



REFIGURING the SPIRITUAL

BEUYS

BARNEY

TURRELL

GOLDSWORTHY

MARK C. TAYLOR

REFIGURING the SPIRITUAL

RELIGION, CULTURE, AND PUBLIC LIFE

RELIGION, CULTURE, AND PUBLIC LIFE

SERIES EDITORS: MARK C. TAYLOR AND ALFRED STEPAN

The resurgence of religion calls for careful analysis and constructive criticism of new forms of intolerance, as well as new approaches to tolerance, respect, mutual understanding, and accommodation. To promote serious scholarship and informed debate, the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life and Columbia University Press are sponsoring a book series devoted to the investigation of the role of religion in society and culture today. This series includes works by scholars in religious studies, political science, history, cultural anthropology, economics, social psychology, and other allied fields whose work sustains multidisciplinary and comparative, as well as transnational, analyses of historical and contemporary issues. The series focuses on issues related to questions of difference, identity, and practice within local, national, and international contexts. Special attention is given to the ways in which religious traditions encourage conflict, violence, and intolerance and also support human rights, ecumenical values, and mutual understanding. By mediating alternative methodologies and different religious, social, and cultural traditions, books published in this series will open channels of communication that facilitate critical analysis.

...

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For more than a century, widely held assumptions about religion and modernity have led to a failure to recognize the important relationship between spirituality and the visual arts. Many social analysts and cultural critics have long argued that modernization and secularization go hand in hand—as societies modernize, the story goes, they become more secular. Moreover, this process was supposed to be inevitable and irreversible. Recent developments, however, make it clear that this narrative is seriously mistaken. There has been a global resurgence of conservative religion throughout the world that all too often has resulted in growing intolerance and even violence. This unexpected turn of events has led to an understandable reaction against religion in all of its manifestations.

But something else is also going on as well. Although traditional forms of religious belief and practice have been subjected to trenchant criticisms, alternative forms of spirituality are thriving. Many people who are committed to no organized religion willingly identify themselves as spiritual. In some cases this spirituality involves a return to overlooked or repressed

strands of customary religions; in other cases new syncretistic forms of spiritual belief and practice, which are neither doctrinal nor institutional, have emerged. Religion has never been confined to church, temple, and mosque and has always found expression in areas of culture where it is least expected. Some of the most probing reflection on spiritual questions today can be found in art and literature that initially appear to be thoroughly secular.

This situation is not new. Ever since the beginning of modernism there has been a close, though not always obvious, relationship between spirituality and the visual arts. In their 1911 manifesto *Der Blaue Reiter*, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc wrote: “A great era has begun: the spiritual ‘awakening,’ in the increasing tendency to regain ‘lost balance,’ the inevitable necessity of spiritual plantings, the unfolding of the first blossom. We are standing at the threshold of one of the greatest epochs that mankind has ever experienced, the epoch of great spirituality.” The work of Marc and Kandinsky—as well as others, as different as Klee, Mondrian, Van Gogh, Malevich,

Newman, Reinhardt, and Kiefer—is designed to assist in ushering in this “epoch of great spirituality.”

The artists considered in this book continue this tradition. Their work differs in many ways, but they share a vision of art as a transformative practice that draws inspiration directly and indirectly from ancient and modern, as well as Eastern and Western, forms of spirituality. In a world torn by religious intolerance, where money never sleeps, the art of Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barney, James Turrell, and Andy Goldsworthy harbors lessons well worth pondering.

This book is published in conjunction with a series of conversations with leading contemporary artists, *Refiguring the Spiritual*, which was sponsored by the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life and the Visual Arts Program, School of the Arts at Columbia University during 2010 and 2011. Our guests included Richard Tuttle, Laurie Anderson, and Lynda Benglis. Podcasts of these conversations are available at www.ircpl.org.

Neither this book nor the series to which it is related would have been possible without the support of many people. Even in my absence Margaret Weyers, from Williams College, continues to make it possible for me to do what I do. Emily Brennan, assistant director of the Institute for Religion, Culture, and Public Life, oversees our programs and contributes to planning in unusually creative ways. Joseph Blankholm, Chelsea Ebin, and Jacob Quinn have provided invaluable assistance in preparing this book for publication. Michael Govan and Joan Young provided invaluable assistance in securing

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Refiguring the Spiritual is the first volume of a two-part work. *Rewiring the Real: Literature, Religion, Technology*, which will appear next year, will complement the analysis of the four artists considered in this book with a study of four leading novelists: William Gaddis, Richard Powers, Mark Danielewski, and Don DeLillo.

September 24, 2010
Stone Hill

REFIGURING the SPIRITUAL

1

FINANCIALIZATION OF ART

Art has lost its way. Changes that have been emerging for at least half a century have reached the tipping point, and we now find ourselves in the midst of a seismic sociocultural shift whose proportions are impossible to determine. Of the many factors that have contributed to these developments, none is more important than the transformation of the economy that was made both possible and necessary by new media, information, and networking technologies. Ever prescient, Andy Warhol declared in 1975, “Business art is the step that comes after Art.”¹ Art and money, of course, have always been inseparable. During the past several decades, however, this relationship has been transformed by the appearance of a new form of capitalism—finance capitalism. This is a genuinely novel phenomenon whose global impact has become undeniable. In previous forms of capitalism (agricultural, industrial, and consumer) people made money by buying and selling labor and material goods; in finance capitalism, by contrast, wealth is created by circulating

signs backed by nothing but other signs. When investment becomes more speculative, the rate of circulation accelerates, and the floating signifiers, which now constitute wealth, proliferate. The structure and development of financial markets and the art market mirror each other. As art becomes a progressively abstract play of nonreferential signs, so increasingly abstract financial instruments become an autonomous sphere of circulation whose end is nothing other than itself. When the overall economy moves from industrial and consumer capitalism to finance capitalism, art undergoes parallel changes. There are three stages in this process:

- Commodification of art
- Corporatization of art
- Financialization of art

At the end of these interrelated trajectories the real seems to have become virtual, and the virtual appears to be real.

But just when the circuit seems to be complete, the system implodes, and the real returns.

When Warhol proclaimed art to be business and business to be art, he was acknowledging the overwhelming importance of postwar consumer culture. Not only had the center of the art world shifted from Europe to New York, but the United States had become the world's dominant economic and military power. The work of many of the most influential artists of the era both reflected and promoted American values and power at home and abroad. Warhol's artistic appropriation of the images and icons of consumer culture put on display both the machinations of consumer capitalism and the commodification of art that was so vigorously promoted by the burgeoning gallery system. With increasing economic prosperity, art, whose collection and exhibition had long been limited to the church and aristocracy, became the social marker for individuals aspiring to rise above the middle class. But even Warhol could not have anticipated the explosion of the art market by the turn of the millennium.

According to reliable estimates, by 2006 the private art market had reached \$25–\$30 billion.² Christie's and Sotheby's, the two leading auction houses, reported combined sales of \$12 billion, and more than two dozen galleries were doing \$100 million in sales annually. This phenomenal growth in the art market was not limited to the United States. Global capitalism created a global art market. Between 2002 and 2006 the global art market grew

95 percent, from \$25.3 billion to \$54.9 billion. This astonishing growth was fueled by emerging markets in Russia, China, India, and the Middle East. The price of individual works escalated as quickly as the purported value of the financial securities with which they were being purchased. In 2004 Ronald Lauder, chairman of the board of the Museum of Modern Art, purchased Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* for \$135 million, which at the time was the highest price ever paid for a single painting. Three years later Jeff Koons's *Hanging Heart* sold at auction for almost \$27 million, which was the highest price ever paid for a work by a living artist (Fig. 1.1).³

Koons is the poster boy for this frenzied commodification of art. What began in Warhol's Factory (1962–68) ends in Koons's factory, where his cast of one hundred assistants fabricates whatever he imagines. Whether pornographic figurines or cute flower puppies, remarkable craftsmanship characterizes Koons's art. Just as Warhol, reacting to abstract expressionists, removed hand from work, so Koons further mechanizes the means of production. There is, however, a critical difference between Warhol and Koons. Neither Koons nor his art gives any hint of the irony and parody that lend Warhol's art its edge. Whereas Warhol's work unsettles, Koons's art is eye candy crafted to reassure. Unapologetically embracing banality and freely admitting his ignorance of art history, Koons confesses, "I realized you don't have to know anything and I think my work always lets the viewer know that. I just

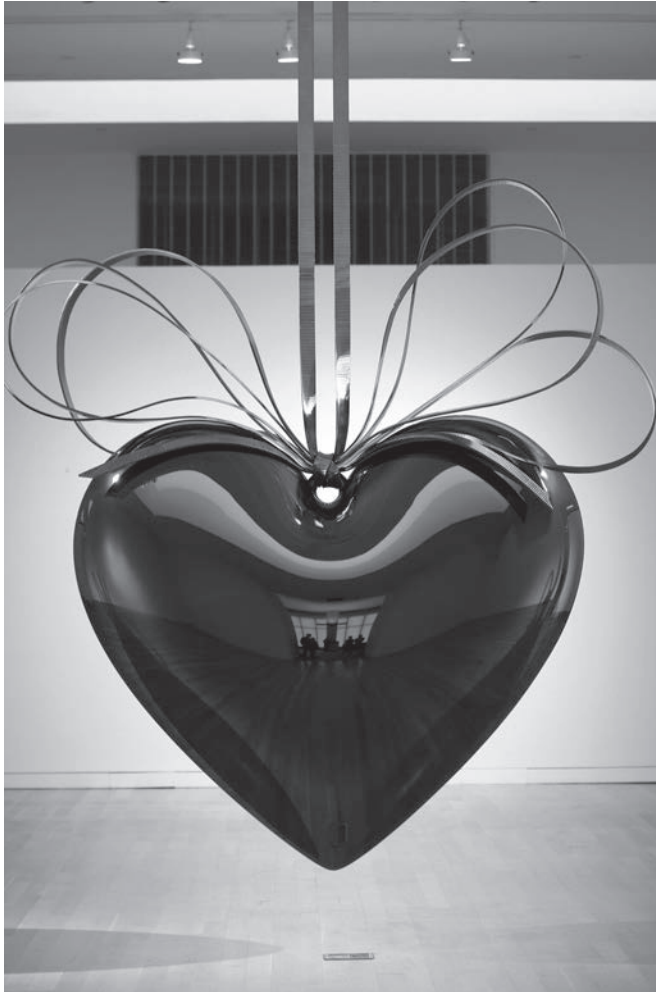


FIGURE 1.1 Jeff Koons, *Hanging Heart*

try to do work that makes people feel good about themselves, their history, and their potential.” Sounding more like the televangelist and media mogul Joel Osteen than Marcel Duchamp, Koons elaborates: “I think art takes you outside yourself, takes you past yourself. I believe that my journey has really been to remove my own anxiety. That’s the key. The more anxiety you can remove, the more free you are to make that gesture, whatever the gesture is. The dialogue is first with the artist, but then it goes outward, and is shared with other people. And if the anxiety is removed everything is so close, everything is available, and it’s just this little bit of confidence, or trust, that people have to delve into.”⁴ Confidence, indeed. What is surprising is how many seemingly intelligent and sophisticated people have been taken in by this erstwhile stockbroker and commodities trader’s confidence game.

Having learned his trade on the floor of commodity exchanges, Koons does not move beyond the commodification of art. His exquisitely crafted works have become precious objects whose worth is measured by their rapidly rising exchange value. The next stage in the development of the art market—the corporatization of art—must be understood in two ways. First, in the past two decades many major corporations have appropriated the age-old practice of attempting to increase their prestige by purchasing and displaying art. In many cases companies hire full- or part-time advisers and consultants to develop their collections. Second, and more suggestive, a few enterprising artists

have transformed the corporation itself into a work of art. The most interesting example of the corporatization of art is the work of the Japanese artist Takashi Murakami. Like Warhol and Koons, Murakami collapses high and low by appropriating images from popular culture to create oversized sculptures and his signature “Superflat” paintings (see Fig. 1.2). But he has also expanded his artistic practice to create a commercial conglomerate that is functionally indistinguishable from many of today’s media companies, advertising agencies, and leading corporations. In 1996 he founded the “Hiropon Factory,” a professional studio to produce his art, much like the factories of Warhol and Koons. Five years later, Murakami took the game to another level by creating the Kaikai Kiki Co. Ltd., which currently employs more than one hundred people. According to the company website, the goals of this enterprise “include the production and promotion of artwork, the management and support of select young artists, general management of events and projects, and the production and promotion of merchandise.”⁵ The products marketed range from more-or-less traditional paintings, sculptures, and videos to T-shirts, key chains, mouse pads, cell phone holders, and even \$5,000 limited-edition Vuitton handbags. His 2008 exhibition, © Murakami, at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art included a fully operational Louis Vuitton boutique. It is clear that the art world has come a long way in a short time. When the Guggenheim mounted a show on Armani fashion in 2000–2001,



FIGURE 1.2 Takashi Murakami, *Eye Love SUPERFLAT*

Thomas Krens was vehemently attacked for being crassly commercial and disingenuously entrepreneurial. Now artists openly hawking their wares in museums receive rave reviews from critics who have bought into their game.

While these practices are innovative, Murakami breaks new ground when he expands his company’s business to create a full-service design and promotion company. Sum-

marizing the trajectory of his work he explains this part of his corporate mission:

Another hurdle I have faced is the difference inherent in Japanese and Western artistic practices, and the frustrating “non-art” status that much of Japanese art bears, both within and outside the country. My first response to this was to market artistic works in non-fine arts media. But after that, I thought: “why not just revolutionize the concept of art itself?” To achieve this, I curated a series of exhibitions: Superflat, Coloriage, and Little Boy, which attempted to portray the lesser-known potential of Japanese artistic creativity by introducing Japanese pop culture creations to an international audience. This approach . . . has become a basic tenet of Kai-kai Kiki’s company activities.

Art is the supreme incarnation of luxury entertainment. When creating works, I am extremely attentive to all aspects of the process; not letting a single detail slip by in my quest to imbue works with a true soul. In the management of our artists, we maintain policies and standards for their dealings in the art world, while also keeping flexible and considering projects case-by-case; all with the careers of our artists in mind.⁶

Having formed a hybrid of a media corporation, advertising company, and talent agency, Murakami dubbed his for-profit corporation a work of art. One of the primary

functions of this novel entity is the organization of a bi-annual art fair in Tokyo, “GEISAI,” which allows clients, that is, young artists, to exhibit their work for a fee. Commenting on his response to Murakami’s LA exhibition, Walead Beshy writes, “It was hard not to appreciate the delirious intricacy of Murakami’s unrepentant entrepreneurialism. His constantly expanding business model has allowed him to parlay his just-over-fifteen-year career into an international corporation whose tentacles extend into a network of alliances spanning the entertainment industry, corporate image consultation, toy manufacturing and high fashion—this aside from the production of art objects. His ability to mold productions (and services) to varying scale into an ornate constellation is as mesmerizing as his willingness to almost selflessly dissolve his own business complex.”⁷

While Murakami’s corporatization of art is a noteworthy development of the ideas and practices of Warhol and Koons, it does not express the fundamental economic transformation that has taken place since the late 1960s. Beneath the surface of the economic recession brought on by the Vietnam War, President Johnson’s Great Society, and the 1973 oil crisis, changes were occurring that created the conditions for today’s global economy. As I have suggested, what distinguishes financial capitalism from earlier forms of capitalism is that wealth is generated by the circulation of signs grounded in nothing other than themselves rather than by the sale or exchange of material

objects or physical labor.⁸ As this new form of capitalism expands, the production of tangible goods is increasingly displaced by the invention of intangible products. This novel financial system was made possible by a new technological infrastructure. Since the dawn of trading, technological innovation has transformed markets: no metal currency without metallurgy, no paper tender without the paper industry, and no digital money without computers and networks. Furthermore, markets require transportation and communication networks—seaways, roads, railroads, telegraph, telephones, and worldwide webs. In recent decades news, information, and network technologies have created both new products to market and new systems of exchange. Unlike products in the past, these financial instruments are immaterial. While much has been written about the shift from a manufacturing to an information economy, the most important development is consistently overlooked: the distinctive characteristic of our age is not simply the spread of computers but the impact of connecting them. The immateriality of the tokens of exchange and the global reach of trading networks completely transform financial markets.

Computers were first introduced to the trading floor in the late 1970s but were not widely used as instruments for financial decision making for several years. Their full impact was not felt until they were networked. While the first financial networks were proprietary, throughout the 1980s the government policy of deregulation created open net-

works, which facilitated wider and faster dissemination of information. As the emerging system transformed money into electronic bits circling the globe at the speed of light, markets became prone to ever-greater volatility and risk. With these developments investment strategy changed from identifying profitable companies to managing risk. The theoretical foundation for risk management was developed in 1952 by Harry Markowitz, a twenty-five-year-old graduate student at the University of Chicago. His paper entitled “Portfolio Selection,” later expanded into a book, *Portfolio Selection: Efficient Diversification of Investments* (1959), fundamentally changed the way investors large and small think about markets and by so doing set the course of much financial economics for the next several decades. His most important innovation was to change the way risk is calculated from analyzing individual stocks to assessing the risk of a portfolio made up of a variety of stocks whose prices are likely to move in different directions. No longer making investment decisions by *referring* to the fundamentals of a particular company or the actual performance of its stock in the past, Markowitz sought to determine the *relative* volatility and hence comparative risk of different securities in the portfolio. The efficiency of the portfolio is a function of the *differences* in the performances of its stocks. It is theoretically possible to hedge risk by buying and holding a diversified portfolio of securities. “The riskiness of a portfolio,” Markowitz argues, “depends on the covariance of its holdings, not on the average

riskiness of the separate investments.”⁹ In matters of risk the whole is sometimes *less* than the sum of the parts.

The complexity of the mathematical equations with which Markowitz developed his theory obscures the far-reaching implications of the change in the way value is determined. Portfolio theory involves a shift from a referential to a relational notion of value. Traditional investors calculated the expected return on investments by analyzing the fundamentals of particular companies or commodities and predicting whether their price would go up or down. In portfolio theory, by contrast, value is determined by risk relative to other assets. The performance of an individual stock matters less than the way its price moves in relation to other securities in the portfolio. The trick of the trade is to balance the expected return on individual assets with the contribution of different securities to overall portfolio performance.¹⁰

At the time Markowitz formulated his theory, the use of computers had not spread much beyond the military and universities. It was therefore difficult if not impossible to do the calculations necessary to determine the covariance of risk in a variety of securities. By the 1980s, the growing use of computers and expansion of networks made it possible to calculate risk and execute trades in real time. As I have noted, these networks also increased the volatility of asset prices and thereby created a greater need to manage risk efficiently. This need was met by a proliferation of new financial instruments (options, swaps, repos,

collateralized debt obligations, and so forth), which were made possible by the very information and networking technologies that were creating instability. The marketing and trading of these instruments required the development of additional mathematical models to determine their value and predict their performance. The effective deployment of Markowitz’s portfolio theory would not have been possible without the development of William Shape’s “Capital Asset Pricing Model” and Fischer Black’s and Myron Scholes’s “Theory of Rational Option Pricing.” As derivatives became more abstract and the mathematical formulae for the trading programs more complex, markets began to lose contact with anything resembling the real economy. Contrary to expectation, products originally developed to manage risk increased market volatility, intensifying the very uncertainty investors were trying to avoid. As derivatives were continuously bought and sold in highly leveraged, computer-mediated arbitrage deals for which twenty minutes was considered a long-term investment, markets lost touch with reality. With virtual currencies and e-money circulating through ethernetets at ever-greater speed, financial markets began to resemble a postmodern play of signs, which, for any rational investor, should have appeared to be a risky confidence game.

The globalization of financial networks created a speculative frenzy that was fueled by escalating leverage. Rather than borrowing money to build houses and factories or expand inventory as had been done in the past, investors

started borrowing money to invest in financial assets. At the same time, there was a change in the nature and amount of collateral (the amount of liquid assets required to secure a loan). Instead of using material assets (e.g., house, factory, or inventory) or cash to secure the loan, lending institutions began the practice of accepting the securities purchased with the loan as collateral for the loan. Furthermore, the percentage of the loan required for collateral decreased dramatically. This practice involves an obvious danger. When the value of the security goes down, the amount of collateral decreases, triggering a margin call in which lenders require borrowers to post additional collateral to compensate for the decrease in the value of their original collateral. But with almost no liquid assets, and security values falling, meeting the margin call becomes impossible. When the failure of Long-Term Capital Management brought the global economy to the brink of collapse in 1998, the company was leveraged 33:1; by the time of the financial collapse in the fall of 2008, leverage had in some cases grown to a staggering 100:1. Many of these “structured investment vehicles” used to increase leverage were offshore entities formed by banks to hold assets off their balance sheets. While borrowing to speculate is profitable when markets are rising, it is catastrophic when they are falling.

Changes in mortgage lending practices in the past several decades underscore the gravity of these developments. Traditionally, most mortgages were issued by local savings

and loan institutions, and the real estate purchased with the loan served as collateral. There was a presumed correspondence between the amount of the loan and the actual value of the real asset. In semiotic terms the value of the monetary signifier (the loan) was determined by its reference to a material signified (the house). But all of this changed in 1981. Continuing economic problems throughout the 1970s created a crisis for savings and loan institutions. To address this escalating crisis, Congress passed legislation intended to help S&Ls by allowing them to sell their low-rate long-term mortgage loans and to use the income from the sales to invest or loan at higher rates. These mortgages were bundled and sold as bonds known as Ginnie Maes through the Government National Mortgage Association (GNMA). The GNMA bought mortgages guaranteed by the Federal Housing Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Farmers Home Administration and sold them as securities. The Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA) also purchased mortgages from lenders and resold them to investors as securities known as Fannie Maes. At first hundreds and then thousands of these individual mortgages were combined into large pools called Collateralized Mortgage Obligations, or CMOs. These pools then issued a series of different tranches or investment-grade rated debt, each of which had different levels of risk and, correspondingly, different rates of return. Each tranche (except the bottom tranche) was rated by one of the two nationally recognized

credit rating agencies, Standard & Poor's or Moody's Investors Service. The bottom tranche was unrated and considered to be equity. These ratings were based on complex mathematical formulae that relied on the underlying credit scores, known as FICO scores, of the homeowners who held each individual mortgage owned in the pool. Unfortunately, these FICO scores had never been tested in a recession or a housing downturn and turned out to be unreliable indicators of the ability of homeowners to service their mortgages when the U.S. housing market began to fall apart in 2006. These securities were repeatedly traded on secondary markets among institutional investors (banks, retirement funds, municipalities, states, and sovereign wealth funds), as well as a growing number of hedge funds. These products created significant demand for mortgage paper that had not previously existed. Moreover, because the mathematical assumptions on which these structures were based turned out to be flawed, these products ended up increasing rather than decreasing market volatility and risk.

For example, billions of dollars of CMOs consisting entirely of subprime mortgages (mortgages issued to borrowers with shaky credit histories) ended up experiencing higher numbers of defaults in their underlying mortgage pools than the models on which they were based had predicted. As a result, many of these transactions defaulted, causing significant losses for the institutional investors that owned the different tranches of their debt. The end

result of the securitization of mortgages was a precarious pyramid scheme. John Geanakoplos explains how pyramiding leads to a relative shrinkage of collateral:

Wall Street took the whole operation a step further by buying big mortgage pools and then splitting them into different prices or “tranches,” which summed up the whole. These derivative prices [are] called collateralized mortgage obligations (CMOs) because they are promises secured by pools of individual promises, each of which is backed by a physical house. . . . There is a pyramiding of promises in which the CMO promises are backed by pools of promises, which are backed by individual promises which are backed by physical homes. The streams of promises sometimes come together when many promises are pooled to back other promises, and sometimes split apart when one (derivative) promise is tranced into many smaller promises. . . .

. . . Pyramiding occurs when an agent A puts up collateral for his promise to B, and then B in turn uses A's promise to him, and hence in effect the same collateral for a promise he makes to C, who, in turn, reuses the same collateral for a promise to D. Mortgage[s] pass[ed] through securities offer a classical example of pyramiding. Pyramiding naturally gives rise to chain reactions, as default by Mr. A ripples through, often all the way to D.¹¹

The collapse of this pyramid scheme, which began in 2007, brought the global economy to the point of terminal meltdown by the fall of 2008. As market models based on abstract mathematical formulae drove trading in financial instruments that were increasingly virtual, the so-called real economy seemed to fade into insignificance. But just as borrowing to speculate in financial assets makes sense when stocks are rising but not when they are falling, so borrowing and the use of excessive leverage for property purchases is prudent when home values are rising but foolish when they are falling. In the absence of responsible regulatory oversight and with government policies encouraging home ownership for people who could not afford it, the housing bubble was a disaster waiting to happen. The same global networks that make it possible for financial assets to proliferate so rapidly also make it possible for them to disappear very quickly. When the pyramid cracked, the effects ripped through the global economy with unprecedented speed. The preoccupation with virtual capital, Ethernets, and computer clouds led people to forget that, in the final analysis, everything hinges on *real* estate. What makes this crisis unique is not only its scale but the way it calls into question the viability of the form of finance capitalism that has emerged in the past thirty years.

But what does all of this have to do with art? Though few have made the connection, developments in the art

market have been following the changing investment strategies in financial markets. The global growth in the art market parallels the worldwide spread of finance capitalism. In recent years the value of art assets has risen at least as fast as, and often faster than, real estate or financial assets. This growth has, of course, been driven by the exponential increase in wealth among those who most benefit from the new financial system. Accounts of newly rich hedge fund managers buying art at ridiculously inflated prices fill the press. This preoccupation with celebrity collectors, however, obscures a more interesting and important development. While buying prestige by purchasing art, as many have in the past, the titans of finance capitalism are also transforming the art market through the financialization of art. This is being done by applying the same investment strategies to art as they have to managing their hedge funds and private equity firms.

Speculating in art is not, of course, new. In one of the most intriguing investment schemes in recent history the Japanese industrialist Ryoei Saito purchased Van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* in 1990 for the then record price of \$82.5 million. Immediately after taking possession of the painting, he secured it in a climate-controlled vault, where it remained for seven years. By 1993 Saito's financial empire had fallen apart, and he pled guilty to the charge of bribery, for which he received a three-year suspended sentence. Since his death in 1996, the location and ownership

of the painting have remained a mystery. This investment strategy clearly treats art like any other commodity purchased for speculative purposes.

The investment game changes significantly when art is regarded as a financial asset rather than as a consumer commodity. Speculators in the art market have recently established hedge funds and private equity funds for the purchase and sale of art. These funds extend the principles of finance capitalism to art. While I will consider the details of these new funds in more detail in chapter 5, in this context it is important to understand how their basic operational principles are related to practices in security markets and private equity ventures. Let us return to the example of mortgages. As we have seen, since the early 1980s mortgages have been securitized as collateralized mortgage obligations (CMOs) so that they can be bought and resold in secondary and tertiary markets. Although the value of these derivatives is supposed to be determined by the value of the underlying asset (i.e., the price of the real estate), in a rising market the value of the derivative increases relative to the collateral on which it is based. With the growing volatility of financial markets, investors attempt to hedge their bets by trading derivatives using different variations of portfolio theory. When mortgages are bundled and tranced, the evaluation of risk has nothing to do with the value of a particular asset but is calculated using mathematical formulae to determine the

statistical probability of defaults of the underlying mortgages. With this practice the derivative drifts farther and farther from its underlying asset until the virtual and the real seem to be completely decoupled.

Private equity funds use a variation of this model. Investors in these funds make money by buying undervalued companies, bringing in new management to restructure them and then breaking up different divisions and selling them off as separate companies. In this case the wager is that the value of the parts is greater than the value of the whole. Investors in private equity funds commit a certain amount of capital for an agreed-upon time. At the end of that period they can reclaim their principle and receive a percentage of the fund's profits or absorb a percentage of the losses. For their services fund managers take an upfront 2 percent management fee and share of the profits but, remarkably, do not share the losses. In addition to this, most firms charge a substantial transaction fee each time they purchase a company, which is generally split in some fashion between the manager and the investors. Permissive accounting policies make it difficult to assess the performance of private equity funds. For example, private equity funds are subject to highly subjective standards in valuing their markets, and managers of these funds often have a great deal of discretion in determining the value of their holdings. Sometimes, when a fund performs poorly, it is simply shut down and the losses not reported. Thus,

public reports on the performance of hedge and private equity funds are highly misleading.

Some enterprising investors have directly appropriated this model and are applying it to the art market. London financier Philip Hoffman, for example, has established Fine Art Management Services Ltd., which speculates in art rather than stocks. This strategy securitizes works of art in the same way that CMOs securitize mortgages. Just as mortgages are bundled and sold as bonds, so works of art are bundled and sold as shares of a hedge fund. In other words, rather than owning an individual work of art, or several works of art, an investor owns an undivided interest in a group of art works. In these schemes, what is important is not the real value of the company, commodity, or artwork but the statistical probability of its price performance within a specified time frame relative to other portfolio holdings. Furthermore, insofar as investors hedge bets by using portfolio theory, the value of any particular work of art is determined by its risk quotient relative to other works of art held by the fund. Like investors in CMOs, who know nothing about the actual real estate holdings whose mortgages they own, investors in art hedge and private equity funds know nothing about the actual artworks in which they are investing. There is nothing to prevent investors in art funds from selling their shares to other investors, thereby creating secondary and tertiary markets. As trading accelerates, derivatives (fund shares) and underlying assets (artworks) are once again

decoupled, creating a quasi-autonomous sphere of circulating signs in which value constantly fluctuates.

This financialization of art is a genuinely new phenomenon that even Warhol could not have predicted. If “business art is the step that comes after Art,” then “being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art.”¹² While Warhol, Koons, and Murakami recognized profits to be made by the commodification of works of art, some artists are now attempting to take advantage of the opportunities created by the financialization of art. The most prominent representative of the financialization of art is Damien Hirst. What is important about Hirst is not the entanglement of his career with the financial success of the hedge fund manager Steven A. Cohen but his creation of works of art specifically designed for new financial markets. An article published in the *New York Times* in 2007 observes that Hirst “has gone from being an artist to being what you might call the manager of the hedge fund of Damien Hirst’s art.”¹³ The most ostentatious example of his strategy was the production and marketing of his \$100 million diamond-studded skull cynically entitled *For the Love of God* (Fig. 1.3).

The financial machinations surrounding the sale of this work were as complex and mysterious as a high-stakes private equity deal. One year later Hirst mounted his own sale at Sotheby’s in London at the precise moment that global financial markets were collapsing. Though the sale was an enormous financial success, it is clear that this unlikely

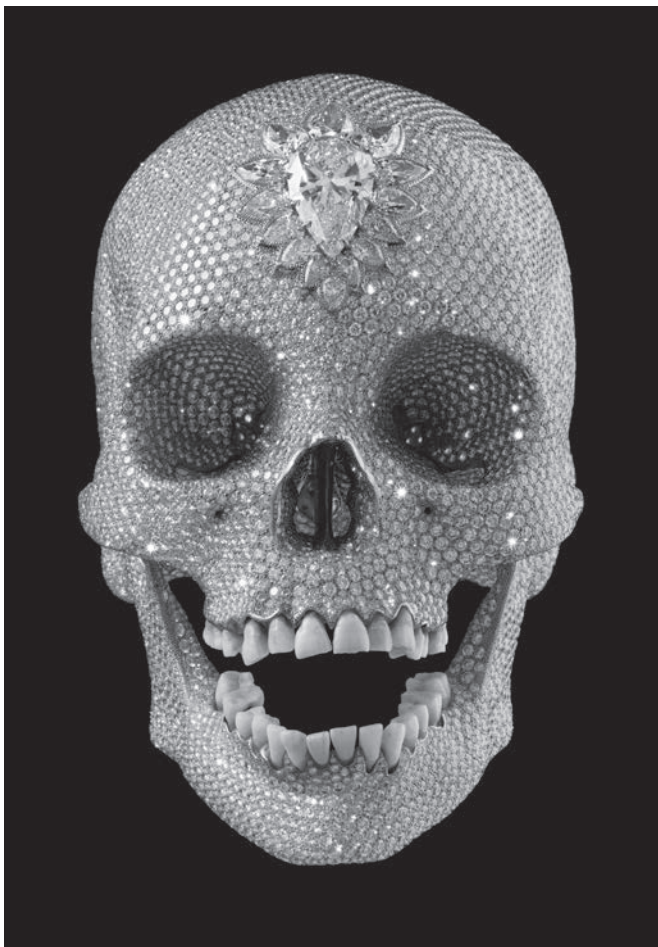


FIGURE 1.3 Damien Hirst, *For the Love of God*

event marked the end of a trajectory that had been unfolding since the end of the Second World War.¹⁴ There are, predictably, some critics who argue that Hirst, like Koons, is, in fact, satirizing or criticizing the market from which he profits so handsomely. While this argument is plausible in the case of Warhol, the art of Koons and Hirst, like the critics who promote it, has lost its critical edge. When the art bubble bursts, the value of their art will plummet as rapidly as the virtual assets with which it is purchased. If each era gets the art it deserves, then the age of finance capitalism deserves the carcass of a rotting shark that no amount of formaldehyde can preserve. *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* harbors a lesson worth noting: reality might not be completely virtual after all, and, far from impossible, death is unavoidable.

The commodification, corporatization, and financialization of art represent the betrayal of principles and values that have guided artists for more than two centuries. The notion of modern art and related ideas of the avant-garde emerged in Germany during the last decade of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ In the wake of the failure of the French Revolution, idealistic philosophers and romantic poets were forced to reconsider the interrelation of religion, art, and politics. In his *Athenaeum Fragments*, published in Jena between 1798 and 1800, Friedrich Schlegel writes: “The revolutionary desire to realize the kingdom of God on earth is the elastic point of progressive civilization and the beginning of modern history. Whatever has

no relation to the kingdom of God is of strictly secondary importance.”¹⁶ When religion and politics failed to realize what many imagined as the kingdom of God on earth, artists and philosophers fashioned new strategies, which more than two centuries later continue to shape our world. M. H. Abrams effectively summarizes these developments: “To put the matter with the sharpness of drastic simplification: faith in an apocalypse by revelation had been replaced by an apocalypse by revolution, and this now gave way to faith in an apocalypse by imagination [i.e., art] or cognition [i.e., philosophy]. In the ruling two-term frame of Romantic thought, the mind of man confronts the old heaven and earth and possesses within itself the power, if it will but recognize and avail itself of the power, to transform them into a new heaven and new earth, by means of a total revolution of consciousness.”¹⁷ From this point of view art is a transformative practice that is insistently critical. We will see in chapter 2 that Friedrich Schiller defines the task of the avant-garde by translating Kant’s interpretation of the beautiful work of art into a social practice. The challenge, Schiller declares, is to transform the world into a work of art. As Schlegel has suggested, the realization of the artistic utopia would be the fulfillment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The commodification, corporatization, and financialization of art subvert this artistic mission. When the artist becomes a commodities trader, corporate executive, or hedge fund manager, criticism gives way to complicity in

an economy that absorbs everything designed to resist it. With asset values rising at an unprecedented rate, the market seems to be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. But just at this moment of apparent triumph, the bubble bursts, and everything must be reevaluated. Though profoundly unsettling, the collapse of finance capitalism creates the opportunity for a reassessment of values that extend far beyond money and art.

In the following pages I explore the work of four important artists who have been overlooked in the market frenzy of the past several decades. Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barney, James Turrell, and Andy Goldsworthy are the antithesis of Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami, and Damien Hirst. Rather than producing work that is readily marketable and highly profitable, they create art that makes absolutely no economic sense. Indeed, this work is designed *not* to be marketable. In some cases works are site-specific and geographically remote; in others they are fashioned to be impermanent and unreproducible.¹⁸ In a world where reality is increasingly virtual, these artists are committed to media that are insistently material: fat, honey, beeswax, Vaseline, ice, leaves, trees, dirt, stone, and volcanic ash. In this matter they find stirrings of the elemental—earth, air, fire, and water—whose rhythms cannot be absorbed in clouds of data. As they elaborate their visions, these artists draw on different spiritual traditions: Beuys, anthroposophy; Barney and Goldsworthy, Celtic mythology; and Turrell, Quakerism and Hopi mythology. All four artists have

an abiding faith in the capacity of an “apocalypse of the imagination” to transform first the self and then the world. Though these artists share important preoccupations, the story I tell is not one of influence. Rather, I have attempted to create a dialogue among important figures whose work can productively illuminate the critical choices we face in the moment in which we find ourselves. Since the personal and the political can never be separated, *Refiguring the Spiritual* is also the story of shifts in my own thinking that have resulted from experiences that extend far beyond the worlds of finance and art.¹⁹

With so much hanging in the balance, the future seems more uncertain than ever. There is a palpable anxiety afoot today that I have never before experienced. The crisis of confidence plaguing individuals and institutions is a crisis of faith. We no longer know what to believe or whom to trust. At such a moment art might seem an unlikely resource to guide reflection and shape action. If, however, God and the imagination are, as Wallace Stevens insists, one, then perhaps art can create an opening that is the space of hope. The wager of this book is that by refiguring the spiritual, art might redeem the world.

2

FAT LIVING ART

REBIRTH

Beuys do not forget
Rudi, do not forget Dutschke,
many times crucified by Germans
He is standing there in the corner
freezing hungry smiling forgotten.
Place your hat on his head
Clothe him in your waistcoat
Give him the honey
Buy yourself a scarf coat cap
at the corner
Bring along the coyote
Warm yourselves at the pastoral fire of the inglorious.
At the monastery of eternal adoration
(I had an aunt there. Didn't you?)
I was always so cold
Only the poverty of tribulations warmed me
O Beuys take care
You are enough.¹

It's all about the fat: the way it looks, smells, feels—the way it oozes and seeps, jiggles and ripples, molds and melts—the way it is stored and burnt. During an era in which art was becoming ever more abstract and, thus, increasingly thin, Beuys made art fat. Real fat. Fat is one of the most unlikely materials with which to make art. Traditionally associated with excess and waste, fat is supposed to be slimmed, trimmed, and eliminated; it is unseemly, inelegant, and ugly. There is something gross, even grotesque about fat. Far from aesthetically appealing, fat is undeniably abject. Yet fat is vital to life: while too much fat can be fatal, bodies live by metabolizing fat to create the energy necessary for bodily functions. The transformational process through which material substance becomes the immaterial is the alchemy of life.

In 1963 Beuys completed one of his first works in which he used fat: *Stuhl mit Fett* (Fig. 2.1). “My intention in using fat,” he explains, “was to stimulate discussion” about sculpture and culture. Beuys is intrigued by fat precisely because it is “not associated with art.” Indeed, fat would seem to be about as anti-art as a material can be. There are, however, precedents for associating—albeit indirectly—fat and art. By titling his work *Stuhl mit Fett* (Chair with fat), Beuys shows that he is fully aware of the psychoanalytic connotations of fat:

The fat on the “Fat Chair” is not geometric, as in the “Fat Corners” but keeps something of its chaotic character.



FIGURE 2.1 Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*

The ends of the wedges read like a cross section cut through the nature of fat. I placed it on the chair to emphasize this, since here the chair represents a kind of human anatomy, the area of digestive and excretive warmth processes, sexual organs and interesting chemical change, relating psychologically to will power. In German the joke is compounded as a pun since *Stuhl* (chair) is also a polite way of saying shit (stool), and that too is a used and mineralized material with chaotic character, reflected in the texture of the cross section of fat.²

Sublimation can be psychological as well as alchemical. Beuys does not deny that art is, in effect, shit, but his governing interests are philosophical—even theological—rather than psychoanalytic. As the material embodiment of chaos, fat is the reserve from which created form emerges.

Fat recurs repeatedly in Beuys's work, but its presence is nowhere more overwhelming than in *Tallow* (Fig. 2.2). In 1977 the city of Münster invited several well-known sculptors to create works for sites they chose in the city. In contrast to the other artists, Beuys selected what, by established aesthetic standards, was the least desirable location in the city. The site he chose was a dangerous underground passage where drug users and criminals often hung out (Fig. 2.3). "By traditional standards," Caroline Tisdall notes, "the site he chose was the worst possible.

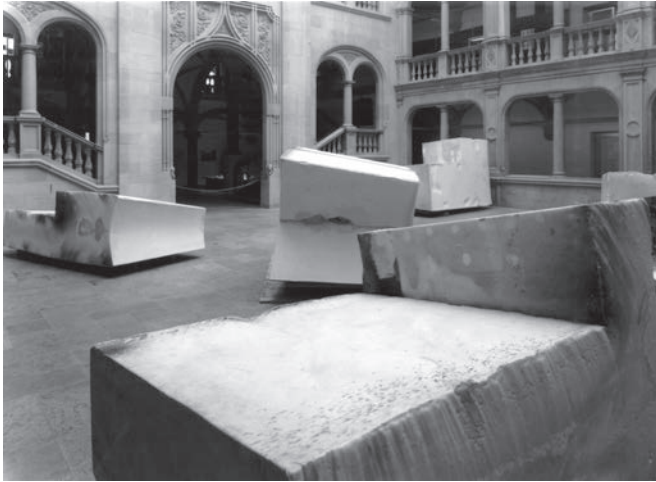


FIGURE 2.2 Joseph Beuys, *Tallow*



FIGURE 2.3 Pedestrian Underpass, Münster

In the concrete underpass to the new auditorium of the university he found an outstanding example of modern architectural folly, a sociopolitical metaphor if there ever were one.”³ The devastation of the site is captured in the abjection of the material. Beuys’s concern is never merely aesthetic; rather, his interest is personal, social, political, and economic renewal and regeneration. He chose the darkest, dirtiest corner of the intestinal underworld for a huge mold measuring five meters by sixteen meters into which he poured a liquid mixture of mutton and beef fat. After letting the material cool and solidify for three months, Beuys cut the fat into wedges and displayed it in the courtyard of the Westphalia Museum. Looking back on this work, he reflects: “I can say that without this ‘Fat Chair’ and the ‘Fat Corners’ as vehicles none of my activities would have had such an effect. It started an almost chemical process among people that would have been impossible if I had only spoken theoretically.”⁴ By bringing traces of “low” life and base materials into the traditional space of “high” culture and fine art, Beuys expresses his abiding commitment to the transformative and regenerative power of art. For Beuys nothing is beyond redemption—not even fat.

❧

Joseph Beuys was one of the most provocative and important artists of the latter half of the twentieth century. The impact of his work extended far beyond the closed com-

munity of artists to the worlds of education, politics, and economics. In spite of Heinrich Böll’s admonition not to forget Beuys, however, recent critics have either ignored or dismissed the significance of his work. This oversight, as we will see, exposes the philosophical naiveté, theological ignorance, and ideological prejudice of much art criticism and critical theory during the past two decades.

Appointed professor of sculpture at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in 1961, Beuys’s many students included some of the most important artists of the past three decades: Imi Knoebel, Blinky Palermo, Anselm Kiefer, Jörg Immendorf, and Sigmar Polke. A relentless reformer, Beuys left no institution with which he was associated unchanged. In 1972 he and Nobel Laureate Heinrich Böll issued a manifesto calling for the establishment of a “Free International University.” One year later, they founded the Association for the Promotion of the “Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research.” In response to Beuys’s insistent agitation for educational reform, the Art Academy dismissed him without notice in 1972. Beyond the confines of the university, he was the cofounder of the still influential Green Party in Germany. Far from distractions, Beuys’s teaching and political activities were extensions of his *artistic* work.

Beuys’s distinctive vision of art and understanding of the role of the artist in contemporary society make it difficult to classify his work. From 1962 to 1965 he was a member of the neo-Dadaist movement known as Fluxus, which at one time or another counted among its members

George Maciunas, John Cage, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono, and Allan Kaprow. While Beuys agreed with Fluxus's commitment to social action and the elimination of fine art, he eventually became convinced that provocation alone would not bring the transformation he believed postwar Germany, as well as the rest of the world, so desperately needed. When Beuys finally broke with the movement, the reason he offered was that Fluxus had no program for effecting real change in the world.

Recognizing that Beuys's disagreement with Fluxus ran deeper than he publicly acknowledged, the influential Italian critic Germano Celant associates him with a group of artists whose work Celant labeled *art povera*:

Animals, vegetables and minerals take part in the world of art. The artist feels attracted by their physical, chemical and biological possibilities, and he begins again to feel the need to make things of the world, not only as animated beings, but as a producer of magic and marvelous deeds. The artist-chemist organizes living and vegetable matter into magic things, working to discover the root of things, in order to re-find them and extol them. His work, however, does include in its scope the simplest material and natural elements (copper, zinc, earth, water, rivers, land, snow, fire, grass, air, stone, electricity, uranium, sky, weight, gravity, height, growth, etc.) for a description or representation of nature. What interests him instead is the discovery, the exposition, the insurrection of the magic and marvelous value of natu-

ral elements. Like an organism of simple structure, the artist mixes himself with the environment, camouflages himself, he enlarges his threshold of things.⁵

While this characterization of Beuys's work is not incorrect, it is incomplete because it fails to appreciate adequately the religious, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions of his art. Throughout his career Beuys was preoccupied with rebirth, renewal, and regeneration. The natural cycle of organic life that Celant emphasizes is but one aspect of this complex process.

The possibility of rebirth emerges in moments of crisis. For Beuys the process of renewal is both personal and political; indeed, personal renewal is inevitably political, and political regeneration is unavoidably personal. The Second World War not only plunged Germany, as well as much of the rest of the world, into chaos but also brought Beuys to the brink of death. Beuys was born in 1921 in Kleve (Cleaves), "a provincial Rhineland town situated on a plain adjacent to the Dutch border," which, John Moffitt notes, "was an anomalous Celtic-ethnic and strictly Catholic enclave tenuously attached to a Germanic and Protestant country."⁶ His parents were devout Catholics, who subjected their son to a strict religious upbringing. These early years laid the foundation for Beuys's lifelong interest in Celtic mythology and commitment to his own version of Christianity. Shortly after the Nazis assumed power in 1933, Beuys, like many of his peers, joined the *Hitler Jugend* and, after graduating from secondary school, enlisted

in the military and joined the Luftwaffe. His experiences during the war transformed his life in ways that decisively shaped his art. For most of the five years he served, Beuys piloted a Stuka dive-bomber. He was injured five times and was critically wounded during the winter of 1942–43. Moffitt recounts what occurred: “Flying in a dense snowstorm in the Crimea after having been struck by groundfire, pilot Beuys’s altimeter failed to function and he crashed into the ground. As a result, he suffered serious head injuries, being rendered completely unconscious for an indeterminate period, between eight to twelve days.”⁷ In the wake of this disaster Beuys claimed that he had what can only be described as a rebirth experience, which became the inspiration and motivation for his art. Several days after the crash, a clan of nomadic Tatars found him buried deep in the snow. Beuys recalled what followed:

Had it not been for the Tatars, I would not be alive today. They were the nomads of the Crimea, in what was then no-man’s land between the Russian and German fronts. . . . Their nomadic ways attracted me of course, although by that time their movements had been restricted. Yet it was they who had discovered me in the snow after the crash, when the German search parties had given up. *I was still unconscious then, and only came around completely after twelve days or so and, by then, I was back in a German field hospital.* . . . [When I hit the ground,] I must have shot through the wind-screen, since it flew back at the same time the plane

hit the ground; that saved me, though I had [sustained] bad skull and jaw injuries. Then the tail [of the plane] flipped over, and I was completely buried in the snow. That’s how the Tatars found me. I remember voices saying “*Voda*” (water), and then [I perceived] the felt of their tents, and the dense pungent smell of cheeses, fat and milk. They covered my body in fat to help it to regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt, as insulator to keep warmth in.⁸

This extraordinary experience became the “stuff” of Beuys’s art. In the course of his career he brings art to life by transforming life into a work of art. Since the personal is political, the lessons of his experience extend beyond the individual to society as a whole. As Beuys struggles to fathom what had occurred, he becomes convinced that his own rebirth harbors lessons for the renewal of Germany, as well as the regeneration of humankind. The mediator between the personal and the political is the spiritual as it comes to full expression in the life of the artist and the work of art.

CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

Late in 1911, Wassily Kandinsky published a small but influential book entitled *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (*Über das Geistige in der Kunst*). In it he described the “spiritual revolution” he believed was then occurring:

When religion, science and morality are shaken, the two last by the strong hand of Nietzsche, and when the outer supports threaten to fall, man turns his gaze from externals in on to himself. Literature, music and art are the first and most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark picture of the present time and show the importance of what at first was only a little point of light noticed by few and for the great majority non-existent. Perhaps they even grow dark in their turn, but on the other hand they turn away from the soulless life of the present towards those substances and ideas, which give free scope to the non-material strivings of the soul.⁹

For Kandinsky the light of spiritual renewal dawns in the midst of the darkness whose primary symptom, he believed, was the pervasive materialism of his time. Kandinsky reclaimed and reinterpreted his Russian orthodox heritage through the theosophical writings of fellow Russian Helena Petrova Blavatsky. Reputed to be possessed of paranormal powers from a young age, Blavatsky traveled throughout Europe, Egypt, and India before settling in New York City and founding the Theosophical Society in 1875. In a series of encyclopedic books, she developed a syncretistic system that weaves together strands of Eastern and Western esoteric and exoteric religious and philosophical traditions. While tracing her spiritual lineage back to Alexandrian, Neoplatonic, and Indian philosophy, she also

drew on the writings of nineteenth-century German romantic poets and idealist philosophers. The most basic tenet of theosophy is that “all men have spiritually and physically the same origin.”¹⁰ This origin is “THE ONE REALITY” that Blavatsky describes alternatively as “Being,” “enduring substance,” “Universal Spirit,” “Nature,” “ABSOLUTE,” “DEITY,” and “GOD.” Within Blavatsky’s scheme duality, division, opposition, and fragmentation are apparent rather than real. Those who have been initiated into “the secret doctrine” realize that human being is a “radiation of the Divine Soul.” Recognition of the divine identity of the self is the salvific gnosis that spiritual teachers East and West bring to their followers.

A few months before the publication of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky and his coeditor, Franz Marc, wrote in the preface to *Der Blaue Reiter*: “A great era has begun: the spiritual ‘awakening,’ in the increasing tendency to regain ‘lost balance,’ the inevitable necessity of spiritual plantings, the unfolding of the first blossom. We are standing at the threshold of one of the greatest epochs that mankind has ever experienced, the epoch of great spirituality.”¹¹ Kandinsky believed that the spiritual revolution beginning in his day would take a century to complete. In the lines immediately preceding the passage from *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* cited above, he quotes Blavatsky: “The earth will be a heaven in the twenty-first century in comparison to what it is now.” The course Kandinsky charts in his art passes from “the nightmare of

materialism” to “the kingdom of the abstract”: “The more abstract in form, the more clear and direct is the appeal. In any composition the material side may be more or less omitted in proportion as the forms used are more or less material and for them substituted pure abstractions, or largely dematerialized objects. The more an artist uses these abstracted forms, the deeper and more confidently will he advance into the kingdom of the abstract. And after him will follow the gazer at his pictures, who also will have gradually acquired greater familiarity with the language of the kingdom.”¹² The goal of Kandinsky’s aesthetic education is the discovery of “the ‘oneness’ of the ‘human’ and the ‘divine.’”¹³

While Beuys does not agree with Kandinsky’s view of abstraction and the dematerialization of the work of art, he shares his spiritual vision and understanding of art’s redemptive power. Rudolph Steiner’s anthroposophy plays the role for Beuys that Blavatsky’s theosophy played for Kandinsky. Beuys came to anthroposophy by way of his immersion in the ancient mythological, magical, and occult traditions underlying much nineteenth-century German theology, philosophy, and poetry. As I have noted, Beuys was raised in a Catholic home, where Celtic mythology continued to resonate deeply. The Rhineland area where he grew up had a rich mystical tradition dating back to the Middle Ages. Though he never studied the Rhineland mystics, like Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Henry Suso, their spirituality filled the air he breathed as a

youth. The abiding importance of his religious upbringing for his work is evident in Beuys’s first appearance in the English-speaking world. In 1971 he performed his Celtic Scottish Symphony in Edinburgh. This work, which begins with Beuys washing the feet of seven spectators and ends with a mock baptism, mixes pagan and Christian themes in a way that anticipates much of Beuys’s mature work.

Beuys eventually came to interpret his experience with the Tatars through the lens of religious traditions native to the Crimea. During his recovery and subsequent reflection on his experience, Beuys became fascinated with shamanism. In his monumental study *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Mircea Eliade points out that “shamanism in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia”:

Throughout the immense area comprising Central and North Asia, the magico-religious life of society centers on the shaman. This, of course, does not mean that he is the one and only manipulator of the sacred, nor that religious activity is completely usurped by him. In many tribes the sacrificing priest coexists with the shaman, not to mention the fact that every head of a family is also the head of the domestic cult. Nevertheless, the shaman remains the dominating figure; for through this whole region in which ecstatic experience is considered the religious experience par excellence, the shaman, and he

alone, is the great master of ecstasy. A first definition of this complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = *technique of ecstasy*.¹⁴

Since his cap or hat is the token of his power, the shaman, like Beuys, never performs without it. During the experience that the shaman mediates, the soul of the initiate is believed to leave the body and journey either to the heavens or underworld. The Tatars have a rich tradition in which the hero descends to the underworld, engages in ritual combat, and returns to life renewed. In Central Asia, as well as many other cultures throughout the world, the power of the shaman is transmitted through animals. The animals that become most important in Beuys's art play a critical role in many shamanistic rituals. Within these traditions horses or stags, coyotes, swans, sheep, and hares are intermediaries between the divine and human realms (Figs. 2.4, 2.5).

