

# OCTOBER

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*Secrets of Tristan Tzara*

*Theory of the Novel: The Literary  
Imagination of Classical Film Theory*

*Len Lye: Body of Cinema*

*Kineticism-Spectacle-Environment*

*The Barred Colors of André Cadere*

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An electronic full text version of OCTOBER is available from the MIT Press.

OCTOBER (ISSN 0162-2870, E-ISSN 1536-013X) is published quarterly (winter, spring, summer, and fall) by the MIT Press, 55 Hayward St., Cambridge, MA 02142-1315. Subscription and address changes should be addressed to MIT Press, Journals Customer Service, 55 Hayward St., Cambridge, MA 02142-1315; (617) 253-2889; U.S./Canada (800) 207-8354; fax: (617) 577-1545. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to OCTOBER, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142-1315. Periodicals postage paid at Boston, MA, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: **Electronic only**—Individuals \$55.00, Students/retired \$26.00, Institutions \$224.00, Canadians add 5% GST. **Print and Electronic**—Individuals \$61.00, Students/retired \$31.00, Institutions \$257.00, Canadians add 5% GST. Outside the U.S. and Canada, add \$23.00 for postage and handling. **Single Issues:** Individuals \$15.00, Institutions \$64.00, Canadians add 5% GST. Outside the U.S. and Canada, add \$6.00 per issue for postage and handling. Claims for missing issues will be honored free of charge if made within three months after the publication date of the issue. Claims may be submitted to: journals-cs@mit.edu. Prices subject to change without notice. OCTOBER is distributed in the U.S. by Ubiquity, 607 Degraw St., Brooklyn, NY 11217; (718) 875-5491. Manuscripts should be emailed to octobermagazine@gmail.com. Rights & Permissions: To request permission to photocopy or otherwise reproduce content from *October*, please complete the online request form found at [www.mitpressjournals.org/page/copyright\\_permissions](http://www.mitpressjournals.org/page/copyright_permissions), or contact the Subsidiary Rights Manager directly at MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142; fax: (617) 253-1709; email: journals-rights@mit.edu.

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Abstracting and indexing: Alternative Press Index, American Humanities Index, ARTbibliographies Modern, Art Index, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals, Bibliography of the History of Art, Current Contents/Arts & Humanities, Film Literature Index, MLA International Bibliography, Periodicals Contents Index, RILM Abstracts of Music Literature, Scopus. Send advertising and mailing list inquiries to the Marketing Dept., MIT Press Journals (address above); (617) 253-2866; fax: (617) 253-1709; e-mail: journals-info@mit.edu.

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REBECCA COMAY

Proust, who claims to have no memory, keeps track of everything. His letters (there are several thousand) provide a running inventory of his bodily functions—letters to his mother providing an update of his respiratory condition, letters to his doctor listing the details of his menu, little notes handed to his housekeeper every morning reporting the number of times he coughed the night before. *September, 1904*: “two creamed eggs, a wing of roast chicken, three croissants, a dish of fried potatoes, grapes, coffee, a bottle of beer . . . followed by a quarter of a glass of Vichy water when I go to bed nine or ten hours after my meal. . . .” Proust counts his bites and gasps and belches with the precision of a Loyola keeping a running tally of his tears, or of a Molloy his farts. *October, 1922*: “I just finished coughing more than 3,000 times. . . .” The involuntary processes of the body are registered in the archive of the voluntary memory until the very act of accounting is transformed into a kind of spiritual exercise—a running litany of complaints from which emerges at once both the possibility and the impossibility of writing: illness provides the stimulus, the impediment, and the essential content of literary production. Nowhere has the act of not writing provided such fertile opportunities for writing. Proust writes to his friends endless letters of apology for not writing, a shopping list of excuses that turn out to be all more or less the same and that therefore generate endless opportunities for new complaints, in turn requiring further apologies for being so boring, and so on. *February, 1905*: “The words ‘I have been so ill, I am still so ill’ have been uttered by me so often . . . that I’m very afraid they will reach your . . . ears somewhat faded and quite lacking in exculpatory and absolving power. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Proust’s catalogue of his own bodily functions forms a small but significant part of the archive of the larger corpus of his writing as it pulses through a com-

\* This essay was greatly enriched by comments from Elizabeth Legge and Dana McFarlane, as well as by responses from audiences in Rio de Janeiro, Halifax, Melbourne, and Toronto, where some of this material was first presented (many thanks, for inviting me, to Tânia Dias, Sarah Clift, Andrew Benjamin, and Lauren Beard and Antonio Viselli). I am also grateful for Rosalind Krauss’s helpful suggestions.

1. All quotations from Proust’s letters in this paragraph are taken from Proust, *Correspondance: texte établi, présenté et annoté*, ed. Philip Kolb (Paris: Plon, 1970–1993), 21 vols. Letter to Georges Linossier, Sept. 1904 (vol. 4, p. 250); note to Céleste Albaret, Oct. 10, 1922 (vol. 21, p. 503); letter to Marie Nordlinger, Feb. 9 or 10, 1905 (vol. 5, p. 41).

plex network of channels and metabolic exchanges with the outside world. As the project unfolds over the last two decades of his life, the work keeps proliferating and condensing into a labyrinth of interpolations and abbreviations—at once expanding into a heap of sketches, elaborations, amplifications and contracting into a series of outlines, synopses, summaries—a double movement of expansion and compression, of inflation and deflation, that registers the contradictory rhythm of the archival drive as such. Like an ocean swelling and subsiding, like a pair of lungs opening and closing (to take only two Proustian images close at hand), the text simultaneously dilates and constricts with a severity as crushing as its will to accumulation is capacious.

We can observe in this rhythm the essential ambiguity, let's call it the basic fetishism, of every collection. Nothing is relinquished, everything is maintained, but only in effigy or in miniature: the object is put into quotation marks, becoming a specimen or example of itself; dead on arrival, it requires supplementing by a further instance, and so on. This is why every acquisition in the collection is strictly the next-to-last acquisition. A relentless drive to accumulation is sustained by the secret knowledge that the object is destroyed in the moment of possession. As the object enters the collection, I take stock of it, I index it, I name it, I assert my mastery over it, I miniaturize it, and in this very moment I concede its irretrievable disappearance. Hence my unappeasable need for more and more. I take an imprint of the thing, as if making a death mask, and in this way I surreptitiously take leave of it without quite having to relinquish it. Every collection can be seen in this light as an act of impossible or interminable mourning: I destroy what I acquire and assume perverse ownership of what I relinquish.

Nowhere is this ambiguity more rigorously or anxiously expressed than in the running catalogue that Proust appends with increasing self-consciousness to his own work. As the text expands in almost uncontrollable directions, he can't stop naming the thing he's generating—endless lists of titles, topics, tables of contents, synopses, paraphrases, sketches. At times, Proust releases these elliptical summaries in letters or in magazines, as advance advertising copy for volumes not yet published; at times he stitches them into the end pages of a published volume, as previews of a forthcoming volume. In the later volumes, written under the impact of war, and eventually in the shadow of death, he starts to incorporate these moments into the text itself. As the book staggers towards the finish line, the writing starts to monitor its own progress, producing a kind of shorthand version of itself—tiny markers of its own progress and signposts of the work to come. But mostly Proust saves these lists for his own records.

Like all lists, these abridgements point in two opposite directions, which prove in the end to be more or less the same. Ellipsis speaks of anticipation. It points forward towards a utopian horizon of fulfilment: a list of train stations, a schedule of theater performances, a catalogue of novelties—all these promissory notes that in their paratactic brevity furnish the young narrator with so many hours of delirious anticipation. And ellipsis speaks of loss. It points back-

wards towards a constantly expanding repository of unrealized possibilities, botched initiatives, and thwarted hopes. By the novel's close, these two temporal directions converge: an invitation list to a party turns into a census of the living dead. In the final inventory—the *danse macabre* that concludes the novel—sketch meets ruin.

Proust's most profound insight is to demonstrate that this mortification of the object is equally a mortification of the living subject: not only is every museum a mausoleum (as Adorno demonstrates), but the sepulchre is ultimately built for me.<sup>2</sup> It is I who must disappear into the hollow spaces of my own collection. This is why the most exquisite form of inventory for every writer is the last will and testament. As my language decomposes into a list of disjointed items, I retrieve the opportunity for sovereign self-assertion: identity is forged, prolonged, and exaggerated in the act of self-divestment. The writer takes stock of his possessions in the ultimate ritual of self-dispossession—a last claim to what is no longer his own to claim.

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Proust dies intestate. Having spent a lifetime as a dying man, taking endless inventory of dead objects, he can never quite bring himself to do a final accounting. Céleste Albaret, his housekeeper, reports that on his deathbed he gestures for pen and paper so as to bequeath to her, or so she surmises, what little is left of his squandered bank account—an impulse that he quickly abandons, evidently deciding that it is pointless, that his signature is too weak to be even legible, and that no one could in any case take seriously the signature of a dying man.<sup>3</sup> Apocryphal or not, it's a good story: although Proust never stops writing and rewriting (the revisions are feverishly accumulating until within a few hours of his death), his last word is never written. His final testament cannot be signed.

This won't deter his survivors from drafting a posthumous testament of the most conventional sort. In the days immediately following his death, a stream of visitors will pass through the apartment. Everyone keeps remarking on the dead man's beauty. By all accounts his body is as lustrous in death as it had been cadaverous in life. Even the process of putrefaction seems to have been reversed. All the memoirs report the same miraculous event. Death has erased the most ruinous marks of living: the lines and wrinkles on Proust's face have suddenly vanished; the disfigurements of aging have disappeared. Even Proust's stubborn Jewish profile, to which everyone keeps nervously alluding, will be delicately transformed into a mark of some vaguely "Oriental" dignity and luminous sagacity, Assyrian, Armenian, even Christlike in its nobility, as Proust's battered

2. Cf. Theodor Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge; MIT Press, 1981), pp. 173–85.

3. Céleste Albaret, *Monsieur Proust* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1973), p. 423.

body assumes the immaculate condition of a saint.<sup>4</sup> François Mauriac notes the preternatural youthfulness of the corpse. "Laid out on his bed, one would not have thought that he was fifty years old, but barely thirty, as if Time didn't dare touch him who had tamed and vanquished it."<sup>5</sup> Paul Helleu, an artist present at Proust's deathbed, will later recall his rapture: "Oh! It was horrible, but how handsome he was! He hadn't eaten for five months, except for café au lait. You can't imagine how beautiful . . . can be the corpse of a man who hasn't eaten for such a long time; everything superfluous is dissolved away. Ah, he was handsome. . . ." <sup>6</sup>

Decades later, Jean Cocteau will remember a scene of dramatic apotheosis.

Celeste led us to her master. The room was empty. A silence reigned, a kind of silence which was to real silence as shadow is to ink —delimited, solemn, light. The absence of anti-asthmatic powder and eucalyptus had meant a veil had lifted. Lying on his childhood bed, flanked in his sentry box by cork tiles, Proust presented the admirable profile of a vizier. . . . As we turned our eyes away . . . we suddenly saw to his left, at the far corner of the mantelpiece on which the dust had draped with gray fur, an uneven tower of school notebooks. This pile was leaning from the side of the shadow, from the side of this shadow softly illuminated by Proust's pale profile as if by a nightlight made of white porcelain, and we remembered that these were the notebooks Marcel had rummaged through when he wanted to read us some chapter. This high, uneven pile of school notebooks, this was . . . the complete oeuvre [*oeuvre complète*] of our friend, or, to speak grammatically, his terminated work [*oeuvre complet*]. This pile of paper to his left continued to live like a watch ticking on the wrist of a dead soldier. I could not tear my gaze away from it. Little by little, the room faded away: only the moving heap of pages grew larger and larger, its ragged corners and angles turning into an immense lacework of walls, arches, rose-windows,

4. The deathbed perspective, showing Proust's nose in profile, reveals an aspect obscured by the well-known frontal view of Émile Blanche's dandy portrait, as well as by the numerous photographs circulating during Proust's lifetime and after (these well-known images also typically show Proust as beardless). See Jean Récanati, *Profils juifs de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1979), p. 68, on the various euphemisms used by Proust's friends to reference the sudden onset of a Jewish appearance; the list culminates with references to the beard of an "Armenian Christ." See also Jonathan Freedman, "Coming Out of the Jewish Closet with Marcel Proust," in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7 (2001), pp. 521–51. In the *Recherche*, beards are frequently Orientalized, particularly when assigned to Jewish characters. In *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur*, Bloch is compared to a Bellini portrait of the bearded Mohammed, elsewhere to a bearded Sargon. Maurice Barrès remarked after the funeral: "I always thought him Jewish, little Marcel, but what a beautiful funeral." Quoted in Richard Davenport-Hines, *Proust at the Majestic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 316.

5. François Mauriac, "Sur la tombe de Marcel Proust," *La Revue hebdomadaire*, Dec. 2, 1922, reprinted in *Hommage à Marcel Proust (1871–1922)*, *Nouvelle revue française* 112 (Jan. 1923).

6. Quoted in Davenport-Hines, p. 305.

vaults, niches, spires, roofs. A cathedral of paper (and I remembered having seen the cathedral of Reims going up in flames, a dead cathedral crowned with a phantom cathedral of smoke) from which the search for lost time rose up, to build in the air a nave in which Albertine would be the angel . . . and the others would be the saints, the damned, and the gargoyles."<sup>7</sup>

Nicola Luckhorst has noted the cinematic quality of Cocteau's description, from its atmospheric tracking shot to its dramatic close-up<sup>8</sup>—a shift from still to moving picture suggestive of the metaphysical movement Cocteau is intent on finding: from inanimate to animate, from body to spirit, from the decrepitude of the flesh to the immortality of the work. As the camera's focus shifts, the manuscript is seen ticking, pulsing, swelling like living matter while the body that produced it stiffens and blanches and eventually dwindles into a "nightlight made of white porcelain"—a tiny stage light trained towards the tower of notebooks looming over it. Cocteau's imagery marks the spiritual ascendancy of the work as both an architectural and a military triumph: the capitulation of experience to inscription and life to its own monument. Excluded from the army for health reasons, Proust, like his narrator, had observed the First World War from the sidelines, following each campaign from his bed in Paris, map in one hand, newspaper in the other. Alone in his cork sentry box, he manages to die a hero's death on the battlefield of letters. Defying gravity, the notebooks soar skyward while the writer's body shrinks. So the stakes are high. But we should not overlook the fragility of the transaction. The paper cathedral is already in ruins, ascending only to disintegrate in a swirl of ashes.

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Struck by the fine condition of the corpse, Proust's brother Robert decides to delay the funeral for a few days to give visitors an opportunity for one last look. Artists are summoned to the bedside (writers, painters, a sculptor, two photographers) and the writer's bedroom turns into a studio, an anatomy theater, and a museum in which Proust's corpse is the only exhibit on display—a tableau vivant, so to speak, Marat at his last gasp, his body arranged in its habitual writing posture, lying in bed amidst the clutter of his papers, arm outstretched as if about to take up the pen like a dying Gaul the sword.<sup>9</sup> Man

7. Jean Cocteau, "La Leçon des cathédrales," in *Poésie Critique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 131–32.

8. Nicola Luckhorst, "Proust's Beard," in Malcolm Crowley, ed., *Dying Words: The Last Moments of Writers and Philosophers* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

9. Albaret reports that when she started to arrange the dead man's hands, Proust's brother intervened: "No, he died working. Let us leave his hands as they are." *Monsieur Proust*, p. 431. In the photograph, however, Proust's arms are noticeably tucked away under the white bedclothes.

Ray, recently arrived from New York, is dragged from his hotel room to take the legendary photograph that will become one of the centerpieces of his series of celebrity pictures, the *Paris Portraits*.<sup>10</sup>

Although normally resentful of this kind of unauthorized hagiography, Céleste Albaret cannot resist adding a little flourish of her own: "One day something extraordinary happened. . . . As I was leaving the apartment . . . I suddenly caught sight of the window of the bookshop, which was nearby, on the rue Hamelin. The bookshop was blazing with light, and behind the glass were the books published by Monsieur Proust, arranged three by three. . . ." <sup>11</sup> Albaret is the only eyewitness to present baldly unembellished citation as reportage. The miracle she recounts is a flatly literal rendering of Proust's own deeply ambivalent and ironic description of the fictional writer Bergotte's martyrdom to the books that have consumed his life, devoured his flesh, but also limply gesture towards his possible redemption, if only in the marketplace of letters. According to rumor, Proust had been drafting his last revisions to Bergotte's death within a few hours of his own. His own description of the writer's apotheosis reads as follows: "They buried him, but all through that night of mourning, in the lighted shop windows, his books, arranged three by three, kept vigil like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection."<sup>12</sup>

But Proust may be ghostwriting the other eyewitness accounts as well. For a novel in which funerals never seem to take place, deaths chronically go unmourned, a friend's announcement of his fatal illness has less import than the decision about which shoes to wear to a party, and war is an annoyance mainly because it wreaks havoc on guest lists, produces a dearth of handsome waiters, and makes it hard to find good croissants in Paris, the number—the very existence—of transfiguration scenes is impressive. Most striking is Proust's well-known description of his grandmother's final passage from the convulsive agonies of dying to the virginal perfection of a young bride.

My grandmother was dead. An hour or two later Françoise was able for the last time, and without causing it any pain, to comb that beautiful hair which was only tinged with grey and until now had seemed less old than my grandmother herself. But now, on the contrary, it alone set the crown of age on a face grown young again, from which had vanished the wrinkles, the contractions, the swellings, the strains, the hollows which pain had carved on it over the years. As in the far-off days

10. For an account of the circumstances of the photograph, see Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* (NY: Da Capo Press, 1991), p. 18, and Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (New York: Little, Brown, 1963), p. 143.

11. Albaret, *Monsieur Proust*, p. 433.

12. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1987), 4 vols., vol. 3, p. 693; trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D.J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1993), 6 vols.; vol. 5, *The Captive and the Fugitive*, p. 246. Hereafter cited as *RTP*; all quotations are from the Moncrieff-Kilmartin-Enright translation, occasionally modified.



*Man Ray. Proust on His Deathbed. 1922.  
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.  
© 2013 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society  
(ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris.*

when her parents had chosen for her a bridegroom, she had the features, delicately traced by purity and submission, the cheeks glowing with a chaste expectation, with a dream of happiness, with an innocent gaiety even, which the years had gradually destroyed. Life in withdrawing from her had taken with it the disillusionments of life. A smile seemed to be hovering on my grandmother's lips. On that funeral couch, death, like a sculptor of the Middle Ages, had laid her down in the form of a young girl.<sup>13</sup>

As it happens, in composing this last scene Proust has recycled one of his own early letters describing the miracle of his mother's deathbed rejuvenation, an account he had in turn lifted from the art historian Émile Mâle's descriptions of the youthful beauty of medieval funerary statuary whose untarnished appearance suggested the promise of resurrection.<sup>14</sup>

A similar iconography informs the rapturous description of Albertine's slumbering body—her body a continuous, unbroken surface, unmarked by any flickering or memory of desire, a climbing plant, a landscape, a tidal swell, a medieval tomb sculpture, a self-running watch (the analogies proliferate to the point of incoherence), an object whose strange self-sufficiency, her lack of tangible relationship to anything or anyone—even or above all to himself—allows the narrator to enjoy her as his exclusive possession.<sup>15</sup>

If Albertine's lips were closed, her eyelids, on the other hand, seen from where I was placed, seemed so loosely joined that I might almost have questioned whether she really was asleep. At the same time, those lowered lids gave her face that perfect continuity which is unbroken by the eyes. There are people whose faces assume an unaccustomed beauty and majesty the moment they cease to look out of their eyes.<sup>16</sup>

Albertine's body reveals no open orifice, no channel to or from the outside world, an opacity that allows the lover's gaze to wander freely without need for scrutiny or penetration. Released from the anxious torment of interpretation—no longer

13. Proust, *RTP* 2, p. 640; *The Guermantes Way*, p. 470.

14. See Proust, letter to Anna de Noailles (Sept 27, 1905), in *Correspondance*, vol. 5, p. 345. Compare Émile Mâle, *Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Dutton, 1913), p. 250. "Mary is beautiful. Old age has not dared to touch her and she is clothed in eternal youth." In a later passage, Mâle will generalize to include all thirteenth-century tomb sculpture, modeled on the youthful corpse of Christ. "All men must resemble their divine Example who at that age triumphed over death. This curious doctrine was accepted literally by the artists. Neither child nor old man is seen in thirteenth-century representations of the Last Judgment, but there rise from the tomb young and beautiful forms in the prime of life" (p. 375).

15. *RTP* 3, pp. 578–83; *The Captive and the Fugitive*, pp. 83–90. This passage was excerpted from *La prisonnière* in advance of publication and printed in the *Nouvelle revue française* just three weeks before Proust's death—the last piece of writing published in his lifetime. Proust, "La regarder dormir," *NRF* 110 (Nov. 1922).

16. *RTP* 3, p. 579; *The Captive and the Fugitive*, p. 86.

compelled to read every gesture as a clue, every mark a hieroglyph to be deciphered—he has no need to scan her body for traces of distraction or infidelity, no urge to inspect the letter that peeks out visibly from her kimono pocket. For a brief, blissful moment both Albertine and the world around her are stripped of meaning and implication—pure surface without inscription, pure image without text. Erased of marks, impenetrable, illegible, the sleeping body has become its own most perfect prison.

Some readers have speculated that in such passages Proust has attempted to inscribe his own death within the pages of his novel, notably reversing the normal sequence of experience. Rather than transforming the debris of life into industrial raw material for literary production, the novel provides the rough draft for the life that will have written it: life itself becomes the retroactive product of its own transcription. Like a recording machine forever running ahead of itself, the book will have already transcribed the conditions of its own termination, turning death into an already accomplished fact, and the writer into his own survivor. Posthumous in his own lifetime, the writer becomes the privileged witness of his own annihilation. In the crystalline simultaneity of a world viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, contingency will have been captured in advance, the future transformed into a modality of the past, and finitude into the infinitude of writing.

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Could Proust possibly also be guiding Man Ray's hand to help him snap the final picture? Having spent his last few years as impresario, stage-manager, and star of his own private theater, carefully regulating the lighting, the curtains, the soundtrack, the props, the flow of visitors, Proust had transformed his dwelling place into a photographer's studio—a camera obscura, a darkroom, an archive and an exhibition space (also a closet) in which everything could be captured, preserved, and displayed in effigy and in negative—day for night, inner for outer, male for female.<sup>17</sup> Albaret describes his bedroom as a cave whose inky darkness was broken only by the light emitted by a bedside lamp and streaming through the partially opened doorway.<sup>18</sup> His own body shrouded in shadow, the light trained exclusively on his notebooks and on his visitors, Proust had turned his bedroom into a permanent zone of transit—a

17. See the fascinating description of Proust's bedroom by Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Rooms and the Writers That Shaped Them* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Mieke Bal has demonstrated how the darkroom, in Proust, functions also as a laboratory for erotic-epistemological experiments: the camera-man's privilege is to bring all the other inhabitants of the closet out into the open while remaining securely closeted himself. See *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 191–212. The locus classicus of this concept is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), and see also Jonathan Freedman, cited n. 3 above. The epistemology of the closet is, in this instance, an epistemology of the vestibule, since Proust's interior is, like so many other fin-de-siècle locations, a liminal site of indecision and delay—neither inside nor outside, neither hidden nor revealed—an ambiguity that transforms the terms of investigation and disclosure. See Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

18. Albaret, *Monsieur Proust*, p. 402.

train, a Noah's ark, a fleeting vantage point from which he could observe a world from which he will have forever been obliterated.

Seeing everything while remaining invisible in the darkness, Proust had become the perfect "spectator of his own absence."<sup>19</sup> Like his own narrator, who had arrived home one fateful day to discover that he was no longer at home, the writer had managed to stage his own death within his own lifetime. Proust had sketched the *mise en scène* with breathtaking efficiency. The sight of his grandmother, *reading*, oblivious to his presence, had confronted the young Gyges with the spectacle of his own nullity. (Does not the sight of any reader—even if the reader is the perfect reader, that is to say, one's own most cherished reader—have this mortifying effect?) With a few strokes Proust had managed to transform a scene of quiet painterly absorption into a nightmarish theatrical spectacle.<sup>20</sup> A domestic genre painting (the lacemaker, *la liseuse*) changes into a ghoulish phantasmagoria in which the direction of the gaze reverses, window becomes mirror, and the excluded viewer puts himself back in the picture, but only as a stain or absence. The narrator catches sight of his own superfluity—"an observer in traveling coat and hat, a stranger who does not belong to the house, a photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which he will never see again."<sup>21</sup>

Proust had in effect staged the paradox of the modern bourgeois interior. My prison, the place to which I cannot stop returning, is the site of my own disappearance. Nowhere am I more exterior to my own interior than where most immured. My home is where I make a habit of the absence of habitation—a shell in which I take the imprint of my own nonexistence, as permanent as a fossil, or as fleeting as an impression in velvet.<sup>22</sup> Evicted from his own dwelling place, Proust had become as expatriate as Man Ray in his hotel nearby—Emmanuel Radnitzky, the American "ray man" who will arrive at the dead writer's bedside to take his final portrait. Only from such a vantage point can the writer dictate the terms of his own resurrection.

It's a risky venture. Omitted from the system of the fine arts, photography and its affiliates have been conspicuously excluded from the imaginary museum of the *Recherche*. There is no Elstir, no Vinteuil, no Bergotte, no Berma of photography. Not even when seamstresses, cooks, and chanting street vendors are admitted into the creative pantheon (Proust's canon expands capaciously, aggressively, and unpredictably) do we encounter an aspiring photographer or cineast—only opportunists peddling souvenirs, amateurs snapping bad snapshots, and the

19. RTP2, p. 438; *Guermantes Way*, p. 183.

20. Cf. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

21. RTP 2, p. 438; *Guermantes Way*, p. 183. I discuss this scene more extensively in "Impressions: Proust, Trauma, Photography," *Discourse* 31 (2009), pp. 86–105; see also more recently Dora Zhang, "An Eye for a Lens: Proust and Photography," *Representations* (2012).

22. I am alluding to the logic of the interior described by Walter Benjamin in "Convolute L: The Interior, Trace," in *Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

tourists, dilettantes, and perverts who peruse, collect, and profane them. As many readers have noted, Proust's explicit aversion to photography will not stop him from shamelessly exploiting the medium, whether as plot device, as literary technique (variable angles, exposure times, close-ups, framing shots, reversals), or above all as a trope of literary production: if the writing room is characterized as a darkroom, this is because it makes palpable the traumatic latency or intermittency—the *Nachträglichkeit*—defines life as such.<sup>23</sup>

As is so often the case, Proust's objections are most interesting where they are most incoherent. *Photography is boring*. It is pedantic, repetitive, inartistic—the standard nineteenth-century objection. It splinters time into an accumulation of empty, isolated instants; it reduces memory to a sterile recall of meaningless, disconnected moments; it reduces the viewer to a stupid, mechanical apparatus; like every instrument of voluntary memory, it numbs, it dumbs, it repeats, it flattens. Or: *photography is not nearly boring enough*. It encourages creepy antics: sadistic, pornographic, perverted. Weird things start happening in the darkroom. (Elevator boys get sexually molested.) Weird things start happening in the living room. (Photographs turn into fetishistic stage props for obscene, parricidal lesbian performances.) And by the end of the novel, when under the narrator's eagle eye, the whole world has turned into a kind of photograph, weird things start happening everywhere else as well: on the beach (the camera pans, and young girls splinter into a whirl of disconnected body parts); in the hotel bedroom (the camera zooms, and a woman dissolves into a many-headed monster); in the street (the shutter flickers, and virile bodies scatter into a spray of chopped-up poses); in the brothel (the aperture opens, and a man freezes into a hunk of bleeding lava); in wartime Paris (the flash goes off, and even the buildings start swaying, as if lasciviously inviting their own flagellation); in the salon (the album flips open, and the specimens are all dragged out: grotesquely magnified, overexposed, shimmering with silvery patina).

The photography that Proust achieves in writing bears little resemblance to the photographs he describes; it is anything but portrait, snapshot, advertisement, or document; it is spirit photography, it is pornography, it is chrono-photography, it is experimental, avant-garde photography, it is Impressionism, it is Cubism, it is Surrealism, it is photography that might have learned a thing or two from Man Ray himself.

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In his artistic practice, Man Ray is familiar with the erotic allure of the inanimate—mannequin-women, sexualized machine bits, masks, surfaces, and detached, cropped, or distorted body parts embalmed in crystalline abstraction. (His commer-

23. For a sustained treatment of photographic tropes in Proust, see Mieke Bal, *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997); see also Brassai, *Marcel Proust sous l'emprise de la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

cial practice as a fashion photographer will also lead him to explore this fetishistic logic from yet another angle.<sup>24</sup>) The year of Proust's death, Man Ray will have stumbled on his most celebrated technique, the rayogram—a camera-less image, produced through the chance encounter between found object and photo-sensitive paper, bypassing the minimal agency of eye and hand, of lens and shutter, doubly mortifying in both its effects and its implications: the artist is reduced to a mechanical appendage to the apparatus, and the image to a whitish silhouette floating against a darkened background. Man Ray himself will note the Pompeiiian aspect of these images—"the undisturbed ashes of objects consumed by flames."<sup>25</sup> The Surrealists will find in these spectral images a trace of photography's earliest spiritualist passions and an inspiration for their own ongoing investigations into the occult.<sup>26</sup>

But this appears to be Man Ray's only attempt to capture an actual corpse. Faced with the gravity of the assignment, he seems to be retreating to more conventional aesthetic ends. Rather than staging the compulsive mortification of living matter, the picture hints of the resurrection of the dead. Even with eyes closed, bruised with shadow, and seen in profile, the dead man seems about to return the gaze.<sup>27</sup> Photography seems to resist the challenge of its own modernity, retreating to its infancy in cult and ritual, as if to recapture a time when things looked back and to anticipate a time when the world might be re-enchanted. As paper turns into stone, the ephemeral image enters the domain of monumental sculpture, a medieval *gisant*, an effigy mediating between the living and the dead, asleep, at rest, released from bodily affliction.

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Intentionally or not, the image unfailingly recalls the icon of nineteenth-century deathbed photography, with Proust's face presenting an almost perfect negative of Victor Hugo's luminous profile as shot by Félix Nadar in 1885. Nadar had shot the dead poet from the side, at eye level, as if to accentuate the intimacy of the encounter, his face blazingly illuminated, beard glowing as incandescent as—a "burning bush."<sup>28</sup> Set against a carefully arranged black velvet backdrop like a Spanish

24. The opposition between Man Ray's artistic and commercial practices has been justly questioned, from André Breton onwards, on both formal and economic grounds. For a recent argument, see Hannah Crawforth, "Surrealism and the Fashion Magazine," *American Periodicals* 14 (2004).

25. Man Ray, *Exhibition Rayographs 1921-1928* (Stuttgart: L.G.A., 1963), quoted by Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MIT, 1986), p. 102.

26. For an outstanding exploration of these themes, see Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (Washington: Cororan Gallery of Art, 1985).

27. Throughout her memoir, Albaret keeps returning to the subject of Proust's penetrating gaze, all the more piercing for being always in shadow. Even in death his eyelids, like Albertine's, are described as loosely closed, as if he were only lightly sleeping. On the relationship between aura and the return of the gaze (and its atrophy in modernity), see Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Collected Writings*, ed. Michael Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996-2003), 4 vols., vol. 4, p. 338.

28. Cf. Richard Howard's ekphrastic poem cycle, "Homage to Nadar," in *Misgivings* (New York: Athenaeum, 1979).



26 Février 1802.

*Victor Hugo*

22 Mai 1885.

NADAR.

*Félix Nadar. Victor Hugo on His Deathbed.  
1885. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.*



*Man Ray. Proust on His Deathbed. 1922.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.  
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(ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris.*

still-life emerging radiantly from the void, the body was released from the fallen everyday realm and returned to the order of divine creation.

Although Man Ray is transparently working within the limits of the domestic setting, he has worked hard to neutralize the background, manipulating the lighting and removing all distracting details from the scene. We can measure the extent of his intervention by comparing the official signed version, in the Getty collection (see page 9), with an unsigned variant in the Musée d'Orsay (see page 16). The Getty version shows barely a hint of context: there is no opening to exteriority or contingency; the flowers strewn across the bedclothes, still visible in the background of the d'Orsay version, have been removed; the sheets neatly stretched; the blinds tightly drawn; every natural source of light has been blocked such that the only light is supplied by the photographer himself, who thus effectively occupies the place of God.

On Hugo's deathbed, with his own participation, the culture industry was transforming the nineteenth-century dream of stone into a media nightmare. As the writer lay dying, his friends and family were relaying his carefully crafted last words to the fans and journalists swarming outside the apartment—headlines were composed, engravings prepared, memorabilia manufactured, song-sheets circulated, posters printed advertising the spectacular state funeral to follow, an event unprecedented in scale and extravagance, attended by over two million (a number greater than the entire population of Paris at the time). The flowers for the event reportedly cost over one million francs.<sup>29</sup> An engraving based on Nadar's photograph was published on a magazine cover, and sold in bulk the day of the funeral. The writer who had announced the triumph of the printed page over the book of stone, literary monument over monumental building,<sup>30</sup> was himself indelibly inscribed within the monumental secular architecture of the Third Republic—outdoors, in the baroquely draped Arc de Triomphe, under which his body lay in state for public viewing, and indoors, in the deconsecrated Panthéon, where it remains to this day. Hugo had sought to secure such petrification within his lifetime. "Je voudrais signer ma vie par un grand acte, et mourir. . . ."<sup>31</sup>

Placed side by side, the two images scan almost exactly in reverse—right for left, light for shadow, white beard for black. What is the force of these negations? Is Man Ray *developing* the cliché of the deathbed transfiguration scene (*cliché*, in French, means also a snapshot, a photographic negative, a printing plate: a

29. For a discussion of Hugo's funeral, see Avner Ben-Amos, "Les Funérailles de Victor Hugo," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–92), vol. 1, *La République*, and in the larger political context of nineteenth-century state funerary culture, see Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789–1996* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also, on the creation of the Hugo celebrity cult, the exhibition catalogue *La gloire de Victor Hugo* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1985).

30. See Michael Garval, *"A Dream of Stone": Fame, Vision, and Monumentality in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2004). In Hugo's case, the political stakes are clear: it is a question of reclaiming the public space of the cathedral for the purposes of secular, democratic modernity.

31. Victor Hugo, "L'Océan," in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Laffont, 1985–90), 15 vols., vol. 15, p. 294.

“stereotype” in every sense); is he *reversing* it, so as to undermine or refuse the romantic platitude of aesthetic redemption; or might there be a secret *solarization* effect at work, a blurring of the line between positive and negative that might disturb or complicate the antithesis between aesthetic transfiguration and its converse? The two portraits explore many of the same ambiguities, not least the tension between a marmoreal aspiration to immortality and the ephemeral exigencies of photography—between monumental literary ambition and the fleetingness of the moment, between singularity and repetition, between stone and paper. Can photography achieve the dignity of sculptural form? Or could it be that sculpture itself is already implicated in the vicissitudes of photography, susceptible to all its proliferations, reversals, distortions, delays?

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The conventionality of the deathbed scenes is only the first hint that Proust, for his part, might be resisting the aestheticization he seems simultaneously to be inviting. The vision of blind somnolence barely veils a recurrent fantasy of violent enucleation,<sup>32</sup> while the image of petrified tranquility is in any case a temporary measure that unfailingly underscores the horror it wants to pacify. The entire narrative leading up to the grandmother's apotheosis had presented the record of an accelerating spiral of decay. Mud-stained in the garden, unruly in the hotel dining room, red-faced in the parlor, disheveled in the carriage, she had eventually metamorphosed into a savage animal in the sickroom, a Medusa covered in leeches, a grotesque fetish-sculpture, only momentarily transformed into a work of civilization, a Gothic masterpiece that for all its perfection has no ability to endure.

Long after her transfiguration, during the nightmarish “intermittencies” at Balbec, she will return, in dreams, as a monster, a ghost, a crumbling statue (petrification fails to stabilize), and finally as a photograph. Returning to Balbec the summer after her death, the narrator is startled by the sight of a photograph of his grandmother taken the previous year; neither the wide-brimmed hat, nor the flattering half-light, nor the carefully contrived pose conceal the fact that her face had already been disfigured by an array of enigmatic inscriptions, each one pre-

32. Behind the ecstatic image of the unseeing sleeping woman lurks the repellent figure of Odette as she had appeared to Swann in a dream towards the end of their romance (that is, shortly before the beginning of their marriage)—her face a ruined landscape, gaunt, pitted with exhaustion, her eyes bursting from their sockets, “ready to detach themselves like tears and to fall upon his face.” As Odette's gaze characteristically starts to wander, Swann experiences a surge of unembellished hatred: he “would gladly have gouged out those eyes which a moment ago he had loved so much, have crushed those flaccid cheeks” (*RTP* 1, p. 375; *Swann's Way*, p. 539). Swann's vengeful fantasy darkly foreshadows the narrator's own superficially more benign childhood reverie, described shortly later: the narrator will cherish Gilberte's gift of a coveted agate marble, bought from a stall on the Champs-Élysées. The scenario will in turn anticipate Albertine's captivity: choosing a marble with the same color as Gilberte's eyes, he endows it with the gleam of life, as if to have taken possession of her gaze (*RTP* 1, p. 395; *Swann's Way*, p. 572).

senting a kind of Rorschach blot in which every reader discerns something different. Everyone who looks at the photograph sees a different mark, each with its specific forensic function. Françoise, the servant, immediately spots the little mole on her cheek. "Poor Madame, it's the very image of her, down to the beauty spot on her cheek."<sup>33</sup> (The photograph as identification.) The narrator's mother sees in her ravaged features the archive of an illness. "[It] seemed to her a photograph not so much of her mother as of her mother's disease, of an insult inflicted by that disease on my grandmother's brutally buffeted face."<sup>34</sup> (The photograph as documentation.) The narrator for his part reads in her sorrowed creases and furrows the indelible stigma of his own guilt. "Never again would I be able to erase that tightening of her face, that anguish of her heart. . . ." <sup>35</sup> (The photograph as accusation, testimony, indictment.)

The narrator's breathlessly anticipated encounter with the statue of the virgin at Balbec church had already set the scene.<sup>36</sup> The first sighting had unfailingly disappointed: endlessly carved and embellished in his feverish imagination, the real thing had, as usual, turned out to be more like a copy than its own copy. Reduced to a "stony semblance" of itself, stripped of aura and originality, it was unable to compete with the plaster casts and photographs in the Trocadéro museum.<sup>37</sup> Grimy with soot, disfigured by the assault of time, neglect, banality, the stony virgin presented the face of irredeemable senescence—"a little old woman in stone, whose height I could measure and whose wrinkles I could count." The desecrated statue is the portrait to the grandmother's Dorian Gray: while the dying woman gets younger, the image putresces.

Its ruined and darkened surface had provoked in the narrator a violent desire to scrawl his signature in chalk for the world to see.

[I]f I had chosen to scribble my name upon that stone, it was she, the illustrious Virgin . . . , the Virgin of Balbec . . . who, on her body coated with the same soot as defiled the neighboring houses, would have displayed—powerless to rid herself of them—to all the admiring strangers come there to gaze upon her, the marks of my piece of chalk and the letters of my name, and it was she, finally, the immortal work of art so long desired, whom I found transformed . . . into a little old

33. RTP 3, p. 172 *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 237.

34. RTP 3, p. 176; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 243.

35. RTP 3, p. 146; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 214.

36. RTP 3, pp. 19–21; *Within a Budding Grove*, pp. 322–25. For the various sources of Balbec cathedral (Bayeux, Saint-Pol-de-Léon, Amiens) as well as the complex Ruskinian subtext of Proust's description, see the editorial notes in RTP 2, p. 1349; see also Jo Yoshida, "Métamorphose de l'église de Balbec: un aperçu génétique du 'Voyage au Nord,'" *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes* 14 (1983), pp. 41–61; and Cynthia Gamble, "À l'ombre de la vierge dorée de la cathédrale d'Amiens: Ruskin et l'imaginaire proustienne," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 1995, pp. 313–22.

37. Compare Hal Foster on the "Mona Lisa" effect whereby "the cliché only heightens the cult." See "Archives of Modern Art," *October* 99 (2002), pp. 81–95.

woman in stone whose height I could measure and whose wrinkles I could count.<sup>38</sup>

Since this imaginary vandalism is one of the few bits of writing achieved even in fantasy at this point in the novel, it should be taken dead seriously. Reduced to its minimum condition of possibility, the act of authorship here amounts to the compulsive tracing of the writer's name. The fantasy points to a destructive kernel at the heart of the literary endeavor: I leave my mark on the body of the mother who must bear the cost of my own productivity as an assault. I destroy what nourishes me, and leave my fingerprints on the corpse for all to see. Simultaneously crime, boast, and the scribble of a confession, the graffiti functions as a kind of photographic negative—white on black: at once a shadowy anticipation and a resistant counter-image—of the work to come.

White on black: the mark also unmistakably retraces the tracks of an earlier crime scene that goes back to the very opening of the *Recherche*. Upon finally securing his mother's forbidden presence, recounts the narrator, "I felt that I had with an impious and secret finger traced a first wrinkle upon her soul and brought out a first white hair on her head. . . ."<sup>39</sup> The crime had marked the inauguration of his literary career and its simultaneous abortion. To this traumatic event he will date the evacuation of all willpower, determination, and writerly discipline.

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The ultimate tension is thus, in the end, not simply between expansion and contraction but between inscription and erasure, between the covered page and the blank page, a distinction that may in the end amount to very little: Proust's desire for the unmarked surface is matched only by a *horror vacui* that shrinks back from the emptiness it continually seeks. Proust dreams of omitting paragraph indentations, composes sentences that run on for pages, paragraphs that refuse to end, pages that invade their margins and overflow their edges, sprouting little strips of paper, the *paperoles* that trail in all directions like the tendrils of a climbing plant (to which Albertine's sleeping body is also compared).

If Albertine's slumbering body, like the grandmother's dead one, is temporarily cleared of marks, if her virginity is restored, this is not only or even essentially with a view to apotheosis. The erasure must also take place to make

38. RTP 2, p. 21; *Within a Budding Grove*, p. 324. "Une petite vieille de pierre": Ironically, it is only the force of citation that restores a glimmer of auratic dignity to the desecrated statue by reabsorbing it within the modernist literary imaginary. See Charles Baudelaire, "Les Petites Vieilles" (1859), *Les Fleurs du mal*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 89–91. Baudelaire had dedicated "Les Petites Vieilles" to Victor Hugo, who upon reading it announced that "a macabre new ray" had entered the artistic universe. Proust remarks on the sublime cruelty of Baudelaire's vision: the poet externalizes or "paints" a feeling in its unvarnished objectivity without seeking either to sentimentalize or to "express" it. Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971), pp. 250–52.

39. RTP 1, p. 38; *Swann's Way*, p. 52.

room for further inscription. Albertine is thus a perfect avatar of Sade's Justine: her unmarked body is a mystic writing pad whose surface needs to be repeatedly restored in order to be defaced—an indestructible surface perpetually available for further mutilation. In Sade, the act of torture is repeated almost infinitely: nothing short of total annihilation can stop the writing machine, which is just what happens at the novel's end when Justine is eventually struck by lightning: the final act of inscription is a natural disaster that outflanks and puts an end to human writing.<sup>40</sup> Her surface is charred to the point where further inscription is impossible, which is why she must disappear without a trace; her existence presupposes her continued capacity for inscription, and the text that bears her name cannot survive her.

The scenario perfectly crystallizes Proust's peculiar testamentary predicament: how to write his name, how to claim authorship of the work that will outlive him, how to sign without sealing his own death warrant in the act of signing, how to die without really dying. It allows the dead writer to negotiate the future while suspending the question of literary succession. Monumental, self-contained, inviolate in his vulnerability, Proust manages to command a legacy while remaining rigorously intestate. Refusing to assume literary paternity even while multiplying his progeny to infinity, Proust systematically blocks every successor but only so as to re-create every reader in his own image. He does this by inflating the act of reading into an act of critical rewriting; he majestically enables. But precisely in transferring authority and authorship to the reader does he impose an irresistible debt and dependency; he jealously disables. Proust in one blow strengthens and disarms every potential rival by capturing all future writing within the orbit of his own text: literature is henceforth both authorized and condemned to be nothing more than the endless rereading of the *Recherche* itself.

But if every reading is a rewriting, and every writing forcibly an erasure, this must be blocked. The text must somehow inhibit or repulse the reading it simultaneously solicits. If the work keeps obsessively staging its own reading, if it cannot stop producing commentary, exegesis, interpretation, self-imitation, this is as much to preempt as to demand further reading. This accounts for the strange minimalism of the Proustian project—I'd even venture to say, its surprising *brevitas*. Despite or because of the gargantuan appearance of the novel, its endless expansiveness and extroversion, the work retreats from the space it opens up. Expansion serves the purposes of infinite contraction: in its gigantism, the work disappears from view. Proust has the almost unique ability to turn accumulation into a mode of subtraction.

Proust is strictly anti-Romantic in his arithmetic: more becomes less. The margins must be filled to leave no room for further inscription. The pages must keep accumulating to ensure that nobody will ever finish reading. The images must keep repeating to the point where they will be impossible to retain, com-

40. Cf. Karmen McKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

pare, or synthesize. The book must be entombed in a library, preferably misshelved or miscataloged, so that nobody will ever find it, at least not on purpose, and in any case never at the right time.

[T]he better part of our memories exists outside us, in a blatter of rain, in the smell of an unaired room or of the first crackling brushwood fire in a cold grate: wherever, in short, we happen upon what our mind, having no use for it, had rejected, the last treasure that the past has in store, the richest, that which, when all our flow of tears seems to have dried at the source, can make us weep again. Outside us? Within us, rather, but hidden from our eyes in an oblivion more or less prolonged. It is thanks to this oblivion alone that we can from time to time recover the person that we were, place ourselves in relation to things as he was placed, suffer anew because we are no longer ourselves but he, and because he loved what now leaves us indifferent. In the broad daylight of our habitual memory the images of the past turn gradually pale and fade out of sight, nothing remains of them, we shall never recapture it. Or rather we should never recapture it had not a few words... been carefully locked away in oblivion, just as an author deposits in the National Library a copy of a book which might otherwise become unobtainable.<sup>41</sup>

And the volume itself must be packaged in such a way that even if he stumbles upon it, the reader will somehow find himself so overwhelmed by the sheer materiality of the thing that he suddenly feels no impulse to read it. The ultimate book in this sense becomes the unopened book, the unread book, the abandoned book, the unreadable book—retained forever because permanently forgotten. This is just what happens in the final scene of the novel, when the narrator, suddenly an old man now, steps into the Guermantes' library and is arrested by the glimpse of a book's red binding.

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An unread book: is this not precisely what we all want to remember, and even, ultimately, how we want to be remembered? This is how Walter Benjamin will describe the rejuvenating power of the involuntary memory: it wipes the slate clean. Deleuze was only half-correct when he admonished Proust's readers—"forget about memory!"<sup>42</sup> Forgetting is not so much the antithesis of memory; it is, for Proust, memory's supreme achievement. This is less about excavating the past, about recapturing a vanished substance, or about returning to the achievements

41. RTP2, p. 4; *Within a Budding Grove*, p. 300.

42. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

of a previous epoch. And it has nothing to do with nostalgia. It is rather about returning to a time before possibilities were eroded, to a moment before opportunities were squandered: what is being reactivated or repeated is not only the pressure of unrealized futures but of futurity itself in its ineffaceable obduracy—a potentiality all the more potent for being irretrievably past. Benjamin speaks of “hope in the past.”

This forcibly has the appearance of a radical erasure. The essential accomplishment of involuntary memory is to undo the indelible traces left by what has been missed. The blots and blemishes of the aging body are, for Benjamin, neither simply the effects of natural senescence nor, as we sometimes like to console ourselves, the marks of accumulated wisdom, the outward expression of an inwardness, the recrudescence of ancestral features, or the visible inscription of moral character.<sup>43</sup> Such marks have no positive significance or hermeneutic content; even to call them remnants, traces, or vestiges is already to suggest something far too monumental. They are rather the ciphers of non-experience—the stigmata of missed experience, squandered experience, ruined experience, experience that failed, at the crucial moment, to register as such. Benjamin speaks of “arabesques of forgetfulness.” This is how he describes the ravages of aging in Proust:

[Proust] is filled with the insight that none of us has time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us—this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases on our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights that called on us; but we, the masters, were not home.<sup>44</sup>

This opens up new directions for physiognomic speculation. Far from being a legible surface on which we might decipher the traits of a stable character or impose narrative intelligibility on a lifetime, the face is revealed as an archive of accumulating omissions; the disfiguring streaks on our skin are just the alluvial deposits left in the wake of what was unlived. A wrinkle shows just how ambiguously time inscribes itself on our mortal bodies. Like every mark, it seems to hint of a discrete and datable moment of decision or incision, while ultimately frustrating the desire to identify any such moment. Even as it seems to bear the stamp of a punctual moment “*in time*,” to mark a singular here and now of inscription, its

43. It is true that this distinction is not consistently observed by Proust himself, or at least by his narrator, who is not always faithful to his own anti-hermeneutic insights. Aging, in the novel, can also trigger the atavistic apparition of suppressed hereditary traits: the disfiguring emergence, in old age, of a “family trait” (invariably Jewish)—the “enormous maternal hook” observed at the final matinée (*RTP* 4, p. 529; *Time Regained*, p. 381) or the “enormous, tumid, crimson” nose erupting on the ravaged countenance of the dying Swann (*RTP* 3, p. 89; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 121)—or of congenital sexual markers, like the homosexuality that ends up secreting itself like a viscous substance on the surface of Charlus’ corpulent body. It can also reveal acquired social characteristics, such as wealth and status: a woman’s face acquires the metallic sheen associated with her father’s banker profession, or another guest’s comes to resemble the streets of his childhood arrondissement (*RTP* 4, p. 529; *Time Regained*, p. 381).

44. Walter Benjamin, “On the Image of Proust,” in *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), ed. Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, vol. 2, p. 244.

belated appearance points only to a prior passage “*through* time.”<sup>45</sup> Appearing only belatedly, like a text written in invisible ink, the wrinkle is the perfect cipher of traumatic anachrony.

Proust’s own violently tactile vocabulary of impinging or breaching—branding, imprinting, piercing, carving, scratching, ploughing, beating (it’s a harrowing series)—can be misleading if we fail to take seriously this temporal torsion.<sup>46</sup> Every impression, from the bloody welts on Charlus’ naked body to “the little furrow traced in us by the sight of a hawthorn,” is a testimony to this traumatic pleating. What impresses itself most cruelly on our fragile membranes is the indelible imprint of what never registers as such. At the limits of legibility, at the limits of narrative, the creases on our skin mark the convolution—the wrinkle of latency—that ruins time itself.

To erase the traces: this is not to overcome time in a moment of crystalline eternity. It is rather to unfold, or un-crease, like a Japanese flower unfolding in water, like a starched napkin grazing stiffly against lips, or like a strip of paper unfurling, scroll-like, from a notebook.<sup>47</sup> One might even say, stretching language slightly, that Proust wants to *decrease*. He wants to smooth out the paper, to expose the creases in the moment of their disappearance: that way he can grant time itself its own fleeting physiognomy.<sup>48</sup> This gives another insight into Proust’s perverse brand of minimalism. It is ultimately what makes the Proustian corpse and corpus, despite everything, a modernist one. Saturated with marks, it manages to purge. Its stained and frayed surface turns marmoreal, and the monument becomes ephemeral—a mystic writing pad, self-regenerating in its tatters, a tabula rasa that marks the briefest interval to a new beginning.

45. I am borrowing Steven Connor’s elegant formulation in *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 90.

46. For more on this language of breaching, see my earlier essay “Impressions” (n. 21 above).

47. This list of Proustian motifs could continue: the rustling pleats of a Fortuny gown, the splaying open of a fan, the spread of a peacock’s tail, even the stretching open of a bent elbow upon awakening: in the opening pages of the novel, the uncoiling of the narrator’s own body becomes both the vehicle and the promissory cipher of exegetical unfolding. All these physical gestures are suggestive of the sensation of opening a book—a gesture that conspicuously does not, however, lead, at the novel’s end, to an experience of actual reading or understanding. When the narrator distractedly opens up the volume of *François le champi* in the Guermantes’ library, he gets no further than the title page before being swept up by the chain of sensations. In the final analysis, reading not only is unnecessary but can even be an obstacle to epiphany: “sentences sometimes are an impediment” (*RTP* 4, p. 464; *Time Regained*, p. 285). “Books [behave] . . . just like other things: the way the covers of a binding open, the grain of a particular paper, may have preserved in itself as vivid a memory . . . as the actual sentences of a book” (*ibid.*). This final image of the book as a tangible object—*une chose vue* rather than *une chose lue*—works against every notion of hermeneutic *Entfaltung*: another model of unfolding is at work, irreducibly sensuous, ephemeral, non-signifying. This frustrates any hermeneutic expectations that may have been planted at the book’s beginning (and moreover subverts the circular closure habitually attributed to the *Recherche*).

48. I am here adapting Walter Benjamin’s powerful summary of his own project: “To write history means giving dates their physiognomy.” “Convolute N.11.2,” in *Arcades Project*, p. 476.

