

Can't have difference without the other thing... Difference in repetition. - Cole

Where is the true red, yellow or blue? - Welsh

Of the Diagram: The Work of Marjorie Welsh

Edited by Aaron Levy and Jean-Michel Rabaté

Contemporary Artists Series, No. 2
Art / Poetry / Criticism

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The work of Marjorie Welsh

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Contributions by Kenneth Baker, Norma Cole, Carla Harryman, Gans & Jelacic Architecture and Design, Olivier Gourvil, Ron Janssen, Joseph Masheck, Bob Perelman, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Frances Richard, Osvaldo Romberg, Keith Tuma, Chris Tysh, and Thomas Zumner.

Work by Marjorie Welsh.

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REFERENCE MATTER

Contributors

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Deborah Gans and Matthew Jelacic are partners in the office Gans & Jelacic, Architecture and Design. Their work in the fields of industrial design and architecture has been exhibited at RIBA, London, IFA, Paris and the Van Alen Institute in New York City. Their recent investigation into disaster relief housing has won international awards and a grant for development from the Johnny Walker Fund. Both Gans and Jelacic are Professors in architecture at Pratt Institute in New York. Deborah Gans is the author of *The Le Corbusier Guide* (Princeton Architectural Press) and the editor of *The Organic Approach* (Architecture/ John Wiley-London, 2003).

Olivier Gourvil is a painter, working and living in Paris. He has edited publications including *Une Fois Une, 1993-96, review* (ed. ERBA Valence), *Tableau: Territoires Actuels* (ed. ERBA Valence/ Le Quartier Centre d'Art), and the online web site *Juste Une Image* (ed. Icono.org). He recently contributed to a special issue of *Abstractions* (Ligeia, sept, 2001). He currently teaches at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Valence in France. Recent solo exhibitions of his work include the ISP Center, New York (1999), the Ecole des Beaux-Arts du Havre (2000), Le Quartier, Centre d'art de Quimper (2003), and Espace Culture, Université de Lille (2003). He is represented by Galerie Corinne Caminade in Paris.

Carla Harryman's eleventh book, *Gardener of Stars*, is an experimental novel that explores the paradise and wastelands of utopian desire. Other works by Harryman include two volumes of selected writings, *There Never Was a Rose Without a Thorn* and *Animal Instincts: poetry, prose, and plays*. Her most recent play, *Performing Objects Stationed in the Sub World*, has been performed in Oxford, England, San Francisco, and Detroit. Recent essays

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Aaron Levy is Curator and Executive Director of Slought Foundation, an arts organization and archival resource, also available online (<http://slought.org>). He recently edited *Searching for Romberg*, essays on artist Osvaldo Romberg, and *Untitled (After Cinema)*, essays on photography and cinema (Slought Books, 2001 & 2002). He curated "Cities without Citizens" at the Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia, and co-edited a companion publication, as their 2003 artist-in-residence.

Joseph Masheck studied art history under Meyer Schapiro at Columbia and proceeded to the doctorate under Rudolf Wittkower and Dorothea Nyberg. A former editor-in-chief of *Artforum* (1977-80), he has taught at Columbia,

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Bob Perelman has published numerous books of poetry, recently *Ten to One: Selected Poems* (Wesleyan University Press, 1999) and *The Future of Memory* (1998); two critical books, *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* (1996) and *The Trouble With Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky* (1994); and has edited two books of poet's talks, *Writing/Talks* (1985) and *Hills Talks* (1980). Forthcoming is *Playing Bodies*, a painting/ poem collaboration with Francie Shaw (Granary Books, 2003). He is Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania.

Jean-Michel Rabaté, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania since 1992, has authored or edited twenty books on Modernism, Joyce, Pound, Beckett, Lacan, Derrida, psychoanalysis and literary theory. Among these, *Lacan in America* (2000), *Jacques Lacan: Psychoanalysis and the subject of literature* (2001), *James Joyce and the Politics of Egoism* (2001), and *The Future of Theory* (2002). He is the editor of the *Cambridge Guide to Jacques Lacan* (2003).

Osvaldo Romberg, an internationally renowned artist, was born in Buenos Aires in 1938. He is currently a professor at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Select exhibition venues include: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Kunstmuseum, Bonn; Ludwig Museum, Cologne; Sudo Museum, Tokyo; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; The Jewish Museum, New York; and the XLI Venice Biennial, Israel Pavilion. He recently curated shows on Faith at the Aldrich Museum and on Urbanism at White Box, New York. He was the subject of a 2001 Slought Foundation conference at the University of Pennsylvania, and a volume of critical essays, *Searching for Romberg* (Slought Books, 2001).

Keith Tuma is Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. He is the author of *Fishing by Obstinate Isles: Modern and Postmodern British Poetry and American Readers* (Northwestern UP, 1998), editor of the revisionist *Anthology of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry* (Oxford UP, 2001), and co-editor of *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* (National Poetry Foundation, 1998). Other essays on modern British, American, and Irish poetry and culture have appeared in numerous journals and book collections. Forthcoming work includes a special issue of the UK journal *The Paper* co-edited with David Kennedy and collecting texts on poetry and site-specific performance, the collaboratively-written experimental travelogue in the Bush entitled "Critical Path" (with cris cheek and Bill Howe), various essays on recent poetry, and possibly an as-yet untitled collection of poems and performance-texts.

Frances Richard is nonfiction editor of the literary journal *Fence*; a member of the editorial team at *Cabinet*; and a frequent contributor to *Artforum*. Her first book of poems, titled *See Through*, is forthcoming from Four Way Books in 2003. She teaches at NYU and Barnard College and lives in Brooklyn.

Chris Tysh, winner of the 2003 NEA Fellowship in poetry, teaches creative writing and women's studies at Wayne State University in Detroit. Her latest

book of poems is *Continuity Girl* (United Artists, 2000) and *Mother, I (fragment of a film script)* (Belladonna, 2002). Her poems, reviews and essays have recently appeared in *Chicago Review*, *Jacket*, *Lipstick Eleven*, *Chain*, *Metro Times*, *Poetry Flash* and *How²*, among others. She edits *mark(s)*, an online quarterly.

Marjorie Welish, a poet, painter and art critic, has contributed to several volumes on contemporary art. Her curriculum vitae is available in Section IV of this publication.

Thomas Zumner is a scholar, writer, curator and artist. His other publications include *Crash: Nostalgia for the Absence of Cyberspace* (with Robert Reynolds); *Rouen: Touring Machines/Intermittent Futures* (with Judith Barry and Brad Miskell); *What the Hell is That?* (a semi-fictional digital e-book); and "Projection and Dis/embodiment: Genealogies of the Virtual" in *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-1977*, Chrissie Iles (catalogue essay for the exhibition of the same name at The Whitney Museum of American Art). He is currently completing a study on the history of reference-systems entitled "Intercessionary Technologies: Archive/ Database/ Interface." Mr. Zumner has curated exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, Columbus, Ohio; Thread Waxing Space, New York; and the Katonah Museum of Art, New York. Mr. Zumner's drawings and sculptural works have been exhibited world wide. He currently teaches in the Critical Studies Department at New York University, and in the Transmedia Programme/ Postgraduate, at Hogeschool Sint-Lukas in Brussels, Belgium.

Introduction

Aaron Levy

"Axiom, carry out atmosphere!"

Since the late 1970s, as a poet, painter, and art critic, Marjorie Welish has cultivated a position of independence from fixed schools or tendencies and has premised her work on the relentlessly self-interrogative question: What needs to be done now? What would be an art in consequence of that question? The criticality evident in her answers joins demanding inquiry with clever playfulness (Richards). She has constructed grammars of reflexive lyricism, "thought forms having to do with possible paradigms."

Although Welish encourages re-thinking classifications and codifications ("Tables of Contents of course are apparatus; they are supplements to books in certain ways, and yet they legislate"), *Of the Diagram* orders contributions with the reader new to Welish's work in mind. It includes papers delivered at a one-day Slought Foundation symposium on Marjorie Welish, organized by Jean-Michel Rabaté and myself at the University of Pennsylvania in April 2002. (These presentations are available in audio format at Slought.org.)

Marjorie Welsh's recent canvases insist on subtle variations—easily overlooked—on the color yellow. In preparing *Of the Diagram*, we spent countless hours in search of digital equivalents for the elusive yellows of yellow. This process of formal differentiation quickly became my opportunity to engage Marjorie in wide-ranging, nuanced discussions revealing the singular complexity of her intellect. Where is the true yellow? Where is Marjorie Welsh? Our conversations led from curatorial practice to archival theory, from alternative art practices to alternative arts organizations. Yet, like her elusive yellows, or Mallarmé's witty extemporalizations that no member of his audience could ever quote, repeat, or reproduce, these conversations with Marjorie resist my attempts to systematically reproduce them.

By assembling art critics and literary theorists, poets and artists, architects and art historians, this collection of essays manifests the ongoing conversations in Welsh's work. Welsh often juxtaposes influences from disparate and unorthodox domains of cultural production. "Much of modern art," Sanford Kwinter reminds us, "stands or falls in relation to a single question: does it or does it not introduce complexity—the complexity of real things—into the domains of the work specifically and of aesthetics generally?" Contributors honor this impulse found in Welsh's work with their own multifaceted intelligibility. "Let's dig, therefore: art is excavation." (Rabaté)

I. Painting and Poetry

Yellow and...

Norma Cole

But this began with a question about yellow. Cadmium Yellow Light and Cadmium Yellow Lemon, what does it mean that they are both called yellow? In her Artist's Statement (undated) Welish speaks about her use of diptych "to announce that this physical difference will be realized also as formal difference." She writes, "Current projects also include paintings whose structure of difference presents two competing yellows, two competing reds and two competing blues, to ask the question: which is the 'true' one (the relative rather than the absolute condition of norms is thereby revealed.)"

About yellow, Goethe wrote in his *Theory of Colours*, "This is the colour nearest the light." And "In its highest purity it always carries with it the nature of brightness, and it has a serene, gay, softly exciting character." "Hence in painting it belongs to the illumined and emphatic side."

Color is a pan-species perception. Color discrimination is an activity in the brain. That is, in humans, it is dependent upon an underlying neural structure, a neural basis of sensation. It is not a cultural construction and does not depend on language. It is not solely a function of the wavelengths of light. It is not just a function of the atomic structure of the object. It is not

simply generated by light upon the object of perception. We humans have color constancy, which is to say we recognize a color as “the same” regardless of whether its wavelength is entirely changed by being seen in red sunlight or blue fluorescent light. Our experience of color is physical, cognitive, not a function of consciousness or of naming. Prior to the work of neuroscientists such as Maturana and Varela, Varela, Thompson and Rosch, color theorist and psychologist Faber Birren might have found this kin to, or a form of, eidetic imagery.

In the beginning I wanted to talk about the painting. However, without having seen, actually physically having seen, the paintings, I could not speak (write) about them.

One way to address both the painting impulse and the poetry impulse was to consider how Welsh has written about painting and use that writing as the journal work, the commonplace book, as her “other” for poetry. This would be an accommodation to both, as well as a speculation about sets of relationships or possible relationships.

In the beginning I thought I could talk about the painting and the poetry together, how they both find their origins in “a smudge, a dot, a line,” the “not very noble” “unpromising” initial and initiating expressions, “physically slight though they may be.”

All of this under the rubric of “yellow and...” our investigation of its absolute, relational, formal, compositional, eidetic and physical, neural qualities. Aural values, rhythmic values, translations?

The focus on competition in the repeated phrase “two competing yellows,” and so on, began to attract attention to itself. After all, Welsh could have expressed these relationships in more general terms of comparison, acts of

bringing together, *com*. “Comparison” is from *compare*, to speak of or represent as similar, to liken, making parallelisms that don’t quite match up; and Welsh was interested in difference. “Competition” is from *competere*, to fall together, coincide, come together. *Petere* itself is to fall upon, assail, aim at, make for, try to reach, strive after, sue for, solicit, ask or seek. In its post-classical sense it is to enter into or be put into rivalry with, to vie with another in any respect. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

Can’t have difference without the other thing. The repetition. Rhythm of repetition. Redundancy, even. Difference in repetition. It becomes interesting to frame or undermine these considerations of competitive relationality with a reading of the use of *simile* in Welsh’s poetry. Think of it: diptych and simile. There is something of the deep structure of comparison to be addressed here. And by “deep structure” I refer to work currently being done by linguists who are tracking simile not as the trivial poetic figure Williams scorned, a rhetorical gesture, a figure of speech—but as a fundamental neural, cognitive, epistemological tool.

A structure of finding out. (We’ll leave the metaphorical possibilities of “finding out” to George Lakoff and move on.) So we have the structure of comparison active as a questioning as well as compositional “idea of form” in the paintings, and we have the structure of comparison using the parallelism of simile as a means of composition in the poetry, through comparison, through composed. Simile in the most open sense: explicit or implicit parallel structure of like or as, often extended, unpleating image in rhythmicizing measure, for instance (from the title poem in *Casting Sequences*):

of actuality.

Of actual number, pale
and spelled in cold,

a contiguity defying visual markers of line, period, space, reiteration with difference, accumulating force in surprising acts of accretion and elimination. Do the terms compete?

The theory of tragedy, in this view, does not separate actor and spectator but extends indefinitely to the farmer walking behind his plough... ("Hymn to Life to Cliff," *Casting Sequences*)

"Logic through lyric is, arguably, intriguing"
("The Logics," *else, in substance*)

Yellow And....

Yellow pigments:
Ochre, transparent
gold ochre, raw
sienna, Mars yellow,
the cadmiums

From pale primrose to
deep
orange, a
wide assortment
of shades. Permanent for all
techniques but
fresco

Identical to cadmium
reds insofar as
pigment properties and
permanence are concerned

Naples yellow, strontium
yellow, cobalt yellow, hansa
yellow, Nickel-azo yellow.

Inferior and obsolete
yellow pigments: chrome
yellows and oranges, Indian
yellow, yellow lakes, Dutch pink
stil-de-grain, not

permanent.
Yellow's changing
music changes.

But we are not looking at the yellows just now but at the syntax, the inner structure of comparison as a means of making order, changing order, ideas of order. The syntax of diptych like or as simile.

Initial point of order: repetition. Repetition as enchantment, incantation, extension, elaboration, registration: the beguiling text that lives within the title, *Begetting Textile*. The *beguine*'s practice accords the viewer, reader, listener, farmer, dance partner a greater role in the completion, or lack of completion of, the accomplishment of, the work. Perhaps completion bears no mention here. The *béguine*, however, was a member of a lay sisterhood in the Netherlands in the 13th century before she became the name of a ballroom dance, based on a rumba-like dance from Martinique named after the *béguin*, the hood worn in the sisterhood, begetting *beguine*, text of flirtation. And in 1935, Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine," from the musical, "Jubilee." Moments divine, rapture serene, begin the beguine.

"As a tourist aches, as a tourist experiences the entailment
of Europe without words and only a wallet to express,
feeling adult but stored within the body of an infant,"
(*"A Way of Life," The Windows Flew Open*)

"O mathematicians, shed light on
error such as this! The spirit has no
voice, because where there is voice
there is body."
—Leonardo da Vinci

Although where there is body there is not always yet voice.

Repetition, its pre-echo. In the beginning is rhythm. This is the point of
departure as well as the *point de repère*, point of reference, guide. This is
repetition and difference. The diptych.

"...recurrent architectural strategies: one sees irony and enchantment, an
evocative rather than archeological use of antiquity, a bricolage of
references, the use of off-balance and ingenuous perspective, a predilection
for secluded spaces that seem suspended from gravity." (Fulvio Irace,
"Precursors of Modernism: Milan 1920-1930")

...In this going abroad

the solid observer antecedes the rebirth
of space. Yet, another voice breaks,
then successively

new excrescences of the invisible
aural spectacle move a process
well in advance of seeing. (*"Danbury Connecticut," Casting Sequences*)

Singing perhaps, in polyrhythmic color, in cubist progressions, even
achromatic, rhythms visible as wave patterns used in Polynesian navigation
where there are long distances to travel over open seas with no fixed
locating points.

When is a metaphysical plaster like a matrix? How does paralysis suddenly
function like a prompt? By wishing, as in

Wishing to make a metaphysical plaster
Wishing to be a matrix
...
...paralysis prompts our plan

of non-identical yet necessarily correlated colonnades—
(*"If I Blind Fold You," Casting Sequences*)

Multiple pulse. Repetition in DNA leads to new organs with new functions.
Repetition, the simplest form of redundancy (a term having suddenly
acquired renewed currency through its use value for information theory)
leads, in time, to chance mutations, the redundant genes ceasing to be
copies and becoming unique sequences. The timing of expression of a gene
that was part of a regulatory system would alter, altering function,
contributing entirely new meaning. (Campbell, *Grammatical Man*)

At first it looked like repetition, but later it became apparent that the rhythm
involved beginning and beginning again, a recuperation through the implied
—or implicated?—series of beginning-again.

Differing from Freudian interpretation, speculation by Benjamin (Mehlman,
Benjamin's Radio for Children) and others has it that repetition is a means of
dealing with trauma. Perhaps you recall a passage from Deleuze and

Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* ("1837: Of the Refrain," 311) which begins:
"A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his
breath." and the paragraph finishes,

"But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginning of
order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. There is
always sonority in Ariadne's thread. Or the song of Orpheus."

The thread and the song.

"Marching orders, it's murdering my sense of rhythm and making me crazy."
(Khlebnikov, *The King of Time*) One's own rhythmizing impulse makes song,
repetition expresses new function, whereas imposed metrics are crazy-
making and life-threatening. There is an unforeseeable homeostatic
relationship between rhythm and expectation, "a constantly renewable
expectation in movement, never a sense of satiety," writes Kolakowsky ("The
Myth of Love," in *The Presence of Myth*)

"Logic through lyric is, arguably, intriguing,

and a lure for more of it.

The logic of love is fascination..."

("The Logics," *else, as substance*)

Expectations need repetition with disturbance. Like genetic forms, art forms
change, as Shklovsky wrote, "in order to preserve the perceptibility of life."
(*Mayakovsky and His Circle*) The ideas of order change in the
progressions. As ideas of order shift new logics are revealed "in the event."
This logic is *rhythmic* event. After all, if the mind as Spinoza would have it is
just an idea of the body then thought—why not?—is rhythm's
accomplishment. Proceeding in cascades on the order of parallel distribution
or simultaneity, ideas of order are physical. And this is where the painting
and the poem are not separate. Poem as symposium, art as forum?

"...a constantly renewable expectation in movement, never a sense of
satiety." A wholeness without completion. A potential wholeness, a phantom
limb. Energy's charge accretes in the gaps.

"As if," "as if," "as if..." (*Begetting Textile*)

"But our minds at some point...began to consider the way they themselves
work." (Naomi Goldblum, *The Brain-Shaped Mind*) The poem is a mind-
reader, beginning at some point to consider how it works. Implicate type
without token. Token is the individual reading. Your firing neurons.
Cascading neurotransmitter. Your receptors. Cascades of activation. Thus
yellow and...parallel distribution, interleaving disturbances of a certain order.
In a certain order of form.

The poem is a mind-reader, "mapping neuronal configurations onto
thoughts...to read other people's minds as well" [Goldblum] is not exactly
what she says, but by simply eliminating a few words, some code, I make her
say this, map a different thought. I'm reading her reading, her neuronal and
semantic mapping of a thought and its rhythm and its thought begins to
move.

As if

answerable to anthem

in antis

Even as

Insofar as

as

as illustrated

As illustrated milk

spilt on printers' ink, throughout the protest movement

sparkling

rhetoric! ("Textile 2," *Begetting Textile*)

A kind of sonic orchestration takes place, out of the waves, making durable form in the registration itself. The registration is in terms of conventions, agreeing and/or breaking with conventions. Like innovation and improv in jazz, the degree of distance from conventions, from use, plays upon the expectations (nerves) of the reader/listener. This is where the issue of perceptibility comes in. The metaphor of the horizon proves useful here: horizon of perceptibility. Threshold of registration. As the poem says, "close as likeness."

"Rhythmico-syntactical figures had been predetermining the thought process." (Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and his Circle*)

"I walk, swinging my arms, and mumbling still almost wordlessly; now, I slow down so as not to interrupt my mumbling; now I mumble more rapidly to keep in time with my steps.

"So the rhythm is trimmed and shaped, for it is the basis of all poetry and runs through it like a roar. Gradually, out of this roar, one starts to pick out separate words." (Mayakovsky, *How Are Verses Made?*)

Aggregate as idea of order. And speaking of syntax, there is the rhythmic structure of simile as in "Personal letters are like a greenhouse—the chiasm of touch." There is the likeness, in a context or matrix of potential difference. All the possible differences cluster about the binary: if the hill were *really* like the issues, increasing as distance decreases... A drawing near becomes a

translation. Picture near rhyme and off-rhyme, their rhetoric framing and containing difference, catching difference in order to study its motives, if it had motives. Its idea of order. Apposite. Unreasonable.

"I had left my house to relax from some tedious piece of work by walking and by a consequent change of scene." (Paul Valéry, "Poetry and Abstract Thought") A shake-up is necessary. Mayakovsky said, "take a bus." The jolting is appalling. A rhythmic figure regenerates—itsself again but changed because changed in the repetition, thickened or quickened.

"As I went along the street where I live, I was suddenly *gripped* by a rhythm which took possession of me and soon gave me the impression of some force outside of myself. It was as though someone else were making use of my *living-machine*. Then another rhythm overtook and combined with the first, and certain strange *transverse* relations were set up between these two principles (I am explaining myself as best I can). They combined the movement of my walking legs and some kind of song I was murmuring, or rather which was being murmured *through me*. This composition became more and more complicated and soon in its complexity went far beyond anything I could reasonably produce with my ordinary, usable rhythmic faculties."

He goes on to talk about music, dream, error and gift. And then it was over. The unexpected had happened and was gone. It left this other order as its evidence....

How to organize (shape, compose) time, in time. Repetition is binding. Spell-binding inexhaustible fundamental: an engineering "we must enter shyly, as in 'I have no idea'" ("Preparing a Length of Arc," *The Annotated Here*).

"A rhythm which cuts and defines another rhythm must leave room for the other rhythm to be heard clearly" (John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*)

"It is as essentially other that the other must be seen." (Jean Pouillon, *Fétiches sans fétichisme*)

"...wanting to come to a common language, one cleared of personality, having its meanings in the community of meanings." (Robert Duncan, unpublished letter to Denise Levertov, July 22, 1966)

The rhythmic level is available unfetishized otherness held in common. "To beguile many and be beguiled by one" ("Moses und Aron," *Casting Sequences*)

Visual rhythms register repetition and difference, expectation and surprise, for instance, in the violent disjunction of "firelight" ("Michaelangelesque," *Casting Sequences*) as struggle within the word. Will it fly apart? Time will tell.

The tragic clock becomes the comic clock where "Suppressed Misfortunes" (*Casting Sequences*) plays out insistence in hilarious fake palindromes, serial reversals, rehearsals in which a finitude is revealed to be contained by the space of history, by the time of comic gesture, Brechtian in its strange-making frontality. Repetition of form allows a tension to develop as coordinates pull apart, false subjects to false predicates overexposing syntax, its traces fading out in rhythmic echo called "music" and "memory."

"All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee..." (Pope quoted in Mehlman)
Wallace Stevens, in his lecture, "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting," quotes a revealing passage from Leo Stein's *Appreciations*. In

Stein's chapter "On Reading Poetry and Seeing Pictures," he describes how, as a child, "he became aware of composition in nature and gradually realized that art and composition are one." He began to experiment as follows:

"I put on the table...an earthenware plate...and this I looked at every day for minutes or for hours. I had in mind to see it as a picture, and waited for it to become one. In time it did. The change came suddenly."

Everything, including the design on the plate became part of the larger composition, which indicated to Leo Stein that he was beginning to see pictorially, rhythmically.

Subsequently, Stevens places "a jar in Tennessee,/ And round it was, upon a hill."

This act of composition, which "made the slovenly wilderness/Surround that hill" is the one explored further, much further, by Welsh's "Thing Receiving Road," an "aggregate" of five poems which, in the journal *New American Writing* No.17, includes a "Supplement" not included in *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems*. What's in question is the "so-called natural state," Stevens' provocative "cultural infiltration" of this "so-called natural state of perception with a first line that does not find things in nature so much as *place* them as nature." Her poems are "ruminations on the fiction established through such a maneuver."

As nature, in nature. The nature of the poems, Welsh's poems, is to make an address beginning with "Still Life," in a stillness that is gathering. It is gathering its address, an energy, as it begins to speak "Of address, or else/ slow to be/ secreted in Tennessee...". As the lines lengthen and the rhythmic impulses quicken and complicate, overtaking one another, knotting

and releasing, the story of the “choice by Wallace Stevens to render the natural world cultural through artifice” plays out. Ruminations are extensions and also exist in their own right, having no need of “Supplement.” They repeat and change the work of composition described by Stevens and before him by Stein in a radical movement of macrorhythms..

Yellow and...

involves a whole of composition that includes fragment, gap, rupture and suture.

Yellow and...

could simply point to the glasses of mango and papaya *jugos* on a table in a restaurant in Minneapolis.

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I. Analytic Love: Syntagm and Paradigm

“Analytic love is exceptional.” It is passionate and cool, and this “and” might also be a “yet,” or an “in spite of being.” *The logistics of allurements are nearly endless*, and this is because the structures that undergird a relationship—be it between lovers or interlocutors, words or atomized phonemes, colors or shapes—acquire self-fulfilling, self-renewing scope only through meticulous, continuous attention. Thus articulated in a poem called “The Logics,”¹ a theory of multiple, proliferating, affectively inflected but emotionally reserved syntax emerges, and this interest in what Marjorie Welsh calls “the diagrammatic phantasmagorical” recurs throughout each sector of her tripartite oeuvre. As a poet, as a painter, as an art critic, Welsh pursues across discursive registers the problem-set of syntagmatic meaning and dismeaning; her work is an ongoing investigation of the ways in which adjacencies, oppositions, parallels, left-turns, clausal insertions, and historical lacunae demonstrate and indeed make possible signification.

In these economies of situational value and replacement, humor is important.

So is reference to a wider community of art-objects and texts. Welish's criticism focuses on the work of post-New York School artists whose interests—in semiotic correspondences and dissonances (Johns, Twombly) or the discourse of seriality (LeWitt, Judd)—dovetail with her own artistic projects. In her poetry and painting, references abound to other arts and artists, as though the borders between different kinds of writing, or between writing and painting, were simply permeable membranes, useful filtration systems in one large and integrated organism. Nevertheless, in mood her work remains resolutely solitary, almost lonely; the networks of association do not generate cozy feelings of coterie. Acts and processes of intellection, not narratives of social interaction, are her field, and the "character" that enacts her gestures is the isolate and analyzing mind. This is not to say, however, that love is absent, only that it is exceptional. In fact, sensory appeal wields decisive power in Welish's aesthetic, though never in obvious ways. She explores the pleasures of texture and comparison, while fiercely curtailing those of plot-line or lyric translucence. Her peculiar generousities lodge like potential energy within vocabulary choices (including the vocabulary of color, hue, and line), and leap into kinetic, almost synaptic form as sparks that travel between terms (words, lines, opinions, theories, blocks of red, yellow, or blue). Precise logistical attention from the reader/ viewer is required for these transactions; to lapse into a passive regard rather than an active deciphering is to forfeit the composed and tessellated whole.

Jokes, companionships, bracing allurements—without such instances of active pleasure, Welish's demanding inquiries would risk didacticism; her episodes of play, though dry and sly, make possible the sustained cerebration of her art. It is against this backdrop of wry gamesmanship that a discussion of her practice in terms of syntax and its rigors must unfold, and in this she is—as she herself would point out—working one of the main veins of twentieth-century Modernism, tracing the "ideas of order" that underlie and counterpose episodes of cryptic sense or indeterminacy.

It may be useful here to revisit a distinction between the semiotic concepts of *syntagm* and *paradigm*, because for Welish (as for the artists she admires), the trick is to imbricate one into the other. Roughly, a syntagm is a unit of meaning whose sense derives from linear sequence; the syntagmatic relationship is one of formal proximity, like the linking of words in a sentence or the flow from edge to edge in an abstract painting. Paradigmatic relationships, meanwhile, depend not on sequential placement but on material rhyme. Homophones and homonyms, synonyms and etymologies are paradigmatic. *Red* and *read*; *read* (past tense) and *read* (present tense); *crimson* and *sanguine*; *lecture* and *elect* function this way. Since the concepts are primarily linguistic, their effects on Welish's poetry might seem easiest to identify. But her long-standing painterly interest in the modernist trope of the grid, or her insistence on a limited palette, or the consistent scale at which she sizes her canvases, also foreground problems in contiguity and disruption (syntagmatic problems), echo and inflection (paradigmatic ones). Her criticism, meanwhile, explicitly identifies with "the semantics of syntax that had determined style during the early twentieth century [and which] grew into a cultural preoccupation by the 1960s and 1970s, because by then constitutive orders had become identifiably signs of modern art." ²

In other words, the quasi-scientific wishful thinking that would keep paradigm and syntagm apart rubs the other way, toward overlap, within the practice of modernity as Welish conceives it. "Notions of recombinatory order and ambiguous sense," as she suggests, invite all figures in the art equation (artist, audience, and object) to enter the dream-state of "structural contingency." ³ Here grammars keep their shapes but fill them up with improper material; the matter-drunk appreciation of paradigmatic form pours itself into the sober, structure-loving vessels of the syntagmatic. Welish cautions, however, against a romantic (or surrealist) understanding of such compressions and displacements. For her purposes, paradigm and syntagm are not Dionysian/ Apollonian opposites, but combinatory integers that meld

in one self-augmenting, tactile, but rule-governed algorithm. "To proceed through the world of the contingent is not to engage in daydreaming; it is rather to enter the realm of the conditional (rather than causal) visual structure: if..., then..., if..., then...."⁴ When applying this dictum to Welsh's own output, for "visual," we may read "verbal," and vice versa, but only if we remember that the syntagmatic difference between the terms—the long history of *ut pictura poesis*, the struggle between the "sister arts" for philosophical primacy—is as vital to an understanding of this artist as is the paradigmatic similarity of the two words—their shared adjective-hood, their gliding "v's" and "l's."

Accordingly, the second half of this paper concentrates upon a simple look into a verbal fragment that is deeply indebted to visual acuity, a structure that refuses (or refutes) simplicity. Section II offers a sustained close reading of a passage of poetry in which the play of Welsh's syntactic mind unfolds on a scale simultaneously monumental and minute. To track that mind is to acknowledge her ideas in their unremitting exactitude. It is also, in a sense, to let poetry stand for painting and criticism, an elision that is antithetical to Welsh's insistent exploration of these discursive languages in their own rights. Nevertheless, as her critical and curatorial practice has affirmed, "indeterminacy assumes the logic of relative solutions...build[ing] art that puts categories in relative and hypothetical adjustment."⁵ One system infiltrates and activates another, so that Welsh's critical interest in the "constitutive orders" of modernity recapitulates her concerns as a maker of both poetry and paintings.

Regarding this further imbrication of one sign-system into another, and pausing to notice painting before shifting wholly into the poetic, consider a series of canvases titled "The Indecidability of the Sign Red Yellow Blue," begun in 1995 and still ongoing. Openly naming her project as semiotic, Welsh annotates the "here" of painting, its locus in the history of art styles

and schools, in the fact of the canvas as two-dimensional, and in the propositions of plane geometry plus or minus primary color. Her visual parameters are tight. She "paints deep within a narrow current,"⁶ and "attacks the same problem over and over...like a cultural Penelope staving off decisive moments by unraveling her conclusions each night."⁷ It is in painting that Welsh's connections to external models and preexisting benchmarks confess themselves most sharply, and this apparent resemblance to what has gone before corresponds, albeit imperfectly, to the traditional idea of pictures as more direct communications than words. In images, linguistic signifiers are traditionally theorized as losing one level of articulation, trading in their arbitrary nature for direct, analogical "likeness." It is true that Welsh weaves and unweaves a few central threads spun out across art history since Rodchenko. But even here, her maverick loneliness is fundamental. In discussing the semiotic shifts her paintings work through, the critics' list of relatives that Welsh might "look like" begins with Mondrian and Malevich and moves through Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism to Mary Heilmann, Stephen Ellis, Kes Zapus, and other "conceptual abstractionists" of the 1980s and '90s. But—again playing upon the conditional rather than causal relation—Welsh is not actually quoting these forebears and peers; she is not pining for Rodchenko to come back from a mythic odyssey, bringing a Platonically perfected representation with him. Instead she operates in an arena that includes but is not circumscribed by these comparative examples, generating extrapolations, not pastiches or parodies.

Welsh's dialogue with other artists is interrogative as opposed to appropriating, which means that her basic painterly interests can regroup under the rubric of poetics without any essential deformation. In either case, she balances on a pivot between the cool acceptance of an inherited aesthetic problem, and an equally cool refusal to make the problem personal or to take on the anxieties of influence. Again, the moments of

delicacy or exuberance, though sternly circumspect, make her project function. To put it another way, if an interest in an historico-stylistic syntax makes possible Welsh's sustained tweakings of the post-Minimal, post-Mondrian grid, then this deductive, ironizing practice cannot signify without some genuine boogie-woogie. And, the boogie-woogie must, in turn, reveal itself as a syntax: a given succession of moves which can be broken down, performed, extended, glossed, turned inside out—but not invented, not emoted or “expressed.”

The modernist grid might seem an unlikely scaffolding on which to arrange a tacitly humorous snapshot of ontological problem-solving, but in her poetry, as in her painting, this is what Marjorie Welsh does. Her comment on the art of Kes Zapkus could be directed at her own as well: “Zapkus's grid, thoroughly integrated into the composition, supplies the modern composition with structural fixity that is antagonistic to the relatively more freely ordered mark.... In just this way, Zapkus will allow the regulatory force of the grid to enter as an order subject to modification.”⁸ In Welsh's poems, the literal grid of the paintings implies itself not only via the armature of stanza and line and the strategic sorting of words, but as an angular, rational plan that implicitly directs the poetic argument. Poem after poem lays out an aural and conceptual architecture, its sound-shapes and thought-patterns squaring, doubling, retracting, attenuating, and starting up again according to the principles of “if...then...if...then.” Against this “structural fixity” Welsh deploys the “more freely ordered marks” of deadpan asides (“‘Mommy, do you want to see me run fast?/ ‘No.’”⁹) or lyric flights (“The hotel is preoccupied with our dangling/ fragilely physical/ gaze”¹⁰). Her gambits interlock, relating parts of poems to their wholes and whole poems to the larger oeuvre so intricately that the fragment examined below has been chosen almost at random. All the elements of a Welshian situation appear in it—the sardonic yet probing attitude, the paradigmatic rhymes of lexicon and implication, the key references to color, the constant return to mind as

both the figure and the ground of art. If these stanzas—from a poem called “Drastic Measures”¹¹—are atypical in any way, it would be in their relatively straightforward grammar and referents. But, as we shall see, Welsh's syntax exists to create torque within itself, to push continually against any too-straightforward version of the underlying “regulatory force.”

II. Feeling Read: A close reading

The nine-stanza “Drastic Measures” ends like this:

At Princeton, the guys speak of restaurants
red,
feeling red—
the guys speaking of restaurants, the gals of intentionality,

as we did, as we might have done.
Feeling read
feeling read, an ontological claim said to inhere in the phenomenal
deeds we did, deeds we might have done.¹²

Here we find a distinct setting, Princeton, and simple characters, guys. These two recognizable nouns speak of a third, restaurants, so that the first line of the poem's penultimate stanza coheres as a clause in conversational American English, with only slight glitches—why, for example, are these nominally privileged guys made to speak in slightly portentous diction of concept-like restaurants? The answer offered by syntax is “red,” and this does not follow. Sentence grammar takes advantage of the drop-off in

meaning occasioned by breaking the line, so that the absence of line-break punctuation determines the clause and the object of the guys' speech evolves into "restaurants red": that is, clubby and posh, or perhaps plasticky, or tritely Italian, with checked tablecloths... At the same time, however, the break exerts a stronger presence than the suggestive absence of a comma or period; the divorce between "restaurants" and "red" asserts itself as equal to, if not more powerful than, the syntactic relation of noun to adjective. So "red" floats, both inside and outside the syntax established by the sentence beginning "At Princeton...", a modifier locked tightly in its logical slot, but debarred from the influx of comprehensibility that usually comes as a reward for such obedient grammatical placement.

"feeling red"—"red" as an implied emotion hovers beneath "red" as a simple descriptor, hangs in syntactic and visual space on the subsequent line, laminating the grammatical into the graphic and moving the story along without allowing it to unfold. What is "feeling red"? The beer-flush on the guys' faces? Their youthful Communist leanings? Their social anxieties, shynesses on a date? And/or the sudden voice of the writing qua writing, leaping out through the hole the line-breaks have poked in the (already slight) narrative, as if the poem as an observing entity were commenting on an access of sentiment or sensation called, for convenience's sake, "red"? By its repetition, the color flares up as an independent subject rather than a dependent modifier—"red, feeling red" momentarily takes shape as an eponymously described noun, a self-mirroring chromatic actor.

Then again, across the line-break, the thin, tensile thread of a plot picks up, with a second episode of repetition, "the guys speaking of restaurants." For four lines, an ABBA structure stutters in place, gridding its symmetries across a vertical armature stepping line by line down the page, and balancing its long and short horizontals as they flow out toward (the A lines) or break off from (the B lines) prose-shaped, clause-length phrases. In the space

diagrammed by these lines as visual elements, our sanguine boys with their oddly flat conversation about eateries wait, stuck in a discourse-loop. Enter a new group of characters: "the gals of intentionality," like the Sweethearts of Rhythm, representing a plot-twist so tightly packed with possible readings that it's amazing to realize it is comprised of only four words. Who are these gals?

They are the guys' opposite number, whose appearance inflects the neutral word "guys" with a period sense of co-ed collegiate social life, but also sarcastically deflates any presumed normalcy. While the guys dither with vague objects and unmoored modifiers, the gals comment directly about the state of being direct. Decisiveness seems to arrive just in time on the scene, ready to rescue the stanzaic diction from increasingly absurd repetition, to snatch forward narrative motion from the slack jaws of textual stasis. Gals are so reliable, so practical! But this, of course, may be too easy. The syntax is loose here, and the sentence that began "At Princeton..." remains unconsummated. Given the string of phrases connected by commas, another possible interpretation would be that the gals do not speak of intentionality, indeed do not speak at all; that the guys have been speaking since the first line and are still speaking now, of various things, from red restaurants and feelings to intentional gals, or of their intentions toward the gals. Shoring up the end of the stanza but hanging in limbo (as did "red") amid the incomplete sentence, the gals slip from subject to object. Their putative intentionality—again like the quality "red"—seems suddenly to urge forth the appraising, detached voice of the poem, which marks its utterances with non sequitur.

Now more white space flows in, graphically isolating one stanza's thought from the next, as if mention of "intentionality" were, paradoxically, enough to cause the whole narrative to trail off again into blankness. This pause for breath also changes the focus. "as we did, as we might have done." Abruptly,

the story turns personal—now the disembodied voice of the poem fleshes itself out as a persona who nods to the reader, reminding “us” of our complicit relationship with guys, gals, red, restaurants, Princeton, speech, and intention. A whiff of ironic nostalgia coalesces suddenly into an open claim for memory—or at least, for the possibility of what might be remembered. The uncertainty surrounding “intentionality” is echoed in the syntactic shift from “we did” to “we might have done,” and the grammatical sentence finally comes to completion on a firmly indeterminate note.

“Feeling read,” indeed. The paradigmatic rhyme with “red” acknowledges the blush of lexical overload, “red feeling red” now rhyming with “feeling read feeling read,” as though whatever feelings “we” might have shared in the hypothetical past—feelings echoed by the guys and gals now at Princeton who rehearse “our” previous (alleged) experience—can only be known via reading. If this begins to sound like a philosophical treatise on the possibility of true knowledge versus blurry experience, the reader continues in sync with Welsh’s plan. For, the feeling being read here—the red feeling that mixes memory, projection, surmise, and a kind of abstract anecdote—is named precisely as “an ontological claim said to inhere in the phenomenal...” Moving too fast for you, *mon semblable*? Been too long since you spoke urgently in social situations of university-caliber lecture topics, or tried to parse the gap between expression and representation? The poem implicitly sighs, turns away again from the philosophical nomenclature, and gathers itself for real closure. “...deeds we did, deeds we might have done.” Turning resolutely toward her interlocutor, Welsh affirms that the act is what maintains value—whether it is a speech act, a writing act, an act of present feeling or of unsentimental recall. These tightly meshed deeds may or may not have taken place, may or may not be served by technical or vernacular explication. Still, they are considered now, in the written, syntagmatic/paradigmatic present. Each possibility annotates the drastically measured “here” that is the poem, the stanza, the sentence, the thought.

III. Syntax: A Situation

In “Drastic Measures,” the urge to catalogue and make orderly measures itself against a drastic insecurity, “an epistemological equivalent of hives or cystitis, indicating/ the ideological body is not well.”¹³ But this potentially catastrophic failure of order is recouped in glimpses of comedy and a careful parsing of movement between formal and conceptual vantage points: “You’re impossible! All right, you’re improbable./ An odor./ An odor rotating.”¹⁴ If the “ideological body” is read as the perfect grid or mastering syntax, then “hives or cystitis” are moments of organic slurring, paradigmatic free radicals. They slide across and disrupt the idealized form, which retaliates by tricking the organic back toward rationality, forcing a wafting odor into the precise mode of “rotating.” Like the blocky increments of color and the black and white lines that sequester them—or across which they bleed—in the series “The Indecidability of the Sign Red Yellow Blue,” or like the minute differentiation drawn between “cube” and “box”—geometric solid versus commercial packaging—in the essay “Box, Aspects of: Donald Judd,”¹⁵ the “diagrammatic phantasmagorical” in “Drastic Measures” arises as an indeterminate certitude, an unstable imperative. In its fine-grained, relentless attentiveness, Marjorie Welsh’s work proposes a meta-syntax in which painting, poetry, and criticism are laid into relationship, paradigmatically entwined. Confronting the same questions again and again, but holding each discourse to its own internal codes, Welsh impels each mode of inquiry to exert a specific gravity upon the adjacent ones. Each “provides frames of reference that act as a check on an infinite regress of interpretation.”¹⁶ Indeterminacy is never cognate with free-for-all, and rigidity is always pervious. *Love’s ratio tantalizes.*¹⁷

Interview

Bob Perelman and Marjorie Welsh

Bob Perelman: So, we've talked many times over the years, Marjorie and I, and we talked last night and came up with some places to begin. But there's been so much said about you and you've been perfectly silent in what seems an incredible asymmetry—you must be absolutely bursting with rejoinder, or nuance, or who knows!

