

THE SUBJECT OF ART



Paul Rodgers

Artlog USA Special Issue

ARTLOG

SPECIAL ISSUE

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MARCELIN PLEYNET. photo, Denise Bourbonnais.

"Notre expérience reste encore prise dans un savoir qui ne fait plus tout à fait expérience, notre savoir est embarrassé d'une expérience qui ne fait pas encore savoir".

Our experience still remains trapped in a knowledge which no longer quite tallies with experience; our knowledge is weighted down by an experience which does not yet amount to knowledge.

Marcelin Pleyner 'La levée de l'interprétation des signes' in *Art et littérature*.

ART AND LITERATURE

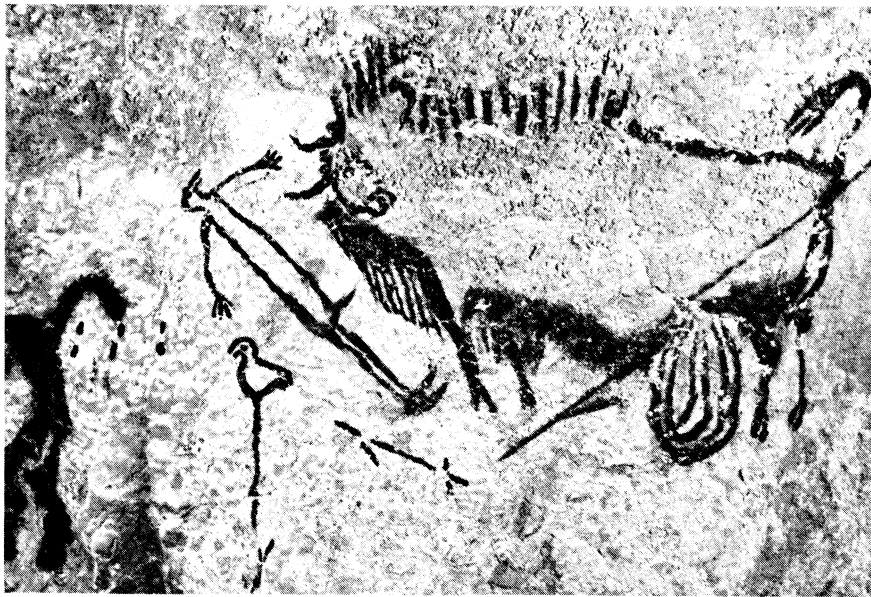
An Interview with Marcelin Pleynet

P.R. Marcelin Pleynet, you are the editor of a review of contemporary literature. You have published numerous volumes of poetry and you have written extensively in the field of literary criticism. What is your relationship with the plastic arts? How do you conceive your activity in this domain? How would you define your interest in art criticism?

M.P. It might seem paradoxical but I attach a lot of importance to the distinction. I am not a specialist in art. The more I work and the more I take an interest in different forms of artistic expression, whether contemporary or past, the less I feel myself a specialist. If I had to define myself, and this without the least modesty, it would be as an amateur, in the broadest sense of the word. You know that Mallarmé, in an article written on the Impressionists and Manet, which was published in England, applied this term to Baudelaire's art criticism in a highly appreciative manner. When I began to write more or less regularly on art, around 1966, I was embarrassed by the prevalent convention at the time which held that a literary writer should avoid the plastic arts. In general French criticism is pejoratively categorized abroad as 'literary'. For all that, in France, the criticism practised for example by Diderot, Baudelaire and even Mallarmé is far from negligible, and the literary character of French criticism deserves reconsideration.

P.R. You insist, as you have elsewhere, on the literary character of criticism. As you remark yourself this attitude clearly distinguishes your point of view from that of English language criticism in general and specifically from the criticism developed in America since the War. What in your opinion is the relationship between literature and the plastic arts? What common ground do they share?

M.P. My experience with poetry and with the plastic arts convinced me relatively early that we must first ask ourselves what implicit value justifies the 'aberrational' character, in the strict sense of the term, of art practice, and what role the historian, theoretician, critic and amateur play in this aberration. Shouldn't the historian first of all explain how art in every civilization has always been connected to *religion*? Shouldn't the theoretician first of all justify his rationalization of a practice which before all else is *irrational*? Shouldn't the critic begin by explaining the contemporary relevance of such a practice and the amateur by specifying what it is about art that compels his interest?



Scene from Lascaux Caves.

The initial response to these questions confirms the antiquity of the aberration. From the caves of Lascaux or Altamira, from the Venus of Lespugue up to our own day, the overall history of humanity itself is tied to the aberration of art. Might we not go so far as to say that as soon as there was man there was art? I personally tend to think so, to the extent that man is specified by an organization, a social constitution, the establishment of a group determined by a system of laws, and to the extent that these laws, which guarantee the survival of the group as such, cannot avoid imposing a limitation on the autonomy and the authority of each member of the group. The necessary and self-imposed laws of men belonging to a community, establish the conduct of the group by way of a common consensus to which the sum total of the individuals composing the group must submit. In short laws repress the impulses of the indi-

vidual since these impulses might otherwise present a danger to community organization. The superiority of no matter which human society over that of animals springs from this organised repression. And it is on the basis of the necessarily normative order of this organization that we can conceptualise the function of this aberration and eccentricity known to us as art. Man is not born adequate to the social norm. And it is on the basis of this *fold* in our experience that we can conceptualise the overall function of the norm, up to and beyond this *anomaly* of art, which, nevertheless, can only be grasped as belonging in some way to the norm. The question I ask here is, how does man reconcile himself to the limits that the norms of the law impose on an energy whose existence they can never quite recognize?. We know that each night dreams provide our individual, *subjective* economy with a safety valve for the repressions imposed by the norm. The phenomenon of the dream is a particularly convincing example of the irrationality daily confronting man. It is an indispensable form of irrationality since absolutely vital: stop a man dreaming and he dies; repress the excesses which flow in his dreams and he dies. It is certainly not coincidental if the etymology of the word 'excess', *excessus*, signifies an exit from life, death. Taking an overall view of art, from the beginnings of human society up to the present, we can define it as a diurnal, social form of treating this excess. Throughout the history of human society, art, in its broadest sense, and religion, the different religions, are social forms, both diurnal and nocturnal, of treating this excess. I say clearly art in the broadest sense of the term since, given the role I attribute to the plastic arts, they are indissociable from the spinal cord of social life, *language*. It seems to me that this link between the plastic arts and language allows us to grasp what is involved in the relationship of art and religion, and through religion, of art and the social structure. As you know in many societies, and in a particularly convincing manner, in archaic societies, religion serves as the social regulator, and the religious account, the language of religion, serves as model for the plastic arts, when they are not purely and simply cult objects. Art and religion. Religion and art. Art of religion and religion of art offer men an extra-social space, a logical anomaly in which they can invest the excesses excluded or limited by their obligatory submission to the law. In consequence the first task for the art historian ought to be to establish as far as possible the relationship of the plastic arts to the religious discourse which founds them on excess. Exit from life. Death. Or, if you prefer, on their metaphysical truth.

P.R. Such a discourse might seem very far removed from the preoccupations of contemporary art criticism, divided as it is between those who defend the autonomy of art and those who would like to develop a mode of criticism based on a sociological model deriving from the nineteenth century.

M.P. Such ought to be the first words of every discourse on art history. We must acknowledge that this is rarely the case, perhaps for the reason that a discourse of this kind raises a question which goes far beyond what we can objectively expect from the historian. You mention the concerns of contemporary criticism. Let us consider then this *'here and now'*. Where are we sit-

uated here and now in the structure of these normative and dissuasive elements which regulate excess? I would say that if we accept the evidence of the daily rhythm of our existence, together with the historical order itself in which, whether we like it or not, we find ourselves enclosed, this *'here and now'* can only be dated from the birth of Christ. It is quite obvious that if we ask anybody at all what day and year we are in he will determine his space and time from the date of Christ's birth. Whether we like it or not, we are and we remain enclosed in time as measured by Christian theology. The French Revolution tried unsuccessfully to make a new departure and the post-revolutionary period returned to this historical continuity dated from a religious event. Not only the date of our birth but also of our death. If we refuse to recognize this we condemn ourselves to unknowingly conduct something which incessantly *measures us*.



Irish High Cross.

P.R. But we might imagine that with what we call, rather vaguely I admit, our 'modernity', we are in the process of emerging from this history. If this is so, to what extent are such references capable of understanding the programme of modern art?

M.P. This is what we tend to think. But we must be careful not to oversimplify. I would prefer to say that if we find ourselves obliged to recognize that we belong to the Christian historical continuity, we must agree at the same time that this continuity does not run without contradiction from its origins to the present day, notably with regard to the two civilizations which it inherited: the Judaic and the Greek. The Christian world displays its contradictions forcefully and sometimes even brutally. It is well known that the primitive Church was the victim of numerous schisms and that the presence of Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought inside the Christian community resulted in the attempt known as Gnosticism to rationalize the religious events. Do we not see in this the passage of one civilization to another? Certainly it indicates a developing contradiction inside Christian dogma. But does it involve something much more profound? We know that this debate extended far beyond the early centuries and that it was firmly checked by Renaissance Humanism. These contradictions and this old debate which we have inherited seem to me still to be the source of a great number of misunderstandings.

If this debate justifies the study of greco-latin influences on the history of art, under no circumstances does it authorize historians and theoreticians of art, to ignore in their usual manner that these influences spring from the dominant structure of the Christian symbolic order. In other words in the order of a structure which is *non-rationalizable*, except perhaps, as Freud suggested, under the form of a *return of the repressed*; that is, in its relation to the unconscious and, by extension, to *excess*.

Having ignored the basis of this contradiction inside Christian culture, the art historian refuses to consider the contradiction's dominant structure, and portrays a continuous development running from Xenocrates, Pliny the Elder, Plato, Aristotle up until the present day, which is coloured in and justified by Vasari's Lives. I would like to give an example here, of where such a development leads, taking the particular case of the art historian André Chastel who is now very well known in France. In a recently published book called *Fables, formes, figures*, Chastel investigates as I have done here, the relationship between the particular characteristics of modern and contemporary art and the history of art in general, on the basis of George Bataille's writings, in particular a book called *La Part Maudite*, and comes to the quite justified conclusion that modern art, like all art from time immemorial, has a connection with the phenomena of festival, carnival ('*jeu*' in French) and the sacred.¹ Once this has been demonstrated, it remains for him to decide which structure of the sacred modern art participates in. Here Chastel observes that the representation of



Piero della Francesca, The Resurrection detail.

Christian symbols is no longer to be found in contemporary art, concluding on this evidence that the religious crisis has evacuated the question, and using the reference of André Masson's work among others, he settles for an explicit return to Greek thought and myth.

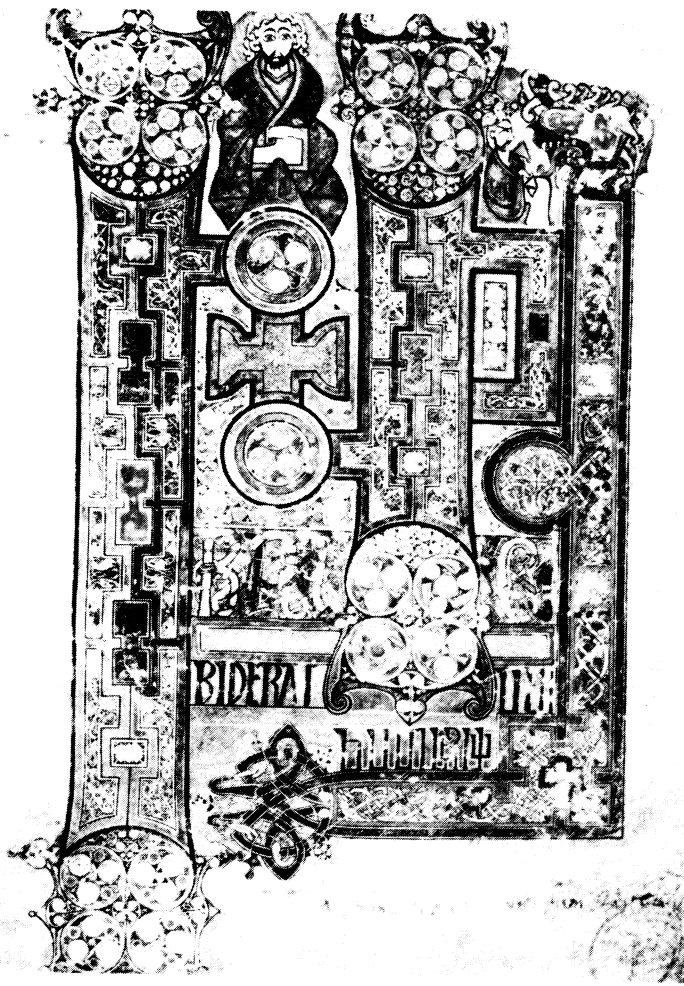
I chose this example precisely because it leads the historian and the theoretician on to the same ground as the critic. If to all appearances representational art, from Byzantium up until the end of the great nineteenth century academies (which, as you know, were founded on a religious, specifically Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, initiative of the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent) remains tied to Christian culture in that, as the Evangelists show clearly, and as the Fathers of the Church, particularly Saint Augustine, never cease to remark, the *Incarnation of the Word produces a figure*, and if Christian iconography is justified by the small sentence at the beginning of the Gospel according to Saint John, it may seem that modern and contemporary art have, as you have just suggested, explicitly severed their connections with this tradition.² However, we have the right to ask the critic what is involved in the contemporary symbolic

form of an art practice which is in fundamental rupture with its history and specifically with religion, its symbolism and its institutions. If we are to develop this line of approach, it is extremely important to ask how the apparent secularization of art has taken place after more than four or five thousand years of history.

It is clear that the secularization of art is not an isolated phenomenon and that the bond of adequation between the religious structures and society itself has weakened. If we try to locate the moment when this took place, and if we accept the collapse of the great academies as significant, we can situate this transformation somewhere between the beginning and end of the nineteenth century. What then took place in the nineteenth century? How has it come about that the contradiction, which we have seen haunts the Christian religious structure from its beginnings, (in other words the greco-latin contradiction inside the Christian world), has assumed such proportions that it has completely evacuated the whole foundation of the Christian symbolic order?

If we are to treat this issue we must first of all adopt a slightly more sociological point of view. I think it is beyond doubt that the nineteenth century displays the experience of a serious religious crisis, which was to produce in France an extremely important event, recognized by the law itself, at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the official declaration of the separation of Church and State. Not that much time has passed since then. The beginning of the twentieth century is only two steps behind us. We are talking about the end of Cézanne's work and the beginning of Picasso's. If we turn around it is only yesterday. The legislative structure in which we live has only taken account very, very recently of this separation. But what produced such a separation? From a sociological point of view we can say that it came about following the transformation of modes of existence. People no longer lived in the nineteenth century as they had lived in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. The development of science and technology had transformed their conditions of existence. It drove considerable populations into towns and factories where it created quite new and specific conditions of existence. For me the most significant aspect of this affair is that this scientific and technological transformation modified an element of fundamental importance for society and for the individual's sensibility, the family unit. In other words the family unit is not the same in an industrial structure as it is in a peasant or craft guild structure. Perhaps we can say that the nineteenth century transformation of the family unit challenged the dominant structure of patriarchy in the history of our civilization. Such a transformation was imposed by the conditions of work, altering the relations between parents and children and parents themselves, when for example the members of the same family no longer worked together or met all at the same hour. In my opinion these are subjective transformations of the greatest importance that must not be ignored when considering the accompanying cultural and artistic transformations. Therefore we have a transformation of the family unit, and I would say, transformation of the family unit as it had been represented throughout our Christian

civilization by the Holy Family. In the nineteenth century the family unit and religious symbolism are no longer exactly adequate. There is something like an hiatus between the new family unit and religious symbolism. In France today we have an absolutely contemporary and flagrant manifestation of this with the laws on contraception and abortion which have recently been discussed and voted. Clearly we have here an extremely serious problem for the adequation of the family unit and for its symbolic and religious representation.



Book of Kells, The opening words of St. John's Gospel.

P.R. Therefore you insist on a *religious crisis* without imagining that religion has been quite simply liquidated as a certain analysis with sociological leanings suggests. You say that this crisis is linked to a transformation of the family unit which, while precipitated by phenomena open to a sociological analysis (in other words transformations in the domains of science and technology) touches more directly the question of subjectivity and by extension art, through its privileged relationship with our subjective experience.

M.P. Our culture has experienced a religious crisis but that does not mean that the question of religion has been evacuated. I think if we want to avoid being religious in spite of ourselves we must recognize that a religious crisis presents above all the question of religion. Therefore a religious crisis does not imply that the question of religion has been evacuated but, on the contrary, that we should examine its contemporary manifestation with the greatest care, bearing in mind that what proclaims itself secular is perhaps *implicitly religious*. It is clear that today a huge number of people maintain to all appearances no explicit link with religion, but it remains to be seen whether in their subjectivity they do not continue to maintain implicit links. You only have to see the embarrassment in this country of free-thinking traditions that the laws on contraception and abortion have already produced to understand that the affair is not as simple as all that. Of course, it is tied to the roots of morality but these roots are bound up with the society, its history and ideology and the religious forms of its culture.

It would be interesting, on the basis of this double movement, of the link of civilizations to a given religion and of religious crisis at a specific time in our civilization, to see which ideological structure determined Christian and classical culture and what could feasibly replace it. I think that if we want to understand what part the symbolic structure has played, the best thing to do is to take one of the major representatives of this cultural space and see how he conceived the symbolic system in which he found himself. For example take Dante and the *Divine Comedy*. There exists a very well known book on the subject by Etienne Gilson, called *Dante et la philosophie*, which shows superbly how Dante conceived the order and scale of values of his culture. We can define it in the following manner : the whole culture is over-determined by theology; next comes morality which is itself over-determined by theology; next philosophy over-determined by morality and afterwards the sciences. This is the scale of values established by one of the great thinkers of Christianity. So what happens to this scale of values in a cultural space which is no longer exclusively Christian? How do we conceive our cultural space today, from the moment that we declare ourselves in a state of crisis with, shall we say, the space of Dante? On this subject there is another extremely interesting book, which came out this year, dealing with Romanticism, by Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe and J. L. Nancy and called *L'absolu litteraire*. It is a book which deals with the question, beginning in the XVIII century and preoccupying the whole XIX century, of how the Romantics replace the theological cultural order by putting philosophy in the place of theology. With German Romanticism philosophy over-determines



Duccio, Madonna, detail.

the general cultural and ideological programme. Obviously we are talking about a considerable transformation which produces very peculiar artistic phenomena in literature and in the plastic arts. It is precisely in the XVIII century with the Romantics that we see the appearance of another form of language. Everybody knows that Dante's language is the *language of poetry*. Well, with the XVIII century we see society progressively cease to recognize poetic language as its representative and choose in its place the *novel form*.

