

The
Frame
and the
Mirror

On Collage and the Postmodern

Thomas P. Brockelman



PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, AND CULTURE

The Frame and the Mirror

SERIES EDITOR

Hugh Silverman



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For Rachel

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Introduction

Collage and the Postmodern

Doubtless, the first questions that will greet this book will concern the strange juxtaposition announced in its very title. Collage, the technique “invented” (more on those scare quotes in a bit) by Braque and Picasso in 1911 and 1912, has been taken by a long tradition of readers, including such venerable names as Golding, Fry, and Greenberg, as the quintessential *modernist* art. How, then, to justify its centrality in a discussion of the *postmodern*?

To understand my reasons for thus abusing standard art history, it's important to recall the accounts by which cubist collage and its offshoots have so often been taken as modernist. Though there are varying reasons for making that claim, most of them start from the historical moment of collage's appearance (right in the midst of the avant-gardist explosions that transformed painting in the early years of this century) and add to that history a basic intention of the collage-artist: in pasting materials from outside of the world of painting onto a canvas, the artist apparently tries to get around the basic painterly conventions of representation, conventions that distance the painting from the immediate reality which we believe ourselves to inhabit. For example, Robert Motherwell's interest in collage is typically modernist when he writes that

[t]he sensation of physically operating on the world is very strong in the medium of the papier collé or collage, in which various kinds of paper are pasted to the canvas. One cuts and chooses and shifts and pastes, and sometimes tears off and begins again. In any case, shaping, arranging such a relational structure obliterates the need, and often the awareness of representation. Without reference to likeness, it possesses feeling because all decisions in regard to it are ultimately made on the grounds of feeling.¹

Depending upon viewpoint, modernist artists and critics have interpreted this reality either as a “materiality” of the canvas and objects placed upon it or as an abstract “flatness” of the painterly plane, but in either case the point is that collage attempts to embody a kind of immediate presence beyond the necessity of representation. For the modernist, collage amounts to a kind of short circuit of the *distance* always implied by signification, indication . . . representation.

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While there's undoubtedly something right about this modernist theory of collage, there's also something obviously wrong about it: the collages of Picasso, Braque, and Gris from the teens, for example, are too obviously playful and ironic to fit into the discourse of "presence."² And there's a reason for that contained in the very practice that produced them: note the following excerpt from an avant-gardist manifesto on collage from the 1970s, a manifesto that closely echoes the earlier claims of the cubists about their technique. In collage,

each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality. The trick of collage consists . . . of never entirely suppressing the alterity of these elements reunited in a temporary composition.³

Collage intends to represent the intersection of multiple discourses. Indeed, it's only this intention that differentiates *cubist* collage from countless earlier examples of folk practices using materials (postage stamps, bones, you name it) in pictorial compositions—and thus justifies art historical talk of its "invention" at the hands of the cubists.⁴

In the early 1970s, the literary theorist and scholar of surrealism, Peter Bürger suggested that this double life of the elements in collage suited it for analysis by means of Walter Benjamin's concept of "allegory." Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* interpreted both cubist collage and dada photomontage in terms of an irreducible *irony*, a double voicing that subverts every attempt to get beyond its representational play.⁵ In other words, Bürger implicitly suggested that collage was ill served by modernist interpreters.

But Bürger's tangential interest in collage and montage didn't impel him to take up the full implications of his interpretation.⁶ That exploration has awaited the (rather late) reception of structuralism and post-structuralism within art historical circles, and particularly within cubist studies. There can be little doubt that recent years have seen a revolution in studies of cubism. Art historians have discovered kinships between the early-twentieth-century artistic movement and the themes articulated by French thought since the Second World War. Or perhaps one had better say that structuralism and post-structuralism have given scholars new glasses with which to examine cubism and that these new glasses reveal aspects of the movement unsuspected by the modernist readers who

preceded Rosalind Krauss, Pierre Daix, Yves-Alain Bois, and Christine Poggi—the historians who have particularly dedicated themselves to this reexamination.

If it can be safely said that cubism as a whole has emerged differently attired from recent investigations, then it is cubist collage that has changed most. Changed in its appearance but, above all, changed in its significance. Christine Poggi is but one of a numerous crowd of scholars who have seen in cubist collage the founding moment of an “alternative to the modernist tradition in twentieth-century art.”⁷ In this interpretation, then, cubist collage opens the path of postmodernism.

The readings of cubist collage developed by this group assert what Yves-Alain Bois calls a “paradigm change” in the very way that artists conceive their role in culture, a change that, while by no means universal, has nonetheless remained influential up to the present. It is the nature of this new way of seeing the aesthetic enterprise—first successfully articulated in cubist collage but reemerging at various moments throughout this century—that I want to explore as *postmodern*. For *what* the new readings of cubist collage have revealed, above all, is the way that the “allegorical” nature of collage works at the level of the very signs of painting. In a brilliant piece of revisionist history published in his recent book *Painting as Model*, Bois has returned to the writings of a contemporary of the cubists in order to argue for a radical break between the analytic period of cubism and the experiments with collage and so on that led to the fully synthetic style of 1914 and afterward.⁸ If the painting of the analytic period can still be read as an effort to produce a nonnaturalistic “realism,” collage indicates the birth of a different project.⁹ Spurred on by the neo-Kantianism of Kahnweiler, the important early critic and patron of cubism, Bois argues that “if the principal rupture in this century’s art was indeed that of cubism, this break was probably not made by the *Demoiselles d’Avignon* nor by analytic cubism” but rather by the collage experiments initiated by Picasso and Braque in 1912 (*Model*, p. 79).

The content of this claim derives from a transformed consciousness about the way visual signs work. Before this period, Picasso and Braque had remained within the traditions of Western pictorial representation in their treatment of such signs. As Picasso put it in a later interview, before the collage period everything was still “painting” or, what amounted to the same thing, “a means of replacing it.”¹⁰ The year 1912, however, ushered in an entirely new vision of pictorial signification. “Painting” now indicated the treatment of signs as though they were *not* signs—as

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though there were a transparent relationship between the pictorial signifier and what it signifies, as though the signifiers might melt into their signifieds or even their referents. In essence, “painting” indicates an artistic practice dedicated to the modernist goal of “presence.” Thus, the rejection of painting means the rejection of any vision of the work of art, or of signs working within it, as *imitations* of the visible world or of the world of meaning. As Kahnweiler puts it,

These painters turned away from imitation because they had discovered that the true character of painting and sculpture is that of a *script*. The products of these arts are signs, emblems, for the external world, not mirrors reflecting the external world in a more or less distorting manner. Once this was recognized, the plastic arts were freed from the slavery inherent in illusionistic styles. (*Model*, p. 74)

Painting and sculpture as writing. This was the model that, on the heels of cubist collage, was to replace painting as mirror of nature or as reproduction of reality. The Kantian vision operates in Kahnweiler’s idea that the signification and reference of the picture are constructed in the viewer’s mind, not on the surface itself. Or, as Kahnweiler writes, they appear “in front of the plane surface” of the image. And they are constructed in the mind *as* constructed, as signified. Thus is opened the possibility of seeing the painting (or signs within it) as the impetus for producing an object “as a whole” in consciousness that does not correspond with the “details of the sign” indicating it. Objects are read from a painting, or from a sculpture for that matter, on the basis of what is explicitly for the viewer a *language* of signs (*Model*, p. 90).

In this context, visual art now can take as its task the investigation of such a language. It is precisely in relationship to such a task that Bois points to Kahnweiler’s emphasis upon a Grebo mask purchased by Picasso in 1912. According to his contemporary, what struck Picasso about this mask was that it was able to signify the face through a syntax of signifiers. We might say that the iconic visual signifier of the mask is defined by minimal conditions; e.g., it must include within itself signifiers for two eyes, a mouth, and so forth, though these may be related spatially in various fashions, may be formally conceived equally variously, and may be constructed out of almost any materials. As Kahnweiler and Bois conceive of it, Picasso’s subsequent work in *papier collé* explores this system of *values* in the construction of visual signs. On the one hand, this is a matter of investigating what I might call the *limits of iconicity*. What,

exactly, are the boundaries of a visual syntax? What can be added to or subtracted from, displaced, or moved in a sign while maintaining its legibility? Is a sign for a guitar readable if the fret and curved “torso” of the instrument are maintained but placed at right angles on top of each other?

On the other hand—and here my reference to a torso is not arbitrary—the association of legibility with a syntax opens a broad space for a “play of signifiers.” If the body of the guitar can be displaced from the other elements that combine to signify it, then that element, that signifier, can also be used as part (or whole) of *another* sign—say, for a woman’s body. With this kind of visual “pun” is opened the possibility announced in the Saussurian thesis of the “arbitrary” or “unmotivated” character of the linguistic sign. In other words, the artist is free not only to test the limits of visual syntax but also to do so in producing an endless combination of the elements of signification, a kind of visual free association based upon the possibilities of semiotic articulation. Guitar becomes woman’s body, becomes face, becomes hat, and so on. The Grebo mask points to a future for the making of art as what Freud would call *primary process*—as a kind of punning play between the meaning of signs and the elements that signify those meanings.

In effect, my idea for centering an examination of postmodernism upon collage started from revisionist investigations of collage technique like those of Bürger, Bois, or Krauss. But, even given the postmodernism of collage, you might still wonder why this phenomenon should focus a philosophical discussion of contemporary culture. There are, at least apparently, many more uniquely postmodern candidates for analysis, and the investigation of an aesthetic phenomenon seems ill suited for raising philosophical questions.

My claim, in essence, would be that these appearances are deceptive. Consider once again the *implications* of considering the collage techniques developed by the cubists to be postmodern: first among them must be a revision of the very status of “postmodern” as a historical concept. This discovery of postmodernism at work in 1912 suggests a significant revision of the kind of periodization that is common within the arts and literature—a periodization that variously places the postmodern after the Second World War or even more recently, in the 1970s or 1980s. There is a kind of myopia at work in such views of the postmodern, but one that is understandable: after all, if you start from the world of art, there have been noticeable shifts in the postwar period from the classical

modernism of the avant-gardes. Something in this picture, however, didn't make sense to me: first of all, the social changes that are now registered by a full-blown postmodern really date back to the last half of the nineteenth century, and the articulation of an ethos in response to those changes has a similarly "ancient" pedigree (Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Simmel). This doesn't invalidate the vision of a postmodernism subsequent to the high modernism of the prewar period; it only complicates it. In effect, much of what we call modernism in the arts appears as a kind of failed response to those material and philosophical conditions that developed with industrialization and urbanization in the middle of the last century. The rest, the *other* response is, well, . . . collage.

Furthermore, collage provides a curious, and to my mind, curiously satisfying origin for postmodernism—right in the heart of cubism, what one scholar calls the "premiere modernist movement."¹¹ This imbrication suggests that we rethink the very idea of the postmodern as a historical era to follow the modern. It's important to remember the modern provenance of historicism itself, with its conception of coherent historical "worlds." Forgetting this is precisely what leads to the critic's prophecy (or declaration) of a "new" world beyond the new world, a coherent moment after modernity. In other words, to the extent that the crisis of modernity at its *end* really brings new phenomena, they defy description in the (modernist) language of historical moments; to the extent that proponents or opponents of the postmodern treat it *as* such a moment, as *postmodernity*, they, too, miss its uniqueness. The postmodern needs a different language for the address of historical and historical/epistemological issues than the one offered by modernism.¹² If postmodernism grows at the very birth of modernism, then perhaps its increasing importance does not bode the demise of modernity at all, but rather a kind of transformation of it from within. With collage we have a postmodern intertwined with the modern, a postmodern as *crisis* of the modern announced from within modernity.

Finally, if that's true, if the postmodern is buried in the midst of modernity—then it's not accidental that postmodernism emerges in collage *without* any avant-gardist group of its own, without the fanfare of its own polemical vision: there is something right in envisioning postmodernism as appearing not in the heat of a "movement," urged by manifestos and angry young artists, but rather as a kind of bypath in the development of what it is supposed (etymologically, at least) to follow. That's because the very technique of collage is unsuited to such polemic.

Here I must confess that my interest in collage as lens for the interpretation of the postmodern developed from a particular and philosophical reading of recent critical and art historical interpreters, an understanding that might diverge at points from the self-interpretation of some of those very scholars. What I hope to bring to the understanding of collage, assemblage, and montage—whether in their cubist origins or in later versions—is an interpretation of it informed by a full reflection on the philosophical issue of *representation*, a reflection that demands more than a displacement of collage within art historical periodization.

What's at stake here is the complexity of the phenomenon emerging from structuralist and post-structuralist reinterpretations of collage techniques. It's possible to take the force of these new readings as a simple challenge to the antirepresentationalism of modernist understandings—as the affirmation of the inevitability of representation in art and culture. Here representation means something like the necessity of signification, of that which denies the possibility of a pure presence. Surely there's something to this view: the work of Bois or Poggi disallows any vision of assemblage or collage as producing a direct aesthetic “presence” of the materials from which the work of art is constructed. But, if we take the word “representation” to mark the cognitive and linguistic mediation not just of experience but also of *meaning* (representation as the completion of a certain movement from a signifier to a signified), then there is also a way in which the new view of collage is itself *antirepresentational*: that is why, for some, like Rosalind Krauss, collage problematizes any view of art as a medium for truth. Here, one thinks of views both of collage and of contemporary culture based upon the reduction of language to a “play of signifiers,” a play without possible completion in a signified.

Nor might these two different uses of “representation” easily coexist within a single interpretive framework. It is uncomfortable to deny the modernist language of immediacy and at the same time to assert a simplified post-structuralist vision of a decentered play of language, one which, ironically, seems to assert an immediacy of the signifier. Nonetheless, and just because of the difficulty it elicits, to say that collage is *both* representational and antirepresentational is to indicate where it is useful as a tool for theoretical analysis of the postmodern. On account of its representational peculiarity, collage questions dogmatisms of all kinds—whether of the kind generated by modernist aestheticism or those resulting from a post-structuralist theoreticism. As seen through collage, the philosophical issue of representation denies the facile verities of “culture wars.”

What interested me about collage as emblem for contemporary cul-

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ture was exactly this undecidability of its representational status. As a result of this interest, every chapter of the present study is riven by the question of representation—whether that question involves the opposition between aesthetic “presence” and an art making truth claims (chapter 1); the epistemological status of truth within a philosophy dedicated to the representation-defying effects of historicity (chapter 2); the peculiar idea of representational “theatricality” in contemporary culture (chapter 3); the problem of judgment as implying representation in the self-experience of the postmodern subject (chapter 4); the importance of Lacan’s notion of the “Real” (as exception point to self-representation) for a “posthumanist” understanding of culture (chapter 5); or, finally, the problematic of utopian representation and realization in postmodern urbanism (chapter 6). Each of these discussions begins from and returns to an impasse in the representational language that allows us to negotiate issues of experience, truth, and meaning. And each of these chapters uses some moment in the history of collage, montage, or assemblage to intervene in that impasse.

Thus, as both revival of representation and paradigm of antirepresentationalism, collage demands a view of the postmodern that resists polemicism. Which is precisely not to say that it is reducible to a kind of aesthetic play, telling us nothing about ourselves or our world; as the first division of this book is at some pains to demonstrate, there is a kind of *truth* to collage, but that truth is precisely unsuited to articulation as an *ideology*. Thus, collage as model for postmodernism presents the full brunt of a paradox: there *is* a truth of the postmodern (to that extent it justifies much of the recent activity in its name), but this truth cannot be embraced, appropriated, made into the material for an avant-gardist ideology. The postmodernism of collage, then, could not be further from the agonistic postmodernism championed by Jean-François Lyotard.

In other words, this book departs from the peculiar question, “If collage is postmodern, what picture of the postmodern might this imply?” The essays that follow assume that challenge in order to articulate a vision of the postmodern *as* shaped by the implications of collage. What interested me about such a project is already implied in the way that collage challenges historicist and avant-gardist assumptions: there is in collage a compelling rethinking of philosophical issues of truth and history that has otherwise failed to gain adequate articulation within the abstract world of postmodern theory.

Indeed, there’s one question, a problematic site, if you will, that col-

lage addresses with strange lucidity: let's call it the issue of historical/cultural "worldhood." One of the broadest developments in twentieth-century philosophy, crossing the geographical and ideological divides that have otherwise carved up the field, has been interest in what Martin Heidegger referred to as "worlds," meaning by that term something like a *meaningful context* within which meaning can occur.¹³ For Heidegger, as for the later Wittgenstein and numerous other thinkers, concrete meanings always appear in relationship to a horizon whose nature appears within it but which resists or refuses objective representation—which remains in some sense also opaque to knowledge. Nonetheless, this context *colors* concrete experience for the individual (her "life-world"). A world marks a kind of fixed and nonobjective boundary to representation necessary for representation to function at all.

My contention is that this philosophical insight is articulated precisely *too late*, at the moment when its veracity historically begins to unravel. Consider the broad accord on the concept of worldhood in relationship to Walter Benjamin's analysis, from the 1930s, of the fate of "experience" in the world of the industrial metropolis. For Benjamin, what characterizes life in the great metropolis is a kind of constant "shock" that threatens the possibility of continuous experience (*Erfahrung*). The life of the city, for which Benjamin takes the crowd as emblematic, is defined by the excess, the too much, of stimulation that its density of communications preconditions. Using Freud's discussion of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as his conceptual source, Benjamin attributes to the city an experience that overwhelms the individual's defense mechanisms, defeating the efforts of consciousness to parry it, parse it, divide it into meaningful concepts. The person subject to such shock is obliged to erect a "screen against stimuli," a screen that effectively prevents the placement of urban life within a context of meaningful experience (*Erfahrung*). Instead, as Benjamin puts it, urban events "tend . . . to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life [*Erlebnis*]." ¹⁴ They are "lived"—in that limited sense, experienced—without the possibility that they could be related to other moments in the individual's life or moments in the lives of others.

It's important to note an essential ambiguity in Benjamin's thesis here: on the one hand, the implication of experience's demise is the disappearance of any single organizing *world*, the fragmentation of individual life between *multiple* contexts in a series of almost "schizophrenic" "lived moments" (*Erlebnisse*).¹⁵ On the other hand, Benjamin's analysis is specific to a literary context—a discussion of lyric poetry in and after Baude-

laire. Read in this light, the “death” of experience doesn’t really mean the *disappearance* of any organizing world for everyday life but rather its *transformation* in such a way as to disallow the traditional poetic function. If you will, there continues to be *a* world, but its structure ceases to grant *meaning* to activity.

The ambiguity in Benjamin’s analysis allows us to see that the function of worldhood is in fact *two* functions—one of which organizes the possibility of cultural activity, of language, and the other of which allows that organization to structure experience as *meaningful*. Without the second of these functions, the “lifeworld” is bound to fall apart, to fracture into a thousand subfields—registered in the metaphor of a discontinuous series of “shocks” replacing the *map* provided by experience. Left without this second function, the first function of worldhood appears in a radically different light, as a kind of impersonal and neutral field of exchange, a market.

Thus, a double result: first, the metropolitan world, the world in which the postmodern emerges, is, in a sense, no longer *a* world at all; it raises the question of how meaning continues to function when the individual routinely crosses boundaries between worlds. Here, the apparently clear status of representation and objectification posited by the philosopher becomes murky: after all, the individual’s mobility condemns every possible context for meaning to objectification from all the other contexts. Second, moreover, the metropolis creates the task of exploring a “neutralized” context for meaning. This means that the *boundaries* or *limits* of experience are defined in a radically different way than they are in more traditional situations. We are no longer in the world of the European peasant, a world in which every thing and person has a predefined place. Nonetheless, in the very erasure of those traditional boundaries, a new kind of limit appears, a limit marked by the apparent meaninglessness of the world as a whole. That, of course, brings us full circle, back to the fragmentation and multiplication of worlds within the metropolis. Above all, then, the conditions of the metropolis demand a philosophical investigation of the new *relationship* between the two fragments of worldhood—between the replacement of the world with a multiplicity of worlds and the transformation of the world as unitary structure.

And that is precisely what collage, taken as guidepost for investigation of the postmodern, promises. Collage practices—the gathering of materials from *different* worlds into a single composition demanding a geometrically multiplying double reading of each element—call attention to the

irreducible *heterogeneity* of the “postmodern condition.” But, insofar as it *does* bind these elements, *as* elements, within a kind of unifying field, the field of what Kurt Schwitters called “*Merz*” (the second syllable of the German *Commerz*), the practice of collage also resists the romanticism of pure difference. This is the case whether one speaks strictly of collage (where elements are attached to a limited surface that symbolizes such a field) or of the three-dimensional effects definitive of “assemblage” in the broadest sense. Collage depends upon a new kind of relationship between these two shards of the traditional concept of worldhood—and, as a result, it promises a new sense of truth and experience, potentially revolutionizing both epistemology and aesthetics. That, in any case, was the suspicion from which the following investigations departed.

Doubtless this view of the postmodern is at odds with assumptions about it from *both* sides of today’s culture wars. In part that’s a product of the polemical situation in which both advocates and critics of the postmodern find themselves. But to a large extent, I would argue, an *interest* in polemics, in the ideological lines that could legitimately be drawn around *modernism* but fail to do justice to the postmodern, leads these cultural warriors away from the very phenomenon over which they pretend to fight. I would point out a couple of directions in which such polemic tends to erase the phenomena that interest me:

1. In neoconservative trends (conservative Heideggerian, Aristotelian/Thomistic), the postmodern is read simply as the *loss* of meaning in the withdrawal of a transcendent guaranteeing principle. Wanting to display this crisis of meaning, they often confine the postmodern—a priori—as it were, within a *premodern* analysis of worldhood. Thus, from the first, they occlude the possibility of a new sense of “world” and reduce the problems and potentials of the metropolitan context to the failure of the unifying structures of traditional worldhood; not much by way of positive understandings of the contemporary world can emerge from this unremittingly negative mode of analysis. Given the unlikelihood of a return to a premodern situation, it seemed worthwhile to me to entertain the postmodern condition more seriously than this approach would allow.
2. In certain neo-avant-gardist approaches (Deleuze, Foucault, Lyotard, Vattimo, and so on), the metropolitan situation gives birth to a kind of radicalized Leibnizian philosophy (Leibniz without God!), one that fantasizes a space of pure difference, a space

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existent only in and through the elements composing it, a space without space. While such positions capture something essential about the postmodern situation, as a doctrine they are, in my opinion, both epistemologically problematic and politically short-sighted. Above all, to insist upon a “rhizomic” model of cultural space is to ignore the dependence of difference upon the totalizing context of global capitalism. In other words, the fantasy of a world of pure difference may serve a role disturbingly close to what traditional Marxism deemed mystifying “ideology.”

You could, indeed, see both the subject matter and the structure of *The Frame and the Mirror* as a response to the limitations imposed upon discussion of the postmodern by these dueling polemics. With regard to the subject matter, it should be obvious at this point that the peculiarity of collage is its resistance to either of the above positions on worldhood. It thus provides a philosophical way of talking about the postmodern without dismissing the phenomenon itself. But it's with regard to the organization of the essays making up this volume that I would point most insistently to the need to answer philosophical positions already staked out. An early version of this work bore the subtitle “The Myths of Postmodernism,” attempting to invoke Rosalind Krauss's seminal work *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*.¹⁶ The idea was to do something for postmodern theory like she had done for modernist theory. The hubris of such a claim led to the quiet “loss” of that subtitle, but the reader should be aware that most of the chapters of the following book start from a critique of a specific thinker addressing postmodern culture and particularly postmodern aesthetic culture. Thus, various chapters of *The Frame and the Mirror* provide readings of moments from the history of collage beside interpretations of theoretical texts by Karsten Harries, Gianni Vattimo, Jean- François Lyotard, Slavoj Žižek, and Rosalind Krauss herself.

For, although it addresses broad hermeneutical/epistemological and ethical issues, this work did take shape within the context of a philosophical investigation of aesthetic phenomena. Indeed, its first two parts—corresponding to the “frame” and the “mirror” of its title—concern first one and then the other of these concerns. The essays of the first part amount to three different “takes” on the question of truth and postmodernism. The first chapter uses a Picasso collage to respond to Heidegger's questioning about art and truth. It argues, against the contemporary Heideggerian philosopher Karsten Harries, for the possibility of a kind of

“truth” in art unbound from traditional conceptions of epistemological space. The second chapter looks at the issue of postmodern perspectivism, focusing upon Gianni Vattimo and the *Merz* collages of Kurt Schwitters. Finally, through an analysis of essays by Krauss and a film by Peter Greenaway, the third chapter talks about the peculiar issue of heterogeneity and representation in relationship to collage.

The second part then looks more directly at aesthetic questions, focusing upon the crisis of “self”-experience created by the modern turn and increasingly evident in the past century. Here discussion turns first to the eighteenth-century debate over the sublime and beautiful: an examination of a Picasso collage in relationship to the categories developed by Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* calls into question Jean-François Lyotard’s identification of the aesthetics of the postmodern with the traditions of the sublime. The part’s other chapter returns once again to Picasso’s cubist output to look at the questions raised by the past century’s crisis in aesthetic humanism; here a debate within the field of psychoanalytic theory about the possibilities and limits for a “posthumanism” helps me to examine the fate of the modern aesthetic subject.

The final part, which is composed of a single chapter, reverses the coin: having constructed what I take to be the most charitable account possible of the postmodernism of collage, I there argue the problematic nature of even this as a *political* vision. Indeed, the subject matter of this chapter is literally “political,” since it focuses upon the architecture of the polis, the city, in the wake of the failure of modernist urbanism. I analyze two different proposals to base urban design upon collage principles (those of Koetter and Rowe and of Koolhaas) and argue—despite its compelling nature—for the failure of the very idea of a “collage city.” To return to an earlier point in my discussion, my assertion here is precisely that postmodernism can’t take the place of modernism . . . and that this place demands to be taken. In other words, the focus here is upon the postmodern as unresolved *crisis* in the modern.

If there’s a conclusion to be reached at the end of all of this, it’s that the very things that make collage (and, by extension postmodernism) powerful, its irreducibility to the coordinates of ideology, its production of a model for unmediated heterogeneity, also mark its limitation. In the end the *promise* of collage, the promise of a concept of “world” and “truth” to replace those of the philosophers, *both* succeeds and fails. It succeeds if you consider the full relationship between representation and the aesthetic, a relationship that collage shifts significantly enough to in-

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validate accusations of aestheticism or narcissism; my readings of collages from Picasso through Greenaway attempt to trace this shift against the background of a number of specific issues. But this imbrication of the aesthetic and the epistemological also indicates a boundary of its truth. There's little to take away from collage, no portable doctrine or ideology with which to settle your affairs.

That's as it should be, but it does indicate a *methodological* imperative that has constantly been with me throughout the development of this project. Namely, collage demands the approach of a *hermeneutics*, an approach that mimes collage in emerging between the concreteness of a literary interpretation and the abstraction of a philosophical system. Just as the collage produces a kind of *tension* between the specificity of its signifiers and the truth they represent, so a theoretical approach to the postmodernism of collage must set itself precisely between the literary task of producing a reading and the philosophical effort to discover generalizable truths. Thus, I hope that the reader of *The Frame and the Mirror* will find in its pages both a set of internally coherent interpretive "essays" and the thread of an argument about the nature of the postmodern. If there's a craft in theorizing about the postmodern, then it's here. But I leave judgment of whether I've succeeded in this to the reader.

Part 1

Frame: The Truth in Collage

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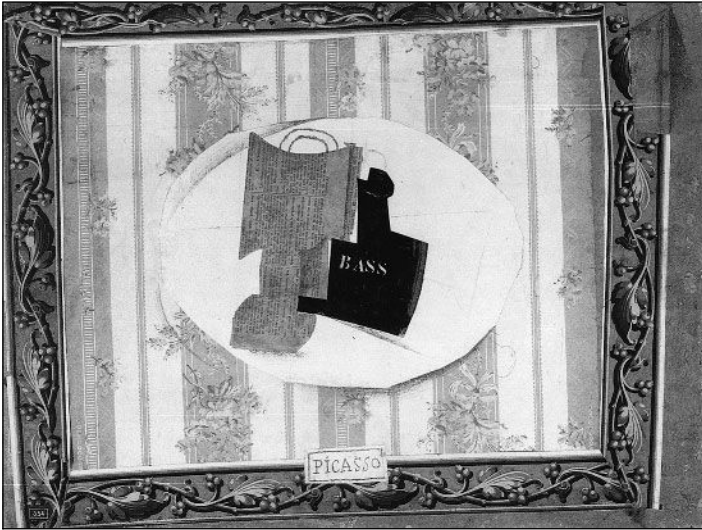


Figure 1.1. Pablo Picasso, *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, 1914

1 | Breaking the Frame of Truth

Karsten Harries and the Truth of Art

KARSTEN HARRIES: ART AND AESTHETICISM

No doubt modernity represents a fundamental shift in the kind of self-experiences Western societies allow individuals, a change in that sphere of cultural life where the experience of artworks takes place. No doubt, too, this shift emerges in the arts through the growth of what the philosopher Karsten Harries calls “the aesthetic attitude”—an attitude marked by an increasingly subjective emphasis evident in artistic creativity. Aestheticism, at least as a broad social phenomenon, may be uniquely modern. Certainly the peculiar cultural problems that emerge when art ceases to articulate social, cosmological, and ontological truth are uniquely suited to demonstrate the shortcomings of modernity. In the tradition of philosophical positions developed as critiques of the aesthetic turn and of aestheticism—a tradition that includes Kierkegaard and the Heidegger

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of *The Origin of the Work of Art* and afterward—Harries's work stands out for its thoroughness. Indeed, the main outlines of Harries's philosophy of art have remained unchanged from *The Meaning of Modern Art* (1968) through *The Broken Frame* (1989) and *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997).¹ The great service rendered by these works is to have clearly articulated different aspects of the essential questions about the trajectory of art within modernity. The following reflections pursue some of these questions.

For Harries, as for Heidegger before him, the crisis that is modern art is simply an extension of the broader crisis of modern Western culture, a crisis that Harries often evokes through Nietzsche's "death of God."² As Harries writes,

Modern art has its origin in the disintegration of the traditional order of values which once assigned to man his proper place; knowing this place, man knew what to do. With the death of God this order has lost both founder and foundation. . . . The death of God leaves man displaced and without a direction. In a godless world, as Nietzsche pointed out, everything seems to be allowed and by the same token everything threatens to become meaningless. (*Meaning*, p. 153)

In registering this "loss of place," a situation about which, by the way, Harries maintains a healthy ambivalence, modern art becomes increasingly an art of the subject. Philosophy already anticipates this before Nietzsche in the Kantian articulation of a philosophy of beauty through the mechanism of the "aesthetic" in his *Critique of Judgment*. With this articulation of a mission for art that removes it entirely from questions of truth, there arises what Harries calls "the aesthetic attitude." According to this attitude, art is purely a reflection of subjectivity—one that attempts to remove itself from all dependence on a transcendent world. Thus, for instance, in Kant the ideal of involvement with the beautiful is articulated in the juridical language of "disinterestedness." To correctly judge beauty (whether in nature or in art) is to maintain a distance from the worldly qualities of the aesthetic object, those that might inspire "interest"—i.e., desire. The aestheticist ideal, like the ideal for the judge, is a kind of recusal from the concerns of the world.

Harries asks that we contrast the "aesthetic attitude" to the attitude of a medieval person in relationship to the Gothic cathedral at a town's center. In this, his favorite symbol for the action of a premodern art, the aesthetic experience of the church is inseparable from its "religious, ethi-

cal and practical” functions (*Rococo*, p. 255). It discloses a view of the inhabitant’s world as a whole, and, in so doing, involves her “ceremonially” in that world so as to grant a sense of place there. As Harries puts it, a work of art like a Gothic cathedral operates in a profoundly “ethical” fashion—“ethical in the sense of helping to establish the ethos of a society, which assigns to persons and things their proper places” (*Rococo*, p. 246).

It’s important to pause here for a moment in order to take stock of a couple of vital terms in Harries’s vocabulary. Perhaps *the* central insight running through Harries’s work, is that there is some connection between what he calls “truth” in art and our very ability to “find our way” within our world. Now, it’s clear from even this much that when Harries writes of such truth, he means more than one might first associate with that word. What’s at stake with this “epistemological” function of art is not simply the ability of artworks to deliver pithy insights about human experience or nature—though that possibility follows from the function that he has in mind. Nor, for that matter, does Harries wish to align himself with those who analyze art through semiotics or semiology, discussing it as a form of communication.³ If that’s *all* that Harries meant by the artwork’s “truth,” then there would indeed be no necessary path from truth to ethics. Harries does wish to concentrate on something that works of art communicate, but he focuses upon a limited subset of such communication, and one that occurs *only* with such works. Furthermore, like Heidegger, Harries wishes to radically question the theoretical limitation of art to *representation*: for both Heidegger and Harries, artworks *can*, in fact, open up or make possible the truth they reveal.⁴

What sort of “truth” would also present, or even possibly produce, an ethos—a way of life or set of customs? Following the path that, above all, Heidegger has opened, Harries suggests that the truth function of art has something to do with its ability to disclose an entire world. Art is true for Harries not to the extent that it grants us specific “truths” but rather insofar as it reveals to us an entire “meaning context”—a world—within which such truths can emerge. Indeed, and this metaphor will turn out to be vital to my reflections, what is at stake in such truth is the possibility of a revelation of that kind of “whole” in which objects can appear. And yet, this world-disclosing function of art is *also* in some fundamental way interpretable in the terms of specific truths. That is, while never reducible to a particular fact within the world, the truth revealed by art does privilege some facts, some understandings, over others.⁵ It privileges those understandings that it itself produces.

It is from this double nature of the truth he associates with art that Harries derives its ethical function: as both an organizing principle *beyond* the world of understanding and a *part of* that world, the truth of art produces a hierarchy of values. Here it's vital to pay attention to that metaphor of "place" and its loss that Harries uses to define the modern situation itself. To "know one's place" is only possible if one can also know the whole within which this position is defined and in such a way as to understand the relationship between the whole and its parts. That is, in its truth, art operates like a kind of map: it pictures or represents the boundaries of experience and does so by showing the relationship between those boundaries and specific points contained within them. Insofar as this trope of the map holds, such truth is literally useful for helping us to "know our place," just as you might consult a map to locate your home city.

But implicit in this "making sense of" is a more active overtone of *ethos*, one that can also be derived from the map metaphor underlying Harries's discussions; for the most part, we use maps, not simply to locate ourselves but to get from one place to another. Harries repeatedly extends the cartographic imagery of his thought by insisting that the truth function of art helps us to "find our way" in the world (*Ethical*, p. 11). That is, an *ethos*, in Harries's sense of the word, is a way of *actively* relating the materials of experience to a whole of meaning. The most intimate bond between truth and ethics in Harries's system lies here: just as a map allows one to "make one's way," overcoming the paralysis of those who "have no idea where they are," the truth of art allows the individual to actively appropriate the meaning context in which he/she lives and to make life choices on the basis of that appropriation.

In this context, you can doubtless see why Harries is so enamored of the Gothic cathedral. As bountiful art historical research indicates, the power of the cathedral for its medieval inhabitants depended precisely on its ability to represent the whole theological/philosophical world of the Middle Ages.⁶ Like the philosophical revolution of the thirteenth century, the architecture of the same period aimed at cementing a bond between "faith" and "reason"—between what transcended and organized the world and what could be discovered within it. Thus, for example, while the medieval visitor to Chartres Cathedral would "read" the narratives contained in the stained-glass windows or its statuary, the experience of the church couldn't be reduced to such reading. The representation of totality here also includes the overwhelming nature of the experience it presents. And, indeed, just as the microcosms discovered

in every detail of the cathedral structure would seem to both point to and serve the overwhelming whole of the building, so also this totality is itself explicitly subservient to its sacred referent; reason serves faith.

Certainly one function of this hierarchical structure is to help the visitor understand *why* she should live as she does—as a Christian, a peasant, noble, craftsperson, and so on. You might say that the experience of the cathedral helps the medieval person to make sense of and accept her lot in life. Thus, you can imagine that the biblical stories (say, the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, for example) depicted for a largely illiterate population in the church's stained glass would provide a language for understanding moral issues; but they would do this only because they would be literally "illuminated" by the sun passing through the glass, indicating the primary insight of the Gothic/Scholastic ideology about the presence of the divine within the world. The ethical function of art and architecture lies in its ability to help us *act* in relationship to a totality, in the way that the illuminated window allows the medieval peasant to act in relationship to the sacred.

Within the modern period, however, the demands of aesthetic autonomy, of the self-experience of an alienated subject, eclipse such an ethical function. For Harries, the origin of this change lies in a transformation of the world-disclosing function of art that we've seen already to be essential to it as truth. Under this new model, the exemplary art within the modern period ceases to be architecture: a new *aesthetic* notion of the artwork's unity tends to favor *painting* as the model art. Harries writes that, from the end of the eighteenth century onward, a new ideal of organicity (and, thus, of beauty) came to dominate Western art; "not . . . the *subordination* but the *coordination* of parts" controls the way we see the organization of a painting (*Rococo*, p. 246). That is, a painting produces a space of "harmony" which precisely cannot appear as a limited object. Nor can there be any sense that certain parts or interpretations of the work lie "closer" to its generating principle. There can be no question with this aesthetic unity of any hierarchy of elements within the work—of the sense that the work has a "head" or a "heart" as the Gothic cathedral has (*Rococo*, p. 246).

The totality here is defined by its "instantaneous" apprehensibility rather than by the presence within it of an articulated controlling principle. As Michael Fried has eloquently put the modern ideal revealed preeminently in painting, the experience of genuine art (and, therefore, the genuine experience of art) is characterized by a radical "presentness" in

which it is “as though, if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.”⁷ Indeed, a finite principle is by definition impossible here; for its existence would imply an eccentricity about the otherwise closed aesthetic totality—would imply something that defied inclusion within the instantaneous experience of the work. If such an artwork revealed a privileged element or meaning (a heart, if you will), that signifier would itself always defy the work’s claims to presentness. To “get it,” one would have to experience *first* the work and *then* its unifying principle.

Thus, the work of art is increasingly conceived in terms of aesthetic form, in terms of an “integrity [which] should be such that to add or subtract anything would be to weaken or destroy the aesthetic whole” (*Rococo*, p. 250). It’s as a result of such *formalism* that the aesthetic attitude “tends toward abstract art,” since “the self-sufficiency demanded of the aesthetic experience implies the demand that there be nothing about the aesthetic object that refers the observer beyond itself” (*Rococo*, p. 252). Thus, instead of *representing* the world in relationship to its subjects, the work increasingly attempts—in a metaphor that Harries borrows from Baumgarten—to *be* the world. Such modernist works continue to present a kind of worldhood, but that unity is now no longer seen as deriving from or applying to the specific world for which it is produced.

As we’ve seen, the modernist artwork can only *be* the world—in the sense of providing an idea of meaningful totality—to the extent that it resists all efforts to use it as way of finding actual meaning. And this increasing abstraction, this withdrawal of the artist’s attention from anything beyond the formal coherence of the work, is precisely where Harries finds the *narcissism* of modern art.⁸ The term narcissism is carefully chosen here—referring not only to the subject-centeredness of such modernist art but also to its exclusion of *everything except* the subject. True Narcissus that he (she) is, the modernist artist is obsessed with his (her) own image to the exclusion of all else.

Clearly, as the descriptor “narcissistic” indicates, for Harries there is something deeply wrong with an art that ceases to relate the individual to his/her world seen as a totality. But what precisely is the problem? After all, by Harries’s own account the experience of aestheticist art does provide a refuge of sorts from the pressures of the everyday modern

world. This would doubtless be a lesser task than that associated with the epistemological function of art, but it is not in itself necessarily worthless. Such art might, indeed, be the most pleasant to experience. But precisely in its retreat from representational tasks, aestheticist art reinforces the problems of a world in which alienation tends to *paralyze* the individual, problematizing all efforts at meaningful action. In other words, if the deepest spiritual manifestation of modernity is that it is difficult for individuals to act meaningfully, then an art that seduces people away from perceiving this crisis must be at least unhelpful and probably harmful. At the very least, it indicates that the artist has given up on making a difference in the world and has him/herself chosen the pleasures of narcissistic retreat as alternative. At the worst, it suggests that he/she is offering such retreat as a seductive alternative to meaningful action.

You might think here of Gustav Klimt's withdrawal, upon the censorship of his murals for the University of Vienna, into the role of portrait painter for the *haute bourgeoisie* of his turn-of-the-century world. As a famous account by Carl Schorske informs us, the earlier Klimt, leader of the avant-garde Secession movement, was determined to explore precisely those elements of the human experience—above all, sexuality—that fin de siècle Viennese culture was determined to repress.⁹ Klimt's paintings prior to 1904 range from playfulness to rage, but many of these works challenge conventional liberal understandings of the self, demanding that the viewer acknowledge irrational and unconscious forces at work in the human being, forces that ill suit the ideal of the autonomous individual. In the first of three murals he made for the University of Vienna, an allegorical work entitled *Philosophy*, this challenge to liberal individualism emerges in a figural world of dynamic merging shadows. In contrast, after the public censorship of this and his other murals for the university, Klimt's later paintings become largely static celebrations of aesthetic presence. Rediscovering his father's craft as a jeweler, he produces jewel-like compositions, paintings that almost seem to trap their subjects in a metallic cage. It is as though the static nature of these paintings exposes the price that the painter himself pays for forswearing his challenge to his world and electing instead to build an alternative, perfect aesthetic world—"a temple of art" into which he withdraws ("Gustav Klimt," p. 264). Schorske, indeed, suggests that the cage here is finally as much Klimt's as his subjects': it represents the paralysis that results from aestheticism.

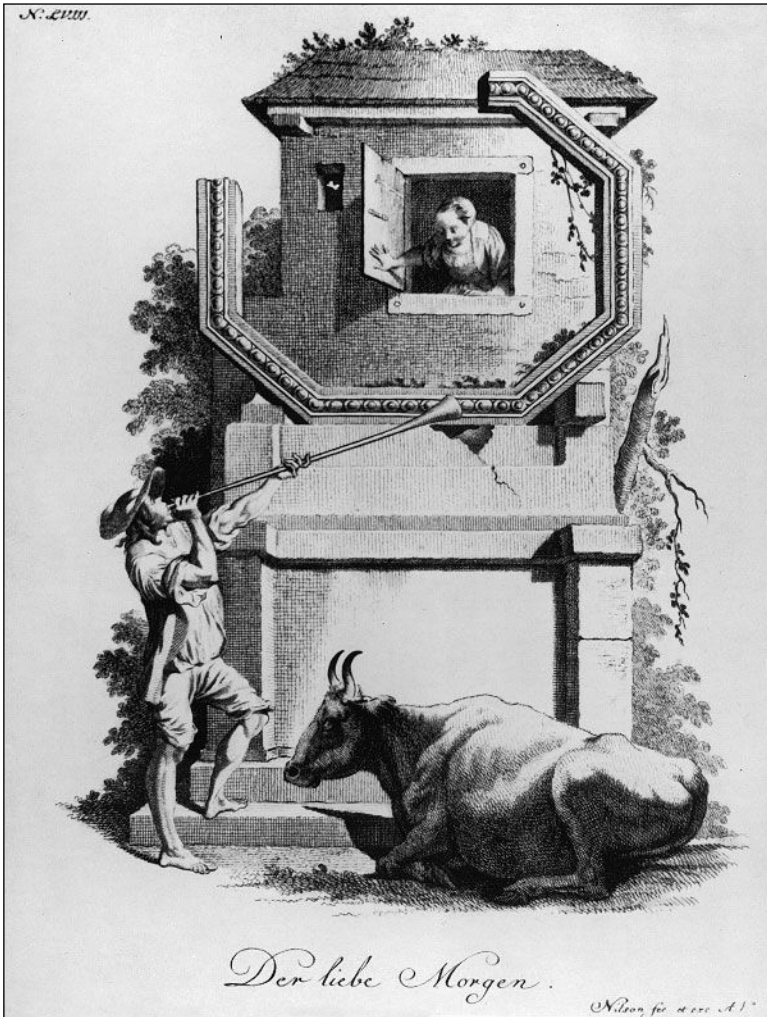


Figure 1.2. Johann Esaias Nilson, *Der liebe Morgen*, 1770

THE BROKEN FRAME

Whatever potential he may see for an authentic art of modernity, Harries sees the actual course of modern art as following an unvarying course.¹⁰ Such art ever more perfectly retreats in order to compose its own world. Thus,

[t]he history of modern art can be told as a story of art's emancipation from all nonaesthetic concerns. The divorce of art

from religion in the early modern period provides an obvious introduction; the progressive attack, first on allegory, then on representation, and finally on all meaning, might be chapters; the emergence of the artwork as an ideally self-sufficient beautiful presence that should no longer *mean* but simply *be* could provide an effective conclusion. (*Broken*, p. xi)

It is in the context of this teleological view of the history of modern art that Harries raises the question of the “broken frame”—a question which provides the title for a series of talks about aesthetic modernism and postmodernism that he presented in the late 1980s. The title itself refers to a late-eighteenth-century engraving by the south German artist Johann Esaias Nilson entitled *Der liebe Morgen*.¹¹ The engraving depicts a cowherd and a woman surrounded (within the picture) by a broken octagonal frame, which is itself supported by a peculiar house/ornament. As Harries’s discussion of the picture makes clear, this image has to be understood as part of a rococo tradition of playful framing/representation. But what concerns me here is less Harries’s analysis of the Bavarian rococo, than his argument that this kind of playful framing exposes the teleology of modern art by discovering the essence of the “aesthetic attitude.” For Harries the broken frame represented in Nilson’s engraving marks the upcoming victory of aesthetic subjectivism:

Der liebe Morgen offers us an interpretation of rococo ornament as essentially a frame on the threshold of becoming a self-sufficient aesthetic object. The frame here disputes first place with the master it once served. The breaking of the frame is at the same time the emancipation of a purely aesthetic interest from an interest in representation. Thus it prepares for the triumph of an abstract art for art’s sake. (*Broken*, p. 81)

To understand why the appearance of the frame within the painting—itsself emblemized in its breaking—should symbolize the death of art dedicated to uncovering some truth about a world that it represents demands a brief consideration of the concept of “framing” in Harries’s work, as well as of a related concept, from his writing on architecture, “ornament.” Both ornament and framing having as their primary function what Harries calls “re-presentation”—by which he means precisely that function whereby certain elements or signifiers both produce and depict the work’s truth. In part, this seems to mean the ability of art to make us “see again” a world that tends to get lost through habit. As he puts it, “re-

presentation invites us to take a second look, bids us take leave from our usual interests and concerns and to attend to what is thus re-presented" (*Broken*, p. 67). Thus, both ornament and frame belong to that truth function of art that the aesthetic attitude threatens.

The role of ornament in traditional architecture is exemplary in such world disclosure; for ornament cannot be reduced to mere aesthetic attention. Indeed, the ornament belongs in an uncompromisable manner to a nonaestheticized sense of unity in a building.¹² Which is, of course, to assert that the ornamented whole is seen as resulting from the kind of hierarchical principle that Harries associates with premodern art—a principle that grants every part its place in a definite, rationally ordered whole. Thus, Harries writes that, "ornament is appropriate only if the different parts of some larger whole are not of equal importance; if there are patterns of subordination, if one part governs the others. Like the human body, a baroque or rococo church may thus be said to have a head and a heart" (*Rococo*, p. 246).

Harries's most compelling discussion of architectural ornament relates it etymologically back to the "ornaments" of the Catholic Church—such as the vestments or the cup for the wine of the Eucharist. As he understands it, architectural ornament is not simply "decoration" but—like the tools of the Eucharist—also what allows the building to fulfill a meaningful function.¹³ In the case of that which we more commonly call ornament, such an underwriting occurs precisely in the way that ornament articulates the building into meaningful divisions. Thus, for instance, within the classical tradition, ornament often separates wall surfaces from windows or doors or divides walls in relationship to the proportions of the human body. But the key here is that ornament doesn't just *divide* surfaces; it can only divide them into *meaningful parts*.¹⁴

Ornament re-presents a world precisely by making this principle of ordered totality present at a reduced scale. And, interestingly, the ornament doesn't simply communicate such an articulation; it *is* the very means by which the building is able to be such a totality. Ornament carves up the building into the parts whose meaningful ordering it also announces. Just as the "ornaments" of a church only communicate ("represent") the functions of the church at the same time that they allow those functions to occur, so also architectural ornaments both "presuppose and help to establish a rank order" (*Rococo*, p. 246). Here we return to the re-presentational nature of the ornament, for it is precisely in this ornamental combination of articulation and representation (understood, colloquially) that ornament is able to re-present a world. To put it differ-

ently, re-presentation is the double function (Harries refers to it as “fetal”) by which something simultaneously establishes a totality and represents it. The ornament both is and is not a part of the building. If it were simply conceived as a direct articulation of structure, then—as a part—the ornament couldn’t sufficiently represent the structure as a whole. If it were simply a representation, the ornament would have no place within the building’s structure. It is the unique status of the ornament to defy this either/or in a unique kind of “between.” It takes what it represents, the order it signifies, to be the principle of the world as totality, and *puts it to work* as ordering structure in the building. Thus, wherever ornament appears, on doors, columns, and so on, it tells us that what is experienced is part of such a whole. It tells us that the building is a microcosm, a world working together according to an articulable principle of hierarchy.

For Harries, framing is a lesser version of ornamental re-presentation, a version already informed by the aesthetic attitude. Nonetheless, like ornaments, frames both represent a fundamental ordering principle and establish that ordering principle with regard to the work. The frame, like the ornament, both is and is not part of the work of art, and this same ambiguous “between” relationship allows the drawing/painting/etching, also, to achieve a meaningful unity.¹⁵ On the one hand, the frame marks such a work as something belonging to the world in which it hangs. On the other hand, framing and frame belong to the painting itself, establishing figure/field relationships within it by establishing a boundary to the field. In other words, framing is a symbolic function indicating a continuity between the work and its world. And, of course, what is symbolized in the “thickening” that inspired frames is the function of a window embrasure. In the history of painting since the Renaissance, what is at stake with the frame is the metaphor of painting as *window*. The ornamental division of the wall performed by window embrasures symbolizes the continuity between the visual space in which we live and the two-dimensional space of the painting. Since Alberti’s *Of Painting*, the metaphor of the window has powerfully indicated this continuity, this translatability of two-dimensional (the “surface” of the window/canvas) and three-dimensional (the space of the viewer that one sees “through” the painting) space.

As with the ornamenting of traditional architecture, the frame gesture indicates, above all, this continuity between two levels of “wholes.” Here that implies that the *formal* or *compositional* harmony achieved on the

The Frame and the Mirror

two-dimensional surface of the canvas serves as representation of the totality of meaning in which the painting is produced. A world can be represented at the same time that its “presence” absorbs the viewer. But, of course, this representational unity doesn’t operate here in conjunction with a complementary sense of the work’s totality. Most concretely, this means that, taken as two-dimensional space, the “whole” presented by the painting/window is really not the same as that delineated by the frame. The formal unity of the composition is, as we’ve seen, *antithetical* to all representation. Representation presents the unity of the work as a kind of object (or at least figure) outlined by a boundary. The aesthetic form presupposes that this unity can only appear as the *field* within which figures play.

This means, and Harries is certainly correct here, that the *modernist ideal* articulated by Fried demands the elimination of the frame, of an apparent addition to the autonomous unity of the work of art. It is for this reason that Harries understands the inclusion of frames within the work’s representational field as the prelude to the dissolution of both framing and representation. Such a play, then, consumes the frame within the formal field, but, in so doing, destroys the representational nature of that field. When the frame is consumed within the work, all that is left, apparently, is a composition aspiring to presentness, a composition that is antirepresentational. The way is opened up for the victory of an art that no longer means but simply “is.” “When the frame becomes an integral part of the painting, it no longer functions as frame meant to represent the ‘painting.’ It has itself become an integral element of the aesthetic object and now helps to liberate it from the rule of representation” (*Broken*, p. 84).

Indeed, this “swallowing” of representation occurs in two symptomatic ways — ways that correspond to the two broad traditions of “modern art.” On the one hand, the devouring of the frame produces a classicizing, formalist tradition that underscores the form divorced from the material elements composing it. For this tradition (which certainly includes Fried and his teacher, Clement Greenberg), the point of a genuinely modern art is to underscore the unity that transcends all such “material.” On the other hand, an equally vibrant romantic and avant-gardist practice (dada, surrealism, minimalism) makes the same point by opposite means. Here the *transcendence* of aesthetic form is underscored by an insistence upon material immediacy. Form, as the contribution of the experiencing subject to objectivity, cannot be supplied *to* an artwork except by the viewer. From this viewpoint (which, as will be seen in a later chapter,

corresponds with the concept of the *sublime*), the aesthetic task is to approximate a kind of brute or naked materiality.¹⁶

In either case, Harries's account of the frame and its demise demands seeing framing as marking a kind of compromise—uncomfortably situated in the historical evolution from ornament to autonomous aesthetic object. The frame emerges in his discussions as a kind of truce line, separating an ornamental task (one that guarantees the residual illusionary and representational function of the picture) and the aesthetic imperative of presentness. Indeed, it is tempting here to use Freud's term for the peculiar constructions resulting from the collisions of unconscious desires and the censoring requirements of consciousness—"compromise formation"—to describe framing. The frame is a compromise formation between art as representation and art as *aesthesis*. The more that the picture approaches the internal, aesthetic unity that the frame helps to establish, the more it will try to escape the necessity of the frame, the necessity that it carry about with it a world that is explicitly heterogeneous to the function it performs. The internal unity of form is limited by the necessity of limit, or, more precisely, by the necessity of including what lies beyond its limits. Thus emerges the movement of art against the frame—the movement for which the "broken frame" serves as emblem. To the extent that play with framing elements serves that purpose, Harries's analysis is certainly right about it. Such play is only the prelude to the disappearance of framing altogether, to the effort to establish an art that knows no limits.

