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# OCTOBER

# 45

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*Techniques of the Observer*

*The Ends of Art according to  
Beuys*

*Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the  
Proletarians*

*Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys*

*The Sound of O in Othello:*

*The Real of the Tragedy of Desire*

*Lacan's Psychoanalysis, or The*

*Figure in the Screen*

*Reproducing Nature: The*

*Museum of Natural History as*

*Nonsite*

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CORRECTIONS: In Leo Steinberg's essay, "The Philosophical Brothel" (OCTOBER 44), fig. 7 is reproduced upside down. In fig. 5, the second composition study for the *Demoiselles*, the artist had traced "a faint segment curve" (p. 24) at the lower center. Our printer, finding this curve too faint for reproduction, had it redrawn in halting pencil lines. OCTOBER apologizes for this alteration.

# Techniques of the Observer

JONATHAN CRARY

Near the opening of Goethe's *Color Theory* (1810) we find the following account:

Let a room be made as dark as possible; let there be a circular opening in the window shutter about three inches in diameter, which may be closed or not at pleasure. The sun being suffered to shine through this on a white surface, let the spectator from some little distance fix his eyes on this bright circle thus admitted.<sup>1</sup>

Goethe, following a long established practice, has made a camera obscura the site of his optical studies. The dark room, of course, had been a crucial feature of the experiments detailed by Newton in his *Opticks* (1704), where it established categorical relations between interior and exterior, between light source, aperture, and screen, and between observer and representation. And as the work of Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, and others attests, the significance of the camera obscura went well beyond the domain of natural science. For nearly two hundred years the camera stood as a sovereign metaphor for describing the status of an observer and as a model, in both rationalist and empiricist thought, of how observation leads to truthful inferences about the world.<sup>2</sup>

But as Goethe continues his recitation, he abruptly and stunningly abandons the order of the camera obscura:

*The hole being then closed* [Man schliesse darauf die Offnung], let him look towards the darkest part of the room; a circular image will now

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Eastlake, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1970, pp. 16-17; *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe, und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, Zurich, 1949, vol. 16, pp. 35-36.

2. The present essay is adapted from a book forthcoming from the MIT Press on the making of the observer in the nineteenth century in which I discuss the paradigm of the camera obscura at length. I argue that the camera obscura must be understood as part of a larger organization of representation, cognition, and subjectivity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (common to all of Europe, not just the North as some have suggested) which is fundamentally discontinuous with a nineteenth-century observer. Thus I contend that the camera obscura and photography, as historical objects, are radically dissimilar. See my "Modernizing Vision," in *Vision and Visuality: Discussion in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Seattle, Bay Press, 1988.

be seen to float before him. The middle of the circle will appear bright, colorless, or somewhat yellow, but the border will appear red.

After a time this red, increasing towards the centre, covers the whole circle, and at last the bright central point. No sooner, however, is the whole circle red than the edge begins to be blue, and the blue gradually encroaches inwards on the red. When the whole is blue the edge becomes dark and colorless. The darker edge again slowly encroaches on the blue till the whole circle appears colorless.<sup>3</sup>

Goethe's instruction to seal the hole announces a disordering and negation of the camera obscura as both an optical system and epistemological principle. The closing off of the opening dissolves the distinction between inner and outer space on which the very functioning of the camera (as paradigm and apparatus) depended. But it is now not simply a question of an observer repositioned in a sealed interior to view its particular contents; the optical experience described here by Goethe presents a notion of vision which the classical model was incapable of encompassing.

The colored circles that seem to float, undulate, and undergo a sequence of chromatic transformations have no correlative either within or without the dark room; as Goethe explains at length, they are "physiological colors" belonging entirely to the body of the observer, and they are "the necessary conditions of vision."

Let the observer look steadfastly on a small colored object and let it be taken away after a time while his eyes remain unmoved; the spectrum of another color will then be visible on the white plane . . . it arises from an image which now *belongs to the eye*.<sup>4</sup>

The corporal subjectivity of the observer, which was *a priori* excluded from the camera obscura, suddenly becomes the site on which an observer is possible. The human body, in all its contingency and specificity, generates "the spectrum of another color," and thus becomes the active producer of optical experience.

The ramifications of Goethe's color theory are manifold and have little to do with the empirical "truth" of his assertions or the "scientific" character of his experiments. Contained within the unsystematized accumulation of statements and findings is a key delineation of subjective vision, a post-Kantian notion that is both a product and constituent of modernity. What is crucial about Goethe's account of subjective vision is the inseparability of two models usually presented as distinct and irreconcilable: a physiological subject who will be described in

3. Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, p. 17. (Emphasis added.)

4. *Ibid.*, p. 21. (Emphasis added.) See Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, and Goethe*, trans. James Gutmann, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1945, pp. 81-82: In his color theory Goethe aimed "to include nothing but the world of the eye, which contains only form and color."

increasing detail by the empirical sciences in the nineteenth century, *and* an observer posited by various "romanticisms" and early modernisms as the active, autonomous producer of his or her own content. This essay seeks to describe some of the features of this new kind of observer and to suggest how his or her formation in the nineteenth century was immanent to the elaboration of new empirical knowledge of vision and techniques of the visible.

Clearly Kant's "Copernican revolution" (*Drehung*) of the spectator, proposed in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), is a definitive sign of a new organization and positioning of the subject. For Kant, continuing the use of optical figures, it is "a change in point of view," such that "our representation of things, as they are given, does not conform to these things as they are in themselves, but that these objects as appearances, conform to our mode of representation."<sup>5</sup> William Blake put it more simply: "As the eye, such the object."<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault makes clear that vision in the classical era was precisely the opposite of Kant's subject-centered epistemology, that it was then a form of immediate knowing, "a perceptible knowledge." For example:

Natural history [in the eighteenth century] is nothing more than the nomination of the visible. Hence its apparent simplicity, and that air of naiveté it has from a distance, so simple does it appear and so obviously *imposed by the things themselves*.<sup>7</sup>

In the aftermath of Kant's work there is an irreversible clouding over of the transparency of the subject-as-observer. Vision, rather than a privileged form of knowing, becomes itself an object of knowledge, of observation. From the beginning of the nineteenth century a science of vision will tend to mean increasingly an interrogation of the makeup of the human subject, rather than of the mechanics of light and optical transmission. It is a moment when the visible escapes from the timeless incorporeal order of the camera obscura and becomes lodged in another apparatus, within the unstable physiology and temporality of the human body.

When Goethe's experiments repeatedly call for either a darkened room or, perhaps more significantly, the closed eye, he is not simply privileging an experience of being severed from contact with an external world. On the one hand he is indicating his conviction that color is always the product of an admixture of light and shadow: "Color itself is a degree of darkness; hence Kircher is perfectly right in calling it *lumen opacatum*."<sup>8</sup> On the other hand he is also posing conditions in

5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1965, pp. 24-25.

6. William Blake, "Annotations to Reynolds" [c. 1808], in *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 456.

7. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York, Pantheon, 1970, p. 132. (Emphasis added.)

8. "Die Farbe selbst is ein Schattiges; deswegen Kircher vollkommen recht hat, sie *Lumen opaca-*

which the inescapable physiological components of vision can be artificially isolated and made observable by themselves. For Goethe, and for Schopenhauer soon after, vision is always an irreducible complex of elements belonging to the observer's body and of external data. Thus the kind of separation between interior representation and exterior reality implicit in the camera obscura becomes in Goethe's work a single surface of affect on which interior and exterior have few of their former meanings and positions. Color, as the primary object of vision, is now atopic, cut from any spatial referent.

Goethe insistently cites experiences in which the subjective contents of vision are dissociated from an objective world, in which the body itself produces phenomena that have no external correlate. Notions of correspondence, of reflection on which classical optics and theories of knowledge were based, although retained elsewhere by Goethe, have lost their centrality and necessity. The priority previously accorded to Lockean primary qualities over secondary ones becomes inverted. Perhaps most important is his designation of opacity as a crucial and productive component of vision. If discourses of the visible in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries repressed and concealed whatever threatened the transparency of an optical system, Goethe signals a reversal, and instead poses the opacity of the observer as the necessary condition for the appearance of phenomena.<sup>9</sup> Pure light and pure transparency are now beyond the limits of the visible.<sup>10</sup>

The articulation of subjective vision in the early nineteenth century is part of a shift which Foucault calls "the threshold of our modernity." When the camera obscura was the dominant model of observation it was as "a form of representation which made knowledge in general possible." But at the beginning of the nineteenth century

the site of analysis is no longer representation but man in his finitude. . . . [It was found] that knowledge has anatomo-physiological conditions, that it is formed gradually within the structures of the body, that it may have a privileged place within it, but that its forms cannot be dissociated from its peculiar functioning; in short, that there is a nature of human knowledge that determines its forms and that at the same time can be manifest to it in its own empirical contents.<sup>11</sup>

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*tum zu nennen*" (Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe*, p. 45). The reference to Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), the Jesuit turned magic-lantern showman, recalls a counter-use of classical optical systems. Kircher's career as a conjurer was based on the subversion and making opaque of the "transparency" of the camera obscura and other optical instruments.

9. The thematic of repression is central to Jean-François Lyotard's discussion of Renaissance representation in *Discours, Figure*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1978, esp. pp. 163–189.

10. This point is made in Elaine Escoubas, "L'Oeil du teinturier," *Critique*, vol. 37, no. 418 (March 1982), pp. 231–242.

11. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 319.

Goethe's affirmation of both the subjective and the physiological in perception obviously is echoed in a wide range of well-known philosophical, scientific, and literary developments. One less familiar but significant parallel is the contemporary work of Maine de Biran. During the first decade of the century, the latter outlined a science of the *sens intime* in an attempt to understand more accurately the nature of inward experience. But in seeking to grasp the density and the immediacy of the *sens intime* Maine de Biran began to blur the identity of the very inwardness that was his original object. He employed the term *coenesthèse* to describe "one's immediate awareness of the presence of the body in perception" and "the simultaneity of a composite of impressions inhering in different parts of the organism."<sup>12</sup> Visual perception, for example, is inseparable from the muscular movements of the eye and the physical effort involved in focusing on an object. In a complete reversal of the classical model of the apparatus as a neutral device of pure transmission, the viewer's sensory equipment now is inextricably mixed with whatever object it beholds. Seven years before Goethe published the *Farbenlehre*, Maine de Biran discussed how perception of color was determined by the body's tendency to fatigue (by a physiological modulation over time) and that the very process of becoming tired was in fact perception.<sup>13</sup> For both of them, the absolute values accorded to color by Newtonian theory are displaced by an insistence on color's transient unfolding within the human subject.

Maine de Biran unravels the assumptions of Condillac and others about the composition of perception. Condillac's notion of sensation as a simple unit, a building block out of which clear perceptions were assembled, is no longer adequate to a new multilayered and temporally dispersed perception which Maine de Biran details, making impossible "a soul reduced to pure receptivity." For both Goethe and Maine de Biran, subjective observation is not the inspection of an inner space or a theater of representations. Instead, observation is increasingly exteriorized; the viewing body and its objects begin to constitute a single field on which inside and outside are confounded. Perhaps most importantly, both observer and what he sees are subject to the same modes of empirical study. For Georges Canguilhem, the reorganization of human knowledge at the beginning of the nineteenth century signals an end to the idea of a qualitatively different human order, and he cites the major discovery by Maine de Biran that

12. Maine de Biran, *Considerations sur les principes d'une division des faits psychologiques et physiologiques*, in *Oeuvres des Maine de Biran*, vol. 13, ed. P. Tisserand, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1949, p. 180. An important study is Michel Henry, *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps: essai sur l'ontologie biranienne*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965.

13. Maine de Biran, *Influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser* [1803], ed. P. Tisserand, Paris, 1953, pp. 56-60: "When the eye fixes itself on a single color, for a certain length of time, in its manner of becoming fatigued there follows a mixed form of this color and several others, and over time the original color will no longer be contained in this new mixture."

since "the soul is necessarily incarnated there is no psychology without biology."<sup>14</sup>

The models of subjective vision outlined by Goethe and Schopenhauer (which were brought to fulfillment in the physiological optics of Helmholtz in the 1860s), also must be seen against the profound changes which took place in theories of the nature of light. The shift from emission and corpuscular theories to undulatory or wave motion explanations have a major significance for nineteenth-century culture as a whole.<sup>15</sup> The wave theory of light made obsolete any notion of a rectilinear propagation of light rays on which classical optics was based and, in part, the science of perspective. All the modes of representation derived from Renaissance and later models of perspective no longer had the legitimation of a science of optics. The verisimilitude associated with perspectival construction obviously persisted into the nineteenth century, but it was severed from the scientific base that had once authorized it, and it could no longer have the same meanings it had when either Aristotelian or Newtonian optics held sway. Dominant theories of vision, whether of Alberti, Kepler, or Newton (Huygens is the obvious exception), all described in their own fashion how a beam of isolated light rays traversed an optical system, with each ray taking the shortest possible route to reach its destination.<sup>16</sup> The camera obscura is inextricably wedded to this point-to-point epistemological setup. At the same time it must be stressed how deeply theological was the notion that light was radiant (composed of rays) and emanative.

The work of Augustin Jean Fresnel has come to stand for the paradigm shift.<sup>17</sup> By 1821 Fresnel had concluded that the vibrations of which light consisted were entirely *transverse*, which led him and those who followed to build mechanical models of an ether which transmitted such transverse waves rather than longitudinal rays or waves. Fresnel's work participates in the destruction of classical mechanics and the eventual dominance of modern physics. What had been a discrete domain of optics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries now became merged with the study of other physical phenomena, i.e., electricity and magnetism. Above all it is a moment when light loses its ontological privilege;

14. Georges Canguilhem, "Qu'est-ce que la psychologie," *Études d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences*, Paris, Librairie philosophique de J. Vrin, 1968, pp. 374-375.

15. See P. M. Harman, *Energy, Force, and Matter: The Conceptual Development of Nineteenth-Century Physics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 19-26; and Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970, pp. 73-74.

16. See, for example, David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1976; and Gérard Simon, *Le regard, l'être et l'apparence dans l'optique de l'antiquité*, Paris, Seuil, 1988.

17. See Edward Frankel, "Corpuscular Optics and the Wave Theory of Light: the Science and Politics of a Revolution in Physics," *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 6, 1976, pp. 141-184; G. N. Cantor, *Optics After Newton*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983, esp. pp. 150-159; and R. H. Silliman, "Fresnel and the Emergence of Physics as a Discipline," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, vol. 4, 1974, pp. 137-162.

and during the nineteenth century the very identity of light as an independent entity became increasingly problematic. Goethe's color theory, with its proposal of a qualitative difference between light and color, had implicitly suggested such developments. More importantly here, however, as light began to be seen as an electromagnetic phenomenon, it had less and less to do with the realm of the visible and with the description of human vision. So it is at this moment in the early nineteenth century, when physical optics (the study of light and the forms of its propagation) merges with physics, that physiological optics (the study of the eye and its sensory capacities) comes to dominate the study of vision.

\*

The retinal afterimage is perhaps the most important optical phenomenon discussed by Goethe in his chapter on "Physiological Colors" in his *Color Theory*. Though preceded by others in the late eighteenth century, his treatment of the topic was by far the most thorough up to that moment.<sup>18</sup> Subjective visual phenomena such as afterimages had been recorded since antiquity, but only as events outside the domain of optics, and they were relegated to the category of the "spectral" or mere appearance. But in the early nineteenth century, particularly with Goethe, such experiences attain the status of optical "truth." They are no longer deceptions that obscure a "true" perception; rather they begin to constitute an irreducible component of human vision. For Goethe and the physiologists who followed him there was no such thing as optical illusion: whatever the healthy corporal eye experienced was in fact optical truth.

The implications of the new "objectivity" accorded to subjective phenomena are several. First, the privileging of the afterimage allowed the thought of sensory perception cut from any necessary link with an external referent. The afterimage—the presence of sensation in the absence of a stimulus—and its subsequent modulations posed a theoretical and empirical demonstration of autonomous vision, of an optical experience that was produced by and within the subject. Secondly, and equally crucial for the rest of the nineteenth century, is the introduction of temporality as an inescapable component of observation.<sup>19</sup> Most of the phenomena described by Goethe in the *Color Theory* involve an unfolding over time: "the edge begins to be blue . . . the blue gradually encroaches inward . . . the image then becomes gradually fainter."<sup>20</sup> The virtual

18. Goethe identifies some of these earlier researchers, including Robert W. Darwin (1766–1848), the father of Charles, and the French naturalist Buffon (1707–1788). See *Theory of Colours*, pp. 1–2. See also E. G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950, pp. 102–104.

19. Nineteenth-century science suggested "the idea of a reality which endures inwardly, which is duration itself" (Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, New York, Random House, 1944, p. 395).

20. Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, pp. 16–17.

instantaneity of optical transmission (whether intromission or extromission) was an unquestioned foundation of classical optics and theories of perception from Aristotle to Locke. And the simultaneity of the camera obscura image with its exterior object was never questioned.<sup>21</sup> But as observation is increasingly tied to the body in the early nineteenth century, temporality and vision become inseparable. The shifting processes of one's own subjectivity experienced in time became synonymous with the act of seeing, dissolving the Cartesian ideal of an observer completely focused on an object.

But the problem of the afterimage and the temporality of subjective vision is lodged within larger epistemological issues in the nineteenth century. On one hand the attention given to the afterimage by Goethe and others parallels contemporary philosophical discourses (such as Maine de Biran) which describe perception and cognition as essentially temporal processes dependent upon a dynamic amalgamation of past and present. In the preface to his *Phenomenology* (1807), Hegel makes a sweeping repudiation of Lockean perception and situates perception within an unfolding that is temporal and historical. While attacking the apparent certainty of sense perception, Hegel implicitly refutes the model of the camera obscura. "It must be pointed out that truth is not like stamped coin issued ready from the mint, and so can be taken up and used."<sup>22</sup> Although referring to the Lockean notion of ideas "imprinting" themselves on passive minds, Hegel's remark has a precocious applicability to photography, which, like coinage, offered another mechanically and mass-produced form of "truth." Hegel's dynamic, dialectical account of perception, in which appearance negates itself to become something other, finds an echo in Goethe's discussion of afterimages:

The eye cannot for a moment remain in a particular state determined by the object it looks upon. On the contrary, it is forced to a sort of opposition, which, in contrasting extreme with extreme, intermediate degree with intermediate degree, at the same time combines these opposite impressions, and thus ever tends to be whole, whether the impressions are successive or simultaneous and confined to one image.<sup>23</sup>

Goethe and Hegel, each in his own way, pose observation as the play and interaction of forces and relations, rather than as the orderly contiguity of discrete stable sensations conceived by Locke or Condillac.<sup>24</sup>

21. On the instantaneity of perception see, for example, Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, pp. 93-94.

22. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie, New York, Harper and Row, 1967, p. 98.

23. Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, p. 13.

24. It should be noted, however, that Hegel, in an 1807 letter to Schelling, criticized Goethe's

Other writers in the first decade also began to delineate perception as a continuous process, a flux of temporally dispersed contents. The physicist André-Marie Ampère in his epistemological writings used the term *concrétion* to describe how any perception always blends with a preceding or remembered perception. The words *mélange* and *fusion* occur frequently in his attack on classical notions of "pure" isolated sensations. Perception, as he wrote to his friend Maine de Biran, was fundamentally "*une suite de différences successives.*"<sup>25</sup> The dynamics of the afterimage are also implied in the work of Johann Friedrich Herbart, who undertook one of the earliest attempts to quantify the movement of cognitive experience. Although his ostensible aim was to demonstrate and preserve Kant's notion of the unity of the mind, Herbart's formulation of mathematical laws governing mental experience in fact make him "a spiritual father of stimulus-response psychology."<sup>26</sup> If Kant gave a positive account of the mind's capacity for synthesizing and ordering experience, Herbart (Kant's successor at Königsberg) detailed how the subject wards off and prevents internal incoherence and disorganization. Consciousness, for Herbart, begins as a stream of potentially chaotic input from without. Ideas of things and events in the world were never copies of external reality but rather the outcome of an interactional process within the subject in which ideas (*Vorstellungen*) underwent operations of fusion, fading, inhibition, and blending (*Verschmelzungen*) with other previous or simultaneously occurring ideas or "presentations." The mind does not reflect truth but rather extracts it from an ongoing process involving the collision and merging of ideas.

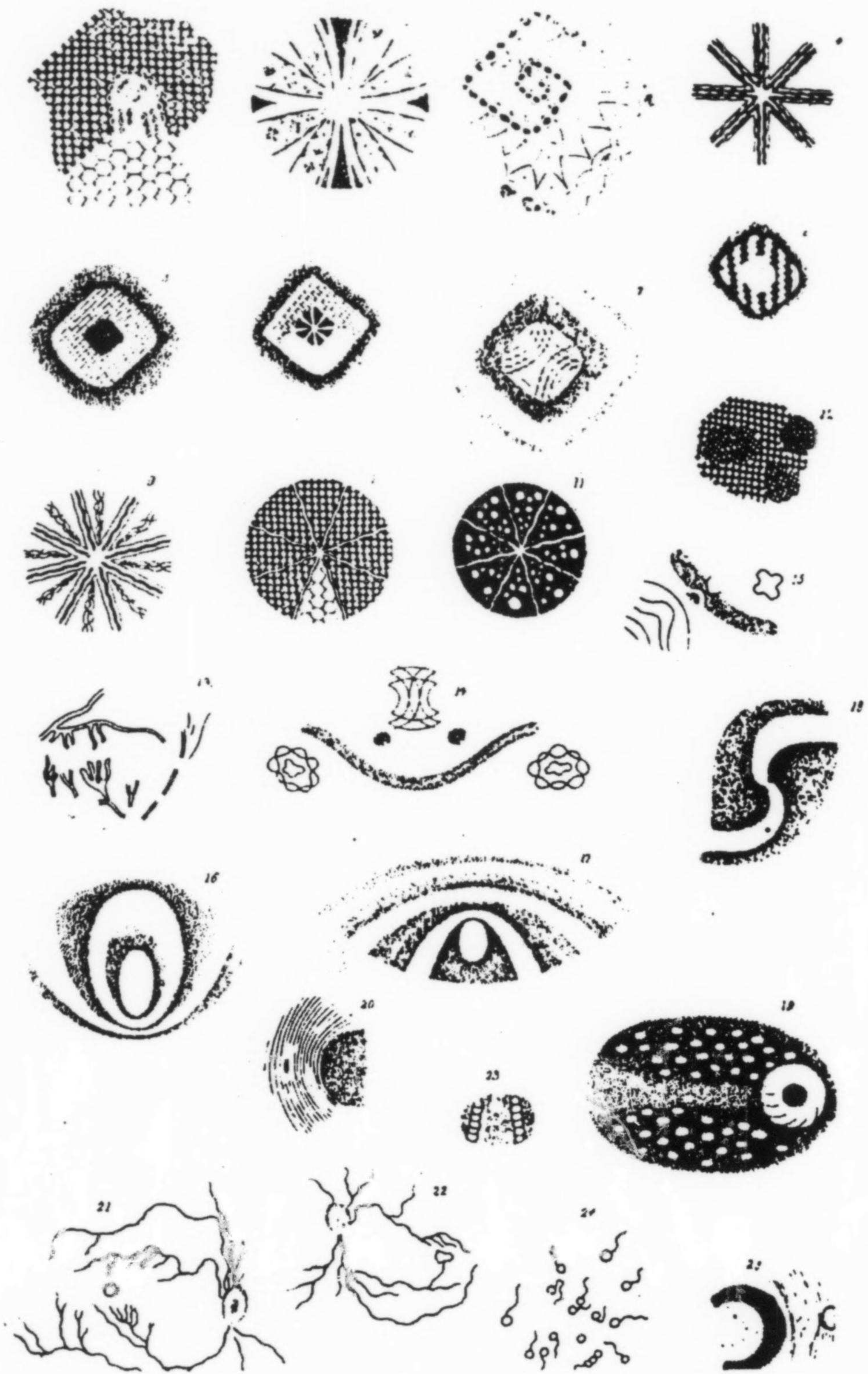
Let a series *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, be given by perception; then, from the first movement of the perception and during its continuance, *a* is exposed to an arrest from other concepts already in consciousness. In the meantime, *a*, already partially sunken in consciousness, became more and more obscured when *b* came to it. This *b* at first unobscured, blended with the sinking *a*; then followed *c*, which itself unobscured, fused with *b*, which was becoming obscured. Similarly followed *d*, to become fused with *a*, *b*, and *c*, in different degrees. From this arises a law for each of these concepts. . . . It is very important to determine by calculation the degree of strength which a concept must attain in

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color theory for being "restricted completely to the empirical" (*Briefe von und an Hegel*, vol. 1, ed. Karl Hegel, Leipzig, 1884, p. 94, cited in Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. David E. Green, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, p. 13).

25. André-Marie Ampère, "Lettre à Maine de Biran" [1809], in *Philosophie des Deux Ampères*, ed. J. Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire, Paris, Didier, 1866, p. 236.

26. Benjamin B. Wolman, "The Historical Role of Johann Friedrich Herbart," in *Historical Roots of Contemporary Psychology*, ed. Benjamin B. Wolman, New York, Harper and Row, 1968, p. 33. See also David E. Leary, "The Historical Foundations of Herbart's Mathematization of Psychology," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 16 (1980), pp. 150-163.



order to be able to stand beside two or more stronger ones exactly on the threshold of consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

All the processes of blending and opposition that Goethe described phenomenally in terms of the afterimage are for Herbart statable in differential equations and theorems. He specifically discusses color perception to describe the mental mechanisms of opposition and inhibition.<sup>28</sup> Once the operations of cognition become fundamentally measurable in terms of duration and intensity, it is thereby rendered both predictable and controllable. Although Herbart was philosophically opposed to empirical experimentation or any physiological research, his convoluted attempts to mathematize perception were important for the later quantitative sensory work of Johannes Müller, Gustav Fechner, Ernst Weber, and Wilhelm Wundt. He was one of the first to recognize the potential crisis of meaning and representation implied by an autonomous subjectivity, and to propose a framework for its disciplining and control. Herbart clearly was attempting a quantification of *cognition*, but he nonetheless prepared the ground for attempts to measure the magnitude of sensations, and such measurements required sensory experience that was durational. The afterimage was to become a crucial means by which observation could be quantified, by which the intensity and duration of retinal stimulation could be measured.

Also it is important to remember that Herbart's work was not simply abstract epistemological speculation, but was directly tied to his pedagogical theories, which were influential in Germany and elsewhere in Europe during the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Herbart believed that his quantification of psychological processes held the possibility for controlling and determining the sequential input of ideas into young minds, and in particular had the potential of instilling disciplinary and moral ideas. Obedience and attentiveness were central goals of Herbart's pedagogy. Just as new forms of factory production demanded more precise knowledge of a worker's attention span, so the management of the classroom, another disciplinary institution, demanded similar information.<sup>30</sup> In both cases the subject in question was measurable and regulated in time.

By the 1820s the quantitative study of afterimages was occurring in a wide range of scientific research throughout Europe. Working in Germany, the Czech Jan Purkinje continued Goethe's work on the persistence and modulation of

27. Johann Friedrich Herbart, *A Textbook in Psychology: An Attempt to Found the Science of Psychology on Experience, Metaphysics, and Mathematics*, trans. Margaret Smith, New York, Appleton, 1891, pp. 21-22.

28. See Johann Friedrich Herbart, *Psychologie als Wissenschaft*, vol. 1, Königsberg, August Unzer, 1824, pp. 222-224.

29. For Herbart's theories of education, see Harold B. Dunkel, *Herbart and Herbartism: An Educational Ghost Story*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970, esp. pp. 63-96.

30. See Nikolas Rose, "The Psychological Complex: Mental Measurement and Social Administration," *Ideology and Consciousness*, no. 5 (Spring 1979), pp. 5-70; and Didier Deleuë and François Guéry, *Le corps productif*, Paris, Mame, 1973, pp. 72-89.

afterimages: how long they lasted, what changes they went through, and under what conditions.<sup>31</sup> His empirical research and Herbart's mathematical methods were to come together in the next generation of psychologists and psychophysicists, when the threshold between the physiological and the mental became one of the primary objects of scientific practice. Instead of recording afterimages in terms of the lived time of the body as Goethe had generally done, Purkinje was the first to study them as part of a comprehensive quantification of the irritability of the eye.<sup>32</sup> He provided the first formal classification of different types of afterimages and his drawings of them are a striking indication of the paradoxical objectivity of the phenomena of subjective vision. Were we able to see the original drawings in color we would have a more vivid sense of their unprecedented overlapping of the visionary and the empirical, of "the real" and the abstract.

Although working with relatively imprecise instruments, Purkinje timed how long it takes the eye to become fatigued, how long dilation and contraction of the pupil take, and measured the strength of eye movements. For Purkinje the physical surface of the eye itself became a field of statistical information: he demarcated the retina in terms of how color changes hue depending on where it strikes the eye, describing the extent of the area of visibility, and quantified the distinction between direct and indirect vision, and also gave a highly precise account of the blind spot.<sup>33</sup> The discourse of dioptrics, of the transparency of mechanical optical systems in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has given way to a mapping of the human eye as a productive territory with varying zones of efficiency and aptitude.

Purkinje's research, along with that of Johannes Müller and others, inaugurated the comprehensive physiology of vision in the nineteenth century. Part of this study involved establishing quantitative and statistical *norms* of the sense of sight. As Foucault and others have shown, the "scientific" assessment of "normality" in medicine, physiology, and other fields became central to the accumu-

31. Purkinje wrote in Latin, which was translated into Czech. For relevant English translations, see "Visual Phenomena," trans. H. R. John, in *History of Psychology: A Source Book in Systematic Psychology*, ed. William Sahakian, Itasca, Ill., F. E. Peacock, 1968, pp. 101-108; and "Contributions to a Psychology of Vision," trans. Charles Wheatstone, *Journal of the Royal Institution*, vol. 1 (1830), pp. 101-117, reprinted in *Brewster and Wheatstone on Vision*, ed. Nicholas Wade, London, Academic Press, 1983, pp. 248-262.

32. Goethe provides a telling account of the subjectivity of the afterimage in which the physiology of the attentive (male heterosexual) eye and its operation are inseparable from memory and desire: "I had entered an inn towards evening, and, as a well-favored girl, with a brilliantly fair complexion, black hair, and a scarlet bodice, came into the room, I looked attentively at her as she stood before me at some distance in half shadow. As she presently afterwards turned away, I saw on the white wall, which was now before me, a black face surrounded with a bright light, while the dress of the perfectly distinct figure appeared of a beautiful sea green" (*Theory of Colours*, p. 22).

33. It should be noted that Purkinje, in 1823, formulated the first classification system for human fingerprints, another technique of producing and regulating human subjects. See Vlasilav Krutz, "Purkinje, Jan Evangelista," *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 11, New York, 1975, pp. 213-217.

lation of knowledge about individuals—whether in medicine, psychiatry, child psychology, the rationalization of labor and education—and thus essential to the exercise of power. My concern here is how the individual as observer became an object of investigation, a locus of knowledge in the first half of the 1800s, and how the nature of vision was thus modified. One feature of this period is the widespread effort by researchers from a variety of fields to establish the bounds of “normative” vision and to quantify forms of optical and other sensory response. The pervasive preoccupation with optical illusions is part of the exploration of the limits and pathology of human vision, defining ever more sharply the shape of the normal. But as Georges Canguilhem has shown, the indication of a norm is not a neutral activity; it never occurs without the specification of technical means to correct, or to produce normativeness.<sup>34</sup>

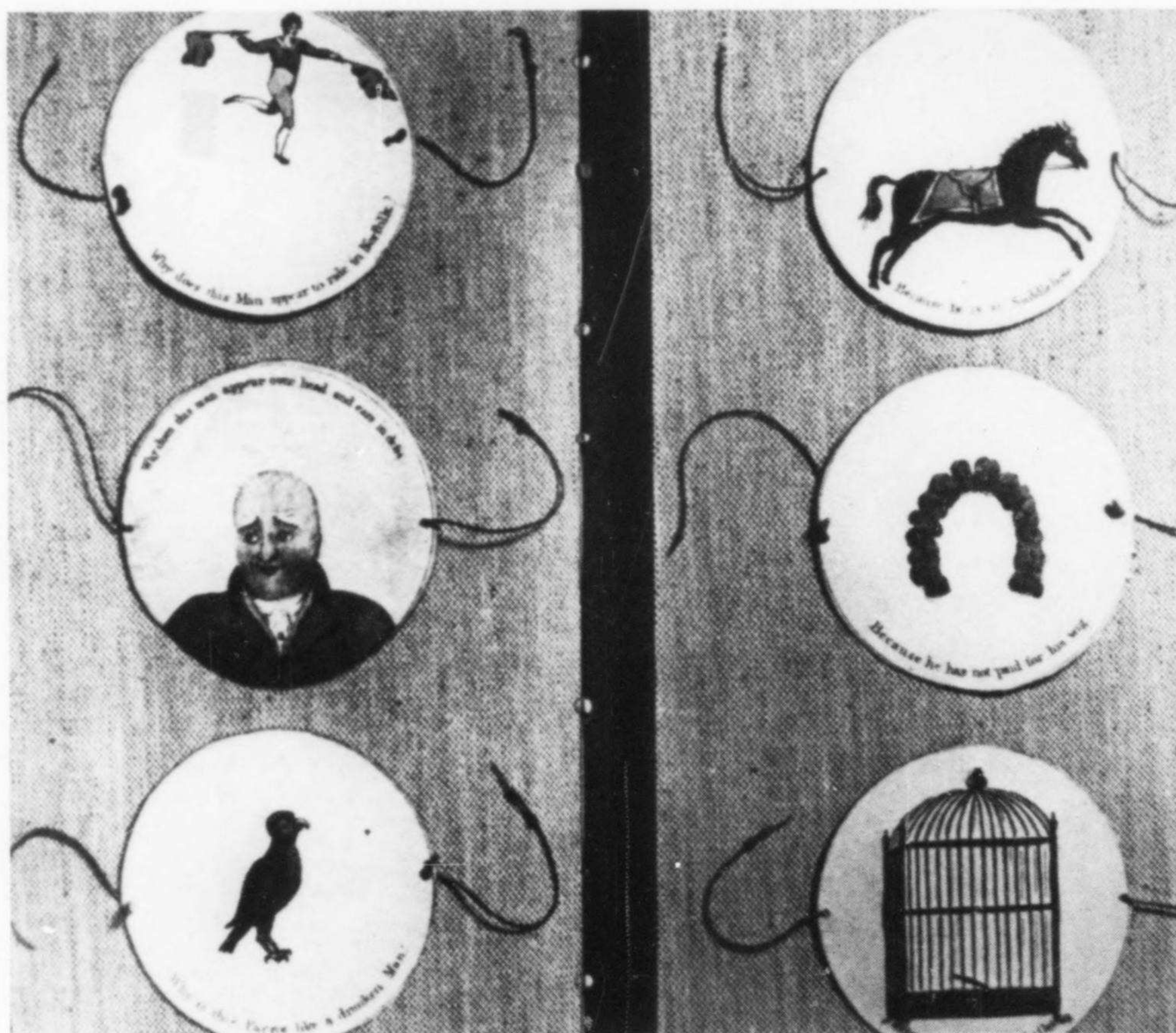
What is of immediate concern here is how some of the optical devices that spawned a new mass visual culture in the nineteenth century are inseparable from the new normative sciences of the observer and of the seeing body. The comprehensive articulation of subjective vision, which included the conceptual severing of visual experience from referent (in Müller’s famous theory of specific nerve energies), and the quantification and study of afterimages, of persistence of vision, peripheral and binocular vision, and thresholds of attention all were directly part of the creation of a new vast domain of visual culture. On one hand there is a new abstraction and mobility of images, on the other is an inverse disciplining of the observer in terms of rigidly fixed relations to image and apparatus, particularly with the stereoscope, the kaleidoscope, the phenakistiscope, and even the diorama.

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Beginning in the mid-1820s, the experimental study of afterimages was intertwined with the invention of a number of related optical devices and techniques. The boundary separating their use for purposes of scientific observation and as forms of popular entertainment is indistinct. Common to them all was the notion that perception was not instantaneous, and the notion of a disjunction between eye and object. Research on afterimages had suggested that some form of blending or fusion occurred when sensations were perceived in quick succession, and it was the duration involved in seeing that allowed its modification and regulation. The control of time becomes synonymous with new modalities of power.

The details and background of these devices and inventors have been well documented and discussed at length elsewhere, but almost exclusively in the

34. See Georges Canguilhem, *Le normal et le pathologique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1966, trans. as *The Normal and the Pathological* by Carolyn Fawcett, New York, Zone Books, forthcoming.

