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Genealogy and Aesthetics: Art, History, Foucault

Dominic Paterson
Degree of Ph.D
University of Glasgow
Faculty of Arts
March 2006

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Abstract

My thesis combines poststructuralist and psychoanalytic approaches to investigate the actual and the possible relations between art history and philosophical / critical discourses. To do so it combines framing case-studies of key art works in Chapters One and Five with more concentratedly theoretical central Chapters. Although the work of Walter Benjamin and Slavoj Žižek strongly informs what I have done here, my primary theoretical orientation is towards Michel Foucault's "genealogical" approach to historiography.

My thesis is underpinned by two assumptions: first, that the historico-philosophical writings of Foucault can be usefully deployed in relation to a number of theoretical and critical problems facing art history in its interpretation of, and relation to, postmodern art practice; second, that Foucault's work has been inconsistently and inadequately addressed by both proponents and detractors of his way of writing history. I argue that close reading of Foucault's texts produces a more complex body of thought than art historical appropriations have allowed. It seems to me that it is the overdetermination of both positive and negative readings of Foucault by the particular stakes surrounding critical-theoretical approaches to art that has produced this situation. In particular, the role of aesthetics in Foucault's thought has been generally missed; on the one hand by those (such as Terry Eagleton) who argue that Foucault capitulates ethical and epistemological concerns into aesthetics in a characteristically postmodern and irresponsible way; on the other by those (such as Craig Owens) who see him as an

antidote to art history's bourgeois aestheticism. In contrast to both these interpretations I argue that Foucault's writing produces a complex interplay of epistemological, ethical and aesthetic levels. Specifically I contend that his epistemological insights are delivered via an "aesthetics of the text" that necessitates an appropriate "ethics of reading." This reading looks at the development of Foucault's thought as a whole, emphasising persistent themes (however radically reworked) rather than rupture. Central to my thesis is the claim that the truth value of Foucault's work is both expressed, and needs to be interpreted, in Nietzschean terms. To that extent, my aim is to evaluate the actual and potential "uses and abuses of Foucault for Art History."

The *potential* uses of Foucauldian principles are identified and enacted in two related case-studies of art historical / art critical problematics. The first centres on a reading of Cornelia Parker's 2003 work *The Distance (a kiss with string attached)*, an appropriation of Rodin's *Kiss* which makes an allusion to Marcel Duchamp. Analysis of this work relates it to problems of institutional and "curatorial" art, to Duchamp as an originary figure for strategies of appropriation, and to broader issues of interpretation and visual culture. The second case-study concerns two appropriations of historical figures by the American artist Matthew Barney. These appropriations work according to a process of excessive identification within a hermetic narrative structure, and my reading of them, by extending this identificatory and narrative logic, attempts to reconnect Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* – a work deemed too "spectacular" to support such a reading – to important critical perspectives on art, aesthetics, and theory. The thesis concludes, then, by offering an alternative paradigm of critical writing on art to that of the *October* group

– whose influential texts form the interpretative context of Chapters One and Two. This alternate paradigm is based in looking *back* to Benjamin and Foucault and reinterpreting their relation to art historical discourse, but it does so in order to look *forward* to new possibilities for engaging with cultural practice.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who have, in different ways, helped me during the course of my doctoral study. Firstly, I am enormously grateful to my family: my parents Iain and Wendy, my sister Katie, and her partner David Milway, who have individually and collectively been an invaluable source of support and encouragement. I am also indebted to my friends outwith academia, whose interest in the progress – but not the content! – of my thesis has been much appreciated.

My supervisor David Hopkins offered thoughtful and friendly advice throughout my research, and I am particularly grateful for the encouragement he gave me to develop the art historical parts of this thesis. I must also acknowledge the working atmosphere created by the staff of the History of Art Department at the University of Glasgow, all of whom welcomed me as both research student and colleague. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Debbie Lewer, Paul Stirton and Juliet Kinchin for their generosity and friendship. My most heartfelt thanks, however, go to three people who have been my main source of intellectual encouragement and friendship during my research: Dr. Alex Kennedy, Dr. Francis Halsall and (especially) Dr. Tina Fiske. Their warmth, humour, and generosity – as well as their intelligence – has been inspiring, and I am proud to know each of them.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to Dr Richard Hooker, under whose supervision I began my research. Though he is no longer an academic, he continues to be a much valued friend and interlocutor. He was admirably honest (and accurate) in describing the highs and lows of the Ph.D. process and I am glad to have eventually

justified his faith in me by completing this work. Whatever is of merit here I happily attribute to his influence; its many flaws bear witness to the absence of his sceptical and searching intellect.

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Exactly how do I write? I had, like many others, the perverted desire to adopt a system and a norm. It's true that I wrote before having the norm and the system, but so did everyone else.

Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*.

Introduction

We are hard at work trying to fulfill the impossible task of reading from the moment we are born until the moment we die. We struggle to read from the moment we wake in the morning until the moment we fall asleep at night, and what are our dreams but more lessons in the pain of the impossibility of reading, or rather in the pain of having no way whatsoever of knowing whether or not we may have, in our discursive wanderings and aberrancies stumbled by accident on the right reading? ... The failure to read takes place inexorably within the text itself. The reader must reenact this failure in his or her own reading. Getting it right always means getting it wrong. Each reader must repeat the error the text denounces and then commits again.

Hillis Miller, 'Reading Unreadability'.

What counts in the things said by man is not so much what they may have thought or the extent to which these things represent their thoughts, as that which systematizes them from the outset, thus making them thereafter endlessly accessible to new discourses and open to the task of transforming them.

Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*.

This thesis attempts to operate at the vital intersection between theoretical and historical perspectives developed to critique modernity – perspectives including Marxism, psychoanalysis, and poststructuralism – and artistic efforts to reflect on aspects of modernism. The most sophisticated practices emergent from both twentieth-century theory and twentieth-century art are committed to critique in the form of a historically based examination of the present and the conditions of its possibility. In the light of an increasingly a-historical and commodified artworld, where such examination is no longer *de rigueur*, it is necessary to ask whether such a critical project extends to our present or has run its course. Further, might it be that the models of critical thinking developed in the 1960s, and collectively – if misleadingly – termed poststructuralism, should now be put to one side? My answer is an emphatic “no.” I believe the theoretical sources I draw on here, and indeed the artistic examples I discuss, are of central importance and do indeed speak critically to our times, though their voices now sometimes *appear* as untimely, spectral, or outmoded.

Christian Thorne recently reworked the Benjaminian theme of a value particular to ideas, objects and images that are passing from newness into obsolescence; he did so under the excellent title of ‘The Revolutionary Energy of the Outmoded.’¹ If there is any “outmodedness” pertaining to the theoretical bases of my study, then I would suggest that it is in this sense only: poststructuralist thought may no longer be *modish*, it may increasingly be historicized in its turn – as *La Pensée 68*, for example – but it still has much energy to impart.² Likewise, if some theorists are now taking their distance from the way that, in the 1980s particularly, “the locus of aesthetic value [in art] shifted from

quality to criticality – from the ‘good’ to the ‘subversive’,” I wish to continue to affirm the value of such criticality in art, with the recognition that its mode of appearance may have changed.³ Criticality has to be found and made in interpretations, not only pointed to in works assumed to be inherently critical.

Chapter One functions in many ways as an introduction to this thesis, so I shall keep my remarks here brief, outlining the basic trajectory of my research project, and the way it is set out in the five chapters that follow. A number of initial assumptions informed the orientation of my research at its outset and, I think, remain implicit throughout its development. The first concerns art history as an interpretative practice: I consider art history (in the hands, at least, of its most critically aware practitioners) to be characterised by a committed attentiveness to its object(s).⁴ This commitment, which is present at the level of description as well as interpretation, is the lever for what may be termed, following Thomas Kuhn’s much-used phrase, disciplinary “paradigm shifts.”⁵ The attention to particularities of objects can necessitate new epistemologies – to describe the specificity of a postmodern art work, for example, may require new interpretative strategies. (The temporality of these moments of interpretation and description is oversimplified here when they are rendered as successive. It is axiomatic that there can be no description which is not already an interpretation).

This is the case because – here is my second key assumption – “art” as an object of historical enquiry has no ontological consistency. Developments in twentieth-century art in particular, which are now treated as unproblematically canonical (Duchamp, and

especially the readymade strategy, is exemplary here), fundamentally alter what comes under the aegis of the history of art, by contesting the authorial, material, temporal, and aesthetic bases of the *auratic* art work. The acceptance of such contestatory work within the story of art is not (only) a recuperation of radical critiques of art-as-institution, but also a historical realisation of the possibilities opened up by “art” as a cultural locus emergent as a bourgeois category in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This claim is not intended to be read in terms of a Conceptualist notion of art-as-idea as the dialectical conclusion or completion of art history, but simply registers the fact that it continues to be necessary and useful to relate such developments to a *history* of art. Further, it is not only that postmodern practices are elucidated by having their genealogies traced, but that they also work their way back into history and problematise any sense of a linear historical development. Again, Duchamp is exemplary here, with his reception in post-war art formative of our current sense of his role as an originary figure.

With these precepts established, the third presumption to which I was committed from the outset was a positive view of the productive possibilities in reading certain theoretical texts from *within* art history. This I conceive as a reciprocal process in which modes of thinking developed to deal with the particularities of aesthetically rich and complex objects (and especially images), and with the historical development of an object – art – without ontological consistency, are hybridised with those which have sought to politicise historical thought and put it to use in the present. Specifically I intended to use Michel Foucault’s work to achieve such a hybrid form. At a conference on *Rediscovering Aesthetics* (University College Cork, 9th-11th July 2004) John Hyman argued that

whatever philosophers and art historians “can offer one another we can do only by remaining firmly on our own patch.”⁶ This division of labour, unsurprisingly, turns out to mean a philosophical elucidation of ideas grounding or influencing art history, and an art historical clarification of the particularity of cultural objects. Such a division seems unsatisfactory to me, not only in preserving a questionable metaphysical authority and notion of philosophical *foundation*, but also in its negation of art history’s ability to go beyond a connoisseurly, perhaps even fetishistic, fixation on the individuality of objects. Art history can, I believe, aspire to much more than this narrow particularism, and the relationship between art history and philosophy / theory need not be shaped only in such a mould.

Nonetheless, at the outset of this project I felt the need for some kind of methodological grounding or, at the very least some theoretical orientation, and this need motivated my initial interest in post-structuralist theory, and especially Foucault. The frequency with which texts relating to my initial research interests (museums, Duchamp, postmodern historiography) quoted and *deferred to* Foucault’s texts, and the authoritative and far-reaching character of the ideas cited, suggested to me that there was great potential for grounding and orientating my own work through them. In fact, when I turned to a close reading of Foucault’s texts themselves, I found that they were resistant to such a usage, at least immediately. As my research developed I became convinced that these writings, to which art historians of a critical bent so often referred and deferred, are themselves deeply implicated in the kinds of issues that they are asked to resolve. Rather than this leading to deadlock, I argue that it offers an opportunity to think through the applicability

of the work of Foucault and others. This is my fourth assumption, and leads on to the fifth. The oft-proclaimed transformation of art history by theory has not occurred, in the sense that it remains marginal to the discipline as it is habitually practised, and yet for art historians taught in the wake of postmodernism, poststructuralism and the New Art History – that is, those for whom these have been received as relative orthodoxies – the possibility exists to read their key texts without overdetermining them in negative dependency on what they are supposed to overthrow. Most importantly, this means being able to think Foucault outwith an overdetermined historicism to which he was often conscripted as, essentially, source material for elucidating “context.” Rather than abandoning work like Foucault’s, or historicizing it in turn in a supposed poststructuralist moment in the late twentieth century, I wondered if it might not be available for a second reception, and that for art history this might be akin to the “second trauma which makes the trauma,” to paraphrase Freud.

My final key assumption is that a relation to such works which treats them as candidates to displace the theoretical / philosophical foundations of art history, as I initially hoped, is already on the wrong track. Whether or not we consider art history as *fundamentally* Kantian in its basis it is by no means the case that poststructuralist theory can take on this foundational role. I take issue with the treatment of such theory – often registered in the deferential use of citation – as a surrogate or placeholder for metaphysical truth. My objection, somewhat counter-intuitively, is not to a self-contradictory presentation of Foucault as truthfully announcing the impossibility of truth (the immanent critique often made of poststructuralism), but rather to the uncritical deference to texts whose efficacy,

as I see it, depends on active engagement. Art history's own professional attentiveness provides a possible analogy or model here for a different strategy of reading.

It is undoubtedly the case that immanent critique can be usefully deployed – as Slavoj Žižek has amply shown in his accounts of the workings of ideology, accounts which, like Foucauldian “archaeology,” operate with an almost formalist emphasis on describing the surface character of what is actually done and said (and thus may not be so far removed from art historical thought).⁷ But immanent critique is also problematic insofar as it tends to privilege the internal consistency of texts across constative and performative levels (in mimesis) and obscure the active processes of reading which animate them.⁸ Hayden White contends that the establishment of historical objectivity by the repression of characteristically literary / fictive tropes masked the persistence of such tropes within historical discourse.⁹ If both modes outlined above – the mimetic / self-consistent, and the open / reader-animated – are both in the end aesthetic modes (corresponding to Modernist and postmodernist paradigms respectively) it needs to be emphasised that they make different uses of the aesthetic – harnessing it either to self-reference / self-enclosure or to active interpretation. My contention, and my last assumption, then, is that it is an *aesthetically* as well as critically aware reading of Foucault's work that can do justice to its potential as a counter-discourse. This means that the primary orientation towards it will be affective, committed, and arising from particular problems, rather than objective, foundational and differentially generalised. My thesis attempts to relate this approach to specific problems in the history of art, to justify its relevance as a reading of Foucault in contrast to existing readings, and finally, to demonstrate its usefulness in an art historical

interpretation formed in the light of this approach, which constitutes my fifth and final chapter.

Foucault himself objected, in a thoroughly and properly Nietzschean fashion, to what he termed *commentary*, by which he meant an attitude that “questions discourse as to what it says and intended to say, ... tries to uncover that deeper meaning of speech that enables it to achieve an identity with itself, supposedly nearer to its essential truth; in other words, in stating what has been said, one has to restate what has never been said.”¹⁰ Foucault noted that commentary assumes an excess of signified over signifier, a non-symbolized “remainder” which becomes the locus of the essential. But “commentary” simultaneously entertains the thought of a “superabundance proper to the signifier” which enables it to bring out the hitherto silent content of the remainder.¹¹ The problem with this structure, in Foucault’s analysis, is that “by opening up the possibility of commentary, this double plethora dooms us to an endless task that nothing can limit...”¹² Foucault here values the endlessness of interpretation (as commentary) negatively, but he develops elsewhere an alternate, labyrinthine conception of language’s infinity, which, rather than a fruitless search *for* identity, becomes a flight from and beyond it. In his books of the 1960s Foucault proposed an alternate conception of interpretation, which he termed archaeology.¹³ Whereas traditionally “to speak about the thought of others, to try to say what they have said” involved analyzing the signified and its remainder, Foucault argued for the possibility of an interpretation “that would evade the fate of commentary by supposing no remainder, nothing in excess of what has been said, but only the fact of its

historical appearance.”¹⁴ It is this that his archaeological writings attempted in relation to madness, medical knowledge, reason, and discourse itself.

Two problems for any appropriation of Foucault for art history emerge here. Firstly, there is his deep-seated hostility to the presumed unity of the author and his works, connected to his passionate commitment to anonymity, to not being known.¹⁵ Second is the restriction he makes to analysis of the what has been said, or enunciated; a mode of interpretation that Foucault rightly and polemically contrasts with the two traditional methodologies of the history of ideas: an “aesthetic” methodology, involving either diachronic diffusion of “geneses, filiations, kinships, influences,” or sociocultural *Weltanschauung*; or a psychological methodology, denying “contents” by a method that has since become “a sort of ‘psychoanalysis’ of thought.”¹⁶ Thus many of the methodological tools of art history as a mode of Humanist discourse seemed inapplicable from the outset, and in fact to be the target of Foucault’s critique. As much was surmised by some of Foucault’s most committed readers, including Craig Owens, for whom poststructuralism was a weapon to be turned against ‘Art History as a Humanist Discipline’ – a discipline that he perceived as fundamentally implicated in critiques of representation and of power.¹⁷ I take issue with Owens’s reading of Foucault in what follows, not out of loyalty to art history or its disciplinary boundaries, but because I do not think it is ultimately satisfactory as an interpretation of Foucault. I trace this realization to two experiences: 1) reading (with very inadequate French) a short text in *Dits et écrits* (Foucault’s complete works) in which he reviews Panofsky’s *Studies in Iconology* and *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* with nothing but good-natured

respect and admiration (and not the scathing anti-Humanist antagonism I had expected); 2) reading Foucault's *The Order of Things* and finding – eventually – a quite different sense of the famous introductory chapter on *Las Meninas* than that set out by Owens.¹⁸ Through these and other experiences of reading it became apparent that there is not a straightforward zero-sum game to be played out between Foucault and art history; it is not “winner takes all.” Foucault’s work speaks primarily to the strategic use of history for the understanding and transformation of the present. Its strategy is often aesthetic both in its treatment of its subject-matter and in its mode of address to the reader. With this in mind, it seemed that rather than recruiting him for an(other) attack on art history’s Kantian / bourgeois / logocentric “foundations” it would be more useful, and appropriate to use Foucault to develop a critical approach to the immanent problems effecting art history in the present.

These problems were, as one might expect in the post-millennial atmosphere of the early 2000s, frequently conveyed with a rather jaded sense of “crisis” in the journal articles which surveyed the field of critical practice. Raphael Rubinstein, in ‘A Quiet Crisis,’ suggested that the problem was the lack of an inclination to engage in the serious critical business of making value judgements.¹⁹ If this is an over-used battle cry, given that crises in taste are endemic since modernism at least,²⁰ other writers tried to pin the contemporary situation down more specifically. J. J. Charlesworth, for instance, attempted in an article in *Art Monthly*, to get to the bottom of what he termed ‘The Dysfunction of Criticism.’²¹ In the 70s, he argues, criticism was still conceived as a vital part of the process of art making. That vital evaluative role has atrophied, Charlesworth

claims, because of the replacement of political commitment in criticism with a professionalized “low octane ethics”²² producing an “obsessive deference to the primacy of the work.”²³ In part he attributes this state of affairs to a postmodernist relativism, and to what he characterizes as the stagnation and institutionalization of identity politics, which he thinks *had been* contestatory in the 1970s and 80s. With contest off the agenda, the critical vacuum is filled by “a privatized, belletristic form of art writing, concerned with the author’s subjective impressions or immediate sentiments, relentlessly affirmative in tone, and passively accepting whatever the art world decides to offer for its attention.”²⁴ It would doubtless not be too difficult to bring to mind examples of art writing which deserve this characterization. But Charlesworth is doubly wrong, I think, in seeing subjectivity or affect as the negation of criticism, and in laying the blame for critical atrophy at the door of an exhausted identity politics. Identity remains political, artists continue to address this, poststructuralist critique continues to speak to our experience of subjectivity, and interventions in identity, whether artistic or critical continue to be problematic and ambiguous, and thus in need of constant and renewed thought *in these terms*. The notion that critical modes need to be constantly changed or replaced to stave off stagnation is itself a symptom of the commodification of intellectual as well as artistic practice. Innovations are required when critical modes are no longer adequate to the salient features of the objects to which they pay attention: I do not think this can be said of poststructuralist theory or other manifestations of so-called “identity politics” (itself a loaded designation: as though identity isn’t always political, or politics not always implicated in identity).

Charlesworth's argument ignores the fact that artistic practices and theoretical interventions of the past 40 years have profoundly problematized the artist-object-viewer relation. To take just one example, performative artistic practices such as those of Gina Pane or Marina Abramovic forced the issue of spectatorial desire and involvement to the fore in a way that made detached critical commentary impossible, or at least irrelevant.²⁵ The question of how to critically engage, and to appropriately historicize, such practices seems to me to be still open – and excitingly so. Matthew Barney's work, the subject of my fifth chapter, may well have been received by "relentlessly affirmative" or belletristic "art writing," but it seems to me still worthy of sustained attention, because it *can* open onto important issues (including those of the status of art-critical writing).

An even more pessimistic reading of the atrophy of criticism was apparent in 2002's *October* roundtable discussion on the subject. Seeing, not unjustifiably, a shift in the balance of power between gallerists, museums and critics, with the latter no longer mediating between market values on the one hand and aesthetic judgements on the other, the panel appeared lost as to how to redress this situation. As George Baker put it, the question is how to find an "outside" to the art world, which is no longer meant to have one, in a situation in which "there is almost immediate affirmation of almost any practice you can imagine."²⁶ But affirmation as well as denunciation has always been part of the dynamic of good criticism – and, for that matter, of good theorizing. It is here that the *October* group, whose work has been at the centre of critical thinking on avant-gardist art and culture seems at a loss as to how to respond: what in, and of, the present can they affirm?

I suggest that by embracing forms of identification at work in the aesthetics of certain texts and artworks a productive revaluation of both critical / theoretical and artistic / contestatory projects can take place. Such a revaluation has in fact been central to the most insightful critique of the modern period. Walter Benjamin, for instance, sought to give art the not inconsiderable task of undoing alienation, and a restoration of bodily sensibility (aesthetics) by affirmatively *passing through* new technologies. The crucial point is that Benjamin's call for such a restoration entails a fundamental change in the meanings of "art" and "aesthetics"; *contra* their determinations in post-Kantian modernity, *politicized* art "would cease to be art as we know it" whilst aesthetics would itself be "transformed indeed, redeemed, so that, ironically (or dialectically), it would describe the field in which the antidote to fascism is deployed as a political response."²⁷ As Terry Eagleton quite rightly asserts, the aesthetic is too important to be abandoned to capitalist utilization in advertising and other spectacularised forms.²⁸ Although in what follows I contest Eagleton's reading of Foucault, I endorse this valuation of the aesthetic. Here is one crucial locus for critical thinking on art to work with *art's own* innovations, in order to see the historical and theoretical lessons to be gained from aesthetic practices not entirely given over to Capital.

Though I had initially intended to write a monographic work on Foucault, I decided that this would not best serve either his work or my intentions, because it is precisely in the notion that some *use* might be made of what he wrote that "commentary" can be avoided. Using Foucault's thought means, as he conceptualized his own use of Nietzsche, making

it “groan and protest” by being treated as material for something new. In this context that means using Foucault with others, for instance Jacques Derrida, who are not natural companions. There are, in any case, many (too many) existing commentaries on Foucault, and they tend, perhaps inevitably, to be marked by the disparity between the urgency and intensity of Foucault’s prose and the force of his ideas, and the demands of academic notions of exegetical “good form.” In contrast, this thesis detects and mirrors an excessive dimension to Foucault’s writing, which is amenable to analysis in aesthetic terms, and to deployment in aesthetic contexts. Consequently, the chapters of this thesis dealing with Foucault are framed by case studies which establish such contexts: the first, though retrospectively informed by Foucault, emerges from issues which preceded (and precipitated) my interest in him; the second, which concludes this work, suggests some future directions for the application and extension of this research. All are “author-ised” by my understanding of Foucault’s work (amongst other sources) as vindicating the utilisation of textual strategies which push historical writing into contact with what might be normally thought of as its ‘others’ – the fictive, the associative, and the identificatory – whilst retaining its essential commitment to explanation. To this extent it takes from deconstruction the principle of deriving tropes from the objects of analysis and, in a sense, making them burgeon or hypertrophy, letting them form and deform the text. This is a matter, as Derrida writes *a propos* Hillis Miller, of *finding* “what [one] *invents*” and understanding theory as “itself part of the fiction ... that thus comprises it at the very moment it allows one to comprehend it in turn.”²⁹ Implication in fiction, then, but not without comprehension.

The form of this thesis is roughly linear and chronological (in terms of my own interests), but it is also conceived as three relatively autonomous sections, in which related problems are cast in different lights. To use a photographic metaphor, these sections could be thought of as separate "exposures," which might be superimposed or projected on each other as much as placed in order. The convergences and discontinuities between them, for example when similar figures connote somewhat different meanings, have been left understated in most cases; both in deference to the reader's attentiveness, and to, in what is a well-worn but still valuable strategy, resist a closure on imaginative engagement and interpretation, at least within the confines of a historically grounded form that is not (only) fictive. Roughly speaking, the topoi of the three sections are: Duchamp and originality (Chapters One and Two), Foucault and aesthetics (Chapters Three and Four), and Matthew Barney and cinema (Chapter Five). Affinities exist between the sections, so that issues of appropriation are to the fore in Chapters One and Five; of identification and loss of self in Two, Four and Five; of "vertigo" in Two and Three, and so on. In her inestimable study of the 'Arcades Project,' Susan Buck-Morss argues that Benjamin's theory of the "dreamworld" of modernity draws on elements "bound together more by literary than logical means."³⁰ Yet this is not to say that literary modes displace historical insights, because "the quality of historical experience that Benjamin was trying to capture in this theoretical montage is conveyed, and it is vital to his project. Moreover ... the theory is unique in its approach to modern society, because it takes mass culture seriously not merely as the source of the phantasmagoria of false consciousness, but as the source of collective energy to overcome it."³¹ It is here that an important, exemplary, model for an affirmative approach to culture starts to take shape.

* * * *

Georges Bataille dreamed of writing a book consisting only of prefaces, a work that would promise what was to come and not ever disappoint or betray its promise by filling in what ought to remain incomplete and open. Walter Benjamin dreamed of writing, or rather compiling, a book consisting entirely of quotations, a montage of fragments that would reveal to the reader something of the past and/in something of the present. If it is not too pretentious to say so (*it is, but...*) this thesis is haunted by something of each of these dreams – the inaugural and the re-collected, the introduction and the citation. The death of Jacques Derrida in 2004 brought home the *generational* passing of a certain moment in critical thought. But, for me, it is this thought that continues to inaugurate the possibility of criticising the present, of framing and directing thought; it still functions “epigraphically” in that sense, and is perhaps now more than ever amenable to new recollections and juxtapositions. Though death is a frequent motif in what follows, I do not think there is yet a need to write epitaph for critical theory.

In order to advance these arguments the thesis is organised into the following chapters:

Chapter One

To establish the parameters of my reading of Foucault, and my sense of the problematics to which genealogy can usefully respond, I begin by setting out a case study of Cornelia Parker’s 2003 work *The Distance (a kiss with string attached)*. *The Distance*, which

received scant critical attention, makes reference to Duchamp both in its *modus operandi* (appropriation) and in a specific allusion to his 1942 “mile of string” installation. Pursuing the thread of this allusion serves to open up questions in pertaining to the interpretation of the Duchampian tradition, and key texts here are Thierry de Duve’s *Kant After Duchamp*, which presents Duchamp as the knowing and subversive manipulator of art history, and Amelia Jones’s *Postmodernism and the Engendering of Marcel Duchamp*, which questions the paradoxical originary patriarchal status given to Duchamp by postmodern critics. Interestingly both books are explicitly Foucauldian in methodological approach, but rather than interrogating the validity of their claims to this position, I use them to address what I take to be a more fundamental problem – that of the inevitably fictive and desire-driven basis of art historical narrative. Parker’s work leads on to discussion of other instances of work that is either Duchampian or “curatorial” in mode, and raises the question of what art history’s function is in relation to such work, which is profoundly “at home” in the museum.

Chapter Two

This issue is pushed further in an extension of the case study of *The Distance*, in which the chain of associations derived from it is pushed further, to come full circle to a conclusion which suggests theoretical short-comings in the predominant models of image and reflexivity derived from a psychoanalytic framework. The key problematic here centres on questions of reification and reanimation, fetishism (in a jointly Marxian and Freudian sense, as theorised by Meike Bal and Laura Mulvey, and photography, death and the image (theorised by Craig Owens and Victor Burgin). Finally, by following these

linked theorisations, I address *Vertigo*, Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 masterpiece, drawing on feminist and Lacanian interpretations to elucidate its radical implications for conceptualising identification and the copy. Taking Slavoj Žižek's synthesis of Lacanian and Hegelian-Marxist insights as the most sophisticated such interpretation available, I try to demonstrate that the models of "screening" and identification often used in visual theory disavow the most radical implications of their own insight, a half measure that, in Žižek's terms at least, is politically regressive and philosophically problematic. Crucially, this account also serves to open up an important critical response to the paradoxical originary status attributed to Duchamp as "author function." In so doing I establish the parameters which determine my own interpretation of Foucault from within art history, and the limits which I see his own writing as constrained (and enabled) by.

Chapter Three

Beginning with alternate models for a positively "vertiginous" aesthetic, I address what I perceive to be a problem in the critical and historical interpretation of art works which mine (or mime) various institutional procedures. I suggest that the typical deployment of Foucauldian thought in this field is too limited. Texts like Philip Fisher's *Making and Effacing Art*, or Douglas Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruins* invoke Foucault in support of a basically historicist analysis of modernity's epistemological procedures as materialised in the museum. Other writers, including Hal Foster, use Foucault's concepts of archaeology and discourse to critique Modernist assumptions about autonomy and authorship. This type of analysis is useful, but misses more troublesome aspects of Foucault's history writing, including his insistence that his works amount to "fictions" that he didn't write

himself, and related questions of interpretation which emerge within their explicitly Nietzschean framework. This chapter thus begins a close reading of Foucault, in the light of the discoveries of chapter one. My approach is to focus on sections in Foucault that refer explicitly to art works and to recontextualise them in terms of the aesthetics of the text rather than as positive claims about the ontology of art. In other words, I show that Foucault's writings on art (which constitute only a small proportion of his output), are not outlines of a putative Foucauldian art history, but serve rhetorical functions within his texts. Analysis of the passages on art in *these* terms does begin to throw light on the characteristics of Foucault's writing of history, and I argue that the art work is in fact *in its mobile historicity* one paradigm for Foucault's concept of historicity *per se*. In other words, *contra* the standard interpretation of Foucault's notion of history as essentially static and synchronic, I emphasise that, particularly in *The Order of Things* and *Madness and Civilisation*, it is dynamic and not conventionally historicist. Central here are analyses of Foucault's writing on Velázquez's *Las Meninas*.

Chapter Four

Whilst my discussion of *Las Meninas* enables identification of what I see as the hegemonic but misconceived art historical use of Foucault, a close reading of Foucault's essay on the hyper-realist painter Gérard Fromanger establishes an alternative paradigm, focusing on the excessive qualities of his text, and its resonance with other examples of "laudatory exchange" between Foucault and other French intellectuals, including Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Klossowski, Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille. It investigates the intertwining of epistemological, ethical and aesthetic registers in a series of texts written

by Foucault on other (primarily literary) French intellectuals. These essays are characterised by their affirmative and identificatory tone, as well as by the recurrence of tropes that I read as deeply connected to Foucault's project in general: the labyrinthine quality of language, anonymity, limit and transgression, the spectral or ghost-like. These themes are *formative* of Foucault's texts insofar as they drive the ethics of his relation to others' thought and provide the aesthetic which shapes his expression of that relation. (This is an aspect of the idea of "writing the self" which is normally only associated with "later" – i.e. 1980s – Foucault). These themes are in fact shared by the literary figures Foucault writes on, and the culture of laudatory exchange in French culture has been analysed in Eleanor Kaufman's book *The Delirium of Praise* which is itself heavily indebted to Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship*. I use both these authors to analyse the form and context of Foucault's writing and to assess the extent to which his own concept of history as fiction is to be understood in this light. I see such writers, and the mode of laudatory exchange, as providing Foucault with a countervailing force in his *œuvre* to the authoritative narrative voice in which his histories are delivered. Via Derrida's analysis of *acolyte* and *anacoluthon* (that is, *he who follows* and the rhetorical figure of *that which does not follow*) as not opposed, I address the question of the aesthetic and ethical problems of philosophical indebtedness. Here I pursue a closely intertwined set of texts – circling around Nietzsche and Montaigne – to establish a model of philosophical relationality that involves precisely the themes of the labyrinth, the selfless, the spectral established earlier, and also bearing on the aesthetics and ethics of epistemological appropriation. I analyse Foucault's two essays on Nietzsche: *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx*, which foregrounds and privileges Nietzschean interpretation; and *Nietzsche, Genealogy*,

History, which (very) closely aligns Foucault's notion of *genealogy* with that developed in *The Genealogy of Morals* and elsewhere. I also analyse Foucault's more passing references to Nietzsche, both in interviews, and throughout his early texts (especially *Madness and Civilization*, *The Order of Things*, and *The Birth of the Clinic*). The main thrust of my argument here is: to show the importance of Nietzsche for Foucault; to show how this is registered in his texts, and to what effect; to address the problematic status of Nietzsche as originary (an echo of the problem identified in Chapter One in relation to Duchamp); to relate two fundamental characteristics of Nietzsche's thought to Foucault's – namely, the radical emphasis on interpretation over facticity, and the fictive production of authorial status.

Chapters Two-Four having established via close reading a more complex and nuanced (as well as more problematic) context for Foucauldian thought, I now attempt a “genealogy” of my own in relation to an artwork not generally thought of in such terms...

Chapter Five (Conclusion)

Here I make a second art historical case study, but this time one that looks forward to emerging modes of art production, rather than back to the museal fate of modernism. I attempt a genealogical critique of Matthew Barney's *Cremaster* films which draws on the identificatory logic internal to the films' esoteric narrative. Here I take advantage of Barney's appropriation of identification with Harry Houdini to move beyond the fantasy of the *Cremaster* narrative, whilst retaining an openly fictive approach to my analysis of the relation between Houdini's “real” escapology and Barney's imaginary escapism. In

this chapter the *Octoberist* orientation of the first chapter is displaced by the interpretative model established via Foucault, and I point to an alternative model of critique.³² My thesis thus reaches a somewhat open conclusion, having displaced one reading of Foucault, and one problematic of critical art history with another which I see as potentially more productive, but also perhaps more risky. The questions which remain open include: to what extent can art history performatively draw attention to its narrative and fictive procedures whilst retaining its explanatory historical force? To what extent can Foucauldian thought survive outwith the context of its initial appropriation into cultural discourse? How much freedom have we in articulating the genealogies of our present to critical effect?

- ¹ Christian Thorne, 'The Revolutionary Energy of the Outmoded,' *October*, No. 104, (Spring 2003), 97-118.
- ² Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, trans. Mary S. Cattani, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) – entitled *La Pensée 68* in the original French. Also Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox & J.M. Harding, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
- ³ David Joselit, 'An Allegory of Criticism,' *October*, No. 103, (Winter 2003), 3.
- ⁴ Here I mean to connote Riegl's concept of "attentiveness" as a quality pertaining to seventeenth-century Dutch art. In Riegl's sense, this means an interpellatory quality in the paintings which necessitates and solicits "the spectator's imaginative supplementation." Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, (London: Yale University Press, 1982), 94.
- ⁵ Kuhn, from 'Postscript – 1969' to *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, in Harrison & Wood, (eds.) *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 936-940.
- ⁶ Hyman's remarks are taken from the edited transcript of a roundtable discussion. I thank Dr Francis Halsall for sharing the transcript with me.
- ⁷ Žižek, S. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 11-53.
- ⁸ See de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
- ⁹ On this point White's contribution to Mitchell, (ed.) *The Politics of Interpretation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) is very useful.
- ¹⁰ Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan, (London: Routledge, 1989), xv.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, xvi.
- ¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹³ Given its fullest, though not necessarily clearest exposition in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan, (London: Routledge, 1989).
- ¹⁴ *The Birth of the Clinic*, op. cit., xvii.
- ¹⁵ As can be seen in the much anthologised essay 'What is an Author?' which is also included in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Two*, ed. J. D. Faubion, (London: Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 205-222.
- ¹⁶ *The Birth of the Clinic*, xvii.
- ¹⁷ Owens, 'Representation, Appropriation and Power,' in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, (London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 88-113.
- ¹⁸ *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. from the French, (London: Routledge, 1989).
- ¹⁹ Rubinstein, 'A Quiet Crisis,' *Art in America*, Vol. 91, No. 3, (March 2003), 39-43.
- ²⁰ On this theme Paul de Man's notion that crisis and criticism are coextensive – an argument developed in relation to Mallarmé's *Crise de Vers* is very useful. 'Criticism and Crisis,' in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 3-19.
- ²¹ 'The Dysfunction of Criticism,' *Art Monthly*, (Sept., 2003), 2-4.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ²⁵ Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language*, (Milan: Skira, 2000).
- ²⁶ Baker, in Baker, G., Buchloh, B. D. H. et al 'Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism,' *October*, No. 100 (Spring 2002), 210. Benjamin Buchloh put it even more starkly: "you don't need criticism for an investment structure, you need experts." *Ibid.*, 203.
- ²⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered,' *October* Vol. 62 (Autumn, 1992), 5.
- ²⁸ Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
- ²⁹ Derrida, 'Le Parjure,' *Perhaps: Storytelling and Lying*, in Derrida, *Without Alibi*, ed. & trans. P. Kamuf, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 167.

³⁰ Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (London: MIT Press, 1991), 253.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "Octoberism" is the name Amelia Jones has given to the body of thought (and the *modus operandi*) established by the key figures around the journal *October*. I am very grateful to her for sharing her forthcoming review of Foster et al's *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*.

CHAPTER ONE: With Strings Attached...

1

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.... In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.... Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.

Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

It now takes about six hours to fly to New York City from Western Europe. It took Marcel Duchamp nine days to make the same journey onboard the *Rochambeau* when he first crossed the Atlantic in June 1915. The technologically driven collapse of distance has been one signal transformation of the world in the twentieth century, with high-speed transport dramatically shortening travelling times, and with electronic communication further rendering physical remoteness no barrier to co-presence (at least in the virtual). These transformations have, of course, impacted profoundly upon culture, and the consequences have been widely discussed. In particular, the way that historical memory is deleteriously impacted by the virtualised space and temporal immediacy of spectacle is a common theme of cultural and political critique, and has been, in fact, since Walter

Benjamin's classic essays of the late 1920s and 1930s, at least.¹ The question of how to rally an anamnesiac relation to the past pertains not only to historical *art works*, but also to theories such as Benjamin's, which in some ways now appear historically distant themselves. Linear models of history seem inadequate to deal with the actual historicity of such critical moments, but whether they can be brought to bear in the present without effacing the specificity of their conditions of emergence, is a vexed question. It is the aim of this chapter to address this issue in relation to the artistic sphere, though the critical and political (and their interconnection) hopefully remain in view, at least by implication, throughout.²

Just as Duchamp himself was to continue to move between the Old World and the New throughout his life, so the reception of his artistic influence has made many transatlantic crossings. This reception, ricocheting between figures such as Richard Hamilton in Britain, Jasper Johns in New York, Arman and Tinguely in France (and innumerable others ever since the 1950s), has occurred at varying speeds and "with all kinds of delays," but it is no exaggeration to say that Duchamp is *the* art historical figure indispensable for the understanding of contemporary art.³ This chapter sets out to explore the implications of this exemplary status: both to question it as a problematic framework for reading Duchamp, and to attempt to displace the model of recuperation and regression with which Peter Bürger influentially conceptualised the relations between "historical" and "neo-" avant-gardes.⁴ The aim is to acknowledge the ambiguous status of neo-avant-garde strategies at the beginning of the 21st century, whilst not foreclosing the possibility that they might continue to offer spaces of critique which can be exploited by critically

committed writing. It does so by deriving a set of key terms and tropes from an art work which exemplifies both the ambiguity and possibility inherent in contemporary art; one which, moreover, explicitly references Duchamp.

The last time I made the journey to New York City my flight left from Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport. Schiphol is a perfect example of the homogeneity of airport design - its Duty-Free zones, cafés, and fast-food outlets would be familiar to any modern air traveller. Schiphol does have one claim to fame however; an innovation in bathroom fixtures that was quickly adapted by John F. Kennedy airport in New York too. The male visitor to its bathrooms finds, as he prepares to take a leak, that the urinals have a life-size fly etched into their basins (Fig. 1). This fly is located at the optimum point for the safe and hygienic conducting of urine into the drain at the bottom of the urinal, and thus for the avoidance of the all-too-familiar pools of piss that tend to accumulate below urinals in public toilets. Of course, the pragmatic rationale of the design doesn't go through your mind when you are actually engaged in the task of having a pee at Schiphol airport. You don't even know that "your" urinal isn't the only one with a fly in it. What you do, and studies have been done to prove it, is take aim at the fly, and thus do Schiphol's cleaning staff a favour without even knowing it.

When Marcel Duchamp, under the pseudonym of Richard Mutt, introduced the urinal into the array of readymade objects that he enunciated as art, his so-called *Fountain* was rejected, "suppressed" even, by the jury of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. Duchamp was a member of the Independents' Committee, and, apart from offering his

opinion that "Mutt's" urinal should be accepted, he did little to prevent them refusing it and thereby revealing that their commitment to independence was really in bad faith.⁵

The urinal itself was removed from its concealed location behind a partition in the exhibition space, and after making a brief appearance to be photographed by Alfred Steiglitz at 291 (Fig. 2), disappeared. Whether Duchamp himself was the author of this disappearing act is unclear, but there is little doubt that he was the author of its reappearance in the art historical record via the second Number of the journal *The Blind Man*, where the justification for its artistic merit was couched in tellingly European terms: "America has given nothing except for its bridges and its plumbing."⁶

Thierry de Duve, playing on Duchamp's own description of *The Bride Stripped Bare...* as a "delay" rather than a painting, sees *Fountain* as a "delay in porcelain," accurately naming the temporality of the work, both in Duchamp's *œuvre*, and in art history, where it has always arrived late, *with all kinds of delays*.⁷ The reappearances of urinals, or fountains, both by *or of* Marcel Duchamp, and more recently by a number of other artists participating in the ongoing elaboration of the Duchampian are well documented. To mention just some examples: in Duchamp's own work there is Steiglitz's photograph in *The Blind Man*, the *Boîtes-en-valise* (which included a miniature urinal place alongside the bachelors' realm in *The Bride Stripped Bare...*), the urinal purchased by Sidney Janis and signed by Duchamp in 1950, and the Arturo Schwarz commissioned replica readymades of 1964 (Figs. 3-5); "fountains" have also been made by Bruce Nauman, Sherrie Levine, and Robert Gober.⁸ These artistic repetitions of *Fountain* trace a history of its changing valence as critical strategy. Nauman's photographic self-portrait *as*

fountain (Fig. 6) and the related neon text work *The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain* (Fig. 7) imply that the artist is himself a commodified, reified object, thus extending the critical thrust of the readymade against the aesthetic *object* in the direction of the aesthetic *subject*.⁹ Levine's work opens up the gendered basis of the aesthetic subject-object relation, and uses appropriation to question the propriety of art.¹⁰ With Goyer's work in particular (for example, *Three Urinals*, Fig. 8) it is clear that among the meanings of his appropriation of Duchamp's "original" readymade, alongside its reference to the proliferation or serialisation of urinals in art, is a playful, though not flippant, nod to the fact that such appropriations of appropriators, or of acts of appropriation, are rivalrous even if they comment, in an act of critical repetition, on artistic rivalry itself. In other words, with Goyer the story of art remains to an extent a pissing contest, even amongst the postmodern appropriators.

Rosalind Krauss addressed urination as an instance of rivalrous erotics in the final chapter of her book *The Optical Unconscious*.¹¹ Drawing on Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where the primitive phallic rivalry with nature registered in the impulse to pee on the fire is read as "an enjoyment of masculine potency in homosexual rivalry," Krauss argues that the relationship between Jackson Pollock's drip works and Warhol's *Oxidation Paintings* (Fig. 9) is a (sublimated) instance of the recurrence of this enjoyment in the form of "mimetic rivalry."¹² The dynamics of mimetic rivalry in the literary field have been extensively explored by René Girard, who theorises that all desires are triangulated - mediated by a relationship to an Other - and thus that no desire can be *original*. Whereas Krauss employs this theory to hypothesise that Pollock's

“ontological sickness” – his uncertainty of being – was rooted in mimetic rivalry (with his brothers, with Picasso), it is possible to argue that it bears as much on art historical writing as it does on art historical relationships of influence. This can be discerned in Girard’s description of triangulation as a narrative structure, in which the desiring subject is joined to its desired object via a mediator. The will to *be oneself* and occupy the position of narrative agent is borrowed from a mediating Other, and “the mediator is imaginary but not the mediation.”¹³ Thus a real structure is derived from a fictive base. Likewise, “the impulse toward the object is primarily an impulse toward the mediator,” the imaginary rival for possession of the object.¹⁴ This is obscured in philosophical and aesthetic discourse because it gives the lie to the “illusion of autonomy to which modern man is passionately devoted.”¹⁵ The mediator as rival determines, by his relative distance or proximity, the strength of “metaphysical” (triangulated) desire, and as the object cannot be adequate to this desire, possession of it leads only to disappointment. Once acquired, “the object has suddenly been suddenly desecrated by possession and reduced to its objective qualities.”¹⁶

Though mimetic rivalry persuades us of the mediator’s “divinity,” the notion of a truly original and self-possessed Other is a fiction; the mediator himself may end up “copying the copy of his own desire . . . model-disciple and a disciple-model. Each imitates the other while claiming that his own desire is prior and previous.”¹⁷ Duchamp was not unaware of the potential for “men [to] become gods in the eyes of each other” (to borrow one of Girard’s chapter titles); in his catalogue entry on Picasso for the collection of the Société Anonyme he wrote: “Every now and again the world looks for an individual on

whom to rely blindly – such worship is comparable to a religious appeal and goes beyond reasoning. Thousands today in quest of supernatural aesthetic emotion turn to Picasso, who never lets them down.”¹⁸ Ironically, it is precisely Duchamp’s uncannily comprehensive occupation of the roles associated with the creation and dissemination of art – artist, dealer, advisor to collectors, competition judge, publisher, cataloguer, librarian, slide-show lecturer (in his later years) – that makes *him* into such an object of attention in post-war art, and which leads to more and more of his life becoming thought of as part of his work – including obscure catalogue entries!

If all desire is mediated via “rivalrous identification,” then all desire is the copy of a copy. The ontological doubt which recognition of this structure must produce should surely be all the more sharply felt when the copied copy *announces itself as such*. This is the case with Duchamp, and particularly with the Readymades, yet his non-original status is rarely acknowledged *within* art historical narrative, perhaps because this would undermine the drive to possess (in knowledge) the truth of his works. The reintroduction of desire into the dynamic of appropriation, exemplified here by Gober’s urinals, complements the recent acknowledgement of such problematic themes in theory too: Amelia Jones’s writing on Duchamp being the best example.¹⁹ Jones sees Duchamp as a counter-part to the figure of Pollock as re-read as “originary trope for the performative subject of postmodernism.”²⁰ Duchamp, on the other hand, is often thought as the “father” of the Jobsonian line of artists “within the codes of an anti-masculinist and, in the U.S. context, potentially (if subtextually) homosexual artistic subjectivity.”²¹ Though this validates a radical re-working of art history’s normative model in one sense, it relies on it

in another: "Identifying Duchamp as "ancestor-hero" is a means of authorizing him, the ancestral line he "fathers," and, by extension, the interpreter (as knowing the "true meaning" both of Duchamp and of postmodernism)." ²² But how is art history to narrate works structured by mimetic rivalry, to acknowledge that appropriation is not *in itself* a critique of such rivalry, as well as taking to heart the lesson that narrative too is structured by a desire that is not original, for objects that are not original? In attempting to propose one answer to this question I take as a privileged example an artwork that operates through a reference to Duchamp, and that has been considered in only one (limited) register by art historians so far: Cornelia Parker's 2003 work *The Distance (a kiss with string attached)* (Fig. 10).

Parker's work was made for Tate Britain's 2003 triennial *Days Like These*, which featured, supposedly, a representative selection of British art at the start of the new millennium. ²³ *The Distance* was given a prime location, in the Tate's Octagon, and attracted publicity thanks to its status as the nearest thing to "yBa" scandal-mongering in *Days Like These*. Its media-friendliness included, in a muted echo of attacks on works by Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, an act of vandalism in which the string was cut from it – an event that gave it a second life in terms of newsworthiness. ²⁴ *The Distance* is (initially at least) an incredibly simple work, and the interpretation panel which accompanied it during *Days Like These* provides a very concise description of its material basis. I reproduce it in full here to indicate exactly how the work was presented to the public by *Days Like These*:

The Distance (a kiss with string attached) 2003

marble and string

Courtesy the Artist

Cornelia Parker often works with 'found' or pre-existing objects which she modifies or transforms in some way. For this piece she has worked with Tate Conservators, and has wrapped a mile of string around Rodin's sculpture 'The Kiss', one of the most famous works in Tate's collection. Parker is interested in the possibility of taking something familiar or clichéd and changing it in an attempt to trigger new layers of meaning. Here, the simple gesture of wrapping string around this iconic work creates a sinister yet elegiac effect. Binding the two embracing lovers together in this way acknowledges the complexity of desire, which can be suffocating as well as passionate.

The work also reflects the artist's interest in Dada and Surrealism and in Marcel Duchamp who, in 1942, contributed to a Surrealist exhibition by criss-crossing a mile of string through the gallery space in order to impede visitors access to the work.

Auguste Rodin 1840-1917

The Kiss 1901-4

Pentelican Marble

Tate: Purchased with assistance from the National Art Collections Fund and

Public Contributions.

In its 200 or so words this text rehearses several ways of describing (and accrediting) *The Distance*, and more or less exhausts the themes that can be found in the critical responses to it – yet, patently, it hardly says the first thing about it. It is the lack of critical commentary on *The Distance* which I want to address, and redress, here. The responses to *The Distance* were mostly journalistic, and all are perfunctory. For *Art Monthly*'s Martin Herbert, it was a safe piece of “broadsheet-baiting” that paid too much homage to the “over-mentioned overlord” Duchamp.²⁵ Perhaps it was the ongoing debates in art critical circles during 2003 about the “crisis of criticism” that got in the way of serious engagement with Parker’s work, perhaps it was simply deemed uninteresting. For my part, I find it an interesting challenge: if this work is so generic, so unremarkable as to provoke no art historical response, might it not exemplify, in a telling way, the conditions under which art is currently being made, and provide a challenge to art history’s ability to respond to these conditions, to connect a work like this to its genealogy? The context of its display, in an exhibition explicitly claiming to survey contemporary art in Britain, certainly invites an attempt to respond to that challenge. Most importantly, *The Distance* asks, in its seemingly unremarkable binding of Rodin and Duchamp, what it means to make such connections, an interpretative action which is, after all, one of art history’s

most basic operations. What desires, what tensions, what knots operate in the articulations that underpin so much art historical narrative?

The majority of the reaction to Parker's work came in the daily press. The most outspoken commentator was James Fenton in the *Guardian*, for whom *The Distance* was an insult to Rodin and to gallery-goers. Perceiving himself, as an art lover, to be the target of Parker's "destructive fantasies" – fantasies born, he asserts, of what he assumes to be her arrogance, vacuousness and self-importance – he drew the conclusion that the Tate's acquiescence to Parker's whims was a sign that they too "despise" the sculpture, which Fenton argues should not have been subjected to such undignified treatment.²⁶ This outburst may represent a certain type of response to *The Distance*, but is, for all its bluster, essentially a red-herring – neither opponents nor supporters of Parker's work seemed *really* bothered by it; the arguments it might obviously provoke either way are by now so well rehearsed that no-one can muster more than a generic response. Yet, as already indicated, it is the work's very generic status that gives it its putative interest. With its Duchampian "assisted" (or perhaps "reciprocal") readymade mode of creation, its institutional context, its media-friendliness, its existence after the span of the exhibition only as photographic image, even its suitability for "public access" (witness its use for children's education programmes, Figs. 11, 12)²⁷, *The Distance* can be read as a particularly canny staging of the conventions of art making and viewing as they stand at the beginning of the millennium, and as an apt articulation of the historicity of a specific strategy of making with the poetics of (interpretative) desire. To address the historical

dimension I will refer to some relevant details of Duchamp's interest in Rodin, and also revisit Adorno's 'Valéry Proust Museum' amongst other *museal* reflections.

Firstly, the life story of Rodin's sculpture (Fig. 13). The Tate's *Kiss* is one of three full-scale versions made during Rodin's lifetime, and represents Paolo and Francesca, tragic adulterous lovers who feature in Dante's *Inferno* and who first appeared in Rodin's *œuvre* amongst the bronze reliefs of *The Gates of Hell*. The particular version owned by the Tate is a copy of the first marble *Kiss*, commissioned by Edward Warren for his Sussex home in 1900. Spending most of the next 50 years in Warren's stable block, it was briefly lent to Lewes Town Hall during WWI, but was deemed offensive by the locals, and potentially morally harmful to the troops billeted there. After a spell under tarpaulin it was sent back to the stables and was only rescued from that fate in the 1950s, when a public appeal raised funds for its acquisition. Its eroticism was still deemed strong enough in 1957 for its planned use in a London Underground poster to be vetoed.²⁸ A hit with the public, the work has had less luck with critics. Leo Steinberg has argued strongly that to recover Rodin for modernism means removing from the equation works like *The Kiss*, which he argues, are in no real way by Rodin's hand. Having signed them, Rodin is legally – but not aesthetically – responsible, for them Steinberg argues.²⁹

There are over 300 extant versions of *The Kiss*, not all authorized by Rodin, and they vary in technical quality.³⁰ For Rosalind Krauss, it is precisely works such as this which undermine the confident claims of modernist authorship in relation to Rodin. In 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde' she compares the notion of the original in Rodin's

sculpture with the notion of the “original” photographic print, which Benjamin had pointed out in the Artwork essay was a contradiction in terms.³¹ Krauss identifies a far-reaching “ethos of reproduction” in Rodin’s working practices; from the manufacture of the plasters that constitute the “core” of his *œuvre*, to the foundry casting in which he took no part.³² This ethos was, however, covered over by another: the cult of Rodin’s genius, encouraged by the artist himself, supported in print by Rainer Maria Rilke, and publicised by the “hand-of-God” and “progenitor” imagery implicit in the work, and reinforced in photographic portraits.³³ Thus, though at the level of technical reproducibility there is not so much to choose between Rodin and Duchamp, in terms of the explicit acknowledgement of the fact, there is a profound difference.

The strongest expression of support for the uniqueness of Rodin’s genius comes from Rilke, whose critical distance was somewhat compromised by his presence in Rodin’s studio as secretary between September 1905 and May 1906, a fact registered in his deferential use of *maître* to address the sculptor. (Rilke was eventually sacked for replying to Rodin’s personal correspondence, i.e. for speaking on his behalf. Here we encounter a cautionary figure of the writer on art who abandons distance in favour of intimacy...). The profound connection assumed to exist between the uniqueness of the creative subject and the autonomy of the aesthetic object is clear in Rilke’s prose. The religious context which had formerly provided a sympathetic context for sculpture was no longer viable, but though sculpture had could now assume an independent existence:

“it must be distinguished from the other things, the familiar things, which anyone could grasp hold of. Somehow it must become untouchable, sacrosanct, isolated from chance and from time, in which it rises, solitary and wonderful as the face of a clairvoyant. It must retain its own sure place, where no caprice had set it, and be introduced into the silent duration of space, and into its great laws.”³⁴

This material instantiation of this space, evoked in ideal terms by Rilke, is the museum. As Ariella Azoulay has argued, once art was “faced with an accelerating loss of place” it

“denied this loss by establishing certain unique places in which the drama of the loss of aura (which makes it possible for the mourning to continue) is re-enacted anew with each viewing. When the work of art loses its anchor in any particular place and does not need a place of presence to be, museums – clear spaces, retrospective exhibitions, art galleries – are constituted as its proper place.”³⁵

Thus a symbiotic relationship between the autonomous artwork as original and the museum as shrine to the loss of that auratic originality is established. Thus there is a mutual dependency between display space and dislocated art work. Rodin’s work is distinct from “familiar things” according to Rilke because it is “untouchable.” For Benjamin, this is one definition of aura: “the unique phenomena of a distance, however close it may be.”³⁶ It is the closure of this *distance*, effected by technical reproduction’s

shift from cult/ritual value to “exhibition” value, which is the cause for Benjamin’s optimism about the utopian dimension of the loss of art’s aura. Rilke’s reading proceeds in the opposite direction, with the museum as the context for the preservation of aura.

The autonomy enabled by the museum and hymned by Rilke is coextensive with the sense of *wholeness* he believes is achieved in Rodin’s sculptures: beyond any mere “circumstantial” considerations, for instance the physical incompleteness of a body missing limbs, “one stands before them as before something whole, perfected, which allows no augmentation”.³⁷ Not only can a fragmented body form such an autonomous whole, but figure groupings can likewise be thought as monads. Hence, for Rilke, the

“unexampled binding-together of figures, this cohesion of images, this never-letting-go at any price. He does not begin with figures that embrace one another; he has no models that he arranges and places together. He starts with the regions of most intense contact, as if at the high-points of the work.... The magic of that wonderful grouping of a girl and a man which is called *The Kiss* lies in such a wise distribution of its life.... This is why one seems to see the rapture of the kiss in every part of these bodies: it is like a sun that rises, and its light shines everywhere.”³⁸

As to Rodin’s own relation to the autonomous life of his works, for Rilke it is not only his original creative act, but his continued power of animation over them, which binds artist and sculpture together. And this is the case, Rilke emphasises, for the works Rodin

owned (as part of his collection) as well as those he *made*: “for when, often at night, he passes carefully about them, as if not to wake them all, and finally, holding a small light, steps up to an antique marble, which stirs and awakens and suddenly arises, it is life which he has come to find and which he now admires...”³⁹ This intimate relationship between Rodin “as a lover, whom nothing could resist” and his works is characterized, significantly for the emergent terms of this discussion, by analogy to childhood object-relations.⁴⁰ To imaginatively grasp this relation, Rilke suggests one “return now with a portion of your weaned and grown-up feelings to any of your childhood things, one which you always had with you. Think whether there was ever anything closer, more intimate or more necessary to you than such a thing.”⁴¹ One becomes unaware in adulthood “that you still have need of things, which, like those things from your childhood, await your trust, your love and devotion.”⁴² It is the ‘thing’ in this sense which is the focus of Part II of Rilke’s text and which names the autonomous art work: “...the thing itself, which, irrepressible, comes forth from the hands of a man, is like the Eros of Socrates, is a *daimon*, an intermediary between god and man, itself not beautiful, but purest love of beauty and purest longing for it.”⁴³ If Rilke’s Rodin is the animating force who produces objects which are themselves whole, and which we relate to as pre-Symbolic (pre-weaning) parts of ourselves (if we can put ourselves in Rodin’s intimate relation to them), then we must note that such a fantasy is doubly regressive in the sense that it returns to the narcissistic inability to recognise Other and object as separate from self, and in the sense that it radically precludes an acknowledgement of the actual conditions of production of the works, as detailed by Krauss. Already one aspect of *The Distance*’s seeming simplicity has been complicated. It doesn’t juxtapose, as one might

imagine, Rodin's sculpture as "original" to Duchamp's string as "readymade" strategy, but points to the logic of reproduction already at work, but veiled, in *The Kiss*.

Parker's intervention in *The Kiss*'s history may, according to our feelings about the result, make us see the emotional/erotic charge of Rodin's sculpture as either enhanced or negated; certainly as a representation of romantic love it has been complicated. We may feel the addition of the string either liberates the content of the original sculpture, releasing it from the hold of cliché by binding it to the present; or that it satirises the immobility, the constriction of the idea of love it has come to exemplify (as one of modernity's characteristic traps...). Parker's intervention in the presentation of the Tate's sculpture seems to give it the kiss of life, redeeming it not only from its lapse into cliché, over-familiarity and kitsch, but also from the burden of its troubled relationship with Rodin's authorship. Indeed, this last point begins to open the discussion of *The Distance* up, moving it from the poetic/redemptive/aesthetic aspect of Parker's work to a critical dimension, latent but unexplored as yet by critical writing.

In attempting to make art historical sense of *The Distance*, then, one might proceed by taking different distances *from* it: first thinking about it in relation to Parker's own *œuvre*; then in connection to related practices which operate in similar modes; then in terms of the art-historical equation Rodin + Duchamp = ?; and finally – speculatively – in terms of art history's relationship to its objects, especially as a narrative form attempting to make sense of non-linear histories in a cultural field being continually transformed by the forces of Capital.

Parker's own stated understanding of how *The Distance* relates to her *œuvre* focuses on its punning quality – its presentation of Rodin's lovers in a “double bind”.⁴⁴ The use of the pun as a strategy for undermining language's referential function in favour of the poetic, and for materialising its plurivocality – which is a defining characteristic of Parker's work (see, for example, *Words that define gravity*, 1992, Fig. 14, or *Projection*, 1996), has its precedents in Duchamp; for instance in *Fresh Widow*, and the selection of 25 puns printed for the *Boîte-en-valise* as “Modified Printed Readymades” and referred to (punningly) by Duchamp as *Morceaux moisis* or “written rotten.”⁴⁵ The clichéd quality of *The Kiss*, as subject of many reproductions, as something, in her words, “done to death,”⁴⁶ also makes it of interest to Parker, who has an enduring interest in the relationship between the “monumental” and the “cliché,”⁴⁷ and who often works with objects which have known, or presumed, histories already attached to them.⁴⁸ This is sometimes a question of cultural associations (for instance in her wedding ring “drawings”), sometimes of acts of “cartoon violence” documented and materially evident in transformed materials (e.g. *Cold Dark Matter*, or *30 Pieces of Silver* – both in the Tate's collection), and sometimes historical associations (e.g. *Grooves in a Record that Once Belonged to Hitler*, Fig. 15). Though in some of these cases the pre-histories of the objects are evident, in many the viewer is placed in the position of having to take Parker at her word, and noting that the objects' auratic character as souvenirs in narrative is contingent on what may be fictional constructs.⁴⁹ Parker also suggests that works which play on drawing and measurement, such as her metal “drawings” provide a context for the thematic content of *The Distance*. If, however, we put aside Parker's own statements

in favour of addressing the enunciative conditions of *The Distance* itself, another perspective on it can be opened up.

There are other works by Parker which have explicitly addressed the fate of auratic objects in the museum, and which arguably provide more relevant bases for comparison. In particular, *Fly That Died on Don Judd's Sculpture*, (2001, Fig. 16) and *The Maybe* (1995, Fig. 17), can be usefully considered in this relation. The former humourously comments on the ineluctability of death even within the most carefully controlled temple to pure modernist aesthetics – Judd's collection at Marfa, Texas. The fly acts as a kind of messenger, intervening in the idealist space of the museum with an *Et in Arcadia Ego*. As well as echoing the fly etched in the airport urinal which was rather flippantly evoked at the outset of this discussion, and Duchamp's own use of flies in the mordant 1959 works *sculpture-morte* and *TORTURE-MORTE* (Figs. 18, 19), this points to the use of flies in recent art which cathect Minimalist presentation with death as a figure for postmodernity's parasitic relationship to Modernism, its "living on" by "living off."⁵⁰ In particular, I am thinking of Damien Hirst's 2002 *Armageddon* (Fig. 20) and Bing White's photographs of flies trapped behind windows (Fig. 21). The former abjects the presentational format of minimalist monochromes by achieving its uniform surface through an amalgam of countless fly corpses, whilst the latter, more poetically, suggest resonances with photography's own origins.⁵¹

Connecting the Marfa fly to *The Distance* brings to the fore Parker's interest in intimations of death in the museum context: a theme which is frequently explored in

contemporary art. Whilst this begins to locate *The Distance* as *object*, *The Maybe* speaks to the subject's interpretative investment in such objects, particularly with regard to the narratives that fill out the horizon of their meaning. *The Maybe*, an installation at the Serpentine Gallery, consisted of two components: first, a number of objects associated with historical figures, taken from various museum collections. These included: Charles Babbage's brain (Fig. 22), the quill with which Dickens wrote his last novel, John Wesley's spur, a fragment of the plane in which Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, Queen Victoria's stocking, Faraday's spark apparatus, and the rug and pillow from Freud's analytic couch, amongst other items. The second dimension of *The Maybe* was a vitrine in which the actress Tilda Swinton slept during the exhibition's opening hours, an "absent presence."⁵² Thus the auratic value accruing to the objects, and the poetic associations posited between them, were linked to the notion of dream or reverie; and the presence of a living (and famous) woman literally on display in the gallery was juxtaposed with the metonymic and synecdochal fragments which represented absent, dead historical figures. We have to take it on faith that these objects are what they say they are, and Swinton's presence implies that the connections between them owe more to the associative (fictive?) dynamics of dreams than to causal historical relationships. Lisa Tickner's attempt to elicit a confirmation of a feminist agenda motivating this aesthetic in a recent interview with Cornelia Parker was notably unsuccessful, with Parker emphasising the distinction between her own attitude to her work, and that of art historical interpreters. This distinction is entirely relevant to the present interpretation also, but in terms of general methodology, and in the particular case of a work predicated on associative logic, this is not necessarily a weakness in the argument presented here.

Indeed, Parker's comment to Ticker that she is a "great admirer of Duchamp" but feels that for her, rather than taking objects "ready-made" she needs to first to "kill them off, so that I can remake them" both supports the basic thrust of my reading of *The Distance* and offers a rationale for my own "unmaking" of it.⁵³

There is not a single one of the divisions, a single one of the double sides that the function of vision presents, that is not manifested to us as a labyrinth. As we begin to distinguish its various fields, we always perceive more and more the extent to which they intersect.

Jacques Lacan, 'The Line and Light.'

"You have become the puppeteer of your past."

Walter Arensberg, to Marcel Duchamp.

In *The Maybe* Parker worked, essentially, as a curator. She told Tickner that for her such works are like drawings: "the blank sheet of paper is the room."⁵⁴ Of course, Cornelia Parker isn't alone in her interest in the museum as context. Increasingly, attention is being paid to the widespread utilisation of various museological practices and tropes by artists. These have taken many different forms, and some examples would include: Mark Dion's archaeological works, Marcel Broodthaers fictive "Department of Eagles" in its various realisations;⁵⁵ Susan Hiller's *From the Freud Museum*, the curatorial strategies of *Readymades Belong to Everyone*; Andrea Fraser's performances as docent "Jane Castleton," during her work *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* in 1989 (Fig. 23). The use of museological strategies in an attempt to reveal the ideologies at work in the

presentation of art has been a persistent strain of much of this “curatorial” art making. Amongst more strongly politicised versions of this practice are Hans Haacke’s use of provenance research as critical tool, and Fred Wilson’s recovery of revealing but hidden objects from the store room and re-curation of them, most notably in 1992’s *Mining the Museum*.⁵⁶ A show curated at Maryland Historical Society, *Mining the Museum* juxtaposed a vitrine of repoussé silver with slave shackles also held, but not exhibited, in the same collection (Fig. 24). As Wilson put it “normally you have one museum for beautiful things and one museum for horrific things. Actually they had a lot to do with one another; the production of one was made possible by the subjugation enforced by the other.”⁵⁷ There is a clear resonance here with Walter Benjamin’s point that the historical materialist is always aware that cultural treasures “have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror.... There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”⁵⁸ The curatorial mode of art making is, in this guise, continuous with the project of materialist history.

One of the most significant – in terms of critical sophistication – of the artists working in this “curatorial mode” is Michael Asher. Asher is perhaps best known for his contribution to the 1979 American Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he moved a replica of an eighteenth century statue of Georges Washington from the front steps at the museum’s entrance to an interior display space (Fig. 25). Asher locates his work under the rubric of “situational aesthetics” – “an aesthetic system that juxtaposes predetermined elements occurring within the institutional framework, that are recognizable and identifiable to the public because they are drawn from the institutional context itself.”⁵⁹

Claude Gintz emphasises that Asher's strategy is distinct from the Duchampian readymade paradigm, which he sees as succumbing, in its very enunciative conditions, to the institutional context whose legitimating function it exposes.⁶⁰ In contrast, Asher utilises elements already present in the closed institutional site, and does not leave a material trace to be recuperated under the sign of his authorship. Though I disagree with Gintz's pessimistic analysis of the Readymade strategy, the issue of resistance or recuperation in relation to the art institution seems to me one of the key questions to be asked of *The Distance*.

The vitrine as display strategy, deployed by Parker in *The Maybe*, has been used frequently in recent British art in particular, and has attracted criticism for its problematic relationship with institutional power and aestheticisation. Jean Fisher has related her experience of working alongside forensic pathologists at the Human Pathology Museum, with its collection of abnormal bodies in *Wunderkammer* type displays, to the vitrine as art paradigm. The ubiquity of the vitrine as display mode in recent British art is extended by Fisher to include Cibachromes and lightboxes as "thin vitrines" and Damien Hirst's notorious shark *The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* as a "thick vitrine," with TV/video/computer screens as also part of this paradigm -- despite their moving images, in "space, content and *affect*, they always stay the same."⁶¹ In other words, the form in which such works *present themselves* produces a fundamental homogeneity of *affect* which overrides their otherwise marked *heterogeneity*. The texture of their enunciation has to be thought alongside the spectacular(ised) content they display.

Just as in the Pathology Museum “the dismembered body” is rendered as an “utterly banal and anonymous relic: a perverse monument to the ideal,” so a new morbidity detectable in British art, seen in “pickled animals, heads of frozen blood, endoscopic excursions, mannequins mimicking genetically mutated humans, photos of the variously dysfunctional or the victims of pathological sexual acts,” ultimately banalizes art and *life*.⁶² But why has Fisher jumped from conditions of display (vitrines etc.) to a (questionable) morbidity of subject matter? She hypothesizes that “*sensation*” is sought vicariously in such work in an experience of “pathological excess” as it is absent from a mnemonically impoverished and banal everyday life.⁶³ Such body horror seems to Fisher to be profoundly conservative given the place given over to a monstrous otherness in the “normal” Western imaginary.⁶⁴ The question of art’s own morbidity, especially in its contemporary generalized museal context is not raised by Fisher, though it certainly seems relevant to a mode of art practice which has tried to solve the problem of this contextual but mortifying dependency on the institution and the increasing awareness of this fact. The “sensational” solution takes the form of “a hair of the dog that bit you” – which can also be read as an aestheticization of the very institutional features which came to be recognized as the ideological support of aesthetic experience.

Fisher links a Thatcherite nostalgia for Victorian morés to the Thatcherite generation’s (yBas) use of a quintessentially Victorian mode of display (vitrines) and way of looking (a fascination with “the *relic*, the primitive and the spectacle of grotesque and freakish humanity”).⁶⁵ Moreover,

“the vitrine is the display tool of the Victorian collector and rationalist; it is the place where the blood freezes and the body suffers a formaldehyde arrest, where the untidiness and chaos of life must be ordered and categorized. It is an idealizing frame that reduces the object to an image of itself. It doesn’t bring things closer to ‘life’, but, on the contrary, museifies, reifies, spectacularises and separates its contents (which can be anything whatsoever) *from* life: everything is given an aura of value, but everything also becomes like the dead specimen of the Pathology Museum. The vitrine is therefore the terminal home of the dead.”⁶⁶

Here, to balance out Fisher’s notion of the categorizing, mortifying rationality of the vitrine, we could counterpose Benjamin’s figure of the collector and his chaotic passion – an anti-hierarchical and re-animating relation to objects which does away with use-value. Why has the vitrine returned now, Fisher asks, “what is in a state of terminal decay, or in need of artificial respiration?”⁶⁷ (Interestingly we see a double figure in the very terms of the question – vitrine as mausoleum *and* hospital I.C.U. Does this not signal one reason why the vitrine is so central to *fin-de-siecle* British art; its dual role resonates with the fate of art in history as dually, paradoxically present/absent, autonomous/institutional, singular/fragmented, dead/living, etc.? The use of the vitrine signals, on one level at least, that the artwork must both be mourned as lost, and preserved as melancholic love object – which has indeed been its fate in many accounts of its history, from pessimistic perceptions of its demise to attachments to its now outmoded and archaic aspects).

In contrast to this moribund “British” art and its vitrines, Fisher highlights the work of politically-motivated postcolonial British artists. This work remains vital, she claims, perhaps because “the legacies of cultural trauma have yet to be fully narrativized and therefore cannot be laid to rest.”⁶⁸ In this final twist, then, Fisher suggests that narrativization allows the recognition of death proper, and shifts us out of the defensive melancholic attachment to the Victorian paradigm of the vitrine (where the dead object is held in suspension, a purgatorial limbo). Yet, with Benjamin, we see an alternate reading of this melancholic attachment, and its temporality and potential, one that might be put to critical, indeed revolutionary, use. In any case, it is by no means clear that we can pass from a fictive narrative that obscures our understanding, to a lucid one in which all the ghosts of our cultural legacies are banished. In fact, as both Susan Stewart and Hayden White alert us, the narrative that claims to renounce such fictive effect and rhetorical affects, is itself a trope which we would do well to be wary of – as when, to take the most obvious contemporary example, George W. Bush or Tony Blair claim to bypass any mediation (“spin” etc.) and address us directly, by speaking “from the heart.”⁶⁹

If the vitrine as the display mode *par excellence* of the curatorial mode is a double figure – both resting place of the dead and restorative place of the undead, so the curatorial mode itself as a critical strategy is marked by a duality of its own. For whilst the approaches of Asher, Broodthaers, Wilson, and other critical artists attempt to draw attention to the ideological status of the museum, others mine its aesthetic qualities, often through a return to modes of display that prioritise the enchanted associative logic of the

“cabinet of curiosities.” Thus the critique of modern systems of classification and ordering is reworked into a return to the pre-modern paradigm of the *Wunderkammer*. Writing of this artistic approach to the museum, James Putnam describes it as motivated by “an instinctive and mysterious love of things which have no relationship to each other. This is the result of a *sammeltrieb* or primal urge to collect.”⁷⁰ Though he draws on similar sources to Putnam (including Benjamin and Broodthaers), Douglas Crimp draws a very different conclusion from them, arguing on the radical exteriority of the *Wunderkammer* to the modern museum. The evocation of the *Sammeltrieb*, which originates with Julius von Schlosser, is, rightly in my view, read by Crimp as an ahistorical essentializing of the property relations idealised in the museum, the history of which he sees as culminating in “the conjuncture of exhibitions as a form of public relations, of the ultimate reduction of art to private property, and of the evolution of artistic strategies into those of a pure alignment of power.”⁷¹

Though museal ways of working have often been associated with an attack on modernist assumptions about autonomy, authorship and originality, there has also been a countervailing trend towards aestheticising museum conventions and “authorising” the role of the curator. The rise of the curator-as-celebrity (witness Rudi Fuchs, Harald Szeemann, Hans-Ulrich Olbrist, *et al.*); of the artist-as-curator (Richard Wentworth, Tacita Dean amongst many examples); and of the celebrity-as-curator (for instance film director Peter Greenaway) points to the ironic recuperation of institutional critique under the very figure of creative authorship it set out to challenge.⁷² By a kind of “cunning of reason,” awareness of the specificity of the institutional conditions shaping modernist

medium-specific aesthetic experience is turned into the aestheticisation of those framing conditions. The act of curation, of assembling and arranging art objects in a certain sequence in a particular place, has been reinscribed with all the creative freedom claimed for the creative subjects of Modernism. This condition has been aptly described by Philip Fisher, who suggests that in a reworking of Greenberg's notion of an "area of competence" much post-war art is adapted to the museum as an "effacing" but inescapable context. The strategy often employed in response to this condition is a reduplication of the museum's effects: "If the museum itself is a collection of the diverse, then the individual painting [or other artwork] might adapt itself to this heterogeneity by offering itself as suitable for a collection insofar as it already is one."⁷³

Alongside the rise of the curator as *auteur*,⁷⁴ and its recuperation of aura and authorship, has emerged the new exhibitionary form termed the "ahistorical" exhibition by Debora Meijers.⁷⁵ The name is taken from Harald Szeeman's 1988 *A-Historische Klanken*, at Rotterdam's Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen. In rearranging the museum's collection Szeeman abandoned chronological or art-historically thematic principles of organization, instead curating rooms on the basis of 'empathy', which, supposedly, justified an aesthetic use of juxtaposition, the contiguity of the incongruent.⁷⁶ *A-Historische Klanken*, as well as making such art-(a)historical connections, effectively joined a reactionary conception of art (rooms were themed according to such categories as "cryptic silence" and "sacral elevation") and a claim for the authorial creativity of the curator-*auteur*. In the ahistorical exhibition, having been "liberated" from the constraint of chronology and other classificatory schemas, the art works are intended by Szeemann to "resonate in

other works of art to produce a spatial dialogue.”⁷⁷ The exhibition visitor will therefore be witness to the interplay of autonomous art works. However, disposing with the burden of one classificatory system which spatially distributes objects merely opens the door to another which hierarchically stratifies subjects – taste – and empathetically links sacralized art and its learned congregation. As Pierre Bourdieu writes: “The fact of being devoid of keys is in no way favourable to the understanding of works which require only that all the old keys be rejected so as to wait for the work itself to deliver the key for its own deciphering.... In short, an ability to hold all the available codes in abeyance so as to rely entirely on the work itself ... presupposes an accomplished mastery of the code of codes.”⁷⁸ Bourdieu’s insistence on the codedness of culture doesn’t mean that the fate of the readymade is simply to accede to a view of the institutional context as the ‘author’ of all works. For Thierry de Duve, “those who conceive of art in terms of the art context and its power are either true cynics or infantile leftists. If they were right the only artists would be the art curators.”⁷⁹ But increasingly the lines between art and curation *are* blurred.

There is a seeming homology between aspects of Greenaway’s curation-as-artistic act and Cornelia Parker’s artistic act-as-curation. In Greenaway’s exhibition *The Physical Self* (Fig. 26), as with *The Maybe*, living people were exhibited in vitrines, and, as with *The Distance*, we have a statue bound in rope (Man Ray’s *Venus Restored*, Fig. 27). But what separates Parker’s work from the restorative and regressive return to the enchanted world of what might be termed the “*Wunderkammer*-without-walls” is its reference to Duchamp, which gives the critical viewer some purchase back into the strategies which

have been pitted against the art work as (commodity) fetish, and the concealment of that status with recourse to naturalising concepts like *Sammeltrieb*.

To tie this back into the discussion of Duchamp's authoritative status in art history, we need only note that the curatorial mode of art-making is often presented as originating with Duchamp – primarily through the readymade strategy, and particularly via *Fountain*. For Putnam “the increasing assimilation of the found object into a work of art of course owes much to Marcel Duchamp,” who had demonstrated “that something as ordinary as a standard urinal could be accorded the title *Fountain* and transformed at will into an art object.”⁸⁰ Such a characterisation elides the critical thrust of the readymade against the museum and art history, in favour of a reading which, in its very terms of expression, attests to the continuation of patrilinear and patronymic models. Is Duchamp, then, to be easily assimilated back into art historical “business as usual”?

One of the distinctive features of the belated reception of Duchamp is the inclusion of his non- or quasi-artistic activities within an ever expanding *œuvre*. These include catalogues and other publications, and, importantly, exhibition and store design.⁸¹ Thierry de Duve, one of the most informative interpreters of the temporality of Duchamp's reception, is also perhaps the figure who most strongly asserts the centrality of Duchamp as someone who anticipated the historical fate of modernism. In a discussion of the Readymades' reception in Conceptual art he asserted that Duchamp

“pointed at the conditions of art making that are not just the ones valid for a decade but valid for 150 years.... in a nutshell what he accomplishes is revealing the transformations of modernity –all of them. So that in a sense you don’t need to establish a causal link or an influence to be able to say that once the finger has been put on the wound lots of things begin to burgeon all over the place.”⁸²

Duchamp is presented by de Duve as “one who knew” – as possessing a critical insight into the artistic *a priori*s of modernity to an extent that could justify the rather outlandish title *Kant After Duchamp*.⁸³ Duchamp’s biographer Calvin Tomkins also subscribes to this view. Duchamp assisted the Arensbergs’ in acquiring as much of his *œuvre* as possible, and then in arranging for it to find a home in a museum. Once his collection was in the hands of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Tomkins writes, Duchamp was “poised to preside over his own posterity.”⁸⁴ This estimation of Duchamp as someone who controlled to some extent the reception of his own work through varied phases suggests that his comment that “Posterity is a form of the spectator ... It’s the posthumous spectator” should be read as indicating that he aimed to position the historical “viewer” just as he did the museum visitor.⁸⁵ After all, *Etant Donnés* is a thoroughly “posthumous” work and is infused with death and desire as themes which the spectator is positioned, pinioned even, to become voyeur of (Figs 28, 29).

The notion of Duchamp as the patriarch of postmodern critique is problematic on a number of levels, and Amelia Jones has given a very full account of this, but increasingly Duchamp's own curatorial activities are coming to be seen as important to an understanding of his *œuvre*, and these activities do seem prescient of installation art. Lewis Kachur, for instance, in his recent book *Displaying the Marvelous* gives detailed accounts of Duchamp's involvement in installing Surrealist exhibitions, including 1942's *First Papers of Surrealism* in New York. Here Duchamp criss-crossed the gallery with a mile of string (after a disastrous first attempt which caught fire...), the gesture to which *The Distance* refers (Fig. 30). Interviewed in 1966 by Otto Hahn, Duchamp responded to questions about his role in the Surrealist exhibitions, stating that he simply did "the décor" of such exhibitions, utilising strings or coal sacks "to try to get a bit of gaiety into it. The danger is of being academic; and one cannot put up a successful show without a bit of gaiety."⁸⁶

Duchamp's multiply-invested roles in these exhibitions can be elucidated somewhat by drawing attention to their gendered basis.⁸⁷ In the 1938 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris which Duchamp designed, he was represented by a mannequin of Rose Sélavy, whilst in the *First Papers* catalogue he was represented by a "compensation portrait" of a female sharecropper.⁸⁸ The role of "decorator" is also coded, of course, not only as feminine, but as domestic. Helen Molesworth has emphasised that one of the key sites of reception for the Readymades was in fact Duchamp's own studio-home. Photographs of them in this context were included in the *Boîtes-en-valise*, and these images reveal that they were conspicuously arranged to impede their quotidian use.

Note that one of these photos shows the *Sculpture for Travelling* (1918) installed – an important precedent for the “mile of string”: this suggests that one resonance of the latter is Duchamp’s home installation of the Readymades where they literally obstructed him, even as they themselves remained unused (Fig. 31). This is important in that it opens out the context of “art institution” to more sites than are usually discussed in debates about the institutional shaping of art’s meaning. This point is reinforced by Molesworth when she notes that Duchamp’s avoidance both of artistic labour and domestic maintenance (both exemplified in the presentation of the Readymades – works chosen not made – in the photos which show them obstructing Duchamp’s home/studio) was contemporary with Taylorism, the “scientific management” theory of industrial production aimed at maximum efficiency for maximum profit.⁸⁹ Taylorist principles, which are usually associated with the factory, were also carried over into the domestic setting. To represent, and thereby rationalise, the domestic worker’s time-motion (which Molesworth notes is usually characterised by its “virtual invisibility”) home economist Lillian Gilbreth proposed that an observer follow the worker around the home, “with a ball of twine, measuring the distance travelled.”⁹⁰ Thus a “resonance” of both *Sculpture for Travelling* and the *First Papers* labyrinths is to be found in this approach to diagrammatically analysing labour. Duchamp’s strategy, of course, celebrates the play of the labyrinth, rather than the economy of the diagram: “The readymades stymie a subject whose identity would be bound up with, and structured by, the phenomenon of work.”⁹¹ In this reading, Duchamp’s string, as domestic and exhibitionary obstruction, frees the subject to be a “breather” rather than a worker, it *unbinds*.⁹²

Such a negation of work in favour of the ludic was proposed by the circumstances of the display of the mile of string. Duchamp arranged for Sidney Janis's son Carroll and his friends to play ball amidst the strings during the preview of the First Papers exhibition, on the 14th October, 1942. The children were instructed to say to anyone who objected to their presence that "Marcel Duchamp said we could play!"⁹³ One strategy for avoiding the pitfalls of turning Duchamp's activities as designer / decorator into further examples of his prescience and originality, might be to embrace the associative and contingent as a way of undermining the authority of the patriarchal author-function in *both* Duchamp and art-historical narrative, hopefully turning the regressive model by which Duchamp has been assimilated against itself. Playing amongst the contingent links between the components of *The Distance* might allow for posterity's role to be turned to advantage.

String itself plays an interesting and important role in Duchamp's work – notably in *Three Standard Stoppages* and *With Hidden Noise* – both works which challenge intentionality in authorship. *Three Standard Stoppages* which was used to determine the placement of elements in the *Large Glass*, subverts the measurement of distance by rendering the metre in idiosyncratic form, apparently derived by ("canned") chance.⁹⁴ Further, Duchamp was *himself* entwined in string for a film made by Maya Deren in 1943 (Fig. 32). Man Ray, who was not included in the First Papers exhibition, made a solarized photograph of entangled strings, entitled *Enough Rope* (Fig. 33), with a text which states that "enough rope," contrary to the proverb, "is a very small portion of the total length allotted."⁹⁵ "Thus his implicit satiric commentary" Kachur suggests, is "that the Surrealists "hung themselves," in both senses, amidst the strings at the Reid mansion."⁹⁶

A more recent artistic reference to the *First Papers* installation was made in Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 1973 performance *Now That You Have Heirs/Airs, Marcel Duchamp*, which used a mile of string to express Duchamp's influence (Fig. 34). Beginning a walk in the Philadelphia Museum, Ukeles, like Theseus setting out to defeat the cunning of the labyrinth, unwound a ball of twine and used it to literally and symbolically connect the *Large Glass* to Moore College of Art, where her own work was on display. At the end of the performance she symbolically cut the string -- a perhaps wishful act of independence from the Duchampian paradigm. And one, interestingly, which expresses this in a way which carries connotations of both death (via Atropos, the Fate who cuts the thread of life), and of the cutting of the umbilical cord. Thus Duchamp is coded as a maternal figure, and Ukeles' own position is implicitly that of the post-partum, out of bodily unity, but not yet symbolically autonomous. The theme of the Fates, and of the post-partum, will be returned to in Chapter Two.

If the connections made here seem somewhat forced, it is worth remembering that not only was Duchamp a consummate curator of his own work, but also that he explicitly licensed interpretative play with his *œuvre*, on the condition that it was recognised that this was the interpreter's own contribution and not Duchamp's, just as Parker has done. To take up some of the threads which Kachur leaves loose in his discussion of the resonances of string in Duchamp's practice we might note that *With Hidden Noise* offers a figure for the idea of a secret kernel of truth which it is the goal of the viewer to know. The object that produces the "hidden noise" was placed inside the ball of twine by Walter

Arensberg, and was unknown to Duchamp himself. Was this perhaps a joke on Arensberg's obsession with the secret of Shakespeare's plays? He was founder of the Francis Bacon Foundation, which employed three researchers in an attempt to prove Bacon's authorship of the plays. It was the Arensbergs' intention to make it a condition of the gift of deed of their collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art that the Foundation's work be supported, though in the end this was not accepted.⁹⁷ A cautionary figure of the art historian/collector as someone who (obsessively) thinks there is something secret to be deciphered, is thus established here, and implicitly critiqued by Duchamp, who makes himself an author who is not "in the know."

To turn now to the specific formula of *The Distance*, that is, Duchamp + Rodin; the first occurrence of a reference by the former to the latter occurs in a note written in Buenos Aires during his stay there in 1918-19 (Fig. 35). Duchamp's decision to leave New York was prompted both by complex personal matters and by his dissatisfaction with the once lively city which no longer seemed so congenial under the cloud of war. Duchamp set sail for Buenos Aires with Yvonne Chastel aboard the *S.S. Crofton Hall* on the 14th of August 1918, intending his stay in South America to last several years (Figs. 36, 37). On board the *Crofton Hall* Duchamp wrote a note, later published by Pierre Matisse in the collection of *Notes* left out of the Green and White Boxes, that simply states "The string around the bouquet" ...⁹⁸ As well as taking his notes for the *Large Glass* with him, Duchamp brought his *Sculpture for Travelling*, a number of coloured rubber strips cut from bathing caps, which could be attached by string to any room in which its owner

finds himself, and, as already noted, a forerunner of the labyrinthine forms of the *First Papers* installation.

Interviewed at Richard Hamilton's house for *The Sunday Times* in 1968, Duchamp discussed his stay in Buenos Aires, saying that while there he worked on "the problem of time and the successive image in art" so that the visit was "not really a matter only of daydreaming."⁹⁹ Duchamp's escape from the retinal mode of art, already pursued via the Readymades, was advanced in Buenos Aires in his increasing interest in the mental activity of chess, and in a non-idealist conception of seeing. It was whilst in Buenos Aires that Duchamp's interest in optics really developed, with works like *Handmade Stereopticon Slide*, and the so-called "small glass." These works indicate that Duchamp's rejection of the retinal was in part achieved through an interest in other modes of visuality, particularly those which due to their scientific character avoided the subjective pitfalls of painting. The "small glass" was originally conceived as a study for the Oculist Witnesses in *The Bride Stripped Bare...*, but with the addition of the instruction/title *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass), with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour* (Fig.38), the work also takes on something of the interpellatory aspect which characterises Duchamp's final work, *Etant Donnés*, which institutionalises, as it were, voyeurism as the basic condition of viewing.¹⁰⁰

Duchamp's interest in manipulating ways of seeing is seemingly the motivation for his first published reference to Rodin. This occurs in a note written on a telegraph card in Buenos Aires:

Make: several sheets of glass or cardboard glued one on top of the other and of different dimensions

[diagram]

a linear drawing (as much as possible) – as if it were drawn on a flat surface – and which when seen from a point X, through a sight, gives the impression of a flat drawing.

