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INSIDE THE WHITE CUBE, PART II: THE EYE AND THE SPECTATOR

By Brian O'Doherty

COULDN'T MODERNISM BE TAUGHT TO children as a series of Aesop's Fables? It would be more memorable than art appreciation. Think of such fables as "Who Killed Illusion?" or "How the Edge Revolted Against the Center." "The Man Who Violated the Canvas" could follow "Where Did the Frame Go?" It would be easy to draw morals; think of "The vanishing Impasto that soaked away—and then came back and got Fat." And how would we tell the story of the little Picture Plane that grew up and got so mean? How it evicted everybody, including Father Perspective and Mother Space, who had raised such nice real children? And left behind only this horrid result of an incestuous affair called Abstraction, who looked down on everybody, including—eventually—its buddies, Metaphor and Ambiguity. And how Abstraction and the Picture Plane, thick as thieves, kept booting out a persistent guttersnipe named Collage, who just wouldn't give up. Fables give you more latitude than art history. I suspect art historians have fantasies about their fields they would like to make stick. This is a preface to some generalizations about Cubism and collage that



Joel Shapiro, Two Untitled Sculptures, 1975, cast iron, left: 7½ x 7½ x 7"; right: 6¾ x 10¾ x 9¼". Photo: Eric Pollitzer.

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The forces that crushed 400 years of illusionism and idealism together and evicted them from the picture translated deep space into surface tension. This surface responds as a field to any mark on it. One mark was enough to establish a relationship not so much with the next as with the esthetic and ideological potency of the blank canvas. The content of the empty canvas increased as modernism went on. Imagine a museum of such potencies, a temporal corridor hung with blank canvases—from 1850, 1880, 1910, 1950, 1970. Each contains, before a brush is laid on it, assumptions implicit in the art of its era. As the series approaches the present, each member accumulates a more complex latent content. Modernism’s classic void ends up stuffed with ideas all ready to jump on the first brushstroke. The specialized surface of the modern canvas is as aristocratic an invention as human ingenuity ever evolved.

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Inevitably, what went *on* that surface, paint itself, became the locus of conflicting ideologies. Caught between its substance and its metaphorical potential, paint re-enacted in its material

The integrity of the picture plane and the morality of the medium favor lateral extension. The mainstream as scheduled from Cézanne to color field glides along the wall, measures it with vertical and horizontal coordinates, maintains the propriety of gravity and the upright viewer. This is the etiquette of normal social discourse, and through it the mainstream viewer is continually re-introduced to the wall, which in turn supports the canvas—its surface now so sensitive that an object on it would cause it, as it were, to blink.

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But as high art vacuumed the picture plane, the vernacular surpassed itself in transgressing its vulgar equivalent. While the Impressionists occluded traditional perspective with a curtain of paint, popular painters and photographers in many countries gamed with illusion, from Archimboldesque grotesqueries to *trompe l'oeil*. Shells, glitter, hair, stones, minerals, ribbons, were attached to postcards, photographs, frames, shadowboxes. This tacky efflorescence, saturated in the Victorian's corrupt version of short-term memory—nostalgia—was, of course, a substratum of symbolism and surrealism. So when, in 1911, Picasso stuck that piece of oil cloth printed with chair-caning on a canvas, some advanced colleagues may have seen it as a retardataire gesture.

It is now collage's Exhibit A. Artists, historians, critics are always tramping back to 1911 to take a look at it. It marks an irrevocable through-the-looking-glass passage from the picture's space into the secular world, the spectator's space. Analytic Cubism didn't push laterally, but poked out the picture plane, contradicting previous advances in defining it. Facets of space are thrust forward; sometimes they look stuck

The moment a collage was attached to that unruly Cubist surface there was an instantaneous switch. No longer able to pin a subject together in a space too shallow for it, the multiple vanishing points of the Analytic Cubist picture shower out into the room with the spectator. His point of view ricochets among them. The surface of the picture is made opaque by collage. Behind it is simply a wall, or a void. In front is an open space in which the viewer's sense of his own presence becomes an increasingly palpable shadow. Expelled from the Eden of illusionism, kept out by the literal surface of the picture, the spectator becomes enmeshed in the troubled vectors that provisionally define the modernist sensibility. The impure space in which he stands is radically changed. The esthetics of discontinuity manifest themselves in this altered space and time: the autonomy of parts, the revolt of objects, pockets of void become generative forces in all the arts. Abstraction and reality—not realism—conduct this rancorous argument throughout modernism. The picture plane, like an exclusive country club, keeps reality out and for good reason. Snobbishness is, after all, a form of purity, prejudice a way of being consistent. Reality does not conform to the rules of etiquette, subscribe to exclusive values, or wear a tie; it has a vulgar set of relations and is frequently seen slumming among the senses with other antithetical arts.

Both abstraction and reality, however, are implicated in that sacred 20th-century dimension, space. The exclusive division between them has blurred the fact that the first has considerable practical relevance—contrary to the modern myth that art is “useless.” If art has any cultural reference (apart from being “culture”) surely it is in the definition of our space and time. The flow of energy between concepts of space articulated through the artwork and the space we occupy is one of the basic and least understood forces in modernism. Modernist space redefines the observer's status, tinkers with his self-image. Modernism's conceptions of space, not its

hierarchies. Its mythologies are drained, its rhetoric collapsed.

It is simply a kind of undifferentiated potency. This is not a “degeneration” of space, but the sophisticated convention of an advanced culture which has cancelled its values in the name of an abstraction called “freedom.” Space now is not just where things happen, things make space happen.

Space was clarified not only in the picture, but in the place the picture hangs—the gallery, which with postmodernism joins the picture plane as a unit of discourse. If the picture plane defined the wall, collage defines the space between the walls. The fragment from the real world plonked on the picture’s surface is the imprimatur of an unstoppable generative energy. Do we not, through an odd reversal, as we stand in the gallery space, end up *inside* the picture, looking out at an opaque picture plane that protects us from a void? (Could Lichtenstein’s paintings of the *back* of a canvas be a text for this?) As we move around that space, looking at the walls, avoiding things on the floor, we become aware that that gallery also contains a wandering phantom frequently mentioned in avant-garde dispatches—the spectator.

Who is this Spectator? Also called the Viewer. Sometimes the Observer, occasionally the Perceiver. It has no face, is mostly a back. It stoops and peers, is slightly clumsy. Its attitude is inquiring, its puzzlement discreet. He—I’m sure it is more male than female—arrived with modernism, with the disappearance of perspective. He seems born out of the picture and, like some perceptual Adam, is drawn back repeatedly to contemplate it. The Spectator seems a little dumb; he is not you or me. Always on call, he staggers into place before every new work that requires his presence. This obliging stand-in is ready to enact our fanciest speculations. He tests them patiently and does not resent that we provide him with directions and responses: “the viewer feels . . .”; “the observer notices . . .”; “the spectator moves . . .” He is sensitive to effects: “The effect on the spectator is . . .”; and smells out ambiguities like a bloodhound: “caught between these ambiguities, the spectator . . .” He not only stands and sits on command; he lies down and even crawls as modernism presses on him its final indignities. Plunged into darkness, deprived of perceptual cues, blasted by strobes, he frequently watches his

weight of meaning, but not always up to it. He balances, he tests, he is mystified, demystified. In time, the Spectator stumbles around between confusing roles: he is a cluster of motor reflexes, a dark-adapted wanderer, the vivant in a tableau, an actor manqué, even a trigger of sound and light in a space land-mined for art. He may even be told that he himself is an artist, and be persuaded that his contribution to what he observes or trips over is its authenticating signature.

