, after we had partitioned off Sadovaya at the second Meshchanskaya. We (several men) were posted on Sreten-skaya Street for observation. We started breaking up fences to build a barricade. The work went on towards the evening. We noticed that soldiers had started moving along Sretenka. We headed for the passages to the Sukharev Tower. Soldiers quickly approached, heading towards the square. A command was heard and the soldiers readied their rifles. We let the barricade know. A moment later, we also gave a hushed command. We fired. The soldiers, even though they were in readiness, hadn't expected such impudence. We fired time after time. I quickly emptied the five bullets in my revolver. There was no time to reload: the soldiers, having discovered us, began spraying the passageway with bullets. In spite of their fire, their bullets didn't touch anyone at our post; only plastering fell down. We made it to the barricade, but the soldiers formed a chain and kept shooting. They were answered in kind, bullets whizzing overhead. After each volley from their side, I wanted to jump up for some reason, as though bullets were supposed to fly underfoot. The exchange of fire was short because many ran away. There were wounded and dead. Returning their fire, our group retreated to a courtyard of some house. Having closed the gates and taken the staircase in the courtyard, we began climbing over a fence into a neighboring courtyard. The barricade was taken by the soldiers, but our group almost all made it into the other courtyard and decided to go to Sretenka and sneak up from the rear. The soldiers entered the courtyard. Those who hadn't managed to crawl over scattered in all directions. I ducked into the first stairwell I came upon, intending to climb onto the roof and crawl down the drainpipe to the street.

Sometimes things occur which rescue people from the most desperate situations.

That's what happened to me. Having reached the third floor, I read on a door the nameplate of someone I knew. I was so taken aback that I was seized with terror, mixed with the desire to escape from my situation. What should I do? Knock or look for the attic? I decided to look for the attic, but could find no entrance. I stood on the stairs and listened; was anyone coming? I counted my bullets—there were five or six. No one was coming. I decided to knock. The door opened.

—It's you! How'd you get away? Got a gun?

—Yes.

—This is trouble, they'll come looking. Look, take your things off, hide the gun under the rug in the hall. Take off your coat and shirt and put on a waistcoat.

I obeyed; there was no time to ask questions. He also took off his jacket, leaving only his waistcoat. Then he took out some tobacco and lit it. There was a lot of smoke. It gave the impression that we'd been sitting all day long smoking and drinking. He brought out some vodka, sausage and cucumbers.

— Sit down and drink.

We drank, and it went straight to my head—I was hungry, and in such cases, vodka always goes straight to your head. He started singing “There’s a birch in the field, kalina-malina.” I sang the bass.

— Sing louder!

A knock on the door. He called out loudly from his seat, “Come in!” (he had purposely left the door unlocked). An officer came in with a gun in his hand.

— Any fugitives?

— What fugitives? Would you like a quick glass? It’s my birthday and my friend and I here . . .

The officer’s anger immediately changed to politeness. He had a drink, another, and yet another. I sat down, sprawled out over my chair, sang “Kalina-malina” through my nose and gesticulated freely.

— Look, he’s certainly in fine fettle . . .

The officer was satisfied: everything was in order. He wiped his lips, excused himself and cried out to his soldiers, “Go on back out!”

We kept up this scene of the first act all night, expecting spectators the whole time.

In the morning, we joined the landlady for a trip to the store, borrowing a small basket from her. We walked out of the courtyard as if nothing were wrong. On the street there stood a short, large-headed officer with some soldiers. . . .

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I went back again to Kursk and continued my impressionism. I loved nature in the spring very much, in April and the beginning of May. I no longer went out on sketching sessions, but worked in the apple orchard next to a small house which I was renting for twelve roubles a month. This orchard was my real studio.

My best friend Kvachevsky would come by to scold me. He couldn’t bear my light blue tones, but in the end, I brought him around. His color scale shifted in the direction of impressionism and he drew fine sketches. His works are collected in the Kursk Museum. *The Clear Glade* [*Yasnaya Polyana*] was his best work; it could have been shown at any major exhibition (he died a long time ago).

I continued working in impressionism in my studio garden. I understood that the essence of impressionism wasn’t to draw phenomena or objects to a “T,” but that the whole point lay in the pure texture of painting, purely in the relationship of all my energy to phenomena, and only to the painterly quality which they carry or contain. My entire work was like that of a weaver who weaves an amazing texture of pure fabric, with the sole difference that I gave a form to this pure fabric of painting, a form which sprang only from the emo-

tional requirements and qualities of painting. I learned that the main stimulus for a painter is always the painterly quality alone. Everything else is inserted into this culture; for example, themes expressing, through means of painting, the psychology of a man sitting for a picture, or illustrating scenes from life, a world outlook, or the heroism of the masses.

I separated these two sides of art and determined that the art of painting generally consists of two parts. One part is pure—the pure unit of painting as such; the other part consists of the objective theme, known as content. Together they comprised an eclectic art, a hybrid of painting and nonpainting. Reality became for me not a phenomenon which should be conveyed with full precision, but a purely painterly phenomenon. Therefore, all the other qualities of an object played no central role, and appeared only to the extent that their contours could not be completely reshaped by the art of painting into an aspect of painting. By working in impressionism, I learned that an objective image never entered into its concerns. If likeness was still maintained, then it was only because the painter hadn't yet found that form which would portray painting "as such," without evoking associations with nature and objects, without being an illustration or a story, but as a completely new artistic fact, a new reality, a new truth.

Impressionism led me to look at nature again with new eyes, and it in turn called forth within me new reactions, ignited my spiritual energy towards art, towards working on a completely different side of the phenomenon.

In analyzing my own activity, I noticed that, strictly speaking, I was working on the liberation of the painterly element from the contours of natural phenomena and the liberation of my painting psychology from the power of an object. But there came along another idea and another feeling which frightened, as it were, this form of painting, one which asked: in what form, liberated from the contours of an object, is painting to be embodied, and can such a form be found?

The preceding schools and the "Itinerants" whom I loved, did the following: they picked an appropriate theme (*Christ and the Sinner* by V. Polenov, *The Resurrection of Jairus's Daughter* by I. Repin) and painted in the form of this theme. That's also what Rembrandt did (*The Prodigal Son*). But these masters made theme the main content to be expressed through painting. My approach was different. I in no way wanted to make painting a means, but only its own self-content. Gay, in his *Crucifixion*, conveyed the feeling of his painting by clothing it in his theme. Thus in *The Last Supper*, he conveyed the effect of light, for which he used the figure of Judas as a means of achieving a lighting effect. I saw in this picture another relationship; I saw that it was also possible to make the theme a means. Strictly speaking, Gay and several other artists sensed pure painting, but they couldn't imagine the existence of painting as such, as nonobjective. They sensed the nonobjective, but made representational things. I also found myself in this situation; it still seemed to me that painting in its pure

aspect was lacking something, that it had to be given a content. But on the other hand, the emotional power of painting wouldn't let me see images in their representational nature, especially if the theme had no origin in painting. The naturalism of objects didn't stand up to my criticism, and I began looking for other possibilities not outside, but within the very core of the emotion of painting, expecting that the painting itself would sooner or later provide the form from painterly qualities, and would avoid any electrical connection with an object, with nonpainterly associations. This position led me further and further away from an academic study of nature, from naturalism, from illusionism. My acquaintance with icon art convinced me that the point is not in the study of anatomy and perspective, that it's not in depicting nature in its own truth, but that it's in the sensing of art and artistic reality through emotions. In other words, I saw that reality or theme is something to be transformed into an ideal form arising from the depths of aesthetics. Therefore, in art, anything can become beautiful. Anything not in itself beautiful, but realized on an artistic plane, becomes beautiful.

The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art

HAL FOSTER

At once eccentric and crucial, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. M.)* (1907) is the set piece of the Museum of Modern Art: a bridge between modernist and premodernist painting, a primal scene of modern primitivism. In this painting a step outside the tradition is said to coincide with a leap within it. Yet one wonders if this aesthetic breakthrough is not also a breakdown, psychologically regressive, politically reactionary. The painting presents an encounter in which are inscribed two scenes: the depicted one of the brothel and the projected one of the heralded 1907 visit of Picasso to the collection of tribal artifacts in the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. This double encounter is tellingly situated: the prostitutes in the bordello, the African masks in the Trocadéro, both disposed for recognition, for use.¹ Figured here, to be sure, are both fear and desire of the other,² but is it not desire for mastery and fear of its frustration?

In projecting the primitive onto woman as other, *Femmes d'Alger* less resolves than is riven by the threat to male subjectivity, displaying its own decentering along with its defense. For in some sense Picasso did intuit one apotropaic function of tribal objects—and adopted them as such, as "weapons":

They were against everything—against unknown threatening spirits.
. . . I, too, I am against everything. I, too, believe that everything is
unknown, that everything is an enemy! . . . women, children . . . the

1. As is well known, an early study included two customers of the demoiselles, a medical student and a sailor, and was thus distanced as a narrative; with these surrogates removed, the painting becomes a direct address to its masculine subject. As for the Trocadéro, Western man, its source of projection, is absent from it: "What was not displayed in the Musée de l'Homme was the modern West, its art, institutions, and techniques. Thus the orders of the West were everywhere present in the Musée de l'Homme, except on display." (James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 4 [1981], p. 561).

2. See William Rubin, "Picasso," in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. Rubin, New York, MOMA, 1984, pp. 252-254. Hilton Kramer, who celebrates the ability of bourgeois culture to negate the primitive "assault," finds this important connection between primitivism and "fear of women" "trivializing" ("The 'Primitive' Conundrum," *The New Criterion* [December 1984], p. 5).

whole of it! I understood what the Negroes used their sculptures for. . . . All fetishes . . . were weapons. To help people avoid coming under the influence of spirits again, to help them become independent. Spirits, the unconscious . . . they are all the same thing. I understood why I was a painter. All alone in that awful museum with the masks . . . the dusty mannikins. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have been born that day, but not at all because of the forms; because it was my first exorcism painting — yes absolutely!³

Apart from a (bombastic) avant-gardism, Picasso conveys the shock of this encounter as well as the euphoria of his solution, an extraordinary psycho-aesthetic move by which otherness was used to ward away others (woman, death, the primitive) and by which, finally, a crisis in phallogocentric culture was turned into one of its great monuments.

If, in the *Demoiselles*, Picasso transgresses, he does so in order to mediate the primitive in the name of the West (and it is in part for this that he remains the hero of MOMA's narrative of the triumph of modern art). In this regard, the *Demoiselles* is indeed a primal scene of primitivism, one in which the structured relation of narcissism and aggressivity is revealed. Such confrontational identification is peculiar to the Lacanian imaginary, the realm to which the subject returns when confronted with the threat of difference.⁴ Here, then, primitivism emerges as a fetishistic discourse, a recognition and disavowal not only of primitive difference but of the fact that the West — its patriarchal subjectivity and socius — is threatened by loss, by lack, by others.

Les Demoiselles d'Avignon was also the set piece of the recent MOMA exhibition-cum-book *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*,⁵ in which the painting was presented, along with African masks often proposed as sources for the demoiselles, in such a way as to support the curatorial case for a modern/tribal affinity in art. (The argument runs that Picasso could not have seen these masks, that the painting manifests an intuitive primitivity or "savage mind.") This presentation was typical of the abstractive operation of the show, premised as it was on the belief that "modernist primitivism depends on the autonomous force of objects" and that its complexities can be revealed "in purely visual terms, simply by the juxtaposition of knowingly se-

3. Quoted in André Malraux, *Picasso's Mask*, trans. June and Jacques Guicharnaud, New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976, pp. 10-11.

4. My discussion of primitivism as a fetishistic colonial discourse is indebted to Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question," *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1983), pp. 18-36.

5. The show, sponsored by Philip Morris, Inc., included some 150 modern and 200 tribal works, most often set in pairs or comparative ensembles. Curated by William Rubin, Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, in collaboration with Kirk Varnedoe of the Institute of Fine Arts, it claimed to be "the first exhibition to juxtapose tribal and modern objects in the light of informed art history." MOMA also published a two-volume catalogue with nineteen essays by sixteen scholars on diverse aspects of "primitivism."

lected works of art."⁶ Though the exhibition did qualify the debased art-historical notion of causal influence (e.g., of the tribal on the modern), and did on another front demolish the more debased racist model of an evolutionist primitivism, it did so often only to replace the first with "affinity" (in the form of the family of *homo artifex*) and the second with the empty universal, "human creativity wherever found."⁷

Based on the aesthetic concerns of the modern artists,⁸ the "Primitivism" show cannot be condemned on ethnological grounds alone. Too often the contextualist rebuke is facile, a compensatory expression of a liberal-humanist remorse for what cannot be restored. It is, after all, the vocation of the modern art museum to decontextualize. (Lévi-Strauss describes anthropology as a *technique du dépaysement*:⁹ how much more is this true of art history?) And in the case of the tribal objects on display, the museum is but one final stage in a series of abstractions, of power-knowledge plays that constitute primitivism. Yet to acknowledge decontextualization is one thing, to produce ideas with it another. For it is this absolution of (con)textual meanings and ideological problems in the self-sufficiency of form that allowed for the humanist presuppositions of the show (that the final criterion is Form, the only context Art, the primary subject Man). In this way the show confirmed the colonial extraction of the tribal work (in the guise of its redemption as art) and rehearsed its artistic appropriation into tradition.¹⁰ No counterdiscourse was posed: the imperialist precondition of primitivism was suppressed, and "primitivism," a metonym of imperialism, served as its disavowal.

This abstraction of the tribal is only half the story; no less essential to the production of affinity-effects was the decontextualization of the modern work. It, too, appeared without indices of its contextual mediations (i.e., the dialectic of avant-garde, kitsch, and academy by which it is structured: it is, incidentally, the excision of this dialectic that allows for the formal-historicist model of modernism in the first place). The modern objects on view, most of which are preoccupied by a primitivist form and/or "look," alone represented the way the primitive is thought. Which is to say that the modern/tribal encounter was mapped in mostly positivist terms (the surfaces of influence, the forms of affinity)—in terms of morphological coincidence, not conceptual displacement. (The "trans-

6. Kirk Varnedoe, "Preface," in *Primitivism*, p. x.

7. *Ibid.*

8. On the one hand, this is a legitimate restriction: to focus on the "appreciation" of tribal art by modern artists, who "generally did not know its sources or purposes" (exhibition pamphlet). On the other hand, it is a curatorial alibi that obscures the ideology of primitivism.

9. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Archaism in Anthropology," in *Structural Anthropology* (Vol. 1), trans. Claire Jacobson, New York, Basic Books, 1963, p. 117.

10. "We owe to the voyagers, colonials, and ethnologists the arrival of these objects in the West. But we owe primarily to the convictions of the pioneer modern artists their promotion from the rank of curiosities and artifacts to that of major art, indeed to the status of art at all" (Rubin, "Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction," in *Primitivism*, p. 7).



Mbuya (sickness) mask. Pende. Zaire.



Pablo Picasso. Les Femmes d'Alger. 1907.

gressivity" of the encounter was largely disregarded, perhaps because it cannot be so readily *seen*.) In this way, the show abstracted and separated the modern and the tribal into two sets of objects that could then only be "affined." Thus reduced to form, it is no wonder they came to reflect one another in the glass of the vitrines, and one is tempted to ask, cynically enough, after such a double abstraction, such a double tropism toward modern (en)light(en)ment, what is left but "affinity"? What part of this hypothesis-turned-show was discovery (of transcultural forms, innate structures, and the like) and what part (modernist) invention?

*Elective Affinities, or
Impressions d'Afrique (et d'Océanie)*

For William Rubin, director of the "Primitivism" show, the idea of "elective affinity" between the tribal and the modern arises from two oracular pronouncements of Picasso: one to the effect that this relationship is similar to that between the Renaissance and antiquity; the other that his own tribal objects were "more witnesses than models"¹¹ of his art. Innocuous enough, these state-

11. Quoted by Rubin, "Introduction," p. 17.

ments nevertheless suggest the way primitivism is conceived as absorbing the primitive, in part via the concept of affinity. The renaissance of antiquity is an intra-Western event, the very discovery of a Westernness: to pose it as an analogy is almost *ipso facto* to inscribe the tribal as modern-primitivist, to deny its difference. Moreover, the analogy implies that the modern and the tribal, like the Renaissance and antiquity, are affined in the search for "fundamentals." Argued particularly by codirector Kirk Varnedoe,¹² this position tends to cast the primitive as primal and to elide the different ways in which the fundamental is thought. The second Picasso testimonial, that the tribal objects were witnesses only, sets up in the disavowal of influence the notion of affinity. Yet, if not direct sources, "the Negro pieces" were not, on account of this, mere secret sharers: they were seen, as Picasso remarked to Malraux, as "mediators,"¹³ that is, as *forms for use*. If the Renaissance analogy poses the tribal as falsely familial, here recognition is contingent upon instrumentality. In this way, through affinity and use, the primitive is sent up into the service of the Western tradition (which is then seen to have partly produced it).

The exhibition commenced with displays of certain modernist involvements with tribal art: interest, resemblance, influence, and affinity proper—usually of a roughly analogous structure and/or conception.¹⁴ In the inspired pairing of the Picasso construction *Guitar* (1912) and a Grebo mask owned by him, Rubin argues that the projective eyes of the mask allowed Picasso to think the hole of the guitar as a cylinder, and thus to use space as form, a surrogate as sign (a discovery proleptic of synthetic cubism). Such affinity, "conceptual ideographic,"¹⁵ not merely formal, is argued in the juxtaposition of a Picasso painting (*Head*, 1928) of superimposed profiles (?) and a Yam mask with the same element for eyes, nose, and mouth. In both works the "features" appear more arbitrary than naturally motivated. The two do share an ideographic relation to the object, and it is true that different signifieds may be informed by similar signifiers. But the works are affined mostly by virtue of the fact that they differ from another (Western "realist") paradigm,¹⁶ and the arbitrariness of the sign (at least in the case of the tribal object) is largely due to its abstraction from its code.

Otherwise, the affinities proposed in the show were mostly morphological—or were treated as such even when they appeared metaphorical or semiological (as in certain surrealist transformations wrung by Picasso). These formally

12. See in particular his essay on Gauguin in "Primitivism," pp. 179–209.

13. Quoted in Malraux, p. 10.

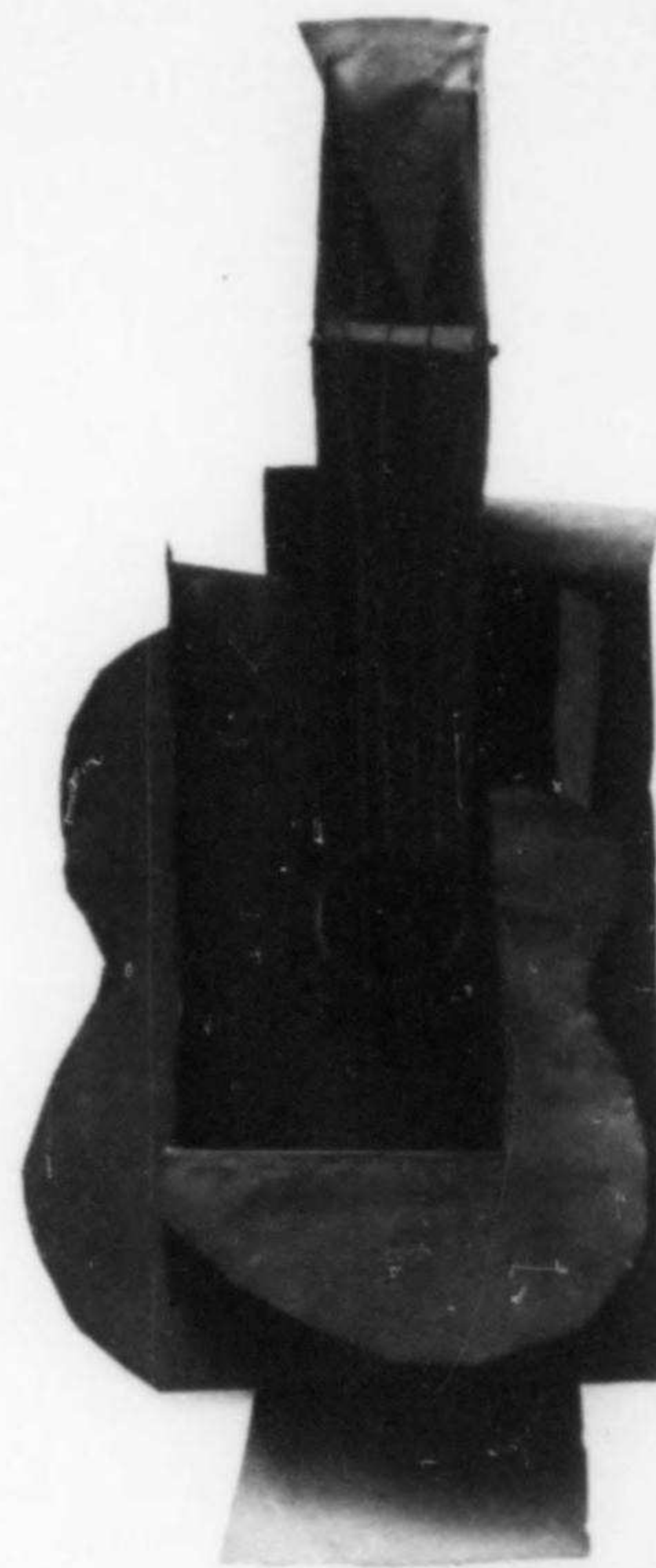
14. To claim affinity, the curators must disprove influence or direct contact—an "argument from silence," which, as others have pointed out, is difficult to make.

15. Rubin, "Introduction," p. 25.

16. See James Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," *Art in America* (April 1985), p. 166.



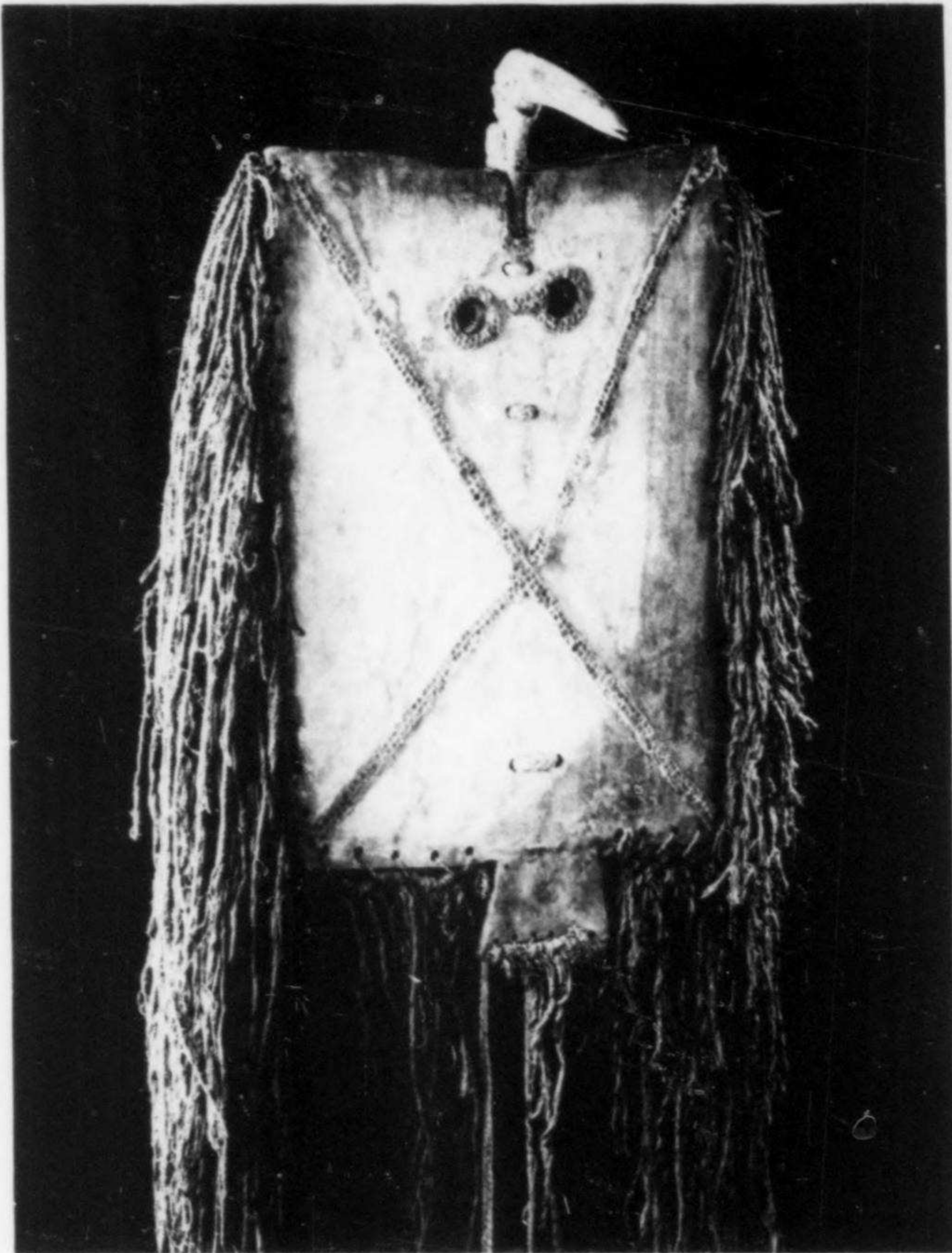
Mask. Grebo. Ivory Coast or Liberia.