I.e. that a straight line from A to B (although A and B are on different planes appear straight from the sight and broken into several levels from a totally different point.

Look for the right use.

One can arrive at: Problem: trace a straight line on Rodin's 'Kiss' as seen from a sight. [viewfinder].¹⁰¹

Duchamp, then, has *The Kiss* in his sights, and relates it to his interest in optics. Here the problem is one of producing a point of view that would produce a particular (misleading) perception of a three dimensional form. With *Etant Donnés* Duchamp would, of course, return to this interest in imposing points of view.

Molly Nesbit has argued that Duchamp's own attitude to the line drawing was structured by the French education system's programme of "drilled" mechanical drawing: a mechanical reproduction aimed at justifying and facilitating mechanical production in the economy. Importantly, *truth*, behind mere appearance was ascribed in this system to mechanical rather than perspectival drawing. Truth was "nonretinal, and clearly identified with the *croquis coté*, the blueprint for production, the working drawing for the commodity. In practice, the language base was hardly neutral; it cheerfully ratified the means and ends of industrial production..."¹⁰² It was this language of line, Nesbit argues, that facilitated Duchamp's abandonment of easel painting. Drawing thus played a part in naturalising an instrumentalised objectification; it established as *given*, "full of the latent idea of work," as it provided "a tool by which one ordered visual experience."¹⁰³ The drawing programme was designed by Eugène Guillaume, who differentiated the pragmatic visual language taught from the aesthetic one of art:

"Drawing expresses the most sublime notions of artists; it is the starting point and the last word of the painter's, sculptor's, and architect's masterpiece; and at the same time it is a means of communication and a practical instrument used by the worker-artist and the artisan. If it has its poetics; it also has in some respects its business language."¹⁰⁴

Thus, a resonance of 'drawing a line' on *The Kiss* is the imposition of the language of the commodity on a work taken to aesthetically transcend that language.¹⁰⁵ This connects it to the readymade strategy, which was a way of drawing a line *under* that sense of the

aesthetic. Ironically, when Alfred Kreymborg, writing in the *Boston Evening Transcript* on 18th September 1915 commented that the audience of the Armory Show “could not distinguish between a Rodin and a canary bird’s cage” he meant to indicate that there was as valid an aesthetic justification for the seeming “quackery” and “self-advertising” of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* as there was for the established modern genius of Rodin’s sculpture.¹⁰⁶ With the Readymades and related works – including *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* of 1921, a bird’s cage filled with marble sugarcubes – Duchamp inverted the terms of this comparison, validating, in effect, the equivalence of Rodin and the bird’s cage. It is this equivalence that *The Distance* underscores; it stymies *The Kiss*’s “originality,” just as Duchamp stymied the working of the quotidian objects he appropriated: “you could pluck one of those marble sugar cubes ... for your coffee (like a plastic fly in a bowl of soup); and if a man pees in the *Fountain* his urine will drip on him.”¹⁰⁷ With Duchamp there is an ongoing oscillation between the object as artwork and as quotidian thing, with neither role ever secure.

For Nesbit, Duchamp staked a claim with the Readymades for a mastery over the commodity and its language, but ultimately an unsuccessful one: “Nobody except industry gets control over its symbolic means, let alone its models of repetition, not even artists.”¹⁰⁸ Thus with the *Boîtes-en-valise* – the travelling salesman’s suitcase in the form of a portable “museum-without walls” Duchamp was, in her view, “just plain repeating himself. ... Outside, unperturbed, the industrial model of repetition rolled along under its own steam.”¹⁰⁹ Yet to ask art to transcend such conditions is surely asking the impossible. Duchamp’s repetitions of the Readymades – including for instance the “reciprocity” of

installing *Fountain* in 1951 in its “useful” orientation – remain within the equivocal locus where art and commodity co-exist. It is this model of repetition, to reiterate, that authorises *The Distance*, though it does not guarantee, as a transcendent origin, its critical efficacy. One can’t be sure what will happen when one pccs (in rivalry) into *Fountain*.

Alfred Barr [re: the readymades]: But , oh, Marcel, why do they look so beautiful today?

Marcel Duchamp: Nobody's perfect.

The idea of “drawing a line” on *The Kiss* was jotted on a telegram card. Interestingly, Duchamp makes a couple of references to telegraphic communication in minor works from his *œuvre*. In the *First Papers* catalogue, on the page entitled “Science Triumphant” a text by Alfred Jarry appears.¹¹⁰ It reads: “Science with a capital S, or rather, because that is still not imposing enough ... Science with a capital SCYTHE.” This was juxtaposed with Duchamp’s *In the Manner of Paul Delvaux*; a bat (an animal which can perceive sound-waves inaudible to humans); and Puvis de Chavanne’s *Good and Bad News*, which features in the foreground telegraph pole and wires (Fig. 39). Puvis described this work as “*Physics*: By the wondrous agency of Electricity, Speech flashes through Space and swift as lightning bears tidings of good and evil.” That science, particularly communications technology is here linked to death is perhaps not surprising. Duchamp might well have remembered receiving the traumatic news, via transatlantic cable from Suzanne Duchamp, of his brother’s death, just three weeks after arriving in Buenos Aires.¹¹¹ On a less speculative and biographical note however, it is clear that Duchamp associated the advance of science with the death of art. Interviewed by *Newsweek* in 1959 Duchamp emphasised that he was a non-artist, not an anti-artist, seeing the latter, like an atheist, as someone who “believes negatively.” Duchamp makes

it clear: "I don't believe in art. Science is the important thing today. There are rockets to go to the moon, so naturally you go to the moon. You don't sit at home and dream about it. Art was a dream that's become unnecessary." Science then is that which both eradicates distance and art – a claim with increasing resonance in our electronically mediated age.

Finally, the telegraph pole appears twice more in Duchamp's *œuvre*, in drawings made whilst on holiday in France in the summer of 1959. One of these drawings is of the lane by the house in which Marcel and his wife Teeny were staying, and was a thank-you gift to their host. The other is entitled *Cols Alité* ("bedridden mountains," but also phonetically "causality," and *colles alitées*: "bedridden glues") and features the Bachelor's machinery from the *Large Glass* hooked up to telegraph wires (Fig. 40). Carol James has suggested, in a reading of these puns, that the *cols* or mountain passes depicted are a connecting passage between the *Large Glass* and *Étant Donnés*, which certainly seems to be a tenable interpretation on iconographic and thematic grounds.¹¹²

Duchamp's second reference to Rodin and *The Kiss* occurs in a series of etchings produced for Galerie Schwarz in 1968. This series of images takes as its theme 'the lovers' and includes images of *The Bride, Étant Donnés*, and Duchamp's appearance as Adam in a live *divertissement* during the last night of Picabia's play *Relâche* in 1924.¹¹³ Also included in the series are four images which deal with the erotic in nineteenth century art. These "Selected details..." (*Morceaux choisis*) after Courbet, Ingres and Rodin emphasise the libidinal basis of art making and viewing, by subtly altering the

content of the original images to reinforce their erotic content, and by connecting them with the themes of *The Bride Stripped Bare* and *Etant Donnés* (Figs. 41-46). In *Selected Details After Courbet* a bird has been added to Courbet's *Woman with White Stockings*, making a phonetic joke on the fact that there are now two *faux cons* in the image. This again relates to the *mis-en-scene* of *Etant Donnés*. *Selected Details After Rodin* takes *The Kiss* and makes only one slight adjustment – moving Paolo's hand to what Duchamp termed its "natural position," and restoring what he told Schwarz must have been Rodin's original intention.¹¹⁴ A complex chain of punning associations is also operative in this work, playing on the connections to be made between the names Auguste and Marcel.¹¹⁵ Having already noted that *The Kiss* was "targeted" by Duchamp, can we now draw any conclusions about its meaning for him, and thus for the historical connotations of Cornelia Parker's work? The answer lies, I think, in Duchamp's association of *The Kiss* with the other images of the *Lovers* series and especially with Courbet (whose Realism Duchamp saw as the origin of retinal painting), and *Etant Donnés*, with its emphatically libidinal account of what we are looking for in museums. "Drawing a line" might mean recoding a work in the (readymade, repetitive) language of commodity. It is also resonant, in *The Lovers*, with an act of de-sublimation. In order to develop this I want to turn now to Claudine Mitchell's analysis of Rodin's own drawing practice and the understanding of his art's eroticism in poet Arthur Symons's early 20th Century criticism.

Rodin liked to make gifts of sculptures of embracing female figures to male intellectuals who supported his work. Examples of works used in this practice of gift-giving include *The Fallen Angel* and the *Metamorphosis of Ovid*, both now in the V&A, and *The Siren*

on a Pillar, given to Arthur Symons and now in the Tate's collection. All these works, like *The Kiss* were conceived in relation to *The Gates of Hell*, and Claudine Mitchell notes that "As gifts and creative works ... that artists exchanged among each other, these sculptures are the reminder of a form of bondage, the certainty of sharing an intellectual territory, a common understanding concerning the purpose and nature of art practice."¹¹⁶ Statements of such common purpose first appeared in British cultural discourse precisely around the work in progress for *The Gates of Hell*. W.E. Henley, for instance, writing in the *Magazine of Art* mentioned the preparation of elements of the *Gates*, including what he termed "a lovely and affecting "Paolo and Francesca" ..."¹¹⁷ Henley had seen this early realisation of *The Kiss* in a photograph, but it was not published, and readers of *The Magazine of Art* had to make do with the description by Julia Cartwright in 1884 in which she wrote: "M. Auguste Rodin ... has sculpted the very instant of the kiss, and that with such a union of *purity* and passion, of lofty art and intense humanity, as places his work on a pinnacle apart."¹¹⁸ Mitchell notes that the use of "purity" in this context conveys the sense that the work respects public decency laws.

She develops her discussion of the "bondage" of shared understanding in an essay on Symons's Baudelairean reading of Rodin's erotic sculptures and drawings, emphasising that the poetry of Baudelaire, particularly *The Flowers of Evil*, provided a common vocabulary for discussion of themes of sexuality in art.¹¹⁹ Yet Mitchell argues that for both Symons and Rodin, while sexuality was at the centre of creativity, their particular "aesthetics of desire" involved a necessary veiling of the sexual by the beautiful. Symons saw this as producing an aesthetics of the "suggested," in which the viewer's own

interpretation of the implied content is key to the experience of the work. Symons had put forward this position in an essay of 1900 on Mallarmé, arguing in favour of allusion and suggestion, and stating that “to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create.”¹²⁰

This argument is used to help Symons differentiate Rodin's practice from “imitation” and characterise it as a kind of poetic “re-creation”. This is achieved, argues Symons, through Rodin's technique of “logical exaggeration,” an approach to modelling which “involves complex processes of selection, omission of details, and the sculptor's decision not to register certain transitions between the main sections of human anatomy.”¹²¹ The specific use which Symons understood Rodin to make of “logical exaggeration” and suggestion in *The Gates of Hell* relates to desire and original sin. Rodin's figures are described as living “with a life of desire,” an obsession which “has carried them beyond the wholesome bounds of nature, into the violence of a perversity which is at times almost insane.”¹²² Symons reads *all* the gestures and contortions of these figures as signifying sexual desire. The particularly Baudelairean dimension of Symons' interpretation is registered in his use of the phrase *femmes damnées* which conveys both the relation of sexuality to evil, and in its effectively *coded* reference to Baudelaire also the shared understanding of Rodin and his critical supporters.

Symons, the literal recipient of one of Rodin's drawings, played an important role in the *critical* reception of them. Mitchell notes that to discuss the drawings required a critical mode that could deal with the problems of both subject matter and issues of representation in Rodin's aesthetic. Whereas some critics simply sidestepped the explicit

content of the drawings, Symons connected it to the interpretation he had already established in relation to the female figures of *The Gates of Hell*. For Symons, the drawings' suggestiveness was an aesthetic matter and not an ethical one; thus Mitchell finds him continually resolving the dualism of desire/Hell versus beauty/purity in a third term, an ideal moment of aesthetic experience. This dialectical metamorphosis, which Mitchell terms the "alchemy of desire,"¹²³ is, in Baudelaire, Symons, and Rodin, linked to a concept of the nude which "provided a paradigm metaphor for the process of artistic creativity whereby sexual desire was understood to be the very material the artist worked upon to create the work of art."¹²⁴ That such work upon desire has an essentially sublimatory structure is emphasised further in Symons's interpretation of Rodin's line as having "the distinction of all abstract thought or form."¹²⁵ Line itself then becomes the medium by which desire is transformed into beautiful images. Duchamp's own line, as it appears in the etchings of *The Lovers* could likewise be read as an intellectualizing of desire, but with quite the opposite aim to that attributed to Rodin by Symons. As Duchamp's etching of *The Kiss* makes abundantly clear, Duchamp's line redraws the boundary between desire and image achieved in sublimation. This difference suggests perhaps the key reason why Duchamp had Rodin, and particularly *The Kiss*, in his sights at least twice in his career. "Using these stolen paintings to play with the tradition he called retinal painting, the precision detail of Ingres and the realism of Courbet, Duchamp showed how what we see masked as the beautiful body, the aesthetic object, is wrapped in worn out repressions."¹²⁶

In pointed contrast to Nesbit's understanding of Duchamp's later work (and by implication the work of those artists who take him as a model) as a capitulation to the logic of the commodity, James interprets the etchings as "something of the final avatar of the readymade, a version that comes around to using art as non-art.... By the time *L.H.O.O.Q.* is *rasée*, art 'quoting' and self-reference are the common material in need of demythologizing."¹²⁷ And, as with *Fountain*, Duchamp treats his trademark motifs and gestures in different ways at different times: they have a tendency to change valence, to come and go, like ghosts moving across barriers that ought to be impermeable.

Symons's writing on Rodin draws on three registers of language: religion, intellectuality and sexuality; and the fact that these could be made to overlap seems essential to his mode of thinking. He employs the term "ecstasy" to describe the creative process and "the appreciation the beholder experiences before the work of art, for the interpretation of "the suggested" gives the beholder an active role." Duchamp also makes religion, intellect and sexuality overlap, but he does so in drawing attention to, rather than participating in, the disavowal productive of the fetish character of the artwork. It is this that the viewer of *Etant Donnés* and/or the Readymades becomes aware of. The museum context fetishises art objects both in attempting to make the inanimate animate and in facilitating the disavowal of primary attachments in favour of substitute objects which veil a presumed lack. These two functions relate to Marx's and Freud's respective understandings of fetishism. This thinking of both commodity and sexual fetish together will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

If the museum aims to bring its objects to life, this may be a disavowed recognition of its actual function. Theodor Adorno famously opens his discussion of the fate of art in the museum by setting out the unpleasant connotations of the word *museal* (museumlike):

“It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture. Art treasures are hoarded in them, and their market value leaves no room for the pleasure of looking at them. Nevertheless that pleasure is dependent on the existence of museums.”¹²⁸

In seeking to formulate a viable response to this that won't just despairingly abandon art as dead, Adorno turns to the contrasting writings of Valéry and Proust. Valéry's essay 'The Problem of Museums' is concerned primarily with the chaotic overabundance of the Louvre. Lamenting the constraints placed upon his person – “no smoking,” the confiscation of his cane etc. - Valéry is also confounded by the sheer quantity of visual stimuli addressed to his attention by so many works, which as Adorno puts it are “frozen creatures each of which demands the non-existence of the others...”¹²⁹ In such circumstances, an excess of riches is ultimately impoverishing, and even the arch-conservative Valéry can register this - his analysis acknowledges metaphorically in

relation to art what can be literally ascribed to the capitalist economy: “The shock of the museum brings Valéry to historical – philosophical insight into the perishing of art works; there he says, we put the art of the past to death.”¹³⁰ Valéry’s essay breaks off before reaching what Adorno sees as its logical conclusion from the conservative position it articulates – “the renunciation of culture out of loyalty to it.”¹³¹

Proust’s contrasting view is woven into sections of *In Search of Lost Time*. For Proust the museum context is precisely appropriate to the experience of the artwork because its abstraction of the work out of its surroundings is analogous to the mental event that produced the work in the first place. For Proust the “exhilarating happiness” of aesthetic experience “can be had only in a museum, where the rooms, in their sober abstinence from all decorative detail, symbolize the inner spaces into which the artist withdraws to create the work.”¹³² We might note here that from the 21st century perspective of *The Distance*, this museological blank canvas is no longer available, and creative acts must now respond to this fact. *The Distance* brings together both museum as muse (Proust) and the cacophony of history (Valéry).

Adorno notes that both writers assume art works are there to be enjoyed, and unsurprisingly he is dubious about this notion of aesthetic pleasure: “For anyone who is close to works of art, they are no more objects of delight than is his own breathing... it is only when the distance necessary for enjoyment to be possible is established between observer and works of art that the question of their continuing vitality can arise.”¹³³

Valéry and Proust occupy the double position of those both at home with art (as

producers) and distanced enough from it (in reflection) to understand the pleasure it can give others. As a creator himself, Valéry has developed a great sensitivity to the physical and intellectual contexts in which art is presented. His art-for-art's-sake stance is pushed to its own negation as the intensity of his reflection leads him

“to see that the object of such pure contemplation must wither and degenerate to commercialized decoration, robbed of the dignity in which both its *raison d'être* and Valéry's consist. The pure work is threatened by reification and neutralization. This is the recognition that overwhelms him in the museum”; Valéry is left merely to “mourn for art works as they turn into relics.”¹³⁴

For Proust, in contrast, it is the afterlife of the artwork that is the starting point for reflection. For Proust's relation to art is not that of the intimacy of the producer, but rather the distanced admiration of the amateur-as-consumer, a position alien to the 'hand's on' artist. Proust's genius lies, Adorno suggests, in making an essentially spectatorial attitude into a new productive mode. While Proust as amateur is at home in the museum, Valéry as artist is at home in the studio, but ironically it is Proust who Adorno sees as ultimately less naïve in his conception of art. Valéry is in thrall to “the unconditional fetishism of the artist who makes the things himself,” but Proust sees works of art as sets of aesthetic qualities which are “part of the life of the person who observes them.”¹³⁵ This mode of experience has as its precondition the “death of the living intention of the work” This formulation is echoed in Duchamp's statement in his text ‘The Creative Act’ to the effect that the spectator (who stands also for posterity in the

form of art history) constitutively interprets a work which is not identical with its intention, a process he describes as “comparable to a transference... through inert matter.”¹³⁶ That the work, for Duchamp, is thus completed *posthumously* is clearly seen in his (uncannily prescient) statement that the artist’s true audience doesn’t appear for “fifty years or a hundred years.”¹³⁷

Valéry’s conservative perspective allows him to criticize the destruction of autonomous culture, whilst Proust’s sensitivity to changes in structures of experience also gives him an acute historical awareness: “Proust knows that even within works of art themselves history rules like a process of disintegration.” Proust’s conception of this historicity could be translated, according to Adorno, as “posterity is the afterlife of the work”; again we resonances with Duchamp.¹³⁸ The vital role of memory in Proust’s idea of aesthetic experience is the reason why the museal chaos perceived by Valéry is, for Proust that which brings the art work to life. The uniqueness of a work, and its life for the consumer of aesthetic experience, only comes into being in the mnemonic experience of afterimage, in which it is “severed from the living order in which it functioned.”¹³⁹

Adorno asks who is right: Valéry, with his emphasis on the sanctity of culture, and his conservative defense of autonomy; or Proust, with his insistence on flux and indeterminacy, which risks affirming the impermanence wrought by Capitalism? Neither position is acceptable to Adorno, nor does he hope for resolution in a mid-point between them. “The conflict between them points up in a most penetrating way a conflict in the matter itself, and each takes the part of one moment in the truth which lies in the

unfolding of contradiction... The fetishism of the object and the subject's infatuation with itself find their correctives in each other"; each writer has access to what are "contradictory moments of the truth."¹⁴⁰ Adorno questions whether there could be artworks without museums, in as much as the death they suffer is part of their own mortality under capitalism. The museal environment is the inevitable locus of art works, but Adorno sees some hope in this irreversible situation; it might dialectically lead art so far from its embeddedness in human rationality that it comes to life again in that very autonomy. Proust to an extent conveys this promise of reconciliation in his subjective mnemonics in which "the chaos of cultural goods" in Adorno's words "fades into the bliss of the child whose body feels itself at one with the nimbus of distance."¹⁴¹

Here we find an echo of Benjamin's conflicted attitude to the death of aura as an effect of distance. In the 'Little History of Photography' Benjamin reads this positively:

"What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance and semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be... Now, to bring things *closer* to us, or rather to the masses, is just as passionate an inclination in our day as the overcoming of whatever is unique in every situation by means of its reproduction."¹⁴²

This was replaced by a much more hesitant tone in the Artwork essay, which, though echoing almost exactly these words in defining aura, sees its loss as leading to "a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and

renewal of mankind.”¹⁴³ Reading across Benjamin’s key texts on this double shattering of tradition and the revolutionary potential inherent in technology, it is clear that of the key figures of the outmoded to be found in them, it is the auratic art work which is the most dispensable, whereas the *collector* and the *storyteller* are more melancholically presented as those able to invest objects with significance and narrate experience respectively.¹⁴⁴ The ambiguity of both Benjamin’s and Adorno’s essays on the conclusions to be drawn on art as an object of ‘exhibition value,’ reliant on the museal context, was certainly justified at the time of their composition. Such ambiguity continues to be relevant in the contemporary situation, where the possibility of experiencing art and of narrating it is compromised by the hyper-extension of the technological transformations which Benjamin was in many ways premature in diagnosing.¹⁴⁵

Reproduction in Benjamin’s essay stands in for the general process of fetishization and commodification as described by Marx. The extension of this process of commodification produces an equivalence between people, places and things. Thus art is exchangeable apart from the privileged loci of its presence – cathedral, concert hall etc. This state of affairs refers to, but contradicts, actual existing property relations. Whereas ritual demands an invisibility of the source of power, once this is revealed, conditions change from those of ritual to those of display. Ritual is opposed by Benjamin to three new conditions designated as display, exchange, politics. The aestheticization of politics amounts to the rules of ritual being brought to bear on conditions which should contradict them.

Hal Foster has recently argued that the dialectical relationship between reification and re-animation set out in 'Valéry Proust Museum' in fact structures all thinking on modern art and the museum. Art history as a modern discipline responds to a mnemonic crisis wrought by the reification of tradition, but it cannot resolve such a crisis, only displace or repeat it.¹⁴⁶ *The Distance* re-members Rodin and Duchamp and in doing so participates in the processes of reification and reanimation constitutive of museal aesthetic experience. If it has a critical dimension it is not a transcendent one: it may open onto a critique of sublimation, via a contrast between Duchamp and Rodin, but it does not escape from the fetishising logic of the reifying and reanimating museum-without-walls in which it continues to circulate as (after)image. Crucially, though, it is possible to think through the role of the critic as viewer (in accordance with Duchamp's own idea of creative collaboration) in a way that bears directly on the strategy pursued by Cornelia Parker in her reiteration of Duchampian appropriation. Just as Duchamp did in the *Selected Details...* series, Parker used artworks as Readymades. Writing of Duchamp's "original" repetition Carol James argues that the late Readymades, amongst which she numbers the *Selected Details...*, "show how iterability is different from mere repetition, that each instance is both new in time and a combination of all previous instances, that the regardeur is responsible for the ordering of the experiences."¹⁴⁷ Thus, as with Barthes, the death of the author is here the birth of the reader / viewer. Such a viewer is not external to the work he / she narrates, but is, rather, an integral mediator of art's positioning "inbetween" of *aura* and *agora*.

This chapter opened with a discussion of the sublimated role of the mediator in “triangulated” desire. It has strayed, via a reading of Cornelia Parker’s *The Distance* and its problematic relation to Duchamp as “originary” authoriser of its procedures, into questions of aura, museum, and their relation to commodification. Homi Bhabha has offered a very nuanced account of art’s place in relation to aura (which stands for rapture and transcendence in his argument) and *agora*, as the locus of quotidian, commercial negotiation.¹⁴⁸ “Negotiation,” Bhabha writes, connotes “a form of trade or traffic, articulation and exchange, connection with contention, which seeks equivalences in the everyday world. Concerned principally with making relations ... negotiation is, most significantly, a discourse of disclosure [my emphasis].”¹⁴⁹ Bhabha qualifies this definition, stressing that what negotiation discloses is not a “common currency” but a “dis-ease” of exchange, precisely insofar as it, negotiation, is concerned with the “the self-disclosure of the agents ... negotiation is the very essence of human action and utterance.”¹⁵⁰ Bhabha’s argument here is explicitly derived from Hannah Arendt’s point that without such negotiated disclosure man is “dead” – no longer part of the world in which he lives. This provides us with one part of an answer to the question of how art history might deal with the absence of original desire, and of an originary mediator; a question raised at the outset here, and crucial where Duchamp is concerned. There is no transcendence of the need for disclosure without “death”; narrative *must* disclose its enunciative conditions. Bhabha’s insistence on narrative as the medium of such negotiation is set out in terms which resonate with the procedure followed in this chapter:

“Concerned primarily with the disclosure of the human subject *as agent*, negotiation is the ability *to articulate differences in space and time, to link words and images in new symbolic orders*, to intervene in the forest of signs and mediate what may seem to be incommensurable values or contradictory realities.... negotiation insists on the *necessity of narrative ...*”¹⁵¹

For Bhabha as for Arendt, then, narrative is where human beings appear to each other *as such*. In art the seeming exteriority of aura, as rapture or transcendence, to negotiation as activity of the *agora* (marketplace) is disclosed as an illusion; rapture has its agency, just as negotiation is marked by “an uncharacteristic moment of radical uncertainty of selfhood and subjectivity.”¹⁵² The spectator of art is neither in the rapturous position of the inspired artist, nor the distracted one of the occupant of the *agora* – both positions are passively receptive in a way which Bhabha insists misses art’s ambivalent and dialogic relation to the world it inhabits. “For art has the capacity to reveal the almost impossible, attenuated limit where aura and *agora* overlap, to find a language for the high horizons of humanity itself and ... *to reveal its own fabulation, its fragility, at the moment of its articulation* [my emphasis]” and, further, art’s disclosure of the overlap of aura and *agora* is made possible by its mediatory in-between-ness; a *human* position that belongs to neither.¹⁵³

As his key example of this positionality, Bhabha takes W.H. Auden’s famous poem ‘The Musée des Beaux Arts,’¹⁵⁴ (Auden is, then, added to the list of museum visitors already crowded into this text: from the children playing amongst the string of the *First Papers*

exhibition in 1942; to Valéry and Proust – as mediated by Adorno; the *voyeur* of the *Etant Donnés*; and, implicitly, myself as visitor to *Days Like These*). Auden's poem describes Brueghel's painting of *Icarus* (Fig. 47) and "how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the scene of the disaster." This juxtaposition of the miraculous and the quotidian occurs throughout *Icarus* and Auden's poem, fitting it to Bhabha's purpose. He stresses that there is a double framing, or mediation, of the "Old Masters" to whom Auden refers – as painting (Brueghel) and poetry (Auden). Thus Icarus' fall, and the everyday life which carries on oblivious to it, are joined in/by "the poet's narrative voice and the artist's vision, which reside neither inside nor outside the poem or painting but hover on the edges of inscription and spectation. ... In the role of translator between painting and poetry, the narrator engineers the juxtaposition of aura and agora and then produces the necessary negotiation of rapture."¹⁵⁵ The exterior interpretative mediation upon which art's articulation depends is, paradoxically *not* exterior to the work itself, but rather "part of the process by which art comes to be *authorized* in the acts of spectatorship and interpretation."¹⁵⁶ The artwork is not temporally or hierarchically *prior* to its interpretation, which is the process by which its multiple elements signify. "Interpretation is not so much an adjunct activity as it is a disjunctive process that questions the very presence or 'being' of the work of art as *a beginning, as an activity of authorship*."¹⁵⁷ Bhabha is himself, *as narrator*, arranging the negotiation of poet and painter by reinscribing the poet as narrator / spectator of the painting – which role he doubles (*en abyme*) without necessarily attaining a metadiscursive, non-implicated position. Indeed, his argument is opposed to such a position, and instead "speaks between." The juxtaposition of the miraculous and the quotidian in Brueghel and Auden,

then, is read by Bhabha as affirming “the human position” as Arendt theorises it. “For art, in the irresolvable “side-by-sideness” of insight and insouciance in that uneasy space and time *in between* birth and death, opens up a space of survival in the interstices between aura and agora.”¹⁵⁸

Bhabha stresses that the *distance* between the sublime, as figured by Icarus, and the everyday of the agora is not merely a matter of “narrative pathos” or a sign of “an ethic of narcissistic self-absorption.”¹⁵⁹ In ‘The Museum des Beaux Arts’ it is the very “turning away” from Icarus’ fate which opens the possibility of a mediation of the rapturous/divine and the quotidian.

“Between the fleeting visibility of art [note here that Icarus now figures *art*] and the position from which a possible narrative or plausible record might emerge [art history?]. . . both Brueghel and Auden pose the poignant issue of art’s survival: as translation, revision, recognition, communication, misrecognition, circulation, mischance. . .”¹⁶⁰

The tentative terms of this interpretative position, as registered in Auden’s language (*may have, must have*) suggests that art-as-rapture is contingent upon “interpretation as an intervention into the very signifying structure of the artwork” and that art’s “power of . . . persuasion through time, depends upon an attenuation and relocation of its “being” as both event and significance. In the very act of mediation or representation there is a necessary threat to art’s originary or essentializing presence. . . in order to ensure the

survival of art, its authenticity or autonomy has to be partially erased.”¹⁶¹ To rephrase this somewhat, if art can only be inscribed as event through a mediation which is internal to it, but nonetheless undermining of its “originary presence” then art history as narrative mediator is both preserver and destroyer of art - both at once - and necessarily so. This is recognised, but not developed, in Bhabha’s claim that art (both visual and textual) produces narratives which “survive and seduce because they continually raise alternatives and *agonists* to their own existence – spectres of memory, phantoms of the future, proxies for the present.”¹⁶² Thus art lives on in the spectral by dint of the contradictions and antinomies it produces.

However, Bhabha’s account needs to be made more historically specific, to avoid simply being the retroactive fantasy of “originary or essentializing presence” as a product of a perceived lapsarian historicity. Walter Benjamin’s account of the loss of aura in the Artwork essay is once again crucial, in that it offers a historically informed explanation for the reproduced work as “aura-less.” If we can accept that all art works are mediated into “legend,” it is works made and circulated after the advent of mechanical reproduction which bring the interpreted historical character of their being *as art* to the fore. To paraphrase Heidegger, they are works for whom this historically mediated character is at issue. Thus *The Distance* and its economical condensation of these issues doubles back to the very moment when the aura of art was fought for (by Rodin) and abandoned (by Duchamp). In doing so it forces the problem of what *possible narrative* or *plausible record* of it can do justice to its simultaneous presentation of itself as art as musical corpse and force of poetic reanimation.

Bhabha's account of art's "inbetween-ness" offers a tremendously attractive notion of narrative self-disclosure as participation in human discourse; attractive particularly in the context of the present discussion because of the resonance of its key terms with those established in the preceding discussion. It opens out to an understanding of the fictive as the basis for such self-disclosure, which is itself the basis of the mediated and mediating "human position." But we have seen with Adorno and Benjamin that to be between aura and agora is not only to be the (nearly) rapturous spectator of art, to be Icarus before he falls to earth, but also to be between a rock and a hard place. For when aura and agora are given their properly historical determination, as part of the dialectic ambiguity of modernity (and after), they can be mapped onto the contrast between the loss of art (Valéry) and the loss of affective experience (Proust); between ritual value and display value; between the mystery of the religious fetish and the banality of the commodity fetish. Taking a more historically specific view of art (and of agora) than Bhabha allows, we must remain sceptical of his positing of art's capacity for "rapturous negotiation," even whilst acknowledging its attractions. As will be argued in the conclusion to Chapter Two, the notion of self-disclosure at work in Bhabha's account can be shown to be bound up with aura and agora in a way that, in acknowledging their historical determination, makes it epistemologically and politically difficult to accept.

In the context of "crises" in criticism and ongoing debates about criticism's relationship with art history, *The Distance* has been singled out here because it is exemplary of a certain mode of art making in its very generic, unremarkable way. I have pursued both a

“respectable” following of clues “in” the work itself, and also a somewhat more outlandish articulation, or suturing, of art works together to produce a horizon of historical meaning. The fictive nature of this articulation, I suggest, is *both* a betrayal of the fragmentary condition of the historical revealed in the incoherence of the Duchampian references in *The Distance*, and an acknowledgement of the provisional and inconclusive basis on which (art) history’s stories must themselves be articulated – an acknowledgement which Hayden White has argued provides the very conditions for critical engagement in history.¹⁶³ White’s contention is that history’s objectivity is a product of the constitutive exclusion of fiction, rhetoric and politics – dimensions which in fact continue to haunt it. This exclusion serves to cover over the traumatic equivalence of two possible theses regarding history: that it is meaningful, and that it is Sublimely meaningless, an equivalence that White argues is not resolvable on epistemological grounds. He proposes that an acknowledgement of the Sublimity of history as empty of meaning is the condition for a recovery of historical agency. But such a recovery depends on the de-sublimation of interpretation as a drive towards meaningfulness in favour of an acceptance of contingency. This chapter has attempted a strategic articulation of art works which are not *causally* connected, and which do not support an originary authorial position in art history *or* art historical discourse, as a step towards such a desublimation.

The Distance draws on the histories of both Rodin and Duchamp and in binding them together provides new “after-images” for both. Just as Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.* became part of the *Mona Lisa* in art historical memory (a fact he registered with *L.H.O.O.Q. Rasée*), so Parker’s string may become, through photographs, part of the memory of *The*

Kiss an after-image that works its way into the original. The crucial question is whether this amounts to an act of critical comment on the museal fate of the work, its inevitable entanglement with an institutional afterlife, or whether it is instead a fantastical attempt at re-vivification. Writing of Michael Asher's "situational aesthetics" Claude Gintz argues that given the seeming inescapability of reification,

"a paradigmatical change such as the substitution of installation for painting as an art category does not suffice to escape that condition. This is probably why a practice like Asher's is acceptable only as long as it remains strictly marginal within an institution that could easily function without it, whereas the existence of that practice is entirely dependent on institutional administrative experience."¹⁶⁴

These concerns apply equally to *The Distance*, which is undoubtedly acceptable and legitimating for the Tate, but which also, as hinted at here, provides the potential of art historical reflection on institutional conditions, at least in an associative and perhaps fictive way akin to Parker's own relation to historical objects. In the context of an art world which increasingly reifies its own procedures, and in which communications technology further extends the art object's historical trajectory from fetish to image, this is a question that goes beyond *The Distance* to art history's mnemonic and critical function. Are its articulations inevitably fictional, and if so how can they be deployed? And if such fictions are inevitably the result of interpretation, what desires are at work in them, and what interpretative tools might allow us to reflect on this process itself?

The ambiguity of the reiteration of Duchampian strategies is clear, and is clearly structuring for the enunciation of *The Distance*. But if this is relatively uncontroversial in recent scholarship, what is less frequently addressed are the related questions posed, and left open, by both Adorno and Benjamin: how is the critical to respond to the dialectic of re-animation and reification?; how is art to be politicised, to counter the aestheticisation of politics? If art history no longer imagines itself to have access to a transcendent point above the field it surveys, if it can't be figured by Icarus in flight, can it avoid the fate of an endless aftermath, an endless fall back to earth, by playing amidst the labyrinths of connection, fabulation, articulation, which works like *The Distance* seem to authorise? If this chapter has embraced and enacted a positive answer to that question, the following chapter raises an agonist to it, re-emphasising the ambiguity inherent in the dialectic of re-animation and reification. The key issue is what kind of ambiguity this is – is it dialectic, or merely an accession to the inbetween-ness of a limbo between art's death and the viewer's birth – the dead and the living all subject to display value in “death's showcase”?

¹ The most well known, of course, is 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, (London: Pimlico, 1999), but its themes of aura, technology, and distance are developed across several texts, including 'A Little History of Photography' (1931), *Selected Writings, Volume 2 Part 2: 1931-34*, pp. 507-530, and 'The Storyteller' (1936), *Illuminations*, pp. 83-107, as well as writings on Proust and Baudelaire. For an account of the development of the "Artwork" essay through its various drafts, and in relation to these other essays, see Miriam Hansen, 'Benjamin, Cinema and experience: "The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology"' *New German Critique*, (Winter, 1987), 179-224.

² A non-linear account of the temporality of critical theorizations of subjectivity is given in Hal Foster, 'Postmodernism in Parallax' in *October*, No. 63, (Winter 1993), 3-20. The historical model he deploys is based in Freud's idea of "deferred action" (*Nachträglichkeit*). Foster's gradual development of this concept in a series of essays and books, culminating in *The Return of the Real*, is fundamental for my understanding of what is at stake here. Foster's contention is that a psychoanalytic mapping of historical time reveals avant-garde temporality as a matter of "protension and retension, a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts." Deferred action "throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition," *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 29.

³ It is instructive that the English edition of Pierre Cabanne's *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. R. Padgett, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), is book-ended by 'appreciations' by Robert Motherwell, a painter involved in the mediation of European Surrealism into American abstraction, and Jasper Johns, a key figure in the reception of Duchamp as proto-Conceptualist. Regardless of one's estimation of either reception of Duchamp in America, it is nonetheless axiomatic that "Duchamp" as he functions in contemporary art is a product of such receptions. This is one register in which Foster's theory of 'deferred action' in art history is useful. Amelia Jones's understanding of Duchamp as an 'author function' produced discursively by such receptions is also apposite. See *Postmodernism and the Engendering of Marcel Duchamp*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴ Bürger, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. M. Shaw, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1996). Bürger's contention that Duchamp's reception by the neo-avant-garde amounted to a recuperation of an original moment of critique, was given figurative form by Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, and Antonin Recalti in their 1965 series of paintings *To Live and Let Die or The Tragic Death of Marcel Duchamp*. The last of the eight works in the series featured Duchamp's burial, with the coffin draped in the Stars and Stripes, and Rauschenberg, Oldenberg, Rayssac, Restany, Warhol and Arman as pallbearers (all dressed as American marines). For Duchamp's "indifferent" reaction to this work, see Cabanne, op. cit., pp. 102-103. Amelia Jones interprets the *Live and Let Die...* series as an attack on Duchamp as figure of paternal authority. She also claims that in these works Duchamp appears as "an object of violence (an object of desire) in a way which undermines his paternal status. As a feminized object of interpretation "Duchamp's identities fluctuate in the transferential web constituted between his enunciations and our interpretations.... one could argue that the author - because situated as *object* of art-historical desire - is inevitably feminized, made subordinate to the masculine interpretive operations of the discipline. Even as the artist, or his or her interpreters, try to mask this feminization, the artist's dependence on the desire of the interpreter/other prompts the inevitable failure of this attempt," Jones, op. cit., 206. Jones reads interpretative desire as a drive to (patrilinear) order, but Julia Kristeva's alternative reading, which suggests that desire-driven interpretation in fact disrupts order, is more pertinent to the argument advanced here. See Kristeva, in Mitchell, (ed.) *The Politics of Interpretation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁵ The classic account of this is in Thierry de Duve's *Kant After Duchamp*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), in particular chapter two, 'Given the Richard Mutt Case,' pp. 89-143.

⁶ Duchamp, 'The Richard Mutt Case,' in Harrison & Wood (eds.) *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell 1992), 248.

⁷ de Duve, op. cit., 139, fn. 62.

⁸ The key text on the *Boîtes-en-valise* is Ecke Bonk's *Marcel Duchamp: the portable museum: the making of the Boîtes-en-valise de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rrose Selavy: inventory of an edition*, trans. D. Britt, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989). On the replica editions of *Fountain* see Camfield, 'Duchamp's

Fountain: Aesthetic Object, Icon, or Anti-Art? in Thierry de Duve, (ed.) *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 133-178. Duchamp's decision to sanction reproductions of the readymades was a contentious issue for those who interpreted them as anti-art gestures. For example, de Duve relates that Daniel Buren interpreted the Schwarz edition as a "sell out." Buren asked Duchamp why he had allowed such a thing to happen, and Duchamp's response was "The notion of original extends to eight ... today," de Duve (1991) op. cit., 309. Thus there is precedent within Duchamp's own approach to the historical destiny of the readymades for the notion that reiteration can be a valid extension of a critical gesture, and not just a sign of domestication or selling out. There is thus no contradiction between Duchamp's avowed aim not to repeat himself, and the reproduction of the readymades: repetition, is strictly speaking, not possible. Interestingly, Duchamp's positive attitude to reproduction as repetition matches Benjamin's. For Benjamin, to (mechanically) reproduce an artwork was "a means of renewing it, of making it useful again in the present," Haxthausen, 'Reproduction/Repetition: Walter Benjamin/Carl Einstein,' *October*, No. 107 (Winter, 2004), 47.

⁹ Benezra, N. et al. *Bruce Nauman: exhibition catalogue and catalogue raisonné*, (Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1994).

¹⁰ For an analysis of Levine's appropriations of Duchampian motifs see David Hopkins, 'The Politics of Equivocation: Sherrie Levine, Duchamp's 'Compensation Portrait,' and Surrealism in the USA 1942-45,' *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 26, No.1 (January, 2003), 45-68. Levine gives her own account of Duchamp's influence on her work in an interview with Martha Buskirk in Buskirk & Nixon (eds.) *The Duchamp Effect*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 177-181. Levine notes that casting the *Fountain* in bronze created an association with Brancusi that accentuated the anthropomorphic quality of the urinal, and also that "Repetition is implicit in the notion of the readymade," in Buskirk, op. cit., 180.

¹¹ Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 242-320.

¹² *ibid.* 276.

¹³ Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 4.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 10.

¹⁵ *ibid.* 16.

¹⁶ *ibid.* 88.

¹⁷ *ibid.* 99.

¹⁸ Duchamp, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: salt seller, marchand du sel*, ed. M. Sanouillet & E. Peterson, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 157.

¹⁹ See Jones, op. cit., as well as her *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1998), pp. 67-77.

²⁰ Jones (1998) op. cit., 68.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Jones (1992) op. cit., 29.

²³ Interestingly, this exhibition also included Richard Hamilton's reconstruction of the *Large Glass* in 'complete' diagrammatic form.

²⁴ And here again Duchamp is inescapable. As I complete this thesis the BBC reports that *Fountain* (at least, the "copy" on display as part of the Centre Pompidou's *Dada-by-Dada* exhibition) has been attacked by a septuagenarian performance artist who wished to protest its fetishistic treatment as auratic relic. Having been slightly damaged by hammer blows, *Fountain* will be removed from exhibition until repairs are carried out. The gentlemen concerned had previously made his feelings known by urinating in *Fountain* in a Nimes gallery in 1993.

²⁵ Herbert, M. 'Review of "Days Like These," Tate Triennial Exhibition of Contemporary British Art, 2003,' *Art Monthly*?

²⁶ Fenton, J. 'No Strings Attached,' *The Guardian* (Saturday 8th March, 2003).

²⁷ A propos these images I cannot resist quoting Benjamin: "Among children, collecting is only one process of renewal; among other processes are the painting of objects, the cutting out of figures, the application of decals – the whole range of childlike modes of acquisition, from touching things to giving them names. To renew the old world – that is the collector's deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things." 'Unpacking My Library,' *Illuminations*, 63.

²⁸ de Caso & Sanders, *Rodin's Sculpture: A Critical Study of the Spreckel's Collection, California, Palace of the Legion of Honor*, (San Francisco: Fine Art Museum of San Francisco, 1977), 149.

²⁹ Steinberg, 'Rodin,' *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

³⁰ *Rodin's Sculpture*, op. cit.

³¹ Benjamin: "Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so *vis à vis* technical reproduction." 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' *Illuminations*, 214.

³² Krauss, 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde,' *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986), 153.

³³ *ibid.*, 156.

³⁴ Rilke, R.M. *Rodin*, trans. Robert Firmage, (Salt Lake City: Peregrine, 1982), 22.

³⁵ Azoulay, *Death's Showcase: the Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy*, trans. Ruvik Danieli, Cambridge: MIT Press, (2001), 22. Azoulay's very useful contribution to the reception of the Artwork essay is to emphasise the anticipatory structure at work in the evocation of lost aura. Following Agamben's definition of melancholia as an anticipatory preparation for loss that has yet to occur, Azoulay sees Benjamin's attitude towards aura as melancholic. Yet, rather than being lost at the time of writing, the auratic work of art was only just emerging, coextensive with the development of institutions dedicated to its preservation and display. Only with the modern art museum as shrine to art object "was the work of art institutionalized as a consistently identifiable point of reference whose sequential history could be written in a positive manner" *ibid.*, 19. This is an example of the non-linear temporality at work in theory as well as artistic practice, a point made at the outset of this chapter.

³⁶ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art...', op. cit., 216.

³⁷ Rilke, op. cit., 35.

³⁸ *ibid.* 38.

³⁹ *ibid.* 72.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* 81.

⁴¹ *ibid.* 72.

⁴² *ibid.* 72.

⁴³ *ibid.* 73.

⁴⁴ 'Cornelia Parker in conversation with Colin Renfrew' 2/4/2003, archived at <http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/parker.htm> (accessed 12/2/05).

⁴⁵ On the 'readymade' puns see Sarat Maharaj, "'A Monster of Veracity, A Crystalline Transubstantiation": Typotranslating the Green Box,' in Buskirk, op. cit., 84. It is noteworthy that both these puns, and *Fresh Widow* were "authored" by Rose Selavy, implying that Duchamp associated femininity with the semiotic play and ambiguity realised in the structure of punning.

⁴⁶ 'Cornelia Parker in conversation with Colin Renfrew' op. cit.

⁴⁷ Stuart Cameron, in Brett et al. *Cornelia Parker: Avoided Object*, Cardiff: Chapter, (1996), 5.

⁴⁸ Interestingly, Parker has said that "The desire to make things imperfect or porous or break the mold of the cliché ... that's something that recurs." In Tickner, 'A Strange Alchemy: Cornelia Parker' *Art History*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (June, 2003), 368. Breaking the mold of cliché takes on an extra resonance in terms of Rodin's relation to reproduction.

⁴⁹ Writing of Parker's 1997 *Pornographic Drawings*, Rorschach blots apparently made from melted down pornographic film stock, Adam Mars-Jones has noted that "there was no way for the viewer to confirm the authenticity of these materials.... This is a game played out with a seriousness that negates any sense of the silly." 'Blowing the Top off a Bottle of San Pellegrino,' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 27, No. 24 (15th December, 2005), 26.

⁵⁰ "Living on" is Foster's term for the fate of art in a condition of "aftermath" after the end of the self-evidence of the end(s) of art. See 'This Funeral is For the Wrong Corpse' in *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, (London: Verso, 2002), 123-143. If neither the recursive nor the 'post' any longer suffice as critical modes, art runs the risk of a "paradigm-of-no-paradigm"; a posthistorical banality which is "no improvement on the old historical determinism of modernist art" *ibid.*, 128. There is a need, in opposition to this indifferent outcome, for narratives of art – what Foster terms "situated stories" – which focus critical practices in the aftermath of postmodernism. Adorno saw philosophy as "living on" because it missed its (Marxist) moment of realisation. For art, "living on" in this sense is not repetition or "postness" but "a making-do with what-comes-after" *ibid.*, 129.

⁵¹ Interestingly, White's related *Wet Window* series, which Foster has described as "the old liquidity of the photograph" ('Water, Paper, Light,' Lucas Schoormans Gallery, www.artnet.com/Schoormans.html, (accessed 10/08/05)) suggests a formal connection to the *Large Glass*. Duchamp had himself considered making the "Milky Way" portion of the Bride's domain of the glass a photographic emulsion, which would have added an extra level of meaning to its themes of desire and mechanization, and, if we read *Étant Donnés* back into it, death. For a discussion of Duchamp's unrealised intention to make a photographic emulsion on the *Large Glass* see de Duve (1991) op. cit., pp. 122-126.

⁵² Cornelia Parker, in Tickner. op. cit., 384.

⁵³ *ibid.* 368.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* 385.

⁵⁵ See Douglas Crimp, 'This Is Not a Museum of Art,' *On the Museum's Ruins*, (London: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 200-230.

⁵⁶ For a discussion of other works by Wilson which also utilise curation as critique, see Susan A. Crauc 'Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum,' *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), 44-63.

⁵⁷ Fred Wilson and Ivan Karp, 'Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums,' in Greenberg et al. (eds.) *Thinking About Exhibitions*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 256.

⁵⁸ Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History, VII, *Illuminations*, 248. NB also Wilson's interview in Buskirk, op. cit., 190, where he states that his working method is "to look at the museum itself and to pull out relationships that are invisibly there and to make them visible."

⁵⁹ Cited in Gintz, 'Michael Asher and the Transformation of "Situational Aesthetics"' trans. J. Aminoff, *October*, Vol. 66, (Autumn, 1993), 113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Jean Fisher, 'Vitrines From the Pathology Museum,' *Vampire in the Text – Narratives of Contemporary Art*, (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003), 263.

⁶² *ibid.* 262. Though she doesn't name names, we recognize easily enough amongst these descriptions the work of Damien Hirst, Marc Quinn, Mona Hatoum, the Chapman brothers.

⁶³ *ibid.* 262.

⁶⁴ On this theme see Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, ed. V. Marchetti & A. Salomoni, trans. G. Burchell, (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 55-80.

⁶⁵ Fisher, op. cit., 263.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (London: Duke University Press, 1993); White, 'The Politics of Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation' in Mitchell, (ed.) *The Politics of Interpretation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 119-143.

⁷⁰ Putnam, *Art and Artifact: the Museum as Medium*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 12.

⁷¹ Crimp, op. cit., 228.

⁷² Greenaway curated 'The Physical Self' at Rotterdam's Museum Boijmas-Van Beuningen, 1991, and 'some Organizing Principle' at the Glynn Vivian Art gallery, Swansea, 1993.

⁷³ Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 52.

⁷⁴ Heinich and Pollak, 'From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a Singular Position', in Greenberg, et al. op. cit., 231-250.

⁷⁵ Meijers, 'The Museum and the 'Ahistorical' Exhibition,' in *ibid.* 7-20.

⁷⁶ On contiguity as a characteristic of the pre-modern museum, see Stephen Bann, 'The Poetics of the Museum,' in Preziosi & Farago (eds.) *Grasping the World: The Idea of The Museum*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). Bann argues that in fact this characteristic is not banished by modern museological systematicity but that both features persist in the museum. This further emphasizes that a double view is required to grasp the dynamics of the museum, and the artwork.

⁷⁷ Meijers, op. cit., 9.

⁷⁸ Bourdieu, 'Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception,' *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. R. Johnson, (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), 226.

⁷⁹ de Duve, (1991) op. cit., 240.

⁸⁰ Putnam, op. cit., 12.

- ⁸¹ Amelia Jones rightly acknowledges the ambiguity of the artistic recovery of such exhibitionary / commercial 'works'. She writes: "The author-function Duchamp appended to these installations, which exist for posterity *only* as photographs and descriptive texts, legitimates them as deliberately conceived works of art," Jones (1992) op. cit., 81. As does Duchamp himself, these works provide an unstable grounding for a 'tradition', at least as traditionally conceived. For an overview of the literature which addresses Duchamp's exhibitionary activities see Sheldon Nodelman, 'Disguise and Display,' *Art in America*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (March 2003), 57-61, 131-134.
- ⁸² de Duve, in Buskirk, op. cit., 210.
- ⁸³ de Duve, (1998) op. cit. The first chapter of the book indicates that de Duve sees Duchamp as establishing *the* paradigm for a philosophical understanding of art, pp. 1-88.
- ⁸⁴ Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, (London: Pimlico, 1996), 373.
- ⁸⁵ in Cabanne, op. cit., 76.
- ⁸⁶ Duchamp, quoted in Hulten (ed.) *Marcel Duchamp*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), (unpaginated).
- ⁸⁷ Amelia Jones, (1992) op. cit., 76-85.
- ⁸⁸ See Hopkins, op. cit., on the compensation portrait.
- ⁸⁹ This is a "resonance" in the sense proposed by Thierry de Duve – that is, not a causal link, but a suggested context. "Resonance" serves to displace the idea that artistic development "is best described as a dialectic made exclusively of influences and ruptures." See de Duve, 'Resonances of Marcel Duchamp's visit to Munich', in Kuenzli and Naumann (eds.) *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990), 42.
- ⁹⁰ Molesworth, 'Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades,' *Art Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Winter, 1998), 55.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 61.
- ⁹² See Cabanne, op. cit., 72, where Duchamp states that he is "enormously lazy" and prefers "living, breathing" to working. Interestingly, Lewis Kachur notes the "biographical curiosity" that assisting Duchamp with the actual installation of the string were two couples who were in the process of separating – David and Susanna Hare, and Andre and Jacqueline Breton, whilst Hare and Jacqueline were forming a new relationship; "so that within the group a hidden association of *unraveling* and perhaps *intertwining*, accrues to the material chosen." Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 183.
- ⁹³ Hulten, op. cit., (unpaginated).
- ⁹⁴ *Three Standard Stoppages* mocks the laws of "logical reality" as "approximations, so that the arbitrary aspects of the system risk becoming obvious," Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, (London: Trianon, 1959), 29.
- ⁹⁵ Quoted in Kachur, op. cit., 181.
- ⁹⁶ *ibid.* 181.
- ⁹⁷ Tomkins, op. cit., 371-373.
- ⁹⁸ Duchamp, *Notes*, trans. P. Matisse, (Paris: Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, 1980), Note 165.
- ⁹⁹ Quoted in Hulten, op. cit., (unpaginated).
- ¹⁰⁰ On Duchamp's use of optical technology to emphasize the libidinal investments of viewing, see Krauss, op. cit., pp. 94-146.
- ¹⁰¹ Duchamp (1980), op. cit., Note 184.
- ¹⁰² Nesbit, 'Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model,' *October*, Vol. 37, (Summer, 1986), 59.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 54.
- ¹⁰⁴ quoted in *ibid.* 55.
- ¹⁰⁵ See Nesbit, 'The Language of Industry', in de Duve (1991) op. cit., 351-384.
- ¹⁰⁶ quoted in Hulten, op. cit., (unpaginated), entry for 18th Sept. 1915.
- ¹⁰⁷ Molesworth, op. cit., 56.
- ¹⁰⁸ Nesbit, (1986) op. cit., 64.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.
- ¹¹⁰ Reproduced in Hulten, op. cit., (unpaginated), entry for 14th Oct. 1942.
- ¹¹¹ See Tomkins, op. cit., pp. 207-223. Duchamp indicated his feelings about this event in a letter to the Arensbergs from Buenos Aires, 8th November, 1918, reproduced in Kuenzli and Naumann (eds.) *Marcel*

Duchamp: Artist of the Century, pp. 207-209. Duchamp received news of several deaths whilst in Buenos Aires, a fact he mentions in a letter of 7th January 1919, in *ibid.*, pp. 210-213.

¹¹² Carol P. James, 'An Original Revolutionary *Messagerie Rose*,' in de Duve (1991) op. cit., 288.

Rosalind Krauss has pointed out *à propos Cols altés* that optical nerve fibres were often compared in nineteenth-century discourse to telegraph wires. This further reinforces the association between viewing, technology, and desire common to *Étant Donnés*, the *Large Glass* and the drawings discussed here. See *The Optical Unconscious*, op. cit., pp. 120-123.

¹¹³ On the genesis and realisation of these works see Hellmut Wohl, 'Duchamp's Etchings of the *Large Glass* and *The Lovers*,' in Kuenzli and Naumann, op. cit., pp. 168-183.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, Volume One*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 246.

¹¹⁵ See George H. Bauer's very detailed discussion of these themes in 'Duchamp's Ubiquitous Puns,' in Kuenzli & Naumann, op. cit., pp. 138-139.

¹¹⁶ Mitchell, 'The Zola of Sculpture?: a Franco-British dialogue' *Rodin: The Zola of Sculpture*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 20.

¹¹⁷ Symons, quoted in *ibid.*, 22.

¹¹⁸ Symons, quoted in *ibid.*, 22.

¹¹⁹ Mitchell, 'Rodin and the Baudelairean legacy: Arthur Symons on the Sculptor as Poet,' *Rodin: The Zola of Sculpture*, 73-94.

¹²⁰ Symons, quoted in *ibid.*, 75.

¹²¹ Symons, quoted in *ibid.*, 76.

¹²² Symons, quoted in *ibid.*, 77.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 85-91.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹²⁵ Symons, quoted in *ibid.*, 90.

¹²⁶ Carol P. James, 'An Original Revolutionary *Messagerie Rose*,' in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 291.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, 294.

¹²⁸ Adorno, 'Valéry Proust Museum,' *Prisms*, (Letchworth: Spearman, 1967), 175.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹³² Quoted in *ibid.*, 179. There is a resonance here with Mierle Laderman Ukeles' 1970s *Maintenance* performances which "posited an equivalence between "public" and "private" institutions of art – galleries, museums, and private homes – by suggesting that domestic labour is not exclusively "private." Instead, her work argues that maintenance work is a continuum that connects usually unseen/unpaid domestic labor to the same maintenance work that occurs in "public" institutions." Molesworth, op. cit., 51, fn.1.

¹³³ Adorno, op. cit., 179.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹³⁶ Duchamp, 'The Creative Act,' in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp: salt seller, marchand du sel*, ed. M. Sanouillet & E. Peterson, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1975), 139.

¹³⁷ Duchamp, 'Interview with James Johnson Sweeney,' *ibid.*, 133.

¹³⁸ Adorno, op. cit., 182.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁴² Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 518-19.

¹⁴³ *Illuminations*, 215.

¹⁴⁴ See 'Unpacking my Library,' *ibid.* 61-69, on the collector; 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,' *ibid.* 83-107, on the storyteller.

¹⁴⁵ On this point see Hal Foster, 'Postmodernism in Parallax,' *October*, No. 63, (Winter 1993), 3-20, where the concept of deferred action is employed to describe the temporality at work in Benjamin's reflections on technology. Theories of the spectacle and of technoculture, Foster argues, do not supercede Benjamin's thesis, but realise it by deferred action.

¹⁴⁶ Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, (London: Verso, 2002), 74.

¹⁴⁷ James, op. cit., 274.

¹⁴⁸ Bhabha, 'Aura and Agora: On Negotiating Rapture and Speaking Between,' in *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives*, Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, (1996), 8-16.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ W.H. Auden 'Musée des Beaux Arts'

*About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along:
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there must always be
Children who did not especially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.*

*In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the scene of the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure, the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing in the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.*

¹⁵⁵ Bhabha, 'Negotiating Rapture...' 11.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶³ White, 'The Politics of Representation,' in Mitchell, (ed.) *The Politics of Interpretation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 119-144. See also White's 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,' *History and Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (February, 1984), 1-33, and 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1980), 5-27.

¹⁶⁴ Gintz, 'Michael Asher and the Transformation of "Situational Aesthetics",' trans. J. Aminoff, *October*, No. 66, (Winter, 1993), 113-131.

CHAPTER TWO – Vertigo and the Copy

1

Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories. ... For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order? ... And indeed, if there is a counterpart to the confusion of a library, it is the order of its catalogue.

Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library'

I defy any amateur of painting to love a picture as much as a fetishist loves a shoe.

Georges Bataille.

The preceding chapter took Cornelia Parker's *The Distance (a kiss with string attached)* as a work exemplary of one strand of contemporary artistic practice, and attempted to show that its frame of reference could be used to open up critical issues relating to the fate of art in the museum and in the age of its technical reproducibility. The justification for the approach taken in analysing this work was, in part, grounded in a conviction that an immersion in the "iconography" of the work and its enunciative conditions would inevitably lead to issues "beyond" art and the museum. This process, and the chain of associations it produces, is extended in this chapter. The relevance to art of culture and history beyond the museum's walls is of course axiomatic to the accounts of modernity

given by Adorno and Benjamin. Yet the historical distance from their writing to the present necessitates that the contemporary, in art and culture, be theorised in its relationship to the transformations they describe. Hal Foster has used the concept of “deferred action” to argue that rather than supplanting the discourses of subject / culture / technology established in the 1930s and the 1960s, the much discussed concepts of the posthuman, identity politics, the post-colonial, virtuality, technoculture, electronic communication, and so on, in fact *realise* them. The transformations of the cultural field wrought by modernity are extended into the present, not supplanted by qualitatively new phenomena.¹ Thus both the negative and positive dimensions of Benjamin and Adorno’s accounts of art’s fate have to be extended to the present; both the potential for a non-aesthetic art and the risk of reification’s colonisation of all spheres of affect. Foster argues that one of the consequences of the postmodern realisation of a fully reified culture is that *design* becomes the paradigmatic form of expression, collapsing the distance between art and life in an ironic realisation of the aims of the historical avant-garde.² If postmodern art (as practised in the 1970s and 80s) had reacted to the transformations of modernity in its turning on / troping of modernism – in Bhabha’s terms treating modernism as a narrative producing agonists to its own existence – contemporary art is characterised by its “after-ness,” its attempted escape from anti-modernist negative dependency as it seeks to negotiate itself a space of survival, without succumbing to the affirmative logic of the design paradigm.³ This chapter pursues the connotations of art’s “living on,” from an analysis of the subjective basis of the collection as narrative, via the technologically mediated image (in photography and cinema), to resolve the epistemological questions left unanswered in the preceding discussion, and their consequences for critical writing.

* * * *

Foster suggests that there are four modes of “living on” of art in contemporary artistic practices: the *traumatic*, the *spectral*, the *nonsynchronous*, and the *incongruent*.⁴ These modes are not proposed as discreet categories, but often overlap and combine. Again, *The Distance* is exemplary in relating to all these modes – its recollection of the *trauma* (for art history) of Duchamp’s readymade strategy; the *spectral* existence of the work as (photographic) afterimage, its *nonsynchronous* combination of different historical moments; and its *incongruent* combination of aesthetic and anti-aesthetic impulses (of Rodin and high modernism with Duchamp as and his reception in neo-avant-gardism). In contrast to postmodernist pastiche, Foster suggests that these modes “trope” genres and mediums *reflexively*, aiming to open out to social praxis. “Through formal transformation that is also social engagement, then, such work helps to restore a mnemonic dimension to contemporary art, and to resist the presentist totality of design in culture today.”⁵ It does not, however, do so alone; critical writing is required to underscore the contingent oppositional potential of art as re-membering. Moreover, it is faced with the difficult task of negotiating the relation between art’s auratic museum life, and its death as critical practice in a commodified, spectacular visual culture, recuperated under the sign of design or style.

The most important of Foster’s four modes of “living on” in the present context are the first two; it is the *spectral* and the *traumatic* which allow us to move from the analysis of a particular work to broader questions of (visual) culture as both symptomatic of

postmodernity and potential site of resistance to it. In the traumatic, Foster contends, the failure of historical memory is met by a "compensatory imperative to remember," most obviously seen in Holocaust commemorations, but also taking the form of museums dedicated to preserving traumatic episodes in history.⁶ The museum itself is implicated in this dynamic of loss and compensatory memories; it is an institution which "builds a secret monument to the end of history. ... In lifting art out of the hurly-burly of historical survival, the museum strips the artwork of its historical existence. It replaces historicity by historiography."⁷ Its relationship to trauma is thus implicitly repressive; it monumentalises rather than activates the historical openings created by traumatic ruptures in the symbolic order of things.

Georges Bataille insisted in the "critical dictionary" published in *Documents* on the sublimatory role of the museum for culture in general. Denis Hollier's analysis of Bataille's radical opposition to architecture as the form of "edifying" systematicity, and as a kind of social mirror stage productive of "We" rather than "I," emphasises this point.⁸ The museum is here a veil for the sacrificial, archaic and labyrinthine space of the slaughterhouse, the truth of which can no longer be faced up to: "those who could not bear the image of decomposition reflected to them by the slaughterhouses go to museums to compose themselves again. They flee the unredeeming ugliness of slaughterhouses for the beauty of museums."⁹ The museum is a crucial architectural edifice in that it not only has this veiling function for Bataille, but also figures the museal dimension as co-terminous with the very possibility of a history of art, a historiography standing in for historicity. Hegel's aesthetics, emergent from a supercession of art by philosophy,

depends on the presumption that art is *a thing of the past*: “Art is dead. With his *Aesthetics*, Hegel constructs its tomb.”¹⁰ For Phillip Fisher, the act of walking past art in our museal perambulations “recapitulates ... the motion of art history itself, its restlessness, its forward motion, its power to link. ... The rapid stroll through a museum is an act in deep harmony with the nature of art, that is, art history and the museum itself (*not* with the individual object, which the museum has profoundly hidden in history).”¹¹ This alignment of art as such with art history and the museum needs to be supplemented by the recognition that we now “wander through museum spaces as if after the end of time.”¹² It is the ambiguity of art’s relationship with an institution that both obscures and creates it, and a discourse that is mutually dependent on this institution, that I wish to underscore here. As was argued in Chapter One, the recognition of the constitutive role of the museum’s / art history’s procedures in producing art risks turning into an aestheticisation of them, just as the fantasy of being “after history” risks abandoning culture as a site of contest within history. If the photographic image is, paradoxically, the final site of cult value in modernity, for Benjamin “it is also that which enables the recuperation of the ethical stance and a certain resistance to the threat of aestheticization.”¹³ It is this possibility which Foster wishes to extend in his notion of art’s survival in traumatic and spectral modes.

Trauma has become a general signifier for contemporary understanding of history and the subject, and indeed the privileged mode of access to shared affective “publicity,” via what Mark Seltzer has termed the “sociality of the wound” in the structurally transformed public sphere.¹⁴ Foster notes that many novelists and filmmakers present experience in

the guise of the traumatic paradox of “experience that is *not* experienced, at least not punctually, that comes too early or too late to be registered consciously, that can only be repeated compulsively or pieced together after the fact.”¹⁵ His examples of traumatic narrative include the novels of W. G. Sebald, Paul Auster and Toni Morrison, but recent movies such as Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000), David Cronenberg’s *Spider* (2003) or *The Machinist* (Brad Anderson, 2004) exemplify this phenomenon even better – in each of these films the narrative which the viewer is presented with as (disturbing, enigmatic) reality, turns out to be the protagonist’s fantasy. The diegetic reality with which we are engaged is in each case a result of these protagonists’ failure to bring some trauma to full consciousness – the death of a wife in *Memento*, the Oedipal scene in *Spider*, the accidental killing of a child in *The Machinist*. Hence, in each case the revelation of the true content of the traumatic episode ruptures the texture of the fantasy which has driven the narrative, and must mean the end of the story and our return to the real in an act of narrative and psychological “closure.”¹⁶ In this sense – to give advance notice of an argument made in more detail later in this chapter – Alfred Hitchcock’s films are more radical than traumatic postmodernist cinema in allowing for a more complex process of spectatorial identification which configures fantasy, cinematic texture and narrative in such a way as to prevent an easy acceptance of the closure of fantasy and a return to the real. In *Vertigo*, for instance, we know before the protagonist does that his experience is fantasmatic, and do so for almost half of the film. In his famous discussion with François Truffaut, Hitchcock justified this unusual plot structure, in which the twist is given away early, as follows: “I put myself in the place of a child whose mother is telling him a story. When there’s a pause in her narration, the child always says, “What

comes next Mommy?"¹⁷ Hitchcock, thus "imagines himself in the double role -- a bisexual role -- of the little boy (the audience) who listens to the story *and* the mother (the director) who tells it."¹⁸ For this account of the traumatic as a mode in contemporary cultural production Hitchcock's statement suggests that the boundaries between knowingness, narration, and the unconscious are structurally ambiguous. *Vertigo*, unlike more recent films in the traumatic mode, allows that narration might persist beyond the point at which trauma is brought to consciousness -- in doing so it resists closure and allows the space for critics to transform it, in much the same way as Foster posits the critical potential in art's condition of aftermath.

If all art exists in the shadow of previous art, as the very condition of its disciplinarity, Foster claims that in contemporary art this shadowing is *spectral* -- it is a question of haunting, to be distinguished from Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence and from postmodernism celebratory homage, or pastiche. The difference lies in the effect that the *spectral* as cultural has on what it haunts: spectral works are those which render the genres they come after "at once archaic and exotic, strangely animated," in a kind of active *production* of "outmodedness" in Benjamin's sense.¹⁹ Further, they work to inscribe themselves in the pasts that make them possible. I have tried to show that *The Distance*, as a relatively unprepossessing example of art operating in the modes Foster identifies, can support a close-reading that helps animate -- that is, keep moving -- the (Duchampian) tradition to which it belongs, and in doing so, haunts the very past which provides the condition of its existence; in other words, it effects the very

conceptualisation of that past. This is the counterpart to the museum's immobilization of history – a dynamic historicity which problematizes historiography as linear succession.

The preceding chapter indicated that art history as narrative is bound up with the re-animation of its privileged objects in their museal context. With Bhabha's emphasis on the *interiority* of processes of interpretation as articulation-fabulation to the artwork, the blow against art's autonomy struck by the historical avant-garde, figured most particularly by Duchamp, was extended to become a general condition of art *per se*. Though the radical thrust this provides against autonomy as an objective property of art (and as a prop for subjective autonomy, as in Rilke's discourse on Rodin) is to be endorsed, Bhabha's account leaves the historical dimension of his key terms – aura, museum, agora-marketplace – unaddressed. This chapter picks up the threads of his conception of narrativity, but brings it to bear on the historical context of art's dual status as auratic ritual object and reproduced display object. Positing the museum as the key context for the duality of death and aura in art, it opens up the problem of subjective investment in the narratives emergent in processes of collection and curation – the fundamental procedures of museological practice. This leads beyond the museum's walls to the problematic of fetishism, in a double Marxist-Freudian sense, and thereby to image and after-image as sites of investment in photography and in cinema. Finally, these arguments lead to a suggested conclusion to the problem of narrative and mediation in relation to copy-as-original – the question set out at the start of Chapter One.

Consonant with Bhabha's argument that narrative is intimately part of the signification of artworks, Mieke Bal has proposed that collections themselves have a narrative form, and that they are therefore interpretable in semiotic terms.²⁰ Just as Bhabha insists on the intersubjectivity of the "human position" and of narrative, so Bal stresses that whilst artistic / cultural production and spectation are ultimately subjective, nonetheless codes or conventions of meaning must be intersubjectively available in objective form for such production/reception to occur. Narrative doubles this situation insofar as it is *constative*, it recounts facts, but does so via a narrator whose subjective viewpoint directs our interpretation of events; thus, all narratives are "by definition more or less fictional," and inquiry into narrative forms must therefore acknowledge that the fictive cannot be entirely eliminated.²¹

Collecting cannot be easily defined, because knowledge based on definition itself depends on procedures of collection and classification, and is therefore implicated in what is at stake here. To get round this difficulty Bal switches her focus to the attitude of the *collector*, and presents collecting as a confrontation between his subjective attitude and the objects collected. These narrative components can then be analyzed in semiotic terms, though, as is often the case when a position between two opposing poles is argued for, there is the suspicion that one side of that opposition is already privileged. Here, Bal's initial promise of treating the *collection itself* as a narrative has quickly slid over into study of the narrative investment of the collecting *subject*.

What drives this investment? According to Bal, the narrative of the collecting attitude is a response to a necessary ambiguity in the collection's origin. The first object of a collection never appears as such; it is bought, but not yet *collected*. "In relation to the plot of collecting, the initial event is arbitrary, contingent, accidental. ... Only retrospectively, through a narrative manipulation of the sequence of events, can the accidental acquisition of the first object *become* the beginning of a collection."²² Collecting is meaningful once it is a narrativized sequence, but this meaningfulness is not transparent to a narrative agent (the collector); an "initial blindness" is a precondition, with this only retrospectively overcome.²³ Thus the shift of attention from collection-as-narrative to collector-as-narrator is not a recourse to a self-transparent and originary subject. The narrative of subjective motivation is a supplementary device to repress the "other beginning" – that of the object which was merely bought, not collected (perhaps illustrating the Hegelian point that a quantitative change, in this instance the accumulation of objects to form a "collection," can become a qualitative one).²⁴ Here we must underscore the resonance with art history's own narrativizing of Duchamp, whose act of introducing the Readymade into the repertoire of art has been given meaning through subsequent re-collections of it: in the narrative of anti-art; the repetitions of its strategy by other artists, (and, indeed by Duchamp himself); and in the establishment of Duchamp as "author-function."²⁵

Bal is aware that there is a risk of naturalizing a socially specific form of engagement with objects by giving it an essentialised subjective definition, in seeing the collecting

attitude as a matter of the subject's desire (as with Schlosser's *Sammeltrieb*). What is required is a concept that keeps open the social/historical dimension even as it tells the story of the subject's desire, and Bal argues that this concept is *fetishism*. Collecting can thus be conceptualised as a fetishistic, possessive strategy deployed in both individual and cultural forms. The collection is here a project of mastery, of the appropriation of otherness. Thus collecting as an extension of self operates in an act of appropriation as de-othering that *produces* alterity so as to overcome it, and it is this paradoxical move which defines fetishism for Bal. If collecting is a (fetishistic) project of mastery, then the contingency of the object which (retrospectively) initiates its narrative is deeply problematic, for it is an origin which depends on a potentially unstable distance and alterity, which the subject may fail to dominate. It is also a project with a troubled relationship not only to this retrospectively attained origin, but also to its possible completion, which inevitably threatens the death of subjective investment. At the turn of the twentieth century Adolph Loos argued against Art Nouveau's ornamentalization of the commonplace, imagining the subject's response to the fully aestheticized environment to be one of horror. For Loos, it is with the full subjectivization of the world – its appropriation into the collection of *art* – that the aesthetic project turns sour; the subject is “precluded from all future living and striving, developing and desiring” and the consequence of completing the subjective investment in objects is living “with one's own corpse.”²⁶ This point will be expanded upon when fetishism is discussed in the context of cinema, and another conceptualisation of the relationship between subjective and cultural investment in objects is considered. But how does fetishism itself operate in narrative terms?

Marx and Freud provide the seminal accounts of fetishism in the social and subjective registers. Drawing on both, Bal insists on the usefulness of a *hybrid* concept of fetishism, a concept which promises to reveal collection as situated in the hybridic capitalist / individualist social sphere. Her reading of Freudian fetishism in semiotic terms runs as follows: the fetishistic investment in an object is explained by a narrative of origins in which three acts of symbolization respond to an initial (visual) perception of lack. According to Freud, faced with this perception, "a child is able to satisfy both the demand to acquiesce in the reality of castration and a conflicting, narcissistic desire to disavow it by maintaining both beliefs concurrently."²⁷ Thus a primal traumatic moment is placed at start of the story. In fact, this initial moment is itself indistinguishable from the fictive symbolic determination of "absence of penis" as lack, a supplementary, metaphorical effect of the subject. This visual interpretation leads on to a second symbolization, which, by "superimposing fiction upon fiction," denies the absence seen in the first – a denial of absence later eroticised into fetishism in a third symbolic act. The object which is to be the paradigm of "object-ivity" is made to mean according to a system of rhetorical tropes: the fetish as penis substitute synecdochally stands for the (unity of the) whole body, of which it is itself part; metonymically, objects like stockings or a chain are valued through their contiguity to the body.²⁸ But in a second aspect of the fetishistic process, wholeness is itself defined by the presence of a single part. As Freud writes, "the normal prototype of fetishes is a man's penis,"²⁹ and it the fetishized penis as phallus that represents / guarantees wholeness. As synecdoche the penis can only represent masculinity – but the object of fetishism (that which it tries to preserve as wholeness) is the female, maternal,

body. This discontinuity is bridged by *metaphor*: "The wholeness of the female body can only be synecdochally represented by the stand-in penis that is the fetish, if that body is simultaneously to be metaphorically represented by the male body."³⁰ Thus the male body establishes the normative principle by which wholeness as such is possible.

This sequence of metaphoric, synecdochal and metonymic substitutions is also, for Bal, the semantic basis of the collection as narrative. An object in a collection means according to its relations to other objects, synecdochally (part of a whole), metonymically (as it relates to another proximate object or idea) but always also *metaphorically* – the object is representative insofar as it can represent other objects. The semiotic logic of the collection is dependant on the "violence" of this process; "each episode of collecting, each event of insertion ... is also an act of deprivation."³¹ As with the doubly fictional erasure of the 'original' traumatic absence in Freudian fetishism, the collector's narrative is a violent rewriting of an object's history. This requires an effect of narrative closure that is achieved retrospectively by the insertion of an original moment that marks the boundary of the narrative, once it has been established. This beginning-as-boundary is thus a retrospective projection which enables the very possibility of narrativization. This violent event of semantic deprivation is, for Bal, the very core of collecting's narrative.³² It is also, insofar as the museum not only relies on the practice and logic of collection but also continues the re-writing of object histories, the core of museology. The problem here, however, is that there is a tendency to valorize the meaning of the object before its collection; to assume a natural/original meaning before appropriation and narration. Thus the radical implications of Bal's semiotics are not carried through to their conclusion.

In both Marxian and Freudian theories of fetishism there is a reciprocal *subjectivation of objects*, and objectification of subjects, and Bal locates the interconnection of these processes in the role of the visual in both theories. In the Marxist account it is as a visual projection that the reciprocal misperception of objects as animate and subjects as images is figured, indeed "this equation of subject and image is isomorphic with the structure of commodity fetishism."³³ As presented in the Freudian account of the child's (mis)perception of female lack, the objectivity of vision is deceptive – it is always already directed by subjective fictions, it is always already a semiotic/rhetorical activity, Bal insists. Thus the basis of the collection as narrative is not the object in its material specificity, but rather its existence as image for the subject. If for Adorno museums are tombs for dead objects, for Benjamin it is photography (and other technologies of reproduction) that kills off auratic art and thereby opens the possibility of a transformation of *image* into revolutionary tool. Yet photography is also a determining, necessary if not sufficient, disciplinary condition of art history's disciplinarity. As well as undermining originality in its own procedures, it also *produces* it retrospectively for art and discourses on art. In the age of mechanical reproduction, the fetishistic character at least minimally present in the art-collecting impulse is revealed clearly, but in a paradoxical way. The ineffable quality of the desired object is veiled / disavowed in an *ideal* projection of its innate value. But, as reproduction makes a version of this ideality generally available as image, so the *originality* of the object comes to be guaranteed by its materiality. There are therefore two versions of the ideality of the art work – that pertaining to the image as freely circulating reproduction (commodity form), and that

paradoxically ascribed to the materially original work (as fetish). The fetishism of collection-as-narrative is violent in that it obscures both this ambiguity and its own rhetorical basis in order to impose its object lessons. Can, then, the two classic theories of fetishism – those of Marx and Freud – undo this narrative, whilst at the same time telling their own?

For Marx it is commodities which represent to producers their relation to manufactured goods as an objective social relation pertaining between goods, not men. With the commodity form, material properties bear no relation to (exchange) value; rather “it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”³⁴ Marx’s clarification of the mystified relations between goods and men brings this to the fore in its combination of the quotidian and archaic / religious connotations:

“In order ... to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.”³⁵

The phrase "commodity fetishism" thus gains its force from an internal tension, which depends for its effect on an Occidental projection of anthropological otherness, and the spectral is associated with the seemingly ordinary objectivity of the commodity.

Both Marx's and Freud's narratives start out from a "primal" scene of visual apprehension which leads on to the relations between objects, and Bal stresses that in both accounts "vision as both positive knowledge and perverting subjectivity constitutes the core event."³⁶ For both, she argues, there is a discrepancy between narrator and "focalisor," her name for the subjective prism through which the narrative is presented to us. The Freudian subject narrates via the symptoms of his fetishism, the Marxian one by fulfilling his historical class role.

"For Freud, the narrator is an adult male agent, for Marx, the historical agent. This narrator is by necessity stuck within a double vision, embedding the focalisation of adult and child, of lucid agent and deceived idolator, indistinguishably. Freud's focalisor has fully endorsed the doubly negative vision of the child, including the remedial denial and the fetishistic displacement. Marx's focalisor is a selfconscious agent standing within the historical process and endorsing as well as denouncing false consciousness and the idols of the mind."³⁷

Crucially, then, we have narratives in which both knowing and not knowing, lucidity and deception, mark the subject's relation to the absent origins which begin these narratives.

But Bal's analysis does not move on from this insight to address the problem of the focalisation of the Marxist and Freudian focalisers: the subjects she interrogates are the analytic patient and the historical (proletarian) agent, and the plausibility of the Marxist and Freudian insights which narrate them, and claim to state the truth of their beginnings, is left untheorised.

Bal's hybridized notion of fetishism suggests that the subjective positions which focalise the narratives of object relations, whether sexually fetishistic, commodified, or mediated into collection or art history as narrative, are inevitably double – both knowing and unknowing. But is this itself a critical perspective, or merely a narratively satisfying conclusion to the paradoxes set out? Is this an affirmation of a fundamental schizophrenia, brought about by the triumph of capital?³⁸ Or perhaps a sign that with this theorization we remain in a historically interstitial moment? All these questions point towards the need either for a metadiscursive/metahistorical perspective from which to answer the question, or, as an alternative, a tactical guide to advancing through this ambiguous territory positively. It is in response to this need that Chapter Three commences. First, the problem of fetishism as interpretative category needs to be developed further.

If Bal's consideration of practices of collection and its semiotic logic from the dual perspectives of narrative and fetishism usefully elucidates the fictive / subjective base of practices normally presented as disinterested, it is less clear that she achieves an entirely satisfactory epistemological resolution to her argument. This is arguably a result of her

lack of attention to the historical/social dimension in favour of the Freudian/subjective. Most importantly, the historical relevance and justification for the synthesis of the two theories of fetishism remains unaddressed here, as does the basis on which we can undo narrative's obscuring of ambiguous beginnings and its own rhetorical acts. In other words, the epistemological and historical basis of critical engagement with fetishism as semiotic mode is still unclear.

The cinema is the 'negative' of the gallery.... In the cinema we are in darkness; the gallery is light. In the cinema we are immobile before moving images; in the gallery it is we who must move.

Victor Burgin

A more detailed account of fetishism as a concept through which to attempt a synthesis of Marx (and the social / historical) with Freud (and the subjective) has been given by Laura Mulvey.³⁹ Like Bal she uses semiotic theory to provide a meta-interpretive position from which to combine Marxist and Freudian perspectives; relating their respective concepts of the fetish to the Peircian categories of index, sign, and symbol, and suggesting that our relation to image is produced in the structural homology that cathects subjective (sexual) disavowal with the collective (economic) invisibility of labour. Mulvey performs a kind of double palinodic return; to the presuppositions of her own intellectual milieu in the 1970s, and to her own disavowal in the landmark essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' of what she now recognises as a critically valuable aesthetic – that of studio-system Hollywood cinema.⁴⁰

Mulvey notes that fetishism was a key concept for anti-Hollywood cinema and psychoanalytically-inspired feminist theory in the 1970s, specifically for the "political aesthetics" of such practices. In the case of *Screen* magazine, it was a Brechtian aesthetic

that resulted, with the revelation of cinema's mechanics of production taken as pointing towards the similarly obscured reality of labour power. Fetishization was, then, something to be *undone*. Initially this seemed possible via the celebration of the instability of meaning, but with the transition to postindustrial capitalism, and the slippage of referentiality internal to it, this came to be synonymous with a cynical and affirmative notion of the postmodern free-floating signifier. Disavowal – the Freudian name for the partial acknowledgement of traumatic realities – and its structure “I know very well, but all the same...” provides the key epistemological as well as aesthetic orientation of Mulvey's argument against such cynicism. From a perspective likewise informed by Freudo-Marxism, Victor Burgin has insisted on the relevance for this structure in relation to art history: the “splitting between knowledge and belief” which characterises disavowal as the “*form of fetishism*” is played out in the failure to acknowledge in institutional and historiographic contexts the impact of social transformation on artistic production and reception. “Today,” he argues, “what has become in effect the ‘official’ posture of the art establishment is a disavowal in respect of history.”⁴¹

In redressing such amnesia, Mulvey's concern is to replace the Brechtian aesthetic and its homologous revelation of material production in cinema and capitalist society with an “aesthetics of disavowal” that addresses the *symbolic* supports of capitalist culture. It is in response to this problem that fetishism emerges as a promising topos for a provisional synthesis of Marx and Freud. Although important differences exist between the two conceptions of fetishism, they become, for Mulvey, complementary. Thus, whereas

Marx's notion of fetishism deals with the failure of inscription, the inability of labour to mark its value on the commodity, the Freudian fetish, in contrast, result from an excessive inscription of a sign to substitute for a perceived (misrecognized) lack. In consumer culture these two logics supplement each other, binding subjective passion to abstract symbolic system.

Mulvey's account of Freudian fetishism does not differ significantly from Bal's, but her use of Pierce's triad of index, sign, and symbol to treat the problem of inscription in Marx significantly advances our argument. Marx's account of the commodity form is translated into Peircian terms as follows: labour power produces an object and is the source of its value, but does not *indexically* inscribe it with the time or skill that went into its making; value then is established in exchange, in the equivalence or mirroring of commodities (akin to Pierce's "iconic" level); finally, circumventing the need for the actual presence of objects in exchange, money as an abstract, *symbolic*, language-like sign-system completes the erasure of labour power as the source of value. Hence the apparent autonomy, and thus the fetishistic character, of the commodity; any index of its origins in labour are erased, and its true source of value is disavowed. Crucially, Mulvey argues that "capitalism resurrects the commodity *as image* [my emphasis]"; an image characterised by its "seductive sheen, competing to be desired."⁴² The commodity fetish masks the secret of capitalist exploitation and "represents the logic of symbolic exchange as an imaginary investment in object as such."⁴³ This "return to the image" as part of a spectacular commodity culture is mirrored in Duchamp's *J.H.O.O.Q. rasée* and indeed in any art object which, like *The Distance*, circulates primarily or exclusively as after-

image, as pure exchange value in the absence of any object. The key question, already raised in Chapter One, is whether such mirroring does more than accede to such a reified exhibition value, and if so, how critical/historical writing may support it?

If the postmodern celebration of the sliding signifier indicates spectacle's defeat of referentiality at both economic and superstructural levels, Mulvey proposes that it is precisely the mechanism of disavowal that allows critical access to this process. The key problematic here is the relationship between disavowal and the possibility of "actually articulating the Real" in both subjective and social senses.⁴⁴ The social/political real is no more representable than the Lacanian Real, she argues, but analysis of its superstructural discursive products might provide insight into transformations in the base/real. The key question is how many superstructural products "may be related back, as symptoms, to the forces that generated them?"⁴⁵ Fetishism as concept is deployed here: firstly in using "structures of disavowal" as a way to reformulate the question of reference, with the over-inscription at the centre of Freudian fetishism providing the epistemological support for analysis of the abstracted symbolic system of capital, and its relation to culture.

Freud emphasised that the key feature of disavowal is its status as a half-measure that only partly fends off an external threat by a partial detachment from reality. As Adam Phillips puts it, the fetish is for the Freudian subject a kind of obstacle which "secretly confronts the fetishist with what it protects him from," which allows both the loss and the retention of the fantasy of the phallic mother.⁴⁶ In response to castration anxiety the fetish commemorates the point of lack, and thus includes "a residual knowledge of its origin."⁴⁷

Mulvey relates this to the Real as unnameable: "disavowal acknowledges its own origin in an unspeakable, and its consequent displacements thus both acknowledge and deny a relation of cause and effect."⁴⁸ We might speculatively suggest here that the art historical response to museal objects is fetishistic in precisely this sense; it has the classical structure of disavowal, the "I know very well... but all the same," i.e. "I know this work is institutionally framed, but all the same I can treat it as autonomous..."; "I know that it is "dead," but I can give it the kiss of life..." etc. Fetishism attributes self-sufficient autonomy to an object, disavowing what is known and replacing it with belief, though being haunted by the fragility of this mechanism. This construction of the fetish from contradictory ideas is precisely, Freud argues, what makes it particularly durable.⁴⁹

How, then, does the structural homology of over-inscribed sexual fetish and under-inscribed commodity come into effect, how are the two fetishisms bound together?

Mulvey argues that the successful fetishization of cinema is supported by its *erotization through the image of woman*. Reciprocally, the construction of erotic femininity depends on fetishism.

"The popular cinema, itself a commodity, can form a bridge between the commodity spectacle and the figure of woman as spectacle on the screen. This, in turn, leads on to the bridging function of woman as consumer, rather than producer of commodities. ... The formal structures of disavowal create a conduit, linking different points of social difficulty and investing in 'sight' as a defence against them."⁵⁰

For Mulvey, then, the screening function of disavowal in cinema is also a suturing one, in which erotic investment in the image of woman is bound to the commodity form. As spectacle the commodity object “becomes image and belief and is secured by an erotic, rather than a religious, aura.”⁵¹ While woman as surface “fronts for” cinema’s productive machinery, a similar relation pertains between woman and commodity.⁵² However, the very strength of the investment in surface raises the question of what is concealed, Mulvey argues, and the anxiety thus aroused is deflected by further investment in image.