Yet the Spectator has a dignified pedigree. His genealogy includes the 18th-century rationalist with an astute eye—Addison’s Spectator, perhaps, whose gallery equivalent is called “the onlooker” and “the beholder.” A closer antecedent is the Romantic self, which quickly splits to produce an actor and an audience, a protagonist and an eye that observes him.

This Romantic split is comparable to the addition of the third actor to the Greek stage. Levels of awareness are multiplied, relationships reformed, new voids filled in by meta-commentary by the audience. The Spectator and his snobbish cousin, the Eye, arrive in good company. Delacroix calls them up occasionally; Baudelaire hobnobs with them. They are not on such good terms with each other. The epicene Eye is far more intelligent than the Spectator, who has a touch of male obtuseness. The Eye can be trained in a way the Spectator cannot. It is a finely tuned, even noble organ, esthetically and socially superior to the Spectator. It is easy for a writer to have a Spectator around—there is something of the Eternal Footman about him. It is more difficult to have an Eye, although no writer should be without one. Not having an Eye is a stigma to be hidden, perhaps by knowing someone who has one.

The Eye can be directed, but with less confidence than the Spectator, who, unlike the eye, is rather eager to please. The Eye is an oversensitive acquaintance with whom one must stay on good terms. It is often quizzed a little nervously, its responses received respectfully. It must be waited on while it observes—observation being its perfectly specialized function. “The Eye discriminates between. . . . The Eye resolves. . . . The Eye takes in, balances, weighs, discerns, perceives . . .” But like any thoroughbred, it has its limits. “Sometimes the eye fails to

wants to see. It is no good at all for looking at cars, bathroom fixtures, girls, sports results. Indeed it is so specialized it can end up watching itself. But it is unmatched for looking at a particular kind of art.

The Eye is the only inhabitant of the sanitized installation shot. The Spectator is not present. Installation shots are generally of *abstract* works; realists don't go in for them much. In installation shots the question of scale is confirmed (the size of the gallery is deduced from the photo) and blurred (the absence of a spectator could mean the gallery is 30 feet high). This scalelessness conforms with the fluctuations through which reproduction passes the successful work of art. The art the Eye is brought to bear on almost exclusively is that which preserves the picture plane—mainstream modernism. The Eye maintains the seamless gallery space, its walls swept by flat planes of duck. Everything else—all things impure, including collage—favors the Spectator. The Spectator stands in space broken up by the consequences of collage, the second great force that altered the gallery space. When the Spectator is Kurt Schwitters, we are brought to a space we can only occupy by eyewitness reports, by walking our eyes through photographs that tantalize rather than confirm experience: his *Merzbau* of 1923 at Hanover, destroyed in 1943.

“It grows about the way a big city does,” wrote Schwitters, “when a new building goes up, the Housing Bureau checks to see that the whole appearance of the city is not going to be ruined. In my case, I run across something or other that looks to me as though it would be right for the KdeE [Cathedral of Erotic Misery], so I pick it up, take it home, and attach it and paint it, always keeping in mind the rhythm of the whole. Then a day comes when I realize I have a corpse on my hands—relics of a movement in art that is now passé. So what happens is that I leave them alone, only I cover them up either wholly or partly with other things, making clear that they are being downgraded. As the structure grows bigger and bigger, valleys, hollows, caves appear, and these lead a life of their own within the overall structure. The juxtaposed surfaces give rise to forms twisting in every direction, spiraling upward. An arrangement of the most strictly geometrical cubes covers the

Witnesses don't report on themselves *in* the *Merzbau*. They look *at* it, rather than experience themselves in it. The environment was a genre nearly forty years away, and the idea of a surrounded spectator was not yet a conscious one. All recognized the invasion of space, the author being, as Werner Schmalenbach put it, "progressively dispossessed." The energy powering this invasion is not recognized, though mentioned by Schwitters, for if the work had any organizing principle, it was the mythos of a city. The city provided materials, models of process and a primitive esthetic of juxtaposition—congruity forced by mixed needs and intentions. The city is the indispensable context of collage and of the gallery space. Modern art needs the sound of traffic outside to authenticate it.

The *Merzbau* was a tougher, more sinister work than it appears in the photographs available to us. It grew out of a studio—that is, a space, materials, an artist and a process. Space extended (upstairs and downstairs) and so did time (to about 13 years). The work cannot be remembered as static, as it looks in photographs. Framed by meters and years, it was a mutating, polyphonic construct, with multiple subjects, functions, concepts of space and of art. It contained in reliquaries mementoes of such friends as Gabo, Arp, Mondrian and Richter. It was an autobiography of voyages in the city. There was a "morgue" of city scenarios (*The Sex Crime Cave*, *The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, *The Grotto of Love*, *The Cave of the Murderers*). Cultural tradition was preserved in *The Niebelungen Cave*, *The Goethe Cave*, the absurd *Michelangelo Exhibition*. It revised history (*The Cave of Depreciated Heroes*) and offered models of behavior (*The Caves of Hero Worship*)—two built-in systems of value, that, like their environment, were subject to change. Most of these Expressionist/Dada conceits were buried, like guilt, by the later Constructivist overlay that turned the *Merzbau* into a utopian hybrid, part practical design (desk, stool), part sculpture, part architecture. As the Expressionism/Dada was collaged over, esthetic history was literalized into an archeological record. The Constructivism did not clarify the structure, which remained, as Schmalenbach says, "irrational space." Both space and artist—we tend to think of them

advance upon him. Eventually he hits around a shimmering space like a piece of moving collage.

There is something involutorial and inside-out about the *Merzbau*. Its concept had a kind of nuttiness that some visitors acknowledged by commenting on its *lack* of eccentricity. Its numerous dialectics—between Dada and Constructivism, structure and experience, the organic and the archeological, the city outside, the space inside—spiral around one word: transformation. Kate Steinitz, the *Merzbau*'s most perceptive visitor, noticed a cave “in which a bottle of urine was solemnly displayed so that the rays of light that fell on it turned the liquid into gold.” The sacramental nature of transformation is deeply connected to Romantic idealism; in its expressionist phase it tests itself by performing rescue operations among the most degraded materials and subjects. Initially the picture plane is an idealized transforming space. The transformation of objects is contextual, a matter of relocation. Proximity to the picture plane assists this transformation. When isolated the context of objects is the gallery. Eventually, the gallery itself becomes, like the picture plane, a transforming force. At this point, as Minimalism demonstrated, art can be literalized and detransformed; the gallery will make it art anyway. Idealism is hard to extinguish in art, because the empty gallery itself becomes *art manqué*, and so preserves it. Schwitters's *Merzbau* is the first example of a “gallery” as a chamber of transformation, from which the world can be colonized by the converted eye.

Schwitters's career offers another example of an intimate space defined by his proprietary aura. During his stay in a British detention camp for enemy aliens in the Isle of Wight he established a living space under a table. This creation of place in a camp for displaced people is animal, ludicrous and dignified. In retrospect, this space, which, like the *Merzbau*, we can only remember, signifies how firmly Schwitters forced a reciprocal function between art and life, mediated in this case by just living. Like pieces of Merz the trivia of sub-tabular occupancy, curtained by moving feet, are transformed in time, by day-to-day living, into ritual. Could we now say this was partly a performance piece in a self-created photo-gallery?

feeling of certainty. Collage is a noisy business. A soundtrack accompanies its words and letters. Without going into the attractive complexities of the letter and the word in modernism, they are disruptive. From Futurism to the Bauhaus, words cut across media and literally force themselves on stage. All mixed movements have a theatrical component which runs parallel to the gallery space, but which, in my view, doesn't contribute much to its definition. Theatrical conventions die in the gallery. Schwitters may have recognized this when he separated his two kinds of theater: one was a chaotic multisensory actualization of the *Merzbau*, enveloping the spectator; the other a clarification of the conventional stage through Constructivism. Neither really intrudes on the gallery space, though the immaculate gallery does show some traces of Constructivist housekeeping. Performance in the gallery subscribes to an entirely different set of conventions from stage performance.