Acknowledging the role of many animals in shamanistic rituals, Eliade stresses the special importance of horses:

Pre-eminently the funerary animal and psycho-pomp, the “horse” is employed by the shaman, in various contexts, as a means of achieving ecstasy, that is, the “coming out of oneself” that makes the mystical journey possible. This mystical journey . . . is not necessarily in the infernal direction. The “horse” enables the shaman to fly through the air, to reach the heavens. The



FIGURE 2.4 Joseph Beuys, *Coyote*

dominant aspect of the mythology of the horse is not infernal but funerary; the horse is a mythical image of death and hence is incorporated into the ideologies and techniques of ecstasy. The horse carries the deceased into the beyond; it produces the “break-through in plane,” the passage from this world to other worlds.¹⁵

Commenting on several of his drawings from the early 1950s, Beuys echoes Eliade's insight: “The stag appears in times of distress and danger. It brings a special element: the warm positive element of life. At the same time it is empowered with spiritual powers and insight, and is



FIGURE 2.5 Joseph Beuys, *Schwanenfrau*

the accompanier of the soul.”¹⁶ Whenever stags or horses appear in Beuys’s art, the range of connotations and associations they bear is borrowed from the role they play in shamanistic rituals.

As Beuys learned from personal experience, within the redemptive economy of shamanism one cannot be reborn without dying. In the traditional structure of the initiation ceremony the individual passes through suffering and death to resurrection and rebirth.¹⁷ The person who undergoes this process emerges transformed and comes to share the shaman’s curative powers. Indeed, only one who has been wounded can heal others. Wrapped in fat and felt in the distant Crimea, Beuys assumed the mantle of the “wounded healer” whose medium eventually would become art. In his widely influential book *The Golden Bough*, Sir James Frazer points to an anticipation of Beuys’s artistic practice in certain magical practices: “If homeopathic or imitative *magic, working by means of images*, has commonly been practiced for the spiteful purpose of putting obnoxious people out of the world [as in voodoo], it has also, though far more rarely, been employed with the benevolent intention of helping others. . . . Thus, among the Esquimaux of [the] Bering Strait, a barren woman desirous of having a son will consult a *shaman*, who commonly makes or causes her husband to make, a small doll-like image, over which he performs certain secret rites. . . . This is done as a charm to make her conceive.”¹⁸ If images can heal, art can be therapeutic.

The other ancient mythic and ritual tradition with which Beuys associates his artistic practice is alchemy. Although the relation between alchemy and art has often been noted, the extent and depth of Beuys's appropriation of alchemical motifs lends this occult tradition special weight throughout his artistic corpus. In a 1974 interview he explains:

And the last title—the last drawing in *The secret block* is *Hare's Blood* [see Fig. 2.6].

This expresses the alchemical character of my person!

. . . (the hare as a sign of alchemical transformation and chemical change: the mobility of blood, the relationship of the hare to menstrual blood, birth and incarnation: the upper half for the soul, and the lower half for fertility . . . “I am the hare.”)¹⁹

While the hare appears frequently in Beuys's work, its role in his provocative 1967 action *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* is particularly suggestive (Fig. 2.7). Appearing in a space closed to the public but visible through a window, Beuys's head is covered with honey and gold leaf, and iron and felt soles are tied to his foot.²⁰ As he moves around the room, he silently mouths words to the mute hare. “The *hare*,” Beuys explains, “incarnates himself into the earth, which is what we human beings can only radically achieve with our *thinking*: he rubs, pushes, digs

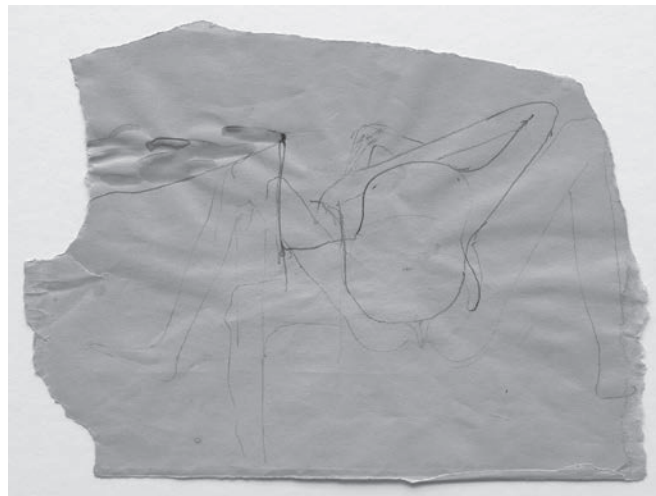


FIGURE 2.6 Joseph Beuys, *Hare's Blood*

himself into *Materia* (earth); finally penetrates (rabbit) its laws, and through this work his *thinking* is sharpened then transformed, and becomes *revolutionary*.” By contrast, “gold and honey indicated a transformation of the head, and therefore naturally and logically the brain and our understanding of thought, consciousness.”²¹ In alchemical terms the relation between hare and honey mirrors the relation between base matter and pure gold. While alchemy originates in ancient mining and metallurgical myths and rituals, its significance is actually spiritual. Just

as shamanism is a “technique of ecstasy,” Eliade argues that alchemy is “a spiritual technique and a soteriology.”²² The soteriological technique employed by the alchemist presupposes an isomorphism between the macrocosm and the microcosm. By refining base metals into gold, the alchemist seeks to purify both self and world. The goal of alchemy is to become as good as gold—pure gold. Gold is not just any substance but is the most rarefied form of the *prima materia*, which is the true substance of all things. From this point of view gold is, in effect, God. To become as good as gold is, therefore, to become God.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, speculative alchemists developed comprehensive cosmological systems in which “the world was seen as a single organism penetrated by spiritual forces that worked at all levels, the vegetable, animal, human and spiritual.”²³ This spiritual alchemy influenced two traditions that became important for Beuys. First, the expanded notion of alchemy had a significant impact on radical millenarian movements that arose in Reformation and post-Reformation Europe and directly influenced both theosophy and anthroposophy. For spiritualists like the Amish, Mennonites, Shakers, and Diggers, spiritual transformation prepared the way for social reformation. These groups practiced what they preached by establishing utopian communities that were intended to prepare the way for wider social revolution. Second, speculative alchemy, as elaborated in the writings of Paracelsus and Jakob Böhme, helped to shape



FIGURE 2.7 Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*

eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German poetry and philosophy. One of the pivotal figures responsible for translating alchemy into modern terms was Goethe. In what he described as “mystical-cabbalistic chemistry,” Goethe saw alchemy’s promise of redemption from the conflict of opposites rending human life. This reconciliation of opposites, he claims, is symbolized by the incarnation of God in man.²⁴ From this point of view the incarnation is not limited to a single historical individual but extends to the human race as a whole. Within this philosophical-aesthetic theology God is present in human beings as the principle of creativity. As Eliade explains, “in the alchemist’s eyes, man is *creative*: he redeems nature, masters time; in sum, he perfects God’s creation. The myth of alchemy is an optimistic myth; it constitutes, as it were, ‘a natural eschatology.’”²⁵ Beuys appropriates many of alchemy’s basic tenets. Most important, he maintains that creativity is not only the distinguishing mark of the artist but is also the point of union between the divine and the human. As he elaborates his understanding of alchemy, he integrates it with his interpretation of several leading nineteenth-century German philosophers.

Responding to a question about the influence of previous artists on his work, Beuys unexpectedly turns to the German *philosophical* tradition: “Another good point to begin would be the age of German Idealism, which is where the conception that I have come into being. You find it in the Romantics, in Novalis, you find it in the whole circle

around Goethe, you find it in the works of Lorenz Ocken, for instance, or in Carl Gustav Carus, or Caspar David Friedrich, you find it in Schelling, Hegel, etc. Later you find it in other people who carried on the German Idealistic tradition, people like Rudolf Steiner, for instance.”²⁶ In the writings of romantic poets and idealistic philosophers, Beuys glimpses a vision that integrates the spiritual, natural, and human domains in a way that overcomes the oppositions and conflicts rending personal and social life. In addition to this, nineteenth century romantics and idealists were convinced that there could be no significant sociopolitical change without a transformation of consciousness.

Steiner played a decisive role in transmitting nineteenth-century philosophy to twentieth-century artists. Whereas Blavatsky sprinkled references to romantic poets and idealistic philosophers throughout her writings, Steiner examined their works carefully and developed a serious philosophical system of his own. While studying mathematics, biology, physics, and chemistry at the Vienna Institute of Technology, he immersed himself in the writings of Goethe and at the young age of twenty-one was given the responsibility of editing Goethe’s scientific writings. After publishing *A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe’s World Conception*, Steiner joined the staff at the Goethe and Schiller archive in Weimar in 1890.²⁷ A lifelong follower of Goethe, Steiner named the headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society in Dornach, Switzer-

land, which he personally designed, the Goetheanum. In Goethe's scientific investigations and reflections on color Steiner discovered what he believed to be a way to penetrate the surface of appearances imaginatively and to uncover spiritual reality underlying everything.

Steiner was associated with the Theosophical Society until 1912, when a dispute erupted between him and Blavatsky's successors. Annie Besant and Charles Leadbetter declared a fourteen-year-old boy named Jiddu Krishnamurti to be the reincarnation of the Lord Maitreya, the World Teacher, who in previous eras had appeared in the guise of exalted figures like Sri Krishna and Jesus. Refusing to accept the authority of Krishnamurti, Steiner broke with the Theosophical Society and formed his own Anthroposophical Society. Anthroposophy (knowledge of humans, or human wisdom) and theosophy do not differ significantly in their essential theological and philosophical principles. In contrast to Blavatsky, however, Steiner tried to develop empirically tested strategies for inducing spiritual vision. The disciplines to which Steiner subjected his followers ranged from "bio-dynamic" methods of soil cultivation to experimental education practices. The arts played a particularly important role in bringing about the anthroposophical goals of personal and social transformation.

Though Beuys was introduced to the writings of Steiner in 1943, he did not begin studying his works seriously until after the war. The more Beuys read, the clearer it became that Steiner provided a bridge that would enable him

to join his explorations of mythology, shamanism, and alchemy on the one hand and, on the other, philosophy, Christianity, and art. In an early text dating from 1909, Steiner laid out what would become the fundamental tenets of anthroposophy:

We are living in the present, materialistically-minded age, and the inflow of spiritual knowledge into our culture is needed in order that mankind's longing for such knowledge may be satisfied. . . . Modern thinking is simply unable to cope with and master the chaos of outer conditions. . . . Thinking itself will become rigid and soon no longer sufficiently fluid and flexible to grapple with and transform the complicated conditions of life. . . . The true meaning of the mandate—"Know thyself!"—lies in our following the way of the evolution of the Cosmos. . . . The self is formed out of, born out of the whole universe, and our own ascent leads us finally to merge with the whole Cosmos. The aim of self-knowledge is to give man his place in the great world in order to reveal to him the true meaning of the word, self-knowledge.²⁸

In a manner reminiscent of alchemy's belief in *prima materia*, Steiner argues the cosmos is pervaded by a spiritual substance that is divine. The material world derives from the spiritual realm through a process of cooling and hardening. Though Steiner draws on many religious and

esoteric traditions, Christianity remains at the heart of his vision. Christ, John Moffitt points out, is “central to his cosmology, and His coming was in essence initiatory: it returned man to a consciousness of his own divine origins.”²⁹

While Steiner often presents his spiritual vision in images, symbols, and narratives, in some works he develops his insights with considerably more philosophical rigor. In *A Theory of Knowledge*, for example, he portrays his philosophical position as “built upon the foundation of the Goethe-Schiller world-conception.”³⁰ The spiritual substance pervading the cosmos not only can be intuited but also can be apprehended through reason. “Thinking,” Steiner argues, “has a twofold function to discharge: first, to form concepts with sharply outlined contours; secondly, to unite the single concepts thus formed into a unified whole. In the first instance, we have to do with the activity of differentiation; in the second with that of combination” (56). While differentiation separates, combination integrates. Within Steiner’s overall scheme these two processes are, in the final analysis, alternative rhythms of the same activity. When thought turns back on itself and becomes reflexive, it appears to be an *organic* whole, which constitutes the essence of reality:

How does our thinking appear to us when observed in itself? It is a multiplicity of thoughts, which are woven and bound organically together in the most complicated

fashion. But, when we have once penetrated this multiplicity from all directions, it becomes again a unity, a harmony. All the elements are related to one another; they exist for one another; one modifies another, restricts it, etc. The moment our mind conceives two corresponding thoughts, it observes at once that these really flow together to form a unit. It finds everywhere in its whole realm the interrelated; this concept unites with that, a third illuminates or supports a four[th], and so on. If for example, we find in our consciousness the concept “organism,” and we then scan o[u]r conceptual world, we meet with another concept, “systematic evolution, growth.” It becomes clear that these two concepts belong together; they represent merely two aspects of one and the same thing. But this is true of our entire thought-system. All individual thoughts are part of a great whole, which we call our conceptual world. (44)

This passage could have been written by Hegel. Steiner realized that the trajectory initiated by Goethe and Schiller comes to conceptual completion in Hegel’s speculative philosophy: “This insight into the purity and completeness of thought appears at its clearest in the scientific system of Hegel. No one else has attributed to thinking a power so complete that it could form a foundation in itself for a world-conception. Hegel has absolute confidence in thinking. Indeed, it is the only factor of reality, which he trusts in the fullest sense of the word” (37–38).

For Hegel the transparency of reason emerges from the opacity of artistic images and religious representations. In the Hegelian system the movement from image to concept marks a progression in the unfolding of knowledge and, thus, in the evolution of humankind. While agreeing with Hegel's claim that art traffics in images and science in concepts, Steiner does not establish a hierarchical relation between them. Rather, artistic images and scientific ideas are often equally effective modes of apprehending different aspects of the same reality:

Science and art are only the objects upon which man stamps what this vision offers to him. In science this occurs only in the form of the Idea: that is, in the directly mental, or spiritual medium. In art it occurs in objects sensibly or mentally perceptible. In science, Nature, as "that which includes every single," appears purely as Idea; in art, an object of the external world appears as a representative of the all-inclusive. The infinite, which science seeks in the finite and endeavors to represent in the Idea, is stamped by art upon a material taken from the world of existence. What appears in science as the Idea is in art the image. The same infinite is the object of both science and of art, except that its appearance here is different from its appearance there. The manner of representation is different. (117)

Borrowing Steiner's analysis of the relation between image and Idea, Beuys reverses the arc of Hegel's analysis.

While Hegel translates image into concept to formulate the philosophical Idea, Beuys transforms idea into image to form creative works of art. Beuys stresses that he has "a much broader definition of art than Hegel's."³¹ Beginning with concepts and ideas, art has the capacity to "transmit knowledge." "For me," Beuys insists, "it's the word that gives rise to pictures." "It is the key [*das Schlüsselzeichen*] for all forms and organic processes."³² Art, then, is about ideas; and ideas are, in the final analysis, works of art.

But Beuys is not interested in just any ideas; he is preoccupied with spiritual and religious ideas. One of the crucial lessons Beuys learns from Steiner is that the most important ideas art is charged with figuring are inseparable from Christianity. In the writings of Steiner, Beuys discovers what he describes as "the creative possibilities of Christianity in the Western world."³³ Steiner's anthropology provides a way for Beuys to integrate Celtic and Nordic mythology, occult spirituality, romantic poetry, and Idealistic philosophy with his version of Christianity to form his artistic mission. For Beuys, as for Steiner and Hegel, Christ is not merely a historical figure but is a spiritual teacher who prefigures the process of death and rebirth, which every individual in search of redemption must undergo. In a 1984 interview Beuys offers an explanation of the personal and cosmic significance of the life and death of Christ that is strictly parallel to the shamanistic ritual of death and rebirth that he underwent in Siberia:

You must first lose your belief as Christ did for a moment on the cross. That means that man must himself also suffer this process of crucifixion and complete incarnation in the material world, working right through materialism. He must himself die, and he must be completely abandoned by God as Christ was by his Father in that Mystery. Only when nothing is left does man discover in his self-knowledge the Christian substance, perceiving it as being absolutely real. . . . This time it is no longer the case that God helps man as occurred in the Mystery of Golgotha. This time the resurrection must be brought about by man himself. . . . A real Mystery, a cosmic event has taken place there rather than just a historical event. There has occurred a flow of the energy of absolute reality. And now there takes place a metamorphosis of man demanding a very great effort from him.³⁴

For Beuys this metamorphosis is brought about through art.

The complex mix of mythology, occultism, spirituality, religion, and philosophy that forms the substance of Beuys's art offends many critics and has led to the dismissal of his work for the past two decades. Nothing has done more to shape critical opinion about Beuys than Benjamin Buchloh's article "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique," published in *Artforum* on the occasion of Beuys's 1979 Guggenheim show. At the time the article appeared, Buchloh was a little-known

professor of modern art history at the Nova Scotia College of Art. His deft use of psychoanalysis, Marxism, and structural linguistics caught the rising tide of critical theory, which was then being promoted by the influential journal *October*. Having strutted his critical stuff, it wasn't long before Buchloh joined the editorial board of *October* and became a member of the faculty at Barnard College. Though many of the essays in the journal during the 1980s and 1990s were insightful and informative, the programmatic exclusion of religion and the complete ignorance of the way theology has shaped the very critical strategies to which contributors were ideologically committed limits the value of their work. Taking themselves far too seriously to appreciate the irony, the group surrounding *October* became a cult presided over by a high priestess, Rosalind Krauss, who declared herself the one critic who could not be criticized. Still claiming to represent "today's artistic, intellectual and critical vanguard," *October* now sounds as tired as *Wired*.

The epigraph to Buchloh's article leaves little doubt about the direction of his criticism. The text he selects from Nietzsche's *The Case of Wagner* ends: "How intimately related must Wagner be to the entire decadence of Europe for her not to have felt that he was a decadent. He belongs to it: he is its protagonist, its greatest name. . . . All that the world most needs today, is combined in the most seductive manner in his art—the three great stimulants of exhausted people: brutality, artificiality and innocence

(idiocy). . . . *Wagner est une névrose.*”³⁵ Acknowledging that “the public myth of Joseph Beuys’ life and work” has “achieved proportions that make any attempt to question it or to put it into historic perspective an almost impossible critical task,” Buchloh levels a vicious attack that is both personal and political.³⁶ Beuys, Buchloh charges, is ignorant of modern art, as well as recent history. He dismisses Beuys’s political activity as “laughable” and declares his effort to reform the German university system is nothing more than “simple-minded utopian drivel lacking elementary political and educational practicality.” The vehemence of the attack suggests that it is symptomatic of deeper interests and anxieties. Buchloh goes so far as to argue that Beuys is a “crypto-fascist” whose work is actually an apology for German fascism.

In the work and public myth of Joseph Beuys the German spirit of the postwar period finds its new identity by pardoning and reconciling itself prematurely with its own reminiscences of a responsibility for one of the most cruel and devastating forms of collective political madness that history has known. As much as Richard Wagner’s work anticipated and celebrated these collective regressions into Germanic mythology and Teutonic stupor in the realm of music, before they became the actual reality and the nightmare that set out to destroy Europe . . . , it would be possible to see in Beuys’ work the absurd aftermath of that nightmare, a grotesque coda

acted out by a perfidious trickster. Speculators in Beuys’ work did well: he was bound to become a national hero of the first order, having reinstalled and restored that sense of a—however deranged—national self and historic identity. (38)

Retracing a well-trodden path, Buchloh implies, without ever explicitly claiming, that the German mythological, spiritual, and philosophical tradition made fascism all but inevitable. At the same time, he naively overlooks the fact that the same tradition he condemns made possible much of the very modern art and postmodern critical theory he admires and promotes.

Although Buchloh’s attack on Beuys is framed in terms of politics, its deeper motivation is to criticize religion. A dedicated disciple of Freud and Marx, Buchloh is convinced that religion is a thing of the past. Though denying belief in any metanarratives, critical theorists like Buchloh nonetheless cling to the outdated theory that modernization and secularization are inseparable. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s many leading sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists argued that the emergence of modern science and technology led to the *progressive* eclipse of religion. From this point of view religion is the vestige of primitive or infantile mentality and is destined to disappear with the inevitable march of history. Buchloh accepts this obviously flawed theory and applies it to the history of art. In an addendum to his 1980 article,

published in 2001, he argues: “The liberation of the work of art from ritual and cult was the key question of the twentieth century.”³⁷ If the *liberation* of the work of art from ritual and cult is regarded as a progressive development, then the effort to reintegrate art, myth, ritual, and religion can only appear reactionary. And this is precisely Buchloh’s point: “Beuys keeps insisting on the fact that his art-object and dramatic performance activities have a ‘metaphysical’ meaning, transcending their actual visual concretion and material appearance within their proper discourse. He quite outspokenly refers to the antihistoric, religious experience as a major source for his art production. . . . Notably, he does not even attempt to qualify his understanding of ‘religious activity’ in historic terms, which would seem obvious, since Feuerbach, Marx and Freud have differentiated in a fairly relevant manner that hardly allows for simplistic concept of ‘religious activity.’”³⁸

The foregoing analysis should make it clear that Buchloh’s claim is simply *wrong*. Beuys does “qualify his understanding of ‘religious activity’ in historic terms” but does not do so in a way that Buchloh finds acceptable. Beuys emphasizes the idealistic side (i.e., Hegel, Schiller, and Schelling) of the same tradition whose materialism (i.e., Feuerbach and Marx) Buchloh and his colleagues privilege. Moreover, Beuys develops a pointed criticism of precisely the kind of materialism Buchloh presupposes but does not support. Once again, Buchloh’s argument turns on his political agenda:

The aesthetic conservatism of Beuys is logically complemented by his politically retrograde, not to say reactionary, attitudes. Both are inscribed into a seemingly progressive and radical humanitarian program of aesthetic and social evolution. The abstract universality of Beuys’s vision has its equivalent in the primitivistic and deeply subjectivist nature of his actual work. Any attempt on his side to join the two aspects results in curious sectarianism. The roots of Beuys’s dilemma lie in the misconception that politics could become a matter of esthetics, as he repeats frequently: “real future political intentions must be artistic . . .”; or, more outrageously:

How I actually bring it as theory to the totalized concept of art, which means everything. The totalized concept of art, that is the principle that I wanted to express with this material, which in the end refers to everything, to all forms in the world. And not only to artistic forms but also to social forms or legal forms or economic forms. . . . All questions of man can be only a question of form, and that is the totalized concept of art.

The notion of “the totalized concept of art,” of course, evokes Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* with which Buchloh begins his essay.³⁹ While any mention of totalization is a red flag for critics of Buchloh’s stripe, the case of Wagner is especially fraught because of his political stance and the

ways in which his work was used in the National Socialist movement. But Buchloh's invocation of this charged past should not be allowed to obscure the problems with his own analysis. The aestheticization of politics is actually unavoidable and, correlatively, art is inescapably political. The question is not whether to aestheticize politics but what political program art promotes. Beuys understands that the modern avant-garde begins with Schiller's call to transform the world into a work of art in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794). What Beuys realizes that his critics do not is that the ideal transforms the real as much as the real conditions the ideal. The aim of Beuys's art is to extend the agenda of the modern avant-garde as leading philosophers and artists have defined it for the past two centuries.

ART IN-FORMING LIFE

In an interview with Achille Bonito Oliva, published in 1986, Beuys provocatively asks: "How come everybody is so interested in Marcel Duchamp? Why hasn't anybody spent a bit longer thinking about Schiller or Nietzsche?"⁴⁰ In taking Duchamp as his target, Beuys raises questions about the artist who was the darling of the critics who were attacking him at the time. Beuys and Duchamp represent two poles of twentieth-century art and as such bear a complex relationship to each other. Although the materials

they use and objects they produce are sometimes similar, the artistic visions informing their work differ significantly. Long harboring suspicions about Duchamp's work, Beuys once famously declared, "Duchamp's silence is overrated." Far from the profound artistic statement critics took it to be, Duchamp fell silent, Beuys insists, because he had nothing left to say: "Duchamp was simply finished. He had run out of ideas":

Before that he had a language. He questioned a particular work. He should have joined in that discussion instead of withdrawing and thinking that he had made his contribution. Duchamp failed to solve or achieve anything. Had he come out into the open and discussed things, especially with young people, his work would have been productive, it would really have led somewhere to concepts which would have been useful today. But—politically and aesthetically—Duchamp got nowhere. He refused to participate. Why? It seems to me that we must return to the concept of "absence of language." How could it be that he had nothing left to say? That he was without language, i.e., unable to communicate? That is the question.⁴¹

For Beuys, as we have seen, *art is fundamentally about ideas*: "Sculpture begins in thought and if thought is not true, the ideas are bad and so is the sculpture. The sculpture's idea and form are identical."⁴² But the relation between

art and idea is even closer than this comment suggests. Works of art not only presuppose ideas, but ideas can actually be works of art. Inasmuch as art is inseparable from ideas, works of art are inescapably meaningful. The meaning of *l'œuvre d'art* is constituted by its place in a web of relations, which includes Beuys's personal narrative, as well as the mythological, spiritual, philosophical, and artistic traditions from which his work emerges. "The outward appearance of every object I make," Beuys explains, "is the equivalent of some inner aspect of human life."⁴³ In this way Beuys's art remains within the regime of representation. This continuing commitment to meaning and a certain version of representation sets him at odds with Duchamp and opens him to criticism from those who do not share his philosophical and religious predilections. Buchloh speaks for many others when he criticizes this aspect of Beuys's work:

Unlike his European peers from the late 1950s—Piero Manzoni, Arman or even Yves Klein—Beuys does not change the *state of the object with the discourse* itself. Quite to the contrary, he dilutes and dissolves the conceptual precision of Duchamp's readymade by reintegrating the object into the most traditional and naïve context of representation of meaning, the idealist metaphor: *this* object stands for *that* idea and *that* idea is represented in *this* object. Beuys has often affirmed this himself, obviously intrigued by Duchamp but not understanding

him, and, therefore not coming to historical terms with him either; as, for example, when talking about his *Bathtub*, 1960: "But it would be wrong to interpret *Bathtub* as a kind of self-reflection. Nor does it have anything to do with the concept of the readymade: quite the opposite, since here the stress is on the meaning of the "object"; or, when talking about his *Fat Chair*, 1964: "The presence of the chair has nothing to do with Duchamp's Readymades, or his combination of a stool with a bicycle wheel, although they share initial impact as humorous objects." ("Reconsidering Joseph Beuys")

But Buchloh is wrong again: Beuys *does* understand Duchamp perfectly well; he just rejects his position.⁴⁴

Buchloh's essay is of interest not only because of the influence it has exercised on the reception of Beuys's work but, more important, because his position reflects broader issues in criticism during the past two decades. Beuys, following Kandinsky and others, believes that many of the problems individuals and society face are the result of an uncritical materialism, which takes a variety of forms. While in today's world the excesses of finance capitalism are symptoms of excessive materialism, for Beuys Marxism reflects the pervasive materialism plaguing society and culture. By the mid 1980s, university campuses in Europe and America were about the only place where Marxism survived. Beuys was highly critical of capitalism and completely devoted to establishing a more just and equitable

political and economic system, but he did not think that either Marx or Marxism provided the solutions society needs. Far more dialectical than those who summarily dismiss his work, Beuys realizes that ideas can have material effects; therefore, “art is able to change the world”: “I work in the field of art, and you know how during a period of Marxist ideology, fewer people are inclined to believe in the power of culture as a whole: they believe in the revolutionary potential of economics, class struggle theory. . . . Therefore it’s time to show that art means the power of creativity, and it’s time to define art in a larger way, to include science and religion too.”⁴⁵

The reigning materialism embodied, *inter alia*, in Marxism overshadowed the transformative potential of nineteenth-century romantic poetry and Idealist philosophy. “Goethe, Hegel, Novalis, and Friedrich von Schiller,” Beuys explains, “were overruled by the materialistic understanding of the world; Steiner was on the line of the red thread. He had the line in his head and he showed already the kind of direction people should go, or would have to go. So therefore the whole historical analysis is very important to bring proposals towards the future.” By providing a bridge from the early nineteenth century to the late twentieth, Steiner helped Beuys find a way to integrate his spiritual concerns, political agenda, and artistic work. Of all his philosophical precursors, however, Schiller comes the closest to anticipating Beuys’s artistic program: “Schiller is a point of reference. He, too, talks about

creativity, and he understood numerous aspects of it: he considers man himself according to how he appears in art. He could have taken this to its logical conclusion and said that man too is a work of art. He could have considered man as equal to art, equal to creativity.”⁴⁶ Beuys finishes what Schiller began.

Beuys learned from Schiller that true art must in-form life. Beuys promotes an “expanded” notion of art intended to break down gallery and museum walls in order to take to the street. “My concern,” he explains, “is for the transformation of substance, rather than the traditional aesthetic understanding of beautiful appearances. If creativity relates to the transformation, change and development of substance, then it can be applied to everything in the world and is no longer restricted to art.”⁴⁷ It is important to note that “substance” here specifies not only material objects, though Beuys, like many of his peers, expands the materials used to produce art until nothing is out of bounds. But this does not solve the problem of aestheticism because the market and museums readily appropriate all objects, no matter how grotesque or abject they are. More important than the use of new materials is Beuys’s claim that social, political, and cultural practices, institutions, and systems can be themselves works of art:

Only on condition of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-

revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deadline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART.

The most modern art discipline—Social Sculpture/Social architecture—will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism. . . . Only a conception of art revolutionized to this degree can turn into a politically productive force, coursing through each person, and shaping history.⁴⁸

The only art that matters for Beuys arises from and addresses personal and social crises. Art should be therapeutic—it should foster reconciliation rather than engender conflict. This does not mean that art is quiescent; to the contrary, art must be transformative—even revolutionary. Beuys intends the therapy he prescribes to renew individuals and regenerate society. Reformers have long debated whether it is first necessary to change the world in order to change consciousness or whether consciousness must be changed before the world can be transformed. Marx and his epigones choose the former alternative; Goethe, Novalis, Schiller, Hegel, Steiner, and Beuys follow the latter course of action.

In an effort to emphasize the social motivation for his work, Beuys typically describes his art as “social sculpture.” He privileges sculpture because of its obvious

association with formation—*Gestaltung*.⁴⁹ “Formation,” of course, can designate either a structure or object on the one hand, or, on the other, the process by which a structure or object appears. In view of Beuys’s larger artistic agenda, it is important to note that *formation* can also refer to the educational process. Beuys’s “expanded concept of art” is, in effect, coterminous with life itself: “all human questions can only be questions of formation—and that is the totalized concept of art.”⁵⁰ Everything that exists is a formation, and since nothing is permanent, every formation is always in the process of formation. Inasmuch as Beuys identifies sculpture with *Gestaltung*, he concludes: “Everything is sculpture.”⁵¹

When sculpture is understood as formation, the focus of attention shifts from product to process: the work of art is not so much the object produced as the creative process through which forms emerge. If, however, art is creative activity, then it is no longer a “specialist activity carried out by artists.” Not only is “Everything sculpture,” but, according to Beuys, “Everybody is an artist.”⁵² “Here my idea is to declare that art is the only possibility for evolution, the only possibility to change the situation in the world. But then you have to enlarge the idea of art to include the whole creativity. And if you do that, it follows logically that every human being is an artist—an artist in the sense that he can develop his own capacity. And therefore it’s necessary at first that society cares about the educational system, that equality of opportunity for self-realization is

guaranteed.”⁵³ Though not all activity is creative, every person does harbor creative potential. The task of the teacher is to cultivate this creative potential. “To be a teacher,” Beuys concludes, “is my greatest work of art. The rest is the waste product, a demonstration.”⁵⁴ Formation, then, can also mean education. Beuys’s teaching is not limited to the classroom but also includes actions, videos, books, exhibitions, and political activity (Fig. 2.8).

By identifying art with creativity, Beuys returns to the realm of religion, which he never really leaves. Though informed about and sensitive to many spiritual traditions, Beuys’s understanding of religion remains surprisingly Christocentric. Indeed, he goes so far as to confess: “For me, Christ was surely the last of the spiritual masters, but especially this spirit, this Christ spirit, was related to the development of the idea of analysis in the world. And the development of this culture-step took place in the Western world, therefore, more than in the Eastern world.”⁵⁵ In a manner reminiscent of Hegel, Beuys maintains that the union of God and man in the particular person of Jesus Christ reveals the universal truth about the unity of the divine and the human. In an interview published shortly after his death, Beuys responds to Bonito Oliva’s question: “What is your conception of God?”: “I shall talk about that now, but only theoretically. Firstly, I have to repeat an important concept. If man is determined by his environment, then there is no such thing as freedom. If freedom exists, it can only come from creativity. We said that



FIGURE 2.8 Joseph Beuys, Free International University

freedom = creativity = man. Therefore freedom is achieved on the basis of the creative principle. And in that case, who else could be God except man? If we don’t want to go quite this far, we could say, using a scientific term, that God is a generator.”⁵⁶

If God is creativity, then human beings are divine insofar as they are creative. Creativity manifests itself through

the process of formation; wherever new forms emerge, the divine is at work. From this point of view human beings are the vessels through which creative energy circulates. Steiner's analysis illuminates Beuys's understanding of his artistic practice:

Just as the creative forces of nature draw upon the inexhaustible source of the infinite, so that it is always possible to perceive in something which has come to fruition much more than was originally implanted in it, so is it also when artistic impulses unite themselves with the mighty creative forces of nature. In such a case the artist is not merely developing some more or less limited impulse, but he reaches the point where he makes of himself an instrument for the creative powers of the universe, so that very much more grows out of his activity than he could originally have intended or foreseen.⁵⁷

Unlike natural processes, human creativity is mediated by consciousness. As we have seen, Beuys's art originates in ideas that are formulated in language. "Consequently, everything that concerns creativity is invisible, is a purely spiritual substance. And this work, with this invisible substance, is what I call 'social sculpture.' This work with invisible substance is my domain. At first, there is nothing to see. Subsequently, when it becomes corporeal, it appears initially in the form of language."⁵⁸ Expressed in theological terms: "In the beginning is the word." Creative

ideas, however, should not remain abstract but should be embodied in social, political, and economic practices in such a way that artistic ideas become incarnate in the very materiality of everyday life.

Beuys rejects the materialism of his age because he thinks it is insufficiently dialectical. Again following Hegel's lead, he believes Christianity reveals the dialectical union of opposites, "the dialectic system in its highest state of sense, while every other kind of understanding of dialectic systems distorts this principally dialectic complicated system of what Christianity means for humankind's transformation towards the spirit."⁵⁹ Dialectical truth can be distorted by either reducing the material to the spiritual or ideal (as Buddhism does, according to Beuys) or reducing the spiritual or ideal to the material (as Marxism does). Christianity's principle of incarnation avoids these extremes by simultaneously joining opposites and maintaining differences. Beuys explains, "So we have only to see that the materialistic understanding of the world has a lot to do with the idea of Christianity. To reach the earthly conditions and to get incarnated in this death, in this idea of death, and that only from this, having really understood this impulse of the materialism, that there can only be a resurrection to have it clear with all the lines of the development."⁶⁰ Far from rejecting materialism, Christianity lends it weight inasmuch as the process of incarnation renders the material meaningful by embodying the ideal in the real (Fig. 2.9).

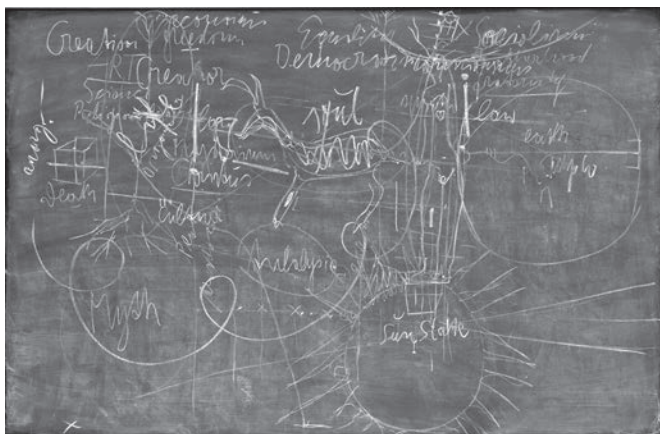


FIGURE 2.9 Joseph Beuys, *Sun State*

Within this scheme the work of art is a therapeutic process whose aim is to reconcile the opposites rending personal and social life. Just as the divine becomes incarnate in the human in order to redeem the fallen world through the life and work of Christ, so the ideal becomes incarnate in the material in order to transform life through the person and work of the artist: “It is after all logical that the self-determining artist—I am not speaking of man as an artist—is the creator. I thus take a concept applying to God and apply it to man, but I do not need to do this since I am far too weak. That already took place through Christ. The deed that will make man free, signifying Christ-in-man and

developing human sovereignty, has already occurred—but it has been concealed. It has been withheld by materialist ideologies, and hushed up by the churches.”⁶¹ In this way Christ prefigures the artist-teacher whose work eventually displaces him.

FAT

Fat is, in many ways, the lowest of the low. Traditionally associated with excess and waste, fat is supposed to be trimmed, eliminated; it is unseemly—inelegant and ugly. There is something gross or grotesque about fat. Far from aesthetically appealing, fat is undeniably abject. And yet, Beuys insists, fat is spiritually significant. Fat “embodies life and movement, flux and flow of energy.”⁶²

Fat, for example, was a great discovery for me. . . . I was able to influence it with heat or cold. . . . In this way I could transform the character of fat from a chaotic and unsettled state to a very solid condition of form. In this way the fat underwent a movement from a very chaotic condition to a geometrical context as its end. I thus had three fields of power and, there, that was the idea of sculpture. It was power over a condition of chaos, over a condition of movement, and over a condition of form. In these three elements—form, movement and chaos—was the indeterminate energy from which I derived

my complete theory of sculpture, of the psychology of humanity as the power of will, the power of thought, and the power of feeling; and there I found it—the schema adequate to understanding the problems of society.⁶³

When understood in this way, fat is no longer merely a biographical trace but the embodiment of the work of art. More precisely, fat is the richest and most accurate representation of sculpture—formation, *Gestaltung*. Fat is less an object than a process—it is never fixed but always in formation. Neither this nor that, fat is irreducibly liminal and, hence, always in-between. As such, fat embodies the process of formation through which opposites are mediated without collapsing into each other:

Formless/Form
Chaos/Order
Heat/Cold
Soft/Hard

The work of art—formation—occurs along the margin that simultaneously separates and unites opposites. While allowing differences and oppositions to emerge, this margin never appears as such. This edge resembles what Schelling describes in his *Philosophy of Art* as the *Indifferenzpunkt*.⁶⁴ For Schelling, as for many other Jena romantics, electricity represents the dialectical interplay of opposites. Hegel both clarifies and enriches Schelling's point:

Electricity is infinite form differentiated within itself, and is the unity of these differentials; consequently the two bodies are inseparably bound together, like the north and south poles of a magnet. Magnetism is mere mechanical activity, however, and is therefore merely an opposition in the activity of movement. . . . In electricity, however, these fluctuating differentials are physical, for they are in the light. . . . Negative electricity is attracted by positive electricity, but repulsed by negative. In that the differentials unite themselves, they communicate themselves to each other; as soon as they have posited a unity, they fly apart again, and vice versa. . . . In the electrical process, each of the two distinct bodies has a differentiated determination that is only posited through the other, but in the fact of which the further individuality remains free and distinct.⁶⁵

For Beuys electricity and fat represent the same difference—the former in an immaterial form, the latter in a material form. Since energy is released by *burning* fat, creation always involves destruction. This metabolic process is a natural expression of the Christian drama of crucifixion and resurrection reenacted in the work of art: “One creates something. The principle of movement itself. And here other influences become apparent—will and energy—so that one knows where movement finds nourishment; and the element of form immediately becomes apparent in terms of creating something for all people. That

is a different structure to what went before. It is the principle of resurrection, transforming the old structure, which dies or stagnates, into a vital, vibrant, life-enhancing, and soul and spirit-promoting form. That is the expanded concept of art.”⁶⁶ Beuys translates the traditional Christian doctrine of the creator God into the notion of creativity. Creativity brings order out of chaos by transforming formlessness into form. Art is another name for this process of in-forming. Since God is creativity, the divine is active wherever creativity emerges. Not only is everything sculpture and everybody an artist, but “God is everything.”⁶⁷

When God is all-in-all, the process of incarnation reaches its end. Theologically understood, this end is the death of God, which occurs with the realization of the kingdom of God; artistically understood, this end is the end of art, which occurs with the fulfillment of the avant-garde’s dream of transforming the world into a work of art. Just as God dies when everybody becomes divine and everything is sacred, so art ends when everybody is an artist and everything is art. The kingdom Beuys imagines is no longer Kandinsky’s “kingdom of the abstract” but the kingdom of *earth*, where God appears in the mess of materiality. With the advent of this kingdom nothing is beyond redemption—not even fat.

3



CREATIVE MORPHOGENESIS

OUR ENTIRE ENTERPRISE WILL BE NOTHING BUT A PROGRESSIVE ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE THIS X, OR RATHER, TO FOLLOW OUT OUR OWN MIND IN ITS NEVER-ENDING PRODUCTIONS. FOR IN THIS LIES THE SECRET OF OUR MENTAL ACTIVITY, THAT WE ARE NECESSITATED FOREVER TO APPROACH A POINT THAT FOREVER ELUDES EVERY DETERMINATION.

F. W. J. SCHELLING

IN FACT, FOR ACADEMIC MEN TO BE HAPPY, THE UNIVERSE WOULD HAVE TO TAKE SHAPE. ALL OF PHILOSOPHY HAS NO OTHER GOAL: IT IS A MATTER OF GIVING A FROCK COAT TO WHAT IS, A MATHEMATICAL FROCK COAT. ON THE OTHER HAND, AFFIRMING THAT THE UNIVERSE RESEMBLES NOTHING AND IS ONLY FORMLESS [*INFORME*] AMOUNTS TO SAYING THAT THE UNIVERSE IS SOMETHING LIKE A SPIDER OR SPIT.

GEORGES BATAILLE

ART AND RELIGION ARE SENSE PRESENTED: WHICH IS ALSO TO SAY, MERELY PRESENTED, MERELY IN FIGURES. AS FIGURES—AND, FURTHER, FIGURES OF FIGURATION ITSELF—ART AND RELIGION INDICATE OF THEMSELVES THEIR OWN MEDIATION WITHIN PHILOSOPHY, FOR WHAT BOTH THE ONE AND THE OTHER REPRESENT IS HOW REPRESENTATION EXCEEDS ITSELF.

JEAN-LUC NANCY

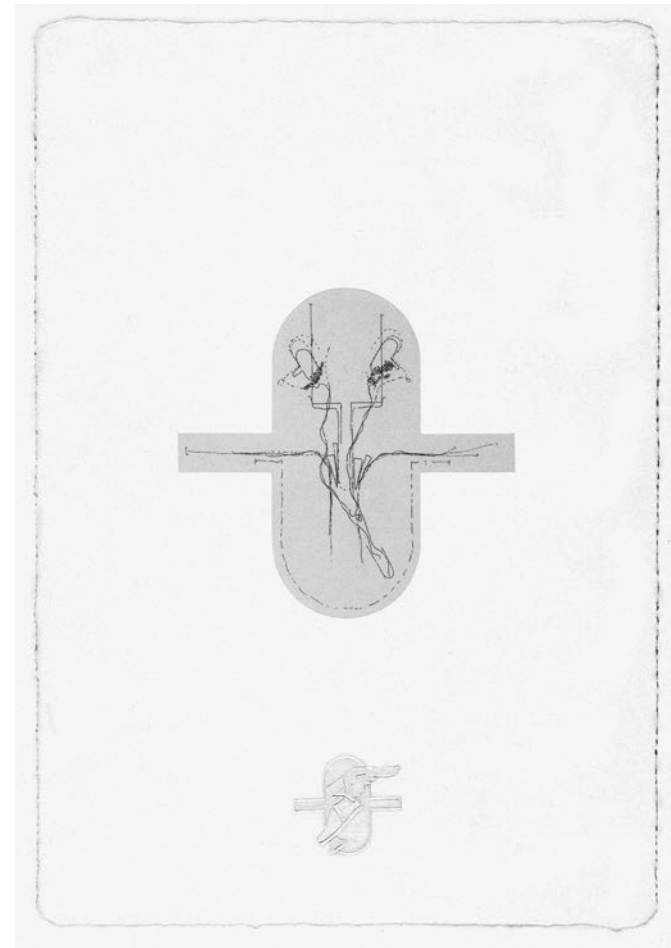


FIGURE 3.1 Matthew Barney, *Field Suite*

Roland Barthes begins *Writing Degree Zero* on a revolutionary note: “Hébert, the revolutionary, never began a number of his news-sheet *Le père Duchêne* without introducing a sprinkling of obscenities. These improprieties had no real meaning, but they had significance. In what way? In that they expressed a whole revolutionary situation. Now here is an example of a mode of writing whose function is no longer only communication or expression, but the imposition of something beyond language.” Literature emerges when language loses its transparency. Far from a window exposing the world, the word is, in Maurice Blanchot’s phrase made famous by Lacan, “the death of the thing.” In the very effort to comprehend the world, the thing-in-itself slips away and becomes an incomprehensible beyond that remains unrepresentable. As language becomes opaque, words separate rather than unite, alienate rather than reconcile. In the wake of the death of the thing, the writer attempts to recover lost unity by turning language back on itself to say what cannot be said in a writing against writing. The writer, in Barthes’s words, “hastens towards a dreamed-of language whose freshness, by a kind of ideal anticipation, might portray the perfection of some new Adamic world where language would no longer be alienated.”

But this dream cannot be actualized, and, thus, the Utopia it promises never becomes a reality. Barthes finally admits that there is always “a tragic element in writing.” Language cannot become transparent because it harbors “ancestral and all-powerful signs” that inevitably hide what they show and conceal what they reveal. Language, in other words—always in *other* words—is inadequate yet inescapable. Paradoxically, the “something beyond language” that haunts the writer can only be articulated *in* the very language that conceals it. “Writing degree zero” is not simply the erasure of language that allows “some new

Adamic world where language would no longer be alienated,” but is the endless reinscription of the null point that is the condition of the possibility of language and at the same time the condition of the impossibility of its transparency. As Barthes notes, “Some linguists establish between the two terms of a polar opposition (such as singular-plural, preterite-present) the existence of a third term, called a neutral term or zero element.”[†]

This point, which is not precisely Barthes’s, is the zero element without which every opposition—be it polar, binary, or dialectical—is impossible. As such, this neutral term is the neither/nor that simultaneously inhabits and exceeds every identity and difference.

Blanchot, following Sartre and anticipating Barthes, labels writing degree zero “*l’écriture blanche*.” In a manner reminiscent of a Malevich or Ryman white monochromatic painting, *l’écriture blanche* inscribes a withdrawal that opens the space of form(ation). This space or, more precisely, spacing is the “pure interval” that is the margin both joining and separating each pair and every couple. “It is this fissure—this rapport with an interruption of being,” Blanchot explains, “that we have dared to characterize as an interval that would be neither [*ni*] of being nor [*ni*] of nonbeing and that bears the Difference of the word or speech [*la parole*], a difference that precedes everything different and everything unique.”[‡] That which is neither being nor nonbeing is, in Mies van der Rohe’s famous phrase, “almost nothing.” The *ni . . . ni* of *l’entre-deux* is the neither . . . nor of the neuter. The neuter is frustratingly evasive because it “names something that escapes nomination, but without making any noise, without even the noisiness of an enigma. We call it, modestly, thoughtlessly, the thing.” This thing, like Heidegger’s *Ding*, is the no-thing that can only be figured by disfiguring. “The Neuter, then, designates difference in indifference, opacity in transparency, then negative scansion of the other, which can reproduce itself only by the averted attraction—omitted—of the one.”[§]

[†] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Smith and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 1, 88, 86, 76.

[‡] Maurice Blanchot, *L’Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 99.

[§] Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 72, 75.

FIGURING $\oplus$

It's all about the goo: the way it looks, smells, feels—the way it oozes and seeps, jiggles and ripples, molds and melts, drips and splashes. During an era in which the material is becoming ever more immaterial, Matthew Barney makes art from the most unlikely materials: Vaseline petroleum jelly, paste, sperm, spit, foam—sea and beer, tapioca, self-lubricating plastic, beeswax, honey. . . . Some things stick, others slip. Sculptures—if that is what they are—supplement videos that overflow their bounds. Neither formed nor formless, works of art are figurations of figuration itself. Never exactly proper, this body works at the edge of genres and genders it repeatedly transgresses.

○ ○ ○

Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* (1994–2003) is a complex multidimensional work that includes five feature-length films, as well as related sculptures, drawings, photographs, and installations. When the show opened at the Guggenheim

In the incalculable calculus of writing, One is (degree) zero: $1 = 0$. This $1/0$ can never be revealed as such but only appears by disappearing in and through the betrayal of the Word. The aversion of the One bars degree zero. $One = 0^\circ = \oplus$. Writing degree zero marks that which exceeds representation by figuring the unfigurable that is neither inside nor outside both language and form. This indifference is in-difference, this infinite is in-finite, this *informe* is in-form(e). The work of art expands the play of scripture by figuring $\oplus$.

⋮

In-Difference

In-Finite

In-Forme

It is no exaggeration to insist that throughout the history of Western philosophy there has been but *one* overriding or underlying problem: the question of the relationship between the one and the many. From the pre-Socratics through the poststructuralists, philosophers have asked whether plurality originates in a more primordial unity and whether the many, whatever they are, can be reduced to one, however it is conceived. The terms of the analysis vary, but the structure of the argument remains the same.

One/Many

Being/Becoming

Substance/Accident

Identity/Difference

Eternity/Time

Reality/Appearance

Museum in New York City in February 2003, it was wildly popular. Indeed, by the time it closed four months later, it had attracted more than three hundred thousand visitors, making it at that time the best-attended single-artist exhibition in the history of the museum. The buzz around town was so great that the *New Yorker* could not resist devoting one of its classic cartoons to the show. *New York Times* art critic Michael Kimmelman went so far as to dub Barney “the most important American artist of his generation.” In an article published several years before the Guggenheim show opened, Kimmelman explains what makes Barney’s art so interesting:

A good way to think about Barney’s work is probably to accept its ambiguity, which, in a sense, is his basic point. Art is unresolved, otherwise it is uninteresting, he says. Sometimes, as in the “Cremaster” films, he has stated this idea as a sexual metaphor: he or one of the characters in the films is presented so that you can’t quite tell whether the sex is male or female. You might say that the fundamental goal of “Cremaster,” like other works by Barney, is to maintain, through one phantasmagoric image after another, a state of creative redolence—which, once you get down to it, is not unlike what the Surrealists and abstractionists earlier in the century were after. Barney considers himself an abstract artist.”¹

Four years later, when the Guggenheim show opened, Kimmelman’s enthusiasm is undiminished: “Hands down, he is, at just shy of 36, the most compelling, richly imaginative artist to emerge in years. ‘Cremaster’ . . . gives us an inspired benchmark of ambition, scope and forthright provocation for art in the new century.”²

I had casually followed Barney’s career but remained unconvinced of his importance. The five-part film that forms the heart of the work is a tangle of

Oneness has been consistently privileged over manyness ontologically, epistemologically, and axiologically. When this synchronic hierarchy is translated into diachronic terms, the one is interpreted as origin/end, and temporal-historical development is interpreted as an archaeo-teleological process that is figured as a circle: O. This problem of the one and the many is not, of course, limited to philosophy but is also important politically, psychologically, sociologically, economically, spiritually, and religiously. The God of the West is One; or, perhaps more precisely, One is God in the West, though not only in the West. Their profound differences notwithstanding, in the religions of the Book, monotheism trumps polytheism every time. Heidegger labels this *philosophia perennis* “ontotheology.” Within this tradition, belief in the ultimate reality of the One, and the unity it is supposed to bestow, is not limited to so-called high culture but has always extended to low culture as well. In esoteric and occult traditions dating back to primal myths and rituals

complex symbols and intersecting narrative lines that create an allegory bordering on the unreadable. Barney seemed to me to push the modernist doctrine of art for art's sake to the breaking point by creating a hermetic work whose sole purpose seemed to be decoding for decoding's sake. I got the point without having to track every reference—or so I thought until I saw the Gugenheim show. As I entered the hivelike rotunda and started up the ramp, I was overwhelmed by the works of sculpture. These were some of the strangest objects I had ever seen. What made them so arresting was that they were not exactly finished but seemed to be forms that were still in the process of formation. I was not sure whether the works on the ramp would stay fixed or would shift their shapes before my eyes. Though seemingly stable, they appeared to figure fluxes and flows that were always about to slip away. All the more remarkable, these objects—if they are objects—were both disturbingly grotesque and strangely beautiful. Just below the skylight at the top of the museum, “The Order,” the central part of the film cycle, was projected on a five-channel video on a giant five-screen Jumbotron. In this film Barney and his cast of characters enact their ritualistic performance in the museum rotunda, where viewers are standing to watch it.