But what is this novel form that we see appearing in the XVIII century and dominating the XIX century? How can we sum up the novel form in a few words so as to grasp its underlying structure? I would say that the best way to define the literary form of the novel is as *morality in the grips of psychology*. The history of the novel as we know it develops a moral debate in the grips of psychology. We can trace that from Madame de La Fayette, passing by Balzac, and right up until the novels of the present day. If we consider this dominant and determinant form of the novel we will see that from the Romantics onwards we have a new structure for conceiving our culture which grants the initiative of direction to philosophy, with psychology and morality beneath. Starting with the Romantics, poets place themselves explicitly in a position of dependence on philosophy, namely, Kant. When you come upon a poet who refuses to make himself dependent on philosophy you will find him living in crisis, and it is extremely interesting to notice that this crisis reveals itself to be of a psychological order. The first to spectacularly live this crisis of a refusal of philosophy, was of course Hölderlin, who, as you know, spent the last forty years of his life locked up in the state of tragic crisis which goes under the name of madness. But the nineteenth century has many examples. If we except Mallarmé who found his style when he read Hegel and who incidentally admitted throughout the difficulty he had in writing, we notice that the majority of poets lived the new ideological consensus and symbolic structure in a very dramatic manner. Nerval hung himself, Rimbaud ceased to write. There are many other examples in the XX century, one of the most spectacular being of course, Artaud.

This crisis of poetic language, we could say crisis of irrationality, crisis of the subject's relationship with what *exceeds* the law, is situated precisely at this point. It can be seen in the most irrational form of language, poetry, but also in every aspect of society. From the moment that you withdraw the mediating role of religion from the individual, who, by definition, contains the experience of *excess* to the laws which limit him, it is obvious that he will find himself extremely brutally confronted by the law and plunged into crisis. The rise of psychology and the novel portray the individual living this crisis in an extremely difficult and unrelieved solitude. You know that Sade explained the rise of the Gothic novel by saying that given the events that were taking place, it was impossible that the novel should remain the story of shepherds and shepherdesses. People had to assume the transformations that they were living through. At the time it was the Revolution of 1789. In a certain manner, they had to assume the presence of the guillotine and get along alone, as best they could, without mediation, in the face of the brutality of the law. Clearly what Sade means is that from then on people began to 'psychologize'. Morality was subdued and we enter the era of psychology. From then on we are no longer living simply a religious crisis (the religious crisis is explicit) but, in an extremely crucial fashion, a moral crisis. Why do the laws on abortion and contraception produce so many problems and force in the end each individual to judge his own case with his conscience? Precisely because we do not have a moral system which can answer for these laws. I do not say that no system of

morality can answer for these laws, I say that we do not have one. We have not founded a moral system capable of answering for the laws that we vote. I think that we are entering a religious crisis and at the same time a moral crisis capable of invading the whole social structure, starting with politics. Therefore morality is subjected to psychology. And, when the preponderance of psychology is lifted, a psychological crisis begins. At this precise moment the work of Freud breaks through to treat the resultant psychological problem. Clearly psychoanalysis is entirely preoccupied with this affair and addresses itself to the questions of psychology and morality.

P.R. And if we turn our attention specifically to the plastic arts?

M.P. I think we can see this psychological problem, and the problem of crisis, function in exactly the same manner with the plastic arts. The crisis of the individual confronted by the law and its norms appears in the domain of the plastic arts with a challenge to the Academy, in other words with a challenge to normative forms of art. What does this challenge imply? It seems to me that we have not considered the question enough. If we take the artists who challenged the great academies or their normative rules we notice that for example Cézanne throughout his life never ceased to repeat 'I want to make an art as great as that of the museum'. In other words he is neither against culture nor the museums. What is happening with these artists? Take Monet as another example. Monet is an admirable example of the challenge to the normative and academic structure. Cézanne and Monet are two artists who, confronted with a given set of laws (the Academy makes the law), drive a wedge between the classical and natural models. What we have here is a certain number of artists who, when confronted with the norms of the law, react by asserting their individual sensibility as artistic phenomena. Until the end of his life Cézanne asserted his 'tiny sensation'. He opposed his 'tiny sensation' to the rules of the Academy and Monet did the same. Monet opposed his vision to the classical rules of his teacher. Therefore we find the same phenomenon in literature and in the plastic arts, an upsurge of the individual, asserting his individuality and its autonomy. The artist asserts his individuality with more or less success depending on the possibilities open to him. In some cases the effort provokes psychological crisis ending in suicide or death. Van Gogh is an illustrious example.

P.R. You mentioned the role of psychoanalysis a minute ago.

M.P. We have therefore this structure of philosophy, psychology and morality, and then we find a doctor of medicine taking an interest in the quite ideosyncratic problems of the psychological crises which overtake individuals. All this is entirely contemporary. It took place in the latter part of the nineteenth century and above all in the first half of this century. All these figures that I have mentioned are as close to each other as we are to them. But as soon as this psychological problem begins to be treated we see some very curious phenomena taking place in the domain of art. From this moment on the history

of modern and contemporary art, passing by the Surrealists among others, cannot avoid the work of Freud. We must never forget that it is to Freud that Breton owes his notion of automatic writing.

P.R. A notion that provides the motor for the great achievements in post-war art. Are you suggesting then that with this notion of automatic writing we can perhaps see the complicated interchange of relations between literature and the visual arts? Interchange in which both literature and the visual arts remake themselves differently through a common experience.

M.P. An extremely curious thing takes place. From the moment that Freud begins to treat psychologism, the traditional novel begins to transform itself and we see what has been called a crisis of the novel breaking through. No doubt this can be seen first of all in the different formal transformations which take place inside the novel form itself, and later, with the publication of *Ulysses* by Joyce, in an *explicit assertion of poetic language* by a novelist himself in the title of his book. The novel begins to transform itself and Joyce is obviously one of the major forces in this transformation, first in *Ulysses* with a conflict between the explicitly poetic vocation of the book and its naturalist, novelistic structure, and afterwards with the publication in 1939 of *Finnegans Wake* where Joyce this time has evacuated all trace of psychologism and we see a return to a purely poetic form of language.

P.R. You have traced the development of an extremely complicated artistic, intellectual and cultural history. How then are we to present the curious phenomena of modern art?

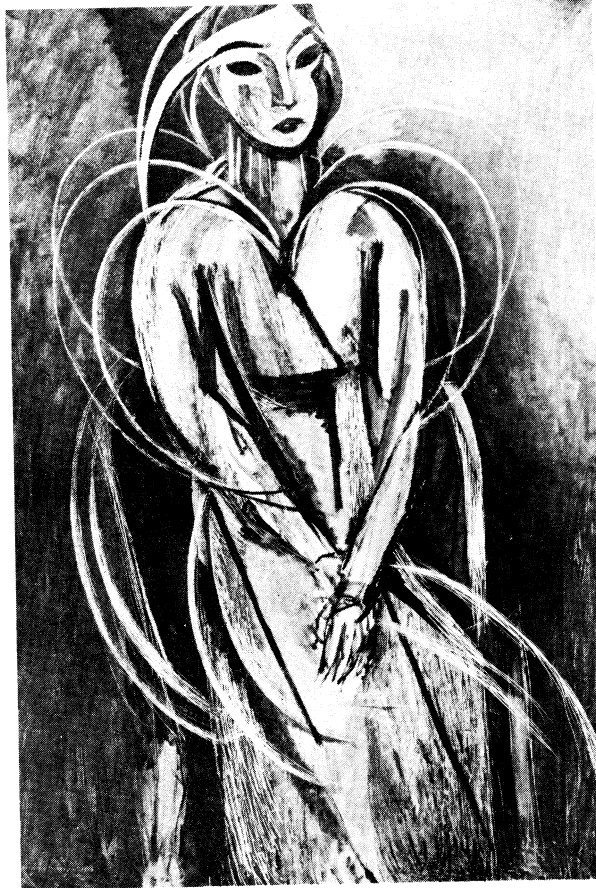
M.P. We live in a culture that I would characterize as accumulative. If we visit a museum of modern art today we will see the works of this century presented as an accumulation. Cézanne will come before Picasso, Picasso before Pollock and Pollock before contemporary painters. We live in a culture of accumulation which has never given itself the opportunity of thinking through its particular characteristics. (We should not forget that our culture contains some extremely eccentric characteristics.) If we put a Picasso beside certain portraits by Leonardo da Vinci it is clear that something extremely violent and difficult has taken place in our history. If we put the *portrait of Mlle. Landsberg* beside a Raphael we will have the clear impression that Matisse did not relate to women in the same way that Raphael did. If we put Duchamp's *Urinoir* beside the *Flagellation* by Piero della Francesca we are going to realize that we are dealing with two different worlds and two different civilizations. Therefore something has without doubt taken place, and is taking place at the present moment. Obviously Duchamp's *Urinoir* cannot be seen continuing the same tradition as a painter such as Piero della Francesca.

The question I ask is, does every work in the history of modern art have an equal importance? Are they all equally defensible, apart from in the context of their chronological cycle? Do they combine to form a cultural fabric or do they

amount to a group of symptoms of the crisis experienced by our culture? Do they belong to the order of culture or symptom? We find ourselves in a society today which has the tendency to limit the damage, if I may put it that way. The economy of its manner of conceiving its specific symbolic structure increasingly allows the appearance of a number of ever more spectacular symptoms of the crisis it is undergoing. It is quite obvious that if, outside a modernist perspective, we consider a young woman in a gallery of avant-garde art who lacerates her arm or tongue with a razor blade, we may well ask ourselves whether we are dealing with a work of art or with a symptom which the young woman manifests in her own manner. Certain contemporary manifestations cannot avoid horrifying the history of our culture, and I think that today we must try to understand these phenomena. In other words we should try to grasp them, not as a chronological accumulation one on top of the other, but as a cultural synthesis one with the other. What can justify a culture hanging a urinoir on the wall of a museum? What can justify a culture presenting a food tin with 'shit of the artist' written on it? Such phenomena inevitably raise a question. The assertion of individuality displayed by art over the last century forces us to ask to what extent this crisis produces culture or symptom. Perhaps, in the end, it will be the task of the last half of this twentieth century to reply.

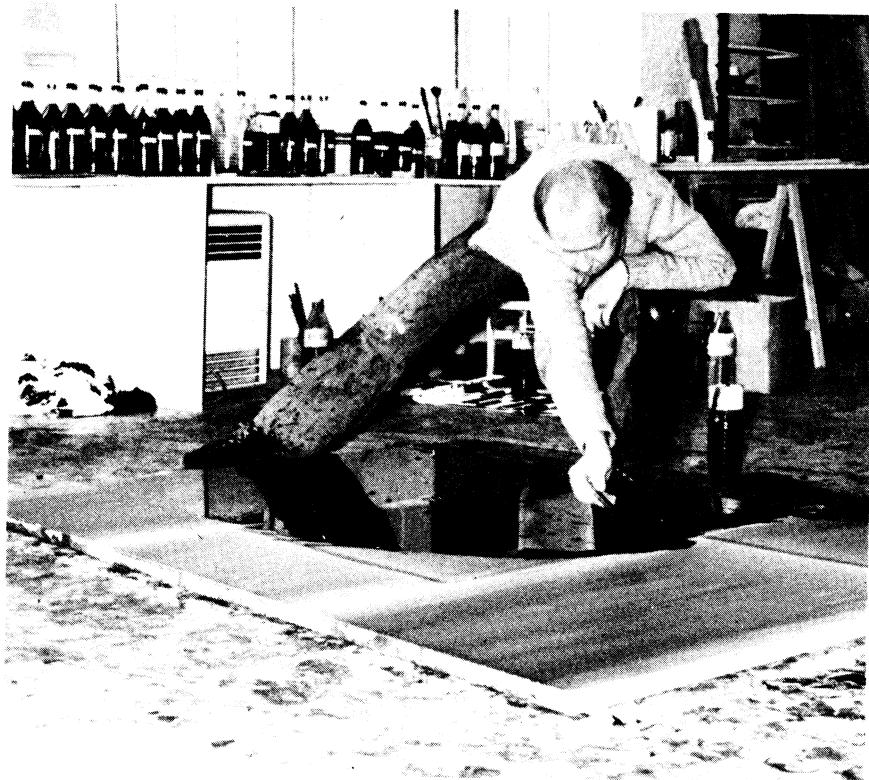


Raphael, Madonna, detail.



Matisse, Portrait of Mlle Landsberg.

1. The French word 'jeu' indicates a physical or mental activity which springs from the realm of pure fantasy. It is entirely gratuitous and its sole end is pleasure.
2. 'And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' John ch.1 verse 14.



MARC DEVADE

THE ARTIST'S STATEMENT

An Interview with Marc Devade

P.R. Glancing through the issues of *Peinture, cahiers theoriques*, review that you founded in 1971 with Louis Cane, Vincent Bioulès and Daniel Dezeuze, and that you direct to this day, we notice a considerable evolution in discourse, political alignments and the choice of theoretical reference points. Could you retrace this history for us, dating back to the events of 1968, the beginnings of the collaboration with *TEL QUEL* and the formation of the group *SUPPORT/SURFACE*? To what extent has your position really changed and to what can we attribute this change?

M.D. Just before the events of 1968 a small number of painters in France began to investigate the fundamental elements of painting, both in theory and practice. I think that is how one could sum up what took place in 1966 with BMPT¹ and afterwards with Support/Surface. In the end BMPT enclosed itself inside a repetitive system and evolved either towards work with a sociological tendency or otherwise towards minimalism. The development of Support/Surface was quite different. For Support/Surface this reflection on the fundamental elements of painting practice gradually led to a more *specifically pictorial* approach to art. This movement has to be seen in its context. Our struggle during the whole period of Support/Surface and *Peinture, cahiers theoriques* was to defend modern art and what for us was its most important development, the historical linearity that we traced to American painting. During our early years as artists we were preoccupied with stressing American painting in contrast to the general atmosphere of painting in France. Our own work was very much influenced by this effort. On the other hand, as the decade of the 1970s advanced we also insisted on opposing the development in American painting known as '*minimalism*', if we take this term to indicate the reductionist culmination of the modernist tradition. There is a very clear distinction to be made here. Defense of *modern* art and of a *certain type* of American painting, yet at the same time opposition to the *modernist* reduction found in minimalism. This is what prepared the way for what I term a *specifically pictorial* approach to art. This situation deserves careful analysis. In America, after the great period of the post-war years, artists became enclosed inside a reference to the specific elements of painting practice, to the exclusion of all other concerns . . . ,

P.R. You are referring to what is popularly known as Formalism?

M.D. Exactly. While in France by way of contrast there was renewed interest in all forms of cultural activity which created the potential conditions for a renewal of painting.

P.R. Support/Surface then is an early movement of orientation and apprenticeship, in the development of a number of French painters. As such, its interest is now chiefly historical. But is it only historical? Support/Surface investigated the fundamental elements of painting practice, its materials, but in contrast to American minimalism these materials were not taken as an end in themselves, but as the structure of a *method* and an *experience* linked to a broader cultural context. In this way the positivist approach of minimalism was avoided and attention to *material* was given a philosophical dimension, linked to the philosophical tradition of *materialism*. We can perhaps see now that Support/Surface undertook the radical critique of minimalism and of its underlying ideology, to use the terminology current in those years.

M.D. That was the consequence of a whole cultural and theoretical reflection related to the review *Tel Quel*. I think that it was the theoretical reflection developed inside *Peinture, cahiers theorique*. It must not be forgotten that 1971 saw the publication of Marcelin Pleynet's *L'enseignement de la peinture* which had a very important influence on the thinking of certain painters at the time. Those were the years when a contemporary theoretical frame of reference deriving from philosophical, linguistic and other studies was developed. From there a more specific preoccupation with painting as a form began to take shape. This specific interest in painting was maintained first of all by Marcelin Pleynet who has renewed the recent history of painting in France on the basis of a revised interpretation of modern painting from Cézanne to the present day, and also by the review *Peinture* which in its earliest issues insisted on the intrinsic values of painting.

P.R. The other aspect, present at the time and related to what we have been saying, was the need felt by certain artists to situate their activity in a social context. This led to direct political commitment in the highly charged atmosphere of the years after May '68. Such political commitment reflected an ambition to break out of the isolation imposed on art by the 'formalist' (perhaps 'autonomist' is a better word) tendency in American criticism. From this point of view Support/Surface can be seen as the precursor of a very broad shift of interest from art as an object with aesthetic value, to an emphasis on art as significant in a cultural context. We find different manifestations of this subsequently in England and the United States, each with varying approaches and more or less convincing results. For example I am thinking of the Art Language group and the New York review the Fox, or to take another example, the English artist Victor Burgin who has tried to integrate a theoretical and a practical approach in his work. Another example is the phenomenon known in England as the 'Social Critics'.

M.D. In France this relationship between art and its social context has to do

with the term 'avant-garde'. The effort of a number of artists associated with Support/Surface was directed towards combining an avant-garde artistic activity with political practice of the same tendency. There is a long tradition of this in France dating back to the 1914-1918 War and the Russian Revolution. Look at the history of Surrealism and the Revolution for example. Therefore one supposed an implicit link between an artistic practice which called itself 'avant-garde' and a political movement with the same claim, in other words Communism. But one must distinguish between a commitment on the model of 'art in the service of the Revolution' and a revolution *in* art parallel with a political revolution. What is indicative of movements belonging to the first category is that they conserve the pictorial traditions of the nineteenth century, while Support/Surface attempted to carry out a revolutionary transformation of art practice parallel with an ambition to transform social relations. The distinction between what took place in France and in other countries was that in France this effort did not lead to the renunciation of pictorial practice as being bourgeois, out-of-date, dead, or what have you, and to its replacement by the social sciences or by photography. Quite on the contrary in France it led to a renewal of interest in painting in the sense of a transformation of painting practice parallel to the transformation of social relations.

P.R. But where did you see the relationship between painting and the ambition to situate art practice in a social context?

M.D. There was no contradiction in our position. We wanted to thoroughly transform the practice of painting. And whereas we no doubt did not thoroughly transform the role of art practice as we had naively intended, we did transform the situation with regard to painting in France. I do not think that materialist theory or Marxism is in any way capable of 'transforming' painting, but it did serve to justify its existence and its renewal. Curiously enough it was in passing through the political ambition of social transformation that we finally managed to renew and impose the presence of what is called 'abstract' painting. From that point on the concept of a group or a movement became unnecessary and was replaced by the phenomenon of multiple individual experiences following the development in each painter's work.

P.R. What you say is extremely interesting and will no doubt provoke long discussions elsewhere. But I wonder what lies behind this ambition to link art and specifically painting, to an avant-garde political commitment. Because it is true that a certain artistic experience specifically linked to painting has led to the systematic renunciation of these political commitments. In this respect the opponents of painting (ironically enough) will see their suspicions confirmed. But I wonder if at a more fundamental level the ambition to interrelate the spheres of art, politics and society has really been abandoned or if it would not be more correct to say that this ambition, seen against the background of contemporary criticism's obsessional isolation of art, indicates an effort to renew the link between art and a broader cultural experience. (Such a link was present in art before the advent of the avant-garde and its insistence

on formal experimentation which dislocated the equation of form and content).

M.D. To understand what has taken place in France it is necessary to take into consideration a fundamentally different frame of reference. I think that finally what gave painting a chance of survival in France was an enormous impetus coming from the field of psychoanalysis and specifically a new conception of the "*subject*" to be found elaborated in Jacques Lacan's rereading of Freud. The painters concerned may have been more or less consciously aware of this influence, or it may have been entirely unconscious, they may never even have taken any direct interest in psychoanalysis, but I think we can attribute the fact that painting has retained its promise to the effects of this influence. For as much as I think that social science and Marxist sociology finally alienate us from painting (and you only have to look to other countries where painting



Freud in his study at 20 Maresfield Gardens.