Schwitters's recitations broke the conventions of ordinary life—talking, lecturing. The way his properly dressed person framed his utterances must have been disorienting—like a bank-teller passing you a hold-up note after cashing your check. In a letter to Raoul Hausmann he reports on a visit to Van Doesburg's group in 1923–24:

“Doesburg read a very good dadaistic Program [in the Hague], in which he said the dadaist would do something unexpected. At that moment I rose from the middle of the Publick and barked loud. Some people fainted and were carried out, and the Papers reported, that Dada means barking. At once we got Engagements from Haarlem and Amsterdam. It was sold out in Haarlem, and I walked so that all could see me, and all waited that I should bark. Doesburg said again, I would do something unexpected. This time I blew my nose. The papers wrote phat [sic] I did not bark, that I blew only my nose. In Amsterdam it was so full, that people gave phantastic prizes [sic], to get still a seat, I didnt bark, nor blow my nose, I recited the Revolution. A lady could not stop laughing and had to be carried out.”

The gestures are precise and could be briefly interpreted—“I am a dog, a sneezer, a pamphlet.” Like pieces of Merz they are

ground for the growth of new conventions, which in the theater would be smothered by the convention of “acting.”

Happenings were first enacted in indeterminate, non-theatrical spaces—warehouses, deserted factories, old stores. Happenings mediated a careful stand-off between avant-garde theater and collage. They conceive the spectator as a kind of collage in that he was spread out over the interior—his attention split by simultaneous events, his senses disorganized and redistributed by firmly transgressed logic. Not much was said at most Happenings, but, like the city that provided their themes, they literally crawled with words. *Words*, indeed, was the title of an environment with which Allan Kaprow enclosed the spectator in 1961; *Words* contained circulating names (people) who were invited to contribute words on paper to attach to walls and partitions. Collage seems to have a latent desire to turn itself outside-in; there is something womblike about it.

Yet the realization of the Environment was oddly retarded. Why is there almost nothing environmental between Cubism and Schwitters—barring forthcoming Russian surprises? Or between Schwitters and the Environments of the late '50s and early '60s which arrive in a cluster with Kaprow, Fluxus, the New Realists, Kienholz and others? It may be that illustrative Surrealism, conserving the illusion within the picture, avoided the implications of the expulsion from the picture plane into real space. Within this time there are great landmarks and gestures that conceive of the gallery as a unit—Lissitzky designed a modern gallery space in 1925 in Hannover, as Schwitters was working at his *Merzbau*. But with some doubtful exceptions (Duchamp's coal bags and string?), they do not emerge from collage. Environmental collage and assemblage clarify themselves with the acceptance of the tableau as a genre. With tableaux (Segal, Kienholz), the illusionistic space within the traditional picture is actualized in the box of the gallery. The passion to actualize even illusion is a mark—even a stigma—of '60s art. With the tableau, the gallery “impersonates” other spaces. It is a bar (Kienholz), a hospital room (Kienholz), a gas station (Segal), a bedroom (Oldenburg), a living room (Segal), a “real” studio (Samaras). The gallery space “quotes” the tableaux and makes them art,

The spectator in a tableau somehow feels he shouldn't be there. Segal's art makes this clearer than anyone else's. His objects—great lumps of them—wear a history of previous occupancy, whether bus or diner or door. Their familiarity is distanced by the gallery context, and by the sense of occupancy conveyed by the plaster figures. The figures freeze this history of usage at a particular time. Like period rooms, Segal's pieces are closely time-bound while they imitate timelessness. Since the environment is occupied already, our relationship to it is partly preempted by the figures, which have the blush of life completely withdrawn from them. They—even in their mode of manufacture—are simulacra of the living, and ignore us with some of the irritating indifference of the dead. Despite their postures, which signify rather than enact relationships, they also seem indifferent to each other. There is a slow, abstract lapse between each of them and between them and their environment. Their occupancy of their environment is a large subject. But the effect on the spectator who joins them is one of trespass. Because trespass makes one partly visible to oneself, it plays down body language, encourages a convention of silence and tends to substitute the Eye for the Spectator. This is exactly what would happen if Segal's tableaux were painted pictures. It is a very sophisticated form of "realism." Segal's white plaster is a convention of removal, which also removes us from ourselves.

Encountering a Hanson or a de Andrea is shocking; it violates our own sense of reality, or the reality of our senses. They trespass not only on our space but on our credibility. They derive, in my view, not so much from sculpture as from collage, something taken indoors and artified by the gallery. Outdoors, in the proper context, they would be accepted as live, that is, would not be looked at twice. They are stations on the way to the ultimate piece of collage—the living figure. This figure was provided at O. K. Harris in 1972 by Carlin Jeffery, the living sculpture, which, like a piece of collage, declared—on request—its own history. A live figure as a collage returns us to Picasso's costumes for *Parade*, a walking Cubist picture. Which is a good point to pick up these two modern familiars, the Eye and the Spectator, again.

it takes up the business of redeeming the picture plane. The Spectator, as we have seen, copes with the invasion of real space from Pandora's picture plane, opened by collage. These two directions—or traditions, as Gene Swenson called them—vie with each other in their opprobrium. The Eye looks down on the Spectator; the Spectator thinks the Eye is out of touch with real life. The comedies of the relationship are of Wildean proportions; an Eye without a body and a body without much of an Eye usually cut each other dead. Yet they indirectly maintain a kind of dialogue no one wants to notice. And in late modernism, the two come together for the purpose of refreshing their misunderstanding. After modernism's final—and American—climax, the Eye bears Pollock's picture plane off triumphantly toward color field; the Spectator brings it into real space where any thing can happen.

In the late '60s and '70s, Eye and Spectator negotiate some transactions. Minimal objects often provoked other perceptions than the visual. Though what was there instantly declared itself to the eye, it had to be checked—otherwise what was the point of three-dimensionality? There are two kinds of time here: the eye apprehended the object at once, like painting, then the body bore the eye around it. This prompted a feedback between expectation confirmed (checking) and hitherto subliminal bodily sensation. Eye and Spectator were not fused, but cooperated for the occasion. The finely tuned Eye was impressed with some residual data from its abandoned body (the kinesthetics of gravity, tracking, etc.). The Spectator's other senses, always there in the raw, were infused with some of the Eye's fine discriminations. The Eye urges the body around to provide it with information—the body becomes a data-gatherer. There is heavy traffic in both directions on this sensory highway—between sensation conceptualized and concept actualized. In this unstable rapprochement lie the origins of perceptual scenarios, performance and body art.