Pablo Picasso. Guitar. 1912.

coincidental affinities seemed to be derived in equal part from the formalist reception of the primitive read back into the tribal work and from the radical abstraction performed on both sets of objects. This production of affinity through projection and abstraction was exposed most dramatically in the juxtaposition of a painted Oceanic wood figure and a Kenneth Noland target painting (*Tondo*, 1961), a work which, in its critical context at least, is precisely not about the anthropomorphic and asks not to be read iconographically. What does this pairing tell us about “universals”? — that the circle is such a form, or that affinity is the effect of an erasure of difference. Here, universality is indeed circular, the specular image of the modern seen in the mask of the tribal.

Significantly, the show dismissed the primitivist misreading par excellence: that tribal art is intrinsically expressionistic or even psychologically expressive, when it is in fact ritualistic, apotropaic, decorative, therapeutic, and so forth. But it failed to question other extrapolations from one set of objects, one cultural context, to the other: to question what is at stake ideologically when the “magical” character of tribal work is read (especially by Picasso) into modern art, or when modern values of intentionality, originality, and aesthetic feeling



Mask. Tusyan. Upper Volta.



Max Ernst. Bird Head. 1934-35.

are bestowed upon tribal objects.¹⁷ In both instances different orders of the socius and the subject, of the economy of the object, and of the place of the artist are transposed with violence; and the result threatens to turn the primitive into a specular Western code whereby different orders of tribal culture are made to conform to one Western typology. (That the modern work can reveal properties in the tribal is not necessarily evolutionist, but it does tend to pose the two as different stages and thus to encompass the tribal within our privileged historical consciousness.)¹⁸

17. The "tribal artists" are also called "problem-solving" (Rubin, "Introduction," p. 25). Though this term imputes an almost formalist orientation, it also suggests a possible "affinity" — of art and artifact as an imaginary resolution of social contradiction. This definition leads one to wonder what contradiction modernist "primitivism" resolves.

18. "Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relation, the comprehension of its structure, thereby allow insights into the structure and relation of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along with it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance with it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known" (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. M. Nicolaus, London, Pelican, 1973, p. 105).

No less than the formal abstraction of the tribal, this specular code of the primitive produces affinity-effects.¹⁹ For what do we behold here: a universality of form or an other rendered in our own image, an affinity with our own imaginary primitive? Though properly wary of the terms *primitive* and *tribal*, the first because of its Darwinist associations, the second because of its hypothetical nature, the curators used both as “conventional counters”²⁰ — but it is precisely this conventionality that is in question. Rubin distinguished primitive style from archaic (e.g., Iberian, Egyptian, Mesoamerican) *diacritically* in relation to the West. The primitive is said to pertain to a “tribal” socius with communal forms and the archaic to a “court” civilization with static, hieratic, monumental art. This definition, which excludes as much as it includes, seems to specify the primitive/tribal but in fact suspends it. Neither “dead” like the archaic nor “historical,” the primitive is cast into a nebulous past and/or into an idealist realm of “primitive” essences. (Thus the tribal objects, not dated in the show, are still not entirely free of the old evolutionist association with primal or ancient artifacts, a confusion entertained by the moderns.) In this way, the primitive/tribal is set adrift from specific referents and coordinates — which thus allows it to be defined in wholly Western terms. And one begins to see that one of the preconditions, if not of primitivism, then certainly of the “Primitivism” show, is the mummification of the tribal and the museumification of its objects (which vital cultures like the Zuni have specifically protested against).

The founding act of this recoding is the repositioning of the tribal object as art. Posed against its use first as evolutionist trophy and then as ethnographic evidence, this aestheticization allows the work to be both decontextualized and commodified. It is this *currency* of the primitive among the moderns — its currency as sign, its circulation as commodity — that allows for the modern/tribal affinity-effect in the first place. The “Primitivism” show exhibited this currency but did not theorize it. Moreover, it no more “corrected” this primitivist code than it did the official formalist model of modernism. This code was already partly in place by the time of the MOMA “African Negro Art” show in 1935, when James Johnson Sweeney wrote against its undue “historical and ethnographic” reception: “It is as sculpture we should approach it.”²¹ Apart from anti-Darwinist motives, the imperative here was to confirm the formalist reading and newfound value of the African objects. With the African cast as a specifically plastic art, the counterterm — a pictorial art — was institutionally bestowed upon Oceanic work by the 1946 MOMA exhibition “Arts of the South Seas,”

19. “Affinity” seems at once a cultural concept and a natural (or at least transcultural) property — a logical scandal, as Lévi-Strauss said of the incest prohibition. But just as Derrida argued that Lévi-Strauss’s “scandal” was an *effect* of his own structuralist system, so might the modern/tribal “affinity” be an effect of its formalist presentation at MOMA.

20. See Rubin, “Introduction,” p. 74.

21. James Johnson Sweeney, *African Negro Art*, New York, MOMA, 1935, p. 21.

directed by René d'Harnoncourt. Although this exhibition did not mention the surrealists directly, it noted an "affinity" in the art with the "dreamworld and subconscious."²² It then remained for Alfred Barr (in a 1950 letter to the *College Art Journal*) to historicize this purely diacritical, purely Western system as a "discovery":

It is worth noting, briefly, the two great waves of discovery: the first might be called cubist-expressionist. This was concerned primarily with formal, plastic and emotional values of a direct kind. The second wave, quasi-surrealist, was more preoccupied with the fantastic and imaginative values of primitive art.²³

The "Primitivism" show only extended this code, structured as it was around a "Wolfflinian generalization"²⁴ of African tactility (sculptural, iconic, monochromatic, geometric) versus Oceanic visuality (pictorial, narrative, colorful, curvilinear), the first related to ritual, the second to myth, with ritual, Rubin writes, "more inherently 'abstract' than myth. Thus, the more ritually oriented African work would again appeal to the Cubist, while the more mythic content of the Oceanic/American work would engage the Surrealist."²⁵ This aesthetic code is only part of a cultural system of paired terms, both within the primitive (e.g., malefic Africa versus paradisaical Oceania) and within primitivism (e.g., noble or savage or vital primitive versus corrupt or civilized or enervated Westerner), to which we will return. Suffice it to say here that the tribal/modern affinity is largely the effect of a decoding of the tribal (a "deterritorializing" in the Deleuzian sense) and a recoding in specular modern terms. As with most formal or even structural approaches, the referent (the tribal socius) tends to be bracketed, if not banished, and the historical (the imperialist condition of possibility) disavowed.²⁶

Essentially, the OED distinguishes three kinds of "affinity": resemblance, kinship, and spiritual or chemical attraction ("elective affinity"). As suggested, the affinities in the show, mostly of the first order, were used to connote affinities of the second order: an optical illusion induced the mirage of the (modernist) Family of Art. However progressive this may once have been, this election to *our* humanity can now be seen as thoroughly ideological, for if evolutionism subordinated the primitive to Western history, affinity-ism recoups it under the sign of Western universality. ("Humanity," Lévi-Strauss suggests, is a modern

22. René d'Harnoncourt, preface to *Arts of the South Seas*, New York, MOMA, 1946.

23. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., letter in *College Art Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1950), p. 59.

24. Rubin, "Introduction," p. 47.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

26. The process is strangely reminiscent of *Impressions of Africa* in which, by a code of his own, Raymond Roussel produces an "Africa" which totally occludes Africa — but nevertheless makes us aware of Western myths of Africa as he does so.

Western concept.)²⁷ In this recognition difference is discovered only to be fetishistically disavowed, and in the celebration of "human creativity" the dissolution of specific cultures is carried out: the Museum of Modern Art played host to the Musée de l'Homme indeed.

MOMAism

MOMA has long served as an American metonym of modern art, with the history of the one often charted in terms of the space of the other. This mapping has in turn supported a "historical-transcendental"²⁸ reading of modernism as a "dialectic" or deductive line of formal innovations within the tradition. Now in the decay of this model the museum has become open to charges that it represses political and/or transgressive art (e.g., productivism, dada), that it is indifferent to contemporary work (or able to engage it only when, as in the "International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture," it conforms to its traditional categories), that it is a period piece, and so on. In this situation, the "Primitivism" show could not but be overdetermined, especially when billed as a "significant correction of the received history of modern art."²⁹ What history was corrected here, and in the name of what present? What would be the stake, for example, if MOMA had presented a show of the modern encounter with mass-cultural products rather than tribal objects? Could it map such a *topos* and not violate its formal-historicist premises? Could the museum absorb art that challenges official modernist paradigms as well as institutional media apparatuses as it incorporated primitivist art? More important, did MOMA in fact pose a new model of modernism here, one based not on transformation within but on transgression without—an engagement with an outside (tribal traditions, popular cultures) that might disrupt the order of Western art and thought?

The conflicted relation of "Primitivism" to the modern and the present was evident in its contradictory point of view. At once immanent and transcendent, mystificatory and demystificatory, the show both rehearsed the modern reception of the tribal "from the inside" and posited an affinity between the two "from above." It reproduced some modern (mis)readings (e.g., the formal, oneiric, "magical"), exposed others (e.g., the expressionist), only to impose ones of its

27. See Lévi-Strauss, "Race and History," in *Structural Anthropology* (Vol. 2), trans. Monique Layton, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1976, p. 329.

28. "The historical-transcendental recourse: an attempt to find, beyond all historical manifestation and historical origin, a primary foundation, the opening of an inexhaustible horizon, a plan which would move backward in time in relation to every event, and which would maintain throughout history the constantly unwinding plan of an unending unity" (Michel Foucault, "History, Discourse, and Discontinuity," *Salmagundi* 20 [Summer/Fall 1972], p. 227).

29. Rubin, "Introduction," p. 71. The exclusion of neo-expressionism from the contemporary section of the show appears almost as a disavowal of one of its subtexts. The work in this section, though not traditional in medium, is so in the way it fashions "the primitive" as an ahistorical process or as a primitivistic look.

own (the intentional, original, "aesthetic," problem-solving). The status of its objects was also ambiguous. Though presented as art, the tribal objects are manifestly the ruins of (mostly) dead cultures now exposed to our archeological probes — *and so too are the modern objects*, despite the agenda to "correct" the institutional reading of the modern (to keep it alive via some essential, eternal "primitivism"?). Against its own intentions, the show signaled a potentially postmodern, post-tribal present; indeed, in the technological vacuum of the museum space, this present seemed all but posthistorical.

But the exhibition did more than mark our distance from the modern and tribal objects; it also revealed the epistemological limits of the museum. How to represent the modern/tribal encounter adequately? How to map the intertextuality of this event? Rather than abstractly affine objects point by point, how to trace the mediations that divide and conjoin each term? If primitivism is in part an aesthetic construct, how to display its historical conditions? In its very lack, the show suggested the need of a Foucauldian archeology of primitivism, one which, rather than speak from an academic "postcolonial" place, might take its own colonialist condition of possibility as its object. Such an enterprise, however, is beyond the museum, the business of which is patronage — the formation of a paternal tradition against the transgressive outside, a documentation of civilization, not the barbarism underneath. In neither its epistemological space nor its ideological history can MOMA in particular engage these disruptive terms. Instead it recoups the outside dialectically — as a moment in its own history — and transforms the transgressive into continuity. With this show MOMA may have moved to revise its formal(ist) model of the modern now adjudged (even by it?) to be inadequate, but it did so only to incorporate the outside in its originary (modern) moment as primitivism. Meanwhile, except for the token, misconstrued presence of Robert Rauschenberg (and perhaps Joseph Beuys), the transgressive in its transfigured (contemporary) moment — in all its disruptions of aesthetic, logocentric categories — was not acknowledged, let alone thought.

This recuperation of the primitive has its own history, which Varnedoe in various essays narrates: from "formal quotation" (e.g., the appropriations of most fauves and cubists) to "synthetic metaphor" (the universal languages of several abstract expressionists) to "assimilated ideal" (the primitivism of most of the artists in the contemporary section), the primitive has become primitivist.³⁰ Reduced to a ghostly affinity outside the tradition, the primitive now becomes an "invisible man"³¹ within it. This absorption allows the primitive to be read

30. See in particular his "Abstract Expressionism," in *Primitivism*, pp. 614–659.

31. In his "Preface" Rubin terms primitive art the "invisible man" of modern art scholarship, a trope that exceeds his suggestion that its minor status in the MOMA history of art is corrected by this show. For not only does it call to mind another repressed figure, the invisible woman artist, it also suggests that the "correction" of primitive art occurred long ago, when via "cultural production" and artistic incorporation it was first rendered a ghostly presence, an invisible man, within the modernist tradition.

retroactively almost as an effect of the modern tradition. Cultural preparation — that “the primitive” was also achieved from within modern art — is claimed. This is the basic argument of the classic *Primitivism in Modern Art* (1938, 1966) by Robert Goldwater; its first sentences read: “The artistic interest of the twentieth century in the productions of primitive peoples was neither as unexpected nor as sudden as is generally supposed. Its preparation goes well back into the nineteenth century. . . .”³² This, too, was essentially the argument of the “Primitivism” show: that modern art was “becoming other” prior to the 1907 Picasso visit to the Trocadéro. Thus the heroes of the show were artists who “prepared” the primitive (Gauguin) and/or incorporated it (Picasso) — artists who turned the “trauma” of the other into an “epiphany” of the same.³³

That the primitive was recognized only after innovations within the tradition is well documented: but what is the effectivity here, the ratio between invention and recognition, innovation and assimilation? Is the primitive to be thought of as a “*robinsonnade* of a constitutive constituent dialectic”³⁴ within Western tradition, or as a transgressive event visited upon it, at once embraced and defended against? For surely primitivism was generated as much to “manage” the shock of the primitive as to celebrate its art or to use it “counterculturally” (Rubin). As noted, the show argued “affinity” and “preparation”; yet here, beyond the abstraction of the first and the recuperation of the second, the primitive is *superceded*: “the role of the objects Picasso saw on this first visit to the Trocadéro was obviously less that of providing plastic ideas than of sanctioning his even more radical progress along a path he was already breaking.”³⁵ This retrospective reading of the primitive “role” tends not only to assimilate the primitive other *to* tradition but to recuperate the modernist break *with* tradition, all in the interests of progressive history. (As the very crux of MOMAism, analytic cubism in particular must be protected from outside influence; thus tribal art is assigned “but a residual role”³⁶ in it.) What, apart from the institutional need to secure an official history, is the motive behind this desired supercession? What but the formation of a cultural identity, incumbent as this is on the simultaneous need and disavowal of the other?

Generally perceived as primal and exotic, the primitive posed a double threat to the logocentric West, the threat of otherness and relativism. It also

32. Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, New York, Vintage Books, 1966, p. 3.

33. See Rubin, “Picasso,” in “*Primitivism*,” pp. 240–343. “The changes in modern art at issue were already underway when vanguard artists first became aware of tribal art” (Rubin, “Introduction,” p. 11).

34. Lévi-Strauss, “History and Dialectic,” in *The Savage Mind*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 264.

35. Rubin, “Picasso,” p. 265.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 309. A residual role but perhaps a real “affinity”: for it could be argued that cubism, like some tribal art, is a process of “split representation.” See Lévi-Strauss, “Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America,” in *Structural Anthropology* (Vol. 1), pp. 245–268.

posed a doubly different artifact, more "immediate," more "magical." We know how the early moderns reclaimed this artifact as art, abstracted it into form; how, also, the "Primitivism" show mitigated its otherness, projected it as affinity. Here we may see how this otherness was further recouped by a reading of the tribal artist that served to recenter the modern artist, rendered somewhat marginal or academic by mass culture, as a "shamanistic" figure. Meanwhile, the tribal object with its ritual/symbolic exchange value was put on display, reinscribed in terms of exhibition/sign exchange value. (Could it be that the "magic" perceived in the object was in part its difference from the commodity form, which modern art resisted but to which it was partly reduced?) In this way, the potential disruption posed by the tribal work—that art might reclaim a ritual function, that it might retain an ambivalence of the sacred object or gift and not be reduced to the equivalence of the commodity—was blocked. And the African fetish, which represents a different social exchange just as the modern works aspire to one, became another kind of fetish: the "magical" commodity.



Georges Braque in his studio, Paris. 1911.

In the "Primitivism" show, a transgressive model of modernism was glimpsed, one which, repressed by the formalist account, might have displaced the MOMA model—its "Hegelian" history, its "Bauhausian" ideals, its formal-historicist operation (e.g., of abstraction achieved by analytic reduction within the patriarchal line: Manet . . . Cézanne . . . Picasso: of the Western tradition). This displacement, however, was only a feint: this "new" model—that the very condition of the so-called modern break with tradition is a break outside it—was suggested, occluded, recouped. With transgression without rendered as dialectic within, the official model of modern art—a multiplicity of breaks reinscribed (by the artist/critic) into a synthetic line of formal innovations—is preserved, as is the causal time of history, the narrative space of the museum.

Seen as a genuine agenda, the show presents this conflicted scenario: MOMA moves to reposition the modern as transgressive but is blocked by its own premises, and the contradiction is "resolved" by a formalist approach that reduces what was to be pronounced. Seen as a false agenda, this cynical scenario emerges: the show pretends to revise the MOMA story of art, to disrupt its formal and narrative unity, but only so as to reestablish it: the transgressive is acknowledged only to be again repressed. As suggested, that this "correction" is presented now is extremely overdetermined. How better, in the unconscious of the museum, to "resolve" these contradictions than with a show suggestive on the one hand of a transgressive modernism and on the other of a still active primitivism? Not only can MOMA then recoup the modern-transgressive, it can do so as if it had rejected its own formalist past. This maneuver also allows it at once to contain the return of its repressed and to connect with a neoprimitivist moment in contemporary art: MOMAism is not past after all! In all these ways, the critique posed by the primitive is contravened, absorbed within the body of modern art: "As if we were afraid to conceive of the Other in the time of our own thought."³⁷

Primitivism

Historically, the primitive is articulated by the West in deprivative or supplemental terms: as a spectacle of savagery or as a state of grace, as a socius without writing or the Word, without history or cultural complexity; or as a site of originary unity, symbolic plenitude, natural vitality. There is nothing odd about this Eurocentric construction: the primitive has served as a coded other at least since the Enlightenment, usually as a subordinate term in its imaginary set of oppositions (light/dark, rational/irrational, civilized/savage). This domesticated primitive is thus constructive, not disruptive, of the binary *ratio* of the West; fixed as a structural opposite or a dialectical other to be incorporated,

37. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York, Harper and Row, 1972, p. 12.

it assists in the establishment of a Western identity, center, norm, and name. In its modernist version the primitive may appear transgressive, it is true, but it still serves as a limit: projected within and without, the primitive becomes a figure of our unconscious and outside (a figure constructed in modern art as well as in psychoanalysis and anthropology in the privileged triad of the primitive, the child, and the insane).

If Rubin presented the art-historical code of the primitive, Varnedoe offered a philosophical reading of primitivism. In doing so, he reproduced within it the very Enlightenment logic by which the primitive was first seized, then (re)constructed. There are two primitivisms, Varnedoe argues, a good, rational one and a dark, sinister one.³⁸ In the first, the primitive is reconciled with the scientific in a search for fundamental laws and universal language (the putative cases are Gauguin and certain abstract expressionists). This progressive primitivism seeks enlightenment, not regressive escape into unreason, and thinks the primitive as a "spiritual regeneration" (in which "the Primitive is held to be spiritually akin to that of the new man"),³⁹ not as a social transgression. Thus recouped philosophically, the primitive becomes part of the internal reformation of the West, a moment within *its* reason: and the West, culturally prepared, escapes the radical interrogation which it otherwise poses.

But more is at stake here, for the reason that is at issue is none other than the Enlightenment, which to the humanist Varnedoe remains knightlike; indeed, he cites the sanguine Gauguin on the "luminous spread of science, which today from West to East lights up all the modern world."⁴⁰ Yet in the dialectic of the Enlightenment, as Adorno and Horkheimer argued, the liberation of the other can issue in its liquidation; the enlightenment of "affinity" may indeed eradicate difference.⁴¹ (And if this seems extreme, think of those who draw a direct line from the Enlightenment to the Gulag.) Western man and his primitive other are no more equal partners in the march of reason than they were in the spread of the word, than they are in the marketing of capitalism. The Enlightenment cannot be protected from its other legacy, the "bad-irrational" primitivism (Varnedoe's dramatic example is Nazi Blood and Soil, the swastika ur-sign), any more than the "good-rational" primitivism (e.g., the ideographic explorations of Picasso) can be redeemed from colonial exploitation. Dialectically, the progressivity of the one is the regression of the other.

Varnedoe argues, via Gauguin, that "modern artistic primitivism" is not "antithetical to scientific knowledge."⁴² One can only agree, but not as he in-

38. See Varnedoe, "Gauguin," pp. 201-203, and "Contemporary Explorations," pp. 652-653.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, New York, Seabury Press, 1972.

42. Varnedoe, "Gauguin," p. 203.

tends it, for primitivism is indeed instrumental to such power-knowledge, to the "luminous spread" of Western domination. On the one hand, the primitivist incorporation of the other is another form of conquest (if a more subtle one than the imperialist extraction of labor and materials); on the other, it serves as its displacement, its disguise, even its excuse. Thus, to pose the relation of the primitive and the scientific as a benign dialogue is cruelly euphemistic: it obscures the real affiliations between science and conquest, enlightenment and eradication, primitivist art and imperialist power. (This can be pardoned of a romantic artist at the end of the last century who, immersed in the ideology of a scientific avant-garde, could not know the effectivity of these ideas, but not of an art historian at the end of this century.)

Apart from the violence done to the other in the occlusion of the imperialist connection of primitivism and in the mystification of the Enlightenment as a universal good, this good/bad typology tends to mistake the disruption posed by the primitive and to cast any embrace of this disruption — any resistance to an instrumental, reificatory reason, any reclamation of cognitive modes repressed in its regime — as "nihilistic," regressive, "pessimistic."⁴³ (It is thus that the transgressive primitivism of such artists as Smithson is dismissed.) We are left where we began, locked in our old specular code of ethical oppositions. But then we were told all along that the issue was "human creativity wherever found":

This is the extreme of liberal thought and the most beautiful way of preserving the initiative and priority of Western thought within "dialogue" and under the sign of the universality of the human mind (as always for Enlightenment anthropology). Here is the beautiful soul! Is it possible to be more impartial in the sensitive and intellectual knowledge of the other? This harmonious vision of two thought processes renders their *confrontation* perfectly inoffensive, by denying the difference of the primitives as an element of rupture with and subversion of (our) "objectified thought and its mechanisms."⁴⁴

There is a counterreading of the primitive precisely as subversive, to which we must return, but it is important to consider here what cultural function primitivism generally performs. As a fetishistic recognition-and-disavowal of difference, primitivism involves a (mis)construction of the other. That much is clear. But it also involves a (mis)recognition of the same. "If the West has

43. See, for example, Varnedoe, "Contemporary Exploration," pp. 665, 679.

44. Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster, St. Louis, Telos Press, 1975, p. 90. The reference is to Lévi-Strauss's claim, in *The Raw and the Cooked* (trans. J. and D. Weightman, New York, Harper and Row, 1969, pp. 13-14), that "it is in the last resort immaterial whether in this book the thought processes of the South American Indians take place through the medium of my thoughts, or whether mine take place through the medium of theirs. What matters is that the human mind, regardless of the identity of those who happen to be giving it expression, should display an increasingly intelligible structure. . . ."

produced anthropologists," Lévi-Strauss writes in *Tristes Tropiques*, "it is because it was tormented by remorse."⁴⁵ Certainly primitivism is touched by this remorse, too; as the "elevation" of the artifact to art, of the tribal to humanity, it is a compensatory form. It is not simply that this compensation is false, that the artifact is evacuated even as it is elevated (the ritual work become an exhibition form, the ambivalent object reduced to commodity equivalence), that finally no white skin fond of black masks can ever recompense the colonialist subjection detailed in Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*. To value as art what is now a ruin; to locate what one lacks in what one has destroyed: more is at work here than compensation. Like fetishism, primitivism is a system of multiple beliefs; an imaginary resolution of a real contradiction:⁴⁶ a repression of the fact that a breakthrough in our art, indeed a regeneration of our culture, is based in part on the breakup and decay of other societies, that the modernist discovery of the primitive is not only in part its oblivion but its death. And the final contradiction or aporia is this: no anthropological remorse, aesthetic elevation, or redemptive exhibition can correct or compensate this loss *because they are all implicated in it*.