DANIEL HELLER-ROAZEN

On December 22, 1959, *Le Monde* ran an article bearing the striking if tentative title “New Findings about François Villon?”<sup>1</sup> A subtitle explained that enigmatic question in more certain terms: “Tristan Tzara restores to the poet of the ‘Testament’ all the lines attributed to Jean Vaillant, discovering 1600 anagrams in Villon’s work, increasing ‘Master François’s’ age by two years.” The essay began by comparing the fifteenth-century poet’s famously tumultuous life to a dark forest that concealed within it not only trees, but also “monks, archers, pickpockets, lawyers, poachers, ambushes, and enchantments.” “For three years now,” the article reported, “Tristan Tzara has been walking in this forest. He has left it dazzled, with the feeling of having grasped hold of something rare: a treasure, or a secret. In one month he will publish—or perhaps one should say, he will detonate, since it will be more like a bomb—a book on Villon, chock-full of explosive material.”<sup>2</sup> The literary news quickly appeared elsewhere in the French press. Only a day later, on December 23, 1959, the French weekly *Les Lettres françaises* published an article by Charles Dobzynski whose title proclaimed: “Five Centuries after the ‘Testament,’ Tristan Tzara Reveals *The Secret of François Villon*.”<sup>3</sup> “In a few weeks, Fasquelle will publish a surprising book,” the article related, “a kind of challenge to the passing of time and the mystery that envelops certain poetic works, that draws away the depth of soul from attention to contemporary matters. The book is signed Tristan Tzara and is called *The Secret of François Villon*.”<sup>4</sup> Lest the readers mistake the identity of the author, Dobzynski recalled that the Tzara who would soon unveil the unknown secret of the fifteenth-century poet was the same who had once founded Dada.

Tristan Tzara is a man of surprises. Almost exactly half a century ago, with Dada, he invented a terrible weapon, a kind of destructive ray,

\* This text will appear in a slightly different form as a chapter of my forthcoming book, *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (New York: Zone Books, 2013).

1. Jean Couvreur, “Du nouveau sur François Villon?,” *Le Monde*, Dec. 22, 1959, p. 9. (All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.)

2. Ibid.

3. Charles Dobzynski, “Le Secret de François Villon,” *Les Lettres françaises* 803 (Dec. 17–23, 1959), pp. 1–4.

4. Ibid., p. 1.

which gave poets the right of life and death over language. Words were submitted to a strange fire that killed commonplaces and, at once, obliterated meanings that had been on the map for centuries. For four years now, in the quiet of his study, which is filled with mementos of Surrealism and Oceanic masks, all competing with the Phoenix of the unusual for perpetual rebirth, Tristan Tzara, like a scientist in his laboratory, has been preparing to reveal one of the most vertiginous literary surprises of the century. It will radically change our knowledge of the greatest poet of the end of the Middle Ages, François Villon, whose "Testament" is, in fact, the birth certificate of modern poetry. This time, therefore, Tristan Tzara has not confronted language in order to destroy it, but to discover within it, under the heavy ash of the centuries, the hidden sense, the fire that burned under the cold appearance of enigmatic allusions and cryptograms, encrusted in a text that has been studied a thousand times, interpreted, debated, in all its symbols.<sup>5</sup>

*The Secret of Villon*, however, was slow to be revealed to the public. The book did not appear in 1960, as the two articles from 1959 promised. At the time of Tzara's death in December 1963, the work had still not come to light. Christophe Tzara, the author's son, would later recall that his father had been "correcting the typed manuscript in his last moments."<sup>6</sup> Yet it was not printed in the immediate aftermath of his death. For further news of Tzara's final work, readers would have to wait until 1967, when Pierre Le Gentil, in a chapter of a monograph on Villon, related what he had found in studying the manuscript of Tzara's last book.<sup>7</sup> More information about *The Secret of Villon* was disclosed eight years later in an article by Jean Dufournet, "Tzara and the Anagrams of Villon."<sup>8</sup> In the same journal in which Dufournet's essay appeared, Henri Béhar published a nine-page fragment from Tzara's book, which he titled "The Meaning of Anagrams."<sup>9</sup> He also contributed to the issue a critical essay of his own in which he revealed that a complete edition of Tzara's work was underway and that, "at a later date," *The Secret of Villon* would appear in print, so that the reader could at last "form an exact and personal opinion" concerning the poet's "decidedly innovative thesis."<sup>10</sup> The "later date" turned out to belong to a future more distant than one might have anticipated. Only in 1991 did the sixth and final volume of Tzara's *Complete Works* appear, disclosing the aged but still new "new findings" promised three decades earlier.

Tzara's interest in the medieval poet had long predated his last book. As early as 1949, he had graced Pierre Savinel's edition of Villon's poems with a

5. Ibid.

6. Henri Béhar, "À mots découverts," *Europe* 53: 555/556 (1975), p. 96.

7. Pierre Le Gentil, *Villon* (Paris: Hatier, 1967), pp. 21-30.

8. Jean Dufournet, "Tzara et les anagrammes de Villon," in *Nouvelles recherches sur Villon* (Paris: Champion, 1980), pp. 249-73.

9. Tristan Tzara, "La signification des anagrammes," *Europe* 53: 555/556, pp. 86-95.

10. Béhar, "À mots découverts," p. 96.

prefatory essay in which he stated that modern poetry, as a whole, "finds one of the elements of its functional mechanism in the poetry of Villon."<sup>11</sup> "Some have wished to see in Baudelaire the initiator of modern poetry," he wrote,

because of his recognition of the real world from which he draws his poetry. In his sincerity, he represents a reaction against Romanticism. In the same way, Villon is at the source of an equally modern current in poetry: that which, in reacting against the Romantic and later conventional love of the troubadours and against the unrealistic religious formalism of his time, announces the end of the Middle Ages. By this realistic position, and by moving from the elements of his life to reach a personal vision of the world, Villon bestows a new criterion on poetic criticism. The authenticity of poetry, from this point on, will be a quality residing in the variable and organic concordance between the apprehended fact and its expressed transposition. Poetry will be true if the sentiment that animates it has been intimately lived, not if it results from some received formula. It will be necessary, in short, for the poet to have lived it intensely enough for his poetic expression to be naturally adequate to it.<sup>12</sup>

In this sense, Tzara concluded, Villon's is not only a "poetry of circumstance" (*poésie de circonstance*), marked by a particular historical setting; it is, more fundamentally, "poetry of *the* circumstance" (*poésie de la circonstance*), drawing from the world the materials of an image uniquely faithful to the poet's encounter with it.<sup>13</sup>

In his preface, "The Modernity of Villon," Tzara makes no mention of anything that the medieval poet might have sought to hide from his readership. The Villon of 1949, it seems, possessed no secret or still kept it to himself. The revelation of *The Secret of Villon* would consist before all else in the disclosure of this one fact: that there existed a "secret of Villon" that had lain concealed for centuries. As the French press revealed, the cryptic thing in question consisted in an art of writing that allowed Villon both to record and to conceal matters relating to the circumstances of his poetry: allusions, suggestions, accusations, and statements about contemporaries, signaled above all by the presence of proper names hidden in a web of anagrams.

Tzara began his book by recalling that Villon's "Lais" (Legacy) presents itself as a "romance" or "novel" (*roman*) of love that retells a major episode in the life of the poet and, more precisely, the reasons that "forced Villon to flee Paris." "While relating the continuation of his adventures, always in an ironic fashion, the 'Testament' completes this first work and retrospectively explains the origins of his misfortunes."<sup>14</sup> Villon loved a woman and would have continued to do so had

11. Tristan Tzara, "L'actualité de Villon," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Béhar (Paris: Flammarion, 1975-1991), vol. 5, p. 119.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6: *Le Secret de Villon*, p. 9.

he not suffered the combined blows of fate and poverty. The twenty-fifth stanza of the "Testament" could not be more explicit:

Bien est verté que j'ay aimé  
 Et amereoie volentiers;  
 Mais triste cuer, ventre affamé  
 Qui n'est rassasié au tiers  
 M'oste des amouereux sentiers.  
 Au fort, quelqu'ung s'en recompence,  
 Qui est ramply sur les chantiers!  
 Car la dance vient de la pance.<sup>15</sup>

It's very true I have loved  
 And willingly would love again  
 But a heavy heart and starved crew  
 Never full by more than a third  
 Drag me down from love's ways  
 By now someone else takes up the slack  
 Who's filled to the brim on the gantry  
 For the dance starts in the belly.<sup>16</sup>

Citing these lines, Tzara draws the reader's attention to the final two, which follows the poet's allusion to the "someone else" who, having taken "up the slack," is "filled to the brim on the gantry." "*Qui est ramply sur le chantier*," he notes, "is an expression of the period, meaning 'Who has eaten well and drunk well,' the *chantier* or *gantry*, the piece of wood supporting the barrel, being, by extension, the cellar. The line *Car la dance vient de la pance* [For the dance starts in the belly] paraphrases a known expression. Here *dance* has the erotic meaning implied by the context."<sup>17</sup> That commentary is supported by the scholarship on Villon's language, which Tzara knew well.<sup>18</sup> Quickly, however, Tzara passes from the poet's statement to a level of the text that lies beneath that of the words that compose it. He evokes a reading of the passage proposed by the early-twentieth-century philologist and editor of Villon, Lucien Foulet.<sup>19</sup> The penultimate line of the stanza, Foulet suggested, contains four groups of sounds that, when combined, spell out the name of

15. Ibid. The Middle French text cited here appears in the format given by Tzara. For a more recent edition of Villon's text, see François Villon, *Poésies complètes*, ed. Claude Thiry (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1991), p. 107.

16. François Villon, "The Testament," in *The Poems of François Villon*, trans. Galway Kinnell (Hanover, NH: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 38.

17. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 10.

18. See, most recently, Claude Thiry's remarks in Villon, *Poésies complètes*, p. 106.

19. See Villon, *Oeuvres*, ed. A. Lognon, revised by Lucien Foulet (Paris: G. Crès, 1919), p. 158. Before being noted by Foulet, they were already observed by Jean Acher in a contribution that Foulet most likely read: Jean Acher, review of Lognon, *Oeuvres de Villon*, *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur* 38, vol. 2 (1911), p. 22. See Béhar's notes, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. VI, p. 539. The passage appears as folio 124.

a contemporary of Villon's evoked in both the "Lais" and the "Testament." It suffices to read "Qui est RAMPLY sur les CHAN-TIERS" for the figure to appear, concealed in an extended anagram: "Itiers Marchant."<sup>20</sup> Foulet had drawn a simple conclusion from this unexpected fact: Itiers Marchant must be the rival "someone" whom Villon evokes, without explicitly naming, one line above.

Once noted in the line, the syllables of the name are difficult to deny. Being audible, their presence, however dislocated, is almost apparent. A note contained in Tzara's unpublished papers suggests that when he first encountered Foulet's remark, he was immediately persuaded of its validity. Yet he also sought to take a further step. He wondered whether there might not be other names hidden in such a form in the syllables of Villon's lines.

The anagram of Ythiers Marchant [as Tzara here spells the name] is perhaps not an isolated case. The analogy of certain lines of the *Lais* with the stanzas of the "Testament," the nomenclature of the legatees, arranged according to category or order of importance, the correspondence of the nature of the inheritance left to his tutor and his mother, are in no way gratuitous. It is in this direction, it seems to me, that one should pursue investigations.<sup>21</sup>

By the time he composed *The Secret of Villon*, however, Tzara admitted that this first intuition had been mistaken. "Persuaded that there must be other revelations in the work of Villon," he recounts, "I looked for anagrams formed as indicated above—without the shadow of success."<sup>22</sup> Pierre Le Gentil later confirmed his conclusion. "Anagrams analogous to the one cited by Foulet," he asserted, albeit not unequivocally, "apparently exist nowhere else in lines by Villon."<sup>23</sup> Yet Tzara tells us that in time, his failure led to one major linguistic discovery. He found that in the line commented upon by Foulet, the name "Itiers Marchant" could also be represented as present in a form different from the one suggested by the philologist and according to anagrammatic rules more subtle, more exact, and more systematic than had ever been observed.

Tzara explains in his book that these rules, when conjoined, define a "procedure" that Villon adopted in the composition of a number of his poems, most notably the "Lais." "The procedure consisted in including, in a line or in a portion of a line involving the anagram, a word or several words whose letters are systematically distributed with respect to a center, constituted by one or two alphabetic signs, the spaces between words counting as null."<sup>24</sup> Three points implicit in this summary are worth retaining. The first is that the anagrams detected by Tzara, unlike the cryptic figures that traditionally go by that name, cannot be restricted to the space of individ-

20. François Villon, *Lais* 81 (XI), in *Poésies complètes*, p. 67; *Testament* 970 (XCIV), p. 169.

21. Tzara, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 539.

22. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 10.

23. Le Gentil, *Villon*, p. 22.

24. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, pp. 10–11.

ual words, being in each case distributed across a single line of verse or one of its segments. The second point is that within such a textual extension, the white spaces between words can play no role. To recover the names hidden in Villon's lines, one must begin by counting only letters. Implicitly, Tzara reasons in this sense as did Mallarmé: for both, as suggested by the author of "Crise de vers," "from many expressions, the line makes a total, new word, foreign to language" (*Le vers, qui de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total, neuf, étranger à la langue*).<sup>25</sup> Finally, within this new "word," a center may be discerned: an "axis . . . constituted by one or two alphabetic signs," with respect to which the letters of the hidden word or words are distributed in strictly symmetrical positions to the left and to the right. For example, if a letter belonging to a secret expression can be discerned two positions to the left of the center, another will be legible two positions to its right; if, by contrast, no such component letter may be observed one position to the left of the center, none may be considered to lie one position to its right. Tzara adds that when the hidden word is composed of an even number of letters, "the center is constituted by one or two letters; in the latter case, the letters may or may not be used in the formation of the anagram." When the concealed expression, instead, possesses an odd number of letters, "the center will be represented by a single letter, which must inevitably count among those that are necessary for the formation of the anagram."<sup>26</sup>

For the poetic procedure to function fully, a certain license is required. "While the numeric disposition of these anagrams is strictly observed," Tzara explains, "Villon takes liberties, which concern only the spelling of words."<sup>27</sup> Some reflect variations in orthography that are commonly to be found in medieval French manuscripts, not least those that transmit Villon's poems. For example, *pauvre* may be spelled as *poivre*, *vieil* as *viel*, *vengeance* as *venjançe*.<sup>28</sup> Yet Tzara insists that one also take into account other types of divergences in spelling. Scholarship on Villon's language, as it is recorded in manuscripts, suggested to him that the poet had taken as equivalent certain written signs that in Middle French were otherwise held to be distinct. Louis Thuasne noted, for instance, that in some cases, Villon adds to words a terminal *s* (or withholds it), without effecting any change in their meaning.<sup>29</sup> But Tzara argues that one must also admit further licenses in writing, many of which were, and remain today, generally unknown to specialists of Middle French scribal habits.

Tzara explains that to grasp the words secretly scattered across Villon's lines, one must always keep in mind a complex system of orthographic imperatives: suppress a *t* at the end of a word ending in *-an* or *-en*, replacing it, if need be, by an *s*; erase any *s* before *t* inside a word; remove *l* before *x*; replace *l* by *z* or *x* or by *c* before *l*, *e*, or *a*; take *i*, *y*, and *j* to be equivalent (or replace a *y* with

25. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Crise de vers," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 368.

26. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 11.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

28. See Dufournet, *Nouvelles recherches sur Villon*, p. 251.

29. Tzara refers (*Le secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, pp. 292–95) to Louis Thuasne's "La rime chez Villon," in Thuasne, *Villon et Rabelais: Notes et commentaires* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1911), pp. 369–418.

two *i*'s); exchange *j* and *g*; rewrite any double consonants as a single consonant or rewrite, instead, some single consonants by two consonants; treat any metrically elided or "mute" *e* as either possibly included in or excluded from the anagram; consider *o* to be equivalent to *a*; take *e* as interchangeable with *i*; write *ou* as *oe* or *oue*; replace *c*, when necessary, with *g*; and take *m* to be equivalent to *n* and *n* as substitutable for *m*.<sup>30</sup> Such rules enable the reader to find certain words that for the purposes of anagrammatic analysis can be represented in a number of different shapes. The priest Sermoise, whom Villon is reported to have killed on June 5, 1455, for instance, appears in Tzara's readings in no fewer than twelve distinct forms: "Sarmoies," "Sarmoie," "Sarmoye," "Sermoye," "Sermoie," "Sermoies," "Cermoie," "Cermoye," "Cermoies," "Carmoie," "Carmoie," and "Carmoies." Yet Tzara also admits that it is possible that his orthographic principles are imprecise, in the sense that "more general laws" concerning the proper spelling of Villon's manuscripts may still be found. "I do not claim," he observes, "to have exhausted the question."<sup>31</sup>

*The Secret of Villon* suggests a graphic method for the illustration of this procedure. It consists of tying individual letters on either side of the central axis to each other by means of "curves" drawn below the printed text.<sup>32</sup> The publishers of Tzara's final work include no images of this method of representation, of which Tzara offers an abbreviated description in his book. Yet one can find an example of its form in an article published in 1960 in which Louis Aragon announced that Tzara will soon unveil unseen anagrams in Villon's successor, Rabelais.<sup>33</sup>

The publishers of *The Secret of Villon* chose to present the anagrammatic procedure by more traditional typographic means, which are easily described. First, all the letters in a single line are set beside each other, without spaces, as if they formed an entire word. Then, on two successive lines below, two more sets of signs are printed. The first will indicate, by means of plus and minus signs, which letters play a role in the hidden word. On the second line beneath the text, the functional letters of the concealed expression will then be numbered according to the order of their appearance in the word or words that they evoke.

The first example printed in this form in *The Secret of Villon* is the line from the "Testament" analyzed by Foulet, which appears as follows:<sup>34</sup>

Q	U	I	E	S	T	R	A	M	P	L	Y	S	U	R	L	E	C	H	A	N	T	I	E	R
+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
4	6	14	9	12	7	1	5	10	11	8	13	2	3											

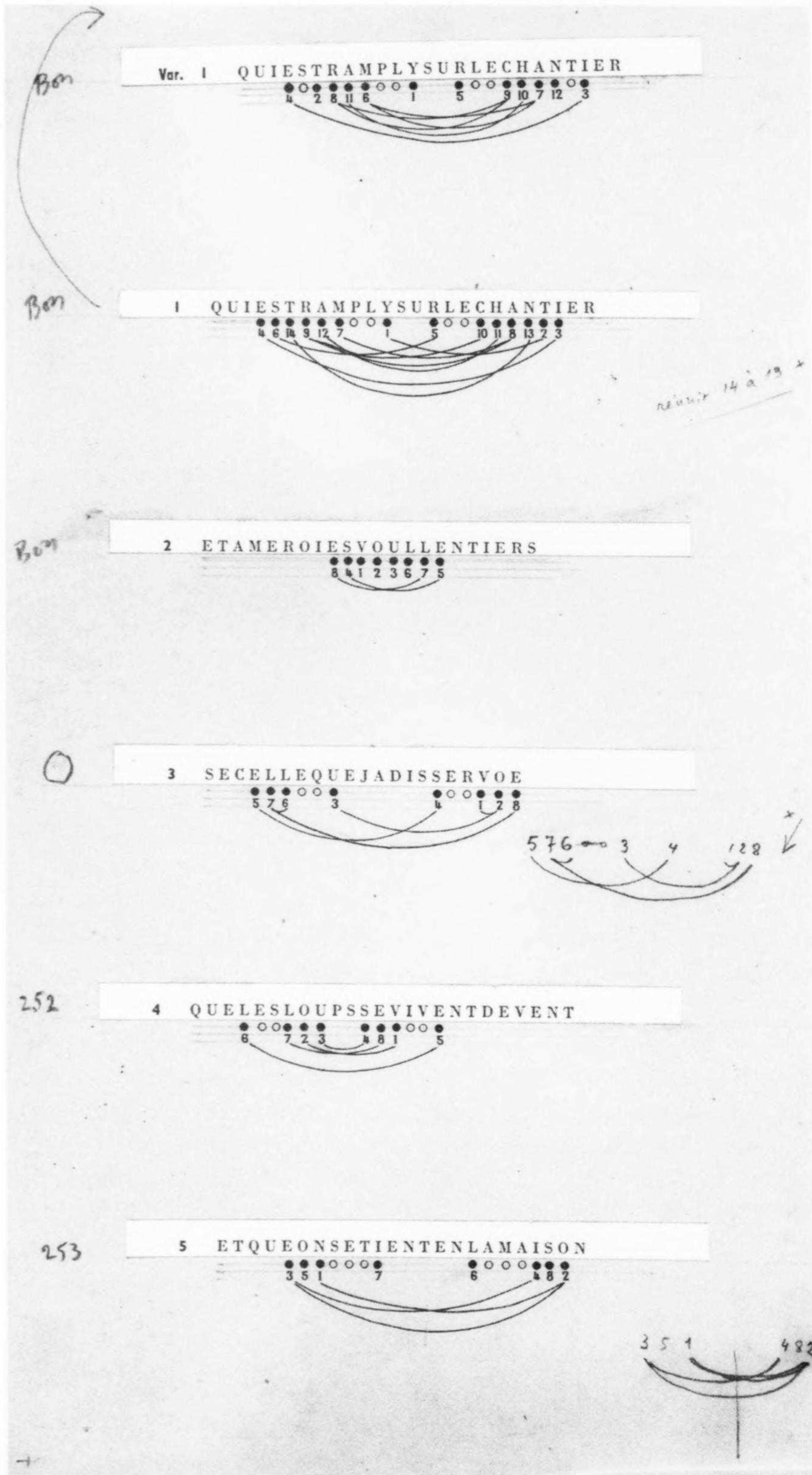
30. See Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, pp. 13–16. Cf. Dufournet, *Nouvelles recherches sur Villon*, p. 251.

31. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 16.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

33. Louis Aragon, "Tristan Tzara découvre une oeuvre nouvelle de Rabelais," *Les lettres françaises* 1000, Oct. 24, 1963, p. 7.

34. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 11.



Tristan Tzara. Combinatorial analysis of François Villon poem.

Here Tzara recovers the same anagram as did Foulet—*Itiers Marchant*—without, however, admitting Foulet's implicit principle that the concealed name be present in the line through the rearrangement of its constituent syllables. Tzara reckons, in short, not in "anaphones," as did Saussure in his hidden notebooks on poetry, but in *grammata* in the strict sense, letters distributed across each line. For him, the words concealed in Villon's verse are composed not from sound clusters but from graphic signs, which function as the indivisible elements of words. It follows that the hidden term ceases to be perceptible to the ear. The play of purely alphabetic units is too subtle and too complex to be heard as such. A syllabic decomposition of one of Villon's lines will issue in only eight or ten elements, depending on the verse form employed by the medieval poet. Admittedly, one may fashion more units by extracting the occasional phonemic part from a syllable, as Foulet does in drawing a *Y* from *ply* in *ramply*. Yet as long as one counts in syllables, the set of functional units will remain small in number. If one reckons in letters, at least twice as many elements will appear. The possibilities of combination and recombination, accordingly, will increase.

Tzara knew this well. More than once in *The Secret of Villon*, he argues that several names could be found in the same words and phrases, being projected across a single metric space and written, so to speak, upon each other. Sometimes entire sentences could be recovered in the space of a line. In the conclusion to the book, for instance, Tzara gives a thorough analysis of Villon's "Ballade à s'amie," ending with an intense interpretation of its final address:

Prince amoureux des amans le greigneur  
 Vostre mal gré ne vouldroye encourir,  
 Mais tout franc cuer doit, par Nostre Seigneur,  
 Sans empirer, ung povre secourir.<sup>35</sup>

Amorous prince and greatest lover  
 I don't wish to call down your disfavor  
 But every true heart must by the heavenly Father  
 Save a poor man before he sinks under.<sup>36</sup>

Applying the rules of the procedure to the first line of this *envoi*, one discovers the hidden name of the "prince": Charles d'Orléans, Villon's friend and fellow poet. Yet one finds six other names, which Villon has "ironically" written over his: "Noé Jolis," "Pardryers," "Denise," "Itiers," "Perinnet," and "Sarmoie."<sup>37</sup> In his analysis of the penultimate line of the same *envoi*, Tzara goes further, finding

35. Villon, *Testament*, CXIII, 966–69, in Villon, *Poésies complètes*, p. 167; for Tzara's analysis, see *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, pp. 278–82.

36. Kinnell, *The Poems of François Villon*, p. 87.

37. For the name Charles d'Orléans, see Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 254; for the "ironic" names, see *ibid.*, pp. 278–79.



Having revealed all the members of this company, Tzara explains that Villon also encrypted in the line a "signature," "validating the authenticity of his anagrams." It consists of a sentence, its letters symmetrically placed as if in a single name:

MAISTOUTFRANCCUEURDOITPARNOSTRESEIGNEUR  
 + + + + O O O + + O + O + +                    + + O + O + + O O O + + + +  
 9 10 15 8            17 1    3    13 5                    6 7    16    2 4    14 18 12 11

= *François m'a escripte*, "François Wrote Me"

Personified, this final anagram writes of itself, commenting in testamentary form on the reasons for its persistence. It is the proof, Tzara writes, that Villon conceived the entire "Lais" as a continuous *roman à clef*. "One could even say *à double clé*," he adds, "if one keeps in mind that the key that serves to open the real domain of the drama and its characters is a function of the second key, which allows one to decipher the anagrams. Villon's rich and varied imagination is thus contained in the corset of a system of interpretation whose rigor and liberty reciprocally command each other."<sup>39</sup>

Learning of this late project, a reader familiar with the works of Tzara's youth might think of that other polyphonic poetic form, the *poème simultan*, which Tzara, together with Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Janco, famously performed in November 1916 before the public of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. Read "in parallel" in French, German, and English, not successively but in a single stretch of time, the poem "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer" consisted in the structural layering of three distinct texts upon one another.<sup>40</sup> In the explanatory "Note to the Bourgeois" that accompanied the original publication of this work, Tzara stated that it responded, in its composition, to a particular pictorial practice. The "transmutation of objects and colors" in "Picasso, Braque, Picabia, Duchamp-Villon, Delaunay" had prompted him to seek to "apply the same simultaneous principles in poetry." The resulting creation, he wrote, was conceived in such a fashion as to permit any member of the public to link the disparate associations of the poem to the "elements characteristic for his own personality, mixing them, fragmenting them, etc., while remaining in the direction that the author channeled."<sup>41</sup> Despite its apparent cacophony, the *poème*, in this sense, was to be led by a conductor, albeit in such a way as to suggest different executions to its diverse listeners. "A contrapuntal recitative," in Hugo Ball's words, it was to constitute a performance "in which three or more voices simultaneously speak, sing, whistle, or do something of the kind, such that their encounters constitute the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre shape of the matter."<sup>42</sup>

39. Ibid., p. 282.

40. For Tzara's "simultaneous poems," see Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 492-500.

41. See the statement accompanying the poem, *ibid.*, pp. 492-93.

42. Hugo Ball, cited in Hans Richter, *Dada, Kunst und Anti-Kunst: Der Beitrag Dadas zur Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1964), p. 28.

The simultaneity of text and anagram in *The Secret of Villon* is of another nature. In the Dadaist poem, three tongues coincide in a temporal extension, sharing a single acoustical form: each is read aloud. Every language is therefore equally perceptible or imperceptible. Tzara presents Villon's poetry, by contrast, as animated by two formally distinct levels of enunciation that are "superposed" like images upon each other.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, while the *poème simultané* prompts those who hear it to "mix, fragment, etc." its elements in possibly incompatible ways, the two levels of the medieval work, for the late Tzara, necessarily compose an ordered and coherent whole. Villon's poetry "contains" its anagrams in every sense. Not only are the signs of the secret words literally present in those that compose its lines; what is concealed in them also reinforces, as if in a secondary role, what the text has openly said. "It will be observed," Tzara writes, "that the meaning of the anagrams is often inscribed in the line that contains it, although neighboring lines or parts of them may lend them a signification by implication."<sup>44</sup> Anagrams do not so much trouble the verse in which they can be discerned as offer them commentary: explanatory and revelatory notes for their interpretation. Tzara repeatedly calls them "signatures" that point to the reality from which the poems spring.<sup>45</sup> Over the syllables of Villon's songs and ballads, they sound softly, as "a kind of echo" or "a voice in mute" (*une voix en sourdine*).<sup>46</sup>

In several respects, the theory of this dark speech remains itself obscure. A first ambiguity involves the relation that is to obtain, for Tzara, between the medieval poet and his hermetic linguistic and literary procedure. *The Secret of Villon* suggests several possibilities. At times, Tzara argues that the poet's art of embedding words within words was never widely known. He reasons then that it allowed the poet to escape censure when inculcating his contemporaries or when disclosing matters of an erotic nature, which medieval mores required him to keep concealed. The "secret," he suggests, was shared only with Villon's closest friends, Catherine and Noël Joris, whom he "initiated" into the principle of his art.<sup>47</sup> This explains why "not one" of the medieval copyists who transcribed Villon's poems "seems to have had any knowledge of the treasure hidden inside the verbal matter of his verse" and why it is that to recover the buried gold, systematic orthographic adjustments must be made.<sup>48</sup> At other times, however, Tzara suggests that the circle of those who knew of Villon's procedure was considerably wider than this summary would allow. Perhaps, he muses, Villon developed his technique with a view to the many friends who would be capable of detecting the recollections, thoughts, and reproaches encrypted in his verse. Tzara wonders

43. Tzara uses the term "superposition" at various points. See, for example, *Le secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 18.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 519.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

even if Villon's misfortunes may not be, at least in part, attributable to the reactions of contemporaries, who could and did perceive the provocations that he had only faintly covered over in his poetry.<sup>49</sup>

Yet in the pages of Tzara's final work, one also encounters the possibility that the poet's concealed communications may, in truth, be "secrets" only for us. Tzara sought to show, in varying degrees of detail, that poets from the troubadours to Charles d'Orléans and Rabelais all employed the "procedure." At the limit, Villon's cryptographic method may have been transparent not to some, but rather to all of his contemporaries. The content of the messages then would have been common knowledge. "If the anagrams give us revelations," Tzara writes, "we must nonetheless believe that in Villon's time, they were only ever 'open secrets' [*secrets de Polichinelle*]. He wrote the anagrams much more for the amusement of his friends than to unveil to them facts that they knew."<sup>50</sup>

The equivocation is of great consequence for Tzara's claims. Depending on the status of the "secret" unveiled in the pages of his book, the procedure may or may not be employed as an historical and philological tool. Repeatedly, Tzara suggests that the presence or absence of anagrams in the verse of Villon's epoch will be a positive criterion for the determination of authorship. One of the more provocative theses of his work, as the French press immediately grasped, was that all poems attributed to the lesser fifteenth-century poet Jean Vaillant were, in fact, Villon's work. Part of Tzara's demonstration consisted in his proof that Villon's procedure could be detected in the poems of Vaillant: the names "François" and "Catherine," in particular, as he showed, are often scattered there. Yet if Villon's technique was a common one, the conclusion hardly holds, since any one of his contemporaries could have woven those names into his own lines. A similar ambiguity marks the substantial biographical assertions that Tzara sought to demonstrate by means of his anagrammatic decipherments. At some times, it seems that words found concealed in verse may be taken as biographical evidence of an almost documentary kind. The most striking example, in this regard, involves Tzara's treatment of Villon's alleged date of birth. On the basis of his recovery of hidden names, Tzara maintained that Villon must have been born two years earlier than had been thought.<sup>51</sup> At other times, Tzara defends the pertinence of the anagrams he has uncovered by anchoring them firmly in historical facts that he takes to be certain. In certain passages of his book, finally, Tzara suggests both possibilities simultaneously, as if unaware of the vicious circle that such a reasoning would imply. "One can only establish with certainty a point in the biography of Villon," Tzara writes, "if the indications derived from the anagrams confirm the facts, and reciprocally."<sup>52</sup> Yet if the first proposition and its reciprocal are both true, neither, strictly speaking, holds.

49. Ibid., p. 89.

50. Ibid., p. 17.

51. For a discussion, see Dufournet, *Nouvelles recherches sur Villon*, p. 264.

52. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 215.

Perhaps the most perplexing ambiguity in the argument of *The Secret of Villon* involves the status of those elements most often treated as secrets: names. It cannot be denied that Tzara's method of decipherment supposes that one knows, before confronting Villon's poetry, which special words it may conceal. Unknown terms, as Tzara himself admits, cannot be recovered by this method. One must draw the name for which one searches, therefore, from Villon's own poetry, concealed names being all, in this sense, recurrences of apparent ones. Yet there is more. Even if one grants that the procedure consists in hiding what is known so that it may, in time, be found anew, a troubling fact remains. It pertains to the identity of the secret names. On the surface, Tzara would seem to accept a common premise in research into anagrams that holds that only forms with definite alphabetic shapes may be hidden and revealed in other expressions. Tzara can recover the distorted shapes of such names as "Tabary" and "Perrinet," for example, since he knows the exact signs by which these names are written. Yet the principles of his method also dictate that a name possess no single form. Just as "Sermoie" can be written as "Sermoye" or "Çarmoie," so "Tabary" can be spelled "Tabarye," "Tabarrie," or "Tabaries," and "Perrinet," as Tzara's own analyses demonstrate, may appear as "Parynet," "Perenet," "Parrinet," "Perynet," or "Parrenet." An intractable difficulty follows, for a simple reason: the very "liberties" that allow Tzara to recover certain names in Villon's work are those that forbid him from recognizing them with certainty. Inevitably, the crucial element in Villon's hermetic art of language—the secret of the secret—cannot but escape him.

In one of the earliest articles on Tzara's last project, Aragon wagered in 1960 that *The Secret of Villon* would, at a future date, provoke critical perplexity. "It will one day be a great subject of astonishment and study how it is that he who, almost half a century ago, founded the Dada Movement, has today become the researcher who, in Villon and Rabelais, takes pains to show that the obscurity of texts is essentially a result of our ignorance of both the social conditions and the biography of writers."<sup>53</sup> The exactitude of Aragon's prophecy is undeniable. Yet it also raises several questions. It is indeed remarkable that the author who once proclaimed that "there is a great destructive, negative task to accomplish" and who called, in his *Manifesto* of 1918, for the radical "sweeping away" of atrophied forms of artistic expression should have later devoted such attention to the recovery of an ancient art of writing for which he had to devote himself, over the course of almost a decade, to mastering the philology of medieval French.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond that formal observation, however, other differences are worth noting. Beginning with his earliest work, Tzara defined "spontaneity" as the supreme feature of future art.<sup>55</sup> In the "Lecture on Dada" that he gave in Weimar and Jena in 1922, he declared: "We have had enough of reflective movements that have dilated, beyond all measure, our credulity in the benefits of science. What we now

53. Aragon, "Tristan Tzara découvre une oeuvre nouvelle de Rabelais," p. 7.

54. Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 366.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 364-67.

want is *spontaneity*. . . . In art, Dada brings everything back to an initial, yet relative simplicity."<sup>56</sup> Again, the contrast with his later conception of Villon's metric lines of words upon words seems sharp. "They are the fruit of a meticulous assembly of disparate pieces, incessantly polished and polished anew so as to be able to follow each other," *The Secret of Villon* explains.<sup>57</sup> But it would be an error to infer that the late Tzara abandoned the literary quality he once extolled. "Granting that the term spontaneity has no meaning when referred to poetry," Tzara writes in his last book, "one must admit that Villon has succeeded in keeping intact the freshness of tone and the accents of his presence, despite the anagrams that lead their independent and swarming life on the inside of the lines that serve as their basis."<sup>58</sup>

The most profound tension between the projects of the early and the late Tzara, however, lies elsewhere. It involves a force that the Dadaists, as perhaps none before them, summoned in the fabric of their art: chance, or contingency.<sup>59</sup> In the "Dada Manifesto on Weak Love and Bitter Love," first read in Paris in 1920, Tzara offered this famous account of how "To Make a Dadaist Poem":

Take a newspaper.  
 Take a pair of scissors.  
 From the newspaper, choose an article of the length you would like your  
 poem to have.  
 Cut out the article.  
 Then cut out each of the words that compose the article and put them in  
 a bag.  
 Shake it softly.  
 Then remove each cut-out, one after the other.  
 Carefully copy them out  
 In the order in which they left the bag.  
 The poem will resemble you.  
 And thus you will be an infinitely original writer of charming sensibility,  
 although still unknown to the common crowd.<sup>60</sup>

These lines evoke a poetic practice in which the methodic destruction of a given text goes hand in hand with a partially random process of composition. The ultimate sequence of words in the "Dadaist poem" will be determined not only by the initial choice of an article, with its length and lexicon, but also by the "soft shaking" in a bag of its words, followed by the extraction of each cutout, "one after the other," in an order that the poet cannot anticipate. The experiment has been compared to practices of artists close to Tzara, not least the ones Hans Arp

56. Tristan Tzara, "Conférence sur Dada," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, pp. 419–24, p. 421.

57. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 219.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

59. See Harrett Ann Watts, *Chance: A Perspective on Dada* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).

60. Tristan Tzara, "Dada manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 382.

named in his "law of chance" (*Gesetz des Zufalls*).<sup>61</sup> As Hans Richter long ago remarked, of all the Dadaists, it was, however, Tzara who carried the principle of chance "to the most extreme point in literature."<sup>62</sup>

One might argue that Villon's procedure, as the late Tzara describes it, recalls to a certain degree the poetic method proposed in the *Manifesto* of 1920. A "meticulous assembly of disparate pieces, incessantly polished and polished anew so as to be able to follow each other," Villon's verse, which resembles him like no other, arises from the combination of minimal units, abstracted and "cut out," so to speak, from chains of signifying sequences. They are more minimal even than the elements that the *Manifesto* recommended as building blocks, being neither words nor even metric parts—syllables, rhymes, or vowels—but mere phonemes, transcribed, for the most part, in accordance with the graphic conventions of fifteenth-century France.

There, however, the similarities between the two literary practices end. The Tzara of *The Secret of Villon* insists that the sequence of names hidden in Villon's verse could be no mere fruit of chance. It must be willed. Like Saussure before him, Tzara could not, however, entirely exclude the possibility that certain stochastic processes might be at play in speech. The "keys" he had detected might partake somehow in random realizations of some possible combinations among others. "One cannot deny," he conceded in a fragment relating to his final work, "that chance plays a relatively important part in the formation of anagrams made of discontinuous letters. The question that arises is that of knowing whether Villon and the other anagrammatists, conscious of this chance, employed, amplified, or provoked it in intending to insert into their texts the greatest number of anagrams and, furthermore, to place them in the places that best suited them."<sup>63</sup>

Tzara had not been led to the "question that arises" entirely on its own. In July 1961, one M. Puisségur, teacher of mathematics in Nevers, happened, during his summer holidays, to read a newspaper article announcing an extraordinary cryptographic find: Tristan Tzara had discovered a forgotten method, once employed by poets, for embedding the letters of names in verse.<sup>64</sup> Few details of the technique were offered, yet the indications sufficed to arouse the scholar's curiosity. On the basis of the examples given, Puisségur began to devise a formal method for calculating, as best he could, the probability that names of a certain length might be present in lines of poetry, their letters distributed according to the symmetrical form that Tzara had identified. "Something" in the announcement, he would later recall, "had ruffled me."<sup>65</sup>

Once he completed his computations, Puisségur wrote to Tzara through the intermediary of the paper, acquainting him with the results of his findings. They

61. See Richter, *Dada, Kunst und Anti-Kunst*, pp. 51–65; and Watt, *Chance*, pp. 51–136.

62. Richter, *Dada, Kunst und Anti-Kunst*, p. 54.

63. Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 525.

64. Jean-Loup Debardie, *Candide*, July 26, 1961.

65. M. Puisségur, "Rabelais, Dada, et les probabilités," *Bulletin de l'Association des professeurs de mathématiques de l'enseignement public* 277 (1971), p. 10.

could be simply summarized: for the formation of discontinuous anagrams spelling out names in poetry, "chance," he concluded, "needs no help." In short, Puisségur took the postulate of a poetic procedure to be superfluous, because the laws of probability alone suffice for lines to contain within them the letters of certain names, distributed in strictly symmetrical patterns with respect to a central axis. In an essay published in the *Bulletin de l'Association des professeurs de mathématiques de l'enseignement public* in 1971, eight years after Tzara's death, he summarized the formal reasoning that had led him to these conclusions. He also recounted how his first letter, years earlier, had met with a courteous reply. The famous poet invited the young mathematician to visit him at home. "Tzara received me in his rue de Lille apartment full of Picasso drawings and African masks," Puisségur recalled. He presented Tzara with his calculations. "I brought him no certitude," he would observe, "since to express a probability (unless it is equal to 0 or to 1) is to make a figured confession of ignorance."

I simply came to say to him, "This is what is due to chance. Let us decide." But faced with my figures, he responded with the conviction of a man who, having discovered a treasure, is told that some of his pieces, if not all, are counterfeit. To my doubts, he responded with his faith. It was difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. But was there any wheat? He, too, must have asked himself this question, and I believe that for this charming, elderly man, I was the cause, that morning, of some pain.<sup>66</sup>

Tzara's papers suggest that he took the mathematician's arguments seriously, at least with respect to Rabelais, who, having been the subject of the newspaper article of 1961, was also their primary topic of conversation. "Employing most ingeniously the calculus of probability," we read in a posthumously published note, "M. Puisségur has obtained interesting results concerning the intrusion of chance in the formation of Rabelais's anagrams."<sup>67</sup> Yet Tzara maintained that such an "intrusion" could be curtailed—above all with respect to Villon. The "authenticity" of the anagrams could be defended. "The proofs by which I have sought to demonstrate the authenticity of the anagrams in Villon's work are isolated and diverse, yet they are concordant."<sup>68</sup> Tzara distinguished, broadly speaking, two types demonstrations. The first involved a hermeneutic principle: in each case, he held, what is hidden in verse responds semantically, in some form, to what is explicitly said in it. That such a rule rests on readings that would be difficult to verify is a point Tzara appears to have conceded: "One could object," he admits, "that these meanings all reflect a hypothetical interpretation that I give of the facts." Then he advanced his second proposition, whose implica-

66. Ibid., p. 23.

67. Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 526.

68. Ibid., p. 525.

tions far outstripped the interpretation of Villon, bearing on several centuries of literary history in the Romance languages. "The second phase in my demonstration has consisted in situating Villon's own activity in a historical movement in which the use of anagrams in poetry can be seen to stretch back to the twelfth century. Leaving aside the question of the origin and the history of anagrams, which I will, incidentally, take as a subject of study elsewhere," he continued, "I have found the prolongation of this activity, whose principles are immutable, even when the meaning given to anagrams and the means of employing them may differ from poet to poet, all the way up to the work of Rabelais, who is one of the last writers to have used it."<sup>69</sup> For Tzara, the two-part proof was sound. "It follows," he concluded, "that the doubts concerning the authenticity of the anagrams in the work of Villon must be definitely set aside."<sup>70</sup>

But the doubts were to return. In 1976, Lynn D. Stults published an article in the journal *Romania*, "A Study of Tristan Tzara's Theory Concerning the Poetry of Villon," in which she recalled that in 1959, it had been announced that a major literary-historical discovery would soon be revealed: "Apparently the celebrated Dadaist poet, Tristan Tzara, had been spending his late years developing a theory concerning the writings of Villon. Tzara had intended to publish his findings in a two-volume work about Villon, but he died before his plans could be realized."<sup>71</sup> Stults recalled that Puisségur, in an earlier article, had subjected the hypothesis of "the celebrated Dadaist poet" to linguistic scrutiny based on the principles of the mathematics of probability. Puisségur, she noted, devised a two-part formula to test Tzara's discoveries: "In the first part the number of possible symmetrical positions for an anagram of a given number of letters is calculated. In the second part the probability that the letters occupying those positions be identical with the letters of a particular name is calculated."<sup>72</sup> Although such reasoning is "mathematically sound," Stults wrote, "its application to French poetry is not." The reason is simple. Puisségur's formula accounts for the relative probability with which any letter will appear in the language (based, of course, on the statistical frequencies of modern rather than medieval French). The formula cannot, however, account for the probabilities dictated by the interdependence of letters. One may, for example, calculate the relative probabilities that the letters *F* and *R* will appear in the language, but the relative probabilities that an *F* will appear after a *R*, or before it, or near it are another matter. The problem, Stults admitted, is not strictly mathematical. Linguistic research would need to provide crucial statistical data about the relations of letters in the language. Yet "the science of linguistics at its present stage is not equipped to construct a comprehensive system of the interdependence of letters in any natural language, let alone fifteenth-century French.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid., p. 530.

71. Lynn D. Stults, "A Study of Tristan Tzara's Theory Concerning the Poetry of Villon," *Romania* 96 (1975), p. 433.

72. Ibid., p. 453.

Unfortunately such a system is a necessary component of any formula that could be used to predict accurately the number of symmetrical anagrams that can be expected to appear in a text by chance."<sup>73</sup>

Having renounced the possibility of determining the exact likelihood with which hidden names might be lodged in Villon's poetry, the scholar chose to evaluate Tzara's hypothesis by establishing a more modest literary fact: the frequency of anagrams contained in the corpus of Villon's verse when compared with those of two of his contemporaries. To this end, Stults availed herself of a computer program, specially designed by Robert Stults, named "Vilgram," that would search for anagrams of forty-three names in Villon's "Lais," Vaillant's "The Debate Between Two Sisters," and Charles d'Orléans' ballads.<sup>74</sup> Stults tabulated the findings reached by her computer, commenting that "from the breakdown of these results one fact clearly emerges: while all but six of the forty-three names searched for do appear in these six hundred lines of poetry, the majority of them do not appear significantly more frequently in the lines by Villon than in the lines by Charles d'Orléans."<sup>75</sup>

"One could perhaps argue," she conceded, "that Tzara's theory is strengthened by the rare occurrence of a long anagram, as for example in stanza 65 of 'l'Embusche de Vaillant' ['The Debate Between Two Sisters'], 'leurs faitz ne sont point vicieux' (Tzara uses an alternate spelling of 'vicieux'):

L E U R S F A I T Z N E S O N T P O I N T V I C I E U L X  
 + O O + + + + O O O + O O + + O O + O O O + + + + O O + O  
 11      2 8 1 3              4      6 14      13              9 7 5 10      12  
 = *François Villon*

"On the other hand," she continued, "it would be rather unconvincing to follow the same logic and yet explain how the name of the Secretary of State of the United States crept into line 130 of 'Le Lais,' 'Regnier de Montigny trois chiens':

R E G N I E R D E M O N T I G N Y T R O I S C H I E N S  
 + + O O + + + + O O O O + O + + O + O O O O + + + O O + +  
 4 2      7 13 14              3      10 12      5              8 6 1      11 9  
 = *Henry Kissinger (c=k)*<sup>76</sup>

Stults also noted a curious detail that Tzara seems not to have observed. "Often when the letters needed to form the anagram are present in a line, several symmetrical anagrams of the same name appear in the same line."<sup>77</sup> The name "Noé Jolis"

73. Ibid., pp. 453-54.

74. Ibid., pp. 445-46.

75. Ibid., p. 451.

76. Ibid., p. 454.

77. Ibid., p. 455.

thus appears not once but four times in the fifth line of the "Lais," and Stults revealed the appearance of no fewer than "twenty Perrenets in line 285."

It would be difficult to imagine that the appearances of all 20 symmetrical anagrams of the name Perrenet in line 285 of "Le Lais" was caused by the manipulations of the poet, and yet it would be equally difficult to determine which one of the twenty anagrams he intended to appear. It seems more reasonable to attribute these multiple anagrams to chance rather than to the efforts of the poet.<sup>78</sup>

Stults could only conclude that although Puisségur's demonstration was in part faulty, its conclusion was sound. "The results of my anagram search strongly suggest that Tzara's theory is invalid."<sup>79</sup>

One might have thought the secret of *The Secret of Villon* dissolved. More than fifteen years later, however, another scholar, Michel Bernard, reopened the dossier in an article, "*The Secret of Villon Put to the Test of the Computer*," published in the pages of the same journal.<sup>80</sup> Respectful of his predecessors in the mathematical study of linguistic regularities in poetry, he permitted himself nonetheless to restate Stults's criticisms of Puisségur. To them he now added that Stults's proof, too, was, from both a technical and a literary perspective, unsound. Although Stults's essay is "the more convincing of the two," he wrote, it "presents two failings that call her conclusions into question."<sup>81</sup> The first involved software: insufficient information had been given about the computer program, Vilgram, since the exact algorithm that had been employed had not been specified. Hence a troubling doubt: "Can one be certain that the program is truly capable of recovering all the symmetrical anagrams in a given verse?"<sup>82</sup> The second criticism was one of literary method. He recalled that Stults had compared the number of anagrams of selected names in Villon's poetry with those in the work of two of his medieval contemporaries, Charles d'Orléans and Jean Vaillant. Having proved that the quantities of hidden names were comparable in all three works, Stults judged it unlikely that Villon possessed an anagrammatic art of his own. Bernard pointed out that such a line of reasoning was weak.

Charles d'Orléans is not only a contemporary but also a friend of Villon's, who could certainly have written under the name of the prince, or have entered into a contest of virtuosity with him, in the tradition of the *grands rhétoriciens*. The second corpus is even more problematic, since L. D. Stults studies the anagrams in "The Debate Between Two Sisters," which Tzara, precisely, attributes to Villon! In

78. Ibid., pp. 457-58.

79. Ibid., p. 458.

80. Michel Bernard, "*Le Secret de Villon à l'épreuve de l'ordinateur: Tzara et les anagrammes*," *Romania* 113 (1992-1995), pp. 242-52.

81. Ibid., p. 245.

82. Ibid.

theory, all three texts could therefore be written by the same author, and when L. D. Stults shows that there are even more anagrams in the works of Charles d'Orléans than in those of Villon, she does not necessarily demonstrate the falsehood of Tzara's theses.<sup>83</sup>

Bernard argued that a definitive refutation of Tzara's claims would need to involve poems unrelated to the literary culture of fifteenth-century France. This he set out to provide. Availing himself of a computer program whose technical specifications he did not conceal, Bernard presented a thorough analysis of the combinatorial possibilities of a single line by the nineteenth-century poet Gérard de Nerval, "Je suis le Ténébreux, le Veuf, l'Inconsolé." He showed that in that alexandrine, one may detect, arranged according the secret procedure identified by Tzara, a startlingly large set of distinguished authors: not least Breton, Corneille, Céline, Crevel, Ionesco, Roussel, and Villon.<sup>84</sup>

Yet Bernard also applied his program to the medieval corpus Tzara had studied. In the same 537 lines in which Tzara, by painstaking analysis, had recovered 1,235 anagrams, Bernard's program, working for twenty-four hours, found almost three times as many: 3,359 hidden names. "And not all Tzara's orthographic licenses," he added, "were even used."<sup>85</sup> Bernard had shown that the scholars who had sought to dismiss the theses of *The Secret of Villon* were in part mistaken in their methods and, at the limit, that they were unable to offer a firm foundation for their claims. Yet their intuitions were to be definitively confirmed when Tzara failed his last statistical test.

Despite the differences between these various scholarly approaches to *The Secret of Villon*, certain critical elements in the discussion have remained constant. The question to be resolved, as Tzara himself, in the end, appears to have conceded, is not whether or not there are names hidden in the lines of the "Lais," but

Bérroul  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
-----L-----BR-----EU-----O-----

Breton  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
-----T---BR-----ON---E

Céline  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
----I--E--N-----E--L--C-----

Corneille  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
----I-L---N---R---E---L---C---O---E

Courteline  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
-----ET-NE-R-----U-LI-CO-----

Crevel  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
-----L-----RE---EV-----C-----

Fénelon  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
-----E---FL-N-ON---E

Fontenelle  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
-----TE-E--E--L---F--N--N-OL-

Ionesco  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
-----I-CONSO-E

Roussel  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
----S-E-----R---L---U-----O-S---

Scève  
JESUISLETENEBREUXLEVEUFLINCONSOLE  
--S-----E---E---V-----C-----

Michel Bernard.  
*Combinatorial analysis of a  
line by Gérard de Nerval.*

83. Ibid., pp. 245-46.

84. See *ibid.*, p. 249.

85. Ibid., p. 248.

to what degree it is linguistically probable that they are present there. One may infer from the research that has been conducted on Villon's poetry that the precise likelihood of encountering the symmetrically placed letters of certain names in fifteenth-century manuscripts may remain unknown forever. What can be determined, however, is the approximate degree of probability with which the letters of certain names may be distributed, according to the procedure, in octosyllabic and decasyllabic lines in the language.

It is here that one reaches what may be the most curious element in the mathematically informed refutation of Tristan Tzara's last work. Explicitly or implicitly, all the critics of *The Secret of Villon* orient their arguments with respect to one unstated axiom in Tzara's investigation: the axiom, namely, that it is unlikely that there will be names legible in Villon's verse, as the procedure would dictate, or, positively stated, that the presence of such names, if established, will constitute an inherently improbable occurrence. Tzara means his unlikely hypothesis—that Villon embedded the letters of certain names in his lines, beyond the threshold of auditory or visual perception—to be supported by this unlikely fact: the names are truly there. The probability of an unlikely claim, in other words, is to be verified by an improbable but true proof. To refute Tzara, then, it suffices to reject the validity of his evidence. If it is more likely than not that letters in a line, disjoined and placed in symmetrical positions, will spell out certain names, then the improbable claim will be revealed to be no more than what it appears to be: not only improbable but, indeed, even arbitrary. Hence the curious form of disproof to which the critics ultimately submit Tzara's argument, which consists, in essence, in reasoning that the poet-scholar was mistaken to think that he had recovered some 1,200 anagrams, because there are more than twice as many there that he did not see. He was more right, in other words, than he ever dared to hope. Therefore he was wrong.