The empty gallery, then, is not empty. Its walls are sensitized by the picture plane, its space primed by collage; and it contains two tenants with a long-term lease. Why was it necessary to invent them? Why do the Eye and the Spectator

It often feels as if we can no longer experience anything if we don't first alienate it. In fact, alienation may now be a necessary preface to experience. Anything too close to us bears the label: *Objectify and Re-ingest*. This mode of handling experience—especially art experience—is inescapably modern. But while its pathos is obvious, it is not all negative. As a mode of experience it can be called degenerate, but it is no more so than our “space” is degenerate. It is simply the result of certain necessities pressed upon us. Much of our experience can only be brought home through mediation. The vernacular example is the snapshot. You can only see what a good time you had from the summer snapshots. Experience can then be adjusted to certain norms of “having a good time.” These Kodachrome icons are used to convince friends you did have a good time—if they believe it, you believe it. Everyone wants to have photographs not only to prove, but to invent their experience. This constellation of narcissism, insecurity and pathos is so influential, I suppose none of us is quite free of it.

So in most areas of experience there is a busy traffic in proxies and surrogates. The implication is that direct experience might kill us. Sexual experience used to be the last place where privacy preserved direct experience without the interposition of models. But when sex went public, when its study became as unavoidable as tennis, the fatal surrogate entered, promising “real” experience by the very consciousness of self that makes it inaccessible. Here, as with other mediated experience, “feeling” is turned into a consumer product. Modern art, however, in this as in other areas, was ahead of its time. For the Viewer—literally something you look through—and the Eye validate experience. They join us whenever we enter a gallery, and the solitariness of our perambulations is obligatory, because we are really holding a mini-seminar with our surrogates. To that exact degree, we are absent. Presence before a work of art, then, means that we absent ourselves in favor of the Eye and Spectator, who report to us what we might have seen had we been there. The absent work of art is frequently more present to us—I believe Rothko understood this better than any other artist. This complex anatomy of looking at art is our “elsewhere” trip; it is fundamental to our provisional modern identity, which is always being

ourselves. They acknowledge that our identity is itself a fiction, and they give us the illusion we are present through a double-edged self-consciousness. We objectify and consume art, then, to nourish our nonexistent selves, or to maintain some esthetic starving called “formalist man.” All this is clearer if we go back to that moment when a picture became an active partner in perception.

Impressionism’s first spectators must have had a lot of trouble seeing the pictures. When an attempt was made to verify the subject by going up close, it disappeared. The spectator was forced to run back and forth to trap bits of content before they evaporated. The picture, no longer a passive object, was issuing instructions. And the Spectator began to utter his first complaints: not only “What is it supposed to be?” and “What does it mean?”, but “Where am I supposed to stand?” Problems of deportment are intrinsic to modernism.

Impressionism began that harassment of the spectator inseparable from most advanced art. As we read avant-garde dispatches, it seems that modernism paraded through a vast sensory anguish. For once the object of scrutiny becomes active, our senses are on trial. Modernism underlines that “identity” in the 20th century is centered around perception, on which subject philosophy, physiology and psychology have also converged major efforts. Indeed, just as *systems* were a 19th-century obsession, *perception* is a 20th. It mediates between object and idea and includes both. Once the “active” artwork is included in the perceptual arc, the senses are called into question. And since the senses apprehend the data that confirm identity, identity becomes problematic.

The Eye then stands for two opposite forces: the fragmentation of the self and the illusion of holding it together. The Spectator makes possible such experience as we are allowed to have. Alienation and esthetic distance become confused, and not unprofitably. It seems like an unstable situation: a fractured self, senses on the brink, surrogates employed in tasks of fine discrimination. But it’s a tight little system with a lot of stability built into it. It is reinforced every time you call on the Eye and Spectator.

about looking at a work of art (looking at ourselves looking), any certainty about what's "out there" was eroded by the uncertainties of the perceptual process. The Eye and the Spectator stand for that process, which continually restates the paradoxes of consciousness. There is an opportunity to dispense with those two surrogates and experience "directly." Such experience, of course, cancels the self-consciousness that sustains memory. So Eye and Spectator acknowledge the desire for direct experience, at the same time they recognize that the modernist consciousness can only temporarily deliver itself to quotas of process. Again the Eye and Spectator emerge with a double function—as much curators of our consciousness as subverters of it. Post-modern art shows an exact appreciation of this. Its quotas of process are succeeded by those traces of organized memory—documentation, not the experience, but the evidence of it.

Process then, gives us opportunities to eliminate the Eye and the Spectator as well as to institutionalize them, and this has happened. Hard-core Conceptualism eliminates the Eye in favor of mind. The audience reads. Language is reasonably well equipped to examine the sets of conditions that formulate art's end-product: "meaning." This inquiry tends to become self-referential or contextual—that is, more like art, or more like the conditions that sustain it.

One of these conditions is the gallery space. Thus there is a marvelous paradox about Joseph Kosuth's "installation" at Castelli in 1972: the tables, the benches, the open books. It is not a looking room; it is a reading room. The ceremony of informality is deceptive. Here is the aura of Wittgenstein's study, as we might imagine it. Or is it a schoolroom? Bare, essential, even puritanical, it cancels as well as draws on the special cloister of esthetics that the gallery is. It is a remarkable image.

So is its opposite—an image of a man in a gallery threatening his own substance with implicit or explicit violence. If Conceptualism eliminates the Eye by once again making it the servant of the mind, body art, such as Chris Burden's, identifies the spectator with the artist and the artist with art—a sacramental trinity. The punishment of the spectator is a

body the vicissitudes of art and process is an extraordinary conceit. We perceive again that double movement. Experience is made possible, but only at the price of alienating it. There is something infinitely pathetic about the single figure in the gallery, testing limits, ritualizing its assaults on its body, gathering scanty information on the flesh it cannot shake off.

In these extreme cases art becomes the life of the mind or the life of the body, and each offers its returns. The Eye disappears into the mind, and the Spectator, in a surrogate's phantom suicide, induces his own elimination.

—Brian O'Doherty

Brian O'Doherty shows at the Betty Parsons Gallery under the name of Patrick Ireland.

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Pablo Picasso, 1935, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.K. Version)*, oil and varnished canvas, 146 cm x 193 cm.

INSIDE THE WHITE CUBE Part II THE EYE AND THE SPECTATOR

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Couldn't modernism be taught to children as a series of Aesop's Fables? It would be more memorable than art appreciation. Think of such fables as "Who Killed Illusionism?" or "How the Edge Revolted Against the Center." "The Man Who Violated the Canvas" could follow "Where Did the Frame Go?" It would be easy to draw morals; think of "The vanishing Impasto that soaked away—and then came back and got fat." And how would we tell the story of the little Picture Plane that grew up and got so mean? How it evicted everybody, including Father Perspective and Mother Space, who had raised such nice real children? And left behind only this horrid result of an incestuous affair called Abstraction, who looked down on everybody, including—eventually—its buddies, Metaphor and Ambiguity. And how Abstraction and the Picture Plane, thick as thieves, kept booting out a persistent guttersnipe named Collage, who just wouldn't give up. Fables give you more latitude than art history. I suspect art historians have fantasies about their fields they would like to make stick. This is a preface to some generalizations about Cubism and collage that seem equally true and fictitious, and thus compose a fairy tale for adults.

The forces that crushed 400 years of illusionism and idealism together and evicted them from the picture translated deep space into surface tension. This surface responds as a field to any mark on it. One mark was enough to establish a relationship not so much with the next as with the esthetic and ideological potency of the

blank canvas. The content of the empty canvas increased as modernism went on. Imagine a museum of such potencies, a temporal corridor hung with blank canvases—from 1850, 1880, 1910, 1950, 1970. Each contains, before a brush is laid on it, assumptions implicit in the art of its era. As the series approaches the present, each member accumulates a more complex latent content. Modernism's classic void ends up stuffed with ideas all ready to jump on the first brushstroke. The specialized surface of the modern canvas is as aristocratic an invention as human ingenuity ever evolved.