THE "MODERNISM" OF CUBIST COLLAGE: GLASS AND BOTTLE OF BASS

But before concluding that all depictions of a frame in ruins indicate the ascent of art to its aesthetic purity, it's important to consider cubist collage in relationship to the problem of the frame, a problem that only emerges with the ideal of aesthetic presentness. Surely, if the *purpose* of consuming the frame within the work is aesthetic unity, a cubist collage by Picasso would seem peculiarly badly suited to that end in other respects. The collage might be considered a composition, but it is difficult indeed to ascribe to it a sense of "totality," that sense of a whole to which nothing can be added or subtracted without its violation that marks the aesthetic "coordination" of elements. Indeed, as Peter Bürger stresses in a reading of cubist collage using Walter Benjamin's concept of "allegory,"

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one of the things that interests us about collages is the sense within them that something *could* be added or taken away without changing the work's essence.¹⁷

Take, for example, Picasso's *Glass and Bottle of Bass* (see figure 1.1), a *papier collé* from the spring of 1914 and one of a series of collages from the same period that explores problems of framing. Around the edge of the composition, Picasso has pasted a wallpaper representation of a frame, upon one part of which, in an obvious mockery of museum identification plates as well as of the gesture of signing a painting, he has scrawled his name. Here, apparently, is a broken "frame" in the most obvious sense—a frame that seems to advertise its own artificiality, its own inability to function *as* frame.¹⁸

As Christine Poggi demonstrates, there's an obvious *economic* dimension to this representation. Frames are "precious," belonging as they do to the world of commodities—or announcing the work's belonging to that world. Thus, it is clear that it isn't a real "frame" because it's composed of cheap materials (wallpaper patterns) that only represent the precious materials of an actual frame. Furthermore, this pasted frame is intentionally askew and badly put together. It's even missing a piece in the upper right corner—a fault that Picasso has emphasized rather than reduced by drawing in the missing piece in charcoal. Furthermore, the ultimate guarantor of the work's value, the museum plate bearing the painter's name, is replaced by an obviously forged copy—a forgery perpetrated by that same Picasso! Everything here tells the viewer that this is not a *real* frame any more than is the edge of the "picture" within it.

The interpretation of the "broken frame" of *Glass and Bottle of Bass* as negation of framing does not, however, do full justice to what's going on there. The pasted frame is also a signifier, and a striking one, for the status of the painting as a whole in relationship to its social world: in its "cheapness," and "inauthenticity," its refusal to "fit" its painting, the frame indicates all the more effectively that the work remains a commodity, something that belongs inevitably to the art market. That is, the effect of canceling the usual external indicators of a painting's "preciousness" is to ironically underscore the way that we look for such "status symbols"—the way that we look at the work as a potential commodity. As Poggi has remarked, this particular kind of play marks the extreme ambivalence of the cubists with regard to the question of the commodification of art.¹⁹ In that sense, the frame, for all its obvious falseness (indeed *because* of the rhetorical inauthenticity with which it is represented) does still fulfill *one* of the functions of the frame. It (metaphorically) bounds the work, indicat-

ing a determining principle of the world to which it belongs—the world of twentieth-century capitalism. It demands that the work be seen as a kind of representation, even if in no sense an iconic or naturalistic one.

Thus, a peculiarity that will repeat itself indefinitely in reading collage: precisely at that point where it seems that we can discern an unequivocal meaning—in this case, the movement of the work into a dimension beyond all finite articulation of meaning—the work demands that we find it doubling itself, calling its own aesthetic status into question. Indeed, Picasso plays on this ironic sort of symbolization: it's only to that missing piece of frame in the work's upper right, the piece that he's drawn in by hand, that Picasso has provided the shadowing that a real frame, a frame with depth, would inevitably produce (*Defiance*, p. 129). It's as if to say, "the more false this frame, the more real it is."

In part, this is precisely the point that Bürger makes in discussing collage as allegorical; it belongs to the nature of an art where each element exists in two "worlds" (the one from which it was drawn and the one into which it is pasted), that it must speak with two voices.²⁰ Indeed, as we've already seen, what legitimates—in the face of much older traditions of pasting objects to surfaces—speaking of the "invention" of collage in the years 1911 to 1912 is precisely the cubists' self-conscious use of this allegorical implication of collage techniques.²¹ Picasso himself later described his interests in collage and *papier collé* this way. He tells us that their purpose

was to give the idea that different textures can enter into a composition to become the reality in the painting that competes with the reality in nature. We tried to get rid of "trompe l'oeil" to find a "trompe l'esprit." . . . If a piece of newspaper can become a bottle, that gives us something to think about in connection with both newspapers and bottles, too. This displaced object has entered a universe for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness. And this strangeness was what we wanted to make people think about because we were quite aware that the world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring.²²

The twist that Picasso gives to his discussion in the last sentence is worth noting; for there he indicates that what is involved is more than an aesthetic play with the possibilities of fragmentation. That is, beyond the curiosity of seeing *elements* of the collage (newspapers, bottles) in two contexts, Picasso hints at a representational interest in something like

worldhood—in those contexts that normally allow signs to function transparently but that begin to operate differently in the world of the metropolis and the collage. That is, at its edges collage becomes a way of investigating the very nature of representation, its dependence upon a kind of totality that cannot otherwise become an object of investigation.

In other words, the play with framing in *Glass and Bottle of Bass* is not *simply* an effort to negate the representational function of painting. It's not simply a matter here of liberating the sense of aesthetic unity in the artwork from the necessities of depicting the world. There's something in collage techniques that resists such a reduction to the coordinates of aestheticism, and, indeed, that element also disallows consideration of the work's *own* unity in the terms of presentness or aesthetic form.

Consider the ironic representational play in *Glass and Bottle of Bass*. As an opening move, we might say that it is a painting "of" a painting hanging on a wallpapered wall. The oval of the white canvas at the work's center depicts a painting of a glass and a bottle of liquor—a café scene. This "painting" hangs upon what must be a wall, since it is covered with commercial wallpaper. Picasso has even reinforced this reading by drawing light shadow at the top and bottom of the painting, the kind of shadow that an actual canvas might throw upon the wall, were it hanging there. That's the fiction we can start with in looking at *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, the frame that we can put around it.

But the fiction of the oval surface as a field for representation, a painting, quickly dissolves in the face of contrary evidence. Not only is it peculiar that one of the two "figures" in the central painting, the glass, is constructed from newspaper (that's another "object" in the café scene, isn't it?), but the construction of both the bottle and the glass defies the very illusion they seem to serve. The glass slips over the edge of the field that's supposed to contain it; the bottle casts a "shadow" over that edge, too—unbelievably, if it's really just a flat representation of a bottle. Furthermore, if shadow there must be here, it should at least register the "bump" from the surface of the canvas to that of the wall "behind" it. But there's no such registration (*Defiance*, p. 129).

Those are the signs that what seems, at first glance, simple is precisely not. Follow the signs I've just listed and it becomes quite confusing. It can't be a painting of a painting because it contains "real" things: a bottle that casts a shadow, newspaper. Thus, the picture here seems to be of a real table in a café. But if that's the case, then the striped paper of

the depicted “wall” becomes the “field” within which the figure of the “table” shape can appear. Of course, that interpretation is unsustainable, too—not only on account of the clues that originally convinced us this was a painting, but also because of internal inconsistency: what to make of a “newspaper” that assumes the shape of a glass, i.e., that becomes the material for representing something within a painting? This does not even broach the problem of the “frame” produced from the same kind of material (wallpaper) as the “field” in which the picture/table is depicted.

In other words, *Glass and Bottle of Bass* insists in a quite specific way on the disruption of aesthetic unity; it underscores the fundamentally *relational* nature of visual representation and does so by maintaining the structural elements of such representation while denying any ontological attribution of them. The point here is not simply that Picasso’s collage depends upon an indispensable ambiguity; it’s also that this ambiguity has to do with the very precondition of something like form. The metaphor that runs through painting since the Renaissance, that even could be said to *form* it, is that the visual field of representation is equivalent to form itself, that the *gestalt* unity of the two-dimensional field stands for the harmony of form. Thus, when a collage prevents firm establishment of a visual field, it creates a powerful hindrance to our ability to see it in the terms of modernist formalism.

Picasso plays with our desire to establish a unified field of representation, a field that can serve to lend the depiction in the collage an *aesthetic* unity. *Glass and Bottle of Bass* is cunningly organized to frustrate precisely that desire. Each and every possible “world” for representation quickly becomes a figure in the field established by another world (oval, wallpaper background, frame). If you will, *each* potential master signifier is subverted by the others; in its oscillation between included figure and excluded field, each acts as a kind of *frame*. The effect of the broken frame here is not to extend the unity of the aesthetic composition beyond the frame but to draw the ambivalent condition of the frame into the work. To this, extent Harries’s polemic in *The Broken Frame* exactly misses the mark.

Now, it’s possible to misinterpret this ambivalence, to see it as preparing the way for the *other* kind of aestheticism: in other words, it’s possible to interpret the collage as transforming each representational field into an objective material presence. Indeed, you might object, this residual *realism* of collage is precisely what ties it to an aestheticized *modernism*.

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After all, as we've seen, one of two ways in which twentieth-century painting has attempted to move beyond the representational structures produced by framing is in a return to an immediacy of the "material" from which the object is made.

But such an interpretation of a collage like *Glass and Bottle of Bass* is fundamentally mistaken: Picasso's point here is not that there are *no* fields for representation—that the elements of the painting all simply become mute "things"—but rather that there are *multiple* such fields. We oscillate back and forth between seeing the field as the white oval at the collage's center, the wallpaper background surrounding that field and the combination of that background and the pasted frame surrounding it. No one of these interpretations is decisive. Each of them calls the others into question. What is negated here is not the possibility of representation *per se* but the possibility of finding a single *ground* for it.

Indeed, such a demonstration is fundamental to the practices of collage. One might go back to the basic gesture of pasting a piece of material to a canvas, a gesture that no doubt *intends* to affirm the existence of some sort of brute reality, to transcend the representing medium of painting.²³ One might take the introduction of framing elements into Picasso's collages as a subset of that general desire to negate representation by consuming into the painting elements of a reality explicitly external to it. Frames are like pieces of newspaper—bits of a world external to the immaterial representations of painting. The consumption of the frame within the collage is an indication of the victory of such a material "reality" over the representational function of painting.

But this leads to another reflection; to what, after all, is the reference of all of this talk about "brute reality" and the like? As Poggi argues, on the one hand, it's clear that the reality in question is that of the painting—as canvas or literal support: part of the importance of cubist collage in modernist narratives about the history of art is that it forces attention to the "literal" supporting nature of the painting's surface. Collage demonstrates the canvas to be the kind of thing *upon which* objects can rest. But, on the other hand, in collage, "reality" clearly also refers to a dimension that is explicitly independent of the artwork, even in its most literal presence. It is the world of newspapers and other "things." Raising the question of the frame's status when it appears within the collage forces our attention to a kind of split or chasm in our understanding of what the "realism" of cubist collage might mean (see *Defiance*, pp. 59–60).

And, indeed, this tension between realism as a representational phe-

nomenon (the representation of reality within the collage through the inclusion of “real” fragments) and realism as the production of an artwork that is nonrepresentational typifies much of the critical literature on cubist collage.²⁴ From Golding through Rubin, major interpreters have tended to confuse or collapse these two senses of “realism” when interpreting cubist collage. Yet, as Poggi puts it, “a theory of realism based on the material presence of the object as a self-contained world does not coexist easily with a theory of realism based on the quantity of information conveyed about the world outside the frame” (*Defiance*, p. 60).

At this point, however, it should be clear that such a tension in the literature is hardly coincidental; for it is present in that initiatory gesture of collage itself—the gesture that, in trying to assert the nonrepresentational immediacy of the artwork, necessarily turns to the *representation* of such immediacy. In parallel fashion, the “realism” of cubist collage is said to refer to the collage itself but also, inevitably, to a world that the collage represents. In the light of this, one could say that there is doubtless something right about interpretations that locate within cubist collage *both* “realisms.” On the other hand, however, traditional interpretations have tended to elide the contradiction between the two interpretations. In other words, interpreters of cubist collage have historically papered over with terms like “realism” the constitutive rift in the practice of collage. They allow the interpreter not to notice that this art’s very constitution is riven and paradoxical. A technique whose existence depends upon a contradiction is not graspable in the same foundationalist language that is often applied to painting or other arts. It is, in some sense, an art of crisis—an art *in* perpetual crisis.

In other words, the “truth” of collage is precisely the *appearance* of the impossibility within the modern world of the kind of truth that Harries looks for in art. The truth we find in collage is that there *cannot any longer be* an “ornamental” art, an art that orders truth itself. In essence, the crisis apparent in collage is this impossibility: what Harries does not and cannot acknowledge, however, is that this, too, *is* a kind of truth—that the very face of truth in art is changed by modernity. It’s for this reason that the theme of the broken frame can only serve for him as a token of art’s loss of truth. The truth of art is no longer something that grants us a “place” in an order that it itself creates. But that doesn’t mean that collage doesn’t articulate a kind of order. Nor does it suggest that collage simply leaves us with the paralysis faced by the occupant of the aestheticist “temple of art.” Collage maintains a certain truth and a certain

ethos that are radically discontinuous with the very structures that Harries derives from traditional art.

TRUTH AND THE ETHOS OF THE BROKEN FRAME

If the broken frame of *Glass and Bottle of Bass* is not interpretable in the terms of aestheticism, then perhaps that means we are to understand collage in the *premodern* language of truth in art that Harries defends? At a first pass, this might seem to be an attractive option, since we've seen that, in ornamental fashion, every possible organizing field for Picasso's collage at some point becomes a figure within the work. But the double function of signs within, for example, Harries's Gothic cathedral only applies to particular, privileged elements—and thus produces an implicit hierarchy. The point of ornament and of frames is that they demand that the work they grace be seen in the terms of subordination rather than coordination of meaning. In *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, the major elements of the work *all* have the double function of figure and field and they have it precisely in relationship to each other. That is, the central oval is a figure to the extent that the wallpaper surface is a field, *and vice versa*. The point of what I've called the oscillation of organizing fields is that it is impossible to establish a hierarchy of elements. Each candidate for "field" has an equal claim *over* the others, which leaves one, peculiarly, with two *different* (and problematically compatible) ways of talking about "truth" and collage—ways that match the two concerns that Harries joins when he speaks of "truth" in art.

1. On the one hand, you can see in the "representational" project of collage, its effort to represent the site in which *different* meaning worlds interact, a kind of residual truth. Collage represents this "ground." In other words, it indicates something essential about the structure of the world in which we live: in a nutshell, it indicates the way that *technocapitalism* orders social relationships within that world.

But essential to this revelation is the difference between the *kind* of ordering that such a world provides and the "boundaries" of more traditional meaning contexts. If capitalism provides a ground, it is one that is essentially unable to produce any way of evaluating or ranking the *different* value systems that interact upon it. You might speak of the collage as a neutral field (a "market") for the exchange of meanings, one that wouldn't correspond to any *compositional* principle.²⁵ There would be certain order-

ings of elements that might be forbidden by such an understanding (for instance, those based upon the unique and untranslatable value of the whole), but this would still radically underdetermine the composition of the picture. Imagine a “map” of France that indicated the country’s boundaries without locating anything (roads, topography, towns and cities, and so on) within it. Such a map has a use—perhaps it allows one to locate this country among the others of Europe—but it’s essentially worthless as an aid for finding one’s way within France. I want to suggest that the pasted “frame” of *Glass and Bottle of Bass* is like that map: it tells the viewer something about the dimension determining all artistic projects in the twentieth century, but it doesn’t offer the individual experiencing the work anything like a location in a metaphysical system of meaning.

2. On the other hand, collage does produce a kind of ethos, but only to the extent that it asserts the nonexistence of any ground. It establishes a set of practices that put the individual in relationship with various “worlds,” without establishing any one of them as permanent ground for the others. In other words, collage, seen in this way, is a tool for making your way in a world apparently without truth, without a map.

The lesson here is about how to live in a “world” composed of competing and interlocking worlds. It’s also a kind of practical response to the *problem* that Harries has rightly found in a world lacking a metaphysical ordering principle. If modernity itself produces a kind of metaphysical or spiritual paralysis, then at least here is an active engagement with questions of meaning. Here lies a possibility for a human life not reducible to passivity in the face of monotonous mechanical conformity. In collage, sense is something to be *made* rather than secured: in the final analysis, the experience of collage both insists that we learn to live without guarantees of meaning (the reality of “knowing our place”) and opens the possibility for a kind of meaningfulness that we ourselves produce through a process of judgment. And in doing this, it fights precisely the obsessive and paralyzing tendencies of modern culture. This skill, this ability to negotiate richly within a universe no longer answering to medieval demands for metaphysical security, is the ethical bequest of the collage tradition.

Truth without an ethic. Ethos without truth. If, in yet a third sense, collage provides a “site” for truth in art, it is only to the extent that it shares out the shards of truth in the full sense invoked by Harries. To this extent, Harries is quite right: the appearance of the frame within the

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work inevitably indicates an art without any possibility for the ornamental truth function that he defends. There can be no question of hierarchy without the possibility of a truth that is itself an ethos and vice versa, which is just another way of saying that this art cannot provide us with a map of the cosmos, that there's no question here of that particular ethical function that Harries describes as "showing us our place in the universe." That's true whichever way you read *Glass and Bottle of Bass*. Empty map. No way to use the map to find your position. Or, alternatively, no map. Same consequence.

This sharing out of art's truth, this division of the spoils of art, marks the crisis but also the promise of collage. I write promise because collage, for all its failure to *integrate* them, does fulfill both of the roles that Harries ascribes to works of art. It does provide a re-presentational articulation of the world at the same time that it produces a kind of ethical framework for surviving as a human being within this dehumanizing context. The blindness implicit in polemically condemning modern art as aestheticism emerges here, in Harries's failure to acknowledge the possibility of such a postmodern response to the double loss that he so tirelessly demonstrates. It emerges in the inability of a conservative Heideggerian discourse about art to do justice to an aesthetic practice that occupies the nonsite "between" traditional art and aestheticism.

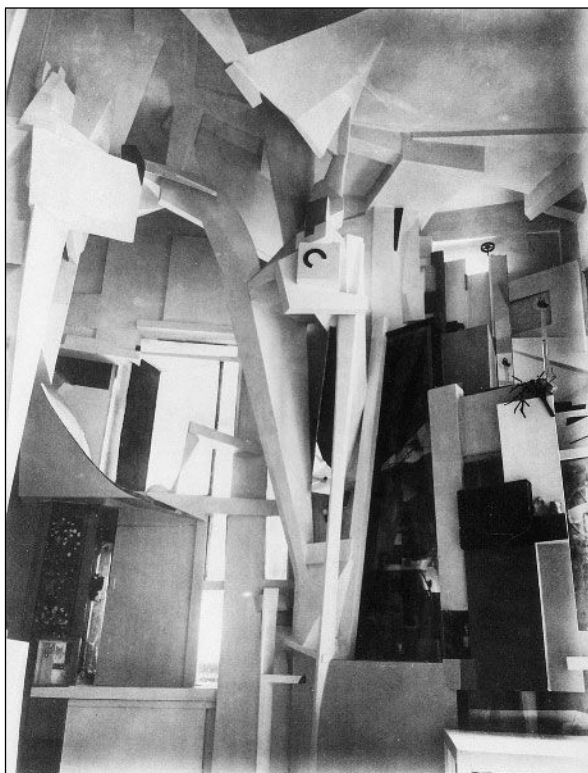


Figure 2.1. Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, general view with blue window

2 | Everything Goes

Collage and Perspectivism in Vattimo and Schwitters

A ceaselessly repeated cliché about the postmodern is that in it “anything goes.” With the breakdown of traditional aesthetic resources of identification, the world appears as an essentially disordered, chaotic place, a place lacking a truth. I suppose the most common way of associating

such a cognitive relativism with the postmodern would be to discuss the breakdown of the ordering principles still organizing, within modernism, aesthetic production across the arts. Whereas modernism gave us movements with manifestos and polemics, the postmodern is characterized by a failure of all programs. That's especially evident with regard to questions of history. Modernist movements shape the present in relationship to an ordered history—or, at least, they allow us to assume that history itself is *shaped*, that it has an established order in which we intervene. In contrast, we find more typical of postmodernism an assertion of historical *chaos*, the denial of any preexisting historical development that might limit the aesthetic intervention of the artist. Thus, for example, an architect asserts her freedom to revive the language of post-Renaissance classicism or, for that matter, to engage in nostalgic reveries on the “good old days” of modernism, if she wishes. History ceases to act as a limiting field for aesthetic liberty: anything goes.

TRUTH AS UNTRUTH: GIANNI VATTIMO'S PERSPECTIVISM

Gianni Vattimo's effort to translate Nietzschean perspectivism into a coherent philosophy of history might well illustrate the problems that arise from thus combining the language of philosophical critique with a radical cognitive relativism. For Vattimo does, indeed, claim that the postmodern is characterized by the “dissolution” of truth, or at least of its “notion.” He even writes that truth “no longer exists” within the postmodern world.¹ To understand this alternative paradigm, it's important to introduce the persistent structure underlying Vattimo's discussions of historical truth, not only the essays of *The End of Modernity* but also those of his next book, *The Transparent Society*.² In these texts, every analysis of the postmodern, every effort to “place” (*End*, p. 7) or locate it in relationship to modernity, repeats this structure, which is essentially *double*: in a first moment Vattimo introduces the notion of *historicism*, binding it, for the most part, with Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophical themes. Whether it's under the name of the Logoi (which structure, through language, historical epochs), of the “heterotopian” structure of the good life within the postmodern, or of the earlier Nietzsche's metaphors of history as a “theater” in which “world views” parade upon the stage, in each and every one of his efforts to define the postmodern, Vattimo begins with the modernist embrace of *becoming*.³ But in each of these analyses, too, the point is that modernist historicism is only an incomplete dissolution

of “necessary and recognizable rhythms that nevertheless maintain a certain ideal stability” (*End*, p. 3). Becoming remains a “structure,” and, indeed, one that is discernable as a “suprahistorical and eternalizing force” (*End*, p. 165).

The consistent second moment in Vattimo’s discussions of the post-modern is the dissolution of this “structural remainder.” In every case, it’s a matter of what the Italian philosopher refers to as a “radicalization” of the themes of historicism, of a gesture in which the link between the structures of *becoming* and *truth* is broken. Thus, for example, his chapter “Nihilism and the Post-Modern in Philosophy” recounts how the Nietzsche of *Human All Too Human* introduces a “chemical analysis” of the concept of truth, one that reveals that, since “man can (not) know things ‘in themselves,’” truth is “impossible because it is nothing other than a series of metaphorizations” (*End*, p. 167). In other words, the very conceptual space of those historical “structures” seems, as a result of its epistemological inaccessibility, to dissolve. It’s not simply that we have no access to truth. Truth “is” not. It doesn’t exist. Vattimo’s analyses, like Nietzsche’s, project a *becoming* entirely without *being*, without a ground.

The payoff of this set of conceptual moves is a transformed vision of philosophy: robbed of the potential for totalizing conceptualization, the philosopher is limited to truth as *narrative*: Vattimo emphasizes this point in his interpretation of the “death of God” in *The Gay Science*. The aphorism entitled “The Madman”

is in no way comprehensible as a metaphysical assessment of the non-existence of God (as if there were a “structure” of Being in which God cannot exist); it is a real announcement, the “narration” of a “fact” or, at least, of an experience that humanity, or Western culture, has undergone. This “fact” proves nothing in the strictly logical sense of the world; it is cited as a rhetorical appeal, as a way to persuade by referring to an experience which everyone is assumed to have had. (*End*, p. 177)

Vattimo gathers a number of themes in this passage, but surely one of them is the “aesthetic” or “rhetorical” nature of truth that focuses so many of his discussions. In other words, at one level the claim here is that philosophy itself no longer *represents* truth (matters of fact that subsist regardless of assertion) but rather *participates* in the creation of truth, even *creates* it from whole cloth. Such is the implication of the metaphors of “radicalization” that accompany Vattimo’s analyses of “modern-

ist” historicism: being gives way to becoming, the reduction of historical time to the present of an ongoing “event.”

Just so, Vattimo takes the value of a “postmodern” philosophy to lie in a kind of immediacy or “nearness” connected to a philosophy of the event. Once being has been reduced to becoming, philosophy can lose the peculiar abstractness that has always separated it (and the philosopher) from the world of everyday experience. Thus, Vattimo justifies what he takes to be the postmodern turn:

But why should we take seriously and conform to the development of Western thought in which, ultimately, God is dead? Precisely because this development has dissolved any other point of reference, any other basis of certainty except the cultural heritage. When the origin has revealed its insignificance, as Nietzsche says, then we become open to the meaning and richness of proximity; or, in other words, we become capable of playing those language games which constitute our existence upon the sole basis of our belonging to a particular historical tradition, which we have to respect in the same way in which we feel respect for monuments, tombs, traces of past life, or even family memories. (*End*, p. 177)

The problem is that this effort to justify a philosophy based upon the end of truth inevitably depends upon that kind of representational truth whose existence it denies. For precisely in that it *is* a justification it cannot be understood in terms of “pure becoming,” whatever that would be. Vattimo appeals to a fixed standard of judgment, a structure which, for whatever rhetorical reasons, he believes will convince us to “conform” to the philosophy of the postmodern. *Why*, asks Vattimo, should we “take seriously” the “death of God”? *Because*, he answers, to do so is to gain a certain concreteness, a “proximity,” in our dealings with the traditions and experiences of our world. There is a *structure* (doubtless, a romantic one) implied by Vattimo’s rhetoric, a structure whose adequacy or inadequacy, whose cogency as justification we can *argue*, and one which the philosopher implicitly claims to *represent*. The gesture by which Vattimo attempts to erase the very space of metaphysical truth can’t wipe away the necessity for assuming such a space within the philosopher’s own discourse. He is inevitably caught back in the web of the performative contradiction: his discourse implicitly claims a truth that the content of his assertion (“there is no truth”) denies.⁴

But this all remains extremely general: it merely repeats the complaint that Habermas, building upon the arguments of generations of analytic philosophers, has leveled against Nietzschean perspectivism and its offshoots.⁵ But the structure that Vattimo repeats so endlessly in his analyses of postmodernism can, at the least, give us a little bit more concrete sense of what's problematic in the perspectivist position.

Let's start from the peculiar duplication of truth implied in Vattimo's effort to establish perspectivism as a standard for the judgment of truth: in the place of "there is no truth," we could underscore the "performative contradiction" by writing: "(1) it is true (2) that there is no truth," an expansion implied precisely insofar as the negation of truth pretends to be a critical representation of a state of affairs. Written in this way, the problem of internal coherence in perspectivism becomes obvious: the form announced in proposition (1) contradicts the content of proposition (2).

But what I want to suggest is that Vattimo's historical genealogy for perspectivism adds something to this old argument. First, it allows us to see that Vattimo's perspectivist criticism of historicism itself depends upon this internal contradiction. Indeed, one could restate Vattimo's critique here as an argument that the historicist has allowed "it is true" to *overpower* "there is no truth." *There is a state of affairs in which truth does not exist.* The historicist reads the negation in proposition (2) as representing a definite state of affairs ("it is true")—one in which truth does not exist. The problem, from Vattimo's viewpoint, is that the question of truth is precisely the question of whether there "are" representable states of affairs. In failing to question proposition (1), modernist historicism in fact tends to retreat to a kind of skepticism. Truth "exists" but it is in principle unknowable. In essence, then, Vattimo's critique of the historicist version of "there is no truth" is that it can't *mean* what it says.

Thus, perspectivism moves to attack the very possibility of "it is true." Here negation is seen as pertaining to the very possibility of a state of affairs: truth can not be represented *as* a state of affairs since it is that by which all states of affairs are measured. But this, too, leaves us with a problem with regard to the proposition (2); for, insofar as it *is* a proposition, it asserts the existence of a state of affairs. But that means that—for the perspectivist—*the second proposition (2) overrides the first (1).* Thus, to be a consistent perspectivist we can no longer say that it is true or untrue that truth does not exist. Or, in other words, the perspectivist doesn't *mean* quite what she says when she asserts that there *is* no truth. In other words, the critique that Vattimo aims at historicism bites just as

well into his own position. Instead of the evolution from an incoherent to a coherent position, we find the representation of two separate incoherent positions, or, to escape the jaws of logical analysis, two positions that fail in symmetrical ways to say what they mean.

KURT SCHWITTERS: THE TRUTH ABOUT *MERZ*

A first evaluation of his work would suggest that the collages and assemblages of Kurt Schwitters are perfectly suited to serve as a kind of *illustration* of the apparently incoherent cognitive relativism that we found in Vattimo's work; for Schwitters's collage/assemblage is deeply split by precisely the divide that appears in Vattimo as the historical narrative connecting "modernist" historicism and "postmodernist" perspectivism. In Schwitters, this rift appears not as between two defined positions but rather in an ambiguity in the representational status of his collage work. Indeed, the defining issue here is a familiar one from earlier chapters of the present investigation—the question of whether to posit an organizing epistemological space in understanding the condition produced by metropolitan capitalism.

On the one hand, if we start from Schwitters's connections to German Expressionism, we can see that his work *does* demand the positing of such a space, though we'll see that the Expressionist label doesn't do justice to the collage/assemblage project that Schwitters called *Merz*. The Hannover artist never ceases to wield the language of expressionist utopianism. As Dorothea Dietrich asserts in the *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters*, Schwitters still believes that art could "join" "disparate parts" of an artwork "in a harmonious, more complete whole" than that allowed by traditional aesthetic form.⁶ Thus, for example, the project of *Merz* is considered a completion of the promise of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁷

Nonetheless, it would be rash either to write off Schwitters's *Merz* as inconsistent or, even worse, to simply agree with Huelsenbeck's polemical evaluation of it as a kind of mystical bourgeois Expressionism.⁸ Neither Schwitters's insistence upon the *rationality* of *Merz* nor his wholehearted embrace of collage principles accords with Expressionist aesthetics—an aesthetics that remains confined by the language of the irrational and a vision of organic totality alien to collage.⁹ Rather, Schwitters uses the language of Expressionism to differentiate *Merz* from the unredeemed fragmentation in, say, John Heartfield's photomontages.

What underlies this difference is, in actuality, an effort to rethink the unity of the social world on the basis of the peculiar chaotic organization

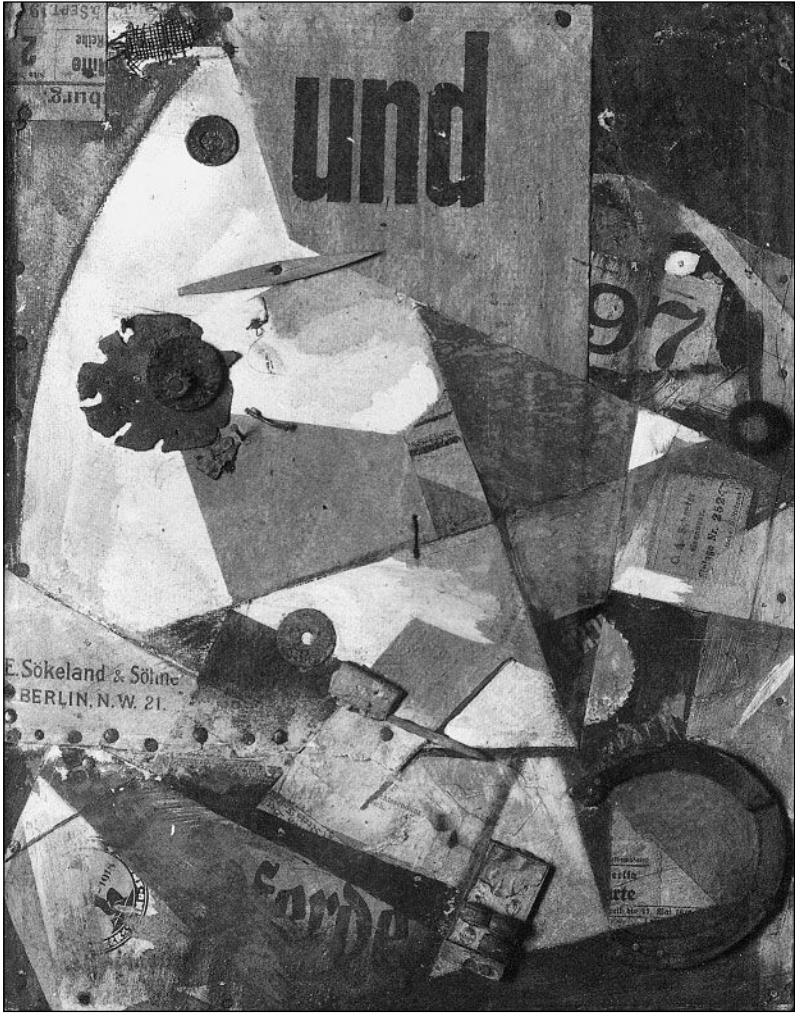


Figure 2.2. Kurt Schwitters, *Das Unbild*, 1920

that Schwitters perceives upon the collage surface. That is, Schwitters is fascinated by the structural ability of collage to provide a space for the “combination of all conceivable materials for artistic purposes” (*Manifeste*, p. 37), and he sees *this* space as representative of a similar structure in the social world—the structure of market exchange. This is, indeed, the origin of the name *Merz*: “*Merz* is nothing other than the second syllable of *Commerz* (‘commerce’),” Schwitters informs the public in 1923 (*Manifeste*, p. 167). Thus, collage is based on the principle

of “equal value” (or, at least, equal *scale* of value) for all elements: the collage surface acts as a kind of market, relating any and all objects with complete catholicity (*Manifeste*, p. 37). Thus, as opposed to dada, Schwitters sees collage and assemblage as—and forms his own collages and assemblages in accordance with—a new, structural principle of unity, the unity of capitalism.

But this new economic/aesthetic unity does not by any means replace the kind of unity provided by traditional aesthetic form; it does not really provide a meaningful *image* of the world that it nonetheless unifies. This difference is inscribed in the very nature of the “commercial” space of collage: what is represented in this field is only the ultimate *incomprehensibility*, the *opacity to representation* of *Commerz*. Indeed, for Schwitters the essential “aesthetic” benefit of collage is that it allows a kind of understanding of such opacity. Thus, he writes in “The Meaning of *Merz*-Thoughts in the World” of 1923:

In the work of art, *Merz* calculates with materials and complexes that it itself can neither oversee nor judge. If we want to form the entire world as a work of art, we’re going to have to figure that there are powerful complexes in the world which remain unknown to us or which we can’t command because they don’t lie within the sphere of our power. In the work of art it’s only important that the parts relate to each other, that they be valued against each other. The great secret of *Merz* lies in its evaluation of unknown quantities. In this way *Merz* rules what can’t be ruled. *Merz* is thus more than *Merz*. (*Manifeste*, p. 133)

While Schwitters’s words here seem only to apply to the *elements* of the *Merz* system, a moment’s reflection shows us that the incomprehensibility of the element also implies the incomprehensibility of the system as a whole: after all, what is unknown is the *value* of the elements in the larger system of “commerce” from which they are drawn. Schwitters is able to reaffirm the essence of each element by putting it into an *alternative market* (that of the collage), but he is certainly not able to determine value outside of the individual work. There always remains another set of relationships that determine the “real” value of the element. To understand the value of the element would be to understand all relationships within which it is or could be imbricated. It would mean to have a totalized representation of the market—precisely what remains beyond our “power.”

Schwitters gives us, in his principle of *Merz*, a rather precise equivalent to the historicist relativism underscored in the *first* moment of Vattimo's narrative about history. *Merz* is, in the first instance, a space of knowledge that nonetheless withstands all efforts to know it, an anchor for the world of becoming that nonetheless maintains its dependence upon being. Doubtless Schwitters's emphasis upon the peculiarity of the collage space as a kind of market for the exchange of all possible materials resonates with the historical eclecticism that emerged in, for example, the "style architecture" of the nineteenth century. If that's true, it's because both underscore a kind of *skepticism*, an assertion of the impossibility of knowing a truth posited along with an all-pervading doubt.

On the other hand, Schwitters's relationship to the Berlin and Zurich dada groups—themselves polemically opposed to all Expressionism—suggests a more radical epistemology. Schwitters, who in the late teens associated with such dadaists as Raoul Hausmann, Hans Arp, and Johannes Baader, was doubtless influenced by dada in his invention of *Merz*, his unique version of collage and assemblage.¹⁰ Schwitters's association with the Berlin dadaists seems to have suggested to him the use of collage techniques as a way of preserving the "phantasmagoric" aspect of twentieth-century urban life. Artists like George Grosz or John Heartfield used collage and photomontage as techniques for underscoring the "chaos" of metropolitan life, and Schwitters's *Merz* follows a similar strategy. Schwitters produced *Merzbilder*, which he compared to the trash dumps of the metropolis. On the surface of a collage, Schwitters could collect "with loving care" the most various refuse, "broken light-switches, damaged neckties, colored lids from Camembert cheese boxes, colored buttons torn off clothes, and tram-tickets."¹¹ The collage surface, robbed of the framing function reserved for it by easel painting, could serve as a kind of representation for a world not organized around a fixed hierarchy of values. It could receive anything, allow anything to interact.

But there's also in *Merz* a deeper common ground for Schwitters and dada, indeed Schwitters and much of the international avant-gardes. This is the conviction that the purpose of collage is not to *represent* the nature of the capitalist phantasmagoria to the viewer as to a potential knower but rather to transform the metropolitan inhabitant from a passive "victim" of the shock produced by the metropolitan chaos to an *active* participant in it. Behind that goal lies a radicalized notion of metropolitan experience, indeed, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, a crisis for the very possibility of what we traditionally called "experience" (*Erfahrung*).

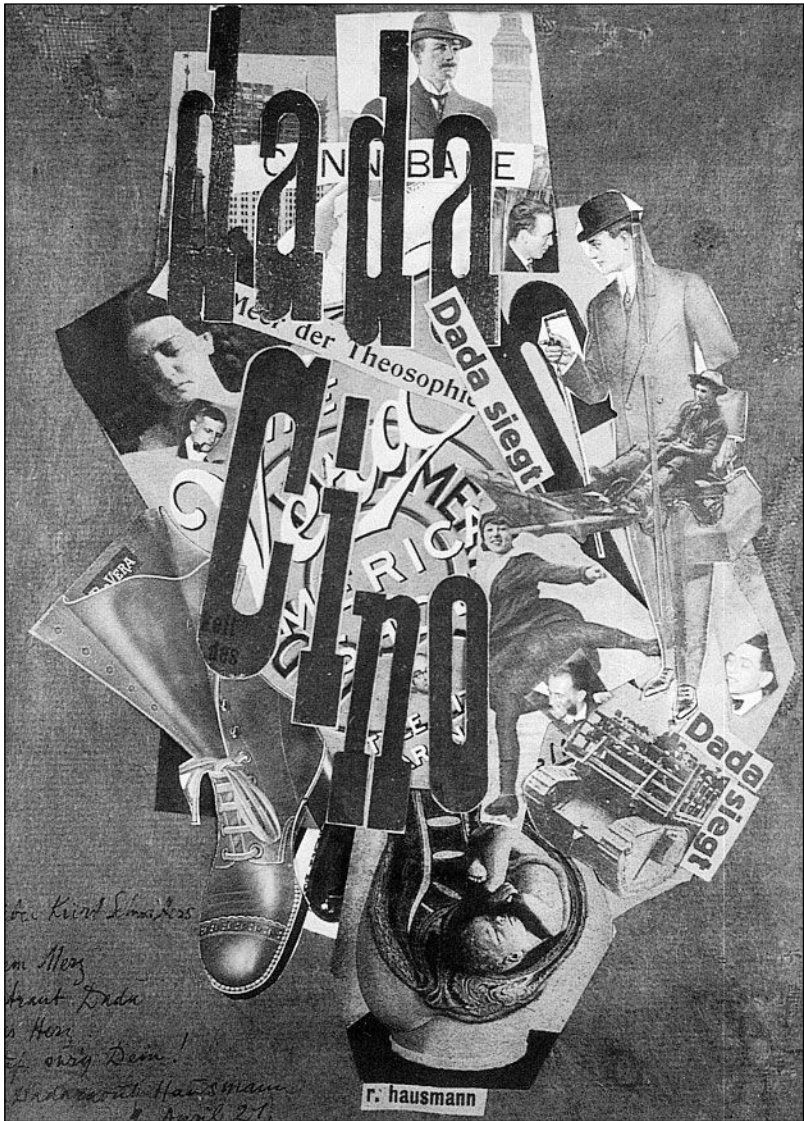


Figure 2.3. Raoul Haussman, *Dada Cino*, 1920

Thinkers throughout the nineteenth century had already noticed that the conditions of the new city didn't so much present "chaos" for a potential knower as *subject* the urban dweller *to* chaos in a way that radically excluded the humanity of cognitive activity. Hence Benjamin's famous analyses of shock:

All these modes of conduct (gambling, assembly line work, stock market exchanges, crowd life) share a concealed characteristic: the figures presented show us how the mechanism to which the participants . . . (are submitted) seizes them body and soul, so that even in their private sphere, and no matter how agitated they may be, they are capable only of a reflex action. . . . They live their lives as automatons. (*Illuminations*, pp. 177-78)

In the light of this metropolitan “shock,” a broad theme of the European avant-gardes from the teens through the thirties is the desire to *make use of* the overwhelming stimulation of urban life, to submit the viewer of the artwork to it in a redeeming manner. As Manfredo Tafuri writes, the shared task of both dada revolutionists and painters like Schwitters was to teach “that one is not to ‘suffer’ that shock, but to absorb it as an inevitable condition of existence.”¹² The “victim” of shock is to become a kind of “capacitor” for the energy of capitalism, a participant in the theatrical event of the new city.

With this dada-inspired vision of a theatrical translation of urban shock, of collage as a practice negating of all static space for epistemological reflection and aiming thus at the production of a certain kind of urban dynamism, Schwitters’s *Merz* speaks, also, to Vattimo’s *perspectivist* position. The incendiary task of Schwitters the avant-gardist is precisely to negate the space of representation (or of the truth that representation serves) in order to affirm a realm of pure becoming. Here we are faced with an aesthetic position matching the epistemology of the aesthetic announced by Nietzsche and seconded by Vattimo. Truth itself is illusion—or so we suspect in the face of the most radical experimentation that we might associate with Schwitters and his dada colleagues.

The peculiar and ironic ability of *Merz* to represent a space whose contents resist all representation should not be limited only to some special quality of the two-dimensional surfaces offered by collages like the *Kirschbild* (1921). Indeed, Schwitters’s most important work, the ongoing project for the *Merzbau* (*Merz-Building*), or *Kathedrale des erotischen Elends* (*Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, abbreviated, *KdeE*)—which, before he was forced to flee Germany in 1936, took up much of his Hannover dwelling—perfectly exemplifies a three-dimensional representation of this essentially conceptual space. The main appearance of the work was of a large “cubistic” sculpture, but, at least in the early and mid-1920s, Schwitters’s main interest in this “architecture” was as a kind of

stage or site for the gathering of various found material: thus, he tells us that “as the ribs of the architecture grow, new valleys, hollows, grottoes come into being” that house the various objects collected by the artist (*Manifeste*, pp. 343–44; trans. in *Collages*, p. 187).

But the *Merzbau* is also the clearest example of Schwitters’s dada-inspired theatricality. You can see that most clearly in the “grottoes” that Schwitters interspersed throughout the structure, miniature assemblage tableaux, each of which suggested an enigmatic narrative. And, like the post-Renaissance garden grotto, these caves become the sites for the display of the darker side of nature, the monstrous and unpredictable. In “*Ich und Meine Ziele*,” Schwitters gives a macabre description of several of these topoi:

Each grotto derives its character from the one or the other of its main components. There is the *Nibelungenshort* [Treasure of the Nibelungen] with its glittering treasure, the *Kyffhäuser* with the stone table, the *Göthegrotto* with one of his legs as reliquary and many pencil stubs, the submerged personal-union city of Braunschweig-Lüneburg with houses from Weimar made by Feininger, a Persil advertisement, and my design of the official emblem of the city of Karlsruhe; the *Lustmord-böble* [Sex-Crime (or *Lustmurder*) Cave] with the abominably mutilated corpse of an unfortunate young girl, painted with tomato juice, and adorned with many votive offerings; the *Ruhrgebiet* [Ruhr District] with authentic brown coal and authentic gas coke; the *Kunstaussstellung* [art exhibition] with paintings and sculptures by Michelangelo and myself, whose only visitor is a dog outfitted with a train [*ein Hund mit Schleppe*]. . . . (*Manifeste*, pp. 344–45; trans. in *Collages*, p. 192)

If the grottoes display the strange intensity of the monstrous, that’s no accident. Their hallucinatory status is, first of all, a result of their theatricality: often contained within glass display cases the grottoes *stage* the fragments that Schwitters has gathered, forcing us to admit that we see them *as* dramatically presented. The grottoes appear as circus *vignettes* instead of mere groups of fragments. But, if that’s the case, then the effects work in the other direction, too: the grottoes don’t simply become unities. They become *monstrous* unities, unities marked by an almost inevitable sublimity that they derive from the fragmentation of the assemblage.¹³ The *shock* of the modern city returns here as a kind of perverse *breach* in narrative order, as a monstrosity operating right in the middle

of narrative representation.¹⁴ The peculiar vividness of recollections like the one below by Rudolf Jahns indicate the effectiveness of this translation of urban overload into sublime narrative:

In [this grotto] bedded on straw, were two strange creatures with large, dirty-white bodies and heads. Each had only a single s-shaped, bent black leg. There was a mysterious muted darkness in the box that barely revealed these creatures. They were two large porcelain insulators of the kind one sees on top of telegraph wires along the railroad tracks. (Cited in *Collages*, p. 193)

In the grottoes of the *Merzbau*, we discover an “experience” that challenges the very space of representation, of experience. By absorbing us within theatrical narrative, they defy understanding in the terms of a represented truth. We are “too close” to the action to consider it as an object of knowledge. But by leading narrative to the cliff edge of monstrosity, they also indicate a heterogeneity of truth beyond all distance. “Truth” is further away than any object: or, to put this in other words, there *is no* space of truth, no universal structure of being to order or discipline the monstrous theatrical becoming of grottoes. We return here to Vattimo’s (and, of course, Nietzsche’s) theme of a radical perspectivism, a perspectivism that dispenses with the very conceptual space in which representation occurs. In the dim, half-lit worlds of the *Merzbau*’s grottoes, there is no possibility for the extension of our knowledge: there the techniques of collage serve only to involve us in the bizarre circulation of energy within the city, in a kind of primary process that leaves no room for the “objective” representation demanded by cognition.

But if Schwitters’s *Merz* is split between the same moments that Vattimo presents to us in his justification of postmodernist perspectivism, then there’s also a way that the intention here is fundamentally different from Vattimo’s; for—as the *Merzbau* already indicates—Schwitters constructs *Merz* not upon a dialectical progression from historicist skepticism to perspectivism but rather upon a strange mutual imbrication of each moment with the workings of the other. In other words, nothing in Schwitters’s work suggests *evolution* of one of these two heterogeneous moments into the other: quite the contrary, if we look for a moment at the *process* by which Schwitters created the *Merzbau*, a work which he insisted was “in principle unfinished” (*Manifeste*, p. 343), we discover a kind of oscillation between the two “truths” that Vattimo always arranges in a line.

The Frame and the Mirror

An account of Schwitters's process by the artist's son Ernst underscores the way that the theatrical spatiality actually led to the formation of the "shell" that organized the work as a whole.

His pictures would decorate the walls, his sculptures standing along the walls. As anybody who has ever hung pictures knows, an interrelation between the pictures results. Kurt Schwitters, with his particular interest in the interaction of the components of his works, quite naturally reacted to this. He started by tying strings to emphasize this interaction. Eventually they became wires, then were replaced with wooden structures which, in turn, were joined with plaster of Paris.¹⁵

Thus, the outer form of the *Merzbau* grew up as a kind of literalization of what I might call the "dramatic" relationships between objects. In the early years of the *KdeE*, say, 1923 to 1927, the gradual enclosure of space by this organic process would always lead to a new layer of assemblage, new objects displayed in the hollows of the structure itself. The shell would provide a kind of home or stage for the "trash" that Schwitters so religiously gathered. In a 1931 document, Schwitters himself records this process:

When I find an object and know that it belongs in the *KdeE* I take it along and glue it on, cover it with plaster and paint it according to the impression of the whole. And one day, a new direction develops, which steps totally or in part over the object's corpse. In this process things that are entirely or partly obsolete remain as proof that they have lost their value as independent elements of the composition. As the ribs of the architecture grow, new valleys, hollows, grottoes come into being that again have a life of their own within the whole of the constructions. (*Manifeste*, pp. 343–44; trans. in *Collages*, p. 187)

And, as Hans Richter describes it, these new "landscapes" then become themselves the sites for additional "sculptural excrescences, new people, new shapes, colors and details."¹⁶ In other words, Schwitters moves, in a potentially endless circle, from a kind of assemblage of found objects to an architectural "covering" or interpretation of the forms thus created and thence back to a new layer of assemblage.

And, indeed, the construction of the *Merzbau* literalizes this creative process. What began as the chaos of Schwitters's studio, where he would gather the detritus he used for his collages—arranging it according to

whim on the walls and furniture—is progressively transformed in the years from 1923 onward by a growing constructed armature both undergirding and surrounding the assembled objects. Thus, as Dietrich tells us, the *KdeE* consists of two parts: “an inner core of collage material, a more or less formless accumulation of things discarded, and a hand-fabricated exterior shell of clear architectural forms created with traditional building materials, wood and plaster of paris, painted white with a few color accents, mostly red, scattered throughout” (*Collages*, p. 164).

Thus, on the one hand, the shell of the *Merzbau* would result from the objects that he gathered. But, on the other hand, the dramatic qualities of the structure’s grottoes depend upon the fixed structure of the shell “architecture.” Though reversed in order from the way we have discussed them previously, we see here equivalents to *both* moments in perspectivism. The *Merzbau* itself is most fundamentally the *process* that results from the endless exchange of these two conditions, from the oscillation between a space or structure grounded by a narrative and a dramatic event dependent upon a preexisting structure that acts as stage for it.

Perhaps Schwitters’s most important acknowledgment of this unstable condition lay in the phenomenal *growth* of the *Bau*, a growth that, famously, burst not only the original walls of Schwitters’s studio but also the floor and ceiling. By the time Schwitters was forced to flee Hannover before the Nazis in 1936, the *Merzbau* took up large parts of Schwitters’s townhouse, stretching vertically from the bottom of a well through the building’s roof (*Schwitters*, pp. 156–57).

It’s important to note that this quasi-organic process indicates more than a nonevolutionary arrangement of the two moments of perspectivism; what the growth of the *Merzbau* signifies is the way that each of these moments *depends upon* the other. The existence of the “space” in which the assemblage of the *Merzbau* occurs derives from a theatrical “event.” On the other hand, the emergence of the drama of the assemblage depends upon the placement of the tableaux upon the “stage” provided by the *Merzbau*’s shell. Thus, we must posit a kind of mutual contamination of historicism and radical perspectivism, a strange, even impossible cofoundation.

THE *MERZBAU* AND AESTHETICIZED TRUTH

It might be possible, on the basis of this cofoundation, to reconsider the double incoherence of relativism we found in Vattimo’s account, to look at the intention of “there is no truth” in terms of, let’s call it, a *nihilism*

that cannot be expressed by *either* the “modernist” (historicist) or the “postmodernist” (perspectivist) view, but must be seen in the dynamic relationship between them. Take, first of all, the moment of historicism: Schwitters’s *Merzbau* seen as architecture or architectural sculpture suggests that the space of “truth” is itself a generated space, one that, at a given time, may be limited to certain propositions: thus it may imply that there is a conceptual space for truth but only to the extent that it validates the proposition “there is no truth.”

There are a couple of implications of this way of viewing things: the first is the implication of this peculiar space/nonspace for our understanding of the world in which we live. Here we are led to a vision of a structure that provides a field for human activity but *without* offering a meaningful sense of our “place” in the world. We get, instead, what previously I’ve called a “neutral” space, the space of *Merz*, the space of commerce. But, secondly, such a view of truth forces us up against the failure point of the very metaphor that we, for the most part, use to understand truth. The metaphor of truth as a “space” organizing meaning breaks down; for here we have a space but no longer a metaphysical structure for the universe, or, in other words, a space that both does and does not embrace the world as a whole. Precisely to the extent that we can’t make sense of truth as both pertaining to all of being (since the assertion, “there is no truth” clearly pertains to that totality) and also not providing any other content for assertion (since “anything goes” *within* the realm of becoming), the neutralized space of collage puts our understanding *in crisis*. Only one truth remains, the truth of the “whole,” a truth that disqualifies all others. In this “space” of crisis, “there is no truth” means something like “it is true that there is no truth except that there is no truth.”

You can also start from the *other* moment, the moment of perspectivism: here the “fact” in Schwitters to which we must turn is the way that the theatrical grottoes of the *Merzbau* themselves depend upon the stage provided for them by the work’s shell. Just so, it’s possible to project a perspectivism that denies the possibility of a space for “meta”-statements about truth as a whole, but does so on the basis of a space for the representation of other truths. It is possible to apply something like “Gödel’s Theorem” to philosophy. In other words, the failure of truth is the impossibility of totalizing assertions about the whole of being/reality rather than of particular assertions *within* that reality. Here the priority of becoming occurs through the *breakdown* of being, as the impossibility of a sufficient representation of reality as a whole (or *as whole*). That is,

becoming is not so much a “state” or “structure” descriptive of the world as a metaphor for what happens to *philosophy*, to efforts to determine the nature of being as a whole, under the conditions of nihilism. Increasingly, these efforts fetch up against the limit of possibility for what can be said at all. But, furthermore, this limit is by definition *mobile*, since it describes attempts to define its boundaries negatively as well as positively: it is this breakdown, this mobility, rather than any fact or state of affairs, that “becoming” represents. In other words, we can say that “it is true” that truth does not exist, meaning by such a statement that it is precisely in the effort to make assertions about being as a whole that we strike the “truth” of our limits. Here, “it is true that there is no truth” reads as something like “in the breakdown of the whole it is becoming true that there is no truth.”

What I want to suggest here is that the mutual contamination of historicism by perspectivism and vice versa provides a kind of partial answer to the problem of the *incoherence* of perspectivism and relativism: whereas my analysis of Vattimo’s discussions had indicated that *each* of the moments in his narrative attempts but fails to *mean* that “there is no truth,” here each of the two moments involved in such an assertion retains its significance: from one position, it remains possible to make a single totalizing assertion about being, to represent being as a whole, *insofar as* that being is conceived as the space of its own negation—the space of the single truth that there is no truth. From the other perspective, finite truths, representations of states of affairs, remain possible precisely to the extent that they cannot substantiate a totalizing and static being.

