Art | Theory | Criticism | Politics

OCTOBER

55

Denis Hollier	*On Equivocation (Between Literature and Politics)*
Thomas Y. Levin	*For the Record: Adorno on Music*
Theodor Adorno	*The Curves of the Needle*
	The Form of the Phonograph Record
	Opera and the Long-Playing Record
Douglas Kahn	*Track Organology*
Manthia Diawara	*Reading Africa Through Foucault: V. Y. Mudimbe's Reaffirmation of the Subject*
V. Y. Mudimbe	*Which Idea of Africa? Herskovits's Cultural Relativism*
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh	*Conceptual Art 1962–1969*

$8.00/Winter 1990

Published by the MIT Press

OCTOBER

editors

Joan Copjec
Rosalind Krauss
Annette Michelson

managing editor

Martha Buskirk

advisory board

Parveen Adams
Luigi Ballerini
Leo Bersani
Homi Bhabha
Yve-Alain Bois
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh
Rosalyn Deutsche
Mary Ann Doane
Hal Foster
Denis Hollier
Andreas Huyssen
Fredric Jameson
Laura Mulvey
John Rajchman
Allan Sekula
Peter Wollen
Slavoj Žižek

OCTOBER (ISSN 0162-2870) (ISBN 0-262-75205-0) is published quarterly (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring) by the MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, and London, England.
Subscriptions: individuals $30.00; institutions $65.00; students and retired $20.00. Subscribers outside of the U.S. add $14.00 for postage and handling. Prices subject to change without notice.
Address subscriptions to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142.
Manuscripts, in duplicate and accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope, should be sent to OCTOBER, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003.
No responsibility is assumed for loss or injury.
Second class postage paid at Boston, MA, and at additional mailing offices. To be honored free of charge, claims for missing copies must be made immediately upon receipt of the next published issue.
POSTMASTER: send address changes to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142.
OCTOBER is distributed in the USA by B. Deboer, Inc., 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110.
Copyright © 1990 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and October Magazine, Ltd. Statements of fact and opinion appearing in OCTOBER are made on the responsibility of the authors alone, and do not imply the endorsement of the editors or the publisher.

55

Denis Hollier	*On Equivocation (Between Literature and Politics)*	3
Thomas Y. Levin	*For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*	23
Theodor Adorno	*The Curves of the Needle*	49
	The Form of the Phonograph Record	57
	Opera and the Long-Playing Record	62
Douglas Kahn	*Track Organology*	67
Manthia Diawara	*Reading Africa Through Foucault: V. Y. Mudimbe's Reaffirmation of the Subject*	79
V. Y. Mudimbe	*Which Idea of Africa? Herskovits's Cultural Relativism*	93
Benjamin H. D. Buchloh	*Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions*	105

Cover Photo: Lazlo Moholy-Nagy.
Gramophone Record. *1927.*

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH is a critic and Assistant Professor of art history in the Department of History, Theory, and Criticism at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

MANTHIA DIAWARA is Acting Associate Director of the Center for the Study of Black Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *African Cinema, Politics, and Culture* (forthcoming, Indiana University Press), and he is currently working on a book on black British independent cinema.

DENIS HOLLIER is Professor of French Literature at Yale University and the editor of *A New History of French Literature* (Harvard University Press, 1989). The English translation of his book on Georges Bataille, *Against Architecture*, was published in the OCTOBER book series (MIT Press, 1989).

DOUGLAS KAHN is an audio-artist. He teaches at the Inter-Arts Center, San Francisco State University, and is coeditor of *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde* (forthcoming, MIT Press).

THOMAS Y. LEVIN, presently a fellow at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, has recently joined the faculty of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Princeton University. His most recent publication is *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (1989). He is currently completing a study of early German film theory entitled *Allegories of Inscription*.

V. Y. MUDIMBE is Professor of Romance Studies and Comparative Literature at Duke University. He has written numerous works of fiction and nonfiction, including *Le bel immonde*, which was recently translated into English as *Before the Birth of the Moon* (Simon & Schuster, 1989), and *The Invention of Africa* (Indiana University Press, 1988).

On Equivocation (Between Literature and Politics)

DENIS HOLLIER

TRANSLATED BY ROSALIND KRAUSS

Never, it would seem, had such a thicket of ambiguity impeded the flow of ideas in France.

—Zeev Sternhell, *Ni droite, ni gauche*

1. In June 1989, French voters received the list of candidates nominated for the European Parliament by each national Party. Those patient enough to read to the thirtieth entry of the list of the Front National, the extreme-right party headed by Le Pen, would have found the name Jules Monnerot. It was followed by the qualifying mention: "Founder of the Collège de Sociologie." Sic. A cunning of reason or of unreason? Did this reference gain a single extra vote for the neofascist party? Did it lose any? How many voters—and in particular how many of those on the extreme right—had the slightest idea of what the cited institution meant, or had meant? Whatever the case, it was thus that the Collège of Sociology, a Sleeping Beauty awakened ten years ago by some erudite sorcerer's apprentices from its slumber of four decades, finally made its entrance into the world of real politics. And, abandoning all ambiguity for the occasion, it confirmed the worst suspicions.

2. The accusation of ambiguity already figured in the first printed response elicited by the activities of the Collège in 1938. Signed by René Bertelé, in *Europe*, a review on the left, it characterized Caillois's positions as "equivocal." Bertelé didn't question Caillois's own intentions. But if Caillois's book, *Le mythe et l'homme,* should happen to fall under Hitler's eyes, what ideas might it not give the Nazi leader! "Caillois should be politely informed that he runs this risk," Bertelé warned.[1]

1. See *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 366. For a similar reaction to Caillois's writing for the Collège, see Meyer Schapiro, "French Reaction in Exile," *Kenyon Review*, vol. 7 (Winter 1945). See

This adjective (equivocal) and its semantic cousins (ambiguous, etc.) are the symptom of the disquiet that is almost automatically triggered by the subject of the Collège. And, in a certain way, it matters little if the pronouncement in which these terms figure is positive or negative; it matters little if the Collège is reproached for being ambiguous or if one denies that it is so. The main point is that everything converges toward this epithet, itself elusively equivocal. I will take two examples. The first comes from a defender. In his biography of Bataille, Michel Surya, dealing with those years during which the greatest attraction to fascism was felt in France, goes on the defensive each time he meets (or even anticipates) an accusation. Entire pages thus demonstrate that one should guard against appearances, that, despite a sometimes deceptive surface, nothing was more foreign and even opposed to fascism than the thinking of Bataille, of *Acéphale*, of the Collège of Sociology.[2]

It's again ambiguity, this time as a *flagrant délit*, that is at the core of Carlo Ginzburg's indictment of the ideological implications of Dumézil's work on Indo-European societies and of the Collège. For example: after recalling that Bataille was fascinated by the relations between death (and sexuality) and the sacred, and Caillois by the relations between the sacred and power, Ginzburg remarks, "In both writers' cases, these themes implied an extremely equivocal

---

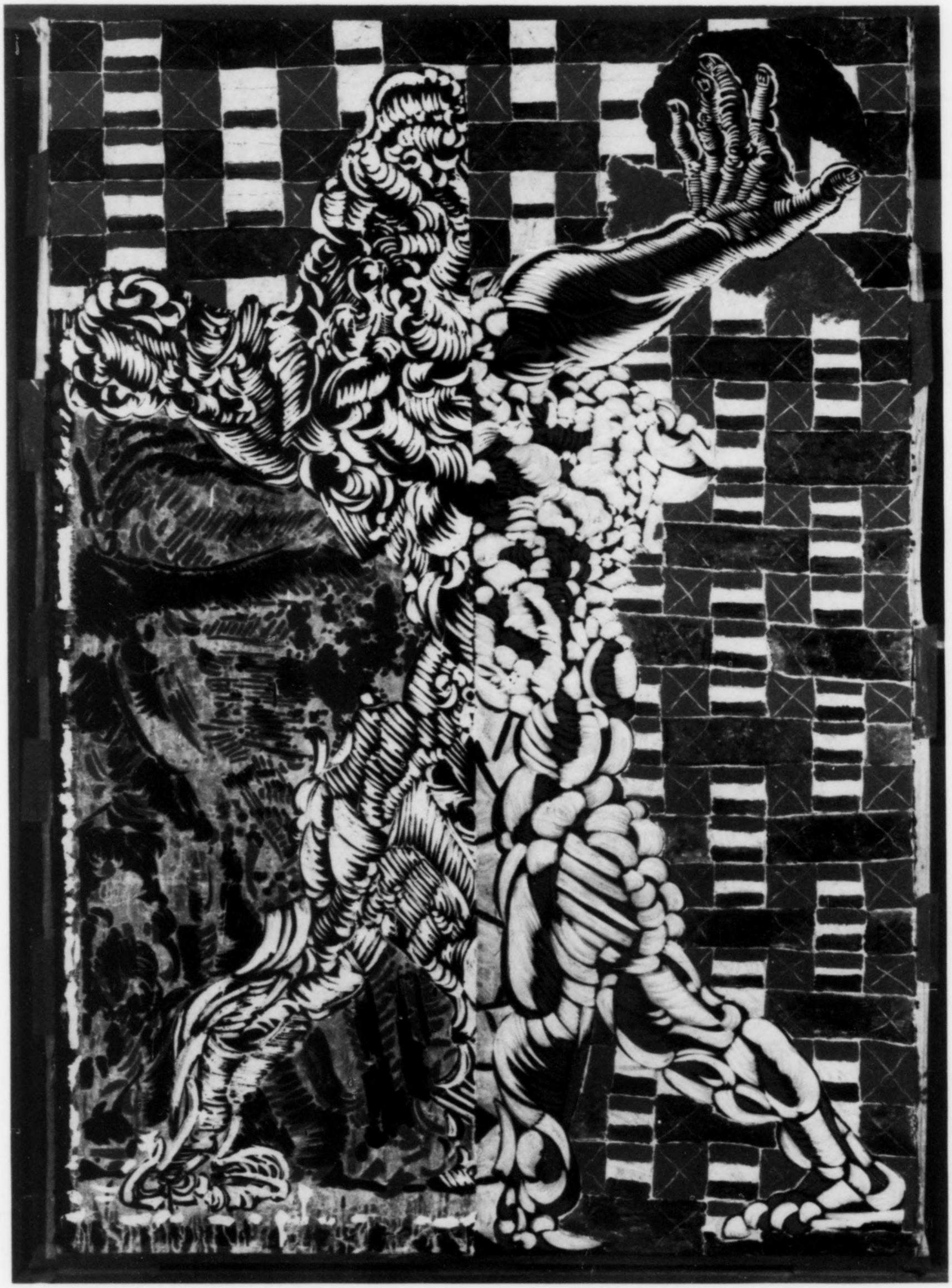
also my essay, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," trans. William Rodarmor, *October* 31 (Winter 1984), pp. 3–15.

2. Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: La mort à l'oeuvre* (Paris: Séguier, 1987). In Surya's view, the "Declaration" by the Collège on the Munich crisis (See *College*, pp. 43–46) constitutes by itself a sufficient refutation of an "accusation of equivocation" formulated against Bataille by Klossowski: "the decidedness of such a declaration cuts short any form of equivocation whatever." Surya nevertheless concedes that something here and there might look equivocal, but only at a "superficial" level: as for the core of the matter, Bataille always was, he claims, "one of the most peremptory of anti-fascists as early as 1933" (p. 273). Not one line written by Bataille "justifies the slightest reservation" (p. 270).

This very statement, however, calls for some reservations. To start with, the "Declaration" (approved by Bataille) was written by Caillois (see the letter dated October 10, 1938, in Georges Bataille, *Lettres à Roger Caillois (4 août 1935–4 février 1959)*, ed. J.-P. Le Bouler, Romillé, Editions Folle Avoine, p. 90). As for Surya's mention of 1933, it obviously refers to Bataille's essay "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" (in *Visions of Excess*, ed. Allan Stoekl [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985]). But here again, things are not that clear-cut. Blanchot recalls that, during the war, Bataille himself came to share Klossowski's reservations: "he came to regret the pages he had written on 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' and which allowed for equivocation" (Maurice Blanchot, "Les intellectuels en question," *Le débat*, no. 29, [mars 1984], p. 20). Bataille thus ended up sharing Walter Benjamin's reaction to his influential 1933 articles: "they were working for fascism!" said Benjamin, reported by Klossowski (quoted by Giorgio Agamben, "Bataille e il paradosso della sovranità," in *Georges Bataille: Il politico e il sacro*, ed. Jacqueline Risset [Napoli: Liguori, 1988]. p. 115).

Surya's view is that Bataille was a superior man, who because of that was able to master the equivocations he was playing with, while around him men with weaker intellects were cut adrift, allowing his projects to be swept in directions it would be unfair to impute to Bataille himself.

François Rouan. The Triumph of Reason. Shred. Tatter. *Laversine, 1989.*



attitude towards Fascist and Nazi ideologies."[3] A few lines further on, it's Caillois's eerie musings—in "The Winter Wind"—on the opportunities that a new ice age would present for the selection of a new elite that sound to him (and quite justly) "an even more equivocal ring." Finally, on the following page, after underscoring "the ambiguity of the structure and the heterogeneity of the participants" of the Collège, Ginzburg underlines (and adopts) Leiris's reticence in the face of "that equivocal project of a 'sacred sociology' of contemporary reality."

Surya's and Ginzburg's conclusions are opposed, but they take off from the very same postulate. Surya congratulates Bataille for having escaped ambiguity, Ginzburg reproaches him for having been infected by it. They both agree, however, in considering ambiguity as such something politically condemnable. For both of them, it is impossible to mention ambiguity without using the tone of a prosecutor. Is the equivocal ever anything but the cover for an univocal fascism? Does Bataille's signing a book called *Guilty* justify making a criminal of him? The excellent response by Giampiero Moretti and Rocco Ronchi to Ginzburg's article, a response that fully illuminates the project and context of the Collège, has the merit of not denying the ambiguities in which the Collège was caught—and in which it engaged, often in full consciousness—but without folding this acknowledgment into an accusation. Their analysis opens a space in which these ambiguities are not, as with Surya, the cover for an impeccable but imperceptible antifascism, nor, as with Ginzburg, for a profascism all the more pitiful in that it dares not, in its shame, claim its proper name. They are the cover for nothing. They are the core of everything. These are profound ambiguities, which are as such—as ambiguities—at the heart of what was thought at the Collège.[4]

3. For Ginzburg is right on one score. There are ambiguities, many of them, in Bataille's work. In Caillois's there are even more, and they generally are more disquieting. For a collector of equivocations, the Collège is a gold mine. And I do not even count the infamous Pierre Libra: his Maurrassism, really, had nothing ambiguous about it, and that's undoubtedly the reason why, after having placed his signature at the bottom of a manifesto, he vanished from the scene[5] (the least that can be asked of an ambiguity is that it be ambiguous). But to read the texts of the Collège against the background of Zeev Sternhell's study of the pervasive presence of fascist patterns in modern French socio-political ideology is

3. Carlo Ginzburg, "Mitologia germanica e nazismo. Su un vecchio libro di Georges Dumézil," in *Miti Emblemi Spie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), p. 230. (English translation *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Ann C. Tedeschi [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989], p. 143).
4. Giampiero Moretti and Rocco Ronchi, "L'ermeneutica del mito negli anni trenta. Un dialogo," *Nuovi Argumenti* 21 (January–March, 1987). See also Carlo Sini, "Bataille o dell'ambiguità," *Rinascita* 11 (April 1987), p. 19.
5. *College*, pp. 5 and 24.

to see what an important aspect of its program falls within the semantic and ideological sphere of influence of "nonconformism," to use the term of choice of the fascist-leaning thinkers of the period.[6] Which isn't surprising: what emerges from Sternhell's picture is how extensive this ideology was despite its so-called nonconformism.

Caillois publishes in *L'ordre nouveau* and in *Volontaires. La flèche*, Bergery's journal, praises the Collège.[7] Guastalla, himself a supporter of Bergery's Front, and the literary columnist at *La flèche,* gives a lecture at the Collège.[8] In 1935, the French translation of *L'idée socialiste* by the most important European ideologue of the period, Henri de Man, is signed by Henry Corbin (who had first translated Heidegger) and Alexandre Kojève (whose seminars on Hegel were already attracting the major thinkers of the future and who will be one of the first speakers at the Collège). On the agenda of meetings of members of the Collège, the names of Arnaud Dandieu, Thierry Maulnier, Drieu La Rochelle, Bertrand de Jouvenel could also be pinpointed. But it's at the thematic level that the "connotations" Ginzburg denounces are most strongly felt and most significant. The Collège's sociology, like that of the nonconformists who refuse both right and left, is opposed to Marxism, substituting the primacy of the symbolic (or, after Sorel, of myth) for that of economics. For the Collège, as for the others, the denunciation of social breakdown, of democratic atomization, is urged by an aesthetizing and organicist vision of society and politics (to put a soul back into a body, to reinspire a spiritless world).

It is with the strategy adopted toward fascism that the resemblances are the most troubling. And here ambiguity is no longer a simple effect of connotation: it is no longer limited to the epithets, but extends to the substantives or rather even the verbs. Equivocation, indeed, is the preferred tool of this very strategy. As Sternhell shows, the French nonconformists' opposition to fascism (that is to say, a foreign fascism — Italian or German) is never frontal; it never takes the form of a confrontation, but rather that of a mimetic subversion that appropriates and diverts the enemy's slogans, that claims to outstrip him on his own grounds, to combat him with his own weapons.[9] This resistance, which counterattacks by identifying itself with the aggressor, is a resistance that is literally equivocal, a resistance through equivocation, within which words lose their meaning: it reshuffles the cards, preventing any distinction of the potential aggressor from his victim. The same type of derealizing raising-of-the-ante is responsible for the

6. Zeev Sternell, *Ni droite, ni gauche,* enlarged edition (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1987). See in particular the two last chapters, "Spiritual Fascism" and "The Fascist Temptation."
7. The article, written by Pierre Prévost (*La Flèche,* May 26, 1939), is reproduced in *College,* pp. 374–75.
8. On January 10, 1939, see Pierre M. Guastalla, "The Birth of Literature," in *College,* p. 198 and ff.
9. Zeev Sternhell, *Ni droite, ni gauche,* p. 267.

invention of a so-called "*surfascisme*" by *Acéphale*, which, if we accept the alchemical transmutation of the prefix *sur* into the prefix *a*, can be presented as an a-fascism.

In the political context of the 1930s, the opening shot of this logic of identification with the adversary was fired by Thierry Maulnier. In his 1933 preface to the French edition of Moeller van den Bruck's *Third Reich*, Maulnier, having insisted on the "specifically anti-French" character of German nationalism, continues, "Even if we must be separated from the new Germany by a conflict that no fraternity could overcome, it seems a good moment to say calmly that we feel closer to and more easily understood by a German national socialist than by a French pacifist."[10] The fight to the death, but with no harsh feeling (and above all without contempt), is the viril form of love. Respect for those who do me the honor of being their enemy. The noble being is closer to those who are distant than to those who are near. The same ambivalence is at the core of the political articles that Blanchot publishes in the extreme-right newspapers of the period, but Blanchot stresses its inward side. Instead of the generous admiration for the potential enemy, instead of the glorious identification with the German aggressor, they express the nausea a Frenchman feels on contact with himself. "As long as the French," Blanchot writes, "fail to understand the value of this terrible paradox that forces them to be French against France and to be nationalists against the nation, they will not understand the kind of effort that is required for their liberation."[11] Maulnier's logic was rooted in the experience of identification with the other. Blanchot's logic is grounded in the desire for a nonidentity with oneself: when Léon Blum can be said to embody France, France becomes an object of disgust for every true Frenchman such that even the most

10. Cited in Sternhell, p. 269. The opportunity referred to by this "good moment" is, no doubt, Hitler's having just risen to power.

On Moeller van den Bruck, see also Hans Mayer's lecture at the Collège, "The Rituals of Political Associations in Germany of the Romantic Period," *College*, pp. 266–67.

Maulnier's is, properly speaking, a terrorist logic, a logic whose prototype was Tchen, the young Chinese terrorist in Malraux's 1933 *Man's Fate*. (Malraux comments on his murder: "One might despise intensely the one one kills. But still less than anyone else. Infinitely less than those who do not kill.")

For other contemporary references to terrorism, see Blanchot's "Le terrorisme, méthode de salut public" (*Combat* [juillet 1936]). See also Laurent Jenny's introduction to the correspondance between Caillois and Paulhan (*Cahiers Jean Paulhan*, no. 5, Gallimard, to be published) and my "Cantique de Saint-Just" (*L'esprit créateur* [Summer 1989], XXIX, 2).

11. Maurice Blanchot, "La seule manière d'être Français," *L'insurgé* 23, (June 1937). And elsewhere: "Patriotic feelings today are mobilized in activities directed against the country" ("Nous les complices de Blum . . . ," *L'insurgé* 20 [January 1937], p. 4).

See Jean-Pierre Azéma (with regard to the consequences this logic will have, a few years later, under the occupation): "Jews and freemasons have been the victims of men who have consciously inverted the order of priorities: those who claimed to be nationalists fought against an assumed interior enemy rather than against the occupiers" ("Il y a 50 ans, la guerre. 1939–1940: L'année terrible," *Le monde*, August 26, 1989, p. 2).

nationalistic German can't hate it more violently. Whence it follows that those who consider it their duty to love France are, at the same time, precisely those who feel the most implacable hatred toward it. The enemies of France (the France of the political parties, of the Jew Léon Blum, etc.) are those who, in the present circumstances, render it the proudest service. Hatred of France has become the definition of the love of France. This terrible paradox (that is Blanchot's phrase) results from the terrorist logic according to which love is indistinguishable from hatred.

In 1932 Lacan defended his M.D. in psychiatry, a study devoted to the mechanisms of delirious interpretation which, in individual subjects, support this very type of paranoiac *quid pro quo*. Lacan gives the name of Aimée to the protagonist of this case study which started, at the stage door of a Parisian theater, with an actress being attacked by a female admirer. Brought to the police station, the attacker justifies her act by accusing the victim of persecuting her. Lacan shows how Aimée's earlier jealous identification with the actress resulted in transforming the former into a persecutor: Aimée's target is thus "the combined object of her hatred and her love," the actress being nothing but the intermediary through which she strikes herself, symbolically at first but in the most real manner soon afterward, since her act leads to her own institutionalization. Aimée's behavior, a feminine version of Baudelaire's "Heautontimoroumenos," emblematizes the pattern of a paranoia of self-punishment; simultaneously hangman and victim, it was she herself who was the real object of her aggression.[12] In 1936, with the mirror stage, Lacan roots this paranoiac reflexivity of aggressive impulses in the constitutive alienation of the ego that makes the subject himself his own first rival: it forces a choice between him and myself even though he is myself. In this mirrored labyrinth, equivocation is law: the difference between the ego and the other, between the victim and the aggressor ceaselessly disappears.

4. Amorous hatred mobilizes effects of indecidability that can be felt right into the reactions of the Collège's audience. In December 1938, after Munich, Bataille added up the costs of the Czechoslovakian crisis in a lecture devoted to the structure of democracies. This presentation, the text of which has not been

12. Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 253.

In a later formulation Lacan would say that the structural effect of identification with the rival "is unconceivable unless it is prepared for by a primary identification that structures the subject as being in rivalry with himself" ("L'agressivité en psychanalyse," *Ecrits* [Paris: Seuil, 1966], p. 117).

It seems that Lacan thought at one time of applying this schema to a political situation: in December 1947 *Critique* announced an article by him on "The Case of Rudolf Hess" that was never written. Would this *Aimée Among the Nazis* have also interpreted Hess's flight to England and his betrayal of the Führer by means of the paranoïa of self-punishment?

On the use of the concept of self-punishment in the psychiatric literature of the 1930s, see Carolyn Dean, "Law and Sacrifice: Bataille, Lacan, and the Critique of the Subject," *Representations* 13 (Winter 1986), pp. 42–62.

preserved, was followed by discussions that, according to witnesses, Julien Benda's presence seems to have rendered particularly agitated.[13]

The participation of this passionate rationalist didn't result in preventing equivocations. Everyone agreed in condemning the present state of things. But, given the paranoid logic of identification—implying that one be the enemy of what one excessively loves—it was impossible to decide if the object of the condemnation was democracy as such or its present condition. This disorientation appears in the account of the meeting that Bertrand d'Astorg published in *Les nouvelles lettres*. "The strange thing," he stated with amazement, "was that one could not tell whether the speakers were perfidious antidemocrats or if they were defending a personal conception of an ideal democracy."[14]

However surprising, this type of equivocation wasn't exceptional. One of the Collège's manifestoes, Caillois's "The Winter Wind," was the occasion of an analogous difficulty for Pierre Missac. In *Cahiers du sud*, Missac had faulted the values defended in this text, adding that they explained that Caillois was receptive to fascism. While he was correcting the galleys, someone apprised him of the fact that he was mistaken: Caillois's allegiances (or, at least, leanings) were in fact communist. Missac therefore adds a correction at the bottom of the page. Fascist. Footnote: No, communist. In any case, he adds, it changes nothing. It's the contrary, but, in a world devoted to duplicity, contraries become the same.[15]

But there as well, equivocation is not a simple surface matter. It goes to the heart of the Collège's concerns. For ambiguity is the very substance of the sacred. What a narrow logic separates as contradictory, the sacred joins. Simultaneously high and low, right and left, pure and impure, it attracts and repels, elicits respect and transgression. It is by this very ambivalence that the sacred distinguishes itself from a profane submitted to a conformist logic within which contraries are only able to oppose each other. "The two poles of the sacred," Caillois writes, "identically oppose themselves to the profane. In their confrontation with it, their own antagonism becomes attenuated, tends to disappear."[16] High is opposed to low, clean expenditure to dirty expenditure, but more profoundly, whether clean or dirty, expenditure is opposed to utilitarian economics. Left is opposed to right, but more profoundly, extremism is opposed to satisfaction and

13. Julien Benda pursues this discussion in *La grande épreuve des démocraties* (New York: Editions de la maison française, 1942). See *College*, pp. 189 and 379.
14. Bertrand d'Astorg, "At the College of Sociology," *College*, p. 194.
15. Pierre Missac, "Avec des cartes truquées," *Cahiers du sud* 216 (May 1939), p. 424. Missac was close to Walter Benjamin. Both would use almost the same terms in their analysis of Caillois's writings (cf. Benjamin's review—signed with the pseudonym J. E. Mabinn—of Caillois's "L'aridité," *Zeitschrift for Sozialforschung* 3 [1938], pp. 463–66). For Caillois's "The Winter Wind," see *College*, pp. 32–42.
16. Roger Caillois, *L'homme et le sacré* [1939] (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 73. One of the book's chapters is called "The Ambiguity of the Sacred." With regard to the logic of "day for night," see my essay "La nuit américaine," *Poétique* 22 (1975).

boredom. Bataille followed the same logic when he described communism and fascism as "two competing revolutions, hostile to one another and to the established order."[17] Once the differences are intensified to the point of becoming contradictions, it becomes possible to bracket what separates the opposites and to identify them, if not in their concrete, positive contents, which have now become accessory, at least in the shared extremism of their performance. If the fascist and communist revolutions (like the German and French nationalisms, according to Thierry Maulnier) are engaged in a mortal combat, this doesn't prevent them, in their manner of transcending classical contradictions, from being partners in extremism; they share in the hatred of the flat prosaic logic, the vulgar logic that requires one to choose between love and hate. Since extremism positions itself by definition beyond all positions (beyond nationalism, Marxism, etc.), extremisms can be partners (or imagine themselves to be) beyond what separates them, which is to say precisely beyond the strictness of the principle of identity.

In this sense the double negation of neither-left-nor-right does not promote a centrist neutralization; it exasperates contrarieties. It's not simply a matter of being a turncoat; of passing from one party to the other; of quitting the Communist Party in order to create, as Doriot did, a Party of the French People (PPF). It's not a matter of abandoning one's own position for another, but of leaving it for another space, a space of direct action, of engagement that is vital, or mortal. Only the sublime dissidences are serious, those that break with the system of parties, those that exceed the closure of parliamentary representation. You have first to lose your seat. In a famous call to dissidence, Blanchot describes the logic of this step beyond; what counts, he says,

> is not to adopt the vulgar slogans all over again: neither right nor left, but to be truly against the right and against the left. In these terms one can see that the true form of dissidence is that which abandons a position without abandoning its hostility towards the contrary position or rather to abandon it in order to exacerbate this hostility. The true communist dissident is he who quits communism, not to assume capitalist beliefs, but to define the requirements of a real struggle against capitalism. Similarly, the true nationalist dissident is the one who drops the traditional formulas of nationalism, not to joint internationalism, but to combat internationalism under all its forms among which is to be found the very economy of the nation.[18]

Frenchmen, once more into the breach, yet another effort if you want to be

17. Georges Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings (1927–1939)*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl, Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 158–59.
18. Maurice Blanchot, "On demande des dissidents," *Combat*, no. 20 (December 1937), reprinted in *Gramma* 5 (1978), pp. 63–65. Sternhell has an excellent commentary on this article, p. 257.

extra-parliamentarians. The tension of equivocation must never let up for a second; ambivalence must be prevented from being resolved, put to rest: your no to communism must not be a yes to capitalism; your no to nationalism must not be a yes to internationalism. Your refusal must never allow itself to be inscribed on electoral ballots. It must remain untreatable, unrepresentable. Your opposition must never allow itself to be seduced by the trap of positions. Beyond the Chamber of Deputies, who cares about either left or right?

Bataille often quoted the words Nietzsche gives to the Madman in *Joyful Wisdom*. "Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not in continual free-fall? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down?"[19] For Bataille these are the very words which prompt what I've called "la prise de la Concorde": in 1938, in "The Obelisk," it's in fact on the empty expanses of the Place de la Concorde that Bataille asks the Madman to pronounce them, which is to say, he has him speak them on a politically equivocal site, the very site of the equivocal, of the extraparliamentary upon which there converged, in February 1934, all who refused the opposition of right and left, all those who rejected the very parliamentary stage with its seating according to the left/right polarization that, on the other bank of the Seine, in the Chamber of Deputies, governed electoral representation. It's on that public square where, in the February 1934 antiparliamentary riots, blood ran for neither right nor left, that Bataille asks Nietzsche's Madman to generalize disorientation. But Bataille doesn't limit his refusal of classical oppositions to the neither-right-nor-left. His "prise de la Concorde" is not that of the extreme-right veterans or the Crypto-Nazi Croix de Feu. It's the same place, but another game. And, at the time of the Collège, in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," he forgets the Chamber of Deputies in favor of the chamber of lovers. We shift to the infinite. From a restricted to a general disorientation.

One could say that this passage to the infinite, this lifting of restriction that marks the move from Blanchot's columns to Bataille's meditations, is also a move out of the political. A little equivocation gets close to fascism, a lot of it moves away from it. Raised to this power, the step beyond not only transgresses the system of parliamentary representation but that of representation in general. In this sense, if political equivocations are condemnable, it's precisely because they are restricted, because, in politics, there is no true equivocation, because an equivocation in politics is always superficial, always the mask of something nonequivocal; it's because, therefore, they aren't equivocal enough, stopping short, at the lid, revealing a proper name every time we look underneath. What should we do, then, with Sternhell's respect (a respect that he does not thematise) for the

19. First occurrence in Bataille's "The Obelisk," in *Visions of Excess*, p. 214. "The Madman" is the fragment 125 of Nietzsche's *Joyful Wisdom*.

separation of literature and politics?[20] Liberally citing the political writings of Drieu and of Brasillach, at no time does he refer to their work as novelists. But the writers of the period would have been almost unanimous in their protest against such a way of isolating them from politics. For Bataille and Caillois, too, the Collège was a way of stepping outside literature, a farewell to the pen. Their literary passion for equivocation demanded precisely that it no longer be possible to draw the line between politics and literature. Doubtless, when they are political, equivocations are dangerous and probably even condemnable, but is it really enough to qualify them as literary to render them innocent? Could we still say that we are in continual free fall were we to be guaranteed that boundless fall is an admission ticket to literature?

5. The theory of fascism is one of the key chapters of the heterology that Bataille sets in place at the beginning of the 1930s. As its flashpoint it has an economy of waste. Power, in fact, is decided at the separation of the proper (or clean) from the improper (or dirty). But in the case of fascist power, the founding gesture of excluding the improper excludes also any valorizing of the excluded term: "Consequently," Bataille comments, "no erotic activity can be associated with the cruelty."[21] Bataille will often denounce the sadism of fascist power. But in such denunciations, the target is not so much sadism itself as its political desexualization. In other terms, there is nothing sacrificial in fascist exclusion. Fascism doesn't render its excluded terms sacred; it suppresses without allowing the sacrificer the space needed for identifying with his victim. The exclusion is an exclusion properly speaking, properly and cleanly done, without blur or desire, without equivocation. Whence the importance in the fascist thematics of cleanliness, of sanitizing, of political salubriousness. In his description of extreme-right ideologies, Sternhell too insists on this moralizing hygienics. The fascist appropriation of the social body begins with an ethics and gymnastics of the clean body, with a condemnation of base materialism.

Heterology reverses this fascist pragmatics of waste. Bataille's erotics is a celebration of the prefix *ex* in words like excess, existence, excrement, etc. Evacuation is the most expressive of the acts of love, its moment that of the highest intensity, its punctuation the most tender. Loss, there, becomes a positive

20. It's nonetheless a literary judgment that delimits the corpus analyzed in *Ni droite, ni gauche.* According to Sternhell, the 1930s constitutes one of "the most sterile" periods of the intellectual history of France, a period when France "produces little and lives on the inheritance of its past" (pp. 25, 346). It is easier to distinguish politics from literature when the latter is practically absent. This is, however, the decade when Malraux writes his novels, the decade of Céline's first novels, of Sartre, and of Nizan, who would have no doubt become one of the major literary figures of the period had he not been killed at Dunkirk in 1940. Not to mention Artaud. Bataille himself. And even Aragon, Bernanos, Giono, Giraudoux, Colette . . .

21. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," in *Visions of Excess,* p. 146.

For the concept of clean expediture, see "Bloody Sundays," my introduction to the American edition of *La prise de la Concorde* (*Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille,* trans. Betsy Wing [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989]).

event. Before Lacan's equation of excrement to *Dasein*, the experience of rot is for Bataille the existential structure of mankind.[22] The same economy is at work in the scatological heroization of the proletariat that, in "The Solar Anus," Bataille sketches when he extols communist workers as, "as ugly and dirty as hairy sexual organs, or lower parts."[23] Adjectives and comparisons that must, of course, be taken as compliments.

Now, it's the same Bataille who, at the time of "Contre-Attaque" (that's to say, during the November 1935 campaign that would lead to the victory of the Popular Front), in the most directly political of the texts he ever wrote, after having denounced the "loutish rascals" who are in power in the parliamentary democracies, unleashes a call to riots: "Against this garbage we must use *direct* imperative violence."[24] This garbage. Sic. It's Bataille speaking. To whom does the word apply? Here it's no longer a matter of eroticizing the wretched of the earth. Turned against the bourgeoisie, the compliment becomes an insult. The proletarianophilic scatologist of yesterday now mounts a campaign for an anti-capitalist hygienics: the word trash has lost any glorious connotation; it returns to a one-way exclusion. The nonconformist influence on Bataille's texts can thus be felt by a plunge outside equivocation, a political literalization accompanied by a semantic fall, a loss of textual energy. Differing with Ginzburg here, I prefer the equivocal Bataille.

6. The kernel of ambiguity is the identification of garbage and power, an identification power refuses to acknowledge. This blindness defines it. Power is that which in the heterogeneous is resistant to heterology. It can be the object of a heterology, but it will never be the subject. Moreover, for all that blindness, it is not nonknowledge (power is a resistance to nonknowledge as much as to knowledge), to the extent that nonknowledge is a form of self-consciousness: nonknowledge, in Bataille, is at the same time consciousness of nonknowledge; power is ignorance that doesn't know itself. Self-consciousness is always consciousness of the self as mortal, as dying, as I-who-die, and it is precisely as a suppression of such a consciousness that power is constituted. Power therefore always resists interiorizing death. Failing such consciousness, it has no access to the tragic realm. In Bataille the figure of power is that of the "armored dodo" (*le butor armé*) whose attributes are naiveté, foolishness.

22. Bataille, "Dans l'histoire comme dans la nature . . . ," *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, p. 91.
23. Bataille, "The Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess*, p. 8.
Does one need to stress that this is not the type of consecration Communist militants were fighting for? In his review of "Pour un Collège de Sociologie" in *Commune*, a journal published by the Communist Party, Georges Sadoul cannot help equivocating with a revenge on Bataille's reversible scatology-escatology (see *College*, p. 370). On this subject, see also my essay, "Bataille's Tomb (A Halloween Story)," *October* 33 (Fall 1985), pp. 92–102.
24. Bataille, "Toward Real Revolution," trans. Annette Michelson, *October* 36 (Spring 1986), p. 37. This, it must be stressed, is a leftist text, which neither claims nor praises (at least consciously) fascist-leaning elements.

Bataille's description of fascist sadism refers to the same resistance to tragedy. His analyses are very close here to Freud's in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," with the difference that for Bataille the instincts follow a reverse development: while Freud describes a process of sexualization, Bataille outlines sadism's desexualizing effects. In Freud, the point of departure—the instinct to master—is a desexualized mastery. Pure aggressiveness (unequivocal, nonsexual), indifferent to what it negates (that which it destroys, assimilates, etc.), evolves—via masochism—toward a complex form of sadism, a sexualized sadism that is only an inverted masochism, a masochism by proxy, by identification. With Bataille, it's the reverse: the initial experience is that of (masochistic, eroticized) identification with the victim, which evolves later toward an ever purer form of aggression, one that is ever less sexual, a form of aggression without identification.

The metamorphosis of the images of Christian sovereignty follows a similar development. Bataille refers often to them in his lectures at the Collège, particularly in the lecture on power. They start with a sacrifice that is accompanied by identification with the victim. Christianity begins thus with a sacralizing exclusion: "Jesus let himself be treated like a criminal and reduced to the condition of a tortured body, thus identifying himself with the deviant and immediately repulsive form of the sacred."[25] But the word *rex* (*Rex Judeorum* in the acronym INRI) was already inscribed on the instrument of torture, a royal title which will quickly lose its initially sarcastic value. Its derisive intention will soon be forgotten and the majesty of the word will occult God's tortured body. The Church's history is that of a repression of its origins: the founding sadism is de-eroticized; the sinister and radical forms of the sacred are rectified; infamy is replaced by glory.

It's in this same lecture on power that the reference to the fascist emblem's being affixed to the front of Mussolini's locomotives is to be found. Bataille's "fascination with fascist symbology," Ginzburg comments, is expressed in "his contrast of the fasces portrayed in Italy 'on the bellies of all the locomotives' and the crucifix associated, *à la* Frazer, to an 'obsessive representation of killing the

25. Bataille, "Power," *College*, pp. 133–34.

Klossowski proposes a much later date (later than Christ's death) for the mutation in the images of Christian sovereignty. The Church being in its very definition the refutation of the Empire, Klossowski denounces any attempt at "transvestying the Empire in a 'triumphant' Church." "In fact Caesar is not yet the Antichrist; it is only after Christ was revealed to the world that Caesar '*with the soul of Christ*' became the Antichrist." It is thus Constantine's "*In hoc signo vinces*" (and not the INRI of the cross) that achieved "the heresy" through which the Christian community was transformed into an Empire ("Qui est mon prochain?" *Esprit* 75 [December 1938], p. 405.)

This fine essay by Klossowski develops a Christian version of the Collège's heterology: "The term 'enemy'," Klossowski writes, "refers to the more or less concerted ignorance in which I remain with regard to my own potential . . . Heterological in essence, the soul projects outside itself what in itself belies the homogenous state at which it fancies it has arrived; with the result that, within the soul, the heterogeneous element will make all the more ravages that its image will have become embodied within the external world" (p. 410).

king.'"[26] In fact, in this reference, the affixing of the fascist emblem on Italian trains illustrates a rather ambitious claim concerning the history of religion: Bataille concludes from it that Nazism (or for that matter Fascism) constitutes the first serious aggression ever against Christianity. "It is only in the past few years," he says, "that the crucified figure has been threatened in Germany and in Italy by images of power that exclude any idea of tragedy, any idea of killing the king. Moreover, the Italian *fascio* as it is seen on every locomotive's belly is in this respect more charged with a precise meaning than is the swastika."[27] Bataille records the date: fascism is the first form of sovereignty that managed wholly to escape its Christian past. An absolutely clean sadism that absolutely repels the repellant. Mussolini is no Dianus. If some kings are to die, that one kills, and he does it without identifying with the victim. There we have an authority who does not seek expiation. He governs innocently. His emblem, most appropriately, is the *fascio*, the weapon of the executioner, a technician of mortality who inflicts death without risking it: an execution is not a duel, and the hangman is neither a warrior nor a sacrificer.

The unilateral character of the executioner's operation makes identification with him difficult. Caillois circulated the story about the unanimity of the *Acéphale* membership with regard to sealing their brotherhood through human sacrifice: everyone volunteered for the role of victim, no one for that of executioner. It is emblematic. When one states, as Bataille did, that it's better to be Prometheus than Jupiter, when one signs oneself Dianus, when one identifies sovereignty with automutilation, and when one gives so many texts an epigraph from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in which Hegel says, "the life of the Spirit is not the life that is frightened by death," one may perhaps be a laughable obsessional neurotic, thereby exposing oneself to a range of insults and sarcasms, among them those of the Marxists; it is difficult, however, to accuse one of being a fascist.[28]

26. Ginzburg, trans., p. 230. Bataille's words are quoted from his lecture on "Power," *College*, 135.

27. Bataille, "Power," *College*, p. 135. For Bataille and the swastika, see Klossowski, "Le corps du néant," in *Sade, mon prochain*, 1st edition (Paris: Seuil, 1947), pp. 164–65. Caillois briefly refers to the Nazi emblem in his essay on archaic Greece ("Jeux d'ombres sur l'Hellade," *Le mythe et l'homme* [Paris: Gallimard, 1938]).

28. Ginzburg seems to consider this type of macabre meditation (what Bataille calls joy in the face of death) and the funerary aesthetic from which it arises as politically marked in a way that has nothing ambiguous about it, i.e., a fascistic one. Nothing is less sure. Janine Bourdin, for example, mentions various attempts made by the Third Republic at the end of the 1930s to turn the theatricality that paid off for so many fascist regimes to the advantage of the democracy. She cites two instances: in July 1938, for the visit of the English sovereigns, and for the celebration of the armistice on November 11 of the same year. Neither the left nor the center had anything against this ceremonial display of black flags and mortuary symbols; the extreme-right *L'action française* was almost alone in finding blame. Janine Bourdin, "Introduction," and "Les anciens combattants et la célébration du 11 novembre 1938," in René Rémond and Janine Bourdin, *La France et les Français en 1938–1939* (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1978), pp. 22 and 110.

The opposition between the military man and the religious man is central here. The military world respects proper names, and because of this, does not tolerate the equivocal. Whatever the fascist connotations in certain of Bataille's texts, they contain none of the arias of indignation deploring the sullying of the proper name of France that are essential to most of the authors cited by Sternhell. In politics the proper name is that of a leader, a fatherland. Would a fascism without a proper name be conceivable? Resistance to the proper name is part and parcel of a politics of ambiguity that deserves, at least at a certain level, to be interpreted as resistance to nationalism.

7. We must revert to a recurrent question in Ginzburg's article: that of the relation between Nazism and Christianity. The Collège is not Ginzburg's real focus; it is introduced only at the conclusion of his essay to reinforce the accusations he just raised against *Myths and Gods of the Germans*, a study in the history of religions published by Dumézil in 1939. There Dumézil makes many references to contemporary Germany that Ginzburg interprets, rightly or wrongly, as support for Nazi propaganda. These references underscore the elements in Nazi Germany that indicate a continuity between archaic Germania and the Third Reich, between a pre- and a post-Christian Germany. The antithesis between the Germanic world and Christianity is thus a central feature of this comparison. But it is not the only one. Dumézil also opposes two archaisms: on the one hand, the pseudo-Hellenic one and on the other, the proto-Germanic—the German version of the ideological Indo-European legacy. "'Neopagan' propaganda in the new Germany," he says, "is certainly an interesting phenomenon for the historian of religions: but it is a matter of individual choice."[29]

On this matter of neopaganism, Dumézil's opinion (widespread in any case) is close to that which Bataille had expressed in 1936 in the special issue of *Acéphale* titled "Reparation to Nietzsche." German neopaganism was the target of the amends made to Nietzsche: there Bataille denounced the ideologues of the Hitlerian regime who distorted Nietzsche's tragic philosophy in order to claim a Hellenic ancestry for Nazi militarism. In the central essay, "Nietzsche and the Fascists," a paragraph was headed "A 'Hygienic and Pedagogical Religion': German Neopaganism." Bataille's irony targeted successively Rosenberg's so-called anti-Christian interpretation of Nietzsche and several nineteenth- and twentieth-century experiments aimed at founding a German church on "the opposition of primitive religious forms to Christianity." It was these religious experiments that Dumézil adjudged voluntaristic. Bataille finds them hygienic. "The account of the role played in Hitler's Germany by a free, anti-Christian

29. Cited by Ginzburg, p. 211. Dumézil replied to Ginzburg in *Annales (Economies Sociétés Civilisations)* 40 (September 1985).

For the contemporary reception of Dumézil's *Mythes et dieux des Germains* as a warning against Nazi Germany, see *College*, p. 138.

enthusiasm, which gives itself a Nietzschean appearance, thus ends," he concludes, "on a note of shame."[30] But if Bataille doesn't take neopagan naturalism seriously, this is not—in distinction to Dumézil—in order to substitute Wagner for Nietzsche and, beneath a superficial neo-Hellenism, to uncover deep archeo-Germanic roots. Greek or Germanic, no matter; in both cases, primitivism here is nothing but a cover. And Bataille needs something more substantial. So sorry. A true anti-Christian would never fall for the Nazi trap. That's what he writes in 1936. We saw that two years later, in front of the Collège, in the lecture on power, he totally reverses his view. He says precisely the opposite: that for the first time in its history Christianism is about to be breached in Germany and Italy.

To evaluate such a judgment we find ourselves in the position of d'Astorg following the democracy debate. Is this a perfidious anti-Christian speaking, or someone who is defending an ideal conception of Christianity?[31] We have entered an ideologically equivocal zone, a zone of intense ambivalence. Is Bataille for or against? And for or against what? One day, in the name of anti-Christianism, he upbraids fascism for staying in the Christian domain; another day opposite values lead him to declare that it has left it. Further, he himself recognizes what is equivocal in his position—and he does so in the very same passages as Ginzburg. Thus, in the midst of the lecture on power, he interrupts his analysis: "Discussions of this sort," he says, "are in danger of introducing many ambiguities; in fact, it was possible last time to take what I said as a sort of apology for Christianity."[32] While he believed himself to have spoken as an anti-Christian, his listeners heard the discourse of an apologist. But who is mistaken, Bataille or his auditors? Bataille wanted to remove the equivocation. He wanted to speak ill of Christianism, but his words outran him, and the listeners heard something else. As though he always ended up being attracted to what he wanted to detest.

I don't think the main thing here is to determine which of the two positions (insofar as they can be reduced to two) would be the one Bataille truly took. Words skip anchor and strong texts don't let themselves be moored. Bataille has more than one voice. And moreover, his is not the only voice at the Collège. The

30. Bataille, "Nietzsche and the Fascists," in *Visions of Excess*, p. 190.

The critique of voluntarism is also at the center of the distinction between myth and literature in Guastalla's lecture at the Collège. This critique blends with that of the proper name: true myths have no authors, bear no proper names, cf. "The Birth of Literature," *College*, p. 204.

31. To give the tourniquet of these successive denials yet one more twist we can refer to Henri Dubief, close to Bataille at the time, who writes: "the Hitlerian neopaganist influence on *Acéphale* is obvious" ("Témoignage sur Contre-Attaque," *Textures* 6 [1970], p. 57).

As for Hans Mayer, who could account for a more direct experience of Nazi ideology, he will dismiss all these primitivist reveries *en bloc*. "Among the concepts and myths that have made Hitler's fortune, those that were strictly Nordic or Germanic, or even Neopagan, have only played an extremely secondary role" ("The Rituals of Political Associations in Germany of the Romantic Period," *College*, p. 265, trans. mod.)

32. Bataille, "Power," *College*, p. 132.

reticences and reservations that Ginzburg mentions (those of Leiris, of Benjamin, to which would have to be joined those of Klossowski, etc.) are important, but we must remember that they were all expressed inside the Collège. At the beginning of his article, Ginzburg very justly declares: "Disagreement with the solutions does not necessarily mean that the problem doesn't exist or is irrelevant."[33] But reading him, one ultimately wonders what the relevance of the problems the Collège addressed would be. For it is rather easy to understand why Benjamin resisted Bataille's theory of fascism or condemned Caillois's ethics, but quite a bit more difficult to explain why he nevertheless participated in the Collège, even how he could compromise himself to the point of committing himself to contribute orally to such an equivocal business.[34]

We can't get rid of the Collège's ambiguities. One can, like Boileau, set out to fight against equivocations; one can decide that what is clearly conceived can be clearly stated. One can blacklist all loaded subjects. For it's not language alone that is equivocal here, it's also the subjects treated by it, the relation between the sacred and death, between sex and death, between power and the sacred. The owl of Minerva takes flight at dusk. For the enemies of equivocation, it's in the wrong; it should go to bed early. Time and again. It should obey the rationalist curfew. After nightfall, thinking is against the law. No one should be permitted to keep thinking in the dark, in the face of the unknown, when the unknown is before one, when one's ignorance puts one in touch with the future. It's the period when Picasso etched his blind Minotaur. Even when night threatens, one should try not to lose all distinction. So that ideas stay distinct even though the night isn't clear.

8. At the center of the definition of power proposed by Bataille, the impossibility of knowledge is inscribed: the law of power escapes the one who exercises it. Heterology is above all an effort to get around this blind spot, to open the black box and overcome power's resistance to knowledge. It's a strategy along the same lines that Paulhan describes in his own lecture. Its subject matter is proverbs. Proverbs, he tells the Collège's audience, offer the same features of "distinction, effectiveness, and ambiguity with which we were trying to characterize the sacred."[35] During a stay in Madagascar in 1908–1911, he had set to studying the origin of the rhetorical power of the local proverbs. Where does their authority come from? More generally, where does the power of words come from; how is it that, independently of their meaning, certain words or phrases (such as proverbs) exercise a power on the hearts and minds of men? In fact,

33. Ginzburg, p. 210.
34. In his autobiography, Hans Mayer recollects that his own conference was substituted at the last moment to the one Benjamin was planning to give on fashion, probably pages from "Paris, Capital of the XIXth Century." (Hans Mayer, *Ein Deutscher aut Widerruf. Erinnerungen* [Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982], p. 241).
35. Jean Paulhan, "Sacred Language," *College,* p. 319.