Inevitably, what went on that surface, paint itself, became the locus of conflicting ideologies. Caught between its substance and its metaphorical potential, paint re-enacted in its material body the residual dilemmas of illusionism. As paint became subject, object and process, illusionism was squeezed out of it. The integrity of the picture plane and the morality of the medium favor lateral extension. The mainstream as scheduled from Cézanne to color field glides along the wall, measures it with vertical and horizontal coordinates, maintains the propriety of gravity and the upright viewer. This is the etiquette of normal social discourse, and through it the mainstream viewer is continually re-introduced to the wall, which in turn supports the canvas—its surface now so sensitive that an object on it would cause it, as it were, to blink.

But as high art vacuumed the picture plane, the vernacular surpassed itself in transgressing its vulgar equivalent. While the Impressionists occluded tradi-

tional perspective with a curtain of paint, popular painters and photographers in many countries gammed with illusion, from Archimboldesque grotesqueries to *trompe l'oeil*. Shells, glitter, hair, stones, minerals, ribbons, were attached to postcards, photographs, frames, shadowboxes. This tacky efflorescence, saturated in the Victorian's corrupt version of short-term memory—nostalgia—was, of course, a substratum of symbolism and surrealism. So when, in 1911, Picasso stuck that piece of oil cloth printed with chair-caning on a canvas, some advanced colleagues may have seen it as a *rétable* gesture.

It is now collage's Exhibit A. Artists, historians, critics are always tramping back to 1911 to take a look at it. It marks an irrevocable through-the-looking-glass passage from the picture's space into the secular world, the spectator's space. Analytic Cubism didn't push laterally, but poked out the picture plane, contradicting previous advances in defining it. Facets of space are thrust forward; sometimes they look stuck on the surface. Bits of Analytic Cubism, then, could already be seen as a kind of collage *manqué*.

The moment a collage was attached to that unruly Cubist surface there was an instantaneous switch. No longer able to pin a subject together in a space too shallow for it, the multiple vanishing points of the Analytic Cubist picture shower out into the room with the spectator. His point of view ricochets among them. The surface of the picture is made opaque by collage. Behind it is simply a wall, or a void. In front is an open space in

parts, the revolt of objects, pockets of void become generative forces in all the arts. Abstraction and reality—not realism—conduct this rancorous argument throughout modernism. The picture plane, like an exclusive country club, keeps reality out and for good reason. Snobbishness is, after all, a form of purity, prejudice a way of being consistent. Reality does not conform to the rules of etiquette, subscribe to exclusive values, or wear a tie; it has a vulgar set of relations and is frequently seen slumping among the senses with other antithetical arts.

Both abstraction and reality, however, are implicated in that sacred 20th-century dimension, space. The exclusive division between them has blurred the fact that the first has considerable practical relevance—contrary to the modern myth that art is “useless.” If art has any cultural reference (apart from being “culture”) surely it is in the definition of our space and time. The flow of energy between concepts of space articulated through the artwork and the space we occupy is one of the basic and least understood forces in modernism. Modernist space redefines the observer's status, tinkers with his self-image. Modernism's conceptions of space, not its subject matter, may be what the public rightly conceives as threatening. Now of course space contains no threats, has no hierarchies. Its mythologies are drained, its rhetoric collapsed. It is simply a kind of undifferentiated potency. This is not a “degeneration” of space, but the sophisticated convention of an advanced culture which has cancelled its values in the name of an abstraction called “freedom.” Space now is not just where things happen, things make space happen.

Space was clarified not only in the picture, but in the place the picture hangs—the gallery, which with post-modernism joins the picture plane as a unit of discourse. If the picture plane defined the wall, collage defines the space between the walls. The fragment from the real world plunked on the picture's surface is the imprimatur of an unstoppable generative energy. Do we not, through an odd reversal, as we stand in the gallery space, end up inside the picture, looking out at an opaque picture plane that protects us from a void? (Could Lichtenstein's paintings of the back of a canvas be a text for this?) As we move around that space, looking at the walls, avoiding things on the floor, we become aware that that gallery also contains a wandering phantom frequently mentioned in avant-garde dispatches—the spectator.

Who is this Spectator? Also called the Viewer. Sometimes the Observer, occasionally the Perceiver. It has no face, is mostly a back. It stoops and peers, is slightly clumsy. Its attitude is inquiring, its puzzlement discreet. He—I'm sure it is more male than female—arrived with modernism, with the disappearance of perspective. He seems born out of the picture and, like some perceptual Adam, is drawn back repeatedly to

effect on the spectator is . . . and smells out ambiguities like a bloodhound: “caught between these ambiguities, the spectator . . .” He not only stands and sits on command; he lies down and even crawls as modernism presses on him its final indignities. Plunged into darkness, deprived of perceptual cues, blasted by studies, he frequently watches his own image chopped up and recycled by a variety of media. Art conjugates him, but he is a sluggish verb, eager to carry the weight of meaning, but not always up to it. He balances, he tests, he is mystified, demystified. In time, the Spectator stumbles around between confusing roles: he is a cluster of motor reflexes, a dark-adapted wanderer, the viewer in a tableau, an actor manque, even a trigger of sound and light in a space land-mined for art. He may even be told that he himself is an artist, and be persuaded that his contribution to what he observes or trips over is its authenticating signature.

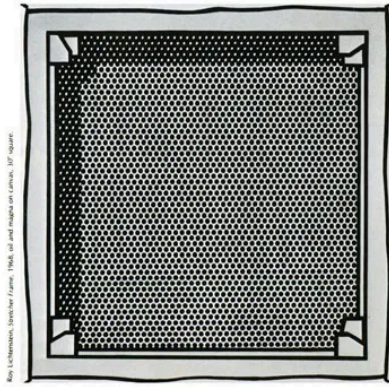
Yet the Spectator has a dignified pedigree. His genealogy includes the 18th-century rationalist with an astute eye—Addison's Spectator, perhaps, whose gallery equivalent is called “the onlooker” and “the beholder.” A closer antecedent is the Romantic self, which quickly splits to produce an actor and an audience, a protagonist and an eye that observes him.

This Romantic split is comparable to the addition of the third actor to the Greek stage. Levels of awareness

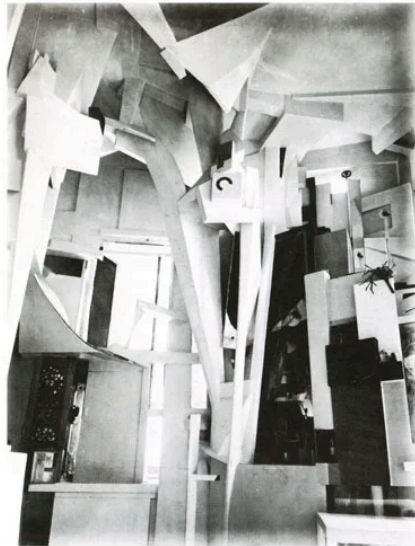
for cannot. It is a finely tuned, even noble organ, esthetically and socially superior to the Spectator. It is easy for a writer to have a Spectator around—there is something of the Eternal Footman about him. It is more difficult to have an Eye, although no writer should be without one. Not having an Eye is a stigma to be hidden, perhaps by knowing someone who has one.