Thus, Schwitters’s *Merz* amounts to a way of allowing us to experience the full and paradoxical force of “it is true that there is no truth,” of allowing someone to actually *mean* to deny the possibility of truth. What’s at stake is the possibility of thinking the most extreme nihilism, a nihilism that erases both of the foundations (“it is true” and “there is no truth”) upon which the assertion is constructed. The collage practices involved here amount to a way of getting around the limits of assertion itself, the necessity of an affirmation of meaning implicit in every propositional negation.

But this possibility only exists insofar as it maintains the interaction between the positions Vattimo labels modernist historicism and postmodernist perspectivism. Indeed, the rearrangement of those two moments that results from such an interaction indicates quite starkly the *limits* of

nihilism's coherence: for in the modified form that *Merz* demands we represent them, the two positions appear as directly *contradictory*: on the one hand, the residual "representational" moment in Schwitters's collage implies there is *only* a space of truth for a particular assertion about being as a whole ("there is no truth"), while, the "delirious" theatricality of the grottoes and so on suggest that there is a space of truth *except for* exactly such a totalizing assertion. Both of these statements can't be true. They are mutually exclusive.

This, first of all, indicates with more precision than has previously been possible what we mean when we speak of the *heterogeneity* involved in the experience of collage. Collage allows us to move between two dimensions of experience that the logic of propositions disallows to be placed together. Schwitters's *Merzbau* becomes a machine for the *only* kind of full experience of nihilism that's possible. It's only insofar as "there is no truth" is unpacked in a collage interpretation, one which demands that the interpreter move between "modernist" and "postmodernist" positions, that "there is no truth" gains any coherence at all.

I'm concerned here with what this indicates about the *experience* of truth—if I can call it that—in the face of a full-fledged nihilism. Truth no longer appears here, as modern philosophy had promised it would, in a finite set of logically consistent assertions. Indeed, it's absolutely essential to my point here that truth is only available *through* the clash of contradictory propositions as to its status. This contradiction guarantees that truth will only be available *as* experience, as process. In other words, what we have here is a precise formula for an *aestheticized* truth.

By this I don't mean—à la Karsten Harries—that in the postmodern the truth function of art is *lost*. Quite the contrary, in the aesthetic of *Merz*, the aesthetic of the postmodern, there is a translation rather than a loss of the truth that is associated with traditional art. The repeated warning of philosophers from Hegel through Heidegger of the "death" of art, of its drying up from want of truth, shows up here as precisely wrong. The problem is not that art ceases to carry truth but that truth becomes artlike, that it needs art to be itself.

And if Harries sees the truth of art in terms of its ability to disclose a historical world, a meaning context that gives value to individual choices and actions, and one that is irreducible to any finite set of truths, then the aestheticized truth of the postmodern strangely approximates these characteristics. Here, too, we have a truth that resists reduction to a propositional content. Here, too, in nihilism, a truth that provides a meaning context for the culture of a historical era. If this "world" is essentially

incomparable with those of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, that's not because it is un-meaning, un-structure. Rather, it's because the *relationship* between truth and representation has changed. To abstract the new truth from its aesthetic imbrication is not to carry it home from church—whether as a moral system or as the metaphysical guarantor of one's "place." The art that corresponds with *Merz* has a quite specific representational task: it is the demonstration of the truth of lack of truth—the creation of an *experience* of the truth of nihilism.

In a brief discussion in *The Claim of Reason*, Stanley Cavell argues that what defines a new historical epoch is the appearance of behaviors—reactions to situations as well as ways of arguing—that appear *incoherent* from the perspective of the old way of seeing things. Cavell suggests that "the idea of a new historical period is an idea of a generation whose natural reactions—not merely whose ideas or mores—diverge from the old; it is an idea of a new (human) nature."¹⁷ Clearly, the experience of collage is a way of bringing us to the limits of explanation within our culture, of moving us to the point where we are forced to take seriously ways of seeing things that nonetheless remain incoherent given the very language that philosophy brings to bear upon them: is this the birth of a new truth? Is this the beginning of a new historical period? A new "human nature"?

On the basis of the fundamental interdependence of the representational and the antirepresentational moments in Schwitters's collage and assemblage, I would argue that it is not. Above all, this is to assert the inevitable imbrication of any postmodernism with modernism. What my discussion of *Merz* indicates is that "postmodernist" perspectivism is incoherent except in relationship with "modernist" historicism. And this relationship cannot be *replacement*; it's necessary that the historicist moment remain every bit as convincing as the perspectivist one. The postmodern cannot follow modernism, cannot strut onto the stage of history as a new "era"; for it remains a kind of limit or border of the modern itself.

But with this, strangely, we return to a theme familiar from Vattimo—from a set of reflections upon history that is far more sophisticated than his rather polemical treatment of historical truth. Vattimo's invocation of the concept of *Verwindung* from Heidegger indicates his awareness of the problematic nature of seeing the postmodern as, in any simple way, transcending or "overcoming" the modern. That is, the postmodern is not simply the rejection of the modernist project of grounding being in

becoming, history in the present: rather, Vattimo repeatedly evokes Gehlen's concept of *post-histoire* to indicate the situation that occurs when the appeal to the present *wears out* because it has become standard:

Gehlen argues that *post-histoire* designates the condition in which "progress becomes routine": human capability to order nature through technology has increased and will continue to increase to such a point that, even while ever-newer achievements have become possible, the increased capability to order and arrange simultaneously makes them ever less "new." In a consumer society continual renewal (of clothes, tools, buildings) is already required physiologically for the system simply to survive. What is new is not in the least "revolutionary" or subversive; it is what allows things to stay the same. (*End*, p. 7)

For Vattimo in his more sober moments, the relationship between modern and postmodern cannot be conceived as the victory of the becoming imperfectly conceived by modernism. Quite the contrary, the ephemeral and transient being of the present—one that Vattimo calls "weak"—is precisely stripped of the utopian pretensions of immanence and transparency. Furthermore, the relationship between the two "epochs" is now blurred: for the "boredom" that comes from the standardization of novelty is not itself a sudden or new thing. The postmodern grows slowly out of the modern, spreading within it like a bacillus. Indeed, Vattimo uses metaphors like "distortion" and "resignation" to translate Heidegger's *Verwindung*, indicating a relationship between modern and postmodern more like "host" and "parasite" than like the eruption of a heroic "new era" (or era of the new) projected by a modernist historicism (*End*, p. 171). Indeed, the most vital result of the postmodern, according to Vattimo, is one that emerges in the gradual fashioning of a new agency *within* an older one: as the twentieth century draws to a close and the twenty-first century dawns, we find it *increasingly* difficult to see history as a unity. As Vattimo puts it, the multiplication of knowledge and discourses increasingly, over time, inclines us to see any possible historical narrative as "but one history among many" (*End*, p. 8). The gradual spread of such *historical* perspectivism and of its ethical/political clones gives content to the *relationship* between modern and postmodern. The postmodern seems to demand a revision of nineteenth-century models for the philosophy of history, a revision that questions the simplistic notion of a series of discrete "epochs" or "eras" linked to one another on a

historical time line. The more “radical” moment of postmodernism appears only as linked to, even contained within, modernist historicism as the deconstruction of its evolutionary language of history.

I offer these distinctions to suggest that the aestheticization of truth is in certain ways problematic. At the very least, such an epistemological transformation raises problems that we will have to return to in this work’s final chapter; for when truth becomes artlike, it is only *through* art (or its cultural stand-ins) that it becomes available. Above all, I will later argue, the price for this is *political*. The art of nihilism leaves no room for the socially mobilizing functions of communal engagement. The politics of the postmodern display all the shortcomings of aestheticism in general—fragmentation and loss of community accepted and even celebrated in a world dominated by international capital.

But these issues and their precise relationship to the effects of truth that are my subject at present must await later treatment. For now, I want to focus on a danger closer to Schwitters’s practice in his *Merz* works. John Elderfield has documented the development of the *Merzbau* in sufficient detail so that we can observe changes in the process by which Schwitters produced it.¹⁸ Based on these observations, it’s possible to notice a gradual abandonment of the hermeneutic process that, at first, had generated the structure. We’ve already had occasion to note the remarkable process by which, in the early years of its growth, Schwitters produced the forms of the *Merzbau*. What I want to indicate here is the fragility of this process—one that requires a ceaseless balance between the demands of representation and those of an unrepresentable dynamism.

In the early years of the *KdeE*, say, 1923 to 1927, the gradual enclosure of space by a kind of organic process would always lead to a new layer of assemblage, new objects displayed in the hollows of the structure itself. But in the late 1920s and early 1930s, visitors to the *Merzbau* observed that increasingly the grottoes were covered, creating an ever more sculptural impression of a “unified whole.”¹⁹ This more sculptural interpretation of the *Kathedrale* becomes so dominant by the time of Schwitters’s flight from Hannover that in the later additions to the *Bau*, the parts spilling out of the original room housing it, the artist no longer builds by means of the process of layering described by his son (*Schwitters*, p. 156). In these later spaces, the *KdeE* is simply a large, organic sculpture, one whose forms *resemble* those produced in the original process but which no longer depends upon actual assemblage. This process becomes

so complete by the time of Schwitters's flight from Germany that, in a letter to Alfred Barr, he describes the work in simple terms as "an abstract (cubist) sculpture in which people can go" (*Schwitters*, p. 156).

In other words, we see a gradual transfer of truth function from the process of its production to the shell of the *Merzbau*. It's no longer the archaeological "core" taken through the layers of the work that reveals its epistemological lesson, but, more traditionally, the framing function of the shell. This change doesn't so much represent a compromise of the work's *aesthetic* emphasis: in the light of his immersion in constructivist and neoexpressionist ideas in these years, Schwitters could maintain that aesthetic form itself remained open and "dynamic"—irreducible to any conceptual intervention. Indeed, what Schwitters seems to do is to substitute the "look" produced by aestheticized truth for its actual unfolding. Doubtless a "natural" enough interpretation (indeed, a process mediated by Schwitters's increasing faith in certain "natural" curvilinear forms), but one that decisively transforms the project. The result is no longer truth as aesthetic but rather aestheticism, pure and simple. Here truth is *nothing other* than the life of aesthetic form, the life of the whole.

In this subtle shift, Schwitters demonstrates how easy is the step from a new kind of truth claim for art to an art that abandons truth altogether in a renewed aestheticism. He could indicate the almost impossible rigor demanded by the practice that he called *Merz* and that we have associated with a radically heterogeneous experience. This "truth" which is not and cannot become a truth is so fragile that Schwitters himself could not bear it, that he himself was forced into the awkward position of *representing* it as a whole. Perhaps the most reliable indicator of the *crisislike* nature of the postmodern is this narrowness of the defile within which it can play. If we mean by *postmodernism* something like the effort to embrace and explore the condition of the postmodern, then it is *only* insofar as the postmodernist refuses to reduce the truth that concerns her to a possible object for polemical representation that she remains *postmodernist*. Precisely at the moment that she returns to the manifestos and the proprieties of the "movement," she reverts to *modernism*—to a truth that falls too easily into either a Hegelian totalization of history or an aestheticized rapture of the present.

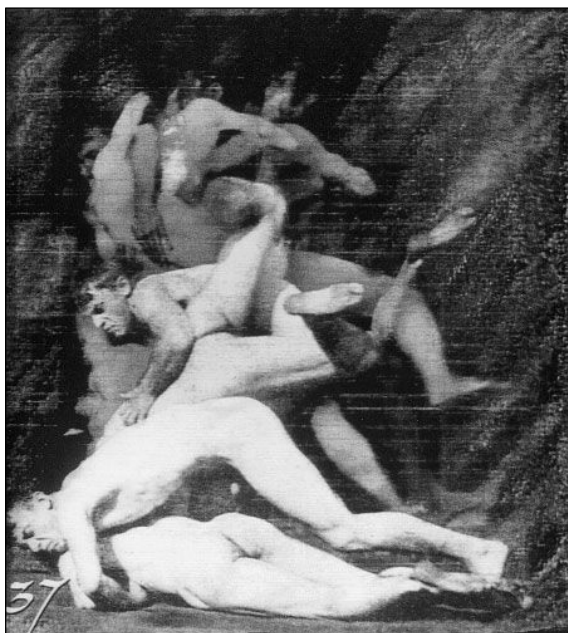


Figure 3.1. Peter Greenaway, *The Autobiographies of Pasiphaë and Semiramis* (detail), paintbox image from *Prospero's Books*, 1989

3 | The Place of Truth

Theatricality and Modernity in Krauss and Greenaway

I. THE PLACE OF THE SIGNIFIER

Introduction: Modernity, Representation, and Theater

I've already had occasion to speak of the *ethical* crisis accompanying the modern turn—accompanying the loss in the West of what Nietzsche refers to as a “fixed horizon” within which to understand human action. Up

to this point, however, I've accepted the metaphors that Karsten Harries, following a long "Copernican" tradition of thinkers, uses to describe the modern world. These tropes distinguish the modern from the premodern world on the basis of issues of *place*. In the modern world, we have "lost our place" and find ourselves, as Edward Casey puts it, "lost in space." Indeed, a prime symptom of the modern turn is the disappearance of notions of place from our science and their replacement by the more abstract coordinates of space and time. Casey tells us:

In the past three centuries in the West—the period of “modernity”—place has come to be not only neglected but actively suppressed. Owing to the triumph of the natural and social sciences in this same period, any serious talk of place has been regarded as regressive or trivial. A discourse has emerged whose exclusive cosmological foci are Time and Space.¹

The “death” of place and the emergence of these new “cosmological foci” indicate, above all, a crisis in the relationship between the human being and her world. Here I might refer to the skeptical thematics dominant in European philosophy from Descartes onward. To the extent that the person is a *subject* of representation, as Descartes already discovered, she cannot be defined in the terms of the world that appears for her as field of representation. Indeed, subjectivity can only be defined as the source of representation that refuses appearance within its own sphere. And this divide is absolute: above all, if our concern here is with the problem of *self*-understanding, we have seen that such a distinction leads to a crisis. Given the diremption apparently constitutive of modern experience, there simply seems to be no possibility in the representational *stuff* of experience for any authentic articulation of subjectivity.

Thus, the emergence of a number of *aesthetic* thematics dedicated to asserting the impossibility of self-understanding through *representation*. We could emblemize these concerns in relationship to the concept of “theatricality.” Modernity is constructed upon the splitting of representation, and, in the wake of that divide, it would seem that any *honest* or *authentic* cultural activity must acknowledge it. Michael Fried's effort, in his 1967 article “Art and Objecthood” and in a series of books and articles since, to define aesthetic modernism as the “war against theater” revives a tradition that extends back to the Enlightenment and its efforts to discipline Baroque theatricality.² For Diderot (whose battles against theatricality center Fried's investigation of French eighteenth-century painting, *Ab-*

sorption and Theatricality)), as for Fried, Baroque theater of all the arts tends toward an *antimodern* aesthetic.³ Denying the unique nature of the modern subject, the *autonomous* subject, the theater tends more directly than any other art to sacrifice the autonomy of the work in order to simply integrate its world with the world of the audience. Think for a moment of the ham actor, the actor who “plays to the audience,” giving its members not what the integral logic of the play demands but what they, at their most base, want. Such an actor is precisely theatrical in Fried’s sense. The exaggerated and artificial nature of her gestures stands for the problem with theater as a whole, with an art form that fantasizes a compromise between the demands of repetition, scripting, and so on and the demands for a lifelike, “natural” presence. But, precisely as theatrical, such acting cannot *convince* us; we understand at some level that what is represented in theatricality is not *really* the modern subject. Thus, within the modern world, theatricality is equivalent to *artificiality*.

To put this in other words, the theatrical seems to deny the necessity for an unbridgeable *gap* between audience and an artwork now dedicated to a pursuit of a “presentness” beyond all representation, a presentness of the subject to itself. The ham actor denies the ontological distinction between the subject as perceiver and autonomous agent and the same subject as a part of the world of naturally and socially occasioned desires and natural instincts. In interacting with the audience, the actor asserts that she belongs to its world as well as to the world of an autonomous artwork. But, according to Fried, to deny the separateness of the artwork is to reduce the human being to the coordinates of social determination and natural causality. Therefore, to allow a free exchange between the stage and the audience is to sacrifice the hope that art could deliver the message of the modern subject, the subject who is autonomous agent, heterogeneous to the world of representations. It is to betray the essential modern insight that removes the subject from any place within the world of representation.

Thus, it would seem that modernity demands an aesthetic life devoted, almost monastically, to the creation of a unique aesthetic presentness, radically dissimilar to all activities that occur within the sphere of the repetitive, the already familiar, the everyday.⁴ This combination of immediacy and repetition informs a more current usage of the word “theatrical”—i.e., gestural, expressive, lively. When seen in this light, the modernist threat to theatricality is also—as noted previously—a threat to the possibility of meaningful action. We are left with a choice between a world of a “truth” that only pacifies, that leaves no room for active

human freedom, and a world of “experience,” that, while promising absolute spontaneity, offers no truth. In other words, modernity sees the slow death of *ritual*. As Lacan puts it, the modern world is characterized by the “increasing absence of all those saturations of the superego and ego ideal that are realized in all kinds of organic forms in traditional societies, forms that extend from the rituals of everyday intimacy to the periodic festivals in which the community manifests itself.”⁵

Thus, we seem to have a neat enough set of categories: on the one hand, theatricality as an aesthetic *antimodernity* seems to assert that we could suture the split in the modern subject, that representation and its source belong together in some *place*. In trying to preserve the liveliness of premodern life, the theatrical affirms place at the expense of the modern subject. On the other hand, modernism would name the art that endeavors to deny the existence of such a topos, such an all-embracing place. It asserts the heterogeneity of subject and representation, the impossibility of capturing subjectivity within the *space* of representation. And in so doing, it seems to condemn aesthetic life to an increasing passivity.

Postmodernism and Radicalized Antitheatricality: Krauss and Cubist Collage

Theatricality may be the single most pervasive property of post-modern art.⁶

You can explain what is perhaps the most pervasive divide in theories of the aesthetic *postmodern* precisely in reference to this set of metaphors used to define modernism. If you take those tropes seriously, they place you in a tight corner in discussing postmodernism; for they seem to both demand and forbid an understanding of contemporary art in the terms of theatricality. The demand is, I think, fairly obvious—and not only to the theorist but also to the artist: one recalls here, particularly, the minimalism so hotly contested by Fried, with its rejection of the ascetic nature of high modernism. In the wake of modernism, art is to become once again a matter of the senses, a matter of physical immediacy rather than of abstract formal presence. Think, also, of the advent of minimalism in music and its displacement of the previously dominant serial composition inspired by Schoenberg and Webern. In the place of the highly abstract and difficult composition following from Schoenberg’s experiments with a twelve-tone system, composers like Philip Glass or Steve Reich

offer an avant-gardism that is melodic, sensuous, and rooted in what I might call the musical traditions of the ear—everything from medieval plainchant to rock and roll.

On the other hand, the very lay of the cultural landscape within which we hear about a “renewed” theatricality dooms it to at least the appearance of asserting a *premodern* idea of human being. If the *difference* definitive of the modern subject is reducible to its *heterogeneity*, if every theatricality boils down to an attempt to see the subject in terms of its determination by an opaque “real,” then any consistent postmodernism must reaffirm the antitheatrical polemic of modernism. Above all, there is the danger of eliding the freedom of the subject, of reducing meaning to the “natural” terms of an ever more dominant technoscience. From this viewpoint, the task of contemporary art must appear not only as a continuation of modernism’s “war against theater” but as the expansion of that campaign.

Nowhere is the result of this double imperative about theatricality and the postmodern in more significant evidence than in Rosalind Krauss’s first important treatment of cubist collage, “In the Name of Picasso.”⁷ Krauss constructs her analysis around two polemics—the first aimed at an increasingly positivistic “art history of the proper name” and the second at modernism and particularly modernist understandings of cubist collage. It’s vital to note the double opponent projected here, because the question of Krauss’s attitude about theatricality receives different, and indeed apparently opposing, answers depending upon which of the polemics one pursues. In this way, the very structure of “In the Name of Picasso” records the fundamentally problematic nature of postmodern theatricality: depending upon context, the postmodern is defined as hypertheatrical or antitheatrical.

Krauss’s essay begins as a simple and devastating response to an emerging “semantic positivism” in art historical treatments of Picasso’s work (*Originality*, p. 32). She notes the increasing obsession of art historians with reductive readings of Picasso’s work in general and in particular of the collages from the cubist period—interpretations that terminate the task of reading when the historian has determined historical models or motivations for elements within the canvas. In other words, Krauss here reads cubist collage against a vision of it that only aims at “what the police call ‘positive identification’” (*Originality*, p. 28). For the historians against whom she aims her polemic, the collage, painting, or sculpture is treated as though it were a proper name, as though it consisted of a

reference without further signification, a kind of “label” that exhausts meaning, excluding further interpretation (*Originality*, pp. 26–27).

What lends effectiveness to Krauss’s response to reductive readings of Picasso’s collage, like Robert Rosenblum’s in “Picasso and the Typography of Cubism,” is the obvious irony involved in reading cubist collage, of all moments in the history of art, in this manner.⁸ In what we’ve seen to be the exemplary avant-gardist art of playful and open interpretability, the methods of “positive identification” seem painfully misapplied: when everything in the collage experiments of Picasso and Braque seems to point toward a signification that never limits itself to a final reference, the confinement of cubist collage to the “art history of the proper name” appears to be nothing less than “grotesque.”

In trying to specify more precisely the monstrosity of this positivism as a response to collage, Krauss investigates meaning within it. Here she calls upon the resources of Saussure’s structuralist linguistics, a linguistics that thematizes the problematic of a split sign (signifier/signified). In this meeting of Saussure and Picasso we find an almost literal illustration of the problems of signification introduced by the idea of the diacritical nature of the sign—of the determination of meaning from within a system of differences rather than by reference; for in collage we find a signifier that literally seems to “cover” its signified. It’s worth quoting Krauss at length, since her argument will be central to everything that follows:

For it is the affixing of the collage piece, one plane set down on another, that is the center of collage as a signifying system. That plane, glued to its support, enters the work as the literalization of depth, actually resting “in front of” or “on top of” the field or element it now partially obscures. But this very act of literalization opens up the field of collage to the play of representation. For the supporting ground that is obscured by the affixed plane resurfaces in a miniaturized facsimile in the collage element itself. The collage element obscures the master plane only to represent that plane in the form of a depiction. If the element is the literalization of figure against field, it is so as a figure of the field it must literally occlude. The collage element as a discrete plane is a bounded figure; but as such it is a figure of a bounded field—a figure of the very bounded field which it enters the ensemble only to obscure. The field is thus constituted inside itself as a figure of its own absence, an index of a material presence now rendered literally invisible. The collage element performs the occultation of one field

in order to introject the figure of a new field, but to introject it *as* figure—a surface that is the image of eradicated surface. It is this eradication of the original surface and the reconstitution of it through the figure of its own absence that is the master term of the entire condition of collage as a system of signifiers. (*Originality*, p. 37)

In collage, then, reference is emblemized as impossible: what would be *referred to*, the literal surface of the canvas, is made to disappear by the very act of *collaging*. The play of surfaces in collage drives home the “status of the sign as substitute, proxy, stand-in for an absent referent” (*Originality*, p. 33). Without the possibility of a transparent reference, all that remains is an open “play of signifiers.” Hence the irony of an approach to collage that uses the methods of historical research to provide “keys” to the work: the “key” to a collage is precisely what is, by definition, missing. The point is, rather, to fiddle indefinitely with the lock.

If you add to Krauss’s polemic against positivist art history her assertion that “the whole structure of postmodernism has its proto-history in those investigations of the representational system of absence,” of which cubist collage is the outstanding example, if you add to this her assignment of cubist collage to the role “contemporaneous alternative to modernism,” then you confront a directly *theatrical* notion of the postmodern: to collage and to the postmodern would belong a sphere of meaning that stubbornly refused reduction to the positivist terms of reference, which insists upon the inescapability of culture, representation—signification. Here, then, the opposition is between antitheatrical efforts to *contain* meaning and an art that insists upon the inevitable contamination of subjectivity by the activity of an uncontainable signification. Here we might oppose the “willful” or “arbitrary” insistence upon reference with the “luxuriant,” “natural,” or “organic” propagation of meanings in collage. Theatricality emerges in postmodernism in the invasion of human language by the *dynamism* of nature. Or, to put this in other words, we have here an art that literally takes on the characteristics of theater—expressive, gestural, sensuous, and active.

But in the argument against *modernism* intertwined with her response to “the art history of the proper name,” Krauss implies a reversal of the polarity of the theatrical: here the response of postmodernism is not to theatricalize meaning but rather to radically exclude any theatrical transgression of the epistemological divide. Here, taking up a position against

her mentor, Clement Greenberg, Krauss extends the critical reach of her defense of cubist collage to the coordinates of “reference”; for it is modernism, and above all Greenberg’s modernism, that reads collage as a kind of reference to the presence of the two-dimensional surface of the painting. In “The Pasted-Paper Revolution,” Greenberg argues that cubist collage marked an essential moment in the development of modernism.⁹ Starting from the crisis in painting caused by the increasing commodification of art, Greenberg advances the claim that the concern of twentieth-century art must be essentially disciplinary. Each of the arts has to assert the conditions of its own separateness, to “entrench it(self) . . . in its area of competence” (*Culture*, p. 89). Only so can art in general preserve its uniqueness within a culture dedicated to swallowing the unique, to transforming it into a commodity.

For painting, such a focus means, most importantly, the exploration and assertion of “flatness,” that is, of the two dimensionality that distinguishes a painting from a sculpture. As a result, Greenberg takes the ultimate importance of the collage gesture to lie in its ability to “heighten” the viewer’s experience of the “material support,” the flat surface of the canvas. But there’s an irony contained not only in this assertion but also in the analysis by which Greenberg indicates it.¹⁰ If the beginning of Greenberg’s discussion is that the collage gesture, putting a surface on top of the painting’s surface, allows us to “see” the literal support, then by the end, it is shown to do this precisely by *depicting* it. What we see in looking at one of Picasso’s collages is not, first of all, the surface of a canvas but rather the surfaces that *cover* that canvas. These, strangely, become the primary symbols for flatness and mediate our vision of it. We see it, both literally and figuratively, *through* the signs that indicate it. Thus, Greenberg writes:

Flatness may now monopolize everything, but it is a flatness become so ambiguous and expanded as to turn into illusion itself—at least an optical if not, properly speaking, a pictorial illusion. Depicted, Cubist flatness is now almost completely assimilated to the literal, undepicted kind, but at the same time it reacts upon and largely transforms the undepicted kind—and it does so, moreover, without depriving the latter of its literalness; rather, it underpins and reinforces that literalness, re-creates it.¹¹

For now I just want to indicate the easy puzzle that Greenberg leaves for Krauss. What is it that suddenly transforms all objects, leaving nothing

that is not representation (including “literalness” itself)? What is it that, in the words of Lévi-Strauss, “could only have been born in one fell swoop,” since it demands a transformation of each and every thing so that presence emerges henceforth only against a diacritical ground of absence?¹² The reader will take the hints as easily as does Krauss: the answer is language, the sign, the precondition for a cultural world at all. Implicit (but, of course, unacknowledged) in Greenberg’s reading is an interpretation of collage as both *language-like* and *about language*. Thus, collage “is a thoroughgoing submission to the action of the sign; it reformulates the visual as language. Through the logic of collage the guitar, the compote, the wineglass, are banished from the image to be re-conjured only through a play of signs—representation as a self-conscious system of substitutions” (“Re-presenting,” p. 94).

But this means that, having unconsciously recognized the explicitly semiotic character of cubist collage, Greenberg has effectively subverted his own assertion of collage’s modernism. Signs disallow an immediate presence of a subject to him/herself because they demand that reflexive experience follow a detour through the language or system—through the absence that constitutes the presence—to which they belong. Thus, it would seem that the paradigm change of collage forbids aesthetic autonomy.¹³ There simply cannot be a self-sufficient presentness of an aesthetic object so long as that object is “really” constructed from signs. In other words, the very history of modern art up to cubist collage is revealed to rest on a kind of “category mistake.” Krauss writes:

Modernism’s goal is to objectify the formal constituents of a given medium, making these, beginning with the ground that is the origin of their existence, the objects of vision. Collage problematizes that goal by setting up discourse in place of presence, a discourse founded on a buried origin, a discourse fueled by absence. (*Originality*, p. 38)

It’s not just, as Greenberg himself or his student Fried would assert, that art cannot wield the language of a “natural” objective/social world. It’s not just that art must find a pure language of the subject (of “presentness”) in order to adequately represent the modern person. Representation is itself already bound to an extrasubjective field, to language, and thus forbids any adequation to subjectivity. Or, to put the same thing in another way, the project of modernism is doomed by the inescapability of theatrical representation. The very project of the aesthetic within mo-

dernity collapses before a post-structuralist understanding of the operations of representation.

Here, postmodernism emerges within the aesthetic sphere as the undoing of that sphere, as “an art of a fully problematized view of representation.” But in doing this, in questioning the dualism upon which not only aesthetics but modern subjectivism as a whole is constructed, it does not put an end to dualism: having collapsed the pair, subject and representation, this approach inevitably constructs an even more absolute rift—between the subject/meaning and “the Real,” a sphere now of absolute heterogeneity to culture. Thus, culture, meaning, and self (now all reduced to a single node) are isolated all the more absolutely from nature, the immediate, and so on. But if you consider that, from Romanticism onward, precisely this realm of a “sublime” and unarticulable real becomes the place of subjectivity, then you will see that the substitution of one divide for the other hasn’t really gotten rid of the problem of theatricality.¹⁴ If the subject exists in the realm of an absolutely unarticulable real, then theatricality is only transformed. Now it emerges as the temptation to represent the real—if only in the paradoxical terms of a presence beyond representation. In other words, it emerges in the kind of *modernism* emblemized by Greenberg himself.

Relative to that modernism, the task of the post-structuralist critic must be to protect against such a second-level theatricality. The post-structuralist project emerges, in Krauss’s polemic against modernism, as a renewed “war against the theater”—now interpreted as a defense against the illusion of an accessible “beyond” of culture, language, meaning. In this way, Krauss’s post-structuralist reading of collage *radicalizes* modernist questioning of representation—and, to that extent, modernist anti-theatricality.

Representation and Reference

I don’t think that Krauss’s two attitudes about what I’ve called theatricality are contradictory. There isn’t necessarily a *problem* with this apparent ambivalence about a concept that she has not, in fact, herself used. Indeed, the two arguments of “In the Name of Picasso” correspond rather exactly to something in collage. The double discourse here serves the investigation of its object. We are, after all, dealing with two different aspects of a single phenomenon—the peculiar relationship between the human world of articulated meaning and an apparently *unarticulated* “real” of reference. If the radical heterogeneity of these “fields” disallows

mediation, disallows “crossing” from one to another within human experience, then, simply put, that seems to mean two radically different things at two different levels. On the one hand, “within” the bounds of meaning, the theoretical insight here protects the almost “organic” process whereby meaning multiplies itself to infinity against the potential interruption of a positivist science. It reveals the interventions of reductionist interpreters to be unwarranted. On the other hand, at the level of epistemology, the post-structuralist insight indicates the radical *inaccessibility* of a natural/immediate “real”—thus extending a modernist thematic beyond itself. Here the insight of postmodernism leads to a renewed asceticism, or, at least, to a kind of farewell to representation.

While at this point we lack a detailed explanation for the interaction of these two levels, Krauss does suggest the route such an account would have to take: the epistemological gap remains in itself unbridgeable, but only at the same time that it somehow opens a strange possibility of mediation at the level of meaning. Meaning itself becomes, in its behavior within collage, a kind of “second nature,” a denatured nature, developing precisely the “theatrical” properties that are in principle inaccessible directly. And this theatricality of meaning itself derives from *something* in the relationship between sign and referent, subject and real. Recall that Krauss herself explains the structuralist insight in *representational* terms: the sign—divided between a material signifier and a “signified” that provides the “immaterial idea or concept”—operates as “substitute, proxy, stand-in, for an absent referent” (*Originality*, p. 33). This means that the gap between an expression and its meaning represents the divide between a sign (as a whole) and its referent.

Nonetheless, the representationalist position outlined here is an uncomfortable one; so uncomfortable, indeed, that Krauss herself seems to abandon it. To do so may seem mere common sense: it might seem to be the simple consequence of the heterogeneity of subject and the real. What else, one might object, do we mean by heterogeneity than a *nonrelationship*? What else do we mean if not adequately or simply the assertion that there is “no place” between the subject and the real? If one takes the tack suggested by these questions, then, indeed, the idea of a *representation* of heterogeneity becomes incoherent. You can’t represent a relationship that simply *isn’t*, as though it *were*: since every representation puts the elements it represents together in a place—in relationship—there simply cannot be any representation of the “gap” between the subject and the real. It’s far simpler, then, to take a radical convention-

alist position—to deny the very coherence of representation within the bounds of meaning.

There is, thus, a more radical strain in the argument of “In the Name of Picasso,” a strain that obscures the representationalist argument grounding the text. It’s worthwhile pursuing this line of thought for a little way—if only to see the limits within which the double gesture of the text as a whole can make sense; for it is possible to articulate the heterogeneity involved in the epistemological relationship in a manner that leaves no room for representation at all.

At certain points in her text, Krauss argues that the absence of the referent in collage subverts not simply the *tenability* of modernism but also the very *desire* underlying it. It’s not just that *presence* is impossible: it’s incoherent, and, therefore, not something that anybody could really *want*. The *telos* of modernism is called into question along with the possibility of reaching that goal. Thus, for Krauss, the construction of the collage artwork denies a “*search for perceptual plenitude and unimpeachable self-presence*” (*Originality*, p. 38; my italics). But if the desire propelling modernism falls into the realm of the incoherent, that’s just another way of saying that the play of signifiers in collage is “originless” (*Originality*, p. 38), that it is not, in the end, a *representation* of anything. Indeed, if there is no “ground” of representation, no *place* containing both subject and the real, then there is simply nothing for the *desire* for presence to aim at.

Approach the issue through Krauss’s own discussion, the one presented in the passage quoted at length above. In that text, Krauss returns to the “inaugural gesture” of collage—the gesture of gluing a piece of paper or other object to the surface of a canvas. This gesture ironically makes of the collage a “representation of representation” and specifically of the absence that “grounds” every representation, the absence of the diacritical field within which signification operates. But here it’s important to go a little bit more slowly than does Krauss herself: what is it exactly that signifies this absence? In cubist collage, it’s really the field provided by the canvas. To show this is to show that the opening gesture of cubist collage is the one that I’ve called the “breaking of the frame” or the representation of the field.

If the desire that starts collage is a “modernist” desire, that is, to present the canvas as literal, or real, then the way to demonstrate this reality is by showing that the canvas is not a “space” but rather only a thing. Okay, then, put something on top of the canvas; show that it can “bear the weight.” As soon as you’ve done that, however, you realize the

irony of the gesture. To demonstrate is to represent; thus what one has actually done is to represent the immediate, “real” nature of the canvas—which is precisely to obscure its simple reality. And, furthermore, the way you have shown this is, in fact, by covering over or hiding the very field that you wanted to present in all of its naked immediacy. The field lies under or behind the collage element that was put above it. You experience “flatness” here precisely to the extent that the thing meant to be experienced as flat, literal, is covered over. Indeed, as Greenberg already saw, the real locus of the apparently literal experience is not the surface of the canvas *per se* but rather the surfaces that cover it. These surfaces seem to remain absolutely flat while the literal surface seems to recede. Now, it’s on the basis of this relationship that Krauss reads collage as a specific allegory—the allegory of the sign: the collage element is playing the role of signifier while the “physical support,” the literal field, is transformed into the signified. Because the ground “is literally masked and riven,” like the signified in the Saussurian model of the sign, Krauss can equate it with the constitutive absence definitive of the signified.

This allegory is the foundation for Krauss’s polemical argument, for her argument that the very desire or “search” implicit in modernism is incoherent. Precisely what the modernist wishes to demonstrate—the naked presentness of the canvas—is transformed by the very desire to demonstrate it into something that is by definition absent, inaccessible—into meaning itself. However, that argument is only half right: surely enough, it’s true that the “search for perceptual plenitude and unimpeachable self-presence” transforms the “object” of that search. But that transformation is only partially, metaphorically (the right word fails me here) a transformation into a signified. At another level, the metamorphosis here is from “literal” object into *signifier*. And Krauss knows this perfectly well. In other words, the field becomes a figure for, a representation of, the necessity of its own absence in every representation. It becomes a signifier for the idea of the signified. In her words: “[The ground] enters our experience not as an object of perception, but as an object of discourse. Within the collage system all of the other perceptual *données* are transmuted into the absent objects of a group of signs” (*Originality*, p. 38).

Once, however, you see that, in a certain sense, everything in the collage has become a signifier, you can also see that the modernist search doesn’t exactly become *meaningless*; for the transformation of both field and figure allows the *sublimation* of the modernist impulse into the *process* of exchange between signifiers. The key is seeing how the ac-

knowledge of signification here is, in fact, the precondition for an *exchangeability* of figure and field. Only as signifiers, as “like” elements, can figure and field substitute for each other. In opposition to traditional painting, where the “framing” gesture asserts an apparent ontological difference between these two roles, in the collage they are revealed as ontologically identical: both function as signifiers. Moreover, not only are support and collage element now homogeneous—not only do they play in the same “field”—but they are also, in a sense, identical: both play the role of figures for the idea of a field. The “support” has, as we’ve just seen, become a signifier for its own necessary absence. The collage element becomes the signifier for “flatness,” for a painterly field, which explains precisely what *does* happen on the surfaces of cubist collages where, as we’ve seen before, an indefinite process of exchange occurs. Thus, the “covering” that Krauss presents as trope for the absence constitutive of meaning is also the *operation* of a substitution. The collage element *substitutes* for the canvas, or for its presence.

It is the great strength of Lacan’s work to have demonstrated, moreover, that this process of substitution is motivated by its ability to translate heterogeneity into a *process*. There are two elements to this insight: the first is that the cleft in the sign—the “bar” between signifier and signified—*represents* the gap between subject and “the real.” Second, however, the “bar” of signification itself is “played out” in a *chain of signifiers*. Lacan locates *desire*, locates the “gap” between signifier and signified, in the movement between signifiers. In other words, the very dynamism of substitution grants a partial, sublimated, presence to the absent signified. Thus, the instability of collage, its indefinite play of substitutions, *represents* the goal of the modernist “search” for autonomy, though without ever coming up with an adequate “objectification” of that end. In transforming the field into a “depiction” of a field (to use Greenberg’s term), the collage displaces the aesthetic “materiality” of the “literal” support (or, the heterogeneity of that materiality to representation) onto the figures that occupy the painting’s ground. The excess of signification left over from the representation of the “real” surface re-emerges in the process of representing additional fields. The figures on the surface become figures for the field precisely by signifying the *loss* in every representation. This *play* of figures and fields—or, for that matter, of frames or simply of varying figures—takes on the unrepresentable excess of the “literal.”

What I want to suggest, then, is that when it problematizes the possibility of autonomy as a goal, cubist collage doesn’t simply cast the *desire*

for such autonomy into the abyss of categorical incoherence. The collage gesture is as much pedagogical as it is oppositional. All of which is merely to suggest that Krauss has misapplied the conventionalist aspect of post-structuralism in pasting it on to, in hoping it will entirely cover, cubist collage. The experience of collage doesn't simply or only dissolve the "search for perceptual plenitude and unimpeachable self-presence." In fact, in a certain way, it intensifies it, sublimating it into the pursuit of the signifier in its material play.

After all is said and done, "In the Name of Picasso" leaves the reader with an obscure representationalism rather than with the easier, sexier, antirepresentationalism that it tries to project. And it's worth noting that Krauss's more recent work on cubist collage, her 1999 book *The Picasso Papers*, eschews the polemical position of her earlier essays on the subject and consciously embraces this difficult truth.¹⁵ But this insight simply reopens the issue that led to the more radical assertion of an "originless" play: in what way is it possible for there to be a representational *relationship* between meaning and an unarticulated "real"? How is representation itself possible?

II. PROSPERO'S BOOKS AND THE "TRUTH" OF COLLAGE

Modernity and Magic in The Tempest

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) is ideally suited to emblemize both sides of the postmodern choice about theatricality, place, and modernity: in the play's body, Prospero's status as "mage" seems to indicate a pre- or antimodern epistemology. He wields a magic that he takes from and returns to *nature*, using its effects to produce a set of absorbing wonders for the audience. Prospero's magic thus both violates the epistemological divide directly, allowing the "power" of nature to become the power of the acting subject (Prospero) himself, and aesthetically, producing a spectacle for the audience that makes its members forget the divide between theatrical representation and the real. On the other hand, the *end* of *The Tempest*, where the magician abjures his magic, promising to destroy his magic books, seems to represent a dawning modernity and the artist's obligations to it. Particularly when coupled with the popular belief that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's last play, this choice at the work's end takes on a significant pathos.¹⁶ So read, we seem to have in the play (and numerous realizations have stressed) a kind of farewell to occult and

Neoplatonic elements of Renaissance thought in favor of an ascetic modernity, a modernity that demands both an end to “magic” and to theatricality.¹⁷ Thus, the end of *The Tempest* seems to promise a double reformation—both the destruction of the mage’s “art” and the purgation of theatricality.

Of course, in reality the text of Shakespeare’s play throws up difficulties for both ends of this dual reading. Let me just mention a couple of particularly striking problems.¹⁸ First, if the action of *The Tempest* results from Prospero’s magic, then his status as a magician must be carefully distinguished from that of the evil Caliban or Sycorax: it’s not just magic that’s at stake.¹⁹ It’s a particular kind of magic—a distinction that is difficult to explain using the epistemological categories I introduced above. In other words, Prospero’s magic is not *simply* his ability to take power from nature: Caliban enjoys that power, too.²⁰ Furthermore, Prospero’s necromancy seems to be itself an answer to his brother’s theatrical vision of state power (Antonio desires “to have no screen between this part he played” in taking the regency for his scholarly brother and “him he played it for”). In other words, magic is the weapon whereby Prospero *challenges* the theatrical collapse of two dimensions of experience. Finally, when Prospero abjures his magic, that doesn’t really put an end to *theatricality*. Now that Prospero’s “charms are all o’erthrown” (5.1.319), what remains is the “spell” cast by the audience itself, its ability to “release” him from his “bands” (5.1.326–27). In other words, theatricality remains, and indeed as a kind of “magic,” at the end of the play. Here, it seems difficult to retain a reading of *The Tempest* as prologue to an antitheatrical modernity.

Prospero’s Books: Rereading The Tempest

In light of these difficulties, I’d like to turn to an interpretation that seems to me to make sense of these seeming contradictions, albeit in a way that necessitates a radical revision of the philosophical understanding of modernity, place, and theatricality that I presented at the outset. This reading, developed in Peter Greenaway’s film *Prospero’s Books*, is entirely constructed upon the principles of collage, of the “broken frame,” as we’ve discussed it in an earlier chapter. If these principles force us to revise the very language of modernity and *place* that organizes all that we’ve said so far, then given what we know of the subversive potential of collage, this should not surprise us much.

It's not that Greenaway simply rejects the traditional staging of *The Tempest*, with its vision of a prolonged farewell to the premodern world. In fact, the film contains even more than the play's *promise* that Prospero will give up his magic: it actually shows him destroying the books that are the "source" of his power. It seems that Prospero must abjure his magic as a *premodern* holdover, electing now to live in a restored world, a world that can, as a result, become *fully modern*. Furthermore, as Greenaway's screenplay for *Prospero's Books* indicates, he accepts the most romantic of the older readings—the one that has the play also serve as *adieu* from the stage for Shakespeare.²¹ In this interpretation, Prospero also speaks for Shakespeare who, having completed *The Tempest*, writes nothing more (at least alone) afterward. Shakespeare, the modern man, must leave the magical theater behind.

But combined with this theatrical reading of Shakespeare's play, *Prospero's Books* sets in motion a counternarrative, one that gently but consistently deconstructs the vision of a great divide between the "magical" action at the play's core and its "antimagical" conclusion. Above all, this deconstructive narrative arises from Greenaway's meditation on the parallel between film as medium and the magic books that Prospero "prizes above (his) Dukedom" (1.2.165). Thus, the title, *Prospero's Books*, for the parallel between book and film determines Greenaway's concentration on the magic books themselves—the texts (Greenaway catalogues twenty-four of them) that Gonzalo casts into Prospero's boat upon his exile from Milan and that serve (at least in Greenaway's version) as the source of his magical power. Indeed, Greenaway writes that in his film he intends to "celebrate . . . the text as text, as the master material on which all the magic illusion and deception of the play is based" (*Prospero's Books*, p. 9).

Both film and book start from a surface, a surface that is then *inscribed*, written upon with the "master material" of text/image. Thus, *Prospero's Books* departs from the properties of surface, deriving from them the "magic" of magician and play. Such a starting point informs, for example, the way that Greenaway sees the island upon which the play's action transpires. As he puts it in the film's screenplay:

It will be no surprise that it is an island full of mirror-images—true mirages—where pictures conjured by text can be as tantalizingly substantial as objects and facts and events, constantly framed and re-framed. This framing and reframing becomes

like the text itself—a motif—reminding the viewer that it is all an illusion constantly fitted into a rectangle . . . into a picture frame, a film frame. (*Prospero's Books*, p. 12)

As a surface—like a mirror—the film is able to present “tantalizingly substantial” images, images that seem to deny their own status as representations. Substantial, perhaps, because they call attention away from the film’s frame, engrossing the viewer in a secondary narrative built upon the *assumption* that the “frame” narrative is the real itself. But this illusion is only maintained on the precondition that, *in fact*, the surface is only a surface, that it is a framed surface. The amazing proliferation of picture frames *within the film’s frame*, not only in *Prospero's Books* but in many of Greenaway’s films since *The Draughtsman's Contract*, reminds the viewer of this fact, “breaking” the framing illusion by placing a frame *within* the frame.²²

The gesture here is importantly double: on the one hand, the image is inscribed upon the surface (page/film) so that it can absorb you in its “substantiality.” The author writes the play within a play to *take the audience into* its narrative, or into the narrative of the framing play. It is doubtless this gesture that explains the *absorbing* quality of *Prospero's Books* as well as Greenaway’s other works. But the very act of focusing and framing that separates the parenthesis or subnarrative also indicates its origin upon a surface, one that thus shows itself to be *distant*, opposed, alienating. In its placement *upon* another surface, *within* a frame, the image is separated from you. It indicates that the imaginary world to which the play or novel gives you access is, in fact, *constituted*, from a textual surface, by you, by your act of imagination.²³ The text is a framed surface. It makes possible the illusion produced by the reader only on the precondition of its actual separateness from her.

The tension between these two effects—between an engrossing and a distancing aspect of framing—becomes itself the dynamo for every level of narrative in *Prospero's Books*. The film unfolds, indeed frame by frame, in a process by which the two sides of a represented framing oscillate, producing narratives that become surfaces only to spawn new narratives, and so on. If this seems appropriate to the episodic character of *The Tempest*, then, as we will see, Greenaway explores the most radical implications of this kind of narrative form.

We are, in other words, back into the thematics of collage and framing. Greenaway’s reading of *The Tempest* arises from his interpretation of Prospero’s Renaissance magic in these terms. The evidence for my inter-

pretation—beyond the filmmaker's own allusions to it in discussions of *Prospero's Books*—comes from the way that he has structured every narrative level of his filmic reading of *The Tempest*. Let me just indicate several of the most important ways that the “magic” of collage theatricality becomes the magic of *The Tempest* itself.

The Twenty-Four Books

Greenaway structures his retelling of *The Tempest* around the “twenty-four” magic books that Prospero takes with him from Milan, interspersing accounts of these books throughout the film. They interrupt Shakespeare's play at appropriate moments, as though to explain the particular kind of magic involved at that point in the narrative. To present the individual books, Greenaway has made use of new video technologies—technologies that allow precisely the kind of play of surface, image, and frame that I've discussed above.²⁴ First of all, a video image is overlaid upon the surface of the film, partially (but almost never entirely) covering the represented action “behind” it. One sees, for example, the book of water “framed,” as it were, by the edges of a shot of Prospero in his bathhouse. Then, within the insets by which each of the magical books is described, Greenaway presents sequences that follow the logic of the “magical book” in making the text constantly give way to what it “represents”: the book of water proves to be wet, the book of motions shakes upon its shelf. At these moments, the insets tend to expand, taking up the entire screen. But, as the inset narrative winds to its end, Greenaway shrinks the video image again, using the distancing devices of montage framing and sometimes affixing an actual gilded picture frame to it.

Furthermore, often the video images of the individual book/narratives archive a series of such framing processes *within* themselves, turning into literal collage images. For instance, in the *Book of Water*, the record of such a progression emerges in the final image, a surface constructed of numerous layers—from the background text to the figures of the sea god and goddess emerging from it, to the “inset” animated figure of a ship at sea over which additional texts are then laid (“imago typhonis” and “the most mighty Neptune, etc”). Or, to give another striking example, the “pornographic” *Autobiographies of Pasiphaë and Semiramis* freezes, in an image reminiscent of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, the various “frames” of some apparent copulation, suggesting orgasmic group sex (see figure 3.1). Each “book” in this manner becomes an archaeological artifact, recording in its layers the process by which the surface of representation has been broken and relocated.

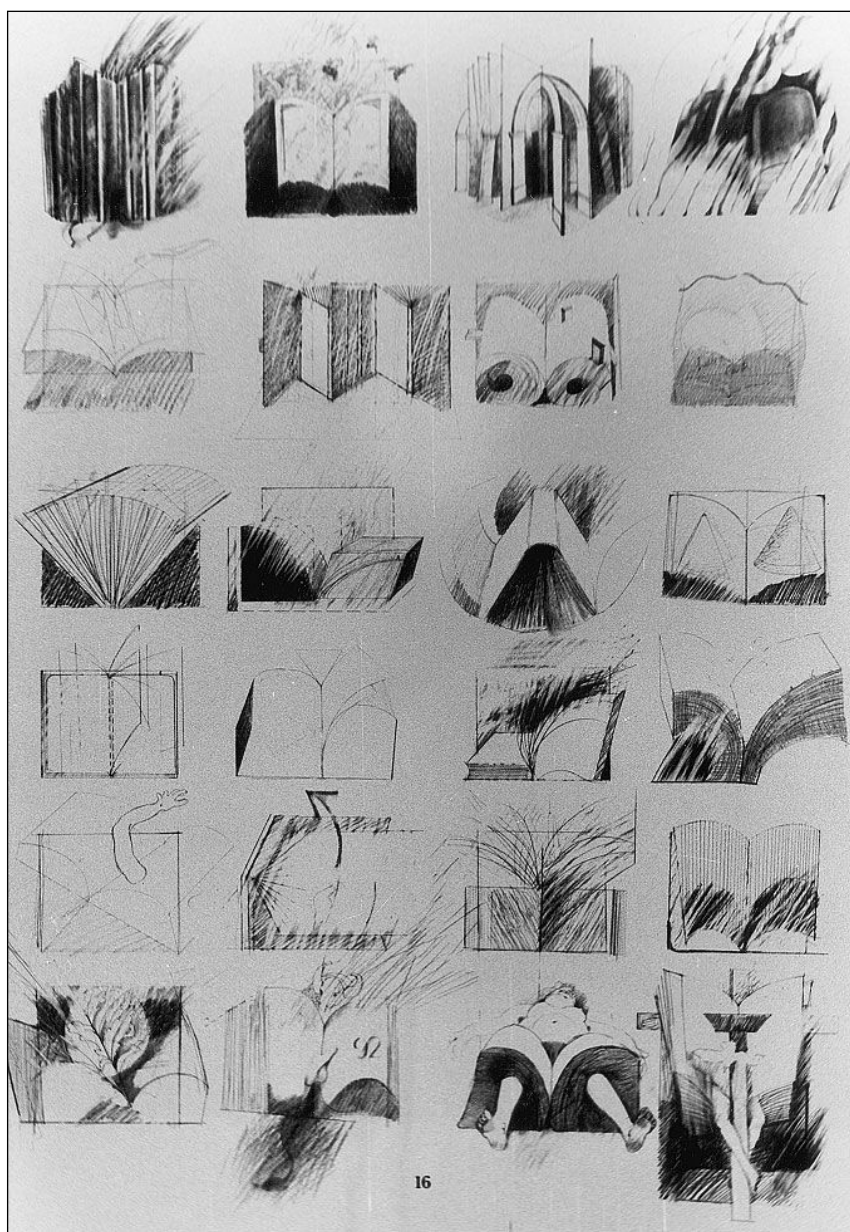


Figure 3.2. Peter Greenaway, *The 24 Books of Prospero's Library*, drawing from the screenplay for *Prospero's Books*, 1989

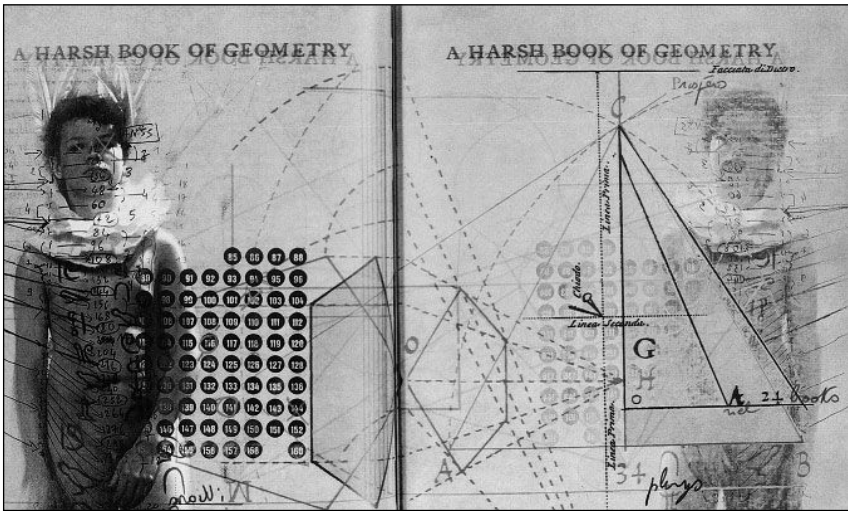


Figure 3.3. Peter Greenaway, *A Harsh Book of Geometry*; paintbox image from *Prospero's Books*, 1989

The Unfolding of *The Tempest*

Within *Prospero's Books*, the story of *The Tempest* also emerges from such a process of layering. At the outset, a textual caption informs us that what follows is to be Prospero's text, a text containing his fantasy of revenge and redemption for the exile that he suffers. And it is within this narrative frame that Greenaway recounts the story. Above all, this means that the filmmaker can present the unfolding of Shakespeare's narrative as itself an example of the framing process. The representation of *The Tempest* begins this way, with Prospero first "mouthing" the words of Shakespeare's drama and then writing them down (*Prospero's Books*, pp. 43–45). We move then from actor John Gielgud's voice to a visual image of the play's opening lines, following at the same time the course from absorption to distancing device. The film insists upon this text, representing much of it (particularly in the beginning) visually. It is this gesture that makes the film more than a mere repetition of the familiar thematics of the magic voice; for it forces every representation of vocal "immediacy" explicitly into a frame. It forces us to acknowledge, as it were, that the power of Gielgud's voice comes from the fact that it represents *Shakespeare's* text. But it also leaves something in Prospero's speech that is not adequately *captured* in the representation of that text. This *excess* then gives birth to new words, themselves immediately thereafter reproduced in textual form. In other words, the collage process becomes the narrative movement of *The Tempest* itself.

