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Reading the Entrails: Splatter Cinema and the Post Modern Body

By Robert S. Parigi

In 1979, two artists working under the collective title "A Picture is No Substitute for Anything" ran a print of Marilyn Monroe's last movie, *The Misfits* (1961), without the picture.[1] The Los Angeles premiere had a New York encore in 1982. Is this the best we can do for a postmodern movie? Even its status as a movie is doubtful; it processes a movie as mere raw material for a new event.

The guts of a super-reanimated zombie strangle a mad scientist. Now *that's* a movie. But is it *postmodern*? This scene from *ReAnimator* (1986) is a prime cut of what horror film director George Romero calls "splatter cinema," a relatively new, and I suggest postmodern, development of the horror movie displaying a gore-nucopia of explicit mutation and mutilation. As an initial index of splatter's postmodernism, note the 1957 release of Terrence Fisher's lushly gruesome *Curse of Frankenstein,* and Romero's revisionist gut-fest *Night of the Living Dead* in 1967, roughly contemporaneous with symptoms of postmodernism in other arts.

More telling than common concomitance is splatter's critique of modernity's myths of world and subject, a recurrent theme in the writings of postmodern theorists as well. Moreover, splatter cinema out-posts postmodernism in other fields by progressing beyond this negative, critical task, to the positive task of constructing new myths.

I am not using "myth" in a disparaging way; on the contrary, myth is "the creation of a sensible and balanced world."[2] In the creation of this shared, sensible world view, without which we would be autistic isolates, myths tell stories about the way the world is and what humans are. Every culture is characterized by these myths, unifying its members and legitimating their community. In this respect, myth on the social level is similar to the minimum of repression necessary on the personal level for the formation of the Freudian ego.[3] A culture's myths reflect and help effect the repressions, sublimations, and reality principle characteristic of the culture's members. Thus, if we reject myth, we reject the very possibility of culture and human community. As Freud points out,[4] and Marcuse elaborates,[5] excessive or surplus repression threatens the personality's well-being. Likewise, myths can so rigidly dominate a culture that they destroy it, or are perceived as irksome and eventually discarded by the culture's members. Evolve or die. We can observe the effects of these characteristics of myth in the current shift from modern to postmodern myths.

The fault-lines of this shift are most active near modernity's myths of the technological program to dominate nature, and the Cartesian subject. Bacon proposes the rudiments of the experimental method so that through science humans may "establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe."[6] Bacon thus establishes the modern technological program: "to make nature serve the business and convenience of man."[7]

Descartes completes modernity's technological myth: short mathematical formulae become the fully adequate descriptions of the world, the measure of human reason and certainty.[8] The world will be made subservient to human will through the application of mathematics and rational planning. Nature is described in the same way as we draw up blueprints for a machine,[9] and the world thus becomes a machine operated by humans through technology.

For Descartes, the thinking mind is the self, while the body and its accompanying sensations are only doubtful and secondary.[10] The Cartesian subject is a rational consciousness discontinuous with the material, natural world, a consciousness thus ideally suited to operate the world-machine.

The interrelations of modernity's myths of the Cartesian subject and the technology dominance of the world are conspicuously visible in the movie Production Code of 1930.

The technological program sought to engineer society, as yet another component of the world-machine through the application of rational planning. Clearly, this is the motivation behind the Movie Production Code:

> The Church, family, and school must always take the foremost place in teaching right conduct. The motion picture can never supplant or

> supercede them. It can unquestionably aid the work so begun by giving it stimulus. . . . It has been the definitely affirmed objective of the motion picture industry to acknowledge a "unifying moral code" through the medium of screen entertainment.[11]

If movies' influence is so meager, why bother? Unless, of course, you assume that through the Code's "rational planning," movies could be designed that help mold a "decent" society: the technological program. Of course, much more importantly, the major Hollywood studios used the Code to maintain their movie monopoly by withholding the Production Code seal of approval from the competition, thus preventing rival movies from being distributed. Still, such a blatant scheme was only plausible by dressing it up as a pious plot to pipe proper pedagogy into the populace. Under the technological program's aegis, the Code became one of the dominant forces shaping classical movies.

The Code is in turn shaped by the myth of modern subjectivity: the essential self is a disembodied consciousness. The invisible observer is also implied by the point of view from which the camera records the action, rarely acknowledged by the characters on-screen. Camera movements rarely mimic bodily movements.[12]

Basically, the Code forbid the pre-eminently visual movie medium from showing the human body. This is particularly surprising when we recall that human bodies were some of the very first subjects filmed. The "skirt dance of Annabelle Whitford Moore, the leaping muscles of Sandow the Strong Man, the sensational kiss of John Rice and May Irwin" were a few of the first events recorded in Edison's early "Black Maria" studio-box.[13] Nevertheless, the Code squelched this spontaneous fascination with the human body.

To testify to the violence of this denial, we can ask for no better witness than the Code itself and the statements of those who helped enforce it. Singling out horror movies, the Code rigidly enforced its ruling that "Excessive horror and gruesomeness will not be permitted," omitting depictions of "such visual details . . . as disfigured, dismembered, bloodstained and mutilated bodies, close-up views of dying men, and hair-raising details of inhuman treatment."[14] Charles Baudelaire distinguished between tales of the grotesque, which emphasize physical suffering, and tales of the arabesque, which emphasize mental anguish. By its horror ruling, the code denied the legitimacy of the grotesque, maintaining only the mental anguish appropriate to a disembodied consciousness. The effect on horror movies is immediate. In *Frankenstein* (1931) we see the brain stolen by Fritz for the Monster; in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1932), Dr. Pretorious and the Monster select bones for the bride. However, in *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), after the Code gained the authority to deny the seal of approval to movies in 1934, there is not a single loose limb or unconnected organ; the only arm that gets ripped off is the Inspector's wooden arm. Code restrictions were so prohibitive that by 1947 *The Beast With Five Fingers* is the year's only horror movie.[15] Prophetically, it depicts a disinherited/dismembered body(part), a hand, that comes back to haunt Peter Lorre. . . .[16]

Nor was the Code simply a misguided attempt to spare squeamish viewers queasy horror. It was rather a wholesale repression of the body and all traces of embodiment. With its gruesomeness ruling, the Code forcibly denies the most disturbing consequence of embodiment, mortality. Countless casualties in war, western, and crime movies were allowed to give up the (safely sanitized, bloodless) ghost, but were not allowed to give up the guts that went along with it. That the code is motivated not by a localized distaste for horror, but a generalized repression of all aspects of embodiment, is most clearly illustrated by Code rulings on sex. We can best illustrate this by processing a hypothetical screenplay through the Code.

Suppose we want to produce a "prestige" picture. We pick a popular opera, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The Code will allow us "To write a screen story about a charming, romantic young chap."[17] But "if he breaks the moral law [i.e., has "illlicit sex"], he must be shown to pay the penalty in some form of suffering."[18] Stern, but so far so good: Don Giovanni is killed by the statue of one of his victims' father. Since the Code restricts depictions of adultery, we restrict Giovanni's activities to unmarried women. But that is not enough, since the story "would require for its dramatization too many details prohibited by the Code."[19] So we will have Giovanni settle down. Still, "Honeymoon or First Night Scenes" are completely prohibited and cannot even be alluded to.[20] So we will lap dissolve from the marriage ceremony to the established Giovanni household several months later. Giovanni must still restrain himself: "Pure love, the love of a man for a woman permitted by the law of God and man, is the rightful subject of plots. The passion arising from this love is not the subject for plots."[21] Only disembodied, Platonic love is acknowledged. Further, childbirth cannot even be suggested in silhouette or by other discrete onscreen veiling, since "depictions of the pains of childbirth are not essential to the motivation of any story."[22] Even further, "any reference to conception, childbearing, and child-birth is considered improper for public discussion."[23] How to explain this mysterious lack in the lives of our newlyweds? Perhaps we could re-write the whole libretto from the point of view of a sterile, cuckold husband? Even this will not work, since the very *suggestion* of impotency is banned by the Code.[24] The Code therefore forcibly denies, in the Freudian sense of a neurotic defense mechanism, all traces of embodiment. Even sexuality sublimated into socially approved institutions such as marriage is denied.

To summarize, the Code omits the bodily component of subjectivity. Instead, the subject is as immaterial as the images projected on the screen. As immaterial, the subject is highly susceptible to influence by the likewise immaterial screen-images, necessitating restrictions on potentially toxic images and making it possible to mold society by the presentation of wholesome images. Sexuality is dismissed as unimportant since its omission from the story is not expected to cause any jarring discontinuity. Nor is this simply a naive oversight; it is an active repression. Seduction scenes are banned because they might incite "morbid curiosity on the part of the spectator,"[25] and are "subversive to the interests of society (by the possibility

of arousing sex excitement [sic] in the viewer)."[26] Consistent with the post-Cartesian characterization of the body, the Code views the flesh as a dangerous source of subversion and chaos which must be rigidly policed. The Code's modern subjectivity is so threatened by bodily contamination that even the borders of mind-body interaction are nervously patrolled: drug use and trafficking cannot even be implied in a Code-cleansed movie. Under the excesses of modern subjectivity, the body becomes not just a stranger, but a threatening intruder.

Considering the vehemence of the Code's bodily repression, the remarkable popularity of the dancing musical during the classical period may be an indication that many subjects were dissatisfied with their disembodied existence, and sought phantasmal release in the highly stylized, abstract eroticism so brilliantly generated by the dance sequences choreographed and directed by Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. The failure of the musical to sustain its popularity in post-Code Hollywood suggests that the genre faded when it could no longer draw on the subjects' sublimated enfleshment. The restlessness of the modern subject expressed by Kelly's athletic acrobatics already marks the beginning of the end for modernity.

Modernity's myths begin to expire as early as the beginning of the twentieth century when psychoanalysis questions the transparency of consciousness, but wholesale rigor mortis does not set in until later in the century. The technological myth was discredited by the failure of its pet project to remodel society through architecture. The modern consciousness's dream of redesigning the engine of society ran into an unforeseen difficulty: the ghost in the machine, the unyielding mystery of the flesh. This is most strikingly illustrated by Le Corbusier's obsessive commitment to the modular measurement schema, even when it failed to produce livable buildings.[27]

More importantly, technology's credentials have been blotted by the surfacing of its dark side. Applying technological planning to society implies that people are raw material to be processed and disposed of in the creation of new product/societies. The optimistic art deco social engineering celebrated in William Cameron Menzies' *Things to Come* (1936) carries within itself the Nazi holocaust as its Hyde-half.[28]

Confronted with nuclear and industrial wastes of its own making that will easily out-last any of its intended artifacts, modernity has lost confidence in technology's claims to provide mastery of the earth. Even if technology can control nature, can we control technology? This results in a frustration proportional to the grandiosity of modernity's failed dreams, as the omnipotence advertised by technology turns out to be a shoddy and makeshift gimmick.

Postmodernity as it stands now, with its emphasis on incommensurability and history, can be considered a contextualist world-hypothesis.[29] Yet it has failed to provide any compelling myths to replace modernity's. Postmodernity dissolves the modern myth of the subject by simply claiming that the subject does not exist, but is a "schizo . . . only a pure screen,

a switching center for all the networks of influence."[30] Claims that the subject is constituted by discourse are equally sere (or trivial), and are hardly less bloodless than the modern disembodied subject. The technological program is a recognized failure, but postmodernity proposes nothing better to do. Technology will not just fade away, so what else should we design machines for, if not to dominate nature? If we do not speak for ourselves, technology will speak for us and bury us in our own industrial waste. Postmodernity is silent.

And yet, perhaps this mythless state "is what the postmodern world is all about. Most people have lost the nostalgia for the lost narrative."[31] Wake up and smell the java. We may have lost the nostalgia for modernity's narratives; we have not lost the need for myth itself. To claim that three hundred years of modernity—or even more laughably, thirty years of postmodernity—has so completely superceded thousands of years of human existence that myth is no longer necessary, is precisely the same myopic modernist hubris that postmodernity is supposed to have outgrown. Further, the contextualist world-myth postmodernity has chosen is inherently labile when compared to organic or mechanical world-myths,[32] suggesting a likely shift to a more stable heuristic system. Postmodern art and architecture have not responded to contextualist liability, by their failure and inability to generate new, compelling myths.

It is precisely in overcoming this inadequacy, by dramatizing and constructing new myths of world and subject, that splatter cinema claims tentative successes where other postmodernisms have failed. Lacking other culture institutions that have the ability or inclination to address nearly all sectors of society, popular culture attains a mythic resonance as one of the few remaining "binding and common experiences" in postmodern society.[33] Splatter cinema's popular culture movie myths can achieve what self-consciously programmatic or polemical postmodernisms cannot, because myth "speaks to the whole man, his entire moral-spiritual being, including his subconscious, causing an aggressively sensuous effect, which is essential for man to be truly touched. . . . It is aversion and wish fulfillment."[34] By addressing an integrated cognitive and emotive viewer, movies also acknowledge a more holistic subjectivity, in contrast to the disembodied intellect implied by drier academic discourses.

From the beginning, the early splatter movies have dismantled modernity's myths, making way for the later splatter movies to tentatively suggest new myths appropriate to the postmodern world. Let us first consider splatter's critique of modernity, and then examine the postmodern changeling splatter has left in its place.

On a basic production level, splatter cinema rejects the Code's program to mold a "decent" society through movies. Splatter's cheerfully gruesome dismemberment of the Code and its disregard for the Motion Picture Association of America's 1966 ratings system, shown by the release of Romero's zombie movies (1967, 1979, 1986) and Gordon's *ReAnimator* (1986) without submitting the movies to the ratings board, rejects the technological program's simple conceptions of malleable viewers and restric-

tive ideas of "decent" entertainment. On a dramatic level, the Code's archaic, surplus repression, still exerting its influence through the ratings system derived from it, actually becomes the subject of stalk and slash movies such as the *Friday the 13th* series (1980, 1981, 1982, 1985, 1986). Recall that the Code requires that "illicit sex" must be punished. Thus, in the stalk and slash formula, teens have sex and are forthwith dispatched by a vengeful lunatic personifying the Code's puritanical morality. The stalk and slash are thus a splatterful reduction ad absurdum of the Code's viciously repressive morality. It is even tempting to consider the variety of sharp, cutting weapons wielded by the stalk and slash maniacs as metaphors for the massacre-scissors of the Code's rampaging censor/editors. The slaughtered teen's helplessness and ineptitude is also a dramatization of the extreme impotence felt in response to the frustration of the technological program's equally extreme megalomania.

Much more explicitly and consistently, the Romero zombie movies *Night of the Living Dead* (1967), *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), and *Day of the Dead* (1986) critique modern society's ability to contain and control the violent and technological processes it uses to sustain itself, as seen in the corrosive effects on the humans of the violence they themselves commit, and in the zombies as a consumer mentality run amok. Reducing a vanload of Sally Hardesty's friends to barbeque, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) carries the technological conception of people as raw material to its logical, cannibalistic conclusion.

In both production and dramatic action, splatter cinema likewise critiques the modern concept of the disembodied subject, remembering the viewers as embodied, and returning the body as a character to the screen. For example, during the bodiless Code years, Universal tinted some prints of *Frankenstein* (1931) "a bilious green, 'the color fright'," and the first Technicolor horror movie, *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1932), emphasized the arabesque green and blue in its primitive two-negative technicolor.[35] However, *Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) emphasizes the grotesque red, bodily tone in its color cinematography.[36] Romero's orchestration of gore in *Dawn of the Dead* (1979) to satiate and jade the audience in the same way in which the movie's characters become inured to violence; the talk and slash's abrupt starts and shocks; Hooper's use of a jarring dental drill and concrete noise soundtrack and eye-watering close-ups of twitching, bloodshot eyes in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974); the "Alien" movies' (1979, 1986) use of flashing lights; all evoke appreciable physiological responses in the viewer, acknowledging the viewer's embodiment and returning it to consciousness.

Splatter's kinesthetic effects recall the living body. Splatter dramaturgy also rejects modernist reductions of the flesh to the inanimate particles of modern medical research. Zaner notes that for medical science:

> Only when a corpse is the body plainly intelligible: then it returns from its puzzling and unorthodox behavior of aliveness to the unambiguous, "familiar" state of a body within the world of bodies, whose general laws provide the canon of all comprehensibility.[37]

Romero's zombies are a caricature of this incomplete medical account of the lived human body, and it is precisely such a reductionistic description of human and fly bodies that leads the teleportation computer to disastrously fuse the two in Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1987). Perhaps the most telling splatter critique of a medical science "under the ontological dominance of death"[38] is *ReAnimator* (1986). When asked what he is researching, medical student Herbert West replies simply, "Death."

Splatter also rejects modern private art's characterization of art and the artistic subject solely in terms of unique innovation. Roger Corman, whose guerrilla production style was later emulated by splatter directors, recalls the inadequacy of the modern characterization of private art:

> [*The Intruder* (1962), an anti-racist statement movie] flopped badly. It lost money immediately. I was devastated. . . . From that point onward, I would never go to the audience directly with my feelings. I would make only films that function on two levels. On the surface they would be entertaining, and any personal statement or feeling I wanted to express would be on a subtextual level.[39]

Many splatter directors have reassessed the role of innovation and self-consciously unique vision in art. Like Corman, Romero also prefers to keep statements a subtext.[40] Tobe Hooper re-assesses the possibilities of genre convention in *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), following the box-office failure of *Eggshells* (1972), his "slightly surreal, end-of-hippiedom love story."[41] After making the more obviously arty *Stereo* (1969) and *Crimes of the Future* (1970), Cronenberg moves on to *They Came from Within* (1975). After a career in experimental theatre in the sixties and seventies at Chicago's Organic Theatre, Stuart Gordon directs *ReAnimator* (1986).