The fetish, by its only partial displacement through disavowal of the traumatic Real, allows its causal link to that Real be known; the key epistemological feature which Mulvey adds to Bal’s account. This is true of culture in general, according to psychoanalytic film theory, which conceives mass culture as a screen “on which collective fantasy, anxiety, fear and their effects can be projected.”⁵³ The forms thus projected are symptoms of the displaced socially traumatic. It is the mother’s body (for Freud) and the worker’s labour (for Marx) which “become the unspeakable, and the unrepresentable, in commodity culture.”⁵⁴ The two repressions – of labour and of the maternal body – are mutually reinforced in image as the site of both commodity as spectacle and woman as surface. Both cinema as surface (which stands in Mulvey’s argument for the conjunction of commodity and image *per se*) and woman as surface (on screen and off it) are sites where an aesthetics of disavowal can operate, in forming passionate attachments and opening critical perspectives. Both, in “implying and

concealing an elusive, unknowable essence," draw attention to their own function as screen.⁵⁵

In distinct contrast to this partial referentiality is postmodern mass culture's spectacularization, for which sight itself, rather than the individual fetish, is the locus of symbolic "richness." Given complex technological support in an image-saturated culture, such "rich sight" is itself developed from structures of disavowal in mass culture, but a disavowal now displaced and doubled. If disavowal maintains, through excessive inscription, a residual connection between cause and effect even as it conceals it, the "investment in visual excess and displacements of signifiers produces a very strong texture that can come to *conceal this need to conceal* the relation between cause and effect ... the blind spots that generated the processes of disavowal get further lost on the way [my emphasis]."⁵⁶ It is questionable here whether Mulvey doesn't disavow her own claims re: the loss of referentiality: "I know very well that cause and effect are severed, but I can nonetheless articulate them as if that were not the case..." The tenuousness of disavowal can easily slip into the spectacular, and it is here that artistic strategies based on complicity with institutional procedures require critical attention to delimit and specify their potential as sites of critique. My contention is that *The Distance* (and other work like it) *both* enacts institutional spectacularization and points to its contingent supports. If, as Burgin argues, the impact of twentieth-century history is disavowed by art's institutions, we must note that an attempt to avow this history via a transition to Visual Studies as paradigm (and, for that matter, via categories such as the spectral) run

the risk of reinforcing the centrality of the image, and thus acceding to the invisibilities it produces.

Mulvey's notion of a Lacanian "screening" of the traumatic real is developed further by Hal Foster in *the Return of the Real* and, although he is more aware of the problems implicit in such a concept, he too remains constrained by the tension between narrative exposition and posited unspeakability. In Foster's exposition, "screen" is taken to refer "to the cultural reserve of which each image is one instance. Call it the conventions of art, the schemata of representation, the codes of visual culture, this screen *mediates* the object-gaze *for* the subject, but it also *protects* the subject *from* this object-gaze."⁵⁷ The screen tames the gaze in an image. Foster sees some contemporary art as attacking, tearing this screen, and thus effecting a "*shift in conception – from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma*" that is characteristic of contemporary culture in myriad forms.⁵⁸ This does seem to be borne out in the passion for "reality" manifest in phenomena such the confessional T.V. talk show, or even more, in the gravitational pull which traumatic events (whether physical or psychic, personal or collective) have for the media. Yet as all such mediations function themselves as screening mechanisms it has to be questionable whether the *really* Real that Foster and Bal stage behind the "screen" appears in culture at all.

The Real as a thing of trauma has been termed the *abject* by Julia Kristeva, a category which is "neither subject nor object, but before one is the former (before full separation from the mother) or after one is the latter (as a corpse given over to objecthood)."⁵⁹ Thus

for Foster, an artist such as Cindy Sherman stages the *obscene* “as if there were no scene to stage it, no frame of representation to contain it, no screen.”⁶⁰ Foster acknowledges that the abject is profoundly ambiguous as a critical concept: “If it is opposed to culture, can it be exposed *in* culture? If it is unconscious, can it be made conscious and remain abject? In other words, can there be a *conscientious abjection*, or is this all there can be?”⁶¹ Kristeva splits the operation of (expelling the) abject as fundamental to subjectivity, and the condition of abjection (which undermines the subject). Crucially, on this model, with the collapse of the Other of symbolic law, the artist’s role is to plumb the depths of the abject. This is how Foster theorizes the image-screen as torn, or under attack. He stresses the need to “rethink transgression not as a rupture produced by a heroic avant-garde outside the symbolic order but as a fracture traced by a strategic avant-garde within the order.”⁶² The avant-garde then is tasked with revealing the productive aspects of symbolic disorder, a project in which “abject art” has tended to fail, Foster argues. He draws on the history of Surrealism’s similarly desublimatory project, noting that it marked the point where Surrealism split, between the “excremental” Bataille, and the “Icarian” Breton (transgressing to invoke the paternal law). For Foster contemporary artists are likewise split between “Oedipal naughtiness” and “infantile perversion.”⁶³

We find, then, that what is argued for by Mulvey – and Foster – is a kind of balancing act on the precarious line dividing “good” and “bad” symptoms: we need a bit of fetishistic disavowal (to hold open partial access to the social real) but not so much that we fall into a totally reified and doubly displaced fetishism of the postmodernist

spectacularized variety; enough rupturing of the screen of the real to open possibilities of transformation, but not so much that we fall into abjection... What is the significance of this figure of the interstitial, or of the third position, (which was present in Bal's argument, and Bhabha's, and will recur in other texts considered here)? Is it itself a symptom of the unresolved epistemology implied by the hypothesis of a constitutive *unnameable* – which has to be acknowledged but can't be represented? We have to conclude that what this eminently historical approach can't do is account for the status of its own insight, insofar as it hypothesises unnameable / unrepresentable dimensions which are constitutive of culture, yet can also be simply named and represented within the terms of the argument. As with Bal, Mulvey posits a state of affairs which should undermine the very possibility of the narrative argumentation presented. Neither really address the limits of what *can* be avowed. How can these processes be spoken/articulated if their constitutive 'Real' cannot? In the end, Mulvey's palinodic return to reinscribe her own passion for the 'aesthetics of disavowal' ironically misses the lesson of her own *epistemology of disavowal*. This is understandable inasmuch as it relies on a disavowal of its own – it both posits an inarticulable Real and speaks its name. To pursue Mulvey's feminist linking of fetishism to veiling via the image, I will consider the critical elaboration of "image" in this sense. This entails a movement through sculpture-as-metaphor, to photographic image, and cinema as site of narrative investment, that recapitulates the arc of *The Distance*, this time not to elucidate *it*, but to draw on its metaphorical resonances as a pretext for shifting attention to much broader (and more important) theorisations of culture and criticism.

Bal and Mulvey appear to exempt their own narratives from the subjective entanglements of desire that they present as constitutive of narration and image-formation respectively. In Bal this is a question primarily of the Oedipal subject, in Mulvey of the subject of postmodern spectacle. But how does the Freudian narrative both rely on operate? Freud's 1927 paper on fetishism gives a special place to foot-fetishism as exemplary of the general dynamics of this form of psychological investment. The dual "affection and hostility in the treatment of the fetish" which results from its function as screen off/for the absence of the maternal phallus is figured by Chinese foot-binding, which both mutilates and reveres.⁶⁴ The foot is also key to Freud's explanation of fetishistic object choice. "It seems ... that when the fetish is instituted some process occurs which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia. ... it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish."⁶⁵ The primal scene of traumatic sight thus produces compensatory images to disavow the absence that is its cause. Hence feet, shoes, and underwear, are common fetishes because of their circumstantial connection to the scene of visual apprehension of lack – they point back to the last possible moment when the little boy *really* didn't know, the last moment in which the maternal body was "whole."

The foot-as-fetish plays a key role in Freud's 1907 essay 'Delusion and Dream in Jensen's *Gradiva*.' To return to this essay is to return both to the first outlines of Freud's theory of fetishism, and to a problematic mythic origin of psychoanalysis as discourse on art. It was, interestingly, of key importance for the Surrealists' understanding of the

operations of repression. David Lomas notes that the *Gradiva* text was an object of social exchange, for instance as a gift from Paul Flouard to Gala and Dali.⁶⁶ André Breton's small Left Bank gallery and *paradis des livres* was, moreover, named Gradiva. In 1937 Duchamp made a door for the gallery which consisted of a piece of glass cut with the outline of a couple. This was, significantly, his first work in glass since the abandonment of *The Bride Stripped Bare...* and suggests, along with a 1945 window display for Brentano's in New York (which included what can be interpreted as a reappearance of Rose Sélavy as mannequin), that Duchamp connected seeing-through glass with both the erotics of vision, and the commercial display of the commodity (Fig. 48). The headless mannequin had a tap attached to its right thigh, and this, and the display's title, *Lazy Hardware*, refer back to Duchamp's 1926 film *Anémic Cinema*, one of the rotary disks for which was inscribed "Among our articles of lazy hardware we recommend the tap that stops running when it is not listened to."⁶⁷ This phrase was also related back to *Fountain* when it (re)appeared in the 1964 drawing *Mirrorical Return* (Fig. 49). For Arturo Schwartz, a psychoanalytic explanation cathects the window-display to the tap to the urinal: it is another confirmation of his notorious theory of Duchamp's incestuous love for his sister Suzanne, and a recognition that the Bachelor's (narcissistic) desire is only satisfied if there are witnesses to his violation of that taboo. In the case of the *Mirrorical Return*, this reading operates through the urinal's changed function:

"Duchamp colored certain letters of the title and the text in red to spell out *urinoir* (urinal) and *urine*, thereby equating the revolutionary tap with a urinal and the liquid that comes from it with urine. Seen in this context, the tap

becomes a penis; urine is sperm; and the urinal, a vagina. It is indeed a revolutionary organ that infringes the incest taboo.”⁶⁸

The excessive crudeness of Schwarz’s explanation makes it counterintuitively attractive, but in its very form – as an assertion of interpretative mastery – it becomes untenably un-Duchampian. Schwartz forgets that to pee into the urinal (in interpretative / appropriative rivalry) is to turn it into a *fountain*, to pee on oneself.⁶⁹ Schwarz, like Arensberg, is a cautionary figure for the interpreter of Duchamp: someone who thought he could find a traumatic kernel of truth in his work. This leads not only to a theory which projects a narcissistic and hermetic interpretation of Schwarz’s own devising onto Duchamp, but also to an epistemologically questionable assumption that such traumatic kernels can be simply divined by iconography, and narrated by art history. It is to question this confidence in narration that we turn to Freud himself, and the *Gratvia* analysis.

‘Delusion and Dream...’ is significant as it is Freud’s first application of his developing concepts of psychoanalysis – particularly the idea of the unconscious – to artistic narratives or objects. It is also of specific interest in the present context as it establishes the space into which the concept of fetishism and the castration complex will later fit, and does so in a treatment of themes of “living death” and “reanimation” which, we have already seen, emerge as key terms for art history’s relation to museal objects; in particular, it uses the statue as a figure for psychic immobility. In fact, Neil Hertz has argued that “moments of immobilization – literal and figurative – are sufficiently frequent in Freud’s writings to warrant our attention.”⁷⁰ These moments begin with

studies of paralysis written under Charcot's supervision, but gradually move to more general considerations of paralysis as related to sexual taboos and the castration complex. For Freud, even analysis itself is figured as "temporary immobilization," a "symmetrical stasis" in which the analysand's chain of associations meet the passive attention of the analyst.⁷¹ Just as repressed affects produce such immobilisation, so, for Freud, the art work is paralyzing of our powers of reflection but subsequently opens up to study of its psychological implications, and of the psychic investment of the subject.

Freud's account of Wilhelm Jensen's 1903 novella *Gradiva* is an application, and a defence, of his theory of dream interpretation in the field of literature, and it is pitted against scientific accounts of dreams as meaningless responses to somatic stimuli. Freud emphasises that mental life is not arbitrary, but governed by discernible laws, and he stresses that Jensen need not have known anything of psychoanalytic concepts for his novel to illustrate such laws. In fact, such ignorance on the author's part wouldn't make Freud's reading a mere subjective projection, for as an assiduous reader of symptomatic clues he has "not discovered anything in his work that is not already in it."⁷² The narrative of Jensen's *Gradiva* is glossed as follows: archaeologist Norbert Hanold discovers, in a museum in Rome, an ancient relief of a girl. He obtains a plaster copy and hangs it in his study, transfixed by what to him is its defining feature – the girl's particularly attractive gait, the way the relief captures her feet in motion (Fig. 50). Explaining this interest is the aim of both Jensen and Freud, and Freud's account consists in restating the narrative and translating it into his terms. Various aspects of the narrative are then shown to be displaced acknowledgements of the repressed truth of Hanold's

desire. Thus his repeated fantasies of statues come to life, of living in the past, of the instant of death in Pompeii, of the return of the dead, are shown to relate to a childhood love of a living woman – Zoë Bertgang - feelings which persist in his unconscious. Freud, following Jensen, shows how displacements and substitutions form the fantasy which appears in Hanold's dreams and delusions.

Pursuing his delusion to Pompeii itself, Hanold tries to carry himself back to the past, not by means of archaeology, but rather via his imagination. Freud quotes Jensen, setting out Hanold's perspective:

“What [science] taught was a lifeless, archaeological way of looking at things, and what came from its mouth was a dead, philological language. These were of no help to an understanding through the spirit, the feelings, the heart – put it as you please. Whoever had a longing for that must stand here alone, the only living creature ... among the relics of the past, and look, but not with bodily eyes ... And then ... the dead wakened and Pompeii began to live once more.”⁷³

This Freud terms an imaginary process of “animating the past.”⁷⁴ When a walking, talking Gradiva appears in this imaginary scene, no longer sculpture but *rediviva*, there is a problem for both Hanold and reader: What kind of event is this?: “real” ghost?; product of Hanold's delusion?; living person? The answer, in the end, is all of these...

The Gradiva who “comes to life” in Hanold’s fantasy of Pompeii is none other than the real Zoë Bertgang, coincidentally also in Pompeii and aware that Hanold loves her but doesn’t yet recognise it. He remains within fantasy, and can’t acknowledge what he already knows, what is “in him more than himself.” For Freud a problematic identificatory structure marks his account of Zoë’s efforts to conspire with and against Hanold’s fantasy and bring him back to the present and reality. He presents Zoë as an exemplary analytic figure, but is also suspicious of her as an “unusually [read *overly*] clever girl.”⁷⁵ Freud’s own transference feelings towards clever young women famously mark his analysis of “Dora,” and were responsible, in part, for the failure of that analysis. Even his choice of the pseudonym “Dora” reflects this problematic antagonism to clever girls, and has been shown to result from a complex overdetermination.⁷⁶ The key point here is that, as subsequent developments in Freudian theory have stressed, there is no position of totally self-transparent reflexivity to be claimed for the analyst. This is hardly registered in Freud’s prose however, and his preferred identification is with Jensen – controller of the narrative. He notes, for instance that Zoë’s explicatory speech on Hanold’s delusion “is in reality a speech made by the author” to the reader, and thus becomes an exchange between Jensen and Freud, a male dialogue from which the upstart female voice is excluded.⁷⁷ Indeed, Zoë’s struggle in the narrative is essentially a struggle for recognition with the male characters’ visual interest in ghostly images or dead animals. Her father is more interested in zoological specimens than in her, she complains – one reason for her transfer of affection to Hanold, a love which grew as he withdrew into science too. “Thus it was made possible for her to remain faithful in her unfaithfulness – to find her father once more in her loved one, to include both of them

with the same emotion, or, as we may say, to identify both of them in her feeling.”⁷⁸ Yet Hanold too fails to notice her, and she has “long grown used to being dead.”⁷⁹

Freud emphasises that repression is not the extinction of memory, but its preservation and the condition of its return, often as the very vehicle of such a return – here archaeology, which had been the defensive screen against desire, returns Hanold to it. The narrative of *Gradiva* furnishes Freud with a perfect analogy for repression conceived in this sense. Just as Pompeii is buried alive, so repression is the mechanism “by which something in the mind is at once made inaccessible and preserved,” and its re-emergence is akin to archaeology.⁸⁰ Here we discover how the repressive screen which should protect the subject from his problematic desire also serves as the agent of return of the repressed: “It was right that an antique, the marble sculpture of a woman, should have been what tore our archaeologist away from his retreat from love and warned him to pay off the debt to life with which we are burdened from our birth.”⁸¹ This process is first registered in Hanold’s sense of the very “lifelikeness” of the relief, his sense that it has something contemporary about it. His (seemingly) arbitrary daydreams of details of *Gradiva* are shown in fact to be returns of his erotic feelings toward Zoë. Hanold’s conscious, archaeological motives “cover” his unconscious erotic ones – but “the unconscious determinants could not effect anything that did not simultaneously satisfy the conscious, scientific ones.”⁸² The fantasy is thus a compromise between the two determinants. In this light, Mulvey’s notion of an aesthetics of disavowal in which the screen of the Real returns us to it, can be seen as a very orthodox Freudian concept, explicitly articulated in his first attempt to theorise fetishistic attachment in the cultural sphere.

As well as treating the motif of immobilization and animation as it appears in Jensen's text, Freud also adds several other active/static distinctions of his own: repression ("a dynamic expression, which takes account of the interplay of mental forces.") / unconscious ("a purely descriptive term, one that is indefinite in some respects and, as we might say, static,"); also Hanold's eroticism / its repression: "The ancient relief aroused the slumbering eroticism in him, and made his childhood memories active."⁸³ Further, we might note that Freud's own authorial strategy shifts from a passive / static reiteration of the narrative into an active analytic mode which unravels the mystery of that narrative. Hanold's delusion is advanced by his dream of discovering Gradiva in Pompeii, in which he witnesses the city's burial, and sees his love become as though a statue. This is, for Freud, a displacement and an assurance about the real state of affairs; Hanold had indeed "transferred his interest from the living girl to the sculpture: the girl he loved had been transformed into a marble relief."⁸⁴ Thus the (seeming) obstacle to Hanold's happiness is the very condition of his achieving it. With Zoë's arrival we are no longer witnesses of delusion but of *cure*. Zoë effected such a cure when she "accepted the role of the ghost awakened to life for a brief hour" – immersing herself in Hanold's fantasy to guide him out of it.⁸⁵ Zoë's therapeutic discourse entails the redeployment of elements from Hanold's fantasy to lead him to his own revelation of the truth. Such ambiguous speech is characteristic of both analyst and analysand, and is the means by which interpretation-as-cure – for which Freud's text effectively polemicalizes – is effected.

Freud's 1912 postscript to his *Gradiva* essay announces the progress of psychoanalysis in treating not only correspondences between its theory and certain fictive narratives, but also in dealing with the author's own psychological material and displacements. In the case of *Gradiva* and other stories by Jensen, Freud (prefiguring Schwarz) detects the theme of love as "an after-effect of an intimate association in childhood of a brother-and-sister kind."⁸⁶ He corrects Jensen's attribution of the *Gradiva* relief – it is not Roman but Greek – and suggests that the female figure depicted was a representation of one of the Horae, the Greek goddesses of vegetation, which in his analysis of 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' Freud links to woman as both force of life and death.⁸⁷ Thus we have an account of how the subject's investments may be decoded, which utilises sculpture as an allegory for psychic immobilisation, and presents analysis as a tactical conspiracy in reanimating the past so as to bring it to consciousness and effect cure.

The *Gradiva* story presents the analytic narrative as a kind of art historical investigation; a matter of iconography and attribution.⁸⁸ Its easy acceptance of the reanimation of the world in a return to love and life marks it as structured as much by narrative conventions as radical psychoanalytic insight. Craig Owens notes that in Jensen's structuring opposition between mobility and immobility *Gradiva* herself can be seen as representing, within the text, "the mobility which recent criticism attributes to every text."⁸⁹ It is this mobility which is effectively silenced in the narrative closure of Freud's essay. If Freud's essay proclaims psychoanalytic narrative as restorative of both lost memories and of the real, it does so via his complicity with Jensen as narrator. As indicated above, this obscures Zoë's role as figure of textual mobility *in her very immersion in the terms of*

delusion. The essay can thus be read as one of those instances where Freud in effect disavows the radicality of his own insight, here relating to narrativity / interpretation as a desire-driven project which does not operate externally to fantasy.⁹⁰ As a “primal scene” for the concept of fetishism, it also presents a problematic origin, one rooted in the fictive. The accounts of fetishism given by Bal and Mulvey likewise operate according to a relatively facile notion of the repressed or disavowed as elements recoverable (at least partially) in narrative. To push this discussion on towards a more troubling, and more valuable, concept of image I turn to Craig Owens, who elucidates the role visual culture plays in social immobilisation, particularly via the photograph, and thence to a discussion of cinema which both builds on and reworks the notions of narrative and image considered so far.

The logic of disavowal leads from object to image, and the photographic image encapsulates this dynamic. Two closely related essays by Owens on art and visibility explore the thematic links between photograph, immobilization, death, image and animation in psychoanalytic terms. Both ‘Posing’ and ‘The Medusa Effect’, crucially, extend this analysis into the social field, to conceptualise both the bind of a patriarchal regime of visibility and a strategy for escaping it. The terms of this account, amongst which statue, fetish, image, unrepresentability, are crucial, make it pertinent to the problematic of *The Distance*, which in my reading, exemplifies the ambivalent dialectic of reanimation and reification Hal Foster has identified at the heart of the art history /museum complex. In these essays Owens endorses the critical strategy of reduplication as operated by Barbara Kruger and Victor Burgin in their respective photographic/textual

practice, seeing in it the *apotropaic* mirroring of the immobilizing visual regime of the “stereotype.”

Kruger’s 1981 work *Your Gaze Hits the Side of my Face* alludes to the power of the evil eye to “suspend movement and arrest life.”⁹¹ Owens stresses that the Medusa myth itself elides into instantaneity two moments which must logically be sequential: the decapitation and the petrification of Medusa. This central episode is almost “proto-photographic” for Owens, in that the pose captured by studio photography is “an animation performed only to be suspended,” a defensive mimicking of immobility to ward off the immobility induced by the gaze (or camera).⁹² Kruger’s apotropaic images, it is claimed, redouble the operations of the stereotype back on itself, and in doing so bring the viewer to reject the double position of the ideological stereotype (a generic personal address). Owens reads this as a liberating, politicising gesture: “Against the immobility of the pose, Kruger proposes the *mobilization* of the spectator.”⁹³

This ‘Medusa Effect’ in relation to the ideological imaginary stereotype is extended in ‘Posing,’ where Owens addresses the apotropaic function of Madonna and child imagery, which presents the wholeness of the phallic mother – a wholeness valorized in Western culture as virginity.⁹⁴ (Interestingly, the ubiquity of this image of maternity even lead to it being one of the associations immediately directed at *Fountain*, which Beatrice Wood records being renamed “Madonna of the Bathroom” following Stieglitz’s photographing of it, a name also used by Carl Van Vechten) (Fig. 51).⁹⁵ For Owens, the figure of the Virgin is regressive: “not only does it stage that split between knowledge and belief

characteristic of fetishism; it also suspends ... the incest prohibition (in medieval tradition, the Virgin is both *mother and bride* of Christ).” Breaking the Mosaic taboo, Christianity introduces “an entire regime of representation based on the maternal body.”⁹⁶ This image of the maternal becomes apotropaic when read in the light of Freud’s insistence on the psychic triple status of the mother as creator, lover and destroyer.⁹⁷ The Virgin allows all three functions to be mastered in a symbolic which Herman Rapaport conveys in explicitly photo-graphic terms: “annihilation (castration, death) can be defeated by means of mastering events through overcoming time, that is, by image formation, immortalization in terms of photography (or Photo-Graphic: pictures but also narratives).”⁹⁸ The fetishistic defence against castration anxiety, in this view, is not investment in object, but in image, and is cast, once again, in terms which recall the bases of the art history-museum-photography nexus.

Owens’s focus on the apotropaic *turning* of the immobilizing gaze against itself relies on a Barthesian conception of photography, but overlooks the very basis of that conception – which lies not in transcending photography’s mortifying dimension, but immersion in it. *Camera Lucida* has two related unrepresentable / unspeakable aspects: the “Winter Garden Photograph” in which Barthes famously finds the *punctum* of his mother’s essence – a photograph not reproduced in the book, explicitly on the grounds that it is only real for Barthes; and Barthes’s pain at the loss of his mother. In his outstanding reading of *Camera Lucida*, Jay Prosser argues that *Camera Lucida* is “a classical case of melancholia, corresponding to Freud’s conception of melancholia as inarticulable and frozen in his famous distinction of melancholia from mourning.”⁹⁹ The Winter Garden

Photograph, and via it, photography in general, is thus read as a melancholic wound, one which “doesn’t move forward but remains frozen. Unlike cinema, it presents the moment of intense immobility, and it is this temporal immobilization that renders photography melancholic.”¹⁰⁰ The *Punctum*, the Real encounter in the photograph, is unspeakable but although Barthes does link this to the maternal body it is a matter of personal *affect*, a personal experience of loss. There is a fantasmic quality to photography which produces the sense of being borne back to where one has been, or forward to where one is going. For Freud (and Barthes) this place is the maternal body. But photography is not only melancholic in holding onto this place, but also palinodic “for it gives us the thing only to retract or lose it, only to present it as already lost. ... It is this pastness of the referent, the repeal of presence, that makes photography so fatal, so inextricably tied to death.”¹⁰¹ Despite its evidentiary and indexical nature, photography “cannot return memory: it is ... not an aide-mémoire but a memento-mori.”¹⁰²

Barthes consistent generational slips in identifying the subjects of photographs by Nadar (wife or mother?), Van der Zee (sister or daughter?) culminate in the “Winter Garden Photograph” which returns Barthes’s mother to him as (his) child (as she was, effectively, as an invalid). But if these slippages are part of the “unconscious logic” of *Camera Lucida*, this is not a Freudian Unconscious. As Prosser stresses, Barthes has lost not *the* mother but *his*.¹⁰³ Prosser insists on the more primordial and unspeakable love of the mother, rather than Barthes’s homosexuality, as the structuring elusive subject matter of the book. This is the love that is “inexpressible, that is not simply representable as unspeakable ... that ultimately may be this absence of or antecedence to language.”¹⁰⁴

This in contrast to Barthes's homosexuality, which *is* spoken elsewhere in his work, albeit in coded terms.

This signal quality of Barthes's text (and what makes it deeply problematic for those who perceive him as a strict structuralist) is its rootedness in such ineffable love and loss, and its consequent recourse to terms thought discredited by deconstruction and semiotic knowingness. Hence, Prosser is quite right to emphasise that in *Camera Lucida* "only masks (veils, language) enable him to real [that is, to insist on its referential character] photography, to talk about "photography" at all. And when the mask dissolves as it does in the Winter Garden Photograph the soul is left. Photographs for Barthes are like masks for primitives. Magical, photographs manifest the souls of ancestors."¹⁰⁵ So Barthes's notion of the photograph doesn't function apotropaically for theory, warding off the spectre of fetishism, but rather is deeply, passionately caught up in it. For Barthes death is culturally present now in photography, not religion, but ironically it is repressed, sublimated via *images*. "The choice in conceiving photography he presents as that between photography as madness (the real), or photography as tamed (the sign): photography's frozen stillness or its mediation; its silence or its narrative movement into language. Barthes chooses madness, silence, stillness."¹⁰⁶ Thus, there is a very real problem in maintaining a critical discourse on the foundation of this melancholic withdrawal.

Victor Burgin's photo series *Gradiva* (Fig. 52) extends Freud's own reading of Jensen's text as an allegory of repression, symptom formation, and analytic resolution, to suggest

that the photographic image is itself the fetishistic screen by which repression and disavowal operate. Owens emphasises that Freud's reading of Jensen's narrative, because it precedes his theory of the castration complex, gives an incomplete account of the fetishistic dimension; this Burgin reinstates via photography, which, like fetishism, produces its object in a framing, fragmenting and immobilizing gaze. Burgin's *Gradiva* series is made up of seven photographs, two series of three with narrative captions, and one photographic reproduction of the artist's hand-written transcription of Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*. In Burgin's *Gradiva* three of the images are close-up film stills photographed in a cinema screening. These "figurations of the photographer's immobilizing gaze" alternate with three images of *Gradiva* as bas-relief, in Pompeii, and finally in contemporary Warsaw – "reflected in what appears to be the mirrored façade of a building, next to an advertising poster of a couple locked in an embrace."¹⁰⁷ This image completes the chain of associations set up by Burgin, from the constituent parts of Jensen's – and Freud's – narrative (sculpture, scene of fantasy, contemporary reality), to the immobilization of the photographic image (its condensation of cinematic narrative), and finally to the social and libidinal scene of image-saturated consumer culture.

Gradiva appears in Harold's fantasy as undecidably dead *and* alive, an undecidability which Owens locates in the Oedipal scene, the moment of lack and substitution. This moment "is an arrest, which is also an *arrêt de mort*..." *both a death sentence and a stay of execution* – "the *arrêt* both condemns and grants reprieve, postpones the deciding of an antinomy."¹⁰⁸ This is a fetishistic structure in which fetishistic monuments (*monuments?*) to the phallic mother (and child) appear, as defences against knowledge. Moreover, the

analogous intimate connection between death and desire in the photograph is a familiar trope. For Walter Benjamin, as the “secularized portrait of death ... which restores its unique and one-time status,” the photograph works to “transform the camera into a useful weapon in the efforts to control death and to prevent or delay its onset.”¹⁰⁹ For Roland Barthes, the photograph “mortifies” the body;¹¹⁰ it transforms the subject into object, “and even, one might say, into a museum object,” a “statue.”¹¹¹ Even as it does this it testifies to the life of the image. The photograph’s evidential/indexical testimony to *what was*, and its carrying of what was into the present, are its ontologically defining features. Thus a photographed corpse is horrific “because it certifies ... that the corpse is alive, as *corpse*: it is the living image of a dead thing... by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces the belief that it is alive.”¹¹²

In Slavoj Žižek’s terms we can say, therefore, that the photographic image is located in the death-driven space where we find “the so-called undead in horror fiction: the ‘living dead,’ indestructible monstrous entities that return again and again from their death.”¹¹³ One of the most persistent themes in Žižek’s thought is the relationship between two determinations of death-drive, both of which pertain to Foster’s notion of art’s “living on” as spectral, traumatic, etc. The first conception of death-drive, relating to the undead, sees it as a product of the “indestructible stupidity of superego enjoyment,” which leads to the subject entering the “spectral phantasmic domain of unconstrained perversion, of ‘eternal life’ ...”¹¹⁴ The key point here is that “our fundamental fantasy, the kernel of our being, is itself such a monstrous thing, a machine of *jouissance*.”¹¹⁵ Against this determination of death-drive Žižek posits another, figured by the immortal Wagnerian

hero, whose problematic is “*the very opposite of dying*” namely entrapment in the “ultimate horror” of living forever.¹¹⁶ A key distinction in Lacan is between desire’s striving after elusive *jouissance*, and drive’s similarly impossible task of “getting rid of it.”¹¹⁷ This second component of the death-drive is the very opposite of the first, the escape from living death in “traversing the fantasy.” The choice between these two modes is the choice between bad and worse, and Žižek insists that the only ethically and politically viable choice, is the worse, the path which does not compromise one’s desire. For Žižek, Lacan’s development of the idea of death-drive is absolutely key to a philosophical elaboration of psychoanalysis; it figures what in German idealism was thought as subjectivity’s “self-relating negativity.”¹¹⁸ Art’s dependency on photographic image places it in this death-driven sphere. How then can the image be thought not in the first determination of death-drive; the idiocy of *jouissance* and fetishism, but in the second; an escape from it? To elaborate on the locus of the image in the “stay of execution” I now shift from Burgin’s *Gradiva* series to another work which sutures the cinematic and the photographic, his photographic appropriation of Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, and its textual theorisation in the essay collection *Formations of Fantasy*.

In common with Bal and Mulvey, Burgin sees a psychoanalytic semiotics as capable of illuminating the ideological internalisation of the social in the very production of subjectivity. For Burgin, film stills and the memory-images that cinema can leave with the subject, are both fragments “which have nevertheless achieved a sort of representative autonomy.”¹¹⁹ Burgin’s argument is that a highly cathected image-fragment “‘takes the place of’, ‘stands in for’, a narrative: it is the *representative* of a narrative.”¹²⁰ This

situation, in which an image-fragment stands out against the vague background of the textual account of it, locates us, for Burgin, in *fantasy*, which 'stands for' "the absence *in* the real, and the absence *of* the real in discourse."¹²¹ Fantasy's sequential basis is abrupt, Burgin argues, and is akin to a series of "stills" – it is represented in a condensed image designated in his argument as *tableau*. Fantasy is to the "otherwise formless" transformations of the subject's desire, as the tableau is to "the endless dispersions and indeterminations of the meanings of material events, of 'history'."¹²²

Burgin gives a brief genealogy of the tableau as descended from the idea of the *peripeteia* (decisive moment) of history painting; his key example is Rubens's *The Judgement of Paris*. The subject matter of this work leads us back to Freud's essay 'The Theme of the Three Caskets,' where the psychoanalytic significance of the choice of the *third* in several myths and other narratives is set out. In *The Judgement of Paris* and other instances of the theme, "the choice between the women is free, and yet it falls on death," Freud writes.¹²³ The question is: how this can be?

Freud's analysis 'The Theme of the Three Caskets,' argues that the "choice" of death is a case of "replacements by the precise opposite."¹²⁴ The Moerae, or Fates (descendants of the Hoerae, and like them represented as spinners, measuring out men's lives in thread), were created, Freud argues, in response to man's realisation of the inevitability of death.

"Man, as we know, makes use of his imaginative activity in order to satisfy the wishes that reality does not satisfy. So his imagination rebelled against the

recognition of the truth embodied in the myth of the Moerae, and constructed instead the myth derived from it, in which the Goddess of Death was replaced by the Goddess of Love and by what was equivalent to her in human shape. The third of the sisters was no longer Death; she was the fairest, best, most desirable and most lovable of women.”¹²⁵

The story of the three caskets and its related themes effect a “wishful reversal” in which *choice* takes the place of the ineluctable.”¹²⁶ Thus in Freud’s counterintuitive reading of *King Lear*, he stresses that Cordelia’s silence points to her as the third Fate Atropos, an avatar of the Goddess of Death. (It is worth noting that Atropos was the Fate who cut the thread of life with the “abhorred shears,” and that there is an obvious comic connection to Parker’s work, and the fact that it itself had its thread cut...).

Burgin offers as an example his own condensation of narrative to image in precisely these terms, a memory of Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* which “surfaces in the form of two images superimposed as one,” a composite image which forms “the very screen upon which my memory of the *reel*-film (the object of ‘criticism’ and most film theory) is projected.”¹²⁷ This initial image (which Burgin specifies as a superimposition of *Vertigo*’s “ideal” woman as masquerade, and the heroine after her suicidal leap into San Francisco Bay) in its turn

“immediately dissolves into a myriad other delegates from a history of Western representations with watery images of women -- from the *Birth of*

Venus to the Death of Ophelia. For example, in pursuit of these last two, I am returned to *Vertigo* by way of the bridge over the bay, in whose shadow Madeleine cast flowers on the water as she prepares to jump, leaping the gap between Hitchcock's and Botticelli/Millais' images of woman/water/flowers."¹²⁸

Thus, in rather confessional terms, Burgin indicates that his fantasy elides a narrative of death with an image of beauty. It is this very associative sequence that makes up the images of *The Bridge* (1984, Figs. 53, 54), a work thematically and presentationally related to the *Gradya* series.

Burgin presents *Vertigo* as exemplifying a certain formation of male desire, in which "passionate attachments" to "exact replica[s]" leads back to a primary Oedipal scenario – "the adult man's love-attachments form an endless series of similar types for the simple reason that, as mother surrogates, they can never match the irreducibly unique qualities of the original."¹²⁹ This is what Kristeva identifies as the adult fantasy "of a lost continent ... not so much an idealized primitive mother as an idealization of the –unlocalizable – relationship between her and us, an idealization of primary narcissism."¹³⁰ Yet the very idealization of maternity, exemplified in Mariolatry, is what makes the subject possible, and sublimates and bars primary narcissism. In the idealized mother "Man surmounts death, the unthinkable, by postulating instead – in the stead and place of thought as well as of death – maternal love."¹³¹ Is Burgin, then, in offering his mnemonic condensation of image(s) claiming to undo this work of sublimation?¹³² If so, how does his authorial

subjectivity remain so authoritative? As with Mulvey's argumentation, and indeed with Bal's and Owens's, it is far from clear how the constitutively excluded / repressed returns without radically undermining both the agency of the subject *and* its desired objects and protective/disavowing images.

The discursive nexus photograph-museum-art history conforms, then, to the structure of disavowal as outlined above. Each aspect of the nexus can be shown to point back to death, even as it attempts to defend against it. The photograph is *ontologically* an intimation of the ineluctability of death, argues Barthes, even as it offers eternal life to artworks in their transformation into pure image; the museum is a mausoleum that attests to art's need for "artificial respiration" even as it announces the "edifying" sublimation that it as architecture and art as beauty are meant to attain; finally, art history, profoundly dependent on both photograph and museum, is also made possible by a historical supercession of its object, registered in the often melancholic character of its articulation.¹³³ Like the fetish as prop of disavowal, these discourses / institutions maintain contradictory positions, preserving belief by warding off knowledge. But if the image is the affective site of investment then what of materiality? What figure of knowledge can describe the significance of the material object? Can we get back to the *thing in itself*? To answer this question and close the discussion set out in the first two chapters of this thesis, I turn now to *Vertigo*, which – it has already been claimed – offers a radical interpretation of desire for the image in relation to death.

*I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights
 With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene
 Never disclosed, but hastened to again,
 Foretold to other eyes on the same screen*
 Walter Hart Crane, 'To Brooklyn Bridge'

*From the demands of the shop windows, from the inevitable response to the shop
 windows, comes the end of choice.*

Marcel Duchamp.

In 'The Three Caskets...' Freud suggests that to understand *King Lear* we have to invert its ending. When Lear carries Cordelia's dead body onto the stage, Shakespeare establishes her as *Death itself*. In fact, argues Freud, as Death, it is *Cordelia* who carries the old and enfeebled Lear away: he is bid "to renounce love, choose death and make friends with the necessity of dying."¹³⁴ Implicit in the theme of the Three Caskets are the three relationships man has to woman, that is "the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him" all of which are "forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man's life – the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother earth who receives him once more."¹³⁵ Thus it is with the Virgin as Mother, Bride, and (in some representations of

Dormition) daughter of Christ -- a single defensive image against the psychic threat posed by the maternal body.¹³⁶ Thus it is also with Hitchcock's *Vertigo*; there are three female characters -- Madeleine, Judy and Midge -- who are indeed figures of desire, death, and maternity. Burgin's photographic works provide a bridge linking the narrative thematics of *Gradiva* and that of *Vertigo*, Freud's redemptive story of the *femme fatale* as "she who (is supposed) to know," with Alfred Hitchcock's cinematic reworking of that theme. In the latter work, though, it is the male protagonist who is set the task of analyzing and curing the woman he desires.

Vertigo's central theme is the entanglement of Woman, death and the copy. It's famous Saul Bass/John Whitney title sequence presents spinning geometrical oval spirals (named, after their inventor, "Lissajous waves") -- spirals that figure the dizzying loss of reason in the film itself, and, it has been noted, recall Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema*: which, indeed, Octavio Paz termed a "vertigo in delay" (Fig. 55).¹³⁷ The film proper opens with a rooftop chase sequence, in which San Francisco detective Scottie (James Stewart) loses his footing and saves his life only by desperately clinging to a gutter (Fig. 56). A second cop comes to his aid, but he too slips, and falls to his death. This opening event is quickly contextualised in a second scene, inside Midge's (Barbara Bel Geddes) apartment, where it is established that Scottie is suffering from vertigo as a consequence of his traumatic near-death experience, and has retired from his job. However, he is soon hired by an old college acquaintance, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), whose wife Madeleine (Kim Novak) believes herself possessed by the spirit of a long dead woman, Carlotta Valdez. Scottie is thus the "focalisor" of *Vertigo's* narrative, to recall Meike

Bal's term, the subjective agency that structures our access to it. In the course of his enquiries Scottie discovers that Carlotta, who was Madeleine's great-grandmother and is therefore "in her blood," had lost her only child when her husband discarded her, a loss that drove her to madness and finally suicide.

Vertigo provides another yet figure of the museum-goer to add to those mentioned in Chapter One (Valéry, Proust, Auden). In his initial trailing of Madeleine, Scottie is led in quick succession to a department store, a church, cemetery, and finally a museum, The Museum of the Legion of Honor, where she gazes at the portrait of the woman, Carlotta Valdez, whom (the film has led us to think) haunts her (Fig. 57).¹³⁸ Her investment in looking at the image is, as we understand it at this point in the film, heightened and complicated by her failure to recognise where reality ends and representation begins: she believes the image to possess a power we rationally know it does not. The chain of associations outlined above (woman / copy / death) is reinforced in this scene by the fact that Madeleine has her hair styled in imitation of the image of Carlotta and by the funereal association of the flowers, painted and real, that both women possess. Our proxy as viewers of this scene is Scottie, whose physical presence goes unnoticed, and who is acting as a "private eye." Like the viewer of Duchamp's *Etant Donnés*, Stewart is in the position of the museal voyeur, and it can be argued that a similar undermining of idealist conceptions of viewing, and of the gender-relations implicit therein, is at work in both.

As Scottie spies on Madeleine, he soon falls in love with her. Once Scottie and Madeleine's romantic relationship develops, he becomes obsessed with convincing her

that she is not possessed, that he can discover real explanations of her supernatural reveries: “there’s an answer for everything” he claims. Briefly, it seems as though a happy ending might be possible for the couple, but death makes its presence felt continually. When they go for a trip into the redwood forest Scottie points out that the trees are properly called *sequioa supervirens* – “always green, ever living,” – but Madeleine counters, “I don’t like them, knowing I have to die.” Her belief in the ineluctability of her fate is ultimately proved correct. Scottie recognises the location of one of Madeleine’s dreams of death as a Spanish mission preserved as a museum. No wonder, he tells her, that she has vivid memories of the place, though she misrecognises it as nineteenth-century Spain: she must have been there before. A return to this place might finally free her of delusion, “destroy” her dreams of death, so Scottie drives her there. However, as Scottie sets about decoding the elements of the dream, Madeleine runs into a bell-tower, where his vertigo prevents him from pursuing her. Thus he is powerless in the end to prevent her acceding to the drive to repeat Carlotta’s suicide, and she jumps to her death from the bell-tower. If *Vertigo* were to end here it would be merely a diverting melodramatic tragedy, and one, moreover, that operates according to a misogynist association of woman with irrationality and death. It would, in other words, fit perfectly with Laura Mulvey’s characterisation of Hollywood cinema as an institutionalisation of fetishistic and voyeuristic “defences” against femininity.¹³⁹ However, the film does not end here, but instead has a second act which renders its narrative far more interesting (and problematic) than a typical tragic plot.

We begin part two of the film with *Scottie* now in the position of being haunted by the return of the dead. In a famous animated dream sequence *he* is now the subject drawn into a vertiginous fall into the grave. *Scottie* revisits the locations to which he had followed *Madeleine*, and on several occasions “sees” her, only to discover on a second look that he is mistaken. Hitchcock cunningly connects the audience to *Scottie*’s misrecognition in one key scene when, in the restaurant where his first (voyeuristic) sighting of *Madeleine* took place, he (and we) see *Kim Novak* walk towards us, but a subtle cut has her replaced by another woman, a poor copy of *Madeleine*. Yet we are about to discover that *Madeleine* herself was not an “original.” When *Scottie* meets *Judy*, a woman who reminds him of his dead lover, we discover via her flashback sequence that the first hour of *Vertigo* has fooled us; “*Madeleine*” was a ruse, an impersonation by *Judy* of *Elster*’s actual wife. It was the real wife who died at the bell-tower, and the flashback elicits our sympathy with *Judy* as an unwitting participant in *Elster*’s scheme, and someone who really fell in love with *Scottie*. *Scottie*’s focalising point-of-view is thus revealed as fallible and it is clear that the gaze of Hitchcock’s camera and *Scottie*’s subjective vision are not straightforwardly aligned.

Judy resolves to try to make *Scottie* love her a second time, this time for herself, but he is driven to remake her in the image of *Madeleine*, to try to remove the “common” aspects which *Vertigo* emphasises mark out *Judy* as an “earthier reincarnation” of the dream-like image *Novak* initially appears as.¹⁴⁰ It is apparent in several key scenes that *Judy*’s physicality is disturbing to *Scottie*, who can hardly bring himself to touch her. Whilst *Judy* is trapped by her own masquerade – the man she loves, loves her only insofar as she

approximates to an ideal she created but cannot *embody* – ironically, Scottie busies himself making Judy approximate a non-existent original object of his desire. Once he succeeds, his fantasy collapses. It is exactly at the point at which he has reproduced Madeleine that he discovers that Judy *is/was* Madeleine, and thus that she never *originally* existed. In a fit of rage he takes her back to Spanish mission, and, overcoming his vertigo at last, drags her back up the bell-tower. Scottie finally learns the truth of his deception, which we as viewers have known for almost half the film. Just as he appears reconciled to Judy, her shock at the figure of a nun emerging from the shadows in the bell-tower (to us too this figure seems spectral, an augurer of death) culminates in the repetition of the scene of Madeleine's death, this time for real. As Scottie unravels the narrative and resolves it, he brings it to a disastrous conclusion. The implications of this for a gendered interpretation of *Vertigo* (its political dimension) and a reflection on the issues of image/representation/narrative/knowledge raised above (its epistemological dimension) will be set out in the remainder of this chapter.

The origin of the woman/copy/death linkage “in” the narrative of *Vertigo*, as we first encounter it (through an identification with the character of Scottie), is explicitly linked to the ghostly return of a mother (Carlotta Valdez) driven to suicide by the loss of a child. The loss of the wholeness of the mother-child dyad is thus linked to death. But this dynamic is not a female prerogative alone in the film. Tania Modleski argues that narrative identification in *Vertigo* is more complex than many feminist readings allow, and not only splits the spectator between Scottie and Madeleine/Judy, but also implicates Scottie within the problematic of femininity as presented by the film (just as Duchamp's

museal voyeur is likewise forced into an uncomfortable identity with the target of his gaze).¹⁴¹

The film starts out suggesting that Scottie will be able to reassert (male) reason over (female) hysteria and irrationality, yet his actions in the film could be read as a parable of analytic fallibility. In contrast to Gradiva / Zoë as the analyst leading her patient back to reason and out of the realm of the dead, Scottie's attempt to show Madeleine that her hallucinations of death and of Carlotta's memories are based in her own (and his) reality end in disaster. It is in this attempt that he both fails to recognise that *he* is already caught in a masquerade, and in so doing condemns Judy to actualising Madeleine's *symbolic* death later in the film. Various moments in *Vertigo* subtly associate Scottie with femininity, and link this to his vertigo. For example, in the first scene in Midge's apartment, he complains about the corset he has to wear; it "binds" him he says. This feminine accoutrement is linked to vertiginous locations in the film when Midge shows him a new bra designed on the "principle of the cantilever bridge" (Fig. 58). For Modleski, such moments in the film jokingly imply that femininity is a male construct or masquerade, but the humorous tone hides a more troubling recognition; "for if woman, who is posited as she whom man must know and possess in order to guarantee his truth and his identity, does not exist, then in some important sense he does not exist either."¹⁴² *Vertigo's* interest in fashion, in particular the scenes in which Scottie makes Judy over and is told on three separate occasions that he "knows what he wants" more than most men, figures this troubling existential dilemma (Fig. 59). For Walter Benjamin "fashion was never anything but the parody of the gaily decked-out corpse, the provocation of

death through the woman, and ... the bitter, whispered *tête-à-tête* with decay.”¹⁴³ In attempting to overcome this provocation, Scottie attempts to re-fashion Judy in his own image of Madeleine. This project must rebound on him, for, as Susan Buck-Morss argues, fashion turns the body into a commodity because it “knows to escape from death only by mimicking it.”¹⁴⁴ The horror of what lies beyond this parody is also the occasion of desire. *Vertigo* suggests that “the source of the man’s fascination with the woman is her own fascination with death, with the gaping abyss, which she hallucinates as her open grave and which is imaged continually in the film in its many arched-shaped forms of church, museum, cemeteries, mission.”¹⁴⁵ Again, it is not too far-fetched to see this in connection to the problematic of the museum as site of both death and desire – an association forced by Duchamp, most particularly in *Etant Donnés*, in which the “gaily decked-out corpse” is finally “stripped bare” and the viewer / voyeur’s idealised notion of sight both gets what it wants, and rebounds on the subject.

For Modleski, what is at work in *Vertigo*, with its multiple ghostly returns that Scottie cannot master – of Carlotta-as-Madeleine, Madeleine-as-Judy – is the troubling disavowed partial recognition of male identity with the feminine as double. She quotes Sarah Kofman’s assertion that “men’s fascination with the eternal feminine is nothing but fascination with their own double, and the feeling of uncanniness, *Unheimlichkeit*, that men experience is the same as what one feels in the face of any double, any ghost, in the face of the abrupt reappearance of what one thought had been overcome or lost forever.”¹⁴⁶ Scottie’s repeated attempts at cure only realise the outcome he wishes to avoid, but which is implicit in the (masculine) logic of representation he seeks

reassurance from – “The very effort to cure her, which is an effort to get her to mirror man and his desire, to see (his) reason, destroys woman’s otherness.”¹⁴⁷ The consequence of this failure, as Scottie’s dream sequence suggests, is his vertiginous fall into the psychic disintegration initially proposed as a feminine, indeed matrilinear prerogative. Just as completion, closure, ends the collector’s narrative in (subjective) death, the loss of investment in the objective, so Scottie’s overcoming of his fantasy and his vertigo, the completion of his narrative, is only achieved with the double loss of ideal image and material object of desire. In contrast to the examples of traumatic cinematic narrative given at the start of this chapter, then, *Vertigo* takes seriously the notion that beyond the fantasy there may be nothing (no subject, no reality).

The insistence on this position as both psychoanalytic and philosophical necessity is axiomatic to Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian-Hegelian theorization of subject and culture. Žižek uses Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* specifically to illustrate the radical implications of psychoanalytic subjectivity – implications which tend to be overlooked in the accounts of fetishism discussed above – and links this to the political consequences of postmodern Capitalism. The two crucial aspects of Žižek’s thought for the present argument are: 1) his insistence on the opacity of the subject to itself, specifically in relation to the gaze; 2) his opposition to false solutions to the political and psychic antinomies of postmodernity. It is these aspects that I will focus on here.

Žižek contends that Kant is the first theorist of the decentred subject, in establishing the inaccessibility of self as “Thing-which-thinks” as the very condition of autonomous

agency.¹⁴⁸ Žižek's reading of Kant with Lacan corrects the common misconception that the accession to the Symbolic is what cuts us off from the plenitude of the Real as *ding-an-sich*, with *objet petit a* as surplus enjoyment left over. For Lacan, rather, "there is no substance of enjoyment without, prior to, the surplus enjoyment. *The substance is a mirage retroactively invoked by the surplus.*"¹⁴⁹ The *Thing's* unattainability becomes conceived as fundamental unknowableness "the moment we "substantialize" it and assume that it ontologically precedes its loss, i.e., that there is something to see "behind the curtain" (of the phenomena)."¹⁵⁰ One of art's characteristic procedures is just such a production of unknowableness, with artistic Beauty serving as "the mask in the guise of which the abyss of the Real Thing, the Thing resisting symbolization, appears."¹⁵¹ Žižek's key example of this is, strangely enough, *Fountain*, a work which he describes as transubstantiating "materiality into the mode of appearance of the Thing."¹⁵² The key point is that materiality is not therefore the true thing-in-itself to which a non-fetishistic mode of apprehension could return, and *Fountain*, in its trajectory from mass-produced commodity, to exhibition entry, to photograph, and finally accepted art-historical event, renders this palpable. Just as *Fountain* is the epoch-defining art work for Žižek – the "zero-level" of appropriative strategies – so *Vertigo* is the film, figuring cinema's special relationship with subjective fantasy.¹⁵³ *Vertigo's* attack on the Platonic triad of Idea, material copy, and copy-of-copy is also applicable to *Fountain*. Žižek argues that what emerges from Scottie's failed attempt to make Judy into a copy of Madeline is that

"the Idea can emerge only in the distance that separates our ordinary material reality ... from its copy. When we copy a material object, *what* we effectively

copy, what our copy refers to, is never this particular object itself but its Idea. ... the Idea is something that *appears* when reality (the first level copy / imitation of the Idea) is itself copied. It is that which is in the copy more than the original itself."¹⁵⁴

What has to be emphasised here is that the copy of a copy competes not with the intermediate material object but the Idea itself.

The "scandal" of psychoanalysis, and its difficulty for metaphysics, is that the "*decentred hard kernel which eludes my grasp is ultimately self-consciousness itself.*"¹⁵⁵ Self-consciousness is *not* therefore self-transparency. This is why "in psychoanalysis, the subject is not the (potential) reader but the bearer of a message addressed to the Other and therefore, in principle, inaccessible to the subject himself."¹⁵⁶ The special conception of the symptom's legibility offered by psychoanalysis must be taken seriously if it is not to be generalized out of all validity. The role played by the analyst is much more complex, and libidinal, than the symptomologies of fetishism, considered above, allow. If they have recourse to psychoanalytic vocabularies, haven't they to pay proper heed to its actual functioning as a discourse?

For Žižek, Kant shows us that "if our experience is to retain its consistency" it is unavoidable that we posit 'things-in-themselves' in a way that not ultimately philosophically grounded or justifiable.¹⁵⁷ Žižek reads Kant's claims here via Bentham's theory of the fictive basis of language, which he sees as articulating *avant la lettre*

Lacan's distinction between Symbolic and Imaginary registers; for Lacan "truth has the structure of a fiction: the dimension of truth is opened up by the order of discourse which loses its consistency without the support of fictions."¹⁵⁸ For Kant the regulative function of transcendental Ideas (fictions) is inseparable from human reason, and is not dissolved by simple reference to their deceptiveness – as, Žižek notes, Marx had warned was also the case with commodity fetishism. Here we find a crucial point of difference between Žižek and the argumentation of Bal, Mulvey, Owens, and Burgin: they seem to assume that such a naming of the problem makes it disappear. Žižek allows us to rethink this with a conception of 'traversing the fantasy' based on excessive processes of identification, which amounts to a reconfiguration of the way in which fantasy frames reality, and is thus an intervention in the Real. The fundamental paradox delineated from reading Kant with Bentham and Lacan is that symbolic fictions both bar us from reality and provide the only possible access to it: "fictions are a semblance which occludes reality, but if we renounce fictions, reality itself dissolves."¹⁵⁹ Hence, in *Vertigo*, because Scottie fails to move from a traumatic encounter with the Thing to a reconfigured fantasy, cleaving instead to an idealization of courtly love even as it collapses around him, nothing comes after the revelation of the Madeleine's non-existence.¹⁶⁰

With Kant neither Reason nor suprasensible Intuition ("ghost-seeing") provides access to the noumenal beyond; all that is possible is to "delineate its empty place."¹⁶¹ The dialectical point about this, which Žižek stresses, is that against appearances, Reason and "ghost-seeing" are not opposed, but are on the same side as regulative ideas supporting reality. This is also true of *das Ding* which is both external traumatic *X*, and the very

kernel of the subject's being, the unthought which must be sacrificed to produce "reality." This is the way Lacan reads the famous *fort-da* game: it is not that the spool substitutes word (representation) for (maternal) Thing, the price being paid being the loss of "mother *qua* Thing."¹⁶² Rather, it is the part of the subject itself sacrificed to accede to the Symbolic, that which ends its fullness of being as an object for the (m)Other.

It is precisely Scottie's own melancholic internalisation, via identification, of Madeleine as loved object that violates this principle in *Vertigo*. Following Freud, Modleski presents melancholia as a regression to a primary narcissism, and in *Vertigo* this regression plunges Scottie into the very madness he had attempted to correct in Madeleine. His failure to recognise Judy as the "real" Madeleine leads him to treat her as the "fully fetishized and idealized ... 'constructed' object of male desire and male 'design'."¹⁶³ There is no "original" woman in the logic of *Vertigo*, and it is this, and the threat it poses to masculine identity that Modleski valorises. Freud linked the "enigma of woman" to the bisexuality that results from the female Oedipal scenario, which, like the masculine, begins with desire for the mother. Against the normative heterosexuality of his narrative, he did recognise the persistence of this identification/desire – which Teresa de Lauretis argues establishes a double positionality of female identification, both active and passive, desire for and desire to be desired by the other. This "enigma of bisexuality ... provides a model of 'overidentification' in which the boundaries between self and other become blurred, and desire for and identification with the other are not clearly separable process."¹⁶⁴ The particular importance of cinema in this connection is the way that it can not only figure such transgressive/excessive identification *within* its diegetic space, but

also go beyond it to produce complex spectatorial identifications on the part of its viewers.

The fundamental insight that fictions structure truth, that truth is possible only via a “fantasy frame” is extended into Žižek’s interpretation of key aspects in *Vertigo*. How, then, does the film reflect this? Žižek notes that the reverse-shot mirror scene at the florists figures the fantasy-frame and its consequences. If Magritte’s *La Lunette D’Approche* (1963) illustrates the Kantian point that we can but point to the “empty space” of the Thing-in-itself, *Vertigo* supplements this by locating the gaze in this very impossible-Real dimension. In the reverse-shot mirror we see both Madeleine and Scottie; although in the diegetic logic Scottie is “really” there and Madeleine only as mirror image, the effect is that Madeleine is real and Scottie “a phantomlike protuberance who ... lurks behind the mirror” (Fig. 60).¹⁶⁵ Whilst Magritte illustrates Kant’s point that we can only indicate the empty space of the Thing, Hitchcock supplements this with a Lacanian theme, by locating in this space *the gaze*, the Otherness which precedes intersubjectivity.¹⁶⁶ The gaze is another name, in Žižek’s reading of Lacan, for the Thing-in-itself *qua* opaque Thing-that-thinks. It is this which analysis proper exploits; the analyst fulfils the function of the *objet petit a* *qua* gaze: “the gaze in the precise point of view from which the stain [as the locus of the subject’s unthought] can be perceived in its “true meaning”.¹⁶⁷ The analyst is he who is supposed to know the meaning of the stain. This externality of the kernel of the (decentred) subject’s being is found also in the gaze – “I am aware of myself only insofar as outside of me there exists where the truth about me is articulated.”¹⁶⁸ This is the first crucial point to be underscored. For psychoanalysis (in

its most advanced form) there can be no easy dispersion of fantasy and a return to the real. The Freudian subject is not self-transparent, and emerges when part of “the subject’s phenomenal (self) experience (his ‘fundamental fantasy’) becomes inaccessible to him.”¹⁶⁹ In analysis, this point relies on the uncanny experience of the analyst taking on the role not of the confident narrator, but of the disturbing Thing. The notions of analytic diagnosis underpinning the theories of fetishism and the image fail to take this into account.

Vertigo initially seems to be composed of two sections, before and after Madeleine’s first death. Žižek suggests that there are actually three; each ended by a suicidal leap. The first, concluded by Madeleine’s jump into San Francisco Bay, presents her as imaginary image; the second which ends with Madeleine’s death, presents her as “barred Other ... the signifier of a certain mystery”; the third presents Judy as *objet petit a* “the excremental object-remainder.”¹⁷⁰ The point is that in Scottie’s fantasy these moments are overlaid, and each represents an attempt to defend against the threat of the abyssal *das Ding*, the Thing which is the cause of his vertigo. To understand how woman as abyssal Thing operates as a “fatal attraction” Žižek emphasises that the gaze is crucial. “The gaze is not simply transfixed by the emergence of the excessive-unbearable Thing. Rather, it is that the Thing (what we perceive as the traumatic-elusive point of attraction in the space of reality) is the very point at which the gaze inscribes itself into reality, the point at which the subject *encounters itself as gaze*.”¹⁷¹ The vital conclusion to be drawn from all this is that, for Žižek, two seemingly contradictory positions have to be thought at once. Against the conceptions of fetishism outlined above, it must be emphasised that the

radical insight of psychoanalysis is that there is no “reality” without the structuring fantasy-frame, and that there is no traumatic Real as prior site of plenitude which is repressed or screened. On the other hand, there is, as a consequence of the subject’s decentred status as opaque to itself, the possibility of traumatic Real encounters. This is what *Vertigo* suggests, and its lesson lies in Scottie’s failure to meet the challenge it makes to him to restructure his fantasy. Against what he terms the “poetic” notion of the Real as impossible, figured in objects which always elude our grasp, Žižek stresses that “the problem with the Real is that it happens and *that’s* the trauma.”¹⁷²

So much, then, for the notion that psychoanalysis simply speaks the Real. What of the political dimension of this? Žižek’s recent critiques of postmodernity have centred on what he argues is its false model of reflexivity. Just as the theories of fetishistic image-making claim to read symptoms of fundamental disavowal in culture at large (whilst seemingly exempting themselves from it), so for psychoanalysis there is the very real problem of postmodern *reflexive symptoms*: if the Unconscious is no longer inaccessible to reflection, then analysands can now produce already interpreted symptoms and “the analyst’s interpretation loses its performative “symbolic efficiency” and leaves the symptom intact in its idiotic *jouissance*.”¹⁷³

The loss of patriarchy’s fundamental symbolic efficiency is welcomed by Žižek, as it is by feminists, queer theorists and postmodernists. But he cautions against seeing this as a utopian escape from the big Other – this role is filled by *something* even if it not a priori by the Father. For Žižek, the promise of a world of desire perfectly transparent to the

subject as reflexive consumer is the fake content of the postmodern concept of knowledge and choice. The positive interpretation of postmodernity offered by “risk society” theorists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens depends on endorsing the Marxist maxim that “all that is solid melts into air.” Against such a positive reading Žižek insists on Marx’s point that individualism’s free choice is constrained by a secular version of Destiny in the form of market relations: “the big Other survives as the social substance in which we all participate by our acts, as the mysterious spectral agency that somehow re-establishes the balance.”¹⁷⁴ The big Other’s withdrawal (from the symbolic efficiency of patriarchy) shifts responsibility onto *us* – a gesture exploited to the full in the political dogma of choice currently employed in making the Welfare State accountable to Capital. The fully reflexive subject must take responsibility for choices which are not in fact radically free decisions of an autonomous agent, but one handed over entirely to the law of the market. The real risk, for Žižek, is that the diminution of patriarchal symbolic authority is paid for “by an even more ‘passionate attachment’ to subjection.”¹⁷⁵

This ties together the “curatorial mode” with the epistemological problem emerging in Mulvey’s, Bal’s and Burgin’s texts: how can we reflexively know the complete conditions of cultural production and subjective investment?¹⁷⁶ Psychoanalysis, of course, sees this as resolved via a dialogue shaped by desire in the form of transference and counter-transference; it cannot be simply a matter of choice. And the exemplification of this fake reflexivity for Žižek is precisely the rise of curation as creative practice:

“Is not the ultimate example of reflexivity in today’s art the crucial role of the *curator*? His role is not limited to mere selection – through his selection, he (re)defines what art *is* today. That is to say: today’s art exhibitions display objects which, at least for the traditional approach, have nothing to do with art, up to human excrement and dead animals – so why is this to be perceived as art? *Because what we see is the curator’s choice.* When we visit an exhibition today, we are thus not directly observing works of art – what we are observing is the curator’s notion of what art is; in short, the ultimate artist is not the producer but the curator, his activity of selection.”¹⁷⁷

This is the ultimate recuperation of the readymade strategy: aesthetic aura is now a property bestowed via a transubstantiation performed by the creative subject. Exactly this point was Robert Smithson’s objection to Duchamp, articulated in 1973 as what he termed “Duchampitis” took hold in American art. Smithson’s criticism was that “his objects are just like relics, relics of the saints or something like that,” and that the Readymade strategy is ultimately “a kind of religion in drag” with “Duchamp as a kind of priest of a certain sort ... turning a urinal into a baptismal font.”¹⁷⁸ Smithson’s rebarbative remarks are more apposite in terms of the reception of the Readymades as transubstantiated objects than they are of Duchamp’s own practice. Yet it is precisely the “religion in drag” dimension of this reception which seems to be winning out in the present; not, however, as a return to a cerebral / aristocratic religious culture in which art is not idealised but integral (which Duchamp might well have endorsed, as a positive “end” to art)¹⁷⁹, but in the drab clothes of a contemporary religiosity configured as New

Age spirituality, which shirks Christianity's once radical rearrangement of the symbolic order in favour of postmodernity's affirmative reflexivity and ethos of "self-determination."¹⁸⁰ The notion of a self-reflexive art which could unveil all its institutional conditions needs to be viewed in this light. At least on Žižek's account, its reflexivity must either fail, or testify to the extinction of the symbolic order it claims as its constitutive-repressed.

If, according to the Marxist part of Žižek's argumentation, reflexivity does not surpass the relation to an ideological big Other per se, but rather emerges in the wake of the Oedipal symbolic order, what form does the big Other take in the postmodern imaginary? The postindustrial figure of the Other as father/master is "a lone figure of uncanny, ethereal, frail materiality, devoid of a sexual partner."¹⁸¹ This is not the (Name of the) Father as guarantor of symbolic status, but the Evil Genius as Maker/manipulator of subject as Thing/artifact. In *Vertigo* this role is taken by Elster – the most mysterious character in many ways; the orchestrator of Scottie's deception, but also he for whom Scottie's fantasy is staged.

To return to Duchamp, in conclusion, and to Schwarz's thesis of his *œuvre* as a masterly sublimation of incestuous desire, we can see that its real failure lies not in its reductiveness – this is a reproach that is ultimately derived from art history's disciplinary attachment to particularism, underwritten by its connoisseurly interest in the specificity of objects – but rather its attachment to a big Other-who-knows. In other words, it is not just that he posits the legibility of what is supposedly a fundamental taboo in Duchamp's

work, but that he imagines Duchamp has orchestrated this in order that he, Schwartz, can decipher it. This both operates with a banal notion of the Unconscious, and establishes the Other as an infallible omniscient being, rather than acknowledging the radical import of the unconscious and realising the *stupidity* of the big Other (as ideological injunction, inaugural patriarch etc.). This is the lesson Žižek insists we must draw from psychoanalysis, in opposition to the profound mutuality of consumer capitalism and reflexivity in its contemporary form. Amelia Jones has written extensively against the image of Duchamp as patriarch; but more often now he appears in the role of knowing orchestrator – the bachelor as “uncanny, ethereal, frail ... devoid of a sexual partner,” as (Evil) Genius – hence the increased interest in *all* his activities, including exhibition design, window-dressing and so on. Might this image of Duchamp be a defense against the radical (traumatic) event of the Readymade, the appearance of the urinal as Maternal Thing (“Madonna of the Bathroom”!) and commodity within the space of art? And if this Event is the symbolic death of art, a death that according to Žižek’s reading of Lacan leaves it in the realm of the “undead,” how can we engage in the project of escaping from such immortality? The key, perhaps, lies in Žižek’s interpretation of Lacan’s analytic discourse.

Lacan distinguishes the analyst’s role from the other discursive modes of the Master, the Hysteric, and the University. The Master’s role “is to change the act into a new Master-Signifier, to guarantee the continuity and consequences of the Event,” whereas the Hysteric insists on the discontinuity between Event and symbolization, each symbolization produces the reaction “*ce n’est pas ça*,” finally, the perverse University

discourse “disavows that there was the event of an act in the first place – with his chain of knowledge, he wants to reduce the consequences of the act to just another thing that can be explained away as part of the normal run of things.”¹⁸² In contrast to this triad is the *analytic* discourse, which affirms the gap between Event and symbolisation as productive; “it asserts the Real of the Event as the ‘generator,’ the generating core to be encircled repeatedly by the subject’s symbolic productivity.”¹⁸³ The unnameable core of the Event for Lacan

“is structured in a fundamental fantasy – that is, it is the core of *jouissance*, and an authentic act *does* intervene in this core. So – to put it succinctly – for Lacan, the authentic act itself in its negative dimension, the act as the real of an ‘object’ preceding naming, is what is ultimately *innomable*. ... For this reason, one should stick to Lacan’s thesis that ‘truth has the structure of a fiction’: truth is condemned to remain a fiction precisely in so far as the *innomable* Real eludes its grasp.”¹⁸⁴

According to Julia Kristeva’s polemic reading (aimed against what she considers the neutralization of psychoanalysis in American university discourse), analytic interpretation aims to effect an *action* by means of its correspondence to a repressed event/sign. It is a *connection* between disparate parts of the analysand’s discourse, but even more, connects signifieds of the analyst with those of his patient. Interpretation is thus what moves across the space of intersubjectivity and here Bhabha’s account of interpretation as the negotiation/mediation of aura and agora is echoed.

“This second circulation, dependent on the analyst’s desire and operative only with him, departs from interpretive mastery and opens the field to suggestion as well as to projection and interminable drifts. In this way, the analyst approaches the vertigo of delirium and, with it, the phallic *jouissance* of a subject subsumed in the dyadic, narcissistic construction of a discourse in which the *Same* mistakes itself for the *Other*. It is, however, only by detaching himself from such a vertigo that the analyst derives both his *jouissance* and his efficacy.”¹⁸⁵

Analyst and analysand alike have to traverse fantasy and to engage the vertiginous openness of interpretation without succumbing to it. The analytic position is not exempted from the misrecognitions and desires it locates in the subject. *Vertigo* as presented by Modleski, indicates that the reinforcement of the subject attempted by the fetishist can never succeed due to the very structure of desire in which the boundaries of the self are undermined in the desire for the object. Her account suggests a liberating perspective is opened up for viewers of *Vertigo* and other of Hitchcock’s films, by the foregrounding of the mechanisms of identification. The consequences of such foregrounding for critical writing are explored in the following chapters.

¹ Foster, 'Postmodernism in Parallax,' *October*, No. 63 (Winter, 1993), 3-20.

² Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, (London: Verso, 2002). Didier Maleuvre has argued that the museum itself is a sign that the synthesis of art and praxis failed – had it succeeded art would have ceased to exist. The museal life of art is a consequence of that failure. See *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 50-56.

³ The distinction between "postmodernism" and "antimodernism" is given a somewhat different spin in *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-Modernism, Postmodernism* (ed.) Foster, Krauss, Bois, Buchloh, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004) pp. 434-679, where a much more pessimistic reading of the anti-modernism to postmodernism transition as spectacularization leads to a marked privileging of the former. Here Foster describes the "sense of *post-histoire*" as a "common institutional effect" which leads us to "wander through museum spaces as if after the end of time," *ibid*, 679. His account in *Design and Crime*, in contrast, holds open at least the possibility of artistic and critical responses to the condition of after-ness. As 'Postmodernism in Parallax' makes clear, rather than an aberrant ahistoricity, Foster's key terms, which again derive from his thinking of *Nachträglichkeit*, remake historicity itself, or at least the historicity of modernity, as a matter of a parallax of anticipations and reconstructions.

⁴ Foster (2002) op. cit., 130.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷ Maleuvre, op. cit., 57.

⁸ Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of George Bataille*, trans. B. Wing, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992).

⁹ *Ibid*, xiii.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

¹¹ Fisher, op. cit., 9.

¹² Foster, *Art Since 1900*, op. cit., 679.

¹³ Azoulay, op. cit., 32.

¹⁴ Mark Seltzer *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*, London: Routledge (1998), pp. 253-292.

¹⁵ Foster (2002), op. cit., 131.

¹⁶ Something of this logic is also at work in *The Usual Suspects*, where the radical evil personified as the unseen figure of Keyser Söze is revealed at the end as a McGuffin; once we see (via the detectives' belated realisation) that the narrative we have been watching is a fictional construct assembled by Kevin Spacey's character from various contingent elements, the narrative must dissolve. Yet we also perceive Spacey's escape as confirmation that he *is* Keyser Söze, and that his radical evil persists as fantasy *within* the Real. This is a key insight of Žižek's Lacanianism and will be discussed further in the conclusion to this chapter.

¹⁷ Quoted in Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 100.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 134.

²⁰ Bal, 'Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,' in Elsner, J. and Cardinal, R. (eds.) *The Cultures of Collecting*, (London: Reaktion, 1994), 97-115.

²¹ *Ibid*, 98. The most comprehensive account of this is given by Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination and Nineteenth Century Europe*, (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

²² 'Telling Objects,' op. cit., 101.

²³ *Ibid*, 102.

²⁴ On this point see Smith, 'Hegel's Idea of a Critical Theory,' *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (February, 1987), 99-126.

²⁵ Indeed, the first exhibition of the Readymades was a total non-Event. *Traveller's Folding Item* and *In Advance of the Broken Arm* were exhibited at the Bourgeois Gallery in New York in 1916, but were literally not registered as works. See Tompkins, op. cit., 157. Hence, perhaps, the care with which Duchamp orchestrated the scandal of *Fountain* a year later – though this event, which now serves as art history's year zero for the Readymade itself amounts to an origin produced retrospectively.

²⁶ Loos, 'The Poor Little Rich Man,' (1900), quoted in Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, (London: Verso, 2002), 15.

- ²⁷ David Lomas, *The Haunted Subject Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity*, (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 102.
- ²⁸ 'Telling Objects,' op. cit., 106.
- ²⁹ Freud, 'Fetishism,' (1927), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI*, trans. J. Strachey, (London: Hogarth, 1961), 157.
- ³⁰ 'Telling Objects,' op. cit., 107.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ³² On this point see also Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 3-29.
- ³³ Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)*, (London: Verso, 2002), 101.
- ³⁴ Marx, 'The Fetish Character of Commodities,' in Harrison, Wood, & Gaiger, (eds.) *Art in Theory 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford: Blackwell (1998), 350.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.
- ³⁶ 'Telling Objects,' op. cit., 109.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ The concept of schizophrenia as a product of Capital's radical destruction of structures of meaning and belief is, of course, articulated by Deleuze and Guattari, who see in it a site of positive transformation: "unlimited semiosis, a radically fluid and extemporaneous form of meaning ... freedom, ingenuity, permanent revolution." Eugene G. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 3. In opposition to this positive reading, Slavoj Žižek has emphasised that the actual psychological consequence of Capital's colonization of meaning and affect is not liberating madness, but a pushing of subjects beyond the limits of their psychic ability to adapt to such radical instability. Hence the incredibly high degree of use of Prozac and other psychotropic drugs: "it is literally that in order to function we already need psycho-pharmacy." See Žižek & Daly, *Conversations with Daly*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 153.
- ³⁹ Mulvey, 'Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture,' *October* #65, (Summer 1993), 3-20.
- ⁴⁰ Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in Harrison & Wood (eds.) *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 963-970. The theme of "palindomic returns" will be returned to (palindomically) in Chapter Six.
- ⁴¹ Burgin, 'The Absence of Presence,' in *Art In Theory 1900-1990*, pp. 1101.
- ⁴² 'Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism,' op. cit., 10. The classic account of this investment in image is of course Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, (New York: Zone, 1995).
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.* The best note effort on the Left to provide such a symptomatology is that of Frederic Jameson. See for instance *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). As a strategy for cultural analysis of critically orientated art, this is problematic, as Craig Owens has pointed out, because it tends to establish a "division of labour" between unconsciously symptomatic producer and diagnostic theorist. Owens does, however, single out Jameson as someone who at least takes visual art seriously, albeit a restricted corpus. See Anders Stephenson 'Interview with Craig Owens,' in Owens, *Beyond Recognition*, 298-315.
- ⁴⁶ Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 93.
- ⁴⁷ 'Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism,' op. cit., 11.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁴⁹ Freud, 'Fetishism,' op. cit., 157.
- ⁵⁰ 'Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism,' op. cit., 7.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁵² A literal interpretation of cinema's 'fronting' for repressed Real contents, focused on the semiotics of Elizabeth Taylor's body as image in *Suddenly Last Summer*, is given in D. A. Miller's 'Visual Pleasure in 1959,' *October*, No. 81, (Summer, 1997), 34-58.
- ⁵³ 'Some thoughts on Theories of Fetishism,' op. cit., 6. The transference of the Lacanian theory of visuality to the cultural sphere in general is a common trope in recent theory. Lacan's position is set out in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (London: Vintage, 1977), pp. 67-119. Two convincing

uses of the concepts of eye, gaze, and screen occur in Foster, *The Return of the Real*, pp. 126-168, and Prosser, *Light in the Dark Room*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 163-181.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7. Re: *The Distance*. "To conceal this need to conceal" is a nice descriptor for Parker's act of wrapping string round the already sublimating sculpture. Here her doubling of concealment in fact cancels out the first (via the reference to Duchamp and his reworkings of *The Kiss*). In an analogous way, the work points to its own museal character, so that, rather than simply re-animating it as a dead work, *The Distance* points (again via Duchamp) to the fetishistic disavowal of its non-originality, in a way that, by deferred action, lodges itself always already within the work. Mulvey's pessimism about the redoubling of disavowal as inevitably determined as spectacularizing can therefore be countered to some extent.

⁵⁷ Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 140.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 157.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶⁴ Freud, 'Fetishism,' op. cit., 157.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶⁶ For general references to this see Lomas's essay 'The Omnipotence of Desire: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Hysteria,' in *Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mindy (London: Tate, 2001).

⁶⁷ Arturo Schwartz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, Volume One*, 227. Duchamp's insistence on the erotic basis of vision, and its link to the commercial sphere is addressed in Krauss's discussion of the pulsile dynamic of the 1925 *Roto-reliefs*, to which *Anémic Cinema* is related, *The Optical Unconscious*, op. cit., pp. 94-97.

⁶⁸ Schwarz, op. cit., 231.

⁶⁹ In his many repetitions of *Fountain* Duchamp continually played with its installation – sometimes it was given its utilitarian orientation; for instance at the "Challenge and Defy" exhibition at Sidney Janis Gallery, and, in miniature form, in the *Boîtes-en-valise*.

⁷⁰ Neil Hertz, foreword to Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. J. Strachey, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), xiii.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁷² Freud, 'Delusion and Dream in Jensen's *Gradiva*,' in *ibid.*, 82.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁷⁶ On Freud's own overdetermination of "Dora" and the problems caused by his failure to account for the effects of both transference and counter-transference on the analysis) see Decker, *Freud, Dora and Vienna 1900*, (London: Macmillan, 1991).

⁷⁷ 'Delusion and Dream,' op. cit., 76.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁸⁷ Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets,' *Writings on Art and Literature*, op. cit., pp. 109-121.

⁸⁸ This parallel is explored in Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm,' *Theory and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (May, 1979), 273-288.

⁸⁹ Craig Owens, 'Posing,' *Beyond Recognition*, 206.

- ⁹⁰ On such moments in Freud see Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). Bersani's deconstructionist approach is very much in keeping with the notion that Freud's texts ultimately fail to control the polysemous excess of meaning produced by their inherent 'mobility'.
- ⁹¹ Owens, 'The Medusa Effect,' *Beyond Recognition*, 195.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 192. Here Owens is clearly indebted to Barthes and *Camera Lucida*.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 199.
- ⁹⁴ Owens, 'Posing,' *Beyond Recognition*, op. cit., 206.
- ⁹⁵ William Camfield, 'Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917,' in Kuenzli and Naumann (eds.) *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press), 74-76.
- ⁹⁶ Owens, 'Posing' op. cit., 206.
- ⁹⁷ This insistence occurs in 'The Theme of the Three Caskets,' *Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. J. Strachey, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
- ⁹⁸ Quoted in Owens, 'Posing,' op. cit., 207.
- ⁹⁹ Prosser, *Light from the Dark Room: Photography and Loss*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 23.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ¹⁰⁷ Owens, 'Posing,' op. cit., 208.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.
- ¹⁰⁹ Azoulay, *Death's Showcase: The Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy*, trans. Ruvik Danieli, Cambridge: MIT Press, (2001), 32.
- ¹¹⁰ Roland Barthes *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 2000), 11.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 77.
- ¹¹³ Žižek, 'Death and the Maiden,' *The Žižek Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 211.
- ¹¹⁴ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, (London: Verso, 2000), 387.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 390.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁸ Žižek & Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 61.
- ¹¹⁹ Victor Burgin: 'Diderot, Barthes, *Vertigo*' in *Formations of Fantasy*, London: Methuen (1986), 86.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 92. Perhaps the clearest instance of this is Chris Marker's film *La Jetée*, which consists entirely of stills (except for one moving image) and narration. In *La Jetée* mnemonic experience as a process of "protenstion and retention" is conveyed by the images which emerge from the narration, and it is they which provide the interest of the film, not its ostensibly sci-fi narrative structure.
- ¹²¹ Burgin (1986), op. cit., 100.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, 98.
- ¹²³ Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets,' op. cit., 117.
- ¹²⁴ Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets,' op. cit., 118.
- ¹²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.
- ¹²⁷ Burgin (1986), op. cit., 101.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ¹³⁰ Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater,' trans. A. Goldhammer, *Poetics Today*, Vol. 6, No. 1:2, (1985), 133.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹³² That is certainly how Paul Smith interpreted *The Bridge*: as an “abstract reverie” revealing Burgin’s “own act, or his own habit of looking as a heterosexual man.” Thus it is taken to figure what Mulvey calls the “collective fantasy” of the Oedipal subject. It is hard to square these comments with Smith’s claim that the works “dispense with the fiction” of the self-transparent subject in figuring the exteriority of the gaze. A more sophisticated conceptualisation of subject, gaze and fiction is offered by Žižek – see below.

¹³³ On the melancholic character of art history see Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 65-78, and Michael Ann Holly’s ‘Mourning and Method,’ *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 84, No. 4, (December, 2002), 660-669.

¹³⁴ Freud, ‘The Theme of the Three Caskets,’ op. cit., 120.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹³⁶ Kristeva, ‘Stabat Mater’ op. cit., 139.

¹³⁷ John Conomos, ‘The Vertigo of Time,’ conference paper given at Hitchcock conference ‘For the Love of Fear,’ Sydney, 2000, available from *Senses of Cinema*,

www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/6/time.html. Conomos stresses that *Vertigo* in important aspects utilizes Surrealist devices, and is in many ways a concealment of Surrealist ideas behind Hollywood forms.

¹³⁸ Briefly visible in *Vertigo*, the Museum of the Legion of Honor’s main attraction is its 1904 cast of Rodin’s *The Thinker*. In its public information about this work, the Museum emphasizes that it was cast under Rodin’s supervision, and approved by him; unlike, for example, one produced, also in 1904, for the Louisiana Purchase exhibition. www.legionofhonor.org/legion/about (accessed 25/10/05).

¹³⁹ ‘This is the famous/notorious argument of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ op. cit.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Obsessed with Vertigo,’ documentary on *Vertigo* DVD.

¹⁴¹ For her account of the identificatory dynamic at work in the *Etant Donnés*, Rosalind Krauss draws on J.F. Lyotard to argue that the perspectival equivalence painstakingly set up by Duchamp implies that *Con celui ce voir* – “he who sees is a cunt.” *Optical Unconscious*, op. cit., 113.

¹⁴² Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 91.

¹⁴³ Quoted in Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), 101.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Modleski, op. cit., 91.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 92.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁴⁸ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵¹ Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 150.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁵⁵ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, op. cit., 66.

¹⁵⁶ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, op. cit., 385.

¹⁵⁷ *Tarrying with the Negative*, op. cit., 85.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶⁰ In fact, Hitchcock did shoot an alternate “happy” ending to *Vertigo*, in which Scottie and Midge listen to a radio report announce Elster’s arrest for the murder of his wife. This alternate ending goes entirely against the sense of the film and, by contrast, emphasizes how its narrative actually works.

¹⁶¹ *Tarrying with the Negative*, 89.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶³ Modleski, op. cit., 96.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶⁵ *Tarrying with the Negative*, 107.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁶⁹ Žižek, *Organs without Bodies*, 96.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁷² Žižek & Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, op. cit., 70.

¹⁷³ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, op. cit., 346.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 339.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 344.

¹⁷⁶ Such knowingness has recently been described as the defining feature of "self-reflexive" art practice. Sally O' Reilly argues that such art "is a direct reflection on the relationship between artwork and audience, implying a self-knowledge and a knowledge that the audience is aware of its status as artifact." 'Self-Reflexivity,' *Art Monthly*, No. 289 (September, 2005), 9.

¹⁷⁷ *The Ticklish Subject*, op. cit., 337.

¹⁷⁸ 'Robert Smithson on Duchamp,' *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. J. Flam (London: University of California Press), 311-312.

¹⁷⁹ On this point see Duchamp's remarks to James Johnson Sweeney in 1946, to the effect that religious painting was "at the service of the mind," in *Marchand du Sel*, op. cit., 125, and to Cabanne, where he distinguishes the religious fetish from the artwork: "It is we who have given the name art to religious things; the word itself doesn't exist amongst primitives. We have created it in thinking about ourselves; about our own satisfaction. We created it for our sole and unique use; it's a little like masturbation. I don't believe in the essential aspect of art," *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, op. cit., 100.

¹⁸⁰ Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, op. cit., 334.

¹⁸¹ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, op. cit., 40.

¹⁸² *The Ticklish Subject*, op. cit., 165.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁸⁵ Julia Kristeva, 'Psychoanalysis and the Polis,' in Mitchell (ed.) *The Politics of Interpretation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 89.

CHAPTER THREE: Foucault, Fiction, Aesthetics

1

The Greek sage, the Jewish prophet, and the Roman legislator are still models that haunt those who practice today the profession of speaking and writing. I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present...

Michel Foucault, *The End of the Monarchy of Sex*.

I sat at a table near the open terrace door, my papers and notes spread out around me, drawing connections between events that lay far apart but which seemed to me to be of the same order.

W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo*.

The previous chapter concluded with the suggestion that the truly radical consequences of realising that the original was always-already a copy has been evaded in Duchamp scholarship – and hence in art history – via the retention of the authorial originality of Duchamp himself. This move was seen as analogous to, perhaps even symptomatic of, the false reflexivity which Žižek identifies with postmodern subjectivity as an aesthetic project of self-fashioning, entwined with a politics and ethics of *choice*. The character of Scottie in *Vertigo* figured the negative consequences of the disillusion felt when the object-cause of desire, and hence the

subject itself, is recognised as a (copy of) a void. For Žižek this recognition is a fundamental psychoanalytic insight, and he insists that it is carried through to the end to show how the subject as such *is* its opacity, its radical negativity or “death drive.” The chief objection raised to the psychoanalytic, and more particularly Lacanian, analyses of Bal, Mulvey, and Burgin – which are estimable in many ways – was that they disavowed this insight; drawing on the rhetorical force of Lacanian argumentation whilst eliding its consequences for their own authorial positioning.

The previous two chapters drew on a variety of theoretical sources which deal in critiques of modernist originality, and offer, as part of this critique, historical accounts which displace this originality. This is an eminently valuable project, especially as it works to open up the autonomy of both art work and creative subject to the recognition of specific historical and social conditions. However, we have seen that when this is carried out according to a Freud-Marxist logic of unrepresentability, it runs into either the trap of self-contradiction in speaking the “unspeakable,” or the necessity of conceiving of abject excluded positions as the only locus of critique. This is also an objection which can be directed at Žižek’s position, as Judith Butler has argued. Indeed, for her the psychoanalytic framework itself is structurally unable to realise its excluded positions as speakable, livable or viable – clearly an unsatisfactory model for critique if normative identity (particularly normative “sexed” identity) is to be challenged. Butler’s reading of psychoanalytic concepts is, as a consequence of this, aimed at deconstructing the Lacanian symbolic / real / imaginary triad in an effort to prevent the reification of “contingent regulatory mechanisms of subject-production ... as universal laws.”¹ Butler employs two strategies in pursuit of this goal: a deconstructive demonstration that the symbolic and imaginary registers cannot

be consistently distinguished (and a consequent elevation in importance of the latter); and a Foucauldian historical analysis aimed against the reification of any particular content of the Real.

In Butler's view, *both* these moves are necessary rejoinders to Žižek. However, his recent books – including those cited in the previous chapter – turn much more towards the imaginary as the key term in the Lacanian triad, and it is the Foucauldian historicity of the Real-as-socially-excluded that continues to be the real bone of contention between them.² For Žižek, Foucault thinks identity in the “reflexive” sense and is thus more a symptom than a diagnostician of postmodernity. Whilst Michel Foucault is often celebrated as establishing the performativity of identity, Žižek argues that

“all this incessant activity of fluid, shifting identities, of building multiple *ad hoc* conditions, and so on, has something inauthentic about it, and ultimately resembles the obsessional neurotic who talks all the time and is otherwise frantically active precisely in order to ensure that something – what *really matters* – will *not* be disturbed, that it will remain immobilized. So, instead of celebrating the new freedoms and responsibilities brought about by the ‘second modernity’, it is much more crucial to focus on what *remains the same* in this global fluidity and reflexivity, on what serves as the very motor of this fluidity: the inexorable logic of Capital.”³

This “spectral presence of Capital” is the figure of the big Other which persists after its destruction of other symbolic orders (including patriarchy).⁴ Hence for Žižek, identity politics is haunted by the spectre of Capital, whilst for Butler, in her synthesis of Foucault and psychoanalysis, what haunts identity itself are the historically contingent constitutive “outsides” of normative identity. The crucial question for Butler is, then,

“how might the excluded return, not as psychosis or the figure of the psychotic within politics, but as that which has been rendered mute, foreclosed from the domain of political signification... How might such socially saturated domains of exclusion be recast from their status as “constitutive” to beings who might be said to matter?”⁵

Against Žižek’s negative estimation of Foucault’s value for such a questioning, I argue that Butler is quite right that the historicity on which he insists is vital to preventing the ossification of excluded subject positions and identifications as “Real.” Such historical contingency keeps open the possibility of political contestation.