Did the author of *The Approximate Man* anticipate such forms of reasoning? "It seems that it exists," he had declared in 1920, "more logical; very logical; too logical; less logical; illogical; truly logical; fairly logical."<sup>86</sup> By choice, by calling, or by chance, Tzara, at the end of his life, was still declining these various possibilities while also suggesting a field in which they might be tested. Another element, however, also lies hidden in the revelation of Tzara's last work. A final mystery, so to speak, remains concealed, although from 1959 to this day, it has never ceased to lie in plain view. It consists in the simple fact that Tzara refused to consider the possibility that the poet's treasure might lie buried in the one place in which one might, in all likelihood, have expected to find it. Villon, by all accounts, wrote a series of poems in a form of speech meant to conceal certain matters. They are his so-called "Ballads in Jargon," which evoke the obscure idiom of the medieval bandits known as the Coquillars, who plotted their unmentionable acts, as the authorities of fifteenth-century Dijon alleged, in "an exquisite language, which

86. Tzara, "Dada manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer," *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 381.

other people cannot understand" (*un langage exquis, que aultres gens ne scevent entendre*). These ballads remain, to a significant degree, impenetrable to this day. Tzara, a learned reader of Villon and the scholarship devoted to him, knew them well. He had also read the critical essays published on the Coquillars' strange language. Yet as Henri Béhar, Tzara's editor, observes, "Curiously, none of his drafts shows any trace of an anagrammatic investigation carried out on the ballads in jargon."<sup>87</sup>

At the beginning of *The Secret of Villon*, Tzara appears to have anticipated that his book might, for this reason, provoke some surprise. As if to dispel the possibility of the reader's bewilderment or disappointment, he writes: "These inquiries do not cover the domain of 'Jargon.' The presence of anagrams is all the more probable there, since this language, being in part recreated by Villon, must have rendered their formation easier."<sup>88</sup> His statement is worth pondering. It suggests, in truth, two propositions. First, the ballads will not be considered as belonging to the corpus of poems containing anagrams; second, anagrams are most probably present there. It is difficult not to pose the question of the logical link that is to obtain between these statements. But Tzara offers another reason for the exclusion of jargon from his book. Raising the question of the opaque poems in a note that was to accompany an unfinished edition of Villon's work, he comments: "Despite the many more or less fantastical attempts that have been made at decipherment, one can only agree with Sainéan, the greatest specialist of jargon, that 'all things considered, most of the terms of the argot or *jobelin* will probable remain a closed book for us, and that, forever."<sup>89</sup>

"The Ballads in Jargon," therefore, are probably hermetic and certainly obscure. In both cases, they can have no place in *The Secret of Villon*. The conclusion may seem sudden, but the truth is that it is far from arbitrary. One may even go so far as to define the object of Tzara's last book in punctual opposition to the two characteristics that in these passing observations he attributes to the poems composed in the bandits' cryptic tongue. In distinction from the obviously "closed book" of "The Ballads in Jargon," the texts of the "Lais" appear to conceal no hidden message. Their obscurity, if one grants it, is uncertain in the extreme. Their secret, by that token, is unlikely. Faced with this fact, Tzara, in a sense, does no more than respect a principle that one might well wish to grant: were the treasure likely, were its appearance obvious, it would be none at all. He takes a further step when he effectively deduces the reality of a hidden thing from that of its unlikelihood, inferring that Villon's poems exhibit a secret procedure not despite but because of the improbability that such a possibility is real. The "explosive material" contained in this most vertiginous of literary finds ensues. The mystery, Tzara will then implicitly maintain, lies in the brightest language of all, its dark-

87. Henri Béhar, in Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 550 n. 4.

88. Tzara, *Le Secret de Villon*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6, p. 17.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 550.

ness dimly discernible in the speech that would seem most crystalline. The true secret, like poetry for Breton, is there where one would least expect it.<sup>90</sup> In the light of evidence, in words manifestly free of the artifice of jargon, there are signs, names, and purposeful patterns, whispered in "a kind of echo" or by a "voice in mute," waiting quietly, below each line of verse, for their knowing reader. To take dictation from these unheard sources, to copy what had not been written, Tzara silenced the doubts that his interpretation provoked and that he himself lived, in part, to perceive. Diving ever deeper into the perilous waters of Villon's songs and ballads, he would not abandon the image of the treasure he sought, even if it was to be at the risk that the language he discovered lay on the crystal's surface and that the secrets he uncovered were his own.

90. André Breton, in Roger Vitrac, "André Breton n'écrira plus," *Le Journal du peuple*, April 7, 1923, reprinted in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet et al., 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard-La Pléiade, 1988-2008), vol. 1, p. 1215.

## Theory of the Novel: The Literary Imagination of Classical Film Theory\*

JOHANNES VON MOLTKE

In the fall of 1921, the Viennese social reformer Eugenie Schwarzwald approached a young Hungarian émigré with a proposition: Mariette Lydis, a friend of Schwarzwald's, had created a set of watercolors, and now the two of them were looking for someone to write a collection of fairy tales to accompany the images in a book publication. The young author, Béla Balázs, agreed, and he penned sixteen tales in the space of three weeks. The book was published under the title *Der Mantel der Träume* (The cloak of dreams).

A few years later, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* began running a serialized novel by a curiously anonymous author: *Ginster: Von ihm selbst geschrieben* (Gorse: Written by himself) was the title, and the novel made a splash. By the time it was published in book form by the prestigious Fischer Verlag in the fall of 1928, however, most interested readers would have divined the author's identity: barely concealed behind the smoke screens of fictionalization, anonymization, pseudonyms, and newspaper bylines was none other than Siegfried Kracauer, himself an editor and film critic at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Forced into exile in 1933, Kracauer would go on to write a second novel, *Georg*, a sequel of sorts, during his Paris years. This time, all indications were that he would publish under his own name—but in the hardships of emigration that ultimately led him to the United States, Kracauer failed to secure a contract, and the novel was only published posthumously by Suhrkamp in 1970.

A similar fate befell another exile who, on July 13, 1940, in London, completed the final page of a typescript entitled *Eine verkehrte Welt* (A topsy-turvy world), a novel of the fantastic (*ein phantastischer Roman*) on which he had been working during the 1930s in Italy and England. In the turbulent years of war and emigration, it would take another decade before the young author, now in the USA, would secure a contract for the novel with the German publisher Curt

\* This article was prompted by the first Berkeley Conference on Silent Cinema, held in 2011 and devoted to "Cinema Across Media." I am grateful to the organizers of that event for including the initial version, which I subsequently developed with the help of incisive comments from Dana Polan and my colleagues Kerstin Barndt, Andreas Gailus, and Julia Hell. I am grateful, as well, to the editors of *October* for their useful feedback during the editorial process. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the German are my own.

Weller. As luck would have it, the latter went bankrupt while the book was in production; only half a century later would a small publishing house in Cologne pick up the manuscript again. By the time *Eine verkehrte Welt* appeared in 1997, its author—Rudolf Arnheim—was well into his nineties.

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A beautifully illustrated collection of Orientalist fairy tales; a pseudo-biographical novel in a mildly satirical mode; and an allegorical piece of science fiction that holds up an inverted mirror to a Western civilization already in disarray: generically and stylistically, these three texts have little to do with one another—or so it would appear, if their authors did not form a rather well-defined trio, whose close relations would have been readily apparent to readers with an interest in cinema: to film scholars, Béla Balázs, Siegfried Kracauer, and Rudolf Arnheim remain well known to this day as pioneers of what we now consider “classical film theory.” Setting out as brilliant young critics of the equally young medium (each of them a consummate stylist in his own right), they were acquainted with each other’s influential articles in the leading papers of Vienna, Frankfurt, and Berlin; and although they began from distinct premises and arrived at divergent conclusions, they would continue to acknowledge, cite, and review each other’s work, going on in a more theoretical mode to dilate on cinematic technique and style, the medium’s relationship to folk art, its form-giving powers, and its redemptive realism.

To be sure, there are important differences between Arnheim’s formalism, for example, and Kracauer’s realism;<sup>1</sup> or between Balázs’s romantic interpretation of the close-up of a face as a conduit to the soul and Arnheim’s modernist enthusiasm for the close-up as an alienating perceptual effect. But historical distance also permits a synoptic view of classical film theory as a relatively unified affair, one in which our trio is comfortably aligned with respect to shared goals and assumptions. From such a historicizing perspective, which has been gaining ground among scholars and critics in recent years,<sup>2</sup> at least three com-

1. This distinction is intimated in Kracauer’s own assertion, in the preface to *Theory of Film*, that “my book differs from most writings in the field in that it is a *material* aesthetics, not a formal one.” Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. xlix (emphasis in original); it was subsequently cemented in Dudley Andrew’s influential *The Major Film Theories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). The realism/formalism divide has served since then as the structuring template for virtually all subsequent accounts of classical film theory, with the notable exception of Malcolm Turvey’s recent critique in *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2. Eric Rentschler points out that already in 1981, Karsten Witte had “described Arnheim, Balázs, and Kracauer as the ‘ABKs’ of German film theory, a formulation that suggests we might productively consider them as a collective corpus rather than as embodiments of altogether different perspectives.” “Rudolf Arnheim’s Early Passage Between Social and Aesthetic Film Criticism,” in *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies*, Scott Higgins, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 62. To the example of the three authors with which this article is concerned, we should add that of André Bazin. Recent scholarly activ-

monalities emerge: first, these three thinkers jointly aspired, along with a host of other classical film theorists, to vindicate cinema as an art form on par with the other arts (consider the title of Arnheim's seminal *Film as Art*). Second, above and beyond their distinct affinities with "modernism" or "formalism" on the one hand and "realism" on the other, they shared an investment in what Malcolm Turvey has usefully described as the "revelationist" strain of classical film theory: each of these theorists was drawn to the new medium for its ability to overcome the perceived shortcomings of human vision—in Kracauer's words, to "reveal things normally unseen."<sup>3</sup> Third, given their background in the humanistic canon of European letters, they shared a number of premises drawn from classical aesthetics. In particular, as Noël Carroll has demonstrated by subjecting important texts by the classical film theorists to analytical critique, virtually all of classical film theory espoused what he calls the "medium-specificity thesis." According to this thesis, which dates back to Lessing's *Laocoön* treatise, "each art form, in virtue of its medium, has its own exclusive domain of development."<sup>4</sup> Carroll has argued persuasively that this line of thinking regularly accompanies the rise of new media such as film, photography, and video, whose status as art it ostensibly helps to legitimize—in other words, the shared espousal of the medium-specificity thesis relates directly to the shared impulse to legitimize film as art.

Carroll has serious misgivings about the validity of this thesis on analytic-philosophical grounds, calling it fallacious to either construe a medium's limitations and possibilities as normative for that medium or assert the existence of a causal connection between style and ontology. This argument has clear merit and is worth

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ities in this area include the fact that Béla Balázs's major works, as well as his fairy tales, are now available for the first time in English translation, and conferences at Harvard, Yale, Paris, and Dartmouth have led to anthologies taking up "Arnheim for film and media studies," "opening Bazin" for reconsideration, and probing Kracauer's legacies. See Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn, 2010); Béla Balázs, *The Cloak of Dreams: Chinese Fairy tales*, trans. Jack Zipes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies*, ed. Scott Higgins (New York: Routledge, 2010); *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*, ed. Dudley Andrew with Hervé Joubert Laurencin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, ed. Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); as well as an edition of *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, ed. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

3. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 46. On the "revelationist tradition" in classical film theory, see Turvey, *Doubting Vision*. Turvey occasionally appears to exclude the "modernist" Arnheim from this tradition, but as he himself rightly points out, the "revelationist" interest in the cinema tends to subsume the modernist/realist dialectic. Turvey further differentiates his arguments in "Arnheim and Modernism," in *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies*, pp. 31–49.

4. Noël Carroll, "The Specificity of Media in the Arts," in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 25. See also "Medium Specificity Arguments and the Self-Consciously Invented Arts: Film, Video, and Photography," in the same volume, pp. 3–24. Kracauer, for example, formulates the medium-specificity thesis at the outset of his *Theory of Film*: "This study rests upon the assumption that each medium has a specific nature which invites certain kinds of communications while obstructing others," p. 3.

debating on its own terms,<sup>5</sup> but there is also a sense in which Carroll's trenchant logical critique misses the point, imposing standards of academic rigor and logical coherence that are at odds with the rather more broadly defined forms of humanistic inquiry that these thinkers pursued during the silent era and beyond.<sup>6</sup> Here, the classical theorists' turn to literary fiction becomes significant—not for being any less rigorous than their critical writings, but for bringing that rigor to bear on the (literary) imagination rather than on (formal) logic, and, perhaps even more important, for pursuing questions of cinematic specificity in the medium of literature.<sup>7</sup> A re-reading of the above-mentioned texts, in other words, gives rise to a lingering suspicion concerning Carroll's argument: if these thinkers were indeed wedded to the notion of medium specificity, how do we account for what we might call their *media promiscuity*, which combined a love for the cinema with attentive criticism and a theoretical defense of the medium, as well as with an urge to try their hands at various literary genres?<sup>8</sup> (This is not even to mention Balázs's forays into opera, or Arnheim's later turn to art history.) As I will show, there is a substantive give-and-take between these theorists' fairy tales and novels, on the one hand, and the theories they construed, on the other. This prose work, in other words, went hand in hand with the elaboration of the central positions in classical film theory, which the novels help in turn to elucidate.

A closer look at these texts quickly reveals their cinematic qualities. Expressionist cinema's nightmare scenarios, silent melodramas' pathos, and espe-

5. In a penetrating analysis of André Bazin's theories of cinematic realism, Daniel Morgan has offered a rejoinder to Carroll, arguing that the medium-specificity thesis may be construed in terms other than the direct, causal link between the "nature" or essence of film and its attendant stylistic options (whether realist or modernist). Following Michael Fried, Morgan proposes that, rather than dispense with the ontological or essentialist arguments of the classical film theorists, we think of style as a way of acknowledging—even if by negation—the specificity of a given medium's constitution. Rather than following necessarily from the photographic nature of cinema, realism as discussed by Bazin or Kracauer should be understood, according to Morgan, as one of various ways to acknowledge the ontology of the photographic image at the level of style. Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Spring 2006), pp. 443–81. For a differently situated argument for reconsidering classical film theory's notions of medium specificity, see Mary Ann Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity," *Differences* 18, no. 1 (2007), pp. 128–52.

6. "By philosophical standards," Miriam Hansen concedes, "Kracauer's mode of analysis sometimes appears slippery and inconsistent, if not contradictory." But unlike Carroll, Hansen proceeds to inquire into the payoff, rather than only into the logical flaws, of the kinds of figurative, rhetorical, and stylistic devices that Kracauer deploys: "What ensures continued fascination with Kracauer's texts is that they are suffused with another kind of logic, a style of theorizing that we might call writerly or poetic. Kracauer argues as much through images and tropes, through figures of chiasmus, paradox, understatement and literalization, as through analytic reasoning and allegorical abstraction." Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 5.

7. It is worth recalling, moreover, that all three authors wrote literary criticism as well, and that Balázs had been the head of the literary department of the governing council in Béla Kun's short-lived Soviet Republic in Hungary in 1919. Cf. Loewy, *Béla Balázs*.

8. Of course, this includes attention to other media. Drawing on Arnheim's numerous writings on the subject of television from 1930 onwards, Doron Galili has persuasively argued that even "this key thinker, who is best known for his commitment to concepts of medium specificity and interest in aspects that distinguish media from one another, was also attentive to questions of intermedial relationships." Doron Galili, "Television from Afar: Arnheim's Understanding of Media," in *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies*, p. 196.

cially America's much-admired slapstick find their ways into the thematic and formal construction of these novels. Similarly, one might consider how "filmic writing" suffuses a novel like *Ginster* just as much as it does texts by other writers of the time, from Alfred Döblin to Irmgard Keun, from Anna Seghers to Dos Passos. Conversely, the literary output of Balázs, Arnheim, and Kracauer certainly invites us to reconsider the narrative and stylistic construction of their more properly theoretical texts; though my focus in the present essay lies elsewhere, I do mean my title to imply what I regard as the centrality of figurative, rhetorical, and other literary devices in the formulation of classical film theory. There is still much to be learned about the latter by analyzing, say, the "literariness" of Kracauer's film reviews from the 1920s or the hyperbole of Balázs' paean to the new medium, its rhetorical construction of his own readership as a collective blessed with new powers of vision.<sup>9</sup>

But what emerges even more importantly from a reading of these novels and fairy tales are their properly *film-theoretical* dimensions. In keeping with Miriam Hansen's reminder, apropos of Kracauer, that "it would be shortsighted to restrict an account of [his] early film theory to writings that explicitly and exclusively deal with film,"<sup>10</sup> I turn to these literary writings for the contribution they make to our understanding of Kracauer's, Balázs's, and Arnheim's canonical works on film. By reading the fictional prose alongside cinema and its theorization, then, I propose neither to retrace the "debates on cinema" among the literati of the 1920s<sup>11</sup> nor to revisit the place of cinema and literature in the "discourse networks" of the time,<sup>12</sup> let alone to offer yet another elaboration of the overworked concept of "adaptation." If anything, I wish to reverse the thrust of the latter and investigate the construction of the novel in the spirit of classical film theory. My goal, then, is not to analyze these texts as exemplars of "filmic writing" in the age of silent cin-

9. On the literary qualities of Kracauer's early criticism, see Inka Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer, Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur: Seine frühen Schriften 1903–1933* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985); on Balázs and spectatorship, see Sabine Hake, "Film, Folk, Class: Béla Balázs on Spectatorship," in *Film—Kino—Zuschauer: Filmrezeption/Film—Cinema—Spectator: Film Reception*, ed. Irmbert Schenk, Margrit Tröhler, and Yvonne Zimmerman (Marburg: Schüren, 2010), pp. 159–71.

10. Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 3. Though the literary production of these three authors has until now not been considered jointly, and while Arnheim's novel has gone essentially unnoticed to date, I am not the first to draw attention to the give-and-take between Balázs's and Kracauer's literary texts and their elaborations on film. On Balázs, see in particular Hanno Loewy, "Space, Time, and 'Rites de Passage': Béla Balázs's Paths to Film," *October* 115 (Winter 2006), pp. 61–76, as well as Loewy's biography, *Béla Balázs: Märchen, Ritual und Film* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2003); and Erica Carter, "Introduction," in Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, pp. xv–xlvi. On Kracauer, see Mülder-Bach, *Siegfried Kracauer*; Christian Rogowski, "'Written By Himself': Siegfried Kracauer's Auto-Biographical Novels," in *Culture in the Anteroom*, pp. 199–212; Jörg Lau, "'Ginsterismus.' Komik und Ichlosigkeit. Über filmische Komik in Siegfried Kracauer's erstem Roman *Ginster*," in *Siegfried Kracauer: Zum Werk des Romanciers, Feuilletonisten, Architekten, Filmwissenschaftlers und Soziologen*, ed. Andreas Volk (Zürich: Seismo, 1996), pp. 13–42.

11. See, for instance, the texts assembled in Anton Kaes, *Kino-Debatte. Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909–1929* (Munich: dtv, 1978).

12. See, most recently, Stefanie Harris, *Mediating Modernity: German Literature and the "New" Media, 1895–1930* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), as well as Francesco Casetti, "Adaptations and Mis-adaptations: Film, Literature, and Social Discourses," in *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 81–91.

ema (the way Eisenstein, for example, reads Dickens)<sup>13</sup> but to trace in them some of the central film-theoretical motifs elaborated by these and other authors at the time—among them the emphasis on perception and spectatorship, cinematography and montage, and the increasing visuality of culture.

Underpinning these motifs, I will suggest, is a common assessment of cinema as a quintessentially modern medium that registers and contributes to shifting constructions of subjectivity. The literary texts under consideration flesh out the contours of such a modern subject, and we might profitably read this as a contribution to film theory. But these texts also yield a further perspective on the theories with which they are indissolubly linked. Far from merely illustrating their authors' theoretical preoccupations in another mode or medium, they draw attention to a fundamental fact all too often overlooked in the discussion of film theory and its histories: the degree to which the elaboration of the "classical" theories of film was a project forged in exile and colored by the theorists' exilic experiences. Buried in books such as *Visible Man*, *The Spirit of Film*, *Theory of Film*, and the editorial history *Film as Art*,<sup>14</sup> the dimension of exile becomes explicit in texts such as *The Coat of Dreams* and *Eine verkehrte Welt* and is present metaphorically in *Ginster*. These authors' literary imaginations, I hope to show, circle around questions of exile and attendant fantasies if not of repatriation then of reparation or repair—fantasies, I will argue, that inform their theoretical projects at some fundamental level as well.

To recover this dimension, we need only recall the circumstances under which our three authors composed their literary works. When the young Balázs accepted Schwarzwald's commission for *Der Mantel der Träume* in Vienna, he had only recently parted ways with his erstwhile friend and collaborator György Lukács and fled the failed Hungarian revolution; what followed was a long period of exile in Berlin (where he wrote his two major volumes on film) and the Soviet Union. The title tale of Balázs's collection, to which I turn in detail below, provides only one instance among several in which forms of exile enter into fairy-tale plots.<sup>15</sup> Arnheim's novel was similarly written in forced exile in Italy and the U.K., and it is here that the motif of exile as the novel's "topsy-turvy world" becomes most explicit: from the moment he crosses a border by train in the opening scene, the protagonist is utterly displaced—and although

13. Cf. Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, 1949), pp. 195–256.

14. *Film als Kunst* (Berlin: Rowohlt) was published in 1932 one year before Arnheim's forced flight into exile; it would be wrong, therefore, to claim that the book is tinged with any history of exile. The volume's widespread influence, however, can arguably be traced more to the abridged English edition of 1955 than to the German original. On the degree to which the truncated *Film as Art* represents not only a shortened but an abstracted, hyper-formalist version of an argument whose roots in daily, lived, and social experience have been severed in translation, see Eric Rentschler, "Rudolf Arnheim's Early Passage."

15. Other fairy tales that spin out the motifs of exile, longing, and displacement include "Die Sonnenschirme," about a couple's attempt to find peace under magical parasols that all seem to conspire against a stable sense of home, and "Die Freunde," in which the prolonged separation of two friends results in a rupture that can only be mended in the afterlife.

the novel never explicitly discounts the possibility that he may be traveling as a tourist, it seems equally significant that the possibility of a return home is never broached. Finally, Kracauer would be forced to emigrate, like Arnheim, by the Nazi's seizure of power and would write his second novel, *Georg*, during his French exile. To be sure, he completed *Ginster* while still in Germany, where he was working at the hub of cultural life at the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. But, as numerous commentators have noted, the motif of homelessness—or, as Kracauer himself would put it, *extraterritoriality*—predates the forced departure from his home country.<sup>16</sup> It is significant that in the original version of the novel, the semi-autobiographical figure of Ginster, who, as we shall see, never fits in and always wants to “trickle away,” ends up stranded in Marseille. Kracauer would go on to reflect explicitly on this tangential, exilic disposition, raising it to a privileged epistemological vantage point in his final work on historiography.<sup>17</sup>

Homelessness, then, was to these authors both a transcendental notion and a lived reality that profoundly marked their writings. While this positioning is less apparent, at first glance, in the film theory for which they became known, I propose that we conceive of their less frequently read literary prose as, among other things, middle texts between authorial biography and cinema theory—fiction that mediates between lived experience (of exile, of cinema) and the attempt to provide a generalizing, theoretical account of that experience. A reading of these film theorists' novels, with their displaced characters who express homesickness and longing, however romantically inflected, in disturbingly upside-down worlds, should prompt us to reread the seminal texts of classical film theory for how they position the new medium and how much of classical film theory is informed by, and produced from, exilic experience.

16. “Kracauer's exile did not begin in 1933, and his later plea for a personal ‘extraterritoriality’ merely made explicit a persistent motif in his writings from the beginning.” Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 286 n. 24. Reading an important essay published soon after Kracauer's arrival in New York, Inka Mülder-Bach similarly argues that this arrival “marks a position that Kracauer had outlined since the 1920s and which informs his early writing both as a concept and a textual perspective.” “The Exile of Modernity: Siegfried Kracauer's Figurations of the Stranger,” in *Culture in the Anteroom*, p. 280. Kracauer himself confessed to “a long-held, deep-seated need to live exterritorially” in a 1963 letter to Theodor Adorno, and he organized parts of his correspondence with the latter in a folder labeled “Exterritorialität.” See Theodor W. Adorno and Siegfried Kracauer, *Der Riß der Welt geht auch durch mich: Briefwechsel 1923–1966*, ed. Wolfgang Schopf (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 621. For further elaborations of the motif of extraterritoriality in Kracauer, see, among others, Martin Jay, “The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer,” in *Permanent Exiles* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 152–97; Enzo Traverso, *Siegfried Kracauer: Itineraire d'un intellectuel nomade* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 1994).

17. Kracauer's *History* works through several figures of the historian, among them Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew; Orpheus; and the Exile. These figurations serve to shore up Kracauer's overall claim that historical knowledge is best constructed in “the near-vacuum of extra-territoriality”: only in a “state of self-effacement, or homelessness,” Kracauer asserts, can the scholar fully grasp the object of study. Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 84.

*Dreams, Inversions, Disappearing Tricks: Fables of Extraterritoriality*

The image that inspires the title of Balázs's book and its eponymous fairy tale is an ornate rendering of a royal couple. The watercolor is dominated by the king, who covers the center and foreground of the image to the point of dwarfing not only the houses and spires in the (presumably distant) background, but also the queen just behind him. And yet, questions of perspective and relative size recede in importance in relation to the watercolor's emphasis on surface and ornament: here, too, the king takes center stage with his elaborately designed cloak—but rather than standing out in front of the background, he becomes part of a planar composition; the contour line hardly contains his massive body, which seems to blend with the similar colors and ornamental echoes of the buildings in the background.

Little wonder, then, that Balázs seized on the motif of the cloak as a surface, a canvas on which the empress stitches the images of her dreams. The accompanying "Oriental" fairy tale, "Der Mantel der Träume," tells the story of Emperor Ming-Huang and his wife, Nai-Fe.<sup>18</sup> Their love, we learn, is "damaged" because Nai-Fe, who died too early in a previous life, has a "dreaming soul": even when the emperor holds her in his arms, her soul drifts away in reverie. One night, she divines the solution to this problem of too distant (or too distracted) love: in her sleep, she sees her husband

wearing a marvelous cloak on which all the images of her dreams had been embroidered. . . . His cloak carried the entire dreamland for which her soul yearned. Nai-Fe's heart was delighted and filled with happiness, for now she could keep her gaze upon the emperor and hold it forever. No longer did she have to choose between the path of her dreams and the path of her love.<sup>19</sup>

As in many other fairy tales by Balázs, the emperor and his wife long for a utopian form of love or friendship that overcomes the separation of self and other, a complete—if mystical—union.<sup>20</sup> As Hanno Loewy notes, Balázs translated his own sense of alienation into a "tireless search for a medium that would create unities between artist and reader, desire and form, object and subject, a search that led him to wallow in romantic irrationalism and to experiment with the widest variety of mediums and genres"—a search that during Balázs's early years would lead him to cultivate the fairy tale in particular as a medium of mystic union.<sup>21</sup> What sets

18. On the pervasiveness of Orientalism at the time when Balázs was writing, see the review of the recent English translation of *Der Mantel der Träume* by Eliot Weinberger, "The Man Who Wrote Everything," *New York Review of Books*, Nov. 25, 2010, pp. 52–53.

19. Béla Balázs, *The Cloak of Dreams*, p. 66.

20. See especially the tales "Die Opium-Raucher" and "Die Freunde" in *Der Mantel der Träume*.

21. Hanno Loewy, "Space, Time." As Zipes puts it, Balázs used the fairy tale "as a genre to pursue his mystical notion of identity and to celebrate his oneness with the world in opposition to the forces of alienation." Jack Zipes, "Béla Balázs, the Homeless Wanderer, or, The Man Who Sought to Become One with the World," in Balázs, *The Cloak of Dreams*, p. 11.



*Watercolor from Der Mantel der Träume:  
Chinesische Novellen von Béla Balázs mit 20  
Bildern von Mariette Lydis. 1922.*

the title tale apart from Balázs's other stories for our purposes is the central device of the cloak as a material—if magical—support for that oneness or union. Having spent five years embroidering it with her innermost images, Nai-Fe brings the coat to the emperor and is "filled with joy and happiness" at the sight of her husband "wrapped in her dreams" (*in ihre Träume gehüllt*, 68). The cloak, we might say, functions as a screen on which Nai-Fe both projects and beholds her dream images. In other words, it is a visual medium that promises immediacy and the fusion of the spectator with the image—a *dispositif* that will resonate strongly in the history of film theory, where we find critics such as Jean Baudry and Christian Metz developing notions of the screen, the spectator, and the fusion of perception and representation along similar lines.<sup>22</sup>

In the tale of Ming-Huang and Nai-Fe, this projection comes at a price. As the lovers realize once the emperor tries on the magical cloak, its dream images create a distance that cannot be bridged physically: when Nai-Fe attempts to approach her husband, "the entire, spacious dreamland lay between her and the emperor, and she couldn't come to him" (68). Again, the two are confronted with a stark choice between empty, physical proximity and fulfilled, dreamy distance. Nai-Fe tells the emperor,

If you take off the cloak, you can hold me in your arms, but my soul will be far away from you. If you wear the cloak, I won't be able to approach you, and I won't be able to come to you. But the longing of my soul will eternally cast its glances upon you (69).

Forsaking physical presence, the emperor chooses the cloak—which is to say: an image-based medium of the soul. In this, as other commentators have also observed, the fairy-tale character anticipates rather strikingly the contemporaneous turn of its author, Béla Balázs, from literature to film, as well as his theorization of the cinema as a new folk art and the medium of the soul.<sup>23</sup> Balázs's subsequent book, *Der sichtbare Mensch* (Visible man), of 1924, is suffused with the same Romantic motifs that he was working out in fairy-tale form in 1921—motifs that include the expressivity of a visual medium and its constitutive link to what Balázs (like the early Lukács) calls the "soul"; the fusion of self and other in the act of spectatorship; and the medium's power to convey the "physiognomy" of things. Like the cloak of dreams, cinema is for Balázs a medium that lends expression to the soul, "the visual corollary of human souls immediately made flesh."<sup>24</sup> What materializes on the coat as "all the images of [Nai-Fe's] dreams" is precisely

22. See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 760–77.

23. Loewy suggests that "The Cloak of Dreams" reads "like a poetic illustration of Balázs' theory of the cinema." Loewy, "Space, Time," p. 66. See also Loewy, *Béla Balázs*, and Hake, "Film, Folk, Class."

24. Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, p. 11.

what Balázs will later theorize as the expressive movement of the soul, the *Ausdrucksbewegung* (expressive movement) as it becomes manifest on the cinema screen through devices such as the close-up.<sup>25</sup> As if echoing the constellation of his earlier fairy tale, Balázs now defines the close-up in cinema, “film’s true terrain,” as a naturalist device but imbues it with a tenderness that prompts him to speak of a “naturalism of love.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time, he places the medium of cinema under the aegis of expressionism for its revelationist physiognomies, its ostensibly unique ability to “represent [the] ‘face of things.’”<sup>27</sup> Zeroing in on the links between expressionism, dream, and vision that would have been apparent to anyone writing on film in the early 1920s, he reprises the direct address with which *Der sichtbare Mensch* occasionally interpellates its readers; but he also reprises the central motif of “The Cloak of Dreams,” in which a landscape, embroidered on a screen-like cloak, is but an extension of Nai-Fe’s soul—her physiognomy, as Balázs would call it:

Have you never had this curious dream experience? You are out walking in a landscape and recognize in it the face of one of your friends or enemies. It is nothing more or less than a landscape. But it contains an obvious physiognomy that betrays it. . . . The capacity to illuminate the secret affinity between the dreamer’s physiognomy and that of his dream is one of the most wonderful miracles of film art.<sup>28</sup>

If “The Cloak of Dreams” is indeed an allegory of cinema, as Sabine Hake has suggested,<sup>29</sup> then what it allegorizes is not simply the historical rise of the medium or its shifting styles but also the “spirit of film” as theorized by Balázs himself—its physiognomic qualities as a new folk art and heir apparent to the oral tradition of the fairy tale.

“All of his life,” writes Loewy, Balázs “wished to remain a writer. He never got over the fact that his writing was lost in the shadow—or better the light—of film.”<sup>30</sup> Perhaps, by reading his film theory as a continuation of his fictional work, we might rehabilitate the latter—both for its intrinsic merits, which have recently been recognized by a new German edition and a translation into English, and as a contribution to a history of classical film theory. To be sure, the cinema produces fairy tales or fantastic genres, films that offer visual equivalents for Balázs’s literary themes of mystical

25. As a “revelationist” medium (Turvey), cinema has the power to visualize—and hence make accessible—the physiognomy of the soul in its outward appearance, its *Ausdrucksbewegung*. On the notion of *Ausdrucksbewegung* and its continued relevance for film theory in its Deleuzian derivations, see Hermann Kappelhoff, *Matrix der Gefühle: Das Kino, das Melodrama und das Theater der Empfindsamkeit* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2004).

26. Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, p. 39. On the relation between fairy tale and close-up, see Erica Carter’s excellent discussion, where she shows that “the fairy-tale prefigures . . . many features of the close-up’s organization of time.” Carter, “Introduction,” pp. xxviii–xxxii.

27. Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, p. 46.

28. Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, p. 49.

29. Hake, p. 168.

30. Loewy, “Space, Time,” p. 61.

union, utopian love, and inner visions of the soul—after all, these are hallmarks of the expressionist cinema that was flourishing at precisely the moment of Balázs's turn to cinema. But my point here is that the fairy tale reads not like the blueprint for a film script but as an elaboration of film theory in a fictional mode. By the same token, Balázs's film theory continues to elaborate the insights he gathers from his preoccupation with fairy tales. For all its insistence on medium specificity,<sup>31</sup> *Der sichtbare Mensch* becomes legible as a trans-medial aesthetics of expressivity that subsumes fairy tales and the cinema as two equally valid avenues for the manifestation of the soul. If anything, the literary texts make more explicit the motif of longing that underpins so much of Balázs's writing, whether in literature or on film: a Romantic motif that the fairy tales render legible as a response to alienation and displacement. The fantasy that animates these tales, in other words, is that of a magical/utopian world in which identification and desire are mutually enabling and where the latter's realization does not exact the price of separation, as in the unbridgeable distance that keeps Nai-Fe and the emperor apart. It is the fantasy of a "society of love," as the young Lukács still called it, a fantasy tested and debated in the famous "Sunday Circle" that both Lukács and Balázs frequented during their Budapest years. Without denying the Central European, cosmopolitan dimensions of this fantasy, which Erica Carter has pointed out, it is perhaps worth recalling that *The Cloak of Dreams* formulates the tale at a remove from the Sunday Circle and the memories of Budapest, placing it at the beginning of an exilic trajectory that will wind up, somewhat bitterly, in Moscow.

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Even more explicitly than Balázs's fairy tales, Rudolf Arnheim's *Eine verkehrte Welt* functions on the level of fantasy, as is evident from its generic inscription as a *phantastischer Roman*. But the latter operates on a completely different aesthetic principle: where Balázs yearns for a re-enchanted world in which meaning and expression and dream world and material world (or what Lukács called "the soul and the forms") are coextensive, Arnheim concocts a strict logical inversion of our world, where binary distinctions are not suspended but *verkehrt*, or turned upside down, as the title readily suggests. So clear is this procedure, in fact, that it also indexes the underlying wish for a situation in which such inversions might be righted again and the displaced subject of the novel regain his bearings.

The story begins as the nameless first-person narrator is crossing a border by train. He carries with him a notebook for the purpose of "writing down what I experience in your country," as he tells the customs officer (8). The experiences that he proceeds to relate over the course of the novel map out a strange world indeed: its

31. Balázs speaks of the *Wesensverschiedenheit* (essential difference) between film and literature (Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, p. 23), and from a comparison between different forms of expressive movement, for example, he concludes that "the screenplay . . . must never be the product of the literary imagination" (*ibid.*, p. 26).

inhabitants sleep during the daytime and go about their business at night; instead of wearing clothes, they hide only their naked faces behind masks. Food, a privilege of the working poor, is distributed as a form of entertainment rather than responding to a basic biological need; dirt is a virtue, and cleanliness shameful. In this country, clocks run according to the whim of their owners rather than following a pre-given rhythm of seconds, minutes, and hours; public transportation is designed to run slowly, unreliably, and with as many accidents as possible rather than serving the needs of travelers. Social hierarchies, too, are reversed: women rule, children command adults, work is a privilege reserved for the upper classes, and the poor lord it over the downtrodden rich who occasionally take to the streets for their rights (as described in a chapter entitled *Reichendemonstration*, or “march of the rich”). Several chapters detail the working of such public institutions as schools, the newspaper, and the decidedly Kafkaesque “patience office” (*Geduldamt*)—a blend of police station and hospital which you enter healthy and leave sick. One chapter, finally, is devoted to a strange blend of cinema and television called *Erziehungskino* (education cinema): here, the audience assembles to watch moving images projected on a screen, but these turn out to be live transmissions. In an inversion of television broadcasting, the images here are somehow transmitted not to the home but from cameras hidden in a regular family’s apartment. Where the narrator expects to see a fictional film, he is confronted with filmed reality. Nonetheless, he is impressed by the powerful performances of the family members—even after he has been told that they are not actors. His companion, the mask-maker’s daughter, explains the aesthetic effect of second-order reality: “It’s in our nature that we only have eyes to see what every day brings when things are represented to us in images and we contemplate them from our seats” (144).

Of course, this moment of aesthetic contemplation and revelationist vision in the *Erziehungskino* is also a *mise-en-abyme*, a moment in which the novel mirrors itself in the object it represents: like the strange events that unfold in the movie theater, the plot of *Eine verkehrte Welt* is designed to “open our eyes” to the construction of everyday reality; the upside-down world allegorizes our ostensibly right-side-up existence, and the narrator functions as an ethnographer whose gaze at the foreign environment has the power of estranging our own notions of self and society. The result is profoundly unsettling—for the reader as well as the narrator, who wonders whether he is gradually becoming used to the absurdities of his new world and no longer perceives them as such, or whether he is now seeing himself for who he really is. “With increasing frequency,” he notes, “I appeared strange to myself, foreign, laughable, even inappropriate in one thing or another” (111).

It is no coincidence that the cinema (coupled with the nascent technology of television)<sup>32</sup> plays a central role in this alienation effect, not because of the par-

32. Arnheim was intensely aware of the changing audiovisual landscape during the 1930s, when cinema and radio had to compete, or find a way to coexist, with broadcast television. As early as 1930, he was anticipating, “within measurable time,” the advent of “films . . . broadcast from a central projecting station by wireless” and available in the private home. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film* (London: Farber and Farber, 1933), p. 294; quoted in Galili, “Television from Afar,” p. 197.

ticular contents of the stories it tells—be it the science fiction of *Eine verkehrte Welt* or the live reality of the *Erziehungskino*—but because of the distance it places between reality and representation and the aesthetic effect that results. After all, this is how Arnheim himself had theorized “film as art” a few years prior to leaving Germany and embarking on what would remain his only attempt at fiction. As is well known, the premise of *Film als Kunst* (Film as art), from 1932, was that, like other media, film *could* but did not necessarily *have to* be used to create art. To argue the artistic value of film, then, Arnheim proceeded to outline a series of fundamental distinctions between what he called *Weltbild*, the image of the world, and *Filmbild*, the image of silent cinema.<sup>33</sup> The latter is determined by various factors: framed film images do not allow for peripheral vision and translate the colors of the world into a gray scale; stereoscopic vision is replaced by the monocular perspective of the camera, reducing the possibilities for depth perception; and for the spectator fixed in his/her seat, the senses of cinema—sight and sound—are isolated from the other senses, which offer no input to accompany the visual perception of, say, a roller coaster amplified by a drum roll from the orchestra pit. Film, according to Arnheim, is art to the degree that it emphasizes these distinctions and uses them as aesthetic devices.

None of this will be news to the reader of classical film theory. What appears significant in connection with Arnheim's novel, however, is the consistency of the underlying impulse to explore the world aesthetically through an epistemology of inversion forged in exile: cinema, following Arnheim's theory, constructs an image of the world according to laws of opposition and difference every bit as strict as those that govern *Eine verkehrte Welt*. Arnheim describes these laws in an introductory note to the novel's manuscript, which describes the literary process as a mechanical application:

[F]or certain malicious reasons the author has thought it worth while to describe an imaginative world in which peoples' manners, public institutions, private and social life are just the contrary of what they are supposed to be in our own world. By transforming, in a more or less mechanical and theoretical way, black into white, up into down, plus into minus, and so on he came to a number of propositions which seemed to possess a strange vital energy.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, and in keeping with an underlying impulse of science fiction as a genre,<sup>35</sup> the emphasis here is both on the aesthetic surplus value and on the knowl-

33. Arnheim, *Film als Kunst*, p. 24.

34. Arnheim papers, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach.

35. Elmer Rice's amusing novel *A Voyage to Purilla* (New York: Cosmopolitan, 1930) provides a kindred contemporary use of science fiction to probe aspects of cinema: two explorers leave Earth to find a planet governed by the laws of cinema, replete with voice-of-God narration and extra-diegetic music. The effect, of course, is to estrange and reveal the formal conventions that classical Hollywood cinema is at pains to hide in plain sight. Thanks to Dana Polan for this reference.

edge produced by turning things on their head. The "formula of inversion," as Arnheim calls it, "proved to be a spell able to conjure up odd dreams which look like telling some queer sort of truth—as dreams often do—and in which the author felt tempted to indulge. Thus, after having applied the key to the entrance, he confined himself to describe what he saw and heard." If the novel draws this queer sort of truth—that is, its aesthetic value—from the inverse relationship of the narrator's home country and the strange customs abroad, then cinema draws *its* aesthetic qualities from the distinctions between the spectator's ingrained habits of perception and their modification by the cinematic apparatus, between *Weltbild* and *Filmbild*.<sup>36</sup>

This, in any event, is the version of Arnheim's film theory handed down from the 1955 edition of *Film as Art*—a book that differs in profound ways from *Film als Kunst* as originally published in 1932. As Eric Rentschler has detailed in a careful rereading of the German original, the earlier version was considerably less invested in the strict distinction between *Weltbild* and *Filmbild*, or between "world" and "art." This allowed for more excursions into the realm of the social than the 1955 version, which seems peculiarly cleaned up in this regard.<sup>37</sup> We can only speculate on the reasons for this reduction or, as Rentschler puts it, "repression." Rentschler himself wonders, with some justification, whether the pressures of the McCarthy era on a Jewish emigrant from Germany with a leftist past might have had something to do with it. For the structural isomorphism between the science-fictional conceit and the world/art distinction in *Film as Art* is one that the novel urges us to link to the experience of exile itself. The difference between Arnheim's novel and his aesthetic theory, then, would appear to lie in the valence of (il)legibility: whereas in *Eine verkehrte Welt* the exiled protagonist is dumbfounded, and semiosis fails as he is confronted with signs he does not know how to read, the aesthetic argument of *Film as Art* holds, by contrast, that the very *illegibility* of the film image as image of the world—its difference from the routine, mechanical reproduction of the world around us—is what grounds the semiotic power of cinema. The emphasis on this difference, this illegibility, is exacerbated under conditions of exile: this is the lesson of the novel—the structuring fantasy of which is that of legibility restored—as much as of the 1955 edition of *Film as Art*, where we find this fantasy sublimated in an aesthetic argument in favor of formal estrangement. It is a lesson that Arnheim will underscore further in his 1963 review of Kracauer's *Theory of Film*, to which I will return in conclusion.

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Critics have tended to place Arnheim's "formalist" approach—his insistence on the power of aesthetic form, be it literary or cinematic, to estrange our perceptual

36. "Die Möglichkeit, daß mit der Filmkamera Kunst gemacht werden kann, ist also jenen . . . Unterschieden zwischen Filmbild und Wirklichkeit zu danken" (we consequently owe the possibility of making art with the film camera to those distinctions between the film image and reality), *Film als Kunst*, p. 49.

37. Rentschler, "Rudolf Arnheim's Early Passage."

habits—in opposition to Siegfried Kracauer's "realism" and its ontological assumptions. But if we turn from Kracauer's summa, *Theory of Film* (1960), to the lesser-known (but equally momentous) *Ginster*, we find in the latter a commitment to modernist devices on par with Arnheim's notions of aesthetic form.<sup>38</sup> A look at Kracauer's novel, then—which Theodor Adorno, for one, considered "Kracauer's most significant achievement"<sup>39</sup>—will serve to relativize Kracauer's realism and highlight its formal contours in the realms of both literature and cinema. Beneath the "redemption" that film is capable of offering reality, and contrary to Kracauer's insistence that his "material aesthetics" stand in opposition to previous formal approaches,<sup>40</sup> we can detect a profound commitment to aesthetic construction in his work. As will become apparent to the reader of *Ginster*, that aesthetic construction centers on a dialectical understanding of reification as both an alienating force to be overcome and as a productive, unsettling cognitive effect, achieved through the modernist device of estrangement, or what the Russian Formalists called *ostranenie*.<sup>41</sup>

Kracauer's approach differs, to be sure, from that adopted in *Eine verkehrte Welt*. Where the latter estranges us from our ingrained "world picture" through inversion, *Ginster* performs this estrangement through an ingenious deployment of narrative voice and an attendant unsettling of both the subjectivity and objectivity of characters. The quasi-autobiographical plot follows a hapless protagonist from the outbreak of war in 1914 through the end of World War I.<sup>42</sup> From his student days in Munich, he stumbles through a thankless job as an architect in Frankfurt, into the military (where he mainly "peels potatoes against the enemy," 204), and out again. He ends up in the provinces, where he waits out the conclusion of the war in a corrupt municipal office, drafting architectural plans and an accompanying book publication.<sup>43</sup> Told in the third person, the narration is col-

38. Miriam Hansen astutely points out the anti-naturalist proclivities of Kracauer's early film criticism as well: "To achieve its very specificity," Kracauer notes in a 1923 review, film "has to completely break apart the natural contexts of our lives." See Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 12.

39. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Curious Realist," in *New German Critique* (Fall 1991), p. 171. Adorno already notes how the novel "sends roots deep into modernism" (p. 169), and Gertrud Koch likewise speaks of a "thoroughly modern novel," seeing in *Ginster* "a Kafkaesque younger brother of Musil's 'man without qualities.'" Gertrud Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer: An Introduction*, trans. Jeremy Gaines (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 53.

40. See *Theory of Film*, p. xlix.

41. Significantly, this approach also informs Kracauer's turn to sociology in *The Salaried Masses*, which adopts the notion of the "mosaic" to define its impressionistic approach to social reality in view of the fact that this reality is itself "a construction," as Kracauer famously observes. If *Theory of Film* approaches this idea of reality as a construction obliquely, from the side of the aesthetic, *The Salaried Masses* takes aim at it squarely, from the side of the social.

42. A final chapter, omitted in later editions of the novel, takes place in Marseille five years after the war. All references to *Ginster* follow the complete text reprinted in Siegfried Kracauer, *Werke*, vol. 7: *Romane und Erzählungen* (Novels and stories), ed. Inka Mülder-Bach with Sabine Biebl (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004).

43. On the motif of stumbling—*stolpern*—in the novel and its relation to Charlie Chaplin's gags, see Lau, "Ginsterismus."

ored strongly by the protagonist's moods, with his inner thoughts frequently related as quasi-objective narration in free indirect discourse. This narrative device, which blurs the boundaries between subjective and objective voice, effectively enacts, at the level of aesthetic form, the quasi-anonymity that is both announced and retracted by the book's title, *Ginster: Von ihm selbst geschrieben* (Ginster: Written by himself). Objectified through a name that is not the (anonymous) author's—nor even really that of the protagonist (who, as we learn in the first paragraph, "wasn't really called Ginster"<sup>44</sup>)—the main character is nonetheless both writer and subject of the novel in which he appears in the third person. .

Like Kracauer, moreover, our nameless hero has earned a Ph.D. but is planning to live without this title, "incognito, so to speak" (11). From here, the novel will proceed to elaborate what it might mean for its protagonist to remain unknown. On some level, this might be construed as simply wanting to blend in, if not as the kind of "deliberate head-in-the-sand policy" that Adorno ascribed to Kracauer himself in an underhanded tribute on his mentor's 75th birthday.<sup>45</sup> But there is more to this "incognito." As a fictional protagonist, Ginster makes for a curiously reticent subject—one who says of himself that "after all, he was nothing" (145), who "would have preferred not to become anything," (24) and who repeatedly dreams of somehow vanishing from the scene altogether. In a conversation with an older woman whom he admires, for example, Ginster blurts out, in spite of himself ("aus einem ihm unerklärlichen Sprechzwang" [due to a compulsion to talk, for which he had no explanation]), the difference that sets him apart: other people, he notes, "are interested in their lives, they have goals, want to own and achieve something. Every person I know is a fortress." (132) If this sounds, among other things, like a workable description of fictional protagonists—well-defined characters with clearly articulated desires to motivate their actions—Ginster, by contrast, is an antihero at best: "For my part, I want nothing. You probably can't understand this, but I'd rather trickle away."<sup>46</sup> Kracauer finds several formulations for his protagonist's impulse to vanish: on a purely physical level, he tries to avoid

44. "Eigentlich hieß er gar nicht Ginster, der Name war ihm aus der Schule geblieben." *Ginster*, p. 23. The subject of Ginster's name comes up repeatedly in the novel. In addition to the prominent discussion of Ginster as, literally, a misnomer, in the first paragraph, see the fascinating scene of Ginster's first roll call at the military. As he is waiting for his name to be called, he becomes distracted by the responses ("Here—Here—Here") of the other soldiers. As a result, the "string of syllables" constituted by the jumble of names comes to a halt: "Suddenly torn right in half, the Heres also ceased. A void, and in this void a single name, alone. The name seemed foreign to Ginster, but it did awaken in him some memory; as if he had encountered this name repeatedly in the past. It took quite a while until he grasped that it was his own. Helplessly, he stared at the name that occupied the entire courtyard and made demands that he, Ginster, could not possibly meet, for after all, he was nothing and could not make any claims to being named individually with such power in the courtyard. He hesitated for a long time whether he should not rather repudiate himself. In the end, it occurred to him that he belonged externally to the name and might commit a legal infraction by withdrawing from it" (p. 145).

45. Adorno, "The Curious Realist," p. 172.

46. "Die Menschen sind an ihrem Leben interessiert, sie haben Ziele für sich, wollen besitzen und etwas erreichen. Jeder Mensch, den ich kenne, ist eine Festung. Ich selbst will nichts. Sie werden mich nicht verstehen, aber am liebsten zerrieselte ich." *Ginster*, p. 132.

the draft by eating less and losing weight, but Ginster's maxim to "hunger himself away, just away" (181) betrays broader metaphysical—or at least metafictional—implications; as does his desire to flee into a place beyond space ("gerne wäre Ginster ins Raumlose geflüchtet") (117), or to replace his bodily existence with a different aggregate state altogether: "for his part, [Ginster] . . . would have liked to be gaseous [gasförmig]" (140). To put this in the cinematic terms that hover just below the surface of this text: Ginster dreams of the dissolve.

This evanescent subjectivity has its flip side in the obstinacy of objects and the objectification of human beings: where either the fictional subject dissolves along with the narrative categories of desire, motivation, and agency or the only remaining desire is one for dissolution into gaseous matter without any spatial extension, a reified world comes into view. As Gertrud Koch rightly observes, in *Ginster* "only the material world of objects offers hooks for the eyes and for language to find an anchor."<sup>47</sup>

In a reversal characteristic of much of Kracauer's writing, though, the crucial object among objects turns out to be the human being—or rather the human body. Ginster himself is a case in point: during a dance lesson, a break from the spiritless instruction finds him "an orphaned instrument" ("ein verwaistes Zweckinstrument" [28], leaning against a wall that had previously permitted others to practice their steps. On a different day, after a morning at the office, he "gradually dissolved, his contours began to run, and he was gone, in the wallpaper"<sup>48</sup>: the motif of reification joins that of the vanishing subject. Faces and bodies become disfigured to the point that they transmute into objects: as a woman speaks, her face assumes "the animation of a beautiful grotto formation" (30); the narration turns people into their accoutrements when a "lorgnon fixates Ginster" (31) and mother and aunt recede from view as "two hats, two coats. First straight ahead and then right, down Main Street" (70).

The fragmentation and reification of individual human bodies is most noticeable in descriptions of the military. Arms and legs become autonomous objects, so many machine parts controlled by mechanical processes rather than individual subjectivity. When the arm of Ginster's friend Otto salutes passing officers, metonymically identified merely as uniforms, Ginster thinks to himself that the military has

forced him entirely into a rectangle . . . an automaton. With every other uniform, the arm went up. It was not raised by Otto, but bolted up on its own accord. Otto would not have recognized the uniforms. The arm had to have been mounted with sprockets in his body. The system was operated remotely by the uniforms. It could not be switched off and presumably worked much better without Otto (50).

What happens to Otto's arms also transpires with Ginster's legs. Once in the mili-

47. Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, p. 37.

48. "Blieb er einen Vormittag im Büro, so zerfloß er allmählich, die Konturen lösten sich auf, weg war er, in den Tapeten." *Ginster*, p. 77.

tary, he works at developing automated salutations similar to Otto's and participates in drills where the object is "to fling the legs in such a manner that they flew over the entire barrack yard. Not that this would even have been all that bad, quite the opposite. Ginster was pleased to be able to dismiss, if not himself, then a few extremities at least."<sup>49</sup> The drill, like a later march of the troops to the countryside, turns into an extended *Ballet mécanique*, its emphasis on autonomous legs a literary echo of the dancing mannequin parts in Léger's 1924 film.