Jacques Lacan, photo François Leclaire.

has been replaced by conceptual art, sociological art or whatever), it seems that what permitted certain artists in France to avoid this tendency was the intervention of a new discourse on painting coming from psychoanalysis. By a new discourse, I mean the insistence on the "*subject*" in the painting act. This influence offered the painting subject the justification of a new discourse capable of asserting the contemporary value of his experience.

P.R. The question of discourse, related as it is to a psychoanalytic frame of reference, is obviously crucial. To link it up with what I said a moment ago, what after all is in question in psychoanalysis, and similarly in an artist's ambition to reach the social and political spheres, especially if we consider this against the background of a critical approach determined to isolate art and reduce the artist's role, if not the relationship of the visual to language? Can we say that the result of the investigation, which at one point in the late '60s and early '70s took the form of a political commitment, has culminated in the development of a conception of the *relationship* between art and language?

(I say clearly relationship because it is obvious that elsewhere an increasing attention to language has had a directly detrimental effect on art, due finally to the fact that no conception of the crucial but illusive *relationship* between the two has been developed.)

M.D. I think that the direct commitment of the 1970s came to an end somewhere around the middle of the decade partly in reaction to certain political events in the 'real' (Cambodia for example) and also following an event in language, the Gulag Archipelago. In other words as a result of the, in some cases rather late, discovery of how socialism works in practice. But in my opinion this is not the only reason. Direct commitment collapsed because the language of sociology could not measure pictorial practice. It was perhaps capable of measuring the place of painting in the market, painting as merchandise. Every practice is answerable to the discourse of social theory from this point of view. On the other hand, the psychoanalytic discourse, as it is to be found in Lacan, in other words related to linguistics, was much better adapted to taking the measure of painting. Psychoanalytic discourse permitted the survival and ultimately the renewal of painting. It gave it the chance of continued existence in the 'symbolic'. Of course, first and foremost, there had to be painting subjects for this to be possible but not subjects outside language, and looking back we can see that a certain language emerged from Support/Surface which allowed us to develop the present state of artistic diversity.

P.R. I was going to say that research into the social sciences and above all into psychoanalysis offered painting the possibility of a very necessary articulation in the social context.

M.D. An articulation in the social context, yes, but I would rather say an articulation of the problems specific to the painter. Marxist (or other) sociology does not permit the painter to articulate himself as *subject*. It may help him to articulate himself as a social subject, as a subject who sells painting, but on the question of the painter as a *subject who paints*, Marxist sociology is silent. A new discourse with a reference in psychoanalysis offered an insight into what takes place when a subject paints, and ultimately justified the pursuit of painting as an activity. At the same time it has allowed certain painters to take a broader interest in cultural history. To the extent that the subject possesses an unconscious, which can be investigated on archeological lines, in the same manner certain painters have undertaken an investigation which I would characterize as archeological. That has opened up new horizons for painting. Also of course there has been the tendency to think that painting behaves, or should behave, like a language. I think there has been some confusion on this point. If, certainly, painting is entirely worked through by language, there remains a specificity attached to the art of painting, coming from its specific execution, the fact that painting is first of all an *act*. I would say that painting is specified by an *interval* between itself and language. The discourse on painting bridges this interval because such an interval inserted inside the function of language makes some people uneasy. Paying attention to such a discourse however does

not imply that painting is incorporated inside language.

P.R. The relationship between art, specifically painting, and language, was asserted very early on in France. We still have to decide of course, *which* language can best serve the interests of art. In France Marxism and psychoanalysis, linked to other contemporary social sciences like linguistics and modern anthropology and to a reflection on the history of philosophy, as it is to be found in the work of Lacan, have been investigated as potential frames of reference, because after all a language must have a base somewhere, in philosophy, theory or elsewhere. Do you think, in the light of the French investigation of these matters, that the social sciences are capable of providing this base?

M.D. I think this is the question which has been asked, with immensely beneficial results for painting. It has offered painting a new departure or rather a justification and an encouragement. However, I think that this period is finished. I think that one can distinguish a symptom among artists in France at the moment. They are fed up with theories on painting and with the discourse attached to painting. I don't say that this is necessarily a positive development. But the symptom exists and no doubt indicates something. It indicates that painting, in so far as it is concerned with its own experience, has begun to feel the limits of the social sciences. Perhaps the irreducible limit between language and painting. There is however, something to add to this. If we look back at our cultural heritage the dominant mode of thought has been, and remains to this day, Platonic. The history of painting can be traced back to the shadows in Plato's cave. I think that we must break the dominance of Platonic thought. But how? It seems to me that this can be done with the help of contemporary developments in psychoanalysis. At the same time the artist is not held to any one particular line as is the specialist in the social sciences. An artist can exhaust a number of different theories. He is not responsible to a system of thought. He can change when he wants. I think that is one of the prerogatives of the artist. From the moment that Marxism, psychoanalysis or another system of thought no longer offer anything new to the artist, no longer help him function as an artist, he is free to look elsewhere. I do not say that the issues of Marxism or psychoanalysis are exhausted. Marxism is far from being finished. Marxism is an ever present issue at an international level, and more so than ever with recent events. That is not what I want to suggest. On the other hand quite possibly the ideas attached to these systems of thought no longer motivate the painter's exploration of his medium. The other thing I would like to add is that art has always been related to literature. This is not the same thing. Painters are much more influenced by writers than they sometimes like to believe. What interests me is to invent this literary influence myself. I think that I am very aware of a literary influence but that in my work I am the least literary of painters, while those who have no literary interest are much more so in their work. I do not oppose a literary influence, on the contrary, I invent one or I reinvent one in painting.

P.R. You mention the impact of Platonism on our culture. We touch here on

an intellectual debate which has been developing in France over the last few years. The influence of Platonism on our thought is there for all to see but our culture contains a second, more obscure, influence coming from the Hebraic religion, which is completely foreign to Greek culture. In a recent book,² which drew a lot of attention in France, René Girard has investigated this cultural contradiction between the two opposing traditions by raising the specific question of imitation or *mimesis*. Is our culture integrally trapped inside the model of representation? And can we not say now that it is this model which has been challenged in modern art? Perhaps, we can say, speaking very broadly and confining ourselves to what we might call its code, that the classical painting tradition has represented either eternal truth or natural reality. But once a painter works with the intention of transforming himself in the act of painting doesn't this imply something fundamentally different? And in the end isn't it precisely this that has been at stake in modern art since, shall we say, Cézanne?

M.D. I think, this is what Girard maintains, that Christianity introduced another function of the double, of narcissism, of imitation, or of mimesis as he calls it, and that this other function is so revolutionary that institutionalized Christianity has spent the centuries obstructing and excluding it. The great painting of the Renaissance was developed to obstruct the Christian revelation of this question of mimetism.³ At the same time the whole of Christianity is penetrated by Greek culture and by Platonism. Christianity both recuperated and was recuperated by Greek culture and I think that institutionalized Christianity has blocked this revelation regarding the function of doubles, as Girard puts it. I think that painting has much to learn in Girard's book, on mimetism, mimetic violence, narcissism, differentiation and questions of this kind. A whole study of Renaissance painting must be undertaken to reveal what it has masked. I would say that that is what modern art is doing. We were discussing the limits which the artist encounters in the social sciences. The question I ask myself as an artist is, what can stimulate my artistic adventure? That is what I am looking for. As an artist it is not my job to assume the role of a specialist in Marxism or psychoanalysis. The question is what can make me think and pursue my adventure as an artist? Well, what makes me think are those things that nobody pays attention to. For example, it is true that a thousand years of Christianity, passed over in silence today by everybody, opens a new horizon for me. Things that I knew during my Catholic education, ten years ago, but which were entirely repressed during the different phases of Sartre, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, common to the intellectual in France. There I discover a totally unimagined field of thought. Somewhat in the same manner Bataille said that since all his friends were occupied with philosophy and politics, he would turn his attention to Christianity. And finally Bataille's whole work is saturated in Christianity without him being for all that any more Christian in the institutional sense of the term. To the extent that he adopted this stance I think that Bataille is the essential reference in twentieth century thought. To illustrate what I mean by Bataille's gesture, take another philosopher of this century, Heidegger. What does he do? He returns to the pre-socratics. The whole of modern thought refuses to consider the crisis of Christianity. Ignores it. I find that quite astounding.

ing. To refuse to consider two thousand years which have formed our civilisation, I find that incredible.

P.R. Perhaps the modern world hoped it had laid those questions to rest once and for all. But there again we can see that it has not listened to the voice of Freud, to Freud's theory of the return of the repressed. Where does this leave our concept of 'modernity', which has been maintained throughout the period of the avant-garde? By 'modernity' I mean the experience, or impression remaining after the fact of those great transformations in the 'real' at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which continue through the disasters of two world wars up until the present day. The experience of modern history has, perhaps, led us to condemn our culture and to look in future to ourselves for references in the development of a quite new and 'modern' culture. How can these two seemingly contradictory forces function for a contemporary artist? You have made a number of recent visits to the United States, to the New World, what impressions did you bring back of our 'modernity' in action?

M.D. I think first of all we have had a lot of illusions about our modernity and about modern progress in general. That can be verified in the real. What strikes me now when I visit the United States is that the great Abstract Expressionist painting is entirely bound up with European culture. In the end the Abstract Expressionists were great painters on the European model.

P.R. Can we not distinguish a new dimension tied specifically to an American spatial context, in the work of these painters? Do we not see an opening towards this new 'subject' we have been speaking about?



Piero della Francesca,
Resurrection, detail

M.D. I think there you touch on the problem of what an artist wants to say in his work – the 'vouloir dire' of an artist. I think that every artist wants to say something in his work, wants to make a statement. The American Abstract Expressionist painters experienced this problem tragically. I think they thought they had failed to express what they wanted to say. It is for that reason I might add that their work succeeds. Psychoanalytic theory allows me to say that; an act which fails equals an act achieved. I mean that an act which fails always says what is not said directly.



Roger van der Weyden, *The Descent from the Cross*, detail.

P.R. This question of what the artist wants to say in his work is extremely interesting since it brings us back to the debate on the relationship between painting and language. Where do the Abstract Expressionists situate themselves in this debate? It seems to me that they were extremely preoccupied with this issue and continually asserted their right to the dimension of language. At the same time they inflexibly refused to accept language as they received it, a certain form of discourse, the Surrealist discourse for example. It is this that makes their painting great. There is a tension between what they wanted to say, what they could not manage to say, but what they managed to paint. It is very significant however that American painting did not sustain their achievement. In this connection can we not attribute later developments in American painting to the failure to develop a parallel critical discourse capable of articulating the experience of Abstract Expressionism?

M.D. The American painters after Abstract Expressionism progressively deprive themselves of anything to say. They paint formally inside the system of painting, or what they take to be the system of painting. Here is the distinction to be made in contemporary painting. If I may speak about myself for a moment, I have never painted inside a closed system of painting. I have always wanted to say something in what I painted, my paintings all want to say something. Obviously there is no equivalent between what the artist wants to say and the execution of his work. That is what distinguishes painting from illustration. No doubt I will never say what I imagine, there lies the whole problem of painting. From the point of what the artist wanted to say no doubt it is lost from the beginning.

P.R. At the same time you think that it is what the artist wanted to say that compels our attention?

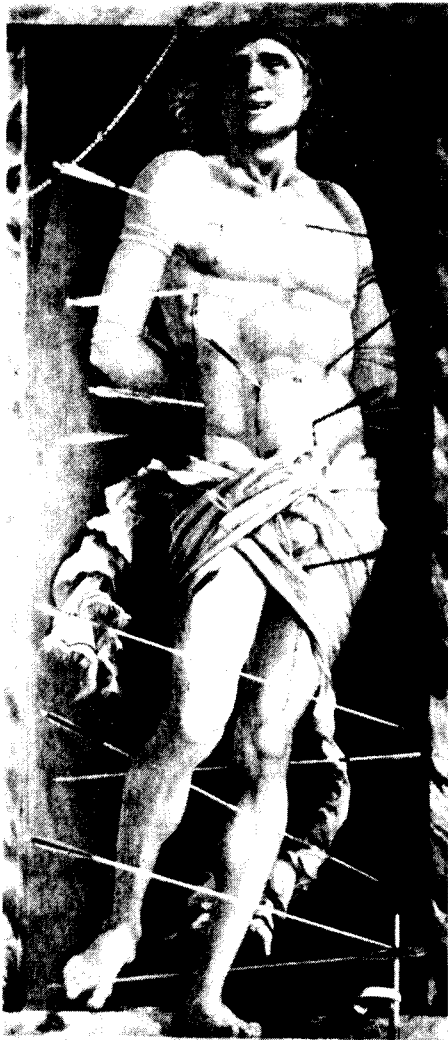
M.D. I think that one will never grasp a painting if one does not grasp something of what the artist wanted to say. I think that one must always search for what the painting subject wanted to put in his painting. That goes entirely against the positivism of formalist criticism.

P.R. It is extremely significant that so much contemporary criticism never listens to the artist. The artist is pushed to one side.

M.D. I think that what is different for me, I don't know if it is the same for others, is that I do not experience the non-correspondence of what the artist wants to say and what he realizes pictorially as an obstacle. Perhaps because of my interest in psychoanalysis I do not think there is a single or unique statement, but that there is a multiplicity of meaning, sometimes even contradictory, in what I paint. It is possible that in the case of the Abstract Expressionists they imagined that there was a single or unique statement to be made and to that extent they were unable to say what they wanted in painting. It is because of my

acquaintance with the social sciences that I think that there is no one sense, or perhaps no sense at all, but rather a multiplicity of signification. That does not mean that the execution is necessarily successful, that is another problem.

P.R. Perhaps we can relate what you have said about a single or unique meaning to the question of the figure in painting. We have to examine the



Mantegna S. Sebastian.

attitude of the Abstract Expressionist painters to the figure and by consequence to the notion of *abstraction*. It seems clear that they recognized the figure as the essential question to be treated, and though undoubtedly they achieve this in their work, it is possible that they were hampered by an idea of unique meaning which tied them to the figure.

M.D. Yes, I think the problem comes from the ambition to achieve an equation of unity between the signifier and signified, the ambition to arrive at a single and unique sense, and the impossibility of conceiving a multiplicity of meanings. I think that every painter who encounters the figure in his work has always had the old metaphysical idea of correspondence between signifier and signified in his head. Hence the dilemma figurative/non figurative, representation/non-representation. I think this problem can be transformed by reference to a multiplicity of signification, the possibility of unlimited free association, offered to us by Freud, and by insistence on the infinity of colour, not primary colours or pure tones as modernism dictates, but an infinity of tones.

P.R. Would you say by the same token that the notion of *abstraction* as the opposite of *figuration* no longer has any value either?

M.D. Absolutely. I think that these ideas of abstraction and figuration are of no further value whatsoever. They only present a problem for those who remain enclosed inside the Platonic and metaphysical question of unity. Abstraction and figuration are notions inscribed in the Platonic system. They are entirely Platonic. I think that we have to break out of this dichotomy of abstraction/figuration, not mind you by simply denying it, but by immersing ourselves in the analysis of the problem. Ultimately we must go beyond it by a transformation of thought in the experience of painting. Today that is the challenge for contemporary painting.

1. BMPT was a group of four artists, Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni who criticised the concept of aesthetic value and the role of art in society. They painted in a mechanical and repetitious manner and insisted on the environmental installation of their work.
2. See René Girard, *Les choses cachees depuis la fondation du monde*, Grasset, Paris 1978.
3. See the remarks on sacrifice in 'The Subject in Process', a reading of Julie Kristeva.



PHILIPPE SOLLERS, photo Denis Roche.

"Comment voir ce qui se parle, et comment parler ce qui éventuellement n'a pas à être vu". *How to see what speaks, and how to speak what in the end is not to be seen.*

Philippe Sollers 'La Trinité de Joyce' in *Tel Quel* 83.

THE SHADOW OF FICTION

On Philippe Sollers

Somewhere along the chain of complicated and tortuous adventures between a birth and a death someone interrupts our charmed attention. To ask us what *we have* (there, cradled lovingly on our knee, the black print curling up between the fingers of our jealously, modestly spread hand) *who we are?* The scene is lost, the action interrupted, the characters surprised and upset. We raise a howl of irritation at this intrusion on our pleasure as he begins to write persistently, stubbornly, filling the pages with long even phrases, blotting out the story which absorbs us.

"LE ROMAN EST LA MANIERE DONT CETTE SOCIETE SE PARLE, la manière dont l'individu DOIT SE VIVRE pour y être accepté" "Le roman est le point d'impact le plus fort de la narration sociale; ce n'est pas un hasard si l'idéologie dominante surveille avec autant de vigilance ce qui relève du romanesque".
THE NOVEL IS THE MODE IN WHICH THIS SOCIETY SPEAKS TO ITSELF, THE MODE IN WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL MUST CONDUCT HIS EXISTENCE if he wants to be accepted.
..... *The novel is the most powerful point of impact of social narrative and of the relationship between the subject and social practice; it is no accident if the dominant ideology surveys so vigilantly everything which concerns the novel form.*

THEORY OF LITERATURE. Who mentioned the word theory?
No matter. The scandal is there.

The novel is the copy of our reality. It is the inspired insight into the movement of our natures, nurtured in the arms of that larger Nature who mothered us, before the fall from grace at the entrance to life in the community, in spite of the perverted construction of an alienating reason. The novel is the emblem of our Humanity; no novel was ever made with ideas. There is a fabulous duplicity in this defence of the novel; a simulation. The novel rests on a series of implicit notions, attitudes, expectancies, which are filtered

through the cultural process of transformation from the Idea to the Real. Theory of Naturalism; theory of Realism. The Real is based on an idea; the novel is based on the denial of the idea. A modern theory of literature would like to expose this (I)de(a)ology.

But what if it were the other way round? What if the flow of origin were reversed? I turn from this reality which lies at the base of the novel to find that the novel has undertaken the direction of reality. After all, when I look back at my life so far, I order it according to the spatio-temporal model of the novel. When I look forward to my future, I see it in a series of adventures already lived in my imagination. Who am I after all but the hero of my own personal novel? We live our reality through the process of fiction. The presence of our reality is a fiction lived through the fiction of our reality.

"C'est donc à l'intérieur du langage, reconnu en quelque sorte mathématiquement comme étant *notre milieu de transformation*, que nous devons poser le problème qui nous occupe - c'est à dire en dehors de la notion de personnage ... en dehors de la notion de produit". *It is therefore inside language, conceived mathematically as it were, as being the scene of our transformation, that we must situate the problem which concerns us. That is, outside the notions of character and product.*

Theory of literature? The simple insistence that fiction is written, that we see the world through writing, that the world is nothing other than the reality of this writing. All else is a *refus de corps*.