For Butler, the signifier operates reiteratively to give the impression that it names and guarantees a “unity” of the signified, but this fails, not because of “an existential void,” but rather because of its “incapacity to include the social relations that it provisionally stabilizes through a set of contingent exclusions. This incompleteness will be the result of a specific set of social exclusions that return to haunt the claims of identity defined through negation; these exclusions need to be read and used in the reformulation and expansion of a democratizing reiteration of the term.”⁶ What is

most valuable for Butler in Žižek's work, then, is precisely the democratic potential in his analysis of political signifiers as "empty signs which come to bear phantasmatic investments of various kinds" and it is the very failure of signification that establishes political signifiers "as sites of phantasmatic investment and discursive rearticulation."⁷ What Butler aims to add to this is the dimension of historicity, provided in her argument by Foucault.⁸ In crafting this position she is able to articulate the subversive potential in the vertigo of the copy or the double. "The loss of the sense of the "normal" ... can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when "the normal," "the original" is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one *can* embody ... all along the original was derived."⁹ How, then, to think and write this positive failure of originality without recapitulating it into the figure of an even more deep-seated originality, as is often the case with Duchamp?

Although it went unremarked until now, many of the texts used in the previous two chapters are predominantly (and explicitly) Foucauldian in inspiration. Thierry de Duve's reading of Duchamp is set out as a Foucauldian archaeology of artistic modernism; Amelia Jones's concept of the Duchampian author-function derives from Foucault's essay 'What is an Author?' – to which Hal Foster's notion of the value of radical returns in deferred action is also indebted; elsewhere Foster uses the Foucauldian sense of "archive"; Douglas Crimp's and Philip Fisher's histories of the museum rely on Foucault's analysis of the classical "*episteme*"; Judith Butler too, as we have just seen, insists on Foucault's importance. I note this for two reasons: firstly, because it is through these texts that I came to read Foucault at all; secondly, because I did so as a result of the *deferral* to Foucauldian concepts as the grounds of historical and philosophical truth, the very condition of possibility of the critiques being carried

out by de Duve, Foster et al. The antinomies of reification / reanimation, copy / original, pathology / normativity which emerged in consideration of Cornelia Parker, Duchamp and a broader field of visual culture and interpretative praxis, strongly imply the need for a turn to the meta-discursive level. If the path through such antinomies frequently seems to turn on a negotiation of two extremes, how are we to gain critical distance on this and justify or account for our position taking? At a more empirical level, if art practices increasingly expand the frame to include conditions of enunciation, how are we to enunciate this? Against what limits does such a move come up against?

A meta-discursive approach that could account for both the historical position in which art finds itself, and the critical perspectives from which we comprehend this position, would certainly be an attractive prospect. Such a position would hopefully also serve as a regulating principle for the kind of associative narratives that seem necessitated by art that operates via suggestion and an appeal to historical "articulation." However, in the readings of Foucault which follow, I hope to show that art historical appropriations of his work have not been attentive to several of its constitutive features which undermine its meta-discursivity. In trying to rectify this by focusing on aspects of Foucault's work that concern art, aesthetics, interpretation and the writing of history I conclude, that it doesn't provide a meta-discursive perspective, but theorises an immanent one that returns us to many of the problems established so far, although it does so in a way that at least accounts for our critical position, even if it doesn't allow us to defer our responsibility for it.

Before turning to Foucault, however, I would like to establish that there is another way to conceptualise the vertiginous experience which accompanies what Foster terms art's (and indeed *our*) condition of "living on" in postmodernity. I draw here on two examples; one anthropological, and one literary. Both recapitulate the themes of spectrality and animation discussed previously.

W. G. Sebald's novel *Vertigo* is an enigmatic combination of biographical reverie, historical reflection and novelistic fiction, punctuated by a collection of image fragments – photographs, receipts, documents, postcards – which likewise relate sometimes to Sebald himself, sometimes to historical moments, sometimes to his own research (for example research into Kafka's travels during 1913). Like art history, then, its narrative is punctuated by images. For the reader, the relationship between text and image often provokes the sense of the uncanny that is, with the melancholic and the mnemonic, one of the characteristics of the *vertiginous* in the book. Do the images illustrate the narrative, do they supplement it, authenticate it? Does the narrative perhaps imbue them with a fictive meaning, an *appearance* of interconnection that holds only insofar as it meets our expectations of narrative coherence? It is the undecidability of this dichotomy that draws us into the field of the "unfathomable contingencies," of the novel, the "details imperceptible to us [which] decide everything."¹⁰ Though the images reproduced in *Vertigo* are on one level evidential, they are also spectral, akin to the visions which haunt Sebald's narrator in his travels – his 'recognitions' of Kafka, of Elizabeth, daughter of James I, in young men and women he encounters. *Vertigo* arises where these two modes overlap – as they do notably when Sebald attempts to determine through research what films Kafka saw at the cinema in Verona, on the night of 20th September, 1913. Kafka's

notes provide no clue, so Sebald cannot know which of the two possibilities his research identifies it actually was: Pathé newsreels, or a *doppelgänger* fantasy set in Prague? The protagonist in the latter, at the beginning of the film, confronts his own mirror-image which “steps out of the frame, and henceforth follows him as the ghostly shadow of his own restlessness.”¹¹ Faced with this horrific haunting of himself by himself, the protagonist can only release himself from (what must be) delusions by shooting the *doppelgänger*, “realising in the same instant that the bullet has penetrated his own heart” (Fig. 61).¹² The *vertiginous* feeling, then, as figured in this cinematic episode, is connected to a sense that one’s delusions cannot be abandoned except by some kind of death, and that there is no empirical way to recover what may be determinant contingencies, either in personal or collective history. Sebald’s novel, however, emergent from this condition, demonstrates that art can be made out of such contingency, through fictive modes which draw connections between historical and personal events.

To rework Hal Foster’s notion of the four modes of art’s condition of aftermath, we might say that it is the spectral and traumatic notion of experience, as emplotted in psychoanalysis and much contemporary cinema and literature, which necessitates the deployment of “incongruous” and “nonsynchronous” strategies in writing. To follow the deferred action of trauma and of its ghostly returns, critical writing needs to work with a form of narrative open to non-linearity, and thus it must, perforce, tarry with the fictive (the component which Hayden White argues is constitutively excluded in history’s disciplinary foundation). One of the crucial lessons to be drawn from Foucault’s work is that it is possible to do this whilst *emphatically not* acceding to a bland relativism. This is the meaning of Foucault’s statement *a propos The Order of*

Things that “my book is a pure and simple fiction: it is a novel, but it is not I who invented it.”¹³ Such statements, which are not infrequent in Foucault, are not the sign that truth is irrelevant to him, that he is just playing games with language. Rather Foucault’s “historical fiction” is aimed at using fictive strategies “to provoke an interference between our reality and the knowledge of our past history.”¹⁴ The ghosts of that history haunt the present and disturb it: Foucault’s hope is that his books, in providing the occasion of such disturbance “become true after they have been written – not before.”¹⁵ It is perhaps the defining feature of Foucault’s historico-philosophical project that whilst formations of knowledge are co-extensive with power, knowledge can also be the locus of a transformation that alters the self and its relation to truth and power. For Foucault the possibility exists “for a fictional discourse to bring induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or ‘manufactures’ something that does not yet exist, that is ‘fictions’ it. One ‘fictions’ history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one ‘fictions’ a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth.”¹⁶ This statement seems to me to be fundamental to reading and understanding Foucault’s work. It operates in the articulation of a genealogical past the truth of which is a property of its conditions of enunciation in the present, with the consequent possibility of moving towards a new politics, the discursive conditions of which, including constitutive exclusions, whilst inevitable, are not yet prescribed. If Sebald’s *Vertigo* exemplifies the fictive and haunted status of texts punctuated by photographic images (and thus stands for art history), so my next example of the vertiginous exemplifies the transformative potential in the loss of the centred self, a key Foucauldian premise related to the political and philosophical ambition of his “fictions.”

In the preceding chapter Hitchcock's *Vertigo* stood for the consequences of not acknowledging the psychoanalytic undermining of Platonic idealism. Alfred Gell provides an alternate determination of vertigo, one which suggests a positive experience of it is possible. His anthropological account is speculative, but does provide a usefully analogous reading of the kinds of subjective dissociation which figure in Sebald's novel and in psychoanalytic readings of Hitchcock's film. Gell's 1980 essay 'The Gods at Play: Vertigo and Possession in Muria Religion' proposes a general account of the vertiginous in secular games and in religious ritual.¹⁷ This discussion also importantly serves to propose another model for investment in object as fetish, in a way that offers an understanding of fetishistic ritual and goes beyond a solely condemnatory response to engage with its "cognitive-aesthetic" potential.¹⁸ Gell's observations of Muria "swinging" practices in Madhya Pradesh, India leads him to a theory of vertigo as a kind of "equilibrium play" which modulates self-world relations in a process of de-automatization. "In all swinging," he writes, "there is an element of self-surrender to a loss of individual equilibrium ... capable of being invested with religious significance."¹⁹ Two examples of this investment are given: firstly, the rituals involving the log-gods or *anga*, which work as a kind of inverted swing; secondly induced "possession" trance states, which Gell reads as operating in a similar cognitive modality as autism.

The *anga* ritual revolves around the *anga* itself – a quadrangular framework with a carved horse-like head piece, which is supported by between two and four young devotees. The ritual, in which the whole community participates as active witnesses, culminates in the possession of the *anga* by a divinity, something made apparent by its violent swinging motion and the altered states of the bearers. What is observed,

Gell notes, is a process in which the divinity “animates it [the *anga*], but is not visually imitated by it.”²⁰ The divinity *is* in the kinetic force, not the object itself, which is merely a vehicle for it. Here we may note that animation in this instance is a question not of a magical object, but the temporary transformation of such an object. In Bhabha’s terms, this is a culture located in the “between” space where aura and agora, God and man, aren’t radically opposed, but can co-exist on the same vertiginous plane. This is evidenced in brass representations of Muria deities as “swinging” beings. In Muria culture “to swing, to ride, is to enjoy the vertiginous triumphs the Gods alone can know.”²¹ Without, seemingly, the inevitability of an Icarian fall...

Gell’s own explanation of the phenomena is, of course, more down-to-earth, but nonetheless provides the basis for his general theory of vertiginous play. The very construction of the *anga*, he argues, because it dissociates the intentionality of the individual bearer and his body from the consequences of his actions, produces a “positive feedback” of involuntary motion, and thereby leads the bearers to attune themselves “to the ‘will’ of the assemblage as a whole.”²² The *anga* dance disrupts self-possession in this loss of will, which is the root of vertiginous pleasure for Gell; it instantiates Divinity in the gap opened up “between the structures of intentionality which underlie normal motor activities, and the consequences of the carriers’ actions as perceived by themselves.... In other words, vertigo threatens intentionality, and the structures of intentionality underlies our sense of ‘self’” (226). How is this so?

In physiological terms, vertigo as a sensory experience is a consequence of disruption of the “vestibular apparatus” in the inner ear. But why should this experience, usually

conceived as deeply unpleasant, bc both a religious technique, and a secular game (and the latter by no means restricted to Muria culture)? Gell's answer turns on the way that such play "raises to explicitness the performance of behavioural routines which are, or will become, subliminal. It is activity engaged in for its own sake, and it always takes place within a frame which isolates it from the context of action performed with an ulterior end in view."²³ If this latter point seems to align it with the rhetoric of "disinterestedness" and thus with a disappointingly conservative notion of aesthetic experience, the notion of "de-sublimation" put forward is much more interesting. For Gell, this bringing into view of subliminal bodily experience is achieved not via ratiocination, but through vertiginous play itself. This operates through the abstraction of the body's "equilibratory activity" from its normal role in locomotion.²⁴ It is by putting one's self out of equilibrium (literally), that one is able to derive pleasure, and knowledge, from bodily *technē*. The significance of this account of vertigo and dis-equilibrium as de-sublimation is three-fold: firstly, it establishes a model of animation that offers potential beyond the negative accounts of fetishism emergent from Marxism and Freudianism (especially in tandem); second, it conceptualises de-sublimation as *embodied* experience, and thus reconfigures the epistemological problematic of the "return of the Real" in a more fruitful direction; finally, it does so by affirming the experience of dis-orientation and loss of self as opening onto possibilities for reframing the "body-world-self" relation. Gell's position is tentatively physiological, involving speculation about the interconnection of motor function, perception and the central nervous system, through his hypothesis that the vestibular apparatus "modulates" the cognitive input and output which assures the consistency of sense of "self." But its significance is not, I would argue, dependent on proof of such connections. If for the Muria "the primordial 'non-

normal' experience, in play, in secular pleasure-seeking, and in religious ecstasy, is the dislocation of the structures of body-world-self intentionality," then it can be argued that the vertiginous is paradigmatic for all such attempts to open a space for the reconfiguration of self.²⁵ Its particular significance here lies in the relation between a concept of bodily experience as occasioning the shattering of the self, the aesthetics appropriate to the writing of such an event (as exemplified by Sebald), and the (utopian) political possibilities implicit in both. Thus this account prefigures, in the context of this thesis, the insistence on the centrality of loss of self in Foucault – a loss for which both textual and experiential aesthetics are proposed as means in his work.

If Foucault's emphasis on the body as a site for the inscriptive operation of power-knowledge is a much-discussed feature of his work, as is his enthusiasm for bodily practices that rework such operations, the concomitant emphasis on writing as an aspect of the same project is less frequently discussed. As Foucault makes clear in late texts such as 'Technologies of the Self,' power-knowledge produces or forms subjects through the very mode in which they have access to their truth.²⁶ Foucault uses a historical analysis to show that whilst this once operated through an ascetic practice of self-renunciation, in the modern era of the human sciences it occurs through the "verbalization" of the self.²⁷ In contrast to this discursive model (which, it should be stressed, is not only linguistic – Foucault gives ample demonstrations elsewhere of the material / spatial correlates of verbalization)²⁸ there is a call for a contemporary ascesis. If psychoanalysis is Foucault's prime example of the centrality of the "speaking subject" in the modern era, it is S&M, read as an innovative "desexualization of pleasure" and "eroticization of the body" that stands for a positive

loss of self that Foucault validates.²⁹ Again drawing on Ancient texts, Foucault puts what he terms “self writing” on the side of ascesis rather than “verbalization”: in Seneca, for instance self writing is the necessary partner of reading others. This is the process by which an identity is formed that doesn’t simply ingest the thoughts of other authors, but *digests* them, makes them one’s own. The role of self writing in Seneca, Foucault writes, “is to constitute, along with all that reading has constituted, a “body” ... writing transforms the thing seen or heard “into tissue and blood” (*in vires et in sanguinem*).”³⁰ For Seneca, Foucault claims, it is through “the interplay of selected readings and assimilative writing” that one forms a legible identity, which he, Seneca, contrasts with the “lifeless” portraits of others that over-faithful reading produces.³¹ Writing in this sense becomes a part of the “care of the self” or the “aesthetics of existence” to which Foucault devoted his attention in the years before his death. But how does his own writing relate to aesthetics, and is this an issue that might have implications for art historical uses of it?

The relationship(s) between critical theory, art and aesthetics are problematic.³² In what follows I wish to indicate both the importance of aesthetics as a cognitive and political topos for Foucault, and to suggest that contrary to the meta-discursive role he plays in much art-theoretical and art-historical writing of a poststructuralist bent, his writing does not, and does not seek to, transcend the problematics of originality in relation to history and truth, neither does it establish a meta-historical or meta-discursive perspective. To demonstrate this I will give a close reading of one of Foucault’s interpretations, or, rather, *uses*, of art in his writing, and of some art historical responses to it. First, though, the role of aesthetics in a more general sense.

In a recent issue of the journal *Art History* devoted to the rise of Visual Culture as a disciplinary field, Peter Osborne argues persuasively that the philosophical tradition of aesthetic theory in its Kantian form has become divorced from the critical task of thinking about the specificity, the historical ontology, of contemporary art.³³

Contemporary art is “post-conceptual,” Osborne claims, and as such has moved beyond aesthetics. Nonetheless, he sees philosophical or critical thought as key to the possibility of re-empowering art critical discourse and assessing its relationship to art history. His aim, which I endorse, is to think through the historicity of contemporary art criticism and its relationship to art history. That this aim derives from a conscious *need* is axiomatic for my argument here. I will return, later in this section, to another invocation of a “historical ontology” that announces its grounding in a contemporary critical need – one that appears in the work of Foucault – to sketch some general principles for a rediscovered use for aesthetics.

Key to Osborne’s argument is his hypothesis that Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* inaugurated a tradition that wrongly identifies aesthetics with the philosophical discourse on art. Though an aesthetic dimension may not be eliminable from art (this Osborne sees as one lesson of Conceptualism), it is nonetheless the case that the ‘art as aesthetics’ discourse runs aground in trying to deal with contemporary artistic practices that do not operate primarily via aestheticism. Here, of course, Duchamp and the Duchampian figures large, as art to which the honorific aesthetic predicates developed in modern philosophy – sublime, beautiful, harmonious amongst others – would not usually (or usefully) be applied. One response to the historical success of such works, in what Osborne terms “a form of philosophical *ressentiment*,” is the ‘end of art’ thesis, in various modes.³⁴ (Here what might be termed the ‘end of art’ theses

of Benjamin and Adorno, with their grounding in the social transformations of modernity, must be distinguished from the end of the “art as aesthetics” line. For Adorno, Modernist art preserves the aesthetic, for Benjamin aesthetics is never identified solely with the artistic). The conception of art developed by Jena Romanticism, which Osborne terms “art as ontology” is presented as more adequate to the historical specificity of contemporary art and the critical scene than “art as aesthetics.” But how is this contemporary reality itself characterized?

The reconfigurations of discourse within the Humanities, as well as the effects of postmodernism understood both as late capitalist epoch and as post-structuralist theory, have led to much debate within theoretically-inclined art history concerning its relationships with philosophy – especially insofar as art history is understood as founded on Kantian principles – and with criticism, perceived as undergoing a crisis induced by its institutional redundancy.³⁵ One consequence of these reconfigurations is the increasing prominence of Visual Culture, with its massive expansion of the types of objects considered along with paintings and sculptures under one remit, which promises to democratise art history at the same time as it threatens to shatter the specificity of its relationship to a set of privileged and canonical objects.³⁶ As Osborne notes, one of the problems raised by ‘visual studies’ as adjunct or replacement for art history is that it runs the risk of affirming the idealist emphasis on opticality characteristic of formalist modernism, and of treating synchronic connections across an expanded cultural field of analysis, whilst neglecting the historical dimension.³⁷ That art historians might seek interdisciplinary connections with philosophy in these circumstances is understandable, though the extent to which this necessitates rediscovering aesthetics remains to be seen. As Osborne argues, the

aesthetics which philosophy has traditionally associated with art is not what is needed to understand, or to try to remedy, the negative effects of convergent historical processes on art critical thought.

The term “aesthetics” and its derivatives might in fact be a complicating factor inhibiting the establishment of such connections. “Aestheticism” is generally used to denote a negative, retrogressive turn when applied to contemporary art and criticism, whilst “aestheticization,” especially in sociological discourse, refers to the reifying drive of consumer culture. “Aesthetics” itself signifies not only a branch of philosophy – itself hardly homogenous – but also serves within recent art history as a placeholder for the interpellatory dynamics of art works, or other cultural objects and practices (where it is a question of delineating the phenomenological specificity of cultural operations),³⁸ and as a name for the “period eye,” a historically specific sensibility. If there has been a recurrence of aesthetics as a theme in recent art history and art criticism, it often signifies not the philosophical tradition, but the specifics of a particular art work’s mode of producing meaning, understood as relating to a broader system of “aesthetics-at-large.”³⁹ Critical writing of this kind has tended to be more interested in the way aesthetics make an artwork *work* than in how they make it *art*. This usage extends to other areas of contemporary critique where cultural practices are treated in terms of aesthetics in this sense.⁴⁰ It might seem that the solution to this confusing state of affairs should be a rigorous separation between aesthetics in a philosophical, specialist sense, and general discussions of period sensibility etc. But a critically useful invocation of aesthetics cannot abandon either, not least because aesthetic experience as it takes place in relation to art of the 20th century is deeply engaged “with aesthetics-at-large” or “at work.”

As Osborne notes, the aesthetic is a necessary dimension of the historico-ontological conception of art, but is “both *partial* and *relational*.”⁴¹ As such, the analysis of a given work will need to treat the specific historically determined character of the relationship between aesthetic and other factors, and from “their relations to the equally variable aesthetic dimension of other (non-art) cultural forms.”⁴² The multiple meanings and sites of “aesthetics” are thus what we must reckon with, rather than try to reduce to a harmonious and well-ordered organisation of clearly defined terms. If the predominant metaphors that describe the role of aesthetics within the changing relationships between philosophy, art practice, art criticism and art history, are of spatial expansion and retraction (the “wider field” of visual culture, and so on), it is also important to figure these relationships as *dispersal*. The multiple loci of invocations of ‘the aesthetic’ effect a decentring of its philosophical determination, and while this is to an extent a consequence of processes of aestheticisation and of critical atrophy, it is also the condition for a possible renewal of art history’s place in the critical project in the wake of poststructuralism.

The death of Jacques Derrida in 2004 marks a key moment in the recent history of critical thought, one in which the possibility emerges of a drawing a line under those who reconfigured so much of “theory” in the late twentieth century. With his passing, after that of Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, *et al*, do we have, finally, closure on these authors, on this period, which is part of the history of critical thought, but perhaps no longer defines it? One way of understanding the reemergence of aesthetics might be to see it as a return to a way of thinking about philosophy and about art that was obscured by the emphasis in poststructuralist theory on textuality, discourse, power

etc., and by the (supposedly) irresponsible "aestheticization" of critical writing. But the most urgent need for a rediscovered aesthetics results from the historical specificity of the place(s) of aesthetics in the present, not least in the textual strategies of poststructuralism itself, which largely still await an aesthetically aware reading. Rather than the rediscovery of a disciplined and secure locus for aesthetics within a hypothetically ideal architecture of knowledge, I would argue that the task facing us is the discovery of modes of critiquing and thinking about the ubiquity, undecidability, and centrality of aesthetics in every aspect of our culture and our knowledge. As may be gathered from the terminology I use here, I think that this necessitates a continued engagement with poststructuralist thought. Particularly within art history *as it is practiced* this means a repetition of the reading of the now canonical texts that were received within it as theory at least 30 years ago. If, as Freud suggests, it takes two traumas to make a trauma, I hope that such a continued engagement will facilitate a traumatic rupturing of disciplinary boundaries and enable a more far-reaching critical investigation of aesthetics.

Historical distance makes it clear that even those works that seemed the last word in the anti-aesthetic in the 1970s – I'm thinking of video art in particular – in fact partook of a highly particular form, a mode of meaning that constitutes, and is usefully named, their aesthetic.⁴³ Of course, this interpretation might seem too general, too much in tune with common usage, which tends to employ 'aesthetic' as a synonym for 'style,' and thus apply it to almost all cultural objects. But it is the ubiquity, the pervasiveness of aesthetic questions that seems to me precisely what needs to be theorized - an analysis of the aesthetics at work in all the ways in which the world is interpreted and changed for us is politically important. I would argue,

then, that what Roland Barthes does in *Mythologies*, when he critiques the semantic function of haircuts in *Julius Caesar*, the symbolic import to French culture of steak and chips, or the political connotations of a photograph showing a black child saluting the French flag, is an analysis of the aesthetic at the level of the social imaginary.⁴⁴ If we assume that all cultural stylizations are products of an aesthetic by which they mean, then analysis of specific *aesthetics* means seeing cultural forms, modes, objects, as determinate (to a degree) and knowable; and what is to be analysed is the specificities of form, of surface.

It was just this analysis of surface that Foucault proposed as the aim of what he termed “archaeology” in the 1960s, and later augmented with “genealogy.” It is Foucault's generation and their followers who may well be held accountable for the “loss” of the aesthetic tradition, (particularly in art history where to their detractors they are synonymous with the elevation of the textual as the paradigm for *all* cultural production), and it is a certain distance from the hegemony of poststructuralism that may make a restitution of traditional aesthetics possible. However, though theoretically-inclined art historians have long utilised poststructuralist texts in the general project of an attack on their discipline's bourgeois, connoisseurly bases, its “bad” aestheticism, they have paid little attention to the aesthetics at work in poststructuralist texts themselves. Michel Foucault has been both enlisted by art historians wishing to overthrow their discipline's aestheticism, and been indicted by theorists (primarily Habermasians) who read him as an irresponsible aestheticist (especially with regard to questions of normative judgement).⁴⁵ That diametrically opposite readings of Foucault's position in relation to aesthetics can be made is all the more surprising when we consider that similar interpretations of aesthetics are made

by each camp. Both sides in this example interpret aesthetics negatively because aestheticism is identified with complicity with forces of capital. How can Foucault be both a weapon against, and a victim of, these forces?

'From Polis to Postmodernism,' the concluding chapter of Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* - which includes a lengthy discussion of Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure* - questions the historical position of aesthetics in late capitalism, and the discourses that seek to describe it.⁴⁶ In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* Eagleton traces the historical fate of the concept of the aesthetic, with particular sympathy for the meanings ascribed to - or imposed on - it by Kant and by Marx. As the product of a response to historical developments including particularly the rise of the bourgeoisie, the aesthetic is from the start implicated in what it opposes:

"On the one hand, it figures as a genuinely emancipatory force - as a community of subjects now linked by sensuous impulse and fellow-feeling rather than by heteronomous law, each safeguarded in its unique particularity while bound at the same time into social harmony. The aesthetic offers the middle class a superbly versatile model of their political aspirations, exemplifying new forms of autonomy and self-determination, transforming the relations between law and desire, morality and knowledge, recasting the links between individual and totality, and revising social relations on the basis of custom, affection and sympathy. On the other hand, the aesthetic signifies ... a kind of 'internalized repression', inserting social power more deeply into the

very bodies of those it subjugates, and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony.”⁴⁷

This basic model of the contradictory status of the aesthetic is found again and again in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, but it is given different inflections along the historical path Eagleton narrates.

Eagleton imagines that there was a time, before the rise of the bourgeoisie, when “the three mighty regions of the cognitive, the ethico-political and the libidinal-aesthetic were still to a large extent intermeshed.”⁴⁸ With modernity however, each region became autonomous; knowledge slipped free of ethical constraint, and ethical questions became detached from cognitive ones. Ethics now looked to the model of autonomous aesthetics as its guide, while the aesthetic, for its part, became an end in itself, so detached from economic and political systems as to have little choice in the matter. Of course, this autonomization is one way of characterising the achievements of Enlightenment, and is thus not seen entirely negatively by Eagleton. Rather, and art is given as the key example, an ambiguous process of autonomization as both increasing room for manoeuvre and diminishing of critical purchase characterises the historical fate of the “three mighty regions” in modernity. Art becomes autonomous, paradoxically, in its integration into capitalist production and while art is marginalized, the aesthetic is generalized. “Indeed one might risk the rather exaggerated formulation that aesthetics is born at the moment of art’s effective demise as a political force, flourishes on the corpse of its social relevance.”⁴⁹ Art production withers in significance, but bequeaths aesthetics as an ideological salve to a social order which has “marginalized pleasure and the body, reified reason, and struck

morality entirely empty. The aesthetic offers to reverse this division of labour, to bring these three alienated regions back into touch with one another, but the price it demands for this generosity is high: it offers to interrelate these discourses by effectively swallowing up the other two. Everything should now become aesthetic.”⁵⁰ It is worth noting here that Eagleton’s diagnosis is the opposite of Osborne’s, according to which it is art that outlives aesthetics and not *vice versa*.

In the post-war period instrumentalization cannot be simply opposed to “culture” any longer; “civil society” reshaped by consumer capitalism becomes “pervasively aestheticized” via the saturation of late capitalism’s “fetishism of style and surface, its cult of hedonism and technique, its reifying of the signifier and displacement of discursive meaning with random intensities.”⁵¹ Where capitalism had first severed the symbolic and the economic, it now harnessed the former to the latter. Though the resultant postmodern culture *could* be viewed as a new variant of avant-gardism, it is clear that Eagleton sees it in a negative light, as a *ressentiment* against truth, morality and beauty, and against any hope of recovering them from instrumentality. This capitulation is witnessed, or so Eagleton would have us believe, in postmodernism’s “consumerist hedonism and philistine anti-historicism, its wholesale abandonment of critique and commitment, its cynical erasure of truth, meaning and subjectivity, its blank, reified technologism.”⁵² The stage is thus set for his attack on poststructuralist theory generally, and Foucault in particular.

Eagleton, keen to diagnose poststructuralism as ailing from the same disease as late capitalist culture generally, sees Foucault’s “radical, implacable refusal” as compromised by his relativism. If politics must have recourse to normativity, and

cultural relativism undermines this ground, Eagleton sees Foucault's objection to "regime as such" as his response to this problem.⁵³ Foucault, Eagleton argues, is both a fantastical escapist, imagining life outwith institutional regime, and a pessimistic pragmatist dismissing the possibility of any escape from power. "This ambivalence then allows him to combine, in a manner typical of much post-structuralism, a kind of secret apocalyptic ultra-leftism with a dry-eyed, pragmatic political reformism. It protects him at once from the reactionary and the romantic..."⁵⁴ Thus, for Eagleton, Foucault has neither the grounds nor even the desire to distinguish fascism from liberalism – an objection not uncommon in Habermasian responses to Foucault. Nancy Fraser also makes the inverse criticism, arguing that Foucault "explicitly renounced the moral-theoretical resources necessary to account for [his] own implicit normative judgements."⁵⁵ For Eagleton then, Foucault can't make the right moral choices because he doesn't normatively ground his judgement, whilst for Fraser he might imply a normative dimension but can't back it up with the right moral framework. Both approaches are unconvinced by Foucault's actual record of political engagement, which as an example of committed intellectual praxis is not to be gainsaid.⁵⁶ Eagleton and Fraser are both engaged here in what can be termed the "hermeneutics of suspicion" – they want to find out what lies beneath the surface of Foucault's aesthetic, whilst for Foucault himself critique takes place exactly at the level of surface.⁵⁷ What both seem unwilling to countenance is that Foucault's rhetoric is aimed at *animating the reader as historical agent*, and that this is achieved not through a systematic, philosophically consistent argumentation, but by the confrontation of specific features of the present with specific histories.⁵⁸ This strategy is a gamble with the openness of history, which is not a necessary progression for Foucault, but a discontinuous and contested field of practices and discourses. Against

Eagleton, we should affirm that Foucault's "ambivalence" is not undermining of historical transformation, but in fact its condition.

Eagleton accuses Foucault of being in thrall to power, of finding "aesthetic gratification" in it, something that is apparently betrayed by Foucault's stylistic "carefully calculated clinical neutrality."⁵⁹ The ethical judgement which relativism had undermined as epistemologically viable is in fact passed over into the realm of the aesthetic, leading Foucault, according to Eagleton, to display a "dangerous inclination towards absolutist coercion as against Enlightenment hegemony."⁶⁰ In the light of this reading of Foucault's general project, which does not in the end seem to do more than exemplify the double-bind Eagleton associates with the modern aesthetics and power per se ("In so far as power remains politically oppressive, it must call forth refusal and resistance; in so far as it is aestheticized, it acts as the medium of a pleasurable expansion and productivity of capacities"), *The Use of Pleasure* is presented as an aesthetic response to an ethical lacuna in Foucault's *œuvre*.⁶¹

From Foucault's presentation of Greek sexual ethics as based on an aesthetics of conduct and an economics of pleasure, Eagleton extrapolates the total renunciation of any criteria of judgement other than the stylistic, and reads *The Use of Pleasure* not at the level it was written, as counter-point to the modern "hermeneutic of the subject," but as if it intended to found a social morality in general on the Greek model.

Foucault stated unequivocally that this was not his intention: "The Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration ... All that is quite disgusting! ... there is no exemplary period that is not our period ... it is not anything to get back to."⁶² Eagleton's decision

to overlook such statements (and, more importantly, the clearly defined project of *The Use of Pleasure*)⁶³ licenses, it seems, a piece of insinuation that sits uncasily with Eagleton's tone of ethical outrage. Having claimed that "it is true... that Foucault, at least at one point in his life, opposed the criminalization of rape," (itself a severe simplification)⁶⁴ Eagleton amplifies its rhetorical force when later in the same paragraph he asks "Does it all come down to a question of how, in postmodernist vein, one 'stylizes' one's conduct? What would a stylish rape look like, precisely?"⁶⁵ The rhetorical escalation that occurs here shows how Eagleton's own understanding of an aesthetic that should function in relation to, but in distinction from, the ethical and the cognitive leads him to read Foucault as symptom of a contemporary malaise – the aesthetic subsumes the ethical.⁶⁶ It does so, moreover, in a most ironic way, for Eagleton's own unethical recourse to an aesthetic device, a rhetoric of persuasion, shows that he too cannot keep these realms as pure as he would like. Unable to read Foucault's text as an aesthetically charged response to ethical and cognitive problems in contemporary Western society, Eagleton performs the operation he accuses Foucault of, the dissolution of ethico-political and epistemological concerns in a hypertrophied aesthetic.

Eagleton's idealised / idealist view of the aesthetic, his attempt to keep it separate from the life-world he sees as disastrously aestheticised by capital, in fact works counter-productively. Unlike Foucault he is unable to rearticulate historical processes and their concomitant transformations of subjectivity as sites of critical intervention and resistance. Thus, whereas the late Foucault began a project of "the aesthetics of existence" that took contemporary narcissism as one of its inspirations, Eagleton remains unable to utilise any of the aestheticising developments he can so lucidly

describe, instead harking back to a prelapsarian and narrowly metaphysical version of the aesthetic as the ludic grounds of affective community. This particular and elusive version of aesthetics is not only unjustifiably kept separate from aesthetics-at-large, but also fails to respond to the critical need for a counter-ideological investigation and use of such aesthetics as at work not only in commodities, but also in art works, and in critical and theoretical writing.

Why is it that Eagleton, whose project as set out in the foreword of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* takes place under the Marxist-Benjaminian rubric of “use what you can,” and aims at the recovery of “whatever is still viable and valuable in the class legacies to which we are heirs,” should be accommodating to Foucault, finds it necessary to refuse him so thoroughly?⁶⁷ The answer to this lies, I think, in a resistance to one of the consequences of his own argument regarding the ubiquity of the aesthetic. Capitalism having so thoroughly and insidiously disseminated aesthetics via the commodity, Eagleton wishes to re-establish the grounds for a more decorous and restrained aesthetics that is kept in check by ethics and epistemology. This triangulation of powers has an aesthetic dimension of its own, of course, as Eagleton’s frequent recourse to a vocabulary of “harmony” and “balance” indicates. The problem Eagleton both recognises and obscures in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* is the impossibility of keeping the aesthetic in its place. This is one reason, perhaps, why his reading of Foucault proves unproductive for him – because he cannot make sense of the aesthetics at work in the text, aesthetics which play out the ethical and epistemological effectiveness of Foucault’s writing. That Eagleton’s oversight on this point is inseparable from the unethical use of insinuation with regard to Foucault, and from the epistemological shape of his reading demonstrates the inevitable coexistence

of these three hypothetically separate modes. The supposed incommensurability between the aims of Eagleton's analysis of the *ideology* of the aesthetic and Foucault's genealogical project remains undecidably located, neither finally assignable to epistemological or aesthetic objections. The role ethics plays here is key. If, as Derrida has argued, the ethical moment occurs precisely when one is faced with genuine undecidability, then we might question Eagleton's ethical response to equivocations that occur both within Foucault's text and in Eagleton's reading of it.⁶⁸ Despite his efforts, it seems to me that Eagleton's reading performs the undecidability of the ethical, aesthetic, or epistemological judgement as pure or foundational, and by not recognising this fails to pay attention to the implications of Foucault's textual aesthetic for his epistemology. If I designate this as an ethical failure on Eagleton's part, it is nonetheless clear that its consequences extend to the epistemological claims and aesthetic qualities of *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. That Eagleton seems blind to the consequences of the ubiquitous "aestheticisation" he theorises as the postmodern condition does not invalidate his project, but it means that we cannot expect a rigid architecture of aesthetic, ethical, epistemological to satisfactorily analyze a state of affairs in which such an architecture doesn't (any longer?) exist.

That Foucault's project can in fact be seen as contributing to the "historical ontology" outlined by Osborne as the motivating need behind the rethinking of the relations between philosophy, art history and art criticism, is clear from his essay *What is Enlightenment?*⁶⁹ This essay, further, shows how aesthetic concerns are indeed central for Foucault, but that they do not, *contra* Eagleton, overwhelm or undermine historico-critical ones. *What is Enlightenment?* brings together two perspectives on the critical project, that of Kant, summarised as the posing of the question *Was ist*

Aufklärung? (seen as a new way of reflecting on the present) and that of Baudelaire, whose aesthetic theory facilitates Foucault's transition from the self-questioning of the Enlightenment to what he terms "the historical ontology of ourselves."⁷⁰ This transition both locates, in Kant's critique, the point of departure for modernity, and conceives modernity not as an epoch, but as an "attitude," by which Foucault means "a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task."⁷¹ Baudelaire, acutely aware of modernity, does not see being modern as merely a matter of recognizing its fleetingness, its contingency. Rather, Foucault stresses, it is a matter of adopting a deliberate attitude which "consists in capturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it... Modernity ... is the will to 'heroize' the present."⁷² Baudelaire's famous comments about the "poetic beauty" of the black frock-coat as "an expression of the public soul," indicative of a society in mourning, and on Constantin Guys as the "Painter Of Modern Life" who accepts the task of "distilling" from the present "the mysterious element of beauty that it might contain, however slight or minimal that element may be" support this interpretation.⁷³ Guys is quintessentially modern for Baudelaire in that he doesn't just depict, but transfigures the world he sees. Foucault glosses this in arguing that "for the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is."⁷⁴ But, further to this, modernity is a relationship to oneself not just to the present, and for Foucault, the attitude of modernity is "tied to an indispensable ascetism."⁷⁵ Ascetism is perhaps Foucault's key term for the understanding of the relation to self as aesthetic

practice, for the self as work of art. The brief characterisations of Kant and Baudelaire in 'What is Enlightenment?' are not given as historical summaries of epochs: while for Foucault we remain rooted in the Enlightenment, this connection is found not in "faithfulness to doctrinal elements" but in "the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."⁷⁶ It is in this light that his "fictions" take shape for us.

The "historical ontology of ourselves" Foucault proposes in *What is Enlightenment?* reflects on limits, but in a way that departs from Kantianism proper:

"if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge had to renounce exceeding... the critical question today must be turned back into a positive one: In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over."⁷⁷

If Eagleton reads Foucault as dissolving the ethical and the cognitive into the aesthetic, 'What is Enlightenment?' makes it clear that the role of aesthetics for critical thought is thoroughly historical, and connected to an ethics at both personal and societal levels. Foucault's thought has been analyzed in detail in terms of its progression through different phases, in which aesthetics is generally conceived as playing a role within texts on literature in the early 1960s, a role which is superseded

by first the archaeology of the classical (seventeenth-eighteenth century) and modern (nineteenth century, Kantian) periods, then by the genealogy of subjection and techniques of bio-power in the 1970s; aesthetics then returns in the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* as the “care of the self.”⁷⁸ Leaving to one side for a moment the question of whether this periodisation is entirely satisfactory, it is significant insofar as the division of Foucault’s work into these different phases has largely determined its reception. Thus, in queer theory it is the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* that are most often referred to when Foucault’s name is invoked; in sociological critical theory it is the work on power; likewise in studies of visual culture, it is *Discipline and Punish* and “panopticism”; finally, in art history it is most often the archaeological phase, and especially *The Order of Things* of 1966 and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* of 1969 which represent Foucault’s thought.⁷⁹ The recent publication of English editions of Foucault’s *Essential Works* and several of his lecture series, provides the occasion for a more comprehensive analysis of the different configurations of aesthetics, epistemology and ethics in his thought, and thus for a more satisfactory reception of his work in the English-speaking Humanities.⁸⁰ Thus, for example, consulting the *Essential Works* we can find aesthetic experience expressed as the “transformation of oneself by one’s self,”⁸¹ knowledge as “a process by which the subject undergoes a modification through the very things that one knows, or, rather, in the course of the work that one does in order to know,”⁸² and ethics as an ascetic practice conceived not as “a morality of renunciation but as an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself.”⁸³ For Foucault, his work was an aesthetic / ethical transformation of himself through knowledge. As his analysis of power amply demonstrates, this is not a question of a voluntaristic reflexivity, but rather of the use of knowledge (particularly

historical knowledge) to open up whatever spaces of resistance and transformation power brings into being. The challenge for the reader / interpreter is to participate in this process.

As an astute and committed reader of Foucault, Judith Butler has perhaps done most amongst recent authors to think through the implications of the interrelation of knowledge, aesthetics, ethics and power in his work. In a close analysis of 'What is Critique?' she poses precisely the question of what Foucault understood by an "aesthetics of existence"⁸⁴ that would be a practice of the self, but not intentional in the Humanist sense?⁸⁵ Her answer turns on the notion of reiteration discussed at the outset of this chapter, and addresses the accusation of 'normative confusion' directed at Foucault by Habermasians. In a move that enhances our understanding of both texts, Butler splices the key terms of *The Use of Pleasure* (by and large an aesthetic vocabulary) with the political insights of the 'What is Critique?' (which trades in terms such as "governmentalization"), and her own terminology of "styling" or "crafting" the self. For Butler, critique operates at the limits of intelligibility, and *contra* Habermas she argues that normativity in his foundational sense remains within the limits already established for it in the status quo. In Foucault's project, in contrast, Butler finds "strong normative commitments that appear in forms that would be difficult, if not impossible, to read within the current grammars of normativity."⁸⁶ Critique is a response to the production of "realms of unspeakability" by social orderings, realms which are not conceived as abject or "Real-impossible" but as "impasses" in the discursive framework.⁸⁷ It is this conception that allows for an ethical art of the self. If subjects are formed in practices which instantiate norms, then the historically contingent "settled domain of ontology" that results does not rule over

the subject it produces in a “predictable” or “mechanical” way, rather, a critical relation to such domains is possible which would “constitute an interrogatory relation to the field of categorization itself, referring at least implicitly to the limits of the epistemological horizon within which practices are formed.”⁸⁸ In contrast to Eagleton’s characterization of Foucault’s project as hyperbolic “fantasies of escape” fading into banal liberal pragmatics, Butler’s reading establishes it as a pragmatic acknowledgement that power / knowledge sets limits on the functioning of truth and the legibility of subjectivity, whilst seeing within the very dynamics of this process the occasion of its possible subversion. It is here that the “aesthetics of existence” comes into play.

As often in Butler’s work – most particularly *The Psychic Life of Power* – the problem to the fore in ‘What is Critique?’ is how to contest subjectivity in its normative mode when the terms used, especially insofar as they evoke agency, *assume* that subjectivity. Foucault’s approach to this problem is to ride roughshod over it, as though by stating a situation he might bring it into being:

“if governmentalization is really this movement concerned with subjugating individuals in the very reality of a social practice by mechanisms of power that appeal to a truth, I will say that critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary inservitude, of reflective indocility. The essential function of critique

would be that of desubjectification in the game [of] the politics of truth.”⁸⁹

Butler’s contribution to this is to validate such a gesture of speaking *as if*...as a necessary part of the art of the game. In a formulation which could stand, I believe, as a definition of critical art history, Butler states that “critique will be dependent on its objects, but its objects will in turn define the very meaning of critique.”⁹⁰ The Foucauldian point upon which she insists here is that the very terms by which this mutual definition establishes criteria of evaluation, and in framing its objects forecloses alternate configurations of truth, does not totally preclude other possible criteria. Part of the process by which power-knowledge produces subjects is through the “crafting” or “stylizing” of selves. Just as in Butler’s own work there is an ambiguity between the implied intentionality of gender as performative, and the insistence on the constraints of discursive normativity, subjection and materiality; so in Foucault she finds a similar equivocation between the voluntary and subjugated dimensions of stylization. This is accounted for by the indeterminate possibilities that lie beyond critique’s positing of a value “which it does not know how to ground or to secure it for itself,” a positing which “shows that a certain intelligibility exceeds the limits on intelligibility that power-knowledge has already set.”⁹¹

The notion of style as part of the subject’s subjection “will be critical to the extent that, as style, it is not fully determined in advance, it incorporates a contingency over time that marks the limits to the ordering capacity of the field in question.”⁹² This is what Foucault means when he speaks of critique as taking place “in the direction of a philosophy to come.”⁹³ Such as yet indeterminate futurity, in ‘What is Critique?’ as

elsewhere in Foucault, turns on the role of “fictive” histories. “Critique begins with the presumption of governmentalization and then with its failure to totalize the subject it seeks to know and to subjugate” Butler writes, but “the means by which this very relation is articulated is described, in a disconcerting way, as fiction.”⁹⁴ This fictionality is not external to critical methodology but part of it, part of the way that rationalization (bio-power, governmentality) and the practices of the self as an art of freedom are distinguished. Fiction, as Butler quite correctly suggests, here signifies a relationship to genealogy in the sense Nietzsche gave to it, wherein “in the place of an account that finds the origin to values or, indeed, the origin of the origin, we read fictional stories about the way that values are originated.”⁹⁵ Such fictions operate not only to displace the ‘original origin’ but work according to a *positing* which is released from “usual discursive constraints” in which one would have grounds for one’s assertions. Not in its content, then, *but in its form*, Foucault’s statement is for Butler “an allegory for a certain risk-taking that happens at the limit of the epistemological field.”⁹⁶ This risk-taking with one’s very subjectivity is the core of critique as an *art*, and furthermore, it is precisely *as an art* that “voluntary insubordination” can take place. As Butler writes, “style will be critical to the extent that, as style, it is not fully determined in advance, it incorporates a contingency over time that marks the ordering capacity of the field in question.”⁹⁷ On this reading, in which notions like style play a key role, it should seem that Foucault’s work will be invaluable in thinking through an “indocile” art history *and* a wider politicized sense of aesthetics. The formulation of “aesthetics of the self” does not fall into self-contradiction by assuming what it contests, but gambles with a positing of the mutability of relationships of power-knowledge. The agent of this gamble is a self “compelled to form itself, but to form itself within forms that are already more or less

in operation and underway.”⁹⁸ The project is, in Butler’s poetic phrase, to “yield artistry from constraint” or, in the present context and if you will excuse the pun, perhaps to yield *art history* from constraint.⁹⁹

Osborne’s analysis of the conditions under which art criticism might be reimagined as a historical ontology of the present establishes both the inadequacy of the “art as aesthetics” thesis, and the ineliminability of the aesthetic dimension of art works. Eagleton’s *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* offers a historical analysis of the social forces that have shaped the contemporary scene from which Osborne starts out. Yet it is Foucault, I would argue, overlooked by Osborne and rejected by Eagleton, who comes closest to articulating aesthetic concerns with the ongoing critical task of a “historical ontology of ourselves.” It is in the service of this aim that a rediscovery of aesthetics would be most useful. I now turn to the *actual* rather than potential way in which Foucault has been received in the history of art, which, I argue, has been hampered in utilising its insights by the overlooking, ironically enough, of the aesthetic dimension at work in his texts. Likewise, philosophical treatments of these passages have taken them for the work of ‘Foucault as an Art Historian’ in a way that is inherently problematic, as I shall seek to demonstrate.¹⁰⁰

Foucault and Art History

In the serious play of questions and answers, in the work of reciprocal elucidation, the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion . . . Questions and answers depend on a game - a game that is at once pleasant and difficult - in which each of the two partners takes pains to use only the rights given him by the other and the accepted form of the dialogue. The polemicist, on the other hand, proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question . . . Has anyone ever seen a new idea come out of a polemic?

Foucault, 'Polemics, Politics and Problematizations.'

Explaining history and making it explicit consists in perceiving it whole, in relating the so-called natural objects to the specifically dated and exceptional practices that objectivized the objects, and in explaining the practices not on the basis of a unique motive force but on the basis of all the neighboring practices in which they are anchored. This pictorial method produces strange paintings, in which relations replace objects. To be sure, the paintings are indeed of the world we know. Foucault is no more an abstract painter than Cézanne.

Paul Veyne, 'Foucault Revolutionizes History.'

What uses and abuses can be made of the texts of Michel Foucault in art history? Two uses, seemingly opposed but fundamentally linked, need, I think, to be rejected, if this “game” of questions and answers is to be productive as well as difficult. The first would take Foucault for a philosopher capable of providing art history with a series of restorative concepts to put a contemporary spin on its founding philosophical precepts – its Kantian or Hegelian epistemological inheritances.¹⁰¹ The second would present Foucault’s thought as fatally undermining such foundations, as ending the metaphysical reverie in which humanist art history has carried out its comically outmoded project.¹⁰² Whether proposing restoration or ruin these views agree fundamentally on the type of relationship “theory” or philosophy can have with art history. In both cases philosophy is seen as determining the form art history takes; it provides it with a determinant content.¹⁰³ The history of art history, in this view, must be written as a history of its engagements with the master discourse of philosophy, its entanglement in totalized systems. This is the realm of the “history of ideas,” which Foucault has rightly criticized and contrasted with the critical project of the “history of thought.” The difference lies in that it is the latter that affords the elaboration of a properly *critical* historical project, rather than the mere appearance of history. Foucault articulated this distinction in a discussion with Paul Rabinow just a month before his death, and in which, as in other late interviews, he sought to re-collect his *œuvre* under a general rubric:

“For a long time I have been trying to see if it would be possible to describe the history of thought as distinct from the history of ideas (by which I mean the analysis of systems of representation) and from the history of mentalities (by which I mean the analysis of attitudes and

types of action). ... Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.”¹⁰⁴

At this stage I will merely note the combination of genealogical questioning and a certain (aesthetic) detachment in Foucault’s statement, and the emphasis on the identification of problems rather than their solution. If Foucault’s warnings against polemics, cited epigraphically at the beginning of this section, seem ironic given the style of his own writings - “imperious and doubt-ridden at the same time,” in the words of Clifford Geertz - we must note that a certain amount of force is required, to shake “evidences and universalities,” before dialogue becomes productive.¹⁰⁵ If, in *Madness and Civilization*, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, or in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault roughly casts off forms of inquiry previously considered essential to the study of madness, of discourse, or of punishment, if he does not affirm the historical refinement of reason’s knowledge of madmen or criminals, this is necessitated by the attempt to recover problematizations and make a questioning of reason possible. The regime of truth in which one is situated can be questioned as to its “meaning, condition and goals” only when its self-evidence has been shaken. To this end, then, Foucault acknowledges that there is an “apparently polemical character” to his writing,

“owing to the fact that one has to delve into the mass of accumulated discourse under our own feet. Through gentle digging one can uncover the old latent configurations, but when it comes to determining the system of discourse on the basis of which we still live, as soon as we are obliged to question the words that still resonate in our ears, that are mingled with those we are trying to speak, then archaeology, like Nietzschean philosophy, is forced to work with hammer blows.”¹⁰⁶

Archaeology is, then, conceived by Foucault as a means of bringing our attention to the present through its history. Polemics contributes to this project by forcing (or fictioning) certain histories into view, the acknowledgement of which may enable the phrasing of appropriate questions, the description of problematizations. Polemics are part of archaeology, but they cannot form part of the ethics of contemporary intellectual relations, Foucault argues, for the most pragmatic of reasons – nothing is achieved in polemical exchange.

In his 1982 essay ‘Representation, Appropriation, and Power’ Craig Owens put forward the argument that there was no satisfactory *rapprochement* possible between an art historical discipline founded on humanist precepts and a poststructuralist critique that radically undermined the foundations of humanist thought. He expressed this antinomy in clear terms: “the poststructuralist critique could not possibly be absorbed by art history without a significant reduction in its polemical force, or by a total transformation of art history itself.”¹⁰⁷ We cannot doubt that of these two options the latter is the only one we can endorse, though we may reflect that, since Owens composed his argument, it is the former that has been most studiously put into

practice. Art historical writings are commonly littered with the debris of poststructuralist theory (Lacan on the gaze, Foucault on panopticism etc.) – as though it were a bomb that has been defused and dismantled, its various components added to the art historical edifice. If we agree that this situation is unsatisfactory we might look back to Owens's essay with a sense of nostalgia for a revolution that never came. Alternatively, it could be that, as with other revolutions before it, this art historical revolution was poorly conceived. (We are no longer surprised, surely, when revolutions turn out to be rearrangements, rather than eradications of the status quo; when they appear to have been mistaken in their conceptions of themselves). We might, then, look back to 'Representation, Appropriation and Power' and wonder if it set out the problem of the relation of art history to poststructuralism correctly (productively) in the first place. In a postscript to the essay Owens concluded that, in its failure to deal with poststructuralist critique and its concerns, art history had become alienated from the best contemporary art, which shared similar preoccupations. Pessimistically, he characterized the situation as follows:

"Isolated not only from the most significant body of criticism of the present, but also from its art, art history has denied itself any connection to the vital present - which as Walter Benjamin understood, is absolutely prerequisite for all historical investigation. Lacking that connection, the art historian lapses into antiquarianism - which may, in the end, be the fate of art history in the postmodern age."¹⁰⁸

Is a vital art history an impossibility? If theory and art are so well matched, what intellectual role might it play? Would it be reduced to an auditing of the theorization

of art as the only alternative to antiquarianism? If Visual Studies and “cultural theory” now seem to have subsumed the most vital areas of art historical inquiry this does not indicate the definitive supercession of art history. I argue that problematics basic to modern art history can be of use in a critical analysis of the vital present; most specifically its attentiveness to the form, and especially the changing form, of its objects of study which, insofar as they are instances of “art” are not guaranteed by an ontologically ahistorical consistency. (Perhaps the most important contribution of Duchamp is to make this palpable; in de Duve’s phrase to point to the existence of “art in general,” not anchored in the inherent qualities of a medium or representational convention). Looking back to the polemical encounter of poststructuralism and art history in Owens essay we might be able to see the beginnings of an alternative relationship - more reciprocal and more productive.

Prominent in Owens’ discussion, along with Louis Marin’s essay “Toward a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin’s *The Arcadian Shepherds*”¹⁰⁹ is an analysis of a controversy around Michel Foucault’s famous characterization of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* as “the representation, as it were, of classical representation” (Fig. 62).¹¹⁰ This is without doubt the most frequently cited of Foucault’s discussions of art, but it has proved opaque to interpreters who have generally appropriated it to their own polemics. The reception of this brief passage of which opens *The Order of Things* is exemplary, I would argue, of the way in which readings of Foucault in art history have been overdetermined by the polemical confrontation of theoretically orientated and traditional factions in art history. Keen to see in Foucault’s *Las Meninas* decisive proof of either art history’s invalidity or of theory’s inattention to specifics, neither side engages with what Foucault is actually attempting in this passage.

Foucault's textual setting of the complex dynamics of mirrorings, gazes, and representational modes in *Las Meninas* is a tour-de-force of *ekphrasis*, and to do justice to it as a piece of writing would take lengthy exposition. For my purposes here it is only necessary to sketch the main points of Foucault's description. First, he notes that Velázquez as represented *in* the painting cannot behold the canvas on which he is representing something *and* appear in the representation that is *Las Meninas* – he is “at the threshold of these two incompatible visibilities.”¹¹¹ The painted Velázquez gazes out at the spectator of the painting, seemingly the subject of the painting he is working on – we are thus implicated as spectators in these visibilities. Yet this position is already occupied by the “actual” model the painted Velázquez is painting, or rather, since that canvas is invisible to us and thus indeterminate, “the painter is observing a place which, from moment to moment, never ceases to change its form, its face, its identity.”¹¹² The gaze of the painting assigns to each viewer “a place at once privileged and inescapable.”¹¹³ This position is further complicated by the presence on the back wall of a mirror which “offers us at last that enchantment of the double that until now has been denied us” – denied, that is, by the fact that we can only see the back of the represented canvas.¹¹⁴ No one *in* the painting looks at this mirror, and it mirrors what is in “our” space not that represented – “it is not the visible it reflects.”¹¹⁵ What it does, instead, is combine the two invisibilities – of the model and of the spectator – in an “unstable superimposition” represented “in the far recess of the painting's depth.”¹¹⁶ Now, as Foucault notes, there is no problem in identifying any of the figures represented in *Las Meninas*, including those who appear in this mirror; undoubtedly it is Philip IV and Mariana.

Proper names might serve here to “give us a finger to point with” as Foucault puts it, as we try to “say what we see,” but in doing so they foreclose what is interesting in this attempt – the possibility that the incompatibility of language and vision might be treated “as a starting-point for speech instead of as an obstacle to be avoided.”¹¹⁷

Forgetting about “Philip and Mariana” allows Foucault to think about the dynamic of representation in *Las Meninas* in its own terms, which emerge in the relationship between hidden canvas, luminous mirror (which reveals the model “full face” – which the canvas, were it to be turned round, would not do; it would reverse left and right...), and the other “opening” represented in the depths of *Las Meninas*, from which a silhouetted figure emerges. Or, rather, appears, for he is also on a threshold “like a pendulum going caught at the bottom of its swing,” between the depths of the picture and the implied space before it.¹¹⁸ Across *Las Meninas*, then, from left to right we have represented the three figures who, by the logic of invisibilities at work in the canvas, occupy the position upon which the gazes of the Infanta and her entourage, and the reflective surface of the mirror, converge. We have Velázquez, the man who stood before *Las Meninas* to compose and execute it, the King, who, the mirror tells us, occupies the space in front of the scene *Las Meninas* represents, and finally, in the figure of the silhouetted man on the threshold of the scene, a representation of the spectator. The point is, then, that if this painting is “the representation of classical representation” it is constituted as such by the fact that the subject who makes the representation, the Sovereign subject for whom the representation is made, and the subject who views this representation are not representable as *one subject* within its very conditions of visibility.

Foucault’s purpose in analyzing *Las Meninas* in these terms can only be understood in

relation to the rest of the text that this *ekphrasis* introduces. But art historians, in a hurry to read this as a proto-type for Foucauldian art history have elided this point. Svetlana Alpers offered an objection to Foucault's analysis on the (not unpredictable) grounds that it neglected the art historical specificity of *Las Meninas's* composition. Alpers contends that the picture has remained a problem for art historical interpretation because of an excess of attention on matters of identification and narrative, and not enough on "the nature of the pictorial representation."¹¹⁹ The narrative discerned has frequently been that of painting's (and the painter's) claim for status amongst the liberal arts – which Alpers *does not* attribute to Velázquez as a motive – and whilst one might assume that Foucault's reading would fulfil Alpers demand for attention to representation, in fact she sees his argument as faltering on the question of the absence of the subject-viewer.

"For the reciprocity between absent viewer and world in view is produced not by the *absence* of a conscious human subject, as Foucault argues, but by Velázquez's ambition to embrace two conflicting modes of representation, each of which constitutes the relationship between the viewer and the picturing of the world differently."¹²⁰

These two types correspond to picture as window, framing the world, and to picture as surface, onto which an image of the world is projected: the first is "Albertian" and makes the claim "I see the world"; the second is "northern or descriptive" and claims that the world is "being seen."¹²¹ Each mode of pictorial representation establishes a different role for the artist in relation to his representation: with the viewer before the scene in the Albertian, and *within* the representation (as in Van Eyck's *Arnolfini*

Wedding) in the “northern.” The difficulty of reading *Las Meninas* for art history is that it compounds these modes, but once Alpers has shown this to be the case, it is Foucault, not art history that is sidelined. For it is not “classical” representation that determines the nature of Velázquez painting, in Alpers view, but “specific pictorial traditions of representation.”¹²²

Alpers presented this argument to the Modern Language Association in 1981, at a panel on “The Applicability of Literary Critical Methodology to the Analysis of Painting.” Craig Owens responded to this version of the paper in ‘Representation, Appropriation, and Power’ by accusing her of ignoring the radical thrust of Foucault’s argument about the ineluctability of “the anonymous, impersonal rules which regulated the Classical system of representation.”¹²³ Whilst Alpers stated her dissatisfaction with conventional art history, she was prepared to defend its borders against the perceived “literary” invasion; and its right to making truth claims against poststructuralist critique. Foucault may have served the painting well, she argued, but he had not served it truly. To Owens, the “guild mentality” exemplified by Alpers indicates art history’s repression of a body of thought that connected representation and power - indeed showed representation to be power’s founding act. If social dimensions are increasingly scrutinized in analyses of art, from relations of patronage to economic systems, why would this thought provoke repression, Owens asks? “Could it possibly be because art history - conceived, in Panofsky’s phrase as a humanist discipline - is itself implicated in the poststructuralist critique?”¹²⁴ This is indeed, as already noted, at the heart of Owens’s interpretation of Foucault, and *Las Meninas* stands here for the definitive incommensurability of his critique and art historical precepts.

Owens turns to Derrida, to his discussion of Heidegger's famous *Origin of the Work of Art* and Meyer Shapiro's art historical response to it, to argue that art history is essentially humanist in a negative sense.¹²⁵ Faced with a representation of a pair of shoes it asks only "to whom do they belong?" When this question is correctly answered – whether by "a peasant woman," in Heidegger's case or by "Van Gogh" in Shapiro's – interpretation is at an end. The meaning of a work is restored when it is attributed to the subject to whom it rightly belongs. Art history, on Derrida's account, presupposes a lack in its objects that can then be supplemented by its interpretative, attributive, restitutive, activity; an activity that takes its place in the humanist, historicist project of revivifying the past. Panofsky's emphasis on iconographical attribution is an example of this tendency - specifically linked in his case to the preservation of humanist culture.¹²⁶ Having characterized its project as attributive, Owens identifies art history's motives as follows:

"a desire for *property*, which conveys man's sense of his 'power over things'; a desire for *propriety*, a standard of decorum based upon respect for property relations; a desire for the *proper name*, which designates the specific person who is invariably identified as the subject of the work of art; finally, a desire for *appropriation*."¹²⁷

Drawing a distinction between theories of representation (Panofsky's of "symbolic form," Gombrich's of "making and matching") and the *critique* of representation, Owens argues that it is the latter that art history needs. He proceeds to set out Foucault's famous description of *Las Meninas* as just such a critique. Lacking a

critique of representation and in thrall to art history's pathological need for attribution Alpers concluded that the "uniqueness" of *Las Meninas* lies in the "paradoxical" circularity it sets up in its admixture of two representational, *pictorial* modes so that the prior world it depicts depends on our presence as viewers. Owens is not convinced that such circularity can stand as evidence of the specificity of Velázquez's painting. Against this reading he sets Foucault's, which he takes to use *Las Meninas* as the exemplification of representational limits shared by all other paintings, all works of literature, indeed all knowledges, of the seventeenth century. It is not a unique pictorial paradox, but "the unfolding on the surface of the canvas of the Classical system of representation itself."¹²⁸ Further, if we take Foucault and Marin seriously, we can see that this representational system is imbricated with power.

For Owens, Foucault has demonstrated that the network of gazes in *Las Meninas* places the viewer in the position of the Classical subject - at once able to appropriate the scene as his and yet subject to the absolute authority of the King - revealed in the vague reflection in the mirror depicted at the back of the painting as the true author of the work: "For the painting represents not the painter's but the King's vision; Velázquez appears to have abdicated his own role as 'author' of the image to that superior authority that sustains him and his art."¹²⁹ *Las Meninas* (and Classical representation with it) is, then, twice implicated in power; first by its appropriating subject; second by its deference to absolute sovereignty. The paradox of its circularity becomes eminently explicable if we see it, as Owens suggests we must, as an imaginary resolution of real social contradictions. Thus the two representational modes Alpers detected correspond to the Absolutist separation of the claims of *property* and *sovereignty*; its "paradox" to the power struggle between landed

aristocracy and monarchy.

If Owens had seemed to imply that a "critique of representation" would supplement a lack in art history we can now see that it rather supercedes it altogether. For once we have connected representation and power in this way what remains to be done - the repetition of the same procedure for any other paintings we might want to study? We can be sure in advance of the same outcome, for in Owens's view Foucault has shown that art works are "conventional," that they conform to the limits imposed by the *epistemes* in which they were made. Art history, in Owens account, must face up to its redundancy, because poststructuralism has undermined its modes of inquiry, exposed its complicity with power, and, crucially, given a better reading of its objects of study than it could achieve. There is therefore no problem of the relation between art history and poststructuralist theory because only one of the combatants survives the encounter.

Yet we might well ask if Owens has served Foucault truly rather than *well*. Does Foucault's analysis of *Las Meninas* really place it firmly within the horizon of the Classical *episteme*, or rather, is this all that it does? Consulting *The Order of Things* we must answer "no." The project of that book was to awaken its readers from the "anthropological sleep" of the "human sciences," a sleep "so deep that thought experiences it paradoxically as vigilance."¹³⁰ The figure of "Man," which Foucault has shown to be a historical product of our disintegrating modernity, has become an "obstacle" to thought.¹³¹ "It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance. For this void does not create a deficiency; it does not constitute a lacuna that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than

the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think.”¹³²

The reputation of *The Order of Things* rests on a series of simple, connected claims Foucault makes, which are no less disarming for their simplicity. Firstly, he shows that anthropological Man, the object of study of such “dubious sciences” as psychology or sociology is not present in Classical thought, despite its frequent references to “man,” or “mankind.” Thus discontinuity is introduced into the history of thought. Secondly, Man, as constituted from the end of the 18th century, is a kind of impossible object. From the Kantian critique on, Foucault argues, the study of human beings has been based on an “analytic of finitude,” in which “limitation is expressed not as a determination imposed upon man from outside (because he has a nature or a history), but as a fundamental finitude which rests on nothing but its own existence as fact, and opens up the positivity of all concrete limitation.”¹³³ This analytic produces a contorted series of “doubles” which have defined the deadening path that the knowledge of human beings has taken since Kant: the empirical / transcendental (man as a fact among others / man as condition of possibility of knowledge); the cogito / unthought (man surrounded by the obscure / man as lucid source of intelligibility); the retreat / return of the origin (man as alienated from his own beginning / history as promising its return).¹³⁴ Anthropological thought has merely played out variations on these doubles, absorbing one side into the other (for example, the empirical / transcendental is worked out in opposite ways by behaviourism and phenomenology). Foucault demonstrates that Man as the grounds of the possibility of knowledge functions as the negation of knowledge. Thirdly, Foucault argues that the epistemological ground “is once more stirring under our feet,”¹³⁵ that he senses the possibility that the arrangements of knowledge that

appeared with man could crumble and that man might “be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”¹³⁶ It is this possibility, the consequences of which are keenly anticipated but not yet known, that motivates Foucault’s writing of the 1960s; whether on literary themes or scientific-historical ones.

The *strategic* role of *Las Meninas* in the argument of *The Order of Things* can only be understood in the context of these claims; on a careful reading (and one, I might add, that reads the book beyond the first sixteen pages!) *Las Meninas* figures the unprecedented emergence of Man on the historical stage. Having described the Classical *episteme* at great length, Foucault returns to Velázquez’s painting when he evokes the historical transformations coterminous with Man.

“When natural history becomes biology, when the analysis of wealth becomes economics, when, above all, reflection upon language becomes philology, and Classical *discourse*, in which being and representation found their common locus, is eclipsed, then, in the profound upheaval of such an archaeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator, he appears in the place belonging to the king, which was assigned to him in advance by *Las Meninas*, but from which his real presence has long been excluded. As if, in that vacant space towards which Velázquez’s whole painting was directed, but which it was nevertheless reflecting only in the chance presence of a mirror, and as though by stealth, all the figures whose alternation, reciprocal exclusion, interweaving, and fluttering one

imagined (the model, the painter, the king, the spectator) suddenly stopped their imperceptible dance, immobilized into one substantial figure, and demanded that the entire space of the representation should at last be related to one corporeal gaze."¹³⁷

Las Meninas functions to mock the pretensions of the Age of Man when it places the subject of representation within representation. If Velázquez had included this amalgamated "sovereign subject" in his painting it would have filled the foreground, and the scene would be obscured. Rather than merely epitomizing Classical representation and its limits, Foucault's *Las Meninas* stages the emergence of man and his place in a new order of knowledge - a place unknown to Classical thought.

Thus we can correct a common (mis)reading of another famous cultural reference in *The Order of Things*; Foucault's evocation of Jorge Luis Borges's "Chinese encyclopaedia," which he credits with enabling the book. *The Order of Things*, he writes in another oft-cited paragraph, arose "out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought - *our* thought."¹³⁸ Borges's encyclopaedia relates a taxonomy of animals, ordered as follows:

"(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."¹³⁹

We are faced, reading this outlandish taxonomy, with what Foucault terms “the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.”¹⁴⁰ But this is *not* to be understood, as it usually is, as an Orientalist evocation of otherness. Foucault is not suggesting that we simply see our systems of classification as another historically, culturally specific ordering, thrown into relief by the exotic taxonomies of other periods or places.

Foucault remarks that his laughter lasted a long time, but was uneasy. The uneasiness was the result not of the juxtaposition of fantastic categories but the presence of “included in the present classification.” “[I]f all the animals divided up here can be placed without exception in one of the divisions of this list, then aren’t all the other divisions to be found in that one division too? And then again, in what space would that single, inclusive division have *its* existence?”¹⁴¹ David Carroll, in an otherwise perceptive analysis of *The Order of Things*, is misled by Foucault’s use of “Same” and “Other” in describing the relationship of this impossible ordering and our own epistemology, and interprets this as meaning that Borges presents us with an unassimilable “Otherness” that serves as a defamiliarizing critique. He writes:

“Without such disturbance and defamiliarization, the familiar aspects of thought would continue to be taken for universal truths, the Other kept in a relationship of dependency or derivation in terms of the Same. When the familiar is made unfamiliar, thought is forced to question itself and confront alternatives to itself; it loses its self-certainty and begins to have trouble recognizing itself in the mirror it holds up in order to send back a reassuring image. For Foucault, critical thought begins in non-recognition, as a result of the distorted mirror in which the confrontation with radical

alterity forces it to see itself.”¹⁴²

In fact the logic of Foucault’s argument works in the opposite direction: the “impossibility of thinking that” connects to Foucault’s uneasy laughter not through an otherness that relativizes our thought, but through a familiarity that makes apparent its absurdity. The mirror Borges’s encyclopaedia holds up to Western thought shows us a distorted figure, an impossible figure, one might say, but not through its own distorting powers. For the figure Foucault recognizes in Borges is that of anthropological thought, the sovereign subject of the analytic of finitude, “included in the present classification.” Both *Las Meninas* and the encyclopaedia *figure* man for us before Foucault has explicitly historicized him. We might say that rather than locating this painting and its contemporaries in the power structures of the 17th century (as Owens argued), Foucault places it within the artifice of his own text – his appropriation of *Las Meninas* is not in the service of art history but of his own need to break free from anthropological discourse. This resonates with Foucault’s aforementioned strategy of writing “fictional constructions with authentic elements.”¹⁴³ His choice of *Las Meninas*, from this perspective, is a question of the aesthetics of his text as such a fiction.

In this light, the careful analysis of *Las Meninas* given by Joel Snyder and Ted Cohen, which undermines the presumptions of the function of the mirroring relied on by Foucault, Alpers and Owens, (and by John Scarle, to whom Snyder and Cohen were responding) *does not* invalidate Foucault’s argument as a whole.¹⁴⁴ The status of *Las Meninas* as paradox depends, ultimately, on what seems to be the impossibility of the reflection. It should include *us*, and Velázquez, according to the logic of the canvas,

yet it shows Philip and Mariana. However, there simply *is no paradox* because, as Synder and Cohen demonstrate by working out the perspectival construction of the painting, the mirror reflects not what lies beyond the canvas, but what is on the canvas whose back faces us (Fig. 63). Searle's supposition that the mirror causes the slippage of "the firm ground of pictorial realism" and a consequent state of "vertigo" in the beholder, is thus disproved: the picture is entirely 'realistic.'¹⁴⁵ But Foucault's reading is not disproved, because it was not primarily a claim about the painting, but a use of that painting to figure something else; namely, pre-Kantian non-anthropological thought. Its advantage for Foucault is that what it *seems* to do (i.e., before one analyses the perspectives and so on) in superimposing painter, spectator and monarch in one "impossible" and invisible locus, figures not only Classical representation, but also, by implication the "impossibility" of the sovereign subject of the human sciences *who is assumed to occupy such a position*. The (possible) truth of Foucault's reading of *Las Meninas* lies not in the seventeenth century but in the 1960s, as part of a polemic against the subject.¹⁴⁶ This is not the only example of Foucault using art works to figure the relations between two *epistemes*. In *Madness and Civilization*, it is time and again literary and art historical works from Bosch to *Don Quixote*, that stand at, and for, the limits of the Classical and modern configurations of madness.¹⁴⁷ Likewise, the opening tableaux which are such a distinctive feature of Foucault's books, from the *Narrenschiff* or Ship of Fools in *Madness and Civilization*, to the water-cure for hysteria that begins *The Birth of the Clinic*, to *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things*, the torture of Damians the regicide juxtaposed with a reformatory timetable in *Discipline and Punish*; enable Foucault to furnish the reader with startling *images* which, in their double role as figures of historical alterity and ciphers for aspects of the present, for *its* non-essentialness exemplify his entire

historiographic approach.¹⁴⁸ Against the synchronic reading of Foucault (generally accepted by both supporters and detractors) we can interpret the function of these images as precisely the activation of a diachronic dimension that depends on the reader's own "projections" and retentions of them.

Owens revealed various contradictions in Alpers's reading of Foucault, but he did not stop to ask "why are art historians so interested in this brief (less than twenty pages) section of a book its author intended for a few specialists in the history of thought?" For Foucault's description of *Las Meninas*, his analysis of its system of representations and exclusions, is neither a piece of art history, nor a sketch of a possible poststructuralist theory of art interpretation. Rather, along with the laughter evoked at the beginning and end of *The Order of Things* (Foucault's laughter at Borges's Chinese Encyclopaedia, the übermenschian laughter that bids farewell to "Man") it is a privileged motif in a text seeking to displace a certain reading of the past 500 years of Western scientific thought. Why would this interest art historians, or rather, given that this theme (along with others in Foucault's work) bears so clearly on art historical thought, why has its interest been diffused in a reading that rushes to extract a theory, a method, a programme, from a text resistant to such appropriations? We can extend this further, asking the same question of those approaches to Foucault that assess the usefulness of his (supposed) theory of visual regimes to art history,¹⁴⁹ or those that seek an elaboration of historical context all the better to restore an art object adrift in time to the plenitude from which history has pulled it. Why has the overwhelming tendency of art historical uses of Foucault been to casually employ anemic versions of fragments of his work?

I suggest that, unbecoming to a discipline that emphasizes close and careful scrutiny of its objects, it is because Foucault has yet to be properly read by art history; hence the misrecognition of the use of *Las Meninas* as “poststructuralist art history.” Further, reflection on the history of art history has often duplicated its procedures at one remove; see, for example, Moxey’s iconological reading of Panofsky’s iconological reading of Dürer’s reading of the Italian Renaissance.¹⁵⁰ Thus, problems Owens identified with art history’s relationship to its objects come to be repeated at the level of reflection on art history. For instance the lack formally perceived in the object is now located in art history - it lacks a theory of power, a critique of representation and so on. The spectre of interpretation in infinite regress haunts many histories of art history, particularly deconstructive ones. Reflecting on the Heidegger-Shapiro-Derrida debate, Stephen Melville imagined the Van Gogh in question hanging on a wall, with Shapiro and Heidegger arguing in front of it. Derrida, meanwhile is “watching it and them, reading it and them, writing.”¹⁵¹ If art historians are to take this activity as their model the imaginary gallery will soon fill up with note-taking observers, while Shapiro and Heidegger continue to argue over the ownership of (represented) shoes. As often happens in the crowded gallery or museum, we might well start to wonder what the point of this milling around really is.

It is possible, I think, to see in Foucault’s work an alternative to this unedifying scenario. Art historical reflection on the discipline has often seemed to have a self-denunciatory character – it can seem driven by a purgatorial or masochistic fixation on its own flaws, as though it was the wrong way of thinking about art that propped up the whole ideological edifice. Gérard Mermoz’ essay ‘Rhetoric and Episteme: Writing about ‘Art’ in the Wake of Poststructuralism,’ exemplifies this tendency.¹⁵² Having

noted that Marxist critique of the discipline tended towards an economic reductionism that left its epistemological status untouched, he proposed a poststructuralist critique to address this. Embarrassed by “the methodological poverty of mainstream art history” in comparison to the “wealth of theoretical material produced outside the discipline” he suggests a Foucauldian archaeology of art history’s concepts, objects and choices.¹⁵³ Mermoz’ view, as presented in this essay, is that we just haven’t been hard enough on ourselves yet. Addressing the rise of S&M in the context of an interview on ‘Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity,’ Foucault admitted that such practices constituted an “eroticization of power,” but differed from the forms of social power in being as a “strategic relation,” that was “always fluid. Of course there are roles, but everyone knows that those roles can be reversed ... you know very well that it is always a game.”¹⁵⁴ S&M is not a renunciation of power, but the introduction of reciprocity into power relations. Thus it might (humorously) serve as a metaphor for a reading of Foucault from within a somewhat embattled art history. A polemical reading which pits him against art history as bourgeois error is unproductive - it fails to read him truly or well - but another approach is possible.

A productive (though certainly disruptive) reading of Foucault from within art history is both possible and desirable, but it depends on establishing parameters proper to the task. If this is done by posing the question, as Foucault himself did of Nietzsche, “what is the maximum intensity to be gained from these texts, what transformations might they make possible?” we begin with an unstable, but far more promising problem. Foucault asks us, throughout his *œuvre*, though in changing ways, to be as historically minded as possible. This should scarcely be a problem for art historians – at least one would hope not. As already noted, such a project must begin with a close

attention to what is being said in Foucault's texts and to where their challenge lies. The point is not to seek the contours of a Foucauldian art history, but to work through the transformations that an enforced collision between a Foucauldian critical strategy that utilises aesthetics, and art history (conceived as an interpretation of both aesthetics and history) might produce. If we are going to take anything from art history with us as we read Foucault it should be its anxieties, its hesitations, for it is here that its theoretical and methodological interest lies. Not because in those moments when its explanations suddenly seem forced, when it equivocates over contradictory interpretations, we can see beneath its surface to its true nature (its unconscious philosophising, its bourgeois presumption), but because here it is facing up to a problem we can hardly neglect – how to write history faced with unstable objects, that is historical ones. Thus, it cannot be assumed from the outset that art history must be the object of condemnation for Foucauldian critique. It is possible that it fits less comfortably amidst the anthropological, teleological thought of the 19th century than is often assumed to be the case.

Paul Veyne's laudatory essay 'Foucault Revolutionizes History' strongly suggests that this might indeed be the case. Veyne urges historians to recognize the fundamentally, quintessentially, historical basis of Foucault's thought; to recognize him, in fact, as "the first completely positivist historian."¹⁵⁵ This claim is based on a convincing insistence on Foucault's *nominalism*, as the tool by which he de-ontologises categories such as "the governed" or "madness" in showing them to have "little more in common than the name."¹⁵⁶ This procedure, as already noted earlier in this chapter, depends on taking as the level of description and analysis simply what is said and done, without assuming any internal ontological consistency beyond the

practice itself. Here we have a notion of history with which art history *ought* to be entirely comfortable, in its aim of specifying the particularity of its objects of analysis. "Objects seem to determine our behaviour," Veyne writes, "but our practice determines its own objects in the first place ... The relation determines the object, and only what is determined exists."¹⁵⁷ The recognition of such determining relations within art history as practice, with its reliance on the reproductive power of photography, and the mnemonic, or at least "preserving" power of the museum, can be traced back to Duchamp. It is in this sense that Thierry de Duve has proposed "nominalism" as an apt description for Duchamp's historical contribution to the de-ontologisation of art; with *Fountain* he shows us that "art was a proper name."¹⁵⁸ What remains to be said here is that nominalism in this sense is what opens the space for action; to Veyne's designation of Foucault as a nominalist we need to add the word "opportunistic." For it is by exploiting the tension between the consistency of words and the heterogeneity of practices that Foucault's histories seek to have an effect on the present. The "images" which are so memorable in his texts "flash" (to borrow Benjamin's apt phrase) into the present to question it. Again, to underscore the point, there is no reason in principle why art history should not be able to contribute to such a project of opportunistic nominalism; but it needs to be recognized also that it cannot simply defer to Foucault's "authority" on this point. His histories are a provocation and an example, but they do not lay ahistorical or apolitical foundations for a systematic methodology. As with Duchamp, it would be a betrayal to remake Foucault in the guise of an omniscient author-function. The point is to exploit the avenues of critique that they have authorized, that is made possible, permissible, not to reify their author-ity.

To read Foucault with art history in mind offers the chance to take seriously, as an integral part of his wider project, his aesthetics. This means not just largely neglected texts on Bataille, Blanchot, Klossowski, Roussel and other “transgressive” writers, but also the very modes in which Foucault writes his own texts as instances of “effective” history that aim to provoke active reading, the interrelation of ethical and aesthetic relations in the theme of the care of the self as a modern practice of an “aesthetics of existence.” Such a reading suggests both a methodological and a political value pertains to the kinds of analysis – historical and attentive to form – that art history has habitually practiced, even as it shifts the aesthetic into a field expanded far beyond art objects and pursues the project of a critical ontology of ourselves conceptualised in *What is Enlightenment?* and other of Foucault’s late works. In the following chapter I seek to further demonstrate the interrelation between aesthetic, epistemological and ethical concerns in Foucault’s texts, whilst also showing how this bears on the themes of loss of self and the critique of originality.

- ¹ Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* (London: Routledge, 1993), 191.
- ² See Žižek's extensive treatment of this in *The Ticklish Subject*, (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 247-312. His central objection is that Butler's reliance on Foucault -- who, as "a perverse philosopher if ever there was one," (251) inevitably ends up denying the Unconscious -- leads her to miss the radical insight of Lacan; that by 'traversing the fantasy' in taking it to its conclusion, the entire hegemonic edifice, and not just contingent constellations within it, may be shaken. In effect Žižek accepts the importance of the imaginary to political transformation, but rejects a Foucauldian mode of access to this project.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 354.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Bodies That Matter*, op. cit., 189.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 220-221.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.
- ⁸ One of the most interesting aspects of Butler's ongoing project is the changing valence of Foucault within her theoretical constructs. From an initial role as the most recent manifestation of French Hegelianism in *Subjects of Desire*, to historicist de-essentialiser in *Gender Trouble*, and pessimistic thinker of subjection in *The Psychic Life of Power*, Foucault is an ever-changing constant, as it were, for Butler. Crucially, she often forces his concepts into counter-intuitive constellations which should be anathema to them: Hegel and desire, Freud and the Unconscious, for example. As will be argued in the following chapter, this is a sign of Butler's fidelity to Foucault -- she follows him by breaking with him.
- ⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 176.
- ¹⁰ Sebald, *Vertigo*, trans. M. Hulse, (London: Harvill, 2000), 156.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 152. Francis McKee has noted that both the culture of the copy produced by the age of generalized reproducibility, and the writing that describes it, are "vertigo-inducing." 'Paper Jam, Call Engineer, *Variant*, No. 3 (Summer, 1997), 12.
- ¹³ Foucault, 'On the Ways of writing History,' *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Two*, ed. J. D. Faubion, (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 286.
- ¹⁴ Foucault, 'Truth is in the Future,' *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. S. Lotringer, trans. L. Hochroth & J. Johnston, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 301.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Foucault, 'The History of Sexuality,' *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 193.
- ¹⁷ Alfred Gell, 'The Gods at Play: Vertigo and Possession in Muria Religion', *Man*, New Series, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Jun 1980), 219-248.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 230.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 226.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 232.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 239.
- ²⁶ Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self,' *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One*, ed. P. Rabinow, (London: Penguin, 2000), 223-251.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.
- ²⁸ See in particular *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, (London: Penguin, 1991).
- ²⁹ Foucault, 'Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,' in *Ethics*, op. cit., 165. Foucault's views on psychoanalysis are set out (somewhat obliquely) in *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trans. R. Hurley, (London: Penguin, 1998). Jacques Derrida gives a very informative reading of this theme in "To do Justice to Freud": The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis,' in Davidson (ed.) *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 57-96. Leo Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' locates Foucault's evocation of a bodily 'self-shattering' in the context of AIDS politics and a psychoanalytic understanding of the function of pleasure; in Krauss, Michelson, Bois, et al, (eds.) *October: The Second Decade, 1986-1996*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 303-328.

³⁰ Foucault, 'Self Writing,' in *Ethics*, op. cit., 213.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

³² These relations, particularly with regard to poststructuralism are analyzed in Hooker, 'Sublimity as Process: Hegel, Newman and Shave,' in P. Crowther (ed.) *The Contemporary Sublime*. Hooker's contention is, like Osborne's, that Romanticist philosophy is better suited to the exigencies of art critical writing than poststructuralism, which he perceives as susceptible to immanent critique.

³³ Osborne, P. 'Art Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Criticism, Art History and Contemporary Art,' *Art History*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (Sept., 2004), 651-670.

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 655.

³⁵ See, for instance, Podro, M. *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, and Baker, G., Buchloh, B. et al 'Round Table: The Present Conditions of Art Criticism,' *October*, No. 100 (Spring 2002).

³⁶ See Deborah Cherry, 'Art History Visual Culture,' *Art History*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Sept., 2004), 479-493. A wide range of perspectives on this theme, from artists as well as theorists, are given in 'Visual Culture Questionnaire,' *October*, No. 77 (Summer, 1996), 25-70.

³⁷ Osborne, p. 652.

³⁸ For instance Emily Apter, 'The Aesthetics of Critical Habitats,' *October*, No. 99, (Winter, 2002), 21-44; or Lupton and Miller, *The Bathroom, the Kitchen and the Aesthetics of Waste*, (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

³⁹ I take this term from Dominic Willsdon's conference paper 'Contemporary Art, its Institutions and the Public Sphere,' delivered at *Rediscovering Aesthetics*, University College Cork, 10th July, 2004. Though I disagree with Willsdon's notion of an "aesthetics of publicness" that would describe both "the public function of art institutions" and "the aesthetic value of art practices" under one purview (this seems to fall into the problematics of the aestheticized curatorial mode) the term "aesthetics-at-large" does seem apposite.

⁴⁰ I'm thinking here of texts such as Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (London: Duke University Press, 1993), which, amongst other things, treats phenomena such as "Tom Thumb Weddings" as instances of an aesthetics of the miniature. The utilisation of the term "aesthetic" to convey overlooked textures of affect across multiple fields of cultural practice is so commonplace that a cursory search of the Glasgow University Library catalogue reveals texts titled as the "Aesthetics of...": historical experience, being, modernity, the feminine, alienation, environment, mysticism, power, the infinite, individuation, design, Roman letter forms, and, more poetically, of vulnerability, conviviality, difficulty, pleasure, disturbance, laughter, bad faith, rare experiences. The "aesthetic" clearly appeals as a way to characterise the varied objects of many disciplines, and often carries a restitutive connotation, as though it related to overlooked or ephemeral dimensions of experience.

⁴¹ Osborne, op. cit., p. 661.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 661.

⁴³ For a general survey of the aesthetics of video see Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), pp. 78-103.

⁴⁴ Barthes, R. *Mythologies*, London: Vintage, 1993.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Nancy Fraser, 'Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions,' in Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), and also the essays collected in Michael Kelly (ed.) *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994).

⁴⁶ Eagleton, T. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁵⁵ 'False Antitheses: A Response to Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler,' in Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* (London: Routledge, 1997), 216.

⁵⁶ On Foucault's political commitment see Macey, D. *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, (London: Hutchinson, 1993), pp. 257-322.

⁵⁷ See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan, (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 79-131.

⁵⁸ See Foucault, 'Interview with Michel Foucault,' *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Three*, ed. J. D. Faubion, (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 237-246. Here it is made clear that Foucault sees his books as inviting the reader to complete a chain of association from past to present that is not explicitly given in the text. "The book makes use of true documents, but in such a way that through them it is possible to arrive at something that permits a change ... a transformation of the relationship we have with our knowledge." *Ibid.*, 244.

⁵⁹ Eagleton, *op. cit.*, 388, 384.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 389. Foucault's writing, because it is directed against the self-evidence of the present does indeed often seem to find more honesty in the functioning of power under Absolutism than in modern form, in *Discipline and Punish* for instance, but this is not a call for a return to public executions or other archaic forms: it is a matter of rhetorical effect. Even towards the Greek sexual aesthetic / ethic Foucault did not maintain a prelapsarian attitude. For a more sympathetic reading of Foucault's attitude to the pre-modern see Deborah Cook, 'Nietzsche, Foucault, Tragedy,' *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Apr., 1989), 140-150.

⁶¹ Eagleton, *op. cit.*, 390.

⁶² Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics,' in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One*, ed. P. Rabinow, (London: Penguin, 2000), 258-259.

⁶³ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2*, trans. R. Hurley, (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 3-13.

⁶⁴ In fact, Foucault had suggested that rape be criminalized as an act of physical rather than sexual violence – a controversial statement, but hardly the same as opposing criminalization *tout court*, and certainly not when viewed in the light of Foucault's low estimation of "pathologization" of criminal acts (see Foucault, 'About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual in Nineteenth-Century Legal Psychiatry,' in *Power*, *op. cit.*, 176-200). On Foucault's comments and the response to them see Macey, *op. cit.*, pp. 374-377.