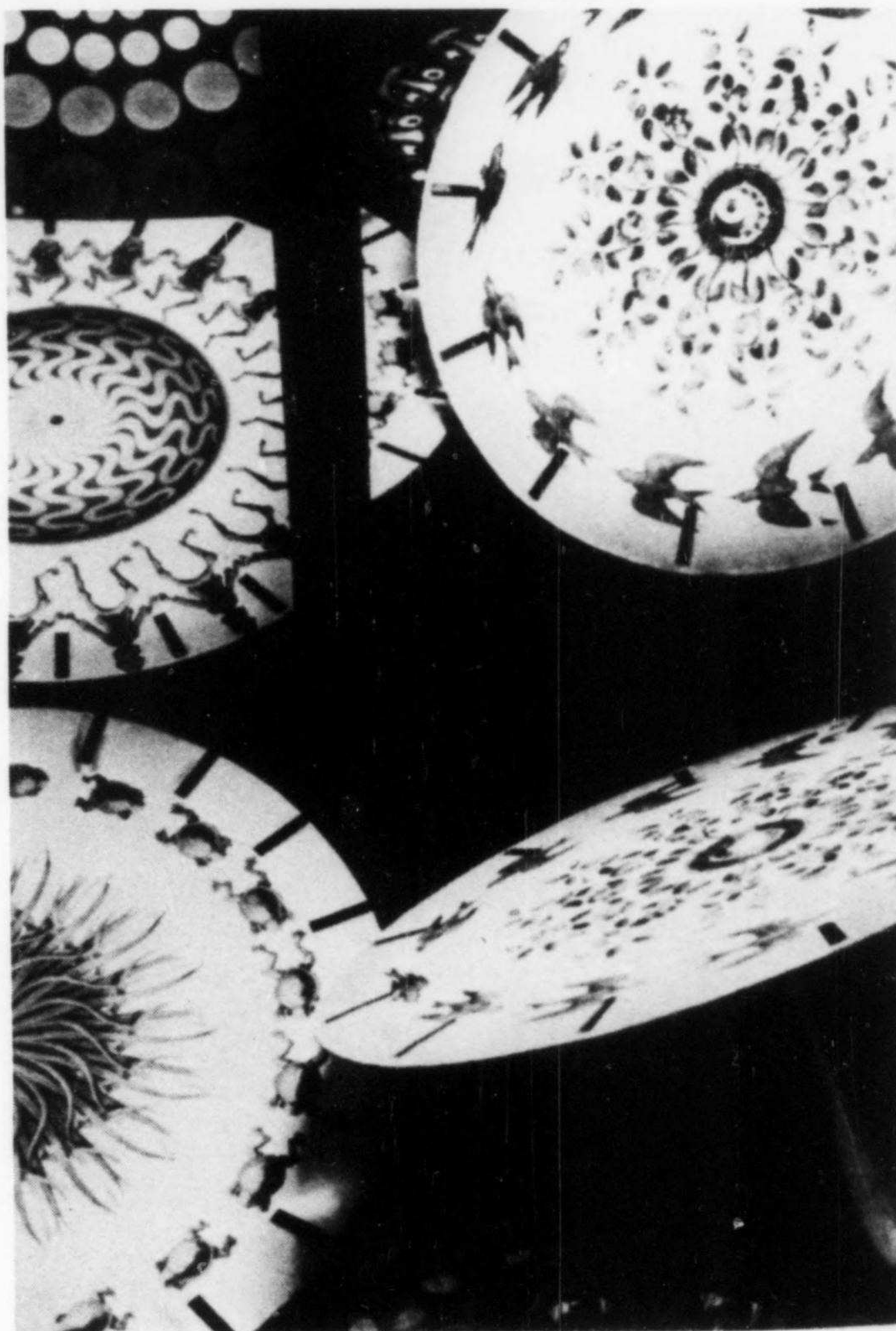
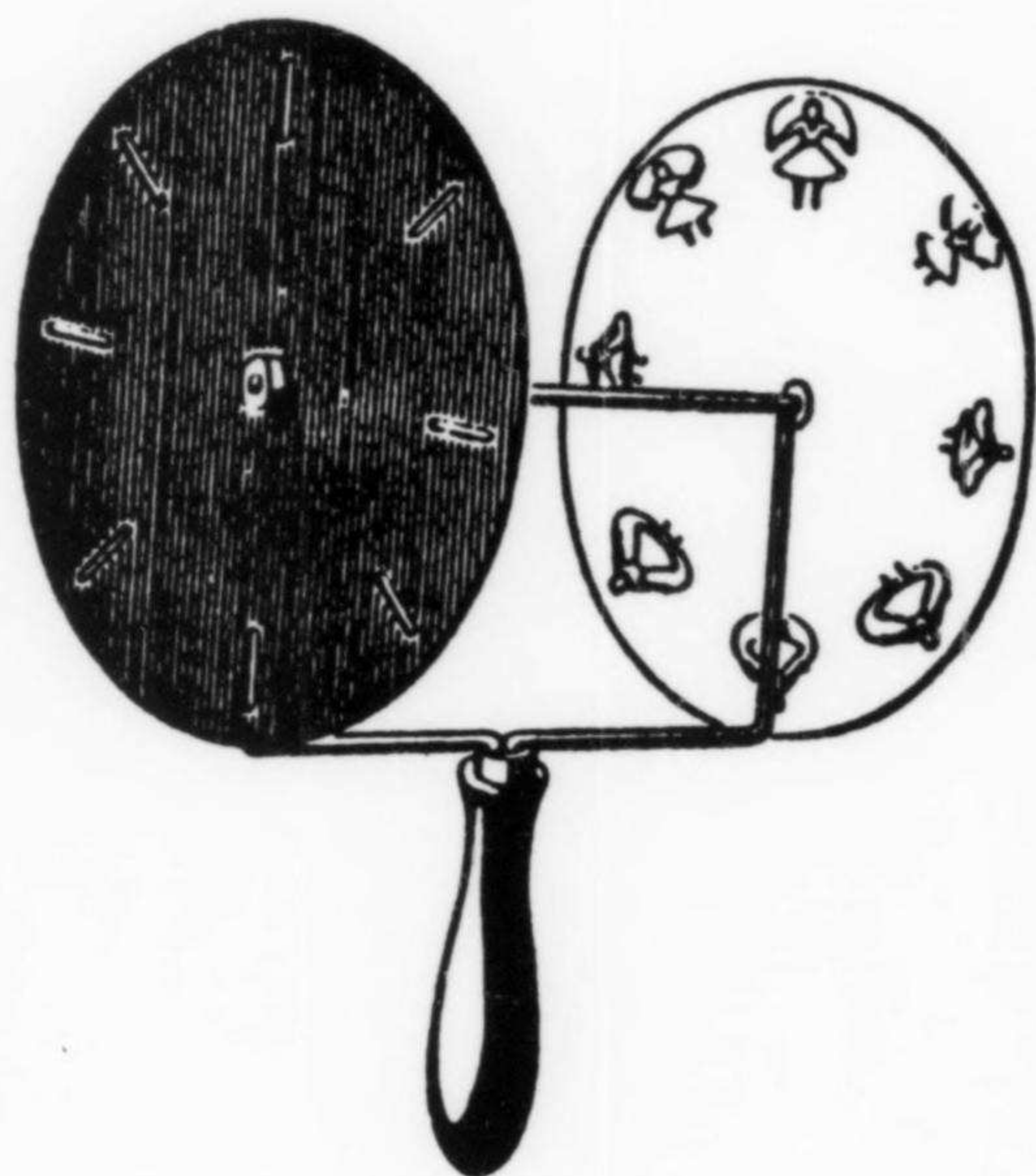


service of a history of cinema.<sup>35</sup> Film scholars position them as the initial forms in an evolutionary technological development leading to the emergence of a single dominant form at the end of the century. Their fundamental characteristic is prematurity; they are not-yet cinema, thus nascent and incomplete forms. Obviously there is a connection between cinema and these machines of the 1830s, but it is often a dialectical relation of inversion and opposition in which features of these earlier devices were negated or concealed. At the same time there is a tendency to conflate all optical devices in the nineteenth century as equally implicated in a vague collective drive to higher and higher standards of verisimi-

35. See, for example, C. W. Ceram, *Archaeology of the Cinema*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965; Michael Chanan, *The Dream that Kicks: The Prehistory and Early Years of Cinema in Britain*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, esp. pp. 54–65; Jean-Louis Comolli, "Technique et idéologie," *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 229 (May-June 1971), pp. 4–21; Jean Mitry, *Histoire du cinéma*, vol. 1, Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1967, pp. 21–27; and Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma*, vol. 1, Paris, Denoël, 1973, pp. 15–43. See also the brief genealogy in Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 5.

Left: Feraday wheel. 1830.

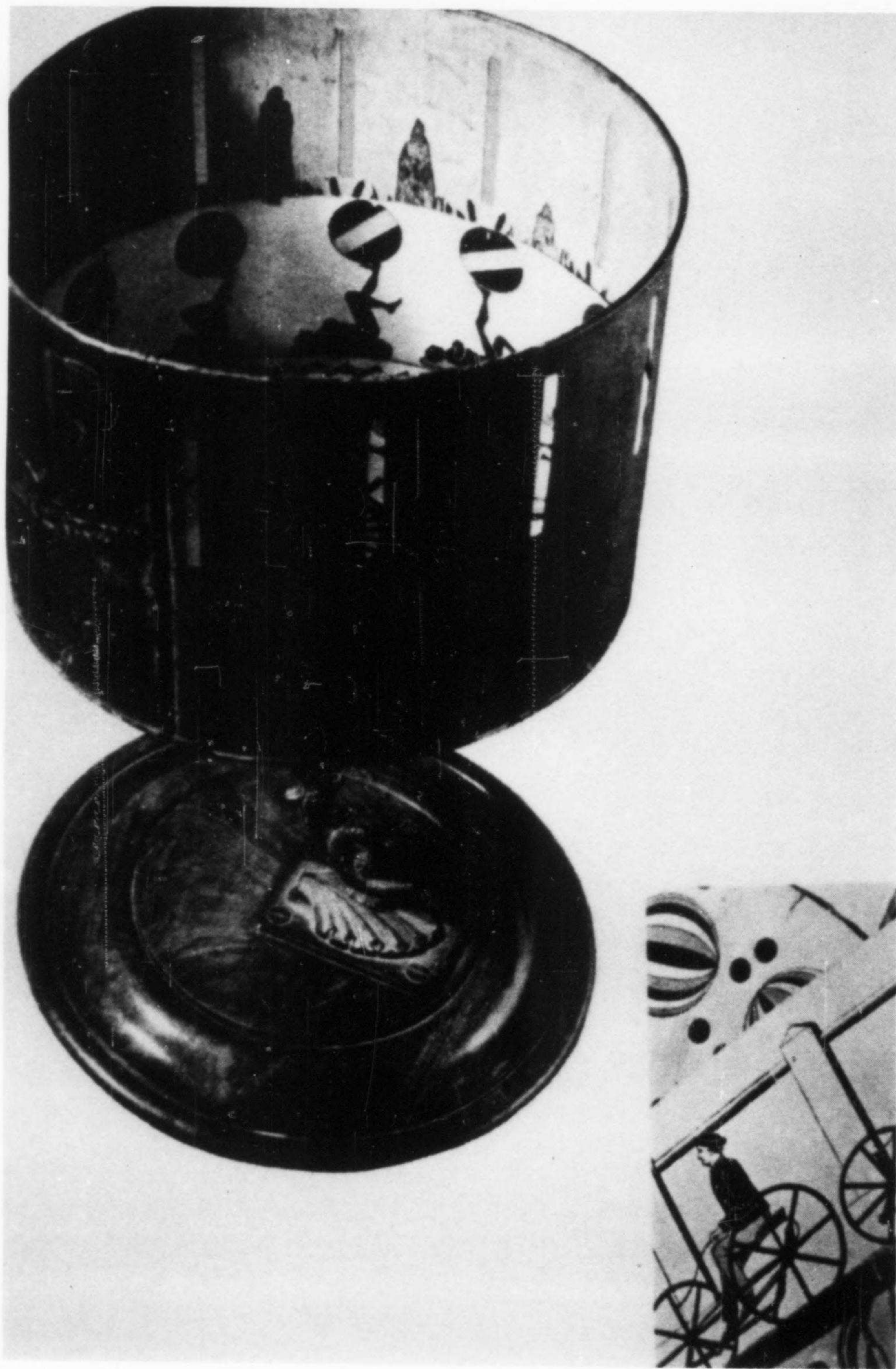
Right: Phenakistiscope. 1832.



litude. Such teleological approaches most often neglect entirely how these devices were expressions of nonveridical models of perception.

One of the earliest was the Thaumatrope (literally, “wonder-turner”), first demonstrated in London by Dr. John Paris in 1825. It was a small circular disc with a drawing on either side and strings attached so that it could be twirled with a spin of the hand. The image of a bird on one side and an empty cage on the other would produce when spun the appearance of the bird in the cage. The simplicity of this “philosophical toy” made unequivocally clear the hallucinatory and fabricated nature of the image and the absolute rupture between perception and its object.

Also in 1825, Peter Mark Roget, an English mathematician and the author of the first Thesaurus, published an account of his observations of railway train wheels seen through the vertical bars of a fence. Roget pointed out the illusions that occurred under these circumstances in which the spokes of the wheels seemed to be either motionless or to be turning backwards. Roget’s observations suggested to him how the location of an observer in relation to an intervening screen could exploit the durational properties of retinal afterimages to create



*Zelloptrope. Mid-1830s.*

various effects of motion. The physicist Michael Faraday explored similar phenomena, particularly the experience of rapidly turning wheels that *appeared* to be moving slowly. In 1831, the year of his discovery of electromagnetic induction, he produced his own device, later called the Faraday wheel, consisting of two spoked wheels mounted on the same axis. By varying the relation between the spokes of the two wheels relative to the eye of the viewer, the apparent motion of the farther wheel could be modulated. Thus the experience of temporality itself is made susceptible to a range of external technical manipulations.

During the late 1820s the Belgian scientist Joseph Plateau also conducted a wide range of experiments with afterimages, some of which cost him his eyesight due to staring directly into the sun for extended periods. By 1828 he had worked with a Newton color wheel, demonstrating that the duration and quality of retinal afterimage varied with the intensity, color, time, and direction of the stimulus. He also made a rough calculation of the average time that such sensations lasted—about a third of a second. What is more, his research seemed to confirm the earlier speculations of Goethe and others that retinal afterimages do not simply dissipate uniformly, but go through a number of positive and negative states before vanishing. He made one of the most influential formulations of the theory of “persistence of vision.”

If several objects which differ sequentially in terms of form and position are presented one after the other to the eye in very brief intervals and sufficiently close together, the impressions they produce on the retina will blend together without confusion and one will believe that a single object is gradually changing form and position.<sup>36</sup>

In the early 1830s, Plateau constructed the Phenakistiscope (literally “deceptive view”) which incorporated his own research and that of Roget, Faraday, and others. At its simplest it consisted of a single disc, divided into sixteen equal segments, each of which contained a small, slitted opening and a figure representing one position in a sequence of movement. The side with figures drawn on it was faced toward a mirror while the viewer stayed immobile as the disc turned. When an opening passed in front of the eye, it allowed one to see the reflected figure on the disc very briefly. The same effect occurs with each of the slits. The images then appear to be in continuous motion before the eye. By 1833, commercial models were being sold in London; by 1834 two similar devices appeared, the Stroboscope invented by the German mathematician Stampfer and the Zootrope or “wheel of life” of William G. Horner.

The empirical truth of the notion of “persistence of vision” as an explanation for the illusion of motion is irrelevant here.<sup>37</sup> What is important are the

36. Joseph Plateau, *Dissertation sur quelques propriétés des impressions*, thesis submitted at Liège, May 1829. Quoted in Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma*, p. 25.

37. Some recent studies have discussed the “myth” of persistence of vision. They tell us, not

conditions and circumstances that allowed it to operate as an explanation and the historical subject/observer that it presupposed. The idea of persistence of vision is linked to two different sorts of studies. One is the kind of self-observation conducted first by Goethe, then by Purkinje, Plateau, Fechner, and others, in which the changing conditions of the observer's own retina was (or was then believed to be) the object of investigation. The other source was the often accidental observation of new industrial forms of movement, in particular mechanized wheels moving at high speeds. Purkinje and Roget both derived some of their ideas from noting the appearance of train wheels in motion or regularly spaced forms seen from a fast moving train. Faraday indicates that his experiments were suggested by a visit to a factory: "Being at the magnificent lead mills of Messrs. Maltby, two cog-wheels were shown me moving with such velocity that if the eye were . . . standing in such a position that one wheel appeared behind the other, there was immediately the distinct though shadowy resemblance of cogs moving slowly in one direction."<sup>38</sup> Like the study of afterimages, new experiences of speed and machine movement disclosed an increasing divergence between appearances and their external causes.

The Phenakistiscope substantiates Walter Benjamin's contention that in the nineteenth century "technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training."<sup>39</sup> While it was of course a mode of popular entertainment, a leisure-time commodity purchasable by an expanding urban middle class, it nonetheless paralleled the format of the scientific devices used by Purkinje, Plateau, and others for the scientific study of subjective vision. That is, a form with which a new public consumed images of an illusory "reality" was isomorphic to the apparatuses used to accumulate knowledge about an observer. In fact, the very physical position required of the observer by the Phenakistiscope bespeaks a confounding of three modes: a body at once a spectator, a subject of empirical research and observation, and an element of machine production. In all three cases it is a question of a body aligned with and operating an assemblage of turning and regularly moving wheeled parts. The imperatives that generated a rational organization of time and movement in production simultaneously pervaded multiple spheres of social activity. A need for knowledge of the capacities of the eye and its regimentation pervaded many of them.

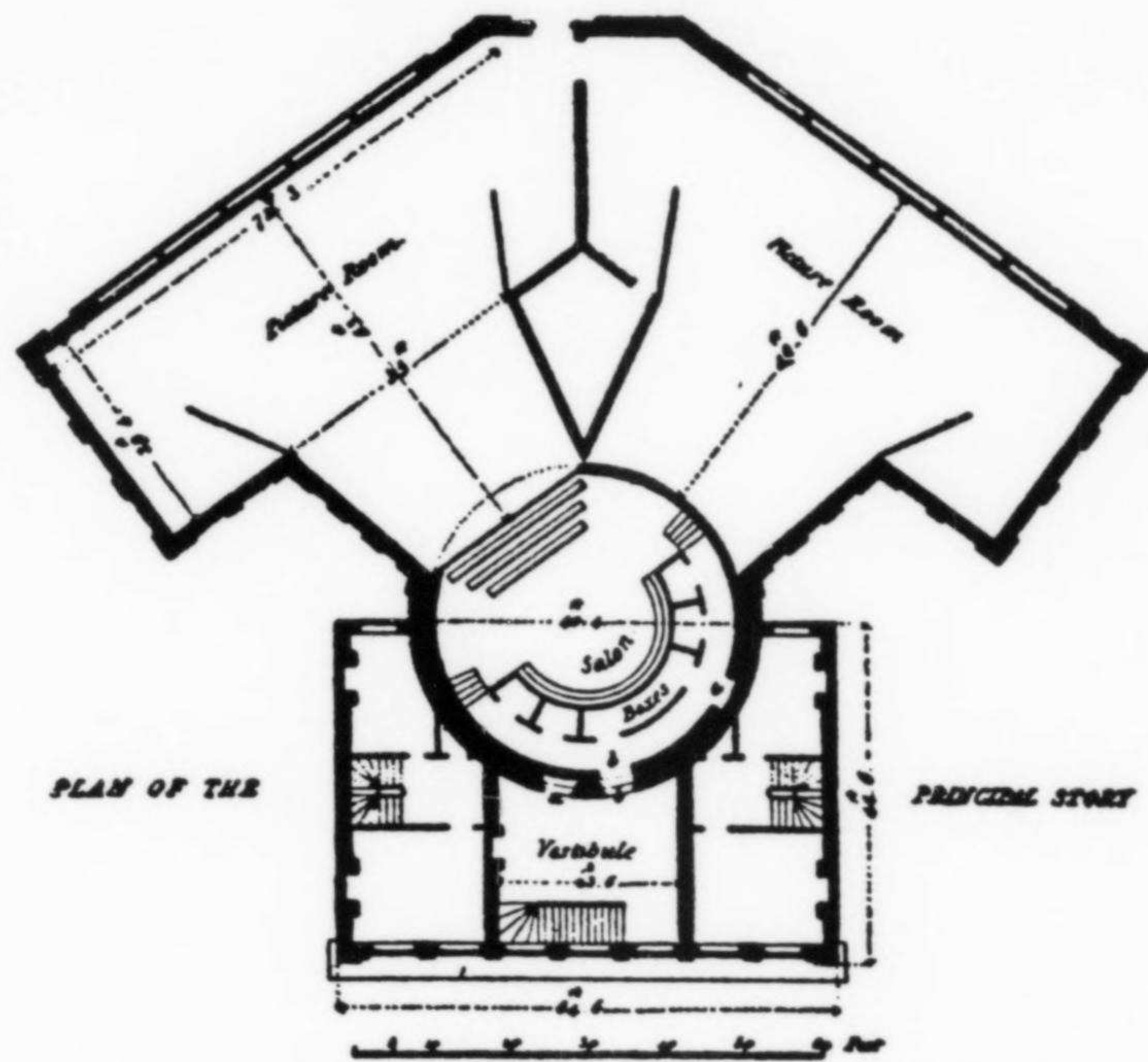
Another phenomenon that corroborates this change in the position of the observer is the Diorama, given its definitive form by Louis J. M. Daguerre in the

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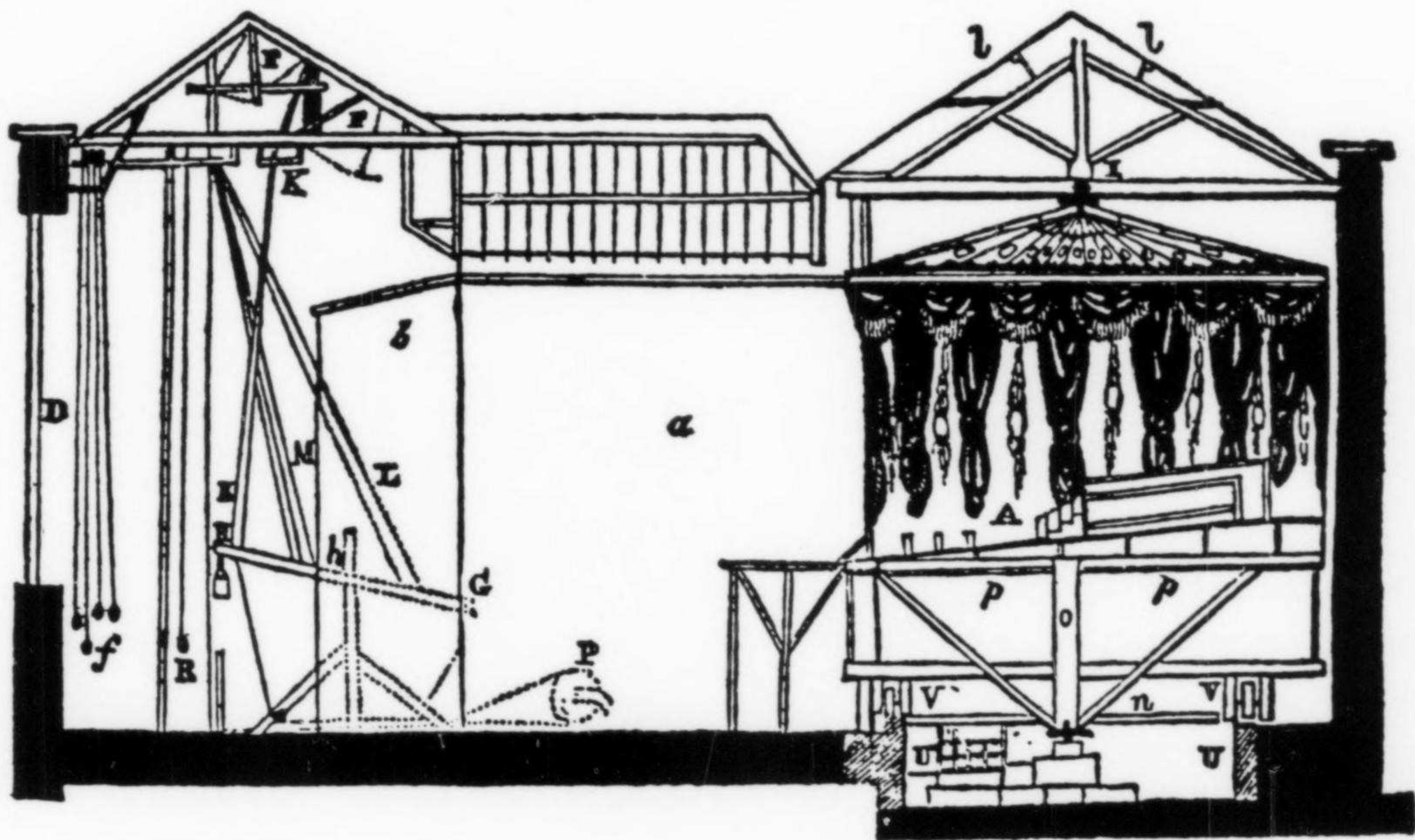
surprisingly, that current neurophysiological research shows nineteenth-century explanations of fusion or blending of images to be an inadequate explanation for the perception of illusory movement. See Joseph and Barbara Anderson, "Motion Perception in Motion Pictures," and Bill Nichols and Susan J. Lederman, "Flicker and Motion in Film," both in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath, London, Macmillan, 1980, pp. 76-95 and 96-105.

38. Quoted in Chanan, *The Dream that Kicks*, p. 61.

39. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn, London, NLB, 1972, p. 126.



(a) Ground plan of the Diorama building, London, by A. Pugin and J. Morgan, 1823



THE DIORAMA.

(b) Cross-section of the auditorium and picture emplacement of the Diorama, London

early 1820s. Unlike the static panorama painting which first appeared in the 1790s, the Diorama is based on the incorporation of an *immobile* observer into a mechanical apparatus and a subjection to a predesigned temporal unfolding of optical experience.<sup>40</sup> The circular or semi-circular panorama painting clearly broke with the localized point of view of perspective painting or the camera obscura, allowing the spectator an ambulatory ubiquity. One was compelled at the least to turn one's head (and eyes) to see the entire work. The multi-media Diorama removed that autonomy from the observer, situating the audience on a circular platform that was slowly moved, permitting views of different scenes and shifting light effects. Like the Phenakistiscope or the Zoetrope, the Diorama was a machine of wheels in motion and of which the observer was an inflexible component. For Marx, one of the great technical innovations of the nineteenth century was the way in which the body was made adaptable to "the few main fundamental forms of motion."<sup>41</sup> But if the remaking of the observer involved the adaptation of the eye to rationalized forms of movement, such a change coincided with and was possible only because of an increasing abstraction of optical experience from a stable referent. Thus a precondition of modernization was the "uprooting" of vision from the delimited and static relations of the camera obscura.

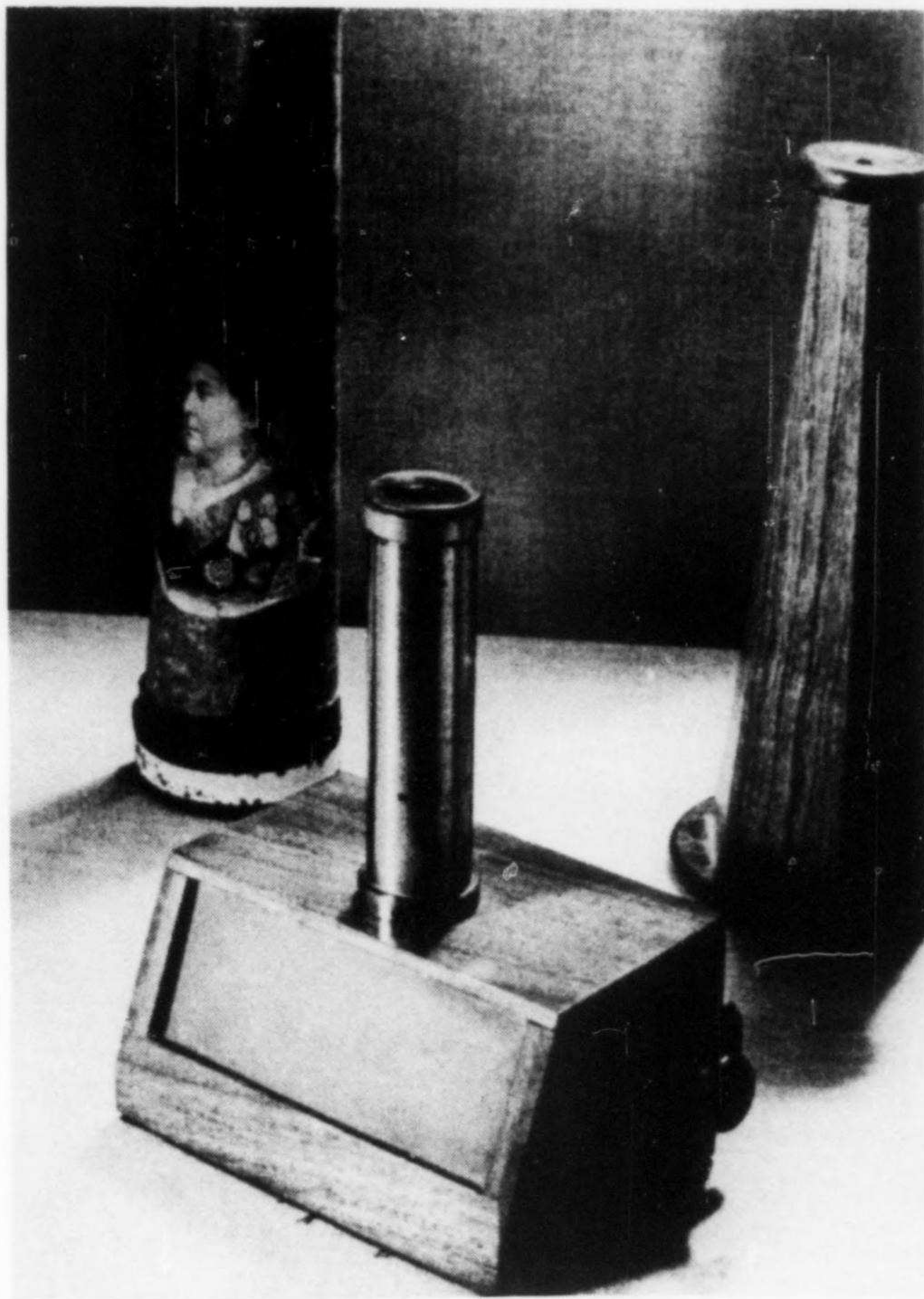
Consider also the kaleidoscope, invented in 1815 by Sir David Brewster.<sup>42</sup> With all the luminous possibilities suggested by Baudelaire, and later by Proust, the kaleidoscope seems radically unlike the rigid and disciplinary structure of the Phenakistiscope, with its sequential repetition of regulated representations. But, for Brewster, the justification for making the kaleidoscope was productivity and efficiency. He saw it as mechanical means for the reformation of art according to an industrial paradigm. Since symmetry was the basis of beauty in nature and visual art, he declared, the kaleidoscope was aptly suited to produce art through "the inversion and multiplication of simple forms."

If we reflect further on the nature of the designs thus composed, and on the methods which must be employed in their composition, the Kaleidoscope will assume the character of the highest class of machinery, which improves at the same time that it abridges the exertions of individuals. There are few machines, indeed, which rise

40. An important study on the relation between the panorama and the Diorama is Eric de Kuyper and Emile Poppe, "Voir et regarder," *Communications*, no. 34 (1981), pp. 85-96. Other works include Stephan Oettermann, *Das Panorama*, Munich, Syndikat, 1980; Heinz Buddemeier, *Panorama, Diorama, Photographie: Entstehung und Wirkung neuer Medien im 19. Jahrhundert*, Munich, H. Fink, 1970; and Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *L. J. M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype*, New York, Dover, 1968.

41. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, New York, International, 1967, p. 374.

42. For more on this device, see my "Notes on the Kaleidoscope and Stereoscope," *Journal*, no. 5 (Autumn 1985), pp. 38-41.



*Kaleidoscope. Mid-19th century.*

higher above the operations of human skill. It will create in an hour, what a thousand artists could not invent in the course of a year; and while it works with such unexampled rapidity, it works also with a corresponding beauty and precision.<sup>43</sup>

Brewster's proposal of infinite serial production seems far removed from Baudelaire's image of the dandy as "a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness." But the abstraction necessary for Brewster's industrial delirium is made possible by the same forces of modernization that allowed Baudelaire to use the kaleidoscope as a model for the kinetic experience of "the multiplicity of life itself and the flickering grace of all its elements."<sup>44</sup>

43. Sir David Brewster, *The Kaleidoscope: Its History, Theory, and Construction* [1819], rpt. London, John Murray, 1858, pp. 134–136.

44. Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1961, p. 1161.

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The most significant form of visual imagery in the nineteenth century, with the exception of photography, was the stereoscope.<sup>45</sup> It is easily forgotten now how pervasive was the experience of the stereoscope and how for decades it defined a principal mode of consuming photographically produced images. This is again a form whose history has thus far been confounded with another phenomenon, in this case, photography. Yet conceptually, structurally, and initially, historically it is independent of the now dominant medium. Clearly, the stereoscope utilized photographic imagery but its invention preceded photography and *in no way required* photographic procedures. Although distinct from the optical devices which represented the illusion of movement, the stereoscope is nonetheless part of the same reorganization of the observer that those devices implied.

Of concern here is the period during which the technical and theoretical principles of the stereoscope were elaborated, rather than its effects once it was distributed in a social-cultural field. Only after 1850 did the wide commercial diffusion throughout North America and Europe of the stereoscope occur.<sup>46</sup> The origins of the stereoscope are intertwined with research in the 1820s and 1830s on subjective vision and more generally within the field of nineteenth-century physiology already discussed. The two figures most closely associated with its invention, Charles Wheatstone and Sir David Brewster, had already written extensively on optical illusions, color theory, afterimages, and other visual phenomena. Wheatstone was in fact the translator of Purkinje's major 1823 dissertation on afterimages and subjective vision, published in English in 1830. A few years later Brewster had summarized available research on optical devices and subjective vision.

The stereoscope is also inseparable from early nineteenth-century debates about the perception of space, which were to continue unresolved indefinitely. Was space an innate form, or was it something recognized through the learning of cues after birth? The Molyneux problem had been transposed to a different century for different solutions.<sup>47</sup> In the eighteenth century, regardless of how the problem was ultimately answered, whether the claim was nativist or empiricist, the testimony of the senses constituted a common surface of order. The

45. There are few serious cultural or historical studies of the stereoscope. Some helpful works are: Edward Earle, ed., *Points of View: The Stereoscope in America: A Cultural History*, Rochester, Visual Studies Workshop, 1979; A.T. Gill, "Early Stereoscopes," *The Photographic Journal*, no. 109 (1969), pp. 546-599, 606-614, 641-651; and Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View," *Art Journal*, no. 42 (Winter 1982), pp. 311-319.

46. By 1856, two years after its founding, the London Stereoscopic Company alone had sold over half a million viewers. See Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1969, p. 191.

47. The best known formulation of the Molyneux problem is John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander C. Fraser, New York, Dover, vol. II, no. ix, p. 8.

question was how the passage from one domain of sense perception to another occurred, how did the senses "reconvene," that is, come together in a body.<sup>48</sup> But those whose answers to Molyneux were negative—a blind man suddenly restored with sight would *not* immediately recognize the objects before him—and these included Locke, Berkeley, Diderot, Reid, and Condillac, share little with the researchers in the nineteenth century who also, with greater scientific authority, answered negatively. By insisting that knowledge, and specifically knowledge of space and depth, is built up out of an orderly accumulation and cross-referencing of perceptions on a plane independent of the viewer, eighteenth-century thought could know nothing of ideas of pure visibility which would arise in the nineteenth century. From Descartes to Berkeley to Diderot is a continued insistence that vision is grounded in the sense of touch.<sup>49</sup> We could not be further removed from Berkeley's theory of how distance is perceived than with the science of the stereoscope. The quintessentially nineteenth-century device, with which distance (or relief) is perceptible solely through an organization of *optical* cues, eradicates the field on which eighteenth-century knowledge arranged itself.

The question that troubled the nineteenth century had never really been a problem before. Binocular disparity, the self-evident fact that each eye sees a slightly different image, had been a familiar phenomenon since antiquity. Only in the 1830s does it become crucial for scientists to define the seeing body as essentially binocular, to quantify precisely the angular differential of the optical axis of each eye, and to specify the physiological basis for disparity. What preoccupied researchers was this: given that an observer perceives with each eye a different image, *how* are they experienced as single or unitary. Before 1800, even when the question was asked it was more as a curiosity, never a central problem. Two alternative explanations had been offered for centuries: one proposed that we never saw anything except with one eye at a time; the other was a projection theory articulated by Kepler, and proposed as late as the 1750s, which asserted that each eye projects an object to its actual location.<sup>50</sup>

By the late 1820s physiologists were seeking anatomical evidence in the structure of the optical chiasma, the point behind the eyes where the nerve fibers leading from the retina to the brain cross each other, carrying half of the nerves from each retina to each side of the brain.<sup>51</sup> But such physiological evidence was relatively inconclusive at that time. Wheatstone's conclusions in 1833 came out

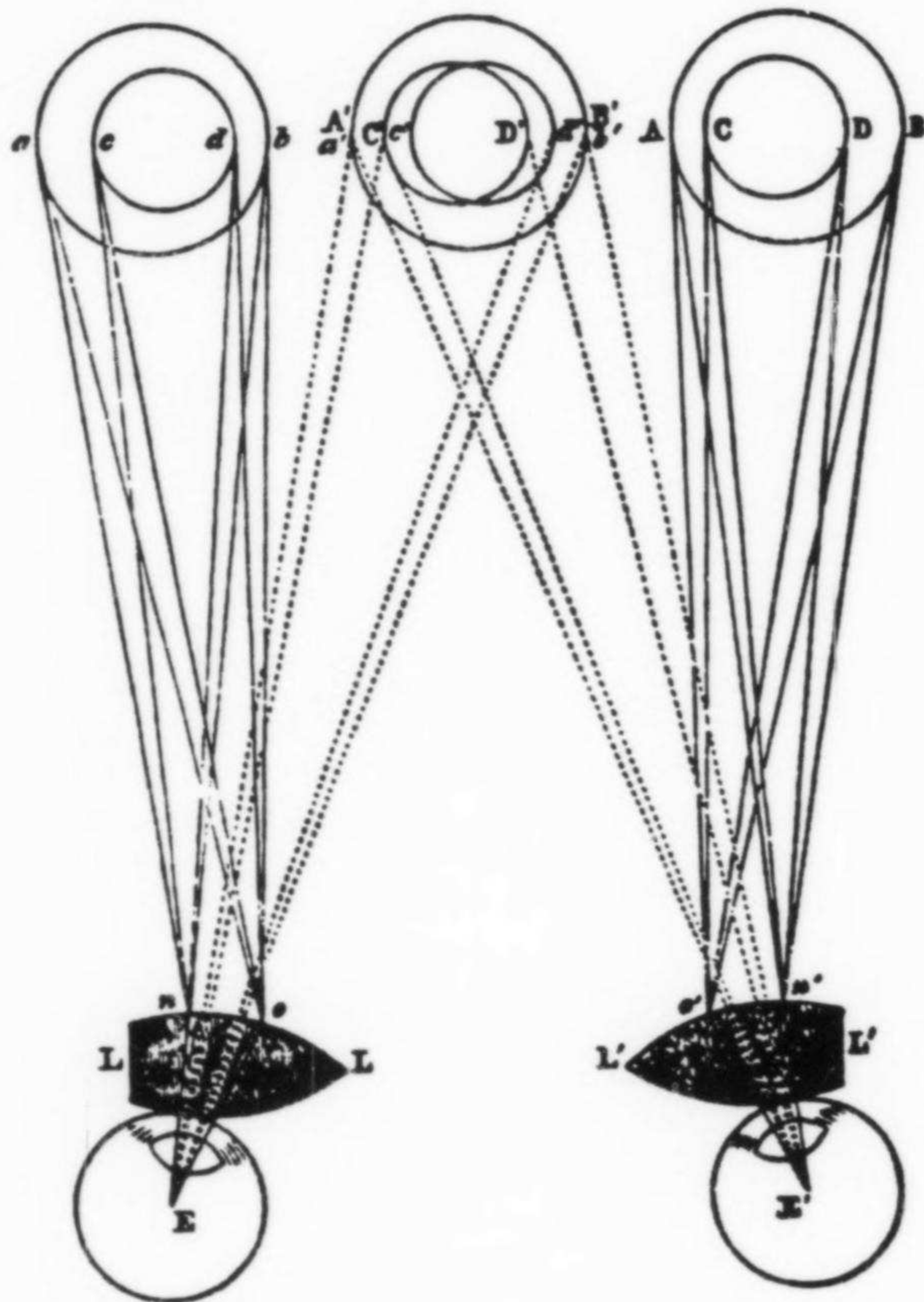
48. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James Pettegrove, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1951, p. 108.