This multimedia spectacle forms what can only be described as a contemporary *Gesamtkunstwerk* whose different parts are carefully connected to create a web of extraordinary complexity. The more one explores, the more associations proliferate; some seem planned, many unintended, but none is insignificant. Part of what makes Barney's work unique is that it is simultaneously ancient, modern, and postmodern—ancient in the origin of its vision, modern in its transformative mission, and postmodern in its performance of the impossibility of realizing this vision and accomplishing this mission.

Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Matthew Barney is the most spiritual and perhaps even most religious artist working today. The roots of his

associated with metallurgy, alchemy, and magic, as well as popular religious movements like Gnosticism, Hermetism, Illuminism, Rosicrucianism, and Freemasonry, everything in the cosmos is the manifestation of an originary first principle or an underlying reality. More recently, new religious movements like theosophy, anthroposophy, neopaganism, and cybergnosticism are, in effect, ontotheology for the masses.

For modern and postmodern religion, philosophy, and art the most important articulation of this enormously influential spiritual trajectory emerged in post-Kantian philosophy and art. During the closing decade of the nineteenth century an extraordinary group of philosophers, poets, and artists gathered in Germany to develop a common diagnosis of the ills plaguing modernity and to devise cures. The problem, they concluded, was the loss of unity—the fragmentation and alienation brought on by modern industrialization. Schiller spoke for many when he wrote in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794): “Everlastingly

artistic vision can be traced to ancient Greek philosophy—especially the pre-Socratics and Neoplatonists—as well as ancient pagan and Christian myths and rituals. This *philosophia perennis* rests on five fundamental principles:

1. Divine reality is not merely transcendent but is also immanent in the world.
2. The self is inseparably related to or even identical with divine reality.
3. This primal unity is lost when human beings fall into a condition of division and conflict.
4. The goal of human life, as well as the cosmos as a whole, is to return to this original unity.
5. The only way to achieve this goal is through the enlightenment brought by spiritual practice.

Without in any way denying its layers of complexity, *The Cremaster Cycle* can be interpreted as an updated version of this tradition staged in terms of modern theories of biology and sexuality dressed up in postmodern gender-bending fashion. Like the Masonic Entered Apprentice, who moves through the lodge from west to east in search of enlightenment and the release it brings, *Cremaster* begins in the West—Boise, Idaho, where Barney grew up—and ends in the East—Budapest, where Harry Houdini was born. The first part of the cycle has a tripartite narrative that marks the stages of spiritual development. This quest can be expressed in different terms:

Philosophical: Unity–Duality/Division–(Re)union

Religious: Creation (Garden)–Fall (World)–Redemption (Kingdom)

Psychosexual: Undifferentiation–Differentiation–(Re)integration

Most of the action in *Cremaster* occurs in the liminal space between stages 1 and 2,

chained to a single little fragment of the whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or his specialized knowledge.”^a To cure this illness, unity—personal as well as social—had to be restored or recovered. The way from fragmentation and alienation (manyness) to integration and reconciliation (oneness), they argued, is through religion, philosophy, and art. While differing in many important ways, religion, philosophy, and art are, in the final analysis, different strategies for the same spiritual quest.

This spiritual and aesthetic tradition continues to inform (often indirectly) artistic theory and practice. Indeed, much of the most interesting and challenging contemporary art cannot be understood outside this religio-philosophical context. No recent artists have been more deeply in-

along the borders of unity and duality, Creation and Fall, undifferentiation and differentiation. The question that obsesses Barney is whether duality, fall, and differentiation are avoidable or inevitable.

While this question is as old as philosophy itself, in the twentieth century art largely displaced religion as the source and expression of spiritual striving. Instead of studying philosophy and theology seriously, many artists tended to draw their insights from religious movements like theosophy and anthroposophy, which present popularized versions of sophisticated philosophical and theological ideas. Firmly rooted in this tradition, Barney's precursors are Kandinsky and Mondrian, who were theosophists, and, most important, Beuys, who, as we have seen, was an anthroposophist. While most critics—and even Barney himself—identify Serra as his most influential precursor, Barney's art cannot be understood apart from Beuys's work. Beuys has influenced both the shape of Barney's artistic vision and the means by which he attempts to realize it. For Beuys and Barney, art is a religio-mythical quest to overcome social, political, and psychological division and conflict and to recover the unity once enjoyed but now lost. In pursuit of this dream they both return to Celtic mythology and occult spiritualism, which, though rarely acknowledged, remain important for modern philosophy and religion. Beuys's fat and Barney's petroleum jelly meet in honey, which has symbolized spiritual unity since the time of the ancient Greeks and Hebrews. In a similar manner Beuys's rabbit and stag become Barney's rabbit and ram, which are representations of renewal and rebirth. Beuys and Barney develop their own mythologies via multiple media, ranging from video, sculpture, drawings, artist books to installations, and performances. When approached from this perspective, it is obvious that *Cre-master* is simply inconceivable without Beuys.

The profound similarities between Beuys and Barney should not obscure equally important differences between their work. While both seek transformation

influenced by the ideas of ontotheology than Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barney, and Andy Goldsworthy. To try to understand their work apart from this tradition is like attempting to interpret Neoplatonism without Plato. While it is neither possible nor necessary to chart this course of development in detail here, some familiarity with the relevant issues involved in the interplay of philosophy, religion, and art in post-Kantian idealism and romanticism is necessary to appreciate the far-reaching implications of Barney's *Cre-master Cycle*.^b Toward this end I will consider three closely related works: Schelling's *The Philosophy of Art*, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, and Bataille's *Theory of Religion*.

Having been a roommate with Hegel and Hölderlin at the Protestant seminary in Tübingen during the late eighteenth century, Schelling developed his own philosophical system when he was very young. Appointed a professor at the University of Jena at the astonishing age of twenty-three, two years later he published his

and renewal, they go about it differently. As we have seen, according to principles of *philosophia perennis*, self and world are not only isomorphic but are inextricably interrelated. To change one, therefore, is to transform the other. Beuys and Barney agree that the point of departure for any significant change is the self-transformation brought about through art. For Beuys, however, the personal must *explicitly* become the political. He is deeply committed to the founding tenet of the avant-garde, which dates back to Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794), according to which one must transform the world into a work of art. We have seen that Beuys developed his notion of social sculpture in which personal transformation effects sociopolitical change to meet this challenge. Working in the midst of the social and political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s, he remained convinced that change was not only necessary but truly possible.

By the 1990s, established powers seemed more entrenched and significant change far less likely, if not completely impossible. This important shift is reflected in Barney's work. Barney is so preoccupied with personal and psychological transformation that he seems uninterested in social and political change. The intricacy of the mythology he elaborates reflects the complexity of the psychological conflicts he explores. As the narrative expands and the images proliferate, his symbology threatens to become arcane and his art hermetic. Yet as the work becomes more and more obscure, the lure of meaning becomes more and more tempting. After years of empty abstraction and decades of blatant superficiality, Barney seems to be suggesting that art can bear meaning that might be profound. The semblance of meaning in an era when it often seems impossible is part of what makes *Cremaster* attractive to so many people. Confronted with this multidimensional work, what you see *is not* what you see because it not only *is* but also *means*.

But *what* does *Cremaster* mean? In the tangled web that Barney weaves, everything seems to be meaningful. In a manner similar to Mark Danielewski's

System of Transcendental Idealism, which remains one of the monuments of nineteenth-century philosophy. At the time of Schelling's arrival, Jena was the center of the most advanced debates in theology, philosophy, and art in the Western world. Indeed, during the seminal decade of the 1790s, the modern avant-garde was invented, and its fundamental tenets were defined in Jena. In the winter semester of 1802–3 Schelling announced a series of lectures on philosophy and art. Though the book that eventually grew out of these lectures (*The Philosophy of Art*) was not published until after his death, Schelling's ideas became influential for philosophers, poets, and artists throughout Europe, as well as in the United States.

In his early work Schelling weaves philosophy, religion, and art together in search of the primordial unity from which all difference and plurality emerge and to which they finally return. The result was his "philosophy of identity," in which God, self, and world are structurally and substantially identical, and, therefore, theology, anthro-

House of Leaves, clue leads to clue, but solutions remain elusive. For every connection there is another connection, for every association another association, until what had seemed to be a familiar linear narrative becomes a nonlinear hypertext. Like Houdini wrapping himself in chains, the very constraints Barney imposes lead to an excess of meaning that allows him to break out of the box in which he seemed to be trapped. *Cremaster* offers us the vision of the world in which the dilemma is not too little meaning but too much—not the lack of meaning but its endless proliferation. When (narrative) lines become (hypertextual) webs, closure is impossible and resolution is uncertain. To capture this world in a work of art would be to figure Θ .

METAMORPHOSIS

It is not necessary to track every reference or trace every association to understand *Cremaster*. Just as self and world mirror each other, in this complex work part and whole are isomorphic. To understand the part, therefore, is to comprehend the whole. In the following analysis I will attempt to come to terms with *Cremaster* as a whole by exploring details of parts two, three, and four of the cycle. It is important to recall that *Cremaster*, like traditional tragedies, is a play in five acts. Indeed, it is possible to understand Barney's work as a reinscription of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, which, in turn, is an interpretation of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* in terms of the tension between Dionysus (the principle of undifferentiation) and Apollo (the principle of differentiation). While each act in Barney's play can stand on its own, the five episodes taken together form a coherent narrative with discernible spatial coordinates that map the movement from ascent to descent and, as I have noted, from west to east. These trajectories represent the transition from undifferentiation to differentiation and, conversely, the transformation from division and materiality to unity and

pology, and cosmology perfectly mirror each other. For Schelling this original unity is the Absolute in and through which everything has its being.

Since concepts and ideas inevitably mark differences and draw distinctions, thought cannot apprehend the Absolute. The Absolute, in other words, is preconceptual. He argues, "All *thinking* and presentation in us is therefore necessarily preceded by an *original activity*, which, *because it precedes* all thinking, is to that extent absolutely *undetermined* and *unconfined*. Only once an opposing element is present does it become a *restricted* and, for that very reason, a *determinant* (thinkable) activity. If this activity of our mind were *originally* restricted (as is imagined by the philosophers who reduce everything to thinking and presentation), the mind could never *feel* itself to be *confined*. It feels its confinement only insofar as it feels at the same time its original *lack of confinement*."^c Bringing together mental functions usually held apart, Schelling names this feeling "intellectual intuition." While the mind is originally unrestricted, intellectual intuition

immateriality respectively. Bringing together high and low, Barney allegorizes spiritual process with biological images that are excessively sexualized and insistently scatological. His art is so polymorphous that it borders on the perverse. In anatomical terms, “cremaster” is “a muscle covering the spermatic cord and testes. It is a derivative of the internal oblique muscle as the spermatic cord passes from the abdomen to the scrotum.”³

The cremaster is responsible for the ascent and descent of the testicles. This process not only protects the testicles but also regulates their temperature and thereby controls the conditions necessary for the production of sperm. As Nancy Spector points out in her superb essay for the catalog accompanying the Guggenheim exhibition:

Testicular migration and its role in prenatal sexual differentiation may well be the ur-symbol of Barney’s entire conceptual practice. The downward developmental slide of the testes into the awaiting scrotal sac, which occurs during the seventh month of fetal growth, is in many ways the final somatic stage in the making of a man. It is not the conclusion of this embryonic evolution, however, that is of foremost interest to the artist, even though his references to male anatomy may seem to suggest otherwise. Rather, it is the path travelled between the states of ascension (female) and descension (male)—and all the possible detours that can occur along the way—that activates and organizes Barney’s mythological system.⁴

Barney is preoccupied with the state that is antecedent to psychosexual differentiation. “The ratios of sexuality,” he explains, “seem to be changing, [and] that’s where I think it entered my work. There’s a proposed organism . . . that at certain points has a gender, but it’s not necessarily a human gender. It has a ratio that fluctuates, 1:10, 2:9, wherever it ends up. Obviously there are articulations

involves a dialectical interplay of opposites in which a person becomes aware of release only through constraint. Like Houdini wrapping himself in chains so he can experience escape, the way to liberation inevitably passes through confinement. Religion and art, which are finally identical, create the possibility of escaping the world of division and conflict and of recovering the unity we once enjoyed but now have lost. In Schelling’s speculative rendering of theology, God is the originary principle or foundation that is the *telos* of all life:

. . . God as infinite ideality that encompasses all reality within itself, or God as infinitely affirming is, as such, the essence of the *ideal* All. . . .

The ideal All encompasses within itself the same unities that the real All encompasses within itself: the real, the ideal, and—not the absolute identity of both (since such identity belongs neither to it nor to the real in particularity)—the indifference of both.^d

that are specifically masculine and feminine, but I think there's a lot of space in between that has to do with other points on the graph."⁵ This "space in between" is the margin of sexual indeterminacy and mutability where *Cremaster* takes shape. This indeterminacy is not so much a pure identity characterized by a lack or absence of difference as a zone of *virtuality*, which is the condition of every identity and all differences.

The first installment of *Cremaster* (1995) is a song-and-dance routine staged on the blue Astroturf of the football stadium in Boise, Idaho, where Barney once played. The logo for Cremaster (—o—) marks the middle of the field. Two Goodyear blimps floating above the stadium are tethered by ropes held by a dancing woman named Goodyear (Fig. 3.2). The blimps allude to both ovaries and testicles that have not yet descended. Inside each blimp four hostesses attend identical white tables with sculptures made of Vaseline. The woman named Goodyear is, impossibly, on the ground and in both blimps simultaneously. The only difference between the two interiors is that one table has green grapes and the other table has purple grapes. The grapes suggest Bacchus, Dionysus, and Pan, whose presence is later invoked by satyrs. Plucking the fruit through a pure white hole that resembles an anus, Goodyear eats the grapes and excretes them through the silver funnel of her shoe. While enjoying the grapes, she directs a dance routine on the field below whose mechanical precision recalls Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. The first act in Barney's play represents the primal condition in which differentiation has yet to occur. Developments about to unfold are prefigured on the gridiron below. In a shot taken from the end zone, which is repeated twice, the goalposts frame the football field (Fig. 3.3). The single base of the post branches upward in two arms that appear to be reaching for the sky. Although it remains unclear whether the posts marking the goal represent one becoming two or two becoming one, it is apparent that the field of play is *entre-deux*. Between the goalposts, the move-

It is very important to understand the implications of Schelling's term *indifference*. It is noteworthy that he does not say that All is the unity of opposites but is the *indifference of opposites*. In the briefest terms possible, the Absolute is, for Schelling, "the indifference point" that is divine. In a more contemporary idiom, which we have already considered, the indifference point is degree zero that everything presupposes but nothing exposes. Philosophy and art offer alternative ways to apprehend, which is not to say comprehend, this ultimate reality. "Philosophy," according to Schelling, "is the immediate or direct representation of the divine, whereas art is immediately or directly only the representation of indifference as such" (29).

Since the indifference point eludes conceptual articulation, it can never be defined clearly and precisely. Like a haunting specter, it shows itself by hiding. This irreducible elusiveness issues in alternative interpretations that entail different ontologies, epistemologies, and, correspondingly, contrasting

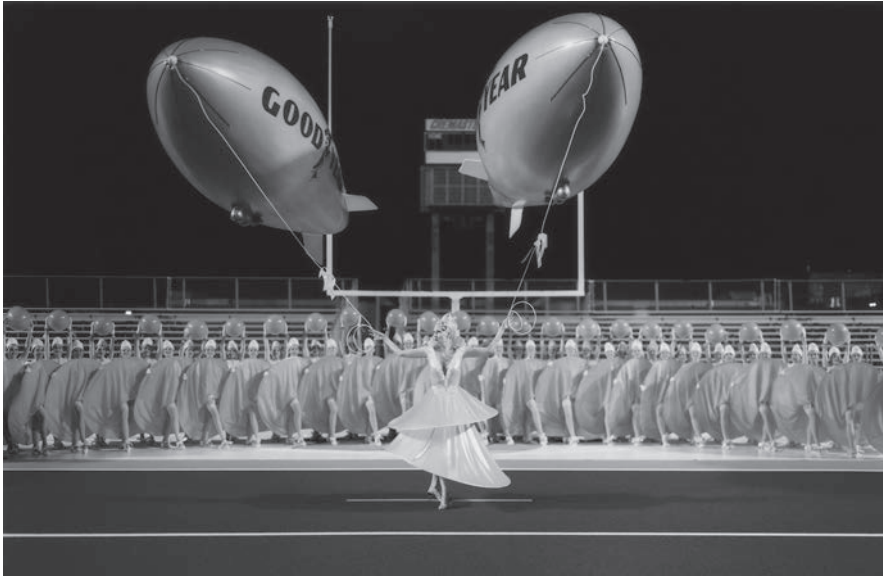


Figure 3.2 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 1*: Goodyear Chorus

ment of the dancers resembles the multiplication and migration of cells as they form a blastula that morphs into the shape of a dumbbell and then divides (Fig. 3.4).⁶ At this point, the process of descent and division begins and *Cremaster 2* is set in motion.

Cremaster 2 (1999) is more or less based on the life of accused murderer Gary Gilmore, whose biographer is Norman Mailer. The second act spans a period extending from 1893—the year of the Columbian Exposition where Harry Houdini (played by Mailer), who might have been Gilmore’s grandfather, performed—to 1977, the last year of Gilmore’s life. Geographically the drama

understandings of art. The indifference point can be understood as that which excludes differentiation, difference, and division. If plurality (i.e., the many) is epiphenomenal, it must be left behind to reach the One, which alone is real. Throughout the history of the West, religious myths, philosophical systems, and artistic practices that seem to share little are actually alternative strategies directed to the same end: (re)union. All of these efforts, however, entail a self-defeating contradiction. If the One *is not* many and indifference *is not* difference, then the indifference point is bound by the very stricture of opposition it is supposed to escape. But what if that for which we long is not a One that excludes the many but an indifference point *between* every identity and all differences. Such an indifference point would be the point in-difference, which remains incomprehensible within the very structure of opposition it nonetheless allows to emerge (see Fig. 3.6). Neither oppositional (either/or) nor synthetic (both/and), the indifference point is the *neither/nor*



Figure 3.3 Matthew Barney, Goalpost, Bronco Stadium

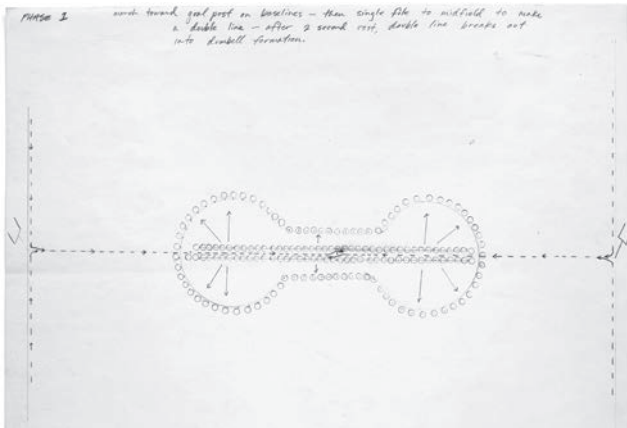


Figure 3.4 Matthew Barney, Concept drawing on paper: Choreographic phase one in two

that is the creative matrix of all that is and is not. As the hinge on which identity and difference swing, the indifference point does not close the circle of becoming but holds everything open by keeping every body in play.

Schelling translates the notion of the traditional creator God into the principle of divine creativity active in all becoming. Understood in this way, creativity is the infinite that acts in and through the finite. Just as the indifference point is neither indifferent nor different, so the in-finite is neither infinite nor finite but is their constitutive mean. The in-finite in-difference of God and world, as well as divine and human, emerges as it withdraws in the work of art:

The universe is formed in God as an absolute work of art and in an eternal beauty.

By universe we do not mean the real or ideal All, but rather the absolute identity of both. If the indifference of the real and ideal within the real and the ideal All is beauty,

extends from the Columbian ice fields in Canada and the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah to the city of Chicago. People, places, and events that seem to have nothing to do with each other are woven together around the landscape, the story of the life and death of Gilmore, and the activity of bees.

The film opens with an extremely rich and symbol-laden sequence that begins with an obscure abstract form. As it emerges and comes into focus, it seems to resemble the Vaseline sculpture on the table in the blimps, as well as the goalposts on the Boise football field. Eventually it becomes clear that it is an inverted western saddle made of glittering rhinestones that later appear to be shaped like the hexagonal cells in which bees store honey. The scene abruptly shifts to a panoramic shot of a glacier imperceptibly flowing through a valley between two mountains whose contoured shape suggests a woman's knees raised during childbirth.

Aerial shots of ice fields, rivers, lakes, and, most impressive, vast moraines, which are rivers of stones and



Figure 3.5 Calvin Taylor

My grandfather, Calvin Taylor (1872–1964), was a large, strapping man whose strength grew from a life of farming (Fig. 3.5). By the time I knew him, he had long ago left the farm for town, but one of his daughters still worked the land where he and his wife, Emma, had raised their eight children. He was a great storyteller, and as a child I would get up before my parents and crawl into bed with him to listen to his tales. Even

specifically beauty in reflected images, then the absolute identity of the real and ideal All is necessarily primal, that is, absolute beauty itself. To that extent the universe, as it is God, is also to be viewed as an absolute work of art in which infinite intention mutually interpenetrates infinite necessity. (31)

If the divine is creativity or creativity is divine, then the work of the artist is the work of the Artist. “*The immediate cause of all art,*” Schelling concludes, “*is God,* for God is by means of his absolute identity the source of all mutual informing (into indifference) of the real and the ideal upon which all art rests” (32). Art, then, is less a matter of forms than of the activity of in-forming into in-difference. Thus, far-reaching implications of this remarkable insight unfold throughout *The Cremaster Cycle*.

A decade after Schelling’s *Philosophy of Art* finally appeared in print, Nietzsche, who was equally precocious, published *The Birth of Tragedy* (1871). At

rocks, twist and flow like works of some unknown sculptor. The camera pauses on an image of a mountain reflected in the lake. The shoreline is so straight that it appears to have been drawn with a T-square. The photograph gradually morphs into an abstract image that resembles one of Rothko's mysterious paintings. The mountain/lake picture returns and gradually rotates 90° as it slips out of focus. The result is an image whose formal structure is repeated throughout *Cre-master*. Paired opposites—mountain/water, form/formless, sky/earth, West/East, male/female, white/black—are simultaneously joined and separated by a line that can be drawn only by withdrawing (Fig. 3.6).

Another abstract figure emerges from the liminal space of this between. Two gently curved shapes bend upward and two downward to create a form that anticipates the horns of the Loughton Ram, which, in act 4, symbolize the balance of opposites. At the last moment, a pair of bees fly out of the center of the emblem.

Most of the second installment is devoted to the reenactment of Gilmore's murder of a gas station attendant and its aftermath that Mailer recounts in *The Executioner's Song: A True Life Novel*. In the climactic scene Gilmore forces his victim to lie face down on the floor and shoots him in the back of the head like a steer being slaughtered. Blood immediately oozes from his brain and gradually spreads across the white tile floor. Barney stages Gilmore's execution through an imaginative rendering of some of the most important tenets of Mormon theology. The Mormons were led to Utah by Joseph Smith, an

then I was not sure where reality ended and fiction began. His stories always left questions, and, as I grew older, I began to suspect that there were dark—perhaps violent—corners of my grandfather's life he allowed no one to approach. The years have only deepened those youthful suspicions. Of the many memories of my grandfather, three remain vivid: bee-keeping, hunting, and slaughtering.

the time, Nietzsche was still enthralled by Wagner, who was developing what would become his highly influential notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. While Nietzsche repeatedly acknowledged his debt to Schopenhauer, the vision of art he developed is remarkably similar to Schelling's. Nietzsche's consideration of the birth of tragedy is a pretext for his consideration of the much broader issue of the origin of art. Like his romantic precursors, Nietzsche believes that art has displaced religion as the primary expression of humankind's spiritual striving. Indirectly echoing Schelling, Nietzsche claims that God "is the supreme artist." Returning to the romantic notion of genius initially defined by Kant in the *Third Critique* (1790), Nietzsche argues: "Only as the genius in the act of creation merges with the primal Architect of the cosmos can he truly know something of the eternal essence of art."^e

Nietzsche defines the eternal essence of art in terms of two competing principles: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. While Greek mythology



Figure 3.6 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 2: Geneology*

itinerant magician and diviner who bordered on madness. In 1827 Smith, who was living in upstate New York, claimed that during a religious trance he had uncovered buried plates bearing instructions from God. Though obviously a con man, Smith attracted a band of devoted followers. Strange beliefs and unconventional sexual practices made the sect a target of hostility. Fleeing persecution, Smith and his

Behind the house in the small Pennsylvania town where he lived after he left the farm, there was a garage where my grandfather kept a few chickens, as well as beehives that he faithfully tended. When collecting the honey, he would allow me

depicts Apollo as the god of the sun whose light represents reason, Nietzsche describes him as “the god of individuation and just boundaries” (65). He elaborates this point by drawing on the work of Schopenhauer:

In an eccentric way one might say of Apollo what Schopenhauer says, in the first part of *The World as Will and Idea*, of man caught in the veil of Maya: “Even as on an immense, raging sea, assailed by huge wave crests, a man sits in a little rowboat trusting his frail craft, so, amidst the furious torments of the world, the individual sits tranquilly, supported by the *principium individuationis* and relying on it.” One might say that the unshakable confidence in that principle has received its most magnificent expression in Apollo, and that Apollo himself may be regarded as the marvelous divine image of the *principium individuationis*, whose looks and gestures radiate the full delight, wisdom, and beauty of “illusion.” (22)

followers eventually settled in what is now the Beehive State, where, they believed, God's kingdom would arrive on earth.⁷ The conviction that sinners can be redeemed only through blood sacrifice is a cornerstone of Mormonism.

Gilmore's execution is ritually enacted on the blinding white salt flats of Utah. Through careful crosscuts, Barney makes the salt flats appear to be an extension of the white ice fields of Canada. In this way the Continental Divide functions as a geological inscription of the line dividing and uniting opposites: west/east, north/south. The scene for the execution is a prison rodeo that takes place in a pure white earthwork whose gentle curves are reminiscent of Robert Smithson's nearby Spiral Jetty, now covered in white salt crystals. With desert heat bending the light just enough to leave things out of focus, the scene is almost ethereal—even otherworldly. Barney mounts a Brahman bull and rides him until both collapse and die. As ten bison surround the bodies, the film cuts to the Church of Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City, where a sculpted baptismal font bears the figures of ten bison representing the ten lost tribes of Israel. When Gilmore and the bull die, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sings hymns of praise in the background. In this economy of salvation, blood is paid for with blood.

to watch from a safe distance. I remember him donning a hood, rolling up his sleeves, and sticking his hands into the hive to remove the honeycombs. Bees would swirl around him as he went about his business. What I recall even more vividly than the sweetness of his honey is my grandfather, sitting on a swing on the back porch after finishing his work, silently pulling dozens of bee stingers out of his huge forearms in what seemed to be his private ritual.



Inasmuch as the principle of individuation issues in differentiation and difference, it is not only the source of illusion but is also “the root of all evil.” This evil can be overcome through “an eventual integration” (66, 67). Dionysus, also known as Bacchus, was the god of wine and inspiration whose followers formed an orgiastic cult devoted to celebrating the power and fertility of nature. For Nietzsche, Dionysus is the binary opposite of Apollo: “The substratum of tragedy irradiates in several consecutive discharges, the vision of the drama—a vision on the one hand completely of the nature of Apollonian dream-illusion and therefore epic, but on the other hand, as the objectification of a Dionysiac condition, tending toward the shattering of the individual and his fusion with the original Oneness” (56).

Nietzsche uses a remarkable range of images and metaphors to evoke this original Oneness: “primal Being” (102), “the extravagant fecundity of the world will” and “life force” (103), “the Original Mother” (102), “the maternal

The narrative about Gilmore is framed by the story of Houdini and Gilmore's grandmother, Baby Fay La Foe. *Cremaster 2* begins with Gilmore's parents, Bessie and Frank, attending a séance presided over by Fay. After a brief greeting, Fay speaks the first words of the entire cycle:

*Let every bond be loosed
Every force fail
All iron be broken
Every rope, strap
Let every knot
Every chain be opened.*

As Fay almost sings these lines, a honeycomb seems to settle over the room. Her poetic words suggest the role Houdini plays in the cycle. Not merely a carnival clown, Houdini is an accomplished escape artist who can break every chain and undo any lock. Barney is looking for redemption from a world knotted in conflict, and Houdini points to a way out. After all, the claims of any savior are no more outlandish than those of Houdini. Houdini's "tricks," Barney suggests, are not mere sleights of hand but grow out of ancient spiritual practices that entail a sophisticated metaphysics. As Fay's words fade, Gilmore's mother, Bessie, whispers in her husband's ear:

In our family there was no clear line between religion and hunting. From the time I was big enough to keep up, I accompanied my father, Noel; his brothers; and my cousins on their hunting trips. We usually hunted small game—mostly pheasants and rabbits on the farm where my father grew up, which his sister and her husband still worked. We would hunt in the morning, break at noon for memorable farm dinners, and continue hunting till dark. My grandfather was a legendary shot who hunted well into his eighties. He always used dogs—hounds, not bird dogs, because, he explained, "Hounds can track pheasants, but bird dogs can't point rabbits." I hunted with my grandfather only once, and what I most remember was his gun.

womb" (97), "the True Subject" (41), "The ground of being," and "the eternal core of things" (53).^f The figure of this primal unity of opposites is for Nietzsche, as for Barney, the satyr. "The Dionysiac reveler," claims Nietzsche, "sees himself as a satyr, and as satyr, in turn, he sees the god" (56). Dionysus undoes the Apollonian *principium individuationis* through "a mystical process of un-selving" that results in "de-individuation" (39, 64). The full realization of this process would be the death of the self.

Upon careful consideration, Nietzsche's Dionysus turns out to be as ambiguous as Schelling's indifference point. Initially it seems that Dionysus and Apollo, like identity and difference, are exclusive opposites. By shattering the principle of individuation through a process of de-individuation, Dionysus constitutes himself as *not* Apollo. But insofar as Dionysus is defined in opposition to Apollo, he is formed by the principle of individuation he purportedly destroys. Far from mere opponents, neither Apollo nor Dionysus

Now we have it put to verse
The secret of the universe
Inter-configuration and inter-control and
Interdependency within the whole
Of forms, of truth, of love, of light
All to master point . . . tight

As the séance proceeds, Fay summons the spirit of Houdini, played by Mailer. The session leads to a perverse sexual encounter in which Gilmore is presumably conceived. With bees buzzing around Bessie and Frank, the camera zooms in on the midsections of their bodies, which are tightly bound in Plexiglas corsets.⁸ As their genitals rhythmically throb, the film cuts back and forth between the lovers and Houdini, whose body is wrapped in a white plastic substance. At the moment of climax, Frank withdraws his penis whose tip turns into a beehive with a bee flying out of it. At this moment his body swells, oozes putrid fluids, and begins to decay. Like an insect whose life's mission is complete after fertilizing the female, the male dies.

Baby Fay and Houdini return at the end of *Cremaster 2* but do not quite bring the narrative full circle. The setting for the final episode is a vast hall for the 1893 Columbia Exposition. The most revealing image of the entire second act is a tight shot of a poster advertising Houdini's act. The title of his performance is *Metamorphosis*. By this point it has become clear that throughout *The Cremaster Cycle* Barney is preoccupied with geological, biological, psychological, and spiritual processes of metamorphosis. Beneath the title, which is in yellow

Throughout most of his life, he had used a muzzle-loader whose barrel he had shot paper thin. In the final years that he hunted, my grandfather used a single-barrel twelve-gauge shotgun. This seemed strange to me because every other hunter I knew used a double-barrel or pump shotgun. When I asked my father why grandpa used a single-barrel gun, he replied: "He never needs a second shot." I soon learned that my father was right.

exists apart from the other. Their relationship, however, is not dialectical. Like the indifference point, Dionysus enables the very individuality he nonetheless undoes. This is why, Nietzsche insists, "Apollo found it impossible to live without Dionysus" (34). Dionysus, in turn, cannot appear without Apollo. Since Dionysus's creative power is ultimately destructive, it can only reveal itself by concealing itself behind the masks of Apollo: "Only so much of the Dionysiac substratum of the universe may enter an individual consciousness as can be dealt with by that Apollonian transfiguration, so that these two prime agencies must develop in strict proportion" (145). The work of art is to show/hide Dionysus by disfiguring the figures of Apollo. Though undeniably destructive, creativity is, in the final analysis, redemptive. Art, Nietzsche concludes, is a "sorceress expert in healing" (52). But the cure art administers is always inadequate because it is inevitably incomplete. Dionysian wisdom is another version of Poe's "never-to-be-imparted secret

on a background of blue (the signature colors of act 4), there is a figure of a hybrid monster with what appear to be curved ram's horns coming out of his head. To the right of the monster, six cells of a honeycomb form an inverted triangle that often symbolizes the female genitals. At the bottom of the poster, under a caricature of Houdini trapped in a small capsule, the following words appear: "World Famous Self-Liberator." Self-liberation—the liberation *from* the self *by* the self—that is what *Cremaster* is all about.

The camera withdraws through a hallway, passing a polar bear and white wolf, which you can almost hear growl, into a cavernous structure, where melting ice sculptures leave big puddles of water on the floor. The silhouette of a wasp-waist woman carrying a little white dog appears. Wading through the water in darkness, she approaches a brightly lit stage where Houdini/Mailer is standing next to a hexagonal trunk used in one of his escape stunts. She calls to the world-famous self-liberator, and the following exchange takes place:

BABY FAY. *And how did you fare in your metamorphosis?*

HOUDINI. *You didn't see it?*

BABY FAY. *Sir, would you not find it more rewarding to transcend your position within the hive to truly metamorphose rather than this exercise in mere physicality?*

HOUDINI. *Physicality? Madame, I can assure you that each time I challenge myself to escape from a locked trunk, a real transformation does take place.*

In the evenings after the hunt, the stakes of the ritual became clear. I always had to help my father clean the game. It was a bloody affair, but the blood, I learned, was what bound my father and his family to the land where they had been born. Far from idle diversion, my father had to return to that land each fall to renew the bond and teach his son a lesson

whose attainment is destruction." Art provides the closest approximation to this nonknowledge that is possible this side of death. This is what makes art so valuable and life so tragic.

While Nietzsche, following Schelling, translates religion into art, Bataille appropriates Nietzsche's interpretation of art, first to develop a theory of religion and then to use this theory to reconceive art. Nietzsche was a seminal influence on Bataille, as well as the surrealists with whom he shared so much. Like any good writer, Bataille was less interested in Nietzsche's work for its own sake than for what he could steal from it for his own purposes. Bataille recasts Nietzsche's distinction between the Dionysian and the Apollonian as the difference between the sacred and the profane. Returning to the contrast between the nonutilitarian and the utilitarian Kant formulated to distinguish high art from low, Bataille defines the sacred as nonutilitarian, excessive, extravagant, and ostentatious and the profane as utilitarian, instrumental, and prudent. The dis-

Within *Metamorphosis* Houdini becomes part of the cage that contains him. He enters the lock and seals his bonds. He digests the lock. It becomes part of him. The walls that imprison his body come open. Tonight the metamorphosis was a count slower but no less effective. For Barney the chains binding the body are figures of a more profound imprisonment from which he seeks release. Physical metamorphosis portends spiritual transformation.

As Fay draws near to Houdini and bees return, or she returns to bees, the question of the relation between the queen and her drones arises:

BABY FAY. *Would this drone wish to end his life as a drone?*

HOUDINI. *Madame, what exactly is your discipline?*

BABY FAY. *I am queen. As queen, I preside over a society of drones. This arouses my interest in your capacity for metamorphosis. I would not wish for you to become a candidate for my throne. So, Mr. Houdini, I have come here for you. I am Fay.*

Dropping her pet dog, Fay falls into Houdini's embrace. Whether she traps him or he traps her remains as uncertain as the outcome of their encounter. The film ends with soaring shots of melting glaciers, rushing rivers, and flowing moraines, as well as the return of the inverted saddle made from rhinestones that now appear to be hexagonal. When the credits roll, Baby Fay La Foe is the only actor listed as anonymous.

words could not convey. Hunting was a ritual sacrifice in which spilled blood was the stuff of a communion I am still struggling to understand.

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tinguishing feature of the profane is discontinuity, which, Bataille argues, is coterminous with the subject-object distinction. "The object," he argues, "has a meaning that breaks the undifferentiated continuity, that stands opposed to immanence or to the flow of all that is—which it transcends. It is strictly alien to the subject, to the self still immersed in immanence. It is the subject's property, the subject's thing, but is nonetheless impervious to the subject."⁸ The differentiation of the subject and object is grounded in reason and emerges through language. Reason, then, is an Apollonian activity that "withdraws from the *continuum*" by defining differences it seeks to secure through the principle of noncontradiction. The domain of profane established by reason is, therefore, insistently dualistic.

The sacred, by contrast, is "continuous being, lost in the world like water is lost in water" (29). Instead of separation and opposition, the sacred involves "*intimacy*, the immanence between man and the world, between

It is impossible to understand *Cremaster 2*, as well as the entire cycle, without coming to terms with the significance of bees. In addition to playing an important role in the videos, beeswax is the substance used to create many of Barney's most intriguing sculptures. Throughout history bees and honey have played an important role in many religious and spiritual traditions. Both honey and beeswax have been used frequently in religious rituals and have often served as offerings to the gods. In the Bible honey provides sustenance in the wilderness (Mark 1:6) and symbolizes rich and productive land (Exodus 3:17). For many people Paradise is pictured as a land flowing with milk and honey. As far back as the Bronze Age (7000 BCE), the first intoxicating drink was made from honey. In German mythology the bark of the Yggdrasil, the world ash that is the *axis mundi*, produces "manna," a sugary substance similar to honey. According to legend, "manna, when long kept, acquires a deeper color, softens, and ultimately deliquesces into a liquid, which, on the addition of yeast, undergoes the vinous fermentation."⁹ In some traditions this intoxicating substance is used to induce trance in rituals.

Not all representations of bees and honey, however, are so Dionysian. From Aristotle to Mandeville's influential *Fable of the Bees* (1723), the image of the hive has been used to illustrate how cooperative activity—be it intended or unintended—can create social harmony. The harmonious activity of bees is directly related to the architecture of the hive. In his remarkable study of morphology, *On Growth and Form*, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson explains how the stunning

In 1922, when my father was fifteen, he kept a diary about his life on the farm. As I now read these fading pages, it is impossible to comprehend the distance separating his childhood from our time. He tells of rising before dawn to tend the livestock before walking three miles to school and then returning to labor behind a horse-drawn plow until ten at night.

the subject and the object" (44). The purpose of religion, especially its rituals, is to recover lost unity:

Man is the being that has lost, and even rejected, that which he obscurely is, a vague intimacy. Consciousness could not have become clear in the course of time if it had not turned away from its awkward contents, but clear consciousness is itself looking for what it has itself lost, and what it must lose again as it draws near to it. Of course what it has lost is not outside it; consciousness turns away from the obscure intimacy of consciousness itself. Religion, whose essence is the search for lost intimacy, comes down to the effort of clear consciousness which wants to be a complete self-consciousness: but this effort is futile, since consciousness of intimacy is possible only at a level where consciousness is no longer an operation whose outcome implies duration, that is, at a level where clarity, which is the

hexagonal structure of the hive is the result of a delicate balance of antagonistic forces: “M. Willem describes vividly how each cell begins as a little hemispherical basin or ‘curvette,’ how laying on the wax roughly like the mud when a swallow builds; how presently they [i.e., bees] concentrate their toil, each burying its head in its own curvette, and slowly scraping, smoothing and ramming home; how those on the other side gradually adjust themselves to their opposite neighbors; and how the rounded ends of the cells fashion themselves into rhomboidal pyramids, ‘following the progressive thinning of the common divisions and the pressures exercised on the two faces of these divisions.’”¹⁰ In a manner reminiscent of Wright’s Guggenheim Museum, where Barney stages his drama, the hive is an architectural representation of the unity for which he is searching.

Two additional representations of bees and honey are critical for Barney’s work: Masonic imagery, which forms the core of the central third act in the cycle, and Beuys’s drawings and sculptures, which, we have seen, are inseparably related to *Cremaster*. In the lecture “The Symbolism of the Beehive and the Bee,” delivered at the Mill Valley Masonic Lodge in 2000, Thomas Worrel points out that the beehive is “the hieroglyphic emblem” given to the candidate when he rises to the Third Degree. For Masons the hive symbolizes the ideal social relations within the lodge. Citing a Masonic textbook, Worrel explains: “The Bee Hive is an emblem of industry, and recommends the practice of that

Though the entire diary is fascinating, an entry in which my father interrupts the recording of his daily routine to comment on something troubling him remains most memorable. After tending cattle, hogs, and chickens for years, he reflects, they become friends—almost part of the family. It is very difficult to see them slaughtered and to know that they soon will be on the dinner table. But, he concludes, “I guess that’s the way it has to be.”

effect of the operation, is any longer given. (57)

This is an extremely important text that bears careful consideration. In contrast to religious traditions in which God is an alien other, Bataille regards the sacred as a lost intimacy that is neither precisely immanent nor transcendent. The sacred is not outside consciousness, nor is it inside consciousness; rather, the sacred is inside as an outside that consciousness can neither comprehend nor avoid. This haunting incomprehensibility creates inescapable apprehension. In a manner reminiscent of Dionysus and his follower Pan, the sacred is fraught with ambiguity and provokes an ambivalence that prompts panic. “What is sacred attracts and possesses an incomparable value, but at the same time it appears dangerous for that clear and profane world where mankind situates its privileged domain” (36). “The danger of the sacred is the possibility that its immanent immensity, where there are neither separa-

virtue to all created beings, from the highest seraph in heaven to the lowest reptile in the dust. It teaches us that we come into the world rational and intelligent beings, so we should ever be industrious ones; never sitting down content while our fellow creatures around us are in want, especially when it is in our power to relieve them without inconvenience to ourselves.”¹¹ Barney’s use of bees in part 2 anticipates the role of Masonry in part 3.

While Beuys also uses bees and the hive to depict the social harmony that is the goal of his social sculpture, he is equally interested in the spiritual significance of bees and artistic possibilities of honey. Bees, beeswax, and honey figure prominently in his suite of drawings titled *The Physiology of Bees* and in the wood and wax sculpture called *Queen Bee III*. In *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* Beuys covers his head with honey, and in *Honey Pump* he uses two tons of honey and two hundred pounds of margarine. A latter-day version of the alchemists’ magic substance, honey is liquid gold, which both represents and promotes personal transformation. Beuys derived the most important aspects of his interpretation of the spiritual significance of honey from Steiner’s 1923 lecture on bees. In terms that are similar to Houdini’s description of the transformation of his body when undergoing a physical trial, Steiner describes the sacrality of bees and the importance of beeswax:

The bees were held in the oldest times to be sacred animals. Why? They were held to be sacred animals because they actually showed, in their whole work, just what happens in Man himself. When one receives a small piece of beeswax, he actually has a middle product between blood, muscles and bones. It inwardly goes into man through the wax-stage. The wad in this way does not yet become firm, but remains fluid until it can be led over into the blood, muscles or bone cells. Thus one actually has in wax that which one has in himself, considered as powers or energies. When people in ancient times made beeswax crosses, and

tions nor limits,” will dissolve all distinctions and thereby overwhelm the individual (42). Religious ritual grows out of the simultaneous desire and dread harbored by the prospect of losing oneself.

The loss of self-conscious subjectivity would be the loss of our very humanity. The dilemma we face is how to experience the intimacy of the sacred without actually losing our humanity. Just as art allows us to apprehend Dionysus through the masks of Apollo, so religious ritual enables us to experience the “prodigious effervescence” of the sacred without forsaking what makes us human. In this way the ritual creates the possibility of experiencing the inexperienceable. Within the general economy of Bataille’s resolutely unsystematic philosophy, the most important ritual is human and animal blood sacrifice. In a chapter entitled “The Individual, Anguish and Sacrifice” he writes: “Paradoxically, intimacy is violence, and it is destruction, because it is not compatible with the positing of the separate individual.

then lit them, they thus actually saw in them a totally holy action: this wax which was burning there, we had gotten it from the beehive. It became solid there. When the fire melts this wax and evaporates it, then the wax comes to the same condition which it is in their own bodies. [This act] led them to look upon bees as especially sacred animals because they prepared something which man must also continually prepare in himself.¹²

The alterations of beeswax, like the transmutations of sculptural materials, represent the spiritual metamorphosis that is the ultimate work of art for Barney, as well as for Beuys. “The heat of the bee-colony,” Beuys explains, is, “without a doubt, the essential element in the connection between the wax and the fat and the bees. What had interested me about bees, or rather about their life-system, is the total heat organization of such an organism, and the plastic complete forms within this organization. On the one hand, bees have this element of heat, which is a very strong fluid element and, on the other hand, they produce crystalline structures; they make regular geometric forms. Here we also find something of my Theory of Sculpture, as we do in [my] corners of fat, which

Many years later—I forget exactly how long—the ritual slaughter was reenacted on the farm of one of my father’s sisters. We were visiting with other family members to celebrate the new year and to help slaughter a steer. Having been insulated from such rituals by cel-lophane and supermarkets, I had no idea what to expect. As the patriarch of the clan, my grandfather had the honor of killing the steer. While others held the steer’s head by the horns, my grandfather approached the animal with a pistol and shot him behind his left ear. This stunned the steer and allowed his heart to keep pumping blood for a few minutes before he died. As soon as the steer dropped, others hoisted his back feet into the air and slit his jugular vein to let the blood drain from his body. The rest of the afternoon was devoted to butchering the carcass.

If one describes the individual in the operation of sacrifice, he is defined by anguish. But if sacrifice is distressing, the reason is that the individual takes part in it. The individual identifies with the victim in the sudden movement that restores it to immanence (to intimacy), but the assimilation that is linked to the return to immanence is nonetheless based on the fact that the victim is just the thing, just as the sacrificer is the individual” (51). Blood sacrifice offers vicarious satisfaction for those who participate in the ritual. Since death shatters discontinuity and returns the sacrificial victim to lost continuity, it is possible to approximate the experience of intimacy through identification with the victim. Bataille’s ritual stages Nietzsche’s tragedy by enacting the double gesture of approaching withdrawal. Through the ritual one approaches what can only be apprehended as withdrawing and that which forever withdraws approaches without ever arriving. The trace of the inexperiencable is blood, which oozes and flows like goo.

also appear in a geometric context in certain situations. But the actual character of the existing heat is a fluid initial element, whereby the fat is affected by the heat and thus flows off. From this undefined element of motion, by way of a diminishing element of movement, there surfaces a form that appears in abstract, geometric configurations. This is practiced regularly by bees.”¹³ Beeswax embodies the tension between formlessness and form that lies at the heart of both Beuys’s and Barney’s art. Never totally firm or completely fixed, beeswax always threatens to lose its shape. When the temperature rises just a few degrees, it melts and flows like honey. This process is not merely destructive because it makes the creation of new forms possible.

From flowing ice and stones in glaciers to melting ice in the exposition hall, everything that appears to be fixed is actually flowing. Whatever stability there seems to be is but a momentary eddy in currents that cannot be stopped. Neither this nor that, all of these flows figure the unfigurable “stuff” that is always in-formation.

There is a final dimension of the spiritual significance of bees in *Cremaster 2* that is not immediately apparent and plays no role in Beuys’s work. In the last scene of the second act Fay taunts Houdini and, by extension, Gilmore, by calling him a drone: “Would this drone wish to end his life as a drone?” Wary of Houdini’s intentions, Fay expresses concern that he might want to displace her from the position of queen. The relation between Fay and Houdini points to one of the most unusual features

As we chatted while others tended the steer, my grandfather retold a family story I had heard often. His brother, who had died years ago, had anemia. Whenever a steer was slaughtered, he would catch the blood in a glass and drink it to restore his own diminished supply. Not even cleaning game had prepared me for the blood of this ritual.

Having appropriated Nietzsche’s account of tragedy to develop a theory of religion, Bataille proceeds to use his understanding of religion to interpret art. By soliciting the return of the repressed underside of orthodox modernism, he elaborates a notion of art that prepares the way for much post-modern theory and practice. One of the central categories in this critical reassessment is *informe*, which usually is mistranslated “formless.”^h In his brief entry for the “critical dictionary,” originally published in *Documents*, Bataille comes as close as ever to defining *informe*:

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *informe* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider

of honeybees: the sexual economy of the hive. All the bees in a hive descend from the queen. Female bees, which become workers, are produced when the queen mates with a male. A few females are fed a substance, known as *royal jelly*, which enables them to become queens and start hives of their own. Male bees, some of which are drones who have no stinger, do no work and make no honey, are produced from the queen's unfertilized eggs. Thus, while females have two parents, males have a mother but no father. When the family tree of a male honeybee is charted, one discovers what is known as the Fibonacci sequence.¹⁴ The male honeybee has one parent (a female), two grandparents (his mother had two parents), and three great grandparents (his grandmother had two parents but his grandfather only one). As the series is extended, it reveals a recursive sequence that obeys the rule according to which the next number is determined by adding the preceding two:

$$F(1) = 1$$

$$F(2) = 1$$

$$F(n) = F(n-1) + F(n-2)$$

The result is 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 . . . When diagrammed, this series looks something like a goalpost or perhaps even a Y whose midpoint marks the transition where one becomes two and two become one (Fig. 3.7).

This seemingly simple sequence can be discerned in a remarkable array of natural and aesthetic phenomena ranging from the chambered nautilus and seed distribution in a cactus to Hindu, Egyptian, and Greek temples. The ancient

Around mid-afternoon my grandfather got up from his chair but stumbled slightly. When others caught him and helped him to sit down again, he was confused, and his speech was slurred.

or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *informe* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.¹

A universe that resembles nothing and is only *informe* . . . The nothing Bataille's universe resembles is not emptiness, absence, or void; rather, it is no thing—nothing defined, determinate, differentiated. This no-thing is not precisely formless; *neither form nor* formless, the in-form(e) is always betwixt and between because it is forever in formation. It slips, slides, flows, and oozes. In contrast to the pure forms of idealism and abstraction, inform(e)s are impure: spit, shit, sperm, piss, vomit, tears, blood, fat, honey, Vaseline, goo. Bataille designates such stuff

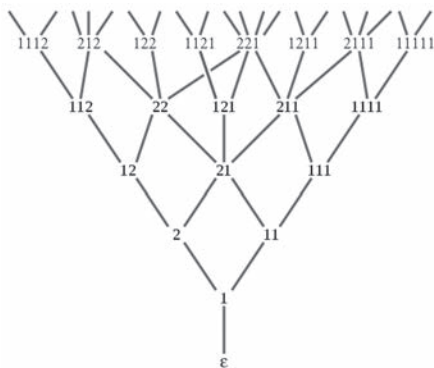


Figure 3.7 Fibonacci Sequence

Greeks already knew the sequence and used it to determine the ratio for what they described as the Golden Mean or Golden Section, which they regarded as “the most pleasing, indeed the aesthetically perfect proportion.” Virtually all their artwork, sculpture and architecture used this ratio.¹⁵ In the chapter “Proportion and the Golden Section,” in his fascinating book *Sacred Geometry*, Robert Lawlor explains:

Many philosophers speak of reaching a state of consciousness in which one is constantly aware of

The local doctor was summoned and said that he had suffered a stroke and should be taken to the hospital immediately. In the following weeks his condition improved; he recovered all of his physical capacities, but his short-term memory was impaired for the rest of his life. As the festive atmosphere turned somber, questions crowded my mind. Was it a coincidence that grandpa suffered a stroke right after slaughtering the steer? Does blood sacrifice involve a restricted or a general economy?*

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* See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988, 1991); and Jacques Derrida, “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 251–77.

“matter” and describes his philosophical position as “base materialism.” It is impossible to locate this matter and the materialism it entails on the grid of traditional philosophy. “Matter,” Bataille explains, “can only be defined as the *non-logical difference* that represents in relation to the *economy* of the universe what *crime* represents in relation to the law.”ⁱ This matter is nonlogical because it eludes the principle of non-contradiction that defines traditional logic. When understood in this way, matter can be neither comprehended by reason nor articulated in language. Like the indifference point, it is inexpressible yet not completely inapprehensible. Never clean (*propre*) or proper (*propre*), matter is always scatological, and bodies, which are necessarily material, are unavoidably grotesque. Instead of a closed system, the body is a tube open at both ends that can best be (dis)figured with in-form(e)s. Bataille labels the body that lies beyond language “a strange or foreign body (*das ganz Anderes*).”^k Analyzing the writings of Rabelais, Bakhtin offers what is, in

this integration and attunement between the apparent external vibratory field and the inner field of perception. This mode of perceptual awareness, which we find comparable to a three-term continuous proportion, was referred to by Sri Aurobindo as “knowledge by identity,” and regarded as an important stage in the process of spiritual development: while acknowledging an external source of experience we recognize that it is in a continual flow of relationship with our internal faculties of perception and cognition, and it is this relationship, not the external object itself, that we are experiencing. The objective world then is interdependent with the entire physical, mental and psychological condition of the perceiving individual, and consequently will be altered by changes in his inward totality of our inner space, thus fusing together the contemplation of self and world.¹⁶

Beekeeping . . . hunting . . . slaughter. I have long suspected that they are related but have never been sure exactly how. Now I am beginning to think that they might intersect in Θ .

