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**M/E/A/N/I/N/G**

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**M/E/A/N/I/N/G**

#1 December 1986

Editors: Susan Bee, Mira Schor

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Subscriptions: \$8 for two issues.  
(Please make checks out to one of the editors.)

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Special thanks to Charles Bernstein, Ann Schoenfeld, and Marshall Harmon  
for their generous help in publishing this issue.

Distributed with the cooperation of the Segue Foundation.

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**For M/E/A/N/I/N/G**

*CHARLES BERNSTEIN*

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. . . It is the part-object  
freaked with shadow & trading our body-  
bits at a loss. . . . Can this be how we inflate  
our meaning presence from our demeaned lives  
caressing the part-payments?

--John Wilkinson, Proud Flesh

It may be that art criticism is always in a crisis; surely it is in one now, principally on account of its refusal, for the most part, to confront the r(e)adical limitations of its project.

Of course, "art criticism" cannot be treated as a single entity; it should, however, suffice to diagnose such magazines as Art in America, Art News, and Artforum to make apparent what therapy is needed. The international importance of these magazines in setting the agenda for discussions and evaluations of contemporary visual art should not be underestimated; and it is worthwhile belaboring the point that these magazines are almost wholly absorbed in the process of promotion and inflation of the art market that informs every aspect of their editorial content. This is not to say that no useful or worthwhile articles appear in these contexts; indeed, the problem is less the fault of individual art writers, or even art critics bunched as a group, than it is the fault of the editorial policies that institutionalize interpretative practices.

The crisis of art criticism is a crisis of representation. For despite the sophisticated perspectives on representational dynamics that engage painters and other visual and verbal artists, the editors and publishers of the major art magazines have rarely allowed any comparable level of complexity into the writing they choose to print. Indeed, the discourse of magazine art criticism is largely carried out in a naively "realist" style of syntax and narration, whether the "content" of such criticism is the "deconstruction" of "logocentric" art or the glamorization of the art (or shoe) collection of Mary "Imelda" Boone.

Certainly, the neo-Marxist claims for "postmodernism" that occasionally adorn the pages of the art magazines are not convincing. The role of criticism in such venues is to decorate, in the sense of providing verbal ornamentation to, the graphics: the "copy" breaks up the procession

of images-cum-gallery logos that are the logocentric ("simulated") heartbeat of each issue. Consider Art in America's grotesque forum (June, 1986) on museum "blockbusters" (it's not incidental that this term once had currency in reference to an unscrupulous realty practice that created business for speculators by undermining neighborhood real estate values). The most negative of the articles in the forum was about Hans Haacke's critique of corporate art funding, yet made no reference to the fact that the article's "perspective" was being used to legitimize the magazine's "pluralist" approach to issues. The author's exclusive, static focus on corporations obscured and thus defused the role that the article itself, published in the context of an art magazine that is subservient to the financial interests of the major commercial art galleries, was at the very moment playing to bolster the apparatus it claimed to be debunking. It should be rudimentary to expect "oppositional" art criticism to assess who or what is served by the particular discursive forms and contexts of publication in which it appears, and by extension to confront the social organization of the art world, particularly the gallery systems (commercial, multinational, cooperative, "alternative"); in contrast, most "oppositional" magazine criticism reifies its own practice by suppressing these social dynamics and its own participation/complicity in them. This goes beyond biting the hand that feeds; more like, feeding the hand that bites.

Within the pages of the officializing art magazines, both mainstream descriptive reviews and poststructuralist commentary serve the same function: the valorization of certain artists and trends over and against other (generally unnamed) aesthetic tendencies. The "realist" or "representational" discourses of art criticism-all the more effective when they can project an increasingly sophisticated arsenal of theoretical concepts-univocally serve as a mechanism of discrimination. Once this mechanism is operative--formulaic reduction of the aesthetic/visual issues, exclusion based on the formula, implicit hierarchization of the included--the content of the particular discrimination is secondary and in some senses arbitrary. This is why it often seems as if the art work "represented" by magazine criticism is of secondary importance: it is.

There is no simple method by which writing can adequately represent painting and other visual works. At base, verbal language and visual language interpenetrate synaesthetically. Nonetheless, for practical purposes, the gap between the verbal and the visual poses an almost insurmountable problem of translation. Of course, there is a long and distinguished history of visual and verbal artists and philosophers who have found remarkable and suggestive ways of addressing this problem. Some of the "classic" twentieth century works that remain relevant include Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Sounds, Moholy-Nagy's Vision in Motion, Stein's portraits of Matisse and Picasso, and such

philosophical essays as Merleau-Ponty's "Cezanne's Doubt". More recently, to name a well-known representative few from a larger mosaic, there are the imaginative collage/essays in The Collected Writing of Robert Smithson, John Berger's ways of informing in Ways of Seeing and The Sense of Sight, Lucy Lippard's considerations of scale in Overlay (a sharp contrast to the formal blandness of her newspaper reviews), David Antin's "talk" pieces, and Madeline Gins's and Arakawa's fundamental rethinking of how to write about the visual arts in the The Mechanism of Meaning. Regardless of how "positively" these works are sometimes regarded or esteemed, from the viewpoint of art magazine editors and publishers they apparently appear iconoclastic or, worse, "creative" and thus are not taken seriously as methodological models for current art critical writing.

In contrast, normatively descriptive writing styles, such as those mandated by the major art journals, are not promising approaches to this problem. Art in America is reported to require aggressively "normalizing" copyediting of the sort unacceptable to writers who do not take style and tone as negligible or expendable ("we'll take the painting but we're going to change the background color and the title and then we'll . . ."). The sobriety and tonal deadliness of many of October's original English-language articles stands in stark contrast to the verbal energy of its many historical and contemporary translations; since the journal is evidently published in the U.S. this is beyond odd--but American scholarly journals are notorious for accepting a level of verbal invention from abroad that they will not broach at home.

I think the failure to engage the issue of the translation of the visual to the verbal (which has been exacerbated by the undigested incorporation of ever new "verbal" formulations into the art critical context), together with the banishment of self-reflection on the interest component of the adopted mode of art critical discourse, combine to exclude from consideration much of the visual art now being created. Since I share an interest in many of the philosophical arguments imported into current art criticism, I am acutely aware that these ideas are too often used as a prophylactic against visual thinking rather than as a means to better engage it. Arguments about the "essential" codicity of art run a high risk of banality; too often they expose a paranoia about meaning--a pervasive suspiciousness that concludes, from the quite necessary questioning of authoritarian and restricted forms of meaning, that all meaning is impossible. Such radical skepticism, lived in the fullness of its implications, would drive one to madness or to an almost unendurable pitch of intensity. As it is, saying such things in the world of art criticism seems merely a cause for tepid celebration of the trace, of simulation, of the coincidence of market forces and fashion that buttress works painted under this Sign. This is not so much intellectual dishonesty as aesthetic shallowness.

Indeed, the valorization of simulation is the credo of shallowness. It represents an effort to sever the internal investigation of visual meaning from the agenda of the visual arts. This process has entailed, first, the attempt to marginalize or discredit painting since its practices continue to resist the Condemnation by Eminent Domain of the Empty Signifier; and second, the replacement of paintings occupied with creating visual meaning in new forms with works that Represent the Codicity of the Sign. Understood in this way, the critical reception of both David Salle and Peter Halley can be seen as part of the same process--a process fueled by such relatively circumspect essays as Hal Foster's Art in America cover story, "Signs Taken for Wonders" (also appearing in the June, 1986 issue). I focus on Foster's article because it represents a more striking critical trend than the scores of even more routine reviews and commentaries that are as untroubled by the methodological problems of their writing project as they are about the political problems within the art environment they form a part of. In addition, Foster is not only a frequent contributor to Art in America but also one of its three senior editors, and his work has appeared in a number of other influential contexts, including October.