49. See Michel Serres, *Hermès ou la communication*, Paris, Minuit, 1968, pp. 124–125; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1964, pp. 169–172.

50. See, for example, William Porterfield, *A Treatise on the Eye, the Manner and Phenomena of Vision*, Edinburgh, Hamilton and Balfour, 1759, p. 285.

51. See R. L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing*, 3rd. ed., New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 45.

David Brewster's lenticular stereoscope. 1849.



of the successful measurement of binocular parallax, or the degree to which the angle of the axis of each eye differed when focused on the same point. The human organism, he claimed, had the capacity under most conditions to synthesize retinal disparity into a single unitary image. While this seems obvious from our own standpoint, Wheatstone's work marked a major break from (or often disregard of) the older explanations of the binocular body.

The form of the stereoscope is linked to some of Wheatstone's initial findings: his research concerned the visual experience of objects relatively close to the eye.

When an object is viewed at so great a distance that the optic axes of both eyes are sensibly parallel when directed towards it, the perspective projections of it, seen by each eye separately, and the appearance to the two eyes is precisely the same as when the object is seen by one eye only.<sup>52</sup>

Instead Wheatstone was preoccupied with objects close enough to the observer so that the optic axes had *different* angles.

. . . when the object is placed so near the eyes that to view it the optic axes must converge . . . a different perspective projection of it is seen by each eye, and these perspectives are more dissimilar as the convergence of the optic axes becomes greater.<sup>53</sup>

Thus physical proximity brings binocular vision into play as an operation of reconciling disparity, of making two distinct views appear as one. This is what links the stereoscope with other devices in the 1830s like the Phenakistiscope. Its "realism" presupposes perceptual experience to be essentially an apprehension of differences. The relation of the observer to the object is not one of identity but an experience of disjunct or divergent images. Helmholtz's epistemology was based on such a "differential hypothesis."<sup>54</sup> Both Wheatstone and Brewster indicated that the fusion of pictures viewed in a stereoscope took place over time and that their convergence might not actually be secure. According to Brewster

. . . the relief is not obtained from the mere combination or superposition of the two dissimilar pictures. The superposition is effected by turning each eye upon the object, but the relief is given by the play

52. Charles Wheatstone, "Contributions to the Physiology of Vision," in *Brewster and Wheatstone on Vision*, p. 65.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Hermann von Helmholtz, "The Facts in Perception," in *Epistemological Writings*, ed. Paul Hertz and Moritz Schlick, Boston, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 1977, p. 133: ". . . our acquaintance with the visual field can be acquired by observation of the images during the movements of our eyes, provided only that there exists, between otherwise qualitatively alike retinal sensations, some or other perceptible difference corresponding to the difference between distinct places on the retina."

of the optic axes in uniting, in rapid *succession*, similar points of the two pictures. . . . Though the pictures apparently coalesce, yet the relief is given by the subsequent play of the optic axes varying themselves *successively* upon, and unifying, the similar points in each picture that correspond to different distances from the observer.<sup>55</sup>

Brewster then confirms there never really is a stereoscopic image, that it is a conjuration, an effect of the observer's experience of the differential between two other images.

In devising the stereoscope, Wheatstone aimed to simulate the actual presence of a physical object or scene, not to discover another way to exhibit a print or drawing. Painting had been an adequate form of representation, he asserts, but only for images of objects at a great distance. When a landscape is presented to a viewer, "if those circumstances which would disturb the illusion are excluded," we could mistake the representation for reality. He declares that up to this point in history it is impossible for an artist to give a faithful representation of any *near* solid object.

When the painting and the object are seen with both eyes, in the case of the painting two similar objects are projected on the retina, in the case of the solid object the pictures are dissimilar; there is therefore an essential difference between the impressions on the organs of sensation in the two cases, and consequently between the perceptions formed in the mind; the painting therefore cannot be confounded with the solid object.<sup>56</sup>

What he seeks, then, is a complete equivalence of stereoscopic image and object. Not only will the invention of the stereoscope overcome the deficiencies of painting but also those of the Diorama, which Wheatstone singles out. The Diorama, he believed, was too bound up in the techniques of painting, which depended for their illusory effects on the depiction of distant subjects. The stereoscope, on the contrary, provided a form in which "vividness" of effect increased as the object represented appeared closer to the viewer, and the impression of three-dimensional solidity became greater as the optic axes of each eye diverged. Thus the desired effect of the stereoscope was not simply likeness, but immediate, apparent *tangibility*. But it is a tangibility that has been transformed into a purely visual experience of a kind that Diderot could never have imagined. Even as sophisticated a student of vision as Helmholtz could write, in the 1850s:

These stereoscopic photographs are so true to nature and so lifelike in

55. Sir David Brewster, *The Stereoscope: Its History, Theory, and Construction*, London, John Murray, 1856, p. 53. (Emphasis in original.)

56. Charles Wheatstone, "Contributions to the Physiology of Vision," p. 66.

their portrayal of material things, that after viewing such a picture and recognizing in it some object like a house, for instance, we get the impression, when we actually do see the object, that we have already seen it before and are more or less familiar with it. In cases of this kind, the actual view of the thing itself does not add anything new or more accurate to the previous apperception we got from the picture, so far at least as mere form relations are concerned.<sup>57</sup>

No other form of representation in the nineteenth century had so conflated the real with the optical, an object with its image.

The stereoscope as a means of representation was inherently *obscene*. It shattered the *scenic* relationship between viewer and object that was intrinsic to the fundamentally theatrical setup of the camera obscura. The very functioning of the stereoscope depended on the visual priority of the objects closest to the viewer and on the absence of any mediation between eye and objects viewed.<sup>58</sup> It was a fulfillment of what Walter Benjamin saw as part of the visual culture of modernity: "Day by day the need becomes greater to take possession of the object—from the closest proximity—in an image and the reproduction of the image."<sup>59</sup> It is no coincidence that the stereoscope became increasingly synonymous with varieties of pornographic imagery in the course of the nineteenth century. The very effects of tangibility that Wheatstone had sought from the beginning were quickly turned into a mass form of ocular possession. Some have speculated that the close association of the stereoscope with pornography was in part responsible for its social demise; around the turn of the century sales of the device supposedly dwindled because of its link with "indecent" subject matter. Although the reasons for the collapse of the stereoscope lie elsewhere, as I will suggest shortly, the simulation of tangible three-dimensionality hovers uneasily at the limits of acceptable verisimilitude.<sup>60</sup>

If photography preserved an ambivalent (and superficial) relation to the codes of monocular space and geometrical perspective, the relation of the stereoscope to these older forms was one of annihilation, not compromise. Charles Wheatstone's question in 1838 was, "What would be the visual effect of simultaneously presenting to each eye, instead of the object itself, its projection on a plane surface as it appears to that eye?" The stereoscopic spectator sees neither the identity of a copy nor the coherence guaranteed by the frame of a window.

57. Hermann von Helmholtz, *Handbook of Physiological Optics*, vol. 3, trans. George T. Ladd, New York, Dover, 1962, p. 303.

58. See Florence de Mèridieu, "De l'obscénité photographique," *Traverses*, no. 29 (October 1983), pp. 86–94.

59. Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," *Artforum*, no. 15 (February 1977), p. 49.

60. The ambivalence with which twentieth-century audiences have received 3-D movies and holography suggests the enduring problematic nature of such techniques.

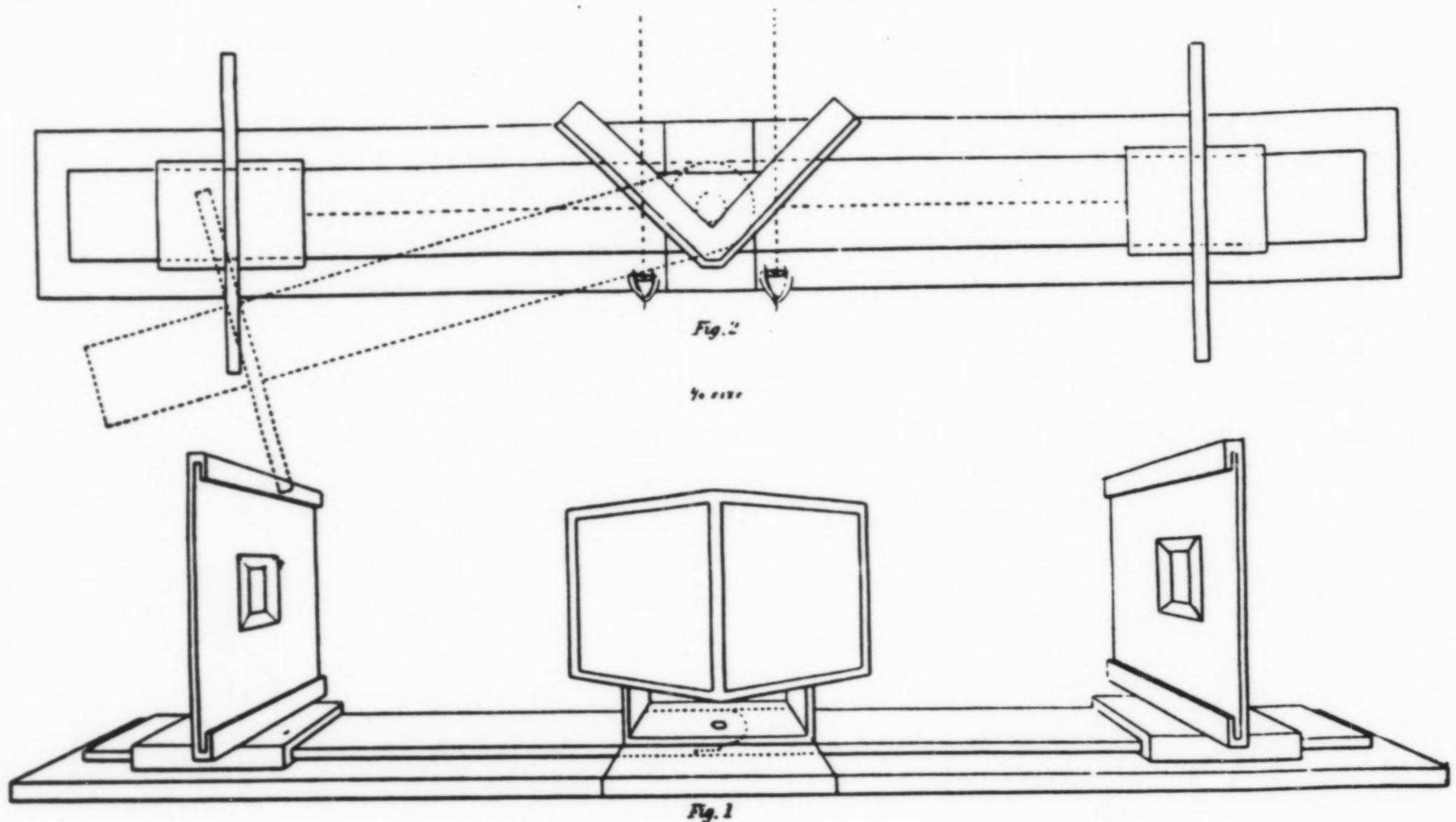


Diagram of the operation of the Wheatstone stereoscope.

Rather, what appears is the technical reconstitution of an already reproduced world fragmented into *two* nonidentical models, models that precede any experience of their subsequent perception as unified or tangible. It is a radical repositioning of the observer's relation to visual representation. The institutionalization of this de-centered observer and the stereoscope's dispersed and multiplied sign severed from a point of external reference indicate a greater break with a classical observer than that which occurs later in the century in modernist painting. The stereoscope signals an eradication of "the point of view" around which, for several centuries, meanings had been assigned reciprocally to an observer and the object of his or her vision. Perspective is not even a possibility under the terms of this technique of beholding. An observer no longer sees an image that has an intelligible or quantifiable location in space, but rather a hallucinatory composite of two dissimilar images whose positions refer to the anatomical structure of the observer's body.

To fully appreciate the rupture signified by the stereoscope, it is important to consider one of its earliest forms, the so-called Wheatstone stereoscope. In order to view images with this device, an observer placed his eyes directly in front

of two plane mirrors set 90 degrees to one another. The images to be viewed were held in slots on either side of the observer, and thus were spatially completely separated from each other. Unlike the Brewster stereoscope, invented in the late 1840s, or the familiar Holmes viewer, invented in 1861, the Wheatstone model made clear the atopic nature of the perceived stereoscopic image, the disjunction between experience and its cause. The later models allowed the viewer to believe that he was looking forward *at* something "out there." But the Wheatstone model left the hallucinatory and fabricated nature of the experience undisguised. It did not support what Roland Barthes called "the referential illusion."<sup>61</sup> There simply was nothing "out there." The illusion of relief and of depth was thus a subjective event and the observer coupled with the apparatus was the agent of synthesis or fusion.

Like the Phenakistiscope and other nonprojective optical devices, the stereoscope also required the corporal adjacency and immobility of the observer. They are part of a nineteenth-century modulation in the relation between eye and optical apparatus. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that relationship had been essentially metaphoric: the eye and the camera obscura or the eye and the telescope or microscope were allied by a conceptual similarity, in which the authority of the eye remained unchallenged.<sup>62</sup> Beginning in the nineteenth century, the relation between eye and optical apparatus becomes one of metonymy: both were now contiguous instruments on the same plane of operation, with varying capabilities and features.<sup>63</sup> The limits and deficiencies of one will be complemented by the capacities of the other and vice versa. The optical apparatus undergoes a shift comparable to that of the tool as described by Marx: "From the moment that the tool proper is taken from man, and fitted into a mechanism, a machine takes the place of a mere implement."<sup>64</sup> In the older, handcraft-based work, he explained, a workman "makes use of a tool," that is, the tool had a metaphoric relation to the innate powers of the human subject.<sup>65</sup>

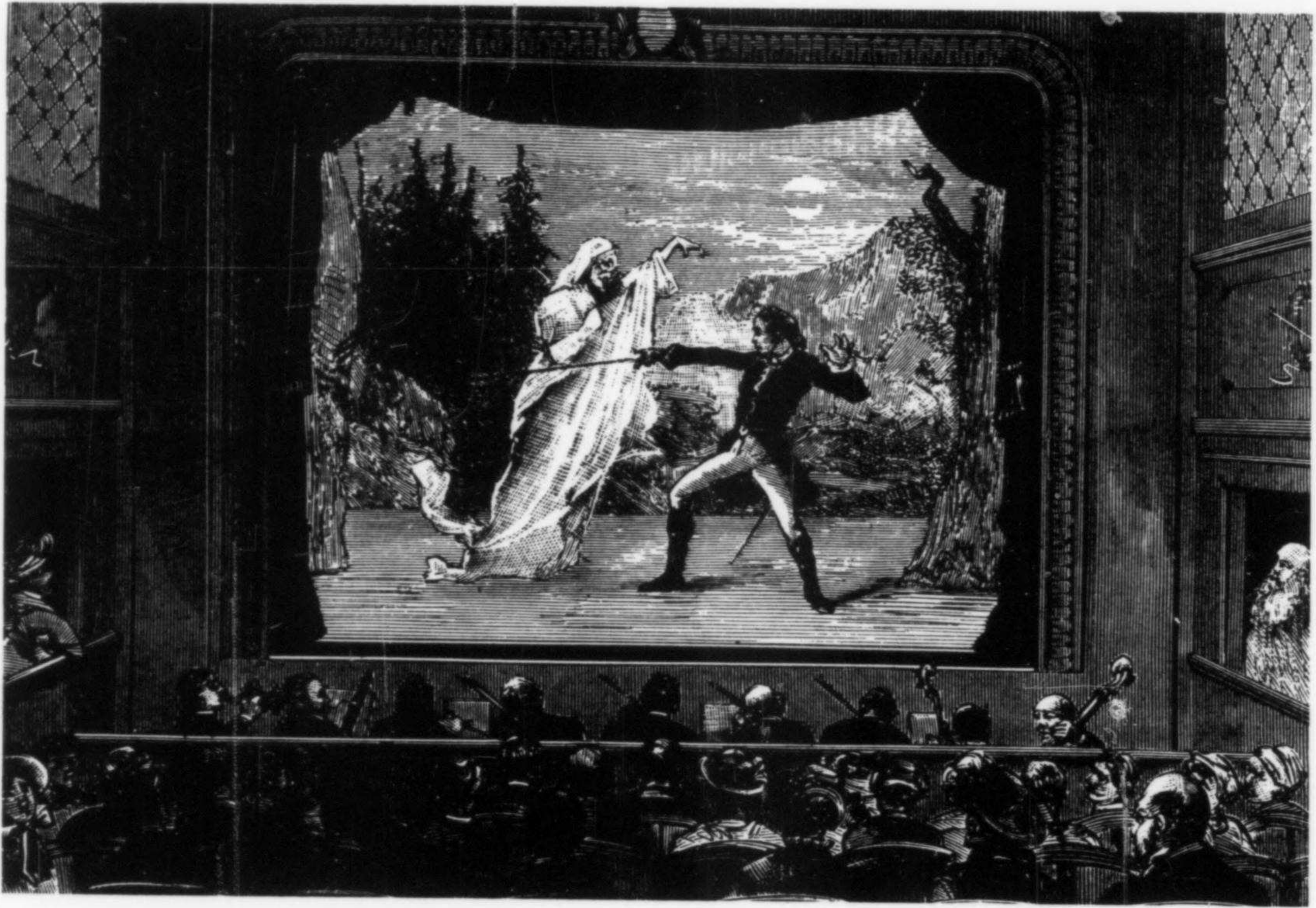
61. See Roland Barthes, "L'effet de réel," *Communications*, no. 11 (1968), pp. 84-89; trans. as "The Reality Effect" by Richard Howard, in *The Rustle of Language*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1986, pp. 141-148.

62. On the telescope as metaphor in Galileo, Kepler, and others, see Timothy J. Reiss, *The Discourse of Modernism*, Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 25-29.

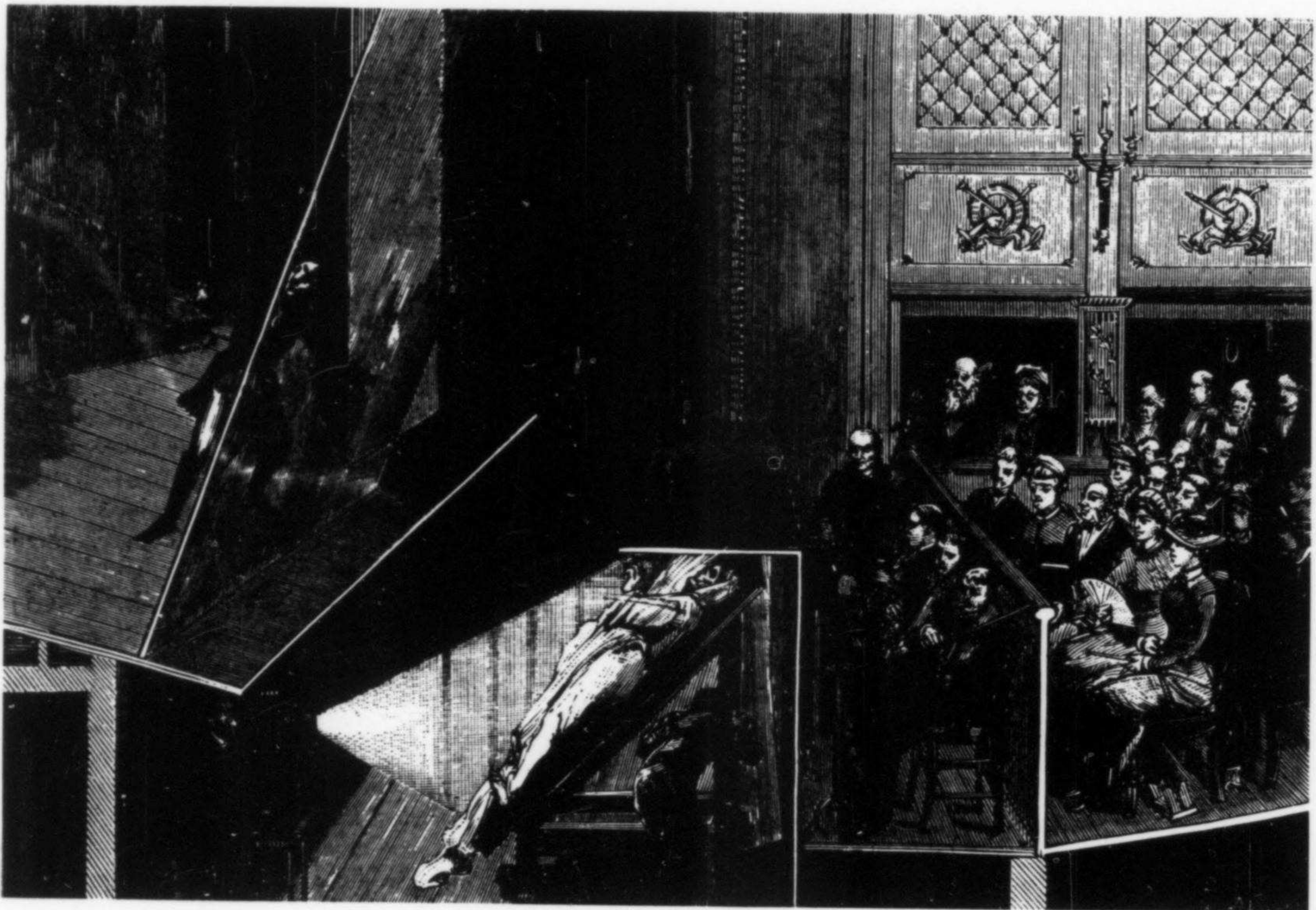
63. "In Metonymy, phenomena are implicitly apprehended as bearing relationships to one another in the modality of part-part relationships, on the basis of which one can effect a *reduction* of one of the parts to the status of an aspect or function of the other" (Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973, p. 35).

64. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 374. In this sense, other optical instruments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, like peep shows, Claude glasses, and print viewing boxes had the status of tools.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 422. J. D. Bernal has noted that the instrumental capacities of the telescope and microscope remained remarkably undeveloped during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Until the nineteenth century, the microscope "remained more amusing and instructive, in the philosophical sense, than of scientific and practical value" (*Science in History, Vol. 2: The Scientific and Industrial Revolutions*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1971, pp. 464-469).



*Phantasmagoria.*



In the factory, Marx contended, the machine makes use of man by subjecting him to a relation of contiguity, of part to other parts, and of exchangeability.<sup>66</sup> Georges Canguilhem makes a crucial distinction between eighteenth-century Utilitarianism, which derived its idea of utility from its definition of man as toolmaker, and the instrumentalism of the human sciences in the nineteenth century, which is based on "one implicit postulate: that the nature of man is to be a tool, that his vocation is to be set in his place and to be set to work."<sup>67</sup> Although "set to work" may sound inappropriate in a discussion of optical devices, the apparently passive observers of the stereoscope and Phenakistiscope were in fact made into producers, by virtue of specific physical capacities, of forms of verisimilitude.

A crucial feature of these optical devices of the 1830s and 1840s is the undisguised nature of their operational structure and the form of subjection they entail. Even though they provide access to "the real," they make no claim that the real is anything other than a mechanical production. The optical experiences they manufacture are clearly disjunct from the images used in the device. They refer as much to the functional interaction of body and machine as they do to external objects, no matter how "vivid" the quality of the illusion. So when the Phenakistiscope and the stereoscope eventually disappeared, it was not as part of a smooth process of invention and improvement but rather because these earlier forms were no longer adequate to current needs and uses.

One reason for their obsolescence was that they were insufficiently "phantasmagoric," a word which Adorno, Benjamin, and others have used to describe forms of representation after 1850. *Phantasmagoria* was a name for a specific type of magic lantern performance in the 1790s and early 1800s, which used back projection to keep an audience unaware of the lanterns. Adorno takes the word to indicate

the occultation of production by means of the outward appearance of the product . . . this outer appearance can lay claim to the status of being. Its perfection is at the same time the perfection of the illusion that the work of art is a reality *sui generis* that constitutes itself in the realm of the absolute without having to renounce its claim to image the world.<sup>68</sup>

But the effacement or mystification of a machine's operation was precisely what David Brewster hoped to overcome with his kaleidoscope and stereoscope. He

66. Marx again indicates the new metonymic status of the human subject: "As soon as man, instead of working with an implement on the subject of his labor, becomes merely the motive power of an implement-machine, it is a mere accident that motive power takes the disguise of human muscle; and it may equally well take the form of wind, water, or steam" (*Capital*, vol. 1, p. 375).

67. Canguilhem, "Qu'est-ce que la psychologie," p. 378.

68. Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London, Verso, 1981, p. 85. On Adorno, Wagner, and phantasmagoria, see Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1986, pp. 34-42.



*Holmes stereoscope. 1860s.*

optimistically saw the spread of scientific ideas in the nineteenth century undermining the possibility of phantasmagoric effects, and he presented a cursory history of civilization in terms of the development of technologies of illusion and apparition.<sup>69</sup> For Brewster, a Scottish Calvinist, the maintenance of barbarism, tyranny, and popery had always been founded on closely guarded knowledge of optics and acoustics, the secrets by which priestly and higher castes ruled. But his implied program, the democratization and mass dissemination of techniques of illusion, simply collapsed that older model of power onto a single human subject, transforming each observer into simultaneously the magician and the deceived.

Even in the later Holmes stereoscope the "concealment of the process of production" did not really occur.<sup>70</sup> Clearly the stereoscope was dependent on a physical engagement with the apparatus which became increasingly inconvenient and unacceptable, but more importantly, the abstract and synthetic nature of the stereoscopic image could never be fully effaced. An apparatus openly based on a principle of disparity, on an awkward "binocular" body, and on an illusion patently derived from the binary referent of the stereoscopic card of paired images, inevitably would give way to a form that preserved the referential illusion more fully than anything before it. Photography also defeated the stereoscope as a mode of visual consumption because it recreated and perpetuated the fiction that the "free" subject of the camera obscura was still viable. Photographs seemed to be a continuation of older "naturalistic" pictorial codes but only because their dominant conventions were restricted to a narrow range of technical possibilities (that is, shutter speeds and lens openings that rendered elapsed time invisible).<sup>71</sup> But photography had already abolished the inseparability of observer and camera obscura, bound together by a single point of view, and made the new camera an apparatus fundamentally independent of the spectator, yet which masqueraded as a transparent and incorporeal intermediary between observer and world. The prehistory of the spectacle *and* the "pure perception" of modernism are lodged in the newly discovered territory of a fully embodied viewer, but the eventual triumph of both depends on the denial of the body, its pulsings and phantasms, as the ground of vision.<sup>72</sup>

69. Sir David Brewster, *Letters on Natural Magic*, New York, J. J. Harper, 1832, pp. 15–21.

70. This device is described by its inventor in Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 3, no. 20 (June 1859), pp. 740–752.

71. For the disruptive effect of Muybridge and Marey on nineteenth-century codes of "naturalistic" representation, see Noël Burch, "Charles Baudelaire Versus Doctor Frankenstein," *Afterimage*, nos. 8–9 (Spring 1981), pp. 10–13.

72. On the problem of modernism, vision and the body, see the recent work of Rosalind Krauss, for example, "Antivision," *October*, no. 36 (Spring 1986), pp. 147–154; and "Where's Poppa," forthcoming in *Marcel Duchamp Centennial Conference at Nova Scotia School of Art*, Thierry de Duve, ed., Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

*Joseph Beuys. Stanhope Hotel. 1974 (Galerie Alfred Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1978).*



## The Ends of Art according to Beuys

ERIC MICHAUD

translated by ROSALIND KRAUSS

*As strange as this might seem, my path has  
been traced by language; it did not spring  
from what one calls an artistic gift.*

—Joseph Beuys

Joseph Beuys wanted to make art the instrument of resurrection, for the unification of man. The proposal is simple. It enlisted the enthusiastic adherence of his disciples and the mockery of his detractors, but never the indifference of the Germans. In his own country his death was hailed as the disappearance of a "German phenomenon"; he had been compared to Dürer. The desire to spread Christianity's faith in the possibility of each human being's rebirth excited this apostle of "the expanded concept of art" just as it had once stirred the master of the German Renaissance.

Dürer's response to Saint Augustine's *creatura non potest creare* (a creature has no power to create) had been to reestablish the original identity between God and man through the use of man's God-given creative power. And such, once again, was Beuys's message to the Germans and to the contemporary world. "Each man is an artist" does not mean that everyone is a good painter. It means, says Beuys, man's possibility of self-determination: "For this time, it is man as aided by no god, as in the mystery of Golgotha. This time, it is man himself who must accomplish the resurrection."<sup>1</sup>

The disturbing element in Beuys's work is not to be found in his drawings, which have their place in public and private collections throughout the world, nor his "performances," which have their place within the Fluxus movement and within a general investigation of the limits of art. It lies rather, I believe, in the flood of pronouncements testifying to the privilege that he gave, throughout his lifetime, to spoken over plastic language. It is this constant inundation of his

1. Interview with Joseph Beuys by Friedhelm Mennekes, in F. J. van der Grinter and F. Mennekes, *Menschenbild—Christusbild*, Stuttgart, 1984, p. 103.

“works” by words—both his own and those of others—this frantic proselytizing in which he exhausted himself up to the time of his death. But it is also—and in the very same impulse that led him to repeat what he thought was Christ’s teaching—this constant wish to “clarify the task that the Germans have to accomplish in the world,” this insistence on the “duty of the German people,” *above all* to deploy this “resurrective force” that was to lead to the transformation of the social body by man-turned-artist.<sup>2</sup>

This flood of words had a function: to fill up the silence of Marcel Duchamp: he who hadn’t dared follow the consequences of his own acts; he who hadn’t understood his own import. The piece called *The Silence of Marcel Duchamp Is Over-Rated* was, thus, a work of criticism:

I criticize him because just when he could have developed a theory on the basis of the work he’d achieved, he contented himself with silence; and the theory that he could have developed—it is I who develop it today.<sup>3</sup>

That object [the urinal]: he brought it into the museum so as to establish that it is the transferral from one place to another that makes it into art. But establishing this did not lead him to the conclusion—simple and obvious—that all men are artists. On the contrary. He hoisted himself onto a pedestal saying, look how I have shocked the bourgeoisie!<sup>4</sup>

In opposition to this, Beuys says, “The most important thing, for someone looking at my objects, is my fundamental thesis: EACH MAN IS AN ARTIST. There is *my* contribution to ‘the history of art.’”<sup>5</sup> Or again, “The most important aspect of my work is the part that concerns ideas.”<sup>6</sup> Beuys’s objects or performances should not, then, be taken for works having their ends in themselves. They are conceived to be read as so many repetitions of the message: you who are looking, you, also, are an artist.

Before even reflecting on this “fundamental thesis,” it must, therefore, be said that, because they are the representations of an end that is external to them, these objects or performances are dependent upon an *instrumental* and entirely classical conception of art in which the “form” is nothing but the unbetrayed *vehicle* of the “idea”: “I said, sculpture begins in thought and if the thought is not

2. Joseph Beuys, “Discours sur mon pays: l’Allemagne,” in *Pour la mort de Joseph Beuys: nécrologies, essais, discours*, Bonn, Inter Nationes, 1986, p. 31.

3. Interview with Joseph Beuys by Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, in *Canal*, nos. 58–59 (Winter 1984–85), p. 7.

4. Interview with Joseph Beuys by Irmeline Lebeer, in *Cahiers du Musée national d’art moderne*, no. 4 (1980), p. 176.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

6. *Canal*, nos. 58–59, p. 8.

true, the ideas are bad and so is the sculpture. The sculpture's idea and form are identical."<sup>7</sup>

It is on this naive certainty of an absolute transparency between form and matter and the "idea" that Beuys's system is constructed. It offers the immense advantage of allowing the artist to create as if in flashes of lightning in which the opacity of (the) work in process is eluded, in which form is always adequate to the idea:

Fat, for example, was a great discovery for me. . . . I was able to influence it with heat or cold. . . . In this way I could transform the character of this fat from a chaotic and unsettled state to a very solid condition of form. In this way the fat underwent a movement from a very chaotic condition to a geometrical context as its end. I thus had three fields of power and, there, that was the idea of sculpture. It was power over a condition of chaos, over a condition of movement, and over a condition of form. In these three elements—form, movement, and chaos—was the indeterminate energy from which I derived my complete theory of sculpture, of the psychology of humanity as the power of will, the power of thought, and the power of feeling; and there I found it—the schema adequate to understanding all the problems of society.<sup>8</sup>

It is thus that fat in all its states became the most adequate representation of the *Gestaltung*—the putting into form—as an end. A schematic representation to be sure, but one which, as such, would best convey the idea of the general process of thought, of man, and of human society: the passage from an indeterminate or "chaotic" state of energy to a state that is determinate, or "crystalline."

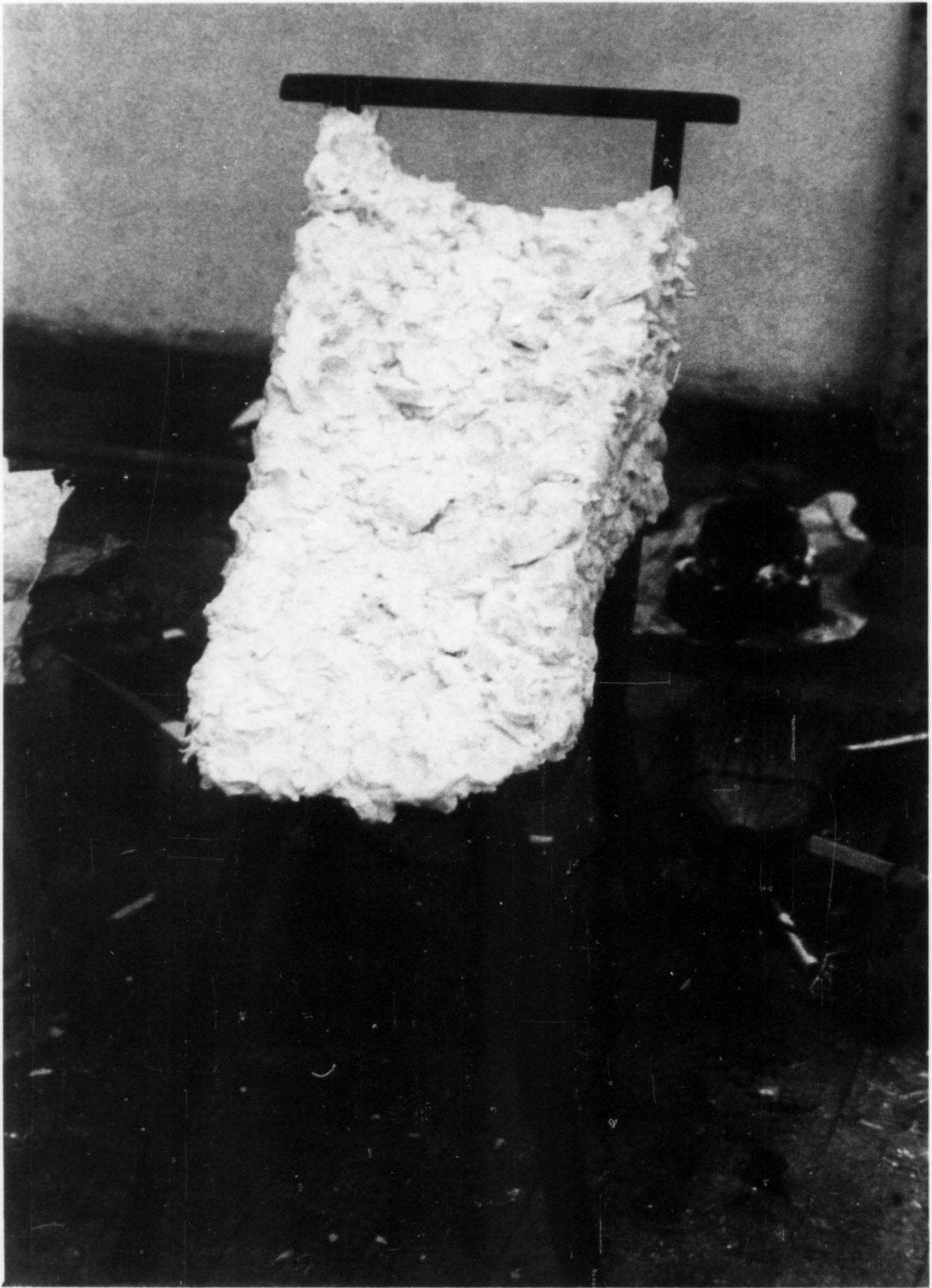
Obviously, this idea of *Gestaltung*, central to Beuys's thought, is the *resurrection of meaning* that Duchamp's silence had buried. This silence, which was spread and reproduced "like a sickness" up to Mario Merz or Kounellis, up to the practitioners of the return to expressionism or those of Bad Painting, this immense silence of Duchamp within which all these artists "languish," has led them to produce nothing but "objects with no consequences": "Their representations are devoid of meaning, and it's this absence of meaning that allows art historians to patch together trivial significations."<sup>9</sup> What these artists haven't understood "is that above all you have to make something that relates to thought and to the development of an idea, so that it later becomes a practical idea within society."<sup>10</sup>

7. *Ibid.*

8. Interview with Joseph Beuys by Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, August 1979, in Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, *Joseph Beuys, Is It about a Bicycle?*, Paris, Verona, 1985, pp. 91–93.

9. *Canal*, nos. 58–59, p. 9.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 8.



