

WORKS CITED

- ALTHUSSER, Louis. 1994. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," In *Ideology*. Ed. Terry Eagleton. London: Longman. 89-111. From Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books, 1971.
- AUDEN, W. H. 1930. *Poems*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1936. *Look, Stranger!* London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1940. *Another Time*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1941. *New Year Letter*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1945. *For the Time Being*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1950. *Collected Shorter Poems 1930-1944*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1951. *The Enchafed Flood, or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1956. "Hic et Ille." *Encounter* 6.4 (April): 33-39.
- . 1959. "The Fallen City," *Encounter* 13.5 (November): 21-31; as "The Prince's Dog," with minor amendments, in Auden 1963: 182-208.
- . 1963. *The Dyer's Hand and other essays*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1964. "Foreword." In *W. H. Auden: A Bibliography*. By B. C. Bloomfield. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia.
- . 1971. *A Certain World*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1973a. "Greatness Finding Itself." In Auden 1973c. Originally published in *The Mid-Century* (June 1960).
- . 1973b. Introduction to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. William Burto. New York: New American Library, 1964. Rpt. in Auden 1973c: 88-108.
- . 1973c. *Forewords and Afterwords*. Ed. Edward Mendelson. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1974. *Thank You, Fog: Last Poems*. London: Faber and Faber.
- . 1995. "Phantasy and Reality in Poetry," 1971. Introduced by Katherine Bucknell, in *In Solitude, for Company: W. H. Auden After 1940*. Ed. Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins. (Auden Studies 3). Oxford: Clarendon. 139-206.
- . 1996. "T. E. Lawrence," ; reprinted in Edward Mendelson (ed), *W. H. Auden: Prose*, vol. I: 1926-1938. Ed. Edward Mendelson. London: Faber and Faber. 61-2. Originally published in *Now and Then* (Spring 1934).
- SMITH, Stan. 1997. *W. H. Auden*. Plymouth: Northcote House in Association with the British Council.



VIEW (1940-47), THE AVANT-GARDE, AND THE UNCERTAIN LIFE OF OBJECTS: CRITICISM AS IF FRAGMENTS MATTERED



JUAN A. SUÁREZ
UNIVERSIDAD DE MURCIA

MODERNITY, THE AVANT-GARDE, AND THE CULTURE OF OBJECTS

Like its twin aesthetic, modernism, the avant-garde can be read as a response to the daily life of modernity. In German and Anglo-American scholarship, the term "modernity" has often been used to designate the historical stage succeeding the nineteenth-century bourgeois revolutions. It was characterized by increasing secularism, massive technological and industrial growth, urbanization, and the democratization of culture—dependent in turn on widespread literacy and the boom of the culture industry (Habermas 1986: 2-5; Frisby 1985: 20-43). Turn-of-the-century sociologists such as Max Weber and Fernand Tönnies have argued that one result of these developments was the dissolution of pre-modern organic communities and of their religious, social, and ideological alibis (Weber 1958: 17-27, Tönnies 1955: 5-12). At the same time, due to the speed of contemporary changes and to the general instability of social and political life, no new cohesive set of beliefs seemed capable of taking the place of the former ones. Instead, the social realm appeared splintered into multiple ideologies and subcultures to the extent that, in the words of critic Charles Russell, most modern writers and intellectuals live and work with the awareness that "a commonly assumed collective vision has not been possible since the Romantic period" (1985: 6).

While totalizing narratives receded, the material environment experienced a cyclopean growth in the form of proliferating consumer products and mass-manufactured cultural artifacts. In a well-known characterization of modern

metropolitan life, the German philosopher Georg Simmel diagnosed the contemporary hypertrophy of the "objective spirit"—that is, material civilization, the objectual realm—and asserted that the magnitude and intricacy of the material environment was not counterbalanced by a parallel development of communal forms of practice able to endow it with meaning. Furthermore, as social aggregates were more and more transient and arbitrary, argued Simmel, communal culture lacked the complexity and flexibility necessary to assimilate material forms and publicly circulated narratives into the conceptual and experiential horizon of individuals (Simmel 1970: 421-22). Echoing Simmel's ideas, Walter Benjamin proposed that modern life produced fragmentary rather than "integrated" experience. Integrated experience (*Erfahrung*) had a communal dimension, as it was anchored in commonly held memory and belief. However, experience in modernity tends to be subjectivized, reduced to a succession of individual sensations and memories with a tenuous social dimension (Benjamin 1969: 159-60, 163). (In this respect, Benjamin regards Marcel Proust's monumental *A la recherche du temps perdu*, about an individual sifting through his memories in search of highly personalized moments of illumination, as a paradigmatically modern situation—and modernist work). Modern fragmentation and individualization also affect the reception of history and tradition, which are progressively seen as relative, susceptible of inflection, and unable to hold uniform, unequivocal lessons for all. A substantial part of modernist and avant-garde artistic production rejected tradition in toto and purported to create the culture anew. But even when tradition was vindicated, it was done in personalized and contingent forms lacking the weight of communal sanction. Familiar examples are T. S. Eliot, who claimed that each individual creative act implied a reassessment and realignment of tradition (Eliot 1951: 13-22), and Ezra Pound, who saw past culture as a repository of esoteric references through which he mediated his own poetic accounts of his life and ideas.