Primitivism, then, not only absorbs the potential disruption of the tribal objects into Western forms, ideas, and commodities, it also symptomatically manages the ideological nightmare of a great art inspired by spoils. More, as an artistic coup founded on military conquest, primitivism camouflages this historical event, disguises the problem of imperialism in terms of art, affinity, dialogue, to the point (the point of the MOMA show) where the problem appears "resolved."

A counterdiscourse to primitivism is posed differently at different moments: the destruction of racial or evolutionist myths, the critique of functionalist models of the primitive socius, the questioning of constructs of the tribal, and so forth. Lévi-Strauss has argued most publicly against these models and myths in a culturalist reading that the "savage mind" is equally complex as the Western, that primitive society is indeed based on a nature/culture opposition just as our own is. Other ethnologists like Marshall Sahlins and Pierre Clastres have also countered the negative conception of the primitive as a people without god, law, or language. Where Lévi-Strauss argues that the primitive socius is not without history but thinks it as form, Sahlins writes that paleolithic hunters and gatherers, far from a subsistence society, constitute the "first affluent" one, and Clastres (a student of Lévi-Strauss) contended that the lack of a state in the primitive socius is a sign not of a prehistorical status, as it may be thought

45. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. J. and D. Weightman, New York, Atheneum, 1978, p. 389.

46. This definition of art (see note 7) was developed by Lévi-Strauss in relation to a tribal form, Caduveo face painting; see *Tristes Tropiques*, pp. 196-197.

in a Western teleology, but of an active exorcism of external force or hierarchical power: a society not without but *against* the state.⁴⁷

Such a theoretical displacement is not simply an event internal to ethnology: it is partly incited by anticolonial movements of the postwar period and by third world resistance in our own; and it is partly affirmed by a politicization of other disciplines. For if primitivism is denial of difference, then the countermeasure is precisely its insistence, "opening the culture to experiences of the Other," as Edward Said writes, "the recovery of a history hitherto either misrepresented or rendered invisible."⁴⁸ Finally, no doubt, a counterdiscourse can only come through a countermemory, an account of the modern/primitive encounter from the "other" side.⁴⁹ But lest this recovery of the other be a recuperation into a Western narrative, a political genealogy of primitivism is also necessary, one which would trace the affiliations between primitivist art and colonial practice. It is precisely this genealogy that the MOMA show does not (cannot?) attempt; indeed, the issue of colonialism, when raised at all, was raised in colonialist terms, as a question of the accessibility of certain tribal objects in the West.

As for a cultural counterpractice, one is suggested by the "primitive" operation of *bricolage* and by the surrealist reception of the primitive as a rupture. Indeed, the dissident surrealists (Bataille chief among them) present, if not a "counterprimitivism" as such, then at least a model of how the otherness of the primitive might be thought disruptively, not recuperated abstractly. It is well known that several of these surrealists, some of whom were amateur anthropologists, were not as oblivious as most fauves and cubists to the contexts and codes of the primitive, that some politicized rather than aestheticized the primitivist-imperialist connection (in 1931, Aragon and others organized an anticolonial exhibition to counter the official *Exposition coloniale* in the new Musée des Colonies). And when these "ethnographic surrealists" did aestheticize, it tended to be in the interests of "cultural impurities and disturbing syncretisms." Which is to say that they prized in the tribal object not its *raisonnable* form but its *bricolé* heterogeneity, not its mediatory possibilities but its transgressive value. In short, the primitive appeared less as a solution to Western aesthetic problems

47. See, in general, Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1976; and Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Urizen Books, 1974.

48. Edward W. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster, Port Townsend (WA), Bay Press, 1983, p. 158.

49. As for a Western text that involves this "other" account, an example is provided by the Jean Rouch film *Les Maitres Fous*, a documentary of the trauma of imperialist subjection ritually worked through by an African tribe. In a trance the tribesmen are one by one "possessed" by the white colonial figures, the Crazy Masters—an exorcism that inverts the one in the *Demoiselles*. Here, though, the image of the other is used to purge the other, and the objectification is reversed: it is the white man who appears as the other, the savage, the grotesque. At the end the tribesmen return to the colonial city and once again assume subject-positions—in the army, in road crews, in the "native population."

than as a disruption of Western solutions. Rather than seek to master the primitive—or, alternatively, to fetishize its difference into opposition or identity—these primitivists welcomed “the unclassified, unsought Other.”⁵⁰

It is most likely excessive (and worse, dualistic!) to oppose these two readings of the primitive—the one concerned to incorporate the primitive, the other eager to transgress with it—and to extrapolate the latter into a counterpractice to the former. (Again, such a counterpractice is not for the West to supply.) However, *bricolage*—which Lévi-Strauss, influenced by the surrealists, did after all define as a “primitive” mode—is today posed in the Third World (and in its name) as such a resistant operation, by which the other might appropriate the forms of the modern capitalist West and fragment them with indigenous ones in a reflexive, critical montage of synthetic contradictions.⁵¹ Such *bricolage* might in turn reveal that Western culture is hardly the integral “engineered” whole that it seems to be but that it too is *bricolé* (indeed, Derrida has deconstructed the Lévi-Strauss opposition *bricoleur*/engineer to the effect that the latter is the product, the myth of the former).⁵²

One tactical problem is that *bricolage*, as the inversion of the appropriative abstraction of primitivism, might seem retroactively to excuse it. Indeed, the famous Lévi-Strauss formula for *bricolage* is uncannily close to the Barthes definition of appropriation (or “myth”). In his definition (1962) Lévi-Strauss cites Franz Boas on mythical systems: “‘It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up, only to be shattered again, and that new worlds were built from the fragments’”; and adds: “In the continual reconstruction from the same materials, it is always earlier ends which are called upon to play the part of means: the signified changes into the signifying and vice versa.”⁵³ Compare Barthes on myth (1957): “It is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a *second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign . . . in the first system becomes a mere signifier in the second.”⁵⁴ The difference is that myth is a one-way appropriation, an act of power; *bricolage* is a process of tex-

50. Clifford, “On Ethnographic Surrealism,” p. 564.

51. This strategy was posed by Abdellah Hammoudi at the symposium (Nov. 3–4, 1984) held at MOMA in conjunction with the show.

52. Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 285. In *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 105), Derrida writes of Lévi-Strauss: “At once conserving and annulling inherited conceptual oppositions, this thought, like Saussure’s, stands on a borderline: sometimes within an uncriticized conceptuality, sometimes putting a strain on the boundaries, and working toward deconstruction.”

53. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, p. 21.

54. Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, New York, Hill and Wang, 1972, p. 114. In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (trans. Charles Levin, St. Louis, Telos Press, 1981, p. 96), Jean Baudrillard writes: “This semiological reduction of the symbolic property constitutes the ideological process.”

tual play, of loss and gain: whereas myth abstracts and pretends to the natural, *bricolage* cuts up, makes concrete, delights in the artificial — it knows no identity, stands for no pretense of presence or universal guise for relative truths. Thus, if it is by a “mythical” reduction of content to form that the primitive becomes primitivist, by a mythical abstraction of signified into signifier that African ritual objects, customs, *people* become “Africanity” — if it is by myth that one arrives at affinity and universality — then *bricolage* may well constitute a counterpractice. For in *bricolage* not only may the primitive signified be reclaimed but the Western signified may be mythified in turn, which is to say that primitivism (the myths of the African, the Oceanic, that still circulate among us) may possibly be deconstructed and other models of intercultural exchange posed. However compromised by *its* appropriation as an artistic device in the West (superficially understood, *bricolage* has become the “inspiration” of much primitivist art), *bricolage* remains a strategic practice, for just as the concept of myth demystifies “natural” modes of expression and “neutral” uses of other-cultural forms, so too the device of *bricolage* deconstructs such notions as a modern/tribal “affinity” or modernist “universality” and such constructs as a fixed primitive “essence” or a stable Western “identity.”

*The Other Is Becoming the Same;
the Same Is Becoming Different*

Below, I want briefly to pose, to collide, two readings of the primitive encounter with the West: that of its progressive eclipse in modern history and that of its disruptive return (in displaced form) in contemporary theory. The first history, as we have seen, positions the primitive as a moment in the “luminous spread” of Western reason; the second, a genealogy, traces how the primitive, taken into this order, returns to disrupt it. The difficulty is to think these contrary readings simultaneously, the first aggressively historicist, the second historically enigmatic.

If the identity of the West is defined dialectically by its other, what happens to this identity when its limit is crossed, its outside eclipsed? (This eclipse may not be entirely hypothetical given a multinational capitalism that seems to know no limits, to destructure all oppositions, to occupy its field all but totally.) One effect is that the logic that thinks the primitive in terms of opposition or as an outside is threatened (as Derrida noted in the work of Lévi-Strauss or as Foucault came to see within his own thought, such structural terms can no longer be supported even as methodological devices).⁵⁵ In the second narrative,

55. See Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play,” and Foucault, “History, Discourse, and Discontinuity.” Frederic Jameson has suggested in this regard that one “referent” of French deconstruction may well be American capital. See his “Pleasure: A Political Issue,” in *Formations*, ed. Victor Burgin, et al., London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

this "eclipsed" or sublated primitive reemerges in Western culture as its scandal — where it links up genealogically with poststructuralist deconstruction and politically with feminist theory and practice. In this passage the primitive other is transformed utterly, and here in particular its real world history must be thought. For the historical incorporation of the outside might well be the condition that compels its eruption into the field of the same as difference. Indeed, the eclipse of otherness, posed as a metaphysical structure of opposites or as an outside to be recovered dialectically, is the beginning of difference — and of a potential break with the phallogocentric order of the West.

This genealogy is not as conjectural as it may seem: connections between certain "ethnographic surrealists" and poststructuralists are there to be traced. The intermediary figures are Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, and, above all, Bataille, whose notions of *dépense* and *la part maudite*, developed out of Mauss's theory of the gift, have influenced Baudrillard, and whose notion of transgression has influenced Foucault and Derrida. On this reading, if the early moderns sublated the primitive into reason, the dissident surrealists thought it transgressively; but it was left to poststructuralism and feminism to theorize it, however transformed in position and effectivity. As Rosalind Krauss has suggested, the poststructuralist and feminist deconstruction of phallogocentric oppositions is related to the "collapse of differences" — i.e., of *oppositions* between natural and unnatural forms, conscious and unconscious states, reality and representation, politics and art — that is at the heart of surrealist scandal.⁵⁶ It is this transgressive enterprise that is dismissed as "arbitrary" and "trivial" in postwar American formalism in which, in a neomodernist moment, crisis is once more recouped for continuity. Indeed, this collapse or rupture is not thought deeply again till the art of the generation of Smithson, in which formalist criteria give way to a concern with "structure, sign, and play," in which, with such devices as the site-nonsite, the form of the exhibition work with expressive origin and centered meaning is displaced by a serial or textual mode "with a concept of limits that could never be located."⁵⁷

On the one hand, then, the primitive is a modern problem, a crisis in cultural identity, which the West moves to resolve: hence the modernist construction "primitivism," the fetishistic recognition-and-disavowal of the primitive difference. This ideological resolution renders it a "nonproblem" for us. On the other hand, this resolution is only a repression: delayed in our political unconscious, the primitive returns uncannily at the moment of its potential eclipse. The rupture of the primitive, managed by the moderns, becomes our postmodern event.⁵⁸

56. Rosalind Krauss, "Preying on 'Primitivism,'" *Art and Text*, no. 17 (April 1985).

57. *Ibid.*

58. Such "delays" are common enough: for example, the critique of representation, initially undertaken in cubism and collage, that returns in a different register in postmodernist art.

The first history of the primitive encounter with the West is familiar enough, the fatalistic narrative of domination. In this narrative 1492 is an inaugural date, for it marks the period not only of the discovery of America (and the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope) but also of the renaissance of antiquity. These two events — an encounter with the other and a return to the same — allow for the incorporation of the modern West and the instauration of its dialectical history. (Significantly, in Spain, 1492 also marks the banishment of the Jews and Arabs and the publication of the first modern European grammar; in other words, the expulsion of the other within and the encoding of the other without.)⁵⁹ This, too, is the period of the first museums in Europe and of “the first works on the ‘life and manners’ of remote peoples” — a collection of the ancients and “savages,” of the historically and spatially distant.⁶⁰ This collection only expands, as the West develops with capitalism and colonialism into a world-system. By the eighteenth century, with the Enlightenment, the West is able to reflect on itself “as a culture *in the universal*, and thus all other cultures were entered into its museum as vestiges of its own image.”⁶¹

There is no need to rehearse this “dialectic” here, the progressive domination of external and internal nature (the colonization of the outside and the unconscious), but it is important to note that this history is not without its representations and contestations in modern theory. Indeed, in 1946 Merleau-Ponty could write:

All the great philosophical ideas of the past century — the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism and psychoanalysis — had their beginnings in Hegel; it was he who started the attempt to explore the irrational and integrate it into an expanded reason, which remains the task of our century.⁶²

There is, however, an obvious paradox here: the Western *ratio* is defined against the very unreason that it integrates; its dialectical identity requires the very other that it absorbs, disavows, or otherwise reduces to the same. It is this paradox that the notion of transgression, as elaborated by Bataille amidst discussions of both “the end of history” and the otherness of the primitive, addresses. (Bataille attended the lectures on Hegel given by Alexandre Kojève in the '30s; he was also, of course, the principal theorist of the primitive as transgressive.) In his essay on Bataille — an essay in which the surrealist concern with the other may be linked to the poststructuralist concern with difference — Foucault op-

59. See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Harper and Row, 1984, p. 123. Todorov argues that the conquest of America was from one perspective a “linguistic” one.

60. Todorov, p. 109.

61. Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, pp. 88–89.

62. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense*, trans. Hubert and Patricia Dreyfus, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1964, pp. 109–110.

poses the transgressive to the dialectical as a way to think through the logic of contradiction, as a "form of thought in which the interrogation of the limit replaces the search for totality."⁶³ Yet if transgression challenges the dialectic, the end of history, and the incorporation of the primitive other, it also presupposes (or at least foreshadows) them. Which is to say that the transgressive appears as a stopgap of the dialectical; it recomposes an outside, an other, a sacred, if only in its absence: "All our actions are addressed to this absence in a profanation which at once identifies it, dissipates it, exhausts itself in it, and restores it in the empty purity of its transgression."⁶⁴ Transgression is thus bound by a paradox of its own: it remarks limits even as it violates them, it restores an outside even as it testifies to its loss. It is on the borderline between dialectical thought and the becoming of difference, just as the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss is on the borderline between metaphysical oppositions and deconstruction.

There is no question that today we are beyond this border, that we live in a time of cancelled limits, destructured oppositions, "dissipated scandals"⁶⁵ (which is not to say that they are not recoded all the time). Clearly, the modern structures in which the Western subject and socius were articulated (the nuclear family, the industrial city, the nation-state) are today remapped in the movement of capital. In this movement the opposition nature/culture has become not only theoretically suspect but practically obsolete: there are now few zones of "savage thought" to oppose to the Western *ratio*, few primitive others not threatened by incorporation. But in this displacement of the other there is also a decentering of the same, as signalled in the '60s when Foucault abandoned the logic of structural or dialectical oppositions (e.g., reason/unreason) in favor of a field of immanent relations, or when Derrida proclaimed the absence of any fixed center or origin, of any "original or transcendental signified . . . outside a system of differences."⁶⁶ It was this that led Foucault to announce, grandly enough, the dissolution of man in language. More provocative, however, was his suggestion, made at the same moment (1966), that "modern thought is advancing towards that region where man's Other must become the Same as himself."⁶⁷ In the modern episteme, Foucault argued, the transparent, sovereign *cogito* has broken down, and Western man is compelled to think the unthought. Indeed, his very truth is articulated in relation to the unconscious and the other; thus the privilege granted psychoanalysis and ethnology among the modern human sciences. The question returns then: What happens to this man, his

63. Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 50.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

65. The phrase is Robert Smithson's; see *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt, New York, New York University Press, 1979, p. 216.

66. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," p. 280.

67. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, Vintage Books, 1970. p. 238.



Lothar Baumgarten. Monument for the Indian Nations of South America. 1982.

truth, when the unconscious and the other are penetrated — integrated into reason, colonized by capital, commodified by mass culture?

Tellingly, it was in the '30s and '40s, after the high stage of imperialism and before the anticolonial wars of liberation, that the discourse of the other was most thoroughly theorized — by Lacan, of course, and Lévi-Strauss (who, in *Tristes Tropiques*, pondered “the ethnological equivalent of the mirror stage”)⁶⁸ but also by Sartre, who argued that the other was necessary to the “fusion” of any group, and Adorno and Horkheimer, who elaborated the role of otherness in Nazism. I mention these latter here to suggest that, however decentered by the other, the (Western) subject continues to encroach mercilessly upon it. Indeed by 1962 (when Lévi-Strauss wrote that “there are still zones in which savage thought, like savage species, is relatively protected”),⁶⁹ Paul Ricoeur could foresee a “universal world civilization.” To Ricoeur, this moment was less one of the imperialist “shock of conquest and domination” than one of the shock of disorientation: for the other a moment when, with the wars of liberation, the

68. Catherine Clément, *The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 76.

69. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, p. 219.

"politics of otherness" had reached its limit, and for the West a moment when it became "possible that there are just *others*, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others."⁷⁰

This disorientation of a world civilization is hardly new to us today. In 1962 Ricoeur argued that to survive in it each culture must be grounded in its own indigenous tradition; otherwise this "civilization" would be domination pure and simple. Similarly, in our own time Jürgen Habermas has argued that the modern West, to restore its identity, must critically appropriate its tradition — the very project of Enlightenment that led to this "universal civilization" in the first place.⁷¹ Allegories of hope, these two readings seem early and late symptoms of our own postmodern present, a moment when the West, its limit apparently breached by an all but global capital, has begun to recycle its own historical episodes as styles together with its appropriated images of exotica (of domesticated otherness) in a culture of nostalgia and pastiche — in a culture of implosion, "the internal violence of a saturated whole."⁷²

Ricoeur wrote presciently of a moment when "the whole of mankind becomes a kind of imaginary museum."⁷³ It may be this sense of closure, of claustrophobia that has provoked a new "primitivism" and "Orientalism" in recent theory: e.g., the Baudrillardian notion of a primitive order of symbolic exchange that "haunts" our own system of sign exchange, or the Deleuzian idea of a "savage territoriality" now deterritorialized by capital; Barthes's Japan cast as the "possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems," or Derrida's or Foucault's China seen as an order of things that "interrupts" Western logocentrism.⁷⁴ But rather than seek or resuscitate a lost or dead other, why not turn to vital others within and without — to affirm *their* resistance to the white, patriarchal order of Western culture? For feminists, for "minorities," for "tribal" peoples, there are other ways to narrate this history

70. Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures," in *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1965, p. 278. Also see Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," in *The Sixties Without Apology*, ed. Sayres, Stephanson, et al., Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 186–188.

71. See Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity — An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, pp. 3–15.

72. Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg Effect," trans. Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, *October*, no. 20 (Spring 1982), p. 10.

73. Ricoeur, p. 278. What clearer sign of this implosion — when mankind is treated as a museum of the West — can there be than the "Primitivism" show? If the "universality" of the Enlightenment positioned the West in a transcendental relation to the primitive, then the "globality" of multinational capital (as represented by Philip Morris) may put us in a transcendental relation to our own modernity.

74. See Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, passim; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Hurley, Seem, and Lane, New York, Viking Press, 1977, pp. 139–271; Barthes, *The Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1982, pp. 3–4; and Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 77–93.

of enlightenment/eradication—ways which reject the narcissistic pathos that identifies the death of the Hegelian dialectic with the end of Western history and the end of that history with the death of man, which also reject the reductive reading that the other can be so “colonized” (as if it were a zone simply to occupy, as if it did not emerge imbricated in other spaces, to trouble other discourses)—or even that Western sciences of the other, psychoanalysis and ethnology, can be fixed so dogmatically. On this reading the other remains—indeed, as the very field of difference in which the subject emerges—to challenge Western pretenses of sovereignty, supremacy, and self-creation.

HOMI K. BHABHA

They [the paranoid], too, cannot regard anything in other people as indifferent, and they, too, take up minute indications with which these other, unknown, people present them, and use them in their "delusions of reference." The meaning of their delusions of reference is that they expect from all strangers something like love. But these people show them nothing of the kind; they laugh to themselves, flourish their sticks, even spit on the ground as they go by—and one really does not do such things while a person in whom one takes a friendly interest is near. One does them only when one feels quite indifferent to the passer-by, when one can treat him like air; and, considering, too, the fundamental kinship of the concepts of "stranger" and "enemy," the paranoic is not so far wrong in regarding this indifference as hate, in contrast to his claim for love.

—Freud, "Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality"

If the spirit of the Western nation has been symbolized in epic and anthem, voiced by a "unanimous people assembled in the self-presence of its speech,"¹ then the sign of colonial government is cast in a lower key, caught in the irredeemable act of *writing*. Who better to bear witness to this hypothesis than that representative figure of the mid-nineteenth century, J. S. Mill, who divided his

1. Jacques Derrida, "The Violence of the Letter," *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 134.

life between addressing the colonial sphere as an examiner of correspondence for the East India Company, and preaching the principles of postutilitarian liberalism to the English elite.

"The whole government of India is carried out in writing," Mill testified to a Select Committee of the House of Lords in 1852.

All the orders given and all the acts of executive officers are reported in writing. . . . [There] is no single act done in India, the whole of the reasons for which are not placed on record. This appears to me a greater security for good government than exists in almost any other government in the world, because no other has a system of recordation so complete.²

Mill's dream of a perfect system of recordation was underwritten by the practice of utilitarian reforms: the union of judicial and executive powers in the tax collector, the codification of the law, the *ryotwar* system of land settlement, and an accurate survey and record of landed rights. But nowhere was this faith in a government of recordation made more problematic than in the dependence of his central concept of "public discussion" on the fundamental principle of speech³ as the guarantee of good government. Nobody who has witnessed Mill's vision of the value of individual independence can be blind to that passionate principle of *speech* that makes it so—"a vivid conception and a strong belief,"⁴ not learned by rote or written but, as he says, articulated with a direct "living 'feeling power' which spreads from the words spoken to the things signified and forces the mind to take them in and make them conform to the formula."⁵ Nobody who has read Mill's metaphors of authority can fail to see that for him the sign of civility is not so much the Lockean consent to Property, nor the Hobbesian assent to Law, but the spirited sound of the *vox populi*, engaged as an individual in public discussion, that "steady communal habit of correcting his own opinion and collating it with those of others."⁶ Nobody who grasps that for Mill the boundaries of the national culture are open so long as the voices of dissent remain individual and closed when that culture is threatened by collective dissension, can fail to hear him propounding the nationalist ideology of *unisonance*⁷ as Benedict Anderson describes it, a contemporaneous cultural cohesion connecting its national subjects through the undifferentiated simultaneity

2. *Parliamentary Papers*, 1852-1853, XXX, testimony of John Stuart Mill to a select committee, June 21, 1852, p. 301.

3. I am using *speech* in the Derridean sense as the expressive sign of the self-presence of voice, the disavowal of the differentiating signifier of writing.

4. John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," *Utilitarianism, Liberty, Representative Government*, ed. H. B. Acton, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1972, p. 99.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

7. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1983, pp. 132-133.

of an "aural" imaginary. And once this nationalist, authoritarian tone is caught in *speech*, it is possible to see in *writing*, how Mill echoes Cicero's forensic principle "that individuals must throw themselves into the mental position of those who think differently from them"⁸ only to use it ambivalently; both as the principle that preserves the liberty of the Western individualist "public sphere" as well as a strategy for policing the culturally and racially differentiated colonial space: "Where you have not the advantage given by representative government of *discussion* by persons of all partialities, prepossessions and interests," Mill continues in his testimony before the Lords, "you *cannot* have a perfect substitute for this, still some substitute [such as recordation] is better than none."⁹

The political moment of cultural difference emerges as the problematic of colonial governmentality, and eclipses the transparency between legibility and legitimate rule. Mill's "recordation" now encounters the *différance* of writing as a strategy of colonialist regulation, and the mimetic adequacy of draft and dispatch is somewhat in doubt.