*Joseph Beuys. Fat Chair. 1982.*

The works and performances of Beuys, on the contrary, as process and as *theorized* passage (this is the difference, he says) from nondetermined to determined, work toward the exhibition of the process of *Gestaltung*, the point of which is *Gestaltung*. The "expanded concept of art" is, thus, this resurrection of meaning as *total* in-forming: "the idea of *Gestaltung* . . . extends to all the problems of society."<sup>11</sup> "The issue is the capacity of each person in his place of work; what matters is the capacity of a nurse or a farmer to become a creative force, and to recognize it as part of an artistic duty that is to be accomplished."<sup>12</sup>

The *Gestaltung* of the world is thus a duty—the duty of everyone, at his place of work—to reform a sick world. But if the *Gestaltung displaying itself* is the resurrection of meaning, it is by the same token, for Beuys, the resurrection of Christ displaying himself in his work ("the human-being-as-artist is the creator"):

I take possession of a concept of God and I give this concept to man, but I don't need to do it: I am much too weak. The act that will make man free, the act that represents Christ in human beings, this act has already been committed. But there's a conspiracy of silence about it.<sup>13</sup>

This is why the monstrosity of the *Gestaltung* engenders the *Gestaltung*: it had to be brought back from oblivion, torn from its place of retreat, so that when presented to men they might recognize themselves in it, recognizing it as their most profound essence: freedom and "self-sovereignty." And this is why its very monstrosity breaks the silence that shrouds it, this very silence with which we still shroud the act through which Christ will free man-as-creator. For the *Gestaltung*, when exposed, quickly finds its Assumption in speech: Beuys's, first of all (his own exposition of the theory of work as a process of exposition, as he says), but also that of others. Their commentary is this new and incessant resurrection of meaning, its active propagation through which it becomes apparent that "everyman is an artist," since in any case, speech is "sculpture":

Consequently, everything that concerns creativity is invisible, is a purely spiritual substance. And this work, with this invisible substance, this is what I call "social sculpture." This work with invisible substance is my domain. At first, there is nothing to see. Subsequently, when it becomes corporeal, it appears initially in the form of language.<sup>14</sup>

Then there awakens "in each human being a sharpened consciousness of the ego, a will to affirm the self."<sup>15</sup>

One can be thankful to Beuys for having reinvented the mystery of the

11. *Cahiers*, no. 4, p. 176.

12. Beuys, "Discours sur mon pays: l'Allemagne," p. 47.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

14. *Cahiers*, no. 4, p. 176.

15. Beuys, "Discours sur mon pays: l'Allemagne," p. 42.

Incarnation. Its rehearsal, however, presents all the signs of a pedagogy that is both banal and disquieting. But it is not its banality, or the banalization of all the grand thoughts with which it decks itself out, that makes it troubling. On the one hand Beuys's social sculpture or social in-forming presents itself as a healing of the social body by way of speech: "I am interested much more," he says, "in the type of theory that releases energy in people, leading them to a general discussion of actual problems. It is thus more a therapeutic method."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand it also claims to be a physical cure, but now no longer by speech, but through *language*.

His 1985 oration in Munich, "Talking about One's Own Country: Germany," should engage our attention: Beuys imagines himself collapsed, dead and buried, but coming back to life within the German language. Once again, it is best to quote him (it is from his tomb that he addresses himself to the Germans):

By using the German language, we would succeed in conversing with one another, and we would discover that in speaking this way it is possible to find a physical healing, but also to experience, too, a deep, elemental feeling of what is taking place on the soil where we live, of what is dead in the fields, in the forests, on the prairies, in the mountains. Our own reanimation will allow us, through language, to recapture this soil. And this means that we will accomplish, thanks to this soil on which we are born, a process of salvation.<sup>17</sup>

The *Gestaltung* is thus a continual resurrection: it dies only incessantly to be reborn, spontaneously generating itself within the circularity of the soil and revealing itself alternatively as the soil of the German language and as the language of the German soil, each finding in the other the force necessary to this continuous self-engendering, whereby they purify themselves ever more highly.

One can see how Beuys's ecology is one of *Gestaltung* as soil and as language, that is, as *a people* ("the idea of a people is fundamentally tied to its language").<sup>18</sup> And it is because his path was not determined by "what is called an 'artistic gift,'" but instead "traced through language" that Beuys decided one day (or was told), "Perhaps your vocation is to give a whole forward thrust to the people's task."<sup>19</sup>

I thus set myself off on a search, in my thoughts about language, and I found some connections that look like this: in the German people — as I've already said — you find the force of resurrection. You also find it, of course, in other peoples; but our strength will unfold within a

16. Lamarche-Vadel, *Beuys*, p. 93.

17. Beuys, "Discours sur mon pays: l'Allemagne," p. 37.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

19. *Ibid.*

radically renewed social fabric. It must unfold in this way, since it would be our duty first of all and, secondly, that of other peoples.<sup>20</sup>

For Beuys is certain that there is "something that they expect from us," "something to be hoped for from the Germans, and thus from the nation, something that flows from the unique genius of this language that we speak," and that "allows us to understand . . . how, through this language, consciousness—consciousness of self—is formed, how it offers man the possibility of self-determination."<sup>21</sup>

There, then, is this "task the people would have," this "task that the Germans have to accomplish in the world": to realize the essence of the spirit of their language, which is the *Gestaltung* of consciousness, that is, the affirmation of the self through self-determination and as self-determination. For the *Gestaltung* is this duty of the German people to heed the call of their essence. Such is the law of this people. To evade it would mean failing in its duty to itself: to affirm the *Gestaltung* which is, in its affirmative display, the self-affirmation of the German people itself, that is, its "self-*Gestaltung*" and its purification according to its essence, by language and by the soil. For this reason, ecology is also the duty of this people: it is the *Gestaltung* of the soil and the "environment," that is to say, at one and the same time the response of Germany to the call of its essence and the preservation of this essence—necessary to the eternal resurrection of the *Gestaltung*. Beuys's social in-forming is thus this generalized and purifying "putting into form," that is, the very task of the German people displaying itself *in its work* by means of "a good sculpture, an admirable image, a car that doesn't violate the environment, a good and healthy potato, a pure fish that the fisherman takes from the sea next to another which is poisoned."<sup>22</sup>

Such an ecology, as we see, doesn't differentiate between what is given to man and what man produces: the fish, the potato, the car, and the image are all thought of as the product of human labor, the product of a *culture* put into good form from which the *Gestaltung* will be able to regenerate and expand: "We need this soil on which man experiences himself and recognizes himself as a creative creature, acting on the world."<sup>23</sup>

"The expanded concept of art," this "social in-forming," or generalized *Gestaltung* can thus be called "the same thing" as politics (as Beuys confided about it in front of the camera of Laure Ball). Or rather—and better still—it renders "useless" the concept of politics:

I, personally, am involved only with representation, with form, which is to say, when I make a statement to the effect that I have nothing to

20. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

do with politics, that means that I am involved with the formation of the world, the formation of the world seen as sculpture, thus as evolution, transformation of this form into a new form.<sup>24</sup>

Since, in effect, the essence of the German people inheres in the spirit of its language, since this language "gives man the possibility of self-determination, and consequently of administration over all spaces of production itself . . . , this concept of self-administration renders the concept of politics void."<sup>25</sup>

In this way, Beuys says, politics should stand aside before language; or rather, politics finds its master in language, since in it the people have the instrument of their self-determination and self-administration made available to them. Which means that self-affirmation of the "sovereign in man," through language and through the soil, is the goal or end of "politics." But it is also the beginning of "social art": "A social art would mean the cultivation of relations between men, almost an act of life."<sup>26</sup> Isn't a social art the very activity that Beuys deploys in displaying himself, liberating "what is sovereign in the human being" through his exhibition, repeating tirelessly "the act that represents Christ within the human being"? Social art is thus the new resurrection of Christ, and it is in Germany that Christ must be again reborn since:

One cannot understand the meaning of Christianity if one doesn't understand German myth. Why was Christianity essentially developed in the very place where this mythology was vital? Isn't it obvious that this mythology was *the vessel* specifically prepared to welcome Christianity in order to accomplish — with both vessel and its content — the development of *Western* human thought, the consciousness of what is transformative [*das Umgestaltende*], to its limit? In order to modify, by means of philosophic methods and the scientific concepts derived from them, the *nature of man* to its most extreme material form, to the point where it becomes *anti-nature*.<sup>27</sup>

He, whose own *Gestaltung* was the work of Nazi instruction and the Hitler Youth, regretted no longer finding in textbooks, as in the days of Nazism, "all sorts of things about the *Edda*," this grand Germano-Scandinavian epic that had provided the source for the *Nibelungen*.<sup>28</sup>

24. Interview with Joseph Beuys by Achille Bonito Oliva, June 1984, in Lamarche-Vadel, *Beuys*, p. 126.

25. Beuys, "Discours sur mon pays: l'Allemagne," p. 49.

26. Interview with Joseph Beuys by Elizabeth Rona, October 1981, in Lamarche-Vadel, *Beuys*, p. 115.

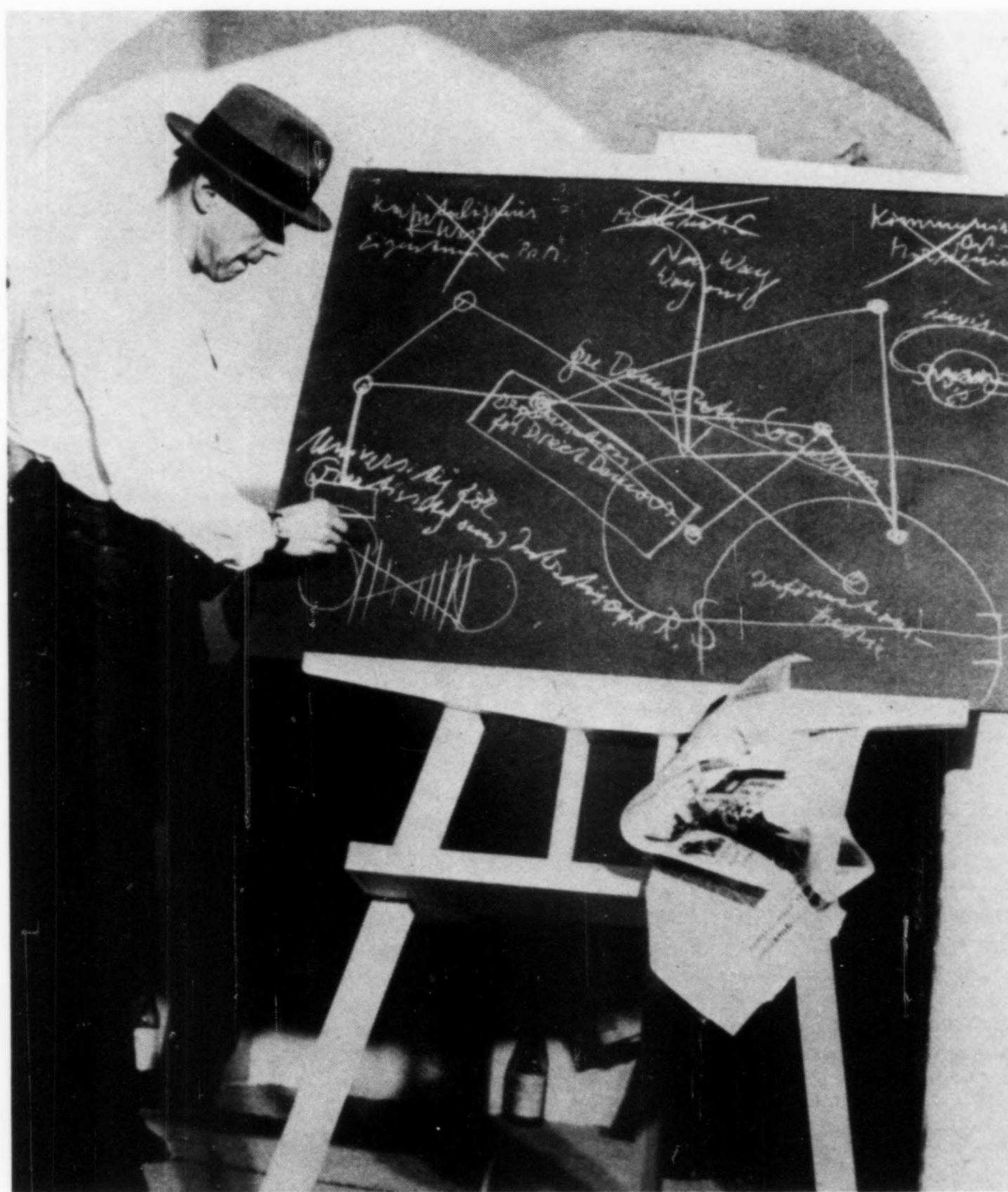
27. Interview with Joseph Beuys by Hagen Lieberknecht, in *Catalogue des dessins de Joseph Beuys*, vol. I, Cologne, Schirner, 1972, p. 16.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 15. For the relationship of Beuys to Nazism, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum*, XVII (January 1980), pp. 35-43.

For German mythology is for him the redemption of this forgetting with which men had shrouded the liberating act of Christ, just as today social art or the generalized *Gestaltung* is the new redeeming of the silence of which Marcel Duchamp, the Pharisee, was one of the last accomplices:

This must be established: the first stage of the parcelling out of Christ's substance (obviously given by Christ Himself), took place on

Joseph Beuys. Political Lecture. Galerie Lucrezia de Domizio, Pescara, 1980.



the site where Germans and Celts stood. It's there that the best soil for what Christ must have wanted was to be found: the transformation (the total transubstantiation) of human nature. And today we must pursue this and lead it toward the next stage.<sup>29</sup>

Beuys was surely of a time when art was experienced less as what Blanchot called "the presence of a produced object" than as the *productive activity* itself. His "expanded concept of art" is the affirmation of man's productive and transformative energy as his highest essence: it is a conception "that descends," he says, "from a deep historical past" and which "returns as future, as a total future, that of man become conscious"<sup>30</sup> — free and autonomous in the achievement of his destiny as producer self-producing at last.

But what is this *Gestaltung*, this productive and transformative energy, if not this power that, in its affirmation and its exhibition, makes of every object in the world the simple instrument or means of its activity—to the point of making itself the instrument of its own perpetuation? What is it if not artistic activity itself? Beuys identified his artistic activity with human labor in general: in so doing, he made of it the law to be adopted by man so as to attain the highest freedom, or absolute autonomy. But his "social sculpture" can, I believe, mean only the subjugation of the real world and real men, which it reduces to the mere instruments of its free exercise. In identifying itself with human labor in its generality, the "expanded concept of art" makes of activity both means and ends: thus, there is no way for it "to render the concept of politics void" or to blend with it without at the same time identifying itself with this self-propaganda and this self-propagation that was, more than all else, the emblem of the Nazi regime — identifying its political action with artistic activity.<sup>31</sup>

The Greeks, Hannah Arendt remarked, if they admired the products of art, maintained as well the greatest suspicion with regard to fabrication in all its forms: because the spirit of the *βᾶναυσοῦ* or of the fabricator is a philistinism that "determines and organizes everything that plays a role in the process—the materials, the tools, the activity itself, including the persons who participate in it; all become simple means to the end and are justified as such."<sup>32</sup> There, where the mechanical or fabricative spirit prevails, every being sees itself degraded into means. This is why it matters that artistic *activity* maintain its reserve.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

30. Beuys, "Discours sur mon pays: l'Allemagne," p. 47.

31. "An internal and unfailing connection exists between the artistic works of the Führer and his political Great Work. The artistic is also at the root of his development as politician and statesman. His artistic activity is not simply an occupation of his youth due to chance, a detour that the political genius of the man was able to take; it was the postulate of his creative idea in its totality" (article from the *Völkischer Beobachter* [April 24, 1936], cited by Lionel Richard, *Le nazisme et la culture*, Paris, Maspéro, 1978, p. 188–189).

32. Hannah Arendt, *La crise de la culture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 276.

## Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the Proletarians

THIERRY DE DUVE

*Milton produced Paradise Lost for the same reason a silkworm produces silk. It was an activity of his nature.*

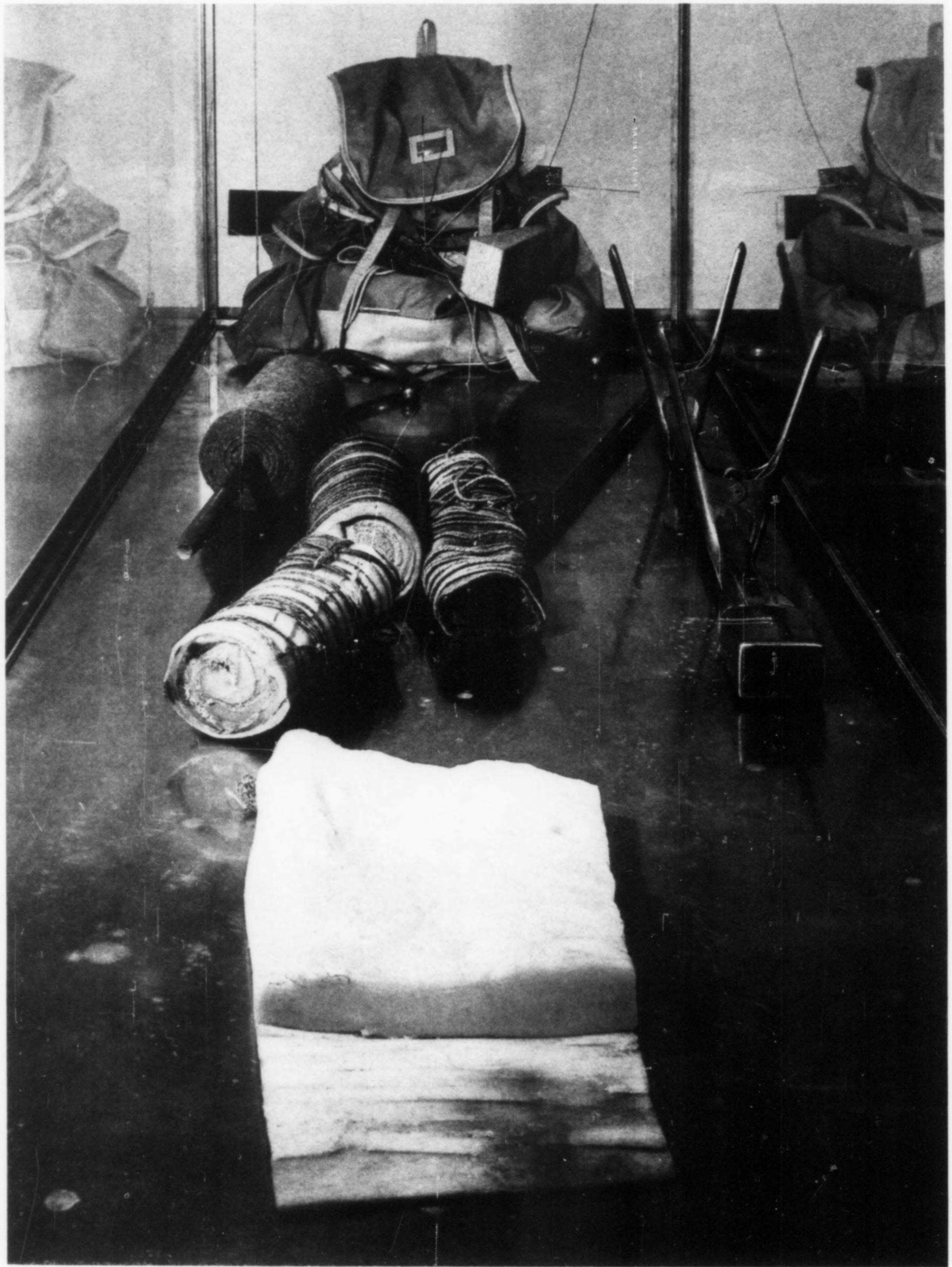
—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Book IV

*If the silkworm were to spin in order to provide for its existence as a caterpillar, it would be a perfect wage-worker.*

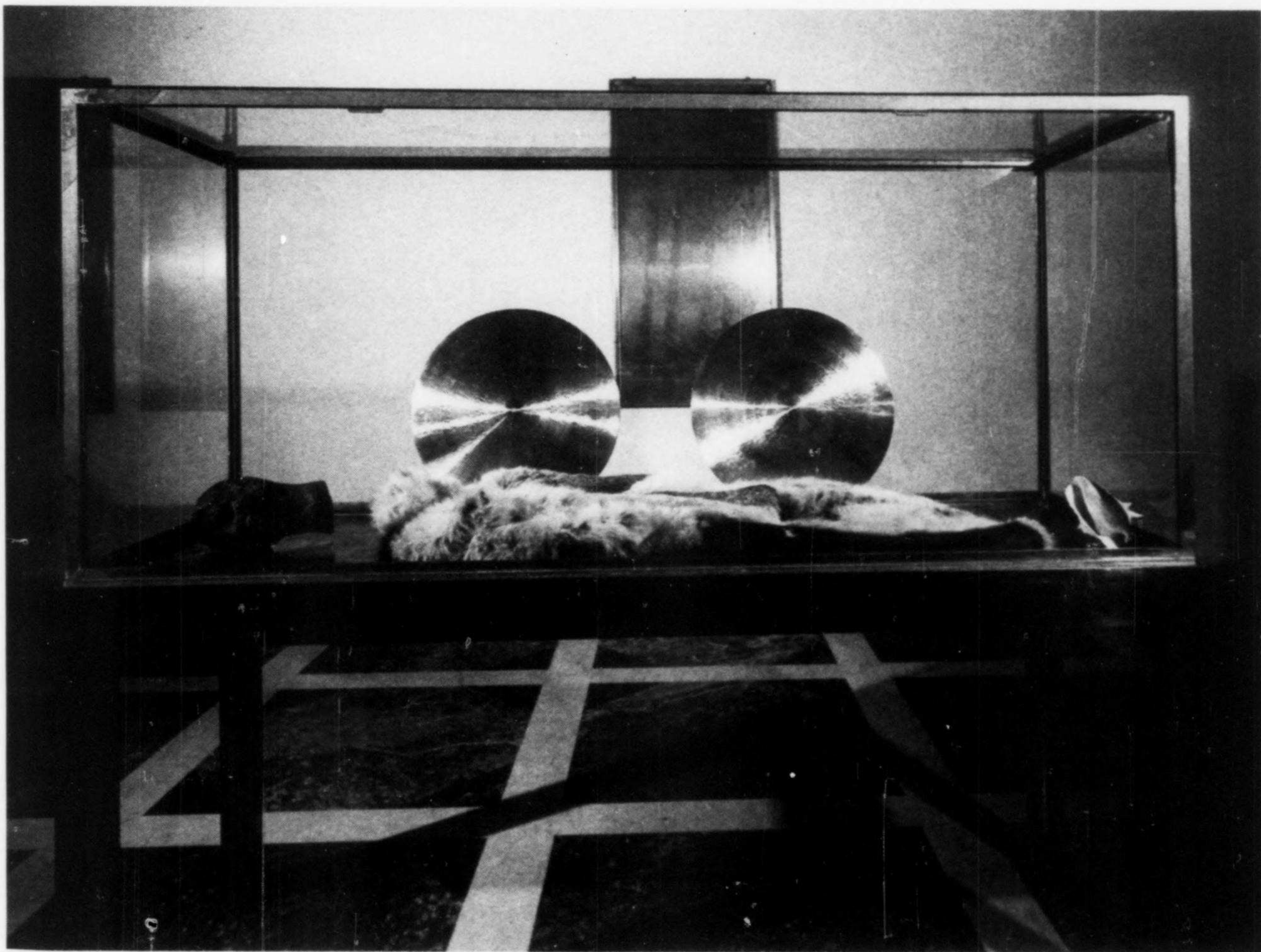
—Karl Marx, *Wage-Labor and Capital*

Overcome by an illness that took hold of him—like a statue—by the feet, Joseph Beuys died on January 21, 1986, after having installed in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples what should be seen as more than just his last exhibition; it should rather be seen as his testament. On the walls were seven gold-leafed monochromes, measuring the height of a man and asymmetrically arranged: four on the right-hand wall, one on the far wall, two on the wall at the left. Within the room stood two cases, or rather, glass caskets—one displaced to a position near the left-hand wall, the other right in the middle. The first contained the pathetic implements of a transient or bum, these arranged in a vaguely anthropomorphic manner: a backpack serving as “head,” two bronze canes, one rolled in felt, doubling as “arms,” two rolls of fat and a roll of copper bound with twine standing for “chest,” and a slab of lard for “legs.” Alongside this dismembered body ran a bronze crutch to which were attached two large electrical clamps. There lay the artist as vagabond—as itinerant clown—encumbered with his meager supplies and limping down the road to exile. Oedipus at Colonnus.

In the central casket the portrait was more composed, tragic, majestic. Oedipus Rex. A cast head (the same that topped the *Strassenbahnhaltestelle* at the 1982 Venice Biennale), its mouth agape as for a last death-cry, protruded from a greatcoat made of hare-skin and lined in blue silk, at the feet of which was



*Joseph Beuys. Palazzo Regale. 1985.*



set the conch shell of a hoped-for rebirth. Two cymbals (used in the performance *Titus/Iphigenia*) stood in at the place where, in the other coffin, the electric clamps with their supporting crutch were located. There lay the artist as tragic monarch, clad in the regalia of his office. The installation was, moreover, titled *Palazzo Regale*.<sup>1</sup>

It is as vain to try to choose between the two images of himself the artist has wished to bequeath us as it would be mistaken to think that—as if retracing the career of Beuys—they map a trajectory from the marginality of his beginnings to the triumph of his end. Like the faces of Janus, the two *gisants* are inseparable. And they are mutually indispensable for understanding what Beuys, throughout his whole life as an artist, wished to incarnate. The ruler and the tramp, the king and his fool, are but one of the bi-cephalic avatars of the artist. There are many others of them that also show, on the one hand, his indefatigable evangelism, his

1. For a similar description, though with more hagiographic overtones, see Thomas McEvilley, "Hic Jacet Beuys," *Artforum*, vol. 24, no. 9 (May 1986), pp. 130–131.

political combativeness, his pedagogical joy, his revolutionary or evolutionary optimism, his propensity to take the role of leader; and, on the other hand, his mystical archaism, his high sense of the pathetic in constant oscillation between farce and tragedy, his tendency to play the victim, his empathy for all the anomic and sacrificial figures of humanity. That of Christ — victim and redeemer — is at the crossing of a double series of identifications: chief and child, priest and scapegoat, shepherd and coyote, stag and hare, composer and thalidomide baby,

*Joseph Beuys. Celtic + ~~~ . Blockhaus St. Jacob. Basler  
Theater. Basel. April 5, 1971.*



social reformer and rebel, legislator and outlaw, statesman and prisoner, mediator and recluse, orator and deaf-mute, prophet and buffoon, professor and student, shaman and sham, utopianist of the future and embalmer of the past.<sup>2</sup>

The ritual, obsessional, and quasi-exhaustive character of this list of the roles he either assumed or impersonated (lacking—and this is significant—only that of worker and prostitute) sets up echoes between Beuys's work and an already extensive litany of similar identifications, all of them allegorical of the condition of the artist within modernity, all of them leading directly—more than a century distant—to a mythical country peopled with all the romantic incarnations of the excluded as bearers of social truth. The name of this country—where strollers and dandies cross paths with peddlers and ragpickers; where art students and medical students thumb their noses at philistines; where the sins of the streetwalker are redeemed by the love of a young poet; where humanity is more humane in the brothel than in the church or palace; where the underworld is the true aristocracy, tuberculosis the pardon for syphilis, and talent the only riches—the name of this country that rings with all the cries of injustice and where—radically—the only one denied a visa is the bourgeois, the name of this country is of course bohemia. It is a literary and imaginary country where, in a deformed image at once tragic and ideal, there was dreamed a humanity to replace the real humankind that peopled the Europe of the nineteenth century, and that industrial capitalism had pitilessly set against itself by dividing it into two new antagonistic classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Doubtlessly, the real name of bohemia is the lumpenproletariat, or at least, the name of its correlate within the actual world: a no-man's land into which there fell a certain number of people incapable of finding a place within the new social divisions—expropriated farmers, out-of-work craftsmen, penniless aristocrats, country girls forced into prostitution. Dickens and Zola have described this dark fringe of industrialization, these shady interstices of urbanization. But, like Baudelaire, Hugo, and many other novelists who hardly professed naturalism, they poured their inspiration into it, contributing to the fabrication of the image of this marginal, lumpenproletariat society transposed into bohemia, functioning all the more as the figure of a humanity of replacement in that it is a suffering humanity, such that nothing but true human values—liberty, justice, compassion—can survive there, and such that it contains the seeds of a promise of reconciliation. To the denizens of bohemia, to Daumier, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, to the

2. Whereas Beuys claimed a forward-looking, emancipatory *theory of social sculpture*, he often gave his work an archaic, purportedly timeless *look*. In fact both the theory and the look are dated. Annette Michelson noted that Beuys's fascination with electrical energy refers to both theories of electricity and formal aspects of electrical contraptions that leave off around 1830, "just after Faraday." This precise date is a symptom indeed. See "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim," a conversation between Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980).

Picasso of the Rose and Blue Periods, to Rouault, and many others, there were presented the faces of Don Quixote and Scapin, of laundresses and opera dancers, of dwarfs and nightclub singers, of saltimbanques and harlequins, the face of Mary Magdalene and that of Christ. It is to this gallery of portraits that Beuys adds his own, it is this gallery that he recapitulates and brings full circle, and which he reconnects—perhaps unwittingly—to its conditions of emergence. All these portraits show the artist as bohemian, the incarnation of suffering humanity and of the just man of the future. All are portraits of the artist as a proletarian.

*The proletarian*—a term that transcodes *the bohemian* as a social type that excludes *the bourgeois* but includes all the rest of humanity suffering from industrial capitalism—is not (or not necessarily) a member of the proletariat, that is, the working class. Of this latter, the myth of bohemia offers a displaced and transposed image; it creates of a transnational reality an imaginary land, a quasi-nation, without real territorial frontiers, since it is peopled with nomads and gypsies, unreal, like Jarry's Poland. The worker himself is rarely an inhabitant. The image of bohemia, one could say, is ideological to the extent that it occults the reality that it is precisely charged with transposing: the massive proletarianization of all the men and women who did not belong to the bourgeoisie. But *the proletarian* is a construction no less ideological—or mythical—of the same personage or social type that *the bohemian* expresses in the discourse of art and of literature. Simply, it expresses it in the discourse of political economy, that of Marx, and even more specifically, of the young Marx.

What, then, is a proletarian for Marx? He is someone—no matter who—who finds himself to have everything to lose from the capitalist regime and everything to gain from its overthrow. Everything to lose—which is to say, his very humanity—and everything to gain—this same humanity. The proletarian is, then, from the origins of industrial capitalism, a figure torn from the future horizon of his own disappearance. He is literally the prototype of the universal man of the future, the anticipated type of the free and autonomous man, of the emancipated man, of the man who will have fully realized his human essence. This essence lies in the two things that define man ontologically, as both a productive being and a social being. He is also a historical being. But as historical changes are only conceivable against the ground of an invariant substrate, they postulate an ontology, and the history of men can be nothing but the growth of productive forces and the progress of the relations of production. For Marx only conceives of man as *homo faber*: labor—the faculty of producing—is what makes him man, and the consciousness he has of it is the import of his humanity. It transforms the simple biological belonging to the human species into consciousness of participating in humankind, and thus makes of all products of labor the privileged place of collective living. This is why the social relation is the essence of the individual as *Gattungswesen* (species-being), and why as well, in turn, all social relations are, in the last instance, reduced to relations of production. These

latter will only be free and autonomous with the advent of the classless and stateless society, the communist society of which the proletariat is the avant-garde. In the meantime the class struggle will be the order, since the proletariat is exploited and alienated by the capitalist regime to which it is subjected, or, to put it another way, since *the proletarian*, dispossessed of his human essence by social relations of production which admit of nothing but the regime of private property, still needs to reappropriate it through struggle.

Even while already being, in anticipation, the type or prototype of man-in-general, the proletarian suffers under the yoke of capitalism from being exploited and alienated. Exploitation, which consists in the fact that surplus value is extracted from the unpaid labor time that the worker is constrained to offer to the owner of the means of production who employs him, is a damage he sustains, a damage which a regrouping of the working forces — as in unionization — could make amends for or lessen, to a certain degree. But alienation is not a damage that can be made up for; it is a wrong that must be righted.<sup>3</sup> It derives from the nature of the transaction between wageworker and employer meeting on the capitalist labor market, as if each were in possession of a ware in which the other is interested, in order to proceed to their exchange. The capitalist offers a salary and the worker his labor power. Now labor power — *Arbeitskraft* or *Arbeitsvermögen* — is, par excellence, that which defines or will define man as productive and social being, universal man in his essence. To have to sell his being as if it were a belonging is precisely what alienates *homo faber* and makes the worker into a *proletarian*. All languages distinguish the auxiliary verbs *to be* and *to have*; these are verbs that do not translate one into the other. But this is what the regime of private property pretends to do where it treats labor power as a commodity, “neither more nor less than sugar,” Marx says. Therein rests the irreparable wrong that Marx calls alienation and that only the abolition of private ownership of the means of production could right.

To say that the proletarian suffers from a confusion between two auxiliary verbs might seem rather light in view of what the working class has had to endure. Marx is much more concrete: it's his life that the worker alienates in selling his labor power to the capitalist; it's his muscular and cerebral force that he cedes to him; his blood that he spills for him; his skin that he wears out; his flesh that he exhausts. But this loss follows from exploitation; it does not involve a change of essence. After all, the salary that his boss pays him allows the worker to reconstitute his lost energies; it is even exactly calculated for a reproduction of his labor power to make up for the expenditure. It is true that the worker wears himself out, but, like everyone else, he is subjected to the irreversible march of time. It is also true that he gives away more time — labor time, that is, sole

3. For the difference between a *damage* and a *wrong*, see Jean-François Lyotard, *Le différend*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1983, pp. 18ff (forthcoming in English translation, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press).

measure of the value of the commodities he produces—than he receives back in the form of wages, but this is precisely because he is exploited. Once again, there is no case for calling that alienation.

In fact, the Hegelian concept of alienation disappears from the writings of Marx after the manuscripts of 1844. As for that of labor power, it does not appear before 1865, in *Wages, Prices, and Profit*. In the first edition of *Wage-Labor and Capital*, which dates from 1849, it is not his labor power that the wageworker sells to the capitalist, but his labor itself. It is only in the posthumous edition of 1891, amended by Engels (who accounts for it in the preface) to take account of the theoretical advances of *Capital*, that labor power takes the place of labor. This last conception is hard to support as such—unless one understands that Marx rehabilitates it under the table—without the concept of alienation, at least the ontological and dialectical sense that this concept carries and which remains from one end to the other essential to Marxist thought, lest one see the essential protagonist of the class struggle, the proletarian, vanish like a ghost. The 1849 conception was, moreover, more logical and more exact: the measure of exchange value being labor, and the measure of labor being time, it is obviously time that the capitalist treats as commodity and “measures with the clock, as he measures sugar with a scale.” But once the concept of alienation is abandoned, whether it be his labor or his labor time that the wageworker sells, no wrong is done him. He suffers the injury that is exploitation, but that is reparable. A better distributive justice could render exploitation tolerable, and it is this that has effectively occurred in the Western democracies. To justify the revolution and to write the abolition of capitalism onto the political agenda, it is necessary that the wageworker suffer a wrong that affects him in his human essence. If it is his labor power that he sells, if he is forced to part with the very thing that constitutes him in his humanity, then he suffers this wrong, then he is a proletarian and not simply a salaried worker, then this wrong must be righted for him to reappropriate his essence, his labor power. (The word “appropriation” betrays the embarrassment of a Marx caught in the trap of his own thought and forced to treat the essence of *homo faber* in theory in the same manner as the capitalist treats it in practice.)<sup>4</sup>

4. The interpretation I have offered of *alienation* thus conflates two separate moments of Marx's thought in a way that suggests that it is essential for the “romantic” Marx to survive in between the lines of the later, “scientific” Marx, in order to uphold the emancipatory horizon of Marxism. Only if the concept of *labor power* (i.e., the ability to deliver work at large, what Marx calls “simple, homogeneous, general, and abstract labor”) is given the same ontological meaning—defining man in his essence as a *species-being*—as, in the manuscripts of 1844, the concepts of *life-activity*, *productive life*, i.e., *species-life*, can it be said that: “From the relation of alienated labor to private property it also follows that the emancipation of society from private property, from servitude, takes the political form of the emancipation of the workers, not in the sense that only the latter's emancipation is involved, but because this emancipation includes the emancipation of humanity as a whole” (Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore, New York, McGraw Hill, 1964, p. 132).

Whether the messianic import was religious, political, or cultural in coloration, an enormous part of modern art and all its utopias have demanded that the wrong done to the proletariat be righted. In thus insisting that the labor power of man-in-general (the individual as *Gattungswesen*) be liberated and "dis-alienated," they have focused on the sense in which man has this power in himself, yet remains dispossessed to the extent, precisely, that he can merely have it, whereas it constitutes him, or will constitute him, in his being, in his belonging, at once unique and universal, to humankind. It is to this demand that modern or avant-garde artists (those at least who fully claimed those titles) have testified, by incarnating *the proletarian*. Obviously what is at stake here has nothing to do with certain ideological alignments by artists with proletarian positions — this existed, but remains the exception — and is not in contradiction with the objective economic situation of artists, which is more akin to that of a small entrepreneur than to that of a waged worker. But subjectively speaking the modern artist is the proletarian par excellence, because the regime of private property forces him to place on the art market things which will be treated as commodities, but which, in order to have an aesthetic value, must be productions and concretions of his labor power and, if possible, of nothing else. Even the bourgeois conception of art "reifies" the work (via the market) on the one hand and, on the other, judges it (via the aesthetic) for the way that it manifests this faculty of *producing value*, which, in order to be authentic, must be unique to the artist and must promise value for all, and thus must have its seat in the very nature of the artist as individual human-in-general.

Marx calls this universal faculty of producing value *labor power*; Beuys calls it *creativity*. Beuys is certainly not the first to give it this name, far from it. He is more like the last to be able to do it with conviction. Beuys's art, his discourse, his attitude, and above all the two faces presented by his persona — the suffering face and the utopian face — constitute the swan song of creativity, the most powerful of the modern myths. Perched on a threshold that he called "the end of modernity," he was in effect its doorman, but the postmodernity onto which he hoped to open the door was as black as his own death. For this tragic and optimistic Janus is above all pathetic; both his faces are turned backward, toward the modernity that he brings to a close. It could not be otherwise, since that which Beuys promised by creativity is what all of artistic modernity never ceased to promise, to hope for, to invoke as the emancipatory horizon of its achievement. "Everyone is an artist." Rimbaud already said it and Novalis already thought it long ago. The students of 1968, in Paris, in California, and gathered around Beuys in Düsseldorf, proclaimed it once again and wrote it on the walls. It always meant, and this since the German romantics: "power to the imagination." It has never become a reality, at least not in that sense. But all that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have implied for the will to emancipation and the desire for dis-alienation has always meant: everyone is an artist, but the masses don't have the power to actualize this potential because they are oppressed, alienated,

and exploited; only those few, whom we stupidly call professional artists, know that in reality their vocation is to incarnate this unactualized potential. Hence the two faces of modernity, of which it is Beuys's pathetic grandeur to have worn both: the public, revolutionary, and pedagogical face, the one that is convinced that an adequate teaching will liberate creativity; and the secret, insane, and rebellious face, the one that claims that creativity is already of this world precisely there where it lies fallow and in waiting, crude and savage: in the art of madmen, children, and primitives. If he had lived in the Germany of Weimar, Beuys could have been at one and the same time Gropius and Beckmann, or perhaps a Klee amended by his teacher Lehmbruck.