It is hard to imagine a more apt description of the equilibrium for which Barney is searching. What makes the Fibonacci sequence in the genealogy of male honeybees all the more intriguing is that the Greeks designated the Golden Mean with the letter *phi*, which is symbolized Φ . With this insight we are able to conclude that it is possible to figure Θ , by rotating Φ 90°: $\Phi = \Theta$.

FORGERY

Though completed last (2002), *Cremaster 3* forms the structural and thematic center of the cycle. Through subtle use of figurative allusions and narrative references, act 3 draws together the work’s past and future in a midpoint that

effect, a concise description of the contours of Bataille’s *corps étranger*:

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, complete unity; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, and transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters and the body emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on the various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.¹

This is the body Barney performs in *The Cremaster Cycle*. By marking and remarking the intersection of religion, philosophy, and art, he figures the unfigurable that is neither inside nor outside language and form.

leaves things unresolved. It begins with an explicit transition from the story of Gary Gilmore and Baby Fay La Foe and ends with a transition to the Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea, where act 4 takes place. In between, the action unfolds in locations as distant as the Isle of Staffa, the Chrysler Building, and the Saratoga Racetrack. Thematically, *Cremaster 3* recasts Barney's quest by weaving together Celtic mythology and Masonic legend and ritual.¹⁷

As we have come to suspect from our consideration of the Fibonacci sequence in the reproduction of bees, numerology is very important in Barney's cosmogonic mythology. From the time of the ancient Greeks, the number 5, called the Pentad, has been deemed sacred. Indeed, it is associated with nothing less than the generation and regeneration of life. Michael Schneider explains:

Geometrically, the Pentad is born through the *vesica piscis* as the pentagon and pentagram (five-pointed) star, as whirling spirals, and as the three-dimensional dodecahedron, the fifth of the five Platonic volumes having twelve pentagonal faces. This last form has been known to philosophers as the *Quintessence* ("fifth being") of nature, encompassing and infusing the four elements—solids, liquids, gases, and . . . fire—with the life they cannot create by themselves alone. Pentagonal symmetry is the supreme symbol of life. Many living forms, plant, animal, and human, display the clear geometry of the Pentad in their structure. The four elements supply the materials of their configuration, but the Pentad carries the flag of life.¹⁸

Pentagonal figures abound in *Cremaster 3*: the Chrysler logo, starting flag, skylight, platform shoes, carved potatoes, elevator button, five stages of ascent, five-point Masonic fellowship, and so on. No less important is the *structural* significance of fiveness. The center of the overall five-part cycle itself has five parts. In the midpoint of the midpoint (part 3 of part 3), entitled "The Order,"

Cremaster is *l'art blanc* that bars the 0° it nonetheless inscribes. At this point, in this point, life becomes a work of art—in-different, in-finite, in-form(e).

Barney stages narratives overlapping both *Cremaster 3* and the whole cycle as a reenactment of the Masonic ritual of initiation in the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum. As the drama unfolds, the narrative begins to resemble nesting Russian dolls. In mathematical terms the structure of *The Cremaster Cycle* is *fractal*. In fractal structures the iteration of self-similar parts produces a whole that has the same structure as its constituents. Fractal structures, like the Fibonacci sequence and the Pentad, are self-generating:

At first glance we see a chain of numbers. But look beyond the visible numbers to the self-accumulating process by which they grow. The series grows by accruing terms that come from *within* itself, from its immediate past, taking nothing from outside the sequence for its growth. Each term may be traced back to its beginning as unity in the Monad, which itself arose from the incomprehensible mystery of zero.

This principle of ongoing growth-from-within is the essence of the Pentad's principle of generation and the pulsing rhythms of natural growth and dissolution. It appears in plants, music, seashells, spiral galaxies, the human body, and everything associated with the fiveness in nature.¹⁹

Unity in the Monad, we have discovered, is not only the Alpha and Omega of Barney's art but is also the origin of *philosophia perennis*, as well as the goal of the spiritual striving at the heart of the Celtic mythology that is so important for both Beuys and Barney and, as we will see, for Andy Goldsworthy. Though not immediately evident, this spiritual tradition traces its roots to yet more ancient myths and rituals associated with metallurgy.

Artistic creation is forgery that displaces the divine prototype on which it is modeled. We have already seen that the bonds between art and alchemy run deep, but it is less often recognized that alchemy grows out of myths and rituals

related to the forge and the smith. Barney places his work within this trajectory by tracing its genealogy directly to Serra and indirectly to Beuys. Throughout act 3 Barney struggles with Serra, the master architect of the Chrysler Building, who represents the legendary Masonic figure known as Hiram Abiff. Serra subtly invokes Beuys's presence with his fedora, which, for Beuys, was the magical hat that bestowed shamanistic powers. In countless traditions throughout the world, the smith and the shaman are the ones whose power comes from their mastery of fire. Beuys's fat and honey and Serra's molten lead meet in Barney's gooey Vaseline.

To appreciate the interrelation of these three major sculptors and, by extension, to understand *Cremaster 3*, it is necessary to consider the spiritual significance of mining and metallurgy. In his definitive book *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, Mircea Eliade points out that metallurgy traces its beginnings on an industrial scale to 1200–1000 BCE in Armenia.²⁰ In the following centuries the secret of smelting spread throughout the Near East, the Mediterranean, and central Europe. Derived either from the heavens (in meteorites), associated with male gods, or from the depths of the earth, associated with female goddesses, iron was regarded as a sacred substance and frequently was used to create religious objects. As the intermediary between these two realms, the smith was an ambiguous figure, whose activities involve a new notion of creation and thus of creativity. Rather than creation *ex nihilo*, the myths associated with metallurgy interpret creation as a process of forging form from formlessness. Inasmuch as the emergence of form involves a process of birth, anthropogenesis is a (ritual) repetition of cosmogenesis. Introducing his study, Eliade explains:

We shall present a series of documents concerning the ritual function of the smith and the links existing between the “magical” mastery of fire, the smith

and the secret societies. . . . When we come to consider mining and metallurgy, we find ourselves confronted with specific concepts relating to the earth as mother, to the sexualization of the mineral world and its tools, and to the interrelationship of metallurgy, gynaecology and obstetrics. We shall start by explaining certain of these concepts in order to better understand the world of the metallurgist and the smith. We shall discover, bound up with the myths on the origins of metals, mythico-ritual complexes embracing the notion of genesis by means of the sacrifice or self-sacrifice of a god; the connections between the agricultural mystique, metallurgy and alchemy; and, finally, the ideas of natural growth, forced growth and “perfection.”²¹

Within this cosmogony the earth is the “chthonian cavern-matrix” where ores are gestating embryos. The smith assists in birth by speeding up the maturation process through an increase of heat. The forge is, in effect, the womb and the smith the attending obstetrician. “Still charged with this dread of holiness, the ores are conveyed to the furnace. It is then that the most difficult and hazardous operations begin. The artisan takes the place of the Earth-Mother and it is his task to accelerate and perfect the growth of the ore. The furnaces are, as it were, a new matrix, an artificial uterus where the ore completes its gestation. Hence the infinite number of precautions, taboos and ritual acts that accompany smelting.”²² The tools of the trade—bellows, hammer, and anvil—are sacred and the construction of the furnace is shrouded in a secret ritual. The smith is “the master of fire” who, like a primitive or Platonic demiurge, brings form out of formlessness. To prepare for their participation in this creative process, miners engaged in ritual fasting, sexual abstinence, prayer, meditation, and purification as late as the end of the Middle Ages. In many myths the act of creation presupposes a ritual sacrifice of a god, a demigod, or a human representative of the divine:

It is important to grasp the significance of the novelty represented by the idea that creation is effected by immolation or self-immolation. Previous mythologies know only of a creation *ex nihilo* or from some primordial substance fashioned by God. The making of the blood sacrifice into a condition of creation—cosmogony as well as anthropogeny—reinforces not only the homologies between man and the cosmos (for the universe itself derives from a primordial giant—Macanthrope), but also introduces the idea that life can only be engendered from another life that has been immolated. These kinds of cosmogony and anthropogeny will have considerable consequences; the state will be reached where creation or fabrication will be inconceivable without previous sacrifice. During building rites, for example, the “life” or “soul” of the victim is transferred into the building itself; the building becomes the new body, structurally speaking, of the sacrificed victim.²³

In *Cremaster 3* “the Chrysler Building,” as Spector explains, “becomes an organism, host to inner, antagonistic forces at play for control of and access to the process of (spiritual) transcendence.”²⁴ As the representative of Hiram Abiff, Serra is the sacrificial victim destined to die.

Cremaster 3 opens with a shot of the Irish Sea between the Isle of Man and the Isle of Staffa. In a manner reminiscent of the aerial vistas of icebergs in the rivers of the Canadian Rockies at the end of *Cremaster 2*, islands emerge from the formless sea like massive sculptural works slowly taking shape. As the camera zooms in, the cliffs of the isle appear to have been deliberately carved like an abstract work of art. Long, parallel basalt columns have been sculpted into hexagonal shapes as precise as cells made of beeswax. At the edge of the water the Giant’s Causeway is formed by columns whose tops look like tiles in a work by Carl Andre. According to Celtic legend, this causeway was created when the Irish giant Finn MacCool challenged the Scottish giant Fingal to a fight. When

Oonagh, MacCool's wife, realizes that the Scottish giant is much larger than her husband, she persuades him to dress as a baby and hide in their sod hut in an effort to deceive Fingal. Having discovered that the source of Fingal's power is a brass finger, Oonagh devises a plan to render him impotent. She bakes loaves of bread, shaped like the fat in *Stuhle mit Fett*, as well as plastic wedges used to secure the motorcycles in *Cremaster 4*, and places a cast-iron frying pan in their middle to break Fingal's teeth. While his wife prepares the loaves, MacCool, dressed like a baby, lies in a bassinet playing with white balls that look like pearls or eggs.²⁵ The preamble closes with the Scottish giant pounding on the door of the subterranean hut. As if to underscore the religious dimension of athletic endeavor, the transition between scenes 1 and 2 is marked by a quotation attributed to both Vince Lombardi and Ignatius W. Cox, SJ: "Character is an integration of habits of conduct superimposed on temperament. It is the will exercised on disposition, thought, emotion, and action. Will is the character in action."

Scene 2 opens in an underground cavern even darker than MacCool's sod hut. Quietly stirring in the darkness, an obscure form gradually comes into focus and eventually appears to be a female corpse. It is as if Gary Gilmore reappears in the decaying body of a woman—perhaps Baby Fay?—struggling for revival. A quick crosscut presents a close-up of a hand using a Masonic trowel to fill the opening for the gas tank in the middle of a large pentagonal Chrysler logo (Fig. 3.8).

The underground cave is an ancient burial ground beneath the partially finished Chrysler Building. While it remains unclear whether this woman had been buried alive or is being resurrected, the dark chamber is both a tomb and a womb. Five men enter the cave and struggle to carry the disintegrating corpse/fetus through an elevator shaft into the building above. The shaft appears to be a vertical tunnel resembling a (re)birth canal with a light at the



FIGURE 3.8 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*

end of it. The body is carried into a dark marble lobby with elaborate art deco design. Diffuse light from windows high above gives the space the ambience of a Gothic cathedral. The male attendants place the abject body in the back of a 1930 Chrysler Imperial New Yorker. During this entire episode Barney, who appears as a Masonic Entered Apprentice, fills the fuel caps of five 1967 Chrysler Imperials with liquid stone (i.e., cement). The choice of material is significant. Modern architecture would have been impossible without cement. But the associations it harbors are considerably richer. Cement embodies metamorphic processes that point to the spiritual significance of architecture that lies at the heart of *Cremaster 3*. Cement brings together the heat of the forge and

architectural practice in a substance whose familiarity obscures its magical power. In his fascinating and provocative book, *My Cocaine Museum*, Michael Taussig writes:

Cement is intimately related to water. It needs water to harden. This seems counter-intuitive. The first-century Roman architect and builder Vitruvius understood stone as composed of four elements: air, earth, fire, and water. As a builder, he wanted a substance like stone but malleable. When you stop to think about it, this is something out of a fairy tale: *like stone but malleable*. Smashing up limestone into small particles and mixing them with sand was not good enough, for there was neither unification nor hardening. That could only come with intense heat, which left the stone porous: “The water and air, therefore, which are in the substance of the stones, being thus discharged and expelled, and the latent heat only remaining, upon being replenished with water, which repels the fire, they recover their vigor and the water entering the vacuities occasions a fermentation; the substance of the lime is thus refrigerated and the superabundant heat ejected.” I quote [Bogue] at length because this is such a vivid example of the ancient four-element theory of being that pre-occupied the pre-Socratic philosophers. It is vivid in that it makes stone seem alive and capable of amazing metamorphoses once they have been processed by man, pulverized to a powder and heated. You start with stone. You make a powder. And then in the process of building, you add water and end up with a

For as long as I can remember, our family Bible was the Bible my father was given when he became a 32° Mason. Like many men of his generation, he had become a Mason when he was young but drifted away from the organization as he grew older. He would occasionally attend a lodge meeting, but that was the extent of it. The more I have studied his Bible, the stranger it has become, and the more questions it has raised about this closed chapter in my father’s life. The first page of the book bears the image of King

new form of “stone” in accord with the shape desired. It sounds like magic but we call it technology.²⁶

Concrete, then, is the primal matter (i.e., the *Ur-Stoff*) with which the architect, like Plato’s demiurge, concretizes forms.

As the apprentice is working with cement, the disinterment scene draws to a close, and *Cremaster 3* scrolls vertically across the screen, followed by the Masonic emblem superimposed on the *Cremaster* logo against the green and orange of the Irish flag. The flag is emblematic of the binary opposites that run throughout the cycle: depth/height, lower/upper, underground/aboveground, dark/light, female/male, horizontal/vertical, water/stone, formless/form, green (Catholic) / orange (Protestant).

The year is 1930; “prohibition was still the law; organized crime—the Syndicate—had infiltrated organized labor in Manhattan; there were some 260 Masonic lodges in the city, forty-seven thousand Irish immigrants had settled since 1925.”²⁷ The construction of the Chrysler Building is the stage for the rite of initiation acted out in the tension between Barney, the Entered Apprentice, and Serra, the architect. While the Oedipal dimensions of this relation are not inconsequential, the Masonic pattern of the drama is considerably more important. The Chrysler Building is, in effect, the Lodge, which for the Masons symbolizes the stages through which the initiate must pass to achieve redemption. The way to redemption passes through death and rebirth; in the words of Saint Paul, one must “put off the old man” through death so that it

Solomon standing before the temple altar with arms extended to the heavens. On the back of the title page, the following words appear: “The Holy Bible/Freemasonry’s Faith, Strength and Hope.” After the list of the books of the Bible, there are five pages

is possible to “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:9–10). In Masonic symbolism the building, as Eliade has explained, “becomes the new body, structurally speaking, of the sacrificed victim,” who in this case is the apprentice as well as the architect. While traditionally associated with medieval guilds, Masonry is a sacramental system extending back through Rosicrucianism to the occult tradition that grows out of alchemy and ultimately metallurgy. According to this salvific scheme, God is the Great Architect who designs the universe and secures its purpose. “The very essence of the Masonic doctrine,” according to W. L. Wilmshurst,

devoted to “Biblical References of Especial Interest to Freemasons.” Among the most important passages for the Masons are those devoted to Hiram, who, according to Masonic legend, became the architect of Solomon’s temple.

is that all men in this world are in search of something in their own nature that they have lost, but that with proper instruction and by their own patience and industry they may hope to find. Its philosophy implies that the temporal world is the antipodes [*sic*] of another and more real world from which we originally came and to which we may accelerate our return by such a course of self-knowledge and self-discipline as our teaching inculcates. It implies that this present world is the place where the symbolic stones and timber are being prepared “so far off” from that mystical Jerusalem where one day they will be found put together and, collectively, to constitute that Temple that even now is being built without hands and without noise or help of metal tools.²⁸

The candidate passes through three stages or degrees in the process of rebirth. The First Degree consists of the self-discipline and purification necessary

for the transition from material to spiritual life. Severe tests of discipline and constraint are required before the neophyte is permitted to move to the next stage. The Second Degree, Fellowcraft, involves contemplation and enlightenment, which are the fruits of purification. Through mental discipline, the candidate “acquires complete control over his passions and his lower physical nature.” If one is to realize the spark of God immanent within himself, it is necessary to “crucify his lower nature and inclinations.” The Third Degree is culmination of the actual experience of self-transformation. As Wilmshurst explains, “If you follow closely the raising ceremony, although distinct reference to the death of the body is made, yet such death is obviously intended to be merely symbolical of another kind of death, since the candidate is eventually restored to his former worldly circumstances and material comforts and his earthly Masonic career is not represented as coming to a close at this stage. All that has happened in the third degree is that he has symbolically passed through a great and striking change: a rebirth, or regeneration of his whole nature.”²⁹ The architecture of the lodge represents the spiritual trajectory of the candidate. As one moves from west to east, he progresses from the material to the spiritual world and, thus, advances from Entered Apprentice to Master Mason. At the completion of the Third Degree the candidate

In the later years of his life my father mentioned several times to my brother and me that when he died, he wanted the Masons to perform their burial ritual for him. This seemed odd to us because Masonry had not been an important part of his life for many years. We pressed him for his reasons, but he refused to explain and simply said: “That’s the way I want it.” When he died, we honored his request and called the local lodge. They said a team of “brothers” would be there the day of the funeral. Again following my father’s wishes, we limited the funeral service to our family. When we met to gather around his

is given a beehive, which, we have seen, is the “hieroglyphic emblem” of the wisdom he has gained through his ordeal.

The prototype for the candidate’s experience is Hiram Abiff, who was the master architect of Solomon’s Temple and is reputed to have known the secret name of God, as well as the mysteries of the cosmos.³⁰ According to Masonic lore, Hiram was killed by three apprentice stonemasons because he refused to reveal God’s hidden name. “When the body was found, King Solomon disinterred it, using the grip of a Master Mason, which incorporates the Five Points of Fellowship: foot is placed to foot, knee to knee, breast to breast, hand to back and mouth to ear. So embraced, Hiram Abiff came back to life and whispered the phrase ‘*Maha byn*,’ an untranslatable term that stands as a Surrogate for the divine knowledge lost at Abiff’s death.”³¹ The experience of Hiram is the prototype for the Masonic candidate. By imitating Hiram Abiff, the apprentice is imitating the imitation of Christ.

As the representative of Hiram Abiff, Serra is the master architect whose sacrifice the Entered Apprentice symbolically reenacts by slaying his lower nature. The dark underground from which the grotesque corpse emerges and the celestial heights toward which the Chrysler Building reaches signify the poles between which the struggle between the Entered Apprentice/Barney and the

open casket at the funeral home, his “brothers” were already there. Their presence seemed an invasion of our privacy just when we needed it most. Before our service began, the Masons conducted their ritual behind closed doors. While we waited outside, we could hear them mumbling but could not understand their words. When they finally emerged, the white lambskin Masonic apron was on my father’s body. The brothers disappeared, and we began our own ritual. But a disruption had occurred, and my father took that disruption with him to his grave.

master architect/Serra transpires. As soon as the corpse is securely placed in the luxury Chrysler, invisible drivers of the five Chrysler Crown Imperials circle the wagons and begin what can only be described as a chaotic demolition derby in which they crush the Imperial New Yorker and its passenger into a tiny ball that can be held in the palm of the hand.

While this fiasco is unfolding, the apprentice enters the elevator shaft and climbs to the top of a cab. Reaching inside the cab, he sets off the sprinkler with a lighted cigarette. These gestures simultaneously recall and anticipate Serra's famous *Splashing* (1968) and *Casting* (1969), in which the artist flung liquid lead from a ladle into the corner where wall and floor met. In a manner similar to Beuys's use of fat in *Tallow*, the apprentice mixes water and cement and fills the elevator cab with liquid stone to create what in the context of Masonic ritual is known as an *ashlar*. An ashlar is a carefully carved stone masons used in the construction of medieval monuments. "In Freemasonry, the ashlar is one of the most important symbols encountered during the rituals of the First Degree. An Entered Apprentice is taught that 'by the rough ashlar we are reminded of our rude and imperfect state by nature, by the perfect ashlar, of that state of perfection at which we hope to arrive.' In some Masonic lodges, newly initiated Apprentices are asked to chisel a piece of rough ashlar to signify their readiness to learn the ways of

In the years following his death I studied the history of the Masons. The more I read, the more intrigued I became. The roots of Masonry are not merely biblical but can be traced to ancient mysteries and the Western occult tradition, which goes back to age-old metallurgical and alchemical myths and rituals. Speculative Masonry, which emerged in the eighteenth century, is a spiritual practice in which rich symbols and elaborate allegories show the way from the corruption of the material world to the realm of pure light. The whiteness of the lambskin apron symbolizes the innocence that has been lost, as well as the purity awaiting the candidate.

the craft.”³² The effort to make a perfect ashlar by using the elevator as a cab as a mold for cement rather than carving stone by hand is a transgression of Masonic ritual that cannot go unpunished. The road to redemption inevitably passes through condemnation.

Barney’s Entered Apprentice receives his due when he and a mysterious woman visit Saratoga Racetrack, where ghostly drivers race with grotesque corpselike horses whose flesh is falling from their bones. Members of the Syndicate attack the apprentice with Masonic trowels bearing the insignia of justice and morality. As his mouth begins to bleed, the scene abruptly shifts back to the Chrysler Building, where the apprentice is held in what seems to be a dentist’s office. But the chair is ambiguous: it has stirrups raised like the inverted sculpture in the blimp in act 1 and the rhinestone saddle in act 2 and, thus, could be a chair used for gynecological rather than dental examinations. After securing the apprentice’s feet in the stirrups, and spreading his legs, one of the attendants raises a fleshy appendage similar to a Masonic apron to reveal the genital area. In place of the penis there is a strange appendage shaped like the splashing raindrop with which the entire cycle ends. As the apprentice is strapped in the chair, the architect interrupts his work on drawings of the building

More than a decade after my father’s death, I was going through a box of old photographs when I discovered a small booklet (copyrighted in 1909) that I had never before seen. My father had signed the title page and dated it 1944:

KING SOLOMON
and
His Followers
PENN
a valuable
AID TO THE MEMORY



Figure 3.9 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*

and descends to the dental/OBGYN office. He carries the small ball composed of the remains of the Imperial New Yorker and the grotesque corpse from the underworld. The architect forges the metal into dentures that he forces into the apprentice's mouth. As the operation is completed, white teeth covered with bodily fluids slip from the apprentice's anus and slowly melt into a porcelain rod shaped like the missing phallus (Fig. 3.9).

This complex scene—I have omitted many fascinating details—can be interpreted in many ways. On the most obvious level the ordeal represents the apprentice’s completion of the Second Degree and, thus, his progress in freeing himself from his “lower” nature. But it is also important to recall that the remains of the reviving corpse of a woman, who might have been a transfigured man, were in the compressed metal ball. The ball, then, becomes something like a communion wafer, and the ritual designed to atone for the apprentice’s transgression is an extension of the blood sacrifice enacted on the Utah salt flats and soon to be reenacted in the Chrysler Building.

Take eat

This is my body broken for you.

At this point the narrative is interrupted by “The Order,” which, as I have noted, restages both *Cremaster 3* and the whole cycle in the form of an athletic contest modeled on the Masonic initiation ritual. In a manner reminiscent of the opening of the third act, “The Order” begins with forms emerging from formless water. Scantly clad women climb out of the water—filled with suds (soap, not beer, this time)—in the nearly elliptical pool on the ground level of the Guggenheim. The ordeal requires the apprentice to pass through five stages of ascent by scaling the oval wall of the rotunda. Every detail is calculated to recall or anticipate other

Although the text is entirely in code, an appended note summarizes the content of the pamphlet. “This is the general title of a series of complete **Instructions** for Blue Lodges, for the use of officers and all who are ambitious to become bright workers. They contain the Opening Work Lectures and Closing, **in the Degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason**; thus embracing everything in its regular order as worked in each degree except the **essential secrets**; the whole given by a system intelligible only to the initiated, but easily understood by them.” The code,

parts of the cycle. Two characters and the incidents in which they are involved are important in this context: Richard Serra and a cheetah-woman. At the beginning of “The Order” Serra appears not as the architect but as himself, wearing a mask, goggles, and kneepads and holding a ladle for molten metal. Prepared to enter the furnace where he plies his craft, Serra seems to be an ancient smith who presides over a sacred forge. At the fifth level, or Fifth Degree, Serra returns and repeats his gesture of hurling a malleable substance against a plate propped on the wall. But this time, the material is liquid Vaseline rather than molten lead, and the plate is white plastic instead of cast iron. The gooey stuff slowly trickles along a plastic trough at the base of the wall along the museum’s ramp. The second incident involves a hybrid creature created when a voluptuous model morphs into a dangerous crossbreed. At level 3 the apprentice is captivated by a beautiful female model, who is not merely another person but also appears to be his own lost half for which he has been searching. As they embrace with the Masonic Five Points of Fellowship, the alluring model whispers in his ear, “*Maha byn.*” Whether this is a moment of harmony and union or a sign of its impossibility remains unclear. No sooner are the sacred words uttered than the model turns into a hybrid creature—half human and half animal—and immediately proceeds to attack the apprentice. Throughout the remainder of “The Order” the apprentice struggles with “lower” self in the form of the cheetah-woman until he finally slays her with his Masonic tools. Like Gilmore’s victim she falls to the museum floor, blood oozing from her head. With his lower self apparently under control, the apprentice ascends to the final stage of the contest. Or so it seems.

While “The Order” is unfolding, the Chrysler Building also undergoes a transformation. As the aspiring architect completes two columns, modeled on the twenty-seven-foot metal pillars Hiram Abiff is supposed to have built for Solomon’s temple, a mysterious mound slowly rises beneath a pentagonal

skylight. It seems as if the subterranean graveyard surfaces to create a burial mound fraught with spiritual significance. As the architect stands atop his creation, workers below dangle green and orange banners out of windows, which improbably ascend and wrap around the building's 180-foot phallic spire to form a fantastic Maypole.

In Celtic mythology the ritual of the Maypole celebrates Beltane, the last of three spring fertility rites. "Beltane, and its counterpart Samhain, divide the year into its two primary seasons, winter (Dark Part) and summer (Light Part). As Samhain is about honoring death, Beltane, its counterpart, is about honoring life. It is the time when the sun is fully released from the bondage of winter and able to rule over summer and life once again." According to legend, "Beltane, like Samhain, is a time of 'no time' when the veils between the two worlds are at their thinnest. No time is when the two worlds intermingle and unite and magic abounds. It is the time when the Faeries return from their winter respite, carefree and full of faerie mischief and delight." On the Isle of Man, the youngest family member "gathers primroses on the eve before Beltane and throws the flowers at the door of the home for protection."³³

the anonymous author proceeds to explain, had been made necessary by circulating counterfeits that were mistaken for real instructions for the candidates.

"For want of an authentic **instructor**, it is a well-known fact that members are using **the Open Exposés**, old and spurious works, published in New York and Chicago. As they are **highly erroneous** and sold to **the public at large**, as well as to the Fraternity, their use is corrupting the ritual and subverting the order. To correct this evil and meet the demand for a work of this nature that is both **accurate** and **legitimate**, these **Instructors** have been prepared." Though I pondered the text at considerable length, I could not crack the code. Of all the pages, it was the last that most interested me (Fig. 3.10).

The film cuts from the Maypole back to the Chrysler Building, where the apprentice, having escaped from the dental/OBGYN office, climbs to the top floor, where he encounters the architect and, in a reenactment of the slaying of Hiram Abiff, strikes a deadly blow to his head. The architect/Serra falls to the ground and, like Gilmore's victim and cheetah-woman, lies face down in a pool of his own blood. The apprentice's success, however, is his failure, for in killing the architect, he destroys himself. The architect's creation turns on the apprentice, and the metamorphic building drives a sharp spire through his skull. This bizarre episode symbolizes the futility of the apprentice/Barney's quest. Without the architect the completion of the building is deferred indefinitely. Inasmuch as the Chrysler Building, like the Masonic Lodge, is the image of the purified self the apprentice longs to become, its incompleteness suggests that he can never become a "new man."

Cremaster 3 ends where it began—in Finn MacCool's sod hut beside the

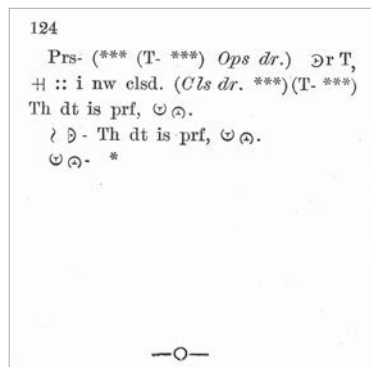


Figure 3.10 Masonic Code Book

How is this —○— to be read?

Irish Sea. Fingal enters the hut, where he discovers a large baby chewing a wax or plastic loaf. Surprised by the size of the “infant,” the Scottish giant frets about the size of his father. When Fingal bites into an egg-shaped loaf, he breaks his teeth, and his mouth begins to bleed. Taking advantage of this distraction, MacCool, disguised as the baby, bites off the brass finger that is the source of Fingal’s strength. Rendered impotent by this symbolic castration, Fingal flees, with MacCool in hot pursuit. As Fingal charges across the sea and destroys the causeway joining the isles, MacCool flings a discus-shaped stone toward him. The stone misses and sinks to the bottom of the sea, where it disintegrates and sets off an underwater volcanic eruption from which a form emerges shaped like the Isle of Man, where the next act takes place.

CYCLES WITHOUT CIRCLES

Cycles without circles are ellipses. An ellipse is an oval—like a racetrack for horses or motorcycles—rather than a perfect circle. Closer to 0 than to O. The word *ellipse* derives from the Greek *elleipsis*, which means a falling short, which, in turn, can be traced to *elleipein*, to leave behind or leave out. “When an ellipse is formed from a conic section the angle made by the base of the cone and the intersecting plane is less than, or ‘falls short of,’ the angle made by the intersecting plane which forms a parabola.”³⁴ In grammar, an ellipsis, is indicated by . . . , which “marks the omission of a word or words necessary for the complete syntactical construction of a sentence but not necessary for understanding it.” If . . . is transcribed as —, perhaps the 0 that falls short when something is left out can be written $\ominus$.

Cremaster 4 returns to the biological metaphor of ascending and descending testicles that Barney uses in earlier installments to probe the tensions between

the contending rhythms of nondifferentiation and differentiation. The film opens with a blank screen colored a pale Celtic green with bagpipe music playing in the background. At the end of a quarter-mile pier shaped like the *Cremaster* logo there is a pure white pavilion similar to a SoHo gallery. In the pavilion a satyrlike figure, named the Loughton Candidate, dressed in a white suit with bright red hair, is attended by three androgynous faeries that look like muscular football players (Figs. 3.11, 3.12).

The name and the form of the Loughton Candidate are significant. As students of Freemasonry have long pointed out, the word *candidate* derives from the Latin *candidatus*, which means clothed in a white toga. The Loughton sheep, which is indigenous to the Isle of Man, is distinguished by four curved horns, two bending downward and two bending upward (Fig. 3.13).

The shape of the horns is identical to the abstract metal form that was the emblem of the rodeo arena where Gary



Figure 3.11 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*



Figure 3.12 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4: Faerie Field*



Figure 3.13 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*

Gilmore and the Brahman bull died. Under his blood-red hair the Loughton Candidate has holes for two horns; the lower horns are represented by long, drooping ears that might well have been modeled on Beuys's 1949 drawing *Shaft*.³⁵ This is not the first time Barney has used a satyr figure. In *Dreaming Restraint 7* (1993) two satyrs frolic in the backseat of a limousine as it rushes through a tunnel toward Manhattan. For Barney, Pan, who originated in Arcadia and is god of shepherds, is associated with panic. According to popular etymology, *Pan* derives from the Greek *πᾶν*, which means all. "This etymology was later taken up by philosophers who saw in the god the embodiment of the Universe, the Totality."³⁶ In a 1995 interview Barney explains: "I was interested in the fact that 'Pan' is the root of 'panic.' It's because Pan leads you to Bacchus—he gives you the moment of unease before you let yourself go."³⁷ Bacchus's other name is, of course, Dionysus. No one ever placed greater emphasis on Dionysus as "the embodiment of the Universe, the Totality" than Nietzsche. The humming of Barney's bagpipes echoes Nietzsche's satyr chorus.³⁸

Images of the Loughton Candidate and faeries are juxtaposed with shots of two hacks (motorcycles with sidecars)—one yellow and one blue—and two drivers whose racing uniforms are color matched with their cycles. The drivers are preparing for a 33.5-mile race for the Tourist Trophy, which has been run on the Isle of Man since 1907. This distance is hardly accidental—it recalls the age of Jesus when he died. Setting off in opposite directions, the competing teams represent the complementary movements of ascent and descent whose aim is a stable balance. An aerial shot suggests the geological, biological, and artistic homologies with which Barney constantly plays. The lower part of the elliptical Isle of Man resembles a scrotum with two dangling testicles.

While the drivers race, the Loughton Candidate tap dances like the architect/Serra had in the previous act. The longer he dances, the thinner the pavilion

floor becomes until a hole opens and the candidate falls into the sea below. As he struggles underwater toward the shore, crosscuts show close-ups of the yellow and blue uniforms of the drivers. Each race jacket has four slits from which gelatinous balls slip. As the hacks speed along the bumpy road, two balls drift upward and two float downward, mimicking the movement of the testes controlled by the cremaster muscle. When the candidate eventually reaches the shore, he enters a low and narrow tunnel. In contrast to the dark-black underground cave beneath the Chrysler Building, the tunnel under the Isle of Man is light and white. Resembling both intestine and birth canal, the walls ooze sticky white goo that is as grotesque as the rotting material clinging to the reviving corpse of the woman. To get through the tight passageway, the candidate must slither on his stomach like a serpent. As he burrows toward the finish of the Tourist Trophy race, the passageway becomes narrower and the goo gets stickier until his elegant white suit is covered with the white waxy substance known as the *vernix caseosa* that protects the fetus as it moves through the birth canal (Fig. 3.14).

Aboveground, a Loughton Ram with yellow and blue ribbons around its horns stands alone in the middle of the road at the finish line of the race. Hearing engines roaring in the distance, the Loughton Candidate begins to dig through the top of the tunnel at the precise point where the competing hacks are to meet and to form the unity of opposites symbolized by fusion of yellow and blue in green, the color of renewal and rebirth. But just before the candidate breaks through, the sound goes silent and the camera pans from the coast to the sea and finally to the sky. Faint clouds gradually fade, leaving an empty screen that begins as a very pale green and slowly becomes white. At this point it is unclear whether the silence and whiteness represent the union of opposites or its impossibility. This question is quickly answered: in the end unity is



Figure 3.14 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*: Field of the Loughton Candidate

not achieved. The scene abruptly shifts back to the pier where *Cremaster 4* began. Behind the pavilion the yellow and blue hacks are carefully installed beside each other on a soft green structure shaped like a Y (Fig. 3.15).

Like everything else in *The Cremaster Cycle*, this sculpture is ambiguous. From one perspective it resembles a man's scrotum, but from another perspective it looks like a woman's spread legs exposing the opening of the birth canal. The conjunction of the three vectors of this Y can be read as either the point where one becomes two (descent/differentiation) or the point where two become one (ascent/nondifferentiation). There is, of course, a third possibility: in a manner reminiscent of the kabbalistic *zim zum*, this point might be both where one becomes two and two become one. If understood in this way, this point is a vanishing point that appears by disappearing, leaving in its wake the paired opposites that structure the cosmos.³⁹

Whether or not union is ever possible, Barney is finally forced to admit that division and differentiation are unavoidable. In the concluding sequence of *Cremaster 4* white curtains separate to reveal two testicles—one with a yellow ribbon and one with a blue ribbon—immersed in white spermlike goo. Forceps appear to draw the ribbons out of the gooey balls. In the final shot the hacks are framed by the Loughton Candidate's spread legs and crotch. In place of his scrotum there are long yellow and blue ribbons that look like streamers for a Maypole. Sitting on the edge of their bikes, the drivers are busy braiding the ribbons.⁴⁰

(E)SC(H)ATOLOGY

It's all about the goo: the way it looks, smells, feels—the way it oozes and seeps, jiggles and ripples, molds and melts, drips and splashes. During an era



Figure 3.15 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*

in which the material is becoming ever more immaterial, Barney makes art from the most unlikely materials: Vaseline petroleum jelly, paste, sperm, spit, foam—sea and beer, tapioca, self-lubricating plastic, beeswax, honey. . . . Some things stick, others slip. Sculptures—if that is what they are—supplement videos that overflow their bounds. Neither formed nor formless, works of art are

figurations of figuration itself. Never exactly proper, this body works at the edge of genres and genders it repeatedly transgresses.



For Barney's art to succeed, it must fail. Contrary to his intentions, he figures the very impossibility of the union his work is designed to realize. What Barney longs for, Poe dreads: "It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge—some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction."⁴¹ This is the knowledge, or nonknowledge, that breeds panic. If Dionysian wisdom were ever realized, art would be not only unnecessary but also impossible. Art, like life, presupposes the differentiation, difference, distinction—the articulation—that would be rendered absent by the presence of 0°. From one point of view the impossibility of complete union or perfect equilibrium renders life tragic. For this reason the birth of tragedy is the origin of art. From another point of view, however, the impossibility of complete union or perfect equilibrium makes life possible. Perfect equilibrium is entropic and, as the realization of complete union, marks the point at which *eros* and *thanatos* become One. Yet Barney and, indeed, perhaps all of us cannot give up the dream of this impossible possibility. This is what his art is all *about*. Barney's artistic dilemma is the same as the writer who attempts to write degree zero. Just as something beyond language can, paradoxically, only be articulated in language by writing against writing, so something beyond form can only be articulated in form by figuring through disfiguring. Disfiguring "represents" what lies beyond representation by articulating a withdrawal that opens the space of form(ation). This space or, more precisely, spacing is the pure interval that is the margin both joining and separating every pair and couple. Neither

formed nor formless, that which is disfigured is always information. Like goo, petroleum jelly, honey, beeswax, melting ice, flowing rocks, cement, molten lead, spit, sperm, and shit, Barney's art is in-form(e). Never fixed or stable, his art always shifts, slips, and slides and, thus, is always in-formation. Barney's disfigured figures are inevitably grotesque and inescapably scatological and, therefore, are unavoidably offensive. These in-form(e)s attract by their repulsion. Art, once again like life, emerges *between* form and formlessness, nondifferentiation and differentiation, identity and difference, and unity and plurality. Art and life are possible because these opposites never come into balance. In Barney's disfigured figures scatology marks the infinite deferral of eschatology. Art devised as a spiritual quest ends by staging the impossibility of the Kingdom toward which it is directed. *The Cremaster Cycle* does not come full circle but remains an ellipse that is, in effect, an ellipsis marking what has been lost but can never be recovered. The recognition of this impossibility and its performance in the work of art is what sets Barney's work apart from the naive New Age spirituality that characterizes so many great modern artists and lends his art the sober "realism" of a mature postmodern sensibility.

The success of Barney's work is its failure. If his quest were successful, art as well as life would end. The medium in which and with which we are destined to work is inescapably liminal. While the realization of the End would be the end, its infinite deferral creates the possibility for endless beginnings. Life is transformed into a work of art when it becomes a process of creative morphogenesis. This is only possible if O is impossible.

All of this and more—much more—is (dis)figured in the seemingly simple logo: ⊕.

4

CREATION OF THE WORLD

PRESUMABLY, THE MYSTERY THAT BECKONS IN WHAT IS TO BE THOUGHT IS NOTHING OTHER THAN ESSENTIALLY WHAT WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO SUGGEST IN THE NAME THE "LIGHTING."

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

THE IDEA THAT WE DO A LARGE PART OF FORMING OUR REALITY—THAT'S SOMETHING PEOPLE ARE NOT TOO AWARE OF. . . . WE ACTUALLY GIVE THE SKY ITS COLOR AS WELL AS ITS SHAPE. . . . IT'S WHAT'S BEHIND THE EYE THAT FORMS THIS REALITY WE CREATE. . . . WE LIKE TO THINK THAT THIS IS THE RATIONAL WORLD WE'RE RECEIVING THROUGH OUR SENSES, BUT THAT ISN'T THE WAY IT WORKS. WE FORM OUR REALITY. ALL THE WORK I DO IS GENTLE REMINDERS OF HOW WE DO THAT.

JAMES TURRELL

THE SONG RESOUNDS BACK FROM OUR CREATOR WITH JOY,
AND WE OF THE EARTH REPEAT IT TO OUR CREATOR.
AT THE APPEARING OF THE YELLOW LIGHT,
REPEATS AND REPEATS THE JOYFUL ECHO,
SOUNDS AND RESOUNDS FOR TIMES TO COME.

HOPI "SONG OF CREATION"

SEEING CREATION

To see seeing would be to be present at the creation of the world. The world, as ancient myths teach, did not begin once-and-for all at a moment in the distant past but is created every time dawning light dissipates darkness and order appears in the midst of chaos or, in a more contemporary idiom, wherever pattern emerges from noise. As I write these words, dawn is slowly breaking on the Berkshire Mountains outside my window. For more than two decades I have begun each day in silence, watching first light gradually dispel lingering darkness. The most remarkable moment in this daily ritual is the instant just before the sun's rays first touch the mountain, when all of creation hovers on the edge of emergence. In this time before time, reality remains virtual, and all things seem possible. But this instant never lasts—it passes in the blink of an eye. As soon as light falls on the mountaintop, it begins a gradual descent to the valley below. The patient eye can glimpse the sun's gradual movement in the steady with-

drawal of shadows. When appearance is disappearance, illumination does not illuminate but creates an obscurity more impenetrable than the darkness it displaces without eliminating. In the moment of creation pure light is indistinguishable from absolute darkness.

What is most remarkable about each dawn is that the light is never the same—it changes with the seasons, by the day, in each moment. There is a texture to light that allows—no, requires—the tissue of vision to be constantly woven and rewoven anew. Screens that simultaneously show and hide settle on the eye like a mountain mist creating dispositions no word or deed can disperse. Colors become moods, moods colors: the blue and gray of winter, the green and lavender of spring, the red and yellow of summer, the umber and amber of fall. In the mountains of New England, light is most remarkable during the early morning and late afternoon on bright autumn days. The dance of shifting shadows and the astonishing color of the hills create a light that is actually palpable. I am never sure whether the light makes the mountains appear or the mountains make the light appear. Around 4:00 in the afternoon on warm fall days, something very strange happens: light is no longer merely a matter of vision; rather it becomes possible to *hear* light as a silence pressing on eardrums. There is no other word for this experience than *synesthesia*. In this moment light sounds a silence that is truly golden. This moment cannot be conjured; it always arrives unexpectedly—as if by grace alone. I have tried to

capture this light many times in the blink of the camera's eye but, of course, always fail. The image is but the trace of a receding presence whose draw becomes more attractive as it becomes more elusive.

Light is always a matter or nonmatter of reflection. To apprehend light, one must reflect (on) a reflection that is not always reflexive. Rather than rendering (the) all transparent, light harbors a darkness that makes vision possible yet leaves it incomplete. Seeing seeing is the apprehension, which is not to say comprehension, of the interplay of the visible and the invisible through which the world is figured. In this way vision becomes the act of creative emergence that transforms the world into a work of art.

My long-standing fascination with light led to my interest in James Turrell's art. I first encountered Turrell's work in an exhibition that Deborah Rothchild organized at the Williams College Museum of Art. I can still picture vividly the work that captured my imagination. It was a rectangular box approximately fifteen feet by twenty feet with only one entrance and exit located in a large dark gallery. On entering the enclosure, I was engulfed by a luminescent blue glow. As my eyes gradually adjusted, I noticed a perfectly symmetrical square white box measuring approximately three feet by three feet that seemed to be floating near the ceiling in the upper-right corner of the room. As I approached what I thought was a box, I realized that it was not a material object but had been created by the play of light. My first response was a sense of bafflement created

by the virtuosity of this extraordinary *trompe l'oeil* effect; this feeling was quickly followed by the determination to figure out how Turrell had pulled it off. The longer I pondered this work, the more intriguing it became, and the more significant the stakes of Turrell's work seemed to be.

That experience more than twenty years ago began a long journey that eventually took me to the Arizona desert. The more I studied Turrell's work, the richer it became and the more difficult it was to locate his work on traditional maps of art history. Turrell's medium is light—he paints with and sculpts light. From one point of view, his work can be understood as a logical extension of impressionism. While impressionist canvases shift attention from illuminated objects to the experience of illumination, Turrell dematerializes the medium to create works of art as effervescent as the act of apprehension itself. From another point of view, his work resonates in certain ways with minimalists like Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and, most obviously, Robert Irwin. He shares Judd's and Irwin's interest in light and, like Serra, he has a long-standing interest in the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which grows out of his concern with the act of perception more than the crafted object. Such similarities should not, however, obscure the very different motivation informing Turrell's art. Having been raised a Quaker and having studied psychology at Pomona College, Turrell and his work cannot be understood simply in terms of art history. Turrell creates his art through a unique combination of

painterly and sculptural strategies, scientific experiment, and, in ways that are not immediately obvious, religious myth and ritual. Like mystics ancient and modern, as well as Eastern and Western, Turrell is obsessed with vision. While mystics stage rituals to create visions they believe will transform consciousness, Turrell combines artistic practice and scientific experiment to create a transformative experience by turning vision back on itself in order to see seeing. To see seeing is to grasp the world as a work of art and to apprehend vision as a cosmogonic act once attributed to the gods.

For time immemorial the place of spiritual transformation has been the desert. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Turrell selected an ancient volcanic field on the edge of Arizona's Painted Desert as the site for his *chef d'oeuvre* (Fig. 4.1). Roden Crater is the most ambitious work and might well turn out to be the most important artwork of our time. For pilgrims fortunate enough to journey *into* Turrell's work, the world is, indeed, transformed.

DESERT VISIONS

Getting to Roden Crater is not easy—it requires time and effort. It took me more than two years and considerable persistence to arrange a visit. In early October 2008 my wife, Dinny, and I finally began our journey by flying from New York City to Phoenix, Arizona, and then driving north



Figure 4.1 James Turrell, Roden Crater

to Flagstaff. Interstate 17 cuts through rugged valleys and foothills covered with sagebrush, chollas, and imposing saguaro cacti that can grow as tall as fifty feet and weigh up to fifty tons. In the course of the 145-mile distance, the highway passes from low desert (Phoenix, eleven hundred feet) to high desert (Flagstaff, sixty-nine hundred feet). As the elevation increases, the topography and color of the

desert change—nondescript brown and umber rock formations give way to surreal outcroppings sculpted from brilliant red sandstone.

About forty miles from Flagstaff we left the main highway and wound our way through the narrow Oak Creek Canyon road, which begins in the picturesque city of Sedona. Surrounded by red-rock monoliths with names like

Coffeept, Cathedral, and Thunder Mountain, Sedona advertises itself as “a spiritual mecca and global power spot,” which “has drawn some of our planet’s most amazing healers, intuitives, artists and spiritual guides.” The Sedona Tourist Bureau website extols the virtues of the place in terms designed to attract New Age seekers:

The majestic red rock scenery and evergreen vegetation are two reasons for the unique energy of Sedona and its tangible regenerative and inspirational effects. The red-orange color of the rock is one of the most neuro stimulating of colors. It enhances creative thinking and problem solving. Because Sedona is framed year round by green, visitors are also bathed in a sense of hope and renewal, regardless of the season. The spectacular trails and overlooks provide numerous opportunities for prayer, and contemplation. Sedona is also internationally known for the uplifting power of its Vortex meditation sites. Two aspects of those sites make Sedona truly special. First within a very small geographical radius you can easily access all the different types of vortexes (upflow/masculine/electric, inflow/feminine/magnetic, or combination/electromagnetic, etc.). Second, the Vortex sites are interwoven with the real world of a growing city. As a result, seekers have experiences in how to live their spirituality as they go through their daily lives. Rather than having to escape from civilization to find peace, visitors discover that Sedona’s splendor gives

them insights for how to create an inner harmony they can maintain once at home.¹

Having had our fill of tripping back to the 1960s, we escaped the draw of the vortices and once again headed north. The road out of Sedona follows a serpentine creek surrounded by cottonwoods whose yellow leaves deepened the reds of the canyon walls and the blue of the clear sky. A few miles south of Flagstaff, a series of switchbacks lead from the canyon floor to the mesa several thousand feet above. The road into Flagstaff passes through a large pine forest maintained by the state. In town, the hotels and shops on the side streets carry one back to the nineteenth century.

Nancy Taylor, from the Skystone Foundation, which supports and coordinates work on Roden Crater, picked us up at our motel at 3:00 in the afternoon. We were going to stay at the Crater from late afternoon through the evening. Sunrise and sunset, Nancy explained, are the best times to experience Turrell’s work. We drove approximately fifteen miles farther northeast until we turned left on an inconspicuous dirt road marked only by a mailbox riddled with bullet holes. Eleven miles down this road Roden Crater rises six hundred feet from the 5,347 foot desert plateau (Fig. 4.2).

The crater is located at the edge of the Painted Desert in the midst of the vast San Francisco volcanic field. It is impossible to appreciate the scale of the project until you see



Figure 4.2 James Turrell, Roden Crater

it, and even then, it is hard to comprehend. Formed during a series of eruptions between 600,000 and 165,000 years ago, the base of the crater is two miles wide. Having just come from New York, I calculated that the dormant volcano is as wide as Manhattan and as high as the City's tallest skyscrapers. The field is still active; indeed, the last eruption was at nearby Sunset Crater only 925 years ago, and future eruptions seem all but inevitable.

Geologists predict that the next volcanic event will most likely be in the general vicinity of Roden Crater. Far from being dismayed by this prediction, Turrell seems to relish the prospect of the eventual destruction of his life's work. "To some degree," he muses, "I made a pre-made ruin." Letting his imagination wander far into the future, he reflects on lessons he has learned from flying his small plane over the western desert for many years:

I like the quality in permanence and impermanence. There are some airfields for World War II that the Americans used in the American desert to practice. Now they are being taken over by sands and by sagebrush and also they are going under the ground. Ground is closing over them. . . . But if you fly over you can see just the ghosting of this, even though it's completely covered with sand. Very thin at the moment, but it's only 45–50 years now. The lines of Nazca form a very beautiful plan. It's like the earth is in an emulsion, a photographic emulsion that you are looking at. You see some things developing, coming out early in development and then some of these things can get covered by other things at later stages of development. Also, there are some things that can be sort of blown away and then they start to come out. Old civilizations that begin to be exposed.²

Though seemingly permanent, the Roden Crater is actually quite fragile. In addition to the constant threat of new eruptions, the crater is made primarily of volcanic sand, ash, and cinders, which desert storms and winds constantly erode.

The winding road leading to the crater cuts through hundreds of thousands of acres of rabbitbrush, whose yellow blossoms in the autumn light create the sense of a muted golden glow radiating from the desert floor. In the distance numerous volcanoes appear on the horizon. The first glimpse of Roden Crater is from a distance of

approximately six miles. Looming on the horizon, the crater is distinguished by two cones, the smaller of which is a deep black and the larger of which is a rich red. This double formation was created by one primary and three secondary eruptions, known as fumaroles, one of which formed the smaller cone. Near the base of the crater, a smaller road branches to the right and gradually bends around the side of the cone. Three quarters of the way up to the summit, a beautiful structure emerges from the side of the volcano. We parked the truck in the red cinders and entered the first of four guest lodges that Turrell has designed to accommodate visitors when the project is complete. The lodge is elegant in its simplicity. The materials of red sandstone and finished concrete create a space similar to the best work of Tao Ando, with whom Turrell has collaborated. Since the lodge is actually built into the volcano, the four bedrooms give one the sense of being underground. Large windows and a surrounding deck open onto a vista that extends to the bordering Navajo reservation and three mesas where the Hopi villages of Bacavi, Old Oraibi, Kykotsmoui, Shungopavi, and Polacca are located. The only break in the expanse is the Little Colorado River, which marks the border between Turrell's land and the Navajo reservation.

With the sun moving lower in the sky, we continued up the side of the volcano to the crater's rim. From the top of the crater, a 360-degree vista extends uninterrupted to the horizon. The initial stage of the project involved sculpting

the bowl of the crater, an ellipse measuring one thousand feet by eight hundred feet, to make the rim perfectly level. This required moving 1.35 million cubic yards of dirt and cinders, which engineers used to reinforce weak spots along the side of the cone. At the current stage of development the centerpiece of the work is the “Alpha Tunnel,” whose entrance is marked by the easternmost fumarole. The color of the door and entryway to the tunnel matches the rusty red of the volcanic sand and cinders. Passing through the vestibule, we enter a dimly lit, round, domed room in which everything is black and white. In the center of the room is an elegant abstract sculpture standing sixteen feet tall and weighing thirty-four tons. This work consists of a seven-foot, four-inch white circle of marble, known as the Image Stone, surrounded by a finely finished rectangular piece of black granite. The sculpture is placed in the middle of a circle of black lava sand, which is raked like the white gravel and sand in Kyoto’s Zen temples. This sculpture is, in turn, encircled by a polished black granite floor. At the top of the dark gray walls, dim lights illuminate a soft white domed ceiling. As we gape at the imposing monolith, its shape continually shifts. Though it initially appears perfectly rectilinear, the sculpture’s thickness is tapered in a way that makes this massive stone work seem to be on the verge of levitating.