Splatter cinema's use of genre conventions brings us to the twilight of its negative critique of modernisms, and to the dawn of its positive contributions to postmodernisms, representing both a rejection of modernist conceptions of art and a postmodern solution to the modernist impasse. Brophy notes how the contemporary horror movie is "involved in a violent awareness of itself as a saturated genre."[42] It distortedly reappropriates its own conventions in much the same manner as punk rock revises rock and roll conventions. Splatter cinema and punk rock share a nihilistic, ferocious undercurrent directed at the cultural stagnation imposed by now restrictive modern myths. Wood interprets this as "a civilization condemning itself, through its popular culture, to ultimate disintegration, and ambivalently (with the simultaneous horror/wish fulfillment of nightmare) celebrating the fact."[43] However, both splatter cinema and punk rock can be seen as artistic slash-and-burn agriculture, the ground-clearing necessary for popular cultural discourse to continue, rather than calling for the end of discourse.[44]

While a negative rejection of modernism's overemphasis on innovation, splatter conventions are also a positive reappropriation of the past and recognition of the creative possibilities of manipulating existing codes, just as postmodern architecture uses conventions in a strange way. Splatter's use of horror movie conventions is not a reactionary retreat to formula, but an ironic reappropriation of the past in order to communicate novel

messages to present viewers, a creative solution to the modernist impasse.[45] *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) uses western movie conventions to emphasize the savagery of the aggressively expansionist frontier mentality earlier westerns romanticized. Cronenberg combines conspiracy, film noir, and horror movie conventions in *Videodrome* (1983) to emphasize viewers' reliance on context to separate reality from video-hallucination. In this way splatter cinema works within the space opened up by the dismantling of traditional categorizations between "art and schlock, between B movies and cinematic savvy, between Hollywood and its market,"[46] avant-garde vs. kitsch,[47] precipitated by the success of Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969, produced by Roger Corman), although Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1967) was genre, before genre was cool. Splatter cinema shares its critique of modern concepts of technology, self, and art with other postmodernisms; now it is time to turn to its new myths of self and world.

One of splatter's most insistent themes is the return of the repressed body to the subject. Zaner notes, "the embodying organism is not only experienced as 'intimate' or 'mine' . . . it is just as fundamental that it is experienced as radically other than me."[48] Modern subjectivity has been disembodied for so long that the reunion is awkward, like two old friends who parted on bad terms. Under these circumstances, it is only natural that the strange, uncanny aspects of embodiment should be most prominent. Zaner elaborates this experience in terms of the four moments in Freud's description of the "uncanny,"[49] each of which is represented within the splatter cinema: a feeling of inescapable helplessness, as depicted in the teen-slaughter movies anticipated by *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and inaugurated by *Halloween* (1979); chilling fear when we realize that not only do our bodies belong to us, but that we belong to our bodies and are at their disposal, as seen in the splatter werewolf movies *The Howling* (1981) and *American Werewolf in London* (1981); a recognition of hidden bodily processes over which we have no control, as when John Carpenter's remade *The Thing* (1982) insidiously takes over scientists' bodies; and a feeling that the body is an alien presence, most vividly portrayed in *The Evil Dead 2* (1987), when the hero must chop off his own hand with a chainsaw to keep the possessed limb from killing him. While the Code's disembodied subjectivity was so threatened by the flesh that it needed to repress all references to it, splatter's strange bodies are attempting to bring back the body by acknowledging and working through its phenomenological strangeness, so that it can again become intimate.

In place of medicine's conception of the flesh as alien material, splatter's recurrent depictions of cannibalism in the zombie movies, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *From Beyond* (1987), on another level recall the perception of the flesh as "magical" that originally motivates ritual cannibalism. Cronenberg's movies recapitulate splatter's working through the "uncanny" experience of the flesh, arriving at a reconciliation with the body. *They Came from Within* (1972) re-enacts the inescapable feeling of consciousness trapped in a body, by trapping its parasite-invested characters on an island; *Rabid*'s (1977) heroine is at the

mercy of her mutated body's strange appetites; *Scanner's* (1982) Cameron Vale must learn to cope with the bodily processes of his telepathy;[50] the *Videodrome* (1983) tumor becomes an alien presence within Max Renn's body. Finally, the intimate/magical qualities of the body return in *The Fly* (1986), when the research scientist discovers the "poetry of the flesh."

Still, what is involved is not a simple return to a given, predetermined experience of the body; no such simple, packaged body experience exists: "my whole body for me is not an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. . . . I know where each of my limbs are through a *body image* in which all are included."[51] What is at stake is our body image, "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way in which the body appears to ourselves."[52] The body image is a fluid,[53] goal-directed conceptualization that can permanently incorporate intimate tools and prostheses,[54] and responds to changes in the environment.[55] As an idealized,[56] culturally conditioned concept,[57] it is also an internalized myth.

Notice that splatter cinema is, quite literally, images of synthetic bodies. Within the movies' fictions, these body images are mutilated. Subjects' projecting penetration themes, such as bullets piercing flesh, X-ray views exposing internal organs, etc., into Rorschach responses is correlated with changes in the subjects' immediate situational conditions.[58] I suggest that one pertinent situational change motivating the production and reception of splatter's penetrated body images is our changing relationship to technology. This becomes more apparent when we recognize that splatter effects are only entertaining because we know that they are technologically simulated spectacles. Boss suggests:

> It is tempting to see the special effects fascination as contributing to [the discourse concerning human/mechanism amalgamation]. . . that the process is one of producing not the total illusion of people in torment—for it is only through awareness of their artifice that we can appreciate them as effects—but of constructing lifelike human simulacra.[59]

It is important to recall that *Fangoria* magazine began publication in 1979, at the dawn of the full-fledged splatter boom. *Fangoria* took pride in its gory photos of the latest splatter effects, as well as its behind the scenes articles and pictures displaying the effects' mechanisms.[60] Tom Savini, the "King of Splatter," begins making appearances on "Late Night with David Letterman," demonstrating gore effects. *FX* (1986), a non-splatter adventure movie, has a splatter makeup technician as its hero. These are media manifestations of viewers' intense interest in the mechanisms that make splatter effects possible. Thus, the mechanical aspects of splatter simulacra are almost as important as their illusion of organic life. Splatter cinema presents body images that are a fusion of organism and mechanism, and dramatize both the threat and the promise of the resulting humanoid synthesis.

This synthesis is perhaps inevitable. It is obvious that the environment and society are very different due to the prevalence of technological ar-

tifacts. Technology is now an integral part of our lives and environment. Recall that the body image responds to changes in the environment, and that splatter arises at about the same time as the Jarvik artificial heart makes humanoid bodies a reality. Thus, in reclaiming the body, we are not simply returning to antiquity's organism. We cannot; it no longer exists in today's technology-infused world. You cannot go home again. The lived body has changed since we left it; it now includes machinery. Postmodern architecture's attempt to reemphasize human/world continuity through the metaphorical use of anthropomorphic and natural forms will remain incomplete until it also acknowledges this brave new world that has such mechanisms in it. This technological addition can be either a destructive parasite or a productive symbiosis depending upon whether we incorporate machines or tools, which are far from the same. If we incorporate machines into our body image, the intrusion will destroy the organic body by reducing it to the status of technological material. On the other hand, if we incorporate tools, our body image can evolve to accommodate the technological world, while retaining the spontaneity of flesh.

Machines dominate the body by imposing the machine's rhythms and demands on humans. An example of a machine is an assembly line, which forces the line's rate of production on the workers. Tools, on the other hand, are developments of human limbs and senses, extensions of the body, and thus responsive to bodily rhythms. A simple example of a tool is a hammer, which extends the body's power while remaining dependent on the body's rhythmical use. A more complex example is a word processor, which facilitates human writing while relying on the writer's individual production rate.

Modernity uses technology to produce machines that are unresponsive to environmental rhythms and needs. Such gross inattention is possible because technology is seen as a means to coerce nature, so that it is only to be expected that machines will exist as discontinuous intrusions into nature and humans. Splatter cinema's grotesque organic-appearing machines are visualizations of the fatal side of allowing our mimetic fascination with simulacra to incorporate machinery into a new concept of the subject. The machine/organism fusion finds expression in the blurring of the distinction between meat and flesh that is prominent in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and even in a documentary, *Meat* (1976), a "detailed analysis of turning living animals into food."[62] This refers to yet a deeper level, the distinction between inanimate and animate. Foucault describes how in the formation of the modern episteme, "The organic becomes the living . . . the inorganic is the non-living . . . it lies at the frontiers of life . . . if it is intermingled with life, it is so as the element within that destroys and kills it."[63] The zombie movies critique machine/human fusion by collapsing these two poles into the incarnation of the zombie.

Through these meat/flesh, inanimate/animate machine/organism condensations, destructive machine/organism fusions occur throughout the splatter cinema. In *Dawn of the Dead* (1979), Roger, surprised by a manikin, imitates it by taking a sweater like the one it is wearing. Later, his iden-

tification with the inanimate becomes total when he becomes a zombie. Dr. Hill, fascinated by West's serum that "gives the dead the appearance of life," becomes himself a re-animated human simulacrum.

Splatter cinema's more literal machine/organism fusions are equally horrific, e.g., the eponymous *Alien* (1979), described by its creator, H.R. Giger, as "biomechanical,"[64] and its use of a human organism to spawn a new biomechanoid. A mechanical intelligence, the robot Ash, is so fascinated by the creature that he allows it to destroy the Nostromo's crew. Max Renn's conversion into a human video-tape player, his pistol sinking metallic tentacles into his arm and melting into his flesh, and Max's grafting a "hand-grenade" onto Harlan's mutilated arm, are perhaps some of splatter's most memorable visualizations of destructive machine/human fusion.

Shallow critiques of splatter cinema attribute its appeal to a neo-conservative or even fascist fascination with violence, similar to the Italian Futurists' expectations that war can "supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology."[65] Perhaps critics so inclined would consider splatter's mechanical simulacra mascots for Marinetti's claim that "War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body."[66]

Such a viewing obviously ignores the horror with which human mechanization is presented in the movies. Splatter's explicit gore stigmatizes this fusion with fear and dread. Roger doesn't *want* to be a zombie, and even says he will "try not to come back." In *Day of the Dead* (1986), scientists are struggling to reverse the zombie-process, while the recurring critique of the myth of regenerative violence upon which fascism depends also reads against latent fascism.

Benjamin's fears are also recognized in Gordon's *From Beyond* (1987), in which a new machine irrevocably alters human senses, unleashing sadistic impulses and gruesomely mutating the pituitary gland, Descartes' seat of the soul and consciousness. The addictive emanations of the machine, a product of modern consciousness, rebound back onto and take control of the technological consciousness that created them. Further, recall Foucault's distinctions between the animate/inanimate and the living/dead. The fusion of machine and organism, via the association of the inorganic with death, thus carries lethal connotations, even necrophilic undertones. Gordon capitalizes on these disturbing cultural implications to critique the mechanization of the body, most effectively in *ReAnimator* (1986), where Dr. Hill's decapitated, reanimated head assaults Meg Halsey.

By thus visualizing our subjection to modernity's machine-myths, splatter cinema provides an opportunity to overcome the myths' domination by "the possibility of fabricating other narratives which counter-value the dominant story . . . whose greatest achievement has been to conceal its own fictionality."[67] Rather than endorsing violence, splatter body images function much like ambivalent nightmare images that fuse "conflicting themes . . . in one, spatio-temporally unified figure."[68] The fearful elements of this fusion are the at times shocking realism and ferocity of the effects, and the nausea they sometimes produce. On a thematic level this cor-

responds to the fear evoked by lethal machine/human fusion. As simulacra, splatter effects literally depict the effigy-like destruction of the feared and hated machine-humans, a rejection of fascist metalization of the human body in a manner similar to Jacobean tragedy's modernist tendencies to destroy the dreaded organic body.[69] Literal mechanical emblems of the lethal fusion are destroyed in the course of the dramatic action as well, e.g., the robot Ash's destruction in *Alien* (1979), or the defeat of the android *Terminator* (1986), as are metaphorical images of human mechanization: the zombie in Romero's movies, and the re-animated Dr. Hill and his lobotomized zombie army. Thus, like Jacobean dismemberment, splatter reflects "the uncertainty of an age no longer able to believe in the old ideals, searching almost frantically for new ones to replace them."[70]

Splatter seeks for these replacement parts in the pleasant elements fused in the ambivalent nightmare image: our mimetic fascination with simulacra, and the corresponding creative possibilities of the postmodern technological condition. Splatter cinema is starting to fabricate a new narrative in which human organisms absorb body-enhancing tools, rather than being absorbed by lethal machines.

Increasingly, members of postmodern society are operating tool-like mechanisms responsive to human rhythms, such as computers, word processors, and videotape recorders that can be timed to record or paused to accommodate human sleeping and viewing rhythms. Recall also that we tend to incorporate responsive tools that extend our capabilities, such as a blind person's cane, or a driver's car, into our body image. Thus, as members of postmodern society spend more time with such tools, we tend to fuse with the mechanisms. This is only a fearsome prospect if we are fused into intrusive machines, rather than absorbing responsive tools. Postmodernity is poised on the brink between terror and transformation. This is a consistent theme Cronenberg deftly develops throughout his movies, such as the parasites in *They Came from Within* (1975), which afford libidinal release but also domination. A more sophisticated depiction occurs in *Scanners* (1981), where mutant telepathy is used by one group to form a new community consciousness, while Revok's faction plans to scan their way to world domination.

Cronenberg's definitive statement on the subject, however, occurs in *Videodrome* (1983), where Renn's fusion with the brain "tumor" is simultaneously a lethal, disease-like invasion by the totalizing, right-wing Spectacular Optical Corporation, and a liberating "total transformation" into a new form of video consciousness by incorporating Prof. O'Blivion's new perceptual organ. Complexly weaving images of fascist mechanization and panoptical terror, with the iconography of religious stigmata suggesting a liberating transformation of the subject, *Videodrome* (1983) remains sincerely ambiguous to the last frame, where Max's "suicide" could just as plausibly be a rebirth.[71]

As mentioned, we cannot reconcile mechanism/organism conflict by simply returning to organism, and we have already dwelled long enough on the unpleasant consequences of subsuming the organic under the

domination of the mechanical myths. The remaining alternative is to subsume mechanisms into the organic myth. By emphasizing technology as a tool-like extension of the human body, we render it responsive to the body's needs. This suggests a corresponding world myth in which the distinction between nature and artifact is redrawn, so that technology becomes continuous with ecology, and is no longer considered an intrusion into nature. In turn, this suggests a new technological program to design mechanisms that function and fit into the world as animals do, rather than as discontinuous artifacts that control nature. While constructing a coal-burning, polluting power plant is consistent with the mechanical myth of dominating nature, a humanoid myth stressing nature/technology continuity suggests tidal generators and windmills that are absorbed by the environment in the same way that our body image absorbs an automobile. But such a change is not a one-way street; our traditional notions of self and nature will be changed just as much by the humanoid myth as our concepts of technology. In a way, our car absorbs us as much as we absorb it. Such an appropriation of our past organic and mechanical cultural myths is consistent with postmodernity's eclectism and re-use of convention.

Constructive humanoid fusions are appearing in the more recent splatter movies. Following the radically critical movies of the late seventies, Cawelti predicts, "we will begin to see emerging out of this period of generic transformation a new set of generic constructs more directly related to the imaginative landscape of the second half of the twentieth century."[72] Perhaps this is already happening in the latest splatter movies: in *Aliens* (1986), Ripley dons a body-responsive mechanism to defeat the lethal biomechanoid threat; in *Evil Dead 2* (1987), the hero welds a chainsaw onto his stump in order to combat the disembodied consciousnesses that have rendered his own body, his hand, alien to himself.[73] Splatter cinema, having worked through the harrowing aspects of aggressive bodily mechanization, now provides images of adaptive humanoid bodies.[74]

What will be the result of this union? Modern myths described themselves as a rebirth of consciousness, a renaissance; hence modernity's passing is a kind of death. Will a lethal, metalized body spring from modernity's quivering corpse, like the chest-burster that rips out of Kane's body in *Alien*? Splatter cinema's synthetic entrails augur another possibility: modernity's shade, longing for the poetry of the flesh, can grow itself a new, synthetic replicant body supplemented by technology, "More human than human."

Endnotes

[1]Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), p. 73. I suppose this alteration of the cast and crew's work was too hip to provoke the critical disgust colorization elicits.

[2]Yvette Biro, *Profane Mythology: The Savage Mind of the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indianapolis University Press, 1982), p. 74.

[3]Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961), p. 44.

[4]*Ibid.,* p. 91-92.

[5]Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 35, 87-88.

[6]Francis Bacon, *The New Organon and Related Writings,* ed. Fulton H. Anderson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1960), p. 118.

[7]*Ibid.,* p. 180.

[8]René Descartes, "Discourse on the Method," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes,* trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press., 1975), vol. 1, pp. 93-94.

[9]Concerning mathematics: "believing that it was of service only in the mechanical arts, I was astonished that. . . no loftier edifice had been reared thereupon," *Ibid.,* p. 85.

[10]René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in Haldane and Ross, Meditation I, p. 151.

[11]Olga J. Martin, *Hollywood's Movie Commandments: A Handbook for Motion Picture Writers and Reviewers* (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1937; reprinted in *The Literature of Film Series,* Martin S. Dworkin, advisory ed., New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times,* 1970), p. 44. Completely *weird* pro-"decency" Production Code polemic by former secretary to Joseph I. Breen, Director of the Production Code Adminstration of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, Inc. Best read to get an idea how utterly misconceived and arbitrary the whole production code and its ratings system clone really are.