*Joseph Beuys. Academy of Fine Arts, Düsseldorf.*



Clearly Marx does not slip out of the mythic fabric of modernity; he is even one of the most formidable of its craftsmen. Creativity is to the cultural field what labor power is to the field of political economy. The two fields imbricate throughout the course of modernity, and in all possible manners. With Beuys, this is why the translation attempted here is so easy—the two fields precisely overlap—and this is what signals to us that their dialectic is over. For, during the last decade of his life and work, Beuys constructed an actual political economy on which he hoped to found his theory of *social sculpture*. Its anchor point was, of course, creativity, which is a universal faculty of man, and even the singular one that makes him man. “Der Mensch ist das kreative Wesen,” Beuys said, as if echoing Marx. Like labor power, but unlike talent—a notion on which classical aesthetics is based—creativity is the potential of each and every one, and it precedes the division of labor: being the capacity to produce, in general. From this it follows that everyone is an artist and that art is not a profession. All productive activity, whether of goods or of services, can be called art; creativity is the true capital, and the exchange of goods is to the flow of creativity within the social body what the circulatory system is to the flow of vital forces in the individual body. (This is what the *Honigpumpe* from the 1977 Documenta symbolized.)<sup>5</sup> In order that this utopia become reality and that creativity be “disalienated,” goods, money included, must not be commodities. Money, called “production capital,” will thus be created from scratch by a central bank (it embodies neither time nor labor power) and distributed democratically. Once placed in the hands of social agents, it would become “consumption capital,” a kind of paper money with no value but that of representing a certain purchasing-power, a value that it will lose in the course of the transaction before returning to the central bank and being reinjected into the economic circuit. Beuys intended in this way to neutralize the private ownership of the means of production.<sup>6</sup> This utopia is pretty, naive, and hardly original. It has Fourierist and Proudhonist overtones, and Marx had already denounced something similar proposed by John Gray. It is difficult to see more than an involuntary caricature of numerous broken promises of modernity in it, a slightly grotesque farce with nothing but a

5. Which suggests that, if Beuys's “electricity theory” refers back to Faraday, his “physiology” refers back to Harvey (as does his “medicine” to Paracelsus). But to translate the economic flow of merchandise into the image of the blood circulation is, again, very much a nineteenth-century idea.

6. See Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979, p. 264. From Tisdall's account, it is not, however, absolutely clear to what extent Beuys is indebted for his political economy to his former student and secretary, Johannes Stüttgen. His own account is best expressed in the “Munich discourse”: “CAPITAL is not money (means of production); CAPITAL is ability and the product of ability. Here there appear further proofs of the idea that ‘Everyone is an Artist,’ proofs of the fact that ability really is a lever. Money is not an economic value! . . . That approach will logically develop the social totality, taking as its starting-point the creative human being as the creator of the world, and proceeding from freedom by way of law to new economic laws and a credit system for the public good” (Joseph Beuys, “Talking about One's Own Country: Germany,” in *In Memoriam Joseph Beuys: Obituaries, Essays, Speeches*, Bonn, Inter Nationes, 1986, pp. 50–51).

retrospective meaning. The last of the proletarians has tried to right the wrong of his condition, which is that of artists and of everyman, by mapping the hopes and prophecies of the modern cultural field onto the field of political economy, in order to revive them. But he has not seen that if they in fact find a part of their historical truth there, it is in the past tense, in terms of the translations made possible by this mapping, and not in the future tense, in terms of the emancipation it was *the proletarian's* vocation to promise.

There remains the suffering of the proletarian and the pathetic irony that means that if the promise of emancipation should be abandoned, the character of the proletarian would vanish. Beuys, the sculptor, knew how, with pain and humor alike, to work out the contradictions that Beuys, the charlatan economist, pretended with utter seriousness to dissolve. The talented artist didn't do the same thing as the prophet of creativity. When it is convincing, his work avows, it



*Joseph Beuys. Raum 90.000 DM. 1981.*

promises nothing. Until the new order arrives, money is capital, not creativity. Everyone has not become an artist, and the art market continues to treat as commodities the productions exuded by the "creativity" of those it recognizes as professional artists. At this level Beuys was coddled: alienated, perhaps, but not exploited. *Raum 90.000 DM*, which is the title of an environment produced in 1981, states its own price.<sup>7</sup> Strewn over the room, five old, rusted drums, once having contained various industrial chemical products, warn of the ecological damages and wrongs wrought by industry (one of them had contained fluorocar-

7. First shown at the Galerie Jöllenbeck in Cologne. A photo-album was subsequently produced, with a short presentation text by Sarenco (Joseph Beuys, *Raum 90.000 DM*, Milan, Factotummultipla, 1982).





bon, the pollutant responsible for destroying the ozone layer), and testify to the consumption of use value. Useless and used-up, the drums will be treated nonetheless as precious objects by the commercial gallery that shows them, wholly aware of their exchange value. But by arranging them as unaesthetically as possible (they don't even make an interesting formal configuration), Beuys succeeds in making their presence incongruous and frustrating. They are different sizes and filled to different levels with scraps of aluminum slag that have been fused together. One of them overflows, and a ladle is attached to the mound of debris. The staging is allegorical, and the allegory is pessimistic: under the conditions of industrial capitalism (the containers), artists' creativity (the contents) can only congeal into commodities and become alienated in their exchange value. The artist is supposed to draw from the well of his labor power, but the alchemy that turns it into gold for the dealer leaves him nothing but slag ("coagulated labor-time," Marx would say).

In a corner of the room, facing this arrangement, is crammed a large copper bathtub filled to the brim with a solution of sulfuric acid. This is another allegory of the artist, and this time the well is alive. Under the conditions of a renewal (the container: the theme of the bathtub has autobiographical resonances of baptism and rebirth within Beuys's work), artists' creativity (the con-



tents: as corrosive as the original contents of the drums was polluting) preserves its subversive potential. But the container is itself contained, the bathtub is not bare but enveloped by a thick layer of terra cotta that seems to protect it and to hide in the depths of its material some strange pouches that the sculptor has modelled as if they were the pockets of a beggar's wallet, or of the artist's famous vest. The dialectic of contained containers (of conditioning conditions) does not stop there, and, even overflowing with corrosive labor power, the bathtub does not escape exchange value. Getting the jump on the dealer, Beuys gouged the price of the work into the still-damp clay: 90.000 DM. Illusion has no foothold. Time gets the last word. Beuys, who understood materials like no one else, knew that, in drying, the clay would contract and would end by cracking. Whether by chance or by design, it happened that one of the fissures has neatly sliced through the price and separated the nine from the zeros, symbolically canceling the monetary value of the work. The bathtub of creativity breaks out of its sheath of reification and the artist strips off his old-man's cloak, ready to bear the novices of a Beuysian utopia to the baptismal font. The ensemble is more ridiculous than sublime and, formally, only semiconvincing. To the left of the bathtub, negligently pinned to the wall, a collage of notes and sketches mounted between two sheets of glass pretends to explain the work and, of course, explains nothing.

Time always has the last word, in effect, and time cracks the statues and corrodes utopia more surely than sulfuric acid. Creativity has nothing subversive left; that myth is dated. *Raum 90.000 DM* subscribes to it, but also exposes its extreme vulnerability, witness to the hope of *the proletarian* but attesting as well the comic aspect of this character. With Beuys gone, and the concretions of his talent (and not of his creativity) more than ever fetishized by a necrophilic art market, time will decide if his sculpture should survive the ruin of *social sculpture*, this modern *Kunstwollen* that he ignited one last time.

In counterpoint to Joseph Beuys, one is tempted to place Andy Warhol, to oppose to the vitalism and populism of the former, the *morbidezza* and worldliness of the latter. In the art of the past twenty years, only Warhol equals Beuys in legend-value—that is, media-value—and the shadow of both of them hovers equally over the art of the younger generation. But Beuys is a hero and Warhol is a star. The first had to immolate himself on a stage dating from the *Comédie humaine*, and his aesthetic is theatrical, confusing art and life in the same authenticity. He lived and died, a perfectly cast character of bohemia. The second died as though by mistake, after having survived, as though by necessity, an assassination attempt, made useless by the fact that all the front pages were already taken up, on that day, by the real assassination of Robert Kennedy. His life and his art were projections of the same life-style, and his aesthetic is that of the simulacrum. Beuys's art demands a myth of origin and a historical telos, that of Warhol the fiction of the eternal return and the steady state of posthistory. For one, capitalism remained the cultural horizon to leave behind; for the other, it was simply nature. Beuys, like Marx a bourgeois German, wanted to incarnate the proletarian; Warhol, an American immigrant of working-class origins, wanted to be a machine. At the center of all these oppositions is the fact that Beuys based art on will and thus on a principle of production, and Warhol on desire and thus on a principle of consumption; that Beuys believed in creativity and Warhol did not; and that for Beuys art was labor while for Warhol it was commerce. Nevertheless, labor and commerce have this in common: the domain of these notions is that of political economy. Indeed political economy is divided up by these concepts that, beyond this field, also divide up the anthropological one: either labor or exchange is primary and defines the social essence of man. Either history or structure. The opposition not only opposes Marxist to liberal economics; it traverses all the human sciences and colors them with economism. That art is available to be decoded by means of political economy does not mean that it is absorbed into it. That, with Beuys and Warhol, art is decoded so obviously by political economy would mean instead that the time has come to decode the code rather than to decode messages by means of it, and that economic values—and the very notion of value—are nothing but a dated translation, neither the most natural nor the most fruitful, of what we must continue to call, lacking a better term, aesthetic judgment.

STEFAN GERMER

*One fact is certain: commentaries on Art are the result of shifts in the economy. It seems doubtful that such commentaries can be described as political.*

— Marcel Broodthaers

I.

Walter Benjamin suggested that in order to establish the political tendency of a work of art one should establish its *position within* the relations of production rather than its *attitude toward* them. In this way political commitment is linked to *artistic technique*. An engaged artist is expected to show more than mere partisanship: a reflection upon the conditions in which he produces must be made part of his artistic project.<sup>1</sup>

II.

In an open letter of October 3, 1972, Marcel Broodthaers demanded that Joseph Beuys reflect on the conditions of his production. He reminded Beuys that artistic production is inseparable from its institutional framework, which—far from being something marginal—determines the work of art in its very

\* I wish to thank Hans Haacke, Anne Rorimer, and Bettina Ruhrberg for their suggestions and support. I also want to thank Julia Bernard, without whose insistence this essay would not have been written.

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984, pp. 297–309 (this text was originally delivered as an address to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris on April 27, 1934).

structure.<sup>2</sup> Broodthaers wrote his letter on the occasion of an exhibition of works by artists from Amsterdam, Paris, and Düsseldorf held at the Guggenheim Museum that year, in which works by both Beuys and Broodthaers were featured.<sup>3</sup>

Broodthaers found participating in a Guggenheim exhibition problematic, and in fact eventually withdrew his works, because the museum had cancelled Hans Haacke's first American museum show the year before.<sup>4</sup> In a by now notorious incident, the museum cancelled the show when Haacke refused to exclude two documentations of Manhattan real estate holdings and a poll of the museum's visitors. In a letter to the artist, Thomas Messer, the museum's director, justified the cancellation:

We have held consistently that under our Charter we are pursuing esthetic and educational objectives that are self-sufficient and without ulterior motive. On those grounds the trustees have established policies that exclude the active engagement toward social and political ends. It is well understood, in this connection, that art may have social and political consequences, but these, we believe, are furthered by indirection and by the generalized, exemplary force that works of art may exert upon the environment, not as you propose, by using political means to achieve political ends, no matter how desirable these may appear to be in themselves. We maintain, in other words, that while art cannot be arbitrarily confined, our institutional role is limited. Consequently, we function within such limits, leaving to others that which we consider outside our professional competence.<sup>5</sup>

Even though Messer stated that he had no intention of restricting artistic practice, he formulated the conditions that a work of art had to fulfill in order to be acceptable within the museum space. Following the idealist concept of the autonomy of art, art is seen as distinct from the social, and the museum is defined as a neutral, nonsocial, apolitical institution.

The work of art is expected to confirm this fiction and thus to appear as the result of a process of production which, in its *artistic* character, differs from other

2. Marcel Broodthaers, "Mon cher Beuys," Düsseldorf, September 25, 1972; published under the title "Politik der Magie? Offener Brief von Broodthaers an Beuys," *Rheinische Post*, October 3, 1972; reprinted in Marcel Broodthaers, *Magie. Art et Politique*, Paris, Multiplicata, 1973, pp. 8-12; and reproduced in Birgit Pelzer, "Recourse to the Letter," *October*, no. 42 (Fall 1987), pp. 174-176.

3. See *Amsterdam-Paris-Düsseldorf*, New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1972, nos. 108 and 109 (Beuys) and nos. 110 and 111 (Broodthaers).

4. For the fullest account and analysis of this incident, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Property Values: Hans Haacke, Real Estate and the Museum," in Brian Wallis, ed., *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986, pp. 20-37.

5. See Thomas M. Messer's letter to Hans Haacke of March 19, 1971, published in, "Gurgles around the Guggenheim," *Studio International*, vol. 181, no. 934 (June 1971), pp. 248-249.

forms of social production. Far better than any restriction of content, this institutional insistence on the specificity of artistic practice neutralizes all political implications of an artwork, since it forces the artist to depoliticize his work in his choice of means. Only in a generalized and unspecific way is "outside reality" accepted into the museum space; the boundary between art and society is thus kept intact, while the social determination of the artwork remains unreflected and the political character of museum decisions unacknowledged.

Haacke's works did not follow these rules. Extending the project of Marcel Duchamp—who had demonstrated the degree to which the concept of the aesthetic autonomy was dependent upon the institutional mechanisms of exclusion—Haacke introduced systems into the museum space that challenged its alleged neutrality. These were systems that functioned in accordance with physical, biological, and social laws of change, growth, and exploitation. Haacke described the effect of this confrontation:

If you work with real-time systems, well you probably go beyond Duchamp's position. Real-time systems are double agents. They might run under the heading "art," but this culturalization does not prevent them from operating as normal.<sup>6</sup>

While Duchamp took the *separation* of cultural and social spheres as his point of departure, demonstrating that it was not the specific quality of an object but only the place and form of its presentation that decided its status, Haacke insisted on the *continuity* between both spheres, thereby unmasking the interests governing the seemingly neutral museum space, and thus making the political uses of culture apparent. While Duchamp *used* the concept of the autonomy of art, Haacke *attacked* it.

### III.

The cancellation of Haacke's exhibition made apparent the extent to which the museum expected its specific mechanisms of exclusion to be respected. This meant that an artist's political practice would have to take into account the institutional limitations of his role. Without consideration of the political character of the institutional framework within which a work of art is presented, the work is in danger of being neutralized, absorbed, and turned into an insignia of power. Broodthaers defined this very threat:

Art is a prisoner of its phantasms and its function as magic; it hangs on our bourgeois walls as a sign of power, it flickers along the peripheries of our history like a shadow-play—but is it artistic?<sup>7</sup>

6. Jeanne Siegel, "An Interview with Hans Haacke," *Arts Magazine*, May 1971, p. 21.

7. Marcel Broodthaers, "To be *bien pensant* . . . or not to be. To be blind." (1975), trans. Paul Schmidt, *October*, no. 42 (Fall 1987), p. 35.

From this vantage point it would be foolhardy to rely on the "magic of art" or to believe in its power. Whoever speaks of the power of art deceives himself about the true character of political power and the actual function of art in society. Wishing to find aesthetic answers to political questions, he believes that, by inventing rather than analyzing social conditions, he could actually contribute to their change. Certainly the most important recent exponent of such a belief was Joseph Beuys.

When the show of the Düsseldorf artists opened at the Guggenheim, it became clear how quickly and easily Beuys's political messages could be absorbed by the institution. Beuys showed a primitive flag and a fur trunk, an ensemble he named *Gundfana of the West—Genghis Khan's Flag* and an object that detailed the social program of his *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* ("Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum"). Both pieces, which the artist explicitly characterized as political, were shown in the very museum that had banned Haacke's work because of its political nature.

Sensitive to the political reasons for the museum's inclusion and exclusion of artists, Broodthaers decided to withdraw his works as an act of solidarity with Haacke.<sup>8</sup> Beuys, meanwhile, remained indifferent to the Guggenheim's act of censorship. Beuys's position led to the suspicion that there was in fact a *connection* between his definition of art and politics and his indifference to an actual political conflict; and therefore Broodthaers raised precisely this issue in his questioning of Beuys's equation of art and politics.

#### IV.

To Broodthaers the situation had an exemplary character, and he therefore renounced the idea of a direct polemic against Beuys; instead he formulated his critique in the form of a historical fiction. In his open letter, Broodthaers reports that he has found, in a dilapidated Cologne slum tenement, a letter addressed to Richard Wagner from Jacques Offenbach; and he has decided to copy this letter and send it to Beuys in lieu of his own.<sup>9</sup> In the fragmentarily legible document, Offenbach comments on the difference between his and Wagner's conception of the relationship between art and politics and expresses his doubts regarding Wagner's receiving the patronage of King Ludwig II of Bavaria. In the historical fiction the allusion to recent New York events becomes clear:

King Louis [Ludwig] II had Hans H. sent away (from) his castles. His Majesty prefers you to this specialist of compositions for the flute.

I can understand—if it is a matter of artistic choice. But is not

8. According to the Guggenheim Museum's wall-list, Broodthaers's works were still shown in New York, but withdrawn from the subsequent presentations of the exhibition.

9. For Broodthaers's open letters, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Open Letters, Industrial Poems," *October*, no. 42 (Fall 1987), pp. 67–100; and Birgit Pelzer, "Recourse to the Letter," *ibid.*, pp. 157–181.

the enthusiasm that His Majesty displays for you motivated by a political choice as well? I hope this question disturbs you as much as it does me. What ends do you serve, Wagner? Why? How?<sup>10</sup>

Offenbach and Wagner are more than merely alter egos for Broodthaers and Beuys respectively. They represent two fundamentally different conceptions of the social role of the artist. Broodthaers labels the identification of art and politics *Wagner*, and has Offenbach say:

Your essay "Art and Revolution" . . . discuss . . . magic . . . politics . . . which you must be aware of. The politics of magic? of beauty or of ugliness? . . . Messiah, . . . In this struggle against the degeneration of art the musical drama would thus be the only form capable of uniting all the arts. I can hardly go along with that contention of yours, and at any rate I wish to register my disagreement if you allow a definition of art to include one of politics . . . and . . . magic.<sup>11</sup>

Broodthaers refers here to events that immediately preceded the New York exhibition. At Documenta V in Kassel (June 30–October 8, 1972) Beuys had set up an "Information Office" to propagate the ideas of his *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*. The program of that organization was characterized precisely by the confusion or conflation of art and politics that Broodthaers criticizes in his open letter. At Documenta, Beuys had stated:

In the future all truly political intentions will have to be artistic ones. This means that they will have to stem from human creativity and individual liberty. This is why I concern myself mainly with the problem of schools, with pedagogy. But mine is a model of freedom that must be understood as revolutionary. It is a model that issues from human thinking and the education of man in this sphere of freedom . . . this cultural sector, of which the institutions, the means of information are part. There would be a free press, free TV, and so on. They must be free from all state intervention. I am trying to develop a revolutionary model that formulates the basic democratic order in accordance with the people's wishes, because we want the rule of the people. . . . I want an area of freedom, which should be recognized as the area that breeds revolution, that changes the basic democratic order and then restructures the economic sector in a way that will serve the people's needs and not the needs of a minority that wants to make its profits. That is the connection, and this I define as Art."<sup>12</sup>

10. Quoted after the reprinted letter in *October*, *ibid.*, pp. 175–176.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

12. Joseph Beuys, quoted in Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, Cologne, Dumont Verlag, 1973, p. 163ff (my translation).

In this conception the position of art is secure, and the role of the artist is unquestioned. By identifying political and artistic practice with one another, Beuys avoids the issue of the social relevance of his activity, since he borrows for it the aura of the political. The necessary precondition for this is the aestheticization of the political. Abstracting from actual conditions, Beuys in effect invents state and society, thus making both into artistic creations. In this aestheticization of politics Beuys follows Rudolf Steiner,<sup>13</sup> who, in his series of lectures entitled *Über die Bienen* ("On the Bees," 1923), had presented the organization of bee communities as a model for human society. Steiner defined this organization as the result of two *formative processes*: the "crystalline-anorganic" construction of the honey-combs, and the "organic-energetic" production of warmth within these combs. By analogy, Beuys could declare state and society (or, as he called them in a telling biologicistic metaphor, the "social organism") to be *works of sculpture*. In this fashion artistic practice was made the paradigm of all human activity, and creativity was presented as the means to shape and change society.

Consequently, Beuys defined the artist's task as one of making people aware of their creativity, as a demonstration of the possibility of change by employing creativity, and finally as the initiation of the necessary changes. The goal of this sculptural-political process was defined as a reorganization of society in a fundamentally democratic fashion.<sup>14</sup> Beuys's political program thus combined ideas as different as Steiner's definition of state and society, the concept of extended creativity put forward by the Fluxus movement, and the political demands formulated by the 1960s *Ausserparlamentarische Opposition* (APO, or Extra-parliamentary Opposition).

The intention of the Fluxus movement had been to free creativity from its confinement to the "artistic field" by generating an awareness of creativity inherent in every activity, and was thus directed at the abolishment of the distinction between artistic and nonartistic practices. As Fluxus's principal organizer, George Maciunas, declared:

The aims of Fluxus are social (not aesthetic) like the LEF Group—1929—in the Soviet Union—and are directed to: step by step elimination of the Fine Arts. . . . This motivates the desire to redirect the use of materials and human ability into socially constructive purposes. . . . So Fluxus is strictly against the artist with an income. At most it can have the pedagogic function of making clear how superfluous art is and how superfluous the object itself is. . . . Secondly, Fluxus is against art as a medium for the artist's ego . . . and tends

13. For the impact of Steiner's ideas on Beuys, see Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, New York, The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, 1979, in particular *SaFG-SaUG* (1953–58) and *Honey Pump*. In connection with Beuys's political actions, see *ibid.*, p. 269.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 265ff.

therefore towards the spirit of the collective, to anonymity and ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM . . . the best Fluxus composition is one which is most strongly impersonal and ready-made.<sup>15</sup>

Beuys shared the Fluxus movement's definition of extended creativity; his own practice, however, differed from the conception sketched by Maciunas to such an extent as to appear almost as its opposite. The difference was intentional: Beuys criticized Fluxus artists for what he considered an obsession with negating the traditional definition of art. Beuys insisted that instead of repeatedly demonstrating the futility of the separation between the artistic and social spheres, artists should apply their conception of extended creativity directly to society:

They [the Fluxus artists] depended on a dramatic mise-en-scène of materials, without wanting to specify concepts. They were lacking a theory, an epistemological substructure, so to speak, with a clearly defined goal. They held a mirror up to the people without any effect and without any improvement of the situation.<sup>16</sup>

Beuys believed that Steiner's theories provided him with the "epistemological substructure" he found lacking in Fluxus events, while the idea of "direct democracy" was the "clearly defined goal" that would permit him to go beyond dadalike actions—to genuine political action.

The concept of direct democracy had initially been formulated by the extraparliamentary opposition in the late 1960s. In those years West Germany's two major parties—Social Democrats and Christian Democrats—had formed the so-called Great Coalition, which encountered only weak opposition within parliament. This meant that any real reflection upon crucial political issues—the suspension of fundamental rights in a "state of emergency," the monopolization of economic power in West Germany, the country's relationship with the U.S. during the Vietnam war, continuities between the Third Reich and the Federal Republic—was left to the student movement, which understood itself as part of a larger extraparliamentary opposition.

Peter Brüchner and Johannes Agnoli analyzed the failure of the representative, parliamentary system in their book *Die Transformation der Demokratie* ("The Transformation of Democracy"). The authors demonstrated how the parliament functioned as an agency for capitalist interests, excluded the majority of the people from political decisions, and was both unable and unwilling to control increasing monopolization in the economic sector. As a solution, the authors called for the formation of a *Fundamentalopposition*, which would organize itself

15. From a letter to Tomas Schmit of January 1964, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 84.

16. Beuys, in Adriani, Konnertz, Thomas, p. 53 (my translation).

in a system of councils that were to supplement and eventually to supplant the parliamentary system.<sup>17</sup>

Beuys borrowed the jargon but not the analysis of the extraparliamentary opposition when he formulated his political program. Thus his various organizational attempts—which ranged from the formation of the *Studentenpartei* (Students' Party, 1967) to the *Organisation der Nichtwähler* (Organization of Non-Voters, 1970) to the *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, 1971) appear more as a mimicry of politics than an actual attempt to politicize artistic practice. In no respect do the programs of Beuys's organizations correspond to political realities. Instead of following the extraparliamentary opposition in its analysis of the economic structures of West German society, Beuys declared the "abolishment of the two-party dictatorship" his main goal, and—adapting one of Steiner's ideas for current purposes—demanded the "tri-partition of the social organism" in order to liberate individual creativity. Taken as a whole, the mixture of Steiner's ideas, the Fluxus concept of extended creativity, and the slogans of the extraparliamentary opposition formed less a coherent political program than a monumental apology for the artist. What had appeared as a radicalization of the Fluxus position was in fact a regression from it, since for Beuys *only the application, not the concept of art* seemed problematic. His enterprise is thus ultimately a conservative one, aiming only at restoring to the marginalized artist a central social role. This explains Beuys's insistence on the importance of *individual* creativity.

It was this concept that had most fascinated Beuys in Steiner's thought. Steiner declared creativity a transhistorical quality of man, which enabled him to shape the world according to his desires. For Beuys, as for Steiner, change is a question of subjective volition:

If one is willing to enlarge art—the concept of art—to such an extent that it would also comprise the concept of science, and thus the whole of human creativity, then it follows that change of the conditions is a matter of human volition, . . . which means: if man realized the power of self-determination, then starting from it he will one day build democracy. He will abolish all nondemocratic institutions simply by practicing self-determination.<sup>18</sup>

17. Johannes Agnoli and Peter Brückner, *Die Transformation der Demokratie*, Frankfurt/Main, 1968.

18. Beuys, in Adriani, Konnertz, Thomas, p. 154 (my translation).

## V.

Belief in the power of creativity is both utopian and reactionary. *Utopian* because this concept gives back to the individual his labor power and thus opposes the division of labor characteristic of capitalist societies. *Reactionary* because it makes this reappropriation appear as an act of individual volition, independent of all social preconditions.

The historical context for Beuys's hypostasis of individual creativity can be determined in a more specific fashion. Post-World-War-II West German ideology has been characterized by de-historicization and concentration on the labor power of the individual. In an attempt to repress the memory of fascism, all historical context was obscured and all energies were directed to *Wiederaufbau* ("Reconstruction"), represented as the achievement of individuals. In this perspective, the economic restoration appeared as a *Wirtschaftswunder* ("Economic Miracle"), and the work of the individual assumed mythical status.

In true Herculean manner, Beuys defined his own biography as a sequence of "works" and made all historical reality disappear behind a self-created myth of the artist-hero. This self-mythification begins with the crash of Luftwaffe pilot Beuys in the Crimea and his acceptance by a local group of Tartars, who shelter him with felt and fat.<sup>19</sup> The myth continues in the invention of state and society. In the end, Beuys's audience is presented with a system of interconnecting links and mutually supporting interpretations and definitions that no longer permit a consideration of anything outside the system. This system can only be understood through its own carefully constructed "evidence"; it is especially in this respect that Beuys's procedure resembles that of Richard Wagner.

The composer had attempted to compensate for the social marginalization of the artist by extending the aesthetic realm to encompass the whole of society. In his exile in Zurich—following the failure of the Revolution of 1848–49, in which Wagner had played an important part—he elaborated this concept in the essays "Art and Revolution," "The Artwork of the Future," and "Opera and Drama."<sup>20</sup>

Taking Greek tragedy as his model, Wagner envisioned the "artwork of the future" as the center of a cult in which the people as a whole would take part and which would fundamentally affect every individual. Originally, Wagner linked the creation of such a *Gesamtkunstwerk* to the overthrow of the capitalist system, and particularly to the abolishment of the division of labor. Once the preoccupa-

19. For a demystification, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Beuys—The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* (June 1980), pp. 35ff; and, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim," *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980), pp. 3–21.

20. Richard Wagner, "Kunst und Revolution," in Dieter Borchmeyer, ed., *Dichtungen und Schriften*, vol. III, Frankfurt/Main, 1983, pp. 273ff. See also Rainer Franke, *Richard Wagners Zürcher Kunstschriften*, Hamburg, 1983.

tion with everyday needs had ceased — Wagner wrote<sup>21</sup> — all activities of liberated mankind would assume artistic features; thus the whole society would become a work of art.

But while the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was in this manner first conceived as the consequence of successful revolution, its meaning changed as Wagner's disappointment with the political situation grew. Eventually, Wagner envisioned the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as merely the *prophecy* of revolution and ultimately as its *substitute*. Even though none of its social preconditions were given, Wagner still insisted on realizing his *Gesamtkunstwerk*; he wanted to reconcile aesthetically what had remained irreconcilable in society. In order to do so he had to change both his own status and that of his work: while at first he wanted to express the dominant tendency of his epoch and thus conceived of his work as part of a universal social change, he now claimed this universality for his art. The precondition for this claim was de-historicization, and thus Wagner's work finds its content in the prehistorical world of German myth.

Mythology permits the artist to style himself as a creator who is unbound by historical conditions and is able to shape the world according to his own desires. To be convincing, however, this fiction depends on the exclusion of every remnant of historical reality. In Wagner's work this operation took the form of an aesthetic substitution: in order to make the social totality disappear, the work itself had to assume a totalizing character. The artist thus forced music, poetry, and dance together, pretending that these media converged in the same project, while their amalgamation was in fact achieved only by his volition, not by any inner necessity. The combination of media is supposed to form a coherent work of art, which in its perfection and its overdetermination of aesthetic means anxiously conceals the process of production behind the spectacular appearance of the product. Adorno defined Wagner's formal principle as precisely this attempt to conceal the conditions of production behind the appearance of the product, and continued in his description:

This is the objective explanation for what is generally thought of in psychological terms as Wagner's mendacity. To make works of art into magical objects means that men worship their own labour because they are unable to recognize it as such. It is this that makes his works pure appearance — an absolutely immediate, as it were, spatial phenomenon.<sup>22</sup>

The "magic of the artwork" resembles the phantasmagorical appeal of the fetish: instead of counterbalancing its attraction, the work of art mimics the

21. See Borchmeyer, *Dichtungen und Schriften*, p. 301.

22. Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans., Rodney Livingstone, London, New Left Books, 1981, p. 83.

commodity. Like the commodity it is worshipped because the labor, the society, and the history that produced the work of art are concealed behind its spectacular effects. Wagner's aesthetic ideology kept him from realizing the congruence between his practice and the fetishization of commodities. Having stylized the aesthetic realm into a totality and thus remaining unable to determine his position in relation to the conditions of production, Wagner did not realize that, in concealing the social determination of his works, he followed that very determination.

## VI.

Beuys was the victim of a similar illusion. Unlike Wagner, however, he could no longer maintain the credibility of his production by presenting the work of art as a self-contained, autonomous whole separate from society, since he worked in a period not only in which the commodity status of the art object had become apparent, but in which avant-garde practice constituted itself through a reflection upon that status. In this situation, Beuys renounced the fiction of the work of art as an autonomous whole and attempted to escape the social restrictions of artistic practice by regressing to a presocietal state, archaically defining his work through the *presence* of the artist. This displacement proved to be a very efficient strategy for avoiding the question of the social relevance of artistic practice, because it allowed Beuys to acknowledge the particularity of his art objects while still claiming universality for his practice as a whole.

The fragmentary character of Beuys's objects is thus deceptive: although they mimic the allegorical form by inviting the beholders' participation, their understanding is always already preestablished within the totalizing system of meaning that Beuys supplied for them. It is within an interpretative discourse emanating from the artist himself that meaning is assigned to the individual works. The beholder's role is thereby restricted to ratifying a *Gesamtkunstwerk* whose logic of production eludes him, since it stems from the artist's volition. Beuys's concept thus required an interpretation that reduced critical commentary to a tautological repetition of his ideas, an interpretation thus incapable of assessing the artist's claims about the social and political implications of his work.

As in Wagner's case, the political is replaced by a totalizing aesthetic concept. But the emphasis with which Beuys's objects insist on *being something other than just art objects* betrays the act of repression necessary to maintain that fiction. Moreover, the more Beuys refused to acknowledge the social conditions of his practice, the more he fell prey to them. The concept of universal creativity prohibits the artist from recognizing the actual social function of artistic practice, since it blurs the boundaries between art and society, thus making it impossible to reflect on the institutional limitations of artistic production.

## VII.

Broodthaers takes these institutional limitations as his starting point. By choosing Offenbach as his example, he indicates that artistic practice is less a mythical act of primal creation than the result of the necessities of the culture industry and the pressures of political censorship. The artist's political engagement cannot consist in expanding art into society, but only in reducing art's claims through the deconstruction of those mechanisms that establish and maintain "the artistic" as different from other social practices. Instead of supplying the market with so-called "political art," which would maintain the illusionary belief in the power of art, Broodthaers undermined this confidence in art through strategies of ironic affirmation.

Jacques Offenbach's work provided an example for such an intellectual subversion of the apparatus of production, which the composer neither owned nor controlled; thus it seemed to Broodthaers a suitable strategy for those forced to cater to the culture industry. Like Wagner, Offenbach operated in the reactionary period following the defeat of the 1848 revolution, but unlike Wagner, Offenbach could not take refuge to a mythical past, since his genre—the operetta—required cooperation with existing forces and conditions. Offenbach provided his audience with the entertainment it believed art to be; but he entertained his public with a parody of its own social mores and expectations. Offenbach's operettas could thus become a powerful instrument of oppositional critique. Siegfried Kracauer, who during his exile from Nazi Germany wrote a biography of the composer, was especially interested in this oppositional strategy:

In a time characterized by the hardening of the bourgeoisie and the almost complete impotence of the Left, Offenbach's operetta became the decisive medium of revolutionary protest. It provoked laughter that penetrated the prescribed silence and excited its audience to opposition while seeming only to entertain it.<sup>23</sup>

Broodthaers realized the usefulness of Offenbach's strategy of ironic affirmation in a situation in which a self-mystification such as that of Joseph Beuys tended to obscure the actual social position of the artist. Like Offenbach, Broodthaers undermined his audience's expectations of art by fulfilling them—a strategy already evident in his declaration that the desire to make money and invent "something insincere" stood at the beginning of his artistic career.<sup>24</sup> Art is

23. Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976, p. 280.

24. I am, of course, referring to the first exhibition at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels in 1964 and the statement published by the artist on that occasion. For a discussion of Broodthaers's statement, see Buchloh, "Open Letters," p. 73ff.

refused any quality that would separate it from the commodity, and thus the actual status of the arts in the era of universal commodification is defined:

I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of Art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of Art into merchandise. This process is accelerated nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. If we are concerned with the phenomenon of reification, then Art is a particular representation of the phenomenon—a form of tautology. We could then justify it as an affirmation of existing conditions, which would at give it a suspect character.<sup>25</sup>

25. Marcel Broodthaers, "Über die Kunst—Im Sinne einer Antwort an Jürgen Harten," *Magazine Kunst*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1975), pp. 73–74.



*Figure from* The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandeville.

# The Sound of *O* in *Othello*: The Real of the Tragedy of Desire

JOEL FINEMAN

*Thus it follows that in love, it is not the meaning that counts, but rather the sign, as in everything else. In fact, therein lies the whole catastrophe.*

—Jacques Lacan, *Television*

*The sexual impasse exudes the fictions that rationalize the impossible within which it originates. I don't say they are imagined; like Freud, I read in them the invitation to the real that underwrites them.*

—Jacques Lacan, *Television*

*Iago: I must show out a flag and sign of love, Which is indeed but sign.*

*Othello*, 1.1.156–157

*Othello: O, Desdemon dead, Desdemon dead, O, O!*

*Othello*, 5.2.282

I have two preliminary remarks.<sup>1</sup> First, this paper adapts material from a

1. This paper was originally delivered at a colloquium on Lacan's *Television* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1974), sponsored by *October/Ornicar?*, April 9–10, 1987. The two epigraphs from *Television* appear in the translation published in *October*, no. 40, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (Spring 1987), pp. 45 and 34, respectively. All Shakespeare references are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. B. Evans, et al., Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1974.

chapter on *Othello* in a book I am writing called *Shakespeare's Will*.<sup>2</sup> This book builds upon an argument I develop elsewhere, in a different book on Shakespeare's sonnets, whose claim is that in his sonnets Shakespeare introduces into literature an altogether novel, lyric, first-person poetic subject or subjectivity effect, which subsequently becomes, for more or less formal, even formalist, reasons having to do with the history of literary history, the governing and paradigmatic model of subjectivity in literature successive to Shakespeare.<sup>3</sup> In the book I am writing now, I am initially concerned, as a matter of practical literary criticism, with understanding how the lyric, first-person poetic subject of Shakespeare's sonnets informs both the authorial third person of Shakespeare's narrative poems and the formally zero-authorial person immanent in Shakespeare's plays. I am also concerned, however, in this new book, with understanding why the literary formalism to which I have referred possesses its historically documentable power. In my current project, therefore, I am concerned, on the one hand, with formal constraints governing the formation and reception of Shakespearean literary characterology, on the other, with the connection of the historical, singular, authorial Shakespeare—the one who writes “by me, *William Shakespeare*” when he signs his will—to these more general formal literary exigencies. In short, I am concerned with what relates Shakespeare, the person, a particular and idiosyncratic historical subject, to the literary invention of Shakespearean subjectivity effects; in particular, with how the contingency of the former informs and is informed by what I understand to be the necessity of the latter. This accounts for my interest in what I call, very literally, Shakespeare's “Will,” or what I will be calling “The Real of the Tragedy of Desire.”