To know that the embryonic ideas of Mill's essays "On Liberty" and "Representative Government" were originally formulated in a draft dispatch on Indian education, written in response to Macaulay's infamous minute of 1835, is to realize—in that fine intertextual irony—both the limitations of liberty and the problems of establishing a mode of governmental discourse that requires a colonial substitute for democratic "public discussion." Such a process of substitution is precisely Mill's system of recordation: events experienced and inscribed in India are to be read *otherwise*, transformed into the acts of governments and the discourse of authority in *another place*, at *another time*. Such a *syntax of deferral* must not merely be recognized as a theoretical object, the deferral of the space of writing—the sign under erasure—but acknowledged as a specific *colonial* temporality and textuality of that space between enunciation and address. As G. D. Bearce has written, the transaction on paper to take effect at the other side of the globe was not, according to Mill, "of itself calculated to give much practical knowledge of life."¹⁰ It is this slippage between the Western sign and its colonial *significance* which emerges as a map of misreading that embarrasses the righteousness of recordation and its certainty of good government. It opens up a space of interpretation and misappropriation that inscribes an ambivalence at the very origins of colonial authority, indeed, within the originary documents of British colonial history itself. "It is probable that writing 15,000 miles from the place where their orders were to be carried into effect," writes Macaulay in his essay on Warren Hastings, the Directors of the East India Company

8. Mill, p. 97.

9. Mill, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1852–1853, p. 310.

10. Mill, quoted in G. D. Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India 1784–1858*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 280.

never perceived the gross inconsistency of which they were guilty. . . . Whoever examines their letters written at that time, will find there many just and humane sentiments . . . an admirable code of political ethics. . . . Now these instructions, *being interpreted*, mean simply, "Be the father and the oppressor of the people; be just and unjust, moderate and rapacious."¹¹ (my emphasis)

To describe these texts as "despatches of hypocrisy"¹² as Macaulay has done, is to moralize both the intention of writing and the object of government. To talk of duplicity is to fail to read the specific *discursive doubleness* that Macaulay insists exists only between the lines; to fail to see that form of multiple and *contradictory belief* that emerges as an effect of the ambivalent, deferred address of colonialist governance. Such a split in enunciation can no longer be contained within the "unisonance" of civil discourse — although it must be spoken by it — nor written in what Benjamin calls the "homogeneous empty time"¹³ of the Western nationalist discourse which normalizes its own history of expansion and exploitation by inscribing the history of the other in a fixed hierarchy of civil progress. What is articulated in the doubleness of colonial discourse is not simply the violence of one powerful nation writing out another. "Be the Father and the oppressor, just and unjust" is a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently reinscribes both colonizer and colonized. For it reveals an agonistic uncertainty contained in the *incompatibility* of empire and nation; it puts *under erasure*, not "on trial," the very discourse of civility within which representative government claims its liberty and empire its ethics. Those substitutive objects of colonialist governmentality — be they systems of recordation, or "intermediate bodies" of political and administrative control — are strategies of surveillance that cannot maintain their civil authority once the "colonial" *supplementarity* of their address is revealed.

When recordation is faced with the doubleness of its writing "between-the-lines," then its institutionalization in the discursive practice of a board of directors or a colonial civil service produces a strange irony of reference. For if the primary impulse and address of government emanates not from a *people*, but from the members of a *service*, or as Mill describes it, a system that must be calculated to form its agents of government, then, in asserting the *natural rights* of empire, Mill's proposal implicitly erases all that is taken as "second nature" within Western civility. It separates the customary association of a "territory" with a "people"; it sunders the "national" representation of an individual by a government; not least, it breaks with any assumption of a *natural* link between

11. T. B. Macaulay, "Warren Hastings," *Critical and Historical Essays*, Vol. III, London, Methuen, 1903, pp. 85-86.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

13. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken, p. 263.

speech and writing. As the chains of civil *substitution* yield to colonial *supplementarity*, the representative nineteenth-century discourse of liberal individualism loses both its power of speech and its politics of individual choice. It is confronted with an *aporia* out of which emerges, in a figure of repetition, the uncanny double of democracy itself: "to govern one country under responsibility to the people of another . . . is despotism," Mill writes.

The only choice the case admits is a choice of despotisms. . . . There are, as we have already seen, conditions of society in which a vigorous despotism is in itself the best mode of government for training the people in what is specifically wanting to render them capable of a higher civilisation.¹⁴

To be the father and the oppressor; just and unjust; moderate and rapacious; vigorous and despotic: these instances of contradictory belief, doubly inscribed in the deferred address of colonial discourse, raise questions about the symbolic space of colonial authority. What is the image of authority if it is civility's supplement and democracy's despotic double? How is it exercised if, as Macaulay suggests, it must be read between the lines, within the interdictory borders of civility itself? Why does the spectre of eighteenth-century despotism — that regime of primordial fixity, repetition, historylessness, and social death — haunt these vigorous nineteenth-century colonial practices of muscular Christianity and the civilizing mission? Can despotism, however vigorous, inspire a colony of individuals when the dread letter of despotic law can only instill the spirit of servitude?

To ask these questions is to see that the subject of colonial discourse — splitting, doubling, turning into its opposite, projecting — is a subject of such affective ambivalence and discursive disturbance, that the serial narrative of English nationalist history can only ever beg the "colonial" question. Deprived of its customary "civil" reference, even the most traditional historical narrative accedes to the language of fantasy and desire. The modern colonizing imagination conceives of its dependencies as a *territory*, never as a *people*, wrote Sir Herman Merivale in 1839 in his influential Oxford lectures on colonization¹⁵ which led to his appointment as Under Secretary of State for India. The effect of this distinction, he concludes, is that colonies are *not* conducive to disinterested control. Too often, their governance is overwhelmed by a feeling of national pride expressed in an exciting pleasure, an imaginary sense of power in extensive possessions which might turn into a Cyclopean polity. If such passion be political, then I suggest that we should pose the question of the ambivalence of colonialist authority in the language of the vicissitudes of the *narcissistic de-*

14. Mill, pp. 382-383.

15. H. Merivale, *Introduction to a Course of Lectures on Colonization and Colonies*, London, 1839, pp. 18-25.

mand for colonial objects, which intervenes so powerfully in the *nationalist* fantasy of boundless, extensive possessions.

What threatens the authority of colonial command is the ambivalence of its address—father and oppressor or, alternatively, the ruled and reviled—which will not be resolved in a dialectical play of power. For these doubly inscribed figures face two ways without being two-faced. There is the supplementarity within the Western imperialist discourse which continually puts under erasure the civil state, as the colonial text emerges uncertainly within its narrative of progress. Then, there is the hierarchical process of *colonialist* differentiation between civility and despotism. Between the civil address and its colonial *significance*—each axis displaying a problem of recognition and repetition—shuttles the signifier of authority in search of a strategy of surveillance, subjection, and inscription. Here there can be no dialectic of the master-slave for where discourse is so disseminated can there ever be the passage from trauma to transcendence? from alienation to authority? How can the white ego-ideal interpellate the native in an eternal miscognition when each point of identification is always a partial and double repetition of the *otherness* of the self—democrat and despot, or from the “other” side, individual *and* servant.

It is around the “and”—that conjunction of infinite repetition—that the ambivalence of civil authority circulates as a “colonial” signifier that is *less than one and double*.¹⁶ The position of authority is alienated at the point of civil enunciation—less than liberty, in Mill’s case—and doubles at the point of colonialist address—just and unjust or the doubling of democracy as vigorous despotism. Such is the devious strategy of Montesquieu’s idea of despotism which authoritatively shaped the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ image of Mughal and Brahmin India. In Montesquieu, it is in the difference between monarchy and absolute monarchy (that is, sovereignty without honor) that despotism emerges as a textualization of the Turk and faces Versailles and the Court with its uncanny horrifying double.¹⁷ In Alexander Dow’s *History of Hindustan* (1768), Sir Charles Grant’s influential *Observations* (1794), James Mill’s monumental *History of India* (1816), Macaulay’s *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), Duff’s authoritative *India and India Missions* (1839): in all these, the strategic splitting of the colonial discourse—less than one and double—is contained by addressing the other as despot. For despite its connotations of death, repetition, and servitude, the despotic configuration is a monocausal system that relates all differences and discourses to that transcendental signified, the absolute, undivided, boundless body of the despot. It is this image of India as a primordial fixity—as a

16. For a further elaboration of this concept, see my essay “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817,” in the special issue on “Race, Writing, and Difference,” ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Critical Inquiry*, Fall 1985.

17. See Louis Althusser, “Montesquieu: Politics and History,” *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, London, Verso, 1982, chap. 4.

narcissistic inverted other — that satisfies the self-fulfilling prophecy of Western progress and stills, for a while, the supplementary signifier of colonial discourse.

But what of the other “native” scene of colonialist intervention where the ambivalence of authority — be moderate and rapacious — is required, Macaulay suggests, as a strategy of surveillance and exploitation? If the “idea” of despotism homogenizes India’s past, the colonialist present requires a strategy of calculation in relation to its native subjects. This need is addressed in a vigorous *demand for narrative*, embodied in the utilitarian or evolutionary ideologies of reason and progress; a demand which is, nonetheless, in Derrida’s words, a matter for the police: “an inquisitorial insistence, an order, a petition. . . . To demand the narrative of the other, to extort it from him like a secretless secret, something that they call the truth about what has taken place, ‘Tell us exactly what happened.’”¹⁸ The narratorial voice articulates the narcissistic, colonialist demand that it should be addressed directly, that the Other should authorize the self, recognize its priority, fulfill its outlines, replete, indeed repeat, its references and still its fractured gaze.

From the journals of the missionary C. T. E. Rhenius, 1818:

Rhenius: What do you want?

Indian Pilgrim: Whatever you give I take.

R: What then do you want?

IP: I have already enough of everything.

R: Do you know God?

IP: I know he is in me. When you put rice into a mortar and stamp it with a pestle, the rice gets clean. So, God is known to me [the comparisons of the Heathen are often incomprehensible to a European]. . . .

IP: But tell me in what shape do you like to see him?

R: In the shape of the Almighty, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Eternal, the Unchangeable, the Holy One, the Righteous, the Truth, the Wisdom and the Love.

IP: I shall show him to you: but first you must learn all that I have learned — then you will see God.¹⁹

And this from a sermon by Archdeacon Potts in 1818:

If you urge them with their gross and unworthy misconceptions of the nature and the will of God, or the monstrous follies of their fabulous theology, they will turn it off with a *sly civility* perhaps, or with a popular and careless proverb. You may be told that “heaven is a

18. Derrida, “Living On: Border Lines,” *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom, et al., London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 87.

19. *Missionary Register*, Church Missionary Society, March 1819, pp. 159–160.

wide place, and has a thousand gates"; and that their religion is one by which they hope to enter. Thus, together with their fixed persuasions, they have their sceptical conceits. By such evasions they can dismiss the merits of the case from all consideration; and encourage men to think that the vilest superstition may serve to every salutary purpose, and be accepted in the sight of God as well as truth and righteousness.²⁰

In the native refusal to satisfy the colonizer's narrative demand, we hear the echoes of Freud's saber-rattling strangers, with whom I began. The natives' resistance represents a frustration of that nineteenth-century strategy of surveillance, the *confession*, which seeks to dominate the "calculable" individual by positing the truth that the subject *has* but does not *know*. The "incalculable" native produces a problem for civil representation in the discourses of literature and legality. This uncertainty impressed itself on Nathanael Halhed whose *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776) was the canonical colonialist codification of Indian "native" law, but he was only able to read this resistance to calculation and testimony as native "folly" or "temporary frenzy . . . something like the madness so inimitably delineated in the hero of Cervantes."²¹ The native answers display the continual slippage between civil inscription and colonial address. The uncertainty generated by such resistance changes the narratorial demand itself. What was spoken within the orders of civility now accedes to the colonial signifier. The question is no longer Derrida's "Tell us exactly what happened." From the point of view of the colonizer, passionate for unbounded, unpeopled possession, the problem of truth turns into the troubled political and psychic question of boundary and territory: *Tell us why you, the native, are there*. Etymologically unsettled, "territory" derives from both *terra* (earth) and *terrere* (to frighten) whence *territorium* "a place from which people are frightened off."²² The colonialist demand for narrative carries, within it, its threatening reversal *Tell us why we are here*. It is this echo that reveals that the *other* side of narcissistic authority may be the paranoia of power; a desire for "authorization" in the face of a process of cultural differentiation which makes it problematic to fix the native objects of colonial power as the moralized "others" of truth.

The native refusal to unify the authoritarian, colonialist address within the terms of civil engagement gives the subject of colonial authority — father *and* oppressor — another turn. This ambivalent "and," always less than one *and* double, traces the times and spaces between civil address and colonial articulation. The authoritarian demand can now only be justified if it is contained in the

20. *Ibid.*, September 1818, pp. 374–375.

21. N. B. Halhed, "Translator's Preface," *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall, London, Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 166–167.

22. *The Compact Edition of the OED*, Vol. II, p. 215.

language of paranoia. The refusal to return and restore the image of authority to the eye of power has to be reinscribed as implacable aggression, assertively coming from without: *He hates me*. Such justification follows the familiar conjugation of persecutory paranoia. The frustrated wish "I want him to love me," turns into its opposite "I hate him" and thence through projection and the exclusion of the first person, "He hates me."²³

Projection is never a self-fulfilling prophecy; never a simple "scapegoat" fantasy. The other's aggressivity from without, that justifies the subject of authority, makes that very subject a frontier station of joint occupation, as the psychoanalyst Robert Waelder has written.²⁴ Projection may compel the native to address the master, but it can never produce those effects of "love" or "truth" that would center the confessional demand. If, through projection, the native is partially aligned or reformed in discourse, the fixed hate which refuses to circulate or reconjugate, produces the repeated fantasy of the native as in-between legality and illegality, endangering the boundaries of truth itself. The litigious, lying native became a central object of nineteenth-century colonial, legal regulation and each winter an Indian magistrate was dispatched to the Caribbean to adjudicate over the incalculable indentured Indian coolies. That the process of colonial intervention, its institutionalization and normalization, may itself be an *Entstellung*, a *displacement*, is the symbolic reality that must be disavowed. It is this ambivalence that ensues within paranoia as a play between eternal vigilance and blindness, and estranges the image of authority in its strategy of justification. For, excluded as the first-person subject and addressed by an aggressivity prior to itself, the figure of authority must always be belated; after and outside the event if it wants to be virtuous, and yet master of the situation, if it wants to be victorious:

The English in India are part of a belligerent civilisation . . . they are the representatives of peace compelled by force. No country in the world is more orderly, more quiet or more peaceful than British India as it is, but if the vigour of the government should ever be relaxed, if it should lose its essential unity of purpose . . . chaos would come again like a flood.²⁵

Delusions of "the end of the world" — as Judge Schreber confessed to Freud — are the common tropes of paranoia, and it is with that in mind that we should reread Fitzjames Stephens's famous apocalyptic formulation that I've quoted

23. Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Schreber)," Pelican Freud Library, Vol. IX, pp. 200-203; see also John Forrester, *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*, London, Macmillan, 1980, pp. 154-157.

24. R. Waelder, "The Structure of Paranoid Ideas," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 32 (1951).

25. J. F. Stephen, "Foundations of the Government of India," *The Nineteenth Century*, No. LXXX (October 1883), pp. 557-558.

above. In the oscillation between apocalypse and chaos, we see the emergence of an anxiety associated with the narcissistic vision and its two-dimensional space. It is an anxiety which will not abate because the empty third space, the *other* space of symbolic representation, at once bar and bearer of difference, is closed to the paranoid position of power. In the colonial discourse, that space of the other is always occupied by an *idée fixe*: despot, heathen, barbarian, chaos, violence. If these symbols are always the same, their ambivalent repetition makes them the signs of a much deeper crisis of authority that emerges in the lawless writing of the colonial scene. There, the hybrid tongues of the colonial space make even the repetition of the *name* of God uncanny:

. . . every native term which the Christian missionary can employ to communicate the Divine truth is already appropriated as the chosen symbol of some counterpart deadly error. . . .

writes Alexander Duff, the most celebrated of nineteenth-century Indian missionaries, with trepidation.

You vary your language and tell [the natives that] there must be a *second birth*. Now it so happens that this and all similar phraseology is preoccupied.

The communication of the *Gayatri*, or the most sacred verse in the Vedas . . . constitutes religiously and metaphorically the natives' second birth. . . . Your improved language might only convey that all must become famous Brahmans ere they can see God.²⁶

26. Rev. A. Duff, *India and India Missions*, London, John Hunter, 1839, pp. 323-324.

CHRISTIAN METZ

To begin I will briefly recall some of the basic differences between film and photography. Although these differences may be well known, they must be, as far as possible, precisely defined, since they have a determinant influence on the respective status of both forms of expression in relation to the fetish and fetishism.

First difference: the spatio-temporal size of the *lexis*, according to that term's definition as proposed by the Danish semiotician Louis Hjelmslev. The *lexis* is the socialized unit of reading, of reception: in sculpture, the statue; in music, the "piece." Obviously the photographic *lexis*, a silent rectangle of paper, is much smaller than the cinematic *lexis*. Even when the film is only two minutes long, these two minutes are *enlarged*, so to speak, by sounds, movements, and so forth, to say nothing of the average surface of the screen and of the very fact of projection. In addition, the photographic *lexis* has no fixed duration (= temporal size): it depends, rather, on the spectator, who is the master of the look, whereas the timing of the cinematic *lexis* is determined in advance by the filmmaker. Thus on the one side, "a free rewriting time"; on the other, "an imposed reading time," as Peter Wollen has pointed out.¹ Thanks to these two features (smallness, possibility of a lingering look), photography is better fit, or more likely, to work as a fetish.

Another important difference pertains to the social use, or more exactly (as film and photography both have many uses) to their principal legitimated use. Film is considered as collective entertainment or as art, according to the work and to the social group. This is probably due to the fact that its production is less accessible to "ordinary" people than that of photography. Equally, it is in most cases fictional, and our culture still has a strong tendency to confound art with fiction. Photography enjoys a high degree of social recognition in another

* A version of this essay was delivered at a conference on the theory of film and photography at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in May 1984.

1. Peter Wollen, "Fire and Ice," *Photographies*, 4 (1984).

domain: that of the presumed real, of life, mostly private and family life, birth-place of the Freudian fetish. This recognition is ambiguous. Up to a point, it does correspond to a real distribution of social practices: people do take photographs of their children, and when they want their feature film, they do go to the movies or watch TV. But on the other side, it happens that photographs are considered by society as works of art, presented in exhibitions or in albums accompanied by learned commentary. And the family is frequently celebrated, or self-celebrated, in private, with super-8 films or other nonprofessional productions, which *are* still cinema. Nevertheless, the kinship between film and collectivity, photography and privacy, remains alive and strong as a social myth, half true like all myths; it influences each of us, and most of all the stamp, the look of photography and cinema themselves. It is easy to observe — and the researches of the sociologist Pierre Bordieu,² among others, confirm it — that photography very often primarily means souvenir, keepsake. It has replaced the portrait, thanks to the historical transition from the period when long exposure times were needed for true portraits. While the social reception of film is mainly oriented towards a show-business-like or imaginary referent, the real referent is felt to be dominant in photography.

There is something strange in this discrepancy, as both modes of expression are fundamentally *indexical*, in Charles Sanders Peirce's terms. (A recent, remarkable book on photography by Philippe Dubois is devoted to the elaboration of this idea and its implications.)³ Peirce called indexical the process of signification (*semiosis*) in which the signifier is bound to the referent not by a social convention (= "symbol"), not necessarily by some similarity (= "icon"), but by an actual contiguity or connection in the world: the lightning is the index of the storm. In this sense, film and photography are close to each other, both are *prints* of real objects, prints left on a special surface by a combination of light and chemical action. This indexicality, of course, leaves room for iconic aspects, as the chemical image often looks like the object (Peirce considered photography as an index *and* an icon). It leaves much room for symbolic aspects as well, such as the more or less codified patterns of treatment of the image (framing, lighting, and so forth) and of choice or organization of its contents. What is indexical is the mode of production itself, the principle of the *taking*. And at this point, after all, a film is only a series of photographs. But it is more precisely a series with supplementary components as well, so that the unfolding as such tends to become more important than the link of each image with its referent. This property is very often exploited by the narrative, the initially indexical power of the cinema turning frequently into a realist guarantee for the unreal.

2. Pierre Bordieu et al., *Un art moyen. Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1965.

3. Philippe Dubois, *L'acte photographique*, Paris and Brussels, Nathan and Labor, 1983.

Photography, on the other hand, remains closer to the pure index, stubbornly pointing to the print of what *was*, but no longer *is*.

A third kind of difference concerns the physical nature of the respective signifiers. Lacan used to say that the only materialism he knew was the materialism of the signifier. Whether the only one or not, in all signifying practices the material definition is essential to their social and psychoanalytic inscription. In this respect—speaking in terms of set theory—film “includes” photography: cinema results from an addition of perceptive features to those of photography. In the visual sphere, the important addition is, of course, movement and the plurality of images, of shots. The latter is distinct from the former: even if each image is still, switching from one to the next creates a *second movement*, an ideal one, made out of successive and different immobilities. Movement and plurality both imply *time*, as opposed to the timelessness of photography which is comparable to the timelessness of the unconscious and of memory. In the auditory sphere—totally absent in photography—cinema adds phonic sound (spoken words), nonphonic sound (sound effects, noises, and so forth), and musical sound. One of the properties of sounds is their expansion, their development in time (in space they only irradiate), whereas images construct themselves in space. Thus film disposes of five more orders of perception (two visual and three auditory) than does photography, all of the five challenging the powers of silence and immobility which belong to and define all photography, immersing film in a stream of temporality where nothing can be *kept*, nothing stopped. The emergence of a fetish is thus made more difficult.

Cinema is the product of two distinct technological inventions: photography, and the mastering of stroboscopy, of the ϕ -effect. Each of these can be exploited separately: photography makes no use of stroboscopy, and animated cartoons are based on stroboscopy without photography.

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The importance of immobility and silence to photographic *authority*, the nonfilmic nature of this authority, leads me to some remarks on the relationship of photography with death. Immobility and silence are not only two objective aspects of death, they are also its main symbols, they *figure* it. Photography's deeply rooted kinship with death has been noted by many different authors, including Dubois, who speaks of photography as a “thanatography,” and, of course, Roland Barthes, whose *Camera Lucida*⁴ bears witness to this relationship most poignantly. It is not only the book itself but also its position of enunciation which illustrates this kinship, since the work was written just after (and because of) the death of the mother, and just before the death of the writer.

4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981.

Photography is linked with death in many *different* ways. The most immediate and explicit is the social practice of keeping photographs in memory of loved beings who are no longer alive. But there another real death which each of us undergoes every day, as each day we draw nearer our own death. Even when the person photographed is still living, that moment when she or he *was* has forever vanished. Strictly speaking, the person *who has been photographed*—not the total person, who is an effect of time—is dead: “dead for having been seen,” as Dubois says in another context.⁵ Photography is the mirror, more faithful than any actual mirror, in which we witness at every age, our own aging. The actual mirror accompanies us through time, thoughtfully and treacherously; it changes with us, so that we appear not to change.

Photography has a third character in common with death: the snapshot, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time—unlike cinema which replaces the object, after the act of appropriation, in an unfolding time similar to that of life. The photographic *take* is immediate and definitive, like death and like the constitution of the fetish in the unconscious, fixed by a glance in childhood, unchanged and always active later. Photography is a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a part object, for a long immobile travel of no return. Dubois remarks that with each photograph, a tiny piece of time brutally and forever escapes its ordinary fate, and thus is protected against its own loss. I will add that in life, and to some extent in film, one piece of time is indefinitely pushed backwards by the next: this is what we call “forgetting.” The fetish, too, means both loss (symbolic castration) and protection against loss. Peter Wollen states this in an apt simile: photography preserves fragments of the past “like flies in amber.”⁶ Not by chance, the photographic act (or acting, who knows?) has been frequently compared with shooting, and the camera with a gun.

Against what I am saying, it could of course be objected that film as well is able to perpetuate the memory of dead persons, or of dead moments of their lives. Socially, the family film, the super-8, and so forth, to which I previously alluded, are often used for such a purpose. But this pseudosimilarity between film and photography leads me back, in a paradoxical way, to the selective kinship of photography (not film) with death, and to a fourth aspect of this link. The two modes of perpetuation are very different in their effects, and nearly opposed. Film gives back to the dead a semblance of life, a fragile semblance but one immediately strengthened by the wishful thinking of the viewer. Photography, on the contrary, by virtue of the objective suggestions of its signifier (stillness, again) maintains the memory of the dead *as being dead*.

5. Dubois, p. 89.

6. Wollen, *Ibid.*

Tenderness toward loved beings who have left us forever is a deeply ambiguous, split feeling, which Freud has remarkably analyzed in his famous study on *Mourning and Melancholia*.⁷ The work of mourning is at the same time an attempt (not successful in all cases: see the suicides, the breakdowns) to survive. The object-libido, attached to the loved person, wishes to accompany her or him in death, and sometimes does. Yet the narcissistic, conservation instinct (ego-libido) claims the right to live. The compromise which normally concludes this inner struggle consists in transforming the very nature of the feeling for the object, in learning progressively to love this object *as dead*, instead of continuing to desire a living presence and ignoring the verdict of reality, hence prolonging the intensity of suffering.