"Nous ne voulons pas entendre parler de notre corps, parce que nous ne voulons pas l'entendre parler, c'est à dire : nous ne voulons pas entendre parler de notre langage parce que nous ne voulons pas l'entendre parler". *A refusal of the body; We do not want to hear our body spoken of because we do not want to hear what it has to say; in other words, we do not want to hear our language spoken of because we do not want to hear what it has to say.*

I am not going to investigate the hypothesis of a theory of language here.(1) I would rather insist on another aspect which is often passed over in silence, but which accounts for the specificity and the achievement of *Tel Quel*. Rather than remaining content to investigate the phenomenon of language in itself and so constitute a science, from its inception *Tel Quel* has centered its analysis in the charge of intellectual and cultural experience of one particular practice of lan-

guage - that of literature. This is what allows Sollers to write:

"Elle (la théorie) met en évidence le statut définitivement contradictoire de l'écriture textuelle qui *n'est pas un langage* mais, à chaque fois, *destruction d'un langage*; qui, à l'intérieur d'une langue, transgresse cette langue".
Theory demonstrates the definitively contradictory status of textual writing, which is not a language, but at each instant, internal destruction and transgression of a language.

What does the post-Formalism of *Tel Quel* consist of? The answer is very clear. From the beginning, *Tel Quel* has insisted on the importance of the 'subject'.

"Je peux en effet revendiquer la totalité, mais qui dit 'je' ? Qui ose d'ailleurs se prévaloir ostensiblement de ce que je suis ? Quel phénomène limité s'exprime à ma place ? L'exploration commence par ce choc, sur un sol neuf, immédiat".
I can in fact lay claim to possess a totality, but who says 'I'? Who, for that matter, dares to ostensibly presume that which I am? What limited phenomenon expresses itself in my place? The exploration begins with this shock, on a new and immediate footing.

But what kind of subject can this be? This new 'subject' is based on the admission that there is something in the experience of living which escapes consciousness and goes beyond rational thought. It is this faculty which continually divides us from the world, so that we live our self-made reality as a fiction.

"L'homme ne sait au fond ce qu'il peut penser : la fiction est là pour le lui apprendre. Quoi que je fasse, il y a toujours, dans le moment même où je l'accomplis, la présence obscure, insaisissable et comme accumulée dans une ombre double, la présence du reste que j'étais (tous les temps du verbe être) ou ne saurais d'aucune façon pénétrer".
Deep down man does not know what he is capable of thinking: fiction is there to teach him. No matter what I do, at the moment I accomplish it, there is always the presence, obscure and elusive, as if accumulated under a double shadow, of what is left over from what I was (every tense of the verb to be) but can never return to.

Past and future. The novel has taught me to live my present as past and future. The novel can only understand the present through transforming it into the past

and through holding out the promise of the future. The novel writes the past and future as a present but the novel cannot grasp the present because it is built on *absence*. We enter a game of ritual. RE-PRESENTATION - OF SOMETHING ABSENT, which through its ab-sense (abstraction of sense) permits the crystallization of a mirror image, which in turn becomes the guarantee of this present which is elsewhere. *I have* this absence in the form of a socially contracted convention of possession which makes me the owner of my world. I? me? The world is there, reality is tangible, in this conspiracy which makes me a present of myself as a full, breathing, conscious pre-sense among the solid objects which I resemble. *I am* born in the presence of this absence which I have come to accept in the barely tolerable convention of its re-presentation. I can only have this absence in the form of the fragile insecurity of this pre-sense which I cling to with a mounting hysteria as the only support from sliding back towards the absence which threatens to dissolve me. The task is achieved. Reciprocally complete the Author (l'écrit-vain) stands back from his work (l'oeuvre), Man from his reality, whose sole condition of presence is absence. At that moment what asserts itself on my consciousness? Something shifts between me and my reality. The clarity of the picture is spoilt. Its hard reassuring outlines blur. Something which I had discounted is coming in between me. Who? A momentum inside me gathers swing, a resistance gives as my sense of presence comes away. What else but the presence of language? The surging impulse of language as process of to and fro which passes back and forth, over and under the fixed entities I have made myself. Language will not stay still. At every attempt I make to touch my reality, language intervenes. Language is everywhere. But what do I find so intolerable in language? The presence of language is incompatible with the I which is absent We must begin again. LANGUAGE - OF NOTHING WHICH IS PRESENT which through its presence renders its re-presentation redundant and so becomes the guarantee of a nothing which is there. *I do not have* this nothing persistently eludes me. I? me? In the presence of this nothing my (I)identity is engulfed in a continual displacement. Lost I move(s) in and through the beating rhythm of language, forming, transforming the plural play of sense. *I am not* in the process of writing (écriture) this reading (lecture) this writing ...

The reference to Freud and to psychoanalysis is unmistakable and it is this crucial reference which takes us beyond the Formalism of the first half of the twentieth century. Sollers resumes this in refuting an allegation made by Alain Robbe-Grillet:

"Il ne s'agit pas, on le voit, d'écrire 'le roman du roman', - d'écrire que l'on est incapable d'écrire un roman -, mais de toucher de façon renouvelée ce point, semblable en chacun, - ce centre nerveux - ce 'nombril des rêves' dont parlait Freud - ce 'centre de suspens vibratoire', disait Mallarmé -, qui est à la source de toute fiction et par conséquent de notre vie se communicant à nous".

The problem is obviously not to write 'the novel of a novel', to write that one is incapable of writing a novel, but rather, in a renewed fashion, to touch that point, similar in each person, that nervous system, Freud's 'focal point of dreams', Mallarmé's 'centre of vibrating suspense', which is the source of all fiction, and in consequence of our life as it communicates itself to us.

Freud himself characterized the nineteenth century novel as providing a sense of the fullness of life and an acceptance of death which is lacking in the individual. Through immersing himself in fiction the reader can share a multitude of fortunes and situations and yet remain exempt from their consequences. He repeatedly suffers and yet survives the death of his hero and in so doing persuades himself that he will not die. We have here the structural relationship of desire to the object, resolved in the process of sublimation, with which man tries to protect himself from the sense that he is *passing through*. Significantly it is to Joyce, and specifically to *Finnegan's Wake*, that Sollers turns when he opposes this model of literature.

"Dans la nuit où Joyce est entré par son écriture, les langues se dénouent et deviennent vivantes, elles dévoilent leur ambiguïté, leur multiplicité dont nous sommes les reflets en plein jour, des reflets, des images qui se croient protégées et claires. Nous vivons dans le faux jour d'une langue morte aux significations bornées : nous manquons le jour dans la mesure où nous manquons la nuit que nous sommes. Mais nous ne sommes pas autre chose que ce mouvement nocturne et diurne du lisible et d'illisible, en nous, hors de nous, - mais cela nous ne voulons pas le savoir".

In the night, into which Joyce entered by means of his writing, languages unravel themselves and come to life. They unveil their ambiguity and multiplicity whose day-time reflections and images we are, thinking ourselves protected by light. We live in the false day of a dead language with stilted meaning. We are unable to possess the day because we are unaware of the night inside us. We are nothing else than the nocturnal, diurnal movement of the legible and the illegible, inside and outside us. But that we do not

want to know.

The choice is clear. Confronted by a reality rendered bearly tolerable in the form of fiction, I am proposed the alternative of living fiction as a reality - but that *I* cannot do.

(1) I refer the reader to the discussion by Stephen Heath in his *The Nouveau Roman*, Elek, London 1972, and notably to his remarks on Derrida's study of Saussure (pp. 196-203) where he throws some doubt on the possibility of a science of semiotics in the face of the 'activity of writing'.

TEL QUEL

Littérature / Philosophie / Arts / Politique

Mao Tse-toung, *Deux poèmes*
Traduits par Philippe Sollers

Alain Peyraube, *La révolution de l'enseignement en Chine*

Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Sexualité féminine dans l'idéologie fasciste*

Daniel Sibony, *Promer nocturne II*

William Burroughs, *Cities of the red night*

Gerard Georges Lemaire, *Biographie*

Jean Jacques Abrahams, *Tu comprends*

Alain Rey, *Par la bande*

Viviane Forrester, *Vestiges*

Notes

Été 1976 



GEORGES BATAILLE, circa 1940.

THE LAUGH OF DERISION

On Georges Bataille

In 1972 a conference was organized at C erisy-la-Salle to discuss the works of Artaud and Bataille. Why Artaud? Why Bataille? In the history of French literature *Tel Quel* has turned up a list of ignored or little understood names. Sade, Lautr eamont, Mallarm e, Bataille, Artaud. Dark names of an alternative tradition where *Tel Quel* has searched out the threads of its project. Project? Perhaps rather the search for a place to situate itself in between or behind the crumbling distinctions of established disciplines - philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, literature, art, etc.

In his text on Bataille, read at C erisy, Roland Barthes refers directly back to Nietzsche, and specifically to his notion of fiction.

"le savoir est l a, non d etruit, mais d eplac e; sa nouvelle place est - selon un mot de Nietzsche - celle d'une *fiction* : le sens pr ec ede et pr ed etermine le fait, la valeur pr ec ede et pr ed etermine le savoir. Nietzsche : 'Il n'y a pas de fait en soi. Ce qui arrive est un groupe de ph enom enes choisis et group es par un  tre qui les interpr ete ... Il n'y a pas d' etat de fait en soi; il faut au contraire y introduire d'abord un sens avant m eme qu'il puisse y avoir un fait'. Le savoir serait en somme une fiction interpr etative".

Knowledge is still possible. It is not destroyed but rather displaced. Thenceforth its place is, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, in fiction. Sense precedes and predetermines the fact. Value precedes and predetermines knowledge. Nietzsche wrote: 'There is no objective fact. Everything that happens combines in a group of phenomena, selected and collected by a being who interprets them There is no objective state of affairs. It is necessary to introduce a meaning before there can be a fact. In short, knowledge is an interpretative fiction.

This quotation clearly fixes Bataille's place in the history of thought. Bataille stands between the Hegelian tradition of metaphysics, culminating in Nietzsche's negative critique, and the new disciplines of psychoanalysis and anthropology, developed respectively by Freud and Mauss. To be more precise, Bataille used a method of thought borrowed from Hegel and Nietzsche to criticize the scientific status claimed by these new disciplines. Bataille saw clearly that, in the transition from a metaphysical to a scientific outlook, a certain basis had been conserved and yet treated differently. This basis, which inside the metaphysical tradition derives from the repressed inheritance of its historical association with theology and religious experience, was projected outside by the scientific method to lodge in the objects of its external investigation. We miss the ideological charm of science as a mode of thought if we do not grasp this inversion. The nineteenth century concept of science is at once the logical extension of the Cartesian system and its reduction to the absurd.

It is a fatal error to take science at its face value when it defines its method as an objective investigation. Barthes goes right to the centre of the problem when he talks about the displacement of knowledge. The Cartesian 'subject' is liquidated in the hollow cavity of the scientific mind, but at the same time installs itself underneath the visible surface of the external world as the object of its research. The compelling fascination attached to the scientific appropriation of the world is in consequence due to a methodological paradox which hopes to locate the subject in its antithesis. For Bataille this meant that if, for the purpose of his critique of science, he was to uncover those forces repressed in the metaphysical tradition, he would have to look for them in the phenomena discovered by those same new disciplines which had taken science as a model.

We could begin in a different way by asking why it is that science is incapable of operating its own auto-critique. Man has founded himself, on the one hand, on his conscience and on his appreciation of difference, above all in language, and on the other, on the principle of work inside a productive economy based on limited supplies of energy and resources. Man's effort is directed towards creating a world of homogeneity.

Bataille does not object to this system in itself but only points out that it excludes one whole side of human experience. Bataille invokes the principle of negativity.

Over and against the complacent dogma of the modern world he uncovers its necessary opposite. In the face of economy, Bataille asserts 'dépense' (*expenditure*) and in opposition to homogeneity he insists on the principle of heterogeneity. With this principle of heterogeneity Bataille breaks through to a world which scientific rationalism is constitutionally incapable of taking into account. It is important to understand what Bataille means by the notion of negativity; Bataille is not arguing for the existence of such a world, but for the impossibility of its existence in a world organized to exclude it.

This methodological problem is at the basis of Bataille's



Head sculpture, Ardèche, France.

thinking:

"rendre compte, exposer et construire une connaissance de ce qui est par nature inaccessible au savoir. Etre à la mesure de l'hétérogène qui est voué au silence mais sur lequel le silence gardé se rendrait complice de l'homogénéisation refulante. Toute la pratique d'écriture de Bataille, dans sa forme diversifiée, dans ses corrections et ses reprises successives, vise à répondre à l'existence de l'hétérogène en reconnaissant à la discursivité de la pensée homogénéisante ses droits, mais sans s'y soumettre".

to locate, expose and develop an understanding of that which by its very nature is inaccessible to knowledge as we know it; to be attentive to the silent force of heterogeneity so as to avoid a silence which renders one accomplice to repressive homogeneity. All the different forms of Bataille's writing, in each successive version, aim at acknowledging the existence of heterogeneity, in recognizing the prerogative of homogeneous discursive thought without submitting to it.

(Jean-Louis Baudry) (1)

Discontinuité - continuité - interdit - transgression.

Bataille's thought is held together by the structure of these concepts. If man identifies himself by his conscience and by work, he becomes a discontinuous being founded in difference. This discontinuity does not know what came before it or what awaits it at its death. The 'interdits' ('prohibitions') of the social system maintain man inside his discontinuous role, but they cannot obliterate his desire to find out what lies beyond. Man is continually tempted to transgress the laws which he has imposed upon himself. The establishment of social law necessitates its transgression and the existence of discontinuous life implies a continuity which defies it. It should be noted that Bataille's logic is impeccable. Bataille does not want to trouble the conscience of discontinuous man by forcing something foreign upon him. He wants to show him the necessary implications of discontinuity. To do so he adopts the stance of rational argument. But with his painstaking rationality Bataille is intent on uncovering the inverse of the rational, or what he calls '*la fonction divine*'. Bataille lists the elements of heterogeneity as:

"L'activité sexuelle perversie ou non, l'attitude d'un sexe devant l'autre, la défécation, la miction, la mort et le culte des cadavres (principalement en tant que décomposition puante des corps), les différents tabous, l'anthropophagie rituelle, les sacrifices d'animaux-dieux, l'homophagie (qui ont en général la

mort pour objet), l'extase religieuse, l'attitude identique à l'égard de la merde, des dieux et des cadavres, la terreur si souvent accompagnée de défécation involontaire, l'habitude de rendre des femmes à la fois brillantes et lubriques avec des fards, pierrieres et des bijoux rutilants, le jeu, la dépense sans frein et certains usages fantastiques de la monnaie etc."

Sexual activity, whether perverted or not, the attitude of one sex in front of the other, defecation, urination, death and the cult of the corpse (principally related to the odour of decomposition), the different varieties of taboos, ritual cannibalism, the sacrifice of animal gods, homophagy (generally with death as its object), religious ecstasy, an identical attitude towards excreta, gods and corpses, terror so often accompanied by involuntary excretion, the custom of rendering women both scintillating and lustful with make-up, precious stones and glittering jewels, carnival, exorbitant spending and certain fantastic financial practices, etc.

(quoted by Jean-Louis Baudry)

Man comes to know of the division, continuity-discontinuity, inside himself by playing on the transgression of the law. These transgressions turn for the most part



Nicolas Manuel Deutsch,
Death in the guise of a
lansquenet embracing a
young woman.

Illustration from *l'Erotisme*, by Georges Bataille

around the drive of sexuality. Bataille writes:

"Dans la mesure que l'homme s'est défini par le travail et la conscience, il dut non seulement modérer, mais méconnaître et parfois maudire en lui-même, l'excès sexuel".

To the extent that man defined himself by work and conscience, he was obliged to not only moderate and disregard, but even on occasion to denigrate his sexual excess.

We must be careful to understand Bataille's concept of transgression. Transgression has nothing to do with the trivial recuperation of sexuality advocated by certain liberalizing tendencies in contemporary society. Such 'pseudo-transgressions', as Sollers has labelled them, are preceded by a scientific exploration of the phenomenon of sexuality which is committed to reconciling the erotic drive of sexuality with the discontinuous world. Such a tactic attempts to place sexuality inside the law so that its definition is expanded but not transgressed.

"Notre époque, donc, sur un fond d'assurance scientifique, croit être celle qui aurait *enfin* levé l'interdit (les interdits) et reconnu le désir (...). La sexualité est en effet représentée comme étant désormais 'sans mystère'; la sexualité, exposée et surexposée, serait donc *naturelle*". Mais "le geste (de la transgression) est irréductible à la rationalité classique".

Thus, against a background of scientific assurance, our age thinks that it has at last lifted the prohibition, or prohibitions, and recognized desire. Sexuality is represented henceforth as 'demystified'. Exposed and re-exposed, sexuality therefore becomes natural. But the active gesture (le geste) of transgression cannot be reduced to classical reason.
(Sollers)

By insisting on the irrational quality of the interplay between transgression and the law, Sollers is echoing Bataille himself who wrote:

"Nous devons tenir compte d'un caractère irrationnel des interdits si nous voulons comprendre une indifférence à la logique, qui ne cesse pas de leur être liée".

We must take into account an irrational aspect of prohibitions if we want to understand their intrinsic indifference to logic.

Bataille is concerned with what the law rejects as incompatible with itself. What it throws out as being inadmissible in articulated, differentiated experience.

The potential charge of sexual eroticism as a transgressive force comes from the fact that it is repudiated by the social code. If society decides, on the other hand, to quite simply admit certain sexual practices to its code of norms, then the cathexis of transgression is defused and the experience of continuity which lies behind is repressed deeper into the unconscious. It is for this reason that Bataille proposes the mediators of this continuity as:

"*Le rire*, évanouissement du sens et seule possibilité de communication. Rire du savoir, de la peur, du moi, donc de toute stase assumée et traversée. - *L'érotisme* : 'l'affirmation de la vie jusqu'à dans la mort'. C'est à dire l'affirmation de la continuité, de la fusion, de l'union à travers la séparation et la discontinuité".
The laugh: *collapse of sense and the only possibility of communication. Laughter at the expense of knowledge, fear, the ego, and every other stagnation in the flow of experience. Eroticism: reaffirmation of life to the point of death. In other words, reaffirmation of continuity, fusion, union, in the very experience of separation and discontinuity.*
(Kristeva)

Implied is utter indifference to the social structure and defiance of its values:

"De quoi rire ici-bas, sinon de Dieu ?" dit Bataille. Ce qui signifie également : de quoi rire ici-bas sinon du fantôme du père qui dérobe et étouffe ce cri de folie qui est le désir de la mère ? De quoi rire sinon de l'emploi de la langue selon la loi ?
'What should we laugh about down here on earth, if not God?' wrote Bataille. Which is the same as saying: what should we laugh about, if not the phantom of the father which masks and smothers the cry of madness expressing desire for the mother? What should we laugh about if not the use of language within law?
(Sollers)

This is the Laughter of Derision. Perhaps now we are in a position to answer the question of why science is incapable of operating its own autocritique ...