Foster usefully reiterates that the "new abstraction" as advocated by, for example, Halley, may be understood as a "passive", antihistorical "pessimism" (I would say, cynicism); Foster even goes on to note, in passing, that the simulation that this art is said to foreground is a powerful tool for social control in our society. Nonetheless, the effect of Foster's "critical" article is undoubtedly to put an official stamp of approval on these painters and their approach; his hedged reservations are in every sense passing, situating themselves like disclaimers printed in small type on the warranty card that comes with a new consumer product. I have already pointed to several reasons for this: the house style of Art in America reduces its contributions to little more than promotional copy, even if, as here, an individual article seems to contradict this; the layout of the article, which is dominated by large color reproductions (creating a visual continuum with the gallery ads elsewhere in the issue) and "call outs"/headlines that range from ambiguously titillating questions to apparent endorsements. There are other problems too: Foster's fundamental suspicion of painting, as such, tends to merge with the simulated concerns of his subjects. Finally, Foster's conclusion--which is buried in "back of the book" out of the sight and mind of most readers--can most kindly be described as evasive: to say, as he does, that the "processes of capital" are the "real subject" of the "new abstract painting" is to utter a truism of poststructuralist Marxism that could be applied to any cultural production; this underlines the fact that Foster is less interested in particularizing how paintings investigate visually conceived issues in a visual language than he is in making a general, verbally dominant cultural critique. Foster's eagerness to expose the

complicity of artworks in the capitalist system appears hollow in the light of his own unacknowledged complicity, through institutional affiliation and choice of discursive style, in what he purports to condemn.

Of necessity, there is more to contemporary visual art than can be reported in the terms now dominant in postmodern critical discourse. For there is an abundance of work that resists description as "digitalized" codes whose only function is to unmask and expose in their semiotic (catatonic?) indeterminacy: work that, in contrast, labors to deepen the visual articulation of alternatives to predetermined or self-effacing styles of representation and conventional figuration. The most urgent task for critical writing at this time is to explore what is instantiated rather than what is commented on--and in so doing to reject the reduction of the artwork to arbitrary markers that distance everything and inhabit nothing. What needs to be articulated is how works of visual art may resubstantiate rather than evacuate: how they mine the visual field for new spaces and new configurations that measure the imaginary in order to make it visible.

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## APPROPRIATED SEXUALITY

MIRA SCHOR

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Whoever despises the clitoris despises the penis  
Whoever despises the penis despises the cunt  
Whoever despises the cunt despises the life of the child.<sup>1</sup>

--Muriel Rukeyser

Rapists make better artists.<sup>2</sup>

--Carolyn Donahue/David Salle/Joan Wallace

A woman lies on her back, holding her knees to her stomach. She has no face, she is only a cunt, buttocks, and a foot, toes tensed as if to indicate pain, or sexual excitement, or both. A patterned cloth shape is superimposed over her, and paint tipped pegs protrude from the wooden picture plane above her. Thus she is dominated by phallic representations.

This image of woman in David Salle's The Disappearance of the Booming Voice (1984) may be appropriated from mass-media pornography, but more immediately it is based on a photograph taken by Salle himself. Salle has said that "what's compelling about pornography is knowing that someone did it. It's not just seeing what you're presented with but knowing that someone set it up for you to see,"<sup>3</sup> and that "the great thing about pornography is that something has been photographed."<sup>4</sup> Salle has even suggested that photography was invented for the enhancement of pornography.

But, cries Robert Pincus-Witten, "clearly your works must be liberated from the false charges of pornography."<sup>5</sup> This sentiment permeates almost all the vast critical literature on Salle. The issue of pornography is forever raised and laid to rest. But the issue of misogyny is left untouched. Yet it is the pervasive misogyny of Salle's depiction of woman that is so persistently refuted and excused in favor of a "wider possibility of discussion"<sup>6</sup> for "in literature of twentieth-century art the sexist bias, itself unmentionable, is covered up and approved by the insistence on . . . other meanings."<sup>7</sup> Salle's depiction of woman is discussed in terms of the deconstruction of the meaning of imagery, and in terms of art historical references to chiaroscuro, Leonardo, modernism, postmodernism, post-structuralism, Goya and Jasper Johns, Derrida and

Lacan, you name it, anything but the obvious. The explicit misogyny of Salle's images of woman is matched by the implicit misogyny of its acceptance by many critics. This complicity is clearly stated by Pincus-Witten: "We're commodifying the object and we're mythifying the makers . . . I've certainly participated in that mechanism because I believe in the mechanism."<sup>8</sup>

The "mechanism" and RPW's belief in it are evident in his earliest interviews with Salle, "up close and personal." He visits Salle's studio in 1979 and meets "a dark 26 year old, impatient and perplexing."<sup>9</sup> "The real content of Salle's painting is irony, or paradox, or parody."<sup>10</sup> Flesh into Word (1979), reproduced alongside this text, contains several images of women. The painting is framed on the left by a kneeling nude, seen from behind, near a telephone, and on the right by a headless, upside down nude. A central, more heavily drawn female contains within her a pleasing, bosomy sketched-in nude. The central figure is scowling and smoking; a small plane flies into her brain. Thus the private plane (canvas plane/paint-brush/penis) of the male artist zeroes in on the only female in his painting who seems to be trying to think and to question his authority.

RPW returns months later, now apparently writing for Harlequin romances. "Complex David Salle -- lean of face, tense, dark hair on a sharp cartilagenous profile -- the unflinching gaze of the contact-lensed. A cigar-smoker (by way of affectation?) and a just audible William Buckley-like speech pattern."<sup>11</sup> The macho positioning is completed by the specification of locale: "the Salle studio is in that row of buildings in which Stanford White -- shot by Harry Thaw -- died."<sup>12</sup> Thus the vicarious glamor of a notorious murder committed over the naked body of a woman is rubbed on to Salle (and perhaps on to his hopeful accomplice, RPW).

RPW off-handedly describes the left half of Autopsy (1981), Salle's notorious photo of a naked woman sitting, cross-legged, sad and stiff, on a rumpled bed, a dunce cap on her head and smaller ones on her breasts. In Autopsy, the naked woman is juxtaposed with an abstract pattern of blue, black and white blocks. This type of juxtaposition of representation with abstraction, as well as any juxtaposition of "appropriated" images, seems to be enough to allow for the deflection of scrutiny away from the sexual content to other, apparently more intellectually valid, concerns, specifically "the uncertain status of imagery, the problems of representation that infect every art."<sup>13</sup>

Challenged in public forums to explain the meaning of Autopsy and other like images, Salle has stated tersely that it is about "irony." Indeed his work is seen by his supporters as an eloquent representation of the nihilistic relativism which can result from an ironic stance and which is one of the hallmarks of current "avant-garde" art.

For Thomas Lawson, who does see Salle's representations of

woman as at best "cursory and off-hand," at worst "brutal and disfigured."<sup>14</sup> Salle represents nevertheless one of the hopes for the survival of painting, painting as the "last exit" before the despair of "an age of skepticism" in which "the practice of art is inevitably crippled by suspension of belief."<sup>15</sup>

This school of art accepts and revels in the loss of belief in painting except as a strategic device. The images of painting are representations of representations, not of a suspect "reality." Belief in any meaning for an image in this age of reproduction is dismissed as naive.

However if all images are equivalent, as the constant juxtaposition of female nudes with abstract marks, bits of furniture, and characters from Disney cartoons in Salle's work indicates, then why are male nudes not given equivalent treatment, not just drawn occasionally from the back, but literally drawn and quartered as female nudes are? If images have been rendered essentially meaningless from endless repetition in the mass media, what is the motivation for the one choice that Salle has clearly made, which is to mistreat only the female nude? Salle does not mistreat the male nude therefore he is sensitive enough to the meaning of some imagery.

Much is made by critics of the refusal of the paintings to render their meaning. Lawson writes of the work that its "obscurity that is its source of strength."<sup>16</sup> "Meaning is intimated but tantalizingly withheld." Donald Kuspit writes of a "strangely dry coitus of visual cliches."<sup>17</sup> In withholding their meaning, the paintings are like Woman, the mysterious Other. In withholding his meaning, the artist is an impotent sadist.