The Unfolding of *Prospero's Books*

In addition, the same structure determines the aesthetic nature of *Prospero's Books* as a whole—determines a process wherein activation of the theatrical moment, the tension between illusion and frame, gives birth to a luxuriant layering of texts. This device, for instance, transforms the reading of *The Tempest* from monologue (at the outset) to full-scale ensemble representation. As the film proceeds, we see and begin to hear the voices of the other actors who are conjured up by the text/reading of Shakespeare/Gielgud—though it is not until Prospero abjures his magic in the last third of the play/film that these voices burst through the “surface” produced by the magician’s voice to speak alone for themselves. In much of the film, the voices of Prospero and the other characters are collaged onto each other. The additional voices act as “insets,” like the book images themselves, bursting through the surface provided by Gielgud’s (now framed) voice.

And, of course, the “substantial” insets within the narrative (whether they are these voices or episodes in Shakespeare’s play) breed additional frames: for each frame burst (text, magician’s voice, and so on) another frame is represented. Thus, for example, in the story of the wooing of Miranda by an African prince, we start from an image of Shakespeare’s text, proceed to images of the African “palace” and its inhabitants, and are then returned to the progress of *The Tempest’s* narrative, when the camera draws back revealing that the “picture” we’ve been enjoying *is* a picture, complete with a gilt frame. The aesthetic texture of the film, its appearance *as* textured, derives from this multiplication of narrative frames. The result is a *process* of textual proliferation, a process that marks surfaces, from mirrors, to images of the human body (those amazing, dancing naked bodies that fill the screen), to the physical film upon which the representation of *Prospero's Books* is inscribed. Things get pretty crowded in the course of *Prospero's Books* (there’s a complete opera by Michael Nyman, for one thing, contained in the middle of it) and it’s this overcrowding that is the surest sign of the theatricality, of the aesthetics of the excess located within representation, that constructs it.

The end of *Prospero's Books* hints at the remarkable interpretive coup that Greenaway has performed. Between the scene in *The Tempest* that restores each character to his/her natural place and the remarkable epilogue with its soliloquy spoken by Prospero, Greenaway inserts one more “book,” only this book—both included and excluded from the series of

twenty-four—shows Prospero destroying his magic books yet failing to destroy one of them, a “twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth” book, the *Works of William Shakespeare*, including *The Tempest*.

A strange gesture: Greenaway has apparently made the act of destroying the books into the production of a new magic book (represented within the scene as Shakespeare’s book), a book whose magic is now *precisely modern*. The filmic gestures at the movie’s end all point in this direction. The destruction of the books is shown as the representation of each of them *qua* surface. That’s true particularly where the book’s destruction, as in the case of the *Book of Mirrors*, explicitly involves the breaking of surfaces. Such a shattering has the effect of *representing* for the viewer “that it is all an illusion constantly fitted into a rectangle . . . into a picture frame, a film frame.” But the destruction of the magic book produces “magic”—i.e., a new surface that covers the surface of the play’s representation in the film.

And that’s true also of the way that Greenaway marks both the penultimate and ultimate scenes of *The Tempest*. In concluding the victorious resolution scene of *The Tempest*, the director actually scrapes the physical surface of the film upon which the scene is represented, insisting through this unique gesture upon our perception of it as filmic text. At the moment when the resolution of the narrative seems to invite us to forget that all of this takes place on a framed surface, the filmmaker insists: it’s as though the force of the aesthetic discipline constructing the film finally bursts through the level of filmic representation, marking the very material that has previously contained all experimentation. And even *this* surface is not to be privileged: in a final gesture, Greenaway seems to challenge even his most daring image, insofar as it might lead one to fetishize the filmic surface as a kind of ultimate and literal “ground” for representation. The final shot of the film has Ariel—the fairy servant of Prospero now released from his bondage—apparently leap into the eye of the camera and, thus, *through* the film. At the last minute, however, we realize that this leap leaves both movie screen and film intact, that Ariel passes “over” rather than through them. Or, perhaps it would be better to say, we realize that the representational “surface” is not identical to the surface of the film that can be scratched or broken—that there is a “surface” closing over even the most immediate rupture in representation. There is no end to the representational “magic” at work here. In the wake of this gesture, it seems that no privileged frame, no actual surface that is not itself both violation of another surface and field for additional representation, remains.

Prospero's Books thus transforms the very idea of magic, rescuing it from the world of occult immediacy and metamorphosing it into a decisively *modern* phenomenon.²⁵ The magic of Prospero—apparently an intrusion of opaque “natural” substance into the world of the subject, an abridgment of the gap between natural force and subjectivity—turns out to be neither of those things but rather an effect of the epistemological divide itself. Its very possibility comes from representation. It is, indeed, an inscription of the heterogeneity constituting modern subjectivity *within* the field of the subject's representation. Surely enough, what the mage is able to accomplish is a certain deflection of representation, one that exposes the mechanisms by which it operates. But this exposure is no simple exposé: if Greenaway “shows the hand” of the magician he does so in *multiplying* the magical effects of *The Tempest*, in indicating the installation of magic within the filmic art.

It's precisely to this extent that *Prospero's Books* is *postmodern*. It returns to the modern subject, the subject of epistemology—but does so in a manner exactly opposed to the asceticism of cultural modernism. The excessiveness here revealed within modernity, always violating representation from within representation, explains those criticisms of “too much Greenaway” in this interpretation of *The Tempest*.²⁶ Indeed, there *is* too much here—though not of the filmmaker's ego—much more than Shakespeare's classicism would ever allow onto the stage. But that “too much,” that excess, is precisely the point, the lesson of *The Tempest* itself. Greenaway's *Tempest* simply insists upon the lesson that Shakespeare's play, rigorously interpreted, discovers.

Let me briefly indicate the way that Greenaway's interpretation of Shakespeare allows us to make sense of places in *The Tempest* that earlier seemed aporetic.

Prospero versus Caliban, Sycorax, and So On

In brief, Prospero's magic is a magic *with* knowledge, a magic explicitly “textual” in its nature—whereas the magic of Caliban, Sycorax, and the others depends solely on a blind use of the illusionary effects in fact created by representation.²⁷ Their magic seems antimodern because it propagates the myth of a collapse or, at least, suspension of the epistemological divide. Prospero's magic explicitly depends upon that divide—giving it its due in the very gesture that multiplies magical effects.

But this multiplication also helps to explain the *superiority* of Prospero's magical power. It gives us a reason why Ariel and Caliban must

work for Prospero rather than the other way around. The magic of the books, precisely in that it makes the technique for the propagation of magic a matter of knowledge, allows it to breed more promiscuously than otherwise it would. For this reason, Prospero is necessarily the greater magician, a magician who works "according to nature," rather than "against it."

Antonio and the Milanese Coup

Strangely, the moral weakness of Prospero's brother in usurping the Milanese throne is similar to that of Caliban, Sycorax, and so on. Antonio wishes to remove the theatrical "screen" separating him from the actual dukedom of Milan. His willingness to murder his brother in order to accomplish this end seems surprising, particularly when we learn that Prospero has already ceded him all but the formal title of duke. But therein lies the rub: Antonio is apparently as "bewitched" by theatrical illusion as the powers of the island are by their magic. Like them, too, he refuses to acknowledge the dependence of his enjoyment of power upon the institutional forms that generated it: instead, he dreams of an unconditional domination, a domination in which all boundaries between monarchical agent and his subjects would crumble. He would become "Absolute Milan" (1.2.110). But this desire is thus predicated upon ignoring the real (and theatrical) conditions for his power. In this he is like someone "who having into truth, by telling of it, Made such a sinner of his memory, to credit his own lie, he did believe he was indeed the Duke" (1.2.104).

In other words, Antonio is like a magician who refuses to acknowledge that the source of magic lies in representation. And for this reason he, too, will succumb to the greater force of Prospero's self-conscious illusion making. His story will be woven *into* Prospero's book, Prospero's narrative, and he will eventually yield the throne back to his brother.

Theatricality and the Epilogue to *The Tempest*

If magic is not a suspension of the laws of representation but rather an effect of them, then, also, the meaning of Prospero's "giving up" his magic must appear differently. Indeed, the epilogue to *The Tempest* gives an essential clue to this difference. Prospero's "charms," "all o'erthrown," give way not to a merely disillusioned reality but rather to the *power of the audience*—a power to determine the fate of Prospero within the individual's imagination (5.1.320).

What's happening here is simply the necessary result of the insight that has granted Prospero the greater power throughout *The Tempest*. If magic depends upon representation, then, as we've already had occasion to see, it depends upon an effect produced, in one sense, "within" the other's imagination. While the role of Prospero is to produce representations that are conducive to the play of images, magic is, in the final analysis, not *his possession*. It is "knowledge," and in this sense belongs to everybody. But the mode of this belonging is purely subjective. The arts of theatricality belong to each individual insofar as they follow the play of representation. Thus, in fact, there is no crossing of the great divide between "subject" and the real: everything already happens within the field of subjectivity, of meaning, of signs. The epilogue is Prospero's admission of this final court of appeal in the matter of theatrical representation—that his project "fails" unless his audience engages with it. In this way, the theatricality of the epilogue is perfectly consistent with Prospero's promise to destroy his magic. At issue is a democratization of magic; the end of an era, yes, but also a certain continuity. We witness here the birth of modernity *as* postmodern, as the continuation of magic within the acknowledged bounds of representation.

Chora, Truth, and the Materiality of Collage

To what extent do subject and the real share a space within this theatricality? To what extent is there a *place* mediating the epistemological divide? On the one hand, we've seen that Greenaway's interpretation of necromancy is, in a sense, a disillusioning one. The appearance of materiality that accompanies every new "event" within *Prospero's Books* is always shown, in a second moment, to already rely upon the effects of representation and distancing. The remarkable "substantiality" of Greenaway's filmic images cannot, however, be adequately interpreted away with such a gesture; for it refers not only to the apparent "immediacy" of inset image but also, more fundamentally, to the very force of temporal unfolding underlying it as narrative. As I've shown above, Greenaway's interpretation has the effect of reading representational time at every level as the unfolding of a tension between apparent immediacy and representation. And where there's tension, there's also relationship. Put simply, if Prospero expunges contact between subject and nature, nature nonetheless reasserts itself as the organic growth of the narrative itself. *Prospero's Books*, then, offers us a variant on the thematics of a "return of the repressed."

The analysis of *Prospero's Books* forces us to the same aporia that led Rosalind Krauss to suggest, with cubist collage, an *antirepresentational* trumping of representation. It seems that the practices of collage catch us between an absolute heterogeneity at the epistemological level and the apparent fact of representational mediation in the dynamism of the sign. There is no path from subject to the real . . . but also the theatricality of signification insists that there *must be*. Indeed, Greenaway's filmic collage technique radicalizes the problem: for, in demonstrating the precise representational relationship between these levels, it forbids the out that Krauss has taken: it disallows the retreat to a simple antirepresentationism.

There isn't and can't be any place attaching the meaningful realm of the subject and the real, but there also *must be* "something" that allows these terms to be *represented*: since representation implies relationship, heterogeneity cannot mean here lack of relationship. Clearly, then, the riddle demands an unusual origin or ground of representation, one that cannot itself appear, that can only appear in its effects, in the play of representation itself. And furthermore, one that, instead of compromising the heterogeneity of subject and nature, in fact, guarantees it.

Curiously, the history of philosophy suggests a precise name for this invisible ground—place itself. In the *Timaeus*, Plato's account of creation by the demiurge is interrupted by the problematic of the *chora* ("receptacle" or "place").²⁸ If all being is divided between the eternal forms and those things that are images of them, between "intellect" and "sense," then this already implies a third term, the *place* that mediates between form and image, allowing the eternal to appear *within* that which becomes (*Timaeus* 49a). However, from the start, this place demonstrates a strange character: indeed, it seems to avoid characterization altogether, taking on the apparent form of whatever "bodies" occupy it while itself remaining "always the same" (*Timaeus* 50b). The *chora*, thus refuses to appear itself: it only appears *through* the specific elements that make it up. Place is only apparent as *a* place: it cannot appear as "itself"; indeed, it has no "self" that can show itself.

Lest one begins to think of *chora* as simply "space," this caution: space implies a universal vessel containing all places. But Plato insists that we cannot adequately describe *chora* as a universal; *even though* it is "eternal" and thus not identifiable with any body occupying it, its eternity is not the substantial unchangeability of form: indeed, "that which is to receive all forms should have no form" and does not (*Timaeus* 50d). Furthermore, unlike the form, which Plato famously accords a greater

reality than its copy, the *chora* is “hardly real” and, indeed, when compared with substance, “has no existence” (*Timaeus* 52b). In short, wishing to preserve the “intermediate” nature of place, Plato deflects our inclination to make it simply another universal.

Nor does Plato allow us to retreat to the *other* possible node of understanding. Though the *chora* always appears *through* and *as* a place, it is also not reducible to the set of terms we associate with particularity—place, myth, and so on. After all *chora* is that *in which* universality, and its relationship with the particular, is determined. No particularity could embrace the platonic forms.

Strangely caught “between” particular and universal, sense and intellect, the *chora* is, as Jacques Derrida has convincingly argued, precisely what resists either the universalizing discourse of philosophy (Logos) or the particularizing sensuousness of art or religion (mythos).²⁹ Thus, Plato, in comparing the thought of the *chora* to a “dream” that “we are unable to cast off” in order to awaken, records this difficulty: if we are said to have an “image” of what place really is, then that means we conceive of that image as *in* a place. Since there’s a place that it doesn’t include, the image can’t really give an adequate picture of place itself (*Timaeus* 52c). This paradox of exclusion is, of course, not accidental: it reveals the intertwining of universality and place.³⁰ An inevitable gesture once one has thought it through: what necessitates the introduction of *chora*, in fact, is the realization that *place* models the relationship between universal and particulars. The elements are *in* the sets, the content participates *in* the form, and so on. Place determines the possibility of universal and particular. But, if that’s the case, then one can’t simply describe place in either of those terms: in some sense it logically precedes either, though the nature of this precedence is not obvious. Or, in other words, “true and exact reason” cannot do justice to place (*Timaeus*, 52c). As a result, Plato claims that we “apprehend” the *chora* “by a kind of spurious reason.” But, on the other hand, the *chora* *does* demand reason: the text insists that it be understood “without the help of sense” (*Timaeus*, 52c). It is not a matter of mythos.

In other words, *chora*, is neither space in general (the universal form of place) nor *a* place (the specific sensuous material of myth). It is place, rather, as a relationship that can only be induced, can never directly appear—since every appearance follows either the path of Logos or of mythos. Or, it *is* something that appears but only in the peculiar “spurious reason” of *aporia*. There it is the phenomenon resultant from “placing” the unmediatable in a relationship of mediation. It is the site of the

double move both acknowledging the impossibility of “Truth,” of an *end* to human desire, of a secured “place” in nature for human existence, and—at the level of the sign—opening up endless places for human habitation. To put this more plainly, I might say that we are being forced here to separate two distinct connotations of “place” in order to see a paradoxical relationship between them. The very admission that there is no such thing as one kind of place opens up another. If we do not “have” a place, if place in that sense is impossible, then, nonetheless, you might actually enjoy *emplacement*, in the sense of “feeling at home,” “making a place for yourself.”

I’d like to call this peculiar interpretation of modern subjectivity, this strange twisting of modern epistemology away from the project of modernism, specifically *postmodern*. It is the impossible truth of the postmodern that as human beings we both are (and must be) and are not *in* place. Or, to put this in another way, we discover that all along the truth of the modern has been not an answer to the question of place—the question that has haunted philosophy since the renaissance—but the openness of the question itself: *are we in place?* It is that inquiry, its insistence and its uncertain resonance, that defines the boundaries of modern experience.

The embrace of that postmodern truth involves a complex double gesture, to use Jacques Derrida’s term, one in which the “war against theater” is both challenged *and* reaffirmed. That’s what we see in both the sensual avant-gardism of *Prospero’s Books* and the complex ambivalence of Rosalind Krauss’s post-structuralism. In each of those cases, the moment of the postmodern involves the exploration of an antimodernist theatricality but one that is self-consciously predicated upon a placeless subjectivity, a *radicalized* modernism. Martin Heidegger spoke of a “simultaneous yes and a no” to modernity, an essential ambivalence about the metaphysico-technological project that continues to shape our world. Perhaps better than Heidegger’s own late ruminations, the peculiar ambivalence about theater and place evident in Greenaway’s films or Krauss’s writings testifies to what such an answer to the modern world involves.

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Part 2

Mirror: The Crisis of Modern “Self”-Experience

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Figure 4.1. Pablo Picasso, *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, 1912

4 | Kant and Collage

Judgment, Avant-Gardism, and the Sublime

THE SUBLIME

There is a remarkable accord among critics of aesthetic modernism about its meaning, an accord that unites a conservative like Karsten Harries and a radical like Jean-François Lyotard. According to both of these thinkers, the art that is called “modern” in the sense of following from the explorations of the avant-gardes owes its origin to the demand that a genuinely

modern self-understanding strip from itself all reference beyond the subject; aesthetic modernism tries to articulate a subject conceived in isolation from or even in opposition to the world. In this sense, Lyotard's effort to found avant-gardist aesthetic practices on the sublime (Burkian and Kantian) is in substantial accord with Harries's Heideggerian critique of modern art as the abandonment of the truth claims of traditional art. While they disagree about the validity of such a direction, these thinkers agree that modern art aims at the independence that I have called "narcissistic," and, as such, that it no longer makes claims about the role of human beings "in the world" (*Broken*, p. 82). And with this transformation, works cease to tell us about the world; instead they are radically about themselves, about a "presentness" or "presence" that is defined only in opposition to anything that could be represented in the world. The result is an aesthetic tradition whose ideal is the antirepresentational work, the work that either means only itself or (ideally) ceases to mean at all, converging upon an absolute silence.

There is, of course, a perfectly good justification for such a project. Modern subjectivism demands a vision of the world as both *constituted* for an observing subject (which is thereby free from it) and as *determining the subject* (which is thereby *unfree*) as part of a comprehensible natural world. As the scientific and technological revolutions of the seventeenth century gave increasing currency to the foundational belief of modern science that there *can be* nothing in the world (including human behavior) that escapes the causal network of nature, the field or territory in which to consider human freedom seemed to shrink progressively away. Since all understanding places that being back in the world, one is eventually left with a "free" subject without the possibility for any self-understanding.

It is, of course, Kant who presents this aporia most rigorously—and particularly the Kant of the first two *Critiques*. These works demonstrate the impossibility of an "understanding" that could really do justice to the "realm of freedom" within which human beings operate as moral agents. The operations of the faculty of the understanding, the "faculty of knowledge" with which the *Critique of Pure Reason* is concerned, presuppose an object that obeys "natural law"—that can be sufficiently explained in regard to categories like causality and location within space. The object of the understanding (to the extent that it *is* such an object) is not free. The subject that is the proper concern of the second *Critique* and Kant's other moral writings *is* free, but this subject can provide no understand-

ing of the laws of nature. Its legislation is solely based upon the “concept of freedom,” a legislation that cannot provide the material (an “intuition”) upon which any understanding is based (*CJ*, p. 13, Ak. 175). Corresponding to the two first *Critiques* is a view of the subject as essentially split: as objects of understanding, we are constrained by the laws of nature. As subjects of moral life, we are free but opaque to understanding.

Jean-François Lyotard defines the project of the avant-gardes precisely as the effort to preserve the freedom of the subject in the face of the ever-advancing objectification offered by science and the positivist political culture supporting it. According to such a reading, the aesthetic avant-gardes of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries represent what is, in fact, the first genuinely *modern* art—the first adequate effort to address the challenge posed by science. Or, if one is to be accurate about Lyotard’s terminology, avant-gardism is inherently *postmodern* in that it radicalizes the effort marked by modernist formalism, giving up on “good forms” in order to mark the heterogeneity of the modern subject.¹

According to Lyotard’s reading, the Enlightenment youth of modernity opens up the aesthetic task of defending the modern subject. It does not, however, stress an effective approach to that assignment right away. For the most part, what Lyotard will label “modern” or “modernist” is this first strategy of art and artists to do justice to the demands of subjectivism. While, in a key example, Kant was aware that the Enlightenment demanded a freedom from the “tutelage” evident in visions of a universe in which human beings took themselves to be assigned a preordained “place” in a divinely created order, he did not see the most radical implications of what he helped to set in motion. Kant’s third *Critique*, the *Critique of Judgment*, projects an aesthetic understanding whose main outlines remain bound to traditional instruments. The judgment of beauty—which Kant refers to as the judgment of “taste”—grounds his transcendental analysis of the working of judgment itself, and taste depends upon a conception of the beautiful object as a kind of “second nature.” That is, the critique of judgment itself depends upon our ability to experience, in beauty, an appropriateness of the object for cognition that is also the promise of the unity and harmony of the natural world.² In the beautiful, we experience ourselves through the “naturalness” of nature, through its ability to form the coherent whole that we assume in our search for knowledge. Thus, the presence of beauty in an object is like the presence of nature itself—or of the harmony between the world and human understanding that philosophy has called nature.

And the beautiful proves, by Lyotard's standards, to be of mixed value. Surely, as Kant demonstrates in the third *Critique*, the beautiful suffices for the modern project in that it provides no empirical knowledge of the object; the judgment of taste is purely "subjective," but this subjectivity is, nonetheless, mediated by "nature." It means that we find ourselves in the mirror of nature.

The price of that reflection, according to Lyotard, is the coherence of modernity's demand for self-understanding. The subject of the beautiful is still bound to the natural world for its sense of self, still formed by a tradition of "rightness" whose measure lies outside of the subjectivist principle of the modern. As a result of this limitation, it's not in the beautiful (or in the formalism that grows out of the tradition of the beautiful in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) that we can hope to find an aesthetic practice adequate to the task set by modernity.

On the other hand, what interests Lyotard about the *Critique of Judgment* is the presence within its pages of an apparent "mere appendage" (*CJ*, p. 100, Ak. 246; translation altered), one that turns out to be, in fact, a "breach" or "break" in the whole critical project—the "Analytic of the Sublime" (*Lessons*, p. 51). Unlike the beautiful, which is characterized by a harmony between nature and the subject, the experience of the sublime asserts their opposition: "What is added to nature finalized aesthetically is, in short, the loss of its finality. Under the name of the Analytic of the Sublime, a denatured aesthetic, or, better, an aesthetic of denaturing, breaks the proper order of the natural aesthetic and suspends the function it assumes in the project of unification" (*Lessons*, p. 53). Thus, the sublime opens a path for constructing an aesthetics suitable to the modern subject, but one that passes beyond the limitations of any merely naturalist "modernism" and thus earns in Lyotard the label, "post-modern."³

The sublime exists where the subject cannot find a form, cannot find that "natural" unity of beauty. The result is a paradoxical, "painful" pleasure. What happens, more or less, is that the subject, in its experience, say, of the raging ocean or of the majesty of the pyramids, is first frustrated in its search for a comprehensible form. The object proves too big or too powerful for aesthetic comprehension. As Lyotard puts it, "the sublime denies the imagination the power of forms, and denies nature the power to immediately affect thinking with forms" (*Lessons*, p. 55). But this check, or *Hemmung* as Lyotard calls it, is immediately followed by an ecstatic reaction, a reaction that Kant explains in relationship to the faculty of Reason. The failure of the imagination to conceive the ob-

ject incites Reason to conceive of the object that must transcend all presentation—the absolutely great or powerful. The peculiar “pleasure” of the sublime is simply the registration of this ability of the subject to think what it cannot represent. Kant writes, the sublime “indicates nothing purposive whatever in nature itself but only in what *use* we can make of our intuitions of nature so that we can feel a purposiveness within ourselves independent of nature” (*CJ*, p. 100, Ak. 246). The self-experience of the subject, therefore, pleases “by its resistance to the interest of the senses” (*CJ*, p. 127, Ak. 267).

This last point is essential to Lyotard’s understanding of *postmodernism* on the basis of the sublime. For, if the self-experience of the subject is an experience only *in simple opposition* to the “limits” or “forms” with which the experience of every concrete subjective identity takes place, then it can only resist every possible identification. Or, in other words, the only kind of understanding that the modern subject can have of itself is the existential understanding *that* it is: in Lyotard’s words, postmodernist art would be the project “which devotes its ‘little technique’ . . . to present the fact that the unrepresentable exists” (*Condition*, p. 78).

And, surely enough, Lyotard’s understanding of postmodernism through the sublime is most useful for explaining the *oppositional* quality of much aesthetic avant-gardism. He is most effective in discussing how the primary weapon of many avant-garde artists has been the polemical tension between what the individual work presents and inherited rules for what constitutes art. Here, the sublime lies not in any quality of the aesthetic object but in the opposition between that object and the implicit rules that we bring to viewing it:

The task of having to bear witness to the indeterminate carries away, one after another, the barriers set up by the writings of theorists and by the manifestos of the painters themselves. . . . Do we have to have stretchers so that the canvas is taut? No. What about colors? Malevich’s black square on white had already answered this question in 1915. Is an object necessary? Body art and happenings went about proving that it is not. A space, at least, a space in which to display as Duchamp’s “fountain” still suggested? Daniel Buren’s work testifies to the fact that even this is subject to doubt. Whether or not they belong to the current that art history calls Minimalism or Arte Povera, the investigations of the avant-gardes question one by one the constituents one might have thought “elementary” or at the “origin” of painting.⁴

The Frame and the Mirror

At every point in this history, what is presented (the indeterminate) is “not that,” not related to whatever particular quality of aesthetic objects you wish to rely upon at the moment. The subject experiences itself at the limit of the imagination’s disappearance, where the senses have been defeated and all that it is possible to say is “that” it is. The modern subject, asserted in a postmodernist avant-gardism, is empty.

In this way, the art that Lyotard labels sublime lives up to the demands of the modern in a way that defeats the *modernist* aesthetics of the beautiful. In replacing “nature” with the “denatured,” “form” with the “formless,” “limit” with the “limitless,” Lyotard succeeds in outlining a genuinely modern self-experience. But it is no longer a self-understanding. Indeed, essential to Lyotard’s position is the impossibility of such an understanding, the necessarily *aporetic* nature of the project that Kant opens up in the *Critique of Judgment*. The modern subject defies understanding in its radical freedom from nature. There *can be* no reflection of this subject in any mirror external to itself.

Lyotard’s reconstruction is interesting because it corresponds to an actual mode of self-understanding, one that has indeed proven powerful within the cultures of modernism and postmodernism. Certainly, Duchamp, about whom Lyotard has written considerably, demands to be understood in relationship to such a sublime principle, as does Warhol. Indeed, Lyotard’s understanding is essential for understanding the quality of avant-gardism that is often called its “negativity”—the quality that leads to the restless, dissatisfied “progress” of art in the period of classical avant-gardism. The category of the sublime seems perfect for describing those “shock” effects that have been so essential to the development of historical avant-gardism.

But if that’s *all* that’s going on in avant-gardism, then it would seem that the argument for any neo-avant-gardism today (which is, after all, what Lyotard intends to advocate) must be pretty weak. As Peter Bürger is only one of many to point out, the effectiveness of avant-gardist shock today has diminished to nothing in a culture where outrageousness is itself a basis for commodification, where the very *ethos* of shock has been co-opted by the capitalist economy.⁵ When Mondrian is “perfect” for coffee mugs and Warhol a small industry, an avant-gardism of the sublime loses any real effectiveness. But the experience of shock doesn’t and can’t add anything to our self-understanding. Insofar as it reduces to an aesthetics of the sublime, Lyotard’s position is, by definition, a formula for a *narcissistic* avant-gardism. That is, it depends upon the progressive pur-

gation from art of every remainder of the “external,” every dependence of the subject upon an other. Thus, if aesthetic avant-gardism is indeed reducible to a strategy of shock, it is really indefensible today.

COLLAGE AND SHOCK

Natural beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form, by which the object seems as it were predetermined for our power of judgment, so that this beauty constitutes in itself an object of our liking. On the other hand, if something arouses in us, merely in apprehension and without any reasoning on our part, a feeling of the sublime, then it may indeed appear, in its form, contrapurposive for our power of judgment, incommensurate with our power of exhibition, and, as it were violent to our imagination, and yet we judge it all the more sublime for that. We see from this that we express ourselves entirely incorrectly when we call this or that *object of nature* sublime, even though we may quite correctly call a great many natural objects beautiful; for how can we call something by a term of approval if we apprehend as in itself contrapurposive? (*CJ*, p. 99, Ak. 245)

If you consider another Picasso collage (surely a product of the historical avant-gardes if there ever was one!) in the same terms that were relevant (in chapter 1) to *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, the picture of a sublime avant-gardist practice immediately becomes more complicated. In Picasso's *Glass and Bottle of Suze* (1912), it is not only the case that the primary “foregrounded” “reality,” the newspaper, is paradoxically used to form both the background for the still life and elements of the still life (part of the glass and the liquid within it); the apparently foregrounded table calls such a simple (though already paradoxical) reading into question (see figure 4.1). On the whole, it stands in front of its newspaper ground, but Picasso compromises this simple reversal of foreground and background at several points. For instance, in the upper left, he uses both charcoal shadowing and a black cutout—itsself ambiguously indicating both a “hole” in and a surface over the table and bottle—to create the impression that one block of newsprint actually lays on top of the surface of the table but has been simply painted blue so as to blend into it. This reading is, in turn, called into question by closer observation, which shows, first, that the block so treated is not single and is partially constructed from a piece of newspaper whose columns don't at all fit the shape “over” the

table, and, second, that there is, in any case, a gap between the edge of the newspaper and the table. We are, in other words, left entangled in a complex web of figure/ground or figure/field reversals.

Now, the first thing to note about this kind of play at the level of visual gestalts is that it is indeed “shocking,” in the specific sense of violating any possible unity of form. If you’re looking for the kind of “formal” beauty here that we associate with painting in its classical moments, you will be disappointed. As my analysis of another collage in chapter 1 indicated, there’s something about precisely this kind of instability, this indefinite postponement of visual resolution, that immediately distances it from the artistic, and particularly painterly, traditions of the beautiful. Peter Bürger’s discussion of the experience demanded by collage describes this in terms of the work’s refusal to provide *meaning*, since it

neither creates a total impression that would permit interpretation of its meaning nor can whatever impression may be created be accounted for by recourse to the individual parts, for they are no longer subordinated to a pervasive intent. This refusal to provide meaning is experienced as shock by the recipient. (*Avant-Garde*, p. 80)

Unlike the beautiful object, Picasso’s *Glass and Bottle of Suze* seems “in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgment, to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to be, as it were, an outrage on the imagination.” Because of this instability of reading—this failure of a “pervasive intent”—we can discount, to a large extent, the aesthetic and compositional intention that obviously accompanies Picasso’s collage technique. Our primary experience of the collage is *not* as a beautiful object.⁶ To that extent, *Glass and Bottle of Suze* does, surely enough, seem to demand analysis using the conceptual apparatus of the sublime.

But the same ludic quality that disappoints, indeed violates, our expectations of beauty, also seems to place *Glass and Bottle of Suze* in the Kantian category of the beautiful, or at least in the category of *reflection* that Kant associates with the beautiful. *Glass and Bottle of Suze* seems always about to “come into focus,” about to give you an adequate reading of what the painting depicts and in relationship to what. That’s what keeps the viewer going through an indefinite series of gestalt shifts. In the language of the *Critique of Judgment*, the work seems *purposive*, though its purposiveness, its appropriateness for understanding, comes not in the approximation of form to a conceptualizable figure but rather in the relationship of figure and field. You seem always about to induce

what is the particular element and what the context in which that and other elements must be considered. And it's that promise, seeming to come *from the work*, that Kant associates with the beautiful. In its unresolved clarity of articulation, in its invitation to *play*, this collage seems "preadapted to our power of judgment, so that it thus forms of itself an object of our delight." To that extent, it seems that the collage *is* like a beautiful object; or, at least, it is an object demanding the same "play of the faculties" that the beautiful object should.

Thus, *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, at the very least, demands consideration in a broader context than Lyotard's polemic would give it. To the extent that it occasions reflection, the cubist collage remains within the boundaries of judgment and refuses consideration in the terms of the sublime. In fact, the appearance of sublimity in the collage comes from a characteristic that makes it inappropriate for consideration as *either* beautiful *or* sublime. How, then, to consider it?

AESTHETIC JUDGMENT RECONSIDERED

While in some ways the really difficult question that Kant leaves for interpreters is what exactly constitutes the *difference* between reflection *per se* and particularly *aesthetic* reflection, it's easy, at least, to *define* the aesthetic for Kant: Kant tells us in the introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* that "what is merely subjective in the presentation of an object, i.e., what constitutes its reference to the subject and not to the object, is its aesthetic character" (*CJ*, p. 28, Ak. 188). The aesthetic "refers to" or presents the subject from *within* the representation of the object: it is that which allows an object to not only occasion a self-experience (the sublime does that) but also to correspond to that experience.

At one level, however, such a process of reference belongs to every judgment. To see this demands that we first recall what Kant *means* by judgment or, as he sometimes specifies it, "reflection" or "reflective judgment." These terms refer to the process wherein, faced with a particular "this," we conceptualize it. Such a process is vital because of the structure of knowledge revealed in Kant's first *Critique*, the *Critique of Pure Reason*: that work has enabled us to understand the necessity by which all inquiry is guided by the fundamental laws of experience—the categories, space, time. But such necessity, while demanding that all understanding follow basic rules, nonetheless leaves the determination of specific laws and rules of nature open. That is, we know that natural objects, as objects, must be causally explicable, but that doesn't at all determine *what*

an individual object's causal explanation might be. This is where reflective judgment enters the scene. Reflective judgment is the process by which we try to determine the shape of all that remains contingent about nature. Starting from a mere unknown "this," we reflect upon the appropriate concepts and laws for the determination of the object.

It's vital to this process that it's contingent, that the phenomenon observed at any given time *could* be classified in any number of ways, and that science might or might not be able to find a proper way of understanding it. Kant is primarily interested in the *faith* or "hope" with which the judging subject enters the field of its scientific labors, the assumption that we carry around with us, when we try to understand things, that they will submit to the mind's inquiries and group themselves in relationship to other things in an orderly way. And, Kant insists, insofar as this "hope" is realized we experience this as a feeling of *pleasure*.⁷ For Kant "pleasure" means the part of an experience that is not simply reducible to the content of knowledge: as he puts it, "that subjective feature of a presentation *which cannot at all become an element of cognition* is the *pleasure or displeasure* connected with that presentation" (*CJ*, p. 29, Ak. 189).

Thus, every cognition—necessarily preceded by a step wherein the imagination elicits a concept of the understanding by presenting the manifold as "purposive" (for conceptualization)—involves a subjective experience, a sense of pleasure: at this level it seems that *every* judgment is aesthetic, or, at least, involves an aesthetic element. But it is not the case that we really *experience* this pleasure in the case of every cognition; or, to put the same thing in other words, only in the case of an aesthetic judgment *proper*; do we *always* notice the pleasure occasioned by conceptual purposiveness. Thus, Kant speaks of the way that, with familiar facts about the natural world, "we no longer feel any noticeable pleasure resulting from our being able to grasp nature," since "we have gradually come to mix it in with mere cognition and no longer take any special notice of it" (*CJ*, p. 27, Ak. 187). At least with familiar knowledge, the actual concept that orders nature thus overwrites and effaces the sense or feeling that makes it possible. In these cases, a concept trumps a feeling, preserving the information ("purposiveness") that it inscribes in the superior form of an actual rule or law (a "purpose"). Or, as Werner Pluhar writes in his translator's introduction, the scientist no longer "notices" the pleasure that he/she must, nonetheless, "feel," because he/she "is concerned mainly with cognition" (*CJ*, p. lix).

Given this model of cognition and affect, one might say that the difference in aesthetic judgment is that instead of tending to fade behind the objective knowledge gained by it, it maintains itself. Nothing occludes the feeling of purposiveness, obscuring it with a determining purpose that, in becoming familiar, will cease to provide pleasure. In aesthetic judgment conceptualization must always be *insufficient* to the understanding of the object. That is, in fact, one way of defining the aesthetic for Kant—the way that he returns to whenever he speaks of the “play of the faculties.” It is a reflective process wherein no sufficient concept is forthcoming and the interpretive movement between imagination and understanding continues indefinitely.⁸ In aesthetic reflective judgment, none of a series of concepts is sufficient to *determine* the particular “this” in question.⁹ Samuel Fleischacker, in a recent book on judgment, describes such a process:

Suppose you are trying to show a friend the beauty in a Jackson Pollock or Anselm Kiefer painting. The sensory material itself is admittedly confusing, but you feel it has some kind of order, and you point out to your friend Pollock’s ways of questioning the traditional distinction between line and color, or Kiefer’s ironic use of myth. These concepts—these organizational tools—help give some coherence to the sensory intuitions and there is a pleasure in using them to bring erstwhile confusion into some kind of focus. But your friend, if she is at all aesthetically sensitive, will not long be satisfied by your remarks, and will complain there is much *more* in the paintings, that your conceptual tools are inadequate. The randomness of Pollock’s way of distributing paint, she might say, defeats any thematic reading of his work, or the thickness of the painting’s texture is too much left out by a bald contrast between line and color. (*Third*, p. 24)

Furthermore, if the deferral of purpose in this kind of interpretive process extends the feeling of *pleasure* implicit in reflection, keeps it from fading behind a sufficient concept, then there are also other ways that it seems to refer to the “subject.” In fact, you might say that while the absence of a determining concept indicates *that* the process of judgment refers to the subject rather than any object, the nature of the process itself indicates *what* the reference contains. As Fleischacker’s example indicates, reflection swings between the individual and apparently immediate world of “sense” and the social and universal world of the under-

standing. Moreover, as the later pages of the *Critique of Judgment* make clear, the fluctuation in reflective judgment is also between the two heterogeneous realms defined by the two earlier *Critiques*; for the representations of the imagination, of “sense,” are “free” (if only in a preautonomous sense) in their relationship to the understanding that is potentially determinative (i.e., like nature).¹⁰ Precisely because they are *free* of sufficient determining conceptual content, the faculties can “play,” that is, move from one conceptual understanding to another. Nonetheless, it is vital that reflection *also* involves the understanding.¹¹ Judgment’s reflexive quality follows from these two moments: the judging subject shuttles back and forth between “two incommensurable ways of approaching phenomena” that are nonetheless bound together by their “need” for each other.¹² The experience of judgment is, indeed, the experience of a kind of “unity” of the faculties, but its nature as *process*—indeed, as we will see, the *necessity* that it appear *only* as process—guarantees that this is always a “paradoxical” unity, a unity *in* heterogeneity. As a presentation of the subject to itself, reflection underscores precisely this heterogeneous unification.

What muddies the waters for this reading of aesthetic reflection in Kant is a second, and overriding, interpretation of the bond between judgment and the aesthetic—the idea of beauty with the related concept of “form.” These concepts give the reader an alternative—and, in the *Critique of Judgment*, far more developed—notion of what about a particular judgment earns it the descriptor, “aesthetic.” And this alternative, it turns out, leads to an entirely different, and (I will claim) problematic, notion of how judgment enters into aesthetic experience.

In this version of the aesthetic, Kant starts from the problem of taste. What is a judgment of taste, the judgment that something is beautiful? It is, first of all, the judgment that a given object is capable of presenting the subject to itself, of inducing the pleasure associated with purposiveness. But it has to be more than that, too: for, as we’ve seen, every comprehensible object is *aesthetic* in this sense. It must also be, or imply, the judgment that a particular object is suitable for *indefinite* reflection, that it is both purposive and not reducible to any given purpose. One might imagine such a judgment *resulting from* an enduring empirical process of judgment. When we can’t find an adequate concept for an object that seems to call for understanding—this account would claim—we call that object “beautiful.”¹³

But, while there are passages that seem to conform to this understanding of taste, Kant makes clear from the start that this understanding is not what he primarily means: I might point to those passages where Kant indicates the superiority of natural over man-made beauty. For example, in a note to §17 in the *Critique of Judgment*, he answers the objection that under “purposiveness without a purpose,” one might include “implements obtained from sepulchral tumuli and supplied with a hole, as if for inserting a handle.” Such objects “by their shape manifestly indicate a finality” but that purpose simply remains unknown. These enigmatic things are not beautiful, Kant maintains, because “by the very fact of their being recognized as products of craft,” it must also be “immediately” recognized “that their shape is attributed to some purpose or other and to a definite end.” In opposition, a tulip *is* beautiful, since the finality that its perception involves calls for no “reference” to “any purpose whatever” (*CJ*, p. 84, n. Ak. 236; translation slightly altered). That is, beauty is to be found only where we feel that there is no *necessary* definite end intruding upon the general purposiveness of the object, even an end that is not obvious in perception of the object. But we can certainly imagine that the *process* of reflection upon those grave objects might continue indefinitely, despite the obvious fact that they did once have a specific purpose. Nonetheless, for Kant they do not qualify as beautiful, which makes it clear that taste cannot refer to actual reflection.

But this, of course, returns us to that central problem of modern aesthetics. It would seem that, if it doesn’t refer to the process of interpretation, the judgment of taste must point to the object upon which it reflects. Kant deflects this apparently inescapable conclusion, thus maintaining the *subjective* nature of this *purposiveness without purpose* (*CJ*, p. 84, Ak. 236), by means of aesthetic form. In §VII of the published introduction to the *Critique of Judgment*, he first introduces the idea of “form” in reference to the play of the faculties: if such play is “merely formal,” then we experience the pleasure resulting from it *rather than* the content that a determining concept would provide. In this guise, Kant’s formalism seems self-evident.

But the trick here is that Kant immediately transfers the language of form from the subjective process of reflection to the object occasioning that reflection: a couple of lines after writing of the form of judgment, Kant suggests that a judgment of taste concerns “the form of an object.” He can make this move because he believes form to be “that which is purely subjective in the representation of an object” but which also “is

incapable of becoming an element of cognition,” that is, of becoming mere content (*CJ*, pp. 29–30, Ak. 189–90). Kant opposes form to “matter” or the “sense” of intuition. Form does not and cannot be seen except through the intervention of our imagination: it is the visible appearance of purposiveness, comprehensibility—something that *we* supply to the object. Thus, at least in a limited sense, form is no quality at all of *the object*, since it is the record *inscribed around the material of the object* of our potential interaction with it.

If this seems like a weak defense of the “subjectivity” of form (and I think it is), then there is a stronger, if only implicit, idea here—an idea that formalist followers of Kant will make explicit. Unlike all objective interpretations, the object’s aesthetic form defies further elaboration. Indeed, it is easy to see that if one follows this formalist route, one ends up not with the “hermeneutics” of reflective judgment but with a description of our interaction with the beautiful that is antihermeneutical. The beautiful would be precisely that which resists interpretation, demanding instead a kind of instantaneous apprehension of its formal comprehensibility. As we’ve seen, for Michael Fried, the formalist ideal demands that we experience such (“beautiful”) art by means of a radical presentness in which it is “as though, if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.”¹⁴

This leads me to observe an ironic quality of aesthetic form as it emerges in the *Critique of Judgment*. It curtails actual reflection in the name of a possible indefinite reflection. The judgment of taste here depends not upon an actual reflective process (wherein, at some point, one says, metaphorically, “this is going to continue indefinitely”) but rather upon some kind of initial grasp (in the colloquial sense) of the object. The object itself just seems to be the kind of thing that is both appropriate for understanding and resistant to reductive understanding. As a result of this aesthetic grasp, reflection becomes unnecessary. The beautiful “form” of the object *guarantees* (or at least asserts) that, no matter how hard we try, we will not be able to do conceptual justice to this object precisely because it is unified in a way that reflects the unity of the subject rather than any particular unity of an object. Because of the beautiful object’s form, it’s not necessary that self-understanding advance through the mediation of actual reflection; it’s not necessary that the subject undergo the temporal heterogeneity at the center of judgment as a *process*. *Form takes the place of a determining concept, insuring that no such concept will interfere with the experience of the object.* In taking this place, in

securing reflection and guaranteeing its subjective nature, the need for an actual “play of the faculties” is eliminated.

COLLAGE, FORM, AND THE REEMERGENCE OF REFLECTION

The first chapter of the present book should serve already to indicate that there is something deeply problematic about an art that attempts to approximate the ideal of form, of presentness, and thus that an aesthetics of taste or of the beautiful is bound to lead art onto the rocks. That’s the case both because of the fact of “narcissism” of an aesthetics of the beautiful and because of the social and political role that such narcissism has played in Western culture in the past two and a half centuries. In this, it would seem, I agree with Lyotard in his polemic against the aesthetics of the beautiful. As my discussion above should make clear, however, I do not concur with Lyotard that the only—or even the best—alternative to the beautiful lies in the tradition of the sublime. Kant’s analysis of the relationship of judgment and the aesthetic already indicates another possibility, the possibility indicated by the “play of the faculties.”

An art that could genuinely occasion the reflection Kant associates with the “play of the faculties” would have to have two characteristics: First, it would have to resist being grasped through form: it would have to lack the “formal” guarantee that it is *indefinitely* comprehensible. But, second and of equal importance, it would also disallow categorization through the sublime: that is, it would still have to produce the “pleasure” that we associate with *comprehensibility*. In fact, such an art would lie precisely *between* sublime and beautiful in offering a promise of cognition but refusing to promise *limitless* comprehensibility. That is, it would save aesthetic reflection from the *de facto challenge* to judgment offered by beauty. It’s precisely here that I’d like to place cubist collage. *Glass and Bottle of Suze* could be said to offer the possibility of a return to an aesthetics of reflection *instead of* an aesthetics of the beautiful.

Return, for a moment, to those mysterious “implements obtained from sepulchral tumuli” that Kant so vehemently excludes from the realm of the beautiful. Kant is muddying the waters in his anxiousness to disassociate such objects from beauty. The “purposiveness” with which the *Critique of Judgment* is concerned is not “usefulness” in general, but rather suitability for the specific use of conceptualization. In other words, insofar as those archaic instruments both defy our comprehension of them and promise that they are comprehensible, they are suitable for an

aesthetic process of reflection—though they are not, of course, beautiful. Consideration of Kant's example, however, also underscores the need for one additional characteristic in order to qualify something as demanding aesthetic reflection: while it is not necessary (and is, as I've tried to show, actually forbidden) that the object *promise*, through a beautiful form, that it could maintain indefinite reflection, it is absolutely imperative that, *in fact*, the object evade finite comprehension. We can imagine a situation in which those same implements of Kant's would have to qualify as, in some sense, suitable for *aesthetic* attention—where (like the railroad transformers in Schwitters's *Merzbau*) they asserted a mysterious incomprehensibility despite all scientific studies of their former uses, thus actually *transforming them* into items of aesthetic interest.¹⁵

And, of course, precisely this combination of a promise of comprehensibility and a de facto incomprehensibility is what we discovered in our analysis of Picasso's collage—in its refusal to establish a definitive, “formal” field combined with its ability to inspire *hope* for a resolution of gestalt issues. The presence of a limited number of elements, the approximation of many of these elements to the visual signifiers for things found in a café (for example, the blue oval of the “table” surface) all promise us that the work could be “figured out.” But every time we feel certain that we might be able to get the figures clear, to defigure the painting, we find that the combination of elements, or the particular positioning of them on the canvas, defies our very desire to establish what's a figure and what's a field. *Glass and Bottle of Suze* demands a reflection that is *aesthetic* precisely to the extent that, in an actual process of interpretation, it both promises final meaning and always refuses to grant it. We might call this the aesthetics of the tease.

Exactly this teasing quality distinguishes the aesthetic at work here from Kant's sublime. In the sublime, as the text of the *Critique of Judgment* tells us, we may indeed get involved with a process where we go “on and on” in fascinated horror in our perception of the sublime scene, but any meaning or pleasure that we derive from such a process does not, insists Kant, represent the object. It is for this reason that the “Analytic of the Sublime” locates it in the interaction of imagination and *reason* rather than of imagination and the understanding: the *comprehensibility* of the beautiful object contributes to our enjoyment of it, allowing us to say, after a fashion, that we take pleasure *in it*. Such is not the case with the sublime, as we've already shown above: the reader will recall that the sublime pleases by its opposition “to the interest of the senses” (*CJ*, p. 127, Ak. 267). That is, in the face of a scene (say, the raging ocean during

a storm) that seems to threaten comprehension, reason calls forth ideas to which the scene itself is “inadequate” (*CJ*, p. 99, Ak. 245–46): ideas like the overall purposiveness of nature. These ideas, in turn, “induce” the mind “to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness” (*CJ*, p. 99, Ak. 246). The painful pleasure of the sublime results from this ability of reason to conquer nature at its most powerful, to indicate that it is *not part of* nature.

On the contrary, the pleasure that we take in Picasso’s collage is still situated *in* what our senses give us. Or, to put it more exactly, such pleasure is representationally related to the aesthetic object. The collage itself seems to call for interpretation, seems to be “meaningful.” But insofar as Picasso’s work doesn’t wield aesthetic form, insofar as it’s not “beautiful” in Kant’s sense, there is also nothing about the work itself that could be said to adequately present the *subject*. That is, the self-reflexive moment here involves *both* something that seems to be present in the work (comprehensibility) and something that doesn’t (the impossibility of actual comprehension). Self-(re)presentation *involves* an element aesthetically present in the work but also an element that defies the terms of such presence.

Glass and Bottle of Suze does, nonetheless, hint at the *possibility* that this work may be indefinitely interpretable: clearly the apparent complexity of the work as composition, its competing materials and elements, when seen in the light of traditions in painting, indicates such a potential. But the key here lies in the difference between the *assurance* or *guarantee* sufficient to motivate a judgment of taste (in the case of the beautiful) and the *hint* or *clue* sufficient only to motivate actual reflection (with collage). If the juxtaposition of a label for the “Aperitif of the Gentility” and the chiaroscuro effects achievable with charcoal or of bits of newspaper and wallpaper and a painterly composition seem to resist immediate comprehension, if they seem (even probably) to be incomprehensible, then this doesn’t in any way achieve what aesthetic form does: it doesn’t *secure* the freedom of the elements within a work.

Precisely on account of its strange, half-representation of the subject, *Glass and Bottle of Suze* can emblemize a genuinely *hermeneutic* tradition of art production. Unlike either the formalist tradition derived from the aesthetics of the beautiful or the antiformalist tradition (minimalism, conceptual art, and so on) derived from the aesthetics of the sublime, the aesthetics of the tease demands actual interpretation, reflection. Indeed, it demands an *indefinite* process—one that is not interrupted by the judgment of taste. Art that produces such interpretation does not

tend, as do the histories of both other traditions, to a kind of *reductio* minimum, a presence that defies further articulation. Indeed, one might say that the aesthetic decisions leading to the “invention” of collage by Picasso and Braque are precisely those needed to found a kind of art that will avoid such reduction. On account of the tease, collage is explicitly an art of open meaning.

In this fashion, collage resists the aestheticist interpretation of modern art upon which Lyotard and Harries (along with numerous others) agree and, in so doing, it suggests an alternative avant-gardism. Here is an art that is genuinely modern, an art of the subject, but also—just because of this very quality—explicitly hermeneutic. It might be useful here, furthermore, to repeat Lyotard’s gesture in relationship to Kant: just as, for him, the “postmodern” aesthetics of the sublime follow the “modern” aesthetics of the beautiful, so it’s possible to affirm the postmodernism of collage. But this postmodernism doesn’t so much *oppose* the Kantian analysis of judgment as return to its essential insight, critiquing it from within. This avant-gardism doesn’t so much depend upon shock (though, once again, that’s certainly at work in it) as upon the interpretive play of Kantian reflection.

Which is to hint at why it is that, growing from a hidden potential of modern aesthetics, collage brings with it neither a full-blown tradition nor the certainties of a “movement.” If collage is postmodern, if it, too, follows the “mistake” of the beautiful, then it does so not with reference to an alternative tradition (that of the sublime) but rather through the non- or antitradition that both founded the beautiful and was repressed by it. This is a better reflection of the postmodern condition than is Lyotard’s neosurrealist aesthetic agonism. In many of his writings on aesthetics, Lyotard takes up the polemical voice of the avant-gardist manifesto, waving the banner of the sublime in a fashion familiar to students of futurism, constructivism, or surrealism. But a postmodernism of *collage* precisely resists the voice of the manifesto, the movement, the “war” of the artist against bourgeois society. With collage, there’s no question of rounding up the shock troops of the revolution—even of a post-Marxist disillusioned revolution. In a period like today, when the ideological fervor of aesthetic modernism seems an ever remoter possibility, collage seems an appropriate emblem.

Once you see that collage represents a third category of the aesthetic, a category that Kantian aesthetics elides with the beautiful, then you must also reconsider the value that Kant grants to beauty: it may be that much

of what gives the beautiful its place in classical aesthetics doesn't properly belong to it at all. It may be that the experience of *freedom* that we associate with the beautiful work of art, for example, doesn't belong to it in its beauty but *rather* in its ability to inspire interpretation. If I can indicate, in Picasso's collage, a kind of object that, in its persistent combination of interpretability and refusal of any sufficient interpretation, brings us into contact with our subjectivity, then this raises a question: is much of what we attribute to contact with the beautiful actually attributable to this more basic aesthetic quality?