"pourquoi, dans la science, la position du sujet tracé par l'interdit et surgissant de sa transgression dans la poussée du désir, ne peut être exposée. La science qui résulte du domaine du travail ne peut se développer qu'à l'intérieur du domaine délimité de l'interdit où le désir est dérivé et le sujet, le sujet que la transgression dénude, enfoui. La science, sous peine de se détruire, ne peut faire retour à son sujet producteur".

why science is incapable of acknowledging the subject, as defined by prohibition and its transgression under the pressure of desire. Science is an outcome of work and can only develop inside the sphere, delineated by prohibition, which deflects desire and buries the subject exposed by transgression. At the risk of destroying itself, science cannot acknowledge the subject which produces it.
(Jean-Louis Baudry)

Bataille employs a process of negativity to question the vision of homogeneous reality proposed by scientific knowledge. This concept of negativity is derived from Hegel, but Bataille gives it a different interpretation. Julia Kristeva clearly points out this difference:

*"Hegel supprime la négativité sous l'unité du concept et du savoir absolu : Bataille retrouve la négativité dans le moment refoulé du savoir absolu qu'est l'expérience immédiate".
Hegel suppresses negativity under the unity of the concept and Absolute Knowledge. Bataille rediscovers negativity in immediate experience, the repressed moment of Absolute Knowledge.*

Similarly, for Hegel desire is the agent which dissolves the 'other' or the 'object' into the 'conscience en soi' or the 'sujet unaire', while for Bataille desire undoes the 'sujet unaire' and returns him to the immediate experience which he has repressed. Again, it is extremely important to grasp the relation between Bataille's concept of negativity and this reference to immediate experience. Bataille confronts the scientific vision of the world with its negative face, which, according to the dictates of its rational logic, must not exist. This non-existence is repressed by the conscious subject only to return as a disruptive force which splits the homogeneous appearance of his reality, and by repercussion, his own sense of presence in that reality. It is this sense of absence, returning to assert its absence in the present, which makes immediate experience unthinkable for the rational thinking process. Here is the meaning of Sollers's extension of Nietzsche's concept of reality as fiction, (2) quoted above by Barthes. Similarly, if our experience of reality is penetrated by a process of fiction, it follows that literature, and art in general, is concerned with issues which go far beyond the narrow category of Modernism. Sollers explains this well when he writes:

"Nous sommes pris aujourd'hui dans la contradiction suivante : parler de 'littérature' pour faire entendre

qu'il s'agit en même temps de quelque chose de *tout autre*, que les signes que nous déchiffrons ou traçons encore, il est plus que jamais nécessaire de les rendre à leur contrôle maximum mais aussi à leur dimension dérobée, ambiguë, qui ne les distingue pas des signes réels dont *ils ne sont pas la représentation*".
Today we are caught in the contradiction of speaking about 'literature' in a way which indicates that something quite different is involved. While the linguistic signs that we use must, more than ever, be given their maximum formal efficacy, they must also be given a denuded and ambiguous dimension, which refuses to distinguish them from the real signs whose representation they are not.

Tel Quel's analysis uncovers the whole dilemma of twentieth century art. Straight away, of course, it is a question of formalism. Formalism of one kind or another has dominated this century's interpretation of art in an effort to destroy the influence of nineteenth century positivism, but it has finally lost all sense of direction by incorporating this same conception inside the structure of the art work itself. The formalist notion of art's autonomy is self-defeating: both Kristeva and Sollers insist on this issue:

"Il ne s'agit pas chez Bataille de *pensée, d'écriture ou de discours*, au sens formaliste de tous ces termes. Il s'agit de *l'expérience* qui est toujours une contradiction entre la présence du sujet et sa perte, entre la pensée et sa dépense, entre la liaison (Logos) et sa séparation".
For Bataille it is not a question of thought, writing or discourse, in the formalist sense of those terms. It is a question of the experience which is always a contradiction between the subject's presence and his loss, between thought and its expenditure, between the liaison, or logos, and its separation.
(Kristeva)

For his part Sollers has written in connection with Bataille's thought:

"Ce mouvement porte, d'emblée, non seulement sur une désintégration de la logique apprise, logique qui tire toute sa force de la mise en place de la grammaire, mais encore, parallèlement, et pour des motifs d'appartenance profonde entre langage et sexualité, sur les interdits sexuels".
This movement of thought is directly oriented, not only towards a disintegration of logic as we have learnt it, based on grammar, but parallel to that, and on

account of the profound link between language and sexuality, towards the sexual prohibitions.

Fiction goes beyond conventional reality to invoke what has been repressed in its formation. In doing so it defines reality as a sense of absence caught in the immediacy of an experience which eludes the conscious thinking subject. The subject is consequently defined as split, or displaced, by the experience of heterogeneity. Bataille's practice of literature captures the ever present moment of silence in social discourse, the returning echo of what socially determined language fails to articulate. His concept of negativity calls the subject's attention to an experience which, if thought, will dissolve the subject in the indifference of the unknown outside. Kristeva seizes this perfectly in her definition of poetic language:

"Le langage poétique est une irruption violente de la négativité dans le discours, qui dénonce toute unité et détruit le sujet en détruisant la logique; il sombre dans la nuit".

Poetic language is a violent irruption of negativity in discourse, denouncing every form of unity and destroying the subject in a destruction of logic; it plunges into night.

(1) Jean-Louis Baudry, Essay in *Colloque de Cérisy*, ed. Bourgois, coll. 10-18.

(2) See above, 'The Shadow of Fiction', on Philippe Sollers.



Sculpture, Chambonas, Ardèche.



ANTONIN ARTAUD, Photo Georges Pastier.

THOUGHT, the BODY, the UNCONSCIOUS

On Antonin Artaud

In a text eight years before *Cérisy*, (1) Ph. Sollers wrote:

"Dans tous ses écrits il n'est pas de mot qu'Artaud prononce plus souvent, ni avec plus d'obstination et de force que de celui de pensée".
In all his writings, from the beginning to the end of his harried life, Artaud pronounces no word more frequently, with more force and obstinacy, than thought.

Artaud doctor of philosophy? What kind of philosophy can this be, coming from the mouth of this old jerk, failed theoretician of the theatre, megalomaniac, alienated in-mate of a mental asylum? But no, rather the thinking underneath of thought turned over, more the refusal of thought in its unwillingness to function, patchy, sliding, uneasy, reluctant, (self-effacing?), above all the impossibility of thought. Artaud mad, crazy old Art?

"Artaud a dénoncé à la fois la folie et la société qui prononce le mot de folie. Ce qu'on appelle *folie* n'est sans doute jamais que ce à quoi la raison refuse de faire face et qu'elle suscite elle-même au besoin pour se transformer. En ce sens, la raison est cruelle, et Artaud l'a vécue en lui comme telle, comme l'aventure même de la raison".
Artaud denounces both madness and the society which pronounces the word. What goes under the name of madness is doubtless never anything other than that which reason refuses to confront. Indeed reason instigates madness when it needs to transform itself. In this sense reason is cruel, and Artaud directly experienced it as such, as the adventure of reason itself.

Here perhaps we have a valuable definition of Artaud's thought, the reverse, inverse, obverse, of social and institutional currency; and Artaud's notion of cruelty, this living of the thought process in a terror imposed by the complacency of ideas. But now a further preci-

sion:

"Il (Artaud) introduit dans ce qu'il appelle la pensée la présence abrupte du corps".
Into what he calls thought, he (Artaud) introduces the abrupt presence of the body.

This proposition bursts in upon us, tearing through our habits of thought. A philosophical tradition has come full circle, passing from an initial stage where a process of sense emanates uncertainly from its origins in matter, through a succession of ever increasing stages of independence during which a referent becomes displaced in an outward projection, to a point of balance where the Idea makes its triumphal return, searching for those same origins in the process of History. It is this balance which Artaud tips over when he retrieves the body of matter and displays it to us as our own absence. Absence, in that the body which Artaud offers us, as the space in which his thought attempts to operate, has escaped to the furthest borders of our consciousness. Yet with Artaud, the forgotten and neglected body in its subterranean blindness does not remain inert, mute, but resurges through the crucial encounter between thought and language.

"Non pas un langage déjà accessible, codifié, perché dans la parole dite ou écrite, mais arrivant de partout et occupant tout, atteignant à la fois notre corps et venant de notre nuit interne, au croisement de l'espace et de la pensée, là où le non-sens passe dans le sens et où, en propres termes, nous réalisons nos signes".

Not an accessible, pre-codified language, stuck in the mode of writing or speech, but rather one which invades from all sides, reaching our body and coming from the night inside us, at the intersection of space and thought, where non-sense turns into sense and where we literally realize our signs.

These words allow Sollers to define thought as the space:

"où nous cessons de distinguer fiction et réalité pour nous en tenir à un plan généralisé des signes".
where we cease to distinguish fiction from reality and adhere to a generalized system of signs.

Three elements combine:

"La pensée, le corps, l'inconscient : telles sont les trois figures ordonnatrices du langage brisé d'Artaud".
Thought, the body, the unconscious: such are the three principal figures of Artaud's fractured language.

Artaud invokes the problematic of language as a process of thought worked over by the new dimension of an unconscious which is the property of the body. This is the problematic of language explored in its different aspects at C erisy. In a way it is less a question of investigating Artaud's texts, since they defy investigation, but of exploring the possibilities of language which they suggest. Straight away the language envisaged by the members of *Tel Quel* encounters a resistance from the traditional discourse of the Institution. Marcelin Pleynet points directly to this issue as being fundamental. Of the two themes in Artaud, he writes:

"L'un serait *le sujet* Artaud (revendication du moi), et l'autre *le th atre* Ce que, dans cette perspective, je voudrais souligner tout d'abord c'est que s'il semble qu'en derni re instance on aboutisse   ces g n ralit s : *Sujet* (Artaud) et *Th atre* (occasion, histoire) comme pr texte   investissements, le r sultat de la lecture est la destruction et l'effacement de chacune de ces g n ralit s. Je dirai que la lecture est ici cette destruction, cet effacement *systematiquement*   l'oeuvre".

One is the subject Artaud (the assertion of his ego), and the other is the theatre ... in this perspective I want first to emphasize that though in the final analysis we seem to arrive at these generalities: the Subject (Artaud) and the Theatre (event, history), as a pretext for cathexis, yet actually a reading of Artaud results in their destruction and eradication. I would say that in this case reading itself is this destruction and systematic eradication at work.

And further on Pleynet addresses himself directly to those who maintain the established academic discourse of the University:

"Sauf   vouloir travestir le texte, la lecture savante ne peut pas ne pas remarquer que tous les concepts, que tous les  l ments culturels qu'avance Artaud sont en contradiction avec le code qui en autorise le savoir. Ce qui ne tente pas bien entendu de mettre en question la r alit  historique (et subjective) d'un savoir mais son r le".

Unless one wants to travesty the text, a specialist reading cannot avoid noticing that all the concepts and cultural elements put forward by Artaud contradict the code which authorizes such erudition. This does not imply a denial of the historical and subjective reality of such knowledge, but only the role which it plays.

Julia Kristeva takes up this problem and places it at

the level of a specifically theoretical discourse by defining her approach as:

"une invasion de la neutralité théorique positiviste par l'expérience même du sujet de la théorie, par sa capacité de se mettre en procès".
an invasion of the theoretical neutrality of positivism by asserting the fundamental experience of the subject of such theory and its capacity to function as a process.

Basing herself on the discoveries of psychoanalysis, Kristeva puts forward a thesis opposing what she calls the 'Sujet Unaire' with a subject divided by the dimension of the unconscious. The 'Sujet Unaire' is the fully constituted subject of consciousness and is dominated by the Law and the Name of the Father. In contrast:

"la psychanalyse actuelle, lacanienne, propose une théorie du sujet comme unité clivée, surgie et déterminée par le manque".
contemporary Lacanian psychoanalysis puts forward a theory of the subject as a divided unity which reappears determined by lack.

This Lacanian subject dissolves the Sujet Unaire, which is:



The young Artaud in *Passion of St. Joan* by Carl Dreyer.

"mise en abîme, liquéfié, excédé par ce que nous appelons 'le procès de la signifiante'".
dethroned, liquified, exceeded by what we call the 'process of signification' (2)

Julia Kristeva injects the question of the subject into theoretical discourse and so places theory outside the reach of the institution with its tendency towards recuperation. The essay written by Sollers for Cérisy occupies a conspicuously different, but intentionally complimentary, position. Read together, these two texts complete each other in the demonstration of a different practice of writing. Both texts take Artaud's writings as their point of departure. While Kristeva concentrates her attention on the underlying implications of Artaud's thought, Sollers investigates the dynamics of his prose. Significantly in this respect, Kristeva develops a highly coherent theoretical articulation while Sollers comes to an abrupt halt in an act of violence.

"Dans ce qui parle, dans ce qui écrit il y a depuis toujours ce qui empêche et empêchera toujours de parler, d'écrire, chaque fois transformé, décalé, tordu, perdu, prélevé, bref un crime, et il me semblerait moins noir, c'est à dire plus criminel encore et d'un autre point de vue, moins mort et vivant, de faire ici comme si Antonin Artaud, n'avait pas été assassiné".

In that which speaks, or writes, there has always been and always will be something which impedes speech and writing, on each occasion transformed, shifted, twisted, lost, deducted, in short a crime, and it would seem to me less sinister, that is still more criminal, and from another point of view less living-dead, to pretend here that Antonin Artaud was not murdered.

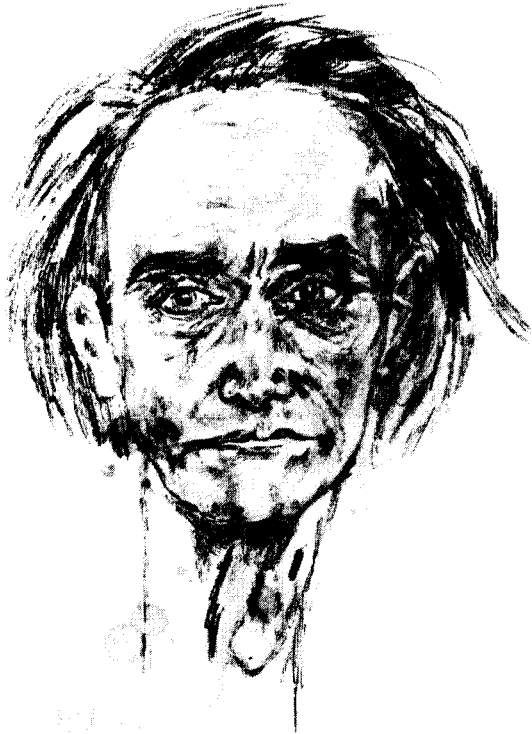
Sollers confronts us with the inevitable outcome of Artaud's refusal of the social consensus and the language which it employs, and he does so in the form of an accusation. Through his stubborn condemnation of the community's language, Artaud became an outcast and finally a victim and scapegoat.

"Qui assassine Artaud ? La famille. Qui la famille, quoi la famille ? Pas seulement la petite charmille, vous, moi, eux, toi, lui, elle, je, il, elle, ils, elles, bref la cellule granulée caviar, mais plus profondément, je veux dire plus coïtalement et crottalement, la méta-famille, le schéma, l'emblème, le symbole soi-disant inné qui veut se faire naître et nier l'inné".

Who murdered Artaud? The family. Which family,

what do you mean the family? Not the little nest-bed of you, me, them, him, her, I, he, she, they, in short the caviar-coated granulated family cell, but more profoundly, I mean more coitally and excrementally, the meta-family, the schema, the emblem, the supposedly innate symbol which wants to come alive and deny the innate.

But why go to such drastic lengths over this small affair of language? Because, if language brings the community together, its bond is sealed by something beyond language, or, as Freud said, by a murder committed in common. Why does Artaud stick in the conscience of the community? Because in his language Artaud breaks the community's tacit agreement and speaks this crime; because Artaud's language is an obstacle to the community's will to forget; because finally Artaud's language stumbles over the well guarded silence at the origins



Antonin Artaud, Self-portrait.

of the community which preserves its murderous will intact. Listen to Artaud himself.

"ce n'est pas une façon de naître, que d'être copulé et masturbé neuf fois par la membrane, la membrane brillante, qui dévore sans dents comme disent les upanishads, et je sais que j'étais né autrement, de mes oeuvres et non d'une mère mais la mère a voulu me prendre et vous en voyez les résultats dans ma vie. Je ne suis né que de ma douleur. Et cette douleur il faut croire que l'utérus l'a trouvée bonne, puisqu'il a voulu la prendre pour lui et s'en alimenter pour lui-même sous couleur de maternité".

The way to be born is not to be copulated and masturbated nine times by the membrane, the suffusive membrane which devours without teeth as the Upanishads say, and I know that I was born differently, by my works and not by a mother, but the mother wanted to embrace me and you can see the results in my life. I was born of nothing but my suffering. And believe me the uterus found this suffering to its taste, since it took it in and fed off it under the guise of maternity.

It must be realized that these lines are intolerable and that their author paid the price imposed by the community when he was overtaken by the same silence which he, for one, would not pass over in silence.

- (1) Ph. Sollers, 'La Pensée et des signes', in *Logiques*, ed. du Seuil. 1965.
- (2) See below 'The Subject in Process', a reading of Julia Kristeva.



JULIA KRISTEVA, photo Anne de Brunhoff.

"La psychanalyse ... ouvre sur un abîme qui est probablement l'enjeu des temps modernes : l'articulation de la biologie au sens, donc l'animal comme parlant".
Psychoanalysis ... opens onto an abyss which is probably the modern world's major challenge: the expression of biology in meaning, and therefore of animality in language.

Julia Kristeva in Introduction, *Polylogue*.

THE SUBJECT IN PROCESS

A Reading of Julia Kristeva

First we must define this space of our modernity. With the concept of modernity we adopt a conviction that we no longer occupy the same space as before, that something has changed, that a transformation has taken place, that all our terms are altered from now on. But when and how did we cross over to the modern world? Can we associate this strange event with a date in history? Or does it have its roots in an experience of staggering technological development, overflowing in ideological schism and military upheaval? We are caught in the mystery of Beginning. Somewhere a clock has been put to turn. We have inherited our modernity and we pedal in time as an hysteric menaced by time. For a second time we have missed the beginning.

Failing to define our modernity we can fall back on the tactic of defining what it is not. Clearly if the concept of modernity is to be of any consequence it has to be based on a sharp rupture with established culture. But such a venture is much more perilous than at first sight it might appear, since if established patterns of culture no longer apply to the changed conditions of our existence, then ultimately we deprive ourselves of the means of thought and judgment dependent on that culture. Still more serious, since the construct of conscious identity is the cohesive guiding principle behind thought and judgment, if we insist in a perception of modernity, by implication we condemn our sense of identity to atrophy. The crisis of modernity is the crisis of subjective identity seen in the inability of the classical subject of established culture to assume an alien modernity and in his impression that this modernity functions without him. Where he locates himself, there, by definition, his modernity is absent while yet curiously maintaining its claim on his attention. Fascinated by its absence, the classical subject passes his time in a game of compulsive repetition, sifting through his experience, unable to believe in his own imminent disappearance.

At the turn of the present century, the arts responded to this predicament with an extraordinary upsurge of energy and dynamism. If we refer specifically to the art of painting, a moment can be located in the experiment of Impressionism. Straight away we notice a contradiction and an ambivalence underlying the character of art. Armed with precepts derived from current scientific theory, the Impressionists undertook an ever more minute exploration of natural phenomena. But contrary to all expectation, the outcome of their efforts was a dislocation from nature. The hard outline of objects and the regulating principle of perspective dissolved in a flux of colour and paint. What took place in the Impressionist prism, to fix the whole course of twentieth century art, if not *a failure to recognize*, set against the background of a profound crisis of the 'subject'? Twentieth century art has discovered that the method of figuration no longer serves to convey its experience and in reaching out beyond it contacts the limits of the code of representation. Implied is a rupture with the structures of meaning, and therefore with language, and since such an act necessarily takes place in the silence of misunderstanding and inadequate interpretation, twentieth century art has remained trapped inside the question of how to represent the figure.