In 1931, three years after the publication of *Ginster*, Kracauer would review the "failed experiment" that was Buster Keaton's first sound film, *Free and Easy*, contrasting it with the successful silent comedies. What had set the latter apart was their medium-specific triumph over (literary) language: there is "hardly a literary technique (*Gestaltung*)," Kracauer writes, "that could capture those modes of behavior that silent film had already discovered and represented completely."<sup>50</sup> But how are we to evaluate the apparent medium-specificity argument when Kracauer's own literary technique approximates that of silent cinema? In a review of 1926, Kracauer had described Chaplin's screen persona as "a lacuna" ("ein Loch"):

he has no will; in place of the drive to self-preservation and the hunger for power, he exhibits nothing but emptiness, as blank as Alaska's snow fields. Others have a consciousness of themselves and enter into human relationships; he has lost track of the Ego. . . . And since he owns no Ego: how could he defend it against the great Ego-bundles? He shrinks from a door if it opens behind him, for it, too, is an Ego; everything that takes command, things dead and alive, everything has power over him, before which one must draw one's little hat, and thus he always draws his hat.<sup>51</sup>

For contemporary readers, this description of Chaplin resonated with Kracauer's evocation of Ginster: dating back to Joseph Roth's glowing and influential review, Ginster's meanderings through the plot of the novel have been compared to Chaplin's stumbling characters in his films: "Ginster in war, that's Chaplin in the Department Store" was the tag line the publisher S. Fischer adopted from Roth to market the book.<sup>52</sup> Whether they stumble through literary or cinematic plots, Ginster and Chaplin are both figures of alienation, medium-specificity notwith-

49. "Es galt, die Beine so aus dem Körper zu schleudern, daß sie über den ganzen Kasernenhof flogen. Das wäre nicht einmal schlimm gewesen, im Gegenteil, Ginster freute sich, wenn nicht sich selbst, so doch ein paar Gliedmaßen entlassen zu können." *Ginster*, p. 159.

50. Siegfried Kracauer, "Mischmasch," in *Werke*, vol. 6, book 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), p. 539. On the following argument regarding the links between Chaplin and Ginster, see also Lau, "Ginsterismus."

51. Siegfried Kracauer, "Chaplin," in *Werke*, vol. 6, book 1, pp.269–70.

52. Joseph Roth, "Wer ist Ginster?," in *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Nov 25, 1928; Ernst Bloch had discovered the same resonance in a letter to Kracauer, who had sent him the first seven chapters while he was still completing the novel. Declaring Ginster to be a new type of hero in literature, he admits that "only from the cinema do certain traits translate, from Chaplin and Buster Keaton; instead of slamming doors, here it is battles or the drafts they produce at home." Quoted in Lau, "Ginsterismus," p. 15.

standing. Kracauer's own literary technique, in other words, *did* "capture those modes of behavior that silent film had already discovered and represented completely," and his film criticism and theory from the 1920s on valorized these modes as part of his cultural poetics.<sup>53</sup> For the film theorist Kracauer, the power of estrangement that had animated the author of *Ginster* is coextensive with photography and hence with the photographic medium of film. To make this point, he returns more than once in his work to an extended quotation from Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, where the narrator happens upon his grandmother and sees her through the eyes of "a photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again." As Kracauer points out in his reading of Proust, the latter compares the photographer here with three types—the witness, the observer, the stranger—whose common trait is a certain distance from the events they perceive; as a stranger, the photographer produces a record that has the power to make strange the reality he records. As Kracauer puts it in a well-known essay published while he was still working on *Ginster*, the photographic archive "assembles in effigy the last elements of a nature alienated from meaning."<sup>54</sup> Photography, he will write in *Theory of Film*, is "the product of complete alienation."<sup>55</sup>

If photography is partly a product of de-subjectivization, the photographic is defined by what Kracauer calls its "affinity" for the object-world—including the reified human body. The cinema, in Kracauer's realist theory, gravitates toward inanimate objects, things normally unseen, the small and the big: a range of objects that are, for Kracauer, "cinematic because they stubbornly escape our attention in everyday life."<sup>56</sup> Betraying an extraordinary debt to Balázs, Kracauer celebrates the cinema for its peculiar ability to zoom in on the physiognomy of things, or what he calls their "psychophysical correspondences."<sup>57</sup> Film is distinguished by its power to isolate fragments of the world, to defamiliarize them and thereby render visible their position within the totality: "The motion-picture camera has a way of disintegrating familiar objects and bringing to the fore . . . previously invisible interrelationships between parts of them."<sup>58</sup>

In this formulation of Kracauer's film theory, then, we find the resonance of his early novel with its recurring trope of the fragmentary, automatized body. And it becomes apparent that the depiction of *Ginster* flinging his limbs this way and that shares with photography, as theorized by Kracauer, precisely this tendency to isolate, to abstract, and to reify parts of the human body—a tendency Kracauer

53. On this point, see again Inka Mülder's pioneering study of Kracauer's early works.

54. Kracauer, "Photography," in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 62.

55. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 16.

56. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 53.

57. Echoing Balázs's notion of cinematic physiognomy, Kracauer notes that the "natural objects" represented on film "are surrounded with a fringe of meanings liable to touch off various moods, emotions, runs of inarticulate thoughts; in other words, they have a theoretically unlimited number of psychological and mental correspondences." Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 68.

58. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 54.

also attributes, in turn, to the treatment of the actor as “an object among objects” in the cinema.<sup>59</sup>

But just as in photography, according to Kracauer, there lies the promise of reconciliation, there is also something redemptive to the reifying stance assumed by *Ginster's* narrative voice. In keeping with the faint but clearly articulated utopian hope that Kracauer introduced in even his most relentless critiques of modernity during the 1920s,<sup>60</sup> *Ginster* operates on a double register. The mildly satirical tone in which the sovereign ego is cut down to size and the world of objects claims its due maps out a “verkehrte Welt,” perhaps; but it also intimates an order of things that would no longer conspire against *Ginster*, tripping him up at every turn.

This order of things—mapped in literature not only by Kracauer but also by authors from Jaroslav Hasek, who created the influential figure of the Good Soldier Svejk, to Franz Kafka, whom Kracauer greatly admired—is precisely the one offered, according to Kracauer's later *Theory of Film*, by cinema. Just as photography promises a reconciliation between humans and nature, the alienating power of Kracauer's prose consists, as we have noted, in its ability to confront us with our own alienation.<sup>61</sup> But whereas the grandmother ultimately appears to Proust's narrator completely alienated, “hardly sane, a dejected old woman whom I did not know,” Kracauer goes on to theorize the redeeming power of such an alienating gaze—its ability to push through abstraction and alienation, to reconstitute an emphatic notion of experience. Endowed with such a gaze, photography and film have the power to “blast the prison of conventional reality” and open our eyes to what we overlook in our everyday routines.<sup>62</sup> Arresting though it may be, Kracauer notes, Proust's definition of photography as alienation is ultimately one-sided; it fails to encompass precisely what the subtitle to *Theory of Film* calls “the redemption of physical reality.” As Miriam Hansen suggests, “In the precarious temporality and historicity of photography, its alienation from human intention and control, Kracauer traces a countervailing potential, neither positivistic nor nostalgic, that he believes can be actualized in the medium of film.”<sup>63</sup> At stake in what Kracauer calls the “go-for-broke game of photography” is nothing less than this idea of redemption, of reconciliation between humanity and nature; the photographic media contribute to this idea through their powers of reification—by fragmenting and integrating the sovereign subject into the fabric of representation as an “object among objects” and by redeem-

59. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 97.

60. See, for example, the essays “The Mass Ornament” and “Photography” in *The Mass Ornament*.

61. In an incisive essay on Kracauer's enduring relevance as a theorist of the photographic, Lutz Koepnick likewise emphasizes this aspect of his thought: “Kracauer's writings on photography throughout his entire career consider states of alienation as vital playgrounds of human experience, liquefying the reified structures of the bourgeois subject and thus re-enabling the possibility of non-intentional behavior and perception. . . . [Photography] alienates us from the mechanisms of alienation so as to allow us to cling to the idea of a future reconciliation between humanity and nature, between the rational and the material dimensions of the world” (p. 118). Lutz Koepnick, “In Kracauer's Shadow: Physical Reality and the Digital Afterlife of the Photographic Image,” in *Culture in the Anteroom*, pp. 111–27.

62. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 48.

63. Miriam Hansen, “Kracauer's Photography Essay: Dot Matrix—General (An)Archive—Film,” in *Culture in the Anteroom*, pp. 93–110.

ing the mute material world through the image of its transience. In a hymn to the cinema of Jean Vigo, Kracauer celebrates the way “the camera does not discriminate between human beings and objects, animate and inanimate nature.”<sup>64</sup>

To the reader of *Ginster*, however, the role of the photographer as a distanced observer and of cinema as a modernist medium of redemption will be familiar as a literary device as well. What critics have described as *Ginster*’s “subject-less-ness” (“Ichlosigkeit”) and as the “photographic vision” of Kracauer’s novel appears in this light as the narrative approximation of the photographer-as-stranger in Proust—as a literary version of photography’s intentionless gaze, one in which “what is living appears as atrophied, whereas the material world becomes animated.”<sup>65</sup> The narrative voice in *Ginster* functions as the literary version of the photographic as Kracauer theorizes it in his writings from the late 1920s onward.

A rereading of *Ginster*, however, also highlights a recurrent fantasy that structures Kracauer’s theorizing. Formulated early in the novel as the protagonist’s desire to remain “incognito,” it is a fantasy of the vanishing subject, the undoing of autonomous, individualized subjectivity, be it in the name of what Adorno would ultimately philosophize as “the preponderance of the object” or of some as yet unrealized—and certainly unnamed—utopia of collectivity.<sup>66</sup> But whereas in *Ginster* this subject *wishes* itself away, wanting to disappear unnoticed from the scene, in Kracauer’s major works on film theory, written after the Holocaust, the desire to fade away, let alone to transubstantiate into a “gaseous” form, takes on a completely different valence. After the literal disappearance of, among so many others, Kracauer’s mother and aunt at Theresienstadt, the reduction of the subject to a thing-like entity and the fantasy of vanishing into the décor can no longer function in the satiric register of *Ginster*. And yet, this impetus returns forcefully in all those passages of *Theory of Film* that invoke the power of cinema to make mute objects speak, to endow them with significance and to subordinate to them the actor or individual as “an object among objects.” Whereas *Ginster* still formulates this de-individuating fantasy from the standpoint of the subject, *Theory of Film* will locate its relevance on the side of the object-world and physical reality, which film—according to the book’s messianic subtitle—has the power to redeem.<sup>67</sup>

*Ginster* treats the fantasy of becoming an object satirically; *Theory of Film*, on the other hand, associates the realism of photographic media with melancholia as a form of self-alienation: as Kracauer claims in an aside on “the possible role of

64. “Jean Vigo,” *Hollywood Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (April 1947), pp. 261–63; reprinted in *Siegfried Kracauer’s American Writings*, pp. 47–50.

65. Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer*, p. 131. On *Ginster*’s “subjectlessness,” see Jörg Lau, “Ginsterismus.” On the “photographic vision” of *Ginster*, see Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, p. 49.

66. For the articulation of collectivity as dream or fantasy in the 1920s, see Barbara Hahn, “Dreams of the Collective—or How to Wake Up,” *Germanic Review*, 87, no. 3 (Summer 2012), pp. 308–18.

67. On the messianism inherent in Kracauer’s notion of redemption and its relation to the cabalistic concept of *tikkun*, see Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, pp. 20–23, and Koch, *Siegfried Kracauer*, p. 139.

melancholy in photographic vision,"

melancholy as an inner disposition not only makes elegiac objects seem attractive but carries still another, more important implication: it favors self-estrangement, which on its part entails identification with all kinds of objects. The dejected individual is likely to lose himself in the incidental configurations of his environment, absorbing them with a disinterested intensity no longer determined by his previous preferences.<sup>68</sup>

As if the exilic subjectivity of this "dejected individual" who has cast off his "previous preferences" were not clear enough, Kracauer goes on to note the close relationship between the melancholic's "kind of receptivity" and the stranger's, thereby referring to a figure who will be central to his arguments about historiography as a profoundly exilic craft in the posthumous *History: The Last Things Before the Last*.

In the closing pages of *Theory of Film*, Kracauer both valorizes and tempers this alienated form of "receptivity" by linking the concreteness of the film image and the medium's inherent realism with the question of experience. Thus he reintroduces a humanist perspective into the "thicket of things" that litter the paths of Ginster and the film spectator.<sup>69</sup> We might say that the fantasy of the vanishing subject is both historicized in relation to the experience of exile and at least partially reformulated by reinstating the individual *as* the subject of experience at the end of *Theory of Film*. In this sense, the late Kracauer edges towards the early Balázs, whom he still quotes in the book, and the logic of whose fairy tales he invokes with an anecdote every bit as Orientalist as the tales collected in *The Cloak of Dreams*: the movie spectator, Kracauer claims, "drifts toward and into the objects—much like the legendary Chinese painter who, longing for the peace of the landscape he had created, moved into it, walked toward the faraway mountains suggested by his brush strokes, and disappeared in them never to be seen again."<sup>70</sup>

Such dissolution is anathema to Arnheim. Though he shares with Kracauer and Balázs the tropes of exile, his underlying investment is not in a communion with the other or physical reality but in their legibility. When Arnheim reviewed Kracauer's *Theory of Film* in 1963, he paid tribute to his fellow exile by calling it the "most intelligent book ever written on the subject of film"—but then proceeded to critique the melancholic stance that fueled the "most intelligent" enterprise. As if to evoke Ginster's desire to dissolve, evaporate, and lose his shape, Arnheim titled his review "Melancholy Unshaped" and zeroed in precisely on Kracauer's valorization of melancholia, quoted above.<sup>71</sup> Bemoaning the "surrender of the formative capacity of the human mind to the raw material of experience," Arnheim noted—both in culture at

68. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 17.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

71. Rudolf Arnheim, "Melancholy Unshaped," in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21, vol. 3 (Spring 1963), pp. 291–97. Intriguingly, Arnheim had accused Balázs's film theory of being shapeless thirty years earlier, describing it as "a heap" of admittedly intriguing observations that did not, however, "give the reader the stable foundation of knowledge that he desires" (Rudolf Arnheim, "The Spirit

large and in Kracauer's diagnostic film theory—an "abandonment of pattern" and an encroaching "loss of visibility," which to him bespoke "nothing but the yearning for the unshaped, a return to the raw material of reality."<sup>72</sup>

We seem to have returned to the dispute over formalism and realism, the debate between an aesthetics that would redeem physical reality and a theory that would insist on the importance of "interpret[ing] the raw material of experience by means of significant form." Against the background of these theorists' literary works, however, we may now recast this debate by considering these works' structuring fantasies—fantasies of wholeness, of inversion, and of subjectlessness, all powerfully tied to tropes of exile and displacement. What emerges from a reconsideration of these theorists, then, is not merely the common project of elevating the cinema to an art form, let alone of insisting on its specificity vis-à-vis other media. It is also the shared impulse to track the alienating force of the moving image, its power to place even the most essentialized notions of the "soul," of the *Weltbild*, and of "physical reality" at a critical distance.

By emphasizing the links between the literary and the (film) theoretical, I do not wish to reduce these authors' fictional works to mere prolegomena for their theories. With the possible exception of *Eine verkehrte Welt*, which is somewhat schematic in its "formula of inversion," these are by no means "theoretical" fictions. And no matter how Chaplinesque Kracauer's hero may have appeared to his readers, these are no "cinematic novels" either, if by that we mean the vaunted "filmic writing" of the 1920s. Rather, as I hope to have shown, these rich literary texts are part and parcel of a broader cultural poetics that their authors develop throughout their entire work. Foregrounding the tropes of distancing, defamiliarization, romantic projection, and inversion, these cultural poetics participate in a larger modernist project inspired by, among others, Georg Lukács's diagnosis of "transcendental shelterlessness"—a trope playfully adopted by Kracauer and Adorno in the 1920s, when they signed a letter to their mutual friend Leo Löwenthal as "agents of the transcendently shelterless." Without hypostasizing the biographical as a causal, explanatory reference for the literary and theoretical explorations charted in the present essay, I do want to reiterate that for the three classical film theorists discussed here, this notion of homelessness would play out in the lived reality of exile. In a historicizing view, the centrality of dislocation and alienation in their texts should come as no surprise, given the circumstances under which they were developed. In this respect, careful attention to these film theorists' literary production yields new perspectives on the historical position and the imaginative dimensions of classical film theory as a whole.

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of Film," in Balázs, *Early Film Theory*, p. 234). But if he ultimately critiques Balázs for sloppy, if enthusiastic, thinking, Arnheim's critique of Kracauer amounts to an indictment of the latter's aesthetics of indeterminacy, which is not itself shapeless but valorizes shapelessness.

72. Arnheim, "Melancholy Unshaped," p. 296.

Len Lye:  
The Vital Body of Cinema

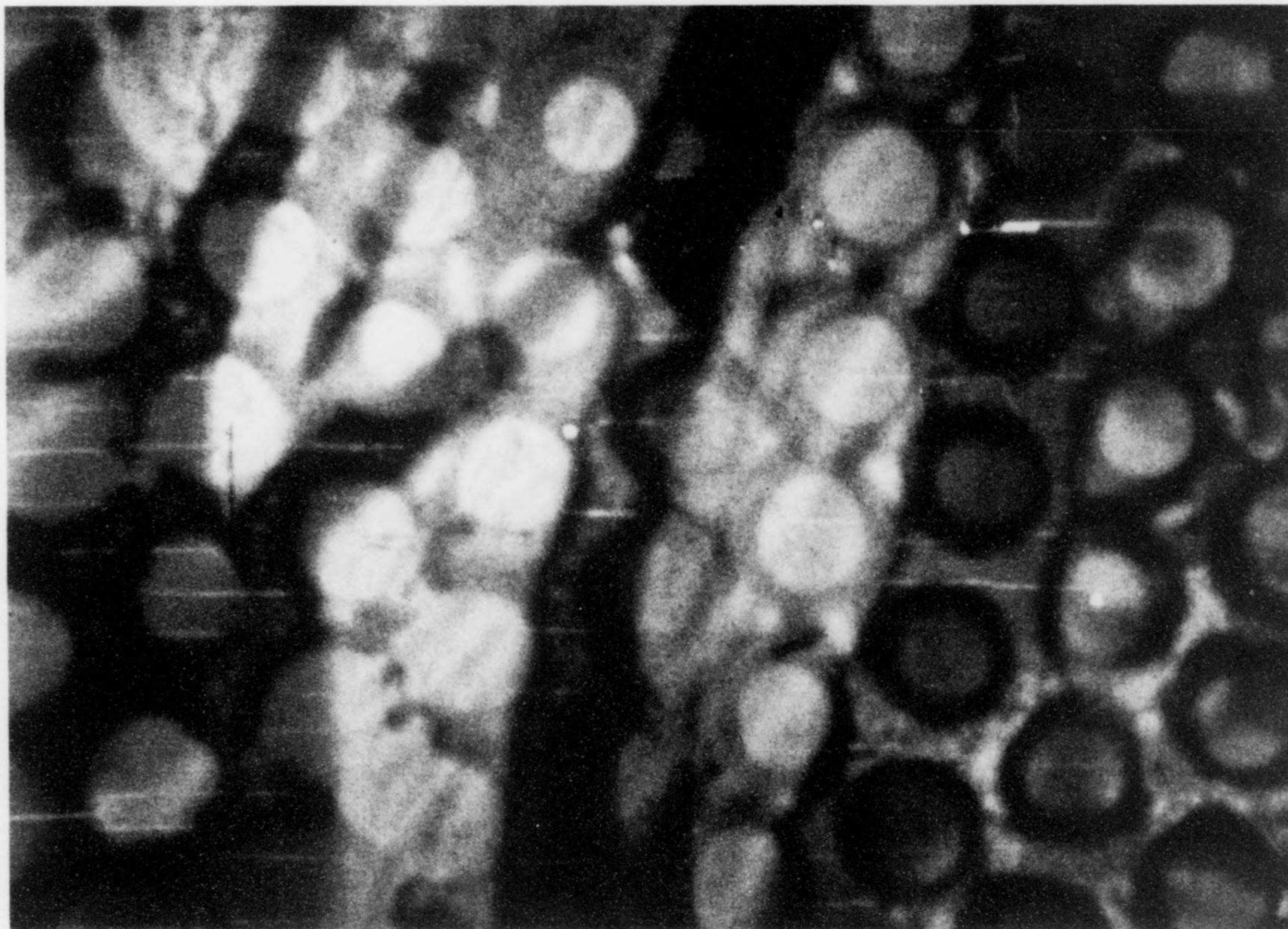
LUKE SMYTHE

In late 1936, a year after it had been awarded a Medal of Honor in the specially created category of “fantasy film” at the International Cinema Festival in Brussels, Len Lye’s first hand-painted film, *A Colour Box* (1935), was screened at the Venice Film Festival, where it met with a less than rapturous response. Consisting of little more than quivering fields of dots, eccentrically pinwheeling triangles, and trembling vertical lines, all jumping to the jaunty rhythms of a Creole jazz soundtrack, the film’s dancing sheets of color instantly aroused the ire of Nazi spectators present in the audience. As the German daily *Film-Kurier* would later report: “The English color short *A Colour Box*, which attempts the kind of abstract film composition of Fischinger but with inadequate artistic means, was met with such loud condemnatory stomping that the screening had to be stopped before the film was over.”<sup>1</sup> So degenerate was the film, it seems, that despite being only three minutes in length it could not be screened in its entirety.

In retrospect, of course, there is nothing startling about this turn of events. By virtue of its complete abstraction and its recourse to a “negroid” musical accompaniment, it would have been difficult in 1936 to find a film more strikingly at odds with even the most liberal canons of Nazi cinema—as the *Film-Kurier*’s rather startling invocation of Oskar Fischinger as a yardstick of comparative acceptability in this context suggests.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, when Lye’s motives for drawing on the combined resources of abstraction, jazz, and animation in his hand-painted films are taken into account, the severity of this judgment can only be compounded. For at the heart of Lye’s filmmaking practice lay an urge

1. “Erfolge und Versager am Lido: Hausschlüssel treten in Aktion,” *Film-Kurier*, Aug. 13, 1936, p. 1, cited (and incorrectly dated August 16) in William Moritz, “Len Lye’s Films in the Context of International Abstract Cinema,” in *Len Lye*, ed. Jean-Michel Bouhours and Roger Horrocks (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2000), p. 194.

2. That Fischinger’s name was mentioned by the *Film-Kurier* at this date is surprising for two reasons: not only because of his history as an abstract filmmaker, but because he had recently fled to the United States in an effort to escape the increasingly unwelcome attentions of the German authorities. For a summary of the race-related criticisms to which jazz was subjected under National Socialism, see Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 31–32.

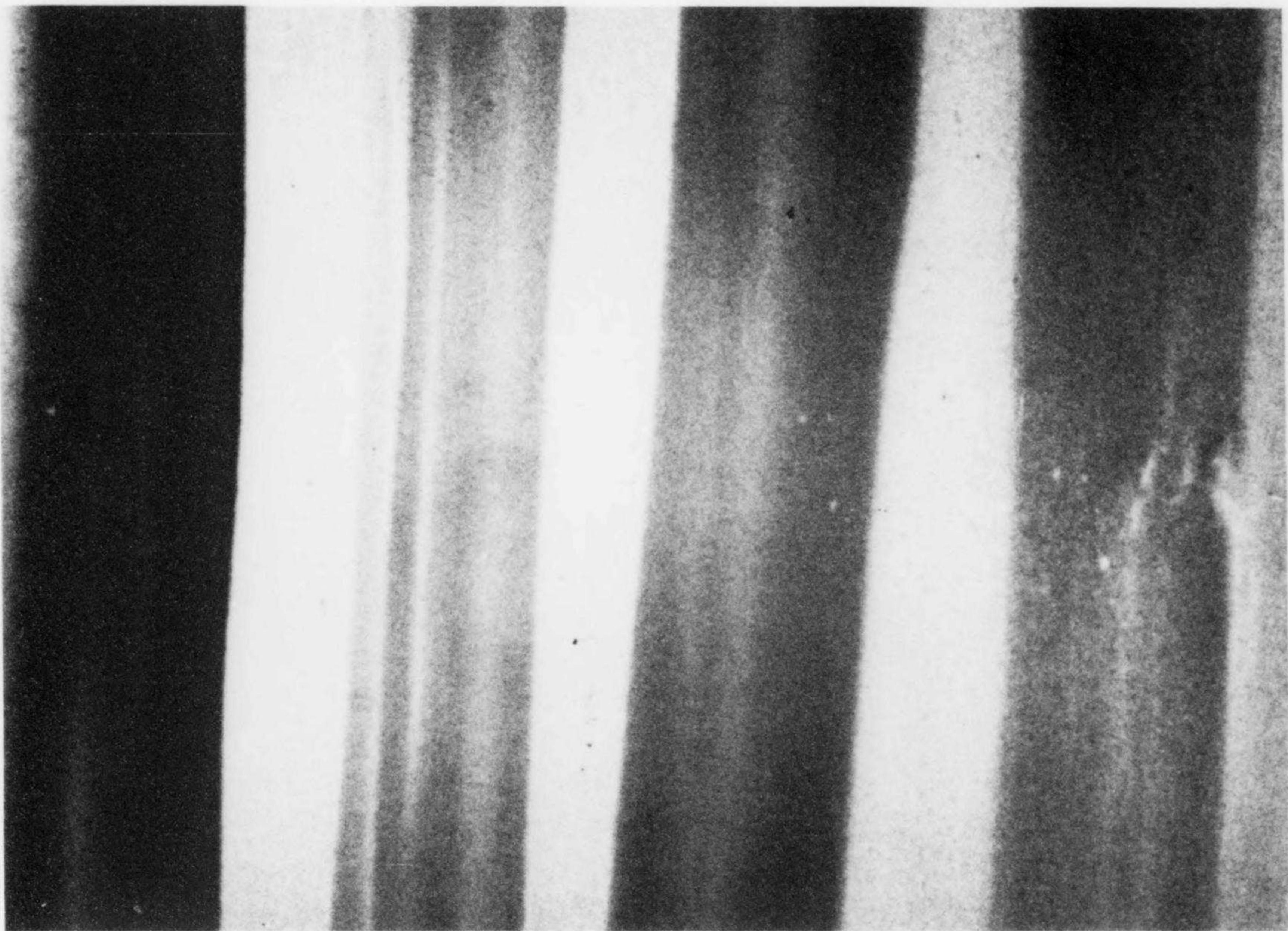


*Len Lye. A Colour Box. 1935. All images courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand.*

to use cinema as a device for enlivening viewers' bodies via a process he referred to as "bodily empathy," an impulse that placed his work in direct opposition to the stern somatic ethos of discipline, desensitization, and corporeal alienation that anchored key sectors of Nazi art production. Little wonder then that *A Colour Box* may well have been the target of a carefully choreographed propaganda attack at Venice.<sup>3</sup>

As dramatic as it was, however, Lye's hostile reception at Venice does not bring the full stakes of his cinematic agenda into view. On the contrary, when we examine the remainder of Lye's prewar cinematic output from the perspective of his lifelong fascination with the body's empathic response to sound and movement, it becomes increasingly evident that his art was ranged in opposition to something much broader than the somatically deadening terms of Fascist aesthetics, namely the forces of corporeal alienation at work in several focal domains of industrial modern life. Among these may be numbered the increasingly Taylorized conditions of the workplace, the rapidly advancing efforts of govern-

3. Moritz, "Len Lye's Films in the Context of International Abstract Cinema," p. 194.



*Lye. A Colour Box. 1935.*

ments worldwide to rationalize and centrally administer the entire social infrastructure, and the sedentary pleasures of the cinema itself. When war broke out, Lye then brought his heightened kinesthetic sensibilities to the battlefield, coolly demonstrating the merits of a refined somatic consciousness in the bloody confrontation with Fascism.

*Movement as Muse*

From the beginning of his career in the early 1920s until his death in 1980, Lye sought to use dynamic artworks to awaken sensations of motion within their onlookers. In service of this aim, he became both a pioneer filmmaker and kinetic sculptor. Working in London in the interwar period, he helped initiate the genres of hand-painted and scratch filmmaking, while also making important early forays into color processing. After moving to New York in 1944, he became a leading figure in the kinetic-sculpture movement of the 1950s and 1960s. His motion-based aesthetic, however, originated in the cities and countryside of his native New

Zealand, where he was born in 1901, far from the centers of the European and North American art worlds where it would later be implemented.<sup>4</sup>

Lye's sensitivities to movement first developed in the context of the "sense games" he invented as a child, in which he strove to focus on a single sensory register from dawn until dusk, later replaying his experiences as he prepared to go to sleep. While developing his senses in this way, Lye grew increasingly receptive to sensations of sound, color, and above all motion.<sup>5</sup> By attending closely to the "figures of motion" inscribed by animals, water, clouds, and plants, he became aware of the phenomenon he would later refer to as "bodily empathy," whereby the echoes of observed movements could be discerned, and indeed amplified, within his own body.<sup>6</sup> As he wrote in 1964,

I . . . eventually came to look at the way things moved mainly to try to feel movement, and *only* feel it. This is what dancers do; but instead, I wanted to put the feeling of a figure of motion outside of myself to see what I'd got. I came to realize that this feeling had to come out of myself, not out of streams, swaying grasses, soaring birds; so, instead of sketching lines and accents described by things in motion, I now tried to tie and plait their particular motion characteristics into my sinews—to attach an inner kind of echo of them to my bones. . . . It might seem inane to anyone else, but the way I practiced it, I could levitate with the curling smoke, scud with the wind-blown leaf, sashay with the reflections of masts on water, shimmy with the flapping flag, glide with the snake.<sup>7</sup>

As these remarks suggest, Lye never aspired to an asubjectival fusion with the natural world in his sense games. To the contrary, he cherished the experience of empathy for the way it heightened and refined his sense of individuality, a task he viewed as fundamental to all forms of creative expression.<sup>8</sup> To observe, absorb, transcribe, and retransmit the experience of motion in ways that could assist others in acquiring a heightened sense of their own somatic capabilities became the focal concern of Lye's art as early as 1920, while he was still a student at Wellington Technical College, and sustained his practice for some sixty years thereafter. Though his first forays in this direction were static (comprising sketches of the movement patterns of waves and clouds), after relocating to Sydney in 1922 he entered the arena of moving images, scratching figures of motion generated from within his own body onto strips of black leader obtained from an anima-

4. Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001), p. 8. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent biographical references will be drawn from this source.

5. See Lye's reminiscences of this early period of his life in "Beginnings" (n.d.), in *Figures of Motion: Len Lye/Selected Writings* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1984), ed. Wystan Curnow and Roger Horrocks, pp. 30–32.

6. Lye introduced the term "bodily empathy" in *ibid.*, p. 25.

7. Lye, "The Art that Moves" (1964), in *Figures of Motion: Len Lye/Selected Writings*, p. 82.

8. See Lye, "Beginnings," p. 32, and "Is Film Art?" (1959), in *ibid.*, p. 53.

tion studio where he had found work. Though no finished films emerged from these experiments, he began working on an animated short, *Tusalava* (1929), following a second move to London in 1926, and completed it some three years later.

Unfolding in extreme slow motion, *Tusalava* depicts the emergence of two opposing figures from a striated matrix of dot-like configurations, most likely inspired by Australian Aboriginal art. Later in life, Lye described one of the figures, which is vaguely humanoid, as a "totem of individuality" and the other, which is wormlike, as a "witchetty grub," an important Aboriginal food source he had never seen but was the subject of a dance he admired featuring sinuous writhing movements akin to those he made use of in his film.<sup>9</sup> Throughout *Tusalava*'s ten-minute duration, the witchetty grub invades its totemic counterpart with a pair of tentacular protrusions, struggling to absorb it in its entirety before being thrust aside by the totem's last-gasp explosive death throes. While Lye himself remained unsure of the film's meaning, it mooted two key premises of his later cinematic efforts: his conception of the film image as a locus for the transfer of energy between bodies and his construal of cinematic movement as a brand of "vicarious" dance.<sup>10</sup> This dance-like understanding of the film image would always hold a central place in his work, as would Primitivism, for Lye would never shed his conviction that tribal cultures remained connected to dimensions of sensory experience that had been covered over in modern Western art forms by a cognitively biased "literary" crust.<sup>11</sup> In his own art he sought to tear away this crust, beginning in the mid-1930s with the hand-painted film idiom he would come to call "direct" filmmaking.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Direct Filmmaking and the Body of Leisure*

During his early years in London, Lye was exposed to a much broader range of films than had been available to him in New Zealand and Australia. At the London Film Society, where *Tusalava* had first been screened, he was able to view the work of significant avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s such as Man Ray, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Fernand Léger, Fischinger, and others. Elsewhere, he was free to sample the full spectrum of narrative-driven, commercial filmmaking streaming out of Britain and Hollywood at this time, all the while seeking to develop new cinematic projects of his own.<sup>13</sup> Some time around 1934, after years of

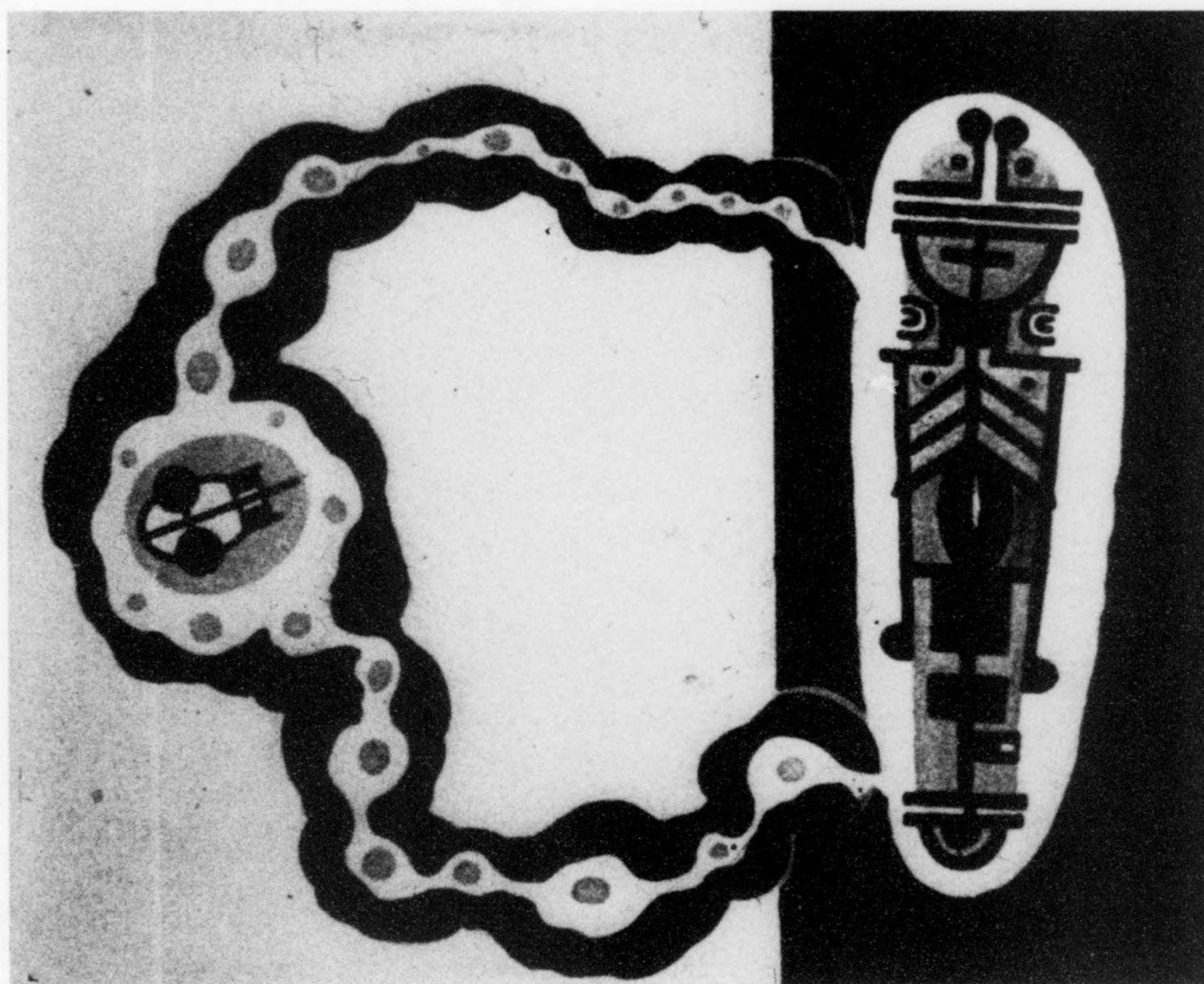
9. Lye, "Gene-Deep Myth" (1978), in *ibid.*, pp. 90–94.

10. Lye posited film movement as a kind of "vicarious dance" in "The Art that Moves," p. 86.

11. Lye, "Notes on a Short Colour Film" (1936), in *ibid.*, p. 51. I employ the term "primitive" here in accordance with Lye's own understanding of its meaning, which, as the foregoing comments make clear, carried no connotations of backwardness or underdevelopment and was instead aligned with a state of somatic advancement.

12. Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography*, p. 133.

13. On Lye's film-going habits in London, see *ibid.*, pp. 97, 127–28.

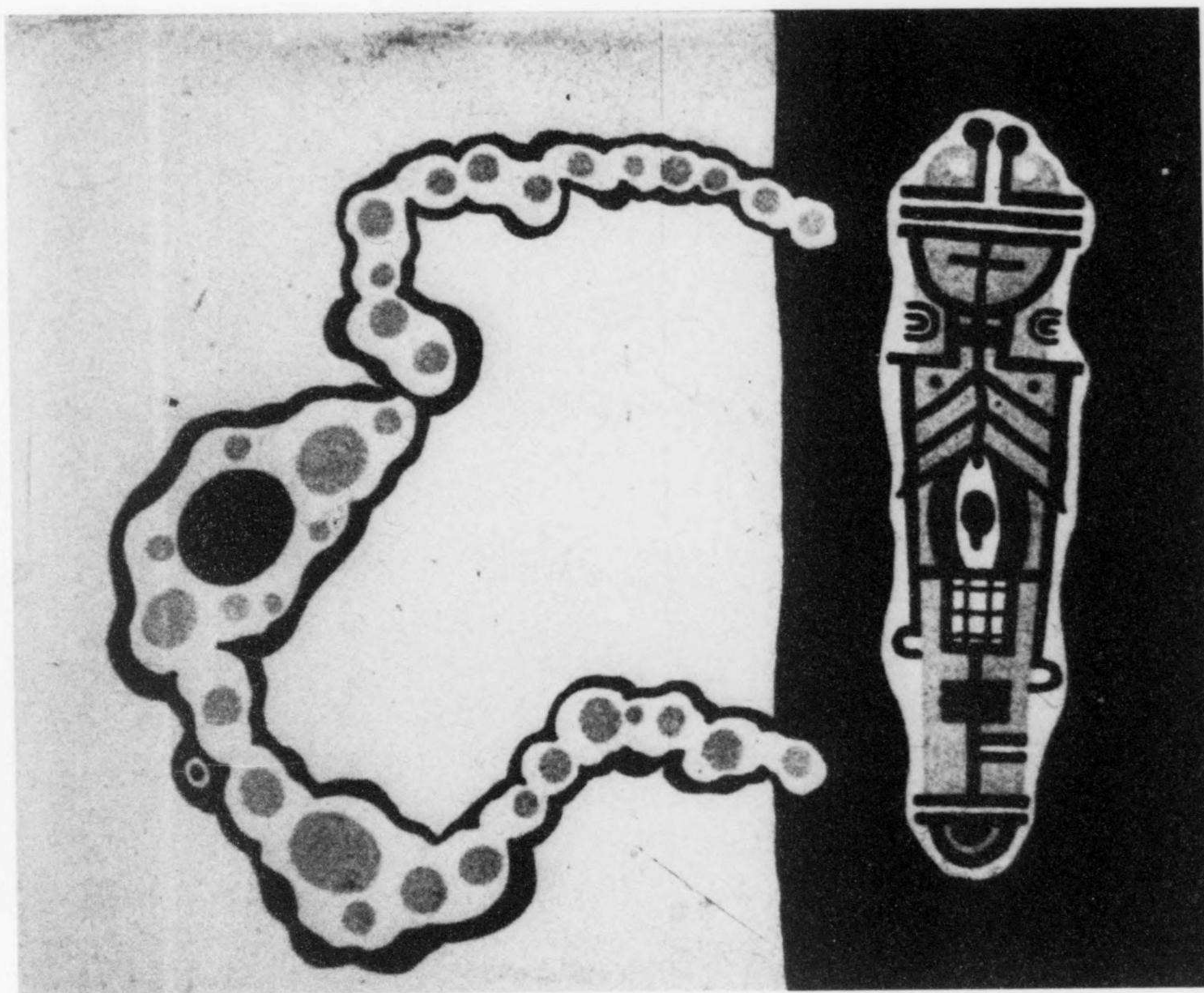


*Lye. Tusalava. 1929.*

fruitless attempts to obtain commercial backing for a variety of ventures, he hit upon the idea of working without the expense of a film crew, camera, or lighting equipment by painting onto and scratching into clear strips of unwanted celluloid. By 1935, he had located a brand of lacquer paint that would not crack or peel when run through a film projector and had obtained the assistance of John Gielgud in the production of his first hand-painted film, *Full Fathom Five* (1935), which featured the actor reading passages of *The Tempest* to a synchronized musical accompaniment and a medley of off-cut film sequences that Lye had hand-tinted.<sup>14</sup> It was this now lost film that won him funding and commissions from the British Government's GPO (General Post Office) Film Unit, which would support him for the next several years.

The GPO Film Unit had been founded in 1933 and was charged with informing the British public of the post office's activities, which at that time included infrastructural projects such as the creation of a national telephone network. In the hands of its first director, John Grierson, however, the unit's informational

14. Like *Tusalava* before it, *Full Fathom Five* benefited greatly from Lye's friendship with the Australian composer Jack Ellitt, who worked closely with Lye on many early film projects.



Lye. Tusalava. 1929.

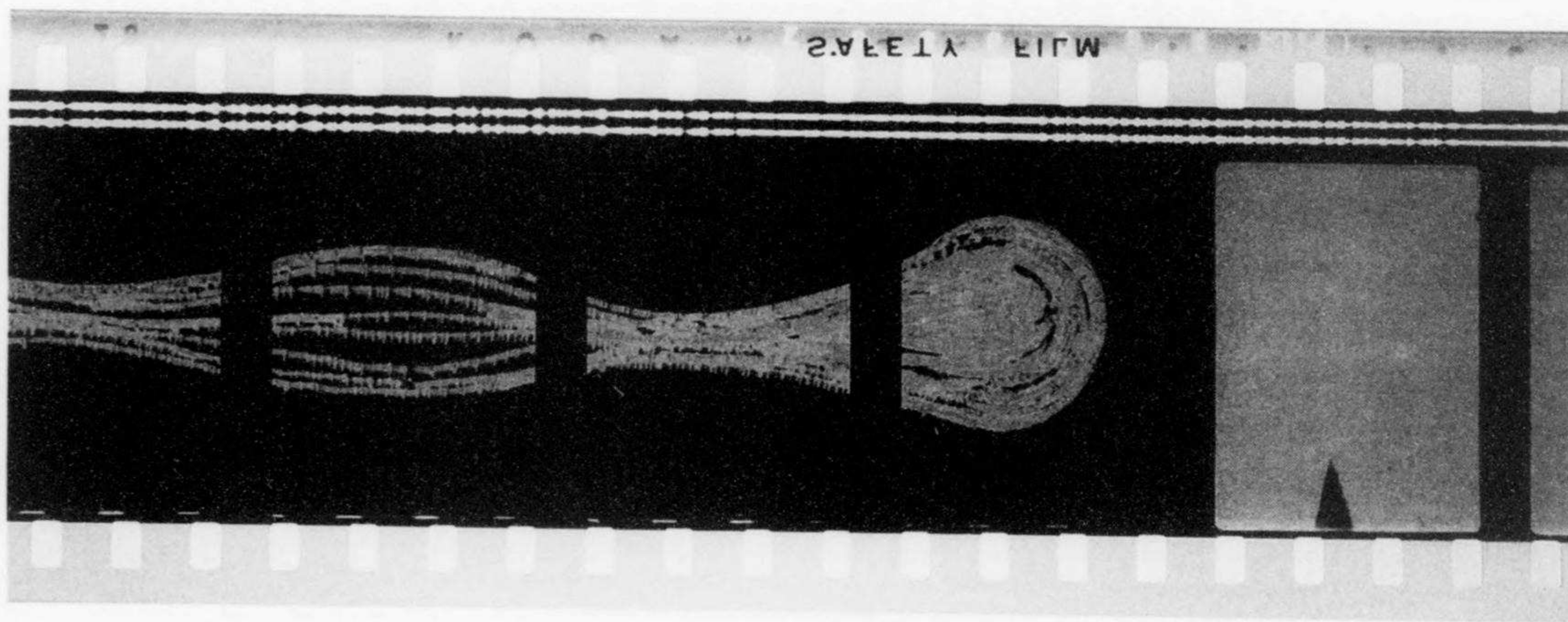
mandate was interpreted broadly, with Grierson trying to produce technically innovative and socially progressive films that would help raise the standards of British filmmaking.<sup>15</sup> While this initiative resulted for the most part in high-quality social-realist documentaries, seeing *Full Fathom Five* inspired Grierson to expand the unit's horizons by underwriting a very different kind of filmmaking. Impressed by Lye's inventive work, Grierson asked him to produce an advertisement for new postage rates. The result was *A Colour Box*.<sup>16</sup> With Grierson's blessing, the film does not belabor its commercial function, remaining wholly abstract until its final thirty seconds. From that point forward, a series of hand-stenciled statements appear onscreen, but make little impression on viewers amid the film's prevailing onslaught of sound and color.<sup>17</sup>

15. For a summary of the GPO's activities, see Scott Anthony, "GPO Film Unit," <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/464254/index.html> (accessed December 12, 2011).

16. For further details regarding the circumstances of this commission, see Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography*, pp. 135–36.

17. As a number of early newspaper reports attest, the advertorial content of Lye's early direct films was often lost on spectators. See, for example, the clippings from the *Leicester Mercury*, the *Illustrated Leicester Chronicle*, and the *Morning Post*, collected in Lye's review scrapbook of the 1930s (Len Lye Foundation Archive, ID 1789, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Zealand, pp. 31–32).

Thanks to the sheer novelty of *A Colour Box*, which earned it a great deal of notoriety in Britain, Lye was given further commissions, both by Grierson and by several commercial sponsors who were attracted to the prestige value of Lye's work.<sup>18</sup> With this support, he produced four more direct films in the '30s: *Kaleidoscope* (1935), commissioned by Churchman's Cigarettes; *Colour Flight* (1938), commissioned by Imperial Airways; and two further GPO commissions, *Swinging the Lambeth Walk* (1939) and *Musical Poster #1* (1940). Given the same kind of leeway in his commercial films as he received in his GPO projects, Lye was able to keep their advertorial content to a minimum and instead focus on advancing his somatic concerns.



Lye. *Swinging the Lambeth Walk*. 1939.

If *Tusalava* had been the first of Lye's works to center on a dance-like exchange of energy between bodies, his direct films of the '30s took this process much further. In a freewheeling but lyrical idiom that resisted any crisp separation of media categories or firm distinction between high and low cultural forms, Lye transformed the moviegoing experience into a source of bodily *jouissance* and revitalization capable of countering the somatically alienating cultural tendencies of his day. Reversing the *enervative* vision of energy transfer that had formed the nucleus of *Tusalava*'s narrative, Lye directed its mode of address outward, across the screen's threshold. In doing so, he transformed the film image into an *inner-vating* reservoir of stored somatic impulses whose energies were capable of arcing outward into real space. These energies, Lye hoped, would invigorate the sensoria of onlookers, allowing them to recover a deeper, more enlivening sense of their individual kinesthetic capabilities within the increasingly ocular-centric and devitalizing spaces of Depression-era cinema.

18. On the relationship between Lye and his commercial sponsors, see Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography*, pp. 142–43.

While the cinematic culture of the 1920s and '30s had by no means been somatically inattentive, the key genres of silent comedy, with its endless series of kinesthetic pratfalls and catastrophes, and early animation, whose metamorphic chaos could (quite literally) stretch the viewer's capacity for bodily empathy to its limits, were by this stage heading into decline. It was into the space vacated by these genres that Lye inserted the innovative language of direct cinema, moving to oppose those remaining forms of narrative cinema that alternately deadened the sensoria of their viewers or fostered a pacifying mode of address, effecting the one by means of escalating and increasingly spectacularized *sensory* assaults and the other by setting aside the corporeal dimension of spectatorship. Working in this manner, Lye would distance himself decisively from all prior efforts in the field of abstract cinema, aligning his practice instead with the liberatory impulses of interwar popular culture and the Weimar-era avant-garde project to restructure the human sensorium by means of mechanical technologies—albeit on his own, highly singular terms.

Purging his films of all but the slightest narrative pretext (in the form of the opening titles and advertising slogans that they were regrettably obliged to bear), Lye developed an abstract cinematic idiom consisting of spinning, stenciled geometries, swaying linear fields, and heady assaults of pure color, all dancing in a loosely counterpointed relationship to their accompanying jazz soundtracks. Using stencils, brushes, sticks, nails, and combs to lay luminous runs of tumbling shapes across saturated fields of color, completely indifferent to the confines of individual frames, Lye sought to distance his work from cognitive preoccupations and bring it closer to what Gilles Deleuze once described as cinema's "signaletic" state. In this condition, which exists before or beyond the imposition of linguistic meanings, the film image is approached as a non-signifying, non-syntactic "signaletic material" whose "modulation features" (such as color, movement, and sound) may be used to address spectators at the level of direct sensation.<sup>19</sup> Lye's hand-painted films of the '30s represent one of the first and most emphatic efforts to work in this manner.

In developing his direct-film idiom, Lye was operating far from the concerns of prior abstract filmmakers, who—from the abortive efforts of the Italian Futurists Arnaldo Ginna and Bruno Corra to create the first signaletic, hand-colored films in 1911 to the development of abstract cinema in Weimar Germany in the early 1920s—had worked beneath the sign of the purist and transcendental aspirations of abstract painting. Figures as diverse as Fischinger, Walter Ruttmann, and Henri Léopold Sauvage had sought to elevate painting to the pure heights of music; more ambitiously, others such as Richter and Eggeling had tried to develop a universal language of moving abstract forms. In pursuit of these objectives, the majority of these "absolute" filmmakers had come to share the synesthetic goal of

19. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 25–30.

uniting music and painting beneath the banner of film, spurred on by the prospect of attaining an ideal convergence of musical and visual form.<sup>20</sup> Lye's kinesthetic objectives were, however, largely at odds with such concerns. Having no interest in furthering the rarefying objectives of existing art forms and favoring the worldlier, more corporeally immediate cadences of jazz over the ethereal musical accompaniments of his Continental predecessors, Lye instead returned abstract cinema to the ground-level clamor of modernity, on terms closest to those of the genre's Futurist inaugurators. In doing so, however, he operated with less violence and pro-industrial zeal, more lyricism, and a much greater affinity for existing mass cultural forms.

Seeking to foster a strong somatic reaction to his hand-painted films, Lye availed himself of the mass cultural resources of jazz, together with the jittery, morphological madness of early animation—both important if contested sources of progressive popular experience during the interwar period. By loosely weaving together the eccentric rhythms of the former and the formal freedoms of the latter and fusing these in turn with the avant-garde traditions of geometric and gestural abstraction, Lye created a hybrid art form centered on the technical apparatus of cinema that sought to deploy the progressive capabilities of both halves of Theodor Adorno's incomplete dialectical whole of mass and elite cultural forms. In this way he was able to bypass Adorno's misgivings concerning the emancipatory potential of both mediums. If Adorno had harbored reservations regarding the excessive standardization of jazz, which he regarded as a cipher for the increasing standardization and administration of society at large, the musical material with which Lye worked was just one strand of a considerably more sophisticated and anarchic ensemble of color, sound, and music. By no means wholly standardized, Lye's films instead tack back and forth between extreme states of order and chaos, their imagery and music moving in and out of sync in a completely unpredictable fashion. In so doing, they serve a somatic sensory agenda that was greatly at variance with Adorno's strict, and strictly modernist, confinement of progressive musical apprehension to a purely auditory (and cognitive) plane. And if Adorno had expressed mounting concern over cartoon violence during the course of the 1930s, believing (contrary to Walter Benjamin) that the audience's laughing response to such events encouraged them to masochistically identify with the violence to which they themselves were subjected in their daily lives, Lye exchanged the depicted brutality of Mickey and Donald for a purely sensory violence of color, light, and sound presented with the hope of countering existing cultural forms of somatic alienation.<sup>21</sup> In this way he was able to maneuver into a critical space

20. I examine the topics of image-music relations and the synesthetic impulse in early abstract cinema at greater length in my "Music and Image in Len Lye's Direct Films," *Journal of New Zealand Art History* 27 (2006), pp. 1–14.