[12]It would be specious to carry this point too far, and, e.g., suggest that the smooth, gliding dollies and pans of the classical Hollywood style are motivated by a floating, disembodied consciousness. Rather, such devices were the consequences of the existing film technology. In the absence of zoom lenses, dollies were the best way to achieve a close-up without cutting; these movements had to be steady in order to allow the focus-puller to keep the subject of interest in focus. Early movie equipment was so bulky that the most convenient way to move it was to roll it on tracks or lift it on cranes, hence also contributing to the smooth style. To carry the camera on a litter would have required more personnel and would have resulted in an image too shaky to present its subject clearly. Of course, some movies, such as *Citizen Kane* (1941), deliberately used these techniques to emphasize the viewer's role as a bodiless spectator by floating through windows, gates, etc.

[13]Peter and Sandra Klinge, *Evolution of Film Styles* (New York: University of America Press, 1983), p. 31.

[14]Martin, p. 123.

[15]Carlos Clarens, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1968), p. 103.

[16]More progressive modern influences on *The Beast with Five Fingers* include Salvador Dali's contribution to the rambling hand effects.

[17]Martin, p. 166.

[17]*Ibid.,* p. 166.

[18]*Ibid.,* p. 166.

[19]*Ibid.,* p. 168.

[20]*Ibid.,* p. 153.

[21]*Ibid.,* p. 171.

[22]*Ibid.,* p. 176.

[23]*Ibid.,* p. 178.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 173.

[25]*Ibid.*, p. 186.

[26]*Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.

[27]Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1959), pp. 111-118.

[28]As an aside, it is interesting to note that the technological program's dark potential only became manifest when it was united with the Cartesian flesh, conceived as the source of madness in modernity, in the Nazi obsession with genetic and racial purity. To anticipate the conclusion of this paper, this suggests that it is just as imperative to develop new myths of the body as it is to develop new myths of technology.

[29]Steven C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 232-279.

[30]Jean Baudrillard. "The Ecstacy of Communication," in *Anti-Aesthetic*, p. 133.

[31]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 41.

[32]Pepper, p. 234.

[33]Morris Dickstein, "The Aesthetics of Fright," in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Grant (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1984), p. 70.

[34]Biro, p. 74.

[35]Clarens, pp. 80-81.

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 81.

[37]Richard M. Zaner, *The Context of Self: A Phenomenological Inquiry Using Medicine as a Clue* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), pp. 29-30,, citing philosopher of medicine Hans Jonas.

[38]*Ibid.*, p. 30.

[39]Ed Naha, *The Films of Roger Corman: Brilliance on a Budget* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1982), pp. 50-51.

[40]Dan Yakir, "Morning Becomes Romero," *Film Comment*, 15, (May, 1979): 61.

[41]L.M. Kit Carson, " 'Saw Thru'," *Film Comment*, 22, (August, 1986): p. 10.

[42]Philip Brophy, "Horrality: The Textuality of Contemporary Horror Films," *Screen*, 27, no. 1 (January-February, 1986): 5 (Special splatter issue!) The saturation of the splatter genre is also evident in the splatter technicians' playful self-consciousness of their horror movie heritage. At a lunch together, makeup artists Tom Savini and Rick Baker drink toasts to Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff (from a telephone conversation with Tom Savini).

[43]Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Planks of Reason*, p. 191.

[44]The direction in which some popular cultural discourse has continued is interesting. Punk rock was followed by yet another pre-fab "British Invasion" of superficial dance bands. Following the unmitigated anxiety of the early splatter cycle is the smug self-assurance of *Fright Night* (1985) in which a resurgence of religious faith helps destroy the vampire. This reveals a "postmodernism of reaction" which avoids addressing postmodernity's pressing problem by an anti-modern return to "the verities of tradition (in art, family, religion . . .)" (Foster, p. xii) within popular culture.

If nothing else, the punk and splatter riots have set the task for popular cultural discourse in the late eighties: picking up the pieces of modern myth. Rather than confronting the postmodern abyss, reactionary pop cultural postmodernism seems to be whistling in the dark. And, as Emo Philips says, whistling in the dark just makes it easier for the monsters to find us.

Of particular interest here are the "Alien" movies. *Alien* (1979) shares the splatter sensibility's ferocity and nihilism: the monster makes mincemeat out of the Nostromo's crew. The sequel, *Aliens*, made in 1986 after the initial, ground-clearing splatter cycle had receded, has the Nostromo's sole survivor returning to nuke the beasties, a decidedly more optimistic ending. I would not simply for that reason, however, consider *Aliens* reactionary; the body count is still high, and the unscrupulous practices of the Corporation and the Colonial Marines' imperialistic, hegemonic references to previous "bug-hunts" casts a critical eye on the proceedings.

[45]It is significant to point out splatter's numerous remakes: the early Hammer Frankenstein and Dracula movies, Paul Schrader's *Cat People* (1982), John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), and Cronenberg's excellent *The Fly* (1986). The splatter remakes retell familiar stories in terms of the graphic return of enfleshed subjectivity.

[46]Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *Sex, Violence, Rock 'n' Roll and Politics: Hollywood Films of the Seventies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), p. 66.

[47]Andreas Huyssen. "Mapping the Postmodern," in *New German Critique*, no. 33, (Fall, 1984): 48.

[48]Zaner, p. 49.

[49]Zaner, pp. 50-54.

[50]Telepathy in *Scanners* is explicitly described as a bodily process of linking two organs separated by space.

[51]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: The Humanities Press, 1962), p. 98.

[52]Warren Gorman, *Body Image and the Image of the Brain* (St. Louis: Warren H. Green, Inc., 1969), p. 6.

[53]CF., *Ibid.*, p. 17, and Merleau-Ponty, p. 100.

[54]Gorman, pp. 14-15.

[55]Seymour Wapner and Heinz Werner, "An Experimental Approach to Body Perception from the Organismic-Developmental Point of View," in *The Body Percept*, eds. Seymour Wapner and Heinz Werner (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 10.

[56]Gorman, p. 9.

[57]*Ibid.*, p. 10.

[58]Seymour Fisher and Sidney E. Cleveland, "Personality, Body Perception, and Body Image Boundary," in *The Body Percept*, p. 65.

[59]Pete Boss, "Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine," *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 1, (January-February, 1986): 24.

[60]The significance of *Fangoria's* appearance is also illuminated by Savini's remark that the makeup effects in *Alien* and *The Thing* scared him because he did not know how they were done (Appendix II, p. 7). *Fangoria* can be seen as neutralizing the horrific aspects of splatter by revealing its technological spectacle, thus facilitating the aspect of fascination with the simulacra.

[61]Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus Books, 1979), p. 171.

[62]Gerald Mast, "Literature and Film," in *Interrelations of Literature*, eds. Jean-Pierre Baricelli and Joseph Gibaldi (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1982), p. 295.

[63]Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 232.

[64]H.R. Giger, *Giger's "Alien"* (London: Big O Publishing, 1979), p. 58. See also Paul Scanlon and Michael Gross, *The Book of Alien* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. "85" (pages unnumbered).

[65]Walter Benjamin. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 242.

[66]Marinetti cited by Benjamin, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 241.

[67]Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 168.

[68]Noel Carroll, "Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings." *Film Quarterly,* 34, no. 3, (Spring, 1981): 19.

[69]Barker, p. 24.

[70]Irving Ribner, *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), pp. 2-3.

[71]Lyotard also recognizes this crucial turning point; cf. *The Postmodern Condition,* p. 67.

[72]John G. Cawelti. "*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* 2nd eds. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), p. 579.

[73]A similar assimilation occurs in Robert Wise's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), between V'ger and Commander Decker. But the goofy substitution of Hays' Code "fireworks" for *Videodrome's* throbbing flesh obscures the immanently sexual, bodily aspects of humanoid fusion.

[74]Splatter cinema's prosthetic make-up technique also help make possible the latest humanoid, Max Headroom. Part of Max's appeal is the spectacle of an organic human actor appearing synthetic and mechanical, the humorous mirror-image of splatter's horrific mechanisms appearing organic. A true media personality incorporating a human actor, synthetic prostheses, and video processing, Max Headroom is the complete humanoid fusion of organism and technology. In the imaginative landscape at the borders of the twentieth century, humans have not disappeared. They have absorbed and been absorbed by their technology, a mythic transformation both reflected and effected by splatter cinema within the hermeneutic circle.

The Icon Without the Image

By Robert C. Morgan

The issue of representation has become so entrenched in contemporary postmodern discourse that it is difficult to distance oneself from the "representations" sufficiently to see the physical context in which they are presented. The physical context, of course, includes the walls, the lighting, the frames, the entire apparatus of how works of art are made to appear when one walks into a gallery or museum. One cannot ignore the effect of these physical facts of presentation on the works. This mechanism of intertextuality between the works and their exhibition apparatus is contingent upon another "hidden" infrastructure: the social and economic basis of the physical context.

Muntadas is an artist concerned with issues related both to representation and presentation. Since the mid-70s his work has dealt primarily with

the processes of demystication and deconstruction in relation to the ideologies of art and media culture. His videotapes, such as *Credits* (1984) and *Slogans* (1986), are involved explicitly with the representation and the repetition of media signs. In another eight-part video work, *Between the Frames* (begun in 1984), Muntadas explores the parameters of art-world people and institutions through a series of interviews and visual commentaries. Each video program is intended to define the distance between those who make art and the audience who responds to it. The audience is not only the people who walk into the gallery for entertainment or enlightenment, but, more specifically, those who have a vested interest in the business of art, namely the dealers, the collectors, the critics, the museum docents, and those who are involved with various channels of media publicity and advertising within the cultural establishment.

In a large installation at Exit Art in May 1987, simply called *Exhibition,* Muntadas presented a series of works which are emptied of images, yet retain the format of their presentation. For example, there are twelve empty frames with cut mats which hang together on a horizontal register. Normally, one would expect to see photographs inside the frames but here only the blank wall can be perceived through the frames. In another "triptych" three large frames were abutted together, carefully lighted from overhead, but again nothing appeared inside the frames except the blank wall. To the far left side of the "triptych" were three monitors on three separate pedestals. The windows behind them had their shades pulled down. On the screen of each monitor was electrical snow, but no image, except in the most generic sense.

Directly across from the video monitors at the far end of the gallery was a large outdoor billboard with a wide aluminum frame, also lighted from overhead, but with nothing on the surface. Near the entry to the gallery a slide projector projected blank slides; only the light within the 35mm rectangle could be seen, repeated over and over at regular intervals. Next to the elevator hung an older-style picture frame with gold-leaf on plaster molding; the hanging wire is visible inside as is the nail upon which the frame is supported.

Other objects in the installation include a series of eight print frames mounted diagonally at waist level directly on one wall. These are the kind of installation fixtures one might discover in the Metropolitan Museum of Art for an exhibition of rare lithographs, woodcuts, or oriental scrolls. Over near the information counter at Exit Art, Muntadas placed a slide table. It functioned as a lit rectangular box on the window ledge. All of these objects are isolated within the darkened space of the gallery. Above the secretary's desk was a grid of medium-sized drawing frames, but no drawings. The space between the frames carried a metaphorical significance that is as powerful as the interior content, because the interior content cannot be separated from the spaces in-between. The system of representation had been expanded to include the very fact of its physical support structure. These installations remind us that in order to come to terms with representation one must consider the fact of how a work of art reads within

the context of its presentation.

For some American viewers, *Exhibition* may have appeared as a rehash of Minimal Art from the 60s. It would be tempting to prematurely judge the work in terms of its use of modularity, permutation of structure, and repetitive rectilinear elements. This becomes problematic from another context; that is, the cultural context of viewing art as an occasion predetermined by memory and already coded by repetition. There are obvious analogies on the level of appearance; but there are marked differences both on the level of the work's intentionality and on the level of its interpretation. For Muntadas, the intentionality of *Exhibition*—its cognitive presence as a pure phenomenon—is just the opposite of Minimalism's intentionality. Where the Minimalists were interested in escaping the appearance of art by resorting to the most basic language structure and the most indelible epistemological awareness of form and space, *Exhibition* is about the positing of this structure and formal epistemology as the very core of the way we view art. The rigorous formalism in *Exhibition* is not an escape hatch in order to posit art in terms other than aesthetic ones. Rather, it asserts the inherent exhibition coding system evident throughout Western art history in today's terms. Where the Minimalists were inherently pragmatic in their art, Muntadas asks us to re-examine the mystique of art through art's absence. Once inside the frame of art, the tendency is to ignore the apparatus. The hyperreality of imagining the relic supercedes our cognizance of the reliquary—the most obvious container, the system of presentation that seals off the presence of art from its absence.

In *Exhibition*, it is the absence which is foregrounded. Yet, at the same time, one cannot avoid the informational aspect of the presentation. The frames, the billboard, the light box, the slide projector, the TV monitors, etc., inform the viewer as to the kind of medium required to transport the spectacle to the viewer's gaze. By the very fact that the lighting for each form of presentation was expressly intense within the darkened space of the gallery, the feeling for the missing image was all the greater. In other words, the lighting intensified the absence. There is no image (other than the throw of the light) to mediate the apparatus. In its purest deconstructive sense, the medium is the message. This is a consequence of the presence of absence. There is no image to mediate difference.

It is not unlikely that this feeling of absence has some relationship to a Lacanian sense of lack.[1] For if the history of Western art emanates through the frame (of culture) as a mystique in direct reference to the imagined relic within the container (a concept most explicitly recognized during the Middle Ages), then one may surmise that the mystique is related to an attraction provided by the absent image. The absent image, in this context, is what Freud interpreted as the *fort da* or the play in which the object of desire disappears before it is again retrieved, that is, the search for the missing Other.[2]

If the Other is retained in fetishistic terms, then one might presume a certain anxiety or frustration in relation to the gaze. This frustration may be attributed to a feeling of lack that is associated with the absence of an

image. In *Exhibition* this lack is clearly masked (the oxymoron adding to the frustration) by showing the means of presentation, that is, the container for the missing image, as having a fetish quality of its own which carries the transference of religiosity—not to the image, but to the Imaginary Self. The notion that religiosity—that is, a certain piety some viewers feel in relation to art—is laminated to the narcissicism of the Imaginary Self appears neither unwarranted nor surreptitious as part of the work's intent.

In *Exhibition* the seduction of the apparatus offers a kind of pivot between the Imaginary and the Symbolic Self. To see the spectacle of light purely in esthetic terms is to instigate a repetition of the Oedipal tragedy where the only retribution is to blind oneself in the course of the narrative.[3] To do so is to miss the apparatus; and to miss the apparatus is to avoid any possibility of response to the symbolic order of things.[4] What Muntadas appears to be offering is not only a mirror by which to reflect but a pivot on which to turn. This pivot is partially existential in that there is a consequence to seeing the apparatus (the mechanics of display) as a support structure which is not removed from the dialectical concerns of political economy.

The presentation of *Exhibition* at Exit Art this past Spring was actually a re-presentation of a similar installation two years ago at Galeria Vijande in Madrid (*Exposicion*).[5] The cultural difference in viewing this reductive work is most significant.

At Exit Art, instead of including a film projector, a light box for viewing slides was substituted. Given the art world codes in New York City—especially SoHo—the choice of the light box made perfect sense in that it could function theoretically and hypothetically during the course of *Exhibition* to suggest that one exhibition generates another or one generic exhibition specifies another. This returns the image to the apparatus as a means of internal critique.

The cultural differences in the perception and understanding of art are further suggested by the critical assumptions made in the place where an exhibition is presented. For example, the entire notion of the relic and the reliquary is quite foreign to the New York art world; on the other hand, in Spain, the mystique of art as a continuum of the reliquary in the development of that particular culture and that particular history is quite understandable. The illumination of the means of presentation within a darkened space carries a sanctimonious absurdity in Spain which would hardly be considered in New York City. It is curious that New York critics immediately made references to Minimal Art as a natural (rather than a cultural) antecedent to what the work was about.

As with many of Muntadas' previous installations and videotapes there is always the perennial overarching concern for the media and how the media has created a mythic presence that displaces present time. In his work for the Times Square lightboard in 1985 Muntadas presented a digital program every twenty minutes called *This Is Not an Advertisement.* The fact that the message was wedged between other commercial messages in temporal sequence gave his work a special irony, if still within the con-

text of imagistic display. The artist's work had three sections. The first read "This is not an advertisement." The second read "This is an advertisement." In the third section, three words progressed horizontally from left to right; they read as follows: "Subliminal—Fragmentation—Speed." As this sequence of language repeated itself on the lightboard, the words gradually became enlarged so that by the final repetition it was impossible to distinguish the message.

This piece has a certain relevance to the two versions of *Exhibition*. Just as the lightboard piece deconstructs advertising by placing itself within the content expectations of other "real" advertisement through the use of sloganeering, so *Exhibition* places itself within the content expectations of the gallery set-up in terms of what we expect art to be. In the case of *Exhibition,* the demystification and deconstructive processes function in a deliberately slow manner. The muteness of the various media representations in the gallery tended to disarm the viewer, possibly inciting a certain awkwardness in that there was really nothing to look at in the sense that there was no image to focus upon. Given the highly conscious constraints of the installation by way of a thorough reduction in subject matter one is asked to consider what is not apparent. Is there an "invisible" significance?

The informational aspect of *Exhibition* is entirely necessary. It provides an identity for the respective media and for the gallery system as an internally operative structure within a larger network of publicity and exchange. Through a concrete placement of specific works in specific places, the viewer understands the basis for *Exhibition*'s intertextuality with critical theory. To come to terms with this vocabulary of form through an identification of each respective medium, one may begin to see the network of loons as a ritually seductive enterprise. In one sense, each medium is given a particular iconic significance. Both Peirce and Gombrich have been helpful in explaining the function of the iconic sign as either natural or motivated.[6] The similarity between the sign and the object is largely understood through cultural assimilation.