At any rate, to begin: Francie [Shaw] and I went to see your show earlier this spring. It was the last afternoon it was up and you were actually there. And within about 25 seconds you had launched us into a fascinating conversation which now threatens to attain a dream-like status because neither of us can quite remember it. I can recall you saying, "There are three kinds of abstractions." And as we spoke last night and I hoped you could repeat your memory of it, you said, I won't remember what I am saying.

Marjorie Welsh: I might now misremember just what I did say then, given that I was caught up with what I was trying to explain.

BP: You mentioned a conversation you and Norma had about paint samples—and this has been brought up a few times today—about yellow.

The notion of the color yellow standing in the midst of an actual maelstrom of perception, usage, physicality.

MW: Let me start with that. The three kinds of abstraction I spoke of at the gallery may have been the historical paradigms informing modern art, to which my paintings are done in response. Even so, an encounter with Norma will reveal the historical situation I was trying to get at. Although Norma and I don't know each other well, we know each other deeply. It was during one of our first conversations in which my paintings came about that I said that in 1995 I had formulated a painting problem specifically for realization on a studio grant, and that problem (indicated on a piece of paper that I still have) consisted of two yellows on a piece of paper, and the mandate to myself: "think about this for a year." And Norma took out of her wallet a color sample of gray, two grays—that's right, two grays. We knew we had a lifetime of conversations ahead of us.

BP: Already in process.

MW: Already in process, without our knowing it, and that we were late in catching up on the conversation in person.

The little thought piece conducted through the lyrical poem "In the Name of Studio" provoked from that dialogue with Norma dates ultimately from nearly a decade ago when I was teaching Wallace Stevens and thinking about naming something by a color: sometimes it's perceptual and sometimes it's conceptual; sometimes it's pragmatic. For instance, one of those sequenced poems on the slought.net website consists of naming Cezanne's yellow palette. Now what kind of a name is that? The spectrum of yellows is not exactly perceptual in the first place because laying out a palette is conventional. And by naming the specific spectrum of yellow, my poem is indicating the conventional sign for a palette adjusted by Cezanne

adjusted for his purposes yet also submitting to the semiotic of names. And the poem is meant to reflect the sign of painting as not natural, given that although his palette is personal, its authority to enter into the discourse of painting is proved through his stylistic invention, and seen through the conceptual heft of Cezanne's own pigmented "realizations"—his word for the paintings. Cezanne's conceptual reworking of perception defines color through an idea of style radically different from defining of color in other art styles. And this differs from naming through other cultural means—naming in inventory, for example. At any rate, the point of my sequenced poem is to display differing conceptual and perceptual registers and orders. They may differ in logic or in terms of knowledge—certain kinds of provisional forms of knowledge, not necessarily logical.

The paintings of mine you were seeing, and that I was "collaring" you about have incorporated some of that thinking on the deferring of the name—or the occupation of the name, with a competing or contesting aspect of a category distinction through the juxtaposition of two material entities that have perceptual similarity but that differ culturally—as a problem of knowledge or a problem of formal logic, depending on one's description, of course, descriptions having unseated definitions.

At any rate—and now I'm getting up on my hind legs—I do remember this very well from our conversation in the gallery: the genealogy of the modern as one credible genealogy informing the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A very interesting institution... a very fortunate institution, in having Alfred Barr, as young as he was, as the first director. Before he knew he was going to be Director, as he was traveling to do graduate work in Europe, his roommate Jere Abbott had said, "You must go to Russia, you must, while we're here go to Russia." As a result of that, as a result of a mania that was very well disposed to conversion experiences, Alfred Barr's Museum of Modern Art, was a museum of at least three modernities. And he's not given

enough credit for a complex modernity differentiated at the start. Although it is true that not all the terms were equally privileged. As an institution the Museum is conceived on the model of the Bauhaus, with a design principle as the comprehending principal for all else—painting sculpture and architecture. To some, the dominant style for art in the Museum is Cubism. But the Museum of Modern Art is also informed through Barr's exposure to Soviet Constructivism and Productivism—surprisingly enough, when you think of Barr's patrician education at Harvard. Informed through conversations with Rodchenko, with whom he disagreed heartily but whose conversations he recorded in his own diaries, as well as with Eisenstein, Meyerhold. Can you imagine this—it was Barr who came back with 42 children's books and with Keno magazines intact. This was not a tourist of the imagination. And he's not given enough credit, I would maintain, for the complexity of the idea of modernity, despite the ideological bias of style in the West being French, prevalent in the galleries. Nonetheless, there are many other artifacts of first importance: Malevich's *White on White*, acquired by Barr. And so, I would maintain, the Museum of Modern Art is a Museum of modernities: the German and the Russian, as well as the French.

BP: This brings up many things I'd love to hear you talk about—too many to fit into some well-formed question: the possibilities of whatever fragments of universality in language; visual literacy—visual grammars. I would like to hear you talk about grammar or syntax of poetry versus those of painting and what differences there might be between them. So, that's one.

Universal language implying something that speaks articulately but immediately to the senses. Everybody can process it. As opposed to visual literacy, which implies pedagogy and histories. I'm trying to sneak up on a basic distinction: what is the substance of your art, your two arts, painting and poetry? I'm remembering both Osvaldo and Joseph saying this morning, "Your painting isn't about paint."

So, for you, what is the substance in art? Is it pigment or history? That is one question. And then, what would be the substance of writing?

MW: Let me see. This may raise more questions than it answers. "Universal" doesn't require a head count in which everyone is polled and found to be understanding a certain body of knowledge in the same way, univocally. There can be legislated commonalities which we sometimes call language, sometimes law, sometimes ethics, cultural commonalities which may not be literally true and may not even be true even in most pragmatic senses, but that guide cultural cohesion. Universality is a projected value that helps coordinate things.

BP: Conversation, hospitality...

MW: Life and death. Rites of passage. Those are universalities by which we take stock. Or at least culture believes it needs to take stock in certain cadenced ways of mortality. I'm not an anthropologist but I do note the hypothetical universalities we require education to sustain. And that is where I would give a course-correction to what you were saying, given that both verbal language and visual language are taught.

Human cultures are predisposed to emphasizing speech and writing over visuality. Then, again, writing as such is specific to culture, if not necessarily the way every culture manifests itself. Some cultures are numeric, some are musical, some are philosophical cultures, actually. I think more should be made of the differences of such universalities.

But getting back to the painting... If there is a historical component to the propaganda I tell myself about my paintings, I think of it in problematic terms. The problematic goes something like this. There are certain commonplaces about modern painting, the primaries of red, yellow, and blue being one

nexus to be addressed. Rodchenko's endgame—his last paintings before he went into advertising, before he actually helped develop graphic design, which is very intrinsic to advertising—was to do a red, yellow, and blue canvas each. Mondrian's conceptual configuration of red, yellow, and blue is very different, utterly different. Some people might argue it is formal rather than material, whereas Rodchenko's was utterly material. Nonetheless, Mondrian concentrated on red, yellow and blue to perpetuate painting, not to terminate it. Barnett Newman, whose conference is down the road today, had given up painting because he knew enough intellectually to realize that merely *being* in one's studio is insufficient to the history or narrative of modern art, insufficient until one had a problem and a stance toward the paradigms of Cubism and Surrealism. When he returned to painting, he settled on red, yellow, and blue. Given these strong paradigmatic incorporations of the primaries that exemplify a modern commonplace, I am now responsible for a question that goes something like this: what would a red, yellow and blue nexus look like to a Post-structuralist or to a Post-modernist? The same with certain kinds of syntax. The series creates syntax... but is red, yellow, and blue a series or is it a sequence? You can see how that might change depending on contextual clues also.

BP: It seems like an extraordinarily clear sense of a universal task and contemporary task for a painter. You said, "I carried around the two yellows for a year, thought about them for a year..." This strikes me as analogous to Newman's initiatory gesture. To gain artistic maturity, you have to go outside routine productivity, get something basic figured out, then come back.

MW: That's one way of doing it, and there are other ways of doing it. Originality in certain cultures that practice, say, calligraphy, is this: that you become original in so far as you have assimilated the principles of practice and have internalized them. Then what you do is obviously original through that assimilated knowledge. It can be intuitive, but in fact the intuition is that

knowing which can perform well once something is assimilated. And that's a kind of originality. The reason I bring that up, aside from the fact that to say 'originality' these days is a red flag, is to address certain universals said to comprehend art and to show that there are other modes of that comprehension.

BP: Somebody here quoted Valéry or Rorty?... Rorty! Something about nuance and originality, that you can't be "nuanced and original." Or, was it rigor and originality, "rigorous and original." Well, my blurry memory aside, you're saying quite the opposite about originality, I would think.

MW: Yes, in the instance of calligraphy...

BP: It's a good thing to say the opposite. It's not done often enough. How about in poetry?

Can you give us a sense of some sort of self-instructional scene equivalent in poetry? Or a problem that you needed really to get clear, at least face straight on? Harder, I would think...

MW: It is, but one of the projects, as you know, quite pedagogical at times....

BP: I'm interrupting... go ahead...

MW: The lyric epic and drama are genres which are institutionalized in certain respects, they've been culturally profiled. The question that I've posed for myself, now that writing has in fact assimilated a gradient of intellectual and expressive pursuits, so that speaking of genre is obsolete, is: Is there any use in even addressing the problem? But a more specific formulation of this, which is, which actually gets me writing, going faster... I'm my own reader-response team!

BP: Yes: go, go.

MW: If the lyric is so identified with early modernity, is there any role for the lyric 100 years later? What should it look like? This is where the critical function comes in, that is to say, the meta-linguistic gambit, to address those conventions directly, within the poem. That's non-solution A, as Barrett Watten would say. Non-solution B might be: just bring two things together and deal with it. Or don't deal with it; just bring two things together. Importing Gerard Genette's Table of Contents from *The Architext* into a poem "Cities of the Table," I continue to write and worry the genre of lyric. Tables of Contents of course are apparatus; they are supplements to books in certain ways, and yet they legislate a very pragmatic way of reading. In fact, they are little lists, or condensed enumerations of some sort, corresponding to a narrative. They're very curious entities. I will continue to brood on those artifactual and cultural entities within the lyric or use them against lyric, playing off discursive and non-discursive means

BP: And so actually the large genres—"poetry," even "writing"—have an odd valence. They're a big question mark, or a site of dissatisfaction—

MW: I would say no. I am not disputing that discontent but I'm also saying, is there another way? Let us posit or propose something. Let's problematize the issue of genre or another standard configuration in theoretically interesting ways. And worry later about the solutions on the page. That's how the critical voice can avoid becoming too dogmatic. Whenever the page becomes a studio or a site of investigation, the rhetoric is more in line with the probing, the research.

BP: We talked last night about genealogies. And if we did an aesthetic DNA test on you, we might get Stein and Stevens, both of whom are situated at the intersection of writing and painting. When you said that Modernism is

identified with lyric, it makes me think of Stein who may be in fact on that same studio page as you, interrogating all manner of generic boundaries as main activity of writing. Does that seem...

MW: No, that's O.K. I didn't say that it was identified with early Modernism, but early modernity. I'm not saying that all of modernity is invested *only* in the lyric, but that the lyric is a mark of a certain modernity, as the lyric fragment appears in Hölderlin, for instance. We were possibly leading to this mark of origin at issue. I sometimes ask, as I did once in an interview with the current Curator of twentieth-century art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: "When did modernity begin?"

That's my test question.

BP: Write it down on a piece of paper...

MW: It's a trick question because... but I don't mind giving you the secret. No, I don't mind because the secret won't provide you with the answer. Because there are several answers.

BP: He had one answer.

MW: He had one answer. His answer was: "In 1890, of course."

BP: As you told me, he then said, "Everybody knows this, of course."

MW: And I said that when I was going to Columbia and studying art history, the key date for modernity in art was 1855, with the appearance of Courbet's *Studio* allegory. And a certain teacher organized his course around that painting and recursively came back to it to pull out—to extract, to draw out, to discuss—the implications in that work. When I told that to the Curator, he

said, “Some people think that the modern era began with Napoleon.” And I didn’t say anything to that! (laughter) But in a poem I wrote ten years later—I’ve been carrying an open file on this—I raised that question again.

Indeed, there are strong arguments to be made for 1890, for 1848, for approximately 1827, or the skid from 1789 to, debatably, 1794. Joseph Masheck makes a very strong case for modernity beginning with the Neolithic, and so with culture, everything else being a course-correction from then. It’s a very interesting position. In this regard, the lyric is only an expression of, a form of, an aspect of, a modernity. It can be entailed or disengaged, depending on the narrative being invoked.

BP: For you, does satisfyingly brisk informative lively art making, your writing, really depend on being au courant with a narrative that satisfies you? In other words, how imperious is that sense of narrative vis-à-vis what’s plausible to do now, what’s needing to be done now, what has been done now and what is old hat....

MW: That’s a very good question. It’s very imperative with me.

BP: Can you identify some of the commanding voices, the impinging conditions? Some specific writers?

MW: There need not be one narrative, but, as Osvaldo Romberg has said, “It’s not: Everything goes,” either. That’s not an idea. It’s not an argument. It’s not a thesis. If we do not think of entailment—if not of necessary and sufficient relations—if we do not think in terms of some entailments, then we can’t use the word ideology. We can’t say we have a belief system, in theory or in practice.

BP: And a belief system is, or isn’t, needed to make art? Think of the sound

byte from Rauschenberg: that it’s crucial not to know what you are doing.

MW: That’s already a belief which has its genealogy in spontaneity, etc. Actually he was one of the better instances of someone who misbehaves in an intuitive, very brainy way. Or at least, he did very early on. He has produced maybe a half dozen theoretically important counter-examples that have helped change a narrative in art history. So he earns the right to say silly things like that.

But I can only say what I think to be culturally entailed in certain significant ways. Certain kinds of narratives have been built on technologies, and certain kinds of technologies have been rationalized through language. Cultural paradigms have been made manifest through the fruitful animosity that goes on between history and theory. I still think they are valid key terms to warrant thought—for instance, in dialogue, to say, “let us posit two or three terms.” Or “three terms where we have two.” What should that third term be? Do we understand enough to know what third term would change this binary? What would be an art in consequence of that?” In other words, in answer to your question about what’s needing to be done now, I would produce thought forms having to do with possible paradigms. One of the reasons I was badgering the grammar of series, is that a series is more structurally significant than a motif. It is a conceptual object and a stand-in for worlds. I’ve been thinking in series and incorporating series into artifacts containing point, line, plane, and red, yellow, blue, as a fruitful way of thinking about object—not in terms of their material properties but in terms of their cultural properties, the object in this sense being not the thing that has a morphology that can be traded and may end up in museums, but indeed that which does have material form yet is, culturally speaking, text.

BP: Let’s see if these two terms will get you going. You were saying that criticality is a crucial term for you, in poetry and in painting. How do you

relate the critical to the pedagogic? It seems to me that they could be opposed very easily. Criticality would be debunking, the sense of some sort of perceptual shock or invigorating shock, as opposed to the pedagogic.

MW: You are very kind in being the straw man for that question, since you have a lot of thoughtful things to say on that yourself. And I'd be interested to hear what you have to say. But when I teach this stuff, I teach criticality in a philosophical sense, that is investigative rather than in advocacy. This "critical" is a clarification of terms that might be obscure, ambiguous, or paradoxical. (I'm not saying that this is the only kind of criticality, but I'm getting at something here.) That the agent, or the person who is being critical, can have a position, can hold a position, but he or she treats his position with the same scrutiny that he would treat others' positions. Therein lies an objectivity. In other words, the subjectivity is acknowledged. Subjectivity is made articulate to the extent that a self-critical approach is not parodic. That's my outflanking maneuver to the parodic, or the infinite regress of framing, or the infinite regress of "this had a weakness," or of "now that the x,y,z invention has been mismanaged, all of technology is sick." (I don't think that such generalizing negativity is a critical position.)

BP: I was trying to ask a slightly more intimate question about criticality and the pedagogic. Not you as a teacher and all the good faith compromises we go through to get the paycheck in the classroom... It seems to me a primary flavor in your poetry is a very decisive criticality. So, a point I was going to...

MW: Well what do *you* mean by that?

BP: I'm getting around to asking you to read a poem because that would be a really good thing to do right now...

The poem "else, in substance," it's in my hand..... The way you present

something in a line, in a couplet, and then immediately critique it. The dress, the other dress....and then as Keith was saying, you think you know the rules of this poem by the fifth couplet, but actually you don't. That is what I'm using the term critical to describe, that mode of activity. As opposed to the pedagogic, where you play Czerny first before you can play Chopin.... First you do this, and then, knowing this, I can show you something more complicated.

MW: I don't quite know what you mean by critical. You went from speaking of critical as a critique to an exemplification. But if you mean rumination or speculation...

BP: The temporary gestalt or frame that the reader gets, where the next thing that happens is "revise that" or "that frame needs to be expanded."

MW: Why isn't that formal composition? As in logic, or a logic. As in formal meaning, you've made a certain move. What is your response to this move? If you are interested in the implications, consequences, or entertain... now I've done this, what are the implications of that? What are the possibilities? I can go here, I can go there. I can do this, I can do that. The critical might impinge on the notion of probabilities in poetry, where it's advantageous in the game called the lyric to make moves that are interesting or stimulating or significant. This then would, could, stand in for the critical function.

BP: I was following you...

MW: until the end—

BP: until the end.

I was going to say at that point, yes, you're describing a dialogic situation

where form is dynamic, is in process... I guess I'm really asking you to read this...

MW: I'll read it.

BP: Because it offers us everything about the lyric, the dress...

MW: This poem indeed began with a mini-strategy. I remember thinking to myself, well, how funny, logically, is a couplet comprised of "The dress, the other dress." They're incommensurate. Culturally the coupling means something, and logically it means something else. I thought that that was hilarious. (laughter)

BP: Wait, say that again. I'll look it up on the tape...

MW: *else, in substance:*

The dress
The other dress.

The recurrent dress
The perpetual dress.

The basic dress
The reductive dress.

The little dress
The little black dress.

The opaque dress
The remote dress.

The opaque dress
The mute dress.

Reply that
rhetorical dress

happens frequently
happens sufficiently

in explicit instances
in the works of X.

The dress
The other dress.

The necessary dress
The contingent dress.

For the thesis that
realizing the ideal

cannot be
in objects such as these

lexicons
not self-identical,

as of forgetful Greece,
say again,

say again,
in memoriam

happens always, frequently
in prophetic dress

of explicit instances:
Helen, merely a limiting case.

Missing mass [is] entailed dress
for the repudiating career.

The belletrist dress
The Situationist dress.

The meaningless dress
The meaninglessness of dress.

The dress the other dress
propositional and repudiating

aftermath. Address
a blank space designating the loan

to a museum elsewhere
and the loan (plausibly) to here.

The dress in estimate
A dress explained.

The explained dress, contemporary
The interpreted winter dress.

The dress
The idea of a dress.

Interpreting ware
Interpreting water.

Else, *passim*.
Intuitions.

Either/or
and one eighth

without dress
throughout dress.

BP: Dare I say it, that's beautiful.

II. Painting

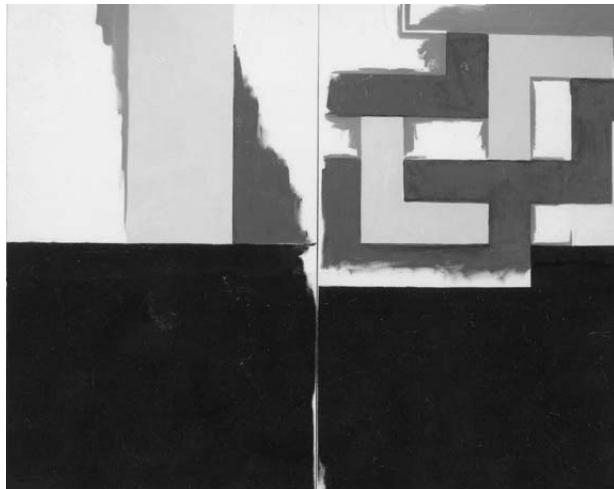


Fig. 1.
Marjorie Welsh, *The Without* (series), V, 36 x 48".

The Without

Gans & Jelacic, Architecture and Design

The diagrammatic aspects of *The Without* series (Fig. 1) entice us, as architects who by nature of our discipline cannot escape the diagram.

In architecture, diagram locates itself first and foremost within the idea of type and then within the nature of architectural representation itself.

Type comes from the Greek *typos*, meaning the striking (of the coin), and also the die (from which a coin is struck). As gerund, the striking of type is gestural, intentional. Within its Platonic framework, it is the motivating of the thing, the becoming of the thing only identified with the thing itself through causality. As noun, type is the generator, the die, the latent form for a multiplicity of objects, each of which is identifiable through any other, yet none of which is a repetition. Within the Platonic incommensurability of idea and thing, the impressed surface of the die is the positive, a presence, while the space of the coin itself is a negative, an absence brought to light only in the reproduction.

In this essay, we trace a chronology of ideas of type that we find present in the work of Marjorie Welsh.

Fig. 2.
Geometric constructions of A, a double square,
and B, a root 2 rectangle, from *De re Aedificatoria*,
Alberti, 1486.

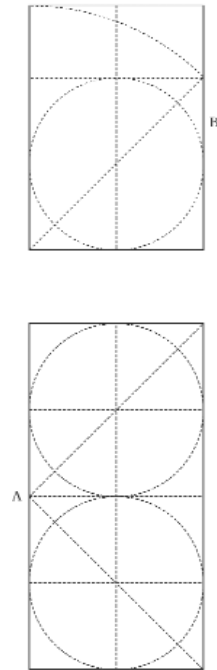


Fig. 3.
Diagram of *The Without*.

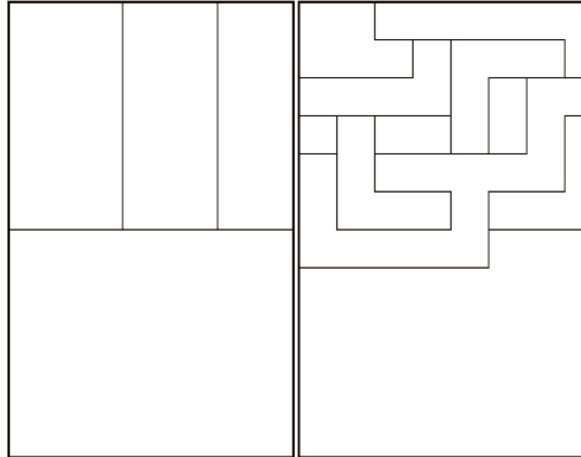


Diagram 1

In classical texts of architecture, namely Vitruvius, and its representation in Alberti, the architectural type is a die. It exists as latent sets of relationships that resist being undone by time or context. It contains more not less information than the type-object itself. It is not representable as such.

The *disegno* or act of drawing described by Alberti is like the striking of the die. The *lineamenta* (variously translated as form, idea, plan, schema, and line)¹ is the architectural ideal. (Fig. 2)

The Without

*The diagram of the painting is, in its classical sense, understood as two coins struck from a single die. Right and left canvases reiterate sets of internal relationships—black below to tripartite tricolor above—and so intimate a latent typos. **With** an identity they establish through each other, the pair remains nonetheless **without** commensurability. The elusiveness of the shared armature rehearses the gap between typos and coin that in turn rehearses the break between idea and thing. (Fig. 3)*

*Alternatively, the process of constructing *The Without* is imagined as a single, continuous striking, and a single continuous dialogue between left and right panels across the break of the die. The dialogue is recorded in the pentimento and in the relationships: between two blacks which are the same, two blues which are the same, two whites which are the same, two yellows.*

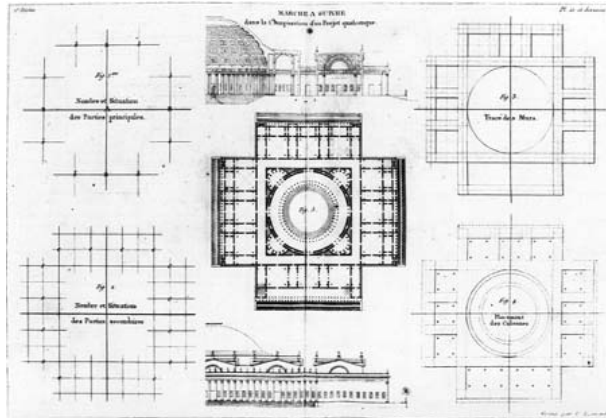


Fig. 4.
"Steps to Follow in a Project," from *Recueil et parallèle des édifices en tous genres*,
JNL Durand, 1799.

Fig. 5.
Diagram of *The Without*.

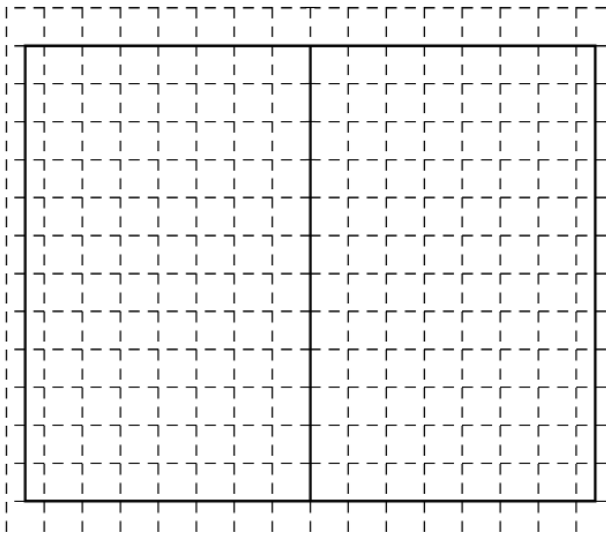


Diagram 2

The so-called neo-classical architect in search of a science of typology sought an equivalence of relationships in the Cartesian system of space. An infinite grid in three dimensions underlay and captured all of architecture and neutralized its other symbolic and figural capacities. Nine squares, formerly the trope of perfection and centrality, become nine squares within many. Durand renames the orders Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite with the numbers 1-5. (Fig. 4)

The Without

*The painting begins **with** the grid. (Fig. 5) The grid does not distinguish difference between the two canvases but rather extends across both. The generator of the grid, meaning the point zero at the intersection of the x-y axes, falls between the two panels. The break line is **without** figural presence. It is an axis in absentia understood through the controlling geometry of the painting.*

There are other MW paintings, such as Small High Valley #20, in which the grid struggles to assert itself in a figural fashion, and ultimately fails to do so. The point of failure is the break between panels where the latent y-axis absorbs and erases the vertical line.

As a series of paintings, the encyclopaedic nature of The Without project is revealed. Pursued exhaustively and methodically, the artist could complete the catalogue.

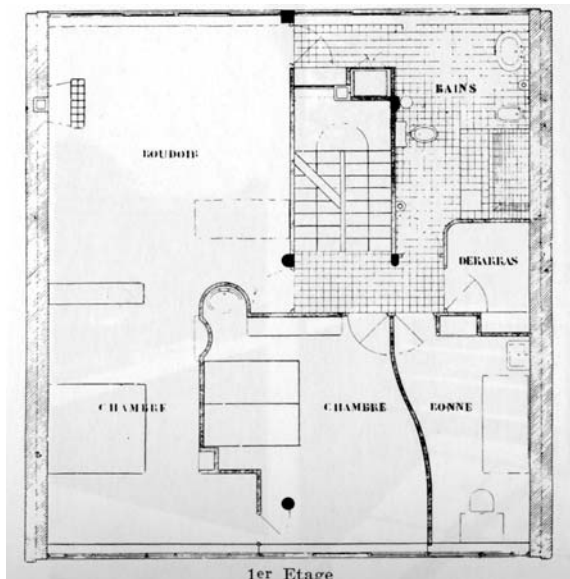


Fig. 6.
Plan of the first floor of Maison Cook from *The Complete Works*, vol.1, Le Corbusier, 1930.

Fig. 7.
Diagram of *The Without*.

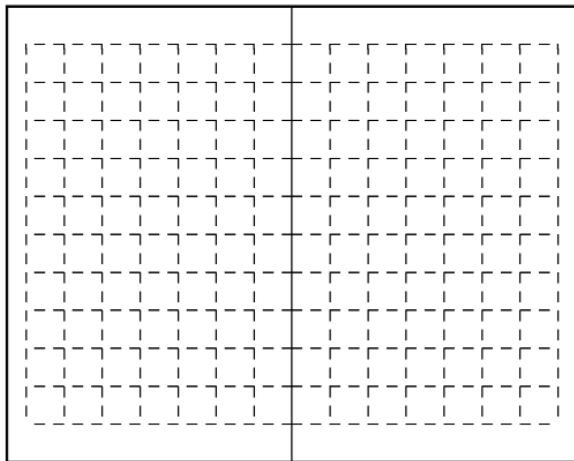


Diagram 3

High Modernism translates the Platonic dualism of idea and thing and its offspring, the Hegelian dialectic of form and content, into a binary structure implicit in the work itself. "The Plan is the generator," "a condensation of sensation" that both exceeds and fails the information of the built form.² (Le Corbusier, Fig. 6) Le Corbusier welds type and object into a single entity which he calls *objet-type* and illustrates with wine bottles as well as house plans and other refined products of mass production. The typological chore of the modern architect is to stabilize architecture through the relationship between form and function and through mass-production that establishes the *type's* (coin's) value.

This so called mass-production is actually an act of serialization, whose goal is not quantity but the perfection of the work lodged in a standard. The standard is the ideal, the *typos*. No two curtain walls of Mies are the same. For Le Corbusier, the Greek temple is a mass-produced object that achieved its unrepeatable perfection—its *typos*—in the Parthenon.

The Without

The painting shares the dry notational system of a plan that encodes spatial and sensual experience. The brush stroke is the mechanistic carrier of pure sensation. The els of blue and yellow construct the spatial arabesque. The plan of the painting is a labyrinth (The labyrinth is the arch plan type conceived by Daedalos and traced by Ariadne's string.)

*This painting does not stand alone. It is one of a series in which the internal binary structure is a repeated feature. **With** repetition comes perfection.*

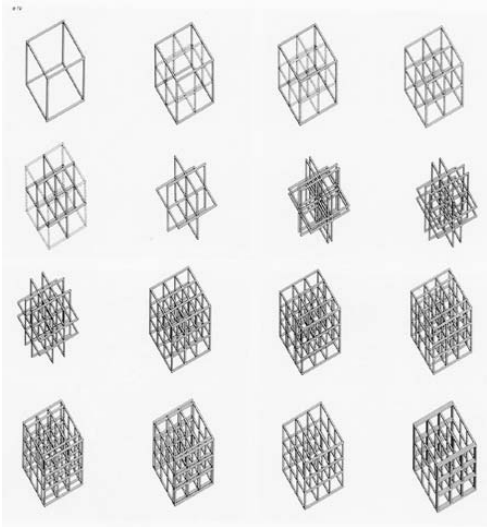


Fig. 8.
Drawing of House IV, *House of Cards*, Peter Eisenman, 1974.

Fig. 9.
The Duck and The Decorated Shed from *Learning from Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, 1977.

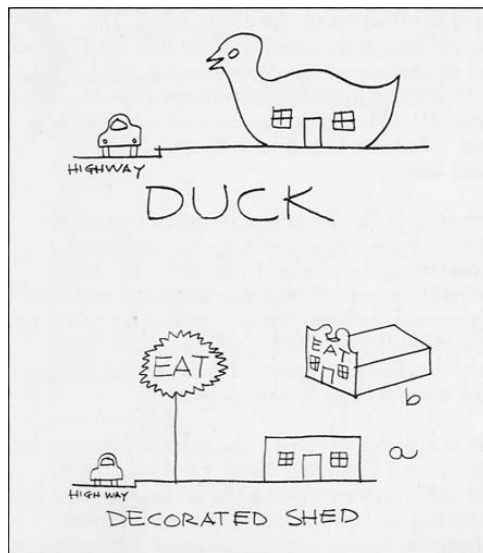


Diagram 4

Deeming the modern project a failure, and withdrawing from the fields of social and mass production, the Post-modernists explored binary conditions of architecture's own linguistic structure which they located either within Cartesian grids, co-ordinates and axes (Eisenman, Fig. 8) or figures taken as signs. (Venturi, Fig. 9) They called the drawing of these relationships the diagram. Subsequently, they re-established type as a code, describing it as a classical text with departures, some of which were "unprecedented" syntagem.³

The Without

Within the set of structural arguments made by the painting (the pre-linguistic penciled rules, the binaries, the relays) we choose to focus on the problem of sameness and difference. Is there an identity within the painting that has been deferred or is the painting constituted solely by its differences? (Barthes/Sassure) (Fig. 10)

*The diagram of the painting is a mirror. The two sides are trapped in mutual distortion. One panel does not exist **without** the other.*

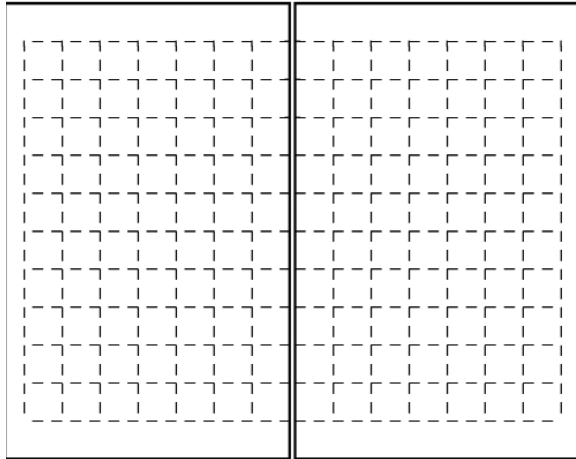


Fig. 10.
Diagram of *The Without*.

Fig. 11.
Drawing of the Paimio Chair, Alvar Aalto, 1933.

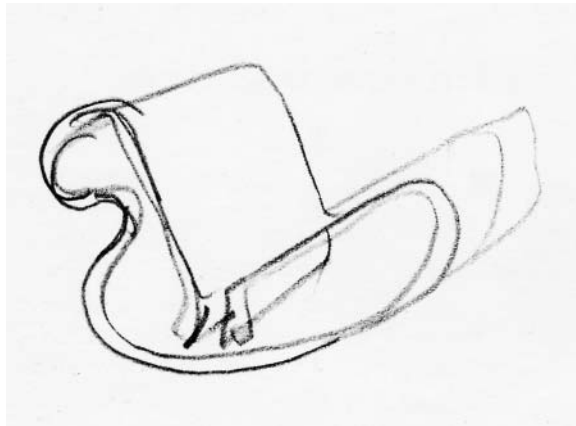


Diagram 5

The contemporary scene again takes up economically driven issues of reproduction and its value—of *typos* as *die*—this time including issues of the virtual and of simulation. Architects play out what they understand to be the inevitable forces of late capitalism in self-conscious commodification (Koolhaas' Prada) or the simulation of a new urbanism (Duany Plater-Zybeck's Seaside). They offer an uncertain kind of resistance through a new emphasis on process and gesture—the striking—taken from the general cultural paradigm of flow. If the value of the architecture is lodged in its design process rather than its objecthood, it is less easily commodified.

In search of the ultimate process, some give up control to the computer algorithm, others, like Gehry, maintain its gestural foundation. (Fig. 11) The goal is to approach pure gesture, such that even the underlay and all previous marks disappear without a trace, leaving the impression of a single continuous strike.

The Without

The gesture recorded as the painterly stroke, the weak edge or the atmospheric space undoes the diagram even as it sets out binary relationships with the graphic, the hard and the flat. (Fig. 12)

The resistant gesture distinguishes The Without from other contemporary paintings of labyrinths, which, according to Hal Foster,⁴ simulate Modernist abstraction while in fact depicting networks of late capitalism, flows of information and the intrinsically abstract thing that is capital itself.

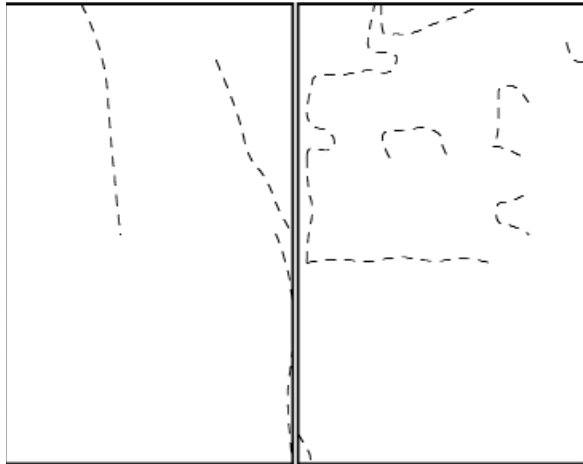


Fig. 12.
Diagram of The Without

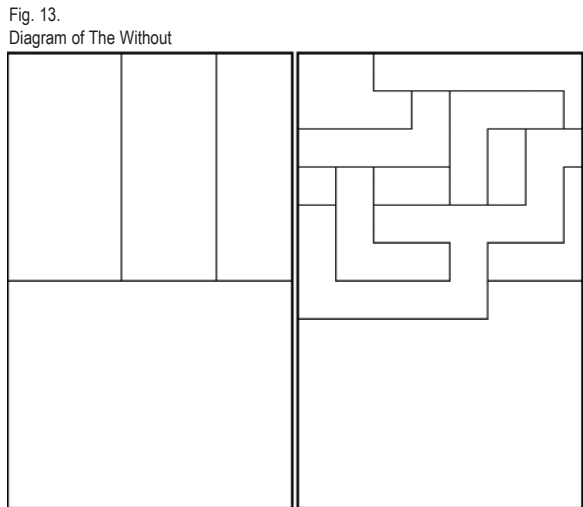


Fig. 13.
Diagram of The Without

Diagram 6

There is perhaps a different kind of resistance possible, one that makes a contest of desires for flow (striking) and objecthood (die), flux and stability, where neither wins.

The Without

The canvas is a single game board, its center break the boundary of each team's territory and the contested edge. The diptych form mandates two teams but not the number of plays and players. (Fig. 13)

The rules of the game are embedded in the board as the pencil "rules". These "ruled" lines are not to be confused with a Cartesian grid in extensio because they end within the border of the canvas. The pencil "rules" dictate the arena for decisions to be made and establish potential syntactical relationships, but do not constitute those relationships themselves. They are an a priori set of formal possibilities. They are the "typos" of the constructed canvas.

Paint is the chip or the coin that allows for syntactic exchange. Bids are made with elements (primary colors), binary systems (two yellows), graphic moves (center and edge), and painterly fields.

Within the syntactical field, there are many gambits. In one gambit, elements compete for our attention by position or identity. Yellow competes with yellow—endlessly. The "forgery" gambit asks us to determine which is the original/ first element and which the imposter. To identify a forgery would mean to discover a duplicity in the die and an inauthentic coin.

The game's theory, the modeling of competition for the purpose of equivalence, is a form of Game Theory, the mathematical modeling of conflict for optimization. According to such theory, the game has no winner.

Vexing the diptych with asymmetry
Joseph Masheck

To paint diptychs—paintings on paired panels or canvases—means not only not painting paintings of a single panel, but not painting triptychs—paintings on three panels. The different implications of the diptych and the painting as a singular field on a single ground, which has long been primary, are more obvious than the difference between diptychs and triptychs. So I want to begin by accounting the triptych as something more drastic for painting than simply a progression from duality into plurality. (Putting the matter this way already tends to eliminate mural painting, with its tradition of multiple images in cycles and registers, though not necessarily the codex format, allowing of double-page spreads in a book.) Let us, then, consider what Marjorie Welsh's painting entails by definitely *not* being a matter of triptychs, let alone polyptychs, and certain structural possibilities thereby accruing, or possible *devices*—in that good old Russian formalist word.

What seems implicitly wrong with the triptych format, from the Welsh point of view, is its hopeless openness to pictorialism.

Allow me to note that Marjorie and I happen to have a peaceable but endless dispute provoked one day, years ago, when walking on East 125th Street, near the Amtrak station in Harlem, when I pointed to an instance of the standard, so-called Palladian window in a second-storey facade, and said that in my view of art history linear diffusion is not so much the point as the immense web of connections between all instances of anything, including here any somehow linking the late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century window on 125th Street with Lord Burlington's definitive Neopalladian Chiswick House, of 1725, in London. While speaking I have been showing an authentic 'pseudo-Palladian' window—as Wittkower insisted it be called, because it is something that Palladio himself never did—namely, a window in that very house. Seen from within, and divided, A - B - A, into minor flat-headed, major round-headed, and minor flat-headed lights, Burlington's window gives a view of the equally definitive 'English garden,' or *jardin anglais*, thoroughly designed by William Kent; and I would maintain that the very triptych-like structure advances an, in this case, peculiarly appropriate sense that what one beholds is literally picturesque. Indeed, the disposition of all one can survey from the window is not natural but highly calculated, with actual artistic models (especially Confucian gardens as well as the paintings of Claude) in mind. Now the view of such an unnaturally artful nature would just not be so effectively picturesque if framed by a pair, only, of rectangular lights. The trouble is, 'picturesque' seems not such a good thing for a modern painting, at least, to be.

By the way: I am deliberately *not* summoning up the old academic red herring of the 'Albertian' window trope because I have already argued elsewhere that Leon Battista Alberti never really pronounced that a painting *should* necessarily be like a window into illusionistic space.¹

Beside one of the world's most definitive Neopalladian (that's a style), pseudo-Palladian (that's a type) windows, I show an Attic black-figured vase

painting of five women at a well, circa 520 B. C., in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This is a good place to open the question of diptychs *versus* triptychs, in that the division of the pictorial field into three zones by two columns, welcoming the inference of a continuous pictorial space behind, is almost exhibitionistically vain where, at the left, the second woman supposedly just happens to be caught behind a column, while the only interesting thing for the spectator is to wonder, then, why the third and fourth figures should instead happen to line up against the column between them, that is, if the *non*-occlusion at the right is more or less contrived. What matters, however, is that regrettably (we moderns would tend to say) the game of compositionally canned pictorial 'scenes'—a term tellingly parasitic on the drama—is already well under way.

There is much evidence to support the claim that the tripartite structure of the triptych serves the dubious cause of the 'picture' in the worst sense. And a 'picture,' it is necessary to say, because a painting by Marjorie Welish presents itself forthrightly as an image, a distinct and complete visual construct, but never as a picture. As Marjorie is aware, this distinction, well established among New York School painters of the Abstract Expressionist generation, has tended to go by the boards especially since, twenty years ago, the money people started perversely affecting an Anglophile-dilettante embrace of 'pictures' in the auction-room sense. The most hopelessly British case, however, must be that of the otherwise critically insightful Michael Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of* [N. B.] *Pictures* (1985); for it is one thing for amateur to confuse 'art' with painting, or even to presume that a bridge cannot be a work of art; but for an expert to devote a chapter of a book on the 'explanation of pictures' to the admittedly magnificent Firth of Forth Bridge is, if words still mean anything, ridiculous.