21. For Adorno's reservations concerning the standardized character of jazz and other forms of popular music, see "On Jazz" (1936), reprinted in *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), trans. Jamie Owen Daniel, pp. 470–96. Together with Max Horkheimer, Adorno voices his concerns regarding the socially submissive character of the laughter elicited by cartoon violence in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), trans. Edmund Jephcott, p. 110.

located between the contrasting stances toward mass culture assumed by the two great German critics in their exchanges of the 1930s. He achieved this by proposing a form of filmmaking that could fulfill Benjamin's hope for a revolutionary "innervation" of technology on the part of the masses, while allowing Adorno's concept of a revived mimetic relationship to nature to take center stage.

Throughout the 1930s, Benjamin grew increasingly pessimistic about humanity's capacity to forge a new and more productive relationship to technology. Nonetheless, he continued to regard an infusion of the revolutionary energies of the masses into the technical apparatus of industry and culture as a potential source of progress on two fronts: politically, as the best hope for advancing socialism, and ecologically, as a means of rebalancing the relationship between nature and technology.<sup>22</sup> Adorno, for his part, was less sanguine about the prospect of an improved relationship to technology, yet he too was concerned to promote a rebalancing of the human relationship to nature, which had been dangerously repressed beneath a veneer of enlightened rationality and modern industrial indifference. For Adorno, the recovery of a now faded mimetic relationship between humanity and the natural realm was a *sine qua non* for the resumption of social progress. Where he broke with Benjamin, however, was over the issue of technology's ability to facilitate this process. To Adorno's way of thinking, technology was too firmly imbued with the abstracting and alienating tendencies of instrumental reason to help redirect society's attentions to the sensuous particularities of the natural world.<sup>23</sup>

When we constellate Lye's position with the views of Benjamin and Adorno, it becomes clear that at an aspirational level he shared key aspects of each critic's outlook, fusing Benjamin's early early (and never wholly relinquished) technological optimism with Adorno's (admittedly faint and carefully qualified) faith in the recovery of certain lost powers of sensuous mimesis. Upon recovering such powers, the human subject could in theory trade its purely instrumental and rationalizing relationship to natural objects for a more balanced interaction of self and world. In his direct cinematic idiom, Lye endeavored to support such a process by

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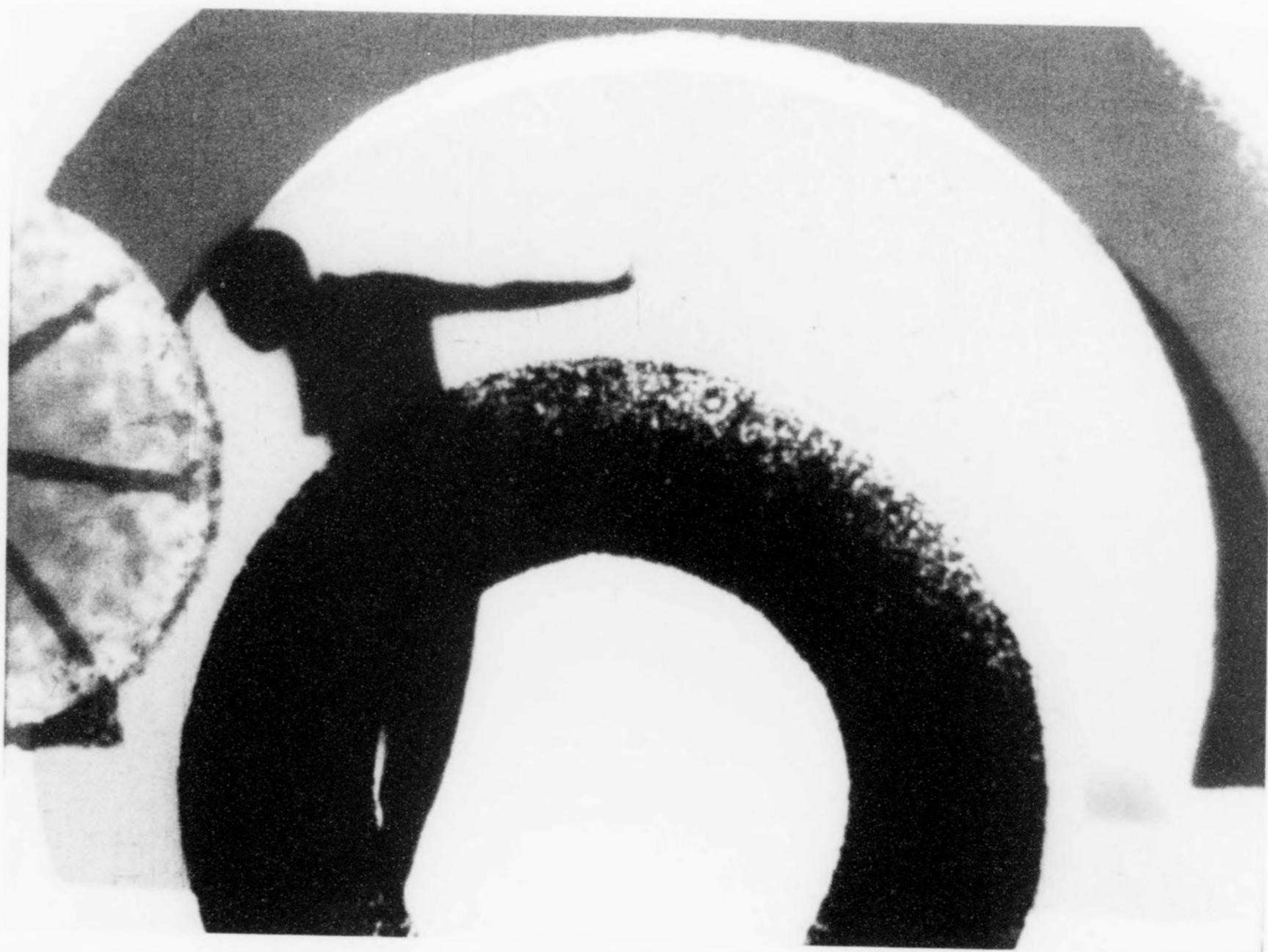
For an important survey of both thinkers' changing views on animation in connection with the broader critical reception of early animation in Europe, see Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso Books, 2002), esp. pp. 115–22, 170–79.

22. In his 1929 essay on Surrealism, Benjamin somewhat cryptically described this infusion as a process of "collective innervation." See Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, p. 218. For important commentaries on this strand of Benjamin's thought, see Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (Autumn 1992), pp. 3–41; and Miriam Hansen's "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street," in *Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), ed. Gerhard Richter, pp. 41–73.

23. On this point, see Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 32. For a lucid exposition of Adorno's concept of mimesis and its social implications, see Richard Wolin, "Utopia, Mimesis, and Reconciliation: A Redemptive Critique of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," *Representations* 32 (Autumn 1990), pp. 33–49.

inscribing a dynamics of motion born in the body's empathic relationship to nature into the image space of cinema, thereby investing the film image with his own highly developed capacities for sensuous mimesis. Contrary to Adorno and Benjamin, however, there was no explicitly revolutionary dimension to his practice and no direct investment in Marxist cultural politics. Instead, his aesthetics were rooted in a simpler wish to use technology to enhance the sensory lives of his films' spectators. This therapeutic agenda enables us to place Lye's work in a further context, namely the efforts of avant-garde artists of the 1920s to use new technology to restructure the human sensorium.

At various moments in the 1920s, European artists had endeavored to use new technology to alter the human sensorium, by amplifying or restructuring its existing sensory capabilities. Richter and Eggeling, for example, had aspired to enhance the communicative capabilities of vision by means of their universal language. Aleksandr Rodchenko and László Moholy-Nagy, meanwhile, had sought to use photography and projected light to adapt the senses to the changing perceptual conditions of modernity. But while Lye shared the belief of these artists in the susceptibility of the senses to the acculturating influence of technology, he was interested neither in expanding the horizons of an existing sensory faculty à la Richter and Eggeling nor in modernizing perception in the manner of



*Lye. Rainbow Dance. 1936.*

Rodchenko and Moholy-Nagy. Instead, his aspirations were strictly therapeutic, being directed toward the restoration of an innate but socially neglected register of somatic experience. Nevertheless, Lye shared the technological optimism of his predecessors, together with their urge to fold the experience of art back into the spaces of everyday life—and it was in this spirit that he produced *Rainbow Dance* (1936), an advertisement for post-office savings accounts that rehearsed a range of possibilities for a somatically unalienated relationship to leisure activity in the world beyond the sedentary confines of the cinema.

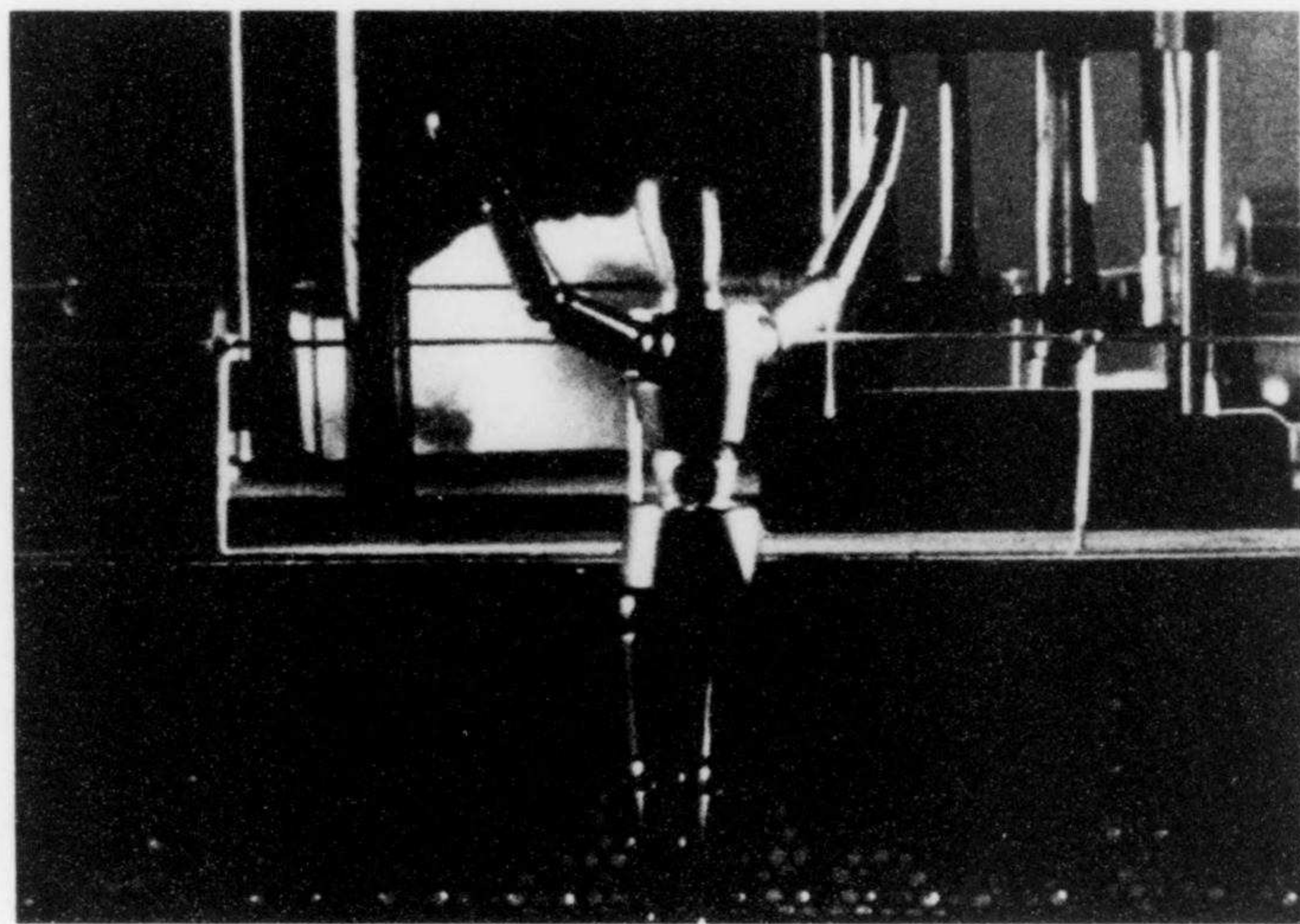
Merging several cinematic idioms and making inventive use of the new Gasparcolor printing process, *Rainbow Dance* was supposed to make the virtues of leaving money in the care of Britain's Post Office Savings Bank abundantly clear. What Lye produced, however, was a heady paean to bodily vitality, as figured by a lone silhouetted figure's jaunty and increasingly rapturous engagements with his worldly surroundings. Loosely chronicling the life and times of a Londoner who leaves the drab confines of the city for a country vacation, where he walks and dances in the hills and then plays tennis with a medley of painted balls that spin and whirl around him, Lye fed a combination of found footage and handmade imagery through the cumbersome three-negative Gasparcolor colorization process. The result is a balletic narrative in which the energies of the natural environment—in the form of ocean waves, rain, and overlaid screens of color—continue to invade and animate the body of his protagonist. In this half-drawn, half-photographic world, the sonorous forces of Creole music and pure, luminous color are repeatedly transposed from the body's exterior to its interior and back again in a free play of counterpointed exchange between the human sensorium and its enveloping milieu. In this dreamworld of unalienated bodily sensation, an emphatically kinesthetic dimension is brought to all modes of leisure activity. So captivating and immediate is Lye's imagery that the stiff voice-over by the film's sponsor during the film's final moments feels like nothing so much as a suffocating recall to the darkly silhouetted realm of featureless streets and houses with which it once more be drained away by the routinized demands of everyday existence.

#### *The Rhythms of Labor and the Social Body*

If in his direct films and *Rainbow Dance* Lye sought to recall for his viewers the pleasures and possibilities of a somatically replenished and re-sensitized approach to their leisure activities, he elsewhere broadened the scope of his socio-somatic interests to encompass the times and spaces of labor and the increasingly rationalized rhythms of the entire social body. That the social field at large could be rendered amenable to the needs and desires of an unalienated human body was an assertion that Lye formulated in two steps, the first taken rather shakily in a seven-minute publicity film for Shell Oil, entitled *Birth of the Robot* (1936), and the second more assuredly in *Trade Tattoo* (1937), Lye's major contribution to the

interwar filmic discourse of rhythm, montage, labor, and social life.

*Birth of the Robot* (1936), a stop-motion puppet film in which Lye presented the discovery and exploitation of oil as the latest and most liberating step in humanity's passage from myth to enlightenment, is a work that is difficult to align with the core values of Lye's empathy-based aesthetic but is significant nevertheless because of the reconciled vision of natural and technological existence it endeavors to put into play. Freely blending imagery from the ancient and modern eras, the film begins with an automobile and its driver touring the Egyptian sands in a car that runs on music beamed from a clockwork space station (symbolizing the solar system) where Venus resides. After the car and its driver succumb to a sudden and mysterious sandstorm in the desert that gradually mutates into a tumbling psychedelic time tunnel, the notes of Venus's music, which rain down from the sky, magically transform into oil droplets that soak into the desert sands. There they contribute to the magical resurrection of both car and driver alike, with the latter reborn as a dancing, hot-stepping robot, whose appearance signals the onset of combustion-driven modernity. During the film's final sequences, a



Lye. *Birth of the Robot*. 1936.

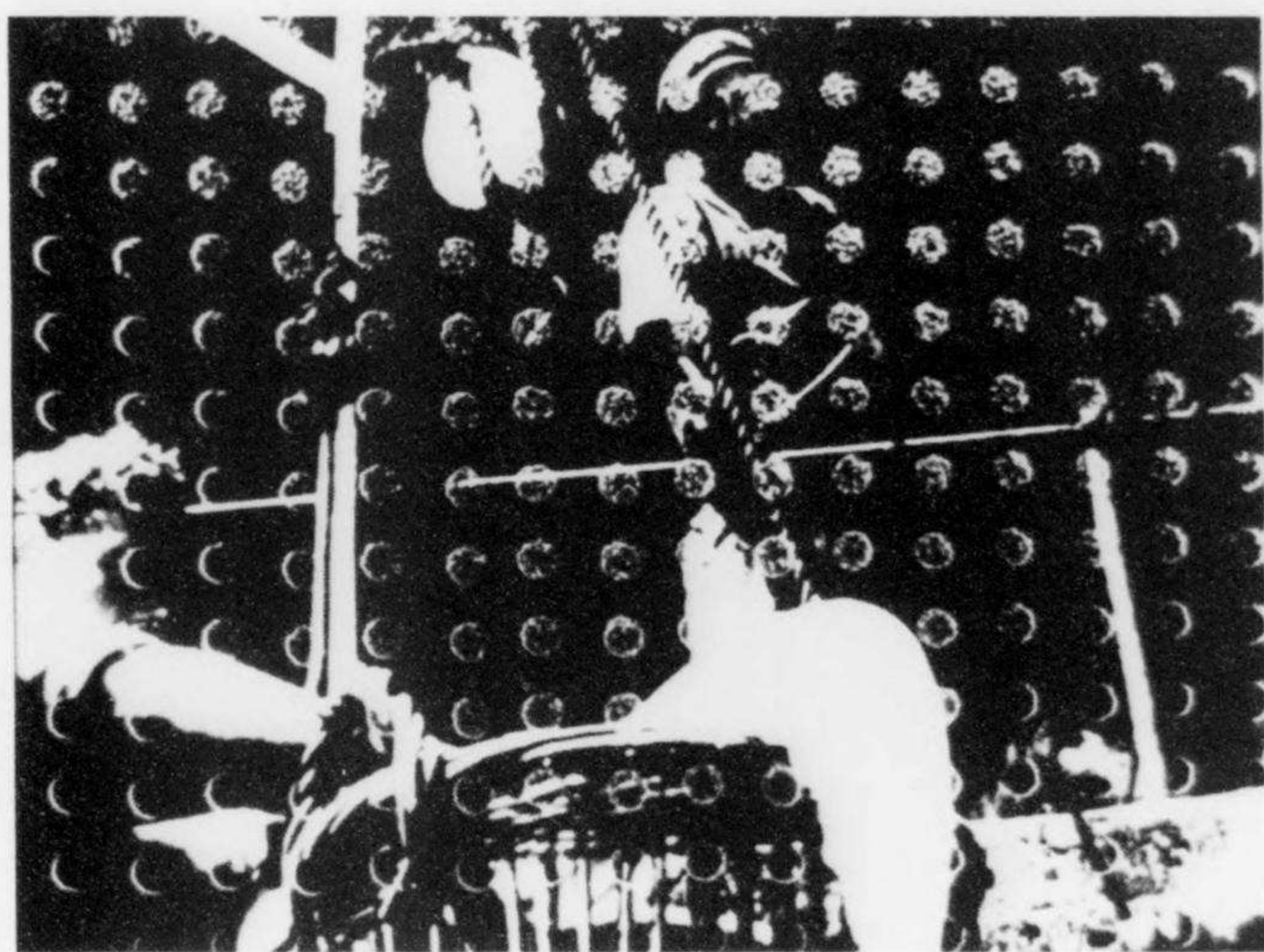
car-driven process of urban and economic expansion begins to overtake the globe, with roads and highways inching their way toward all points on the map. Yet even as this process takes hold, the sun continues to shine, the fields remain green, and the natural environment remains jubilantly intact.

For an artist whose aesthetics were rooted in the human sensorium's mimetic affinity with nature, who would later stress that he derived little "emotional satisfaction from parallels made between human and mechanical principles and processes," *Birth of the Robot* is an odd work. It seems to center on the double fantasy of a robotic apotheosis of the human soma and a utopian conception of a world to come in which the realms of first and second nature will remain in consummate accord.<sup>24</sup> While the first fantasy runs counter to the treatment of technology and

the body that prevails elsewhere in Lye's oeuvre and is therefore difficult to align with the remainder of his filmic output, the second is wholly representative of his never-to-be-abandoned aspirations to a dreamworld of total reconciliation between technology and nature. It is this dreamworld that would form the focus of *Trade Tattoo* (1937), Lye's last major GPO commission and a film in which the laboring body takes center stage.

*Trade Tattoo* was intended to demonstrate the centrality of the mail system to the social and economic welfare of an increasingly rationalized British society at home and across the full reach of its world-spanning trade networks. Lye himself, however, preferred to approach the film as a forum for conveying "a romanticism about the work of the everyday, in all walk/sit works of life."<sup>25</sup> Joining an established line of cinematic efforts to figure the dynamism of modern life via the rhythmic agglomerations of montage, Lye's ode to trade and society in *Trade Tattoo* presents a world in which the demands of labor and social rationalization are reconciled with the pleasures of unalienated bodily sensation.

Working with offcuts of existing GPO films and splicing together a handful



Lye. *Trade Tattoo*. 1937.

of upbeat musical sources, Lye subjected every frame of *Trade Tattoo's* imagery to the subtractive coloring processes of the three-strip Technicolor system, which allowed him to introduce thirty-two different color effects to his black-and-white footage. Alternating between entirely hand-painted sequences, luridly tinted passages of found footage, and hybrid moments in which the two are superimposed, the film as a whole comprises a powerful rhythmic aggregate of image, color, and sound, resting as usual on the loose and occasionally divergent approach to synchronization that was Lye's stock-in-trade. Opening with a flurry of color in the form of Lye's familiar fields of stenciled dots, diamonds, and other geometric

24. Lye, "The Art that Moves," p. 85.

25. Lye, cited in Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography*, p. 151.

forms, the film soon progresses to a smooth montage of scenes addressing differing facets of British economic life; laboring processes like the smelting and forging of metal, the shipping of goods, and the bustle of markets in far-flung geographic locales dominate proceedings. From the film's midpoint onward, the hand-stenciled intertitles that impose a minimum of narrative structure on Lye's ceaselessly mutating imagery shift from outlining the tasks of trade and industry to stressing the role of the postal system in facilitating trade. Toward the film's end, amid an increasingly far-flung montage of shipping, rail travel, and postal sorting, the viewer is reminded that "the rhythm of trade is maintained by the mails." Moments later, the viewer is exhorted to "keep in rhythm by posting early." Thus, while the film operates most immediately as a vehicle for assimilating the spectator to the routinized requirements of the mail system, at a more expansive level it concerns the role of the laboring body within an entire complex of rationalizing forces over which the British government presides. And this role, as the film suggests, is not one of docile submission; instead, the laboring body's function is to infuse the rigid rhythms of the social structure with the lively, less predictable impulses of the human soma.

Throughout *Trade Tattoo*, Lye constructs sequences in which a more balanced exchange of energies between the domains of the organic and the mechanical prevail. To this end, the blue-collar workers in the film are shown in only lightly industrialized settings, directing the movements of cranes and ropes with ease instead of having the rhythms of automated machinery imposed upon them. And when footage of a mail room appears, Lye focuses not on the sedentary and repetitive desk-bound activities of white-collar work, but instead hones in on the deft and dexterous hand movements of bustling clerks and secretaries.

The film also works to soften and contest the rhythms of automation at an abstract level, for from start to finish, Lye employs the syncopated and unpredictable rhythms of music, montage, and stenciled fields of color to further mitigate the severe and unforgiving routines of rationalized labor. Crucially, however, he never brings these rhythms to a halt, nor does he derail them completely—gestures of restraint in keeping with his energizing but not non-revolutionary aspirations in the field of leisure. In *Trade Tattoo*, Lye was by no means agitating for the inception of entirely new processes of labor and social oversight; instead, he was calling for a much-needed recalibration of the relationship between the abstracting forces of reason and the singular needs and powers of the bodies over which they reign.

#### *Kill or Be Killed*

The word "tattoo" has two meanings. In addition to referring to an image on the skin, it can also designate a form of military entertainment in which soldiers march in lockstep formation to a musical accompaniment. While the free and live-

ly rhythms of *Trade Tattoo* exhibit no such discipline, seeming if anything to mock the notion of martial uniformity, when war did come to Europe, Lye proved that he was more than capable of militarizing his practice.

In 1941, after several years of sparse freelance work, Lye began receiving commissions from a second government film agency, the Realist Film Unit, producing informational shorts for the war effort. While required in these soberly paternalistic films to adopt a blandly realist idiom, on one memorable occasion, the riveting *Kill or Be Killed* (1942), about the mutual stalking of a British and a German sniper in woodland surroundings, he was able to put his kinesthetic interests to chillingly effective use. By the standards of Lye's previous output, *Kill or Be Killed* was extremely long. In other respects, however, it marked a return to earlier interests: working to transform the film's straightforward narrative scenario into a tense evocation of the body's role in tactical combat, he found himself deploying the slower rhythms of *Tusalava*, from some fifteen years earlier.

As Roger Horrocks was the first to observe, *Kill or Be Killed* is the only film among Lye's wartime output to firmly incorporate his somatic concerns: it makes inventive use of close-ups and long, gradually unfolding sequences of movement to align the somatic experiences of spectators with those of the film's protagonist, a Scottish sniper patiently tracking and then assassinating his German counter-



Lye. *Kill or Be Killed*. 1942.

part.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the film's painstakingly relayed real-time sequences, which Lye himself directed, a variety of isolated audio and visual cues—ranging from a sudden gleam of light reflecting off a hidden pair of binoculars to the sound of hurried footsteps on the forest floor—are used to punctuate the film's incremental narrative flow. Aside from these occasional moments of audiovisual excitement, however, it is the film's unstinting concentration on the nuances of bodily movement, the gradually unfolding figures of motion inscribed by the crawling, sidling bodies of the snipers that imbue it with a slowly mounting sense of drama. Anticipating the first-person shooting techniques of later decades, Lye mounted a camera on the British soldier's waist for an early sequence in the film. Later, as the soldier moves stealthily among the undergrowth, his movements are plunged periodically into darkness, such that tracking his position becomes as much a matter of corporeal guesswork and anticipation as detached observation. The results of this artfully observed encounter are brutal: following his death, the German sniper's body is used as a decoy to attract a nearby patrol, each of whose members are in turn picked off as they move into an open clearing.

If Lye had endeavored to deploy cinema as a life-giving apparatus during the 1930s, transforming the screen image into a vital and enlivening repository of stored somatic energy, he emphatically reversed his priorities in the midst of war, returning not only to the incremental rhythms and gray tones of his first film, *Tusalava*, but also to that film's grisly scenario of life-taking. Having been forced by circumstance to relinquish the formal freedoms of abstraction, Lye was obliged to bring his somatic preoccupations to bear within the context of a purely depictive idiom. In doing so, he was at last able to proffer his deferred response to the events of Venice in 1936, exchanging the joyful energies of color, line, and syncopated rhythm for the altogether sterner regimens of military discipline and control. Not only this, but even as he consented to militarize his practice, Lye offered a second, strictly cinematic rebuke to Fascism, counterposing the sovereign individuality of his triumphant British sniper to the docile ranks of the militarized German masses, the image of whom was writ large in innumerable films and photographs of this period.

*Coda: Somaesthetic Cinema*

If Lye's early films are usually seen in the context of abstract cinematic paradigms, it should now be evident that he was not the last exemplar of a transcendently directed and idealizing tradition of prewar avant-garde film practice. He was instead that period's most significant exponent of an earthbound and materially inflected form of cinema, one whose rehabilitative bodily concerns would eventually be revived in the postwar period.

When the avant-garde filmmaking tradition resumed on the American West Coast in the 1950s, it initially owed much to the visual-music paradigm of the pre-

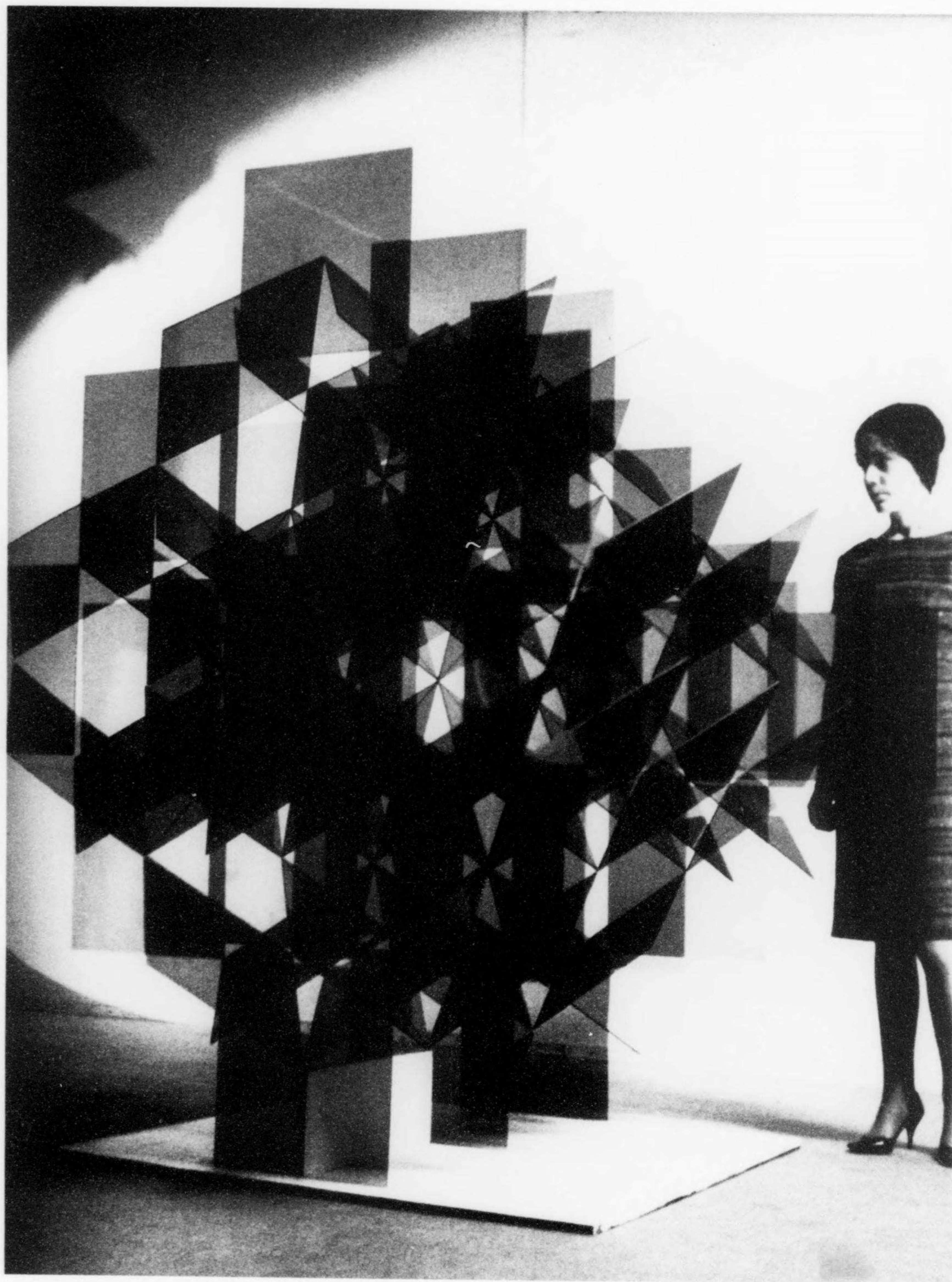
26. Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography*, p. 199.

war period. In the 1960s and 70s, however, the body once again became the object of a host of new moving-image practices. Employing many different formats and technologies, these ranged from the nonobjective extremes of psychedelic light shows, flicker films, and three-dimensional projections to the arch-realistic enterprises of Warholian ennui and real-time video surveillance. Though many of these practices aspired to a much less reassuring mode of bodily address than Lye sought to foster in his own work, all evinced a Lye-like urge to protect the body and its sovereign capabilities from the encroachments of socially prevalent forms of corporeal discipline and control.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it is this protective impulse that unites such diverse phenomena as the sensory assaults of the flicker film (as shown in the work of Tony Conrad and Paul Sharits), the soothing exchange of energies between human bodies and slowly shifting beams of light (as shown in the solid-light films of Anthony McCall), and the use of video surveillance to critically restructure viewers' relationships to their own body images (as shown in the work of Bruce Nauman).<sup>28</sup>

Like Lye, many of these postwar practitioners adopted an expanded and increasingly transmedial cinematic outlook, while others moved beyond the confines of film entirely. Here too, Lye remains an important precursor, for such developments were entirely in keeping with his work as a direct filmmaker where considerations of medium- and apparatus-specificity remained secondary to a reception-centered interest in somatic rejuvenation. It is for this reason that Lye's approach to kinetic sculpture in the postwar period could proceed on much the same basis as his filmmaking activities, remaining rooted in the phenomenon of bodily empathy in spite of his transition from celluloid to steel. Thus, in works ranging from his softly swaying *Fountain* (1963–76) to his violently shuddering *Blade* (1976), the transmission of somatic energy from artwork to spectator remained uppermost in Lye's mind. His ultimate allegiance was to figures of motion and their impact on the human body, *not* to cinema or sculpture per se.

27. Several publications by Branden Joseph address this phenomenon. See, in particular, his *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

28. I consider McCall's contribution to the postwar tradition of somaesthetic cinema in my "Anthony McCall and the Somaesthetics of Solid Light," in *Anthony McCall: Drawing with Light* (Wellington, N.Z.: Adam Art Gallery, 2010). See: <http://www.adamartgallery.org.nz/admin/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/lukesmytheessay2.pdf> (accessed October 24, 2010).



*Francisco Sobrino. Transformation instable-juxtaposition-superposition 6.  
1962-63. © Francisco Sobrino.*

## Kineticism-Spectacle-Environment\*

LARRY BUSBEA

During the 1960s, the sublatory project of the historic avant-garde seemed to be transforming from a revolutionary utopian dream into a counterrevolutionary cultural inevitability. The breakdown of the ideological barriers separating the arts, and moreover those separating art from the “praxis of life,” was being effected not by artistic visionaries but by mass culture, by a society caught up in a seemingly ineluctable movement toward a consumerist and spectacular world.<sup>1</sup> Of course, under these conditions, the sublation could only be seen, in Peter Bürger’s terms, as “false.”<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the interpenetration of art and life came into perfect alignment with what Herbert Marcuse called “repressive desublimation,” in which “higher culture becomes part of the material culture.”<sup>3</sup>

But this counterrevolutionary model of desublimation was not simply understood as a vertical collapse of cultural strata. It was immersive. It had a breadth and depth that allowed it to be experienced quite literally as a new kind of *environment*. “The horrors and the comforts of functional architecture”<sup>4</sup> were merely symptomatic of the revelation of this new environment, which found many theoretical formulations: “urban society,” “the society of the spec-

\* I would like to thank several individuals who encouraged me in developing this material and provided me with venues in which to present my ideas: Daniel Adler and Jeannette Redensek, Elyse Speaks and Chuck Loving, John Harwood, and Oscar Olivier-Didier. My sincere thanks also to Laurence Le Poupon at the Archives de la critique d’art, where the papers of Frank Popper are held.

1. This transformation is noted by Hal Foster: “A reconnection of art and life *has* occurred, but under the terms of the culture industry, not the avant-garde, some devices of which were long ago assimilated into the operations of spectacular culture (in part through the very repetitions of the neo-avant-garde).” *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 21. Jacques Rancière has suggested that these two movements—art becoming life or life becoming art—have constituted the very structure of modern aesthetics and social life: “The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes,” *New Left Review* 14 (March–April 2004), pp. 133–51.

2. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

3. “[The] liquidation of *two-dimensional* culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of ‘cultural values,’ but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction on a massive scale.” Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 57.

4. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 11.

tacle," "postindustrial society," etc. In each of these instances, something fundamental about the human milieu seemed irreversibly changed or intensified (labor, spatial patterns, technology, communication).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, each such formulation implied a profound disruption in the apparent barriers separating the human subject's inner psychical and existential life from the exterior environment of intensified urbanization, information, and technology.

The porosity of the border between interior and exterior life was perceived acutely in France, and it was during the historical crucible of these transformations—the 1960s—that the sociologist Edgar Morin attempted to make some sort of descriptive generalizations. Morin's 1962 *L'Esprit du temps* became a touchstone for those seeking to understand the cultural vicissitudes of this emerging environment, one in which the "uninterrupted progress of technology" was beginning to have observable effects on humanity. For Morin, the "strange noosphere" of the tertiary era was one in which, quoting Clement Greenberg, "there is no discontinuity between art and life."<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, employing the ascendant cybernetic vocabulary of the time, he described the new global situation as a network—or even "nervous system"—in which "there is no longer a single molecule of air that is not vibrating with messages that some apparatus, gesture, does not render immediately audible or visible."<sup>7</sup> The connection between this pulsing, networked world and the human perceptual apparatus was more than just metaphorical, and Morin described the merging of the two using an incredibly charged metaphor: a "second colonization" (the first being the literal colonization of the globe), in which the human soul became a "new Africa" penetrated and filled by the products of the culture industry.<sup>8</sup>

Guy Debord would also invoke the trope of colonization to describe the visual dissemination of the commodity: "The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life."<sup>9</sup> But whereas Debord saw the spectacle as a visual phenomenon with the exclusive effect of reification, Morin and others saw a potentially liberating potential in its inclusionary logic. Indeed, communications technologies, according to Morin, led

5. As Sanford Kwinter has recently written: "We cultivate and theorize our technological environment today in strange and partial ways, without ever admitting to ourselves that this is what it is, *an environment*." Sanford Kwinter, *Far from Equilibrium: Essays on Technology and Design Culture* (Barcelona and New York: Actar, 2008), p. 18.

6. Edgar Morin, *L'Esprit du temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1962; 1975 edition cited), p. 14. Morin employs the quote from Greenberg's "Avant-garde and Kitsch" on p. 20. The term "noosphere" is taken from Teilhard de Chardin, whose mystical theories of human evolution were published in *Le Phénomène humain* (Paris: Ed. Du Seuil, 1955).

7. Morin, *L'Esprit du temps*, p. 13.

8. Morin, *L'Esprit du temps*, pp. 13–14. Morin introduced the Frankfurt School concept of the Culture Industry into French discourse. For more on how the theme of colonization and in particular the French war in Algeria (of which Morin was an outspoken critic) shaped postwar culture, see Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

9. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), p. 29.

to a "democratization of culture," and to potentially more participatory forms of cultural production.<sup>10</sup> For Morin, modern culture tended toward the spectacle, which, in contradistinction to Debord's definition, encouraged the "consumer imaginary" into a mode of aesthetic engagement and participation—a formulation that anticipated Michel de Certeau's understanding of everyday life.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the spirit of interactivity would infuse much artistic production at this time. The art critic Guy Habasque signaled the enthusiasm for this conception of art in recognizing, in reference to a vast field of multidimensional, animated art of the 1960s, that "[this work] is no longer the petrification of a privileged moment or aspect, it is a *spectacle*."<sup>12</sup>

Morin's technological agnosticism and his willingness to recognize some positive aspects to the "integrated society," as he often described it, make his work resonate strongly with that of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV), whose experiments with kinetic art, spectacle, and participatory environments occupied a gray area between technological integration and social intervention. Several key works and essays of the GRAV will constitute the main objects of analysis of this essay, as well as their theoretical inflection by Frank Popper, whose 1968 exhibition "Cinétisme-Spectacle-Environnement" has provided my title. As Popper's sequence of terms suggests, the present analysis will move quickly beyond the simple device of kinetic art, suggesting that kineticism itself maintained at best a metaphorical relationship with its true *raison d'être*: the highly charged spaces of the modern environment.

The problem of the environment and the architecture that often structured it was one of the key problems of postwar art and design, from the formulation of a *synthèse des arts majeurs* by Le Corbusier and his colleagues to the rise of institutional critique in European and American Conceptual art. Commenting recently on Daniel Buren's artistic development from the moment of the *Hommes/Sandwichs* (1968) signboards, in which people held aloft his "signature" vertical-stripe compositions and circulated around the Palais de Tokyo, to later works in which these same stripes are applied to existing architecture and public spaces, Benjamin Buchloh was moved to ask a question that could very easily be applied to the work of the GRAV as well:

At what precise historical moment will artistic practice have declined to such an extent as to fully fuse with the very mechanisms of ideological suture that it supposedly critiques? That decline was at first hesitantly, and then enthusiastically, embraced by Buren in his transition from conceiving spatial structures as analytical and phenomenological situa-

10. Morin, *L'Esprit du temps*, p. 69.

11. Morin, *L'Esprit du temps*, p. 103. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

12. Guy Habasque, "Notes on a New Trend: Multidimensional Animated Works," *Yale French Studies* no. 19/20 (1957), p. 43.



Daniel Buren. *Hommes/Sandwichs*.  
 April 1968, Paris. Detail. © DB-ADAGP Paris.

tions for the viewer's self-determination to thinking instead of spatial experience as an art consumer's celebratory disco design.<sup>13</sup>

Both of these options—subjective agency vs. spectacular immersion—are figured by Buchloh in spatial terms that strongly recall the rhetoric of the '60s in France, one in which art was activated not just within a space but as a kind of tool to modify existing spaces and environments.

There was therefore a conflation that occurred (consciously or not) between a modernist conception of optical or pictorial space, the literal spaces of architecture and urbanism, and the situation of the viewer outside or within those spaces. Obviously, much of what gallerist Denise René famously called *art abstrait constructif international*, and especially its optical and kinetic manifestations, implicated space as a matter of course; the exploration of real and illusory space is part of those works' physical and perceptual fabric. As Jack Burnham stated, there was for this generation "a growing desire to extend phenomenal appearances as far as the eye could see."<sup>14</sup>

13. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Group That Was (Not) One: Daniel Buren and BMPT," *Artforum* (May 2008), p. 13.

14. Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 239. Burnham spends a considerable amount of time analyzing the works of the Nouvelle Tendance and the GRAV particularly. Their adherence to a strategic impersonality and seeming embrace of technological complexity made them exemplary for his scientific theses.

Indeed, much of this work would question the very distinction between actual and phenomenal space that had been the bedrock for modernist discourse in the visual arts up until this time. For instance, Victor Vasarely—one of the patriarchs of the younger generation that concerns us here—spoke of the “conquest of dimensions beyond the surface.”<sup>15</sup> At precisely the same moment, another elder statesman of these trends, Lucio Fontana, stated: “I do not wish to make a painting; I want to open up the space, to create a new dimension for Art, to tie it to the cosmos as if it was expanding beyond the restricted plane of the painting.”<sup>16</sup> These formulations, which seem so characteristic of certain European Constructivist trends of the '50s, would soon give way to the spatial conceptions of '60s op and kinetic art, such as that of the GRAV, which went beyond the universal spiritual-optical space of the early avant-garde and would implicate a much more specific, contingent, and political social space. Noticing this in 1967, British critic Stephen Bann pointed out that “kinetic works automatically form part of our environment. . . .” Interestingly, he would portray the work of the GRAV as a new form of classicism—a dispassionate attempt to “achieve an unproblematic relationship between the work of art and the outside world; to eliminate the anxiety which hovers around the corners of the picture frame.”<sup>17</sup> Such a characterization seems to de-radicalize the Group's own positioning of their works as destabilizing spectacles meant to reveal particular perceptual and ideological mechanisms of the modern environment.

#### *The Spectacle of the GRAV*

The GRAV was founded in 1961 by an international coterie of young artists: the Frenchmen Yvaral (a pseudonym to avoid the family name of Vasarely), François Morellet, and Joël Stein; Spaniards Francisco Sobrino and Horacio Garcia Rossi; and Argentinian Julio Le Parc (Vera and François Molnar were also initial participants).<sup>18</sup> All these artists shared an interest in abstraction, optics, and technologies that might be able to effect a new relationship between the artwork and the viewer. From their Paris headquarters, they also acted as a hub for sympathetic groups and individuals in virtually every European country.<sup>19</sup> One of

15. Victor Vasarely, quoted in Willy Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), p. 144. The statement is taken from Vasarely's contribution to the “Yellow Manifesto”: a seminal statement in the history of kinetic art, written on the occasion of the exhibition “Le Mouvement” at Galerie Denise René in Paris in 1955.

16. Lucio Fontana, quoted in Guy Brett, “The Century of Kinesthesia,” in *Force Fields: Phases of the Kinetic* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2000), p. 13.

17. Stephen Bann, “Environmental Art,” *Studio International* 173, no. 886 (February 1967), pp. 78–81.

18. On the cultural background of specific members, and the particular importance of South American artists in Paris at this time, see Isabel Plante, “Les Sud-américains de Paris: Latin American Artists and Cultural Resistance in *Robho Magazine*,” *Third Text* 24, no. 4 (July 2010), pp. 445–55.

19. For an excellent analysis of these international connections, see Valerie Hillings, “Experimental Artists' Groups in Europe, 1951–1968: Abstraction, Interaction, and Internationalism” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 2002).

their most enduring collaborations, with artists from Italy, Croatia, and Germany, was called "Nouvelle Tendance—recherche continuelle (NTrc)." From the outset, the work of GRAV members instantiated itself within a massive network of progressive and experimental groups, institutions, private galleries, and international biennials that promoted a broad range of activity, from Concrete art to Nouveau Réalisme.<sup>20</sup> Much of the GRAV's theoretical activity involved making distinctions between their work and that of these various contemporaries.<sup>21</sup>

The strongest distinction they sought to make regarded the status of the object. Far from the expressionism of lyrical abstraction, from the rigorous formal delineation of Concrete art, and from what they considered the paradoxical object fetishism of Nouveau Réalisme, the GRAV posited the art object as an open-ended entity wholly reliant upon the eye and mind of a viewer to "complete" it. The materials, the form, the scale—in other words, all of the plastic qualities of the object were only contingencies and potentialities awaiting the presence and participation of the spectator.<sup>22</sup> This led to aesthetic choices such as the use of Plexiglas, reflective metal, steel and nylon wire, neon and incandescent lights—media whose reflectivity, transparency, and peculiar physicality might disrupt the modernist idea of autonomy, beginning most explicitly with the paradigmatic categories of painting and sculpture. These materials also brought the works into alignment with an industrial, constructive ethos.

GRAV members worked in various scales and often in atypical formats such as relief and abstract shadow boxes—forms that hovered between the second and third dimensions. In one of Sobrino's Plexiglas constructions, for instance, the formal qualities and visual stability of the basic unit of the square are deconstructed through the superimposition of oblique layers, the placement of which constitutes a crystalline mass with a complicated and transparent symmetry that compels a contingent, ambulatory experience, not a stable and contemplative one. As the critic Jean Clay said of these works, they "are composed in space but . . . have a texture such that there is no precise point on which the spectator can fix his gaze, no way in which he can reconstitute the reassuring limits of a clearly defined volume."<sup>23</sup>

The GRAV were no less interested in the fourth dimension. If their work began by emphasizing optical phenomena, it quickly incorporated kinetic phenomena as

20. See Véronique Wiesinger, "L'art cinétique dans la guerre des marchés: de l'hommage à New York à l'ouverture du Centre Georges Pompidou (1960–1977)," in *Denise René, l'intrépide: une galerie dans l'aventure de l'art abstrait, 1944–1978* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2001), pp. 129–41.

21. For a brief discussion of these distinctions and their relationship to different models of participation, see Anna Dezeuze, "'Cinétisme du corps' et participation du spectateur," in *L'Oeil moteur: Art optique et cinétique 1950–1975* (Strasbourg: Musées de Strasbourg, 2005), pp. 85–87. See also Aldo Pellegrini, *New Tendencies in Art*, trans. Robin Carson (New York: Crown Publishers, 1966).

22. Several contemporary commentators have pointed out the inaccuracy of the continued insistence on labeling this work as purely "optical." See especially Arnauld Pierre, "De l'instabilité: perception visuelle/corporelle de l'espace dans l'environnement cinétique," *Les Cahiers du musée national d'art moderne* 78 (Winter 2001–2002), pp. 40–69, and Frances Follin, "The Resurrection of the Body: Op Art as Modernist Event," in *Op Art*, ed. Martina Weinhar and Max Hollein (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2007), pp. 43–57.

23. Jean Clay, "Painting—A Thing of the Past," *Studio International* 174, no. 891 (July–Aug. 1967), p. 13.

well, using the devices of physically moving components, or a mobile spectator. At the height of their activity in the mid-sixties, works by the GRAV were often no more than simple games. These involved the low-tech interaction of the simplest of forms, altered or distorted in various ways: by the play of light in a shadow box filled with wires suspended at various depths, transformed in the perceptions of a mobile spectator, in the wobbling reflections of shaped mirrors, the movements of springs and gears, or the actual dismantling and reconfiguration of constructional elements. These simple moments of interaction between object and spectator were meant to be concentrated "experiments" in mental, optical, and somatic engagement. As such, the significance of the plastic qualities of the works were consistently denied, even though they have an obvious formal consistency, and moreover a stylistic genealogy traceable to Neo-Plasticism and Constructivism.<sup>24</sup>

Though they rarely invoked Marxian terms like alienation, reification, or commodity fetishism, it was clear that the inherent incompleteness of the art object was part of the GRAV's social project, which involved seeking sublation via the demystification of high culture, without, however, celebrating mass culture; deconstructing the myth of artistic genius and aesthetic autonomy on the one hand, and closing the alienating gap that existed between art and public on the other. In perhaps their most famous manifesto (there were several), a statement of 1963 called *Assez de mystifications*, the group declared: "In so far as it is possible, we want to free the spectator from his apathetic dependence, which compels him to accept in a passive fashion, not only that which is imposed upon him as art, but an entire way of life."<sup>25</sup> The interactivity of their art constituted so many attempts to transform habitual passive observation of the world into a more active engagement.<sup>26</sup> In this spirit, *Assez de mystifications* concludes with the following imperatives:

IT IS FORBIDDEN NOT TO PARTICIPATE  
IT IS FORBIDDEN NOT TO TOUCH  
IT IS FORBIDDEN NOT TO BREAK [THE WORK]<sup>27</sup>

24. The group vigorously denied any kind of historical continuity between its work and that of the historical avant-garde, with the exception of the late works of Mondrian (thanks to Yve-Alain Bois for this information) and an almost grudging acknowledgment of the importance of Constructivism. See George Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution* (New York: George Braziller, 1967), pp. 72–74.

25. "Assez de mystifications," trans. Simon Pleasance and Charles Penwarden, reprinted in *Strategies de participation: GRAV-Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, 1960–1968* (Grenoble: Le Magasin—Centre national d'art contemporain de Grenoble, 1998), p. 126. This statement was actually the second to have this title, and was written in response to an article by the architect Pierre Faucheux, who had overseen the construction of the group's first *Labyrinth* at the 3rd Paris Biennial: "À la 3ème Biennale de Paris/Le cri d'un art vital," *Arts* no931 (Oct. 12, 1963), pp. 1, 10–11. Faucheux celebrated the work of the group in terms that they considered expressionistic, poetic, and ultimately supportive of the mystification of artistic genius.

26. The trend of this critique of habit relative to optical and kinetic art in the '60s is discussed by Diedrich Diedrichsen in "Critique of the Eye—the Eye of Critique," in *The Expanded Eye: Stalking the Unseen* (Zurich: Kunsthaus Zurich, 2006), pp. 61–70.

27. "Assez de mystifications," reprinted with English translation in *Strategies de participation*, p. 126.

One hopes that the respective members of the group were aware of the irony of dictating participation as a liberating act, but an analogous sense of paradox pervades most of their work, which seems simultaneously rebellious and bureaucratic.<sup>28</sup> The work of the GRAV seemed to lie naively outside (or to blur) the outlines of the great conflict of the era as described by Theodore Roszak: between a countercultural youth movement and the technocratic Establishment.<sup>29</sup> The *Weltanschauung* of the Group comprised insights inherited from information theory, the new mathematics, and cybernetics—in other words, the very disciplines that propped up the technocratic and bureaucratic ethos.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, they modeled their activities not on the mythologized artist-genius but on the anonymous research *equipe*, the most available models of which were the Centre national de recherche scientifique, but also rock groups such as the Beatles.

The Group's problematic model of social engagement made it inevitable that they would invoke spectacle, which was perhaps the most pressing idea in cultural discourse in France at this time. Members of the GRAV detested the image of the awed and silenced crowd, be it in a theater, museum, or in the city. Ultimately, the GRAV sought to create events or opportunities for perceptions and experiences that might invert the traditional power relations of spectacle. As Clay put it: "The spectacle must be integrated with the spectator."<sup>31</sup> In a sense, the work of the GRAV epitomized a larger conception of a cultural world moving more and more toward spectacle and interactivity. As the distinguished sociologist Jean Duvignaud stated at this moment: "We are invaded by art, not by signs but by art *transformed into an event*, and which becomes symbolic in order to suggest momentary forms of participation."<sup>32</sup>

Within the circle of the GRAV, this idea was formulated most explicitly by Julio Le Parc in a 1962 essay entitled "*A propos de art-spectacle, spectateur actif, instabilité et programmation dans l'art visuel.*"<sup>33</sup> Here Le Parc explained that new ideas of a "stimulated" or engaged spectator had completely dismantled the traditional act

28. For an analysis of the concept of participation in the work of the GRAV, see Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 87–93. For an institutionally grounded account of their activities, see Rebecca J. De Roo, *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art: the Politics of Artistic Display in France After 1968* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 43–45.

29. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1968).

30. Yvaral stated in 1965 the necessity of "making use of various procedures that take into account the methods and techniques offered by modern science (topology, the calculation of probability, statistics, combinatory systems, information theory, even cybernetics)" (Yvaral, untitled text of 1965, reprinted in *Strategies de participation*, p. 159).

31. Clay, "Painting—A Thing of the Past," p. 17.

32. Jean Duvignaud, *Sociologie de l'art* (Paris: PUF, 1967), trans. Timothy Wilson (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 135; italics original. See also Jean Duvignaud, *Spectacles et société* (Paris: Denoël/Gonthier, 1970).