The Eye can be directed, but with less confidence than the Spectator, who, unlike the eye, is rather eager to please. The Eye is an oversensitive acquaintance with whom one must stay on good terms. It is often quizzed a little nervously, its responses received respectfully. It must be waited on while it observes—observation being its perfectly specialized function. “The Eye discriminates between . . . The Eye resolves. . . The Eye takes in, balances, weighs, discerns, perceives . . .” But like any thoroughbred, it has its limits. “Sometimes the eye fails to perceive . . .” Not always predictable, it has been known to lie. It has trouble with content, which is the last thing the Eye wants to see. It is no good at all for looking at cabs, bathroom fixtures, girls, sports results. Indeed it is so specialized it can end up watching itself. But it is unmatched for looking at a particular kind of art.

The Eye is the only inhabitant of the sanitized installation shot. The Spectator is not present. Installation shots are generally of abstract works; realists don't go in for



Roy Lichtenstein, *Study for Figure*, 1964, oil and magna on canvas, 60" square.



Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, Hannover, Germany, begun 1923, destroyed 1941.



Allan Kaprow, *Environment*, 1960, Environment, Madison Memorial Church, New York City.

them much. In installation shots the question of scale is confirmed (the size of the gallery is deduced from the photo) and blurred (the absence of a spectator could mean the gallery is 30 feet high). This scalelessness conforms with the fluctuations through which reproduction passes the successful work of art. The art the Eye is brought to bear on almost exclusively is that which preserves the picture plane—mainstream modernism. The Eye maintains the seamless gallery space, its walls swept by flat planes of duck. Everything else—all things impure, including collage—favors the Spectator. The Spectator stands in space broken up by the consequences of collage, the second great force that altered the gallery space. When the Spectator is Kurt Schwitters, we are brought to a space we can only occupy by eyewitness reports, by walking our eyes through photographs that tantalize rather than confirm experience: his *Merzbau* of 1923 at Hannover, destroyed in 1943. “It grows about the way a big city does,” wrote Schwitters, “when a new building goes up, the Housing

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Bureau checks to see that the whole appearance of the city is not going to be ruined. In my case, I run across something or other that looks to me as though it would be right for the KdeE [Cathedral of Erotic Misery], so I pick it up, take it home, and attach it and paint it, always keeping in mind the rhythm of the whole. Then a day comes when I realize I have a corpse on my hands—relics of a movement in art that is now passé. So what happens is that I leave them alone, only I cover them up either wholly or partly with other things, making clear

that they are being downgraded. As the structure grows bigger and bigger, valleys, hollows, caves appear, and these lead a life of their own within the overall structure. The juxtaposed surfaces give rise to forms twisting in every direction, spiralling upward. An arrangement of the most strictly geometrical cubes covers the whole, underneath which shapes are curiously bent or otherwise twisted until their complete dissolution is achieved.”

Witnesses don't report on themselves in the *Merzbau*. They look at it, rather than experience themselves in it. The environment was a genre nearly forty years away, and the idea of a surrounded spectator was not yet a conscious one. All recognized the invasion of space, the author being, as Werner Schmalenbach put it, “progressively dispossessed.” The energy powering this invasion is not recognized, though mentioned by Schwitters, for if the work had any organizing principle, it was the mythos of a city. The city provided materials, models of process and a primitive esthetic of juxta-



Clas Oldenburg, Happening, 1960



Lucas Samaras, Bedroom, 1964

position—congruity forced by mixed needs and intentions. The city is the indispensable context of collage and of the gallery space. Modern art needs the sound of traffic outside to authenticate it.

The Merzbau was a tougher, more sinister work than it appears in the photographs available to us. It grew out of a studio—that is, a space, materials, an artist and a process. Space extended (upstairs and downstairs) and so did time (to about 13 years). The work cannot be remembered as static, as it looks in photographs. Framed by meters and years, it was a mutating, polyphonic construct, with multiple subjects, functions, concepts of space and of art. It contained in reliquaries mementoes of such friends as Gabo, Arp, Mondrian and Richter. It was an autobiography of voyages in the city. There was a "mouque" of city sensation (The Sea Crime Cave, The Cathedral of Erotic Misery, The Grotto of Love, The Cave of the Murderers). Cultural tradition was preserved in The Niebelungen Cave, The Goethe Cave, the absurd Michelangelo Exhibition. It revised history

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(The Cave of Depreciated Heroes) and offered models of behavior (The Caves of Hero Worship)—two built-in systems of value, that, like their environment, were subject to change. Most of these Expressionist/Dada conceits were buried, like guilt, by the later Constructivist overlay that turned the Merzbau into a utopian hybrid, part practical design (desk, stool, part sculpture, part architecture. As the Expressionism/Dada was collaged over, esthetic history was literalized into an architectural record. The Constructivism did not

clarify the structure, which remained, as Schmalenbach says, "irrational space." Both space and artist—we tend to think of them together—exchanged identities and masks. As the author's identities are externalized onto his shell/cave/room, the walls advance upon him. Eventually he flits around a shrinking space like a piece of moving collage.

There is something involuntarily and inside-out about the Merzbau. Its concept had a kind of nuttiness that some visitors acknowledged by commenting on its lack of eccentricity. Its numerous dialectics—between Dada and Constructivism, structure and experience, the organic and the archeological, the city outside, the space inside—spiral around one word: transformation. Kate Steinitz, the Merzbau's most perceptive visitor, noticed a cave "in which a bottle of urine was solemnly displayed so that the rays of light that fell on it turned the liquid into gold." The sacramental nature of transformation is deeply connected to Romantic idealism; in its expressionist phase it tests itself by performing



Allen Ruppers, Words, 1962, Environment

"The passion to actualize even illusion is a mark—even a stigma—of '60s art. With the tableau, the gallery 'impersonates' other spaces."

rescue operations among the most degraded materials and subjects. Initially the picture plane is an idealized transforming space. The transformation of objects is contextual, a matter of relocation. Proximity to the picture plane assists this transformation. When isolated the context of objects is the gallery. Eventually, the gallery itself becomes, like the picture plane, a transforming force. At this point, as Minimalism demonstrated, art can be literalized and detransformed; the gallery will make it art anyway. Idealism is hard to extinguish in art, because the empty gallery itself becomes art *marqué*, and so preserves it. Schwitters's Merzbau is the first example of a "gallery" as a chamber of transformation, from which the world can be colonized by the converted eye.

Schwitters's career offers another example of an intimate space defined by his proprietary aura. During his stay in a British detention camp for enemy aliens in the Isle of Wight he established a living space under a table. This creation of place in a camp for displaced people is animal, ludic and dignified. In retrospect, this space, which, like the Merzbau, we can only remember, signifies how firmly Schwitters forced a reciprocal function between art and life, mediated in this case by just living. Like pieces of Merz the trivia of sub-tubular occupancy, curtailed by moving feet,

are transformed in time, by day-to-day living, into ritual. Could we now say this was partly a performance piece in a self-created photo-gallery?

Schwitters's Merzbau, like other Cubist collages, sports an odd letter; letters and words being donors of, in Braque's view, "a feeling of certainty." Collage is a noisy business. A soundtrack accompanies its words and letters. Without going into the attractive complexities of the letter and the word in modernism, they are disruptive. From Futurism to the Bauhaus, words cut across media and literally force themselves on stage. All mixed movements have a theatrical component which runs parallel to the gallery space, but which, in my view, doesn't contribute much to its definition. Theatrical conventions die in the gallery. Schwitters may have recognized this when he separated his two kinds of theater: one was a chaotic multisensory actualization of the Merzbau, enveloping the spectator; the other a clarification of the conventional stage through Constructivism. Neither really intrudes on the gallery space, though the immaculate gallery does show some traces of Constructivist housekeeping. Performance in the gallery subscribes to an entirely different set of conventions from stage performance.