On the far side of the room the opening to the tunnel appears like a black hole drawing everything and everybody into its dark interior. As we approach the opening,

it gradually becomes clear that there is light at the end of the tunnel. The 849-foot passageway inclines upward at an eight-degree angle. At the far end of the keyhole-shaped tunnel, a black circle surrounded by white light comes into focus (Fig. 4.3). Alpha Tunnel, so named because it is the first of many that are planned, is suspended between two seemingly symmetrical images: a white circle surrounded by black and a black circle surrounded by white. Shifting my gaze from one end to the other, I found it difficult not to feel caught between two unblinking eyeballs.

Alpha Tunnel is both an artistic and an engineering marvel. Buried in loose volcanic cinders, the tunnel was created with 660 tons of reinforced steel and 5,500 tons of poured concrete. The passage way is 12 feet in diameter and rises 150 feet. Turrell’s plans called for “precision-cut, 2-inch by one quarter-inch aluminum baffles mounted on the raw concrete interior walls at 4-foot intervals for the length of the tunnel. Between baffles, an installation of lath, base coat plaster and Venetian plaster would be applied over the concrete, to a depth at which 1½ inches of the baffle surface would be left exposed. The aesthetic purpose of the baffle exposure is to fragment and mute the shaft of natural light cast on the tunnel walls from an oculus at the top of the chamber.”³ The tunnel is designed to capture light from the sun and the moon and direct it to the white Image Stone. What appears to be a wall at the end of the tunnel is actually a room that is open to the sky. The opening, tunnel, and Image Stone are



Figure 4.3 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Alpha Tunnel to East Portal

precisely aligned so that for the ten days surrounding the vernal equinox, sunlight passes through the opening and down the tunnel. Halfway along the passage, there is a retractable lens that is five feet in diameter, making Roden Crater the world's largest naked-eye telescope. Since the lens is refractive, the image the sun casts on the stone is true rather than reversed. When there is solar activity, sunspots can be detected on the Image Stone. Every 18.6 years, the moon lines up and projects its image directly on the stone's white surface.

To achieve this effect required extraordinary precision in the construction process. The line of sight from one end of the tunnel to the other had to remain absolutely constant all along the entire 849-foot incline. "Each key-hole-shaped assembly . . . [is] center-oriented horizontally, vertically and rotationally to within plus or minus one-sixteenth of an inch of the theoretical image eye. Each baffle . . . [is] oriented perpendicular to the rising gradient (8 degrees) and square with the centerline of the pathway."⁴ The twenty-eight-thousand-square-foot tunnel wall is covered with a 1¼ base coat of plaster, which, according to specifications, had to be "baby's bottom smooth." This substrate is coated with a lime-based coat of plaster to create a finish similar to that on which Venetian frescoes are painted. The walls are covered with several coats of black paint, carefully calibrated to balance the absorption and transmission of light.⁵

Though the axis of orientation is obvious, negotiating the dark space of the tunnel is disorienting. Sight and

sound play tricks that distort perception or, perhaps more accurately, create unexpected perceptions. As the white circle surrounded by black fades, the black circle surrounded by white comes into sharper focus, until it forms the precise figure of a keyhole (Fig. 4.4). When I reached the end of the tunnel, however, something very strange happened. What had appeared to be a wall with a large round black circle turned into an elliptical room. Crossing the room's threshold, I noticed that everything suddenly changed—what I had thought was a black circle on a wall was actually a twenty-nine-foot by ten-foot elliptical opening in the ceiling revealing a brilliant blue sky. The room at the top of the tunnel, known as the Sun and Moon Room (forty-seven feet, two inches by thirty feet, three inches) is the reverse of the room at the bottom of the tunnel: white rather than black, elliptical rather than circular, open rather than closed. At the center of the red granite floor of the room, a black granite ellipse mirrors the ceiling opening. At the near edge of the ellipse is a beautiful stone circle whose blues, reds, whites, and ambers are reminiscent of NASA's photograph of the earth taken from the moon. Along the edge of this stone a copper staircase, which is itself an impressive sculptural work, rises to the heavens like steps on an ancient Mayan pyramid (Fig. 4.5).

Entering this room created a Gestalt-shift in which everything I thought I had seen and understood as I made my way up the tunnel was suddenly recast. A student of perceptual psychology and a devoted pilot, Turrell has long been interested in the tricks vision plays on us. He



Figure 4.4 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Keyhole with Stairs

does not, however, regard these tricks as illusions; to the contrary, what appear to be illusions, he believes, actually disclose the paradoxical reality vision reveals. In response to an interviewer's question, "You make something from



Figure 4.5 James Turrell, Roden Crater, East Portal High

nothing—an illusion?” Turrell replies: “Yes, however, I don’t think it’s all illusory. Although light exhibits wave phenomena, nevertheless it is a thing—it is optical material. We don’t treat it as such. Instead we use it very casually to illuminate other things. I’m interested in the revelation of light itself and that it has thingness. It alludes to what it is, which is not exactly an illusion.”⁶

The Sun and Moon Room is connected to the crater’s second opening by a finely crafted red sandstone tunnel that recalls both subterranean labyrinths at the base of pyramids and the networks of tunnels beneath desert anthills. The second opening (eighteen feet in diameter) is located in the eye of the volcano, at the precise point where the primary eruption occurred. The dark passageway opens into an exquisitely designed and executed circular room, approximately forty-two feet in diameter and twenty-five feet high. In the center of the room there is a circle of black lava sand precisely raked exactly like the sand circle at the base of the tunnel. This circle, which shadows the eighteen-foot oculus in the ceiling, is surrounded by a red granite floor and a rust-colored sandstone bench curved along the circular wall. The precise proportions and exquisite finish of this room create a sense of serenity that sharpens all the senses.

A second tunnel wraps around the exterior of the central chamber and leads outside to the bowl of the crater (Fig. 4.6). Viewed from the crater’s interior edge, the elliptical and circular openings appear to be finely crafted

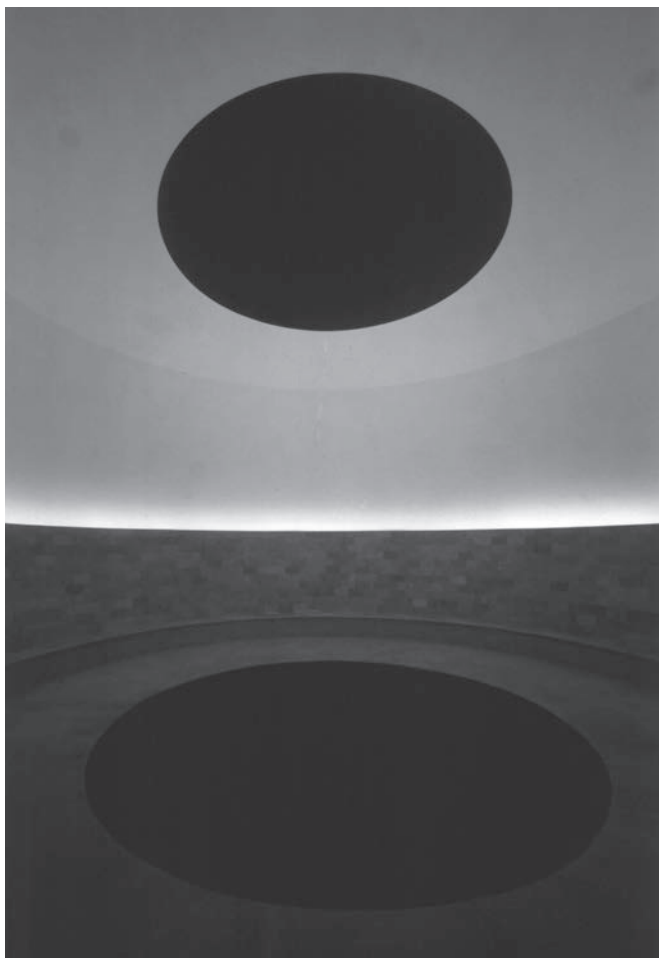


Figure 4.6 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Crater's Eye (interior)

sculptures resembling two huge eyes cast heavenward. The side of the central oculus consists of a beautiful red sandstone drywall constructed by traditional Navajo craftsmen. At the four compass points along the wall, there are white benches that extend outward and slope gently downward (Fig. 4.7). The angle of these benches is calibrated to make possible the experience of celestial vaulting. When you lie on the bench and tilt your head backward until you see the rim, the perception of depth suddenly disappears and the sky appears to be a dome or vault enclosing the volcano. Explaining why he chose Roden Crater for his life's work, Turrell describes the phenomenon he first experienced when flying his small plane over the desert Southwest:

I looked for a space that was at least 400 to 600 feet above the surface of the earth, because at that point when you fly or when you stand on a mouth that's above a plane, the earth seems to curve the wrong way. I wanted to make this experience of sky and the celestial vaulting. Then when you went up to the edge, you were in the space that seemed to be curving overhead. But then you saw this reverse curving underneath you. Vaulting is actually an art history term. Celestial vaulting is a term that refers to how the sky was depicted. You notice sometimes children will paint the sky as a curve. They're correct in the sense that we do see shaping to the sky. That means that there are conditions that change if

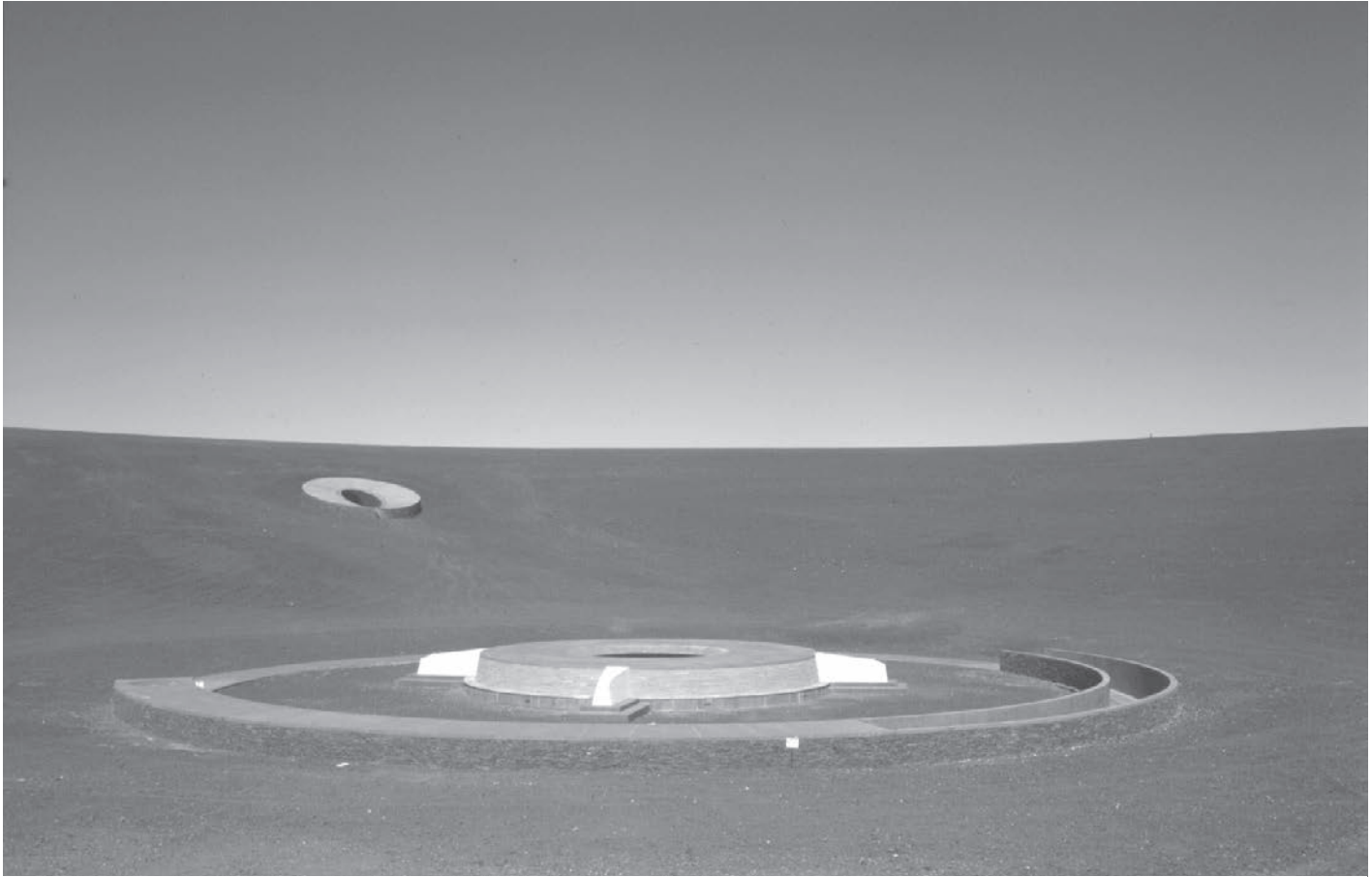


Figure 4.7 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Crater's Eye (exterior)

we change ourselves, or if I change you, I can change the context or shaping. So that this form is something we give it. We're not aware that we give the sky its color and we give it its shape. But we do. In fact, as you move around in the crater, the shape of the sky will change. It does empower you, in fact, that you are fully a part of that, and it's a great feeling.⁷

The entire ocular structure is encircled by carefully raked rose volcanic gravel. Many years ago, a close friend of Turrell's, Gene Sequeptewa, who was a member of the Hopi tribe, suggested that the central opening be named Soo Kiva. Turrell appreciated the multiple resonances this name evoked and accepted the suggestion. But in the late 1990s, an overly ambitious politically correct young American anthropologist objected to a Hopi name being used by a non-Native American. To avoid conflict, Turrell renamed the chamber Crater's Eye. As we will see, however, Hopi ghosts nonetheless continue to haunt the crater.⁸

As I stood on the rim of the crater looking first outward to the distant Little Colorado River and Hopi Buttes and then inward to this unique work of art, associations ancient and modern rushed through my mind: Stonehenge, pyramids—Mayan as well as Egyptian, even the ominous monolith at the beginning of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. There is no doubt that Roden Crater forms what historians of religion call the *axis mundi*. Countless religious myths and rituals describe an opening in the earth's surface where

spirits from the underworld and heavens communicate with human beings. Turrell's cone forms something like a sacred mountain that transforms the proportions of space and changes the scale of time. Human time simultaneously expands and contracts as it is woven together with geological and astrological time. "When I work on pieces like the crater," Turrell explains,

I'm working on bringing the cosmos to you. In the same way the sky is brought down to your space, I actually can bring light from outside this galaxy. This idea of bringing the cosmos to you, this idea that you could actually stand and be confronted by a space occupied with a light that's older than the solar system—that's interesting to me. It makes the cosmos personally accessible and makes it part of our sense of territory. If you light the night sky, like cities do, it cuts off your vision to the universe, and the space, which we consciously inhabit is decreased. With the crater, you go out there in this huge area of southwestern space, but it makes this part of it yours and yours alone.⁹

As dusk began to fall, it became clear that it would take time—a very long time—to understand Roden Crater. In a world where speed is quite literally the currency of the realm, Turrell pushes back by insisting that slowness is a virtue. "I mixed it up in terms of the time-making quality. Sometimes we make the time, but other times things are

slowed down, and something else makes the time. Time plays a crucial role in this work. I like things that take place over time, but then it's interesting to know which things are stable or staying the same and what is changing. They all have that sort of time sense, or sensibility." The time Turrell probes extends as far as the origin of the universe.

With light dawning as the sun disappeared, I realized that my journey, which began long ago and will continue as long as I can imagine, is part of this work of art. In Turrell's own words, "The main thing is to make a journey, so that you actually go to something purposely and have time to settle down and empty out the noise and distractions of daily life. Often we can shift gears more quickly in places like a church or a library—perhaps because they are designated as places of silence and reflection. Most people by the time they arrive at the crater are pretty well set up for it. It would be wonderful if visitors could spend at least 24 hours, but it would be better to stay longer."¹⁰ To undertake such a journey is to begin a pilgrimage that knows no end. Like so many lifelong journeys, this trip takes one deep into the desert, which is not merely external, where nothing remains the same.

Before leaving, we had drinks on the deck and a candlelight dinner with Nancy and Tom McGarth, who has been the project manager for thirteen years. Tom's detailed knowledge of the engineering and construction challenges

deepened my appreciation for the scope and scale of the project. Lingered longer than anyone had intended, we found our conversation was punctuated by long stretches of silence, as we struggled to absorb what surrounded us. The only light visible in the vast expanse of the desert came from distant Navajo and Hopi villages. Nowhere is the night sky as clear as in the desert. Stars do, indeed, seem to reach down and take you into their midst. By coincidence the morning before we left on our trip to the Crater, I had taught Kant's Second Critique and discussed his famous passage, which came to mind in the desert darkness. "Two things," Kant writes, "fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily reflection is occupied with them: *the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me*. Neither of them need I seek and merely suspect as if shrouded in obscurity or rapture beyond my own horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with my existence."¹¹ Had Kant lived in the desert, writing might have become superfluous.

With midnight drawing near, we climbed into the truck and headed back down the dirt road. The trip was slower at night, but, although tired, I welcomed the time to think. Surrounded by darkness, we once again seemed to be in a tunnel but this time with no light at the end. Dodging jackrabbits dazed by the headlights, we could see nothing but sagebrush at the edge of the road.

THE EMERGENCE

One does not have to be a New Age enthusiast to realize that the rhythms of Turrell's work are cosmic. During an era when everything and everybody seems on the move and reality is increasingly virtual, it is easy to forget that so-called real time is unreal and place truly matters. As globalization accelerates, the most radical gesture might be to slow down and stay in one place. It is not so much that vision *takes* time—rather, vision, slowly cultivated, *gives* the time and place that form the worlds in which we dwell. As ancient myths and rituals teach, and Turrell understands, vision is an endless quest.

The land surrounding Roden Crater is haunted by ghosts from the past. This is the territory of the Hopi, who still regard themselves as the first inhabitants of North America. Oraibi, one of the principal tribal villages visible from Roden Crater, is the oldest continuously occupied settlement in the United States. If one listens patiently as dusk falls in the desert, it is possible to hear the shak-ing rattles and dancing feet of the *kachinas* as they drift through the Spirit World at the edge of the land of the living. The more one ponders the myths and rituals of the Hopi, the less accidental it seems that Turrell has chosen this particular site for his life's work. There are surprising similarities between the Hopis' religious vision and Turrell's artistic vision. Even more uncanny is the way in

which the Hopi myth of cosmogenesis prefigures contemporary scientific accounts of the way human vision fashions the world.

For the Hopi the universe is, in contemporary terms, fractal—the same pattern governs the origin and development of the cosmos, the seasons, the human life cycle, the course of the day, and the lives of people. As in many other Native American traditions, the Hopi believe that the earth is a living organism. Indeed, “the living body of man and the living body of the earth,” Frank Waters points out, “were constructed in the same way. Through each man ran an axis, man's axis being the backbone, the vertebral column, which controlled the equilibrium of his movements and his function. Along this axis were several vibratory centers which echoed the primordial sound of life throughout the universe or sounded a warning if anything went wrong.”¹² The spatial structure and temporal rhythms of the cosmos are reflected in the complex myths and esoteric rituals that chart the course of what the Hopi describe as the Road of Life (Fig. 4.8).

The present world is not the original creation but is the Fourth World, named Túwaqachi (World Complete), which is the result of an underground devolutionary process. Tribal myths describe the creation as “The Emergence.” The four-stage process of emergence involves the familiar movement from undifferentiation through differentiation to conflict, which leads to dissolution,

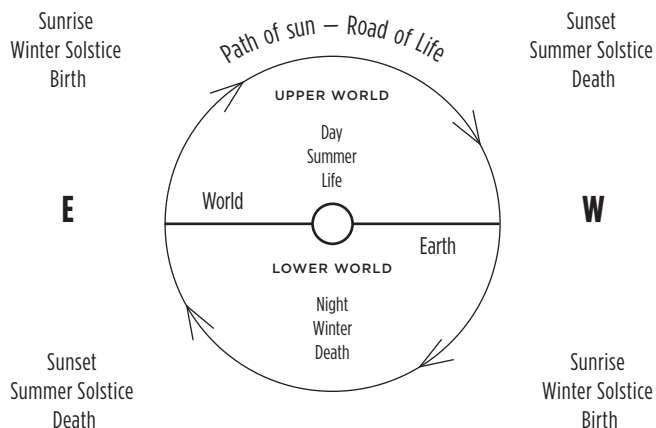


Figure 4.8 Frank Waters, *The Road of Life*

destruction, and eventual renewal. Creation and destruction are inseparable—each new world emerges from the dissolution of the previous world. The supreme Creator, who oversees and directs the Emergence, is the Sun God, Taiowa. Before the beginning of the world there is nothing but “Endless Space”: “There was no beginning and no end, no time, no shape, no life. Just an immeasurable void that had its beginning and end, time, shape, and life in the mind of Taiowa the Creator” (3). Taiowa brings forth his nephew Sótuknang, whom he commands to create solid substance and mold it into the shapes that form the nine universal kingdoms. When he is ordered to create life and

the forces to sustain it, Sótuknang fashions an assistant named Kókyangwúti, Spider Woman, who remains on earth to act in his stead. Far from a mere governess, Spider Woman is the earth goddess and the mother of the Hopi people. “They were made from her flesh; they suckled at her breast. For her milk was the grass upon which all animals grazed and the corn, which had been created to supply food for mankind. But the corn plant was also a living entity with a body similar to man’s in many respects, and the people built its flesh into their own. Hence corn was also their mother. Thus they knew their mother in two aspects, which were often synonymous—as Mother earth and the Corn Mother” (7). Unlike many of her offspring, Kókyangwúti never forgot her place in the order of things; having received her charge from Sótuknang, she recites a poem entitled “Song of Creation” to remind her children of Taiowa’s plan for them:

The dark purple light rises in the north,
A yellow light rises in the east.
Then we of the flowers of the earth come forth
To receive a long life of joy.
We call ourselves the Butterfly Maidens.

Both male and female make their prayers to the east,
Make the respectful sign to the Sun our Creator.
The sounds of bells ring through the air,
Making a joyful sound throughout the land,

Their joyful echo resounding everywhere.
 Humbly I ask my Father,
 The perfect one, Taiowa, our Father,
 The perfect one creating the beautiful life
 Shown to us by the yellow light,
 To give us perfect light at the time of the red light.

The perfect one laid out the perfect plan
 And gave to us a long span of life,
 Creating song to implant joy in life.
 On this path of happiness, we the Butterfly Maidens
 Carry out his wishes by greeting our Father Sun.

The song resounds back from our Creator with joy,
 And we of the earth repeat it to our Creator.
 At the appearing of the yellow light,
 Repeats and repeats again the joyful echo,
 Sounds and resounds for times to come. (6)

As this song makes clear, the rich array of Hopi myths and rituals develops an interpretation of the creative process in which light and color play essential roles. The course of the cosmos is determined by the movement of celestial bodies—especially the sun. The light of the sun is never the same but differs from time to time and place to place. Each stage of the Emergence is related to a different color, which, in turn, is associated with a specific direction, mineral, plant, and animal.

THE FOUR HOPI WORLDS				
	FIRST WORLD	SECOND WORLD	THIRD WORLD	FOURTH WORLD
	TOKPELA (ENDLESS SPACE)	TOKPA (DARK MIDNIGHT)	KUSKURZA	TÚWAQACHI (WORLD COMPLETE)
DIRECTION	West	South	East	North
COLOR	Yellow	Blue	Red	Yellowish white
MINERAL	Gold	Silver	Copper	Sikyápala (mixed mineral)
PLANT	Muha (four- leafed plant)	Spruce	Tobacco	Juniper
SOURCE OF CONFLICT	Racial hostility	Barter, Commerce, and Greed	Urbanization and Sexuality	
ANIMAL	Snake Fat-eating bird	Eagle Skunk	Crow Antelope	Owl Mountain Lion
DESTRUCT- -ION	Fire	Ice	Water	

While it is neither possible nor necessary to consider the complex details of the creation narratives in this context, several aspects of the Emergence point to suggestive connections with Turrell's art and the issues it raises.

In a pattern as old as religion itself, the First World emerges from the formless void of empty space as a harmonious whole where conflict, disease, and suffering are unknown. After Sótuknang separates earth and water, he summons Spider Woman and orders her to create plants, birds, and animals. When her work is complete, she turns to her master:

Sótuknang was happy, seeing how beautiful it all was—the land, the plants, the birds and the animals and the power working through them all. Joyfully he said to Taiowa, “Come see what our world looks like now!”

“It is very good,” said Taiowa. “It is ready now for human life, the final touch to complete my plan.” (5)

Following the established chain of command, Taiowa tells Sótuknang to direct Kókyangwúti to create human beings. She fashions humanity from her palette of four colors:

So Spider Woman gathered earth, this time of four colors, yellow, red, white and black; mixed with *túchvala*, the liquid of her mouth; molded them; and covered them with her white-substance cape, which was the creative wisdom itself. As before, she sang over them

the Creation Song, and when she uncovered them these forms were human beings in the image of Sótuknang. Then she created four other beings after her own form. They were *wúti*, female partners, for the first four male beings. (5)

The four races and two sexes live together in harmony until Lavaíhoya (the Talker), who is a mocking bird, appears and incites conflict by deepening their differences. As harmony gives way to warfare, almost all the people forget to worship their Creator by following his plan. In what amounts to the Hopi version of the Rapture, Sótuknang leads the faithful remnant to a safe underground hideaway:

He led them to a big mound where the Ant People lived, stamped on the roof, and commanded the Ant People to open up their home. When an opening was made on top of the anthill, Sótuknang said to the people, “Now you will enter this Ant kiva, where you will be safe when I destroy the world. While you are here I want you to learn a lesson from these Ant People. They are industrious. They gather food in the summer for the winter. They keep cool when it is hot and warm when it is cool. They live peacefully with one another. They obey the plan of Creation.” (13)

There are several points of interest in this suggestive text. First, the narrative describes the ant colony as a kiva,

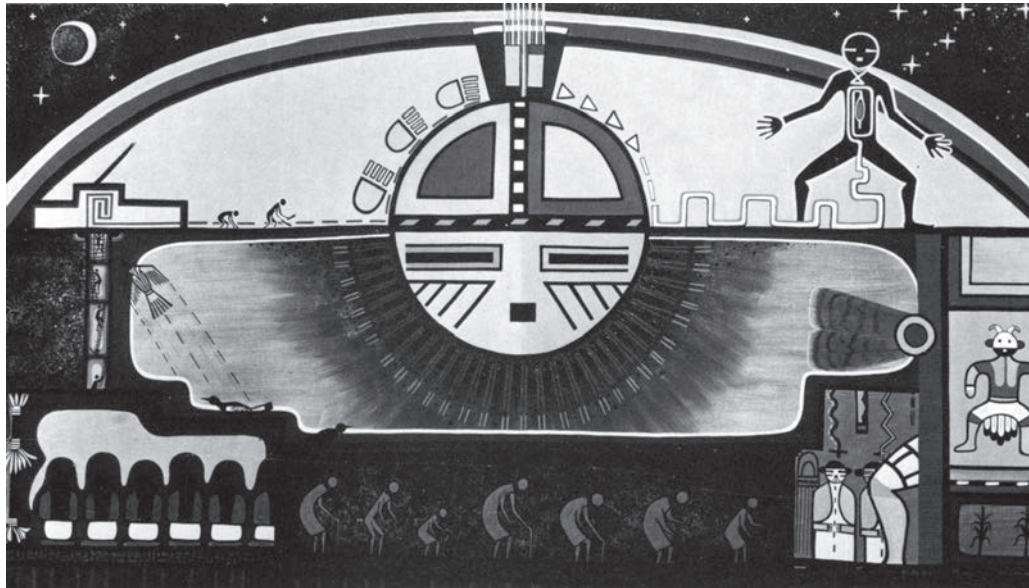


Figure 4.9 Milland Lomakema, *Emergence*

which consists of an intricate maze of underground passageways and a mound that opens to the sky. As we will see in more detail below, the kiva is the center of the ritual life of the Hopi. In this context it is important to note that the architecture of the ant kiva bears a remarkable resemblance to the design of Turrell's Roden Crater. A painting entitled *Emergence* by the contemporary Hopi artist Dawk-kema-Milland Lomakema makes the structural similarity of the ant kiva, the ritual kiva, and Roden Crater explicit (Fig. 4.9).

The second noteworthy point in the narrative about the Second World is the use of the ant colony as an example of order. In recent studies of self-organizing systems, scientists often illustrate the phenomenon of emergence by analyzing ant colonies. The colony forms a distributed network in which order emerges from the interaction of independent agents acting according to specific rules. In his seminal book *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, Douglas Hofstadter parodies a Socratic dialogue to make a very serious point about the similarities between

the activity of an ant colony and the operation of the brain's neural networks:

ANTEATER: *For example, even though the ants as individuals wander about in what seems a random way, there are nevertheless overall trends, involving large numbers of ants, which can emerge from that chaos. . . . There is some degree of communication among the ants, just enough to keep them from wandering off completely at random. By this minimal communication they can remind each other that they are not alone but are cooperating teammates. It takes a large number of ants, all reinforcing each other this way, to sustain any activity—such as trail-building—for any length of time. Now my very hazy understanding of the operation of brains leads me to believe that something similar pertains to the firing of neurons. Isn't that true, Mr. Crab?*

CRAB: *Definitely. Take the Neurons in Achilles' brain, for example. Each neuron receives signals from neurons attached to its input lines, and if the sum total of inputs at any moment exceeds a critical threshold, then that neuron will fire and send its own output pulse rushing off to other neurons, which may in turn fire—and on down the line it goes.¹³*

The point Hofstadter is making in this clever exchange is very important: the same structural principles and operational logic govern the event of emergence regardless of the medium in which it occurs. The dynamics of an ant colony and the activity in the brain's neural networks are

formally identical. As we will see, this insight is very important for understanding how vision occurs. It is, therefore, not too much to suggest that the Hopi Ant People prefigure the dynamics of vision that Turrell's art probes.

The Second World, Tokpa, collapses as a result of the greed created by the introduction of barter and commerce. This time Taiowa stops the rotation of the earth and brings on an ice age. Once again Sótuknang calls on the Ant People to open their underground world to the few people who remain faithful. When the earth eventually warms and starts rotating again, the survivors once more climb up the ladder leading out of the kiva and enter Kuskurza, the third and final world prior to the present world. When the pattern of corruption repeats itself, a raging flood destroys the Third World. This time the faithful escape by hiding in hollow reeds, where they float until the storm subsides. When they eventually reach land, Sótuknang is waiting to greet them:

"I have something more to say before I leave you," Sótuknang told the people as they stood at their Place of Emergence on the shore of the present Fourth World. This is what he said:

"The name of this Fourth World is Túwaqachi, World Complete. You will find out why. It is not all beautiful and easy like the previous ones. It has height and depth, heat and cold, beauty and barrenness; it has everything for you to choose from. What you choose will determine

if this time you can carry out the plan of Creation on it or whether it must in time be destroyed too. Now you will separate and go different ways to claim all the earth for the Creator. Each group of you will follow your own star until it stops. There you will settle. Now I must go. But you will have help from the proper deities, from your good spirits. Just keep your own doors open and always remember what I have told you. This is what I say.” (21)

Though the Emergence was a mythic event, the Hopi nonetheless believe it took place at a specific place named the Sepapu, which is located deep in the Grand Canyon at the confluence of the Colorado and Little Colorado rivers, which, as I have noted, border the lands surrounding the crater. In his autobiography entitled *Sun Chief*, Don Tayesva recounts his visit to this holy site:

We followed down the stream and reached the place of blue salt. There we deposited prayer feathers and climbed onto a little hillock surrounded with bushes. This was the original kiva, and the hole through which all mankind emerged. We stepped over the soft, damp earth and worked our way through the bushes of hard wood, such as is used in making drills to kindle new fires in the kiva for the Wowochim ceremony. Beyond the ring of bushes we came to a central mound of yellowish earth and stepped to the north side to remove our moccasins before entering the sacred place. The War Chief took

four prayer sticks and four feathers, one with a breath line on it, and stepped with us upon the hillock to a flat area about ten feet in diameter. At the very center was the original sepapu, the opening leading to the underworld. There was some yellowish water about two feet down, which served as a lid for the sepapu so no ordinary human could see the marvels of the underworld.¹⁴

The physical structure of Sepapu reveals a suggestive symmetry among different elements in the Hopi’s mythic cosmos: the site of the Emergence, the mother’s extended abdomen prior to birth, the kiva where the Hopi perform their sacred rituals and, finally, the Kópavi, or Open Door, which is the opening at the crown of the skull that enables human beings to communicate with the Creator. The birth of the child and rebirth of the initiates reenact the events that took place at the beginning of the world.¹⁵

Like the tunnel in Turrell’s crater, the daily and annual rituals of the Hopi are organized to reflect the movement of the sun. Just as each of the Four Worlds is associated with a particular color, so the three transitional phases of dawn are characterized by different colors: “Qöyanguptu, the purplish dawn-dusk when the shape of man is first outlined; Sikanguuqa, the yellow light of dawn, which reveals man’s first breath; and finally Tálawva, the red sunrise glow in which man stands proudly revealed in the fullness of his creation” (137). The course of each day repeats the annual cycle, which, in turn, repeats the three phases

of all creation reenacted in the three major winter ceremonies Wúwuchim, Soyál, and Powamu. Lunar observations determine the timing of the first and third ceremonies. Soyál occurs in December and is bound to the winter solstice; the movement of the sun establishes the precise time of the beginning of the ritual. "Beginning with the first day of the new moon, the chiefs of the Sun and Flute Clans make solar observations each sunrise from a house in Oraibi on a high point, which gives an unobstructed view of Sun House Mesa across the valley. Each morning the rising sun casts its shadow a little closer to the designated mark on the west wall. When it reaches the mark, the chiefs are able to determine the exact number of days until the Winter Solstice, when the most important ritual in Soyál is observed" (154). The Soyál cycle, which lasts twenty days, begins with purification rites and ends with a rabbit hunt and feast. The turning point of the renewal ritual occurs when the chief dances rhythmically around the fire-pit in the middle of the underground kiva. As the beat becomes more rapid, the dance becomes more frenzied. The timing of the dance and chants is coordinated with the shifting position of the three stars in Orion's Belt, known to the Hopi as Hotomkam. The reversal of the sun's course, which marks the beginning of the new year, depends on the precise performance of the ritual dancing, singing, and recitation.

Powamu, the final ritual in the winter cycle, is the first of two major ceremonies involving *kachinas*. These spirits

of the invisible forces of life are represented by tribal members who paint their bodies and wear costumes and masks designed to frighten children. In this elaborate rite, lasting eight days, the current created order is portrayed in all its complexity and conflict. The forces of creation and destruction are woven together in narratives and songs to dramatize the richness and fragility of life. There are two important aspects of this ritual process: the bean-planting ritual and, more important in this context, the initiation of the Hopi children into the traditions of the tribe. During the first four days of the ceremony, tribal leaders gather soil from the fields and plant beans in small pots, which are then placed in the kiva, where they are kept warm and tended until they begin to sprout. Sacred cornmeal is sprinkled on the soil to promote rapid growth. The successful completion of this stage of the ritual celebrates the renewal of the earth and ensures a good harvest.

Every four years, Powamu includes a ritual of initiation into the Kachina Society or Powamu Society for children of both sexes between ten and twelve years old. The ceremony takes place over three nights and centers on the ceremonial flogging of the children with yucca whips. This is supposed to purify the initiates and secure the secrecy of the lore they are about to receive. Prior to their initiation, children are terrified by *kachinas*, who live on distant mountain peaks but periodically visit the villages to discipline the wayward. In the course of the ritual, the children learn that the *kachinas* are not real gods but merely human

representatives of them. Don Talayesva recounts this moment of disenchantment:

When the Kachinas entered the kiva without masks, I had a great surprise. They were not spirits, but human beings. I recognized nearly every one of them and felt very unhappy, because I had been told all my life that the Kachinas were gods. I was especially shocked and angry when I saw all my uncles, fathers, and clan brothers dancing as kachinas. I felt the worst when I saw my own father—and whenever he glanced at me I turned my face away. When the dances were over the head man told us with a stern face that we knew who the Kachinas really were and that if we ever talked about this to uninitiated children we would get a thrashing even worse than the one we had received the night before.¹⁶

With this knowledge comes responsibility—the most important lesson of the ritual is that members of the tribe play a crucial role in maintaining the invisible forces on which life depends. When gods are exposed as human, human beings are revealed as gods. In this moment disenchantment is transformed into reenchantment. Waters summarizes the overall course of the ceremonial cycle:

It is over, all over at last, this great three-act drama of all Creation. There is no mistaking its meaning. In Wúwuchim, the first phase, man made his Emergence

to this new world, the first fire was lit, and life was germinated. In the second phase, Soyál, man's dwelling place was erected on the solidified earth, the sun was redirected on its course to give warmth and strength to germinate life and the first *kachinas* arrived to consecrate its growth. With Powamu, in the third phase, plant life made its first appearance, mankind, as children, was initiated by the host of *kachinas*, and the entire Road of Life throughout all the worlds was purified. So man stands now, fully formed and informed, in the proudness [*sic*] of his pure Creation. (187)

By reenacting the Emergence, the ceremonies that take place in the kiva serve three important functions. First, they align earthly and heavenly bodies in a way that provides temporal and spatial orientation for tribal members. Second, the rituals attune participants to the rhythms of the cosmos, which are embodied in their daily lives. When the masks of the *kachinas* are stripped away, creative emergence shifts from the divine to the human realm. Finally, ritual visions transform everyday vision.

BURIAL

The center of Turrell's work of art is a giant oculus that opens to the heavens, as well as the earth. This eye, I have suggested, is something like the *axis mundi* where the

celestial and the terrestrial mingle. This center is a strange axis, however, because it disorients more than it orients, dislocates more than it locates. Along the rim of the crater, the oppositions that order everyday life—ancient/modern, depth/surface, interior/exterior, simple/complex, cold/hot, silence/sound, red/black, divine/human, death/birth—are no longer clear and distinct.

As I lingered in the door to enter the darkness, more associations flooded my imagination: matter, *mater*, matrix, Plato's cave, Christian catacombs, Sepapu, tunnels beneath desert anthills and termite colonies, Hopi kivas, Marduk and Tiamat, Orpheus and Eurydice, Dionysus and Apollo, Eros and Thanatos, shades, ghosts, shamans, alchemists, writers from Dante to Kafka, Poe to Auster, Melville to Danielewski, Courbet's *The Origin of the World*, Kiefer's pyramids and charred canvases, Serra's fiery forge, Beuys's melting fat, Barney's volcanoes and tunnels. I felt suspended between a sense of Dante entering the gates of hell and Loughton Candidate venturing into a serpentine birth canal. Roden Crater cannot be understood from a distance—you must literally enter it. And when you enter it, it enters you.

Approaching the darkness surrounding the glowing white Image Stone, I sense that I am about to undergo a ritual rebirth. Silent echoes evoke ancient sites and rites buried deep in the recesses of the cultural unconscious. The length of the passageway that must be negotiated suggests that whatever transformation lies ahead will be

a long, slow process. Circumambulating the Black Stone like a pilgrim circling the Kaaba in Mecca, I felt that time slowed down and rhythms modulated. As I glimpsed the light at the end of the tunnel, my mind's eye leapt to an aerial photograph of Roden Crater I had seen recently. At that moment I was no longer mired in the fluxes and flows of bodily canals but was transported along the optic fibers beneath or behind the eye as they snaked their way through convolutions of the brain. Black becoming gray: mind and mat(t)er . . . the mind's eye and the eye's mind. A passage about passages from Augustine's *Confessions* drifted into my mind from hidden corners of my memory:

How great, my God, is this force of memory, how exceedingly great! It is like a vast and boundless subterranean shrine. Who has ever reached the bottom of it? Yet this is a faculty of my mind that belongs to my own nature; nor can I myself grasp all that I am. Therefore, my mind is not large enough to contain itself. But where can that uncontained part of it be? Is it outside itself and not inside? In that case, how can it fail to contain itself? At this thought great wonder comes over me; I am struck dumb with astonishment.¹⁷

As I groped along Alpha Tunnel toward the east portal, the passageway became an axon, and the periodic steel ridges surrounding the tube appeared to be folds of cerebral tissue. It was as if I were tracing the optic nerve

from the interior of the brain to the opening of the eye. As I reached the end of the tunnel and entered the Sun and Moon Room, the figure of the keyhole, as I have explained, was transformed as the circle on the wall became an ellipse to the ceiling open to the sky. I was startled as my vision turned back on itself, and I began to see seeing. Turrell is right—visual illusion reveals the truth of vision. As I was processing this thought, my mind wandered to lines from Wallace Stevens: “The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.”¹⁸

My reverie was interrupted when Nancy caught up and said, “We must get to Soo Kiva quickly. Dusk is approaching and you must stay there for at least an hour.” Winding our way through the labyrinthine tunnels, we reached the stunning rose and white circular room open to the heavens, whose pitch-black center is the pupil of Crater’s Eye. Nancy left Dinny and me alone and told us to meet her at the rim of the crater after dark.

Sitting on the rose sandstone bench circling the room, I noted the soft light radiating upward and casting a golden glow on the white walls. Looking skyward, Crater’s Eye resembles the aperture of a camera obscura. I had the uncanny feeling of actually being inside my own eyeball. As I leaned back and stared intently at the circular opening, the sky lost all depth and appeared to be a perfectly executed monochromatic painting. But the colors of this work of

art were unlike any I had ever seen. Furthermore, the intense hues changed constantly but imperceptibly. During the ten minutes immediately before and after sunset, the sky turned shades of blue and black that appear on no spectrum and elude all words. The dim reflection of the reds, ambers, and umbras of the desert floor created subtle shades of lavender that enriched the blues of the sky. Searching my memory for associations, all I could recall was a liminal blue-purple in my favorite Renoir painting. As darkness deepened, blues turned to black or, more precisely, blacks. The sky just after sunset reveals that black, like every other color, is not one color but many colors. The exhibition did not end when the sun drifted below the horizon; the colors kept changing as light arriving from origins in the universe bent around the earth’s curved surface and entered my sphere of vision. Light, lighting, *Lichtung*, clearing, the Open, Enlightenment. . . . It was as if I were gazing into the empty depths of heaven.

In the course of the hour, I moved around the circumference to view the opening from different angles and was astonished to realize that the colors of the sky changed with the angle of my perception. Inside the Eye the shifts were subtle but unmistakable. When I went outside to look at the desert twilight, the color and the texture of the sky changed completely. The sky became more gray than blue, and the seamless surface became wrinkled and dappled. Unable to believe my eyes, I rushed back into Soo Kiva and found the texture of heaven as it had been

before I left. Along the margin simultaneously separating and joining inside and outside, I realized what Edwin H. Land, the greatest American inventor after Thomas Edison, and creator of the Polaroid Land Camera, discovered long ago: color, like life itself, is relative, relational, differential. "Context is everything. The eye has no interest in absolute levels of illumination, nor in absolute color values. Every color is perceived in relation to every other, just as every patch of light is perceived in relation to every patch of shade."¹⁹ Change the context, and the color changes. Slowly Crater's Eye and my eye became one. The longer I pondered, the more I began to appreciate the cosmic dimensions of Turrell's vision. At the edge of the crater telluric and celestial forces collide to mark the boundary along which worlds are created and human life is lived. The cosmos that emerges from this interplay of differences is as much my creation as the creation of the gods. With time slipping away, we had to leave the oculus to meet Nancy. In the darkness of the desert night, the headlights of her truck shone on the crater's rim.

SCREENING VISION

In the days, weeks, and months after our visit to Roden Crater I struggled to understand what I had experienced. I was not sure how to classify Turrell's work: painting or sculpture; art, religion, philosophy, or science? Since no single approach to his art seemed adequate, I decided to

begin again by returning to familiar ground I share with Turrell—the work of Merleau-Ponty.

As I have noted, the publication of the English translation of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* marked a turning point for many artists who were searching for ways to move beyond what they regarded as the aridity of abstraction and emptiness of conceptualism, while at the same time avoiding the crass commercialism of Pop art. Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the importance of perception and the bodily bias of the mind created new avenues for artistic exploration. Turrell has long drawn on Merleau-Ponty's work in his sustained effort to see seeing; indeed, he effectively extends the phenomenology of perception from philosophy to art to create works that not only recall ancient myths and rituals but also border on cutting-edge perceptual psychology and cognitive science. To understand the importance of these developments, we must first consider Merleau-Ponty's contribution to the critique of the modern philosophy of self-consciousness and then examine how the limitations of his analysis can be overcome through an account of perception in terms of information processing. While Merleau-Ponty repeatedly borrows insights from artists to develop his phenomenology, Turrell appropriates lessons derived from *Phenomenology of Perception* to create works of art whose "substance" is light and aim is the transformation of vision.

Having grown suspicious of the philosophy of reflection that forms the foundation of much modern philosophy and art, Merleau-Ponty turned his attention to "the

advent of being conscious” by casting a critical eye toward perception. “The mistake of reflective philosophies,” he argues, “is to believe that the thinking subject can absorb into its thinking or appropriate without remainder the object of its thought, that our being can be brought down to knowledge. As a thinking subject we are never the unreflective subject that we seek to know; but neither can we become wholly conscious, or make ourselves into the transcendental consciousness.”²⁰ For the philosophy of reflection, which begins with Descartes’s inward turn and reaches closure in Hegel’s comprehensive speculative system, the autonomous subject is the alpha and omega of thought and, as such, the foundation of all knowledge. Through critical reflection, the self seeks to become completely transparent to itself. For Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, the self-conscious cogito remains irreducibly obscure because it is secondary to more primordial perceptual processes that it presupposes but cannot comprehend. Self-consciousness is always *subjected* to a “phenomenal layer” of sensibility that is, according to Merleau-Ponty, “literally prelogical and will always remain so.” This rudimentary layer of the subject is inaccessible to the reflective cogito but is accessible to what he describes as “the prereflective cogito”:

There is, therefore, another subject beneath me, for whom a world exists before I am here, and who marks out my place in it. This captive or natural spirit is my body, not that momentary body, which is the instrument

of my personal choices and which fastens upon this or that world, but the system of anonymous “functions,” which draw every particular focus into a general project. Nor does this blind adherence to the world, this prejudice in favor of being, occur only at the beginning of my life. It endows every subsequent perception, of space with its meaning, and it is resumed at every instant. Space and perception generally represent, at the core of the subject, the fact of his birth, the perpetual contribution of his bodily being, a communication with the world more ancient than thought.²¹

This is a very important insight whose implications reach far beyond what Merleau-Ponty could have realized at the time he wrote *Phenomenology of Perception*. By positing a prereflective cogito, he extends cognitive activity beyond the realm of consciousness and suggests something like a *cognitive unconscious*. The “anonymous functions,” which are “more ancient than thought,” constitute the blind spot without which vision is impossible. Vision, therefore, is always shadowed by an irreducible invisibility:

When I say then that every visible is invisible, that perception is imperception, that consciousness has a “*punctum caecum*,” that to see is always to see more than one sees—this must not be understood in the sense of a *contradiction*—It must not be imagined that I add to the visible perfectly defined as in Itself a non-visible (which would be only objective absence) (that is, object

presence *elsewhere*, in an *elsewhere* in itself)—One has to understand that it is the visibility itself that involves a non-visibility—In the very measure that I see, I do know *what* I see.²²

Phenomenology exposes the invisible in the eye of the visible, but it can go no farther. To see why perception is imperception, it is necessary to move beyond phenomenology by analyzing the prereflective cogito and its system of anonymous functions through which vision arises and consciousness emerges.

In the years since Merleau-Ponty completed his work, advances in biology, psychology, informatics, and cognitive science have made it increasingly apparent that the mind-body dualism that lies at the heart of much modern philosophy is simply wrong. Mind and body, nature and culture are not two distinct realms but are alternative modalities of the same processes. The body, like the mind, is a distributed information-processing network or, more precisely, network of networks. Though operating in different media, these networks are, as I have suggested, both isomorphic and fractal; that is, they display the same structure and operational logic at every level from the molecular and cellular through the organismic to the perceptual and cognitive. To understand the dynamics of these codependent networks, it is necessary to consider the interplay of information and noise first in general terms and then in relation to the specific experience of vision.

Far from antithetical, information and noise are integrally related: information emerges from noise through a process of screening in which schemata filter data (i.e., the given) to form patterns that facilitate effective responses in a constantly changing environment. While schemata function as receptors, they are not simply passive but interact with noise in such a way that they both form and are transformed by the data processed. It is important to note that noise is not the complete absence of form but involves patterns that cannot be processed by a given schema. There is no such thing as absolute noise; or, in different terms, chaos is not the complete lack of order but an alternative configuration that generates static for established schemata. Noise is information in the process of formation. What counts as noise and passes for information is relative to the level at which processing occurs. Sensation, perception, and cognition are hierarchically arranged in such a way that output at one level (information) becomes noise (input) at another level. Progressive schematization involves increasing screening, which results in greater resolution. From the molecular and cellular through the organismic to the sensory, perceptual, and conceptual levels, receptors, rectifiers, and schemata create apprehensible patterns by screening data. The more comprehensive the schema, the more comprehensible the data. When noise is filtered, it does not simply disappear but forms something like a penumbra, which creates resonances that cannot be clearly articulated. The penumbral

resonance of ambient noise is functionally equivalent to the “prelogical” layer of experience that Merleau-Ponty identifies as the heart of perception.

With these insights in mind it is now possible to return to the problem of seeing seeing. The creation of the world as we know it results from the complex interaction of organism and environment or, more precisely, light (i.e., electromagnetic radiation), eye, and mind. In his *Principles of Psychology* William James compares the screening and compression of the data of experience that eventually issue in consciousness to the work of a sculptor. To appreciate the implications of this seminal insight, it is helpful to recall that *sculpture* derives from the Latin *sculptus*, which means to carve.

The mind, in short, works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone. In a sense the statue stood there from eternity. But there were a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extricated this one from the rest. Just so the world of each of us, howsoever different our several views of it may be, all lay embedded in the primordial chaos of sensations, which gave the mere *matter* of the thought of all of us indifferently. We may, if we like, by our own reasonings unwind things back to that black and jointless continuity of space and moving clouds of swarming atoms which science calls the only real world. But all the while the world *we* feel and live

in will be that which our ancestors and we, by slowly cumulative strokes of choice, have extricated out of this, like sculptors, by simply rejecting certain portions of the given stuff. Other sculptors, other statues from the same stone! . . . My world is but one in a million alike embedded, alike real to those who may abstract them. How different must be the worlds in the consciousness of ant, cuttle-fish, or crab!²³

In this remarkably prescient text James makes several important points. Most obviously, mind and matter are not opposites but are different moments in a complex information process that creates the multiple worlds in which we dwell. As we will see, this insight undercuts the decisive opposition that has been the foundation of philosophy since the time of Descartes. Second, the data of experience do not form an undifferentiated flux but harbor implicit patterns that “sculpt” the eye that is sculpting them. In his suggestive book *A Natural History of Seeing: The Art and Science of Vision*, Simon Ings explains the implications of this insight: “Retinas are sculpted by the kind of light they are exposed to. Blurred light encourages visual abilities that do not rely on clearer images: areas devoted to the detection of movement, and to providing good all-round vision in dim light. Well-focused light favors visual abilities that make use of plentiful light in a fine-grained view of the world. This is why photoreceptors of the vertebrate retina have evolved and specialized into rods and cones.”²⁴

The complex process of sculpting has a “subjective” and an “objective” moment: the eye processes the data it receives, and light, which is information, shapes the eye that figures it. It is important to emphasize that subjectively or objectively considered, at the most archaic level, the activity of sculpting does not presuppose a sculptor.

The insistence that sculpting, or what I have described as screening, is impossible without an intentional agent constitutes what the Danish writer Tor Nørretranders aptly labels “the user illusion.” He coins the suggestive term *exformation* to describe the process of sculpting/screening: “Exformation is perpendicular to information. Exformation is what is rejected en route, before expression. Exformation is about the mental work we do in order to make what we want to say sayable. Exformation is the discarded information, everything we do not actually say but have in our heads when or before we say anything. Information is the measurable, demonstrable utterances we actually come out with. . . . The information content of a conversation is demonstrable, expressed, explicit. But the whole point of this explicitness is to refer to something else, something implicit, something unexpressed. Not just not present, but explicitly not present.”²⁵ The process of exformation creates a residue that becomes the “material” for further figuring.

In addition to these distinctive characteristics of vision, James insists that there is a continuum between the way in which humans and so-called lower animals process in-

formation. The example of ants that he cites is more suggestive than he could have realized. We have already encountered the emergent activities of Ant People in Hopi rituals and will see in more detail below how insect colonies like anthills, termite nests, and beehives produce something like an emergent mind that provides clues about how human perception and cognition are formed in the neural networks of the brain. For such emergence to occur, the operational logic of information processing must extend downward from cognition and perception to biological functions and chemical activities of the human organism.