The key here is that beauty—form—*adds* something to aesthetic reflection. It adds the promise, the guarantee, of endless reflection. But it really promises something much more fundamental—that the rift in experience, the divide between nature and freedom opened by modernity, will be healed. It promises that subjectivity will appear to itself in a complete and sufficient manner.¹⁶ And it does this precisely so as to secure this subjectivity, to capture it for knowledge, for our modern self-understanding. But this placement of the modern subject, in guaranteeing its *freedom*, *actually* compromises it. Freedom secured is actually freedom foreclosed. Think, for a moment, of Narcissus as described by Ovid, captured, paralyzed by his own image in a pool of water. The function of form, of that which demands a judgment of taste, is this capture, and its result just such an incapacity to actively engage the world. Faced with your inability to actually say anything about the beautiful object, you are forced instead into an act of social aggression: "It's beautiful," you judge, daring anyone to disagree. Only in this challenge to all comers is one able to release some of the frustration at being wordlessly captured by the beautiful object.

This may seem an overly subtle psychology; but in this matter of the beautiful, only the most subtle distinctions can capture what's at stake. Surely, we have all "had" an experience that we, too, have attributed to beauty—an overflow of meaningfulness, a certain dumbness before the phenomenon, awe. However, my point here is that all such experiences are not the same: they can be distinguished on the basis of whether they lead to interpretation or to obsession, to the "play of the faculties" or to the "timeless" frustration of the beautiful. While this may not be an objective distinction at all (there may be no set of qualities that objectively corresponds to "beauty" or to aesthetic interest, for that matter), it does, I think correspond to two distinct subjective *approaches* to aesthetic phenomena—two different ways of producing or receiving aesthetic objects. It may be that much of what we tend to call beautiful actually be-

longs to the aesthetics of the tease. On the other hand, it may also be the case that the cult of beauty itself marks an unnoticed danger within our world, a danger that extends well beyond the realm of what we usually call aesthetic life.¹⁷

THE AESTHETICS OF COLLAGE

The uncertainty with which collage demands that we approach the question of its open interpretability disallows the siting of judgment produced by taste. The collage leaves us *uncertain* about the openness of our reflection upon it; it is thoroughly permeated by this uncertainty principle. But, as a possibility, this open interpretability cannot be linked dialectically with the *actual* comprehensibility of the object: there is no “between” between them. In effect, the object leaves us with *two* possibilities: either it *is* indefinitely interpretable, in which case it is purposive without purpose, or it is only finitely interpretable, in which case it is merely not-yet-cognized-but-cognizable. Thus, it avoids the role of dialectical mediator. Doubt keeps us from simply folding this experience between purposiveness and purposelessness. Thus, their combination doesn’t compromise the need for an *actual* subjective process.

In effect, *Glass and Bottle of Suze* forces us to see the relationship between the play of the faculties and the judgment of taste in a new light: it forces us to see that the bond upon which Kant built the argument for book 1 of the *Critique of Judgment*—between the beautiful and aesthetic reflection—really doesn’t exist. Instead, it is the aesthetics of collage that promises to disclose a genuinely modern dimension of self-experience.

But this aesthetics also has some surprises in store. For a work of art that attempts to evade the entrapments of beauty but remains a site for open reflection explores territory that Kant, himself fixated upon the beautiful and taste, could not imagine. Having noted the hermeneutic element in collage, I must immediately write that the result of such a “Kantian” reading of Picasso’s collage must be as much to transform our understanding of judgment as to add a category to those by which we tend to consider modern and postmodern art. Such a transformation occurs in a number of ways.

Uncertainty

In the case of collage, the affective nature of representation, the feeling of pleasure that we associate with aesthetic play, is fundamentally *contin-*

gent. Remember that, in opposition to the assurance given by the beautiful object, with the collage we never definitively establish that any object actually occasions an *unending* play of the faculties. There's always the *possibility* that an adequate characterization will put an end to reflection, hiding the feeling of comprehensibility behind the actual comprehension of the object. In other words, the self-presentation of the subject in reflecting on a Picasso collage is colored by doubt. Let me suggest that this coloration affects the *modality* in which we experience this object. Instead of asserting "this experience resents me to myself," reflection here always implicitly transpires as question: "*is this experience me?*"¹⁸

All of which suggests that an essential characteristic of much that we call art in the twentieth century—art that, in its aesthetic status, follows the tradition of cubist collage—is that we cannot be *certain* it is art. This is not simply because, having lost the beautiful, we are without any clue as to the nature of art. Nor is it only because the avant-gardes follow the kind of sublime strategy of "shock" endorsed by Lyotard, because they try to violate whatever rule it is that commonly defines something as an artwork. Even when we have some sense of what it is that would constitute art (say, the potential to occasion aesthetic reflection), and even when a work is not simply an essay in oedipal rebellion, the doubt remains. Perhaps the most interesting situation where today we constantly have to ask, "is it art?" arises from a new way of making artworks, a way of constructing art that refuses to offer the reassurances and certainties that beauty gives us. Any one of such works *may* offer a site for aesthetic reflection. But, then again, it may not, too.

Collage represents through the process of reflection alone and it doesn't make us certain of ourselves. It presents us to ourselves in the mode of *doubt*. Those are the first essential differences between collage and the beautiful. There are others.

A Different Sociability

In thus jettisoning the certainty of form for an uncertain reflection, collage also forces us to reconsider the relationship posited by Kant between taste and "sociability," a relationship that Kant both posits and evades in the final version of the third *Critique*.

In 1787, Kant had already begun work on a "critique of taste," a critique that, most historians agree, was to bind judgments of taste with our very ability to be social. Most likely the sections of the *Critique of Judgment* dealing with communicability and Kant's peculiar translation of *sensus communis* date from this period. While it's commonplace to no-

tice the later displacement of the critical role originally given to these sections by means of the material dealing with nature and natural science, few have noted what now can appear as a significant rupture in the intention of even the earlier texts. On the one hand, there is a strain of the argument that is at least consistent with the theme of a bond between taste and nature: this is the argument that ties the “necessity” claimed in judgments of beauty with a “disinterested” “common sense,” one that is really no “sense” at all but rather the *feeling* of the harmony of the faculties. By this interpretation, the “feeling” produced by this accord of imagination and understanding is universal precisely to the extent that we can assume, as underlying cognition, that others also must be capable of such a feeling: the beautiful is *communicable* because it depends upon a universal disposition (*CJ*, p. 158, Ak. 292).

On the other hand, certain implications of Kant’s discussion of sociability in §39 of the *Critique of Judgment* are often overlooked precisely because they don’t fit very well the larger project binding beauty, nature, and form in the finished *Critique*. If the emphasis of the sections I mentioned above lies upon the divide between the experience of taste and the “interests” of the senses, then in §39 Kant also offers a more nuanced view of judgment’s relationship to sociability. The distinction there is not simply between the interested particularity of sense experience and the disinterested universality of taste: Kant also distinguishes judgment from the use of ideas of reason in moral life and the application of concepts in cognition. Both of these latter practices differ from judgment in the *certainty* they offer. At least from a Kantian view, there’s no arguing with moral laws or concepts of nature: their universality allows them to be *demonstrable* from the acts or objects involved.

But precisely what characterizes judgments of taste is that they defy *both* the pure individuality and particularity of sensations *and* the inalterable universality of cognitions and practical ideas (see *Third*, p. 30). They occupy a space in some sense *between* these two extremes, a space constituted by the possibility of *discussion* and *argument*. In other words, it is a genuinely social field—one in which the issue is already more definite than the amorphous stuff of sense but also less certain than the products of the cognitive or moral faculties. Only about the results of judgments can we really argue. Reflection thus serves as the precondition for sociability, understood not as a utopian social agreement (pace Habermas) but rather as the space within which dispute and disagreement as well as possible consensus can occur.

In other words, when you peel away those parts of Kant’s arguments

prejudiced by beauty—when you look at judgment through the lens of collage rather than beautiful art—you see that judgment alone opens the possibility of the social, understood as that sphere within which a genuinely human uncertainty is located.

Collage thus also hints at what defies the representational either/or Lyotard so ably defends: the “representational” moment there depends not upon a presence of nature within the object but rather upon the social nature of the artwork’s representational language. In judging, we are members of a sphere that transcends us, but this field is not Kantian “nature.” Rather, it is the field that is a priori open to interpretation and dispute.

Judging between Worlds

The contingency of aesthetic judgment and its bond to sociability demand only relatively minor changes in our understanding of reflection. Not so the next change; it necessitates that we rethink judgment itself.

The interesting thing about the interpretive process that I’ve described with *Glass and Bottle of Suze* is how badly it fits Kant’s epistemological purposes in the *Critique of Judgment*. Most glaringly, we see that’s the case in trying to figure out the *kind* of judgment that it demands. Kant only allows two types—one (determinative) where we start from a universal and find a particular suitable to it and the other (reflective) where we start from a particular and seek the proper conceptual universal. It’s the latter that he calls judgment proper and it’s the latter, as well, with which any aesthetics must be concerned. But in the case of Picasso’s collage, there’s an interesting sense in which “this,” the particular element depicted in the painting’s field, remains radically undetermined. We don’t even know “where” it is, which element counts *as it*. Indeed, as I noted above, the reflective moment here, the promise of order involved in a work like this one is precisely that what counts as “this” might be fixed. In the meantime, we are busy trying to figure out what counts as the particular and what as the “universal” “in which” to understand it. We are busy trying to get to a situation where there is a clear possibility of subsuming a particular under a universal.

While reflective judgment, as Kant defines it in the *Critique of Judgment*, itself depends upon a certain reassurance—the reassurance implicit in the idea that “this” is already somehow spatiotemporally isolated, simply awaiting determination by judgment—collage allows no such certainty. Or, to put the matter more precisely, collage *suggests* such reassur-

ance, but this suggestion is precisely not a certainty, not a promise. Thus, the collage forces us, as it were, a “level” back from the experience of the beautiful. The “hope” is not so much that “this” will conform to a naturalist judgment but rather that we will win through to the point where we have a fixed “this” at all. Thus, neither the collage nor the “harmony of the faculties” it occasions seems to give any reassurance about the purposiveness of nature.

This is simply not a situation whose possibility would have occurred to Kant. Nor, in his epistemology, an epistemology entirely founded on the distinction and continuity between sensuous “intuitions” and “concepts,” would it make much sense. Indeed, contrary to Kant’s assertion in the *Critique of Judgment*, aesthetic judgment as revealed in collage doesn’t directly concern the knowledge belonging to the natural sciences at all. Rather, it addresses the kind of meaning questions raised by the “human sciences.” In that context, the problem indicated by the play of figures and fields in Picasso’s collage is quite familiar: it is the problem of anyone living in a world of multiple meaning contexts, multiple worlds—a world without the overall metaphysical/theological ordering for which Karsten Harries looks back to the Middle Ages. In this quintessentially twentieth-century problematic, there is, in fact, a certain *underdetermination*, a certain element of simple choice about *which* meaning context to inhabit or use. When in today’s world, for instance, I have to decide upon a career for myself, I’m immediately struck by the way each possible choice is accompanied by a different but internally consistent set of criteria for making such a decision. The airline attendants see travel and blocks of free time as decisive, while the tax accountant may see financial security as uppermost. Thus, I’m not just determining what the “right” choice is, but also which *set of questions* about myself and the world I will accept in making it. I can easily find myself choosing a “world” at the same time that I choose an interpretation of “my” world. That doesn’t mean, of course, that anyone steps entirely out of all “worlds” in order to make choices; but there is an essential sense in which we today repeatedly find ourselves on the boundaries of *multiple* defining contexts.

In any case, the experience of collage is an experience of world displacement—whether or not the collage becomes a self-conscious reflection upon such displacement as occurs in *Glass and Bottle of Suze* and a number of Picasso’s other collages from the second decade of the twentieth century. To understand the aesthetics of collage is to understand this semiological experience, this uprooting of the basic contexts within

which meaning is produced. And, the skills of judgment that our uniquely twentieth-century world has demanded of us are above all those necessary to negotiate such situations. They are the skills that allow us to cross the nonspace between worlds.

Revolutionizing Art, Revolutionizing Culture

Closely related to this doubling of judgment within collage, this disappearance of the stable ground for judgment, is the way collage transforms the status of art and artistic creativity. I'm getting at something here closely related to what Peter Bürger (himself borrowing a concept from Walter Benjamin) has called the *allegorical* nature of collage. Bürger and others have noticed that producing collage involves the consideration of a given element within two meaning systems. A collage "manifesto" from the 1960s, by the so-called Group Mu, communicates this insight well: "Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality" (cited in *Futurist Moment*, p. 47). As I've tried to underscore from the start, however, it's not enough to consider what happens to particular *elements* in the collage. The peculiar action of the collage also affects the "texts" from which the individual element is drawn and into which it's placed. That's easy to see in relationship to the "target" text, the canvas onto which the object is pasted or stuck. Indeed, critics from the first have underscored the disturbance of the semiotic system of painting implied when, say, a piece of newspaper enters that system as a signifier.¹⁹ The world of painting suddenly loses its aloof "separateness" from the world of everyday implements or entertainment. A painting is no longer a painting. In this regard, it's worth recalling Picasso's later description of his intentions in cubist collage and *papier collé*:

The purpose of the *papier collé* was to give the idea that different textures can enter into a composition to become the reality in the painting that competes with the reality in nature. We tried to get rid of "trompe l'oeil" to find a "trompe l'esprit." . . . If a piece of newspaper can become a bottle, that gives us something to think about in connection with both newspapers and bottles, too. This displaced object has entered a universe

for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness. And this strangeness was what we wanted to make people think about because we were quite aware that the world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring.²⁰

The substitution of “*trompe l'esprit*” for the old tradition of “*trompe l'oeil*” indicates precisely this subversion of the old status of painting. But Picasso's words also indicate the cubists' intention to challenge the way that we see everyday objects. The gesture of pasting also transforms the world *from which* the pasted signs are drawn: making us aware of its “strangeness.” How? Above all, it forces us to realize that the world of what Bürger calls “everyday practice” is itself constituted as a meaning system—that it is not simply the transparent “referent” of pictorial representation.

In part this is a way of challenging the limitation of creativity to the “Sunday” world of art. The world of newspapers becomes (potentially) a realm of creativity and meaningful activity just as the realm of painting becomes less distant. But it's also a way of recasting aesthetic creativity itself, turning it away from the classical and Romantic ideal of the “genius” to something that's more continuous with everyday humanity and everyday activity. In obscuring the boundary between art and nonart, collage also forces us to rethink the assumed gulf between the creative activity of the artist and the interpretive processes followed by everyone else.²¹ Implicit, then, in the radicalized hermeneutics of collage is an explosion of the myth that creativity is limited to an isolated realm of high art. Not only does painting become more like other things in the world, but also other things become more like painting—sites for potential aesthetic play and creativity.²²

Crisis of the Self

Finally, I've spoken a number of times about the aesthetic as the realm of the subject's “self-experience.” The aesthetics of collage, however, demand, at the very least, a certain degree of caution in using such language. It's interesting, in this light, to note the general emphasis of the cubists upon the “impersonal” nature of their explorations in collage, an emphasis that recent scholarship on cubist collage has underscored.²³ If there is a self-experience in the “aesthetic” moment of collage, it is the experience of a self that is continuous with the more or less “mechanical”

processes increasingly dominant in Picasso's turn-of-the-century metropolitan world. That is, this self doesn't experience itself over and against the world of the market and the machine. And what that implies is a self that never contains itself, that is never fully "present" to itself.

But to what extent is this mass-produced and self-transcending subject really a self at all? The foundations of modernism even beyond modernist aesthetics seem to shake when we begin to consider an "aesthetic" without the affirmation of an autonomous self. I say this, first of all, because the link between the beautiful and modern self-experience is so strong: what fascinates me about a beautiful object is that its beauty seems to present *me* to myself. Because it is unified in a way that makes use of the materials of nature and yet transcends any definite (i.e., natural) qualities, because it both indicates my link to and my freedom from nature, the beautiful continues today, at a deep level, to affect our Western notion of what a *self* is. In other words, the link between the beautiful and selfhood may be strong enough that it doesn't really make sense to speak of a self experiencing itself *except through* the mediation of the beautiful. Perhaps I am a self precisely to the extent that I am a transcending unity of the "natural" traits of character, physique, and so on that "make up" my personality.

In the experience of reflection demanded by *Glass and Bottle of Suze*, there's no longer a question of a unity *transcending* the natural characteristics of the person. The *continuity* between the two characteristics of Western selfhood seems to be broken here. And that's inevitable, given the parallel, demonstrated already in chapter 1, between the definitive establishment of a gestalt field and the impression of totality delivered by a given work. A work is able to establish *aesthetic* unity only to the extent that it is able to establish visual coherence. Where, in Picasso's collage, there is no established coherence, there can be no transcending sense of unity. The result is an experience of the "self" as fundamentally *split* between heterogeneous realms.

Such a splitting is itself only the most radical implication of that shift we observed earlier in the "level" at which the hope or promise of judgment occurs; with collage the experience of the work no longer contains any explicit reference to a subject in harmony with itself through a transparent self-consciousness. This suggests a kind of dissonance at work in judgment itself, when seen in the light of collage: if the level of promise shifts, if it's now only a promise that one might *possibly* arrive at a situation in which comprehension is *possible* through judgment, then we might suspect that harmony here is actually only an occasion for what

The Frame and the Mirror

Freud would call a *sublimation* of desire. While such promise remains indispensable as a hook or lure for the experience of the collage work (thus the irreducibility of collage to the coordinates of the sublime), there is, in the final analysis something else at work here, too. The *promise* for a self-presence of the subject is displaced onto *another* hope—a hope that belongs to the, still to be explored, splitting or heterogeneity of subjectivity.

The question for the next chapter, the question whose answer will direct us to the work of Jacques Lacan, is to what extent words like “self,” “subject,” or “experience” can describe this radicalized “play of the faculties.” At the very least, it’s possible to say at this point that collage marks a *crisis* in the possibility of self-experience.

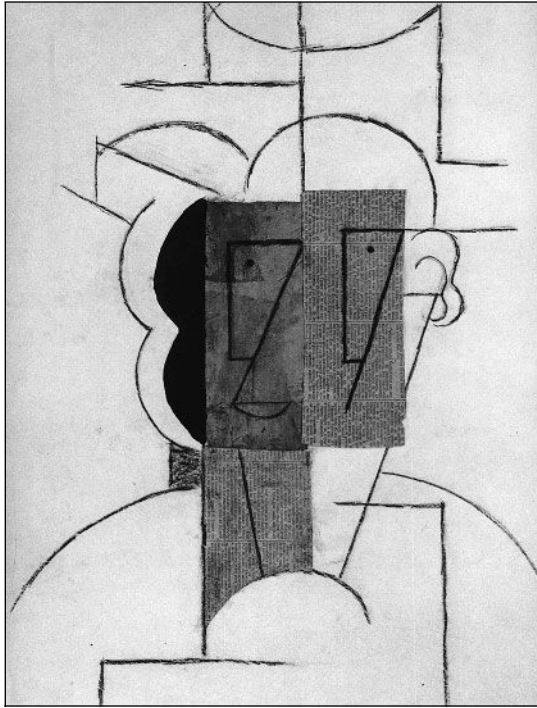


Figure 5.1. Pablo Picasso, *Man with a Hat*, 1913

5 | Posthumanism and the Postmodern in Contemporary Psychoanalytic Theory

The publication of Martin Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* (1947) and Michel Foucault's *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966) mark two key moments in the development of a posthumanism within continental philosophy.¹ As these two titles indicate, providing anything like an adequate context for this term would demand an inquiry into its derivation both from the problems of hermeneutics and from the entanglements of Marxism in France in the 1960s and 1970s. Doubtless, too, in certain versions of recent “culture wars,” terms like “posthumanist” have too easily been

stripped of any specific meaning and reduced to slogans; with the result that it often seems nothing remains to debate under this heading. But I would like to consider one limited dimension where talk of an “end” to humanism does continue to have a historical meaning, and one that emerges precisely in relationship to the issues that I raised in the last chapter—the questions of the aesthetics of the beautiful.

From its earliest modern forms, humanism is marked by this peculiarity: if it is a way of engaging human creativity, then essential to that engagement seems to be the assertion of mastery through representation. One has only to think of Bacon’s “new science,” which combines the celebration of a magical nature and projection of a science designed to tame nature through a representational regime, to find this principle vividly illustrated. Above all, humanist art—and this would be true since the Italian quattrocento—celebrates humanity by *representing* it. Whether it’s the “Vitruvian Man” illustrated by so many of the humanist architects or the figure of Narcissus who, for Alberti and others, symbolizes the task of the painter, the humanist artist engages the world only in representing the humanity that he/she serves.² There is always, then, a relationship between the worldly engagement won by a humanist ethic and the picture of the human being presented by works of art.

Nor is it the case that such representation necessarily is of a heraldic or even figurative nature. At the deepest level, and at humanism’s most profound *modernist* moments, *beauty* itself takes on this representative function. Recollect the function of form in Kant’s discussion of aesthetic judgment. As we’ve already seen, it is that which, incapable of translation into any objective quality of an object, remains purely subjective in representation. We are present to ourselves in art not in any particular figure but rather in the beautiful form that unifies and constructs all such elements. The “play of the faculties” described in the *Critique of Judgment* suggests the possibility, in the light of formal beauty, of an endless effort to approximate this *je ne sais qua* of the object through a hermeneutic process. In the language of semiology, beauty represents humanity not as a possible signifier (emblem, symbol) but rather as signified—as the meaning endlessly approached, but never reached, in a series of approximations.

Recall, here, Plato’s *Symposium* and the “dialectic of *eros*” undergone by the disciple of love. In this and similar erotic ladders within Western culture (Dante, Goethe, Schiller, and so on), the function of the beautiful is to elude finite grasp but to do so in such a way as to draw out interpretation. The lover is drawn toward the beautiful in such a manner as to

“ascend” through a series of interpretations of it. It is this combination of an inaccessible representational goal, a goal posited in the sphere of the signified, and an interpretive path *toward* that goal that provides the mark of what I am calling here *aesthetic* humanism. That is, in such a humanism the subject both cannot and can “experience” herself; as ultimate signified, subjectivity escapes all representation, but just *as signified*, as meaning, subjectivity necessarily inhabits a common space with representation.

In the following reflections, the term “posthumanism” will mark a crisis in the possibility of this peculiar combination. It will mark the question of what happens when the bond between the representation of the human and the unfolding of meaningful human activity begins to dissolve, when representation loses its ability to provide a site for such activity or actually proves harmful to it. Doubtless the cultural changes that I describe are gradual and rarely clear: but there is something like a *shift in emphasis* apparent in the aesthetic revolutions of this century, revolutions marked by the paths of the avant-gardes. The transformation in the arts of the past century marks a fundamental change in the opportunities for and limitations of human fulfillment in Western societies, indeed a change in the very way that we represent for ourselves what combination of pleasures and satisfactions could be considered ingredient to such fulfillment. If “posthumanism” means anything, it means the transformation in the economies of “self-experience” emblemized by the decay of beauty as aesthetic goal and measure for cultural achievement.

DEATH AND POSTHUMANISM: ŽIŽEK

One of the most interesting arenas in which the debate about the meaning of humanism and its death has taken place has been psychoanalytic theory and particularly the theory stemming from the work of Jacques Lacan. It's not simply that Lacan's own enigmatic indictments of humanist thought have been revived: more importantly, the rich ambiguity in Lacan's “return to Freud” and particularly in its implicit *historical* theses, has fueled an illuminating debate about posthumanism. On the one hand, a pessimistic interpretation of Lacan's writings equates the death of humanism with an increase in the paralysis that gives birth to ideological extremism. Here, the crisis and failure of humanism must be seen as an expression of a culture at the end of its resources, aware of its inability to provide adequate representations of subjectivity (identities) and constantly responding to the “flare ups” of regressive, inadequate identities (fascism, religious fundamentalism, and so forth) that claim to fill this

void. But, on the other hand, a more optimistic Lacanianism has emerged from the primarily existentialist accounts of the 1970s, one that emphasizes the new opportunities for “enjoyment” (*jouissance*), opened by the failure of humanist sublimation.

What Lacan’s work and, in its wake, the work of scholars like Slavoj Žižek and Richard Boothby underscores is the foundation of Freud’s apparently “biological” speculations in cultural phenomena and, more particularly, in the phenomena of modernity. Here Lacan’s translation of the Freudian thesis of a “death drive” becomes decisive. Indeed, it is the familiar issue of *representation* that centers the Lacanian account of death, and much of the debate about the nature of posthumanism implicitly transpires in a disagreement about where the bond between representation and death is tied.

In Žižek’s hands, “representation” names—in a Heideggerian fashion—the technological and political will-to-mastery evident throughout modern societies. The Western “death wish” is evidenced in the ever expanding sphere of subjectivist, “symbolic” control of nature and human social apparatus: or, to put this more precisely, it is in the effects of this mastery upon subjectivity—driven into an ever tighter corner by the advances in its own power—that we see the workings of death on modern and postmodern societies. In other words, Žižek puts us in the world of the cyborg, of the human being *in the process* of replacement by the machine that she herself has produced.

Žižek’s analysis of the conundrum of postmodern subjectivity—elaborated in a number of texts published in the past ten years—indicates the “back side” of modernity’s quest for control: for him, the death drive is the symptom of a subject that *necessarily* resists representation—a modern subject.³ What psychoanalytic theory from Freud to Lacan calls the “death drive” emerges with special force within the modern world precisely to the extent that the world both insists upon and represses this hidden “truth” of subjectivity. For Žižek, who marries Lacanianism and Kantianism, the modern subject is defined precisely as that which evades representation—as that source of representation that can’t be included in “the picture.” This is the insight already implied in the Kantian critiques, an insight that Žižek articulates in relationship to the thesis of the “thing in itself.”

The subject (for Lacan) “is” only insofar as the Thing (the Kantian Thing in itself as well as the Freudian impossible-

incestuous object, *das Ding*) is sacrificed, “primordially repressed”—we are again at the motif of *Versagung*. This “primordial repression” introduces a fundamental imbalance in the universe: the symbolically structured universe we live in is organized around a void, an impossibility (the inaccessibility of the Thing in itself). The Lacanian notion of the split subject is to be conceived against this background: the subject can never fully “become himself,” he can never fully realize himself, he only ex-ists as the void of a distance from the Thing. The split thus divides the subject in his positive (i.e., “pathological,” empirical-contingent) features from the subject *qua* 0, the mark of the absent, “sacrificed” Thing. (*Enjoy*, p. 181)

But, as the passage cited above hints, Žižek’s Kantianism is also not Kant’s. Lacan’s focus upon the *structure* of the subject in the Kantian critique subverts Kant’s universalism, the very goal toward which Kant thought that the critique aimed. The key is that *universality still posits a conceptual “space” for subjectivity, a “field” or “realm” that it inhabits*. It thus theoretically allows a mapping of the relationship *between* the space represented and the space from which representation occurs. Žižek finds, in Kant’s radical insistence upon heterogeneity (subject or thing-in-itself versus representation), a hidden demand to overcome the possibility of such mapping. For, according to Žižek, the Kantian subject is constituted by a “hole” in universality precisely at the point of transcendental subjectivity. In Žižek’s words, “as soon as the Thing in itself is posited as unattainable, *every universality is potentially suspended*,” because the Thing “implies a point of exception at which its validity, its hold, is canceled, or, to put it in the language of contemporary physics, a point of singularity,” i.e., the “*Kantian subject himself*, namely the empty subject of the transcendental apperception” (*Enjoy*, p. 182).

The effects of this subversion of Kantianism from within are most evident with respect to Kant’s moral philosophy, the critique of the “faculty of desire.”⁴ As Žižek sees it, Kant’s moral rigorism results from his inability to go far enough in responding to the “splitting” of the subject implied in his own insight. For simplicity, let me record Žižek’s reading in a series of steps (see *Tarrying*, pp. 172–73):

1. First step: The Enlightenment project demands autonomy, demands that the subject act according to itself rather than according to the dictates of tradition or superstition.
2. Second step: Kant sees that the splitting of the subject demands a further division—that between the “pathological” de-

sires of an empirical subject and the “universal” dictates of the moral law. To act autonomously is not simply to will but to will purely.

3. Third step: But Kant didn’t see that the structure of the modern subject demands another split. Universality is still too “natural.” This split must divide the “universal” subject—whether moral or empirical—from the transcendental subject, which can only emerge as the “exception” or “excess” of universal law.

It is this third step that introduces the Freudian thesis of a “death drive” and the Lacanian interpretation of it in the terms of *jouissance* or enjoyment. To wield this second term, the important opposition to understand is Freud’s “pleasure principle.” From the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* onward, Freud discusses pleasure in the language of what he calls “secondary process”—that is, as something that can be balanced with, calculated against, the demands of “reality.” What this implies for Lacan is that pleasure is a formation of the “will” wherein the will can—however fleetingly—represent its desires in objects, wherein the will can find itself *in relationship* to a socially constituted (i.e., symbolic) reality. Pleasure depends upon identification, upon the possibility of “finding yourself” within the world where you live. In Žižek’s interpretation, “enjoyment,” the master term of the later Lacan, stands for precisely what Lacan perceives to be left out of every (necessarily universalizing) representation. It is the “surplus” to every representation in a chain of desire, a “painful” or “morbid” formation of the will entirely resistant to every attempt at representation.

Thus, as Žižek’s interpretation of Kant makes clear, this surplus is not of a nature to be redeemed as an *end* or *form* of representation. What Lacan and Žižek have in mind is more *excessive* than the metaphor of excess expresses; for it is precisely the element that refuses location in relationship to the unitary “picture” given representation—even as its organizing principle. To say that the modern subject is split, in Žižek’s terms, is not to say that it is divided “between moral law and pathological desires”—since that’s just a way of mapping the space of moral will—but rather that it is torn “between enjoyment and pleasure” (*Enjoy*, p. 182).

How then to conceive the action of enjoyment? Precisely as unpredictable eruption, as symptom, as what defeats the control of either desire or will. As Žižek’s analyses of both totalitarianism and popular culture indicate, the emergence of such a subject of “enjoyment” in modernity gives birth to a series of *pathological* phenomena—phenomena that symptomatize a return of the energies repressed by humanism’s will-to-

control. Concretely, for Žižek, this means that even Kantian moral action, the “purity” of the good will, only deepens repression by placing the subject’s “rational” will on the same map as its “pathological” desires. “Enjoyment” announces this repression, by acting as a pure surd, what in subjectivity cannot be plowed back into a socialized creativity. It names the cause of desire that refuses consideration in the terms of causality *or* will, in the terms of *economy*—one that erupts as “against our will,” as the paradoxical representation of what disrupts representation, as the *horror* implied by the truth that *not to represent* is still a way of representing:

What characterizes postmodernism is therefore an obsession with the Thing, with a foreign body within the social texture, in all its dimensions that range from woman *qua* the unfathomable element that undermines the rule of the “reality principle” (*Blue Velvet*), through science-fiction monsters (*Alien*) and autistic aliens (*Elephant Man*), up to the paranoid vision of social totality itself as the ultimate fascinating Thing, a vampire-like specter which marks even the most idyllic everyday surface with signs of latent corruption. (*Enjoy*, p. 123)

Precisely because the tools of modernist representation cannot do justice to the “Thing” created by modernity, to the pure subject of enjoyment, the “postmodern” is the realm of monstrosity, of invading monsters, whether those of fiction (*Alien*, among others) or of political reality (Hitler, Stalin), who enforce the principle of modernity as symptom. This symptom erupts as a kind of revenge of the modern against itself, wherever it seems that modern representation has extended to everything, where it seems that “everything is under control.” It demands acknowledgment of the “blind spot” in the most complete and universal representation, exacting the price of an “undead” monstrosity for the repression of this truth/antitrueth of the modern. Žižek’s posthumanism—emergent both in popular culture and the politics of totalitarianism—provides a powerful tool for analyzing all of those modes in which the contemporary social/political world is shaped by a peculiar fascination with/horror of the Other.

DEATH AND POSTHUMANISM: BOOTHBY

Richard Boothby’s *Death and Desire* offers an alternative interpretation of Lacan and, by implication, an alternative version of a Lacanian posthumanism to Žižek’s.⁵ For Boothby, Lacan’s thought doesn’t foreshadow the

end of all possible representation of the subject as much as it foreshadows the subject's transformation, and the site for this transformation is the Lacanian theory of "desire." For Boothby, the Lacanian thesis of symbolic desire not only allows us to grasp Lacan's work as a whole, it also makes sense of Freud's insistence that there is an obscure relationship between desire and death.

Building upon another element in Lacan's work, Boothby equates the violence in Western culture (indeed in *every* culture) not with the *symbolic* activities of post-Baconian technology and politics but rather with the *imaginary* predilections of the subject.⁶ Recall that, for Lacan, the "specific prematurity" of our births constitutes an existential fact. Because we are born "too soon," before we are able to control our own bodies, Lacan posits that we must develop *representational* mechanisms (imagos) in order to correct for our weakness and uncoordination. "Selfhood" or "identity"—the functions of the "ego"—are, for Lacan, the primary representational mechanism by which we stabilize a world that forever seems about to slip out of our control. I form an identity through a kind of imaginary mirror play, the result of which is a stable "picture" of myself, one that is fundamentally at odds with the active subjectivity of the person looking *in* the mirror. In other words, the representational structures of the imaginary already split what we would normally call the "self" into two poles: an ego that as the French, *moi*, indicates, is already conceived as an object, something outside of "me," and a *representing* subject, the font of those energies that refuse representation.

These "imaginary" mechanisms, which are absolutely fundamental to all human culture, since they explain, for example, the formation of our sense of "self," nonetheless also explain human aggression. Boothby, following Lacan, favors a language of gestalts to describe the imaginary exclusion at work here: the imaginary "image" is like a gestalt figure. It rests in a field and can only be perceived in relationship to that field, but our immediate reaction to it is to focus upon it *to the exclusion of* any context. If, narcissistically, we wish to establish control over the figure, this limitation of our vision always leads onto the rocks; indeed, every effort to establish ultimate control is bound to fail similarly, since it necessarily depends upon the exclusion of some "field" in which the representation necessary to control something occurs. Thus, the birth of what Lacan calls *aggressivity*—the origin of human violence.

Like Žižek, Boothby follows Lacan in seeing the Lacanian "real" as beyond representation, as (in practice) the excess of every representation. But Boothby's far more optimistic Lacanianism offers the possibility

for a *sublimation* of the energies of the real in the symbolic *movement* of *desire*. In essence, desire “kills” the identifications that stabilize the ego, forcing the subject to follow a path that is foreign to the world of will or selfhood. As Boothby puts it, the death drive is “the struggle toward discharge of vital energies against the constraints of the ego” (*Death*, p. 87). In fact, Lacan’s model here implies a central *ethical* observation: a lack of control, and the insecurity resulting from that lack, are existential determinants of human life. The “self” is a name for one of the structures that we form in order to deal with that primordial insecurity. The test of a psychoanalysis (and here you can see the polemic aimed at various versions of “ego psychology”) is whether it is able to bring the analysand to loosen her vicelike grip on an identity, to follow *desire* instead of the dictates of an alienated self. Psychoanalysis serves death.

In other words, *Death and Desire* presents a model of an active and dynamic *posthumanism*; Boothby offers an alternative to Žižek’s view of a posthumanism seen only as failure, only as pathology. The marriage of “death” and “desire” in Boothby’s Lacan offers the possibility of a different kind of engagement with the social world than that predicated by “pleasure”—an ethos of “enjoyment.” Though Boothby doesn’t himself articulate any historical theory, it seems that his treatment of “death” makes room for a posthumanism of renewed social creativity and activity.

ŽIŽEK VERSUS BOOTHBY

In his book *Tarrying with the Negative*, Žižek criticizes *Death and Desire*, accusing Boothby of *substantializing* the Lacanian Real. While Boothby follows Lacan in asserting that the Real is no substance, his argument does tend to give it a substantial content.⁷ Indeed, this treatment of the Lacanian Real seems essential to Boothby’s use of it as measure against which the imaginary comes up short. This metaphor, bound up with his effort to revive Freudian energetics, inevitably gives the real the substantial qualities of a *whole*: thus, “the imaginary siphons off and directs only *a portion* of the energies animating the organism” (*Death*, p. 57; my italics); or, again, “the imago can ‘represent’ only *a fraction* of the organism’s panoply of vital energies. The imago fulfills its function of unity only by imposing an intrinsic limitation—only, in effect, by *leaving something out*” (*Death*, p. 58; my italics). That is, some “whole” of energies must precede either imaginary or symbolic representation: the symbolic is simply more adequate to this totality than is the imaginary.

If Žižek is right, the result is that Boothby’s account reduces the La-

canian Real to a kind of organic “life” principle and, in so doing, reduces Lacan’s thought to a revived Romantic *Lebensphilosophie* (See *Tarrying*, p. 179). Interestingly, in a chapter that locates Lacan’s thought in the tradition including Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Boothby himself acknowledges this proximity.⁸ Just as the “ethics of psychoanalysis” for Boothby boil down to an imperative to defeat the strictures on human development created by the obsessive self and its representational structure—just as the commandment of Lacanian psychoanalysis (“Enjoy!”) is precisely to overcome who one “is” at a given moment—so also Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, each in their own way, demand the defeat of the self in favor of some larger and/or more immediate “life force” (“universal will” for Schopenhauer, the “Dionysian” for the Nietzsche of the *Birth of Tragedy*). The parallel between Boothby’s Lacan and his nineteenth-century predecessors is indeed striking.

What, according to Žižek, seems to lead Boothby into these much-frequented waters is his desire to explain all of Lacan’s work with a single thesis.⁹ Because he is unwilling to admit that the late Lacan—the Lacan who rethinks the Real and death in a radicalized fashion—moves beyond his earlier views, Boothby tends to collapse the later work into the earlier. This is most directly the case in Boothby’s dependence upon notions of the “Mirror Stage” and the imaginary: in these structures, as Boothby’s discussion of them in the terms of gestalt psychology makes clear, Lacan posits an unavoidably conservative notion of subjectivity—one that depends upon the *formal* relationship of a figure and its grounding field. According to this view, *the Real, the subject—what is “excluded” from imaginary representation—is nothing else than the space in which the image can appear*. Indeed, for Žižek, precisely what leads Lacan in *Seminar VII* to abandon his earlier analyses of subjectivity in terms of the imaginary/symbolic axis is the necessity by which the subject constructed above and against the imaginary will appear as form for its imaginary self. In other words, Boothby can’t acknowledge the fundamental insight of the *late* Lacan, the insight according to which the Real evades conceptualization as space for representation, according to which the Real is not substance but only pure relationship, pure eruption. According to Žižek, Boothby’s *optimism* turns on his unwillingness to take the Lacanian insight to its most radical conclusion.

LIKE A DREAM . . .

In the final chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud makes a distinction that is vital for sorting out the dispute between Žižek and

Boothby. While the entire structure of Freud's study asserts the continuity between dreams and other "symptomatic" formations, the discussion in these final pages suggests a *contrast* between dreams and neurotic symptoms. The dream, while like the symptom doubtless an unconscious formation, contrasts with the neurotic symptom in its inclusion within a "healthy" psyche.¹⁰ Indeed, for Freud the dream has a positively therapeutic effect, acting as a kind of "safety valve" for the discharge of unconscious energies normally repressed by the preconscious (*Interpretation*, p. 179). In one passage, he goes so far as to limit "possible outcomes for any particular unconscious excitatory process" to symptom formation and dreaming: "Either," he tells us, the process "may be left to itself, in which case it eventually forces its way through at some point and . . . finds discharge for its excitation in movement," thus forming a hysterical symptom, or it can produce a dream (*Interpretation*, p. 578). Thus, the dream marks a peculiar compromise: on the one hand, it has the vital task (like that of analysis itself) of "bringing back under control of the preconscious the excitation in the unconscious which has been left free." But, on the other hand, its means of doing this is precisely that it "*discharges* the unconscious excitation" (*Interpretation*, p. 579; my italics). One and the same phenomenon both marks the emergence of a symptomlike unconscious energy and the mastery of that energy.¹¹

Freud's analysis of the dream suggests, then, what Žižek seems to exclude in his vision of the postmodern—a "nonpathological" presence of the "excessive" energies of the subject, a presence of those energies that both preserves their unrepresentability and places them at the service of a "representational" consciousness. After all, the release of unconscious excitation in dreaming must be seen in the context of the impossibility of representing the unconscious—an impossibility that Freud underscores in this same chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The "primary process" of the unconscious is radically unrepresentable: only its *existence* can be deduced from its oneiric and symptomatic *effects*. The "dreamwork" thoroughly disguises the unconscious material in the dream, intermixing and replacing it with material from everyday life. In other words, the unconscious is deduced.

The appearance of the unconscious in the dream belies a transformation of its contents so radical that it involves no iconic or representational moment. The dream *sublimates* the processes of the unconscious. Indeed, dreaming is, for Freud, a kind of reversal of normal—thoroughly representational—psychical functioning: the key to the efficacy of the dream, to its ability to act as a nonpathological outlet for primary process, lies in a kind of reversal of the flow of psychical energies marked as nor-

mal in Freud's model of the psyche. Blocked by the sleeping state of the preconscious from becoming a conscious idea, the material in the incipient dream is said to "regress," to move in the direction opposite to the normal stream of energies from perception through consciousness (*Interpretation*, pp. 533–49).

There's something else about dreams that's striking in the light of Žižek's theoretical apparatus: Freud repeatedly insists upon *topographic* metaphors for the discussion of dreams: dreaming occurs on "the other stage."¹² Furthermore, Freud's metapsychological discussion in chapter 7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is built upon the so-called topographical model of the unconscious—a model that gives dreaming a specific site in the psyche. But recall that, for Žižek, the breakdown of modernist universalism is explained precisely as the *disappearance* of any space for representation. The necessity by which modernist representation gives way to postmodernist monstrosity is marked by the shriveling of even the "empty" or "formal" space of Enlightenment universality. Given the obvious explanatory power of Žižek's narrative, we thus face a kind of apparent aporia: in order to do justice to the dream as postmodern phenomenon, we need to acknowledge a kind of representational space as belonging to the postmodern. In order to be fair to Žižek's analyses of postmodern politics and popular culture, we have to, at the least, explain the disappearance of the Enlightenment space of universality.

Once again, the terms of Freud's discussion in *The Interpretation of Dreams* can help here; for they allow us to understand that the space of the dream is *not* the space of conscious representation but rather "another stage," and indeed one that is structured in an entirely different manner than the one in which conscious thought processes occur. This "unconscious" space is structured by a constitutive hole or lack. Thus, Freud writes, in a famous footnote, that "there is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable—a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown" (*Interpretation*, p. 111 n.). In other words, the structure of this space cannot appear within the space that it structures—even as form. This gives it a peculiar phenomenal nature: in all directions, this space is boundless: one never hits or perceives its limit. One never finds something that *doesn't belong* or *can't fit* in this space. But, on the other hand, the space of the dream *is* structured and thus limited. The structure of dream space works like an equation for an infinite curve: radically heterogeneous to the phenomenon that it describes and yet determinative of it.

I want to dwell a little more upon this last metaphor, which was, of course, a central trope for Leibniz.¹³ An equation describing the disposition and behavior of all things through all time seems, in fact, to violate the injunction that I have found in the structure of the other space of the dream; for the equation does, like a form or even more like a premodern “ornamental” organizing principle (see chapter 1), appear *within* the space it organizes. But this appearance is necessarily deceptive. The equation appears not *as* itself (as a mathematical function) but rather as the pattern it generates—as a figure or image rather than a structured process. If one imagines the symbols of the equation within the world of the geometrical figure, it is simply as another “figure.” Like a newspaper in a collage, it ceases to speak its original language in order to appear as an aesthetic element.

Indeed, there is no language within the space of the representation for the equation “itself”: its existence can only be deduced by the slight oddity of certain elements within that world—elements precisely like the “pasted” equation or like those bits of newspaper in cubist collages. And, as Freud’s theory of dream interpretation teaches us, it’s precisely in those irritating and apparently most nonsensical details of the dream that we can expect to find its unconscious wish. That is, the *truth* of the dream (as discovered from “outside” by its interpreter) appears precisely at those points that act like bits of newspaper or the symbols for an equation in a painting—that act like fetishes. Sites of *intensity* take the place of boundaries or frames in the representation of this space as a whole.

In other words, the dream suggests a *kind* of representational site that is itself a negation of the meaningful universal space of the Enlightenment—that space that, as we’ve had ample opportunity to see, must be conceived in *formal* terms. What makes the unconscious “stage” heterogeneous is that it is structured heterogeneously to the space of conscious representation. With this insight, I want to suggest an alternative to *both* the positions of Žižek and Boothby. Freud’s discussion of dreams, in fact, seems to fit precisely between their two interpretations of Lacan: it asserts the continued existence of a space of representation (as does Boothby), but it differentiates this space from the space of *conscious* representation with sufficient radicality to do justice to the phenomena Žižek underscores in arguing for the disappearance of the space of the Real. In the reading I’m suggesting, the postmodern does, indeed, mark the radicalization of representational prohibition, the splitting off of meaningful universality from the space of the subject, but that doesn’t leave the subject entirely without a field of representation. The remaining

space, the field in which a kind of representational practice remains viable, is precisely the site of dreams. And that, once again, opens up the possibility that Žižek really seeks to foreclose in rejecting Boothby's approach—the possibility of a nonpathological posthumanism.¹⁴

To get a more concrete idea of what is implied by the positing of the “other stage,” reflect on Freud's remarkable analysis of what he calls the “dreamwork,” the process by which unconscious wishes are interwoven with materials from everyday experience in dreams. Freud's great interpretive insight here is that the dream is *not* like a picture but rather like a *picture puzzle* or rebus (*Interpretation*, pp. 277–78). That is, unlike “every attempt hitherto” to interpret dreams, Freud sees that the qualities of the manifest dream (the “dream content”) can't be understood as a simple “picture” of their meaning: the effort to interpret dreams in that way only leads to the conclusion that they are meaningless. In a picture, say, *The Lacemaker* by Vermeer, the individuality of the different signifying elements tends to fade before the ensemble effect produced by them all together. The illusion supported by *The Lacemaker* is that the work is not really made up of signs at all—that it's built up of visual “parts” just as the actual object is supposed to be. That's what's usually meant by pictorial “naturalism,” and it is what allows you the sense that you can look *through* the work rather than *at* it.

In contrast, a rebus demands attention to each of the individual elements *as* individual. The key to understanding it is determining the particular signification of each element composing it: “obviously,” writes Freud, “we can only form a proper judgement of the rebus if we put aside criticisms such as these of the whole composition and its parts and if, instead, we try to replace each element by a syllable or word that can be represented by that element in some way or other” (*Interpretation*, p. 278). Indeed, insofar as we *expect* a picture *rather than* a picture puzzle, the first thing that we experience before such a game is a certain chagrin: we thought we could just “look at” what the picture represents, but instead we have to figure it out.

Because it allows a more precise distinction between the kind of universality forbidden by the postmodern and the unconscious, the distinction between picture and rebus is useful for our efforts to understand the peculiar representational space within which a posthumanist practice can develop. In effect, like a picture, the formal space of modernism claims a kind of direct access to what is represented, the “end” of representation. Thus, for Kant, insofar as one follows the formal imperatives

of the categorical imperative, one is supposed to inhabit the “kingdom of ends,” a space that, while unthinkable, remains nonetheless formally present to us in our moral and political lives. Similarly, beautiful form provides a “symbol” and a “feeling” of this realm of ends: the beautiful acts as a kind of ultimate meaning, a signified that holds together the various signifiers that represent it.

But such a signified unifying meaning is precisely what *cannot* appear on the “other stage.” Insofar as meaning is like a rebus, insofar as it is only accessible *as* mediated by a series of individual *signifiers*, the illusion of looking “through” the work becomes impossible. And it’s not even necessary (as Freud still suggests in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) to see the signification of these individual elements in the limited terms of a “code.” Indeed, if the point is the necessity of giving up on a view of representation as organized by a single signified for which the individual elements are *parts* of a larger signifier, then it’s easy to see how the individual signifiers can themselves be caught up in a kind of rebus play ad infinitum.¹⁵

Take, for example, Picasso’s collage *Man with a Hat*, 1913 (see figure 5.1). Here, everything is built upon a radicalization of the representational stricture that we associated (in the last chapter) with judgment. As we saw there, Kant explains reflection as an indefinite series of approximations to an elusive formal/aesthetic meaningfulness. The pleasure in this “play of the faculties” lies entirely in its approximation of a single meaning—in the case of aesthetic reflection, of the meaning of the subject. The beautiful work of art is supposed to be structured according to this transcendence of the signified over any particular signifier. In the case of *Man with a Hat*, however, the interpreter must take account of a more radical process. Here the object seems composed based not upon the *signified* but rather upon the attributes of the *signifier*: A single form, say the one composing the left side of the “man’s” face, participates in at least two different significations (face, violin). And these relationships are not mediated by a transcendent meaning that each partially expresses. Rather, the relationship between the two significations is produced—punlike—from the visual similarity of the signifiers or elements composing them.

Thus, the displacement visible in *Man with a Hat* also indicates a shift in the very meaning structure of art. The viewer is made aware of the separation between the material signifier in the painting and its “signified” by means of a series of visual “puns,” each of which demands that

one sees a given signifier as maintaining a value in more than one signifying system. Thus, for instance, Picasso uses the conventional signs he himself has developed for drinking glasses both for that signification and to indicate the man's nose, cheeks, and eyes. Furthermore, the man's figure is composed of a combination of figures for violins and guitars (classical cubist subjects). It's both the case that the man's head is really the neck of a guitar, the main body of which composes the man's shoulders and torso, and that the man's head is composed (e.g., his ear or the entire left side) of figures for violins. A particular figure (line, color, and so on), then, inevitably participates in at least two (and usually more) different significations: glass/face, shoulder/guitar, and so forth. In each of these cases, the double signification denies any possibility that you might simply look through it, taking its reference as its meaning. The very nature of the signifying material demands that you always "look again" and keep looking indefinitely at the painting's signifiers.

What is this nature? Here Yves-Alain Bois's discussion of Picasso's collages in the terms of Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of "value" can help.¹⁶ Bois shows how the explorations of works like *Man with a Hat* depend upon a quality of signs that is already apparent in gestalt relationships. The sign always acts within a field. That's true with signifiers at the most general level (the level of language as a whole), but it is also the case within more limited contexts that concern signs as units (comprising both signifier and signified). If a picture is to signify "the human face," then there is both a limitation and a freedom that task brings with it: the limitation is that it must wield a particular "syntax." In order to produce a recognizable indication of a face, a picture must include certain basic features—perhaps something to mark a mouth, a nose, and two eyes, perhaps something else. But the freedom is that, once such a syntax is established in a preliminary fashion, any number of forms could substitute for each other as the sign for those features. Either a dot or a button, for example, could easily stand for an eye. Such an element could substitute for the button because it has the same "value" within the semantic system. In other words, collages like this one explore the very limits and possibilities of visual signification. They are, in Rosalind Krauss's words, "representations of representation" (*Originality*, p. 37). And, as such, they absolutely insist upon those operations of signification that traditional artworks have tended to obscure.¹⁷

The explicit emphasis upon artwork as language in *Man with a Hat* also demands a transformation in the way that we take it as representation of meaning. The substitutability of signs at work in the experimenta-

tion with signifiers for “face” or “guitar” opens up the possibility of multiple signification. There’s no reason that a painting needs to signify according to only one syntactical system. So, if the painter sees a way that the signs for “eye,” “nose,” and “mouth” could be combined into a form signifying a wineglass, that could suggest a second system (signs indicating a café table and objects upon it or just glasses) that might make use of (some of) the same signifiers as the first one (the system of pictorial signs for a face). The viewer/reader of *Man with a Hat* is forced back and forth between several interpretations of any individual signifier in a kind of *free association* of forms.

Effectively, the work presents no transparent aesthetic meaning, no formal representation of the *end* of interpretation structuring it.¹⁸ The play of signifiers in *Man with a Hat* is also a play of every conceivable semantic system within which they could operate: now it’s a picture about a man (a portrait); now about a café table, now musical instruments. Every possible context of meaning enters the field of signification *as* signifier; none remains aloof. In other words, the play that this collage presents for us seems to depend upon an *excess of the signifier* over the signified rather than, as was the case with beautiful works of art, of the reverse. The interpretive “movement” associated with art here is precisely the opposite of what it is in every traditional ladder of the beautiful. Not the signified but the signifier controls development.¹⁹

COLLAGE AND “SELF”-REPRESENTATION

Two theses, then, about the possibilities for a posthumanist practice: first, such a practice depends upon the peculiarities of a representational space without form, a space structured so as to allow the greatest possible play of signifiers within itself. Second, based upon the impossibility of structuring this space by means of a signified—a form—the energies usually devoted to pursuing that meaning are instead sublimated into following the path of a play of signifiers.

Together these ideas indicate a peculiar fate for the *aesthetic* dimension of modernity in the wake of humanism, the dimension by which the self-experience of the modern subject is mediated. On the one hand, the “aesthetic” experience is no longer organized subjectively, that is, by form; to this extent, Picasso’s collage doesn’t really belong to the aesthetic at all. Nonetheless, this negation of form doesn’t so much block or repress the desire to present ourselves to ourselves as *divert* it. In the space of the dream, the space of the picture puzzle, the subject’s desire

for aesthetic self-presence gives way to the movement of *primary process*, the dynamism of free association.

At a second level, such a process itself becomes a representation of subjectivity, its boundless and unpredictable excessiveness. Like the dream, the structure of the signified provides its own peculiar stage for a kind of representation. The humanity of this posthumanist “aesthetics” lies in its combination of a “no” and a “yes” to representation. It denies our desire to create a complete “picture” of ourselves but only at the same time that it produces a kind of unfolding “motion picture” in the play of signifiers. The representation of the posthumanist subject emerges in this double gesture—a check on our desire for self-“presence” followed by a substitute, a representational alternative to the pleasures of form. Thus, we return elliptically to the description of a posthumanism implied by the concept of *desire* in Boothby’s *Death and Desire*, the notion of a sublimation of representation itself.

But who is the subject emerging from such an antiaesthetic? Who is the subject of this play of signifiers? At the end of the last chapter, I wrote of the deep connection between beautiful form and our very sense of what a self is. We find the beautiful object a kind of “signature” for ourselves because it marries our belonging to a world of material things (in the elements from which it’s composed) and our freedom from that world (in the form that is irreducible to any individual element). Certainly, the experience of *Man with a Hat* is incapable of this kind of integration: that’s intentional, since part of what’s going on here is a rejection of the notion that aesthetic experience should be unified as though by a will. The unity of the subject subjected to the play of unconscious forces (the irony of this phrase is intentional) is not the “self” who knows “what she wants” or even “what she should want.”