⁶⁵ Eagleton, *op. cit.*, 394.

⁶⁶ A correlative criticism – that Foucault subsumes the epistemological in the aesthetic – has been launched from the perspective of his relationship the French history of science. Walter Privitera's *Problems of Style: Michel Foucault's Epistemology*, trans. J. Keller, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), focuses on the use made of Gaston Bachelard's concepts of "discontinuity" and "spirit"; from a leftist position both Dominique Lecourt and later Peter Dews have taken Foucault to task for his supposed falling off from the epistemological standards of Bachelard and Canguilhem, with a consequent diminution of political normativity. Lecourt, *Marxism and Epistemology: Bachelard, Canguilhem and Foucault*, trans. B. Brewster, (London: NLB, 1975); Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*, (London: Verso, 1995).

⁶⁷ Eagleton, *op. cit.*, 8.

⁶⁸ Derrida, 'Following Theory,' in Payne & Schad (eds.) *Life After Theory* (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 31-32.

⁶⁹ Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?,' (1984) in Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, *op. cit.*, 303-319. This essay is a reworking of a lecture given at the Sorbonne on the 27th of May 1978, published as 'What is Critique?' in James Schmidt (ed.) *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, (London: University of California Press, 1996), 382-398. The relationship between the two texts is largely unexplored and deserves further study. I wish only to note here that the earlier lecture reveals the later essay to be profoundly connected to Foucault's political project of genealogical history and the critique of "governmentality" in the 1970s, and that Baudelaire, who appears only in the essay, figures the aesthetic dimension which we are, I would argue, justified in projecting back as an implicit feature of that project.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 310.

⁷³ Baudelaire, 'The Salon of 1846' in Harrison, & Wood, (eds.) *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 303; Baudelaire 'The Painter of Modern Life,' in *ibid.*, 497.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

⁷⁸ The most informative of these general accounts is Dreyfus & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1982). On subjection and “bio-power” see Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

⁷⁹ See for instance the uses made of them by Foster, Crimp, Fisher, Holly, Moxey in texts cited in previous chapters. Both *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* are problematic in this context: the former because it is a polemic against Humanism read as a constative synchronic exposition of historical epochs, the latter because its substantive content is limited and again it functions more or less polemically against structuralism. Indeed Allan Megill refers to this book as a “parody of method” in its excess of style over substance; see his *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, (London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 227-229.

⁸⁰ Foucault’s pedagogy played a crucial role in the transitions that took place in his thought, especially during the 1970s. This can be seen in the course outlines reproduced in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth* op. cit., pp. 3-106, and in recently published lectures included in *Fearless Speech*, ed. J. Pearson, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, ed. V. Marchetti & A. Salomini, trans. G. Burchell, (London: Verso, 2003), “*Society Must be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. M. Bertani & A. Fontana, trans. D. Macey, (London: Allen Lane, 2003), and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, ed. F. Gros, trans. G. Burchell, (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

⁸¹ Foucault, ‘An Interview by Stephen Riggins,’ in Foucault, *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, op. cit., 131.

⁸² Foucault, ‘Interview with Michel Foucault,’ *Power*, op. cit., 256.

⁸³ Foucault, ‘The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,’ in *ibid.*, 282.

⁸⁴ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, op. cit., 12.

⁸⁵ Butler, Butler, J. ‘What is Critique?: An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue,’ www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/kadish/what%20is%20critique%20J%20Butler.pdf (accessed 12/12/2003). This analysis is continued in Butler’s most recent book *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 15-26, 111-136.

⁸⁶ ‘Foucault’s Virtue,’ op. cit., 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁹ ‘What is Critique?’ op. cit., 386.

⁹⁰ ‘Foucault’s Virtue,’ op. cit., 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹³ ‘What is Critique,’ op. cit., 382.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ ‘Foucault’s Virtue,’ op. cit., 18. Butler has modified this point in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, where she sees this risk-taking as of necessity passing through a relation to the Other that Foucault overlooks, op. cit., 23. Later in the same volume Butler tantalizingly intimates that psychoanalysis might be accommodated into the *techne* of ‘care of the self,’ but only sketches the outline of such a move.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ The phrase is Claude Gandelman’s; ‘Foucault as an Art Historian,’ *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1985), pp. 266-280.

¹⁰¹ For instance Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1984), pp. 158-193.

¹⁰² A presumption made by Craig Owens and Gerhard Mermoz – both these authors are discussed in what follows.

¹⁰³ An attitude implicit in a survey such as Michael Podro’s *The Critical Historians of Art*, (London: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁴ Foucault, ‘Polemics, Politics and Problematization,’ *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, op. cit., 117.

¹⁰⁵ Geertz, ‘Stir Crazy,’ *New York Review of Books*, 26th January, 1978, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, ‘On the Ways of Writing History,’ *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Two*, ed. J. D. Faubion, (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 293.

- ¹⁰⁷ Owens, 'Representation, Appropriation, and Power,' in Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, (London: University of California Press, 1994), 88.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ¹⁰⁹ Marin, 'Towards a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's *The Arcadian Shepherds*,' in Preziosi (ed.) *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 263-275.
- ¹¹⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. from the French, (London: Routledge, 1989), 16.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9. This simple phrase gives the lie to the notion that Foucault reduced the visual to a textual model. It is also worth noting, *contra* Owens, that Foucault did not see an antagonist to his work in humanist art history, at least as practiced by Panofsky. Reviewing French editions of *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* and *Studies in Iconology* for *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1967 he praised them precisely for resisting the reduction of image to word. Foucault 'Les Mots et les images', in Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 1, ed. D. Defert & F. Ewald, (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).
- ¹¹⁸ *The Order of Things*, op. cit., 11
- ¹¹⁹ Alpers, 'Interpretation without Representation, or, The Viewing of *Las Meninas*,' *Representations*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Feb., 1983), 34.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, 40.
- ¹²³ Owens, op. cit., 88.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.
- ¹²⁵ These texts are reproduced in Preziosi (ed.) *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 413-449.
- ¹²⁶ See Moxey, 'Panofsky's Melancholia,' Ch. 2 in *The Practice of Theory: Poststructuralism, Cultural Politics, and Art History*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 65-78.
- ¹²⁷ Owens, op. cit., 95-96.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.
- ¹³⁰ *The Order of Things*, op. cit., 341.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 342.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*, 315.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 303-343. On this topic Dreyfus and Rabinow are indispensable – see *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, op. cit., pp. 16-43.
- ¹³⁵ *The Order of Things*, op. cit., xxiv.
- ¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 387.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 312.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, xv.
- ¹³⁹ Borges, quoted in *ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xvii.
- ¹⁴² Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*, (London: Methuen, 1987), 55.
- ¹⁴³ Foucault, cited in Macey, op. cit., 480.
- ¹⁴⁴ Snyder & Cohen, 'Reflexions on *Las Meninas*: Paradox Lost,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Winter, 1980), 429-447; Searle, '*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation,' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1980), 477-488.
- ¹⁴⁵ Searle, op. cit., 480.
- ¹⁴⁶ Likewise, research establishing that the "ship of fools" was a literary invention does not fundamentally undermine its role as a literary trope in the first chapter of *Madness and Civilization*. On this research and Foucault's response to it see Macey, op. cit., 432.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. R. Howard, (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 7-37, 279-289.

¹⁴⁸ Again this is an underthought feature of Foucault's work, though it is often noted in passing. John Rajchman does allocate a couple of paragraphs to this in 'Foucault's Art of Seeing,' *October*, No. 44, (Spring 1988), 89-117.

¹⁴⁹ The assumption that Foucault proposes a theory of visibility in general underpins Martin Jay's negative assessment of his work, and does so in a way that is even more problematic in its presentation of Foucault and Debord (by suturing "panopticism" with "spectacle") as two sides of the same coin, which they emphatically are not. See Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in 20th Century French Thought*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 381-434.

¹⁵⁰ Moxey, op. cit. This kind of problem has been treated in great detail by James Elkins in *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History As Writing*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

¹⁵¹ Melville, 'The Temptation of New Perspectives,' in Preziosi, ed. *The Art of Art History*, op. cit., 412.

¹⁵² Mermoz, 'Rhetoric and Episteme: Writing About 'Art' in the Wake of Poststructuralism,' *Art History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 1989), 497-509.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 507.

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, 'Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity,' in *Ethics*, op. cit., 169.

¹⁵⁵ Veyne, 'Foucault Revolutionizes History,' in Davidson, op. cit., 147.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁵⁸ de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 3-86.

CHAPTER FOUR: Delirious Writing

1

We must give up trying to know those to whom we are linked by something essential; by this I mean we must greet them in the relation with the unknown in which they greet us as well, in our estrangement. Friendship, this relation without dependence, without episode, yet into which all of the simplicity of life enters, passes by way of the recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak of our friends but only to speak to them, not to make them a topic of conversations (or essays), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even on the most familiar terms, an infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation. Here discretion lies not in the simple refusal to put forward confidences (how vulgar this would be, even to think of it), but it is the interval, the pure interval that, from me to this other who is a friend, measures all that is between us, the interruption of being that never authorizes me to use him, or my knowledge of him (were it to praise him), and that, far from preventing all communication, brings us together in the difference and sometimes the silence of speech.

Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*.

Friendship is just one of the forms given to the care of the self. Every man who really cares for himself must provide himself with friends.

Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutic of the Subject*.

To make the transition from Foucault's writing on art, to writing as an art contributing to the aesthetics of a positive loss of self, an analysis of the text 'Photogenic Painting,' written by Michel Foucault on the painting of Gérard Fromanger is helpful (Fig. 64). This text is exceptional in a number of ways, but it is noteworthy not least because it is really the *only* text in which Foucault ostensibly takes on the role of "art historian," that is, the role of evaluating and locating an artist and his works in a historical context.¹ As Adrian Rifkin has noted in his own essay on Fromanger, Foucault, and Deleuze, we have become used to philosophers' assumption of the moral authority to supply art with its meaning and value in a situation in which "art seems more and more to exist for, or by virtue of, the quality of the philosophical discourse that can be directed at it."² If, as Rifkin suggests, "an indiscreet over-interpretation of art is an effect of philosophy's narcissistic requirements for representation of its own power," Foucault certainly doesn't play the role of Narcissus in his essay on Fromanger.³ Recalling that the mirror-play of *Las Meninas* figured for Foucault the impossible status of the subject of representation included in his own representations, we can assume that Foucault may recognize something of himself in Fromanger's images, but it is not his *identity*, certainly not as a philosopher seeking conformation of his "moral authority."

Fromanger's painting attracted the attention of a group of Parisian intellectuals in the 1970s, including Foucault, Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who recognized in his work an affinity with their own, and Foucault gladly wrote an essay, *Photogenic Painting* for the

catalogue of the *Desire is Everywhere* exhibition of 1975. This catalogue was, Rifkin tells us, "a thin, red-covered pamphlet that was generously illustrated without being in any way a self-important publication."⁴ Whereas David Macey in his biography of Foucault refers to this as a "gesture of friendship" in which Foucault patronised (in both senses) the young artist, Rifkin takes issue with this interpretation, suggesting that a more reciprocal relation was established by this gesture.⁵ He points to the quite obvious pleasure that Foucault took in addressing these paintings, and notes that the work of both theorist and painter alike emerged in "a moment of Parisian sociability and friendships anchored in and nourished by a succession of political projects and aspirations."⁶ I agree with Rifkin that what we have here is not philosophy extending its kudos to art: what is most notable about the essays that Deleuze and Foucault wrote on Fromanger is the lack of overbearing interpretation, the refusal to treat these paintings as awaiting philosophical rescue. Nor is there any recourse to a symptomology - they don't seek to read in Fromanger the malaise of the present, or the crises of a subject. For both Deleuze and Foucault, Fromanger's images open up possibilities - of an aesthetic project of action, of a critical relation to the past. I would like to return to the question of 'Photogenic Painting' as a *gesture of friendship*, but first I will set out its argument, and the context of its composition. In what follows I cite Foucault's text extensively, as not only its content, but also to a great extent its tone and form are crucial.

Fromanger worked in the 1970s in series, using found images from mass media sources, as well as his own photographs taken for the purpose, but not with their aesthetic, or "painting-genic" qualities in mind. He projected these images onto his canvas in a

darkened studio, and, without a drawing stage, painted, using commercial colours, under/over the projected image. In many of his paintings of the early 1970s, Fromanger included a representation of his own silhouette in his paintings, fixing the shadow that fell on the canvas as he worked, but in the form of a generic black portrait (Figs. 65-67). Deleuze noted that "Fromanger's model is the commodity. Every kind of commodity: vestimentary, balneal, nuptial, erotic, alimentary . . . everything is rendered in terms of the single model, the Commodity, which circulates with the painter"; a painter who is included in this circulation through his trademark silhouetted image.⁷ Yet, in paintings made up entirely of colour relationships, this omnipresent image of the painter hardly operates as a sovereign subject. As Deleuze points out, in the system of hot and cold colours Fromanger sets in motion "black does not exist, the black painter does not exist."⁸ His shadow as it falls across the images he produces does not signify a privileged position; it is the afterimage of someone that was once present before the work, but is now another node in a system of commodities. Fromanger's silhouette is everywhere "but there is no mirror there for anyone."⁹

Foucault's essay too, as we might expect recalling again the analysis of *Las Meninas*, takes up the question of the painter's shadow, but in a historical reading that touches on the relationship between painting and photography, and seeks, through Fromanger's work, to give it a new meaning. He opens the essay with the words of Ingres: "photography is no more than a series of manual operations."¹⁰ What if painting could be described this way too, asks Foucault in response, what if it too was a series of manual operations? "And what if one were to combine them, alternate them, superimpose them,

intertwine them, if one effaced or exalted the one by the other?" The strangeness of that last phrase deserves to be underscored. "Effaced or exalted"? As if effacement might have something of the character of an exaltation about it...

Foucault's second paragraph begins like his first, with Ingres on photography:

"Photography is very beautiful, but one cannot admit it."¹¹ Foucault counters this remark with an evocation of Fromanger's work, although at this stage he remains unnamed, anonymous. "When painting re-covers the photograph," Foucault writes, "occupying it insidiously or triumphantly, it does not admit that the photograph is beautiful. It does better: it produces the beautiful hermaphrodite of instantaneous photograph and painted canvas, the androgynic image."¹² Already, I think, it is clear that this exhibition catalogue essay is up to something - our critical suspicions are aroused by this unguarded introduction. Having evoked Ingres in his first paragraph, Foucault has gone on to suggest Fromanger's practice produces hermaphrodite, androgynic images. If the first gesture, the evocation of Ingres, seems more than a little grandiose, not to mention art historically far-fetched, the second, the claim of "androgyny," takes on outlandish importance when one considers the world-historical significance Foucault had given to the notion of the heterogeneous in his preface to *The Order of Things*. He had written there that he detected "a worse kind of disorder than that of the incongruous" (the juxtaposition of umbrella and sewing-machine - or of Ingres and Fromanger, we might add), and this would be the disorder of the *heteroclite*, the heterotopia. To quote Foucault:

"*Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and opposite one another) to 'hold together.' ... Heterotopias ... dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences."¹³ (xvii-iii).

Foucault, of course, does not see the disturbing, dessicating, sterilizing effects of the heteroclite as regrettable --indeed they are evidence of the 'end of man' that *The Order of Things* famously announces. So, to return to the essay under consideration, we can see that Foucault's description of Fromanger's images as hermaphrodite, androgynic, exceeds the implied art historical link to Ingres -- that it constitutes an excessive claim with regard to a series of paintings that may be many things, but surely can't be said to be one of the signs of "Man's" extinction; indeed, have attracted relatively little attention outwith a clique of French intellectuals. If the opening of 'Photogenic Painting' begins in excessive, even overblown fashion, Foucault turns, in his third paragraph to a more restrained history of the heteroclite painting/photograph. He writes:

‘The years 1860 to 1880 witnessed a new frenzy for images, which circulated rapidly between camera and easel, between canvas and plate and paper - sensitised or printed; with all the new powers acquired there came a new freedom of transposition, displacement, and transformation, of resemblance and dissimulation, of reproduction, duplication and trickery of effect. It engendered a wholesale theft of images, an appropriation still utterly novel, but already dextrous, amused and unscrupulous.

Photographers made pseudo-paintings, painters used photographs as sketches. There emerged a vast field of play where technicians and amateurs, artists and illusionists, unworried about identity, took pleasure in disporting themselves. Perhaps they were less in love with paintings or photographic plates than with the images themselves, with their migration and perversion, their transvestism, their disguised difference. Images – whether drawings, engravings, photographs or paintings – were no doubt admired for their power to make one think of other things; but what was particularly enchanting was their ability, in their surreptitious difference, to be mistaken one for another.”¹⁴

Along with the development of professional image-making, facilitated by the development of cheaper and easier to operate cameras, Foucault notes that there emerged an amateur practice, or rather a series of practices, which confused the two media of painting and photography. These would include: photomontage; overdrawing and

overpainting, developing photographs on silk fabric “sensitised with a preparation of cadmium chloride, benzoin and mastic” or on eggshells “treated with silver nitrate”; photographs printed on lamp-shades or on lamp-glass – a panoply of hybrid forms which, according to Foucault, constituted a “shared practice of the image, accessible to all,” a field of aesthetic play in which amateurs and professionals alike “unworried about identity” could play.”¹⁵ Here there is an interesting parallel with Walter Benjamin’s ‘Little History of Photography,’ which argues that the rapid industrialisation and commercial exploitation of photography prevented the philosophical import of its rise and fall from being investigated. Benjamin, writing in 1931 and with Surrealism in mind, thought he could discern a return to photography’s first heroic decade in which, although photography *was* already appropriated for gain and thus moved into the commercial sphere, this appropriation was carried out by “hucksters and charlatans” whose efforts Benjamin describes as akin to closer to the fairground than to industry.¹⁶

Benjamin identified photography’s usurpation of the ability to make likenesses and imply their permanence as its characteristic professional achievement, one which meant that it was not painting in general, but the portrait miniature, which was replaced by photography. He notes that by 1840 many professional miniaturists had turned to photography as a profession, and were aided by their “craft” background rather than any specific painterly artistic sensibility in the making of their images. Soon, though, business encroached and, with vogueish references to antiquity, self-conscious artfulness and posing, instituted the decline of photography. Describing a photograph of Kafka as a child, Benjamin notes the various props which decorate the studio in which he is posed:

the studio itself is seen as occupying an ambiguous location "between execution and representation, between torture chamber and throne room."¹⁷ He also sees, in distinction from early photography, Kafka's gaze as looking out at the world in an "excluded and godforsaken" manner.¹⁸ It is in contrast to this that *aura*, designating the special quality that early photographs possesses in Benjamin's eyes, is first introduced, as the "medium" which "lent fullness and security" to the gaze of subjects "even as it penetrated that medium."¹⁹ Technically this was the result of the effect of the subject's emergence in light out of a purely dark background. The aura is conceived in a double sense here, as both formal property determined by the technical limits of the first cameras, and as something more: the product of the meeting of photographer as technician and subject as "a member of a rising class equipped with an aura that seeped into the very folds of the man's frock coat or floppy cravat. ... in this early period subject and technique were as exactly congruent as they become incongruent in the period of decline that immediately followed."²⁰ The technical and social bases of the aura were historically outmoded in this period. Knowing conspiracy with the production of the image ruins it for Benjamin, as if for the gaze to be present it has to be captured unconsciously, as part of the "unconscious optics" which he conceives as emergent in the technically enhanced vision of photography. If the interest of early photography for Benjamin lies in its condensation of class history and technical limit, for Foucault it turns on the implication of an escape from such identities and limits.

Foucault, though sharing Benjamin's sense of the possibilities inherent in photography,

an antipathy to photography as *Art*, and a certain nostalgia for the “heroic” phase, determines this relationship differently. It is precisely in the staged recreation of painting in photography (and vice versa) which Benjamin deprecates that Foucault detects something valuable. Interestingly, in a paragraph that links the descriptions of professional and amateur photo-painting Foucault asks: “How might we recover this madness, this insolent freedom that accompanied the birth of photography?” – a formulation that suggests Foucault is aligning his own work with the somewhat cavalier history of photography he is setting out, and which (he has already hinted) he sees Fromanger as the exemplar of.²¹ The very next sentence implies the same again, though with reference to a different part of Foucault’s *oeuvre*. He writes of this playfully heteroclitic ‘birth of photography’: “In those days images travelled the world under false identities. To them nothing was more hateful than to remain captive, self-identical, in *one* painting, *one* photograph, *one* engraving, under the aegis of *one* author.”²² Here, I think is an allusion to the themes of impersonality Foucault had developed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in ‘What is an Author?’ He wrote, in a famous passage that introduces the former text:

‘What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing – with a rather shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear

at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write'. ”²³ (Fig. 68)

How, then, do Fromanger’s images contribute to this project of anonymity, of labyrinthine retreat from identity? Having described the perhaps rather marginal nineteenth-century practices of “photo-painting,” Foucault turns to addressing an art historical development with which we are perhaps more familiar. The playful practice of the image, he asserts, was halted by the professionalization of photography (the commercialization of development and so on) and the purifying aesthetics of 20th century modernism, which expelled the image from painting in favour of the “abstract.” With these developments, in Foucault’s view “the photographic professionals have fallen back on the austerity of an ‘art’ whose internal rules forbid the crime of plagiarism.”²⁴ He does not conceal his regret:

“Gloomy discourses have taught us that one must prefer the slash of the sign to the round-dance of resemblance, the order of the syntagm to the race of simulacra, the grey regime of the symbolic to the wild flight of the imaginary . . . As a result of which, deprived of the technical ability to produce images, subordinated to an art without images, subjected to the theoretical obligation to disqualify them, forced to read them only like a

language, we could be handed over, bound hand and foot, to the power of other images, political and commercial, over which we had no power.”²⁵

Here we can clearly see that Foucault’s conception of the potential for artistic critique of images is at one with Owens’s as set out in *Representation, Appropriation and Power*. Both regard inattention to the images which surround us as dangerous. Yet a difference emerges, I think, in their treatment of “transparency.” For Owens, the transparency of contemporary representation is like that of Classical painting, it is a concealment of the material support, and thus an ideological and deceptive ruse: it is what we have to see through in *seeing-through* (*per-specere*, perspective). According to this logic revealing the material support reveals the power, Absolutist or capitalist, which acts through its representational capability. Much of postmodern critique has been launched in pursuit of this aim. Foucault, however, draws on another image of “transparency”; that of Fromanger, standing before his canvas at the moment he turns off the projector which has conveyed the image he paints onto that canvas, removing the transparency to reveal a painting that must stand on its own. What is revealed are not the conditions by which the representation existed, by which it concealed its true nature. What is left when Fromanger removes the transparency is an *image* in this of what Foucault terms *an event*. In ‘Critique and Power’ Foucault called for an “eventialization” (*évènementialisation*) of history – meaning a process by which, in connecting “mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge” would not establish “what is true or false, justified or not justified, real or illusory, scientific or ideological, legitimate or abusive” but rather how power-knowledge creates “positivities,” events of truth.²⁶ The key dimension of such an

eventualization for Foucault is that it opens up a space of possibility – “and consequently of reversibility” – in relation to given structures of power-knowledge; spaces that can be exploited by “archaeology, strategy, and genealogy.”²⁷ In his “photogenic painting” practice Fromanger has not seen through the photograph to a ruse of power, or to the truth of an object, he has created an event that slips out of his hands and into circulation with myriad other image-events, in a way that Foucault celebrates.

In Foucault’s art history lesson it is Pop Art and hyperrealism that have “re-taught us the love of images.”²⁸ They have done so through a rediscovery of the photo-painting hybrid, not seeking a renewed relationship with the object of representation after modernist abstraction, but reconnecting with the energy of images in endless circulation. Whereas artists have traditionally used optical and photographic devices to capture the object more securely, Foucault suggests that hyper-realists paint *images as images*, there is nothing under the surface to be unveiled or shown to be more real. Rather than an essence of an object, or the nature of a medium, what is produced in such work “is not a painting based on a photograph, nor a photograph made up to look like a painting, but an image caught in its trajectory from photograph to painting.”²⁹ Fromanger is exemplary in his enthusiastic endorsement of this launching of images into the (commodified) world where infinite others already circulate. In contrast to the Debord-inspired lamentation of the virtualization wrought by “spectacle” and the reign of images in postmodernity, Foucault affirms the possibilities inherent in such a development.

To explain how Fromanger is at the forefront of this rediscovery of the pleasure of the

image, Foucault turns to his technique, evoking the hours spent staring at projected transparencies seeking “the event which is taking place and which continues endlessly to take place in the image, by virtue of the image.”³⁰ In illustration of his analysis Foucault presents Fromanger’s images of a prisoner’s rebellion at Toul prison (Fig. 69). Here Fromanger has applied coloured blocks and dots across his photo-painting canvas. Foucault notes that the press photos from which these images are derived are ubiquitous; but, he asks, “who has seen what is happening in it? What commentary has ever articulated the unique and multiple event which circulates in it? In scattering a handful of multicoloured dots whose position and colour are not calculated in relation to the canvas, Fromanger draws countless celebrations from the photograph.” The context of this example is crucial: if Foucault is praising the vision of Fromanger in seeing the celebratory image-event in the press photo, he praises himself too – all the more so when we consider that although Fromanger was a member of the *Groupe d’information sur les prisons* which drew national attention to issues of capital punishment, the poor conditions in which prisoners were held, and questioned the “right to punishment” itself, it was Foucault who was its most prominent figure.³¹ A process of identification is subtly at work in this essay, one that is very much part of a cultural-political situation in which, in the early 1970s “Foucault’s biography was part of a collective biography.”³² Here, then, is one figure of the loss of self that Foucault sought – that produced in political commitment – but other modes can be discerned in ‘Photogenic Painting.’

After 1972 Fromanger modified his methodology, reworking identical photographs in differing ways, rather than submitting different photographs to the same process. And –

crucially for Foucault's reading - he no longer incorporated his black shadow on the final image. Where once the painting had caught the painter between the transparency and the canvas, amidst the street and its commodity forms, the image now held all this in itself without needing to represent it directly. Foucault writes of the "streetsweeper" series as revealing the image to contain "a whole series of events buried in the distance: rain in the forest, the village square, the desert, the swarming people. Images the spectator does not see come from the depth of the space, and impelled by an obscure force they spring out from a single photograph to diverge in different paintings" (Fig. 70).³³ In Foucault's analysis, *Las Meninas*'s representational system converged on the place where "Man" was to emerge at the end of the 18th century, the paradoxical place of the sovereign subject. Fromanger's images, at least in Foucault's reading, do not converge on anything.

The disappearance of the painter's silhouette figures the possibilities that emerge in the absence of man. Fromanger is no longer the author of his own work, which passes on images through the photograph - transparency - painting series:

"Earlier, in the painter's sombre presence (passing in the street, silhouetted between the projected transparency and the screen on which he paints, remaining in the end on the canvas) acted in a way as a sort of intermediary moment, the point where photograph and canvas were pinned together. Now . . . the image is fired off by a firework-engineer of whom not even the shadow is any longer visible."³⁴

Given the vibrant, cavalier and laudatory tenor of Foucault's essay it is worth risking a response in kind. It is possible to locate a number of identifications Foucault makes with Fromanger's work: the painter's shadow seems to stand for Foucault's own struggle to dispense with the shadow cast by the anthropological subject, and its disappearance for the "archaeological, strategic, genealogical" project Foucault was undertaking in the 1970s; Fromanger's method is seen as a "sling-shot" for images, propelling them into a "myriad surging images,"³⁵ whilst Foucault's own aim for his critical project is that it contribute to his "becoming anonymous one day" and being able "to obliterate one's proper name and to lodge one's voice in that great din of discourses which are pronounced."³⁶ It is justifiable, I think, to suggest that Foucault identifies himself and his work not only with Fromanger, but also with the images he puts into circulation. In this sense he might indeed be seen as in some way outlining a model of an art historical strategy that accepts excessive identifications, particularly when they tend towards a loss of self and loss of author-ity. The art of history, the art of anonymity, and the art of the self, all form part of Foucault's critical ontology of ourselves, which must be considered in part an aesthetic enterprise. Through a non-polemical reading, rather than an image of Foucault as destroyer of art history, we see a body of thought that in its concerns and techniques seems to respond to a range of problems art history finds itself with at the start of the 21st century. How is it to contribute to a questioning of today?, how is it to avoid antiquarianism?, how is it to orient itself in a wider field already occupied by Visual Studies etc? Perhaps attention to Foucault's own struggles will provide an outline of a response to these questions.

Adrian Rifkin, quoting Foucault's remark on purchasing a painting by Tobey and finding himself "inside it, convinced that I should never get out," makes a connection to Fromanger, whose paintings, also admired by Foucault, could hardly be more different. Playing on this juxtaposition and connecting it to Foucault's personal life (the contradiction between his "eventual sexual utopianism" and "Zen secrecy") Rifkin suggests that "something of the complexities of the author-function we call Foucault" is caught "between the antinomic surfaces of two such different artists' canvases."³⁷ I would also suggest that a close reading of Foucault's conclusion to 'Photogenic Painting' leads us to a more historically specific and less narrowly personal interpretation of the contradiction Rifkin notes. Foucault's last two paragraphs read as follows:

"The present exhibition closes on two paintings, two foci of desire. At Versailles: a chandelier, light, glitter, disguise, reflection, mirror; at this symbolic centre, where forms were ritualised in the sumptuousness of power, everything is decomposed in the very glitter of the pomp and the image discharges a volley of colours. Royal fireworks, Handel falling like rain; at the Bar of the Folies Royales, Manet's mirror shatters into fragments; the Prince in drag, the courtier is a courtesan. The greatest poet in the world officiates, and the regulated images of etiquette take flight at a gallop, leaving behind them only the event of their passage, the cavalcade of colours gone off elsewhere.

Beyond the steppes, in Hu-Xian, the amateur peasant painter applies

himself. Here is no mirror or chandelier. His window opens on no landscape, but onto four bands of flat colour that find themselves transposed in the light that bathes him. From Court to discipline, from the greatest poet in the world to the seven hundred millionth humble amateur, a multitude of images bursts out, and this is the short-circuit of painting.”³⁸

In her “series introduction” to the volume containing Foucault’s essay Sarah Wilson refers to this comparison, summing it up as the contrast of depictions of “the extravagant individualism of a poet at the Versailles Opera and the simplicity and authenticity of a Chinese peasant painter.” Whilst this seems to have falsified Foucault’s actual phrasing – where has Wilson got “simplicity and authenticity” from? – this contrast does seem particularly relevant. Wilson sees its significance in relation to Fromanger and “revolution as a contemporary problem”; I read it as much more ambiguously addressing Foucault’s interpretation of his own relation to Fromanger. Note that the contrast is summed up in the phrase “from court to discipline,” the historical transition that was the centre of Foucault’s attention in the mid-1970s and the subject of *Discipline and Punish*. I would rather suggest that this juxtaposition figures a genuine dilemma in Foucault’s thought in the 1970s: how to square a desire for an active revolutionary politics with a continued interest in “limit-experience” (derived from an engagement with Bataille) that depends to an extent on an excessive individualism taken to the point where the subject shatters. It is not in the content of ‘Photogenic Painting’ that we begin to see Foucault’s response to his dilemma, but rather in the form. It is to the form of the laudatory essay that I will now turn.

As we have seen, 'Photogenic Painting' is characterized by its excess - an excessive praise, an excessive identification between Foucault's project and Fromanger's paintings, and an excessive identification on Foucault's part between his own wish for dispersed, anonymous subjectivity and his analysis of Fromanger's images. These qualities are not unique to 'Photogenic Painting' in Foucault's oeuvre. His essays on Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski, and particularly Gilles Deleuze share its laudatory, celebratory quality. Note, for example, the statement made in a review of two of Deleuze's books, that "perhaps one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian." Even 'Photogenic Painting', ostensibly about Fromanger, alludes to Deleuze in its consistent references to "desire" - a key Deleuzian term, and one that Foucault usually eschews in favour of "power." This form of writing, in which authorial identity is porous to the concepts of others, and seems to collapse the boundaries between the subject and object of its discourse, is not only to be found in 'Photogenic Painting' but is common to a network of texts written by and on Foucault, and it is these that I now address.

Eleanor Kaufman has addressed the importance of the networks of laudatory exchange between Bataille, Blanchot, Foucault, Deleuze and Klossowski in her book *The Delirium of Praise*.³⁹ Kaufman, rather than focusing on this nexus in terms of its social dimension (i.e. as a grouping of male intellectuals of a certain class in French society) considers the *form* of the encomium as revealing of a textually mediated intersubjective relation that has its own critical potential. She cites Denis Hollier's suggestion, *à propos* the College

of Sociology, that the intense group dynamic fostered and formed in the laudatory exchange of texts in French literary-philosophical culture was “a mechanism of erasure, a machine for desubjectified, impersonal enunciation.”⁴⁰ Such an erasure was, as we have seen already, something Foucault actively sought as part of a project of desubjectivation, and so it is little surprise that his essays on Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze and Klossowski (amongst others) abound with the kind of excessive claims Kaufman addresses in her invaluable study, and which ‘Photogenic Painting’ is but a muted instance of.⁴¹ The term “delirium” is used by Kaufman to describe “the ecstatic breakdown of identity that occurs when it is no longer discernible what thought belongs to whom and whose voice is being heard at any given moment.”⁴² Delirium, or rather *délire* has a tradition in French culture as a concept deployed in both literary and philosophical work in the twentieth century, and often used as a way to cross or erase the boundaries between the two.⁴³

Amongst the key features of such delirious writing is “an experience of possession, a loss of control by the subject”⁴⁴ which negates an instrumental relationship to language; language “masters” the subject rather than vice versa. As a temporal, repetitious form language is both “always tending towards death as the end of a process of repetition” and “always tempting the subject to try to discover the secret of his origin which always evades him.”⁴⁵ Language is both inadequate to the subject’s desire for meaning, and excessive in its proliferating polysemy. The strategy of the delirium of praise is to endorse rather than contest this situation. The consequences for the form of the philosophical encomium are the evasion of “critique” properly speaking, and an inversion of the expected modality of intellectual tribute: rather than restraint there is an outpouring

of hyperbole. As the epigraph to this section suggests (by Blanchot, in tribute to Bataille), the only fitting response to the duty of friendship is to refrain from commentary and to speak *to* rather than *of* the other. This is in itself consonant with Bataille's hostility to "writing *on*" as a controlled discourse which operates reassuringly "in a realm over which it has taken possession, one it has inventorised after first closing it off, to make sure it is absolutely safe. This discourse runs no risk at all: it is not uneasy about the future, it steadily expands."⁴⁶ Against such a limited and delimiting notion of writing, Bataille affirmed the values antipathetic to it, particularly incompleteness and death. Blanchot's epigraphically cited words come after Bataille's death, and the laudatory form maintains an intimate relationship with death, and, consequently, with spectrality, with the ghost to whom one is bound to speak. As Kaufman demonstrates, the excessive textual machine of the encomium is one way of fulfilling the antinomic obligations of praising and not writing *on*; by pushing language or, rather, form, to a delirious limit where it turns into its reverse, into silence.⁴⁷ And such a silence is itself, in Kaufman's argument, and those of the essays she writes *on*, like a specter summoned by a profusion of chatter.

One of the figures for this effect, drawn by Bataille in writing on Blanchot, is the *acrobat*, as one launched (like excessive praise) into a void. A "vertiginous movement" without foundation, excessive praise is an affirmative act which doesn't leave grounds for a response from the other, nor indeed does it maintain the boundary between the subject and the object of its expression.⁴⁸ This elision of the difference between oneself and the one who is praised is figured in Michel de Montaigne's 'On the Education of Children' in terms of citation as digestion. By *incorporating* another in the body of one's own text, or

one's own thought, one breaks a relationship of mastery and enters into a properly philosophical exchange. Just as honey is the result of bees "pilfering" from flowers, but is nonetheless something new, so borrowed texts can be transformed into a new substance.⁴⁹

Whilst Montaigne defends his own habit of frequent quotation by arguing that it is both openly revealed as such and amounts to an appropriation into *his* discourse rather than a deceptive conferral of authority by proxy, he emphasises only the latter feature when it comes to the pupil whose education the essay concerns: "Let him conceal all that has helped him, and show only what he has made of it. Plunderers and borrowers make a display of their buildings and their purchases, not of what they have taken from others."⁵⁰

A properly philosophical education must instil independence in the pupil by teaching self-mastery, not mere obedience to masters. If 'On the Education of Children' suggests an appropriative ethos which makes others one's own, Montaigne's seminal essay 'On Friendship' – crucial, perhaps foundational, for the ethics and aesthetics of the "delirium of praise" – works in the opposite direction, in a self-estrangement through an excessive identification with the other.⁵¹

Montaigne opens his treatise on friendship with a metaphor for his own writing.

Montaigne notes that a painter in his employ "chooses the best spot, in the middle of each wall, as the place for a picture," and fills the surrounding empty space with grotesques – "fantastic paintings with no other charm than their variety and strangeness."⁵² It is to these that Montaigne compares his own writing: "what are these things of mine, indeed, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together from sundry limbs, with no definite shape, and with no order, sequence, or proportion except by chance."⁵³ He denies having

the skill for a “fine, finished picture” and so instead “borrows” one from his friend Etienne de la Boétie. The text in question, *The Voluntary Servitude*, was to have appeared as Chapter 27 in the *Essays*, but Montaigne eventually decided against publishing it, as a consequence of its problematic appropriation by Huguenot pamphleteers, under the title of *The Protest*, in 1576. The vexed question of whether to disown, on la Boétie’s behalf, this piece of writing is negotiated by Montaigne at the end of his essay, in a not entirely convincing way. He offers an apologia for la Boétie’s “boyhood” treatment of a “common theme which has been a thousand times worn threadbare in different books” whilst also affirming its sincerity and earnestness, so as not to betray his friend as a deceitful author: “he was too conscientious to deceive even in jest.”⁵⁴ These issues of fidelity to the friend, of textual legacies for which one is responsible though not the author of, set against the necessity of speaking for or *as* the friend will be returned to in relation to Derrida’s writing on Paul de Man. *Montaigne*, having been bequeathed la Boétie’s unpublished papers as well as his library, was in the position to substitute twenty nine sonnets by his friend for the controversial essay, and so the gesture of incorporation was made in any case.

We can see, in Montaigne’s description of his own writings as “monstrous bodies” composed of several parts, a continuity with the themes of the essay on education. Indeed, *The Voluntary Servitude* is mentioned in that essay, as an example of the ways in which past authors can be usefully interpreted.⁵⁵ If the gesture of making la Boétie’s writing the centrepiece of the *Essays* seems to fall within the kind of deferential citation, symptomatic of a lack of independent judgement, that Montaigne condemned, we find

that the rest of *On Friendship* is, in fact, concerned precisely with establishing an entirely different paradigm for the relationship between the two men. This establishment of *friendship* as a paradigm revalues practices of textual quotation / appropriation / incorporation as forms of interpersonal relation. The bonds of duty that arise from friendship, and their conflicts with other duties, are treated extensively by Montaigne — once again through the prism of Classical precedent, to which he defers. But also clearly at stake is Montaigne's responsibility towards la Boétie as the surviving friend, writing in the wake of the other. This includes a responsibility for the dissemination of his work, which has become Montaigne's property, and *On Friendship* can be read as an aesthetic response to the ethics of a friendship in mourning.

The importance of *The Voluntary Servitude* in relation to these themes, and therefore of its proposed inclusion in the *Essays*, is emphasised by Montaigne, who stresses the scarcity of la Boétie's textual traces, and gives *The Voluntary Servitude* an extra interpersonal significance

“because it was the means of our first acquaintance. For it was shown to me a long time before I met him, and gave me my first knowledge of his name, thus preparing the way for that friendship which we preserved as long as God willed, a friendship so complete and perfect that its like has seldom been read of, and nothing comparable is to be seen among the men of our day.”⁵⁶

la Boétie's writing, then, brackets the friendship; it both pre-empts and outlasts its "real" interpersonal instance. *The Voluntary Servitude* substitutes for the absent friend, just as Montaigne conceives of his own writings are substitutes for *his* person.⁵⁷ Note here that the text becomes the privileged locus of both friendship's existence and its memorialization – "its like has seldom been *read* of" – and that the friendship seems to either exist outwith "our day" – like a Classical text perhaps – or to mark a transition to a new contemporary age, characterised as that in which Montaigne finds himself *after* the "perfect" friendship. Both friendship and its writing seem to take place outside of time.

Having introduced the idea of the (almost) incomparable friendship between himself and la Boétie, Montaigne turns to the task of defining this "perfect" relationship in distinction from other common, and lesser, interpretations of the term "friendship." Although friendship, in the elevated sense Montaigne wishes to give it, is in one sense a social achievement (thus, "of a perfect society friendship is the peak") most of the definition depends on the exclusion of forms of social obligation. Friendship must be free of motivations other than "friendship itself" – in fact, the mixing of other interests makes relationships "so much the less *friendships*."⁵⁸ Having made friendship self-identical by definition, Montaigne seems obliged to define it negatively, to keep it free of contamination, and to delineate it more clearly than this first attempt achieves. In doing so, Montaigne argues that a child could not be friends with its father, as too great a disparity in age and status precludes the free exchange by which true friendship is sustained: paternal authority could not be properly challenged by a child, and such challenges, in the form of "admonitions and reproofs" are "one of the first duties of

friendship.”⁵⁹ Nor is brotherhood any more amenable to friendship – Montaigne quotes Plutarch’s interlocutor: “I do not value him any more highly for having come out of the same hole.”⁶⁰ Of course, Montaigne notes, the *name* of “brother” is to be esteemed, but when it is applied metaphorically to friendship rather than imposed on us by actual kinship. The disparities and rivalries which are an inevitable part of familial relations are excluded from friendship, as is marriage as “continuance in it being constrained and compulsory.”⁶¹ Friendship occurs in the unconstrained exercise of free-will or it doesn’t deserve the name.

Nor, despite suggestions to the contrary detectable in Montaigne’s tone, is sexual attraction compatible with friendship. The affection for women may be “more active, hotter and fiercer” but it is “changeable,” “fickle”: in other words, Montaigne attributes to the desire for women the attributes usually taken to characterise women themselves and, in contrast, he finds in friendship “a general and universal warmth, temperate, moreover, and uniform, a constant and settled warmth, all gentleness and smoothness, with no roughness or sting about it. What is more, in sexual love there is only a frantic desire for what eludes us.”⁶² Unlike sexual desire, friendship is strengthened not weakened by its enjoyment – its economy is quite different, and does not depend on the elusive. Montaigne acknowledges that both himself and la Boétie were occasionally seized by “those fleeting affections” but that the higher passion pursued its course “on proud and lofty wing, and looking disdainfully down on the other as it pursues its way far below.”⁶³ It seems, then, that while sexual love (for women) cannot turn to friendship or participate in it, friendship (between men) can incorporate sexual attraction or “affection”

and as men are uniquely capable of bearing the intensity of feeling and responsibility proper to it.

It is not quite that sexual relations are incompatible with friendship, because Montaigne argues that a friendship that extended to the body as well as the soul would "be a fuller and more complete friendship."⁶⁴ What Montaigne terms "that alternative, permitted by the Greeks," which some of his remarks would seem to endorse, is in turn, however, excluded from friendship. Though Montaigne writes that "our morality rightly abhors it," homosexual relations are exempted for reasons of the economy, rather than the nature, of Greek sexual ethics and aesthetics.⁶⁵ The first reason given for this incompatibility is the disparity of age and station between lovers, which characterized the ideal relations between *erastes* and *eromenos*; as with paternalism too great a disparity precludes the reciprocity proper to friendship. Secondly, Greek erotics was based on youthful beauty; thus the desire of the older citizen for the loved youth is not based, as friendship should be, on knowing the mind of the other. All that might potentially compromise the disinterestedness of friendship, or disturb its harmony by asymmetric obligations (whether between father and son, or lover and loved in Greek sexual ethics), is excluded by Montaigne from the "perfect" form he praises in this essay.

Having defined friendship negatively, Montaigne attempts a more positive characterization. In the highest form of friendship the two "mix and blend one into the other in so perfect a union that the seam which has joined them is effaced and disappears. If I were pressed to say why I love him, I feel that my only reply could be: 'Because it

was he, because it was I'."⁶⁶ Friendship, then, has a paradoxical character, insofar as it is both a result of the contingent particularities of each partner, but also produces their dissolution:

"Such a friendship has no model but itself, and can only be compared to itself. It was not one special consideration, nor two, nor three, nor four, not a thousand; it was some mysterious quintessence of all this mixture which possessed itself of my will, and led it to plunge and lose itself in his; which possessed itself of his whole will, and led it with a similar hunger and a like impulse, to plunge and lose itself in mine. I may truly say *lose*, for it left us with nothing that was our own, nothing that was either his or mine."⁶⁷

The issue of textual propriety/property that arises from Montaigne's publication of la Boétie's work amongst his own is given a twist by the characterization of the friendship between them: if nothing of theirs could be said to be solely owned, how are we to understand Montaigne's use of la Boétie's texts? The ethic of appropriation outlined in *On the Education of Children*, where citation is acceptable when it takes another's text only to affirm it as one's own, and remains unconstrained by over-deference, is here taken further. For now it is no longer a question of the other's words becoming the vehicle of one's own opinions, but of the dissolution of self and other to the point where individual identification becomes impossible. One's words may not be one's own.

Such a loss of self is, as we have seen, part of the motive force driving the “delirium of praise.” It is also problematic with regard to the ethical obligation to the friend, the injunction not to betray them: what if one doesn’t know what one is saying? For Montaigne “the secret that I have sworn to reveal to no other, I may without perjury communicate to him who is not another – but is myself.”⁶⁸ It is precisely in terms of perjury that Jacques Derrida has explored his own obligation of fidelity to his friend Paul de Man, an obligation that he reads through Montaigne’s claim in ‘On the Education of Children’ that “who follows another follows nothing. He finds nothing, and indeed is seeking nothing.”⁶⁹ In a paradox analogous to those that proliferate in laudatory exchange, Derrida argues that to follow *too* faithfully is a betrayal. Using the etymological relation of *acolyte* (he who follows) to *anacoluthon* (the rhetorical figure of what grammatically – does not follow) Derrida argues that these two figures can’t be opposed, that “in order to follow in a consistent way, to be true to what you follow, you have to interrupt the following.”⁷⁰ This is a figure for Derrida’s own ethics of reading and writing, which involves close following of texts, a reiteration of them that allows, as much as possible, the text to speak in its own (spectral) voice, but also a deconstructive “displacement” that introduces something new. For Derrida “displacing is the only way to pay homage, to do justice. If I just repeat, if I interpret ‘following’ as just repetition ... just repeating, not animating, it’s another way of betraying.”⁷¹ It was according to the logic of ‘doing justice to’ that Derrida wrote his tribute to Foucault after the latter’s death, reopening a debate on the writing of madness that had led to their estrangement.⁷² But rather than reiterating the confrontation between Foucault and Derrida here, it is more advisable to try to animate it by introducing something new. To use Derrida to

elucidate Foucault might seem a betrayal of the latter given his antipathy to deconstruction's particular form of emphasis on textuality, but it is a move that might also instantiate the kind of faithful breaking that Derrida figures as *anacoluthon*.⁷³ It is with this in mind that I review the argument of Derrida's extraordinarily rich essay on de Man, '“Le Parjure,” *Perhaps*: Storytelling and Lying.'

This essay is itself part of network of sociality amongst a textual community insofar it was written for Hillis Miller (a close friend and deconstructive accomplice of de Man and Derrida), and also continues Derrida's series of texts on de Man after his death in 1983, which were given a new urgency with the revelation (in 1987) of de Man's collaborationist journalism in World War II Belgium. '“Le Parjure,” *Perhaps*' turns on a work of fiction that may be factual and a fact that may be a fiction. The openly fictional work is Henri Thomas's novel *Le Parjure* and the fact that *might* be a fiction is a remark that Derrida claims de Man made to him: "If you want to know a part of my life, read 'Hölderlin en Amérique'," – the story reprinted as the novel *Le Parjure*.⁷⁴ This novel tells the story of Stéphane Chalié, a figure clearly based on de Man, who leaves Belgium promising to write a work entitled 'Hölderlin in America,' and whilst working at an American university is discovered to have perjured himself in making a second marriage whilst failing to declare a first. In Derrida's reading, the double figure of *le parjure* as naming (in French) *both* "perjury" and "perjurer" (and, of course, the name of the novel itself) is only one of a series of uncanny doublings and uncertainties that pervade the text. Not the least of these is the doubling of Stéphane's flight from Europe to America, and the secret that comes to catch him up, by de Man's own secret past and its (posthumous)

discovery. Other such doublings or complications of identification arising in and around the text include: 'Hölderlin in America' (the story Stéphane promises to write), which is also 'Hölderlin en Amérique' (the story Henri Thomas *did* write), and de Man's own work on Hölderlin, carried out in America. Emergent from these complications is the crucial identification of the character of the "narrator-witness" with the perjurer. And, just as the narrator-witness of *Le Parjure* has a responsibility to his friend Stéphane, and ends up having to try to write a "report-confession" for him, *as him*, so Derrida found himself in 1987 in the position of having to speak for de Man's past.⁷⁵

Not only de Man's reputation, but also that of deconstruction as an interpretative practice, was at stake in the debate surrounding his war-time journalism. As Derrida notes in "Le Parjure," *Perhaps*, de Man's own brilliant deconstructive reading of Rousseau sought to establish the impossibility of confession – a claim that appeared post-1987 to be a self-exculpatory gesture in itself.⁷⁶ Derrida's own response has been critiqued as exemplifying "deconstruction's inability to come to terms with the ethical dimension of interpretation."⁷⁷ Rather than an evacuation of the ethical, in fact, we find in Derrida's reading of a case of perjury in fiction a strong assertion of ethical responsibility. This responsibility is not, however, grounded in the surety of the "I" but a consequence of its non self-sameness. This is figured in *Le Parjure*, and Derrida's reading, where it is repeated over and over, by the response of Stéphane when asked how he could have perjured himself in "a little lapse of memory" on the day of his second wedding: "Just imagine, I was not thinking about it." For Derrida such a lapse is internal to the possibility of thinking, just as the possibility of perjury is internal to the structure of the

promise. "If there is no thinking without the risk of forgetting ... then what is called thinking? And forgetting? What is called not thinking?"⁷⁸ If, as Derrida suggests, it would be "inhuman and indecent" to ask the subject to answer for *all* its ethical obligations continuously, as though nothing was forgotten and the subject remained always unchanged, how does the ethical figure? For the "the sublating negation of time is the very essence of fidelity, of the oath, and of sworn faith," but who can promise not to be effected by time, not to change?⁷⁹ What if "I am another, *I* is another"? This is indeed the case, but it is not, in Derrida's view, a justified grounds for the abnegation of ethical responsibility.

It is in the *anacoluthon* that Derrida finds a figure both for the effects in the text and his engagement with it. For, like the narrator-witness of the novel, his reading (of Thomas, de Man, Miller) turns into an ethical *act*: the requirement to speak in the place of the other, to make an impossible confession. Thus Derrida's insistence on the non-consistency of the self is figured through an unavoidable act of fidelity to the friend. In other words, just as the narrator-witness takes on the role of making what is an account of someone else's perjurious lapse, so Derrida insists on the necessity of signing for one's own acts even in the absence of a permanent lucidity that would make them the acts of a self-same subject. But there is a further twist, because Derrida also argues that this following, which is the prerogative of the *acolyte* must itself culminate in a breaking off, an *anacoluthon*. This is the point (in a deconstructive reading) where fidelity to the text and its internal logic produces a difference, and it is here, Derrida states that he takes responsibility with what he terms a "counter-signature ... which both confirms the first

signature ... and is nevertheless opposed to it; and in any case it's new, it's my *own* signature."⁸⁰ The lesson Derrida derives from *Le Parjure* is that perjury and fidelity, betrayal and faithfulness are not to be opposed, but thought together. And we should also note that the "real" referent of this lesson – Paul de Man – as well as the author who both betrayed and was faithful to him in writing a novel that revealed a his part of his life, and Derrida himself, constantly change places in an argument that itself is faithful to *Le Parjure* but makes it also say something else. Derrida, de Man, Stéphane, the narrator witness, Hillis Miller, all seem to haunt each other in Derrida's text. As Derrida himself put it:

"the narrator, as a narrator, is a survivor; because, when you tell a story, especially when you sign a confession, you already write something which might in principle survive. The story, and the true subject of the story – and the book now, because the two men are dead – is a survivor. It is a ghost story in a certain way. When I say this I am speaking as the ghost of Paul de Man, as the ghost of Henri Thomas."⁸¹

Thus we have not only the identification of one author with (the ghosts of) others, but also the identification of the author-narrator with the body of their text. This, as already noted, was Montaigne's conception of the *Essays*, and as well as echoing him, Derrida echoes de Man's own 'Montaigne and 'Transcendence.' In this text de Man reads Montaigne as writing so entirely in the present: the "past collapses straightaway into

oblivion," and if Montaigne doesn't try to maintain consistency with his past ideas this is because "literally, he has forgotten them."⁸² Further, in de Man's reading, "his book is actually written from the point of view of Death – of a man who is already dead."⁸³ Perhaps it is in recognition of this series of identifications that Derrida so often wrote *as if he were a ghost already*. There is a profound poignancy in reading such writing now, *after* him. There is also an obligation to read him through this excessive process of identifications that blurs the lines between fiction and reality, presence and absence, the personal and the communal, the other in the self, the other *as* the self. This aesthetic blurring or undecidability is not, as we have seen with the notion of the "counter-signature," the evacuation of the ethical – a point expanded by Hillis Miller.

In a lucid exposition in *The Ethics of Reading*, Miller (to whom, remember, Derrida's *Parjure* is addressed), strongly refutes the charge that deconstruction is a relativism that falsely endorses any and all uses or interpretations of a text. In fact, the ethical moment proper to reading tends in precisely the opposite direction. In terminology which Derrida follows closely in addressing himself to de Man (and Miller), Miller writes that this moment is one "in which there is a response to the text that is both, necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my response and for the further effect, "inter-personal," institutional, social, political, or historical, of my act of reading."⁸⁴ This is, in other words, a Kantian ethics in which freedom takes the form of a "You Must!"⁸⁵ Further, the ethics of reading are not only a matter of literary scholarship: they inflect reading across philosophy, politics and history too, so that the literary tropes accompanying these discourses (on the

inside, as it were; like a lining) are “in some way a cause and not merely an effect.”⁸⁶

Deconstruction, then, makes an injunction or “irresistible demand” of its own: to treat textual form as a cause and thus let it work in/on the critique that addresses it.

Derrida offered an intriguing self-description to the effect that he was a person “dying to be unfaithful in a spirit of fidelity.”⁸⁷ The many possible ways of reading such a statement, which condenses many themes of friendship and the ethics of reading, again indicates the complexity which accompanies the anacoluthonic form, and again corresponds to an incessant demand. For Derrida goes on to say that he is an “heir” who:

“came to think that, far from the secure comfort that we rather too quickly associate with this word, the heir must always respond to a sort of double injunction, a contradictory assignation: It is necessary first of all to know and to know how to *reaffirm* what comes “before us,” which we receive even before choosing, and to behave in this respect as a free subject ... it is necessary to do everything to appropriate a past even though we know that it remains fundamentally inappropriable, whether as a question of philosophical memory or the precedence of a language, a culture, and a filiation in general. What does it mean to reaffirm? It means not simply accepting this heritage but relaunching it otherwise and keeping it alive.”⁸⁸

We cannot choose it, but we can choose to keep it alive. Here the problematic which itself animated the first two chapters of this thesis returns in a different aspect. The two

scenes, of the possible animation(s) of museal art and the animation of a philosophical tradition should in fact be superimposed. To risk a rather presumptuous conclusion, the first may depend on the second; and in art theory they may be mutually implied; spectral thinking to accompany spectral aesthetics... The advantage of Derrida's formulation, and what it adds to the outcome of the extended interpretation of *The Distance (a kiss with string attached)*, is that it avoids the two false solutions to the problem of unthought; it neither avows remainder-less reflexive choice nor negates all agency in an utterly non-accessible Real. Rather it counter-signs for both what it has to follow, and what it can break with, returning responsibility to a subject that is not presumed to be self-identical but is assumed to be ethical. With this formulation in mind, I turn now to Foucault's own anacoluthonic relationship to Nietzsche.

Nowadays I prefer to remain silent about Nietzsche. When I was teaching philosophy I often used to lecture on Nietzsche, but I wouldn't do that anymore today. If I wanted to be pretentious, I would use 'the genealogy of morals' as the general title of what I am doing. ... Nietzsche's contemporary presence is increasingly important. But I am tired of people studying him only to produce the same kind of commentaries that are written on Hegel or Mallarmé. For myself, I prefer to utilise the writer I like. The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to inform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest.

Michel Foucault, 'Prison Talk.'

"My kind of "pity." – This is a feeling for which I find no name adequate: I sense it when I see precious capabilities squandered, e.g. , at the sight of Luther: what force and what insipid backwoodsman problems! (at a time when in France the bold and light-hearted skepticism of a Montaigne was already possible!) Or when I see anyone halted, as a result of some stupid accident, at something less than he might have become. Or especially at the idea of the lot of mankind, as when I observe with anguish and contempt the politics of present-day Europe, which is, under all circumstances, also working at the

web of the future of all men. Yes, what could not become of "man" if—! This is a kind of "compassion" although there is really no "passion" I share.

Nietzsche, *Will to Power*: 367 (1885)

I cared by style and tendency,

you follow and come after me?

Follow your own self faithfully -

take time - and thus you follow me.

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*.

Perhaps the most common shared point of reference and site of affiliation for the authors whom Foucault praised, and was praised by in turn, was Nietzsche. From Klossowski's 1969 *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, to Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* of 1961, to Bataille's *On Nietzsche* of 1945, the post-war philosophical landscape in France was in large part shaped by a use of Nietzschean ideas to attempt a break with both the Cartesian subject and the distinction between literature and philosophy as *forms*.⁸⁹ The centrality of Nietzsche's thought for Foucault in particular is evidenced not only in the implicit taking up of Nietzschean themes -- most noticeably with *Discipline and Punish*, which can be read as a historical extension of *The Genealogy of Morals*, and Volume One of *The History of Sexuality* (entitled *The Will to Knowledge* in "rather extravagant homage" to Nietzsche)⁹⁰ -- but also in the many references to him that occur in Foucault's discourse and in his dialogues. These references operate very much in the logic of the delirious encomium, and do so, significantly, at moments in Foucault where he is accounting for

the very possibility of his own project, and locating its origin. It is *these* moments that I address here, rather than pursuing a “deeper” analysis of Foucault’s Nietzscheanism. Such an approach, which concerns itself with the function of the word “Nietzsche” at the surface of Foucault’s texts is consonant with both his “opportunistic nominalism” and the Derridean ethics of reading figured by the *anacoluthon*, the following that breaks off, betrays, in order to be faithful. I will argue that Foucault’s textual relation to Nietzsche is anacoluthonic, but in a way which exploits tropes already established in this discussion, including the use of excess to invoke silence (and vice versa), as well as the erasure of difference between self and other that was for Montaigne the essence of friendship. One way to make the anacoluthonic break might be, I suggest, to push fidelity in the form of identification to its breaking point.

David Macey has attempted to retrace the moment of Foucault’s first engagement with Nietzsche. He deems it unlikely that this occurred during his student days; but it seems that he read the *Untimely Meditations* during the summer of 1953. Foucault drove to Rome with his friend Maurice Pinguet in August of that year, and whilst there, the latter recalls, Foucault would be constantly immersed in this text.⁹¹ The significance of Nietzsche to the orientation of Foucault’s initial theoretical project is registered in the unpublished “complementary thesis” (required by the Sorbonne’s doctoral regulations and submitted along with *Madness and Civilization*) which is an introduction to Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Here the question of Nietzsche’s relation to Kant is raised in terms that will reappear in *The Order of Things*:

“Nietzsche’s undertaking might be understood as finally putting an end to questions about man. Is not the death of God in effect manifest in a doubly murderous gesture which, by putting an end to the absolute, is at the same time the murder of man himself? ... Is it not possible to conceive of a critique of finitude which would be liberating with respect to both man and the infinite, and which would show that finitude is not an end, but that curve and knot of time in which the end is beginning? The trajectory of the question *Was ist der Mensch?* through the field of philosophy ends in the answer which challenges and disarms it: *de Übermensch*.”⁹²

In discussions of his own intellectual trajectory Foucault frequently asserts the role of Nietzsche as that of making possible a break with the hegemonic French versions of “anthropology”; that is, phenomenology, French Hegelianism (including Marxism) and existentialism. Crucially, in these statements Nietzsche appears both utterly singular – *the* figure responsible for implanting in Foucault the “desire of doing personal work,”⁹³ – and part of a series of figures who together establish the possibility of the anonymous discourse beyond Man. Hence, it is via Bataille and Blanchot, but also through Bachelard and Canguilhem that Foucault gets to Nietzsche.⁹⁴ It is perhaps one of the key features of Foucault’s *nomination* of Nietzsche as the origin of his own works that it frequently occurs in association with other names. Thus in *Madness and Civilization* we have sentences like: “the life of unreason no longer manifests itself except in the lightning-flash of works such as those of Hölderlin, of Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud”;⁹⁵ and evocations of the “madness of Nietzsche, the madness of Van Gogh or of Artaud.”⁹⁶ In

The Order of Things: “we are led back to the place that Nietzsche and Mallarmé signposted when the first asked: Who speaks?, and the second saw his glittering answer in the Word itself”,⁹⁷ in a discussion of ‘The Cogito and the Unthought’ and thought as perilous act, we have: “Sade, Nietzsche, Artaud, and Bataille have understood this on behalf of all those who tried to ignore it”.⁹⁸ In ‘The Retreat and Return of the Origin’ a path passing from “Hegel to Marx and Spengler” is opposed to that of “Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.”⁹⁹ Thus Foucault introduces a lineage that helps him break from a lineage; as he does when he suggests that his interest in “people like Georges Bataille, Friedrich Nietzsche, Maurice Blanchot, and Pierre Klossowski, who were not philosophers in the institutional sense of the term” resulted from the fact that “their problem was not the construction of a system, but a construction of a personal experience. At the university, by contrast, I had been trained, educated, driven to master those great philosophical machines called Hegelianism, phenomenology.”¹⁰⁰ The very possibility of Foucault’s project as a historically-based, nonsystematic form of thought – that is, as *genealogy* – is thus linked to the break with philosophy achieved in experiences which function as a “wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution.”¹⁰¹ This notion of experience extends to Foucault’s sense of his own textual practice: “however erudite my books may be, I’ve always conceived of them as direct experiences aimed at pulling myself free of myself, at preventing me from being the same.”¹⁰² Nietzsche is here one figure amongst several credited with establishing this possibility, but he is also posited as the origin of such experience, for those others and, ultimately, for Foucault. Nietzsche is, as we shall see, posited as the origin of thinking against the origin.

Indeed, it is conspicuously the case that Nietzsche is given total priority in the possible end of Man when, at the conclusion of *The Order of Things*, Foucault evokes the possibility of a new dawn. He writes that “it will be said that Hölderlin, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx all felt this certainty that in them a thought and perhaps a culture were coming to a close, and that from the depths of the distance, which was perhaps not invincible, another was approaching.”¹⁰³ However, Foucault interjects, “this close, this perilous imminence whose promise we fear today, whose danger we welcome, is probably not of the same order”; and it is Nietzsche, again, who is credited with responsibility for the contemporary possibility of thought. It is Nietzsche who, in “offering this future to us as both promise and task, marks the threshold beyond which contemporary philosophy can begin thinking again.”¹⁰⁴ In phrasing that, in its reprise of his supplementary thesis, demonstrates the continuity of Foucault’s thinking of Nietzsche’s historical role, he claims that “rather than the death of God – or, rather, in the wake of that death and in a profound correlation with it – what Nietzsche’s thought heralds is the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man’s face in laughter, and the return of masks.”¹⁰⁵ Such a claim resonates with Nietzsche’s own interest in the mask as a figure, and also provides a form for Foucault’s own laudatory essay on Deleuze, ‘*Theatrum Philosophicum*.’ In an extraordinary passage Foucault moves from a discussion of Nietzsche as thinker of the sign and “Eternal Return” to a crediting of *Deleuze* with the opening anew of the space of thought. Foucault writes: “from an always-nomadic and anarchic difference to the unavoidably excessive and displaced sign of recurrence, a lightning storm was produced which will bear the name of Deleuze:

new thought is possible; thought is again possible.”¹⁰⁶ This (excessive) praise is quickly followed by a repetition of the terms in which Nietzsche’s importance is framed in *The Order of Things*. I quote at length to give the full effect of this passage, which locates in Deleuze a resurgence of philosophy and figures this in multiple forms:

“genital thought, intensive thought, affirmative thought, acategorical thought -- each of these an unrecognizable face, a mask we have never seen before; differences we had no reason to expect but which nevertheless lead to the return, as masks of their masks, of Plato, Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and all other philosophers. This is philosophy not as thought but as theater -- a theater of mime with multiple, fugitive, and instantaneous scenes in which blind gestures signal to each other. This is the theater where the laughter of the Sophist bursts out from under the mask of Socrates; where Spinoza’s modes conduct a wild dance in a decentered circle while substance revolves about it like a mad planet; where a limping Fichte announces “the fractured I // the dissolved self”; where Leibniz, having reached the top of the pyramid, can see through the darkness that celestial music is in fact a *Pierrot lunaire*. In the sentry box of the Luxembourg Gardens, Duns Scotus places his head through the circular window; he is sporting an impressive moustache; it belongs to Nietzsche, disguised as Klossowski.”¹⁰⁷

This evocation of a masked (or perhaps more accurately hallucinatory, spectral) “community” of thinkers is not only a matter of retracing an intellectual lineage, but is a *form* in which Foucault frequently presents Nietzsche. In the last interview given before his death Foucault suggested that it was indeed in *combination* that Nietzsche had become singularly important to him. Foucault moved from reading Heidegger in 1951-52, to Nietzsche in 1953. Whereas, Foucault states, Nietzsche “by himself” said nothing to him, “Nietzsche and Heidegger – that was the philosophical shock.”¹⁰⁸ Yet when it comes to characterising the development of his own project shortly after this remark Foucault asserts “I am simply a Nietzschean, and I try ... to see with the help of Nietzsche’s texts – but also with anti-Nietzschean theses (which are nonetheless Nietzschean!) ... what can be done in this or that domain.”¹⁰⁹ It doesn’t seem that there is any question of a “simple” Nietzscheanism if it, of necessity, involves the combination of Nietzsche’s thought with that of others. Further, to return again to the dynamics of laudatory exchange, there is a complex relationship at work in the tension between *being* Nietzschean and discoursing on this theme. For Foucault also notes that he has written little on either of his two main influences, and argues that “it’s important to have a small number of authors with whom one thinks, with whom one works, but on whom one doesn’t write. Perhaps some day I’ll write about them, but at that point they’ll no longer be instruments of thought for me.”¹¹⁰ What should would-be exegetes of Foucault make of such a statement? It both holds out the promise of a kind of textual unconscious to be mined, and suggests that the very form of writing that would reveal this would in itself be undermining of the usefulness of thought. Could one write “on” Foucault and think with him, use him as an instrument of thought?

Foucault's presentation of his Nietzscheanism is emblematic of a series of linked problems which I will raise here: what does Foucault's notion of the originary role of Nietzsche amount to?; in what ways is it amenable to analysis?; what does it mean to say "I am simply a Nietzschean"?; can one agree with Foucault that "it's important to have a small number of authors with whom one thinks, with whom one works, but on whom one doesn't write," while at the same time writing on him?; finally, and inextricably linked with the other questions raised here, what is the meaning (that is, the *effect*) of Foucault's evocation of Nietzsche? Rather than attempt a "deep" analysis of Foucault's fundamental Nietzscheanism, I will follow the simple traces of his evocations, the appearances of "Nietzsche" in his texts, and in so doing attempt to think through some implications of its *style* as a gesture.

In *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, Alan Schrift suggests that the extraordinary renewal of interest in Nietzsche's work that took place in French philosophical circles during the 1960s and 1970s was sparked by two publications; Heidegger's two-volume *Nietzsche* and Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* both published in 1961.¹¹¹ These two books established to a large extent the particular direction that Nietzsche interpretation was to take in France: crudely, one could characterise this by saying that Heidegger's thinking of "will to power" as the last stage in the metaphysical forgetting of the "Being of beings" was largely reacted against, whilst Deleuze's emphasis on Nietzsche as the thinker of multiplicity and difference was mostly affirmed. By the 1980s and 1990s, the Nietzschean strain of thought in French

philosophy, having become itself a hegemonic form, was rejected by a subsequent generation as a break from the politically and epistemologically serious legacy of critical thought. This position is articulated in Vincent Descombes' philosophical survey *Modern French Philosophy* and in the essays collected in *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*, edited by Luc Ferry and Alain Renault. The very title of the latter work, part of an ongoing attempt by its authors to put the Nietzschean philosophers of the 1960s *in their place* (in both senses), is indicative of the importance of taking one's distance from Nietzsche as a gesture of superseding the generation of Foucault and Deleuze.

Two colloquia punctuate the period of intense Nietzscheanism in France: firstly, the Royaumont colloquium on Nietzsche, held 4th – 8th July 1964, at which Deleuze, Foucault, Gianni Vattimo, Jean Wahl, Karl Löwith, and Pierre Klossowski (among others) gave papers. Also present were Giorgio Colli and Massimo Montinari who reported on progress towards a full edition of collected works of Nietzsche. (Foucault and Deleuze, who each praised the other in their papers, were to oversee the production of a French edition of the collected works, publication of which began in 1967 with Klossowski's translation of *The Gay Science* and was completed 1990 with a new translation of *Untimely Meditations*).¹¹² The second conference took place at Cerisy-la-Salle in July 1972, and saw papers presented by several of the protagonists of Royaumont (including Deleuze, Klossowski, and Löwith), as well as contributions from Derrida, Sarah Kofman, and Jean-François Lyotard. The proceedings of both conferences were published, joining the large volume of works explicitly addressing Nietzsche produced in France during the period 1960-1980. The title of the Cerisy conference, *Nietzsche*

aujourd' hui is particularly interesting, as it signals the sense in which Nietzsche seemed, in 1972 at least, to be essential to any concept of "philosophy today," rather than a historically remote figure.

Foucault's paper at Royaumont, later published as 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' took as its subject the techniques of interpretation to be found in these three "masters of suspicion." Behind his analysis of this theme, Foucault stated, was what he termed the "dream" of a possible encyclopaedia of interpretative techniques, which are argued to be characteristic of an epoch. Foucault starts his discussion with the postulate that language has, at least in Indo-European cultures, always aroused two modes of suspicion: firstly, that language "does not mean exactly what it says. The meaning that one grasps, and that is immediately manifest, is perhaps in reality only a lesser meaning that protects, confines, and yet in spite of everything transmits another meaning, the latter being at once the stronger meaning and the "underlying" meaning."¹³ The second suspicion Foucault identifies is the notion that language might exceed verbal form, that there might be other non-linguistic signs in the world – in nature, animals and so on. We shall see that neither of these suspicions are adequate to Foucault's conception of the modern interpretive *techné*, though the place given to allegory will be of significance.

If these suspicions are already apparent with the Greeks, Foucault argues, they have not yet disappeared, and indeed take on a new force and urgency from the nineteenth century, since we believe "that mute gestures, that illnesses, that all that tumult around us can speak; and more than ever we are listening in on all this possible language, trying to

intercept, beneath the words, a discourse that would be more essential.”¹¹⁴ Each Western culture has had its own system / technique / method of interpretation – “its own ways of suspecting that language means something other than what it says, and of suspecting that there is language other than language.”¹¹⁵ To throw light on nineteenth century interpretation – in which, Foucault says, we remain implicated – we require a “remote reference point” to allow us to recognise its particularities in contrast to a counter-example. Foucault uses the interpretative structures of the 16th century for this purpose. In a passage that is clearly recognizable as a version of the historical analysis elaborated in far greater detail in ‘The Prose of the World’ (the second chapter of *The Order of Things*) Foucault summarizes the reliance of 16th century interpretation on the principle of *resemblance*, which provided its possibility and locus. When two things resembled each other “something wanted to be said and could be deciphered.”¹¹⁶

In *The Order of Things* one of Foucault’s reference points for the epistemological operation of *resemblance* is Montaigne. In his essay ‘On Experience,’ Montaigne evokes the infinite regress of the dictionary definition as a metaphor for the endlessness of interpreting texts:

“A stone is a body. But if you press the point: And what is a body? – A substance. And what is a substance? and so on; you will end by driving the answerer to exhaust his dictionary. One substitutes one word for another that is often less well understood. I know what Man is better than I

know the meaning of Animal or Mortal or Rational. To resolve one doubt, they present me with three; it is the Hydra's head."¹¹⁷

Montaigne is concerned in this essay with two subjects in particular – law and habit. Conceiving of the world as multifarious and particular by definition, Montaigne sees any law as necessarily arbitrary in its application, unable to respond to the specificity of events. And, if no number of laws could ever comprehend the infinity of cases, interpretation will always be necessary. Even if a supposedly fixed reference point is taken, conflict of interpretations ensues: “those men who think they can lessen and check our disputes by referring us to the actual words of the Bible are deluding themselves, since our mind finds just as wide a field for controverting other men's meanings as for delivering its own. Could there be less spite and bitterness in comment than in invention?”¹¹⁸ This problem of the endlessness of interpretation and counter-interpretation is not limited to biblical texts, but applies to all that become subject for commentary. “The hundredth commentator passes it on to his successor in a thornier and more crabbed state than that in which he first discovered it. When did we ever agree in saying: ‘This book has had enough. There is nothing more to say about it?’”¹¹⁹ It is on this infinity at work in interpretation that Foucault cites Montaigne as evidence of the sixteenth-century *episteme*:

“There is more trouble in interpreting interpretations than in interpreting the things themselves, and there are more books about books than on any other subject; we do nothing but write comments on one another.... Is not

the principle and most famous branch of modern learning to understand the learned? Is this not the common and final purpose of all our studies? Our opinions are grafted one on another.”¹²⁰

Foucault presents us with an analysis of how words and things intersected in the sixteenth century to produce an epistemology. Montaigne’s statement is taken as an example of how in this epistemology “Language contains its own inner principle of proliferation.”¹²¹ *Resemblance*, the organizing principle of sixteenth-century knowledge, had four key figures: *convenientia*; *aemulatio*; *analogy*; and *sympathy*. These figures describe the way the world is self-identical thanks to different, but interdependent, relationships of resemblance. But for man to understand the meanings of these resemblances a secondary level of resemblance, that of signs, or rather signatures, is necessary. Foucault gives the following example: the sixteenth-century perceived a “sympathy” between aconite and the eye, the grounds of this perception themselves lying in the visible resemblance found in a “signature on the plant, some mark, some word, as it were, telling us that it is good for diseases of the eye.”¹²² This signature is the resemblance of aconite seeds to eyes.

Resemblance is only knowable through the deciphering of such signs, which themselves take the form of resemblances adjacent to that which is signalled. If we call “hermeneutics” the knowledge that makes signs speak, and “semiotics” the analysis of the laws that link them, then, Foucault argues, we can see that:

“the sixteenth century superimposed hermeneutics and semiology in the form of similitude. ... The nature of things, their coexistence, the way in which they are linked together and communicate is nothing other than their resemblance. And that resemblance is visible only in the network of signs that crosses the world from one end to the other.”¹²³

This ubiquity of resemblance as both mark and content means that, as Montaigne’s reference to the dictionary indicates, knowledge must be pursued infinitely, drawing its certainty only by a cumulative process that is never-ending. Hence, Foucault suggests, the sixteenth century’s propinquity for compilation, for the accumulation of the things and the signs that resembled one another. The sixteenth century *episteme* was, because of this, “plethoric yet absolutely poverty-stricken.”¹²⁴ Montaigne’s remarks that in his era the trouble lies in “interpreting interpretations” are not, for Foucault, “the statement of the bankruptcy of a culture buried beneath its own monuments” but rather an indication of “the inevitable relation that language maintained with itself in the sixteenth century.” In an order of things and signs based on similitude language can “accumulate to infinity ... no longer able to halt itself,” because it cannot close the play of resemblance.¹²⁵

But, Foucault states, commentary on resemblance proceeds on the assumption that beneath the surface of the text one interprets there is something essential, which one is failing to adequately know. The epistemological configuration of the sixteenth century was thus caught in the gap between the two precepts – the “primal Text” (i.e. the “word of God”) and the “infinity of Interpretation.”¹²⁶ The world is made up of signs and thus

discourse on them proliferates infinitely, but alongside, in fact underpinning this proliferation is the dream that such infinite interpretation might be brought to an end if access to the “primal written word” were possible.

In two interviews with Raymond Bellour that accompanied the publication of *The Order of Things*, Foucault was pressed on the dual role given to Nietzsche in that work; both exemplary of and *exempted from* the archaeological inquiry conducted there. Foucault responded by arguing that Nietzsche’s insight was that “the rediscovery of the dimension proper to language is incompatible with man.” It is the delirious, infinite dimension of language that Nietzsche points to – a dimension indicated in the *episteme* of *resemblance*, but subdued in sixteenth-century thought by the guarantee of the primal word. Nietzsche, as a figure in Foucault’s text, thus moves back to the configuration of knowledge that preceded the modern anthropological thought, and forward “prophetically” to what lies beyond such thought. He indicates “that where there is a sign, there man cannot be, and that where one makes signs speak, there man must fall silent.”¹²⁷ On the other hand, Foucault also stated that if *The Order of Things* were to be re-written, he “would try not to give Nietzsche that ambiguous, utterly privileged, metahistorical status I had the weakness to give him.”¹²⁸ In what follows I hope to show that Nietzsche does indeed enjoy an “utterly privileged” status in Foucault’s texts (here *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx* in particular). I will then show how he retains a vitally *ambiguous* place in Foucault’s *œuvre* - without which it would not be possible - as a non-originary origin, a non-foundational foundation. The “weakness” to which Foucault refers would be that of betraying

Nietzsche's insights in making him into the very figure of a philosophical master he wrote against.

'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' in its doubling of the chapter on resemblance in *The Order of Things*, but with the difference of an *explicit* Nietzschean dimension which is elided in the latter, raises the suspicion that the book, which makes its debt to Nietzsche exorbitantly, excessively clear in other places, is permeated by Nietzsche throughout, that is, even where his name is not inscribed. He is present as a ghost, as it were, at the origin of its thought. The question remains of the appropriate interpretative strategy by which to pursue this suspicion. In search of an answer I turn back to 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx.'

The interpretative techniques resulting from the organisation of the world as resemblance were suspended by the development of Western thought in the Classical age; but the thought of the nineteenth century, especially with Nietzsche, Marx and Freud has opened up a new possibility of interpretation Foucault argues. Nietzsche, Marx and Freud have, Foucault announces, "founded once again the possibility of a hermeneutic."¹²⁹ I underscore here *founded once again* – a phrase that alerts us to Foucault's reluctance to locate an absolute origin of what he terms hermeneutics, and note that while this re-founding of interpretative possibility is here attributed to all three of the "masters of suspicion," Foucault will end his essay by crediting it only to Nietzsche.

Foucault describes the works of Nietzsche, Freud and Marx as 'wounds' in Western thought, they possess a "shock effect" that he attributes to the "uncomfortable position"

of utilising techniques of interpretation which “concern us ourselves, since we, the interpreters, have begun to interpret ourselves by these techniques. With these techniques of interpretation, in turn, we must interrogate those interpreters who were Freud, Nietzsche and Marx, so that we are perpetually sent back in a perpetual play of mirrors.”¹³⁰ The evocation of an abyssal mirror-play puts us in mind of Foucault’s interpretation of *Las Meninas* and of the two, differently valued, modes of the infinite or labyrinthine that Foucault identifies; namely the infinite being of language as *délire* which undoes, destabilises, de-essentialises, transforms, and which is celebrated; and the infinite playing out of “Man and his Doubles,” which Foucault sees as formative of the object/subject of the human sciences and opposes. It is not yet clear, at this point in *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx* how Foucault is going to value the “uncomfortable” interpretation of the interpreter as an infinite task.

In a key passage, Foucault clarifies the nature of the transition he sees being made in interpretive techniques during the nineteenth century. Freud had seen his “discovery” of the unconscious as a third “narcissistic wound” in man’s self-image, after those made by Copernicus and Darwin, and Foucault suggests that Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx, constitute

“mirrors in which we are given back images whose perennial wounds form our narcissism today. ... [they] have not in some way multiplied the signs in the Western world. They have not given a new meaning to things that had no meaning. They have in reality changed the nature of the sign

and modified the fashion in which the sign in general can be interpreted....

Have not Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche profoundly modified the space of distribution in which signs can be signs?"¹³¹

On a minor point of style: at this point in the text the shifting order of priority of this triumvirate seems to be merely a question of good form, of avoiding excessive repetition, but finally, as we shall see, it is indeed a question of *priority* to be resolved in favour of Nietzsche. With Foucault's suggestion of a transformed functioning of the sign circa 1900 the usefulness of the comparison with the *episteme* of resemblance is now clear – it provides a vivid example of a different spatial organization of signs, and thus paves the way for Foucault's claim that interpretation is a historically variable function of the "nature" and "distribution" of signs, and thereby for his analysis of the historical contribution of the "masters of suspicion" to this function. In the sixteenth century signs were homogeneously disposed in a homogeneous space – "they referred from man to animal, from animal to plant, and reciprocally."¹³² From the nineteenth century signs were arranged in "depth" in a much more highly differentiated space. This "depth" is not that of interiority, but of exteriority. Foucault privileges Nietzsche in his exposition of this point. Nietzsche critiques the notion of interior depth as a philosophical invention, and his hermeneutic suspicion is directed at showing that that it is other than what it claims to be:

"Nietzsche shows how it implies resignation, hypocrisy, the mask; so that the interpreter must, when he examines signs in order to denounce them,

descend along the vertical line and show that this depth of interiority is in fact something other than what it says ... [W]hen one interprets one can trace this descending line only to restore the glittering exteriority that was covered up and buried. For if the interpreter must go to the bottom himself, like an excavator, the movement of interpretation is, on the contrary, that of a projection, of a more and more elevated projection, which always leaves depth above it to be displayed in a more and more visible fashion: and depth is now restored as an absolutely superficial secret...¹³³

This, Foucault says, is comparable to Marx's demonstration of the platitudinous operations of bourgeois ideology: Marx shows that the treasured and mysterious prevailing conceptions commodity, class, and so on, are in fact reifications of existing property relations. Turning to the third member of the triumvirate, Foucault describes Freud's space of interpretation as more than a topology of consciousness and the unconscious, but as involving also the rules of treatment and the practices of analysis itself, that is a discourse. At this stage, though each thinker has been treated independently, and their contributions to modern interpretation have been treated as equivalent and related, the remainder of 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx' takes a rather different turn.

Foucault moves from an analysis of Nietzsche, Freud and Marx's alteration of "the space of distribution in which signs can be signs" to his second theme: interpretation, with the

“masters of suspicion,” becomes “an infinite task.”¹³⁴ In contrast to the infinite relation of signs in the sixteenth century, that of the signs found by/in psychoanalysis, Marxism and Nietzsche appears “because there is irreducible gapping and openness”; an incompleteness of interpretation which appears “in the form of the refusal of beginning.”¹³⁵ I underscore this *refusal of beginning* as a key motif for Foucault’s essay, and my interpretation of it. Especially significant here is that Foucault’s way of “refusing beginning” is to pass it on to Nietzsche, who himself stands (in Foucault) for the refusal of beginning. It is this gesture itself that I am interested in – a gesture both Nietzschean, and a betrayal of Nietzsche; the first because, as Judith Butler shows in *The Psychic Life of Power*, this circular figure is precisely how Nietzsche proposes a non-originary description of the origin of the subject,¹³⁶ the second because it involves a speaking of, and deferral to, Nietzsche as origin.

It is also with these three, especially Nietzsche and Freud, that one sees another characteristic of modern hermeneutics: it seems that interpretation carried through as an infinite task might reach an “absolute point” which would be “a point of rupture.”¹³⁷ Here we have the reappearance of theme of the disappearance of man, undermined by the irruption of the infinite of language. Thus the question raised earlier as to how Foucault *values* the infinite character of interpretation begins to be answered – it takes its place alongside other apocalyptic signs of the transition to a post-humanist *episteme*. It remains however to evaluate the individual contributions of Nietzsche, Freud and Marx to this process.

Interpretation remains incomplete in Nietzsche: having announced the death of God, the external point of authority that guarantees univocal meaning in language, Nietzsche's own genealogical tracing of the "origins" of concepts and words can, by its own admission, never come to an end. Foucault links the thinking of this incompleteness, as he does in other discussions of labyrinthine language, to madness. Alan Schrift has identified the labyrinth as the basic metaphor for the *text* in Nietzsche, a metaphor used in relation to his own writings; for instance, *Zarathustra* is described in *Ecce Homo* as a "labyrinth of daring knowledge."¹³⁸ It is on account of the exacerbated labyrinthine quality of Nietzsche writings that he sees "strength, courage and a "predestination for the labyrinth" as the traits which his "rightful readers" must possess. This is to say, armed with the knowledge that a labyrinth can also be a goldmine, these readers will have both the courage to enter the textual labyrinth and the strength to commandeer what is to be found therein."¹³⁹ Foucault writes of the consequences of venturing into this labyrinth (which is his privileged figure for textuality also): "What is in question in the point of rupture of interpretation, in this convergence of interpretation on a point that renders it impossible, could well be something like the experience of madness."¹⁴⁰ Such an experience was at stake, albeit in different very ways, in both Nietzsche's and Freud's discourses, though it is clear in this essay, even more so when writings such as *Madness and Civilization* are taken into account, that it is Nietzsche who for Foucault pursues this interpretative delirium to its radical conclusion.

The incompleteness of interpretation leads to two further constitutive postulates of modern hermeneutics. The first is that as everything is already interpretation "there is

nothing to interpret." Here, again, although ideology and the symptom are "interpreted interpretations" it is Nietzsche who is privileged. We can assume, I think, that Foucault is drawing in his formulation of this point on division 481 of *The Will to Power* where Nietzsche asserts "Against positivism, which halts at phenomena – "There are only facts" – I would say: No, facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations."¹⁴¹ In a further Nietzschean twist to the formulation "there is nothing to interpret," Foucault adds that interpretation "does not clarify a matter to be interpreted, which offers itself passively; it can only seize, and violently, an already-present interpretation, which it must overthrow, upset, shatter with the blows of a hammer."¹⁴² It is in precisely these terms that Foucault expresses the affinity between Nietzsche and his own interpretative methodology: "when it comes to determining the system of discourse on the basis of which we still live, as soon as we are obliged to question the words that still resonate in our ears, that are mingled with those we are trying to speak, then archaeology, like Nietzschean philosophy, is forced to work with hammer blows."¹⁴³ In 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx' Foucault presents Nietzsche's specific contribution to the interpretation of interpretation in similar terms: "Nietzsche seizes interpretations that have already seized each other."¹⁴⁴ Here I underscore that (at least in my reading) this is the essence of what I have termed Foucault's own "opportunistic nominalism." As an example, Foucault cites Nietzsche's analysis of the etymology of *agathos* in the first treatise of *The Genealogy of Morals*. *Agathos* ("good," "noble," "brave") does not mean because it signifies a factual state of affairs, but because it is an idea of the nobility who have interpretive values based on their status. "This is what Nietzsche means when he says that words have always been

invented by the ruling classes; they do not denote a signified, they impose an interpretation." Interpretations are not secondary to signs.

Whereas for the sixteenth century the sign was benevolent – resemblance “simply proved the benevolence of God and separated the sign from the signifier by only a transparent veil” – with Nietzsche, Freud and Marx in the nineteenth century, the sign (which is preceded by interpretation) becomes malevolent.¹⁴⁵ This is the case with money (for Marx), symptoms (with Freud), and, in Nietzsche, is true of “words, justice, binary classifications of Good and Evil” which are “masks.”¹⁴⁶ This new function for signs of masking interpretations makes the sign itself the container of “negative concepts, of contradictions, of oppositions.”¹⁴⁷ The second constitutive postulate of modern hermeneutics identified by Foucault is that interpretation is *obligated* to carry itself on infinitely. This, in turn, has two consequences: firstly, interpretation becomes interpretation “by whom?” – one does not interrogate the signified but “who posed the interpretation,” because “the basis of interpretation is nothing but the interpreter.”¹⁴⁸ Obviously this is not to be taken as proposing the question of “who?” in the sense of a hermeneutic of the sovereign subject as source of its own representations, but as itself a nexus of violently imposed interpretations (capitalist, oedipal, Christian, etc. – “who?” is a question of *exteriority*, not of origins). Nietzsche’s interpretation of *agathos* could again serve as an example, where philology reveals the noble origin of the morality it participates in.¹⁴⁹ Secondly, “interpretation must always interpret itself and cannot fail to turn back on itself. In opposition to the time of signs, which is a time of definite terms, and in opposition to the time of the dialectic, which is linear in spite of everything, there

is a time of interpretation, which is circular.”¹⁵⁰ Thus interpretation is obliged to retrace its steps to reinterpret itself.