How are we to think through this crisis of the 'subject'? It is clear that the institutional language of traditional thought is unable to provide an answer. Its structure of explanation lies helpless. Can we develop a theory of the modern 'subject', of the 'subject in process'? Can we develop a theory of a modern practice of language? Or rather, can we develop a practice of discourse, of different discourses, of a plurality of discourses, capable of feeling out the experience of our modernity in language? This is the programme.

Julia Kristeva has explored the problem from one angle in a series of books. Among these, two operate together. In *La Révolution du langage poétique*, she indicates a preliminary theory and then uses it to investigate the concrete historical situation of the last half of the nineteenth century, through the two transformational literary practices of Lautréamont and Mallarmé. In *Polylogue* she shows how her theoretical articulation develops in a modern practice of literature in the twentieth century.

La chora - le thétique - le sémiotique - le symbolique.

We should notice straight away that Julia Kristeva does not address herself to the familiar linguistic and semiological preoccupations which centre on the meaning

or sense of language, but rather carries her investigation to the point where language and meaning are formed.

In the beginning was the Word. But the child is not born with the facility of language. Language is learnt at the cost of long and painstaking effort, and marks the entrance of the child into social organization. How then do we explain this origin, this *before language*? Julia Kristeva borrows the term 'chora' from Plato to designate an obscure, unstable and formless area of non-expressive movement or drives, of 'charges énergétiques' and 'pulsions'. Plato himself immediately recognized such a concept of a pre-conceptual state before language as a 'raisonnement bâtard', but here Julia Kristeva confronts Plato within his own tradition by associating the chora with the 'rythm' of Democritus, and then carries the debate over to her principal frame of reference in psychoanalysis:

"La théorie du sujet proposé par la théorie de l'inconscient nous permettra de lire dans cet espace rythmé, sans thèse, sans position, le procès de constitution de la signifiante".

The theory of the unconscious puts forward a theory of the subject which allows us to read the process of the constitution of meaning in this rhythmical space which is without thesis and without position.

In this way Julia Kristeva associates the chora with a principle belonging to language, and, at the same time, undermines the view that language is an exclusively normatised and homogeneous system of sense. Two further points can be made. If language, while remaining the primary code of socialization, contains the experience of the child's earliest life, we may associate this intralinguistic principle with the mother and more specifically with the body of the mother. Secondly, since this principle is anterior to, and must be mastered by, the process of socialization, it survives in language as a negation, or to use Julia Kristeva's term, as a 'négativité', which distinguishes it from the act of negation in conscious thought elaborated in Hegelian philosophy. Our attention is now carried to the moment when signification takes form in this 'rhythmical space' of language, and Julia Kristeva labels this moment after Husserl and Hjelmslev 'une phase thétique' (*a thetic phase*):

"Nous appellerons cette coupure produisant la position de la signification, une phase *thétique*".
We will call this separation which leads to posing a meaning, the thetic phase.

The thetic phase installs sense in language and allows us to make judgments, but again the key question remains one of origin. Can we, along with the philosophic tradition, accept that the origin of the 'thetic' is to be located in the 'I' of being, the cogito, the transcendental ego? Her reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis leads Julia Kristeva to reverse the proposition:

"La position qui pose la doxa de *l'être* n'est-elle pas logiquement et pratiquement celle du jugement, de la cogitation toujours thétique *pour autant que ce qu'elle pose est un 'je'?*
Logically and practically, doesn't the hypothesis of being always depend on a judgment and on cognitive acts which are always thetic (positional) in so far as they hypothesize an 'I'?

Concluding:

"En d'autres termes, la *thèse* n'est-elle pas avant tout une thèse du 'je', avant d'être une 'thèse naturelle' ou une 'fonction thétique' du jugement ? Et alors, la question ne doit-elle pas porter sur ce qui produit le 'je' plutôt que sur les opérations de ce 'je'-là ? Loin de poser le 'je' jugeant comme origine, pour nous une telle question ne fait que placer le thétique et le doxique comme *internes au procès* de la signification qui les dépasse, et soulève une nouvelle interrogation : comment le thétique qui est une *position* du sujet, a-t-il pu être produit ?"
In other words, isn't the thesis above all a thesis of the 'I', before being a 'natural thesis' or a 'thetic function' of judgment? And so, shouldn't the question concentrate on what produces this 'I' rather than on its operations? Far from supposing that the 'I' of judgment is an origin, such a question will place the thetic function and belief (the doxic) inside the more extensive process of signification, and produce a new line of investigation: how is the thesis, which is the positional act of the subject, produced?

The moment of signification, the thetic, then, is intimately related to the 'subject' and this 'subject' does not exist prior to language but is formed inside and by language. It follows that our sense of personal identity, centred on the 'I', has been determined by our philosophical and cultural tradition, and is only one formation of the subject in language. The 'I' is not an eternal being situated above language with rights over language, but is itself transformable through language. This is the perspective opened up by contemporary psychoanalysis.

Julia Kristeva's work is based on a theory of the 'subject'

to be found in modern psychoanalysis, as developed by Jacques Lacan. But she concentrates her interest on a specific practice of language which remains on the periphery of psychoanalytic theory, the literary text and, by extension, art in general. What is the link between art and psychoanalytic theory, and why does psychoanalysis treat art as incidental and peripheral? As Plato was quick to understand, art is a dangerous rival to systematic thought since it has the same concerns as philosophy and yet refuses to systematize itself in theory.

Is there then no relationship between art and theory? The question is perhaps more delicate than we might suppose. Julia Kristeva argues that the 'thetic' is an integral moment in the formation of signification, and if we exclude it from the practice of art, then we deny art access to the symbolic. Art becomes trapped inside the shapeless domain of the chora and the semiotic drives. In the same way, if art does not have the support of theory, it is unable to resolve its transformation of the subject and finds itself condemned indefinitely to formal repetition. For its part, theory is continually compromised by the prevalently existing formulation of the subject and, while it can indicate the terms of a transformation, it can only do so from the position of that subject. Theory must rely on art practice to shift its subjective position. Left to itself, it can only reiterate a subject which in our case is the subject of transcendental consciousness. It would seem, then, that art and theory are irremediably bound together, and that, while it is a misunderstanding to talk about a theory of art, nevertheless art can never be divorced from the principle of the 'thetic'.

Language in Julia Kristeva's theory is based on two fundamental principles. As a system of signification relating the subject to the social world, it contains the principle of the 'symbolique', while as a vehicle of subjective transformation, it contains a principle derived from that area designated above as the chora and termed by Julia Kristeva the 'sémiotique'. The symbolic and the semiotic both complement and oppose each other in the structure of language. As the guarantor of social meaning, the symbolic is dedicated to imposing its definition on language at the expense of the semiotic, while nevertheless relying on the semiotic to provide the material for social organization. For its part, the semiotic refuses its confinement and struggles to burst through the screen erected by the symbolic. In the normative language of social communication, a balance is established between the two principles which the symbolic then defends against all modification. Of all human activity, art alone has the capacity to revise

this balance, and this is its unique contribution. In its different practices art, at the level of its formal elements, transforms the symbolic, allowing the semiotic drives to be funneled back towards the surface of signification so that the subject is renewed in a series of ever changing positions.

Representation - mimesis

The process of signification installs an inter-dependent relationship between subject and object in language and then seeks to ratify its system by soliciting the authority of a referent in the real world. Once the different elements of the system have crystallized in a symbolic formulation the symbolic dedicates itself to preserving its terms intact. At this point language with its sub-



Giovanni Bellini, The Pieta with St. John.

versive principle of the semiotic becomes a liability and the symbolic ties it down to an external and independent reality presented as anterior to language. In this way language is deprived of its power to engender our relationship with the real and becomes instead dependent on the natural model. Our ideological code identifies the symbolic with the truth of a reality based on the existence of the object and constructs the subject after its likeness. The subject and the object watch each other with fascination in real space? in symbolic space?

But springing from the subject's divided allegiance to the symbolic and the semiotic lived through an experience of language, there is something intolerable about this subjective dependence on the object. What a fabulous culture of the sublime we owe to this discomfort!

Contrary to what might be imagined the great tradition of representational art does not subscribe to an ideology of the object but mediates with this ideology on behalf of the subject:

"La *mimesis* serait précisément la construction d'un objet non pas vrai mais vraisemblable dans la mesure où il est posé comme tel (donc séparé, noté quoique non dénoté), mais en dépendance interne d'un sujet de l'énonciation, différent de l'ego transcendantal en ceci que la *chora* sémiotique n'y est pas supprimée mais relevée au statut de signifiant obéissant ou non aux normes de la locution grammaticale : c'est ainsi que nous entendons l'objet mimétique *connoté*. La *mimesis* participe de l'ordre symbolique, mais pour en reproduire certaines règles constitutives, ou, si l'on veut, la grammaticalité; du coup, elle ne peut pas ne pas poser un objet, mais cet 'objet' n'est qu'un résultat de l'économie pulsionnelle de l'énonciation; la véritable position de cet objet lui reste indifférente".

The object constructed by mimesis is not true but vraisemblable (likely) in that it is presented as an object (therefore separate, noted although not denoted.) It is internally dependent on a subject of enunciation which, however, differs from the transcendental ego in that the semiotic chora is not suppressed there, but is raised to the stature of a signifier, which may or may not obey the norms of grammatical locution: this is what we mean by the connoted mimetic object. Mimesis participates in the order of the symbolic, but only to reproduce certain constitutive rules from it, or, if you prefer, its grammaticality; as a result it cannot avoid posing an object, but this 'object' is only the outcome of the enunciation's economy of drives.

The actual position of this object is a matter of indifference to it.

We might say that we live our subjective dependence on the object as a weight, precisely because 'the real' weighs heavily in the structure of the symbolic. It is the job of art to lift this weight. The symbolic gravitates towards the object and the natural model. On the other hand:

*"L'art consiste à ne pas lâcher le thétique tout en le pulvérisant par la négativité de la transgression".
Art consists in maintaining a hold on the thetic while at the same time pulverizing it with the negativity of transgression.*

This transgression conducts the return of the semiotic:

*"Le sémiotique se charge alors d'être ce signifiant linguistique qui signifie un objet pour un ego, constitués de la sorte comme thétiques. Par son caractère thétique, altérant, le signifiant représente le sujet : entendons qu'il représente non pas l'ego thétique, mais le procès même de sa position".
The semiotic undertakes the role of the linguistic signifier which signifies an object for an ego constituted in this way as thetic. By its transformative thetic character, the signifier represents the subject: not the thetic ego, but the very process of posing it.*

The subject escapes a crushing likeness to the object by opposing the object's stability with the mobility of the signifier. We can see then, that while the symbolic mediates between the subject and the real, its own relationship with the semiotic must be mediated if it is to avoid identification with the real. When this mediation weakens or fails the ultimate consequence is annihilation of the subject in the real. From one point of view we can see that the history of modern art, as opposed to a certain elusive experience asserted by the moments of its highest achievement, is both the symptom of such failure and the active agent of its acceleration. The dislocation and separation of the signifier and signified, arrived at by the formal innovation of the avant-garde at the beginning of this century, explicitly broke the dependence of the symbolic on the natural model. From this point on, Julia Kristeva would argue, art is implicitly concerned with the transformation of the subject. However such concepts as the avant-garde and transformation must be considered very carefully, since they come from a frame of reference in nineteenth century sociological thought. Perhaps we can characterize the nineteenth century as experiencing a crucial struggle between a dominant vision of scienti-

fic positivism, which attempts to identify the symbolic with the real, and a contestation in the form of Marxist thought, which makes use of the symbolic in an attempt to change the real. In both cases the symbolic is collapsed into the real. The subject is excluded and becomes a victim of real events. The experience which emerges from the nineteenth century, and surges out of the crises of technological advances, warfare and mass extermination

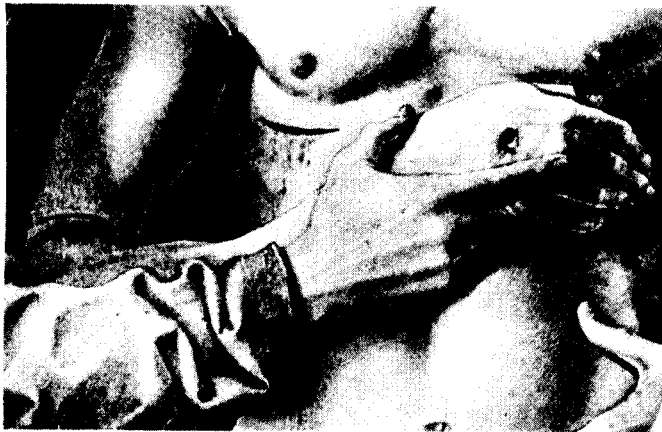


Herman Nitsch, Action.

in the twentieth century, is rather one of subjective void or absence. The subject ceases to recognize itself in the real, and lacking the mediating services of the symbolic, loses the ability to function. The crisis of modern art and the crisis of the subject are intimately linked. The subject, as void or absence, cannot be represented by art. The subject can no longer define itself on the natural model. The problematic of contemporary art is to develop an alternative to representation based on a non-naturalist sensibility.

Beyond a post-formalism

Or rather a conception of art after the last post. We live today in brutal subjection to the real; in abject realization of the object. (1) It is hardly surprising that such a situation should stimulate an investigation of signification in language (linguistics), and the formation of primitive society (anthropology). The effort is to re-find, or re-found, the symbolic structure on which the community is based. The social sciences have the job of re-cementing social consciousness. This project awakens the interest of one social science in particular - psychoanalysis (Freud), and one activity outside science and the social sciences - art (Bataille). Psychoanalysis operates a critique of the social sciences, as art transgresses the norms of the social bond. All the same, it is striking that the most advanced thought of the late twentieth century should search for confirmation of its social structures in the remnants of primitive society, dating back to a pre-historic age, before time, society, thought, as we know them.



Giovanni Bellini, Pietà, detail.

Anthropological study turns up a crucial aspect of primitive society in focusing our attention on sacrifice. However, far from confirming our inclination to view sacrifice as socially destructive, anthropology insists on how it plays an indispensable part in the maintenance of the social structure. Julia Kristeva recognizes as much when she writes:

"Elle (l'anthropologie sociale) accomplit un immense pas lorsqu'elle associe les choses sacrificielles aux choses sociales".
Social anthropology made an immense step forward in associating the element of sacrifice with the social structure.

But we must be very careful to define the role of sacrifice in society, and not treat it on a par with other social practices. We need only look to how modern man recoils in horror at the mention of sacrifice to realize the singularity of this role. Sacrifice only takes on its full dimension when seen in the light of Freud's investigation of sexuality and the unconscious, in other words, of a side of human experience, either outside the social structure, or at least heavily censored by its laws. Freud's speculations allow Julia Kristeva to define sacrifice as an:

"acte violent qui met fin à la violence (sémiotique, présymbolique) préalable, et qui, en la déposant dans une victime, la déplace dans l'ordre symbolique au moment même où cet ordre se fonde. Le sacrifice instaure le symbole en même temps que l'ordre symbolique, et ce symbole 'premier' qui est la victime d'un meurtre, ne fait que représenter la violence structurale de l'irruption de langage comme meurtre du soma, altération du corps, captation de la pulsion".
a violent act which brings a previous state of violence (semiotic, presymbolic) to an end, and which, by concentrating it on a single victim, displaces it into the symbolic order, at the precise moment of that order's foundation. Sacrifice simultaneously establishes the symbol and the symbolic order; this 'first' symbol, in the form of a murder victim represents the structural violence of the irruption of language as murder, alteration of the body and inhibition of the drives.

Sacrifice then, is the condition under which the symbolic subdues the unchecked flow of semiotic impulses and establishes the social order. Sacrifice is situated on the border-line of the social pact, pointing out its limits:

"C'est seulement à partir de cette position en bordure

du social que le sacrifice peut être envisagé non seulement comme une imposition de sa cohérence, mais aussi comme la limite de cette cohérence. De l'autre côté de la limite, il y a l'a-symbolique, la dissolution de l'ordre, l'effacement des différences et enfin de l'humain dans l'animalité".

We can only envisage sacrifice from this position on the border of the social, not only as enforcing social coherence, but as marking the limit of this coherence. Beyond this frontier is the preserve of the a-symbolic, the dissolution of order, the effacement of difference and ultimately of the very distinction between animal and human.

Sacrifice, to borrow Julia Kristeva's phrase, is an 'irruption in language', and therefore consciousness, permitting the community limited exercise of the organized repression in its composition. It does not align itself with language but with the unconscious:

"Non pas d'une langue, mais de l'inconscient qui est la condition non dite de la systématisation linguistique".

Not with a language, but with the unconscious which is the unavowed condition of the linguistic system.

We can easily see why the phenomenon of sacrifice directly concerns psychoanalysis and why it attracted the interest of Freud. In the same way, the whole question explodes in twentieth century art; in the work of Picasso, de Kooning and Newman, as in the writing of Artaud and Bataille. Julia Kristeva shows how this contemporary concern goes back to the origins of art. She insists that art has always been intimately linked to sacrifice, and that in fact we can only grasp the full dimension of art when we see it in a sacrificial context. According to Julia Kristeva's definition, art is a:

"pratique qui entoure le sacrifice et qui à travers sa position, avec elle et malgré elle, déploie la dépense de la véhémence sémiotique, bouscule la bordure symbolique et tend à dissoudre l'ordre logique, c'est à dire en somme la limite d'où s'instaure l'humain et le social. Il s'agit de la représentation qui précède généralement le sacrifice et qui est le laboratoire du théâtre, de la poésie, du chant, de la danse, etc. : l'art. Qu'elle mime le combat préalable à la mise à mort est secondaire par rapport au fait qu'elle mime".

practice accompanying sacrifice, which, by virtue of this alliance or even in spite of it, deploys the discharge of semiotic vehemence, upsets the border of the symbolic, and tends to dissolve the logical order - in short the established limits of all that is human

and social. Art, in the form of theatre, poetry, song and dance, takes charge of the representation which generally precedes the sacrifice. The fact that it mimes a combat preceding the sacrificial act is secondary to the fact that it mimes.