Paulhan finds an equivalent between Malagasy proverbs and Occidental political slogans, with their "high-flown words," those words that are imposing, charged with a rhetorical force out of all proportion to their semantic potential (and perhaps we should add the word "equivocal" itself to the list given by Paulhan). But his lecture is the narrative of a failure. Although he still understood nothing about it, Paulhan discovered that he began to speak in proverbs, that, without knowing it, he took on a proverbial authority. But he is not a triumphant sorcerer's apprentice. "There is nothing in the world more humiliating," he confesses, "than to be able to do perfectly something one is incapable of understanding."[36]

Thus it is the negative epistemological aspect of this occurrence that interests Paulhan: less what he succeeded in doing than what this success prevented him from knowing. And the lecture is precisely an effort—for want of victory—to give an account of his strange defeat, that is, to survive and resist it. "The rout of intelligence," Paulhan says, "is also something which happens to intelligence."[37]

Moretti and Ronchi are right to center the Collège's preoccupations around a critique of science, to insist on its will "to submit reason to the demands of the sublime."[38] Heterology, contemporaneous with what Paulhan calls the rout of intelligence, is in fact not simply one more science. It is a consequence of the discovery that the authority of science relies on a contract that carries negative clauses; as in the Blue Beard story, there are doors it must swear never to open. Every will to knowledge is lined with a rejection: a will not to know. Heterology begins there where science stops respecting the contract; it is the science of what science doesn't want to know, the science of what exceeds knowledge. The science of epistemological residues and lexical scapegoats.[39]

Bataille and Caillois achieve this epistemological transgression through different styles. Bataille's gesture is one of taking on the aspect of a subjective engagement, implying a hermeneutic risk, an intepretative complicity which Moretti and Ronchi describe quite well. Caillois's consists rather in lunging past

36. *College,* p. 316. For Paulhan's remarks on the contemporary political vocabulary, see his 1938 "Lettre aux *Nouveaux cahiers* sur le pouvoir des mots," republished by J.-C. Zylberstein in his edition of *Les fleurs de Tarbes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

37. *College,* p. 319.

38. Moretti and Ronchi, p. 85.

39. In Bataille's "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," the specificity of the "objects" which heterology treats is precisely their "nonobjectivity": "There is no way of placing such elements in the immediate objective human domain, in the sense that the pure and simple objectification of their specific character would lead to their incorporation in a homogeneous intellectual system, in other words, to a hypothetical cancellation of the excremental character" (in *Visions of Excess,* p. 98).

And Caillois, in his 1934 *Procès intellectuel de l'art,* gives the formula of his heterology when speaking of "combining in one system what until now an incomplete reason systematically eliminated" (reprinted in Caillois's *Approaches de l'imaginaire* [Paris: Gallimard, 1974], p. 36). See also his conclusion to *Le mythe et l'homme* (1938).

the contradiction between order and disorder toward a kind of structuralist construction of a more complex order within which disorder, as is the case with his theory of festival, will have its own place, an order that will allow disorder itself to enter into the order of things, an order capable of disorder. It is not a matter of an irrationalist liquidation of rationalism, but of its surrationalist overcoming: reason should now take cognizance of its exclusions, its limits, take cognizance of what it rejects, of what rejects it. Whatever the affinities of thought to light might be, vigilance shouldn't stop at nightfall. Caillois left surrealism after a quarrel about Mexican jumping beans. He wanted to know why the beans jump. Breton was afraid that in opening them, the mystery would be destroyed. But mystery shouldn't be confused with the fear of knowing. Who would want a miracle to have as its condition that it shouldn't be interrogated? Heterology's objective is to be witness to the existence of a "marvelous that is not afraid of knowledge."[40]

9. The concept of ambiguity is central to existentialism. It refers to an equivocation that does not result from the imperfections of language or of knowledge, but from the very structure of existence. Existential equivocalness plays a decisive role in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception,* an ambiguity which, he writes, "is not some imperfection of consciousness or existence, but is the definition of them."[41] Ambiguity is also the essential dimension of the theory of history that Raymond Aron presented in 1939, according to which the relativity of historical knowledge is connected "to the equivocalness of the spiritual becoming"; equivocation, Aron says elsewhere, is the very "substance" of history.[42]

In his review of Aron's book, Bernard Groethuysen insists on the implications of this thesis that turns historical discourse into the discourse of a science no longer in a position to know. And it is not, as was traditionally said, because past events are unrepeatable and that one can't replay the Battle of Waterloo in order to decide which witness was right and which was wrong. On the contrary, it is because of the structure not of the past but of the present, it is because history has the present for its object that it has stopped being in a position to know. It's the present's irruption within the historical horizon that produces effects on scientific discourse identical to those Paulhan recognized. For the historical present (was this more able to be experienced in 1939 than in 1989?) is first and foremost uncertainty with regard to the future, which is to say, a present that is

40. Caillois, *Procès intellectuel de l'art,* in *Approaches . . . ,* p. 36.
41. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), p. 332.
42. Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986 edition), p. 365. See also Aron, *Marxismes imaginaires. D'une sainte famille à l'autre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 359: "As I wrote in one of my first books, all historical work is *equivocal* and *inexhaustible.*"
Hans Mayer refers to Aron's just-published *Introduction* in his lecture, *College,* p. 264.

the presence of the unknown. "There is something happening, and we don't know what," Groethuysen writes.[43] In this sense, the Nietzschean lack of knowledge about the future (unknowing as the experience of the future) to which Bataille refers so often defines not an imperfection, but the very form of historical experience. The equivocal, being the very nature of the present, requires a hermeneutical risk. In these conditions, to wish for a mode of thought without equivocation is to want a type of thinking without history, or a history without risk. And of course all equivocations are not equal. Of course there is even no innocent equivocation, no clean ambiguity. To denounce equivocations as such implies nevertheless a belief in the possibility for language to exist without equivocation, which in its positivist naiveté looks more like a refusal of language itself.

As for Jules Monnerot, it would be incredibly interesting, indeed, to know how a former communist student from Martinique, who in 1935 authored the declaration from the French Antilles to the International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, presenting himself as "grandson of black slaves and of white adventurers as well," can, fifty years later, allow himself to be a candidate on a fascisto-racist ballot.[44]

But this story, in order to make sense, would require historical tools sharper than the equivocal accusation of being equivocal.

(Happily, since Le Pen did not get thirty candidates elected, the Collège de Sociologie will not be represented in Strasbourg.)

43. Bernard Groethuysen, "Une philosophie critique de l'histoire," *La nouvelle revue francaise* 313 (October 1939), p. 627.

See also Bataille's intervention in an unsuccessful attempt at reviving the Collège in November 1939: "History's worlds are incomplete worlds. It's that which *essentially* characterizes these worlds" ("Discussions sur la guerre," *Digraphe* 17, p. 129).

44. *College,* p. 48.

For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility

THOMAS Y. LEVIN

> *If at some later point, instead of doing "history of ideas" [*Geistesgeschichte*], one were to read the state of the cultural spirit [*Geist*] off of the sundial of human technology, then the prehistory of the gramophone could take on an importance that might eclipse that of many a famous composer.*
>
> —T. W. Adorno (1934)

Fresh scholarship has finally begun to displace the longstanding misreading of Adorno in the Anglo-American reception of the Frankfurt School.[1] Adorno's position on popular culture—most often presented in the context of the polemical exchanges with Walter Benjamin—has generally been characterized as a myopic mandarinism blind to the utopian and progressive dimensions of mass media such as film. This black-and-white juxtaposition of Adorno and Benjamin—while perhaps valuable as a reductive pedagogical device for presenting an historical debate on aesthetics and politics—depends in large measure on somewhat hasty readings of Adorno's essays on popular music and jazz,[2] and of the

1. See, for example, Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London/New York: Verso, 1990).

2. Besides "On Popular Music" [written together with George Simpson], in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1941), pp. 17–48, and "Perennial Fashion—Jazz," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), pp. 119–32, there are a number of other texts by Adorno on the subject available in English. These include a review of Wilder Hobson's *American Jazz Music* and Winthrop Sargent's *Jazz Hot and Hybrid* in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1941), pp. 167–78; an entry on jazz in the *Encyclopedia of the Arts*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes and Harry G. Schrickel (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), pp. 511–13; and most recently, "On Jazz," trans. Jamie Owen Daniel, *Discourse* 12 (Fall/Winter 1989/90), pp. 45–69. Here too, recent readings have recognized that the object of Adorno's critique is not jazz per se but rather a very specific moment in its history such as the music of Paul Whiteman (see, for example, Wolfgang Sandner, "Popularmusik als somatisches Stimulans. Adornos Kritik der 'leichten Musik,'" in *Adorno und die Musik*, ed. Otto Kolleritsch [Graz: Institut für Wertungsforschung, 1979],

1938 study "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening,"[3] readings which simply reduce the often problematic analyses to variations of the "culture industry critique" articulated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But as Fredric Jameson has rightly pointed out in his recent study of Adorno, "the Adorno-Horkheimer theory of the Culture Industry provides a theoretical description of mass cultural experience which can scarcely be reduced to sheer opinionated or elitist vituperation against 'bad art.'"[4] It is certainly true that Adorno's opinion of film, from the perspective of an exile in Hollywood in the 1940s, was not nearly as high as Benjamin's, which was in large part a response to the Soviet avant-garde over a decade earlier. Yet while Adorno was certainly not immune to "tiresome bouts of *haut bourgeois* anti-technological nostalgia,"[5] his critique of mechanical reproduction should not be mistaken as an objection to the technology of cinema *per se*.

Adorno was no Luddite; rather, his negative response to cinema was a theoretically grounded objection to what he perceived to be the primacy of technology over technique in film. This dominance of technology is largely due to the surface mimesis of the cinematic medium, Adorno argued, that is, to the indexical iconicity of the photographic frames. As a result, film "does not permit absolute construction [because] its elements, however abstract, always retain something representational; they are never purely aesthetic values."[6] Recent

---

pp. 125–32). While Adorno's failure to differentiate here is highly symptomatic given the sophistication of his analyses of other musical genres and periods, it by no means justifies a wholesale rejection of the work. As Bernard Gendron notes in an article entitled "Theodor Adorno Meets the Cadillacs" (in Tania Modleski, ed., *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986], pp. 18–36): "Despite its failures and excesses, Adorno's 1941 essay 'On Popular Music' remains in my opinion one of the two or three most penetrating pieces on the subject; it addresses many important questions which are often neglected by those who tend to dismiss Adorno's work" (p. 19).

3. This essay in particular—available in translation in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Urizon Books, 1978), pp. 270–99—must be understood, so Adorno insisted, as a response to Benjamin's "Artwork" essay (see Adorno, "Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America," in *The Intellectual Migration*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969], p. 342, and the preface to *Dissonanzen*, vol. 14 of the *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann [Frankfurt a.M.: Surkamp Verlag, 1973], p. 10). Most commentators fail to recognize that, as such, it was written as a polemical "corrective" to what Adorno perceived as Benjamin's "all too unmediatedly redemptive" arguments. If it is overstated, it is thus to an important degree out of this specific, rhetorical necessity. For a nuanced reading of Benjamin's "Artwork" essay, see Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,'" *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987), pp. 179–224.

4. Jameson, *Late Marxism*, p. 145.

5. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 358.

6. Adorno, "Filmtransparente" (1966), *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10 (1977), p. 357; translated as "Transparencies on Film," Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique* 24/25 (Fall/Winter, 1981/82), p. 202. In Alexander Kluge's anecdotal rendering of Adorno's allergy to film's photographic immediacy, the philosopher is claimed to have said: "I love to go to the movies; the only thing that bothers

Le Pere Engramelle. Workshop for the Production of Mechanical Musical Instruments: Frontispiece to La Tonotechnie ou l'Art de noter les cylindres. *1775.*



attempts to read Adorno against the grain have argued that in later essays such as "Transparencies on Film" (1966) even this prejudice—to some degree a function of the Jewish taboo on representation so central to Adorno's aesthetic—is traversed by a recognition of the progressive and critical potential of cinematic montage to transform even photographic mimesis into constellations, i.e., a type of writing, thus acknowledging that cinematic technique is not structurally excluded by its technology.[7] However, such a redemption of mechanical reproduction by virtue of its status as inscription is not merely a late development in

---

me is the image on the screen" (cited in Miriam Hansen, "Introduction to Adorno's 'Transparencies on Film,'" *New German Critique* 24/25 [Fall/Winter, 1981/82], p. 194). For an extended treatment of sound-image relations, see Adorno's study of film music, *Komposition für den Film* (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15), written in German together with Hanns Eisler in 1944 but first published in English in 1947 as *Composing for Films* (New York: Oxford University Press). For a discussion of this text, see my "The Acoustic Dimension: Notes on Cinema Sound," *Screen* 25 (May/June 1984), pp. 55–69.

7. See Adorno, "Transparencies on Film"; Miriam Hansen, "Introduction."

Adorno's writing on the cinema, but can already be found in publications from the 1920s. Indeed, it may be that the stakes of Adorno's resistance to film can only be properly understood through a consideration of his remarks on the technology of mechanical reproduction in a field in which he was professionally trained: music. For it is here, in a series of texts on the gramophone, that a rather different, more Benjaminian dimension of Adorno's position on the relation of cultural production and technological reproducibility finds expression.

Adorno's serious interest in questions of popular culture and technology was already clearly evident in his — largely overlooked — involvement as a young man with the *Musikblätter des Anbruch*, an avant-garde music journal founded in Vienna in 1919 as one of two house periodicals of the music publisher Universal Edition.[8] Adorno began contributing to the *Musikblätter* in 1925, having been introduced, one surmises, by the composer Alban Berg, his teacher at the time and the first of the journal's many editors.[9] In 1929, after years as a regular contributor,[10] Adorno was invited onto the editorial board of the *Musikblätter*, joining the two other long-time editors Paul Stefan, a music journalist, and Hans Heinsheimer, the representative of Universal Edition.[11] He immediately pro-

8. The other journal, *Pult und Taktstock: Fachzeitschrift für Dirigenten*, was aimed primarily at conductors. Adorno published here as well, submitting essays in the mid-1920s on Béla Bartok, Arnold Schönberg, and on questions of interpretation; see, for example, the texts reprinted in "Musikalische Schriften V-VI," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18 (1984), pp. 279–81, 324–27, 335–44, and vol. 19 (1984), pp. 440–47.

9. Adorno's all-too-little-known work as a composer is available in two volumes edited by Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn: *Kompositionen* (Munich: Verlag Edition Text und Kritik, 1980). Volume 1 contains piano song cycles; volume 2 chamber music, choral, and orchestral works. The complete musical oeuvre was performed in a gala concert entitled "Theodor W. Adorno: Der Philosoph als Komponist," in Frankfurt on September 17, 1988 as part of a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Nazi pogrom on the night of November 9, 1938. The program also included the world premiere of two songs with orchestra from Adorno's uncompleted singspiel based on Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which he wrote between November 1932 and August 1933. See Adorno, *Der Schatz des Indianer-Joe: Singspiel nach Mark Twain*, ed. and with an afterword by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979). The complete compositional works were just released on a Wergo CD (#6173-2). With the exception of an early essay by René Leibowitz ("Der Komponist Theodor W. Adorno," in *Zeugnisse: Theodor W. Adorno zum sechzigsten Geburtstag* [Frankfurt a.M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963], pp. 355–59), studies of this dimension of Adorno's creative output have begun to appear only recently. These include: Dieter Schnebel, "Einführung in Adornos Musik," in *Adorno und die Musik*, pp. 15–19; Rolf Tiedemann, ed., *Adorno-Noten* (Berlin: Galerie Wewerka Edition, 1984); Sigfried Schibli, *Der Komponist Theodor W. Adorno* (Frankfurt a.M.: Frankfurter Bund für Volksbildung, 1988), and "Theodor W. Adorno: Der Komponist," *Musik-Konzepte* 63/64 (January 1989).

10. Well over two dozen of the articles Adorno published in the *Musikblätter des Anbruch* — including a series of musical aphorisms, articles on Gustav Mahler, Béla Bartok, Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, Anton von Webern, Hanns Eisler, on twelve-tone technique, on the new Brahms edition, on hit tunes and a study of the concert audience — are reprinted in volumes 18 and 19 of the *Gesammelte Schriften*; precise bibliographic information can be found in volume 19, pp. 641–54.

11. For a more detailed discussion of these two figures and the power politics surrounding the editorial board of *Anbruch*, see Heinz Steinert, *Adorno in Wien: Ueber die (Un-)möglichkeit von Kunst, Kultur und Befreiung* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1989), pp. 133ff.

posed a radical reorganization of the journal starting with the very title, which was shortened from *Musikblätter des Anbruch* to simply *Anbruch* (since the expressionist literary publication to which it had originally been linked had since ceased to exist). Fortunately, Adorno laid out his new agenda for the *Anbruch*—effectively a full frontal attack on what he considered to be the reactionary forces in the music world—in a pair of programmatic tracts written at the time.[12] Together with the actual development of the journal itself, these polemical texts document in great detail Adorno's early thoughts on the aesthetics and politics of music and, in particular, his conception of popular culture and technology.

Among the many changes Adorno proposed for the *Anbruch*, there is an adamant call to broaden its scope to include a focus on "light music" [*leichte Musik*] and kitsch. Anticipating elements of the "culture industry critique" developed together with Horkheimer years later, Adorno already asserted here that "light music" and kitsch are by no means the "collective" art they claim to be, but are rather an ideological surrogate structured by specific class interests. In strictly musical terms kitsch is not at all modern, he argued, but reactionary. However, this did not lead Adorno to dismiss it. On the contrary, he insisted unequivocally on the redemption [*Rettung*] of kitsch as an object "of the greatest importance." The *Anbruch*, he suggested, ought to have a special issue and a regular column on the subject.[13] In both, "light music" and kitsch must be defended (against those who would simply dismiss them) and also simultaneously criticized (to counter those who would simply champion them). As Adorno puts it:

> In conjunction with sociological analyses there is also an entire field of music—previously denied any serious study whatsoever—which ought to be incorporated into the domain of the *Anbruch*; namely, the entire realm of "light music," of kitsch, not only jazz but also the European operetta, the hit tune, etc. In doing so, one ought to adopt a very particular kind of approach that ought to be circumscribed in two senses. On the one hand, one must abandon the arrogance character-

12. The first of these texts, "Zum *Anbruch*: Exposé," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, pp. 601–2, is dated 1928 and was unpublished. The second text, "Zum Jahrgang 1929 des *Anbruch*," first appeared as the unsigned lead article in *Anbruch* 11 (January 1929), pp. 1f, and was also reprinted in the feuilleton of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* 73 (January 25, 1929; Erstes Morgenblatt), pp. 1–2. It is now available in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, pp. 605–8.

13. The third issue of *Anbruch*, published following Adorno's official appearance on the editorial board in 1929 (vol. 11, no. 3), was in fact entirely devoted to the subject of "light music" with essays on operettas, film music, salon orchestras, and radio by Ernst Bloch, Ernst Krenek, and Kurt Weill, among others. Adorno contributed a text analyzing three popular hit tunes ("Schlageranalysen," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, pp. 778–87). Missing from the issue—and probably never written—was an essay on "Musik als Hintergrund" [music as background], which had been proposed by Siegfried Kracauer, one of the nonspecialist contributors Adorno had recommended for the revamped journal (see *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, p. 604).

> istic of an understanding of 'serious' music which believes it can completely ignore the music which today constitutes the only musical material consumed by the vast majority of all people. Kitsch must be played out and defended against everything that is merely elevated mediocre art, against the now rotten ideals of personality, culture, etc. On the other hand, however, one must not fall prey to the tendency —all too fashionable these days, above all in Berlin—to simply glorify kitsch and consider it the true art of the epoch merely because of its popularity.[14]

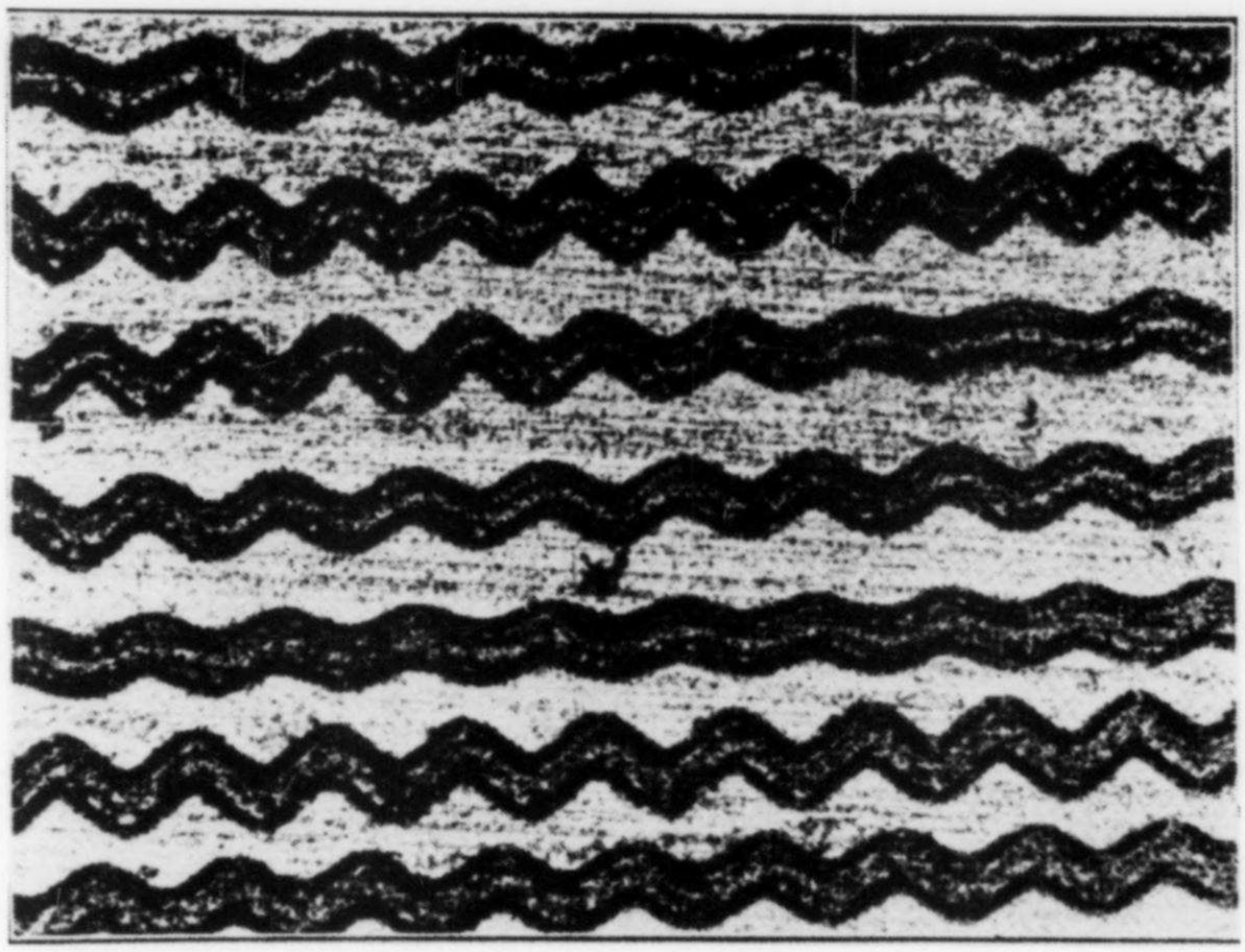
Here Adorno is effectively calling for a reading of kitsch—and indeed of all mass culture—that is sensitive to both its reified and its utopian dimensions.

In a similar vein, Adorno also maintained that the new *Anbruch* ought to undertake a critical reconsideration of the wide range of *technologies* currently being employed in the production of both "light" and "serious" music. To this end, he proposed a new rubric entitled "Mechanische Musik" to be devoted exclusively to questions concerning music and machines. Such a column had in fact already been inaugurated in the *Musikblätter* years earlier by the music critic Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, but had fallen into neglect. According to Adorno, this was because Stuckenschmidt had made the mistake of orienting the rubric toward the *producers* of mechanical music, i.e., the record industry, the gramophone manufacturers, etc., in hopes of attracting revenue from advertising. However, since the industry had its own journals, the *Anbruch* was hardly appealing as a propaganda vehicle, and the anticipated advertising did not materialize. Instead, Adorno conceived the column—now under the direction of Frank Warschauer—as a critical and pedagogical forum directed towards the *consumers*, providing them with both technical advice and musicologically knowledgeable criticism of work produced for various new media. Indeed, as is evident from Adorno's unpublished memorandum on the new editorial direction of the journal, the scope of the new rubric was to be very comprehensive:

> The section on mechanical music can not have a one-sided focus only on record criticism. Instead, it must also address problems concerning radio and possibly even provide regular reviews of the most important broadcasts of modern music (here too, critique!). Finally it must also discuss all the musical problems of the cinema, that is, both the older forms of film music as well as the newer problems of the sound film.[15]

In the later version of his programmatic sketch for the revitalization of the

14. "Zum *Anbruch*: Exposé," pp. 601–2 (this and subsequent quotations, except where otherwise noted, have been transated by the author). For a slightly later version of Adorno's position on kitsch, see the unpublished essay "Kitsch," written circa 1932, and now in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, pp. 791–94.
15. "Zum *Anbruch*: Exposé," p. 601.



Anbruch, Adorno articulated the socio-philosophical imperatives that motivated this call for a regular focus on the relationship between music and technology. "The purpose of the rubric on mechanical [music]," he writes,

> is not merely to trace journalistically a conspicuous trend in current musical life. Rather, it will attempt to shed light on the very meaning of mechanization, will weigh the different tendencies of mechanization against each other and will try to have an influence on the politics of programming [for these mechanical media]. All this grows out of the conviction that the mechanical presentation of music today is of contemporary relevance in a deeper sense than merely being currently available as a new technological means. To put it another way, this position arises out of the conviction that the availability of means corresponds to an availability of consciousness and that the current historical state of the [art] works themselves to a large extent requires them to be presented mechanically.[16]

In light of this insistence on the importance of technology as an issue for contemporary musical practice of all kinds, it is not entirely surprising that alongside his extensive work on radio,[17] Adorno also chose on a number of occasions to write

16. "Zum Jahrgang 1929 des *Anbruch*," p. 607.

17. Adorno's various essays on radio—including "The Radio Symphony: An Experiment in Theory" (*Radio Research 1941*, ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton [New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1941], pp. 110–39); "The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses" (1943, written in English and unpublished during Adorno's lifetime, now in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 9/1 [1975], pp. 7–142); "A Social Critique of Radio Music" [English original, written together with Dr. George Simpson of the Princeton Radio Research Project], *Kenyon Review* 7 [Spring 1945], pp. 208–17)—will be collected in a forthcoming supplementary volume of Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften* which will also contain the previously unpublished fragments of an uncompleted book-length study entitled "Current of Music. Elements of a Radio Theory."

about the other influential mechanical musical apparatus: the gramophone. Indeed, at the time of Adorno's editorial overhaul of the *Musikblätter*, the first of his three articles on the phonograph had already been published in the February 1928 issue of that very journal.

Adorno's earliest essay on the gramophone, a series of paratactical reflections entitled "The Curves of the Needle,"[18] ranges widely, speculating on the psychological appeal of the new medium (comparing its allure to the pleasure afforded by the photograph), its ramifications for the experience of music, its potential effect on hearing (such as its threat to the future of absolute pitch), and the sociology of its reception and commercial exploitation. The text begins with the question of how, like photography, the mechanical mediation of the gramophone transforms in various and subtle ways the events it records. "In the aesthetic form of technological reproduction," writes the twenty-five-year-old author, "these objects no longer possess their traditional reality." Clearly the gramophone does alter the dimensions of the live musical event, transforming everything—in a manner similar to radio—into chamber music, i.e. music for domestic environments. However, Adorno immediately points out that it is also an "obedient" and "patient" machine that does not impose itself upon the music it records but rather accommodates itself to it. Indeed, where the essay is nostalgic it is not a pretechnological world that is mourned. Rather, if anything is lamented, it is the decline of certain qualities characteristic of early recordings (and of early photographs as well): "In their early phases, these technologies had the power to penetrate rationally the reigning artistic practice." Contemporary vocal recordings, by contrast, lack the subtlety and authenticity of earlier ones, the records themselves are no longer as durable, and the apparatuses have increasingly sacrificed their former, unabashedly technological appearance for the pretense of bourgeois furniture. All these later developments are ideologically overdetermined, according to Adorno, who argues that they function to mollify the all-too sobering, critical effect of the technology at its inception. Linking the question of the politics of mechanical reproduction to the issue of the

18. Full bibliographic information can be found in the opening note of each of the three translations of Adorno's essays on the gramophone that follow. Unlike the two later texts, "The Curves of the Needle" was reprinted—almost four decades after its initial publication in *Musikblätter des Anbruch*—in a German record journal, *Phono: Internationale Schallplatten-Zeitschrift* 11 (July/August 1965), pp. 123–24. As Adorno explains in a note appended to this later republication, "The motifs have been retained unchanged and with no attempt to cover up the temporal distance; the author made changes in the language to the extent that he deemed it necessary." While the translation follows this later version—at the insistence of the publisher—the changes made in 1965 are more than just cosmetic. Indeed, a closer comparison of the two versions might well provide an interesting index of the extent to which Adorno's later positions on music technology had changed in the thirty-eight-year interval.

politics of Enlightenment itself, the very first section of the essay closes with a recognition of their shared *ambiguity* [*Zweideutigkeit*]:[19]

> The positive tendency of consolidated technology to present objects themselves in as unadorned a fashion as possible is, however, traversed by the ideological need of the ruling society, which demands subjective reconciliation with these objects. . . . The ambiguity [*Zweideutigkeit*] of the results of forward-moving technology—which does not tolerate any constraint—confirms the ambiguity of the process of forward-moving rationality as such.

For Adorno, the history of technologies of mechanical reproduction and the history of Reason are both marked by a tension between their progressive potential and a simultaneous threat of appropriation by the forces of reaction.

Adorno's next essay on the gramophone, written under the pseudonym Hektor Rottweiler, was published in 1934 in the notoriously polemical Viennese music journal *23*.[20] As indicated by its title, "The Form of the Phonograph Record" focuses on the materiality of the medium itself, its *thingness* [*Dinglichkeit*], since, as Adorno puts it, "It is not in the play of the gramophone as a surrogate for music but rather in the phonograph record as a thing that its potential significance—and also its aesthetic significance—resides." The essay opens with a philosophical phenomenology of the gramophone record reminiscent of the extraordinary chapter in *The Magic Mountain* that meticulously describes Hans Castorp's discovery and fascination with the new technology in the sanitorium's salon.[21] For Adorno, the most immediately significant feature of the curious black-surfaced objects is that they are "covered with curves, a delicately scribbled, utterly illegible writing, which here and there forms more plastic figures for reasons that remain obscure to the layman upon listening." That is, what is essential about the "form" of the phonograph record is that this spiral is a

19. It is interesting to note that, as Samuel Weber has pointed out, both Kant and Heidegger also articulate the question of art and technology in terms of a *Zweideutigkeit*, which Weber translates as equivocation or ambiguity. In Weber's rendering of Heidegger's formulation this reads: "The essence of technics is in an elevated sense ambiguous (*zweideutig*). Such ambiguity points toward the mystery (*Geheimnis*) of all 'dismounting' (*Entbergung*), i.e., of truth." (Martin Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* [Pfullingen: Neske, 1967], p. 33). See Samuel Weber, "Theater, Technics, and Writing," *1–800* 1 (Fall 1989), p. 17.

20. Founded in 1932 as a corrective to the unrigorous music criticism in Vienna, *23* quickly developed into a critical voice reminiscent of Karl Kraus' *Die Fackel*. The journal's title refers to paragraph 23 of the Austrian journalism law, which guarantees the right to force publication of a correction to previously published false information. As an indication of the intensity of *23*'s invective, one can point to the lawsuit that was initiated shortly after the appearance of its first issue by the established Viennese music critic Julius Korngold (1860–1945) against the journal's editor Willy Reich for defamation of character; the trial, which lasted over a year, ended with Reich being cleared of all charges.

21. See Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer, 1974/1986), pp. 883–906.

trace, which is to say, it is a form of inscription that is nevertheless not readily intelligible.

Pursuing the comparison with photography begun in the previous article, Adorno argues that the record is a faithful reproduction, an "acoustic photograph" intelligible even to the dog listening diligently for his master.[22] And yet, like photographic inscription, Adorno adds—in a striking anticipation of the key move in Benjamin's later discussion of the destruction of "aura"—the record *does* change the status of the acoustic event it captures since "the latter cannot be turned on and repeated at will but is rather bound to its specific place and time." This results in the loss of what Adorno calls—in a more metaphysical than simply physical sense—the "third dimension" of the original work. It is no accident that one speaks of both photographic and gramophonic "plates" (*Platte* is the German word for "record") since in both cases the term captures the two-dimensionality of a representation—described earlier as "fragile like tablets"—that can be displaced both temporally and physically, and also traded on the market like a commodity. "Records are possessed like photographs" and both, like stamps, were collected in albums in the nineteenth century. Taking up a topos from the earlier essay, Adorno describes all three as "herbaria of artificial life" in which the memories of a vanishing existence and temporality find domestic refuge.

Adorno's response to what is effectively the destruction of the "aura" of the musical event through gramophonic reproduction is not, however, what one would expect. For while he describes phonographic reproduction unambiguously as a reification—Adorno states explicitly that the record makes it possible for the first time to own music as a thing—this reification is not negatively marked. Rather, it is read as the condition of possibility of the transformation of music into text:

> There is no doubt that, as music is removed by the phonograph record from the realm of live production and from the imperative of artistic

22. The record as an acoustic photograph is, in fact, a figure that even precedes and then follows the invention and early development of the phonograph. As early as 1856 Nadar had the idea of a "*daguerréotype acoustique*" that would faithfully reproduce sounds. In 1864 he again describes such an apparatus—which he is the first to call a "phonographe"—and the possibilities of "time shifting" that it would afford:

> One of these days it will come to pass that someone will present us with the daguerreotype of sound—the phonograph—something like a box within which melodies would be fixed and retained, the way the camera surprises and fixes images. To such effect that a family, I imagine, finding itself prevented from attending the opening of a *Forze del destino* or an *Afrique*, or whatever, would only have to delegate one of its members, armed with the phonograph in question, to go there. And upon his return: "How was the overture?" "Like This!" "Too fast?" "There!" "And the quintette?" Your wishes are served. Marvelously. Don't you think the tenor screeches a bit?

(F. Nadar, *Les Mémoires du géant* [Paris, 1864], p.1; cited in Jacques Perriault, *Mémoires de l'ombre et du son: une archéologie de l'audio-visuel* [Paris: Flammarion, 1981], pp. 133–34).

> activity and becomes petrified, it absorbs into itself, in this process of petrification, the very life that would otherwise vanish. The dead art rescues the ephemeral and perishing art as the only one alive. Therein may lie the phonograph record's most profound justification, which can not be impugned by any aesthetic objection to its reification. For this justification reestablishes by the very means of reification an age-old, submerged and yet warranted relationship: that between music and *writing*.

The notational system for music prior to the invention of the gramophone, Adorno explains, was an arbitrary signifying system, a structured collection of "mere signs." Through the gramophone, however, music liberates itself from the shackles of such notation, from its long subordination to the dictates of marks on paper, and *itself* becomes writing. But a writing of a very specific sort since this concentric hieroglyph, Adorno points out, "is inseparably committed to the sound that inhabits this and no other acoustic groove." The indexical nature of the inscription produced by mechanical reproduction thus recuperates the unavoidable reification of the acoustic event by transforming it into a "necessary" trace.

Suddenly it becomes clear why Adorno has *de*emphasized the various features of the musical event which *are* transformed—for better or for worse—through mechanical reproduction. When Adorno writes that what is captured on the record is "music deprived of its best dimension" and then immediately adds that this music "is not significantly altered by it," it is evident that this lost dimension is only insignificant because Adorno is concerned with something that is gained in the process: the nonarbitrariness of the acoustic groove produced by the indexical status of the recording. This is why he must insist that the form of the record is "virtually its nonform": it must efface itself in its indexical transcription of the musical event. The constant comparisons with the equally indexical medium of photography serve largely to emphasize this point. Indeed, one could argue that it is Adorno's commitment to the mechanics of indexicality that leads him to argue that the significance of the phonograph is to be sought in the development of the protogramophonic musical machines such as music boxes and player pianos. Why? Because the history of these machines is the genealogy of the indexical inscription of the acoustic. This is confirmed in a series of aphorisms entitled "Drehorgel-Stücke" [Barrel Organ Pieces] that Adorno published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* a few months before the appearance of "The Form of the Phonograph Record."[23] The significance of the barrel organ,

23. Adorno, "Drehorgel-Stücke," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, July 28, 1934; now in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, pp. 37–39; citations pp. 38 and 39. On the prehistory of gramophone, see Eugéne H. Weiss, *Phonographes et Musique mécanique* (Paris: Hachette, 1930), and H. Weiss-Stauffacher, *Mechanische Musikinstrumente und Musikautomaten* (Zurich: Orel Füssli Verlag, 1975).

"whose cylinders anticipated those of the phonograph and thereby modernity itself," is to be found entirely in its technology, Adorno writes, that is, in the "cipher [*Geheimschrift*] of its cylinders whose simple mechanics are already utterly rational." Indeed, he adds, "In the encounter with the barrel organ, one gets a hint of that reconciliation with technology, which one day will be of greater significance than any Luddite attacks, when technology finally regains its proper place."

The importance of the gramophone's indexical trace also clarifies Adorno's otherwise puzzling, repeated denial of the possibility of gramophone-specific music. For while the statement "there has never been any gramophone-specific music" might make sense as an aesthetic judgment, it is simply false as an historical claim. However successful they might have been from a musical point of view, what is described as the first experiments in gramophone-specific composition had already been carried out in 1930 by none less than Paul Hindemith and Ernst Toch at an event entitled "Neue Musik Berlin 1930" at the Hochschule für Musik. In a note published in the German music journal *Melos*, Heinrich Burkhard describes these works as follows:

> This made-for-phonograph-record-music [*Originalschallplattenmusik*] was accomplished by superimposing various phonograph recordings and live musical performances, by employing variations in speed, pitch height and acoustic timbre which are not possible in real performance. The result was an original music which can only be recreated by means of the gramophone apparatus.[24]

Together with Moholy-Nagy's 1923 call for a transformation of the gramophone from a repro-ductive into a pro-ductive technology through the development of a "groove-script alphabet" that would be physically incised onto the record,[25] these are, of course, some of the pathbreaking moments in the archeology of the contemporary practices of gramophone-specific music referred to as "scratch" and "mix." From Adorno's perspective, however, both of these directions represent a move away from sustained indexicality; indeed, from the outset, the desire for gramophone-specific music was in fact articulated by its advocates as "an

24. Heinrich Burkhard, "Anmerkungen zu den 'Lehrstücken' und zur Schallplattenmusik," *Melos* 9 (May/June 1930), p. 230. For comments by one of the "gramophone composers," see Ernst Toch, "Ueber meine Kantate 'Das Wasser' und meine Grammophonmusik," Ibid., pp. 221–22, and his earlier essay, "Musik für mechanische Instrumente," *Neue Musikzeitung* 47 (July 1926).

25. See "Neue Gestaltung in der Musik: Möglichkeiten des Grammophons," in *Der Sturm* 14 (July 1923), pp. 103–5; translated as "New Form in Music: Potentialities of the Phonograph," in Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), pp. 291–2, and in a different translation by Ed Cantu entitled "New Plasticism in Music: Possibilities of the Gramophone," in *Broken Music: Artists' Recordworks*, ed. Ursula Block and Michael Glasmeier (Berlin: DAAD and gelbe Musik, 1989), pp. 54–56.

attempt to get away from the phonetically transcribed, *photographed music* which was originally conceived and written for a different instrument."[26]

But if Adorno was willing to embrace the inscription produced by the mechanical reproduction of music, why does he seem to refuse to do so when it comes to film (whose photographic signifiers are no less indexical)? It is, one could answer, because the indexical traces of the photograph have the additional semiotic characteristic of *iconicity*—i.e., a formal surface resemblance which endows them with facile intelligibility. In other words, what distinguishes mechanically reproduced music from mechanically reproduced images is the combination of indexical "*necessity*" (the record as a motivated, not arbitrary, trace or sign) and *unintelligibility* (despite their motivation, these "reticent" gramophonic traces are not immediately readable). Music, Adorno writes, is recorded

> at the price of its immediacy, yet with the hope that, once fixed in this way, it will some day become readable as the "last remaining universal language since the construction of the tower," a language whose *determined yet encrypted expressions* are contained in each of its "phrases" (emphasis added).

Thus the same dual specificity of the phonograph record that distinguishes it from the cinematic sign also enables Adorno to see in it, for reasons that will become clearer below, an inkling of the "final language of all mankind."

At first glance there is a striking similarity between Adorno's evocation of a post-lapsarian utopia and the universal language topos that accompanied early cinema.[27] The parallel logic in what one could call the Esperantist conception of the cinema is evident, for example, in D. W. Griffith's claim in a 1921 interview that "A picture is the universal symbol, and a *picture that moves* is a universal language. Moving pictures, someone suggests, 'might have saved the situation when the Tower of Babel was built.'"[28] Just as cinema was heralded as a transparent, unproblematically accessible (because visual) alternative to national lan-

26. Rudolf Sonner, "Die Musikmaschine," *Der Auftakt*, vol. 9, no. 5 (1931), p. 141 (emphasis added).

27. As Miriam Hansen has pointed out, this metaphor of universal language, which was "used by journalists, intellectuals, social workers, clergy, producers, and industrial apologists alike . . . drew on a variety of discourses (Enlightenment, nineteenth-century positivism, Protestant millennialism, the Esperanto movement, and the growing advertising industry) and oscillated accordingly between utopian and totalitarian impulses" (Miriam Hansen, "The Hieroglyph and the Whore: D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance*," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 88 (Spring 1989), p. 362. For more on the universal language discourse in early cinema, see also Hansen's "Universal Language and Democratic Culture: Myths of Origin in Early American Cinema," in *Myth and Enlightenment in American Literature: In Honor of Hans-Joachim Lang*, ed. Dieter Meindl, et al. (Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlagen-Nürenberg, 1985), pp. 321–51.

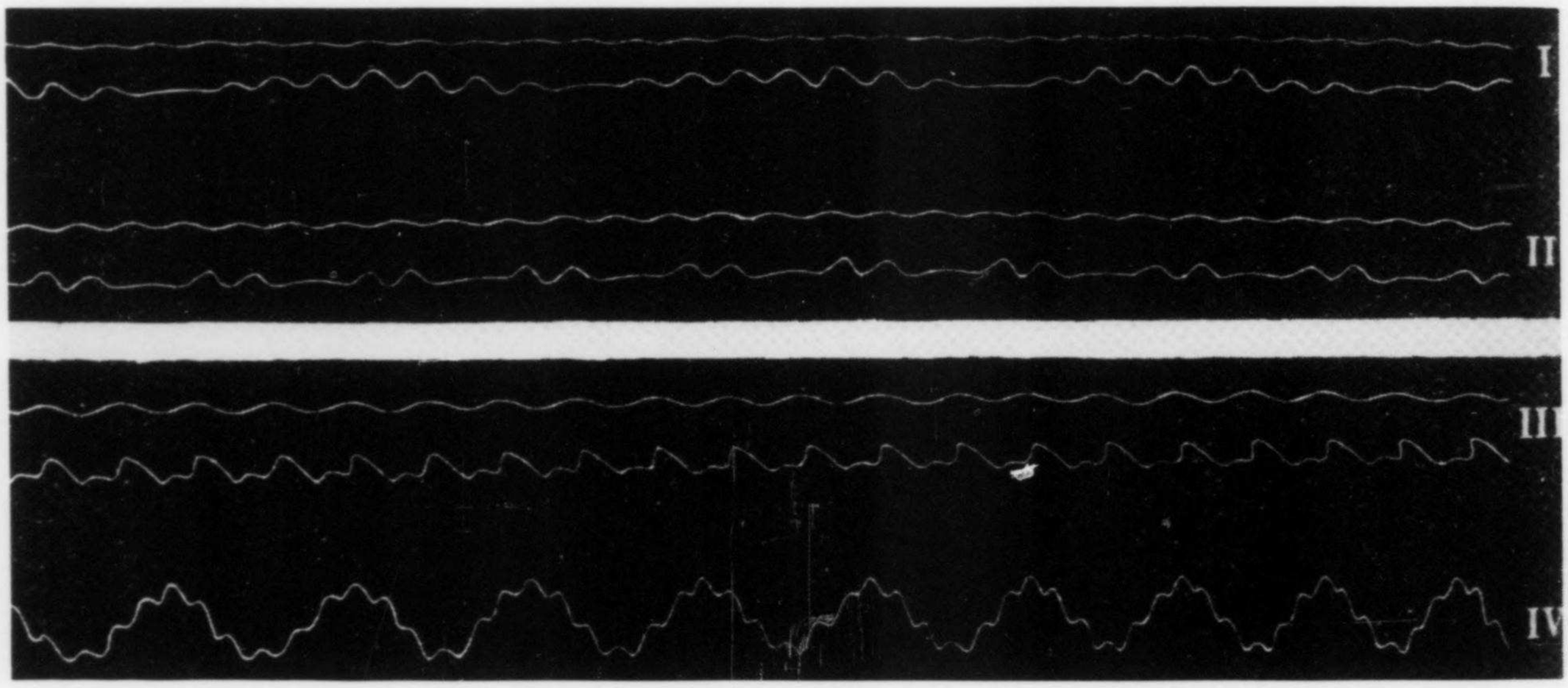
28. D. W. Griffith, "Innovations and Expectations," in *Focus on Griffith*, ed. Harry M. Geduld (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 56.

guages, an analogous discourse of democratization and univocal, natural signs accompanied the prehistory and invention of the phonograph. During the first half of the nineteenth century, phonography—defined in the *OED* as "a system of phonetic shorthand invented by Isaac Pitman in 1837"—was heralded as a "natural method of writing"[29] and was arduously defended by worker's groups as a means of making writing more widely accessible.[30] In the same vein, the "phonautographe," invented by Léon Scott de Martinville in 1857, was an attempt to produce, as the machine's subtitle explained, an "Apparatus for the Self-Registering of the Vibrations of Sound." The resulting "natural stenography" would be, according to the title of Scott's book on the subject, *sound writing itself*.[31] Illiteracy would thus be eliminated by substituting hearing and speaking for reading and writing. Indeed, one of the most popular uses of the early phonographs—which, one should recall, could both play *and* record—was acoustic correspondence. The "phono-post" speaking postcards, which one recorded and sent through the mails, made writing superfluous, a fact stressed by

29. See Pitman's 1840 treatise, *Phonography; or, Writing by Sound; Being a Natural Method of Writing, Applicable to all Languages, and a Complete System of Shorthand* (London: S. Bagster & Sons, 1840).

30. This accounts for its appearance as a topic of debate at the 1867 congress of the International Worker's Association in Lausanne, a discussion that is summarized in G. Duveau, *La Pensée ouvrière sur l'éducation pendant la Révolution et le Second Empire* (Paris: Domat-Montchrestien, 1947), pp. 115–16.

31. Edouard-Léon Scott de Martinville, *Le Problème de la parole s'écrivant elle-même: La France, l'Amérique* (Paris, 1878). Earlier Scott had published a study of stenography entitled *Histoire de la Sténographie depuis les temps anciens jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Ch. Tondeur, 1849).



Léon Scott de Martinville. Phonautograph of acoustic waves. 1857.



advertisements that invited potential users to drop their dictionaries and "Speak! Don't write any more! Listen!"

Unlike the visual Esperanto of the cinema, however, the possibility of universal language held out by the gramophone is just that: only a possibility, a hope. While the traces of the gramophone are just as indexical as the cinematic signifiers, they are not, as Adorno is careful to point out, readily intelligible like photographs. Rather, they are both indexical *and* enigmatic. In this regard they can claim both of the contradictory qualities of the hieroglyph: "universal" and "immediate" by virtue of their "natural," necessary relation of sign to referent, and also esoteric, recondite and requiring decoding, due to their surface inaccessibility.[32] Phonograph records are, to quote an astonishing early anticipation of Adorno's techno-cryptogrammic characterization, "cabalistic photographs [by means of which] sound can outlive itself, leave a posthumous trace, but in the

32. As an early nineteenth-century scholar has pointed out, ancient hieroglyphs were also, in fact, phonographic: "Hieroglyphic characters are either ideographs, that is, representations of ideas, or phonographs, that is, representations of sounds" (Hincks, *On Hieroglyphics*, cited in *OED* 7, p. 789).

Société Anonyme des Phonocartes. 1905.

form of hieroglyphs which not everyone can decipher."[33] Despite their shared millenarian formulations, the universal language rhetoric accompanying early cinema is thus far indeed from the post-Babelian figure employed by Adorno in his recuperation of gramophonic reification by means of what is almost a theology of indexicality. The latter must be located, rather, in a very different tradition: the hieroglyphics of nature articulated in German romanticism and, in particular, as mediated by Walter Benjamin.

At the time of the second gramophone essay, Adorno's thinking was quite marked by Benjamin's work, especially his writings on the theory of language and allegory. Just two years earlier, Adorno had taught an entire seminar on Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book at the Frankfurt University.[34] The 1934 text, "The Form of the Record," not only quotes from the *Trauerspiel* book, but also pays a hidden compliment to Benjamin—described as "one of the most important contemporary aesthetic theorists"—for his discovery of the German physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter's reading of the work of another German physicist, Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni. For it is here, in the context of the tendency among Romantic poets, philosophers, and even physicists to see nature as hieroglyphic writing, that one must locate Adorno's reading of the cipher of the gramophonic spiral. According to the most general version of this romantic theory, manifest for example in the writings of Herder, all of nature speaks through its form, and the physiognomy of the natural world is cast as language, the "book of nature" that merely awaits correct deciphering. A more restricted variant holds that only those aspects of nature which have a formal feature reminiscent of inscription are to be described as hieroglyphs. Here nature seems to be saying something in a language that the human race can no longer understand, that it has forgotten. But this language is in fact the most ordinary language, the Ur-alphabet in which creation was, as it were, spelled out. Indeed, *unlike* all subsequent languages, what marks this primordial language is that it does not require any code at all since, here, sign and referent are the same. These hieroglyphs *are* what they mean. Their unintelligibility today is simply an index of the extent to which the present era has lost touch with that nature.

For the German romantics, there were generally only two ways to reestab-

33. Emile Gautier, *Le Phonographe: son passé, son présent, son avenir* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1905), p. 28. The implication in Gautier's remark that *some* people might be able to "read" the gramophone record is curiously confirmed by the case of Tim Wilson, a thirty-three-year-old Englishman who made the rounds of British and American talk shows in 1985 demonstrating his particular ability to identify unlabeled records, ostensibly by reading the patterns of the grooves (DPA press release, October 1985).