Sociologists and anthropologists arrive by other means at similar conceptions. The funeral rites which exist in all societies have a double, dialectically articulated signification: a remembering of the dead, but a remembering as well *that they are dead*, and that life continues for others. Photography, much better than film, fits into this complex psycho-social operation, since it suppresses from its own appearance the primary marks of "livingness," and nevertheless conserves the convincing print of the object: a past presence.

All this does not concern only the photographs of loved ones. There are obviously many other kinds of photographs: landscapes, artistic compositions, and so forth. But the kind on which I have insisted seems to me to be exemplary of the whole domain. In all photographs, we have this same act of cutting off a piece of space and time, of keeping it unchanged while the world around continues to change, of making a compromise between conservation and death. The frequent use of photography for private commemorations thus results in part (there are economic and social factors, too) from the intrinsic characteristics of photography itself. In contrast, film is less a succession of photographs than, to a large extent, a destruction of the photograph, or more exactly of the photograph's power and action.

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At this point, the problem of the space off-frame in film and in photography has to be raised. The fetish is related to death through the terms of castration and fear, to the off-frame in terms of the look, glance, or gaze. In his well-known article on fetishism,⁸ Freud considers that the child, when discovering for the first time the mother's body, is terrified by the very possibility that human beings

7. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-1974, vol. 14.

8. Freud, "Fetishism," *S.E.*, vol. 21.

can be "deprived" of the penis, a possibility which implies (imaginarily) a permanent danger of castration. The child tries to maintain its prior conviction that all human beings have the penis, but in opposition to this, what has been seen continues to work strongly and to generate anxiety. The compromise, more or less spectacular according to the person, consists in making the seen retrospectively unseen by a disavowal of the perception, and in *stopping the look*, once and for all, on an object, the fetish — generally a piece of clothing or under-clothing — which was, with respect to the moment of the primal glance, near, just prior to, the place of the terrifying absence. From our perspective, what does this mean, if not that this place is positioned off-frame, that the look is framed close by the absence? Furthermore, we can state that the fetish is taken up in two chains of meaning: metonymically, it alludes to the contiguous place of the lack, as I have just stated; and metaphorically, according to Freud's conception, it is an equivalent of the penis, as the primordial displacement of the look aimed at replacing an absence by a presence — an object, a small object, a part object. It is remarkable that the fetish — even in the common meaning of the word, the fetish in everyday life, a re-displaced derivative of the fetish proper, the object which brings luck, the mascot, the amulet, a fountain pen, cigarette, lipstick, a teddybear, or pet — it is remarkable that the fetish always combines a double and contradictory function: on the side of metaphor, an inciting and encouraging one (it is a pocket phallus); and, on the side of metonymy, an apotropaic one, that is, the averting of danger (thus involuntarily attesting a belief in it), the warding off of bad luck or the ordinary, permanent anxiety which sleeps (or suddenly wakes up) inside each of us. In the clinical, nosographic, "abnormal" forms of fetishism — or in the social institution of the striptease, which pertains to a collective nosography and which is, at the same time, a progressive process of framing/deframing — pieces of clothing or various other objects are absolutely necessary for the restoration of sexual power. Without them nothing can happen.

Let us return to the problem of off-frame space. The difference which separates film and photography in this respect has been partially but acutely analyzed by Pascal Bonitzer.⁹ The filmic off-frame space is *étouffé*, let us say "substantial," whereas the photographic off-frame space is "subtle." In film there is a plurality of successive frames, of camera movements, and character movements, so that a person or an object which is off-frame in a given moment may appear inside the frame the moment after, then disappear again, and so on, according to the principle (I purposely exaggerate) of the *turnstile*. The off-frame is taken into the evolutions and scissions of the temporal flow: it is off-frame, but not off-film. Furthermore, the very existence of a sound track allows a character who has deserted the visual scene to continue to mark her or his presence

9. Pascal Bonitzer, "Le hors-champ subtil," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 311 (May 1980).

in the auditory scene (if I can risk this quasi-oxymoron: "auditory" and "scene"). If the filmic off-frame is substantial, it is because we generally know, or are able to guess more or less precisely, what is going on in it. The character who is off-frame in a photograph, however, will never come into the frame, will never be heard—again a death, another form of death. The spectator has no empirical knowledge of the contents of the off-frame, but at the same time cannot help imagining some off-frame, hallucinating it, dreaming the shape of this emptiness. It is a projective off-frame (that of the cinema is more introjective), an immaterial, "subtle" one, with no remaining print. "Excluded," to use Dubois's term, excluded once and for all. Yet nevertheless present, striking, properly fascinating (or hypnotic)—insisting on its status *as excluded* by the force of its absence *inside* the rectangle of paper, which reminds us of the feeling of lack in the Freudian theory of the fetish. For Barthes, the only part of a photograph which entails the feeling of an off-frame space is what he calls the *punctum*, the point of sudden and strong emotion, of small trauma; it can be a tiny detail. This *punctum* depends more on the reader than on the photograph itself, and the corresponding off-frame it calls up is also generally subjective; it is the "metonymic expansion of the *punctum*."¹⁰

Using these strikingly convergent analyses which I have freely summed up, I would say that the off-frame effect in photography results from a singular and definitive cutting off which figures castration and is figured by the "click" of the shutter. It marks the place of an irreversible absence, a place from which the look has been averted forever. The photograph itself, the "in-frame," the abducted part-space, the place of presence and fullness—although undermined and haunted by the feeling of its exterior, of its borderlines, which are the past, the left, the lost: the far away even if very close by, as in Walter Benjamin's conception of the "aura"¹¹—the photograph, inexhaustible reserve of strength and anxiety, shares, as we see, many properties of the fetish (as object), if not directly of fetishism (as activity). The familiar photographs that many people carry with them always obviously belong to the order of fetishes in the ordinary sense of the word.

Film is much more difficult to characterize as a fetish. It is too big, it lasts too long, and it addresses too many sensorial channels at the same time to offer a credible unconscious equivalent of a lacking part-object. It does *contain* many potential part-objects (the different shots, the sounds, and so forth), but each of them disappears quickly after a moment of presence, whereas a fetish has to be kept, mastered, held, like the photograph in the pocket. Film is, however, an extraordinary activator of fetishism. It endlessly mimes the primal displacement of the look between the seen absence and the presence nearby. Thanks to

10. Barthes, p. 45.

11. Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," trans. Phil Patton, *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg, New Haven, Conn., Leete's Island Books, 1980.

the principle of a *moving cutting off*, thanks to the changes of framing between shots (or within a shot: tracking, panning, characters moving into or out of the frame, and so forth), cinema literally *plays* with the terror and the pleasure of fetishism, with its combination of desire and fear. This combination is particularly visible, for instance, in the horror film, which is built upon progressive re-framings that lead us through desire and fear, nearer and nearer the terrifying place. More generally, the play of framings and the play with framings, in all sorts of films, work like a striptease of the space itself (and a striptease proper in erotic sequences, when they are constructed with some subtlety). The moving camera caresses the space, and the whole of cinematic fetishism consists in the constant and teasing displacement of the cutting line which separates the seen from the unseen. But this game has no end. Things are too unstable and there are too many of them on the screen. It is not simple — although still possible, of course, depending on the character of each spectator — to stop and isolate one of these objects, to make it able to work as a fetish. Most of all, a film cannot be *touched*, cannot be carried and handled: although the actual reels can, the projected film cannot.

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I will deal more briefly with the last difference — and the problem of belief-disbelief — since I have already spoken of it. As pointed out by Octave Mannoni,¹² Freud considered fetishism the prototype of the cleavage of belief: "I know very well, *but* . . ." In this sense, film and photography are basically similar. The spectator does not confound the signifier with the referent, she or he knows what a *representation* is, but nevertheless has a strange feeling of reality (a denial of the signifier). This is a classical theme of film theory.

But the very nature of *what* we believe in is not the same in film and photography. If I consider the two extreme points of the scale — there are, of course, intermediate cases: still shots in films, large and filmlike photographs, for example — I would say that film is able to call up our belief for long and complex dispositions of actions and characters (in narrative cinema) or of images and sounds (in experimental cinema), to disseminate belief; whereas photography is able to fix it, to concentrate it, to spend it all at the same time on a single object. Its poverty constitutes its force — I speak of a poverty of means, not of significance. The photographic effect is not produced from diversity, from itinerancy or inner migrations, from multiple juxtapositions or arrangements. It is the effect, rather, of a laser or lightning, a sudden and violent illumination on a limited and petrified surface: again the fetish and death. Where film lets us believe in more things, photography lets us believe more in one thing.

12. Octave Mannoni, "Je sais bien mais quand même. . ." *Clefs pour l'imaginaire; ou, L'autre scène*, Paris, Seuil, 1969.

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In conclusion, I should like to add some remarks on the use of psychoanalysis in the study of film, photography, theater, literature, and so on. First, there are presentations, like this one, which are less "psychoanalytic" than it might seem. The notion of "fetish," and the word, were not invented by Freud; he took them from language, life, the history of cultures, anthropology. He proposed an *interpretation* of fetishism. This interpretation, in my opinion, is not fully satisfactory. It is obvious that it applies primarily to the early evolution of the young *boy*. (Incidentally, psychoanalysts often state that the recorded clinical cases of fetishism are for the most part male.) The fear of castration and its further consequence, its "fate," are necessarily different, at least partially, in children whose body is similar to the mother's. The Lacanian notion of the *phallus*, a symbolic organ distinct from the penis, the real organ, represents a step forward in theory; yet it is still the case that within the description of the human subject that psychoanalysis gives us, the male features are often dominant, mixed with (and as) general features. But apart from such distortions or silences, which are linked to a general history, other aspects of Freud's thinking, and various easily accessible observations which confirm it, remain fully valid. These include: the analysis of the fetishistic nature of male desire; in both sexes the "willing suspension of disbelief" (to use the well-known Anglo-Saxon notion), a suspension which is determinant in all representative arts, in everyday life (mostly in order to solve problems by half-solutions), and in the handling of ordinary fetishes; the fetishistic pleasure of framing-deframing.

It is impossible to *use* a theory, to "apply" it. That which is so called involves, in fact, two aspects more distinct than one might at first believe: the intrinsic degree of perfection of the theory itself, and its power of suggestion, of activation, of enlightenment *in another field* studied by other researchers. I feel that psychoanalysis has this power in the fields of the humanities and social sciences because it is an acute and profound discovery. It has helped *me*—the personal coefficient of each researcher always enters into the account, despite the ritual declarations of the impersonality of science—to explore one of the many possible paths through the complex problem of the relationship between cinema and photography. I have, in other words, used the theory of fetishism as a fetish.

Psychoanalysis, as Raymond Bellour has often underscored, is contemporary in our Western history with the technological arts (such as cinema) and with the reign of the patriarchal, nuclear, bourgeois family. Our period has invented neurosis (at least in its current form), *and* the remedy for it (it has often been so for all kinds of diseases). It is possible to consider psychoanalysis as the founding myth of our emotional modernity. In his famous study of the Oedipus myth, Lévi-Strauss has suggested that the Freudian interpretation of this myth (the central one in psychoanalysis, as everybody knows) could be nothing but

the last variant of the myth itself.¹³ This was not an attempt to blame: myths are always true, even if indirectly and by hidden ways, for the good reason that they are invented by the natives themselves, searching for a parable of their own fate.

After this long digression, I turn back to my topic and purpose, only to state that they could be summed up in one sentence: film is more capable of playing on fetishism, photography more capable of itself becoming a fetish.

13. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, Chapter 11, "La structure des mythes," Paris, Plon, 1958; translated as *Structural Anthropology*, New York, Basic Books, 1963.

An Interview with Bill Viola

RAYMOND BELLOUR

Bellour: You started doing video when it was brand new. Why were you first drawn to it?

Viola: Probably for a lot of the wrong reasons in the beginning. I was in art school at Syracuse University, and I was one of the worst painters in the class. The school was very traditional; we had to sit all day and draw apples and oranges on a table, or nude models, like in the seventeenth century. Abstract painting wasn't even being taught yet. There was an explosion of media, process, and information all around us, but at the school there wasn't even a hint of this new "software" approach. As with most art schools, the approach basically revolved around a notion of art classes as shop classes, as building things.

Bellour: Like carpentry?

Viola: Yes. So I would try to make a square box and the corners would come out one sticking up over the other, or I'd make something with a drawer that you couldn't close. I just had no physical connection. I was really doing badly, and was about to leave the school when one of my teachers, Jack Nelson, saved me. He created a department for all the students who didn't fit into the other departments, sort of an orphans' home. It was called the experimental studio, and it was a totally free space. Nelson was the one who introduced super-8 into the school, and later brought in video. He didn't even know how video worked at the time, he just thought we should have it, and that the students would figure out how to use it—that's the kind of rare, open-minded teacher he was.

Bellour: When was this?

Viola: 1970. Until then the only thing I had really connected with was music. It's still very important to me.

Bellour: Did you study music?

Viola: Not formally. I started playing drums in a rock and roll band when I was in high school, and continued into my university days. That was the real focus of my life. It was the first time I really had the experience of practicing and developing something, perfecting a skill—of pushing it beyond an initial stage. This has always stayed with me and helped me develop my video work.

Bellour: And that's what gave you the strong connection with sound that you've shown from the very beginning.

Viola: Yes, in the university I also took classes in electronic music. We had one of the first of the early music synthesizers, the Moog; working with it was like doing sculpture. I had always liked tape recorders, microphones, and so on, and this took me even further into electronics and technical things.

Now I always advise my students to take a class in electronic music, because a lot of video technology was predated by electronic music technology, which was itself predated by the telephone. In fact, much of media comes from the telephone, which ties everything back to communication.

Just an example: John Cage, in the late 1950s, before electronic synthesizers, used one of the first electronic music circuits, called a ring modulator. It's a simple circuit invented by the phone company to send long-distance telephone calls. It takes the normal speaking voice and transposes it up to a frequency which can carry much further—this process is called modulation. Then the circuit demodulates it at the other end—subtracts the carrier frequency so that you're left with the original voice signal. What Cage and others did was to modify the circuit so that once the voice has been modulated up to the special carrier frequency, it was kept there and never demodulated down to a normal voice. And that's the familiar sound that everyone recognizes now—it's a classic electronic music cliché. In the scene on the boat in my tape *Hatsu Yume*, when you hear a strange voice, that's the sound. It's the boat captain talking on the CB radio.

Bellour: So, for you, the technical aspect of electronic music was the most important?

Viola: Yes. At the time I was seriously trying to compose music, but when I look back I realize that the work I was doing was not really good. The crucial thing for me was the process of going through an electronic system, working with these standard kinds of circuits which became a perfect introduction to a general electronic theory. It gave me a sense that the electronic signal was a material that could be worked with. This was another really important realiza-

tion. Physical manipulation is fundamental to our thought processes — just watch the way a baby learns. It's why most people have so much trouble approaching electronic media. When electronic energies finally became concrete for me, like sounds are to a composer, I really began to learn; as I said, it all became a primary process again, like sculpture. Soon I made what was for me an easy switch over to video. I never thought about it in terms of images so much as electronic process, a signal.

Bellour: And even though there was super-8 in the department, you weren't interested in it right away?

Viola: No, I was too impatient. I'd shoot it and then want to see it immediately. When I first saw video, first touched it, that was it. There was no question.

Bellour: And from that point, making video became a regular activity for you?

Viola: Yes, I did more tapes in 1973 than I ever have in any other year.

Bellour: Could you compare those early tapes, which I don't know, to your later tapes? Could you describe them briefly?

Viola: *Red Tape*, from 1975, was a sort of bridge. Before that, the tapes were didactic, the content was the medium, like structural film in a way. For all of us, I think, the whole focus was on the medium. We were all learning what it could do. So the act of making a tape became a process of discovering and demonstrating something about video. When I look back now I realize that what I was doing was solving a series of problems I had posed for myself.

Bellour: Do you mean that every tape was about one specific problem?

Viola: Yes. For example, I made a tape in 1973 called *Passage Series*. It's a series of three or four pieces, and each one has a different problem. In one, for instance, I saw that there was a huge difference between a zoom and a dolly (the zoom being, I think, still today the most overused thing in video; video cameras all come with zoom lenses so everybody just does it, like Pavlovian training). If you look down a hallway you see a perspective, the classic Renaissance vanishing point. I experimented with walking down the hall in a way that looked like a zoom, and zooming in a way that looked like a walk. Finally I took the camera and I put it against the wall of this very long hall and scraped it all the way down and back along the walls. You see the wall scraping past at the side of the frame. The sound was very strong.

Bellour: It sounds like an exercise, a total training.

Viola: Yes, a physical reexperiencing of that hall, a translation, so that instead of becoming an image the hall became tactile—a physical thing. A lot of these problems and exercises came from my studies in perception and experimental psychology, which I was introduced to through McLuhan.

During my first few years with video, I was totally into electronics, using synthesizers, image processing, building little circuits, wiring things myself. Then—again in 1973—I made a tape called *Information*. I was making a copy between two machines and by accident I plugged the output into the input of the same machine, pushed the record button, and suddenly there was this strange feedback, a signal that was no signal at all. But since it was routed through all the equipment in the studio—the switcher, the chroma keyer, all the monitors—every time I pushed the button it did something different. That was the best tape I'd ever made, at that time. (*Laughs*) And I felt that if the best thing I'd ever made was a mistake, I needed to understand things a little better.

Up until that point I thought that the raw material in video was the technology, and then I realized that was wrong, or only half the issue. The other half was the human perception system. I began to realize that I needed to know not only how the camera works, but how the eye functions, and the ear, how the brain processes information, etc. This investigation brought me into a whole new area in my later work. I slowly began to consider video as a total living system.

Bellour: In practical terms, how did this affect the way you used the technology?

Viola: I began to rely on it less. I got a sense, which grew stronger through all my later works, of an unseen presence or missing element “out there” all the time, which it was necessary to contact in order for the work to live. It was something not yet manifest, and so it made the immediate work—the recording—incomplete in a sense. This missing element was, of course, the viewer, or the viewing experience—the other half of the system. It's the dynamic interaction between these two systems, not just the technology and language of video alone, that is the fundamental nature of the medium.

Bellour: Were you influenced by other work being done in video then?

Viola: I should say first that this was really a unique time for video and I was very lucky to be a student just then. While still in school I was showing in exhibitions with people like Nam June Paik, Bruce Naumann, Richard Serra, Peter Campus—all the leading early video artists. No one had made any more tapes than anybody else at that time. Video was still really new; we were all discovering it together. My influences, initially, were more from the art world. I was interested in performance art, which was just beginning then, and a little later

in experimental film. A friend of mine took me to see work by Michael Snow, Ken Jacobs, Hollis Frampton, Stan Brakhage, etc.

Bellour: Did you feel a connection between those films and the immediate feeling you had for video?

Viola: Well, even in those days I didn't think of film and video as being that different. When my friends and I discussed film, we were really discussing images, camera, and structure; we would think about them in video terms later.

But getting back to the question of influences, one thing that was very important for me was Gene Youngblood's book *Expanded Cinema*. This was mainly because he devoted part of the book to describing some of the technical processes of video as key formal elements of the aesthetics of the medium. He decided what the basic elements were and listed them. It was very clear. No critic had done that; many still don't because they don't understand the technology. By doing this he also demystified the medium to some extent, since in those days technology like chroma key was only available at TV stations and very difficult to access. Our main problem in the early days was how to get to these tools, and then how to have enough time using them so that they became part of ourselves. This is still one of the primary difficulties for artists coming to video—how to personalize a technology which is economically and politically a corporate institutional medium.

Bellour: To situate your work a little better, I'd like to concentrate on the series of tapes called *The Reflecting Pool* (1977–80), and particularly on the title piece, which lasts seven minutes. Here is the way I would roughly describe the tape, having seen it a few times and taken notes on the last viewing.

The camera is still. In the foreground there is a pond, or pool, and in the background a forest. Throughout the tape a kind of windlike sound of varying intensity covers the soundtrack. A man (you) emerges from the forest, walks up to the edge of the pool. We see his reflection in the water. He stays there for a long time, and then suddenly jumps, but his body freezes in midair above the water. In the pool the light changes, the water is animated by various movements. The reflection reappears. The frozen figure gradually fades into the landscape. More movements in the water, this time in backward motion. Then the reflection alone. The water turns black, then back to its original color, and suddenly a man, the same man, emerges from the water naked, his back to us, climbs onto the edge of the pool and disappears, in small fragmented movements, into the forest.

First: how was all this done technically?

Viola: It's actually fairly primitive as far as video effects go. It would be easier to do today than when I did it a few years ago. The key element of the piece, as in

a lot of my other work, is the stationary camera. Keeping the camera in the same place automatically means that any objects that have not moved between different recordings can be registered (aligned) again, broken up and put together, and reconstructed to make a whole image. So the final image seems like a complete coherent space, although I've actually cut specific areas of the frame into different sections of time. It's something I've been trying to work with for a while: recombining levels of time *within* the frame, times which are not strictly dependent on the sort of absolute time of the running of the videotape machine.

I had three elements in the piece, three separate recordings (or series of recordings). First: a series of recordings of all the things happening within the pool. Second: a recording of the scene where I come out of the forest and jump into the water. Third: a recording of the scene completely empty, with no one in it at all.

The final edit was done in stages. I first combined all of the different spontaneous actions that I did to the pool, like throwing things in the water, walking around the edge to show my reflection, and so on, and made a submaster. This is a preedited tape; it was edited using very slow dissolves to link each of the pool actions to create the appearance of continuously merging activity. That became source number one. Source number two consisted of the walking out from the forest, jumping into the air, and freezing the videotape frame at that point. The primitive part is next: I first measured out on the monitor screen what the shape of the pool was in the frame. Then I made a card, a black and white graphic design where the pool shape was white and the rest of the frame was black, and I put that on a stand in the studio. (This could be generated electronically today, but when I did it a lot of studios were still using graphic cards for titles.) I pointed the video camera at the card and with the zoom I lined up the shapes on the black and white card with the image in the original shot as precisely as possible. Then we did what's called an external key.

Bellour: Could you briefly explain what that is?

Viola: In video there are two kinds of keys that allow one image to be matted onto another. A key can be determined either by differences in brightness between two parts of the picture (luminance key) or by differences in color (chroma key). In the key that is normally used, a camera is pointed at one object, for example a newscaster in front of a blue background; then his shape is electronically "cut out" by dropping out of the picture anything that is that particular blue color. Then another source is inserted in place of the blue area behind him. The external key is done the same way, except that the newscaster shape is also filled in with a different second source, so that the only thing remaining from the original image is his shape. You don't see his face anymore, there is another image inside him and a second image around him.

This is what I used: the card itself disappeared and just became the two

different levels of brightness, black and white, necessary to cut the external luminance key. It defined the pool and the background. Inside the pool I inserted the submaster that I made first, with all the changes and the actions. I used a "soft" key to cut the edge—where the edge of the shape that is being matted is softened and blended in with the background. I combined the other two recordings—of my walking out, jumping, and freezing in midair, and the shot of the empty space in real time—by doing a slow fade, about three or four minutes, from the frozen figure background to the empty background. The figure appears to disappear into the landscape. All the while, the pool activity sequences are only visible within the cut-out pool shape and appear as reflections and ripples on the surface of the water in an otherwise still or empty scene. Finally, I did one last dissolve from this whole compound image of my climbing out of the pool and walking away into the woods. So the frame is broken up into three distinct levels of time—real time, still, and time lapse—and reconstructed to look like a complete image of a single space, since the lines along which it was divided match the geometry of the original scene.

Bellour: It's far more complicated than what one can imagine on first viewing, a simple division, a split screen between the bottom and top of the image.