Because this discussion is set within the context of a colloquium on the psychoanalytic work and thought of Jacques Lacan, I will be concerned here mostly with the way language, as theme and performed action, generates in *Othello*, the play, a specifically Shakespearean psychologistic formation marked by what I want to identify as a characteristically Shakespearean signature. I must say in advance, however, that, given the constraints of the context, I will be obliged to do this only perfunctorily and to presuppose almost completely the full-scale reading of *Othello* on which much of my argument depends. Perfunctory, therefore, as my account will be, I nevertheless think it is relevant to the concerns of this colloquium because, insofar as it suggests an explanation for the way, at the level of subjectivity, the particularity of Shakespeare's person is related to Shakespeare's literary personae, it also helps to explain how the uniquely individual and individuated Shakespeare speaks to and founds an institution, the Shakespearean in general. In several respects this is relevant to a colloquium on Lacan, not only because, as I will try to show, there are striking

2. Forthcoming, University of California Press.

3. Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1986.

thematic homologies between, on the one hand, the psychoanalytic subject as described by Lacan and, on the other, the characteristically Shakespearean (most especially with regard to a real that can be neither specularized nor represented), but also because these homologies raise the historical question of the relation of psychoanalysis to the institution of literature as such. This allows us to ask whether we should understand Shakespeare as corroborating evidence of Lacanian psychoanalysis or, instead, whether we should understand Lacanian psychoanalysis as epiphenomenal, institutional, and literary consequence of what is characteristically Shakespearean.

Second, still preliminary, I want, before beginning, to note that it was Angus Fletcher who first drew my attention to the sound of *O* in *Othello*, in a graduate seminar in which he remarked the haunting quality of the sound in the play. While it is altogether likely Angus Fletcher will not be altogether persuaded by the explanation I propose to offer of the force of the sound of *O* in *Othello*, I want to acknowledge this particular debt, and, more generally, a larger debt, since the work of Angus Fletcher has very much influenced my thinking about psychoanalysis, literature, and the relation of each of these to the other.

\*

If Shakespeare knew even a little of the little Greek Ben Jonson begrudgingly allowed him ("small Latine & lesse Greeke," says Jonson in his prefatory verse to the *First Folio*), he would most likely have known the Greek verb *ethelō*, which means "wish," "want," "will," "desire," though Shakespeare would more probably have known the word in its *New Testament* form, *thelō*, where the initial epsilon has dropped out.<sup>4</sup> Since Shakespeare appears to have chosen or invented Othello as proper or appropriate proper name for the more or less anonymous "The Moor," whom he reads about in Cinthio's source-story, we are actively entitled to think the semantic field attaching to *ethelō*—"wish," "want," "will," "desire"—identifies the specifically Greek resonance—appropriate to Cyprus, birthplace of Aphrodite, and also the locus of the central action of the play—that *The Tragedy of Othello* calls forth for or from Shakespeare, a nominal speculation further warranted by the fact that Cinthio, at the end of his version of the story, explicitly explains the destiny of Desdemona by reference to the meaning of her name in Greek: *dusdaimon*, "the unfortunate."<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, assuming

4. For Shakespeare's probable Greek education, see T. W. Baldwin, *Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1944. According to F. W. Gingrich's *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, rev. F. W. Danker (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983), *thelō* means primarily "wish," "will," "desire," but, also, "resolve" and "purpose"; as with French *vouloir*, *thelō* also carries the sense of want as lack, for example, a *want* "to mean" or "to be," e.g., Ac. 2:12, "ti thelei touto einai," "what does this mean?"

5. Of the many plausible Greek etymologies to associate with the name Desdemona, Cinthio, in conclusion, stresses: "It appeared marvelous to everybody that such malignity could have been discovered in a human heart [here speaking of the Iago prototype]; and the fate of the unhappy Lady

Shakespeare read a little Greek and also read a little Cinthio—and scholarship speaks for both assumptions—we can say *The Tragedy of Othello*, as it is called in both the Quarto and Folio versions of the play, would have been for Shakespeare, at least in one summary, etymological register, a tragedy of wishing and wanting or, quite literally, *The Tragedy of Will* or *The Tragedy of Desire*.<sup>6</sup> Yet more precisely, if we hear the first *O* of O-thello as some reflection of the Greek augmenting and inflecting prefix, either aorist or imperfect—again assuming Shakespeare would have known the *New Testament*, not the classical, form of the word, i.e., *thelō*, not *ethelō*—we can still translate *The Tragedy of Othello* as *The Tragedy of Will* or *The Tragedy of Desire*, but with the understanding now that both *Will* and *Desire* are here denominated as something in or of the past, “I wish” or “I desire” becoming “I wished” or “I desired” when one adds to its beginning the *e* (ε) or *ē* (η) to *thelō*.<sup>7</sup>

Taking, therefore, this name, Othello, as it is given, at its word, a series of interrelated questions almost immediately arises. First, why is this, for Shakespeare, the proper proper name for the unhappy Moor? Initially, this is a question about Shakespeare, the person, not about the Moor, the tragic hero of the play, and so, paraphrasing Juliet’s famous question to Romeo—“What’s in a

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was lamented, with some blame for her father, who had given her a name of unlucky augury” (excerpt from *Gli Hecatommithi* [1566 edition], trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1973, Vol. 7, p. 250). There are alternate speculations regarding Shakespeare’s source for the name Othello, e.g., Thorello, in Ben Jonson’s *Everyman in His Humour* (1598). Shakespeare often associates Venus, or Aphrodite, with Cyprus, referring directly to her mythological birthplace, e.g., the final couplet of *Venus and Adonis*: “holding their course to Paphos, where their queen/Means to immure herself, and not be seen” (1193–1194). The *Revels Accounts* records the first performance of *Othello*—before the king, on November 1, 1604—as “The Moor of Venis” by “Shaxberd” (Bullough, *Sources*, p. 193).

6. In his Introduction, Bullough reviews arguments for and against Shakespeare’s knowledge of Cinthio’s text (*Sources*, pp. 193–238). Cinthio’s text was first published in 1565, and Shakespeare may have read this; there is also a French translation, dated 1584, by Gabriel Chappuys, which Shakespeare may also have read. The first English translation appears in 1753.

7. The prefix-marker in Greek for aorist or imperfect tenses is *e* (ε) or, under certain circumstances *ē* (ω). The first-person imperfect for *thelō* is thus *ēthelōn*, with the final *ōn* marking the first person. Hence my remarks above. Various Greek scholars with whom I have conferred are willing to hear a collation between the sound of *O* in *Othello* and the initial prefix—*ē*—but they also insist they do not hear a convincing collation between the sound of *O* and the final *ōn* of the first-person imperfect. Despite such philological objections, I continue to think Shakespeare—who had very little Greek indeed, and who regularly makes greater and far freer auditory free-associations in English—would have heard a connection between the sound of *O* and the final *ōn* of the first-person imperfect of *thelō*. However, if one does not grant this final association, then my argument above about the subjective force of the sound of *O* in *Othello* loses only one half of its two markers of the first-person imperfect, and, in either case, the argument retains its validity with regard to the subjective apprehension of the present. However, in the context of what I say later about Lacan’s account of the constitution of the subject, it is significant that the two markers of the on-going first-person past (*ē* at the beginning and *ōn* at the end) are bound up together in the sound of *O* in *Othello*, for, thus conjoined, they register the durative experience of the (insistently repeated) moment of the constitution of the subject as the sustained and immediate *passing* of the present, as in my discussion above of “That’s he that was Othello, here I am” (5.2.284).

name?" (*RJ*, 2.2.43)—we can ask what is it about *Othello*, the name, or in it, that makes it what we can call, using a technical term, Shakespearean? Second, if it is right to hear a specific semantic field resonating out of or around the name *Othello*—again, "wish," "want," "will," "desire;" and, however playfully he may have done so, Shakespeare certainly elsewhere liked thus to derive connotation out of designation, or perhaps the other way around: e.g., Bottom is an ass in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Perdita is lost in *The Winter's Tale*, to take some obvious examples; or, to take some yet more pertinent examples, the ways in which in several sexy sonnets Shakespeare plays upon his own name, Will—why is this semantic field called up by Shakespeare as something in the past?<sup>8</sup> Why, for Shakespeare, is it O-thello and not *thelō*, i.e., why is it *I wished* or *I desired*, and not *I wish* or *I desire*, that is thus sounded out by the temporally inflecting *O* in this Shakespearean name? Finally, or third, both more generally and more particu-

8. The most immediately relevant Shakespeare Sonnets are 135 and 136. I quote them here so as to recall, first, the performative way Shakespeare exploits the fact that his name designates both male and female genitals, second, the "overplus" arithmetics of *Will* (for discussions of these sonnets, see *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, chapter 5):

## 135

Whoever hath her wish, though hast thy *Will*,  
 And *Will* to boot, and *Will* in overplus;  
 More than enough am I that vex thee still,  
 To thy sweet will making addition thus.  
 Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,  
 Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?  
 Shall will in others seem right gracious,  
 And in my will no fair acceptance shine?  
 The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,  
 And in abundance addeth to his store,  
 So thou being rich in *Will* add to thy *Will*,  
 One will of mine to make thy large *Will* more.  
 Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;  
 Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

## 136

If thy soul check thee that I come so near,  
 Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy *Will*,  
 And will, thy soul knows, is admitted there;  
 Thus far for love my love suit, sweet, fulfil.  
*Will* will fulfill the treasure of thy love,  
 Ay fill it full with wills, and my will one.  
 In things of great receipt with ease we prove  
 Among a number one is reckon'd none:  
 Then in the number let me pass untold,  
 Though in thy store's account I one must be,  
 For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold  
 That nothing me, a something sweet to thee.  
 Make but my name thy love, and love that still,  
 And then thou lovest me, for my name is *Will*.

larly, if, for Shakespeare, *Othello* is at once the personal and personalizing name of desire, why is this generically determined as something tragic, as, specifically, *The Tragedy of Othello*? Why, that is, for Shakespeare, is the story of the man named desire a story that is tragic and not, for example, something pastoral, or comic, or romantic?

Phrased this way, all these questions address themselves to Shakespeare, the person, and to his quite literal and personal relation to the name and naming of desire. Yet the same questions may also be raised, and in straightforwardly thematic ways, in relation to Othello—not himself a person, but the literary representation thereof—since Othello seems to act out his love story—a characteristically Shakespearean love story of delusional, paranoid, and mortifying jealousy—as though it were effectively determined by his registration of his name. If so, what is the relation between these two distinct relations, that of Shakespeare, the person, and that of the Moor, the literary figuration of a person, to the same name, *Othello*? To begin an answer to this question, which is a question about the relation of an author to an authorized persona—the relation, therefore, between a historical subject, whom we call Shakespeare, and, equally historical, one of Shakespeare's strongest literary subjectivity effects, whom Shakespeare called Othello—I want to suggest that the lexical issues I have so far mentioned in connection with *ethelō* are relevant in more than simply thematic ways to two questions of motivation regularly raised by or addressed to the play: on the one hand, why is Othello so gullible; on the other, why does Iago do what he does to Othello?

Since we know Iago is the motivator of Othello, Othello's first cause, we know also that an answer to the second of these questions is effectively an answer to the first. But this is precisely why Iago's motivation—the motive for his actions which are in turn the motive for all other actions in the play—has always seemed a central problem, one foregrounded by the play insofar as all Iago's explanations of the reasons for his actions either seem inadequate as motives or, instead, to contradict or undercut each other—e.g., Iago's resentful disappointment at Cassio's military promotion over himself, or Iago's expressed suspicions, which he himself suspects, that both Othello and Cassio have cuckolded him, or Iago's stressedly homosexual envy of the “daily beauty” (5.1.18) in Cassio's life. This enigma attaching to the motives of Iago was the cue for Coleridge's famous characterization of Iago's diverse and conflicting rationalizations as “the motive hunting of motiveless malignity.” The phrasing points to the fact that the question of Iago's motivation has regularly been posed in moral terms, which is why, as developed Vice-figure, the particular motive for Iago's particular evil is so readily assimilated to the general motive of generic evil as such. In either case, however, particular or general, the question of Iago's motivation presents itself as a familiar question about the motive at the origin of evil, a question about the origin of the energy for originary sin, and the reason why this question is familiar is because traditional psychology can only understand desire, that is, that which

motivates an action, as an impulse or a pulsion toward the good.<sup>9</sup> Speaking very broadly, we can say that for the tradition of philosophical and faculty psychology that extends from Plato to the Renaissance, it is relatively easy to explain the motive for an action by reference to an ultimately instrumental reason that conduces toward the satisfaction of a rational desire. In this tradition there is, therefore, necessarily, a good reason for doing something good, since Reason is the reason for doing anything whatsoever, and, moreover, Reason is, by definition, something good. For this very Reason, however, there can, in principle, be no good reason, and therefore no reason whatsoever, for doing something bad, which is why, for all intents and purposes, that is, as a matter of intentional or purposeful action, we can say that in this tradition there is no such thing as evil. Hence, for example, the familiar ontological definition of evil as the absence or privation of the good, and the corresponding psychological explanation of an agent's evil motivation in terms of either his mistaken or his thwarted movement toward the good.

If we take this tradition seriously, and if we agree Iago is the motivator of Othello's actions in the play, we can begin to understand how and why Othello acquires both his large and at the same time empty grandeur. At the very beginning of the play, Iago explains himself to Roderigo, and does so in terms of his relation to Othello: "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (1.1.43), "It is as sure as you are Roderigo, / Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago" (1.1.56–57), and, finally, a pregnant phrase, the opposite of Yahweh's self-denomination, "I am not what I am" (1.1.65). Thus defined, Iago presents himself as a being whose being consists in being that which is not what it is, an entity—here we can think either of Jacques-Alain Miller's discussion of the Lacanian zero in Frege or of Shakespeare's arithmetic of *Will* in sonnet 136: "Among a number one is counted none"—that is nonidentical to itself.<sup>10</sup> And it is this principle—"I am not what I am"—a principle of seeming-being—to be *as* not to be—that, we can say, Iago, as complementary opposite of a less complicated Othello, introduces to or into Othello in the course of the play. Given the tight economy of

9. Lacan accounts for the subjective experience of original sin by reference to the lack imported into the subject through His (his/her), subjectively constitutive, accession to a name through the discourse of the Other: "'I' am in the place from which a voice is heard clamoring 'the universe is a defect in the purity of Non-Being.' And not without reason, for by protecting itself this place makes Being itself languish. This place is called *Jouissance*, and it is the absence of this that makes the universe vain. Am I responsible for it, then? Yes, probably. Is this *Jouissance*, the lack of which makes the Other insubstantial, mine, then? Experience proves that it is usually forbidden me, not only, as certain fools believe, because of a bad arrangement of society, but rather because of the fault [*faute*] of the Other if he existed: and since the Other does not exist, all that remains to me is to assume the fault upon 'I,' that is to say, to believe in that to which experience leads us all, Freud in the vanguard, namely, to original sin" ("The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, W. W. Norton, 1977, p. 317).

10. Jacques-Alain Miller, "'La suture': Éléments de la logique du signifiant," *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, no. 1/2 (1966), pp. 37-49; e.g., "C'est l'énoncé décisif que le concept de la non-identité-à-soi est assigné par le nombre zéro qui suture le discours logique," p. 46.

their stipulated relation — “I follow him to serve my turn upon him,” “Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago” — we can think of Iago, precisely because he is the motivator of Othello, as the inside of Othello, as a principle of disjunct being — “I am not what I am” — introduced into the smooth and simple existence of an Othello who, at least at the beginning, is, whatever else he is, surely what he is.

It is in this way, through the idea of a “one” inhabited by “none,” that we can understand *The Tragedy of Othello* as, specifically, *The Tragedy of Desire*, and at the same time understand how a specifically Shakespearean conception of tragic motivation conduces towards a specific subjectivity effect. The play unfolds so as to show the passage of Othello from being, as Lodovico describes him, and as we see him at the start, “all in all sufficient” (4.1.265) — “Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate/Call all in all sufficient?” (4.1.264–265) — to being, instead, eventually, the empty shell of a hero self-proclaimed by Othello at the end as “That’s he that was Othello, here I am” (5.2.284). This evacuating clarification of Othello, most fully realized at this moment when the hero names his name, is what gives Othello his heroic, tragic stature, at the same time, however, as it specifies the way in which Othello, as a tragic hero, is inflated with his loss of self. This subject who speaks, in the third person and in the past tense, of “he that was Othello,” is at the same time present, deictic referent of the *I* who tells us “here I am.” And yet this *I* who stands and speaks before us can only speak about himself in terms of how he now survives as retrospective aftermath of what was once the “all in all sufficient,” as though the name *Othello* only served to warrant or to measure how Othello, now, as speaking *I*, is absent to the self that bears his name. Speaking, therefore, of himself as *he*, because his *I* — what Roman Jakobson would call a shifter, what Bertrand Russell would call an egocentric particular — is thus subjectively discrepant to the “Othello” *I* recalls, Othello thus assumes his name only through his registration of his distance from its designated reference. And if it is Iago’s *I* to which the play initially accords the paradoxical condition of an entity unequal to itself — “I am not what I am” — then we can see the way in which it is Iago — whom I will now define as *ego* — who leads Othello thus explicitly to speak about — indeed, to name — his structured difference from his own denomination: “That’s he that was Othello, here I am not what I am.” The image from *The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, a picture of what Othello describes to Desdemona, when he woos her, as “the Cannibals that each other eat,/The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads/Do grow beneath their shoulders” (1.3.143–144), is an illustration of the way this kind of materialized absence of self to itself might be imagined to inhabit or to inhere in the experience of self, thereby generating the substantialized emptiness that motivates and corroborates precisely that psychologistic interiority for which and by means of which Shakespeare’s major characters are often singled out. The picture schematically illustrates an anorectic, homophagic economy of subjectifying self-cannibalization, “feed[ing] thy light’s flame with self-substantial fuel,/

Making a famine where abundance lies," to use the carefully considered language of Shakespeare's very first sonnet.<sup>11</sup>

I have elsewhere argued that Shakespeare is not only responsible for first introducing this kind of literary subject, compact of its own loss, into literary history, but that the literary features through which this Shakespearean subject is constructed and imagined are, for more or less formal reasons, strictly circumscribed.<sup>12</sup> Summarizing that claim very briefly, I have argued that Shakespeare writes at the end of a tradition that identifies the literary, and therefore literary language, with idealizing, visionary praise, a tradition in which there is, at least figuratively speaking, an ideal Cratylitic correspondence, usually figured through motifs of visual or visionary language, between that which is spoken and that which is spoken about. Registering the conclusion of this tradition of the poetry of praise, a tradition that reaches back to the invention of the "literary" as a coherent theoretical category, Shakespeare, *to be* literary, is obliged to recharacterize language as something duplicitously and equivocally verbal rather than something truthfully and univocally visual, and, as a consequence, Shakespeare is both enabled and constrained to develop novel literary subjects of verbal representation for whom the very speaking of language is what serves to cut them off from their ideal and visionary presence to themselves. More clearly and starkly than any other Shakespearean tragedy, *Othello*, the play, is organized or thought through precisely such a large disrupting and disjunctive thematic opposition between visionary presence and verbal representation, not only when Iago determines, as he puts it, "to abuse Othello's ear" (2.1.385), or to "pour this pestilence into his ear" (2.3.356)—and such poisoning through the ear is of course a Shakespearean commonplace; think of Hamlet's father—but, more generally, in Iago's plot to substitute for the "ocular proof" (3.3.360) Othello demands—"I'll see before I doubt" (3.3.190)—the indicators or the signifiers whose "imputation and strong circumstances . . . lead," Iago falsely says, "directly to the door of truth" (3.3.406–407).<sup>13</sup> Because, as Iago explains to Oth-

11. Shakespeare probably took the anthropophagi topos from Philemon Holland's 1601 translation of Pliny's *Natural History*. Shakespeare regularly conceives eating in terms of self-consumption, as in the opening procreation sonnets to the young man or, for another example, as in *Troilus and Cressida*, "He that is proud eats up himself. Pride is his own glass, his own trumpet, his own chronicle, and whatever praises itself but in the deed, devours the deed in the praise" (2.3.154–157). Lacan remarks, apropos of Freud's dream of Irma's injection, "If there is an image that might represent for us the Freudian notion of the unconscious, it is exactly that of a headless subject, of a subject who has no more ego, who is beyond the ego, decentered in relation to the ego, who is not of the ego" ("S'il y a une image qui pourrait nous représenter la notion freudienne de l'inconscient, c'est bien celle d'un sujet acéphale, d'un sujet qui n'a plus d'ego, qui est extrême à l'ego, dé-centré par rapport à l'ego, qui n'est pas de l'ego") (*Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1978, p. 200).

12. See *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*.

13. The relation of vision to speaking, mediated by the motif of writing—a writing which is neither the former nor the latter and yet, nevertheless, a little of both—is how the play, quite apart

ello, there are things, especially sexual things, "It is impossible you should see" (3.3.403), Othello will receive instead the signs—like the misplaced, fetishistic handkerchief, ornamented with aphrodisiacal strawberries—which, conceived and conceited as something verbal, "speak against her with the other proofs" (3.3.441). We can say, speaking very abstractly, that this arrival of the specifically and corruptingly linguistic—through the instrument of Iago—is what determines the details of Othello's destiny as well as the two morals of the play, summarized at the end, after Othello's suicide, as, on the one hand, "All that is spoke is marr'd" (5.2.357), and, on the other, "The object poisons sight,/Let it be hid" (5.2.364–365). So too, we can also say, speaking formally, that it is only to the extent the play manages to make its own language perform, as does the Liar's paradox, the truth of its own falseness, that Othello, as the representation of a person, exudes a powerfully psychologistic subjectivity effect.

This performative aspect of the play's language accounts for my concern with the sound of *O* in *Othello*, for I understand the sound of *O* in *Othello* both to occasion and to objectify in language Othello's hollow self. Thus it is that the line

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from its critics, explains the original motivation of Iago; this is specified quite clearly in the opening lines of the play, when Iago complains about

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine  
 (A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife),  
 That never set a squadron in the field,  
 Nor the division of a battle knows  
 More than a spinster—unless the bookish theoretic,  
 Wherein the toged consuls can propose  
 As masterly as he. Mere prattle, without practice,  
 Is all his soldiership.  
 But he, sir, had th' election;  
 And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof  
 At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds  
 Christen'd and heathen, must be belee'd and calm'd  
 By debtor and creditor—this counter-caster,  
 He (in good time!) must his lieutenant be,  
 And I (God bless the mark!) his Moorship's ancient. (1.1.20–33)

What Iago here calls "bookish theoretic," the preference for which explains why, according to Iago, "Preferment goes by letter and affection,/And not by old gradation, where each second/Stood heir to th' first" (1.1.36–38), can serve as both the motto and the explanation of *The Tragedy of Othello*, if we remember the etymology of "theoretic," from Greek *theorein*, to see, and if we appreciate the way this "bookish theoretic" stands at odds with the immediate vision of an "I" "of whom his eyes had seen the proof." This is related to the military, erotic, and semiotic issues at stake in the matter of Iago's promotion, his rise from the rank of "Ancient," or ensign—the man who bears before the troops the flag or insignia of their collective power—to the rank of "Lieutenant," the man who, behind the troops, stands as executive *place-holder* of a power that is thus represented rather than seen; hence my first epigraph from *Othello*: Iago's "I must show out a flag and sign of love,/Which is indeed but sign" (1.1.156–157). Very roughly, I am here connecting Lacan's three knotted registers, the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, to, respectively, Shakespeare's equally knotted concatenation of the visual, the verbal, and the written; see footnote 24, below.

I took as one of my epigraphs—Othello's "O, Desdemon dead, Desdemon dead,/O, O!" (5.2.282)—is not only the conclusion of Othello's discovery of Iago's plot, but is also immediate preface to the line in which Othello names his absence to himself "That's he that was Othello, here I am" (5.2.284). In some respects, my insistence on the importance and significance of this sound is not a novel claim. Frank Kermode, for example, in his introduction to the *Riverside* edition of the play, makes something like, or almost like, this point when he says: "*Othello* no less than the other great tragedies invents its own idiom. The voice of the Moor has its own orotundity, verging, as some infer, on hollowness."<sup>14</sup> Yet if we initially agree that what Kermode calls Othello's "hollowness" is materialized in the sound of *O*, it is important also to realize that this peculiar voicing is sounded out throughout the entirety of the play, that is, that *Othello's O* is by no means restricted to Othello's mouth. We hear it, for example, in almost all the names of the characters—Brabantio, Gratiano, Lodovico, Othello, Cassio, Iago, Roderigo, Montano, Desdemona; again, most of these so-called by Shakespeare—and so, too, is it evoked or invoked as a continual refrain, often metrically stressed, throughout the dialogue, for example, these lines from Act 5, Scene 1:

*Iago:* O treacherous villains! What are you there? Come in and give some help.  
*Roderigo:* O help me there!  
*Cassio:* That's one of them.  
*Iago:* O murd'rous slave! O villain!  
*Roderigo:* O dam'd Iago! O inhuman dog! (5.1.57–63)

or, a few lines later:

*Bianca:* What is the matter ho? . . .  
O my dear Cassio, my sweet Cassio!  
O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!  
*Iago:* O notable strumpet! Cassio, May you suspect  
Who they should be that have thus mangled you?  
*Cassio:* No.  
*Gratiano:* I am sorry to find you thus; I have been to seek you.  
*Iago:* Lend me a garter. So.—O for a chair  
To bear him easily hence!  
*Bianca:* Alas he faints! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio! (5.1.74–84)

These are representative examples, which could be multiplied, of the way the sound of *O* is sounded out throughout the entirety of the play, and not just by Othello.

14. Frank Kermode, Introduction to *Othello*, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 1198.

Why is it, then, that this sound — these abject *O*s, which I will soon want to associate with Lacan's *objet a*, that is, what for Lacan is the occasion of desire and the mark of the real — is, both for Shakespeare and for Othello, constitutive of Othello's self? This is a more precise way of asking the questions I asked earlier as to why, for either Shakespeare or Othello, Othello's tragic passage into empty, retrospective self occurs at the climactic moment when the hero names his name? In search of an answer, I want now to turn to some of Lacan's remarks concerning proper names, beginning with what is perhaps the most well known of these, the passage in "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," where Lacan explains the relation of a subject to a signifier:

My definition of signifier (there is no other) is as follows: a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier. This signifier will therefore be the signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers represent nothing, since nothing is represented only *for* something else.<sup>15</sup>

Lacan speaks here, more or less straightforwardly, of the way, as he understands it, the speaking subject is constitutively precipitated, as ruptured or as broken subject, as an effect of the language in which he finds himself bespoken — and no more so self-evidently than when this subject speaks explicitly about himself. For Lacan, as he explains in this section of "The Subversion of the Subject," the subject comes to be a subject through his dialectical relation to a generalized Other conceived to contain or to comprise, like a thesaurus or treasury, the entirety of signifiers that for one single and particular signifier represent the subject. This unique and distinct signifier — distinct because within the treasury of signifiers in the locus of the Other, it represents the subject for another signifier, indeed, for *any* and for *every* other signifier — is at once the mark of the totality of language for the speaking subject and of the totality of the subject thus bespoken. In either case, however, speaking either of the subject or of the Other, the entirety thus marked as something total is for that very reason lacking that which marks it as complete. Lacan explains:

Since the battery of signifiers, as such, is by that very fact complete [what Shakespeare would call "all in all sufficient"], this signifier [i.e., that which represents the subject for another signifier] can only be a line (*trait*) that is drawn from its circle without being able to be counted part of it. It can be symbolized by the inherence of a (-1) in the whole set of signifiers. As such it is inexpressible, but its operation

15. Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject," p. 316; subsequent references to this essay will be noted in the text within parentheses.

is not inexpressible, for it is that which is produced whenever a proper name (*nom propre*) is spoken (*prononcé*). Its statement (*énoncé*) equals its signification ("Subversion of the Subject," pp. 316–317).

It may seem odd, a kind of vestigial Cratylism, for Lacan to say of the operation of the proper name that its statement equals its signification, but this is because, for the subject, the paradoxical statement of the proper name, like the Liar's paradox, is that its statement is *not* equal to its signification. We can say that this is the *only* statement language can speak truly to and for a subject. Hence the precision, which is only slightly comic, of Lacan's algebraic formulation of the signification, for the subject, of the signifier that represents him for another signifier:

$$\frac{S(\text{signifier})}{s(\text{signified})} = s(\text{the statement}), \text{ with } S = (-1), \text{ produces } s = \sqrt{-1}$$

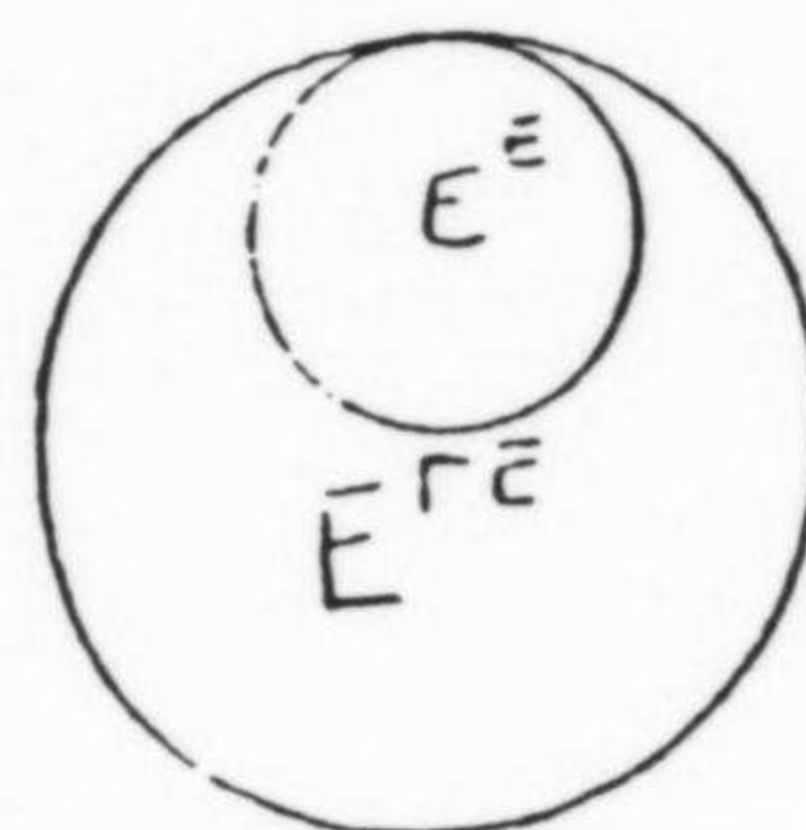
where the signifier, understood as minus one, is to be divided by the signified it equals, which is therefore also understood as minus one, yielding as the product of division the imaginary but still useful number we have learned to call the square root of minus one ("Subversion of the Subject," p. 317). Lacan immediately explains what this means for the subject: "This [i.e., the  $\sqrt{-1}$ ] is what the subject lacks in order to think himself exhausted by his *cogito*, namely, that which is unthinkable for him" ("Subversion of the Subject," p. 317).

This lack in the subject — on the one hand, unthinkable for the subject; on the other, responsible for His (his/her) constitution *as* subject, specifically, as a desiring subject — is, at least in this formulation, occasioned by the subject's registration of His (his/her) proper name, the *trait unaire*, as Lacan explains in "The Subversion of the Subject," "which, by filling in the invisible mark that the subject derives from the signifier, alienates this subject in the primary identification that forms the ego ideal" (p. 306). This alienation is a function, Lacan says, of "the relation of the subject to the signifier — a relation that is embodied in an enunciation whose being trembles with the vacillation that comes back to it from its own statement" (p. 300); "An enunciation that denounces itself, a statement that renounces itself, ignorance that dissipates itself, an opportunity that loses itself, the trace of what *must* be in order to fall from being?" (p. 300). And this fall therefore determines, Lacan says, the being of the subject, determines it as "Being of non-being, that is how *I* as subject comes on the scene, conjugated with the double aporia of a true survival that is abolished by knowledge of itself, and by a discourse in which it is death that sustains existence" (p. 300). Or, to cite one of Lacan's many glosses of Freud's "*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*," but which might equally well serve to gloss the temporal structuration of "That's he that was Othello, here I am," *not* what *The Standard Edition* translates as "where id was there shall ego be," but, instead, and more Shakespearean, "There where it

was just now, there where it was for awhile, between an extinction that is still glowing and a birth that is retarded, 'I' can come into being and disappear from what I say" (p. 300).

Lacan always, by no means only in "The Subversion of the Subject," returns to this necessary lack, gap, absence, disjunction, hole, determined for the subject by the very registration or denomination of the all, the complete, the total, the one, the whole, in which the subject finds himself, and therefore finds himself as lost. Elsewhere, in the *Seminar on Identification* (1961–1962), Lacan develops the same point, again in connection with proper names and the unitary trait, in terms of the paradox of classes with which Russell confounded Frege.<sup>16</sup> Lacan uses the diagram of an inverted figure-eight to illustrate the paradox that results when one asks, as inevitably one must, whether the class of classes that do not contain themselves is itself contained in the class of classes that do not

$E^B$ :ensemblesqui se comprennent eux-mêmes  
 $E^{\bar{B}}$ :ensemblesqui ne se comprennent pas  
 eux-mêmes  
 schéma



contain themselves.<sup>17</sup> If so, then it is contained in the class of classes that do not contain themselves, which is paradoxical, and, if not, then we come upon an analogous impasse. We can note the way Lacan's inverted figure-eight reproduces the structure of subjective inversion imaged by the Mandeville drawing of "the men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders" — the circle within and without that which it circles — an inversion Lacan explains in terms of a redoubling, or turn, or return, by means of which, in Russell's paradox, the interiority of the inside is rendered homogeneous with the exteriority of the outside in a systematically aporetic way.<sup>18</sup> Between the one and the other, between, that is, an

16. I thank Helena Schulz-Keil, first, for many helpful and instructive conversations about the work of Lacan, second, for bringing to my attention both the existence of this unpublished typescript redaction of the *Seminar on Identification* and its discussion of the *trait unaire*; on the unitary trait, see also Helene Muller, "Another Genesis of the Unconscious," *Lacan Study Notes*, 5 (Summer 1985), pp. 1–22. I will be referring to the eighteenth meeting of Lacan's Seminar, May 2, 1962; page numbers refer to the typescript's numeration.

17. *Seminar on Identification*, p. 9. I discuss this paradox in relation to proper names and Lacan in "The Significance of Literature, *The Importance of Being Earnest*," *October*, no. 15 (Winter 1980), pp. 79–90.

18. *Seminar on Identification*, p. 9. For the Shakespearean resonations — especially the materialized liquidity of ejaculate suspense: "the phenomenology of the spurt" — attaching to this image of a space both within and without itself, see my illustration and discussion of the death of Lucrece in "Shakespeare's Will: The Temporality of Rape," *Representations*, no. 20 (Fall 1987), pp. 25–76.

inside and an outside that are both turned inside out, stands the tangential, placeless, auto-differential mark that is neither the one nor the other, but, instead, the lack in both that derives from their disjunctive conjunction, the same lack that is disclosed, Lacan says in the *Seminar on Identification*, by the fact that “a signifier, insofar as it might serve to signify itself, is obliged to pose itself as different from itself.”<sup>19</sup>

This determination of the auto-differential mark—which Lacan alternately develops in terms of the post-Cartesian difference between the subject who speaks and the subject who is bespoken, or in terms of the difference between the subject of the signifier and the subject of the signified, or in terms of the desire precipitated by the infinite discrepancy between finite need and infinite demand, or in terms of the fading of the subject in the intersubjective dialectic between the intersaid (*interdit*) and the intra-said (*intradit*), or in terms of the disjunctive intersection of the imaginary and the symbolic (I say in passing that all this can be directly related to the by now familiar quarrel in Anglo-American philosophy between descriptivist and causal-chain theorists of proper names)—is for Lacan the mark of the real: “the cut in discourse, the strongest being that which acts as a bar between the signifier and the signified” (“Subversion of the Subject,” p. 299). As Lacan puts it in “The Subversion of the Subject”: “This cut in the signifying chain alone verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real” (p. 299). And it is around this cut, experienced *as* cut, that the subject finds the motivating lack around which his desire circulates in a structurally asymptotic and vain effort to plug up the hole within the w-hole that is its on-going, constituting cause, as does Othello, when, entering the bedroom to strangle Desdemona, he explains: “It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul;/Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,/It is the cause. Yet I’ll not shed her blood,/Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,/And smooth as monumental alabaster” (5.1.1–3). On the one hand, the mark of this cut determines what is erotic in the so-called “erogenous zone”: “the result of a cut (*coupure*) expressed in the anatomical mark (*trait*) of a margin or border—lips, ‘the enclosure of the teeth,’ the rim of the anus, the tip of the penis, the vagina, the slit formed by the eyelids, even the horn-shaped aperture of the ear” (“Subversion of the Subject,” pp. 314–315); on the other, “this mark of the cut is present in the object described by analytic theory: the mamilla, faeces, the phallus ([as] imaginary object), the urinary flow.” (An unthinkable list, if one adds, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice, the nothing) (“Subversion of the Subject,” p. 315). And so, too, says Lacan, is this the “‘stuff,’ or rather the lining . . . of the very subject that one takes to be the subject of consciousness. For this subject, who thinks he can accede to himself by designating himself in

19. “En fait c’est une chose excessivement bête et simple ce point très essentiel que le signifiant en tant qu’il peut servir à se signifier lui-même doit se poser comme différent de lui-même” (*Seminar on Identification*, p. 10).

the statement, is no more than such an object" ("Subversion of the Subject," p. 315). It is for this reason, also, that I associate the sound of *O* in *Othello*, insofar as this is sounded out as mark of a subjectifying name, with the mark of the real, the *objet a*, that occasions desire in the first place, as well as its subjective temporality as aftermath, also in the first place.

But what kind of desire is this, really? Lacan, though he says it elsewhere, offers an answer in *Television* when he says, stressing the banality of the observation that "there is no sexual relation," that is, that there is no sexual rapport, by which he means, at the very least, that the ideal unity of two is precisely that which forecloses the possibility of union, thereby provoking a desire for precisely that which it prevents.<sup>20</sup> The topos brings us back to *Othello*, the representation of a person, and through him back to Shakespeare, the person.