Without pretending to survey the development of the altarpiece of triptych, or three-paneled, form, it can be noted that in Domenico Veneziano's 'Saint

Lucy Altarpiece,' of the *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 1440-42 (Florence, Uffizi), a tripartite division by columns into three architectural 'bays' plays similarly against the division of the image into three, as in all altarpieces where a central subject from the New Testament or the life of a saint is flanked by saints and/or donors on separate 'wings' physically hinged to the central panel, here by having the social form of a metaphoric *sacra conversazione*, which, semiotically cutting across the generations, establishes a typically Italianate-classical metaphysical unity, advancing a naturalistic unification of space. Such unifying pictorialism is however by no means necessarily advantageous from a modern point of view, in that it works to compromise sign-value in favor of a supposedly natural, unconcocted 'nature.'

The triptych with hinged wings is a common format for Flemish altarpieces, with a definite tendency to have pictorial space spill with naturalistic consistency between main field and wings. In the Robert Campin 'Merode Altarpiece,' of about 1425, an *Annunciation*, in the Cloisters (of the Metropolitan Museum), there is a witty sense of exterior and interior contexts as both related to the chamber containing the archangel Gabriel and Mary. In Joachim Patinir's altarpiece of circa 1518 (also in the Metropolitan) with a central panel of the *Penitence of Saint Jerome*, and also many other such works, there is instead an extensive landscape setting, all pretty much of a pictorial piece: the ordinariness of the natural world just, 'interestingly' enough (if you *like* things interesting instead of beautiful) keeps flowing metonymically, oblivious to the physical splice. If anything, the classic Flemish triptych format shows a tropism toward metonymical continuity in the interest of pictorial naturalism.

When, in the Baroque, Rubens inherits this very format, his grand figural compositions such as the *Raising of the Cross*, 1609-10, in Antwerp cathedral, manage to maintain a sense of subordination of the wings. This



Fig. 1.
Poet and Muse. Early Christian Ivory diptych, V Century. Monza, Cathedral treasury.



Fig. 2.
Roger van der Weyden. *Crucifixion with Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist Mourning*, c1450-55.
Oil on panel. John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Fig. 3.
Pablo Picasso. *Bowl with Fruit, Violin, and Wineglass*, 1913.
Mixed media on cardboard. A.E. Gallatin Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Fig. 4.
Adolf Loos. Semi-detached houses in the Werkbundsiedlung, Vienna, 1930-32. Photograph by Marjorie Welish.

has wings with two saints each, plus assorted other figures, in settings having some continuity with the main image yet disjunct from its action, though the initial sketch for altarpiece was without wings.² Twenty-five years ago, by an amazingly solid argument, Alan Birnholz showed that Rubens' main composition, with its powerfully thrusting diagonal, inspired Kazimir Malevich's important *Suprematist Painting*, of 1917 (Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum) in which the three transverse arcs overlaying the hefty diagonal, derive from the crossbar and tilted figure, with shorter transverse axes, of Rubens' *Raising of the Cross*.³ Birnholz's study appeared just as we were also learning how Russian modernist interest in the Orthodox *ikon* had been piqued by the cleaning of the old paintings in the early years of the twentieth century. Natalia Goncharova, for one, did set and costume designs based on the essentially diptych-like 'royal doors' of the *ikonostasis* separating sanctuary from nave in Orthodox churches, for a projected Ballet Russe work titled *La Liturgie*, rehearsed in 1915 and then abandoned.⁴

The tropism of the triptych for more or less naturalistic pictorial continuity is evident in its mobilization as a device in early modern photography of decidedly 'pictorialist' cast. With actual vertical cuts, breaks in the image, and, as far as I know, untitled work of F. Holland Day, c. 1899, was not unique; and while the device serves to tender an image that is arty and artificial, in the sense of like art because like painting, the kind of painting on which it is parasitic was a naturalism itself trying to be 'poetic,' i. e., quasi-*symboliste*. Whatever carries over from symboliste spiritualism to expressionism, even expressionist painters—and long before Francis Bacon—might fall back on the triptych format: Erich Heckel's *Triptych: Convalescence of Woman*, 1913 (in the Busch-Reisinger Museum, at Harvard), does something quite this-worldly with it, setting up a continuum yet breaking it down, by a domesticated animism into an A-B-A sequence of potted plant, reclining figure in the positively passive state of convalescence, and sunflower blooms like therapeutic sunlamps, in a kind of spiritualistic altarpiece. Yet the very

strength of the naturalistic presumption is, for example, what Bernice Abbott structurally engaged and constructivistically overcame by using the vertical forms of two steel beams to break into three panels, altarpiece-like in being narrower / wider / narrower, of a triptych-structured photo mural at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932. By comparison, the carefully split, Rocky-Mountain-sublime landscape photograph pasted into Mies van der Rohe's famous project drawing, of 1938, for the Resor House, in Wyoming, is quite standardly naturalistic as a set-up for a structure exquisitely dematerialized—not to mention the transnaturalistically sublime structural conviction, ten years later, of Barnett Newman's classic paintings.

So much, for now, for the perennial triptych, the reason why it lends itself to pictorialism being its readiness to facilitate a continuity that may seem only incidentally interrupted, in comparison with the split between halves of a diptych as an undeniable 'caesura.' But before the triptych took off on its career, late antiquity had offered a format more integrally engendering of plays of similarity and opposition: that of the so-called 'consular diptych,' which played its part in the Byzantine prehistory of the Orthodox *ikon* that would be rediscovered by the Russian moderns. By analogy with the ancient diptych type, Welish's resort to the diptych format can begin to be seen—more than holding out against the relative pictorialism of the triptych—as the basis of a fine structural ingenuity.

Rejecting the triptych as such, with its pictorialist connotations, in Marjorie's name (Pictorial structure? *Just say 'No'!*), I want to dilate on the more welcome structural implications of the diptych, as founded on these examples in shallow ivory relief, of late Roman into Byzantine times as pairs of panels—at first book covers—related as 'braces' by identity, similarity and/ or opposition. They emerged in the late fourth century, serving as imperial gifts manifesting imperial identity after the subdivision into four of imperial rule, especially after the death of Constantine in 337. Consular

diptychs actually come in a variety of types, only some of which are consular or other imperial portraits but most of which admit of either doubling, including doubling with some element or elements somehow reversed, or binary opposition, while the format itself proves surprisingly open to category substitution, whether pagan or Christian, secular or sacred, even concrete or abstract.

In a late fourth-century diptych in the Liverpool City Museum, Asclepius and Hygenia personify medicine and hygiene. The equal-and-opposite structural relation of serpent exomorphially spiralling around the rough wood staff of the one and an otherwise similar serpent endomorphically unfolding itself like a firehose from within a metal tripod beside the other, is more to the artistic point. In another famous late fourth-century example now split between the Musée Cluny and the Victoria and Albert, two priestesses are seen respectively performing pagan rites; and had only the right half been found, understood to represent specifically a marriage rite, something otherwise similar-but-different—say something to do with marriage but civic, rather than some other sort of sacrifice (as here)—might have turned up as the lost left half.

In one remarkable fifth-century case, in Vienna (Kunsthistorisches Museum), personifications of Rome and Constantinople present themselves as a categorical pair of imperial capitals, analogous but different, equal and opposite—Miss West and Miss East—as differently but comparably in Islamic manuscript illuminations with paired views of the two Muslim holy cities, as for example in a work of 1739-40, in the Museum für Kunsthandwerk at Frankfurt (in a manuscript of Al-Gazeli's eleventh- or twelfth-century *Prayers and Litanies in Praise of the Prophet*), with Medina and Mecca appearing almost stereoscopically similar. Another fifth-century diptych, in the Monza cathedral treasury, is all the more remarkable on behalf of our painter-poet for showing a poet and muse. (Fig. 1) Here the male poet

sits, passively attentive in a worldly manner, with legs casually crossed, while the female muse not only stands statuesquely but presses actively forward, as if in unruffled uniform, like a proper express-delivery person. How easy—thinking of our female poet—it would be to effect a substitution in respect to gender, without compromising the structure, as perhaps by some play on the terms ‘anima’ and ‘animus.’ The flexibility of structure that would allow of such substitution is just the reason why, when one half of a consular diptych is missing, there can be a reasonable sense of what the missing half should look like, buffered by a skepticism that something about it will prove not simply *like unto* at all but rather *like* as equivalently different.

I realize that for a generation now structuralism as such has been criticized for schematizing reality into seemingly just the kind of closed, equational structures framed in terms of polarities as I seek to elucidate here, and this must be relevant in the present context if we are to see the ancient diptychs in light of Welsh’s, or vice versa. Although I tend not to wish to abandon art in its physical presence, I can at least remind all concerned that it is quite possible for art to stand respectably in Schopenhauerean-compensatory disjunction with life, rather than in metonymic continuity or reflexive relation with it. It is even possible that there is something as ‘universal’ or at least as universally accessible in art as there is in, say, chess, without it being reactionary to pursue such a thing.

Further examples of the variety of ways the consular diptych game could be played include such a subtle equation of differences as a double image of Boethius as consul, of A.D. 487, in the Museo Cristiano of Brescia, where standing figure and seated figure are equated in a curious post-classical isocephaly. Horizontal division of the panels offers one of the more conspicuously Welsh-like categories of variation, such as in the panels of Probianus as Vicar of Rome, dating to 402, where a hierarchy of size in the miniaturization of subsidiaries to the throned figures above extends to

medium-sized burners of incense ‘below decks.’ In another fifth-century example at Brescia, members of the ‘Lampadi’ family look down from a balcony upon chariot racing below. Finally, a much later example in this distinguished tradition in the borderland between sculpture and painting, purportedly of the tenth century, has a rather Welsh-like differentiation of panels into three bands each but that as much as refuse to jibe.

It should be apparent, in view of these various examples, that the doubled, couplet-like presence of the paired ivory panels, wood panels or stretched canvases foregrounds the formal role of image structure, as with regular metric forms in poetry. And is there not something marvelous in the fact that one might find a damaged manuscript of an unpublished poem, and, lacking the end of a certain line, make quite reasonable inferences about the sound of a missing word without even knowing what the word was.

Considering these matters from a structural rather than an antiquarian point of view, it strikes me that, side by side with the ‘complete set-up’ of Giovanni Bellini’s 1488, altarpiece in the Frari church, at Venice, with Saints Nicholas and Peter in the lefthand wing and Benedict and Mark in the right, the pair of orphaned altarpiece leaves, dating from about 1523-26, in the Munich Alte Pinakothek, the so-called *Four Apostles*, by Dürer, an admirer of Bellini, always looks only all the more punchy seen cheek by jowl, with Peter and John at the left and Paul and Mark at the right, doing quite anti-pictorially well, thank you, without an intervening narrative panel. And one cannot raise this question in this city without saluting the splendid diptych by Rogier van der Weyden of the *Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist*, from the earlier 1450s, in the Philadelphia Museum. (Fig. 2) With triptychs, the plurality of the tripartite might seem to promise a beneficial openness, but it proves all too easy to have figural side panels facilitate naturalistic consistency in the principal scene by a merely conventional ‘openness.’ Better the forthright clash of structures showing structure forth as such, as in

the amazing Philadelphian *Crucifixion*, in which the active, diagonal sagging and lifting of earthly bodies and hearts on one side is countered by the centrality, frontality and—except for the rustling ends of the Christ figure's drapery—the timeless stasis of the cross and corpus at the right, in a kind of equal-and-opposite balance of asymmetric differentiation. How Rogier's red 'cloth of honor' hangs, leaving wide even borders of gray stone and, across both panels' tops, black, can be likened to the play of broad (and narrower) bands of color, including black, in orthogonal interplay, of such a work by Marjorie Welish as *The Without I*, of 1999.

It happens that for some years before arriving at her definitive diptych format, Marjorie produced four-canvas paintings in which there are top-to-bottom shifts, displacements and doublings as well as left/ right discontinuities, *The High Valley No. 13*, of 1982, being an example. Back then, around the turn of the 'seventies, one might have justified this as painting by emphasizing its large patterned section as 'decorative,' it supposedly being a prerogative of women's art to indulge a polymorphous-perverse hysteria of surface ornamentation over and against, supposedly, all the compulsive centering of attention in guy-painted painting. The trouble was (and unfortunately often still is) that the decorative articulation of a 'literally' flat surface was the great plateau of Post-impressionism, attained by 1890 with the final elimination of illusionistic space; but this elimination of the false old pictorial space in virtue of an affirmative decorativeness shared with the applied arts at the turn of the century, was not enough, neither for expressionists, who bridled at the an-aesthetic tendency to idealize a passively pacific surface; nor, still more consequentially, for the cubists. Negating the false old space was certainly not enough for Braque and Picasso: notwithstanding, or in spite of, its two-dimensional limitation, painting must be capable of engendering a new, non-illusionistic structure of space, not a given scaffold but space elicited in consequence of intersections of the forms of things, interference patterns, as it were, of edges as constituting a virtually crystalline structure *entailing*

space—for example, in Picasso's early *Nude Woman*, a beautiful charcoal, analytical cubist drawing assigned to 1910 by the Museum of Modern Art. Edges as frontiers of 'extension' assume new importance as constituting a construct, in this conception.

Although the question of Immanuel Kant in relation to cubism is complex, I want to point out that in the 'Transcendental Aesthetic' of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant nullifies the presumption of space and time as objective conditions in part by offering (A47/ B65) that the claim that with "two straight lines... alone no figure is possible" cannot be "deriv[ed]... from the concepts involved" but must, as ever in geometry, depend on intuition as itself formed by a "universal *a priori* condition under which alone the object of... outer intuition is itself possible" (A48/ B65).⁵ Kant is busy explaining the self-evidence of the idea that with "two straight lines... alone no figure is possible," and we cannot pretend we miss the point; but how shall it matter if actuality flies in the face of agreed impossibility?

Kant must have been unaware of a caricature by Hogarth in which two lines only (A, B) constitute a describable "figure"; true, there is a third line, a curve (C), but it does not compromise the case because the extra line is disposable with a simple adjustment of the title. (Those of us of a certain age will recall that the visual pun by Hogarth adumbrates the sight-gag drawings done 'live' on 1950s television, by the cartoonist Roger Price.) While Hogarth's drawing obviously consists of three lines, whereas two straight lines only would be specified, the third line, a curve, could be handily negated to satisfy Kant's specification, most simply by amending the promise of the title from 'A Man Carrying a Rifle Leaving a Tavern with a Dog' to a prosaic 'Man Carrying a Rifle Leaving a Tavern' or (rather like the way Mae West said "if you're really good at it"), to 'A Man Carrying a Rifle Leaving a Tavern *Ahead* of His Dog.' There would not have been sufficient visual wit for the joke were it not for the 'counting in' of the punningly 'concrete' door-jamb edge as a

spatial disjunction or caesura indicated by the single vertical line, nor without a basic sense that the same feature might semiotically *occlude* the other two. Had Hogarth been around to respond to Kant, he might have one-upped him by drawing his single diagonal along the right-hand edge of his sheet of paper, capitalizing on the edge as the line for his door-jamb and doing the job with *one* line alone. And I would add that there is today something left of Hogarth's witty play on the inner-edge idea—as well as a cubistic play on the concreteness of letters as signs—in Jasper Johns's *Field Painting*, of 1964.

Among Welsh's earlier, four-panel works that put me in mind of the little Hogarth *caricatura* in light of Kant, *The High Valley No. 13*, again, is already diptych-like in the primacy of its split into left and right more than top and bottom halves, the diagonal edges of related triangular forms meet up, at an angle, not only with the upper edge of the whole but with such an 'internal edge' as occurs between the abutted panels of the right-hand diptychly 'leaf,' and this relation of side of triangle to edge of panel, playing on line as limit of material extension and line as pertaining to surface.

In the later 1980s Welsh's four-canvas format became a transitional diptych, in that its two 'leaves,' while no longer structurally divided each in two, top and bottom, in the sense of physical structure, were still, or only *all the more*, 'structurally' so divided. Thus, seven or eight years later, in *Small Higher Valley No. 9*, 1994-95, one panel of the diptych is dominated by a clash between two broad-banded 'tricolor' areas, a vertically banded atop a horizontally banded, consisting of two different yellows and two different blues, with a kind of 'wipe' between, while the other panel harbors a complexly checkered area that loosens up into its lower half to make for a large plain area subdivided by line into complementary geometric and organic forms. But I wish to elaborate on this construct at the left of this painting, which is very characteristic of Welsh's sense of—one wished there

were a better word than 'pictorial,' how then about *imagic*—structure, which seems to me to partake of the sometimes amazing structural astuteness of early cubist collage, but precisely as 'pure painting.'

For elucidation: in one of Picasso's best early collages, the *Bowl with Fruit, Violin and Wineglass*, of 1912, in the A.E. Gallatin Collection, here at the Philadelphia Museum, something has long struck me as one of the most structurally decisive and intellectually exciting twentieth-century 'moves' in the game of painting. (Fig. 3) I speak not of the witty substitution of 'real' graphic illustrations of fruit for conjured fruit-surrogates to suit the flat stand-in for a compote at the upper left (which I always suspect might have been cut from that all-American monument of turn-of-the-century color printing, S.A. Beach, N.O. Booth and O.M. Taylor's two-volume 1905 *The Apples of New York*, though admittedly the stray pear cannot have dropped in from *The Pears of New York*, which apparently appeared in the same New York State agricultural series only in 1921).

No, I most particularly mean Picasso's 'nonrepresentational' *papier collé* construct in the lower left. There, by some combination of ink-brush-like painting and cutting, rotation and overlapping the black-brushed paper, Picasso has produced a row of even, neatly brushy black stripes alternating with wider-spaced 'blanks' in between, like the 'blacks' and wider 'whites' of a piano keyboard. Then by a single transverse tear, careful but apparently 'freehand' as torn after folding, the now bifurcated strip of capital 'T's' is rotated ninety degrees and turned back on itself, producing at left a capital 'E.' Here the very *matériel* of language is concretized, but though linguistic in an obvious sense, this is as utterly *non-verbal* as those eye-charts for pre-literate children, consisting of all capital E's variously rotated. Moreover, just as non-verbally yet more linguistically, an algebraic equation of sorts is hinted at by the same cut and rotation: 'E = 2T.' Brilliant, in the context, is the cubist overlap, whereby one sign is made only more concrete as sign under

impingement or impact of another: the otherwise insignificant corner of white from the 'T' row over the central prong of the 'E,' making it only the more properly typographical a Roman capital.

From among any number of Welishes proffering comparable devices, I show for its associations with the constructivism that developed out of cubism a collaborative drawing, *Lodz Project No. 1*, made as a visiting artist at The Artists' Museum, at Lodz, in Poland, in 1997, in collaboration with Jerzy Grzegorski. This was the first of sixteen pieces, in which Welish painted on heavy paper, and in each case Grzegorski responded to her drawing by drawing an overlay in charcoal on tracing paper. In the present instance, her composition by subdivision into quarters, thirds and halvings, with displacement, in black bands against white paper alone, comes quite close to the structure of Picasso's 'E = 2T' device.

As Marjorie has made no secret of her respect for just the constructivist tradition that more young Polish artists would nowadays do better to respect, I show an example rather more 'concrete' than her own, which also relates to the Picasso device: *Composition*, 1932, by the Polish constructivist Henryk Stazewski, who only died in 1988. With Wladyslaw Strzeminski, at just about the moment he painted this work, Stazewski was articulating 'Unism' as a way of transcending the limitations of composition in the traditional sense—even still in purely nonobjective art—of the artful subdivision of a still all too pictorial field. The *composition* in question has two rectangular areas of smooth white, fused and breaking up a surrounding white field, distinguished only by the peaked facture of its bushwork in larger and smaller, though still quite 'non-relational,' areas. By no means out of character with it is such a work as *Small Higher Valley No. 8*, of 1994, in which Welish both allows of substantial areas of white, and makes a point of the coexistence of two factures: a 'weak' brushiness, especially in the white, and a plainer fullness in the yellow and red.

Yet because Marjorie is simply not a neoconstructivist painter, it seems worth looking into later cubism as well. Picasso's great *Girl Before a Mirror*, 1932, in the Museum of Modern Art, is obviously more affected by surrealism than Stazewski's all-white abstraction of the same year, though many a surrealist could appreciate the sheer extremism of Stazewski's compositional differentiation by facture alone. Let us juxtapose with the audaciously complex *Girl Before a Mirror* a comparably twin-lobed, split, diptych-like composition by Matisse, *Odalisque with Tambourine*, of five years earlier (1927; Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum). When he painted this *Odalisque* Matisse had already painted the better known *Moorish Screen* (1921), in the Philadelphia Museum, whose informal composition of two women with the same screen behind them has none of the diptych-like bifurcation featured here.⁶

In the Pasadena *Odalisque* Matisse's figure rather smooths over the fact of a hinge between panels of the deep indigo, ornamentally patterned screen. This seems conservative, naturalistic in its presumption of coherent contiguity, before the great *Girl Before a Mirror*, in which Picasso elaborates a brassy, percussive, coloristically clashing complex consisting not only the self and self-image of the young lady contemplating her own anatomical bodiliness, but also accompanying inflections of the common context of the figure or pair of figures. The percussive rhythms of the doubled figure's patternistic 'back-up' shift raucously without missing a beat in the trellis-like wallpaper pattern of lozenges picked out with a circle in each: here red as pattern, there as ground; here and there green doubling with black, as if in a jazzy warble, against the blaring, Van Gogh-like yellow ground.

It's just too simplistic to go along with the notion that, in effect, the decorative colorism of Matisse is bodily and feminine, and that that's either good enough for gals to identify with or else for guys to bag as their proper quarry, leaving—funny thing—Picasso, the brain, as ever the artist-genius. So I

want quickly to make two points: (a) that in this work so charged with the notion of male creativity as compensation for the unfathomable mystery of childbearing, notwithstanding Picasso's analytical penetration of the figure's own penetrating self-regard what Matisse produces is not just a pretty face, but also (b) that the structural articulateness of Marjorie's painting is more like the *Girl Before Mirror* than the *Odalisque with Tambourine* anyway. Certainly the Marjorie Welish who often elects to work with two reds and two yellows or blues in one diptych has something structural in common with the Picasso who seems here to double and treble the structural interest of his so coloristically constituted pattern; for nothing in all this is more relevant to the hyper-structural art of Welish than the way Picasso supercharges that grid which might have remained just so much onrolling wallpaper pattern as supposedly decorative, hence secondary. Ever since late nineteenth-century Post-impressionism the decorative had been contrasted with the pictorial, which is still true as far as it goes; but as cubism made evident and Welish seems evidently aware, *on the farther side of the decorative is the structural*.

Yet Matisse himself is also seen to have been manifestly capable of building up an image structure of coloristic differentiation in respect to the skewed grid of a textile pattern seemingly cast over a clothed figure like a unifying net. In fact, in *Woman with a Veil*, also of 1927 (Museum of Modern Art), he had more reservedly shifted colors beneath a similarly skewed grid, if without as fully integrating them with it in a bold color-quartering of the figure. Here Matisse's seated figure sits frontally, legs centrally crossed, with head upon hand and elbow upon knee like a Renaissance 'Melancholia,' the quadrants of her over-shoulder scarf and skirt, split left and right while affiliated by overlay of a diagonal grid of yellow lines. This yellow pattern is indeed a grid, but its being uppermost in the surface gives it no structural priority: rather, as with the tick of a metronome 'in front of' music, its division of the surface only heightens a play of structural differences going on

beneath. For the lefthand half of the 'draped' figure only counts as two quadrants of 'red,' i. e., a vertical pair of red 'sames,' because the righthand quadrants are both 'differents,' what with the upper right green, and the lower right black. (And let us note in passing that Matisse's active engagement of black as a color is one of the more significant practices on the way from Manet to Welish.)

The structure of Matisse's quartered figure is so engaging in its overlapping equations of identity and difference that it should remind many of my generation of a frequently reprinted diagram from Claude Lévi-Strauss. The diagram was, to begin with, a drawing on paper by a native artist of the Caduveo people in Brazil of a face-painting of traditional sort. Lévi-Strauss first discussed it during the War in the first issue of the New York avant-garde, especially surrealist, art magazine *VVV* in 1942, and again in *Tristes tropiques* (1955), and also in an essay on 'Split Representation in the Art of Asia and America' in *Renaissance* for 1944-45, published in New York by the exile École Libre des Hautes Études and later collected in *Structural Anthropology* (1958). When I saw it in this last source and wrote a little about it in an amateur-structuralist essay on new abstract painting in *Artforum* for November 1979, 'Nothing/ Not Nothing/ Something,'⁷ I had not yet read Jameson's *Prison-House of Language* (1972), where the same item is embedded in a critique of structuralism as showing, apparently incompetently, "[a]rt... as a working out in formal terms of what a culture is unable to resolve concretely." That might sound innocent enough, in that art has often managed, if not always explicitly to engage, often to deal indirectly or by sublimation with matters of social as well as individual life, including mortality; but Jameson is disappointed that art doesn't affect social contradictions, only as "an articulation on the level of the signifier, of a signified which is essentially felt to be an antinomy or a contradiction."⁸

It is now a long time since Jameson described structuralist binary opposition

as “a kind of arrested dialectic, the projection of a multi-dimensional concept into a world of plane surfaces”;⁹ but in painting there is little to build up an image with, representational or not, on the singular plane surface, besides such oppositions and distinctions, especially if we consider the whole matter of complementary colors binary. Something that deserves to be affirmed is the generally overlooked ‘socialization’ value of even nonobjective painting in its more analytically demanding forms as offering intensive occasions of shared, sympathetic cognition. Without implying that it need bear the whole weight of a defense of structuralistic abstraction, I think it is only fair to credit Welsh’s work in painting with problematizing structural thinking as happily mind-engaging, in that it welcomes cognition about visual, formal conjunctions of color as well as form and rewards it with delight.

Relatedly, the checkering that occurs in many of Welsh’s paintings is not really so much a question of ‘grid’ painting as it is a generative structure of mutually negative mutual definition, white squares being *nothing but* non-black ones, independently of any ‘grid’ lines in between. It may be significant that all checkering seems complete in a markedly asymmetric condition, starting with a dark or light unit and ending the row with its opposite, whereas grids purport to be on-rolling symmetries (at least in the mathematical or musical sense, in which A-B-A-B is a symmetry). In an article titled ‘Hard-Core Painting’ in *Artforum* for April 1978 I reproduced a checkered diagram from Goethe’s *Farbenlehre* (1810),¹⁰ a diagram that soon recurred in Rosalind Krauss’s essays on the pictorial grid, starting a year later (with the Summer 1979 *October* magazine and a 1980 catalogue for the Pace Gallery). But Goethe wasn’t really talking about ‘the grid’—for in a sense there is only one—and neither was I, any more than I have concentrated here on Matisse’s yellow ‘grid’ as, if anything, decoratively passive vis-à-vis the fascinating, almost heraldic ‘quartering’ that it overlays. Inspired by then contemporary abstract painting, I was trying to ‘get at’ something about the dialectic of visual structure.

When the checkerboard structure reminds us of the game of chess, we are thereby reminded of a game that no player will ever dismiss as formalism. It is enough to recall the great respect of not only surrealists but the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky for the ‘knight’s move’ in particular. Besides the knight’s move as signifying political astuteness, Shklovsky writes, in his introduction to *The Knight’s Move* (1923), a collection of essays published between 1919 and 1921 (a period all too easily idealized when the main reason for any lack of artistic repression was simply the greater urgency of all matters other than art): “There are many reasons why the knight moves this way, and the most important of them—the conditionality of art...” (ellipsis in original): “I am writing about the conditionality of art.”¹¹ The sheer limitations of all planar formats and the chemical and optical limitations of color are all certainly ‘conditional’ in painting.

But I’m not *quite* finished! I want to offer a little coda, concerning form in architecture, specifically, the early modernist architecture of Adolf Loos (even one’s obsessions can be portals to wisdom!). For I am struck by certain formal parallels implying similar attitudes toward form as a matter of interrelated orthogonal subdivision, whether in Marjorie’s painting or in the plastic slicing through of a wall, breaking its bulk into boxy, closed and open volumes, in Loos’s architecture. Certainly some compositional similarity obtains between the long, transverse wall of what we Americans would call the living room of Loos’s 1930 Villa Müller, in Prague, and such a composition by Marjorie as *The Without VI*, of just last year (2001). No need to spell this out in descriptive detail when it is enough to remark a totality-to-totally equivalence, despite the different circumstances, between the flat wall as cut through irregularly but everywhere rectilinear and orthogonal—especially as silhouetted against dark and light areas behind in a head-on photograph—and the rectilinear and orthogonal articulation of the uncompromisingly flat, ‘imagic’ composition in painting.

One of the recurrent motifs of Marjorie's painting, however, a certain 'L'-shaped or *gamma* form, is a structural motif with especially interesting architectural counterparts that, by comparison, show up formal significance—even, dare one say, formal poetry—as against a structural neutrality (sometimes positively antiformalist) found not only in 'functionalist' architecture but also in materialist-constructivist painting. The same recent diptych just cited makes a point of the symmetries and asymmetries obtaining between several yellow or white *gamma* forms and their upper-to-lower and left-to-right affiliates that reminds me of an interesting late work by Loos, his double, semi-detached houses built as municipal housing in the Werkbund Siedlung, on the western outskirts of Vienna, in 1930-32; but lest this be considered idle association on my part, I hasten to add that to my best recollection the photograph of the Loos project which we are looking at was actually taken by this artist, as well as poet, whom we honor today. (Fig. 4)

There is general precedent for the Welsh *gamma* form in the architectonic 'gamma' formed where an L-shaped wall opening develops because a rectangular opening is partly blocked by a smaller rectangular solid—not unlike, by the way the Polish constructivist Composition of Stazewski, from 1932, already invoked, but also not unlike, in a classic example, the shopfronts of the ground floor of Bramante's so-called House of Raphael, in the High Renaissance. Furthermore, in a drawing by Palladio of the corner of the same house that highly plastic architect was also interested in how a 'leftie' version of the form pairs up, à la Welsh, with a 'rightie' around the corner. Some such forms are, to be sure, artlessly a-formal even if not utterly inadvertent. With Welsh in view, it is striking to see how actively and engagingly symmetry and asymmetry are negotiated by Loos in major and minor 'gammas,' not to render the facade in any sense decorated but to accord it visibly intelligent formal articulation.

While with the Villa Müller Loos was permitted to work much more expensively than the house's unostentatious exterior plainness might suggest, here he was no doubt working under economic constraint on a tight budget: talk about the Shklovskiiian 'conditionality' of art, which is quite relevant here in terms of the 'knight's move.' And in fact, even Loos's little double house, already by itself an architectural diptych, was actually built as a brace of two. In any case, the top-and-bottom, left-and-right symmetries and asymmetries of Loos's semi-detached, double houses and Marjorie Welsh's diptychs must have been similarly conceived, and, especially for their deployment of the knight's-move *gamma* device, similarly *tweaked*, which must mean something more than vexed.

MIND : THE GAP
Kenneth Baker

Searching for a way to describe Marjorie Welsh's painting *Small Higher Valley 6* (1994), I hit upon the following possibility:

1.

Left of the median, deferring,
right serving the same silhouette:
the silhouette of taking half,

then half again, within
a box, siring box-like
textual symptoms most widely speculating

on a set of fixities
consumes prestigious amounts
of interchangeable nature

reliably modular
weighing in modular
dimension

of fixed lust
characteristic of the exterior
boxes in series
even as much of this ballast
anticipates interior
diction.

2.

Box, divided from self, expects orienting louver
(Note the mortuary practices sustained.)

Two pages—the isomorphism is only partial, of course.
Falling short is a prospect of a kind.

Two pages from afar, “of the two malefactors who were crucified....”
“We now follow the second procedure,” he said.

3.

Exterior dimensions invariable
interior dimensions unthinkable.

Exterior dimensions invariable
interiors variably thinkable.

Artificial lakes
artificial lakes

to the left, to the right
ordination of the interior. (*The Annotated “Here,”* 3)

This, of course, is Welsh's own poem, “A Work.” As a match for *Small Higher Valley* 6, it has the advantage of not being a description, for the painting responds to, but does not correspond to, matters outside itself. The poem also responds rather than corresponding. Like the painting, it is a chamber in which the ambiguities of borrowed materials clash and echo until the principles by which meaning is read from and into them shake loose.

Some of Welsh's work in poetry *and* painting reminds me of certain sculptures Joel Shapiro made early in late 70s and early 80s. Eccentrically angular, floor-bound solids cast in plaster or bronze, they materialize the spaces among forms that have long since been removed. They come as close as any other artist has to objectifying the preoccupation of Welsh's work as poet and painter: the unnameable volumes and contours of interruption. Not merely spatial or physical discontinuities, not merely gaps in time, observation or memory, but the uncharted rifts between things and events and the language with which we try to corral them, befriend them, bring them close. (One philosopher has argued recently that the mark of the mind is what quantum physics calls non-locality: i.e., that the mind does not inhabit space. On purely intuitive grounds, I couldn't agree more.)

Words themselves, as Welsh deploys them in poetic structures, display the fact that the mesh they form is really a tangle, and almost all holes. Functioning as a critic, Welsh is forced to pretend otherwise, as are we all, if we wish to get through the day without collapsing into Wittgensteinian solipsism. But secretly we know that ordinary life in society is a vast conspiracy to pretend that the common world is more solids than voids and that we can magically re-pattern the way things stand existentially, even metaphysically, by the incantatory powers of word and syntax. “Exterior dimensions invariable/ interior dimensions unthinkable./ Exterior dimensions invariable/ interiors variably thinkable,” as Welsh puts it, with admirable avoidance of reference.

We are forever checking the world against our versions of it, meanwhile checking one version against another, until inevitably we lose ourselves in the shuffle. Helplessly finding ourselves in the shuffle—finding ourselves finally to be nowhere else—is a recurrent theme of Welsh's work as I read it.

That is one reason she favors diptychs, I believe, because even if completed, or abandoned, as artifacts, they can never be exhausted as objects of interpretive consumption. Not because they are inherently involving as a format, but because they enforce a process of cross-checking. Looking from side to side of a diptych such as *Small Higher Valley 6*, we expect one side somehow to account for the other—perhaps by a quote, an excerpt, an expanded detail, a retraction, redaction, a contradiction. But as her poetry postpones conclusive readings, even of its component fragments, most of her diptych paintings postpone or preclude discovery of an equation that might resolve the two sides' relationship. Once begun, the search for explanatory reciprocity in principle (setting aside practice) never ends.

The easy escape, if we remain engaged with the painting, is into imagining a genealogy for what it presents. Welsh's paintings can be fitted into a modern lineage of abstraction that descends through the work of Barnett Newman and Ellsworth Kelly, among others. But her work, at least *Small Higher Valley 6* and a number of others I can call to mind, has about it the air of an abandoned game—though, not of an abandoned project—that few abstract painters of an earlier generation would have tolerated.

In most painters' hands, abstraction today looks like the end of something. Imagining a future for it has become inestimably more difficult than plotting a past. I take the unfinished quality (a disguise, I believe) of some of Welsh's paintings to be an acknowledgment of this state of affairs and even, in some measure, an answer to it, as the doubleness of her canvases is.

If abstraction can begin, or restart, something now, it must be a process that does not reside in the object itself. The formal transactions between the two sides of Welsh's diptychs, played out in the shuttling of the viewer's attention between them, speak of mismatch as an inevitable feature of reference, allusion, recognition, implicitly of all interpretive maneuvers.

"A Work," the poem, holds another clue to Welsh's diptychs in its reference to "the two malefactors who were crucified." To anyone familiar with Christian altarpieces, this reference brings to mind their traditional format: the triptych. This far from explicit reference may confirm a viewer's feeling about many of Welsh's diptychs: that they imply a missing middle panel, or middle term.

The missing middle would make immediate sense of those parts we see and confer the feeling of wholeness from which a consciousness of history makes us moderns (post- or not) feel hopelessly alienated. The middle term is the non-existent glue (or god or perfection of mind) that would certify and vindicate the matches between sign and meaning that we falteringly make in our decipherment of signs, selves, feelings, events and passages. The non-existence of that middle term—of the center panel—seems merely to make us crave it all the more, even though we survivors of the twentieth-century have never known it. In Welsh's work we have the materials with which to educate ourselves out of the longing for it, which is, at best, doomed to nostalgia.

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Correspondances (Beyond the structure)

Olivier Gourvil

In this text I should like to evoke the active relationships Marjorie Welsh sets in motion between art and language, in her painting as in her statements, and more specifically between abstraction and language. The title “Correspondences” recalls Baudelaire’s famous poem, for continuous correspondences set themselves up between the language of art and the art of language. Make no mistake here: these correspondences between art and language are in this context not poetic allegories but the very materials of reflection, analysis and creation. They are the correspondences between various modes of perception, sensation and thought continuously provoked by the works, “engaged mode of thought rather than a holding pattern in archival practices,” as Marjorie Welsh herself defines her critical practice in her Introduction to *Signifying Art*.¹ And what of the structure announced in the subtitle? Does it not seem to come to oppose the apparent fluidity of the correspondences? Henceforth let us say that in Marjorie Welsh’s paintings a heterogeneity slips into the structure and that a asymmetrical order sometimes dissolves into the colors. Beyond the structure...

In every instance, this structure and these correspondences between art and language return to the surface in the work of Marjorie Welsh. On this ground

of art and language we share (with so many other artists), at the suggestion of painter Bruno Rouselot, I invited Marjorie Welish to write a statement about her work as an artist for the publication, "Tableau: Territoires Actuels." ² This statement is entirely centered on language, on the movement of language in the work and more generally in the abstract painting:

"Modern abstraction has become a language fully capable of articulation. Bias toward an abstraction comprehensive of a gradient of meaning developable into criticality, the several series comprising the 'High Valley,' Small Valley' and 'Small Higher Valley' attempt to advance art as a fully articulate language and text." ³

Marjorie Welish equally advances a notion of style and of grammar:

"Within these polyptychs—which also may play one order against three or two orders against two—color participates in an ongoing conceptual consideration of style and grammar (...) Style as grammar is a special presupposition of mine, for which syntax holds a signifying place." ⁴

The manner in which the historical materials (colors, grids etc.), modes of presentation and repetition (polyptich, series...) articulate in the work of contemporary abstract painters establishes a grammar and a syntax for this pictorial vocabulary. The work is on the actual materials of painting. Certain of these artists have privileged exploitation of and technical constraints on paint-matter (like Bernard Frize, or the Support-Surface group in France), others insist on forms or models (Richter); but these artists never forget historical legacy as the fundamental element of this syntax. Marjorie Welish manifests this separate awareness of modern history in her paintings as in her statements. While I evoke notions of grammar and syntax, the literary

arena, which is par excellence that of language, presents us with a rich illumination of this idea through Emmanuel Hocquard's reflection:

"Besides those who continue to celebrate 'the height of human song' and eternal Poetry's 'music of the soul', those who 'express their impressions' happy or miserable, we find the ones who have chosen rather to place the accent on language itself, on its function and its functions, not on linguists and philosophers, but, I would say, on grammarians. So as to open the idea of grammar to other than just a code of fixed rules and authorities ruling our language and our thought." ⁵

This last thought helps to place the work of Marjorie Welish squarely on the side of language, in language.

...

The pictorial work of Marjorie Welish proceeds serially. In her paintings, in this serial formation, a space and a temporality both historical and plastic arise. Historical because this space and this temporality are furnished on the one hand by inherited modern color (yellow-red-blue), and on the other hand by the modern grid Marjorie Welish uses to disrupt. Plastic because this space and this temporality meet the phenomena of repetition, asymmetry and nuance, as much through color as construction. The modern vocabulary is thus worked not like invariant structures but, on the contrary, like structures in transformation, subject to the instabilities of our contemporary vision. Colors become tactile, the grid shifts. A kind of labyrinth substitutes for the traditional grid, like an *after-grid*. This labyrinth constitutes a figure opening

onto numerous correspondences in the arena of art, history and human thought. Open and enigmatic structure occurs in this painting.

This consciousness of modernity is thus one of surpassing. Surpassing is in no way negation, rejection or even opposition, but historical continuity. This continuity which is a constant and very rich datum of the abstract adventure is equally a constitutive element of abstract painting.

Still in reference to the “High Valley,” “Small High Valley” and “Small Higher Valley” series, Marjorie Welish notes:

The physical seam between canvases indicating juxtapositions of orders still announces that structuring a relationship between similarity and difference is a primary consideration in the language of painting to be found here, even those relationships inflected with heterogeneous themes.⁶

Similarity and difference show clearly the preoccupation of an active reading of the signs of modern thinking about art in the perception of a painting. The structure which lays itself bare contains: the red-yellow-blue patterns reinterpreted, the *disrupted grid* to use Andrew Benjamin’s expression, the diptych and serial development. Resemblance/ similarity in opposition to difference: this opposition expresses the comparison with an identity, with a term, with two terms or even more as you consider a series of paintings. I will quote a passage from a text by Philip Armstrong clarifying the position of this “serial thinking” in twentieth-century art:

If serial practices frame decisive although imperfectly distinguishable moments of the history of modern thought, thus exposing us to traces of

the work which at once blend questions of identity, resemblance and difference, principles of variation and structures of repetition, that testifies perhaps less to the impossibility of writing its history than to the appearance of another thought—another genealogy—of modernity itself, another thought of the eternal return of the same, to which serial thought is intimately linked, another identity—an other *subject*—for the work of art presenting itself as object theoretically, historically and structurally informed.⁷

This evocation of “another genealogy,” of “another subject,” of this “return to the same” suggests that other openings exist into the understanding of serial thought in the history of modernity. The language of modernity does not have a fixed grammar and syntax, and multiple orders, multiple interpretations may develop from that “genealogy.”

Serial thought appears to have reached its highest point in the Sixties with all sorts of experiments in various artistic, musical and literary arenas. Not by chance did this same period see structuralism touch every arena of thought. We know structuralism aimed for universality. The construct of the social sciences sought its foundations in language and its model in linguistics. Structure (it willingly acquired a capital S in the Sixties, an infrequent occurrence in the French language) was described by the editor of a journal from the Structuralist years (*Aletheia*, 1966) as a veritable “object of love and suspicion.” The stakes were high since they concerned closing in on universal principles in the diversity of their human manifestations. In other words, what Structuralism had at stake was the will to apply rational systems to the interpretation of human activity which escaped scientific logic.