33. Julio Le Parc, "A propos de art-spectacle, spectateur actif, instabilité et programmation dans l'art visuel," pamphlet, reprinted with English translation in *Strategies de participation*, pp. 96–99.

of passive aesthetic contemplation. This same development could rejuvenate the idea of the spectacle: "The notion of spectacle has always been pejorative when applied to the visual arts. By frankly admitting this reversal of the traditional situation of the passive spectator, we find a way around the idea of spectacle and come to the notion of activated or active participation."<sup>34</sup>

Because of their near-paranoiac fear that their techniques might be co-opted, the Situationist International felt compelled to respond to the GRAV, and to the phenomenon of interactive art more generally. The most lasting analysis of spectacle in this historical context was, after all, Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, and earlier formulations of this idea by Debord and Situationist colleagues. Though the critique of spectacle culture has come down to us as a condemnation of the popular or mass media, it was historically also addressed to participatory forms of art, with which the Situationists were deeply involved.<sup>35</sup> Much like the GRAV, the Situationists sought to disrupt the figure of the *captivated* spectator, and they understood this project as being fundamentally urban or environmental.<sup>36</sup>

In the "Editorial Notes" of the SI journal's January issue, several pages were devoted to an ideological critique of aesthetic phenomena that had as their goal "to integrate several arts among themselves, and at all costs to integrate the spectator."<sup>37</sup> Examples of integration, according to the SI, included a wide range of cultural manifestations, from Nicolas Schöffer's *Mur création*, executed with the help of engineers from Philips Electronics, to Robbe-Grillet and Alain Resnais's film *Last Year at Marienbad* (whose nonlinear plotting and ambiguous cinematography left the film hermeneutically open). But they reserved their most intense vitriol for the GRAV, and in particular Julio Le Parc (who was, ironically perhaps, the most left-leaning among the Group's members in his political views):

Some Technicians would like to reform the spectacle. Le Parc, in a tract published in September in 1962 by the "Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel," thinks it possible for the passive spectator to evolve into a "stimulated spectator" or even an "interpreter-spectator," but still within the framework of specialized old-hat ideas. . . . At most, Le Parc reaches the point of using a few para-situationist formulas: "In frankly admitting the reversal of the traditional situation of the passive spectator, one distorts the idea of the spectacle. . . ." This is an idea, however,

34. Le Parc, "A propos de art-spectacle," p. 97.

35. In 1960, for instance, the Situationists considered, but then aborted, a collaboration with the Stedelijk museum to construct a kind of labyrinth that would coincide with 3 days of urban *dérives* in surrounding neighborhoods in Amsterdam. See the Situationist description of these events, "Notes éditoriales: Die Welt als Labyrinth," *Internationale situationniste* 4 (June 1960), pp. 5-7. Eventually, in 1962, K. Pontus Hulten would draft Nouveaux Réalistes Jean Tinguely and Daniel Spoerri to construct a "dynamic labyrinth" at the museum.

36. See Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

37. "Avant-garde de la presence," *Internationale situationniste* no. 8 (January 1963), trans. John Shepley, "The Avant-Garde of Presence," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge: October Books and MIT Press, 2002), p. 140.

that it is better not to distort, but properly to gauge its place in society. The futility of Le Parc's hopes for his spectator who will gratify him by achieving "real participation (the manipulation of elements)"—oh yes! And the visual arts will certainly have their elements all ready—takes on more solidity when, at the end of his text, he extends a hand toward "the notion of programming," i.e. to the cyberneticians of power.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, for the Situationists, the imperative to include the spectator in the spectacle resulted in a further ideological integration. The simple games of the GRAV, their optical environments and demountable abstractions, were meant to have the reciprocal functions of drawing spectators into a spectacle while snapping them out of their *vie quotidienne*. The Situationists saw in their ideas not a modification or subversion of the logic of spectacle society, but an uncanny prediction of its advanced, global deployment, in which no activity whatever escaped the organizing activities of the programmers.

#### *Architecture and Environment*

As the autonomous work of art disintegrated and moved more and more toward a kind of collective spectacle, it literally had to become environmental as well. Once the boundaries separating the work from its milieu were disintegrated, the optical space of modernist art was free to overflow its proverbial frame and to stake a claim to real space and time. The expansive potentiality of op and kinetic work was recognized immediately by Frank Popper, perhaps the most important theorist of this segment of the European neo-avant-garde. By the late sixties, Popper was able to make the generalization that "since 1965 there has been an almost universal tendency among kinetic artists to enlarge the physical size of their projects, and even to conceive them in direct reference to an existing or prospective space. This is how the difficult concept of the 'environment' has come into use." Popper expanded on this difficult concept:

The term can be made to refer to purely physical dimensions, or it can acquire a psychological flavor. It can be used in a strictly architectural sense, to designate a narrow internal space, or it can be extended to cover the cosmos. . . . The space occupied by the work and the space occupied by the spectator are no longer separate. Thus a subtle game between illusory space and real space, between illusory movement and real movement, is established. The frame which was the artificial barrier around the plastic arts is completely superseded, and the way is left open for union with the spheres of architecture and town planning.<sup>39</sup>

38. "Avant-garde de la presence," pp. 141-42. On the SI's response to the GRAV, see Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, pp. 91-93.

39. Frank Popper, *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art*, trans. Stephen Bann (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphical Society, 1968), p. 204.

Environment here functions as much more than just a slightly expanded conception of space. It is both the literal and perceptual field of sublation. It is the arena in which the urban infrastructure and the phenomenological existence of the spectator are synthesized. The GRAV found themselves in the complicated position of embracing the aesthetic and social possibilities of this environment, while at the same time disavowing the recent discourse of artistic synthesis as it had been formulated in France since the 1940s.<sup>40</sup> In a 1964 article in *Melpomene*, the architecture students' journal of the *École des beaux-arts*, they admitted that "the relations between architecture, painting, and sculpture have always been an issue and these encounters make it clear that there is a need for a synthesis and integration which would be an answer to all past attempts." However, they were quick to distinguish their conception of integration from previous models:

We do not think it is necessary to add to an architectural proposition plastic elements designed to create an ambience or decoration. Visual artists must not be decorators who are called in once the work is finished, and you can't solve the problems of painting and the synthesis of the arts simply by sticking a few pleasant colors on some architectural complex.

The visual element must be so closely integrated within the architectural module that there can be no question of dissociating the two.<sup>41</sup>

The objection here to the danger of rendering the "plastic elements" mere decoration (a common complaint of artists working in collaboration with architects at this time) should not be understood as a defense of the notion of autonomy. Indeed, the insistence upon total integration with the architecture was a way of decentering and demystifying the latter. In 1967, Morellet would state unambiguously, "We have absolutely no desire to reinvent the complete spectacle or synthesis of the arts."<sup>42</sup>

Despite frequent invocations by members of architecture in a literal sense,<sup>43</sup> it was the perceptual and experiential environment that seemed most susceptible to radical aesthetic transformation. And so the GRAV shifted the locus for such

40. On the postwar history of the synthesis of the arts and its appropriation by the Situationist International, see Joan Ockman, "A Plastic Epic," in *Architecture + Art = New Visions, New Strategies*, ed. Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Academy, 2007), pp. 30–61, and Nicola Pezolet, "Spectacles plastiques: Reconstruction and the Debates on the 'Synthesis of the Arts' in France, 1944–1962," (Ph.D. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013).

41. Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, "Recherche d'art visuel," *Melpomene: L'actualité de l'École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts* no. 16 (December, 1964), pp. 11–12; reprinted in *Stratégies de participation*, pp. 149–50.

42. François Morellet, "Mise en condition du spectateur," in *Art cinétique à Paris/Lumière et mouvement* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1967), p. 80; reprinted in *Stratégies de participation*, p. 200.

43. Sooner or later, most members of the GRAV either spoke in architectural terms or executed work that engaged architecture in various ways. Sobrino coined the phrase for his work: "permutational sculpture-architecture." Le Parc developed the idea of a "parallel architecture." Morellet is especially interesting in this regard. On various occasions he expanded his systemic art to an architectural scale, for instance in his 1970 collaboration with the architect Claude Parent for the Venice Biennial, and that same year in a famous mural project adjacent to the "hole" of Les Halles, at the beginning of construction of the Centre Pompidou.

transformation from the physical structures of space to the physiological and psychological experiences of users or inhabitants. Popper was highly sympathetic to this conception of not only artistic integration but the active incorporation of the eye, mind, and body of the spectator:

The most obvious points of contact in this connection between experimental architecture and kinetic and allied arts are probably the following: the elusive notion of space itself (gradually transformed into the new notion of environment), unstable structures, dynamic architectonic elements, a common preoccupation with light and such innovations as the inflatable. As far as spectator participation is concerned, it must be admitted that there are few architects who have thought about the programme in the same way as the artist does. The architect is likely to plan the environment of the future inhabitant of his building in a much more all-embracing and less personal way than a participation artist, who will probably retain the right to intervene as an intermediary on the building site. The architect, together with the artist who is only concerned with integrating his work into the existing environment, is likely to hand his project over entirely to the spectator or user, leaving him free to act.<sup>44</sup>

Popper's architectural analysis was clearly influenced by his extensive contact with the GRAV. He would equate their interest in unstable (or destabilizing) structures with the "oblique function" of Architecture Principe, and their privileging of the free will of the spectator with the "Mobile Architecture" of Yona Friedman.<sup>45</sup>

But, again, it was not a question of morphology or of literal architectural space, but one of human participation and activation. The necessity of achieving this activation in real space and time meant that the work of the GRAV would naturally tend toward a quasi-architectural expression, and, as we will see, an explicit engagement with the urban environment as well. In 1963, at the Third Paris Biennial, the Group installed its first *Labyrinth*: a collectively conceived environmental deployment of their works. Here, a linear succession of rooms offered a number of distinct environments and opportunities for the active participation of visitors or, in the words of the artists, "visual activation and saturation."

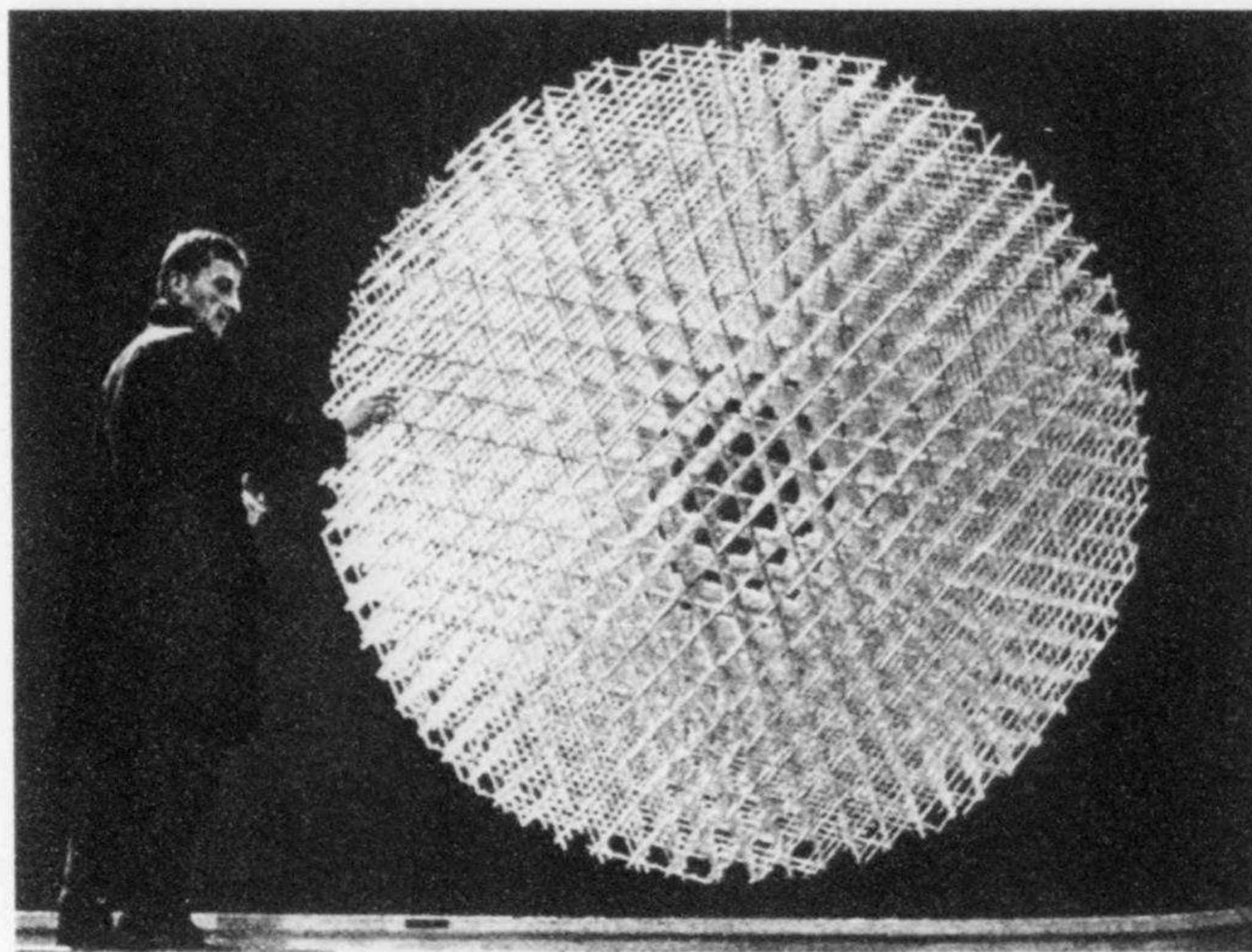
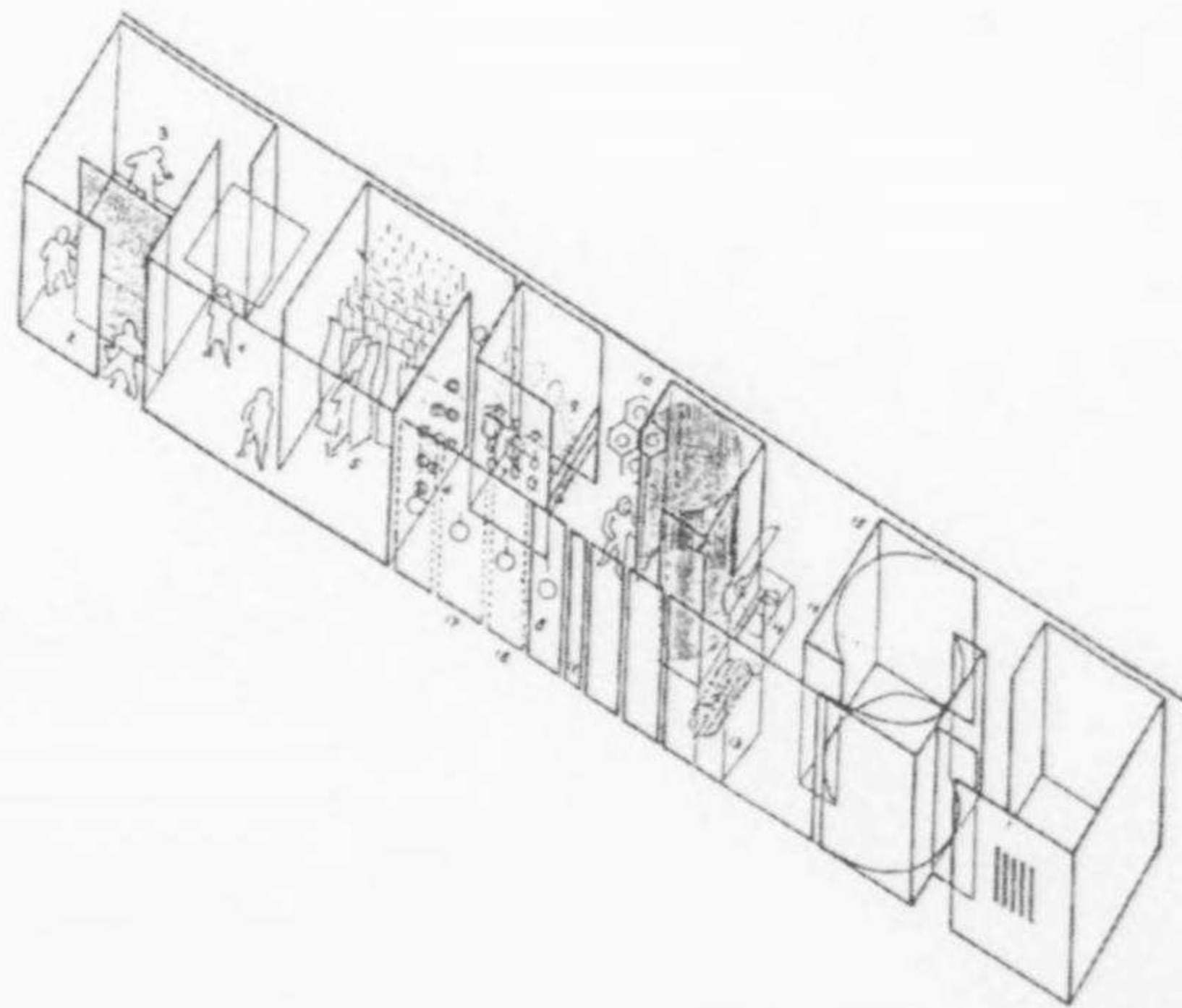
Even before entering the labyrinth proper, spectators would commence a series of interactive experiences. These were classified according to the physical movement of the work and the degree of engagement of the spectator. One of Morellet's *Sphère trames*—at 2.5 meters in diameter—greeted visitors at the top of

44. Frank Popper, *Art—Action and Participation* (London: Studio Vista, 1975), p. 52.

45. Popper, *Art—Action*, pp. 56–57. That these two models of radical architecture were not necessarily compatible is discussed in Larry Busbea, *Topologies: The Urban Utopia in France, 1960–1970* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 160–67.

the stairs. This was a static piece whose interactivity required movement on the part of the viewer, who would see, "deep within it, a series of combinations based on superimpositions of grids." Once inside the labyrinth, spectators would initiate "a series of situations." In room 3, for instance, walls were covered with a checkerboard pattern of red and blue squares—virtually an Op painting expanded to an entire room. Room 5 required "obligatory passage through a series of moving reflecting sheets, walls covered with shiny aluminum; when the onlooker walks through, he nudges the metal sheets which break up and increase the number of images, making noises at the same time."<sup>46</sup> This cybernetic fun house continued with distorted reflections, pulsating lights, peepholes, and manipulable objects. One of the more striking aspects of these apparatuses is their low-tech, handmade quality<sup>47</sup>—these are simple machines made to elicit haptic experiences. Hinges turn, springs coil, physical objects bounce, spin, and swing in (sometimes awkward) analogue reality.

Clearly, the *Labyrinths* were quite literal spaces. But the physical environment, as Popper had observed, was less important than the psychological or experiential environment. The effect of these spaces was not intended as a way to reshape architecture, but to reconstitute environmental perception on the part of the individual. They did this in part by being

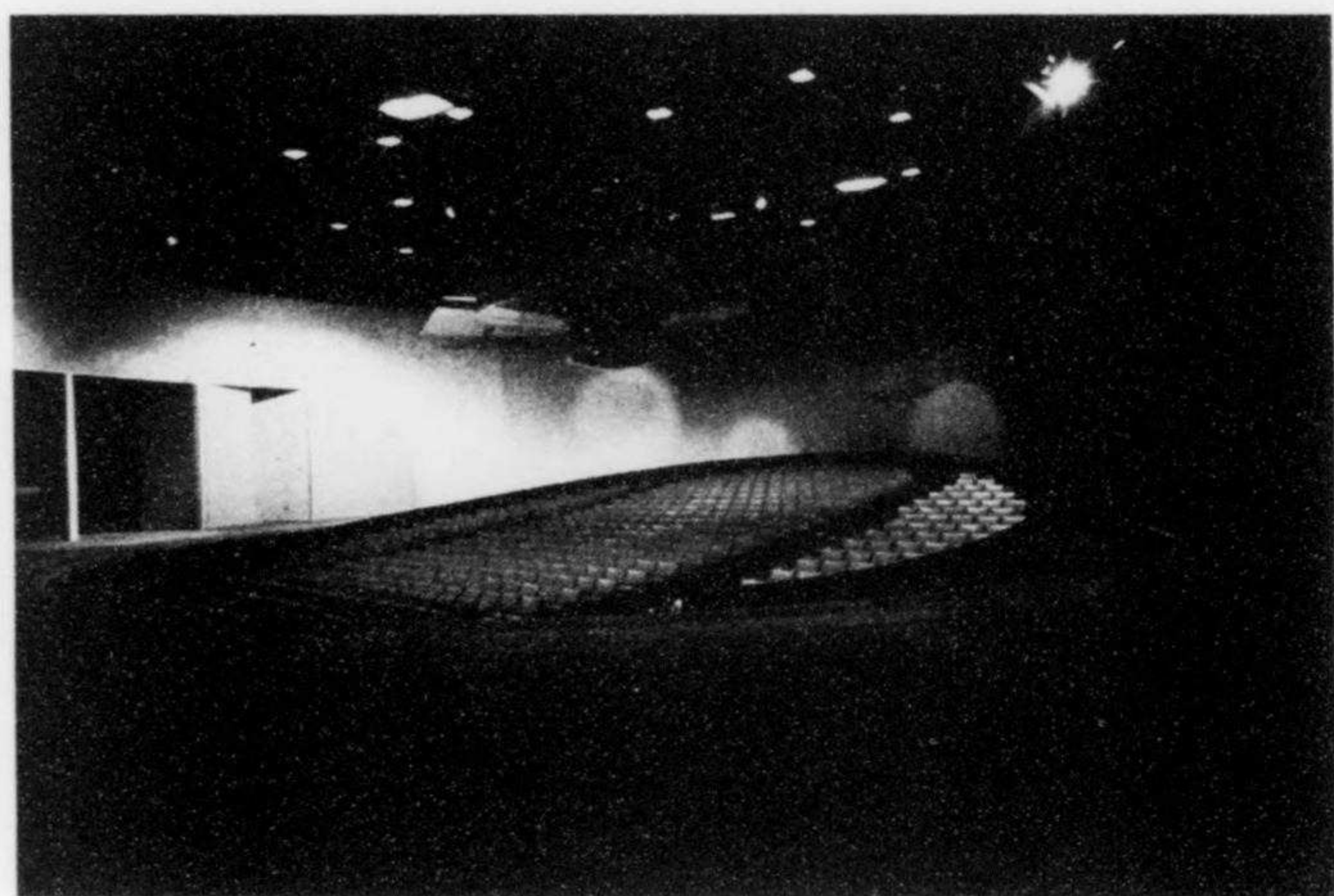
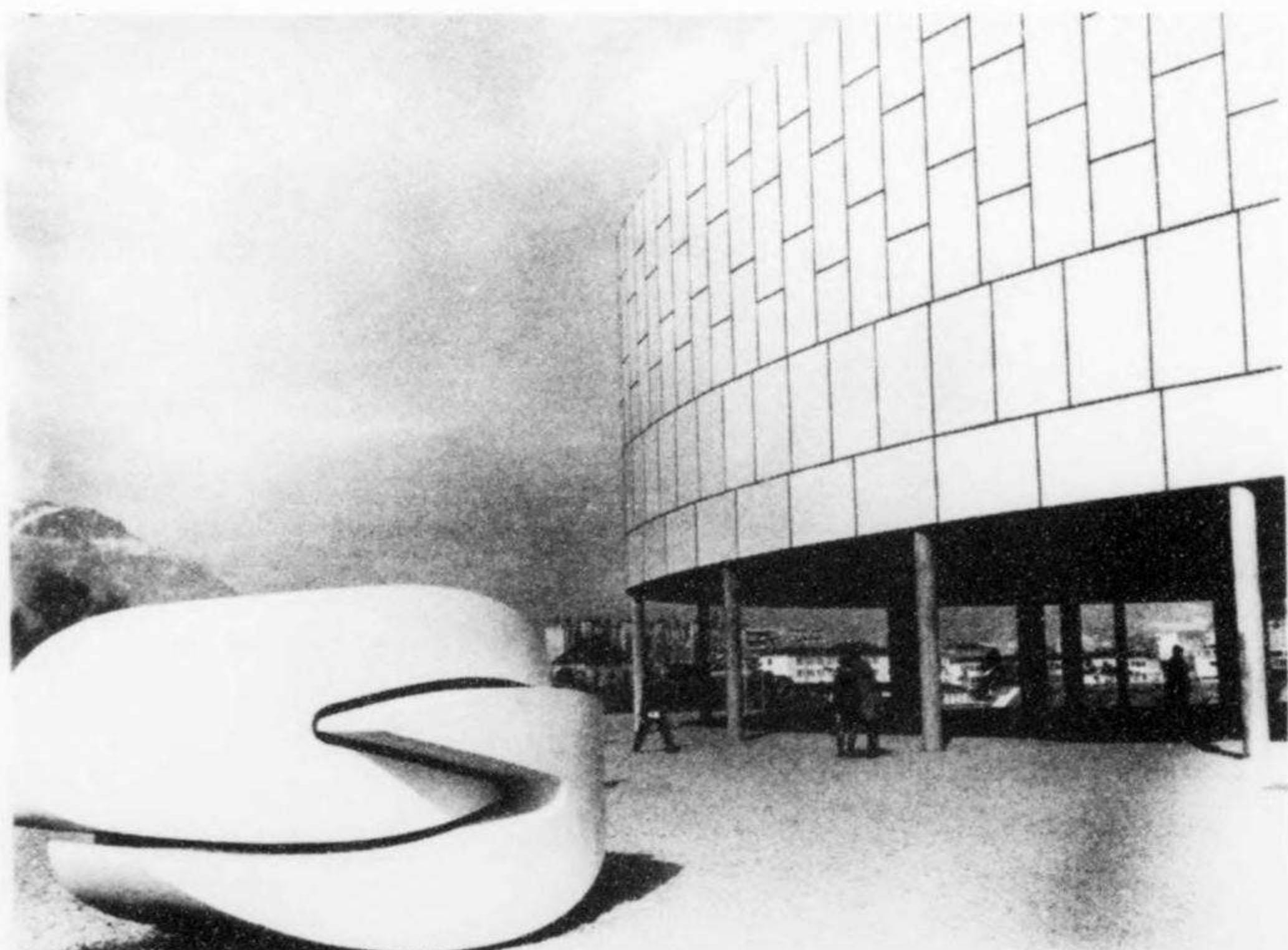


Top: GRAV. Labyrinth. 1963. © Joël Stein.  
Bottom: GRAV. Labyrinth. 1963.

46. All the preceding quotes are from the brochure of the Third Paris Biennial, the text of which is reprinted in *Strategies de participation*, pp. 121–23.

47. These observations are based upon a visit to a partial reconstruction of the 1963 *Labyrinthe* that is permanently installed at the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Cholet, France, Morellet's hometown.

harsh and agitating. Color combinations were chosen for maximum optical abrasiveness. Stroboscopic effects were calibrated for the greatest possible discomfort, bleakly illuminating the darkened spaces and leaving burning after-images on the retina. This was not an ambience, or a total work of any kind, but rather what group members described as moments of destabilization—spaces of deterritorialization in which the senses were torn away from the body and dis-



lodged from any familiar orientation.<sup>48</sup> Subsequent *Labyrinths* in the following two years extended these propositions. It was also around 1963 that the group began to speak explicitly in terms of their work as establishing a *lieu d'activation*, a concept that stressed the architectural specificity of their ideas, but also their antagonism toward the construction of a plastic space.

Popper was far more systematic than GRAV members in the attempt to describe kinetics and interaction in terms of environmental application, and he spent the last years of the '60s exploring these propositions theoretically and curatorially.<sup>49</sup> In 1968 Popper organized an exhibition, "Cinétisme-Spectacle-Environnement," which was

Top: André Wogenscky with Alain Richard. *Maison de la culture, Grenoble*. 1966–67. Photograph by Michel Semeniako.

Bottom: Wogenscky with Richard, in collaboration with Jacques Polieri. *Mobile theater at Maison de la culture, Grenoble*. 1966–67.

48. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari compare op art to the compositions of Pierre Boulez and attribute to both the partial establishment of a smooth space: *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 478. For an excellent analysis of the use of destabilization, see Arnauld Pierre, "De l'instabilité," pp. 40–69.

49. In addition to the exhibition that will concern me here, see also the catalog for the concurrent show, Frank Popper, *Art cinétique et espace* (Le Havre: Nouveau Musée, 1968). Popper also facilitated several public installations by various kinetic artists in and around Paris in 1969 and '70. The most famous of these was Carlos Cruz Diez's *Chromosaturations* at the Odéon Métro, and others included work by Piotr

conceived as a kind of spatial manifesto for kinetic art.<sup>50</sup> Popper's exhibition was held in Grenoble, at the newly opened Maison de la Culture, in May and June of that year—perhaps the most unfortunate timing imaginable. The building itself was an interesting choice of venue. Designed by André Wogenscky, one of Le Corbusier's most loyal and prolific disciples, the structure was an amalgam of the master's plastic and structural gestures, while utilizing new materials such as the prefabricated panels that clad its curved exterior. Included in the program were more radical touches as well, such as the "mobile theater" occupying the prominent prow of the building, itself an elephantine version of the entrance façade of the Villa Savoye. The idea of a more dynamic type of theater space is one of the touchstones of the design avant-garde and has its most famous exemplar in Walter Gropius's *Total Theater* project of 1927. Wogenscky had been fascinated by this concept and had worked from the 1950s with the director and scenographer Jacques Polieri on its elaboration. Additionally, Marta Pan, a sculptor and the architect's wife, is credited as the project's *plasticien*, or aesthetic consultant. One of her large, abstract concrete sculptures sits just outside the front of the building, its curves both echoing and establishing a formal dialogue with the building that many at the time would have seen as plastically animating the public space surrounding the complex. This was precisely the model of artistic synthesis that the GRAV sought to disrupt.

In implicit agreement with them, Popper filled the entire building with works by the GRAV, and many others by a large and international group of contributors, including stalwarts of the older generation like Alexander Calder and younger artists such as Hans Haacke. Virtually every space was filled, and the Maison became a kind of spatialized survey of developments in kinetic, optical, and technological abstract art. Indeed, Popper's catalog essay was organized around the spaces of the building, and he sought to produce more or less coherent statements about various historical stages in the development of kineticism and its possible environmental application. Jean Tinguely's massive *Requiem pour une feuille morte* (1967) in the foyer was a massive wall-shaped clockwork of gears, and seemed to metonymically invoke the early history and industrial roots of kinetic art. But further in, the experiments became increasingly sophisticated and, more important, explicitly environmental and spectacular. These propositions were explored by group installations in the theater and its wings. On both the static and mobile stages, various artists and collaborative groups produced

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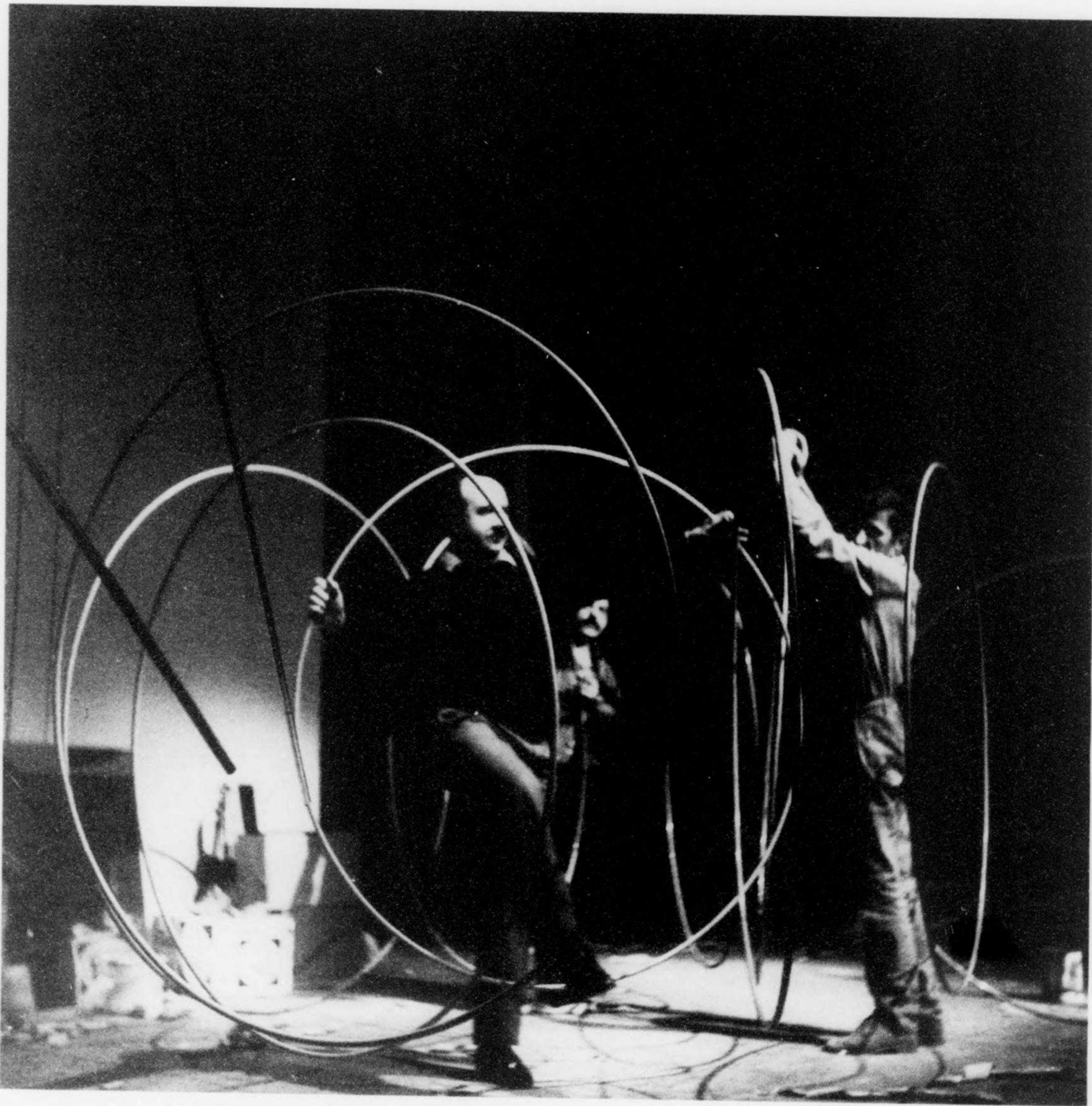
Kowalski at the Place du Châtelet, Schöffer at the Musée d'art moderne, and Lily Greenham in Montreuil. See Frank Popper, "Paris Lumino-Cinétique," *Chronique de l'art vivant* no. 9 (March 1970), n.p.

50. Initially, Popper had entitled the show "Cinétisme-environnement (le problème des groupes)," reflecting his recent engagement with the paradox, which was especially acute in the GRAV, of collective and anonymous production meeting the demands and contingencies of individual professional development. As Popper's thinking about the show evolved, he shifted his emphasis from the insular group problem to the broader social implications of spectacle and environment. A draft of the catalog essay indicates that Popper changed his description of spectacle-oriented works from establishing a "stimulus esthétique qui engendre un sentiment existentiel intense" to "de nouvelles relations entre l'homme et son environnement."

installations that explicitly effected spectatorial integration. According to Popper: "After entering the mobile theater, we are led to examine the 'spectacular' possibilities of kinetic art in general; but in this context, the new role of the spectator is invoked."<sup>51</sup>

The GRAV's contribution, *Parcours en mouvement continu*, was a series of metal rings, tensegrity structures, and other quasi-architectural components located on the circular mobile stage, which could be walked through and under. The relatively simple forms of this piece—essentially giant hoops and spokes—belied a phenomenological complexity activated by the movement of the stage and the interactions of spectators. This very late piece by the Group demon-

51. Frank Popper, *Cinétisme-Spectacle-Environnement* (Grenoble: Maison de la culture, 1968), p. 26.



GRAV. *Parcours en mouvement continu*. 1968.  
Photo courtesy of Yamil Le Parc.

strated the evolution of their works away from complex mechanisms and things like flashing lights, as well as their dedication to analogue experience (even while many of their colleagues were experimenting with computers, cybernetics, and algorithmic *programmation* of various types<sup>52</sup>); instead, they seemed to invest in simple viewer interaction through “cool” forms—giving spectators as little information as possible and leaving the response up to them. There was also a certain irony inherent in locating the works of the GRAV on the mobile stage. Given the seminal role of theatrical and operatic design in the development of the *Gesamtkunst* idea, this installation cannot have been accidental on Popper’s part.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, the GRAV rejected the invitation to produce an immersive experience, and decided instead to simply eradicate the fourth wall, as it were, and invite participants onto the stage-carousel.

While this may have seemed the end point of an aesthetic and ideological progression for the GRAV, reconsidering the spectacle was just an intermediate step along the way to fully realizing its environmental application for Popper. In the theater wings, Popper installed pieces that he felt showed potential for true environmental integration. In so many variations on the idea of ambient space, projected light, enclosed rooms, and various architectonic manipulations, viewers were immersed in a veritable landscape of sublated experience. Jesús Rafael Soto installed one of his *Penetrable* works comprising a volume of steel rods hanging from nylon strings, into which the spectator could enter. Carlos Cruz-Diez submitted a “physiocromatic” box—a kind of telephone booth with tinted glass that would enclose the participant in a “conditioning” bath of colored light. Nicolas Schöffer was represented by *Chronos 8* (1967–68), one of his spatiodynamic and cybernetic sculptures. The titles alone of many of these works give an indication of the prevailing ethos: *Chromatic Space* (Gregorio Vardanega), *Space Moved by Color: Visual Propositions for Architecture* (Lily Greenham), *Successive Ambiances* (Bernard Lassus), *Environment in Continual Displacement (Black Light)* (Hugo De Marco), and so on. Popper’s description:

In moving behind the stage—in the wings—the visitor will discover the results of an important phase of kineticism: the “environment.” A series of sectors are devoted to artists or groups of artists. Each of these proposes a mode of environment corresponding to an interior or exterior architecture. They appeal to movement, to light, to the different

52. For a contextualization of some of these concerns, see Peter Weibel, “It Is Forbidden Not to Touch: Some Remarks on the (Forgotten Parts of the) History of Interactivity and Virtuality,” in *MediaArtHistories*, ed. Oliver Grau (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 21–41. See also the remarkable collection of texts and images from the Nouvelle Tendence meetings: ed. Margit Rosen, *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, a Magazine, and the Computer’s Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961–1973* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011).

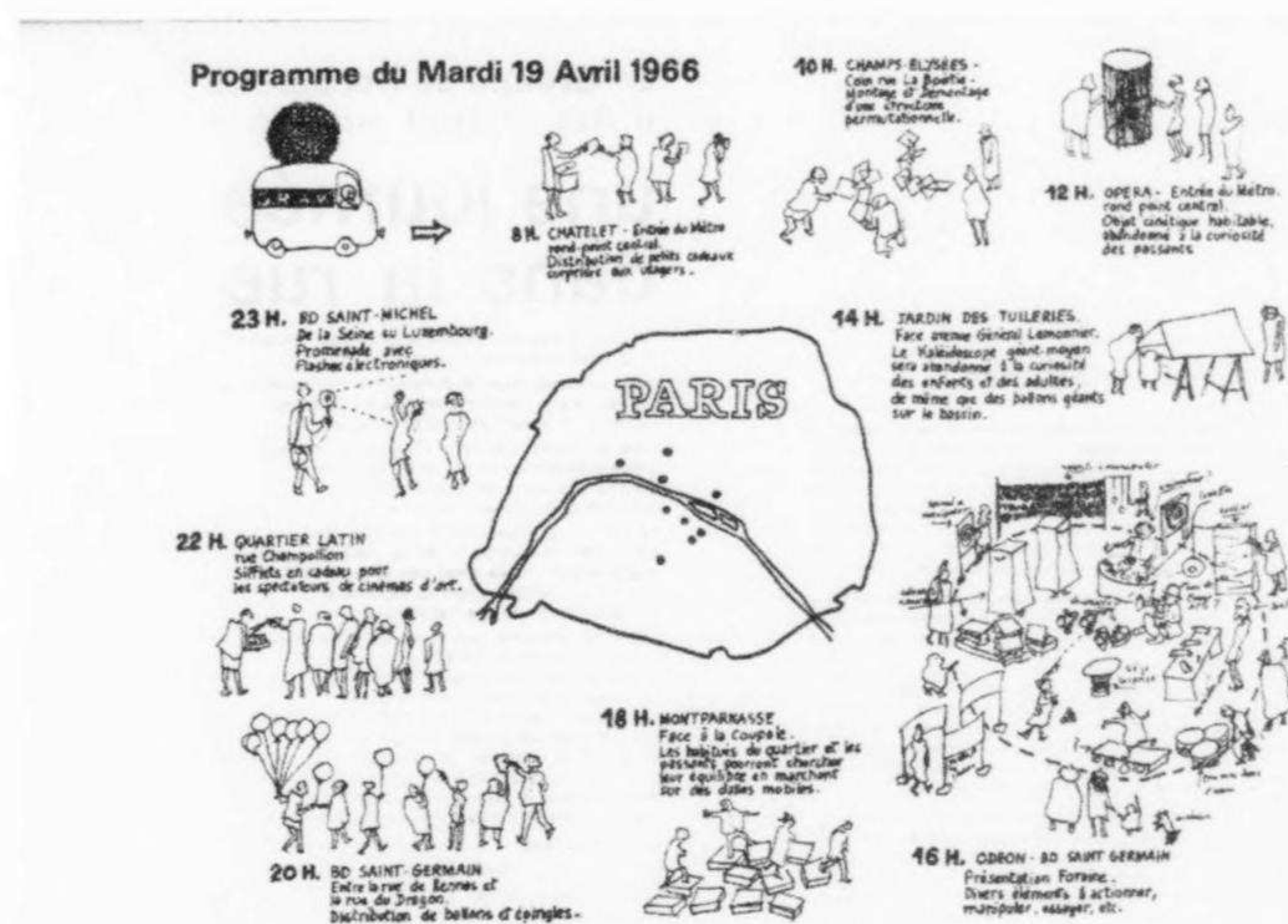
53. For more on the Wagnerian notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its complex relationship to the modernist notion of aesthetic autonomy, see Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

senses of the spectator: one enters into the work, touches it, has direct experience of the plastic proposition. Thus, as in life, the aesthetic environment indissolubly converges [*joint*] with the psychological experience and activity of the spectator.<sup>54</sup>

Popper foresaw a sublation: a breakdown of medium-specific boundaries into a particular kind of environment, the most integral component of which was a perceiving subject (or, better, group of subjects). If, for him, the incorporation or activation of the spectator was one step toward this final goal, the *Parcours* of the GRAV, as well as other works, resisted this logic of ambient integration. Popper's model implied a kind of equilibrium, in which plastic elements were spatialized and animated in such a way as to reflect or even enhance the psycho-biological well-being of the participant.

But the GRAV did not seek amelioration or contemplative immersion. They utilized techniques of intervention and described a much more dynamic spectator than that demanded by ambience.

For the members of the GRAV, the interior world of perception and the outside world of space were in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship. But theirs was no simple existential phenome-



GRAV. Pamphlet for *Une Journée dans la rue* (top) and installation shot (bottom), 1966.  
© Horacio Garcia Rossi.

54. Popper, *Cinétisme-Spectacle-Environnement*, p. 27.

nology; it was tempered by the ideological proposition that the environment was not an interior reality projected outward from the subject, but rather that it was the environment that was being projected inward, into the eye and mind of the individual, coercing consent and conditioning behavior—"colonizing" the soul, as Morin would have it. This explains the political significance of the GRAV's insistence on an integral visual or somatic "instability" in their work, an imperative that flew in the face of the integrative aspirations of Popper.

This point was demonstrated by an April 1966 manifestation called *A Day in the Street*. This event comprised a scheduled series of stops around central Paris at which various interactive devices and situations would be encountered. In some of these, art objects literally became interactive, as in Sobrino and Stein's demountable Plexiglas structure whose form was determined by the crowd. Other pieces demanded the participation of spectators in other ways. Julio Le Parc deployed several unstable boxes, whose minimalist forms belied their ludic function. At other stations, balloons were popped and gift boxes were handed out to passersby. Yvaral constructed a mini-environment—a shower-curtain-like structure from inside of which the world must have looked considerably different; this was referred to as a "habitable kinetic object," a phrase that truly collapses the distinction between the thing and its environment. Interestingly, at every location on the itinerary of *A Day in the Street*, participants would give their opinions and comments in a questionnaire.<sup>55</sup>

These rather tame happenings were hardly unprecedented. But what is remarkable about the GRAV's *Day in the Street* is the degree to which spectator behavior and urban environment are inseparable. From the pamphlet:

The city streets are criss-crossed by a network of habits and deeds that are repeated every day.

We think that all these routine gestures taken as a whole can induce total passivity or create a general need to react.

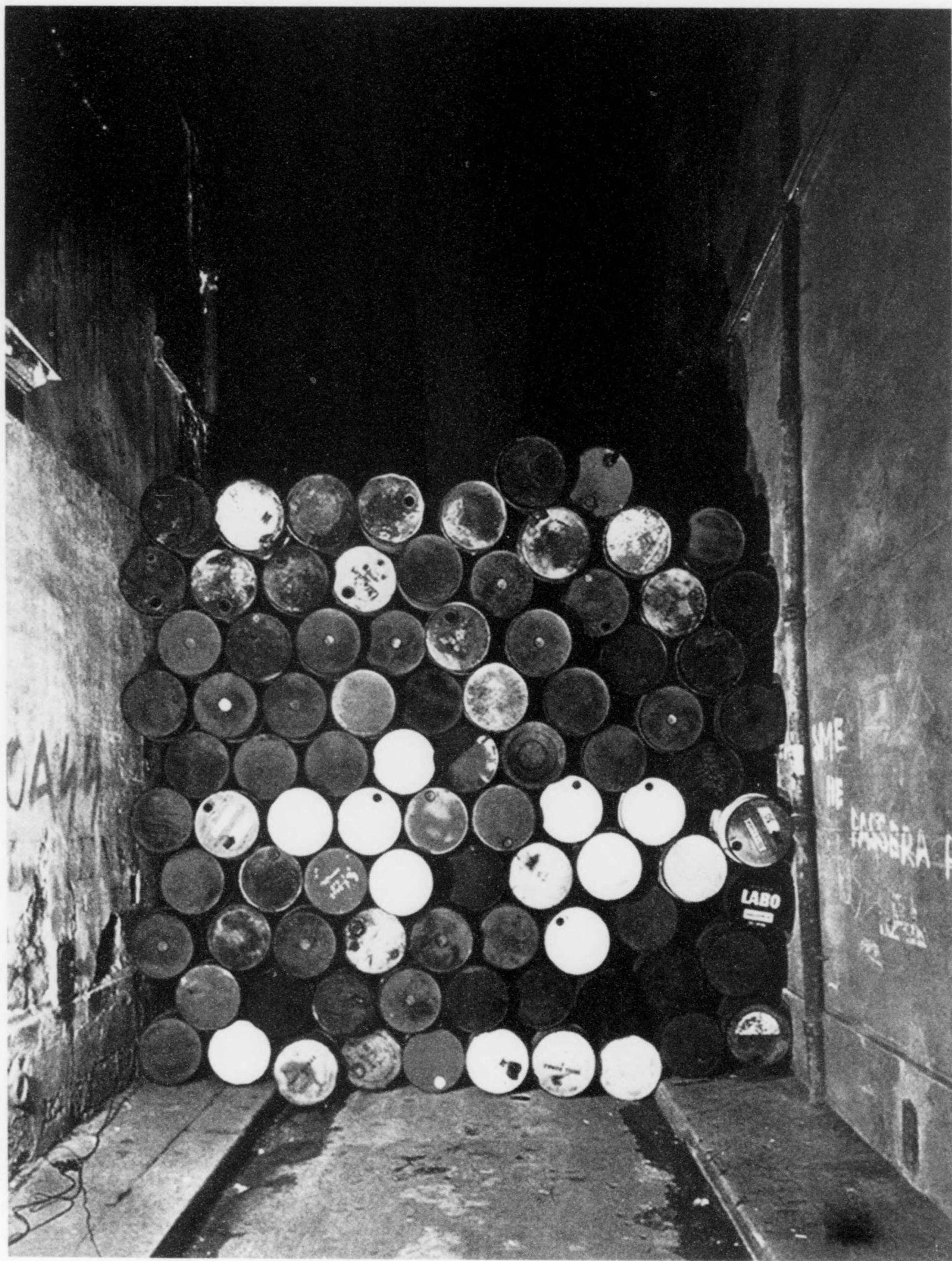
We want to introduce into the network of found and repeated gestures of a day in Paris a series of intentionally orchestrated punctuations.

Life in big cities might be bombarded not with bombs but with new situations calling for participation and responses on the part of inhabitants.<sup>56</sup>

Here, habitual activity, the movements of commuters, and the infrastructure of the streets and transportation networks they utilize constitute the environment—not the physical properties of the architectural spaces. Art intervenes as a strategic

55. On the relation of this project to contemporaneous statistical investigations into the relationship between the public and the world of fine art, see DeRoo, *The Museum Establishment*, pp. 32–43.

56. Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, *Une Journée dans la rue*, pamphlet, reprinted with English translation in *Strategies de participation*, pp. 180–81; translation altered slightly.



*Christo and Jeanne Claude. Wall of Oil Drums—  
Iron Curtain, rue Visconti, Paris. 1961–62.  
Photograph by Jean-Dominique Lajoux.*

experiential disruption in this network of urban gestures. In other words, the city is already an ambience; passersby are already integrated, passive viewers in the vast work of art that is the city.

This brings *A Day in the Street* into the orbit of Buren's signboards, even if the former lacked that project's semiotic and historical savvy. Both projects sought to disrupt the environmental equilibrium of the urban network—of the fabric of flows and communication that seemed to constitute its particular authority over



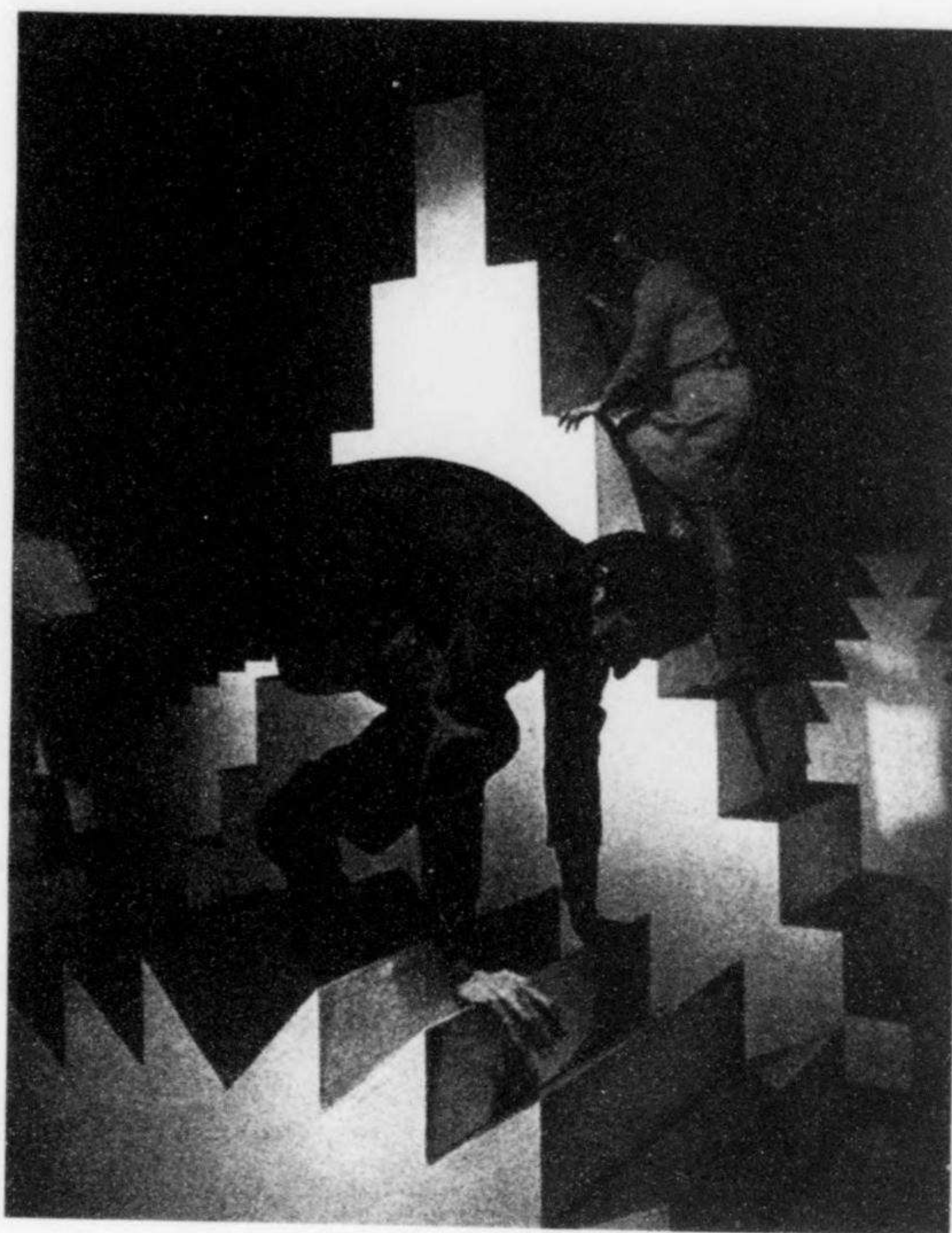
Nicolas Schöffer. SCAM 1, sculpture automobile n° 1. 1973.  
Banque d'Images, ADAGP / Art Resource, NY.

everyday life. Buren understood that circulatory system as economic, and he deployed into the urban texture of exchange and human labor one of the foundational devices of the historic avant-garde: the "pure" geometric abstraction.<sup>57</sup> The GRAV approached the issue from the perspective of phenomenology, and sought to pluck passersby out of their somnambulistic, spectacular stream. We might locate both of these projects somewhere in between the poles established by two other street-based interventions that chronologically bracket the era: Christo and

57. On the function of Buren's stripe paintings in the Parisian context, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry* (Cambridge: October and MIT Press, 2000), pp. 119–39.