This understanding of perception and cognition points to a model of mental activity that is very different from the traditional philosophy of the *cogito* that informs much modern philosophy. In *La dioptrique*, published in 1637, Descartes offers a surprisingly accurate diagram depicting light passing through the lens in front of the eye and forming an inverted image on the retina. He made this discovery by dissecting the eye of a living ox (Fig. 4.10). In this model the image is first recorded and then projected on an inner screen in what Daniel Dennett famously described as “the Cartesian theater.” Given Descartes’s commitment to ontological dualism, how can body and mind interact to create vision? In his 1644 *Principles of Philosophy* he attempts to answer this question by providing another visual aid (see Fig. 4.11). The organ responsible for mediating materiality (i.e., body) and immateriality

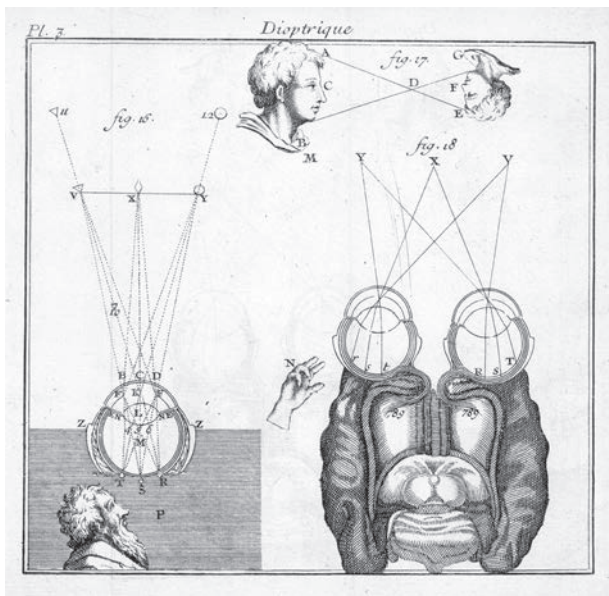


Figure 4.10 René Descartes, *La dioptrique*

(i.e., mind), Descartes argues, is the pineal gland. Light passing through the lens impresses subtle particles, which function as something like photons, on the retina. These particles are then transmitted to the pineal gland, where they are transformed into a mental image. The pineal gland functions as a central processing unit running the programs necessary to process sensible data to create perceptions that can be further processed to form concepts.

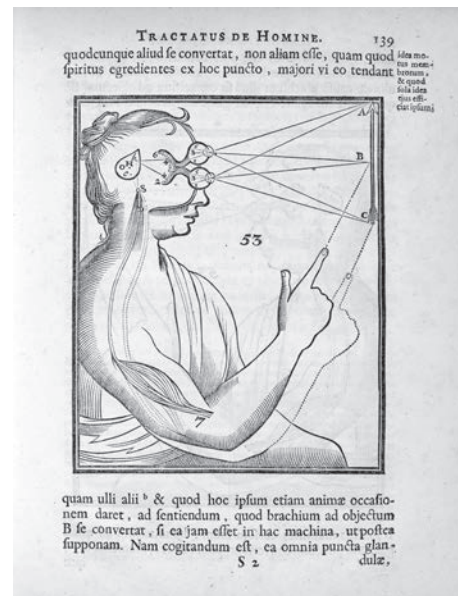


Figure 4.11 René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*

Recent studies of brain-mind interaction call into question Descartes's two fundamental assumptions. First, as I have already suggested, body and mind are not qualitatively different but are both information processes. From the molecular to the systemic level chemical and biological processes are information processes. Information, in other words, is the currency that allows the exchange between body (the material) and mind (the immaterial) to

occur.²⁶ Second, borrowing metaphors from information technology, the brain is not a centralized processor but a distributed network. Perception and cognition are not simply the product of the cogito; to the contrary, the cogito is an emergent phenomenon that is the product of the information processes constitutive of perception and cognition. To understand the implications of these complex processes for Turrell's art, it is helpful to consider how the vision of color occurs.

Though virtually impossible to imagine, the world itself is not colored.²⁷ Color is the product of the interaction between the different wave lengths of light reflected from objects in the world and the eye. Vision requires the effective processing of massive streams of data carried by light. Screening or filtering begins at the most rudimentary level of perception. Human physiology limits vision to between 400 and 750 nanometers, a narrow range of the overall light spectrum. Further constraints are created by the structure and biochemistry of the eye, as well as the neural architecture of the brain. It is difficult to comprehend the astonishing complexity of the brain and its wiring network. There are an estimated one hundred billion neurons in the brain, each of which is connected to approximately ten thousand other neurons. These neurons can process more than one bit per second. "Each human eye," George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out, "has 100 million light-sensing cells, but only about 1 million fibers leading to the brain. Each incoming image must therefore be reduced in complexity by a factor of 100. That is,

information in each fiber constitutes a 'categorization' [or schematization] of information from about 100 cells. Neural categorization of this sort exists throughout the brain, up through the highest levels of categories that we can be aware of."²⁸ As one moves from lower to higher levels of schematization, the bandwidth of awareness narrows progressively.

Cones, which line the retina, are programmed to process stimuli from only one specific color—some cones are sensitive to red light, others to green, and still others to blue. An important distinction, however, must be made in the case of red. There are two common alleles (i.e., any of the alternative forms of a gene that may occur in a given context) of the gene for the red pigment expressed in red cones. They differ slightly (by about five nanometers) in the wavelength of light that is most effective for activating the chemical reaction that starts the process of sensing photons. While this is not a large difference, it is big enough so that the red considered to be "reddest" or "truest" is measurably different for people who have different forms of the allele. This is particularly noticeable when it is tested on men because the alleles for these pigments are carried on the X chromosome, so men only have one genetic form of the pigment. Women, by contrast, may have both forms and so may consider either red to be the "true" red. There is also a difference in how the alleles are distributed in geographic areas—the reddest red for most Asians is different from the reddest red for most Europeans.²⁹ This discovery has far-reaching implications—at the

most basic level of perception biological constraints appear to condition alternative modalities of processing information by different genders, races, and cultures. These constraints are not, however, completely determinative because cones and rods do not merely record different wavelengths. Rather, receptors actively compensate for variations in light emitted or reflected from the same source in a way that makes it possible for different wavelengths to be perceived as the same color.

Rods and cones on the retina convert light into neural impulses through complex chemical processes. Each eye has approximately one hundred million light-sensing cells located on the retina's 120 million rods and 5 million cones. The cones are most densely packed around the fovea, which is a depression one hundredth of an inch wide located near the center of the retina. On the surface of rod and cone cells there are photopigments that serve as light receptors. When a photon is absorbed by proteins in the cells of the rod, the shape of the molecule changes in a way that triggers the production of neurotransmitters. In 1967 George Wald received the Nobel Prize for his discovery that the chemical responsible for initiating the electrical impulse in neurons is rhodopsin. The fact that about one billion of the molecules in each of the eye's 120 million rods contain rhodopsin suggests the magnitude and complexity of this process. Sidney Perkowitz offers a helpful summary of this discovery:

Wald showed that retinal is formed in the body from vita-

min A and explained how it detects light: A molecule of retinal is built around a long backbone of carbon atoms spaced like fence pickets, but with part of the fence bent, like a gate set slightly ajar. When the molecule absorbs a photon, the added energy changes the links among its atoms, bringing the gate into alignment with the fence. The straightening of the retinal molecule splits off part of the rhodopsin that contains it and that freed portion goes on to accelerate a complex cascade of chemical reactions in the rod. These eventually release specialized molecules that travel across the gap from the rod to a nearby nerve fiber producing an electrical impulse in the nerve—the first recognition by the neural network that photons have reached the retina.”³⁰

These neurochemical reactions constitute a long series of filterings that eventually issue in visual figures the mind can apprehend.

The retina cells are linked to the axons, which transmit information from the eye to the brain. Since brain activity is decentralized, distributed networks consisting of multiple parallel processors can manage vast amounts of information very quickly. This neural architecture makes it possible to sort the information initially screened by the retina and distribute it to different areas of the brain, where it is further processed by a series of receptors or rectifiers hierarchically arranged. Information, therefore, has already undergone considerable processing even before the brain receives it from the eye. The implications of these insights

were first recognized in a seminal paper entitled “What the Frog’s Eye Tells the Frog’s Brain,” published in 1959 by Jerome Lettvin, Warren McCulloch, Walter Pitts, and Humberto Maturana. Summarizing their conclusions, the authors write: “What are the consequences of this work? Fundamentally, it shows that the eye speaks to the brain in a language already highly organized and interpreted, instead of transmitting some more or less accurate copy of the distribution of light on the receptors.” Far from a *tabula rasa* or passive receptor, the eye and brain, the authors insist, are programmed in a way that enables them actively to process the data they receive:

The image on the retina, taken at the grain of the rods and cones, is an array of regularly spaced points at each of which there is a certain amount of light of a certain composition. If we know the position of every point and the value of light at every point, we can physically reconstruct the image and, looking at it, understand the picture. . . . By transforming the image from a space of simple discrete points to a congruent space where each equivalent point is described by the intersection of particular qualities in its neighborhood, we can then give the image in terms of distributions and contributions of those qualities. In short, every point is seen in definite contexts. The character of these contexts, genetically built in, is the physiological synthetic a priori.³¹

The carefully chosen terminology of this passage suggests that the physiological synthetic a priori is the neurological basis for Kant’s synthetic a priori, which consists of the forms of intuition and categories of understanding. When Kant’s theory of cognitive functioning is recast in terms of neurophysiology and information processing, at least two important modifications must be made. First, forms and categories—or, in different terms, schemata—are not fixed and stable but are emergent and coevolve as they adapt to the changing fitness landscapes of natural and cultural environments. These changes lend the mind a plasticity that enables it to function effectively. Second, as we have already discovered, mind and matter—or, in this context, subject and object—are not separated by an unbridgeable gulf but are coemergent and codependent and function according to similar rules. The data processed are not completely indeterminate (i.e., are not an unknowable thing-in-itself) but are patterned in ways that allow schematization to yield knowledge.

Though Maturana never explicitly explains his disagreement with Kant on this critical issue, their differences become clear in his later work with Francisco Varela. In *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*, Maturana and Varela present a corrective to representational accounts of cognition. Their aim, however, is not limited to epistemology but extends to ontology. The mind as well as the body, they argue, is an autopoietic structure in which parts and whole are reciprocally related in such

a way that neither can be apart from the other. To demonstrate this common structure, they begin by examining the anatomy of the brain. The information transmitted by optical impulses from the eye to the cortex, they point out, passes through a structure of the thalamus known as the lateral geniculate or *corpus geniculatum laterale*, which is abbreviated LGN. “The LGN,” Varela explains,

is usually described as a “relay” station to the cortex. However, at a closer examination most of what the neurons in the LGN receive comes not from the retina (less than 20%), but from other centers inside the brain. . . . What reaches the brain from the retina is only a gentle perturbation on the ongoing internal activity, which can be modulated, in this case at the level of the thalamus, but not instructed. This is the key. To understand the neural processes from a nonrepresentationist point of view, it is just enough to notice that whatever perturbation reaches from the medium will be informed according to the internal coherences of the system.³²

This is a very important point. What appears to be a representation presupposes a more originary presentational activity that cannot be represented and, therefore, always eludes consciousness.

To understand the isomorphism of chemical, physiological, and mental processes in the emergence of vision, it is helpful to return to the model of the brain as hav-

ing something like a complex database in which information is organized, distributed, and stored. It now becomes clear that individual neurons are analogous to fields of data, which can be accessed through distributed networks and activated by parallel processors. After passing through the thalamus, information gathered by various senses is stored in different areas of the cortex. Each part of the cortex is further divided into a sensory area, where sensations are tagged for later identification, and an associative area, where sensations are organized and eventually create perceptions. The transition from sensation to perception is not instantaneous but takes time and requires input from past experience. For example, the visual experience of three straight lines does not constitute the experience of a triangle. To perceive a triangle, these lines must be associated through a process that renders the present in terms of memories stored in other parts of the brain. The recognition of this phenomenon translates two important philosophical insights into scientific terms. First, Plato and Augustine were right—knowledge is impossible apart from memory. Past experiences scattered in the nooks and crannies of the caverns of the mind first must be re-collected and re-membered and then associated with the data of present experience. Second, Hegel and Derrida are right when they argue that the present is never present but is always already past. The most recent research has established that perception always lags behind the activity of the eye. “Half a second of visual information,” Ings explains,

“is held in a ‘buffer’ of some kind. The eyes stay one step ahead of the body, dealing with the next view, the next task, the next set of predictions and calculations, while the body relies on the buffer. This raises the odd but compelling idea that the ‘present moment,’ as we experience it, has a measurable duration. We operate in the world not as it is, but as it existed a second ago.”³³ Consciousness, in other words, is irreducibly temporal. Since experience presupposes activities that inevitably take time, the present cannot be apprehended as such. Inasmuch as the presencing of the present is never present, the here and now is neither here nor now. This long-standing philosophical insight proves to be scientifically correct.

This account of vision brings us back to Merleau-Ponty’s “prereflective cogito.” Lakoff and Johnson label what Merleau-Ponty describes as “the anonymous functions,” which are “more ancient than thought,” “the cognitive unconscious”:

Cognitive scientists have shown experimentally that to understand even the simplest utterance, we must perform . . . incredibly complex forms of thought automatically and without noticeable effort below the level of consciousness. It is not merely that we occasionally do not notice these processes; rather, they are inaccessible to conscious awareness and control.

When we understand all that constitutes the cognitive unconscious, our understanding of the nature of

consciousness is vastly enlarged. Consciousness goes way beyond mere awareness of something, beyond the mere experience of qualia (the qualitative senses, for example, of pain or color), beyond the awareness that you are aware, and beyond the multiple takes on immediate experience provided by various centers of the brain. Consciousness certainly involves all of the above plus the immeasurably vaster constitutive framework provided by the cognitive unconscious, which must be operating for us to be aware of anything at all.³⁴

From this point of view Freud’s analysis of the unconscious is incomplete. The content of the unconscious is not merely the result of repression but also consists of complex networks that process massive amounts of data, which are then transmitted to consciousness, where they are further schematized. The cognitive unconscious more closely approximates what Jacques Lacan points to when he claims that “the unconscious is structured like a language.”³⁵ Lakoff’s and Johnson’s analysis suggests that Lacan’s symbolic information processing networks can be reconceived as “prelogical” schemata from which all perceptual and cognitive activity emerges. Lacan’s notion (or nonnotion) of the real, in turn, can be recast as noise, which, though incomprehensible, is not without nascent pattern. The prelogical real is a tear in the symbolic network that creates the fabric of our worlds. This hole is the blind spot that rend(er)s vision (possible).

AFTER THE ORIGIN

From ancient myths and religions to modern art, philosophy, and science, light, vision, and the world have been understood as inseparably interrelated. Recalling the sun god worshipped in ancient Egypt, Ings writes: “For the Nile-dwelling worshippers of Ra, living in the New Kingdom of Egypt around 1500 BC, light was Ra’s act of witness. Light was the god’s sight, and things existed because Ra saw them. Ra sees—and all is illuminated. What happens if we humanise this dogma—strip the divinity out and place a bare forked human being in its place?”³⁶ This is precisely what James Turrell does. In his art the divine creator dies and is reborn as an infinite creative process that simultaneously includes and surpasses human activity. Summarizing the epistemological and ontological implications of his work, Turrell explains, “You create the world around you, but you are not aware that you are doing so. You generally do not see light filling space, we are not aware of the material nature of light. In my work, you become aware that the act of observing can create color and space. But it is never ‘just’ an impression that you get, your eyes actually experience light as physically present, and present it is.”³⁷ From this point of view the work of art is not an object created but the process of creation, which has no end other than itself. The worlds in which we are destined to dwell are fashioned as much as found, figured as much as discovered.

As I have noted, Turrell’s fascination with light is at least in part the result of his Quaker heritage. Like Lutheranism and Calvinism, Quakerism is deeply mistrustful of images and, therefore, highly suspicious of art. But unlike traditional Protestantism, Quakerism shares with other heirs to the radical reformation a heterodox spirituality that complicates the relation between religion and art. In his suggestive book *The Ground of the Image* Jean-Luc Nancy uncovers the roots of the tangled relationship between the divine and human imaginations that eventually leads to the idealistic and romantic vision of the world as a work of art:

As a movement with mystical tendencies (particularly in comparison to the dominant form of Lutheranism), Pietism had a complex relationship with the imagination. The latter was simultaneously rejected, on the grounds that a given image cannot claim to be an immediate presence of the divine or of spirit, and yet solicited once again—behind the scenes, so to speak—as a force capable of letting the divine manifest itself in an inner light (an expression associated with the Puritan traditions) by which one accedes, not to the images properly speaking, but to the very condition of all vision and/or truth (if it is true, precisely, that truth must in the end be seen). On this point as on others, one always finds in Protestantism (of which I consider Kantianism to be one extreme) a tendency to discredit a false religion (and

sometimes religion in general) for the purpose of establishing another that is more pure, more abyssal or more abysmal (more engulfed, more rapturous . . .), and thus a movement that carries itself beyond images (idols) toward the very origin of illumination and, constantly, toward the obscure point of a divine imagination. If Leibniz's God calculates, Kant's God, to the extent that one can speak of him, imagines: he imagines the moral world and he imagines himself as the light of this world. For this God is nothing other (and in this sense he is an heir to Spinoza's God) than the *intuitus originarius*, which in turn is nothing other than the imagination that creates the world. This latter . . . is what must regulate the thought of the *intuitus derivatus*, that is, the imagination that produces our representations. This movement toward the source, both unconditional and asymptotic with respect to the originary imagination, will have managed to pass through the very death of God.³⁸

When art displaces religion as the source of spiritual inspiration and expression, the divine imagination is humanized or, conversely, the human imagination is divinized. As I have argued elsewhere, Kant's critical philosophy plays a pivotal role in the emergence of both modern theology and art.³⁹ While the importance of his account of the beautiful and sublime in the *Critique of Judgment* is widely acknowledged, the artistic and aesthetic significance of his interpretation in the imagination in the *Critique of Pure Reason*

is less often recognized. Though he never presented his argument in precisely these terms, Kant, in effect, translates ontology into epistemology. In a manner reminiscent of the Platonic Demiurge, the mind creates the world by bringing together form (i.e., the forms of intuition and categories of understanding) and matter (i.e., the sensible manifold of intuition) through the agency of the imagination.⁴⁰ Heidegger explains the implications of Kant's argument on this critical point: "If ontological knowing is schema-forming, then therewith it creates (forms) from out of itself the pure look (image). Is it not the case, then, that even ontological knowledge which occurs in the transcendental power of the imagination is 'creative'? And if ontological knowing forms transcendence, which in turn constitutes the essence of finitude, then is not the finitude of transcendence burst asunder because of this 'creative' character? Does not the finite creature become infinite through this 'creative' behavior?"⁴¹

When the divine becomes human, the *intuitus originarius* becomes the productive or originary imagination, and the *intuitus derivatus* becomes the reproductive or recombinant imagination. In its productive modality the imagination figures forms that reproductive imagination combines and recombines to create the schemata that organize the noisy data of experience into comprehensible patterns. So understood, the work of the imagination is the formation of form or the figuring of figure. Coleridge, who heard Fichte's lectures in Jena and transmitted German

philosophical idealism to British romantics and American transcendentalists, reformulates Kant's doctrine of the imagination in a way that also translates theology into anthropology: "The *imagination* I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree* and the *mode* of its operation."⁴² Following Jena romantics like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Coleridge extends Kant's analysis of the imagination beyond the bounds of the human until it becomes the creative cosmic principle that transforms the world into a work of art. This interpretation of art involves an expanded understanding of poetry that points back to the Greek word *poiesis*, which means "making" or "creation." As Heidegger repeatedly stresses, *poiesis* is not limited to poetry in the traditional sense but involves all productive and creative activity. In his widely influential *Athenaeum Fragments*, Friedrich Schlegel concisely states what he regards as the inevitable conclusion of Kant's interpretation of the imagination: "No poetry, no reality. Just as there is, despite all the senses, no external world without the imagination."⁴³

The distance separating the late eighteenth-century German university town of Jena from a dormant volcano in the Arizona desert is not as great as it might initially

seem. There is a direct line from Jena's idealist philosophers and romantic poets to James Turrell's art. Throughout his entire career Turrell has been preoccupied with the art of vision. In a 1996 interview he describes Roden Crater in terms that are strikingly reminiscent of the views Kant and his followers expressed more than two centuries ago:

Our vision is not rectilinear, our vision is sort of two spheres that actually make an ellipsoidal shaping of the perceptual field. So if you create spaces that are rectilinear and still have them neutral in this very curvilinear, voluptuous earth form of the volcano in which all the forms are actually parabolic or elliptical . . . There's one circular part, one crater that is actually within seven feet of being a circular radius of 800 feet, 814 feet. It is within seven feet of being a perfect circle, which is amazing. This gives me a way to make curvilinear spaces neutral, whereas it is not quite as appropriate in museums and spaces that are rectilinear. The rectangle, sort of the slightly off square is much more neutral than is a circle or an ellipse in these situations. Otherwise it can become shaped canvases. When you come in you can see that there is a *forming of form*, but what becomes very positive is this thing in between the space, in the work that I do. At the crater, I make an architecture of space and I use these forms to capture the light, to hold it, to, in a way, give it form, give it the space to reside.⁴⁴

The work of art is for Turrell what the imagination is for Kant—the “forming of form.” Always forming but never formed, always figuring but never figured, art emerges along the borders and margins of what Wallace Stevens poetically describes as the “edgings and inchings of final form.”⁴⁵

Artistic creativity is not limited to the work of creative artists as traditionally understood but extends to all humankind and, indeed, beyond, to the cosmos itself. As Joseph Beuys declared, “Everybody is an artist.” Through imaginative activity, individuals and communities create the personal and social worlds in which they live. Whenever form is forming, the imagination is at work, and worlds are emerging. Subject and object, interiority and exteriority are not fixed opposites but, as Nietzsche suggests, “entwined, enmeshed, enamored.”⁴⁶ If the imagination is the activity of figuring that delimits figures, then it can be understood as an in-form-ation process that occurs wherever figures are articulated. The so-called natural world is a work of art de-signed by an anonymous artist whose work we momentarily figure. In a startling observation, Turrell goes so far as to suggest that the world becomes aware of us in our awareness of it. “My art,” he concludes,

is an art that is not about my seeing, it’s about your direct perception of the work. I’m interested in having a light that inhabits space, so that you feel light to be physically present. I mean, light is a substance that is,

in fact, a thing, but we don’t attribute thingness to it. We use light to illuminate other things, something we read, sculpture, paintings. And it gladly does this. But the most interesting thing to find is that light is aware that we are looking at it, so that it behaves differently when we are watching it and when we’re not, which imbues it with consciousness.⁴⁷

Not only is Roden Crater an oculus designed to enable those who enter it to see; Turrell goes so far as to suggest that it is actually an eye that itself sees: “Roden Crater has knowledge in it and it does something with that knowledge. Environmental events occur; a space lights up. Something happens in there, for a moment, or for a time. It is an eye, something that is itself perceiving. It is a piece that does not end. It is changed by the action of the sun, the moon, the cloud cover, or what day of what season that you’re there and it keeps changing. When you’re there, it has visions, qualities, possibilities, and a universe of possibilities.”⁴⁸

If light is in some sense imbued with consciousness and the crater is an eye that sees, the art of vision is part of an infinite creative process in which every poem is, in Stevens’s fine phrase, “a poem within a poem”:

This endlessly elaborating poem
Displays the theory of poetry
As the life of poetry. A more severe,

More harassing master would extemporize
Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory
Of poetry is the theory of life,

As it is, in the intricate evasions of as,
In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness,
The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands.⁴⁹

“In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness.” Nothing is ever transparent because the eye always has a blind spot; therefore, there is never insight without blindness. Blindness is neither the negation of nor extrinsic to sight but is the condition of its very possibility. When thought becomes reflexive and we see seeing, we realize that vision is the art of world-making. Since the invisible inevitably haunts the visible, worlds appear to be “created from nothingness.” The circuit of reflexivity never closes because further analysis exposes a crack in the mirror of reflection. In an important fragment from his posthumous book suggestively entitled *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty explains the duplicity of vision:

The quasi “reflective” redoubling, the reflexivity of the body, the fact that it touches itself touching, sees itself seeing, does not consist in surprising a connecting activity behind the connected, in reinstalling oneself in this constitutive activity; the self-perception (sentiment of oneself, Hegel would say) or perception of perception does not convert what it apprehends into an object and

does not coincide with a constitutive source of perception: in fact I do not entirely succeed in touching myself, in seeing myself, the experience I have of myself perceiving does not go beyond a certain *imminence*, it terminates in the invisible simply this invisible is *its*, i.e., the reverse of *its* specular perception, of the concrete vision I have of my body in the mirror. The self-perception is still a perception, i.e., it gives me a *Nicht Urpräsentierbar* (a not-originally presentable), but this it gives me through an *Urpräsentierbar* in transference (i.e., as a latency)—My invisibility for myself does not result from my being a *positive* mind, a *positive* “consciousness,” a *positive* spirituality, an existence as consciousness (i.e., as pure *appearing to itself*), it comes from the fact that I am he who: 1) has a visible world, i.e., a dimensional body, and open to participation; 2) i.e., a body visible for itself; 3) and therefore, finally, a self-presence that is an absence from self—The progress of the inquiry toward the *center* is not the movement from the condition unto the condition, from the founded to the *Grund*: the so-called *Grund* is *Abgrund*.⁵⁰

I have quoted this passage at length because it might serve as a comment on Turrell’s Roden Crater. In the eye of the crater, what had seemed to be a perfect circle appears to be an ellipse whose center is not single but double. The opening of the eye exposes a ground that is not a ground but an *Abgrund*, an abyss whose infinite profundity creates a residual obscurity shadowing all vision. Turrell’s patient

exploration of vision reveals that consciousness is always limned by formative activities of which we can never be fully aware. Thus, I do not entirely succeed in perceiving myself perceiving or seeing myself seeing. Self-reflexivity, therefore, always harbors “an absence from self,” which is an interior abyss that is the nothingness from which worlds are created:

But as a world opens itself, the earth comes to rise up. It stands forth as that which bears all, as that which is sheltered in its own law and always self-secluding. World demands its decisiveness and its measure and lets beings attain to the Open of their paths. Earth, bearing and jutting, strives to keep itself closed to entrust everything to its law. The conflict is not a tear (*Riss*) as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather, it is the intimacy with which opponents belong to each other. This rift carries the opponents into the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground. It is a basic design, an outline sketch that draws the basic features of the rise of the lighting to beings. This rift does not let the opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure and boundary into their common outline.⁵¹

The Open is the *Abgrund* that is “the origin of the work of art.” The origin is not the same as the beginning. Beginning emerges as the origin recedes, leaving in its wake a

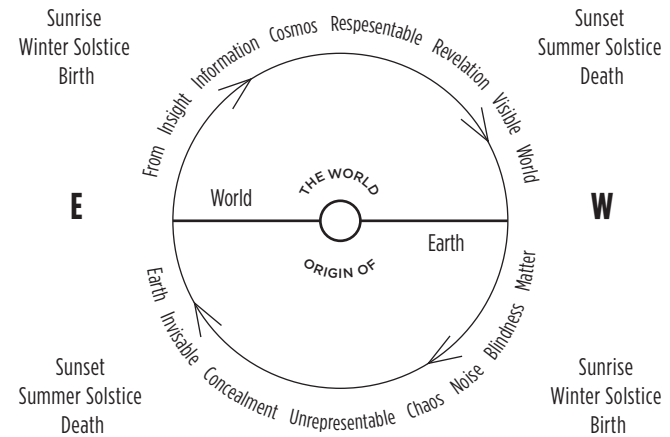


Figure 4.12 Mark C. Taylor, Creation of the World

past that becomes the future to form a circle that never closes. In this wake we are always after the origin.

Along the rim of the crater a world opens itself and earth rises up as that which forever withdraws. Along this boundary, opposites are intimate and belong together (Fig. 4.12).

We are too quick to believe that the mystery of what is to be thought always lies distant and deeply hidden

under a hardly penetrable layer of strangeness. On the contrary, this has its essential abode in what is near by, which approaches what is coming into presence and preserves what has drawn near. The presencing of the near is too close for our customary mode of representational thought—it exhausts itself in securing what is present—to experience the governance of the near, and without preparation to think it adequately. The mystery that beckons in what is to be thought is nothing other than essentially what we have attempted to suggest in the name of “lighting.”⁵²

This presencing of everything present figures the worlds in which we dwell. Lighting is the openness of the Open that brings opposites together by holding them apart and holds them apart by bringing them together in the restless work of art. The origin of the work of art is the modest tear that creates the world. Creation is not a once-and-for-all event but an eternal process that began long before us and will continue after we are gone. “It does empower you, in fact, that you are fully a part of that, and it’s a great feeling.” This is the transformative insight that James Turrell has buried deep within the recess of Roden Crater.

5

CURE OF GROUND

POIESIS

Recovering from major surgery takes time—time that cannot be measured by clocks or calendars. As weeks turned into months and months became a year, my physical wounds healed but psychological scars lingered. Disease—especially when it is chronic—transforms awareness in subtle ways that are difficult to measure. The changes are neither conscious nor unconscious; rather, changes linger like shadows at the edge of vision that illuminate much that had been obscure. The pace and rhythm of life are altered in ways that are not easy to understand or describe. Outwardly everything seems to be the same, but inwardly everything is different. Time, you discover, is more analog than digital—it can be neither divided nor punctuated, neither directed nor controlled. We never have enough time because time always has us. Life, as I had long believed, is lived along a fragile fault in folds of fluxes and flows whose rhythms circulate through us without our

conscious awareness. Far from threatening, this realization is strangely liberating. As rhythms alter, urgency vanishes, and everything inexplicably slows down. Something shifts inconspicuously, and things are no longer aligned as they once had been.

In the months following surgery, my life gradually seemed to return to normal. Days were filled with classes, research, meetings, chores, and errands. Deadlines were set and usually met; decisions that had been deferred now had to be made; and slowly, ever so slowly, it once again became possible to make plans, however tentative those plans now became. But inwardly normality appeared to be little more than a cruel joke contrived to repress what we prefer to avoid. I played along as if everything were fine and conveyed no hint of the subtle way the axis of the world had tilted. Indeed, I did not really understand exactly what was happening.

One of the most puzzling shifts that occurred was that writing did not seem as urgent as it had always been. It

was not that ideas had ceased to flow; to the contrary, more ideas rushed through my mind than ever before. But writing and publishing my thoughts no longer were so important. The less I wrote, the more I read. And yet even here things were different; what I read and how I read had changed. Before illness struck, I had been reading widely and deeply in the natural and social sciences, as well as technology. After surgery, these subjects no longer held my attention, and I returned to earlier preoccupations—literature and art. While I explored many new works, I also reread writers I had studied for many years—Melville, Poe, Gaddis, Kafka, Beckett, Kundera, Updike, Roth, Auster, Powers, Hustvedt, Danielewski, Dickinson, and Stevens—above all others, Wallace Stevens. Whatever was stirring within me resonated more with literature and poetry than with science and technology. The way I read also changed; my reading, which had always been deliberately directed, became serendipitous. I had neither plan nor project but selected books on a whim. I no longer took notes; indeed, I did not even underline passages that seemed important at the time. It was as if my reading had become purposeless, perhaps, after all these years, even errant.

I also started looking at art more seriously than ever before. Once again, the familiar attracted me more than the new—Grünwald, Van Gogh, Renoir, Matisse, Heizer, Serra, Reinhart, Hopper, Richter, and Kiefer. I even started buying art and surrounding myself with works that reminded me of the artists I admire. What I saw and how

I looked were different. Books and artworks I thought I had understood now appeared strange. I gradually realized that when reading literature and looking at art, I had always been preoccupied with concepts and ideas. Art becomes comprehensible, I had long assumed, only when image is translated into idea. But this point of view no longer seemed adequate, and I came to suspect that by concentrating so exclusively on the conceptual, I had missed what is most distinctive about art. The critical issue now seemed to be elusive rhythms that can be articulated but not always clearly conceptualized.

One day in early summer, on the first anniversary of my surgery, I decided to reread all of Stevens's poetry, as well as his *Opus Posthumous*. I had read his work often and know many lines by heart. My favorite poems, to which I have returned again and again over the years, are "The Snow Man," "Sunday Morning," "The Man with the Blue Guitar," "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," and "Not Ideas About Things But the Thing Itself." Stevens is, of course, a philosopher's poet. Steeped in Nietzsche, he presents a vision of the world in which God dies and is reborn in the human imagination. In a series of aphorisms reminiscent of Nietzsche's work, Stevens writes:

Proposita: 1. God and the Imagination are one. 2. The thing imagined is the imaginer.

The second equals the thing imagined and the imagined are one. Hence, I suppose, the imaginer is God.¹

If God and the imagination are one and, thus, the imaginer is God, then the poet is divine, and *poiesis* is the creative activity that transforms the world into a work of art.² For Stevens, God is not the creator; rather, creativity is God. *Poiesis*, which derives from the Greek *poien* (making, creation), is not limited to poetry in the traditional sense but involves all productive and creative activity. While this vision of art underlies all of Stevens's work, he makes the point more or less explicitly in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven."

The poem is the cry of its occasion
Part of the *res* itself and not about it.
The poet speaks the poem as it is,

Not as it was: part of the reverberation
Of a windy night as it is, when the marble statues
Are like newspapers blown by the wind. He speaks

By sight and insight as they are. There is no
Tomorrow for him. The wind will have passed by,
The statues will have gone back to be things about.

The mobile and the immobile flickering
In the area between is and was are leaves,
Leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees.

And leaves in whirlings in the gutters, whirlings
Around and away, resembling the presence of thought,
Resembling the presences of thoughts, as if,

In the end, the whole psychology, the self,
The town, the weather, in casual litter,
Together, said words of the world are the life of the world.³

Leaves, whirling around and away resembling the presence of thoughts, as if the words of the world are the life of the world. What are these leaves, and what reverberations can toss marble statues like blowing newspaper? In this quiet "as if" the echo of Stevens's "intricate evasion of as" resounds. If is is always as and as is all there is, then life is poetry. Far from ephemeral, the poem is "part of the *res* itself and not about it." But what is this *res* or, as Heidegger once asked, "What is the thing?"

CLEARING

If the world is a work of art, then gardening, like writing, is a poem within a poem. Long before I was a writer, I was a gardener. My gardens, I confess, are as important to me as my books. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that gardening is the form of writing that keeps me grounded. I do some of my best thinking while gardening. Each garden has its own vocabulary, grammar, and style. Trees, shrubs, and bushes frame the work; plants and flowers—some annuals, others perennials—provide the words; placement and arrangement create the style. I never read books about gardening or study the work of

others. Though it has changed over the years, my style has always been improvisational, sometimes almost free. Like many of my most creative thoughts, I do not know where the designs for my gardens come from. Nor can I explain why one shrub or plant is right and another is wrong. The proper plant is *le mot just* that completes the work. Hoe as pen, pen as hoe: cultivation is where nature and culture meet. Nature, like art, is purposeless; or, more precisely, it has no purpose other than itself.

As the lush green of June gave way to the dry brown of August, I continued to read but not to write. Thoughts came and went, but nothing seemed important enough to record. Then one day, for reasons I am still trying to understand, I decided to stop reading and start gardening. For almost two decades, the window where I write has overlooked a wooded area that once had been a pond. The brush was thick, and poplar and willow trees had grown tall. The decision—if it was a decision—came suddenly on an impossibly hot afternoon. I had no plan, no vision of what I wanted to accomplish. I got up from my desk, dug out my chain saw and started cutting. This was not the first time I had cleared land. Thirty years earlier, I cleared the lot where we built our first home. During the intervening years, I engaged in constant border skirmishes with the ever-encroaching forest. I have always known that in the end the forest will prevail; indeed, I suspect that one of the reasons I continue to garden is so I do not forget this lesson.

When you stop to consider it, nothing is more primordial than clearing. The initial cut marks the difference between nature and culture. Culture begins with cultivation and, by extension, thinking is bound to gardening. During an era when reality appears to be becoming virtual, it is easy to forget that the forest remains the origin even when all the land has been cleared. No thinker has been more decisively shaped by forests than Heidegger. He could never write in the city—even a city as small as Freiburg—but only wrote in his primitive hut perched on a hillside overlooking a valley in Todtnauberg. The title of one of his most seminal books could be used for all his writings—*Holzwege*, which might best be translated “forest paths that lead nowhere.” As Heidegger followed these errant pathways, he eventually realized that thinking *is* clearing. In his suggestive book *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison points out that “*hyle* in Greek does not originally mean matter, it means forest. Let us repeat that *hyle* is the Greek word for forest. The cognate of *hyle* in Latin is *silva*. The archaic Latin word was *sylua*, phonetically close to *hyle*. It is strange that the Romans should have translated the Aristotelian *hyle* with the word *materia* when the Latin language possessed such a cognate. But even the word *materia* did not stray very far from the forests. *Materia* means wood—the useable wood of a tree as opposed to its bark, fruit, sap, etc. And *materia* has the same root—yes, root—as the word *mater*, or mother.”⁴

Forest, wood, material, matter, mother. The activity of thinking is prefigured by forest clearing. To think is to bring form to matter through the process of clearing. As mythologies East and West have long insisted, clearing is inevitably violent and, thus, unavoidably traumatic: in the beginning is the cut. This cut opens the space and creates the time in which appearances appear. Far from a harmonious realm removed from the travail of history, the garden is the aftereffect of a violence that is always occurring but never takes (a) place.

The longer one labors in gardens, the more one learns to respect the resistance forest and earth offer. The work of clearing is never finished, not only because the forest always grows anew but, more important, because clearing exposes something that cannot be exposed. Inasmuch as thinking is clearing, thought remains forever imbricated with the unthinkable. This is the fundamental insight that underlies and undercuts all of Heidegger's work:

The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is by nature undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up. All things of earth, and the earth itself as a whole, flow together into a reciprocal accord. But this confluence is not a blurring of their outlines. Here there flows the stream, restful within itself, of the setting of bounds, which delimits everything present within its presence. Thus in each of the self-secluding things there is the same not-knowing-

of-one-another. The earth is essentially self-secluding. To set forth the earth means to bring it into the Open as the self-secluding.⁵

As we have seen in our exploration of Roden Crater, Heidegger makes this observation in his influential essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." The origin of the work of art, he argues, is "the Open as the self-secluding." To grasp Heidegger's point, we must note the duplicity of his language. Both *of* and *work* must be read in at least two ways. The first *of* in the title "The Origin of the Work of Art" serves as a double genitive: on the one hand, the origin of the work of art is that from which art originates, and, on the other hand, the origin of the work of art is that which the work of art brings into being. Art is, impossibly, both the cause and effect of the origin of the work. *Work*, in turn, must be understood as both noun and verb. The work of art is the product created, as well as the activity of creation. Art is the creative process of formation or, more precisely, figuration, which reveals the concealment that allows appearances to appear.

When I left my study and started to clear the forest, I thought I was setting aside thinking but soon realized that my research had taken an unexpected turn. What at first seemed to be a circumscribed task kept expanding; the more I cleared, the more I discovered needed to be cleared. My strength had not fully returned after the surgery, and in the oppressive August heat the work went more slowly than I wanted. After a few weeks I had cleared

all the brush and cut down all the trees in the area that had been the pond. I still had no plan and was not sure what I was doing or why I was doing it. As I pondered my next step, something very strange began to happen. When the wind was still, it seemed as if the earth were whispering in my ear what it wanted me to do next. From that moment on, I simply followed the messages the land sent me.

Eventually, I reached the limit of what I could do alone and, though I was reluctant to do so, recruited stronger bodies and heavy machinery to chip the brush and remove the tree stumps. As the debris was hauled away, the land began to reveal itself in new ways. Where the pond had been there was a beautiful symmetrical bowl that seemed to have been crafted with great care. It remains unclear, however, whether this form is natural or artificial because it folds into the gentle slope of the earth in a manner that does not seem man-made. As the bulldozer filled the holes left by stumps and smoothed the earth the forest had covered, the blade struck an outcropping of ledge. I carefully removed the soil and discovered a beautiful amber shape. By the time I had finished, the rock appeared to be the nose of an ancient leviathan that had been long submerged. As I struggled to decipher the rock's etchings, my mind wandered to Melville's *Moby-Dick*:

In life, the visible surface of the Sperm Whale is not the least among the many marvels he presents. Almost invariably it is all over obliquely crossed and recrossed with numberless straight marks in thick array, something

like those in the finest Italian line engravings. . . . These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious ciphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connexion. By my retentive memory of the hieroglyphics upon one Sperm Whale in particular, I was much struck with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiselled on the famous hieroglyphic palisades on the banks of the Upper Mississippi. Like those mystic rocks, too, the mystic-marked whale remains undecipherable.⁶

Mystic rocks, like mystic bones, remain indecipherable. The tip of the rock could do no more than suggest the depths that remained concealed and secrets that will forever remain untold.

The revelation of the self-concealing rock recast the contour of the land. At the edge of the field that the woods surrounded, I discovered the hint of another outcropping I had never before noticed. With pick and shovel I gradually stripped away the earth and found a beautiful formation that appeared to be frayed pages of an ancient book (Fig. 5.1). As I studied this ancient text, it seemed undeniable that Heidegger is right when he insists that the interplay between disclosure and concealment is the "essential strife" in and through which earth and world eternally emerge:

The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering

and concealing. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything that is closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.⁷

I still was not sure how to convey the lessons I was learning. Then one afternoon in early August, while sitting on the slope of the erstwhile pond and pondering what to do, I noticed a large rock at the edge of the clearing (Fig. 5.2). I had seen this rock countless times, but in the open it looked different. It was richly colored limestone that time had shaped and etched in ways no human sculptor could match. In that instant I realized what the earth wanted me to do. I would create a rock garden similar to those I had admired in Kyoto temples years ago. In the following days I drew up plans, selected the rocks, and laid out their arrangement. I decided to make the outcropping of ledge the anchor and to place the other rocks in relation to it. The centerpiece would be the sculpted rock I had rediscovered. At one end the exposed rock carried messages from the underworld, and at the other end rocks floated weightlessly on a surface that runs deep. Among the rocks

I spread luminous blue-gray gravel, hinting of the ocean's surface, and around the garden I scattered grass seed and covered it with straw. As I surveyed the work, it had an unmistakable symmetry I had not planned. Assuming my work was finished, I sat back and prepared to watch the grass grow.

During the night there was a violent thunderstorm that brought heavy rain. When I awoke the next morning, the garden was completely submerged. While there is an upper pond that sometimes overflows, the lower pond had never held water, so I decided to wait a few days to let the water recede. But after a week the water level remained unchanged, and I decided to bring in a pump to drain the pond. As I struggled with the water, I began to feel that my labor was a ritual reenactment of ancient cosmogonic myths. The only solution I could imagine was another cut; I called back the heavy equipment to dig a culvert at the lower edge of the basin. When the soil dried, I reseeded the area that had washed out. The warm days of August turned into the cool nights of September, and the grass grew quickly until the rock garden was transformed into an island surrounded by a verdant sea of green. What intrigued me most as I contemplated the garden was the way in which the rocks made the light visible. It was not so much that changing sunlight illuminated the rocks, but, rather, the opaque rocks illuminated the shifting light. It was as if the seemingly lifeless rocks rendered the golden northern light a palpable presence.



Figure 5.1 Mark C. Taylor, Stone Hill



Figure 5.2 Mark C. Taylor, Stone Hill

As summer gave way to fall and fall to winter, the grass turned brown; “leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees” whirled through the rocks, and the light slowly changed. The changes wrought by clearing were greater than I expected. The garden evoked moods I had never experienced. As these moods settled like a mountain mist, I discovered rhythms I had never noticed—the path of

light revealed by rocks, the play of shadows cast by forest’s edge, lines of flight followed by different species of birds, tracks of animals leaving messages difficult to read. Most surprising of all was the steady flow of water that ran through the pond bed I had always assumed was dry. Though it sometimes withered to a trickle, the current did not stop all winter. When snow arrived, the flowing water



Figure 5.3 Mark C. Taylor, Stone Hill

created what appeared to be a dappled Jackson Pollock canvas (Fig. 5.3). By spring it was clear that I needed more than a culvert to deal with the water. As always in life, there seemed to be two options: resist or go with the flow.

Watching the stream for several months, I became fascinated by the subtle ways the water reshaped the earth I had so carefully formed. As the soil washed away, layers

of deeply etched burnt umber rock appeared just beneath the surface. Like the stunning color of sea creatures lurking in ocean depths, here was a beauty no human eye had ever beheld. Once I realized the importance of water for the composition of the work, I knew I had to redraw my designs. Instead of attempting to drain the pond dry, I decided to emphasize the flow of water by integrating the



Figure 5.4 Mark C. Taylor, Stone Hill

stream and the rock garden. This required undoing much of what I had done the previous summer. After considering different alternatives, I once again recruited help, and we devised a self-circulating system that consisted of an upper and a lower pond and a 140-foot streambed. With more heavy equipment we began digging with the backhoe and shaping with the bulldozer (Fig. 5.4).

Both of the ponds, as well as the stream, would be lined with rocks and stones, ranging from three to four feet in diameter to pea-sized gravel. All this material was either gathered from our land or brought in from nearby fields and quarries. The rocks and stones were placed to maximize their aesthetic effect. In all honesty, this process remains mysterious to me; for some reason, a particular

rock looks just right or completely wrong in a particular place. The greatest challenge was defining the serpentine course of the stream in a way that resonated with the gentle curves of the land, as well as with the contour of the rock garden. After several days and countless adjustments, the work seemed complete. What has been most surprising about these changes is how much the addition of motion and sound enriched the overall effect (Fig. 5.5). The water also attracts many varieties of wildlife, especially during the early morning hours—raccoons, deer, turkey, hawks, once even a mysterious white coyote, reminiscent of Beuys's famous conversation in *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974).

For the past several months I have done most of my reading beside the stream. I am still not underlining texts or taking notes. But something else has changed—just as the stream and rock garden allow me to see what I had never noticed, so their quiet rhythms alert me to lines I had overlooked and nuances I had never noticed in texts I thought I knew well. A few days ago I was rereading “The Origin of the Work of Art” and paused over a passage I had read many times and have quoted above but never really appreciated: “All things of earth, and the earth itself as a whole, flow together into a reciprocal accord. But this confluence is not a blurring of their outlines. Here there flows the stream, restful within itself, of the setting of bounds, which delimits everything present within its presence.” By delimiting everything present within its presence, the

stream is, in effect, the clearing that transforms the world into the work of art.

FLOW

I have often pondered the importance of timing for responding to books and appreciating art. Books and poems that at one time seem pointless at another time prove compelling; art that initially leaves one cold comes alive when viewed in a different time or place. The first time I tried to read *Moby-Dick*, I was unable to finish it; when I picked it up again several years later, it seemed as though my entire life had been preparing me to read this novel. I had been aware of Andy Goldsworthy for years—indeed, I even owned one of his books—but I had never taken the time to consider his work seriously. Friends and colleagues whose judgment in art matters I respect dismiss him as irrelevant for the contemporary scene. Many of these people ardently promote the work of Damien Hirst and his American counterpart, Jeff Koons. While resisting their infatuation with these two con artists, I suspect I was unduly influenced by their consistent dismissal of Goldsworthy. I had not been thinking about Goldsworthy when, one day that fall, I took his book entitled simply *Walls* from my shelf and began studying it. I had just finished writing an essay about a stone wall I had built more than two decades earlier and was curious to see what



Figure 5.5 Mark C. Taylor, Stone Hill

light Goldsworthy had to shed on the subject. The more I read, the more interested I became, and by the time I had finished the book, I was convinced that precisely his purported irrelevance makes his work relevant at this particular moment. Goldsworthy's art provides a corrective to the excesses of finance capitalism and proposes a vision

that addresses many of the critical environmental issues we are facing.

My friends and colleagues are not the only ones who think Goldsworthy an unimportant artist. Though his works, or, more precisely, books of photographs of his art, are immensely popular, critics in the United States and

Europe ignore his work. In a 2000 article about young British artists, entitled “World Famous, yet Cast Out of London’s Art World,” Gillian Bowditch writes: “‘Few art world taste-makers in Britain take Andy Goldsworthy’s work seriously, dismissing it as transient, populist New Age whimsy,’ wrote Doris Lockhart Saatchi, the art critic and former wife of Charles Saatchi, earlier this year. ‘He is not represented in the Tate Collection by a single piece.’”⁸ It is possible to learn quite a bit about contemporary art, as well as the state of the world today, by considering this statement and others like it.

In many ways Goldsworthy’s work is the negative image of what many artists, curators, and critics value. Whether by design or default, he embraces what the art establishment rejects. Goldsworthy prefers:

Rural to urban
Hand to machine
Walking to riding
Materiality to virtuality
Analog to digital
Energy to entropy
Lingering to leaving
Slowness to speed
Concentration to distraction
Healing to wounding

And, most important of all, Goldsworthy is preoccupied with beauty and the sense of place.

It is not easy to categorize Goldsworthy’s work. In some ways he seems rooted in the English landscape tradition. Many of his works look like a Constable painting translated into three dimensions. More than one critic has insisted that his work is more craft than art. But Goldsworthy, as much as Warhol, collapses the distinction between high and low or fine art and craft. Though rarely noted, resonances do exist between Goldsworthy and more recent artists, whose work is embraced by the same critics who reject Goldsworthy: Beuys (trees, leaves, feathers, and sheep), Sandback (finely strung threads of grass), Hamilton (walls and dust), Serra (precariously balanced plates and arcs), Barney (Celtic landscape and mythology), and Turrell (light). More commonly, Goldsworthy’s work is associated with the American earthwork artists who burst on the scene in the late 1960s. On several occasions he has expressed his interest in Smithson’s work; indeed, it is not difficult to detect references to *Spiral Jetty* in much of Goldsworthy’s art. But whereas Smithson’s scale is grand, Goldsworthy’s is modest. Rather than truckloads of rock dumped into the dead Great Salt Lake, Goldsworthy creates spirals out of pebbles, twigs, leaves, grass, ferns, snow, and ice (Figs. 5.6, 5.7). His works are not made to last for generations but are created to disappear quickly. The difference in scale and material reflects different in-

terests and values. Goldsworthy has commented on the significance of the spiral in his work:

All forms are to be found in nature, and there are many qualities within any material. By exploring them I hope to understand the whole. My work needs to include the loose and the disordered within the nature of the material as well as the tight and regular.

1985 saw my first use of the spiral. It took me a long time to come to terms with this form, so evident in nature, and I still avoid the overblown spiral. I prefer that of the unfolding fern, which gives the feeling of endless growth.⁹

Whereas Smithson is preoccupied with entropy and decline, Goldsworthy is concerned with energy and growth (see Fig. 5.8). Smithson searches the swamps and wastelands of New Jersey for decaying debris in which he sees primarily death; Goldsworthy, by contrast, uncovers rotting material in rural settings where he sees life renewing itself. As Simon Schama points out, Goldsworthy's concern is "the natural process of catastrophe and redemption":

The connoisseurs of decomposition are overwhelmingly urban, and walls generally capture their interest only when scrawled with graffiti. Goldsworthy, too, plays in

the junk yards of the world, but his are strewn with the rubble of the eons, not last night's Chinese take-away. And then he is obstinately indifferent to cool, impervious to the laconic game-playing required for certification in conceptual subtlety. He has never made a secret of valuing clarity over irony and northern plainness over metropolitan chic. When, in the late 'eighties, his former dealer, Fabian Carlsson, offered him a long-term contract on condition that he move to London, the price was too high.¹⁰

Professionally, as Goldsworthy and others have learned, staying in the country and not moving to the city can also have a high price.

Less often noted but no less important are similarities between Goldsworthy and other leading earthwork artists like Michael Heizer and James Turrell. Goldsworthy's use of dried clay to create intricate wall drawings and sculptures that appear to be eroding recall Heizer's works drawn with motorcycle tires and etched in dry, cracking Nevada lake beds (*Rift*, 1968; *Isolated Mass/Circumflex* [#2]) (Fig. 5.9). Goldsworthy, like Heizer, is fascinated by faults and fissures. But, once again, his scale differs drastically. Rather than a fifteen-hundred-foot cut in a remote desert mesa, Goldsworthy exposes faults in fractured pebbles, an irregular trench edged with clay, and a line drawn in slate on a Cumbrian farm.