34. Benjamin's influence on Adorno in the early 1930s is perhaps most clearly evidenced in the latter's 1932 essay "The Idea of Natural History," one of Adorno's first major public lectures in his new professional capacity. ("Die Idee der Naturgeschichte," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 [1973], pp. 345–65). For a detailed reading of this lecture, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Macmillan, Free Press, 1977), chapter 3.

lish contact with this Ur-language: either through the direct, but ephemeral, recreation of that language through poetry, or the more tedious, step-by-step relearning of that alphabet through the scientific exploration of nature. The task of physics was thus to make legible once again the currently unintelligible hieroglyphs of nature. Indeed, for the romantics, the discoveries of contemporary physics seemed to confirm the promising visions of the poets. In 1777—exactly one century prior to invention of the phonograph—Georg Christoph Lichtenberg came across the fact that dust particles formed distinct figures on positively or negatively charged fields: here the mysterious phenomenon of electricity had finally become readable![35] An even more dramatic find of a similar sort—which at the time was nothing less than sensational—was the discovery in 1787 by Chladni of the patterns produced by acoustic waves. Chladni's experiment consisted in spreading quartz dust on various plates that were then made to vibrate. Depending on the rate of the vibration, the sand distributed itself into lines, curves and hyperboles, gathering in those areas that were free of movement. Here, for the first time, one could associate acoustic phenomena to specific graphic figures which, most importantly, were "drawn" by the sounds themselves! These "tone figures" [*Klangfiguren*], as Chladni called them, were not arbitrary but were rather in some sort of a "necessary"—indexical—relation to the sounds. In the graphic traces of these "script-like Ur-images of sound," one could see, as Ritter put it, "the notation of that tone which it has written by itself."[36]

As a visible materialization of a previously phenomenal event the gramophone record is very much like the tone figures. In fact, referring explicitly to Chladni, Adorno insists that contemporary music technology "has, in any case, continued what was begun there: the possibility of inscribing music without it ever having sounded has simultaneously reified it in an even more inhuman manner and also brought it mysteriously closer to the character of writing and language." However, to appreciate the gramophone record in its materiality one must extricate it from its instrumental role as a mere means to rephenomenalize a previous acoustic event. Indeed, if Adorno maintains that its aesthetic significance can only be established by focusing attention on its form, on its status as an object prior to any rephenomenalization, it is because otherwise the record simply recedes behind the phenomenal events it stores and then reproduces. As a thing, however, it is a materialization, a reification which transforms an acoustico-temporal event into a trace. It is, in short, a writing, but a writing, as discussed above, of a special, indexical sort.

Cosubstantial with what it represents, the record does not "mean" the acoustic event but is rather like the proper name of the performance it inscribes.

35. On the details of Lichtenberg's discovery, see Walter D. Wetzels, *Johann Wilhelm Ritter: Physik im Wirkungsfeld der deutschen Romantik* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1973), pp. 88ff.
36. Cited in Wetzels, *Johann Wilhelm Ritter*, p. 91



In this regard, the record, like the tone figures, evokes the notion of natural or sacred writing: no longer of the order of signification, this is the form of the divine name. Indeed, it is tempting to read the scene depicted on the pre-Nipper HMV record labels—a cherubic angel inscribing circular traces with a quill—as a figuration of this very claim. The virtually theological character of this interpretation of the record is, however, almost indistinguishable from the tone Adorno employs elsewhere to describe the linguistic specificity of music itself! As a temporally articulated series of sounds, he argues, music is like language. However,

> compared to referential language [*der meinenden Sprache*], musical language is of a thoroughly different sort. And it is this difference

The Gramophone Company, London. Writing Angel trademark motif.

> which constitutes its theological dimension. *What music expresses in its phenomenality is simultaneously fixed and hidden.* The idea of music is the form of the divine name. It is demythologized prayer, freed from the sorcery of influencing. It is the always already futile mortal attempt to name the name itself rather than conveying meaning.[37]

Like the romantic reading of the hieroglyphs of nature, both music qua language and the gramophone record qua trace serve Adorno as figures of an Ur-language, a "true" or "divine" language, where these are understood (for both Adorno and Benjamin) not as a nostalgic origin, but rather as a limit, as a regulative ideal against which all empirical languages can be measured. Simultaneously fixed and hidden, these ciphers also figure our distance from that (nonsemantic) asymptote. Furthermore, Adorno suggests, the spiral crypt of the gramophone record may also contain a message regarding the apocalyptic and/or utopian significance of the modality of its own inscription—technology:

> Ultimately the phonograph records are not artworks but the black seals on the missives that are rushing towards us from all sides in the traffic with technology; missives whose formulations capture the sounds of creation, the first and the last sounds, judgment upon life and message about that which may come thereafter.

Not only a figure of a "true" language, the gramophone record—as form—thus also reads as a hieroglyphic prognosis of our relationship with technology itself.

In its reification of both sound and time, the phonograph record recalls Chladni's tone-figures in another sense as well: where music writes itself there is no writing subject. The record eliminates the subject (and the concomitant economy of intentionality) from the musical inscription. Here too it is similar to the structure of music itself since, according to Adorno, "music aims at an intention-free language."[38] Along with the subjectivity of the interpreter(s), the record also eradicates the spatio-temporal uniqueness of the performance. It becomes a citation or, one might say, an allegory of a phenomenal moment (of more or less extended duration), that is, a present marker of a past event which is

37. Adorno, "Fragment über Musik und Sprache" (1953), *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16, p. 252 (emphasis added).

38. Ibid. In his suggestive study of technologies of nineteenth-century writing, Friedrich Kittler states: "Since the advent of the phonograph there has been writing without subjects. Since the advent of this technology it is no longer necessary to assume that every trace has an author, even if he be God" (*Grammophon Film Typewriter* [Berlin: Brinkmann & Bose, 1986], p. 71; partially translated by Dorothea von Mücke with Philippe L. Similon as "Gramophone, Film, Typewriter," *October* 41 [Summer 1987], pp. 101–18). The above remarks would seem to indicate that, if there is anything like a "beginning" to writing without a subject, it must be backdated at least to Chladni's eighteenth-century discovery of the tone figures.

radically past: determinate yet irrevocable. Through the record, performances become historical as allegories. This is already manifest in the very terms gramophone, phonograph, and *Klangfiguren*: like the traces of sand, the curves of the needle are *figures* of tones, i.e., materializations (*gramme*) of phenomenal events (*phone-*) which allegorize them in the process.[39] The gramophone record may in fact be, as Adorno seems to suggest, an allegory of art itself:

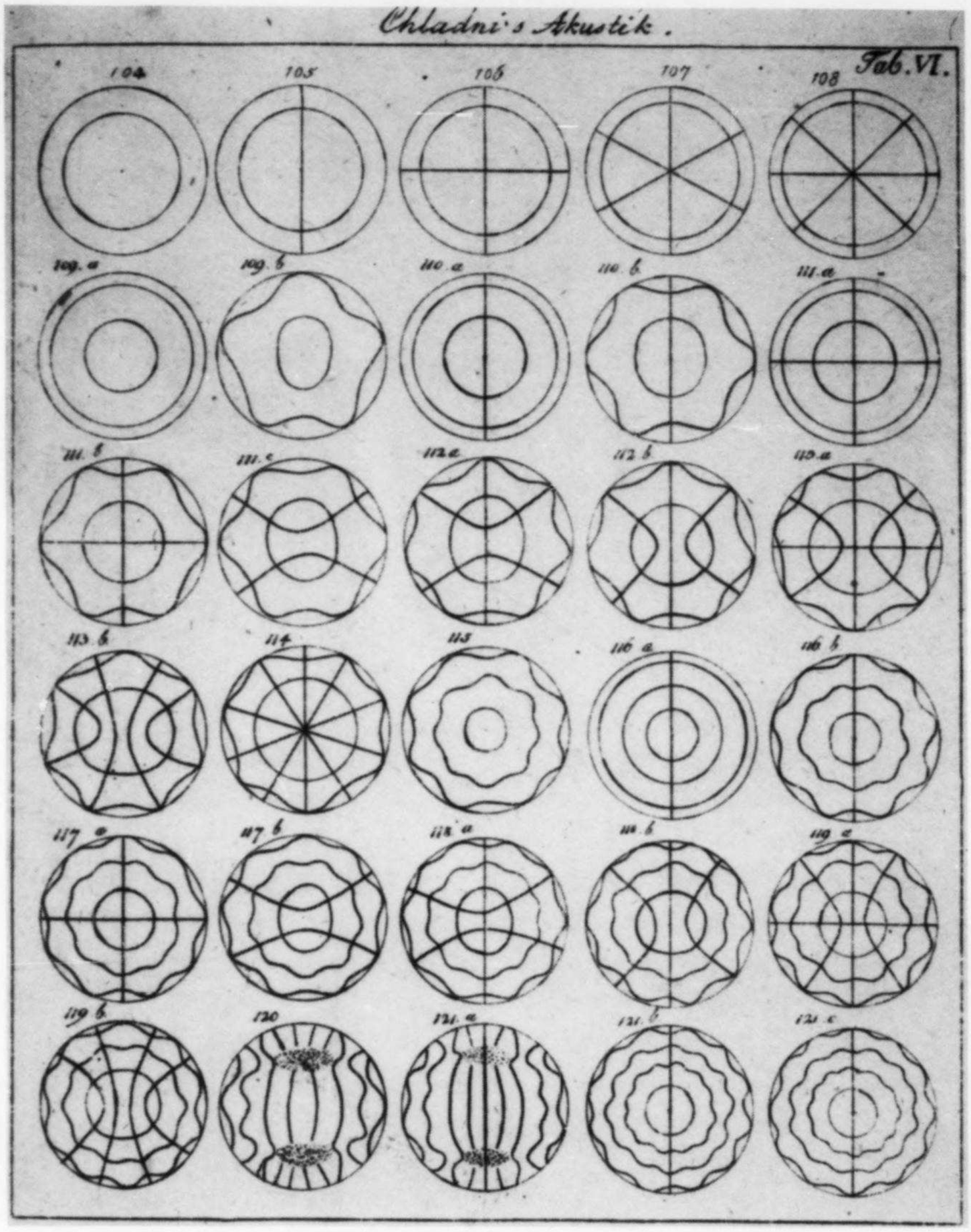
> The truth-content of art only arises to the extent that the appearance of liveliness has abandoned it; . . . artworks only become "true," fragments of the true language, once life has left them; perhaps even only through their decline and that of art itself.

Just as the gramophone record functioned to confirm Adorno's model of music as language, in the last of the three texts devoted to the gramophonic medium it served to bolster his position on opera. In this article—entitled "Opera and the Long-Playing Record" and published in 1969 (the year of his death) in *Der Spiegel*—Adorno insists that the effect of phonographic technology on opera is nothing less than "revolutionary" (the pun is his).[40] The LP, the text claims, solves the dilemma of contemporary opera which has been forced to compensate for the drastic lack of truly contemporary operatic compositions by employing traditional fare in a series of equally unsatisfying ways: historical settings that are embarrassingly anachronistic; modernized stagings that seem arbitrary if not foolish; and concert versions that simply do not work. "It is at this point," says Adorno, "that the long-playing record makes its appearance like a deus ex machina." Taking up the figure of the record as inscription once again, Adorno insists that it is the LP that "allows for the optimal presentation of music, enabling it to recapture some of the force and intensity that had been worn threadbare in the opera houses. Objectification, that is, a concentration on music as the true object of opera, may be linked to a perception that is comparable to reading, to the immersion in a text."

Here again Adorno privileges the mediated over the "unmediated" performance, arguing that the record is a better vehicle for opera than what he caustically describes as the "supposedly live performances" because it permits repeated audition. Listening to something a number of times, in turn, gives rise to a type of familiarity that is not a trivialization but is rather in the service of critical interrogation. In other words, a recording facilitates a close reading that

39. It is interesting to note that Adorno employed Chladni's term as the title of his first collection of essays on music, a series of what one could call "figurations on tones": *Klangfiguren: Musikalische Schriften I* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1959; now in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16).

40. Indeed, Adorno here goes so far as to acknowledge that the two senses of *Technik* are *both* of great consequence for cultural production: "The same historical process, the same human forces of production are at work behind the technological-industrial discoveries and behind the purely artistic ones. That is why the two merge."



is almost impossible in live performances. The LP, Adorno adds, also makes it possible to possess music in a way similar to visual art, a possession which is not, however, dismissed as mere commodification since "for anything unmediated to come into the world, even in art, there is almost no alternative to ownership or reification." But such a gramophonic reification of opera provides Adorno with a crucial surplus value: for along with iterability, the record also simultaneously eliminates the visual dimension of the medium. Adorno's position in the centuries-old debate as to the relative status of the visual versus the acoustic in opera is unambiguous: "the true object of opera," he states above, is the music. Elsewhere this is made even more explicit:

> What is most important is that all aspects of opera, including its theatrical aspects, must be subordinated to the primacy of the music.

Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni. Tone figures from Die Akustik. *1802.*

> Opera is only drama and only action to the extent that it is drama and action through music. . . . One ought to do without optical stimuli.[41]

While the absolute music aesthetic which informs this argument is admittedly not unproblematic, it does make Adorno into a gramophonic enthusiast—to a degree, in fact, which is largely unknown.

The long playing record—as opposed to the short early records that Adorno had called "acoustic daguerreotypes"—now provides a response to the question he had already posed in 1928 regarding the purpose of the gramophone's archival capacity. These LPs enable the music lover to have an acoustic museum at home which—unlike the mausoleum-like opera houses—do not neutralize the recorded works. Rather, as Adorno puts it, "Similar to the fate that Proust ascribed to paintings in museums, these recordings awaken to a second life in the wondrous dialogue with the lonely and perceptive listeners, hibernating for purposes unknown."

In fact, Adorno was quite aware of, and made great use of, at least one of the most important capacities of a gramophonic library: citation. In the introductory note to a collection of essays entitled *Der Getreue Korrepetitor* (The Faithful Music Coach), Adorno explains that this book—a series of analyses of musical works—was originally supposed to have had an accompanying record, a plan that ultimately proved to be impossible due to copyright problems: "As a result, the author had to be content with the more traditional means of citation using musical notation, a practice which disturbs the textual flow without providing the living sound of the music which is precisely what is needed here."[42] Instead, Adorno advises the reader to go out and buy the appropriate records and, to that end, provides a limited discography at the back of the volume.

In his preference for gramophonic citation, Adorno was speaking from experience since all the texts collected in this volume were in fact transcriptions of a remarkable facet of his production: a series of radio shows which he did for the North German radio (NDR). Yes, Adorno was a rather engaged disc-jockey! The concluding essay in the volume, "On the Musical Employment of Radio," reads, in fact, like a theoretical justification of his didactic mass-media practice.[43] To understand what might have led Adorno to an involvement with radio, it is important to remember that, similar to his response to the gramophone, he considered acoustic mediation not only adequate but even *superior* to live performances: through radio "the technologically mediated [sound] gains a corporeal proximity which the immediacy of the live performance often denies to those

41. Adorno, "Konzeption eines Wiener Operntheaters" (1969), now in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, p. 509.
42. *Der Getreue Korrepetitor* (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1963); now in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, pp. 157–402; citation p. 160.
43. "Ueber die musikalische Verwendung des Radios," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, pp. 369–401.

whose goal is a concentrated reception."[44] Even more significantly, however, and contrary to the received reading, Adorno did recognize the *strategic* value of the utopian and progressive moment in even the "regressive hearing" he had previously so condemned:

> Oft disparaged qualities of the listeners such as curiosity, the desire for stimulation, and for sensation would not be the worst place [for an alternative media practice] to start. In the grey uniformity of the flattened out and reified consciousness there are desires—about which the ethos of authenticity gets most upset and which it ascribes to the decadence of the masses—which are the refuge of a better state.[45]

This recognition has concrete ramifications for Adorno's practice: the former critic of "atomistic" hearing now devotes increasing attention to the importance of the detail—even citing a long passage from *Composing for the Films* that calls for a strategic abandonment of internal construction in favor of compositions that emphasize surface, texture, and color. Simultaneously, Adorno insists that the structure of radio shows themselves must abandon the practice of simply playing one record after another. Instead, "the radio show must become the commentary of the musical work."[46] This means that they must include what Adorno calls—using the English term—"running comment," i.e., interspersed analytic observations that organize the chosen "citations" in a didactic and often polemical fashion. Not merely a theoretical suggestion, Adorno instantiates these imperatives on a number of occasions, most dramatically perhaps in a radio program entitled "Beautiful Moments," which is nothing less than a commented montage of his favorite musical passages.[47]

Adorno's didactic imperative also leads him to call for a recording practice which, in its employment of sophisticated microphone techniques, is analogous to the close-up and the jump cut. Significantly, the analogy he chooses is cinematic: "A renewal of the practice of technological recording of music could learn a lot from film. One need not, for example, be embarrassed to cut together the final tape out of a series of partial takes, selecting only the best out of 'shots' that were repeated ten or fifteen times."[48]

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 383.
46. Ibid.
47. Broadcast on July 15, 1965, by the Hessische Rundfunk in Frankfurt a.M., the program "Schöne Stellen" was just under two hours long and contained fifty-two musical examples from thirty-seven different compositions by fourteen composers. All the individual recordings had been chosen by Adorno. The text was subsequently published in the *Philharmonischer Almanach II*, ed. Klaus Schultz and Peter Girth (Berlin: Das Orchester, 1983), pp. 101–18, and is now included in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 18, pp. 695–718. For an analysis of the program, see Helmut Haack, "Adornos Sprechen über Musik," in *Adorno und die Musik*, pp. 37–51.
48. "Uber die musikalische Verwendung des Radios," p. 392.

Adorno advocating gramophonic montage? Yes. Such practice, he now argues, enlists the element of chance (which is unavoidable in all performance) in the service of reason, and exposes the falsity of the ideology of inspiration that is already incompatible with the iterated structure of traditional rehearsals. Finally, and without doubt most importantly, such a montage technique would, as Adorno's composition teacher Alban Berg already recognized (with regard to *Wozzeck*), "foster an analytic type of hearing which, in its capacity to distinguish primary from secondary voices, is in the end a polyphonic hearing."[49] What music would lose in homogeneity through such a process it would gain in sensuous articulation of the details. Adorno praises film for its radically *constitutive* aesthetic—not simply reproducing but *producing* something that exists only on screen. Both radio and recording practices, he insists, should also stop trying to imitate the concert hall performance and exploit instead the destructive and constructive power of montage in a didactic fashion:

> Differentiated, selective and directed recording processes should sustain a relentless mobility toward the material they are transmitting. . . . Admittedly, these in a certain sense break down [deconstruct—*demontieren*] the works and in the process generate substantial protest. But, if it is only selection, repetition and dissection that can liberate hearing from neutralization and direct it towards understanding, then such a practice is simultaneously a response to the crisis of such works, to their immanent destruction.[50]

Thus the model for such practice, for Adorno's *own* practice, is in the end the cinema. Adorno, the supposed knee-jerk Luddite and mandarin opponent of film, ultimately turns out to be taking various capacities of the cinematic medium as his structural paradigm:

> Film is, despite the backwardness in its substantive and aesthetic aspects dictated by the profit motive, the most technologically progressive process because it is most free of a dependence upon a material that is handed to it already finished, merely to be transmitted and depicted. Production and reproduction collapse [in the cinema]; what is produced is only that which is seen on the screen. This is how radio ought to act as well.[51]

Not surprisingly, this also leads Adorno to change his position on the possibility of gramophone specific music as well. Abandoning his earlier insistence on the record as a nonform, he now calls for a phonographic recording practice that goes beyond the mere conservation of pregramophonic acoustic

49. Ibid., p. 397.
50. Ibid., p. 398.
51. Ibid., p. 396.

events. Instead, citing at length a text by Karlheinz Stockhausen that calls for the birth of a "legitimate, functional loudspeaker-music,"[52] Adorno looks forward to a use of the gramophone as a productive technology that will generate work unique to its capabilities.

Adorno's complex and changing relation to the gramophone thus requires that one reconsider his position on mass media and technology in general. For parallel with an ideological critique of the culture industry and its commodification of popular culture, Adorno sees in the inscription produced through mechanical reproduction a decidedly progressive moment. While it is not until 1966 that Adorno accords this potential to the cinema—locating its power in a "montage which does not interfere with things but rather arranges them in a constellation akin to that of writing"[53]—this redemptive reading of the technological trace can already be found decades earlier in Adorno's reflections on the recording of the acoustic. It is here that one finds a dialectical interpretation of mechanical reproducibility that cannot simply be located at one end of a facile "high-low" spectrum. As Adorno so often insisted, a cultural criticism worthy of the name must always grapple with both moments simultaneously: "To conceive twelve-tone technique together with *Madame Butterfly* on the gramophone—this is what musical knowledge in all seriousness ought to strive toward."[54] Adorno's writings on the gramophone record, as the translations below will confirm, explore just this sort of seriousness. As such, they remain worthy of attention to this day, and not only, as it were, for the record.

52. Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Elektronische und instrumentale Musik," *Die Reihe. Information über serielle Musik* 5 (1959), p. 55; cited in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, p. 387; translated as "Electronic and Instrumental Music," *Die Reihe* 5 (1959), p. 64.
53. "Transparencies on Film," p. 203.
54. Adorno, "Motive IV: Musik von Aussen," *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 11 (November/December 1929), p. 338; reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16, p. 269.

Max Beckmann. Möbliert. *1920.*



The Curves of the Needle*

THEODOR W. ADORNO

TRANSLATED BY THOMAS Y. LEVIN

Talking machines and phonograph records seem to have suffered the same historical fate as that which once befell photographs: the transition from artisanal to industrial production transforms not only the technology of distribution but also that which is distributed. As the recordings become more perfect in terms of plasticity and volume, the subtlety of color and the authenticity of vocal sound declines as if the singer were being distanced more and more from the apparatus. The records, now fabricated out of a different mixture of materials, wear out faster than the old ones. The incidental noises, which have disappeared, nevertheless survive in the more shrill tone of the instruments and the singing. In a similar fashion, history drove out of photographs the shy relation to the speechless object that still reigned in daguerreotypes, replacing it with a photographic sovereignty borrowed from lifeless psychological painting to which, furthermore, it remains inferior. Artisanal compensations for the substantive loss of quality are at odds with the real economic situation. In their early phases, these technologies had the power to penetrate rationally the reigning artistic practice. The moment one attempts to improve these early technologies through an emphasis on concrete fidelity, the exactness one has ascribed to them is exposed as an illusion by the very technology itself. The positive tendency of consolidated technology to

* This essay, "Nadelkurven," was written in 1927 and published in 1928 in the *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 10 (February 1928), pp. 47–50. It is reprinted in *Phono: Internationale Schallplatten-Zeitschrift* 6 (July-August 1965), pp. 123–4, and again in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), pp. 525–29, © 1984, Suhrkamp Verlag. The 1965 republication carried the following note:

It goes without saying that over the course of forty years, insights into a technological medium become outdated. On the other hand, even at that time there was already a recognition of aspects of the transformed character of experience which, even as it was caused by technology, also had an effect on that very same technology. The motifs have been retained unchanged and with no attempt to cover up the temporal distance; the author made changes in the language to the extent that he deemed it necessary [Adorno's note; all subsequent notes are by the translator].

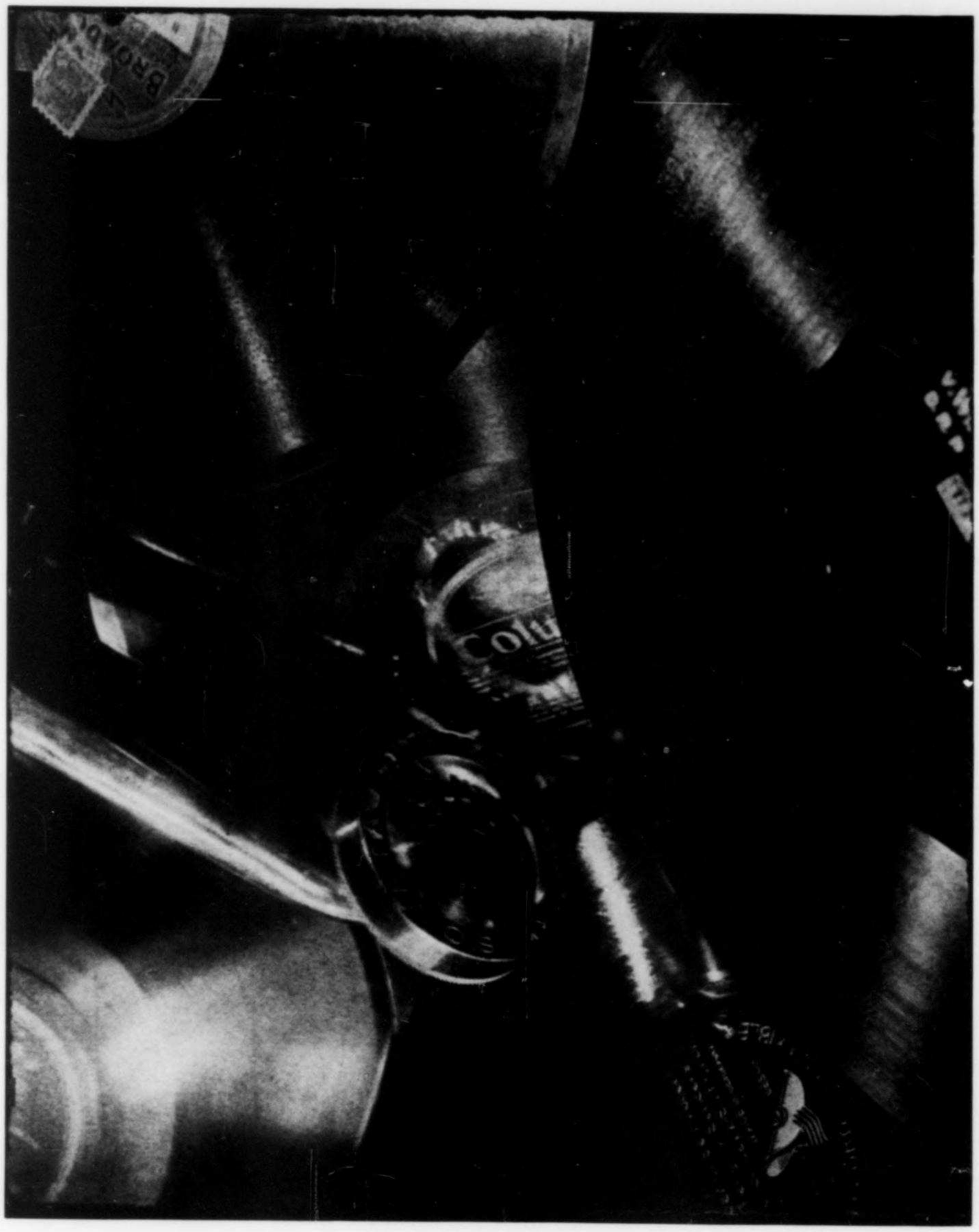
present objects themselves in as unadorned a fashion as possible is, however, traversed by the ideological need of the ruling society, which demands subjective reconciliation with these objects—with the reproduced voice as such, for example. In the aesthetic form of technological reproduction, these objects no longer possess their traditional reality. The ambiguity [*Zweideutigkeit*] of the results of forward-moving technology—which does not tolerate any constraint—confirms the ambiguity of the process of forward-moving rationality as such.

The relevance of the talking machines is debatable. The spatially limited effect of every such apparatus makes it into a utensil of the private life that regulates the consumption of art in the nineteenth century. It is the bourgeois family that gathers around the gramophone in order to enjoy the music that it itself—as was already the case in the feudal household—is unable to perform. The fact that the public music of that time—or at least the arioso works of the first half of the nineteenth century—was absorbed into the record repertoire testifies to its private character, which had been masked by its social presentation. For the time being, Beethoven defies the gramophone. The diffuse and atmospheric comfort of the small but bright gramophone sound corresponds to the humming gaslight and is not entirely foreign to the whistling teakettle of bygone literature. The gramophone belongs to the pregnant stillness of individuals.

If one were to be thoroughly rigorous, the expression "mechanical music" is hardly appropriate to talking machines.[1] The mechanism of the gramophone effects only the reduced transmission, adapted to domestic needs, of preexisting works. The work and its interpretation are accommodated but not disturbed or merged into each other: in its relative dimensions the work is retained and the obedient machine—which in no way dictates any formal principles of its own—follows the interpreter in patient imitation of every nuance. This sort of practice simply assumes the unproblematic existence of the works themselves as well as the interpreter's right to that freedom, which the machine accompanies with devout whirring. Yet both of these are in decline. Neither the works (which are dying out) nor the interpreters (who are growing silent) obey the private apparatus any more. Interpretations whose subjective aspect had been eliminated—as is virtually the case in works by Stravinsky[2]—do not require any further

1. Adorno is referring here to the use of the term in such vanguard musicological debates of the time as H. H. Stuckenschmidt's 1926 article on "Mechanische Musik" in a special issue of the Prague music journal *Der Auftakt: Musikblätter für die Tschechoslowakische Republik* on "Music and Machine," vol. 6, no. 8 (1926), pp. 170–73. The tenacity of this designation, Adorno's objections notwithstanding, is indicated by its employment as late as 1930 in the title of a special issue of *Der Auftakt* (vol. 10, no. 11) devoted to "Mechanical Music."

2. For a discussion of what Adorno described as Stravinsky's "hysterically exaggerated suspicion of the subject" and the consequent attempt on the part of the composer to excise all traces of subjectivity in his works, see Adorno's 1962 essay "Strawinsky: Ein dialektisches Bild," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), pp. 382–409 and especially p. 397.



reproduction; the works that in themselves are in need of free interpretation begin to become unreproducible. The archival character of records is readily apparent: just in time, the shrinking sounds are provided with herbaria that endure for ends that are admittedly unknown. The relevance of the talking machines is debatable.

The transformation of the piano from a musical instrument into a piece of bourgeois furniture—which Max Weber accurately perceived—is recurring in the case of the gramophone but in an extraordinarily more rapid fashion.[3] The

3. For an illustrated discussion of this development, see Graham Melville-Mason, "The Gramophone as Furniture," in *Phonographs and Gramophones: The Edison Phonograph Centenary Symposium* (Edinburgh: The Royal Scottish Museum, 1977), pp. 117–38.

Pierre Dubreuil. Lyres Modernes. *1928–29.*
(Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum).

fate of the gramophone horns marks this development in a striking manner. In their brassness, they initially projected the mechanical being of the machines onto the surface. In better social circles, however, they were quickly muffled into colored masses or wood chalices. But they proceeded to make their way into private apartments, these fanfares of the street, loudspeakers and shrouds of the emptiness that people usually prefer to enshroud within themselves. In Max Beckmann's postwar paintings, these drastic symbols are still recorded.[4] The stabilization subsequently excises these disturbers of the peace with a gentle hand; the last ones still drone out of bordello bars. In the functional salon, the gramophone stands innocuously as a little mahogany cabinet on little rococo legs. Its cover provides a space for the artistic photograph of the divorced wife with the baby. Through discrete cracks comes the singing of the Revelers,[5] all of whom have a soul; baby remains quiet. Meanwhile, the downtrodden gramophone horns reassert themselves as proletarian loudspeakers.

With its movable horn and its solid spring housing, the gramophone's social position is that of a border marker between two periods of musical practice. It is in front of the gramophone that both types of bourgeois music lovers encounter each other. While the expert examines all the needles and chooses the best one, the consumer just drops in his dime—and the sound that responds to both may well be the same.

In Nice, on the other side far away from the big hotels, there is a locale where, with considerable effort, one extracts some publicity from the gramophone whose private character is conserved in French fashion. There, along the walls in sealed glass cases, one finds twenty gramophones lined up one next to

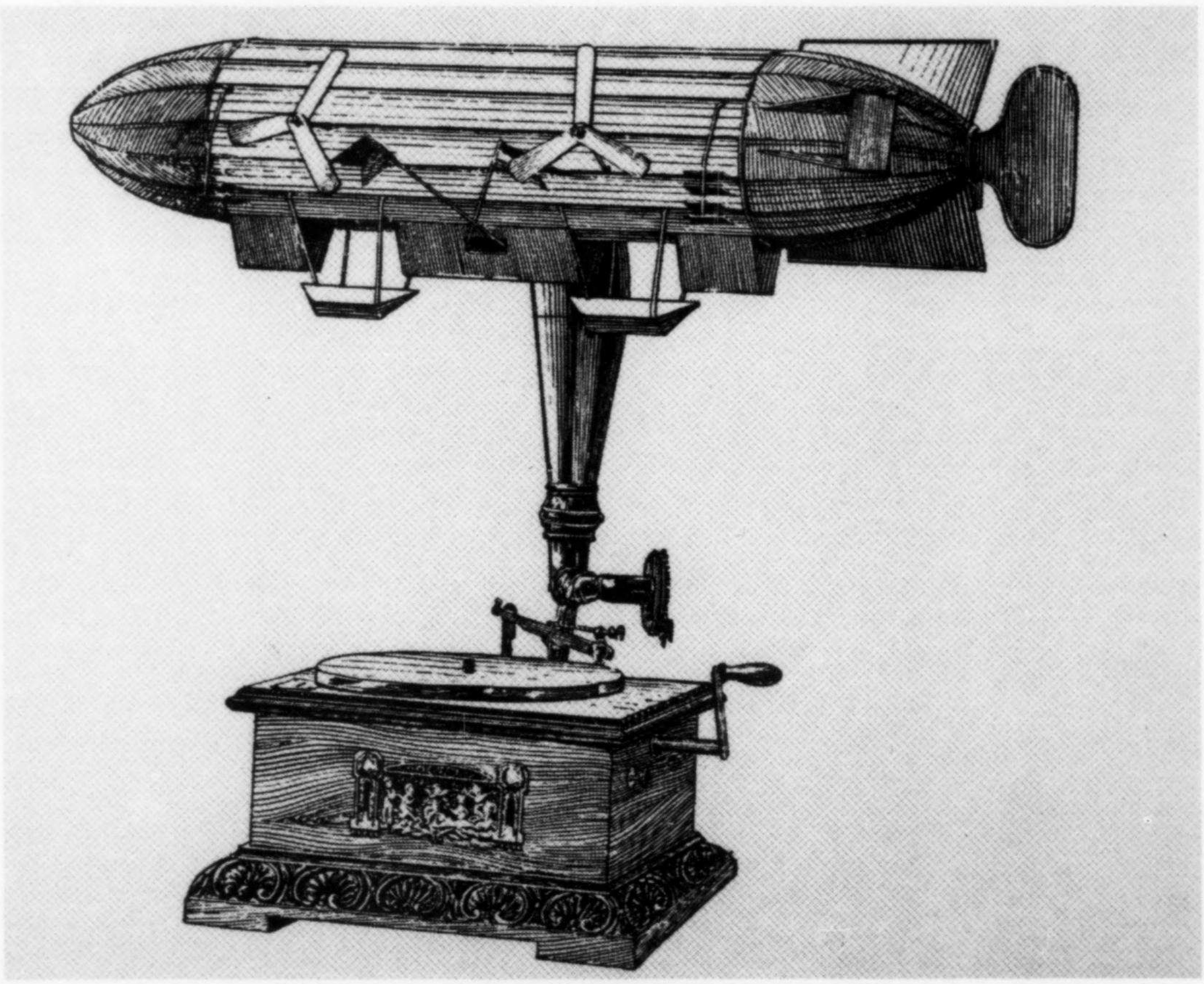
For Weber's remarks on the piano, see Max Weber, *Die rationalen und soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik* (1921), which is included as an appendix in Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann, 4th edition (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 925–28, and which has been reprinted as a separate volume (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1972), pp. 73–77. An English translation by Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel, and Gertrude Neuwirth was published under the title *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958). The section relevant to the current context is also available in a translation by Eric Matthews entitled "The History of the Piano," in *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 378–82.

4. See, for example, the 1920 lithograph *Möbliert* from the *Stadtnacht* series, as well as the 1924 painting *Stilleben mit Grammophon und Schwertlilien*, in Max Beckmann, *Frankfurt 1915–1933*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz (Frankfurt a.M.: Städtische Galerie, 1983).

5. The Revelers were the most popular singing act of the latter half of the 1920s in vaudeville and cabaret, on the air, and on records. Originally known as the Shannon Quartet, the group consisted of Lewis James and Franklyn Baur (tenors), Elliott Shaw (baritone), and Wilfred Glenn (bass); in 1924 they were joined by the baritone, piano accompanist, and arranger Ed Smalle. Most well known as "The Revelers," the name under which they recorded for Victor (HMV) Records, the quintet also made records as "The Merrymakers" (on the Brunswick label) and as "The Singing Sophomores" (on Columbia Records). Members of the group also sang—often anonymously—as duos, trios, and quartets on hundreds of cuts by dance bands of all sorts from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s.

another, each of which doggedly services one record. The gramophones are operated automatically by inserting a token. In order to hear something, one has to put on a pair of headphones: those who don't pay hear nothing. And yet, one after another, everyone hears. In this manner the use of radio technology penetrates the tenaciously preserved sphere of the gramophone and explodes it from within. Audience and object alike are petit bourgeois girls, most of them underage. The big attractions are a screeching record by Mistinguett[6] and the lewd *chansons* of a baritone who rhymes the impotent Siméon with his large pantalons. Both text and music hang on the wall above. The girls wait for someone to approach them.

6. Mistinguett (1875–1956) was the stage name of Jeanne Florentine Bourgeois, a French chanson singer and actress who performed early in her career at the Folies-Bergères together with Maurice Chevalier and quickly became the leading lady of the Paris revue-theaters in the 1920s. Her autobiography is available in a translation by Lucienne Hill as *Mistinguett, Queen of the Paris Night* (London: Elek Books, 1954).



Phonograph with Zeppelin-Shaped Speaker, Schwäbische Metallwarenfabrik GmbH, Unterlenningen-Teck, Würrtemburg. 1908.

The dog on records listening to his master's voice[7] off of records through the gramophone horn is the right emblem for the primordial affect which the gramophone stimulated and which perhaps even gave rise to the gramophone in the first place. What the gramophone listener actually wants to hear is himself, and the artist merely offers him a substitute for the sounding image of his own person, which he would like to safeguard as a possession. The only reason that he accords the record such value is because he himself could also be just as well preserved. Most of the time records are virtual photographs of their owners, flattering photographs—ideologies.

The mirror function of the gramophone arises out of its technology. What is best reproduced gramophonically is the singing voice. Here, "best" means most faithful to the natural ur-image and not at all most appropriate to the mechanical from the outset. But good records want, above all, to be similar.

Male voices can be reproduced better than female voices. The female voice easily sounds shrill—but not because the gramophone is incapable of conveying high tones, as is demonstrated by its adequate reproduction of the flute. Rather, in order to become unfettered, the female voice requires the physical appearance of the body that carries it. But it is just this body that the gramophone eliminates, thereby giving every female voice a sound that is needy and incomplete. Only there where the body itself resonates, where the self to which the gramophone refers is identical with its sound, only there does the gramophone have its legitimate realm of validity: thus Caruso's uncontested dominance. Wherever sound is separated from the body—as with instruments—or wherever it requires the body as a complement—as is the case with the female voice—gramophonic reproduction becomes problematic.

With the advent of the gramophone, absolute pitch runs into difficulties. It is almost impossible to guess the actual pitch if it deviates from the original one. In that case, the original pitch becomes confused with that of the phonographic reproduction. For as a whole, the sound of the gramophone has become so much more abstract than the original sound that again and again it needs to be complemented by specific sensory qualities of the object it is reproducing and on which it depends in order to remain at all related to that object. Its abstraction presupposes the full concreteness of its object, if it is to become in any way graspable, thereby circumscribing the domain of what can be reproduced. Phonographic technology calls for a natural object. If the natural substance of the object is itself already permeated by intentionality or mechanically fractured, then the record is no longer capable of grasping it. Once again the historical limits of the talking machines are inscribed upon them.

7. English in original. For a richly illustrated account of the HMV logo, see Leonard Petts, *The Story of "Nipper" and the "His Master's Voice" picture painted by Francis Barraud* (Bournemouth: The Talking Machine Review International, 1973/1983).



The turntable of the talking machines is comparable to the potter's wheel: a tone-mass [*Ton-Masse*][8] is formed upon them both, and for each the material is preexisting. But the finished tone/clay container that is produced in this manner remains empty. It is only filled by the hearer.

There is only one point at which the gramophone interferes with both the work and the interpretation. This occurs when the mechanical spring wears out. At this point the sound droops in chromatic weakness and the music bleakly plays itself out. Only when gramophonic reproduction breaks down are its objects transformed. Or else one removes the records and lets the spring run out in the dark.

8. Adorno here plays upon the untranslatable polyvalence of *Ton*, which in German means both "sound" or "tone" and also "clay." A *Ton-Masse* is thus a quantity or mass both of acoustic and of argillaceous material.

Phonograph with Rotating Christmas Tree, Wilhelm Dietrich Co., Leipzig. Circa 1909.

The Form of the Phonograph Record*

THEODOR W. ADORNO

TRANSLATED BY THOMAS Y. LEVIN

One does not want to accord it any form other than the one it itself exhibits: a black pane made of a composite mass which these days no longer has its honest name any more than automobile fuel is called benzine; fragile like tablets, with a circular label in the middle that still looks most authentic when adorned with the prewar terrier hearkening to his master's voice; at the very center, a little hole that is at times so narrow that one has to redrill it wider so that the record can be laid upon the platter. It is covered with curves, a delicately scribbled, utterly illegible writing, which here and there forms more plastic figures for reasons that remain obscure to the layman upon listening; structured like a spiral, it ends somewhere in the vicinity of the title label, to which it is sometimes connected by a lead-out groove so that the needle can comfortably finish its trajectory. In terms of its "form," this is all that it will reveal. As perhaps the first of the technological artistic inventions, it already stems from an era that cynically acknowledges the dominance of things over people through the emancipation of technology from human requirements and human needs and through the presentation of achievements whose significance is not primarily humane; instead, the need is initially produced by advertisement, once the thing already exists and is spinning in its own orbit. Nowhere does there arise anything that resembles a form specific to the phonograph record—in the way that one was generated by photography in its early days. Just as the call for "radio-specific" music remained necessarily empty and unfulfilled and gave rise to nothing better than some

* This essay, "Die Form der Schallplatte," was first published in *23: Eine Wiener Musikzeitschrift* 17-19 (December 15, 1934), pp. 35–39 [signed "Hektor Rottweiler"]. It is reprinted in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften,* vol. 19 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), pp. 530–34, © 1984, Suhrkamp Verlag. More recently, this text has been reprinted in *Broken Music: Artists' Recordworks,* ed. Ursula Block and Michael Glasmeier (Berlin: DAAD and gelbe Musik, 1989), pp. 47–48, together with translations into French by Carole Boudreault ("La Forme du disque," pp. 51–52) and into an often clumsy and inaccurate English by John Epstein ("The Form of the Record," pp. 49–50) [this and subsequent notes are by the translator].

directions for instrumentation that turned out to be impracticable, so too there has never been any gramophone-specific music.[1] Indeed, one ought to credit the phonograph record with the advantage of having been spared the artisanal transfiguration of artistic specificity in the arty private home. Furthermore, from their phonographic origins up through the electrical process (which, for better and for worse, may well be closely related to the photographic process of enlargement), the phonograph records were nothing more than the acoustic photographs that the dog so happily recognizes. It is no coincidence that [in German] the term "plate" is used without any modification and with the same meaning in both photography and phonography.[2] It designates the two-dimensional model of a reality that can be multiplied without limit, displaced both spatially and temporally, and traded on the open market. This, at the price of sacrificing its third dimension: its height and its abyss.

According to every standard of artistic self-esteem, this would imply that the form of the phonograph record was virtually its nonform. The phonograph record is not good for much more than reproducing and storing a music deprived of its best dimension, a music, namely, that was already in existence before the phonograph record and is not significantly altered by it. There has been no development of phonographic composers; even Stravinsky, despite all his good will towards the electric piano, has not made any effort in this direction.[3] The

1. The stakes involved in Adorno's resistance to the possibility of composition specific to what he himself called "the most important of all the musical mass media" are articulated in the opening lines of his essay "On the Musical Employment of Radio":

> In the early 1920s, when radio was becoming generally established, there was much talk of radio-specific music. Such compositions had to be particularly light and transparent since it was held that not only anything massive but also everything complex could only be transmitted badly. Individual acoustic timbres such as the flute would stick out so badly that one would do well to avoid them. On the surface, such rules recalled those contemporary imperatives for both construction and functional forms that did justice to their materials. In truth, however, they ran parallel with the enthusiastic community-oriented slogans calling for simplification that had been launched around the same time in reaction to the alienating aspects of new music.

"Über die musikalische Verwendung des Radios," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15 (1976), p. 369.

2. In German this linguistic coincidence still resonates clearly since, analogous to the photographic plate, the word for the phonograph record is *Schallplatte* (literally "sound-plate").

3. Stravinsky, whose interest in mechanical musical instruments of all sorts dated back to his childhood, composed a study for pianola in 1917 for the Aeolian Company, London, whose exhibition of pianolas he had seen a few years earlier. This short, barely two-minute-long piece (which the composer orchestrated in 1928 under the title "Madrid" as the last section of his "Quatre Etudes pour Orchestre") was performed on October 13, 1921, in the Aeolian Hall in London and was subsequently published as roll #T-967B. In 1923, the year he signed a six-year contract with Pleyel in Paris to record his entire corpus on pianola rolls, Stravinsky also wrote an early instrumentation of "Les Noces" for two cymbalons, harmonium, pianola, and drums. In a statement entitled "My

only thing that can characterize gramophone music is the inevitable brevity dictated by the size of the vinyl plate. Here too a pure identity reigns between the form of the record disc and that of the world in which it plays: the hours of domestic existence that while themselves away along with the record are too sparse for the first movement of the Eroica to be allowed to unfold without interruption. Dances composed of dull repetitions are more congenial to these hours. One can turn them off at any point. The phonograph record is an object of that "daily need" which is the very antithesis of the humane and the artistic, since the latter can not be repeated and turned on at will but remain tied to their place and time.

Nevertheless, as an article, the record is already too old not to present us with its riddles, once one forgoes considering it as an art object and explores instead the contours of its thingness. For it is not in the play of the gramophone as a surrogate for music but rather in the phonograph record as a thing that its potential significance—and also its aesthetic significance—resides. As an artistic product of decline, it is the first means of musical presentation that can be possessed as a thing. Not like oil paintings, which look down from the walls upon the living. Just as these can hardly fit any more in an apartment, there are no truly large-format phonograph records. Instead, records are possessed like photographs; the nineteenth century had good reasons for coming up with phonograph record albums alongside photographic and postage-stamp albums, all of them herbaria of artificial life that are present in the smallest space and ready to conjure up every recollection that would otherwise be mercilessly shredded between the haste and hum-drum of private life. Through the phonograph record, *time* gains a new approach to music. It is not the time in which music happens, nor is it the time which music monumentalizes by means of its "style." It is time as evanescence, enduring in mute music. If the "modernity" of all mechanical instruments gives music an age-old appearance—as if, in the rigidity of its repetitions, it had existed for ever, having been submitted to the pitiless eternity of the clockwork—then the evanescence and recollection that is associated with the barrel organ as a mere sound in a compelling yet indeterminate way has become tangible and manifest through the gramophone records.

Position on the Phonograph Record," published in 1930, Stravinsky calls not only for recording practices that take advantage of the plastic capabilities of phonographic reproduction, as the composer claims to have done in his records for the Columbia label; he also insists that "it would be of the greatest interest to produce music specifically for phonographic reproduction, a music which would only attain its true image—its original sound—through the mechanical reproduction. This is probably the ultimate goal for the gramophonic composer of the future" (Igor Stravinsky, "Meine Stellung zur Schallplatte," *Kultur und Schallplatte* 9 [1930], cited in *Musik und Gesellschaft*, vol. 1, no. 8 [1931], p. 32).

The key to the proper understanding of the phonograph records ought to be provided by the comprehension of those technological developments that at one point transformed the drums of the mechanical music boxes and organs into the mechanism of the phonograph. If at some later point, instead of doing "history of ideas" [*Geistesgeschichte*], one were to read the state of the cultural spirit [*Geist*] off of the sundial of human technology, then the prehistory of the gramophone could take on an importance that might eclipse that of many a famous composer.[4] There is no doubt that, as music is removed by the phonograph record from the realm of live production and from the imperative of artistic activity and becomes petrified, it absorbs into itself, in this process of petrification, the very life that would otherwise vanish. The dead art rescues the ephemeral and perishing art as the only one alive. Therein may lie the phonograph record's most profound justification, which cannot be impugned by an aesthetic objection to its reification. For this justification reestablishes by the very means of reification an age-old, submerged and yet warranted relationship: that between music and *writing*.

Anyone who has ever recognized the steadily growing compulsion that, at least during the last fifty years, both musical notation and the configuration of the musical score have imposed on compositions—(the pejorative expression "paper music" betrays this drastically)—will not be surprised if one day a reversal of the following sort occurs: music, previously conveyed by writing, suddenly itself turns into writing. This occurs at the price of its immediacy, yet with the hope that, once fixed in this way, it will some day become readable as the "last remaining universal language since the construction of the tower,"[5] a language whose determined yet encrypted expressions are contained in each of its "phrases."[6] If, however, notes were still the mere signs for music, then, through the curves of the needle on the phonograph record, music approaches decisively its true character as writing. Decisively, because this writing can be recognized as true language to the extent that it relinquishes its being as mere signs: inseparably committed to the sound that inhabits this and no other acoustic groove. If the productive force of music has expired in the phonograph records, if the latter have not produced a form through their technology, they instead

4. As early as the mid-1920s, articles discussing the prehistory of the gramophone were in fact being published in increasing number in the more progressive music journals of the time: see, for example, H. H. Stuckenschmidt, "Maschinenmusik," *Der Auftakt*, vol. 7, no. 7/8 (1927), pp. 152–56; K. Marx, "Schallplatten-Geschichte," *Der Auftakt,* vol. 10, no. 11 (1930), pp. 241–43; and Günther Ziegler, "Musikautomaten," *Der Auftakt,* vol. 13, no. 9/10 (1933), pp. 131–33.

5. See Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels,* in vol. 1 of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), p. 387; translated by John Osborne as *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 214; translation slightly modified.