In *Exhibition* each medium is given a particular sign-value with a generalized referent. The sign may be a series of small aluminum frames with uniformly cut mats. The referent suggests a series of photographs. This is reinforced by the presence of other media signs, each suggestive of a particular kind of image; some static, some kinetic; *and some worth more than others.* The question is then raised: Why are some images worth more than others? Is it simply because one medium has a longer tradition than another? Is an image that doesn't move more significant and therefore more valuable than another? Or is the question of value in relation to medium fairly arbitrarily based on museum power and popular consent?

Over the years Muntadas has been involved with investigating the relationship between the inherent disjuncture in all forms of media delivery and the reality of this disjuncture as it comes to affect our fundamental concepts about culture and civilization. In an era of hyperreality in which the image-glut has virtually erased any viable connection with history, it

is questionable as to what form of representation should receive more attention than another.[7] The three words repeated in *This Is Not an Advertisement* could apply equally to the viewing of works of art in any gallery or museum. "Subliminal—Fragmentation—Speed." If, indeed, the average viewer response to a work of art is five seconds, as some researchers have claimed, it would suggest that images seen in an art context receive little more attention than those seen in a commercial advertising context. *Exhibition* suggests not only an absurd religiosity but a heightened form of cultural narcissism as well. What gets the attention of the viewer is entirely contingent upon how the presentation represents the mythic reality of the hyperreal.

When *Exposicion* was shown in Madrid, it was accompanied by another installation in one of the gallery offices called *The Board Room.* In the smaller office installation a series of black and white enlarged photographs of various world leaders were hung around the room. A conference table with chairs was also present in the space. Each photograph had an insert of an actual TV monitor in the area of the portrait's mouth. Each monitor played actual speeches, interviews or propaganda related to the political leader being represented in the portrait.

Due to limitations of space, time, and budget, it was decided that the American version of *The Board Room* would not be shown with *Exhibition* at Exit Art but would be shown separately at another location. Muntadas also decided not to reproduce the same world leaders as he had used in Madrid but to concentrate on the role of religious leaders in world politics as disseminated through the media. Basically the same format was employed as used at Galeria Vijande.

The American version of *The Board Room* opened at the North Hall Gallery at the Massachusetts College of Art in September (closing October 5). It was supported through the Massachusetts Council on the Arts as a "New Works Project." For this installation, the artist painted the entire room black. The table was sixteen feet long. There were thirteen chairs around the table corresponding to thirteen enlarged black and white photographs with video monitors inserted within each portrait on the wall. In addition, the artist hand-colored each portrait to resemble the look of iconic representations usually sold at religious shrines. The portraits of religious leaders included such notables as Billy Graham, Reverend Ike, Pat Robertson, Oral Roberts, Sun Myung Moon, Maharishi, Ayatollah Ruhoilah Khomeini, and others.

While *Exhibition* emphasizes the presence of absence by removing any trace of representation other than the apparatus of representation itself, *The Board Room* focuses upon the overdetermination of the media image, as if to mask the apparatus completely. In one sense, *The Board Room* functions as the exact opposite of *Exhibition.* Whereas *Exhibition* is about icons without images, *The Board Room* is about icons without referents. Through the mediation of religion, a definitive style of authoritarianism is cultivated. Secular spiritualism becomes mediated spiritualism, religion without any authority based upon actual contact with life experience. In *The Board*

Room, religion is portrayed as a sellout, a vacuous serendipity of anxious voices and propaganda ululating in a dark room, without substance. What remains is a fanatical rhetoric to support another form of apparatus quite opposite from the necessary dialectics of a reasoned system of governmental or ecclesiastical exchange.

At another exhibition in Paris earlier this year, Muntadas mounted an installation of *Generic Still Lifes* consisting of multiple cans, jars, boxes, packages, and bottles with generic labels.[8] In addition there were framed photographs of these objects both in singular and multiple varieties. Again, the lighting of the shelves was a significant installation factor. In this case, the empty labels—without a corporate identity—implied the presence of another absence, an apparatus without a name, a political economy that takes care of the leftovers in a society which cannot afford to engage in the buying of brand names. *Generic Still Lifes* became a reverse Pop Art strategy. No decorative labels, no real image. In some ways less accessible than *Exhibition,* these generic products did not point directly at the apparatus, but circumscribed it. The support structure was missing, suspended in its absence.

As with *Exhibition* and *The Board Room,* the problem is one of specularity in relation to the image that begs for signification, but is left hovering in the darkness. The choice for the viewer in either case is to remain in the "mystical" state of not questioning the apparatus, or to enter the symbolic world of discourse and thereby alleviate the burden of the mediated image. For Muntadas, to hold such choices in abeyance is not the solution.

Notes

[1]This concept is shared by Freud and Sartre among others. For a discussion, see Jacques Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 185-204.

[2]Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* (New York, Bantam, 1959), pp. 32-34.

[3]Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 126-141.

[4]I am using the term "apparatus" the way it is used by Brecht to connote the social, political, and economic structure which supports a particular *gestus* or metaphorical sequence of action. See John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theatre* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1984).

[5]See my essay, "On the Activity of Slowing Down Or the Media Becomes the Media" in Muntadas, *Catalogo/Exposicion* (Madrid, Fernando Vijande Editor, 1985), pp. 7-26.

[6]See Torben Vestergaard and Kim Schroder, *The Language of Advertising* (Oxford, Basil Blackwood, 1985), pp. 36-42.

[7]The term "hyperreality" is used frequently by John Baudrillard in relation to his theory of the simulacra. See *Forget Foucault* (New York, Semitexte, 1987), pp. 67-78.

[8]Paris, Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, 1987.

Young German Painting: Towards the Hyperreal

By Stephen S. High

What distinguishes contemporary German painting today? In a period of recovery from the "nationalisms" in art of the last ten years, is it instructive to continue to isolate German art from the art of other countries? It is of value to focus specifically on German artists, for young German painting today exemplifies the need for contemporary artists to confront the social and political situations of their time. It is a highly moralistic art based in an aesthetic vocabulary often cruel and cynical and always impassioned. Contemporary German painting explicates that sense of unification which exists in the best of postmodern artistic activity: a unification of aesthetic issues with a perceived reality of the world. Their ability to link contemporary aesthetics with social and intellectual concerns emphasizes the degree to which contemporary art can become involved with the world.

The modern history of German art and the international emergence of a postmodernist aesthetic can provide clues toward an understanding of contemporary German painting. Hitler's declaration of experimental art activity in Germany as "degenerate" threw the avant-garde art of the 1930s into disarray. Hitler imposed upon German art a mediocre aesthetic based upon neo-classical models. His intention was to support the fascist state through the depiction of a strong and righteous populace functioning within an organized society. Hitler's outlawing of "degenerate art" was not simply for aesthetic reasons. He understood how art converges with other areas of experience, such as philosophy and politics, and that art of critical power could maintain a subversive position in relation to his ideal society.

Following the end of World War II in 1945, German art was left without a vital history from which to develop. German artists were not only isolated from their own artistic past because of the Nazi experience but were cut off from much of past German culture due to its association, in the eyes of the rest of the world, with National Socialism. Instead, an international focus emerged in German art based to a large degree on the emerging American Abstract Expressionists and the European *l'art informel.* This internationalism, contemporaneous with the international programs initiated to rebuild the emaciated European economy, began to replace the formally nationalistic traditions of past decades. The concepts of the avant-garde and modernism—central to the construction of an international art—became universal. They implied a linear progression of developments in art which increasingly acquired analytical refinement and material uniqueness. International modernism became interested primarily in the tautological investigation of the art process, investigative extensions of the abstract analysis of existence arising in part out of the early philosophical theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the logical positivists. Modernism was in pursuit of the ideal, avoiding subjective or emotional attitudes in preference for an objective analytic viewpoint.

This modernist development refutes the historical basis of German art. Since the romanticism of Friedrich and Runge, German artists have contemplated the spiritual self. Through symbolic, allegorical, or expressionistic techniques, German artists have interpreted art as a subjective investigation of the solitary artist, rather than as an abstract, objective analysis of art itself. The reappearance in the early 1960s of a personal mythology in art in the work of Eugen Schönebeck and Georg Baselitz in Berlin, Joseph Beuys in Düsseldorf and the founding of the highly politicized art group SPUR in Munich, reestablished the German traditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These traditions, however, were now situated within an art experienced with an abstract self-critical analysis of its own existence. In the work of Beuys this took the form of a multiplicity of media. Using the manipulating elements from his environment (felt, fat, and lead), he recreated personal histories tied closely with contemporary society. Baselitz, on the other hand, returned to the pleasure of painting and the evocation of a more private expression.

Baselitz's paintings show a return to the concept of a German tradition. In his iconic paintings of "heroes," statuesque figures in frontal or side views, the inversion of the image acts to question the nature of subject. It signals to the viewer that what one sees is a painting. Baselitz's inverted paintings become signs which state two opposing concepts simultaneously. First, through the expressive realism and intensity of the brushstroke a private and symbolic emotionalism is conveyed which is, second, negated by the work's inversion and subsequent recognition that the subject is painting about painting not representation. Baselitz combines an expressionistic subject (a reference to an historic past) with an acknowledgment of the impossibility of interpretation (the inversion). It is the duality which Baselitz evokes in his paintings, the confrontation of historical reference with an increased understanding of the difficulties of interpretation, that is of interest in viewing the young German painters. Baselitz incorporates a strong historical romantic tradition within the modernist influence of ontological analysis.

This synthesis of past and present is one essential definition of a postmodern sensibility. Part of this sensibility is the acknowledgment that images and texts are recombinations of previous images and texts, each additional work supplementing the one before, yet both existing parallel to one another. Thus the acknowledgment of history becomes essential to the creation of art. Postmodernism, then, is diametrically opposed to the modernist view of linearity and transgression, where each new activity transgresses, or violates, what came before.

Markus Lüpertz, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter evoke other syntheses of past with present which are of significance when looking at the young German painters. Lüpertz's appropriation of nationalist styles and his representation of Germanic and fascist subject matter highlights the regressive or historicist nature of the act of painting. On the other hand, Polke's subversion of high art through the introduction of mass media (newspaper photographs, comic book characters, etc.) and Richter's ironic razing of the expressionist brushstroke introduce a critical attitude toward the subject matter of art. Together, these painters question both the nature of style and the nature of subject. For the Cologne painters, Walter Dahn and Jiri Georg Dokoupil in particular, these issues are central to their work.

In Munich during the 1960s, artists grouped under the name of SPUR were forming a set of views oriented toward the importance of play in art and the transcendence of art from the formal to the political. Their attitude toward art and society sets the groundwork for the cultural viewpoints of today's young German painters. Composed by Lothar Fischer, Heimrad Prem, Helmut Sturm, and Hans-Peter Zimmer, SPUR's manifesto of 1958 opposed the modernist tendency to turn art into a pseudo-science. SPUR emphasized that "art draws from an instinct, from the elemental creative forces,"[1] rather than from abstract analytical observations. The art of SPUR is more closely aligned to that of the COBRA group than to the work of Baselitz or Beuys, in part due to SPUR's association with Jorn and Constant in the Situationist Internationale of the early 1960s. However, it is in

their awareness and approach to political concerns that an affinity can be found to the young painters of today. SPUR proposed an open nihilism to the political and social situation. "The greatest crimes of man are committed in the name of Truth, Honesty, Progress, for a better future."[2] It is this acknowledgement of the futility of political systems that the young German painters carry forward so convincingly.[3]

By the mid-1970s, painting had become devalued by modernist artists as a source of aesthetic analysis. Through minimalism and conceptualism and the modernist necessity for new materials, it had become confined by them to a strictly historical position. Precisely for this historicism, these young German artists looked toward the tradition of painting as a source for further investigative possibilities. Looking to their predecessors who had first attempted such an investigation—Baselitz, Lüpertz, and Kiefer, with their attempt to reinvigorate the Germanic tradition within their painting, and Polke's and Richter's pursuit of a critical and ironic attitude in painting—the younger artists rejected the modernist emphasis on new materials and pursued painting.

They did so with an awareness of the modernist position and what that implied, namely, the historical nature of the act of painting. With this understanding they have been free to manipulate history, to return to traditions to find their materials and, simultaneously, to unite them with contemporary social, spiritual, and political issues. Hence these artists investigate, not the breaking of boundaries as in modernist theory, but the limits of boundaries within the discourse of painting. The function of transgression thus becomes transformed. The transgressive tendencies are internal rather than external, working within the paradigm rather than establishing new paradigms. This situation creates what Wolfgang Max Faust has termed a "freestyle art"[4] and what Achille Bonita Oliva calls "the bewildered image."[5] The result is images which reflect many diverse styles of painting, recombining them in multiple variations, and images which imply meanings or sets of interpretations yet without gratifying that implication through a concrete content. They create a palimpsest which delineates the difficulty of interpretation when meanings shift so rapidly or rely so heavily upon other constructs that true interpretation is impossible. They show the impossibility of the search for the one true meaning.

Though the images are "bewildered," they still reflect a primary preoccupation with subject. Yet the subject is composed of a private language drawn from images of the past and present, ideas of both avant-garde and tradition, and concerns both social and private. It is a language which shows clear pleasure in the act of painting, a pleasure which discards "all barriers, all classes, all exclusions"[6] for an amalgam of voices outside the restraint of logic, contradiction, or style. It is this freedom, evoked by pleasure, which allows the artists to pursue their imagery.

With this ruleless imagery, a vocabulary of discourse nevertheless forms. This discourse focuses upon critical attitudes which confront both the nature of painting and the absorption of painting within our society. The young German painters accomplish this critical act by questioning key issues with

regard to art, namely, the concepts of originality, interpretation, and appreciation, and by confronting key concerns with regard to society, morality and human potential within a self-destructing world.

The aggressive manipulation of the brushwork and the striking use of colors, which generated the terms *Heftige Malerei* and *Neuen Wilden* in Berlin but which also exist in the work of the Düsseldorf, Hamburg and Cologne painters, elicit comparisons to the historical styles of the Fauves and Expressionists as well as to the more recent Abstract Expressionists. These comparisons, which point out the works' "regressive" character, are strategic in that they shift attention to the issue of what connotes style. By borrowing so heavily from the appearance of the past without incorporating the meanings of the past, these paintings base their structure on the pastiche. They rely on the shock of recognition, the connection with history. In fact, the works of Fetting, Oehlen, Dahn, and many others are concerned with the supplement; that structure which exists parallel to the past but which places into question through appropriation the idea of true authorship. In a time and society dominated by the reproduction of images, emphasis on this loss of authorship is based, as Walter Benjamin has observed, on politics.[7] Through reproduction, art leaves the realm of the "ritual" and enters the realm of the "critical." It begins looking at itself and the social and political structures on which it is based rather than the ritual structures of the past.

The question of how social and political structures are examined becomes crucial to an understanding of contemporary German painting. This is where the "honest nihilism" of SPUR becomes evident. The German response is a skepticism toward mankind's future. This doubt is expressed through exaggeration. In the work of the young German painters we reach the realm of the hyperreal. As defined by Baudrillard, the hyperreal is "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality,"[8] or, in effect, the establishment of a state of simulation. Yet we can also interpret hyperreality as a direct response to perceived reality, an exaggeration of this reality, and as a result of the contemporary interpretation of reality, a recognition of its inherent futility. It is in this sense of the word that the young German artists of today view the world. Germany today is a country on the edge—the wall becomes the strongest metaphor for the country's condition[9]—it is a country at the fulcrum of world tension, caught in the middle between the superpowers of east and west. The country itself stands as a symbol to this world division while Berlin and the wall are its epitome. Yet Germans are relatively powerless to affect change, and this inability to alter the present stands at the crux of the German use of hyperreality in art. This real impotency can be symbolically overcome only through the extravagant action, the intensification of reality by the artist to achieve the state of the hyperreal—where images through their sheer blunt force profess the necessity for change. Although perhaps a naive attitude, it is the only recourse, save acquiescence, available to German artists today.

How the hyperreal is expressed in contemporary German painting is focused upon the idea of expression. German painting today is concerned

with a critical and aggressive manipulation of the painted surface. Minimal abstraction, either in its most cool or ironic element, is practically nonexistent in contemporary German painting.[10] Indeed, expressionist painting is perhaps the only manner in which to portray the hyperreal. By reason of its extreme subjectivity, its privacy of personal intent, expressionist painting is capable of allowing the exaggeration, the fantasy,[11] necessary to portray the private view of the public world.

The expressionism and symbolism contained in the work of the young German painters link contemporary painting with the German tradition. This connection is most clear in the work of the *Heftige Malerei* artists from Berlin (the most well-known and documented of all the young German painters): Rainer Fetting, Helmut Middendorf, Salome, and Bernd Zimmer. In the work of these four artists the thematic and aesthetic linkage with early 20th-century expressionism is at its most concrete. Often focusing on the German subculture, rock clubs, homoerotic scenes, the communal bath, or at times on a more restrained and traditional subject, landscape and portraiture, these artists impart an aggressive manipulation of the paint with a high correlation to sexual explicitness which is seen in the best of the early 20th-century expressionists. The interdependence of expressionist painting with sexuality and dominance, seen most openly in the work of Salome, is an issue which has been raised previously and is predominantly and historically associated with the male role.[12] Therefore it is interesting to look closely at two young female artists actively working today in Berlin, Elvira Bach and Ina Barfuss, to note the divergent direction of their aesthetic interests and the effect and function of sexuality in their art.