The source of this anger is to be found in the intertwined associations among painting, woman, meaning, and death, which form the core of Salle's work. These are clearly expressed in his 1979 manifesto "The Paintings are Dead:"

1. The Paintings are dead in the sense that to intuit the meaning of something incompletely, but with an idea of what it might mean or involve to know completely, is a kind of premonition. The paintings in their opacity, signal an ultimate clarification. Death is "tragic" because it closes off possibilities of further meaning; art is similarly tragic because it prefigures itself as an ended event of meaning. The paintings do this by appearing to participate in meaninglessness.<sup>18</sup>

For "the Paintings" and "art" one can read "woman" who can only seem to be "known," then returns to the self-enclosed "opacity" of her sex. The meaning "intuited" is that, in the words of Simone de Beauvoir, "to have been conceived and then born an infant is the curse that hangs over [man's] destiny, the impurity that contaminates his being. And, too, it is the announcement of his death."<sup>19</sup> The opacity of the Mother, the calm

enclosure of the promise of his own death seems to incite man to fantasies of rape of woman, and of art.

It is significant that the illustration to Salle's manifesto is an installation shot of the dunce cap pictures. It is also significant that in response to the seemingly obvious offensive nature of this image (*Autopsy*), Kuspit writes that "to put dunce caps on the breasts as well as the head of a woman, and to paint her with a mechanically rendered pattern . . . is to stimulate, not critically provoke-- to muse, not reveal."<sup>20</sup> This brings to mind *Cane* (1983), in which a woman, hung upside down in one of the traditional poses of Christian martyrdom, is impaled by a real rubber-tipped cane resting in a glass of water on a ledge. The cane represents the phallus of the artist, as well as being an art historical notation, as the painting and the woman are screwed; as befits a "strangely dry coitus" she may die of peritonitis but she won't get pregnant.

Salle uses woman as a metaphor for death; woman has become a vehicle for the difficulty of painting. Painting, with the potential sensuality implicit in its medium, has become a metaphor for woman, and, also, a vehicle for the subjugation of woman/death. In *Face in the Column* (1983) a naked woman is pressed down by a hand which cannot be her own, by a slice of orange, and by a black band of shadow that straps her down to the ground or bed. A drawing of a woman sitting on a toilet is superimposed so that her ass is directly over the larger woman's face, a further reminder of her disgusting physicality. A white profile of Abraham Lincoln acts as a representative representation of honest male activity distanced from the physical functions of woman, for, to quote Salle, "the ass is the opposite end of the person, so to speak, the most ignoble part of the person and the face is the most noble, the site of all that specificity."<sup>21</sup> As the *butt* of the ironist, woman is "trapped and submerged in time and matter, blind, contingent, limited and unfree."<sup>22</sup>

Carter Ratcliff comes close to grappling with Salle's treatment of women, admitting that "to glamorize cruelty is the pornographer's tactic."<sup>23</sup> But "Salle's images of nude women" are "not exactly pornographic. He brings some of his nudes to the verge of gynecological objectivity."<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Ratcliff means veterinary gynecology because I have only seen dogs take poses remotely as contorted as the one a naked woman is forced into in a 1983 Salle watercolor: flat on her back, her thighs spread apart, her legs up. Footless, armless, helpless, she serves as the base for a set table in a pleasantly appointed room. In *Midday* (1984) a woman is on the floor of a similarly decorated room. Flat on her back, legs up, she holds up her hands as if to help her focus on, or protect herself from, the actively painted face of a man floating above her.

To Ratcliff, Salle is "like a self-conscious pornographer, one capable of embarrassment."<sup>25</sup> A repentant rapist then, who can be excused

from culpability. However, Ratcliff continues, "to see his paintings is to empathize with his intentions, which is to deploy images in configurations that permit them to be possessed"<sup>26</sup> [my emphasis]. It is crucial to emphasize that this form of possession implies a male spectator and is condoned by the male art critic. Linda Nochlin writes that "certain conventions of eroticism are so deeply engrained that one scarcely bothers to think of them: one is that the very term 'erotic art' is understood to imply 'erotic for men.'"<sup>27</sup> The hierarchy of erotic art is clear: "the male image is one of power, possession and domination, the female one of submission, passivity and availability."<sup>28</sup> Carol Duncan stresses the violence with which "the male confronts the female nude as an adversary whose independent existence as a physical or a spiritual being must be assimilated to male needs, converted to abstractions, enfeebled, or destroyed."<sup>29</sup>

Salle's reduction "of woman to so much animal flesh, a headless body"<sup>30</sup> seems, in part, to be a response to radical avant-garde feminism that he was exposed to while a student at the California Institute of the Arts in the early 70s. The Feminist Art Program at CalArts, created and led by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, which I was part of, aimed at channeling reconsidered personal experiences into subject matter for art. Personal content, often of a sexual nature, found its way into figuration. Analyses and quotes (i.e. "appropriation") of mass media representations of woman influenced art work. "Layering" -- a technique favored by Salle -- was a buzz word of radical feminist art and discourse, as a basic metaphor for female sexuality. The Feminist Art Program received national attention and was the subject of excitement, envy, and curiosity at CalArts. Even students, male and female, who were hostile to the Program, could not ignore its existence or remain unchallenged by its aims.

The history of this period at CalArts has been blurred, for instance in the curating of the CalArts Ten Year Alumni Show (1981), which excluded most women and any of the former Feminist Program students. In Craig Owens' review of that show, he mourned the resurgence of painting by artists nurtured in the supposed post-studio Eden of CalArts. His point may be well taken on the nature of the sell-out by certain artists, but he does not probe beneath the given composition of the show to see that the Feminist Program, excluded from the retrospective, was truly radical and subversive in daring to question male hegemony of art and art history, whereas post-studio work at CalArts often simply continued an affectless commentary on art history.

Salle's lack of belief in the meaning of imagery is in striking and significant contrast to much work by women artists. From Paula Modersohn-Becker, Florine Stettheimer, and Frida Kahlo to Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois, Nancy Spero, and countless other artists working today, women artists have shown a vitality that shuns strategy and stylistics in

order to honestly depict the image of the core of their being. A comparison of two artists' statements speaks to this difference in belief, and, parenthetically, of motivation:

I am interested in solving an unknown factor of art, an unknown factor of life. It can't be divorced as an idea or composition or form. I don't believe art can be based on that . . . In fact my idea now is to counteract everything I've ever learnt or ever been taught about those things -- to find something inevitable that is my life, my thoughts, my feelings.<sup>31</sup>

--Eva Hesse

I am interested in infiltration, usurpation, beating people at their own game (meaning scheme). I am interested in making people suffer, not through some external plagues, but simply because of who they are (how they know).<sup>32</sup>

--David Salle

Salle's abuse of the female nude is a political strategy that feeds on the backlash against feminism increasingly evident in the national political atmosphere. The current rise of the right in this country puts issues pertaining to female organs and women's freedom or loss of choice at the top of their list of priorities. It is not surprising that in such an atmosphere Salle's theater of mastery of humiliated female Fleisch (the title of a Salle painting) is so acceptable despite its badboy shock value.

As the black leather trappings of the Nazi SS have become trivially eroticized, so too it is possible for some critics to openly succumb to the cult of the artist as magical misogynist. Michael Kruger describes a day in the country with Salle:

And then he did something that left me completely perplexed . . . without removing the cigar from his mouth, David concentrated his attention on the center, where he placed the gigantic figure of a woman, naked, her thighs spread apart. And he did all this in such a convincing matter-of-factness that the obscenity of the gesture with which he had drawn so quickly in the snow only struck me as my view began to melt. . . . The most obvious explanation . . . was that David was using a symbolic action to liberate the instrumentalized body from the constraints of the economy, to return it to nature. So there was this splendid body before us, several hundred meters across, and there were the skiers, their tiny bodies wrapped in the most incredible disguises, registering naked shock. . . . The route back down the valley obliged them to desecrate the figure.<sup>33</sup> [my emphasis]

Woman apparently cannot win, either she is nature, or must returned to it , in order to be desecrated , in a scene that rivals the imaginings of Ian Fleming -- a giant cunt, a scenic mountain full of skiers, and the heroic male artist, James Bond/David Salle, cigar/pacifier in his mouth, poker-faced no doubt. One can only wonder what the reaction of the critic and the skiers might have been if an artist had drawn a giant male figure with erect penis positioned so as to invite castration.