6. A play on the German word *Satz*, which means "phrase" and—in a musical context—the "movement" of a composition.

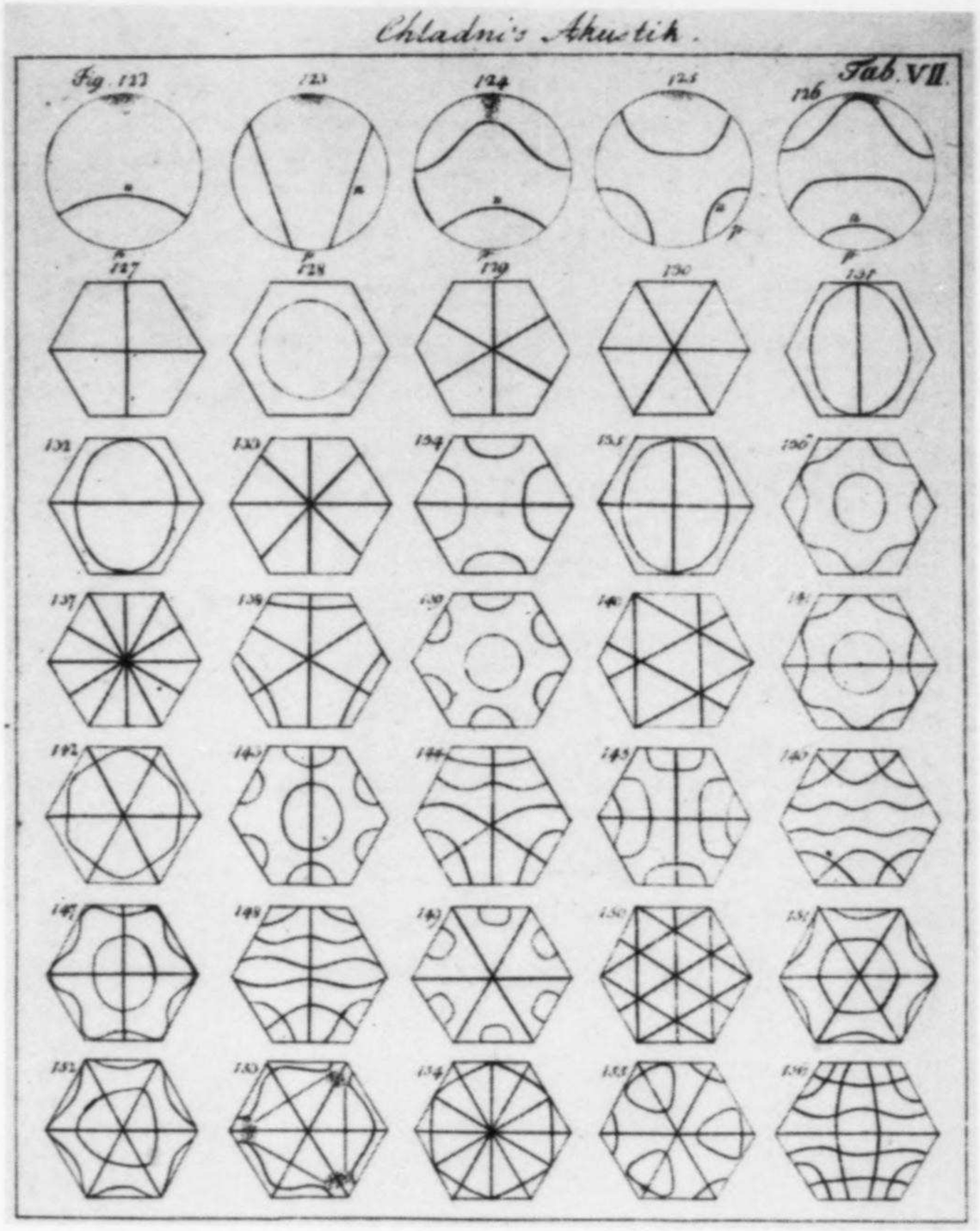
transform the most recent sound of old feelings into an archaic text of knowledge to come. Yet though the theologian may feel constrained to come to the conclusion that "life" in the strictest sense—the birth and death of creatures— cannot be ascribed to any art, he may also tend to hold that the truth-content of art only arises to the extent that the appearance of liveliness has abandoned it; that artworks only become "true," fragments of the true language, once life has left them; perhaps even only through their decline and that of art itself. It would be then that, in a seriousness hard to measure, the form of the phonograph record could find its true meaning: the scriptal spiral that disappears in the center, in the opening of the middle, but in return survives in time.

A good part of this is due to physics, at least to Chladni's sound figures,[7] to which—according to the discovery of one of the most important contemporary aesthetic theorists—Johann Wilhelm Ritter referred as the script-like Ur-images of sound.[8] The most recent technological development has, in any case, continued what was begun there: the possibility of inscribing music without it ever having sounded has simultaneously reified it in an even more inhuman manner and also brought it mysteriously closer to the character of writing and language.[9] The panicked fear that certain composers express regarding this invention cap-

7. Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni (1756–1827), a German physicist often called the "father of acoustics" for his pioneering studies of the transmission of sound. The first to examine sound waves mathematically—as in his 1802 study entitled *Die Akustik* published in Leipzig by Breitkopf und Hertel—Chladni experimented with vibrating plates of thin glass and metal covered with sand, noting that the sand remained in curved lines at the points where the plates did not quiver. These symmetrical patterns, the so-called Chladni figures, attracted popular attention, and in 1809 a demonstration was staged for Napoleon. In 1790 Chladni invented a musical instrument called the "euphonium," which was composed of glass rods and steel bars made to sound through rubbing with moistened fingers. Along with its contemporary, the "aiuton," invented by Charles Clagget, the euphonium was the first of numerous friction bar instruments, some with piano keyboards and horizontal friction cylinders or cones that acted on vertical bars, and others with bars stroked by the player's fingers or with a bow. For more on Chladni, see Mary Desiree Waller, *Chladni Figures: A Study in Symmetry* (London: G. Bell, 1961).

8. The German physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810), often called the "father of electrochemistry," is credited with the discovery in 1801 of the ultraviolet region of the spectrum and in 1803 of the polarization of electrodes in batteries. Adorno here extends a concealed compliment to Walter Benjamin, who reviewed Ritter's treatment of Chladni in the *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*. For further remarks on Ritter by Benjamin, see the introductory note to Ritter's letter to Franz von Baader included in Benjamin's epistolary compilation *Deutsche Menschen* (1936), in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, pp. 176–77. For Ritter's discussion of Chladni, see Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers: Ein Taschenbuch für Freunde der Natur*, ed. J. W. Ritter [Editorship fictitious], vol. 2 (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1810), pp. 227ff. For a detailed study of Ritter, see Walter D. Wetzels, *Johann Wilhelm Ritter: Physik im Wirkungsfeld der deutschen Romantik* (Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1973).

9. Adorno here is most likely referring to the more recent variations on the possibility of composing for mechanical pianos by inscribing directly upon the scrolls. This had been demonstrated as early as 1926 at a "Festival of Mechanical Music" in Donaueschingen where Ernst Toch and Gerhard Münch had composed pieces in this manner for a Welte-Mignon pianola. These works were "performed" by Paul Hindemith (who serviced the machine) together with a similarly generated work by Hindemith that served as an accompaniment to Oskar Schlemmer's "Triadic Ballet." See



tures precisely the extraordinary threat to the life of artworks that emanates from it just as it already did from the gentler barbarism of the phonograph record albums. What may be announcing itself here, however, is the shock at that transfiguration of all truth of artworks that iridescently discloses itself in the catastrophic technological progress. Ultimately the phonograph records are not artworks but the black seals on the missives that are rushing towards us from all sides in the traffic with technology; missives whose formulations capture the sounds of creation, the first and the last sounds, judgment upon life and message about that which may come thereafter.

Dr. Erich Steinhard, "Donaueschingen: Mechanisches Musikfest," *Der Auftakt,* vol. 6, no. 8 (1926), pp. 183–86; on the history of the pianola, see Peter Hagmann, *Das Welte-Mignon-Klavier, die Welte-Philharmonie-Orgel und die Anfänge der Reproduktion von Musik,* (Bern/Frankfurt/New York: Peter Lang, 1984). In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the music journals were regularly reporting on a host of newly "invented," largely electric instruments such as Theremin's "Ätherwellenapparat," Dr. Friedrich Trautwein's "Trautonium," Helberger's "Hellerton," and Jörg Mager's "Sphärophon": see, for example, Herbert Weisskopf, "Sphärophon: Das Instrument der Zukunft," *Der Auftakt,* vol. 6, no. 8 (1926), pp. 177–78; Hans Kuznitzky, "Neue Elemente der Musikerzeugung,"*Melos* 6 (April 1927), pp. 156–60; Frank Warschauer, "Neue Möglichkeiten elektrischer Klangerzeugung," *Der Auftakt*, vol. 10, no. 11 (1930), pp. 233–35; and Edwin Geist, "Bedeutung und Aufgabe der elektrischen Musikinstrumente," *Melos* 12 (February 1933), pp. 49–52.

Ernst Florens Friedrich Chladni. Tone figures from Die Akustik. *1802.*

Opera and the Long-Playing Record*

THEODOR W. ADORNO

TRANSLATED BY THOMAS Y. LEVIN

In the history of music it is not all that rare for technological inventions to gain significance only long after their inception. This was the fate of the valve horn with the chromatic scale, which did not become fully utilized until Wagner. The saxophone, a connecting link between woodwind and brass instruments, was already hesitantly used by Bizet,[1] but only entered the domain of serious music by means of a detour through jazz. A similar development now seems to be taking place with the phonograph record.

In music, *Technik* has a double meaning.[2] On the one hand, there are the actual compositional techniques and, on the other, there are the industrial processes that are applied to music for the purpose of its mass dissemination. The latter do not, however, remain completely external to the music. Behind both the

* This essay was first published as "'Die Oper Ueberwintert auf der Langspielplatte': Theodor W. Adorno über die Revolution der Schallplatte," *Der Spiegel* 23 (March 24, 1969), p. 169; it has been reprinted under the title "Oper und Langspielplatte" in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), pp. 555–58, © 1984, Suhrkamp Verlag [this and subsequent notes are by the translator].

1. Adorno is referring to Georges Bizet's employment of the saxophone in the two orchestral suites for "L'Arlésienne," incidental music written in 1872 for a drama by Alphonse Daudet. The composer's hesitation regarding the new instrument is expressed in a prefatory note to the original edition where he explains that one can leave out the saxophone if one likes and have its part played instead by various other wind instruments.

2. In German, *Technik* refers both to artistic technique (in the sense of compositional style) and to technology. In his study of film music coauthored with Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), Adorno articulates this distinction with regard to cinema as follows: "In the realm of motion pictures the term 'technique' has a double meaning that can easily lead to confusion. On the one hand, technique is the equivalent of an industrial process for producing goods: e.g. the discovery that picture and sound can be recorded on the same strip is comparable to the invention of the air brake. The other meaning of 'technique' is aesthetic. It designates the methods by which an artistic intention can be adequately realized" (p. 9, note 3; compare also Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15 [1976], p. 19, note 2). For more on the question of musical technique, see Adorno's remarks in his 1958 essay "Musik und Technik," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16 (1978), pp. 229–48, translated by Wes Blomster as "Music and Technique," *Telos* 32 (Summer 1977), pp. 79–94.

technologico-industrial and the artistic discoveries there is the same historical process at work, the same human force of production. That is why they both converge.

As late as 1934 it still had to be claimed that, as a form, the phonograph record had not given rise to anything unique to it.[3] This may well have changed since the introduction of long-playing recordings, irrespective of whether, on the one hand, LPs might have been technologically possible from the very start and were only held back by commercial calculations or due to lack of consumer interest, or, on the other, one really only learned so late how to capture extended musical durations without interrupting them and thereby threatening the coherence of their meaning. In any case, the term "revolution" is hardly an exaggeration with regard to the long-playing record. The entire musical literature could now become available in quite-authentic form to listeners desirous of auditioning and studying such works at a time convenient to them.

The gramophone record comes into its own, however, by virtue of the fate of a major musical genre: the opera. It has been more than thirty years since any operas have been written for opera houses that—if one is allowed to insist on such high standards—manifested something of world spirit [*Weltgeist*]. The supply of traditional operas on the stages reserved for them has, however, become folderol for opera fans[4] or cult objects for culture worshippers. Thus the tireless efforts to modernize operas in opera houses with new sets and new stagings—at the expense of their substance. This confrontation as surrealist tease has itself already become institutionalized, and rapidly loses its effect. In its heroic periods, modern music distanced itself from the production of opera for opera houses and groped toward a theater qualitatively different from the high bourgeois representation of the nineteenth century.[5] The current avant-garde has taken this up once again—probably most radically and convincingly by Kagel.[6]

3. Adorno is here referring to his own remarks made decades earlier in "The Form of the Phonograph Record."

4. Word in English in original; on Adorno's use of foreign words, see my introduction to Adorno's essay "On the Question: 'What is German?'" entitled "Nationalities of Language: Adorno's *Fremdwörter*," *New German Critique* 36 (Fall 1985), pp. 111–19.

5. Adorno is referring to works such as Alban Berg's "Lulu" and Arnold Schoenberg's "Moses und Aron," about which he notes elsewhere: "It is hardly a coincidence that since 'Lulu' and 'Moses and Aron' no operas have been written that were truly modern and simultaneously authentic" ("Zu einer Umfrage: Neue Oper und Publikum," *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, p. 494). For more on Adorno's position on opera, see his 1955 essay "Bürgerliche Oper" (now in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 16, pp. 24–39), which will soon be available in translation under the title "Bourgeois Opera," in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David Levin (London: Radius, 1991).

6. Following initial experiments in the 1950s with *musique concrète*, composer Mauricio Kagel (born in Argentina in 1931) began experimenting with different electro-acoustic and audio-visual media, which he subsequently translated into various sorts of theatrical and multi-media performance pieces. Kagel also incorporated the theatrical aspect of performance itself as a new compositional

When, almost forty years ago, audiences began to chuckle about Lohengrin's swan and the Germanic beards in the *Ring*, this was not due only to the inability of an already then sobered generation to experience art according to its stylistic principles, that is, in terms of its distance from the everyday. One sensed that, artistically, things just could not go on like this, that this very stylization was making opera into a marketable specialty item. The music of *Figaro* is of truly incomparable quality, but every staging of *Figaro* with powdered ladies and gentlemen, with the page and the white rococo salon, resembles the praline box,[7] not to mention the *Rosenkavalier* and the silver rose. If instead one sweeps away all the costuming and has the participants, copying the practices of contemporary dance, dressed in sweat suits or even timeless outfits, one cannot avoid asking, What's the point? Why even bother doing it on stage? One wants to spare Mozart from this.

It is obvious that Mozart's operas cannot be performed in oratorio fashion without an unintentionally comic effect. Television broadcasts of gala opera evenings do not make things any better. A million praline boxes are actually worse than one single one that still retains something of the childlike joy of blissful moments.[8] Radio operas merely produce the effect of a pale replica of the live performance, yet without relinquishing the claim to singularity that has become fatal. It is here that the LP makes its entrance as deus ex machina.

Shorn of phony hoopla, the LP simultaneously frees itself from the capriciousness of fake opera festivals. It allows for the optimal presentation of music, enabling it to recapture some of the force and intensity that had been worn threadbare in the opera houses. Objectification, that is, a concentration on music as the true object of opera, may be linked to a perception that is comparable to reading, to the immersion in a text. This offers an alternative to that which opera does in the best case—and which is just what an artwork ought not do—that is: cajole the listener. The form of the gramophone record comes into its own as a form of sound figures. The ability to repeat long-playing records, as well as parts of them, fosters a familiarity which is hardly afforded by the ritual of performance. Such records allow themselves to be possessed just as previously one

---

parameter in traditionally nontheatrical genres such as the string quartet. One can find observations by the composer on his conception of opera in his introductory comments to the 1964 piece "Match für drei Spieler" entitled "Kaum eines Musikstückes" in Leo Karl Gerhartz, *Oper: Aspekte der Gattung* (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 1983), pp. 188–95. See also Dieter Schnebel, *Mauricio Kagel: Musik, Theater, Film* (Cologne: Dumont Schauberg, 1970).

7. Probably a reference to the commercial exploitation of the iconography of classical stagings of Mozart operas on the boxes of "Mozartkugel" (Mozart Ball) chocolates.

8. For more extensive observations on the aesthetics and politics of music broadcasts on television, see Adorno's 1968 discussion with the editors of *Der Spiegel*, "Musik im Fernsehen ist Brimborium," and the subsequent polemical response to readers' letters, "Antwort des Fachidioten," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 19, pp. 559–69 and 570–72.

possessed art-prints. But there remains hardly any means other than possession, other than reification, through which one can get at anything unmediated in this world—and in art as well. One of the essential properties of operas, particularly such as those from the later period by Wagner and Strauss, is long temporal duration: they are sea voyages. LPs provide the opportunity—more perfectly than the supposedly live performances—to recreate without disturbance the temporal dimension essential to operas.

The gramophone record becomes a form the moment it unintentionally approaches the requisite state of a compositional form. Looking back, it now seems as if the short-playing records of yesteryear—acoustic daguerreotypes that are already now hard to play in a way that produces a satisfying sound due to the lack of proper apparatuses—unconsciously also corresponded to their epoch: the desire for highbrow diversion, the salon pieces, favorite arias, and the Neapolitan semihits whose image Proust attached in an unforgettable manner to "O sole mio."[9] This sphere of music is finished: there is now only music of the highest standards and obvious kitsch, with nothing in between. The LP expresses this historical change rather precisely.

At the time when music critic Paul Bekker was trying his hand as opera house director, he may have been the first to have spoken of opera as a museum.[10] Despite the fact that when Richard Strauss subsequently took this up the result was reactionary, there is still something to it.[11] The form of the LP makes it possible for more than a few musically engaged people to build up such a museum for themselves. Nor need they fear that the recorded works will be neutralized in the process, as they are in opera houses. Similar to the fate that Proust ascribed to paintings in museums,[12] these recordings awaken to a second

9. See Marcel Proust, *The Fugitive*, in *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 3, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, and Andreas Mayor (New York: Random House, 1981), pp. 677ff.

10. [Max] Paul [Eugen] Bekker, (1882–1937), turn-of-the-century German music critic at the *Berliner neueste Nachrichten*, *Berliner allgemeine Zeitung*, and the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, was an enthusiastic advocate of the music of Mahler, Schoenberg, Hindemith, Krenek, and Schreker. In 1925 he became director of the theater in Kassel and, after holding the same position at the Wiesbaden theater from 1927–1933, emigrated to New York to escape the Nazis in 1934 and died soon thereafter. An English version of his study, *The Story of Music*, translated by M. D. Herter Norton and Alice Kortschak, was published as early as 1927 (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.), followed by his *The Changing Opera*, translated by Arthur Mendel (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.) in 1935.

11. Adorno is referring to the anachronistic eighteenth-century period settings of Richard Strauss's opera *Der Rosenkavalier* (1909–1910). For further remarks by Adorno on Strauss, see the translations by Samuel and Shierry Weber of Adorno's lengthy 1964 essay "Richard Strauss" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16, pp. 565–606), in *Perspectives of New Music* 4 (Fall/Winter 1965), pp. 14–32, and (Spring/Summer 1966), pp. 113–29.

12. Adorno discusses Proust's position on the museum at some length in his 1953 essay "Valéry Proust Museum," republished in *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10 [1977], pp. 181–94), and translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber in *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 173–85.

life in the wondrous dialogue with the lonely and perceptive listeners, hibernating for purposes unknown.

Of course, the LPs do bear the marks of the system within which they are produced. This is true, first of all, of their rather steep prices, the necessity of which—at least in Western countries—is doubtful. One notices many inadequacies in the LP that are probably the product of the longstanding unequal relationship between the extramusical technology and music in itself. The most dubious of these shortcomings, all assurances to the contrary notwithstanding, still remains the manipulation of the sound. Another sensitive point is the practice of making cuts within an act, the unity of which ought to be respected at all costs. Plausible explanations will inevitably be proffered for all of these, as one can always comfortably argue against the ends from the standpoint of the means. Once the industry becomes fully aware of the ramifications of this invention, then mechanical reproduction might well be able to help resurrect opera in a decisive way at a time when it has become anachronistic in its own loci.

Track Organology*

DOUGLAS KAHN

The Weight of Music

The division between sound and musical sound is negotiated and policed in terms of a traditionally established axis irrelevant to most music. For twentieth-century Western art-music theory, however, it is relevant. And for theoretically inspired music impinging upon notions of worldly sound as discursive foil and actual material—music generated in response to changing social conditions of aurality—the implications of this unacknowledged dividing line are crucial. Music's dominance gained momentum from its complacent valorization as the *sine qua non* of the arts of sound. Its establishment as such has served to stifle the other arts of sound: the blinded ones, the multisensory ones, and the daily experience of aurality in general. Music in turn has, ironically, weighed upon itself through its imagined mission, whose goal—the modeling of proliferation, the charting of sublimity, and the providing of a Dionysian rebuff to constraint—is itself constraining and constrained.

Musical ideas and analogies are constantly employed throughout the non-musical arts, and the closer their proximity to sound, the more powerful they become as productive aids, circumventions, or impediments. Within the period of modernism and the avant-garde, when many present-day assumptions were generated, music was valued as a model of artistic ambitions for self-containment. Having already thus arrived at what the other arts sought, music failed to question its own representational operations, even though acoustic and electronic recording were to offer other possibilities. Thus secured, musical auto-referentiality did violence to a system of aural signification whereby the associative characteristics of sounds, their attendant social and imaginative domains, were reduced, trivialized, or eradicated.

* Many thanks to Fran Dyson for her assistance with this essay, and to Mitchel Clark, Heidi Grundman, Dan Lander, Christopher Schiff, Ron Kuivila, Dan Warner, and Gregory Whitehead.

A reading/listening of music from the time of Luigi Russolo's formal introduction of noise in 1913 to John Cage's musically emancipatory postwar endgame demonstrates that the incorporation of ever-expanding realms of hitherto extramusical sound has been performed strategically to rejuvenate musical practice. Russolo, however, contradicted his profession of a potentially autonomous "art of noise" in his writings, his compositional and performance practice, and in the design of his instruments by diminishing a complete play of the aural signification of worldly sounds to their timbral signatures in order to engineer "a great renovation of music." From that point on, Western art music has been consistent in its maintenance of a unity for music. Varèse battled against noise and imitation to situate his own "liberation of sound" more securely within the conservative institutions of Western art music. Stockhausen valorized electronic sounds over "all instrumental or other auditive associations; such associations divert the listener's comprehension from the self-evidence of the sound-world presented to him because he thinks of bells, organs, birds, or faucets."[1] Pierre Schaeffer similarly safeguarded *musique concrète*, beginning with his very first work *Etude aux chemins de fer*, and continuing in a recent statement:

> You have two sources for sounds: noises, which always tell you something—a door cracking, a dog barking, the thunder, the storm; and then you have instruments. An instrument tells you, la-la-la-la (sings a scale). Music has to find a passage between noises and instruments. It has to escape. It has to find a compromise and an evasion at the same time; something that would not be dramatic because that has no interest to us, but something that would be more interesting than sounds like Do-Re-Mi-Fa. . . .[2]

The intrinsic despair of "compromise and . . . evasion" found quick and sad fruition even more recently, however, in an interview in which Schaeffer dismissed his entire career as having been a futile venture, returning to an extremely conservative notion that no music was possible outside of conventional musical sounds: "It took me forty years to conclude that nothing is possible outside Do-Re-Mi . . ."[3] (When told of Schaeffer's lament, Cage replied, "He should have kept going up the scale.") In 1963 the famed musicologist H. H. Stuckenschmidt framed *musique concrète* in terms of a feminized mystery of music:

1. Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Electronic and Instrumental Music," *Die Reihe* 5(1961), pp. 59–67.
2. John Diliberto, "Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry: Pioneers in Sampling," *Electronic Musician* (December 1986), p. 56.
3. Interview by Tim Hodgkinson, *Re Records Quarterly Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1987), p. 5. The responses to Schaeffer's interview throughout the magazine fail because they ultimately share the same source that produced his lament.

John Cage. Table of Preparations for Sonatas and Interludes. *1946–48.*



TONE	MATERIAL	STRINGS LEFT TO RIGHT	DISTANCE FROM DAMPER (INCHES)	MATERIAL	STRINGS LEFT TO RIGHT	DISTANCE FROM DAMPER (INCHES)	MATERIAL	STRINGS LEFT TO RIGHT	DISTANCE FROM DAMPER (INCHES)	TONE
				SCREW	2-3	1 1/4 *				A
				MED. BOLT	2-3	1 3/8 *				G
				SCREW	2-3	1 5/8 *				F
				SCREW	2-3	1 13/16 *				E
				SCREW	2-3	1 3/4 *				E
				SM. BOLT	2-3	2 *				D
				SCREW	2-3	1 9/16 *				C
				FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	2 3/16 *				B
				SCREW	2-3	2 1/2 *				B♭
				SCREW	2-3	1 7/8 *				A
				MED. BOLT	2-3	2 3/8 *				G♯
				SCREW	2-3	2 1/4 *				G
				SCREW	2-3	3 3/4 *				F♯
				SCREW	2-3	2 5/16 *				F
	SCREW	1-2	3/4 *	FURN. BOLT + 2 NUTS	2-3	2 5/8 *	SCREW + 2 NUTS	2-3	3 1/4 *	E
				SCREW	2-3	1 13/16 *				E♭
				FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	1 7/8				D
				SCREW	2-3	1 15/16				C♯
				SCREW	2-3	1 1/16				C
	(DAMPER TO BRIDGE = 4 7/16, ADJUST ACCORDINGLY)			MED. BOLT	2-3	3 3/4				B
				SCREW	2-3	4 7/16				B♭
	RUBBER	1-2-3	4 1/2	FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	1 1/4				A
				SCREW	2-3	1 3/4				A♭
				SCREW	2-3	2 5/16				G♯
	RUBBER	1-2-3	5 3/4							G
	RUBBER	1-2-3	6 1/2	FURN. BOLT + NUT	2-3	6 7/8				F♯
				FURNITURE BOLT	2-3	2 9/16				F
	RUBBER	1-2-3	3 5/8							E
				BOLT	2-3	7 1/8				E♭
				BOLT	2-3	2				D
	SCREW	1-2	10	SCREW	2-3	1	RUBBER	1-2-3	8 1/4	D♭
	(PLASTIC (over G))	1-2-3	2 5/16				RUBBER	1-2-3	4 1/2	C♯
	PLASTIC (over 1 under 2-3)	1-2-3	2 3/8				RUBBER	1-2-3	10 1/8	C
	(PLASTIC (over D))	1-2-3	4 1/4				RUBBER	1-2-3	5 7/16	B
	PLASTIC (over 1 - under 2-3)	1-2-3	4 1/8				RUBBER	1-2-3	9 3/4	B♭
	BOLT	1-2	15 1/2	BOLT	2-3	11/16	RUBBER	1-2-3	14 1/8	A
	BOLT	1-2	14 1/2	BOLT	2-3	7/8	RUBBER	1-2-3	6 1/2	A♭
	BOLT	1-2	14 3/4	BOLT	2-3	9/16	RUBBER	1-2-3	14	G
	RUBBER	1-2-3	4 1/2	MED. BOLT	2-3	10 1/8				D
	SCREW	1-2	5 7/8	LG. BOLT	2-3	5 7/8	SCREW + NUTS	1-2	1	D
	BOLT	1-2	7 1/8	MED. BOLT	2-3	2 1/4	RUBBER	1-2-3	4 1/8	D
	LONG BOLT	1-2	8 3/4	LG BOLT	2-3	3 1/4				D
				BOLT	2-3	11/16				D
	SCREW + RUBBER	1-2	4 7/16							D
	ERASER (over D under C♯-E)	1	6 3/4							D

AM. HEXACOL CO. #46

*MEASURE FROM BRIDGE.

> [The phenomenal power of *musique concrète*] lies in its capacity to change any tone, sound, or noise so that the initial form is no longer recognizable. It is a technique of metamorphosis with results no less astonishing than the ancient metamorphoses of mythology described by Ovid, such as the transformation of a nymph into a laurel tree.[4]

The traditional ritual of negotiation will be present in any and all arenas of discourse and event has its further cast of characters: the work of Pierre Boulez, Milton Babbit, Hans Werner Henze, Trevor Wishart, Chris Cutler, Alan Durant, Evan Eisenberg, Marvin Minsky, Throbbing Gristle, Peter Kivy, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Roger Reynolds. While its terms may be indispensable to the policing of musical boundaries, the strategies of proliferation, rhetorical play, and semiotic mobility characteristic of certain postmodern and poststructuralist theory demand their replacement. These strategies would provide a means of response to the problematizing or transgression of musicalization. They do not necessarily entail an attempt to constitute a "sound" composition consisting of that which music has historically excluded, for that would simply repeat the same demarcative procedures. One might, of course, expect Roger Scruton to balk at quotations of Charles Ives, or Claude Lévi-Strauss to pull up short at *musique concrète*. One is, however, somewhat surprised by the thoroughgoing Ludditism of Jacques Attali. In *Noise*, he makes the phonograph the wicked steam engine of the era of "repetition," banishing it from the desirable epoch of "composition." And Deleuze and Guattari, the champions of deterritorialization, toe the line with an even finer irony. Having celebrated Varèse's composition as an exemplary musical machine—"a *sound machine* (not a machine for reproducing sounds), which molecularizes and atomizes, ionizes sound matter and harnesses a cosmic energy"[5]—and after suggesting the extension of the electronic synthesizer to philosophy—"like a thought synthesizer functioning to make thought travel, make it mobile, make it a force of the Cosmos (in the same way as one makes sound travel)"[6]—they flash the inevitable warning: "Sometimes one overdoes it. . . ."

> The claim is that one is opening music to all events, all irruptions, but one ends up reproducing a scrambling that prevents any event from happening. All one has left is a resonance chamber well on the way to forming a black hole. A material that is too rich remains too "territori-

4. H. H. Stuckenschmidt, "Contemporary Techniques in Music," *The Musical Quarterly* (January 1963), p. 14.
5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 343.
6. Ibid., p. 343.

> alized": on noise sources, on the nature of the objects . . . (this even applies to Cage's prepared piano).[7]

Of course, the name of Cage leaps instinctually to the lips of most postmodern theorists when required to add a musical name (acid test: do they ever name a tune?) to the roster of painters, poets, novelists, theorists, architects, and the like. But Cage's emancipatory endgame does not depart from Russolo's modernist strategy for musical rejuvenation. The "lateness" of his modernism is directly related to the conservatism of Western art music. Cage performed the last possible modernist renovation of Western art music and thereby "filled music up." After him there is no dividing line between musical sound and sound because all sound can be music. Also, there need be neither artistic intention nor any other act of human volition except the willingness to attune to aural phenomena for music to exist. This collapse of sound into a problematic of musical sound betrays a contradiction at the very center of his philosophy. By saying that sounds not intrinsically human should be thought of as music, he contradicts his anti-anthropomorphism. His suppression of anthropomorphism opposes the politics of ecology, which must begin with an assumption of both the social incursion into nature and the historical determination of the very idea of nature. Cage's subscription to Eastern philosophies—which were constituted prior to the effective capacity for domination of nature, let alone total global ruin—betrays his notion of an idealized separation of nature and society. He speaks for an odd transcendence through musical means that entails something of an urban asceticism. Individuals lack or must deny or purge themselves of subjectivity, sociality, and historical situation in order to become empty vessels, receptive of the aural surround as natural and pure as the air they breathe. In fact, it is because he understands music to be a natural element of the world that his claims for "all sound" run counter to an ecology of aural signification that includes sociality.

The Nature of Sound

The naturalizing consequences of avant-garde musicalization have run counter to the increasing sociality of sound within the century of sound—maturation of phonography and telephony, microphony, amplification, sound film, incidence of radio, television, synthesis, acoustical engineering, virtuality, and so on—where technologies proper are both marked by and the markers of complex relationships among social practices. The early breakup of naturalization began with the rise of communications technologies in the nineteenth century. The result was the technical capacities to see visual sound and visual speech

7. Ibid., p. 344.

and to transport over great distances the movements of the finger and the voice. Phonography played a crucial role, for with it came the unique ability to return the subject's voice to his or her own ears; previously this return had been limited to mandibular and cranial resonance along the throat on up through the head. The voice as the privileged site of union between audition and utterance (perhaps the most common privatized act performed in the company of others) was "deboned" as vocal presence was wrenched from the throat and phonographically inscribed. This served to represent and technologically manifest the severance of speech from the speaker, the voice from the body, the voice from the soul, and the voice from the literary voice. The mix of utterance and audition moved from experience to representation, a representation bereft of the resonating chamber of the skull or the reflective landscapes of the echo; but it could move back toward experience, simulating it, in moments of dislocation, composition, relocation, dispersal, and so forth. Ultimately, however, at the turn of the century, the mix and mobility remained fixed in systems of mechanics, scientism, natural philosophy, metaphysics of presence, spiritualism, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, synesthesia, etc.

The twentieth century of perception actually got underway, according to Henri Lefebvre, with a decline and breakdown of referentials around the years 1905–10.[8] The importance of referentiality did not decrease. Because it was problematized it became more of a concern, eliciting its first trenchant critiques and desperate celebrations. A contributing factor and consequence of this breakdown was a growth in the complexity of the senses—not a commonsense of coming together, but an articulation of senses within complex configurations, with listening among them. Ears had not suddenly grown prehensile, but what was made of what was listened to and listened for had become increasingly social, cognitive, and self-conscious. Furthermore,

> it is not only that the complexity of our senses and of the information they impart has increased; the sense of hearing has acquired a greater aptitude for interpreting visual perceptions and the sense of sight for interpreting auditive ones, so that they signify each other reciprocally. The senses are more highly educated and their theoretical ability has increased; they are becoming "theoreticians"; by discarding immediacy they introduce mediation, and abstraction combines with immediacy to become "concrete." Thus objects in practice become signs, and

8. Henry Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1984), pp. 110–14. "A hundred years ago words and sentences in a social context were based on reliable referentials that were linked together, being cohesive if not logically coherent, without however constituting a single system formulated as such. These referentials had a logical or commonsensical unity derived from material perception (euclidean three-dimensional space, clock time), from the concept of nature, historical memory, the city and the environment or from generally accepted ethics and aesthetics" (p. 111).

> signs objects; and a "second nature" takes the place of the first, the initial layer of perceptible reality.[9]

Within the avant-garde at about this time, sound began to be consistently conceived in nonmusical and nonsynesthetic ways, relating instead in a new way to graphic, textual, spatial, spatial/static, conceptual, and corporeal forms. Important in this respect were Roussel's novels, Duchamp's ideas for conceptual sound, Marinetti's documentary onomatopoeia, Apollinaire's writings, the French Surrealists' approach to sound and their antipathy to Western art music, and so forth. Some ambitions were keyed to actual phonographic realization, among them: Dziga Vertov's aspirations to develop stenographic audio montage within a Laboratory of Hearing; Moholy-Nagy's plans for a phonographic alphabet of all sounds—his lost drawn-sound film *The Sound of ABC* and the drawn-sound films of others; certain *Hörspiele* of the Weimar period, Ruttmann's *Weekend* among them; and the brash experimentation introducing Alexandrov's *Romance Sentimentale* (debatedly in collaboration with Eisenstein). These ambitions remained isolated and never attained a state resembling an established practice. Optical sound film held out the greatest technological promise through its plasticity and graphic overlap with writing. During the mid-1930s, however, the question as to why this promise was never fulfilled exceeded attempts at its realization.

In the latter half of the 1920s, however, radio and the sound film did change sound in two major ways. They introduced spatial representation and modulation among the auricular and ventricular chambers of minds, bodies, and environments, and they introduced on a social scale a pervasive, detailed, and atomized encoding. For the first time, a diapason of worldly sound encompassing all of its visual, literary, environmental, gestural, and affective context could be displaced, presented, and represented. Worldly sound became worldly; the nature of sound was less natural; the realm of sound expanded and the number of sounds increased, confirming Lefebvre's claim that "The senses are more highly educated. . . ." By the 1950s, when, for instance, Cage's influence was beginning to be registered, television was introduced, and there had already been more than two very active decades during which cinema and radio bellowed, often in a mutally parasitic manner. Sound began to be sedimented with multiple allusions and meanings. The famed ephemerality of music itself began to be inflected with code, even if it was just the code of a famed ephemerality. In a century during which the nature of sound had increasingly become one of sociality, the goal of Cage's art—"to imitate nature in the manner of her operation"—has become beleaguered, and Adorno's axiom—"music rescues name as pure sound—but at the cost of severing it from things"—has become deeply wistful.[10]

9. Ibid., pp. 112–113.
10. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (London: New Left Books, 1974), pp. 222–23.

Social Instrumentality

Everyone has already been tutored in the "appreciation" of the culture of recording, of code, and of space, but very few have taken up their instruments. Recent appropriative strategies within Western art music at least acknowledge the sociality of musical sound, including that which was once noise (as well as novelty music, cartoon music/fx, Spike Jones, and others), and have incorporated it on an elemental level. Music has always covered and quoted other music, but this has relied upon appropriations at least as long as a melodic fragment, in which ostensibly neutral elements are organized to invoke a formerly meaningful experience. Now, however, single sounds—those of a twangy guitar such as that of the Ventures, Duane Eddy, Ennio Morricone, spaghetti westerns, Clint Eastwood films, John Zorn arrangements, etc.—are deployed. But no one, to my knowledge, yet composes musically in a semiotic framework within which, among other possibilities, the vertical organization of encoded elements strains at the coherence of a passage through associative irregularities, chains, and din—the role formerly reserved for dissonance.

All this would still remain comfortably within the prescribed bounds of music. But composition could go much further if the demarcation were ignored. From the graphic, textual, spatial/static, spatial, conceptual, and corporeal registers of sound, combinatory possibilities suggest the development of numerous transformative rhetorics. For example, even while being crassly formal, consider a mobility of the voice as generated amid noise teased out of noise by signal, then sustained at a fevered pitch in text with three-part harmony bleeding off to a space in the body which is racked and choked in puns, overtones, and allusions of choking and so on. What will be required are notions based on a materiality of sound and grounded in the idea that sound's ambient medium is not merely air. All the absorption, refraction, reflection, inflection, bifurcation, multi-tracking, mixing, bodies, voices, writings, spaces, places, noises, and information; all inscriptive, dislocative, migratory, and reconfigurative strategies of the reproduction and necrosis you've come to expect is not merely air.

Instruments are currently pitched for composition, writing, and accumulation, not for performance, speech, and improvisation. They are laggard and methodical like a pen, not fast and first-draft like a tongue. Writing condenses through the action of the writer's repeated listenings to the art-work-in-formation prior to public display; an accumulation of listening and utterance is thus stacked amid a detached interlocution. A certain sense of writing has been technologically facilitated by the increased availability of digital audio recording workstations[11] capable of providing this form of writing with sound, or rather, a

11. In a familiar frame, digital audio recording workstations make it easy to migrate amid poetry, literature, cinema, theater, journalism, oratory, the ambiences of quotidian speech and sounds, music, etc. Capabilities for synchronization with film, video, installations, theatrical spaces, etc.

"word processing" with sound. Workstations present a graphic representation alluding to the alphabet of all audible sounds entertained by avant-gardists in the 1920s and 1930s. Workstations can cut and paste at subperceptual durations and thereby simulate signifiers; they can pivot, branch out, detour, and flesh out. And, like any other form of recording they can also manipulate durations of pure tedium. There is no restriction to duration that mandates sequencing, no necessary adherence to any form of interval. Rather, the configurations are potentially rhetorical in the most general sense of the word, and they are very conducive to admixture, stretch, continua, and transformation.

Such compositional latitude results from the conflicting industrial exigencies of film/video and music (post-dub and mastering) being designed into the technology, a conflict that makes it much easier to defeat the technology's protocol for artistic purposes. For instance, although subperceptual editing is designed for glitch control, it can be redirected toward constructing sounds/words from the inside out and toward semanticizing glitches. Likewise, although macro manipulation at the textual level is designed to expedite production, it can be redirected toward intensification. Even a minimal effort invested in the defeat of the technology, however, necessarily leaves scars; the original never exists, but it is always signal (despite the fact that the terms one hears are either synthesis or recording, either complete artifice or lack of it, never simulation). Workstations mimic synthesis because the cut-and-paste editing occurs at such a minute level that it is transformed into a generative operation independent of its source. The charade is displayed when an elastic independence from the source is amplified and results in the emblem of the technology: electronic grate and sheen. There can be no writing from scratch.

The source is always generated with its microphones posed, spaces modulated, networks played back, already marked. Composing with and through it layers code upon code, including codes that can distract and otherwise interfere. The code of the technology can itself be easily shielded and, although this is what most people are offered, it can occur in a spirit of masquerade. The primary dependence is upon recorded sources, requiring a working mode of interpolation that functions best with a quantity of material at hand, and this presents some severe limitations. But the amount of accumulated and composited material—whether recorded, prerecorded, or played back again; available from archives, cheap recording, or the daily din—does not exactly represent a crippling situation, nor does the simulation of the most common unrecorded and unrecordable sound—the sound of verbal thought. The next generation of

---

extend this list considerably. Digital workstations are relatively user-friendly and thereby promise some relief from the thick toys-for-boys climate of programming, mathemusic, and electronics that plagues the experimental media arts of sound. Equipped with the desktop and word-processing designs, the field should soon open to all those who write, not just those who solder.

technology will break free of such accumulation through analysis and resynthesis; eventually sophistication will be gauged by the minuteness of the sample needed to elicit a simulation of potentially infinite articulation.

A formal trope for a compositional process can begin with the capability to join sonic and phonic events at the level of the signifier and move to and from larger events and to fields between and among them. To date, however, concentration on the auditive signifier has been contained by the urge to anchor an event in physicality, technicism, in utterance and presence, in asocial tropes of nature, in a modeling of events outside of it, and, when it comes to composition with sound conceived at a minute level, in music. Yet the signifier is already somewhere else. It signifies before it exists in its own right. It is therefore never an anchor, but something continually in transit, dispersing movement into other areas.[12] This dispersal could be the figure of echo as allusion, echo as decay into resonance, an allusion to noise, or it can be modeled on coarticulation, a phonological term for a meshing of adjacent phonemes (especially vowels, glides, nasals, and laterals) such that it becomes extremely difficult if not impossible to describe when one ends and the other begins. They are cast in anticipation and recursion, not vertically like simultaneity, although new harmonies and counterpoints could be built. The greatest benefit is the increased probability of encountering "unspoken" nascent or moribund states[13] and the capacity to extend procedures to the coarticulations of ideology. Ideologues themselves can be ventriloquized, as can any voice given a proper supply. This paradigmatic practice of generating uncharacteristic candor or untypical intensity is afforded by the ambiguity often attendant upon sound. As site of redirection, amplification, and ambiguation, then, one could explore intricate transitions. There would be certain expectations for the existence of a median between two sounds, including a vocal median between two people, whereas in reality the characteristics would be entirely arbitrary, and a gradient between them would provide an occasion for a trail that would always be off-track.

12. Acts of "privileging the signifier," if they truly aspire to this figure, must become mobile. Pregutteral and musicalized speech/sound performed under these auspices would be self-contradictory. Even the musical privileging of pitch over timbre is called into question. It is still argued that musical elements must remain "minimally encoded" and "highly polished" (Serres) to appeal to universality, to relate "partial to global structures" (Boulez), and to be comprehensible in passages of horizontal or vertical density. The former two ideas should be manifest as ambient sounds for watchmakers. Difficulties with timbral and invocatory density should have been addressed long ago by Cagean musical listening and by acknowledging the capacities already practiced in mass media, spectacular viewing/listening, and much not so spectacular.

13. For example, Russolo crudely proposed that the acoustic periodicity of conventional musical sound is inscribed in vowels and the aperiodicity of noise is inscribed in consonants. Thus, in someone's speech or in any type of auditive event, there is not only an inscription of one sound upon another, there is a coarticulatory relationship of large categories of sound from one moment to the next.

But this is all composition; workstations are still modeled upon the desk top, not the stage. The instruments are not pitched to speaking and performance. Digital sampling, unlike digital recording workstations, has been generated almost entirely within a framework of music, which is thus burned into the design of the sampler. Certain limitations of the musical sampler can be defeated, but with undue effort for little result. But how would another type of digital recording-based instrument be constructed? It would be constructed first of all by an entirely reconstructed concept of the instrument, beginning with the simple question, "where and what is the instrument?" The sound of a musical instrument is thought to be contained by the instrument itself; the sound of a violin may be directly traced to action upon the physical materials and mechanics of the violin. Recorded sound or radiophonic sound cannot be traced in the same manner but must be played across locations. Instruments, therefore, are to be constructed as much at the constellated semiotic dislocations invoked by the sound as at the immediate physical site of physiological contact by the performer. Instruments constructed in and with the medium of semiosis are exceedingly malleable and transformative; they can "fold back" upon themselves like a Klein bottle by incorporating the presumed integrity of the performance itself into a rhetoric constructed dislocatively; they can dissolve any lingering distinctions among instrument, performance, and composition; and they are theoretically infinite.

The biggest challenge becomes to *name* the instrument, which may be as constraining as the name of your best friend, your own, or that of an epoch. Naming cannot be equated with the simple metonymic procedures of sampling, quotation, and appropriation. Metonyms would of course play a large part, not as reductive markers that organize and silence what they exclude, but as way stations dispersing attention to the elements of what was, could have been, or could have never been excluded, or even as markers of formations constructed within the performance itself. It should be remembered, however, that some very simple musical instruments require years of intense study to master in performance and that instrument-building itself can be an extremely meticulous practice; the expediencies usually associated with digital electronics should not mask the possibility of a similarly rigorous practice for this new class of instruments.

The physical attributes of the instrument should be *built* with aspects overlapping and leading past the writing-oriented model of the desktop digital workstation (perhaps by shorthand?), and the intervalic segmentation of musical samplers should be extended to designs based upon the space of gesture and the recursive and "fuzzy" segmentation of a general grammar, or of elements within a constituted rhetoric. It is obvious that the two general areas of construction—in semiosis and physical-electronics—would be entirely interdependent. Both aspects of construction are unorthodox and unfamiliar and require equally comprehensive attention; the former, however, should be privileged, i.e., the instru-

ment should be *named* before it is *built*, not only to hold in check the technicism that plagues all types of design but, more substantively, because it would be extremely presumptuous to build a general physical instrument that would put undue restrictions upon the field of potential instruments.

The technological area of virtual reality promises a hospitable *topos* for these types of considerations because—and this is not a prediction—spectatorial systems of representation are at once sensorially coordinated, completed, and then forever confounded by experiential modes of activity. Composition and performance will have incredible transformative capacity over all elements of the sensorium, including the actual venue and the corporeality of everyone "present." It must be emphasized, however, that the instruments described in this essay are not dependent upon any "new technology" in the physical-electronic sense, just in design, and that there is no guaranty whatsoever that virtual reality will not repeat one more time the inhibitive precepts of modernism, musicalization, and musicalized postmodernism.

Reading Africa Through Foucault: V. Y. Mudimbe's Reaffirmation of the Subject

MANTHIA DIAWARA

Everyone knows the famous words of the Sun-King to his godson, Aniaba, the Black Prince. On the Eve of Aniaba's departure for his states, as he was saying his farewell to the king, Louis XIV is said to have told him: "Prince, the only difference between you and me is the difference between black and white." We interpret: after the education that we have provided you at our court, you have become a Frenchman with a black skin.

—Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Vues sur l'Afrique noire, ou assimiler, non être assimiler"

Michel Foucault, because of his influence, his originality, and the significance of his work, may be considered a noteworthy symbol of the sovereignty of the very European thought from which we wish to disentangle ourselves.

—V. Y. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père*

Mudimbe posits here, in a rather blunt manner, the place that Western thought occupies in non-Western discursive formations. For him, it is necessary for the theorist in Africa to appreciate what it takes to create an authentic statement that reflects African sociocultural practices and takes as its condition of possibility a local discursive space. Such a project must distinguish what is still Western in the discourse that denounces the West. Likewise, the non-Western theorist, in search of the enabling elements inside the Western canon, must be aware of the traps and reversibilities embedded in that same canon.

Mudimbe's theoretical books, *L'autre face du royaume* and *L'odeur du père*, and his novels, *Entre les eaux* and *L'écart*, engage as their subject the enabling as well as the regressive elements in Western discourse, thereby liberating spaces in Africa from which more empowered discourses can be uttered. In this essay, I will show how Mudimbe follows Michel Foucault's definition of the rules that subjugate discourse, and then apply a Foucauldian critique to *négritude* in order

to reveal the presence of the Western *ratio* in this first African literary movement; next I will show that Mudimbe's transformation of Foucault's thought is a necessary step in the creation of African essentialisms that in turn become targets for criticism.

Foucault's archaeological approach to discourse is doubly enabling: first, for thinking against the grain within the Western canon, and second, for proposing alternative discursive formations outside the West. On the one hand, Mudimbe uses Foucault's method to unmask and unmake the Western *ratio* that dominates the human sciences and, under the guise of universalism, duplicates Western man in Africa. On the other hand, Mudimbe creates a postcolonial and postimperialist discourse that posits a new regime of truth and a new social appropriation of speech, thereby raising the question of individual subjugation in postcolonial discourse.

Out of Foucault's subversive uncovering of the rules that govern discourse in the West, Mudimbe unmasks the Western *ratio* in the African literary canon. But first, let's read Foucault through Mudimbe. In *L'odeur du père*, he argues that, for Foucault, societies control discourse by first positing external rules. These include the construction of forbidden speech that bans certain words from certain statements; the designation of madness that opposes reason to insanity; and a regime of truth that determines the desire to know and practices a principle of discrimination based upon access to "education, books, publishing houses, and libraries, as well as the secret societies before and the laboratories today."[1]

Next there comes an internal system for tying down discourse. This internal system is aimed at classifying, ordering, and distributing discursive materials so as to prevent the emergence of the contingent, of the Other in all its nakedness. This internal system of discursive subjugation involves the concept of authorship, which serves to rarify the quantity of statements that can be made; the construction of the organization of disciplines as a delimiting force; and a notion of commentary that organizes discursive statements according to temporal and spatial hierarchies.

The third system for mastering the movements of discourse that Mudimbe finds in Foucault consists of positing the conditions of possibility for putting discourse into play through the subjugation to rules of the individuals involved in discursive deployment. The object, however, is neither to neutralize the return of that which was repressed nor to conjure out the risk of it appearing in discursive practices, but to make sure that "no one will enter the discursive space unless certain prerequisites are satisfied and one is qualified to do so."[2]

1. V. Y. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père: Essai sur des limites de la science et de la vie en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1982), p. 39. This and subsequent translations are by the author unless otherwise specified.
2. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père*, p. 40.

It is this last system of control through discourse that serves to distribute and specialize the speakers. It involves four rules: the discursive rituals that place constraints on the manner of delivering a discourse; the presence of discursive groups that have as their mission the keeping of discourse from multiplying and losing authenticity; the discursive norms that, through their deployment in certain spaces, have the double function of linking the speakers to those spaces and of distributing them into specialized groups; and finally, the social appropriation of discourse that binds together discursive statements with such nondiscursive spaces as institutions, class interest, and political events.

For both Foucault and Mudimbe, societies put into play these discursive rules to repress the irruption of discontinuities, disorders, and the vengeful return of discourse as nonsense. At the same time, Foucault points out, the deployment of the rules coincides with the creation and the positioning of Western man, with all his positivity, at the center of discourse. Because Western man has been creating and recreating his positivity through discourse, a problem concerning traps and reversibilities arises whenever an African theorist uses the dominant canon to represent African realities. Paradoxically, then, African theorists who assume a violence toward the West run the risk of unwittingly reasserting the superiority of the Western nation of rationality if they lose themselves in a discourse derived from Western ethnocentric canons. As Foucault puts it, "there is a certain position of the Western *ratio* that was constituted in its history and provides a foundation for the relation it can have with all other societies."[3]

Mudimbe's reading of the Foucaldian criticism of discursive rules reveals both the position of the Western subject and the condition of possibility for its removal from the center of African discourse. The founders of *négritude*, for example, while aware of the duplication of French canons in their poetic statements, did not question the dangers of reproducing a French *ratio* in Africa that repressed the local epistemologies as its Other (i.e., "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois").