Foucault contrasts the “death” of interpretation -- the belief in signs as originary and coherent -- with its “life,” which is found in the Nietzschean assertion that there are, in fact, only interpretations. Foucault asserts that semiology and hermeneutics must be enemies, a historical lesson that many contemporaries forget, because semiology corresponds to belief in the coherent systematicity of signs, and thus

“abandons the violence, the incompleteness, the infinity of interpretations in order to enthrone the terror of the index or to suspect language. Here we recognize Marxism after Marx. On the contrary, a hermeneutic that wraps itself in itself enters the domain of languages which do not cease to implicate themselves, that intermediate region of madness and pure language. It is there that we recognize Nietzsche.”¹⁵¹

At the last we find that the rebirth of the possibility of hermeneutics, previously credited to the three “masters of suspicion,” is, for Foucault, really Nietzsche’s achievement.

It is not without significance that in Foucault’s last sentence Nietzsche is without “followers” -- there are not Nietzscheans in the same sense as there are Freudians and Marxists, something that seems part of Foucault’s positive valuation of his interpretative *techné*. At the last Marx is not on the “good” side of Foucault’s valuation of infinite

interpretation after all, and Freud is abandoned without a word. Interpretation in the sense of the “hermeneutic,” as opposed to the merely “semiological,” is to be credited solely to Nietzsche. Though Foucault’s argument here could certainly be read in the context of the competing analyses of the place of language in contemporary thought – especially, as his argument with Derrida over Descartes and the “evil genius” would prove, because Foucault resisted a *purely* linguistic account of historical phenomena – I am more interested in the game being played around the evocation (invocation) of Nietzsche. Foucault’s final comment about “Marxism after Marx” links up with his remarks in ‘What is an Author?’ about the break that occurs between the founders of a discourse and its followers. ‘Nietzsche, Freud and Marx’ also addresses much of the terrain of *The Order of Things* – not just in its discussion of resemblance, but also in the priority it gives to Nietzsche in relation to the notion of a rupture with the semiological structures coterminous with “the age of Man”. I cite again Foucault’s remark to Raymond Bellours, *a propos The Order of Things*, that he regretted giving Nietzsche an “utterly privileged, metahistorical status.” To which Bellours replied, in a perceptive comment that correctly identifies this ambiguous, “utterly privileged” place for Nietzsche as a key locus of Foucault’s entire project:

“But, in that case, how can one restore Nietzsche to archaeology without the risk of being false to both? There seems to be an insurmountable contradiction in that very fact. ... Isn’t Nietzsche precisely the locus where all signs converge in the irreducible dimension of the subject, anonymous

by dint of being itself, anonymous by the fact that it incorporates the totality of voices in the form of fragmentary discourse.”¹⁵²

Bellours goes on to add this comment – Nietzsche is in fact missing from the book, and that Foucault’s own “presence” in *The Order of Things* corresponds precisely “to the impossible anonymity you dream of, an anonymity that, being told, can only signify a world without written speech or, to the point of madness, the circular literature of Nietzsche.”¹⁵³ It is the latter option that Foucault would, one guesses, prefer. One of his routes to “impossible anonymity” is exactly an attempt to defy in his own “circular literature” the either/or of the presence of Foucault and Nietzsche.

My own interpretation of ‘Nietzsche, Freud, Marx’ is, if we remain consistent with its argument, not a perspective on a *fact* but on what is already an interpretation. Nor is my interpretation impartial; it is shaped by my positing of the importance of Nietzsche in Foucault’s thought. This is not to say that I don’t think that my interpretation is correct (or following Nietzsche’s transvaluation of value, perhaps, *good*). Interpretation in the sense Foucault gives it here – a Nietzschean sense, which I affirm – is always violently imposed, and can only be deemed *good* according to the value of the will-to-power of which it is an instance. The affirmation and acknowledgement of the infinite play of interpretation *as such*, and the refusal of the closure of this process, is one criteria for such a positive valuation for Nietzsche.¹⁵⁴ Following Foucault and de Man, and their insistence on the constitutive status of “blindness” for any knowledge, it is necessary to note that this goal may only be achieved elliptically. Any interpretation must do violence

insofar as it quite incorrectly neglects the multiplicity and difference of the *world as interpretation*. Textual strategies may negotiate between these two imperatives: to interpret openly and participate in the abyssal infinity of interpretation; and to remain intelligible within conventions of language use that operate to deny this abyssal quality. If I use nominalism of a sort (the pursuit of instances of "Nietzsche") to bracket out a portion of Foucault's *œuvre* from the endless interpretive play of his texts, I do not do so arbitrarily, but with the aim of revealing *and* participating in a textual strategy which I interpret as performed and, as it were, authorised, by Foucault and Nietzsche. Nietzsche, as we shall see, is an especially useful (non) starting point, which Foucault always seems to come back to.

If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history.

Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.'

Only he who changes remains akin to me.

Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

Except for a few exceptions, my company on earth is mostly Nietzsche...

Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*.

Nietzsche, reflecting on how to find oneself outwith convention, argues that rather than burying inwards in search of "depth," which is a harmful and fruitless search, for one can never reach a point at which one can say "this is no longer outer shell" one should ask, instead

"what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft,

what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it? Set up these revered objects before you and perhaps their nature and sequence will give you a law, the fundamental law of your own true self. Compare these objects with one another, see how one completes, expands, surpasses, transfigures another, how they constitute a stepladder upon which you have clambered up to yourself as you are now; for your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least high above that which you usually take yourself to be. Your educators and formative teachers reveal to you what the true basic material of your being is, something in itself ineducable and in any case difficult of access, bound and paralysed: your educators can only be your liberators.”¹⁵⁵

Here we find Nietzsche, describing *Schopenhauer as Educator*, producing through rhetorical excess a fiction of such a liberator, one that corresponds more to his own needs than to what Schopenhauer actually wrote, most of which, in point of fact, Nietzsche vehemently opposed. Such a fictioning of influences is registered elsewhere in relation to friendship; for instance in number 30 of the ‘Preludes in German Rhyme’ to *The Gay Science*: “I do not love my neighbor near, / but wish he were high up and far / How else could he become my star?”¹⁵⁶ For Nietzsche the setting up of irreconcilable antagonisms or unattainable exemplars was crucial to the development of his will-to-power, in a way that is both central to his rhetorical style, and deeply problematic for any interpreter who wishes to get close to him. In Nietzsche’s view it is “Better a whole-hearted feud / Than a friendship that is glued,”¹⁵⁷ This attitude is pushed further when Nietzsche expounds,

later in *The Gay Science*, on 'Star Friendship.' Writing of a relationship estranged by "exposure to different seas and suns" – an different exposure that makes the two former friends unrecognisable to each other – Nietzsche insists that they might yet be "venerable for each other." This would not mean an interpersonal closeness, but an anonymised, distanced elevation: "There is probably a tremendous but invisible stellar orbit in which our different paths and goals may be *included* as small parts of this path; let us rise up to this thought. ... Let us then *believe* in our star friendship even if we should be compelled to be earth enemies."¹⁵⁸ As with the passage on Schopenhauer, we find Nietzsche projecting a fictive companion out of reach as part of an elaboration of self.

Nietzsche's entire *œuvre* can be seen as enacting the dual call *for* and rejection *of* friends as companions, those who accompany or follow. The contradictory desire for singularity and for companionship in thought might even be seen as structural to Nietzsche's writing, most particularly in the way it determines the excessive qualities of his style(s) – pushing both laudatory and denunciatory modes to extremes. the figure of *Zarathustra* would represent one pole of this dynamic, as would those instances where Nietzsche anticipates his reception by kindred spirits. An example of such anticipation can be found in the epode to *Beyond Good and Evil* where he writes, in phrases that conclude the book:

"Oh life's midday! Oh second youth! Oh garden of summer! I wait in restless ecstasy, I stand and watch and wait - it is friends I await, in readiness day and night, *new* friends. Come now! It is time you were here!

This song is done - desire's sweet cry died on the lips: a sorcerer did it, the timely friend, the midday friend - no! ask not who he is - at midday it happened, at midday one became two...

Now, sure of victory together, we celebrate the feast of feasts: friend *Zarathustra* has come, the guest of guests! Now the world is laughing, the dread curtain is rent, the wedding day has come for light and darkness...¹⁵⁹

Here, strangely, we find Nietzsche's solitude ended by his own fiction, by Zarathustra himself, in the splitting of the "I" into guest and (implicitly) host. Whilst this is an occasion for celebration, throughout Nietzsche's aphoristic writings in particular one finds contrasting and severe defenses of his singularity.¹⁶⁰ Thus he acknowledges that one may write with the aim of *not* being understood. It is the purpose of "the more subtle laws of any style" to "keep away, create a distance, forbid "entrance," understanding" even as "nobler spirits" are addressed.¹⁶¹ In what reads as a moment of doubt or hesitation about the strategy Nietzsche was to pursue in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, (the beginning of which was included at the end of *The Gay Science*, as division 342 of the First Edition) he writes: "must not anyone who wants to move the crowd be an actor who impersonates himself?"¹⁶² To map this back on to the "delirium of praise" we could define this as a double injunction to the reader: both to make Nietzsche into a "star" to follow, and also as a "*noli me legere*."¹⁶³ Thus we can incorporate Nietzsche too in the corpus of

(Nietzschean) writers for whom “friendship” as theme is central to a discourse that confuses philosophy and literary/poetic modes. The attraction of this confusion lies perhaps in the complicity generated in it between writer and reader, subject and object, praise and silence, in the excessive rhetorical structures of identification and narration, which metaphysics (and history) disavows. But to assimilate Nietzsche in this way is, inevitably, to break with him, at least in part, because, again in defense of his singularity, he argues that “those who want to mediate between two thinkers show that they are mediocre; they lack eyes for seeing what is unique.”¹⁶⁴ What is aimed at, in distinction from such a mediocre mediation, is the properly anacoluthonic break with Nietzsche that presents the plurivocality of his writing and doesn’t reduce it to a singular *origin*, which, as we shall see, would be a truly unfaithful act of following. The watchword for the reading attempted in distinction from this might well be Deleuze and Guattari’s opening statement in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd.”¹⁶⁵ How, then, to figure this in reading and thinking Foucault’s *genealogy* – the name he gave to his critical histories from the early 1970s onwards?

Questions of lineage are obviously important when one’s critical approach is described as genealogy. We are used to thinking of lineage now in terms of privilege – of cultural reproduction through patrilinear inheritance for example. The conception of creativity as shaped by Oedipal conflict between father and son – exorbitantly manifest in Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* – seems to confirm this suspicion. A history of art, any history, rooted in this conception must surely end up suffering not just from “the anxiety of influence” but also an unsupportable patriarchal bias. As an example I turn to the

words of a fictional representation of a real historical figure. In Act 2 Scene 4 of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* we find Roy Cohn, a New York lawyer notorious for his support of several Republican administrations, his closeted homosexuality, and his death from AIDS (which he attempted to pass off as liver cancer), lecturing his legal protégé on lineage as privilege:

“everyone who makes it in this world makes it because somebody older and more powerful takes an interest. The most precious asset in life, I think, is the ability to be a good son. You have that Joe. Somebody who can be a good son to a father who pushes them farther than they would otherwise go. I've had many fathers, I owe my life to them...”¹⁶⁶

Roy Cohn, it needs to be noted, is thinking of Joe McCarthy here! When his protégé interjects that his own relationship to his father was very difficult, Roy responds ‘Then you have to find other fathers, substitutes...’¹⁶⁷ Could one imagine a figure more antithetical to Foucault than Roy Cohn, the Republican closet-case, advocate of nepotism in the interests of perpetuating the ruling elite? Yet, if we can bracket for a moment the Oedipal dimension of Roy's analysis, he seems in fact to be raising a very pertinent question. I stated at the outset that Foucault's “genealogy” as a critical historical approach is indebted to Nietzsche. The question of how to be a “good son” to Nietzsche is a very difficult one, but the idea that one can in a sense “choose” substitute fathers is pertinent to the way Foucault characterized his relation to Nietzsche, and indeed to Nietzsche's notion of “star friendship.” As we have seen he credited Nietzsche with

providing a way of escaping the education in phenomenological thought which had provided Foucault with his initial intellectual inheritance, which had provided a filiation to the philosophical fathers Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. Is the patriarchal the appropriate mode to figure what is escaped *to*?

Foucault's much-cited polemic in 'What is an Author?' is aimed at the prevalent conception of the author as a source of signification, as a source of ever-proliferating meaning, as characterized by *priority*, in all senses. As ever in Foucault, at stake is the reversal of the question of how history and discourse are to be accounted for on the basis of the creative subject – the “anthropological” question – in favour of an inquiry into how the subject as a form is to be accounted for historically.¹⁶⁸ Also at issue is “writing” in relation to this problematic. Reversing conventional attitudes, Foucault characterizes the “author function” as a *restriction* on the production of meaning, the creation of a limit around the “cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations.”¹⁶⁹ Though by habit we think of the author as “the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations,” in fact, according to Foucault, rather than this transcendental figure the author is “a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.”¹⁷⁰ Our notions of authorship as originary genius are then a cover for the fact that the author functions to constrain discourse. “When a historically given function is represented in a figure that inverts it, one has an

ideological production. The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.”¹⁷¹ If Foucault concedes that there is no possibility of fictive writing without constraint, he certainly anticipates a reconfiguration of the “author function,” perhaps its disappearance and a new mode of existence for polysemous texts. After the death of the author would come the life of the text. In this new *episteme* discourses of all kinds would “develop in the anonymity of a murmur.” This anonymity would negate the questions habitually asked of texts and referred to their authors. Rather than debating the authenticity or originality of a text, we could ask “Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself?”¹⁷² Foucault evokes here themes that are, as we have seen central to his thought - anonymity, appropriation, the assumption of varied positions. Interestingly it is in the second essay in which Foucault explicitly, and for the last time, addresses Nietzsche, that we can see the importance of these themes to his thought, to the very possibility of the works gathered under his name. It is in ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ that Foucault indicates the ways in which he negotiates his self-proclaimed Nietzscheanism and his questioning, seen in ‘What is an Author?’ of the individual subject as either object of interpretation or source of meaning.

As it is *origin* that is at stake here, I focus on the text that was Foucault’s original introduction to Nietzsche (and my own, for that matter); namely, ‘The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,’ the second of the *Untimely Meditations*.¹⁷³ This text, in large part an anti-Hegelian polemic, is particularly pertinent as it addresses the

problem of lineage directly. As Nietzsche exalts Goethe, and lambasts the historians of his own time, he continually finds ways in which the will to knowledge manifest in history leads to unhappiness and nihilism, to inaction. In contrast to the “dust-eating” history of philologists and others Nietzsche proposes that Life needs history insofar as it pertains to living man “as a being who acts and strives”, “as a being who preserves and reveres”, and “as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance.”¹⁷⁴ Corresponding to these needs are three modes of historical knowledge – *Monumental*, *Antiquarian*, and *Critical*. Each mode has its “uses and disadvantages” and must be employed in conjunction with the others if it is to avoid becoming a kind of dead, and deadening knowledge. Each mode can become dangerous if pursued for its own sake. These forms of history become disadvantageous when not controlled by necessity, when they fall into the hands of the “critic without need, the antiquary without piety, the man who recognises greatness but cannot himself do great things.”¹⁷⁵ Nietzsche elaborates on the pros and cons of each mode of historical knowledge, seeing in the *Monumental* a useful counter-example to present, which throws into relief contemporaries who are “feeble and hopeless idlers” climbing on pyramids or wandering round art galleries. Such “monuments” of attainment as Goethe spur us out of resignation, acting as “teacher, comforter and admonisher” and motivates us to join with the “human mountain peaks” of history, whose achievements attest to the “solidarity and continuity of the greatness of all ages.”¹⁷⁶ Thus such useful monuments are not be left adrift in a remote past, but are themselves untimely – they light up the present. There are, concomitantly, disadvantages to the monumental mode: it necessitates requires forgetting in its very functioning – it perforce negates the specific circumstances of past instances of greatness, and thus of how impossible it is that they

should occur again. *Monumental* history deals in generalities, and doing so exalts effects over causes. It is the understanding of past greatness as *effects in themselves* that motivate the ambitious and alive, but this runs the risk of producing a history indistinguishable from fiction – and thereby misrepresenting the past. For if value is found in monumentality, and that is conferred by history, how can the present be valued? In fact, Nietzsche argues, “connoisseurs” of the monumental militate against the creation of new monuments of greatness by making the authority of the monumental derive from its pastness:

“Monumental history is the masquerade costume in which the hatred of the great and the powerful of their own age is disguised as satiated admiration for the great and the powerful of past ages, and muffled in which they invert the real meaning of that mode of regarding history into its opposite; whether they are aware of it or not, they act as though their motto were: let the dead bury the living.”¹⁷⁷

The *antiquarian* mode is, in turn useful in that by preserving and revering the past makes it a place of identification for the antiquary, testifying to the resilience of his culture. Again citing Goethe, Nietzsche describes the antiquarian mode as allowing access to a community of like souls, even to perceiving the soul of one’s nation as his own: antiquarian knowledge gives one “the contentment of a tree in its roots, the happiness of knowing that one is not wholly accidental and arbitrary but grown out of a past as its heir...”¹⁷⁸ Again, this has disadvantages as its flip-side; specifically the risk of an

attenuated, local view of history which endangers the past in isolating historical phenomena to bring them close as objects of appreciation and preservation. Assuming the value of the past as such leads to reverence for the old without discrimination, a reverence that can “mummify” what it preserves. (As, it wouldn’t be hard to argue, is often the case with art...). Assuming that age confers value leads to historians “content to gobble down any food whatever, even the dust of bibliographical minutiae.”¹⁷⁹

Finally, the *critical* mode of history is useful for *judging* – for enabling negative evaluations of the past in the name of *life* and the present. If we can’t free ourselves from a relation of some kind to previous generations, what we *can* do is

“confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our own knowledge of it, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were *a posteriori*, a past in which one would like to originate in opposition to that in which one did originate...”¹⁸⁰

To conclude this summary, the disadvantage of the critical mode is that it suspends the necessary element of forgetfulness, which Nietzsche has already argued is the basic condition for the possibility of happiness and life. This forgetting, we might remember, is at the heart of Derrida’s reading of the multiplicity of identity in *Le Parjure*.¹⁸¹

The force and direction of Nietzsche's polemic here poses a problem for anyone wishing to treat him as a historical figure. Clearly there are many ways in which a historical understanding of his thought would be a betrayal of that thought, many ways to become a Nietzschean in a sense that Nietzsche would violently oppose. We have seen that Nietzsche gave considerable thought to how he might be received as a historical figure – the extent to which he expected his “true” audience, the “we” he continually evokes in his writings, to be in the future. Thus we can I think hypothesize that alongside its anti-Hegelian bluster, and its evocation of a reborn German culture, the second *Untimely Meditation* is concerned with Nietzsche's own reception, and with warning off the wrong kind of followers. What options are available, then, to someone who wishes to take up Nietzsche's thought? Wouldn't accepting Nietzsche's view of historical relations here mean a reverence for history over life, a mummification of his corpus, a self-abnegation that Nietzsche would characterise as weakness? Is to be a Nietzschean to betray Nietzsche?

The most effusive, excessive, of Foucault's writings on Nietzsche is ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ of 1971. The title itself implies the central theme of the essay – the utter identification of the name of Nietzsche, and the practice of genealogy, with the very possibility of a useful History. This essay is, on one level, a traditional commentary, seeking to clarify another thinker's terminology. But it also goes much further, setting out the *form* of Foucault's history writing as genealogy, whilst also accounting for its epistemological possibility. Foucault sums up, and endorses, Nietzsche's attack on traditional history, drawing attention to a necessary distinction made between *ursprung*

(origin) as the object of historical enquiry and *herkunft* (descent) and *entstehung* (emergence) as the objects of genealogy.

Nietzsche is opposed to the pursuit of *ursprung*, Foucault writes “because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purist possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that proceed the external world of accident and succession.”¹⁸² Nietzsche recognises no such forms – “no facts, only interpretations” – and therefore opposes an interpretative mode which “necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity.”¹⁸³ This is not to say that historical knowledge is impossible, merely that its explanations are not characterized by ideality, but by the brutal and antagonistic forces of contingency. Historical knowledge itself as an interpretative *techne* emerged from “the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason.”¹⁸⁴ Here we have a key aspect of Foucault’s Nietzschean project - the metaphysical belief in essence or identity is replaced by the idea that everything arises from historical contingency. There is no “Reason” or *telos* behind history – history is entirely explicable, on the condition that metaphysics, and any notion of a necessary succession in the order of the forms of reason, is left behind.

This assertion leads to a second key point. Genealogical attention to history leads to laughter at the solemnities of the origin.” (Recall here that Foucault’s uneasy laughter at Borges’s Chinese encyclopaedia is an (preceding) echo of the laughter of the *übermensch*.¹⁸⁵ Already there is a doubling of author and subject at work...).¹⁸⁶ We tend

to think of things as most pure at their conception or inception. In fact, Foucault argues, origins are lowly, base, they do not precede a Fall. Linked to the commonly *assumed* prestige of the origin is the postulate that it is a privileged site of truth, albeit one obscured. It is this assumption that structures the knowledges that find it elusive: “the origin makes possible a field of knowledge whose function is to recover it, but always in a false recognition due to the excesses of its own speech. The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss.”¹⁸⁷ The origin is the Holy Grail of traditional history, and of metaphysics, but one that is explicitly denied to historians and philosophers by their own concept of it.

It is this melancholic knowledge that Nietzsche replaces with a *genealogy* which doesn't assume that its object eludes it. Indeed it is by drawing on accessible history (that is, interpretations) that the genealogist can “dispel the chimeras of the origin.”¹⁸⁸ Here, again, a key point: the genealogist needs history, it is not just distinct from, but a weapon *against* metaphysics. In history the various lowly and disparate sources of contemporary concepts, values and objects are to be found. Genealogy will, therefore, commit itself to at least one value held dear by historians – an attention to detail. “Genealogy is grey, meticulous and patiently documentary...it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality.” What it patiently records, Foucault writes, is precisely “what we tend to feel is without history ... not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they are arranged in different roles” – a phrase that sutures Nietzsche's genealogy of *ressentiment* and morality to Foucault's own analyses of madness and sexuality (amongst other things) normally deemed *ahistorical*, or those such as reason or penal practice which are thought to *progress*.¹⁸⁹

Rather than *origins*, then, the proper objects of genealogical analysis are descent and emergence. Descent – *Herkunft* – seems to refer, in its etymological connotations, to a kind of racial or blood heritage. However in Nietzsche, Foucault argues, it is not a principle of continuity or of unitary beginnings. Genealogy doesn't describe the evolution of a species or describe racial destiny. "On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us..."¹⁹⁰ Descent does not provide a heritage, or foundations, rather it fragments and unsettles – "it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."¹⁹¹ This is why genealogical history always has the characteristics of critique: it does not establish foundations but disturbs them.

Entstehung, emergence, as a process described by genealogy, displaces the notion that a phenomenon can be known by appeal to its culmination (an example of which would be positing the modern penal system as the final solution to a perpetual, gradually resolved problem of criminality, or modern sexual attitudes as a liberation of a once repressed innate desire, both moves that Foucault vigorously contests). "We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history" – historical knowledge is the antidote to this view that feelings – or the body in its materiality – could provide a principle of continuity or unity across time.¹⁹²

Genealogical analysis of *emergence*, in contrast, posits the beginnings of objects, subjects

and practices in a violent clash of powers seeking to impose interpretations: it “seeks to re-establish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations.”¹⁹³ Thus power becomes a crucial part of any genealogical analysis, it is a conflict of power that is delineated as the circumstance and condition of emergence. Further, “the forces operating in history do not obey destiny or regulative mechanisms, but the luck of the battle.”¹⁹⁴ There is, as a result of this, no *subject* of an emergence – it is an anonymous precipitate of intersecting and conflicting power relations; the outcome of which is not society’s “progress” (as a lessening of violence), but the installation of “each of its violences in a system of rules ... [which proceed] from domination to domination.”¹⁹⁵ Such rules are empty and can be seized, bent, redirected, reversed. Whereas metaphysics seeks meaning in a lost origin, genealogy follows the luck of the battle. Genealogy, then, is a history of the formation of what seems most natural, most ahistorical, using the minute details of the past to show the lowly and disparate descent, the violent emergence, of our values and concepts.

What is the relation between traditional history and genealogy, conceived as “wirkliche Historie” or effective history? Foucault emphasizes that Nietzsche, from the time of his second *Untimely Meditation* onwards, questions any history that assumes a suprahistorical perspective:

“a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the

displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development. The historian's history finds its support outside of time and claims to base its judgements on apocalyptic objectivity. This is only possible, however, because of its belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself... On the other hand, the historical sense can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes."¹⁹⁶

It is the kind of perspective, then, "capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of the past."¹⁹⁷

Historical objectivity would only be possible if history were over and one thus had an archimedean point from which to objectify the past.

Foucault outlines three main senses in which genealogy opposes traditional history: firstly it is *parodic*, it does not seek the pathos of "recognition"; secondly, it is *dissociative* and opposes itself to history-as-continuity; thirdly, it is *sacrificial*, and opposes history as a form of knowledge/truth. Genealogy reveals that "the instinct for knowledge is malicious" and that what is sacrificed in its procedures is "the unity of the subject."¹⁹⁸ Genealogy shows that knowledge cannot be grounded in man as nothing in man is ahistorical. The contemporary form of man can be explained historically because history, descent and emergence, the luck of the battle and the play of dominations has produced him.

As Foucault's essay draws to a close it becomes even more Nietzschean in tone, to the point where it is sometimes unclear, as the language of the citations and of the "commentary" become intertwined. Thus, with 'The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life' clearly in mind Foucault asserts that whereas traditional history is given to contemplating "distances and heights" – the noblest periods, the greatest achievements and so on – it does so "by getting as near as possible, placing itself at the foot of its mountain peaks, at the risk of adopting the famous perspective of frogs."¹⁹⁹ In contrast genealogy, or "effective history," grasps what is already close to it, in an act which violently dispossesses it of its distanced and prestigious status.

The genealogy of traditional history shows it to be of "humble birth" – signalled by its self-effacement – one form of which is its claim to "accept everything without making any distinctions ... Historians argue that this proves their tact and discretion. After all, what right have they to impose their tastes and preferences when they seek to determine what actually occurred in the past?"²⁰⁰ Nietzsche, unsurprisingly, sees this as a total lack of taste. "Objectivity," and "accuracy" cloak the feeble perspective of traditional history. The traditional historian has to "mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead" (note here the echo of Nietzsche's "let the dead bury the living" ...).²⁰¹ Just as does Nietzsche in 'The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,' Foucault stresses the importance of forgetting, of not being in thrall to all that has gone before. How is this to be done? It is a matter of doing as Nietzsche did, in turning history into something else: "only by being seized, dominated and turned against its birth" was history made into

genealogy.²⁰²

While in the *Untimely Meditations* Nietzsche had reproached critical history for elevating truth over life, Foucault sees him later in his work as seizing hold of the historical sensibility and reshaping monumental reverence into parody, antiquarian preservation into affirmation of discontinuity, and, in the most Foucauldian of these Nietzschean transformations, “the critique of the truth held by men in the present becomes the destruction of the man who maintains knowledge by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge.”²⁰³ How, then, does Foucault do justice to Nietzsche? It is certainly not through parody, for this essay is absolutely in earnest; not through a dissociation of the line running from Nietzsche to Foucault; and by no means does it suggest an injustice is to be perpetrated on its subject. Yet this is not to offer an immanent critique, to suggest that it is undermined by a contradiction of content by form. For that contradiction is an apt response to the double injunction of Nietzsche; his call for followers who take responsibility for their own selves – who “counter-sign,” in Derrida’s terms.

‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ is, I would argue, to be understood in terms of the economy of laudatory exchange, of unconditional affirmation, that characterized Foucault’s “literary” writings, rather than as philosophical critique. It is notable that it was written for a collection of essays published in posthumous tribute to one of Foucault’s teachers, Jean Hyppolite – the eulogy being one of the laudatory forms that appears most commonly within the intellectual sociality of twentieth century French culture.²⁰⁴ That Foucault should chose to write on Nietzsche *in place of* Hyppolite is also

noteworthy. Again and again it is Nietzsche who Foucault presents as *behind* the writers he most praises – Blanchot, Bataille, Klossowski, Deleuze. In doing so he echoes Bataille who wrote: “My life with Nietzsche as a companion is a community. My book is this community.”²⁰⁵ In Bataille’s case, to write *On Nietzsche* necessitated “*experiencing*” him, and meant “pouring out one’s lifeblood,” and the result of this is a text that combines autobiographical reflection by the author with extensive quotation from his subject.²⁰⁶ The reader experiences an excess of identifications and an absence of commentary that makes such an experience more likely, even as it dissolves the singularity of the authorial function.

Nietzsche makes this community of writers possible by being a mask that can be worn without implying a depth behind the mask; a place from which to speak which is not an origin, an authority which is not an author function. In the first *Untimely Meditation* Nietzsche mocks the philosophical pretensions of David Strauss, particularly his masquerading as a genius - but interestingly he also draws a distinction between the good actor and the bad, and between the mask that masks itself, and that which appears as such. If Strauss must wear the mask of the classic, Nietzsche writes, “I wish he were a good actor and knew better how to imitate the style of naïve genius and the classic. For it remains to be said that Strauss is in fact a bad actor and utterly worthless as a stylist.”²⁰⁷ In Alan Schrift’s *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* it is the *interpretation which appears as such* that is shown to be the goal of Nietzsche’s philosophy, whilst in *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* Alexander Nehamas argues that Nietzsche achieved this through a style that established himself –

and his truth claims – as literary figures. Even more importantly, Paul de Man demonstrated that Nietzsche, in *his* deconstruction of the law of non-contradiction (the very foundation of philosophical truth) instantiated an undecidability of rhetorical (literary) and logical forms.²⁰⁸ The evaluative criteria emergent from such a paradigm are inevitably, therefore, at least partly aesthetic in character. It is the latter which is relevant here - Foucault's affirmation of Nietzsche is none too subtle, it operates through the excessive strategy of laudatory exchange, but it also passes from this mode into a more complete fusion with the mask Nietzsche provides, his disappearance from Foucault's texts occurs at exactly the point in which he is internalised into genealogy as method. Deferring in this most intimate way with Nietzsche, who stands for origin, Foucault preserves and makes implicit the immanence of his project to the circumstances of its enunciation. The games between speaking of, speaking through, and writing *on* in Foucault's treatment of Nietzsche are played out so as to remain faithful by breaking. The anacoluthonic mode is thus the means by which Foucault can be both properly Nietzschean; he stands in Nietzsche's place, in place of him as it were. But doing so obviously Foucault acknowledges his own non-originality, passing this on to a figure who is himself multiple, untimely, and who writes against originality. Nietzsche is a mask that *appears as such*.

Foucault's reflection on the themes of 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' is in fact an astonishing and sustained manifesto of his own genealogical project, an illumination of the methodological and critical principles of the historical sense at work in *Discipline and Punish*, *The History of Sexuality* and other writings of the 1970s and 1980s. But it also

speaks to (and from) the precepts of the French literary-philosophical culture of *délire*. There is an excessive identification operative in the essay which makes it quite different in tone from 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx.' The "voices" of Nietzsche and Foucault (who writes, ostensibly, as a critical philologist) intermingle throughout, in a tone of mutual affirmation. Rather than critique in the genealogical sense, rather than tracing the descent and emergence of Nietzsche's own thought, Foucault's essay continually reinstates his centrality, unsurpassability, one might say his *originality*. But this affirmation itself, this preserving and monumentalising of Nietzsche, is precisely what allows Foucault to occupy his own critical position. And it is precisely here, with the most intense affirmation of Nietzsche, and the most excessive closure of the distance from him, that Foucault's writing *on* him ends, as if it is indeed through the delirium of praise that one reaches the proper silence. Moreover, it is as though this same transition effects that which changes a "master" whom one quotes and writes on into the figure of a "friend" whom one speaks to and as, and is no longer distinct from. Hence, in Foucault's writing on and thinking with Nietzsche we see how an aesthetics (of *délire*), an ethics (of reading), and an epistemology (not foundational, but emergent in the violent immanence of genealogy) are productively superimposed.

The textual traces of Nietzsche in Foucault's work present a contradictory figure: origin (of Foucault's philosophical autonomy) and refuter of origins; ground of possibility and destroyer of foundational concepts; exemplar of the *délire* of the labyrinthine being of language, with its concomitant absence of work as corpus (*le désœuvrement*) and author

of the Nietzschean *œuvre* analysed in *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. If the textual strategies of these last two essays in particular present a chain of identifications that seem to displace critical discourse as it would usually be understood, they can be read as implicated in the logic of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, where Foucault's evocation of the text as a labyrinth in which to lose oneself is presented in terms which imply an identification of author and text. That his discussion of *œuvre*, book, and author in the *Archaeology* and in 'What is an Author?' seem to propose such an identification as a principle of critical analysis further complicates matters. Foucault seems to suggest that he, as an author, is no more than the statements he has made (if his argument is consistently applied at least), and that such statements are certainly not to be assumed to possess any unity due to their shared association with his name. Yet it is precisely by means of a opportunistic nominalism that Foucault organises his histories, and finds the possibility of their articulation.

It is by the name "madness" that Foucault has access to a history of practices that he can then show do not have a common object. The consistency of the name lends an illusion of continuity to an object that has none in essence. This nominalistic strategy itself amounts to a Nietzschean inheritance in Foucault's thought and brings us back once again to the question of how to understand the relation between the two. If Foucault's reading of Nietzsche takes the proper name as a pretext for the gathering together of various statements, which are articulated differently at different points in his (Foucault's) texts, he can be seen as being consistent in his application of his own argument. Yet it is clear that he goes further, in invoking Nietzsche as a point of origin; one that seems to displace

the question of origins. Thus Foucault's relation to Nietzsche can be characterized as one of fidelity and betrayal, or rather betrayal *as* fidelity— as we have already seen, Nietzsche makes it very hard to be a Nietzschean without betraying him (one cannot be a Nietzschean without betraying Nietzsche – reads two ways, either one can't be a Nietzschean, or one can, but only by betrayal). In turn my own treatment of Foucault has this quality – to make of his work an *œuvre* is to organize his statements according to an author-function and thus to betray his thought, but if this is done *in name only*, if the gathering of texts is nominal, if it doesn't assume an originary point in the subject, it perhaps remains faithful after all.

Nietzsche's assessment of the historical sensibility of his own time, and its detrimental effect on life, on action, leads him to propose that the degree at which study of history becomes harmful must be determined. This degree depends on what Nietzsche terms the "plastic power" of a man / people / culture. He defines "plastic power" as follows:

"the capacity to develop out of oneself in one's own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds. ... The stronger the innermost roots of a man's nature, the more readily will he be able to assimilate and appropriate the things of the past; the most powerful and tremendous nature would be characterized by the fact that it would know no boundary at all at which the historical sense began to overwhelm it; it would draw into itself

and incorporate into itself all the past, its own and that most foreign to it, and as it were transform it into blood."²⁰⁹

An appropriation that becomes blood, that is, as it were, the appropriation of a lineage, the making of oneself into a descendant, or better an incorporated "friend" – this is precisely how to characterize Foucault's relation to Nietzsche as exemplified clearly in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, and more opaquely in his other texts. And yet this appropriation takes the form of an affirmation of precisely Nietzsche's own concept of the historical sense governed by a "plastic power." Foucault becomes Nietzsche to become himself; Nietzsche is a mask that can be worn to clear the space for a relation to history that serves the present.

¹ As already indicated, it can be shown that Foucault's better known writings on art are concerned with other issues, they are figures for thought. Hence *Las Meninas* is a microcosm of *The Order of Things*, the essay on Magritte's *C'est ne pas une Pipe* is concerned with syntactical analysis, amongst other possible examples.

² Rifkin, 'A Space between: on Gérard Fromanger, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault and some others,' in Wilson (ed.) *Photogenic Painting: Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Gérard Fromanger*, (London: Black Dog, 1999), 40.

³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ See Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, (London: Hutchinson, 1993), 337-338.

⁶ Rifkin, op. cit., 47.

⁷ Deleuze, 'Cold and Heat,' in *ibid.*, 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁰ Ingres, cited in Foucault, 'Photogenic Painting,' in *ibid.*, 83.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (London: Routledge, 1997), xvii-iii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁶ Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography,' *Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-34*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999), 507.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 515.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 515, 517.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 517.

²¹ Foucault, 'Photogenic Painting,' op. cit., 84.

²² *Ibid.*, 84-85.

²³ *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan, (London: Routledge, 1989), 17.

²⁴ Douglas Crimp addresses the "modernization" of photography in his 'The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject,' *On the Museum's Ruins*, (London: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 66-83. Crimp's analysis of the appropriationist photographic practice of Sherrie Levine is also relevant here. Against the implied logic of Foucault's argument (and indeed against his own writing of the 1980s), Crimp locates such appropriation ultimately *within* modernism, and sees the shift to postmodernism as occurring in the shift from contesting the museum to a wider politicized field of representation, for example in AIDS activism. Interestingly he sees an analogy here to Foucault and the trajectory "from an archaeology of modernism toward a theory of postmodernism"; Crimp, 'Photographs at the End of Modernism,' in *ibid.*, 27.

²⁵ 'Photogenic Painting,' op. cit.,

²⁶ Foucault, 'Critique and Power,' in Schmidt, (ed.) *What is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, (London: University of California Press, 1996), 393.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 397.

²⁸ 'Photogenic Painting,' op. cit., 91.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

³¹ See Macey, op. cit., pp. 257-289. See also Foucault and Deleuze, 'Intellectuals and Power,' in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. S. Lotringer, trans. L. Hochroth & J. Johnston, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), pp. 74-82, and 'Confining Societies,' *ibid.*, 83-94.

³² Macey, op. cit., 257.

³³ 'Photogenic Painting,' op. cit., 99.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁶ Foucault, 'On the Ways of Writing History,' in *Aesthetics*, op. cit., 291.

³⁷ Rifkin, *op. cit.*, 46.

³⁸ 'Photogenic Painting,' *op. cit.*, 103-104.

³⁹ Kaufman, *The Delirium of Praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Klossowski*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Hollier, *The College of Sociology*, cited in *ibid.*, 4.

⁴¹ These essays of the early 1960s form the first part of *Aesthetics*, and include 'A Preface to Transgression,' which presents Bataille as establishing that "the experience of the limit" and its philosophical understanding "is realized in language and in the movement where it says what cannot be said," (86); 'The Prose of Acteon' on Klossowski, where Bataille and Blanchot are invoked in support of the claim that his is a "transgressive speech" in which it is through "impurity" that language addresses the "pure silence" which is its being, (133); 'The Thought of the Outside' which sees in Blanchot a textual experience in which "the movement of attraction and the withdrawal of the companion, lay bare what precedes all speech, what underlies: the continuous streaming of language" (166). The working of these themes into a labyrinthine network of borrowings, silences, of praise and reticence extends the thinking of language as labyrinth already begun in Foucault's study of Roussel, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. C. Ruas, (London: Continuum, 2004). In all these works the silence of language revealed in transgression opens onto the desubjectified experience of anonymity Foucault sought.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴³ On the history of *délire* see Leclercle, J-J. *Philosophy through the Looking-Glass: language, nonsense, desire*, (London: Hutchinson, 1985). Leclercle argues that *délire* is strictly speaking untranslatable because in English "delirium" has no equivalent tradition of usage outside psychology and metaphorical applications; for the sake of consistency I have retained Kaufman's use of English, but note that it needs to be thought in literary and philosophical senses as well as psychological.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁶ Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of George Bataille*, trans. B. Wing, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992), 23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-36.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁹ Montaigne, 'On the Education of Children,' in *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen, (London: Penguin, 1958), 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 57. This comment is very much in same spirit as Foucault's comments on thinking *with*, not speaking *of*, Nietzsche as we shall see. (Even more so as both Montaigne and Foucault conspicuously fail to practice what they preach on this point). We might also note an affinity with Foucault's unconventionally lax approach to footnoting!

⁵¹ On this exemplary status of Montaigne for the writing of friendship see Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins, (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 171-193.

⁵² Montaigne, 'On Friendship,' in *Essays*, *op. cit.*, 91.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁵⁵ Specifically, Montaigne cites Plutarch's comment that the peoples of Asia were subject to one man's rule "because they did not know how to pronounce the single syllable, No" as the source for la Boétie's essay. The context of Montaigne's remark strongly implies that la Boétie's approach is the kind of interpretation worthy of the great authors of the past, because it isn't merely subservient. 'On the Education of Children,' *op. cit.*, 54.

⁵⁶ 'On Friendship,' *op. cit.*, 92.

⁵⁷ As indicated in his prefacing address "To the Reader" of the *Essays*: "This reader is an honest book. It warns you at the outset that my sole purpose in writing it has been a private and a domestic one.... I have intended it solely for the pleasure of my relatives and friends so that, when they have lost me – which they soon must – they may recover some features of my character and disposition and thus keep the memory they have of me more completely and vividly alive... So, reader, I am myself the substance of my book and there is no reason why you should waste your leisure on so frivolous and unrewarding a subject. Farewell then, from Montaigne, this first day of March, 1580." *Essays*, *op. cit.*, 23. Montaigne's address to the reader presents his writing in the interpersonal context of kinship/friendship, and offers the written trace as a substitute for self. Moreover it suggests that the text is *already* spectral, already a voice from beyond the grave.

⁵⁸ 'On Friendship,' op. cit., 92.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Montaigne's argument here thus has an interesting affinity with Foucault's interest in Greek sexual practices as aesthetically and ethically problematic, in contrast to the ontologization of Sex that occurs gradually from early Christianity up to the modern era. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*, and *Volume III: The Care of the Self*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁹ 'On the Education of Children,' op. cit., 56.

⁷⁰ Derrida, 'Following Theory,' in Payne & Schaf (eds.) *Life After Theory* (London: Continuum, 2003), 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷² Derrida, '“To do Justice to Freud”: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis,' in Davidson, (ed.) *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 57-96. Derrida's 1980's writing on de Man, including his eulogy for him, and his response to (and deconstruction of) the revelation of de Man's journalism is collected in the revised edition of *Memoires: for Paul de Man*, trans. C. Lindsay, J. Culler, E. Cadava, & P. Kamuf, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Derrida's breach with Foucault resulted from his deconstruction of *Madness and Civilization*, to which Foucault responded polemically in 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire,' in 1972. Derrida had prefaced his critique of Foucault with comments that resonate both with Montaigne and the form of the encomia: "... having formerly had the good fortune to study under Michel Foucault, I retain the consciousness of an admiring and grateful disciple. Now, the disciple's consciousness, when he starts ... to articulate the interminable and silent dialogue which made him into a disciple – this disciple's consciousness is an unhappy consciousness. Starting to enter into dialogue in the world, that is, starting to answer back, he always feels "caught in the act," like the "infant" who, by definition and as his name indicates, cannot speak and above all must not answer back. And when, as is the case here, the dialogue is in danger of being taken – incorrectly – as a challenge, the disciple knows that he alone finds himself already challenged by the master's voice within him that precedes his own. He feels himself indefinitely challenged, or rejected or accused; as a disciple, he is challenged by the master who speaks within him and before him, to reproach him for making this challenge and to reject it in advance, having elaborated it before him; and having interiorized the master, he is also challenged by the disciple that he himself is ... The disciple must break the glass, or better the mirror, the reflection, his infinite speculation on the master. And start to speak." 'Cogito and the History of Madness,' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, (London: Routledge, 1978), 31-32.

⁷³ Foucault saw Derrida as effecting "the reduction of discursive practices to textual traces; the elision of the events produced therein and the retention only of marks for a reading; the invention of voices behind texts to avoid having to analyze the modes of implication of the subject in discourses; the assigning of the originary as said and unsaid in the text to avoid placing discursive practices in the field of transformations where they are carried out." 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire,' op. cit., 416. In this (polemical) reproach Foucault sets out important differences between his conception of discourse and Derrida's of textuality, but this should not bar an acknowledgement of the role of textual strategies in his own work.

⁷⁴ '“Le Parjure,” *Perhaps: Storytelling and Lying*,' in *Without Alibi*, ed. & trans. P. Kamuf, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 170.

⁷⁵ See Derrida, 'Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War,' in *Memoires: for Paul de Man*, op. cit., 155-263.

⁷⁶ de Man, 'Excuses (*Confessions*), in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 278-301. Derrida has given an extensive reading of Rousseau and de Man in 'Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink' in *Without Alibi*, op. cit., 71-160.

⁷⁷ Dieter Freundlieb, 'Derrida's Defence of Paul de Man's Wartime Writings: A Deconstructionist Dilemma,' *Orbis Litteratum*, No. 55, (2000), 2-14.

- ⁷⁸ "Le Parjure," *Perhaps*, op. cit., 163.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.
- ⁸⁰ 'Following Theory,' op. cit., 10.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.
- ⁸² de Man, 'Montaigne and Transcendence,' *Critical Writings, 1953-1978*, ed. L. Walters, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 11.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 43.
- ⁸⁵ It thus stands in contradistinction from the exhortation Žižek sees as at the heart of relativist reflexivity, the totalitarian "You May!" – a slogan taken from a brand of German fat-free sausages (!) 'You May!' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 21, No. 6, (18th March, 1999).
- ⁸⁶ Miller, op. cit., 5.
- ⁸⁷ Derrida, & Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow... A Dialogue*, trans. J. Fort, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 3.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁹ See Alan Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism*, (London: Routledge, 1995). A number of other French writings on Nietzsche, including Blanchot's 'The Limits of Experience: Nihilism,' are collected in Allison, (ed.) *The New Nietzsche*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985).
- ⁹⁰ Foucault, 'Structuralism and Post-structuralism,' in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Two*, ed. J. D. Faubion, (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 445.
- ⁹¹ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, (London: Hutchinson, 1993), 55.
- ⁹² Foucault, cited in *ibid.*, 89.
- ⁹³ 'Michel Foucault: An Interview with Stephen Riggins,' in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One*, ed. P. Rabinow, (London: Penguin, 2000), 125.
- ⁹⁴ 'Interview with Michel Foucault,' in *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Three*, ed. J. D. Faubion, (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 246-249, 255-256. See also Foucault, 'Structuralism and Post-structuralism,' op. cit., 438-439.
- ⁹⁵ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. R. Howard, (London: Routledge, 1989), 278.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.
- ⁹⁷ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. from the French, (London: Routledge, 1989), 382.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 328.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 334.
- ¹⁰⁰ 'Interview with Michel Foucault,' op. cit., 240-241.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 241.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 242.
- ¹⁰³ *The Order of Things*, op. cit., 384.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 385.
- ¹⁰⁶ Foucault, 'Theatrum Philosophicum,' in *Aesthetics*, op. cit., 367.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 367-368.
- ¹⁰⁸ Foucault, 'The Return of Morality,' in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. S. Lotringer, trans. L. Hochroth & J. Johnston, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 470. Foucault's rather opaque relationship to Heidegger is addressed as a question of interpretation in Dreyfus, & Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1982), and also in Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History*, (London: Continuum, 2001).
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 471.
- ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 470.
- ¹¹¹ Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 77.
- ¹¹² Macey, op. cit., 152-4.

- ¹¹³ Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' in *Aesthetics*, op. cit., 269.
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁷ Montaigne, 'On Experience,' in *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen, (London: Penguin, 1958), 349.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 344.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 349.
- ¹²¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. from the French, (London: Routledge, 1989), 40.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, 27.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ¹²⁷ Foucault, 'The Order of Things,' *Aesthetics*, op. cit., 266.
- ¹²⁸ Foucault, 'On the Ways of Writing History,' *ibid.*, 293.
- ¹²⁹ 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' op. cit., 272.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹³² *Ibid.*
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*, 273.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 272, 274.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.
- ¹³⁶ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 63-78.
- ¹³⁷ 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' op. cit., 274.
- ¹³⁸ Cited in Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 197.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁰ 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' op. cit., 275.
- ¹⁴¹ Nietzsche, . *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Vintage, 1968), 267.
- ¹⁴² 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' op. cit., 275.
- ¹⁴³ 'On the Ways of Writing History' op. cit., 293. Nietzsche uses exactly this metaphor in 'The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life': "that breach between inner and outer must again vanish under the hammer-blows of necessity." *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82.
- ¹⁴⁴ 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' op. cit., 276.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.
- ¹⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. M. Clark & A.J. Swenson, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), divisions 4 & 5, pp. 12-14.
- ¹⁵⁰ 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,' op. cit., 278.
- ¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵² Bellours, in Foucault, 'On the Ways of Writing History,' op. cit., 294.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁴ This issue is dealt with in Chapter Six of Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, pp. 144-168.
- ¹⁵⁵ Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator,' *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129.
- ¹⁵⁶ *The Gay Science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix in songs*, trans. W. Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1974), 53.
- ¹⁵⁷ Nietzsche, 'The Good Man,' prelude 14, *ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche, 'Star Friendship,' division 279, *ibid.*, 226.

¹⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (London: Penguin, 2003), 223.

¹⁶⁰ See Lampert, L. *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (London: Yale University Press, 1986).

¹⁶¹ *The Gay Science*, 343.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁶³ Kaufman, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-17. This "don't read me" refers to a reading that would be the correlate of writing *on* the other. Nietzsche's conflicted attitude to the consequences of not making this double injunction, i.e., either acolytes or loneliness, is perhaps most tellingly expressed in the thirty-third Prelude to *The Gay Science*, entitled 'The Solitary,' where Nietzsche writes :

"I hate to follow and I hate to lead.
Obey? Oh no! And govern? No indeed!
Only who dreads himself inspires dread.
And only those inspiring dread can lead.
Even to lead myself is not my speed.
I love to lose myself for a good while,
Like animals in forests and sea,
To sit and think on some abandoned isle,
And lure myself back home from far away,
Seducing myself to come back to me."

The Gay Science, 53.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi, (London: Continuum, 2004), 3.

¹⁶⁶ Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part One; Millennium Approaches*, (London: Royal National Theatre/Nick Hern Books, 1992). Kushner's political sensibility is in part shaped by a Foucauldian notion of specific sites of resistance, albeit one filtered through a Brechtian aesthetic. These commitments are discussed in Robert Vorlicky (ed.) *Tony Kushner in Conversation*, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 40.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Foucault's answers to this question might be classified according to those which reveal the subjectivizing practices of psychiatry, penal authority, medical knowledge, and other discourses of 'bio-power,' and those which analyses the ways in which the subject experiences this subjectivity, particularly in *The History of Sexuality*.

¹⁶⁹ Foucault, 'What is an Author?,' in *Aesthetics*, *op. cit.*, 221.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,' in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁸¹ It is also, on a more empirical note, increasingly recognized that forgetting is not a failure of consciousness but *its very raison d'être*. Slavoj Žižek has recently drawn attention to the convergence of neuroscientific insights with Lacanian ones, in seeing consciousness as a mechanism for *limiting* what the subject knows, in order to make its functioning possible. See *Organs Without Bodies: on Deleuze and Consequences*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 136-140.

¹⁸² Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' in *Aesthetics*, *op. cit.*, 371.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, op. cit., xvi, 385. Here we have another example of Nietzsche's untimeliness in Foucault's thought.

¹⁸⁶ 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,' op. cit., 372.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 373.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 369.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 379.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 376.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 378.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 383.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 384.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 389.

²⁰⁴ Best exemplified by Derrida's collection of eulogistic writing *The Work of Mourning*, ed. P-A Brault & M. Naas, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001). As Judith Butler noted in her obituary for Derrida, his own death places a demand on us to respond, as he did in mourning, by "asking what it means to know and approach another, to apprehend a life and a death and to do that justly." Butler, 'Jacques Derrida,' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 26, No. 21 (4th Nov., 2004).

²⁰⁵ Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. B. Boone, (London: Continuum, 2004), 9.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, xxi.

²⁰⁷ Nietzsche, 'David Strauss: The Confessor and the Writer,' *Untimely Meditations*, op. cit., 48.

²⁰⁸ De Man, 'Rhetoric of Persuasion (Nietzsche),' in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 119-131.

²⁰⁹ Nietzsche, 'The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,' op. cit., 62-63.

CHAPTER FIVE: Escaping From / To Identity

1

We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology, and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is moulded by a great many distinct regimes ... it constructs resistances. 'Effective' history differs from the history of historians in being without constants. Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men ... History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being - as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself.... Knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.

Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*.

*Of Bodies changed to other forms I tell;
You Gods, who have yourselves wrought every change,
Inspire my enterprise and lead my lay
In one continuous song from nature's first
Remote Beginnings to our modern times.
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.*

Backward Turn backward o Time in your flight

Bring me my childhood just for a night

Father come back from your Echoless shore

And be in the midst of those you adore.

Harry Houdini.

At the top of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York, incongruously framed by its pristine white walls and lit by its crystalline cupola, a figure dressed in industrial protective clothing and face-mask is concentratedly engaged in an arcane ritual. He repeatedly moves between propped steel plates and a propylene burner, on top of which is a vat of molten petroleum jelly. Hurling the liquefied jelly against the propped metal, the protagonist sends a slow stream of clear liquid down the incline of the Guggenheim's famous ramp. This is Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 3* and the figure in the protective gear is none other than Richard Serra. Barney incorporates Serra and his artistic practice within a section of the film that is a microcosm of the *Cremaster Cycle* project, and has him re-enact an iconic moment from his own sculptural practice of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with Barney's own signature material – Vaseline – displacing Serra's original molten lead (Fig. 71). How might one make sense of this outlandish act of appropriation, and the art work of which it is only one part?

The trajectory of this thesis has moved from the conditions of contemporary criticism, via a consideration of themes of appropriation, image, and cinematic narrative, to an analysis of the importance of loss of self and textual aesthetics for Foucault's

historiography. To bring these themes together and offer a forward-looking conclusion, this Chapter offers an analysis of Matthew Barney's appropriations of Serra – treating him both as an art-historical figure and as a site of phantasmatic identification – and of the (still) famous magician and escapologist, Harry Houdini. It is my contention here that Barney's appropriation of Serra suggests a way of rethinking Hal Foster's notion that postmodern art "tropes" its predecessors and, further, that Barney's identification with Houdini not only offers one way *into* his hermetic conceptual and iconographic system, but that Houdini can also figure something for the art historian – a possible way back out again to a position from which to read it in a broader cultural context.

This Chapter attempts to put into practice the hypothesis that criticism which embraces the types of spectatorial identification exemplified by cinema can negotiate a positive reading of the ambivalence of postmodern culture. The paradigm of critical writing developed in *October* – which provided the general theoretical frame for Chapters One and Two of this thesis – struggles to achieve this in relation to contemporary art in general, and Matthew Barney in particular. The antipathy of *October's* editorial heavyweights, most particularly Benjamin Buchloh, to Barney is clearly expressed in their survey of *Art Since 1900*.¹ For Buchloh, Barney's success testifies to the fact that "the mnemonic dimension in art ... is the most susceptible to fetishization and spectacularization" and that as much as historical memory *can* oppose such processes, the form validated in contemporary art merely delivers "the aesthetic capacity to construct memory images to the voracious demands of an apparatus that entirely lacks the ability remember and reflect historically."² This same objection was lodged by Rosalind Krauss against video art, on the grounds that its

defining medium was not grounded in *material* specificity, but rather in the psychological condition of narcissism.³ In Krauss's reading, the narcissistic indistinction of subject and object is "the prison of a collapsed present ... a present time which is completely severed from a sense of its own past ... totally cut-off from history."⁴ But, following Buchloh's own insistence that no particular artistic paradigm can be considered *inherently* critical, can't we reassert the fundamental ambiguity of technological spectacularization as theorised by Benjamin, and argue that no paradigm is inherently regressive either; at least not when it contains the resources to support a critical interpretation that opens up the historical mnemonic dimension? It is precisely such an interpretation that I attempt here, seeking to "cut" historical scenes into the present of Barney's films. Further, against Krauss's negative estimation of narcissism, I argue that it can play a role in this project.

In different ways Lou Andreas-Salomé and Julia Kristeva propose Narcissus as a positive, creative figure. For Andreas-Salomé he figures the intensity of passionate engagement with both self and world as "Narcissus the Magician"; for Kristeva he faces up to "the vertigo of a love with no object other than a mirage."⁵ Unlike Scottie in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* who can't face the void of his desire, Narcissus in Kristeva's account *could* potentially overcome this emptiness at the core of the subject. Whereas Scottie, like *Ovid's* Narcissus, is made both murderous and suicidal by his love for a fake, *Kristeva's* Narcissus "lives because he truly loves this 'fake' ... he neither needs to have it nor to be it."⁶ His desire is not without an object, because "*the object of Narcissus is psychic space; it is representation itself, fantasy.* But he does not know it and he dies. If he knew it he would be an intellectual, a creator of speculative fictions, an artist, writer, psychologist, psychoanalyst."⁷ Barney's work, I shall try to show,

speaks to such psychic space and suggests that “speculative fictions” may contribute to a contemporary re-imagining of the relations between self and world.

Barney’s increasingly elaborate films have developed a complex, and frequently esoteric, aesthetic vocabulary, including a personal mythology of sorts. The five-part *Cremaster Cycle* (1994-2002) and the *Drawing Restraint* series (1988-2005, and ongoing) form the core of Barney’s activity, and are incredibly rich and engaging pieces, which present notable problems for art historical interpretation. Indeed, the initial reception of these works within art history, and in the cultural journalism which quickly latched onto them, conspicuously struggled to go much beyond an evocation of the confusion of the interpreters. The effect is often like reading a description of an opera by someone who has no idea what’s being sung about; hence detailed accounts of iconographic elements within the films rarely added up to much, beyond pointing to the lavish production values and outlandish frames of reference in the work. Rarely – Lena Relyea’s 1991 *Artforum* exhibition review being a notable exception – was the art historical location of the work addressed.⁸ This unsatisfactory state of affairs is (over)compensated for by the initiates of Barney’s hermetic imaginary – figures such as Nancy Spector, Richard Flood and Neville Wakefield – whose writing often tends towards the reduplication of Barney’s own (admittedly fascinating) aesthetic universe.⁹ This dimension of writing on Barney, which reached its apotheosis in the exhibition catalogue for 2002’s *Cremaster* blockbuster at the Guggenheim (a publication that is essentially an interpretative handbook to the work) is, to continue the musical analogy, akin to the literalist interpretations of music E.M. Forster’s satirises in *Howard’s End*, in which elephants and goblins populate a Beethoven *scherzo*.¹⁰ In other words, here it is all too clear what everything “is” and criticism

becomes merely the recovery of what is encrypted in the forms of the work; i.e. it becomes akin to what Foucault terms “commentary.”

If the generally uninformative quality of much critical writing on Barney “from without,” as it were, suggests an opportunity for serious and prolonged engagement with the intricacies of his iconography, the “insiders” view presents a very real problem to such a project, for if Barney’s “libretto” is so unequivocal – if each element is given a determinate place, and detailed accounts of this published – what is the *purpose* of further writing? I argue that it is precisely to establish a critical genealogy of the work, by moving both inside and outside its own terms, and in so doing, to estimate its value to the present. *The Cremaster Cycle*, and Barney’s work in general, has effectively operated without the aid of critical writing in this sense, and so seems to bear out the pessimistic conclusions drawn by the *October* roundtable on art criticism (discussed in my introduction), which decried the gallery-star nexus as sidelining the critic in favour of pure market logic. But it hardly seems satisfactory that the response to this should be the abandoning of an incredibly ambitious and aesthetically engaging body of work to a reception taking the form of either cynical dismissal (à la Buchloh) or hyperbolic praise.¹¹ My aim here is to strategically draw on the connotations of Serra and Houdini in Barney’s use of them, in each instance attempting to indicate how following through on these identifications opens the work out to broader questions; specifically (and unlikely as it may seem!) to Walter Benjamin’s analysis of cinema’s potential role in the transformation of art, and to feminist theorisations of phallic authority. First though, an exposition of the basic thematics of Barney’s work is in order.

A former college football star, one time medical student aiming for a career in plastic surgery, and (briefly) male model, Barney is “the most important American artist of his generation” if you believe the *New York Times*.¹² Barney’s art is rich in every sense, his films, videos, sculptures, installations and photographs produce a symbolic universe hybridized from sport and pop culture, as well as literary, psychoanalytic, art historical, and scientific narratives spliced with the artist’s own biography. The *Cremaster Cycle*, begun in 1994 and completed in 2002, takes in a variety of genres, cinematic and televisual styles, appropriated narratives, and symbolically loaded locations. It features costuming by Isaac Misrahi and Manolo Blahnik, and cameo appearances by Norman Mailer and Ursula Andress, as well as Serra. The *Cycle*’s associative / metonymic logic even sees Johnny Cash represented as a death metal band jamming with a hive of bees. In his films, up to and including the *Cremaster Cycle*, Barney appears as a startling array of characters - his personae have included serial killers, Masonic apprentices, athletes, pipers, Hollywood starlets, satyrs, magicians, giants. Often using prosthetics to drastically alter his appearance - including the appearance of his genitalia, Barney presents his body, and those of his co-stars, as constantly morphing sites for the expression of psychological and biological states (Fig. 72). The *Cycle*’s representation of *in utero* biological differentiation and post-natal psychical development, via appropriated cultural narratives blurs the line between bodily fact and cultural fiction, and seems to *invite* interpretation to respond in kind. Key to understanding Barney’s oeuvre, I would argue, have been two constants: first the foregrounding of his own body and of bodily metaphors in the work, and second, his identification with, and imaginative use of, Houdini’s mythology alongside his own.

Barney's early video pieces often presented him playing Houdini in the guise of "The Character of Positive Restraint" – a protagonist, like all of Barney's alter-egos, made up of drives but seeming to lack agency. Extrapolating from a remark of Houdini's that he could intuit the workings of any lock – even one not yet invented – by "absorbing" it, Barney conceptualized Houdini according to his own esoteric understanding of the process of form-making. Reflecting on the training of his own athletic body through hypertrophic growth, whereby muscle tissue is placed under strain to exhaust it and produce enlargement, Barney developed a theory of form in which resistance is crucial to development – whether physical, psychical, or artistic. Barney proposed a three-part schema for the creation of form – *Situation, Condition, Production*. *Situation* is a zone of pure potential, in which raw drive is conceived as sexually charged but as yet useless. This raw energy is processed through *Condition*, a zone conceived on the model of a "disciplinary funnel" in the body – digestion as a metaphor for forming. Finally, in stage 3 – *Production* – form enters the world via anal or oral channels. Barney quickly revised this model, removing the stage of production and short-circuiting the system he had proposed. "The internal matrix would then oscillate exclusively between Situation and Condition, between desire and discipline, in a never-ending, self-referential, autoerotic cycle."¹³ As Barney himself put it "if Production is bypassed ... the head goes up the ass, and the cycle flickers between Situation and Condition, between discipline and desire."¹⁴ The creation of such a self-referential hermetic system poses an obvious problem of interpretation. To what extent can we penetrate this world? Can we enter into Barney's aesthetic without following him up his own ass?

Short-circuiting this self-created and somewhat perverse schema seemed to Barney to

open on to the kinds of areas in which his art was already involved – specifically a kind of narcissistic confusion of self and world in which the boundaries between the human and the mechanical, the male and female, the erotic and the auto-erotic, the psychical and the physical no longer hold. These ideas are summarized in Barney's "Field Emblem," ubiquitous in his work since 1988 (Fig. 73). The Field Emblem represents an orifice and its self-enclosure, but also describes the body as stadium or playing field. The embodiment of the Field Emblem idea, Houdini functions in Barney's early work as a representative of narcissistic auto-criticism.¹⁵ In 1989's video action *FIELD DRESSING (orifill)* Barney, as Houdini, naked apart from a climbing harness, lowers himself from the gallery ceiling to a Vaseline field emblem below and attempts hermetic self-enclosure by filling all his orifices with Vaseline. This action also exemplifies the way Barney often reverses normative relations between part and whole, and between bodily and architectural space. Lowering and raising himself between the refrigerated floor and the heated ceiling Barney becomes a part object – as though controlled by the cremaster, the muscle which raises and lowers a man's testicles in response to temperature and fear.¹⁶ This approach, and the metaphorical use of Houdini was developed further in Barney's twin 1991 installations *Transsexualis*, which featured gym equipment sculpted from Vaseline, and kept solid by walk-in fridges (Fig. 74).¹⁷ Included in these installations was human chorionic gonadotrophin, a hormone only produced in the placenta – metaphorically turning the gallery into a bodily space, a womb. The *Transsexualis* installation also featured prosthetic plastics and medical devices for opening, inspecting, and intervening in the body. All this provided the setting for a chase between "Houdini" and an antagonist based on a famous American football player (LA Raiders star Jim Otto, representing an "extrovert" counterpart to Houdini's

hermeticism, an openness to penetration), in which Houdini at one stage appears in drag in an attempt to evade his opponent (Figs. 75-77).¹⁸ That Barney's sculptural media tend to be substances, devices or apparatuses for the metamorphosing of the body – whether in foetal development, surgical procedures or athletic training, emphasizes that he is interested in the body as a site of transformation and change. His conception of the body could aptly be characterized as “hormonal” insofar as this terminology reflects not only Barney's actual practice, but also implies a non-ontological understanding of gender, which acknowledges biological difference without organizing it into permanent and originary binaristic categories of identity.

Barney's use of sport as a metaphor for conflict, and for willed transformation of the body through resistance, lends itself to being critiqued from two points of view. Firstly, for Theodor Adorno sport itself is a deformation of the ludic dimension of experience, which demonstrates that rather than expanding possibilities for authentic play “the crisis of semblance may engulf play as well, for the harmlessness of play deserves the same fate as does harmony, which originates in semblance. Art that seeks to redeem itself from semblance through play becomes sport.”¹⁹ Adorno's thoroughgoing antipathy to sport in all forms is based in his understanding of it as play made into Duty – “a ritual in which the subjected celebrate their subjection.”²⁰ Secondly, Barney's representational games with normatively illegible, anomalous genitalia could be interpreted as a classical defensive fetishistic move. Freud writes:

“In very subtle instances both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of the fetish itself.

This was so in the case of a man whose fetish was an athletic support-

belt which could also be worn as bathing drawers. This piece of clothing covered up the genitals entirely and concealed the distinction between them. Analysis showed that it signified that women were castrated and that they were not castrated; and it also allowed of the hypothesis that men were not castrated, for all these possibilities could equally well be concealed under the belt – the earliest rudiment of which in his childhood had been the fig-leaf on a statue.”²¹

David Lomas cites this passage in a discussion of Miro’s drawing practice, and emphasises that against the narrative of the fixity of gender, the fetishist’s disavowal can be read as the disruption of “a normative adult body schema”; a disruption which results in “a feeling of unbridled libidinal energy, excessive and polymorphously perverse.”²² The fetishism of the ‘athletic support man’ would, then, be “a refusal to submit to the binary oppositional terms overseen by the phallic signifier that organise sexual difference under patriarchy.”²³ Barney’s work seems to enact a similar refusal, albeit in such a way that the feminism-inspired tenor of Lomas’s terms cannot be immediately mapped onto it. There is more (and less...) going on here than a deconstruction of logocentrism.

The Houdini-Otto conflict came to a conclusion, with neither side victorious, in *Ottoshaft* (1992), Barney’s contribution to *Documenta IX* (Figs. 78-80). This piece, which to a greater extent than before *incorporated* site as protagonist and as imaginary bodily space, was a key stepping stone to the dynamics of *The Cremaster Cycle*. And just as *Ottoshaft* metaphorically exploited the various physical sites of Kassel, so 1993’s *Drawing Restraint 7* posited Manhattan Island as a body,

continually entered and exited by three Satyr characters in a limousine, via each of its interconnecting tunnels and bridges. *Drawing Restraint 7* combined mythology (the story of the flaying of Marsyas from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) with the search for narcissistic self-enclosure (again) – figured by Barney as an immature “kid” satyr perpetually chasing his own tail – and connected the hubristic struggle to make form with the confusion of body and world, body and machine (Figs. 81, 82).²⁴ Thus the basic working methods which have informed Barney's work since 1994 were established gradually, from an initial approach which operated in (relatively) conventional terms of task-orientated performance video, to a much more elaborate aesthetic.

Making an imaginative leap from the fact that the human embryo becomes male or female when hormones influence the ascent or descent of initially undifferentiated “buds” to become ovaries or testes, the *Cremaster Cycle* extrapolates from the ascent and descent of the adult testes that there might be forces of resistance to the definitive and final gendered identity of the body. Broadly it describes the growth of an embryo from its initial phase of “pure potential” when it is yet to become male or female, through a struggle against differentiation to a final definitive metamorphosis to masculine form, presented as tragic death. In presenting masculinity as both biological destiny and heroic failure, Barney successfully elaborates a polymorphous repertoire of self-representations, succeeding, at least in fantasy, in escaping the normative limits of legible masculinity. Telling a story about the inevitability of differentiation, Barney fashions for himself a series of alter-egos who play out alternative possibilities, and presents normative masculine identity as the loss of these

possibilities.

By means, as indicated already, of a confusion of body and world, of self and other, cultural myth and personal biography, Barney plays out an extraordinarily rich and elaborate system. The *Cremaster Cycle* moves from the description of the undifferentiated state, represented by chorines on Barney's hometown football field in *Cremaster 1*; through the dark Western of *Cremaster 2*, based largely on Norman Mailer's extraordinary journalistic novel *The Executioner's Song*, Mormon doctrine, and the life-cycle of bees; the Oedipal struggle of *Cremaster 3*, drawing on Masonic mythology, psychoanalytic discourses on narcissism, and the construction of the Chrysler Building; to the panic of *Cremaster 4*, where Barney appears as a man / ram hybrid struggling to tunnel into the Isle of Man. From numbers 2 to 4 we see Barney's protagonists (played by himself) struggling against differentiation, as all the while – as we might expect given his basic conception of form-making – they provide the very resistance necessary for differentiating growth. *Cremaster 5*, a tragic opera set in Budapest, presents the failure to maintain the state of undifferentiated wholeness Barney's characters had sought (whether this wholeness is pre-natal, pre-symbolic, narcissistic, or anal-sadistic). It ends with the death of Houdini (played by Barney) as he jumps, in manacles representing both ovaries and testicles, from the Lánchíd bridge, the possibility of deferring fully differentiated masculinity seemingly at an end.²⁵

Having sketched what is only one possible reading of the *Cremaster Cycle*, I shall now turn to the role, or roles Houdini plays within it. He appears first in *Cremaster 2*, played by none other than Norman Mailer (Fig. 83). As the author of *The*

Executioner's Song – the book that provides the narrative elements of Barney's film – Mailer brings a triple paternal dimension to the role of Houdini.²⁶ Firstly, he is the “creator” of the film's protagonist Gary Gilmore (famous for insisting, despite hope of clemency, that the state of Utah execute him in 1977, for his confessed double murder) insofar as Gilmore's life story is primarily known through Mailer's book. Secondly, in that book Mailer suggests that Houdini may have been Gilmore's grandfather. Finally – Mailer brings with him to the role his own reputation as a particularly masculine figure. *Cremaster 2* opens with an extraordinary scene in which Gary Gilmore's conception is represented as a séance carried out by his grandmother (a medium known as Baby Fay La Foe) spliced with the process of reproduction in the bee hive.²⁷ *Cremaster 2* ends with a representation of Houdini having just performed *Metamorphosis* – one of his signature tricks - at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. As he prepares for his performance, Houdini is made an offer by Baby Fay, who is both historical character here and the Queen of the hive.²⁸ In the *Cycle's* only lines of spoken dialogue she attempts to seduce Houdini, sensing that his trans-gender *Metamorphosis* makes him a rival. Thus *Cremaster 2* ends with three seemingly simultaneous events: Houdini's performance of *Metamorphosis*; the implication of a sexual union which (may have) lead to Gilmore's birth; and the representation of Gilmore's death, three moments which seem to be equivalent in the hermetic logic of the *Cycle*.

Cremaster 3 makes use of another hermetic system – Freemasonry. This may in itself be a reference to Houdini, who achieved the rank of Master Mason in the St. Cecile Lodge in New York, but the film also refers back to Houdini's role in *Cremaster 2*. One of the first scenes in *Cremaster 3* reveals the outcome of Houdini's encounter

with Baby Fay, in what is a typical confusion of chronology and sequence within the *Cycle*. Gary Gilmore digs himself out from under the foundations of the Chrysler Building, metamorphosed, through “the space of Houdini” (i.e. his meaning within Barney’s cosmology), into a female corpse (Fig. 84). This splices the substitution trick *Metamorphosis* with one of Houdini’s many spectacular feats of escapology – digging himself out of a coffin buried fully 6 ft. below ground. It also confuses Gilmore’s death in 1977, with his birth, and Houdini’s possible paternal relation to Gilmore in the 1920s (when he met Baby Fay) with his performance at the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893. This is typical of Barney’s sculptural approach to narrative, and points up, I think, the problems his work presents for anyone with the hubris to try and interpret it. One is faced with a wealth of historical and cultural allusion, processed through a hermetic system that digests this material to its own ends: historical events and personages seem to be merely grist to Barney’s mill.

Cremaster 4 alludes in various aspects of its design to “the period of the “physical culture” in which Houdini and these other performance artists took on the Victorian ideal of how physicality should be expressed.”²⁹ It also features Barney in a couple of particularly Houdini-esque actions, but it is the fifth and last film in the *Cycle* that foregrounds Houdini as Barney’s alter-ego most clearly. Set in Budapest it features Ursula Andress as the “Queen of Chain” (Fig. 85), whose tragic story is told as an opera. Matthew Barney plays three roles in *Cremaster 5* – “The Queen’s Diva,” “Her Giant,” and “Her Magician” (Houdini) (Figs. 86-88). As noted earlier, this film describes the final differentiation of the foetal body into a male form, figured primarily through Her Giant in a scene which takes place in the Gellert Baths in Budapest. As is typical of Barney’s aesthetic system a camera shot which starts to

move down to look through the Queen's thrown to the Baths below, is cut with one moving up under her dress, suggesting that the action described takes place *in her body*. I have already indicated that differentiation means death for the *Cremaster* system, whose protagonists struggle to maintain a narcissistic, pre-natal wholeness. This is indicated by *Cremaster 5*'s tragic tone, which centres on a love affair between the Queen and Her Magician (Fig. 89).³⁰ It is characteristic of Barney's work that pre-natal physical development and post-natal psychological development are hybridised in narratives made up of digested cultural and biographical material. Here Houdini's intensely close relationship with his mother is overlaid on a tragic love story between Queen and Magician and the biological metaphor pursued throughout the Cycle as a whole. The Magician's death is represented by the re-enactment of one of Houdini's famous bridge-jumps (Fig. 90). Yet this moment, which narratively appears to be the tragic culmination of a love story between The Queen of Chain and Houdini as Her Magician is also a moment of possibility – in fact a moment of birth, as the libretto makes clear. The Queen of Chain's lament for her lost lover begins:

The 24th of March – in the final freeze of that year

This was our first and painfully, our very last

Over the Danube

I left you there on a bridge of chain³¹

24th March 1874 was Houdini's birthday; thus the *Cremaster Cycle*'s basic modus operandi – the overlaying or hybridization of pre-natal biology and post-natal psychic development – is concluded by the birth of the figure whose resistance to the loss of wholeness and non-differentiation (whether intrauterine or pre-symbolic) has driven it

from the start. The implication, figured by two teardrops falling from the Queen of Chain into the Danube, is that either there is a cyclical return to the beginning of the process, or that there *is* an escape from its seemingly all-pervasive logic. Houdini the escapologist, and Houdini, the narcissistic "Character of Positive Restraint," figures both possibilities, and thus also serves as a figure for the art historical interpreter, who can either traverse Barney's fantasy and emerge outwith its terms, or remain caught in its hermetic logic. It is this dual role of Houdini in the *Cremaster* system - as both emblem of hermetic self-enclosure and as escapee from its logic that first made me think of him as perhaps a privileged figure for the kind of engagement with Barney's work I wanted to attempt - one that could move between his hermetic system and a world of historical and art historical meanings outside it. This approach seems to me appropriate to Barney's aesthetic insofar as it means engaging in the very kind of identification with Houdini that he employs, though to different ends, and abandoning the kind of interpretative distance that tends to undermine art historical discussion of art practices that trouble traditional artist-object-viewer relations. *The Cremaster Cycle*'s ending in "death," with the birth of Houdini, then, provides the starting point for this analysis.

*Perhaps one can define the times, and the individual people who live through them, by their exits; by what they think of themselves as having to escape from, and to confront, in order to live the lives they want. Every modern person has their own repertoire of elsewheres, of alternatives – the places they go in their minds, and the ambitions they attempt to realise – to make their actual, lived lives more than bearable. Indeed the whole notion of escape – that it is possible and desirable – is like a prosthetic device of the imagination. Adam Philips, *Houdini's Box*.*

The magician is the beloved fairy god-mother of capitalism.

Jorge Luis Marzo, 'Sleight of Hand.'

Born Ehrich Weiss, in 1874, Harry Houdini arrived in America in 1878, and made his stage debut at 9, as "Ehrich, Prince of the Air." His stagename (which would become his *only* name) came from an Anglicization of his nickname – Ehrie – and an appropriation of the surname of legendary French Magician Robert-Houdin. Like many immigrants Houdini had to suffer frequent misspellings of his name before he made it: he was billed as "Houdin," "Hunyadi," "Hondini," Robert Houdini, and even, with his wife, "The Houdinese." His own repertoire of stagenames and acts was hardly less varied: he appeared as Professor Murat, Cardo, and for a period as Projea,

Wild Man of Mexico. The requirement to metamorphose his act in search of success lead Houdini to try his hand at comedy, musical skits, even promotion - running a short-lived Burlesque act. If this constant change was familiar to Houdini, who had in his teens already worked at various jobs, including factory worker and messenger boy, it constituted nonetheless something he wanted to escape from, and not just for economic reasons.³²

Houdini was troubled all his adult life by his memory of his father as a failed immigrant - a German speaking rabbi who couldn't find an American congregation, and had to seek work as a butcher, a mohel, and finally as a factory worker alongside his son. In later life Houdini would, in what was clearly a compensatory manner, exaggerate his father's social status and learning - he had a Ph.D., he fled Europe after a noble duel, and so on. Houdini would also seek to buy back the books his father had been forced to sell, building what would become a massive collection and eventually employing Harvard's theatre librarian to organise the more than 50, 000 books on religion, magic, drama and Spiritualism that he had acquired. Houdini's description of his father's death in 1892 is particularly revealing of his relation to his *mother* (Cecilia), for Houdini reported his father's last words as an instruction to look after her.³³ Whether or not this was actually the case or a rewriting of history, Houdini certainly saw it as his role. Hopelessly devoted to his mother, who called him "little papa," Houdini would subtitle a photo of himself with his wife and mother "my two sweethearts," and well into adult life would reprise his childhood habit of listening to his mother's heartbeat while she held him.³⁴ He described the news of her death in 1913 as "a shock from which I do not think recovery is possible." These twin factors - his father's failure in America, and his own passionate love for his mother -

provided some of the psychological ingredients which Houdini would turn into one of the most engaging and compelling of modernity's performative practices.

But that was still some way off when, appearing in the early 1890s in "dime museums" – a kind of human equivalent of the cabinet of curiosity – Houdini, together with his wife Bess, shared the bill with performing monkeys, sprinting contests for fat ladies, and such wonders as Unthan, an armless violinist, and Count Orloff, the "Human Window Panc" (advertised with the promise "you can see his heart beat! you can see his blood circulate!").³⁵ If Houdini felt an affinity with the likes of the Human Window Panc, (being, as he noted, "classed a freak too") the dime museum was nonetheless a context he wanted to escape from and, although it went relatively unnoticed at first, one of the key ingredients for his elevation to a different kind of public attention – one where he would be an exemplar rather than a freak – was already in place. On the dime museum circuit Bess and Houdini performed between 9 and 14 shows daily, and their tour-de-force was a stunt called *Metamorphosis*, a substitution cabinet effect Harry had done since starting out, notably at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (Fig. 91). A contemporary magazine described how *Metamorphosis* worked – but not of course, how it was done:

"...to the audience and to the close inspection of the volunteers upon the stage, the time-worn trunk was shown, and its four sides, bottom and cover well sounded to prove the absence of trickery. Next there were given for examination a black flannel bag, seven feet in length, a yard or so of tape and some sealing wax. Houdini's next request was that his

committee securely encase him in the previously examined sack, tightly bound its mouth together with heavy tape already in their hands, and secure the knots with sealing wax.”

Houdini would then be then shut inside a padlocked and roped trunk, which is in turn enclosed in a cabinet. “Mrs Houdini, standing at the open curtain, makes the following announcement. “Now then, I shall clap my hands three times, and at the third and last time I ask you to watch CLOSELY for - the - EFFECT.” At this, she rapidly closes the curtain and vanishes from sight, yet instantaneously the curtain is reopened - this time by Houdini himself.”³⁶

Houdini would open the still padlocked and roped trunk and reveal Bess inside. To audiences the trick could seem, literally, miraculous. Especially, as Houdini pointed out on his earliest adverts for *Metamorphosis*, “the time consumed in making the change is THREE SECONDS!” Houdini would experiment and tinker with *Metamorphosis* throughout his career, but at this still formative stage he was particularly aware of the aspects that heightened the audience’s engagement with the drama he was presenting. Three are of particular importance here. Firstly, *Metamorphosis* drew a far better response when performed with Bess than with any of his “brothers.” Perhaps because he seemed a more prepossessing showman when juxtaposed with his barely five-foot bride, perhaps because there was something exciting, in all senses, about the suggestion that Houdini had changed into a female version of himself - an ambiguity suggested by the performers’ stage name - the Houdinis - that had not been presented when Harry was one half of “The Brothers Houdini.” Secondly, it was not necessary for Bess to be released from the bag for the

trick to be deemed a success with the audience – it was Harry’s release that was dramatized and which satisfied the audience’s motional investment in the trick. Finally, when Houdini combined the substitution effect with what he called “the braid trick” – having his hands tied behind his back with rope or braid – *Metamorphosis* seemed all the more miraculous, and all the more compelling for the audience.³⁷ Houdini hyped his act relentlessly, claiming to have wowed the world with *Metamorphosis* in his 1895 flyers. But if *Metamorphosis* could genuinely amaze audiences, Houdini had yet to find the act, and perhaps more importantly the stage, that would catapult him to global celebrity. His escape to that fame and success were to come from dramatizing *escape itself*.

It is no surprise that a man whose name remains synonymous with escapology should have tried to make a career for himself in what is perhaps modernity’s most characteristic place of escape (or at least escapism): the cinema. Houdini, who opined that “the moving picture is the most wonderful thing in the world,” made his big-screen debut in 1918 in *The Master Mystery*, pitting his wits against “Automaton,” a proto-cyborg villain, and winning a huge global audience in the process.³⁸ Yet Houdini’s cinematic career could not match his “live” theatrical feats for sheer excitement. However skilfully, however strenuously, he might perform his escapes for the camera, the mediation of that camera meant he simply could not compel an audience to believe its eyes when it was witness to the “impossible.” It was this ability that had marked Houdini out from the start of his career as a dime theatre performer.

As an immigrant who literally made his name in America, Houdini exemplified the entrepreneurial spirit applied to self-creation and self-promotion. What is interesting

about his rise to global fame is the extent to which it relied on a *theatricalization* of escape, and an appeal to the popular imaginary, rather than an actual pre-eminence as a magician. Indeed, most of the feats with which Houdini made his name, including *Metamorphosis* were variants on well-established, and frequently performed, stage-magic tricks. What Houdini had on his competition, though, was a canny sense of how to dramatize both his escapes and his masculine body, and in doing so to compel the imaginary investments of mass audiences in him. From around 1906 his act began to incorporate public and obviously strenuous (sometimes exaggeratedly strenuous) stunts. He escaped from a kind of fantasia of modern sites of restraint: straitjackets, handcuffs, prison cells, and, in one spectacular run in Boston, a “crazy crib” (a bed designed to hold the violently insane, Fig. 92) as well as a selection of modern industrial and commercial objects: a hot-water tank, a milk-can, packing cases, and perhaps most tellingly, a modified roll-top desk.³⁹ Later he turned to the public stunts for which he is perhaps still most famous; inverted straitjacket escapes hanging from buildings, and manacled bridge jumps; feats which could draw crowds of many thousands. He underwent self-imposed trials of his skill – and very visibly his strength and endurance – in which the audience watched him risk the profoundest metamorphosis – death – only to thrill as he emerged unscathed. It is this aspect of Houdini’s escapology that Adam Philips has analyzed as the true content of all his stunts.⁴⁰ He dramatized a kind of metamorphosis in *which the end result was that he stayed the same*: in the face of the entrapping products of modernity, the threats to masculinity of a changing social order, and death itself, Houdini remained Houdini – unique, unsurpassable, his own man.

Perhaps we can see what was at stake for Houdini’s *audiences* if we consider another

of his signature escapes. He made it a point of principle that, on arrival in a new town, the first thing he would do was break out of jail, with the Press in attendance to guarantee maximum publicity. Often performing these escapes naked (to add to the mystery of how it was done) and, when possible, from the cells of notorious criminals (to add to the emotional charge), Houdini found a brilliant means of self-mythology and free publicity (Fig. 93). Appealing at once to the fear of imprisonment in whatever form, and to the fear of a criminality that could not be contained, Houdini allayed anxiety in one form while stoking it in another. Key to this, as John Kasson has argued, was Houdini's presentation of his own body as prodigious (and self-made) in a culture that widely subscribed to anxieties about the emasculating consequences of modernity.⁴¹ A passionate opponent of Spiritualism, Houdini had no desire for his audience to ascribe magical powers to him. However much he presented his feats as inexplicable, he wanted them to be understood as unique achievements of his physical strength and skill, as *bodily* miracles. He went to great lengths to preserve that uniqueness; against those who emerged as challengers, and those who appropriated, or approximated, his name, often revealing his rivals' secrets as "tricks of the trade."⁴²

Houdini's body – repeatedly beset by self-imposed dangers – was the sign and guarantee of his uniqueness and indefatigability. Houdini's signature escapes were often performed naked or nearly naked, a fact that as well as implying a lack of trickery, gave a libidinal dimension to the identifications of his audience. That Houdini's male body – under threat, but resilient – should have become such a popular spectacle, is unsurprising given the oft-remarked disparity between the symbolic authority of the masculine subject position and the experiential travails of

men in modernity. Houdini provided a site of identification and desire for his audience that allowed them to escape the uncertainties of identity via the repeated escapes of a performer whose name and body both seemed to guarantee his uniqueness. The powerful effect that this could have on an audience is shown in Houdini's reception in Glasgow September 22nd 1904. After performing the packing case escape, which is a relatively simple effect, depending on misdirection and strength but can be dazzlingly effective, Houdini was given a hero's reception. He recorded in his diary: "mob waited for me, took me shoulder high, carried me home and upstairs. I had to make a speech from the window."⁴³ The unprecedented, and therefore thrilling, possibility of seeing Houdini fail, possibly paying the ultimate price for failure, kept audiences anxious and enthralled. But it was his success that they cheered; Houdini's unique ability to escape from failure, entrapment, death (both real and symbolic), was what his fans wanted from him.

If at least one factor in Houdini's success was his repeated dramatization of the threat to masculine identity, and his escape from this threat to an identity secured via an appropriated (yet self-given) name, coupled with a male body that emerged unscathed from the most severe dangers, then we might hypothesize that it was his performance of an unassailable phallic masculinity that compelled his audiences' imaginary investment. Yet, as Judith Butler has argued in *Bodies that Matter*, the performative basis of such phallic identity, its reliance on repeated citation, is the condition of its possible subversion. The very repetition of Houdini's escapes, then, testified to the persistent need for the performing of a constructed identity, and implied, at least, the possibility of a disruption to that performance. That Butler's own subversion of psychoanalytic theory (particularly that of Lacan) is based on deconstructing the

distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary (guaranteed by the phallic signifier) is highly significant for my argument here. Butler deconstructs the role of the phallus in both Freud's and Lacan's versions of subject formation, and argues with regard to the latter that the distinction between imaginary and symbolic (which describes the passage to a sexed subject position within language) cannot hold.⁴⁴

While Houdini's performance of masculinity worked according to a reiterated phallogocentric logic, Matthew Barney appropriates aspects of Houdini's biography in actions, videos and films that consistently explore the identificatory and libidinal possibilities of refusing the foreclosure of the symbolic and figure instead the morphogenetic possibilities of narcissism, anal-eroticism and psychosis.

* * * *

2003's media "silly season" seemed sillier than most thanks to the fascination with two famous self-made Americans. Whilst in the U.S. Austrian-born bodybuilder turned movie-star Arnold Schwarzenegger made what remarkably turned out to be a successful bid for the Governorship of California, thousands of people flocked to London's South Bank to watch contemporary magician David Blaine spend 40 days in "isolation," getting thinner in a suspended glass box, from which he not only failed to escape, but failed to even try to escape (Fig. 94)! Both men are descendants of archetypes from the birth of the modern media in America; both are presented as self-made men who by force of will – and the canny use of publicity – have transformed themselves into icons, of physical development on the one hand, and psychic development on the other. And both, it should be added, have claimed their Americanness, through this very process. The most interesting thing about both

Schwarzenegger's electioneering and Blaine's stunt was the way in which they cleverly used the media to present themselves to the public, and thereby attract the intense involvement of at least sections of their publics in what they were doing.