Jeanne-Claude's famous wall of oil drums on the rue Visconti of 1962 and Nicolas Schöffer's infamous *SCAMI*, an unlikely combination of a Renault chassis and one of the artist's spatiodynamic sculptures (*Chronos 10*) of a decade later. The first sought absolute circulatory arrest and the demystification of the urban system,<sup>58</sup> while the latter sought full circulatory access, using the extant network of streets to deploy a synthetic environment (which Popper, presumably, would have fully endorsed).

Even in the moment, then, the question was never as simple as integration versus intervention. The transformation of sublimation into repressive desublimation manifested at this moment as a radical transformation of what an environment was, and what humanity's relationship to its environment had become. A critical space of self-determination or collective action was always, it seems, contained within the "disco" ambience of the period, and vice versa.<sup>59</sup> Even if Popper sought to push kinetic art toward an immersive environment, the GRAV understood that pole as spectacular and ultimately passive. This position became very clear in one of their very last collective installations. The *Staircase Variations* (1968) were installed at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery's "Plus by Minus" exhibition, a historical survey of Constructivist and abstract art. These were precarious and uncomfortable-looking structures. Gone are the flashing lights and twisting kaleidoscopic mirrors. They have been replaced by ambiguous monuments, impediments to habitual movement that engaged the body more than any previous work by the Group. They are simultaneously more solid but also more conceptual than their previous multimedia works; the austere forms acknowledged opticality only in their brightly colored steps. The *Staircase Variations* seemed to enact a kind of struggle against social constraint, against the programming of the spatial network itself. They rose up to challenge vision and change comportment. This was the GRAV's final attempt at a "distorted" spectacle that might destabilize the contemporary environment.



GRAV. Staircase Variations. 1968.

58. See Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century: Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 87–97.

59. On the theme of disco and total art, see (in addition to Buchloh, op. cit., Hervé Vanel, "Visual Muzak and the Regulation of the Senses: Notes on Nicolas Schöffer," in *Audio-Visual: On Visual Music and Related Media*, ed. Cornelia Lund and Holger Lund (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche Verlagsanstalt, 2009), pp. 72–74.

## The Barred Colors of André Cadere\*

MATT JOLLY

*That which changes our way of seeing the street is more important than that which changes our way of seeing a painting.*

—Guy Debord, *Report on the Construction of Situations* (1957)

*MUSEUM . . . a rectangular director. A round servant . . . a triangular cashier . . . a square guard . . . To my friends, the people are not admitted. One plays here daily until the end of the world.*

—Marcel Broodthaers,  
*Open Letter* (1968)

On a June day in 1972, crowds were converging on the Museum Fridericianum for the opening of Documenta 5, the fifth installment of the large international art survey that at the time was held every four or five years in the picturesque city of Kassel, Germany. At some point during the opening, André Cadere excused himself from the festivities and quietly executed what was certainly the least appreciated “painting” in the entire show: an unsightly composition of red, blue, and yellow splotches that the artist illicitly spray-painted on one of the exhibition buildings in an act of defiance against its organizers. Months earlier, Cadere had been invited to contribute a piece to the show by Documenta director Harald Szeemann, but when he arrived that afternoon he was abruptly informed that Szeemann had rescinded the offer. As a matter of fact, Szeemann had banned Cadere from even *attending*

\* This essay developed out of a seminar on postwar European art taught by Benjamin Buchloh at Harvard University, and I want to express my gratitude to Professor Buchloh for his unflagging support and generosity. Yve-Alain Bois provided crucial editorial feedback, and I am especially grateful to him for re-translating several of Cadere’s letters cited in the text. Lucy Flint improved this manuscript immeasurably, and I am in her debt. My colleagues in the History of Art department have talked with me about *barres* of round wood probably more than they cared to at times. Their insights are everywhere in this text and their friendship has sustained its author. To David Breslin, Sam Johnson, Trevor Stark, Megan Sullivan, Lanka Tattersall, and Taylor Walsh, I give my heartfelt thanks.



*André Cadere. Spray-paint on the rue Visconti, Paris. 1972.*

*Photograph by Daniel Pype. Courtesy of the Estate of André Cadere and Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy.*

Documenta 5, let alone *participating* in it, after discovering that the artist had disregarded a highly unorthodox proviso the director had folded into the invitation. The situation could not have been more awkward, given that Cadere had personally brought his submission on the train from Paris, in eager anticipation of his international debut. But it was not to be. A quarrel erupted in front of the Neue Galerie, and a short time later the south wall of the building was defaced. The graffiti itself contained no inflammatory message; it looked more like a code. The serial deposits of spray paint precisely duplicated the sequence of colors in Cadere's artwork, effecting a crude, one might say emergency reproduction of the censored object on the exterior of the exhibition site. The same spray-painted ciphers had already begun appearing on the walls and sidewalks of the gallery district in Paris earlier that spring. In a photograph of one such action, the crouching artist is seen in the foreground beneath a frieze of Krylon deposits—his blurred profile adding to the already entropic mood of the image—dripping colors subsumed in the gray scale. The image attests to the marginal state of Cadere's activities, and it portends, through the sum of its distortions, a rather different scenario of "dematerialization": not the lucid sublation of the art object, but the process of historical disappearance that awaits objects that have been disqualified from the sites and spaces of cultural reception. This outcome seems to have been anticipated by Cadere from the very start of his artistic practice. He alluded to it in a series of let-

ters to the gallerist Yvon Lambert: "My activity does not have a following, nor a future," he wrote. "My work is by definition visual, it exists where it is seen."<sup>1</sup>

Until very recently, the activities that André Cadere conducted between 1970 and 1978 have remained largely unaccounted for in the histories of post-Minimal and Conceptual art—or they have been relegated to anecdotes, footnotes, and asides ("Enigmatic to us all" is how Catherine Millet begins the single paragraph about Cadere in her encyclopedic survey of contemporary French art).<sup>2</sup> The artist's (re)emergence as a figure of interest within contemporary curatorial practices is perhaps surprising given the almost unanimous derision that greeted him throughout the 1970s. To the majority of observers in the European art world and most of his peers, Cadere's work was not so much "enigmatic" as it was illegitimate, and Documenta 5 was neither the first nor the last scene of his institutional expulsion. Nevertheless, it is the appropriate site from which to begin retracing Cadere's steps, inasmuch as it positions him in the vicinity of (but, crucially, outside) an exhibition that is synonymous with establishing the centrality of European Conceptual art to the art world at large. Moreover, the inclusion of Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, and Hans Haacke ensured that the most radical and oppositional strains of Conceptual art would be a part of the exhibition, theoretically making Cadere's exclusion all the more astonishing. And yet, when asked in a late interview to define the nature of his work, Cadere stated: "I define myself precisely as having *nothing* to do with the Conceptual movement."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, on further inspection, his project can be seen as initiating a cunning *détournement* of the strategies through which Conceptual art had staked its most radical positions, and as a consequence it remains one of the least understood artistic practices of the 1970s.

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In 1967, Cadere immigrated to Paris, and within a year had abandoned the vibratory, op-inflected style of abstract painting he had practiced in his native Romania, undoubtedly in response to the artistic milieu he encountered in France, where op art had reached a saturation point and was being very quickly supplanted by more reductivist pictorial strategies.<sup>4</sup> By 1969, Cadere had dispensed with the easel format altogether and begun experimenting with the object type that would preoccupy him for nearly a decade: a polychromatic cylindrical structure he constructed out of wooden dowel rods. It was a laborious process that involved sawing the readymade rod into tiny, modular segments—often just two inches in length and diameter. Cadere chiseled the edges of the round wooden pieces until they were smooth and painted them one at a time with high-gloss enamel. He then attached the monochrome segments with pegs and glue, bead-

1. André Cadere, "Letter to Yvon Lambert, May 24, 1978," repr. in *André Cadere: All Walks of Life*, ed. Carole Kismaric et al. (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1992), p. 21.
2. Catherine Millet, *L'Art contemporain en France* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), p. 184.
3. Interview with Sylvère Lotringer: "André Cadere: Boy with Stick," *Semiotext(e)* (New York) 3, no. 2 (1978), p. 150.
4. See Stephen Bann, "From Kineticism to Didacticism in Contemporary French Art," *Studio International* 185 (March 1973), pp. 105–09.

ing them together into a tubular assemblage of repeating serial colors that range in length from one and a half to six feet. Between 1970 and 1978, Cadere fabricated approximately 180 of these works, methodically varying their size, color scheme, and compositional order so that each ostensibly had the status of a "unique" object, though what kind of object is far from clear.

These diminutive, brightly colored constructions bear little resemblance to paintings or sculptures and could easily be mistaken for a concatenation of children's blocks or an instrument culled from the inventory of a kindergarten. Cadere referred to them simply as *barres de bois ronds* ("round bars of wood"), a classification that sounds ostentatiously, almost apocryphally unassuming. ("Remember, Lynda," he told the critic Lynda Morris when she inquired about his work, "the scientific appellation of my work is not 'pole' but 'round bar of wood.'")<sup>5</sup> Mocking the technocratic rhetoric of the *specific* (object) and the *primary* (structure), "round bars of wood" conjures scenes of a preindustrial economy and imbues the ludic objects with vague, utilitarian overtones. None of the *barres* are signed or initialed.<sup>6</sup> The artist instead issued index-card "certificates," which did little to authenticate the works since they consisted of eight-to-twelve-digit serial numbers in a code known only to Cadere. The generic-looking certificates and the clusters of misaligned segments, coagulated glue, and other fabrication defects put one in mind of the stereotypical deficiencies of a counterfeit luxury object, corroborating a faint but growing suspicion that these works are nothing but *faux* pieces of reductivist abstraction. But

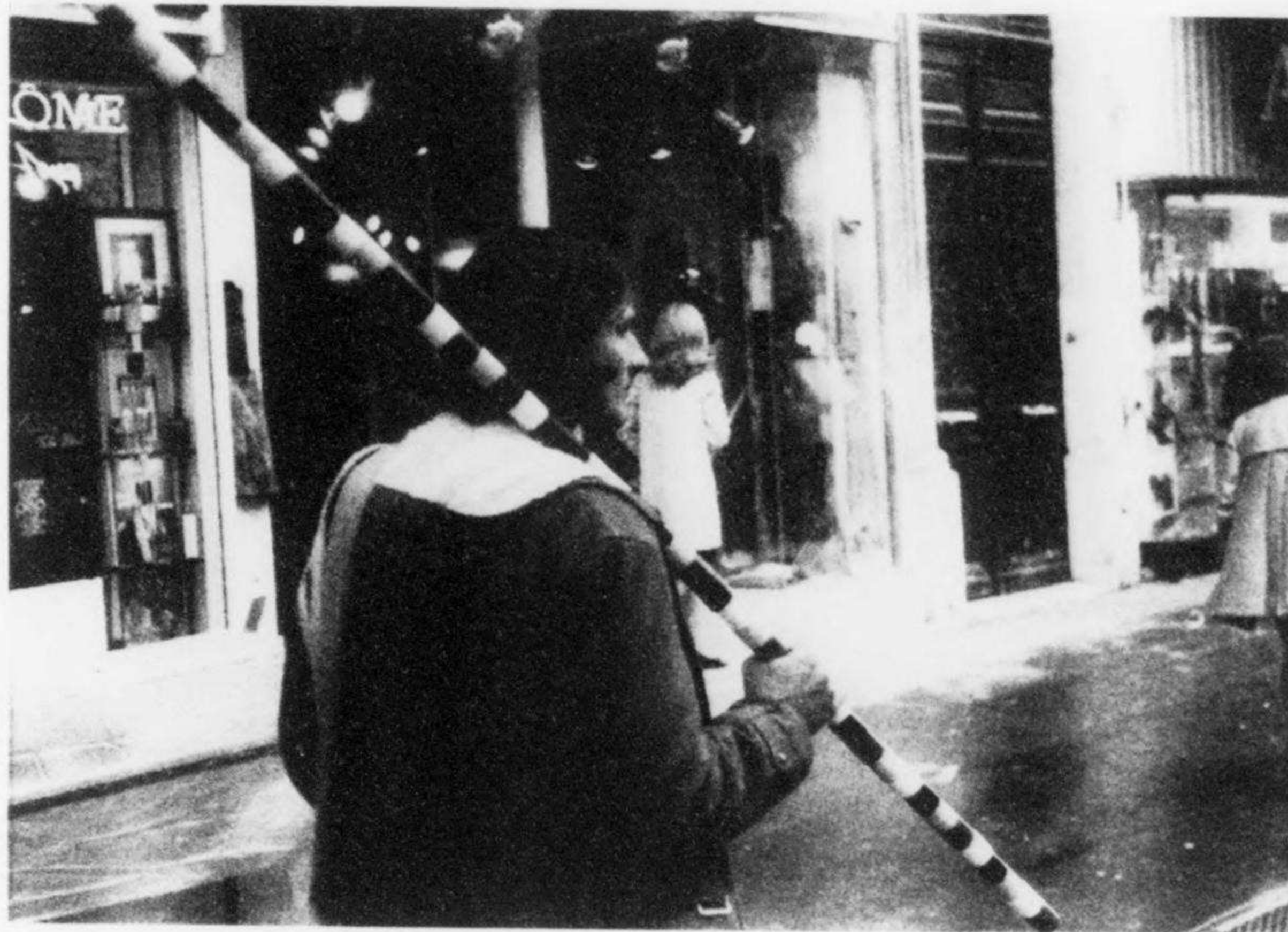


Cadere. Barre de bois rond A 02301040, red/white/yellow/blue, 20 segments. No date (after 1972). Photograph by Philip Bernard.

5. André Cadere to Lynda Morris, May 9, 1975, unpublished letter cited in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 21.

6. "None of the pieces are signed because a signature implies other considerations such as up, down, right side, wrong side, beginning and end. Each work has its own certificate. The certificates give a code number indicating all the characteristics of a particular piece. The certificates are not signed." Cadere, *Présentation d'un travail/Utilisation d'un travail* (Hamburg, Hossmann/Brussels, MTL, 1975), p. 15 n. 8.

the minuscule circumference of the *barres* intimates a reductivism of a drastic or comical scale, as if the art object were now confined to the spatial dimensions of a doorjamb, a windowsill, or a clasped hand. Cadere placed no restrictions on how or where his *barres* of round wood could be displayed; his only stipulation, in fact, was that each one of them "must be of a size and weight that the artist can carry in order to maximize his opportunities for showing it."<sup>7</sup>



*Cadere walking on the Avenue des Gobelins, Paris. 1973.*  
© Archives de la Galerie des Locataires.

As early as 1970, Cadere began "exhibiting" his *barres* anonymously in outdoor and semi-public locations in Paris such as bus kiosks and cafés; he carried a *barre* with him on the metro. And in the gallery district of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, it was not unusual to see him loitering on the corner with one of his flamboyant accoutrements, or in the bakery across the street from the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, where he placed a *barre* in the window alongside the baguettes. Most intriguingly, he displayed his works while taking long solitary walks in Paris, Brussels, and New York. One of the only recordings of these actions, a 16-mm film from 1973, shows the artist traversing the avenue des Gobelins with a *barre* resting on his shoulder, slowly weaving his way through a crowd of trench-coated Parisians bearing shopping bags, briefcases, and quizzical looks.<sup>8</sup> Staged at a distance from the institutional locations where art is ordinarily displayed, these perambulations remained almost completely indecipherable as "exhibitions" and were seldom ever documented. But in an inverse exercise of the *barre's* portability, Cadere routinely "exhibited" his works, with-

7. André Cadere, "Presentation of a Work/Utilization of a Work," (1976) trans. Beatrice Berger and Lynda Morris, repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 36.

8. "Le Baton," *16mm*, 2:58, Alain Fleischer, camera; produced by Ida Baird in association with Galerie des Locataires (Paris: April 1973).

out permission, in commercial galleries and museums. In 1970, he carried a *barre* into the opening of an exhibition of the Italian-Swiss artist Niele Toroni and paraded it past his *empreintes*, to the vexation of everyone in attendance. A spate of intrusions followed, but there was no discernible pattern to them. Cadere placed the *barres* in the middle of the floor, leaned them against the wall, stashed them in the corner, and set them at appallingly close range to the actual works of art on display, like some enigmatic offering. It was not long before the colorful objects began to be confiscated, increasingly at the behest of artists. As his activities persisted, Cadere would himself be routinely ejected from the premises, but rather than desist, he equipped himself with smaller, baton-sized *barres* that could be unveiled once inside.<sup>9</sup> In 1972, he showed up to the opening of the Barnett Newman retrospective at the Grand Palais with a six-foot *barre* and was forcibly removed by director Reynold Arnould. But Cadere was undeterred. As he stated somewhat cryptically, he had but a single objective: "My only goal is to *show* and to keep that word from becoming useless, I am obligated to present my work in the most diverse situations and as often as possible. The purpose of my work is to be *seen* which means that reactions of indifference, hostility, or love are of no interest."<sup>10</sup>

These visitations were impertinent to begin with, but from the perspective of the radical artistic practices of the late 1960s and early '70s, more serious objections could be leveled at Cadere's method, or lack thereof. The supposition that the abstract painterly object can be *shown* in virtually any location or framework just by dint of being transported there is a travesty of the site-specific protocols that post-Minimal and Conceptual artists deployed to initiate a critical analysis of art institutions. Insisting as they did that any credible attempt to contest the authority of the museum/gallery apparatus depended on acknowledging its determinations, these practices anchored the aesthetic intervention to the actual location where it appeared. Cadere's casual meandering from one place to another would seem to personify what Daniel Buren denounced in 1972 as "the illusion of self-sufficiency"<sup>11</sup>—the "illusion" that works of art exist prior to, or

9. The slightly felonious aura of Cadere's activities is borne out in a short blurb about him in *Studio International* that seems to adopt the narrative conventions of the detective novel or the undercover reporter. "I had an appointment to meet Cadere in a café and I had been told that I would know him because he would have his work with him. 'He will have his stick.' . . . The one that he had with him on that day was about three feet long. It rested conveniently on the café table and didn't knock the glasses over when we got up to go. The one he took during the evening on his way to a couple openings was a more substantial affair that would barely fit in the taxi. For visiting museums or in situations where official objections might cramp his style, he had smaller pieces, easily palmed." Daniel Forge, "Letter from Paris," *Studio International* (March 1973), p. 116.

10. André Cadere, "Letter to Yvon Lambert, June 7, 1978," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 22.

11. "Whether the place in which the work is shown imprints and marks [it] . . . or whether the work itself is directly—consciously or not—produced for the Museum, any work presented in this framework that does not examine the influence of the framework upon itself falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism." Daniel Buren, "The Function of the Museum," *Artforum* 12, no. 1 (September 1973), p. 68.

apart from, their institutional inscription. The very design of the *barres* (if the concept of design is even appropriate) is an affront to the decorative and administrative sobriety of Conceptual art. As if exemplifying the rejection of Conceptual art's methodical dismantling of the conventions of visuality, the *barres* appear to spring from the most irrational registers of scopic investment, mimetically oscillating between toy and totem, irreducible to language and altogether averse to it: "I am not a teacher and there is nothing to discuss, nor to write," the artist stated. "The purpose of my work is to be *seen*."

Cadere did speak about his work on rare occasions, however, and he made it quite clear that the transient condition of the *barre* was a function of its unusual morphology—its roundness. The recto/verso opposition that ordinarily determines the spatial orientation of a painterly object is collapsed by the application of color to its cylindrical support. Similarly, the modular division of the *barre*'s volumetric structure into an accumulation of identically sized units of color with no discernible pattern confounds the distinction between the object's top and its base. "A painting is automatically hung on the wall," Cadere explained. "It has a top, a bottom, a front, a back. None of this exists in a round *barre* of wood. . . . Unlike other paintings, this work does not have *two* sides."<sup>12</sup> The decision to map a non-compositional color sequence onto the dimensions of a manipulable device results in a plastic object with an undecidable spatial orientation: *barres* of round wood cannot be seen sideways, backwards, or upside down;<sup>13</sup> they can only be *seen*. The ambiguity surrounding the proper way the *barre* should be placed, installed, and displayed is an index of its latent capacity to be *grasped* and transported elsewhere—*out* of the locations where objects acquire exhibition value or, perhaps, *into* them. By repeatedly and continually placing and displacing his *barres* in and out of official contexts and public places, Cadere suspends the object in a performative simultaneity of dislocation and display. As he put it: "A cylindrical form without a right or reversed side can be placed, carried along, propped, or hung . . . it requires no nails, no glue, or any other system of installation. . . . It is obvious that a round *barre* of wood can be exhibited anywhere."<sup>14</sup>

The tendency to dismiss Cadere's work as illegitimate or simply ludicrous might be redirected by recalling Theodor Adorno's statement that "what is artistically legitimate as alienating infantilism . . . becomes merely infantile when it starts to claim theoretical or social validity."<sup>15</sup> Adorno's remark is provocative not for

12. André Cadere, "Letter to Yvon Lambert, June 7, 1978," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 25.

13. This is a paraphrase of El Lissitzky's critique of the frontality of the easel painting cited by Yve-Alain Bois in his seminal analysis of Lissitzky's *Prouns*. Directing his remarks at Suprematist painting, Lissitzky states: "For all its revolutionary force, the Suprematist canvas remained in the form of a picture. Like any canvas in a museum, it possessed one specific perpendicular axis (vis-à-vis the horizon), and when it was hung any other way it looked *as if it were sideways or upside down*." Cited in Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America* (April 1988), pp. 161–80.

14. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, pp. 22–23.

15. Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. and trans. Ronald Taylor (New York: Verso, 1980), p. 183.

seeming to endorse an un-dialectical commitment to “alienating infantilism” but in raising the possibility that, under certain historical conditions, strategies of self-marginalization become necessary in the cultivating of an aesthetics of opposition and dissent. As I hope to show, Cadere’s wanderings and trespasses delimit a space of radical dislocation; a vantage point from which to reframe the neo-avant-garde critique of institutions in relation to a set of historical and theoretical questions that are often elided in the art-historical discourse of institutional criticality. If Marcel Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-valise*—a suitcase containing miniaturized reproductions—had figured the (trans)portable artwork in a form that unavoidably conjured the sample case of the traveling salesman, the sight of Cadere carrying one of his abstract painterly staffs evokes the enigmatic arrival of the wandering stranger<sup>16</sup>—a figure with whom the artist, as a Romanian émigré, identified. The disconcerting stipulation that each round *barre* of wood “be of a size and weight” that Cadere alone can carry implicitly nominates the body and its envelope of spatial and object-relations as one of the few remaining accessible “sites” where the artistic construct might be constellated. By allying the decontextualized circulation of the (art) object to the movements of a culturally dislocated subject, Cadere’s peripatetic performances re-situate the discourse of institutional critique around the disavowed geopolitical hierarchies between center and margins. His interventions in the neo-avant-garde’s putatively democratic project were unwelcomed (and unwelcome), what with the sudden intrusion of the body, the scandal of the handmade, and the insinuations of subjects—and subject-positions—to whom their self-reflexive project is not addressed. In this way, Cadere reopens the question of institutional critique not only from the perspective of the geopolitical margins but from the historically distant legacies of utopian thinking that had been associated with earlier historical phases of geometric abstraction but had been programmatically voided from the agenda of Conceptual and post-Minimal art.<sup>17</sup> But rather than

16. “I have more and more the feeling about myself that I am a stranger in any situation: in France, in Italy, in England. Being a stranger means I arrive in a situation as a stranger. . . . I am not in a powerful situation, you know. I am an émigré. Not from beautiful Switzerland but from a completely underdeveloped and dirty East European country. . . . It means that from my position I have nothing to lose. A Marxist position, like the quotation from Marx, ‘the proletariat has nothing to lose but his chains.’ I feel myself to be in this position. I think that in the occidental countries the proletariat, the workers, have a lot to lose, they have a television to lose, a car to lose, a family. I have nothing. I have no television, no family, I really have nothing to lose.

LM: Your round bar of wood?

AC: If I lose it, I do it again, I really have nothing to lose.

LM: But by now you have a reputation?

AC: Maybe this is the poisoned gift [*laughing*]. The occidental cultural gift [*laughing*].” Cadere, “Talking with Lynda Morris,” interview (March 1976), published in *André Cadere: Peinture sans fin*, ed. Karola Grässlin et al. (Cologne: König, 2007), pp. 33–35.

17. “The utopian stance of the writings of these first abstract artists tends to be ignored by historians . . . but they all insisted on this point: art strives for its own end as a separate activity. The myth of the ‘last picture,’ or of the ‘dissolution of art into life,’ is one of the most common of the avant-garde theories of the twenties and underlies the importance of a hopeful eschatology (another name for utopia) in all the texts by artists of this first modernist wave.” Yve-Alain Bois, “Lissitzky, Mondrian, Strzemiński: Abstraction and Political Utopia in the Twenties,” in *Cadences: Icon and Abstraction in Context*, exh. cat. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1991), pp. 81–105.

endorsing a facile art-into-life philosophy, as some have mistakenly assumed, his cylindrical painting attests to the increasing dissociation of these spheres through the vicissitudes of its transportation. As the *barre* shifts precariously between public and institutional precincts, between spatial and discursive boundaries, and between conditions of being *illegible* and *illegal*, Cadere enacts the restricted maneuvers of the nonhierarchical object in the new hierarchical order of spaces.

Circumscribing Cadere's project from the outset within the discursive context of neo-avant-garde reception and institutional criticality counteracts recent attempts to reclaim him under the depoliticizing rubric of an "artist's artist" or to rejoice in his "eccentricity"; these misunderstandings of his activity might explain why the *barres* frequently appear *benumbed*, to recall Roland Barthes' description of the appearance primary objects acquire in their transposition to a secondary order of de-historicizing mythification.<sup>18</sup> The commercial and museological canonization of artists associated with institutional critique has produced a range of attempts to re-clarify its aims, to probe the etymological ambiguities of the terms themselves, and to retroactively repudiate it as a project of complicity with the powers it claimed to be undermining.<sup>19</sup> Cadere's tenuous place within that discourse confronts us with a different set of questions, as well as a potentially productive way to defamiliarize the project and its protagonists. Perhaps the apposite classification for Cadere's project, at least by way of introduction, is simply that of *critique*, in the specific sense that Michel Foucault defined the word: "Critique only exists in relation to something other than itself: it is an instrument . . . it oversees a domain it would not want to police and is unable to regulate. By its very nature, by its function . . . it seems to be condemned to dispersion, dependency, to pure heteronomy."<sup>20</sup>

#### *Portable Abstraction*

In a 1974 lecture in Louvain, Cadere offered the most comprehensive explanation of his work, including the elaborate production method of his *barres*. The Belgian satirist Jacques Charlier composed a series of cartoons based on Cadere's talk that make a useful, if slightly risible, visual aid. In the first sheet, we see a quaint tableau of a forest, and below, an extreme close-up of two arms sawing a tree branch as beads of sweat and the audible scrape of metal against wood complement the pseudo-documentary angle of vision. Charlier's illustrations are unserious, but in this case his knack for caricature pays off: the portrait of the artist as a rural woodcutter is keenly attuned to the way Cadere himself plays up

18. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 125.

19. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* (Sept. 2005), pp. 278–83.

20. Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?," trans. Lysa Hochroth, in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 25.



Jacques Charlier. Dessins Humoristiques  
(André Cadere). 1975. © MHKA.

These blunt, cylindrical lengths of wood could fulfill any number of utilitarian functions (e.g., as broom handles, curtain rods), but they were predominantly employed in carpentry and light construction to fasten together and reinforce larger wooden structures. Dowel rods inhabit a liminal condition inasmuch as they have already been extracted and estranged from the natural world, and they are destined for still further fragmentation, sawed into pegs and secreted away into some more substantial object.

Since sawing the dowels is one of the prescribed and therefore most mundane actions one could perform on the material, there is little to distinguish Cadere's task from the garden-variety chores of builders and *bricoleurs* except for the dimensions of the cuts themselves. In his lecture the artist stated that after the wood had been cut, "the length of each segment must be equal to its diameter. This relationship," he added, "is determined by the material from which the object is made."<sup>21</sup> The resulting abundance of minute, modular wooden seg-

the primitivizing expectations for authenticity that invariably greet—or rather, confront—an artistic producer from the geopolitical periphery (in this case, the densely forested, unevenly industrialized then-Eastern Bloc country of Romania). The arrow didactically identifying the cross-section of the tree branch and the accompanying shouts of "DU BOIS DU BOIS!" set the scene for the denaturing and disappearance of the venerable substance as Cadere crafts his hybrid, hand-held device.

After all, Cadere's "wood" is not exactly the majestic oak that Constantin Brancusi carved in Edward Steichen's garden at Voulangis in 1926, transforming the felled tree into a sublimely rhythmic articulation of vertically repeating rhomboids. He fashions his *barres* out of wooden dowel rods, an industrially prefabricated lumber product whose round, manicured contours are the work of a mechanized "wood-shaper."

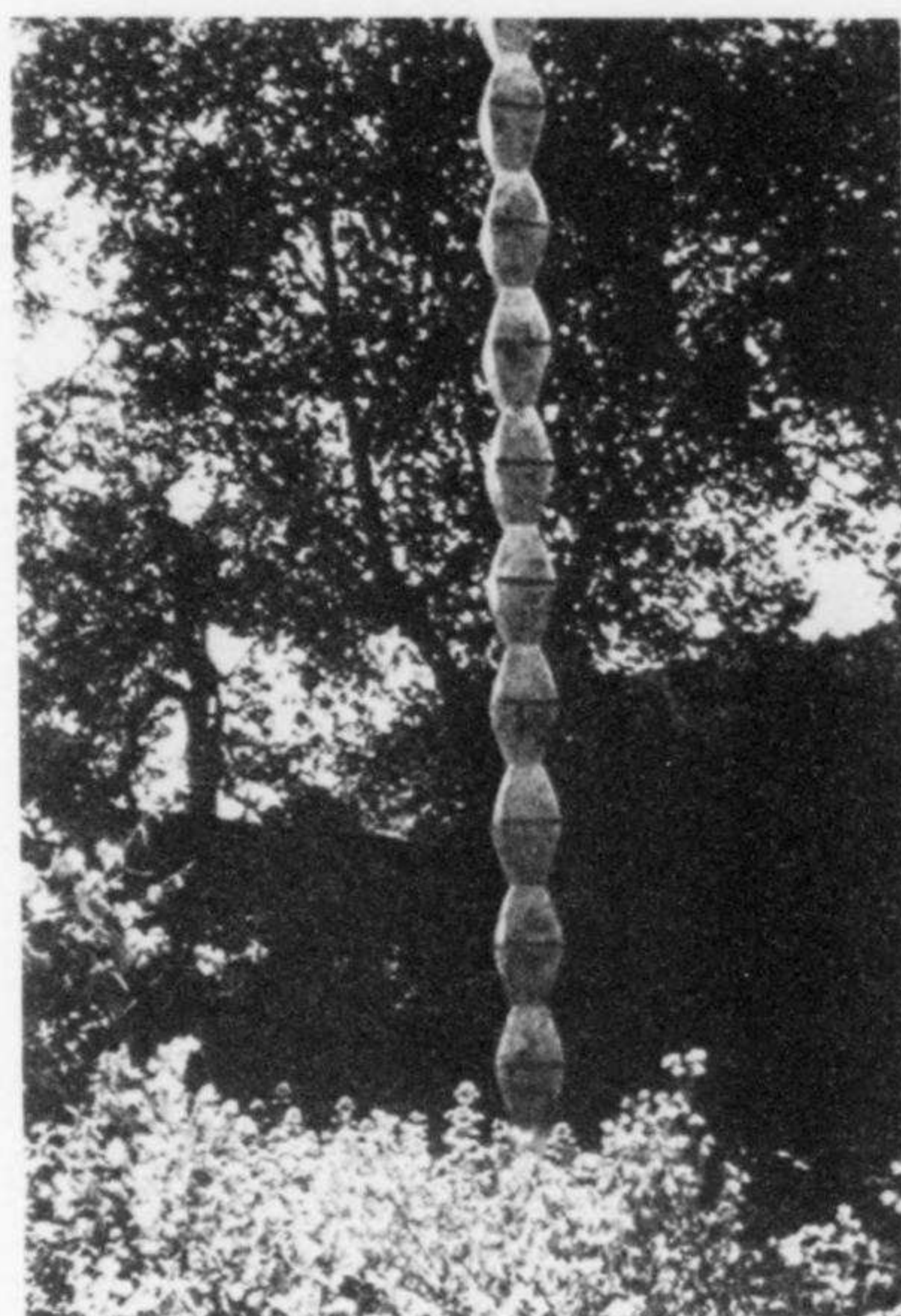
21. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 29.

ments is a first sign that the dowel rod will be spared from its usual utilitarian function. One commentator dryly observed: "The artist's task would have been a whole lot easier if he had simply painted a dowel with a succession of colors."<sup>22</sup> But it is precisely this lapidary ritual of splitting apart a prefabricated unit of matter and piecing it back together that will enable him to mime the idioms of advanced abstraction with procedures and materials plucked from the realm of the quotidian.

Cadere specified from the outset that the *barres* would be limited to combinations of only eight colors.

There are a limited number of colors that can be used: only those which give the greatest contrast: black, white, and the six colors of the rainbow: yellow orange red purple blue and green. However, these eight colors only constitute a reality in words. If we ask for green paint at a hardware shop the assistant will show us ten tins all containing different shades of green. The shade chosen must, in the context in which it is used, be different or distinct from the other colors: In this case, the most *obvious* green, the most *obvious* red, etc. . . . Subtle nuances must be avoided because they automatically make a work harmonic, aesthetic and subjective and so allow for an avoidance of discussion.<sup>23</sup>

Store-bought color and the consequences it posed for painting and traditional composition is one of the central *topoi* of twentieth-century art, one that had been addressed relatively early by Marcel Duchamp. In his perplexing final painting, *Tu m'*, from 1918, Duchamp not only *depicted* color in the reified guise of a hardware-store catalog swatch, he enlisted the device of perspectival recession to create the illusion of a vast, mismatched assortment of deracinated color samples (mauves, pinks, lavenders) vectoring out of the upper left edge of the canvas. If Duchamp, circa 1918, underscored the aleatory excess of readymade tints and shades to mock the scientific pretensions of color theory, the converse decision by Cadere to select only the most "obvious" colors is attuned to the synthetic palette of post-war industrial-design objects. Dispensing with any "subtle nuances" lets him infuse



Constantin Brancusi. Endless Column, Voulangis. 1926–27.  
Installation photograph by Edward Steichen. © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

22. David Bourdon, "André Cadere, 1934–1978," *Arts* (November 1978), p. 103.

23. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 29.

the achromatic wooden *barres* with the kind of acrid hues that Barthes classified as “chemical color”—a chromatic condition that Barthes associated most closely with American Pop Art and polystyrene plastics.<sup>24</sup>

Devoting himself to the recondite labors of a Miniaturist—not Minimalist—abstract painter, Cadere carefully painted the spool-shaped pieces with a single shade of high-gloss enamel, suffusing the tiny segments in a bright coat of lacquer. The artificial sheen of the paint combined with the underlying contours of the dowel parts gives the serial units the semblance of readymade industrial objects—an effect Cadere accentuated by minimizing the drag of the paintbrush. If it had been Brancusi’s tendency to efface the artisanal basis of his production by emulating the gleaming contours of serial machine parts, Cadere’s de-skilled procedures engender a different kind of slippage between the handmade and the mass-manufactured. He splices together heterogeneous substances and materials, extracting the most denatured properties of prefabricated matter and fusing them into generic hybrids that appear progressively more *industrial* as they become smaller, brighter, and more *infantile*.<sup>25</sup> These round, rigid colors could be the puzzle pieces of a child’s game, the color-coded components of assembly-line manufacturing, or a set of oversized Ben-Day dots designed by Claes Oldenburg. Thus Cadere’s fusing of painterly and sculptural elements will not so much disturb the division of labor between the studio-based disciplines as defamiliarize the very process of artistic production into a distorted hybrid of ludic game-playing and alienated labor.

This becomes apparent upon learning that the order and placement of the painted segments in each *barre* are automatically determined by a permutation of its color scheme. “I observe an order,” Cadere explained,

the most precise order in existence is the mathematical order. I have chosen a mathematical order of permutations. This is an example of the system of permutation: 1234, 2134, 2314, 2341, 3241, etc. We continue until we rediscover the first formula: 1234. Translate these numbers into colors.<sup>26</sup>

With unerring logic, the permutation exhausts all the possible variations that can be obtained from a given color combination and maps them in one con-

24. “These acrylics, these flat primaries, these lacquers, in short these colors which are never shades, since nuance is banished from them . . . aggressively refer[s] to the artifice of chemistry, in opposition to Nature.” Roland Barthes, “That Old Thing Art,” in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), p. 204.

25. The complementarity between the serialized industrial module and the libidinally invested part-object is brilliantly analyzed by Mignon Nixon in “O + X,” *October* 119 (Winter 2007), pp. 6–20.

26. Cadere, “Presentation of a Work,” repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 30. Cadere employed two different types of permutation as well as a numerical code for every color. The intricacies of the system deserve a fuller elaboration than can be provided here, and are explained most lucidly by Bernard Marcelis, “How to Look at a Round Bar of Wood,” in *André Cadere: Catalogue Raisonné* (Köln, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), pp. 17–21.

tinuous linear sequence, leaving Cadere to glue sometimes upwards of eighty of the one-and-a-half inch pieces together. The prohibitions on compositional decision-making have their counterpart in the reduction of the role of the hand to a sequence of clipped, repetitive motions. One can distinguish a comparable attempt to align the artistic process with the fragmented routines of anonymous, unskilled labor in the paintings of Niele Toroni, which—beginning in 1966—consisted of nothing but repeated monochromatic imprints of a no. 50 brush, separated by intervals of 30 cm. Toroni's serialized dabs purged the paint mark of any residuum of dexterity and desire, but this devaluation of painterly procedure belied a conservative attachment to the discipline's artisanal legacy by retaining its master-tool—the paintbrush—which Toroni wielded with imperious delicacy. Cadere's sorting,



Charlier. Dessins  
Humoristiques  
(André Cadere)  
(detail). 1975.  
© MHKA.

grasping, and fitting together of the tiny components recasts the process of placing and arranging colors in a radically unrecognizable guise that conjures an anonymous stage in the manufacturing process of serial objects, a kind of assembly-line abstraction.

Although differentiating the identically sized segments with maximally contrasting colors introduces a nascent logic for piecing them together, it paradoxically impedes the production of anything resembling a finished, integrated object; the staccato color combinations unavoidably superimpose a sequence of *optical* disjunctions onto the manually re-assembled *barre*. This paradoxical making and unmaking is the inevitable result of Cadere's functional definition of color. "The essential function of color is to differentiate objects," Cadere explained:

If you open a transistor, you will see groups of wires inside. They are not different colors to make the inside of the transistor pretty, but to

show that they have different functions. Color is used in this work for this essential quality: *to show a difference*.<sup>27</sup>

To a person prying open the transistor, the contrasting colors of the wires spark a rudimentary understanding of how the device is constructed by differentiating its electrical circuitry. In a non-technological instrument like the *barre*, these chromatic cues are radicalized to the point where the mere perception of the colored segments de-fetishizes the object entirely: "You can see the segments, you can see that the segments are assembled," Cadere explained. "The segments are all the same size. . . . The finished piece does not hide the means by which it is manufactured."<sup>28</sup> Yet like the wires in the transistor, the colors in the round *barres* are coextensive with—indeed, inseparable from—the components they're assigned to designate. By tautologically mapping the means for deciphering the different parts of the object onto the parts themselves, he effaces the ground that would permit us to recognize colors as functional. In contrast to the monochrome's fusing of figure and ground, which renders the rectangular-shaped *painting* an object in actual space, applying a single paint color to these minuscule "supports" with their manifestly tactile dimensions causes *color* to acquire the guise of an object. Dislodged from the prescribed rectangularity of the painterly support but not yet subsumed into a finished structure, the units of the *barre* of round wood signify little more than *reds, yellows, blues, greens*. The excessive instrumentalization of material and gesture returns in the finished *barre* as a surfeit of color and a non-instrumental perceptual experience.

Using color to demarcate and, in a sense, *signal* the artwork's fabrication process is anathema to the way color was deployed in the industrially derived hybridization of pictorial and sculptural elements in American Minimalism. The decision by Donald Judd to discontinue his early practice of painting directly on plywood supports in favor of pre-colored, synthetic materials was motivated by a desire to dispense with the applied, extraneous quality of painting. It was a means to more effectively consolidate "shape, color, and surface" on the way to asserting the presence of a "single thing that was intense, clear, and powerful."<sup>29</sup> For Judd, this was the very anatomy of a specific object—that it *had* no anatomy, no "visible parts, connections, or transitional areas."<sup>30</sup> A round *barre*, on the other hand, is nothing but visible parts, connections, and transitional areas. The pride that Judd and many of the Minimalists professed in outsourcing the production of their objects is likewise undone in Cadere's *barres* by the clusters of egregiously mis-

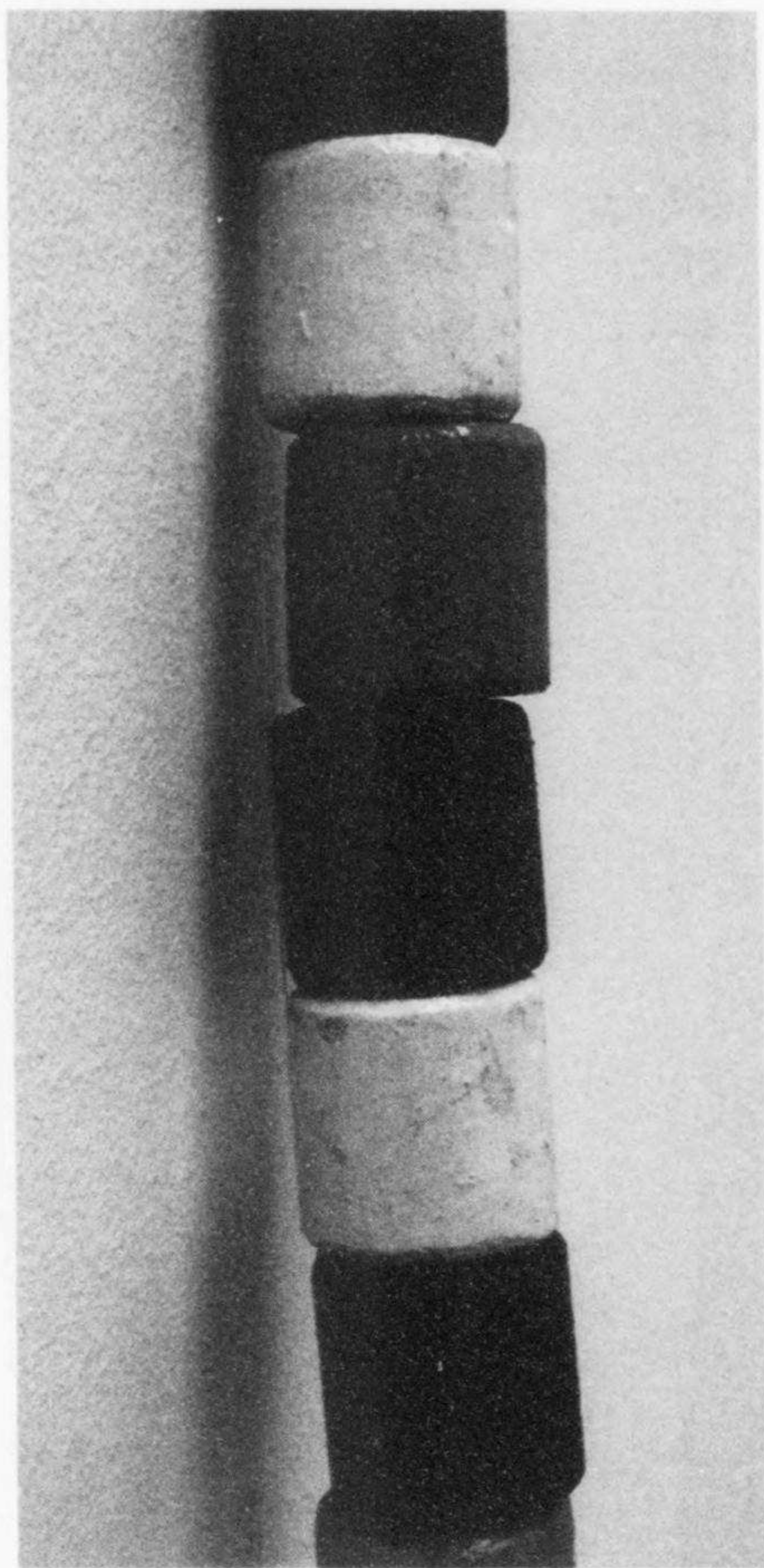
27. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 30.

28. Ibid. It's worth noting that the verbal refrain "round *barre* of wood" participates in the de-fetishization process by invoking an achromatic material and tacitly disclosing that the *barre* is in fact painted.

29. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook* 8 (New York, 1965), repr. in *Judd: Complete Writings, 1959–1975* (Halifax, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 187.

30. Judd, p. 187.

aligned segments, unseemly gaps, and other errant traces of the hand that are set into palpable relief by the modular uniformity of the vertebrated segments. The accumulation of these tiny manual discrepancies render the cylindrical *barres* slightly crooked and contorted, multiplying the spectrum of contradictions in these objects, which appear somehow both hand-crafted and industrially derived, primitivistic and not biodegradable. While in theory a given *barre* could consist of

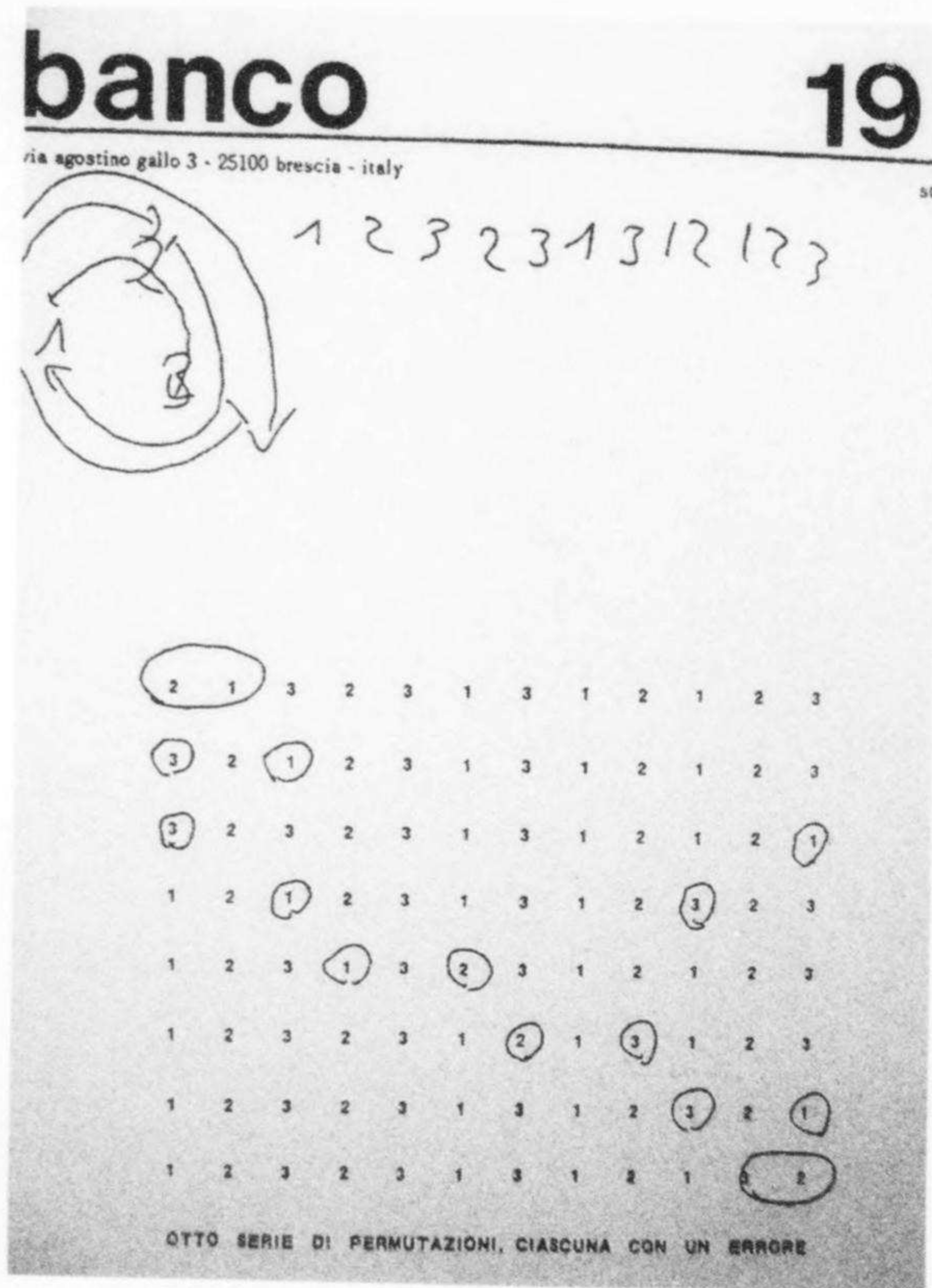


Cadere. *Barre de bois rond B* 02300140, violet/white/yellow/blue, 52 segments (detail). No date (after 1972).

combinations of all of the eight possible colors, in reality the permutational expansion of more than five colors would result in an object too large for Cadere to carry and therefore was not attempted, drastically limiting the number of works he could produce.<sup>31</sup> By adopting the (non)compositional “serial attitude” that was de rigueur to Minimal and Conceptual art, but insisting on the manual execution of the proliferating seriality, Cadere exposes that “order” to imprecision, breakdown, dysfunction. To wit, every *barre* contained what the artist termed an “error”: a minor but deliberate transgression of the color order dictated by the permutation, which casts a disconcerting pall on the discourse of *specific* objects and confronts us with the stigma of a *defective* one.

Cadere introduced the error by transposing two differently colored segments from the permutational sequence prior to gluing the pieces into place. This seemingly facile maneuver was not entirely uncomplicated, however; it had to be executed without causing either of the transplanted segments to be re-placed beside an adjacent segment of the same color, as this would have interfered with the non-compositional neutrality of the color sequence and made the discrepancy glaringly

31. “Since everything—size, colors, number of permutations—is limited, it is obvious that the number of pieces I could make is likewise limited. And even if it is higher than the number of pieces that I could make in my lifetime, it nevertheless reveals a principle that traditional artists reject, since they wish to convey the illusion of something like an infinite ‘creativity’; my work is located at the exact opposite, clearly revealing its limits.” Cadere to Yvon Lambert, June 16, 1978, repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 24. “Other mathematical series, the binary one, the Fibonacci sequence, can go on ad infinitum. In the realm of art they provide an illusion of infinity, of absolute freedom. All this is nothing but romanticism, for in reality, every artwork is limited. The limit should not be masked, it should be shown in the very structure of the work.” Cadere to Yvon Lambert, June 14, 1978, repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 23.



*Cadere. The eight ways in which an "error" can be produced in a three-color barre. 1975. Courtesy of the Estate of André Cadere and Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy.*

apparent. Instead, the error is embedded in the *barre*, becoming manifest only as the spectator starts to decipher the underlying permutational pattern through a close inspection of the colors. According to Cadere, the error ensured that "each piece is unique at one point," and to that end he refrained from generating an identical error in *barres* bearing the same combination of colors.

Error does not chime with the practiced ineptitude we associate with artistic "deskilling"; nor could it be said to arise through chance operations. Error identifies an instance of misconduct within a set of administrative and disciplinary parameters, and it reverberates with disapproval. In *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze ponders the epistemological status of error and concludes that for all of its pejorative charge, an error only reaffirms the axiom that it transgresses:

Does not error itself testify to the form of a common sense, since one faculty alone cannot be mistaken but two faculties can be, at least from the point of view of their collaboration, when an object of one is confused with *another* object of the other? Whence does it come if not from

a false distribution of the elements of representation? . . . Error, therefore, pays homage to the "truth" to the extent that, lacking a form of its own, it gives the form of the true to the false.<sup>32</sup>

Camouflaged in the monotonous yet playful micro-tasking, the error could be the consequence of fatigue and distraction; it could be a ludic gambit; or it could be a furtive "double-switch" engineered to sabotage the machinery of production; error ambiguously suspends the subject's agency between its sheer propensity to lapse and its potential to enact micrological forms of noncompliance under partial cover of repetition. "The error is apparent because of the order," the artist stated. "Its existence is made possible by a strict framework, a preexistent structure. The dogma can only be seen in comparison to the error. If it disappears, the dogma becomes invisible, moreover, unthinkable."<sup>33</sup> Defined in this way, adopting the order/error binary as a compositional principle poses an implicit counter-model to the post-Cagian paradigm of order and chance that had remained a compelling model for structuring non-compositional procedures.