The word *négritude* was coined by Aimé Césaire in the 1930s to conceptualize a Black literary movement in Paris that was committed to freeing Blackness from the pathological and evil space reserved for it in Judeo-Christian discourse. The *négritude* poets such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, David Diop, and Léon G. Damas wanted to restore to the word *Black* a "true" meaning and a sense of "dignity" that would correspond to the lived experiences, cultures, and civilizations of Black people throughout the world. For Senghor there is an objective and a subjective level to *négritude*: on the one hand, it stands for an inventory of the sum total of Black civilizations; and, on the other, it describes the way in which people of the African dispersion articulate their Blackness in their contact with the material and spiritual worlds. The *négritude* writers be-

3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 377.

lieved in a complementary relation between civilizations and saw as their task the definition of Black values that were necessary for the Creolization (Senghor's word) of the world.[4] *Négritude* was a literature of emancipation that addressed itself to the oppressor in the language of the Parisian élite.

Négritude was inevitably an exotic literature. It was exotic both because it was written by Africans and Caribbeans who came from distant places and because the movement was inscribed in a tradition of exoticism that runs from Baudelaire's West Indian poems, to Victor Segalen's *Les immemoriaux*, and to Rimbaud's identification with Blackness in *Sang d'un poète*. However, the exoticism of the *négritude* writers differs from that of the French symbolists, who appropriated the distant object by describing it in a familiar language. With poets such as Senghor, we face a reverse exoticism: the "barbarian" assumes the position of the writer and defamiliarizes the French language for French readers. Thus the newness of the writings: the *négritude* poems are "authentic" and "unmediated" because they represent the primitive's own subjectivity. On the ideological level, the *négritude* writers' participation in the tradition of exotic literature only complicates further the definition of the movement.

Négritude vascillated between Black nationalism, which found its expression in French theories concerning Marxism as methodology for action, and the need to assimilate the Black world to the universal (i.e., French) culture. In short, the *négritude* poets, even as they sang about the "total sum of black values" and denounced European ethnocentrism, were reasserting the superiority of the West over Africa. As Mudimbe puts it, *négritude* was "a product of a historical moment proper to Europe, more particularly to the French thought which marked it."[5]

Perhaps this is best seen by the way in which Léopold Sédar Senghor, in a 1945 text that is formative for the ideas in *négritude*, addressed the manner in which the African canon may be constituted out of the study of French letters. For Senghor, just as such French authors as Racine shaped French values and styles out of their mastery of Greek fables and techniques of representation, Africans, too, must "discover their blackness and a style to express it through the study of French letters."[6] For Senghor, the knowledge of Africa must pass through a knowledge of France as recorded in literature. A mastery of "the most humane authors such as Corneille, Racine, Molière, and Hugo" imparts universal values like honesty to the African student and provides him with a language

4. See Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Liberte I: négritude et humanisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 7.

5. V. Y. Mudimbe, *L'autre face du royaume: une introduction à la critique des languages en folie* (Geneva: L'Age d'homme, 1973), p. 101. Mudimbe argues that, ironically, the relativist discourse of European anthropologists such as Leo Froebenius gave fuel to the *négritude* poets to sing about the beauty of Blackness. See my essay, "The Other('s) Archivist," *Diacritics* 18 (Spring 1988).

6. Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Vues sur l'Afrique noire, ou assimiler, non être assimiler," *La communauté imperiale Française*, ed. Robert Lemagnen et al. (Paris: Editions Alsatia, 1945), p. 95.

and a style to express them. The French writers are not only the masters with which to think; they are also the masters of language and style. Senghor recommended them for an essential French quality, a French way of doing things that he was later known to call *la francité*: the "clarity, order, harmony of ideas" which the African needs in order to describe his feelings and the world around him.[7] Senghor defended the principle of *francité* as recently as 1985 against Captain Thomas Sankara, who staged a coup d'état and changed the name of Haute Volta to Burkina Faso. Senghor saw some originality in the name change itself, but was offended by the official adoption of "Burkinabe" instead of "Burkinais" or "Burkinois" as a way of referring to the people of Burkina Faso, for the latter would have "obeyed the rules of French grammar." Senghor concludes that, in this day and age, "*on aura tout vu*," but the refusal "to render adjectives and substantives in French [*franciser*] shows an inferiority complex."[8]

To create the "African Humanities," Senghor desired the assimilation of French classics to be accompanied by a teaching of ethnology that would make Africa known to Africans. The works of such French ethnologists as Leo Froebenius and Delafosse were necessary in the classroom, "because they are our ancestors who saved us from despair by revealing our rich tradition to us."[9] Thus ethnologists showed the world that Africans, too, had an art, a philosophy, and a history. With the tools and the disciplines thus imported from Europe, Africans could begin a new humanities with an African style, which Senghor defines "not so much as a technique, but a state of mind which takes its nourishment from the deep sources of the black soul; it is found in the traditional qualities, i.e., the warmth, the tension, and the rhythm."[10] For Senghor, the Black is, before everything else, a lyrical person with a strong sense of verbal imagery, rhythm, and the musicality of words. Finally, following Froebenius' opposition between the Hamite and the Ethiopian, Senghor posited Africa as the primitive contemporary of Europe and argued that the former could help the latter to rediscover ancient values that had been deformed by the loss of natural feelings since the industrial revolution.[11]

Note that Senghor's defense of assimilation rests on a view of the world centered around France. This is understandable given that he wished to transcend what he called the "false antinomy" between the terms of assimilation and association. According to Senghor, the concept of assimilation has always been embodied within French civilization. Moreover, it is a Cartesianism that transcends human passions in order to emphasize reasoning as the glue that unites all men, regardless of their skin color. "French universalism speaks of Man, not

7. Senghor, "Vues sur l'Afrique," p. 93.
8. "Négritude et Vaugelas," in *Le Monde* (August 18–19, 1985).
9. Cited in Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père*, p. 36.
10. Senghor, "Vues sur l'Afrique," p. 92.
11. Ibid., p. 98.

men." When this Cartesian notion is applied to politics and colonialism, it results in the "Declaration of Human Rights," the creation of "La Societé des Amis des Noirs," the abolition of slavery, and the assimilation of Africans to the universal French civilization.[12]

For Senghor, the concept of assimilation that requires Africans to espouse the French language as the universal tool does not contradict the concept of association that implies a relationship between two autonomous states. The doctrine of association seeks to undo hierarchies and to create the possibility for cultures and nations, diverse in origin, customs, religion, and race, to work together. It was a concept used by the opponents of assimilation during the period of the French Imperial Community, and it is used today by those in the Organization of Francophone countries to denounce France's cultural imperialism within the organization.

Senghor defends himself against the proponents of association by drawing an evolutionist scheme that has equality as its goal. To become uncolonizable, Africans must first assimilate that which would enable them to be as educated as their colonizers. By posing the problem in this manner, Senghor wishes to show that the proponents of association, in their radical demand for equality between Africans and French, are against much-needed education in Africa.[13] In place of the concept of association, Senghor prefers terms like universalism, Creolization, symbiosis, grafting—all of which posit France in the center and Africa on the margins.[14]

Let's now read this Senghorian statement through Mudimbe (and Foucault). To apply a Mudimbean reading to these Senghorian passages is not to deny the merit of *négritude*, which participated in the modernist movement of the 1930s and '40s and helped to undermine the dogmatic claims of the canons of Western civilization. In short, the goal of this approach is not to criticize assimilation as a bad object, but to show that assimilation is an unattainable goal because of the barriers inherent in French discourse between the West and Africa. Following Mudimbe, one reads Senghor in order to reveal the structures that create ambiguity and contradictions in his discourse and to posit the conditions of possibility necessary for getting rid of those structures. Thus, Senghor's intention to create the "African Humanities" through assimilation is debunked by the emergence of a French *ratio* at the center of the text that forces Senghor to construct the African as the European's Other.

Given that Senghor's only audience at that time was in France, it can be argued that he had no choice but to speak in an appropriated discourse that could recognize the African only as Other. Even his categories of the Black as

12. Ibid., pp. 57–65.
13. Ibid., pp. 63–64.
14. See also Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine," *Cahiers Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, vol. 3, 1962.

warm, rhythmic, musical, and emotional come from a well-established source in French literature, extant since the Enlightenment and rethematized in the nineteenth century by the arch-racist Joseph Arthur Gobineau. As Christopher Miller has shown, Gobineau and other writers stripped the Black of reasoning faculties and depicted him as one who is moved only by a blind sensorial desire. Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* "is at the origin of a notion that gained wide acceptance: that blacks are endowed with greater 'imagination' than whites and are thus the source of the arts. From the *Essai*, through Guillaume Appollinaire's theories on 'fetish-art' to Sartre's 'Orphée noir,' this assumption continually endows the Black with a type of thinking that simultaneously robs him of the ability to think as a fully reflexive intellect. The *Essai* often reads as a caricature of other, subtler texts."[15]

The *négritude* of Senghor, because it was only addressed to French People, and because it was removed from Africa, constituted a Black that never existed except as the Other in the unconscious of the French. Nevertheless, it was an Other that was presented as real, human, and beautiful. But the result of such a discourse is not only the impossibility of beautifying the Other—that is, of making it exotic and French—but also the impossibility of speaking of Africa without reasserting the superiority of the West over it. To paraphrase Mudimbe, this discourse has internal constraints, so that even if Senghor's discussion of African beauty leads one to believe that he is against Western ethnocentrism, he nonetheless maintains the binary oppositions that separate European and African, civilized and primitive, rational and emotional, religious and idolatrous.

This brings us to my initial epigraph—namely, that the only difference between prince Aniaba and Louis XIV is one of skin color. Senghor's assimilationist discourse, far from making the African the European's equal, and therefore uncolonizable, participates in a universalist concept of man that posits Western man as the model and the African as its aberration. Africa, according to the Senghorism described above, is the primitive contemporary of the West; and as such, it can help Europe to rediscover its lost traditional values. According to a Mudimbean reading, however, this overstatement of universalism at the expense of difference leaves unstated a construction of Africa that sees it as "the infancy of humanity which, when studied carefully, reveals certain trauma repressed in Western societies."[16]

A Mudimbean/Foucauldian analysis of discourse also reveals the way in which *négritude* duplicates themes and motives that are always already appropriated by social conditions in the West. As Mudimbe puts it, "Western discourse defines its space and takes its order from a specific socio-economic and cultural structure. It can address other societies and cultures only in reference to itself,

15. Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 88.
16. Mudimbe, *L'autre face du royaume*, p. 81.

and never to specific systems that cannot be reduced to it."[17] Senghor, in an attempt to find African equivalents for European art and to valorize African culture in order to bring the West to respect it, has forced a reading upon Africa that estheticizes and deforms it by making it conform to the gaze of the West. That is, *négritude*, in the name of a French universalism, unleashes on the surface of Africa Europe's regime of truth (*la volonté de verité*), its notions of authorship and its disciplines. *Négritude*, for Mudimbe, "simply and faithfully takes categories, concepts, schema and systems from the West, and runs them into African entities."[18]

Following this Mudimbean/Foucauldian reading of some of the original claims of *négritude*, let us now turn to the other aspect of Mudimbe's work that transforms Foucault's thought. As I have shown, Mudimbe's critique of *négritude* is intended to name the paradoxical presence of the Western *ratio* in it, so that it can be removed, circumvented, or surpassed by a more liberated discourse. It is here that Mudimbe stands Foucault on his head.

Foucault is well known for his criticism of the use of discourse merely to indicate a structure of language put into play in order to produce meaning. For him, discourse is not simply there to mediate between thought and speech or to legitimize original experiences through the constitution of subjects. Foucault calls for the resurgence of discourse without signification; for a world of discontinuity between the speaking subject and the discourse he or she produces; for a pure discourse criticism divorced from the type of sentence criticism that is enthralled by the analysis of latent meaning and propositional statements. He draws our attention to the exteriority of discourse by delineating the condition of possibility for its materiality.[19]

To obtain this pure discursive analysis, Foucault proposes to remove from discourse the regime of truth and to return to discourse its aleatory and subversive elements. In this effort, he debunks classical notions of creativity, unity, originality, and signification in discursive analysis, and he emphasizes in their stead the notion of reversibility, which reveals the negative side of subjugating discourse; the notion of discontinuity, which posits discursive statements as discontinuous practices that intersect each other, address each other, or exclude each other; and the notion of specificity, which conceives of discourse as a violence practiced upon other bodies. It is in these practices that contingencies and chance assume their regular recurrence and the notion of materiality comes to define the exterior "body" of discourse and its condition of possibility.[20]

If we suppose that Foucault is to Mudimbe what the French anthropologists were to Senghor—in the sense that the Africans have been empowered by the

17. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père*, p. 44.
18. Ibid., p. 43.
19. See Diawara, "The Other('s) Archivist."
20. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père*, p. 42.

Europeans to carry on a discourse about themselves—the next question raised by Mudimbe's *L'odeur du père* is how to get rid of the father's abusive smell. For Mudimbe, "really to escape the supremacy of Western thought presupposes an exact appreciation of what it means to rid ourselves of it. It presupposes a knowledge of how far the West, perhaps cunningly, has recreated itself in us. It presupposes also a knowledge of the Western in what has enabled us to denounce the West.[21]

The West cannot talk about Africa outside the Western text, just as Africans cannot form canons with texts that reflect European socio-cultural conditions. I have tried to show in this essay how Foucault's work influenced Mudimbe's critique of discursive formations in Africa. Moreover, when conceived in another manner, it is possible to argue that Mudimbe contradicts the French thinker. Foucault's thought properly belongs to a specific region in Western discourse which gives it its condition of possibility as a necessarily counter-hegemonic statement. In short, the Foucauldian system, too, under whatever ideological and methodological metamorphoses it appears, belongs to the history of Western culture. Even Foucault's call for a pure discourse criticism, for a discourse unconstrained by social appropriations, leaves unsaid the repression of non-Westerners by Western discourse. Additionally, I would like to suggest that what is feared most in the West is not the emergence of the discourses of Foucault, Marx, Freud, or Nietzsche, which are always already appropriated; what is feared is the emergence of (an)Other discourse, one that excludes the Western *ratio*. This means the breakdown of hierarchies between the West and the Other; the end of conquest and the removal of the self from the Other's space; the breakdown of the security and comfort to which one was accustomed when one was able to predict the Other's actions in one's discourse. In essence, the West fears the fear of the unknown. Accordingly, Foucault's call for the removal of the subject and the return of pure discourse criticism posits the condition of possibility for the deployment of a new Western *ratio* and the repression of other subjectivities. The pure discourse criticism, which is part of a particular culture, enables non-Westerners to denounce the domineering presence of the West in their texts, but paradoxically does not allow them to move forward and create a discourse outside the Foucauldian system.

Mudimbe, on the other hand, calls for a reformulation of discourse in Africa. He argues that "we Africans must invest in the sciences, beginning with the human and social sciences. We must reanalyze the claims of these sciences for our own benefit, evaluate the risks they contain, and their discursives spaces. We must reanalyze for our benefit the contingent supports and the areas of enunciation in order to know what new meaning and what road to propose for our quest so that our discourse can justify us as singular beings engaged in a history that is

21. Ibid., p. 44.

itself special."[22] For Mudimbe, Africans must rid themselves of the smell of an abusive father, of the presence of an order which belongs to a particular culture but which defines itself as a fundamental part of all discourse. In order to produce differently, they must practice a major discursive insurrection against the West.

For Mudimbe, the most radical break with the West can be obtained only through a linguistic revolution in which European languages are replaced by African languages. Just as the originators of Greek thought set into motion a reorganization of knowledge and life through their transformation of ancient Egypt's use of science and methodologies, the West dominates the rest of the world today because it has appropriated Greek thought in its languages. In like fashion, for Mudimbe, at least "a change in the linguistic apparatus of science and production would provoke an epistemological break and open the door for new scientific adventures in Africa."[23]

Mudimbe further argues that the other insurrectionist practice against the abusive father is obtained through the excommunication of Western *ratio* from African discursive practices that take place in European languages. In other words, Mudimbe calls for a reformulation of disciplines inherited from the West and a subtle discursive technique aimed at deconstructing Western control over the rules that govern scientific statements. While working within Western languages, the new practice nevertheless departs from the traditional duplications of the Western canon in Africa and moves toward the construction of an African regime of truth and socially appropriated sciences. The new and cannibalizing discourse swells, disfigures, and transforms the bodies of Western texts,[24] and establishes its order outside traditional binary oppositions such as primitive/civilized, (neo)colonized/colonizer, slave/master, receiver/donor. This uncovers the centrality of Althusserian notions of ideology in Mudimbe's work, which are beyond the scope of the present essay.

I will now turn to the novel *L'écart* in order to show Mudimbe's discursive practice of unmaking the Western *ratio* and of building the African regime of truth. *L'écart* is about Ahmed Nara, an African student in Paris working on a history dissertation on the Kouba people. Nara meets two Africans, Salim and Aminata, who are archivists at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Aminata and Nara become lovers. Other important characters in the story are Soum, an internationalist Marxist; Isabelle, Nara's French girlfriend; and Dr. Sano, a psychoanalyst.

The novel takes as its subject the questions of existence, history, and ideology. Its narrative strategy consists of describing African images in French

22. Ibid., p. 35.
23. Ibid., p. 47.
24. For more on the reorganization of Western texts by discourse in Africa, see Christopher Miller, "Trait d'union: Injunction and Dismemberment in Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence*," *L'Esprit créateur* 23 (Winter 1983), pp. 62–73.

discourse as a projective construction in order to reveal the modes of existence of the "real" contours of Africa. Nara finds his individual freedom trapped by Sartre's influential definitions of *négritude* in *Orphée noire*, the famous introduction to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948). As Mudimbe argues in *L'odeur du père*, Sartre's intent to theorize *négritude*-for-*négritude*'s-sake was defeated by a master text: i.e., that of Existentialist Marxism. Sartre blots out the irreducible part of the *négritude* movement, manipulates its operational system, and contructs the black man as an androgynous character—that ambiguous figure already common in Western literature. For Mudimbe, Sartre "modified, in fact, the ascension of the first manifestations [in *négritude*], fixed the ways of interpreting the writings, named the rules and the modulations of the action, articulated, at last, the claims of the black race, and proposed a universalist strategy [identification with the proletariat] for its struggle."[25] *Orphée noire* has influenced in a fundamental manner not only the criticism of *négritude* but also the creative writing that followed it.

In *L'écart*, Nara tries to undo Sartre's recreation of androgyny in Africa and the limitation of his freedom as constrained by the Sartrean construction of the personae of *négritude*. Nara realizes that, for Isabelle, his French girlfriend, he is the one half of the androgynous figure—that is, the animal—while she herself is the other half—that is, the human. Their sexual encounter is therefore symbolic of the encounter between Europe and Africa, between the civilized and the primitive. As Nara puts it, "I was a phallus . . . could only be that . . . and the gasps that I was to hear, these cries that I had wanted never to have heard were supposed to have come from the junction of two reigns, the human and the animal."[26] Nara and Isabelle are incapable of reaching true love because of the barrier that Western literature constructs between the "rational European" and the "emotional African"—concepts which are thematized in Senghorian *négritude* and made to trap the lovers' freedom in their text. According to Nara, Isabelle sees him in every erotic poem she reads and tells him "you are my totem," to which he answers "I am not an animal."[27]

In the novel, Mudimbe also illustrates the manner in which universalist Marxism debunks the freedom of Africans by assimilating their struggle to that of the proletariat. Mudimbe, in *Entre les eaux* (1973), a novel that was awarded the Grand Prix Catholique Littéraire, had already exposed the violence inflicted by both Catholicism and classical Marxism on African spaces, which were outside the societies and class relations that produce these systems of thought. Likewise in *L'écart*, Soum, the socialist realist friend of Nara, believes that "to be a black, that is nothing exceptional in itself. To be a proletarian, yes."[28] Blotting out the

25. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père*, p. 139.
26. V. Y. Mudimbe, *L'écart* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1982), p. 34.
27. Ibid., p. 170.
28. Ibid., p. 45.

differences of culture and history and emphasizing class alone, Soum states that history begins the moment Africa joins the proletarians in the fight against the Euro-American capitalists and their puppets. Soum points out to Nara that to celebrate his African heritage is to indulge in false consciousness: "For thirty years [since independence] they have tried to divert us. They sing the richness and the complexity of our culture. . . . What a farce! When you think about the fact that the majority of our people do not have one full meal a day."[29]

Nara, however, is not satisfied with Soum's deterministic positivism and tabula rasa approach to African culture and history. He thinks to himself, "How could our people live all their desires if they could not have, in addition to the architects and the engineers, culturally impassioned people who could, if need be, look for and find the secret keepers of our traditions?"[30] Elsewhere he states, "How am I to tell Soum? When I tried to communicate my doubts to him on the universality of his practice, he quoted Marx to me: The relations of production form a whole; that does not imply at all that history is a totality, but that there are totalities in it."[31]

As a student of history, Nara is not convinced by Soum's "scientific" method, which pushes aside as insignificant the ambiguities, the contradictions, and the challenges that African societies present to Western discourse. Nara argues against the anthropologists and historians who project images of their own desires onto the surface of Africa and posits as an imperative for himself the need to be more sensitive to the specificity of local knowledge. For him, the question of archives is not limited only to "the particular expressions actualized by the brief history of Europe."[32] The new historian must also question the oral traditions, reformulate the symbols in local cultures, and avoid easy conclusions about rituals. Nara, who spends most of his time ruminating about the mode of existence of a discourse not held hostage by a Western regime of truth, states, "It is Aminata, boiling with a cold anger, who gave me last year a good lesson: 'Watch the dead, some things can make them move in the grave.' No other image could have been stronger for me. She forced me to be cautious, and I stopped entertaining Salim about the primitive aspects of Nyimi funerals. I found the itinerary of silence and sympathy. The contact with tradition and its rigorous practice subjected me to its norms, and *my speech bent faithfully before it.*"[33]

Defining history from the perspective of oral tradition, Nara compares it to memory, to a thought understanding itself at the root of its own consciousness. He says, "Science was, in my mind, a memory. I could dig it up, read it in my own way; if need be, find it in error and discard it."[34] Clearly what Nara is doing at

29. Ibid., p. 44.
30. Ibid., p. 45.
31. Ibid., pp. 149–50.
32. Ibid., p. 67.
33. Ibid., p. 28.
34. Ibid., p. 68.

the Bibliothèque Nationale is appropriating the archives and constructing his own regime of truth. For him, the anthropologists have either dismissed the rigid norms of African tradition as primitive or aestheticized them beyond their socio-cultural limits. He therefore calls for a critical practice that will reveal the meaning of people's life to themselves instead of using them to form a metadiscourse on the West.

So far I have shown that Nara in *L'écart*, like Mudimbe in his books of criticism, creates a distance between himself and Western master texts by moving toward the construction of a discourse that can be socially and culturally appropriated by Africans. The comparison of the fiction to Mudimbe's theoretical works also helps us to understand *L'écart* within the social context that gave it theme and structure. When dealing with an elusive character such as Nara, an easy way out, inherited from traditional Western criticism of the novel, would be to label him as insane. I will call to the reader's attention here Foucault's criticism of the division of insanity discussed above as a means of controlling discursive deployments. The blurb on the back of *L'écart*, for example, describes Nara in the following terms: "Mudimbe is most certainly interested in a character who is a neurotic; he lives on the margins [*il vit l'écart*] of society. He is schizophrenic and it is killing him." Certainly the story of *L'écart* can be twisted to fit the classic case of a character who is mad. As a child, Nara was locked up in a rat-infested cellar for an entire night. The following morning he was told of his father's death. As a student in Europe, Nara's fear of rats and the dark became obsessive. And in Paris, Nara's women play simultaneously the ambivalent roles of lover and mother. It is convenient for a critic of thematology—the Geneva school of criticism for example—to find here a network of obsessive objects that are linked to a primal repression.

But such an interpretation only represses the revolutionary aspects of the text. Nara's power consists in being able to construct his text on the outer limits of Western discourse. He slips out of Soum's deterministic construct of history, Isabelle's image of the African as a totem, and the use of an Oedipus universalis to explain his desires. To put it in his own words, "I slipped out of bed, oozed out in the embrasure of the door, and took the first train to leave behind, forever, the torment of being loved."[35]

Nara's reformulation of discourse on Africa, like any form of essentialism, raises questions of discursive subjugation that Mudimbe addresses in *L'odeur du père*. As we have seen, however, Mudimbe's criticism of essentialism and identity does not mean a rejection of the concept. It is necessary for Africans, too, to construct temporary totalities and to be allowed to raise questions of individual freedom within these totalities. For example, such categories as African history and African literature, by assuming the cultural unity of Africans, leave unstated

35. Ibid., p. 50.

the diversity of traditions and, since the era of independence, the emerging nationalist discourse of the authors. Since the '60s, works of art and the lives of people have become reorganized according to new needs. They respond no longer to the need to struggle for independence or to the horrors committed by the white man. For Mudimbe, nowadays, "There is a clear diversification of themes, and, like all literatures, African literature too tends to occupy new spaces of enunciation. Each text is thus particularized according to the ideological and the literary inclination of its author. To a certain degree, the author's nationality also counts."[36]

The social context that provides the writer with the elements of his or her text is no longer the same from country to country; "the father to kill or to celebrate, when such is the case, is no longer the same from Senegal to the Congo."[37]

The unanimist tendency that one encounters in Nara and also in Mudimbe, although necessary, can therefore be posited only momentarily. It is necessary and convenient for signifying Europe's discursive violence against Africa, and the need for Africans to call for a discourse that can represent their history, their life, and their literature. But once Africans stand up and speak, a new discursive violence takes place, and this has to be constantly challenged.

In summary, I have tried to show Mudimbe's original contribution to African and contemporary discourse. His texts address the condition for the existence of literary canons in Africa and the issues of epistemological breaks both with the West and with traditional Africa. Mudimbe also raises questions concerning identity and difference in postcolonial discourse, and he thus reformulates the Foucauldian definition of discourse and transforms *négritude*.

36. Mudimbe, *L'odeur du père*, p. 143.
37. Ibid.

Which Idea of Africa? Herskovits's Cultural Relativism

V. Y. MUDIMBE

Knowledge about Africa is now ordering itself in accordance with a new model. Despite the resiliency of primitivist and evolutionist myths, a new discourse, more exactly, a new type of relation to the African object is taking place. Anthropology, the most compromised of disciplines in the exploitation of Africa, began to rejuvenate itself first through functionalism (during the colonial period) and then, toward the end of the colonial era, in France, through structuralism. In so doing, anthropology, at least theoretically, revised its connection with its own object of study. In any case, in the mid-1950s it merged with other disciplines (economics, geography, history, literature, etc.) to constitute a new but rather vague body of knowledge about Africa or "Africanism." Bound together in the same epistemological space but radically divided in their aims and methods, these disciplines were caught between very concrete demands for the political liberation of Africa and the institutional demands to define their own scientificity, their own philosophical foundation. The figure of the African was taken both as an empirical fact and as the sign of absolute otherness. Michel Foucault remarks this point quite well in the following passage from *The Order of Things*:

> In this figure, which is at once empirical and yet foreign to (and in) all that we can experience, our consciousness no longer finds—as it did in the sixteenth century—the trace of another world; it no longer observes the wandering of a straying reason; it sees welling up that which is, perilously, nearest to us—as if, suddenly, the very hollowness of our existence is outlined in relief; the finitude upon the basis of which we are, and think, and know, is suddenly there before us; an existence at once real and impossible, thought that we cannot think, an object for our knowledge that always eludes us.[1]

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 375.

From this quotation—a commentary on the figure of madness as the truth and the alterity of modern Western experience—I would like, paradoxically, to suggest that, in general, truth has been the aim of "Africanism." But is this really a paradox when one considers the way these "exotic" figures have, since the fifteenth century, served to testify to a conjunction of Africa with folly?[2] Yet, as strange as it may appear, methodical shifts, transformations, and conversions within the technical discourses of African anthropology and history have been guided by criteria designed to attain the truth about Africa and express it in true and "scientifically" credible discourses. It is this search which, for example, accounts for the existing tension in anthropology between evolutionism, functionalism, diffusionism, and structuralism.

It appears to me that the various methods of Africanism have also had to confront another major issue. This issue concerns the way empirical discourses must witness to the truth of theoretical discourses and vice versa. Indeed, this problem largely transgresses the modalities of Africanist methodological schools. In a paper on "The Search for Paradigms as a Hindrance to Understanding," Albert Hirschman notes that "a recent journal article argued forcefully against the collection of empirical materials as an end in itself and without sufficient theoretical analysis to determine appropriate criteria of selection." Immediately after this, Hirschman specifies his own project: to evaluate "the tendency toward compulsive and mindless theorizing—a disease at least as prevalent and debilitating . . . as the spread of mindless number work in social sciences."[3]

I would suggest that the real issue is not one of theory versus empirical observation and collection; it is, rather, the silent and a priori choice of the truth at which a given discourse aims. In this context, I understand truth as a derivative abstraction, as a sign and a tension. Simultaneously uniting and separating conflictual objectives of systems constituted on the basis of different axioms and paradigms, truth is neither pure idea nor purely objective.

"Whatever may be the case in respect to [a] wish for unity, it is at the beginning and at the end of truths. But as soon as the exigency for a single truth enters into history as a goal of civilization, it is immediately affected with a mark of violence. For one always wishes to tie the knot too early. The *realized* unity of the true is precisely the initial lie."[4] Thus, for example, the challenge of a Christianity linking its fate in 313 to that of the Roman Empire; the paradoxical power of a European expansion outside its borders which, almost exactly 500

2. See Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Myth of Africa* (New York: The Library of Social Science, 1977) and Bernard Mouralis, "L'Afrique comme figure de la folie," in *L'Exotisme*, ed. Alain Buisine, et al. (Paris: Didier-Erudition, 1988).

3. Albert Hirschman, "The Search for Paradigms as a Hindrance to Understanding," in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 163.

4. Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 176.

years ago, invented and organized the world in which we are living today on the basis of the concept of natural law; finally, the lie that justified slavery and, apropos of all non-European territories, the idea of "*terra nullius*" thanks to which America, Australia, and South Africa are what they are today. The representations and signs that gave the hidden and violated memory of these countries its right and pertinence as a beginning seem now to have disappeared.

This type of "paradoxical" sign might be less interesting. It unveils too easily its own internal contradictions. But could I anchor this statement about truth as fault in a reflection dealing with the tasks of Africanists and, at the same time, found it?

Let me elaborate my hypothesis. I think that in the brief history of Africanism it has become obvious that beyond the dichotomy entertained by evolutionists—Lévy-Bruhl and his disciples, including Evans-Pritchard—between rudimentary and scientific knowledge, illusion and truth, there is a major problem concerning the very conditions of knowledge. Most of us would agree with Foucault that some distinctions should be made. On the one hand, there are necessary distinctions to be made about truth itself. One: there is "*a truth that is of the same order as the object—the truth that is gradually outlined, formed, stabilized, and expressed through the body* and the rudiments of perceptions"; two: there is "*the truth that appears as illusion*"; and three: concurrently "*there must also exist a truth that is of the order of discourse*—a truth that makes it possible to employ, when dealing with the nature or history of knowledge, a language that will be true.[5] Such distinctions should have a universal application. On the other hand, there is an important question which concerns the status of a true discourse. As noted by Foucault, "either this true discourse finds its foundation and model in the empirical truth whose genesis in nature and in history it retraces, so that *one has an analysis of the positivist type* . . . or the true discourse anticipates the truth whose nature and history it defines . . . so that *one has a discourse of the eschatological type*."[6]

These methodological separations into types of truth, these attempts to define the conditions of possibility of a true discourse and the tension between positivist and eschatological discourses, make sense. Is there really a way of rigorously conceptualizing the reality of Africa without dealing with them? In order to clarify some theoretical consequences of the preceding remarks, I would like to focus seriously and at length on the notion of cultural relativism as expounded by Melville Herskovits, the founding father of African Studies in the United States.

*

5. Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. 320 (emphasis added).
6. Ibid. (emphasis added).

Let us begin with a simple inquiry. Herskovits's questions about ancient civilizations will speak to the most skeptical: how true is our knowledge about them?

> One may well ask, is not our knowledge of the civilizations of the palaeolithic at best too scanty? Do we know too little of the actual life of the people to judge it? In what sort of dwellings did these men live from the earliest times? What sort of language did they speak? What was their religion and their social organization? What clothing did they wear? What foods other than the meat of the animals whose bones we find in the refuse heaps did they eat? These and numerous other questions will occur to one; it is unfortunate that most of them cannot be answered with anything more than guesses, shrewd though these be.[7]

The predicament, as well as the real significance, of the so-called crisis of social sciences in general and African studies in particular might be located here. As Benoît Verhaegen saw it,[8] it resides in the tension between the claim and will to truth of empirical discourses (in which supposedly reality determines the credibility and objectivity of the discourse) and the claims of eschatological discourses (in which the value of a hope and a promise is supposed to actualize a truth in the process of fulfilling its being). Apropos this same tension, Foucault notes that Marxism comes in contact with phenomenology to posit the human being as a disturbing object of knowledge. More simply, one also discovers that Auguste Comte and Karl Marx witness to an epistemological configuration in which "eschatology (as the objective truth proceeding from man's discourse) and positivism (as the truth of discourse defined on the basis of the truth of the object) are indissociable."[9]

This awareness should have imposed itself as an epistemological demand. But in the 1960s, most African Marxist projects ignored the complexity of their epistemological roots and thus erased the paradoxes inherent in their own discourse and practice. On the other hand, non-Marxist works, by ignoring both the historical framework of their own discourses and the conflicting historicities of their "objects" of knowledge, tended to privilege allegorical models of closed, nonexistent societies reduced to mythical pasts; or, as in the case of John Mbiti, wrote and thought in a subjunctive mood accounted for by an uncritical leap out of history into Christian eschatology.[10] In all cases, it is the past—history, or

7. Melville Herskovits, "The Civilizations of Prehistory," in *Man and His World*, ed. B. Brownell (New York: Van Nostrand Co., 1929), p. 121.
8. See Benoît Verhaegen, *Introduction À l'Histoire Immédiate* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1974).
9. Foucault, *Order of Things*, pp. 320–21.
10. See John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

more exactly, histories of Africa—which was erased, thus reducing the idea of Africa to a potentiality in the future. Here we may recall Herskovits's advice:

> Make no mistake, cultural relativism is a "tough-minded" philosophy. It requires those who hold to it to alter responses that arise out of some of the strongest enculturative conditioning to which they have been exposed, the ethnocentrisms implicit in the particular value-systems of their society. In the case of anthropologists, this means following the implications of data which, when opposed to our enculturated system of values, sets up conflicts not always easy to resolve.[11]

I question Marxist lessons on Africa. Yet, they seem somehow right in insisting on the fact that there is a relation of necessity between the practice of social science and politics, and thus ethics. One might oppose the political deductions of the Marxists, but, about the idea of Africa, there is no way of ignoring their significance and the evidence they unveil. In terms of the future, the cost (or the price) of social mythologies (development, modernization, etc.) invented by functionalism, applied anthropology, and colonialism is such that a redefinition of the "Africanist" discourse and practice should be isomorphic with that of our political expectations. In terms of the past, the same holds true: what is the price to be paid in order to bring back to light what has been buried, blurred, or simply forgotten?

Perhaps it is now time to reread carefully Herskovits's *Economic Life of Primitive Peoples* (1940) and reanalyze its basic opposition between life before and after the machine, between the "foreign" and the "familiar."

*

In his well-known volume on *Cultural Relativism* (1972), Herskovits stresses that cultural relativism—that is, an anti-ethnocentric approach to otherness—should be understood as a method, a philosophy, and a practice:

> As a method, relativism encompasses the principle of our science (i.e., anthropology) that in studying a culture, one seeks to attain as great a degree of objectivity as possible; that one does not judge the modes of behavior one is describing, or seek to change them. Rather, one seeks to understand the sanctions of behavior in terms of the established relationships within the culture itself, and refrains from making interpretations that arise from a preconceived frame of reference. Relativism as philosophy concerns the nature of cultural values and, beyond this, the implications of an epistemology that derives from a recogni-

11. Melville Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism*, ed. Frances Herskovits (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 37.

> tion of the force of enculturative conditioning in shaping thought and behavior. Its practical aspects involve the application—the practice—of the philosophical principles derived from the method, to the wider, cross-cultural world scene.[12]

The project thus explicitly promotes the necessity of making statements which fall within the context of the actor's perceived and understood terms and experiences. Most clearly it denounces the partiality of prejudice. The exigency of such an orientation in Africanism actualizes a hermeneutical task, that of interrogating the reality of "temporal distance" and "otherness" with a rigor similar to that proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer apropos of historical consciousness:

> We must raise to a conscious level the prejudices which govern understanding and in this way realize the possibility that "*other* aims" emerge in their own right from tradition—which is nothing other than realizing the possibility that we can understand something in its *otherness*. . . . What demands our efforts at understanding is manifest before and in itself in its character of otherness . . . we must realize that every understanding begins with the fact that something *calls out* to us. And since we know the precise meaning of this affirmation, we claim *ipso facto* the bracketing of prejudices. Thus we arrive at our first conclusion: bracketing our judgments in general and, naturally first of all our own prejudices, will end by imposing upon us the demands of a radical reflection on the idea of questioning as such.[13]

The identity of tasks that I postulate by bringing Gadamer's meditation on the problem of historical consciousness to bear on Herskovits's relativism also reflects itself in the similarities that exist between history and anthropology. Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued that these two disciplines are actually two faces of the same Janus: "the fundamental difference between the two disciplines is not one of subject, of goal, or of method. They share the same subject, which is social life; the same goal which is a better understanding of man; and, in fact, the same method, in which only the proportion of research techniques varies. They differ, principally, in their choice of complementary perspectives: History organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of social life, while anthropology proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations."[14]

Herskovits's cultural relativism bears witness to *Einfülhung*, which strictly means "sympathy." This reminds me of a remarkable temptation faced by the

12. Ibid., pp. 38–39.
13. Hans-Georg Gadmer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," in *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 156–57.
14. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 18.

Belgian missionary Placide Tempels in the 1940s—an era dominated in anthropology by reductionist models. The temptation was precisely to fuse, to identify with the other to the point of becoming the other, if only for a moment, in order to be able to speak sense about the other. Yet, such a project and its procedures of *Einfülhung*, undoubtedly legitimate, at least in principle, are fundamentally difficult to understand. They seem to presuppose at least two ambitious theses. The first concerns the possibility of a fusion of the I and the Other which would suggest that, transcending or negating its own indetermination and unpredictability, the I can really *know* the Other. Sartre has indicated, in a powerful and convincing text, some of the major and paradoxical difficulties of this thesis.[15]

The second problem stems from the questionable transparency of the object of anthropology. For Herskovits, the human as object of knowledge and science seems an obvious and unproblematic given, accounted for by the history and dynamics of a cultural space. Thus, for example, Schmidt's notion of "cultural invariants" from a comparative perspective, or Edel's theory of "indeterminacy" matter little to him, "since the difficulty would appear to be no more than a semantic one":

> The problem would rather seem to be analogous to that of ascertaining *the most adequate basis* for deriving general principles of human behavior, in terms of the relation between form and process. Here the issue is clear . . . with the particular experience of *each society giving historically unique formal expression to underlying processes*, which are operative in shaping the destiny of all human groups.[16]

In sum, Herskovits privileges the culture as a totality rather than the individual consciousness. As a consequence, a collective societal dynamic appears to stand, diachronically or synchronically, as a sort of consciousness of a society. Herskovits thus clearly confirms anthropology in its traditional configuration, that is, in its proximity to nineteenth-century biology and physiology. Yet, he insists that his "cross-cultural approach" studies "*Man in the large*, in the light of differences and similarities between societies, and in the ways by which different peoples must achieve these ends that all peoples must achieve if they are to survive and adjust to their natural and social environments."[17] A question remains: what is this "*Man in the large*"? How has he been conceived as a possible object for knowledge or for science, and from which epistemological and cultural space?

15. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), p. 353.
16. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism*, pp. 56–57.
17. Ibid., p. 108.

Focusing on the various hypotheses regarding this "*Man in the large*," Herskovits sees distortions in interpretations as dependent upon inappropriate attitudes and as exemplifying the paradox of the history of anthropology. "Early students of man," he notes, "stressed the concept of 'human nature,' but this was essentially to allow them to bring observed divergences under a single head. Later, more emphasis was laid on these differences, but again this was to show how diverse the manifestations of common human tendencies might be."[18] Or, as in the case of "Man" before and after the machine, he antagonizes and brings together cultures in terms of the type of their technologies.[19]

Herskovits's concept of "*Man in the large*" does not seem to rest on a clear distinction between the subject and the object of a culture, a language, a thought, on the one hand; and the subject and the object of the anthropological discourse on the other. In fact, I would say that the concept, mainly in Herskovits's earlier works, actualizes a truism of physical anthropology of the period: in order to know Man (with a capital m), it is imperative to know the varieties of men, their differences and similarities. A concrete illustration can be seen in his contribution to *Man and His World* (1929). In his essay entitled "The Civilizations of Prehistory," Herskovits ceaselessly makes statements such as: "we cannot say what *type of man* lived at the dawn of prehistory"; "*Man of [the] pre-Chellean epoch* had little in the way of civilization, yet it must have taken hundreds of generations to have brought him to this stage"; "That *paleolithic man* lived in Africa we are certain"; "the greatest contribution of *neolithic man* to human civilization was the fact that he learned how to tame plants and animals"; and so on.[20]

That Herskovits was aware of the problem (and of the complexity of the fundamental question that goes back to Kant's anthropology: what is man?) is obvious when one pays attention to the declension of the concepts of civilization and culture in their singular and plural forms: the singular generally postulates the unity of humankind, and the plural its diversity and cultural variation. One gets the clearest picture of Herskovits's art of double-talk in his brief 1961 critique of Henry E. Garret, a psychology professor who argued that racial differences and inequalities are empirical facts that were being opposed by a conspiracy of apostles of "the Equalitarian Dogma." Garret's arguments, published in an issue of *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* (Autumn 1961), furnish an example of what Herskovits himself calls elsewhere "classical imperialism." Herskovits's criticism outlines two different and complementary orders of reflection. On the one hand, an explicit ethical argument contending in the name of "science" and "reason" that there is a historicity proper to each human group and even to each individual. This historicity can account for differences between

18. Ibid., p. 57.
19. Melville Herskovits, *The Economic Life of Primitive Peoples* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 22.
20. Herskovits, "Civilizations of Prehistory," pp. 108, 110, 127, 130 (emphasis added).

cultures and between individuals, but "no scientifically valid evidence has ever been produced to show that these differences, either in general intelligence or particular aptitudes, are related to race."[21] On the other hand, a more discreet order, strongly pressed, yet implicit, alludes to a major epistemological issue that I can illustrate by reference to one of Foucault's statements: "Western culture has contributed, under the name of man, a being who, by one and the same interplay of reasons, must be a positive domain of *knowledge* and cannot be an object of *science*."[22]

Fundamentally a relation to values, cultural relativism, whether diachronic or synchronic, is, as Herskovits aptly put it, "an approach to the question of the nature and role of values in culture."[23] As such, it defines itself as a vivid interrogation of ethnocentrism:

> The very core of cultural relativism is the social discipline that comes of respect for differences—of mutual respect. Emphasis on the worth of many ways of life, not one, is an affirmation of the values in each culture. Such emphasis seeks to understand and to harmonize goals, not to judge and destroy those that do not dovetail with our own. Cultural history teaches that, important as it is to discern and study the parallelisms in human civilizations, it is no less important to discern and study the different ways man has devised to fulfill his needs.[24]

Following Kluckhon, Herskovits believed that "the doctrine that science has nothing to do with values . . . is a pernicious heritage from Kant and other thinkers."[25] His *Human Factor in Changing Africa* (1967), particularly its two chapters on "Rediscovery and Integration," is probably the most concrete illustration of this belief.

*

Let us now turn the discussion toward structuralism, the other major relativist trend in anthropology. In a careful reading of structuralism, after expounding the linguistic model and its transposition in Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* (1963) and *The Savage Mind* (1966), Paul Ricoeur turns to the German theologian Gerhard Von Rad's *Theology of the Historical Traditions of Israel*, and notes:

21. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism*, p. 115.
22. Foucault, *Order of Things*, pp. 366–67.
23. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism*, p. 14.
24. Ibid., p. 33.
25. Ibid., 42.

> Here we find ourselves confronting a theological conception exactly the inverse of that of totemism and which, because it is the inverse, suggests an inverse relationship between diachrony and synchrony and raises more urgently the problem of the relationship between structural comprehension and hermeneutic comprehension.[26]

This statement springs from both a methodological critique of structuralism and a philosophical thesis. The critique, says Paul Ricoeur, shows that "the consciousness of the validity of a method . . . is inseparable from the consciousness of its limits."[27] These limits would seem to be of two types: "on the one hand . . . the passage to *the* savage mind is made by favor of an example that is already too favorable, one which is perhaps an exception rather than an example. On the other hand, the passage from a structural science to a structuralist philosophy seems to me to be not very satisfying and not even very coherent."[28] If I understand correctly Ricoeur's critical reading of Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* (1963) and *The Savage Mind* (1966), the example which permits the first passage is Lévi-Strauss's thesis about kinship as a form of language, or, symbolically, marriage rules as "words of the group."[29] As to the second passage, its fragility could be accounted for, according to Ricoeur, by the Lévi-Straussian concept of *bricolage*. Here is Ricoeur's question:

> Hasn't he [Lévi-Strauss] stacked the deck by relating the state of the savage mind to a cultural area—specifically, that of the "totemic illusion"—where the arrangements are more important than the contents, where thought is actually *bricolage*, working with a heterogeneous material, with odds and ends of meaning? Never in this book is the question raised concerning the unity of mythical thought. It is taken for granted that the generalization includes all savage thought. Now, I wonder whether the mythical base from which we [Westerners] branch—with its Semitic [Egyptian, Babylonian, Aramaic, Hebrew], proto-Hellenic, and Indo-European cores—lends itself so easily to the same operation; *or rather, and I insist on this point, it surely lends itself to the operation, but does it lend itself entirely?*[30]

The overall effect of this line of questioning is important, for it implies two main problems. First, the "unity" supposed by the concept of the "savage mind" is not proven. Thus Melville and Frances Herskovits's *Dahomean Narrative*, for

26. Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 45.
27. Ibid., p. 44.
28. Ibid., p. 45.
29. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, p. 61; Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 36.
30. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 40–41 (emphasis added).

example, would simply witness to a well-localized "*bricolage*." Secondly, if the "savage mind" is only a hypothetical construct whose theoretical unity is challenged by a tension between actual, well-spatialized, and contradictory "*bricolages*," how could it be used as a measure for comparison with the base from which sprang the Western tradition?

Let us pause one moment and reflect on the last phrase of my quotation from Ricoeur. Does the mythical base from which Westerners branch lend itself *entirely* to the same type of operation as does the mythical thinking of non-Western cultures? As hypothesis, we could retain Herskovits's understanding of myth, that is, a cultural narrative "deriving from human language skill, and man's fascination with symbolic continuities. But as a cultural fact, it also finds dynamic expression in the play between outer stimulus received by a people, and innovation from within."[31]

Well, I think Edmund Leach has demonstrated, in his brilliant and controversial studies, that biblical narratives can lend themselves to structuralist analysis.[32] Although George Dumézil rejected the concept of structuralism and explicitly stated that he was not a structuralist,[33] his works convincingly demonstrate that Indo-European historical and cultural experiences submit to typologizations, systems of transformations, and patterns similar to those produced by structural analysis in non-Western societies. And, Luc de Heusch's *The Drunken King* (1982), one of the foremost systematic structuralist analyses applied to Bantu myths, derives its methodology from both Lévi-Strauss's and Dumézil's lessons. These facts seem, at least partially, to lay to rest Ricoeur's suspicions.

But in the case of Israel's historical tradition, Ricoeur claims to find a conjunction of three historicities that does not seem to exist in totemic cultures and societies.[34] The first of these is that of a *hidden time* which expounds, in a mythical saga, Yahweh's action as Israel's history. The second, that of a *tradition*, founds itself on the authority of the hidden time; in successive readings and interpretations of this authority, it perceives its past and becoming, and reflects it as a *Heilgeschichte*. Finally, there is the historicity of hermeneutics, which Ricoeur refers to, using Von Rad's language, as "*Entfaltung*, 'unfolding' or 'development' to designate the task of a theology of the Old Testament which respects the threefold historical character of the *Heilige Geschichte* (the level of the founding events), the *Uberlieferungen* (the level of constituting traditions), and finally the identity of Israel (the level of a constituted tradition)."[35]

Of course, this makes sense. Yet how can one jump from the founding sagas of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob to the concept of a *Heilgeschichte* unless one has

31. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism*, p. 240.
32. See George Dumźil, *Camillus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
33. Ibid., p. 11, n. 17.
34. Ricoeur, *Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 45–56.
35. Ibid., p. 47.

already accepted that these founding events do indeed bear witness to it? It is *faith* in the confession, overextended by the narratives and subsequently by the power of commentaries and interpretations, which justifies and confirms a hidden time as sacred as it transmutes it first into signs of God's kerygma, then into both a history and an eschatology.

Here then is the paradox: Ricoeur's reading seems pertinent only insofar as it can be understood within the economy of the *tradition* that it documents and explains on the basis of the whole significance and role of a Christian thinking in the West. On the other hand, it is the very foundation of this tradition, and particularly the posited singularity and specificity of Israel's history, that gives meaning to Ricoeur's hermeneutics and its ambition. We are really facing something like a firmly closed circle which expands by exaggerating its own significance from the internal logic of a dialogue between its own different levels of meaning. In effect, from the margins of Christianity or, more exactly, from the margins of a Western history that institutionalized Christianity, how can one not think that what is going on here is a simple exegesis of a well-localized and tautologized tradition which seems incapable of imagining the very possibility of its exteriority, namely that, in its margins, other historical traditions can also be credible, meaningful, respectable and sustained by relatively well-delineated historicities?

It is in Herskovits's philosophical statements that I have found reasons to believe in truth as a goal. Other traditions situated outside the Western space—Christianity and its institutionalized procedures, and today's secularized philosophies—speak also about their own hidden times, and all of them, each in its manner, bear witness to their own historicities. Are these historicities two, three, or four? What really should matter is the challenge that this question implies. As Herskovits aptly put it: "there remains the challenge to take concepts and hypotheses into the laboratory of the cross-cultural field, and test their generalizing value, or arrive at new generalizations. Perhaps 'challenge' is too austere a word for our implicit meaning. In the tradition of humanistic scholarship, it is an invitation to discover for the world literature and thought vast resources which will inform and delight us."[36]

Precisely: taken seriously, this last invitation cannot but destroy classical Africanism, or, at any rate, conflict with its conceptual frames and boundaries.

36. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism*, p. 241.

Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions*

BENJAMIN H. D. BUCHLOH

This monster called beauty is not eternal. We know that our breath had no beginning and will never stop, but we can, above all, conceive of the world's creation and its end.

—Apollinaire, *Les peintres cubistes*

Allergic to any relapse into magic, art is part and parcel of the disenchantment of the world, to use Max Weber's term. It is inextricably intertwined with rationalization. What means and productive methods art has at its disposal are all derived from this nexus.

—Theodor Adorno

A twenty-year distance separates us from the historical moment of Conceptual Art. It is a distance that both allows and obliges us to contemplate the movement's history in a broader perspective than that of the convictions held during the decade of its emergence and operation (roughly from 1965 to its temporary disappearance in 1975). For to historicize Conceptual Art requires, first of all, a clarification of the wide range of often conflicting positions and the mutually exclusive types of investigation that were generated during this period.

But beyond that there are broader problems of method and of "interest." For at this juncture, any historicization has to consider what type of questions an art-historical approach—traditionally based on the study of visual objects—can legitimately pose or hope to answer in the context of artistic practices that explicitly insisted on being addressed outside of the parameters of the production of formally ordered, perceptual objects, and certainly outside of those of art history and criticism. And, further, such an historicization must also address the

* An earlier version of this essay was published in *L'art conceptuel: une perspective* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989).

Sonatine Bureaucratique

(BUREAUCRATIC SONATINA)

Erik SATIE

He's off.
Le voilà parti.

Allegro

PIANO

f

He goes merrily to his
Il va gaiement à son

office
bureau

+)*"en se gavillant"*
en se "gavillant"

with a contented nod of his head
Content, il hoche la tête

+)*"en se gavillant"* is not translatable.

Copyright 1917 by S.Chapelier Paris
L. PHILIPPO, Editeur, 24, Bd Poissononnière, Paris. P. 669
TOUS DROITS D'EXECUTION PUBLIQUE DE TRADUCTION DE REPRODUCTION ET D'ARRANGEMENTS RESERVÉS POUR TOUS PAYS Y COMPRIS LA SUÉDE LA NORVEGE ET LE DANEMARK

Erik Statie. Bureaucratic Sonatina. *1917.*

currency of the historical object, i.e., the motivation to rediscover Conceptual Art from the vantage point of the late 1980s: the dialectic that links Conceptual Art, as the most rigorous elimination of visuality and traditional definitions of representation, to this decade of a rather violent restoration of traditional artistic forms and procedures of production.

It is with Cubism, of course, that elements of language surface programmatically within the visual field for the first time in the history of modernist painting, in what can be seen as a legacy of Mallarmé. It is there too that a parallel is established between the emerging structuralist analysis of language and the formalist examination of representation. But Conceptual practices went beyond such mapping of the linguistic model onto the perceptual model, outdistancing as they did the spatialization of language and the temporalization of visual structure. Because the proposal inherent in Conceptual Art was to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone (the work as analytic proposition), it thus constituted the most consequential assault on the status of that object: its visuality, its commodity status, and its form of distribution. Confronting the full range of the implications of Duchamp's legacy for the first time, Conceptual practices, furthermore, reflected upon the construction and the role (or the death) of the author just as much as they redefined the conditions of receivership and the role of the spectator. Thus they performed the postwar period's most rigorous investigation of the conventions of pictorial and sculptural representation and a critique of the traditional paradigms of visuality.

From its very beginning, the historic phase in which Conceptual Art was developed comprises such a complex range of mutually opposed approaches that any attempt at a retrospective survey must beware of the forceful voices (mostly those of the artists themselves) demanding respect for the purity and orthodoxy of the movement. Precisely because of this range of implications of Conceptual Art, it would seem imperative to resist a construction of its history in terms of a stylistic homogenization, which would limit that history to a group of individuals and a set of strictly defiñed practices and historical interventions (such as, for example, the activities initiated by Seth Siegelaub in New York in 1968 or the authoritarian quests for orthodoxy by the English Art & Language group).

To historicize Concept Art (to use the term as it was coined by Henry Flynt in 1961)[1] at this moment, then, requires more than a mere reconstruction of the

1. As is usual with stylistic formations in the history of art, the origin and the name of the movement are heavily contested by its major participants. Barry, Kosuth, and Weiner, for example, vehemently denied in recent conversations with the author any historical connection to or even knowledge of the Fluxus movement of the early 1960s. Nevertheless, at least with regard to the invention of the *term*, it seems correct when Henry Flynt claims that he is "the originator of concept art, the most influential contemporary art trend. In 1961 I authored (and copyrighted) the phrase 'concept art,' the rationale for it and the first compositions labeled 'concept art.' My document was first printed in *An Anthology*, ed. La Monte Young, New York, 1962." (La Monte Young's *An Anthology* was in fact published in 1963.)

movement's self-declared primary actors or a scholarly obedience to their proclaimed purity of intentions and operations.[2] Their convictions were voiced with the (by now often hilarious) self-righteousness that is continuous within the tradition of hypertrophic claims made in avant-garde declarations of the twentieth century. For example, one of the campaign statements by Joseph Kosuth from the late 1960s asserts: "Art before the modern period is as much art as Neanderthal man is man. It is for this reason that around the same time I replaced the term 'work' for *art proposition*. Because a conceptual *work* of art in the traditional sense, is a contradiction in terms."[3]

It seems crucial to remember that the oppositions within the formation of Conceptual Art arose partly from the different readings of Minimal sculpture (and of its pictorial equivalents in the painting of Mangold, Ryman, and Stella) and in the consequences the generation of artists emerging in 1965 drew from those readings—just as the divergences also resulted from the impact of various artists within the Minimalist movement as one or another was chosen by the new generation as its central figures of reference. For example, Dan Graham seems to have been primarily engaged with the work of Sol LeWitt. In 1965 he organized LeWitt's first one-person exhibition (held in his gallery, called Daniels Gallery); in 1967 he wrote the essay "Two Structures: Sol LeWitt"; and in 1969 he concluded the introduction to his self-published volume of writings entitled *End Moments* as follows: "It should be obvious the importance Sol LeWitt's work has had for my work. In the article here included (written first in 1967, rewritten in 1969) I hope only that the after-the-fact appreciation hasn't too much submerged his seminal work into *my* categories."[4]

A second contestant for the term was Edward Kienholz, with his series of *Concept Tableaux* in 1963 (in fact, occasionally he is still credited with the discovery of the term. See for example Roberta Smith's essay "Conceptual Art," in *Concepts of Modern Art*, ed. Nikos Stangos [New York: Harper and Row, 1981], pp. 256–70).

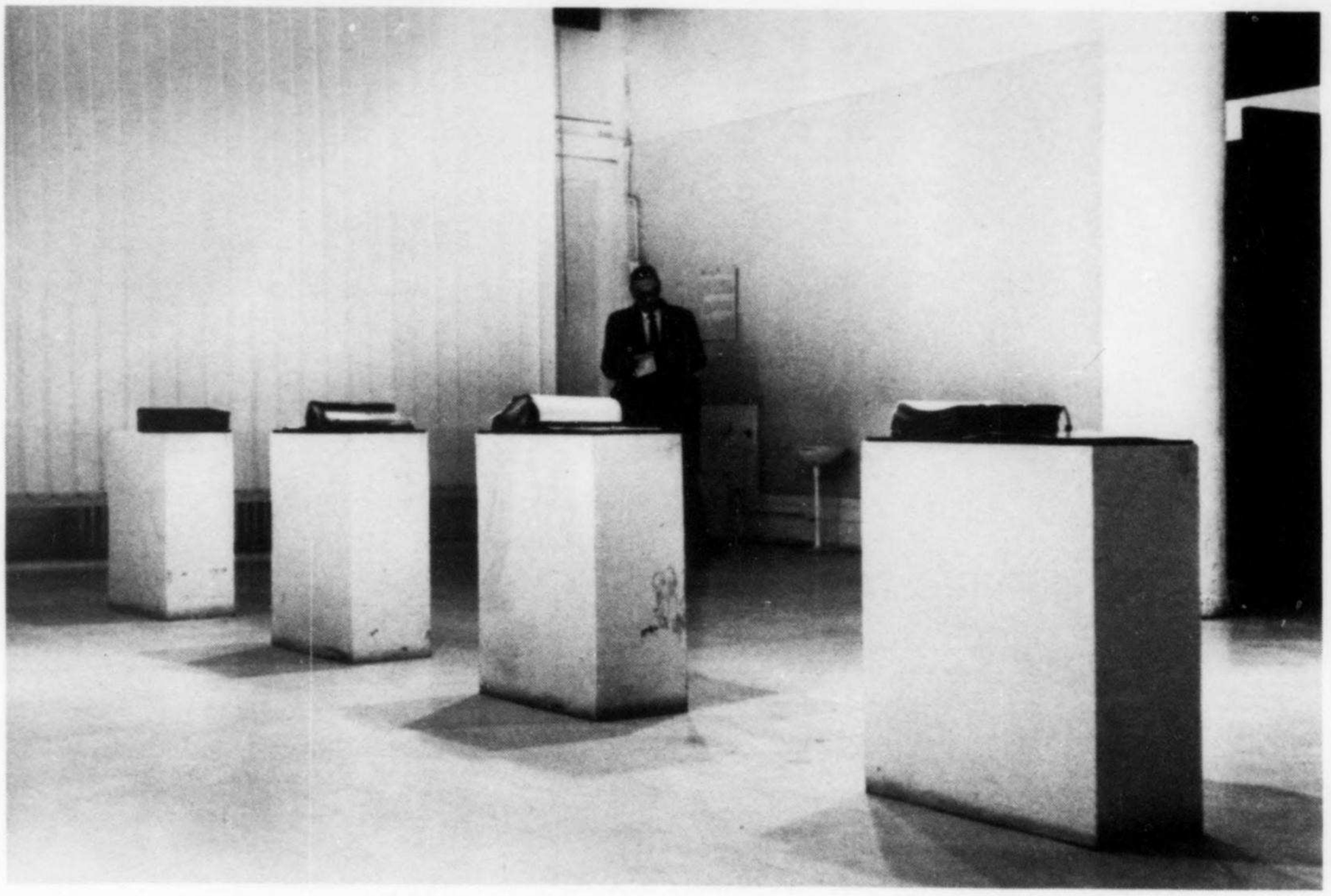
Joseph Kosuth claims in his "Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14" (published by Gerd de Vries, Cologne, 1971, n.p.) that he used the term "conceptual" for the first time "in a series of notes dated 1966 and published a year later in a catalogue for an exhibition titled *Non-Anthropomorphic Art* at the now defunct Lannis Gallery in New York."

And then there are of course (most officially accepted by all participants) Sol LeWitt's two famous texts from 1967 and 1969, the "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," first published in *Artforum*, vol. V, no. 10, pp. 56–57 and "Sentences on Conceptual Art," first published in *Art & Language*, vol. 1, no. 1 (May 1969), pp. 11–13.

2. For a typical example of an attempt to write the history of Conceptual Art by blindly adopting and repeating the claims and convictions of one of that history's figures, see Gudrun Inboden, "Joseph Kosuth—Artist and Critic of Modernism," in *Joseph Kosuth: The Making of Meaning* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1981), pp. 11–27.

3. Joseph Kosuth, *The Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14* (Cologne: Gerd De Vries/Paul Maenz, 1971), n. p.

4. Dan Graham, *End Moments* (New York, 1969), n.p. The other Minimalists with whose work Graham seems to have been particularly involved were Dan Flavin (Graham wrote the catalogue essay for Flavin's exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 1967) and Robert Morris (whose work he discussed later extensively in his essay "Income Piece" in 1973).



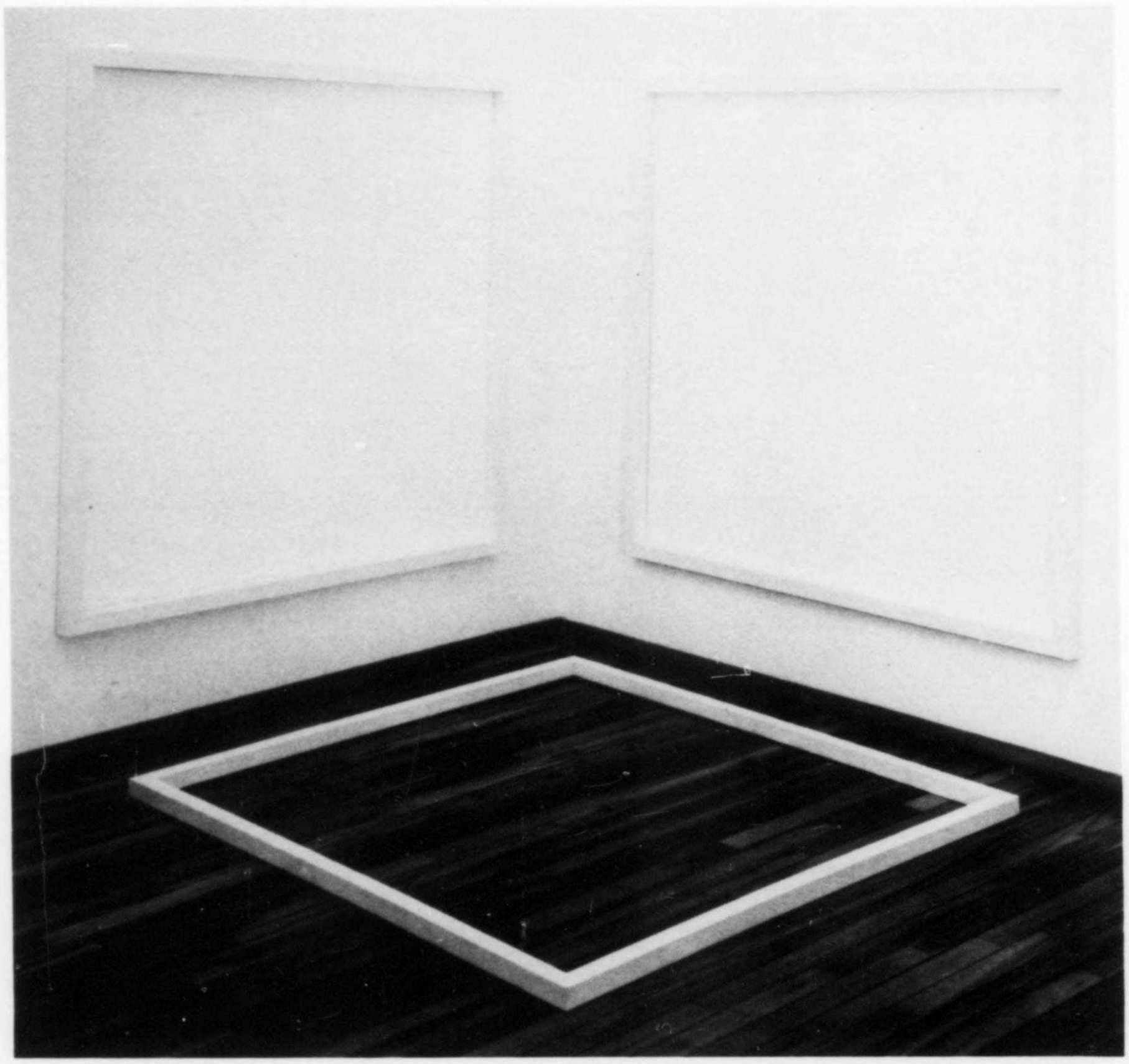
Mel Bochner. Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art. *Installation, School of Visual Arts Gallery, December, 1966.*

Mel Bochner, by contrast, seems to have chosen Dan Flavin as his primary figure of reference. He wrote one of the first essays on Dan Flavin (it is in fact a text-collage of accumulated quotations, all of which relate in one way or the other to Flavin's work).[5] Shortly thereafter, the text-collage as a presentational mode would, indeed, become formative within Bochner's activities, for in the same year he organized what was probably the first truly conceptual exhibition (both in terms of materials being exhibited and in terms of presentational style). Entitled *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art* (at the School of Visual Arts in 1966), most of the Minimal artists were present along with a number of then still rather unknown Post-Minimal and Conceptual artists. Having assembled drawings, sketches, documents, tabulations, and other paraphernalia of the production process, the exhibition limited itself to presenting the "originals" in Xeroxes assembled into four loose-leaf binders that were installed on pedestals in the center of the exhibition space. While one should not overestimate the importance of such features (nor should one underestimate the pragmatics of such a presentational style), Bochner's intervention clearly moved to transform both the format and space of exhibitions. As such, it indicates that the kind of transformation of exhibition space and of the devices through which art is presented that was accomplished two years

5. Mel Bochner, "Less is Less (for Dan Flavin)," *Art and Artists* (Summer 1966).

later by Seth Siegelaub's exhibitions and publications (e.g., *The Xerox Book*) had already become a common concern of the generation of post-Minimal artists.

A third example of the close generational sequencing would be the fact that Joseph Kosuth seems to have chosen Donald Judd as his key figure: at least one of the early tautological neon works from the *Proto-Investigations* is dedicated to Donald Judd; and throughout the second part of "Art after Philosophy" (published in November, 1969), Judd's name, work, and writings are invoked with the same frequency as those of Duchamp and Reinhardt. At the end of this essay, Kosuth explicitly states: "I would hastily add to that, however, that I was certainly much more influenced by Ad Reinhardt, Duchamp via Johns and Morris,



Sol LeWitt. Wall Floor Piece (Three Squares). *1966.*

and by Donald Judd than I ever was specifically by LeWitt. . . . Pollock and Judd are, I feel, the beginning and end of American dominance in art."[6]

Sol LeWitt's Structures

It would seem that LeWitt's proto-Conceptual work of the early 1960s originated in an understanding of the essential dilemma that has haunted artistic production since 1913, when its basic paradigms of opposition were first formulated—a dilemma that could be described as the conflict between structural specificity and random organization. For the need, on the one hand, for both a systematic reduction and an empirical verification of the perceptual data of a visual structure stands opposed to the desire, on the other hand, to assign a new "idea" or meaning to an object randomly (in the manner of Mallarmé's "transposition") as though the object were an empty (linguistic) signifier.

This was the dilemma that Roland Barthes described in 1956 as the "difficulty of our times" in the concluding paragraphs of *Mythologies:*

> It seems that this is a difficulty pertaining to our times: there is as yet only one possible choice, and this choice can bear only on two equally extreme methods: either to posit a reality which is entirely permeable to history, and ideologize; or, conversely, to posit a reality which is *ultimately* impenetrable, irreducible, and, in this case, poetize. In a word, I do not yet see a synthesis between ideology and poetry (by poetry I understand, in a very general way, the search for the inalienable meaning of things).[7]

Both critiques of the traditional practices of representation in the American postwar context had at first appeared mutually exclusive and had often fiercely attacked each other. For example, Reinhardt's extreme form of self-critical, perceptual positivism had gone too far for most of the New York School artists and certainly for the apologists of American modernism, mainly Greenberg and Fried, who had constructed a paradoxical dogma of transcendentalism and self-referential critique. On the other hand, Reinhardt was as vociferous as they—if

6. Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy" (Part II), in *The Making of Meaning,* p. 175. The list would seem complete, if it were not for the absence of Mel Bochner's and On Kawara's name, and its explicit negation of the importance of Sol LeWitt. According to Bochner, who had become an instructor at the School of Visual Arts in 1965, Joseph Kosuth worked with him as a student in 1965 and 1966. Dan Graham mentioned that during that time Kosuth was also a frequent visitor to the studios of On Kawara and Sol LeWitt. Kosuth's explicit negation makes one wonder whether it was not precisely Sol LeWitt's series of the so-called "Structures" (such as *Red Square, White Letters,* for example, produced in 1962 and exhibited in 1965) that was one of the crucial points of departure for the formulation of Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations.*

7. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 158.

not more so—in his contempt for the opposite, which is to say, the Duchampian tradition. This is evident in Ad Reinhardt's condescending remarks about both Duchamp—"I've never approved or liked anything about Marcel Duchamp. You have to chose between Duchamp and Mondrian"—and his legacy as represented through Cage and Rauschenberg—"Then the whole mixture, the number of poets and musicians and writers mixed up with art. Disreputable. Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg. I'm against the mixture of all the arts, against the mixture of art and life you know, everyday life."[8]

What slid by unnoticed was the fact that both these critiques of representation led to highly comparable formal and structural results (e.g., Rauschenberg's monochromes in 1951–1953 and Reinhardt's monochromes such as *Black Quadruptych* in 1955). Furthermore, even while made from opposite vantage points, the critical arguments accompanying such works systematically denied the traditional principles and functions of visual representation, constructing astonishingly similar litanies of negation. This is as evident, for example, in the text prepared by John Cage for Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* in 1953 as it is in Ad Reinhardt's 1962 manifesto "Art as Art." First Cage:

> To whom, No subject, No image, No taste, No object, No beauty, No talent, No technique (no why), No idea, No intention, No art, No feeling, No black, No white no (and). After careful consideration I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in these paintings that could not be changed, that they can be seen in any light and are not destroyed by the action of shadows. Hallelujah! the blind can see again; the water is fine.[9]

And then Ad Reinhardt's manifesto for his own "Art as Art" principle:

> No lines or imaginings, no shapes or composings or representings, no visions or sensations or impulses, no symbols or signs or impastos, no decoratings or colorings or picturings, no pleasures or pains, no accidents or ready-mades, no things, no ideas, no relations, no attributes, no qualities—nothing that is not of the essence.[10]

Ad Reinhardt's empiricist American formalism (condensed in his "Art as Art" formula) and Duchamp's critique of visuality (voiced for example in the

8. The first of the two quotations is to be found in Ad Reinhardt's Skowhegan lecture, delivered in 1967, quoted by Lucy Lippard in *Ad Reinhardt* (New York, 1981), p. 195. The second statement appears in an interview with Mary Fuller, published as "An Ad Reinhardt Monologue," *Artforum*, vol. 10 (November 1971), pp. 36–41.

9. John Cage (statement in reaction to the controversy engendered by the exhibition of Rauschenberg's all-white paintings at the Stable Gallery, September 15–October 3, 1953). Printed in Emily Genauer's column in the *New York Herald Tribune*, December 27, 1953, p. 6 (section 4).

10. Ad Reinhardt, "Art as Art," *Art International* (December 1962). Reprinted in *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 56.

famous quip: "All my work in the period before the *Nude* was visual painting. Then I came to the idea. . . ."[11]) appear in the historically rather unlikely fusion of Kosuth's attempt to integrate the two positions in the mid-1960s, leading to his own formula, which he deployed starting in 1966, "Art as Idea as Idea." It should be noted, however, that the strange admixture of the nominalist position of Duchamp (and its consequences) and the positivist position of Reinhardt (and its implications) was not only accomplished in 1965 with the beginnings of Conceptual Art but was well-prepared in the work of Frank Stella, who in his *Black Paintings* from 1959 claimed both Rauschenberg's monochrome paintings and Reinhardt's paintings as points of departure. Finally, it was the work of Sol LeWitt—in particular work such as his *Structures*—that demarcates that precise transition, integrating as they do both language and visual sign in a structural model.

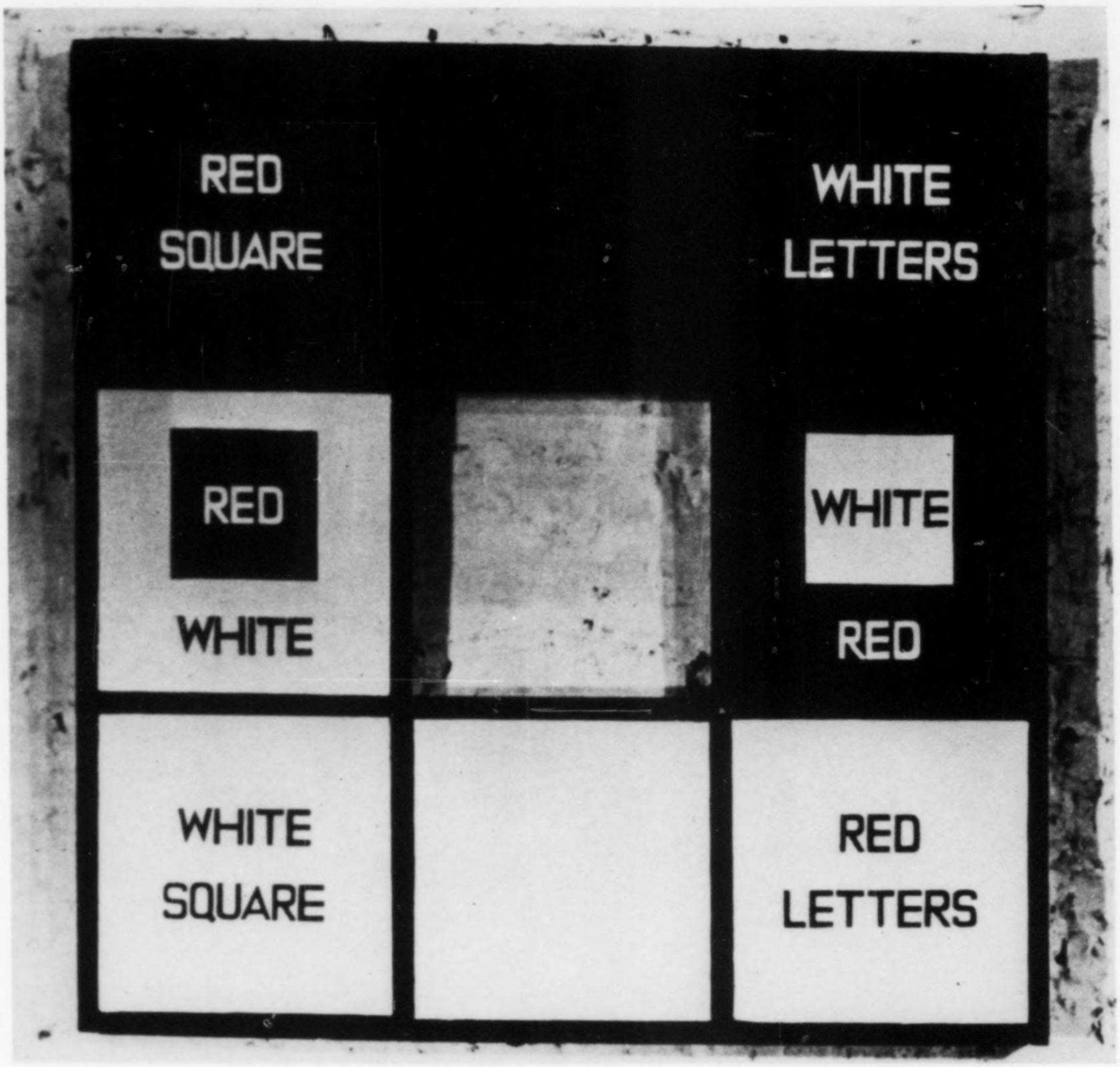
The surfaces of these *Structures* from 1961 to 1962 (some of which used single frames from Muybridge's serial photographs) carried inscriptions in bland lettering identifying the hue and shape of those surfaces (e.g., "RED SQUARE") and the inscription itself (e.g., "WHITE LETTERS"). Since these inscriptions named either the support or the inscription (or, in the middle section of the painting, both support and inscription in a paradoxical inversion), they created a continuous conflict in the viewer/reader. This conflict was not just over which of the two roles should be performed in relation to the painting. To a larger extent it concerned the reliability of the given information and the sequence of that information: was the inscription to be given primacy over the visual qualities identified by the linguistic entity, or was the perceptual experience of the visual, formal, and chromatic element anterior to its mere denomination by language?

Clearly this "mapping of the linguistic onto the perceptual" was not arguing in favor of "the idea"—or linguistic primacy—or the definition of the work of art as an analytic proposition. Quite to the contrary, the permutational character of the work suggested that the viewer/reader systematically perform all the visual and textual options the painting's parameters allowed for. This included an acknowledgment of the painting's central, square element: a spatial void that revealed the underlying wall surface as the painting's *architectural* support in actual space, thereby suspending the reading of the painting between architectural structure and linguistic definition.

Rather than privileging one over the other, LeWitt's work (in its dialogue with Jasper Johns's legacy of paradox) insisted on forcing the inherent contradictions of the two spheres (that of the perceptual experience and that of the linguistic experience) into the highest possible relief. Unlike Frank Stella's response to Johns, which forced modernist self-referentiality one step further into the ultimate *cul de sac* of its positivist convictions (his notorious statement "what

11. Marcel Duchamp, interview with Francis Roberts (1963), *Art News,* (December 1968), p. 46.

Sol LeWitt. **Untitled (Red Square, White Letters).**
1962.



you see is what you see" would attest to that just as much as the development of his later work),[12] Sol LeWitt's dialogue (with both Johns and Stella, and ulti-

12. Stella's famous statement was of course made in the conversation between Bruce Glaser, Donald Judd, and himself, in February 1964, and published in *Art News* (September 1966), pp. 55–61. To what extent the problem of this dilemma haunted the generation of Minimal artists becomes evident when almost ten years later, in an interview with Jack Burnham, Robert Morris would still seem to be responding (if perhaps unconsciously) to Stella's notorious statement:

> Painting ceased to interest me. There were certain things about it that seemed very problematic to me. . . . There was a big conflict between the fact of doing this thing, and what it looked like later. It just didn't seem to make much sense to me. Primarily

mately, of course, with Greenberg) developed a dialectical position with regard to the positivist legacy.

In contrast to Stella, his work now revealed that the modernist compulsion for empiricist self-reflexiveness not only originated in the scientific positivism which is the founding logic of capitalism (undergirding its industrial forms of production just as much as its science and theory), but that, for an artistic practice that internalized this positivism by insisting on a purely empiricist approach to vision, there would be a final destiny. This destiny would be to aspire to the condition of tautology.

It is not surprising, then, that when LeWitt formulated his second text on Conceptual Art—in his "Sentences on Conceptual Art" from the spring of 1969—the first sentence should programmatically state the radical difference between the logic of scientific production and that of aesthetic experience:

1. Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.
2. Rational judgments repeat rational judgments.
3. Irrational judgments lead to new experience.[13]

Robert Morris's Paradoxes

> *The problem has been for some time one of ideas—those most admired are the ones with the biggest, most incisive ideas (e.g., Cage & Duchamp) . . . I think that today art is a form of art history.*
>
> —Robert Morris, letter to Henry Flynt, 8/13/1962

Quite evidently, Morris's approach to Duchamp, in the early 1960s, had already been based on reading the readymade in analogy with a Saussurean model of language: a model where meaning is generated by structural relationships. As Morris recalls, his own "fascination with and respect for Duchamp was related to his linguistic fixation, to the idea that all of his operations were ultimately built on a sophisticated understanding of language itself."[14] Accordingly, Morris's early work (from 1961 to 1963) already pointed toward an understanding of Duchamp that transcended the limited definition of the ready-

---

because there was an activity I did in time, and there was a certain method to it. And that didn't seem to have any relationship to the thing at all. There is a certain resolution in the theater where there is real time, and *what you do is what you do.* (emphasis added)

Robert Morris, unpublished interview with Jack Burnham, November 21, 1975, Robert Morris Archive. Quoted in Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 25.

13. Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," first published in *0-9*, New York (1969), and *Art-Language,* Coventry (May 1969), p. 11.

14. Robert Morris as quoted in Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 22.

made as the mere displacement of traditional modes of artistic production by a new aesthetic of the speech act ("this is a work of art if I say so"). And in marked distinction from the Conceptualists' subsequent exclusive focus on the unassisted readymades, Morris had, from the late 1950s when he discovered Duchamp, been particularly engaged with work such as *Three Standard Stoppages* and the *Notes for the Large Glass (The Green Box)*.

Morris's production from the early 1960s, in particular works like *Card File* (1962), *Metered Bulb* (1963), *I-Box* (1963), *Litanies*, and the *Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal*, also entitled *Document* (1963), indicated a reading of Duchamp that clearly went beyond Johns's, leading towards a structural and semiotic definition of the functions of the readymade. As Morris described it retrospectively in his 1970 essay "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making":

> There is a binary swing between the arbitrary and the nonarbitrary or "motivated" which is . . . an historical, evolutionary, or diachronic feature of language's development and change. Language is not plastic art but both are forms of human behavior and the structures of one can be compared to the structures of the other.[15]

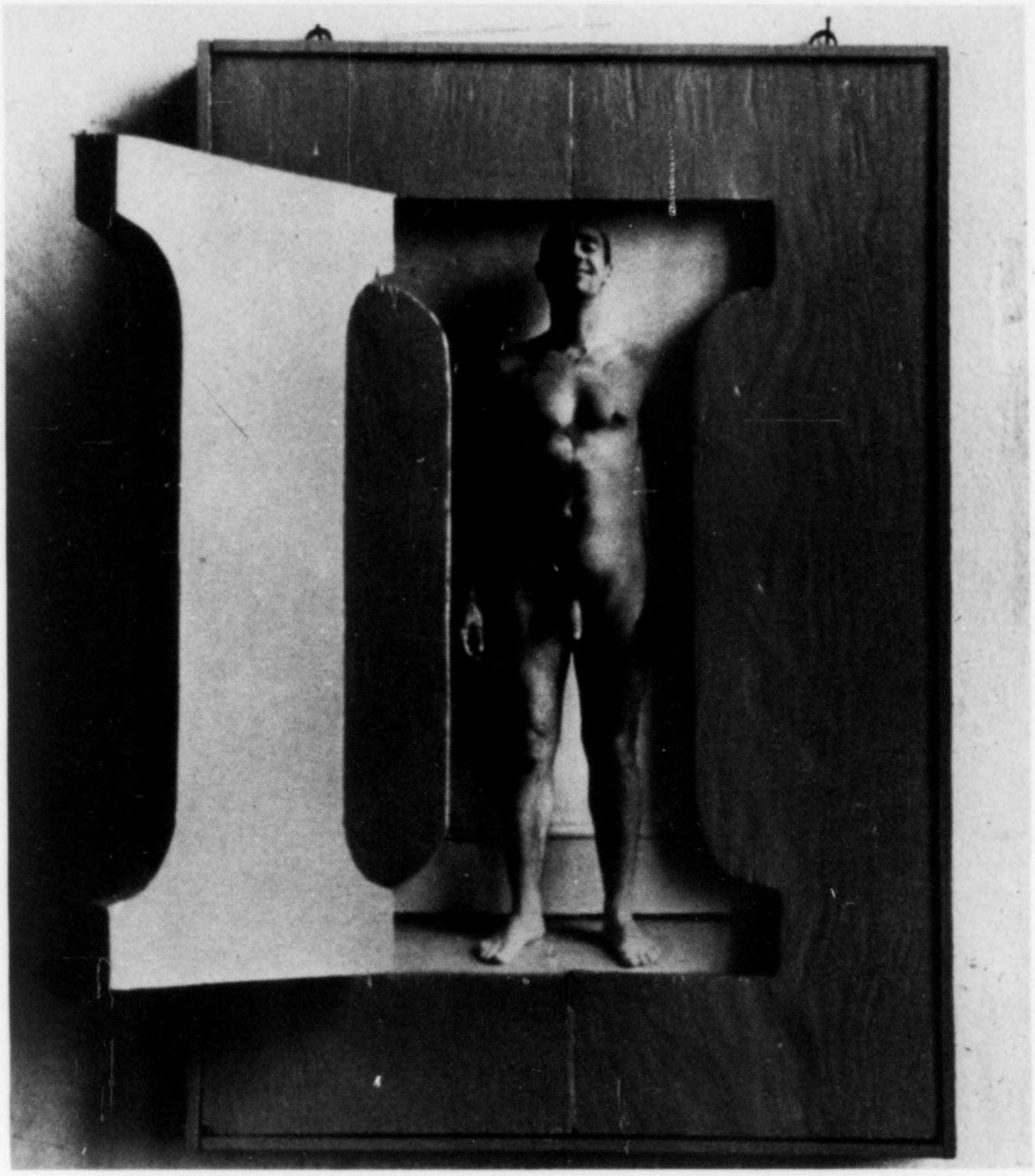
While it is worth noticing that by 1970 Morris already reaffirmed apodictically the ontological character of the category "plastic" art versus that of "language," it was in the early 1960s that his assaults on the traditional concepts of visuality and plasticity had already begun to lay some of the crucial foundations for the development of an art practice emphasizing its parallels, if not identity, with the systems of linguistic signs, i.e., Conceptual Art.

Most importantly, as early as 1961 in his *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, Morris had ruptured both. On the one hand, it dispenses with the Modernist quest for medium-specific purity as much as with its sequel in the positivist conviction of a purely perceptual experience operating in Stella's visual tautologies and the early phases of Minimalism. And on the other, by counteracting the supremacy of the visual with that of an auditory experience of equal if not higher importance, he renewed the Duchampian quest for a nonretinal art. In *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, as much as in the subsequent works, the critique of the hegemony of traditional categories of the visual is enacted not only in the (acoustic or tactile) disturbance of the purity of perceptual experience, but it is performed as well through a literalist act of denying the viewer practically all (at least traditionally defined) visual information.

This strategy of a "perceptual withdrawal" leads in each of the works from the early 1960s to a different analysis of the constituent features of the structured object and the modes of reading it generates. In *I-Box*, for example, the viewer is confronted with a semiotic pun (on the words *I* and *eye*) just as much as

15. Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum*, vol. 9 (April 1970), p. 63.

Robert Morris. I-Box. *1962.*

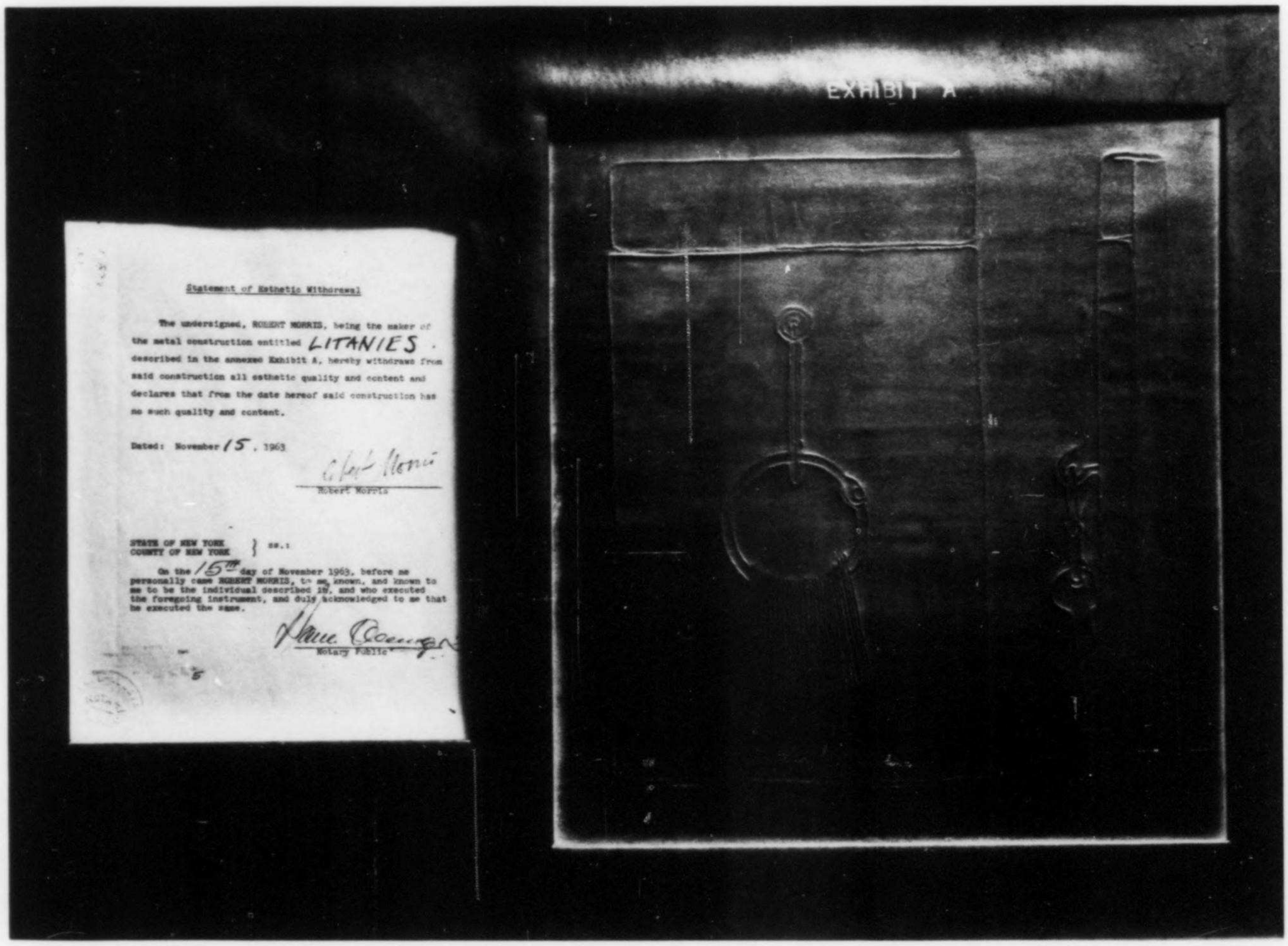


with a structural sleight of hand from the tactile (the viewer has to manipulate the box physically to *see* the *I* of the artist) through the linguistic sign (the letter *I* defines the shape of the framing/display device: the "door" of the box) to the visual representation (the nude photographic portrait of the artist) and back. It is of course this very tripartite division of the aesthetic signifier—its separation into object, linguistic sign, and photographic reproduction—that we will encounter in infinite variations, didactically simplified (to operate as stunning tautologies) and stylistically designed (to take the place of paintings) in Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations* after 1966.

In *Document (Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal)*, Morris takes the literal negation of the visual even further, in clarifying that after Duchamp the readymade is not just a neutral analytic proposition (in the manner of an underlying statement such as "this is a work of art"). Beginning with the readymade, the work of art had become the ultimate subject of a legal definition and the result of institutional validation. In the absence of any specifically visual qualities and due

to the manifest lack of any (artistic) manual competence as a criterion of distinction, all the traditional criteria of aesthetic judgment—of taste and of connoisseurship—have been programmatically voided. The result of this is that the definition of the aesthetic becomes on the one hand a matter of linguistic convention and on the other the function of both a legal contract and an institutional discourse (a discourse of power rather than taste).

This erosion works, then, not just against the hegemony of the visual, but against the possibility of any other aspect of the aesthetic experience as being autonomous and self-sufficient. That the introduction of legalistic language and an administrative style of the material presentation of the artistic object could effect such an erosion had of course been prefigured in Duchamp's practice as well. In 1944 he had hired a notary to inscribe a statement of authenticity on his 1919 *L.H.O.O.Q.*, affirming that ". . . this is to certify that this is the original



Robert Morris. Untitled (Statement of Aesthetic Withdrawal). *1963.*

'ready-made' *L.H.O.O.Q.* Paris 1919." What was possibly still a pragmatic maneuver with Duchamp (although certainly one in line with the pleasure he took in contemplating the vanishing basis for the legitimate definition of the work of art in visual competence and manual skill alone) would soon become one of the constituent features of subsequent developments in Conceptual Art. Most obviously operating in the certificates issued by Piero Manzoni defining persons or partial persons as temporary or lifetime works of art (1960–61), this is to be found at the same time in Yves Klein's certificates assigning zones of immaterial pictorial sensibility to the various collectors who acquired them.

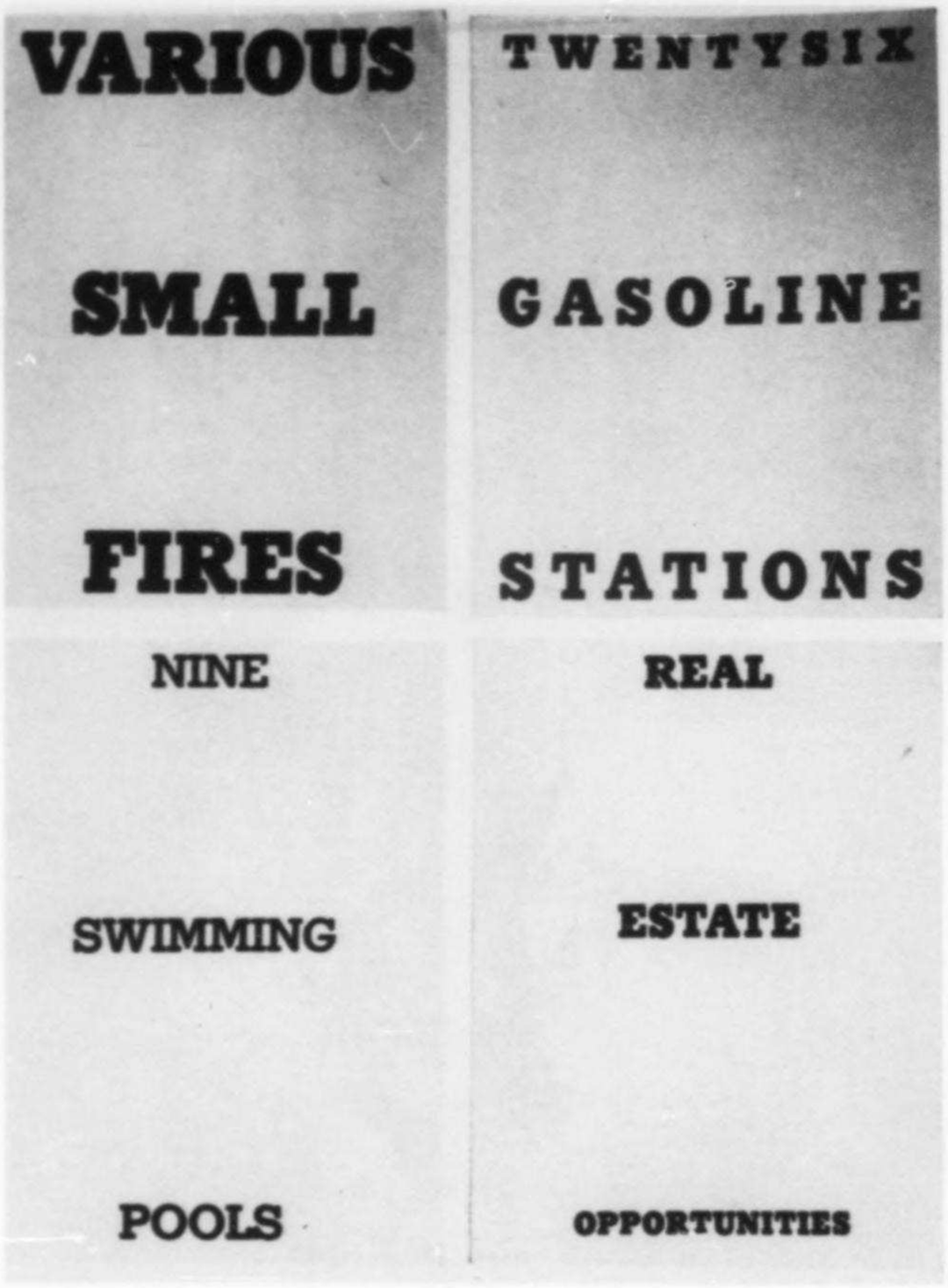
But this aesthetic of linguistic conventions and legalistic arrangements not only denies the validity of the traditional studio aesthetic, it also cancels the aesthetic of production and consumption which had still governed Pop Art and Minimalism.

Just as the modernist critique (and ultimate prohibition) of figurative representation had become the increasingly dogmatic law for pictorial production in the first decade of the twentieth century, so Conceptual Art now instated the prohibition of any and all visuality as the inescapable aesthetic rule for the end of the twentieth century. Just as the readymade had negated not only figurative representation, authenticity, and authorship while introducing repetition and the series (i.e., the law of industrial production) to replace the studio aesthetic of the handcrafted original, Conceptual Art came to displace even that image of the mass-produced object and its aestheticized forms in Pop Art, replacing an aesthetic of industrial production and consumption with an aesthetic of administrative and legal organization and institutional validation.

Edward Ruscha's Books

One major example of these tendencies—acknowledged both by Dan Graham as a major inspiration for his own "Homes for America" and by Kosuth, whose "Art after Philosophy" names him as a proto-Conceptual artist—would be the early book work of Edward Ruscha. Among the key strategies of future Conceptual Art that were initiated by Ruscha in 1963 were the following: to chose the vernacular (e.g., architecture) as referent; to deploy photography systematically as the representational medium; and to develop a new form of distribution (e.g., the commercially produced book as opposed to the traditionally crafted *livre d'artiste.*

Typically, reference to architecture in any form whatever would have been unthinkable in the context of American-type formalism and Abstract Expressionism (or within the European postwar aesthetic for that matter) until the early 1960s. The devotion to a private aesthetic of contemplative experience, with its concomitant absence of any systematic reflection of the social functions of artistic production and their potential and actual publics, had, in fact, precluded any exploration of the interdependence of architectural and artistic production, be it



Edward Ruscha. Four Books. *1962–1966.*

Andy Warhol. From Thirteen Most Wanted Men. *1964.*

even in the most superficial and trivial forms of architectural decor.[16] It was not until the emergence of Pop Art in the early 1960s, in particular in the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, Claes Oldenburg, and Edward Ruscha, that the references to monumental sculpture (even in its negation as the *Anti-Monument*) and to vernacular architecture reintroduced (even if only by implication) a reflection on public (architectural and domestic) space, thereby foregrounding the absence of a developed artistic reflection on the problematic of the contemporary publics.

In January 1963 (the year of Duchamp's first American retrospective, held at the Pasadena Art Museum), Ruscha, a relatively unknown Los Angeles artist, decided to publish a book entitled *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations.* The book, modest

16. It would be worthwhile to explore the fact that artists like Arshile Gorky under the impact of the WPA program would still have been concerned with the aesthetics of mural painting when he was commissioned to decorate the Newark Airport building, and that even Pollock tinkered with the idea of an architectural dimension for his paintings, wondering whether they could be transformed into architectural panels. As is well known, Mark Rothko's involvement with the Seagram Corporation to produce a set of decorative panels for their corporate headquarters ended in disaster, and Barnett Newman's synagogue project was abandoned as well. All of these exceptions would confirm the rule that the postwar aesthetic had undergone the most rigorous privatization and a reversal of the reflection on the inextricable link between artistic production and public social experience as they had marked the 1920s.



in format and production, was as removed from the tradition of the artist's book as its iconography was opposed to every aspect of the official American art of the 1950s and early '60s: the legacy of Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting. The book was, however, not so alien to the artistic thought of the emerging generation, if one remembers that the year before an unknown artist from New York by the name of Andy Warhol had exhibited a serial arrangement of thirty-two stenciled paintings depicting Campbell Soup cans arranged like objects on shelves in the Ferus Gallery. While both Warhol and Ruscha accepted a notion of public experience that was inescapably contained in the conditions of consumption, both artists altered the mode of production as well as the form of distribution of their work such that a different public was potentially addressed.