In their differing though related self-presentations Blaine and Schwarzenegger were merely following in the footsteps of their most famous precursors - Houdini (the most famous and most astutely self-publicizing magician of the 20th century), and Eugene Sandow (the founder of modern body building). Houdini and Sandow shared the bill at various points in their careers, and as John Kasson has argued, both were involved in projects of performative masculinity that spoke powerfully to the massive popular audiences they attracted.⁴⁵ A brief discussion of Sandow's presentation of a masculine ideal will, in addition to the previous discussion of Houdini, help throw some light on some of the cultural and historical resonances of Matthew Barney's own performance of masculinity.

Eugene Sandow arrived in America in 1893 via Prussia and England, and quickly became one of the most famous bodies in the Western world. In a stage act that combined feats of strength – performing military drills using a man instead of a rifle, lifting pianos (and pianists) – with poses designed to show off his physique, Sandow set a new standard for male physical development and self-presentation. Playing both sculptor and statue Sandow imitated classical poses - the reference to high culture providing cover for the more libidinous aspects of the interest in his nearly naked body. These aspects were less well concealed in Sandow's society soiree appearances - in which female guests would be encouraged to touch his exemplary body. Sandow was praised not just for his sheer strength, but also for his beauty. Dudley Sargent -

the leading promoter of physical education in America - declared Sandow to be proportionally "the Perfect Man." He wrote of his first examination of Sandow: "[he] is the most wonderful specimen of man that I have ever seen. He is strong, active and graceful, combining the characteristics of Apollo, Hercules and the ideal athlete. There is not the slightest evidence of sham about him. On the contrary, he is just what he pretends to be" (Fig. 95).⁴⁶

This last comment is particularly interesting in that it highlights a certain anxiety about the performative aspect of Sandow's masculinity. While he helped establish the theme of physical and moral self-fashioning as a key component of American ideals of masculinity - ideals pursued by, among others, Charles Atlas (the one-time 97-pound weakling Angelo Siciliano) and President Theodore Roosevelt - Sandow's route to this position had more than a touch of the theatrical about it.⁴⁷ Not all his feats of strength were achieved the hard way; he required more than a little stagecraft to defeat rivals for his title as the world's strongest man - substituting weakened chains that could be easily snapped for example. This brings us back to the stagecraft of Houdini, but before turning to him, I would like to summarise the importance of Sandow in this discussion. Sandow's body spoke to a variety of anxieties in American culture - allaying some, while creating others. In his own biographical accounts Sandow attributed his will-to-(self-)forming to seeing classical statuary in Rome - an experience which threw modern male bodies into stark relief. Sandow's father explained the discrepancy with reference to the excessive comfort of modern life: it was modernity itself, he argued, which put masculinity in jeopardy, feminizing the male body through inactivity.⁴⁸ At the same time, of course, modernity seemed to be empowering women - leading to anxieties about the stability of gender identity on

both sides. A 1908 essay by psychoanalyst Fritz Wittels entitled 'The Natural Position of Women' put it explicitly: "women bemoan the fact that they did not come into the world as men; they try to become men through the feminist movement."⁴⁹ The possibilities of a metamorphosis in gender relations, with masculinity under threat from modernity itself provoked considerable anxiety. Sandow's body showed this was not inescapable, but at the same time it created the basis of anxious comparison for men who could not help but look on Sandow's body in relation to their own. That this comparison was part of the discursive role of Sandow's highly publicised body was clear at the World's Columbian Exposition at which he was one of the main attractions. Alongside the exotic foreign bodies found at so many of the 19th-century expositions, visitors to the Columbian show could see statues representing the average body - based on Dudley Sargent's measurements of Harvard and Radcliffe students, and of course the body of the Perfect Man, Sandow. Sandow's body was an icon of masculinity attuned to the anxieties of the modern world, presented in a way that exploited emergent media and engaging with the libidinous attractions and confusions attendant to identification with a "perfect" body.⁵⁰

As Houdini aged, so the strenuousness his stunts demanded became more exhausting for him. It was in response to this Houdini sought out a new role for himself. If he couldn't wow cinema audiences the way he could a live public, he soon found another way to present himself as unique - by performing a metamorphosis from master of mystery to America's most famous *demystifier*. It is here that identifying (with) Houdini as the key protagonist in Barney's imaginary suggests another model of art history; for as demystifier Houdini insisted on a materialist understanding of

performances that suggested powers beyond the humanly achievable. If as an escape artist, he masterfully occasioned identification with his fantastic powers, Houdini was vehemently against such fantasy crossing the line into the *exploitation* of the most deeply held hopes of those who identified with him. This was how he perceived Spiritualism, against which he waged a relentless campaign.⁵¹

Though the psychological roots of this role are complex in Houdini's case, the key catalyst came from his encounter with Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle. A former pupil of Sandow's and an advocate of vigorous masculinity in general, Doyle is of course most famous as the creator of Sherlock Holmes. If Holmes is the arch-rationalist and, moreover, the detective whose reasoning has been seen as a model for art-historical investigation, his creator was of a much more mystical inclination.⁵² By the early 1920s, when he came to know Houdini, Doyle was a zealous believer in Spiritualism and – unwisely – attempted to convert Houdini, whom he believed to clearly possess genuinely magical powers. For two reasons Houdini was a very unlikely convert; firstly because he literally knew the tricks of the trade, having himself performed Spiritualist effects in the 1890s, and second because so much was at stake for him in the notion of the return of the dead. Longing more than anything to communicate with his lost mother, Houdini could not bear to see such reunions faked. Flattered by the Doyles' attention he agreed to participate in a séance with them. In a massive misjudgement of Houdini's character, Lady Doyle claimed to be channelling Cecilia Weiss – hoping this would convince Houdini of the reality of psychic phenomena. Whether she could have done so is doubtful, but her supposed "spirit-writing" guided by Cecilia Weiss was scuppered by two discrepancies. The first thing Lady Doyle "channelled" from Houdini's Jewish mother was a Cross (!), and this was followed by

various words of comfort to her son in English: as a non-assimilated immigrant, Cecilia spoke, wrote and understood only German.⁵³

The encounter with the Doyles provoked Houdini into a very high profile anti-Spiritualist crusade - including lecture tours, demonstrations of Spiritualist tricks of the trade, polemical books, the employment of undercover investigators and most famously, participation in scientific studies of Spiritualist phenomena. Along with Harvard professors and New York journalists Houdini formed part of a committee which investigated America's most plausible medium - Mina Crandon, known as "Margery." Margery claimed to be able to summon forth her dead brother Walter, who would perform an array of psychic effects. Houdini went to extraordinary lengths to prove Walter was nothing other than Mina Crandon herself, that her psychic phenomena were skilfully performed magic tricks, and that those she had convinced were taken in by her sexual allure as much as anything. Houdini attempted to devise a trap for Margery from which she could not escape - an elaborately designed box utterly restricting her movement (Fig. 96). Amongst the many factors determining Houdini's battles with Spiritualism, obviously including his relationship to his mother, perhaps the most important was, as Adam Phillips suggests, the challenge it presented to his achieved identity. If "magic" was really magical, if it was the product of ghostly forces, then Houdini himself was neither unique nor the author of his own success - both accomplishments crucial to his sense of self. He wanted to perform escapes his audience couldn't explain, but that they knew he had mysteriously achieved by force of will and bodily strength and skill; to be the unmasker who couldn't be unmasked. Neither must we overlook the gendered nature of the contest with Spiritualism - which established a public forum for female magicians, in what

had previously been a male preserve. If Margery could be seen as performing a version of *Metamorphosis* in reverse – finding a way of performing a male identity – this was both troubling and fascinating for the men who sat at her séances. It was also something that Houdini wished to expose as impossibility. For all his own metamorphoses he was always escaping to an unassailable identity that he had performatively achieved and maintained by playing on the key anxieties of his age, and moving between the world's of mystery and demystification.

So far I have contrasted two historically situated performances of male identity. I have presented Houdini and Sandow as a “self-made men” who dramatized and performed a masculine identity that could survive the emblematic traps and risks of modernity and its discontents. Houdini's performances depended on his literal embodiment of the symbolic authority and mastery that he continually risked losing; he was always escaping so as to remain the same, to emerge unscathed, to confirm his unassailable, self-same identity. The lesson of the comparison to be made with Matthew Barney does not depend on a contrast between the “reality” of Houdini's bodily risks, and the artifice of Barney's prosthetic imaginary. Escape is staged and performed by Houdini every bit as much as by Barney – but with different props and to different ends. It is a question of what is escaped from and to. For Harry Houdini escapology was a way to uniqueness, pre-eminence and a self-same identity fully and legibly embodied. With Matthew Barney artistic practice is a way to escape from identity in this homogenous sense.

Representations of male bodies in both popular cinema and sport tends to focus on fantasies of mobility that are at odds with the physical abilities of the audiences that

they aimed at, a disparity that constitutes their identificatory appeal. Advertising featuring sports stars in particular works this seam, showing footballers or basketball players as able to master space like superheroes rather than athletes. The Hollywood blockbuster seems now to consider such mastery an indispensable element – the *Spiderman* franchise is perhaps the most obvious recent example.⁵⁴ If Barney's self-representations tend toward the heroic, they do so not so much through the fantasy of spatial mobility and mastery (though the *Cremaster Cycle* is full of characters climbing, tunnelling etc., they always do so laboriously) but through a mobility in representation itself. Barney's prosthetic representation of the body, in which the phallus is displaced as the organising principle of normative morphogenesis, and the states normatively conceived as surpassed in subject formation (narcissism, anal-eroticism) are presented as a goal (albeit a frustrated one), seems to me to be a highly important development in the history of performed male embodiment. If, under phallogocentrism, materiality has been identified with what Butler terms "formless femininity," Barney's representation of the male body as just such a zone of morphological fluidity, suggests that the normative intelligibility of sex can be re-articulated, re-imagined, and that such re-imaginings can be the object of audience identification.⁵⁵

Barney takes discourses on / of the male body, whether medical, Freudian, or athletic, as material, whilst at the same time he presents the materiality of the body as discursively transformed, in part by postmodern or feminist interventions in the "body politic." His approach gives form to one possible mode of a Foucauldian "Care of the Self," a way of making the body and embodied (non)identity available to be worked on. This remains, as it does in Foucault, ambiguous - a question of tarrying with the

norms that produce and define identity - in Barney's case his trained body refers back to the self-formed masculinities of Houdini, Sandow, Roosevelt, or Arthur Conan-Doyle, but it also participates in the prosthetic world of what Donna Haraway has termed the "cyborg" body - showing both the possibilities enabled by modern technology and the ever greater extent to which power moves through "capillaries" to invest bodies.⁵⁶ If the description of modern power as moving through ever finer capillaries was a metaphor for Foucault, it becomes almost literal in the contemporary world described by Haraway - where technology intervenes in and on the body, enabling and controlling at the same time.⁵⁷

Matthew Barney's work presents a narcissistic masculinity which can't hold the boundaries between itself and the world, male and female, pre- and post-natal, the physical and the psychological. It refers to the world of possibilities opened up by medical and cosmetic interventions in / on the body, but also shows the risks of hubristic self-forming. Unlike Orlan, and her production of a "surgical self"⁵⁸ for example, Barney *represents* such possibilities more than he embodies them, but in doing so he shows how anxieties around masculinity may have changed. While Houdini sought an unassailable and stable identity, manifest in his bodily development and skill, Barney performs an elusive move in the opposite direction - resisting finality, singularity, self-sameness, or autonomy - at least in the fantasies he creates. The fact that his work has managed to operate in contexts outwith "pure" fine art is not only a consequence of its spectacular visual aspect; it is also a consequence of the way it proposes to audiences a "Houdini-like escape from the rigidifying determinations of sexual difference."⁵⁹ As Judith Butler herself has acknowledged, it is interesting that the hypothesis of the performativity of gender, exemplified by drag in *Gender*

Trouble and recanted in *Bodies That Matter*, was so enthusiastically received.⁶⁰

“What’s interesting is that this voluntarist interpretation, this desire for a kind of radical theatrical remaking of the body, is obviously out there in the public sphere. There’s a desire for a fully phantasmatic transfiguration of the body.”⁶¹ The dialectic in Foucault between the desire to escape *from* identity as subjection, and *to* identity as non-essential practice or care of the self can thus be mapped, particularly with regard to gender, onto a broad audience, indeed perhaps onto our culture in general. Barney’s fame, like Houdini’s in his own time, is achieved through a representation of the male body that speaks to our culture and its anxieties, pointing to the kinds of escapes to and from identity we find most compelling, and with which we can identify.

I guess for me if it's erotic, it's auto-erotic

Matthew Barney.

The particular character of Barney's appropriation of Serra requires detailed analysis. As indicated above, it operates at the first level by re-enacting an iconic moment from Serra's career – one that already connotes generational influence as a matter of recoding. The lead splashing pieces of the 1960s and 70s participated in a wider interpretation of Pollock, and modernism, according to a "phenomenology of making," a new interest in conditions of viewing, and in site specificity (Fig. 97).⁶² As Rosalind Krauss has argued, this was essentially a matter of thinking through the non-idealised implications of Pollock's working methods as based on process, gravity and horizontality.⁶³ This was developed by Serra in the 1970s as he moved away from a hegemonic minimalist notion of sculpture, to one based on "a structuring of materials in order to motivate a body and to demarcate a place: not a fixed category of autonomous objects, but a specific relay between subject and site that frames the one in terms of the other, and transforms both at once."⁶⁴ Serra explains the particular orientation of his practice towards industrial materials and techniques, most dramatically in his recent *Torqued Ellipses*, as a preference for engineering over sculpture.⁶⁵ If this is nothing too remarkable for Serra – "little boys like bridges" he observes – for Hal Foster it connects to a particularly "American ethos of building as analogue of self-building," which also surfaces in Whitman and Hart Crane's hymning of the Brooklyn Bridge, for instance.⁶⁶ If for Foster and Buchloh, Serra's

evocation of industrial engineering already risks mystifying the contemporary reality of artistic (and commodity) production, Barney's use of Serra's work might, on this historical model, seem to crase the dialectical subtlety with which it related to Pollock, spectacularizing what had been a materially based practice.⁶⁷ However, this is not to take into account either the fact that Barney remakes Serra's work *with his own signature material*, and that within the narrative of the *Cremaster Cycle*, the relationship between the two artists is multi-layered and complex.

The trope by which Barney incorporates his own is aptly figured by Harold Bloom's theory of "strong misreadings" as forms of poetic influence.⁶⁸ Specifically, amongst the six modalities of the anxiety of influence Bloom outlines it is *apophrades*, or the return of the dead, which most closely describes the gesture of incorporation Barney makes in relation to Serra.⁶⁹ *Apophrades*, in Bloom's typology, is the figure in which the later (influenced) poet holds his work open to the precursor, seeming to return to a state of apprenticeship yet achieving the impression of having authored the precursor's work. In *apophrades*

"the tyranny of time almost is overturned, and one can believe, for startled moments, that they are being *imitated by their ancestors* ... the triumph of having so stationed the precursor, in one's own work, that particular passages in *his* work seem to be no presages of one's own advent, but rather to be indebted to one's one achievement ... The mighty dead return, but they return in our colours, and speaking in our voices..."⁷⁰

Bloom's theory relies on a potent mix of Nietzscheanism and Freudianism and

operates essentially on an Oedipal model augmented by a notion of *askesis*. Thus both the Oedipal rivalry and the primordial murder of the father (the event which sees him return as Name, symbolic authority) provide Bloom's figure of the influential, anxiety-making poet.⁷¹ The achievement of the "truly strong poet" is to maintain himself, via *askesis* as "both Prometheus and Narcissus."⁷²

Narcissism – primary narcissism – is the key term for Bloom's analysis. It is ultimately a narcissistic pleasure in the self that is at the core of the experience of poetic beauty. Further, the very basis of poetic influence as a development of the ego *away* from identification (which narcissistically subsumes the precursor) is complicated by this persistent narcissistic pleasure so that Bloom argues "that each ephebe's initial appearance of being found by a precursor is made possible only through an excess of self-love. *Apophrades*, when managed by the capable imagination, by the strong poet who has persisted in his strength, becomes not so much a return of the dead as a celebration of the return of the early self-exaltation that first made poetry possible."⁷³ Again, this formulation is particularly relevant to Barney's appropriation of Serra insofar as that gesture takes place in a film series structured by narcissism (both as, to some extent an autobiographical statement, and more abstractly in terms of its thematics), in a film, *Cremaster 3* which within the Cycle is the most explicitly narcissistic of the series, in a portion of that film which as a choric interlude narcissistically contains all of the Cycle, and, moreover, in a narrative which sets up Serra as the Oedipal father to Barney's apprentice. This last narrative element is complex: Serra features in *Cremaster 3* as himself, as the architect of the Chrysler Building, and as Hiram Abiff (the architect of Solomon's Temple and, in Masonic lore, the patriarchal figure murdered by his apprentices for

refusing to impart the secrets of the universe).⁷⁴ These elements are conspicuously interlinked so that, for example, when Serra is playing the architect of the Chrysler Building, he builds two towers which relate to the pillars of Solomon's Temple, to Serra's own *Skullcracker* stack piece (Fig. 98), and, in another instance of *apophrades*, to Barney's own imagery (specifically his "Field Emblem" which provides the form of one of the towers, Fig. 99). This interlinking, or overlaying, figures the narcissistic basis of *Cremaster 3*, in which Barney, Serra, the Chrysler Building itself (as well as the Guggenheim) are all manifestations of the psychic and biological changes occurring to one organism. The most relevant theoretical account of such phantasmatic indeterminacy concerning the boundaries of the self is Lacan's famous concept of the "mirror-stage."

Following Freud's hypothesis of narcissism as a component of normal psychological development,⁷⁵ Lacan suggests in the famous mirror-stage paper, that the subject's passage from an initial state of undifferentiated libido to ego-identity is not decisive or complete. Crucial to this is Lacan's thesis of man's "premature" birth,⁷⁶ which results in an initial inferiority to the chimpanzee in terms of "instrumental intelligence" though not in terms of the ability to use the mirror for self-perception.⁷⁷ It is this disparity which produces the split in the subject, when the not yet self-sufficient baby, unable to master its motor-capacity *can* make a visual identification with an imago of a *gestalt* body.

"This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* [pre-verbal] stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursing dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic

matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.”⁷⁸

This primordial, or Ideal “I” is what makes the secondary step of transferring libido to external objects. For Lacan the key point here “is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being of the subject symptomatically.”⁷⁹ The mirror-stage operates “to establish a relation between the organism and its reality” and is specifically a response to man’s “prematurity of birth” in the form of a “temporal dialectic.”⁸⁰ The most significant consequence of this is that as “a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation” the mirror-stage achieves for the subject “caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality ... to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.”⁸¹ Thus the dialectic of the mirror-stage sees the fragmented body emerge as a retrospective effect of the fantasy of the Ideal *gestalt* imago, and it is the fall back into the fantasy of fragmentation in adulthood that reveals the significance of the mirror-stage.

In dreams the “armoured” I is symbolized, argues Lacan, by “a fortress or a stadium.”⁸² This brings us back to Barney, whose interest in the sports stadium is marked throughout his *œuvre* – from the omnipresent “field emblem” to the transformation of the Guggenheim rotunda into an athletic arena, complete with blue

Astroturf flooring. Here the stadium figures Barney's notion of hermetic self-enclosure and resistance to it, that is, in Lacan's terms, the narcissistic collapse of self-world objectivity, the reversal of the identifications constitutive of the I via the mirror-stage. Within the *Cremaster* logic, then, rather than secure symbol of the armoured subject, the stadium is both the site of contest over the direction of an organism's development, and (as the location of *Cremaster 1* – the film representing the pre-differentiated state) the locus of intrauterine wholeness.

As Norman Bryson has pointed out, the chorine choreography of *Cremaster 1*, in a quite uncanny way, brings to mind both Busby Berkeley musicals and, in another stadium, "another system of totally controlled group movement," namely Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (Figs. 100-102).⁸³ Did, Bryson asks, the choreographer of Hollywood kitsch and the propagandist of Nazi social transformation "dream the same dreams?"⁸⁴ As already argued above, in Barney's art this devolves on the hubristic effort to hybridize the body, whether via athletics or aesthetics; a project which it remains ambivalent about; celebrating it at the level of form, questioning it at the level of narrative. There is an ambivalence here for critical theory too, relating to the utopian and destructive facets of technological advance. The attempt to think through this ambivalence is one of the salutary features of Benjamin's Artwork essay, and it is to this that I turn now. Two recent interpretations in particular determine the lessons I draw from it – Susan Buck-Morss's focus on fascist aesthetics, and Miriam Hansen's focus on cinema as the "blue flower in the land of technology," the potential locus of a redemptive transformation of modernity.⁸⁵ The relevance of this line of inquiry to Barney's work is both specific and general; my aim is to map the work, negatively and positively, onto the two strong interpretations of Benjamin: Buck-

Morss's attack on 'anaesthetic' narcissistic and fascist fantasies of autogenesis; and Hansen's defence of cinematic experience as a non-auditory mode. The point is precisely *not* to resolve the antinomy of these two readings, but to insist on their juxtaposition, their dialectical mutuality. The challenge for the art historian / theorist faced with interpreting Barney's work is not to fall for one position or the other, either the techno-pessimist or the techno-utopian, but to recognise and deal with the profound ambivalence of both at once.

One of the key lines of argumentation Buck-Morss pursues is a historically based reading of Lacan's mirror-stage. The mirror-stage paper's central hypothesis of a specular misrecognition of bodily unity, retrospectively producing the fantasy of the "body-in-pieces" has been historically connected to fascism by Hal Foster,⁸⁶ but Buck-Morss suggests going beyond that historical comparison, to suggest that "the mirror stage can be read as a *theory of fascism*."⁸⁷ The mirror stage itself works on a retrospective logic, the deferred action of the symptom, but Buck-Morss wishes to transpose this to modernity, as the context of "the experience of the fragile body and the dangers to it of fragmentation that replicates the trauma of the original infantile event."⁸⁸ She notes that Lacan's first version of the mirror-stage thesis, which entered common theoretical parlance in its 1949 version, was in fact contemporaneous with the Artwork essay; in 1936, after having delivered the paper in its first form at Marienbad, Lacan attended the Olympics in Berlin. The fascist aesthetics of this event, documented by Riefenstahl in *Olympia*,⁸⁹ literally presented the regimented body as an "armor against fragmentation", a body "numbed against feeling"; indeed, Buck-Morss notes, the very word narcissism "comes from the same root as narcotic!"⁹⁰ Fascism's utilisation of aesthetics as a *social* narcotic, and the way it

manipulates a narcissistic structure of subjectivity is Buck-Morss's interpretation of Benjamin's dire warning against the aestheticization of politics, with which the Artwork essay concludes.

The fascist narcotic is only one instance of a general compensatory effort in the social sphere to adapt the subject to the qualitatively new "shock" effect of industrialised modernity -- a traumatic effect impacting on both psychic and physical integrity.

Another manifestation of such a compensatory aesthetic occurs in Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which Buck-Morss, citing Adorno, critiques as offering an illusory and falsely consoling "reunification" of the senses that is at root ersatz and inauthentic, a superimposition of unity where none exists. For Adorno, Wagner "would like single-handed to will an aesthetic totality into being, casting a magic spell and with defiant unconcern about the absence of the social conditions necessary for its survival."⁹¹ The inauthentic and illusory unity of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an instrumental response to modernity's destructive impact on human apperception: "The task of his music is to hide the alienation and fragmentation, the loneliness and the sensual impoverishment of modern existence that was the material out of which it was composed" or, in Adorno's most scathing phrase, "to warm up the alienated and reified relations of man and make them sound as if they were still human."⁹²

Significantly, it is precisely in these terms that Benjamin Buchloh expresses his opposition to Barney's practice. If in the 1980s "artistic production was subsumed into the larger practice of the culture industry, where it now functions as commodity production, investment portfolio, and entertainment" then, for Buchloh, Barney "has articulated, that is to say exploited, those tendencies. In that sense he is a proto-

totalitarian artist ... a small-time American Richard Wagner who mythifies the catastrophic conditions of existence under late capitalism."⁹³ If, it should be clear by now, I am not in sympathy with such a view, it does at least have the merit of locating Barney's work in a context where it is taken seriously beyond its own terms. It does so by seeing it as a symptom of the very processes Benjamin identified as destroying tradition. To specify these processes further, Buck-Morss gives a genealogy of two parallel historical developments – of modern aesthetics and an *anaesthetic* technics both of which respond to modernity's assault on the human sensorium.

Against the tendency to treat "aesthetics" as a catch-all concept for the troubling residues of irrationality in the modern, Buck-Morss works back through the history of this diminution of the aesthetic.⁹⁴ She notes that it is the (masculinist) myth of autogenesis that grounds modern aesthetics as such. "What seems to fascinate modern 'man' about this myth is the narcissistic illusion of total control. The fact that one can *imagine* something that *is* not, is extrapolated in the fantasy that one can (re)create the world according to plan."⁹⁵ Here Barney's interest in autogenesis would seem to place him on the side of modern aesthetics in Buck-Morss's reading (albeit that his narratives figure, unlike the modern "fairytale" of autogenetic creation, the possible consequences of such hubristic over-reaching). The feminist interpretation of this myth reveals it to buy an autogenetic aesthetics at the cost of the corporeal and the sexual: "it is precisely in this castrated form that the being is gendered male – as if, having nothing so embarrassingly unpredictable or rationally uncontrollable as the sense-sensitive penis, it can then confidently claim to *be* the phallus. Such an *anaesthetic* protuberance is this artefact: modern man."⁹⁶ Thus both maternal/reproductive femininity and homosexual sensuality are repressed in support

of this autonomous masculinity in nineteenth-century philosophical discourse, which presents the “autotelic subject a sense-dead, and for this reason a *manly* creator, a self-starter, sublimely self-contained.”⁹⁷ Buck-Morss’s Benjaminian recovery of aesthetics from this fantasy works by a historical genealogy of the human sensory apparatus itself.

This genealogy assumes the cognitive-sensorial as entwined with the world to the extent that subject / object distinctions are beside the point. Buck-Morss terms this non-autonomous aesthetic-perceptual consciousness the “synaesthetic system” – a system “decentred from the classical subject” and “wherein external sense-perceptions come together with the internal images of memory and anticipation.”⁹⁸

This is an “open” system and hence one deeply effected by transformations in perceptual conditions; specifically the “shock” effect of modern, industrialised life.

But this openness can be foreclosed, and with the onslaught of modernity on the senses, bodily affect and sensory reflection are negated in favour of a non-response to excessive stimuli. Just as the factory-machine automatizes motion, so there is a counterpart effect of “sectioning” time as “repetitive moments without development”; a process which destroys the “synaesthetic system’s” capacity to respond to the world: “rather than incorporating the outside world as a form of empowerment, or “innervation”,” it now takes on the role of “defensive reflex.”⁹⁹ To protect both body and mind from trauma it must become an *anaesthetics*, a numbing of the subject.

Crucially, for Buck-Morss, once “aesthetics changes from a cognitive mode of being “in touch” with reality to a way of blocking out reality” political agency is disabled: without authentic experience there is no basis for a political orientation.¹⁰⁰

“Anaesthetics” became, towards the end of the nineteenth century an increasingly “elaborate technics,” deployed not only to facilitate surgery (more and more the consequence of industrial accidents and modern warfare, both shocks against the integrity of the body) but also to defend against neurasthenia, conceived as a shattering or fragmentation of the psyche. The ability to immobilise either surgical patient’s body or neurasthenic’s over-stimulated brain with drugs (from ether to opium) was the chief medical / psychological response to the modern (lack of) experience. The key point is that for Benjamin, in an analogous way, “in the nineteenth century, a narcotic was made out of reality itself.”¹⁰¹ This is the phantasmagoria of modernity, a “technoaesthetics” of everyday life, which operates not by directly numbing, but by overstimulating the senses.¹⁰² The phantasmagoric is the means by which the mass spectacle meets the individual in the form of a private dreamworld.¹⁰³ As Buck-Morss notes, this privatization of sense-experience is exacerbated in the present; whether in packaged tourism, shopping malls, as well as “the individualized audiosensory environment of a “walkman,” the visual phantasmagoria of advertising, the tactile sensorium of a gymnasium full of Nautilus equipment.”¹⁰⁴ Again, here we could easily align Barney’s hermeticism and his use of gymnasium props with what Buck-Morss attacks as a phantasmagoric anaestheticisation of the subject.

If phantasmagoria is the compensatory social manifestation of the anaesthetic, Fascism’s genius is to rework the tripartite division of experience, characteristic of modern aesthetics as autogenesis, by placing the masses in the position both of observer and *hyle* (mute matter), whilst retaining the position of agent-surgeon for itself. It is by this positioning that “due to a displacement of the place of pain, due to a

consequent mis(re)cognition, the mass-as-audience remains somehow undisturbed by the spectacle of its own manipulation."¹⁰⁵ This is exemplified for Buck-Morss in Leni Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), in which the massed bodies form a cinematic aesthetic surface. "The aesthetics allows an *anaestheticization* of reception, a viewing of the "scene" with disinterested pleasure, even when that scene is the preparation through ritual of a whole society for unquestioning sacrifice and ultimately, destruction, murder, and death."¹⁰⁶ The "aesthetics of surface" by which fascist aesthetics presents the social body to the individual offers "a reassuring perception of the rationality of the whole ... which when viewed from his or her own particular body is perceived as a threat to wholeness."¹⁰⁷ The representation of the social mass as

"a deindividualized, formal, and regular pattern ... is already present in Wagner's operas in the staging of the chorus, which anticipates the crowd's salute to Hitler. But lest we forget that fascism is not itself responsible for the transformed perception, musical productions of the 1930s used this same design motif (Hitler was an aficionado of American musicals)."¹⁰⁸

To recall Norman Bryson's question re: *Cremaster 1*, it would seem on this reading that Berkeley, Reifenstahl, Hitler and Barney *do indeed* dream the same anaesthetic dreams. But the Artwork essay offers another way to read the aesthetics of cinema, and to resist this hyperbolically negative interpretation.

According to Buck-Morss's argument, the medical use of anaesthetics combined with the social technologies of visual presentation when, with the emergence of germ theory and the consequent emphasis on sterility, the pedagogic operating space was remade from a *theatrical* stage, into a kind of proto-cinematic apparatus, with projection screen etc. This formulation recalls Benjamin's argument in the Artwork essay that the cameraman compares to the painter as surgeon does to magician. Yet Benjamin's point is not that both are *anaesthetic* technicians, but that this comparison establishes cinema as the utopian form of technology par excellence. Benjamin writes:

"The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body... In short, in contrast to the magician – who is still hidden in the medical practitioner – the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him."¹⁰⁹

Likewise, whereas "the painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web."¹¹⁰ The paradoxical point upon which Benjamin insists here is that film's very mechanical technique, in its disguising of itself, presents "an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment ... what one is entitled to ask from a work of art."¹¹¹ Thus the reaction of the masses shifts from a reactionary one to Picasso, to a progressive one to Chaplin, a reaction "characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation

of the expert ... With regard to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide."¹¹² The key reason for this is the imbrication of individual and collective responses – something that painting's intimate conditions of viewing precludes.

Just as Freud brought attention to slips which had previously passed unnoticed so "the film has brought about a similar deepening of apperception."¹¹³ Film isolates and precisely reveals behaviour – a capacity which makes it of mutual (indeed, Benjamin goes as far as to say *identical*) value for art and science. Film as visual technology "extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action."¹¹⁴ Cinema is a playing out of shock that helps us deal with shock. It does so, Benjamin thinks, by engaging a mode of reception characterised as 'distraction,' so that whereas "a man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it ... In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art."¹¹⁵ Benjamin's attitude to this second mode of apperception goes against the grain of much modernist aesthetics in elevating precisely the qualities usually deprecated as the loss of culture.¹¹⁶ This elevation is predicated on the positive estimation Benjamin makes of the habitual as a means of 'innervating' transformed conditions of existence. Thus, for him, architecture is appropriated by the subject both optically (contemplation) and tactilely (by habit), and this indicates that "the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation."¹¹⁷ Art provides the condition for such transformation of apperception,

by habituating the subject to what he would, as an individual avoid. This is the positive role Benjamin sees as being (potentially) played by film.

Buck-Morss's account might lead us to align, as Buchloh does, Barney's aesthetic with Wagner's, and thus to see in it a failure to authentically respond to traumatic social conditions and their assault on the "synaesthetic apparatus." This charge can be refuted by reference to Benjamin's attitude to cinema as medium. Perhaps more serious, however, would be the charge that Barney's basic conceptual focus on the narcissistic auto-criticism wherein self / other, self / world boundaries are permeable and mutable, is in fact analogous to an overly *successful* internalisation of technology's most damaging effects. This internalisation has been given a detailed analysis as a major component of the psychology of psychotic serial killing by Mark Seltzer. Seltzer notes that serial killers are unusually well-versed in professional and pop-psychological concepts of their activities, indicative of an assimilation of the very discursive power-knowledge which frames them. Ted Bundy would be a case in point: he expressed himself in "endless strings of mass media and pop-academic clichés ... as if the pages of *Psychology Today* were time-sharing his words..."¹¹⁸

It is precisely in terms of technologically-mediated mimesis and excessive identification (valorized in the present argument, and frequently in interpretations of Barney) that Seltzer discusses the psychology of the modern serial killer. In his argument "repetitive, compulsive, serial violence ... does not exist without this radical entanglement between forms of eroticized violence and mass technologies of registration, identification, and reduplication, forms of copy-cattng and simulation."¹¹⁹ It is by excessive endorsement of the radical equivalence of bodies

under capitalism, and of the informational and productive indifference towards the subject that the serial killer emerges – and this takes place via over-identification: “The distinctions between fact and fiction and between bodies and information vanish, along the lines of an identification without reserve.”¹²⁰ Both killers and detectives participate in such identification, the efforts of the latter attempting to make intelligible the intentions of the former.¹²¹

Uncannily, it is in terms very similar to Barney’s that Dennis Nilson expressed his simultaneous sense of oneness with Nature and of the mass populus as indistinct, already dead. A central feature of serial killing is that a pathological identification with others renders the self-other distinction inoperative. Hence, for Nilson, his relationship with the world “starts in narcissism and ends in confusion.”¹²² Seltzer argues that this identification that undoes identity operates through the subjective absorption in technologies of mechanical reproduction. “For Nilsen, it involved, above all, a fixation on mirror images of his own made-up body and on the mirroring and photographing of the made-up, taken apart, and artifactualized bodies of his victims.”¹²³ The repetition of the dynamics of the mirror-stage is clear, with body-in-pieces and as *gestalt* both re-staged, and it is no coincidence that the serial killer encounters his victims as *image*.

For Seltzer it is characteristic of the serial killer that they are unusually typical, a “mass in person.”¹²⁴ Again, the dynamics of this resonate with Barney’s project, insofar as “this absorption in typicality and melting into place is bound up with another form of self-evacuation or devivification: *a drive to make interior states audible, visible, and controllable.*”¹²⁵ The dismemberment of others, the exploration

of their interiors through violence, is thus an attempt at self-discovery projected onto a world not differentiated from the self. Nilsen and John Wayne Gacy, in their respective accounts of their crimes, present them as “suicides by proxy” – as indeed *Cremaster 3* treats Oedipal patricide, which in that film’s Masonic logic is a serial self-mortification; expressed in the chant “I die daily” performed by a hardcore punk band in the Guggenheim interlude, and in the simultaneous deaths of the various manifestations of Barney’s “self” – including the patriarchal Serra / Hiram character – that concludes the film.¹²⁶

Seltzer’s primary example of the serial killer’s narcissistic assimilation of/to the traumatic technological social context takes us back once again to the World’s Columbian Exposition, where Houdini and Sandow (and, at least fictionally in *Cremaster 2*, Barney) made exhibitions of themselves. Taking advantage of the crowds who flocked to the White City and its pedagogic and populist attractions was Herman Webster Mudgett, a.k.a H. H. Holmes, who had constructed a 100-room building, one purpose of which was to provide rented accommodation, but which also served as a murder weapon – with estimates of Holmes’s victims running into the hundreds. The so-called “Castle” was a maze-like house of traps, concealed passages, surveillance devices and “lethal architecture” (such as a fire-proofed gas-chamber), whose ways were only known by Holmes himself.¹²⁷ This building makes explicit “the intimacies of serial violence and machine culture” in “the strange prosthetic devices Holmes invented to process his victims. ... [H]is inventions and self-inventions make him something like an extreme limit case of the self-made man.”¹²⁸ If the “self-made man” is – as we have seen with Houdini and Sandow – usually considered to have achieved singularity, uniqueness, with the serial killer the

achievement is rather an “exorbitant typicality” inseparable from “the subject’s over-identification with others and the subject’s over-identification with place.”¹²⁹

Holmes furnishes the most extreme example of this. Chicago – which Seltzer sees as *the* turn of the century “shock city” – amongst other achievements, lead the way in mechanised butchery – one meat-packing plant dispatching 60,000 head of cattle *per day* on its “disassembly lines.”¹³⁰ In Seltzer’s thesis, subjectivity in a state of traumatic shock, failing to establish public/private and other boundaries is not to be thought only in the celebratory postmodern form as an openness to self-construction, but with the countervailing “endlessly endured imperative of self-production (a repetitive drill in autogenesis)”: an “internally divided logic of self-construction [which] is indissociable from the double-logic of prosthesis: the vexed intimacy with technology that defines the subject of machine culture.”¹³¹ Barney’s extensive use of prosthetics in the construction of his body-morphing representations seems to gloss over this latter point.¹³² However, if for Katharine Ott the *metaphorical* allusion to prosthetics in recent theory tends to elide the experiential conditions of those literally tasked with the self-constructive project of incorporating prostheses as part of their selves, Barney *is* arguably sensitive to this.¹³³ Along with Serra, his alter-ego in *Cremaster 3* is Aimee Mullins, a double amputee who like Barney himself has been an athlete and model (Figs. 103-106).¹³⁴ The mutability of self-prc-sentation achieved in the various prostheses Mullins wears in the film does not support what would be misleading claims for aesthetic-performative subjectivity *inventing itself* autogenetically - which would elevate this highly mediated instance beyond its bounds. On the other hand, it does at least point to the qualitative improvement that has taken place in prosthetic technology since, for example, the World’s Columbian

Exposition, where nine different manufacturers vied for attention and custom, and promised to make amputees “whole” again. At this historical juncture, the increased social importance of appearance in an urban “society of strangers” meant that prosthetic technology (literally) propped normative identities.¹³⁵ That Barney can aestheticise what is clearly *not* such normative embodiment seems to me a welcome sign.

Seltzer reads Holmes as literalizing the capitalist equivalence of commodities in relation to bodies. Counter-intuitively, the key point for Seltzer here is that the focus on the body is atavistic in its “violent materializations of the passion for equivalence.”¹³⁶ Naturally Barney’s films are not morally equivalent to the acts of a serial killer (!), but the point to be emphasised, against a binaristic opposition of “good” bodily equilibrium and “bad” (proto-fascist) narcissistic fantasy, is that it is precisely their phantasmatic virtuality that manifests a counter-movement to the atavism of a “refeudalised” alchemy of the body, and indeed to a fascist armouring of the self.¹³⁷ To develop this point I now return to Benjamin’s Artwork essay, and more specifically to Miriam Hansen’s reading of it.

Hansen focuses on the utopian possibilities released in the technological shattering of tradition. Her argument forms a necessary counterpoint to Buck-Morss’s emphasis on Benjamin’s warning against the dire threat of the fascist aestheticisation of the political and experiential. To read both approaches together is to open up again the ambivalence which Benjamin’s thought consistently works with/in, and thereby to reinstate its challenge to artists and theorists. Slavoj Žižek has recently argued that Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* and *Triumph of the Will* should not be read as revealing the

proto-fascist basis of all projects of mass participation, but as the fascist *appropriation* of specifically communist forms of activity. "Along the same lines," he writes "one should radically reject the notion that discipline, from self-control to bodily training, is inherently a proto-fascist feature."¹³⁸ Rather, the task is to achieve a counter-appropriation, and to accept that rather than evidence of primordial, innate fascism, Riefenstahl's varied cinematic projects reveal her as "inconsistent, caught in a web of conflicting forces."¹³⁹ If Benjamin's political call for the politicisation of art unequivocally binarises the options for artist and critic, this is not to say that everything exploited by fascism is to be abandoned to it.

Hansen refocuses the Artwork essay's positive interpretation of the role of cinema by reading as its "*Ur-text*" the second version of February 1936; doing so allows her to amplify the concept of *Spielraum*, a theme largely overlooked in the reception of the essay via the redrafted version included in *Illuminations*.¹⁴⁰ Hansen notes that Benjamin's argument is unusually binary in the canonical version of the Artwork essay, especially in opposing *masses* and *aura*; a rhetorical device which functions to "crystallize" the intellectual's choice, as unequivocally put in the conclusion to the Artwork essay, between communism and fascism, politicization and aestheticization.¹⁴¹ The *Ur-text* complicates this by locating *aura* within the constellation of "semblance and play."¹⁴² Here *play* is the concept which allows Benjamin "to imagine an alternative mode of aesthetics on a par with modern, collective experience, an aesthetics that could counteract, at the level of sense-perception, the political consequences of the failed – that is, capitalist and imperialist, destructive and self-destructive – reception of technology."¹⁴³ It is within this constellation that film takes on its particular significance for Benjamin. Play is, in

Benjamin's thinking generally, valorised as a mode of "innervation," that is, as a repetitive habitual transformation of the experience of shock.¹⁴⁴ This conception is clearly articulated in the 1928 essay 'Toys and Play,' where Benjamin argues that it is "not a 'doing as if' but a 'doing the same thing over and over again,' the transformation of a shattering experience into habit ... that is the essence of play."¹⁴⁵ It is in these terms, Hansen argues, that Benjamin conceives of film as "the medium of repetition par excellence."¹⁴⁶ One connotation of this, deriving from the *trauerspiel* study is that melancholia, as a form of repetition takes on a utopian, and distinctly non-Freudian value in Benjamin's thought.¹⁴⁷ Another connotation is gambling as play – *Hasardspiel* – which is part of Benjamin's ongoing effort to theorise alternate modes of apperception to those produced in the "bungled reception of technology", a reception already manipulated by fascism.¹⁴⁸ The crucial point is that for Benjamin the ambiguous status of play is taken as a "point of departure, rather than a token of decline."¹⁴⁹ *Spielraum* constitutes that point as the positive consequence of the decline of an art of aura and semblance, and counter-intuitively it is here that Benjamin situates film.¹⁵⁰ Film *qua* art's role is to work through the technological interplay between humanity and nature and thus provide the conditions for a positive transformation of apperception, or, to recall Buck-Morss's term, the "synaesthetic system." Benjamin saw in cinema a play-form of technology which might enable "the aesthetic mobilization of affective and cognitive processes that both depend upon and shape the viewer's memory, imagination, and mimetic capacity."¹⁵¹ This is the part of his project which continues, insistently, to address the present, even as the political frame – fascism or communism? – which shaped its formation seems to have been superseded.

Against the general decrying of spectacularisation, which is today often carried out in his name, Benjamin conceived of the triumph of the image as a political opportunity, with the circulation of images within a collectivity establishing the possibility of new forms of space-body-image relations. If image-technology in its destructive aspect “annihilates” the individual, a reciprocal transformation of collectivity is called for.¹⁵² In cinema specifically this is indicated by the actor’s “*individual* innervation of technology at the level of *production*” which opens the possibility of “*collective* innervation at the level of *reception*, in the corporeal space of the audience assembled in the theatre, through processes of mimetic identification specific to cinema.”¹⁵³ Benjamin thus “valorizes film for making self-alienation materially and publicly perceivable, in other words, quotable and available for action.”¹⁵⁴ Here Chaplin is cited as the cinematic icon who reveals the bodily and psychic consequences of fragmentation and alienated labour. Such a reading might provide one genealogy of Barney’s exploration of masculinity, one in which just as Chaplin innervated the production line, comically representing the overly-successful adaptation of the human body to the mechanical, Vito Acconci could be read as enacting the failure of compensatory superego injunctions, and Barney as inverting this concept of failure to become a perverse success.

Hansen rightly invokes the challenge of the virtual, digitised, spectacular age as one which Benjamin would not have pessimistically shirked: digitisation “opens up for human beings another, dramatically enlarged *Spielraum*, a virtual space that significantly modifies the interrelations of body- and image-space and offers hitherto unimaginable modes of playful innervation.”¹⁵⁵ This is precisely where the most positive, albeit emphatically not unambivalent, reading of Barney’s art takes place. He

indicates that an innervation of hybridity and bodily transformation under the reign of image can be positively accomplished, at least within the privileged sphere of art. Significantly, the relevance of this extends far beyond the (identity) politics of representation, to the transformations in conceptions of embodiment and the ever greater mutability of bodies, with far-reaching consequences for both subjectivity and the extension of power through ever finer capillaries. The terms in which this is expressed indicates the three primary theoretical orientations of this thesis: a Benjaminian insistence of the ambivalence of technological transformation; a Foucauldian conception of power, and of the co-extensiveness of resistance to it; and a Žižekian acknowledgement of the problematics of reflexivity and identity politics as an outcome of poststructuralist/postmodernist critique. The full elaboration of this as a theoretical position depends on a complex negotiation of Foucault's antipathy to psychoanalysis as discursive producer of 'sexuality', Žižek's rejection of Foucault for this very reason, and Benjamin's dialectical conception of temporality with both. Such a project seems to be a viable future direction emerging from this thesis, a positive move towards "following by betraying" as outlined in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

For Buck-Morss “the camera can aid us in knowledge of fascism, because it provides an “aesthetic” experience that is nonauratic, critically testing, capturing with its “unconscious optics” precisely the dynamics of narcissism on which the politics of fascism depends, but which its own auratic aesthetics conceals.”¹⁵⁶ This is not just a historical question for Buck-Morss: she argues that we must recognise our own narcissism as a trait that functions “as an anaesthetizing tactic ... appealed to daily by the image-phantasmagoria of mass culture” and, moreover, “the ground from which fascism can again push forth.”¹⁵⁷ Yet this is to miss the ambivalence that pertains even to such a pathologised subjective condition as narcissism. Just as Foucault’s aesthetics of the self suggests that opportunities for substantively transformed experiences of subjectivity exist, so Matthew Barney’s art reconfigures narcissism as a way of generating forms that work against the representation of self as armour.¹⁵⁸ The crucial point is that a melancholic attachment to lost sites of critique – which, somewhat harshly perhaps, I attribute to Buchloh – is ultimately not even contesting the production of meaning in other sites. Barney’s work may have been theorised in a particularly esoteric (even baroque) mix of psychoanalysis and pop culture references, but that is not to say that it should be understood exclusively in those terms. Or rather, the work itself suggests in its very treatment of psychoanalytic and cultural narratives, that they are not the ahistorical, ultimate horizon of meaning. In Barney’s art, particularly the *Cremaster* series, myths, novels, artists, technologies, and bodies are

treated as so much material to be used – as are the theories, especially psychoanalytic theories, that interpret them. The significance of this is that rather than confirm the omnipotence of psychoanalytic approaches, it implies that they may no longer be the distinctive interpretative technique of our time. Rather than exemplifying the fallen world of ‘reflexive’ portfolio identities, of psychoanalysis as (self-) mythology, of art as commodified spectacle, by treating narratives as material to be sculpturally reformed or hypertrophically inflated, Barney’s art gestures towards the positive possibilities which accompany these phenomena.

In Judith Butler’s work, the political project of queering gendered identity operates with a psychoanalytic vocabulary transmuted by, amongst other things, its hybridization with Foucauldian insights, and thereby not dependent on an unchanging repetition of Freudian normativity. As she writes,

“the phallus appears *as symbolic only to the extent that its construction through the transfigurative and specular mechanisms of the imaginary is denied*. Indeed, if the phallus is an imaginary effect, a wishful transfiguration, then it is not merely the *symbolic* status of the phallus that is called into question, but the very distinction between the symbolic and the imaginary.”¹⁵⁹

The crucial achievement of this work is to politicise the imaginary through this questioning. The key term for Butler in this “resignification” of the phallus, disconnected from the penis, and from Lacan’s symbolic schema, is the “lesbian phallus.” Though deliberately left indeterminate in her argument,

the lesbian phallus as “possible site of desire” is not an imaginary identification to be set against a *real* one.¹⁶⁰ Rather it serves to promote an alternative *imaginary* to a hegemonic imaginary, and to show, through that assertion, the ways in which the hegemonic imaginary constitutes itself through the naturalization of an exclusionary heterosexual morphology.”¹⁶¹ Matthew Barney’s prosthetic imaginary is likewise not to be set against the reality of the body, but rather set to work within the imaginary supports of the contemporary body politic. As Jay Prosser relates, in an extraordinary evocation of personal loss and desire, the surgical-prosthetic transformations of the body reach their limit in the construction of a functioning (that is *phallic*) penis for female-to-male transsexuals. Yet, Prosser argues, “in spite of the fact that transsexuality is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing.”¹⁶² The crucial theoretical point here is that the aesthetic as an imaginary, affective locus of subjective transformation offers the possibility of recovering (from) the past. Just as Benjamin held out hope for the politico-aesthetic worth of the ‘dialectical image’ that brought together past and present, and Foucault utilised an aesthetic approach to history-as-genealogy to disrupt the naturalised present, so here I have returned to these theorists, whose moment might be thought to have past, to insist on the continued value of their projects. For Prosser such returns are *palinodic*, and the palinode, “though tied up with loss and belatedness – like transsexuality an attempt to *get it right this time* – is ultimately restorative in realizing loss.”¹⁶³

This thesis began with a consideration of Cornelia Parker’s *The Distance*, an image of constraint. It concludes by identifying with Houdini as figure of the art historian, an identification that implies the possibility of an escape from constraint. Such an escape, it should be clear by now, is not a transcendence of the problematics of modernity or

postmodernity, but a figure for the belief that critical potential exists within these problematics. If art's "living on" is in many ways an auratic living death, accompanied by art history's melancholic attachment (to something it creates out of its very loss), then Barney's art, and my interpretation of it, affirms that there is a future beyond the acceptance of this loss. Such a future need not only be the triumph of spectacular amnesia but might also offer new fantasy-frames for the reconfiguration of reality – at least in theory. Two forms of melancholia need to be contrasted, rather than opposed to the closure of mourning: the attachment to the dead object that remains elusive, and Benjamin's notion of the *play* of melancholy which recovers the past for the dialectical imaging of the present. Art history tends too often to operate in the former mode.

Amongst Houdini's attempts at originality and uniqueness was a bid to hold an aviation record – on a par with Blériot, who made the first crossing of the English Channel in 1909 – though in the end he had to settle for being 'the first magician to fly in Australia.'¹⁶⁴ That he was attracted to aviation and the aeroplane as "the symbol of modern people's hubris" – the vehicle for their hope of "getting away from it all" – is hardly a surprise.¹⁶⁵ If Houdini was famous for falling from bridges, it is also unsurprising that he should be interested in flight as an escape from gravity, a way of maintaining the moment of weightlessness, which, as Michael Balint argues, repeats both "the very early mother-child relationship" and "the still earlier intrauterine existence, during which we were really one with our universe."¹⁶⁶ Flight is thus a kind of hubristic unity which transgresses the very limitations that constitute human mortality, and the Icarus myth suggests that the consequence of such hubris, such presumption of transcendence, is a fall to earth. The story of Icarus is almost always

invoked as a cautionary tale against over-reaching, yet Phillips notes that it also implies “that we transgress *in order to find out if we can escape; to find out just what ... the instigators of the law are made of.*”¹⁶⁷ The ambiguity of the myth, then, which is usually effaced to affirm of the wisdom of a middle course, is that Icarus’s punishment is for an experiment with limits that is inherent to the hubris of flight itself as a rivalry with the Gods. The aeroplane is one of Benjamin’s examples of the failed reception of technology. Susan Buck-Morss writes:

“The airplane, miraculous object of the new nature, has no theological meaning in itself. That would be phantasmagoria (– one thinks of the image of Hitler’s plane flying divinely through the clouds in Riefenstahl’s film ‘Triumph of the Will’). The airplane’s theological meaning in Benjamin’s sense emerges only in its ‘construction’ as a historical object.”¹⁶⁸

In other words, it is only when, in a double image or double view, both the “Messianic” potential and Hellish reality are juxtaposed that the dialectical meaning of this technology emerges. In a fragment for the *Arcades Project* Benjamin cites Pierre-Maxime Schuhl’s 1938 *Machinisme et Philosophie*: “The bombers make us remember what Leonardo da Vinci expected of man in flight; that he was to ascend to the skies ‘in order to seek snow on the mountaintops and bring it back to the city to spread on the sweltering streets in summer’.”¹⁶⁹ Benjamin also cites Leonardo in this fragment, to the effect that his technological inventions should not be disseminated, for they will inevitably be exploited by “the wickedness of men.”¹⁷⁰ The bomb-dropping airplane is in just this sense the dialectical antithesis of da Vinci’s utopian,

Icarian, anticipation of human flight. As Benjamin puts it in the Artwork essay's penultimate paragraph, "instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, [society] drops incendiary bombs over cities."¹⁷¹

Hansen draws attention to the way, in the Artwork *Ur*-text, that Benjamin set out the distinction between first (ritual) technology and (modern, mechanical) second technology in terms of the latter's minimal use of human beings. This difference was figured by Benjamin as the culmination of ritual in human sacrifice, and the culmination of second technology "in the remote-controlled aircraft which needs no human crew."¹⁷² For Benjamin this was, contrary to what we might expect, a sign of technology's utopian potential; the positive repetition that, exemplified by cinema, creates *Spielraum*. Yet, as Hansen registers, the image of the remote-controlled aircraft for the contemporary reader suggests not the montage technique inherent to film, even less the child's mimetic relation to the world in play, but rather "American-style electronic warfare (drones, cruise missiles)."¹⁷³ Amongst the most poignant images of the Gulf War of 1991 was that of Iraqi troops attempting to surrender to an unmanned surveillance drone, which impassively relayed these increasingly desperate signals to remote intelligence officers, and thence to the global media. Here we recognise the central dilemma of the "panoptic" prisoner in Foucault's account: the central place of power is empty, but its effects are dispersed throughout an architectural apparatus of knowledge-power both containing and creating the subject. The ambivalence of technology identified by Benjamin, and the ambivalence of power as identified by Foucault are increasingly complementary. If art history is to have a politically effective dimension it has to respond to this state of affairs, both in recognising the negative, oppressive impact of an ever more visual / virtual culture on

subjects (and art itself), and articulating the sites and strategies through which art might operate as critique. This was exactly how Foucault saw his project; it was emphatically *not* anaesthetic in its effects, but rather immobilizing, or paralyzing of the self-evident “acts, gestures, discourses” of the present, through a historical analysis that renders them problematic. Against the criticism that his work was anaesthetic in terms of its lack of a programme for action, Foucault insisted that “critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, “this, then, is what needs to be done.” It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. ... The problem ... is one for the subject who acts – the subject of action through which the real is transformed.”¹⁷⁴ This *positive* response to the changes wrought by postmodernity must mean not only the analysis of symptoms, but an attempt to wrest from the present the potential to escape them.

At the beginning of this thesis I suggested that although it was possible to conceive of the period of critically engaged art and poststructuralist critique as over, I wished to strongly resist such a move. The group around the journal *October* have been perhaps the most successful exponents of such critical engagement, yet I wish to conclude by indicating how I have come to think that critique itself needs to move beyond the limits of their model – which seems to culminate in their collaborative book *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* – not to break with it entirely, certainly not to revert to a prior state of affairs, but perhaps to “follow by betraying.” My project has shifted from its initial grounding in *Octoberism*, through a critique of its way of reading certain theoretical positions, to the beginnings of an alternate paradigm. One of the symptomatic features of *Octoberism* is a fundamental difficulty

in mapping the present. There is, I contend, a resistance to any cultural practice that is inassimilable to what they have called "antimodernism," conceived as a kind of dialectical expansion of central features of modernism itself (that is: specificity, critical self-reflexivity). This much is evident in Rosalind Krauss's essay 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,' in the very first issue of *October* (in relation to Vito Acconci's *Centers*), and in many essays since then. What is interesting in *Art Since 1900* is how their inclination / ability to affirm art work as critically valuable tails off towards the end of the twentieth century; when artistic practices are affirmed it is under the rubric of "obsolescence" and the "archival." Does this evidence a kind of disavowed self-recognition of the fate of *Octoberism* itself? Or, more likely, doesn't it show how much the critical judgements of the leading members of the group (and many who follow in their wake, or who have pursued parallel projects) have always been predicated on a negation of a postmodernity that has been defined in multiple ways, but usually, modernistically, as a kind of collapse into spectacle? In the end such models are fundamentally attuned to the kinds of challenges to the institution of art that were advanced in the 1960s and therefore struggle to plausibly tune in to much else, even when, as I tried to demonstrate in relation to Cornelia Parker, such challenges may still appear, albeit in new forms.

One of the key problems with a model which weighs critical value according to "antimodernist" criteria is that it misses or performatively contradicts the lessons of the critical sources on which it draws. Alongside the failure to acknowledge the subjective and contingent bases of knowledge, a further crucial dimension of this problem emerges precisely in relation to the way that the postmodern present becomes determined as (political, aesthetic) catastrophe: simply, there is a failure to engage

with the example of (for example) Benjamin and Foucault, who both ground their accounts of modernity in the historical exigencies of their respective presents.

Foucault called for a “historical ontology of ourselves,” bringing together historiography and a form of self-relation, a practice of working on the self through knowledge. There is good reason for the *Octoberists* to avoid such a foregrounding of *themselves* in relation to their historiography, as this would force them to come to terms with their hegemonic rather than oppositional (“revolutionary”) status. (A symptom of this avoidance is in the continued negative dependency on Greenberg as an antagonist against which to maintain an oppositional pose, despite the fact that “Greenbergians” are notably thin on the ground). The question, I think, is why, in producing such an obviously canonizing book, they have - like Napoleon – decided to end their revolution by crowning themselves?

The interesting thing for me about *Art Since 1900* is that these issues – commitment to continued / expanded modernism, interest in obsolescence and archive, refusal to incorporate or implicate the authorial position as part of what is theorised – seem bound together, and imply specific directions in which to move beyond *Octoberism* without throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Specifically, I think that it is necessary to ask how it might be possible to think through the subjective, desire-driven, identificatory bases of such elementary art historical procedures as connecting or “articulating” art works within larger narratives, in such a way that not only “excessive” performances of “fictioning history” but *all* such accounts would be fully implicated in the stakes of the present. It is this project that I have tried to begin here. Genealogy, as the use of history to undermine the self-evidence of the present, and

aesthetics, as the affective mode by which trauma might be turned into *spielraum*,
provide the tools for such a project.

¹ Foster, H., Krauss, R. E., Bois, Y.-A., Buchloh, B. H. D. *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), pp. 636, 658, 673, 677, 681. Though Buchloh is most outspoken amongst the *October* group, Foster has also expressed reservations about Barney's "quasi-athletic apparatuses" as estranged objects related to the body, which as an example of work evoking the real, run the risk that an "illusionist approach to the real can lapse into a coded surrealism." *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1996), 152.

² Buchloh, *Art Since 1900*, op. cit., 677.

³ 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,' *October*, No. 1, (Spring, 1976), 51-64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵ Karla Schultz, 'In Defense of Narcissus: Lou Andreas-Salomé and Julia Kristeva,' *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 2, (Spring, 1994), 190.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁷ Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, cited in *ibid.*, 190.

⁸ Relyea, 'Openings: Matthew Barney,' *Artforum*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (May, 1991), 124.

⁹ Writing by Spector and Wakefield dominates *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2002); essays by Wakefield and Flood are to be found in Barney, *PACE CAR for the Hubris Pill* (exh. cat.), (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 1995). As David Frankel has noted, the explanations emerging from such sources (and from Barney himself) are "minute, lucid, yet delirious (delirious because so minutely lucid)" but ultimately "leave you feeling that you can't get there by yourself." 'Hungarian Rhapsody,' *Artforum*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (October, 1997), 78.

¹⁰ This passage was discussed in Frank Kermode's review of Zadie Smith's novel *On Beauty*, and much criticized for its snobbery and facetiousness. 'Here she is,' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 29, No. 6, (6th October, 2005),

¹¹ Such hyperbole abounds in the Barney literature, to a quite astonishing degree. Francesca Miglietti serves as evidence of this here: "the beings of Matthew Barney seem to have been composed of the material of the colours and auras activated by magnetic fields made from high-voltage electricity, beings that have chosen to interpret a mission that develops through the hybrid forms of a reflection based upon insistent ethical questions from a media-based organism that renders us complicit in the uncomfortable position of voyeurs." *Extreme Bodies: The Use and Abuse of the Body in Art*, (Milan: Skira, 2003), 180-181.

¹² Michael Kimmelman, "The Importance of Matthew Barney." *The New York Times Magazine*, Oct 10, 1999, p. 63.

¹³ Nancy Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us" in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle* (New York: Guggenheim, 2002), p.6. As indicated above, this source is indispensable for the deciphering of Barney's iconography, and I draw on it extensively here.

¹⁴ Barney, in Thyrza Nichols Goodeve 'Travels in Hypertrophia,' *Artforum*, Vol. 33, No. 9 (May 1995), 117.

¹⁵ Perhaps the most famous representation of male narcissism in modern art is Duchamp's 'Bachelor Machine' in 'the Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even'. A model of a short-circuited and self-referential system fuelled by desire, but unable to achieve its goal, it stands at one end of an art historical arc which Barney's work also participates in. Depicted as 'coffins' the Bachelors take the form of uniforms for what were at that time all-male jobs - Department Store Delivery Boy, Priest, Undertaker, Station Master, Flunky etc. While these roles were exactly the kinds of coffins for masculinity that Houdini would escape from, Barney's male icons are decidedly more heroic in tone - athletes, cowboys, rock stars.

¹⁶ An action in which, Spector notes, "the performing body transmutes into its "part object";" op. cit., 13. In other words Barney, 'becomes' the testicle. (The inverted commas are well-advised - it is a notable feature of the Barney literature that the lines between artistic representations of metaphoric or metonymic transformations are rendered as literal metamorphoses. This is an index, I would argue, of the identificatory involvement which Barney's work's encourages particularly ably.

¹⁷ In the process Barney introduced a humorous kind of 'audience participation' into the work. Male visitors to the exhibitions were subject to the biological consequences of a low temperature...

¹⁸ The two protagonists are struggling for control over the direction in which the 'organism' of which they are part will develop. Barney represented Houdini's attempts to evade Otto and preserve a narcissistic wholeness of the organism via his drag act as the 'Feminine Jim Blind,' with East and West coast types (New York socialite and L. A. starlet). This, along with his presentation of his naked body

as a site for penetration in early video pieces, was problematic for male critics of the work, and lead to a perception of Barney as 'gender-bending.' See Simon Watney, 'Aphrodite of the Future,' *Artforum*, Vol. 32, No. 8 (April, 1994), 75-76, 119.

¹⁹ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London: Continuum, 2004, 133.

²⁰ Adorno, 'Schema of Mass Culture,' cited in Hansen, 'Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema,' *October* No. 109, (Summer, 2004), 35.

²¹ Freud 'Fetishism,' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XXI*, trans. J. Strachey, (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 157.

²² Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity*, (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 135.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ The conflict over form making in *Drawing Restraint 7* ends with the adult satyrs flaying each other, an act which resonates with early theories of photography and their use of bodily, and morbid metaphors. Relevant in particular is Oliver Wendell Holmes for whom, in 1859, the photographic image was the result of the sloughing off of 'membranes' from the subject. This new image culture was expressed by Holmes in terms of flaying: "Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us. Men will hunt curious, beautiful, grand objects, as they hunt cattle in South America, for their skins." Quoted in Jay Prosser, *Light From the Dark Room: Photography and Loss*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 180.

²⁵ As well as referring to Houdini, this jump connotes Narcissus as one who falls to his (watery) death.

²⁶ Mailer, *The Executioner's Song*, (London: Vintage, 1991). Barney's use of this book is often very subtle. Details such as the specific type of car Gilmore drove are given symbolic meaning in the film, and his aversion to noise – which made prison a particular torment – is brilliantly evoked in the sound design.

²⁷ The séance has particular resonance in Houdini's biography – something I will return to.

²⁸ I hazard a guess that Baby Fay is played by Barney's own mother. As the role is credited to 'anonymous' in the film's credits, and no other author has discussed this, I have so far been unable to ascertain whether or not this is correct. Barney's mother did appear in *Ottoshafi* (as a male football coach), and his father plays the judge of the harness track race which figures the character assessment establishing the guilt of Barney as the Entered Apprentice. There is a far greater degree of 'self-portraiture' in the *Cremaster Cycle* than is usually acknowledged, but the significant point is that Barney consciously exploits cultural, scientific and psychoanalytic narratives of patriarchal and matriarchal relationships to achieve this.

²⁹ Barney, in Goodeve, op. cit., 117.

³⁰ Again, this may refer to Houdini's biography. In a diary entry from the early 1920s records his observation of a son and mother relationship (in fact, that of Lady Doyle and her son): "He kissed her caressingly on the mouth, picked up her hand and kissed each finger in as courtly a manner as any prince kissing his Queen's hand." Cited in Kenneth Silverman, *Houdini!!! The Career of Ehrich Weiss* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 280. This observation, resonant as it is with Houdini's own relationship to his mother and his longed for reunion with her, helps explain some of the context of *Cremaster 5* and the relation of the Queen and her Magician.

³¹ This translation is given in Spector, op. cit., 69, and not in *Cremaster 5* itself – another example of the indispensability of this 'insider's' account.

³² Silverman, op. cit., 3-21.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴ John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man: the White male body and the challenge of modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 82-83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶ Cited in *ibid.*, 12.

³⁷ Kasson, op. cit.

³⁸ Silverman, op. cit., 232-235.

³⁹ Kasson, op. cit., 119.

⁴⁰ Adam Phillips, *Houdini's Box: On the Arts of Escape* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).

⁴¹ Kasson, op. cit.

⁴² Here Houdini's inescapability for magicians is akin to Duchamp's for appropriation artists. Many 'innovative' contemporary magicians use the spilling of trade secrets to indicate their anti-establishment attitude, and to disarm the competition – Houdini was using this trick in the early 1900s.

⁴³ Cited in Silverman, op. cit., 54.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 57-91.

- ⁴⁵ Kasson, op. cit.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-76.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ⁴⁹ Cited in Decker, *Freud, Dora, and Vienna 1900*, (London: Macmillan, 1991), 202. Freud's antipathy to Wittels's reductive understanding of psychoanalytic precepts is worth noting here. See Joseph Schwartz, *Cassandra's Daughter: A History of Psychoanalysis in Europe and America*, (London: Allen Lane, 1999), 102-103.
- ⁵⁰ Kasson, op. cit., pp. 21-76.
- ⁵¹ Silverman, op. cit., pp. 249-386.
- ⁵² See Ginzburg, C. 'Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm,' *Theory and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (May, 1979), 273-288.
- ⁵³ This episode is related in Silverman, op. cit., 280-284.
- ⁵⁴ That identification with spatial mastery of the New York skyline carries greater emotional weight than can ever have been expected surely contributes to the success of the *Spiderman* films. The trailer for the first film was memorably withdrawn after September 11th because it featured Spiderman swinging between the Twin Towers.
- ⁵⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, op. cit., p.53.
- ⁵⁶ Haraway, 'The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,' *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 149-181.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, see also Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™*, (London: Routledge, 1997).
- ⁵⁸ Philip Auslander, *From Acting to Performance*, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 127-134.
- ⁵⁹ Goodeve, op. cit., 67.
- ⁶⁰ Against the voluntarist interpretation of drag as intentional gender performance Butler recasts performativity "as a specific modality of power as discourse. For discourse to materialize a set of effects, "discourse" itself must be understood as complex and convergent chains in which "effects" are vectors of power." *Bodies That Matter*, op. cit., 187.
- ⁶¹ Butler, 'Gender as Performance,' in Osborne (ed.) *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 111.
- ⁶² Robert Morris 'Notes on the Phenomenology of Making,' in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: the writings of Robert Morris*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press).
- ⁶³ Krauss's account of Serra's reading of Pollock emphasizes how horizontality transformed "the whole project of art from making objects, in their increasingly reified form, to articulating the vectors that connect objects to subjects." "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 26. Serra's emphasis on the object and its material specificity is obviously distinct from Barney's approach to material as psychosexual/biological metaphor. Serra concisely expresses the difference in approach as that between a model-based approach (his own) and Barney's image-based work. Interview on PBS DVD *Art:21*
- ⁶⁴ Hal Foster, 'The Un/Making of Sculpture,' *Richard Serra, Sculpture 1985-1998*, (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 17.
- ⁶⁵ On the *Torqued Ellipses* and their industrial manufacture and perceptual originality, see Serra's detailed interviews with David Sylvester in *Interviews with American Artists*, (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 287-327.
- ⁶⁶ Foster, op. cit., 24.
- ⁶⁷ This was Serra's own concern too -- in an interview in the Guggenheim's *Cremaster Cycle* catalogue, he indicated that he had initially thought of Barney's use of him as "a satire or as a deconstruction" or "some kind of postmodernist pastiche." op. cit., 499.
- ⁶⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-155.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ⁷¹ Žižek gives a very informative account of the supplementary role of Freud's narrative of primordial patricide in relation to the Oedipus complex. In the former it is established that as cultural beings we are all responsible for an act which is dreamt about in the Oedipal scene. *The Ticklish Subject*, 314-316.
- ⁷² Bloom, op. cit., 119.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁷⁴ The association of Serra's last splashing pieces with a patriarchal/masculine persona is reinforced within the logic of the Guggenheim interlude in *Cremaster 3* by the fact that he represents the 5th Degree of Masonic initiation and thereby *Cremaster 5*. As Barney himself explains, "in the cycle of films, 5 is representative of the fully descended system; or this organism that's going through an evolution toward a defined sort of evolved state; in number 5 it finally defines itself and in that way begins to die. So the thrown lead works always felt to me like an interesting way of thinking about this idea, where an undifferentiated mass, a chaotic mass of hot lead was taken and willfully thrown against the wall where it would crystallize into a differentiated form." 'Director's Commentary,' *The Order* DVD, Palm Pictures, 2003.

⁷⁵ Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction,' (1914), in *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. John Rickman, (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), pp. 118-141. This theory was derived from Freud's analysis of pathological conditions, including the Schreber case, in which paranoia is linked to narcissism and repressed homosexuality. As early as 1899 Freud had described paranoiac conditions, in a letter to Fleiss, as a "return to an early autoeroticism." Letter of 9/12/1899, cited in Freud, *Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*, *Case Histories 2*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 132.

⁷⁶ Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I,' *Écrits* (London: Routledge, 1989), 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸³ Bryson, 'Matthew Barney's Gonadotrophic Cavalcade,' *Parkett*, No. 45, (1995), 32.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁵ Buck-Morss, S. 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered,' *October* Vol. 62 (Autumn, 1992), 3-41; Hansen, M. B. 'Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema' *October* Vol. ? (Summer, 2004) 3-45; Hansen, M. B. 'Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: "The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology"' *New German Critique*, (Winter, 1987), 179-224.

⁸⁶ Foster, H. 'Postmodernism in Parallax' in *October*, No. 63, (Winter 1993), 3-20.

⁸⁷ Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics,' op. cit. 37, my emphasis.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁹ See Taylor Downing, *Olympia*, (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

⁹⁰ 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics,' op. cit., 38.

⁹¹ Adorno, cited in *ibid.*, 24-25.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹³ Buchloh, in Foster et al, (2004) op. cit., 673. It was precisely for reasons of (perceived) neo-Wagnerianism that Buchloh expressed his disapproval of Joseph Beuys. Beuys's statement that he would not "carry art into politics" but rather "wished to "make politics into art" is contrasted with Benjamin's Artwork essay conclusion, and taken by Buchloh as evidence of a "crypto-fascist" attitude. 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol: Preliminary Notes for a Critique,' *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), 61. The antipathy to Barney and Beuys in American art history is to be addressed by David Hopkins in a forthcoming publication, and I am indebted to discussions with him on this point.

⁹⁴ Buck-Morss cites Jameson on Habermas as the neo-Kantian in whom the aesthetic ends up as "a kind of sandbox to which one consigns all those vague things ... under the heading of the irrational."

Quoted in 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics,' op. cit., 7

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ A detailed account of Benjamin's theory of phantasmagoric dreamworlds is given in Buck-Morss's *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (London: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 253-286.

¹⁰⁴ 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics,' op. cit., 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, (London: Pimlico, 1999), 227.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* Is not this analogy realised in today's hospital-based T.V. dramas? In *ER*, for instance, the relentless movement of the camera following the programme's stars as they sweep through waiting rooms, corridors, and operating theatre swing-doors, enacts the desire to penetrate the space it moves through, towards its inevitable target: the body laid out on the operating table, opened up as a public traumatic site. It is also worth noting, in this relation, the tremendous narcissism of the typical *ER* scenario, in which each traumatized body is remade by a huge number of dedicated surgeons. The disparity between the exigencies of contemporary health care provision and this image identifies it as a fantasy – one with which the viewer has an understandable identification.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹¹⁶ For contemporary criticism this attitude is usually exemplified by Greenberg's 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch.'

¹¹⁷ 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' op. cit., 233.

¹¹⁸ Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 11. Žižek has argued that such an incorporation of ideology must be seen not as cynical, but as projecting the cynicism of psychological knowledge back onto itself. Interestingly, he begins this point in discussion of neo-fascism, then shifts to identification with the serial killer (specifically the Washington sniper) as the exemplary late capitalist individual "asocial but well disciplined and perfectly trained." *Organs Without Bodies: on Deleuze and Consequences*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 190.

¹¹⁹ Seltzer, op. cit., 3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹²² Quoted in *ibid.*, 20.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Here it is worth noting that Barney's expressed interest in bodily connective tissue or *fascia* and the way it operates against the representation of autonomous individuals could be etymologically linked to *fascism's* 'binding' or 'bundling' of persons *en masse*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 191 [my emphasis].

¹²⁶ "The death to which Masonry alludes, using the analogy of bodily death and under the veil of a reference to it, is that death-in-life to a man's own lower self which Saint Paul referred when he protested 'I die daily'." Wilnshurst, *The Meaning of Masonry*, cited in Wakefield, 'The Cremaster Glossary,' *The Cremaster Cycle* op. cit., 102.

¹²⁷ Seltzer, op. cit., 206.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 43.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹³² The body politics of prosthetic technology, and its vexed history, is addressed in Ott et al. (eds.) *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthetics*, (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

¹³³ Ott, 'The Sum of Its Parts: An Introduction to Modern Histories of Prosthetics,' *ibid.*, pp. 1-5.

¹³⁴ Barney draws on Mullins's already established 'hybridization' of her body. As an athlete she broke the paralympic 100-metres world-record thanks to graphite prostheses modelled on a cheetah. *Cremaster 3* extrapolates from this to present her as a cheetah amongst (many) other things.

¹³⁵ Stephen Mihm, "A Limb Which Shall be Presentable in Polite Society": Prosthetic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century,' *ibid.*, 287.

¹³⁶ Seltzer, op. cit., 212.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Žižek, 'Learning to Love Leni Riefenstahl,' *In These Times*, (Sept. 10, 2003), http://inthesetimes.com/comments.php?id=359_0_4_0_M.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ This version is included in Eiland and Jennings (eds.) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 3, 1935-1938*, (London: Belknap Press, 2002), 101-133. It was to the *Ur*-text draft that Adorno famously responded, in defence of the value of the autonomous artwork. Adorno insisted on the importance of acknowledging that "the dialectic of the lowest has the same value as the dialectic of the highest, rather than the latter simply decaying. ... Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up." 'Letter to Benjamin,' (18th March 1936), in Harrison & Wood (eds.) *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 522. Adorno hoped to deflect Benjamin away from Brechtian cultural politics and back towards the autonomous artwork.

¹⁴¹ Hansen, 'Room-for-Play,' *op. cit.*, 5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ On Benjamin's general positive attitude to repetition see Haxthausen, 'Reproduction/Repetition: Walter Benjamin/Carl Einstein,' *October*, No. 107 (Winter, 2004), 47-74.

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin 'Toys and Play,' *Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999), 120.

¹⁴⁶ 'Room-for-Play,' *op. cit.*, 28.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8, fn. 11.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics,' *op. cit.*, 41.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ In fact, Foucault revealed that his turn to the topos of Greek aesthetics / ethics of the self was inspired by Christopher Lasch's polemic against narcissism. Martin, L. H., Gutman, H., Hutton, P. H. (eds.) *Technologies of the Self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). For Lasch, the contemporary narcissist is the ideal consumer: "His cravings know no limit; he does not accumulate goods and provisions against the future, in the manner of the acquisitive individualist of the nineteenth-century political economy, but demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire," *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: Warner, 1978), 23. Unlike Lasch, neither Barney nor Foucault sees the humanist individualist as the figure to be upheld against such desire. The project of the second and third volumes of the *History of Sexuality* is, then, an attempt to give a positive account of ways in which the attention to the self constitutive of narcissism might be reworked as a critical project, an *ascesis* towards "a manner of being that is still improbable." Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life,' *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume One: Ethics*, (London: Penguin, 1997), 137.

¹⁵⁹ *Bodies That Matter*, *op. cit.*, 79.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Prosser, *op. cit.*, 179.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ See Silverman, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-150. In fact Houdini was beaten to even this record, by one day. He noted, in perhaps disavowed acknowledgement of this, that he was "uncontestably, the first magician who flies." Quoted *ibid.*, 148.

¹⁶⁵ Phillips, *op. cit.*, 70.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁶⁸ Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (London: MIT Press, 1991), 245.

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland & K. McLaughlin, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap 1999), N18a, 2, 486.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' *op. cit.*, 235.

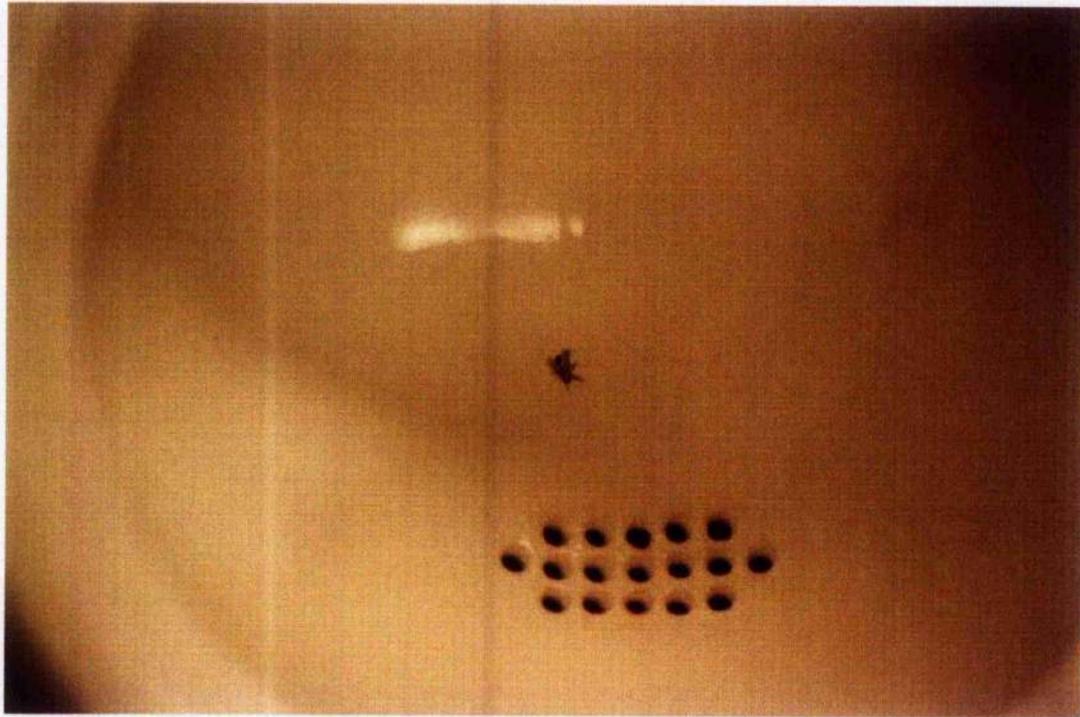
¹⁷² Quoted in Hansen, 'Room-for-Play,' *op. cit.*, 17.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Foucault, 'Questions of Method,' *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume Three*, ed. J. D. Faubion, (New York: The New Press, 2000), 236.

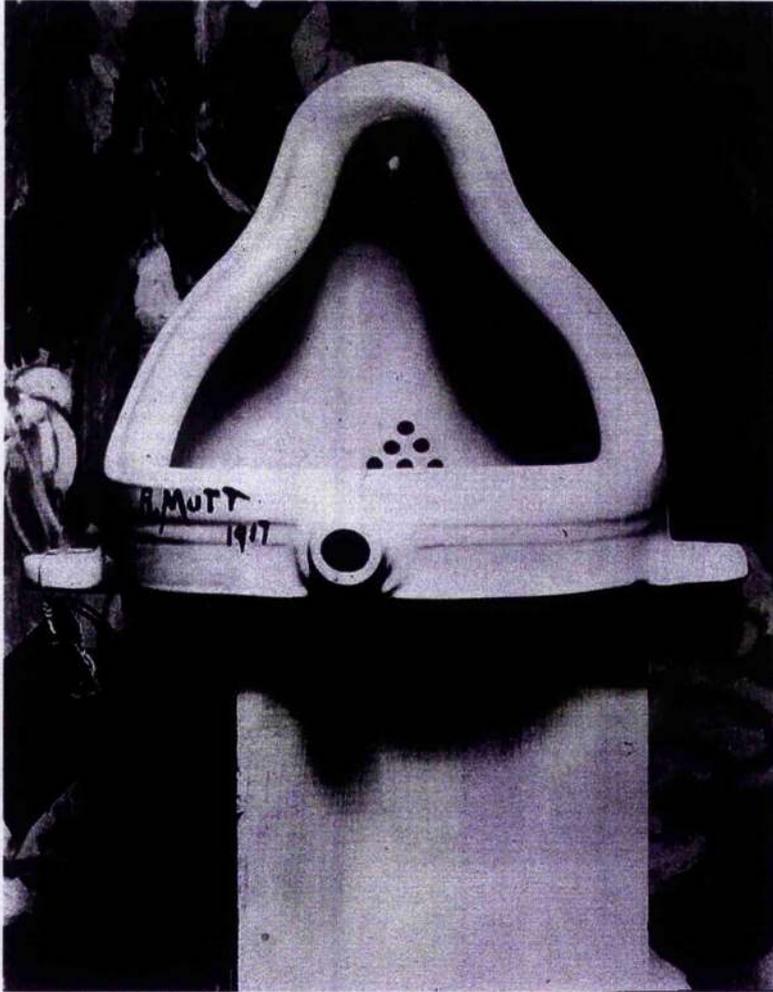
PLATES

Fig. 1



Urinal (with etched fly), Schiphol Airport.

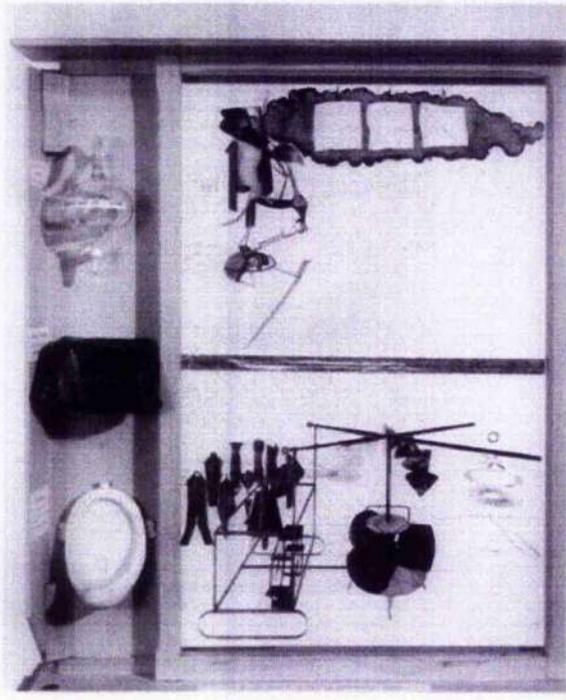
Fig. 2



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, readymade, 1917 (lost). Photograph by Alfred Steiglitz,

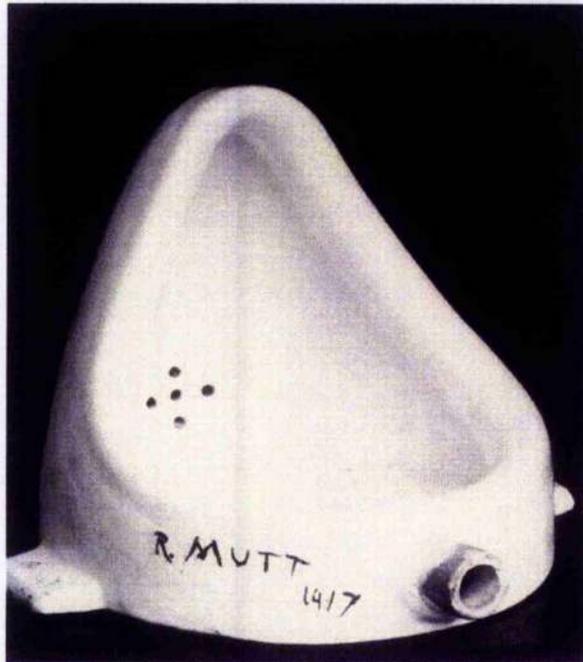
as reproduced in *The Blind Man*.

Fig. 3



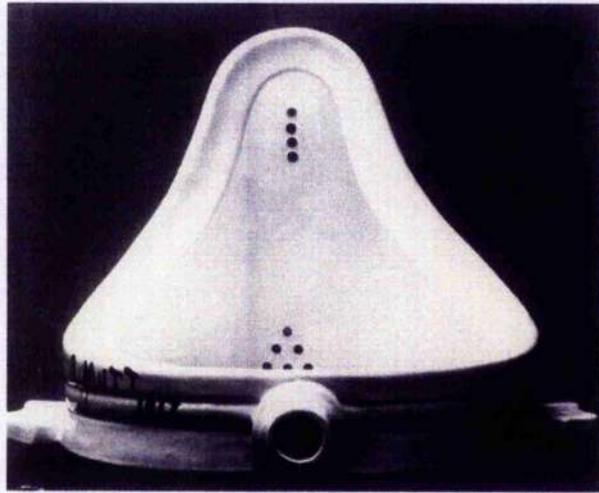
Marcel Duchamp, *Boîtes-en-valise* (centrepiece detail), 1942-54.

Fig. 4



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1950, (requested and signed by Duchamp, selected by Sidney Janis).

Fig. 5



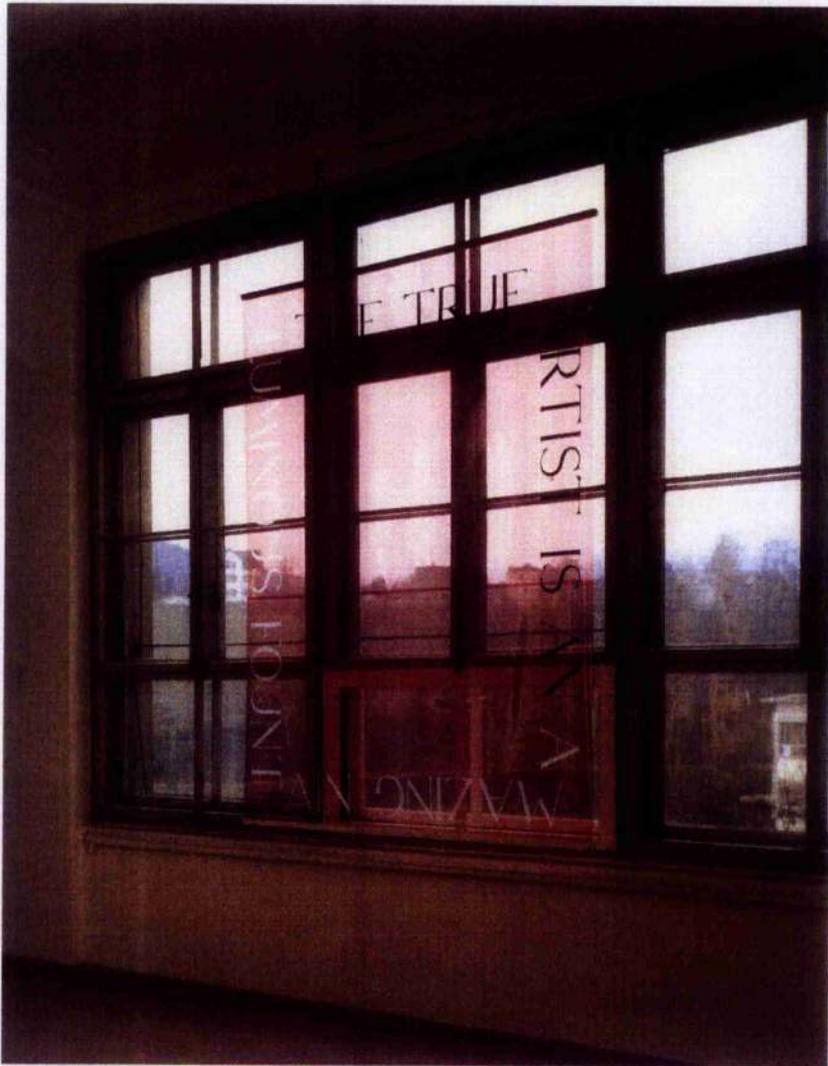
Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1964, (fabricated replica by Arturo Schwarz, authorised by Duchamp).