But, and I must insist upon this with equal force, neither is this self simply an “other”—nature, someone else’s will, or, more fashionably, language. The message of posthumanism is not simply that we are *not* autonomous subjects. *Somebody* is playing, not something. Indeed, the creative process of free association that produces a collage like *Man with a Hat* is precisely caught between the “impersonal” nature of a canvas dedicated to exploring the play of signifiers and the intensely “personal” nature of the associations (wineglass/eye and so on) that allow that investigation. I don’t mean by this last assertion that collage must be reduced to a form of autobiography: the play here is only personal in the sense

that its associations, while inevitably following the pathways opened by a language, are thoroughly determined by the unique unpredictable flow of a “primary process.”

Thus, a new sense of selfhood, one that emerges both in collage and, almost simultaneously, in Freud’s psychoanalysis: it is the “self” as both *effect* of forces beyond the subject and as a *particular way* of remaining an exception to those forces. The great mystery of psychoanalysis, the mystery that has divided interpreters for the entire century of its existence, concerns this sense of personhood: Freud wishes to both emphasize the impersonal nature of the unconscious (the symptom, primary process, and so forth) and to insist that this “other” force is *meaningful*, that it is, in some sense, *me*.

Reflect on the famous imperative from *The New Introductory Lectures*: “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden” (most commonly translated as “where the id was, there the ego must come to be”). Freud’s own interpretation of this seems, at first, disappointing—for it only repeats the prejudices of the Enlightenment: psychoanalysis intends to deliver the id over to the control of the ego; where the pathological eruptions of the unconscious disrupted our sense of ourselves, the ego will reestablish control.

It’s precisely against the personalistic limitations of that interpretation, the interpretation upon which British and American ego psychology is based, that Lacan developed his own reading of the Freudian dictum: Lacan’s reversal of the Enlightenment imperative begins from his argument that the ego (or self, as I shall refer to it) itself is primarily an *object*, the *moi* rather than the subject (*je*) of representation. Thus, for Lacan *es* (it) becomes the ego, and *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden* appears as the demand to replace the *ego* with the always emergent and excessive *subject* of representation (*je*). Here the unconscious as “self” must give way to the “anonymous” forces shaping human reality.²⁰

Based upon *Man with a Hat*, I want to suggest a third interpretation of *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*, one that, in a sense, accepts *both* of the earlier ones. If we can observe in *Man with a Hat* a clear imperative to break through the obsessive self marked by the organization of an artwork around a formal signified, such an observation doesn’t do full justice to the collage. It’s worth recalling that *Man with a Hat*, like most of Picasso’s work in this period, is actually part of a series—one in which similar forms (the “guitar shoulders” and so on) are reworked in different media and different compositional arrangements. The first thing I want to note about this is that here and in several other compositions, Picasso

repeats almost exactly the same forms as those seen in *Man with a Hat*: in other words, the primary process here is, in an important, literal, sense, a *re-presented* one.

What this representational moment emblemizes is the reemergence of a new identity paradoxically *in* the process by which the grip of the ego is broken. It is an identity that is marked both by the specific signifiers that have emerged upon the canvas and the process of their emergence: in the place *where* the id was—on the “other stage” of primary process—*there* the ego should come to be. The new “self” takes shape precisely in and as the space of the self’s negation.

To understand what this version of the Freudian imperative means, recall that Picasso’s variations on the theme in *Man with a Hat* don’t *just* repeat the original: inevitably these other compositions add or subtract some element from those involved, using this as a way of changing the whole painterly context. Thus, for example, *Man in Hat with a Guitar* extends the play in *Man with a Hat*, adding to the image of the latter an extension “representing” the lower half of a body and a guitar. Notice that the interpretation of *Man with a Hat* in *Man in Hat with a Guitar* can’t dispense with the actual forms of the composition upon which it builds: the additional material here extends and continues the play of *Man with a Hat* (for example, forcing us to think about what happens when the signifiers for “guitar” are used in two different ways in two different parts of the collage), but it doesn’t *replace* the other work as a signified is supposed to replace a signifier. Thus, in the very means of interpretation, the reinterpretations of *Man with a Hat* also acknowledge the inadequacy of every “picture” of the self or even of the idea of the self *as* picture. Just where we find Picasso treating his own image as a meaning, a signified, there we find him also insisting that it remain a signifier.

In this way the inevitable attribution of an ultimate source for meaning (subject, consciousness, and so forth) gains a place but always by taking on the attributes *of* that place, the place in which “words behave like things.” It is this double imperative that dictates what I might call the “posthumanist self.” Each of us, of course, needs to conceive of ourselves *as* self; but this need can only be legitimately fulfilled on two conditions: first, the self must emerge in the place wherein self-understanding is broken apart, where it enters crisis. Second, moreover, the ultimate meaning such an understanding posits must be taken, also, as a signifier, so that it, in turn, can be dissolved and recast. In the specific sense of this mobility, the demand here is for a sense of self that acts like erotic desire: in

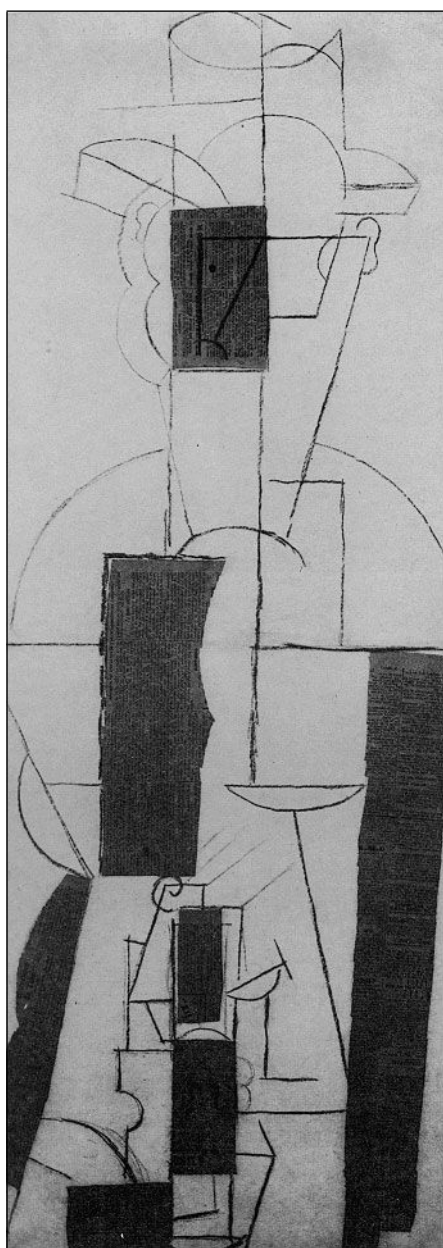


Figure 5.2. Pablo Picasso, *Man in Hat with a Guitar*, 1913

its shifts from “object” to object it remakes itself. The ego should be only there, in the place of the id.

DEATH AND ENJOYMENT

But all of this leaves aside perhaps *the* theoretical issue: if posthumanism thematizes a heterogeneous space of subjectivity, a field in which a new model of both activity and self-understanding emerges, then what to make of the inevitable “border” phenomena announced by the very fact that this *is* a space and thus theoretically mapable with the space of consciousness? How to respond to the space implied by the common category of the two spaces—the space of space itself?

While this may seem an abstract issue, it has immediate consequences for our discussion of a posthumanist art—consequences indicated by the problem of the psychical “intensity” attaching to the heterogeneous “stage” provided the unconscious. With almost perfect unanimity, critics since the eighteenth century have agreed that an aesthetics alternative to the beautiful must explain effects more *vivid* than the harmonious experience of beauty. This is, indeed, one of the reasons for Freud’s assumption of a “death” drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and afterward: he must find a seduction so powerful that it defeats the imperatives of pleasure, reality, indeed of the very survival of “life.” Death names this other desire—soon identified with the drift of all biological life toward self-annihilation—which is from the first seen as *more powerful* than its opponent. Thus, also, Boothby’s Romantic moments, moments where *Death and Desire* seems to posit (in death) a life force that overwhelms the instincts of individual self-preservation. It is in this light, for example, that Boothby reads Lacan’s interest in Sade. Boothby and Lacan before him both return to the metaphors of the Marquis de Sade in *Juliette*—to his concept of a “second death,” of a sacrifice of *individuality*. Sade writes,

At the instant we call *death*, everything seems to dissolve. . . . But this death is only imaginary, it exists figuratively but in no other way. Matter, deprived of the other portion of matter which communicated movement to it, is not destroyed for that; it merely abandons its form, it decays—and proves that it is not inert; it enriches the soil, fertilizes it, and serves in the regeneration of the other kingdoms as well as of its own.²¹

The individual dies in order to further the “life” of the whole, the “greater” life of nature itself, which subsists precisely in this consumption of individual forms. Thus, Lacan and Boothby borrow from Sade the essentially perverse strategy wherein the disruption of natural form becomes the disguise of a renewed naturalism. It’s a strategy that emerges the moment that the energies of death, of symbolic desire, of enjoyment, are conceived as “more” or “more adequate” than those given over to the representational functions of life, the ego, pleasure. And this underscores the very problem upon which Žižek dwells, the problem of an implicitly substantialized, Romantic subject: in other words, the language of “intensity” or vividness applied to the *other* economy, the economy of death, immediately ties it into the preexisting economy of pleasure and reality. It creates an exchange, establishes an exchange rate between their “currencies.” In short, it creates a *single* economy, a single space in which representation occurs. Thus, it apparently justifies Žižek’s refusal of any “spatialization” of the subject.

But, while in practice this trade across the borders may be inevitable, it is not theoretically identical with the postulation of an “other stage,” which is also to say that using the rhetoric of “enjoyment” and “death” for description of an aesthetic practice need not lead onto the rocks of Romanticism. The myth of a *greater whole*, a *more intense* pleasure, is just that—a myth. This is not to deny the seductions of the “other scene,” seductions doubtless multiplied by the *removal* of those strictures that bind pleasure to reality, instrumental thought, and so on. To operate (however momentarily) under an economy where “release of tension” (in Freud’s formulation for all pleasure) is not tied to the practical imperatives of survival and security is doubtless in itself liberating. Furthermore, as a *heterogeneous* economy, *enjoyment*, like pleasure, must exercise its own addictive qualities: once well settled into a world, we tend to stay there. But neither of these observations amounts to the assertion of a Romantic “life” force suppressed by representation. The real problem faced by posthumanism is not the discovery of a *better* “pleasure” than the ascetic economy of the reality principle allows, but rather the emergence of simply a radically *heterogeneous* economy. And the real challenge for a theory of the contemporary must be the description of this heterogeneity and of the effects of an “experience” formed precisely in moving between heterogeneous realms.

It is with regard to the effects of this emergence that I would defend Boothby against the limitations of Žižek’s approach to posthumanism;

Žižek cannot do justice to the most obvious evidence for the existence of such a practice—the *aesthetic* phenomena of this century, whether in the worlds of “art” or popular culture. He cannot do justice to the transformed model of aesthetic creativity that has been so revolutionary in this century. *Death and Desire*, however imperfectly, attempts to articulate in the language of Lacanian desire the peculiar nature of posthumanism’s heterogeneous space. It attempts to acknowledge the ways that a *practice* and an *ethos* can result from the crisis of modernity of the past hundred years or so. Boothby, for all the Romantic detours in his reading of Freudian/Lacanian “energetics,” *does* make a start at delineating the structures of this other space and above all at the *negotiation* involved between spaces, in a manner that is relevant to the new aesthetic paradigm. In this light, one could take the defeat of “form” and emergence of play in *Man with a Hat* as emblematic of precisely the relationship between the economy of the ego and the economy of enjoyment that is Boothby’s central theme. It is both emblem for and explanation of the almost *delirious* qualities of twentieth-century aesthetic cultures, their remarkable ability to take the limitations imposed by the onward march of a technometaphysical modernity and use them as the context for a certain liberation.

Part 3

The Agony of Utopia

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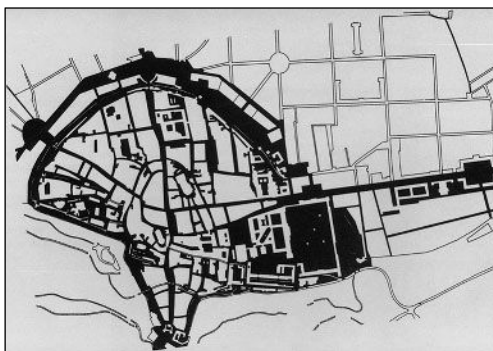


Figure 6.1. Munich circa 1840, figure and ground plan, from *Collage City*, 1978

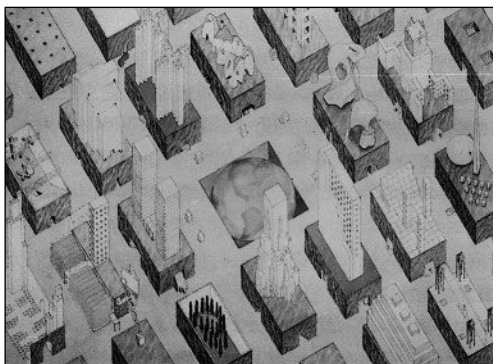


Figure 6.2. Rem Koolhaas and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, *The City of the Captive Globe*, from *Delirious New York*, 1978

6 | Utopia, the City, and the Limits of Collage

THE END OF MODERNITY AND THE DEATH OF UTOPIA

It has become something of a cliché within discussions of the postmodern to declare that utopia is “dead.”¹ Indeed, the quantity of such pronouncements suggests that this death serves to define the postmodern

itself. In the face of critiques of utopia and utopian thought in fields as diverse as architecture, liberal political philosophy, and Marxist critical theory, it seems that the body of modernist utopianism has been definitively laid to rest. And it is in regard to this dimension of contemporary theory—a dimension that I might call, in the broadest sense, *political*—that the image of the postmodern as a simple *replacement* of the modern has gained perhaps the greatest currency. Under the banner of a politics of “difference,” a popular (if also infamous) set of positions has emerged that claims to be definitively and unproblematically postmodern. At least within the limited world of the North American academy, the rhetoric of *this kind* of postmodernism has been afforded a certain institutional recognition. (One finds university presidents wielding it as well as professors on the “Left.”)

It is possible to explain this predominance of the politics of difference within contemporary institutions by means of the *apparent* logic in the critique of utopia itself. If Western political thinking since Plato could be characterized as essentially utopian, and if the utopian essence of this thinking is the effort to posit society *as* a totality (the ideal society, the society “in heaven” against which every real polis must be measured), then the disasters of twentieth-century totalitarianism seem to demand a radical rethinking of the political. They seem to demand a politics not conceived as the critical or idealizing conception of an alternative totality to the one in which we live but rather as the (non)representation of a nontotality. No longer can the task of political theory be to represent a “better world” that will act as a kind of blueprint for political action. Rather, the theorist must work within a paradigm of political community liberated from the utopian screen. Thus, the death of utopia.

A number of philosophical texts in recent years (Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, Alphonso Lingis’s *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, and Giorgio Agamben’s *The Coming Community* leap to mind as examples) have projected a vision of political community irreducible to substance—to an “identity” or totalizing form posited as definition or as goal.² These texts share the ethical and political project of freeing community from utopian structure, a structure that potentially screens out everything except what can be subsumed under the common identity of a totality. In order to avoid such a screening, these contemporary theorists embrace a neo-Leibnizean philosophy, one that calls into question the very idea that political community occurs within a preexistent space or place: here the effort is to get away from

the illusion of the communal as a totality, representation, or essence in some sense separable from the particular individuals, practices, or institutions composing it at a given moment.³ Indeed, the project is to conceive of community in temporal language, as “event” or practice rather than as object unified by a space or site independent of its instantiation as a particular.⁴ In this light, Jean-Luc Nancy’s position as articulated in *The Inoperative Community* is typical. He writes:

I start out from the idea that . . . the thinking of community as essence—is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in* common means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this* (narcissistic) “*lack of identity*.” (*Inoperative*, p. xxxviii)

The picture here is of a path of theory seemingly running straight from the problems of utopian totalization to a particular philosophical position, or, at least, group of positions. We might represent the implicit logic here as a kind of conditional: “If utopia is dead, then community must be understood as precisely what every utopian thinking obscures, as that which evades totalizing representation.” But closer attention to a specific field of theory about utopia necessarily complicates this conclusion. Where the philosophical arguments of Nancy, Vattimo, or Andrew Benjamin (whose *Plural Event* articulates a kind of metaphysics corresponding to this notion of community) seem to present an almost logical bond between the predicate of postutopianism and the conclusion of a political theory of the “event,” in fact, things aren’t so clear.

The following reflections investigate this “uncertainty” with regard to a field that has a peculiar historical relationship to the political: the field is architectural urbanism, an area whose very history is intimately related to the question of the polis, its constitution and its relationship to the utopian problematic. And it is a field, furthermore, that has entered a prolonged crisis precisely around the failure, in the years following the second war, of its own utopian visions.

RETHINKING THE POLIS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY AND UTOPIA

Nowhere have efforts to *realize* the demands of utopianism failed more dramatically than in this century's architectural urbanism. The modernist city formulated by Le Corbusier and his followers in CIAM (Congrès Internationaux de Architecture Moderne) in the 1920s and 1930s didn't just fail to provide a meaningful environment for individual social engagement: it failed spectacularly. One has only to mention the legacy of this urbanism in the gigantic American "urban renewal" projects of the 1950s and 1960s to register this failure. And perhaps no text was more decisive in the formulation of the CIAM agenda than Le Corbusier's 1924 book *Urbanisme* (translated as *The City of Tomorrow*).⁵ In that text, as in his *La Ville Radieuse* of 1935, Le Corbusier combined several urban schemes with a heated polemic arguing for his modernist agenda. While this isn't the place for a full treatment of the modernist city, a quick glance at the *The City of Tomorrow* suffices both to illustrate the utopian nature of its urbanism and to communicate the shortcomings of such an approach.⁶ First, Le Corbusier's urbanism is, indeed, squarely within the traditions of rationalist utopianism, traditions that hark back to the Platonism of the *Republic*. That is, returning to a philosophical tradition that extends from Plato, Le Corbusier sees the task of the city as to *represent* reason itself and, in so doing, to reinforce reason as the very bond of community.⁷ Doubtless, this first means the exercise of utopian vision as a *critical* perspective: the activity of thought, of reason, is conceived as measure against which the shortcomings of society as currently constituted appear in relief. But, of course, this critical standard itself easily becomes the imaginary ideal that we associate with utopian fantasy.

On the other hand, the urbanism of *The City of Tomorrow* and other texts and projects is also utopian in a quite specifically *modernist* sense: the reason that the architect represents here doesn't simply exist (as it did for Plato) in a never-never land of the ideal. Rather it is *immanent* in history. Above all that means, in the situation facing Le Corbusier in the 1920s and 1930s, that the architect/social visionary must embrace the conditions produced by the industrial revolution—the explosion of metropolitan culture and the development of a technologized mass society. Given Le Corbusier's acceptance of the Hegelian historicist translation of Plato—a translation that produces a specifically *modernist* utopianism by making reason immanent within history—the option of rehumanizing the city by returning to an older, preindustrial city is out of the question. In any case, Le Corbusier rejects the Romantic urbanism of Camillo Sitte

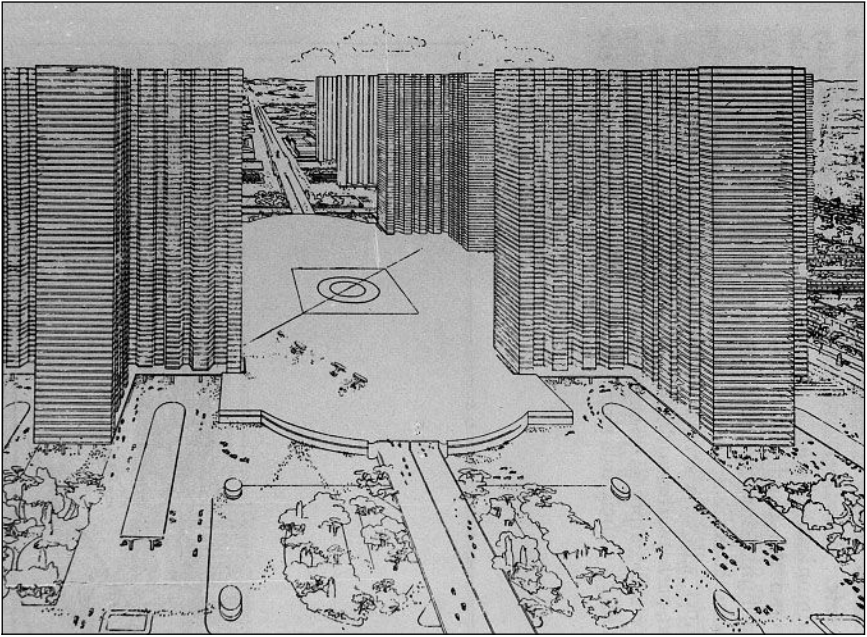


Figure 6.3. Le Corbusier, *City for 3 Million Inhabitants*, from *The City of Tomorrow*, 1929

and his disciples, equating the “picturesque” visions of such urbanists with the irrationality of a donkey.⁸

The brilliance of Le Corbusier’s urbanism—in this way strictly parallel to the brilliance of Marx’s modernist vision—is to have answered *both* the demand of traditional rationalism for a reflection of reason and the specifically modernist demand for an urban vision that builds upon the essential characteristics of the metropolitan present. The key to this success (as it was for Marxism and every other successful modernist utopianism) was to envision the reason implicit in the thinker’s activity as the end or goal implicit in the development of the present. That is, the critical task is to measure society by a yardstick consistent with the very reason that has led to the development of the industrial metropolis—not to reject the metropolitan condition with all of its complexity. But the utopian fiction here also must *demand* the work of the genius/architect: in this case, the work of the architect recalls history to its essential course—a course from which various irrational forces divert it. The architect thus provides the tonic that corrects the deficiency within reason through reason.⁹

Architecture as reason means, first of all, that the architect adapts a

position that totalizes society, which overviews it as a whole. But it also means that the social totality is viewed with regard to the specific kind of whole that characterizes the architect's creative activity—taken as the type for rational understanding. It is this specific activity that performs the corrective to the technofunctionalism of the industrial city, the measure of Le Corbusier's *critique* of the modern city. In fact, *The City of Tomorrow* alludes to a rather complex vision of architecture, one that distinguishes between, on the one hand, a zeitgeist, embodied by society as a whole and realized in anonymous production, and, on the other hand, the artistic genius who, standing on the "platform" constructed by this purely mechanical production, is able to create an enduring work:¹⁰

The engineer is a pearl among men, we agree. But he is a pearl on a string, and the only other pearls he knows are his two *neighbors*, for his narrow researches lead him from an immediately anterior cause to a direct and immediate result. The poet sees the whole necklace [Or *is he* the whole necklace? Surely a strange trope! T.B.]: he perceives individuals with their reasons and their passions; behind them he sees the *thing we call man*." (*Tomorrow*, p. 53)

Thus, the critique here, strikingly similar to Enlightenment visions like Schiller's, is of a dysfunctionality implicit in the inner development of modern reason.¹¹ The architect/poet's aesthetic vision allows him to "see the whole" in a way that is otherwise impossible. In revealing the rational underpinnings of social progress, the architect also criticizes the "functionalism" by which that rationality is for the most part interpreted and developed. The architect *humanizes* technological rationality, and, indeed, in a way that is *supposed to inform* the texture of the city: the unity of reason doesn't appear in opposition to the individual life of the elements that it organizes (in this case, buildings, roads, and so on).

The unity of the city is *not* like the unity imposed by a concept or "idea," a unity that vanquishes the individuality of elements. Thus, Le Corbusier insists upon the provision of "a composition rich in contrapuntal elements like a fugue or symphony" at the level of the whole urban plan, because only this can balance the "uniformity in detail" demanded by rationalization (*Tomorrow*, p. 74). In other words, this totality is *aesthetic* in nature, *composed* in a way that preserves the character of individual elements while giving them the unity of form. Above all, this humanization is the justification for the persistent greenery of Le Corbusier's urban proposals: the "city in the park" is to offer an alternative to the monotony of the city as machine, the industrial city of Europe.

If the metropolis is potentially like architecture in its dedication to the totalizing effects of aesthetic reason—totalizing effects only maximized by the artistic vision of the architect—then there is also another similarity: architecture (the *creation* of built form) is not simply rational; it is rational *activity*, and in this, its dynamism, it matches what is clearly the “spirit” of the modern city. Such a priority is foreshadowed in the planning problem that the architect treats as central—traffic. The first goal of Le Corbusier’s urban schemes is to free the inner cities from vehicular congestion while increasing the density of their inhabitation. That is, the architect wishes to introduce speed to the city so as to increase mobility.

With the theme of mobility, the reasoning behind the urban proposals of the 1920s—the “City for 3 Million Inhabitants,” the “Radiant City,” and the “Plan Voisin”—becomes clear. Order allows speed, and this in a two-fold sense: first, the production of a rational structure for the city, the clearing of old congested neighborhoods, and the subsequent improvement of roads literally makes the city into a more functional machine. Second, the architect uses the regular placement of static elements (cruciform skyscrapers, apartment slabs) to create a rhythm that increases our aesthetic sense of velocity as we pass through the new metropolis. Thus, here the form of the city as a whole becomes the ground upon which the figure of dynamism can appear.

Furthermore, the “order” of the entire composition indicates the spontaneity of the city’s subject. Speed itself is, here, only a figure. What the figure points to is that freedom opened by increased mobility—freedom from place. It is this liberation from any constraint of the local that suggests a poetic vision of nonconstraining, rational space. A passage from *The City of Tomorrow* indicates the force of such poeticization in Le Corbusier’s writing:

An overwhelming sensation. Immense but radiant presence (of the skyscrapers in the city’s center) . . . The traveller in his airplane, arriving from Constantinople, or perhaps Peking, suddenly sees appearing through the wavering lines of rivers and patches of forests that clear imprint which marks a city which has grown in accordance with the spirit of man: the mark of the human brain at work. As twilight falls the glass skyscrapers seem to flare. (*Tomorrow*, p. 178)

But the ecstatic discovery indicated by this poetry of open space and movement through it also brings a price; for all of Le Corbusier’s care to project an *aesthetic* totality, a totality that will symbolically leave room for

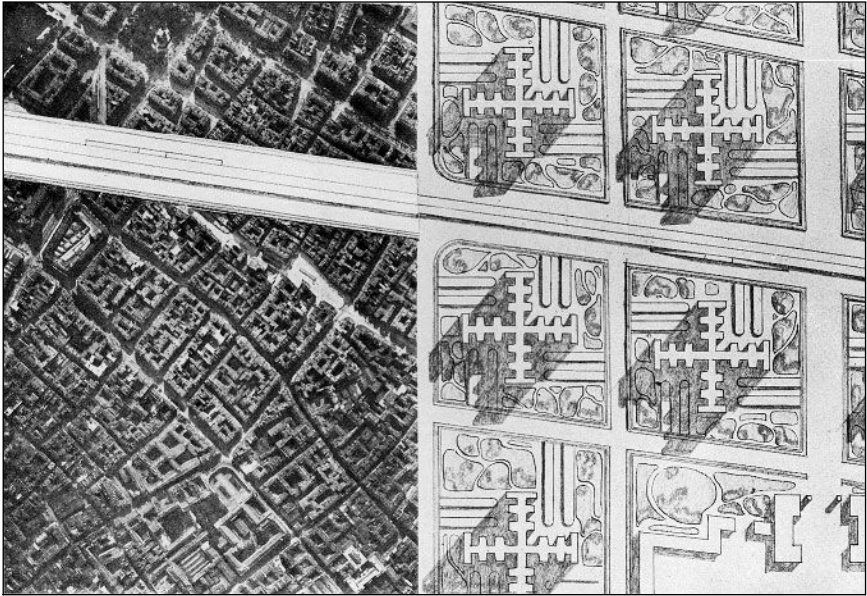


Figure 6.4. Le Corbusier, *Plan Voissin*, “Paris, Before and After,” from *The City of Tomorrow*, 1929

the individual, the exception, and so on, this vision of an unconditional freedom anchored in infinite open space actually produces a city that is totalizing in the most dehumanizing sense. The urban visions of Le Corbusier’s specific proposals—say, the “City for 3 Million Inhabitants” or the “Plan Voisin” for Paris—owe their primary characteristics to *this* totality, *this* dream of a seamless social unity. What is indicated here is a whole not explicable in the terms of aesthetic form with its implicit preservation of *aufgehoben* terms.

The result of this dream is that, in actuality, the modernist city displays precisely the kind of totalization that its aesthetic strategies were intended to avoid.¹² First of all, this totalization overtakes the aesthetic impulse in the form of a planning *technique*. When, in considering the case of Paris, Le Corbusier asks the question “physic or surgery?” (i.e., mere alteration or new beginning), he plumps down (with some politic exceptions in the case of certain monuments) decisively on the side “surgery” (*Tomorrow*, pp. 251ff.). Thus, his “Plan Voisin” proposes leveling the center of Paris as a kind of coronary operation on the sick city. The first move in realizing modernist utopia is a leveling of the old city. Such a method leaves no possibility for any acknowledgment of historicity.

Such a totalizing attitude appears, also, in the *image* of the city projected in Le Corbusier's urban projects. In his proposal for a "City for 3 Million Inhabitants" (1922), the space of the modernist city proves totalizing in its almost panoptic demands. Because of the need to represent itself as a whole for its inhabitants, the primary victim of modernist urbanist polemics must be the *fabric* of the traditional European city.¹³ In the modernist urbanism that grows with and out of Le Corbusier's proposals, you can sense a confluence of forces hostile to urban fabric—to the urban street "wall" made up of multiple adjoining facades. Both the generally utopian demand for a visible totality and the specifically futurist fascination with rapid movement reinforce the imperative to shrink urban structures until only residual elements remain. On the one hand, it's vital that the inhabitant be able to see around the buildings so as to locate herself in the city as a whole. On the other hand, (though the two points are clearly related) buildings become mere markers of movement through the city. In effect, Le Corbusier's rationalist polemic makes the "corridor street" of the older European and American city a symbol of and occasion for irrationality—replacing it with a transparent, unified "space" littered with sculptural objects. Thus, utopian totalization produces the overwhelming visual characteristic of the modernist city—a quality of unrelenting uniformity and exposure.

Nor is this utopian violence to our desire for what I might call a sense of place in any way an accident; it is, I would claim, an inevitable result of the *synthesis* underlying Le Corbusier's vision—the synthesis between utopian reason and modernist immanentism, the artist/philosopher and the engineer. Because, ideally, nothing remains of the *difference* between the critical, rationalist moment and the essence of modern life, this unification is itself necessarily totalizing in the most violent sense. In other words, from the start Le Corbusier's critical polemic is supported by the dream of healing the rift *between* the architect and the "engineer"—that is, between the humanistic rationality of the architect and a technoindustrial functionalism—but this dream is not, in the final analysis, describable in the humanist terms of aesthetic modernism. When eternal reason corresponds exactly to historical reason, there is no need to preserve difference, to preserve the specific, the sensuous, or the individual. In effect, all that remains is to follow the dictates of the engineer, since the task of the artist is nothing other than a projection of engineering's organic development. Nothing actually remains to that artist, standing on the shoulders of the anonymous scientist, except to affirm the rationality of science itself.¹⁴

UTOPIA AFTER UTOPIA: *COLLAGE CITY*

In *Collage City*, written in 1973, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter use the ironic and playful traditions of collage to distance themselves from Le Corbusier's modernist utopian claims and from the disastrous image of the modernist city.¹⁵ Taking up the challenge of totalization both in relationship to modernism's rejection of urban fabric and its design process, they use collage as a source for a countertradition. They start from the fabric of the traditional European city that Le Corbusier's utopian vision demanded he reject, ironically interpreting *it* as key to an avant-gardist vision alternative to modernist utopianism. Recall that Le Corbusier interprets the traditional urban texture of the European city, with its corridor streets as a kind of opaque solid from which the space of the street or square must be carved. Arguing the terminal unclarity of such a city, he proposes a city of parklike open space rhythmically punctuated by slabs or towers.

It is, above all, Le Corbusier's *analysis* that Rowe and Koetter challenge.¹⁶ They refuse to reduce the urbanism of the traditional European city to the "carved space" of the medieval street or square. Rather, they concentrate upon a peculiar gestalt *reversibility* in classical traditions of European urbanism. For Rowe and Koetter, the traditional city in its classical moments is defined by a constitutive undecidability of figure and ground—what is often called a "reciprocity." Does the space (piazza and so forth) define objects within it (the cathedral in its square) or do the objects (facades, cloisters, and so forth) define the urban space (street, courtyard, and so forth) (see figure 6.1)? The urban principle, as understood by Rowe and Koetter, in essence makes an a priori answer to this question impossible (*CC*, pp. 83).

Thus, for example, the front facade of the Palazzo Borghese in Rome establishes it as a monumental urban object. But its plan makes clear that the facade bends to create a wall not only for its surrounding streets but also for its own gardens. It is a structure both *in* space and definitive *of* the spaces of the streets surrounding it. In other words, Le Corbusier, with his polemic, missed the nature of the urbanism he rejected. Such a practice is not *simply* a way of defeating the humanist need for a totalizing space but, instead, is a manner of insisting upon the undecidability of field and figure.

And, such is the implication of the argument in *Collage City*, it is precisely this error in analysis that Le Corbusier's modernist architectural utopianism demands. It is absolutely vital to the urbanism of the "Intern-

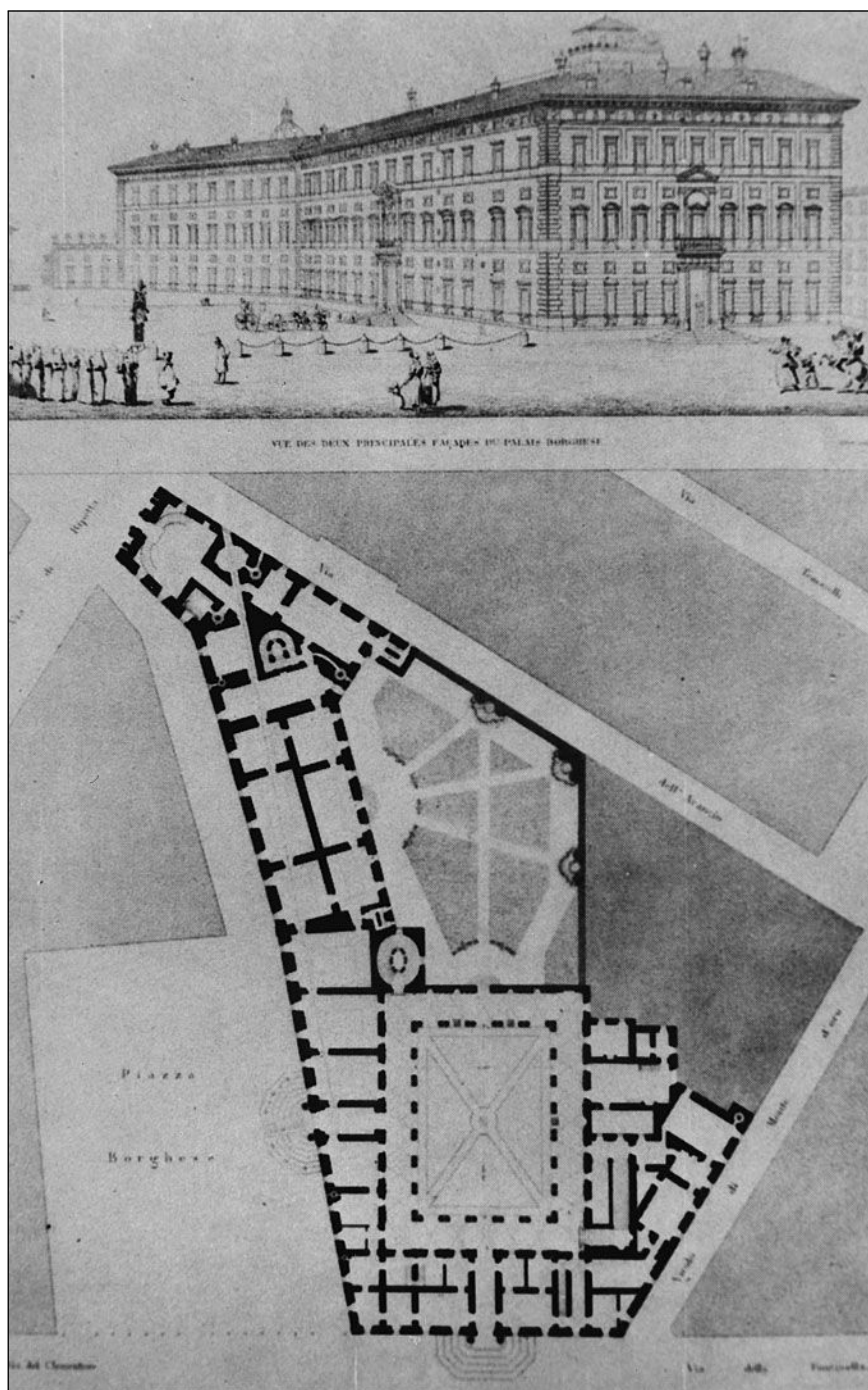


Figure 6.5. Palazzo Borghese, Rome, elevation and ground plan, from *Collage City*, 1978

tional Style,” the urbanism for which Le Corbusier’s schemes become canonical, that the immanence of history’s end announce itself spatially, announce itself *as* absolute and empty space. In part, that necessity is negative: to embrace the present, as the imperative of modernism demands, is not to embrace the reality of the historical city because that reality blocks those characteristics of the present—transparency, dynamism—that correspond to the rationality of the architect. But, for Rowe and Koetter, there’s more than that at work in Le Corbusier’s privileging of empty space as the utopian field for urbanism. Above all, their predecessor’s choice acts as symptom of the repressed totalization involved in closing the gap that I’ve discussed as opening between the “engineer” and the “architect.”¹⁷ It is this space that tells us that the ultimate priority here is a unity *without* meaningful individuality. Thus, the modernist polemically misreads the form of the existent city, reducing it to a hollowed-out solid, *so that* utopian modernism can break the vessel, reverse figure, and ground; so that the new city can rescue the traditional city from its irrationality, replacing it with the lucid, transparent image of an empty space, a space effectively uncompromised by individual places.

The collaged composition of the traditional city, for Koetter and Rowe, represents the impossibility of such a pure *field*. Urban fabric stands for a nontotalizable city. The task of the architect/urbanist in intervening in the city becomes the maximization of this undecidability. In other words, ideally she produces built forms that demand double readings in their relationship to urban fabric—both reinforcing the public space of the street and announcing themselves as monumental objects within space. If you are looking for the “scaffold” within which the city is organized in *Collage City*, you won’t find it at the level of *architectural form*.

But *Collage City*’s rejection of Le Corbusier’s utopian modernism shouldn’t be understood as a rejection of *modernism* itself: indeed, central to the project here is the preservation of something like a modernist theory to support a modernist practice. Building an urbanism, as it does, from the immanent measure of architectural practice, Rowe and Koetter’s approach *does* remain a modernism. Indeed, in a sense, the move here is simply to *deepen* architecture’s modernist commitment—for now the immanent measure for reshaping the city is the historicity of all human practice rather than an aesthetic dream of escaping history. Here, the implicit argument is that what is genuinely modern is historically finite action, or, to put it negatively, the admission of our inability to transcend

our historical situation. Ironically, this historical limitation is itself the key to a modernist knowledge—what we can know about ourselves beyond the limitations of that situation. In other words, *Collage City* remains modernist in its embrace of traditional urbanism, in its insistence upon the viability of the *critical* gesture in modernism. The foundation for a genuine modernist approach to the city lies in the acceptance of finitude, the acceptance that the architect is—in a trope central to the argument of *Collage City*—a kind of Lévi-Straussian *bricoleur* always working within a given historical context (see *CC*, pp. 102–16).

Thus, the paradox of a modernism founded upon the implicit rejection of modernist urbanism's utopian technique and image. In contrast to the modernist insistence upon a utopian “new start” for the city, Rowe and Koetter's urbanism is the basis of an interpretive practice. Instead of starting the city anew, the architect transforms a given urban situation. A new building may create a new monumental focus for a street or it may convert a prior monument into “fabric.” The exact nature of the contribution will be determined by the demands of collage undecidability. But whatever the character of the architect's intervention, it is vital that it must *remain* an intervention, that it eschew the utopian impulse to “start over.” Here, in contrast to the utopian modernism of Le Corbusier and his followers, urbanism becomes an apparently antiutopian, essentially hermeneutic practice.

However, this appearance of a modernist antiutopianism does not go very far. After all, the very possibility of a modernist criticism already implies a utopian measure. And, in fact, Rowe and Koetter explicitly make that measure the model for a new urban utopia. Indeed, as we shall see, everything in the text is set up so as to preserve the viability of the reflexive utopian move that was discernible in Le Corbusier's texts on urbanism: once again, the activity of the architect is to provide a measure for the form of the polis itself.

Thus, the rejection of Le Corbusier's model is not the rejection of a *modernist* utopia, but it is the casting off of *utopian modernism*. It is the negation of the *union* of utopian vision and modernism underlying the modernist city.¹⁸ And in the place of such a synthesis, Koetter and Rowe put the heterogeneity definitive of *collage*.

Throughout this book, “collage” has repeatedly emerged as signifying a split that refuses to be thought in the terms of either opposition or totality, difference or identity. Whether we've seen that heterogeneity in the terms of the relationship between a transformed space of worldhood

and a nonspace (chapter 1), between the negated universality of historicism and the negating particularism of perspectivism (chapter 2), between the theatricality and antitheatricality of the postmodern (chapter 3), or between the comprehensibility promised by judgment and the disruption to comprehension caused by the splitting of the subject (chapters 4 and 5), in every case, collage has forced us to acknowledge a dimension of experience resistant to the very categories by which thought organizes relationships. *Collage City* makes use of that characteristic of collage to attempt to answer the demands of *both* traditional utopianism and modernism *without* synthesizing the two.

First of all, collage names a kind of traditional rationalist utopianism—though, as we’ve seen repeatedly, the space of such rationalism emerges transformed by collage practice. In this case, the transformation is evident in the limitation of what can be “said” by a restricted “language” of urbanism. Within the language of architectural urbanism, the language of Noli (figure/ground) diagrams involving the play between figure and field, object and space, a “collage” city, in fact, avoids producing a totalizing space like that of the modernist city. This, of course, is the case because architectural urbanism has no vocabulary for the open play *between* figure and field, the play that—in another sense—provides the “space” of the city itself. In the simple binarism of this gestalt spatial language, there’s no “word” for a third element, the active mediation of binary opposition. Thus, so long as urbanist architectural practice is arguably a cleanly separated field of knowledge, one can claim that the practice associated with it is shielded from the possibility of totalization.

And, indeed, Rowe and Koetter have a name for this totality they believe to be incapable of architectural totalization: they identify the city of collage with the nineteenth-century vision of the “museum city” (see *CC*, pp. 126–36). At first glance, one might limit the role of this utopian image in *Collage City* to the “content” of specific institutions, excluding it entirely from the urbanist coordination of institutions and their built spaces. In every specific case examined within the text, the city is conceived as the “public” organization and display of a series of institutional worlds—the “scaffolding” supporting those institutions: parliament stands beside university, city hall, art museum, theater, and so on. Utopia, according to this model, lies, first of all, in the individual pieces, the “vest pocket” idealizations (“Swiss Canton, New England village, Dome of the Rock, Place Vendôme, Campidoglio, etc.”) assembled within the collage city, not in the texture of the whole (*CC*, p. 149).

But the real vision of urban life as a whole in *Collage City* lies in the

collaged *community* of these utopias: it is this vision that the authors christen the museum city, recalling the European and American cities of the last century. Such a city of pieces without a transparent architectural ground feeds an ideal of a *political* and *social* urbanity framed by a tolerant, pluralistic, even relativistic public space. In other words, the utopia here is the dream of a society based upon the values of tolerance—of a civic “public space.” The museum itself (the city as museum) becomes the urbanist ideal. The last chapter of *Collage City* itself is largely devoted to tracing the applicability of collage as a paradigm for understanding the workings of the “traditional” urbanism of the nineteenth-century city.

But it would also be wrong to conclude that *Collage City* simply rejects the modernist dream of immanence—the present—or even that dream’s specific interpretation as the *dynamism* of life in the metropolis. The *modernism* of *Collage City*—that hermeneutic practice associated with bricolage—also suggests an *optative* vision (if *not*, for obvious reasons, a developed modernist utopia). On the basis of the creative hermeneutic activity of the architect/urbanist, the *ideal* of *Collage City* is supposed to be a city that, in opposition to the traditional “utopian illusion” of “changelessness and finality,” now offers us “a reality of change, motion, action and history” (*CC*, p. 149). In other words, Rowe and Koetter invoke the active nature of collage, the fact that it always demands another intervention, that it is productive of an endless series of historically finite interpretations. The dynamism of the metropolis is represented by the fact that it is always, from the viewpoint of the architect/urbanist, a city in the process of becoming. And the text of the title chapter of *Collage City*, with its appeal to the “ironic” character of Picasso’s cubist collage practice, makes clear that the hermeneutic model of urbanist “bricolage” is supposed to lead to a dynamic, modern metropolis.

Of course, however, this dynamism is precisely *not* to be measured in either particular architectural forms or through some pregiven “scaffold” in which they are located: as we’ve had opportunity to see above, neither of the two “words” used in the gestalt language of architectural urbanism can bear the modernist dream. That vision can only emerge in the instability of meaning that is the architect/urbanist’s goal—an instability that emerges for the interpreter of the city (whether she is an architect or not). There’s, literally, *no-thing* that one could point to as the embodiment of the modernist dream. In other words, the fundamental dynamism of the city is only present in the active *collaging* of built structures—a process that is registered *independently* of the static elements

of the built environment. The urbanist facilitates this overlaying of institutional structures, but she does not (and, according to the argument of *Collage City*, cannot) *build* it. The dynamism of the metropolis remains heterogeneous to the materials of urban fabric: the limits of the language of urbanism are used to build a wall between the elements of the apocalyptic synthesis in Le Corbusier's utopian vision.

A collage city offers us—such is the claim—the benefits of *both* traditional and modernist ideals, but it also protects us from the highly flammable combination of these projects, quarantining them at different levels of communication. The hope is that the overdetermination implicit in “collage” can name both a traditionalist utopia and this dream of modernist dynamism. That's possible because, as we've seen, collage refers both to something like what we've called a neutral structure or framework for a potentially utopian plurality and a practice irreducible to any pregiven “scaffold” for meaning. In this way, the choice of collage as the vessel for the presentation of their urban model allows Rowe and Koetter to apparently evade simply ignoring the utopian claims implicit in modernist historicism—allows them to apparently satisfy *both* the demands of utopian modernism while also rejecting their marriage.

You will doubtless perceive something artificial about the boundaries within which Rowe and Koetter here claim to have avoided the projection of a totalizing utopian synthesis. Their argument depends upon the clean separation between an *architectural* language and a broader set of socially constituted languages—a neat division, to put the same point in other words, between the language of the architect/urbanist and the language of the *theorist*. Now, at one level, this divide *does* work: it prevents the illusion that the architect's practice might adequately replace the ideal that it signifies. Rowe and Koetter make a great deal of returning to the traditional (Platonic) notion of the utopian city as *metaphor*.¹⁹ Their urbanism takes the architect back from the millenarian brink to which Le Corbusier's modernist vision had brought architecture: one needs no longer hope (worry) that a given urban plan will itself somehow end the messy business of history. The ideal is safely divvied among two languages between which there can be no translation, thus forbidding the possibility of an actual “completion” of history.

On the other hand, the falsity of the idea of a pure and simple language of urbanism—a language hermetically sealed within the boundaries of gestalt play—does have consequences. You might say that there is something about the effort to separate off a formal language of urban

architecture that is, in the final analysis, *anticollage*. Collage must, at the level of its most radical *dynamism*, assert the impurity of all languages, their fundamental contamination by each other, so that they can meet in collage play. Collage must, as we've had numerous opportunities to see, break every space or frame claiming to contain it, including the "space" of a pure practice.

Nor is this a merely academic failure. The price for ignoring that principle of collage in Rowe and Koetter's embrace of it—the *symptom* that inevitably emerges in every architectural effort to follow the principles of *Collage City*—is the slowing of the dynamism supposedly projected by the process of urbanist collaging. In fact, the inert weight of the "museum city" defeats any sense of "change, motion, action, and history" in the city resulting from Rowe and Koetter's theory.

The similarity between *Collage City* and its nineteenth-century ("museum city," "city beautiful") predecessors is illuminating.²⁰ Koetter and Rowe hope to achieve the suppression of all limited identity for the public sphere through its articulation only as *fabric*. But their more or less traditionalist interpretation of architectural urbanism itself provides a kind of generic identity to the city. It allows the *idealization* of the public sphere *qua* public, just as did the old nationalist and colonialist identities of the nineteenth-century city. In other words, as was the case with the museum city of the last century, urban-scale architecture transforms the new collage city into an inert ideal. The only difference is that the new "monument" of identity is no longer associated with particular nationalist or colonialist programs: rather, it is precisely that kind of "traditionalist" urban texture that Koetter and Rowe fight to reestablish.²¹

Furthermore, the essentially passive notion of cultural engagement suggested in the idea of the *museum* marks a significant continuity between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century versions of the city. In the museum, culture is something to be absorbed rather than made. There's little room for aesthetic or political activity in such a public sphere. Indeed, the open, neutral totality of *Collage City* suggests a situation that would simply aggravate this passivity. No longer tied to the nationalist, imperial identities of the nineteenth-century metropolis, the new "museum city"—the city of the "invisible" public space—would spawn a purely scopic culture, a culture without the real possibility of meaningful engagement.

Clearly something has gone wrong in utopia. The disturbing complicity between the neutralized "museum city" and pseudo-variety of, say, the

American consumer mall suggests that the compromise between traditional and modernist utopian ideals in *Collage City* collapses: as we've repeatedly seen in earlier chapters, the aesthetics of collage is fundamentally *ludic*, demanding an activation of the individual in relationship to the collage/work. But while the urban design paradigm here certainly opens the doors for the *architect* to engage richly with public space in the process of shaping it, the very necessity of re-creating a utopian vision of the city as collage tends to subvert the activating potential of collage for the city's *inhabitant*. Indeed, when the gesture of utopian idealization transforms the neutral scaffold of collage into a mere simulacrum of a meaningful totality, the city ceases to allow any real public activity.

The city as museum: there one has a distinct step back, in the discussions of urban form in *Collage City*, from the emphasis upon engaged process. If, as earlier chapters of my discussion have demonstrated, the aesthetics of collage is divided between a play defeating all efforts to contain it within a conceptual space and the peculiar representation of a "neutral" space that contains all potential play, then here the latter collage potential seems to displace the former. The overwhelming characteristic of the city resultant from *Collage City* is the neutral city, the city that contains all possible truths. And, to that extent, there is a decisive favoring (I won't call it a prejudice) in *Collage City* for a view of collage as producing an "invisible" public space in which fixed institutions vie for attention. That the role of the architect is ceaselessly to erase any architectural monumentalization of such space doesn't effect its importance to the overall project. The effect of collage play is to establish a museum city, a city that symbolizes the possibility of competing "truths," that "accommodates" "a whole range of axes mundi" (CC, p. 149). This might be just fine—if the project of *Collage City* were not also to defeat totality and identity in favor of the playful activation of the individual. But the utopian valorization of public space here keeps the city from fulfilling that modernist promise of collage.

DELIRIOUS NEW YORK: DISPOSING OF ARCHITECTURAL URBANISM

We've seen that the compromise of *Collage City* in regard to the city of modernism follows from a particular interpretation of collage, an interpretation that subsumes the gestalt play of collage fields to the necessity of idealizing a neutral field. While it is doubtless an "open" totality, Koet-

ter and Rowe's city necessarily serves such a meaning context. Furthermore, we've also seen that what necessitates this prejudice is, in the final analysis, the authors' insistence upon a formalist view of the relationship between theory and architectural practice. But it's possible to start from the *other* interpretation of collage—the interpretation that refuses to set limits to the subversive potential of collage play. It's possible to use collage as an aesthetic weapon for resisting the establishment of any utopian totality, of any ultimate “field” for the play of aesthetic vision. And that's precisely what the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas explores in his work, starting from his 1978 book *Delirious New York*.²²

Determined to make the dynamic potential of a collage urbanism uppermost, Koolhaas subverts the gesture in *Collage City* that limits the urban “product” of design to the peculiar stasis of the museum city—the gesture drawing a formalist boundary around the language of architectural urbanism. Thus, Koolhaas, who was at Cornell with Rowe in the 1960s, begins *Delirious New York* with a set of conditions precisely calculated to forbid *Collage City*'s traditional urbanist discourse with its formalist conception of urban theory. In Manhattan, with its limited area, preset grid, and practically unlimited vertical space, there is really no “room” for the spatial plays of traditionalist urbanism. The “solids” and “spaces” in this city are predetermined by the economic dimensions of twentieth-century corporate capitalism—by the phenomena that, in his recent *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, Koolhaas places under the rubric of “bigness.”²³ Thus, Manhattan (and, by extension, the late-twentieth-century city in general) starts from a situation that makes the desire for the humanist formal play of Noli diagrams irrelevant.

Thus, in *Delirious New York*, the advance of capitalism immediately washes away the ideal of urbanist architectural practice so carefully built up by Rowe and Koetter. Koolhaas embraces the conditions created by this development with an enthusiasm that would remain impossible for the authors of *Collage City*, still committed to theory as delineating formal rules for architectural practice. The *possibility* that Koolhaas sees here is precisely what would set free architectural urbanism to the point where it could genuinely prepare the conditions in which the metropolis would open up a dynamic enjoyment for its inhabitants.

With the disappearance of the opportunity that had defined modernist architectural practice (as bricolage) in *Collage City*, the broader “conceptual” field that had fixed a relationship *between* theory and practice also withers. That is, for Koolhaas, theory is no longer conceivable as

articulating invariable rules (which thus remain “formal,” given content only by specific projects) for practice. Instead, from the start, the model here is a kind of mutual contamination of theory by practice and vice versa. There is no clean break between the language of theory and the spatial languages used by the architect/urbanist.