The original function of art must be situated in the close vicinity of sacrifice, but the two should not be confused. According to the theory outlined above, sacrifice mediates between semiotic violence and social restraint; but far from advocating the free play of the semiotic, its objective is to limit its scope. As such, it is an invaluable mechanism for assuring social order, and in consequence, religion, as the principle organ of mediation between man and society, places it at the centre of its mystery. The sacrificial act may be tolerated as the unavoidable minimum of semiotic expression, but it is clear that even though carefully codified and hedged around by ritual ceremony, the ecstasy provoked in *passage to the act* of violence escapes organized restraint and is therefore a point of weakness and crisis in the social fabric. With this in mind, the efforts of religion are obviously directed towards incorporating sacrifice exclusively at the level of the symbolic. Religion has practiced many different forms of sacrifice, human, animal, vegetable; but without doubt, Christianity took an immense step forward when it limited sacrifice to the ceremonial commemoration of the crucifixion. In the commemoration of Christ's death the symbolic completely dominates the real and entirely banishes any resort to an act of violence. However, Christianity ran a very large risk in denying any form of actual expression to semiotic violence, and in the event, it could only do so by enlisting the services of art. Christianity saw that art had privileged access to the semiotic and thus offered a potential alternative to sacrifice. The genius of Christianity was to have promoted art from the role of an accessory to sacrifice by accentuating the representation of the sacrificial act. Viewed in this light, the two most striking aspects of Renaissance art, the predominance of violent scenes, and the heightening of realistic effect by the device of perspective, take on a new dimension. In a mysterious manner artistic representation achieves the same release of semiotic drives as resort to an act of violence. Here the parallel ends, because art attains its effect by diametrically opposite means to those of sacrifice. Where sacrifice seeks to limit violence, art transforms it in a symbolic practice. In other words, at the moment when the symbolic institutes its censorship in the real, art incorporates the transfer of semiotic drives and assures them continued expression in a symbolic practice which defuses their potential resort to violence. Julia

Kristeva grasps this distinction between art and sacrifice clearly when she writes:

"Tandis que le sacrifice assigne la *limite* productrice de la jouissance dans l'ordre symbolique et social, l'art précise le moyen - le seul - que la jouissance se préserve pour s'infiltrer dans cet ordre".
While sacrifice assigns the productive limit of semiotic pleasure ('jouissance') in the symbolic and the social order, art provides the sole means left by which pleasure may infiltrate this order. (2)



Rembrandt, Abraham's Sacrifice.

But where does artistic representation derive its mysterious power? Perhaps the answer lies in its treatment of what René Girard has called the 'function of doubles' (*Les choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*), by which violence is triggered off when a certain mimetic threshold is crossed. Man, a social animal, defined by difference, feels menaced by a likeness which recalls an origin beyond difference. When the semiotic achieves a certain intensity of pressure on the screen of the symbolic and on social consciousness, likeness resurges, dissolving identity in a recourse to acts of violence. If we accept such a mechanism, we can see that artistic representation approaches the experience of 'doubles' only to replace the outcome of violence in the real by channeling the semiotic towards expression in the symbolic. No doubt this is what enables Julia Kristeva to assert that artistic representation is ultimately indifferent to the object which it constitutes. In the same way perhaps, we can understand Freud's assertion that no repression is implied in the concept of sublimation.

It may seem anachronistic to discuss sacrifice in the context of modern and contemporary art. We have the tendency perhaps to associate sacrifice with a distant past, long since mastered by the advances of civilization. It may come as a shock to realize that Christian culture was so preoccupied with sacrifice, and that its mastery of the forces involved was precarious and perhaps never more than partial. We might do well to consider our attitudes with some scepticism. We might even ask ourselves if our convictions with regard to progress and the achievements of the modern world are not in inverse proportion to an underlying anxiety and insecurity. Recent history is far from devoid of the trace of sacrifice. Certainly the modern world has felt its own pulse. When we deny Christian culture as an archaism, we question the continued efficacy of religion's mediation in the changed circumstances of the modern world; but we also hope perhaps to avoid the real events of our century. If our culture can no longer contain those events in the symbolic, at least it provides an uncomfortable reminder. The blithe and complacent demand for a new culture may be nearer to a demand for no culture at all.

What takes place in a society when the intercession of religion is removed? What happens when the religious mediation between the symbolic and the real can no longer contain the chain of real events? The events of the twentieth century reduce the discourse of the religious institutions to homily, and in response, the community repudiates religious conscience as an obstruc-

tion of its acts. Are we not spectators before a destruction of the symbolic in the real? To use the obscure and ominous words of Freud, 'In the beginning was the deed'.

We could perhaps call the concentration camps and the widespread political torture of the twentieth century contemporary expressions of sacrifice were it not that they incite further atrocities. What is the role of art in a world which has repressed and ultimately evacuated religious mediation between the symbolic and the real? Art has been deprived of its role of representing the religious mystery of the Passion, and faced with the phenomenon of genocide, the representational model itself breaks down.

La dépense - le rejet.

What is the relationship of art to thought? To what extent can we think the practice of art? To what extent can art approach thought, to become itself a process of thought? Or to reverse the question, what distinguishes art from thought?

The term 'rejet' ('*rejection*' or '*expulsion*') acknowledges the encounter between Freud and the theory of negation or the:

"*négation interne au jugement*"
negation as an element incorporated inside judgment.

"*La négation interne au jugement est une négation du prédicat, elle est liée à la fonction de prédication, elle est impossible en dehors de la relation syntaxique*".
The negation inside judgment is a negation of the predicate. It depends on the function of predication and is impossible outside syntax.

The negation as an element inside or belonging to judgment then, is:

"*une marque de la fonction symbolique et/ou syntaxique*".
an index of the symbolic and/or syntactic function. (3)

But Julia Kristeva has already situated the literary text on the borders of the symbolic, at a point where it tilts into the semiotic. Such a notion is based on the Freudian theory of the unconscious as proposing the existence of an area of human experience beyond the range of conscious conception. The notion of the 'rejet' then, will offer an account of a negation which continually resists and eludes the thinking process. If we are to grasp the

concerns of literature and art, Julia Kristeva suggests that:

"Il faut donc sortir de l'enclos langagier pour saisir ce qui opère dans un temps génétique et logique préalable à la constitution de la fonction symbolique absorbant le négatif dans le prédicat. Il faut sortir de la fonction verbale vers ce qui la produit, pour saisir le procès du rejet qui anime les pulsions d'un corps pris dans le réseau de la nature et de la société".

We must go beyond the enclosing circle of language in order to grasp what operates in a genetic and logical phase preceeding the constitution of the symbolic function which absorbs the negative in the predicate. We must break out of the verbal function and look towards what produces it, so as to grasp the process of rejection (the 'rejet') which animates the drives of a body caught in the network of nature and society.



The category of the real has always remained philosophically ambiguous. Does the real exist prior to thought, is it generated by thought, or is it a matter of indifference to philosophical enquiry? Freudian theory enables us to consider the problem at the level of the body. While the functioning body is a complete unit, it produces and discards waste or 'rejets', which on leaving the body, fall away to the outside and constitute an object by definition absent:

"Dans cet espace précis, corporel, biologique mais déjà social (liant aux autres), agit une négativité non symbolisée, non arrêtée dans les termes du jugement, non prédiquée comme négation interne au jugement. Cette négativité - cette dépense - pose un objet comme séparé du corps propre et, au moment même de la séparation, le fixe comme *absent* : comme *signe*. Le rejet donc instaure l'objet comme l'objet réel et du même coup signifiable, au sens de déjà pris comme un objet interne au système signifiant, comme subordonné au sujet qui le pose par le signe".

In this precise space which is corporal and biological, yet already social (attaching to others) there operates a negativity which is neither symbolised nor fixed in the terms of the judgment (non-predicated as a negation inside judgment). This negativity - this expenditure ('dépense') - separates an object from the body, and simultaneously fixes it as absent: as a sign. The 'rejet' therefore establishes the object as at once real and signifiable, in the sense of an object which is already incorporated in the signifying system and subordinate to the subject which proposes the sign.

In this way:

"rejet - anal, sadique, agressif - pose l'objet et le signe et ... constitue le réel dans lequel se trouve la fantasmatique ou l'objective réalité".
the 'rejet', anal, sadistic, aggressive, poses both the object and the sign and ... constitutes the real in which is lodged fantasmatic or 'objective' reality.

We can easily see that a real which admits the 'fantasmatic' and 'objective' as equal terms can have little appeal for conventional philosophy. Such a real, on the other hand, excites the interest of the arts and provides the focal point for their obsessive sifting of experience.

The 'rejet' establishes the real as absent by definition, and sets the sign in its place. It remains for us to consider how this model functions in the different practices of the symbolic. Julia Kristeva refers to Freud's short text, the '*Vernichtung*' (more properly 'the denial',

but translated in the English as 'negation'). (4) Freud accepted that symbolization entailed a partial repression of pleasure. This repression, he suggested, could be, again partially, relieved by a 'negation'. In other words, the repression can be admitted to consciousness on the condition that it is denied there. The negation then, provides an 'intellectual acceptance' of the repression, albeit of a compromised and contradictory character. The psychoanalytic method, according to Freud, can go one step further. In psychoanalysis, he writes: 'We succeed in conquering the negation as well, and in bringing about a *full intellectual acceptance of the repressed*; but the repressive process itself is not yet removed by this.' Freud states unequivocally here that full intellectual acceptance does not imply removal of the repression. Such an admission gives us a crucial insight into the nature of thought and the basis for a clear distinction between thought and art. But Freud is even more specific about the nature of 'intellectual acceptance'. He suggests that negation undoes one



Mantegna, Dead Christ.

consequence of repression: 'namely, of the *ideational content* of what is repressed not reaching consciousness', (which is the same as saying that the *ideational contents alone* reach consciousness). Freud insists on the privileged relationship between consciousness and 'ideational contents'. We might conclude that in the confrontation between the symbolic and the semiotic, conscious thought ranges itself on the side of the symbolic, and uses the 'ideational contents' of repression as a protective screen against the semiotic. Thought can be seen to be attached, by its very definition, to the idea, in a struggle to maintain the repression on which the symbolic depends. If the thought processes are committed to such a programme the relationship of the arts to the structure of the symbolic and semiotic is quite different:

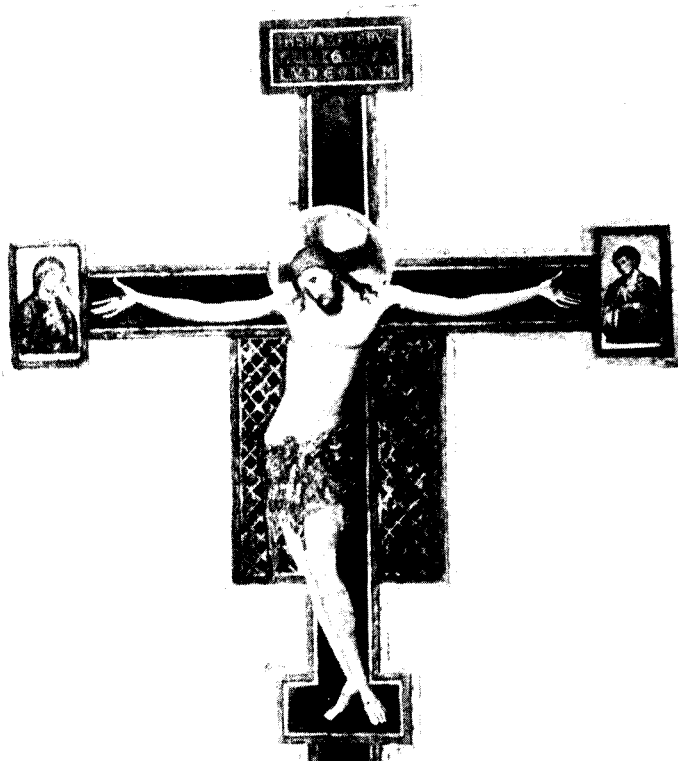
"La dépense *pulsionnelle*, tout en posant le symbolique et sa différenciation, y fait retour - dans le texte notamment - pour faire éclater la différence et pour introduire, à travers son jeu ce qui l'agit en silence : les scissions de la matière".
The expenditure of drives, while establishing the symbolic and its differentiation, reacts upon it, notably in the text, so as to burst open this differentiation and, through its play, introduce that which acts silently upon it: the fission of matter.

"Dans les productions esthétiques, qui ne sont pas des situations transférentielles, la négation n'est pas 'vaincue' : le rejet est opérant et produit non pas 'l'acceptation intellectuelle du matériel refoulé' (ce qui veut dire qu'il ne produit pas son passage dans le signifié, dans la fonction symbolique), mais son marquage dans le matériau signifiant".
In aesthetic productions, which are not situations of transfer, negation is not eliminated: the 'rejet' is allowed to operate, but rather than producing 'the intellectual acceptance of the repressed' (in other words the transfer of the repressed material onto the signified within the symbolic function), it produces its imprint in the material signifier.

In this way poetic language contains:

"une *modification de la linéarité et de l'idéalité linguistique et logique*, qui n'est pas localisable dans aucun moi".
a modification of linguistic and logical ideality and linearity, which cannot be localised in an ego.

In contra-distinction to psychoanalysis:



Giunta Pisano, Painted Crucifix.

"Le rythme poétique n'est pas la reconnaissance de l'inconscient : il en est la dépense et la mise en oeuvre".
Poetic rhythm does not itself constitute recognition of the unconscious: but results rather from its staging and its expenditure.

Le sujet hétérogène. Polylogue/polyphonie.

"un rythme, une musique, et, dans la langue, un texte".
Julia Kristeva.

Our system of thought is based on the ideational content

of phenomena, or on what modern linguistics terms the 'signified'. Out of this structure emerges our equation of consciousness, the inter-dependent relationship of personal identity and external reality. In contrast, modern and contemporary art:

"démontre au contraire la possibilité d'un procès de la signifiante différent de celui de la pensée conceptuelle unifiante".

demonstrates the possibility of a different process of significance from that of unifying, conceptual thought.

Does this imply the development of an ultimately formalist philosophy of the 'signifier'? Art opposed such an alternative when, from the end of the nineteenth century:

"(il) s'est essentiellement attaché à faire passer dans une *non-pensée*, par le *procès du langage*, la violence du rejet qui apparaît comme une mort du sujet unifié, comme une castration à l'analyste - l'analysant".
it essentially undertook to express the violence of the 'rejet', which takes the form of death for the unified subject, and castration in psychoanalytic explanation, in the terms of a non-thought, using the process of language.

The contemporary literary text has privileged the process of language just as the other art forms have concentrated on an exploration of their materials; but what values are contained inside the language of the literary text, and, by implication, inside the other arts?



Giovanni Bellini, *Pieta*, detail.



Giovanni Bellini, Pietà, detail.

Julia Kristeva approaches this question with a brief survey of the history of language and literary form; beginning with the development of classical form on the model of ancient Greek, and then going on to consider the struggle against national language engaged by Romanticism, Symbolism, and after them by modern literature in general.

"Rappelons que le mètre classique était une transposition d'une régularité musicale (chant ou danse) dans le système des langues à accent mélodique (le grec, par exemple). Le résultat de cette transposition ne pouvait qu'être une structure métrique fondée sur la longueur et le nombre des syllabes. La versification syllabique ainsi obtenue relevait les particularités des langues mélodiques, mais en fait elle les soumettait à des matrices musicales extra-linguistiques qui ont fini par couper l'expérience *métrique* du sujet parlant de son expérience *rythmique* dans le signifiant d'une langue nationale n'ayant pas d'accent mélodique".
We should remember that classical metre borrowed a musical regularity, of song and dance, from the system of languages using a melodic accent (for example Greek). The inevitable result was a metric structure founded on the length and number of syllables. Although the syllabic versification obtained in this way brought out the particular qualities of the melodic languages, it in fact subjected them to musical matrices of an extra-linguistic character which, in the signifier of a national language without melodic accent, ultimately severed the metric experience of the subject speaking of his rhythmic experience.

Julia Kristeva then, insists on how the subject uses language to express a certain rhythmic experience. While such a rhythmic experience was present in the melodic languages, it took on an abstract form in classical language and in national language disappeared entirely. National language replaced musical metric with the *word* and with a structure of sense dedicated to objective inquiry. The great literary movements of the nineteenth century, Romanticism and Symbolism, rebelled against national language by reasserting the value of rhythm, and modern literature has continued this tendency. However, instead of returning to an 'abstract' rhythm, contemporary literature has struggled for a synthesis between rhythm and the concrete character of national language. In this struggle contemporary literature is searching for a subjective experience contained in the properties of language. Julia Kristeva writes that the twentieth century avant-garde:

"font exploser dans les séquences linguistiques, sans compter les limites lexicales, une pulsionnalité inconsciente qui, à travers la langue nationale retrouvée, touche le procès signifiant tel que l'éprouve le sujet parlant. En d'autres termes, le renouveau rythmique apporté par le romantisme et le symbolisme, devait renouer avec une pulsion vocale non plus musicalement abstraite ... mais enracinée dans le système de la langue nationale, pour retrouver enfin une autre mémoire qui n'est plus 'nationale', mais relève de l'expérience particulière de chaque sujet".

produce the explosion of an unconscious drive in linguistic sequences which, ignoring lexical limits, teaches in the rediscovered national language the signifying process as it is experienced by the speaking subject; In other words, the renewal of rhythm in Romanticism and Symbolism was combined once again with a vocal drive, which no longer remained musically abstract, but rather, took root in the system of national language, so that in the end it rediscovered another memory, no longer 'national' but derived from the particular experience of each subject.

Another memory, ... derived from the particular experience of each subject. This insistence on a rhythmic language covering a memory, and specifically *another* memory, subverts language as it is normally employed. Whereas we are accustomed to employing language as an instrument of projection outside, towards the world beyond ourselves, Julia Kristeva argues that poetic or literary language channels our attention inwards, towards a world which has been denied. The language of the text no longer serves as a window leading the eye out onto a surface landscape but instead induces the subject of memory to sink beneath this surface in search of an equivalent of its experience.

Insistence on the subjective experience contained in language overturns the model of a natural reality, but it also discards the dogma of collectivity. A modern practice of language shows how both the natural and the social model (as we crudely understand it, that is as a collectivity of individuals) remain attached to the same subjective construct, so that when socialist aspirations are applied to a political context in the real, they inevitably result in a repressive inversion of the existing social structure which is based on the natural model. As always, the victim of such transformations is the concrete, sensual experience of the subject, situated on the borders of the semiotic and the symbolic. The literary text, and art in general, alone seem capable of treating this subject, because they alone are concerned with *what makes the subject's sense*. Sense is attached to the symbolic and the social context, so that the subject is always the son or daughter of a father and mother, tied to the determining matrix of the family and the social order beyond. Art is that sense (the negation of sense?) which allows the subject of language to fly through the net of social division and sexual difference. How does art achieve this delicate manoeuvre? In the words of Julia Kristeva, by practicing a:

"division du sens, de la proposition, du mot; perte de leur identité au profit d'un rythme, d'une musique, d'une mélodie".
division of sense, of the proposition, of the word; producing a loss of their identity in the interest of a rhythm, a music, a melody.

This rhythmic music, containing a certain 'timbre', belongs to the:

"chora sémiotique qui sous-tend le système de la langue" and "branche le sujet sur le procès pulsionnel inconscient".
semiotic chora which underlies the system of language and establishes the subject's contact with the process of the unconscious drive.

It is just the search for this contact which compels our ambivalent fascination with art.

Footnotes:

- (1) For a study of the concept of 'abjection', see Julia Kristeva, *Pourvoirs de l'horreur, Essai sur l'abjection*, Paris, 1980.
- (2) 'Jouissance': the French word combines the notions of sensual enjoyment and the legal tenure of property.

- (3) See Julia Kristeva, *Préliminaires théoriques* ch. II, in *La révolution du langage poétique* for a discussion of the concept of negation in Hegel and Frege.
- (4) See also J. Hippolyte's essay and Jacques Lacan's commentary in J. Lacan, *Écrits*. Quotations from Freud are taken from the Standard edition, ed. Strachey.