Schwitters's recitations broke the conventions of ordinary life—talking, lecturing. The way his properly





Claes Oldenburg, Bedroom Ensemble (detail), 1961, mixed media.

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Oldenburg, 22 x 9 x 4, "Bedroom Ensemble" (detail), 1961, mixed media.

barked loud. Some people fainted and were carried out, and the Papers reported, that Dada means barking. At once we got engagements from Haarlem and Amsterdam. It was sold out in Haarlem, and I walked so that all could see me, and all waited that I should bark. Doesburg said again, I would do something unexpected. This time I blew my nose. The papers wrote that [sic] I did not bark, that I blew only my nose. In Amsterdam it was so full, that people gave phantastic prizes [sic], to get still a seat, I did not bark, nor blow my nose, I recited the Revolution. A lady could not stop laughing and had to be carried out."

The gestures are precise and could be briefly interpreted—"I am a dog, a sneezer, a pamphlet." Like pieces of Merz they are collaged into a set situation (environment), from which they derive energy. The indeterminacy of that context is favorable ground for the growth of new conventions, which in the theater would be smothered by the convention of "acting."

Happenings were first enacted in indeterminate, non-theatrical spaces—warehouses, deserted factories, old stores. Happenings mediated a careful stand-off between avant-garde theater and collage. They conceive the spectator as a kind of collage in that he was spread out over the interior—his attention split by simultaneous events, his senses disorganized and redistributed by firmly transgressed logic. Not much was said at most Happenings, but, like the city that provided their themes, they literally crawled with words. Words, indeed, was the title of an environment with which Allan Kaprow enclosed the spectator in 1961. Words contained circulating names (people) who were invited to contribute words on paper to attach to walls and partitions. Collage seems to have a latent desire to turn itself outside-in; there is something womblike about it.

Yet the realization of the Environment was oddly retarded. Why is there almost nothing environmental between Cubism and Schwitters—harring-forthcoming Russian surprises? Or between Schwitters and the Environments of the late '50s and early '60s which arrive in a cluster with Kaprow, Fluxus, the New Realists, Kienholz and others? It may be that illustrative Surrealism, conserving the illusion within the picture, avoided the implications of the expulsion from the picture plane into real space. Within this time there are great landmarks and gestures that conceive of the gallery as a unit—Lissitzky designed a modern gallery space in 1925 in Hannover, as Schwitters was working at his Merzbau. But with some doubtful exceptions (Duchamp's coal bags and string!), they do not emerge from collage. Environmental collage and assemblage clarify themselves with the acceptance of the tableau as a genre. With tableaux (Segal, Kienholz), the illusionistic space within the traditional picture is actualized in the box of the gallery. The passion to actualize even illusion is a mark—even a stigma—of '60s art. With the tableau, the gallery "impersonates" other spaces. It is a bar (Kienholz), a hospital room (Kienholz), a gas station (Segal),



Duane Hanson, Man with Hand Truck, 1973, polyester and fiberglass, life-size.



John de Andrea, Installation view, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1972.

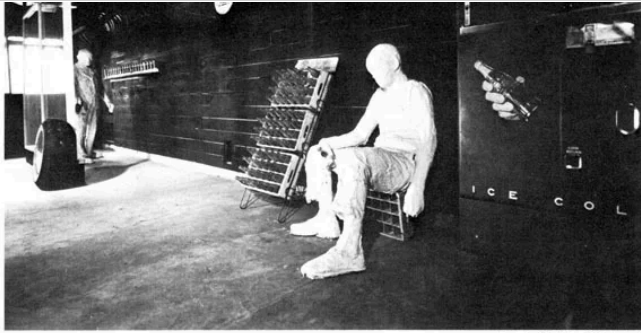
"Encountering a Hanson or a de Andrea is shocking; it violates our own sense of reality... they are stations on the way to the ultimate piece of collage—the living figure."

a bedroom (Oldenburg), a living room (Segal), a "real" studio (Samaras). The gallery space "quotes" the tableaux and makes them art, much as their representation became art within the illusory space of a traditional picture.

The spectator in a tableau somehow feels he shouldn't be there. Segal's art makes this clearer than anyone else's. His objects—great lumps of them—wear a history of previous occupancy, whether bus or diner or door. Their familiarity is distanced by the gallery context, and by the sense of occupancy conveyed by the plaster figures. The figures freeze this history of usage at a particular time. Like period rooms, Segal's pieces are closely time-bound while they imitate timelessness. Since the environment is occupied already, our relationship to it is partly preempted by the figures, which have the blush of life completely withdrawn from them. They—even in their mode of manufacture—are simulacra of the living, and ignore us with some of the irritating indifference of the dead. Despite their postures, which signify rather than enact relationships, they also seem indifferent to each other. There is a slow, abstract lapse between each of them and between them and their environment. Their occupancy of their environment is a large subject. But the effect on the spectator who joins them is one of trespass. Because trespass makes one partly visible to oneself, it plays down body language, encourages a convention of silence and tends to substitute the Eye for the Spectator. This is



Carlotta Jeffery, Installation view, O. K. Harris Gallery, 1972.



George Segal, *Car Station*, 1968, mixed media.

exactly what would happen if Segal's tableaux were painted pictures. It is a very sophisticated form of "realism." Segal's white plaster is a convention of removal, which also removes us from ourselves.

Encountering a Hanson or a de Andrea is shocking; it violates our own sense of reality, or the reality of our senses. They trespass not only on our space but on our credibility. They derive, in my view, not so much from sculpture as from collage, something taken indoors and artfied by the gallery. Outdoors, in the proper context, they would be accepted as live, that is, would not be looked at twice. They are stations on the way to the ultimate piece of collage—the living figure. This figure was provided at O. K. Harris in 1972 by Carlin Jeffery, the living sculpture, which, like a piece of collage, declared—on request—its own history. A live figure as a collage returns us to Picasso's costumes for *Parade*, a walking Cubist picture. Which is a good point to pick up these two modern familiars, the Eye and the Spectator, again.

The Eye and the Spectator set off in different directions from Analytic Cubism. The Eye goes along with Synthetic Cubism as it takes up the business of redefining the picture plane. The Spectator, as we have seen, copes with the invasion of real space from Pandora's picture plane, opened by collage. These two directions—or traditions, as Gene Swenson called them—vie with each other in their opprobrium. The Eye looks down on the Spectator; the Spectator thinks the Eye is out of touch

with real life. The comedies of the relationship are of Wildean proportions; an Eye without a body and a body without much of an Eye usually cut each other dead. Yet they indirectly maintain a kind of dialogue no one wants to notice. And in late modernism, the two come together for the purpose of refreshing their misunderstanding. After modernism's final—and American—climax, the Eye bears Pollock's picture plane off triumphantly toward color field; the Spectator brings it into real space where anything can happen.

In the late '60s and '70s, Eye and Spectator negotiate some transactions. Minimal objects often provoked other perceptions than the visual. Though what was there instantly declared itself to the eye, it had to be checked—otherwise what was the point of three-dimensionality? There are two kinds of time here: the eye apprehended the object at once, like painting, then the body bore the eye around it. This prompted a feedback between expectation confirmed (checking) and hitherto subliminal bodily sensation. Eye and Spectator were not fused, but cooperated for the occasion. The finely tuned Eye was impressed with some residual data from its abandoned body (the kinesthetics of gravity, tracking, etc.). The Spectator's other senses, always there in the raw, were infused with some of the Eye's fine discriminations. The Eye urges the body around to provide it with information—the body becomes a data-gatherer. There is heavy traffic in both directions on this sensory highway—between sensation

conceptualized and concept actualized. In this unstable rapprochement lie the origins of perceptual scenarios, performance and body art.