Indeed, perhaps the first thing to strike the reader of *Delirious New York* is the gain that we’ve already had occasion to measure through collage practices: in disallowing an ontological distinction between “levels” of discourse to stand, in insisting on the continuity between any languages, Koolhaas opens the possibility for an open and indefinite exchange. In this case, that allows the possibility of an ongoing reevaluation of practice itself. It’s vital to see that this gain is intimately linked with the changed role of theory; for in Koolhaas’s writing, theory and practice inform each other in a fundamentally egalitarian fashion. Theory is simply *another language* for the articulation of architectural ideas and no longer a transcendent guarantor of them.

Take, for example, the thematics of the “unconscious” as a structure informing the life of Manhattan. Rather than simply framing a thesis about the unconscious and the city and then “illustrating” it at various moments in textual exposition, *Delirious New York* interweaves theoretical references to Freudian concepts (the unconscious, death) with their articulations within projects—“instantiations” that develop and even transform them *as* concepts. Whether it’s the phallic nature of the skyscraper (playfully explored in Madelon Vriesendorp’s renditions of an “affair” between the Chrysler and Empire State towers) or the links between water and the death drive that build from the discussions of the theme parks at Coney Island through the proposed projects at the end of *Delirious New York*, in every instance, it’s a matter of an endless process of contamination between theories and their instantiations (see figure 6.8). Koolhaas even gives a rather precise description of this process in his discussion of Salvador Dalí’s “Paranoid Critical Method”: like the thought of the paranoid, Manhattan develops by a two-step process. First, a sort of interpretive delirium yields a “rich harvest of unsuspected correspondences, analogies and patterns”; then the paranoiac’s strange sense of order introduces a “critical” realization to the material thus introduced, congealing the “delirious” material into a “fact” or set of facts to which all aspects of reality are made to adhere (*DNY*, p. 238). In other words, a set of theoretical interpretations is affixed to some “practical” manifestation, which then, in turn, exercises a kind of gravitational pull upon all subsequent interpretations. Thus, each building in Manhattan, each project, is

both a product of a theoretical speculation and the binding transformation of the theoretical field in which interpretation occurs.

As a result, the gain from *Delirious New York*'s starting point lies in the very "delirium" announced in its title. Here, no formalist interest stands in the way of an avant-gardism aimed at activating the metropolitan experience. Here, the very constitution of architecture from theory and practice serves the cause of dynamism.

Perhaps this story is best told in terms of a vital tension in the architecture of "manhattanism"—that between the tower and the globe. First of all, the Manhattan grid provides a neutral field that is obscured by the peculiarity of the block-sized worlds it creates—that they are also *view-points* out onto the city as a whole. Manhattan is, above all, a *city of towers*, of sites for the representation of the city as field, but, that also means, of subject points, points of exception to that representation. However, the gesture of manhattanism, endlessly repeated throughout *Delirious New York* is that the very act of marking a point of exception, of building a tower, is itself the creation of a *world*. The enjoyment of the point of exception, its *inhabitation*, transforms it into a *world* of exception. It is for this reason that the city of towers inevitably becomes a city of worlds, an apparent (though not real) approximation of the "museum city." And in each of these worlds—the skyscraper microcosms of Manhattan—the whole of the city is reduced to the status of *view*, of a *figure* visible from the window. The undecidability of figure and ground in collage reemerges here in an oscillation of the "reality" of the city in the urban dweller's experience.

In the ideas of the "tower" and the "globe," Koolhaas provides images for this swing between point of exception and world, source of representation and representational totality. The true foundation for the development that most concerns Koolhaas, the development of the Manhattan skyscraper, derives from a synthesis of these two forms, the proposal for a Globe Tower (1906–10) to be built on Coney Island (*DNY*, pp. 71–75). Designed (but never constructed) by Samuel Friede, the Globe Tower represents both the ultimate destination of the theme park motif ("an agglomeration of Steeplechase, Luna Park, and Dreamland, all swallowed up in a single interior volume, stacked on consecutive floors") and the emergence of the idea for the skyscraper. Friede's tower is to contain the "highest observation platform in the United States," able to command the entire world of New York. But, as a globe, it also contains roof gardens, a layer of theaters, a hotel, a zoo holding animals and plants from

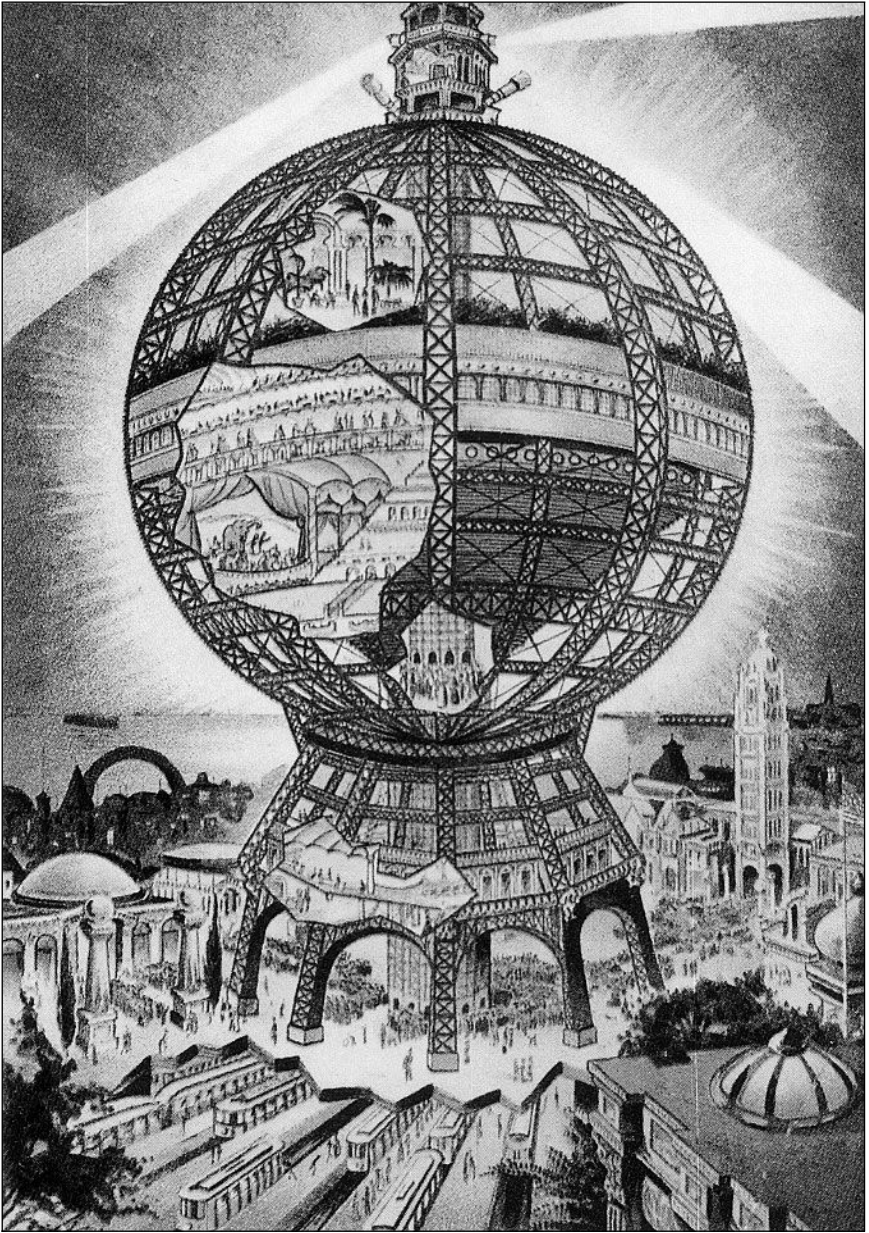


Figure 6.6. Samuel Friede, proposal for the “Globe Tower,” from *Delirious New York*, 1978

the different continents; in short, the whole world (*DNY*, p. 73). That is, the “Globe Tower” is both place for the representation of the world and world. Its very power to produce a sense of self-containment depends upon its visual domination of the landscape around it.

Now, for Koolhaas precisely this ability to be a world, in the double sense of a site for the representation of all possible experience and a self-contained totality, lies behind the tradition of the skyscraper. Thus: “the Globe Tower must be seen as the essence of the idea of the Skyscraper, the most extreme and explicit manifestation of the Skyscraper’s potential to reproduce the earth and to create other worlds” (*DNY*, p. 75). It’s vital to the symbolic narrative of *Delirious New York*, however, that the Globe Tower turns out to be a scam—that the developer, having absconded with the investments that were to fund it, leaves town without realizing the project. There can be, in fact, no adequate compaction of the structure of delirious representation, the structure of manhattanism, into an adequate representation.

But it’s wrong to think of this inadequacy in the formal terms of traditional theory: the problem isn’t that every project fails to live up to the ideal of the Globe Tower so much as that every project *qua* realization (including, of course, the Globe Tower as a realization *in* theory) outstrips its “form” or “idea.” Here we return to Freudian/ Lacanian thematics of an unconsciousness conceived as the play of signifiers.

Giorgio Agamben, in *The Coming Community*, invokes Walter Benjamin’s idea of a redeemed world where everything will be exactly like the present but “just a little bit different” (*Coming*, p. 53). Precisely this “little” difference established within the representation of city as a whole produces the *delirium* of manhattanism. That is, the transformation of the tower into a globe is a representational process—one in which the difference between “original” and representation is registered as an excess of the latter over the former (of the signifier over the signified, as Lacan would put it). Just as the act of painting escapes the painting’s image, so, in general, also the act of representing here eludes representation. In effect, the theatricality of manhattanism derives from the excessiveness of the representative over what it represents.²⁴ Each skyscraper, each amusement park, exactly reproduces the “world” of Manhattan itself. But this copy always bears the mark of its production from a point of exception: it *is* the world it represents, but it is also *exceptional*—erotic, uninhibited, and theatrical—because, as representing it contains something that is, by definition, excluded from the image it produces.



Figure 6.7. "City of Light," Edison Pavilion, 1939 World's Fair, from *Delirious New York*, 1978

Furthermore, manhattanism demands, in a second moment, that the site of exception itself be added to any future representation of the whole—but *precisely* as the image of the exceptional. Above all, one sees this process in Koolhaas's discussions of the Coney Island amusement park. For example, Luna Park, conceived by Fredric Thompson and Elmer Dundy in 1903, inscribes the themes of representation within a "lunar" fantasy: Coney Island is, of course, itself an exceptional space in the exchange system of New York—an island away from the island of Manhattan, a representation of the city to which the "masses" escape for leisure. Luna Park, however, is entirely planned to reinforce such a sense of the exceptional. Following the lead of earlier theme parks (e.g., George Tilyou's "Steeplechase"), Thompson and Dundy wall off their "sacred-space" and reinforce this literal separation with a symbolization, the journey to the Moon: "The Trip to the Moon on the airship Luna IV," in which "[a] wonderful, widespread panorama of the surrounding sea, Manhattan and Long Island" opens up as "the ship mounts upward."²⁵

Thus, the visitor to the theme park steps through what Koolhaas calls a "conceptual air-lock" into a space from which the world of everyday experience becomes visible as a whole. We go to a place that's "out of

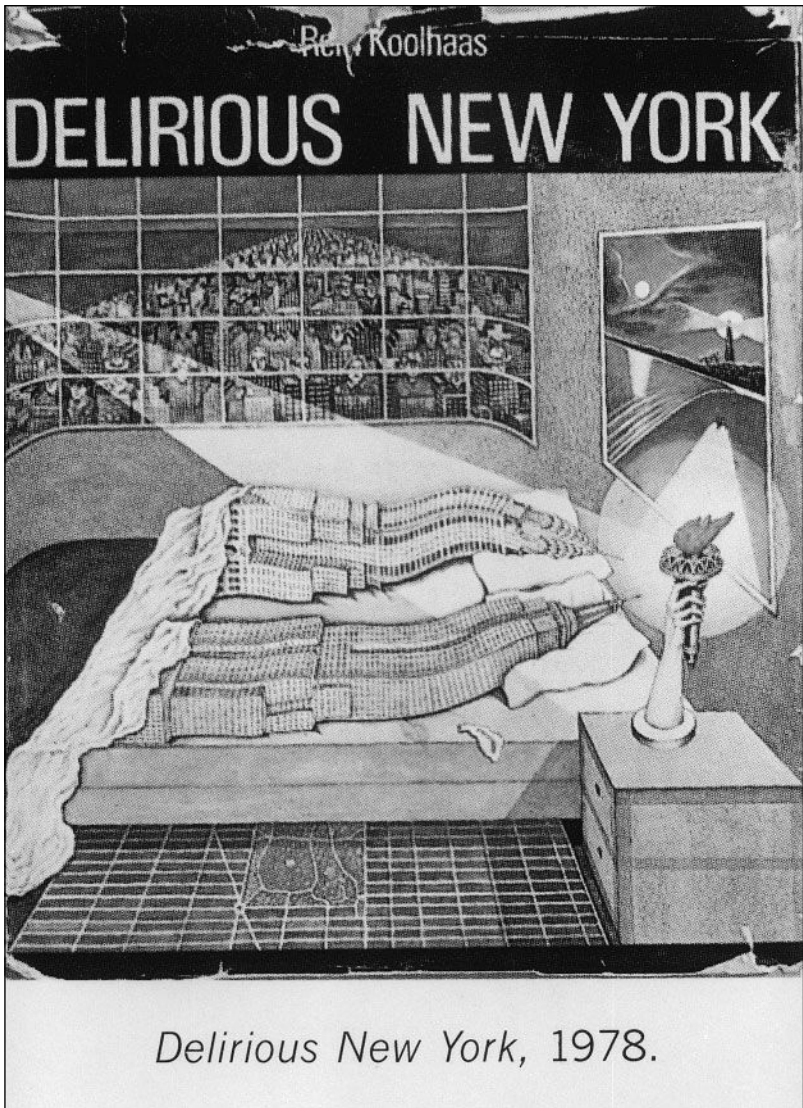


Figure 6.8. Madelon Vriesendorp and Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York* cover, 1978

this world” to look at the world. But, as any tourist of a contemporary theme park knows, this departure from the world of everyday experience does not end in the qualityless space of noplacé. Indeed, as a *journey* it is inevitable that it ends up *someplace*, and indeed this someplace turns out to be *another world*, the world of the Moon. Furthermore, this

“other world” turns out to be nothing other than a representation of the world from which the visitor comes. Luna Park, like Manhattan, is a city of towers, the absurd height of which reinforces lunar “weightlessness.” The antigravity of the moon is thus a suspension of the “mutually reinforcing realities of the earth—its laws, expectations, inhibitions” in favor of a “delirious” dynamism.

And this dynamism also explains the formal creativity of manhattanism. Excess—representation—excess: the process is potentially endless as a tool for the *generation* of urban carnival. Whenever you think that there’s nothing more to be added, that there are no more possible metaphors for escape from representation, another one pops up; another “theme” added to the list or another twist on the idea of the “themes” themselves. Indeed, the growth of the theme park depends upon *primary process*, an eruption of the unconscious into the field of everyday representation. It’s the uncanny sense that, just when you thought there was no other “way out” of the world of representation, there emerges “the door at the edge of the world”; just when you think that every metaphor for the boundaries of life has been utilized, the park adds a clinic dedicated to the newest incubator for premature babies or an exhibit in which the “end of the world according to the dream of Dante” is endlessly reenacted. The points of exception multiply in the dark of the metropolis, only to erupt—as the masses escape Manhattan on their week-ends—in the unconscious forms of the parks themselves.

The skyscraper translates the idea of the Globe Tower into a pure verticality. And from this synthesis derives the creativity not only of the great tall building projects—from the Downtown Athletic Club through the Waldorf-Astoria and, as a climax, Rockefeller Center, the Chrysler Building, and the Empire State Building—but also of Koolhaas’s own proposals for a renewed manhattanism. Each skyscraper is both a view onto the world of Manhattan and an independent world. To exemplify the result of this synthesis, the tower of the “new” Waldorf-Astoria, constructed in the 1930s, presents the design problem of the “greatest hotel of all time,” combining “a transient hotel, an apartment house, a great ballroom and entertainment layout, a garage for private railroad cars (off the New York Central tracks), various exhibition rooms and everything one can think of, the whole thing mounting to forty stories” (*DNY*, p. 145). But this miniature world is also explicitly a theater, in which the guest “buys his way into an ever-expanding script, acquiring the right to use all the decors and to exploit the prefabricated opportunities to interact with all

the other ‘stars’” (*DNY*, p. 150). Architecturally, the structure expresses this theatricality not only in its exotic “rooms” (Starlight, Empire, Jade, Blue, and so forth) but also in its external form—a theatrical representation of the old Waldorf-Astoria hotel on 34th Street.

In his own proposal, at the end of *Delirious New York*, for a “Hotel Sphinx” to occupy the northern end of Times Square, Koolhaas fits his own work into this tradition of the grand hotel. The program here is of almost self-parodying complexity—including a ground floor designed to facilitate “the questionable activities that give the Times Square area its character,” a complete hotel, a new subway station connecting all available services, auditoriums, theaters, ballrooms, a restaurant, condominiums, an office block, an indoor/outdoor pool beneath a planetarium “influenced” by the programming of the swimmers, a beauty parlor, a “message board” displaying signs from the professional organizations occupying the offices, etc., etc. Thus, a city whose very totality is excessive. Koolhaas also plays with the “image” of this completion of the metropolis, giving it the form of sphinx, complete with neck, tail, and so forth. In other words, this proposed addition to the Manhattan skyline is thoroughly determined by the operations of manhattanism.

Koolhaas explores the nature of manhattanism’s delirium in a theoretical project attached to *Delirious New York*, “The City of the Captive Globe” (see figure 6.2). A series of famous architectural proposals, utopias, are trapped in the blocks of the Manhattan grid (there are the cruciform skyscrapers of Le Corbusier’s “Radiant City,” Dalí’s “Angelus,” the “Perisphere and Trylon” from the 1939 World’s Fair, and so on). One might be tempted, at first glance, to compare this proposal with the “museum city” of Rowe and Koetter. In both versions, it seems that we engage the fantasy of a world of independent worlds.

There is, however, an important limitation to the comparison with the museum city: it is not the specific set of utopias here that is “preserved” in the eternity of a museum, nor is it even the static fact of variety that is here idealized. Koolhaas tells us that “the changes in this ideological skyline will be rapid and continuous,” with the towers of individual blocks constantly “collapsing” either in failure or in “a speculative ejaculation” (*DNY*, p. 294). “The City of the Captive Globe” is an armature for producing an image of an *event city* or city *as event*. That is, it is *change itself, dynamism itself*—the excess within every representation—that is celebrated. What remains through the events in “The City of the Captive Globe” is only the structure of the grid itself, the structure that allows

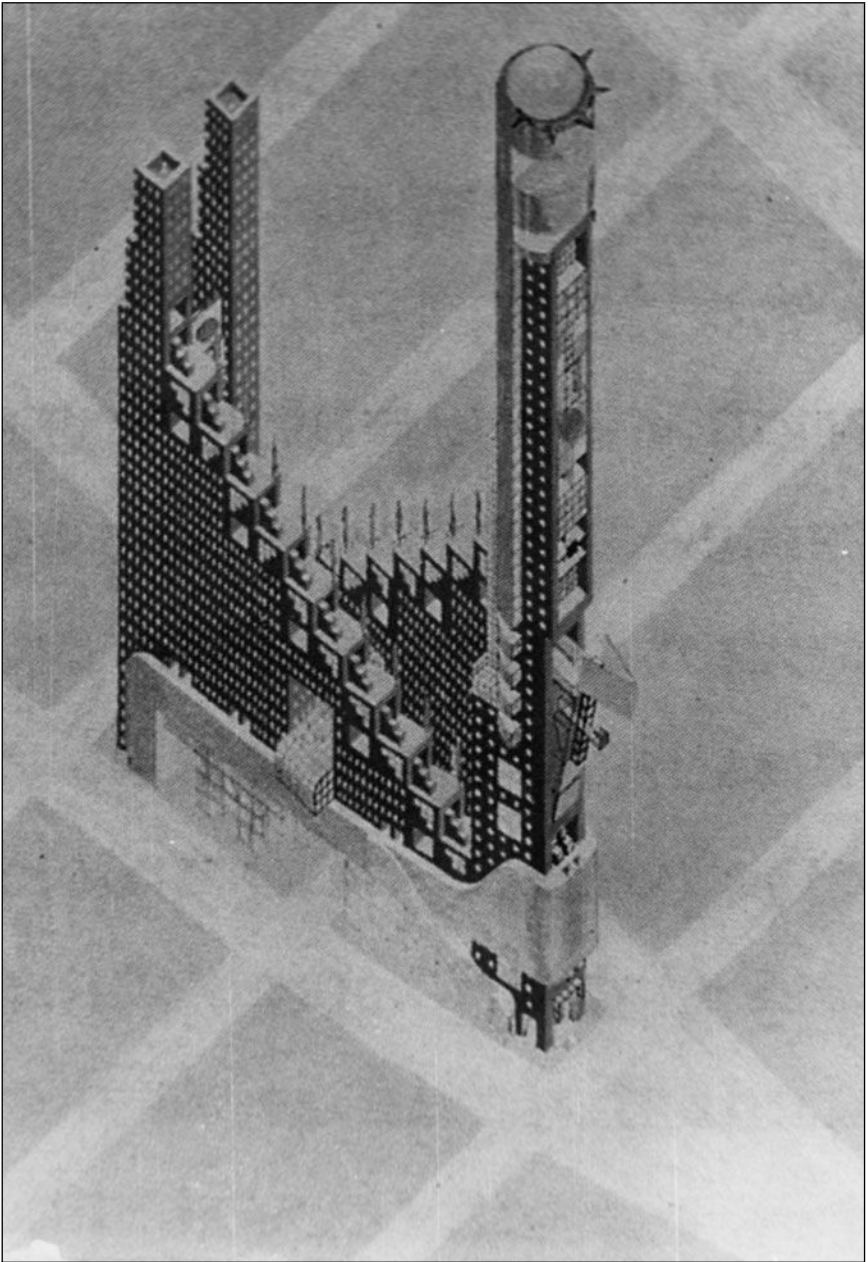


Figure 6.9. Rem Koolhaas and the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, "Hotel Sphinx," Times Square, proposal from *Delirious New York*, 1978

these worlds to present themselves as excessive within a field of representation.

Here representation is reconceived: reversed from a mechanism of totalization to one for the subversion of totality within totality. Strangely, it is the structure of the grid that allows this reversal—both in “The City of the Captive Globe” and in Koolhaas’s vision of Manhattan’s development. That’s certainly the case with regard to the history of Manhattan that Koolhaas narrates at the beginning of *Delirious New York*. Koolhaas starts his account of manhattanism with a single totalizing “fact” responsible for all that follows and then documents the systematic subversion or irrelevance of that fact. That fact, or set of facts, derives from the limited real estate available on a small island. Already bounded by three rivers, the future of manhattanism was further determined by the Commissioners’ proposal of 1811—the plan that fixed the Manhattan grid. Placed on the confines of an island, the greedy ruling of Manhattan’s land into preset streets (for maximization of real estate profits) long before any such survey was necessitated by population growth, at a stroke “immunize[s] against any (further) totalitarian intervention” (*DNY*, p. 20), since it limits any architectural project to the scope of a single block. This structure, not to be reduced to the aesthetic qualities of the street grid, continues through the theoretical development of the skyscraper and the passage of the zoning ordinances of 1916. It is the order in which the disorder and chaos of manhattanism can unfold—whatever (grid, zoning ordinance, traffic plans) guarantees that order at a given time. But, more than this, New York will be a constantly changing, episodic metropolis; the value of land will dictate the replacement of the shorter by the taller and the older by the newer.

In effect, the grid transforms totality, robbing it of the ability to play a utopian role outstripping representation. What traditionally totalizes the city in that way is now entirely “indifferent”: it is simply a “fact.” Put another way, the grid *displaces* (an absurd operation, doubtless) the space of utopian representation, the space that Le Corbusier tries to transform into the *content* of his utopian projection. Precisely there, where we search for a totalizing perspective, none is available. In this economy, the grid, as it does in “The City of the Captive Globe,” seems to add a twist to the etymological game that Thomas More inaugurated with the very word, *u-topia* (the good place/nonplace); for the grid is like a place that only exists as negation of the very function of utopian representation. It is no longer “no place,” in the traditional sense (an ideal place that has not yet been realized), but rather is the “no-place” that

displaces the very possibility of such an ideal topos. As such, it is only a residual something at all, a mere remainder of place . . . almost nothing at all.

Which doesn't mean that there isn't a kind of representational totalization (as we've seen) in *every* skyscraper, *every* project within the grid: but the presence of the grid guarantees that no project can claim to be the ideal that transcends articulation. Indeed, *the ideal cannot claim to be itself*, since its very conceptual *locus* has been taken from it. No, all that remains is an ideal-in-articulation, an ideal representation to which the excess of itself belongs in essence. All that remains is a utopian "event" without an ideal space to organize it; for the marriage of representation and excess can never produce a space lacking the very instability that is delirium. The mechanism of the grid guarantees an endless procession of "realizations" and guarantees that, even when this procession itself is treated as ideal, the dynamic will always conquer every idealization, every totalization.

Thus, we arrive at a kind of architectural equivalent of the post-structuralist visions of "community" from which these meditations upon postutopia started: we arrive at the eventlike nontotality of a community no longer based upon a "common being" or "place." There is no substantial "shared identity," no "public space" to unify Rem Koolhaas's Manhattan or his emblem of it in "The City of the Captive Globe." All that remains of the "city" is its endless self-transformation, is the process that the architect translates into "delirium" for its inhabitants. But in *that* dream of modernism, in the dream of using the means of technocapitalism in order to engage the urban dweller in an endless creative activity, Koolhaas's vision marks a real victory. Finally, finally, the *speed* of modern life has been appropriated *for* those who otherwise would only *suffer* it.²⁶

UTOPIA AND POLITICS

But if this vision of the city as delirious event seems to successfully realize what could be saved from the modernist vision, if it seems to mark a way that the architect can challenge the banal passivity of capitalist life using the very structures made available by capitalism, then we should nonetheless hesitate before declaring the strategy of *Delirious New York* a successful negotiation of the postutopian situation. We should hesitate before declaring the victory of a new politics of architecture. *Delirious New York* also makes clear the boundaries within which this victory can be celebrated. Above all, it forces us to ask about the extent that we can

call this a *politics* at all. For the strategy of Koolhaas's theory must fail the rationalist utopian potential of Le Corbusier's urbanism just as surely as *Collage City* must fail its modernist possibilities. That is, we have to ask to what extent a metropolitan architecture after Koolhaas depends upon the disappearance of the very possibility for a polis, which is, after all, a common space for self-determination. Can there be an architectural *politics* within the noplacé?

Whereas the architect of *Collage City* ornaments neutral space, assuring its "public" nature by means of the tools of traditional urbanism, in Koolhaas's vision it remains stark and naked. Architecture becomes a matter of the "private" spaces contained within the city blocks; or, more accurately, the very distinction between public and private breaks down in the representational "competition" between blocks. As in *Delirious New York* as a whole, the city gains in creative dynamism (those "speculative ejaculations") but only at the price of any public sphere. Thus, there is here—in opposition to *Collage City*—no architectural intervention, no attempt to dissemble the true nature of the field in which the phantasmagoria of utopias unfolds. The streetscape of "The City of the Captive Globe" presents a world of bleak neutrality for what it is—completely dehumanized.

This neutral grid assures that (no matter how insubstantial and inconsequential the "remainder" seems to be) the event cannot actually operate in relationship to the whole. There is always the same "little something" (the frame, the grid) that is not open to change. It forces us to raise perhaps *the* most pressing and painful question: can there be a *politics* that is not *potentially* transformative of any given part of the social context in which it operates? Can there be a *limited* politics, a politics that eschews a priori the demand for a genuine representation, that a priori leaves a prespecified something (capitalism, the market, the nature of the totality) out of all political discourse? I would argue that such a thing simply cannot, in the long run, exist.

This is not simply an "academic" question, since it arises with increasing urgency in a world of private enclaves claiming "public" functions: and the limitation toward which I am pointing arises precisely in those situations where the bone of an apparent democracy strikes up against the limitations of a bureaucratic capitalism—the interests of the board, the desire of the mall owners to suppress distasteful (i.e., anticonsumptive) agitation.

In short, precisely what traditionally made up a *political* world has become impossible. That "neutral" grid and the plinths articulating it in

three dimensions can only provide a kind of simulacrum of the public, the political space of the traditional city. Strangely enough, Koolhaas has explored this very loss in the theoretical drawing for “The City of the Captive Globe”: the figure of the sunken globe at the scheme’s center here emblemizes the radical transformation of “worldhood” demanded by this new relationship between organizing field and individual elements. The globe (the “good old” world) is itself “captive” to the play that produces competing utopian worlds: in the full sense, the sense of a context of *potential self-determination*, the only world left is the process of play of worlds produced by the conditions of collage. There *is* no world in the sense of a potential representation. The only static “world” is the field of the market, the field in which the play of meaning emerges. The captivity of the globe marks the disappearance of the kind of world that might correspond to *utopian* representation, to the space of a representation corresponding to the activity of reason: and as such it marks, also, the disappearance of the very possibility of the political.

Without public space, the city of *Delirious New York* is *depoliticized*: that is to say, here there is really no *polis* and thus no possibility for a *discourse* of the *polis*, a politics. Something else, too. Koolhaas interprets the placement of the globe in his scheme as its installation within an “incubator,” one whose temperature is raised “through our feverish thinking in the towers.” *Delirious New York* thus transforms the function of the globe from a static “mapping” of meaning (“showing us our place,” in the language of Karsten Harries) to an “ageless pregnancy” (*DNY*, p. 249) for our own creation of meaning. In other words, the imprisonment of the globe—the replacement of traditional worldhood by the mechanisms of capitalism—is the *precondition* for the remarkable creativity of the new city. Only by capturing and harnessing traditional worldhood, by hitching it up to the mechanism of delirium, can that delirium operate at all. The very energy for the operation of an avant-gardist strategy derives from capitalism’s repression and sublimation of the demand for political self-determination, comes from the replacement of utopia with the grid. That is to say, no capitalism (or technosocialism, which for this purpose amounts to the same thing), no collage, and no “delirious” city.

This goes a long way, I think, toward explaining the distinctive feeling of being “soiled” that seems to haunt today’s neo-avant-gardist architectural visionaries in the symptomatic incoherence of their theoretical self-justifications. Not only are they unable to believe, as could their predecessors in the 1920s and 1930s, that the strategies of delirium serve a politi-

cal utopia; now they suspect, perhaps even know, that they have signed a devil's bargain. The urbanism of *Delirious New York* and other neo-avant-gardist texts and projects, in fact, directly serves the *ends* of capitalism—allowing capitalism to thrive by meeting the consumer “needs” of the metropolitan inhabitant for a culture whose dynamic intensity will match that of the metropolis itself. To his credit, Rem Koolhaas is remarkably candid in revealing the complicity between capitalism and the aesthetic creativity we have associated with collage, the creativity that the historical avant-gardes consistently took to be itself *revolutionary*.²⁷ Koolhaas reveals the hollowness of the political pretensions of aesthetic radical chic in a culture where the avant-gardes serve (in Thomas Crow's words) “as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry.”²⁸

In presenting the *political failure* of *Delirious New York*'s neo-avant-gardism in these terms, I am trying to suggest a position irreducible to either of the extremes common in recent debates. On the one hand, neo-avant-gardists (Lyotard, Andrew Benjamin) advocate a revival of traditional avant-gardist practices at a social/cultural level. They argue that the transformations in behavior induced by avant-gardist shock can produce shock waves even at the political level.

On the other hand, the debate since the 1970s has produced a number of eloquent arguments, beginning from historical reflections on art and politics, which have asserted the impotence of neo-avant-gardist practices to transform political reality. Most worth remarking in this tradition are Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* and Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide*.²⁹ Huyssen, in particular, is effective in isolating the *political* failure of avant-gardist art: “Like a parasitic growth, conformism has all but obliterated the original iconoclastic and subversive thrust of the historical avant-garde of the first three or four decades of this century. This conformism is manifest in the vast depoliticization of post-World War II art and its institutionalization as administered culture” (*After*, pp. 3–4).

What collage urbanism demonstrates to us is, ironically, the correctness of *both* of these opposing positions. The avant-gardism of *Delirious New York* is effective as a social agent introduced in the battle against cultural passivity. On the other hand, this activation of the urban dweller is purchased at the price of an exact limit—the limit of the political itself. The possibility of cultural change is bounded *a priori* by the system that makes it possible. In other words, this version of avant-gardism may *transform* capitalism from within, but it can never call it into question.

Public space without the possibility of public activity. Public activity without the possibility of public space. There is a certain symmetry between *Collage City* and *Delirious New York*. And that's not accidental; for each of them, like a spy protecting a code, holds *half* of the utopia of modernism itself. Each of them holds half of the double demand that we be able to build a world that would both represent reason—the uniquely human activity—and connect to the possibilities opened by modernity. Each of them holds half of the dream of a world that would satisfy both the need for an enriching social totality (to produce individuals capable of democratic life) and the equally pressing demand for a place of meaningful individual activity. That we measure the failure of each of the collage proposals we've looked at in this chapter against the quality contained in the *other* part of the modernist vision vividly illustrates that we haven't really overcome modernist utopianism at all. This *structure* of modernism—this dual demand for a meaningful social world and individual freedom to contribute to its making—remains powerful today, even after the dramatic failure of all efforts to realize it.

Above all, like those codes whose keys lie in two hands, the dream of a politics that would also nourish the activity of the individual is only itself when the two halves are joined: half, in this case, is always less than half, for the dream behind the modernist dream, the real modernist utopia, lies in the hope given by the dialectical mediation of social determination and individual activity; autonomy, after all, names the wish that we might take control of our lives. But what does that mean?

An answer emerged at the end of the Enlightenment, in Schiller and Hegel: it means that we would live in a society that would provide a rich context for individual action *and* also that the individual, formed by this rich totality, would actively reshape *it*. The *combination* of a public sphere for identification and a context for individual creativity alone produces an epistemologically coherent democracy, a democracy that is more than a rolling plebiscite of manipulated market forces. Without such a combination, the result is always a kind of *maimed* utopia, a mere mockery of its own potential. And, without the modernist hope, both architecture and politics tend to degenerate into feudal squabbling.

This is not to suggest that the "death" of utopia, the critique of social totalization, doesn't hit the mark. I'm not calling for a naive return to something like Le Corbusier's utopia. Given the very project of combining traditional utopianism and modernist immanentism, the failure of that utopia as a totalizing vision of the metropolis seems inevitable. My effort here is only aimed at underscoring the *crisis* facing us today. If modernist

utopia is dead, it is also impossible to live without. In the final analysis, collage utopia, in either the form of a euphoric pluralism or of a radical activation of difference, only underscores this failing.

Once more, then, we are forced to acknowledge the *crisis* nature of a present best articulated through collage. Doubtless, this point has become familiar to the reader by now; but I reiterate it here in order to combat *another* illusion of the postmodern than those we have discussed earlier. The symmetry between *Collage City* and *Delirious New York* indicates that those forms of post-structuralist, postcolonialist, and multiculturalist argument that celebrate the possibility of a community of the event as opening a politics of “difference” suffer from self-delusion. In other words, the picture of a straight path running from the critique of utopia to a new politics turns out to be indefensible. There *is no* political vision adequate to the critique of utopia—the critique of utopia offers us not a coherent politics of difference but only the unhappy choice *between* a politics *and* difference. Not one but two paths lead from modernist utopianism, and neither path provides an adequate response to the utopian intention.

There are, I believe, two premises foundational to this conclusion. The first is that—contrary to what emerges in most philosophical efforts to project a “plural event” or a neo-Leibnizean theory of the “fold”—the production of a society not describable in the terms of totality *actually* depends in a certain way upon a new and peculiar kind of totality. Koolhaas’s work allows us both to confirm the unavoidability of a kind of “structure” underlying the possibility of a city of the event and to distinguish this kind of structurality from what that term usually *means*. In this light, the benefit of our diversion through architectural urbanism has been the peculiar *obviousness* within that field of this necessity: just as manhattanism depends upon the economic/political structure of the Manhattan grid, so, in general, a society of the event is only conceivable on the basis of the “noplacé” that displaces the utopian impulse and, in so doing, transforms the nature of representation. To that extent, the advantage of the architectural “allegory” offered to us by Rem Koolhaas is that it demonstrates what philosophical articulations of a similar vision obscure.

The nontopos supporting Manhattan’s “delirium” defuses the very possibility of politics by preserving a structure or field from possible political determination. In other words, the delusion underlying what seems a healthy popular vision of political action as purely *local* is that such

action is truly political. Doubtless, *some things* can change as the result of such intervention—of that kind of demand for change by groups not justified by a universalizing vision of social justice: but all such change is predicated upon the absolute immovability of “something” else—of a particular no-place that, in each case, supports the possibility of “events” by removing itself from question. For that reason, such a “world” cannot support genuine political engagement and breeds, instead, apathy and fragmentation.

The other premise underlying *my* view of the present as a crisis in modernity is that, as a result of the political failure of “difference,” we are forced to see the deepest political dimension of the present in the undecidability of the *debate* between neoutopian and antiutopian positions that has split continental philosophy in recent years. It’s not so much a matter of judging the winner between various polemical post-structuralisms and Habermasian or neo-Hegelian utopias as seeing that, like Koolhaas and Rowe, each contestant inevitably carries only an inadequate answer to the demand awakened by modernist utopianism. In the wake of the “great utopia,” all that remains is the *failure* of the synthesis at its core.

Conclusion

Collage Hermeneutics

The meditations in the last chapter are intended to bring us more clearly than heretofore to both the limits and the potential of collage within contemporary culture. If, as we've had opportunity to see in earlier chapters, collage practices are built upon an aporetic or even paradoxical condition—if the *ontology* of collage demands that we conceive of it in terms of concepts like the *chora* of the *Timaeus* with its refusal of either straightforward universality (Logos) or simple sensuous particularity (mythos)—then it is no wonder that both architectural urbanism and political action force us to admit the shortcomings of collage. Both of these areas of human endeavor demand that we short circuit the operations of aporia, that we substantialize the peculiar space/nonspace that guarantees collage operations. In both cases, it's necessary to choose one aspect of collage so that one can obtain the ground necessary for action. As a politics, collage practice inevitably wounds itself, splits itself, leaving half (and, indeed, more than half) of what makes it collage behind. It's this self-mutilation that we saw in the symmetrical shortcomings of *Collage City* and *Delirious New York*.

But, on the other hand, precisely in the political dimension, where it inevitably fails, collage also demonstrates its most profound historical truth. As opposed to the languages of philosophy and other theoretical disciplines, collage allows us to understand the decay of the polis in our day. To see that the crisis of modernity derives from something like the condition of collage—a condition that makes problematic our very search for a modern political ideal—is to understand more deeply than is otherwise possible the problem that we face every day in a fragmented and increasingly directionless political world. A political society whose “progressive” aspirations are structured like the two moments definitive of collage—that's the “picture” I'm suggesting here.

Paradoxically, to suggest such an image is to indicate the *philosophical* truth function of collage precisely where its effectiveness as a visionary political device becomes suspect. In this role, collage, which in so many ways anticipates and/or follows the path that we might identify with contemporary post-structuralism, also calls certain post-structuralist visions into question. To put this in other words, I'm suggesting a *collage hermeneutics* as an alternative to the more prophetic moments in contemporary theoretical discourse.

Collage hermeneutics. The phrase could easily lead to confusion. One might think that this name referred in a simple manner to interpretive practices resistant to reductive totalization. At several points in this book, I've opposed versions of what I'll call a "polemical postmodernism"—an approach that reduces the essentially collagelike conditions of the postmodern to some kind of certitude, albeit the certitude of a guaranteed arbitrariness. In response to such polemicism, I have, variously, used collage as a way of questioning the appropriateness of the manifesto to the postmodern or of criticizing any attempt to posit a "postmodernity" following modernity. One might, on the basis of these discussions, associate a collage hermeneutics with any effort to fold knowledge back into a collaging process—to deny the privilege traditionally accorded to philosophical theory, to avoid totalization. Understood in this way, a collage hermeneutics names something like a common version of *deconstructive* practice.¹

In part, certainly; but even that's not the whole story. Indeed, herein lies the ultimate justification for the use of collage as an instrument in discussing the postmodern; let's say—to admit once more the assumption upon which the foregoing investigations were based and which they, in some measure, hoped also to substantiate—that the postmodern "condition" is collagelike. As we just saw, that means that the postmodern resists understanding in any language (teleological, synthetic, dialectical) that reduces its binary qualities to unity. But surely, insofar as one understands deconstruction *simply* in terms of the effort to avoid totalization, one has implicitly given it a paradoxically teleological spin. So understood, deconstruction takes representation (knowledge) and transforms it into event, spinning straw into gold. It's like the argument that collage practices univocally *intend* (as goal or end) the desubstantialization of the artwork, the production of a pure activity without limiting field. One *can* see collage in that way without evident contradiction.

The problem is, of course, that one can just as well see it in the *opposite* manner. In other words, *equally* convincing to the view of collage as event is the view of it as "neutral" space. Indeed, what defines collage as object of investigation is precisely this *double* imperative, an imperative without the possibility of resolution. This is vital; for it contains precisely the origin for a kind of interpretation, a hermeneutics, which would *not* be teleological, synthetic, or dialectical. So, let's say, instead of simply refusing totalization, collage hermeneutics totalizes: but the totalized knowledge that is its product informs us precisely of the *impossibility* of totalization. Here, I might invoke what Slavoj Žižek has to say

about the work of Jacques Lacan as opposed to what I've been calling "polemical postmodernism":

The "postmodern theory" which predominates today is a mixture of neopragmatism and deconstruction best epitomized by names such as Rorty or Lyotard; their works emphasize the "anti-essentialist" refusal of universal Foundation, the dissolving of "truth" into an effect of plural language-games, the relativization of its scope to historically specified intersubjective community, etc., etc. . . . Lacan, however, is not part of this "postmodern theory": in this respect, his position is homologous to that of Plato or Kant. The perception of Lacan as "anti-essentialist" or "deconstructionist" falls prey to the same illusion as that of perceiving Plato as just one among the sophists. Plato accepts from the sophists their logic of discursive argumentation, but uses it to affirm his commitment to Truth; Kant accepts the breakdown of traditional metaphysics, but uses it to perform his transcendental turn; along the same lines, Lacan accepts the "deconstructionist" motif of radical contingency, but turns this motif against itself, using it to assert his commitment to Truth *as contingent*. (*Tarrying*, p. 4)

Like Lacan's thought (or Žižek's Lacanianism, in any case), collage forces us to an essentially paradoxical view of knowledge, a view that demands radical ambivalence from the knower. This ambivalence is the first mark of collage hermeneutics.

But if, as with Lacan's work, it's possible to locate collage hermeneutics within modern thought, now reenvisioned as supporting ambivalence, it's also important to understand how collage marks a peculiar twisting of that tradition. What, in the final analysis, collage forces us to do is to admit the *complexity* of the Enlightenment vision. For Kant, to follow Žižek in naming perhaps the primary exemplar among many, universality indicates *both* an organizing principle for experience (space, time, and so on) *and* the possibility of transcendental meaning (source of the categorical imperative and so on). Collage, on the other hand, radically divides these two functions from each other, forcing us to conceive of a "meaningless" organizing principle and a kind of "meaning" which is not understandable *as* universality.² In other words, what we see here is the phenomenon I discussed in the introduction to this book as the crisis in our sense of *worldhood*. Just because it does not imply the cancellation

of universality but rather its division, the result obtained from a collage hermeneutics is radically different from any polemical postmodernism.

This suggests, under the title of collage hermeneutics, not so much a vision as a research agenda. Let's say that we might understand modernity under the general heading of "Copernican Revolutions."³ As Žižek rightly perceives, such revolutions always involve two moments: on the one hand, in undermining the certainties by which we view the world, they produce skepticism, unease, unknowing. A *loss* is essential to the modern world. But, within modernity on the other hand, this loss is always compensated by a new *kind* of knowledge: thus, for example, in the fifteenth century, Nicholas of Cusa discovers a paradoxical knowledge in the "ignorance" that infinity imposes upon him.⁴ He asks the question, *how* is it that I can know what I don't know? What is it that this failure implies about the structure of my knowing as a relationship to the world? The double move within Cusanus's philosophy is entirely typical of the patterns of modern thought that will develop after him.

What I have called "polemical" postmodernism posits an end to this double gesture: it suggests that, with the *postmodern* turn, we have an uncertainty to which no new knowledge will or even *can* correspond. The postmodern, by this view, gives us uncertainties whose extension is conceived as, well, certain. It is precisely this guarantee of anxiety, this secured unknowing, that I wish to associate with the thesis of a substantial *postmodernity*.

The path of a collage hermeneutics leads us in a different direction. Here, the suggestion is not so much an end to the double event of the modern as a *transformation* of that event. Above all, this means that there *is* a kind of knowledge accompanying the crisis we have detailed in the modern project; but such knowledge marks an essentially *new* answer to Nicolas of Cusa's question—a new sense of what the decentering of our universe brings back "on the ricochet." In other words, we have here a new kind of modern knowledge, one which defies any of the labels (reflection, transcendental philosophy, philosophy of spirit, and so forth) that previous modernisms have used.

With the division of the functions of worldhood, the splitting of universality, there is, in fact, a significant reduction in our expectation of knowledge. We might say, knowledge no longer answers uncertainty with certainty but rather with more uncertainty. Collage hermeneutics offers us the specter of an uncertain uncertainty. By this, I suggest the possibility for a kind of knowledge, a kind of universality, that will remain constitutionally unable to answer the *crisis* of the modern—to reconsti-

tute a modern politics with a utopian vision of the polis. But, at the same time, this *will be* a knowledge, and because of that, it will not simply reproduce the endlessly repeated gesture whereby thought immolates itself for fear of totalization.

Which brings me back to the research project that I projected above under the heading of collage hermeneutics: the task of a collage hermeneutics must be, above all, to reread—to reinterpret the modernist project in the light of the division in universality. It must be to reexamine the formative moments in the unfolding of modernity so as to detect within them the emergence of the split subject that now appears as definitive of the modern itself. Corresponding to the name of collage hermeneutics, then, would be interpretive practices—and one would doubtless include *certain* moments of post-structuralism within any list of such practices—which trace the crisis of the modern to its very foundations, articulating both the fundamentally problematic nature of modernity and its inescapability as *our truth*. Doubtless, this will be seen as a *pessimistic* view of the present, and in a sense it is. But it also shelters what remains possible of the optimism with which we associate the Enlightenment: we develop real knowledge so that it might eventually help to open up new historical possibilities for meaningful lives.

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Notes

Introduction

1. Robert Motherwell, cited in David Rosand, "Paint, Paste and Plane," in *Collage*, ed. Jeanine Plottel (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1983), p. 130; hereafter Plottel.

2. See the foreword by Kim Levin in *Collage: Critical Views*, ed. Katherine Hoffman (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1989), hereafter *Critical*: "From our vantage point near the end of the century we can now begin to see that collage has all along carried postmodern genes. Pieced together with byproducts from the modern world, collage—the most literally materialistic of mediums—has always contained information that pointed beyond modernism. The germs of appropriation and simulation can be found in the earliest recycled scraps of Cubist collages" (p. xix).

3. From the "Group Mu Manifesto" of 1978, cited in Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 49, hereafter *Futurist Moment*.

4. See *Futurist Moment*, pp. 47–49.

5. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), hereafter *Avant-Garde*. The peculiar thing is that Bürger suggests this theory of collage in the context of a broader theory of avant-gardism that leaves little room for irony or representational play. For Bürger, avant-gardism is characterized by the effort to "reintegrate art into the practice of life" (*Avant-Garde*, p. 22). But, in this history, collage takes on a peculiar role: on the one hand, it is *the* exemplary avant-gardist practice; on the other, Bürger takes collage as more than mere example. He is convinced that, whereas avant-gardism as a whole failed, the fact that collage, in its ironic, allegorical nature, remains art allows it to succeed: "Paradoxically, the avant-gardist intention to destroy art as an institution is thus realized in the work of art itself. The intention to revolutionize life by returning art to its praxis turns into a revolutionizing of art" (*Avant-Garde*, p. 72).

6. The reader will note that I use "collage" as an umbrella term embracing practices of montage and assemblage. It's worth taking some space to distinguish these practices and to explain the reasoning behind this subsumption. While the distinctions between these three aspects of twentieth-century aesthetic practice are imprecise, it's possible to make some general observations about the extension of the terms involved. Usually the distinction between a *collage* and a *montage* is understood in terms of the differ-

ence between juxtapositions in *space* and in *time*. Whereas collages demand that the viewer relate elements spatially next to or in front of each other, montage demands a *reading* of images presented sequentially, the most striking and famous example of which is the process of construction film images by means of an editing process.

“Assemblage,” a word originally developed to describe three-dimensional experimentation using collage elements, is often used as the master term for discussing all collage practices, including collage and montage. (See the excellent discussion of terminology in *Futurist Moment*, p. 246 n. 5.)

In selecting the word “collage” rather than either “montage” or “assemblage,” I am implicitly making a twofold claim: collage cannot be subsumed under *either* montage or assemblage.

From the perspective of many post-structuralists, as Gregory Ulmer demonstrates (see “The Object of Post-Criticism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster [Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983], hereafter *Anti-Aesthetic*), the practices of collage serve montage almost as means to end: since “‘collage’ is the transfer of materials from one context to another, and ‘montage’ is the ‘dissemination’ of these borrowings through the new setting” (*Anti-Aesthetic*, p. 84), and dissemination is the key to the ethical force of deconstruction, montage takes on a peculiar priority in contemporary theory. Attached to this practical valorization of montage over collage is often a philosophical preference for “assemblage” as master term. If collage practices aim, in the final analysis, at a temporal unfolding of the assembled material rather than a spatial mapping of it, it would seem possible to construct a philosophical position which argues against the necessity of the painterly spatial conditions definitive of collage. Assemblage answers to this demand. Unlike collage, which operates in a defined space—the space of the canvas—the assemblage *constructs* space. Thus, the priority of assemblage, of a practice *without* a space, for many contemporary theorists.

For example, in his recent argument for an “architecture of complexity,” Jeffrey Kipnis claims that collage is insufficient to the tasks of the contemporary architect because it is “wholly dependent on effecting incoherent contradictions within and against a dominant frame” (“Towards a New Architecture,” in *Folding in Architecture: Architectural Design Profile 102*, ed. Andreas Papadakis [1993], p. 42). In other words, the priority of space in collage stabilizes its effects. Furthermore, because of this spatial “framing,” collage always implies a certain possibility for *knowledge*: “the long-term effect of collage is to valorise a finite catalogue of elements and/or processes.”

My choice of collage as descriptor for practices including montage and assemblage indicates my rejection of the *project* announced by Kipnis and others. While I certainly wish to acknowledge the ethical force of dissemination and to see it as already implicated in collage practice, the following

pages articulate the claim that something like the space (and with it the “knowledge”) so disturbing to Kipnis is the precondition not just of collage but also of montage and assemblage. In other words, collage gains its priority in the following pages precisely because of what leads to its rejection in much contemporary theory. While I will insist that the painterly conditions specific to the history of collage be understood as *metaphor*; they do indicate something irreducible about *all* collage/montage/assemblage. Something like a *space* of possibility serves as condition for these practices, regardless of which characteristics come to the forefront in any particular instance.

The real question in the following text will be the unique ontological and epistemological status of this conditioning space—a status which is *irreducible* to either objectivity or, indeed, to being.

7. Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. xiii, hereafter *Defiance*.

8. Yves-Alain Bois, “Kahnweiler’s Lesson,” in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), hereafter *Model*.

9. Doubtless, one person against whom this argument is directed is John Golding, whose classic *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907–1914* (London: Faber, 1968; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) assumes a continuity between analytic cubism and collage: thus, in the period of Picasso’s and Braque’s most “hermetic” experiments in analytic techniques, the painters included visual “keys” that pointed forward to the inclusion of actual pieces of material. Golding writes of

Picasso’s use of illusionistically painted, or at least immediately legible details, coat-buttons, moustaches and so on, which help the spectator to identify his subjects, asserts in a more obvious way the realistic character of the style. Then the stencilled letters in Braque’s *Le Portugais* and the words or titles written over his and Picasso’s paintings, were in a sense also clues for the reconstruction of the subject. But these keys or clues did not only serve to make the painting more legible; they were also elements of reality, which as Braque himself put it, could not undergo pictorial distortion. From the desire to evoke as concretely and immediately as possible fragments of external reality in their paintings to the insertion of the fragments themselves was a short step. (p. 106)

Of course, this view of the *evolution* of painting already indicates Golding’s interpretation of its nature: collage, too, is seen as a kind of “realism.”

10. From a 1955 dialogue between Picasso and Kahnweiler about the show, cited in “The Creators of Cubism,” in *Model*, p. 94.

11. Edward F. Fry, "Picasso, Cubism and Reflexivity," *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (winter 1988): 296.

12. Hugh Silverman begins to articulate just such an alternative vision in the introduction to the volume *Postmodernism: Philosophy and the Arts*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 4–5.

13. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 102 (H. 72). For Heidegger, "the world itself is not an entity within-the-world; and yet it is so determinative for such entities that only in so far as 'there is' a world can they be encountered and show themselves, in their Being, as entities which have been discovered." Nonetheless, the fact that worldhood can't be thematized as an object ("present-at-hand," in the language of *Being and Time*) doesn't mean that it fails to appear at all. Rather, for Heidegger, there is a way (in our implicit awareness of the contexts within which things are used) that "the worldhood of those entities within-the-world with which it is concerned is, in a certain way, lit up for it, *along with* those entities themselves." Though Heidegger considerably expands his notion of worldhood beginning with *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935), throughout his life his analysis remains within the general boundaries marked out here: worldhood is constitutive of meaning but only appears in a nonobjectified form; it demands a different kind of "knowledge" than that we can have of "facts."

14. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 163, hereafter *Illuminations*.

15. For precisely this reason, Fredric Jameson suggests, in a now-famous essay, that the postmodern be identified with psychosis as opposed to neurosis; see "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *Anti-Aesthetic*.

16. Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), hereafter *Originality*.