If, as we believe, unconscious human activity of the mind consists of imposing form on content, and if these forms are basically the same for all

minds, ancient and modern, primitive and civilized—as the study of symbolic function expressed by language so brilliantly shows—it is necessary and sufficient to reach the structure of the unconscious beneath every institution or each custom in order to grasp a principle of interpretation valid for other institutions and customs, provided, of course, that the analysis is pushed far enough.⁸

In one sense, the universalist project of approaching the world was also that of modernity in art, not only on the formal plane, but as real political developments. Modern art, having analyzed and theorized color and form, plane, point, line, function, sensation and relation thus succeeded in deploying constructed systems, countless mediating models between reality and the structured work, and, consequently, an extensive body of signs which constituted a kind of available language. The tools of this construct are often directly and more or less consciously taken from language. Language develops like a “double” in the field of abstract research, like a “replica,” that is, a *response* in the field of language, discussion, rhetoric. The replica gives the visual effect of dialogue’s false symmetry to the image of the diptych. Diptych in the painting of Marjorie Welsh is a dialogic form in the plastic and historical temporality and space I referred to above.

The diptych is one such device for revealing the material disjunction across a tangible space, or for indicating the formal disjunction across a plane surface. A diptych is sufficient to point to the idea of difference across a divide: the difference, say, between the Modernist commonplace of red, yellow and blue taken to signify painting, both real and ultimate, in several defining moments in the 20th century scheme of things, and that same scheme re-conceived. The scheme may indeed be conceived as a retrograde inversion of itself or some other idea of order (including chance). Alternatively, the scheme may propose a

structure that combines several orders in a juxtaposed display, from left to right, from above and below an implicit horizon, to provide a kind of conceptual moire by formal means...⁹

In this continuity, Marjorie Welsh recalls a historical transformation:

If Structuralism finds its equilibrium in a structure of similarities within difference, Post-structuralism enjoys dispossessing Structuralism of equilibrium, for a disequilibrium in which difference has the upper hand.¹⁰

Thus Marjorie Welsh’s project remembers modernity and Structuralism, but with the clear consciousness that structure has lost its homogeneity. Correspondences have clouded structure, as though correspondences and structure have discreetly traded qualities. I referred also to the disturbance of the grid. This disturbance occurs through the breakdown of color, and the brushstrokes or blows of the brush that may recall the art of Clyfford Still. By means of the pictorial brushstroke and the hand producing it, the moving contact of color shows in the surface of the painting and in the structure of different and juxtaposed orders. Now, recall that *Signifying Art*, collecting texts from over twenty years, opens with “Narrating the Hand,” and at the other extremity, ends on “Ideas of Order,” approaching the basic elements of creation.

Although the essays gathered in *Signifying Art* take for granted an art biased toward the brushstroke as the minimal unit of visual and cultural meaning, they also take for granted an art that is self-conscious of compositional structure and the idea of order as such, and they rely on the modern notion that to adopt an order of some kind is to propose a style and mentality.¹¹

I hope you will forgive me for not being able to conclude this text. In fact, the exchanges between Marjorie Welsh and myself have not settled on any conclusion regarding her work. So I will get myself off the hook by punning on the correspondences I evoked at the beginning: for so it is, to recall the word correspondence in its most ordinary and vernacular sense, that the artistic and intellectual exchange we worked out has often taken the form of correspondence, mail or email, according to circumstance. This form, often elliptical or at times improvised, keeps an opening and a richness between us that is a reminder to me personally that research in art must build dialogues from one artist to another, from one country to another. Marjorie Welsh practices dialogue most excellently.

Translated from the French by Norma Cole.

The Dark Opacity of Making
Thomas Zimmer

On the Painting of Marjorie Welish

...a universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart. The skin of a living organism cuts off an outside from an inside. So does the circumference of a circle in a plane. By tracing the way we represent such a severance, we can begin to reconstruct, with an accuracy and coverage that appear almost uncanny, the basic forms underlying linguistic, mathematical, physical, and biological science, and can begin to see how the familiar laws of our own experience follow from the original act of severance. The act is itself already remembered, even if unconsciously, as our first attempt to distinguish different things in a world where, in the first place, the boundaries can be drawn anywhere we please. At this stage the universe cannot be distinguished from how we act upon it, and the world may seem like shifting sand beneath our feet.

—G. Spencer-Brown¹

] the inscription of a circle in the circle does not necessarily give the abyss, onto the abyss, en abyme. In order to be abyssal, the smallest circle must inscribe itself in the figure of the largest. Is there any abyss in the Hegelian circulation? To the question posed in this form there is no decidable answer. What does the "there is" mean in these statements? Wherein does the "there is" differ from a "there exists" or "X is," "X presents itself," "X is present," etc.? Skirting round a necessary protocol here (it would proceed via the gift or the giving of the abyss, onto the abyss, en abyme, via the problematic of the es gibt, il y a, it gives [ça donne], and of the es gibt Sein, opened by Heidegger), I note only this: the answer arrests the abyss, unless it be already dragged down into it in advance. And can be in it without knowing it, at the very moment that a proposition of the type "this is an abyss or a mise en abyme" appears to destroy the instability of the relations of whole to part, the indecision of the structures of inclusion which throws en abyme. The statement itself can form part of the whole. [

— Jacques Derrida²

[the given]

In the indeterminable space between these two epigraphs we might compose a series of questions: What is (a) *painting*? What is a *painting* painted over and over again? Where does (a) *painting* take place? Or, one might rephrase the question to ask, what is the space of *painting*? Or perhaps better: what is the given space of painting. And this, in turn, gives us a place to begin.

It is, of course, a question of framing. Of determining limit and extent, interior and exterior, sequence and succession, one and another. At the same time it involves the inevitable questions of reference, of the ostensible signs of painting, of the protocols of manufacture and consent, of the politics of interpretation.

Marjorie Welish's work tampers with the place of painting. She is relentless, rigorous, and generous (within reason), good humored, and in fact quite witty about it. For Welish, there is a logic of entailment—an implicative structuring of the place of painting which is constantly in movement towards a serial outside. I use the term 'serial' here to indicate that the move to the outside enabled by these works is not a mere evacuation, nor completion, nor simple circumscription of boundaries, edges, or limits, but a suspension of the determinations *interior* and *exterior*, a suspension, that is to say, of the singularity of painting. There is a deferral, a play of identity and difference set in motion between her works, which brings about an abnegation of the artifact as complete or self-sufficient. It is this strange poverty, figured in the curious lack of 'painterliness,' for example, that sets her work in a very different sort of relation to seriality than one finds tacitly figured in abstract painting, and explicitly so in minimal and conceptual art. Her practice not only questions the process of painting's 'taking place,' but its extent as well. When does (a) painting end? How? And how do we know? Welish's pluralized space of painting produces a seriality without sequence, a lateral, z-axis occlusion of painting, the performative act of painting multiplied, repeated *ad infinitum*. It is in this sense that her works are excessive. They exceed the bounds of painting, the strategies and *habitus* of contemporary favor. But what, precisely, is meant by such excess?

A mark, a quality, an attribute—perhaps not yet a sign—which spills out of a context or framework. This framework (support) may be of the literal sort, an armature which structures the field of painting, for example, or it may refer to

the conventions which structure that armature. Or to a text, one which exceeds a frame of reference or interpretation, something indecorous, absent or absurd. There are forms of excess which evacuate the senses, by holding a position—*taking place*—differently, problematizing the sense they occlude, becoming, as in the works of Marjorie Welish, a play between sense and non-sense, one and another, painting and non-painting. One does not even have the solace of the artifact, original, unproblematic, real—all of Welish's paintings are conditional: arrestments of the virtually (in every sense) endless process of painting. This is what they have in common with minimalism: there is a promissory structure in evidence, and an impossibility of closure. (Welish's works are by no means considered 'minimalist' and, in spite of sharing certain affinities, they remain absolutely contradistinct.) In serial works, by Donald Judd for example, there is no necessary origin or termination, and the question of precedence—of origin—is deferred. Each (hand-) manufactured artifact coalesces into every other: copies of copies. One might suggest an irony: that they are a *simulation* of the simulation of mass production. (We will use *mass* here as Benjamin suggests, with its connotations of massive, mass-like collective). Judd's sequence/ configuration of objects alludes to a sort of promissory violence: that there is no end, nor a beginning, just a proleptic, anticipatory structuring. All that is accessible is an arrestment, an arbitrary one, of a process which could have begun anywhere, gone on at any time or for any length of time. Consider the 'drawing-machine'/ wall drawings of Sol Lewitt: one might have started such a process anywhere, any time, and continued, uninterrupted, to this day and on into an indeterminate future. Issues of exhaustion, and of the index of labor enter back into the aura of artworks in a curious manner, indicators of the a-subjectivities of mass, and the arbitrary duration of events, rather than as singular forms of productive 'genius.' Again, it is an issue of *gestell* (frame), of enframing the entire process of production into/ as an 'artwork.' Vito Acconci's pretense (it was never very well tested) at working himself into a frenzy beneath a ramp in a Soho gallery is another

form of promissory/ performative violence. Where is the beginning and end of this performance? It's deictic register—it's temporal and spatial coordinates—are coextensive with the location of the exhibition space and the duration of the event/ exhibit. Outside of this frame of reference, Acconci would have been ignored or arrested. Much of Conceptual art might have been understood less as a sequence of constructed contexts, than as a proto-deconstructive discourse on context itself, brokering a critical transition from intertextual to interdiscursive orders of signification. This is the reflexive thread that is to be traced in Marjorie Welish's project of painting. For Welish's deconstructive project(ion) on painting it is also a question of the intra-textual, of an interrogation of the place of painting, from an outside, which is at the same time, paradoxically, folded into its (painting's) interior. Welish causes painting to re-cite (re-site) itself, to arrest its process at another iteration, as a succession of multiple iterations. Marks look like marks, embedded in the transience of each other's meaning, one line looking like another looking like another. Almost. But in the register between lexicon and incident there is also a space for irony, reflection and humour. Welish's work opens itself to this play of surfaces, de-scriptions and territories by problematizing some of the most basic assumptions that persist about painting.

[plurality and incompleteability]

In a sustained critique of the semiotic approach to visual signs, James Elkins³ points out that what are presumed to be stable and irreducible elements of images—marks, lines, traces, edges, outlines, surfaces, textures, fields, or even relations of figure and ground, tonality and illumination—give way upon close examination to a much more unruly series of historically specific practices and discourses, which are themselves

irreducible to a re-translation into signs or narratives. The graphic mark remains both mysterious (since it is infinitely variable and replete with meaning) and secondary (since it is incapable of becoming a legible sign so long as its meaning depends so intimately on its form). While such elementary marks may be invested with meaning in and of themselves, and recast as elemental pictures or figures, these are determinations which occur almost entirely in language. Rorschach's set of diagnostic designs are an interesting, if extreme, example of this.⁴ Rorschach's aggregate collection of stains is a legislated and overdetermined sign-system, one whose use is rigorously controlled, and restricted to psychiatric and psychoanalytical professionals. There are, in fact, strict legal sanctions for misuse. At the same time it is remarkable in its normative anxieties about the proper containment of representation. This discrete set of images, composed by Rorschach, is fixed and arrested, sustained by and constrained to very precise hermeneutic and exegetical rules. While these "blots" may have originated as "random," the recognitions performed by psychological test subjects, and diagnostic interpretations, certainly are not. As 'representations' these stains are fragmentary and incomplete, and entirely dependent upon a complex and exterior process of linguistic determination. As Louis Marin remarks, in his discussion of the works of Poussin,

"...(t)he legible and the visible have common spaces and borders; they overlap in part, and each is embedded in the other to an uncertain degree."⁵

Similar sorts of investments in the materiality of the mark as an aesthetic signifier are made in certain forms of abstraction or material reflexivity, such as occurs in the painting of Jackson Pollock or Cy Twombly, or the systematic deployment of marks that one finds in works by Hanne Darboven, Sol Lewitt, Richard Long or Jonathan Borofsky. These idiolectic 'sign-systems' are embedded in the heterogeneity of play between the

visible and legible, sutured together, yet irreducibly different. There are many other examples of the reflective insistence on the material and linguistic conditions and constituents of the art work that take place within the modernist framework, and persist in sometimes exotic forms in contemporary, postmodern, mediated practices. Another register of materiality and insistence takes place in artworks which appropriate, simulate, cite or mimic other works and things. Different types of paratextual formulations operate to secure an image as a specific type of depiction. The relation of contingency between (para)text and image is irregular, unstable, provisional, and plural, and extends even to the implications of the unsaid. Certain works, in fact, operate by strategically leaving the obvious unsaid, by saying something else, or by deferral to the linguistic/textual 'outside' of the work, as is the case with certain performative or site-specific works and processes which engage the unconscious reflexes or interaction of a given audience in the completion of the work. Some works are made or unmade in language, as has been the case with the determination of forgeries, where, as attribution (signature) changes, the status of a work, which had been a particular thing for a certain duration, is radically altered. Consider too, the difficulties that arise with technical reproducibility, where even in the simplest photographic recording of events or situations, it is impossible to make a clear determination of, for example, identity, originality, truth, culpability, causality or consequence. Where even the index of the photo-chemical trace is under suspicion, a suspicion which is exterior, as it always has been, to the work.

[rhetoric and temporality]

Paronomasia: a play upon the sounds and meanings of words which are similar but not identical in sound.⁶ A pun, in other words, which, insofar as

it is wrong, is nonetheless closely related in sound or shape to the correct, but absent, term, and so alludes to that term, calling it into presence, causing a kind of fibrillation in its place, a coextensive cohabitation of meanings, without the fixity of determination. One term echoes the other, in a form of reply, a constant 'turn(ing) back' or 'fold(ing) again'—*pli*—but also, etymologically, a *replica*, 'a copy, duplicate or reproduction of an original,'⁷ the effect of which is to pluralize the space of representation, to set it in motion, a play of identity and difference. It is, in a sense, a species of the performative. A pun—the wrong pun—by occupying the place of the correct term, recalls that term, alluding to it without itself evacuating the space. *Allusion*: an indirect reference, figurative, covert, implied.⁸ Something which is alluded to is, by definition, not exactly present. Nonetheless, its referential claims are predicated on the presumption of a presence, or proximity of even a marginal or conditional sort, which is consonant with, and fulfills, the rhetorical requirements of allusion. Painting's allusion to other painting, extant outside the work itself, defines, in Welish's *oeuvre*, the function of individual instances of painting, and constitutes the cause of their coming into being, 'taking place' as arrestments of painting, i.e., as 'paintings' of a provisional sort, each and all standing for/ in the place of painting.

[neither inside nor outside]

Derrida's text on painting enframes and is enframed by other texts—Heidegger, Shapiro, Hegel, Kant—and Derrida, who has occupied himself with "writing... around painting," with

folding the great philosophical questions of the tradition... onto the insistent atopics of the *parergon*; neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work (*hors d'oeuvre*), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below,

it disconcerts any opposition, but does not remain indeterminate and it gives rise to the work. It is no longer merely around the work. That which puts in place—the instances of the frame, the title, the signature, the legend, etc.—does not stop disturbing the internal order of discourse on painting, its works its commerce, its evaluations, its surplus-values, its speculation, its law, and its hierarchies. On what conditions, if it's even possible, can one exceed, dismantle, or displace the heritage of the great philosophies of art which still dominate this whole problematic...?⁹

This text is itself a reply/ *re-pli*, a fold, a *parergon*, a boundary or frame exterior to painting as such, and yet which in-forms painting in surprising ways. It is a theoretical text, operating upon theoretical texts, and so often occupies a somewhat suspect position with regard to the practices of painting. It is a theoretical tampering with texts which have attempted to secure the proper place of artworks, with a theory of art. But etymology deserves close consideration: the term *theoria* in its original Greek context, referred to a process whereby a designated group of citizens in the *polis*, the *theoros*, bore the responsibility for determining the import or significance of an event or occurrence such that it could be represented to others, in public discussion, so that a judgment could be rendered and an appropriate series of actions undertaken. *Theory* in this original sense referred to a process of mediation demarcating the passage of an action or event into language, such that it could take place (appear) in a discursive public sphere. In the contemporary aesthetic sphere it is a commonplace of artworks that they support a wide range of paratextual supplements: titles, signatures, inscriptions both interior and exterior to the work, rumours, price tags. The profound complicities and resistances between artwork and language are often displaced or deferred, circumscribed by a language, critical or economic, presumed to be wholly outside, which is folded in. But the space of painting is permeable and plural. It is bounded and occupied by a range of liminal devices and conventions, forming a complex mediation between

inside and outside, image and spectator, inscription and mark, signature and text, title and account. These paratextual elements have an illocutionary force which constrains, and also shapes, the spaces of painting, and, while it often circumscribes their uncertainties, it also underwrites their legibility. Paratextual elements—grids, fields, armatures, means, proportions, rules of composition, perspective; inference, reference, text, intertext, paratext, style, genre, oeuvre—generate and constrain the contours of painting's unconscious habituations.

[exemplars]

There is a small drawing by Frederic Edwin Church in the permanent collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum. It is a delicate rendering of a tree, probably a beech tree. In the margins of this study Church has left a note to himself, remarking that the dissymmetry of the tree as it is was unconvincing, and reminding himself to correct it at a later date. Is this notation a part of the work, since it resides within the visual field of the work, or is it in fact exterior to the drawing? How would such a determination be made? What is the nature of such exteriority, when it is coextensive with the interiority of the artifact? Or is it prescriptive, a proleptic constraining of a work not yet accomplished, one prior to a space of painting *in potentia*, and so exterior to a work not yet, perhaps never, complete or completeable, a form of precession which frames the possibility of a work?

...

In a similar manner, it is impossible to paint a wave. A wave, moving through water, *is* water; how many waves, what duration of their passage, might be necessary to the persuasive manufacture of an image of waves? With such

simple observations representation unravels, and the phantasy of a referential mimesis collapses into the relentless logic of the simulacrum: a mimesis that imitates nothing, a copy of a copy, producing an effect of identity without being grounded in an original, a copy too distant to partake in the essence it copies, a false semblance, or similitude, a model—that is, a synthetic judgment—which precedes, and so takes the place of an empirical referent. A copy of a copy, within an order of pure signification, at an infinite, or at least incommensurate, distance from a reference that might serve as a point of origin. In the absence of the original, a copy stands in relation only to other copies. That is to say, a painting of waves standing in relation to other images of waves. Empiricism as such, exceeds the space of painting.

...

There is a point, in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, where two men—Lanzmann and a former intern of the Treblinka concentration camp—are walking in a meadow. It is morning, and everything is a muted shade of green. They are conversing in French and Polish. Lanzmann keeps asking, "is it here? Or there?" They continue walking until the man stops, and points to a place indistinguishable from any other in the landscape, and says "it's here" referring in the present tense to the place where the terminal boundary, the outer fence of the camp, once was.

...

Not long ago I gave a lecture under the title "Shoebboxes." I had thought it a somewhat clever title, since my task was to address certain 'accumulations of texts,' bodies of work such as Benjamin's *Passagenwerke*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Zettel* and various notebooks, Humphrey Jennings' *Pandaemonium*, Georges Bataille's *Atheology*, and works by Charles

Sanders Peirce, Arno Schmidt, Athanasius Kircher, and others, all of which are, in a sense, archives (one might call them accretions) of texts, notes, aphorisms, and diagrams, which were collected —more or less— into the metaphorical equivalents of ‘shoeboxes.’ Benjamin’s unfinished project, for example, has two German editions, a French edition, and an English edition, and numerous commentaries. Each are organized differently, with a different taxonomy, apparatus and emphasis. Bataille’s project had so many contradicting promised variants that it is difficult to sort out just what the final shape of such a work might have been, or, for that matter, which of Bataille’s promises should be regarded with suspicion. The point is that the sequential organization of such textual ensembles do not have a necessarily determinate form, thematic configuration or extent, but operate more as ‘virtual’—that is as conditional or possible—assemblages, and thereby admit of a number of possible concrete forms. Simultaneously. In a very real, pragmatic, sense they are incompleteable, and only the most likely variants, or iterations, are arrested and fixed into a published form. The analogy I wish to draw out here goes something like this: the notion of the page as a ground or space of writing is relatively little concerned with actual pages, since they may vary greatly in composition, trim size, ratio, etc. As an armature which ‘holds’ writing it is a metaphor, and so not unlike the ‘space’ which supports iteration after iteration of painting. In Marjorie Welish’s work it is a frame, or field, a relay, or machinery, of which we—artist and spectator—are elements, in a radical re-questioning of the ground of painting, which originates neither wholly inside nor outside painting, as neither act nor institution, production of consumption.

The question of self-reference presents an *aporia* in representation. It is not a question of identity, but of the temporal articulations of an abyssal structure: in order to refer to itself a work must differ from itself, so that even if its contours are exact, it must displace itself in time, trading places, and priorities, a *mise-en-abyme* modified by deictic determinations (spatio-temporal markers: *here, there, now, this, that*).

[process and transmission]

There is a curious form of paratext that one often sees on the screens of contemporary television broadcasts, a word all the more curious for its degree of familiarity: the word *live* residing somewhere on the surface of an image, simultaneously outside and inside the visual field. One may see this image/ text configuration many times over, always indicating that it is a “live transmission.” What is going on here? What precisely is being indicated? It is useful to note that the term *live* arose at a particular historical juncture, as the dominion of uncontested naturalness of presence (life) diminished, entering into mediation. In early radio broadcasting, the term *live* was invoked in an effort to sever the connection between death and distance, between the past and present of events, people, and things. *Live* is the prosthetic form of life, something that announces its authenticity against potentially deceptive substitutes; the fundamental sense of *live* was therefore contrastive: “*live*” means “not dead.” By the end of the 1920s, *live* had come to mean “simultaneous broadcasting,” where the “live” performances or events were coextensive with their technical transmission. The notion of “dead air” is interesting in this respect, almost like a kind of Turing test for broadcast media. In today’s mediated public sphere, live has come to mean something quite different: live means something like “present = having-been-present”—a present-tense of media that seeks to reassert an authoritative authenticity by a claim to presence having been—in front of the camera—at some point. The shifting contours, attenuating boundaries of the specular event, are thereby pluralised, abstract. A *live* broadcast

“...does not transmit ‘dead’ material as does the phonograph, but present and ‘living’ events...” (E. W. Burgess) ¹⁰

in a generalized space of “having-been-present”—i.e., as a virtual and continuous presence. Between radio and phonographic recording, the

explicit equation of simultaneity with life, and recording with death, is propounded and exemplified, over and over again. Television is figured as an explicitly “live” medium; the signal is “live” whether what is transmitted is currently unfolding or has been previously recorded. There is in television, within its carefully wrought artifice of intimate familiarity, an irruption of the uncanny that occurs with the displacement and repetition of live images. As familiar as furniture, the television screen is still a dangerous membrane with the possibility of overturning its domesticity at any moment. Why else would so much energy be expended in circumscribing its use as an appliance, containing it as a live medium? The capacity to discern whether or not an image is a live image, or even whether that might matter, is evacuated in an architecture of evidentiary invisibility, to be relocated—in fact, domesticated and repressed—only in the most conventional manner, and via the most minimally intrusive paratextual elements: as captions, titles, notes, attributions: “LIVE.”

With every new technology, space and time have appeared to collapse. The interval is attenuated, and, paradoxically, extended ad infinitum. But it is the very appearance of collapse, one might suspect, that gives away the foundational slip, the elision, the phenomenological sleight of hand, wherein at the moment of its greatest weakness—the recuperation of these categories as forms of life—that the loss is most profound. Consider again that most common paratext, found now, almost everywhere, the term LIVE inscribed on the surface of a screen, indexed to a transmission, literally written into an event, a textual marker that something is taking place now (and, tacitly, here), at this very moment. Event and transmission are coextensive, and the question of origin has apparently been recuperated—snatched at the last moment—from an inaccessible real. Despite its deictic distance (its remoteness from a terminal spectator), this now phantom event has become, in its mediality, both document and event, sense and memory, at the same time. Perhaps it was this sort of spatio-temporal aporia that

Heidegger refers to, asking himself “What is nearness if, along with its failure to appear, remoteness also remains absent?”¹¹

The remote as a mediated suspicion: “LIVE” as a deictic marker that is no longer bound by the constraints of sense, marking and indicating time, to be sure, but of what sort? Not the present as such, which passes away, but a present-perfect, which persists. Sense returns, arrested. Once having been, the presence of what has transpired before the camera is always accessible. But this deixis also marks another form of loss: the photo-chemical index of the photographic linkage to the real vanishes, just as the hope of recuperation takes up residence in the word: LIVE.

The image passes before us, in its real time, just as it does, we suppose, as we see it. There are only flashes, *Aufblitzendes*, arrested and fixed to the continuity of their endless passage: a persistence of vision. It is not that they have ended as fast as one sees them, but rather that their continuity has been parsed so that they no longer (re)attach to any subsequence (history), but only to other consequences (representations). This may be what Benjamin implies by considering History as photographic. The place of the image has been changed, and there are certain governances, and consequences, to such modifications.

Even the wrap-around digital signage in Times Square, on the Reuters or NASDAQ buildings, for its part arrests, momentarily, the subject of its gaze, even if its seductions take place in a fraction of a second, and only then in our peripheral vision. This architectural/ digital phantasmata is more and more a constant within our environment, a “background condition,” less on the order of a direct address than a constant and probabilistic conditional: always ready to be there. It is a variant of what Baudrillard has called the *hyperreal*, a precession of signs before, or without, referents, or even a concatenation of conflicting and absent referents adduced from the seductive

collusion of sign-effects. Unlike the cinema, to which they are nonetheless related, architectural projections do not impose a form of present-tense direct address; they operate in the marginal space of peripheral vision, as something almost already past, its import lying in having been, in enframing rather than engaging. Cinema's forms of address, whether one is present or not, are always directed as if to "you," the phantasmatic/structural subject-position mitigated by the consensual suturing of ourselves into the specular apparatus. The architectural progression of images claims only to have taken place; "you" are not its subject-position. Like delirium, a dream, an impression, it addresses the peripheral, the unconscious, in a reflexive marking—like a flash or an afterimage—of the body in its passage. This is the territory of our contemporary mediascape, our cities, our theaters, our stadiums, our homes. It is a world where everything is always already an image, where reflection and phenomenality occupy the sort of position formerly circumscribed by the notion of a "soul," where the referent is inscribed into the field of signs as a questionable and dangerous evidentiary trace.

But it is not my purpose here to examine the constant, hidden tropes of televisual transmission. The task is to point out that a certain transformation of the space of events has taken place, a certain mutation in duration and extent. In other words, in the process of enframing (*gestellen*) an event. Even the event of painting, as Marjorie Welish so well knows, is subject to this, and efforts to preserve its sanctities as a discrete array of objects become more strenuous, as paintings slip away from reference, exceed their supports, or contradict standards of classification as work, diptych, series, oeuvre, etc. Painting, too, operates in a generalized space of 'having-been-present' as presence, legitimated by its referential variability, marking its excession of, or inscription into, the body of tradition. Marjorie Welish's painting brilliantly addresses the vicissitudes of this process, reflexively probing the purity of the act of painting, and the troubling evidence of its

residues. No single canvas of Welish's makes sense—it is only in collective apprehension that her task becomes clear, only when one comprehends—in a series of flashes (*Aufblitzendes*)—the occlusion of the space of painting by its myriad possibilities, a series of material remainders through which one might momentarily glimpse *painting* in the present-perfect tense.

Stupid like a painter
Oswaldo Romberg

The Good Painter

Being an Argentinean adolescent artist was not easy. As soon as I began to interact with the artistic milieu in Buenos Aires in the 50s I submitted, with obsessive frequency, to the sentence: "But he's a good painter." From about 12 to 20 years of age, I desperately tried to understand, in the cafés and bars where we used to meet, the meaning of being a good painter. The different answers were concerned at times with the quality of the textures on the canvas, at other times with the construction and the form of the figure, the flatness, or even the purity of the pigment. So it was very difficult to put together a precise definition. I had available to me only decontextualized particulars, fragments of different discourses. How right Duchamp was in his commentary on the I.Q. of painters, when he proposes the phrase "Stupid like a painter." (We should not forget that the 50s were particularly difficult, at least in Argentina, for those who wished to talk about artists as a category because there were painters, sculptors, draftsmen, etc. The concept of an artist who thinks and directs his ideas visually was simply not common in Buenos Aires then.)

Tragically, this peripheral phenomena that I saw in Argentina are much too frequently observed as well in the galleries of New York today. Of the few artists who are definitely “hot” (meaning being in fashion because of prestige, or for evidencing astonishing innovation, opportunism, gender promotion or other means of self-legitimization), most of the galleries (even the prestigious ones) put their bets on “good painters”—which of course will have the upper class, kitschy marketability desired by the majority of American collectors. Here is where the work or the practice of Marjorie Welish comes to light, and shines for us in a scenario desperately in need of illumination.

She is not a “good painter.” She is a good artist. And she is a good artist though her work looks “wonderfully ugly” because this is, in itself, her definition of art and in no way a sum of aesthetic effects composed to produce *déjà vu*. In fact, when I saw her work recently at Baumgartner I was mesmerized by her lack of beauty. This lack of beauty in fact makes her work profoundly sensitive and tragic. I feel like I am in front of a movie that shows me the difficult and painful road required today to make a painting that in turn makes sense.

The Good Lie

When looking at the history of art from the last two centuries, it is easy to observe that as soon as your subject matter departs from nature, you need to replace the theory of duplication for a theory that legitimizes your lack of reality in representation. The further away from the original model of nature (in which you aim for the reproduction of what you see), the more complex and sophisticated your story should be. This is obviously evident from Impressionism to the contemporary period. And I will say that passing through Fauvism, Cubism, and Surrealism, the process of explanation becomes more subjective and complex. When we arrive at abstraction, the

road of self-referential painting, which Cézanne put forward, ends majestically with Mondrian referring to the borders of the picture.

From now on, when talking about abstraction, we are nearly in the land of Clement Greenberg. The story required to justify our lack of mimesis, and the brilliant subjectivity required of us, is more and more demanding. I will put it into a simple story: imagine somebody who is speeding in a car at 180 miles per hour and stopped by a state trooper. The driver needs to find a very good “lie.” Otherwise, he will not be able to convince the police that he is *not* a transgressor. Here again, the work of Marjorie Welish comes to mind, in this case after seeing her recent show at Baumgartner Gallery. I would say that Marjorie does not invent a good lie to justify her speeding car (her abstraction); rather, she is running at a far greater speed, into an epistemological road (and quest) in which there are no police, no limits but the land of the spirituality—nobody’s land.

What makes the story of Marjorie different from that of Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis or any other artist who lives near the Greenberg cult is the following: her discourse, though humbly subjective, is specifically about painting and grammar. She is a kind of story teller, and her work is a kind of commentary on the difficulty of painting. Her work does not employ a tricky gag so as to conform or belong to a school of abstraction. Nor does she put herself in the ridiculous position of many abstract artists today, who pretend to save abstraction from its inevitable fate in decoration.

The Return of the Horse

Painting has become almost an aristocratic activity, something like riding horses. But this is not where the similarity ends. Let us remember that some centuries ago it was impossible to go from New York to Philadelphia without

a good horse, just as it was impossible to show somebody's features without a good portrait painting.

Without doubt, the similarities do not end here. Both underwent mutations, which made them in a way anachronistic to their original functions. Today, transportation is not reliant upon the horse, and contemporary art, in turn, has enormously reduced the activity of painting as the primary mode of expression. It is now a secondary, anachronistic form. If what was once transport is, today, almost a sport, the question remains if and when the function of the horse will return to be transportation. Will painting become the central issue in contemporary art again? If so, when?

Questions appropriate to our debate: When does a special situation allow for the return of an old form of expression? Sometimes, a geographical situation like mountains with special terrain or a military strategy like in Afghanistan requires horses. Thus, does the horse return to original function, or is it replaced with artificial horses in specific situations. Does painting return to its original function or will it be replaced by video, holograms or other media?

Where is the future of painting? In this moment, it seems that unless it is "retro," the field of painting is reduced to commentary or paintings which try to explore the limited possibilities of the subject. What is it possible to do with painting that cannot be done with anything else? Here again we come to the work of Marjorie Welish, because her late work articulates with enormous insight the mechanics of Modernist painting in a manner impossible to describe in words.

In this sense, I feel myself as an artist whose work in the 70's has an affinity with her work today. The didactics of Marjorie's work is expressive only pictorially. It cannot be articulated in any writing or oral explanation. (Maybe that is why I am joking so much today!) The work of art, in this case a

painting, physically embodies its meaning. She creates a lot of empty space for the viewer so that he can articulate his own discourse about what he sees. As is the case in any other field of complex expression, the work of Marjorie Welish requires knowledge and sophistication. In her case, and against Greenberg's idea of the reduction of content, her work shows a very interesting thesis, namely, "the more you know the more you get."

III. Poetry

a creative text that performs appreciation

Carla Harryman

Words and phrases sampling Welsh's texts are here drawn from a longer initial query that initiated the correspondence that follows.

a creative text that performs appreciation
and critique

or that exploration whose impulse is unknown ¹

question indicative of a mood swing

in the manner of a drawing x-ploring gravity
as a problem of public space

construed over centuries of incident

all-over organization "built of insignificant materials" ²

might orchestrate its materials

of the ethos of close readings

note that myth

recollects to the poem covering
as well as implement

...capacity casting rather than figure fixing

might ask an unheimlich double or heimlich playmate "Are we falling up?" ³

plus salient

precise poetry's disarray favors a subversive

"appearance of what had been unarticulated" ⁴

Of, and/or Through: A Correspondence

Carla Harryman and Marjorie Welsh

Marjorie Welsh: Point of clarification: Social history: “impressionistic,” not “creative,” is the problematic term, as in the practice of so-called impressionistic criticism found in promotional writing for the glossies and more and more frequently in commissioned writing of all kinds. Writing by poets has a vexed history at best—Georges Braque’s disregard for Apollinaire’s writing on art is well-known, yet the belletristic mode of reviewing (as practiced by, for instance, the New York School poets appearing in *Art News*), together with the art historical and journalistic modes, form a gamut of approaches to the artifact that invites the intervention of a critical function.

Today, criticality in the complete sense of the term is largely disallowed in the press. Editors for art magazines as well as dealers seek impressionistic or ‘poetic’ writing, as it is called, because such belles-lettres will appear to satisfy the need for an intellectual writing without requiring the reader to know anything about the art history, criticism or theory that indeed constitutes the object. The received wisdom here is that the lay viewer requires appreciation. The market has driven underground critical thinking of most any kind.

Point of Clarification: Cognitive theory: Are creative and critical thinking compatible—even synergistic? Of course.

Even so, our dialogue might need to establish a speculative domain directed to practical or philosophical assumptions.

Point of departure: “of creative commentary [...] that both performs appreciation and critique via...” rhetoric or even rhetorical exposé of the gesture. “The Letter as Such” proposing the mood of handwriting, or rather the mood through which handwriting emerges, is a discourse of the gesture put forth by Klebnikov and Kruchenykh taken up in later avatars of this poetics. Our criticism of this poetics favoring accident through calligraphy might extend a critique of motor automatism (remember the reprint of *Motor Automatism*, copies of which we both bought?—now, that was a gestural swerve!)

The mood swings informing opinion (read “intellectual opportunism,”): not the same thing as judgment; not the same as the theory sustaining nomadic paths through my writing as your writing performs it. The gravity of incident you suggest might become a poem puts the public sphere on notice in indicating general economies of recycling, like recycling the language of the archive that we come across in garbage of the ancient cultures: cult books of the times, together with accounts, et cetera.

At least one book has been written on the excavation of garbage dumps in ancient Greece, and subsequently a discourse on the book has “excavated” the public sphere which authored such detritus.

“...might orchestrate its materials...” as a problematic of the public sphere? Might compose or select an order for the materials in accordance with the significant imaginative perspective of recycling, we should say.

Reconceiving the remainder in the order of a catalogue, “Kiss Tomorrow Good-bye” (a poem you cite) has already acknowledged the aftermath of myth in literature. Another order is the gamut, the gamut of expression that incorporates rather than opposes terms in a range of interpretive possibility. The gamut may be schematic, in which case, it is more likely identified as intellectual or conceptual than if it be—as Twombly’s mark is—a sensuous construct. My essay “Narrating the Hand” deliberately yokes together the disparate rhetoric of Twombly and of Mary Kelly to allow the mutual interrogation of each other’s signs, however. “Might orchestrate its materials...”: toward differing narratives of language acquisition.

“...of the ethos of close readings...” may be found through an immanent critique of Geneva School philosophers that Vincent Descombes deploys in one essay, only to redirect it for an analytic critique elsewhere. Immanent critique will ask of the dialecticians: Is it sufficiently dialectic?, will query the axiomatic notions. What is the alternative? Close-reading, a technique belying a set of assumptions about sense, is an inadequate instrument for interpreting certain poetries, yet it persists. Far-reading, by way of ideology, literary theory, or other axiomatic paradigm, accomplishes much, despite biases of vision. But at least paradigmatically aggravated presentations allow us to see the mentality of the subject at work: structural, post-structural, allegorical, culturally contextual, psycholinguistic—the Other, in symbolic mode.

Carla Harryman: My first comments and questions above were intended partly as a record of reading: a certain kind of reading. This kind of reading is prior to conventions of exterior organization; although the writing itself produces structure.

The writing is recording a certain kind of scanning. Yet, the reading itself was not as superficial as the word “scanning” might suggest. The thoughts

instigated by the reading are scanned. The mind is selecting and some of the selection is recorded. William James's description of selection in "The Philosophy of Psychology" approximates a description of an aspect of this procedure (or should I call it a less-than-schematic "gamut") in the sense that given innumerable possibilities of entry into the work and selections to be made, I allowed (I did edit) certain features of the stream—to become apparent. However this "stream of consciousness" device is further complicated by the fact that I consciously made the "stream" as full as possible: I used as resource several of your essays, reviews, interviews, and your poetry. The genres in which you write were considered not as a unity but at-the-same-time. Another aspect of this procedure is similar I think to sampling. Sampling requires both preparation and unknown results.

Your lucid responses uncover questions latent in the recorded reading and to some extent reveal a demand of this kind of procedure—to read the reading, to anchor the reading.

Please forgive me because, now I would like to start someplace else but also refer back to your poem "Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye." You say, "Reconceiving the remainder in the order of a catalogue, 'Kiss Tomorrow Good-bye' has already acknowledged the aftermath of myth in literature." What immediately pops to mind are a) the common description of the replacement of myth with written narrative i.e. written narrative is second order myth but all that we've got, alas... b) *there is no story here*. The latter interests me more. The question of narrative enters the catalogue. However, the question of narrative seems to be the resource (perhaps recycled?) of the poem which comically references "certain booby-trapped stories," "a narrative complete with lunch menu and stereoscopic thugs...", "a narrative clad in itself...", "a threat to the logical unit."

An issue for me in contemporary poetics is what I would call an

underdeveloped examination of non/narrative. *Poetics Journal: Non/Narrative* 5 introduces important discussions about the relationship of non-narrative to narrative as designated in the slash between the two words; but in the world of practicing poets, this thread was taken up in following years more in regard to positionality than in respect to aesthetic, cultural, or theoretical questions of a broad nature.

I would like to ask you several questions about non/narrative. 1) How has visual art practice, theory, and/or criticism influenced your practice as a poet in respect to considerations of non/narrative? 2) What notions about narrative or non-narrative in circulation now would you want to challenge in either visual art or poetry? 3) How has your writing practice changed from the 70's to the present in respect to considerations of non/narrative?

M.W.: "How has visual art practice, theory and/or criticism influenced poetic considerations of non/narrative?" As part of the general modern experiment with temporal order, visual art helped educate my already focused attention on conceptual and critical investigation of events. Early on, modern music, dance, and theories of these, together with New Wave film, had a decided impact on my expectations for the nature of the verbal artifact we call a poem. Even so, the museological mentality that reads and interprets and generates critical theory for visual, aural and written stuff, constituted my "play" activity long before that. Generating games and improvising rules for the "pieces" of other games had fed an insatiable conceptual appetite for non/narrative—that is to say, those temporal orders built of convention, contingency, but not of causality, as narratology now explains. (The Russian avant-garde book offers a compelling argument for inviting non/narrative play into the reading process, and so invites an imaginative cognition.)

In challenging stories with plot, procedure or poetics, literature has given priority to strategic thought. Currently presupposed is that discursive

dispossession of formal strategies will improve art through engagement with “life”—which term usually means art-political stances often enough unintelligently advocated. Hybridity—the “free-speech” issue of the day—assumes admixtures are liberating to the symbolic order, but, conducted for its own sake, has let many insipid visual-culture projects thrive.

As for changing concerns in non/narrative from the 1970s, my poetry has allowed itself to become more and more explicitly tactical; and instead of embedding the compositional tactics, the poems manifest the critical apparatus in use. Of the non/narrative tactics, one that has not changed is repetition through revision; yet repetition through translation has also informed my poetics of non-identity from the start. Repetition in utterly problematic self-identity informs Arshile Gorky’s imitations of art and letters is the theme as well as method of an early poem of mine, “Greenhouses and Gardens.”

By the early to mid 1980s, the artifice is writ large. Non/narrative conducts its affairs through meta-narrative, as in the poem “Wild Sleeve.” It converts temporal, evolutionary narrative comprising the history of pattern, to a two-step process seen in spatial terms: “In Figure 1,” [...] “In Figure 2.” This device for establishing a sequence might be enlisted to explain, but merely describes and synthesizes more comprehensively—pointing to that.

The sequence “Carpet Within the Figure” reflects the fact I had been reading not only Henry James but also Peter Brook on James’s melodramatic aspirations, and for the first poem—while thinking how Robbe-Grillet might do it—I overlaid an obscured *récit* from “Turn of the Screw” on the torturous image of Hercules’ crushing Anteus, a sculpture made in bronze, as an inkstand. The operative arbitrariness is that which brings to the grotesque improbably concrete realization. Your book *The Words* does bring discourses into the realm of the fantastic, reflecting back on their arbitrariness. Or so I understand it.

C.H.: Can you clarify the phrase, “In challenging stories with plot...literature has given priority to strategic thought.” Can you ground this statement a bit more?

M.W.: Recently, a student asked for my definition of poetry, and in answer to that I said that one definition may be that “poetry is play organized.” Keeping this in mind will help clarify the notion of plot as the strategic narrative that regards story as a pretext to distribute and transform its materials. Literature—certainly modern literature—is a strategic activity conducted through language, and favors theorizing through imaginative conceptual frameworks.