It is often remarked that *Othello's* jealousy is necessarily delusional, for, given the compressed and double time-scheme of the play, there is literally no time for Cassio to have cuckolded *Othello*. It is not so often noticed, however, that, for the same reason, there is no time in the play for *Othello* ever to have consummated his marriage to *Desdemona*.<sup>21</sup> What should have been the lovers' first married night together, in Venice—in Venus—is interrupted by the announcement of the Turkish threat, whereupon *Othello* and *Desdemona* both set out for Cyprus in separate ships. In Cyprus, the postponed honeymoon night is once again delayed and interrupted by Cassio's noisy, drunken riot, and the interruption occurs at precisely that moment when Iago says, "the General hath not yet made wanton the night with" *Desdemona* (2.3.16). Affectively, that is to say, *Othello* never consummates his marriage until the climactic moment in which he strangles *Desdemona*, when the marriage bed, in characteristically Shakespearean fashion, becomes the death bed. This consistent instantiation of *Othello's coitus interruptus*, an interruption specifically signalled by noise, is emblemized in a small scene, often cut in production, in which some wind musicians, at Cassio's behest, come on stage to serenade *Othello* and *Desdemona* from beneath their bedroom window. No sooner do they start to play, however, than *Othello's* clown comes out to tell them to be silent: "The General so likes your music, that he desires you for love's sake to make no more noise with it" (3.1.11–12). Instead, says the Clown, "If you have any music that may not be heard, to't again," but, if not, "Go, vanish into air, away!" (3.1.15–16).<sup>22</sup>

I stress the emblematic significance of this scene because I take its evoked

20. *Television, October*, p. 45 ("'Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel': Il est frappant que ce sens réduise au non-sens: au non-sens du rapport sexuel, lequel est patent depuis toujours dans les dits de l'amour," *Television*, p. 18).

21. Exceptionally and suggestively, Stanley Cavell stresses the interruption of *Othello's* honeymoon night (*The Claim of Reason*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 487).

22. The anal and syphilitic reverberations of the "wind" in this scene are significant:

“music without sound” to be a definition, “for love’s sake,” of the sound of *O* in *Othello*. And the reason why this seems important is that this “music without sound” returns again to the play, and does so in a passage that, for purely vocal reasons, has always seemed, to critics and to audiences, profoundly strange and haunting. I refer to Desdemona’s “Willow Song,” which she sings just prior to her murder and where even the “wind” of the wind musicians reenters the diegesis of the play, and reenters it again *as* interruption:

*Desdemona.* “The poor fool sat sighing by a sycamore tree,  
Sing all a green willow;  
Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,  
Sing willow, willow, willow.  
The fresh streams ran by her, and murmur’d her moans,  
Sing willow, willow, willow;  
Her salt tears fell from her, and soft’ned the stones,  
Sing willow” —  
Lay by these —  
[Singing.] “— willow, willow” —  
Prithee hie thee; he’ll come anon —  
[Singing.]  
“Sing all a green willow must be my garland.  
Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve” —  
Nay, that’s not next. Hark, who is’t that knocks?  
*Emilia.* It’s the wind.  
*Desdemona.* [Singing]  
“I call’d my love false love; but what said he then?  
Sing willow, willow, willow;  
If I court moe women, you’ll couch with moe men.” —  
So get thee gone, good night. Mine eyes do itch;  
Doth that bode weeping?  
*Emilia.* ‘Tis neither here nor there.  
*Desdemona.* I have heard it said so. (4.3.40–60)

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*Clown:* Why, masters, have your instruments been in Naples, that they speak i’ the nose thus?

*Musician:* How, sir, how?

*Clown:* Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?

*Musician:* Ay, marry, are they sir.

*Clown:* O, thereby hangs a tail.

*Musician:* Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

*Clown:* Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know. But, masters, here’s money for you; and the general so likes your music, that he desires you for love’s sake to make no more noise with it.

*Musician:* Well, sir, we will not.

*Clown:* If you have any music that may not be heard, to’t again; but (as they say) to hear music the general does not greatly care.

*Musician:* We have none such, sir.

*Clown:* Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I’ll away. Go, vanish into air, away!

*Exeunt Musicians* (3.1.1.20)

*Emilia.* 'Tis neither here nor there.

*Desdemona.* I have heard it said so. (4.3.40–60)

The central, we can say the most Shakespearean, fact about this “Willow song” is that it is *not* by Shakespeare, and would have been recognized as such, i.e., as non-Shakespearean, by the original audience for the play.<sup>23</sup> What is called Desdemona’s “Willow song” is, in fact, a traditional ballad, reproduced in miscellanies, that appears to have captured Shakespeare’s aural imagination—inspired him, we can say, thinking of the wind—and which he here introduces into the play as though to sound out something that comes from a literary place outside the literariness of the play. Recognizing this, my claim is a simple one, but one with several consequences: namely, that the “willow” of Desdemona’s “Willow song” amounts to Shakespeare’s literal and personal translation of the Greek verb *ethelō*, and that this is a significant translation because Desdemona’s “Willow song,” understood in this way, therefore marks the place where Shakespeare’s own name, Will, is itself marked off by the invoked, cited sound of the sound of *O* in *Othello*—“Sing will-ow, will-ow, will-ow.” If this is the case, then we can say, at least in this case, precisely what there is in a Shakespearean name that makes it Shakespearean. It is specifically the *O*, calling to us from an elsewhere that is other, that determines the Shakespearean subject as the difference between the subject of a name and the subject of full being, or, even more precisely, as the subject who exists as the difference between the *Will* at the beginning of *William* and the *I* of Williams’s *I am: Will-O-I am*.<sup>24</sup>

23. Norman Sanders, editor of *The New Cambridge Othello*, notes: “This is a version of a song well-known before Shakespeare used it and often quoted in earlier plays and poems. The fullest texts of the original can be found in Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 1765, 1, 199–203, and *The Roxburghe Ballads*, ed. W. Chappell, 1888, 1, 171. For his version Shakespeare changed the sex of the singer and drew mainly on stanzas 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 11 of the original. There are three contemporary musical settings of the song in British Library Add MS 15117 (1616 or earlier), The Lodge Book, Folger Library (early 1570s) and the Dallis Book, Trinity College, Dublin (c. 1583)” (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 190).

24. I have argued elsewhere, in “Shakespeare’s *Will*: The Temporality of Rape,” that Shakespearean signature effects are regularly related not only to Shakespeare’s registration of his name but also to the orthographic staging of the writing of this name through the chiasmic coordination of the letters *WM*, the first and last letters of Shakespeare’s first name, and also Shakespeare’s abbreviation of his name, at least as he signs it to the mortgage deed of Blackfriar’s House, “*W<sup>M</sup> Shakspē*”; this happens here, again, with the *O* of Desdemona’s “Willow Song,” for example, “The fresh streams ran by her, and murmur’d her moans, / Sing wil-low, willow, willow,” or “Sing willow, willow, willow; / If I court moe women you’ll couch with moe men”—lines, by the way, Freud cites to exemplify the logic of projective jealousy; see Sigmund Freud, “Certain Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia, and Homosexuality” (1922), in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, ed. Philip Rieff, New York, Collier Books, 1970, p. 162.

It can not only be shown that this *WM* formation is related to Greek omega—written as  $\omega$ , but sounded as *O*—but in addition, that there is a longstanding tradition that interprets the orthography of Greek omega in thematic terms that correspond to those I am arguing are associated with the subjectivity effect of the “characteristically Shakespearean.” I refer here, too briefly, to the opening

In Desdemona's "Willow song," therefore, we can say the real of the subject of Shakespeare enters the play, informing with the force of its contingency the otherwise merely formal literary exigencies with which and through

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of the treatise "On Apparatus and Furnaces: Authentic Commentaries on the Letter Omega," by the third-century hermetical alchemist known as Zosimos:

Round Omega is the bipartite letter, the one that in terms of material language belongs to the seventh planetary zone, that of Kronos. For in terms of the immaterial it is something else altogether, something inexplicable, which only Nokotheos the hidden knows. In material terms Omega is what he calls "Ocean, it says, 'the birth and seed of all gods,'" as he says, "the governing principles of material language" (*Zosimos of Panopolis On the Letter Omega*, ed. and trans. Howard M. Jackson, Missoula, Mo., University of Montana Press, 1978, p. 17).

Zosimos, though obscure, is important because he contributes to an influential tradition of hermetic and alchemical iconography that survives up through and beyond the Renaissance; there are many manuscript versions of his commentary scattered through the libraries of Europe. (There is also reason to suppose that Lacan would have been familiar with the document, either from the partial version printed in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. Arthur Nock and André-Jean Festugière, Vol. 4, Paris, Société d'éditions "les Belles Lettres," 1954, pp. 117-121, or the full version printed in Carl Jung's *Psychologie und Alchimie*, Zurich, Rascher Verlag, 1952, pp. 360-368.)

The significance of this text, in this context, is that for someone like Shakespeare, who has only a little Greek, the Greek alphabet would not have been a transparent medium of signification; on the contrary, the graphic inscription of the Greek alphabet would have been for Shakespeare something whose typographic materiality would be literally visualizable. This suggests that when Shakespeare had Greek in his mind, or when he thought the letter omega—again, written as  $\omega$ , but sounded as *O*—he would have *seen*  $\omega$  but would have *heard* *O*. Accordingly, it is through this slippage between the visual and the spoken, mediated by the unrepresentable phenomenality of writing, that the sound of *O* in *Othello* acquires its *characteristically* Shakespearean subjective properties.

What is thus *idiosyncratically* Shakespearean, however, also corresponds with what is a general, even a generic, tradition assembled around omega. Consider, in this context, the editor's note on the passage from Zosimos cited above: "The shape of the Greek letter omega ( $\omega$ ) suggests the descriptions of 'round' and 'bipartite.' The reason for their inclusion is not so obvious, but it is probably in anticipation of correlating the letter omega with Ocean. Ocean was conceived to be a river that encircled the world; Homer describes the shield of Hephaistos for Achilles as depicting Ocean flowing around its outer rim (*Iliad*, 18.607; cf. also Herodotus 4.8) [cf. the Mandeville or Lacan illustrations above; also the circular river of blood that surrounds the dying Lucrece]. This fact accounts for omega's being called *stroggulōn* [round]. The explanation for *dimerēs* [bipartite] is perhaps that Zosimos held ocean to be a hermaphrodite being. The alchemist Olympiodoros (who just may be identical with the Neo-Platonic commentator of Plato) cites Zosimos as saying that the sea is *arreno-thēlus* [bisexual] (Berthelot II, iv, 32, texte grec 89.19). The background for this odd, un-Greek conception is supplied by a statement in Diodorus of Sicily (actually his source Hekataios of Abdera): the Egyptians say that 'the ancients named the moist element "Okeane," which means "Sustenance Mother"; but by some of the Greeks it is held to be "Okeanos" (i.e., masculine)' (1.12.5). In classical Egyptian cosmogonies the primeval waters of chaos are a divine syzygy, Nwn and Nwnt. Furthermore, Diodorus (1.12.6) goes on to say that the Egyptians consider Ocean to be the Nile, and the ancient Egyptians often depicted the god Nile as a man with pendulous breasts" (p. 39).

The central practical literary question raised by the regular occurrence of the Shakespearean signature is to determine what *topoi* control the relation of the speaking to the writing of a name. In *Othello*, writing calls up a particularly coded erotic name, which is why Othello would rather not write: "Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, / Made to write 'whore' upon?" (4.2.71-72). Accordingly, Othello strangles Desdemona rather than scar her, for reasons Lacan articulates in the conclusion of the quotation from "The Subversion of the Subject" cited above: "For this subject who thinks he can accede to himself by designating himself in the statement, is no more than such an

which the subjectivity effect of the hero is constructed. And this is important because we can thereby account for the powerful investment, specifically at the level of subjectivity, of both author and audience in the character of Othello, for in both cases what is necessarily and structurally at stake in the representation of a persona whose subjective evacuation is substantiated by the sound of *O* in *Othello* is the way in which, in the words of Lacan that I took as epigraph, "The sexual impasse exudes the fictions that rationalize the impossible within which it originates." For both author and audience these fictions—what I will elsewhere call the "alibi" (*alius ibi*, i.e., the elsewhere) of subjectivity—really are "the invitation to the real that underwrites them," but of a specifically Shakespearean real, the willful legacy of which continues to determine, as the example of Lacan makes evident, not only the erotic contents but also the tragic contours of the literature of person. Hence the concluding answer I propose to the question I raised earlier as to whether we should see in Othello and Shakespeare the corroborating proof or evidence of Lacan's theorizations about subjectivity or, instead, whether we should see in Lacan's theorizations an epiphenomenal consequence of the powerful literary subjectivity effect Shakespeare invents toward the end of the English Renaissance: given the historical force of the sound of *O* in *Othello*, I say the latter and call him, Lacan, Shakespearean.

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object. Ask the writer about the anxiety that he experiences when faced by the blank sheet of paper, and he will tell you who is the turd (*l'étron*) of his phantasy," p. 315. In Shakespeare's tragedies *l'étron*, like the "letter," always returns to its sender in inverted form:

*Othello*: I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,—and smote him—thus.  
*Lodovico*: O bloody period! (5.2.355–357)

## Lacan's Psychoanalysis, or The Figure in the Screen\*

SHOSHANA FELMAN

What can an analyst do, psychoanalytically, on a television program? In its very terms, the question seems an aporia. What, indeed, can be more contrary to the privacy, the intimacy of psychoanalytic work than the publicity, the ostentatiousness of what is called "show business"? How, in spite of this discrepancy of contexts, can an analyst take a psychoanalytic stance on a television screen? It is nothing less than the challenge of this question that Lacan addresses through his enigmatic and ironical performance on the tube. If the written text of this video performance, originally aired on French television (January 1973) as a program named "Psychoanalysis," was from the outset destined to be published, simultaneously, as a book entitled *Television*, it is, I would suggest, because, confronted with the camera, Lacan invites us not to take "the little screen" for granted, but to rethink through it, provocatively, his complex structure of address. Through the duplicity of title and of medium of transmission, we are in fact invited to attend the very dissonance inscribed in the *text of an appearance*: a text which, paradoxically enough, fails to appear to the spectator; a text which, to appear as such, demands not just a reader (rather than a viewer), but, specifically, a reading (and, I would insist, a psychoanalytic reading) of the very act of viewing.

### *Speaking the Truth*

"I always speak the truth," says the opening sentence of Lacan's television speech. "Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying the whole truth is materially impossible: words miss it. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real."<sup>1</sup>

\* This text is a slightly revised version of a paper given at the *October/Ornicar?* colloquium "Jacques Lacan/Television." Organized by Joan Copjec and Jennifer Stone, the colloquium was held at Cooper Union, New York City, on April 9-10, 1987.

1. Lacan, *Television*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, *October*, no. 40 (Spring 1987), p. 7 (translation slightly modified). All further citations of *Television* will be

This opening, at once ironical and solemn, suggests that Lacan's stance in the public eye of television is that of a *witness*: a witness called upon to testify to the advent—or to the event—of psychoanalysis. And yet the status of this testimony will be complex, in that it will also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a self-subversion of the witness. Calling into question the traditional witness's oath, the process of this public psychoanalytic witness will also testify to a radical change psychoanalysis has introduced into the very status of the act of witnessing. This is why the witness does not swear to say "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," but promises, more paradoxically, to speak the truth precisely insofar as truth *cannot be whole*.

The television testimony is thus less a statement than a speech act, a performance which enacts at once truth's slippage and the failure of the witness to "say it all" (to say it whole).

I will confess then to having tried to respond to the present comedy and that it was good only for the wastebasket.

A failure, then, but thereby, actually a success in relation to an error, or, to put it better, in relation to an erring. . . .

The erring consists in this idea of speaking so as to be understood by idiots. . . .

For there's no difference between television and the public before whom I've spoken for a long time now, in what is known as my seminar (*TV*, 7, tm).

#### *Teaching and Understanding*

I acknowledge, says Lacan, my own unintelligibility: even in this television program designed to make my discourse more accessible, I failed to respond to the comedy of placing myself at the level of mass communication. I acknowledge having failed in the enterprise of making myself understood. But in this respect my seminar is not so different from this television program. I cannot, in fact, count on my seminar's being understood any more than I can try here to make myself understood by nontrained people. My teaching, focused as it is on psychoanalytic training, indeed *does not address itself to understanding*, since its thrust is, on the contrary, to put understanding into question. This is because the primary reference of my teaching is not theory, but practice.

Psychoanalytic practice operates at the very limits of understanding, both the patient's and the analyst's. If the practice works, if the patient changes through the analyst's *efficacious witnessing* of the patient's discourse, it is to the extent that what is witnessed on both sides cannot be subsumed by either's

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indicated in the text with the abbreviation *TV*, followed by a page number. The abbreviation tm will indicate my minor modifications of the translation of the original *Télévision* (Paris, Seuil, 1973).

comprehension. Psychoanalytic efficacy stems from that beyond of understanding, from the way in which, in analytic practice, understanding comes undone. The psychoanalyst is therefore not defined by understanding, but by his position as an efficacious witness within the psychoanalytic dialogue—within the discourse of the unconscious. The unconscious as such takes existence and effect not by virtue of its being understood, but by virtue of its being witnessed.

Does the unconscious imply that it be listened to? To my mind, yes (*TV*, 18).

The psychoanalyst has a position which happens ultimately to be that of a discourse. He doesn't transmit a body of knowledge with it; not that there isn't anything to be known, since that is what is being called into question: the function in society of a certain knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

It provokes smiles at a certain use of interpretation, as the sleight of hand of comprehension. An interpretation whose effects are understood is not a psychoanalytic interpretation. It is enough to have been analyzed or to be an analyst to realize that ("Responses to Students in Philosophy," *Dossier*, 113).

The analyst makes do with the nonavailability of understanding. Since comprehension is a form of appropriation of the meaning of the Other, it is, indeed, when comprehension seems too readily available that the analyst should become wary and keep its availability in check.

What counts, when one attempts to elaborate an experience, is less what one understands than what one doesn't understand. . . . How many times have I pointed it out to those I supervise when they say to me—I thought I understood that what he meant to say was this, or that—one of the things we should be watching out for most is not to understand too much, not to understand more than what there is in the discourse of the subject. Interpreting is an altogether different thing from having the fancy of understanding. One is the opposite of the other. I will even say that it is on the basis of a certain refusal of understanding that we open the door onto psychoanalytic understanding.<sup>3</sup>

2. Lacan, "Impromptu at Vincennes," *Dossier on the Institutional Debate*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *October*, no. 40 (Spring 1987), p. 18. Further citations of this collection of documents will be indicated in the text with the word *Dossier*, preceded by the document's title and followed by the page number.

3. Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre I: Les écrits techniques de Freud*, Paris, Seuil, 1975, pp. 87–88 (my translation).

*The Crowd's Gaze*

*Television* thus partakes of a paradoxical teaching position that solicits and sustains a certain refusal of understanding. This is not the only paradox, however, through which Lacan on television *mimics* his own seminar. For there is another aspect that the seminar and television have in common: both are *spectacles* in which Lacan feels watched by, and exposed to, the crowd's gaze.

For there's no difference between television and the public before whom I've spoken for a long time now, in what is known as my seminar. What is at stake in both cases is a gaze: a gaze to which, in neither case, do I address myself, but in the name of which I speak (*TV*, 7, tm).

Insofar as the visual medium of the television show exacerbates the spectacularity and specularity of the seminar; insofar as Lacan finds the gaze taxing and the medium of the screen an impossible one, what he calls "the present comedy" will offer, I will argue, a satirical pastiche of his own pedagogy and, specifically, of his own pedagogical use of the gaze. *Television* is an ironizing hyperbolization of the element of spectacle inherent in the seminar.

Given the voyeurism of my audience — Lacan implicitly could ask — how can I make heuristic use of my own exhibitionism? What can be the psychoanalytic value of my offering myself as spectacle? The answer is complex, but its first stage — that of tease and of frustration, that is, of a problematization of the public's scopic drive — could perhaps be articulated as follows:

You want to see me, says Lacan, let me show you. You want a "Reader's Digest"; I will give you a reader's indigestion. You want me to give answers, to play — on the television screen — Doctor Ruth: I will play a Doctor Ruth who bears psychoanalytic witness to the fact that "there is no such thing as a sexual relation" (*TV*, 45). You want me to expose myself — you want psychoanalytic pornography: I will give you nakedness; I will give you nothing less than the king's nakedness, but only insofar as the king's nakedness is itself a *figure* in the screen — or in the carpet, insofar as the king's nakedness, like in "The Emperor's New Clothes," is precisely what, as crowd, you *cannot see*.

*The King's Nakedness*

Lacan alludes ironically to the way in which the public vests his image with imperial clothes:

To put it bluntly, you *know* that I've got an answer to everything, in consideration of which you credit me with the question: you place your faith in the proverb that one lends only to the rich. And with good reason.

Who doesn't know that it's with the analytic discourse that I've

made it big? That makes me a *self-made man*. There have been others, but not in our lifetime (TV, 31).

What is then the emblematic relevance of "The Emperor's New Clothes" to Lacan's discourse? In one of the seminars, Lacan notes:

I have heard it reported that Lacan says nothing better than that the king is naked. Perhaps it was I myself who was aimed at, but let's suppose, in the better hypothesis, that it was what I am teaching. Of course, I am teaching it in a way that is far more humorous than my critic suspects. . . . If I say that the king is naked, it is not in the manner of the child supposed to dispel the universal illusion, but rather in the manner of Alphonse Allais, who makes the passers-by crowd in, alerting them in a sonorous voice, *What a scandal! Look at this woman! Under her dress she is naked!* And in truth, I'm not even saying that.

If the king is in effect naked, it is only insofar as he is under a certain number of clothes—fictitious, doubtless, but nonetheless essential to his nakedness. And in relation to these clothes, his nakedness itself could well be never naked enough.<sup>4</sup>

Why is nakedness not naked? Why does the crowd, the public fail to see the nakedness of their king? Because the two imposters who pretend to weave the nonexistent new clothes of the emperor claim their clothes have the peculiarity of being utterly invisible to all those who are either stupid or unfit for their positions.<sup>5</sup> In the very act of seeing the nonexistent clothes, the public thus denies their own unfitness, their own castration, their feelings of inadequacy and shame at their own nakedness—under their clothes. Their visual denial claims the king cannot partake of their own nakedness: it is impossible that the king can be as naked (as inadequate, castrated) as everybody else is—under their clothes.

Now, the nonexistent clothes are *signifiers* woven with the weavers' *language* (what the weavers *tell* the audience about the clothes), and it is those linguistic signifiers which precisely screen the king's—like everybody's—nakedness. Nakedness exists only in relation to the structure of language as a screen of signifiers which (like the purloined letter, like the figure in the carpet, like the king's nakedness) screen only insofar as they are exposed in full view and exhibited to everybody's gaze.

"The Emperor's New Clothes" is not so much about nakedness, then, as it

4. Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, p. 23 (my translation). Further citations will be indicated in the text with the abbreviation *S VII*, followed by the page number.

5. Hans Christian Andersen, "The Emperor's New Clothes," in *Eighty Fairy Tales*, New York, Pantheon, 1976, pp. 64–68.

is about its compulsive specular denial, about blindness as the nakedness's effect. In implying the king's nakedness as a figure in the screen, Lacan's goal is not to expose the nakedness but to reveal, inside the eye, the function of the blind spot: the function of *the screen within the gaze*.

*The Function of the Screen, or  
The Other Scene of Teaching*

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan discusses in an altogether different context the function of the screen in painting. His remarks on painting could, however, turn out to be uncannily illuminating as a commentary on his own appearance on the screen, as a reading of his own television picture.

The correlative of the picture . . . is the point of gaze, while that which forms the mediation from the one to the other, that which is between the two, is something of another nature than geometrical, optical space, something that plays an exactly reverse role, which operates, not because it can be traversed, but on the contrary because it is opaque—I mean the screen.

In what is presented to me as space of light, that which is gaze is always a play of light and of opacity. . . .

And if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen.<sup>6</sup>

If Lacan is thus staging on television the satirical comedy of his own exhibitionistic act in an exacerbated version of his own seminar as spectacle, the scene he plays out points at the same time to *another scene*, of which the former is a screen. While our fascinated gaze is focused on the personal comedy—or tragedy—of Lacan's persona, the other scene is that on which the teaching truly takes place, comes into effect beyond, outside the pathos—and the drama—of the personal stakes. Lacan writes elsewhere: "The discovery of the unconscious . . . is that the implications of meaning infinitely exceed the signs manipulated by the individual."<sup>7</sup> In relation to the screen, "reality is marginal," says Lacan (*FFC*, 108). The personal scene is centered; the other scene—the scene of teaching—is decentered: its stake is neither self-representation nor representation, but something of visuality as such cannot avoid eliding:

6. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1978, pp. 96–97. All further citations of this seminar will be indicated in the text with the abbreviation *FFC*, followed by the page number.

7. Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre II: Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 150 (my translation).

In Holbein's picture I showed you . . . the singular object floating in the foreground, which is there is be looked at, in order to catch, I would almost say, *to catch in its trap*, the observer, that is to say, us. It is, in short, an obvious way . . . , and one due to some moment of reflection on the part of the painter, of showing us that, as subjects, we are literally called into the picture and represented there as caught (*FFC*, 92).

In as much as the picture enters into a relation to desire, the place of a central screen is always marked, which is precisely that by which in front of the picture, I am elided as subject of the geometrical plane.

This is why the picture does not come into play in the field of representation. Its end and effect are elsewhere (*FFC*, 108).

*The Trap of Seeing, or  
The Specular Illusion*

As spectators, we are literally called into the screen and represented there as caught. The screen screens insofar as it reflects our act of seeing as complete, but does not reflect the screen within our gaze. This is why Lacan says he does not address himself to our gaze, but nonetheless speaks in its name. He does not address himself to our gaze insofar, precisely, as he captures it, insofar as our gaze is fascinated—in the mirror of the television picture—by the emperor's new clothes as a screen to our own nakedness. On one level, then, the television picture functions as a mirror.

Now the mirror, as is well known, is Lacan's fundamental paradigm for the genesis of perception, for a human psychic development modulated by an originary, emblematic phase he calls "the mirror stage." The first assumption by the child of his subjectivity is derived, according to Lacan, from the child's first perception of his body in the mirror (in the mirror, at the same time, of the Other's gaze, of the mother holding him whom he also sees in the reflection of the mirror, looking at him), a perception through which, in an imaginary movement, the child identifies with the human form, in recognizing as the image of his body not so much his real body—as yet uncoordinated and deprived of the control of its own movements—as the mature, autonomous, more powerful body of the adult parental figure holding him, which he thereby assumes as identical to, and constitutive of, his own image. The mirror thus epitomizes perception as a visual centering anchored in the misperception—in the denial—of one's own castration: the apparent fullness of the image in the mirror is an objectification of the gaze which, in substantifying the image as an object, elides from it the very insufficiency experienced by the subject. Facing his mirror image, the child perceives himself as king (all powerful, all seeing), in much the

same way as the subjects, in "The Emperor's New Clothes," attribute sovereignty to the king so as to deny their own unfitness.

This specular illusion (or elision) becomes constitutive of consciousness as such, in its basic gesture of self-reflection:

That in which consciousness may turn back upon itself, grasp itself . . . *as seeing oneself seeing*—represents mere sleight of hand. An avoidance of the function of the gaze is at work here (*FFC*, 74).

Psychoanalysis regards consciousness as irremediably limited, and institutes it as a principle not only of idealization, but of *méconnaissance* [misperception, misrecognition], as—using a term that takes on a new value by being referred to a visible domain—*scotoma* (*FFC*, 81–83).

The whole tradition of philosophy, in fact, based as it is on a reliance on the narcissistic specularity of consciousness, is equally determined as misguided in its primal reference to reflection as a visual centering.

Does its empire [narcissism in its reference to the specular illusion] not extend as far as this reference of the philosophical tradition represented by plenitude encountered by the subject in the mode of contemplation (*FFC*, 74)?

#### *The Transference as Picture*

Insofar as the picture on the screen captures the spectators in calling them into the picture, in soliciting them to perceive Lacan as king (an idealized self-image: "You *know* that I've got an answer to everything. . . . Who doesn't know that it's with the analytic discourse that I've made it big?"), *Television* is, indeed, a trap for the spectator's gaze.

But this trap is not so different in its essence from what happens, in psychoanalysis, in the process of the transference, in which the patient falls in love with his own ideal image mirrored by the analyst, an image which thereby functions as a screen to the analysand's unconscious.

I have already explained to you how it works, by referring to it the narcissistic relation by which the subject becomes an object worthy of love. . . .

As a specular mirage, love is essentially a deception. It is situated in the field established at the level of the pleasure reference, of that sole signifier necessary to introduce a perspective centered on the ideal point, capital I, placed somewhere in the Other, from which the Other sees me, in the form I like to be seen (*FFC*, 267–268).

I have described elsewhere the sight in the mirror of the ego ideal, of

that being that he first saw appearing in the form of the parent holding him up before the mirror (*FFC*, 257).

The transference, however, is not simply love—it is love addressed to knowledge. In the patient's specular idealization, the analyst is imaginarily invested with the knowledge the analysand precisely lacks: knowledge of the subject's own unconscious. "The transference," writes Lacan, "is unthinkable unless one sets out from the subject supposed to know" (*FFC*, 253).

But the subject who is supposed to know is, in its very constitution, a denial of the unconscious, a denial of the screen within the gaze in the very gesture of asserting—in the mirror—the possible completeness of the act of seeing:

The subject supposed to know, God himself, to call him by the name Pascal gives him, . . . the god of the philosophers, here he is, dislodged from his latency in every theory. *Theoria*, might that not be the place in the world for theo-logy?<sup>8</sup>

The level of reciprocity between the gaze and the gazed at is, for the subject, more open than any other to alibi. That is why we should try to avoid, by our interventions in the session, allowing the subject to establish himself on that level. On the contrary, we should cut him off from this point of ultimate gaze, which is illusory. . . . It is not, after all, for nothing that analysis is not carried out face to face (*FFC*, 77–78).

#### *The Analyst's Face*

That analysis is not held face to face becomes emblematic, for Lacan, of the fact that in the transference, the analyst gives face to something that cannot be seen, something that enacts a split between the gaze and vision. If *Television* does, indeed, show us Lacan's face, I would suggest precisely that the whole thrust of the program is to make of Lacan's face a figure, paradoxically enough, of the invisibility of the analyst's face: to show the analyst's face insofar as it *resists appearing face to face*.

It could thus be said that what Lacan is doing on the television screen is playing God, playing, in effect, the God of Moses, whose face cannot be seen and who pronounces, from within the ardent bush (the ardent screen) the enigma of an essentially hermetic message: "*I am that which I am.*"

"I would very much like to know," says Lacan, "in the face of whom, in the face of what, Moses was on the Sinai":

8. Lacan, "La méprise du sujet supposé savoir," in *Scilicet*, no. 1, Paris, Seuil, 1968, p. 39.

But, due to the impossibility of sustaining the radiance of the face of the one who said, "I am that which I am," we should be content to say that the ardent bush was the thing of Moses, and leave it there (*S VII*, 205).

Commenting on Freud's late study, *Moses and Monotheism*, Lacan insists on the way in which Freud postulates an understanding of the endurance, against all odds, of Moses's teaching only through what is, in Freud's interpretation, the Scriptures' fusion of *two* different Gods, of *two* different episodes in history, of *two* different men named Moses, the first of whom is murdered by his people after having successfully led the liberation movement of the Exodus, and the second of whom picks up, at a two-generation gap, the tradition of the first beyond and through an occultation of its creator's murder, and carries to fruition the resettlement of the monotheistic tradition and the historical foundation of the new religion based upon the ten commandments. Lacan recapitulates Freud's interpretation in a style which is at once elliptical and full of resonance. It is as though the "thing of Moses," the radiance of the *face* that Moses's gaze cannot sustain was precisely the *de-facement* of a murder. And it is the nakedness of this defacement which, like the king's nakedness, cannot be *faced* and which is therefore screened by the textual inscription of *another* face. What cannot be seen is death, the murder and mortality of kings, the split within the oneness of authority (the wholeness of the truth) which founds the uniqueness of Mosaic teaching, paradoxically enough, in the division, and the substitution, between the two figures who are its vehicles. It is as though Lacan's very hermeticism, his very textualization of the television show and of the image of the face, reinscribes Freud's teaching in the same way that the second Moses recapitulates the teaching of the first:

We have the dissociation of Moses the rationalist and Moses the inspired, the obscurantist. On the basis of an examination of the traces of history, Freud can find a motivated way for the message of Moses the rationalist only insofar as this message has been transmitted in obscurity, that is, insofar as the message has been linked, in repression, to the murder of the Great Man. And it is precisely through that, Freud tells us, that the message could be passed on, conserved in a state of efficacy that we can measure in history. This is so close to the Christian tradition that it is impressive—insofar as the primordial murder of the Great Man reemerges in a second murder that, in some way, translates it and brings it to light—the murder of Christ (*S VII*, 205).

If the analyst's face is thus exhibited as what cannot be seen, it is not simply, therefore, insofar as it embodies what defies the gaze in God's face, but insofar as

it embodies, *at the same time*, what defies the gaze in the king's nakedness. The king's nakedness inhabits God's face in the very nakedness of the face—or of the figure—in the screen.

*The Price of Incarnation*

So that, playing God, or playing king, Lacan enacts, in fact, on television, nothing less than an incarnation of God's death. In his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan says:

We have to follow Freud, not as individual, in his atheistic profession of faith, but the one who, the first, gave value and legitimacy to a myth that answers in our thought this fact which has been formulated without reason . . . in the consciousness of our time, this fact perceived by the most lucid minds, and even more by the masses, which is called the death of God (*S VII*, 227).

The myth of the origin of the Law is incarnated in the murder of the father. . . . The myth of the murder of the father is, indeed, the myth of a time for which God is dead.

But if God has died for us, it is because he has always already been dead, and this is what Freud tells us. He has never been the father, except in the mythology of the son. . . . That is to say that the man who has incarnated the death of God is still there (*S VII*, 209).

But who is the man who has incarnated the death of God, and who is still there? Within this implicit figure of Christ, brought deictically into the present, Lacan reveals to us a second-degree figure both of Freud and of himself, or of anyone who takes upon himself the particular burden of insight of God's death: a figure of the price paid by the incarnation of the radicality of the psychoanalytic message. "The analyst," says Lacan, "pays with his person: he is literally dispossessed of it" (*S VII*, 337).

This is equally the price paid by Lacan on the television screen: "Man survives the death of God assumed by himself, but in so doing he offers himself before us" (*S VII*, 209).

*Not the Whole Truth*

Unlike Christianity, however, which invites us to behold God's death, to bear witness to it precisely in the act of seeing and thereby to recuperate it, to deny it in the resurrection (Jesus is alive, God is alive), Lacan's Christ is a figure of the signifier, insofar as in the signifier we forever address but a screen—a substitute, but not a screen or substitute for something that was ever—or could ever be made—present: "God has always already been dead." God's death

cannot be seen—represented, understood, or known—any more than God's face can be faced. If Lacan's mode, unlike Jesus's, is not resurrection, but survival ("Man survives the death of God assumed by himself, but, in so doing, he offers himself before us"), this *signifying* of God's death does not become itself a *signified*, a known, a content, but is rather the performance of an abyss in the very act of bearing witness to it, an enactment of the abysmal quality of the survival. Psychoanalysis cannot become, in other words, an adequate epistemology of God's death, it can only be an act, a practice, an enactment or, as Lacan audaciously puts it, an *ethics* of the nontotality of truth as vision: an ethics, that is, of nondenial of this nontotality, of bearing witness—and of giving space—to the very marginality of reality with respect to the screen.

Lacan, on the television show and in the thrust of his whole work, does not give us, therefore, an account of God's death: rather, what he offers is an *efficacious*, that is, a *displacing* act of *witnessing* both the necessity and failure to account for it. The efficacy of Lacan's performance as a witness—on the screen as in his whole work—is connected to the ways in which he shows us that his witness, his performance, cannot be completely seen. In enacting the abysmal quality of man's survival of God's death, Lacan invites us, in effect, not to see, but to become in our turn the attentive witnesses of language and of discourse insofar as discourse, failing to rejoin itself and coincide with its own meaning, fails precisely to be *whole*: fails here—in the "sovereign act" which is Lacan's own—both to establish the *integrity* of its signification and *fully to signify* its own failure to signify.

It is, however, through this breach of sense and this eclipse of image that the screen bears witness, and that the analyst's face, in paradoxically bespeaking the necessity of facing its own radical defacement, becomes an *analytic voice* that carries way beyond the breach of vision; a voice (a figure, properly, of speech) that, in embodying the very split between the gaze and vision, and in enacting the disintegration of its constant effort to recover the integrity of its own truth (the wholeness of its vision), makes us stumble on, and hit upon, the real.

I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying the whole truth is materially impossible: words miss it. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real (*TV*, 7).

# Reproducing Nature: The Museum of Natural History As Nonsite

ANN REYNOLDS

*I mean it was just the whole spectacle, the whole thing—the dinosaurs made a tremendous impression on me. I think this initial impact is still in my psyche. We used to go to the Museum of Natural History all the time.*

*That was your museum rather than the art museum?*

*Yes.*

—Robert Smithson, interview,  
July 1972

Out there, exquisitely extending from Rozel Point and then turning in on itself to a place that is both an ending and a beginning, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* needs to refer to nothing outside itself; site and nonsite collapse into the vertiginous patterning of a strange footprint on the shores of the unknown. And even the artist is "startled to discover that this footprint is our own."<sup>1</sup> Yet, because of its location and physical fragility, few of us have actually experienced it in this way. Instead we see it neatly framed as a striking still photographic image that is endlessly reproduced as the preferred symbol, elegant and concise, for "earth art," with its visual self-sufficiency still assumed to be intact.

Many images are imposed on the eye during a single viewing of Smithson's film *The Spiral Jetty*; spliced together they flicker in and out on the screen, but like the shredded pages that float down the side of a cliff in an early segment of the film, their singular referential logic is renounced for the distanced experience of the reproductive process. Pieces in the Jetty's story are lost or reshuffled

1. A. S. Eddington, cited in Tobias Dantzig, *Number, the Language of Science*, New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954, p. 232; quoted in Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," ed. Nancy Holt, *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, New York, New York University Press, 1979, p. 113.

so as never again to present a simultaneous impact. In one of these fragments, we see the artist, or merely the eye of his camera, weaving amidst the reassembled bones in the American Museum of Natural History's Hall of Late Dinosaurs, he and everything surrounding him scorched by a red filter held over the camera's lens. Space and objects burn together, their independent contours becoming confused and imprecise. Over this image, the sound of Smithson's voice reminds us of his presence there through a quotation from Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*: "I have been here, ever since I began to be, my appearances elsewhere having been put in by other parties."