Elvira Bach has been associated with the *Neuen Wilden* from Berlin. As with Middendorf and Fetting, she is often involved with mass culture in her painting, although with Bach it is a culture based in advertisement and consumerism. Bach isolates the female figure in her work; the figure becomes an icon of sexuality variously adorned with serpents or thunderbolts. Yet her women, through the frontality of the placement on the canvas, assert their sexuality and simultaneously control it through the aggressive handling of the phallic snake. Bach, like the straightforward sexuality of Fetting or Salome, elevates sex to an affirmation of independence.

Ina Barfuss, in collaboration with her husband Thomas Wachweger, does not rely on sexuality to the extent of Bach, Fetting, and Salome. Barfuss' and Wachweger's work contains strong political and moral concerns more in correlation to the artists of Hamburg, from where they emigrated to Berlin in 1978, than to *Neuen Wilden*. Barfuss and Wachweger appropriate symbolic imagery (from the exotic to the religious) or references to the wall to give forceful and penetrating denouncements of contemporary political and moral issues. The paintings are composed of swift moving arcs which violate the figures, puncturing and thus destroying any sense of stability. Barfuss and Wachweger acknowledge, as a title by Wachweger illustrates, that we are *Always on the Edge (Natur/Kultur)*, that we straddle the wall which, in this instance, separates morality from decadence.

Also from Berlin, Thomas Lange usually concentrates on solitary figures or small groupings of figures. Whereas with Elvira Bach the figure is primary, Lange's figures seem to become lost amid the backdrop of confused and tangled images often becoming so absorbed by the frenetic background that only a head or hand remains visible. Lange's paintings imply the loss of self-control, the inability to control results. This attitude of pessimism evident in Lange's work is a reasonable one. In a world predominated by the bomb and its destructive power, Lange seems to show us the futility of individual action.

The Hochschule der Künste Berlin has been a significant influence for a number of today's young artists. Lange studied there, as did Fetting, Middendorf, Salome, and Bach. Two other young artists from Berlin also studied at the HdK: Reinhard Pods and ter Hell. These two artists focus on pure abstraction to convey their intent; figuration is discarded. Their decision to work in complete abstraction is strategic, offering them the opportunity to move away from the more direct narratives toward a more private expression. ter Hell's paintings are the most direct. His use of strong color and violent attack of the painting's surface suggests the freedom of graffiti. Yet with ter Hell's paintings, as with Reinhard Pods, the result is a harsher reality. The paintings push beyond the commonplace by relying on abstract principles to express a vicious cynicism. In these works, the expressive code, the need to convey emotion and anxiety, is strongly apparent.

By its uniquely isolated position within an eastern block country, Berlin has always been a center of an art intensely interested in the analysis of political and cultural phenomena. Peter Chevalier, Thomas Schindler and Stephanus Heidacker are three Berlin artists whose work also looks closely at cultural and ontological issues; but with these artists expressionist violence is discarded for a classical symbolism. All were students at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig where they studied under Hermann Albert. Known as the Braunschweig Metaphysicians, these artists focus on the isolation of man within his environment. Again, as in the work of the other artists from Berlin, Chevalier, Schindler, and Heidacker leave little hope. They combine a vocabulary of forms which are consistently reused in their canvases. The objects are rich in allusions to religion, art history and contemporary life, yet they are used in an almost collage approach. These images are oriented around general humanistic concerns about existence, but they are presented through an intensely personal vision. They are seductive paintings because of the easy associations they engender, however they confound interpretation except in the broadest of readings.

In Hamburg, Albert Oehlen, Markus Oehlen and Werner Büttner singly or collaboratively concentrate on critiques of contemporary and historical political and cultural situations. From the sordid palette of Büttner (dark browns, oranges, and greys) to the onanistic fantasies of Albert Oehlen, their work is the most harsh and offensive of all the German painters. Yet within this conscious vocabulary of sarcasm, they illuminate and critique concerns of central importance: the Berlin wall and the Soviet presence,

the guilt of Germany's past, social and political conditions in Germany, and finally, the moral position of the artist. It is perhaps in the work of Albert Oehlen that this last position is so clearly stated. For in his series of self-portraits, the artist is dominant in the act of creating; however the human skull, the traditional symbol of *momento mori,* is always present signaling the temporality, and futility, of the artist's existence. It is in the Hamburg artists' questioning of these significant issues and, in particular, their bizarre sense of humor, "dadaist" disregard for taste and morals and their blatant overuse of provocative subjects, that their art transcends the banal and becomes some of the most interesting work being produced today.

Often collaborating with the Hamburg artists is the Cologne-based painter, Martin Kippenberger. Kippenberger's work focuses on the mundane with the same humor and disregard that the Hamburg painters display. Kippenberger often incorporates in his work a written narrative, usually a pun on the image which it surrounds. Through this device, the intention of Kippenberger's work becomes more accessible but also more complex, focusing the viewer toward a multitude of associations between image and text. Kippenberger's acknowledgment of Sigmar Polke's work is clear in his use of media imagery.

A response to media is important for several other contemporary artists. Charly Banana's paintings and cutouts seem inspired by advertisements and billboards, whereas Friedemann Hahn appropriates stills from old movies, adding blocks of color to the image. Hahn's transformation of the media image is reminiscent of Warhol and certainly owes much to Warhol's repetition of media heroes. However, Hahn's constructions isolate a single image from a moving narrative, creating a hierarchical significance of the image in direct opposition to Warhol's subversion of the image.

One step further removed from the work of Hahn is the Düsseldorf artist Axel Kassebőhmer's excerpts and recombinations of art masterpieces. These replications of innocuous elements from well- and lesser-known paintings (i.e., the column and drapery from Ingre's *Antiochus and Stratonice* in Kassebőhmer's *Saule,* 1981) are at once captivating, through the viewers recognition, and strained, through the artist's attempt to "deconstruct" the image. But above all, Kassebőhmer's work isolates the fragment through cropping and enlargement to create works of a completely altered intensity. This dichotomy between the analytical method and the surprisingly provocative result is what gives Kassebőhmer's work its strength. His work is the literal manipulation of art history.

Also from Düsseldorf is *Gruppe Normal* comprised of Jan Knap, Peter Angermann, and Milan Kunc. These artists worked collaboratively for several years in the early 1980s. All three artists studied at the Staatlichen Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with Gerhard Richter and Joseph Beuys. *Gruppe Normal*'s actions were oriented toward the replication of naive and folk art. However, their work carried a bitter and sarcastic edge to its amusing and childlike imagery. Scenes of the German landscape are marked by the political division of Germany. The work of *Gruppe Normal* borders on

the surreal. Nowhere is this more clear than in the work of Milan Kunc. As the only member to remain in Düsseldorf (Knapp lives in Rome, Angermann in Nuremberg), Kunc's work displays a harsher view of reality through his surrealistic images. The images are often more straightforward and directly tied to human experience. They elicit in the viewer a contradictory response, one of ease and recognition through the historicism of the imagery, and of cynicism through the image's associations.

Isolde Wawrin's paintings are quite removed from the comical and surreal work of *Gruppe Normal.* Her abstractions are expressively linear in the tradition of the pre-war Kandinsky. Almost cavelike in their graphic quality, they evoke a primitive language of ideograms. The black and white lines with red, yellow and green—added as if to emphasize the natural elements of the language—remain undecipherable. It is ultimately a private language, one to which the viewer is not allowed intimate access. The viewer is seduced by the general interpretation of the symbols, such as in the work of Chevalier and Schindler, but is restricted from deciphering any clear content.

Felix Droese studied at the Staatlichen Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with Joseph Beuys. Unlike the members of *Gruppe Normal,* Droese's work is reflective of the social and theoretical teachings of Beuys, even to the extent of incorporating Beuys' imagery (rabbits, felt, etc.) within his own work. Droese's works are black abstract and figurative wall hangings with provocative titles (*Hunger, Five Witnesses, I Have Killed Anne Frank*). They are large works which consume the space and overpower the viewer by their sheer size and darkness. In this way, they are captivating works which forgo the violent expressions of the Berlin abstract painters. These abstractions are more consciously constructed by the artist, yet the oppressiveness of the imagery, the intimation of deprivation, violence and death through the titles, convey a similar sense of loss and cynicism for the future. Within these works, Droese maintains a connection to the spiritual, often including highly symbolic religious imagery or relying on Christian parables for thematic development. This spirituality can also be seen in the work of Troels Wörsel and Franz Hitzler from Munich. Wörsel and Hitzler both evince an expressionistic activity in their work which links them to the Berlin painters. Yet where the Berlin painters concentrate on more socially oriented subjects, Wörsel and Hitzler reject the social for the spiritual in their expressively diagrammatic abstractions. They confront the larger issues of existence in their works and thus come closer in spirit to the work of Droese.

In the last eight years, Cologne has become one of the most important centers for contemporary art in Europe. The variety and energy of the work being produced there and the subsequent vitality of the gallery system has generated a great amount of attention to the city. The most significant group of artists to emerge in Cologne during this period has been the *Mülheimer Freiheit.* A short-lived group which disbanded in 1982, *Mülheimer Freiheit* was composed of six artists: Hans Peter Adamski, Peter Bömmels, Walter Dahn, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, Gerard Kever, and Gerhard Naschberger.

Hans Peter Adamski, working in black aspersion on paper, creates large and graphic indictments of Germany's past. By reintroducing almost prohibited images in Germany (the swastika, the concentration camp ovens, Nazi soldiers), Adamski acts as the conscience of Germany, blatantly placing these images in view—not in affirmation of their principles but simply in acknowledgment of their existence. Adamski, like Albert Oehlen, uses extremely raw materials for his works (pasted paper, thick rugs, white and black pigments). This coarseness exemplifies a primitive aspect to his work, an explicit amateurism intended to focus the viewer on content, not form. To the same result, his most recent work has focused upon a more naive and colorful imagery and is reflective of the childlike imagery of *Gruppe Normal* or the child images of Jiri Georg Dokoupil.

Dokoupil is perhaps the most complex of the Cologne painters. His work constantly changes, assimilating styles for both aesthetic and symbolic emphasis. Dokoupil simultaneously provides a discourse on artistic and social conventions: the romanticism of his early 1980s imagery of political oppression and conceptual restraint, his surreal and naive imagery of the mid-1980s, and his most recent focus on capitalism and the art market through corporate and museum logos. He is significant for his ability to endow art with the criticality and humor necessary to keep the work interesting and vital.

Walter Dahn is equally "freestyle" in his use of styles. Like Dokoupil, whom he collaborates with frequently, Dahn has progressed through a series of formal and thematic concerns, from the rough and comical blockheads of the early 1980s to the graffiti-inspired spray paint works of recent years. Like the Hamburg artists, formal and technical concerns are inconsequential for Dahn, Dokoupil, Adamski, and Peter Bömmels. Many of the works are in a constant state of decay. But the preciousness of the art object is precisely what is being attacked. For Dahn, art concerns both banal and extraordinary questions of today; but it is above all a contemporary phenomena. The lack of interest in technique and, therefore, longevity of the object, emphasizes that the art experience is synonomous with the creative act and not inherent in the object itself. These paintings can never achieve historical status like the styles they emulate. Except through photographic documentation, these works will never last.

Peter Bömmels is the most consistent of the *Mülheimer Freiheit* artists in his thematic exploration, often confronting major questions as to man's existence in the contemporary world. Bömmels creates infernos crafted from human hair and *papier mache*. Three-dimensional reliefs of mutated figures populate his environments. The artist presents for us a post-nuclear hell of horror and terror. They are disgusting paintings in their use of human hair and sickly palette—a *memento mori* crafted from human detritus. But the disgust they elicit is healing in its effect, for these works absorb our own fears and act as a catalyst for our expression of these fears. These are moral paintings in the tradition of Bruegel and Grünewald, healing paintings through the depiction of torment.

Also living in Cologne are the artists Andreas Schulze and Stefan

Szczesny. Schulze's and Szczesny's work stands in direct opposition to the portentous work of Bömmels or prolific style production of Dokoupil and Dahn. Andreas Schulze works with limited formal elements in his paintings. His paintings usually contain an isolated object (cloud, balls, tubes, etc.) or groupings of biomorphic forms placed on a multicolored ground. These are large and simplified paintings evoking little but the grandeur of the objects presented. Stefan Szczesny, like Schulze, uses color as a decorative mode rather than as aggressive violation. His paintings are seductive works in their juxtaposition of nudes interconnected by lines and positioning relative to one another. Szczesny's work is alternatively reminiscent of classical sculpture, the architectonic figures of Cezanne and the organic forms of Matisse while the multi-colored canvases recall the Fauve palette, vibrant but without garish contrast. Schulze and Szczesny are involved with a playful surrealism most akin to the work of *Gruppe Normal*. But whereas with *Gruppe Normal* the playfulness borders on the cruel and bizarre, Schulze's and Szczesny's work does not leave the realm of play. They are paintings which, after all, elevate the formal above the social and, as such, their works are appealing to the eye but less than challenging to the mind.

The final two artists to be discussed both draw from romanticism and the sublime to create the brooding intensity of their works. Volker Tannert and Christa Näher are both from Cologne. Tannert studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with Gerhard Richter. Tannert's work ranges from the bizarre anthropomorphic distortions of the early 1980s to his more recent dark and ominous landscapes and views of ruins. His paintings suggest a continuing conflict with mankind's position in the world, from the early deformations which imply confinement, torment and death, to his latest works where civilization is invoked by the decaying architectural remnants. Like many of the young German painters, Tannert works with artistic paradigms to symbolize social concerns. The use of the sublime, the overpowering terror of nature, as a metaphor for the human position in this world is dramatically effective.

Like Tannert, Christa Näher also invokes the sublime in her somber, monochromatic paintings. Näher studied at the Hochschule der bildende Künste Berlin and now lives in Cologne. The blacks, browns and greys of her palette and the imagery of animals consumed by the landscape symbolize a post nuclear world of little hope. Existence in this conceived world is at the most primal. Näher's vision leaves little room for encouragement; it is a cynical view resigned to the realities of modern existence.

The vitality of contemporary painting in Germany is growing. As new artists emerge in Berlin and Cologne, the significance of the German condition on their work should not be ignored. German painting today is closely tied to international concerns about postmodern aesthetics and is indicative of the exploration in this area by the most advanced artists. But German art is also strongly reflective of its indigenous culture and history. This ability to synthesize the national with the global is a significant development in contemporary international art. Supplementary to this aesthetic contribu-

tion, German painting evinces a strong moral statement on mankind's position within the contemporary world. German art is confrontational, as opposed to meditative, art. It expects and encourages the active intervention of the viewer to complete the creative cycle. Above all, German painting is a humanistic art, an art concerned with the human condition at its most intellectually abstract and morally concrete.

Notes

[1]Manifesto reproduced in *Aufbrüche, Manifeste, Manifestationen,* ed. Klaus Schrank (Koln: DeMont Buchverlag, 1984), p. 181.

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]Donald Kuspit discusses this attitude of pessimism in "The Freshly Pessimistic Pictures of Some Young German Painters." *Aggression, Subversion, Seduction* (Portland, Maine: The Baxter Gallery 1986), pp. 7-17.

[4]Wolfgang Max Faust, "Der Hunger nach Bildern," *Kunstforum* (Dezember 1981/Januar 1982), p. 97.

[5]Achille Bonita Oliva, "The International Trans-Avantgarde," *Flash Art* (October/November 1981), p. 39.

[6]Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), p. 3.

[7]Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 224.

[8]Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), Inc., 1983), p. 2.

[9]The wall is an image which often appears in contemporary German painting. Rainer Fetting, Albert Oehlen, Walter Dahn, Jiri Georg Dokoupil, *Gruppe Normal,* and many other artists have used this image in their work. It also appears in paintings commissioned for Berlin's 750th anniversary installed in East Berlin's subways. The wall is a prevalent image in German literature and popular culture as well (i.e., Peter Schneider's *Der Mauerspringer*).

[10]It is only in the work of artists who matured in the 1970s, Blinky Palermo, Imi Knoebel, and Michel Sauer, that a strong minimalist abstraction occurs in recent German painting.

[11]See Kuspit (above, p. 7), for a discussion of this term.

[12]See Carol Duncan, "Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth Century Vanguard Painting," *Artforum* (December 1973), pp. 30-39.

High Style

By Joseph Nechvatel

It might be possible to define "higher" states of consciousness as conditions in which reality is perceived as consisting of "more" than that which everyday vision brings to light or in which some higher purpose to life may be observed. "Higher" states may be thought of as those which bypass discursive rational processes of thinking, or which give greater scope to "imaginative" vision, or which raise us toward some greater self-knowledge or some sense of harmony with the cosmos.

All these aspects suggest a merging of one state, if not into another, at least into a more expanded version. It is difficult to be precise about the point at which quantitative difference is such that it marks a qualitative change. Perhaps it is helpful to remember here that quantum theory recognizes that particles manifest themselves as distinct quanta of energy

at different frequences, but are also found as non-localized waves; and these waves may themselves be derived from the "plenum" or vacuum state, a kind of residue of potential energy. Thus it is possible to say that the distinct states of manifestation are distinguished according to the degree to which that potentiality is energized. To apply this to consciousness would suggest that a possible criterion for making qualitative distinctions is the degree to which the neutral or potential state of consciousness (its quality as awareness of awareness, pure consciousness) is experienced. Thus a clear experience of this by itself constitutes a fourth state of consciousness, as distinct from waking, dreaming and sleeping. This state functions as a gateway to a fifth state in which it is retained as a basis for or backdrop to perception and action. It would then be possible to define a state of consciousness as not merely "altered" but "higher" on the grounds that it includes the fourth state, the only known condition of pure meta-awareness.