C.H.: “Currently presupposed is that discursive dispossession of formal strategies...” do you mean that formal strategies have been dispossessed of their power or potential aesthetic properties by explanatory language? An example of this would be a work I recently saw at Detroit Contemporary. The show was the result of a problem posed to various Detroit artists: the gallery had asked them to make use of enormous quantities of stuff the gallery (built in an abandoned two story nineteenth-century live/ work building) was about to throw away: including anti-freeze, dilapidated window detailing, miscellaneous metal pipes, packing materials, year old root vegetables, and all sorts of functional and decorative kitchen things. The work in question was an installation: dirt mixed with degraded construction material was distributed on the floor of a rectangular nook. It suggested a “domestic” sandbox, as white plates were wedged into the dirt in a slightly irregular pattern. Suspended on wire in a symmetrical pattern above the area of the “sandbox” were old potatoes and forks. It was its own contained little world and I thought quite well done, but on the wall was a continuation of the work—a little paragraph by the artists about a degenerating into boredom domestic relationship. That killed the work. There are so many examples of poor, over-determined use of text in visual art since (when? 1979?) and this was “just” another instance to me. Is this the kind of thing you mean?

M.W.: "Discursive dispossession of formal strategies"—yes. In conceptual art, certainly, critical language contests formal thought, although not always with the intelligence that discourse arrogates to itself.

C.H.: Please say more about "hybridity for its own sake" if possible.

M.W.: Much freedom is ascribed to "hybridity" whenever that term is invoked, but its claim is no better or worse than the mentality informing the term.

C.H.: I would like to follow this hybridity detour for a moment. It seems to me that what you are criticizing in regards to hybridity is a superimposition of a concept, "hybridity," on art activity that does not itself address the formal issues or propose a valuable methodology in considering the deployment of the term. What is a hybrid work? You claim that the work itself is no better or worse than the mentality of the person making the work. Is that a critique of hybridity per se? Or a critique of its use as a cover for work that is not self-reflective? That assumes description as an answer to a question or problem?

Is it of any interest to separate the question of "fad" from concept and/or practice? In much of my work hybridity has everything to do with questions of reproduction. In an initial reaction (a visceral-intellectual response full of astonishment in many directions circa 1971) to reproducing lyric structures as such, I turn to prose, a prose that would propose causality as only one potential trajectory of prose writing e.g. "I prefer to distribute narrative rather than deny it." The writing is certainly "play organized," hence, in your sense of the word, it's poetry. Plot in the conventional sense belongs to narrative rather than story, which is related to an account of a chain of events. I tend to prefer story and argument combined: essays tend toward argument and poems participate in philosophical and theoretical questions related to argumentation, at least as demonstrations of method—but the terms are usually suspended, held up to scrutiny—mine and another's. So there is a

convergence of genre that can be usefully pointed to, using the word "hybrid." (e.g. "these hybrid writings staged as they are between fiction and theory...the creator and her artifact...etc.) There must, perhaps, be a gap between the descriptive word, for purposes of this discussion "hybrid," and the text that "plays" as innovative text.

Commentary on any of the above is welcome.

Given the impact that New Wave film had on your thinking "back when," how did/ or would Robbe-Grillet's *Notes for a New Novel* fit into that?

I also want to ask you about your use of "the critical." In an earlier version of this conversation, you end your last comment with "instead of embedding the compositional tactics, the poems manifest the critical." It seems that there is a deep curiosity in all of your work that I can identify with the topographical. Does the critique, the object, the thing, the construct, the artifact, change, transform, or does it maintain its properties when subject to different (spatial/ conceptual) circumstances—this type of question seems to be an aspect of this generative curiosity. Do you consider criticality to be topographical in this sense? And if this seems to be an off the mark question, perhaps you would be willing to indulge me in this: what is critically most important to you in your most recent writing?

M.W.: Your analytic queries concerning the concept of hybridity demand more thorough answers than I can sketch out. The modernity that gave rise to collage is forever being invoked on behalf of pastiche, as though any miscellany will do. The same lack of scruple with regard to structure, style and ideological aesthetics occurs, with hybridity, which is deemed liberating by fiat. In either case, the principles informing heterogeneity, by which rupture is more than an appearance, more than a mention, are rarely in play. Similarly rare are the crucial discriminations that would treat the modalities of

hybridity in deeper cross-cultural trade, conflict, and synthesis as distinct from mere opportunistic mimicry—the fad for notional imitation in parody, as you say. (This last amusement is neither sub- nor trans- version.)

Robbe-Grillet's *For a New Novel* was entirely encouraging to read if for no other reason than that it reinforced my own already developing commitment to abstract formal and theoretical poems and poetics.

Inventing the ordering principles and moves that comprise literature is Robbe-Grillet's modern birthright, and it was reassuring to encounter someone who re-cognizes the experimental quality of writing in such severe deployment of space, or in such severely polarized subjective and objective dispositions given to time in his collaboration with Alain Renais for *Last Year at Marienbad*. The tensions between so-called lived experience and language as artifice being played out in the poetics of the 1960s (with the rejection of the former by the latter) became crucial for my own work. (About the time Brook wrote *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Brooks directed his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I saw, as I had seen his *Marat/Sade*. More to the point, however, is the very assumption of artifice I took art to be.) Along the way, encounters with New York School poetry representing the poetics of the French Symbolists transmitted through a ramified modernity in Ashbery's case (from Stein to Stevens—whose "Sea-Surface Full of Clouds" provoked his saying to me that Stevens is "the best poet" the United States has produced) happened to reinforce my interest in literary genres, styles, and metacritical stances toward these types. The very literariness of Ashbery's sociolects seemed to parallel semiological developments. Moreover, Guest's embedded poetic discourse scrupled to be writerly and even more demanding of the literature.

What do you mean by topologies? Cartographies, as in Deleuze's sense of the social diagram?

C.H.: Re: methodologies by fiat: Unchallenging communication can lead to tepid versions of status quo aesthetics. So what's interesting to talk about would be aesthetic practices and constructs that are not inadequate to the demands of the artist's practice or method. I don't see how any area of investigation, including hybridity, could be excluded from this, but this is my opinion not yours.

Re: topographic—an example: "In the space of barely/indicated..." ("Preparing a Length of the Arc")

Poems might begin with indication, words that indicate certain content areas; for instance in another poem, "The World Map," "prospect" indicates view and landscape and "annexation" indicates takeover: there is a kind of dancing between elements of landscape and "annexation of processes"—the poem in a sense appropriates "annex" to itself: it annexes certain kinds of causal processes: it awakens problems that have been indicated such as the relationship of manifest destiny to romanticism. The poem is a lyric poem actively problematizing lyric poetry: it interrogates the position of the lyric, and it I think asks one to question the positioning of the lyric. My reading of the work excludes the possibility of either favoring stability of meaning over instability or instability of meaning over stability—and these non-exclusive options are very contemporary: how do you do this? Or accept this? By recognizing non-subordination as if in spatial relationship?

You are interested in gamut, which suggests extent. I am thinking about the relationship of part to position/ placement in your poetry as it brings into play the world of visual, conceptual, and other/ philosophical thought. These relationships are not fixed but mobile/ nomadic: but they do not forget themselves: the poem is written read. There is agency related to deliberateness at play in your work. The word has been put on the page, the mark has been made, now the follow-through is charted. You do not just let

something go. The language is precise, even if it breaks a code, looks over a cliff, or follows a “landslide” as if a landslide were simply metaphorical, or entirely literal, or a subversive concept, as well as a description of unnamable psychological, historical and aesthetic forces, all gathered here on “emancipated frontiers” (and bounded defined and already known) to lay out and focus a seventeen line poem, which is not (exactly) a “fragmented prayer.” One is left with something more vexed and aesthetically placed, “idling in the mirror...”

Alternatively, I could imagine “drawing” a map or scheme of your poem “The World Map.” It would and would not be a world in itself. It would and would not indicate “a machine made of words” distributed spatially. Perhaps the topography I refer to has to do with what is positioned in the space between the autonomous poem and indications of that which exceed its autonomy. It is an indication of a deep layer of abstract imagination.

M.W.: With lyric poetry so identifiably an early modern expression, is there any place for it now? I write poems to address this and, yes, to make of the very problematic a critical lyric. “The World Map” was a deliberate attempt to do just that by incorporating what used to be called second-order discourse into the lyric, yet also, as with my writing in general, by assuming a cerebral prerogative for the lyric. (Although the romantic landscape is a topic I often try to transform into a site, an excavation, an installation—anything that can reconceive the “prospect” and especially anything that indicate the landscape’s cultural status, it was actually another verbal text that provoked this lyric of a topographically-styled world-view.)

C.H.: There are many matters we have barely touched upon. One of them is translation, which you obviously have a lot to say about. I would love to hear what you had to say about your translation of Williams in “The Black Poems.” These *are* poems with edges. And I’m also interested in how these

poems relate to some of your other works—how do you view these poems in respect to works that reference drawing? Further, I would like to know, in respect to “instrumentality of critique” of the lyric, how do you position these poems in respect to what follows?

M.W.: Since World War II, which saw stringent aesthetic reduction yet also cultural amalgamation in genres, poetry has rendered itself an aspect of writing in general, but this assimilation does not necessarily dictate the poetics today. The earliest strategy I could manage was that of what I called “the translation problem,” and this remains a crucial mode of mine for problematizing the lyric, which has assumed an instrumentality of critique.

To keep the alternative translations in play in the final “product” known as the poem struck me as productive of sense, even productive of cultural necessity, since I was a student, when I found myself coping with multiple translations. As I recall, a compelling instance of the translation problem came up when reading three translations at once, of Baudelaire’s “Correspondences”—yet especially of “Harmonie du Soir.” Revelations in themselves, the translations only exaggerated the issue of the lyric as composed, as composed of signs, and exposed that arbitrariness in reference I had long taken for granted in visual art and music. These commonplaces are not obvious when first encountered. Very marked was the interpretive latitude—even incompatibility—of translations that his lyrics provoked. The latitude in translating him provoked what in my own practice I later reported to David Shapiro as writing poems that were translations without originals.

Anyway, repetition as a principle of praxis in my own poetry came about through this issue of translation, inherently relative yet struggling, as Ms. Stein would say, with the real. Later, through acquaintance with the real in Stein, I took note of her efforts at realizing a poetics of iterating and

reiterating analytic atomic propositions.

This was interesting although not quite news, given my long familiarity with the several significant conceptions of modern abstract art. (*Alternatives* to the calligraphic mode of free verse coincident with modern calligraphy in art remain an on-going concern.)

By the way, in my studio practice about this time (1975) I presented my teachers with three or more versions of the same subject as “the same”: in other words, productive of difference within similarity. Some of these were exhibited when Laurie Anderson, then Curator of the Whitney Museum of Art Resources Center, in New York, invited me to show in the Museum’s satellite space dedicated to offering first shows.

Translation tests assumptions about repetition and difference, and recent theory has accommodated Post-structuralist accounts of the impossibility of identity between the translation and source text, of the subjectivity wherein translations are really (culturally marked) interpretations, etc. The conflict between incommensurate interpretations which initially arrested my attention also qualifies as “an object.” Yet one still reads conceptual accounts that distinguish literal from other approaches that would render the ideas or else the spirit of the original, and so expose the tension between the rendering and the text under consideration. Translating to expand the archive is not the same as speculating on the situation of translation as such. Again, metacritical cultural commentary has “weighed in” on this issue; so has critical theory; a ruminative sort of Post-structuralism is already revising the poetics of translation: teasing out linguistic usage points to the historical contingencies in the language taken to be ideologically given. I do not intend to proliferate plurality here through mention but am trying to articulate the poetics of translation as it now seems, as it now seems especially to converge on poetry.

The critical lyric could reconceive the analytic in this cultural vein. Or create a semiotics of contingency. At any rate, internalizing the critical function in poetry is itself worth the pursuit, even though this may not take the directive to define and to locate things as Robbe-Grillet undertook laboratory experiments in structure and language. In the current writing on this novelist, conceptual paradigms for future literature revise his texts as metahistorical schemes, lending writing new purpose after 1968. Or so some would argue.

A general point to be made is that today’s critical instrumentality tends to be empirical and historical, to query analytic presuppositions, in reaction to early twentieth-century rationalism not yet giving up on deploying analytic instruments to test the accidentally scientific and contingent empiricism of history. This rough dialectic may itself undergo significant self-criticism, so long as analytic, speculative and pragmatic models be allowed to thrive long enough to interrogate each others’ signs.

“and us coming potentially from where we are”

—Major James B. Higgins, U.S. Marines, Afghanistan

For Emerson in the 1840s, the poet “re-attaches things to nature.”¹ A hundred years later, John Cage would speak of the artist’s choices as leading “to the world of nature where, gradually or suddenly, one sees that humanity and nature, not separate, are in this world together.”² It is a mark of shifting paradigms that in the 150 pages of *The Annotated “Here,”* reference to nature is infrequent though we find mention of earth, isle, landscape, or more specifically of rocks, stones, gravel, clay, cinders, sand, and ashes; we find landslides and earthquakes; there are plants, greenery, leaves, pine needles, and even lichen, ivy, rosemary, and watercress, as well as peonies, carnations, gladiolus; we can find peas, asparagus, lemons, peaches, apricots, pears, grapes, walnuts, peanuts, and milled wheat; there are bushes, trees, and a hedgerow and even birches, silver maple, butternut, and spruce; one finds blue jays and a crane, cats and dogs, foxes and hens, a rabbit, a rat, a python, a deer, tigers, an arachnid, insects, snails, and duck-headed snakes, a miscellany of generalized landscape features complete with lakes; we have sun, moon, stars, and sky, and the various

weathers, especially wind, rain, and snow. Condensed to a list it seems fulsome; dispersed throughout the book, it seems scant. And one can observe that the density of such reference weakens as one moves from the back of the book to the front, from early work to recent.

If nature is not Welsh's poetic subject, then what is? Some years ago, Christopher Alexander reminded us, in what sounds like a deconstruction of our late Romantic sensibilities (it isn't that, in fact, but that is beside the point here), that "a city is not a tree," and he even went on to remark that "the tree of my title is not a green tree with leaves. It is the name of an abstract structure."³ Of Welsh we might say that in place of nature we have what we might call "the made thing": "A Work," as one of her poems has it, "a box, siring box-like/ textual symptoms."⁴ If it is to be landscape, it is "this landscape of facsimile" (7), it will be world "verbally reconfigured." (5) It is of point to note that Welsh's lakes are referred to once as "artificial" and again as "non-mimetic" and her rain as "rain imitating rain/a central fiction." (4, 73, 107) With a couple of rare exceptions, Welsh's poetic world is not the world of nature reconnected but rather the world of words and concepts, a constructivist's *paradis artificiel*.

Rigor is the first quality of Welsh's writing, as of her thought and of her speech. Having worked its way through Williams, Stein, Stevens, this writing represents a new inauguration of the mind in poetry. But it is mind not unaware of where it comes from and what has preceded it. "The sentence of liquid shadows," Dominique Fourcade says, "beyond which we do not look, writing it."⁵ For Charles Olson, the poet "can go by no track other than the one the poem *under hand* declares, for itself" (my emphasis).⁶ Robert Creeley remarks that "we're thinking, we're gaining an articulation for ourselves in the activity of the poem."⁷ Flat against the page we've learned to live, like soldiers on their bellies. As the lover, focused, lovingly caresses the rising line of the beloved's body, so we, anchored in our

here, feel our way forth from where we are. Welsh can adduce something like a sense of process art also. There is vector and dynamic:

"And so forth," meaning "setting out"
reiteratively from the heartland (1)

Position and movement: "of focus and of setting out." (1) However, ultimately we must find no Romantic instantiation, but rather "Box, divided from self." (3) Pencil marks we are, scratched upon a scrap of not inextinguishable timelessness.

How to turn our fragmentation to purpose? It is a central concern for which Eliot composed his entire opus. Everything flows from "these fragments I have shored against my ruin." Translators and writers like Charles Olson, Guy Davenport, Armand Schwerner have made an aesthetic of the poetic fragment within a larger Poundian tradition. Welsh extends these studies in a wholly new direction, "the future of us in words" (8) in all our "vernacular homelessness" (9), an image that picks up one mark of the international cityscape and transposes it into the wordscape of a reconfigured universe.

Art belongs, at least, to our hunting-gathering stage, the literary art being the finding of words. Welsh belongs in one dimension of the long tradition of the modern from Mallarmé and Stevens on down that has to do not with the representation of a physical world but with the construction of a verbal universe. "As chair is to table, so hair is to fortuitous" she writes in "A Project for Aspects." (9) The sentence will be confusing if we allow the opening comparison to mislead us. Of course, chair has a certain relation to table in use value, in function. But this is a distraction, a ploy, even a witticism. It is the beginning of a transposition into the world of wit, the world of intellect operating on its materials, here words. We are in a verbal universe, not a natural one. It is not the "here" that is so important in Welsh's book, as it is

the “annotation”—the taking note of and on—the metacommentary. Verbally, then, chair is no more related to table than hair is to fortuitous—or is related, verbally, in the same way: through interpretation. Hair may be said to be fortuitous, if we interpret it in certain ways—and yet all these considerations may be without point, no more than passing commentary in “selected non-sense.”

In its second sentence the poem seems to try to start again, but quickly runs into even deeper befuddlement than in the first instance, turns into a parody of gestures that may be descriptive (“chairs face inward” as in furniture arrangement), philosophical (“pitch dark aspects” as in existential *nada*), or even commercial (“correspondingly affiliated with” as in business jargon), in undercurrent, in “octave.”

Then we have “And”: Welish’s writing wears the mask of ordinary discursive logics of sequence and conjunction, here reinforced for two lines or so by a plausible and familiar scene.

Welish is adept in the construction of difficulty, is a believer in the salutary effects of difficulty in literature, in difficulty as a tool for proceeding, and is herself drawn to the arts of the difficult in our own time. Each of her poems is a zone of unknowing within which we are invited to lay down all our foreknown laws of procedure, to put aside our syntactic maps, to suspend our ordinary narrative expectations. All causality, as the path into receding mists, is romantic, sentimental even, our hopeless stay against the uprooted geometries of this phenomenally deconstructed moment which is our *situation*, our world of indirection, non sequitur, adjacency, extraneousness, lack, and discontinuity that, as Martine Bellen has said, “subverts sequence to a stranger and other order outside the unnarratable”⁸ through whose unmappable and borderless terrain we grope toward the other flickering sentimentality that opens just ahead. But, oh, the force of disinformation by

which we persuade ourselves otherwise, of the “fixity of the sign”!

Not only in its rigor and difficulty and wit but also in its elegance (in the scientific sense), Welish’s work is a corrective to what she calls in one poem “the disenchantment of the phrase,” while at the same time she herself is expert in producing what she has called “a page dramatically estranged.” The “drama” has to do with, among other things, the dialogue between rhetorical modes, between the poetic assertion and the rhetorical commentary on it, between a slice of quotation and the words that complete it. The “estrangement” has to do with the seam between book and life along which the poet lays down her zig-zag trails of narrative. Nearly all of Welish’s poems lay down such a narrative trail, but it is a vectored path shooting its energies off in unexpected directions. Words are laid in whose parts of speech fulfill a syntactical need but whose semantic dimensions effect, if not a narrative *rupture*, then a surprising narrative redirection, one that opens vistas which seem to draw and channel our gaze, or in some instances vistas that may even seem to turn their gaze on us in a Freudian reversal of perspective.

There is much in Welish’s work, as in other of the most interesting experimental artists, about parallel planes and reversed perspectives, much about modes of representation, the language that embodies them, and the rhetoric that commands and comments on them. It is in this last area, especially, that Welish’s recent work is rooted. It is also in this area that her work establishes itself among the most interesting and useful poetry of our time. The arbitrary split between literary theory and practice maintained primarily within academic discourse and institutions is, in Welish’s work, explored and put to use (not “resolved,” for that would be inimical to her aims). Indeed, this may be one of the main contributions of her work—the making of purposefulness out of the falsely divided institutional mind.

Lyric's due: The Performative Poetics
of *Begetting Textile*

Chris Tysh

In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge comes only
in lightning flashes. The text is the long roll of thunder that follows.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

It therefore might be helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of
always hearing only what we already understand.

—Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book*

Begetting Textile, a chapbook of sixteen poems published by Equipage in 2000, is Marjorie Welsh's superb demonstration of what we might be tempted to call a performative poetics, ceaselessly rethreading the very text it weaves before our eyes through a series of self-conscious iterative moves which showcase language's infinite plasticity and irreducible provisionality.¹

Like Cage's prepared pianos, these textile scores of "interpenetrating vocabularies" and auto-representational tropes, fold, signal and retrench, only to mark "the forward edge of reading" (11) and begin again along a new tonal row. A run of rhetorical gates or structural levers opens up the sequence—"as if," "because," "insofar as," "as in," "which is," "for the

reason that," "even as"—willing on one hand to advance a poetic argument made tangible by dint of these solid logical mallets, while at the same time renouncing the illusion of syllogistic progress and truth claims:

"advocating little posits, immense thickness". (14)

This deeply characteristic frame produced by *Begetting Textile* has less to do with the sort of Wittgenstein-inspired logic one might encounter in the poetic practice of, say, Rosmarie Waldrop (*The Lawn of the Excluded Middle*) or perhaps Leslie Scalapino (*That They Were at the Beach*), than with a cultural syntax of alterity written outside the orbit of "self-same traffic." (4) That meaning is mediated, pressed into being, "begot," under construction or erasure, does not simply overturn the paradigm of referentiality, a dead horse if there ever was one—"a sweater's overcoming mimesis" (19)—but profiles a turnstile through which passes the complex and ruinous "*Als-Struktur*," as Maurice Blanchot calls it in *The Writing of the Disaster*.²

The *Als-Struktur* [the structure of the *as*] introduces us to difference, not to be confused with the different, to the fragmentary without fragments, to the *remainder*: that which is left to be written and which, like the disaster, has always preceded, and ruined, all beginnings, including the beginning of writing and language. (131)

Lest one hasten to think that *on se presse au portillon* pell-mell, *Begetting Textile*'s compositional strategies will quickly disabuse us. Welsh's intervals, spacings and rhythms are calculated with the uncanny precision of a chess player or master weaver: "a path formatted across a wave." (22) Some of the L-shaped stanzas might recall the knight's moves,³ rushing two spaces forth and one sideways, suggesting the possibility of tumbling and unraveling as both the Red and White Knights repeatedly do to Alice's bewilderment:

This time it was a White Knight. He drew up at Alice's side, and tumbled off his horse just as the Red Knight had done: then got on again, and the two Knights sat and looked at each other without speaking. (*Through the Looking-Glass*, 258)

Such then is the lyric's due: to exact a meaning field without foreclosing the debt of tilling—all those signifying paths which open a fork in the road of reading; to hold out a mirage of plenitude, (i.e. "what the lyric can comprehend" [3],) and yet have it blown up by its own bomb; to punch the numbers "as illustrated" (5), as if a little heaven could land us on the right page where we say yes to writing:

"literature sinking water impersonating the fast moving words". (28)

It would be tempting to read in such an account a quasi-totalizing notion of poetics wherein everything merges—social subjects, the world and its messy determinisms—with the verbal medium which comes to assume an overarching, positivist function. As Benjamin Friedlander writes in his riotous "A Short History of Language Poetry," "now we see only language, displaced in a myriad of structures, and identity is merely a formal possibility of language".⁴ I want to suggest that the insistent oscillations, half-steps, quirky reprises that Welsh's poems execute, the whole textual (textile) mechanics of *Begetting Textile*, aim at sighting that very possibility, locating its anchor points, its alternate routings, and then almost immediately inscribing a falling off, "a long escarpment" (3), a blind spot, which undo the stitches, disturb the pattern, designify. The "infinite erosion of repetition," to use Blanchot's metaphor, the errant shuttle of discourse, the *fort* and *da* from "song" to "disenchantment" (20), haunt *Begetting Textile* in ways that speak of the lyric as always already a risky relation, as the strange place from which to recast poetry's abode, de-formed and "pebbled with trial."

From trace to trespass

Mercifully we are long past the frenzied poetry wars of the '80s and if today's graduates from writing programs at Brown, Buffalo or elsewhere are any indication, the tendency is toward a postmodern lyric free to espouse a range of practices which cross boundaries, merge camps and complicate the tyrannical and bruising alignments of last decades. This transformation does not inaugurate a touchy-feely model where everything goes, but raises the ante vis-à-vis the production of poetic meaning and promotes a critical fluency essential to interpretive communities which might be called to analyze a Coolidge text one day and a hip-hop poem the next. It is within this temporality of postlanguage that one could consider Welsh's own brand of radical textualities.

The performative *démarche* of *Begetting Textile* consists in making the reader perceive a unit of signification, only to wrench it in its next incarnation by projecting a new recontextualized linguistic sign which itself will be further recast within a new syntagm. If I may be allowed to quote Blanchot speaking about Marx as cited in Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, "...the voice of writing, a voice of unceasing contestation, must constantly develop itself and *break itself into multiple forms*" (35, Derrida's emphasis). The result of that obsessive breaking, that performative contestation, is that the poem disbelieves any obtained meaning and forces the lyric's instant comprehensibility to be examined and reassessed by the fierce demands of the next verse.

"Textile 8" dramatizes this schema with a subtle formation pivoting around "post" and "past," a pair of morphemes which make visible their phonemic differentiation and which bring forth a parade of "posthumous," "past perfect," "passage," "passing" and "passion." Contrary to the classissist take on poetry, where the *mot juste* is the only target, Welsh repudiates the

ascendancy of the syntagmatic axis of language by activating the paradigmatic extensions *as if* one could never settle and just be done worrying the line:

Point

as a net: they have netted themselves

[a form of because in pointing to it. (18)

The threading and rethreading allows the smallest trace to both migrate from one point of the text to another, while interiorizing the memory of meaning, as in a palimpsest, silhouetting passage inside passion, filtering post through posthumous. Far from being a dizzying, gratuitous, formalist exercise encumbering the text with an endless dissemination, *Begetting Textile* plays out the dialectics of identity and difference within language in a poetic idiom which pleads for "a surfeit of aspect" (18), and opens up the signifying chain to its dormant or absent selves, pressing in at the gates with nothing more than a trace, a filigree of prefixes, in order to stress the unfixable yet material nature of any lyric speech act:

prompting lanes

lanes with the *propensity* for assent

promised ascent

(16, my emphasis)

By enacting such productive yet trying relations between the various axes of language—the synchronic and the diachronic, word to line, line to text, textile to book, word to world—Welsh reminds us that writing is written across those inexhaustible passages and arcades which shadow meaning, "even as a reticent reader works through such maneuvers". (14)

Errant surplus-value

If language be our shelter, the poet has constructed “a house of faulty entries” and “walls in diaspora” (*else, in substance*). If it be “more text than house” (18), then one will keep all checkpoints open and put the costly romance of presence, hospitality and welcome through the turnstile which scatters, dismantles and orphans that which it just housed a minute ago. If we were to formulate the production of this persistent undoing as “errant surplus value,”⁵ what would it buy in this delicate economy marked by the instability of its goods?

With an eye to the now proverbial materiality of the signifier, Welsh capitalizes on the poem’s unstoppable energy and on its “comings and goings” (26) which function somewhat like retardation devices in the mystery genre where they thicken the hermeneutic code and postpone the final unveiling. In the context of *Begetting Textile*, this signifying excess takes the form of a circuit, a language traffic that can only purchase yet another set of terms through which the lyric is encoded.

Admittedly, the Marxian metaphor of surplus value is only advantageous if we read it as a performative device toward understanding the paradoxical logic of Welsh’s writing: the surplus is reinvested not to accrue more value and meaning but to substantiate an iterative process that entails permutation, distortion and expenditure. The recasting of the old, forms and deforms the new in a ceaseless web which plays up poetry’s errant and profligate nature, always angled against inheritance, settlement and stasis. It’s as if *Begetting Textile* were unconsciously heeding Blanchot’s old call to arms for writing’s voice to contest and break itself into multiple forms, enacting a language event which traces and retraces its own “begetting”; it is as if Mallarmé’s dice were thrown⁶ over and over, and each time the poem verified the inexhaustible nature of its own game, letting in another shift, another “as if.”

Deforming the lyric

In an e-mail posted on January 8, 2002, Welsh writes: “One way to regard the lyrics in *Begetting Textile* is from the initiative I took to open Mallarmé’s parenthesis.” For the author of *Un Coup de Dés n’abolira jamais le Hasard*, poetry’s engagement with chance is the subject’s engagement with necessity and materiality: “Rien n’existe que la matière, éternel clapotis de l’être,” writes Jean-Paul Sartre in his preface to the Gallimard edition of *Poésies*.⁷ Man’s appearance, Sartre continues, transforms the eternal into temporality and the infinite into chance. (7) But chance itself, that mad instigator, will be caught up in an agonistic relation with writing wherein each affirms itself by denying the other: “Dans le poème c’est le hasard lui-même qui se nie; la poésie née du hasard et luttant contre lui abolit le hasard en s’abolissant parce que son abolition symbolique est celle de l’homme”. (12)⁸ From dice to words, the visionary aesthetics of *Un Coup de Dés* deploys a writing scene which must shipwreck (“be/ that/ the abyss”), disperse and spread out (“prismatic subdivisions of the idea”) or else, as Mallarmé explains in his prefatory note, “...that from this naked use of thought, retreating, prolonging, fleeing, or from its very design, there results for the person reading it aloud, a musical score”. (105)

Paul Valéry’s description puts into motion both the visual novelty of the Mallarméan script and its conceptual immensity: “Il a essayé, pensai-je, d’élever enfin une page à la puissance du ciel étoilé!”⁹

It would take more resource and talent than I can corral at the moment to adequately account for Welsh’s recoding of the Mallarméan brackets (as if) which fracture and disrupt the unpaginated text by invoking the very notion of writing as it borders, right in the gutter, the void: “hovers/ about the gulf.” It seems to me that contrary to *Un Coup de Dés*—where the two sets of “as if” literally open and close off that double page, tracing two outer limits, top

and bottom, left and right—in *Begetting Textile*, “as if” loses its twin and comes to pinch and hem the left side of the text, leaving the other to its own compositional devices. More precisely, “as if” appears to carry with it the pointy self-presence of anaphora:

As if,
 then. [...]
 as if shadow [...]
 as if sand[...]
 As if
 conjecture (10-11)

And yet it continually renounces and deforms that assurance, since it serves to open the initial syntagm to what it is not. Thus, the text is held in place(s), its left band apparently solid, stitched by these lexical binds, when in fact they become the porous entries, blowholes as it were, through which the poem leaks out under the law of *ostranenie*.

Viktor Shklovsky’s wildly useful notion of defamiliarization articulated in 1929 will bring us back to the problem of temporality evoked earlier by Sartre’s preface. *Ostranenie* sharpens art’s imperative to see things anew: “You have to tear the thing from the row of habitual associations in which you find it. You have to rotate it like a log in a fire,” the Formalist critic writes.¹⁰ This slow and willful rotation can be read as a way to inscribe a language worked, played and transformed by time. Such is the case in *Begetting Textile*, which offers the spectacle of a verbal object produced by a web of changes—non-contemporaneous, non-identical, non-unitary—all deforming the presumed and eternal beauty of a verse mired in its own flash. Narcissus on the heights of Mount Helicon, what do you see in the troubled waters?

The shuttle of discourse

Language does not fall from the sky.¹¹ There is something obstinate but also ludic about the way Welsh hammers at this evidence. One could say that she rehearses for us the process of interpellation and breaks it down to its constitutive elements to better underscore language’s tie to the social contract. From the anarchic abundance, where words await in their *Sleeping Beauty* coma—“suspended in a warehouse” (19)—to the site-specific power of stepping out into a performative space—“speech acts walking a stag” (19)—a writer goes to work: naming, interrogating, struggling, bringing up the passive, the repressed, the imaginary and the real.

“beneath the language however through language: why” (25)

In this shift articulation between the poem’s ideological ground and the distance it will travel, between its various psychic registers and temporalities, we see a structure and a poetic event take place which redistribute and scatter meaning across a whole signifying field. It becomes then not so much a matter of a given subject-position as rather the constant staging of these traversals “in verse”. (15) I have spoken elsewhere about Welsh’s concerns for a critical lyric¹² which her work has engaged for over three decades now. *Begetting Textile* reconfigures that commitment with regard to its performative strategies, which put to risk the sovereignty of language as stable and fenestrational medium of communication.

Begetting Textile is literally shot through with the all-suffusing presence of discourse, what we’ve come to call criticality in our typical shorthand. We encounter it, not as a supplemental trope meant to lift the verse from its narcissistic being, but as materialized responsibility and process inextricably bound up with its own production. Like a weaving shuttle, discourse (*discursus*: the act of running to and fro) plies and turns itself over from one

edge to the other. It runs; it writes. What passes in this ferrying? What verities? What promises? What returns with each shuttle? Will I recognize it when it sails by again?

In the face of these questions we must first acknowledge something opaque which installs a limit, an epistemological stump, or perhaps just a fringe of resistance, hardened and shiny like “automotive taillights”. (26) To neglect such epistemic fissures would be tantamount to equating discourse with pre-given signifieds, always already there, fully attired and recognizable. This being said, *Begetting Textile* presses into service a sizable matrix of critical modalities which instantiate lyric’s debt to theory: a whole meta-rhetoric bent on showcasing the play of difference, abstraction and materiality while downgrading the poet’s subjective voice as legitimizing factor for its own practice. Aligned with other significant experiments in critical poetics, Welsh’s work acknowledges their presence and hails them in a dialogic movement which allows her discourse to be at once an immanent force in the production of meaning *within* a particular text and a communication line, *out* of the poem and toward a given writing community (i.e. a group of poets, writing practices and texts) that it addresses, ventriloquizes or conjures.

“literature conjectures across texts” (10)

What the poet apprizes here in this two-way construct, romantically reminiscent of Cocteau’s famous image of the poet as radio—later brilliantly evoked in Jack Spicer’s oeuvre—is not a set of particular referents overheard above the din of traffic but a common nexus of interrogations dictated by contemporary poetics. Turning more and more toward theory in order to account for a lyric which takes on the ambitious task of reflecting critically upon the world and its own role vis-à-vis the social materials, Post-modern poetry (Marjorie Welsh’s more precisely) seeks to incarnate

the very conditions of its coming-into-being, appropriating and detouring, to do so, discourses which had a monopoly on such activities. By stretching “what the lyric can comprehend” (3), “up to and including incomprehension” (3), by displacing “song” onto “disenchantment,” the poet moves the goal posts on the signifying field and alerts her readers to the complex calculus where neither word nor world nor work disappear.

However characteristic of the postmodern moment, however emblematic of a common practice, however consistent with a logic of pushing the envelope, as our culture likes to say, and testing the limits of the genre, it seems that this is still not enough to recover the specificity of Welsh’s critical lyric. Beyond the poetics of intertextuality, the meta-discourse on form and social formation, the interpellating agency of language, the dialogue with community and its cultural codes, to list a bare minimum, *Begetting Textile* performs yet something strikingly different.

Let us agree that one pole of the discursive activity in *Begetting Textile* is caught up in denaturalizing language, upsetting the presumptions of genre autonomy and generally making an argument for a poetics striving to interrogate the lyric’s mobile location in relation to its rhetorical patterns and materials.

Being chased.

Directly to poetics.

A slice. (18)

This criticality, then, is always on the move: example, question and objection to its own choices and procedures, rolled into one verbal object, wearing its threads, fronting its cleavages, “even as/quiddities in pictures tangled”. (9)

Just as *Begetting Textile* makes visible its double margins, subject to distinct

textual economies—the left pinned in place by logical units, while the right profiles a vertical paradigm ¹³—similarly, one could posit a second theoretical slant. This other side of the discursive chain would lie empty, because it does not exist prior to and separately from the lyric's functioning. Taking liberties with Judith Butler's concept of performative identity, ¹⁴ we could hazard that it is the performance which constitutes the appearance of discourse—in this sense not expressing anything that precedes it, but constituted as an effect of each iterated movement within the poem. Understood as performative practice, the shuttle of discourse carries with it the risk of unraveling, of losing its place in the text(ile), and disrupting the very meaning it creates: "[..] how things might have been different. A different thing". (12)

When all the chips are cashed in, lyric's postmortem can only unveil what writing wrings out of the real, leading us back from the "carcass" (10) to the unknown and disarranged space where a poem turns from song to disenchantment and back again.

Marjorie Welsh's Logics and Annotations

In a recent note in *Boundary 2*, the Irish poet Randolph Healy writes that "It is possible to misrepresent the historical context of logic as a search for the truth," as "a wholehearted attempt to uncover the picture of the world". (133) Logic's ability "to uncover the picture of the world" has been "hopelessly compromised," he continues, but if this "instrument of orthodoxy" or "scaffolding of the world" has "begun to collapse under internal pressures," logic might still be of interest to the poet for its "expressive potential" (133-4). Healy's note is meant in part to explain tendencies in his own poetry, and I don't want to make too much of it. But a philosopher or logician might want him to say a little more about what he means by logic, by its supposed collapse. A quick scan of *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* finds modes of logic called by the following names: combinatory, default, deontic, deviant, dynamic, epistemic, erotetic, formal, free, higher-order, infinitary, informal, intensional, many-valued, mathematical, modal, non-monotonic, ordinal, Polish, predicate, quantum, relational, second-order, symbolic, tense, terminist, and three-valued. Surely Healy does not imagine that all of these logics have been discredited but means simply to recognize that

specific logical forms—he mentions the axiomatic method—are no longer “the instrument of orthodoxy.” A plurality of logics extant speaks to an end of orthodoxy. Perhaps he means also to suggest that in some more general way the relationship of logic to knowledge is not what it once was. Aristotle viewed logic as the foundation of knowledge, for instance. Logical positivist philosophers held that language reflects the structure of the world. Healy might have claims like this in mind.

Marjorie Welish is one poet who has found her poetic practice amid logics and their collapse. Her poems, particularly in recent collections such as *else*, *in substance* (1999) and *Begetting Textile* (2000) but also in *The Annotated “Here” and Selected Poems* (2000), often inhabit or allude to logical forms or modes of reasoning and problem-solving the common reader might think foreign to poetry. “Chronic Dreams,” for example, one of the newer poems in the selected poems, mimics an algebraic problem rendered discursively:

A function of x
foreshadows
“of” with “less”
in an impaired crossing

of arithmetic processes,
while a number greater
than a portfolio of bathers
destroyed

takes the product
of two numbers greater
than “of” and very stimulated,
in an effort to do the wrong thing

for the right reasons:
saying “of” when naming “less”
until amnestied. For the right reasons, he gave
the tablet a spatial location in haste. (30)

This amusing poem seems to explore the rejection of representational content in abstract art, and more especially the rationales used to defend art, perhaps by an artist discussing his own work. Foreshadowing “of” with “less” means only that the word “less” comes before the word “of,” the opposite of what happens on the page here. “Of” might refer to content or figure the artist rejects or diminishes; the abstract painting is not a painting “of” something in the way that one ordinarily speaks of a painting “of” a horse or dog or a bloated elephant in the bush. An “impaired crossing” might refer to the algebraic language the poem mimes and distorts or abstraction’s aesthetic theory as borrowed from discourses belonging to mathematics, logic, or metaphysics. Via acts of substitution words stand in for numbers in this poem in the way that letters do in algebra. The poem’s syntax gives and takes away, adds and subtracts, especially in the movement between the seventh and eighth lines with their lurid “portfolio of bathers/ destroyed.” Following this line of thinking about the poem one might notice that the suggestion that abstract art is “greater than” representational art gives us the language of critical judgment in the dry idiom of mathematics. That phrase is comically extended in the phrase “very stimulated,” which might poke fun at a particular artist or popular views of artists as frenzied, excitable types. The poem continues by inverting the more common order of the phrase “doing the right thing for the wrong reasons” and then, in its final stanza, refers to a tablet given a “spatial location in haste” as an act performed for the “right reasons,” which would seem to suggest a concluding affirmation of intuition as part of the practice of the artist, after a previous line indicates that his or her after-the-fact explanations might need to be “amnestied,” as that odd idiom has it. My crude paraphrase shaves the poem of its sharp edges

and turns, and I can only guess at the meaning of the title. Perhaps it refers to a kind of guilt or uncertainty regularly accompanying the contemplation of composition after the fact, or alternatively to a proposed relationship between intuitive or dream-like logic and artistic creation. Whatever we make of the poem, it is its unusual language that we will notice, this sense that a manner of speaking or writing found most often in one kind of problem solving has been moved over for use in another. Algebra will have a host of associations that might well exist at some distance from our thinking about art, or perhaps this is true only for those who lack a stable or synthetic vision of the relationship between different kinds of knowledge. Dry I said, as if this is what algebra is: I suspect that some readers will miss the humor in this poem.

This and other related poems do not necessarily propose a critique of logical (in this case algebraic) forms. If logics provide a means of inferring or discovering knowledge via procedures for ordering discourse and thought, if they offer modes of reasoning, these poems inhabit these modes for aesthetic ends, for the purposes of the poem. They empty logical forms of their typical functions. They disable logical propositions and orders, and it is difficult to imagine how it would be possible to understand or describe what happens in "Chronic Dreams" as any known mode of discursive "reasoning" exactly. Phrases such as the one about the bathers are lurid for the dissonance of form and content. But finding such surprising language might well have the effect of affirming the borrowed form by showing how its uses can be extended. Form preserved absent its typical functions. Art as critique and sanction of logics.

We might look at another example, "else, in substance," a poem full of allusions to the languages of logics. This poem is written in couplets. As a literary form the couplet has a history of associations, but little of that history seems important to this poem. Here the couplet is of interest for its ability to

present, investigate, model, and complicate binary, either/ or reasoning. Paired lines allow the reader to consider the relationship between short noun phrases, and the relationships of individual couplets in a series of couplets. The end-stopped lines and phrases of the poem's first couplets establish the pattern that the poem later interrupts:

The dress
 The other dress.

The recurrent dress
 The perpetual dress.

The basic dress
 The reductive dress.

The little dress.
 The little black dress.

The opaque dress
 The remote dress.

The opaque dress
 The mute dress. (1)

The title's reference to "substance" identifies one point of the repetition of the word "dress." Substance, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* tells us, was defined by Aristotle in the *Categories* as "that which is neither predicable... of anything nor present in anything as an aspect or property of it. . . . We can predicate *being a horse* of something but not a horse; nor is a horse *in* something else". (774-5) Substance, for Aristotle, was what "remained self-identical through change. All other things are accidents of

substances and exist only as aspects, properties, or relations of substances". (775) We can trace the debate about substance through Hume, who denied the existence of substances and instead held that things are bundles of properties, and beyond him to bundle theory and the latest physics. In discussing "substance" we are talking about a series of related questions involving essences, self-identity, identity and difference, and "the thing," and all of that is figured in this poem's "dress," in its composition or perhaps I should say costume.