Fig. 6



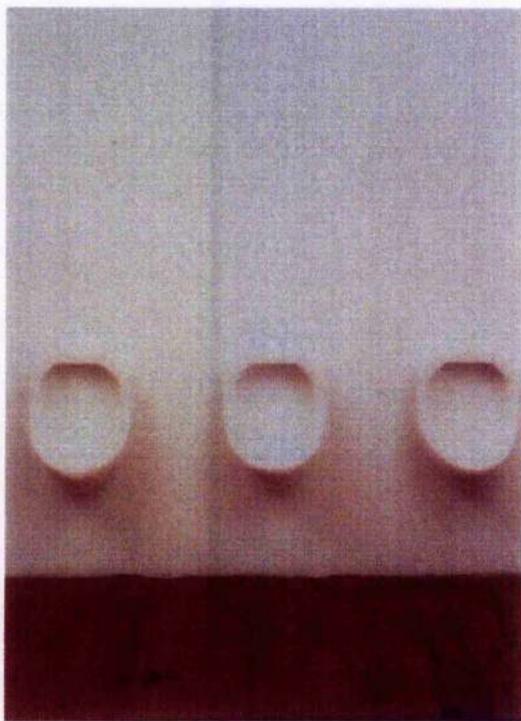
Bruce Nauman, *Self Portrait as a Fountain*, photograph, 1966.

Fig. 7



Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist is an Amazing Luminous Fountain*, text printed on transparent Mylar window shade, 1966.

Fig. 8



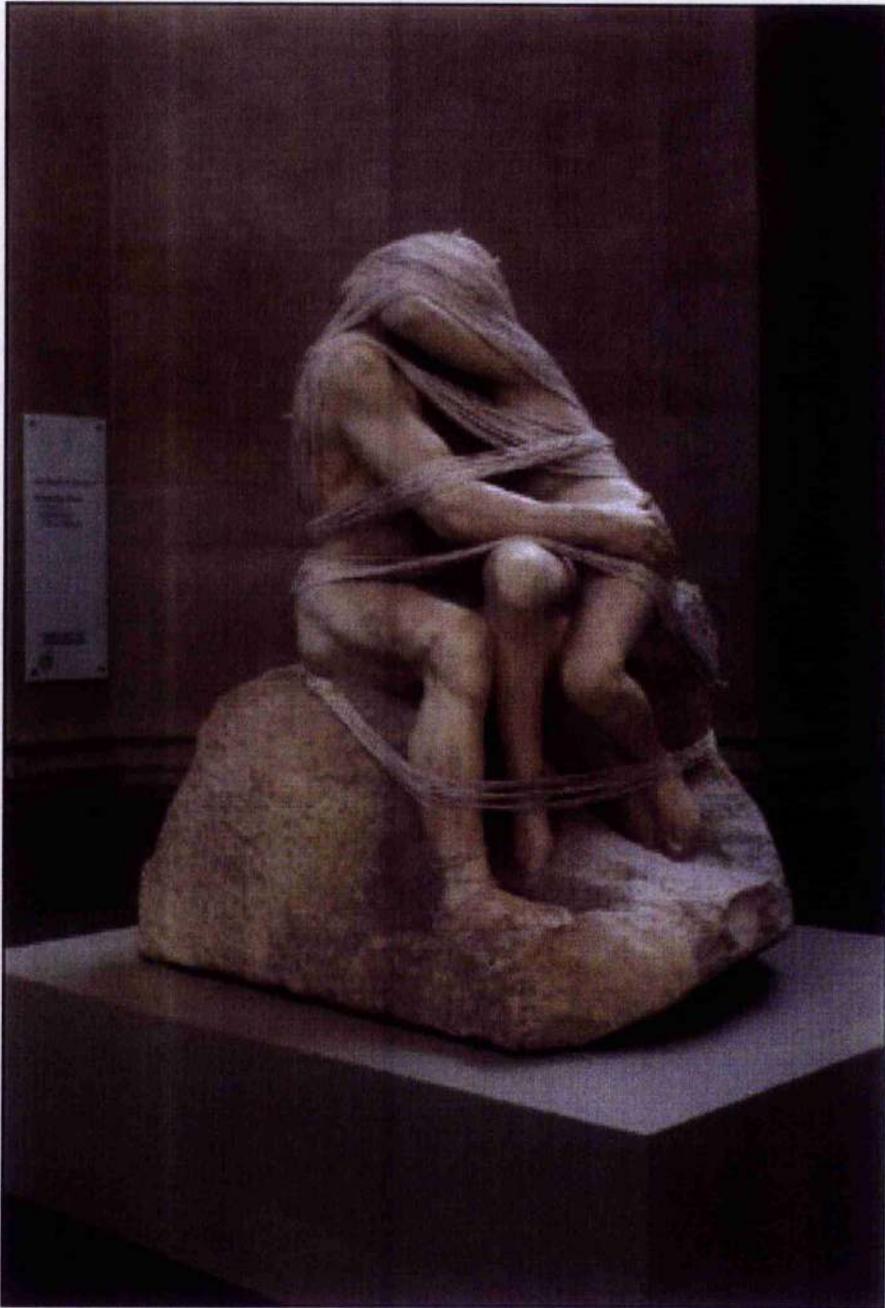
Robert Gober, *Three Urinals*, plaster, 1988.

Fig. 9



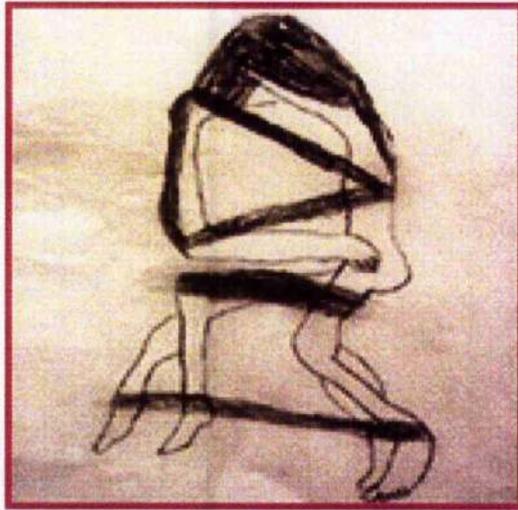
Andy Warhol, *Oxidation Painting*, acrylic ground (gesso), copper metallic paint, urine on canvas, 1978.

Fig. 10



Cornelia Parker, *The Distance (A kiss with string attached)*, marble and string, 2003.

Fig. 11



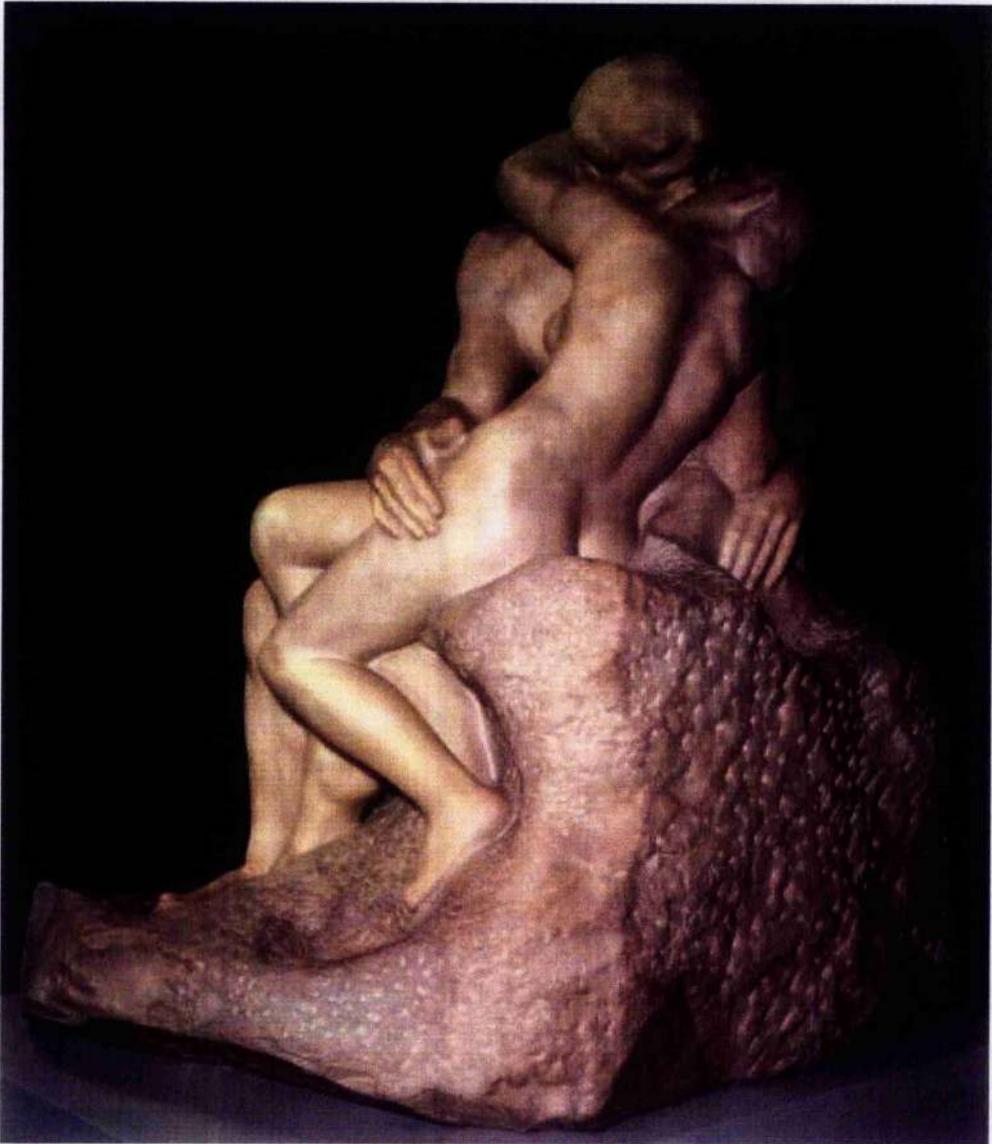
Anonymous, (drawing of *The Distance*, from Tate Education project).

Fig. 12



Anonymous, (drawing of *The Distance*, from Tate Education project).

Fig. 13



Auguste Rodin, *The Kiss*, Pentelican marble, 1901-4.

Fig. 14



Cornelia Parker, *Words That Define Gravity*, 1992.

Fig. 15



Cornelia Parker, *Grooves in a Record That Belonged to Hitler*, (*Nutcracker Suite*), photograph, 1996.

Fig. 16



Cornelia Parker, *The fly that died on Judd*, Fly found on Donald Judd's aluminum sculpture at Marfa, Texas, 2001.

Fig. 17



Cornelia Parker and Tilda Swinton, *The Maybe*, performance / installation view at Serpentine gallery, London, 1995.

Fig. 18



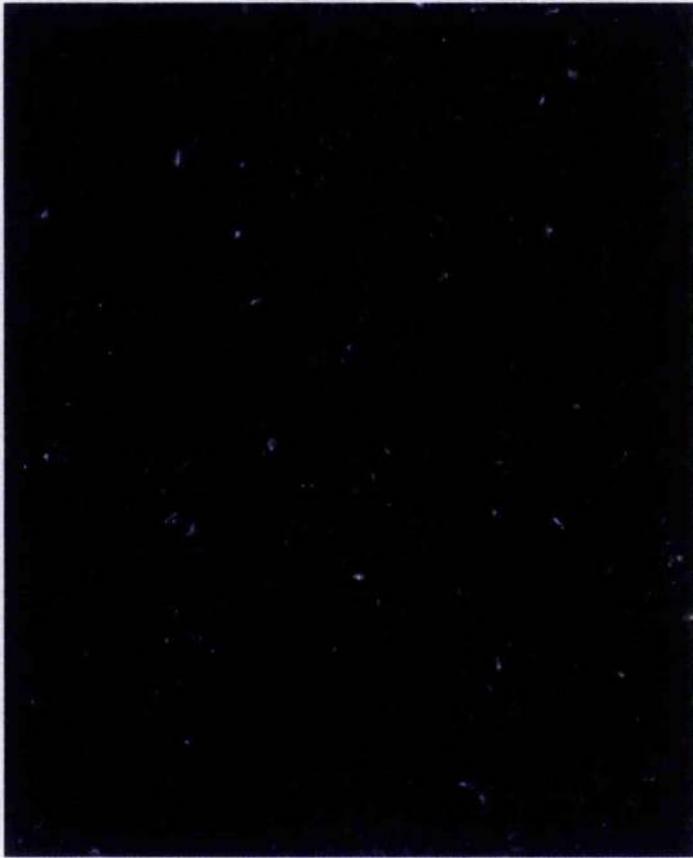
Marcel Duchamp, *sculpture-morte*, almond paste and insects mounted on paper, 1959.

Fig. 19



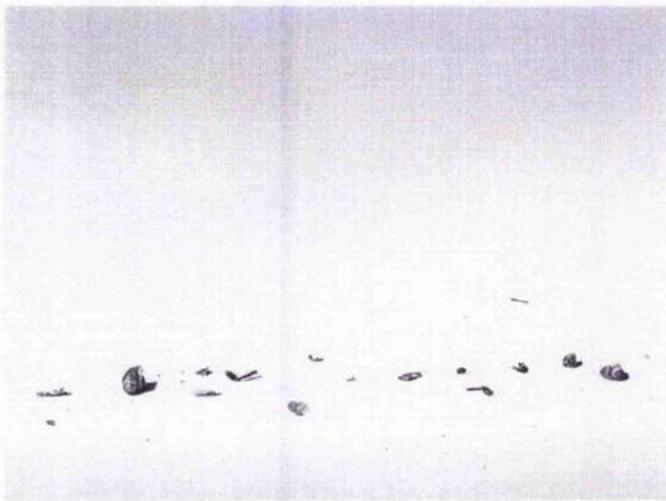
Marcel Duchamp, *TORTURE-MORTE*, painted plaster and flies, on paper mounted on wood, 1959.

Fig. 20



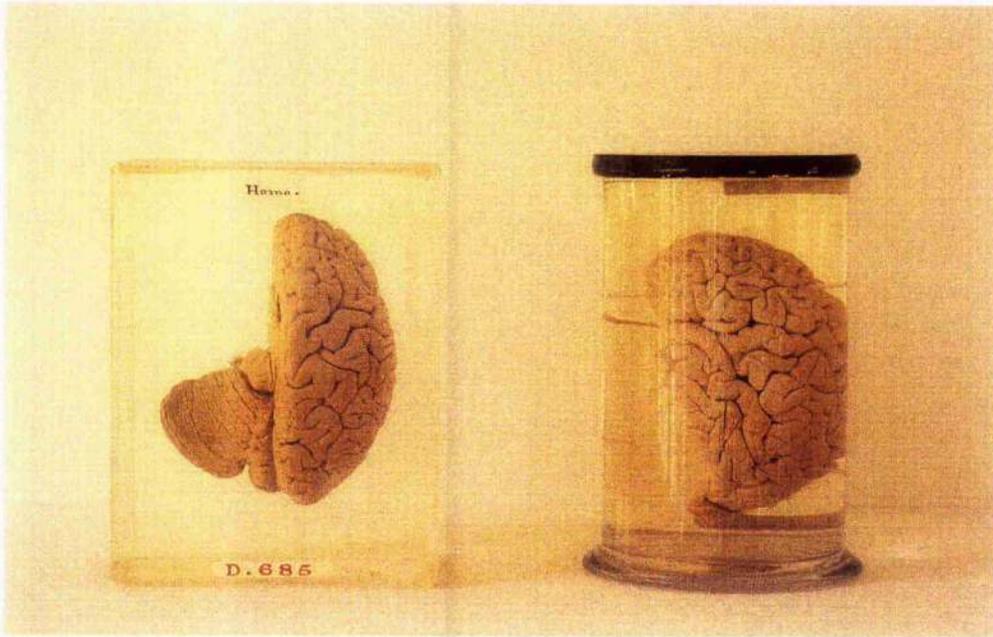
Damien Hirst, *Armageddon* (detail), house flies on canvas, 2002.

Fig. 21



Bing White, *Fly Disaster 5*, photograph, 1995.

Fig. 22



Cornelia Parker, *The Maybe* (detail), Charles Babbage's brain, 1995.

Fig. 23



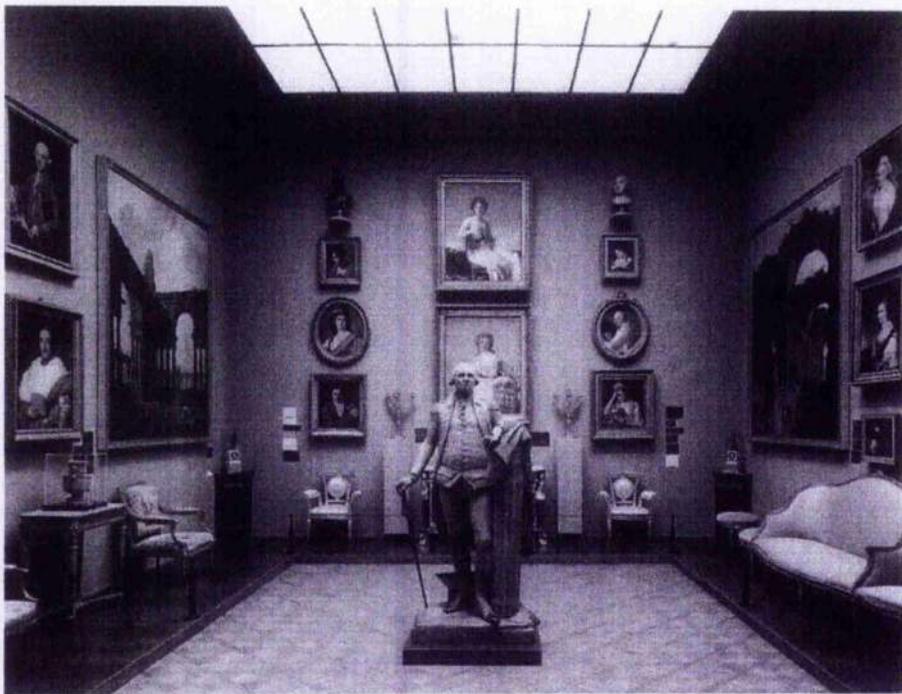
Andrea Fraser, *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, performance photograph, 1989.

Fig. 24



Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum* (detail), installation view at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992.

Fig. 25



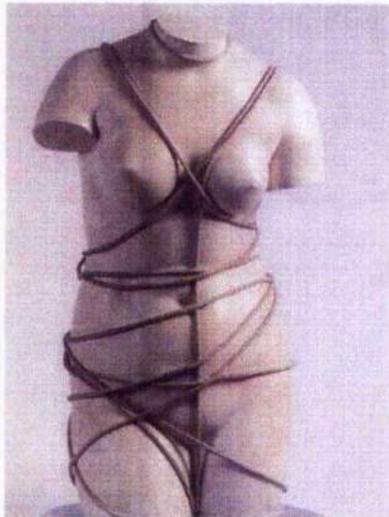
Michael Asher, installation view at The Art Institute of Chicago, Gallery 219, 1979.

Fig. 26



Peter Greenaway, "The Physical Self," installation view at Museum Boijmans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1991.

Fig. 27



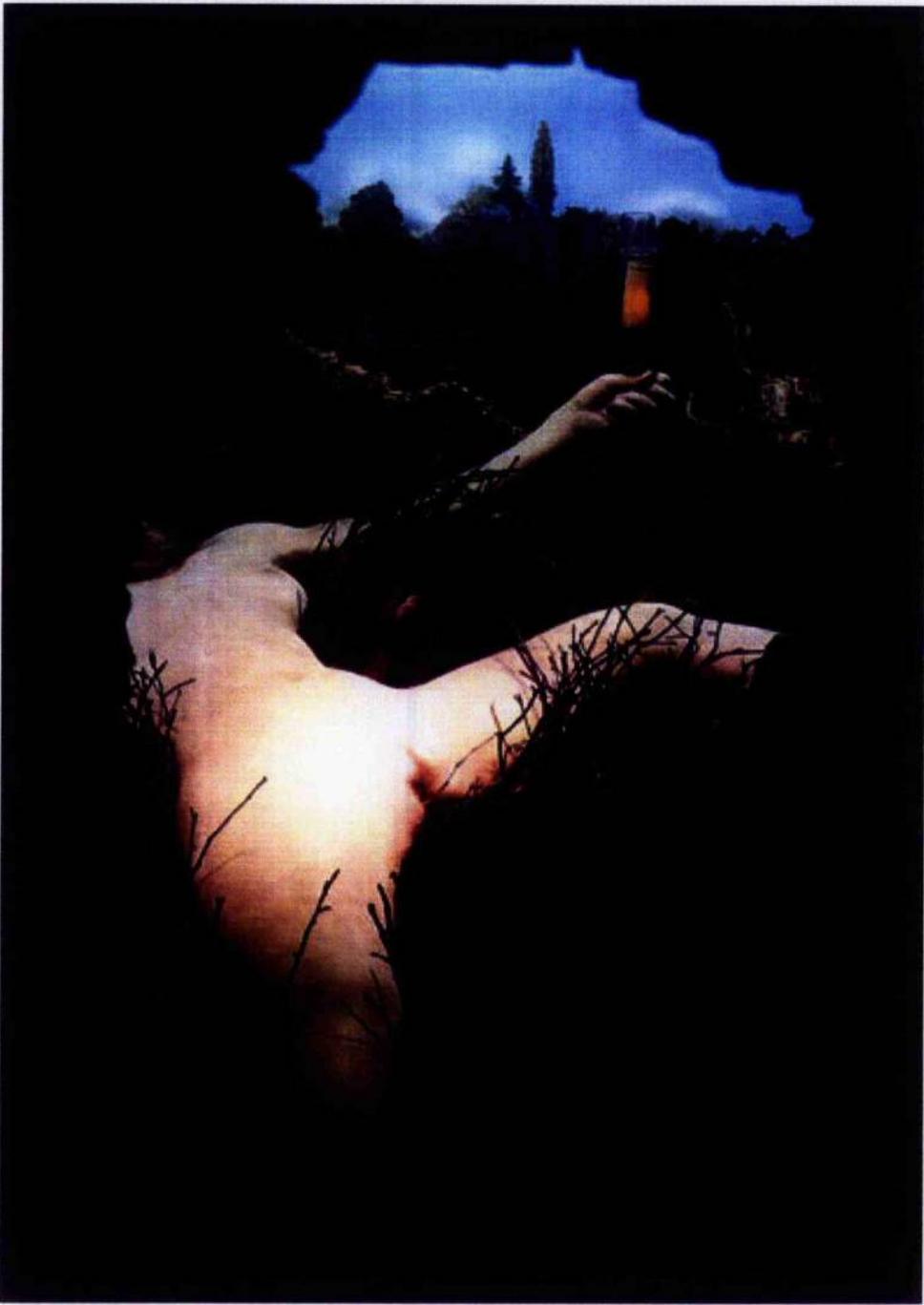
Man Ray, *Venus Restored*, assemblage: plaster cast and rope, 1936/1971.

Fig. 28



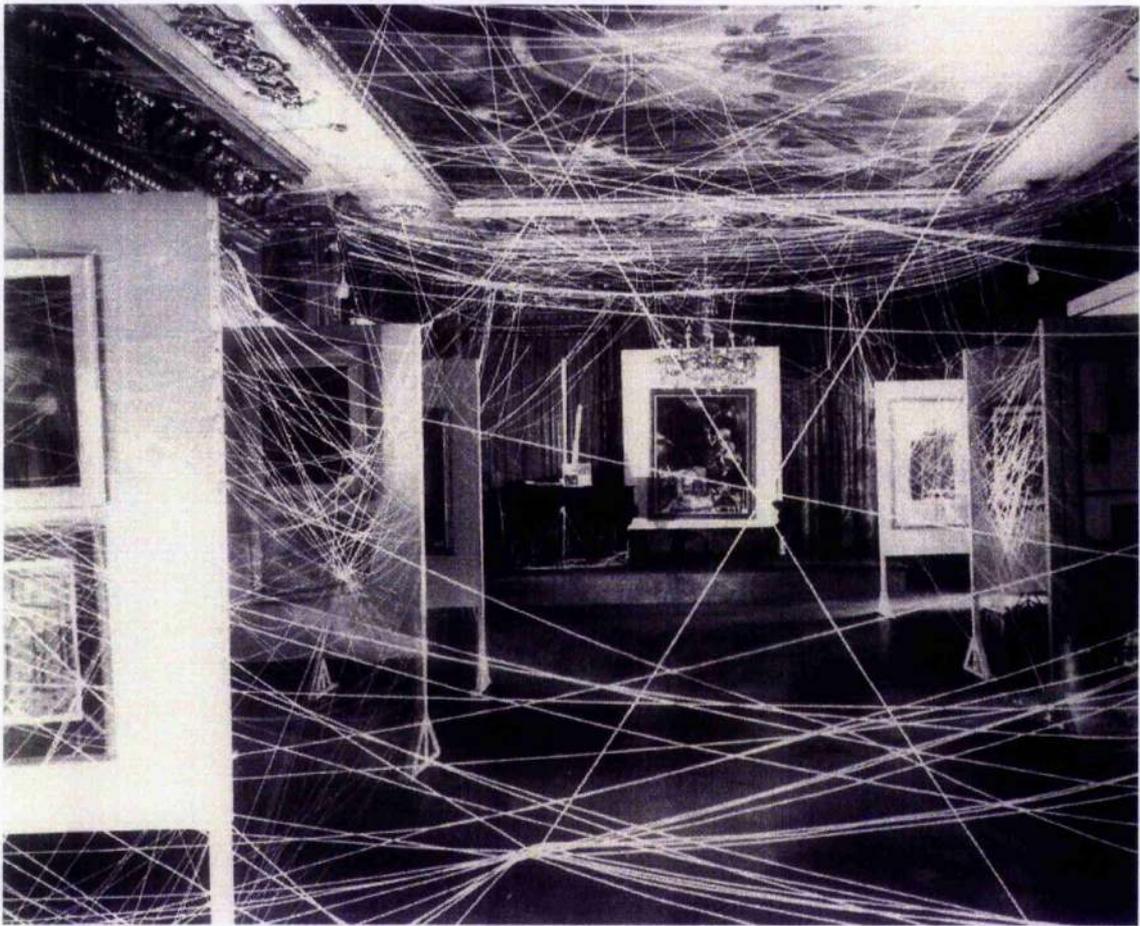
Marcel Duchamp, *Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage*, exterior view, Philadelphia Museum Of Art, 1946-66.

Fig. 29



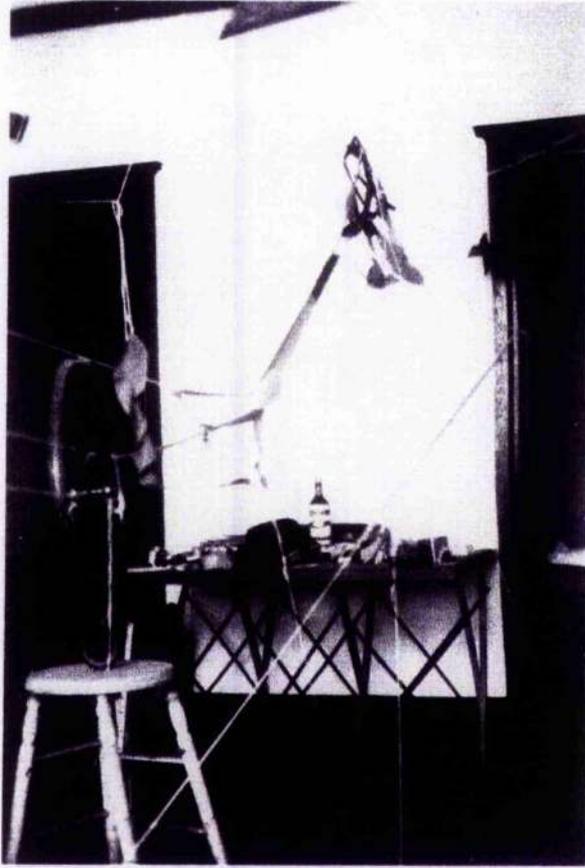
Marcel Duchamp, *Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-66, interior view, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Fig. 30



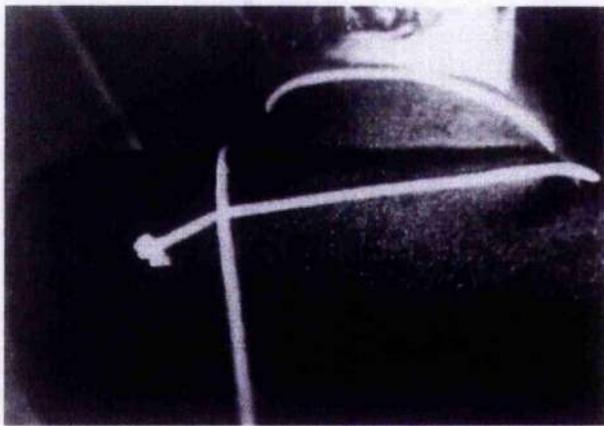
Marcel Duchamp, **Mile of String**, installation view at "First Papers of Surrealism,"
Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, 451 Madison Avenue, New York,
1942.

Fig. 31



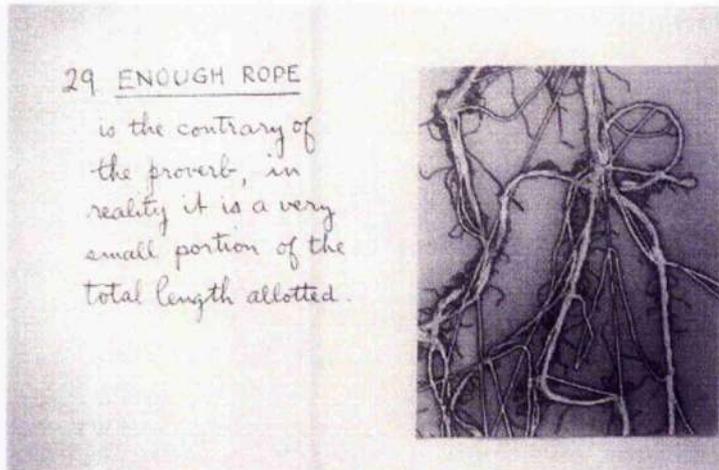
Marcel Duchamp, *Sculpture for Travelling*, rubber, 1918 (lost).

Fig. 32

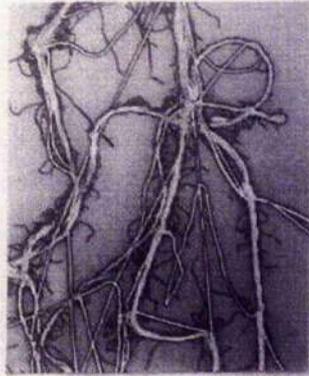


Maya Deren, *Witch's Cradle*, (unfinished film), 1943, still showing Duchamp with string.

Fig. 33



29 ENOUGH ROPE
is the contrary of
the proverb, in
reality it is a very
small portion of the
total length allotted.



Man Ray, *Enough Rope* with inscription, from *Objects of My Affection*, manuscript, 1944.

Fig. 34



Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Now That You Have Heirs/Airs, Marcel Duchamp*, Philadelphia, 1973, performance photograph.

Fig. 35

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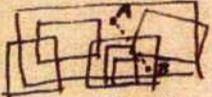
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NO. _____ M M _____ HORA _____ PALABRAS _____ TASA _____

A MEDIA TARIFA

CABLEGRAMA DIFERIDO

Face = *recartons*
 Plusieurs verres collés
 les uns au dessus des autres
 et de différentes dimensions



un dessin linéaire (autant que possible) - comme dessin sur une surface plane - et qui vu d'un point X , d'un viseur, donne l'impression d'un dessin plan.

C.à.d. qu'une ligne droite de A à B. (quoique A et B soient dans des plans différents paraisse droite du viseur, et brisée en plusieurs plans d'un tout autre point - chercher la bonne utilisation.

on peut arriver jusqu'à :
 Protéger: tracer une ligne droite sur le "Faiser de Rodin" vu d'un viseur.

X *Viseur*

Declaro que el texto del telegrama que adrecede está por completo en lenguaje claro, que no tiene otro significado que el que foye del mismo. Solicito que el telegrama se transmita bajo la fe de esta declaración y estando conformado con las condiciones al dorso de esta fórmula.

Firma y dirección del remitente.

Nº 1-1-18

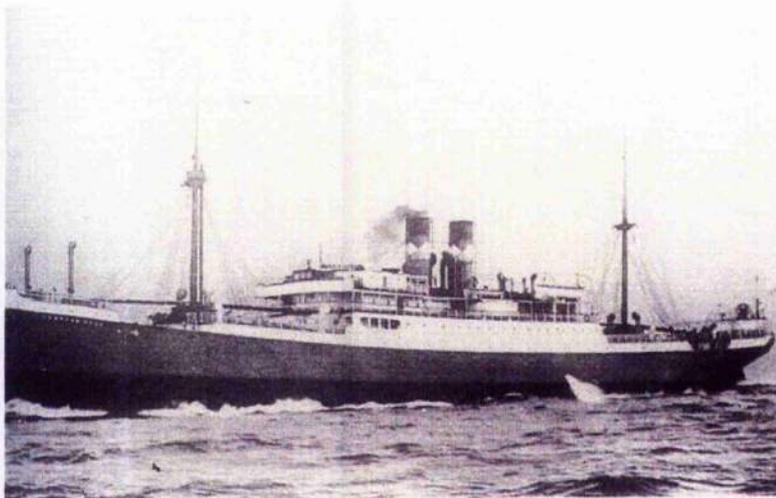
Marcel Duchamp, Note written on telegraph card, 1917.

Fig. 36



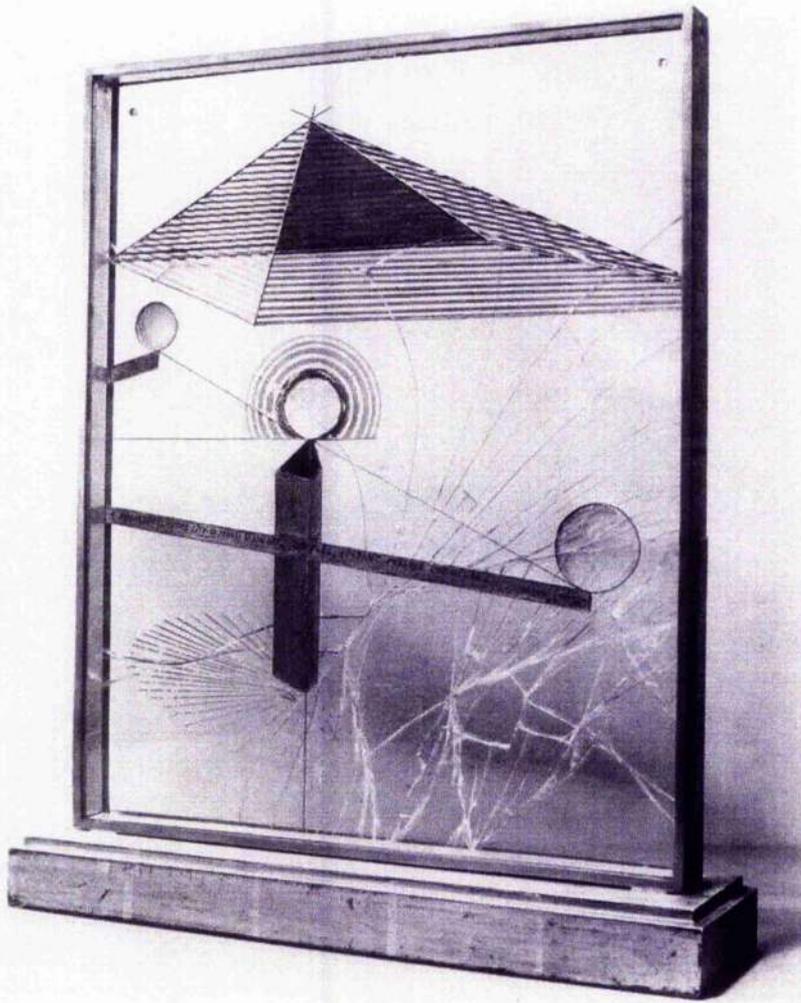
Marcel Duchamp, drawing sent to Florine Stettheimer, showing Duchamp's route to Buenos Aires.

Fig. 37



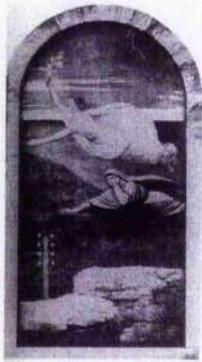
Postcard of S. S. *Crofton Hall* sent by Duchamp, 1917.

Fig. 38

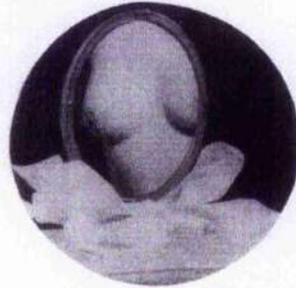


Marcel Duchamp, *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass), with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*, oil, silver leaf, lead wire, and magnifying lens on glass (cracked), mounted between panes of glass in a standing metal frame, on painted wood base, 1918.

Fig. 39



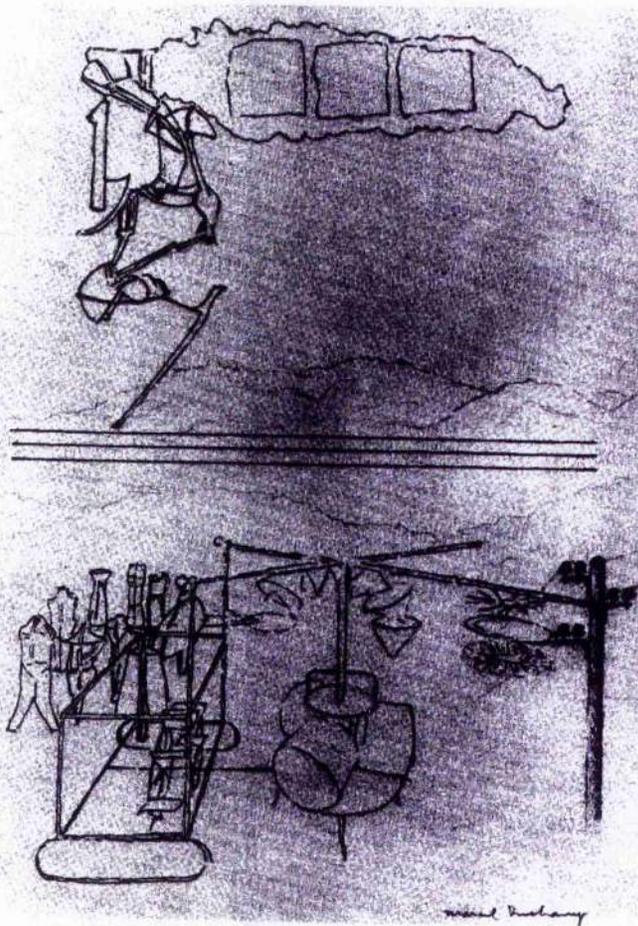
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TRIOMPHANTE



M.D. A la manière de Delvaux LE PÉCHÉ ORIGINE

Catalogue of "First Papers of Surrealism," showing Duchamp's *In the Manner of Paul Delvaux*, 1942.

Fig. 40



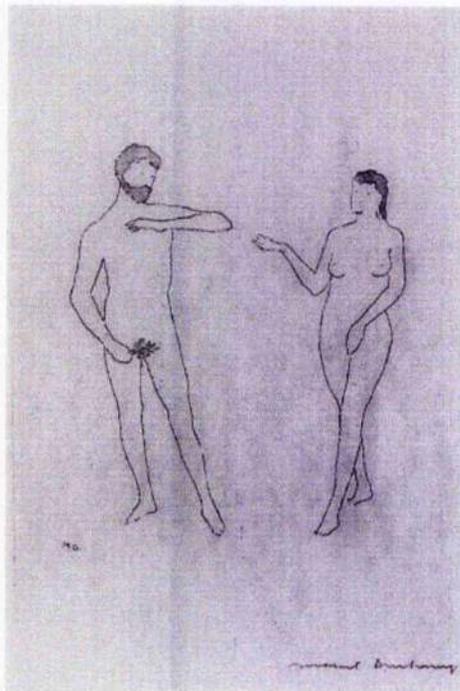
Marcel Duchamp, *Cols Alités*, drawing, 1959.

Fig. 41



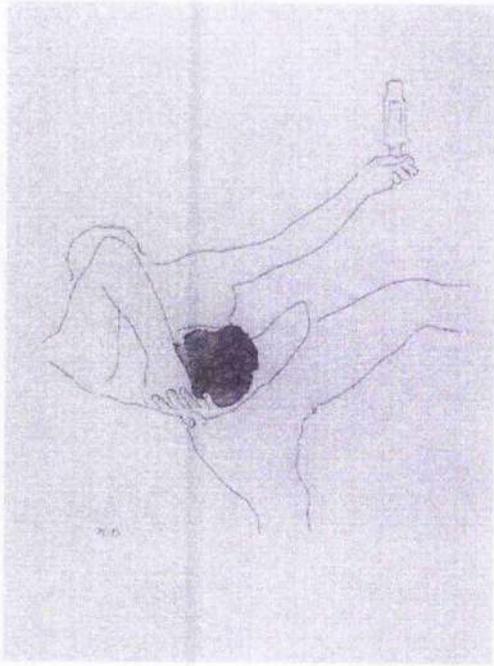
Marcel Duchamp, *Selected Details After Ingres II*, etching (second state), 1968.

Fig. 42



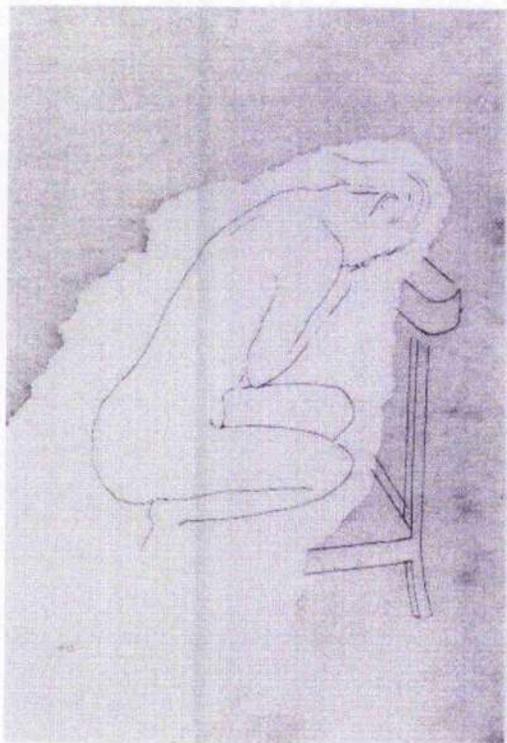
Marcel Duchamp, *Selected Details After Cranach and "Relâche,"* etching (second state), 1967.

Fig. 43



Marcel Duchamp, *The Bec Auer*, etching (second state), 1968.

Fig. 44



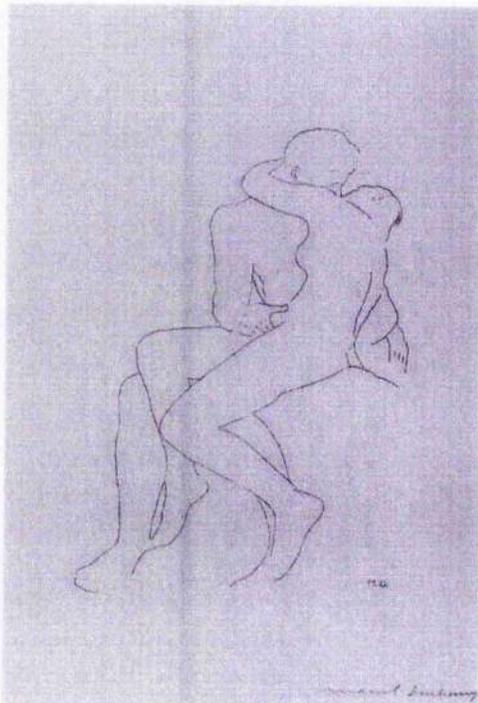
Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare*, etching (second state), 1968.

Fig. 45



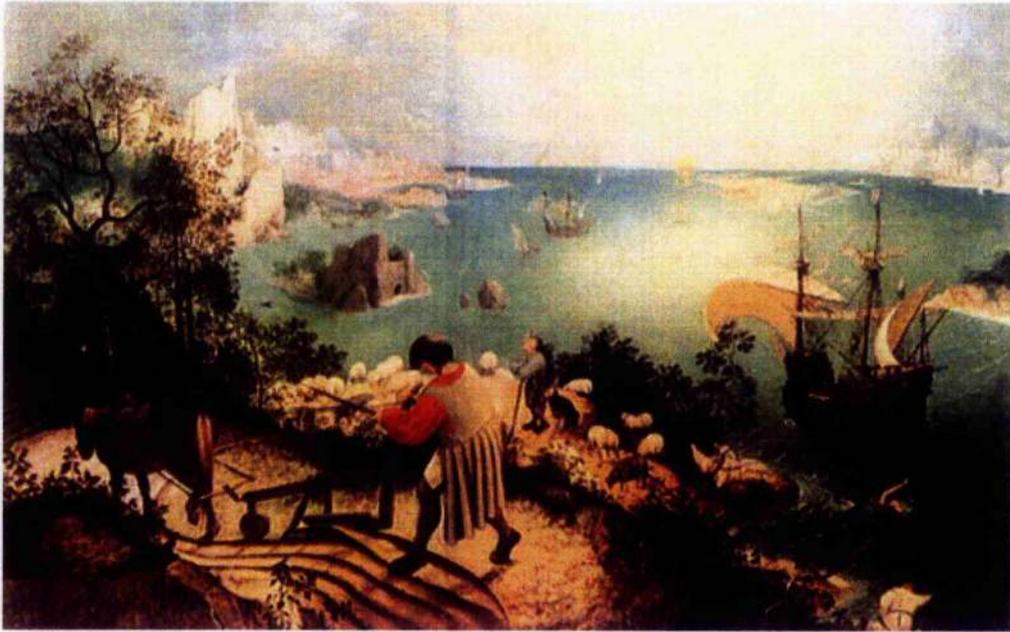
Marcel Duchamp, *Selected Details After Courbet*, etching (second state), 1968.

Fig. 46



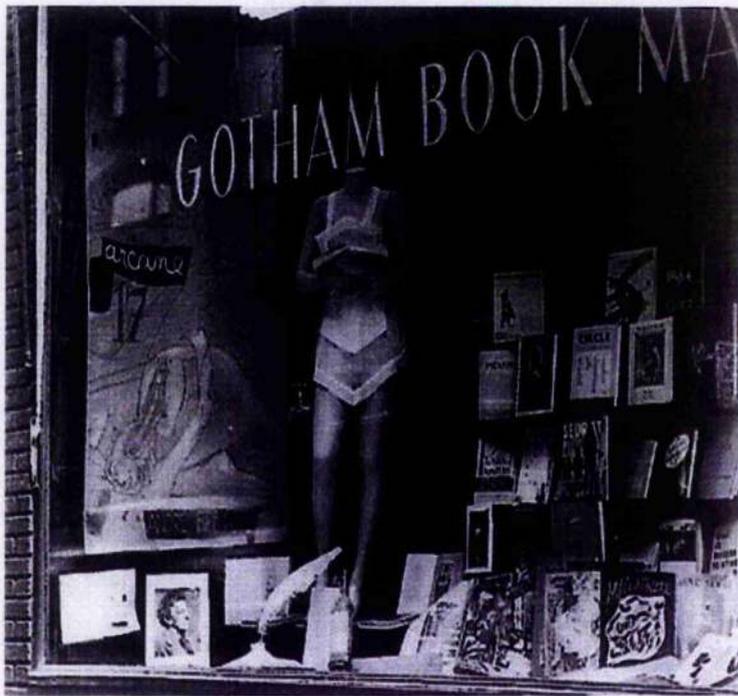
Marcel Duchamp, *Selected Details After Rodin*, etching (second state), 1968.

Fig. 47



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fall of Icarus*, oil on panel, c. 1558.

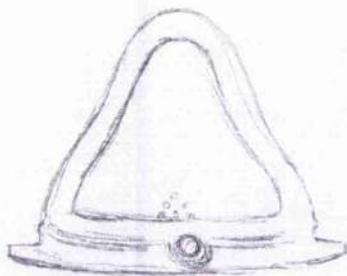
Fig. 48



Marcel Duchamp, "Lazy Hardware," view of window installation by Duchamp and André Breton for publication of Breton's *Arcane 17* at Gotham Book Mart, New York, 1945.

Fig. 49

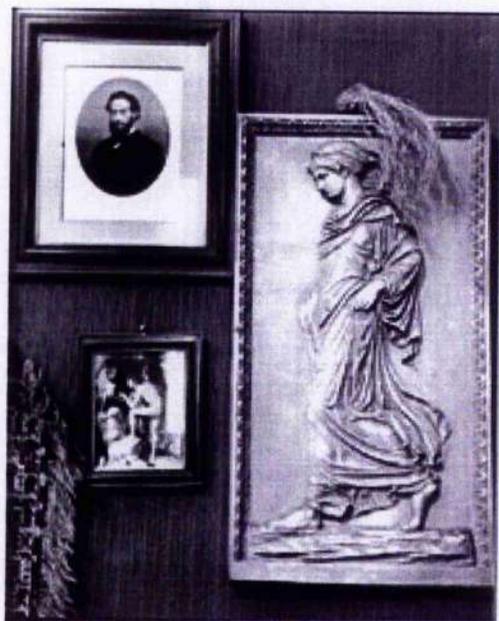
UN ROBINET ORIGINAL REVOLUTIONNAIRE
"RENVOI MIRRORIQUE."



"UN ROBINET QUI S'ARRETE DE COULER QUAND ON NE L'ECOUTE PAS"

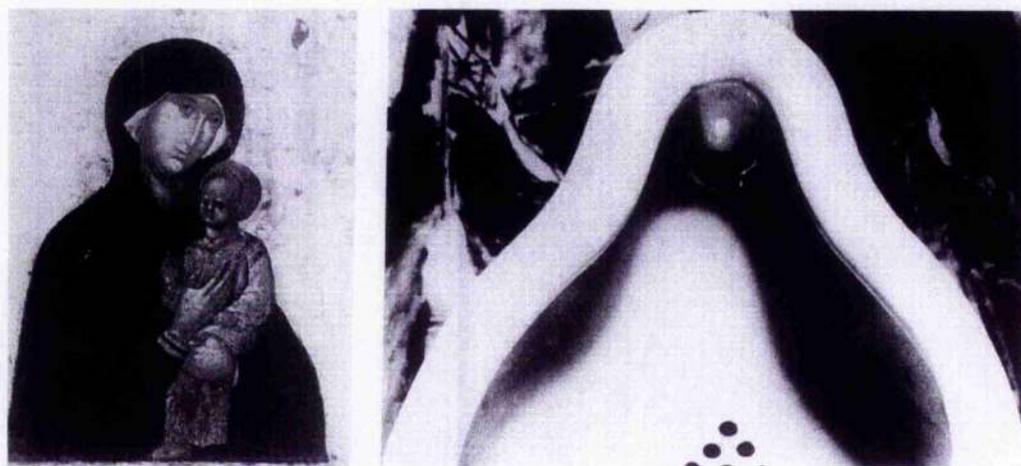
Marcel Duchamp, *Mirrorical Return*, etching, 1964.

Fig. 50



Plaster copy of *Gradiva*, as hung above Freud's desk.

Fig. 51



Comparison between Pimen, *The Virgin of Pimen*, c. 1380, and *Fountain* (cropped).
(As reproduced in Camfield 'Duchamp's *Fountain*: Aesthetic Object, Icon, or Anti-Art').

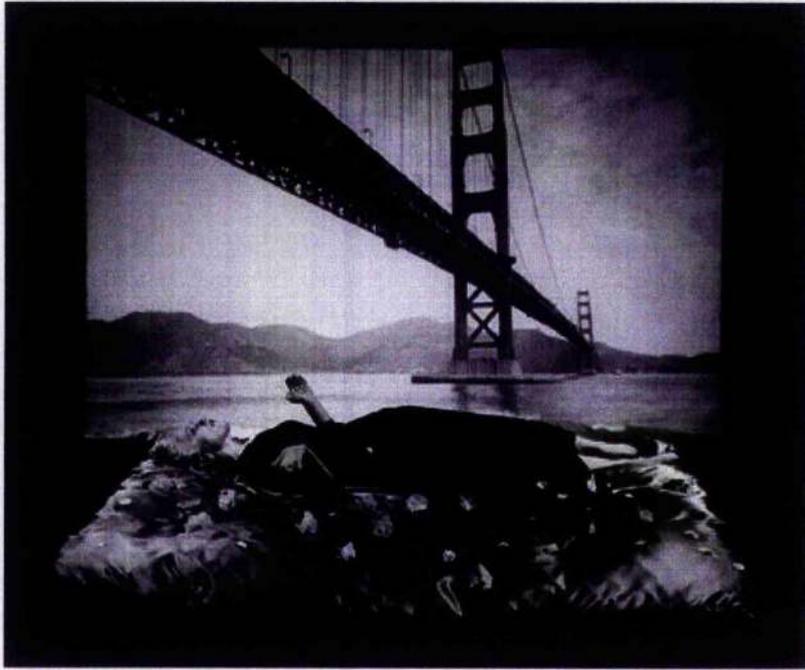
Fig. 52



ALONE
IN THE RUINED STREETS
HE WAS STARTLED BY THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF
THE FIGURE OF A WOMAN
MOVING WITH GRADIVA'S UNMISTAKEABLE GAIT

Victor Burgin, *Gradiva*, 1 of 7 black and white photographs with text, 1984.

Fig. 53



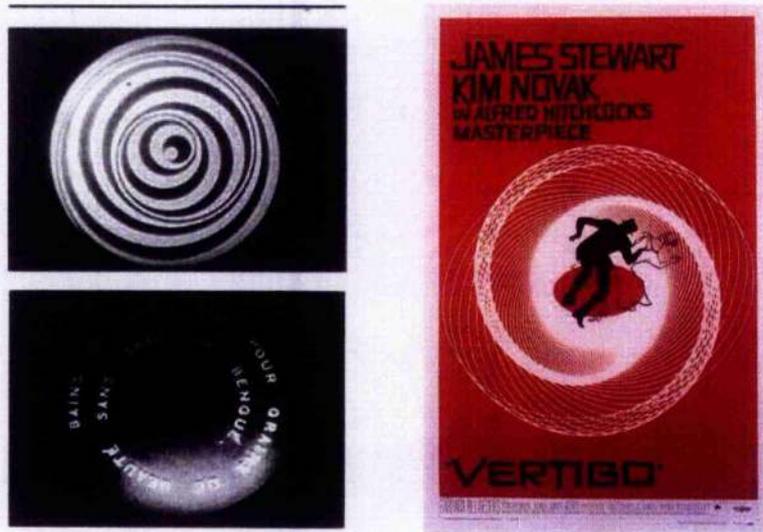
Victor Burgin, *The Bridge* (detail), photograph, 1984.

Fig. 54



Victor Burgin, *The Bridge – Venus Perdica*, photograph, 1984.

Fig. 55



Comparison of Marcel Duchamp, *Anémic Cinéma*, 1926 (film still) and Saul Bass, *Vertigo* title sequence (film still), 1958.

Fig. 56



Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), film still.

Fig. 57



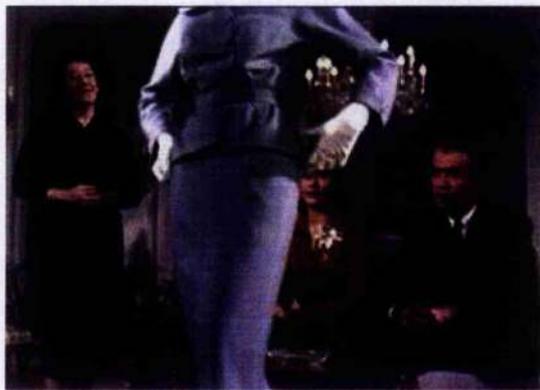
Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), film still.

Fig. 58



Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), film still.

Fig. 59



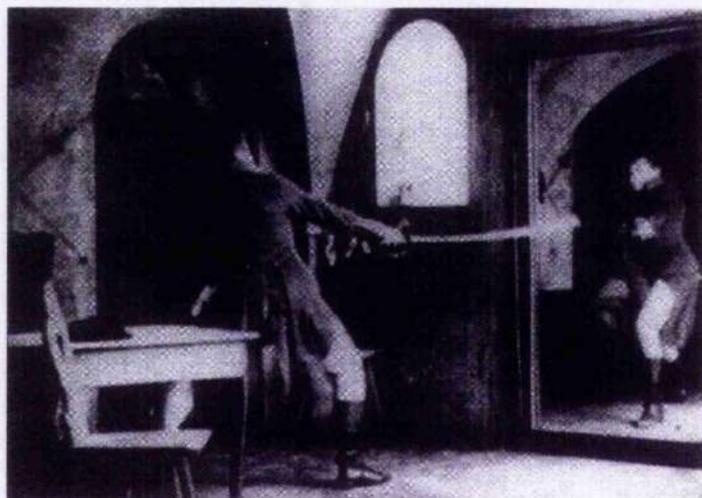
Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), film still.

Fig. 60



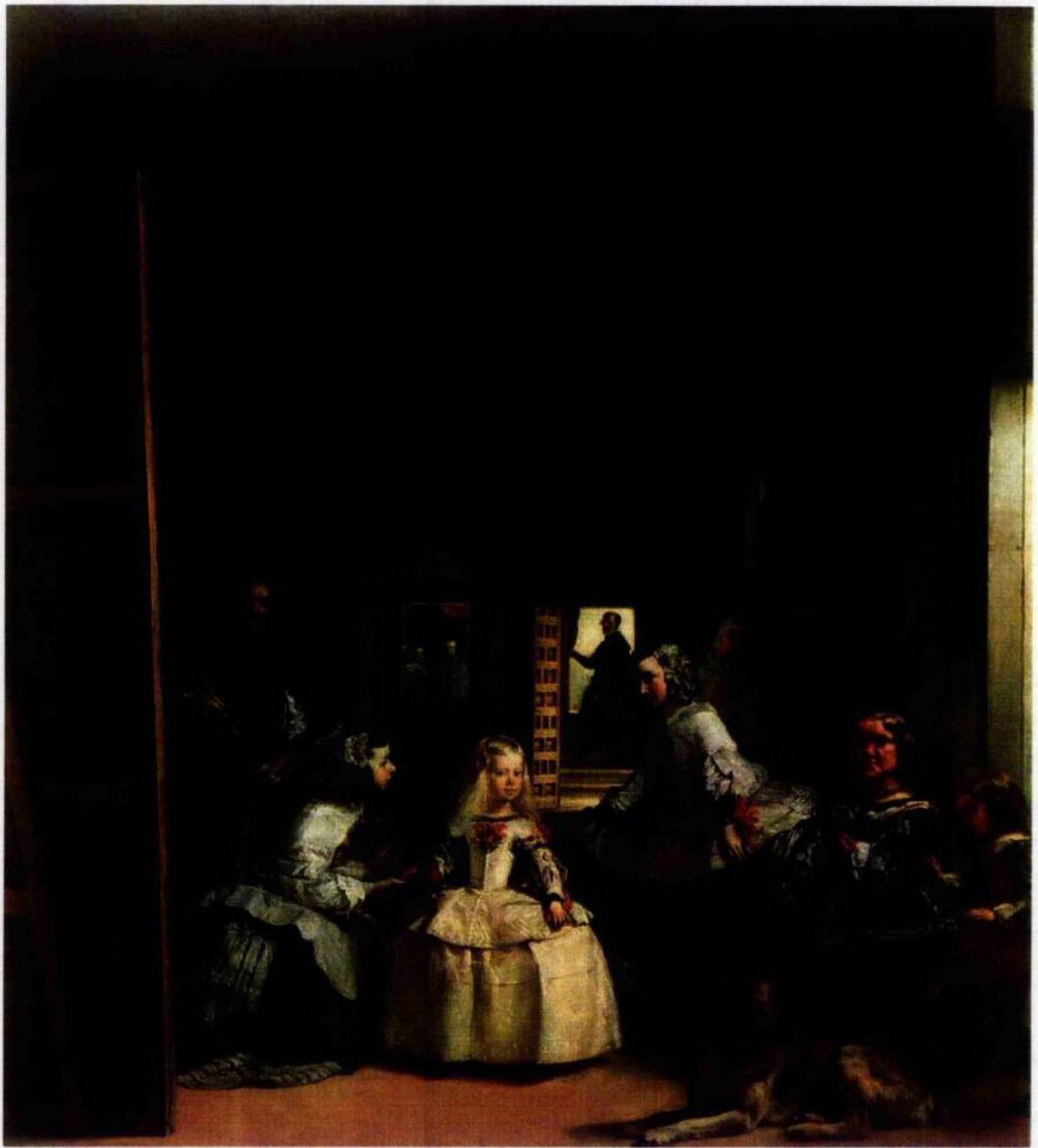
Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), film still.

Fig. 61



The Student of Prague, (Henrik Galeen, 1926), film still (as reproduced in W. G. Sebald, *Vertigo*).

Fig. 62



Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, oil on canvas, 1656.

Fig. 64



Gérard Fromanger, *Michel Foucault*, oil on canvas, 1974.

Fig. 65



Gérard Fromanger, *Vert Véronèse*, oil on canvas, 1972.

Fig. 66



Gérard Fromanger, *Rouge de Cadmium clair*, oil on canvas, 1972.

Fig. 67



Gérard Fromanger, *Violet de Mars*, oil on canvas, 1972.

Fig. 68



Photograph of Michel Foucault.



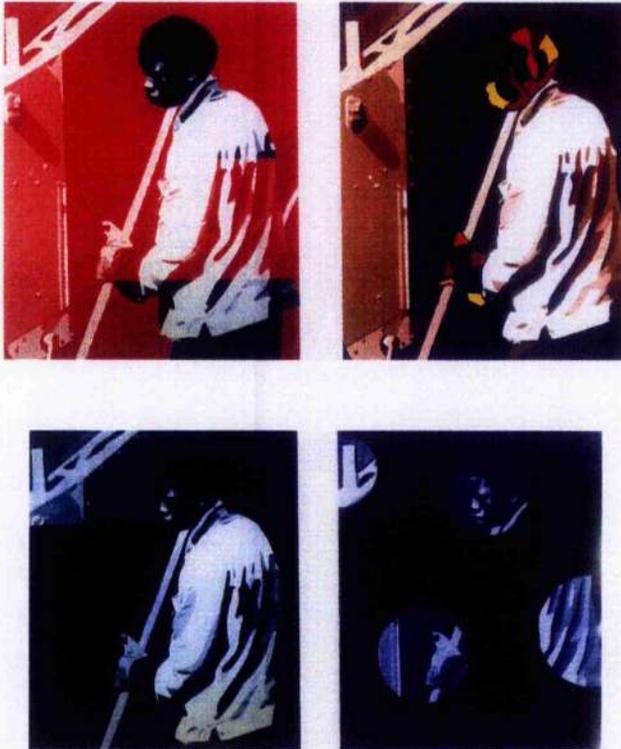
Gérard Fromanger, *Existe*, oil on canvas, 1976.

Fig. 69



Gérard Fromanger, *En révolte à la prison de Toul II*, 1974.

Fig. 70



Gérard Fromanger, comparison of *Desert Street*; *Savannah Street*; *Street of my People*; *My Village Street*, oil on canvas, 1974.

Fig. 71



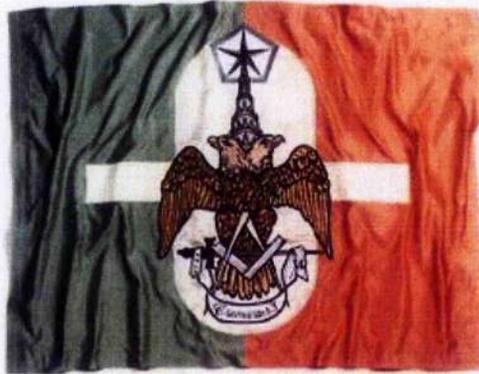
Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 3: The Order*, (film still showing Richard Serra splashing molten Vaseline), 2002.

Fig. 72



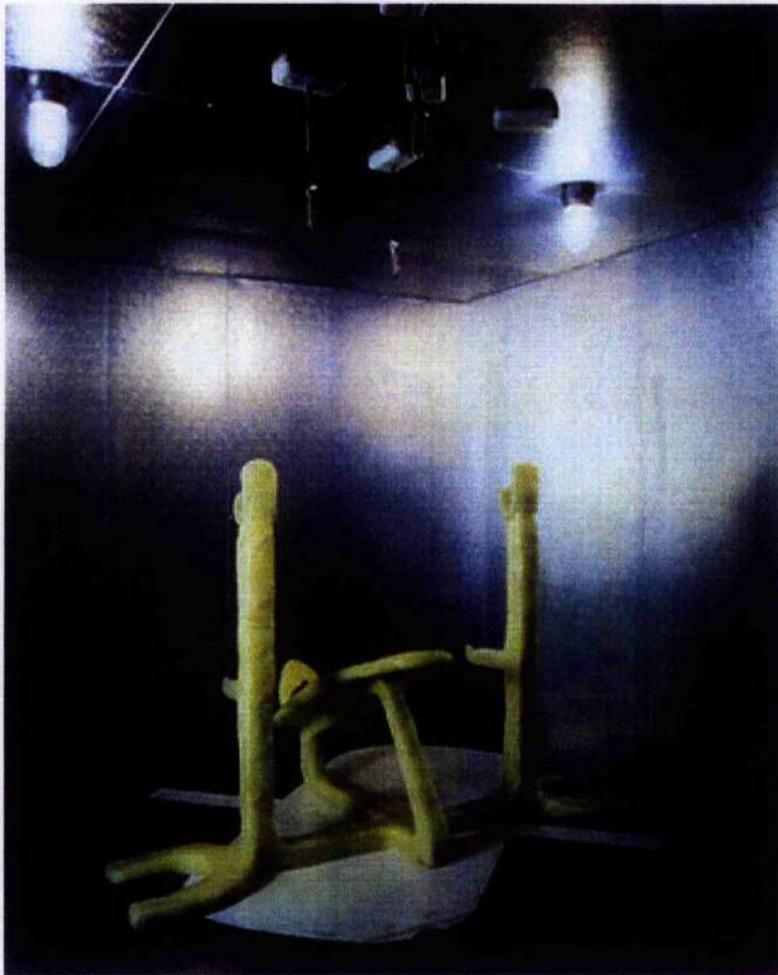
Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 3*, (production photograph showing “dental operatory sequence”), 2002.

Fig. 73



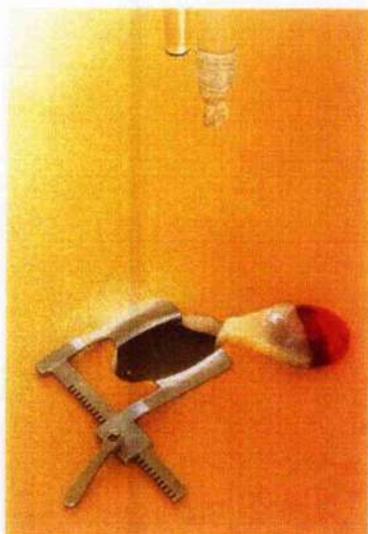
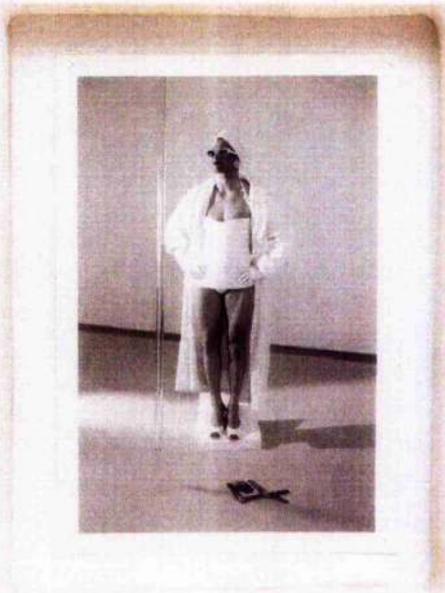
Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 3*, (flag with “field emblem” and insignia), 2002.

Fig. 74



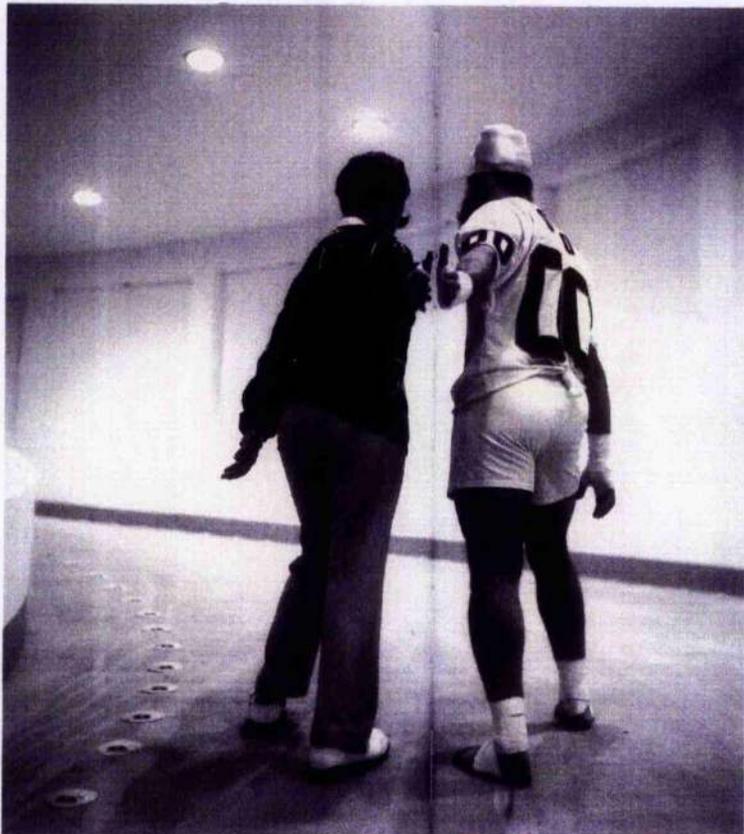
Matthew Barney, *TRANSEXUALIS (decline)*, installation view, 1991.

Figs. 75-77



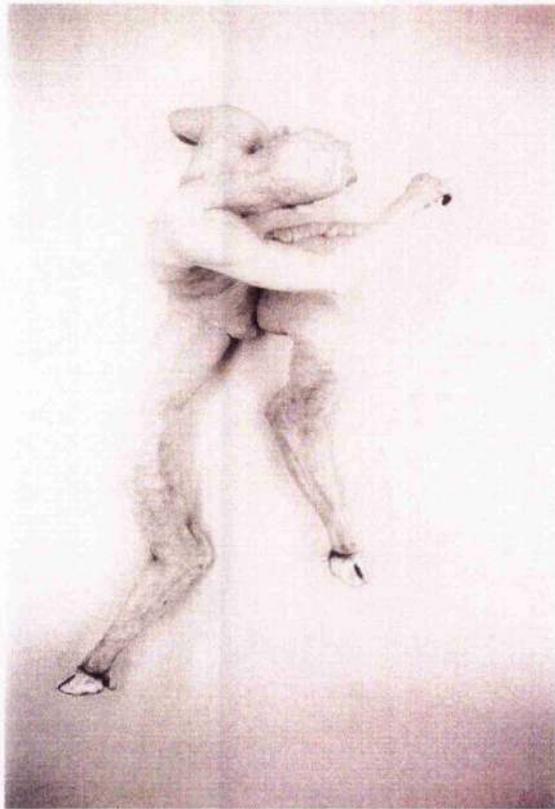
Clockwise from top left: Matthew Barney, *DELAY OF GAME* [facility of *INCLINE*], 1991 (detail); Matthew Barney, *Radial Drill* [facility of *DECLINE*], (production photograph), 1991; Matthew Barney, *REPRESSIA* [facility of *INCLINE*], (detail), 1991.

Figs. 78-80



Matthew Barney, *OTTOshaft*, (details of *OTTOdrone*, production stills), 1992.

Fig. 81



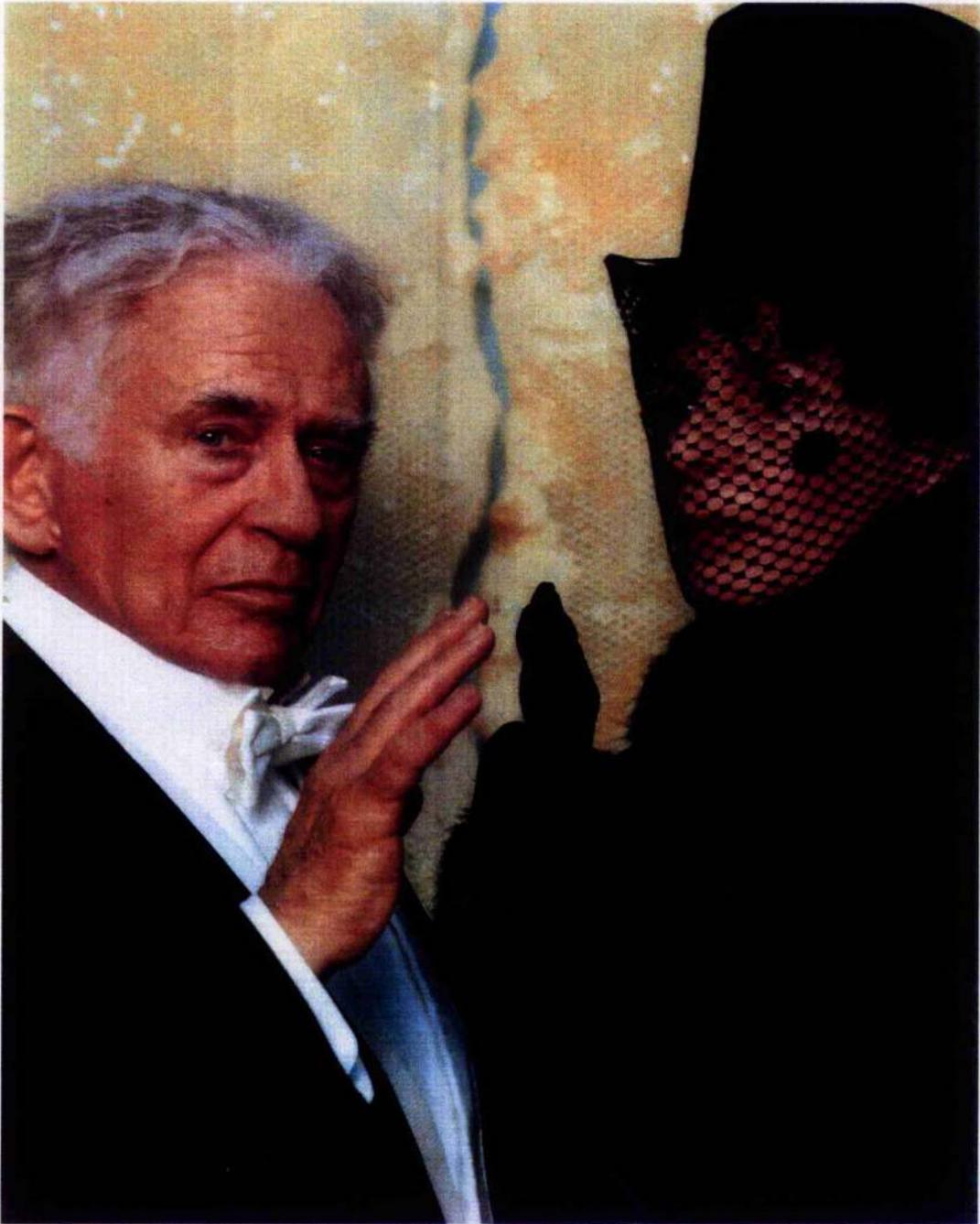
Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 7*, (production photo), 1993.

Fig. 82



Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 7*, (production photo), 1993.

Fig. 83



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 2: Genealogy*, 1 of 3 C-prints in acrylic frames (shown unframed), 1999.

Fig. 84



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 3: Gary Gilmore*, C-print in acrylic frame (shown unframed), 2002.

Fig. 85



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 5: The Queen of Chain*, Gelatin-silver print in acrylic frame (shown unframed), 1997.

Fig. 86



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 5: her Diva*, C-print in acrylic frame (shown unframed), 1997.

Fig. 87



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 5: her Giant*, C-print in acrylic frame, 1997.

Fig. 88



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 5*, (production photograph showing Matthew Barney as *her Magician*), 1997.

Fig. 89



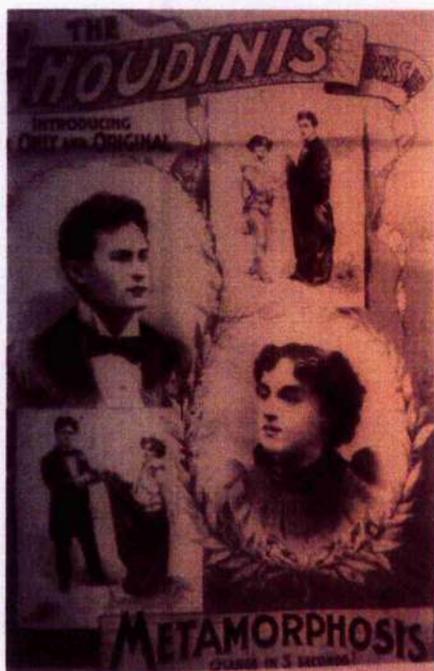
Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 5: Elválás*, Gelatin-silver print in acrylic frame (shown unframed), 1997.

Fig. 90



Houdini performing a manacled bridge jump.

Fig. 91



Poster for the Houdinis' *Metamorphosis*.

Fig. 92



Houdini strapped to a "crazy crib."

Fig. 93



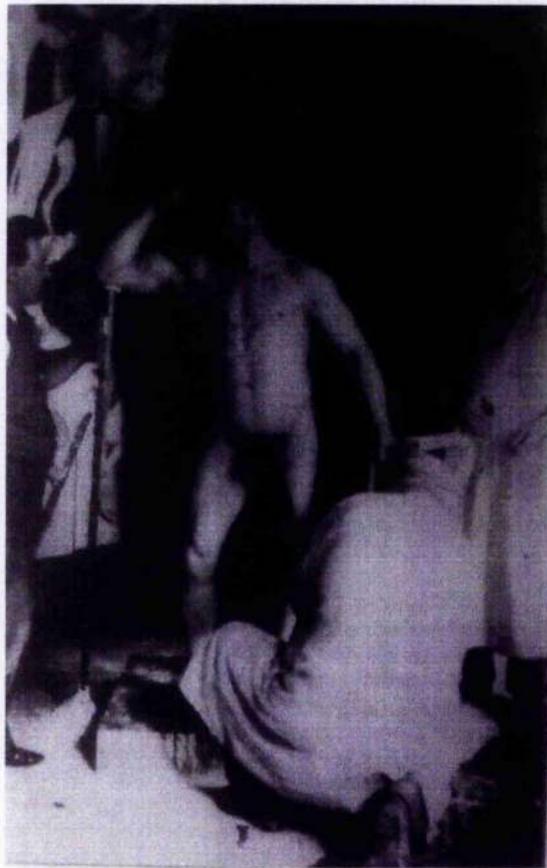
Houdini naked in prison cell, Boston Tombs, 1906.

Fig. 94



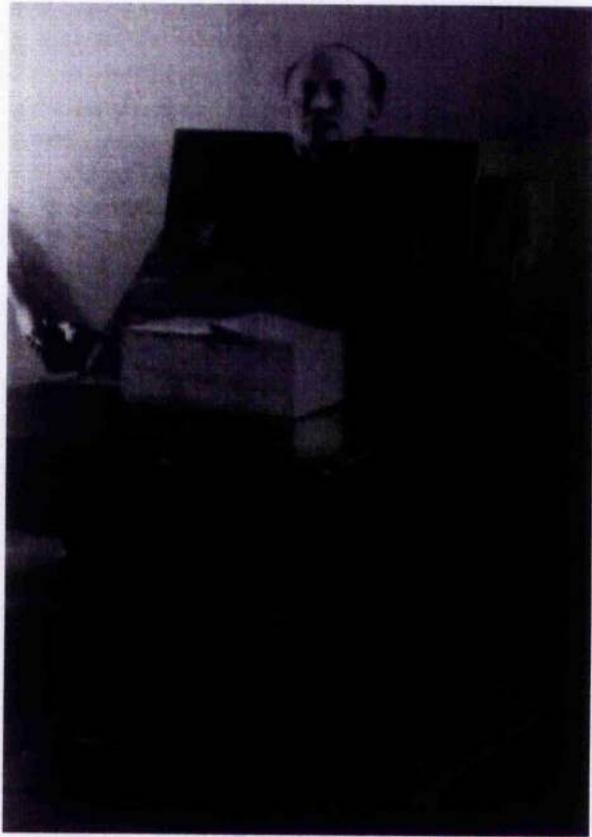
David Blaine performing 'Above the Below,' Southwark, London, 2003.

Fig. 95



Sandow posing for cast of statue of "European Man," 1901.

Fig. 96



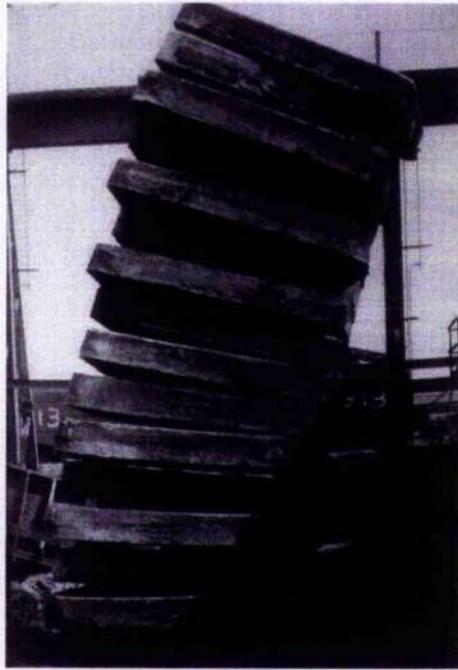
Houdini in cabinet devised to thwart "Margery."

Fig. 97



Richard Serra, *Splashing*, lead, 1969.

Fig. 98



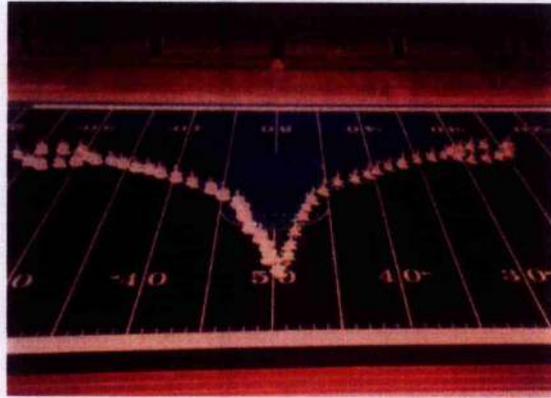
Richard Serra, *Skullcracker*, steel, 1969.

Fig. 99



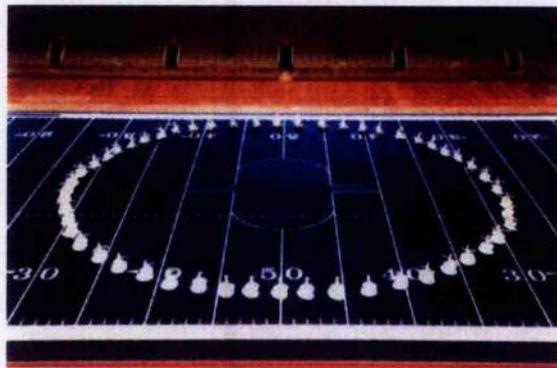
Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 3: Hiram Abiff*, C-print in acrylic frame (shown unframed), 2002.

Fig. 100



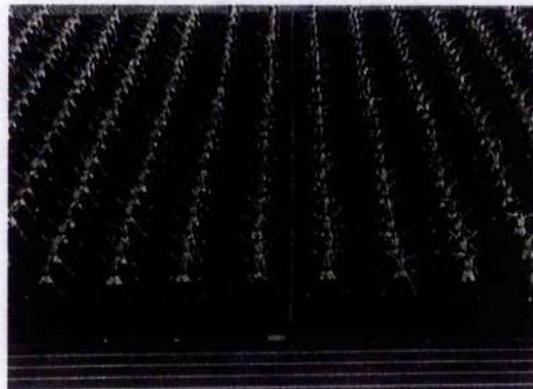
Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER I*, choreographic phase eleven (production still), 1995.

Fig. 101



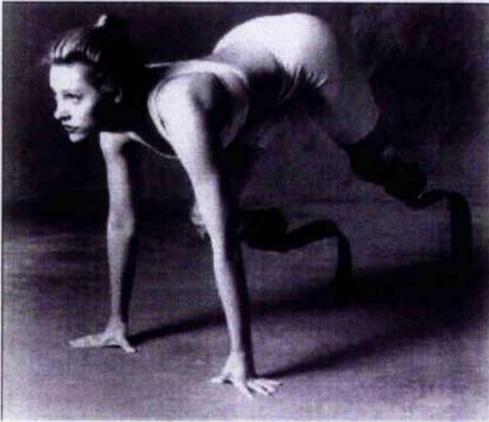
Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER I*, choreographic phase three (production still), 1995.

Fig. 102

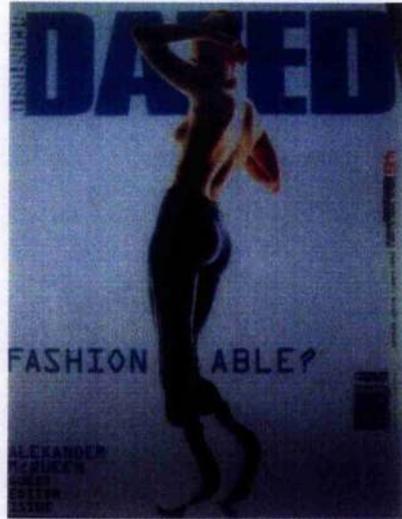


Olympia, (Leni Reifenstahl, 1936), film still.

Figs. 103-104

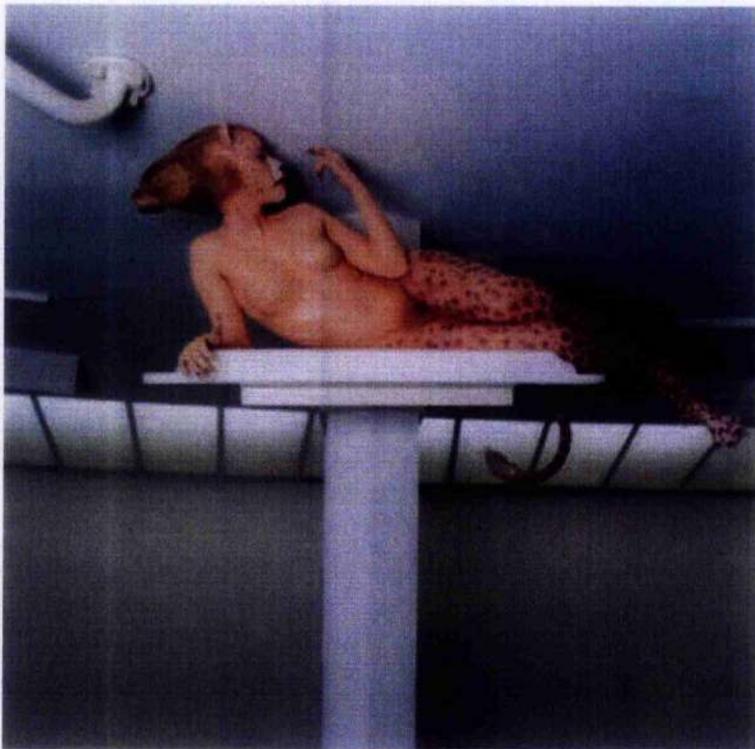


Aimee Mullins wearing graphite running legs



Cover of *Dazed and Confused* magazine, No. 46 (September 1998) showing Aimee Mullins.

Fig. 105



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 3: The Third Degree*, 1 of 2 C-prints in acrylic frames (shown unframed), 2002.

Fig. 106



Matthew Barney, *CREMASTER 3: Mahabyn*, 1 of 3 C-prints in acrylic frames (shown unframed), 2002.

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