Figure 5.6 (top) Andy Goldsworthy, *Broken Icicle*
Figure 5.7 (right) Andy Goldsworthy,
 Leaves wrapped around several sticks/Joined
Figure 5.8 (bottom) Andy Goldsworthy,
 Broken pebbles scratched white with another stone



Figure 5.9 Andy Goldsworthy, *White Walls*

Turrell is as much concerned with the heavens as with the earth; more precisely, he is interested in the relationship between heaven and earth. Goldsworthy shares Turrell's fascination with light. Many of Goldsworthy's works are designed to reveal the changing appearance of light in different places at different times. While the interplay between light and shadow is important for all of his work, the most effective exploration of the apprehension of light is *Night Path* (2002). This work consists of a three-kilometer trail winding through the ancient forest in Pentworth Park on the Leconfield Estate in West Sussex. This path is

formed with pulverized white chalk gathered from Sussex Downs. Like Turrell, Goldsworthy is convinced that the best time to see light is, paradoxically, at night. Accordingly, the path is open to the public only three nights each month around the time of the full moon. Richard Dormant describes his experience of the work:

You reach the entrance to the path after dark, of course, and admittances to the wood are timed so that the already apprehensive visitor sets off alone and in silence. This is an important part of the experience. As you walk through the woods guided by the shining path in front of you, the softest sounds become intensified. By this hour, even the hum of distant traffic has died down. The crack of a twig, fronds or branches brushing against your side, invisible footfalls in front or behind you: each is heard with a clarity that would be lost in daytime.

On a clear night, the milky light flooding a forest clearing becomes confused in your mind with the artificial "moonlight" at your feet. At the same time, the world has become infinitely strange, a place drained of color, reduced to tones of light and dark. Like animals, the longer we stay in the wood, the more acute our sense becomes.¹¹

It is important to remember that in moonlight it is impossible to perceive colors, and everything appears to be

black and white. What is most interesting about the photographs of this work is the way the path radiates rather than reflects light. It is as if this *Holzwege* were illuminated from within to create a sense of lighting (*Lichtung*) that is a clearing (*Lichtung*).

These important similarities between the work of Goldsworthy and his predecessors should not obscure their equally significant differences. There is a noteworthy difference in tone as well as substance between his work and earthwork artists. The work of the Americans is more muscular and assertive than that of Goldsworthy. Their lives and work incongruously bring together the myths of the isolated, renegade artist and the solitary American cowboy. In heading west, Heizer, Smithson, and Turrell not only seek wide-open spaces but also stake their claim to remote territory, where they can create works that flaunt their originality and authenticity. Ascetic aesthetes, they retreat to the wilderness—Heizer to the Nevada desert, Smithson to the Great Salt Lake in Utah, and Turrell to the volcano fields of Arizona—to escape the urban scene. The scale of their art is designed for the immensity of the space. Their massive projects make use of heavy industrial machinery and require teams of workers and decades to complete. This is art designed to stand the test of time. Wandering through these monumental works, it is not difficult to imagine future generations discovering in them what we see in the ruins of ancient civilizations ranging from Egypt to the Yucatan.

Goldsworthy's approach is completely different. He believes that place matters more than space. He was born in Cheshire (1956) and grew up on the Harrowgate side of Leeds, West Yorkshire, in a house at the edge of the green belt. After graduating from Bradford College of Art (1975) and the University of Central Lancashire (1978), he moved to Cumbria. In following years he drifted northward to Langholm in Dumfries and Galloway, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, before finally settling in the village of Sumfriesshire, located at the foot of the Scottish lowlands. Never simply a geographical direction, "north" is a medium in Goldsworthy's art. "When I work with winter," he observes, "I work with the North. For me, north is an integral part of the land. I can touch it in the cold shadow of a mountain, the green side of a tree, the mossy face of a rock. Its energy is made visible in snow and ice."¹²

The northern Scottish lowlands and hills are haunted by Celtic ghosts that quietly roam through Goldsworthy's work even when they are not explicitly invoked. Rather than attempting to impose his will on virgin territory, he listens to the land to hear the stories—some human, some inhuman—it tells. Hearing what the land has to say requires patience and takes time:

My strongest work now is so rooted in place that it cannot be separated from where it is made—the work is the place. Atmosphere and feeling now direct me more than the picking up of a leaf, stick, stone. . . .

I am no longer content simply to make objects; instead of placing works upon a stone, I am drawn to the stone itself. I want to explore the space within and around the stone through a touch that is a brief moment in its life. A long resting stone is not an object in the landscape but a deeply ingrained witness to time and a focus of energy for its surroundings.¹³

As the title of one of his books indicates, Goldsworthy's aim is to establish a "collaboration with nature." In contrast to artists like Heizer and Smithson, who attempt to transform the earth into their own image, Goldsworthy accommodates himself and his work to the rhythms of the land. "Even with works made in stone, such as the Dunsin Cairns in which my hand retains some control," he writes, "there is a feeling of nurturing the sculpture into fruition rather than forcing the form into being. There is a difference between placing and making a work on a site. A work made in a place grows there and becomes part of it in a way that a sited object has difficulty in achieving. This is not a criticism of other sculptures, just an observation that in my own work I can see the way different approaches affect the way a sculpture welds to a place."¹⁴

The land with which Goldsworthy works differs in significant ways from the land that serves as the stage for earthwork artists. There is no wilderness in the United Kingdom; even land that is not currently cultivated is nonetheless tended. "The response of British land art-

ists to all these Big-Sky-Bad Boy heroics," according to Schama, "was creative understatement laced with a smidgen of polite distaste. Trucking through the desert and shifting the dirt was fine for a country with millions of acres of unpopulated wilderness, but Britain was the opposite kind of place. Not an inch of its crowded landscape was unmarked by human occupation. So its land art needed to be practiced as though Wordsworth were still with us: it had to be respectful of ancient rights of way, reverently self-effacing."¹⁵ As if to make a virtue of necessity, Goldsworthy insists that he is not interested in unsettled territory but seeks to collaborate with nature and to establish a conversation with previous generations who have worked the land. Agriculture, he believes, is already an artistic activity: "Farming is a very sculptural profession. Building haystacks or plowing fields, burning stubble."¹⁶ Like his ancestors Goldsworthy avoids heavy machinery and prefers to work by hand. Flaunting the virtues of craft in the face of those who privilege machines and their abstractions, he extols the value of handwork. The hand, he believes, draws together material, place, work, and artist.¹⁷

Goldsworthy's dedication to place runs counter not only to the dominant current of modernism but also to the trajectory of modernity. Modernity is resistant to and even destructive of place. The process of modernization inevitably involves physical and psychological displacement. When societies modernize, technological developments tend to bring a shift away from traditional values.

As change becomes the highest good, the new replaces the old, and stability gives way to mobility. The shift is not only geographical but, more important, axiological—to be on the move is to be on the make and those who stay in one place are left behind. But mobility is not always a virtue, for it can distract from what most needs attention. Serious thinking cannot be rushed, and the work that really matters takes time. Consider some of the greatest modern thinkers: Kant never left Königsberg; Hegel never ventured from what is now Germany; and Kierkegaard left Copenhagen only once. Goldsworthy sometimes travels but prefers to stay in his Scottish village. “Most (if not all) that I need,” he admits, “can be found within walking distance of my home. When traveling I regret the loss of a sense of change. I see differences not changes. Change is best experienced by staying in one place.”¹⁸ For an age obsessed with mobility and speed, there is wisdom in this insight.

Goldsworthy’s preoccupation with place is often misunderstood. Some critics summarily dismiss him as a druidic figure devoted to Celtic paganism and occult mysticism. It is important to acknowledge that some of his comments tend to encourage this reading of his work. Goldsworthy often writes about a common energy that circulates through both nature and his art. Responding to criticisms of his art for being merely decorative, he leaves himself open to attack on other grounds. “Color for me,” he explains, “is not pretty or decorative—it is raw with en-

ergy. Nor does it rest on the surface. I explore the color within and around a rock—color is form and space. It does not lie passively or flat. At best it reaches deep into nature—drawing on the unseen—touching the living rock—revealing the energy inside.”¹⁹ The more carefully one studies Goldsworthy’s work, however, the clearer it becomes that his vision differs from New Age spirituality in important ways. While New Age believers preach a gospel of harmony and light, Goldsworthy acknowledges the violence and darkness of natural processes. He probes this darkness in a series of works that figure holes. “The hole,” he explains, “has become an important element. Looking into a deep hole unnerves me. My concept of stability is questioned and I am made aware of the potent energies within the earth. The black is that energy made visible.”²⁰ Turrell might well have written these words. Over the course of his career Goldsworthy has explored holes in a variety of media—rocks, stones, sand, mud, flowers, leaves, twigs, snow, ice, frost, wool, feathers, even water (Figs. 5.10, 5.11).

What is impressive about the most fragile and delicate of these works is not so much the interplay of light and darkness but the interrelation of beauty and void. If, as Stevens suggests, the poem is “part of the res itself and not about it,” then these works by Goldsworthy are, like Heidegger’s thing, no-thing. Heidegger’s account of the potter shaping a jug effectively describes Goldsworthy’s work with holes:

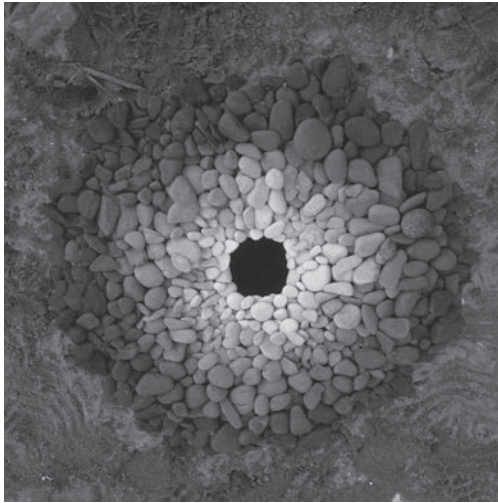
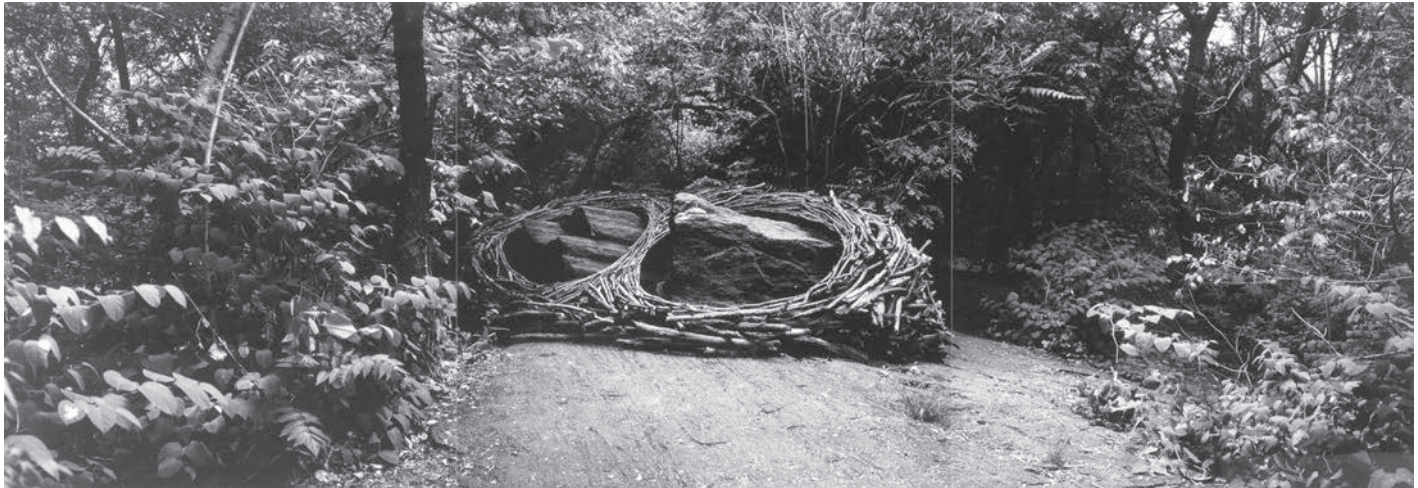


Figure 5.10 (*top*) Andy Goldsworthy, Pebbles around a hole

Figure 5.11 (*bottom*) Andy Goldsworthy, Sticks stacked around two rocks, Central Park, NY



Sides and bottom, of which the jug consists and by which it stands are not really what does the holding. But if the holding is done by the jug's void, then the potter who forms the sides and bottom on his wheel does not, strictly speaking, make the jug. He only shapes the clay. No—he shapes the void. For it, in it, and out of it, he forms the clay into the form. From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of a containing vessel. The jug's void determines all the handling in the process of making the vessel. The vessel's thingness does not lie in all the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.²¹

The activity of figuring the void does not overcome the dread it harbors; to the contrary, when the work of art is nothing, it turns us toward that which we prefer to avoid. Goldsworthy confesses, “I feel a deep insecurity in nature—a fragile, unpredictable and violent energy. The black holes and cracks are windows into that energy.”²² Far from placid and tranquil, nature, in Goldsworthy's view, is characterized by a ferocity effectively captured in Nietzsche's Dionysian vision:

The world: a monster of energy, without becoming, without end . . . a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing

and rushing together, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms . . . a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this is my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal.²³

Goldsworthy's multifaceted work is not only place specific but is also time specific. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that time is one of his most important “tools.” While some of his works are planned to last for a long time, most are created to disappear—some in years, some in weeks, some in days, some even in minutes. The exploration of the interplay between permanence and impermanence is a constant theme in his work. Because so much of his art is temporary and in remote locations, most people know it only through his lavish books. Goldsworthy accompanies his exquisite photographs with diary entries in which he records the process of conceiving and creating the work. His works are not only material objects but also the photographs, narratives, and books related to them.

Goldsworthy's materials are even more diverse than his works. All are natural, none artificial—if, indeed, that distinction any longer makes sense. Like an ancient demiurge, Goldsworthy works with the four basic elements—earth, air, fire, and water. But his media are immaterial,

as well as material: light, darkness, shadows, wind, and sound. His works are always crafted in concert with the distinctive rhythms of different times and places. In Goldsworthy's world nothing is at rest, and everything is interconnected and in motion. "The aim," for Goldsworthy, "is to understand the nature of nature—not isolated materials." "I do not simply cover rocks. I need to understand the nature that is in all things. Stone is wood, water, earth, grass. . . . I am interested in the binding of time in materials and places that reveals the stone in a flower and the flower in a stone."²⁴ If a stone is a flower and a flower a stone, nothing is merely itself, and everything is other than what it appears to be.

Goldsworthy's most popular works are those in which he paints and sculpts with leaves. Unlike so many in today's art world, he is charmed with color and is not afraid to use it to spectacular effect. He weaves together red, yellow, and amber autumn leaves to create paintings that resemble a cheerful Rothko canvas (Figs. 5.12, 5.13). His use of greens and browns in works that obscure the line between painting and sculpture reveals shades of difference that are usually imperceptible. In other works Goldsworthy draws with leaves, twigs, feathers, and mud. His use of naturally colored stones reveals subtle hues no artist can create. When he covers rocks in rushing streams with brilliant red, yellow, or green leaves, color explodes as if ignited from within (Fig. 5.14). One of Goldsworthy's most intriguing works is a single rock placed at the edge of

a field in Dumfriesshire and covered with different leaves during different seasons: ash in winter, beech in spring, sycamore in summer, and hazel in fall (*Penpoint Stone*, 1991–93). What is interesting about this sculpture is the way the leaves covering the rock disclose the changing colors of the surrounding field. This play of colors reveals the elemental to be relational and the relational to be elemental.

Goldsworthy's signature works, however, are not brightly colored but are cast in quiet shades of gray, brown, and black. Transforming craft into art and exposing aesthetic value in utilitarian objects, he creates stone walls and cairns that are sculptural works. Dry-stone walls have long been a feature of the Cumbrian landscape where Goldsworthy lives and works. These walls mark property lines, many of which date back to the Middle Ages. In northern moorlands less suited for farming, the walls serve to enclose sheep and thereby to control their grazing. Each wall forms an integral part of a complex network that extends throughout the United Kingdom. "The British landscape," Goldsworthy notes, "is rich with agricultural dry-stone walls. Their effect upon my work has been more profound than that of prehistoric stone circles, to which I make only occasional visits. Walls are a living part of the landscape and are a great lesson to a sculptor in their response to material and place."²⁵ Embracing rather than avoiding the utilitarian function of walls, Goldsworthy has helped to restore many stone walls that are still

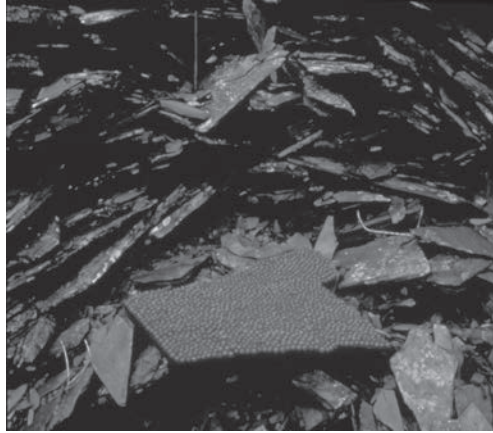
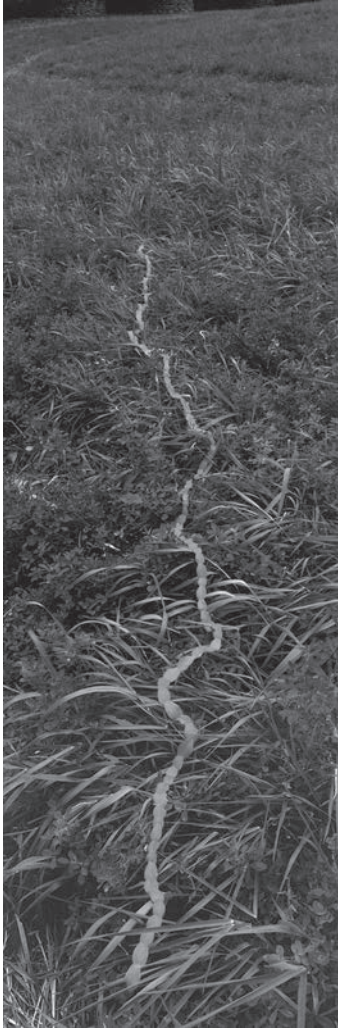


Figure 5.12 (*far left*) Andy Goldsworthy, Leaves from nearby bush / each leaf stitched to another / to make line / laid on grass

Figure 5.13 (*top*) Andy Goldsworthy, Mountain ash berries laid on slate

Figure 5.14 (*bottom*) Andy Goldsworthy, Dandelions held to river stone, Scaur water, Dumfriesshire

used by farmers and sheepherders in the Cambria area. While carrying traces of functionality, his most important wall sculptures emphasize aesthetic values.

The largest and most impressive wall Goldsworthy has created to date is located in Storm King, a sculpture park in the Hudson Valley (Fig. 5.15). The work, which began in 1995 in response to an invitation and was completed three years later, extends 2,278 feet and is 2½ feet wide. Stone walls are much more common in the United Kingdom than in the United States. Most of the walls in the United States, made by settlers on rocky land in the Northeast, have fallen into disuse and been overgrown by second-growth forest. Goldsworthy speculates that Scottish immigrants might have built the walls around Storm King and notes that the stone in this area is similar to that around his home village. In this work, as in many others, he begins with the ruins of a wall that was barely visible beneath trees and roots. He explains the reasons for this approach: “I have generally been more satisfied with wall sculptures I have made that relate to an old wall. I like the resonance of making an old wall new again, and allowing it to change in response to the place as I find it.”²⁶ Evocation of the old rather than assertion of the new guides his work. The wall gradually emerges from the woods and winds its way over hills, through a pond, and across a field, where it stops just short of traffic rushing along the New York Thruway.

The work was actually made by wallers Goldsworthy brought with him from north England and Scotland. He



Figure 5.15 Andy Goldsworthy, *Storm King Wall*

freely admits the limitations of his contribution: “I acknowledge the extraordinary craft of wall-making, but my art lies in the line taken by the wall and its relationship to place rather than to the method of its construction” (46). The line and its relation to place, however, prove rather elusive. As we have seen, Goldsworthy is committed to collaborating with the land rather than asserting his control over it. His art, therefore, consists not so much in creating as

discovering the line in the land. "Searching out lines that already exist interests me more than imposing new ones. I have made lines that explore and follow the contours of a rock, the edge of rivers, the growth of a branch, the junction between house and street. . . . Pressing leaves into the bark of a tree produces lines dictated by the tree's growth patterns. The intention is not just to make a line, but to draw the change, movement, growth and decay that flow through a place" (36). When viewed from a distance and from the air, the Storm King wall appears to be a snake slithering across the ground. The subtle shifts of the line suggest the unexpected complexity of the work. Though such walls were initially intended to mark boundaries, Goldsworthy's wall not only separates but also unites. His work confounds rather than secures opposites: high/low, art/craft, complexity/simplicity, inside/outside, depth/surface, presence/absence, permanence/impermanence, stability/instability, movement/rest. Though seemingly immobile, the undulating line oscillates between the opposites it simultaneously brings together and holds apart and clears the opening in which the event of creation occurs.

The distinctive feature of Goldsworthy's rift-design is its serpentine character. This pattern appears in many of his works made in media ranging from snow, sand, and mud to leaves, twigs, and feathers. He uses this design in one of his few monumental works. While acknowledging obvious associations between these lines and snakes,

Goldsworthy insists that his interests lie elsewhere. "I am not interested in the symbolic or representational aspects of the snake," he writes. "But I have to admit that when I see snakes, they are the perfect sculptural form—no legs!—and their movement is such a perfect expression of their form. They draw the path they're taking, and I look for the same quality in the sculpture I'm making. It's the idea of fluidity that is the connection, but I'm not really talking about a river either. It's the movement that interests me" (13). What is most remarkable about the Storm King wall is the interplay between stasis and fluidity it stages. Rather than clearing land to create the wall, the sculpture wanders among trees in a way that enfolds them in a protective embrace. Looking at the wall from a distance, it is difficult to be sure where one side ends and the other begins. Like an Escher drawing or a ribbon that has no end, the wall is a Möbius strip whose folds are infinite.

The wall not only confounds the opposition between inside and outside but also complicates the relation between surface and depth, presence and absence. Where forest meets lake, the circuitous wall disappears in a pond and reappears on the far side of the water. It is impossible to be sure whether the wall continues underwater. Although this section of the wall is reminiscent of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, the differences between the two works are more important than their similarities. Whereas Smithson's spiral reaches a dead end in a dead lake, Goldsworthy's serpentine wall plunges into a pond filled with life, emerges, and

runs through the woods to a verdant field, where it uncoils in a straight line that points to a receding horizon. As I have stressed, for Smithson nature is entropic, and the future coils in on itself in a dead sea; for Goldsworthy nature is bursting with energy and explodes like a fern's uncoiling frond reaching for the sun.

It takes time to appreciate the Storm King sculpture; this work cannot be absorbed quickly. Nor can it be viewed simply from a distance; it is necessary to walk—preferably alone—with it. If you take time, you discover surprising moments when the wall seems to move, as if really it were a snake slipping through grass or a stream meandering among the trees, while rising and falling with the gentle shape of the land. In a DVD devoted to his work—entitled, significantly, *Rivers and Tides*—Goldsworthy confides that “rivers and the sea have been the greatest influence on me.” It might, then, seem strange that in so much of his work he uses stones and rocks. But Goldsworthy has a fluid notion of rocks and an expansive understanding of rivers. Commenting on work in Santa Fe, he writes:

This sand is between stone and water—evidence of a deeper movement, energy and change. These feelings are made stronger by the red, which has a flow and life of its own. The red streams running from the cliff were once the cliff itself.

I have worked with many rivers here in New Mexico, two of which, while dry, have obviously had water flow-

ing along them at some time. There are also rivers of sand, of stone, and the river of red. When I worked with red sand on red stone I was dipping my hand into the red river that runs through all nature. My idea of a river is much more than just water. . . . I have learnt a lot by working with the absence of water.²⁷

Though rivers are always fluid, not all of them are flowing water.

In Goldsworthy's world everything is in motion—“everything is fluid, even the land, it just flows at a very slow rate.”²⁸ Twisting and turning, the Storm King wall appears to be a glacial moraine winding to the sea. Material erodes, dissolves, and reforms in rhythms as endless as time itself. “The real work,” Goldsworthy concludes, “is change.”²⁹ Nowhere are these rhythms more evident than at land's edge. Ever since he left his white-cube studio during his art-school days, Goldsworthy has worked on the beach. The border where land and sea meet is not merely the site of much of his work but is actually the substance of his art:

I was interested in seeing work change and decay, but usually as a spectator. Lately the challenge has been not simply to wait for things to decay, but to make change an integral part of a work's purpose so that, if anything, it becomes stronger and more complete as it falls apart and disappears. I need to make works that anticipate,

but do not attempt to predict or control, the future. In order to understand time, I must work with the past, present and future.

The beach was, and still is, a great teacher. This is where many of my working rhythms were first established. Work between the tides usually has to be made quickly and lasts for only a short time. Timing is critical. There is a gamble and balance between what I want to make and the time available to achieve it. Rarely is there enough time to finish a work just as I want. This lesson reaches beyond work made on the beach. I have tried to pitch my life so that I make the best use of my time and energy. I prefer works that are fashioned by the compromises forced upon me by nature, whether it be an incoming tide, the end of a day, thawing snow, shriveling leaves or the deadline of my own lifetime.³⁰

Changing tides, the end of the day, thawing snow, shriveling leaves—Goldsworthy works along the edge where everything is in flux.

Another of Goldsworthy's preferred forms is the cairn. Cairns, like stone walls, usually are not associated with fine art, and this is precisely what makes them so attractive to Goldsworthy. He has made cairns in many settings using wood, snow, and ice, as well as rocks and stones of all sizes and shapes. He describes these cairns as cones filled with seeds ready to burst. Their shape, no less significantly, also resembles an egg. Though most of the cairns

appear to be quite stable, they are actually very fragile. As in his walls, Goldsworthy uses no mortar to hold the work together; each sculpture consists of hundreds of delicately balanced rocks and stones. The smooth lines and precise symmetry of the finished product conceal the diversity and complexity of its composition. In one way or another Goldsworthy addresses the challenge of balancing conflicting forces in all of his work. He is not so much interested in harmonizing differences as in maximizing tensions up to the point of collapse. "The very thing that brings the work to life," he observes, "is the thing that will cause its death."³¹ The fragility of balance and prospect of collapse transform static objects into mobile processes.

While many of Goldsworthy's walls evoke rivers, some of his most suggestive cairns are surrounded by tidal flows (Fig. 5.16). Any sculpture set in sand is bound to collapse, for what appears to be the ground is no ground at all. Shifting sand marks the flow of time, and time, I have stressed, is one of Goldsworthy's most important media. When he creates cairns on the beach, he works with time in several ways. First, and most obviously, tidal flows limit the time for the creation of the sculpture; when working on the beach, Goldsworthy never has longer than the time between low tide and high. This limitation of time increases the precariousness of the work. In a description resembling a concrete poem, whose shape conforms to the object described, Goldsworthy describes a work executed on February 5, 1999:

Cairn
Built on sand
Between tides
Several collapses
Ran out of time
Returned the following day
One more collapse before I succeeded
Cairn survived several tides³²

Even when complete, the work of art is subject to time. Incoming and outgoing tides create a play of presence and absence by gradually revealing and concealing the sculpture. This revelation is twofold—the rock reveals the sea as much as the sea reveals the rock. What is most important is the *interplay* of rock and sea. Just as Roden Crater makes light and the movement of the heavens visible, the placement of the sculpture makes it possible to glimpse rhythms that seem to reenact ancient creation myths in the movement of the sea. As the tide ebbs and flows, the cairn appears like a sacred mountain or island emerging from primordial waters only to be washed away by rising floodwaters. The alternation of appearing and disappearing captures the rhythms of life and death.

Even when they appear to be discrete, Goldsworthy's works are always interconnected. In his most extended work, which spans the entire American continent, he makes these relations explicit by creating cairns on both coasts (Pigeon Point, Half Moon Bay, California; and New



Figure 5.16 Andy Goldsworthy, *East Coast Sea Cairn*

Rochelle, New York), as well as in the Midwest (Grinnell, Iowa). Having worked with earth, air, and water, Goldsworthy deploys the final primal element, fire, in creating the Iowa cairn. Appropriating the practice of farmers in whose fields he was working, Goldsworthy cleared the earth by setting it on fire. "The process," he observes, "turned out to be far more significant than I had expected. The scale of the fire and the size of the flames and clouds of smoke engaged with, and then engulfed the cairn. I had feared that the cairn would stand somewhat aloof from the fire as it passed around it at ground level. I felt as if the cairn had passed through a real test and, upon emerging from the smoke and flames, it looked fresh and alive. The scene was not one of destruction but of regeneration."³³ Once again, the work of art takes or, more precisely, is time. Over the course of the following year the prairie revives and returns richer than before flames consumed it. Just as the seaside cairns allow one to see the movement of the tides, so the prairie cairn makes it possible to watch the growth of plants as well as the changing light and seasons. As grass and grain grow and wither like rising and falling tides, they reveal and conceal the cairn. The egg-shaped cairn ripe with seeds reveals "lewd spring" bursting from "winter's chastity."³⁴ The ostensible immobility of the stone cairn joins the rhythms of the midwestern prairie to the movement of the seas on either side of the continent. It is as if the work of art were a lens mounted on a slow-motion camera to expose changes that usually go undetected.

A poet rather than an art critic offers the most illuminating commentary on Goldsworthy's work. Wallace Stevens's "Anecdote of the Jar" might well be describing the cairns.

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.³⁵

Goldsworthy seems to be responding to Stevens's poem when he writes, "A stone changes a place with its presence, with time filling it and flowing around it, just as a sea or river rock affects the surrounding water by creating waves, pools and currents. Drawing touches works, explores and makes visible the relation between rock and place."³⁶ Goldsworthy's sculptures, like Stevens's jar, allow what surrounds them to rise up and reveal itself once again for the first time.

The aim of Goldsworthy's art is to understand what is rather than to project what ought to be. Perhaps more accurately, he attempts to envision what ought to be by comprehending what is. "My intention," he admits, "is not to improve on nature but to know it—not as a spectator

but as a participant. I do not wish to mimic nature, but to draw on the energy that drives it so that it drives my work also.”³⁷ This leads to another reason for Goldsworthy’s rejection by the art establishment. In an era when everything is purportedly political, his work is often dismissed as insufficiently critical—it is compliant rather than defiant, soft rather than hard-edged. These assessments, however, are ill-informed and lack the very self-criticism they claim is missing in Goldsworthy’s work. Few critics today are sufficiently informed about the history of philosophy to understand that the notion of criticism informing modern art originates with Kant’s critical philosophy. In his three critiques Kant argues that transcendental reflection attempts to establish the conditions of the possibility of thinking (*Critique of Pure Reason*), acting (*Critique of Practical Reason*), and judging (*Critique of Judgment*). When translated from philosophy to art, criticism becomes the exploration of the conditions of the possibility of various artistic genres and different artistic media. From this point of view philosophy and art are thoroughly reflexive or self-referential—just as transcendental philosophy is thinking about thinking, critical art is art about art. Turning away from the world and back on itself, art becomes increasingly abstract and ever more distant from the shifting currents of everyday life.

Goldsworthy disrupts the closed circuit of reflection by drawing us toward timely rhythms that we ignore at our own peril. In Goldsworthy’s world permanence yields to transience, and nature’s momentary balance is repeatedly

disrupted to create a beauty that often is dark. Never turning away from this darkness, his work embraces decay and death as necessary conditions for the regeneration and creation. Here as elsewhere, Goldsworthy’s art translates Nietzsche’s vision from word to image and theory to practice:

Did you ever say “Yes” to one joy? Oh my friends, then you also said “Yes” to *all* pain. All things are entwined, enmeshed, enamored—

– did you ever want Once to be Twice, did you ever say “I love you, bliss—instant—flash”—then you wanted *everything* back.

– Everything anew, everything forever, everything entwined, enmeshed, enamored—oh, thus you love the world—

– you everlasting ones, thus you love it forever and for all time; even to pain you say: Refrain but

– come again! *For joy accepts everlasting flow!*³⁸

Within rather than beyond time, this eternity is earthy.

CURE

Colorful leaves pressed on rocks in streams rushing to the sea, rivers of stone imperceptibly flowing to places unknown, melting snow, clouds of dust, rustling wind, flickering light. The world is, indeed, a work of art, even if the artist remains unknown. In this art time is inescapable,

and timing is essential. I probably would not have paused over Goldsworthy's book had I not been immersed in creating my own private earthwork at the time. Unbeknownst to me, designing the rock garden and laying out the stream were tasks that prepared me to appreciate his work. In retrospect, my effort to understand his art was really an attempt to understand what was happening as I cleared the forest and worked the earth. While Kant correctly stressed the primacy of practical reason, he did not sufficiently appreciate how practice transforms the affective dimension of life in ways that transform thinking. Doing alters awareness and attunes thought differently. Creating the garden not only opened me to Goldsworthy's work but also refocused my vision in ways that changed my understanding of authors with whom I have lived for many years. It is not so much that Heidegger, Nietzsche, Hegel, and Melville have helped me understand my rock garden and stream; rather, clearing the land and fashioning garden, ponds, and stream have cast the work of these writers in a different light. I have used their writings to understand the garden, and I have reread their writings through the garden and stream.

The pedagogy of earth, rock, and water has not been limited to philosophy, theology, and literature. As I cultivated my garden, I began to rethink the work of other artists I had been studying—Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barney, and James Turrell. Gradually, I realized what had drawn me to their work in the first place. Each of these artists in a different way understands his work to be part of a more

comprehensive process that extends far beyond the walls of studio, gallery, and museum. Though never explicitly claiming to do so, they all take up Schiller's challenge to the avant-garde to transform the world into a world of art. If, as Stevens insists, the world is a work of art, then the activity of the artist is but a moment in an infinite creative process. The poem within a poem is infinite because it is the Infinite itself. As the title of another of Stevens's poems suggests, "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself":

That scrawny cry—it was
A chorister whose c preceded the choir.
It was part of the colossal sun,

Surrounded by its choral rings,
Still far away. It was like
A new knowledge of reality.³⁹

I am not sure such knowledge is accessible to everyone everywhere. Our knowledge of reality is inseparable from the place and time of its formation. What you think is in large measure a function of where and when you think; it is impossible to understand certain writings and appreciate some works of art if you do not live in the country.

I had always suspected that my turn to woods and earth two summers ago had something to do with the lingering trauma of illness. Although my physical wounds had healed, psychological scars festered. Having worked the

land from the time I was a child, I had been taught that ground can cure. As my father and I labored together in his outdoor classroom, he tried to teach me the importance of the earth and staying grounded. He also exposed me to what he believed to be the elemental, which he knew, and I would learn, cannot be avoided. After I left home, many of these lessons began to fade. Over the years my studies taught me that ground is elusive and grounding is not only impossible but actually undesirable. To seek secure ground and search firm foundations, many argue, is to turn away from modernity and to betray our postmodern condition by courting a fanaticism that threatens human survival. But matters are not so simple. The question of ground and the problem of grounding involve more than firm foundations and fundamentalism. *Hyle, silva, materia, mater*: earth teaches that ground is complex.

As the water flowed through the rocks and the surrounding grass began to grow, I continued to reread Stevens's poetry. Late one September afternoon, I returned to one of my favorite poems, "The Rock." I had always been impressed by what seemed to be the steely-eyed realism of the opening stanzas:

It is an illusion that we were ever alive,
Lived in the houses of mothers, arranged ourselves
By our own motions in a freedom of air.
Regard the freedom of seventy years ago.
It is no longer air. The houses still stand,
Though they are rigid in rigid emptiness.

This time, however, different lines leapt from the page and came to life:

It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves.
We must be cured of it by a cure of the ground
Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure

Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness.
And yet the leaves, if they broke into bud,
If they broke into bloom, if they bore fruit,

And if we ate the incipient colorings
Of their fresh culls might be a cure of the ground.
The fiction of the leaves is the icon

Of the poem, the figuration of blessedness,
And the icon is man.⁴⁰

In leaving study for garden and stream, I was looking for "a cure of the ground." If reading and writing did not help, perhaps working the earth would. And yet cure, I had learned from life as well as books, is every bit as elusive as ground. Although I had found Goldsworthy's art helpful, Stevens was telling me, "It is not enough to cover the rock with leaves"—perhaps of a book. What, then, is "a cure of the ground"?

Nothing is ever simple—especially when *poiesis* is involved. In Stevens's phrase "cure of the ground," *cure*, *of*, and *ground* must all be understood in at least two ways. *Cure* means both "the restoration of health, recovery from

disease” and “to prepare, preserve or finish (a substance) by a chemical or physical process.” *Of* in this phrase is a double genitive. Finally, *ground*, like *work*, can be a noun and a verb. While *ground* has multiple meanings, only some are relevant in this context. *Ground* means earth or soil, as well as “the foundation for an argument, belief, or action.” As a verb, *ground* means “to cut or dig into the soil, as in plowing,” “to connect to a ground,” “to secure a foundation,” and “the foundation or acting of securing a foundation.”⁴¹ Given the duplicity of language, “a cure of a ground” can be read in two opposite ways. On the one hand, the phrase means the restoration of health brought by the preservation of secure ground or firm foundation. On the other hand, “cure of ground” can mean being cured of the need for a foundation by confronting the reality of the absence of any secure ground. Does ground cure us of the traumas that afflict us? Or must we be cured of the affliction of needing a ground?

Stevens seems to suggest an answer to these questions when he writes that we must be cured

... by a cure of the ground
 Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure
 Of the ground, a cure beyond forgetfulness.

But what would such a cure be? What would it mean for a cure to be “beyond forgetfulness”? A few lines later, Stevens answers the first question:

The magnum wreath of summer, time’s autumn snood,
 Its copy of the sun, these cover the rock.
 These leaves are the poem, the icon and the man.
 These are a cure of the ground and of ourselves . . .

The leaves covering the rock are the leaves of the poem, and these leaves are “a cure of the ground and of ourselves.” The poem, we have been led to suspect, is not limited to poetry in the strict sense of the term; extending beyond the pages of a book, the poem is an act of *poiesis* through which the world appears to be a work of art. Art cures by clearing the creative ground of thinking and acting. Again, the seemingly insignificant word *of* creates ambiguity. Does art cure by providing a ground, or does art cure us of the need for a ground? And what is the forgetfulness that must be forgotten for the cure to be effective?

To answer these questions, we have to ask what is the rock that the leaves (of the poem and the book) cover? Stevens’s rock is not the rock of ages that is a firm foundation; to the contrary, the rock in this poem figures the groundless ground that appears by disappearing. It is etched with an indecipherable script that recalls hieroglyphic scars on the nose of an ancient leviathan. This rock refigures what we have seen Heidegger describe as earth. “The earth,” the philosopher avers, “is essentially self-secluding. To set forth the earth means to bring it into the Open as the self-secluding.” The work of art clears an opening that reveals the concealment of the rock:

In this plenty, the poem makes meanings of the rock,
Of such mixed motion and such imagery
That its barrenness becomes a thousand things

And so exists no more. This is the cure
Of leaves and of the ground and of ourselves.⁴²

The cure beyond forgetfulness always remembers the darkness within the midst of light and the hidden lurking in the clearing. The barrenness of the rock, which makes the poem possible, is the *Abgrund* that renders every ground groundless. *Nothing* is fixed—*nothing* remains—*nothing* but in the words of the madman the “everlasting flow,” the philosopher “the arising and passing away that does not arise and pass away,” and the poet, “a permanence composed of impermanence.”⁴³ The Infinite is nothing more than the braided rhythms of these flows. If what is is what ought to be, the ordinary is extraordinary. This is “the vulgate of experience” in which “the point of vision and desire are the same” even during “an ordinary evening in New Haven”:

We are not men of bronze and we are not dead.
His spirit is imprisoned in constant change.

But ours is not imprisoned. It resides
In a permanence composed of impermanence,
In a faithfulness as against the lunar light,

So that morning and evening are like promises kept,

So that the approaching sun and its arrival,
Its evening feast and following festival,

This faithfulness of reality, this mode,
This tendance and venerable holding-in
Make gay the hallucinations in surfaces.⁴⁴

The garden no more than this book will ever be complete, but I now understand that clearing and tending it for the past two years have made it possible for me to put aside saw, pick, and shovel (at least for now) and once again to take up paper and pencil and finally finish writing this book.

AFTER THOUGHT

BASICALLY I SELL BLUE SKY AND COLORED AIR. BACK IN THE GIDDY DAYS OF ECONOMIC RIDICULOUSNESS, THOSE WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CURRENT FINANCIAL CRISIS WERE SELLING BLUE SKY TOO. BUT AT LEAST I DELIVER!

JAMES TURRELL¹

If, as Hegel insists, the Owl of Minerva only takes flight at twilight, understanding is always an afterthought. Looking back, we often are able to discern patterns that were inconspicuous when we were in the middle of things. We cannot be sure whether the order of things is uncovered or imposed. Moreover, meaning is never stable; as we spin and respin our tales, patterns shift and lines that once seemed fixed must be rewritten.

If I had to guess, I would wager that *Refiguring the Spiritual* began on October 19, 1987. On that day, known as Black Monday, financial markets around the world

suddenly collapsed. The crash began in Hong Kong and quickly spread across international time zones first to Europe and then to the United States. By the end of the trading day, the Dow Jones Industrial Average had fallen from 2,246 to 1,738, losing 22.6 percent of its value. Between Tuesday, October 13, and Monday, October 19, the Dow fell by almost one-third, and stocks lost approximately one trillion dollars, which was an inconceivable amount at the time. The October crash seemed to mark the end of the bull market, which had begun with the Dow at 776 in August 1982.

When the crash occurred, I thought more than the bull market had ended. I had long suspected that postmodern art and finance capitalism were inseparable. It seemed undeniable that artists recycling signs and images of other artists simultaneously reflected and extended an economy that consisted of floating signifiers backed by or grounded in other signifiers. This insight was not, of course, original; artists and critics had made similar observations.

Indeed, Beuys had made this point a decade earlier. In 1978 he wrote in an essay entitled “What Is Capital?”: “But what is capital? I deduce that it can only be a question of human abilities. The expanded concept of ‘art’ is the concrete concept of ‘capital’: art = capital.”² He accompanied his analysis with a provocative work, which is reminiscent not only of Warhol’s multiple silk screens of money but more suggestively of Duchamp’s *Tzanck Check* (1919).

JOSEPH BEUYS, ART = CAPITAL (KUNST—KAPITAL)

Beuys is making at least two points in this work. First, since “everyone is an artist,” creativity can be expressed in any medium—even capital. The question, it seems, is not What is art? but What is *not* art? Though art is everywhere and is thus unavoidable, not all art is the same—some is productive, and some is destructive. Second, creative activity, Beuys insists, should not reinforce unfair economic practices and unjust social policies but should be directed to revolutionary ends that promote human welfare and protect and renew the natural environment. While other artists acknowledged Beuys’s identification of capital and art, many drew very different conclusions. For them, the burgeoning art market that had exploded in New York City in the years following the Second World War presented an opportunity for serious financial profits.

On December 11, 1987, just two months after the market crash, Oliver Stone’s *Wall Street* opened in 730 theaters and grossed \$4.1 million. Michael Douglas received an Academy Award for his portrayal of Gordon Gekko, the Wall Street tycoon whose character is a composite of Dennis Levine, Owen Morrissey, and Ivan Boesky (all of whom were convicted of insider trading), corporate raider Carl Icahn, Hollywood agent Michael Ovitz, and, above all others, junk bond king Michael Milken. Stone lifted the signature line of the film, which for many people effectively captured the spirit of the era, from Boesky’s commencement address at the University of California, Berkeley, Business School on May 18, 1986. “Greed is all right,” Boesky assured the graduates. “I want you to know that. I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself.”³ Addressing a crowded room of eager stockholders, Gekko preaches the gospel of greed that defined the decade of the 1980s. “Greed is good, greed is right, greed works.” Though Douglas will always be remembered for his paean to greed, Gordon Gekko presents a more suggestive analysis of the significance of the market frenzy of the 1980s for art later in the film. The scene is set when Bud Fox, Gekko’s protégé (played by Charlie Sheen), confronts his mentor about his plans to break up and sell off the airline for which Bud’s father had long worked. In a desperate effort to become a player in the world of high rollers, Bud betrays his blue-collar father by giving Gekko information he could use to manipulate

the price of the airline's stock. Feeling guilty about his disloyalty to his father and rage at Gekko's duplicity, Bud charges into his boss's office and interrupts a meeting with Japanese businessmen. After a heated exchange, Gekko responds to Bud's challenge by presenting his view of the world that he has, in no small measure, created:

"It's all about bucks, kid; the rest is conversation. Hey, buddy, you're still going to be president, all right? And when the time comes, you're going to parachute out a rich man. With the money you're going to make, your dad's never going to have to work another day in his life."

"So tell me, Gordon, when does it all end? How many yachts can you water ski behind? How much is enough?"

"It's not a question of enough, pal. It's a zero-sum game. Somebody wins, somebody loses. Money itself isn't lost or made, it's simply transferred from one perception to another. Like magic. This painting here, I bought it ten years ago for \$60,000 and could sell it today for \$600,000. The illusion has become real and the more real it becomes, the more desperately they want it. Capitalism at its finest."

"The richest 1 percent of this country own half our country's wealth—\$5,000,000,000,000. One-third of that comes from hard work, two-thirds from inheritance—interest on interest accumulating to widows' idiot sons, and what I do—stock and real estate speculation."

It's bullshit. You got 90 percent of the American public out there with little or no net worth. I create nothing; I own. We make the rules, pal: the news, war, peace, famine, upheaval, the price of paper clips. We pick the rabbit out of the hat while everybody sits out there wondering how the hell we did it. Now you're not naive enough to think we're living in a democracy are you, buddy? It's the free market and you're part of it."

This is a remarkably astute analysis of the interplay between finance capitalism and the art market. The most revealing moment in the film occurs when Gekko declares, "The illusion has become real and the more real it becomes, the more desperately they want it. Capitalism at its finest."

Even the most cynical observers could not have imagined just how many people would chase the illusion of virtual wealth in the next two decades. I was wrong when I thought the 1987 market crash marked the end of an era and exposed cracks in the façade of postmodernism. Within several months the Dow was back to its precrash level, and the economy was roaring toward the dot-com era of the 1990s and the world of derivatives, options, futures, and swaps ushered in by the new millennium. As we have seen, the new financial economy was not limited to Wall Street; the wealth generated by this virtual economy has created new financiers of art. Brook Hazelton, managing director of the New York-based auction house Phillips de

Pury & Co., observes, “There is a fundamental change in the way people approach art. People are viewing art more as an asset category.” In an article entitled “Picasso Lures Hedge-Fund-Type Investors to the Art Market,” Deepak Gopinath quotes the art investor Philip Hoffman, who underscores Hazelton’s point:

Melding art and finance, art funds aim to trade Picasos and Rembrandts the way hedge funds trade U.S. Treasuries or gold—and collect hedge-fund-lie fees in the process. Hoffman’s Fine Art Fund, for example, charges an annual management fee equal to 2 percent of its assets and takes a 20 percent cut of profits once the fund clears a minimum hurdle.

Hoffman, a former finance director at London-based auction house Christie’s International Plc, says his fund isn’t about beauty, truth and passion; it’s about making money.

“We take a completely cold view,” Hoffman says.

Hoffman’s investors need cool heads too. He requires a minimum investment of \$250,000, and investors can’t withdraw their money for three years.⁴

As speculation increased and prices rose beyond reasonable levels, artists decided they wanted a piece of the action. In an article entitled “Confessions of Hirst, Prince and Murakami,” Milton Esterow reports an exchange between Damien Hirst and Richard Prince:

HIRST: *I don’t agree with the old van Gogh thing that artists are supposed to suffer for their art, but a lot of people still believe that’s the way it should be. I think it’s tragic that great artists die penniless. I think Warhol made it ok for artists to deal with money and not be seen as a sell out. How’s your relationship with money now that you’re selling for mega bucks?*

PRINCE: *Warhol made a lot of things possible. . . . I’ve been rich and I’ve been poor. I’d rather be rich.*⁵

Not content to peddle his wares through traditional intermediaries like galleries and dealers, Hirst decided to go straight to investors and cut his own deal with them. Though all his art is designed to game the system, *For the Love of God* is his most provocative work to date. Some critics argue that this diamond-studded skull is a trenchant criticism of the financial excesses and worship of wealth during the past several decades. But this interpretation is naive, misguided, and self-serving on the part of critics, museum directors, curators, and collectors who seek to profit from market machinations. Like the wizards of Wall Street who have brought markets to the brink of collapse, Hirst is a confidence man who plays on human greed and the insatiable desire for celebrity. *For the Love of God* is a platinum cast of a human skull, adorned with 8,601 diamonds. In the middle of the forehead, there is a 52.4 carat pear-shaped pink diamond, surrounded by fourteen diamonds with the same shape and color. The cost of production has been estimated to be \$28 million, for which

Hirst is personally responsible. While risk appears to be considerable, this seems to have been a profitable investment. The sale of the work remains shrouded in mystery but according to most reports an anonymous consortium purchased the work for \$100 million, which would be a record for a single work by a living artist. Other reports insist that Hirst had to drop the price to \$72 million. Whatever the actual price of the work, he appears to have pulled off the ultimate con job by selling the work without losing control of it. Hirst retains a 24 percent stake in the diamond skull. Like ancient alchemists, he makes something out of nothing by turning base material into virtual gold. Twenty years ago this level of market manipulation would have been as inconceivable in the art world as it was on Wall Street. As the stakes rise, deception becomes more sophisticated.

How much have we really learned in the two decades separating the market collapses in 1987 and 2007? Now, as then, the market quickly bounced back, and Wall Street has returned to business as usual. But foxes are guarding the henhouse—the very people who created the financial fiasco are now in power and are supposed to be fixing the system they so craftily gamed for personal profit and corporate power. Should we be surprised that so little has changed? The art market has been slower to recover than the financial markets that fueled the excesses of recent years. However, if obscene bonuses for financiers who create nothing and simply shuffle signs in global ether nets

are any indication, the recovery of the art market will not be far behind. Nor has the crisis in financial markets put an end to schemes to turn quick profits in the art market. Credible rumors circulate about major private equity firms signing up artists to become the sole providers of art for new investment funds restricted to high-end clients. Perhaps predictably, in the midst of this recovery without recovery, Gordon Gekko has been released from jail and made his return in Oliver Stone's *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010).

We always tell ourselves, "This time it's different," but it never is. Nonetheless, the gap between the real and the virtual economies continues to grow and at some point, the real has its revenge. The situation in which control of financial markets is limited to relatively few individuals, institutions, and countries and a small percentage of the world's population consumes the vast majority of the world's resources is simply unsustainable. The question is not whether change will occur but when it will occur and whether it will be violent or peaceful.

In 1987 I thought the collapse of the stock market signaled the failure of finance capitalism and with it the end of postmodern art and architecture, but, in fact, the show was just getting started. By the late 1990s, markets were soaring, dot-coms were generating virtual profits with virtual products, and art and architecture were not only generating financial wealth for artists, as well as investors, but were becoming vehicles for economic renewal. The most

influential example of this development was the Guggenheim Bilbao, whose unexpected success created what has come to be known as “the Bilbao effect.”⁶ Frank Gehry’s stunning architecture overwhelmed but could not completely obscure Jeff Koons’s signature forty-three-foot-tall *Puppy* topiary. With manufacturing jobs disappearing or migrating abroad, local, state, and national governments invested heavily in art and culture in the hope of creating more jobs and generating much-needed income. In the years since Guggenheim Bilbao opened, this model for economic development has spread across the globe with astonishing speed. From Brazil, Mexico, Saint Petersburg, and Berlin to Shanghai, Urdaibai, and Abu Dhabi public officials and private investors have attempted to cash in on art and architecture. While some of these projects have been successful and have had salutary effects that are more than economic, others are languishing, and still others have failed. The question is whether this model and the art it sponsors are symptoms of a financial system whose recent recovery masks a more profound failure.

To answer this question and many others, I will return to Las Vegas. For more than twenty-five years I have been telling anyone who will listen that if you want to understand the present and glimpse the future, you must go to Las Vegas. Though the reasons have changed, I believe Vegas is still a good barometer of what is going on in the world. Las Vegas is, of course, where postmodernism began—and it might be where it is ending. When Robert

Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour conducted their study on Vegas at Yale in 1968 and published *Learning from Las Vegas* in 1972, they signaled the dawn of a new age. While they argued that Vegas reveals the distinctive features of postwar American automobile culture, their more important insight was the recognition of the growing importance of new information and communications technologies for society, the economy, and culture. In the late 1960s and early 1970s this was very prescient. Though they could not have anticipated the transformation of art and the frenzy of markets that took place in the following decades, Venturi and his colleagues realized the far-reaching implications of the shift from a world in which the currency of exchange is material stuff to an economy of immaterial signs. Since the early 1980s, Las Vegas has consistently displayed the multiple ways in which the real has become virtual and the virtual has become real. In the decades since the 1960s the casino economy spread from the Strip to Wall Street, and the stakes kept rising until the party suddenly ended on September 15, 2008, when Lehman Brothers filed for Chapter 11.

Understanding, I have insisted, is always an afterthought. Looking back, we can discern signs of this collapse that were inconspicuous or that people refused to recognize when the ante was still rising. For anyone with eyes to see, Vegas should have foreshadowed things to come. I will concentrate on three signs people missed—art, *real* estate, and water. Though these three factors are

seemingly unrelated, there is, in fact, a close correlation among them. How we reread these signs will determine how we negotiate the return of the real that is now occurring.