The poem begins simply, allowing us to consider basic relationships between paired terms—one dress, the other dress—and then in its second couplet distinguishes the "recurrent" and the "perpetual." Already by this point our attention to the dress "itself" has been stripped; we know what game we are playing. In the third couplet Welsh uses terms that factor in what logical positivists call the "verifiability criterion of meaning," much as later in the poem "necessary" and "contingent" dresses allude to kinds of "truth" in logical positivist systems. In the fourth couplet's second line the addition of the word "black" distinguishes not only by adding specific color but also by alluding to Coco Chanel's famous dress, thereby producing a kind of category error, the merely descriptive term matched with one conjuring with an entire cultural history. Adjectives in the fifth couplet make for a more mysterious, possibly inexplicable pairing, and then in the sixth the couplets reject one of the "rules" of the poem to this point—the rule that no adjective will be repeated. At this point the poem altogether interrupts the pattern of end-stopped, paired noun phrases:

Reply that
rhetorical dress

happens frequently
happens sufficiently

in explicit instances
in the works of X. (1)

Variation within the simplest of forms? But it is the form itself that allows such variation to show up. "Rhetorical dress" suggests "rhetorical address," so even the "substance" of the word as *word* is shadowed by difference, by the "else" of the poem's title.

The poem seems to insist on this "else" throughout the lines following these, which state that "realizing the ideal / cannot be / in objects..." If I stop the phrase right there the poem seems to be stating that the object can have no ideal or essence. But I have cut the sentence off. The turns the syntax takes are more complex:

cannot be
in objects such as these

lexicons
not self-identical,

as of forgetful Greece,
say again,

say again,
in memoriam

happens always, frequently
in prophetic dress

of explicit instances:
Helen, merely a limiting case. (2)

Looking again at the dictionary of philosophy, we see that a limiting case is “an individual or subclass of a given background that is maximally remote from ‘typical’ or ‘paradigm’ members of the class with respect to some ordering that is not always explicitly mentioned”. (436) If Helen is or was a realized ideal, she is not a typical but rather a limiting case. But was Helen indeed a realized ideal? Helen is a lesson in the danger of ideals, a lesson much repeated throughout some of our histories. If Greece is forgetful some of us are not, or not always. Complexity beyond the distinction between typical and limiting cases seems to be indicated. I am taking some liberties with this paraphrase, which would in turn affirm what these lines say about lexicons not “self-identical.” In any event the poem shows us something “else” beyond the either/or structure the couplets hint at. The couplets themselves present this something else. These lines end the poem:

Else, *passim*.

Intuitions.

Either/or

and one eighth

without dress

throughout dress. (3)

Intuitions not as opposed to logics but as a kind of supplement to logics or as other logics. The otherwise or the “else” not as what leaves us “without” the dress, without the costumes that dress our world, but as already evident “throughout” them. Fuzzy dresses.

Welish’s poems often tell us what they are doing as they are doing it. “To the artifice’s winding paths we lend our gloss” she writes in another poem from *else, in substance* entitled “Less Music”. (9) The word “gloss” there, like the

words “annotation” and “description” in other poems, identifies another dimension of her practice. I am not altogether certain how to relate it to what I have said above, to that interest in logics that extends even to allusions to the “as if” fictive reasoning of Hans Vaihinger. The idea of glossing or annotating the word as *word*, logical form as *logical form*, and poem as *poem* folds self-reflexive activity within a constructivist poetic. Possibly it accounts for what to some readers seems like a highly intellectualized practice. Welish’s is a poetry that values the intuitive, as also what she calls in her art criticism “the open work.” It deploys the “multicursal and continuous”—to cite a few more words from “Less Music”—as these make for “devastating complexity”. (9) Such self-reflexive moments suggest a kind of rigorous self-consciousness some would find more typical of theory than of poetry. I cannot for example think of poems more recursive in their movement than the first and title poem of *The Annotated “Here” and Selected Poems*, a poem by the way which might be read as a kind of *ars poetica*. Reference to a winding artifice *glossed* [my italics] in “Less Music” is akin to mention of a “parallelism” of “focus” and “setting out” in that poem. “Focus” suggests discipline and plan, “setting out” a beginning while looking ahead, a journey or investigation or exploration. One might propose alternatives to these associations, but the terms “focus” and “setting out” are not opposed by the poem—that is the point—but rather located as parallel. If rigor is possible only within a known system or discourse, it is impossible to be both original and rigorous, but in their movement Welish’s poems offer the contrary impression by managing to be both precise and inexplicable. Intellection is suggested by recursive movement, by iteration and reiteration, a painstaking care with text as pattern, or even as textile, as the title of one pamphlet suggests. The movement of the poem is slowed, even at the cost of a certain fluidity of phrase often described as poetic “musicality”—the title “Less Music” perhaps alludes to the prosaic nature of these poems. Less music, more thought, the equation might be.

Syntactic repetition is not new in Welsh's recent poems. We find it for instance in "Among Them All," from her first book *Handwritten* (1979):

A car turning onto a driveway. An activity
that slows down activity. Also a routine
associated with domestic life, heard from inside.

The front tires passing though a puddle and dully
hitting a curb, then the rear tires
passing through the same, rolling onto the same
soothing routine, make me think that after rain
each dip is an excuse to change timbre.

The wet, the partially wet sounds of paint rollers
pushed from the gutter of a tray are the tires also.
I remember now I heard the car approach,

its description
ushered softly forward, growing louder, turning. (121)

In an email to me discussing this poem and others, Welsh writes that "this early poem indicates my interest in repetition as a tactic to enable structural and semiotic translation." The poem is metonymic where it might be metaphoric, which befits a poet who has worked variations and translations on one of the most famous poems of William Carlos Williams in her sequence "The Black Poems." Another poet, working in another mode, would have been satisfied with simile—the rolling of car wheels is like paint rollers dipping in pan or tray. But in the end it is not the observation of likeness that is notable in this poem but sentence and phrasal rhythms, parallelisms and repetition as they offer a slightly ominous, deliberate "turning." We might even say that the poem is about describing turning and it certainly describes turning—the first stanzas issue in the phrase "its description" set apart as a

penultimate line. Thus it is not only repetition but also self-reflexivity that is present in Welsh's poetry from the beginning, though I would argue that this self-reflexivity or, as I call it above, "glossing" or "annotating," is pushed forward, more common, in recent poems.

In his book *The Muses* (1994), Jean-Luc Nancy argues that Hegel's famous definition of art as the "sensible representation of the Idea" should be read as indicating the "dialectical necessity" that "the Idea... go outside itself in order to be itself". (92) This reading of Hegel's definition is meant to complicate oppositions between the abstract and the concrete, the inside and outside, the invisible and visible, and so on. I was reading these remarks while just beginning to think about Welsh's poetry and thus happened to turn to a translation of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, where I found in the following sentence from the preface the word "here" placed in italics: "Through the power of philosophic thinking we are able to soar above what is merely *here*, above sensuous and finite experience". (314) I thought immediately of the quotation marks placed around "here" in the title poem of Welsh's selected poems. Welsh is on record in an interview with Daniel Kane for having said that "Sense data have been largely overrated," and I had the idea momentarily of reading her work within this Hegelian proposition. But Welsh would seem to relish works of art that resist the kinds of future synthesis proposed by Hegel in that same preface: "[S]pirit can heal the breach between the supra-sensuous and the sensuous brought on by its own advance; it produces out of itself the world of fine art as the first reconciling medium between what is merely external, sensuous, and transient, and the world of pure thought, between nature with its finite reality and the infinite freedom of philosophic reason". (315) Welsh follows her observation about the status of sense data by telling Kane that "This having been said, the cultural value of putting our ideological or expressive clichés to the test by observing matters firsthand provides us with crucial help in gauging the weaknesses of ideas." Looking critically both ways, Welsh

would seem to want to resist absorption into idea without falling back on the senses in any naïve fashion. Similarly, in what I suppose might be called a mode of philosophical realism, she seeks to preserve consciousness of the limits of representation within the practice of what she calls in one passage in *Signifying Art* “phenomenological description”. (225) In her art critical writing on the minimalist sculptor Donald Judd she admires the way that Judd’s work presents us with abstract objects frustrating our efforts to name and categorize them:

Words replace objects of experience, and with Judd’s objects, which feign synonymy with the “cube,” words replace objects readily. Thus, to frustrate this synonymy, Judd adjusts the proposed object so that it falls between names and categories of reference. Put another way, as in Adorno’s cultural theory, the irreconcilability of concept and object is integral to art; and thus deliberately exploited by Judd is the dimensional conundrum of the not-cube and the unboxlike box relative to the essentializing words of “cube” and “box.” (228)

Welish writes of “postponing” classification, and this postponing seems to take on ethical weight for her. It should not be difficult to see the ways in which description giving way to re-description and to self-consciousness about description figures in her poems addressing Judd’s work, the three poems beginning with ‘This Near That’ in her selected poems. These poems, like others in *The Annotated “Here” and Selected Poems* and other volumes, make considerable use of citation; the passages cited are perhaps descriptions of Judd’s work. But the equivalent of Judd’s “box” in Welish’s poems, the objects that are described and redescribed as a means of delaying any final naming, are the words, sentences and structures of the poems themselves. She tells Kane that ‘This Near That’ is “decidedly not about. . . merely matching a verbal resemblance to a visual art object; but it does make a certain use of ekphrasis for noting the logical disposition of the

work. The object in question is the logical description (together with the functional description) of the structural complex called a box.” Self-reflexivity in Welish’s poems thus refers to the act of commenting on the poem as an object with a “logical disposition,” which is to say not a shape so much as structure and purpose within a system. Any commentary on the poem is part of the poem; temporal and spatial descriptions that divide our attention to the poem or allow us to forget the contingencies at play in our engagement with the work do not serve us well. “So too are mathematical and literary forms made contingent on the ruminative marks that produce them,” Welish writes, noting Twombly’s “proposal that these marks. . .are speculative instruments perennially delving into the nature of their own visual existence”. (38)

When I first read the title poem of Welish’s selected poems I wanted to read the quotation marks around “here” as scare quotes indicating an ironizing of the word “here” and pointing to a distinction between the word “here” on the page and any possible location of the poem’s “speaker.” “Here” refers to the poem itself, I thought, proud of my cleverness. This reading searches out playfulness, as if in using the phrase “this table” while reading my essay aloud at this conference I pointed to a table in front of me. But there is little irony in Welish’s work. Rather the quotes around the word “here” in her title identify the word “here” as simply undergoing scrutiny. They also disappear in the poem below, which insists upon the demands made by or in “actual” space:

The here of actual space, addressed
in face, to face
proximally yet aesthetically in pencil
like an eyelash
an eyelash addressing the canvas
which tantalizes. (2)

"In face" gives us the person visibly marked by her environment, context, and activity; "to face" insists upon the ethical agency of artistic response. Any response to the artwork will usefully acknowledge our distance from it and inexactitude in description; what we do in responding to art as also experience will be akin to probing rather than seizing or capturing. Proximate and aesthetic: focus and setting out: context and possibility. The poems delay naming to remember or preserve the difficult otherness of the object, preferring the experience of classification to classifications. The eyelash might be crucial, for it adds the erotic to the ethical. One might even speak of a poetics of the eyelash. And if the eyelash is a fluttering between eye and object of vision it also keeps dirt out of the eye.

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Writing through *The Annotated "Here"* and *Selected Poems*

A is for Annotated Alphabet

In spite of Pound's forceful Imagist "Don'ts" that marked the beginning of the new poetics in English for the twentieth century, we have now learned to go less "in fear of abstraction." Which does not mean that we have been forced to rally Wallace Stevens's first injunction: IT MUST BE ABSTRACT of *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*. Who's there left to provide injunctions, to tell us "It Must", anyway? Why should Abstraction be the first term in a series leading to Pleasure via Change? Here, redoubling its quotes in an Annotated "Here", the supreme key will not be Fiction, the Imagination or a new Symbolism implied by the twenty-first century's "new modernism" (to quote Marjorie Perloff) but quite simply an annotated alphabet. This is how we can begin constructing a specific grammar of poetry.

"Placed above the blackboard
the row of cards was a model blackboard.
I remember thumbtacks sinking through,
And when I looked at the letters
I liked the warmth of "a" near "A," "b" near "B,"
daughter near mother..." (137)

Therefore A is for an Alphabet of generation—only an alphabet can be
"perennial" because it combines the materiality of a substance made up of
paper, ink, flesh and skin, and an abstract but serial principle of paternal
cross-references.

"Bleak notation for nostrils lower left
in regard of that flesh estuary

pressed from pulp and paper
for a perennial alphabet of lesser mortals—
primarily a thing to be read, you decided.
Select the size and face of type,

In 12-point figure-landscape, all exile..." (73)

Just a little later, the same poem engages with the issue of paternity:

"Adrift is the handkerchief

of which the paternity is known,
albeit threaded with thorough perplexed reference.
That blotted tongue, that thoroughly bollixed signature

[perplexing an anteriority
we cannot substantiate, this, despite known paternity." (73)

The almost Derridean concept of a "bollixed signature" links disorder, chaos
and a faint suggestion of paternal testicles... All of these networks are
necessary if we want to "spell out" people as alphabets:

"Alphabetizing the cards,
slavishly
the person comes first,
in cold blood
and spelled out...." ("Casting Sequences," 56)

In fact, A stands also for Aaron, caught in his moment of hesitation after
Moses had gone. Where was Moses when the candle blew out?, Bloom
wonders in *Ulysses*. His answer to the old riddle is not just "in the dark". Yes,
Schönberg will play the role of a symbolic father, but will this be as an artist?

"Screams, laughter where there is enigma
or the onset of the nearby, discolored now,

disinterred many times as they parody ultramarine,
the sun, the sun's disappearance.

Move What? To Where?
Unimaginable, omnipresent, eternal,

stay far from us.

Move what? *Staff, law; serpent, wisdom.* To Where?

Now this God can be imagined." (62)

Schönberg's *Moses and Aaron* introduces the death of the artist as divine
author: "Why ask the artist? Ask the art" (58). Or rather, ask letter A.

B is for “B. and B.”

What if our alphabet happened to be stuck at letter B? If upper case B and lower case b were to replay a child’s guide to Heidegger’s ontological difference? Stevens has already punned on the “bees” of being and the idea that “be” must be “the finale of seem” in his famous “The Emperor of ice cream.”

“Meanwhile analysis grew and grew
in the baby. “B” and then “B” and then “Brr.”
With performative scratches and eventual socialization, left to right,
the roaring wind. The wind in vagaries
let us stutter further
for a wealth of
usage: more analytical when left-handed than he seems in ratiocination...,
reversing “B” in time
to rest our conceptions.” (19)

In the previous poem that “prepares” for the calculation of the “length of an arc”, it is less the psychology of the child that interests us than a guide to B and B’s:

“Revolutionary guidebooks
attempting “Bed and Breakfast” (which I heard as
“breakfazed”), bring exaggerated light: your bed is the bedroom
when empty... (...) A specious present
the very craving of which may be “B or B”—
there must be something
referred to by such expressions.” (18)

C is for Conversation

There is an art of polite conversation to be deduced from Marjorie Welish’s poetry. It prefers the negative to the positive, but its Poundian “don’ts” will help you solve difficult questions of etiquette. For instance, whether to use knives or not when eating peas, or what to say when you want to get married. Or again how to introduce to friends someone whose name sounds like a joke. Semantically, this question is related to that of the bed and breakfast—socially, of course, this implies a different series of “don’ts”:

“Let me introduce... do you know Joe Brainard? If not,
why not?

If he is as finite, as bound to time,
a small mass of dripping paint...

“I don’t...”

“I don’t...”

“I don’t... what?”

“Don’t touch the wood.”

“Don’t touch—cut. Don’t cut the wood.”

As he is finite and bound to a bed,
speak after me.” (32)

At times, it is best not to beat around the bush:

““Young or old?”

“For that I don’t need English.”” (32)

After he had published his *Tractatus* and had gone to Cambridge, Wittgenstein discovered that the truth tables he had devised to test the logic

of scientific or philosophical statements would not work when one was dealing with everyday language use. Welsh generalizes this insight and rereads Shakespeare accordingly. Thus Macbeth "in battle" initiates a different conversational war. An inkling of dialectic and logics is a prerequisite:

"Let's get married." "That's False."

"Not unmarried," she estimated.

Redness is whimsical or whitened. "I wonder
where my wallet is?" is not a question

but an implicit temptation trafficking
in interrogatives. Adam and Eve

encumbered.

Between languages

Subsisting on values, and modernism.

The idea of gray is not a true copy.

"Don't!" (28)

Questioning all questions, the poem seems to conclude by establishing an equivalence between question marks and exclamation marks. Thus the polite "Excuse me?" can turn into an order to move or make room: "Excuse me!" (we see this with "or else!," 29) It all boils down to a problem not of content but of forms, or more precisely, of manners:

"What's the manner with you?"

"Ready, or not!" (28)

It is clear that poor Macbeth has already lost the battle. To whom? It would

be too simple to say: to Lady Macbeth—that hag devoured by ambition. No, the answer is simpler: he has lost to the principle of non-contradiction:

"Using clues: it is raining, it is not raining. Do not eat

knives frozen.

"Excuse me?"

Do not eat peas with a knife, knives.

"Excuse me?" (28-29)

Macbeth is a Mad Hatter, honing his knives...

D is for Design

Ten years ago, the walls of the London tube were full of posters showing pretty woman's legs with fancy stockings and a caption: the brand name had designs on your legs! Thus "design" belongs to the body as well. In "Design, with Drawing", we read:

"And slowly, Monet underwent a conversion from wrist
to shoulder and thence to the ambit
of paint dragged across surface unappeased:
plasticity without an appointment
or trace of retinal light." (58)

In a remarkable essay on the "later Monet" written in 1957, Greenberg admits that he has been wrong so far to downplay Monet's influence. Indeed, Monet himself had been mistaken about the aims of art, since he thought that what mattered above all was to be faithful to Nature, to reproduce as accurately as possible the colored world seen by his eyes. But his true genius consisted in this faith in himself and his refusal to take older masters as models the way even Cézanne did. "In the end he found what he was looking for, which was not so much a new principle as a more comprehensive one: and it lay not in Nature, but in the essence of art itself, in its "abstractness." That he himself could not consciously recognize or accept "abstractness"—the qualities of the medium alone—as a principle of consistency makes not difference: it is there, plain to see in the paintings of his old age." (Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism* vol. 4, Chicago, 1993, 8) Because of his fidelity to his visual sensations, Monet gives all his attention to problems of equivalences without dominances and creates a superior unity when the colored surfaces become unmodulated monochromes. Even if Pissarro observed ironically that Monet was a "decorator without being decorative," it remains that Monet's later paintings anticipate the "wall-paper effect" of some all-over paintings by Pollock and other American Abstract Expressionists.

E is for Exit and a bit in Exhibit

The ideal gallery is also a tunnel:

"I want you to accept a gallery that is also a tunnel..." (126)

Let's dig, therefore: art is excavation.

"The exhibit is inconsequential, but we move
trying to taper off gradually" (126)

No need to rush through the show, anyway!

"Mommy, do you want to see me run fast?"
'No.' (23)

An Exit Throughout

Or a ball around which it is not raining
In everyday language." (23)

In everyday language, the miracle is miserably brief:
"enter brief miracle.

I have added nothing a priori blue" (24)

F is for French Fashion

In “The Seasons Change” Welsh meditates wittily on the second axiom offered by Stevens: IT MUST CHANGE. She notes that women’s bodies often undergo metamorphoses in order to follow the dictates of fashion:

“Crescent-shaped this season,
anatomy stays home wearing the casual shirt-dressing with details you’ll
[love,
the assumption being that your very marrow is disloyal, forgetful material.
[...]
In matinee we have changed,
and to the simple inquiry, ‘Are you wearing silk?’
comes the unrehearsed, ‘No, I’m wearing a modern convenience,’
mimicking the synthetic
memoranda almost without knowing it,
impressionable even as each season ‘goes on loving after all hope is
[gone.’” (87-88)

Where am I, throughout this fashion show? Sitting next to the runway while
top models are doing the catwalk? Is this really “amusing”?

“The chairs
of 18th-century France are set in amusing
configurations throughout the salon.
Throughout the salon,
the French say ‘amusing,’ meaning anything.” (88)

G is for Gymnasium or Garden

Let us just change slightly Marguerite Duras’s title: “Destroy, she says...” and
rewrite: “Delete, she writes.”

“Delete ‘gymnasium.’ Delete ‘night garden.’
In the delicate gymnasium of battle they knelt, as between rooms,
while the consequential warrior combed the night and the night became him.”
(110)

A deleted garden, a deleted gymnasium have the same function as
Mallarmé’s abolished flowers and *abolis bibelots d’inanité sonore*. The
difference is that their very deletion still contains Mallarmé’s
abolished objects.

H is for Hat

“H Is for Hat

Regrettably, you put it near me.
It was as though an unstoppable fact had come between us.
How appropriate, therefore, to be literature in a bereft state,
unpaginated.” (39)

The poet is a woman who mistook her book for a hat. And what about a
hatrack? It must be a dictionary—as Ford Maddox Ford told Pound “get a
DICtionary and learn the meaning of the words.” Here, the poet agrees:

“I am talking, by definition, about *it*.” (39)

She is talking by definitions. She is talking about the definition of *it*:
by definition, *it* means *is*!

I is for “Is”

Whenever we talk about “being” as a noun, do we reduce “is” to an “it”? What is “is”? Pound followed Fenollosa and believed that in nature there were only actions, forces, transactions. But here is an even clearer definition:

“The word ‘is’
consists of three letters.” (23)

Why is that? This means simply that the word “is” is a joke, like this old Belgian joke: “There are three types of people—those who can count and those who cannot.” We cannot count to three, not even to two, for there is only One. Let’s call him the Emperor or Imperatrix—the only Empress is the Empress of Is. Ys or Is is a magical island that disappeared one day off the coast of Brittany. This is why “i” is also the missing letter in Welsh...

J is for Joyce’s jar in translation

Reading Marjorie’s poems, suddenly I felt that I was able to reconcile Joyce’s alphabets with Stevens’s jar in Tennessee. *Finnegans Wake* repeats: “(Stoop) if you are abcedminded, to this claybook, what curios of signs (please stoop), in this allaphbed! Can you rede (since We and Thou had it out already) its world? It is the same told of all. Many. Miscegenations on miscegenations. Tieckle. They lived und laughed ant loved end left.” (FW. 18, 17-21) In Welsh’s poetry, Joyce becomes Welsh—American via Wallace Stevens. His ballad on Finnegans’s whiskey turns into a Bourbon bottle or a “jar in Tennessee.” By pure luck, the script can be slipped into a jar—Stevens’s old jar in Tennessee:

“That jar in requiem for wilderness even on a fingernail. [...] A wilderness equidistant between a jar and an aspect of the jar.” (47)

K is for Keeps

“Finders keepers: Roman coins in and under talons
(we are disturbing the earth to get at them)” (45)

There is a wonderful serendipity in Marjorie Welsh’s poetry: you cannot see where she has found her ready-mades, you cannot recognize the *objets trouvés*—you only know that what she has found she will keep, not in her mind, but for us, in a hard and almost impersonal language.

L is for Labyrinth

“A lost center
We lost her center to
a short step.
Lose center to gutter until the labyrinth is
no longer an explanation.
[...]
A person believes the labyrinth to be seriously absent.
Lose center to gutter, skeptically.” (27)

From Yeats’s lost center of European culture (“it cannot hold”) to Derrida’s critique of a centrality still lurking in Lévi-Strauss’s collective social structures: the labyrinth reintroduced the *labor intus*, the work of the inner, the interior *Arbeit* maze, an amazing piece not of mastery but of self-reflexivity.

M is for “mimesis, mind”

“Anathema
corresponding to gold

mimesis,
mind. Where is rival

dumbfoundedness?” (61)

But this mimesis will be warped, for the book is not called Marjorie: In “Within
This Book, Called Marguerite” (title of a poem, 86) she wonders:

“... I wonder if the mind will ever stop pursuing
rival minds or at last rival murmuring. It is a long sky
that convenes this endlessness.” (86)

What “ness” is endless here? Just the “infinite regress” (86) of mimesis of
mimesis of mimesis...

N is for “non-mimetic”

The contrary is therefore true: non-mimesis obtains. One example will do,
from the aptly titled “Pre-echo”:

“Unblinking non-mimetic lakes taped to the cheek,
and here physiognomic truth-functions inhabit
a logically scented and non-specific
self vindicated at all four corners, a kind of facial site.

Adrift in such skin, our iteration,
our iteration with which countries cannot vie, transliteration
secretly abetting impenetrable baptism.” (73)

O is for Object

When then is the object in and out of the mirror? The quasi-divine qualities
formerly granted to the subject are now given to the object. It is already too
late—

“You were omniscient a moment ago.” (61)

This belatedness, this secondarity can be systematized:

“Let us effect a moratorium on things.

Let us say

An object is not an image, aerodynamically speaking.” (63)

“Ephemera, illustrate this.

Free fall, illustrate this,

scalpel in hand,

in an acutely skeptical reading

of the snail incised with dotted

passivity in tawdriness,

the object obsolescent, abject, or gone.

When is an object not an object?” (64)

When it can be paraphrased.

P is for Paraphrase

"You said,
Rake raking gravel,
racing gravel, a gravelly race
her precursors never knew.

You said,
Paraphrase

at cross-purposes to abrasion.

through use." (15)

R is for Restore

In "Sleepless Before Sleep" we hear a "petitioning" voice saying: "Restore the same/ innocence for your friends, too." (148) The poems unfold like a Kafkaian dream sequence suggesting that no innocence can be restored:

"This is the liberal dream of all of us,
and so the body perpetually responds,
assumes the wish of another and grow flushed.
The meaning of her existence has already
been most adequately expressed; Innocent or not,
her dress is caught on something." (148)

In a similar fashion, we are warned against the naivety of "restoration" especially when it presupposes that authenticity can be preserved:

"Restoration *can be all boredom and anxiety,*
artifice the only remedy.
[...]

Restoration botched *can be all boredom and anxiety.*
Plexiglas broadly discussed *the only remedy*
cast among us; there is nothing human
alive. The heart, the mind, the soul will then
become more apparent, if not elaborate." (68)

Finally, yes: "Repairing the whole *can be all boredom and anxiety.*" (68)

"... *the first and the second death drive out*
norms...in my fate." (71)

But: "I admired the restored torso,
as, for example, when one's enemy is admired without bitterness." (122)

S is for "Seasons"

By a simple consonantal shift, Seasons have replaced Reasons: "in an effort to do the wrong thing/ for the right reasons". (30) It is safer to trust the seasons:

"The seasons went.
The lives in which we live become insolvent.
And they went down slowly, then fast.
Human and restless,
seasons never cease to amaze us for their versatility,

and for the full-scale illusionist realism
wherein we walk down city streets." (88-89)

T is for Table

In “At table”, the word “table” is generated by “suitable.” But the menu is a whole program, from political party to reading list:

“Of being suitable
or to the right of the fold,
extrapolated
like this, like that intelligibility
of plate fettered to table, with program,
academe in hand, and denoted forks speaking with us

transitorily...
‘Scattered totalities,’” (8)

U is for Usage

In Welsh’s poems, we must find our bearings in a Wittgensteinian notion of language games. There is no truth divorced from usage, here meaning is totally use. But use is never abstract or universal, it is linked with everyday practice in a social context, a place that we know well and that we may call America:

“‘which consists in touching the recipient’s cheek with one’s own’
in touching the recipient with one’s own usage,
Modern American Usage.” (78)

In this *American Usage*, “acquiesce” meets (or means) “assent.” A little later in the same poem:

“‘which consists in touching the recipient’s cheek with one’s own’
in touching the recipient with one’s own usage,
Modern American Usage, (78)

usage: ‘Acquiesce,’ meeting ‘dream’
On brick, ivy-laden,
ivy in ideological stranglehold,
meaning ‘assent’ or ‘submit.’” (79)

Or again:

“The floor’s countenance
distributed throughout social consciousness.

‘I no longer know’ is not the same aphorism.
‘I know.’ An aphorism

advancing neither... nor.

The floor-through element in Anglo-American...
the floor-through Anglo-American element in verse tribute.” (40)

V is for Vico

“In the space of barely/ indicated hospitality is Vico tasting his forks.” (18)
Welsh alludes to Giambattista Vico’s *New Science*, especially to the passages in which Vico accounts for the Roman cities whose origin is due to hospitality, or *philoxenia*. In Vico’s account, original family units gathered around one central archaic Father would often explode and disbanded, because of the endemic violence implied by a lawless state. Then the

stronger killed the violent aggressors and took under their protection the weaker ones who had fled from them. This generated the “heroism of virtue” for which Rome became known, the principle being of sparing the submissive fugitives and declaring relentless war on too proud enemies. This virtue allowed for the transition from “the feral state, fierce and untamed” to “human society” and “matrimony.” Thus all heroic cities were founded upon the law of hospitality: Cadmus founded Thebes as an asylum, Theseus declared Athens an “altar of the unhappy” and Romulus founded Rome by opening an asylum in a clearing. For once, Vico’s philology is correct—the French linguist Benveniste has observed a curious link between *hostis* (a guest, foreigner who has certain rights, similar if not identical to a Roman citizen’s) and *hostis* meaning the enemy, and he adds that it was when the old Roman society became a “Nation” that the split occurred: only then would one distinguish between *hospes* (he who receives the other, the host) and *hostis* or *hostes* (the hostile foreigner).

W is for Wish

Wish well! Or don’t wish at all... That’s all. The alternative: eat or burn. (American cuisine is often both.)

“I wish you a child pulling a pull-toy
and all increase. All increased
like knives on marble. Shove, stab, and fall

across the human family
who has commenced to extinguish itself.
Paste chutes to ladders, paste napkins to bells,
splash knives on marble: ashes, ashes, for example.” (101)

Wishes open to Windows, which is why they “flew open”—was it once only?
“The traveling theater will be your well-being.
You are the window for all that sullen reference.
(When the bus arrives) with your window,

you will disappear. Good luck!” (138)

X is for Else, in absence

“The opaque dress
The remote dress.

Reply that
rhetorical dress

happens frequently
happens sufficiently

in explicit instances
in the works of X.” (*else, in substance* (1999), 1)

Y is for Why

“Why do this?” is not identical with “Why do you do this?” One answer might be: because we like letters, we are literary people. We swim and sin and think in alphabets.

“yet non-contradiction
mentions why.” (29)

Z is for zenith, Zeno and Zukofksy

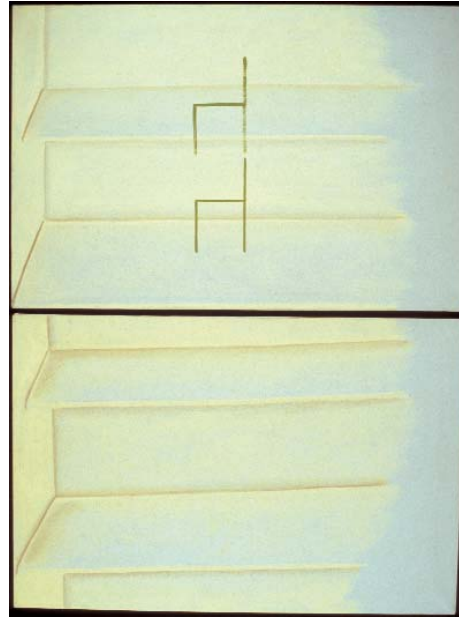
“Zeno slowly grabbing the wrong sister” (46) sends us to Italo Svevo’s wonderful *Confessions of Zeno*, or rather *Zeno’s Conscience*. In the same way as there is no “last cigarette” for Zeno, there will never be a “last poem” or even a “last letter” for Marjorie. Curiosity alone allows us to find our bearings with a zenith:

“and for the full-scale illusionist realism
wherein we walk down city streets.
At their zenith
they seem all crossed out,
unanswerable and advancing, curiosity traversing the island” (89)

But Z is also for Zukofsky, who happens to be the author of *A*. *A* as a whole long poem reaches its zenith with pure music: A-24 is a Masque: there, the whole poem culminates on a musical score. As Zukofsky writes: “And it is possible in imagination / To divorce speech of all graphic elements” (*A*, 566) Which music do you prefer: Handel’s fugues, Paul’s violin or Louis’s words on the page? To sound a different tune, why not hear some Zouk music—this Caribbean music inspired by African dance rhythms with Creole lyrics?

The reading ends with Kali’s “L’histoire du Zouk” played very loud.

IV. Selected Work by Marjorie Welsh



Marjorie Welsh, *Application (9)*, 1978. Oil and acrylic on canvas.
Collection of Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Sherman.



Marjorie Welsh, *Indecidability of the Sign: Frame 2*, 2002. Acrylic and ink on panels.



Marjorie Welsh, *Small High Valley 36*, 1990. Oil on canvas.



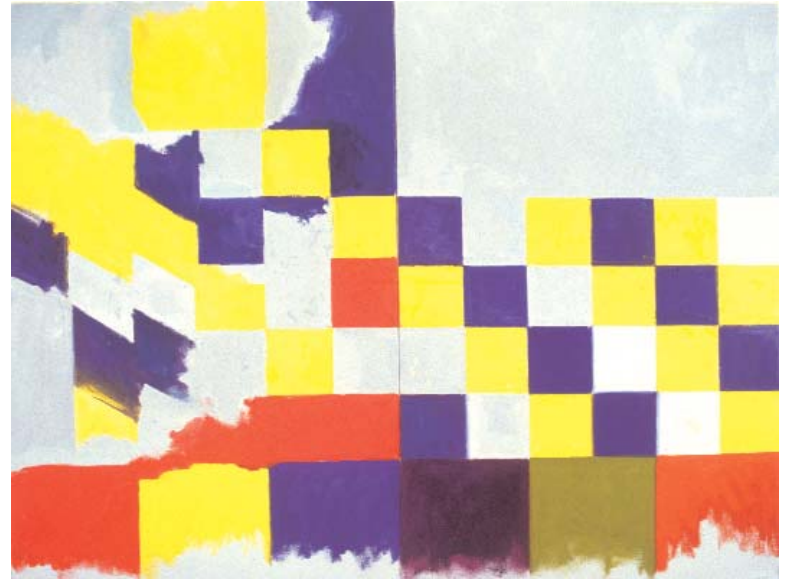
Marjorie Welsh, *The High Valley 19*, 1984. Oil on canvas.



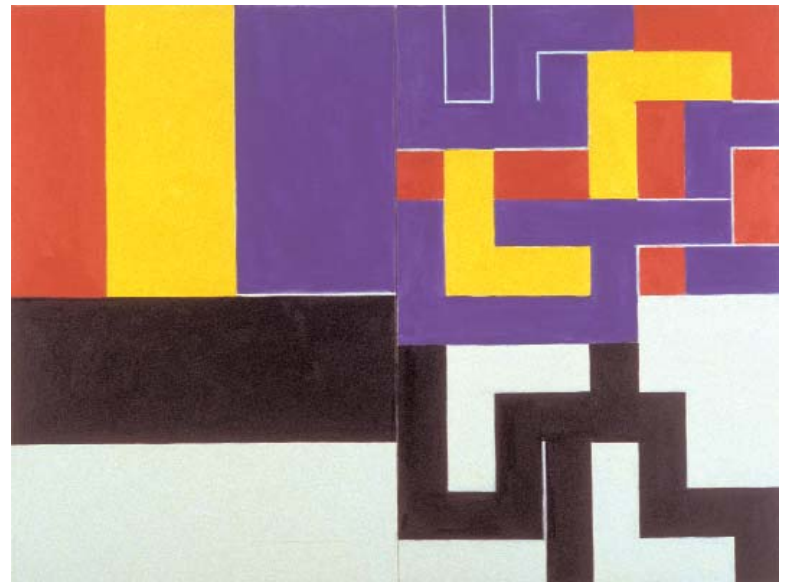
Marjorie Welsh, *Small High Valley 66*, 1994. Oil on canvas.



Marjorie Welsh, *The Indecidability of the Sign: Red, Yellow, Blue, 1*, 2001. Oil on canvas.



Marjorie Welsh, *Small High Valley 38*, 1990. Oil on canvas.



Marjorie Welsh, *The Without, 1*, 1999. Oil on canvas.

Roland Barthes on Cy Twombly

Neither an art historian nor an art critic, Roland Barthes writes so rarely on painting that when he does, we anticipate his commitment to something else. We see this commitment when we discover that Barthes wrote on the art of Cy Twombly not once, but twice. The question immediately presents itself: What urgency or scintillation does this art possess for him, a *littérateur* of cultural scope? Answers may strike us with peculiarly vivid force if we regard Barthes's literary interpretation of Twombly from the perspective of art history, because from the vantage of art history, the semiology that Barthes pursues is literary both in its peculiar emphasis on literariness as well as in its assumptions of the verbal grounding of visual things. From the perspective of art history—art history, moreover, occasioned by the constraints of the catalogue essay—the norms lie elsewhere.

Whereas the catalogue essay is typically bound to honor its function of describing art rather than criticizing it, the catalogue essay specifically occasioned by a retrospective is further bound to administer the entire career

of works on display. With time here an epistemological factor, if not also a factor of style, sense must be made of the art through a compelling temporal order that demonstrates and proves the content that the art historian believes significantly integral to the work. The art essay of some intellectual heft, meanwhile, treats the artist's stylistic history as it also engages cultural history in significantly conjunctive or disjunctive ways. In other words, whatever else it is, the catalogue essay is a species of dependent beauty. Its constraints are demonstrably those of occasion, function, and social purpose, the last being tied to educating a public.

Any audience already familiar with the mentality of Barthes has already guessed that he would have exploited the occasion otherwise. Commissioned by the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York to write a catalogue essay, one that would accompany a mid-career retrospective of Cy Twombly's art (spanning 1954-77), Barthes wrote "The Wisdom of Art."¹ Cheerfully frustrating the curatorial and educational staff in the process, he would pretend to acquit himself with this essay of extravagantly "free" beauty. We shall examine this essay.

Barthes's literary representation of visuality flaunts poetic over historical narrative. He delights in the perversity of doing antinarrative antihistory when professional decorum would suggest doing otherwise. Barthes indeed exercises the option to be literary that is accorded *homes de lettres* when commissioned to write catalogue essays. Topics freely adapted from Aristotelian poetics, announced at the outset, will become the mobilized nodal points under phenomenological consideration. A fact, a coincidence, an outcome, a surprise, an action—these are the terms of interest.

Material facts are noted. Elements prior to art—pencil scratches, brown smudges—are seen "as stubborn substances whose obstinacy in 'being there' nothing (no subsequent meaning) can destroy." The pencil line has

come to usurp the place of the brushstroke, but it is not noted as such.² Rather, in Barthes's schema, pencil is less an instrument and more a residue comparable to material *prima*.³ Barthes has found a visual analogue to the prelinguistic verbal utterances remarked by Julia Kristeva.

Graphic elements receive a provisional taxonomy: scratching, smudging, staining, and smearing. Then the written elements are mentioned, and the names Virgil, Orpheus, the Italians (all used in the paintings by Twombly) lose their "nominalist glory" as a result of having been written clumsily. Even so, this clumsiness of application "confers on all these names the lack of skill of someone who is trying to write; and from this, once again, the truth of the Name appears all the better."⁴

Barthes next entertains chance under the aspect of inspiration. The material smudges and stains seemingly thrown across the canvas, separated in space, produce in Barthes "what the philosopher Bachelard called an 'ascensional' imagination: I float in the sky, I breathe in the air. Those stains: it is as though Japanese aesthetics inform them."

Up to this point Barthes has cited works from the early 1960s. *Mars and the Artist* (1961), a work on paper from 1975, now prompts a passage contemplating symbolic composition featuring furious lines at the top and a contour forming a flower below, a flower accompanied by the artist's name. Figurative and graphic elements combine to raise the issue again of representation. "It is never naïve...to ask oneself before a painting *what it represents*," he says. People "want meaning" from a painting and are frustrated if the painting, this painting or another (here, Barthes returns to *The Italians* [1961]), does not give them the understanding they seek. This is especially so since viewers seek meaning by way of analogy from the title they read to the image they see. Looking at *The Italians*, people are bound to ask, "Where are the Italians? Where is the Sahara?" Even so, Barthes

maintains, the viewer intimates a proper solution or outcome consonant with the painting at hand and perceives “what Twombly’s paintings produce....: an effect.” Explaining his choice of the word “effect”—that is, he associates it with the French literary tradition (from the *Parnasse* to *Symbolisme*, it “suggest[s] an impression, sensuous usually visual”)—he said that it is the very word that for him captures the airy qualities in such early paintings as *The Italians* or *The Bay of Naples* (1961), qualities suggestive to Barthes of an effect of the Mediterranean.⁵ It is a Mediterranean effect “into which [Twombly] introduces the surprise of incongruity, derision, deflation, as if the humanist turgescence was suddenly pricked”—or else through such deflationary pricks and clumsiness, there arises the experience of *satori*.

Finally, the drama of it all registers. A designation integral to “a kind of representation of culture,” one achieved not through “depiction” but through “the power of the Name,” animates these paintings. The name that stands in for the subject in classical painting presents the topic in these paintings as well: the question of rhetoric reflecting what is being talked about. What is being talked about in the painting as subject falls back on the subject who painted it: Twombly himself.⁶

If an historical narrative may be defined as a temporal ordering of events happening under the aegis of an intellectually predetermined scheme, then a poetic nonnarrative may be said to propose a contingently arrived-at simultaneity, one where events that might have happened breathe with life.⁷ History whose causal or logical temporality has relaxed serves the ascendancy of the lyrical narrative; at least since Wittgenstein, theories of interpretation have displaced explanation, and they have built upon the longstanding contention between the human sciences’ reliance on meaning and intention and the analytical sciences’ reliance on logic and necessity for what constitutes explanation in history.

Barthes’s interpretative performance puts such history on notice, particularly that sort of docile unfolding of fact and biography associated with the norm of historical narrative that is appropriate for the museological occasion. A declared Symbolist bias aids and abets Barthes’s phenomenological ready of Twombly. Sensation as such is all-important. That Barthes searches out the tangible effect of emotion shows a predisposition to view Twombly as Baudelaire viewed Delacroix.⁸ But Barthes’s assumption that poetic effect and sensation are synonymous (revealing a bias that Surrealist poet Paul Eluard would come to reinforce) leads Barthes to overestimate this content: He will neglect or otherwise discount the cognitive component in Twombly’s visual discourse. Even though in another, subsequent piece on Twombly he notes that gesture conveys intellection, that comment is mere mention, and it contrasts with the weight given to intuited sensation with resultant *satori*, putting analytic intention at a clear disadvantage.⁹ A manifested spirit-within-matter is Barthes’s interpretive choice.