Consciousness in this condition may be said to be self-referential and self-sufficient. In order to circumvent the current fragmentary view of world and self (built into the structures of language and underpinned by the Cartesian/Newtonian classical model in physics), it would be necessary to develop ways of achieving insight into how the instrument of thought is working. To do this, would be to overcome the tendency for thought to analyze itself in terms of a presumed separation between the process of thinking and the content of thought that is its product. This (phenomenological and structuralist) view clarifies the issue in one sense, namely that thinking is a process consisting of the transformations of "thought-events" as continuous waves. Thoughts are not distinct from thinking, and similarly "I" am not distinct from the process by which I recognize myself. Thought, thinking and thinker are a continuity.

Taking it a step further, it makes sense to see thinking, thought, self and experienced world as a non-localized flow of awareness, in which "blips" occur. Thoughts, locations of self, events, objects or particles, (all of which are only relatively circumscribed), remain subject to the interpenetration and modification which characterizes the flow. The term 'reality' indicates an unknown and undefinable totality of flux that is the ground of all things and of the process of thought itself, as well as of the movement of intelligent perception.

Thus when consciousness in this condition additionally recognizes this quality as its own basis, it is not only self-referential but also fully integrated within itself and with everything (which is another way of saying the same thing). Here the self is experienced as capacity, rather than existential identity. It is therefore correct to call such consciousness "higher" precisely because it does not merely amend but radically revises the evaluation of self from bound to boundless. Such consciousness represents a paradigm shift which relativizes all other recognitions of the phenomenon of self or consciousness.

The specific focus of close involvement is sharpened or thrown into relief by the broad scan of "detached" awareness which can locate contours

of individual events precisely because it is aware of the context within which they move. As in the quantum view of physical reality, character and events can be seen as processes in space-time rather than isolated phenomena. Hence, too, we can view art as a generative set of relations rather than a closed statement. And, as for artist and work, so too for the receiver: aesthetic distance or catharsis seem to require that state of balance between involvement and detachment, experiencing and comprehending, in which the work can be said to resonate with and enliven all the receptive (sensitive) and organizing attributes of awareness, to be actively "scripted" rather than passively "read," in Barthes' sense.

As awareness, it contains the attributes of sensitivity, discrimination and organization: it is the ability of perception *per se* and thus the generative power for activity within new contexts and frames of reference. As frictionless flow of awareness, it is not perceptible but rather the *sine qua non* of perception. It thus inevitably gives rise to other "higher" states in which increasingly fundamental implicate orders of manifestation are recognized. Indeed, it is such recognition of structural levels or orders in creation that is the only way in which consciousness can develop further. Its awareness of itself as plenum cannot be surpassed or added to. But the latent power of perception which it unfolds may allow it to identify two important aspects of the manifest order of things.

The first of these is the ability to perceive increasingly fundamental structural principles "hidden" within the ways we think and behave, and to see evidence of similar principles in the implicate orders enfolded within more clearly visible levels of manifestation (features of structuralist models). Ultimately this implies being aware of design or formative causation at its most delicate or subtly compacted level—sensing the blueprint for any emergent event, structure or activity in its specificity. Intuitive insight is wholeness before it is "worked out."

The second distinct level is one where all material form is found to exist as transformational energy, "beyond" even any specific blueprint. Here, consciousness as an awareness of its own nature as potential is united with matter in its ground state as "energy-filled" void (or Unity consciousness or Vedanta).

Equivalents clearly exist in literature and other arts, for example in the sense that a work of art presents a system in which all parts encode the structure of the whole. Close analysis frequently aims to show that a small extract contains, or has enfolded within it, the essential features of the whole work; whether these are approached stylistically or ideologically. Moreover, appreciating this wholeness is a major element in aesthetic satisfaction, which seems to be shorthanded for consciousness functioning in a holistic way, operating at the level at which it can take in the implicate order. Theories of creative activity which are essentially process-models (related to the process philosophies of Whitehead and Bergson), are presented as united or identical—as both flow of form and consciousness of that flow, as both expression and the organic potential for articulation.

In terms of the "development" of art in recent times, its increasing self-

consciousness may be perceived as a movement toward understanding its own nature. Even forms of negation, like "anti-art" or the undermining of structural assumptions by the multiplication of narrative identity, function ultimately as ways of opening up the capacity for plurality. Many recent theories tend in the same direction, locating the end of art as the capacity for participatory structuring by the viewers in partnership with the art, identifying levels or structures which act as generators.

Art in which the living organism strives for higher motives provides an opportunity for what could be called integration, the discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance. Thus, technique is not abstract or external: it is how the body accedes to its own resources, how it discovers that it can be, say, do, understand and transmit, with and to anything and anyone. This is so because the bodily condition in which that capacity is touched is a tensed and balanced orderliness which, like an act of love, is not closed off from anything. In this state, we interpenetrate.

In the same way, according to modern physics, we interpenetrate with the universe. We are not separate observers but part of the play.

New ways of understanding involve a change in perspective, and that change is marked by an extended capacity for order.

Structures which have this capacity are emergent in that they lead into higher levels of organization; they can redistribute their energy in an orderly way. Similarly, shifts in consciousness involve a passage through the "anarchy" of neutrality, giving up the existing framework of self and world, taking in aspects we might prefer to shut out.

But they are the way in which we do more living, and involve the discovery of new organizational energy as we evolve new patterns of response and expression. A work of art presents just this challenge, exploding frameworks and requiring new understanding, as metaphors require us to redraw the contours of parts of language and the concepts and sensations they enfold.

"Higher" states of consciousness mean more energy in more orderly forms. The orderliness is in the consciousness, in the matter which is organized, and in the organizing relationship. There is no separate envelope of awareness, even in the resting phase of neutrality. Consciousness is participation: in the multiple possibilities of self, in the capacity for play, and perhaps ultimately in the sense that we are the universe's way of becoming conscious of itself.

"Altered" states of consciousness, whether through dreams, drugs, art or "mystical" practice, have, whatever their respective shortcomings, always been attractive in the final instance because they offer "more," in terms of our experience and understanding of ourselves and our universe. We normally conceive of this as a disclosure of different levels or ways of perceiving, an opening of doors (Blake) or bypassing of valves (Huxley). The model implied here is largely vertical or synchronic: the doors open suddenly and mysteriously under the influence of "inspiration" or chemicals. The trouble with many such descriptions, whether artistic or mystical, is that ineffability or enthusiasm may convey the value, but often

obscure the mechanics.

It is important to focus on the nature of this moment of revelation, and on all its implications; but we should also remember that consciousness is not a static phenomenon, but a historical process in time.

In other words, consciousness is a development, and certainly for individuals this means that it occurs physiologically, and is dependent on everything that has happened before. In order to understand altered states, and to see where they might lead, we therefore need a sense of this development and a model of consciousness which can account for physiological change. Antonin Artaud claims (in *Le theatre et son double*) that theater is a means of directly influencing the physical organism and altering the quality of our sensibility; he puts the same case for poetry.

You are blasted out of your mental set experiencing no longer what you thought you knew but more a prelude to knowing. The recognition process therefore involves a *stopping* or unseating, a prying-loose from former bonds of identity, which is uncomfortable, or puzzling, or exciting, or all three.

It is essentially a challenge and a proposal: a challenge to find the context, the mental and physical resources, to cope with the new stituation; a proposal that the very gasp of recognition implies that those resources are available, if as yet undefined. Neutrality or witnessing is, as it were, potentially anticipatory or excited: it looks forward to displaying its own capacity in an extended range of action.

Defamiliarizations shift awareness from one set of criteria by which we recognize "reality" to another. We need to acknowledge, I think, that these approaches are complementary, even interchangeable, and not mutally exclusive.

The essential characteristics of this transformational quality of consciousness may be grouped into two sets. The first set (A) includes suspension or extreme refinement of physical activity, suspension of judgment (indifference, neutrality), extension of perceptual boundaries (including sensitivity to language), and consciousness of being conscious (meta-awareness). The second set (B) includes sense of unity or wholeness (self + work/world, all aspects of work, organic understanding), modification of evaluation of self, potential for creating form (readiness for voluntary acts, awareness of multiple possibilities, spontaneity), and conjunction of distance and involvement. Of these criteria, the first set has mainly to do with a temporary or synchronic condition; the second set involves a more active and continuous situation. But experience—probably repeated experience—of A is necessary in order to produce B. Defamiliarizations can be understood as methods of instituting A, which is itself a preparation for and almost inevitable instigator of B.

Evidence for the existence of such conditions is not hard to find, provided we assume that the entire Verdic, Taoist and Buddhist traditions are not based on mere speculation, or that Plotinus, Eckhart, Boehme, Goethe, the English Romantics and the Symbolists are not entirely deluded about the nature of their experience.

Much art comments—as it progresses—on its own compositional process, thereby producing a level of meta-awareness which runs along throughout, always at least implicitly—and often overtly—weighing up the possibilities for what comes next.

Once activated, awareness in this condition goes into overdrive (operates in a "high"), in which it is able to pick up information from many different channels simultaneously. Its co-ordinates of expectation are significantly enlarged.

An extremely pliable state of consciousness, resting on the basis of relaxed (extended) attentiveness, may thus become available; and it is within this elastic framework—ideally constituted both between artist and audience and within the individual awareness of each participant—that the art takes place. When this does occur, even to a limited degree, one has, not surprisingly, an "uplifting" experience, which brings a sense of communion and completeness. Again, this is a major part of what thinkers like Artaud have described as the sacred, ritualistic or Shamanistic function. We are close here to participation in the "divine play" of forms, the freedom to perceive relationships in the making, if we stop "blocking" and eliminate our resistance to this psychic process of wholeness and holiness.

"Mindfulness" expands awareness to many possible mental events—sensations, thought, memory, emotions, perceptions—exactly as they occur over time.

The natural tendency is to "habituate" to the world surrounding one, to substitute abstract cognitive patterns or perceptual preconceptions for the raw sensory experience. The practice of mindfulness is purposeful dehabituation: to face the bare facts of experience, seeing each event as though occurring for the first time. The means for dehabituation is continual observation of the first phase of perception when the mind is in a *receptive*, rather than reactive, state. Attention is restricted to the bare noticing of objects.

Thus, as opposed to the conceptual nature of everyday perception with its inherent categorization, there is a shift to a more "direct" mode of perception which entails a sensory experience. Such an uncoupling of thought from perception is attained through the deautomatization of the perceptual process, whereby more emphasis is placed on recording the perceptual world than on constructing it.

The technique of art is to make objects unfamiliar, to make form difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.

In his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Walter Benjamin remarks:

> Since the end of the last century, philosophy has made a series of attempts to lay hold of the 'true' experience as opposed to the kind that manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses. It is customary to classify these efforts under the heading of a philosophy of life. Their point of departure, understandably enough, was not man's life in society. What they invoked was poetry, preferably nature, and, finally and most emphatically, the age of myths.

The concern here is to shift the criterion of truth and significance away from that which is central to rationalist and pragmatic ways of thinking, to shift the center of "reality" to a new locus in the depth separate from the surfaces of material or social human phenomena.

The mythic stratum of life which enters and transforms the ordinary domain of existence, therefore, is opposed to the pragmatic considerations of advantage and security. It breaks into that domain disruptively and rapturously. In contrast to the pedestrian values of the "civilized masses," it is an ecstasy and an intoxication.

The fundamental idea behind the interpretation of enraptured, ecstatic and intoxicated states, in a tradition which turns toward a hidden mythic or elemental level for its truth, is that this alteration of consciousness is a break with the singular level of unified world. It is not a more fluid, swifter, less inhibited movement through the articulations of one continuous reality, like a renewed melody in a single key, but the sound of new notes from a quite different key, one with a deeper and more universal tone.

The boundaries which make up the various territories of the horizontal plane of objective or historical knowledge are transcended by their relation to the depth of the element and the mythic representations by which we attempt to grasp it. All branches of learning in this light begin to resemble the compositions of poetry. They are metaphors or translations of something both separate from them, yet perhaps alive in the spirit which animates them. As Benjamin observes in his essay on Surrealism: "The dialectics of intoxication are indeed curious. Is not perhaps all ecstasy in one world humiliating sobriety in that complementary to it?"

The Surrealist understanding of the subconscious clearly posits it as an extension of the human sphere, not an alternative to it. A harshly demanding mythic domain is one where the person not only transcends the narrow and bogus values of bourgeois individuality but also frees himself from all the desires of security, comfort, pleasure and happiness which animate the familiar experience of everyday life.

For the Surrealists, the subconscious was merely the home of a more vivid, vibrant and unfettered version of those desires. Although there is a real difference between the desire uncovered by revelation of subconscious contents of the mind and personality and that of the bourgeois domain, that difference does not involve breaking out into a realm which disrupts the integrity of the desiring subject. Surrealism simply subverts the false limits constructed about the enfeebled and conventionalized image of the bourgeois individual as defined by the relations and demands of a competitive economy and administrative structure.

Benjamin, in his essay on the Surrealists, notes how their emphasis on ecstatic experience as an opposition to that domain of purposes does indeed dissolve away the idea of the self determined by it. Yet he sees an important dialectical element in their procedure here: "This loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed these people to step outside the domain of intoxication." This is all-important to Benjamin, for, writing in 1929, the aspect

of their work and their movement which strikes him as embodying its principal value is its place in the political awareness and struggle of socialist resistance to the rising threat of Fascism. The dialectical step beyond intoxication which is reached by entering into it is the beginning of a new realm of purposes, now directed toward the revolutionary transformation of social reality. This means that the intoxicated rapture of poetry must be carried over beyond the limited space of a momentary ecstasy, and sustain a renewed sense of the rights and potentials to be redeemed in all levels of actual human life.

Their task is to step beyond the imaginative rejection of things as these make themselves known under the conditions of bourgeois knowledge, a rejection pursued into the alternative domains of art, literature, the occult and drug-induced raptures, and bring this exterior perspective to bear on the irrational self-contradictions of an ideology which insists on calling itself rationalism. The danger to which they are subject and which threatens their ability to complete this task lies in the "pernicious romantic prejudices" which lead to fascination with those alternatives as objects of desire and pursuit for their own sake. Are they emphasized *instead* as the renewed possibilities of consciousness in political reality? Or are they a place of flight and complacent illusion? Understanding this is the key to all Benjamin has to say about the dialectic of intoxication:

> Any serious exploration of occult, surrealistic, phantamagoric gifts and phenomena presupposes a dialectical intertwinement to which a romantic turn of mind is impervious. For histrionic of fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday. The most passionate investigation of telepathic phenomena, for example, will not teach us half as much about reading (which is an eminently telepathic process), as the profane illumination of reading about telepathic phenomena. And the most passionate investigation of the hashish trance will not teach us half as much about thinking (which is eminently narcotic), as the profane illumination of thinking about the hashish trance.

The validity of exploration of such altered states of consciousness depends on the capacity to overcome that romantic attribution of separate reality which enthralls the mind and takes us no further. That in turn depends on the understanding that the subject experiencing an altered state of consciousness remains in principle the same; the consciousness is essentially that of the same person, and the content of consciousness, the ideas and dreams, are those of the same person also, albeit revealed at a heightened level of intensity by the removal of inhibiting agencies and habits of mind.

In "Les Paradis artificiels," Baudelaire affirms the closeness of the intoxicated state of the norm which reigns in the drug-taker's life: "Dans ses *Confessions,* De Quincey affirme avec raison que l'opium . . . n'excite [l'homme] . . . que dans sa voie naturelle, et qu'ainsi, pour juger les mer-

veilles de l'opium, il serait absurde d'en re'fe'er a un marchand de boeufs; car celui-ci ne revera que boeufs et paturages."

It is on this basis that Benjamin can demand that the revelations of ecstatic visions be made subject to the same criteria of knowledge as those of a sober state, just as the conventions of conformist ideology must be treated to the same scepticism as one applies to raptures and dreams.

Ecstatic experience has two phases. First it is a liberation, a breaking free of an ordinary place cramped among the oppressive desiderata of individual existence. That is an intoxication beyond all intoxications, an unleashing that bursts every bond. But it is also an experience which brings another sphere, uniting one with a larger reality, one melted together with the universe as though the wave had glided back into the ocean.

The abandon of wide ecstatic courage is a self-abandonment. It breaks away from the despised brief life of an individual and the enclosed, fragile existence one knows, to hatch out for flight through an experience beyond bounds. The things of the narrow world therefore undergo a reduction in significance. Their meaning in themselves is also abandoned; they must become indifferent as ends. Nothing may be desired for its part in the texture of ordinary human life. This ecstasy of self-forgetting weakens the links of consciousness to a domain of rational purposes and breaks loose from an identity anchored there. Consequently strength accumulates in the reality and attraction of what lies beyond, even though it may strike the person looking on from outside as strangely abstract and nebulous.

This intoxication is the construction of a unified world where there is no unity in the reigning order of things.

Gauguin: The Eve of My Choice

By Linnea S. Dietrich

Gauguin's work offers us a vision of women freed from European gender-stereotypes, a view which Gauguin developed along with his vision of humans as whole, integrated beings whose lives embrace the two major civilizations, Eastern and Western, the two modes of cognition, thinking and feeling or the rational and the intuitive, the two spheres of human existence, nature and culture, the two levels of reality, matter and spirit.

In order to "deconstruct" the traditional dichotomies, Gauguin used the female form in his art and the feminine principle in his thought as vehicles to explore the relationship between these concepts, which, ever since Pythagoras, at least in the West, have been considered opposites.

Many of Gauguin's works have conventionally been given the title "Eve," and Eve, understood as the archetypal female, or feminine principle, seems an adequate way to deal with them. Most scholars, however, have unques-

tioning accepted the name Eve and have assumed that the association Gauguin wished to convey was Eden, the Fall, the Femme Fatal, and the whole Judeo-Christian emphasis on sin and death as a consequence of sex.