Recent attention has been focused on Paul Outerbridge's photographs of oppressed looking female nudes posed with the standard trappings of fetishism and sado-masochism, on Balthus' pedophilic portrayals of little girls who just happen to have their skirts flipped up around their waist. This attention represents an effort to give art historical validation to present styles and content. A pertinent example of this art historical bolstering, and one that is revealing as to the sources of his misogyny, is Salle's choice of "appropriation" in Black Bra (1983) in which a real, large, black brassiere hangs off of a peg attached to a large image of a Cezanne-like bowl of apples.

As Meyer Schapiro's "The Apples of Cezanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-life" illuminates, still-lifes provided Cezanne with a method of self-control, a "self-chastening process."<sup>34</sup> "I paint still-lifes. Models frighten me. The sluts are always watching to catch you off your guard. You've got to be on the defensive all the time and the motif vanishes."<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Cezanne's early paintings of nudes are anxious, uncontrolled, and violent, as the thick, gloppy brush marks demonstrate. Through painting careful arrangements of "perfectly submissive things" that have "latent erotic sense,"<sup>36</sup> Cezanne achieves self-possession, possession of the object of desire, and control of his medium. Needless to say, the comparison between Salle and Cezanne invited by Salle's appropriation of the apples goes no further than the original misogyny. Cezanne was able to arrive at a restructured vision of erotic struggle in which the original violence is transcended and the link between sexuality and death is addressed beyond the target of female flesh. In short, Cezanne grew up.

But, by his quoting of Cezanne, Salle only links himself to the master's subjugation of the uncontrollable forces of sexuality and death incarnated by man in woman. By positing the art work as being about the self-consciousness of the artist in relation to art history he deflects the perception of its content for what it is -- misogyny, narcissism, impotence. To condemn that content is to betray misunderstanding of the whole purpose, which seems to be a continuation of a male conversation which is centuries old, to which women are irrelevant except as depersonalized projections of man's fears and fantasies, and in which even a man's failure is always more important than a woman's success. In Laura Mulvey's formulation "the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious

is two-fold, she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of a penis and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end, it does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack."<sup>37</sup>

If, in a painting as in a dream, all the elements can be seen to represent the artist's psyche, then Salle is the upside-down nude impaled as well as the rubber-tipped Cane. The identification with martyrdom indicates that the artist is subjugating the woman in himself. In subjugating woman who, historically, is linked with painting as muse, model, and embodiment of sensuality, he is suppressing the painter in himself. Perhaps he is conquering fears about his virility, for "the victim of rape is not inclined to question the virility of her assailant."<sup>38</sup>

To some extent this essay was suggested by a male artist who explained to me that Salle's work was not misogynist but was a coded message to other men of his own impotence. Well, like the little girl in the old cartoon, "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it." Whatever the message is -- be it homoeroticism, self-hatred, suicidal fantasy -- the "desecration" of woman is Salle's expressive vehicle, his "code."

The painting What is the Reason for Your Visit to Germany (1984), which could also be titled "Bend Over Baby, While I Quote Jasper Johns," seems a temporary summation of Salle's constant themes. In one panel a naked woman bends over, her breasts dangling as she performs for the artist and the spectator. The word "fromage" is written across the center of the panel, at the very least indicating the condescending relationship of photographer to child, "say Cheese," certainly a reference to "Cheesecake," maybe a derogatory reference to the very smell of her sex. A companion panel of a lead covered saxophone provides a phallic bulge and a competitive allusion to an older master. Over the woman is drawn, twice, the image of Lee Harvey Oswald being shot; once, so that the physical resemblance to Salle himself is immediately apparent, and then again as his head explodes into paint.

We see in this one painting a conflation of Salle's humiliation of woman, his glamorization and martyrdom of the assassin/artist, as he links woman, death, and paint.

A vicarious suicide, David Salle savages woman rather than savage himself. This is considered appropriate sexuality, and this is a source of his market value.

I researched and wrote the first draft of this essay in the spring of 1984. The Art Index entries under SALLE, DAVID were then, and are now, composed almost totally of supportive presentations and exegeses of his position. Articles critical of him are few and timid in their scope. There are none that are critical from a clearly feminist point of view. My article could be endlessly updated to include analyses of recent writings on Salle but the balance of opinion is unchanged.

Some have questioned my use of the word "cunt" to describe female genitalia. I do so advisedly. It is the word that best describes what Salle paints, and it is a word that he himself does not shun.

I have limited my focus to Salle's depiction of women and to the treatment of that depiction by critics, that is to say I have scrutinized only his subject matter. I have not addressed myself to issues of quality or style. If the question is asked "is David Salle a 'good' artist?", I can answer that I feel that he is very good at what he does, which is the manipulation and juxtaposition of appropriated images and styles. It is crucial to offer a critique of his imagery because he is so effective in his presentation of it, because he is a critical and a financial success, and because his work and his career have epitomized a system of art practices and theories that dominate this decade..

October, 1986

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## LES IMMATERIAUX: Long-term Effects of the Exhibition

JOHANNA DRUCKER

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Les Immateriaux was an exhibition staged at the Centres Georges Pompidou in Paris from March until July of 1985, organized and supervised by Jean-Francois Lyotard. I saw the exhibit in April.

Imagine going to the Exploratorium with one of those damn French intellectuals talking in your ear the whole time, running a kind of theoretical gloss over the full range of gadgets which can be allowed to pass for technology. At every turning of a knob, fiddling of a dial, investigation of the beam of a laser, sound of a synthesizer, or sniff of an artificial 'natural' flavor, the running narrative would emphasize your lack of choice or control over those larger systems being evidenced by these devices and by the roles circumscribed within their social place and function by the conceptual bases on which they had been brought into being. This essentially structuralist sensibility (and unfortunately most of the more interesting poststructuralist rethinkings of the ways in which these systems get conceptualized were missing from this exhibition) in its most reductive form has a totalitarian inevitability to its tone. One of the little alcove stations on the labyrinthine track through the exhibit hit the spectator over the head with its simplicity, just to be sure the message was clear: stepping over one square after another in a checkerboard pattern of rug activated by a ceiling light while the text in the headphones declared: 'You are what you are by your place in the code.' The heavy-handedness of this particular piece only made more obvious the problems which plagued the exhibit on theoretical and material levels -- though its ambition and pretentiousness caused a strong enough immediate reaction to evoke an articulated response even now, six months later.

The intention of the exhibition, deduced from the show itself and the few bits of writing and interview material in which Lyotard's ideas were put forth, seemed to be to demonstrate the extent to which the technological capacity to reproduce the 'real' in systems which 'represent it' actually questions an aesthetic which is based upon their distinction (basically, the aesthetics which underlies all of Western art, literature, etc.)

The technological capacity to reproduce the 'real' raises questions about the extent to which representation comes to take a primary position in that experience, capable of displacing the so-called real itself. But, to put it very reductively, do synthetic skin, apple scent, and holograms replace the

original article? Do they really generate an aesthetic which challenges the so-called genuine articles? Or do they only pose the question of the conceptual categories each occupies so that the representations come to function as their own system.

However, the idea of 'immateriality' which underlay the exhibit did not seem to be the immateriality of those representational surrogates for the supposedly genuine items of the 'real'. The 'immateriality' is instead the conceptual realm, and invoking this term as an overall title to this presentation points toward the privileging of the theoretical, rather than material, aspects. The conceptual bases on which we function, individually, as part of a particular culture in a particular historical moment, are being changed by the evolution of technologies which have implications for the way we construct and live our lives -- especially in the ways in which the systems of representation -- language, images, etc. -- are the basis of a certain conceptual framework for that existence. It is with the structure and function of these 'immortal' dimensions that the exhibit proposed itself to be concerned.