In Barthes’s scheme of things, values—centering on epitome gives privilege to paintings and essentializes sense and significance. Selective attention paid to early work establishes a core stylistic identity for Twombly—a core stylistic identity, furthermore, that accords with Barthes’s own. When Barthes wrote this first essay for Cy Twombly’s retrospective in 1979, he chose to concentrate on the paintings created in 1960 or thereabouts, those done relatively early in the artist’s career. Here is an occasion to examine the significance of Barthes’s selective attention as an historical representation of the artist and as a stylistic representation of himself.

Discarded by Barthes are various alternative themes of an artist’s retrospective career. Among the art-historical discourses not assumed by him is, least interestingly, the chronological account typical of catalogue essays, at least in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s (although still often obligatory). As the discursive yet redundant form of the listed biography

otherwise placed in the back pages, this chronicle of a life also unfairly stigmatizes all art history—as though chronology and history were synonymous, both despite the fact that “history” is a universal term covering any number of particular temporal employments; and despite the fact that in the allowable decorum governing catalogue practice, most approaches, ranging from formalist to cultural, are practiced simultaneously.

Attention paid to chronology in the Twombly catalogue is abbreviated indeed:

Cy Twombly was born April 25, 1928, in Lexington, Virginia, studied at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Boston Museum School in Boston, Massachusetts, and [the] Art Students League in New York. In 1951 he studied at Black Mountain College, North Carolina. Between 1951 and 1953 he traveled and lived in North Africa, Spain and Italy. In 1957 he moved to Rome where he still lives.

This is the entire biographical text, printed in the back of the catalogue alongside a chronology of exhibitions that follows reproductions of Twombly's work. Ever since *Sade/ Fourier/ Loyola* (1971), we have come to expect this inverted priority of fact and interpretation from Barthes, and here it is again. But independent of this, many artists of Twombly's generation—especially those raised on avant-garde formalism as well as those in color-field painting who belatedly joined in the formalistic rhetoric—disallow anecdote, incident, and other signs of the personal biography which are doted on by editors of glossy art magazines. Twombly has long distanced himself from public appetite. In this sense the intentionalist fallacy will be defended wherever catalogues devoted to him appear, and as with the catalogue copy for this retrospective, biography is similarly perfunctory elsewhere.

Chronology, by no means only a normative historical approach for catalogue writing, may occasionally prove even strategic.¹⁰ Yet social history may be

the preferred mode when treating entire art movements or when plotting artistic interventions such as those by Andrea Palladio or Vladimir Tatlin or Man Ray, whose functionally dependent art or career is inextricable from milieu and cultural context. In fact, a culturally contextual approach to art writing is more commonly employed than is readily acknowledged by those who want to stereotype the historical enterprise by limiting the scope and resourcefulness of its instrumentality.

Although intellectual antagonists, formalism and social history coexist in educating the public. One need only remember the debate in the 1930s between formalist Alfred Barr (first director of the Museum of Modern Art, who in 1929 coined the term “Abstract Expressionism” to refer to Kandinsky) and social art historian Meyer Schapiro over the meaning of abstract art. The subsequent emergence of the New York School provoked rival histories and commentary by the art historians Meyer Schapiro and Robert Goldwater, by the formalist Clement Greenberg and the humanist Harold Rosenberg—both cultural critics—and by the formalist chronicler Irving Sandler and the cultural critic Dore Ashton.

Essays by critical historians or semioticians are prevalent in certain museological enclaves: much depends on the intellectual and administrative freedom given museum staffs by their board. By the 1970s and sporadically thereafter, when Barthes was approached by the Whitney Museum, the critical paradigms applied to catalogue essays were quite variously creative. Recall, for instance, Lawrence Alloway's applied communication theory and semiotic overlay on American Pop Art for the Whitney Museum after decades of writing about the subject which he had initially defined and traced in Britain and the United States.

These days, however, the thematic approach favored more and more in an era of nonspecialist audiences is also ironically most amenable to the

littérateur, because, of all the typologies, this one requires the least scholarly specialization or comprehension. The thematic approach lends itself to lay percipience, which is expressed in the aperçu and in the impressionistic criticism that poets write when writing on art. Together with Meyer Schapiro and Rudolf Arnheim, poets—and artists—were conscripted by *Art News* editor Thomas Hess to review and cover Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, when such painting was shunned almost everywhere else. That's how the poet and lawyer Harold Rosenberg, who had published Vorticist poems in *Poetry* magazine in the early 1940s, found a forum for his metaphoric art criticism, which mobilized enthusiasm for "action" painting. In contract to the sociolinguistic practice of our times, when an avid appetite for simplistic popularization in the press assumes a reception made queasy if confronted with art history, intellectual history, or criticism, Barthes's playful interpretation of Twombly supplies what the public wants; yet his interpretation does so elusively. As sensuous impression, Barthes's art writing is meanwhile consistent with a tradition of the belletrist liberal construal of his object.

*

Since, after all, a retrospective raises the question of style across time, let us review Cy Twombly's career by decade to ascertain the interpretive spin Barthes puts on the matter at hand. Although ignored by Barthes, the decade of the 1950s was indeed represented in the retrospective exhibition and catalogue. A formalist would have taken note that, in Twombly's work, *matière* and tactility, both registering the artist's allegiance to *art brut* (and Jean Dubuffet in particular), give way to attenuated expression. Reliance on line is conspicuous. If style is "patterned selection of possibility afforded by forms,"¹¹ these early works reveal Twombly's interest in exploiting reduction for expressive possibility; yet given the variety of expressionist tendencies that kept pace with the stylistic milieu of the period, Twombly's personal style, it may be guessed, will continue to form in response to the period style.

Given the emphasis that Abstract Expressionism placed on Nietzsche—that anti-aesthetic archaism the anteriority of which was already a commonplace by the time the craze for Nietzsche reached the United States—we might assume Barthes would have laid even more emphasis on expressions of Dionysiac archaism made lean.¹² Neither children's art nor the art of the insane—whose grammatical and lexical forms are writ large in Twombly's work (as they are in European and Europeanized art of the 1950s)—figure in Barthes's discussion, except through the attribute of clumsiness. Were he to have mentioned the aesthetics of children's art, as he did in his second article, "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper," then his interpretation of Twombly at this stage would have had to reformulate itself. It would be obliged to consider the sensorimotor handicap Twombly deliberately undertook when drawing with his left hand to place himself at a disadvantage to acculturation.

Drawing the graphic equivalent of the prelinguistic utterance and so sacrificing linguistic competence by reducing one's means—such was decidedly part of the ethos of authenticity inscribed in Twombly's aesthetic. Because of this, it is tempting to wonder why Barthes laid so much emphasis on *satori* if the Greek concept of vulnerability, "which is essential to the manner in which the excellent man conducts himself," was culturally closer at hand.¹³ The answer might be that, with Twombly classified as a Symbolist, surprise—and ironic surprise especially—lent the notion he needed to fill out his scheme. To return to the phenomenological without delineating the historical era associated with it may be Barthes's implicit purpose.

Although literary critics and art historians alike do not tend to disregard the stray, idiosyncratic, or occasional manner as intellectual noise irrelevant to the style of art unfolding before them, art historians more readily accept the deviation because their commitment is to an unruly universe of experiential findings even at the expense of the rational principles they hold to be true.

Barthes's adherence to an original grammar of style located in those values deemed representative of the artist's work centers on works from the early 1960s, the years when the artist came into his own. Given this selective attention to the early 1960s, the grammar of dispersal, disposing of lexical smudge and smear, is adequate to interpreting Twombly at this moment. It accounts for the highly articulated range of material properties a painterly mark can manifest; not merely various, Twombly's mark-making unsystematically encapsulates a set of intensely sensuous and expressive reductions ¹⁴—and Barthes gets a good grip on this heterogeneous material anatomy even if, semantically, he could have noted that a fully formed lexicon is implicit at this early, so-called primitive, stage.

The consensual cultural reading reinforces Barthes's interpretation. The milieu at Black Mountain College—where John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg brought fruitful anarchy to the disciplined yet pragmatically oriented *téchné* that had been brought there by Joseph Albers, Anni Albers, and other exiles from the Bauhaus—fostered radical experiments with materials and craft. It also gave rise to radical renovations of definition. For instance, music now construed to be anything derived from the principle of sound is answered by the notion that dance incorporates all kinesis. (Anecdotally, this assumption of art as materially and formally comprehensive extends to Twombly, who, only a few years ago, wondered aloud if he would ever hear again “a certain Futurist music entitled *Veil of Orpheus*,” which he had heard long before. Fortunately, I, too, had heard Pierre Henry's *Veil of Orpheus* and could supply Twombly with a cassette of this *musique concrète* of 1953, which is largely percussive thanks to its object-generated sounds and so provides an aurally dispersed lexicon of timbre and rhythm—and which, by the way, still sounds new, unlike so many experiments that have attained a quaint status as period pieces.) Twombly's effort to realize the phenomenal visual analogue to aural sound structures remains underappreciated because naïve viewers (including the more

discerning Barthes) perceive, at best, a rarefied sensibility.

Further issues of signification arise even where Barthes is strongest. *The Italians* seizes his attention as a painting whose title finds no objective or subjective representation on canvas; the relation of signifying title to signified subject remains tantalizingly abstract. “Where are the Italians? Where is the Sahara?” he asks in vain. ¹⁵ Yet even as the nonreferential title underscores the abstract nature of painting itself, Symbolist traces abound, if only to manifest the content of this style, which animates nothing providently. Given the chromaticism and wet-in-wet pigment decidedly present in *The Bay of Naples* and *The Empire of Flora* (1961), for instance, more needs to be done to elucidate content than Barthes's hedonist impulse will allow. Barthes may have even suppressed the latent historical content suggested by his questions that only a few years ago he might well have allowed himself to recall. ¹⁶ Another mention of *The Italians* confidently asserts its allusion to the classical spirit, but, if anything, Twombly's calligraphic mark serves the Nietzschean barbaric revitalization of that classical spirit.

Perhaps because pursuing the Mediterranean effect under the aegis of French grace, Barthes ignored the consensual interpretation that could reinforce his own sensualist bias. As though unfamiliar with André Breton's writings on Arshile Gorky—not to mention the painterly antecedent to Twombly in Gorky—Barthes disregards both the Surrealist gynecological vernacular and the scatological corollary to *matière* deposited on canvas. Nor in his mention of the Mediterranean effect does Barthes take into account that this very Surrealist content prevented Twombly from being accepted as an Abstract Expressionist when the lines of aesthetic and ideological battle were being drawn up—and that Twombly's move to Italy in 1957 was due in large measure to the pressures to become a purist when the impure state of throwing figural and abstract gestures and signs together in a condition of contested agony was his abiding interest. These very vestiges

of Surrealism, not to mention figuration as such, were prejudicially received by the formalist critic Clement Greenberg. The artistic climate in the 1950s and 1960s, which was decidedly formalist and materialist, promoted color-field painting, at the time Minimalist objects. Europe, not America, remained more hospitable to art nurtured in the legacy of Symbolism. Barthes does not rehearse this critical face-off, so he does not exploit the situation debated within painting—Twombly's painting—itself.

Even early on, Twombly's paintings take up the issue of radical aesthetic purity. In the 1961 painting *School of Athens* and with determined frequency thereafter, Twombly engages in a structuralist discourse conflating expressively and rationally coded painterliness that dramatizes the possibility of synthesis. Today, I show no slides of this painting, with its schematic stairs that serve as a rectilinear dais engaging vehement gesture as *The School of Athens* (1961) and the New York School play out their destinies jointly.¹⁷ Nor is there a slide of *Leda and the Swan* (1962), the necessary antagonism of whose theme throws together a formalized expressionism. Yet both works were on view in the retrospective. Deservedly well known are the paintings by Twombly that treat mathematical and rational discourse as felt ideas. In a deceptively simple formal conversion, what was white is black and what was black, white; and the field of sensation has become a didactic field of operational thought.

On Twombly's "blackboards," the semantic range of the mark has been reduced to almost sheer uniformity: Some feature a single line read as measurement—the notion of measurement—by virtue of a number placed above, where convention would mandate. Syntax as operational thought being more elaborate elsewhere, campaigns or topology become the elusive subject of a serial accumulation of line, one heavily qualified by trial and error—or at least the apparition of trial and error inscribed, erased, and reinscribed. In consequence, the quarantining of poetic from scientific

discourse advocated by the New Critics is, in Twombly's calligraphic compositions from this phase, synthesized. The field of thought seems as creative as critical, as expressively self-forgetful as empirically inquiring. But whereas the dialectical process seems to have intervened at the point of origin in some canvases, in others, isolating poetic from scientific vocabulary seems more clear-cut. In any event, Twombly's analytical intention is in the foreground.

Jasper Johns owns a painting by Twombly in which the calligraphy has achieved the perfect neutrality and uniformity that earlier paintings had barred from their surfaces. This, of course, is not a consequence of development, insofar as Twombly's skill—indeed, his virtuoso *techné*—was evident all along in the pictorial intelligence, as Barthes noted, wherever one looked. Here, rather, is captured the antithesis of the prelinguistic sign which is seen in abundance earlier on developmentally; this evidence of motor control revealed through the Palmer method of calligraphic training for children proves the code of acculturation and mastery. It is, furthermore, the symbolic code for prose. Barthes ignores this phase of Twombly's art almost entirely, perhaps since its style might seem to refute that which he had identified as recently his own. In evoking the authority of the poetic mark, then, Barthes may be reluctant to acknowledge the full spectrum of Twombly's discursive intentionality.

Barthes's selective attention to the original phase in Twombly's art treats the oeuvre as an enactment of Barthes's own late poetics. Aphoristic impressions, willfully literary but not historical, stand for Barthes's declared representation of Twombly's history on the occasion of the retrospective. What Barthes leaves out is cultural context in the panorama of the stylistic milieus in which Twombly moved—and to which his embedded rhetoric gave witness. The mid-1970s saw a relatively conservative historicism in art. Neo-Expressionism purported to recuperate meaning, yet with few

exceptions, artists revised only illustrative and familiar ambivalences to nationalist themes. Against this Post-modernist reaction, Twombly's reinvestment in figural imagery seems to be more continuous with his own poetics than appropriated from without.

The retrospective featured a few of these efforts and included canvases and drawings penciled with single mythic names—or, rather, a penciled name together with a reductive graphic symbol serving as attribute. Thus, “Virgil” was erased by applying paint that smeared the graphite; “Dionysus” rides a phallus; “Orpheus” is set above a launched strong diagonal in awkward cursive script. In light of work soon to follow, propulsive gestures organizing themselves into a nearly pacific image in *Mars and the Artist* may dramatize the motivated sign as well.

Twombly's so-called return to figuration, then, is symbolic—a virtue or quality enacting a name. With a modernist's clarity and using the universality of poetic sign to treat topics, Twombly himself seems to be insisting on the Structuralist phase of Barthes's early rhetoric. Free variants on a thematic constant abound. Here, then, are early modernist ideograms whose formalist reductions function equally as sign-system and as reference. Although beyond the scope of the retrospective, the epic *Fifty Days at Iliam* (1978) was available for viewing courtesy of the Dia Foundation at the same time, and it might well have existed in transparencies for Barthes to see. A single painting comprising ten canvases now on permanent view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Twombly's *Fifty Days at Iliam* is truly a major work from his career.

Poetry ignores writing as a figure of history in styles, according to Annette Lavers.¹⁸ But Twombly's thematic inscription of epic into a lyrical mode compels attention to this implication of history, if only to lend myth the experiential feeling of history. Meanwhile, taking a linguistic approach to

structure, Twombly seems to “omit what is accidental or contingent...and gives imaginative expression to the essential type,”¹⁹ because he utilizes style and schema alike to encapsulate the drama of Apollonian and Dionysian crisis. Note, then, the evolving or devolving image-concept.²⁰ Whether single or manifold, each image is precisely that, Alois Reigl would argue, because it is condensed by virtue of enfolding motivic transformations:

Shield of Achilles
 Heroes of the Achaeans
 The Vengeance of Achilles
 Achaeans in Battle
 The Fire That Consumes All Before It
 Shades of Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector
 House of Priam
 Ilions in Battle
 Shades of Eternal Night
 Heroes of the Ilions

Action painting, having accrued libido and animus, subsides into gesture; gesture subsides into contour. Remember the myth of Flora memorializing the destiny of warriors who, when they die, undergo a transformation and metamorphose into flowers. Having painted this symbol early on (in vivid chroma), Twombly in mid-life will have continued to grant the motif of the heart (or flowering heart or passionate flower) in the schema of the rosette so that it may be interpreted as a funerary remembrance.

Now note a conversion from the diachronic story into a structure featuring transposition and reflection. Where in Homer's myth the empowering shield had been placed centrally in the narrative, Twombly's retelling has the shield initiate the action. Occupying the center of Twombly's narrative is the

scheme of rosettes symbolizing the shades of Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector—and, in reflection on either side, images of victory and defeat, passion and reason, which represent, left and right respectively, the houses of the Achaeans and the Ilions. Painting and drawing administer the contesting forces of passion and reason in the synchronic epic Twombly has constructed for his *Fifty Days at Iliam*. The question remains: Why did this not appeal to Barthes, the once master Structuralist? I believe it might, had not Barthes, years before, disavowed this Structuralist possibility for himself. If the catalogue essay on Twombly demonstrates anything, it is a stylistic representation of Barthes himself in a Post-structuralist phase, someone acknowledging that the validity of the artist might be enacted in a form and manner compatible with his (the artist's) own beliefs.²¹

The ahistorical aspect of Structuralism could be said to be expressed by those who treat a retrospective study of art thematically on a sample of work meant to suffice for the entirety. In this sense, the Aristotelian categories Barthes imputes to Twombly's work emerge not only through the suggestive link with actual text on canvas but also through the adoptive myth located in mythic time which Twombly desires for his archaic modernity, a mythic time to which Barthes willingly subscribes. At least for the duration of the catalogue essay, Barthes treats those Aristotelian terms as though they were *churinga* of European vintage—verbal objects of symbolic representation removed from the depths of a cave to be verbally caressed and prayed over, and then returned to their proper archival setting once the connection between the present and mythic past had been made. (Refelt and thus remade, as George Poulet might advise, the terms may now be said to embody the essences to which they refer.) Let's say this ahistorical metaphor for history is not incompatible with Barthes's synchronic approach to Twombly's style but represents a thematic appreciation of symbolic events, acts, and effects more connected to a mythic saturation than to its modern and contemporary histories that contextualize conditions and intentions. But

it is the Post-structuralist scatter and dissemination to which Barthes returns at the end of his essay that gives emphasis to his own intentions. Having inverted the intellectual hierarchy by which the structure of history culminates as a sequence of contextual approaches to an event—in this case, the event of Twombly's particular paintings—Barthes distributes free variants of key terms throughout the essay, and the sensuous effects of these terms scattered throughout the essay constitute a field of *écriture* closer to art appreciation than to art criticism.

The significance of Barthes's impressionistic and selective attention, then, is meant to reinforce Barthes's own late style of transfigured dissolution. The columns he wrote for *Le Nouvel Observateur* from December 1978 to April 1979 reveal, as much as do his late books, this Post-structural rationale for style in which the particular—the occasional—moment at hand is historically embedded in life, and this is as much of a claim to structuring history as he wishes to make. This is why, toward the close of his catalogue essay on Twombly, he writes,

Thus this morning of 31 December 1978, it is still dark, it is raining, all is silent when I sit down again at my worktable. I look at (*Herodiade* [1960]) and have really nothing to say about it except the same platitude that I like it. But suddenly there arises something new, a desire: that of *doing the same thing*; of going to another worktable (no longer that for writing), to choose colors, to paint and draw. In fact, the question of painting is: "Do you feel like imitating Twombly?"²²

And so Barthes, himself a transient figure inscribed as Proust inscribes himself within a text, closes his essay by considering the topic of production and the drama of doing that initiates Twombly's art and essentially permeates it.

Interview

Lawrence Weiner and Marjorie Welsh

Conceptual art is visual art that is not retinal, or that at least resists appealing to sight at the expense of thought. It often manifests itself in language that assumes the entire burden of compelling the viewer to read the signs on gallery walls. Conceptual art persists and is not amenable to the merchandising that subsequent decades have brought about. Whether they knew it or not, formalists of the 1960s presupposed the early modern achievement of Russian and French artists and writers. Conceptual artists as well show the formal and structural bias of manipulating language operationally. Sites formally intended for live events or "actions" now allow mental operations to substitute for physical behavior. Lawrence Weiner is among the most respected in the loose federation of artists that includes Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, and Joseph Kosuth, and extends to Sol LeWitt, who remains a key figure in artistic formalism. Weiner's language refers to works both specific and general. In sites that are specific, yet treated categorically, Weiner's words occupy the book, the gallery, the street, the stage. His words and works act as cultural irritants wherever they appear. Ranging from mildly to aggressively interventionist, Weiner's verbal art uses formalism to drive a wedge into the cultural status quo.

Marjorie Welsh: The retrospective of your books and posters at The New York Public Library was titled *Learn to Read Art*. That's just what viewers resist—why do you give us that imperative?

Lawrence Weiner: That phrase is advertising a particular means with which you can go through life, it doesn't tell you that if you don't learn to read art you're going to be fined, it just says: Learn to Read Art. I don't see that as an imperative. All artists are attempting to communicate, in whatever form, and if you can learn to read that form then you can either accept it or reject it. If you can't read it, then it doesn't mean shit to you.

MW: The word "read" replaces the word "see," and so is provocative to those who somehow insist that art be taken in through the eyes.

LW: Blind people read without seeing.

MW: It's both an invitation and a challenge—to read and, as the word implies, interpret—to engage in the visual in a more comprehensive way than through sight alone.

LW: But we live in a world where each individual is unique and alone—and this is the definition from a \$1.98 dictionary of existentialism—in an indifferent and often hostile world. If one finds oneself by virtue of one's existence in an adversarial position to the world, if I find myself that way, then there must be at least another million people who do as well. That's a log of people. That's a gold record.

MW: What exactly was included in your show at the New York Public Library, and how did the show come about?

LW: It was a presentation of all the books I'd made over the years. Small

editions of about three hundred to one thousand so they are now quite rare. Robert Rainwater is one of those curators who is legendary in the United States. He doesn't have any trouble with: Is it poetry, art, drawing, mock-up... he can read it. I had a curator who could read. And a library that was devoted to reading, and they showed my books. And I was pleased as punch. It was probably the big show of my life. For a New York City kid from the South Bronx, the library was the most important part of my entire education. And having been involved in a lot of political activity from civil rights on—I spent reasonable amounts of time in New York City lockups and holding tanks, so it was really rather nice that every son of a bitch who ever thought I was crazy had to go by for four months and see my name on the front of the New York Public Library. I liked it.

MW: In doing the show, did you learn anything? As you were reviewing the material, seeing it on display—did anything occur to you?

LW: [pause] Quite frankly, no. I'm an artist, which means I'm in a position every time I start doing something to review things from the beginning. It's only the production of one person, and sometimes as enormous as it looks, it's still comprehensible to me. So I don't think I learned anything aesthetically. Emotionally I learned a lot. I had to admit to myself that I made art because I was unsatisfied with the configuration that I saw before me. The reason I make art is to try and present another configuration to fuck up the one that I'm living in now.

MW: Where do you see yourself now and where would you like to be artistically in, say, three years?

LW: I see myself now, personally, in a very complicated part of my life—it's not mid, late, or early, it's basically nothing. I am one of those lucky artists who has been able to remain in exactly the same position as a human being

as when I first jumped onto the ice floe. And luckily people have dropped sandwiches and cigarettes on the iceberg along the way, so I can sort of sit there. Where I'd like to be tomorrow is where I am now, doing public installations about things that interest me. I'm doing one in Denmark which takes over this whole city. I'm building the piece out of cobblestones. The cobbles lead from a house into the highway. And on the highway people are offered a choice between paper and stone, and water and fire. Every single child knows what it means. I don't know if adults know any longer. Fire and water means joining the circus; paper and stone is to make yourself a stable set up in that society. The piece runs through the vestibule of a building into this enormous courtyard, and in this courtyard it says, "When in doubt, play tic-tac-toe and hope for the best." And all through the town this slogan is reiterated. So what do you do when a society starts to destroy its circles? You play tic-tac-toe and you hope for the best, you don't just sit there and watch. That's what we do as artists, our responsibility is to try to survive within society saying what the society might not be interested in hearing, but still surviving. Which is against this idea of the leftover Left, that you have to lose. You don't have to lose, but you do have to do what you do.

MW: Then resistance in the form of silence is not an option?

LW: Not for a person who stood up at one point in their life and said "I am an artist." If you are a fireperson and there's a fire you are expected to go put it out; and if you are an artist and there is absolute brutalizing of the material value of either human beings or objects, you are beholden to say something.

MW: A recent installation of yours at the Castelli gallery emphasized the word "stone" by incising that word many times into the gallery wall. Ampersands were introduced between each of those words. What did that mean?

LW: What do you mean, what did that mean?

MW: What did the introduction of the ampersand, as a graphic notation in a lexical display of the word "stone," mean?

LW: I use the ampersand because of its difference from the plus sign. Plus is an additive thing and ampersand is accompaniment thing. Sticks and stones with an ampersand is one thing. Sticks plus stones is another thing. But in this particular case—this was my twenty-fifth year of showing with Leo Castelli. (We've had a very wonderful, strange relationship of a deal and an artist that was not about art dealing.) Leo always had a fantasy of having something cutting through the walls of the gallery. I figured, after twenty-five years, if that's what Leo wanted, I would incise it into the wall. And it worked. Incising is how I address the idea of stones and stones and stones. With no implication of pond, no implication of thrown, no implication of any place, just stones and stones and stones.

MW: Incision induces a kind of materiality.

LW: It's a tattooing, that's what it is. And once it's tattooed, it's just like painting it on the wall, the viewers still have to decide what to do with it. They have to decide if it functions for them or not.

MW: That leads me to think about the nature of the sense and reference in what would otherwise seem to be a perfectly straightforward presentation of words. I've noticed elsewhere in your work that the words may seem to refer to something direct, but they do not mimic.

LW: No, they don't resemble, they present. You ask where I want to be, I want to be able to be engaged in my existence. And at the same time I want the work that I'm doing to be informed by my contemporary existence, my

existence now. I have to look at situations, at configurations, and essentially translate them into what their components are. The components themselves connote what will happen. There can be, as far as I can determine, four coherent truths for each individual act. The fifth has a tendency to contradict one of the four.

MW: What are the four?

LW: Whatever the four happen to be. That's the point. If you mix stone and water, you will get about four different results—depending on what climate, depending on this and that. That means that I can determine and present what I see in the world without a metaphor. I place it somewhere, and the society that's either trying to reject it or use it will give it its metaphor. That's how art functions.

MW: Then, insisting on the formal relations between signs is a way of keeping the language on the level of language.

LW: Because you really think that there's a significance to the use of the ampersand, which for years I called the "typewriter and." It's like the choice of saying "they are not" or "they ain't." They're both correct, but they both connote a different placement within society.

MW: I'm interrogating you on the use of language in your work. Formalisms that withhold their hedonism, or their hedonist possibilities, even as they present the challenge to create meaning, or an impression of meaning, is one of the most consistent principles I see when I look at your work. Does this ring true? And does material form not make your work, at least, in some general sense, a kind of concrete poetry by emphasizing?

LW: I don't know how to read hedonistic as nonsensual. If hedonistic is

nonsensual, then, I don't agree with you. One of the hallmarks of art is its sensuality. There is a sensuality in all materials. There is certainly a sensuality between any relationship of one material to another. The acceptance of sensuality is a necessity, and its existence is not hedonistic, it's just realistic.

MW: Many people would respond to your work as a cerebral enterprise, a withholding of pleasure.

LW: We'd have to get into what constitutes pleasure. But, withholding is a whole other story. I'm not withholding anything from anybody, because nobody asked me anything. That's what everybody seems to forget with an artist. Everything I've done is this self-standing "thing"... it's not really in response to anything; I'm not trying to be a piper, I'm doing my job. I have to be a personality in order to get paid. Someone has to know where to send the check. We accept that. But the work itself, nobody asked for it! There's no withholding. This is the way I would prefer people approach their relationship to the world. So I present art in the manner I would prefer they approach it.

MW: Exactly, against certain expectations of what "art" ought to be. The withholding could be perceived by some as, "Where's the visualization?"

LW: There is no analogy that I can make. Because it's not foreplay, it's the whole thing: the immediate tactile response. There's nothing, nothing being held back. That's all there is. And if that's not enough, then I have a problem, and maybe contemporary art history has a problem. As far as its relationship to concrete poetry, there is none. Most of our academic concrete poetry is nice, but it's bourgeois, it's "Let us go against this."

MW: I'd like to discuss the problem of making your work: looking at some of

the plans for works in progress here in your studio.

LW: You don't see work in progress on the walls. What you see is the means of figuring out how to present it to a public. If I want to be allowed to have this straight relationship to materials, and to live my life amongst objects, volatile and nonvolatile, as an artist I have to present that, and each individual situation becomes the best way to present that particular kind of work. It may be a movie... it might end up in three or four different works, looking for its place. Almost every work of mine doesn't have a place. It doesn't belong anywhere.

MW: Are the works conceived before opportunities for showing take place?

LW: I get fascinated by materials, and then I get involved in the fact that without any kind of watching, these materials start to mix together. They molecularly bind in some way. The work itself never has a place. Neither has it to be installed at any given time. It's information being passed on. I just did a show in St. Gallen, in Switzerland, based on this idea. For years we've been stuck in this problem of geometry being the necessity of our existence, geometry as we know it, because you have to get from one side of the river to the other. If you go to a place like New Guinea, they still accept the idea that they can build a bridge that's not geometric, and it still gets you across the river—you don't fall in the river, and you don't get eaten by crocodiles. That's the whole point of a bridge. So I would like to deal with the fact that the reason materials work and don't work is not because the culture has found, in Calvinistic terms, the correct way things should be done; but it's because for that particular point in time those materials chose to work that way. What's interesting with quantum physics is that they've discovered they can have no theories, because if the metal is not enticed, it might not hold together that day, and it just falls down. Each individual material has with it a certain amount of energy, and the material itself, by response to the

stimuli presented to it, decides whether to function that way or not.

MW: And what do we see here on the wall?

LW: You see the rough scheme of a piece for Barcelona, a place called L'Avinguda Mistral. You see here, within a city resplendent with statues standing high above the population, podium after podium, marked with the words of Frederik Mistral, this poet from Provence. The populace walks among the piece. There are three concrete pillars, or blocks, which are found standing among the fallen podiums. So what we have are the concrete pillars themselves taken off from their essential stance, and placed within the landscape, which is rolling. I had an intuitive feeling about the size of the concrete slabs. I wanted them to be six meters long and they said "No, why don't you go for twelve, because there's the problem of seeing and not seeing." I said six, and we went out, and it turns out in the old town from façade to façade, it's six meters. So there's six-meter-long slabs of concrete to which I mixed color—terra-cotta, ocher, blue—essentially as close as one can get to the concept of Mediterranean and Catalan colors. And then I decided what the substance of a popular sculpture would be. This is a working-class district, and I'm a working-class person. So essentially what became the necessity became the text: "And something given to the sea, and something woven, and something forged," in Catalan, in stainless steel inside the concrete.

MW: I want to discuss the drawing for this piece. Hand-drawn phrases, "Atop, the placement of the place."

LW: That is just so the architect knows where they go. Then there's a cut in negative stencil... there's a poem about the language of Provençal; it's in English, Catalan, Provençal, and I fought for Spanish. They didn't want Spanish, and I said, "You can't do that, 40 percent of the population speaks

Spanish, and just because someone is racist toward you, you don't have to be racist toward them." These are the things which human beings have brought from the objects and materials of the earth, which is what artists are supposed to deal with. That's why they hire an artist to do it. They want poetry, they go to a poet.

MW: A slogan, actually hand-lettered on a diagonal, crosses the represented site. And on either side of the drawn park on this piece of paper are large Xs whose size are the same size as the lettering of the slogans themselves. To the right of all this is a legend of graffitied plinths in their site, and off to the right is Mistral's poem. Your graphics reveal stylistic choices.

LW: Artistic notations.

MW: They are and they're not. They're more of a visualization of the verbal content than the final result, what the actual sculpture will be. They're a totally graphically dynamic presentation of something that will be much more homogenous once existing in an actuality.

LW: Okay, what you're reacting to is interesting, it's different publics. This is for the people who have to build it, the others are for the people who can use it. In fact, they can't use it until they've built it.

MW: But this drawing implicates a rhetoric—this is not a challenge, it's an observation—the rhetoric of the Russian avant-garde in its self-conscious visualization of the space of the page. [*Vasili*] Kamensky slices the corner of his page, so that his four-sided page becomes five-sided.

LW: His interest is for it to become five-sided. I used to take this paper and say, "I'm not going to sit here and say this isn't an object." It is an object and with it comes a tradition of design and political decisions on how to present

things to the people who are going to build them. So, you take off the corners, and you make them into an object, there's no more question that it's some sort of ethereal thing.

MW: Exactly. This is the real space of the page, not the illusion of the page. In these drawings, if I may call them that, these schemas, dynamism is introduced within the given space of the page. But it's decidedly there. The diagonal alone gives you away.

LW: It's the street—the diagonal is the way the street is designed.

MW: Yeah, [*laughter*], but the style of your artistic solution is deliberate; the style itself signals a choice for semicontrolled anarchism.

LW: I have something to say. And it's about class. And it's about consumption. Yes, whatever you're saying is correct. But you have to remember that when you consume a CD, a play, an exhibition... that's your interaction, not yours personally, but one part of the public's interaction with the work. In order to build anything, there's another whole set of problems, and in order to solve those problems and to make meaning clear to somebody else, you are required to make real political decisions about how you want to explain things to working people. I chose to be able to explain things to the installers who work in museums, and in public projects, and in movies, by telling them how I would like it to be—and take it for granted that although I'm supposed to know an enormous amount about this, at the same time, I want to bring their craft to it. And if they know they can build something that's not going to fall down by adding two millimeters or two centimeters to it, it's not a question for me. If they can mix the same color that I want by using something different, it's not a question. My point is to get across the general idea of what I'm putting out. So these drawings are for the people who have to pour the damn concrete, who have to haul the stuff,

and place in the letters. They are for them to read, and to give them a general sense of —I hate to use the word—the grandeur of whatever the object is that I'm trying to present, or whatever the experience is that I'm trying to present to somebody else. I'm having a relationship with them through these drawings that has really nothing much to do with the public. Often they print these drawings along with the presentation of the piece. I always think that's funny, but I like the drawings, so it's okay.

MW: Of course these are functional drawings. But I can't help noticing that along with their functional aspect is an aesthetic and it is an aesthetic that accords with certain avant-gardes, Russian avant-garde, perhaps, in this case, Dutch avant-garde notation.

LW: Or Dutch socialist aesthetic, like Piet Swart, whose drawings of a telephone instruction manual set the tone for how generations of Dutch people relate to the telephone. Sunlight in Barcelona is intense, so anything that's Inox stainless steel will reflect onto something else. So you might see "something given to the sea," or parts of it, reflected from the stainless steel onto trees backwards or onto the sky because there's a mist. This is a place that has more sunlight than you could ever imagine. It's going to glisten, and it literally is going to have that ephemeral feeling of glistening in time. You can't see stainless steel buildings in the heat without them having this funny fuzz and aura around them. And you'll see in every one of these pieces, 70 percent of their existence will be glimmering in front of you. That's the sense that I'm trying to convey. I want the builders to understand that when it's sitting in the concrete it doesn't have to be read like an advertisement. It's not selling a product. People will have to move in order to read it, they have to get the glare, the glint, out of their eye.

MW: Then this drawing would represent an effect or an expression of the intended material result?

LW: For the people who are building it. It's being socially responsible and allows me to question myself as to how I want this to look. Once this exists in society, they can print it in the back of a book, on a banner, on their ass, it's all the same.

MW: In the course of doing this presentation or any other, were there any stages in which heavy revision was necessary, a revision of your concept that shows in the drawing proper?

LW: Yes. Installation drawings or instructions of mine from the sixties and seventies attempted to incorporate what I saw as a rejection of the superfluous within drawing. Slowly, I began to reexamine what was superfluous and what was not superfluous and how you can do it in a clear way.

MW: But in the course of introducing many variables into an installation, surely you have determined how it will look. I'm asking you to recall an instance in which some revision of the concept was necessary.

LW: I wouldn't be able to determine that, it's a natural process. I see decisions being made every day. So when you ask about developments within projects, let's just say, you play games with things. It's one of your prerogatives as an artist. You're allowed to play games with things, but in fact they're real. So once you play that game and you find that it's doing what you want it to do, you just keep playing it and you forget that you ever played it another way. So when you ask me to remember an incident, I already don't. I remember necessities where I think something is not working.

MW: But the nature of the game that's being played is a kind of formalism with real results. Addressing the issue of that: Has there been revision, or if revision is an unacceptable word, how do you adapt the concept to...

LW: There are things politically I will not accept in presentation.

MW: I'm talking about the present, a given drawing at a given time, in which there is a problem to be solved. I'm not talking about how the past looks upon the future or the future on the past, but about the nature of thought within the process of arriving at an installation or a presentation. Let's then talk about another presentation or drawing; this one is a stage set.

LW: The kyogen is the entr'acte in Japanese Noh theater, a skit within the play. The Noh theater is quite idealistic and involved with the history and pageant of life. In the middle of this, somebody comes out and presents a skit that reminds you that you shit, piss, eat, and fuck. It's very earthy, and it's always about that kind of thing. I'm making a little stage set edition that's about the stage set they want to do. It pops up and says, in Japanese, "apples and eggs" in blue. Then it pops up and says in Japanese, "salt and pepper," in Loony Tunes colors: blue, red, yellow, black, and shiny white. Then in English it says: apples and eggs. Salt and pepper. That's the set for *Madame Butterfly*. Apples and eggs are something the Japanese culture is very involved in. And the American naval officer's idea of refinement is salt and pepper. It's called *Stage Set for a Kyogen for the Noh Play of Our Lives*. Our lives, meaning the Japanese and English. I made this out of cardboard, it's an inexpensive edition.

MW: Is this a proposal for an actual stage set?

LW: You can get it built. I would like to see a stage where they came out with these things on cardboard plaques with a triangle on the back to hold it up, like a paper doll, do the kyogen, clear it off, and let the actors come back out and finish their Noh play. See, art's not supposed to interrupt the flow of life, it's supposed to bring to you information that changes the next course. Do you understand what I'm saying? It's not a barrier, it doesn't stop you from

doing what you're doing, but it changes the flavor.

MW: In this case it doesn't stop the action, dramatically speaking. What would constitute a failure in the conception of a style of one of your installations?

LW: The content of the work is something which fails for me when it has no material relationship of substance. When the material relationship that I've become fascinated with, in fact, has no significance. It has no substance, and that happens often.

MW: Is that because the site that you had anticipated was other than expected, or is it about a formal relation that doesn't kick in?

LW: You're still not allowing me to have this divergence between what's being presented and the presentation.

MW: Well, I'm investigating...

LW: Presentation can fail because it's klutzy. You're a pro, you go into a situation, it could be the worst, broken-down alternative space situation or the worst, overdesigned contemporary museum situation or the worst off-Broadway theater. Whatever it is, your job is to be able to present your content within that in a correct manner. And if you don't do it correctly, you fucked up, you're klutzy. You just didn't have enough of an attunement with what the space was. You couldn't determine the space in a way that your content was not lost. Content is something else: the sculpture, the whole reason for doing all the rest of the stuff. That fails when it becomes obvious that the materials which fascinated you had too shallow a relationship or a relationship that was imaginary, and the materials themselves are not of enough substance to constitute any meaning for anybody.

MW: Among the kinds of discourse floating around the art world now are those resisting rational language, structural relations, formal relations, and even a certain disposition of material relations in language. One sees it in art writing and art criticism where deliberately and lavishly irrational subjectivity is the very point of the discourse. It's meant to confront the tradition of rationalism. Do you see this effort as an alternative world of language that is interesting in itself but of no interest to you, or do you see it as totally misconceived and misguided?

LW: I'd say I'm not a believer in inherent structure, and yet I find this phenomenon of the irrationality you were just speaking of—although it does produce interesting products every once in a while (and certainly not misguided because it does serve the intellectual views every once in a while), it is effectively bourgeois. If you're only reacting to one specific idea in the structure of language, one specific idea of the structure of history, and one specific idea of the comprehension of language and history, then you're accepting something that your work is claiming it does not want to accept. Why not just do something without having to make the reference to what is not acceptable? That would be my major complaint with the whole thing.

MW: There's a precalculation of the reception of something that puts the sociology ahead of the ideal or the problem being addressed.

LW: But that's rather shrewd. My parents were from the South Bronx, Jewish, working class. I never graduated from college. Yet I'm considered to be a paradigm of the American WASP intellectual because I'm blonde and blue-eyed. In their eyes I was able to do what I do because I was that WASP. Now, I never said I was; I never said anything. Their presupposition was a commodification of the artist. I was on a panel once in Belgium. And somebody in the audience asked, "How do you people intend to make a living?" This was maybe 1971-72. I had a child I was raising and sort of

getting by. But not enough in their eyes. And Carl Andre looked up and said, "That's not my problem. The genius of the middle class is that they can figure out how to buy anything. My problem is to make it." As an artist, as an artist, your concern is to make this product, this thing, to stand for exactly what it's supposed to, and not to worry about how somebody is going to put it in a bag and carry it home. They can figure that out, that's part of their job. That's division of labor. That's the same thing as these drawings you've been looking at. I give a dignity to the people who say they can build something. I don't have to tell them how to do it. To put that on paper would be a gross insult to their skill. Their skill is to translate my intentions into this thing. The artist presents art, it's useful to the society; the society knows it's spending time making money. Society pays the artist for that which enriches life, and the artist uses the money to buy time to continue this work.

Cities of the Table

Marjorie Welsh

Cities of the Table: Marginalia

1.

Such as we see here

as here and as above, three

echoes are met in encrypted turbulence:

a topic. Contents re-cognizing a list

breaks a very light repose

or not loathsome array of which man takes hold.

Take hold.

“Condensed enumeration” in zeros and ones, apparently

and cantilevering. From the content, the table

of that same content,

we read “Chapter 1” (or more often “1”) moving in rented

advantage, much of it; he elsewhere, of what?