As the *Spiral Jetty*'s image wanders far from the site of its creation, so did its maker travel—up and down the state of New Jersey, the West, Midwest, and Europe—collecting things. These things—rocks, sand, maps, fossils, dead trees, documentary sketches, photographs, and postcards—made their appearances within the white walls of various art-world institutions—the museum, commercial gallery, alternative space, and the artist's own studio. But if, on the film's sound track, Smithson still insists that he remains within the halls of the Museum of Natural History ("I have been here, ever since I began to be"), he and his objects have more than a symbolic relationship with that institution. Like the fossilized footprints of a brontosaurus, fragments of a giant redwood, and meteorites from Greenland, Smithson's artifacts not only make their appearances elsewhere but also refer back to the sites and/or historical moments from which they came, as pieces of a narrative that is always embroiled in controversy and that can never be reproduced completely.

Smithson confessed that he found art museums generally "kind of dull," while the "whole spectacle" of the natural history museum held his interest for his entire life. To recognize that Smithson's thinking about objects and their presentation came from a separate place and developed out of a separate frame of reference and set of assumptions about visual experience than that of an artist "formed" by the pedagogy of the art museum is to gain a certain insight into his art. This becomes all the more clear when it is seen that this place defined in turn the habits of viewing he hoped to promote in his own work, particularly the nonsites.<sup>2</sup>

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Smithson's conception of natural history, and of museums in general, began with New York's American Museum of Natural History. Reconstructing the general shape of his understanding is fairly simple; the museum's Department of

2. This essay is a portion of a much larger study, *Robert Smithson: Reproduction to Reclamation*, my dissertation in progress at the Graduate Center, CUNY. Garth Alperstein enticed me into the American Museum of Natural History and Lissa Becker listened to my stories about it. I also want to thank the staff of the museum's Film and Photograph Archive, Penelope Bodry-Sanders, Carmen Collazo, and Billy Byrne, for their time and patience.

Public Instruction provides a script of its educational aims and how they were to be carried out through a systematic pedagogical approach that sought out its audience both inside and outside its exhibition halls.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the premise that direct contact with natural objects and the people who study them will teach children and adults more about the natural world than any textbook can, the museum's education staff devised and distributed nature study collections to the public schools. This would "place in the hands of the teacher, so far as practicable, the actual specimens required in her work."<sup>4</sup> Representative specimens of mammals, birds, insects, minerals, and wood, drawn from the museum's collection, traveled to and from the schools in drab wooden carrying cases called musettes, and frequently teachers set up temporary museums of natural history in their classrooms by borrowing and displaying several different musettes at once.<sup>5</sup> These portable collections performed, on a smaller scale, the major practical work of their home institution: the metonymic transportation and reproduction of natural history. But looking at and touching these bits of the natural world were followed by visits to the more complicated displays in the museum itself, and then field trips out into parks, quarries, and the wild; thus the child's experience of the museum became increasingly involved with the consideration of an endless number of locations outside it.

In linguistic terms, metonymy is based on a proposed contiguous association between the literal subject and its adjacent replacement; the same can be said for an analogous, although primarily visual system of signification used in the musettes and ultimately in the museum's halls. There the visitor is presented with an assembly of fragments that are associated with much more general natural categories or places by being actual members or parts of them, but that never intend

3. There is little in the way of secondary source material dealing specifically with the museum's education policies. John Michael Kennedy's 1968 Yale dissertation, *Philanthropy and Science in New York City: The American Museum of Natural History*, Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1970, is the only thorough historical account of the museum. Kennedy analyzes the often difficult relationships between the trustees, staff scientists, and education department and how these hostilities affected the way the museum collection was displayed in the exhibition halls, but the education policies of the museum are of secondary concern to him. The museum's own publications, annual reports, in-house correspondence, and departmental archives are still the best sources of information.

4. George H. Sherwood, "The Story of the Museum's Service to the Schools," *Natural History*, vol. XVII (July-August 1927), p. 323. Sherwood notes that musettes were developed partly in response to the addition of "nature study" to many public school curricula. The museum's practice of constructing and lending the musettes to the public schools continued until about 1980.

5. Smithsonian would not have benefited personally from this and other outreach programs, since none of them except the 1950s television series "Adventure" reached his public school system in New Jersey. Although he could have seen photographs of the musettes reproduced in numerous museum brochures and magazines or set up at the Bear Mountain Trailside Museum, it is not necessary to establish a direct route of influence for these pedagogical tools; they are small-scale versions of the exhibits in the halls of the museum with which he was very familiar. They just make the pedagogical underpinnings of these larger "musettes" explicit. Marjorie Ransom, of the museum's Education Department, provided me with information concerning how and where the musettes and other programs were distributed.



*Great Horned Owl Musette. (Courtesy American Museum of Natural History).*



to replace one's complete experience of the latter. "Habitat groups," the AMNH's term for its stationary dioramas, may suggest their intended function as something closer to a sprawling wildlife sanctuary than a museum installation, yet their individual perimeters are selective enough to meet the particularly didactic aims of the institution:

The well-labeled exhibition hall with its habitat groups, its carefully selected specimens and its well thought out arrangements, stands as the great silent teacher, a true exponent of visual education. What a vast store of information is contained in these halls and what an aid they are to teachers in giving to their pupils accurate knowledge of nature.<sup>6</sup>

By plodding through a series of repetitive methodological steps in the field and then in the museum's halls, teams of naturalists and artists were thought to attain visual—and thus factual—accuracy in their reproduction of particular natural environments and their indigenous species.<sup>7</sup> But what they were in fact doing was suspending a group of relatively disparate but choice objects and images, gathered from a generally defined area, within the highly artificial confines of a gridded diagram of space. That space metonymically refers to but is not identical with a particular place somewhere "out there." The teams achieved specific accuracy through their transportation and/or reproduction of individual parts, but not in the total image they ultimately provide.

All of the habitat groups were constructed the same way, regardless of the origins of their specimens. An undulating grid of wood and wire mesh covered the floor of the display case; collected animal and reptile skins mounted on synthetic casts, plants, and rocks were carefully set down within it, then its surface was dressed and modeled with plaster-of-paris-coated burlap. Loose soil and random natural debris, strewn on this now painted surface, hid any lingering traces of the ordering matrix underneath. The same process of masked suspension of parts produced the image presented on the curved walls behind the groups. Using a penciled grid, the artist executed an exact blow-up of his best oil field sketch on the canvas-covered walls, constantly checking the accuracy of the transferred image by comparing it with equally gridded stereoscopic photographs also taken in the field.

6. Sherwood, "The Story of the Museum's Service," p. 332. This has been the Education Department's attitude toward the exhibition halls up to the present, although the terminology in which it is expressed, except for the ever-present phrase "visual education," has altered over the years. See, for example, the in-house publication *Curator* for numerous discussions of the pedagogical issues involved in exhibition design from 1958 to the present.

7. This information comes from passages in several of the museum's "Official Guides" to its halls, press releases for the openings of particular halls, a 1950 in-house film entitled "Preparing a Museum Group," narrated by Ray deLucia, and conversations with deLucia, a background and foreground artist for the museum's habitat groups and other installations for over forty years.



*Installation of Elk Group, North American Mammal Hall, 1941 (courtesy AMNH).*

By smoothing over the rigid horizontals and verticals of the grid that carried the natural order into the institution, the habitat teams were able to enchant the viewer with remarkably illusionistic images, yet they were not permitted to fool this audience into believing that they themselves had been physically transported in time or space. Maps and written descriptions of the area's topography, climate, and history and often a narrative of how particular specimens were collected, hang on the walls beside the groups and set a much more directly pedagogical process in motion forcing the viewers to consider at least two different, yet metonymically related places, one located outside the walls of the museum and the other, an exacting although selective reproduction of it, located in the exhibition hall's display case.<sup>8</sup> This dual consideration also requires the spectator to establish a conceptual relationship between these two sites, regardless of whether or not they have actually traveled to both places.

8. The Trustees' Committee on the North American Mammal Hall opened this space to the public after only ten of the projected eighteen groups were complete so that the museum visitor could observe firsthand the process of transferring a selected area to the habitat group showcase; press release for the opening of the North American Mammal Hall (March 29, 1942).

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Robert Smithson often described his concept of site and nonsite in terms of sculpture's traditional relation to nature: "Instead of putting something on the landscape, I decided it would be interesting to transfer the land indoors, to the nonsite, which is an abstract container."<sup>9</sup> But he was not interested merely in reversing the sculptural object's location or even its identity. For that to be so, he would have been satisfied simply with dressing up a portion of the land indoors. "Most sculptors just think about the object," he insisted, "but for me there is no focus on one object so it is the back and forth thing."<sup>10</sup> Smithson's terms were "indoors" and "outdoors," not sculpture and nature; he was intent on bringing something from the great, unfocused landscape into an enclosed space without suppressing his natural souvenir's ability to refer to its former position in the outside world.

The relationship between Smithson's nonsites and the strategies used in the AMNH habitat groups and musettes is highly suggestive. Both present collected specimens in geometric containers that refer, in a variety of ways, to the original context for their retrieved contents. In displaying maps, photographs, and sometimes supplementary texts along with the artifacts he had collected from specific areas, Smithson was engaging two places, one inside and the other outside the exhibition space, in a way that the viewer cannot fail to understand, even if he or she were not a regular visitor to the American Museum of Natural History. But the spectacular hook of the technicolor images created by the public institution to draw its audience into its pedagogical project is disregarded, for the most part, in the nonsites, and as a result questions raised by what one is looking at inside any institution in relation to the world outside only multiply.

The nonsites do not provide a very satisfactory aesthetic appearance; their parts do not come together to complete a unified conception of what one is viewing, nor do they send the spectator eagerly outward in search of a beautiful spot referred to in the piece. If, through the shimmer of mirrors, the intensity of enamel paint, or the texture of collected materials, the pieces are visually striking, their beauty is always kept in check by the relative banality of the documentary photographs and harsh photostat blow-up maps, and particularly by the titles of the pieces. Phrases such as "Line of Wreckage" and site locations such as chalk pit, quarry, salt mine, and mineral dump twist one's visual pleasure with an inescapable irony that succeeds in short-circuiting the uncontrollable assumptions one has about what and how nature should be viewed. Like the audiences Smithson lured to public lectures by promising to talk on the ruins at Palenque, then stunned by showing slides of a run-down hotel in the small town of Palenque

9. "Symposium," in Nina Jager, ed., *Earth Art*, Ithaca, Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, 1970, n.p.; reprinted in Holt, *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, p. 160.

10. *Ibid.*; Holt, p. 161.



*Mineral and Gem Hall, AMNH.*

itself, the viewer of the nonsites sees his or her preconceived notions of what is possible in the repertoire of landscape subject-matter challenged and even dismissed. With few exceptions Smithsonian's sites are not the places one usually goes in search of spectacular visual experiences, even if the objects one finds there are, in themselves, quite extraordinary. The staff of the Museum of Natural History understood and respected this type of difference, and, in order to maintain a spectacular appeal for their audiences, they left certain moments in nature's history out or, when presenting their artifacts, suppressed all "ugly" aspects in favor of an orderly facade.

Until 1975, the Mineral and Gem Hall presented such a facade. Containing long glass cases filled with individual specimens set on pedestals or resting on label cards arranged in neat rows, this hall was a reminder of how all the exhibition halls looked before the early experiments with habitat groups began to appear alongside the encyclopedic display cases, finally replacing them altogether. The last to be radically renovated, the Mineral and Gem Hall posed a particular conceptual problem. For when the Mineral Sciences Department's staff began to develop designs for a new hall in 1974, they did not consider constructing natural habitat groups, but chose the jewelry store as their model



*Entrance to Hall of Minerals and Gems, AMNH, 1976.*

instead. Lining large, variously shaped cases with dark fabric, they arranged the most valuable or visually appealing specimens in pleasing patterns under dramatic lighting in an otherwise dimly lit space.<sup>11</sup> With cost a probable factor, the designers of the new hall did not re-create the original habitats of particular minerals and gems. The value possessed by mineral-rich sites is economic rather than aesthetic in any traditional sense. Smithson did not live to see the curatorial solution to the problem of constructing aesthetically pleasing habitat groups of rocks in the new Mineral and Gem Hall, but he had already devised his own method of displaying the mineral riches of particular sites. His sympathetic critique of the museum's exhibition practices is most clearly stated in his site/nonsites of industrial areas, particularly those he produced in Germany in the late 1960s.

In mid-December 1968, Smithson accepted an invitation from Konrad Fischer to make an installation for the art dealer's Düsseldorf gallery. Smithson was not commissioned to do anything in particular, but he had already re-

11. The early hall contained a few mineral and gem habitat groups, but even these were depictions of highly romanticized subjects, such as pearl diving.



Robert Smithson. *Gute Hoffnung's Hütte*. 1968.

searched the nearby Ruhr District before he arrived—which indicates that he had been thinking of dealing with it in some way. Fischer arranged for the photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, who had extensive knowledge of the area from their own interest in its industrial architecture, to drive Smithson and himself around the Ruhr Valley. Bernd Becher remembers that Smithson was interested in seeing local types of slag, a by-product of steel production.<sup>12</sup> They visited many sites, but Smithson seemed to be looking for a particular type of material and not a particular place; color and the physical structure of the rocks seemed to be his major concern. When they arrived at one steelworks in Sterkrade (Oberhausen), Gute Hoffnung's Hütte, Smithson was quite impressed with its landscape and called its views "dramatic."<sup>13</sup> This became his chosen site.

12. My information concerning Smithson's travels around the Ruhr and his collection of materials for *Nonsite (Ruhr-District)* and *Nonsite—Essen Soil and Mirrors* comes from interviews with Bernd and Hilla Becher, July 1987 and February 1988.

13. According to Bernd Becher, this site was his idea, as were all the others he showed Smithson. The Bechers themselves were working on a project on the Oberhausen steelworks and foundries at this time.

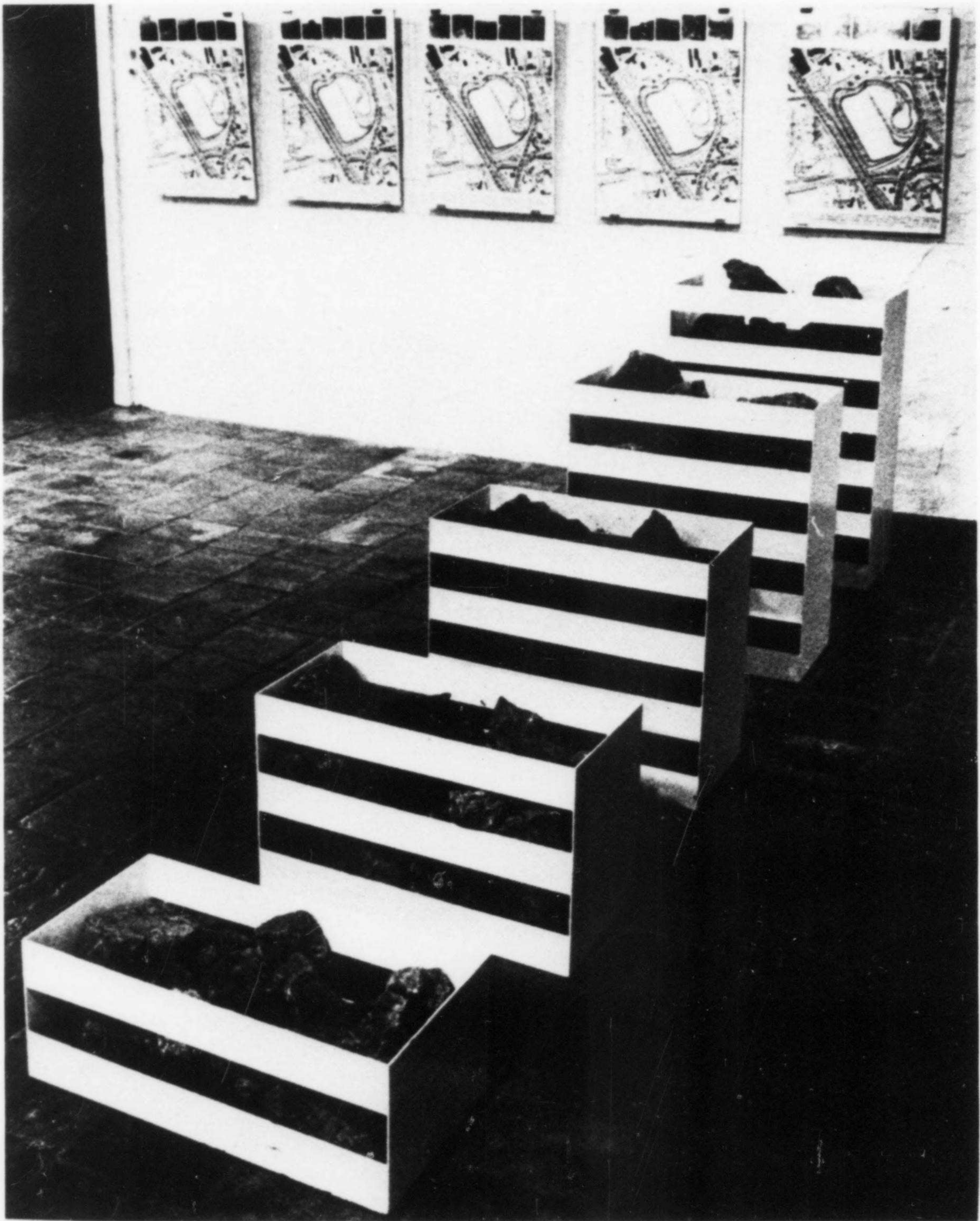
Although the curatorial staff of the American Museum of Natural History never sent its habitat teams to such a site, Smithson proceeded to document the site's appearance and collect specimens as if he had been in that institution's employ. He may have started with an idea about seeing particular kinds of materials, but he was also thinking in terms of images. And he therefore got permission from the company to photograph the area in addition to collecting some of its slag.

Finding a "subject" in vast fields of gray and brown matter such as these is not easy, but Smithson, having carried his camera to urban, industrial, and quarry sites for more than two years, had developed something of a routine in his picture-taking. With every snap of the camera's shutter, he selected from a repertory of pictorial conventions, ranging in type from the documentary to the picturesque. At Sterkrade, he aimed his camera alternately at the slag piles and rubbish heaps, circled and scored by the deep tire tracks left by heavy industrial equipment, and across the dingy field to the smokestacks and blast furnaces shrouded in thick, gray haze. The first type of shot resulted in close-ups that record the complex textural patterns of the area's surface as well as slag in its various states—as a hardened liquid and as a large, amorphous mass, broken up into chunks. In the second type, Smithson used the mounds of slag and dirt as dark repoussoir elements in views of the furnaces. These include small, gesturing figures to indicate scale and establish focus in a few of his sweeping views of the overall area. In a third type of image, he documented his procedure of gathering site materials. One photograph includes Fischer collecting slag. He is obviously a visitor to the site, his hard hat contrasting sharply with his elegant overcoat. Glancing toward the camera from under the hat, he resembles the strip mining company executives, sleeves hastily rolled up in the field, who are depicted in the companies' annual reports, which Smithson would begin to collect a few years later.<sup>14</sup> If the image of Fischer mimes the collecting of slag, Smithson performed this job in earnest, gathering great quantities of the rough, gray rocks on several trips to the site. These specimens, as well as the black and white photographs, were the raw material he took back to the gallery.

Smithson's resulting *Nonsite (Ruhr-District)* consists of five steel bins filled with the gathered slag, together with five nearly identical framed sets of documentary material. The largest document in each group is a photostat blow-up of a site map; Smithson obtained the original in his usual way—by cutting out a section of a 1:25,000 topographical map of the district. The map indicates the various railroad routes and highways that weave around the area; the slag and refuse fields remain a blank, oval space in the center, telling nothing of their topography, only of their position in relation to the travel routes that determine

14. There is some irony in this, whether or not Smithson was aware that Gute Hoffnung's Hütte was founded, in part, by Fischer's great grandfather.

*Robert Smithson. Nonsite (Ruhr-District). 1968.*



their edges. Each map is bounded on the top by five different photographs taken at the site and, running along the bottom, a descriptive text. The viewer is thus presented with several different images of the site: one from above, whose topographical accuracy, based on aerial photographs, fails to keep up with or, rather, doesn't even try to record the rapid transformations of the industrial landscape; another consisting of a variety of views composed by the artist; and a third describing the site's dissolution in an indirect and slightly poetic manner.

The exhibition announcement, which Smithson also designed, features a section of a map of the Ruhr Valley.<sup>15</sup> The rectangular card cuts off the map at its left edge, just at the point where the site is indicated with a symbol for iron foundry and steelworks. The local town's name, Sterkrade (Oberhausen), is cut in half, leaving only "rade." By cropping the map in this way, the symbol key and the site itself just fit, one on each end of the announcement, making the card a miniaturized model of the distance to be bridged between the site and its symbolic equivalent, the nonsite. And, although the actual distance between Konrad Fischer's gallery in Düsseldorf and Sterkrade is not so great—only a matter of minutes—the distance between the metonymic image in the "art" and the place itself is intentionally circuitous. None of the images Smithson has proposed can replace the site; they can only refer to it through the various artistic and scientific conventions available. In this way Smithson creates his "back and forth thing."

Smithson set the white bins containing the slag in a row perpendicular to the wall in front of the last set of framed documentary material. The bins are of graduated heights and widths; as they increase in height toward the wall, they decrease in width, as if each were a compressed and stretched version of its predecessor. They are all open at the top and have slatted vents on both of their long sides. The slag chunks are loosely piled within the steel bins, their irregular edges erratically poking out of the side slat openings and the top.<sup>16</sup>

The AMNH's collections have always been presented in geometrical boxes, too, although the museum's curators transformed the ordering role of the grid inside these boxes with the habitat groups. In each group, the habitat teams presented a more "natural" history by concealing the grid that originally organized the reproduction of its particular site. The regularizing system still stretches across the walls of the exhibition halls, yet it disappears as one peers into the window displays onto images rather than artifacts of nature. Unlike the AMNH artists, Smithson exaggerated the metonymic process of referring to his Ruhr District site in the gallery by neither reproducing a miniaturized context ("habitat") for his rocks nor allowing the diagram that reordered the transported

15. The original map was torn from Konrad Fischer's school atlas (conversation with Konrad Fischer, New York, September 1987).

16. Smithson also exhibited a lump of asphalt that he picked up at the site. It was set within the perimeters of a white square on the gallery floor. Becher notes that this is fitting since it is another kind of residue product often dumped at industrial areas after the completion of a newly paved road.

material to disappear. The geometric containers state their role as just that: containers that hold the jostled rocks brought in from outside the gallery.

The bins and their contents also speak of their production and the role that container and contained, product and by-product, have played in the process. The rise of the bins echoes the rise of the molten slag during an early process of refining iron ore in the making of steel. When heated, flux (a substance used to promote the fusion of minerals) draws the impurities out of the raw iron ore and combines with them to form slag. Lighter than the metal, the slag floats on top and is then skimmed or drawn off. Robert Hobbs has argued that filling steel containers with the "industrial sludge" that steel refining produces undermines the piece's apparent rationality—its neatly ordered bins and documents—and the underlying premises of mass production itself.<sup>17</sup> But in reality the piece does neither of these things. Slag is not the waste product it was considered to be in the nineteenth century. The mineral content of the slag has been discovered to be a good fertilizer, and its abundance in previously abandoned industrial areas of Germany has revitalized some of these districts as profitable agricultural centers. Smithson is also not specifically commenting on the wasteful terms of mass production. The nonsite bins were hand-manufactured to Smithson's specifications by several local metal workers; their hand-crafted origins are quite obvious in their imperfectly welded seams and slightly irregular dimensions. Nor can one call the pyrometallurgical procedure that produced the slag a representative aspect of mass production. Thus, at the time it was created, the industrial image Smithson provides is not so much contradictory as unstable.

A great source of pride to Germany before World War II, the Ruhr produced the machinery of two world wars, inspiring the Neue Sachlichkeit photographers to commemorate its industrial monuments in albums such as *Der Gigant an der Uhr* (Berlin, Abertus-Verlag, 1928). The Ruhr District continued to support West Germany's postwar recovery, but the area was threatened in the late 1960s by a decline in heavy industry like that in America. An article that Smithson clipped out of *Time* the month before he left for Germany made this quite clear: "The Ruhr seems unable to break out of its outmoded coal- and steel-based industrial pattern, which is slowly pulling it down."<sup>18</sup> What Smithson's *Nonsite (Ruhr-District)* offers, then, is an image of an endangered species, a place soon to pass out of existence, only to be reclaimed in terms of a different kind of use value. And this is exactly what has happened. Gute Hoffnung's Hütte has closed, and the property has been sold to a developer; most of its buildings have been torn down, and the slag fields, now covered with a tentative crop of grass and wildflowers, bears a sign with a map of the site that is strikingly similar

17. Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1981, p. 115. Hobbs calls the piece *Nonsite, Oberhausen, Germany*. I am using the original title.

18. Clipping from *Time* (November 8, 1968), p. 108, in Smithson Papers, Archives of American Art.

to the one Smithson used in the nonsite and a text outlining the initial development of the area.

\*

The AMNH curators were and still are aware of the instability of many of the images they reproduce. In fact, they openly confessed that they would probably have to let go of the "back and forth" in the museum's last major habitat group, the North American Mammals Hall. Dr. Harold E. Anthony, curator of the museum's Department of Mammalogy, proposed the creation of the hall because he felt that, in light of the increasing disappearance of American wildlife, the museum should provide a permanent image of the American wilderness "for future generations that may not have the opportunity of knowing the living animals."<sup>19</sup> The possibility of this happening to the animals and plants presented in the North American Mammals Hall, and in many others as well, is one of the reasons for the museum staff's consistent stress on the metonymic relationship between the habitat groups and their original sites, a relationship that they thought would produce a "correct" image of nature, and perhaps, someday, the only remaining evidence of its existence.<sup>20</sup>

If the American wilderness has not yet passed away, it, as well as other places, cultures, and wildlife, are unstable enough for the images of them presented by the museum to be suitably dramatic. The Dinosaur Halls, Smithson's particular favorites, are spectacular precisely because they refer to an actual place in time that cannot be experienced directly, but only imagined.

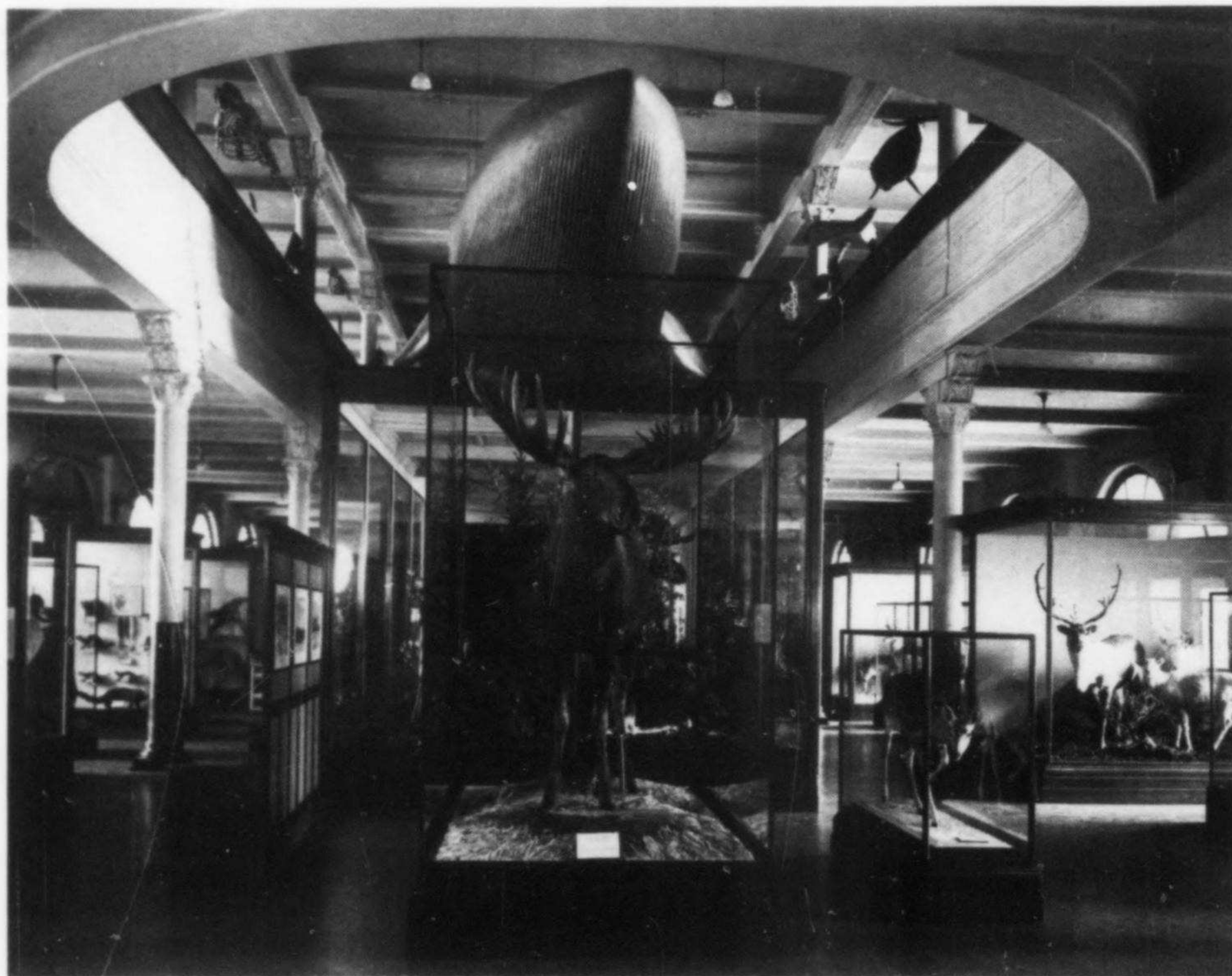
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What, then, does it mean to exhibit or re-create Smithson's nonsites without their accompanying documentary material, or out of sync with the sites to which they refer, as has recently become the habit of galleries and museums? The AMNH's installations, particularly the habitat groups, are elastic commodities, remaining pedagogical on many levels within many contexts, and often for profit. The extensive photo documentation of the habitat groups, catalogued by subject matter as well as by location in the museum's photographic collection, reveals the expanded potential of the groups as images or pedagogical illustra-

19. Press release from the opening of the North American Mammals Hall.

20. The habitat group also sought a kind of completeness in its references that went beyond the scientific; frequently it took the form of popular myths as well. An early wall label for the Grant Caribou concludes a brief summary of the physical qualities of the species and its eating and migration habits with: "Caribou are close relatives of the European Reindeer which draw Santa Claus's Sleigh at Christmas tide." Fact and legend sit quite comfortably together here as they are presented to the minds of children.

*North American Mammal Hall, AMNH. c. 1922.*



*New North American Mammal Hall, AMNH. 1976.*



tions of nature in magazines and textbooks. But, when reproduced in such new contexts, they are always associated with the places and things they represent.<sup>21</sup> Are Smithson's nonsites endlessly elastic too?

The historically and geographically specific set of circumstances within which Smithson embeds his works are, of necessity, temporary. Take, for instance, *Nonsite—Essen Soil and Mirrors*, the other nonsite Smithson executed in Düsseldorf, for the Kunsthalle's "Prospect '69" exhibition. The older mine sites in Essen, a town also located in the Ruhr District, consist of mountains of red soil, the by-product of an obsolete process of extracting coal from rock. Now used as paving for walkways and tennis courts, this material has recently become quite scarce. The mountain of red earth that Bernd Becher selected for Smithson to collect specimens from was already a very low hill in 1969, and it was soon to be redeveloped as a housing tract. Long before Smithson came to Düsseldorf, the

21. The habitat groups are carefully photographed from an elaborate scaffolding suspended inside the groups in order to make them appear to be scenes from nature itself rather than reconstructions in a museum setting.

*Robert Smithson. Nonsite (Palisades, Edgewater, New Jersey). 1968. Installation Whitney Museum of American Art, 1988.*



mine had been closed, and although in the summer of 1987 Becher could still identify the general area where the mine had been located, the particular site had already been erased in the redevelopment process. Smithson's nonsite thus presents a fragile system, soon to be nothing more than an image without a referent. An "eerie stillness," similar to *Time's* description of the abandoned mines in parts of the Ruhr Valley, hangs over the work.<sup>22</sup>

In viewing a recent reproduction of this nonsite at the John Weber Gallery, it is not so important to understand that one is looking at a reconstruction, or that the specific site from which Smithson collected the material can no longer be found, as it is to maintain *some* relationship with this changing area of the Ruhr. If the fragility or frustration of the connection between the site and the nonsite is not felt, the viewer is thrown back upon the beauty of the nonsite alone.<sup>23</sup> And although the beauty of Smithson's work is certainly an intentional element of one's experience of it, the isolation of this aspect distorts one of the work's fundamental purposes. For in that condition the red soil becomes a kind of relic with little power to refer to any kind of process—dynamic or in decline. And isolated relics interested Smithson not at all; they were the concern of the art museum. The problem of how to estimate the "visual literacy" of the viewer and how much work must be done by the supplementary material needs to be considered if site- and time-specific pieces are to be reconstructed. Perhaps little needed to be done in Düsseldorf in 1969, for Essen's business was known to many. But, for the New York art viewer, this is hardly the case.<sup>24</sup>

There is even less excuse for disengaging the nonsite from the documentary material the artist provided of the site and intended as part of the nonsite. But this is what the Whitney Museum has recently done by installing Smithson's 1968 *Nonsite (Palisades, Edgewater, New Jersey)* without its accompanying map and text, which the museum also owns. A light blue aluminum bin filled with trap rock now stands next to a horizontal box by Donald Judd in the museum's permanent collection installation; the curator obviously intends the two pieces to represent "minimalism" collectively through their juxtaposition and formal similarities. Stripped of its narrative history and turned improperly away from the wall and toward the work by Judd, Smithson's bin becomes a memento of an art-historical category rather than a souvenir of a trip to New Jersey.

Neither Smithson's nonsites nor the artifacts presented in the American Museum of Natural History are to be judged simply on the basis of their formal appearance. Both are conceived so as to resist such an exclusive identity—"Most sculptors just think about the object, but for me there is no focus on one object so

22. *Time*, p. 108.

23. *Robert Smithson: Sculpture 1968-69*, New York, John Weber Gallery, 1987. The original work, severely damaged during the exhibition, was destroyed at the close of "Prospect '69."

24. In fact, it is so well understood in Essen, that the town is vigorously working to change its "mining town" image now that many of the local mines in the immediate area have closed.

it is the back and forth thing" — through various methods of referring to their sites. Once stripped of these abilities, they are reduced to a kind of muteness. Smithson's AMNH-informed visual thinking comes to an end, and his art and its surrounding space, for all their beauty, become "kind of dull." And at such point, Smithson's nonsites appear to have no relationship with what he was trying to accomplish at the end of his life:

The artist must come out of the isolation of galleries and museums and provide a concrete consciousness for the present as it really exists, and not simply present abstractions or utopias. The artist must accept and enter into all of the real problems that confront the ecologist and industrialist. . . . Art should not be considered as merely a luxury, but should work within the processes of actual production and reclamation. We should begin to develop an art education based on relationships to specific sites. How we *see* things and places is not a secondary concern, but primary.<sup>25</sup>

However complicated Smithson's relationship to the AMNH's images of natural history, his optimism about the process of direct engagement with the landscape "as it really is" and the possibility of creating images that allow nature to speak of its own conditions as part of history — geological, environmental, political, and aesthetic — consistently depended on that museum. And these voices served him well in his final works, the land reclamation projects.

25. Robert Smithson, "Proposal, 1972," in Holt, p. 221.

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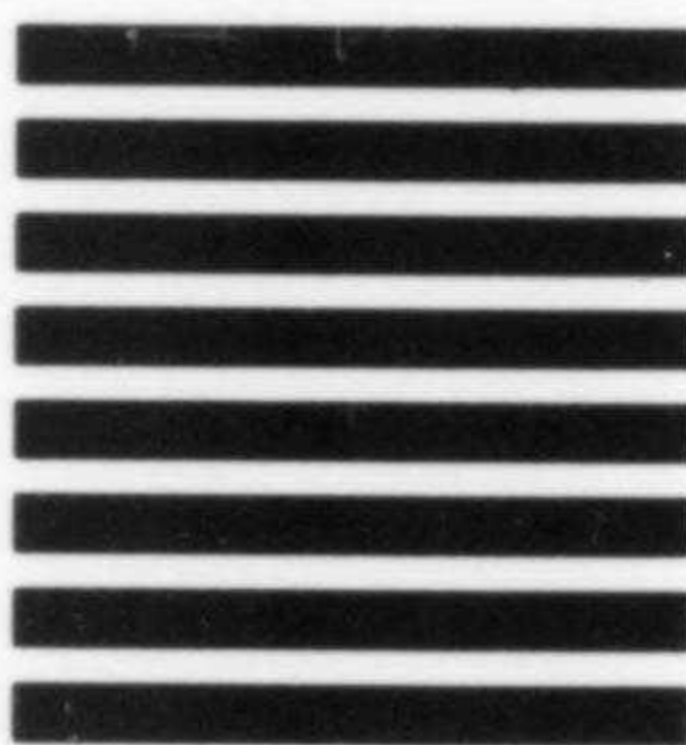


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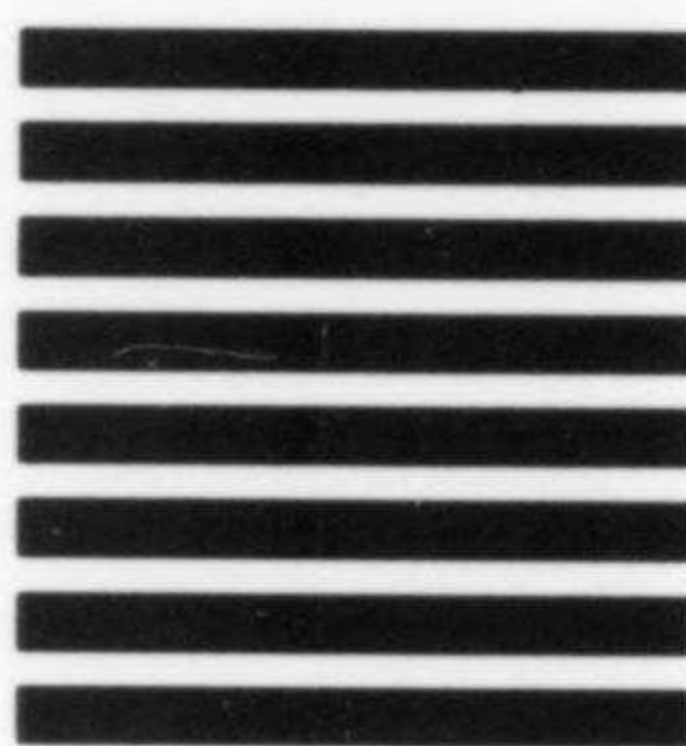


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