Chapter 1

1. Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), hereafter *Meaning*; *The Broken Frame: Three Lectures* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1989), hereafter *Broken*; and *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), hereafter *Ethical*. See also *The Bavarian Rococo Church: Between Faith and Aestheticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), hereafter *Rococo*.

2. In this, too, Harries follows Heidegger. See Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: God Is Dead," in *The Question Concerning Technology*

and *Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland, 1977), pp. 53–114.

3. Indeed, a central point in Harries's *Ethical Function of Architecture* is that what he calls the "representational" nature of architecture cannot be adequately understood through any semiotics or semiology. See pp. 50–84.

4. Heidegger exemplifies an art that can actually produce or create a world in his discussion of the Greek temple in "The Origin of the Work of Art," reprinted in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1977), hereafter *Basic*.

5. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger speaks of the truth function of art in terms of the relationship between "world" and "earth," two doubtless enigmatic terms. At least part of what Heidegger is getting at there, however, is this sense of a truth that is both exterior to the realm of facts—since it organizes it—and indefinitely interpretable within that world. "Earth" names that about artworks which disallows reduction to any particular truth, which insists upon sensuous specificity, while "world" indicates the way that this truth nonetheless organizes a way of life for a historical people, i.e., which produces specific interpretations. Thus, "[t]he world is the self-opening openness of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continuously self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing" (*Basic*, p. 172).

It's important to note here that Harries's emphasis upon the bond between art and *worldhood* already amounts to a particular reading of Heidegger. Gianni Vattimo claims, quite justly I think, that what distinguishes a "conservative" Heideggerianism (like that of Vattimo's teacher Gadamer or, in this case, Karsten Harries) is the elision of this earthy element in art. In other words, there is another possible reading of Heidegger on art and truth, one that Harries seems to consistently overlook. One could see much of the split between post-structuralism and traditional philosophical hermeneutics as deriving from approaches to this relationship between world and earth. So as not to claim that Harries's reading of Heidegger needs to be normative, I refer to his position as a "conservative Heideggerianism." For more on this, see Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 63–65 and 129, hereafter *End*.

6. See, for instance, Erwin Panofsky's classic monograph *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (New York: Meridian, 1976), which argues for a parallel between the Gothic and the development of scholastic thought, or, for a more complete treatment of the problem, see Otto von Simson, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

7. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," originally printed in *Artforum* 5,

no. 10 (June 1967): 12–23, but used here from the reprint in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 140, hereafter “Objecthood.”

8. See the first lecture in *Broken*, especially pp. 14–22.

9. Carl E. Schorske, “Gustav Klimt: Painting and the Crisis of the Liberal Ego,” in *Fin de Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1981), hereafter “Gustav Klimt.”

10. This discovery of narcissism in modern art should not, however, lead the reader to think that Harries is a simple antimodernist. Rather, he sees the modern as an irrevocable choice—one whose benefits (such as technological advance and increased freedom) must be weighed against its price in alienation. But what effect does this begrudging modernism have on Harries’s criticisms of modern art? Most obviously, it blocks off what would seem the most obvious counterposition to the “aesthetic attitude.” If art should not retreat from the project of articulating truth, then it would seem we should applaud any contemporary artwork that lets us know our “place” in the cosmos, that revives the traditional “ethical” function of art. But, like Heidegger, who speaks in such situations of the “flight of the gods,” Harries takes the modernist turn seriously enough to believe that we really no longer can believe we have such a fixed position within a finite universe. The “death of God” is no illusion for Harries, and therefore an art that pretends otherwise is seen as representing bad faith. To discuss such art, Harries evokes the concept of “kitsch” (*Meaning*, p. 81).

But, on the other hand, Harries can no more accept an art that embraces alienation than one that denies it. This means that for him the task of any modern art arises from the project of articulating the anguish or need implicit in the modern condition. As Harries sees it, the very passage in Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* in which the death of God is announced betrays the condition accompanying it. Thus, he writes in *The Meaning of Modern Art*, “even the nihilist continues to demand meaning, and this makes it impossible for him to accept the absurdity of his situation. Man cannot live with the absurd but must struggle against it” (*Meaning*, p. 153). The genuine task of a modern art must be the articulation of this struggle, this anguish of the modern condition.

11. Interestingly, a Nilson engraving also appears in Harries’s *Ethical Function of Architecture*. This minor artist’s work thus takes on almost the quality of a leitmotiv in Harries’s studies.

12. One of Harries’s most compelling arguments relates this insight to the crisis of ornament in the architecture of the past two centuries; see *Rococo*, pp. 245–55, and *Ethical*, pp. 16–84.

13. As Harries puts it, “Such ornament would include chalice and vestments, organ and altars, and can include decoration, but placing it in a larger context. Decoration is ornament in this sense only if it exists not for its own

sake, but stands in the service of the Church and its worship. Accordingly I would like to understand ornament as decoration that has a ceremonial and festal function” (*Rococo*, p. 245).

14. Harries quotes Christopher Alexander’s *A Pattern Language* as indicating that ornamenting of a church portal occurs because it “is so important, symbolically, to the people who worship there” (*A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1977], p. 1150, quoted in *Ethical*, p. 125 n.).

15. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 72, Ak. 226, hereafter *CJ*. All citations also include the page number from the original Akademie Edition (Ak.). Kant distinguishes *parerga* (ornaments) like picture frames from the decoration of mere “finery” because of the purely *formal* nature of the former. In Kant’s formalist theory of beauty, this gives the frame a peculiarly intermediary status. As a kind of form, it belongs essentially to the work (*ergon*), but as an *additional* form, a moveable form, it is external to it. Thus, as Jacques Derrida writes, “A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon*, the work done [*fait*], the fact [*le fait*], the work, but it does not fall to one side; it touches and cooperates within the operation, from a certain outside. Neither simply outside nor simply inside.” See Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian Mcleod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 54.

On the basis of this analysis, Derrida argues for the *irreplaceability* of the frame: that is, he demonstrates the impossibility of the ideal of “presence” by showing the necessity of this external/internal framing for the very possibility of its presentation.

16. See chapter 4 of the present work.

17. See *Avant-Garde*: “The organic work intends the impression of wholeness. To the extent its individual elements have significance only as they relate to the whole, they always point to the work as a whole as they are perceived individually. In the (allegorical/avant-gardiste) work, on the other hand, the individual elements have a much higher degree of autonomy and can therefore also be read and interpreted individually or in groups without its being necessary to grasp the work as a whole” (p. 72).

18. See *Defiance*, p. 129.

19. For both the preceding and following analysis of *Glass and Bottle of Bass*, I’m indebted to Poggi’s discussion in *Defiance*, pp. 83–84.

20. “Each cited element breaks the continuity or the linearity of the discourse and leads necessarily to a double reading: that of the fragment perceived in relation to its text of origin; that of the same fragment as incorporated into a new whole, a different totality. The trick of collage consists . . . of never entirely suppressing the alterity of these elements reunited in a

temporary composition.” From the “Group Mu Manifesto,” cited in *Futurist Moment*, p. 49.

21. See chapter 2, “The Invention of Collage,” in *Futurist Moment*, pp. 42–79.

22. Pablo Picasso, in conversation with Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, *Life with Picasso* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 70; hereafter *Life*.

23. See the discussion of Rosalind Krauss’s work on cubism in chapter 3 of the present study.

24. For an excellent discussion of the history of this tension, see *Defiance*, pp. 52–65.

25. See my discussion of this metaphor of collage as market in chapters 2 and 6 of the present work.

Chapter 2

1. *End*, p. 167.

2. See Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), hereafter *Transparent*.

3. On the Logoi, see “Truth and Rhetoric in Hermeneutic Ontology,” in *End*, p. 130. On Nietzsche’s metaphors of history, see “Nihilism and the Post-Modern in Philosophy,” in *End*, pp. 164–181. See also “From Utopia to Heterotopia,” in *Transparent*, pp. 62–75.

4. This argument has become, of course, something of a chestnut in the world of analytic philosophy. See, for example, Hillary Putnam’s efforts in *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) to exorcise the demons of Kuhnian perspectivism in regard to science. Putnam writes that “(complete) relativism is inconsistent is a truism among philosophers. After all is it not *obviously* contradictory to *hold* a view while at the same time holding that *no* point of view is more justified or right than any other?” (p. 119). For an excellent general discussion of relativism from an analytic perspective, see Gordon C. F. Bearn, “Relativism as Reductio,” *Mind* 94, no. 375 (July 1985): 389–408.

5. See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), especially pp. 83–105, 336–67.

6. See the discussion of Schwitters and dada in Dorothea Dietrich, *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters: Tradition and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 17, hereafter *Collages*.

7. Kurt Schwitters, *Manifeste und kritische Prosa*, vol. 5 of *Das literarische Werk* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1981), p. 144, hereafter *Manifeste*.

8. Huelsenbeck, who excluded Schwitters from official membership

in the Berlin dada group, wrote of him that he “lived like a lower middle-class Victorian. . . . we called him the abstract Spitzweg, the Kaspar David Friedrich of the Dadaist revolution.” See Richard Huelsenbeck, “Dada and Existentialism,” in *Dada: Monograph of a Movement*, ed. Willy Verkauf (New York: G. Wittenborn, 1957), p. 58; quote cited in John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 40, hereafter *Schwitters*.

9. See, for example, the utopian projects for “Alpine Architecture” from the poetry of Paul Scheerbart as drawn by Bruno Taut (*Glass Architecture* [New York: Praeger, 1972]). Scheerbart is typical of the expressionists in his disdain for the urban condition and his call for a return to the organic world of small community (*gemeinschaft*) as opposed to the alienating world of metropolitan society (*gesellschaft*): “Glass architecture will only come if the city as we know it goes. It is completely clear to all those who care about the future of our civilization that this dissolution must take place” (p. 71).

10. See the discussion of Schwitters and dada in *Collages*, p. 18.

11. From a contemporary account of Schwitters’s studio in 1920 by Alfred Dudelsack in *Beilage zur Braunschweiger Illustrierten Woche* (Braunschweig, 1920), cited in *Schwitters*, p. 144.

12. Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), p. 86, hereafter *Utopia*. Tafuri’s general analyses of the relationship between collage/assemblage and the development of the metropolis are unparalleled: “For all the avant-garde movements—and not only in the field of painting—the law of assemblage was fundamental. And since the assembled objects belonged to the real world, the picture became a neutral field on which to project the *experience of shock* suffered in the city” (p. 86).

13. This is not to say that all of the grottoes have themes as monstrous as the *Lustmordhöhle*; but even in the harmless “friendship” grottoes, the grottoes dedicated to various friends of the artist, a fundamental perversity prevails. Schwitters would inevitably memorialize his friends with the most banal of their possessions (a key, toenail clippings, urine, and so on), and these objects would often be gained by theft. Thus, even the friendship grottoes aimed to shock and surprise. Kate Steinitz, for example, tells of Schwitters’s theft of a key of hers and subsequent display of the object within the *Merzbau*. See *Collages*, pp. 197–98.

14. For more on monstrosity and posthumanism, see my discussion of Slavoj Žižek’s work in chapter 5.

15. In Seibu Takanawa, *Kurt Schwitters* (exhibition catalogue, Seibu Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 1983), cited in *Schwitters*, p. 148.

16. Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London and New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), p. 152.

17. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 121.
18. See *Schwitters*, pp. 166–71.
19. Rudolf Jahns, cited in *Schwitters*, p. 154.

Chapter 3

1. Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. xiv, hereafter *Back*.
2. See chapter 1, note 7.
3. See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
4. See Fried's famous formulation, "Presentness is grace," in "Objecthood," p. 142.
5. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 26, hereafter *Écrits*.
6. Howard N. Fox, introduction to *Metaphor: New Projects of Contemporary Sculptors* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), p. 16; quoted in *Futurist Moment*, p. 110.
7. Reprinted in *Originality*, pp. 23–41.
8. Robert Rosenblum's "Picasso and the Typography of Cubism" is reprinted in *Picasso in Retrospect*, ed. Roland Penrose and John Golding (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 49–75.
9. Reprinted as "Collage" in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), hereafter *Culture*.
10. Both Krauss and Poggi indicate this irony in Greenberg's account. I'm particularly indebted to Poggi's discussion of this passage for the idea that Krauss's deconstruction of Greenberg is really prefigured in Greenberg's own discussion. See *Defiance*, p. 255 and "Re-presenting Cubism," *Art in America* 68 (December 1980): 94 n; hereafter "Re-presenting."
11. *Culture*, p. 77.
12. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference and Other Essays*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 291.
13. The most rigorous and extended argument in favor of the idea that collage marks a radical departure in the conception of what it means to make art is Yves-Alain Bois's essay "Kahnweiler's Lesson," in *Model*, pp. 65–97. Bois makes this argument in the process of reviving the criticism of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, a neo-Kantian contemporary of the cubists. In effect, "Kahnweiler's Lesson" endorses Kahnweiler's assertion that with collage "the Cubist painters now meant to represent things by invented signs which would make

them appear as a whole in the consciousness of the spectator, without his being able to identify the details of the sign with details of the objects ‘read’” (p. 90). In other words, the collage consciously and explicitly offers a text rather than an aesthetic “object” to the viewer. See my discussion, pp. 3–4.

14. See my discussions of this move in chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 4 I address the aesthetics of the sublime, while in chapter 5 I address the Romantic interpretation of the real in relationship to Lacan’s work.

15. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999). While this recent text maintains Krauss’s thesis that, with collage, painting loses the representational bond in signification, the extent and value of this loss here emerge much more aporetically and even paradoxically than in the period of Krauss’s initial involvement with the journal *October*. Using the metaphor of the demise of the “gold standard” to discuss Picasso’s insight in cubist collage, Krauss emphasizes the trade-off implicit within it: if there is no longer any substance with which to “cash out” of the currency system, then all that remains is the possibility of indefinite exchange of meanings—an exchange precisely demonstrated by the process of collage. But this new situation brings with it two possible and dialectically intertwined outcomes. On the one hand, an art which responds to this situation can become a reflection upon that very situation, upon the conditions of possibility for a new economy of signification in modern life. The *truth* of economic exchange is that it takes place entirely without an ultimate reference to a “real” standard, and the task of art now is to explore this truth. On the other hand, art can simply give up its commitment to truth, becoming in the process an aestheticized “pastiche.” That is, the artist can simply try to “take advantage” of the loss of authenticity much as a modern counterfeiter uses the artificiality of paper money to *make money*. This second possibility names what happens to Picasso’s own art in the period following the cubist explosion—the period of the artist’s return to a kind of debased neoclassicism. And this fact, that one and the same artist both accomplishes the semiotic revolution and leads the retreat from it, indicates what, for Krauss, is the implicit danger of a euphoric postmodernism: to simply celebrate the failure of reference or signification is to enter a world of *increased* fraudulence, increased counterfeit. All of this follows, even though the original rejection of “gold” (representation) was accomplished in the name of truth and authenticity. (Actually, money doesn’t work that way. . . .)

Thus, whereas in the 1970s Krauss had led the charge *away from* modernism and played the role of prophet of *postmodernism*, in *The Picasso Papers* she returns to advocating modernism, albeit modernism problematized by the ultimate impossibility of the reflective knowledge embraced by Greenberg or Fried. In other words, she now articulates something much more like the position I’m defending here.

16. Current scholarly research questions this assertion and the related

idea that the play's end reflects the censorious demands of the Puritan King James in relationship to Shakespeare's "art." See Stephen Orgel's introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Tempest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), hereafter Orgel.

17. Of particular importance in the line of readings that interpret Prospero as a kind of allegory for Shakespeare and his departure from the stage are those of Campbell and Luce. See Frank Kermode's discussion of the history of interpretations of *The Tempest* in *The Arden Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1964), pp. lxxxi–lxxxiii, hereafter Kermode.

18. I am indebted to the recent survey of the literature on *The Tempest* by Orgel.

19. On this matter, see Kermode's interpretation of *The Tempest* in his edition (Kermode, p. xlvii): Prospero's "art is contrasted with the natural power of Sycorax to exploit for evil purposes the universal sympathies. It is a technique for liberating the soul from the passions, from nature . . . etc."

20. "There is nothing whatever in the play implying that Sycorax's ministers are devils, or that the spirits she controls are any lower, or indeed any other, than those 'weak masters' at Prospero's command" (Orgel, pp. 21–22).

21. Peter Greenaway, *Prospero's Books: A Film of Shakespeare's "The Tempest"* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991), p. 9, hereafter *Prospero's Books*. For an excellent discussion of Greenaway's film in the context of his larger oeuvre, see Bridget Elliott and Anthony Purdy, *Peter Greenaway: Architecture and Allegory* (London: Academy Editions, 1997), hereafter *Allegory*.

22. Along with *The Draughtsman's Contract*, other pertinent films by Peter Greenaway include *Vertical Images Re-make*, *A Zed and Two Noughts*, *A TV Dante*, *Drowning by Numbers*, and *The Pillow Book*.

23. The role of imagination in representation and the accompanying theme of the falsity of naturalism are constants in Greenaway's work. For an interesting discussion of the way that Greenaway treats representation as constituted by the imagination of the *artist*, see Leon Steinmetz's discussion of *The Draughtsman's Contract* in Leon Steinmetz and Peter Greenaway, *The World of Peter Greenaway* (Boston: Journey Editions, 1995), pp. 35–43, hereafter *World*. Greenaway himself writes: "I suspect the main frustrations and certainly the main delights for me of manufacturing cinema are relevant to what I would call the battle between image and text. This battle can of course be joined outside of cinema—and most traditionally in a book, where the time-frame consumption belongs to the reader and not the author" (*World*, p. 1).

24. Greenaway writes of this new technology:

The newest Gutenberg technology—and to talk of a comparable revolution may not be to exaggerate—is the digi-

tal, electronic Graphic Paintbox. This machine, as its name suggests, links the vocabulary of electronic picture-making with the traditions of the artist's pen, palette and brush, and like them permits a personal signature. I believe its possibilities could radically affect cinema, television, photography, painting and printing (and maybe much else), allowing them to reach degrees of sophistication not before considered. (*Prospero's Books*, p. 28)

Beyond *Prospero's Books*, Greenaway has explored the potential of Paintbox technology in his *TV Dante* and in his recent film *The Pillow Book*.

25. The peculiar nature of this postmodern theatricality is paralleled in an interesting body of structuralist anthropological, semiological, and psychoanalytic theory devoted to the nature of *sacrifice*, surely a concept that seems to share the fate of theatricality itself; that is, like the theatrical, and certainly historically even *before* any discussion of theatricality, sacrifice seems to exactly emblemize what modernity rejects. Here one could return to several premodern "modernizations"—to the Christian rejection of Jewish and pagan sacrifice and to the ongoing theological reinterpretation of the Eucharist within the history of Christianity—for evidence of an ongoing sacrifice of sacrifice itself, for evidence that the topos of sacrifice is precisely antimodern. Sacrifice, like the aesthetic concept of theatricality, seems to demand a mediation, a "place" connecting human and divine. And the "disenchanted" world of modernity forbids that.

But it is the virtue of the structuralist theory developed by Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva to have implicitly challenged this picture of sacrifice. Kristeva, building upon Freud's account of a primal murder in *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism*, articulates a theory of sacrifice that, at least potentially, allows us to see sacrifice as a shockingly modern practice. In her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she argues that sacrificial practice has two components. In the first place, it is ritualized murder: that is, it marks an act of violence, of transgression, but, at the same time, it *confines* this violence to the sacrificial object—the heifer, the goat, and so forth. On the other hand, however, sacrificial practice seems to be almost inevitably accompanied by an *enlivening* effect. Kristeva writes of such "practice" taking the form of the performance associated with sacrifice, a performance that "is the laboratory for, among other things, theater, poetry, song, dance—art" (Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], p. 79, hereafter, *Revolution*).

26. Peter Greenaway, cited in *World*, p. 114.

27. See Kermode, pp. xlviii.

28. All citations of Plato's *Timaeus* are from the translations by Benjamin Jowett, reprinted in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamil-

ton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 1151–1211. For an excellent general discussion of the philosophical implications of Plato's idea, see Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), chapter 2.

29. See Jacques Derrida, "Khora," in *On the Name*, trans. Ian Mcleod, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), hereafter *Name*. It's worth noting that, in a slightly altered form, this essay is reprinted in the recent collaboration between Derrida and the architect Peter Eisenman, *ChoraL Works* (New York: Monacelli, 1997), pp. 15–32.

30. Julia Kristeva, for whose early work the idea of a "semiotic chora" is central, tries to articulate this strange status of the *chora* in relational terms. For her, the *chora* itself is *mythological*, a prerepresentational site that, nonetheless, can only appear as articulated *within* representation. Thus, in her work the *chora* serves as a theoretical posit that explains the presence of energies from the real within the world of symbolization. See *Revolution*, pp. 26–37.

Chapter 4

1. Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism," in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 81, hereafter *Condition*.

2. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 216, 223, hereafter *Lessons*.

3. See *Condition*.

4. Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), p. 207, hereafter *Reader*. It's worth noting that, precisely in regard to this essay, I am eliding part of Lyotard's position for the purposes of my argument here. While I would argue that Lyotard's embrace of the sublime does, for the most part, boil down to a radicalized subjectivism, it is also true that in "The Sublime and Avant-Garde" Lyotard ties his position to a more radical stream in his own and post-structuralist thought—an *antisubjectivist* direction best indicated by Heidegger's term *Ereignis* ("event" or "event of appropriation"). As Lyotard puts it here, the notion of the present at stake within this more radical tradition is not the moment of consciousness but rather "what dismantles consciousness, what deposes consciousness, and even what consciousness forgets in order to constitute itself" (*Reader*, p. 197).

I take up the challenge of a postmodernism founded upon such a conception of "event" in the final chapter of this work and would ask that the reader

look there for my (more sympathetic) response to *that part* of Lyotard's thought. I would, nonetheless, also defend a reading of Lyotard's work on the sublime in the Kantian terms of subjectivity: precisely to the extent that Lyotard's theory of avant-gardism amounts to a theory of *negation*, a theory that traces the nature of avant-gardism to its negation of the structures of representation, he inevitably returns to a radicalized subjectivism. Perhaps the strongest symptom of the neo-Romantic streak in Lyotard is his attraction to the very concept of the sublime, particularly as developed by Kant.

5. See *Avant-Garde*, p. 53: "Since now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as institution is accepted as *art*, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant-garde becomes inauthentic. Having been shown to be irredeemable, the claim to be protest can no longer be maintained."

6. Thus, without denying the assertion of scholars like David Cottington or Bürger himself that one can detect a certain formal intention of unity in Picasso's collages, I want to question the importance of that aesthetic unity in the experience of these works. See David Cottington, "What the Papers Say: Politics and Ideology in Picasso's Collages of 1912," *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (winter 1998). For an excellent discussion of Picasso's ambivalence about the aesthetic status of his collages and assemblages, see chapter 5 ("Cubist Collage and the Culture of Commodities") in *Defiance*.

7. "The attainment of an aim is always connected with the feeling of pleasure" (*CJ*, p. 27, Ak. 187). Also see *CJ*, p. 29, Ak. 189: "Therefore, in this case we call the object purposive only because its presentation is directly connected with the feeling of pleasure, and this presentation itself is an aesthetic presentation of purposiveness."

8. As will be seen, this is a controversial assertion in the history of Kant interpretations. There is a long series of readings of the third *Critique*—beginning with Romantic interpretations during Kant's own lifetime—which emphasize passages where Kant seems to discount the involvement of any conceptualization in aesthetic judgment. Typical of such approaches to Kant is a reduction of his "play of the faculties" to the play of the imagination alone, the removal of any role for the understanding in aesthetic judgment. In recent years, Paul Guyer's reading in his *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), hereafter *Claims*, attempts to account for aesthetic reflection entirely without the need of any conceptual moment, as does—in continental circles—Hans-Georg Gadamer's account in his *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury/Continuum, 1975). I could also mention here Donald Crawford's *Kant's Aesthetic Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974); Dieter Henrich's *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); and Gilles Deleuze's *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Among recent interpretations favoring a role for cognition in reflection, I would mention Rudolf Makkreel's *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) and Samuel Fleischacker's *A Third Concept of Liberty: Judgment and Freedom in Kant and Adam Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), hereafter *Third*. On the basis of an effort to make Kant's account both internally consistent and harmonious with the epistemology of the first *Critique*, Fleischacker argues, against Guyer, that to reflect simply *is* to offer concepts (*Third*, pp. 28–51).

While the lasting nature of this disagreement indicates, I think, that Guyer is right in stating that “there can be no interpretation of Kant's theory of taste without some reconstruction of it” (*Claims*, p. 11), since the account in the *Critique of Judgment* is fundamentally inconsistent, there are different ways to respond to that inconsistency. All of the readings above try, in one way or another, to eliminate the inconsistency from Kant's account, try to render it a single account. This is precisely where I depart from them. The following comments assume (what is manifest in most interpretations of the text) that the account of aesthetic reflection in the *Critique of Judgment* is necessarily and symptomatically split. I take the role of the sympathetic hermeneut here only to articulate as clearly as possible where the fault lines in Kant's account lie.

In effect, this assumption leads me to a compromise position on the role of the understanding in Kant's account of aesthetic judgment. I follow Fleischacker in his convincing argument that for Kant any reflection must involve concepts. But I agree with Gadamer, Guyer, Crawford, Henrich, and others that the judgment of taste, the judgment that something is beautiful, involves no hermeneutic process. What allows me to agree substantively with both positions is my reading of the *Critique of Judgment* as offering two different and incompatible accounts of aesthetic judgment. The first account, which I associate with the idea of the “play of the faculties,” demands the active use of the understanding. The second, which focuses upon the judgment of taste and the role of beautiful form in the formation of that judgment, actually suppresses conceptualization.

This compromise position saves me the embarrassment faced by Guyer and other proponents of the “Romantic” Kant of explaining away Kant's insistence upon the role of a process of understanding in aesthetic reflection. Similarly, it spares me from having to explain away Kant's *formalism*, his insistence that beautiful form involves no concept. Common to all the earlier interpretations is a (quite reasonable) model of aesthetic judgment based upon the experience of the beautiful, based, that is, upon an implicit promise “in” the object that it is not only cognizable but *indefinitely* so. The trick, for me, is that I can show the *beautiful* is a special case of aesthetic reflection,

a case where the “promise” implicit in the “harmony of the faculties” extends beyond comprehensibility. That promise seems to include, also, the information that actual comprehension will be impossible. In other words, the beautiful seems to dispense altogether with the need for actual reflection and thus for actual cognition.

9. I would insist here on the literal meaning of Kant’s German word for “determinant” judgment: *bestimmend*, which is usually translated as “determinant,” could perhaps better be translated as “determining.” That is, in it a given universal sufficiently *determines* a particular.

10. See *CJ*, §59, “Beauty as the Symbol of Morality,” pp. 225–30, Ak. 351–54.

11. Fleischacker offers several arguments for why this must be the case: (1) That the account of cognition in the *Critique of Pure Reason* leaves no room for a specific object unified without a concept. But, unlike the sublime, which is *not* specific (since it concerns nature as a whole), the beautiful is *always* some particular beautiful thing (*Third*, pp. 23–24). (2) That the “general condition for application of a concept” met by the beautiful object can only be met in relationship to an earlier series of actual concepts. In other words, the judgment of an object as “beautiful” only makes sense if we can compare a series of earlier *interpretations* of the object, interpretations that are necessarily already conceptual (*Third*, pp. 24–26). (3) Finally, Fleischacker also makes a textual argument for his position, an argument that helps to make sense of Kant’s use of the term “play of the faculties.” In this final argument, he focuses on Kant’s repeated insistence that aesthetic reflection involves “no determinant concept.” Fleischacker rejects both the interpretation (by Pluhar, Deleuze, and others) that claims an “indeterminant” concept to be involved and the alternative position of Guyer and others that aesthetic reflection involves no concept at all. In the place of these interpretations, he argues that closest to the text is a position that claims that no single concept suffices for the determination of the object: “To think without a determinate concept is not, indeed, to think *with* an *indeterminate* concept—the phrase is close to an oxymoron for Kant (in practically the only place it appears in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, it represents a *limitation* to thought [*CPR*, B307], something that cannot itself be thought)—but it could well be to use concepts without allowing any single concept to determine one’s thought” (*Third*, p. 281 n.). By interpreting “determinate” in this way, Fleischacker gains, in addition, a way of explaining Kant’s persistent use of the plural in “play of the faculties.”

12. *Third*, p. 26. My thanks to Samuel Fleischacker for allowing me to read this chapter of his book before its appearance.

13. Here I take leave from Fleischacker, who tries to defend the notion that the experience of beauty is primarily describable in terms of an actual

process of reflection and is, in fact, exemplary for such reflection (see, for instance, *Third*, p. 30). The problem that Fleischacker does not account for is the judgment of taste itself: what is the relationship of this judgment to reflection? How is it that there can be both a judgment, “this is beautiful,” and an indefinite process of interpretive play in relationship to the object? If we judge that the object is beautiful—that it is purposive *without* a definite purpose—then interpretation becomes, in a sense, futile. First of all, we now face the depressing fact that any and every interpretation of the object will fail. It’s unclear, in fact, how such a situation really allows any interpretation to be considered *better* than another; so there’s not necessarily even the pleasure of “getting closer” to truth. Furthermore, actual reflection here seems redundant. We already know what there is about this object to know (that it is purposive without purpose) and any other conceptualization of it adds nothing.

Certainly, the history of modernist art, the history that Karsten Harries so acutely describes in the terms of aestheticism, indicates that *artists* have implicitly understood interpretation’s redundancy and even destructiveness to beauty. Thus, the general evolution of modern art toward the formalist ideal of a “presentness” that is resistant to all interpretation.

This is not to say, of course, that beautiful works can’t and don’t occasion the kind of reflection that Fleischacker describes in relationship to paintings by Kiefer and Pollock. My claim would only be that beauty tends to interfere with a process of interpretation rather than to encourage it—that what interests Fleischacker about works of art (their ability to inspire indefinite actual interpretation) is precisely *not* beauty. When beauty obtrudes, when it forces a judgment of taste *rather than a process of judgment*, then we find interpretation cut short. In seeing this (and thus explaining away actual reflection in relationship to the judgment of taste), more traditional interpreters of Kant like Schiller or Guyer seem more on target than Fleischacker.

14. *Objecthood*, p. 140.

15. Indeed, though the issues here are complex, it seems to me that it is precisely to this “middle” category provided by indefinite aesthetic reflection that much of what we wish to call “art” belongs, regardless of its beauty.

16. In effect, I’m asserting that Kant is wrong, or at least not completely right, about judgments of taste: in attributing “form” to the object they are, in a sense Kant didn’t consider, *objective*. The judgment, “this is beautiful,” is inevitably a way of locating and pointing at a place in conceptual space—precisely that site between purposiveness and purposelessness. To that extent, even if the judgment of taste describes a state of the subject rather than of the object, in giving it a place, it describes that state objectively. Kant’s language of a “territory” of judgment (*CJ*, p. 16, Ak. 177) and later of a “bridge” between the faculties indicates the compromise forged by taste.

The beautiful is the *locus* of mediation between the purposiveness of the understanding and the immediacy of sense. If only at the level of logic, it gives us a place to point to, one that's *between* these demands. It is that *je ne sais qua* of the beautiful object at which we (conceptually) gesture, and precisely to the extent that we are unable to further articulate or locate this "quality," to the extent that we judge the object "beautiful." In other words, beauty gives the subject a *place*. I have explored the nature of this "place," which I call the "no place," in a couple of articles. See, in particular, my "Modernism and Theatricality," *Art Criticism* 8, no. 1 (1993): 49–69.

17. I have in mind here, of course, the analyses of Jacques Lacan, analyses that indicate the intimacy of narcissism and the sources of human aggression, what he calls "aggressivity." See Jacques Lacan, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits*, pp. 8–29. Also see chapter 5 of this book, where I take up a couple of interpretations of Lacan's work.

18. Here, I would return to Lyotard's meditation on Barnett Newman's work in "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde." There, Lyotard distinguishes two different sublimines, one that he associates with the dynamics of postmodern capitalism and the other that he finds in Newman's painting. This second sublimity poses itself as a question about the moment of modernist immediacy. The genuinely sublime work (as opposed to its capitalist shadow) implicitly asks, "does it happen?" instead of asserting "it happens." This is a promising path of inquiry: but I would assert that, *as question*, it is no longer closely related to the sublime of Burke or Kant.

19. Above all, see Poggi's discussion of the transformation produced by the inclusion of wallpaper and newspapers within the space of the canvas. She argues that the cubists include these objects within their collages as a polemical rejection of the aestheticism implicit in symbolist art (*Defiance*, pp. 137–53).

20. Pablo Picasso, in conversation with Françoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, in *Life*, p. 70. See my earlier discussion of this passage on p. 31.

21. It's possible to see in Kant's abbreviation of aesthetic judgment the reason for the myth of *genius*—of, that is, the notion that *making* art involves an activity that is radically different from its reception. The concept of genius emerges in *The Critique of Judgment* from the shortcomings of *taste* for explaining aesthetic creativity: taste, which can help the artist to give a representation a beautiful form, nonetheless proves helpless for explaining another quality of art: art demands open interpretation.

Paragraphs 46–48 of the *Critique of Judgment* explain the production of "fine art" (*schöne Kunst*) through a combination of "taste" and "genius." This addition of the concept of genius to Kant's aesthetic vocabulary is necessitated by the limits that "form" has given to aesthetic reflection. One can see this when, in §48, Kant discusses the role of taste in the creation of art. In

effect, taste produces that aspect of the aesthetic representation (say, of a person or of a horse) that is *beautiful* because it exhibits “the form by which (the) concept is universally communicated” (*CJ*, p. 180, Ak. 312). Taste concerns that aspect of a picture of a horse, for example, that makes it a beautiful representation of that animal. But Kant sees that there is much in art that can’t be explained in this manner. In particular, the “liveliness” of fine art can’t be boiled down to either accuracy or beauty of representation. This “spirited” (*geistig*) quality of art, this “animation,” adds an essential creativity to the work of art that taste can’t give it. And this creativity must be understood in a hermeneutic manner: that is, Kant has in mind the way that artistic representation animates *meaning*, causing it to multiply. That is, the poet doesn’t just *show us* a battle, she brings to that depiction “the thoughts of much that is ineffable” (*CJ*, p. 184, Ak. 316) and therefore elicits interpretation. According to Kant, *genius* supplies to the representation of a morning battle all those “poetic” qualities that make us feel that interpretation is not exhausted by its denotation; it’s a glorious battle, a battle like the morning sun, and so on.

Genius interprets meaning, though never, of course according to a preset rule—always *creatively*. It is on account of this creativity that the genius is “nature’s favorite,” that she is like the force of a “second nature” within human culture. The “life” that she imparts to her work is the life of potential interpretations. Unlike the rest of us (the scientists, the pedants), who are restricted to the canons of taste, the genius *creates* taste, creates new forms that will become the arbiters of future judgments. Kant has already plowed the field of Romanticism here, and particularly the soil from which the Byronic poet will spring.

But if the distinction between the genius and everybody else is that the genius alone is creative, then what should be made of Kant’s own account of reflective judgment, a process that is *never* sufficiently determined by a rule, a process that always demands the use of interpretive creativity but is manifestly involved in *all* knowing? What should be made of a creativity that belongs to everyone? In fact, Kant can only justify the unique quality of genius by diminishing reflection to correctness of taste, by eliminating from judgment the manifestly creative process essential to it.

22. See Christine Poggi’s excellent discussion of these issues as they impinge upon cubist collage in particular: “Yet within the context of early twentieth-century painting, to substitute ready-made elements for the indexical traces of the hand, as Picasso did in his first series of collages, is to demonstrate the impersonal, conventional aspects of personal expression. Moreover, because these elements were drawn from the familiar realm of mass-culture, they provoke a reevaluation of the attempt to found the authenticity of painting on its *difference* from popular cultural artifacts” (*Defiance*, p. 254).

23. For more on the “impersonal” and even “mechanical” nature of cubist collage, see Pierre Daix, *Picasso: The Cubist Years 1907–1916* (New York: Graphic Society/Little, Brown, 1980), p. 25. See also *Originality*, pp. 38–39.

Chapter 5

1. See Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, reprinted in *Basic*, and Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon, 1973).

2. See Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1991), p. 61.

3. See Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 1992), hereafter *Enjoy*; *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), hereafter *Tarrying*; *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), hereafter *Know*; and *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (London: Verso, 1994), hereafter *Metastases*.

4. It's also worth considering Žižek's revival of the language, first developed by Claude Lefort, of a modernist political “space” in which liberal democracy can arise. Kant's ambivalence about the French Revolution is, according to Žižek, theoretically grounded; for, while Kant affirms that “power belongs to the People” to the extent that “nobody is allowed to appropriate it” (so that any king and so on is a tyrant), he also warns against any attempt “on the part of the People to assert itself as the actual, positively given sovereign” since precisely such a gesture leads to the Terror (*Tarrying*, p. 272 n. 13). In other words, democracy depends upon differentiating the “People” as subject from any substantial realization of “popular will.” Democracy is only possible on the basis of this crisis, this positing of a sovereignty that belongs solely to the People at the same time that it evades the popular will. Žižek's psychoanalytic Kantianism thus confirms Lefort's thesis of an “unoccupiable” or empty space at the core of democracy (see Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], pp. 17, 226).

5. Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (London: Routledge, 1991), hereafter *Death*.

6. It's worth noting a recent text that ties together the historical thesis of Žižek's approach with the categories used by Lacan in the 1950s. Departing from the Lacanian notion of imaginary aggressivity and Lacan's hints about the historical evolution of this aggression, Teresa Brennan's *History after Lacan* (London: Routledge, 1993) tries to develop a coherent philosophy of history on the basis of Lacan's few cryptic comments on this bond.

7. See Jacques Lacan, “The Real Is the Impossible,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 167.

8. See *Tarrying*, pp. 179ff., for Žižek’s critique of Boothby (a critique carried out in the process of developing a reading of the history of Western opera).

It’s true that Boothby, having introduced this parallel, is at some pains to demonstrate its limitations. But it is the “painful” nature of the distinctions that Boothby draws in this attempt to distance Lacan from *Lebensphilosophie* that is perhaps the best indicator that Žižek’s critique has hit the mark. For example, Boothby has to shape contradictory strategies in regard to the “will” to distance Lacan from Schopenhauer and from Nietzsche in turn: in the case of Schopenhauer, Boothby contrasts the nineteenth-century valorization of the “resignation” of the sage in the face of the world will—the emphasis upon a stoic relinquishment of will—with the Freudian/Lacanian insistence upon an active “working through” of death (*Death*, p. 217). On the other hand, Nietzsche’s emphasis upon the “affirmation” implicit in the activity of the “Dionysian” reveler turns the argument in the opposite direction: here it is the “willfulness” of the Nietzschean ideal that must be contrasted with the emphasis upon the unconscious, primary process, and so forth in psychoanalysis. Boothby tries to trump this contradiction in his approaches to nineteenth-century thought with the observation that *Lebensphilosophie* wrongly assumes that philosophy can adequately discuss death through a “posture of the will” (even if it’s not the same one); but then, implicitly unable to come up with an alternative to the language of the will, he returns to it. He describes the uniquely psychoanalytic process of free association as “the willed suspension of the will” (*Death*, p. 218). Doubtless, this is true. Unfortunately, however, that description suits *both* Schopenhauer and Nietzsche just as well as it does Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis.

9. From a conversation with Žižek, March 1992. In several places, Žižek writes of the conviction that Lacan’s work cannot be reduced to a single position. See, for example, *Metastases*, p. 173: “True, the fundamental presupposition of my approach to Lacan is the utter incongruity of a ‘synchronous’ reading of his texts and seminars: the only way to comprehend Lacan is to approach his work as a work in progress, as a succession of attempts to seize the same persistent traumatic kernel.”

10. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vol. 5 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1958), p. 607; hereafter *Interpretation*. The processes involved in forming dreams, writes Freud, “show the closest analogy in their essentials to the processes observable in the formation of hysterical symptoms. A dream,

however, is no pathological phenomenon; it presupposes no disturbance of psychical equilibrium; it leaves behind it no loss of efficiency.”

11. See Žižek’s discussion of Lacan’s effort to similarly overcome these two interpretations of the purpose of psychoanalysis: “This is how Lacan subverts the opposition that provides the axis of the entire history of psychoanalysis: either the resigned-conservative acceptance of Law/Prohibition, of renunciation, of ‘repression,’ as the *sine qua non* of civilization; or the endeavour to ‘liberate’ drives from the constraints of Law” (*Metastases*, p. 174).

12. The principle was taken over by Freud from Fechner. In Strachey’s translation, “The scene of action (*Schaubühne*) of dreams is different from that of waking ideational life” (*Interpretation*, p. 48; see also p. 536).

13. See G. W. F. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Related Writings*, trans. and ed. R. N. D. Martin and Stuart Brown (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1988).

14. This doesn’t imply an embrace of the position that, above all, has come to be associated with de Chirico, Ernst, and other members of the surrealist group. While the surrealists were right to emphasize the “surreality” of the unconscious, too often they simply placed this space at the service of consciousness representation by simply *representing* it. Indeed, I would argue that Dalí and de Chirico stumbled into a kind of kitsch when they represented the space of dreams as though it were simply a radicalized Cartesian or Newtonian space. To do that is implicitly to reduce this space to the formal coordinates of the space of consciousness.

15. The early work of Jacques Derrida is unparalleled in thinking through the nature of a space in which signification is not conceived in terms of a “transcendental signified” but in which the diacritical nature of signification is taken to its logical outcome. See, in particular, his *Writing and Difference* and *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

16. See *Model*, pp. 86–89.

17. In reference to the explicitly “linguistic” nature of this play, it’s interesting to note the text of the newspaper fragment included in the composition: “*C’est que la toilette-baccale n’est pas seulement une question de coquetterie, ni même de propreté banale. Son importance est autrement grande, car elle commande, en réalité, toute l’hygiène défensive. C’est là que la vie s’élabore. . . . Il n’y va pas seulement de l’intégrité des dents, des gencives, des fosse nasales et de la gorge: il y va de la santé générale, évidemment subordonnée au bon fonctionnement des organes sacrés, come l’appareil respiratoire et l’appareil digestif, qui débouchent dans ce cavum.*” [It is that the oral toilette is not only a matter of attractiveness, nor even of common cleanliness. Its importance is great in another sense, for in reality it controls all defensive hygiene. The mouth is, in effect, the antechamber of the organism. It is here that life elaborates itself. . . . It is not a question

merely of the soundness of the teeth, of the gums, of the nasal passage and the throat: it is a question of general health, evidently subordinated to the proper operation of the sacral organs, like the respiratory system and the digestive system, which open into this *cavum*.] Cited and translated in Rosand, "Paint, Paste, and Plane," Plottel, p. 128.

18. As Boothby writes of desire in Lacan, "Here, too, it must be said, there is no possibility of an exhaustive representation of the body's impulse-life. Strictly speaking, in the symbolic dimension as Lacan thinks of it there is no representation at all in the sense of *Vorstellung*, an apprehension of presence-in-form" (*Death*, p. 227).

19. Max Ernst's dada and surrealist collages can be read in a similar fashion to *Man with a Hat*. See, for example, Charlotte Stokes interpretation of these works in relationship to Freud's *Jokes and Their Relationship to the Unconscious* in "Collage as Jokework: Freud's Theories of Wit as the Foundation for the Collages of Max Ernst," in *Critical*, pp. 253–69.

20. See *Écrits*, p. 128: "[Freud] wrote *The Ego and the Id* in order to maintain this fundamental distinction between the true subject of the unconscious and the ego as constituted in its nucleus by a series of alienating identifications." I should note that Lacan's interpretation already moves in the direction I suggest below; for it underscores the importance of the *spatial* metaphor in Freud's formula; "Wo (Where) *Es* (the subject—devoid of any *das* or other objectivating article) *war* (was—it is a locus of being that is referred to here, and that in this locus) *soll* (must—that is, a duty in the moral sense, as is confirmed by the sentence that follows and brings the chapter to a close) *Ich* (I, there must I—just as one declared, 'this am I,' before saying 'it is I'), *werden* (become—that is to say, not occur, or even happen but emerge from this very locus in so far as it is a locus of being)."

21. Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1978), p. 772, quoted in *Death*, p. 69. See also Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–60*, trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1992), pp. 210–17.

Chapter 6

1. Certainly there are exceptions to the chorus of voices announcing utopia's decease. Most important among them would be Jürgen Habermas in Germany. Fredric Jameson, in this country, develops an interesting argument for a kind of "disarmed" or modified utopianism. Jameson's notion of post-modern utopian "spatialization" corresponds to the idea of "neutral space" that I develop in previous chapters and extend here. See especially *Postmod-*

ernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), particularly chapter 6. My argument in the following text, however, should make clear that spatialization is inadequate as a replacement for modernist utopia, that the dialectics of spatialization as ideal inevitably leave a certain lack. To the extent that I reject Jameson's viewpoint, my own position is, in fact, closer to Habermas than Jameson. Having said this, however, I should (in lieu of the longer analysis this question demands) indicate that I remain unconvinced by Habermas's claim for a "paradigm shift" based upon the communicative turn. In other words, while I agree with Habermas's claim that postmodernism can only indicate a crisis in the project of modernity rather than a coherent alternative to that project, I do not follow Habermas in his claim to have an adequate answer to that crisis.

2. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al., ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, hereafter *Inoperative*; Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), hereafter *Coming*; and Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

3. Perhaps the most interesting and extended discussions of the notion of a plurality not anchored within a universalizing space in recent theory derive from rereadings of Leibniz's position. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), and Andrew Benjamin, *The Plural Event: Descartes, Hegel, Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 1993), especially pp. 112–28, hereafter *Plural*.

4. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy writes, "Society (*Gesellschaft*) was not built on the ruins of a *community* (*Gemeinschaft*). It emerged from the disappearance or the conservation of something—tribes or empires—perhaps just as unrelated to what we call 'community' as to what we call 'society.' So that community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us*—question, waiting, event, imperative—in the wake of society. Nothing, therefore, has been lost, and for this reason nothing is lost" (*Inoperative*, p. 11).

5. Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow*, trans. Frederick Etchells (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), hereafter *Tomorrow*.

6. I refer the reader to several excellent studies for a fuller understanding: Robert Fishman's *Urban Utopias of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982) contains an excellent chapter on Le Corbusier's urban schemes. Also worth noting is the discussion of Le Corbusier in Manfredo Tafuri's *Utopia*. Finally, Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's *Collage City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), hereafter *CC*, begins with an illuminating

chapter on the history of architectural utopianism, a chapter in which Le Corbusier plays a prominent role. See discussion below for Rowe and Koetter's response to Le Corbusier's urbanism.

7. "The things he [man] makes for himself are a creation which contrasts all the more with his natural surroundings because its aim is closer to his mind, and further away and more detached from his body. We can say that the further human creations are removed from our immediate grasp, the more they tend to pure geometry; a violin or a chair, things which come into close contact with the body, are of a less pure geometry; but a town is pure geometry. When man is free, his tendency is towards pure geometry. It is then that he achieves what we call order" (*Tomorrow*, p. 28).

8. See *Tomorrow*, p. 14.

9. Manfredo Tafuri convincingly argues that the preservation of a role for the genius/artist was, in fact, the increasingly desperate aim of avant-gardist architects in the 1920s and 1930s. See *Utopia*, pp. 78–125.

10. In *The City of Tomorrow*, this philosophy of history is above all articulated as a critique to *Futurism*, an aesthetic approach that Le Corbusier (wrongly, no doubt) equates with the merely mechanical production of the engineer. See *Tomorrow*, p. 58.

11. See Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Continuum, 1965), hereafter *Letters*. Writing in the wake of the French revolution (the *Letters* were published as a group in 1795), Schiller takes as his task the defense of Enlightenment ideals in the face of the excesses of the Terror. In particular, the *Letters* defend the possibility of a democracy that would maintain the individual's freedom before the state. One could say that Schiller's aesthetic utopia results from the necessity of producing a totality that will maintain the individual's freedom while guarding against the willfulness of mob rule. As a result, he conceives of a new ideal for the utopian unification of society, one no longer predicated upon the *rejection* of the concrete, the individual. Whereas Plato in the *Republic* rejected poetry for its devotion to mere appearance, Schiller wishes to save the kind of appearance (*Schein*) that presents humanity with its own essence—with the combination of sense ("condition") and reason ("self"). Thus, he writes, "To the question *how far appearance may exist in the moral world*, the answer is short and concise: *insofar as it is aesthetic appearance*, that is appearance which neither seeks to take the place of reality nor needs to have its place taken by reality" (*Letters*, p. 129).

12. There's a certain irony in this, as a closer study would reveal, given Le Corbusier's rejection of the hard-edged "futurist" proposals of his day.

13. In suggesting a utopian scheme for a city that dispenses of traditional urban fabric, Le Corbusier claims that the "corridor street" has "been a depressing element in our lives" (*Tomorrow*, p. 240).

14. For another argument about the inevitability of crisis here, see

Tafari's discussion of Le Corbusier's proposals for Algiers in *Utopia*, pp. 125–48.

15. In fact, for various reasons, *Collage City* was not published until 1978, though it circulated in manuscript form throughout the 1970s.

16. "Certainly, in considering the modern city from the point of view of perceptual performance, by *Gestalt* criteria it can only be condemned. For, if the appreciation or perception of object or figure is assumed to require the presence of some sort of ground or field, if the recognition of some sort of however closed field is a prerequisite of all perceptual experience and, if consciousness of field precedes consciousness of figure, then, when figure is unsupported by any recognizable frame of reference, it can only become enfeebled and self-destructive" (CC, p. 64).

17. The first chapter of *Collage City* attempts to separate off precisely such a totalizing "activist" utopia from older utopian traditions. For Rowe and Koetter, it is the marriage of romanticism and positivism in Le Corbusier's urbanism that explains both its potency and its disastrous results. See CC, pp. 15–29.

18. In chapter 1 of *Collage City*, "The Decline and Fall of Utopia," the authors attribute the crisis of urbanist utopianism to the union of French positivism and German Hegelianism—to that particular synthesis that gave birth to what they call the "activist" utopia (see CC, pp. 30–32).

19. For example, Rowe and Koetter end the text of *Collage City* by quoting book 9 of Plato's *Republic*:

I understand; you speak of that city of which we are the founders, and which exists in idea only for I do not think there is such an one anywhere on earth.

In heaven, I replied, there is laid up a pattern of such a city, and he who desires may behold this, and beholding, govern himself accordingly. (CC, p. 149)

20. There are clearly limits to the comparison of Rowe and Koetter's city with the nineteenth-century "museum city." They concern the difference between a city where architectural urbanism can symbolize totality and one where the ground rules forbid such totalization. The "field" in which the specific institutions of the *contemporary* "museum city" are to appear is no longer a totality in the same sense as is its nineteenth-century model. The contemporary city is no longer an *illustration* of political totality. The new city no longer monumentalizes national or civic identity in the way that its nineteenth-century predecessor did. That's not to say that there isn't an organizing field at work here, nor that this field doesn't, in a sense, still appear to the urban dweller. The context visible within the contemporary city, however, has a peculiarly abstract and "neutral" quality about it. Surely enough, the city remains a polis, a public space, but, at least architecturally, this space

can now only be characterized in terms of the abstract processes that generate it. It has no discernible *identity*.

21. I have in mind here the explosion of “neotraditionalist” urbanism in the United States and Europe in the wake of *Collage City*.

22. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli, 1994), hereafter *DNY*.

23. See Rem Koolhaas, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, and Bruce Mau, “Bigness,” in *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, ed. Jennifer Sigler (New York: Monacelli, 1995), pp. 494–517, hereafter *S,M,L,XL*.

24. See my discussion in chapter 5 of the Lacanian notion of an excess of signifier over signified.

25. *Guide to Coney Island*, Long Island Historical Society Library; quoted in *Delirious New York*, p. 39.

26. Developing Walter Benjamin’s ideas, Manfredo Tafuri argues that the primary project of the avant-gardes was to register the “shock” of the metropolis in a way that would transform the urban dweller from a passive “victim” to an active participant in technological urban life. Thus, Tafuri writes: “The public had to be provoked. Only in this way could it be actively introduced into the universe of precision dominated by the laws of production. The passivity of the *flâneur* sung by Baudelaire had to be conquered. The *blasé* attitude had to be transformed into effective participation in the urban scene” (*Utopia*, pp. 91–92).

27. *S,M,L,XL* contains an analysis in which Koolhaas comes close to explicitly confronting the problematic nature of his approach to the metropolis. In “Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis . . . or, Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa,” Koolhaas is forced to confront the cultural implications of the very condition he so successfully embraces in his architecture. Here, he, too, admits to being disturbed at the possibility of a society that is based upon the limitation of political participation and freedom precisely as the price paid for a delirious culture. See *S,M,L,XL*, pp. 1013–87.

28. Thomas Crow, “Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts,” in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 257.

29. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), hereafter *After*.

Conclusion

1. I would argue, in fact, that this common view of deconstruction does not do justice to what Jacques Derrida, at least, means by the term. While this is an issue of greater complexity than I can do justice to here, I

would point out Derrida's interest, in recent years, in articulating a "positive" or "affirmative" vision associated with deconstruction. Thus, for example, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes: "Once again, here as elsewhere, wherever deconstruction is at stake, it would be a matter of linking an *affirmation* (in particular a political one), *if there is any*, to the experience of the impossible, which can only be a radical experience of the perhaps" (*Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [London: Routledge, 1994], p. 35, hereafter *Specters*).

And, indeed, in that text, the author also attempts to articulate a nonteleological political vision of the relationship between critical thought (with its essentially idealizing implications) and practices "putting into question again, in certain of its essential predicates, the very concept of the said ideal" (*Specters*, p. 86). It would seem (though the text is ambiguous as to exactly where one would locate "deconstruction") possible to understand deconstructive practices as the nonteleological oscillation of these two conditions. Thus, Derrida claims that these two approaches "must not be added together but intertwined. They must be implicated with each other in the course of a complex and constantly reevaluated strategy" (*Specters*, p. 87).

My disagreement with these passages would not, then, be "methodological" but "political": or, rather, it would be with the idea that such a practice could suffice for constructing a genuine politics. See chapter 6.

2. For more articulated versions of this distinction, see both chapters 1 and 5.

3. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Modern Library, 1958), p. 22.

4. See Nicholas of Cusa, *Of Learned Ignorance*, trans. Germain Heron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

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Credits

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