Ruscha's vernacular iconography evolved to the same extent as Warhol's had from the Duchamp and Cage legacy of an aesthetic of "indifference," and from the commitment to an antihierarchical organization of a universally valid facticity, operating as total affirmation. Indeed, random sampling and aleatory choice from an infinity of possible objects (Ruscha's *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations,* Warhol's *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*) would soon become essential strategies of the aesthetic of Conceptual Art: one thinks of Alighiero Boetti's *The Thousand Longest Rivers*, of Robert Barry's *One Billion Dots,* of On Kawara's *One Million*

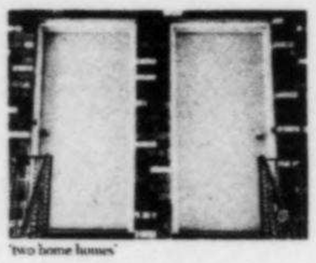
Years, or, most significantly in this context, of Doug Huebler's life-long project, entitled *Variable Piece: 70.* This work claims to document photographically "the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner. Editions of this work will be periodically issued in a variety of topical modes: '100,000 people,' '1,000,000 people,' '10,000,000 people,' . . . etc." Or again, there are the works by Stanley Brouwn or Hanne Darboven where in each case an arbitrary, abstract principle of pure quantification replaces traditional principles of pictorial or sculptural organization and/or compositional relational order.

In the same manner that Ruscha's books shifted the formal organization of the representation, the mode of presentation itself became transformed: instead of lifting photographic (or print-derived) imagery from mass-cultural sources and transforming these images into painting (as Warhol and the Pop Artists had practiced it), Ruscha would now deploy photography directly, in an appropriate printing medium. And it was a particularly laconic type of photography at that, one that explicitly situated itself as much outside of all conventions of art photography as outside of those of the venerable tradition of documentary photography, least of all that of "concerned" photography. This devotion to a deadpan, anonymous, amateurish approach to photographic form corresponds exactly to Ruscha's iconographic choice of the architectural banal. Thus at all three levels —iconography, representational form, mode of distribution—the given forms of artistic object no longer seemed acceptable in their traditionally specialized and privileged positions. As Victor Burgin put it with hindsight: "One of the things Conceptual Art attempted was the dismantling of the hierarchy of media according to which painting (sculpture trailing slightly behind it) is assumed inherently superior to, most notably, photography."[17]

Accordingly, even in 1965–66, with the earliest stages of Conceptual practices, we witness the emergence of diametrically opposed approaches: Joseph Kosuth's *Proto-Investigations* on the one hand (according to their author conceived and produced in 1965);[18] and a work such as Dan Graham's *Homes for*

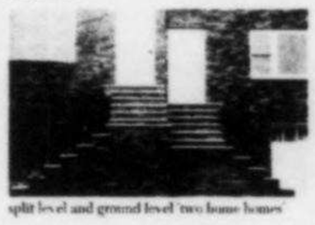
17. Victor Burgin, "The Absence of Presence," in *The End of Art Theory* (Atlantic Highlands, 1986), p. 34.

18. In the preparation of this essay, I have not been able to find a single source or document that would confirm with definite credibility Kosuth's claim that these works of the *Proto-Investigations* were actually produced and existed physically in 1965 or 1966, when he (at that time twenty years old) was still a student at the School of Visual Arts in New York. Nor was Kosuth able to provide any documents to make the claims verifiable. By contrast these claims were explicitly contested by all the artists I interviewed who knew Kosuth at that time, none of them remembering seeing any of the *Proto-Investigations* before February 1967, in the exhibition *Non-Anthropomorphic Art by Four Young Artists,* organized by Joseph Kosuth at the Lannis Gallery. The artists with whom I conducted interviews were Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner. I am not necessarily suggesting that the *Proto-Investigations* could not have been done by Kosuth at the age of twenty (after all, Frank Stella had painted his *Black Paintings* at age twenty-three), or that the logical steps



'two home houses'

Moonstone Grey

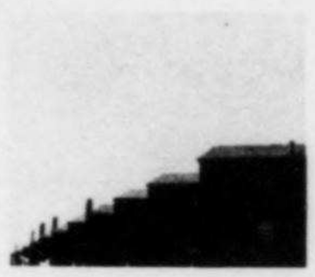


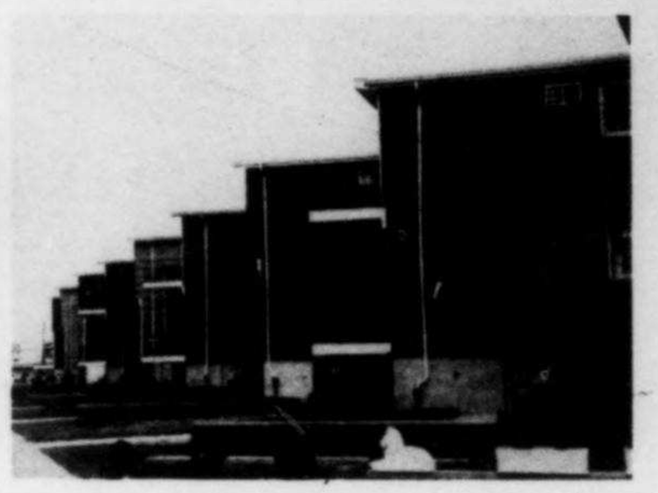
split level and ground level 'two home homes'



Dislike'









Homes for America

Early 20th-Century Possessable House to the Quasi-Discrete Cell of '66

D. GRAHAM

Bellaplain	Garden City
Brooklawn	Garden City Park
Colonia	Greenlawn
Colonia Manor	Island Park
Fair Haven	Levittown
Fair Lawn	Middleville
Greenfields Village	New City Park
Green Village	Pine Lawn
Plainsboro	Plainview
Pleasant Grove	Plandome Manor
Pleasant Plains	Pleasantside
Sunset Hill Garden	Pleasantville

Large-scale 'tract' housing developments constitute the new city. They are located everywhere. They are not particularly bound to existing communities; they fail to develop either regional characteristics or separate identity. These projects date from the end of World War II when in southern California speculators or 'operative' builders adapted mass production techniques to quickly build many houses for the defense workers over-concentrated there. This 'California Method' consisted simply of determining in advance the exact amount and lengths of pieces of lumber and multiplying them by the number of standardized houses to be built. A cutting yard was set up near the site of the project to saw rough lumber into those sizes. By mass buying, greater use of machines and factory produced parts assembly line standardization, multiple units were easily fabricated.

Each house in a development is a lightly constructed 'shell' although this fact is often concealed by fake (half-stone) brick walls. Shells can be added or subtracted easily. The standard unit is a box or a series of boxes, sometimes contemptuously called 'pillboxes.' When the box has a sharply oblique roof it is called a 'Cape Cod.' When it is longer than wide it is a 'ranch.' A two-story house is usually called 'colonial.' If it consists of contiguous boxes with one slightly higher elevation it is a 'split level.' Such stylistic differentiation is advantageous to the base structure (with the possible exception of the split level whose plan simplifies construction on discontinuous ground levels).

There is a recent trend toward 'two home homes' which are two boxes split by adjoining walls and having separate entrances. The left and right hand units are mirror reproductions of each other. Often sold as private units are strings of apartment like, quasi-discrete cells formed by subdividing laterally an extended rectangular parallelepiped into as many as ten or twelve separate dwellings.

Developers usually build large groups of individual homes sharing similar floor plans and whose overall grouping possesses a discrete floor plan. Regional shopping centers and industrial parks are sometimes integrated as well into the general scheme. Each development is sectioned into blocked-out areas containing a series of identical or sequentially related types of houses all of which have uniform or staggered set-backs and land plots.

The logic relating each sectioned part to the entire plan follows a systematic plan. A development contains a limited, set number of house models. For instance, Cape Coral, a Florida project, advertises eight different models:

A The Sonata
B The Concerto
C The Overture
D The Ballet
E The Prebelo
F The Serenade
G The Nocturne
H The Rhapsody

AABBCCDD	ABCDABCD
AABBDDCC	ABDCABDC
AACCBBDD	ACBDACBD
AACCDDBB	ACDBACDB
AADDCCBB	ADBCADBC
AADDBBCC	ADCBADCB
BBAACCDD	BADCBADC
BBAADDCC	BACDBACD
BBCCAADD	BCADBCAD
BBCCDDAA	BCDABCDA
BBDDAACC	BDACBDAC
BBDDCCAA	BDCABDCA
CCAABBDD	CABDCABD
CCAADDBB	CADBCADB
CCBBDDAA	CBADCBAD
CCBBAADD	CBDACBDA
CCDDAABB	CDABCDAB
CCDDBBAA	CDBACDBA
DDAABBCC	DACBDACB
DDAACCBB	DABCDABC
DDBBAACC	DBACDBAC
DDBBCCAA	DBCADBCA
DDCCAABB	DCABDCAB
DDCCBBAA	DCBADCBA

The 8 color variables were equally distributed among the house exteriors. The first buyers were more likely to have obtained their first choice in color. Family units had to make a choice based on the available colors which also took account of both husband and wife's likes and dislikes. Adult male and female color likes and dislikes were compared to a survey of the homeowners:

'Like'

Male	Female
Skyway	Skyway Blue
Colonial Red	Lawn Green
Patio White	Nickle
Yellow Chiffon	Colonial Red
Lawn Green	Yellow Chiffon
Nickle	Patio White
Fawn	Moonstone Grey
Moonstone Grey	Fawn

'Dislike'

Male	Female
Lawn Green	Patio White
Colonial Red	Fawn
Patio White	Colonial Red
Moonstone Grey	Moonstone Grey
Fawn	Yellow Chiffon
Yellow Chiffon	Lawn Green
Nickle	Skyway blue
Skyway Blue	Nickle

A given development might use, perhaps, four of these possibilities as an arbitrary scheme for different sections, then select four from another scheme which utilizes the remaining four unused models and colors, then select four from another scheme which utilizes all eight models and eight colors; then four from another scheme which utilizes a single model and all eight colors (or four or two colors); and finally utilize that single scheme for one model and one color. This serial logic might follow consistently until, at the edges it is abruptly terminated by pre-existent highways, bowling alleys, shopping plazas, car lots, discount houses, lumber yards or factories.

Although there is perhaps some aesthetic precedence in the row houses which are indigenous to many older cities along the east coast, and built with uniform facades and set-backs early this century, housing developments as an architectural phenomenon seem peculiarly gratuitous. They exist apart from prior standards of 'good' architecture. They were not built to satisfy individual needs or tastes. The owner is completely tangential to the product's completion. His home isn't really possessable in the old sense; it wasn't designed to 'last for generations', and outside of its immediate 'here and now' context it is useless, designed to be thrown away. Both architecture and craftsmanship as values are subverted by the dependence on simplified and easily duplicated techniques of fabrication and standardized modular plans. Contingencies such as mass production technology and land use economics make the final decisions, denying the architect his former 'unique' role. Developments stand in an altered relationship to their environment. Designed to fill in 'dead' land areas, the houses needn't adapt to or attempt to withstand Nature. There is no organic unity connecting the land site and the house. Both are without roots — separate parts in a larger predetermined, synthetic order.

Top left: set-back rows (rear view'). Bayonne, N.J.

Top right: set back rows (front view'). Bayonne, N.J.

Bottom right: two rows of set-backs, Jersey City, N.J.

Dan Graham. Homes for America (Arts Magazine). *December 1966.*

America on the other. Published in *Arts Magazine* in December 1966, the latter is a work which—unknown to most and long unrecognized—programmatically emphasized structural contingency and contextuality, addressing crucial questions of presentation and distribution, of audience and authorship. At the same time the work linked Minimalism's esoteric and self-reflexive aesthetics of permutation to a perspective on the architecture of mass culture (thereby redefining the legacy of Pop Art). The Minimalists' detachment from any representation of contemporary social experience upon which Pop Art had insisted, however furtively, resulted from their attempt to construct models of visual meaning and experience that juxtaposed formal reduction with a structural and phenomenological model of perception.

---

fusing Duchamp and Reinhardt with Minimalism and Pop Art leading up to the *Proto-Investigations* could not have been taken by an artist of Kosuth's historical awareness and strategic intelligence. But I am saying that none of the work dated by Kosuth to 1965 or 1966 can—until further evidence is produced—actually be documented as 1965 or 1966 or dated with any credibility. By contrast, the word paintings of On Kawara (whose studio Kosuth visited frequently at that time), such as *Something*, are reproduced and documented.

By contrast, Graham's work argued for an analysis of (visual) meaning that defined signs as both structurally constituted within the relations of language's system *and* grounded in the referent of social and political experience. Further, Graham's dialectical conception of visual representation polemically collapsed the difference between the spaces of production and those of reproduction (what Seth Siegelaub would, in 1969, call primary and secondary information).[19] Anticipating the work's actual modes of distribution and reception within its very structure of production, *Homes for America* eliminated the difference between the artistic construct and its (photographic) reproduction, the difference between an exhibition of art objects and the photograph of its installation, the difference between the architectural space of the gallery and the space of the catalogue and the art magazine.

Joseph Kosuth's Tautologies

In opposition to this, Kosuth was arguing, in 1969, precisely for the continuation and expansion of modernism's positivist legacy, and doing so with what must have seemed to him at the time the most radical and advanced tools of that tradition: Wittgenstein's logical positivism and language philosophy (he emphatically affirmed this continuity when, in the first part of "Art after Philosophy," he states, "Certainly linguistic philosophy can be considered the heir to empiricism . . ."). Thus, even while claiming to displace the formalism of Greenberg and Fried, he in fact updated modernism's project of self-reflexiveness. For Kosuth stabilized the notion of a disinterested and self-sufficient art by subjecting both —the Wittgensteinian model of the language game as well as the Duchampian model of the readymade—to the strictures of a model of meaning that operates in the modernist tradition of that paradox Michel Foucault has called modernity's "empirico-transcendental" thought. This is to say that in 1968 artistic production is still the result, for Kosuth, of artistic intention as it constitutes itself above all in self-reflexiveness (even if it is now discursive rather than perceptual, epistemological rather than essentialist).[20]

19. "For many years it has been well known that more people are aware of an artist's work through (1) the printed media or (2) conversation than by direct confrontation with the art itself. For painting and sculpture, where the visual presence—color, scale, size, location—is important to the work, the photograph or verbalization of that work is a bastardization of the art. But when art concerns itself with things not germane to physical presence, its intrinsic (communicative) value is not altered by its presentation in printed media. The use of catalogues and books to communicate (and disseminate) art is the most neutral means to present the new art. The catalogue can now act as the primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information *about* art in magazines, catalogues, etc. and in some cases the 'exhibition' can be the 'catalogue.'" (Seth Siegelaub, "On Exhibitions and the World at Large" [interview with Charles Harrison], *Studio International,* [December 1969].)

20. This differentiation is developed in Hal Foster's excellent discussion of these paradigmatic differences as they emerge first in Minimalism in his essay "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Individuals* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), p. 162–183.

At the very moment when the complementary formations of Pop and Minimal Art had, for the first time, succeeded in criticizing the legacy of American-type formalism and its prohibition of referentiality, this project is all the more astounding. The privileging of the literal over the referential axis of (visual) language—as Greenberg's formalist aesthetic had entailed—had been countered in Pop Art by a provocative devotion to mass-cultural iconography. Then, both Pop and Minimal Art had continuously emphasized the universal presence of industrial means of reproduction as inescapable framing conditions for artistic means of production, or, to put it differently, they had emphasized that the aesthetic of the studio had been irreversibly replaced by an aesthetic of production and consumption. And finally, Pop and Minimal Art had exhumed the repressed history of Duchamp (and Dadaism at large), phenomena equally unacceptable to the reigning aesthetic thought of the late 1950s and early '60s. Kosuth's narrow reading of the readymade is astonishing for yet another reason. In 1969, he explicitly claimed that he had encountered the work of Duchamp primarily through the mediation of Johns and Morris rather than through an actual study of Duchamp's writings and works.[21]

As we have seen above, the first two phases of Duchamp's reception by American artists from the early 1950s (Johns and Rauschenberg) to Warhol and Morris in the early 1960s had gradually opened up the range of implications of Duchamp's readymades.[22] It is therefore all the more puzzling to see that after 1968—what one could call the beginning of the third phase of Duchamp

21. See note 5 above.

22. As Rosalind Krauss has suggested, at least Johns's understanding at that point already transcended the earlier reading of the readymade as merely an aesthetic of declaration and intention:

> If we consider that Stella's painting was involved early on, in the work of Johns, then Johns's interpretation of Duchamp and the readymade—an interpretation diametrically opposed to that of the Conceptualist group outlined above—has some relevance in this connection. For Johns clearly saw the readymade as pointing to the fact that there need be *no* connection between the final art object and the psychological matrix from which it issued, since in the case of the readymade this possibility is precluded from the start. The *Fountain* was not made (fabricated) by Duchamp, only selected by him. Therefore there is no way in which the urinal can "express" the artist. It is like a sentence which is put into the world unsanctioned by the voice of a speaker standing behind it. Because maker and artist are evidently separate, there is no way for the urinal to serve as an externalization of the state or states of mind of the artist as he made it. And by not functioning within the grammar of the aesthetic personality, the *Fountain* can be seen as putting distance between itself and the notion of personality per se. The relationship between Johns's *American Flag* and his reading of the *Fountain* is just this: the arthood of the *Fountain* is not legitimized by its having issued stroke-by-stroke from the private psyche of the artist; indeed it could not. So it is like a man absentmindedly humming and being dumbfounded if asked if he had meant that tune or rather another. That is a case in which it is not clear how the grammar of intention might apply.
>
> Rosalind Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility," *Artforum,* vol. 12 (November 1973), pp. 43–52, n. 4.

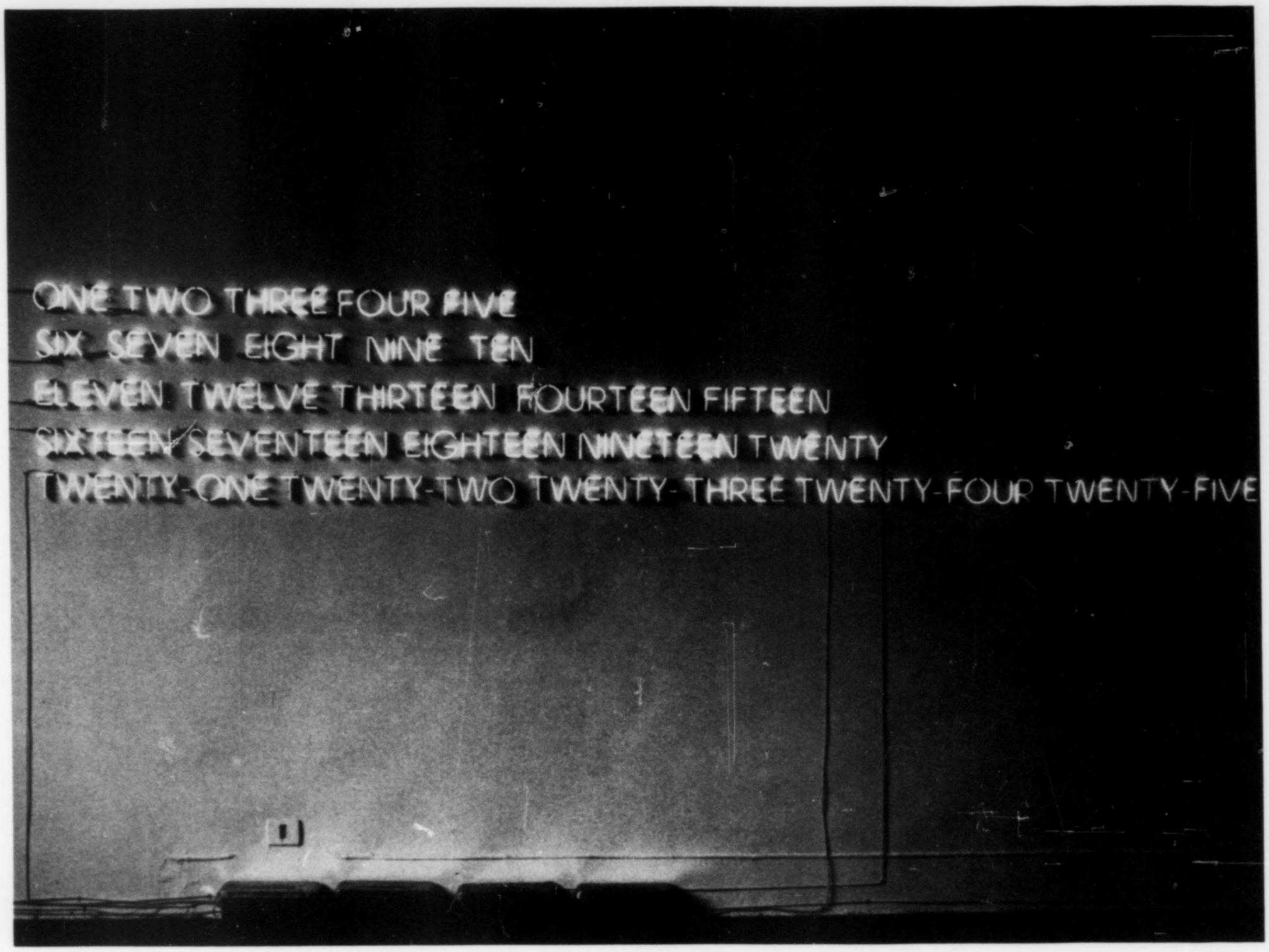
reception—the understanding of this model by Conceptual Artists still foregrounds intentional declaration over contextualization. This holds true not only for Kosuth's "Art after Philosophy," but equally for the British Art & Language Group, as, in the introduction to the first issue of the journal in May 1969, they write:

> To place an object in a context where the attention of any spectator will be conditioned toward the expectancy of recognizing art objects. For example placing what up to then had been an object of alien visual characteristics to those expected within the framework of an art ambience, or by virtue of the artist declaring the object to be an art object whether or not it was in an art ambience. Using these techniques what appeared to be entirely new morphologies were held out to qualify for the status of the members of the class "art objects."
>
> For example Duchamp's "Readymades" and Rauschenberg's "Portrait of Iris Clert."[23]

A few months later Kosuth based his argument for the development of Conceptual Art on just such a restricted reading of Duchamp. For in its limiting view of the history and the typology of Duchamp's oeuvre, Kosuth's argument —like that of Art & Language—focuses exclusively on the "unassisted readymades." Thereby early Conceptual theory not only leaves out Duchamp's painterly work but avoids such an eminently crucial work as the *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913), not to mention *The Large Glass* (1915–23) or the *Etants donné* (1946–66) or the 1943 *Boîte en valise*. But what is worse is that even the reading of the unassisted readymades is itself extremely narrow, reducing the readymade model in fact merely to that of an analytical proposition. Typically, both Art & Language and Kosuth's "Art after Philosophy" refer to Robert Rauschenberg's notorious example of speech-act aesthetics ("This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so") based on the rather limited understanding of the readymade as an act of willful artistic declaration. This understanding, typical of the early 1950s, continues in Judd's famous lapidary norm (and patently nonsensical statement), quoted a little later in Kosuth's text: "if someone says it's art, then it is art. . . ."

In 1969, Art & Language and Kosuth shared in foregrounding the "analytic proposition" inherent in each readymade, namely the statement "this is a work of art," over and above all other aspects implied by the readymade model (its structural logic, its features as an industrially produced object of use and consumption, its seriality, and the dependence of its meaning on context). And most importantly, according to Kosuth, this means that artistic propositions constitute themselves in the negation of all referentiality, be it that of the historical context of the (artistic) sign or that of its social function and use:

23. Introduction, *Art & Language*, vol. 1, no. 1 (May 1969), p. 5.



> Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context-as-art, they provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art. Thus, that it is art is true *a priori* (which is what Judd means when he states that "if someone calls it art, it's art").[24]

Or, a little later in the same year, he wrote in *The Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14* (a text that has mysteriously vanished from the collection of his writings):

> If one considers that the forms art takes as being art's language one can realize then that a work of art is a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment on art. An analysis of proposi-

24. Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy," *Studio International,* nos. 915–917 (October–December 1969). Quoted here from Joseph Kosuth, *The Making of Meaning,* p. 155.

Joseph Kosuth. Five Fives (to Donald Judd). *1965 (?).*

> tion types shows art "works" as analytic propositions. Works of art that try to tell us something about the world are bound to fail. . . . The absence of reality in art is exactly art's reality.[25]

Kosuth's programmatic efforts to reinstate a law of discursive self-reflexiveness in the guise of a critique of Greenberg's and Fried's visual and formal self-reflexiveness are all the more astonishing since a considerable part of "Art after Philosophy" is dedicated to the elaborate construction of a genealogy for Conceptual Art, in and of itself a historical project (e.g., "All art [after Duchamp] is conceptual [in nature] because art exists only conceptually"). This very construction of a lineage already contextualizes and historicizes, of course, in "telling us something about the world"—of art, at least; that is, it unwittingly operates like a synthetic proposition (even if only within the conventions of a particular language system) and therefore denies both the purity and the possibility of an autonomous artistic production that would function, within art's own language-system, as mere analytic proposition.

Perhaps one might try to argue that, in fact, Kosuth's renewed cult of the tautology brings the Symbolist project to fruition. It might be said, for example, that this renewal is the logical extension of Symbolism's exclusive concern with the conditions and the theorization of art's own modes of conception and reading. Such an argument, however, would still not allay questions concerning the altered historical framework within which such a cult must find its determination. Even within its Symbolist origins, the modernist theology of art was already gripped by a polarized opposition. For a religious veneration of self-referential plastic form as the pure negation of rationalist and empiricist thought can simultaneously be read as nothing other than the inscription and instrumentalization of precisely that order—even or particularly in its negation—within the realm of the aesthetic itself (the almost immediate and universal application of Symbolism for the cosmos of late nineteenth-century commodity production would attest to this).

This dialectic came to claim its historical rights all the more forcefully in the contemporary, postwar situation. For given the conditions of a rapidly accelerating fusion of the culture industry with the last bastions of an autonomous sphere of high art, self-reflexiveness increasingly (and inevitably) came to shift along the borderline between logical positivism and the advertisement campaign. And further, the rights and rationale of a newly established postwar middle class, one which came fully into its own in the 1960s, could assume their aesthetic identity in the very model of the tautology and its accompanying aesthetic of administration. For this aesthetic identity is structured much the way this class's social identity is, namely, as one of merely administering labor and production (rather than producing) and of the distribution of commodities. This class, having be-

25. Joseph Kosuth, *The Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14.*

come firmly established as the most common and powerful social class of postwar society, is the one which, as H. G. Helms wrote in his book on Max Stirner, "deprives itself voluntarily of the rights to intervene within the political decision-making process in order to arrange itself more efficiently with the existing political conditions."[26]

This aesthetic of the newly established power of administration found its first fully developed literary voice in a phenomenon like the *nouveau roman* of Robbe-Grillet. It was no accident that such a profoundly positivist literary project would then serve, in the American context, as a point of departure for Conceptual Art. But, paradoxically, it was at this very same historical moment that the social functions of the tautological principle found their most lucid analysis, through a critical examination launched in France.

In the early writing of Roland Barthes one finds, simultaneously with the *nouveau roman*, a discussion of the tautological:

> *Tautologie.* Yes, I know, it's an ugly word. But so is the thing. Tautology is the verbal device which consists in defining like by like ("*Drama is drama*"). . . . One takes refuge in tautology as one does in fear, or anger, or sadness, when one is at a loss for an explanation. . . . In tautology, there is a double murder: one kills rationality because it resists one; one kills language because it betrays one. . . . Now any refusal of language is a death. Tautology creates a dead, a motionless world.[27]

Ten years later, at the same moment that Kosuth was discovering it as the central aesthetic project of his era, the phenomenon of the tautological was once again opened to examination in France. But now, rather than being discussed as a linguistic and rhetorical form, it was analyzed as a general social effect: as both the inescapable reflex of behavior and, once the requirements of the advanced culture industry (i.e., advertisement and media) have been put in place in the formation of spectacle culture, a universal condition of experience. What still remains open for discussion, of course, is the extent to which Conceptual Art of a certain type shared these conditions, or even enacted and implemented them in the sphere of the aesthetic—accounting, perhaps, for its subsequent proximity and success within a world of advertisement strategists—or, alternatively, the extent to which it merely inscribed itself into the inescapable logic of a totally administered world, as Adorno's notorious term identified it. Thus Guy Debord noted in 1967:

> The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. It is the sun

26. Hans G. Helms, *Die Ideologie der anonymen Gesellschaft* (Cologne, 1968), p. 3.
27. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* pp. 152–53.

> which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.[28]

A Tale of Many Squares

The visual forms that correspond most accurately to the linguistic form of the tautology are the square and its stereometric rotation, the cube. Not surprisingly, these two forms proliferated in the painterly and sculptural production of the early- to mid-1960s. This was the moment when a rigorous self-reflexiveness was bent on examining the traditional boundaries of modernist sculptural objects to the same extent that a phenomenological reflection of viewing space was insistant on reincorporating architectural parameters into the conception of painting and sculpture.

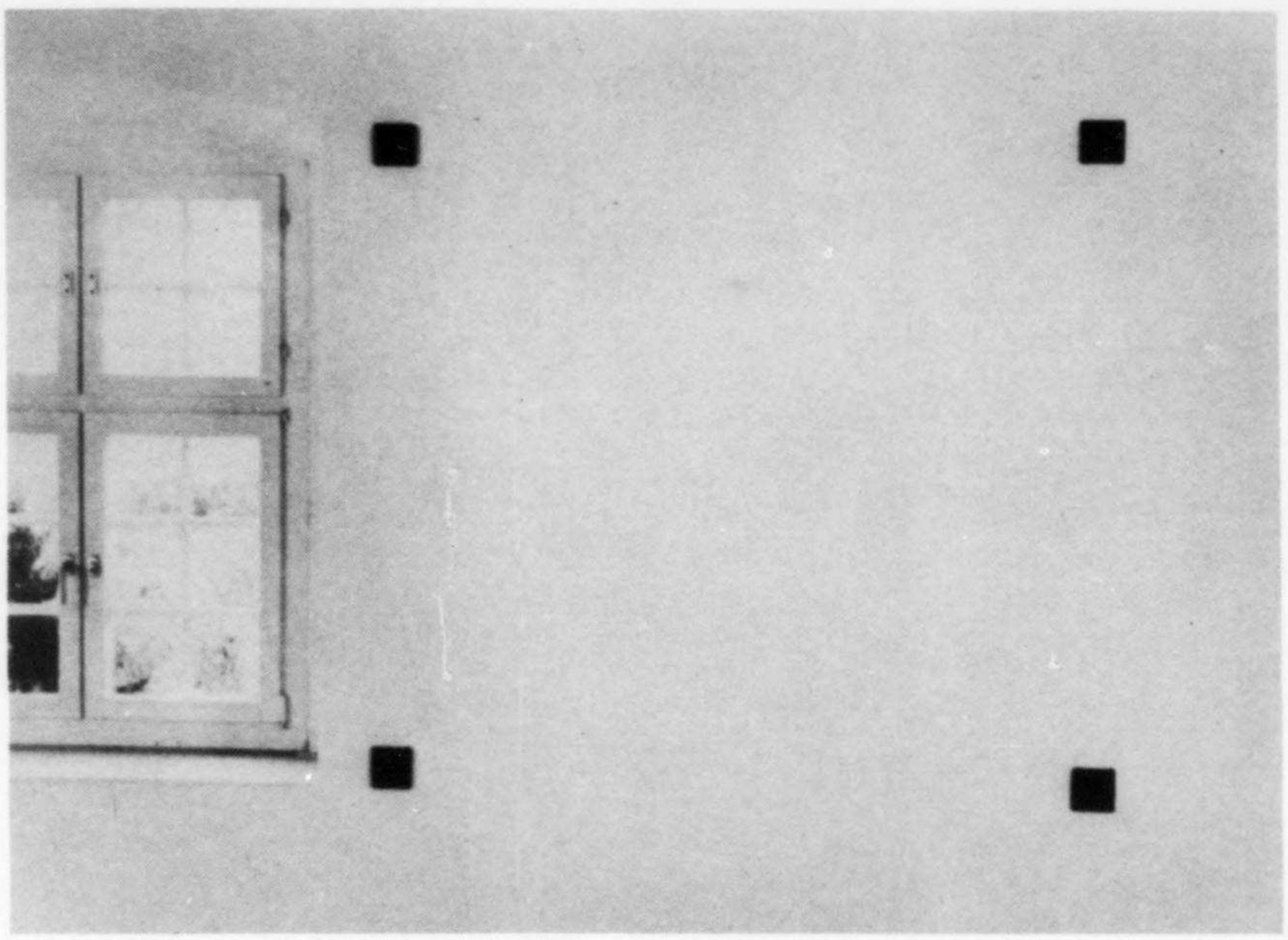
So thoroughly did the square and the cube permeate the vocabulary of Minimalist sculpture that in 1967 Lucy Lippard published a questionnaire investigating the role of these forms, which she had circulated among many artists. In his response to the questionnaire, Donald Judd, in one of his many attempts to detach the morphology of Minimalism from similar investigations of the historical avant-garde in the earlier part of the twentieth century, displayed the agressive dimension of tautological thought (disguised as pragmatism, as was usual in his case) by simply denying that any historical meaning could be inherent in geometric or stereometric forms:

> I don't think there is anything special about squares, which I don't use, or cubes. They certainly don't have any intrinsic meaning or superiority. One thing though, cubes are a lot easier to make than spheres. The main virtue of geometric shapes is that they are not organic, as all art otherwise is. A form that's neither geometric nor organic would be a great discovery.[29]

As the central form of visual self-reflexiveness, the square abolishes the traditional spatial parameters of verticality and horizontality, thereby canceling the metaphysics of space and its conventions of reading. It is in this way that the square (beginning with Malevich's 1915 *Black Square*) incessantly points to itself:

28. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970), n. p., section 13. First published, Paris, 1967.

29. Donald Judd, in Lucy Lippard, "Homage to the Square," *Art in America* (July–August, 1967), pp. 50–57. How pervasive the square actually was in the art of the early- to mid-1960s is all too obvious: the work from the late '50s, such as paintings by Reinhardt and Ryman and a large number of sculptures from the early 1960s onwards (Andre, LeWitt, and Judd), deployed the tautological form in endless variations. Paradoxically even Kosuth's work from the mid-1960s—while emphasizing its departure from painting's traditional object status and visual/formal design—continues to display the definitions of words on large, black, canvas *squares*. By contrast one only has to think of Jasper Johns's or Barnett Newman's work as immediate predecessors of that generation to recognize how infrequent, if not altogether absent, the square was at that moment.



Robert Barry. Painting in Four Parts. *1967.*

as spatial perimeter, as plane, as surface, and, functioning simultaneously, as support. But, with the very success of this self-referential gesture, marking the form out as purely pictorial, the square painting paradoxically but inevitably assumes the character of a relief/object situated in actual space. It thereby invites a viewing/reading of spatial contingency and architectural imbeddedness, insisting on the imminent and irreversible transition from painting to sculpture.

This transition was performed in the proto-Conceptual art of the early- to mid-1960s in a fairly delimited number of specific pictorial operations. It occurred, first of all, through the emphasis on painting's *opacity*. The object-status of the painterly structure could be underscored by unifying and homogenizing its surface through monochromy, serialized texture, and gridded compositional structure; or it could be emphasized by literally sealing a painting's spatial transparency, by simply altering its material support: shifting it from canvas to unstretched fabric or metal. This type of investigation was developed systematically, for example, in the proto-Conceptual paintings of Robert Ryman, who employed all of these options separately or in varying combinations in the early- to mid-1960s; or, after 1965, in the paintings of Robert Barry, Daniel Buren, and Niele Toroni.

Secondly—and in a direct inversion and countermovement to the first—object-status could be achieved by emphasizing, in a literalist manner, painting's *transparency*. This entailed establishing a dialectic between pictorial surface, frame, and architectural support by either a literal opening up of the painterly support, as in Sol LeWitt's early *Structures*, or by the insertion of translucent or transparent surfaces into the conventional frame of viewing, as in Ryman's fiberglass paintings, Buren's early nylon paintings, or Michael Asher's and Ger-

Robert Morris. Four Mirrored Cubes. *1965.*

hard Richter's glass panes in metal frames, both emerging between 1965 and 1967. Or, as in the early work of Robert Barry (such as his *Painting in Four Parts,* 1967, in the FER-Collection), where the square, monochrome, canvas objects now seemed to assume the role of mere architectural demarcation. Functioning as decentered painterly objects, they delimit the *external* architectural space in a manner analogous to the serial or central composition of earlier Minimal work that still defined internal pictorial or sculptural space. Or, as in Barry's square canvas (1967), which is to be placed at the exact center of the architectural support wall, a work is conceived as programmatically shifting the reading of it from a centered, unified, pictorial object to an experience of architectural contingence, and as thereby incorporating the supplementary and overdetermining strategies of curatorial placement and conventions of installation (traditionally disavowed in painting and sculpture) into the *conception* of the work itself.

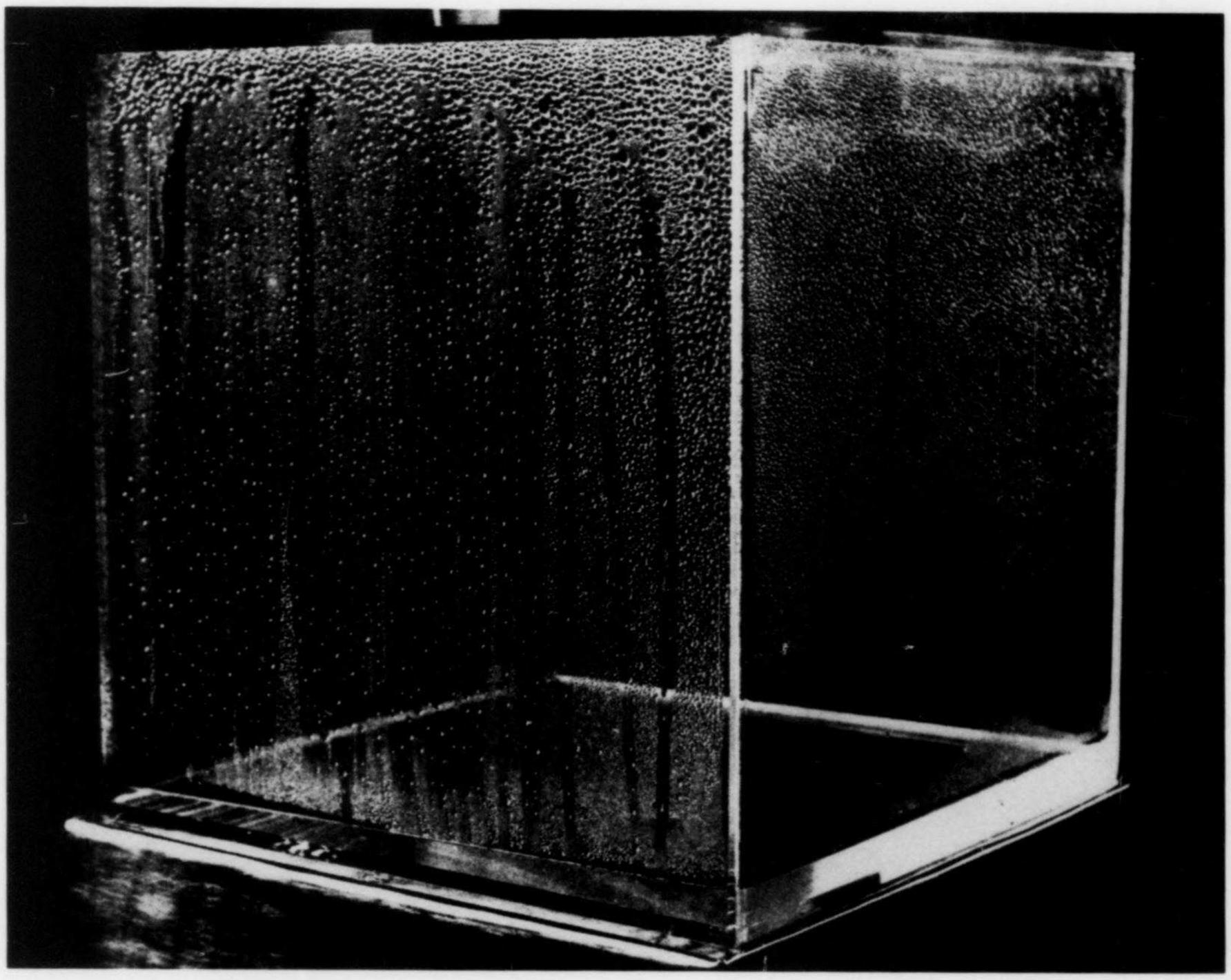
And thirdly—and most often—this transition is performed in the "simple" rotation of the square, as originally evident in Naum Gabo's famous diagram from 1937 where a volumetric and a stereometric cube are juxtaposed in order to clarify the inherent continuity between planar, stereometric, and volumetric forms. This rotation generated cubic structures as diverse as Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963–65), Robert Morris's *Four Mirrored Cubes* (1965), or Larry Bell's simultaneously produced *Mineral Coated Glass Cubes*, and



Hans Haacke. Condensation Cube. *1963–65.*

Sol LeWitt's *Wall-Floor Piece (Three Squares),* 1966. All of these (beyond sharing the obvious morphology of the cube) engage in the dialectic of opacity and transparency (or in the synthesis of that dialectic in mirror-reflection as in Morris's *Mirrored Cubes* or Larry Bell's aestheticized variations of the theme). At the same time that they engage in the dialectic of frame and surface, and that of object and architectural container, they have displaced traditional figure-ground relationships.

The deployment of any or all of these strategies (or, as in most cases, their varying combination) in the context of Minimal and post-Minimal art, i.e., proto-conceptual painting and sculpture, resulted in a range of hybrid objects. They no longer qualified for either of the traditional studio categories nor could they be identified as relief or architectural decoration—the compromise terms traditionally used to bridge the gap between these categories. In this sense, these objects demarcated another spectrum of departures towards Conceptual Art. Not only did they destabilize the boundaries of the traditional artistic categories of studio production, by eroding them with modes of industrial production in the manner of Minimalism, but they went further in their critical revision of the discourse of the studio versus the discourse of production/consumption. By ultimately dismantling both along with the conventions of visuality inherent in them, they firmly established an aesthetic of administration.

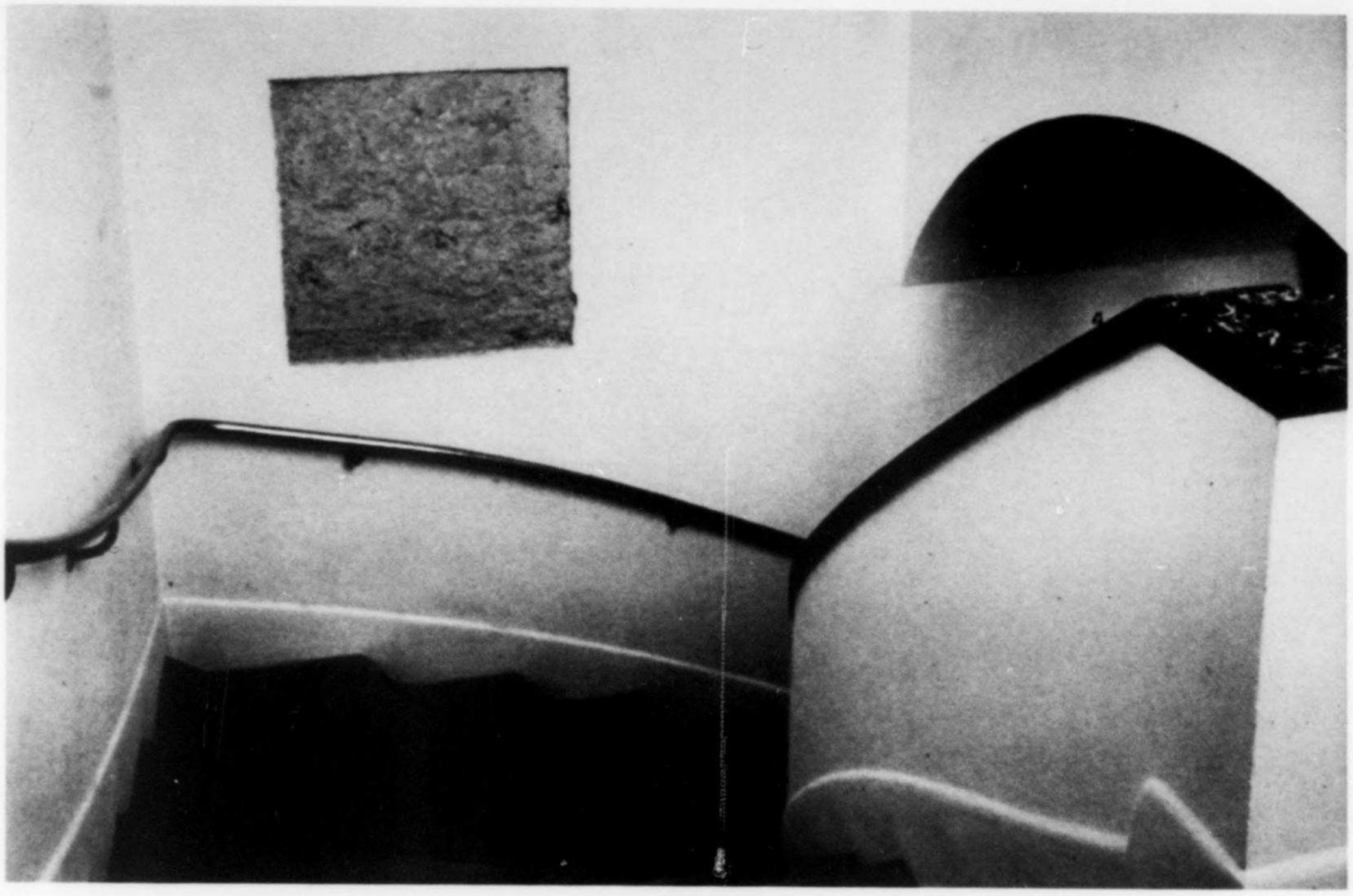


The diversity of these protoconceptual objects would at first suggest that their actual aesthetic operations differ so profoundly that a comparative reading, operating merely on the grounds of their apparent analogous formal and morphological organization — the visual topos of the square — would be illegitimate. Art history has accordingly excluded Haacke's *Condensation Cube,* for example, from any affiliation with Minimal Art. Yet all of these artists define artistic production and reception by the mid-1960s as reaching beyond the traditional thresholds of visuality (both in terms of the materials and production procedures of the studio and those of industrial production), and it is on the basis of this parallel that their work can be understood to be linked beyond a mere structural or morphological analogy. The proto-conceptual works of the mid-1960s redefine aesthetic experience, indeed, as a multiplicity of *nonspecialized* modes of object- and language-experience. According to the reading these objects generate, aesthetic experience — as an individual and social investment of objects with meaning — is constituted by *linguistic* as well as by *specular* conventions, by the institutional determination of the object's status as much as by the reading competence of the spectator.

Within this shared conception, what goes on to distinguish these objects from each other is the emphasis each one places on different aspects of that deconstruction of the traditional concepts of visuality. Morris's *Mirrored Cubes*, for example (once again in an almost literal execution of a proposal found in Duchamp's *Green Box*), situate the spectator in the *suture* of the mirror reflection: that interface between sculptural object and architectural container where neither element can acquire a position of priority or dominance in the triad between spectator, sculptural object, and architectural space. And in so far as the work acts simultaneously to inscribe a phenomenological model of experience into a traditional model of purely visual specularity and to displace it, its primary focus remains the sculptural object and its visual apperception.

By contrast, Haacke's *Condensation Cube* — while clearly suffering from a now even more rigorously enforced scientistic reductivism and the legacy of modernism's empirical positivism — moves away from a specular relationship to the object altogether, establishing instead a bio-physical system as a link between viewer, sculptural object, and architectural container. If Morris shifts the viewer from a mode of contemplative specularity into a phenomenological loop of bodily movement and perceptual reflection, Haacke replaces the once revolutionary concept of an activating "tactility" in the viewing experience by a move to bracket the phenomenological within the determinacy of "system." For his work now suspends Morris's tactile "viewing" within a science-based syntagm (in this particular case that of the process of condensation and evaporation inside the cube brought about by temperature changes due to the frequency of spectators in the gallery).

And finally, we should consider what is possibly the last credible transformation of the square, at the height of Conceptual Art in 1968, in two works by



Lawrence Weiner, respectively entitled *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use* and *A 36″ × 36″ Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall* (both published or "reproduced" in *Statements,* 1968), in which the specific paradigmatic changes Conceptual Art initiates with regard to the legacy of reductivist formalism are clearly evident. Both interventions—while maintaining their structural and morphological links with formal traditions by respecting classical geometry as their definition at the level of shape—inscribe themselves in the support surfaces of the institution and/or the home which that tradition had always disavowed. The carpet (presumably for sculpture) and the wall (for painting), which idealist aesthetics always declares as mere "supplements," are foregrounded here not only as parts of their material basis but as the inevitable future location of the work. Thus the structure, location, and materials of the intervention, at the very moment of their conception, are completely determined by their future destination. While neither surface is explicitly specified in terms of its institutional context, this ambiguity of dislocation generates two oppositional, yet mutually complementary readings. On the one hand, it dissipates the traditional expectation of encountering the work of art only in a "specialized" or "qualified" location (both "wall" and "carpet" could be either those of the home or the museum, or, for that matter, could just as well be found in any other location such as an office, for example). On the other, neither one of these surfaces could ever be considered to be independent from its institutional location, since the physical inscription into each particular surface inevitably generates contextual readings dependent upon the institutional conventions and the particular use of those surfaces in place.

Lawrence Weiner. A 36″ x 36″ Square Removal to the Wallboard or Lathing from a Wall. *1968.*

Transcending the literalist or perceptual precision with which Barry and Ryman had previously connected their painterly objects to the traditional walls of display, in order to make their physical and perceptual interdependence manifest, Weiner's two squares are now physically integrated with *both* these support surfaces and their institutional definition. Further, since the work's inscription paradoxically implies the physical displacement of the support surface, it engenders an experience of perceptual withdrawal as well. And just as the work negates the specularity of the traditional artistic object by literally withdrawing rather than adding visual data in the construct, so this act of *perceptual* withdrawal operates at the same time as a physical (and symbolic) intervention in the institutional power and property relations underlying the supposed neutrality of "mere" devices of presentation. The installation and/or acquisition of either of these works requires that the future owner accept an instance of physical removal/withdrawal/interruption on both the level of institutional order and on that of private ownership.