The exhibition was constructed as a maze framed up by industrial screening in which there were distinct areas of focus and definition. The entrance was guarded by an Egyptian relief showing a goddess giving the 'sign of life' to an Egyptian pharaoh. At the very gates, then, the motif of the exhibition was set: systems of representation will be examined as the 'signs' of lived experience, and the 'artifacts' which belong to or are produced by those systems will constitute the evidence serving as the basis for certain conclusions. Exactly what these conclusions are and the way they relate to this evidence is made clearer to the spectator by the texts, cued electronically, from small broadcast units, each located to be audible within a limited range. Moving from one spot to another in the maze, alcove to alcove, one hears fragments of Artaud, Barthes, Mallarme, Beckett -- the allstars of French literature, philosophy, or its critical enquiry. The ethnocentrism of the exhibit is so strongly apparent that it is no doubt invisible to the French themselves, who, by the precise alignment of the tone/texts/vocabulary with current French intellectual idiom, no doubt take as universal not only the ideas but the basis of their formulation. The fact that a critical position is precisely situated within a particular ideology is taken so much for granted as to be left unremarked upon, and the delivery of the texts, disembodied voices speaking to (through) the viewer, give the 'insightful' quality of their content a sinister tone. No authors' names, no references, are cited (except in the catalogue) and so the texts really 'speak themselves' with a tone of absolute authority -- the relentless 'this is' of the omniscient voice.

The regular reader of Tel Quel or the mass of critical literature produced by the powerful French intellectual industry, especially since the

1960s, would not only recognize the texts, but have a curious sense of the *deja-vu* at the exhibit as a whole. Isn't this already all terrifically familiar? Banal almost? Cliched? Isn't the exhibit a parody, a caricature of what seemed like a radical position when it was posed by Barthes as the 'end of humanism,' 'death of the author,' in such a way that the idea of the dominating power of linguistic and other representational systems worked its way into a primary theoretical position? But didn't this position also serve as the basis of a critical investigation which took orthodox structural linguistics as the foundation of a method applied across a wide range of areas and disciplines which were forced into correspondence with this method until finally it was the critical inquiry which had to become recognized as the subject of those investigations instead of its supposed objects? But if there is really, as there seemed to be on one level, nothing new in all of this, then why the exhibition? For the benefit of the 'masses'? That group which is the very substance of the image invoked by the term 'La Republique', itself so completely, characteristically French? And if it was for the 'people' then was its purpose, as its overwhelmingly didactic tone implied, to teach? To enlighten? To take the ordinary mind from some uninformed, slumbering state to a state of informed awareness? To an awareness of the conditions in which one functions? 'You are what you are by the place in the code.' Incitement to riot, routine, or resignation?

Or was there something new? Certainly it's 'new' to see an exhibition organized by an intellectual with a group of consultants who were also intellectuals, part of the generation which broke their milk teeth digesting the work of Barthes, Lacan, and Foucault. But the 'masters' were never so limitedly orthodox nor so prescriptive as these latter-day disciples seem to be. Has the descriptive problematics which questioned the conceptual basis of discourse in the process of conceiving it been replaced by a more rigid orthodoxy which takes description for analysis and the evident for the inevitable? It is hard to forget, looking at the exhibition, that its organizer is the author of a new book titled Les Post Moderns and hard not to suspect that in the exhibit itself lies the expression of the critical formulation of this postmodern sensibility.

Appropriation would have to be one of the strongest features of that sensibility -- different from a modernist appropriation in which collage, montage, made use of materials in a way which privileged their materiality, made it primary as subject matter as well as the basis of an aesthetic breaking free from the narrower material sensibility which had always dominated the fine arts and made a tight distinction between the materials of representation and its referential objects, between the image of materials and their actuality. But the appropriation of Postmodernism has the glib effect of levelling the specificity of materials, texts, artifacts, by removing them from any context. In its way this Postmodernism is based on a kind of

essentialism, which assumes the object simply is what it is, in itself, by itself, containing in its actuality the full force of an identity which may suggest a history we all agree to as a fictional construct anyway, but the objects lose their specificity quickly in these circumstances, and the collection becomes an exhibition of the decorative surfaces of objects -- of their evident identity, so that only the obvious features remain significant. As the texts are authorless, so the objects are contextless, and finally are more about standing for something than about really being something. Their role is representative, characteristic, rather than defined and pinpointed. Obviously this is in direct contradiction to the original structuralist propositions in which value was defined by use and the place of an element in a finite system of which it was a discrete functional part. So, this eclectic selection of items -- from Cezanne and Kandinsky paintings to a bunch of (mostly not working) computers with narrative trees and games contained in a program designed for 'interaction' (is the choice of one of two options, each equally fixed within a single moment of division, a choice?) reduces them all to miscellany. The inherent implication in this 'essentialiam' is that the objects are to be read literally, that what they present is sufficient as the field of investigation. Any context or system of which they partake is a surplus, essentially fictional, and rooted in the kind of system dependence which characterized earlier orthodox structuralism. Why then does this structuralism seem to display itself with such force throughout this exhibit? And how is it to be taken, except literally-- by returning to the show the same critical view which it has placed upon the objects within its domain.

Peculiarly enough, the mechanisms, the cultural operations, within which these artifacts and their conceptual categories are produced are never pointed out, never addressed, and the real issues inherent in the current state of 'invention' are not even named. Indeed, the articulation of a Postmodern sensibility may well legitimize this levelling in the name of a structuralist precedent with which it is actually in contradiction (since it was never the intention, for instance of Saussure, to imply that the langue which was culturally based precluded a validly individual parole by dominating all instances of speech by the rules governing their production). Such a Postmodern perspective ignores the poststructuralist problematizing of the too narrow, too determinative vision of structuralism itself, proposing a position in which value is merely decorative. If imitation of a natural scent which precisely mimics a natural scent is supposed to invalidate the distinction between representation and its real referent, to collapse the difference on which mimesis, as a rhetorical strategy anchored in verisimilitude, is based, then how can it possibly be useful except in the most negative capacity in which it forces us, me, to a rejection of that formulation? I am not what I am by my place in the code --any more than

my specificity is already contained within the set of possibilities which are the norm or than my speaking, writing, is already spoken, written, by the system of language of which I make use. Yes, I am circumscribed to a great extent in my thinking, speaking, even being, by those norms -- but my specificity and the specificity of my object, artifact, text, lies in the fact that its existence is an actual deviance, an aberration. Just as the structuralist enterprise had to go searching through the field of poetics in order to find a fertile ground to investigate the poetic substance in linguistic form, and just as a poststructuralist inquiry was necessary to reveal the prejudices inherent in the structuralist formulation, revealing its biases and framing it within its own conceptual limitations, themselves already circumscribed, defined and limited by the specificity of the cultural and historical moments in which they had their origin -- so, the formulation of a position in which the contemporary state of the culture can be somehow made apparent -- a tricky enterprise at best -- seems to require at least some recognition of the broader implications of this technological gadgetry -- not for itself, not as objects and artifacts, but as suggestive evidence of a far more complex issue than the equation of 'real' and 'artificial' value.

If the success of the artifice is meant to challenge our notion of the 'real' then it must do so within the conceptual framework in which it exists as a category distinct from the 'artificial' or represented, and all of the ramifications which follow from that distinction. This is not, it should be mentioned at least in passing, the same crisis of a difference whose structuring principle is at the basis of the sign. Signifier/signified linked in a relation of presence and absence such that the ultimate signified is Being itself, in the Derridian formulation, so that the only escape from this position is to address the process of difference itself, rather than the two opposed terms which are linked by it. No, this distinction of real and artificial is a crisis of the sign and its referent, of the idea of the relation of a 'real' to the system of signification such that the sign is assumed to stand for something else -- not a signifier standing for a conceptual signified, but as word stands for thing, not an idea.