As Soon As Possible is content to arrive. And so we subsist on “systematized

[data”

cantilevering and/or articulating a convoy: 1, 2, at something like full stature.

Advocates place it preceding the text

“Contents

Foreword

Translator’s Note

Architext: an Introduction

Index”

is an anatomy.

2.

One eye too many?

Cities of the Table: Apparatus

Foreword

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Photographers

and echoes are met in encrypted turbulence:

a topic. Contents re-cognizing a list

breaks a very light repose

where dialectic had been.

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Supplementary Bibliography

Second Supplementary Bibliography

Table of Names and Dates

Index

in zeros and ones, apparently

and cantilevering. From the content, the table
of that same content,

We have reached Chapter 1 (or “1”)

- Acknowledgments
- Notes
- Index of First Lines
- Index

moving in rented advantage, much of it digestive.

Sampling has distributed the wealth
in corridor throughout acoustic mix, electronic lavatory
through others’ interpreted indexical scrapes across the floor of
rhetoric, as here and as here in, of, or not, loathsome.

Cities of the Table: Profile

Of such and such as we see here, here and here: circle and dot are met iterating
a topic, breaking a very light repose above and without.

“Contents

Foreword

Translator’s Note

Architext: An Introduction

Index”

Epitome which opens the poetics
discussed (“bracing his left leg
against the border”): Athenian, as
advocated.

A shortcut predicted the text.
Protocols crumpled.

Of that same content preceding the
“excitable, degenerate” body
we read rhetoric

where dialectic once was, will have
been scraped of that same content

and imitating the table placed in advance, placed after broad-mouthed Chapter 1.

Cities of the Table: Translation

Of such and such as we see here

here and here: many echoes

are met iterating

a topic. Commentary encrypted within

“pre-existing taxonomies”

etc.

might be better disrobed:

List of Plates

Foreword to the First Edition

Foreword to the Second Edition cantilevering and/or articulating a convoy: 1, 2,

at something like full stature.

Advocates place it preceding the text

Foreword to, a profile preliminary to the main

lyric that amalgamates a schema.

Notes

Supplementary Bibliography cantilevering and/or articulating

Second Supplementary Bibliography

Table of Names and Dates a profile preliminary to the main

Index mediating supplement

might be better to enrobe

grammar

frequently—the known frequency

being a sign. A sign

foraging within an appendix

might be spent

in necessity, he said

wrote twice.

Signature

Cities of the Table: Edit

1.

The pen is on the table.

Cantilevering from the content, the table.

Advocates place it antecedently, alternatively throughout
his constantly recurring body more or less textual.

We are at table.

Tables: placement of, in manuscript.

No "light table" appears in this edition

obedient to "light pen" still.

"To remove from consideration indefinitely"

is not the same as "having a plane surface."

The light pen rests satisfactorily
on the incised folding table, upon the unruly fold-out table.

2.

The winged pen rests.

Cantilevering from the content, the other larger slab.

Accompanied by a dog or standing apart,
he hears it also.

We are at table.

Chronological tables, with rustic setting.

"Light tables," "light pen"—few and far between are these phrases
in reference to advancing light traveling a light-year.

"Condensed enumeration"

"Systematized data"

with text to follow in imitation, promoted.

Protocols, stationed beneath handles.

All falling pens, some stationary tables.

Cantilevering from the content, Contents

Contents

Chapter 1...

Advocates place it in advance; proponents sum up
the body, the body dolorous and difficult.

"Light tables" are fast, faster; "light tables" becoming obsolete

"The Auroras of Autumn" may well have had life

in hallucinatory aftermath: see "light shows"

Contents

Chapter 1...

The light pens rest satisfactorily archaic,
electric, acoustic, electronic—in kaleidoscopic life-blood.

Cities of the Table: Apparatus and Apocrypha

We read

an injured translator's note, an apologetic translation
an apodictic profile throughout the body

As Soon As Possible is Fragile Contents. Priority,
with text. This codicil should be spent within the text.

A list burrowing into a signature, a list cantilevering
syllabus within "pre-existing taxonomies" etc.

At issue is a table to stand upon. At issue is a table
imitating the grammar of that same folding table,

of that same focal point. The preface may say—indeed does.
"Even as I write these words," the author may never have said.

Saying as though through earlier versions, and to what and to whom
we owe this work-in-progress, is author-as-stutterer. To whom

is the index speaking? To what? What the text actually said, as against what
[claim
preliminary to sense, may be an index, an index "which seems to me to
beckon"

value by the chapter. Sputter ruminative minutes concerning obsolete
sentences,
then limit sense and worry a length of compendious something.

Axiom, carry out atmosphere!

Epitome Stunned Immortal Source Text!

"A sign foisted off on the appendix" tempting text that might think,
he said, he wrote, quoting a deferred band-width and literature.

Clans, Moieties and Other

Marjorie Welsh

Used and out-of-print books classified as steppe. Fish were an important supplement.

Only printed words. Forty-two children's.... Territory there in the archive frequents an inkling or inking: Eskimo, harpoon, seal; Australian aborigine, boomerang, kangaroo—throughout image, music, text. After a few uniformities, traps and axes acquire traits of amphitheaters and

[tribunes.

Where is the true red, yellow or blue? is wearing a stubbornness in which two reds, two yellows, two blues, vie for that distinction. Who's Afraid of Nouns, Verbs, and Adjectives?

Band exogamy: in exchange, hunting, dancing, gambling. Whereabouts of the winter encampment, whereabouts of less strongly tied margins of error. A fish weir similar to ours.

Where red, yellow and blue is a commonplace diving under yellow in some scheme of left and right counter tops, to be sent up to be as sky to the earth's black and white, ivory black and/ or lamp black. Lamp and mirror shade to keep away composure: blues will do it, as will jazz blues, Orpheus! The deceased were burned and buried, or bound and buried, the former in the low lands.

Baseball. Prehistoric football, AND, OR, BUT NOT unlike surpluses.

Curriculum Vitae

Marjorie Welish

Marjorie Welish, a poet, painter and art critic, has contributed to several volumes on contemporary art, including *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, and *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics*. Her selected criticism appears in *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). She is the author of *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems* (Coffee House Press, 2000) and *Word Group* (forthcoming 2004). She exhibits her paintings with Baumgartner Gallery in New York.

Education

B.A. Columbia University

M.F.A. Vermont College

Poetry

PUBLICATIONS

Poetry Books

Word Group, Coffee House Press (scheduled for 2004)

Vocalist of Differences (chapbook), Paradigm Press, 2003

Begetting Textile (chapbook), Equipage [Cambridge, England], April 2000

The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems, Coffee House Press, 2000

else, in substance (chapbook), Paradigm Press, 1999

Casting Sequences, University of Georgia Press, 1993

The Windows Flew Open, Burning Deck, 1991

Two Poems, (chapbook) Z Press, 1981

Handwritten, Sun Press, 1979

Anthologized Poetry

One Score More: The Second Twenty Years of Burning Deck (edited by Alison Bundy and Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop), Burning Deck, 2002

Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women (edited by Mary Margaret Sloan), Talisman House Press, 1998

The Gertrude Stein Awards in Innovative American Poetry: 1995, Sun & Moon Press, 1997

The Gertrude Stein Awards in Innovative American Poetry: 1993, Sun & Moon Press, 1995

Out of Everywhere: Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the U.K., (edited by Maggie O'Sullivan and Ken Edwards), Reality Street Editions, 1995

Experimental Poetry in America, 1950 to the Present: A Norton Anthology (edited by Paul Hoover), Norton, 1994

From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry, 1960-1990, Sun & Moon Press, 1994

Out of This World (edited by Anne Waldman), Harmony Books, Crown Publishers, 1992

49 + 1 Nouveaux Poetes Americains (edited by Emmanuel Hocquard and Claude Royet Journoud), Editions Royaumont, 1991

New Directions 54 (edited by James Laughlin), 1990

Annual Survey of American Poetry: 1988 (consultant: Maxine Chernoff) Roth Publishing, Inc., 1989

Summer, AddisonWesley, 1990

Best Poems of 1988 (edited by John Ashbery) Scribners, 1988

Annual Survey of American Poetry: 1986 (consultants: Louis Simpson, David Ignatow and David Lehman) Roth Publishing, Inc., 1988

Up Late: American Poetry Since 1970 (edited by Andrei Codrescu) 4 walls/ 8 windows, 1987

Ecstatic Occasions, Expedient Forms (edited by David Lehman), Macmillan, 1987

The World (edited by John Yau), St. Marks Church, 1979

The Big House, Ailanthus Press, 1978

Fresh Paint, Ailanthus Press, 1977

Magazines (selected)

American Letters and Commentary, *American Poetry Review*, *Chicago Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Conjunctions*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Facture*, *Fence*, *fragmente* (England), *The Gig* (Canada), *Grand Street*, *How (2)* (on-line), *Jacket* (on-line), *mark(s)* (e-zine), *MOMA* (Magazine of Museum of Modern Art), *New American Poetry*, *Parataxis* (England), *Partisan Review*, *Phillytalks 19* (on-line), *Po&sie* (France), *Sulfur*

Reviews

Correspondent for *Sulfur*, Spring 1989-2000

Poetry reviewer for *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 1988-1990

Further essays and reviews

"Slow Song for Mark Rothko" (John Taggart), *Third Mind: Creative Writing Through Visual Art* (edited by Tonya Foster and Kristin Prevallet), Teachers and Writers, 2002

The poetry and essays of Barrett Watten, *Textual Practice* (England), Spring 2000

"The Lyric Lately," *Jacket* (on-line), Spring 2000

"On Barbara Guest," *Moving Borders: Three decades of innovative writing by women* (edited by Mary Margaret Sloan), Talisman House Publishers, 1998

The art writing of John Ashbery and John Updike, *Partisan Review* (Fall 1991)

"Underworld Overcoat: A note on the drawings of Philip Guston" relating to themes of Ernest Hemingway), *Sulfur*, No. 23, 1988

"Flesh and the Devil: The Sensational in Figure Painting," *Partisan Review* (Vol. 1, No. 4) 1983

"Four Plays by Edwin Denby," Edwin Denby, *Art in America*, October 1981

"City Junket," by Kenward Elmslie, *Art in America*, February 1981

"Harrisburg, Mon Amour," a play by David Shapiro and Stephen Paul Miller, *Art in America*, December 1980

"Preserving the Scholarly and the Homespun: Literary Memorial Societies,"

Coda (Vol. 5, No. 4; April/May 1978)

"8 Book Coops in the U.S.: Roots for 1987," and "Lit Goes Abroad—Live," *Coda* (Vol. 5, No. 2; November/December 1977)

"Literary Translation in America: A Struggle for Recognition," and

"Lost American Fiction," *Coda* (Vol. 4, No. 5; June/July 1977)

TRANSLATIONS

Poems translated into and published in French, Icelandic, Danish

Translations by, anthologized: *Reft and Light: Poems by Ernst Jand* (edited by Rosmarie Waldrop). Burning Deck: Providence, 2000.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Finalist for the Lenore Marshall Prize, Academy of American Poets, 2001

Award from Fund for Poetry, 1999

Howard Foundation Fellowship, administered by Brown University, 1998-1999

Fondation Royaumont, France, October 9-22, 1990

New York Foundation for the Arts, fellowship, May 1990-April 1991

Award from Fund for Poetry, 1989

Djerassi Foundation, residency, March 1-April 7, 1988

IBM-Michole Nicholson Fellowship in Literature at the Djerassi Foundation

Award from Fund for Poetry, 1987

MacDowell Colony Residency and Fellowship, March 1987

MacDowell Colony Residency and Fellowship, November 1978

Van Rensselaer Prize for poetry, Columbia University, 1971

TEACHING

Brown University, Spring 2003, Visiting Associate Professor of English

Brown University, February 25-March 1, 2002, Visiting Poet

Naropa University, July 8-15, 2001

New School University, Fall 2000-1

Pratt Institute (seminar on criticism), Fall 1997—

Hofstra University, July 10-21, 1996, Visiting Poet
Brown University, Fall 1993-Spring 1994, Visiting Associate Professor of English
and Creative Writing
Brown University, Fall 1991
Brown University, Spring 1990
School of Visual Arts, 1987-1990

REVIEWS AND ARTICLES ABOUT

The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems:

Boston Review: Poetry Microreviews,
<http://bostonreview.mit.edu/BR26.6/micropoetry.html>
The Gig [Canada] December 2001, by Ian Hunt
St. Marks Newsletter, September 2001, by Forrest Gander
Salmagundi, Summer 2001, by Terry Diggory
Chicago Review, Spring 2001, by Joel Bettridge
Bomb, March 2001, by Frances Richards
Jacket (on-line), December 2001, by Chris Tysh
Voice Literary Supplement, February 2001, Selected for 25 Best Books of 2000
Raintaxi, Spring 2000
Publishers Weekly, April 15, 2000
Kirkus Review, April 15, 2000

else, in substance:

"Gathered, Not Made: A brief history of appropriative writing,"
by Raphael Rubinstein, *American Poetry Review*, March/April 1999

Casting Sequences:

"Imperturbable Things," Beth Anderson, *Impercipient Lecture Series*,
Vol.1 No.5, June 1997
Voice Literary Supplement, December 1993, Selected for 25 Best Books of 1993
Voice Literary Supplement, October 1993, by Alissa Quart

New York Newsday: Fanfare, August 15, 1993, by Geoff O'Brien
Ohio Review #50, 1993, by Donald Revell

The Windows Flew Open:

"Innocence after Experience," Allen Fisher, *Spanner*, (England),
September 29, 1996
"After Olson and Celan: The twist and the breath of the referent," Albert Cook,
American Poetry Review, July-August 1995
Denver Quarterly, Winter 1992, Janet Bowden
Home Planet News #34, September 1992, by Roger Riggins
Multicultural Review, Vol. 1, No., by Joseph Donahue, 1991
American Book Review, December 1991, by Adam Craig Hill
The Readers Catalog, Fall 1991, by Geoffrey O'Brien
The Pilot, Southern Pines, North Carolina, April 29, 1991, by Shelby Stephenson

Two Poems:

Epoch, Fall 1983, by David Lehman
Newsday, December 1982, by David Lehman

Handwritten:

Poetry News, July 1981, by Dennis Cooper
Parnassus, Spring/Summer 1981, by Peter Schjeldahl
The Villager, February 8, 1981, by Debby Mayer
Library Journal, December 15, 1980, by Susan Shafarzek
St. Marks Newsletter, June 1980, by Madeline Keller

GENERAL

"Ashbery's Menagerie and the Anxiety of Influence," John Gery, *The Tribe of
John: John Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry*, (edited by Susan Schultz),
The University of Alabama Press, 1995

INTERVIEWS

- Interviewed by Daniel Kane, "Poets on Poetry," (on-line)
Teachers and Writers, July-August 2002
- A conversation on poetry and poetics with John Koethe,
LIT (New School University), January 2000
- Interviewed (along with Jackson MacLow, Eliot Weinberger, Serge Gavronsky,
Ron Padgett, et al.) for radio (Dijon, France) on the literary history of
Greenwich Village, September 20, 1991
- Statement of poetics, *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1991

Painting

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- Donahue/Sosinski Art, New York, November-December 1997
- Woodland Pattern Gallery, Milwaukee (works on paper), March-April 1996
- E.M. Donahue Gallery, New York, May 1995
- Catalogue essay by Elaine King
- E.M. Donahue Gallery, New York, June 1993
- Catalogue essay by William S. Wilson
- P.S.1, Long Island City, New York, May 1981
- Whitney Museum Art Resources Center, New York, December 1975
- Organized by Laurie Anderson

TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- Manfred Baumgartner Gallery, New York, December 2001
- Ben Shahn Galleries, William Paterson College, Wayne, N.J., March-April 1997
- Catalogue essay by Naomi Spector
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst, February 1992
- Catalogue essay by Pat McCoy
- Edward Thorp Gallery, New York, Summer 1984
- Noho Gallery, New York, December 1976

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- "Magnitude," Educational Alliance, February 13-March 27, 2002
- Interview essay by David Shapiro and Sam Truitt
- "Transcendent & Unrepentant," Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery,
The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, January 25-February 25, 2002
- Organized by Sid Sachs
- "Solitary Pursuits," Elizabeth Foundation Studio Center, April 3-23, 2001
- Organized by Iskra Fidantcheva
- "Marking," Center Arts, Tucson, Arizona, October-November 1999
- Organized by Elaine King
- "After the Fall: Aspects of Abstract Painting," Snug Harbor Cultural Center,
Staten Island, New York, April-June 1997
- Organized by Lilly Wei
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst, February 1997
- Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., January 1997
- Condeso-Lawler Gallery, New York, January 1997
- Organized by Margaret Thatcher
- "Reconstructivism," Space 504, New York, September 1995
- Organized by Peter Frank
- "New York Abstract," Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, April-June 1995
- Organized by Lew Thomas
- "Critics as Artists," Andre Zarre Gallery, April 1995
- "Semaphore: Placing the Mark," 407 Greenwich Street, March-April 1995
- Organized by Bill Bace
- "Jours tranquilles à Clichy" (Quiet Days at Clichy), Paris, June 1993;
Tennisport, Long Island City, September 1993
- Organized by Alain Kirili
- "Songs of Retribution," Richard Anderson Gallery, New York,
January-February 1993
- Organized by Nancy Spero
- "Painting as Paradigm," Eric Stark Gallery, January 1993
- E.M. Donahue Gallery, New York, June-July 1992

"Slow Art: Painting in New York Now," P.S.1, Long Island City, New York,
 April-June 1992
 E. M. Donahue Gallery, New York, June-July 1991
 "New Generations: New York," Carnegie-Mellon University Gallery,
 Pittsburgh, May-June 1991
 Organized by Elaine King
 "Literary Vision," Jack Tilton Gallery, New York, November 1988
 "Illustrations for Poems by Stephen Paul Miller," P.S.1, Long
 Island City, New York, February-March 1979
 with John Cage, Yvonne Jacquette, Lucio Pozzi et al.

ARTIST MULTIPLE

Boîte à malices, Stellar Graphics, Paris, Autumn 1992

STATEMENTS

"Juste_une_Image" [website], as of November 1999
Tableau: territoires actuels (Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Valence and
 Le Quartier [art center], Quimper), 1997
 "Look Who's Talking: Questions of Standards, Values, and Criteria"
 (panel discussion organized for the Triangle Artists'
 Workshop, Thread Waxing Space, New York, March 25, 1992),
ICI Newsletter (Independent Curators Incorporated), Spring 1992

FELLOWSHIPS

Pratt Faculty Development Grant, 2002
 Trust for Mutual Understanding: International Studio Program and
 The Artists' Museum, Lodz, Poland, July 1997
 Pollock-Krasner Foundation, 1997
 International Studio Program, New York, 1995
 Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, 1993
 Triangle Artists Workshop, Pine Plains, N.Y., July 1990

TEACHING

Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, Spring 1990-present
 Cleveland Institute of Art, Summer Session, June 1992
 Brown University, Providence, R.I., Spring 1990

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

Art in America, May 2002, by Edward Leffingwell
Art News, April 2002, by Lilly Wei
New York Observer, January 7, 2002, by Mario Naves
Village Voice (notice), January 1, 2002
The New York Times, December 28, 2001, by Ken Johnson
The New York Times, August 3, 2001, by Ken Johnson
Cover, June 1998, by Robert Mahoney
The New York Times, December 19, 1997, by Grace Glueck
Review, December 1, 1997, by J. Bowyer Bell
The New York Times (New Jersey edition), April 13, 1997, by Barry Schwabsky
Amherst (Mass.) Sunday Republican, February 9, 1997, by Gloria Russell
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, April 7, 1996, by James Auer
Bomb (illustration), Winter 1995
The Art Bulletin, August 1995, by David Carrier
Village Voice, May 2, 1995, by Peter Schjeldahl
New York Newsday, April 7, 1995, by Amei Wallach
Art in America, November 1993, by Lilly Wei
Art News, October 1993, by Meyer Raphael Rubenstein
The New York Times, July 2, 1993, by Holland Cotter
Art Initiatives, September 1992, by Meredith Bergmann
Artspace, May-June 1992, by William S. Wilson
Tema Celeste, January 1992, by Robert C. Morgan
 reprinted in his *Art of the Nineties* (New York: Red Bass, 1993)
Art in America, June 1989, by Gerrit Henry
Arts Magazine, February 1989, by Robert C. Morgan

Cover, January 1989, by Jeff Wright

Print Collector's Newsletter, January 1989

OTHER

Invitational auction sponsored by the Foundation for Contemporary
Performance Arts, Inc., New York, 1993, 1995, 2000

"Working Titles," collaborative project with Olivier Gourvil, New York-Paris,
September 2000—

Painting selected for jacket of *Postmodern Sublime*, by Joseph Tabbi
(Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995)

Paintings reproduced on jacket of *The Opposite of Letting the Mind Wander*,
by Keith Waldrop (Providence, R.I.: Lost Roads, 1990)

COLLECTIONS

Private

Boston, Detroit, Edinburgh [Scotland], Milwaukee, Montréal [Canada],
New York, Oxford [Ohio], Pittsburgh, Sydney [Australia]

Public

Burning Deck, Providence
Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson
New York Public Library, New York
Rutgers (University) Archive for Printmaking Studios, New Brunswick, N. J.
Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts
U.S. Department of State: American Embassies, Armenia and Moldova

Corporate

Saint Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital, New York
Best Foods Corporation
Progressive Corporation

Art Criticism

BOOKS

Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960, Cambridge University Press, 1999

Reviews: *New Art Examiner*, July-August 2000; *CAA.reviews* [e-zine],

Craig Adcock, February 19, 2001; *The Burlington Magazine*,

Merlin James, May 2001

ANTHOLOGIES AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS

"How to Undo/Redo the Object by Osvaldo Romberg," in *Searching for Romberg*
(edited by Aaron Levy), Slought Books, 2001

"Donald Judd," "Ad Reinhardt," *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*
(edited by Michael Kelly), Oxford University Press, 1998

"Contratemplates," *Uncontrollable Beauty* (edited by Bill Beckley and
David Shapiro), Allworth Press, 1998

"Lawrence Weiner," *Bomb: Speak Art!* (edited by Betsy Sussler),
G+B Arts International, 1997

"The Art of Being Sparse, Porous, Scattered," *Writing the Image after
Roland Barthes* (edited by Jean-Michel Rabaté), University of
Pennsylvania Press, 1997

"House Beautiful," Georgia O'Keeffe, *From the Faraway NearBy* (edited by
Christopher Merrill), Addison-Wesley, 1992

"Ideas of Order," originally published in *Artstudio*, Fall 1987, and republished
in *Sol LeWitt* (edited by Bruno Cora), AEI/IO, Italy 1995

GUIDE

"Storefront for Art and Architecture," (Steven Holl/ Vito Acconci),

City Secrets: New York (edited by Robert Kahn), The Little Book Room, 2002

ART CATALOGUES

6 + 1, Petra Bungert Projects, July 1997

[Drawings by Russell Maltz], Werner Kramarsky, May 1997

Indicating Surface (Merrill Wagner), William Paterson College, Wayne,

New Jersey, October 1996

Boulders from Flatland (drawings by Jene Highstein), SECCA, February 1996

Pail For Ganymede (Robert Rauschenberg), Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,

October 1995

Word into Image (Martha Rosler), Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio,

September 1993 (reprint of interview published in *Bomb*)

Maquettes and Models (Siah Armajani and Hannes Brunner), The Swiss Institute,

New York, April 1994

"*is stuff that was once rock*" (Frances Barth), Herter Art Gallery, University

of Massachusetts, Amherst, March 1994

"Jonathan Lasker," Sammlung Goetz, Munich, December 1993

Imagination without Strings (Rauschenberg retrospective), Contemporary Art

Museum, Hiroshima, November 1993

A Literature of Silence (Nancy Haynes), John Good, New York, September 1993

Silhouetted Exodus (George Wardlaw), University Gallery, University of

Massachusetts, Amherst, November 1992

Waxmusic and Candelabracabra (Donald Lipski), Galerie Lelong, New York,

February 1992

Synthetic Duo: David Reed and Tom Nozkowski, Baumgartner Galleries, Inc.,

Washington, D.C. February 1992

Monochromatic Thinking (ChoongSup Lim), Kukjae Gallery, Korea,

November 1991

Shy Effrontery (Richard Tuttle), (with essays by Marcia Tucker and

Dietmar Elger), Sprengel Museum Hanover, June 1990

Jan Fabre, (with essay by Donald Kuspit), published by Jack Tilton,

December 1989

Kestutis Zapkus, Lithuania State Gallery, 1989

Paolo Icaro, published by Jack Tilton, May 1989

Edge of Fable (Frances Barth), published by Tomoko Liguori, March 1989

"Siah Armajani," "Richard Artschwager," "Robert Ryman,"

Carnegie International catalogue, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1988

From Auto to Autonomy (Rauschenberg), published by BMW, October 1988

Cityscape By Degrees (Catherine Redmond), Butler Institute of American Art,

Fall 1987

Crazy Wisdoms (Les Levine), published by Elizabeth Galasso Editions, 1986

Cy Twombly, Early Paintings, published by Stephen Mazoh Gallery, May 1983

ART WRITING/ ADMINISTRATION

Consultant to video artist and art critic, Douglas Davis

Curatorial and administrative tasks related to Davis' museum shows at Lodz,

Poland (February 1982) and The Whitney Museum (May 18, 1981) for the performance, *Double Entendre*

Editor and designer for *Concentricity: International Network for the*

Arts Newsletter, 1980-82

GRANTS

Pratt Faculty Development Fund, Pratt Institute, 1998; 2002

TEACHING

Pratt Institute, Spring 1990—

Brown University, Spring 1990

School of Visual Arts, 1987-1990

Colloquia

Provost's Colloquium, Pratt Institute, with Dr. A. Richard Turner,
Goddard President of Art and Humanities, New York University, on "Sources/
ResourcesHistory, Context Values," March 5, 1997

Provost's Colloquium, Pratt Institute, with Tony Jones, President of the Art
Institute of Chicago, and expert on Charles Rennie Mackintosh, on "Design
Today: Teaching and global future," December 5, 1996

EXHIBITIONS ORGANIZED

"Structures," (with Linda Francis), Michael Brennan, Linda Francis,
Nancy Haynes, Jim Hyde, Thomas Nozkowski, Marjorie Welish, Kes Zapkus,
The Work Space, New York, June 3-August 31, 2001, traveling, expanded to
the Payne Gallery, Moravian College, Bethlehem, November 8-January 6,
2002, and the Palmer Gallery, Vassar College, January 13-February 6, 2002
Ken Johnson, *The New York Times*, August 3, 2001

"The Open Work," Siah Armajani, Öyvind Fahlström, Ron Gorchov, Jim Hyde,
Jasper Johns, and Kes Zapkus, John Good Gallery, April 2-May 2, 1992
William S. Wilson, *Artspace*, MayJune 1992
William S. Wilson, *Artspace*, JulyAugust 1992

"Not Nature," Richard Artschwager, Zaha M. Hadid, Richard Kalina,
Elizabeth McDonald Gallery, December 15, 1988-January 28, 1989.
Robert C. Morgan, *Arts Magazine*, April 1989

"Louise Fishman, Joan Mitchell, David Reed," Barbara Toll Gallery,
June 17-July 28, 1988
Roberta Smith, *The New York Times*, July 22, 1988
Peggy Cyphers, *Arts Magazine*, October 1988

SELECTED ARTICLES

Art News (senior editor, Barbara MacAdam), "Donald Judd," Dia Foundation,
New York, October 2000

Textual Practice [England] (reviews editor, Peter Nicholls), "Rodchenko,
Museum of Modern Art," Winter 1999

Annals of Scholarship Vol. 13. Nos. 1-2 (editor Marie-Rose Logan), "Narrating
the Hand: Cy Twombly, Mary Kelly and the Story of Writing," Fall 1999

Bomb, (editor, Betsy Sussler), (review) "Stefan Gritsch,"
Margarete Roeder, March 1999

Bookforum (editor, Andrew Hultkrans), review of *OULIPO Compendium*,
March 1999

Bomb (editor Betsy Sussler), "Jasper Johns," Fall 1996

Bomb, "Lawrence Weiner," Winter 1995-96

Annals of Scholarship Vol. 10 Nos. 34 (guest-editor, Robert C. Morgan),
"The Critic in the Studio," 1995

Languages of Design (editor, Raymond Lauzzana),
"The Andy Warhol Museum," 1995

Bomb, "Word into Image" (interviews with Robert Barry, Martha Rosler, and
Nancy Spero), Spring 1994

Journal of Contemporary Art (editor Klaus Ottmann) Interview with John Duff,
Spring 1994

Sulfur #32 (editor Clayton Eshleman), "Contextualizing 'The Open Work',"
Spring 1993

Tema Celeste (editor, Demitri Paparoni), (reviews) "Valerie Jaudon," "David Reed,"
"Richard Tuttle," January-February 1993

Meaning #11 (editors Susan Bee, Mira Schor) Round Table on Art Criticism (with
Saul Ostrow), May 1992

Partisan Review (editor, William Phillips), *Selected Writings of Barnett Newman*;
James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space, by Craig Adcock, Spring 1992

Arts (editor Barry Schwabsky), "The Sketch as Theory," (Remy Zaugg)
March 1992

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³ Welish, "Contextualizing 'The Open Work,'" *Sulfur* 30, Spring 1993, 257. This essay originated as a curatorial statement accompanying an exhibition titled "The Open Work," organized by Marjorie Welish at the John Good Gallery in New York in 1992.

⁴ Welish, "Contextualizing 'The Open Work,'" *Signifying Art*, 278.

⁵ Ibid., 279. "Contextualizing 'The Open Work'" was then abbreviated and reformatted conventionally for publication in *Signifying Art*.

⁶ J. Bowyer Bell, "Marjorie Welish: New Paintings and Works on Paper," *Art Review*, December 1, 1997, 45.

⁷ Robert Mahoney, "Icons of Integrity," *Cover*, June 1998, 25.

⁸ "Indeterminacy Meets Encyclopedia (Kestutis Zapkus)," *Signifying Art*, 186.

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¹⁰ "Still to Come," *The Annotated "Here"*, 102.

¹¹ "Drastic Measures," *The Annotated "Here"*, 76.

¹² Ibid., 76.

¹³ Ibid., 75.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Box, Aspects of", *Signifying Art*, 222.

¹⁶ "Introduction," *Signifying Art*, 4.

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² Le Corbusier. *Vers une Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, 1987): 8.

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⁴ Hal Foster, "Signs Taken for Wonders," *Art in America*, July 1986.

Vexing the diptych with asymmetry

¹ Joseph Masheck, 'Alberti's "Window": Art-Historiographical Notes on an Antimodernist Misprision' (1989; 1991), repr. In my *Modernities: Art-Matters in the Present* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993): 15-32.

² H. Gerson and E. H. ter Kuile, *Art and Architecture in Belgium 1600 to 1800*, Pelican History of Art (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), 79 (Gerson).

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⁴ Illus., Walter Archibald Propert, *The Russian Ballet in Western Europe 1909-1920* (London and New York: Lane, 1921; repr. New York: Blom, 1972).

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781; 1787), trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1963): 86.

⁶ Before that he had already experimented twice with triptychs, first by determining to

hang three of his Moroccan paintings of 1912 to be exhibited as a figure painting (*Zorah on the Terrace*) flanked by two architectural compositions (though these canvases, which belong to the Pushkin Museum, in Moscow, were not exhibited thusly until 1969), while the Barnes Foundation, in Merion, holds another: *Three Sisters: Triptych*, of 1916-17, whose central panel *Three Sisters with Gray Background* is flanked by images of the sisters in conjunction with works of art (an African sculpture and Matisse's own *Rose Marble Table*). Pierre Schneider, Jack Cowart and Laura Coyle, 'Triptychs, Triads and Trios: Groups of Three in Matisse's Paintings of the Moroccan Period,' in Cowart et al., *Matisse in Morocco: The Paintings and Drawings 1912-1913* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1990): 270-74.

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¹⁰ Masheck, 'Hard-Core Painting,' *Artforum* 17, no. 8 (April 1978), 46-55, repr. (without illus.) in *Historical Present*, 153-69.

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² Olivier Gourvil, Ed. *Tableau: Territoires Actuels* (France: Edition Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Valence and Le quartier Centre d'Art de Quimper, 1997).

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- ⁵ Emmanuel Hocquard, *Tout le monde se ressemble* (Paris: Paris editions P.O.L., 1995), 17-18. This remark is cited in a text by Eric Suchère that emphasizes the close relationship between abstract contemporary painting, poetry, and music, and develops the notion of syntactic abstraction: Eric Suchère, "Quelque chose s'est passé?" in *Collection du Frac Auvergne*, ed. Frac Auvergne (Clermont-Ferrand, 2001).
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- ⁷ Philip Armstrong, *Series and Aporias: Painting after Minimalism* (Bruxelles: Ed. La part de L'Oeil, 2001).
- ⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale* (Paris: Plon), 28. Cited by Serge Thion in *Aletheia* #4, Mai 1966, 219.
- ⁹ Welish, *Against Image*: http://www.icono.org/juste_une_image <Accessed 06/ 2002>
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Welish, *Signifying Art*, 1.

The Dark Opacity of Making

- ¹ G. Spencer-Brown, "A Note on the Mathematical Approach" in *Laws of Form* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969): xxix.
- ² Jacques Derrida, "Parergon 1. Lemmata," in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 27.
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- ⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Parergon 1. Lemmata," in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- ¹⁰ E.W. Burgess, "Communication" in *American Journal of Sociology* 33, 1928.
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a creative text that performs appreciation

- ¹ Marjorie Welish, *Signifying Art: Essays on Art After 1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 35.
- ² Ibid., 13.
- ³ Welish, *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2000).
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- ¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2000): 295.
- ² Tom Mitchell, "The Product as Illusion," *Design after Postmodernism: Beyond the Object*, Ed. John Thackara (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988): 212.
- ³ Christopher Alexander, "A City Is Not a Tree," *Design after Postmodernism*: 67.
- ⁴ Marjorie Welish, *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2000): 3. References to this volume will be made parenthetically.

⁵ Dominique Fourcade, "The Sentence," *Crosscut Universe: Writing on Writing from France*, Ed. and trans. Norma Cole (Providence: Burning Deck, 2000): 63.

⁶ Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," *Collected Prose of Charles Olson*, Ed. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): 240.

⁷ Linda Wagner, "A Colloquy with Robert Creeley," *Contexts of Poetry: Interviews 1961-1971*, Ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973): 98.

⁸ Martine Bellen, *Places People Dare Not Enter* (Elmwood: Potes and Poets Press, 1991): 3.

Lyric's due: The Performative Poetics of Begetting Textile

¹ In this paper, I quote extensively from Marjorie Welish, *Begetting Textile*, Cambridge: Equipage, 2000, and Welish, *else, in substance* (Providence: Paradigm Press, 1999). References to these volumes will be made parenthetically.

² See Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995): 93-97.

³ I am indebted to the author for bringing this figure to my attention. See Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (New York: Tudor, 1944).

⁴ Benjamin Friedlander, "A Short History of Language Poetry/According to 'Hecuba Whimsy'," *Qui Parle* 12.2 (2001): 107-142.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994): 40.

⁶ BT is the result of a workshop Marjorie Welish taught on Stéphane Mallarmé. I am grateful to the author for sharing this important point with me.

⁷ "Nothing exists but matter, eternal lapping of being..." (my transl.) Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945): 7.

⁸ "In the poem, it's chance itself that is denied; born out of chance, and fighting against it, poetry abolishes chance by abolishing itself because its symbolic abolishment is that of man." (my transl.)

⁹ "He has attempted, finally, I thought, to raise a page to the power of the starry sky!" (my transl.) Paul Valéry, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957): 625.

¹⁰ Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, quoted in Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972): 70.

¹¹ Roland Barthes: "...le langage que chaque critique choisit de parler ne lui descend pas du ciel..." Roland Barthes, "Qu'est-ce Que la Critique?" in *Essais critiques* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964): 257.

¹² Chris Tysh, Review of *The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems*, *Jacket* 15, December 2001. <http://www.jacket.zip.com.au/jacket15/tysh-reviews-welish.html>

¹³ "...sometimes decidedly independent of the sense conveyed otherwise." Cf. letter from the author, August 8, 2000.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," *inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, Ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991): 24.

The Art of Being Sparse, Porous, Scattered

¹ Roland Barthes, "The Wisdom of Art," in Annette Lavers, trans., *Cy Twombly: Paintings and Drawings 1954-1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1979), catalogue for the exhibit of the same name, April 10-June 10, 1979. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations of Roland Barthes are from this essay, delivered for the Roland Barthes conference at the University of Pennsylvania, April 15-17, 1994, first published in *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, ed. J.M. Rabaté (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997): 201-16.

² See Chapter 3 of my book *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960*, "The Art of Cy Twombly: A Discourse on Twombly," which originally appeared in *Art in America* 67 (September 1979), 81-3.

³ In phenomenologically keyed interpretations, Barthes takes pains to record primordial experiences for primordial forms.

⁴ Barthes dwells on the issue of names. Preoccupying Barthes, I believe, is not only the painting *The Italians* (1961) but the name "The Italians," for as a name it recalls "Italianicity" from earlier writings on advertisements in which the name suggests inflated value and cultural priority. Italy as connotative of cultural priority over the French haunts Barthes still, even as the uncertain calligraphy of Twombly's inscription

of the name deflates its “nominalist glory” and calls into question its “pure” value.

⁵ The unmotivated signifier of the title throws the abstract nature of the composition into relief. Beyond the scope of this paper is a discussion of “possible worlds” that names in Twombly’s art evoke. The mythological or legendary status of certain names is particularly provocative: “Homer” represents that cultural entity indicating the collectively authored oral epic poem *The Iliad* that is recited over time. Barthes, fascinated with designation as well as meaning, might well have been drawn to Twombly’s art for the enigmatic modalities of naming as much as for the codes inscribed in the gestural calligraphy.

⁶ As Annette Lavers reminds us, style for Barthes is the instrumentality of the imagination, not of the social sphere (see Lavers, *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982]).

⁷ During Twombly’s formative years, the idea of history that was advanced in the United States by New Critic Kenneth Burke was one suggesting a metaphoric notion of dramatism, a notion crucial to the advancement of the aesthetic and ethos of “action” painting. Antithetical to New-Critical practice, the revered Chicago Aristotelian Richard McKeon developed thematic typologies for philosophy, history, rhetoric, and poetry.

⁸ See Lee McKay Johnson, “Baudelaire and Delacroix: Tangible Language,” *The Metaphor of Painting* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).

⁹ See Barthes, “Cy Twombly: Works on Paper,” in *The Responsibility of Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 160.

¹⁰ The exhibition *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism*, organized by William Rubin for the Museum of Modern Art in 1989, depended on an almost forensic patience for day-by-day evidence of the collaborative effort in evolving the Cubist style. Temporal and material positivism here proves strategic.

¹¹ Seymour Chatman, “The Styles of Narrative Codes,” in Berel Lang, ed., *The Concept of Style* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979, 1987): 239.

¹² Placing creative expression at the putative poetic origin of human utterance is a cultural phenomenon that Barthes ignores, but in the 1940s Vico’s translated writings encouraged the identification of behavioral and evolutionary

linguistic development in primitive vocal practices.

¹³ Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 20.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3 of my book *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960*, “The Art of Cy Twombly: A Discourse on Twombly,” 35-8, which originally appeared as an untitled catalogue essay in *Cy Twombly: Paintings* (New York: Stephen Mazoh Gallery, 1983), unpaginated (catalogue for the exhibition of the same name).

¹⁵ The history that may have subconsciously formulated these “random” questions possibly centers on Mussolini’s advance on Africa. My thanks to Joseph Masheck for the suggestion.

¹⁶ See Chapter 3 of my book *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960*, “The Art of Cy Twombly: A Discourse on Twombly.”

¹⁷ See *ibid.* In a *New York Times* review of the 1983 exhibition *Cy Twombly: Paintings* at the Stephen Mazoh Gallery in New York, art critic John Russell denied the possibility of ratiocinative processes and intentions in the intuitive art of Cy Twombly. His response is typical.

¹⁸ See Lavers on poetic coinages, in *Roland Barthes: Structuralism and After*, 42-3.

¹⁹ Richard McKeon, *Thought, Action, and Passion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954, 1974): 204. Expression of essences throughout Twombly’s art from the 1960s onward would seem to cast it in this vein. Meanwhile, as Twombly’s figural manipulations simplified, Barthes’s were prefigured to be growing more complicated. Gerard Genette had already noted in 1964 that Barthes was preparing to deal with free variants of constants (see Gerard Genette, “The Obverse of Signs,” *Figures of Literary Discourse* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1982], 27-44).

²⁰ Lavers notes Barthes’s admiration for Bachelard’s definition of an image as a set of potential transformations (Lavers, *Cy Twombly*, 37).

²¹ Once “postulating...that any process presupposes a system,” Barthes would seem now to believe that any system presupposes process (Lavers, 53). Whereas once “the effects” of happenings were doomed to trivialize confrontational dialectic, Barthes now prefers the former for its nonauthoritarian stance (Lavers, 79).

²² Barthes’s writerly symbolist correspondence to Twombly’s style recalls a similar

impulse not so long ago in art criticism, criticism that agitated on behalf of that sort of Abstract Expressionism known as “action painting.” Well known is the fact that in 1952, when support for abstraction was at best precarious even among the well-intentioned art public in New York, the poet and cultural critic Harold Rosenberg tried to mobilize the public with a passionate partisanship, one inspired by Baudelaire in essays on European abstraction in exile. “The American Action Painters,” notorious then, has subsequently moved through the status of celebration back to notoriety, as younger critics, siding with Greenberg’s color-field formalism, declared Rosenberg’s essay to be both ill-conceived and unreadable. What is less well known, yet which I maintain elsewhere (see Chapter 10 of my book *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960*, “Harold Rosenberg: Transforming the Earth,” 127-45), is that the charge that Rosenberg “made up” the term “action” so that artists would rally around him demonstrates an ignorance of the traditions of Romanticism and of revolutionary activism, both of which informed Rosenberg’s choice of slogan; at the very least, the spirit of Vorticism informing Rosenberg’s first and only book of poetry, *Trance Above the Streets*, which was published a decade prior to his art essay, shows the poet-critic promoting a culturally embedded metaphor wrested from Aristotelian poetics and reconfigured “dramatically” for a variety of modernisms. As for being unreadable, “The American Action Painters” is, like Barthes’s essay on Twombly, an enactment in the style of the message he is advocating, and, as such, in its aphoristic performative mode, it is perfectly readable—this last point remaining undetected even by the progressive wing of art writers who profess to advocate style as content.

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Let's dig, therefore: art is excavation. - Rabaté

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