It was only logical that, on the occasion of Seth Siegelaub's first major exhibition of Conceptual Art, the show entitled *January 5-31, 1969,* Lawrence Weiner would have presented a formula that then functioned as the matrix underlying all his subsequent propositions. Specifically addressing the relations within which the work of art is constituted as an open, structural, syntagmatic formula, this matrix statement defines the parameters of a work of art as those of the conditions of authorship and production, and their interdependence with those of ownership and use (and not least of all, at its own propositional level, as a *linguistic definition* contingent upon and determined by *all* of these parameters in their continuously varying and changing constellations:

> *With relation to the various manners of use:*
> *1. The artist may construct the piece*
> *2. The piece may be fabricated*
> *3. The piece need not to be built*
> *Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership*

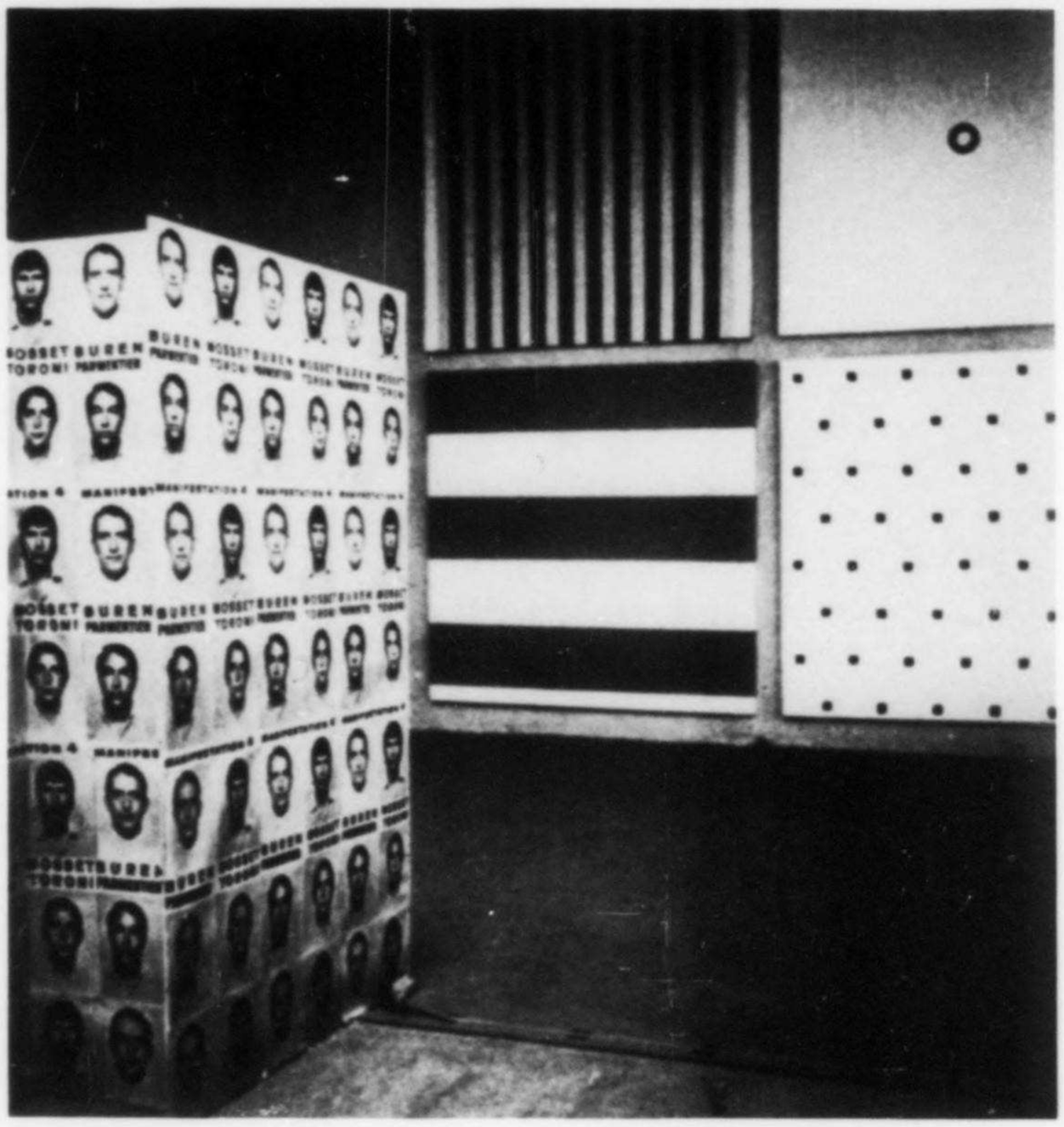
What begins to be put in play here, then, is a critique that operates at the level of the aesthetic "institution." It is a recognition that materials and procedures, surfaces and textures, locations and placement are not only sculptural or painterly matter to be dealt with in terms of a phenomenology of visual and cognitive experience or in terms of a structural analysis of the sign (as most of the Minimalist and post-Minimalist artists had still believed), but that they are always already inscribed within the conventions of language and thereby within institutional power and ideological and economic investment. However, if, in Weiner's and Barry's work of the late 1960s, this recognition still seems merely latent, it was to become manifest very rapidly in the work of European artists of the same generation, in particular that of Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, and Hans

Haacke after 1966. In fact an institutional critique became the central focus of all three artists' assaults on the false neutrality of vision that provides the underlying rationale for those institutions.

In 1965, Buren—like his American peers—took off from a critical investigation of Minimalism. His early understanding of the work of Flavin, Ryman, and Stella rapidly enabled him to develop positions from within a strictly painterly analysis that soon led to a reversal of painterly/sculptural concepts of visuality altogether. Buren was engaged on the one hand with a critical review of the legacy of advanced modernist (and postwar American) painting and on the other in an analysis of Duchamp's legacy, which he viewed critically as the utterly unacceptable negation of painting. This particular version of reading Duchamp and the readymade as acts of petit-bourgeois anarchist radicality—while not necessarily complete and accurate—allowed Buren to construct a successful critique of both: modernist painting and Duchamp's readymade as its radical historical Other. In his writings and his interventions from 1967 onwards, through his critique of the specular order of painting and of the institutional



Daniel Buren. Installation at the Guggenheim International Exhibition. 1971.



Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni. Manifestation Number Four, September 1967, Fifth Biennale de Paris, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

framework determining it, Buren singularly succeeded in displacing *both* the paradigms of painting and that of the readymade (even twenty years later this critique makes the naive continuation of object production in the Duchampian vein of the readymade model appear utterly irrelevant).

From the perspective of the present, it seems easier to see that Buren's assault on Duchamp, especially in his crucial 1969 essay *Limites Critiques*, was primarily directed at the conventions of Duchamp *reception* operative and predominant throughout the late 1950s and early '60s, rather than at the actual implications of Duchamp's model itself. Buren's central thesis was that the fallacy of Duchamp's readymade was to obscure the very institutional and discursive framing conditions that allowed the readymade to generate its shifts in the assignment of meaning and the experience of the object in the first place. Yet, one could just as well argue, as Marcel Broodthaers would in fact suggest in his catalogue of the exhibition *The Eagle from the Oligocene to Today* in Düsseldorf in 1972, that the contextual definition and syntagmatic construction of the work of art had obviously been initiated by Duchamp's readymade model first of all.

In his systematic analysis of the constituting elements of the discourse of painting, Buren came to investigate all the parameters of artistic production and reception (an analysis that, incidentally, was similar to the one performed by Lawrence Weiner in arriving at his own "matrix" formula). Departing from Minimalism's (especially Ryman's and Flavin's) literalist dismemberment of painting, Buren at first transformed the pictorial into yet another model of opacity and objecthood. (This was accomplished by physically weaving figure and

ground together in the "found" awning material, by making the "grid" of vertical parallel stripes his eternally repeated "tool," and by mechanically—almost superstitiously or ritualistically, one could say with hindsight—applying a coat of white paint to the outer bands of the grid in order to distinguish the pictorial object from a readymade.) At the same time that the canvas had been removed from its traditional stretcher support to become a physical cloth-object (reminiscent of Greenberg's notorious "tacked up canvas [which] already exists as a picture"), this strategy in Buren's arsenal found its logical counterpart in the placement of the *stretched* canvas leaning as an object against support wall and floor.

This shifing of support surfaces and procedures of production led to a wide range of forms of distribution within Buren's work: from unstretched canvas to anonymously mailed sheets of printed striped paper; from pages in books to billboards. In the same way, his displacement of the traditional sites of artistic intervention and of reading resulted in a multiplicity of locations and forms of display that continuously played on the dialectic of interior and exterior, thereby oscillating within the contradictions of sculpture and painting and foregrounding all those hidden and manifest framing devices that structure both traditions within the discourse of the museum and the studio.

Furthermore, enacting the principles of the Situationist critique of the bourgeois division of creativity according to the rules of the division of labor, Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni publicly performed (on various occasions between 1966 and 1968) a demolition of the traditional separation between artists and audience, with each given their respective roles. Not only did they claim that each of their artistic idioms be considered as absolutely equivalent and interchangeable, but also that anonymous audience production of these pictorial signs would be equivalent to those produced by the artists themselves.

With its stark reproductions of mug shots of the four artists taken in photomats, the poster for their fourth manifestation at the 1967 Biennale de Paris inadvertently points to another major source of contemporary challenges to the notion of artistic authorship linked with a provocation to the "audience" to participate: the aesthetic of anonymity as practiced in Andy Warhol's "Factory" and its mechanical (photographic) procedures of production.[30]

The critical interventions of the four into an established but outmoded cultural apparatus (represented by such venerable and important institutions as the Salon de la Jeune Peinture or the Biennale de Paris) immediately brought out in the open at least one major paradox of all conceptual practices (a paradox,

30. Michel Claura, at the time the critic actively promoting awareness of the affiliated artists Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, and Toroni, has confirmed in a recent conversation that the reference to Warhol, in particular to his series *The Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, which had been exhibited at the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in 1967, was quite a conscious decision.

incidentally, which had made up the single most original contribution of Yves Klein's work ten years before). This was that the critical annihilation of cultural conventions itself immediately acquires the conditions of the spectacle, that the insistence on artistic anonymity and the demolition of authorship produces instant brand names and identifiable products, and that the campaign to critique conventions of visuality with textual interventions, billboard signs, anonymous handouts, and pamphlets inevitably ends by following the preestablished mechanisms of advertising and marketing campaigns.

All of the works mentioned coincide, however, in their rigorous redefinition of relationships between audience, object, and author. And all are concerted in the attempt to replace a traditional, hierarchical model of privileged experience based on authorial skills and acquired competence of reception by a structural relationship of absolute equivalents that would dismantle both sides of the equation: the hieratic position of the unified artistic object just as much as the privileged position of the author. In an early essay (published, incidentally, in the same 1967 issue of *Aspen Magazine*—dedicated by its editor Brian O'Doherty to Stéphane Mallarmé—in which the first English translation of Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" appeared), Sol LeWitt laid out these concerns for a programmatic redistribution of author/artist functions with astonishing clarity, presenting them by means of the rather surprising metaphor of a performance of daily bureaucratic tasks:

> The aim of the artist would be to give viewers information. . . . He would follow his predetermined premise to its conclusion avoiding subjectivity. Chance, taste or unconsciously remembered forms would play no part in the outcome. The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions *merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise* (italics added).[31]

Inevitably the question arises how such restrictive definitions of the artist as a cataloguing clerk can be reconciled with the subversive and radical implications of Conceptual Art. And this question must simultaneously be posed within the specific historical context in which the legacy of an historical avant-garde—Constructivism and Productivism—had only recently been reclaimed. How, we might ask, can these practices be aligned with that historical production that artists like Henry Flynt, Sol LeWitt, and George Maciunas had rediscovered, in the early '60s, primarily through the publication of Camilla Gray's *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922*.[32] This question is of particular importance since many of the formal strategies of early Conceptual Art appear at first glance

31. Sol LeWitt, "Serial Project #1, 1966," *Aspen Magazine,* nos. 5–6, ed. Brian O'Doherty, 1967, n. p.
32. The importance of this publication in 1962 was mentioned to me by several of the artists interviewed during the preparation of this essay.

to be as close to the *practices* and *procedures* of the Constructivist/Productivist avant-garde as Minimal sculpture had appeared to be dependent upon its *materials* and *morphologies.*

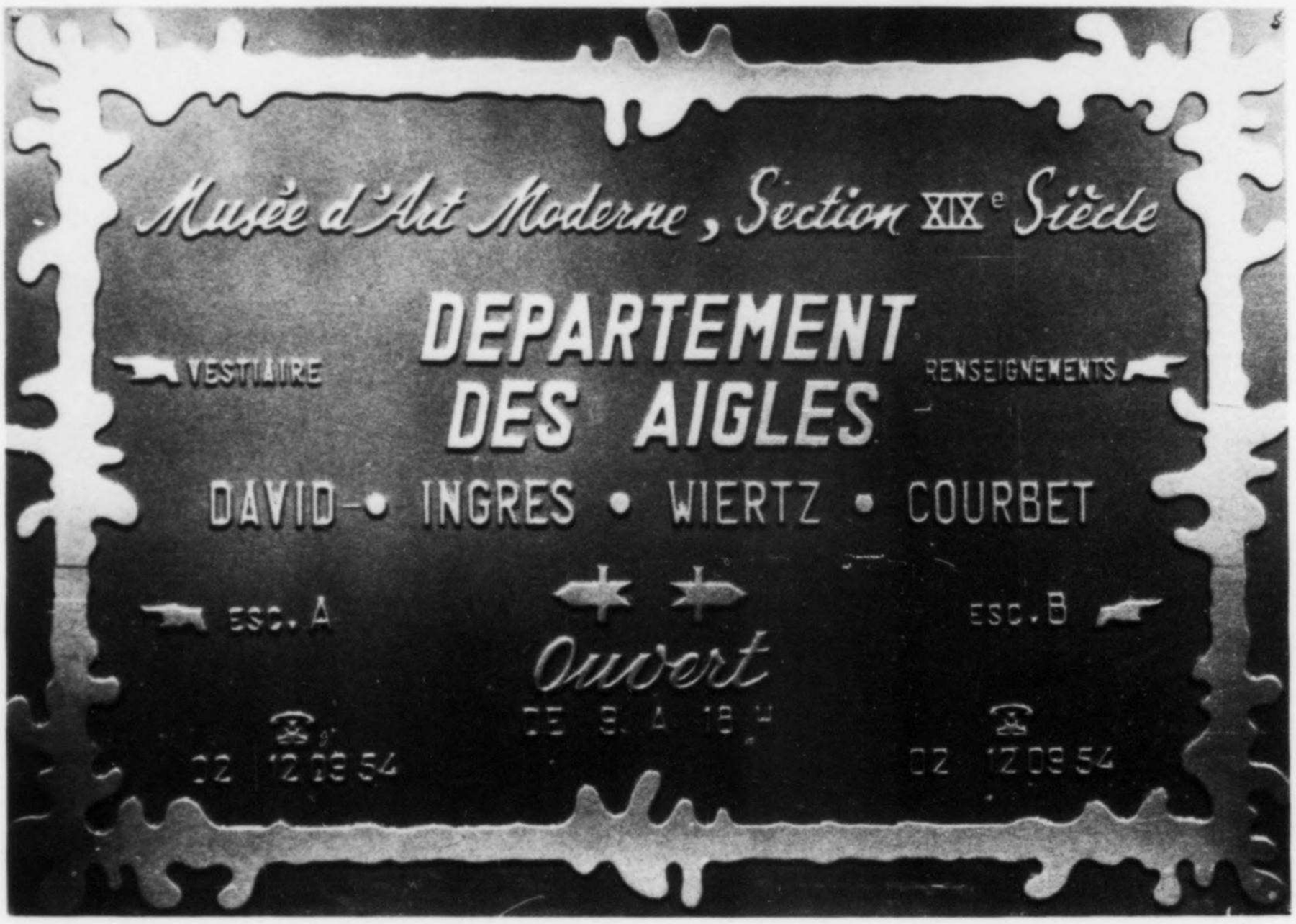
The profoundly utopian (and now unimaginably naive) nature of the claims associated with Conceptual Art at the end of the 1960s were articulated by Lucy Lippard (along with Seth Siegelaub, certainly the crucial exhibition organizer and critic of that movement) in late 1969:

> Art intended as pure experience doesn't exist until someone experiences it, defying ownership, reproduction, sameness. Intangible art could break down the artificial imposition of "culture" and provide a broader audience for a tangible, object art. When automatism frees millions of hours for leisure, art should gain rather than diminish in importance, for while art is not just play, it is the counterpoint to work. The time may come when art is everyone's daily occupation, though there is no reason to think this activity will be called art.[33]

While it seems obvious that artists cannot be held responsible for the culturally and politically naive visions projected on their work even by their most competent, loyal, and enthusiastic critics, it now seems equally obvious that it was precisely the utopianism of earlier avant-garde movements (the type that Lippard desperately attempts to resuscitate for the occasion) that was manifestly absent from Conceptual Art throughout its history (despite Robert Barry's onetime invocation of Herbert Marcuse, declaring the commercial gallery as "Some places to which we can come, and for a while 'be free to think about what we are going to do'"). It seems obvious, at least from the vantage of the early 1990s, that from its inception Conceptual Art was distinguished by its acute sense of discursive and institutional limitations, its self-imposed restrictions, its lack of totalizing vision, its critical devotion to the factual conditions of artistic production and reception without aspiring to overcome the mere facticity of these conditions. This became evident as works such as Hans Haacke's series of *Visitors' Profiles* (1969–70), in its bureaucratic rigor and deadpan devotion to the statistic collection of factual information, came to refuse any transcendental dimension whatsoever.

Furthermore, it now seems that it was precisely a profound disenchantment with those political master-narratives that empowered most of '20s avant-garde art that, acting in a peculiar fusion with the most advanced and radical forms of critical artistic reflection, accounts for the peculiar contradictions operating within (proto) Conceptual Art of the mid- to late-1960s. It would explain why this generation of the early '60s—in its growing emphasis on empiricism and its scepticism with regard to all utopian vision—would be attracted, for example, to

33. Lucy Lippard, "Introduction," in *955.000* (Vancouver: The Vancouver Art Gallery, January 13–February 8, 1970), n. p.



Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni. Installation at Marcel Broodthaers's Museum (Plaque). 1971.

the logical positivism of Wittgenstein and would confound the affirmative petit-bourgeois positivism of Alain Robbe-Grillet with the radical atopism of Samuel Beckett, claiming all of them as their sources. And it would make clear how this generation could be equally attracted by the conservative concept of Daniel Bell's "end of ideology" and Herbert Marcuse's Freudo-Marxist philosophy of liberation.

What Conceptual Art achieved at least temporarily, however, was to subject the last residues of artistic aspiration toward transcendence (by means of traditional studio skills and privileged modes of experience) to the rigorous and relentless order of the vernacular of administration. Furthermore, it managed to purge artistic production of the aspiration towards an affirmative collaboration with the forces of industrial production and consumption (the last of the totalizing experiences into which artistic production had mimetically inscribed itself with credibility in the context of Pop Art and Minimalism for one last time).

Paradoxically, then, it would appear that Conceptual Art truly became the most significant paradigmatic change of postwar artistic production at the very

moment that it mimed the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality in an effort to place its auto-critical investigations at the service of liquidating even the last remnants of traditional aesthetic experience. In that process it succeeded in purging itself entirely of imaginary and bodily experience, of physical substance and the space of memory, to the same extent that it effaced all residues of representation and style, of individuality and skill. That was the moment when Buren's and Haacke's work from the late 1960s onward turned the violence of that mimetic relationship back onto the ideological apparatus itself, using it to analyze and expose the social institutions from which the laws of positivist instrumentality and the logic of administration emanate in the first place. These institutions, which determine the conditions of cultural consumption, are the very ones in which artistic production is transformed into a tool of ideological control and cultural legitimation.

It was left to Marcel Broodthaers to construct objects in which the radical achievements of Conceptual Art would be turned into immediate travesty and in which the seriousness with which Conceptual Artists had adopted the rigorous mimetic subjection of aesthetic experience to the principles of what Adorno had called the "totally administered world" were transformed into absolute farce. And it was one of the effects of Broodthaers's dialectics that the achievement of Conceptual Art was revealed as being intricately tied to a profound and irreversible loss: a loss not caused by artistic practice, of course, but one to which that practice responded in the full optimism of its aspirations, failing to recognize that the purging of image and skill, of memory and vision, within visual aesthetic representation was not just another heroic step in the inevitable progress of Enlightenment to liberate the world from mythical forms of perception and hierarchical modes of specialized experience, but that it was also yet another, perhaps the last of the erosions (and perhaps the most effective and devastating one) to which the traditionally separate sphere of artistic production had been subjected in its perpetual efforts to emulate the regnant episteme within the paradigmatic frame proper to art itself.

Or worse yet, that the Enlightenment-triumph of Conceptual Art—its transformation of audiences and distribution, its abolition of object status and commodity form—would most of all only be shortlived, almost immediately giving way to the return of the ghostlike reapparitions of (prematurely?) displaced painterly and sculptural paradigms of the past. So that the specular regime, which Conceptual Art claimed to have upset, would soon be reinstated with renewed vigor. Which is of course what happened.

CORRECTION

We have received and here reprint, at the request of its author, Ken Jacobs, the following communication regarding the participation of Jack Smith in his filmmaking projects, discussed by Michael Moon in "Flaming Closets," published in *October* 51:

"With the exception of *Blonde Cobra*, the films were conceived, directed, photographed, edited, and paid for by myself. *Blond Cobra* was entirely reconceived by me from silent footage of Smith photographed by Bob Fleischner intended for a much longer work. I composed the sequence and juxtaposition of imagery and sound (Fleischner gave over the fragments of the aborted feature completely into my hands; when taping Smith's voice for the film, he had no idea where lines—some of which I fed him—or songs would fit in); the idea of using a live radio at certain points in the film was mine. As far as I know, Smith saw the completed film once, disapproved of it, and some years later set a lawyer on me to stop its screening (he had no case). I don't know that he ever saw the completed *Little Stabs at Happiness*. If these films and others I made with him before the camera as performer had actually been collaborations, you can be sure he would have insisted on owning prints and on a share of the rentals and sales income earned. His only involvement with these works was when in front of the camera, not before and not after."

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION
(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. A. Title of Publication: October
   B. Publication No.: 01622870
2. Date of Filing: 9/27/90
3. Frequency of Issue: Quarterly
   A. No. of issues published annually: Four
   B. Annual subscription price: $30/Ind $65/Inst
4. Location of known office of publication (not printer): MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Middlesex, MA 02142-1399
5. Location of Headquarters of General Business office of the publisher (not printer): same as item 4
6. Names and Complete Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142-1399
   Editor: Joan Copjec, Rosalind Krauss & Annette Michelson, October, 19 Union Square West, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10003
   Managing Editor: Martha Buskirk, October, 19 Union Square West, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10003
7. Owner (if owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stock-holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual, must be given. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, its name and address must be stated.): MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142 and October Magazine Limited, 19 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003
8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None
9. For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates: Has not changed during preceding 12 months
10. Extent and nature of circulation:
    A. Total number of copies printed (not press run):
       Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 4538
       Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 4311
    B. Paid and/or requested circulation:
       1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales: Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 1375
          Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 1480
       2. Mail Subscriptions: Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 1787
          Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 1951
    C. Total paid circulation: Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 3162
       Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 3431
    D. Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means—samples, complimentary and other free copies: Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 284
       Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 203
    E. Total distribution (Sum of C and D): Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 3446
       Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 3634
    F. Copies not distributed:
       1. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing:
          Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 767
          Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 677
       2. Returns from news agents: Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 325
          Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 0
    G. Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A):
       Average number of copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 4538
       Actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: 4311

I certify that the statements made above by me are correct and complete.

Dorothy Devereaux
Circulation Manager

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction

Edited by

CONSTANCE PENLEY, ELISABETH LYON,
LYNN SPIGEL, *and* JANET BERGSTROM



Ranging from avant-garde films to television sitcoms, *Close Encounters* offers enlightened critical approaches to the strange and brave new worlds of science fiction as represented in film, television, fan culture, and other non-literary media.

Includes the complete script of Peter Wollen's 1987 film Friendship's Death.

$12.95 paper

800/388-3863, ext. 52

UNIVERSITY of MINNESOTA PRESS

VISUAL ART INTENSIVE

THE PROBLEMATICS OF PUBLIC ART

THREE WEEKS - JUNE 10 TO JUNE 28

faculty

ROSALYN DEUTSCHE
ALLAN SEKULA
KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO

THE CONTEMPORARY ARTS
SUMMER INSTITUTE
1 • 9 • 9 • 1
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
VANCOUVER
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Lectures, seminars and critiques focus on how the idea of public is generated and comes to inform the appearance of contemporary art in civic and corporate environments in relation to art's function in these public and private social contexts.

For practising artists and writers as well as advanced students.

For brochures and applications, contact
Angela Crump, Coordinator, 1991 Summer Institute
School for the Contemporary Arts, Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, B. C. V5A 1S6 (604) 291-4672

Harvard

Pierre Boulez
Dominique Jameux
Translated by Susan Bradshaw
The first thorough biography of Pierre Boulez interrelates the major aspects of his professional life: as composer, as conductor, as critic and polemicist for new music. Lively and knowledgeable, it will fascinate both students of contemporary music and concert goers. Jameax includes analysis of major compositions.
$25.00 cloth

Looking at the Overlooked
Four Essays on Still-Life Painting
Norman Bryson
Norman Bryson argues that the family resemblances between the different types of still life stem from their common portrayal of a level of material culture that retains its fundamental outlines through time and across cultures: the culture of domestic routine and the rituals of hospitality. How this "low-plane reality" is historically viewed and inflected by the "higher" levels and discourses of the surrounding culture is his central focus and he interprets the genre of still-life painting from the perspective of New Art History.
12 color, 60 b/w halftones
$25.00 cloth

Lipstick Traces
A Secret History of the Twentieth Century
Greil Marcus
This is a secret history of modern times, told by way of what conventional history tries to exclude. *Lipstick Traces* tells a story as disruptive and compelling as the century itself.
"A corruscatingly original piece of work, vibrant with the energy of the bizarre happenings it maps out."
—Terry Eagleton, *New York Times Book Review*
76 halftones, 4 color illus., 516 pp.
$14.95 paper

I-VI
John Cage
One of the century's most influential composers turns his attention to the spoken word. As provocative as any of his music, these six lectures—or performances—were delivered at Harvard in 1988-1989. The compositions are intended to be read aloud, and the accompanying tapes preserve Cage's own mesmerizing reading as well as the lively exchange that followed each lecture.
Norton Lectures
15 halftones, 2 audiocassettes, 464 pp.
$34.95 cloth
250 signed first edition copies available.
$150.00

Highbrow/Lowbrow
The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America
Lawrence W. Levine
"Provides just the kind of balanced, historically informed assessment that can be of immediate value at a time when appeals to eternal truth fly thick and fast." —Walter Kendrick,
Village Voice Literary Supplement

"Absorbing and provocative, clearly a product of humane judgment and mature reflection, and a pleasure to read." —Jackson Lears, *Tikkun*

"Levine's lucid, mind-stretching and highly accessible scholarship describes how, by the late nineteenth century, American culture divided into high art and low, two warring camps."
—*Newsday*
William E. Massey, Sr., Lectures in the History of American Civilization
18 halftones,
$12.95 paper

Harvard University Press
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 495-2480

A Film Quarterly of Theory, Criticism, and Practice

WIDE ANGLE

Jeanne Hall, Editor
Center for Film and Video,
Ohio University

WIDE ANGLE presents today's leading scholarship in film studies, examining a range of topics from international cinema to the history and aesthetics of film. Forthcoming issues will focus on "Contemporary Soviet Cinema," "American Cinema of the 1920's," and "Black Cinema." WIDE ANGLE features:

- Thematically-focused issues
- In-depth critical analysis
- Challenging and controversial theories
- Provocative interviews with filmmakers
- Examinations of every genre and historical period
- Coverage of all national cinemas

Published quarterly in January, April, July, and October.

Send orders to: The Johns Hopkins University Press, Journals Division, 701 W. 40th Street, Suite 275, Baltimore, MD 21211.

WIDE ANGLE

☐ Individual, $20/year ☐ Institution, $46/year
☐ Check or money order enclosed ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard

Acct. # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____
Name _____
Address _____
Ciyt/State/Zip _____

Call toll-free 1-800-537-JHUP to place an order using VISA or MasterCard. Foreign postage: $3.00 Canada and Mexico, $6.75 outside North America. MD residents add 5% sales tax. **EA0**

PARACHUTE

HAVE A GRASP ON TODAY'S ART



PARACHUTE has offered its readers a new look on international contemporary art for 15 years. For our writers, art is a passion to be shared. The quality of their articles and columns have placed PARACHUTE among the most important art magazines published world wide.

Take advantage of our 15th anniversary special offer at $25 (US): five issues for the price of four.

Thus, you will receive at home our special Fall issue #60 for free. This issue, entitled "*Art, Lies and Virtues*," will discuss key theoretical and esthetic issues in contemporary art.

Please enter my subscription to PARACHUTE.

NAME

ADDRESS

TELEPHONE

Find enclosed my payment by: ☐ cheque ☐ money order ☐ Master Card ☐ Visa

CARD NO. EXP. DATE

SIGNATURE

This offer is valid for individuals only until March 1991. PARACHUTE is published four times a year.

Return to: PARACHUTE, Subscription Services, C.P. 70, Succ. Longueuil, Longueuil, Qc, Canada J4K 4Y3

Annals of Scholarship

STUDIES OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Forthcoming Issues:

Victorian Misrepresentations

"Engagement": French Cultural Politics in the Thirties

Rereading 19th Century Woman in England and America

New Perspectives on Modern Drama

Christopher Columbus, 1492-1992

Deconstructing and Reconstructing Objectivity

Address Inquiries to:

Annals of Scholarship
1841 Broadway
New York, New York 10023

issue price: $10.00

annual subscriptions:

institutions $50.00
individuals $28.00
foreign mail,
add $2.00 per issue

THE SPECTATRIX

a special double issue
Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane,
issue editors

camera obscura

A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory/20-21

Available June 1990

"The Spectatrix" surveys research on and theories of the female spectator in film and television studies. The issue is based upon the responses of 60 scholars active in the field of feminist issues in film and/or television studies and the female spectator. The editors have included overviews of research in Australia, Canada, England, and Italy in addition to the individual responses. "The Spectratrix" vividly demonstrates the diversity of positions among scholars, the development of feminist film and media theory, and the challenges that lie ahead. A comprehensive bibliography is included.

International Overviews:

The Image (and the) Movement: An Overview of Italian Feminist Research / Giuliana Bruno

As Canadian as Possible: The Female Spectator and the Canadian Context / Rhona Berenstein

Medusa in the Land of Oz: The Female Spectator in Australia / Barbara Creed

British Feminist Film Theory's Female Spectators: Presence and Absence / Laura Mulvey

Published three times a year (January, May, and September) by the Johns Hopkins University Press for the University of Rochester. **Annual Subscriptions:** $18.00/individuals, $35.00/institutions. Foreign postage: $6.75 Canada and Mexico, $7.50 outside North America. **Issue 20-21 only:** $13/individuals, $20/institutions. MD residents add 5% sales tax.

Send order with payment or credit card information (MasterCard or VISA number, expiration date, and signature) to:
The Johns Hopkins University Press, Journals Division,
701 West 40th Street, Suite 275, Baltimore, MD 21211-2190.
Tel: (301) 338-6964 FAX: (301) 338-6998

OCTOBER BOOKS

THE SUBJECTIVITY EFFECT IN WESTERN LITERARY TRADITION

Essays Toward the Release of Shakespeare's Will

Joel Fineman

"Joel Fineman's writing amuses, fascinates, alarms, and at times outrages me, makes me nervous, forces me to think about familiar texts in unfamiliar ways, at once illuminates and darkens the literary tradition it addresses. There was, quite simply, no one like him, and his death is an absolute loss. But the essays collected here continue to function as provocative anecdotes, introducing unsettling openings into our comfortable narrations."— Stephen Greenblatt, University of California, Berkeley

256 pp., 8 illus. $29.95

LOOKING AWRY

An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture

Slavoj Zizek

"A Hegelian and a Lacanian Hitchcock has my vote! Looking Awry is a wonderful introduction to dialectical psychoanalysis; to a fresh approach to the subjectivities of mass culture; and to an extraordinary new voice we will hear often in the coming years."— Fredric R. Jameson

200 pp. $22.50

Original in Paperback

THE DESTRUCTION OF *TILTED ARC*

Documents

edited by Clara Weyergraf-Serra and Martha Buskirk

Introduction by Richard Serra

304 pp., 16 illus. $16.95 paper

PAINTING AS MODEL

Yve-Alain Bois

400 pp., 89 illus. $39.95

TECHNIQUES OF THE OBSERVER

On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century

Jonathan Crary

"Jonathan Crary provides a stunning challenge to conventional wisdom about the epochal transformation of visual culture in the 19th century."— Martin Jay, University of California at Berkeley

200 pp., 32 illus. $22.50

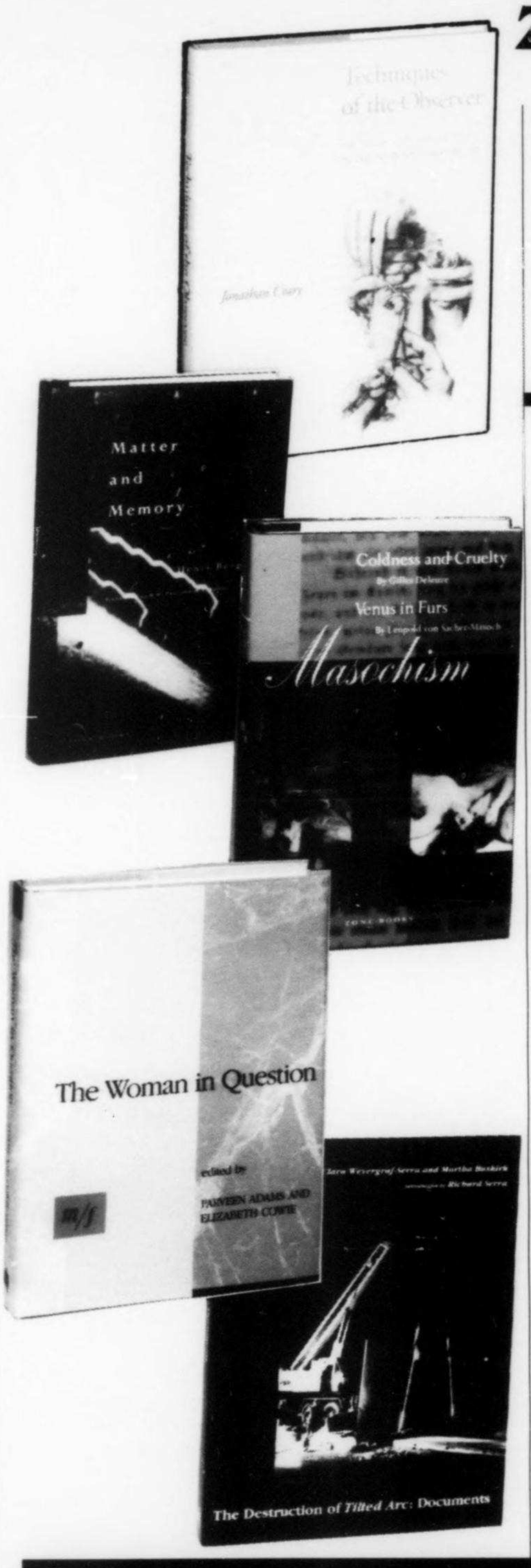
THE WOMAN IN QUESTION m/f

edited by Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie

"The contribution of m/*f* to feminism was, and continues to be, of immense significance. At the vital interface of social theory, representation and psychoanalysis, m/f provoked intense debate among feminists, raising issues which still act as a crucial point of reference for much feminist thinking to this day."— Jacqueline Rose

383 pp., 29 illus. $25.00

ZONE BOOKS



FRAGMENTATION AND REDEMPTION
Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion
Caroline Walker Bynum
426 pp., 44 illus. $24.95

Now Available in Paperback

MASOCHISM
Coldness and Cruelty
Gilles Deleuze
translated by Jean McNeil
Venus in Furs
Leopold von Sacher-Masoch
translated by Jean McNeil
294 pp. $13.50 paper (April)

THE ACCURSED SHARE
Volume 1
Georges Bataille
translated by Robert Hurley
198 pp. $12.95 paper (April)

MYTH AND TRAGEDY IN ANCIENT GREECE
Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet
528 pp. $18.95 paper

MYTH AND SOCIETY IN ANCIENT GREECE
Jean-Pierre Vernant
279 pp. $14.95 paper

MATTER AND MEMORY
Henri Bergson
284 pp. $26.95 cloth, $14.95 paper

BERGSONISM
Gilles Deleuze
translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam
142 pp. $12.95 paper

To order call toll-free (800) 356-0343
or (617) 625-856 Fax (617) 625-0660
Mastercard and Visa accepted.

The MIT Press
55 Hayward Street
Cambridge, MA 02142

MIT Press Journals Presents
OCTOBER/Back Issues Available

!!! SPECIAL SALE !!!
Receive Back Issues at over 40% Discount!
Pay only $10.00 per Back Issue.
To order, see bind-in card.
This offer expires on March 1, 1991.

Featured Articles

OCTOBER 6
Beckett's. . . *by* ... *clouds*. . . , Kristeva, Pleynet, a... ...ers on the U.S., and texts by Michael ...wn, Tom Bishop, Octavio Armand, others
Sold Out

OCTOBER 10
Herbert Dami... ... Duchamp, Lyotard on Daniel Bu... ...terviews with Trisha Brown and Richa... Serra, texts on Dan Graham and Robert Smithson
Sold Out

OCTOBER 14
Maya Deren's 1947 notebook, Eisenstein's letters from Mexico, interview with Pierre Boulez, Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Annette Michelson on the centennial *Ring* at Bayreuth

OCTOBER 17
The New Talkies: A Special Issue
Jameson on Syberberg, Copjec on Duras, Frampton, Wollen, Rosler on filmmaking, and texts by Philip Rosen and Mary Ann Doane

OCTOBER 23
Film Books: ...ial Issue
Arthur D... ...oan Copjec, Fredric Jameson, Stuart Li...man, Nick Browne, Noël Carroll on new film books
Sold Out

OCTOBER 24
John Rajchman and Jean-Marie Alliaume on Foucault, Marc Chénetier on Debray, interview with Beth and Scott B, poetry by Marinetti

OCTOBER 26
Louise Lawler's photographs, Pierre Rosenstiehl and Yve-Alain Bois on Barthes, Christopher Phillips on calotype aesthetics

OCTOBER 28
Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis
Texts by Laplanche, Roustang, Bersani, Homi Bhabha, Joan Copjec, Jennifer Stone, Perry Meisel

OCTOBER 29
Michelson on the Eve of the Future, Yve-Alain Bois on Serra, Georges Didi-Huberman on the Shroud of Turin, interview with Jonas Mekas, texts by Georges Méliès and Joseph Rykwert

OCTOBER 30
Walter Grasskamp on Hans Haacke, Haacke interview, Crimp on the art of exhibition, Buchloh on Productivism, Bois on late Picabia

OCTOBER 31
Roger Caillois on mimicry, Denis Hollier on Caillois, Caillebotte dossier, Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Ryan on East Village gentrification

OCTOBER 32
Hollis Frampton: A Special Issue
Texts by Annette Michelson, Barry Goldensohn, Hollis Frampton, Christopher Phillips, Bruce Jenkins, Peter Gidal, Allen S. Weiss, Brian Henderson

OCTOBER 34
Shklovsky on trans-sense language, Malevich's autobiography, Hal Foster and Homi K. Bhaba on colonialism

OCTOBER 37
Symposium on originality as repitition with Buchloh, Fried, Krauss, Nochlin; recent art history books reviewed by Bois, Herding, Marin; tribute to Leroi-Gourhan

OCTOBER 41
Jacques-Alain Miller on Panopticon, Friedrich Kittler on writing machines, Ann Smock on Duras, Patricia Mainardi on the Musée d'Orsay, interview with Steve Fagin

OCTOBER 42
Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs
Essays by Rainer Borgemeister, Benjamin Buchloh, Yves Gevaert, Michael Oppitz, Birgit Pelzer, Anne Rorimer, Dieter Schwarz, Dirk Snauwaert

OCTOBER 44
Leo Steinberg on Picasso's *Les Demoiselles*, Denis Hollier and John Rajchman on Foucault

OCTOBER 45
Stefan Germer and Eric Michaud on Beuys, Shoshana Felman on Lacan, Jonathan Crary on the making of the observer

OCTOBER 47
Rosalyn Deutsche on public art, David Lurie and Krysztof Wodiczko on the Homeless Vehicle Project, Walter Benjamin on art history, Thomas Y. Levin on Benjamin

OCTOBER 48
Andreas Huyssen on Kiefer, Benjamin Buchloh on Richter, Gertrud Koch on *Shoah*, Eric Rentschler on Riefenstahl, Hans Haacke and Werner Fenz on the *Styrian Autumn*

OCTOBER 49
Tania Modleski on some functions of feminist criticism, Eric Michaud on Van Gogh, Denis Hollier on Chateaubriand, D. A. Miller reviews Susan Sontag

OCTOBER 50
Gertrud Koch on censorship and pornographic film in Germany, Slavoj Žižek on nostalgia, the gaze, and the death drive in film, Jonathan Crary on the spectacle, Copjec on G. G. de Clérambault

OCTOBER 51
Crimp on mourning and militancy, Michael Moon on the films of Jack Smith, Jacques Lacan's "Kant with Sade," Laurent Jenny on automatism

OCTOBER 52
Stephen Melville on postmodernity and art history, Michelson on Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin,* Trinh T. Minh-ha on documentary, Krauss on Sherrie Levine, Thierry de Duve on Marcel Duchamp

---

Prepayment is required
Back issues are $18.00.

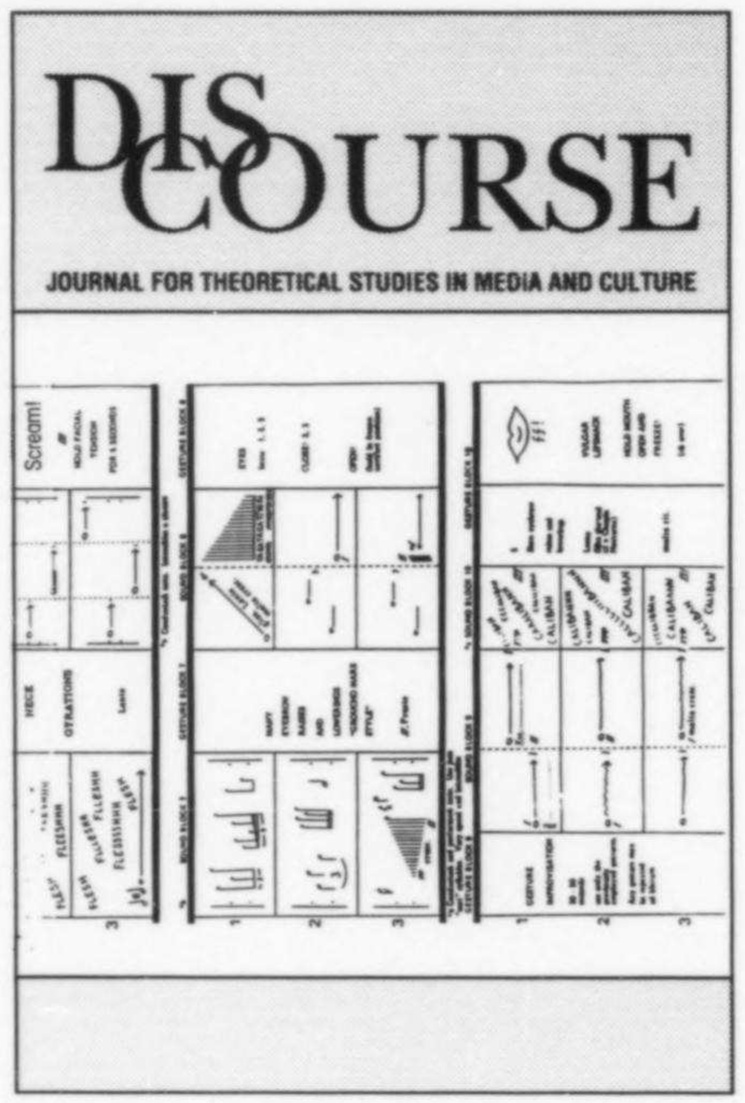
For delivery outside of the U.S.A., please add $5.00 postage and handling per issue.

Make check or money order payable to OCTOBER and mail to:

MIT PRESS JOURNALS
55 HAYWARD STREET
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02142 USA

DISCOURSE

Discourse, **Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture, edited by Roswitha Mueller and Kathleen Woodward, explores a variety of topics in continental philosophy, theories of media and literature, and the politics of sexuality including questions of language and psychoanalysis. It provides a forum for genuinely interdisciplinary and intertextual discussion of culture.**



Bi-annual. Subscriptions: $15 individuals, $30 institutions. Outside US, add $5 for foreign surface post. Send orders to Indiana University Press, Journals Division, 10th & Morton Streets, Bloomington, IN 47405. Or call 812-855-9449.

SUBSCRIBE TO *OCTOBER*!

Give yourself or a colleague the gift of critical insight -- **subscribe to *OCTOBER***. A serious journal of theoretical inquiry, **OCTOBER** brings you a full year of innovative and provocative articles on the arts. For the next four issues of the best contemporary aesthetic criticism -- send in your subscription today!

OCTOBER

Please ☐ **begin** my subscription
☐ **renew** my subscription
☐ send gift subscription

☐ individual $30.00
☐ institution $65.00
☐ student/retired $20.00

☐ **Add $14.00 postage and handling outside U.S.A.**

Prepayment required
☐ payment enclosed
☐ charge to my
☐ MasterCard
☐ VISA

card # exp. date

signature

Please send subscription to: **BC91**
Name

Address

Zip Code

OCTOBER

Please send the following back issues of **OCTOBER** at the price of $18.00 each:

___ 6	___ 26	___ 34	___ 47
___ 10	___ 28	___ 37	___ 48
___ 14	___ 29	___ 41	___ 49
___ 17	___ 30	___ 42	___ 50
___ 24	___ 31	___ 44	___ 51
	___ 32	___ 45	___ 52

☐ I am ordering _____ copies at $18.00 each
☐ **Add $5.00 per issue for postage and handling outsideU.S.A.**

Prepayment required
☐ payment enclosed
☐ charge to my
☐ MasterCard
☐ VISA

!!! SPECIAL SALE !!!
Prepayment required
☐ I am ordering _____ copies at $10.00 each.
☐ Add $5.00 per issue for postage and handling outside U.S.A.
This offer expires July 1, 1991.

card # exp. date

signature

Please send back issues to: **BC91**
Name

Address

Zip Code

SUBSCRIBE TO *OCTOBER*!

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST CLASS PERMIT NO. 309 BOSTON, MA

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

MIT Press Journals
55 Hayward Street
Cambridge, MA 02142-9949

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST CLASS PERMIT NO. 309 BOSTON, MA

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

MIT Press Journals
55 Hayward Street
Cambridge, MA 02142-9949

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

OCTOBER is funded in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and from the New York State Council on the Arts. The editors would also like to acknowledge the generous support of the following individuals and foundations:

Benefactors:

Pentti J. K. Kouri
The Pinewood Foundation

Patrons:

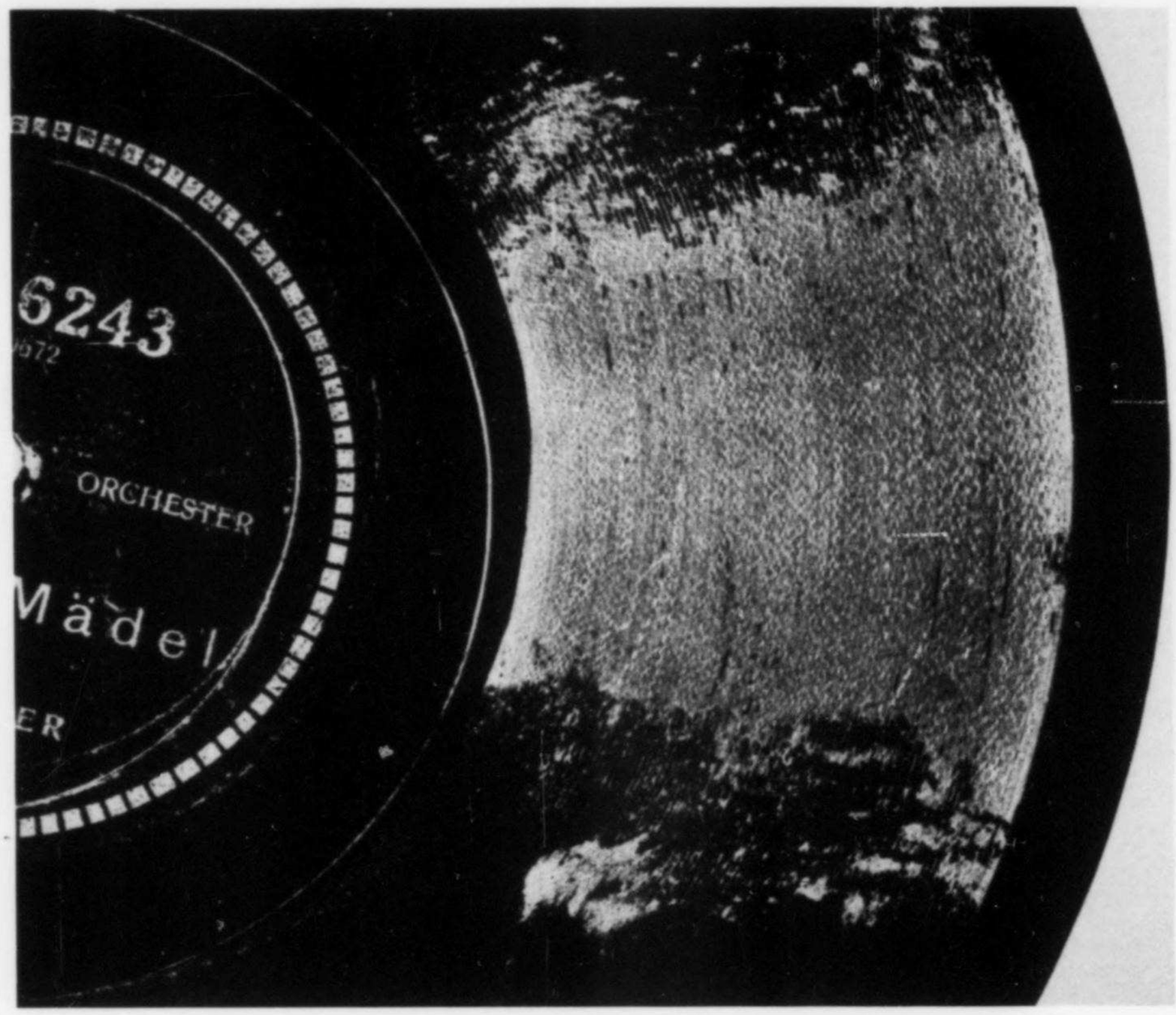
Constance R. Caplan
Leo Castelli
Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein
Richard Serra and Clara Weyergraf

Sponsors:

Phoebe Cohen
Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen
Mr. and Mrs. Walter Thayer
Bagley and Virginia Wright

Contributors:

Susan Crile
Sam Francis
Robert Shapazian



OCTOBER 56

High/Low
A Special Issue

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh — *Décollage and Dérive*

Hal Foster — *Armor Fou*

David James — *The Unsecret Life: A Warhol Advertisement*

Rosalind Krauss — *"Nostalgie de la Boue"*

Annette Michelson — *Mass Culture and Gesamtkunstwerk*

Molly Nesbit — *The Rat's Ass*