So the Postmodern problem seems to hinge upon this relation of systems of representation to an assumed real not dependent on any system or signifying structure. This explains the de-contextualization and de-historicization of artifacts and the assumption that they bear their history, and that there is a reciprocal interchangeability between things and signs. But the basic flaw in all of this is that the assumption is false. For even if an imitation can operate functionally as the thing it imitates, it comes to be a thing itself, not the same thing. Its status is not as a sign, but as a functional object. Artificial skin is neither real skin nor a sign for it, but a synthetic substitute capable of performing certain limited functions as a surrogate. Life is not a text and things are not signs and representation through which we function, socially, individually, culturally exist, they do,

by their form, influence the organization and processing of experience through and in, representation. It is the structure of those systems of representation, and their changes and shifts and the alteration of conceptual categories which are implied by their reinvention which is the legitimate field of inquiry, the urgent and suggestive field of inquiry. For even if we depend, to a greater or lesser extent, upon the constructions (some might say the fictions) which are imposed upon us by these representational systems for a sense of history, culture, and identity as they are negotiated in the process of the use of these representational modes, we are affected, not in a McCluhanesque determinative way, but in a Lacanian symbolic sense, by the changes in the way we invent ourselves in those systems and the ideas they provide us with as information/image. Even the sense that representation is stable enough to be examined is open to question given the degree to which an electronically recorded trace (and here a Derridian reading would be appropriate and add a dimension to this discussion) is vulnerable to a continual reinvention and replacement and, seems to have a powerfully suggestive impact upon notions of history, culture, and identity which themselves are grounded in trace(s) as a natural articulation. If this seems closer to a Modernist sensibility than a Postmodern position, it is certainly an attitude processed through both a structuralist and a post-structuralist analysis. If the term Postmodern has come to describe a kind of stagnant pool in which no forward momentum can be envisioned, only a return to history as a field of fragments and artifacts available for re-use, when the only possibilities of invention are in recombination out of (literally in the sense of moving from) old possibilities, then the proposition for a synthetic position in which some other vision of the contemporary situation could be conceived would have to find itself another term.

The misconceptions of the Postmodern sensibility are too limited to be worth a reworking, and a different field of inquiry, under the name Metamodernism, implying a continuation of and synthesis from all that is and was inherent in Modernism, including structuralism and its derivatives and descendants, is what is proposed. The foundation of this position would be a strong sense of the necessity to articulate precisely the conceptual strategies inherent in representational systems and their distinct relation to the named categories of both the 'real' and the 'conceptual' order of activity, and a strong insistence on the infinite variety and high specificity of each and every statement, event, and artifact as an item whose individuality is guaranteed by the system from which it is an isolated instance. While the full plenitude of such a position has yet to be articulated, the necessity to do so is evident precisely because of the kinds of traps and deceptions so easily perpetrated by a rhetoric which is willing to confuse objects and their representations, signs, and things, and to bereft us of the richness which a highly specific system of articulation can use to negotiate an individual and cultural endeavor.

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## PORFIRIO DIDONNA : In Memory

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### Porfirio DiDonna, 1981

Porfirio. Negative spaces establish the surface. There is almost no surface yet it is penetrated. One never sees into the light, one never establishes the surface. One sees the light. If the light is depth, then the light is fronted lit surface. It is then something frontal to the viewer. The viewer sees through it.

Porfirio makes negative spaces, this is the psychological content. When it arrives at a state of value, the value is perceived, and the painting is released. The value, not that the surface has longer to be held, is when the place of the element establishes itself so firmly that the element doesn't need to be there. Beyond the elements into light in negative space.

Porfirio paints through resistance. Porfirio establishes a hierarchy which resists.

Porfirio nails down (Technique). The points of light say "this is where I must be."

Porfirio, building up, establishes the outside light as the manufacturer of drawn space. Competition, cooperation, between the lights creates the surface, a completion.

Porfirio. Shape that is transparent.

Porfirio. Drawing executes/completes, the painting.

Porfirio separates the drawing and the painting. Porfirio finds painting in finding drawing in relation to the shape (of light) already there.

\*

Porfirio's light, is a dark light with/in the depth. And a "light" up front. From in back and in front this latter light is lit twice.

When the rectangles of light move, the painting flows across: the light holds the elements away from the center. The movement with in the painting is its

narrative limit, its action.

The ground comes forward based on the intervals between the light. The ground is then forward in the light.

The dots punctuate the painting in temporal conclusion. The shapes hold the punctuating dots to this assertion.

Texture also picks out light. Light in texture makes of the painting, of paint, an object.

A movement of the light in one direction motivates in reverse a movement of the background.

(This) painting makes the invisible visible. The painting is not made "invisible."

ALAN DAVIES

*A memorial service was held for Porfirio DiDonna at the New York Studio School on October 17, 1986. DiDonna died in the summer, from cancer; he was 44. The following two excerpts are from statements read at the service.*

Honest paintings are neither for or against the world, honest paintings quite simply are, and in that areness, loved or not, will always be. Pro's paintings will always be, for Pro was not just an artist, though a fine artist he was, Pro was a painter, an honest painter. Pro's life, the core of his being, centered around, was painting, and for those who love painting, the art of painting, he left many fine and beautiful things.

JAKE BERTHOT

Some of the things I want to say about Pro are true of all painters, but he represented these things in a clear way.

When I first met Pro he showed me how to make black oil, which was not only a Renaissance technique for binding pigment invented by Giorgione, but a revelation to me about all old painting and how it was made, and why it looked the way it looked.

For Pro technique was a way to reach expression. He thought in all things and in painting that the approach ought to be indirect, that the persona should be filtered. So he was always preoccupied with how he was going to make a particular painting, and was always cooking or mixing or preparing his canvases in a new way, with a kind of mad scientist or sorcerer's intent: he would get feverish at the sight of a book of formulas for painters. I think

he felt that by focusing on these other things he could create a vehicle for the spirit and the mystery of the painting which then could come out automatically through a miraculous combination of elements.

He was fascinated with techniques in an alchemical way, the intention being to transform matter into spirit, and he had a particular understanding of the protocol, both personally and professionally, for such an enterprise, because he had an awesome respect for it and for others involved in the same pursuit. And he never wavered.

LEE SHERRY

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## From the NOTEBOOKS OF RENE SANTOS

*edited by BRAD BAKER and ANN SCHOENFELD  
introduction and translation by ANN SCHOENFELD*

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René Santos was born into a wealthy Puerto Rican family in 1954. He left Puerto Rico to attend college first in St. Louis, then in Boston. Soon after graduating he moved to New York. He died in New York in May 1986 after a short fight against AIDS.

Santos steeped himself in intellectual culture throughout his life: he read all the time -- anything philosophical, aesthetic, or literary; listened to music incessantly; and made art during it all. He aligned himself conceptually first with Semiotics, then Structuralism, and eventually Poststructuralist theory, so as one might expect, his art addressed the unavoidable "social construction of representation." But theory ended at some point and in its place a gap left him confronting the problematic situation of how to reconcile the potential tyranny of the discourse with what you know is more important: the instant intuition of meaning, the feeling of immediate pleasure. He answered himself by continuing to paint because it felt good.

Santos died 5 months after a modest one-man show at NYU's Grey Art Gallery, 4 months after an ambitious group show at the New Museum, 3 months after his one-man show at Feature Gallery (Chicago) and his first one-man exhibition as a member of Diane Brown Gallery's (NY) stable, 2 weeks before the opening of another gallery's group exhibition, and 1 month before the opening of the Venice Biennale where he was one of six artists chosen to represent the U.S. in the exhibition's Aperto section.

What follows are fragments from a journal that René kept from at least 1978 onwards. He wrote in it infrequently, just whenever he wanted to pin down a thought or transcribe onto his own pages a quote from someone else's pages.

When the invitations for the grand reception in my studio came back, observing my name in bold Garamond letters, I was explaining to my friend the horror (experienced as paranoia) of seeing my name in print. As if I was seeing myself in the mirror for the first time or as if I was violating someone else's copyright.

My friend responded -- "But what you describe happens to everyone."

"If indeed it happened to everyone, expressionism would not exist," I thought fearing deep inside that maybe I was an expressionist after all.

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Aesthetic -- function of time -- the older an artwork gets, the more its meaning will seem to depend on aesthetic information.

Seeing, experiencing a work of art, aesthetically, is a way of taming it. It places its import on an intuition of the Self. It subordinates it, completely entraps it within this center -- the self-generator of self-referential meaning.

Aesthetics -- an accomplice of market system, and the most effective inoculation available against artistic schizophrenia.