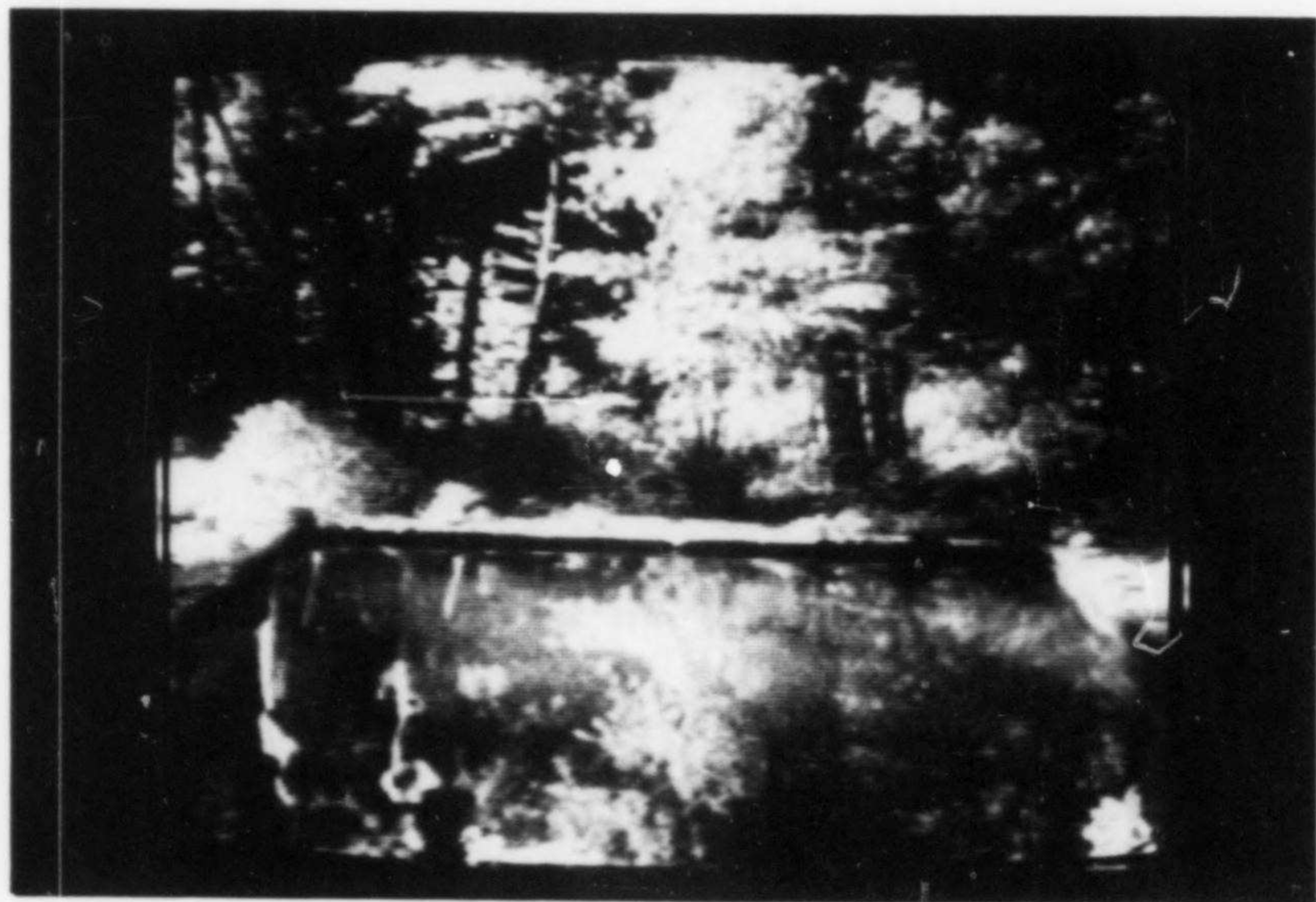
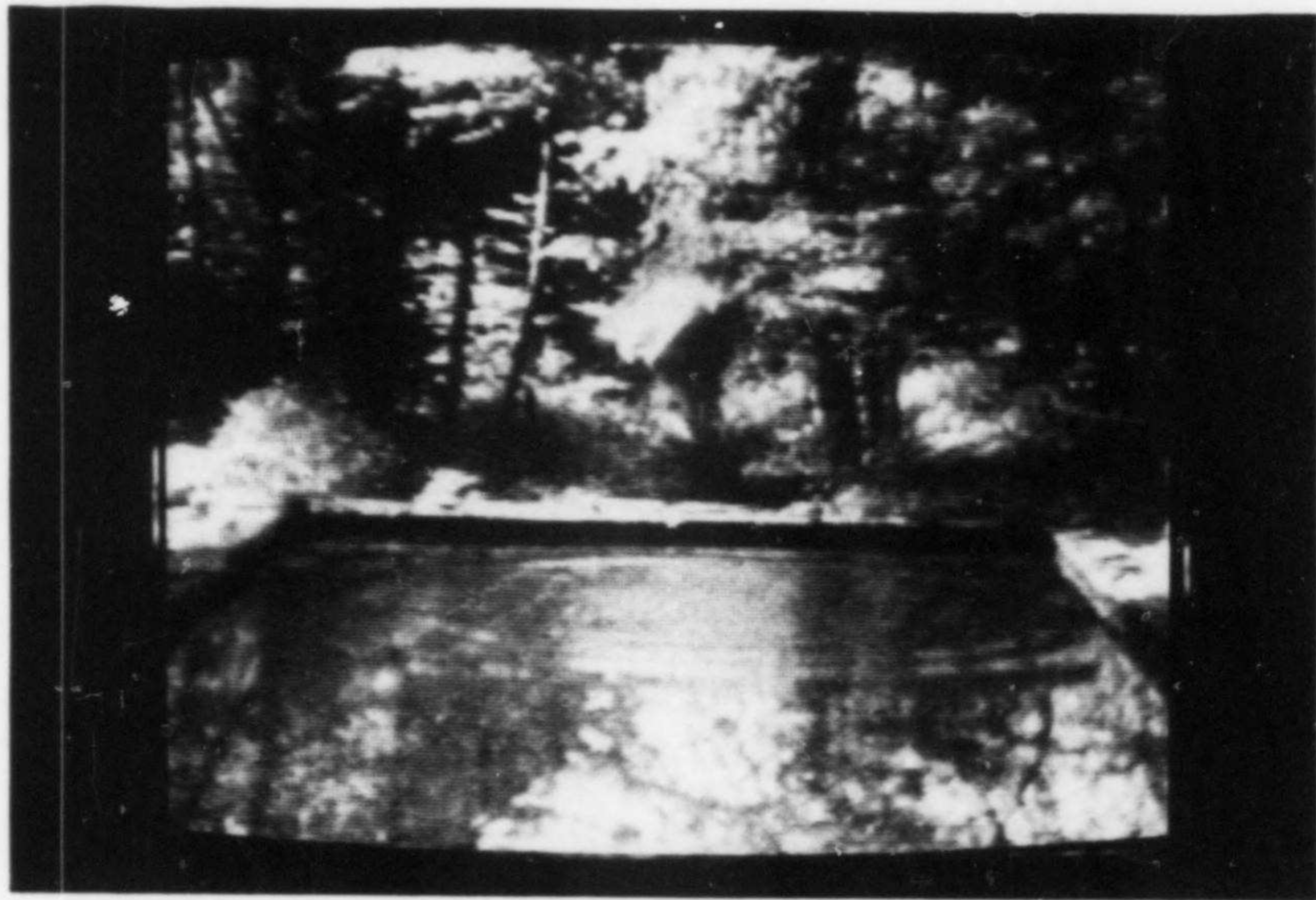
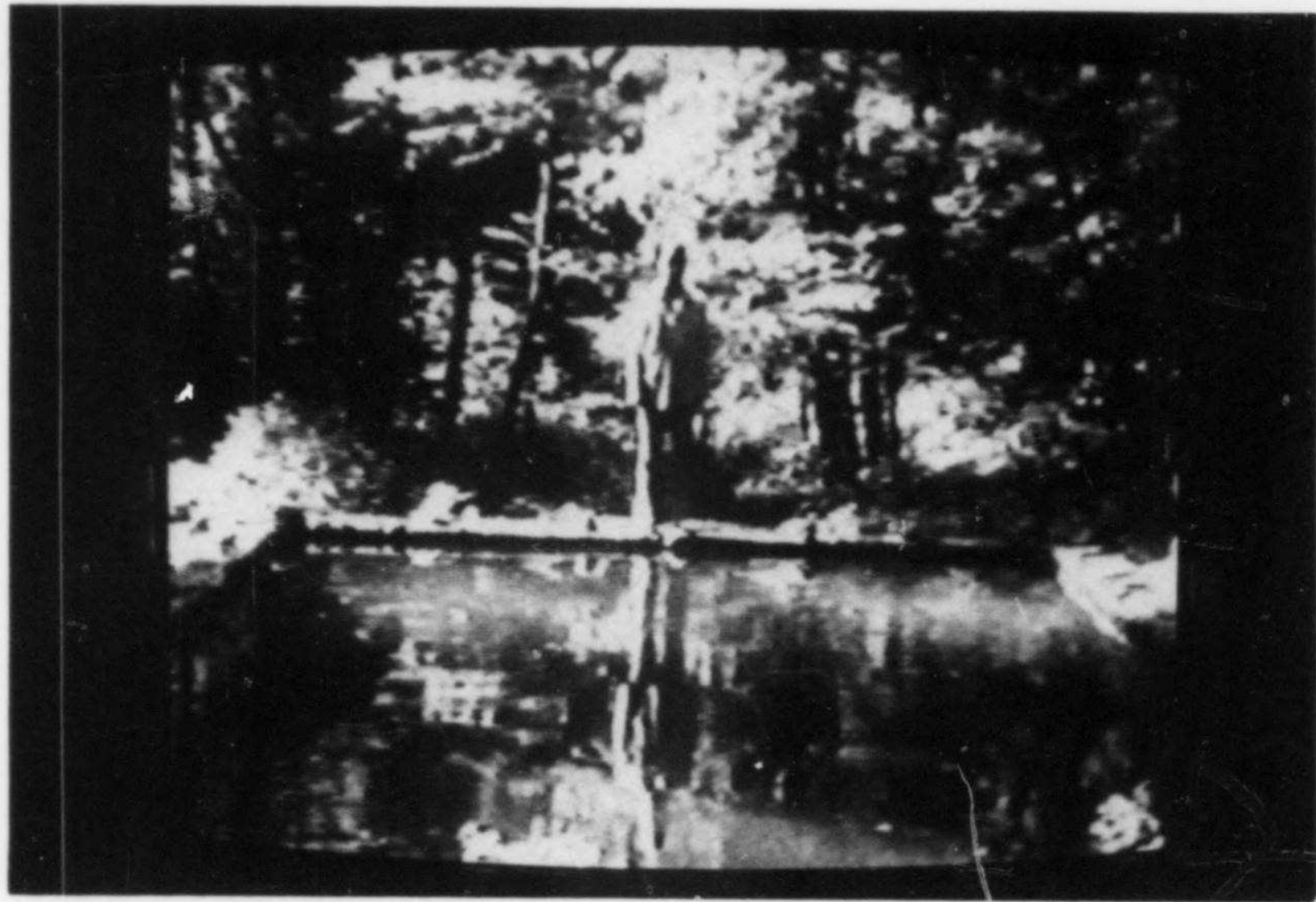
Viola: It is more complicated: like sculpting with time.

Bellour: What ideas were you trying to get across with the piece?

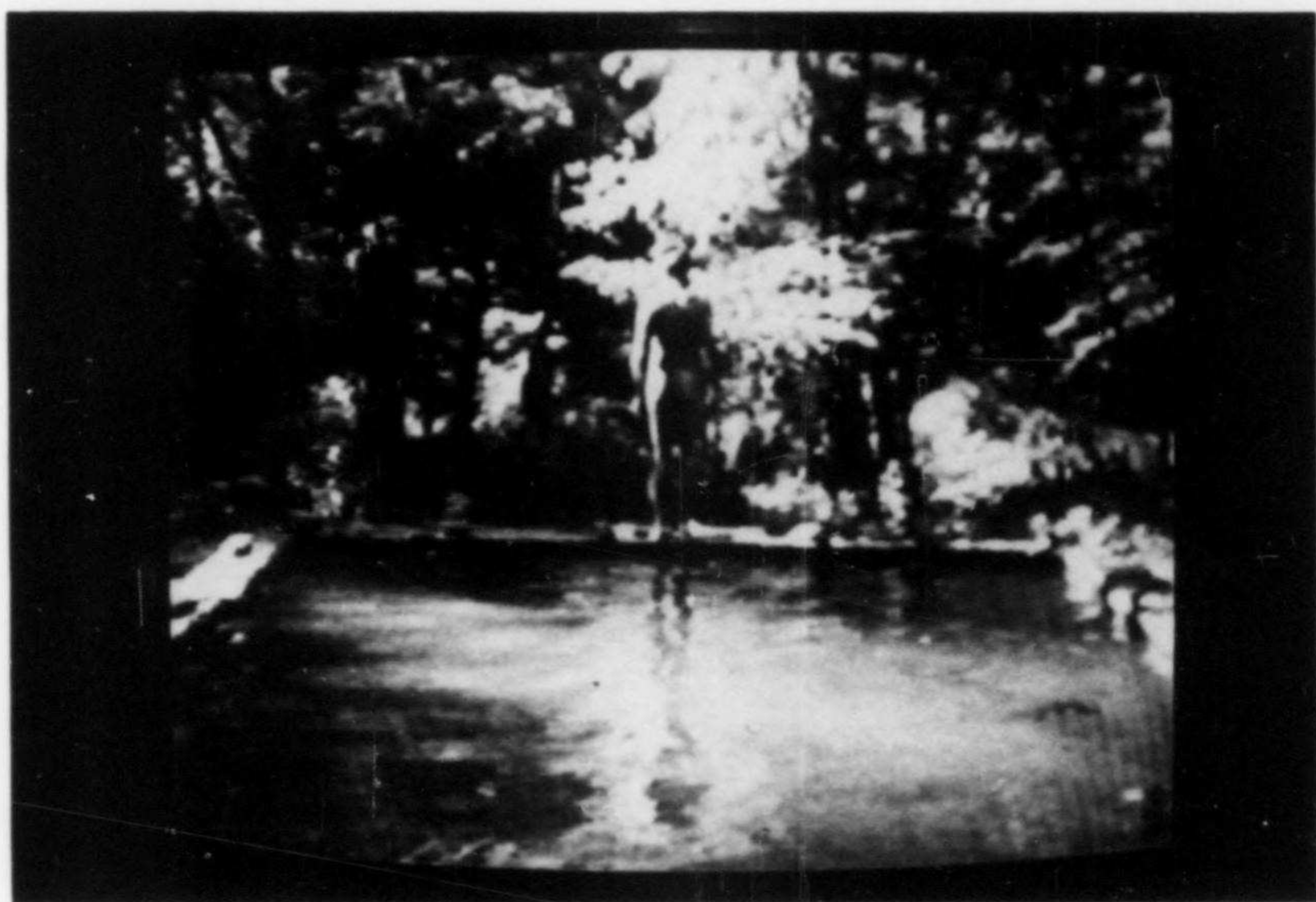
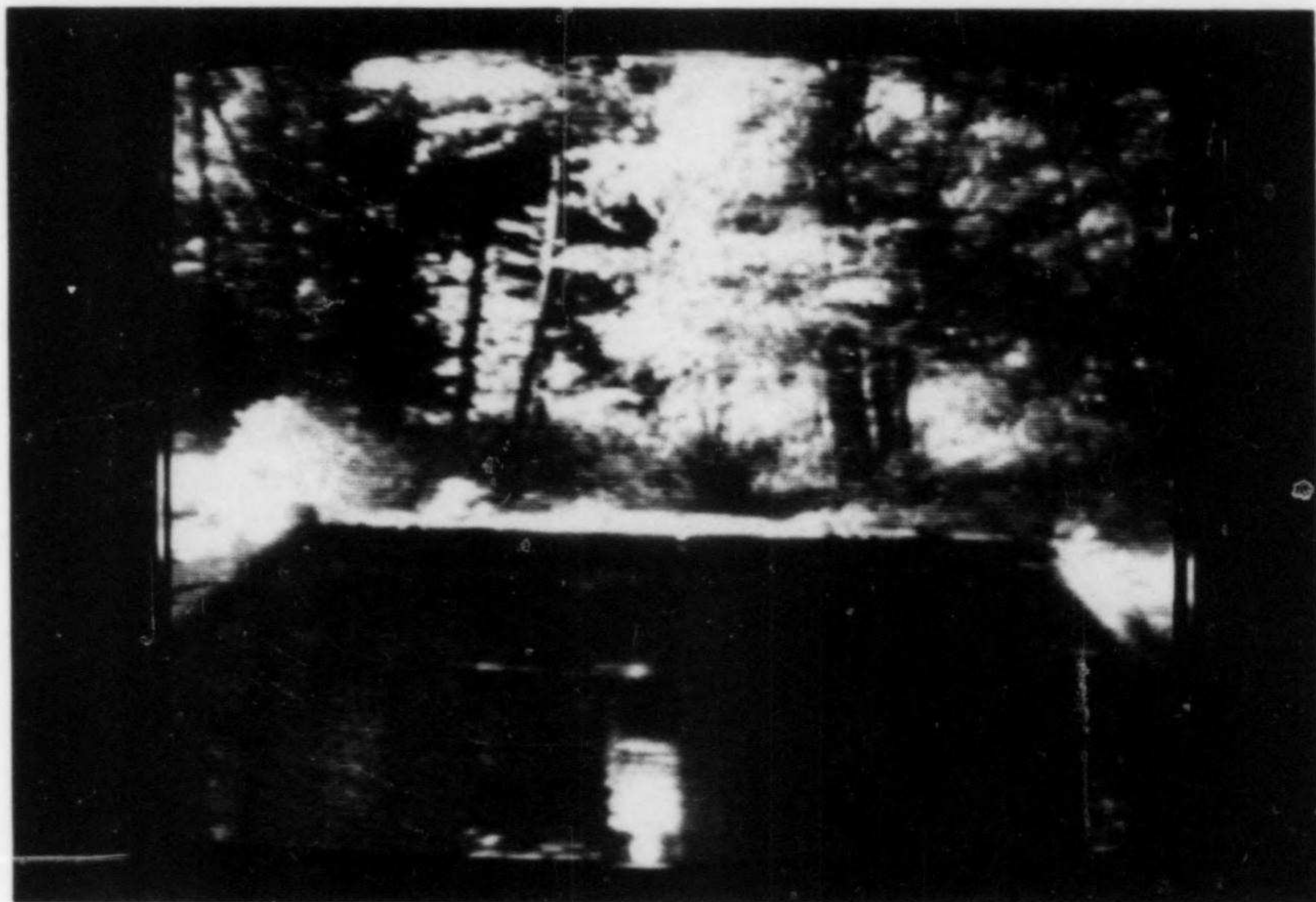
Viola: I was trying to get at the original notion of baptism in a way—a process of cleansing or clearing away, and the idea of breaking through illusion. Water is such a powerful, obvious symbol of cleansing, and also of birth, rebirth, and even death. We come from water and in a way slide back into its undifferentiated mass at death. There is the emergence of the solitary figure—the process of differentiation or individuation out of an undifferentiated, natural ground. There is also the suggestion of the events of this world's being illusory, or transient, since they are only visible as reflections on the surface of the water. The direct reality is never perceived—like Plato's cave.

Bellour: And then you come out of the water.

Viola: Yes, I come out of the water. The key element in the piece is the frozen action. There is a transformation that's all based on the original decision to give up; I think it relates to death in some way, or letting go of the things that you know, just releasing everything. The image I have is of a cliff, you're right at the edge, and you have to decide to go ahead or go back. I think we must jump.



Bill Viola. The Reflecting Pool. 1977-79.



Photographs by Kira Perov.

Bellour: *The Reflecting Pool* is one of five in a series of tapes.

Viola: Yes. When I started doing the early tapes I would put a lot of pieces on one reel, just to have them on one tape. Then I began to realize that this obviously made them affect each other and that I could make a sort of metapiece which had discrete parts, yet could be considered a single work. I thought it would be like a record album; you could take one song from it and play it on the radio or you could listen to the whole thing. I first did this in *Red Tape* and most recently in *The Reflecting Pool*.

Bellour: Your tapes are often very abstract, paradoxical, illusory, in terms of perception and the experience of time, and part of this comes from editing, special effects, and so on. What impresses me is that unlike a lot of video artists who use effects to get away from realistic images, real time, etc., your tapes almost give an impression of "reality," of a spatial and temporal continuity.

Viola: Yes, I think this ultimately comes from the realization that for me all of video has its source in the live image. When I broke away from all the image-processing stuff and started working with real situations again, the first thing I did was begin stripping away all unnecessary elements to try to get back to the basics. For several months I ended up exploring the most fundamental unit in video—the camera and the monitor. In film, recording is the inseparable essence of the medium. In video, it is the secondary stage. You don't need a recorder to have video. You turn it on, and the circuits are all activated—it's humming, it's going. It's more related to sound than to film or photography because it's exactly the same as the microphone/speaker relationship. We have a microphone here and all of a sudden your voice is coming out across the room, it's all connected—a living, dynamic system, an energy field. There are no frozen, discrete moments.

When you make video you're interfering with the ongoing process which exists before your intention to use it—that's the biggest difference between video and film. It's sort of like a light is on when you come into the room. It's all there already. It's a different sense of creating something. The decision to record is to turn on the video recorder, not the camera. The camera is always on, there is always an image. This duration, this always-there, can be said to be real time. You're working with the image—I don't want to say creating images because the camera is creating the images—and it's synchronized with your experience at the moment you're there. That's what I meant when I said I was impatient with super-8—the image would come tomorrow.

Bellour: Do you always have a monitor with you when you work?

Viola: Yes, everywhere, so that I'm always seeing a color image. People sometimes look at my work and say I must have studied lighting. I've never read a single book on lighting, but I have done a lot of tests on my own, just changing lights, until I got what I wanted—creating space, destroying space. It's so clear that way; it becomes a physical skill. You see the effects of your actions on the image while you are carrying them out.

Bellour: And this is what you mean when you say: "I'm thinking with my hand instead of with my head"?

Viola: Yes: thinking with the hands, images in the hands. When I teach workshops in video, one of the first things I do is cover the viewfinder in the camera. That way you're pointing the camera in one direction and your head's turning in the other, looking five meters away at your image on the monitor across the room; it's really a disembodied kind of situation. That's why I like the *la paluche* mini-camera: it teaches you that the image is in your hand, it's not in your eye. It's like those incredible animals, certain crabs and so on, that have their eyes at the end of little rods. That kind of linking to your sensory experience via a remote "image arm" is so wonderful. Video was first used for remote sensing—all TV was live. Closed-circuit surveillance systems are a major part of video history.

Bellour: So in other words we really have three separate "times." First the continuous time which involves just you and your perception of reality as it appears simultaneously on your monitor. Then the recording time which makes a selection from that continuum, and finally the time of the finished, edited piece which creates the illusion that the second time, the separate recording, possesses the continuity of the first.

Viola: Exactly. For me the most important thing to be developed in making video is the ability to sense these "other times" as they are contained in the primary time of experience. The act of recording as an experience for myself and the transformation of that recording as it becomes a part of a future event—both are real and both must exist at the same moment when I make a work.

I've learned so much through my video work—far more than what I need to practice my profession. The real investigation is of life and being itself; the medium is just the tool in this investigation. You can see many parallels in ancient Eastern disciplines of mind and spiritual training. There the skill of the master, for example, is considered to be not so much the accumulation of knowledge or even the acute awareness of the present. Rather it is seen as the knowing how a present action will be transformed into the future. This is an incredibly difficult thing to do. It's not a matter of future prediction, but of future knowledge. "It is much easier to pick up an acorn than to move the tree," the Chinese saying goes. In meditation training you are given exercises which don't

make sense or are unpleasant and even painful. You protest and maybe even refuse to do them. But if you go through with them, a change occurs, and only later does the real value of the experience become clear and possibly indispensable.

Bellour: And how do you connect that, practically, within the elaboration of your work?

Viola: I think this has to do with the relation between spontaneous inspiration and calculated, rational thought. I sometimes think of my work as "rational inspiration." I don't like the way things are done in films: an inspiration gets written up and set out as a sort of blueprint. The act of shooting the film becomes a matter of following the blueprint and reconstructing the original inspiration. Even though some of my work is precisely predetermined down to the individual shots, the experience I'm having while recording is still connected with the work. It's really the reason why I do it, ultimately. It is important for me not always to know what I am doing. If I can sense the experience strongly enough while I'm recording, then I think it comes out in the final work.

Bellour: Isn't there a contradiction between this preplanning of every shot and the powerful experience you're trying to get at the moment of the shooting?

Viola: No, because the knowledge that I have of what the piece will be is not necessarily literal. When I look at the finished work, it's like *déjà vu*. We are here talking and all of a sudden I think, "This has happened before," but it's not a visual image, not in the sense that you have the same sweater on, or your hair is the same, etc. It's more a feeling inside that the same thing is happening.

Bellour: Then where does the element of planning come in?

Viola: For me it's always been a matter of fighting for control. When I started in video, there was barely any control at all. It was like driving downhill with no brakes: you could turn but you couldn't stop. You couldn't edit an individual frame in 1970—the frame existed, but it was inaccessible until the introduction of computer editing in 1973. You couldn't shoot in color outside a studio, and you couldn't shoot and record in color unless you had a really large, professional two-inch videotape recorder. So we all used black and white. At the same time that my work was developing, new technology kept coming out, allowing more and more control. The turning point was the introduction of the portable color camera, which I used for the first time in 1975 for *Red Tape*.