Summing up the fabrication process, Cadere made a rather surprising comparison:

[T]he car has an important role in society; it is made by means which correspond economically and socially to thousands of workers and factories. . . . Now, the manufacture of this object is not industrial; it is not part of the economy of a country. The process is limited to the individual. The finished piece does not hide the means by which it is fabricated.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the *barre* finds its quintessential counter-object in the car, the technology that Guy Debord anointed in 1959 as "the sovereign good of an alienated life and the essential product of the capitalist market"<sup>35</sup> (a distinction that now belongs to the iPhone). If the production process of the car is made recondite by the monochromatic surface shell, the *barre* has a polychromatic pattern indicating each step of its fabrication. If the primary function of the car is to transport the subject, the *barre* is a functional object defined by its capacity to be transported. And if the mobility of the car renders the subject's body sedentary, the mobility of the *barre* necessitates that the subject's body become active so as to distribute it through public space: a round *barre* of wood in a forest of signs.

32. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 148–50.

33. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 30.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

35. Guy Debord, "Situationist Theses on Traffic," *Situationist International* 3 (December 1959), cited in Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), p. 26.

UNE PRESENTATION DU TRAVAIL DE CADERE

AURA LIEU A PARIS LE 25 JUIN 1974

16 h 00 - métro Pont Neuf, quai direction Porte de la Villette  
 16 h 10 - bouche métro Pont Neuf  
 16 h 25 - coin Pont Neuf/quai de Conti  
 16 h 28 - coin Pont Neuf/quai des Grands Augustins  
 16 h 30 - coin quai des Grands Augustins/rue Dauphine  
 16 h 35 - coin impasse de Nevers/quai de Conti  
 16 h 36 - coin quai de Conti/rue Guénégaud  
 16 h 46 - coin rue Guénégaud/rue Mazarine  
 16 h 47 - coin rue Mazarine/rue Jacques Callot  
 16 h 50 - coin rue Jacques Callot/rue de Seine  
 16 h 56 - coin rue de Seine/rue Mazarine  
 17 h 02 - coin rue Mazarine/rue Jacques Callot  
 17 h 05 - coin rue Jacques Callot/rue de Seine  
 17 h 07 - coin rue de Seine/rue Jacob  
 17 h 08 - coin rue Jacob/rue de l'Echaudé  
 17 h 16 - coin rue de l'Echaudé/rue de l'Abbaye  
 17 h 20 - coin rue de l'Abbaye/place St. Germain des Prés  
 17 h 21 - coin place St. Germain des Prés/boulevard St. Germain des Prés  
 17 h 23 - bouche métro St. Germain des Prés  
 17 h 28 - métro St. Germain des Prés, quai direction Porte d'Orléans

les rues seront utilisées du côté impair .

*Cadere. Itinerary for a Promenade, June 25, 1974. Paris. Courtesy of the Estate of André Cadere and Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy.*

*Walking in the City*

In the small cache of ephemera related to Cadere's activities, we find a 1974 flyer designed by the artist announcing an upcoming exhibition of his work in Paris: it comprises twenty outdoor locations—street corners, quais, metro stations, kiosks—and the corresponding times when Cadere would pass by these non-sites during a June 25 promenade. The use of a simple forward slash between streets to denote an intersection (“coin rue Jacob/rue de l'Echaudé”) results in an abundance of tiny typographic bars that play quietly in the bureaucratic typewriter font like tokens of the object whose coordinates they mark. Setting out from the Pont Neuf metro stop at 16:00 sharp, Cadere crossed over to the Left Bank, passing the quai de Conti at 16:25 and proceeding south-southwest. He took a roundabout route through the 6th arrondissement, crossing streets and turning corners at the appointed times, until he reached the Saint-Germain-des-Prés metro stop, where the perambulation abruptly concludes at 17:28. Brief intervals of two, three, and five minutes between locations indicate that the artist

is in unhurried but constant motion for the extent of this unconventional "traveling exhibition."

Cadere carried a *barre* with him everywhere he went, of course, even on utterly mundane errands; resting them on café tables and countertops during a repast; maneuvering them in and out of taxicabs and subway cars and thereby insinuating his portable painting-objects into a variety of spaces where artworks aren't ordinarily seen. "To emphasize the independence of the work, it is important to show outside art enclaves," he stated, "in the streets, subways, restaurants, everywhere . . . which [is] possible because the presence of the wall is not necessary."<sup>36</sup> While these everyday meanderings were un-choreographed and largely anonymous, a suite of so-called "promenades" like the one conducted on June 25 were more formal affairs. The typed itinerary is reminiscent of a Fluxus event score in serving to "frame" an everyday occurrence so it might receive "art-like attention." But this was not so easily achieved. In the absence of any legitimating institutional markers—where the diminutive object would be framed by a panoramic assemblage of signs, signals, bodies, and buildings—the aesthetic intentions behind Cadere's actions are subject to erasure, his mobile exhibitions morphing into ambiguous, fugitive interventions into the everyday.

Cadere's walks are situated at an oblique intersection between categories of performance and public artwork: ultimately, they remain irreducible to either genre. As "performances," they occur outside the studio/laboratory settings where post-Minimalist artists staged somatic events and recorded their interactions with objects.<sup>37</sup> But though Cadere's promenades took place in *public*, his roaming the streets with a particular object constituted an ephemeral and for the most part anonymous action, an activity so "public" that it risked dissolving into the amorphous multiplicity that is public space. The very gesture of *displaying* the object was submerged in the quotidian activity of walking. What Cadere's transient exhibitions *showed* us was not so much, or not only, an object but a subject, the archetypal traveler—the stranger, the vagabond, some kind of wandering sage. This in turn raises the vexing question of whether the "independence" of Cadere's project was not merely the performative reanimation of a mythical—and mystical—personification of the artist.

This is apparently what Harald Szeemann thought when he learned of Cadere's walks. Szeemann invited the artist to participate in Documenta 5 with one condition: that he make his way to Kassel on foot carrying one of his *barres*, a mock reenactment of the sojourn that fellow Romanian Constantin Brancusi purportedly made from Munich to Paris in 1904. Cadere consented to Szeemann's

36. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 36.

37. As Astrid Ihle points out, "Cadere steadfastly refused to have his rounds documented in forms which could be exhibited in a gallery or sold. Only few photographs exist of him during his actions in the public domain, and most of these pictures are personal, souvenir photographs." Ihle, "Andre Cadere: Interventions in the Public Domain," in *Peinture sans fin*, p. 57.

proposal, and in the weeks leading up to the June opening, he mailed a series of postcards to Szeemann and Jacques Caumont falsely updating them on the progress of his journey.<sup>38</sup> His final communiqué exposed the ruse: it contained the departure and arrival times of the train Cadere and Jean Le Gac were scheduled to take to Kassel, infuriating the Documenta director so much that he banned Cadere from participating.

The Documenta imbroglio sheds further light on the performative dimension of Cadere's project: with the *barre* resting on his shoulder or held like a walking stick or pilgrim's staff, Cadere affected the bearing of an archetypal wanderer; a geopolitically displaced, preindustrial figure whose itinerancy is associated with religious pilgrimage, statelessness, migration, and eventually—by the mid-nineteenth century—bohemian subjectivity. This was the moment when the socially marginalized figures of the Gypsy

and the *juif-errant* would emerge as newly authentic models of avant-garde artistic identity, most scandalously in Gustave Courbet's 1854 painting *Meeting: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew*. However, the vivacity of Cadere's "staff" quickly checks such anachronistic references. Its strident colors spring from the land of mass-produced design objects. With a complicated double gesture, Cadere effaces any regionally specific sign of cultural identity by

allegorically alluding to an outmoded but canonical personification of a nomadic subject; at the same time, he inscribes this rural, transhistorical figure in the present-tense of urban-industrial object production, metonymically encapsulated by the *barre's* bright colors. Against the backdrop of urban commuting, this premodern invocation of "migrating" registers as a pedestrian protest against the spatiotemporal regimentation of everyday life.



Gustave Courbet. Meeting: A Portrait of the Artist as a Wandering Jew. 1854.

38. For Cadere's correspondence with Szeemann and a valuable historical account of his earliest experiments with Le Gac and Sarkis, see *Une Scène parisienne 1968-1972*, ed. Jean-Marc Poinsot (Rennes: Centre d'histoire de l'art contemporain, 1991), pp. 99-111.

In the short recording of his 1973 promenade on the avenue des Gobelins, Cadere traverses the sidewalk at a medium-slow, almost meditative pace. With his back to us, and the camera trailing at a considerable distance, he advances against the direction of the traffic that passes in and out of the left side of the frame. He has a *barre* propped casually against his right shoulder; its stacked segments appear to extend three feet beyond his head. As he progresses, Cadere is increasingly obliged to break stride as cars turn left onto the avenue. The sheer number of automobiles—parked along the curb like a quasi-serial row of Minimalist objects or idling at traffic lights in a cloud of exhaust fumes—heightens our awareness of the asynchronicities of walking and driving, the disparity between the enclosed interior of the car and the exterior space of the street. With each surge of pedestrians, the *barre* elicits double-takes, eye squints, and expressions of incredulity: some passersby literally look Cadere up and down, others shoot a quick glance at the *barre* as they pass it or furtively turn around and peer, but none slows his or her pace, and neither does Cadere. In this ambient field of traffic lights, signs, and café tables, the *barre* can sustain no more than a passing glance—the “curious, then empty but fascinated look” that Maurice Blanchot characterized as the perceptual modality of the everyday.<sup>39</sup> The multitude of small painted modules that comprise the *barre* finds its spectatorial corollary in the profusion of hurried looks, anonymous glances, and microscopic responses by pedestrians who unexpectedly pass it on the street.

Alain Fleischer's three-minute recording of the walk gives little indication that these public actions were ever intended to engender alternative artist/spectator relations. (“I don't collect the public's feelings,” Cadere once said.<sup>40</sup>) In this respect, it is worth comparing his walks to the pedestrian interventions of Stanley Broun, whose earliest projects evinced a similar concern with traversing urban space, albeit in vastly different ways. In 1961, Broun began a series of works in which he approached a random pedestrian in the city of Amsterdam and asked him or her for directions to a particular part of town. Often, the obliging passerby sketched the route on a piece of paper that Broun provided. With each improvised encounter, the artist gradually amassed a collection of small, spontaneously executed drawings that vary dramatically in draftsmanship but share recurring motifs like grid-like configurations signifying city blocks, directional arrows, and boldly drawn circles marking Broun's desired destination. He stamped each drawing with the words “this way broun,” a non-signature that authenticated the collaborative production process between Broun and an anonymous pedestrian.<sup>41</sup> Given that the artist had immigrated to Amsterdam in the late 1950s from the Dutch colony of Suriname and thus had presumably found himself in the position of asking the denizens of the colonial metropole to assist him in spatially

39. Maurice Blanchot, “Everyday Speech,” trans. Susan Hanson, *Yale French Studies*, no. 73 (Fall 1987), p. 14.

40. Cadere, “Presentation of a Work,” repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 22.

41. For a useful introduction to Broun's underexamined activities, see Antje von Graevenitz, “‘We Walk the Planet Earth’: The Artist as a Pedestrian in the Work of Stanley Broun,” trans. Ruth Koenig, *Dutch Art and Architecture Today* 1 (June 1977), pp. 2–11.

reorienting himself, Brouwn's seemingly anodyne ritual of soliciting directions takes on an unlikely ethico-political inflection.

The salient difference between the two artists' utilization of the urban everyday is not one's foregrounding of dialogic interaction and the other's quietistic detachment; rather, it is Brouwn's inclusion of the anonymous passerby in the *production* process and Cadere's inscription of the pedestrian public in the process of *reception*. Cadere's inscrutable appearance produces a momentary sense of strangeness, but it does not exactly disrupt the smooth functioning of urban public space. The strangeness that ripples through the crowded sidewalk is not the spectacular scene of pathology but the incongruity of being near the aesthetic without recognizing it as such. The strangeness of the object metonymically implicates Cadere himself as a *stranger*—an identity that is reinforced by the *tableau vivant* of a nomadic wanderer. In Georg Simmel's excellent definition, the stranger is a figure combining relations of distance and nearness:

The unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation is organized, in the phenomenon of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near. For, to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction. The stranger is an element of the group itself—an element whose membership involves both being outside it and confronting it.<sup>42</sup>

If Cadere's attempt to display his artwork independently of any institutional setting seems to intimate the proximity of an alien(ated) subject, a stranger—or, at the very least, a figure marked by alterity—then this points to a complicated interrelation between the artist's condition of geopolitical displacement and the (im)possibilities of a public or publicly available artwork. Cadere's solitary processions resonate with what Leah Dickerman has called, in relation to the pre-World War II Dada practices of Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara, "the public performance of privatism."<sup>43</sup> As Dickerman argues, the two exiled artists publicly enacted their isolation through the mediums of the manifesto and the poetic recital, exploiting

42. Georg Simmel, "The Stranger" (1908), in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971). I am indebted to Rosalyn Deutsche's citation of Simmel's text and to her elaboration of strangeness as an ethico-political category in an essay about the "immigrant instruments" of Krzysztof Wodiczko. The relationship between these objects and Cadere's is undoubtedly complex, and even a cursory attempt to differentiate their historical contexts would exceed the boundaries of a footnote. See Rosalyn Deutsche, "Sharing Strangeness: Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Aegis* and the Question of Hospitality," *Grey Room* 6 (Winter 2002), pp. 26–43. Deutsche's thinking on public urban space has informed much of my discussion here. See especially *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

43. Dickerman positions Dada's assault on the communicative functions of language within what she terms "an aggressive detachment from collectivity" whose nostalgic and memorial overtones signal the loss of traditional community structures. Leah Dickerman, "Dada's Solipsism," *Documents* 19 (Fall 2000), pp. 16–19. See also T. J. Demos, "Zurich Dada: The Aesthetics of Exile," in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), pp. 7–30.

these forms of verbal production to transgress the phonetic and semantic axes of language and hence the communicative functions of language itself. The air of privatism surrounding Cadere's walks is not the clamor of glossolalia; it is engendered through the autotelic silence of the nonrepresentational painterly sign, through its separation from the institutional locations that give it legibility, and by the intimate proximity of the object to Cadere's body. Holding the *barre* only recapitulates its *inaccessibility* by coding an unidentifiable object as a personal possession, much in the same way that walking expedites the withdrawal and removal of the object from every space and spectator to which it comes into proximity. This dialectic of approaching and retreating, of extending and withholding, epitomizes the paradox of Cadere's peripatetic exhibitions.

The suspicious stares and sidelong glances directed at Cadere and his *barre* could not supply more poignant evidence of the failure of abstraction's utopian aspirations to one day constitute a universal language capable of transcending linguistic and geopolitical differences. Through the metaphor of the painterly object as pilgrim's staff, Cadere reoriented abstraction's claims to universality from the anticipation of a transcendent internationalism to the ever more "universal" experience of cultural dislocation and displacement. Yet the recognition of the inapplicability of utopian ideals allows for the emergence of a radically different model of how an aesthetic object can function in the present. Benjamin Buchloh has suggested that the extent to which the utopian thinking that informed earlier avant-garde experiments in abstraction in the 1920s has waned can be gauged by the drastically different way postwar artists conceived of the relationship between painting and architecture. As an example, he cites the dramatic expansion of pictorial scale in the abstract paintings of Barnett Newman and Ellsworth Kelly:

One could venture as far as saying that it was precisely the ever increasing emphasis on scale, size, and dimension in Kelly's, Morris Louis', and Newman's work from the late 40's that reveals the deeply felt loss of an *actually given social space*, either as an architectural framework to correspond to the claims for autonomy in the spaces of the paintings themselves or in the sense of an audience with which these communicative structures could be enacted.<sup>44</sup>

What Cadere's portable painting foregrounds to an almost grotesquely comical degree is precisely *the loss of an actually given social space*, a loss that is objectified in the shrunken format of the *barre* and performatively reiterated in the physical labor of carrying it through the streets—an action that itself epitomizes transience. The close intertwining of artist and work forfeits any claims for painting's autonomy, suggesting that neither subject nor object is complete and entirely self-sufficient under their dual conditions of displacement. The inscription of Cadere's somatic presence into the visual field of painting/object recasts the public dimension of the work within the fleeting intersubjective relation between one's self and another, between near-

44. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Isa Genzken: The Fragment as Model," in *Isa Genzken*, exh. cat. (Chicago: University of Chicago, Renaissance Society, 1992), p. 136.

ness and distance, between sight and touch. The solitary, de-dramatized ritual of carrying the *barre* through the crowded streets of Paris suggests the paradoxical form that a collectively available artwork would assume when the actual conditions of publicness are ones in which subjects are spatially proximate but socially isolated.

The tension embodied in the *barre* between pictorial sign and functional device is present in the work of Daniel Buren, whose decision in 1967 to restrict his pictorial output to the simplified pattern of alternating white and colored vertical stripes resulted in a systematic analysis of the museum. By modifying the format and installation of his striped canvas/cloth material every time it was presented, and by letting the particularities of the location dictate its placement, Buren demonstrated that the "meaning" of the work was always suspended and interwoven with institutional and discursive frames. The striking incongruities between Cadere's *barres* and Buren's stripes—between, that is to say, a practice of nomadic dislocation and a discourse of site-specificity—become particularly pronounced in the context of an early exhibition by Buren that incorporated the act of walking. For the 1968 Salon de mai at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, Buren installed a fifty-four-by-fifteen-foot piece of green-and-white-striped paper inside the museum, where a customary wall label identified the artist. For a second component of the exhibition, Buren engaged the services of two men equipped with sandwich boards fitted with rectangular sheets of the same green-and-white-striped paper to circulate in the public vicinity of the museum. By inserting his (emblem of) reductivist painting into the sandwich-board placards—devices that ordinarily advertise disposable goods or coming attractions—Buren reversed the process of rarefication that the readymade striped paper underwent through its placement in the museum. The implication that even aesthetic objects will stoop to the most vulgar sales pitch magnifies the vernacular violence of the commodity form by affirming it as a universal principle from which not even art is exempt. In this way, Buren subjected art and advertisement to a double mortification. But the subdued stripe motif deflects our attention back onto the harness-like contraptions borne by these "human billboards," whose bodies are converted into a sign for something they did not produce<sup>45</sup> and whose labor requires their separation from the aes-

45. The following description of the piece is published on Buren's catalogue raisonné website: "Repeatedly, two men walk about Paris wearing on their back, by means of straps, a placard in two parts—a large one above their head and a little one at the level of their torso—covered with green and white striped paper. . . . Nothing else is visible, no title, no author's name: in addition, the men were ordered to respond, in case of interrogation by passers-by: 'We are wearing some placards covered with green and white vertical stripes.'" (catalogue.danielburen.com/fr/).

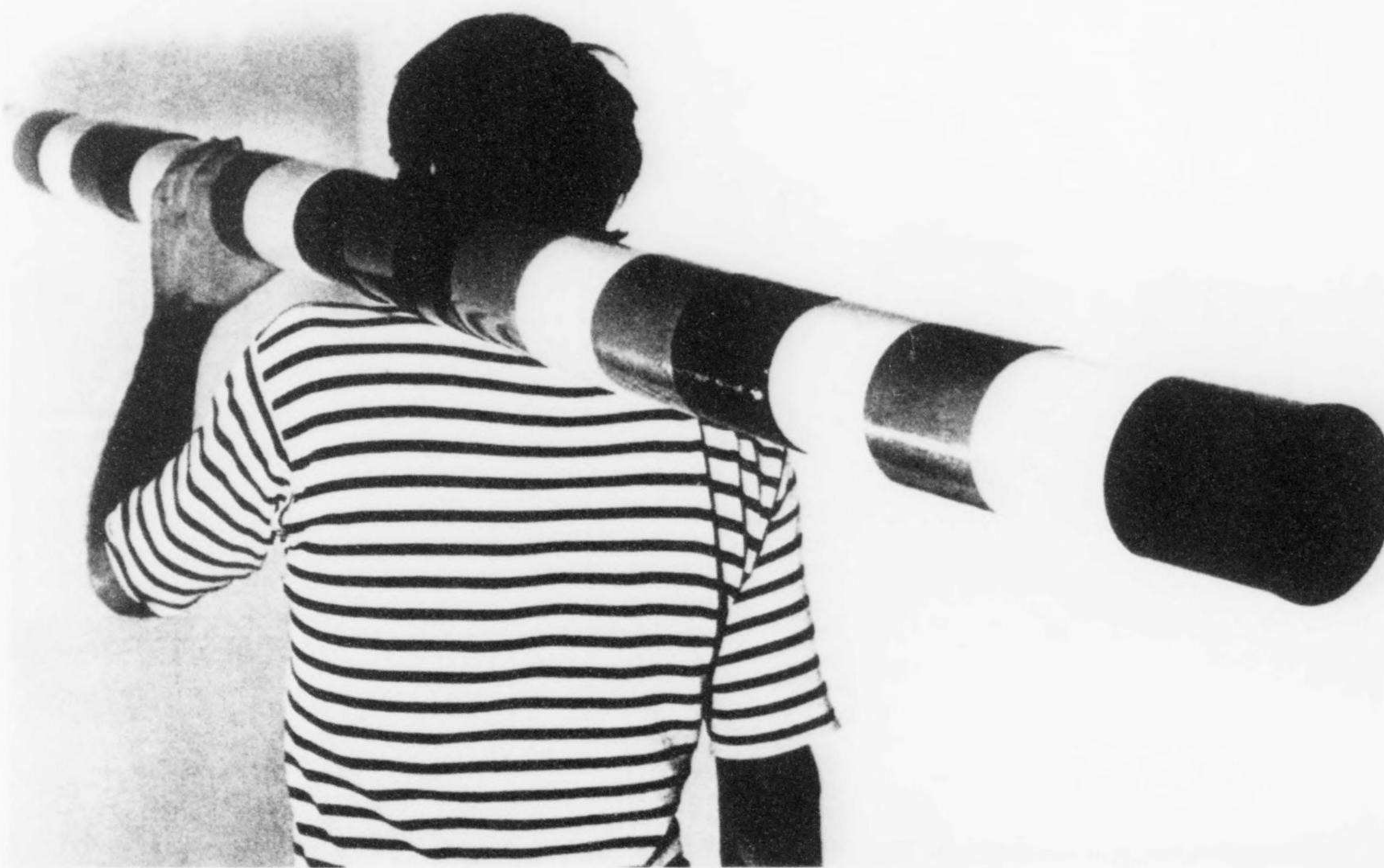


Daniel Buren.  
Hommes/Sandwichs.  
April 1968, Paris (detail).  
© DB-ADAGP Paris.

thetic epiphanies theoretically occurring inside the museum.<sup>46</sup> Exhibited in the shadow of the May '68 uprisings, Buren's gesture reverberates with profound cynicism about the viability of artistic practice when other, more direct means of intervention have been dismantled. But in the attempt to homeopathically devalorize the aesthetic, he precipitates a scene of actual degradation. The Salon de mai exhibit prefigured subsequent observations by Buren's critics that the repetitions of his iconic motif unavoidably function as a kind of corporate logo, making his post-Situationist interventions uncomfortably close to an advertising campaign. Here, Buren literally mounts the logo on the backs of subjects whose labor generates the extractable surplus value that makes the existence of works of art possible.

We do not know whether Cadere's habit of donning striped shirts was meant to coyly implicate Buren's signature striations in the realm of fashion or whether he sim-

46. By the year of Buren's exhibit at the Salon de mai, the sandwichman was already a somewhat obsolete advertising device. But as Susan Buck-Morss reminds us in a brilliant essay, the figures who performed the task were historically synonymous with the proletariat. "The sandwichman was a denigrated, yet familiar figure in Paris in the 1930s, one which would have entered the perceptive range of most city-dwellers. Human billboards, they advertised and publicized the products and events (cinemas, store sales) of bourgeois consumer culture. Yet they themselves, despite the uniforms they were loaned to give a respectable appearance, were associated closely with poverty. . . . The step from displaying sandwich board advertisements to the display of one's own body for sale seemed to them a small one." Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique*, no. 39 (Autumn 1986), pp. 109-10.



*Cadere with barre.* 1974.

Photograph by Bernard Borgeaud. Courtesy of the Estate of André Cadere and Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy.

ply wore the clothing to highlight the three-dimensionality of his own "painting." The mimetic transformation of the artwork into an advertisement and the uncanny figures of the *hommes-sandwichs* attest to a form of publicness that is different from, but no less alienated than, Cadere's solitary nomadism, because it tacitly aligns the social legibility of the subject in public space with the way his or her activities and appearances facilitate the circulation of sign-exchange values. Buren had acknowledged the transportability of the art object as an unavoidable "compromise" in its necessary passage from the studio—the site where it originates and languishes as a "non-entity"—to the public walls of museums and galleries where it gains official visibility. He wrote:

Work produced in this way [i.e., in the studio] makes its passage, *in order to exist*, from one refuge to another. It should therefore be portable, manipulable if possible, by whoever (except the artist himself) assumes the responsibility of removing it from its place of origin to its place of promotion. . . . Thus the studio is a place of multiple activities: production, storage, and, finally if all goes well, distribution. It is a kind of commercial depot.<sup>47</sup>

Buren's hopes for the eventualities of distribution ("if all goes well") are ruptured by the proscribed scenario of *the artist himself* literally transporting his works. Cadere's decision to assume responsibility for the distribution of an object in addition to its fabrication is clearly unthinkable in Buren's scenario because it complicates the division of labor between the purely creative domain of the artist and the menial sphere of the promoter of the products of that creativity, just as Cadere's mode of exhibiting threatens to de-differentiate artist and spectator. Buren's sardonic reference to the artist's studio as a "commercial depot" calls to mind the *mise-en-scène* of shipping crates, moving truck, picture postcards, and personnel that Marcel Broodthaers assembled for the opening of his fictitious *musée* in 1968. Cadere's stipulation that his objects be limited to a size and weight that he can physically carry portends a mode of distribution that is bereft of these devices of dissemination. It implies that the work's passage from "origin" to institutional "refuge" is beset with vicissitudes and indefinitely postponed. In lieu of Buren's inexorable arrival to the place of *promotion*, the form of Cadere's diminutive objects mimetically anticipates their abandonment to interminable *motion*.

#### *Colors for a Brick Wall*

Had Cadere been content to simply make his round wooden paintings and circulate more or less unobtrusively through the streets with them, his practice would have certainly paled in significance to the sophisticated dismantling of exhibition conventions that artists like Buren initiated and honed over the next

47. Daniel Buren, "The Function of the Studio," (1971), trans. Thomas Repensek, *October* 10 (Fall 1979), pp. 51–58.

decade. But just as the *barres* of wood disguise a lucid understanding of reductivist painterly idioms beneath a seeming credulity in cult and craft, the indifference to institutional framing conditions implied by Cadere's desultory walking and wandering is misleading. For it is precisely by showing his work in "one place after another"—to borrow Miwon Kwon's indispensable formulation of the demise of the site-specific paradigm—that will enable Cadere to intervene in the institutional framework in ways that would have been unthinkable to his peers.

What begins to emerge from an analysis of Cadere's walks is that his antipathy for Conceptual art was grounded in a more serious objection to its methods. One can readily surmise that any claims to democratize the art object by situating it within a spectrum of linguistic or architectural determinations would have appeared profoundly inadequate from the perspective of the language deficits and dislocation that determine the experiential conditions of being a "stranger." More likely still, Cadere's position as a stranger led him to recognize that there was nothing innately transgressive about the doctrinally self-reflexive project of critique promulgated by the neo-avant-garde; on the contrary, it entrenched their practices ever deeper behind the walls where Western European institutions housed their embarrassing riches of cultural production, and it sublimated more radical demands and desires that had historically been entwined with avant-garde visual practices. Cadere's project hinges on the way he deploys the trappings of his own unassimilated, or partially assimilated, cultural identity to claim a space of alterity and opposition to the institutional *acculturation* of "radical" art, devising a practice of critique that does not presuppose unlimited and universal access to artistic institutions.<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Weiner once wryly referred to the process of installing sculpture as "the intrusion of a fabricated object into space." But what does it mean for Cadere and his *barre* to literally intrude into institutional space, with "intrude" being defined as putting oneself "into a place or situation where one is unwelcome or uninvited"?

After declaring his portable paintings independent of any architectural supports and therefore equipped to be shown "everywhere," the artist appended a caveat: "Nevertheless, there are museums and galleries, particular places for looking at art. If we don't take them into consideration, our position is illusory."<sup>49</sup> This acknowledgment that "particular places for looking at art" have a singular power to determine the reception and the discursive status of objects prompts the recognition that Cadere's daily practice of carrying his *barre* is less a modus for disseminating his work than a purposeful way of dissociating and dislocating the abstract painterly objects from "museums and galleries." Habituating the *barres* to the spaces, scenarios, and object-relations of the everyday makes it possible to

48. "One must also point out that the artist comes from an eastern European country. This is a profoundly determining factor. Indeed, could we imagine, say, an American artist bringing his own work to an exhibition if he hadn't been invited to participate in it?" Cadere, *Présentation d'un travail/Utilisation d'un travail* (Hamburg: MTL, 1975), pp. 15–16, n. 10.

49. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 22.



*Cadere. Barre. No date.*

invest them with a subversive utilitarian capacity at the very moment they cross over into "particular places for looking at art" (as they inevitably would)—the capacity to produce and call attention to the very situation of their own ineligibility and disqualification. "My work does not have anything to do with the architecture, with the style, with the aesthetics of the gallery," Cadere explained to Lynda Morris, "but it does have to do with: 'What is a gallery?' A gallery is a structure of power. My work has a critical attitude against that power. So it is possible to look at what is the power of galleries from the position of my work. This is what I call the political in my work."<sup>50</sup>

What governs the dialectic between "Presentation/Utilization"—the two terms comprised in the title of Cadere's lecture—is the *barre*'s incessant shifting between locations and frameworks: circulating more or less freely in public space, where objects are presumed to be practical, fungible, and transient; or, alternately, entering "particular places of art" but without permission or consent. It is this splitting and polarizing of the performative proposition from the locational context within which it would find its validity that generates the force field of Cadere's actions and prevents the *barre* from ever resolving into a merely visual or merely functional object. While it had been something of a normative preoccupation to examine the changes that objects/materials undergo when they cross into and out of discursive and institutional boundaries, Cadere's project is distinguished by the introduction of a bodily presence into the equation. Placing himself at the threshold between public and institutional space alters the question concerning the eligibility of his work from an anonymous, invisible administrative decision to an embodied confrontation that radicalizes the disembodied, self-affirming paradigm of the performative in Conceptual art with somatic presence, speech, and argumentation. As Cadere stated: "I have to speak when the situation allows me to . . . Speaking *for* my activity becomes extremely important."<sup>51</sup>

Now, as Emile Benveniste reminds us in an exemplary passage, the outcome of a performative proposition is intricately bound up with the question of authority:

A performative utterance . . . has existence only as an act of authority. Now, acts of authority are first and always utterances made by those to whom the right to utter them belongs. This condition of validity, related to the person making the utterance and the circumstances of the utterance, must always be considered when one deals with the performative. . . . Anybody can shout in the public square, "I decree a general mobilization," and as it cannot be an *act* because the requisite authority is lacking, such an utterance is no more than *words*; it reduces itself to futile clamor, childishness, or lunacy.<sup>52</sup>

50. Cadere, "Talking with Lynda Morris," interview (March 1976) in *Peinture sans fin*, p. 31.

51. Cadere, "Letter to Yvon Lambert, 22 May 1978," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 21.

52. Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, Miami Linguistics Series, no. 8 (Miami: University of Miami Press), p. 236.

Benveniste's reference to "utterances made by those to whom the right to utter them belongs" goes straight to the problem of so-called "speech act" aesthetics. In the case of Robert Rauschenberg's notorious 1961 telegram bearing the message "This is a Portrait of Iris Clert if I Say So," it is on account of the sender's status as an artist—one invited by the Clert Gallery to contribute a work, no less—that Rauschenberg need only tack on his name to validate the proposition contained in the telegraph. One implication of Rauschenberg's work is that the legislating subjectivity of the artist enables a situation in which a performative proposition is always already authorized under the dubious auspices of creativity or caprice. A somewhat knottier meditation on the issue raised by Benveniste concerning authority and performativity can be found in Marcel Broodthaers's decision to inaugurate a fictitious art museum and assume the bureaucratic role of director.<sup>53</sup> The ingenuity of Broodthaers's gesture lies in the way it mobilizes the artist's performative capacities to renounce the delusion that the artist is a figure who still possesses any meaningful social agency under present historical conditions. The shift in the enunciative register from artist to depersonalized entity of "art institution" would become the explicit subject of one of Broodthaers's *Industrial Poems* from around this time—a rectangular, vacuum-sealed plaque-object embossed with an array of lettering, the most prominent of which spells out the word MUSEUM in bold capitals, thereby evoking the exterior nameplate/signage that one would encounter near the entrance to just such a destination. Oscillating between a poem, an entrance policy, and an administrative chain of command, the plaque begins by listing several very general plastic attributes of artworks—form, surface, volume—and then inexplicably dubs them "servile"; institutional personnel are associated with "hard edges"; beneath the word MUSEUM is embossed the sadistic interdiction *enfants non admis*. But what is the status of the performative proposition from which the requisite authority is *lacking*, and which is destined to "futile clamor, childishness or lunacy"?

Cadere stated his rationale for exhibiting his work without invitation—or even "against the will" of the location's owners—in this way:

The power of these institutions is first of all the power of selection. We are not in a free situation. If it is not possible to destroy their power, it is necessary to at least show it. . . . It must be noted that this way of showing the work is entirely peaceable and non-aggressive. A round *barre* of wood is materially a small thing, and does not prevent, in any way, an exhibition to take place. The fight takes place on an essential, ideological level, and aggression and violence are always employed by those who are powerful.<sup>54</sup>

53. Rachel Haidu incisively analyzes Broodthaers's performative strategies in *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964–1976* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).

54. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 34. English translation modified by Yve-Alain Bois.

As this last and slightly ominous-sounding remark suggests, the sight of the colored stick in exhibition spaces touched off myriad skirmishes and provoked a decidedly different reaction than the distracted stares that pedestrians directed at Cadere as they passed him on the street. Small and unobtrusive though it may be, the illegitimate addition of the *barre* is a poisoned gift, a "temporary loan" that was never requisitioned but has nonetheless installed itself. Its totemic and ludic characteristics provide an almost anthropological demonstration of how an un-aculturated object would appear in the antiseptic spaces of advanced curatorial practice by conjuring after-images of the primeval categories of experience (the magical, the ludic) for which institutionalized art serves as a disenchanting substitute. Mobilizing the disruptive effect of the supplement, Cadere's illegitimate submissions cause the institution's dedicated operations of "selecting," presenting, and preserving objects to lurch into reverse, inducing personnel to perform grotesquely literal acts of exclusion, removal and confiscation, the authoritarian overtones of which are only magnified by the childlike qualities of the *barre*.<sup>55</sup> But it is Cadere's bodily proximity to his *barres* of round wood that imbues the ritual of their institutional removal with a vaguely disquieting air, suggesting that the power to expel and exclude objects is perhaps never very far removed from a perceived right to exclude subjects or visitors. Indeed, one of the poignant aspects of Cadere's institutional critique—exemplified in the image of his being ushered out of the entrance to the Grand Palais—is that his thwarted attempts to place his *barres* into official exhibition spaces are recognizable as the very embodiment of the subject's desire to gain access to the cache of cultural artifacts.

Cadere evidently realized from the start that any truly radical contestation would have to invite the possibility of *not* being received or recognized as an artistic object/practice at all, *while at the same time* demonstrating perfect fluency with the coding systems and meta-languages of the advanced forms of artistic produc-

55. The most notorious of these incidents occurred in June 1973, when Michel Claura and René Denizot organized "A Painting Exhibition Reuniting Certain Painters Who Put Painting in Question," a group show in the posh apartment-like setting of the first-floor exhibition space at the Place Vendôme in Paris. Cadere deposited a *barre* of round wood on the occasion of the opening, only to return several days later to discover that the work had been removed from the exhibition space and placed in the nearby broom closet at the behest of one of the show's participating artists—Daniel Buren. In response to this casual act of censorship, Cadere distributed a text to friends and colleagues announcing that an exhibition of his work would be on display in the "Cagibi" at the Place Vendôme, directing them to the custodial *non-site* where the *barre* was sequestered. At the bottom of the announcement was a bulleted list describing the exhibition space: "The rest of the place was occupied by: some mirrors; some marble fireplaces; an exhibition of artists questioning the status of painting; marbleized doors and walls; crystal chandeliers; etc. . . ." Displacing the *barre* to the broom closet—in addition to denouncing Cadere—was undoubtedly meant as an implicit critique of Cadere's disavowed reliance on the strategy of the readymade by returning the *barre* to the realm of functional objects. Ironically, though, Cadere's canny decision to use the incident as the basis for an exhibition perfectly exemplifies the simultaneity of the *barre's* "Presentation/Utilization," making it perhaps the closest example of a site-specific exhibit of his work—a painting that questions certain exhibitions about painting, as it were. For details on the incident, see Bernard Marcelis in "Peinture sans Fin / Unlimited Painting," in *L'art conceptuel, une perspective* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1989), p. 143.

tion. Yet since it was generally assumed that "placing an object in a context where . . . spectators will be conditioned toward the expectancy of recognizing art objects"<sup>56</sup> was tantamount to declaring that the object was a work of art, he would have to sabotage the success of the performative every time he insinuated his *barres* into the legitimating ambience of "particular places for looking at art." Illegitimately displaying the cylindrically shaped pieces of painted wood alongside officially exhibited artworks is an example of what Jacques Rancière calls an "egalitarian assumption": a making "visible of what had no business being visible," which, by becoming visible, instigates an "argument and a demonstration."<sup>57</sup> Yet this is a deeply paradoxical gesture insofar as it stages its claim for equality with objects that are defined by their radical singularity and difference; it constitutes, in a sense, an impossible demand, since the act of positing the *barre's* status as a work of art would theoretically render the latter category sufficiently porous as to dissolve it altogether. By inserting his *barres* in official contexts, Cadere critiques the neo-avant-garde's *merely* discursive contestation of institutional power as unacceptably conservative, and logically calls for the abolition of art as a separate, specialized category; at the same time, the method of his intervention is that of repeatedly petitioning for the discursive legitimation that he protests as insufficiently egalitarian.

As Bernard Marcelis and others close to Cadere have pointed out, the artist's situation would eventually undergo a change—but only after several years of activity and only very gradually. He would cease to be a stranger. He would even be welcomed. When he did accept the invitation to officially exhibit his work, though, he typically demurred from presenting objects in the gallery, choosing instead to walk the streets with a *barre* of round wood, "at the whim of the different movements that only a city can trigger: encounters, curiosity, fatigue, boredom."

Even when they would be (eventually) displayed and disseminated through the proper channels, there is still something a little bit "erroneous" about Cadere's *barres*; their roundness never properly squaring with the "rectangular galler[ies], . . . rectangular magazine[s]," and "rectangular thought patterns" that Allan Kaprow once identified as art's spatial and cognitive frameworks.<sup>58</sup> Mounted on the wall "in the classic fashion" (which the artist fully allowed it could be),<sup>59</sup> the *barre* inhabits the venerated place accorded to painting, and withholds even a modicum of planarity, like a striped canvas that has rolled itself back up in refusal. Its meager linear vol-

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

57. Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 92.

58. Allan Kaprow, "The Shape of the Art Environment," *Artforum* 6, no. 10 (Summer 1968), reprinted in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley, p. 92.

59. Cadere was careful to point out that although his work was deliberately conceived to be exhibited in non-conventional spaces by virtue of not being dependent upon the traditional display space of the wall, "the very same work can be hung on a wall—including a gallery wall—and fixed or set-up in any number of ways in the places assigned to 'classical works.'" Cadere, "Letter to Yvon Lambert, June 7, 1978," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 22.



*Cadere being ejected from the Grand Palais after attempting to enter the opening of a Barnett Newman exhibition, 1972. Photograph by André Morain. Courtesy of the Estate of André Cadere and Galerie Hervé Bize, Nancy.*

ume protrudes awkwardly off the wall, soliciting our tactile senses before eventually abandoning us to stare at the ponderous and empty expanse of white wall. Set down on the floor like a would-be sculpture, the *barre* is every bit the dangerous supplement, its only conceivable tie to the vertical axis being its capacity to upset the spectator's uprightness in the way that Marcel Duchamp's *Trebuchet* (1917)—a coatrack Duchamp mischievously nailed to the floor of his apartment/studio—caused visitors to “stumble out of virtual space into actual space,” as Benjamin Buchloh once described it. When the *barre* is coaxed into the customary spatial assignment of a pictorial or sculptural object—that seems to be the moment when it is most decidedly *not* such an object.

If anything, it accommodates itself to the creases between wall and floor, to baseboards, doorjambs, and protruding ductwork, as if magnetically attracted to the functional nooks of architecture. Being placed without being implanted in display space is epitomized by the gesture of propping the work against the wall, in

the way one might momentarily rest a broom or a mop handle on a nearby surface. While this mode of display is one we tend to associate with demonstrations of elementary sculptural forces, the spindly lightness of the *barre* of round wood imbues its presence with the casual impermanence of things that we not only look at but also use; it appears to us the way an object might look on moving day.

Cadere concluded his "Presentation/Utilization" lecture with an anecdote on the ambivalence of acculturation. Not to be left out of the rampant *Cézannisme* of the moment, he recounted a rather different story about the man that returned to the rustic backdrop of Aix: "One last example will illuminate this point," Cadere began. "After Cézanne's death, one of his paintings was discovered patching up a hen coup. It was being used to keep the rain out. Cleaned and restored, it was presented to a museum. It is obvious that on the hen coup Cézanne's painting was in use, but it was not presented. I hope the work presented here acts in a very different manner."<sup>60</sup>

60. Cadere, "Presentation of a Work," repr. in Kismaric, *All Walks of Life*, p. 36.

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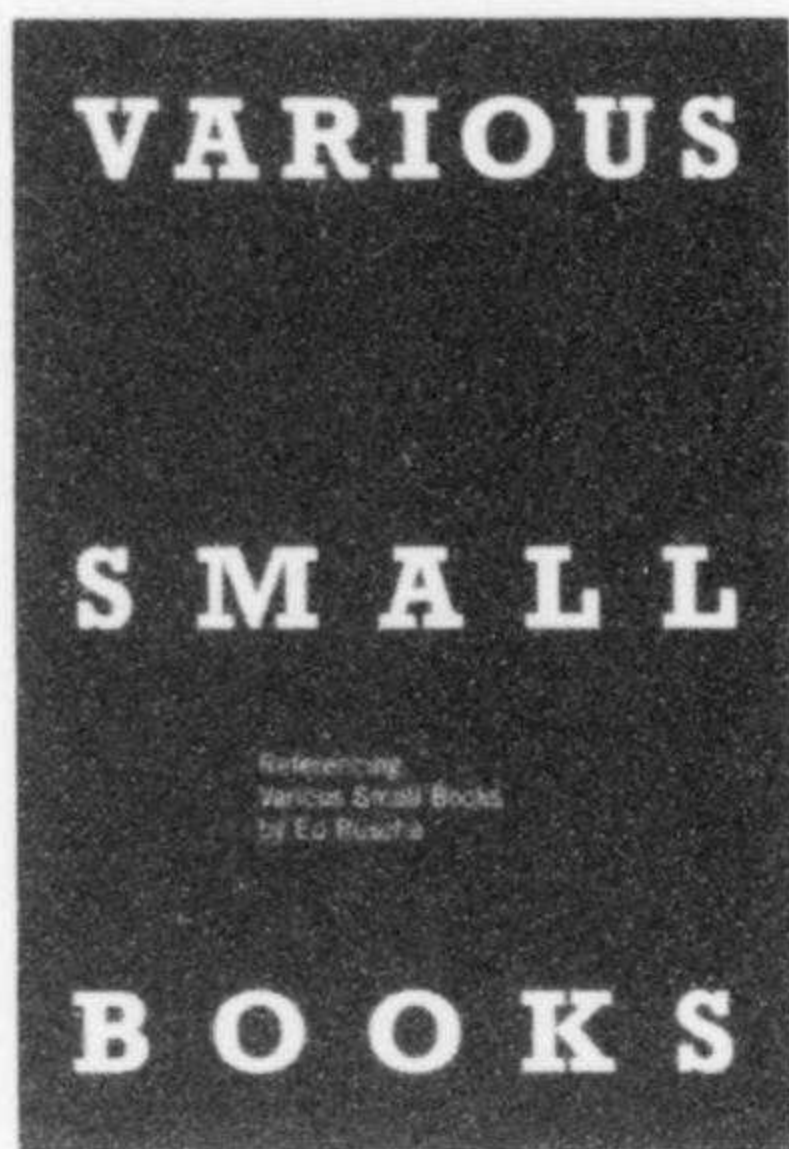
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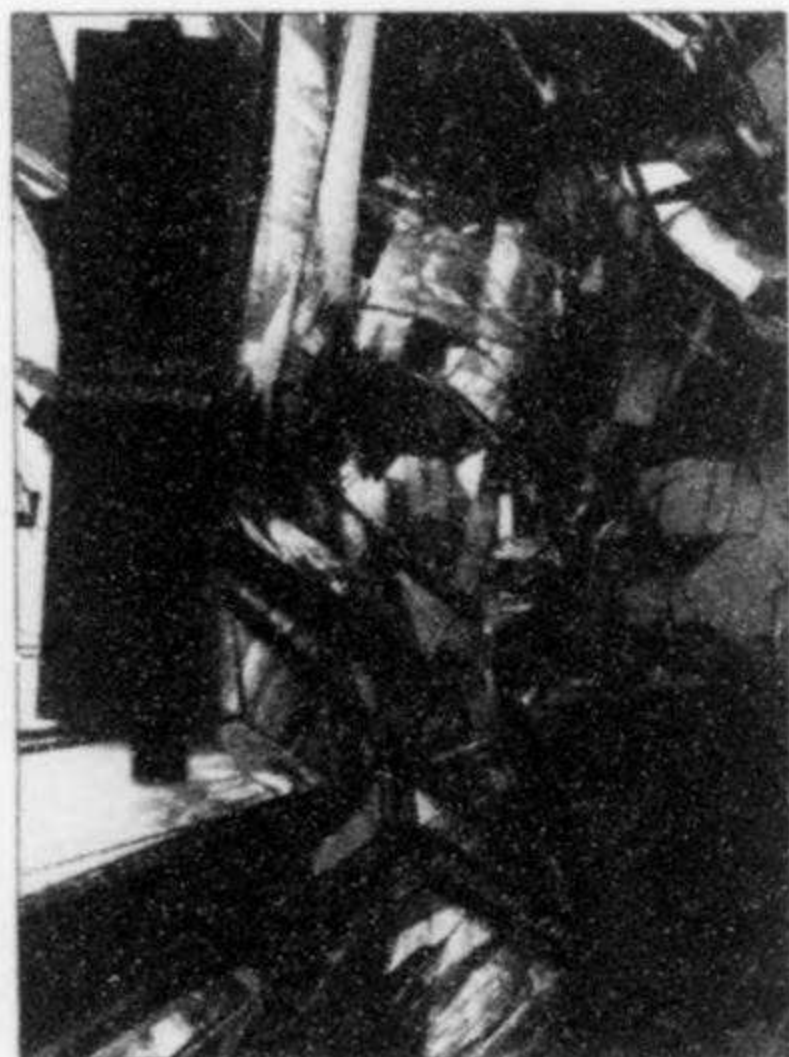


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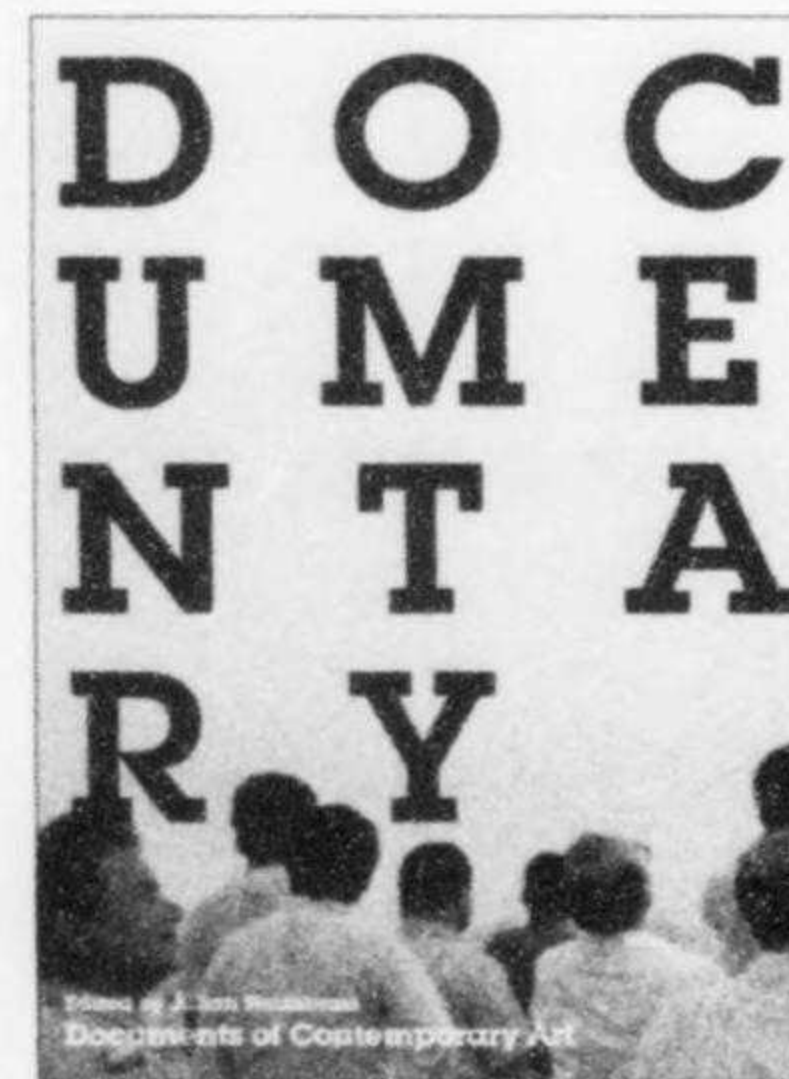


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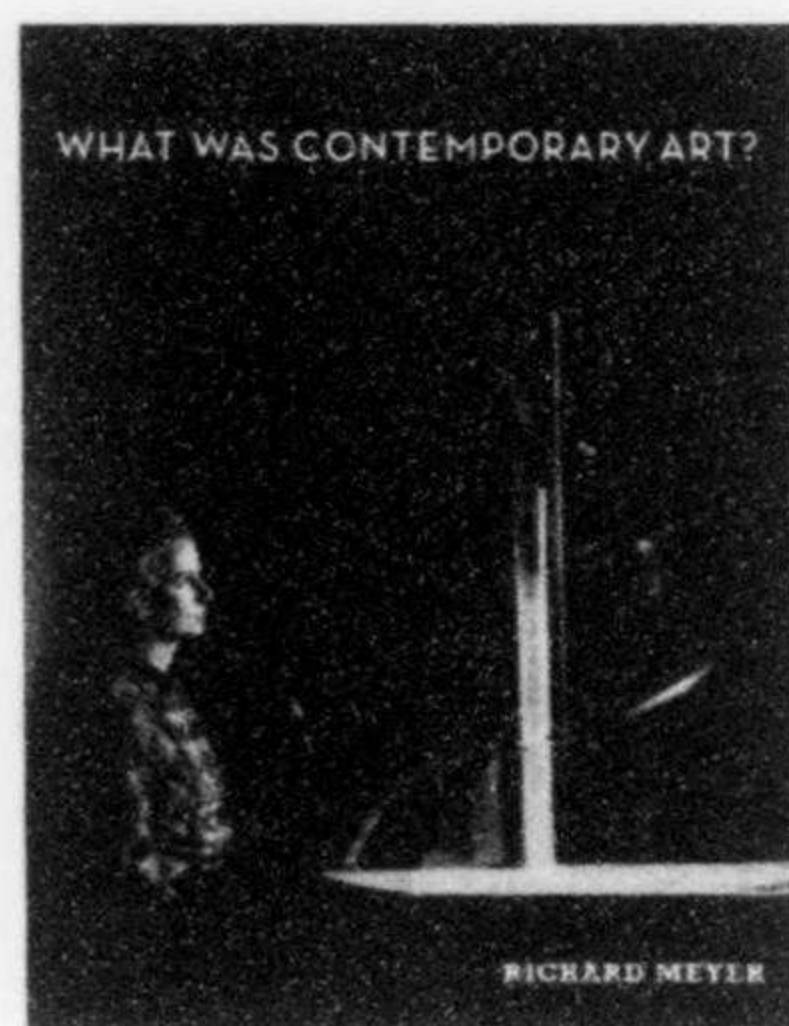
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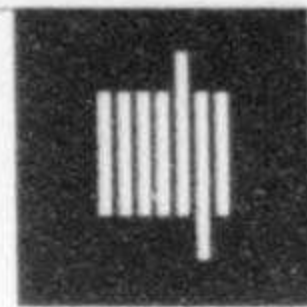


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- **ROMANCE (forthcoming 2013).** This *Mosaic* special issue engages the rich history of the word Romance, with essays on "the Romantics," the roman, romantic fiction, Romanticism, the state of the love story in literature and film, and the figure of the "romantic."
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