#### Aesthetics vs. Schizophrenia

"What's new is something else. That the value in itself, the autonomous value, of the aesthetic wasn't asserted so often in the past, at least in the Western past, doesn't mean that we're permitted to keep on doing the same. We've eaten of the Tree of Knowledge. The more ruthless examination and cross-examination of inner experience, the more searching introspection, that have gone with the advance (if it can be called that) of rationality have shown well enough that the aesthetic is an intrinsic, ultimate, and autonomous value." -- Clement Greenberg

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I proceed by setting up contradictions. It is very difficult to state procedure since it implies totality and the work presents itself through the juxtaposition of fragments. These very fragments -- the individual pieces themselves -- are composed of other fragments. The groupings are essentially arbitrary,

the totality, that is, the sense of totality subverted by an organizational logic appropriated from a realm outside of art but not outside of aesthetics: Dog Show: Pure Breeds

Genus = Dog -- difference within sameness

---

presentation and negation -- in a logical contradiction existing in purely visual terms.

*lo contrario no es lo inverso.*  
the opposite is not the inverse.

to dominate, but not with certainty of closure.

*eliminación y constitución del sentido*  
elimination and constitution of meaning

---

*En el quehacer del arte teoría y método son la misma cosa.*  
In the task of art, theory and method are the same thing.

*La pintura, con sus diferentes tiempos concordantes, en lo real debe de existir en el tiempo de la especulación. El estallido de la sorpresa estética debe prolongarse en la energía nerviosa de la pregunta.*

The painting, with its different concordant times, that which is real must exist in a time of speculation. The sudden burst of aesthetic surprise must extend itself in the nervous energy of the question.

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Problema del lenguaje  
Problem of language

*Es posible que una forma de expresión diga algo falso aun cuando tomado como proposición indique algo cierto.*

It's possible that a form of expression says something false although it's taken as a proposition that indicates something certain.

"Was it seeing or was it thought?"

*El arte mira al arte como arte.*  
Art looks at art as art.

*El arte está por encima de la naturaleza porque es la naturaleza misma.*  
Art is above nature because it is itself nature.

*Lo inconsciente: sujeto no determinado --*

*El interval -- Espacio de la ruptura -- El no, uno que tampoco es completo*  
The unconscious: undetermined subject --  
The interval -- space of the rupture -- The no, neither is it complete.

*El caminar del inconsciente es una escoba que borra de la conciencia.*

Moving along the unconscious is a broom that sweeps away the conscious.

"The object of aesthetics is the perfection of sensory cognition as such and  
this is beauty."

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## RIVET, LIVELY FOR BEING ITSELF

a. Portraiture      b. Atmosphere

MIMI GROSS

1. Could be simpler (r) :  
Leaves, in layers of space.  
Researching

New York/Florence.

Then  
Cubism  
Byzantine

Also, classicism seen  
Curtained frames  
Onto inconclusive vistas.

2. In a linear/flash  
Say, ultramarine  
vermilion  
Volume between narrative parts,  
(As in cheeks)  
Familiar from known  
Or picture books

3. Out of brushes:  
Expressionism  
Draws,  
Saws,  
Figures; colored moving,  
Tactile materials,  
Intending  
To  
Make  
It  
Up  
(From) scratch,  
Between  
Laminated  
Atmospheres.

4. Years find  
Dimensions re/sorted,  
Variety.

We gather flowers  
For fully colored rooms.

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## RUNNING ON EMPTY: An Artist's Life in New York

SUSAN BEE

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"You need to build up your stamina."  
"Paint larger paintings."  
"You need a larger studio."  
"Move downtown."  
"Rent a basement space."  
"Simplicity."  
"Just paint; don't think so much."  
"You have too many ideas."  
"Your work is too complex."  
"You painted this?"  
"I like the way everything is painted but the area under the chair."  
"The images are great."  
"It's humanist and psychological."  
"It's not narrative enough."  
"Put \$50 more paint on the canvas."  
"Use bigger brushes."  
"I like everything but the hair."  
"They're very handsome."  
"I like them but I can't use them."  
"They're quite interesting."  
"They're not for us."  
"Come back in six months."  
"Is this a painting of The Flood?"  
"I get it -- it's about the blending of cultures that we all live with everyday."  
"These should be more well-known."  
"They're really funny."  
"Don't be bitter."  
"The brushwork is not aggressive enough."  
"These may be too political."  
"We're booked up right now."  
"Call us in a few months."  
"Your work is a jumble."  
"This painting is clearly the culmination of your work."  
"Do you do works on paper?"  
"Is all your work that size?"  
"I like everything but the background."

"You could paint even bigger."  
"What's that supposed to mean?"  
"How much is it?"  
"Are these realistic?"  
"Paint ten more like that."  
"Don't call us we'll call you."  
"Come back when you've got more."  
"Your time will come."  
"Don't be discouraged."  
"Too many colors."  
"Loosen up."  
"Don't believe what dealers tell you."  
"At least you're working."  
"It takes time."  
"Don't be impatient."  
"You're not ambitious enough."  
"Your slides are lost."  
"Your work's too personal."  
"Don't believe what other artists tell you."  
"Why don't you paint on the other wall?"  
"Too much sexual imagery."  
"You're still painting?"  
"It's narrative and nonnarrative at the same time."  
"Of course, your hand will develop in ten years."  
"I get it now."  
"So where do you want to show?"  
"He can't sell anything."  
"Where do you get those images?"  
"Send me your slides."  
"I like your old work better."  
"Come back when you've got six more."  
"Keep working."  
"Just ignore the outside world."  
"Go to more openings."  
"Introduce yourself to her."  
"I'll recommend you."  
"It's too lyrical."  
"I get it."  
"I don't get it."  
"Use your whole arm."  
"These seem big enough."  
"Just keep working -- something will happen."  
"Oh."

*All quotes verbatim.*

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## MOTHER BASEBALL

VANALYNE GREEN

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"Did it ever occur to you," I recently asked a friend, "that baseball is played on the landscape of the female body?"

"Yeah, sure," he responded, "all those little men in the middle of a big womb, trying to inseminate the field with their balls, yeah. But you can't reduce it to that, you know."

Oh yes I can, I thought. Why not? Men do it. Baseball, they say, is America; or baseball is the individual versus the universe; baseball is statistics and ordering. Why can't baseball be seen as a pagan spectacle about the cycles of birth and death? Seasonal contests to promote fertility and the ripening of crops underlie most primitive ritual. The word pagan originates with the Latin *pagus*, or country -- something to think about when sportswriters reminisce about baseball's pastoral beginnings.

Mother baseball. I enjoy speculating about its bloody beginnings as a fertility rite. Funny that with all the verbiage about the sport no one mentions the obvious structural relationship between a baseball stadium and a womb: in design, a stadium is both a circle and a "Y," two notorious female symbols. The curved and sloping shape of the stands is like a plush endometrium in which we fans cozy up to watch a lone batter square off against the universe. In the bowels of the mother, her reassuring presence presides over our humble attempts to reconcile the desire to live forever with hard, brutal facts.

But I do not worship at the altar of the Great Goddess. Unlike some feminists, I don't write *wommin* for *women* just to get rid of "men," and I'm not a member of a coven. The remarkable likeness that a baseball stadium bears to a womb means little in and of itself. But 50,000 people sitting in a monolithic uterus is an interesting notion to contemplate. I especially like to think about that when announcers describe players' bats as fast, corked, dead, quiet, live, or as loaded barrels -- and pitches as high hard ones.

\*

I went to my first game two years ago, at Yankee stadium. I hiked up the concrete ramps that encircle the stands and as I came out into the open, I saw a beautiful canyon of green, summer green, and light, the way it is at dusk, filling the basin of that space. And it was as if I'd just discovered a secret, but a secret that everyone else knew and took for

granted. Why hadn't anyone told me?

Going to Yankee stadium was a more important experience than visiting the Grand Canyon -- a fact that has to do with representation and with being a woman. I grew up with textbook photos and tourist snapshots of the Grand Canyon, so when I went there I wasn't moved. The potential shock of its grandeur had been diffused by countless two-dimensional representations; the real thing was like a living postcard. But as a woman not steeped in the history and culture of baseball, going to the game was a revelation. I didn't know its visual terms; I could possess it for myself for the first time.

I've since concluded that being female actually predisposes me to get more value for the price of my admission ticket. Unlike those men who were raised in the game and are more prone to associate it with their own oedipal struggles, I am freer to rethink its structure. Baseball can be the remnants of a sacrificial rite or it can reflect the nation's regressive, nationalistic mood. It can be a postindustrial outlet for cramped urban workers. Or baseball can be, as one woman friend describes it, an aesthetically pleasing opportunity to look at handsome men who don't talk back.