Has poor Eve still no other role to play in the great unfolding of the history of ideas? Without getting into the fascinating speculations concerning the Genesis myth, and the roles Eve-Mary have played in Christian art and literature, is it possible that Gauguin wished to explore, not the familiar Eve portrayed so tirelessly in Western art, but another Eve—Eve before the Fall, before disobedience to God's law, before rational knowledge, before awareness of nakedness? Or after the Fall in a new dispensation or context wherein the Fall is Fortunate, an elevation or maturation into experience of a fully *human* consciousness? A world in which sexuality is good? Or can Gauguin have imagined an entirely new Eve, an Eve who represents the mother of all things and who never met Adam or the serpent except in the imagination of writers and artists?

The mighty power of Gauguin's imagination recreated the myth in a Breton or tropical setting, soon to be Tahitian, already Eastern or primitive—a place in which the Biblical story does not hold, where the artist uses the female, the creative force of things, to explore his own questions about the feminine and about human sexuality. He himself is Eve, an Eve starting from scratch, as it were, to reinvent human relations on another plane. Gauguin identified with Eve as, unconsciously, Dürer had done in Melencholia I. Eve is the most powerful symbol of the scapegoat in the Western tradition. Gauguin had already identified himself with Christ and saw the artist as the martyr sacrificed to expiate the sins of all. But Eve predates even Christ and represents the most misunderstood half of the human population. Contrary to much research on the 19th century (Praz, Dijkstra, and so on), many artists in the Symbolist and early modernist period were engaged in the re-evaluation of the power, role, "essence" of women. Van Gogh identified with the prostitute Christine, Cézanne explored the Eternal Feminine and female bathers, Mondrian's eternal principles can be labeled male and female, Duchamp created a female alter ego in the invention of Rrose Sélavy. Gauguin's exploration of Eve—his attempt to understand the blame assigned to her in history—his attempt to understand women as they have been stereotyped and imaged, and as they actually are and could be, is very much part of a discourse that still continues. Once Gauguin could accept that women are not evil because of their association with sex and other bodily experiences, he could begin to see that women are not *opposite* to men, but that both sexes have the same capacities for a full range of human intellectual, emotional, and sexual experience and validity.

Gauguin's questions, and the paintings he created to explore them, are full of uncertainties—among them the problem of why death is inevitable. The Christian answer that Eve's sin leads to death and to Christ's eventual promise of redemption no longer satisfied him. Gauguin's search, pictorially, personally, and in his literary work, was active in him until at least 1898, and his *L'esprit moderne et le Catholicisme (The Catholic Religion and*

the Modern Mind) deals with his conclusions.

If we reexamine the "Eve" paintings of 1888-91, and after, and the scholarship that has discussed them, we find two opposing views. Either Gauguin is a Symbolist whose work bridges worlds and transforms consciousness or he is a guilt-ridden, sin-obsessed lapsed Christian with a mother-complex to boot. "Gauguin was haunted by the idea of woman as the root of sin and death,"[1] says Henning, supporting the latter view.

The debate centers largely around the paintings Gauguin did of a woman holding her hands to her ears, a figure often paired with a woman standing with her hands raised.

The single figure in the so-called *Breton Eve,* 1889, is indeed based on a Peruvian mummy,[2] and she has a long history ahead of her in Gauguin's oeuvre, appearing finally in *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* The *Breton Eve,* shown in the Volpini exhibition of 1889, was accompanied by an inscription on the information sheet stating, "Pas écouter li . . . li menteur" (Don't listen to the liar). Gauguin raged at a critic's comment, "On what document does M. Gauguin base his assumption that Eve spoke pidgen French?" Gauguin responded to Emile Bernard: "It seems that Eve did not speak negro but my God what Language did she speak, she and the Serpent."[3]

Good point. Eve is either trying not to listen to the serpent and is in hysterical anguish, or she is contemplative, pensive, introspective, thinking, as was Gauguin at the time, about the burden of sin and sex and what they have to do with a forty-year-old married man who wants to be an artist and isn't allowed to see his wife and children.

The *Breton Eve* states the problem. At the same time, Gauguin coupled the contemplative figure with an active one—a figure rushing toward the waves—in the drawing made for the Volpini exhibition, *Aux roches noires.* One woman, head in hands, sits and thinks, the other, arms up, rushes toward the waves. Decision—the passive or active, the contemplative or sensuous. The black rock, phallic enough as we see and know it to be from Breton legends, appears, like the tree in the *Breton Eve,* as a reminder of the choices.

In *Nirvana,* 1890, the complementary pair appear again, in front of black rocks, and behind a mystical portrait of Meyer de Haan, Gauguin's Hebrew friend. De Haan's face is fox-like and his eyes burn; he sees, not the real world before him, but behind and beyond it. That Gauguin identified with De Haan is clear from the signature on de Haan's right hand with its stylized, serpentine "G."

Nirvana then is a state of being in which the mind embraces both active and contemplative, the feminine and masculine aspects of oneself, the animal and the spiritual.

An *Eve* of 1889 (W.330) shows the female figure bathed in sunflowers. The *Eve* of 1890 (W.385) is derived from a photograph of Gauguin's mother and the frieze from Borobudur.[4] The connection with Gauguin's fondly remembered mother and the much valued Eastern source indicate that the woman in the painting is in a happier context than her Breton counterpart.

This Eve fingers a flower or fruit on a tree, complete with coiled and circus-like snake which also sniffs a flower. A rooster and chicken copulate nearby. The woman's placid, even smiling expression, reveal a new and more positive attitude to the Edenic drama. The snake and she are engaged in some mutually satisfying activity and the pose of the mother-Eve figure is that of the Buddha in the Javanese frieze. (Snakes in Buddhist iconography are protective and altogether salutary.)

The wood panel *Be Loving and You Will Be Happy* is perhaps the most difficult in Gauguin's oeuvre to interpret. Most commentators have emphasized, as before, the connection between sexuality and evil and assume Gauguin's title is ironic. Andersen sees the female figure in the panel as a tragic heroine, the male clutching the woman's hand as Gauguin, lustful lover, infant monster, and the fox as an evocation of the devil.[5] Ziva Amishai-Maisels sees "Gauguin the Temptor (who) tries to seduce a woman with the honeyed words of the title."[6] Jirat-Wasiutynski says, "Gauguin himself is simply trying to hide his real nature, his sensitivity, and become an insensitive monster, in order to force the issue of free love."[7]

Gauguin wrote of the strange panel to Bernard, "Gauguin (as a monster) taking the hand of a woman who defends herself saying to him, 'Be loving and you will be happy.' The Indian fox symbol of perversity, little figures in the interstices."[8] Thus it is the *woman* who tells the man to be loving.

Gauguin wrote again, "A simple woman whom a demon takes by the hand and who defends herself against the good advice of the temptor of the inscription. A fox (symbol of perversity among the Indians). Several figures in all this group who express the opposite of the advice (you will be happy) to indicate that he is lying. For those who want the literature on that. But it's not for examining. The basis of all that is the sculptural art of bas-relief, forms and colors in the character of the material. Between the possible and the impossible."[9]

Once again, Gauguin expresses himself in dualities—possible and impossible, form and content, and with the male in relation to the female. Either she tells him to be loving or he tempts her with promises of false happiness or both.

Since the woman wears a wedding band, and since Gauguin's relations with his wife were at a very low ebb at this time, the woman could be Mette. Frequently in his correspondence Gauguin referred to himself as a monster when he chided himself or quoted Mette's criticism of him as a poor provider—and the fox, with whom Gauguin identified, is a creature who turns things about—per-verse. Gauguin is expressing here his bitter disappointment in his marriage, the forlorn hope that the marriage might be saved, and the conflict in both himself and Mette over the relationship between sex, love, and marriage. But most of all, he is questioning whether or not sexual love is sin.

Be Mysterious, the companion panel which Gauguin carved later, shows the woman in the waves, the active aspect of the self, poised between two mysterious figures, perhaps choosing between two alternatives. Francoise Cachin comments in her article on the panel that Gauguin wished "to make

an amalgam of the barbaric and artistic, savagery and style, a style before the original sin, according to him, the academy, the civilization of art."[10]

Gauguin identified with the woman in the panel, so much so that in a letter to Bernard he wrote that he "had been delivered of a woodcut, *Soyez mysterieuses,* with which I am content."[11] By taking on the birth-giving role as an artist, Gauguin acknowledged his psychological incorporation of the feminine within him as a necessary prerequisite to creating and to resolving the conflicts he was experiencing with love.

The *Loss of Virginity* of 1891 is Gauguin's final painting on these themes before his departure for Tahiti. The work has been criticized for its academic or heavy-handed symbolism, or alternatively seen as a summation of all "Gauguin's stylistic and color innovations in this ultimate translation of a vision."[12] This disparity may be the result of a confusion about the title, or an attempt to relate that title to the painting itself. It has been variously called *Tahitian Girl with Dog,* the *Awakening of Spring,* and possibly *A Nude* or *A Christian* (female), and there is perhaps no reason to call it the "loss of virginity" at all.[13]

In the absence of a title which would serve as a clue to the content of the work, and in the absence of any direct comment by Gauguin himself, we are left with our own visual observations, guided by common sense assumptions of Gauguin's content in general. An observer neutral to the argument would identify the subject matter as a nude woman lying in a field with her left arm around a fox.

But once again, the prevailing view is that the woman in the painting is "desolate,"[14] "frozen in a death-like state,"[15] "another lost maiden of vanquished virginity,"[16] and "has accepted temptation and the fall."[17] Even if the "loss of virginity" were the true title, there is no indication here that such an event is evil or not to be desired. Most people would not relish the idea of lying in a field with a fox, but metaphorically speaking, the idea of lying out in nature, at one and at peace with the animal, is provocative, an inversion of the conventional interpretation.

The model for the painting has been identified as Gauguin's mistress, Juliette Huet, introduced to Gauguin by his friend, Daniel de Monfreid.[18] (Gauguin wrote frequently to de Monfreid from Tahiti expressing concern for her and the daughter she bore him.)

The fox certainly has links to the creature in *Be Loving,* to the mystical portraits of Meyer de Haan, and perhaps has its origins in the little figure of a dog-fox that Gauguin noticed and drew as part of his studies for the *Yellow Christ* in the church at Trémalo. That Gauguin consistently identified with fox, dog, de Haan, and Christ makes a further identification likely here.

Andersen's rather lengthy discussion of the painting offers a rich mine for interpretation. He connects Christian imagery with the Breton harvest ritual, fox and grain imagery, the myth of Persephone with its message of seasonal renewal, with Oriental physiognomy, with Milton's theme of the two choices in *Paradise Lost,* and so on. His multi-level approach, interweaving various sources, myths, and ideas, is appropriate to understan-

ding Symbolist art. Yet he persists in his view that sex is sin to Gauguin and asserts that "Gauguin preferred to follow Milton in treating the dark side of the prototypical myths."[19] Such a conclusion is not warranted here as before. Gauguin depicts the fruitful merger of human and animal, male and female, Oriental, Breton, and Greek mythologies. The merger is articulated dynamically by the contrasts of strong horizontal nude in the foreground coupled with the verticals of the group of Bretons in the middleground, and the juxtaposition of what Rewald calls the "delicate hatching of his impressionist phase and the entirely different application used for the flat areas."[20] Contrasts of color move from the stark white of the woman's body to the spectacular pink of the land below, to the serene and somber blue of the water and sky beyond.

The fox, like Gauguin himself, plays the role of inversion here, and turns the woman into a flower-bearer, his embrace into flowering, the Fall into Fortune, and if the analogy to Christ is necessary and operative here, then the sacrifice—or entrance into experience—becomes a solemn ritual of redemption and new life.

Gauguin had found in Juliette Huet a new love even as he sought a new understanding of human interaction, sexual or spiritual, and was already on his way to Tahiti where these ideas could be tested and lived. He had written to Bernard that he had been trying to get at a corner of himself which he did not yet understand.[21] With the *Woman with Fox,* he had arrived at certain conclusions to be tested in another environment, more conducive to what he wanted and hoped for.

Once there, Gauguin quickly realized that Tahiti, especially its art and religion, had been destroyed. Gauguin's art and writing recreate ("recover and rekindle" are his words, *NoaNoa,* p. 33) a Tahitian culture mythos, and in the process, Gauguin recreated himself as an individual and as an artist whose identity incorporated Werstern and Eastern values, masculine and feminine principles, nature and culture.

Ancien Culte Mahorie (Ancient Maori Religion), Cahier pour Aline (Notebook for Aline), Notes diverses, NoaNoa (Various Notes for NoaNoa), and especially *NoaNoa* are the works that document Gauguin's state of mind and his creative struggle to Know (*NoaNoa*, p. 33). *NoaNoa* tells how Gauguin made the transformation from civilized to savage, from a European with one set of values, especially regarding women, sex, sin, and death, to a natural man, with an entirely different and forgiving set of values. Gauguin learned that in Tahiti "love is still Love, even though it is so much in the blood, selfless or selfish" (*NoaNoa,* p. 34).

NoaNoa gives us an almost step by step account of Gauguin's initiation into this new world, crediting both Teha'amana, his native wife, and J.A. Moerenhout as catalysts in this process.[22]

Gauguin's first encounter with Tahitian women began at the last king's funeral. The queen in her sculptural grace and beauty suggested to Gauguin the triangular form of the Trinity, and her sparkling eyes held a "vague hint of passions which kindled suddenly and immediately enflamed the life around. And it is thus that the Island itself surged up from the Ocean"

(*NoaNoa*, p. 30). Gauguin saw both holiness and sensuality in the Tahitian woman, and together these form the creative process itself and at the very moment of the old king's death.

Gauguin wrote of his hesitation and timidity with women at first and accepted the company of a half-caste whom he knew could not help him "learn what I wanted to know" (*NoaNoa*, p. 35).

Another Tahitian woman recited to Gauguin the La Fontaine fable of the grasshopper and the ant. She preferred the singing, giving grasshopper, of course, and welcomed Gauguin to Tahiti with the words, "Ia Orana Gauguin."

Gauguin moved from Papeete to a less European village and saw there in the purple soil the words that spell God, Atua, Buddha, in whose eyes "purity and impurity are like the dance of the six nagas"—benevolent snakes who accompany the Buddha (*NoaNoa*, p. 39).

Gauguin contrasted himself with his European inability to find food for himself in the presence of natural abundance to the Tahitians who did not cut themselves off "from life, from space, from the infinite" (*NoaNoa*, p. 41).

He longed for initiation and while painting a portrait of a Tahitian woman told her that he was *Olympia*'s husband! (He had a reproduction of the painting in his hut.) He was aware, he wrote, that "my examination as a painter included a thorough study of the interior life of the model like a physical possessing" (*NoaNoa*, p. 45).

Gauguin struggled to learn the Tahitian language and adapt himself to his new life. "Civilization is departing from me little by little. I am beginning. . . . to love my fellow creatures. I have all the joys of the free life, animal and human. I am escaping from the artificial, I am entering into nature" (*NoaNoa*, p. 72).

Proving himself to be worthy, Gauguin then meets a friend who takes him inland to look for a special tree whose wood is suitable for making a fine sculpture—just as Gauguin himself was not a suitable candidate for initiation into Tahitian life and self-knowledge.

The incident with the Tahitian youth, Jotépha, has been much discussed as it hints of "crime, homosexual desires," and so on (*NoaNoa*, pp. 74-83). However, Gauguin perceived the youth as androgyne, the very incarnation and expression of all this vegetal splendor which surrounded him. He willed to *not* violate Tahiti itself and commented that the androgynous appearance of the Tahitians facilitates their relations both as lovers and friends, in contrast to the artificial, sadistic, ashamed and furtive colors of love among civilized people.

Having wrestled with his conscience, Gauguin plunged into the baptismal waters and heard the voice of Nature accepting him as one of her children.

They found the rosewood tree and in cutting it down, Gauguin cut out the evil in himself, "breaths of death"—self-love. The brutal assault on the tree was justified, one must suppose, because of its ritual significance and its purpose, to be made into a work of art.

Gauguin was then worthy to receive his reward—he was another man,

a Maori. The reward came in the form of a marriage, that of Gauguin to a young Tahitian beauty, Teha'amana. He therein joined his masculine and European self with the feminine and natural. On his journey toward what turned out to be Teha'amana, Gauguin had visions (inspired by Moerenhout) of scenes he later put into the paintings *Hina Te Fatou* and *Pape Moe*. He "sees distinctly, even though they are not there, the statues of female divinities" (*NoaNoa,* p. 98). Therefore, he created them in his painting.

Teha'amana was given to Gauguin by her parents and Gauguin was in awe of her. When he returned to his village, the contrast between European and Tahitian values could not have been more clear. The French wife of the local gendarme called Teha'amana a whore.

"It was two races face to face, and I was ashamed of mine. . . . I quickly turned my gaze to rest on and rejoice in the radiance of this living gold that I already loved" (*NoaNoa,* pp. 104-5). European lust for money is compared to real love for the Tahitian with the golden skin.

Gauguin and Teha'amana spent a week learning to know each other. "I loved Teha'amana and I told her, which made her smile—she knew it well! She seemed to love me in return—but she never said it. *But* sometimes in the night lightning flashed on the gold of Teha'amana's skin" (*NoaNoa,* p. 106).

"Then began the life full of happiness: founded on assurance of the following day, on mutual confidence, on the reciprocal certainty of love." Gauguin and Teha'amana lived "as the first man and woman in paradise" (*NoaNoa,* p. 107).

This may be a romantic fantasy of Gauguin's, but he discussed this love as the final penetration of the mysteries he had been seeing. Through his senses and emotions—not through reason and memory—he was permeated with an inner knowledge as Teha'amana's perfume permeated him. "I was perfumed with her. NoaNoa!" (*NoaNoa,* p. 107).