Michelangelo, Moses.

A POSTCARD FROM FREUD

by Philippe Sollers

The postcard in question is the one which Freud addressed on the 20th May, 1939, four months before his death, to his editor, Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia Woolf, who had just sent him the English edition of *Moses and Monotheism*. Here it is:

20, Maresfield Gardens, N.W.3.
Tel.: Hampstead 2002
May 20th, 1939

Dear Mr. Woolf,

Accept my hearty thanks for the advance copy of *Moses and Monotheism* you were so kind to send me. The outfit of the book is very satisfactory and the reproduction of the grandiose face of the Michelangelo statue on the jacket is the most impressive you could have chosen. By the way, it is rather a bit of irony that this face should be so full of contradiction to the content of the book. The Moses of my construction living under the XVIII dynasty could only be clean shaven. I know no such representation is to be found in the arts.

with high regards,
Yours sincerely,
Sigm. Freud.

The laconism of this card is sensational. In fact, it amounts to a veritable auto-critique of the 'Moses of Michelangelo' which first appeared anonymously in February 1914. We know that this text, written curiously enough before the First World War, like *Moses and Monotheism* just before the Second, draws attention to the petrified movement in the pose of the hero's body,

by emphasizing the position of the hands in the beard. "The simple truth is that the index finger (alone) is laid over a part of the beard and makes a deep trough in it." "Strands of hair coming from the left lie over strands coming from the right, both caught in by that despotic finger." "I venture no opinion whether the sculptor really does invite us to solve the riddle of that *knot* in the beard of his statue" (underlined by Ph. S). In short, the whole question of the written tablets of the law depends on these sculpted hands entwined in hair: "The (left) hand is laid in the lap in a mild gesture and holds, as though in a caress, the end of the flowing beard. It seems as if it is meant to counteract the violence with which the other hand had misused the beard a few moments ago."

I think that today the sexual tenor of this text is sufficiently clear. However, we could quickly evoke the fantasmatic montage of feminine fingers at play weaving the pubic hair mounted on the statue of the patriarchal law giver. It is all the more striking to see Freud, at the end of his life, his jaw gnawed by cancer and his beard recently shaven for radium treatment, discover and comment on the inadequation of Michelangelo's representation, which is enthroned to this day on the covers of our translations of the Bible, with the *man* Moses as he would have been in real life.

The Moses of Freud's final 'construction', that of the eighteenth dynasty, could only have been clean shaven. Therefore, this long fascination for Michelangelo's fantasm in stone is deprived of sense. In the same way, no doubt, that the entire plastic form of Christianity and art is deprived of an object. And so? What becomes of the Humanist culture of the man, Freud? Towards what is he being prompted in this manner? Is he not henceforth in a position to understand that in the encounter, literally taking place in his jaw-bone, between the death drive and the invisible rays which were trying to contain it, between two intangible causes, one internal the other external, a perception of the object, in short, of the world as something which we can lay hold of, is giving way.

To dissolve the fetish and its corporal cathexis as an image or volume of the body; this is the long march, a sort of Exodus, of the hopeless knowledge of analysis. A question of *disembodiment*. After all Freud knew how to die when the time came (see Schur's book).

Moses was not an Egyptian among others, anymore than a Jew among others. Twice 'different', then. From the inside and the outside. Perhaps, like every young and beardless man promulgating the law, the hymnic law of

the one, and for this reason becoming the blind spot,
the volatilized and slaughtered body of the species?
The *embodiment* of repression?

The hypothesis that man enters into the unrepresentable,
in so far as his ambition is to assume the paternity of
the one, and accedes towards the one as unthinkable?
It took Freud to see it.

Not without irony Freud threw one last look here on his
consuming passion for reason and occidental art. 1939:
the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people had begun, the
slaughter was spreading, the revelation of the Fascist
and Stalinist concentration camp phenomenon was soon to
begin.



Michelangelo, Moses, detail.

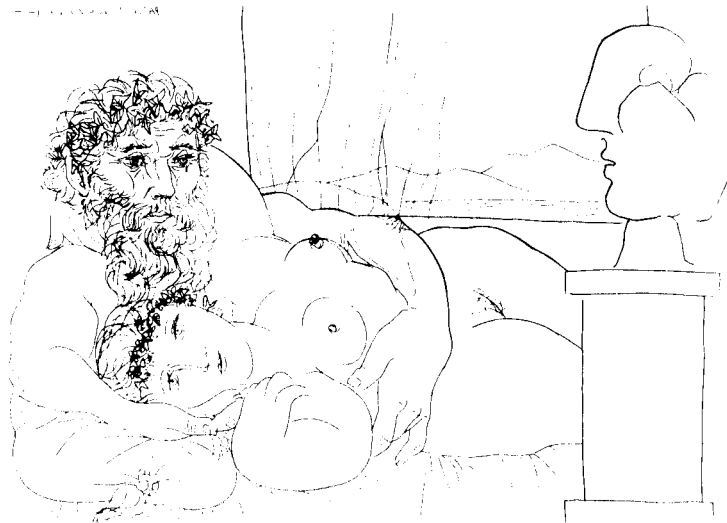
SUBLIMATION

A Fragment by Marcelin Pleynet

From as far back as we can imagine, in the heraldic organization of the Occidental subject, with his hierarchical scale of above and below, his tastes and aversions, painting has gone to the greatest lengths to conceal the drive which it has the task of sublimating. The archaic character of this drive continues, through its considerable displacement, to endow painting, or the activity of painting, with widely recognized social value. The success of painting has been quite exceptional from this point of view, and it is no coincidence if, after having fallen prey to the speculation of the Church, it was subjected at the end of the nineteenth century to that of capitalism. We can easily understand that religion had an interest in appropriating the displacement of the sexual drive behind colour, and that the emergent capitalist ideological system with its inherent repressions attached priceless value to this mode of sublimation. Does not Freud indicate as much when he writes: "A certain kind of modification of the aim and change of the object, in which our *social valuation* is taken into account, is described by us as 'sublimation'." (Freud, 'Anxiety and Instinctual Life', in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, social valuation my emphasis (1)). The relationship to be established here is that of the displacement of the sexual drive on to the social value of the cathected object. If pictorial production, as I hope to have demonstrated (see 'Le système de Matisse', in *L'Enseignement de la peinture*), is determined by the most archaic drives accessible to modern science (the oral and anal phases), then we can state without further elaboration that social value thoroughly represses this *material* and *implicitly sexual* base while giving priority to the cathexis and preservation of the displacement which modifies and replaces it. The law declares a scandal the moment a specific practice openly acknowledges the sexual order of the contradiction at the origin of its production, while social and legal status, in the form of purchase, is assessed according to the place that the object and the goal of sublimation occupy in this dimension.

Certainly the pictorial, alongside the musical, is one

of the most successful modes of sublimation; the principal reason for this 'success' doubtless stemming from the character of "pictorial representation, wherein the subject cathects a narcissistic, that is a post-oral and anal, organization which inevitably obscures the analytic base of production." Here we have the source of the invariably dual character of the discourse on painting; source which allows us to appreciate both the rigour of formalist analysis and the limitation which makes necessary its re-evaluation. (The organization of these two stages should be investigated in cinema production). In any case, we are now in possession of the key to that inarticulate language which the discourse on painting exposes. If, as it is commonly said, painting incites people to a verbal response, that is because it provides the analytic base on which the subject is reduced to puerile gesticulation. There is no shortage of such examples; the most recent and voluminosly long-winded surely being the *Henri Matisse Roman* recently published at great expense by Aragon. Painting only tolerates a commentary which rules out all illustration; otherwise it effaces itself behind the illustration and exposes the decorative prose of the writer's self-indulgence. Such efforts are a pretext for the law and today amount to nothing more than caricatures. They spring from that conceited sentimentality which has given art a social value, in that they guarantee, in the words of Freud,



Picasso, drawing.

to "come to a stop on their way to satisfaction". Modern painting, and notably Matisse (hence his strategic importance), has overturned this state of affairs in which sublimation is auctioned off. In a first phase the priority of modern art was to uncover the coloured sexual base on which the subject's narcissism projects its outline. By this I mean that modern painting (above all in the person of Matisse) concentrates on a certain manner of treating the figure through colour. This, however, implies that even if modern painting plays forcefully on a radical transformation of space and the figure, nevertheless, it continues at one level to produce a specular illusion. We can affirm that subsequently the historical development of modern painting, via of course its familiar empiricist tactics, has tried to annihilate this illusion. From a formalist perspective this produces an increasingly explicit accentuation on colour, which becomes the focal point of experimentation in modern painting. And if colour, in the case of Matisse but also in the cases of a large number of so-called non-figurative painters, initially 'sublimates', that is because it is still effectively caught in this movement upwards from below which has conditioned its history. The painter will have to make a direct discovery of the profound and familiar strangeness of his material before painting will at last be able to resurge downwards. "Anal eroticism, therefore," writes Freud, "succumbs in the first instance to the 'organic repression' which paved the way to civilization. The existence of the social factor which is responsible for the further transformation of anal eroticism is attested by the circumstance that, in spite of all man's developmental advances, he scarcely finds the smell of *his own* excreta repulsive, but only that of other people's." (*Civilization and its Discontents*) Only this movement of painting towards the origin of the sexual drive in the oral and anal phases can point the way to a theoretical and analytical clarification of what underlies all discourse. A theory of this analytic movement is indispensable if we want to develop a study of colour which avoids bombast and rhetoric. As it happens, the coloured base, brought to our attention by modern painting, can also be used to repress the drive which produces it. In this case the base is conceived as an essence, and the laws of its development are presented as technical or mechanical in character. Once again the relationship of painting to its productive force, the sexual drive, should be grasped in two phases. While doubtless it should first of all be grasped in the coloured base of the drive which pre-empt the subject's narcissistic organization, this base can clearly be taken as an 'origin' which is merely repeated passively and mechanically in the organization



Matisse, drawing.

and social valuation of sublimation; and yet the treatment of colour in modern painting should be conceived as closer to an *indication* of the material field as a productive drive, rather than as the actual matter of that *reality*. It is no coincidence if the materialists, such as Democritus, claim that "colour does not exist in nature". For us here and now today, this resurgence of colour should be thought of from one angle in the context of an ideology dividing above from below: the principle of the narcissistic subject's organization aligned with the vertical. Freud touches on this ideological measure when he writes in *Civilization and its Discontents*: "The fateful process of civilization would thus have set in with man's adoption of an erect posture. From that point the *chain of events* would have proceeded through the devaluation of olfactory stimuli and the isolation of the menstrual period to the time when *visual stimuli were paramount* and the genitals became visible, and thence to the continuity of sexual excitation, the founding of the family and so to the threshold of human civilization."

The issue raised by Freud's text has less to do with the credibility of the description of a mechanism (Freud himself qualified it as a "theoretical speculation") as with the ideological reality which surely justifies it. The repressions implied in 'verticalization' entirely correspond to the subject and object structure of sub-



Cézanne, Peasant with Straw Hat.

limation. I will only insist on the 'verticality' of painting so as to demonstrate and then dismiss, on the basis of what I have designated the coloured base, its mechanical and entirely natural assumption of an ideological role. The ideological dictate which establishes the 'social value' of sublimation obliges us to interpret the drive underlying colour as a background rather than as an 'origin' of vision. The experience of colours should expose this back-ground in a process of resurgence. This back-ground cannot be divided up or dismembered into, for example, orality and anality, but should be considered in each particular case as an independent whole. The visible presence of colour should establish itself on the sexual base which dominant ideology represses as a back-ground. The experience and implications of colour should manage, so to speak, to 'colour in', at the most repressed point of sublimation, this sexual base of the production and absence of colours. I would even suggest that, given the structure of the occidental subject envisaging an analysis of this kind, he should interpret the Freudian order of the different phases of libidinal evolution in terms of systematic inversion or repression: for painting therefore, according to an anal/oral mode.

- (1) Translations from Freud are taken from the Standard English edition, ed. Strachey.

QUOTATIONS

Philippe Sollers

History and Art

"Freud, en écoutant, découvre que l'être qui parle, par une bizarrerie brusquement évidente, échappe au temps, est immergé dans quelque chose qui ignorerait le temps".

"Ou bien le discours religieux et le discours esthétique, les discours de l'art et de la littérature, sont une catégorie du temps, ou bien c'est le temps qui est une catégorie de ces discours. Il faut choisir".

By an oddity which suddenly becomes obvious, Freud, while listening, discovered that the being which speaks escapes time, is immersed in something which ignores time. Either the discourses of religion and aesthetics, the discourses of art and literature, are a category of time; or otherwise time is a category of those discourses. You must choose.

'Le Tri' in *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 13.

Religion

"Or qu'est-ce que le fait religieux ? Une façon de synthétiser dans des discours qui finissent par se stratifier, l'énigme de la sexualité pour l'être parlant que nous sommes".

What is the basis of religion? A certain way of synthesizing the enigma of sexuality, in increasingly stratified discourses, for the speaking beings that we are.

'D'où viennent les enfants ?' in *Tel Quel* 65.

The Subject

"Le sujet est la conséquence de son langage".

The subject is the result of his language.

'Littérature et totalité' in *Logiques*.

Psychoanalysis

"Ce qu'il (Freud) découvre n'est évidemment pas l'inconscient, comme tout le monde le répète, mais le transfert".

Obviously what Freud discovered was not the unconscious, as everybody says, but the transfer.

'Socrate en passant' in *Tel Quel* 83.

Marxism

"Le marxisme, je l'ai dit, c'est Balzac plus les camps".
Marxism, as I have already said, is Balzac plus the camps.

'Socrate en passant' in *Tel Quel* 83.

Sexuality and Politics

"Comment la sexualité se prend-elle dans la politique ? Les névrosés, les pervers, les psychotiques sont venus le crier : par un père mort, une mère cousue. La politique pourrait être définie comme l'ensemble des efforts pour gérer, gouverner, encadrer, détourner, différer, la question d'où viennent les enfants. La politique est cette prise de parti sur le temps de manière que n'arrive pas la question de l'inconscient ignorant le temps".

What form does sexuality take in politics? The neurotics, pervers and psychotics are there to bear witness: by a father murdered, by a mother stitched up. Politics could be defined as the sum total of efforts to manage, govern, enclose, distort, postpone the question of where children come from. Politics is that predisposition of time so as to avoid the question of the unconscious which ignores time.

'D'où viennent les enfants ?' in *Tel Quel* 65.



ROLAND BARTHES, photo Sophie Bassouls.

ROLAND BARTHES 1915-1980

An Obituary

"il ne s'agit pas de raconter, mais de raconter que l'on raconte".
Roland Barthes in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*. (1)

Julia Kristeva acknowledges Roland Barthes as the "fondateur des études modernes de la littérature". (2)
The title seals Roland Barthes' place in history and now, with a date, history has laid claim to its own.

Roland Barthes confronted, and was confronted by, two polarities, History and the Subject; at their intersection he placed the Sign.

Under the Sign of Literature, Roland Barthes made his contribution to its history in the twentieth century by offering us a reading, and a manner of reading, its texts. But during the course of this reading a curious operation takes place; the Sign is submerged by its polarities and gives way to ... l'écriture, désir, plaisir ...

In the end, faced with the claim of History, Roland Barthes asserted the prerogative of the Subject.

(1) "it is not a matter of telling a story, but of telling that one is telling a story".

(2) Julia Kristeva, "Comment parler à la littérature", in *Polylogue*.

Bibliographical note

It would be premature, and in any case over-ambitious in the space of a single special issue of a review, to attempt an exhaustive investigation of *Tel Quel*. I have not tried to do so. Notably I have avoided an historical approach which would have demanded consideration of the different phases of *Tel Quel*'s evolution. With special regard to the work of Julia Kristeva, I have not attempted a detailed study of either her linguistic and semiological, or her philosophical frame of reference.

Tel Quel has confronted the pressing task of developing a contemporary theoretical frame of reference for modern literature and by extension art. This concern springs from the conviction that the development of a theoretical approach is indispensable to the problematic of contemporary literature itself. In other words, since its inception, the group's theoretical activity has been oriented towards a contemporary practice of literature. In consequence, I have allowed my approach to be guided by subjective interest. My criteria has been to search for those formulations where theory and practice encounter each other and so open up the possibility of a modern experience of literature and art.

For the theoretical dimension of Julia Kristeva's work, I have referred for the most part to section A of *La révolution du langage poétique*, ed. du Seuil, Paris, 1974. For the critical studies of Artaud and Bataille, I have used the 10/18 edition of the Colloque held at Cérisy-la-Salle in 1972, ed. Christian Bourgois. Julia Kristeva's essays have since been collected in *Polylogue*, Le Seuil, 1977; Marcelin Pleyne's essay on Artaud in *Art et Littérature*, Le Seuil, 1977. For Philippe Sollers' theoretical formulations on fiction I have referred mainly to two essays, 'Logique de la fiction' and 'Le roman et l'expérience des limites', collected in *Logiques*, Le Seuil, 1968.

My translation of 'Une carte postale de Freud' by Philippe Sollers is taken from *Tel Quel*, no. 65, Spring 1976. 'Sublimation' by Marcelin Pleyne served as the introduction to 'La couleur au carré, les rides, le dessein', essay on the painter James Bishop, which is published in *Art et Littérature*.

In English

Columbia University Press (New York) have recently published a collection of essays by Julia Kristeva entitled *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Edited by Leon S. Roudiez and translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez. The book is published in England by Blackwell. A collection of Marcelin Pleynet's essays on twentieth century art is to appear shortly, published by Chicago University Press. A collection of essays entitled *Writing and the experience of limits* by Philippe Sollers is to appear shortly at Columbia University Press.

St. Pierre-le-déchausselat.
Ardèche, September 1980.

THE SUBJECT OF ART

We have gradually come to feel in the twentieth century that the conditions of our cultural existence have been drastically altered, and yet the history of our 'modernity' has been full of false promise. As Belief—in Religion, in Science—has faltered we have turned to the Arts—literature, painting, music, dance—in the hope that they will directly furnish us with a new cultural model. At the turn of the century the avant-garde rose to this challenge by severing its ties with Nature, but since then we have failed to resolve the consequent problem of Art's relationship to Knowledge. TEL QUEL situates itself strategically at mid-century in this adventure by developing an interdisciplinary approach to art which draws on the most contemporary research in the Social Sciences—anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis...

Mallarmé was perhaps the first to articulate the direction of the modern world when he wrote. 'Everything comes down to Aesthetics and Political Economy.' The question of Art's relationship to Politics centres on the problem of Criticism. If Art is to play the new role expected of it, it must deliver up its Sense, but Art *resists* sublimation in the Idea. TEL QUEL offers an alternative to this dilemma by exploring the ambiguous space between Knowledge and Experience through the development of a discourse couched in *language* and the *subject*.

Somewhere between the Old and New Worlds this study sets out to trace the path of such an adventure.

P.R.



Paul Rodgers is a writer who was born in Dublin, in 1951. From 1974 to 1980 he lived in Paris studying contemporary developments in literature and art. His critical essays have appeared in both European and American magazines. Paul Rodgers is currently resident in New York City.