It should come as no surprise that baseball, of all American sports, draws so many female fans. First, baseball historically has attracted marginal people. Crazies. And women are, after all, marginal themselves -- an economic and social underclass. Also the structure of the game involves elements traditionally associated with women: oral history, story-telling, and gossip. And although baseball has its own arcane language (for example, the box score), it's more accessible than football is because the slow pace of the game provides announcers with the time to call up relevant historical and strategic information.

At Yankee stadium, I sit in the "Little Tripoli" section, which is behind home plate in the upper decks. This is where the fanatics congregate, the ones glassy-eyed from the recitation of statistics. Sportswriters are critical of the sometimes dangerous antics of the fans. I certainly don't like the sexism and occasional mean-spiritedness. Yet compared to Manhattan -- which is increasingly drained of its neighborhoods and ethnicity by gentrification and corporate hegemony -- I find the unabashedly tribal rites at the stadium to be revivifying. I'm amused when men in suits and ties are told to go back to Wall Street where they belong. During the Yankees/Red Sox game, in which Clemens walloped the Yankees, a comatose Little Tripoli fan stripped, then twirled his clothes over his head and threw them out into the fans, I understood: defrocked, humiliated, and demoralized, he was acting out for all of us.

Family. Membership in the sports club is a calling card anywhere the language of sport is spoken. Being conversant breaks down sexual

boundaries. To my surprise, most men have welcomed me into that circle where arcane memories of former heroes, great plays, and Freudian dramas are reenacted. And if I don't talk to them about mother baseball, that's all right; I'm a spy in the house that Ruth built.

\*

Watching baseball is an opportunity to decipher the now illegible handwriting of matriarchal culture.

In 1937, an Italian scholar, Gorrado Gini, traveled to North Africa to study a tribe of blond-haired Berbers. The blond strain was believed to be descended from Nordic invaders who had come to North Africa in the Stone Age. Gini was an Americanophile; he noticed that the Berbers played a game that was a remarkable mixture of elements resembling American baseball and earlier forms of European "baseball" (often called "cat" from catapult). The Berbers called their game "the ball of the mother of the pilgrim." When a batter struck out, they said he was "rotten," and "moldy." Considering this in light of the fact that in the Scandinavian game upon which baseball is based, players that were safe were called "fresh" may lend some credibility to the notion that baseball originated as a ritual battle between dying winter and a burgeoning spring.

In the Berber game the runner's base is called "mother;" in the earliest games the batters were on the "father's side." Compare this with a related game, called "egg-carrying," which was played by women on the Estonian island of Runo. The ball represented seed and was placed in holes in the ground.

At first glance, contemporary American baseball, with its media coverage, advertising revenues, and millionaire players, appears to have wiped out all traces of primeval ritual. But this is not so. Consider the "rundown." A rundown is a kill; there is no other moment like it in baseball. It occurs when a runner is on second, say, and follows a batted ball, such as a ground ball to short. He heads to third, but the ball arrives first, having been picked up and thrown by either the short stop or the outfielder. The runner heads back to second, but by now he's caught in a rundown. His only chance, almost always futile, is to try and beat the throws going back and forth and closing in on him. He will do anything -- cheat, look ridiculous, even spastic, run like a doomed animal -- to avoid the tag. His motions are wild, out of control, and a disturbing contrast to most of the otherwise routinized, repetitive gestures of the game.

Getting thrown "out" or being made a fool of (Daily News World Series coverage designated a "hero" and a "goat" for each game), continues to link baseball with rituals of sacrifice and scapegoating. Indeed the game of tag is "a survivor of rites going back to the labyrinth, to the scapegoat fool or sacrifice," according to Lucy Lippard. In Overlay she quotes Francis Huxley: "Tag is an 'endless game' that circulates the touch -- a kind of

infectiousness, reflected in a similar game in Madagascar where the chaser is called 'the leper.' He says that "children who end the day as 'it' are truly ill at ease, as if some racial memory of sacrificial victims operated." In this context, such words as "safe" and "out" take on special significance: baseball is a struggle between becoming *it* and returning home alive.

Modern baseball is a game of constantly shifting roles and signifiers, a delicate balance between randomness and order. It is a stage onto which we project our most primitive feelings about the seemingly random events that determine human fate.

A. Bartlett Giamatti, the president of the National League, illustrates baseball's ambiguities by analyzing the position of the catcher. Although playing defense, the catcher actually dictates the game by signaling to the pitcher what kind of pitches to throw. Further, his position behind the plate offers him the vantage point of the offense. Giamatti says that "part of the secretive, ruthless dimension of baseball, is the knowledge that an opposing player, crouching right behind him, signals wordlessly in order to exploit his weakness."

Since players are traded so often, it frequently occurs that a runner and a baseman know each other from a previous team. Yet later in their careers the two friends stand inches apart, each with the intention of causing his former teammate to lose.

Such a moment occurred in the sixth game of the 1986 playoff series between the Boston Red Sox and the California Angels. The game was characterized by miraculous turnarounds and history making plays. More important, the Angels had only to win this game to take the Pennant. During the 11th inning, Don Baylor reached first base when Donnie Moore's second pitch hit Baylor on the arm. His old friend and former teammate, Angel's player Bobby Grich, was playing first. "What do you think, Groove?" (Baylor's nickname).

Baylor turned to Grich and said, "This is the greatest game I've ever played in."

"Me too, partner," Grich replied.

If baseball is a game of surrogate kills, duels between men with clubs and men with rocks -- primitive in its barely veiled murderous gestures -- then moments such as this one may be interpreted as an astonishingly sentimental conversation between an executioner and his victim -- because someone has to lose.

\*

I have a diagram on my wall. It's a crude, stick-figure rendering of a baseball drill, printed in a guide for little league players. Looking at it, the tiny narrow line that marks the baseball paths becomes the edge of the world. It's so easy to fall off. Sometimes, I just let my eye follow the base

path, tracing all the things that can happen, like chapters in a novel or a person's life, from home plate and back around again.

A player is born when he steps into the batter's box. Once there, his job is to keep breathing. If the batter is able to foul off the ball on a count of two strikes, he is "still alive." He continues to live if he gets on base, where he enters the wilderness of the playing field.

On base, a batter is transformed into a runner. He struggles to stay alive for himself and his team (his species?). He is dependent upon his teammates to get him home. And if they don't, then he's "stranded," "abandoned," or "picked off."

The outfield is a black universe provoking the same endless contemplation of nature's mysteries that occurs when you look through a telescope. Consider the folklore surrounding the ball that was "hit into infinity." It was a home run that landed in a travelling truck on an adjacent freeway. It is still travelling, they say -- the longest home run in the world.

My eye continues, back to the figure coming home. But the purpose of the drill that's being illustrated is to show what happens when the runner misjudges the arm of the rightfielder throwing to home. He will be out. The ball sits in the catcher's glove, waiting. And that, surely, is the greatest tragedy, the most uneconomical of acts: to be thrown out at home plate.

And what is home, anyway? Home is a white surface in the shape of a house.

\*

It's winter, the baseball season is over, and I, as every other baseball fan, go into hibernation. But I'll put myself down with machinations about the coming rebirth. In the twilight between my waking consciousness and dead sleep, I'll ask myself if Lou Piniella will have the horses next year, a twirler on the mound who can get the job done. And about the St. Louis Cards? Will they finally overcome the fatal Dave Denkinger call during the 1985 World Series and come back and be the team they should be? Have they been punished enough for their hubris? Is it possible that Bill Buckner could redeem himself in 1987? As I begin to sleep, the stadium filters into a dreamscape. I see it as from an aerial photograph. It looks like a Robert Smithson earthwork. Claw marks on the earth for space visitors to decode? America's answer to Stonehenge? Mother baseball. To sleep. In April the sun will come out again, and I shall be there to watch men with clubs and seeds stand on a green pasture and coax the sun to stay out.

## Contributors

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Jake Berhot is a painter who lives in New York.

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Lee Sherry is a painter who lives on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

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