NoaNoa then recounts the incident on which Gauguin based one of his greatest paintings, *Manao tupapau* (*She Thinks of the Spirit of the Dead or the Spirit of the Dead Thinks of Her,* W. 457, 1892).

This episode is followed by a long section on the Tahitian religion, especially matter and spirit, Hina and Taaroa, feminine and masculine, the two great principles of life which dissolve into a supreme unity (*NoaNoa,* p. 147). Just as Gauguin was joining with Teha'amana and Tahiti, he evolved a philosophical system paralleling his own life. He related these ideas to the Bible and to Buddhism (a connection he developed in later writings). When Teha'amana at last proved unfaithful, Gauguin saw her transformed into "a masterpiece of nature, naked though covered in clothes of yellow orange purity, the gold mantle of Bhixu" (*NoaNoa,* p. 200). Instead of beating her, as she requested, Gauguin embraced her and uttered the words of Buddha, "It is by sweetness that violence must be conquered; evil by good; lying by the truth" (*NoaNoa,* p. 201).

Gauguin had come a long way to forgive a sexual infidelity and to see his worldly affairs as a small microcosm of the larger operations of nature

and divine forgiveness.

In the *Cahier pour Aline* (*Notebook for Aline*), written in the spring of 1893 while waiting to return to France, Gauguin wrote:

> . . . *freedom of the flesh* must exist, otherwise it is a revolting slavery. In Europe human copulation is a consequence of love. In Oceania love is a consequence of coitus. Who is right?
>
> He or she who gives his or her ass commits a little sin, and even this is detestable. . . . In any case the sin is in large part redeemed by the most beautiful act in the world, Creation, a divine act, in this sense that it is the continuation of the work of the Creator. He or she who sells his or her body commits a true sin. This act of venality degrades mankind and places him lower than the animals. You will always find a mother's milk in primitive Arts. In the Arts of advanced civilization, I doubt it![23]

Gauguin's paintings of this first Tahitian period document just as fully as *NoaNoa* Gauguin's transformation from European to natural man, his growing understanding of love and sex without sin and guilt, his philosophical position on the unity of opposites. In these paintings the female form becomes the most frequent and most important image in his oeuvre. For him, the women in the painting embody his own attitudes and states of mind as he explores the natural, feminine world to incorporate it into himself.

Gauguin scholarship, dating at least from Henri Dorra's 1953 article, "The First Eve's in Gauguin's Eden," has frequently repeated Dorra's initial view that there are two types of women or Eve figures in Gauguin's Tahitian works. The first represents Eve before the Fall and the second, Eve after the Fall.[24]

A painting of the first type is *Te Nave Nave Fenua* (*Land of Sensuous Pleasure,* W. 455, 1892), and of the second is *Parau na te Varua Ino* (*Talk of or about the Evil Spirit,* W.458, 1892). Ziva Amishai-Maisels enlarges on the theme of the Fall, and the cycle of life in "Gauguin's Philosophical Eve," and Jehanne Teilhet-Fiske sees the female in *Parau na te Varua Ino* as remorseful and holding a white cloth over her genital region to symbolize her loss of chastity.[25]

These paintings need not refer to the Christian fall whether before or after, but to Gauguin's restructuring the idea of the relationship between sex and sin. In a land of sensuous pleasure it is the talk of or about the evil spirit that creates guilt, not sexuality itself. Death and night, evoked by the presence of the evil spirits, exists as a complementary part of life, and sex is surely the start of both these processes.[26]

In *Manao tupapau* Gauguin shows the two linked together in a definitive pictorial statement. In his "Genesis of a Painting" in *Cahier pour Aline,* Gauguin stated that the theme of the painting is Night and Day. This complementary pair stands for the other pairs of death and life, masculine and feminine, spirit and matter, and so on. This pairing exists on a formal level as well—the gold of the woman's body in contrast to the violet of the background, the horizontality of the woman coupled with the verticality of the tupapau and post. Gauguin's discussions of the work in *NoaNoa,*

Cahier pour Aline, and in letters indicate that he was confronting his own mortality and the role of sexuality in that context.

In *Hina Te Fatou* (W. 499, 1893), the masculine and feminine principles confront each other directly. In the legend of the moon and the earth, Hina insists that *her* province, matter, will live forever, though humans must perish. The masculine force provides an ever-fecundating spirit, and the two principles dissolve into the supreme unity of creation and re-creation. Gauguin names that unity Taaroa, and equates that divinity with Hina, Buddha, and Christ.

Arearea (*Joyousness* W. 568, 1892), depicts the central female as Buddha in the earth-touching mudra, when Buddha, sitting under the bodhi tree, calls the-earth-to-witness and enters enlightenment. The painting summarizes Gauguin's pictorial and philosophical intentions—the double, the other female, with closed eyes and rapt attention, plays the vivo, the reed instrument of the ancients, which allows the imagination to create, to see without physical sight. Worshippers dance around a statue of Hina, while the red dog, spirit of Gauguin, the masculine, Spirit itself, nuzzles the ground of being. Thus did Gauguin create joy in a place where male and female, Buddha and Tahitian, imagination and nature, unite and thereby regain Paradise.

This truth, this prime function of art, may last forever, but in life, in Gauguin's life, it did not.

One of Gauguin's last paintings in 1893 before his return to France, is the powerful *Otahi* (*Alone,* W. 502). Teha'amana would be alone and so would Gauguin. The state of being alone—and not sin—is perhaps the real Fall.

Gauguin arrived back in France and wrote to Mette, "You will find a husband to embrace you not too much like a skinned rabbit and by no means worn out."[27] They exchanged invitations to visit each other, but arguments about money seem to have prevented any reunion.

Gauguin must have resumed relations with Juliette Huet, until Daniel de Monfreid did him the dubious favor of introducing him to Anna the Javanese. Gauguin's portrait of her, *Aita Parahi Te Tamari Vahine Judith* (W. 508, 1893), is strikingly modern and bold. The title, *The Child-Woman Judith is not yet Breached,* and Gauguin's associations with Judith, the daughter of his friends, Ida and William Molard, have led scholars to think of Gauguin as a "dirty old man" lusting after the young thirteen-year-old girl. Judith's memoirs imply that Gauguin fondled her, yet there is no evidence that anything more untoward occurred. Possibly Gauguin's feelings for the girl were fatherly—no real conclusion can be drawn without further evidence. If Gauguin wanted to apply Tahitian morals to European situations, perhaps in this case he knew better than to try. To William Molard he wrote, "If you thought of sending Judith to Brittany, I would look after her like a father, but perhaps from the standpoint of the proprieties it would not altogether do."[28]

Gauguin had sent Mette 1500 of the 13,000 francs he received from a legacy in or around February, 1894. Their correspondence reads like finan-

cial reports and Gauguin made plans to return to Tahiti.

Nowhere is the contrast between Gauguin's European and non-European values more apparent than in the exchange of letters between Gauguin and the misogynist dramatist, August Strindberg, in 1895.

Strindberg may not have liked Gauguin's too Tahitian art, but he understood Gauguin's achievements. "You have created a new earth and a new heaven, but I do not feel easy in your new universe; for me, a lover of the chiaroscuro, it is too ablaze with sunlight. And in your paradise dwells an Eve who is not my ideal; for I also have a feminine ideal—or two!" He continued, "Who is he then? He is Gauguin, the savage, who hates civilization's restrictions; rather, a Titan, jealous of the Creator and wanting to take his leisure in his own little Creation. He is a child taking his toys to pieces to make new ones, rejecting and defying and preferring a red sky to everybody else's blue one."

Gauguin's response is equally significant.

> I had a feeling of your rebellion: everything in conflict between your civilization and my barbarism.
>
> Civilization is what you suffer from. Barbarism is a rejuvenation for me.
>
> Before the Eve of my choice, whom I paint in forms and colors from another world, evokes in you perhaps a sad past. The Eve of your civilized conception makes you and makes nearly all of us misogynists; the ancient Eve, who frightens you in my studio could one day make you smile less bitterly. This world, which may never be discovered by a Cuvier, or a botanist, may be a paradise which I alone have sketched out. And there is a long way from the sketch to the realization of the dream. What does it matter! Glimpsing happiness, isn't it is foretaste of *nirvana*?
>
> The Eve I have painted (she alone) logically can remain nude before our eyes. Yours in this simple state could not move without shame, and too beautiful (perhaps), would be the evocation of evil and unhappiness.[29]

Gauguin, with one of his frequent analogies to language and its properties, goes on to compare the two Eves to the two languages they speak. The Oceanic language is primordial, bare, without artifice. The European languages are far more complicated.

The analogy and the comparison of the two Eves make clear how far Gauguin has progressed toward an understanding of women free from the artificial constraints of European morality.

Gauguin's remaining years brought him increased bitterness, disillusion, and even cynicism with regard to his wife, the institution of marriage, and even the possibility of earthly happiness. Yet, his "tenacity, his power to search out, to question, to discover" remained strong.[30]

In the last years, in Tahiti and the Marquesas, Gauguin's thoughts turned less to physical concerns and more toward spiritual issues. His paintings retain the use of the female figure as the chief pictorial focus but reveal a new lyricism, a relaxation from the complex mythologies of before.

Gauguin's everyday existence was inevitably difficult, punctuated by deaths, disease, despair. Yet he was able to turn some of these sad events into paintings with positive themes. In 1896 he painted a *Self Portrait near*

Golgotha. Later that year he moved in with a native woman, Pahura (Teha'amana having married in his absence). Pahura's child by Gauguin, a daughter, died a few days after birth, and Gauguin painted a work in response to that event, as Teilhet-Fiske indicates.

She states that the title *Te Tamari No Atua* means *God's Child,* and is a way of acknowledging the female gender of the child just lost. She discusses the work at some length to demonstrate Gauguin's incorporation of Christian and Tahitian beliefs and to show Gauguin's true feelings (negative) toward Pahura.[31] This nativity, complete with stable, haloes, and an angel seems to me rather a counterpart to Manet's *Olympia,* complete with reclining female, and *white* cat. If open sexuality makes Olympia a modern woman, then Pahura here completes the cycle. She has given birth, the child passes from her, to the tupapau—the spirit of death—to the angel, and Pahura, haloed on a golden drapery, is sanctified. Death,like sex, is present, or even inevitable, but it is not evil. Goldwater comments about this painting that it contains a "tenderness Gauguin often hid."[32]

Could Gauguin have intended that any child, male or female, is the child of God? (He discussed Christ's *human* nature at great length in *Diverses choses* (*Different Things*), and stated that Christ is a model for us all to follow, the "standard of *ideal* realization of acquired perfection *identifying us more and more with divine nature*" (*Diverses choses,* p. 280).

He wrote elsewhere in the same journal, asserting the positive aspects of his view of death, "You will always find inspiration in primitive art. In the arts of advanced civilizations—nothing—except repetitions. When I studied the Egyptians, I always found in my brain a healthy element of something else, whereas the study of Greek, especially decadent Greek, inspired in me either disgust or discouragement, a vague premonition of death without hope of rebirth" (*Diverses choses,* pp. 223-4).

Gauguin's preoccupation with thoughts of human mortality, his comparison of Christian views on the subject to Tahitian, Buddhist, and so on, occupies a large portion of *Diverses choses* and *L'esprit moderne et le Catholicisme*. By the end of 1897, he learned of the death of his daughter, and had completed these texts. (He added on to *L'esprit moderne* in 1898 and transcribed it again in 1902.) He had written to de Monfreid of his approaching death, and then, ill and discouraged, of his own attempt to kill himself. A letter to Charles Morice explicating the great *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* ends with the line, "Write nothing to my wife."[33]

And Gauguin survived to write bitter diatribes against marriage and the society which insists on it.

> If therefore this institution of marriage, which is a *sale* pure and simple, is *declared to be the only moral and recognized method of uniting the sexes,* then there is necessarily an exclusion from this morality of all those who cannot or do not wish to marry. There is no place *for love* or for good feeling. . .
>
> Treated thus, woman falls into a state of abjection, condemned to marry if her fortune is great enough, or to remain virgin; that monstrosity,

unhealthy and unclean, so unnatural, so contrary to true sentiment which is love. . . .

And we cry: woman is after all our mother, our daughter, our sister, and she has the *right to earn her bread,* the right to love whom she chooses, the right to do what she wants with her body and her beauty and the right to give birth with the right to bring up her child—and to do all that without recourse to a priest and a notary. . . .

Be charitable—love each other. That is still the only means of conduct both for woman and man. They are both born *to live happily.* (*L'esprit moderne et le Catholicisme,* pp. 85-86.)

Sin is an invention of the church, marriage a sale, and one which denies paternal feeling, humiliates women, and renders some children illegitimate.

In 1898, with *Faa Iheihe* (*To Glorify*?, W. 569), Gauguin turned the mysterious and gloomy quest of *Where Do We Come From?* into a golden vision. His description of a large painting he dreamed of doing, described in *Diverses choses,* may apply to *Faa Iheihe.* "The principle figure will be a woman turning into a statue, keeping life, but becoming an idol. The figure will be seen against a background of a clump of trees unlike any which grow on earth and which can be found only in paradise. . . . Sweet smelling flowers rise in all directions. . . . the colors will sing, they will be pale in color like grains of wheat!" (*Diverses choses,* p. 252.)

What a powerful image of the human-divine female—a real human being with aspects of divinity! Gauguin has inverted his own dichotomy of female = nature and male = spirit to reveal his understanding that both genders can represent both principles. Women can be both physical and spiritual and men can be both also. (In other words, gender does not determine or limit mental capacities.)

And the Gold of their Bodies (W. 596, 1901) continues this theme of rebirth and renewal. The women in the painting are the living gold that Gauguin loved, natural and naked in a natural setting.

Contes Barbares (W. 625, 1902) also depicts two golden women, one in the pose of the woman in the previous painting, and one in the lotus position. With the pair is the old mystic, the seer from Gauguin's Breton days, Meyer de Haan, whom Gauguin had depicted in the work entitled *Nirvana.*

Gauguin's pictorial definition of nirvana is matched by his verbal description, "Buddha, a simple mortal, who neither conceives nor knows of God, but conceived and knew all the wisdom of the human heart, arrived at the eternal blessedness, Nirvana, the last step of the soul in its progressive movement, through the different ages. All people, by their wisdom and their virtue can become Buddhas" (*Diverses choses,* p. 272).

Gauguin's achievement was not only the "emancipation of painting"[34] but the emancipation of humanity from a dualism which separates and subordinates. It was not women Gauguin hated, or sex, but hypocrisy and conventional morality—all the barriers to individual freedom. "Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated,"[35] as Woolf said, and Gauguin's work goes a long way toward doing just that.

Footnotes

[1]Edward B. Henning, "The Woman in the Waves," *Art News,* (March, 1984), p. 105.

[2]Wayne Andersen, "Gauguin and a Peruvian Mummy," *Burlington Magazine,* 109 (April 1967), p. 238.

[3]Gauguin to Emile Bernard (November, 1889), in *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis,* Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1946), p. 172.

[4]Henri Dorra, "The First Eve's in Gauguin's Eden," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* (March, 1953), p. 198.

[5]Wayne Andersen, *Gauguin's Paradise Lost* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), pp. 112-14.

[6]Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Gauguin's Philosophical Eve," *Burlington Magazine,* (June, 1973), p. 374.

[7]Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski, *Paul Gauguin in the Context of Symbolism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), pp. 180-81.

[8]Gauguin to Emile Bernard (September, 1889), in *Lettres,* p. 167. The exact quote is, "Gauguin (comme un monstre) prenant la main d'une femme qui se défend, lui disant, 'Soyez amoureuse, vous serez heureuse.' "

[9]Gauguin to Théo van Gogh, in Douglas Cooper, *Paul Gauguin: 34 Lettres à Vincent, Théo, et Jo van Gogh* (Staatsuitgevery: Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, 1983), p. 163.

[10]Francoise Cachin, "Un bois de Gauguin: *Soyez mystérieuses," Revue de Louvre* 29 (1978), p. 217.

[11]Gauguin to Emile Bernard (Spetember, 1890), in *Lettres,* p. 203.

[12]John Rewald, *Post-Impressionism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), p. 433.

[13]That name is given in Jean de Rotonchamp's early biography, *Paul Gauguin 1848-1903* (Paris: Editions G. Crès, 1925), p. 81.

[14]Denys Sutton, "La Perte du Pucelage," *Burlington Magazine,* 91 (1949), p. 105.

[15]Andersen, *Paradise Lost,* p. 100.

[16]*Ibid.,* p. 104.

[17]Jirat-Wasiutynski, p. 230.

[18]Rewald, p. 433.

[19]Andersen, p. 108.

[20]Rewald, p. 435.

[21]Gauguin to Emile Bernard (August, 1889), in *Lettres,* p. 122.

[22]J.A. Moerenhout's *Voyages aux iles du Grand Océan* (Paris, 1837) was an important source for Gauguin. He acknowledged it several times in the *NoaNoa* manuscript. He probably read Moerenhout in March, 1892.

[23]Gauguin, Paul, *Cahier pour Aline* (Paris: Damiron, 1963), facsimile, unnumbered page 32.

[24]Dorra, pp. 200-201.

[25]Jehanne Teilhet-Fiske, *Paradise Reviewed, An Interpretation of Gauguin's Polynesian Symbolism* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), p. 75.

[26]Jirat-Wasiutynski, p. 276 also sees several of the paintings from this period, particularly *Te Aa No Arois* and *Vairaumati tei oa,* as indicating a positive attitude, "the results of the Tahitian Annunciation, the new seed and the new hope."

[27]Gauguin to Mette (August 3, 1893), in *Lettres,* p. 243.

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