The empty gallery, then, is not empty. Its walls are sensitized by the picture plane, its space primed by collage; and it contains two tenants with a long-term lease. Why was it necessary to invent them? Why do the Eye and the Spectator separate themselves out from our daily persons to interrupt and double our senses?

It often feels as if we can no longer experience anything if we don't first alienate it. In fact, alienation may now be a necessary preface to experience. Anything too close to us bears the label: *Objectify and Re-ingest*. This mode of handling experience—especially art experience—is inescapably modern. But while its pathos is obvious, it is not all negative. As a mode of experience it can be called degenerate, but it is no more so than our "space" is degenerate. It is simply the result of certain necessities pressed upon us. Much of our experience can only be brought home through mediation. The vernacular example is the snapshot. You can only see what a good time you had from the summer snapshots. Experience can then be adjusted to certain norms of "having a good time." These Kodachrome icons are used to convince friends you did have a good time—if they believe it, you believe it. Everyone wants to have photographs not only to prove, but to invent their experience. This constellation of narcissism, insecurity and pathos is so influential, I suppose none

of us is quite free of it.

So in most areas of experience there is a busy traffic in proxies and surrogates. The implication is that direct experience might kill us. Sexual experience used to be the last place where privacy preserved direct experience without the interposition of models. But when sex went public, when its study became as unavoidable as tennis, the fatal surrogate entered, promising "real" experience by the very consciousness of self that makes it inaccessible. Here, as with other mediated experience, "feeling" is turned into a consumer product. Modern art, however, in this as in other areas, was ahead of its time. For the Viewer—literally something you look through—and the Eye validate experience. They join us whenever we enter a gallery, and the solitariness of our perambulations is obligatory, because we are really holding a mini-seminar with our surrogates. To that exact degree, we are absent. Presence before a work of art, then, means that we absent ourselves in favor of the Eye and Spectator, who report to us what we might have seen had we been there. The absent work of art is frequently more present to us—I believe Rothko understood this better than any other artist. This complex anatomy of looking at art is our "elsewhere" trip; it is fundamental to our provisional modern identity, which is always being reconditioned by our table senses. For the Spectator and the Eye are conventions which stabilize our missing sense of ourselves. They acknowledge that our identity is itself a fiction, and they give us the illusion we are present through a double-edged self-consciousness. We objectify and consume art, then, to nourish our nonexistent selves, or to maintain some esthetic stinking called "formalist man." All this is clearer if we go back to that moment when a picture became an active partner in perception.

Impressionism's first spectators must have had a lot of trouble seeing the pictures. When an attempt was made to verify the subject by going up close, it disappeared. The spectator was forced to run back and forth to trap bits of content before they evaporated. The picture, no longer a passive object, was issuing instructions. And the Spectator began to utter his first complaints: not only "What is it supposed to be?" and "What does it mean?", but "Where am I supposed to stand?" Problems of department are intrinsic to modernism. Impressionism began that harassment of the spectator inseparable from most advanced art. As we read avant-garde dispatches, it seems that modernism paraded through a vast sensory anguish. For once the object of scrutiny becomes active, our senses are on trial. Modernism underlines that "identity" in the 20th century is centered around perception, on which subject philosophy, physiology and psychology have also converged major efforts. Indeed, just as systems were a 19th-century obsession, perception is a 20th. It mediates between object and idea and includes both. Once the "active" artwork is included in the perceptual arc, the senses are called into question. And since the senses apprehend the data that confirm identity, identity becomes problematic.

The Eye then stands for two opposite forces: the fragmentation of the self and the illusion of holding it together. The Spectator makes possible such experience as we are allowed to have. Alienation and esthetic distance become confused, and not unprofitably. It seems like an unstable situation: a fractured self, senses on the brink, surrogates employed in tasks of fine discrimination. But it's a little tight system with a lot of stability built into it. It is reinforced every time you call on the Eye and Spectator.

But the Eye and the Spectator stand for more than slipping senses and mutating identity. When we became self-conscious about looking at a work of art (looking at ourselves looking), any certainty about what's "out there" was eroded by the uncertainties of the perceptual process. The Eye and the Spectator stand for that process, which continually restates the paradoxes of consciousness. There is an opportunity to dispense with those two surrogates and experience "directly." Such experience, of course, cancels the self-consciousness that sustains memory. So Eye and Spectator acknowledge the desire for direct experience, at the same time they recognize that the modernist consciousness can only temporarily deliver itself to quotas of process. Again the Eye and Spectator emerge with a double function—as much curators of our consciousness as subverters of it. Post-modern art shows an exact appreciation of this. Its quotas of process are succeeded by those traces of organized memory—documentation, not the experience, but the evidence of it.

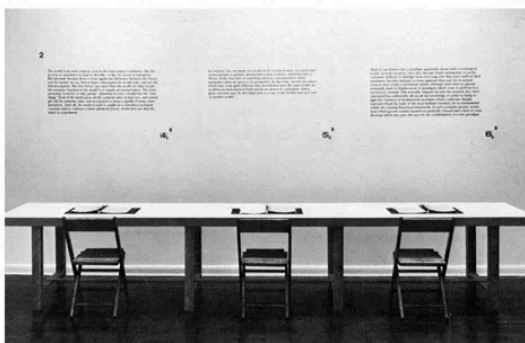
Process then, gives us opportunities to eliminate the Eye and the Spectator as well as to institutionalize them, and this has happened. Hard-core Conceptualism eliminates the Eye in favor of mind. The audience reads. Language is reasonably well equipped to examine the sets of conditions that formulate art's end-product: "meaning." This inquiry tends to become self-referential or contextual—that is, more like art, or more like the conditions that sustain it.

One of these conditions is the gallery space. Thus there is a marvelous paradox about Joseph Kosuth's "installation" at Castelli in 1972: the tables, the benches, the open books. It is not a looking room; it is a reading room. The ceremony of informality is deceptive. Here is the aura of Wittgenstein's study, as we might imagine it. Or is it a schoolroom? Bare, essential, even puritanical, it cancels as well as draws on the special cloister of esthetics that the gallery is. It is a remarkable image.

So is its opposite—an image of a man in a gallery threatening his own substance with implicit or explicit violence. If Conceptualism eliminates the Eye by once again making it the servant of the mind, body art, such as Chris Burden's, identifies the spectator with the artist and the artist with art—a sacramental trinity. The punishment of the spectator is a theme of advanced art. Eliminating the spectator by identifying him with the artist's body and enacting on that body the vicissitudes of art and process is an extraordinary conceit. We perceive again that double movement. Experience is made possible, but only at the price of alienating it. There is something infinitely pathetic about the single figure in the gallery, testing limits, ritualizing its assaults on its body, gathering scanty information on the flesh it cannot shake off.

In these extreme cases art becomes the life of the mind or the life of the body, and each offers its returns. The Eye disappears into the mind, and the Spectator, in a surrogate's phantom suicide, induces his own elimination. ■

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Joseph Kosuth, *Installation*, Leo Castelli Gallery, 1972.

Brian O'Doherty shows at the Betty Parsons Gallery under the name of Patrick Ireland.

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