When I finally got outside, the studio had already turned into an incredible limitation for me, even though it was so important in the beginning. I was determined not to just shoot at random. I never liked the early documentary video style or guerrilla television stuff where you shot everything all the time

and just put it together later. I always thought you had to start with an idea, but when I got out into the real world I found that you could never totally pre-determine things. There are some incredibly beautiful moments in some of my tapes that were totally unplanned. The most striking one is at the very end of *The Space between the Teeth*, when the photograph falls into the water.

My plan was that the photograph would sink into the water (I'd mounted it on a piece of sheet rock), but just as we were ready to drop it, I saw a boat coming up the river, and so I told my friend to wait and when he finally let the photograph go, the wave from the boat submerged it.

Bellour: It's very strong—the moving image suddenly turns into a photograph, and we get the feeling that the whole tape gets carried off by a wave.

Viola: Yes, and this kind of thing happens again in *Sweet Light*. There's a scene in which I throw a piece of paper down and a moth comes out of it, totally by chance. I was making a tape about phototropism—about insects blindly driven on toward light—thinking about it in relation to fanaticism and so on. I had started at ten in the morning, working alone almost continuously, performing this tedious process of moving the camera down in a predetermined path, thirty different camera positions to get a sort of simulated zoom. By the time I got down to the floor, it was night. I had two thousand-watt studio lights, and the bugs started coming into the room, going crazy. One actually went straight into the light and landed right in front of the camera with its wings burned. My God! That's what my tape was about! In my more recent work this whole process has been snowballing. You wonder after awhile who is controlling whom. It's like that principle of quantum physics—the presence of the observer always affects and becomes inseparable from the result of the experiment.

Bellour: What's really striking is that the reality that unfolds in your tapes is also a constant flow of mental images. We're always brought back to the inside and the outside of the representation. As if you were able to project into exterior reality the images that go through your mind, since reality has left its mark there.

Viola: Certain experiences keep reappearing as images; those images, for me, are crucial, the basis of all my work. In a way my work is very literal, but it has more to do with the after-experience than the actual experience in itself. As if memory were a sort of filter, another editing process. In fact the editing is going on all the time. Images are always being created and transformed.

Bellour: So for you memory is a constant reworking . . .

Viola: Yes, it is an active sense, not a past sense at all. I think memory is as much about the future as it is about the past.

Bellour: You talk about your work the way certain writers describe their relationship to literature. You often choose to use yourself as "actor," as if to show that it's really your experience, your body, that's at stake. It seems to me that when making video involves so much subjectivity, such a direct and solitary relationship to the act of creating, representing things, and developing them in time, it becomes very much like writing.

Viola: Yes, exactly. The work comes from a very personal place for me and it's always a matter of keeping it as close as possible to that source. This is what makes me feel that there is no difference between what I'm doing and what a writer does. In the beginning I had to teach myself the language, how to write. Now I know enough of this technology to do things on my own, so it's becoming even more personal than before.

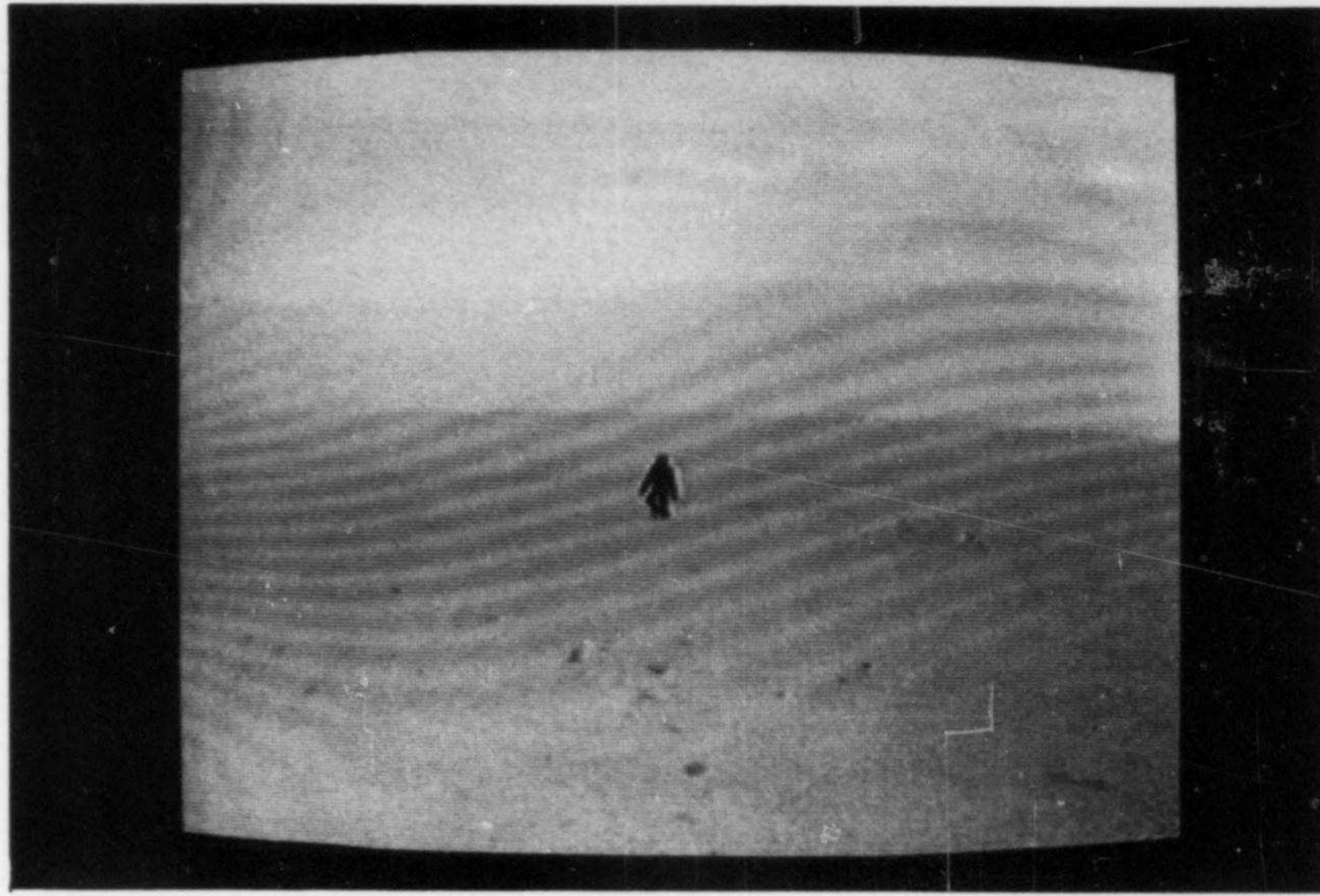
Bellour: What's your relationship to fiction? In your articles you talk a lot about landscapes, objects, nature, but in your tapes these images always happen to somebody, in one way or another.

Viola: There are shots in my tapes which are just landscapes without people, but you're right, they always come back to a human presence, at least as a point of identification. In *Chott-el-Djerid*, when a little black dot walks across the screen you know it's a person, it's not some animal or little rolling stone or something like that. All my images, as you say, feel more inner than outer; they are all personalized.

I think that all my works are narrative, they all have to do with drama. *Chott-el-Djerid* is phenomenal in this respect. I can show it in a room with fifty people where the monitors are not so big, the black dot on the screen might be four or five video lines high, a speck, really, yet it has a personality. Everyone in the room is watching a black dot a quarter of an inch high, travelling across the square. It's like composing for the retina, for the eye, knowing for almost every frame exactly where someone's eye would be. The meaning that is there is revealed through some kind of action, or resolution of the scene. Narrative structure, I think, is part of our central nervous system; it is biological in origin and I am interested in approaching that origin. That's why I'm not interested in constructing things the way you would for a movie where it is a matter of a simulation of a situation.

Bellour: So there's a limit for you, one that you don't want to cross, between the way you work with narrative and more traditional ways of telling stories, as in cinema, with actors and so on.

Viola: Well, I haven't necessarily decided not to cross it, you know. (*Laughs*) If someday I feel I need to use professional actors, to create a situation which is



Bill Viola. Chott-el-Djerid. 1979.

very much like cinema where I want to reconstruct an event with people, I'll do it. Nor do I have any objections to using words or text. I haven't used them so far — any spoken words in my work have just been part of the sound landscape — but it's not a boundary line that I set up and decided I wouldn't cross.

Bellour: Yes, but there does seem to be a line (and this has been very powerful in American culture) which puts experimental and research work on one side, and mainstream, narrative movies on the other. What's your feeling about this strict separation?

Viola: I think it's unnatural, even dangerous, and it's as much the fault of the artists as the public. But I also think it's unfortunate that the larger public feels it needs a story with actors, a dramatic story in order to feel it's had a satisfying viewing experience. Every once in a while, people from the Hollywood industry will invite me to show my work or will come to one of my shows, and I get the feeling that what they're thinking is: if he really knew what he was doing, he'd be able to tell a good story, he'd be trying to work with the system and break into Hollywood.

Bellour: If Hollywood came to you and asked you to make a film, would you do it?

Viola: It depends. If I were given a dream opportunity to have complete creative control, I would do it. I've been approached on several occasions by Hollywood

producers, but they all looked at my work from the point of view of how it could help them. They look at the ways I've edited something, the kinds of shots I used, as a way of finding new techniques to use in their work. For me, obviously, the work is not about special effects: all the effects and techniques are there in service to an idea. But the people in the industry refuse to acknowledge those ideas, since they're not part of the traditional story-telling mode.

Bellour: But in order to serve your own ideas, you more or less depend, like most video artists, on foundations, museums, universities, and a whole system of grants. You don't really enter into the laws of the market, which presupposes a minimum audience.

Viola: That's true, although I am subject to the laws of the video art "market" or field, as different and disconnected from the mainstream as that might be. I think in some ways advancing into the mass market would be a lot healthier and potentially a more democratic way to determine the life of a work than the fashion-oriented, isolated art-world system. But I still feel that a large part of the work of an artist, a scientist, any creative person, always exists independent of the system that disseminates it. The success and popularity of a work is not necessarily related to its eventual importance in the history of ideas. The most important thing for an artist is to keep working.

I do think, however, that the mass-audience situation and our relation to moving images is changing dramatically right now — with cable TV, home video, video games, etc., the whole video "revolution." Historically, I think the first big break with convention came with the introduction of video games in the mid-'70s. That was the first time the general public could conceive of a television set as useful for something other than watching TV. It became something that people could interact with. It's fascinating that people became so captivated with these extremely primitive images — flat little squares and simple line drawings that don't even give the illusion of three-dimensional space. And yet kids are more interested in these than in *Dallas*.

Bellour: Because they manipulate them themselves.

Viola: Exactly. Then the next big change was the home video recorder which allowed you to record TV at any time and make your own tapes. And now more recently you have music television which is very interesting because . . .

Bellour: You mean what we call "video clips" . . .

Viola: Yes, in the U.S. there's an entire cable channel with twenty-four hours of nothing but "video clips." I think it's really a visual interpretation of AM radio, visual junk food, but every once in a while you'll see something that's quite in-

teresting. And of course the main genre that they've been drawing on for these things is the commercials, which themselves have always drawn on experimental film and video. I've seen the work of Peter Campus, for example, reproduced in a clip by some producer in Hollywood last year. This is now the most popular form for teenagers. When these kids mature, this will be their experience. Three-minute clips, along with home video and computers.

Bellour: And so you think this will change the way we relate to sounds and images in general?

Viola: Yes, because some kid is going to take that music video experience and really turn it into something profound. As Cage stressed over and over, the most important thing is not to make value judgments, but to promote curiosity and awareness. As you yourself mentioned, that's the mistake the avant-garde has made: sticking so rigidly to its position as avant-garde that it has had to downgrade things like TV commercials — some of which are fantastic in themselves, and better than many experimental works — or else insisting on an anti-narrative approach, like Brakhage and a lot of other filmmakers. It's always a divisive position rather than an expansive one.

Bellour: This brings us to the problem of getting video art shown on TV. What has been your experience?

Viola: Well, as you know, I've been artist-in-residence at Channel 13 in New York since 1976. I'm sure a lot of people in Europe know about the experimental laboratories that were set up in the public television stations in the States. Actually, the first experimental work was done at WGBH-TV in Boston, in the late '60s — 1967 or so. They started broadcasting experimental programs made by the producers of the station, but they were very innovative and used a lot of new video techniques. That led to the first television lab, which was created around 1969-70 in San Francisco, at KQED. Very soon after, WGBH in Boston and Channel 13 (WNET) in New York also created television laboratories where they would invite artists-in-residence to use the tools of broadcast television. That was the main idea: not necessarily to have artists use portapak or that sort of thing, but to have artists use the production tools of the mass media to create new work. As usual the first years were the best, the most open and innovative, before things gradually changed and became fossilized. I believe that WGBH still maintains a weekly Sunday night program of artists' works, the longest running experimental showcase, since 1975 or '76. It's the last program on the air and it's always artists' work. Their works are any length — five minutes to an hour.

Bellour: And is there a real public for that?

Viola: Oh, yes, by now they've generated an audience, not a large one, of course. Channel 13 tried another approach: they made a shorter series and publicized it as much as possible. The Video and Film Review series runs for ten weeks during the summer, again on Sunday night at 11 P.M. (one of the least popular viewing times). It's really gotten quite a good response, although unfortunately they're stopping it this year. All my tapes since 1975 have been broadcast on public television in the States, mainly Channel 13 in New York.

I don't want to work specifically for broadcast, however, and I've been criticized on that point by the producers at Channel 13. They say: "You should really acknowledge that you're dealing with a mass audience; you can't hold these shots on the screen for two or three minutes," and so on. But I don't believe in stylistic limitation and the dominance of packaging in broadcast TV. I think that there are some universal elements, in the sense that all human beings have two eyes, two ears, and a brain, they have the same machinery — even if a given culture drastically determines consciousness and even perception. We all share the same basic conditions of life — birth, growth, death — and can even have the same aspirations. This has been my model for thinking about the mass media and I have tried to get in touch with that part of everyone. So, even though I haven't been making works specifically for broadcast, I do feel I'm making work for a larger number of people than the specialized audience of the art world.

Bellour: Speaking of which, could you talk a little about this recent series of spots you did, to which you gave the very ambiguous title *Reverse Television*? It seems to be directly connected with this audience problem.

Viola: That's true. I think it's like my videotape *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*, which is also related to that problem because it makes directly visible the nature of the viewing experience. It's very long and difficult to watch, people squirm in their seats; it's a sort of confrontation.

Bellour: An appeal to people, to spectators.

Viola: Yes. *Reverse Television* is related even more to that and is the only piece I have done specifically for broadcast. The idea was to use the space between programs where publicity would normally be. In American public TV there are no commercials, so they tend to publicize themselves: "At eight o'clock, watch this show," etc. It still has the feeling of a timed, rhythmic device that breaks up the programs, frames them, and leads the viewer to the next one. So it's like what's known in computer terminology as "down time." Down time is



Bill Viola. Reverse Television-Portraits of Viewers. 1983-84.

the space between the programs; that's what makes the commercials so powerful—once again that figure/ground relationship. I look at my father watching TV; as soon as the show is over, he relaxes. And just when he's the most relaxed—boom, the ad comes on. It goes right in. It's really smart.

I'm interested in that space and also in the idea of broadcast scheduling as a sort of field to be used, so that the process of scheduling becomes related to editing. It's just like montage. Each shot follows the other, but it takes two weeks instead of five minutes for them all to complete themselves. I call this a television "micro-series." For *Reverse Television*, I went around to about forty people in the Boston area; I went right into their homes, and had them sit in the most comfortable chair in their living room. I framed it so that you could see their whole body and part of the room where they lived. They were just sitting and staring at the camera in silence. When the normal program is over, the publicity comes on and then bang!, there's this image of a person sitting in silence. You hear them breathing because I had the microphone up very loud, you hear cars driving by outside their window, whatever, and the person is just staring at the screen. And then they go off. There is no label, no title, or anything attached to it at all. Then the next hour there is another one. This lasts for a two-week period.

Bellour: Was this the formula which was not accepted by the station?

Viola: Of course. You already mentioned the title, which does in fact have a sort of subversive ring to it; they felt that right away. Television is essentially the art of packaging; everything has to be framed. My piece really had to appear to be from the ground—like that space in the computer, the data field (the ground), which exists only for things (the figure) to happen on. Or the notion that under all of us, there is some kind of continuum. In television I was always fascinated by the fact that at any moment there are millions of people sitting in their own homes individually watching the same image. My piece arose from a very spatial idea, as though there were a sheet over something and every once in a while it parted and revealed the ground or field that's always there underneath. You just see it for an instant and then it's gone.

But the TV people really had problems with the notion and it finally came down to a confrontation with the director of the station, who would not let anything go on without a title. I refused to put a title at the beginning since it would have really destroyed the piece, but was forced to put one at the end. They wanted it to be a whole description of what the piece was, because again you have to describe in words what everyone's seeing. I finally got away with just having my name and the date, which was sort of ridiculous.

Bellour: So it was the signature that isolated it as just the provocation of an artist.

Viola: Yes. I didn't like that, but it was the only way it could go on the air. Also they couldn't give me a minute for every hour; they only scheduled the pieces five times a day and they wanted each spot to last just fifteen seconds. For me this was too short, because my idea relied on breaking with the viewer's expectation, this habituation to television as words. Someone appears on the screen, and people are expecting him or her to talk, and when he doesn't, people think it's a mistake, that the announcer forgot to signal someone to start. So, for the first ten or fifteen seconds, you're grappling with the problem that this person isn't speaking, and you have to get beyond that point. I think a lot of my work deals with the notion of getting beyond, breaking some sort of expectation or patterning, reaching a point where you have to just give up and reevaluate what something is, and come to it a second time.

Bellour: And one way you try to do this is duration.

Viola: Yes, because thought is a function of time. That's why *Hatsu-Yume*, for example, is so long. I really wanted to go beyond desire in that piece, and the same with the portraits I just mentioned. But in television duration is a luxury. Time is money, and when something lasts a long time, those producers just see the dollar signs rolling. That's why everything is cut quickly as well. In the end we compromised with thirty seconds for each portrait, which for me was still too short.

Bellour: I'd like to talk about another project you have, one involving video disc, and about the video disc phenomenon in general.

Viola: The video disc is the biggest change in moving image technology in the last forty years. It puts the process of editing in the control of the viewer.

Bellour: In what way?

Viola: Literally. When you sit down to play back a video disc, you're editing. So the whole notion of editing takes on an entirely different meaning. To me it's part of a development that began with computer editing systems where you have time codes put on the frames and you're actually writing a computer program or "score" to edit the piece.

Bellour: And what exactly did computer editing change for you, besides the precision factor?

Viola: Previously editing was always a linear process. I don't mean just laying

shots back to back, but that every cut follows every other cut. The computer taught me that you can finish your tape before you actually edit it.

Bellour: Meaning?

Viola: You do all your rough editing on a lower format system. You write down frame numbers and so on, and then you make your list which becomes the computer program to do your final edit. Of course you have to do it this way because you are an artist with no money and you only have four hours to do an edit in an expensive studio. But for me, conceptually, what happened was that I began to see my pieces as something that could exist all at once, as a whole, rather than being put together bit by bit. Like a word processor: write out the whole text and then make your changes in the software. The final step is printing it out; this is different from writing at the typewriter, where the first step is the printing.

Bellour: And how is all that related to video disc?

Viola: The thing that fascinated me about computer editing was that there was a field or ground which had to exist before the computer could do anything. By entering into the computer the list of shots, you're describing the space the computer works in. On the video disc itself you're laying out programmed information. There are 54,000 frames on each side of a video disc; the way the material is laid out is called the information geography or disc geography.

Now there's no reason why you have to play those 54,000 frames in the order in which they've been recorded. Theoretically, you could play frame number 1, then number 50,000, number 4, number 1700, and so on, at the same frame rate, thirty frames a second in the American standard. That means you can jump anywhere.

Bellour: What kinds of effects do you imagine this can produce?

Viola: As a starting point, let's take a familiar example from film. In standard cinematic language you have three basic shots: long shot, medium, and close-up. The process of editing reconstructs the illusion of "real time" from these separate parts, as if you're jumping from these different spatial points in the room in step with the real time in the scene. With the video disc, it's possible to record all of those different camera positions at once and always have them there. You could record more—ten, twenty, a hundred. It's like an audio recording if you have a ten-track audio recorder: ten microphones in the room, ten people talking. And when you play it back you have those ten microphone

positions all playing back in real time. It's possible to jump over to any one you want while the tape is rolling.

Bellour: So this is your video disc project . . .

Viola: One of them. It's the idea of having parallel camera points of view, in terms of traditional cinema. So, for example, if you want to watch a conversation from across the room for the whole time as a long shot, you can; or if you want to go right in toward the guy who is talking, you can do that, too. The important idea is that the other points of view still exist, whereas in cinema they're on the editing room floor. With the video disc, the process of viewing becomes editing.

This is why the video disc is a newly emerging art form. It's the art of interactivity. One of the areas where we really need new skills is in deciding what our scheme for interactivity is. That's the whole notion of "menus."

Bellour: It's difficult if you have 54,000 frames.

Viola: It's incredible. It becomes more like a book than a movie. With a book you have a sense of the whole before you actually get into it — there is the physical book in your hand, as well as the table of contents and index. With the disc, the trick is to have a menu or some sort of metadescription to present what's going on to the viewer. It's all there, but the viewer has to know what to access, to know it's possible to go to another camera point of view and so on. The question is, how do you mechanically, physically, and conceptually work out this process of interaction so as to make it as natural as possible?

Bellour: Have you found a way to work this out for your own project?

Viola: No, that's part of my excitement in doing it. I really think there are better ways than what's been tried up 'til now. Rather than just putting a list of words on the screen, saying number one is such-and-such and pushing number one you can go there, etc., I'm looking for ways to make it arise naturally out of the images themselves. Just the images telling you what to do, coupled with the viewer's desire. Part of the work of composing the piece becomes composing for this other level. To be able to build pieces from within a piece, so that you and I could sit down at the same disc and see completely different things — there would be parts I would see that you would never even reach. It becomes a lot more like exploring a territory, and that's why I think the whole process of recording is becoming a lot more like mapping.

Bellour: You mean now that computers are involved in the process?

Viola: Yes. The video disc actually represents the merger of two of the most powerful media in this century—video (and by proximity cinema) and the computer. The computer is becoming more and more integrated into all these different areas. As Youngblood puts it, the computer will contain and become all media, all the other individual systems that we have. They will retain their individuality but all of them, including photography, cinema, and writing, will have as their base some digital code. In that sense the notion of translating takes on tremendously new possibilities, because everything is written in the same code.

Computer graphics will ultimately replace what we now call camera images. I'm waiting for that, I think we'll be able to see that in our lifetime. The end of the camera! I think I'm going to buy a big bottle of champagne while I'm in Paris and save it for that day—ten, twenty, thirty years from now—when the camera will end. I'll pop the cork, not to celebrate a demise, but because it's going to be one of the major historical shifts in imagery. I think it could be compared to the development of illusionistic Renaissance perspective in art.

Bellour: And what makes it so revolutionary for you?

Viola: From the camera obscura onward, the prerequisite of all images has been light, and that's going to end. We will soon be able to make complex, realistic images without relying on light, and once you have an image which does not use light as its primary source material, then you're in the domain of conceptual space.

Bellour: Yes, but is it really different for the one who's seeing the image, since in either case he/she is seeing the same effect of light?

Viola: The important difference is in the process of making the image. The real nature of a situation is not the visual image, but the information model of objects and space that the brain creates from visual impressions. The image is just the source, the input. Now, if you're talking about creating entire images that don't rely on light anymore, about building images from the point of view of conceptual space, then the mapping aspect comes out again. For example, the last thing in the process of making a three-dimensional computer graphic image is positioning the point of view.

Bellour: Which in a camera is the first step.

Viola: Exactly. So if you wanted to make a computer graphic image of this room, you wouldn't take a camera and shoot it; you'd measure everything in centimeters, or in millimeters, where all the objects are. Then you'd enter that into the computer and you'd have the room.

Bellour: And what happens to the point of view?

Viola: The room is in there, everything—the bottom of the table, the top of the table, all your books—and it's not an image, it's an informational pattern. Then the *last* thing you say is: now I want the point of view. Even in computer graphics they call it "the camera," even though it doesn't exist. Like the movie *Tron* that Walt Disney Studios produced a few years ago. A terrible movie, but it was fascinating to see traditional cinematic camera gestures—that sort of grand, sweeping panoramic shot and the crane shot—transposed into this computer program which didn't have to do that at all. But they still did it! Incredible! Human conventions, not technology, are always the limiting factor. But getting back to the example of this room, to get an image you say: OK, let's put the point of view one meter from wall A and two meters from wall B, and half a meter high, aiming in this direction, etc., describing it all mathematically. Then lenses become mathematical algorithms, equations. Of course, that's how they originally make lenses, with the mathematics of optics. What happens in a computer, then, is that the mathematics of optics doesn't describe the building of a physical object called the lens, but the behavior of light in that space. So a wide angle lens becomes a certain equation, and once you have the point of view, you type in that equation and there it is. The laws of optics are entered into the computer data base first, the images of objects come later.