On April 10, 2008, the *Las Vegas Sun* ran an article with the headline “Vegas, Say Goodbye to Guggenheim: Art Museum Will Close Its Doors at the Venetian in May, Leaving Only One Gallery on the Strip.” The closing of Guggenheim Las Vegas marked the end of one of the most unlikely yet most imaginative chapters in the history of both museums and casinos. The Guggenheim was not the first to bring high art to the Strip, but this improbable venture took the game to a new level. A few years earlier, Steve Wynn, often dubbed the godfather of the new Vegas, started buying second- and third-rate impressionist paintings to display. Thomas Krens, then director of the Guggenheim, realized that Wynn was on to something but thought he had underplayed his hand. Having learned the lesson of Las Vegas, Krens doubled down—he cut a deal with casino magnate Sheldon Adelson to create a counterpart to the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in the “real” Venice by opening a new Guggenheim at the faux Venice in the Venetian Resort Hotel Casino. With culture becoming as global as the financial markets that support it, this deal involved players from Vegas and New York to Europe and Russia. The State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, with which the Guggenheim already had a partnership, got in on the action and on October 7, 2001,

only a few weeks after 9/11, the Guggenheim opened not one but two museums in Las Vegas. Following the formula that was so successful in Bilbao, Krens hired Rem Koolhaas to design both museums. The first, which was a joint venture with the Hermitage Museum, was a variation of the traditional white cube made of Cor-Ten steel in which to display works from the permanent collection of the Guggenheim and the Hermitage. The second was a sixty-three-thousand-square-foot space that was used only once for the Guggenheim’s controversial exhibition *The Art of the Motorcycle*, whose installation was designed by Frank Gehry. Though much fanfare accompanied the opening, the effort to bring together high and low, art and entertainment, not-for-profit and for-profit never really worked. Only fifteen months after the opening gala, the larger museum closed; and by the time the Guggenheim Las Vegas closed its doors for good in 2008, the real economy was bringing the virtual economy back down to earth, and global financial markets were in turmoil.

Casinos and culture entrepreneurs were not the only ones betting on Vegas—commercial and residential real estate speculators also had a lot at stake. In 1945 the population of Las Vegas was fewer than five thousand; by 2008, more than 1.8 million people lived in Vegas. For several decades during the latter half of the twentieth century, Vegas was regularly the fastest growing city in the United States. During the boom years, real estate speculators invested heavily in both residential and commercial developments.

As demand grew, prices rose, but as the 1990s wore on, it should have been evident to any reasonable observer that far too many houses and hotel rooms were being built. It is now obvious that such excessive real estate development was financed by unreal financial instruments. Mortgages, which no longer were linked directly to actual real estate, were bundled, securitized, and then sold and resold on secondary and tertiary markets. As financial assets drifted farther and farther from the real estate in which they were supposed to be grounded, the play of signifiers accelerated until it inevitably imploded. As everyone now knows, the housing bubble that burst in the fall of 2008 triggered a worldwide collapse of financial markets and ushered in the longest recession since the Great Depression. Las Vegas is ground zero for the mortgage and housing crisis; the percentage of foreclosures is higher in Las Vegas than in any other American city. To make matters worse, the real estate problem is not limited to the home market but extends to commercial real estate. In Las Vegas, as in Dubai, construction of commercial buildings has suddenly come to a halt. The ongoing difficulty financing and completing the much-touted sixty-eight-acre, \$11 billion MGM Mirage City Center, which is planned to be 16,797,000 square feet and have more than four thousand rooms, is a sign of how much the business climate has changed. With the American economy in recession and fewer high rollers, known as Whales, coming from Asia, the Vegas economy shows no signs of recovery.⁷ It is not necessary to know

the intricacies of derivatives and swaps to realize that this house of cards would inevitably collapse.

Finally, water or, more precisely, water and electricity. While it is obvious that the virtual economy runs on electricity, the far-reaching implications of this fact are rarely noted. In finance capitalism, money is light, and currency is current. While electricity can be generated in different ways, Las Vegas gets its electricity primarily from the overflow of water at Hoover Dam. Indeed, without Hoover Dam there never would have been a Las Vegas. When completed in 1936, Hoover Dam was the largest hydro-electric power-generating station in the world. Today the dam's power plant provides electricity to homes and businesses from Southern California (28 percent) to Nevada (23 percent), Arizona (19 percent), and Las Vegas, which gets almost all of its electricity from Hoover Dam. With changing climatic conditions, it is not clear how much longer this can continue. Like most of the American West, Las Vegas is facing a crisis—it is running out of water. Until recently, Las Vegas used more water per capita than any city in the United States. Most of this water was wasted on lawns and the city's more than fifty golf courses. For more than a decade the West has been in the grip of the most serious drought in over a century—streams are disappearing, and rivers are drying up. Several times in recent years, the water in Lake Mead has been so low that there almost was not enough overflow to run the turbines that generate electricity. When the rivers run dry and Lake

Mead becomes a muddy pond, the lights will go out in Las Vegas and much of the rest of the Southwest. Without electricity computers shut down, the economy grinds to a halt, and virtual assets that are nothing more than bits of light vanish.

Water is, of course, more than a financial matter; indeed, life is impossible without water. I believe water will be one of the most pressing environmental, economic, social, political, and strategic issues of the twenty-first century. Considerable evidence suggests that the past century was unusually wet in the American West; therefore, the enormous westward expansion took place under anomalous conditions. As precipitation declines, demands on limited water resources will increase, and conflicts will become more intense. From Las Vegas to the steppes of Russia and from Africa to India and China the world is running out of water. While some of these problems are the result of population growth and industrial pollution, global climate change is undeniably one of the most important factors contributing to this crisis. But none of this seems to matter—skeptics with vested interests question scientific evidence, and the temperature keeps rising.

The lesson Las Vegas teaches today is that we face a future in which financial catastrophe might well become inconsequential because natural catastrophe could bring the end of human life as we know it. This claim is not hyperbolic—it is simply a fact. In the face of such overwhelming problems art might seem insignificant, but I do

not think that is the case; indeed, art can play an important role in helping us address these unprecedented challenges. To do so, however, art will have to be transformed. The artists considered in this book have important lessons to teach us about the changes that are required if we are to negotiate the turbulent currents threatening to engulf us. I began this book by declaring, “Art has lost its way,” and I proceeded to argue that contemporary art has succumbed to the lure of a marketplace based on pure speculation. For art to find its way again, it must recover the commitment to personal and social transformation that was an essential part of the modernist tradition but was lost with the commodification, corporatization, and financialization of art that began in the 1950s and still continues. To see what would be involved in this recovery, I return one final time to the pivotal year of 1987. While the stock market was plummeting and Gordon Gekko was preaching his gospel of greed, an important art exhibition began at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and ended up at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. The exhibition was organized by Maurice Tuchman and was entitled *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*. In his introductory essay for the show’s catalog Tuchman writes:

Abstract art remains misunderstood by the majority of the viewing public. Many people, in fact, consider it meaningless. Yet around 1910, when groups of artists

moved away from representational art toward abstraction, preferring symbolic color to natural color, signs to perceived reality, ideas to direct observation, there was never an outright dismissal of meaning. Instead, artists made an effort to draw upon deeper and more varied levels of meaning, the most pervasive of which was that of the spiritual. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* demonstrates that the genesis and development of abstract art were inextricably tied to spiritual ideas current in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An astonishingly high proportion of visual artists working in the past one hundred years have been involved with these ideas and belief systems, and their art reflects a desire to express spiritual, utopian, or metaphysical ideals that cannot be expressed in traditional pictorial terms.⁸

The artists included in the exhibition range from the expected—Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich, Ad Reinhardt, and Barnett Newman—to the unexpected: Jasper Johns, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Sigmar Polke, Bruce Nauman, Brice Marden, and Tony Smith. While these artists differ in countless ways, Tuchman correctly argues that they all share a concern with what Kandinsky labeled “the spiritual in art.” To appreciate the significance of this insight, it is important to distinguish the spiritual from the religious. Whereas religion tends to refer to institutions and dogmas, spirituality indicates

personal and inward dimensions of experience. The spiritual extends beyond churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques to all dimensions of culture.⁹ Tuchman’s exhibition demonstrates that art that is not explicitly religious can be implicitly spiritual.

While Tuchman acknowledges the sinister role some occult traditions played in twentieth-century politics, he realizes that the forms of spirituality that have been most important for artists can be traced to ancient mystical traditions conveyed in the writings of figures such as Plotinus, Hermes Trismegistus, Paracelsus, Jacob Böhme, and Robert Fludd. “Several ideas are common to most mystical and occult world views,” Tuchman explains. “The universe is a single, living substance; mind and matter also are one; all things evolve in dialectical opposition, thus the universe comprises paired opposites (male-female, light-dark, vertical-horizontal, positive-negative); everything corresponds in a universal analogy, with things above as they are below; imagination is real; and self-realization can come by illumination, accident, or an induced state: the epiphany is suggested by heat, fire or light. The ideas that underlie mystical-occult beliefs were transmitted through books, pamphlets, and diagrams, often augmented by illustrations that, because of the ineffable nature of the ideas discussed, were abstract or emphasized the use of symbols.”¹⁰ As we have seen, Beuys, Barney, Turrell, and Goldsworthy explicitly and implicitly draw on different aspects of these traditions in developing their art. Their

distinctive appropriations of these spiritual traditions insist that the purpose of art extends beyond the machinations of the market.

To understand what makes the work of these artists so timely, we must consider both how their work is similar to and how it differs from the work of the artists included in *The Spiritual in Art*.¹¹ In many ways these four artists might seem to represent the opposite pole of the artistic spectrum from the artists Tuchman selects. I have argued that Beuys, Barney, Turrell, and Goldsworthy are, in different ways, interested in the materiality or, more precisely, the materialization of art. The artists Tuchman considers are, by contrast, committed to the dematerialization of art, which leads to abstraction. Kandinsky set the course others followed in his 1911 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Recasting the kingdom of God as an artistic utopia and reinterpreting religious prophets as avant-garde artists, Kandinsky argued that we must pass through “the nightmare of materialism” to “the kingdom of the abstract”: “The more abstract its form, the more clear and direct its appeal. In any composition the material side may be more or less omitted in proportion as the forms used are more or less material, and for them substituted pure abstractions or, largely dematerialized objects. The more the artist uses these abstracted forms, the deeper and more confidently will he advance into the kingdom of the abstract. And after him will follow the gazer at his pictures, who also will

have gradually acquired a greater familiarity with the language of the kingdom.”¹²

Nothing would seem to be farther from Beuys’s fat and honey, Barney’s beeswax and blood, Turrell’s rock and volcanic ash, and Goldsworthy’s stone walls and leaves than Kandinsky’s abstract forms. But, as always, when pushed to extremes, opposites tend to reverse themselves and turn into each other. Whereas Kandinsky and his followers are concerned with the spiritualization of the material, Beuys, Barney, Turrell, and Goldsworthy are committed to the materialization of the spiritual.

These two artistic tendencies are different aspects of a common transformative process. As we have seen, Schiller argued long ago that the mission of the avant-garde is to transform the world into a work of art. For many people who no longer regard themselves as religious, art replaces ancient beliefs and rituals with new forms of spirituality. Using diverse styles and contrasting media, the work of Beuys, Barney, Turrell, and Goldsworthy renews the lessons of ancient spiritual traditions; self and other, inner and outer, culture and nature, finite and infinite, and material and immaterial, they teach us, are not opposites but are, in Nietzsche’s words, “entwined, enmeshed, enamored” in a complex web that forever evolves.¹³ When art is effective, it does not lift one out of time into a timeless aesthetic realm; to the contrary, art that matters situates us in the world differently by opening us to temporal rhythms

and spatial flows that alter the mind by attuning the body differently.

The web of life is threatened now more than ever before. The challenge confronting us is not merely to avoid financial disaster and natural catastrophe, though it is essential that we do so. At a deeper level we are facing a crisis of vision. If, as Turrell's work shows, vision involves nothing less than the creation of the world, then *to see differently is to be different*. We will never bring about the changes so urgently needed until our vision is transformed in ways that not only allow but actually require us to act differently. The hour is late—so late that perhaps only an artist can save us now. Art, however, cannot redeem the world without first redeeming itself by refiguring the spiritual.

NOTES

1. FINANCIALIZATION OF ART

1. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), 92.
2. I have drawn the figures in this section from Eileen Kinsella, “\$25 Billion and Counting,” *ARTnews*, May 2008, 122–31.
3. By the spring of 2009 there were signs that the global financial meltdown was having an impact on art auctions. Collectors facing financial pressures and needing to sell art for liquid capital became reluctant to put their works up for public auction. In a *New York Times* article titled “Sold! in Private as Art Auctions Fall from Favor,” Carol Vogel reports: “The game has definitely shifted,’ said Christopher Eykyn, a former head of Impressionists and modern art at Christie’s who is now a dealer in New York. ‘A lot of clients don’t want to be seen selling, so the private route is suddenly more attractive.’ Just six months ago Sotheby’s Impressionists and modern art sale brought \$223.8 million; its May 5 sale is expected to fetch only \$81.5 million. Christie’s Impressionist and modern art action in November totaled \$146.7 million; its May 6 sale is estimated at only \$94.9 million” (April 26, 2009).
4. Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, “The Turnaround Artist: Jeff Koons, Up from Banality,” *New Yorker*, April 23, 2007, 58–67.
5. “What Is KaiKai Kiki?” <http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp/whatskaikai-kiki/>.
6. “Laying the Foundation for a Japanese Art Market,” <http://english.kaikaikiki.co.jp/whatskaikaikiki/message/>.
7. Walead Beshy, “Los Angeles,” *Artforum*, Dec. 2008, 220.
8. I have considered these developments in more detail in Mark C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
9. Quoted in Peter Bernstein, *Capital Ideas: The Improbable Origins of Modern Wall Street* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 54 (emphasis added).
10. This shift from referential to relational value can also be seen in the suspension of the gold standard. In the absence of the reference of the signifier (paper money) to the signified (gold), value is a determined relation between and among floating signifiers (currencies).
11. John Geanakoplos, “Promises, Promises,” in *The Economy as an Evolving Complex System, II*, ed. W. Brian Arthur, Steven Durlauf, and

David Lane (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 285–320, 288–89, 295.

12. Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 92.
13. “Damien Hirst and the Sharks,” *New York Times*, July 24, 2007.
14. I consider these events in more detail in chapter 5.
15. I have examined the relation between art and religion in a number of books. See, e.g., my *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); *Imagologies: Media Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994); *Hiding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); *About Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); *The Picture in Question: Mark Tansey and the Ends of Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); *Mystic Bones* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
16. Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 48.
17. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 334.
18. Even works designed to resist the market cannot escape market forces. Some of the most important art created in the past several decades has been enormously expensive and would have been impossible without generous financial support. This fact was driven home during my visit to Turrell’s Roden Crater. The morning after Tom McGrath had explained to me that even though Turrell had been working on the crater for thirty years and had spent millions of dollars, it was still only half complete and would require at least another \$50 million to finish the work, I turned on the TV and learned that the stock market had dropped seven hundred points on news of the deepening financial crisis. Given the magnitude of the economic problems we

are facing, I suspect Turrell will never raise the additional capital he needs to complete his life’s work.

19. See Mark C. Taylor, *Field Notes from Elsewhere: Reflections on Dying and Living* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

2. FAT: LIVING ART

1. Heinrich Böll, “For Beuys at 60,” in *In Memoriam, Joseph Beuys: Obituaries, Essays, Speeches* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1986).
2. Joseph Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America: Energy Plan for the Western Man*, ed. Carin Kuoni (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 125.
3. Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 248.
4. *Ibid.*, 126.
5. Germano Celant, *Art Povera* (New York: Distributed Art, 1997), 225. Other artists Celant includes in this group are Mario Merz, Richard Long, Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Eva Hesse, and Michelangelo Pistoletto.
6. John Moffitt, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art: The Case of Joseph Beuys* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 127. The following biographical details are based largely on Moffitt’s informative account.
7. *Ibid.*, 129.
8. *Ibid.*, 130. In a bitterly critical yet extremely influential article to which I will return in the following pages, Benjamin Buchloh questions both the accuracy and motivation of Beuys’s account of this experience: “Beuys’s ‘myth of origin,’ like every other individual or collective myth, is an intricate mixture of facts and memory-material

rearranged according to the dynamics of the neurotic lie: that myth-creating impulse that cannot accept for various reasons, the facticity of the individual's autobiography history as such. . . . As in every retro-projective fantasy, such a narcissistic and slightly pathetic distortion (either dramatization or nobalization) of the factually normal conditions (made either more traumatic or more heroic) of the individual's coming into the world, the story told by the myth's author reveals truths, but they are different from what their author would want them to be" ("Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol—Preliminary Notes for a Critique," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray [New York: Distributed Art, 2001], 202–3). This article first appeared in *Artforum* in 1980.

9. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), 14.
10. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (Point Loma, CA: Aryan Theosophical Press, 1913), 42.
11. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, *The "Blaue Reiter" Almanac*, ed. Klaus Lankheit (New York: Viking, 1974), 250.
12. *Ibid.*, 2, 32.
13. Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, trans. Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay (New York: Dover, 1979), 21.
14. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1964), 4. Eliade's study of shamanism was first published in French in 1951 under the title *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot).
15. *Ibid.*, 467.
16. "Joseph Beuys im Gespräch mit Caroline Tisdall, 1974," in *Joseph Beuys: The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland* (Bonn: Schirmer/Mosel, 1988), 49.
17. Eliade, *Shamanism*, 33.
18. Quoted in Moffitt, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art*, 80.
19. Beuys, *The Secret Book for a Secret Person in Ireland*, 50.
20. Bees and honey also play important roles in many of Beuys's works. Rudolph Steiner's 1923 lecture "Über die Bienen" (About bees) alerted Beuys to the spiritual and artistic significance of bees. Beuys sees in honey and beeswax many of the same qualities that make fat so intriguing:

The heat organism of the bee-colony is, without a doubt, the essential element of the connection [I draw] between the wax and the fat and the bees. What had interested me about bees, or rather about their life-system, is the total heat organization of such an organism and the sculpturally finished forms within this organization. On the other hand, bees have this element of heat, which is a very strong fluid element and, on the other hand, they produce crystalline structures; they make regular geometric forms. Here we also find something of my Theory of Sculpture, as we do in [my] corners of fat, which also appear in a geometric context, in certain situations. But the actual character of the existing heat is a fluid initial element, whereby the fat is affected by the heat and thus flows off. From this undefined element of motion, by way of a diminishing element of movement, there surfaces a form, which appears in abstract geometric configurations. This is practiced regularly by bees. (Quoted in Moffitt, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art*, 136)
21. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, 101, 105.
22. Eliade, *Shamanism*, 107.
23. Allison Coudert, "Renaissance Alchemy," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 201.

24. Ronald Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist: A Study of Alchemical Symbolism in Goethe's Literary and Scientific Method* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 54, 49.
25. Mircea Eliade, "Alchemy," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1:185.
26. Joseph Beuys, "If Nothing Says Anything, I Don't Draw," *Joseph Beuys: Drawings* (Munich: Prestel, 1979), 98.
27. Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, trans. David Britt (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), 35.
28. Rudolph Steiner, *Rosicrucian Esotericism* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1978), 5–13 (quoted in Moffitt, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art*, 109).
29. Moffitt, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art*, 116.
30. Rudolph Steiner, *A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1968), 10.
31. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys: Drawings*, 97.
32. Beuys, *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, 9.
33. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America*, 255.
34. Joseph Beuys, "Joseph Beuys in Conversation with Friedhelm Menekes," in *In Memoriam, Joseph Beuys*, 31.
35. Benjamin Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique," *Artforum*, Jan. 1980, 35–43, 35. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations in the following paragraphs are from this article.
36. I have already noted that as part of his strategy to delegitimize Beuys and his work, Buchloh goes so far as to question the veracity of Beuys's accounts of his crash and survival in the Crimea. See above, note 8.
37. Benjamin Buchloh, "Reconsidering Joseph Beuys: Once Again," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, 87.
38. Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique," 40.
39. Elsewhere I have argued that poststructuralist criticisms of various forms of totalization presuppose a monolithic notion of system and structure. See Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
40. Beuys, "Death Keeps Me Awake," in *Joseph Beuys in America*, 169.
41. *Ibid.*, 169, 170.
42. Joseph Beuys, interview, *Canal*, nos. 59–60 (winter 1984–85): 8.
43. Joseph Beuys, *Joseph Beuys: Transformer*, video recording, Mystic Fire Video, 1998.
44. It is ironic that critics like Buchloh who are so quick to see irony in others are often blind to it in their own work. Their overwrought texts often become parodies of the very seriousness they seek to promote. Consider, for example, the following passage:

The difference, however, the profound difference in Arman's project was that objects that were serialized, multiplied and devalored never took on meaning, at least no meaning other than the structural transformation of the ready-made model itself. Neither iconographic nor metaphoric nor representational narratives could be spun from looking at Arman's work. This was one aspect of Arman's postwar authenticity and epistemological specificity that set his work totally apart from Beuys' subsequent reinscription into the aesthetic of trauma and trash, of garbage and shambles, with an infinity of spectatorial interpretative projections. (Buchloh, "Reconsidering Beuys," 86)

Buchloh never explains what he means by "authenticity" or why the lack of meaning is a mark of "postwar authenticity."

45. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America*, 31.

46. Ibid., 255–56, 166–67.
47. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys: Transformer*.
48. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America*, 21.
49. *Gestalten* means form, fashion, mold, shape, arrange, and organize. *Gestaltung* means formation, forming, construction, shaping, fashioning, modeling; creation, and production.
50. Quoted in Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, 70.
51. Beuys, *In Memoriam, Joseph Beuys*, 57.
52. Joseph Beuys, *Joseph Beuys: Multiples* (New York: Edition Schellmann, 1985), 11.
53. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America*, 26.
54. Ibid., 85.
55. Ibid., 247.
56. Ibid., 178. By calling God a generator, Beuys associates the divine with electricity. I will return to his understanding of electricity in what follows.
57. Rudolph Steiner, *A Lecture on Eurythmy* (London: Rudolph Steiner Press, 1967), 8.
58. Joseph Beuys, *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, no. 4 (1980): 176.
59. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America*, 248.
60. Ibid., 246.
61. Beuys, *In Memoriam, Joseph Beuys*, 43.
62. Beuys, *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, 49.
63. Joseph Beuys, interview by Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, August 1979, in Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, *Joseph Beuys, Is It About a Bicycle?* (Paris: Verona, 1985), 91–93. Beuys is, of course, fully aware of the horrific connotations of fat that grew out of practices in the concentration camps during the Second World War.
64. As we will see in the following chapter, something like the *Indifferenzpunkt* lies at the heart of Matthew Barney's work. Beuys anticipates many of the themes and motifs in Barney's highly acclaimed Cremaster cycle.
65. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Michael Perry (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), 2:174. The work of the physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810) exercised considerable influence on the members of the romantics in Jena. The principle of polarity, Ritter argues, is "ein allgemeines Weltgesetz" (a universal world law). Romanticism saw in his experiments with galvanism a way to bridge the difference between living and nonliving organisms. While often highly speculative, German *Naturphilosophie* during the early nineteenth century had a significant impact on important scientific developments. The notion of a comprehensive unity of opposites influenced the Danish physicist Hans Christian Oersted and contributed to his discovery of electromagnetism in 1820. See: H. A. M. Snelders, "Romanticism and *Naturphilosophie* and the Inorganic Natural Sciences, 1797–1840: An Introductory Survey," *Studies in Romanticism* 9 (1970): 193–215; and J. L. Heilbron, *Electricity in the 17th and 18th Centuries: A Study of Early Modern Physics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).
66. Beuys, *In Memoriam, Joseph Beuys*, 33–34.
67. In a 1979 interview Beuys accepts this formulation of Louwrien Wijers. See Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America*, 250.

3. ⊕ CREATIVE MORPHOGENESIS

1. Michael Kimmelman, "The Importance of Matthew Barney," *New York Times*, Oct. 10, 1999, mag. sec.
2. Michael Kimmelman, "Art Review: Free to Play and Be Gooley," *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 2003.
3. "Cremaster muscle," GP Notebook, www.gpnotebook.co.uk/simplepage.cfm?ID=-731185075.
4. Nancy Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, ed. Nancy Spector (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003), 13. Framing her analysis primarily in biological and psychoanalytic terms, Spector appropriates many crucial insights from Lacan. While she does not discuss philosophical and religious issues that are germane for Barney's work, her argument is completely consistent with the trajectories I am tracing.
5. Quoted in *ibid.*, 14.
6. In light of Barney's interest in athletics and repeated consideration of the importance of overcoming self-imposed constraint in self-development, this figure also suggests the weights football players use in their physical training.
7. The beehive had been selected as the emblem of the provisional State of the Desert in 1848 but did not become the official symbol of Utah until 1959. According to reports at the time, the beehive represented industry and the pioneer virtues of thrift and perseverance.
8. In a discussion of Kant's analysis of art, Derrida explores the necessity of constriction for the production of freedom. The image Kant uses is a corset. Derrida writes:

And yet in the exercise of a liberal art (of the free spirit) a certain constraint must be at work. Something compulsory ("zwangmässiges" is also the word used to designate the constraint imposed on handicraft) must intervene as a "mechanism" [*Mechanismus*]. Without this coercive constriction, this tight corset [*corsage*], the spirit which must be free in art, "would have no body and would evaporate altogether." The body, constraint, or mechanism, for example, of poetry, the highest of the liberal arts, would be lexical accuracy or richness . . . , prosody or metrics. The freedom of a liberal art relates to the system of coercions or constraints, to its own mechanism as the spirit does to the body or the living body to its corset. (Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis," *Diacritics* 11, no. 2 [1981]: 2–25, 7).

- a. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. F. M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 35.
- b. For a more detailed consideration of these issues see Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- c. F. W. J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol Harris and Peter Heath (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 174–75.
- d. F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas Scott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 28. In this section subsequent citations of this book are given parenthetically in the text.
- e. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), 42. In this section subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically in the text.
- f. Casting Nietzsche in their own image as a philosopher of difference, Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze overlook this important aspect of Nietzsche's work. This reading of Nietzsche as a philosopher of difference is as ill-informed and misguided as the com-

9. Quoted in Darl J. Dumont, "The Ash Tree in Indo-European Culture," *Mankind Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (summer 1992): 323–36, www.musaaios.com/ash.htm.
10. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form* (New York: Dover, 1992), 541–42.
11. Thomas D. Worrel, "The Symbolism of the Beehive and the Bee," <http://mill-valley.freemasonry.biz/worrel/beehive.htm>. I will consider the important role of Masonry in *Cremaster* in more detail in the next section.
12. Quoted in John Moffitt, *Occultism in Avant-Garde Art: The Case of Joseph Beuys* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988), 137.
13. *Ibid.*, 136 (translation modified).
14. This sequence was discovered in the thirteenth century when businessman and mathematician Fibonacci posed the following question: "How many pairs of rabbits will be produced in a year, beginning with a single pair, if in every month each pair bears a new pair which becomes productive from the second month?"
15. "The Fibonacci Sequence," Platonic Realms, www.mathacademy.com/pr/prime/articles/fibonac.
16. Robert Lawlor, *Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 44–45.
17. The close relationship between Mormonism and Freemasonry dates back to Joseph Smith, who was a Mason.
18. Michael Schneider, *Constructing the Universe: A Beginner's Guide to the Mathematical Archetypes of Nature, Art, and Science* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 97.
19. *Ibid.*, 117.
20. Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trans. Stephen Corrin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). I have drawn my summary of metallurgy largely from Eliade's account.
21. *Ibid.*, 26.
22. *Ibid.*, 57. Eliade points out that "in European metallurgical terminology the kiln where enameling material was smelted (*schmelzofen*) was designated by the name of matrix or maternal bosom (*Mutterschoss*)" (38).
23. *Ibid.*, 31.
- g. Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 29. In this section subsequent citations of this work are given parenthetically in the text.
- h. See Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997). While there are many valuable insights in this book and the accompanying exhibition, the failure of Bois and Krauss to appreciate the importance of religion and their limited perspective on German idealism and romanticism limit the value of their analysis.
- i. Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.
- j. *Ibid.*, 129.
- k. *Ibid.*, 94. In much modern theology God is defined as *das ganz Anders*—the wholly Other.
- l. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 26.

24. Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 43–44.
25. I have drawn the details of this Celtic myth from Spector's essay.
26. Michael Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 161–62. Taussig's quote comes from Robert Herman Bogue's *The Chemistry of Portland Cement* (New York: Reinhold, 1955), 5.
27. Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 44–45.
28. W. L. Wilmschurst, *The Meaning of Masonry* (New York: Bell Publishing, 1980), 47–48. I have followed Wilmschurst's account in summarizing the details of the Masonic ritual.
29. *Ibid.*, 42.
30. Though Hiram Abiff is not mentioned in the Bible, it is reported that Solomon summoned Hiram of Tyre to work on the Temple. See 1 Kings 6–7.
31. Spector, "Only the Perverse Fantasy Can Still Save Us," 44.
32. *Ibid.*, 46.
33. Christina Aubin, "Beltane—Holiday Details and History," The Witches' Voice, www.witchvox.com/holidays/beltaine/beltaine_story.html.
34. *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 954.
35. In addition to the lamb's long ears, Beuys's use of triangles is noteworthy. Triangles play an important role and carry multiple meanings throughout *The Cremaster Cycle*. The outline of the triangle, which recalls the sides of a pyramid, is prominent in Masonic imagery. Trowels, aprons, and the Masonic emblem bear images of triangles. To suggest this, the inverted Greek letter delta—Δ—has been used to symbolize the female genitals since ancient times. If, as Freud would argue, Barney is struggling to return to the maternal womb, this symbol would represent the goal of his journey.
36. Peter Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 341.
37. "Travels in Hypertrophica: Thyra Nichols Goodeve Talks with Matthew Barney," *Artforum*, May 1995, 69.
38. There are a few moments of Dionysian release in *The Cremaster Cycle*. The most frantic moment occurs during "The Order" in part 3, when the raw energy of two New York punk bands, Agnostic Front and Murphy's Law, sends dancers into a frenzy.

39. In Kabbalah, God, initially omnipresent, creates by withdrawing into a point called the *zim zum*. The cosmos is ordered and governed by the Ten Divine Aspects of Sefirot, which are represented by a series of paired principles: Binah (understanding) / Hokhmah (wisdom), Gevurah (power) / Gedulah (greatness), Din (stern judgment) / Hesed (mercy), Hod (splendor) / Netsah (eternity).
40. There is, of course, a fifth part of the cycle. While visually rich and engaging, this installment does not advance the overall narrative and adds nothing of significance to the artistic, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions of Barney's work.
41. Edgar Allan Poe, "MS. Found in a Bottle," *Poetry and Tales*, ed. Patrick Quinn (New York: Library of America, 1978), 198.

4. CREATION OF THE WORLD

1. Sedona Tourism Bureau website, www.visitsedona.com/index.php/article/151.
2. James Turrell, interview with Esa Laaksonen, Blacksburg, VA, 1996, www.ark.fi/ark5-6_96/turrell.html.
3. Vincent Bailey, "Roden Crater: A Lath and Plaster Work of Art," *Construction Dimensions*, Sept. 2005, www.awci.org/cd/archiveArticles.pl?id=472&acat=1.
4. Ibid.
5. Simple things sometimes prove to be the most complex. The paint used to cover the plaster walls has created a potentially disastrous problem. Though thoroughly researched by Turrell's architectural consultants—Skidmore, Owings and Merrill—the paint has cracked and is peeling. The day we visited the crater, a team of specialists were taking samples of the paint to figure out what went wrong and to establish legal liability. The entire tunnel will have to be carefully sandblasted and repainted with an off-the-shelf black acrylic paint.
6. Elaine King, "Into the Light: A Conversation with James Turrell," *Sculpture* 21, no. 9 (November 2002): www.sculpture.org/documents/scmago2/novo2/turrell/turrell.shtml.
7. EGG: The Arts Show, interview with James Turrell, www.pbs.org/wnet/egg/215/turrell/interview_content_1.html.
8. Before breaking ground for construction in 1999, Turrell was required to conduct a complete archaeological survey of the crater. This undertaking was directed by archaeologists from Northern Arizona State University, but much of the work was done by members of the Hopi tribe who live in nearby villages.
9. EGG: The Arts Show, interview with James Turrell.
10. King, "Into the Light."
11. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, quoted at Cambridge Collections Online, cco.cambridge.org/public_home: "Introduction: The starry heavens and the moral law," by Paul Guyer.
12. Frank Waters, *Book of the Hopi* (New York: Viking, 1963), 9. In developing my account of Hopi mythology, I have followed Waters's version of the legends. In this section, page numbers in the body of the text refer to Waters's book.
13. Richard Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Random House, 1980), 316.
14. Don Talayesva, *Sun Chief: The Autobiography of a Hopi Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 240–41.
15. When reading this Hopi myth, I am reminded of Courbet's controversial painting *The Origin of the World* (1866).
16. Talayesva, *Sun Chief*, 84.
17. Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: New American Library, 1963), 219.
18. Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Random House, 1982), 163.
19. Simon Ings, *A Natural History of Seeing: The Art and Science of Vision* (New York: Norton, 2007), 236.
20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 61–62.
21. Ibid., 274, 298, 254.
22. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 247.
23. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1891), 288–89.

24. Ings, *A Natural History of Seeing*, 125.
25. Tor Nørretranders, *The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness Down to Size* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 95.
26. For a more detailed analysis of these points see Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), chap. 7; and Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), chap. 7.
27. Kepler was the first to realize that color is not an objective quality of objects but is created in the eye.
28. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 18.
29. I would like to thank my colleague Heather Williams for this insight.
30. Sidney Perkowitz, *Empire of Light: A History of Discovery in Science and Art* (Washington: Joseph Henry Press, 1996), 26–27. In working out the neurological aspects of vision, I have been guided by Perkowitz's fine study.
31. Jerome Lettvin et al., "What the Frog's Eye Tells the Frog's Brain," in *The Mind: Biological Approaches to Its Functions*, ed. William Corning and Martin Balaban (New York: Interscience, 1968), 255–56.
32. Francisco Varela, "Laying Down a Path in Walking," *Gaia: A Way of Knowing*, ed. William Thompson (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1987), 59–60. See also Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (London: Reidel, 1980). The mistake Varela and Maturana make is insisting that autopoietic systems are closed. While perception and cognition display the characteristic of self-organization, they cannot be understood in terms of closed systems that do not receive external input.
33. Ings, *A Natural History of Seeing*, 139.
34. Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, 11. Researchers recently reported an unusual case of "blindsight" in which a man who had been blinded by two strokes was able to navigate an obstacle course and recognize threatening faces. The *New York Times* reports, "Scientists have long known that the brain digests what comes through the eyes using two sets of circuits. Cells in the retina project not only to the visual cortex—the destroyed regions in this man—but also to subcortical areas, which in T. N. [the patient] were intact. These include the superior colliculus, which is crucial in eye movements and may have other sensory functions, and, probably, circuits running through the amygdala, which registers emotion" (Benedict Carey, "Blind, yet Seeing: The Brain's Subconscious Visual Sense," *New York Times*, Dec. 22, 2008).
35. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 20.
36. Ings, *A Natural History of Seeing*, 158.
37. James Turrell, *James Turrell: Into the Light* (Pittsburgh: Mattress Factory, 2002), n.p.
38. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 83.
39. See, e.g., Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Mark C. Taylor, *Hiding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Mark C. Taylor, *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Taylor, *After God*.
40. What Kant identifies as schematization, I have described above as

the process of screening. Just as the forms of intuition and categories of understanding process the data of experience, so the imagination screens noise to create information.

41. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 85.
42. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 1:202.
43. Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 70.
44. Turrell interview, www.ark.fi/ark5-6_96/turrell.html (my emphasis).
45. Wallace Stevens, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," *Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 488. Turrell is fascinated by this "space between." "While there is an architectural vocabulary referring to the space between," he explains, "this has rarely been enlivened—it's more rhetorical than actual. The art that I make covers this ground between form and actually forming space using light" (King, "Into the Light").
46. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1957), 335.
47. EGG: The Arts Show, interview with James Turrell.
48. Quoted in Craig Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 207.
49. Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, 174; *Collected Poems*, 486.
50. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 249–50 (trans. mod.).
51. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 63 (trans. mod.).
52. Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Krell and Frank Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 121.

5. CURE OF GROUND

1. Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous: Poems, Plays, Prose*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York: Knopf, 1982), 178.
2. This understanding of the poet's mission can be traced to the late eighteenth century, when poets and philosophers gathered in the German duchy of Jena. Drawing on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, philosophers like Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel and poets like Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schiller developed an interpretation of art and the avant-garde artist that continues to shape aesthetic theory and artistic practice. I have examined this trajectory in more detail elsewhere. See, e.g., Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
3. Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 473–74.
4. Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 28.
5. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 47.
6. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 315.
7. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 49.
8. Gillian Bowditch, "World Famous, yet Cast Out of London's Art World," *Sunday Times* (London), Aug. 27, 2000.
9. Andy Goldsworthy, *A Collaboration with Nature* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1990), n.p.
10. Simon Schama, "Garden of Stones: New York," in *Passage*, by Andy Goldsworthy (New York: Harry Abrams, 2004), 58–73, 61.

11. Richard Dorment, "Night Path: Sussex," in Goldsworthy, *Passage*, 152–53.
12. Goldsworthy, *A Collaboration with Nature*, n.p.
13. Andy Goldsworthy, *Stone* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994), 6.
14. Andy Goldsworthy, *Time* (New York: Harry Abrams, 2000), 93–94.
15. Schama, "Garden of Stones," 60.
16. Andy Goldsworthy, interview by Tim Adams, *Observer* (England), March 11, 2007.
17. For an important discussion of the metaphysical implications of the hand and handicraft see Jacques Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand," trans. John P. Leavey Jr., in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 161–96.
18. Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 6.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Goldsworthy, *A Collaboration with Nature*, n.p.
21. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 169.
22. Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 64.
23. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 550.
24. Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 64, 6.
25. *Ibid.*, 106.
26. Andy Goldsworthy, *Wall* (New York: Harry Abrams, 2000), 28. Goldsworthy's comments in the next two paragraphs are taken from this book.
27. Goldsworthy, *Time*, 156.
28. Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 65.
29. Goldsworthy, *Rivers and Tides*.
30. Goldsworthy, *Time*, 7.

31. Goldsworthy, *Rivers and Tides*.
32. Goldsworthy, *Time*, 105.
33. Goldsworthy, *Passage*, 95.
34. Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 468.
35. *Ibid.*, 76.
36. Goldsworthy, *Stone*, 82.
37. *Ibid.*, 50.
38. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1957), 324–25.
39. Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 534.
40. *Ibid.*, 525, 526.
41. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).
42. Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 527.
43. *Ibid.*, 472.
44. *Ibid.*, 471, 472.

6. AFTER THOUGHT

1. Quoted in George Stolz, "Bringing the Sky to Earth," *ARTnews*, June 2009, 45.
2. Quoted in Marc Schell, *Art and Money* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 179n63.
3. Satya J. Gabriel, "Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* and the Market for Corporate Control," *Economics in Popular Film*, Nov. 21, 2001, www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/sgabriel/filmcourse/oliver_stone.html.
4. Deepak Gopinath, "Picasso Lures Hedge-Fund-Type Investors to Art Market," Jan. 26, 2006, <http://www.bloomberg.com>.

5. Milton Esterow, "Confessions of Hirst, Prince and Murakami," *ARTnews*, Sept. 2009, 102.
6. What few people realize is that the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, which was conceived by Thomas Krens, Michael Govan, and Joseph Thompson in the mid-1980s, is the prototype for Bilbao. The genius of the Massachusetts MOCA is that it was always presented in terms of economic development rather than as a cultural project. Since it opened in 1999, the museum has continued to prosper under the capable leadership of Joe Thompson.
7. These problems have been compounded by the growth of the Chinese economy. With greater affluence, China is developing its own entertainment and gambling industry centered in Macau. Recognizing the shifting currents in the global economy, Vegas tycoons are hedging their bets. In 2002 the Macau government ended its monopoly on gambling operations and granted concessions to six casinos, including Wynn Resorts, MGM Mirage, the Sands, and the Venetian. The most impressive venture to date is Sheldon Adelson's Venetian-Macau Resort Hotel (see www.venetianmacao.com/en/).
8. Maurice Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art," in *The Spiritual in Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 17. I have considered the issues this exhibition raises at considerable length in Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
9. For an elaboration of this point see my *About Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and *After God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
10. Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art," 19.
11. Beuys's *Dance of the Shaman* (1961) was included in the exhibition.
12. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977), 14.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1957), 335.

CREDITS AND PERMISSIONS

- 1.1 Jeff Koons, *Hanging Heart*
Jeff Koons, *Hanging Heart*, 2007. Photographed by Emmanuel Dunand / AFP. Used by permission.
- 1.2 Takashi Murakami, *Eye Love SUPERFLAT*
Takashi Murakami (Japanese 1962–)
Eye Love SUPERFLAT, 2003 Acrylic on canvas mounted on board
1000 × 1000 mm
© 2003 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.
- 1.3 Damien Hirst, *For the Love of God*
Damien Hirst, *For the Love of God*, 2007. Photographed by AFP. Used by permission.
- 2.1 Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*
Installation view of Joseph Beuys' *Fat Chair*, 1964, exhibited during Joseph Beuys, November 2, 1979–January 2, 1980, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photograph by Mary Donlon.
© The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. Used by permission.
- 2.2 Joseph Beuys, *Tallow*
Joseph Beuys, *Tallow*, 1977. Photographed by Rudolf Wakonigg, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, Germany. Used by permission.
- 2.3 Pedestrian Underpass, Münster
Photographed by Rudolf Wakonigg, Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte Münster, Germany. Used by permission.
- 2.4 Joseph Beuys, *Coyote*
Joseph Beuys, *Coyote*, 1974. Photographed by Caroline Tisdall. Used by permission.
- 2.5 Joseph Beuys, *Schwanenfrau*
Swan Woman (Schwanenfrau), 1958
Graphite and watercolor (beize) on paper
Measured over Plexiglas: 11 5/8 × 8 1/8 inches
(29.6 × 20.7 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Gift, Anne and Anthony d'Offay, 1991. Used by permission.
- 2.6 Joseph Beuys, *Hare's Blood*
Hare's Blood (Hasenblut), 1962
Graphite and hare's blood on paper

- Measured over Plexiglas: 9 3/4 × 13 3/8 inches (24.7 × 34 cm)
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
Gift, Anne and Anthony d'Offay, 1991. Used by permission.
- 2.7 Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*
Art "Happening" of Joseph Beuys in the Gallery Schmela.
Duesseldorf, Germany. 1965. Photographed by Imagno/Walter
Vogel/Getty Images. Used by permission.
- 2.8 Joseph Beuys, Free International University
Joseph Beuys, Free International University, Documenta 6, 1977.
Photographed by Caroline Tisdall. Used by permission.
- 2.9 Joseph Beuys, *Sun State*
Joseph Beuys (1921–1986). © ARS, NY. The Sun State, 1974.
Chalk on slate, 47 1/2 × 72.
Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller and acquired through the Lillie
P. Bliss Bequest (by exchange) (369.1984)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, U.S.A.
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by
SCALA/Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.
- 3.1 Matthew Barney, *Field Suite*
Matthew Barney, *Field Suite*, 2002 (detail)
Portfolio of 5 etchings in self-lubricating plastic portfolio box
15 3/4 × 10 3/4 inches (40 × 27.3 cm) paper
17 3/4 × 13 × 1 inches (45.1 × 33 × 2.5 cm) box
© Copyright Matthew Barney
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York. Used by permission.
- 3.2 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 1: Goodyear Chorus*
Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 1*, 1995
Production still
© 1995 Matthew Barney

- Photo: Michael James O'Brien
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York. Used by permission.
- 3.3 Matthew Barney, Goalpost, Bronco Stadium
- 3.4 Matthew Barney, Concept drawing on paper: Choreographic phase
one in two
- 3.5 Calvin Taylor
- 3.6 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 2: Genealogy*
Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 2: Genealogy*, 1999
Triptych: 3 C-prints in acrylic frames
Left/Right panels: 21 3/4 × 21 3/4 inches (55.2 × 55.2 cm) each
Center panel: 28 × 23 3/4 inches (71.1 × 60.3 cm)
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- 3.7 Fibonacci sequence
- 3.8 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*
Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*, 2002
Production still
© 2002 Matthew Barney
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Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York. Used by permission.
- 3.9 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*
Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*, 2002
Production still
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- 3.10 Masonic Code Book
- 3.11 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*
Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*, 1994

Production still

© 1994 Matthew Barney

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Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York. Used by permission.

3.12 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*: Faerie Field

Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*: Faerie Field, 1994 (detail)

4 C-prints in self-lubricating plastic frames

Small image: 17 1/2 × 12 3/4 × 1 1/2 inches

(44.5 × 32.4 × 3.8 cm) each

Large image: 27 1/2 × 33 1/4 × 1 1/2 inches

(69.9 × 84.5 × 3.8 cm) each

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3.13 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*

Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*, 1994

Production still

© 1994 Matthew Barney

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3.14 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*: Field of the Loughton Candidate

Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*: Field of the Loughton Candidate, 1994

2 C-prints, self-lubricating plastic frames

33 1/4 × 27 1/2 × 1 1/2 inches each

84.5 × 69.9 × 3.8 cm each

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3.15 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*

Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 4*, 1994

Production still

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4.1 James Turrell, Roden Crater

James Turrell, Aerial view of Roden Crater, 1982

4.2 James Turrell, Roden Crater

4.3 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Alpha Tunnel to East Portal

4.4 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Keyhole with Stairs

4.5 James Turrell, Roden Crater, East Portal High

4.6 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Crater's Eye (interior)

4.7 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Crater's Eye (exterior)

4.8 Frank Waters, The Road of Life

"Illustrations" by Oswald White Bear Fredericks,

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4.9 Milland Lomakema, *Emergence*

Milland Lomokema, Sr. "Dawakema," *Emergence*

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4.10 René Descartes, *La Dioptrique*

Image from René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode: Pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences: a bilingual edition and an interpretation of René Descartes' philosophy of method* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994). Used by permission.

4.11 René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*

Image from René Descartes, *L'Homme de René Descartes, et la formation du fœtus, avec les remarques de Louis de la Forge* (Paris, Compagnie des Libraires, 1729).

- 4.12 Mark C. Taylor, *Creation of the World*
- 5.1 Mark C. Taylor, *Stone Hill*
- 5.2 Mark C. Taylor, *Stone Hill*
- 5.3 Mark C. Taylor, *Stone Hill*
- 5.4 Mark C. Taylor, *Stone Hill*
- 5.5 Mark C. Taylor, *Stone Hill*
- 5.6 Andy Goldsworthy, *Broken Icicle*
 Andy Goldsworthy
Broken Icicle reconstructed, spin welded, only able to work in the mornings when temperature below freezing stored overnight in a sheep shelter
 Langholm, Dumfriesshire, February 22–23, 1986
 Used by permission.
- 5.7 Andy Goldsworthy, *Leaves wrapped around several sticks / Joined*
 Andy Goldsworthy
Leaves wrapped around several sticks / Joined, October 12, 1999
 Used by permission.
- 5.8 Andy Goldsworthy, *Broken Pebbles scratched white with another stone*
 Andy Goldsworthy
Broken Pebbles scratched white with another stone
 St Abbs, The Borders, June 1, 1985.
 Used by permission.
- 5.9 Andy Goldsworthy, *White Walls*
 Andy Goldsworthy, *White Walls*, 2007
 Porcelain clay
 1,964 linear feet, one inch thick (dimensions variable)
 Installation view: Galerie Lelong, 2007.
 Used by permission.
- 5.10 Andy Goldsworthy, *Pebbles around a hole*
 Andy Goldsworthy
Pebbles around a hole
 Mie, Japan
 December 7, 1987.
 Used by permission.
- 5.11 Andy Goldsworthy, *Sticks stacked around two rocks, Central Park, NY*
 Andy Goldsworthy, *Sticks stacked around two rocks, Central Park, NY*, June 15, 1993.
 Used by permission.
- 5.12 Andy Goldsworthy, *Leaves from nearby bush / each leaf stitched to another / to make line / laid on grass*
 Andy Goldsworthy
Leaves from nearby bush / each leaf stitched to another / to make line / laid on grass
 Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York, October 16, 1998.
 Used by permission.
- 5.13 Andy Goldsworthy, *Mountain ash berries laid on slate*
 Andy Goldsworthy
Mountain ash berries laid on slate
 Scaur Glen, Dumfriesshire, August 31, 1992.
 Used by permission.
- 5.14 Andy Goldsworthy, *Dandelions held to river stone, Scaur water, Dumfriesshire*
 Andy Goldsworthy
Dandelions held to river stone with mud, Scaur water, Dumfriesshire, 1993.
 Used by permission.

- 5.15 Andy Goldsworthy, Storm King Wall
Andy Goldsworthy, *Storm King Wall*, 1997–98
Fieldstone
Approx. 5 × 2,278 feet
Site-specific sculpture created for Storm King Art Center,
Mountainville, New York.
Used by permission.
- 5.16 Andy Goldsworthy, East Coast Sea Cairn
Andy Goldsworthy
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Plate 1 Jeff Koons, *Hanging Heart*



Plate 2 Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*



Plate 3 Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 1: Goodyear Chorus*



Plate 4 *Cremaster 4*



Plate 5 (*top*) James Turrell, Roden Crater

Plate 6 (*bottom*) James Turrell, Roden Crater





Plate 7 James Turrell, Roden Crater, Alpha Tunnel to East Portal

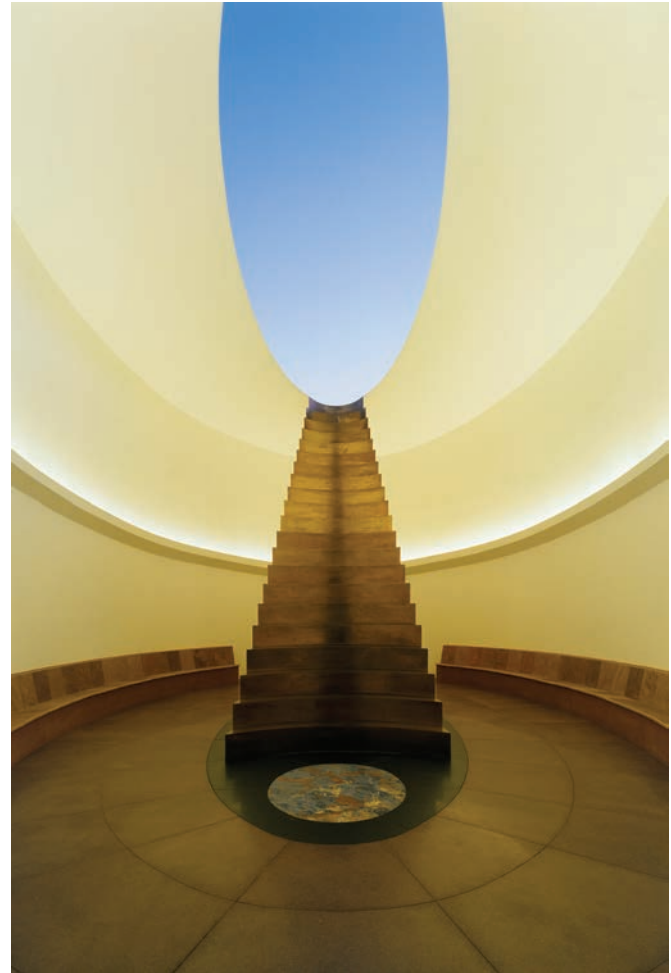


Plate 8 James Turrell, Roden Crater, East Portal High



Plates 9, 10, and 11 (*clockwise from top left*) Mark C. Taylor, Stone Hill



Plate 12 (*left*) Andy Goldworthy, Mountain ash berries laid on slate

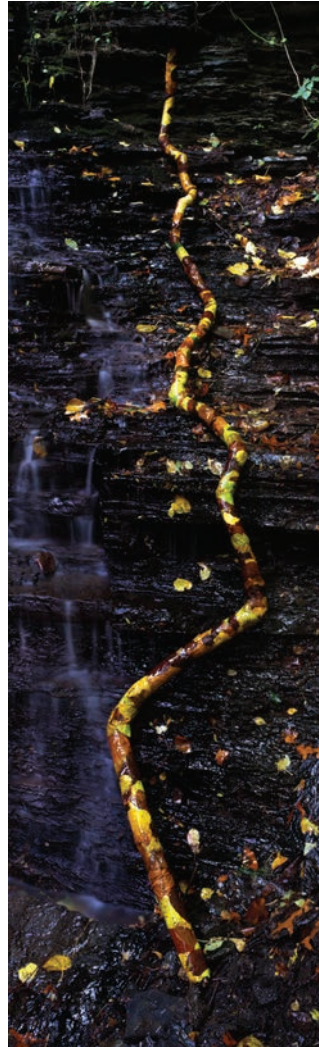


Plate 13 (*center*) Andy Goldworthy, Leaves wrapped around several sticks/joined



Plate 14 (*right*) Andy Goldworthy, Leaves from a nearby bush/ each leaf stitched to another to make line/laid on grass



Plate 15 (top left) Andy Goldworthy, *Broken Icicle*

Plate 16 (top right) Andy Goldworthy, *Pebbles around a hole*

Plate 17 (bottom left) Andy Goldworthy, *Broken Pebbles scratched white with another stone*