Bellour: But the computer images we see today are so simple and primitive—like cartoons.

Viola: Yes, of course, but the next generation of computers will produce images that are equal to camera images. The camera, today, still remains the best way of generating "realistic" images. And it will continue to be so for a long time. But once the computers come up to a very high level of resolution and information content in the image, you won't be able to tell the difference. And at that point it won't matter. The whole notion of what a camera physically is might change, too.

Bellour: For example?

Viola: You could derive enough information from this room to make a fairly decent computer graphic image from sonar, you know. That's what submarines do: they send out sound waves which bounce off objects, come back, and create a sound impression. You could put a sonar "camera" here and it would send out waves all over the room, hit all the objects, and come back and be registered. That's not a visual recording process at all, it's acoustic, sound mapping. That's how they map the ocean floor and it could be a perfectly valid way of creating an image of this room with a computer.

Bellour: I noticed, in one of your articles on this whole issue of evolving technology, that you made many references to Oriental culture. Also, the presence of Eastern imagery and ideas is very strong in many of your tapes. Could you say something about the connection you see there?

Viola: I've been realizing that there is a strong link, or a potential link, between what's happening with technology now and the artistic traditions of the past in Oriental culture. Or even the traditions of Western culture before the Renaissance, when the East and the West were really connected in terms of cultural patterns. Oddly enough, one of the main breaking points between them was the whole restructuring of the image through perspective — Brunelleschi and the formulation of illusionistic space. I think that in a funny way this breaking away from the light basis of images will lead back to certain aspects of the older tradition, to the way that images were created in the Middle Ages in Europe, and still are in the East. The image is not considered to be a frozen moment or an arrested action or an effect of light or anything like that. It's really conceived as existing within the spectator. The image is a projection of the viewer and the whole point is the interaction of the viewer and the image. The image itself becomes related more to a diagram. A mandala, for example, is really a diagrammatic or schematic representation of a larger system, not necessarily the depiction of how an object appears to the eye . . .

Bellour: To the outside eye . . .

Viola: Yes, that's really fundamental. And I see the technology moving us toward building objects from the inside out rather than from the outside in.

Bellour: So — if I understand correctly — you find in the technology itself, first, a return to a whole series of human traditions, and second, a sort of universal link.

Viola: Yes, I think it is a historical necessity that at this time we have been discovering so much more about the past. We are moving into the past as well as into the future. It's an organic progression, like the way a tree grows — a tree doesn't grow from bottom to top, becoming taller. It radiates out from the center, expanding concentrically. Slice a cross section and you see concentric circles. That's how a person grows.

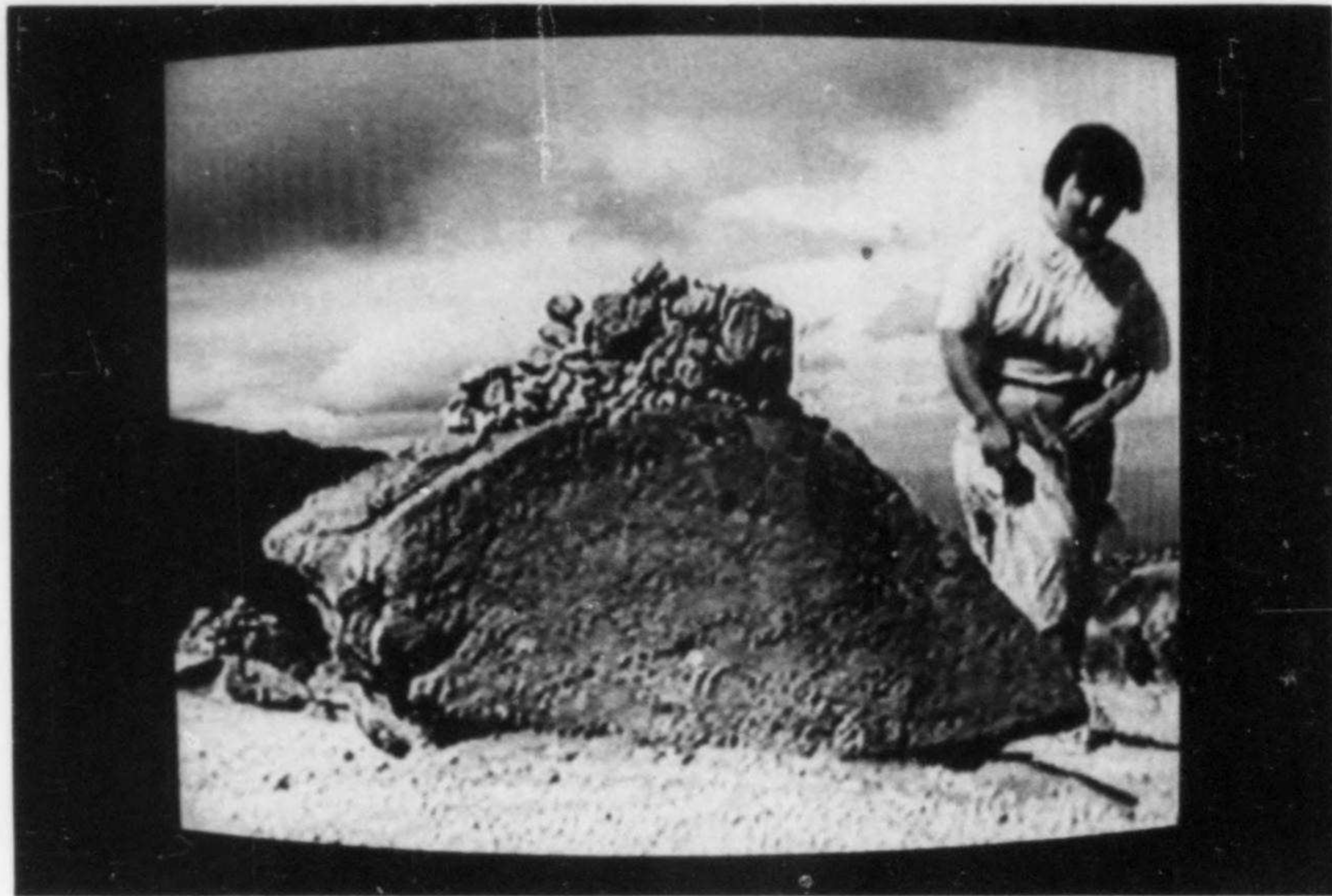
Technologically, I can see, for example, the way video reached back to touch painting once artists made the breakthrough and developed the ability to manipulate line and color electronically. This was the first stage — the first video images made without a camera. Soon images will be formed out of a system of logic, almost like a form of philosophy — a way of describing an object based on mathematical codes and principles rather than freezing its light waves in time. This is the intrinsic reality of objects in traditional Asian art.



Bill Viola. Hatsu-Yume. 1981.

Bellour: So, at that level, it becomes almost essential for any artist who wants to manipulate images in the future to have a deep technological knowledge.

Viola: Yes, but I think that has always been true, in the same way that if you want to be a good pianist, you need to know the mechanics of your piano in order to play it. That's mandatory. I think that this has been a problem in video because the technology is expensive and exclusive. It's not always accessible, and there's a big gap now which has developed between high and low technology. A piece like *Hatsu-Yume*, for example, which was done at Sony in Japan, could never have been done with most of the video systems that were available to me in the States. Economics has to be taken into account whenever we discuss



Bill Viola. Hatsu-Yume. 1981.

video because it's a huge factor. It's like the piano—unless you spend a lot of time with the medium, you're still fumbling around with the individual notes, you're not really thinking about music.

Bellour: Yes, but in this case the object itself is so phenomenally complex.

Viola: For us, yes, but just watch the young kids playing computer games. The kind of skills that we need today—not only to make images with video, but really to do many day-to-day things—have less and less to do with the skills we're born with. From birth our whole system functions on a level of manipulation and this structures all our thought processes—it's hand to mouth to eye. Our thoughts are based on this physical relation to reality, like that of burning

your hand in the fire or working with some clay. We've all developed a very high level of physical intelligence. But working with a computer today is so incredibly tedious, because at the moment it's still an intellectual tool, not an intellectual-physical tool. Mind and body become separated. If you want to make something red, you type M-A-K-E R-E-D, because the computer abstracts everything to the level of the written word symbols. But if you have a red pen or a red brush you just go pffffff. . . . That's such a direct, instantly understandable experience. Instead of pushing the edit button and typing in frame numbers, I would much rather move an object with my hand. That's what they mean when they say "user-friendly": making the computer more integrated into people's natural tendency. As time goes on, computers are becoming less intellectual and more physical. This is the evolution of technology. The image I get is more like a monkey manipulating some kind of tool.

Bellour: So in a way we've come back to those first tapes you made: for example, the experience of physically scraping the camera back and forth along a hallway wall.

Viola: Yes, it's always a circle.

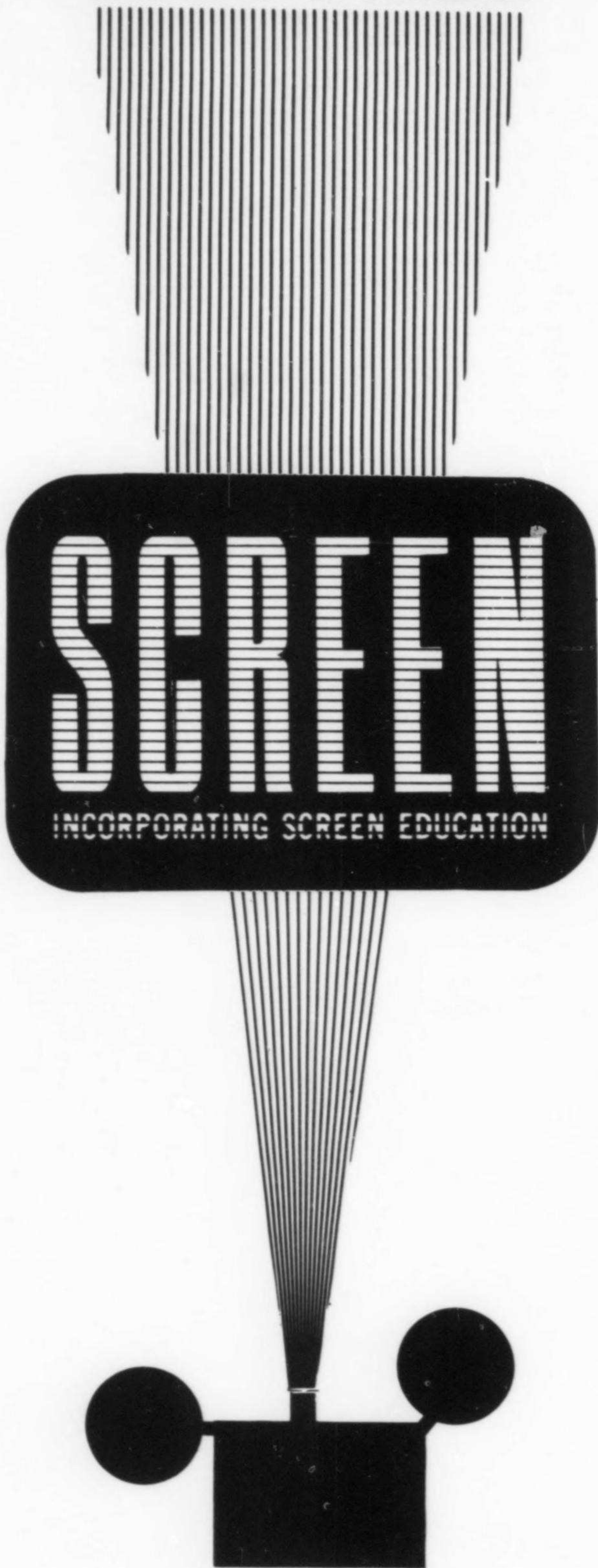
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Postscript: Since the interview, Bill Viola wrote to me, "I just received a grant from the American Film Institute to do a new tape about animals. I'm trying to become artist-in-residence at the San Diego Zoo."

Paris — Los Angeles, January 1984 — January 1985

Bellour wishes to thank Lisa Kruger without whose aid this English version of the text would not have been possible.

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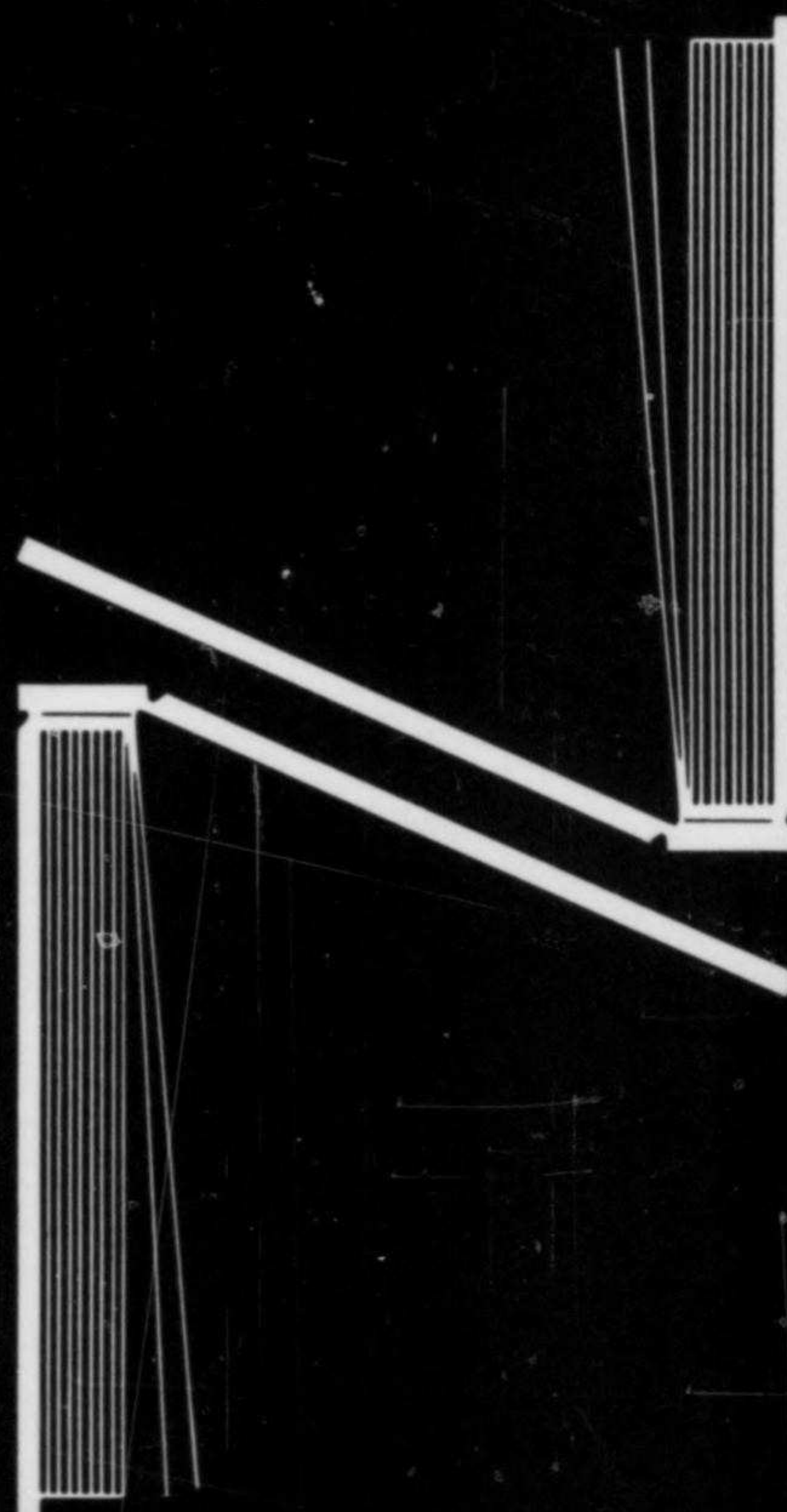
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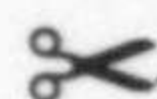


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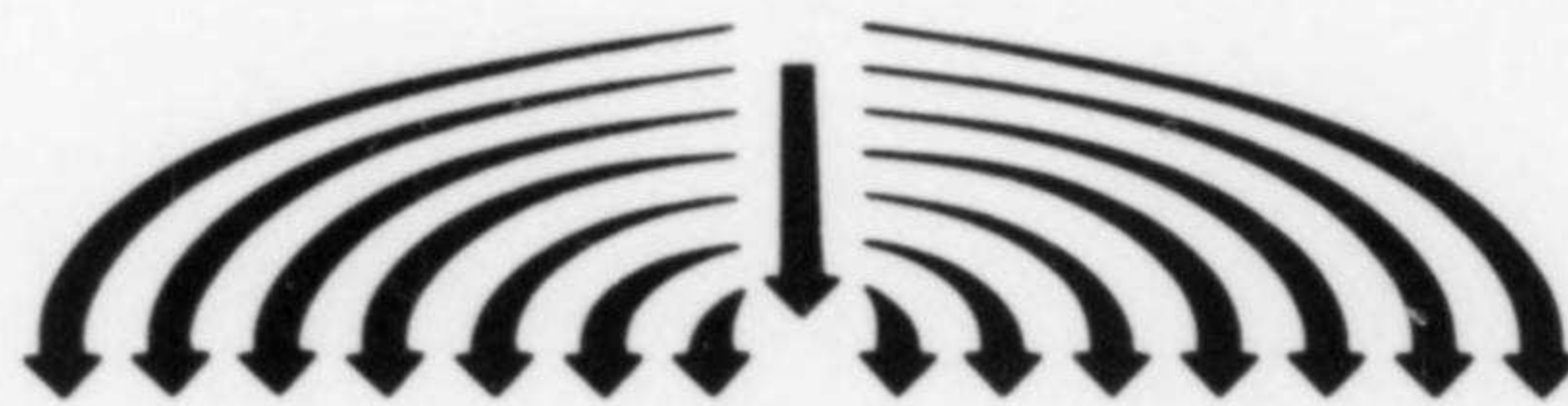


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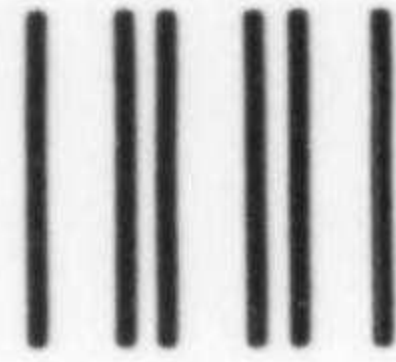
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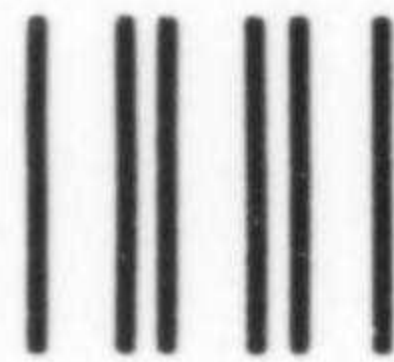
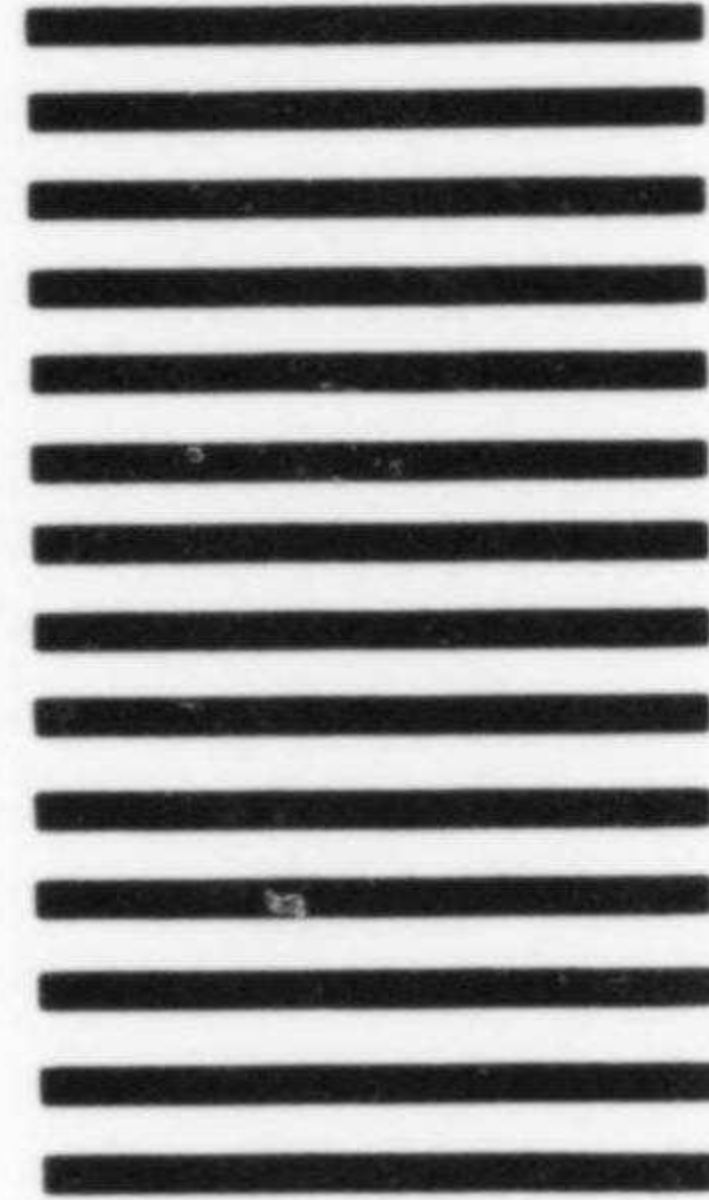
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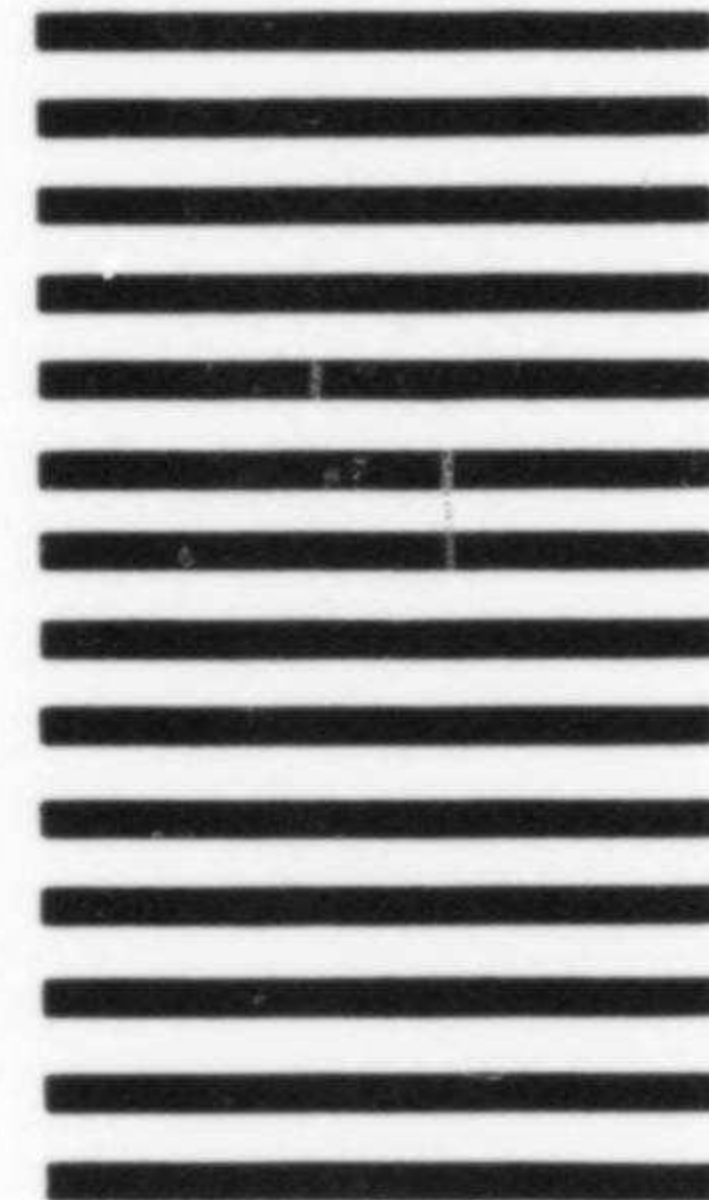
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