The profusion of seemingly unassimilated objects, images, and narratives made the modern social and cultural landscape into a funhouse of drifting signs and enigmatic clues devoid of immanent meaning. Walter Benjamin explains that Charles Baudelaire tried to recreate the world as "a forest of symbols" which looked back at the poet "with their familiar glances" (Benjamin 1969: 181). Yet familiarity, the token of a certain "connectedness" and intelligibility, had to remain confined to the province of the aesthetic in a radically estranged modernity whose enigmatic nature was underlined, from widely different perspectives, by other modernist thinkers. Thus, for Baudelaire's contemporary Karl Marx, modernity was characterized

by the overdevelopment of capitalism and the reified and mystified social relations it enthroned; an important part of these were woven around the "fetishism of commodities," which he described as "hieroglyphs"—"mysterious" and "very queer thing[s], abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." (Marx 1978: 319, 320) For a later thinker like Sigmund Freud, daily life was equally hieroglyphic, as seemingly innocuous everyday objects and gestures could be seen as multi-layered messages inscribed with psychological latencies. Common to these views is the notion that, because of the free-floating quality of its objects and fragments, modernity presents a problem of legibility: it is a period whose meaning is problematic to itself; whose social forms constantly demand to be read; whose culture endlessly requires evaluation and interpretation.

The artistic cultures of modernism and the avant-garde inhabit this environment of meaningless objects, broken stories, and mysterious clues, yet they react differently to them. On the basis of their inhabitation of modernity, we can hypothesize that while modernism is a discourse of order, precarious and arbitrary as this order may be, the avant-garde is one of disorder. Modernists try to integrate objects and fragments into new symbolic arrangements, an impulse that underwrites the frequent resort to myth. Symptomatic in this respect is T. S. Eliot's assessment of James Joyce's *Ulysses*: "In using myth . . . Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. . . . It is simply a way of ordering, of giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility which is contemporary history" (Eliot 1975: 177). And even when modernists took fragments as their point of departure or medium, as did the imagist poets or T. S. Eliot himself, it is often in order to propose new plenitudes, or, in the last instance, to assert the integrating and restorative capacity of their craft.

The avant-garde, for its part, makes of dispersal its main strategy for inhabiting the modern. Its exemplary products are carefully designed to blast the presumed organic unity of the art work. The enjoining of the disparate and the dispersion of the contiguous are central tactics to this effect. Avant-garde manifestos, for example, routinely combine self-explanation and self-erasure, this last in the form of irrecoverable conceptual scattering. As Tristan Tzara fulminated in his first dada "Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine" (1917): "Dada is for and against unity and definitely against the future" (1951: 75). And a subsequent "manifesto on feeble love and bitter love" (sic) performs dispersal through a nearly psychotic language, devoid of connections or logic. It opens:

preamble=sardanapalus

one=valise

woman=women

pants=water

if=mustache

2=three

cane=perhaps

or all of this together in any arrangement at all whether savorous soapy brusque or definitive—picked at random—is alive. (Tzara 1951: 86)

Without reaching the virulence of dadaism, other avant-garde movements also evidenced an analogous desire to inhabit the disconnected object. This is the case with Russian constructivism, which championed an industrial aesthetic based on the assemblage of detachable parts. Some of its best known manifestations are Sergei Eisenstein's 1920s films, ruled by the dialectic of montage, which emphasized film's ability to convey concepts and ideas by editing together discontinuous shots. For their part, the surrealists defended a similar conception of the poetic image as the combination of "two distant realities" (Breton 1972: 36); the emblematic example was the Count of Lautreamont's paradigm of the beautiful: "the fortuitous encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table." In Germany, Bertolt Brecht's left-oriented theater opposed the "culinary" unity of traditional theater and sought to split the dramatic representation into its basic components in order to shock spectators into political awareness. And, to add just one more example, the Italian Futurists' experiments with "simultaneism"—the bringing together of unrelated actions unfolding at the same time—bespoke an analogous fascination with the disparate and disconnected.

Despite this emphasis on disgregation and on prying objects loose from their usual cognitive and narrative frames, critical discourse has yet to confront the avant-garde object on its own terms—without reducing it to a part in an overall narrative. The production of continuity and order has ruled critical and historical discourses on the avant-garde. These have attempted to systematize plural mechanisms of subversion and formal experimentation into a coherent front of dissent. Hence a wide range of modes such as collage, performance, the *détournement* (rerouting) of found objects, scandalous forms of public presence, the emphasis on style, the fascination with the fragmentary and unfinished, and the championing of different forms of marginality have frequently been subsumed under overarching projects. Some of the most familiar have been the turning of form into the subject matter of the artwork

(Greenberg 1961); the sublation of art and life (Bürger 1985); anti-traditionalism (Poggioli 1968); a utopian orientation toward the future (Calinescu 1987); or the practice of a form of cultural activism peculiarly aligned with revolutionary politics and science (Russell 1985). These readings are ruled by the imperative of order, which tries to produce continuities over discontinuities; wholes over holes. In Michel de Certeau's terms, these readings turn the avant-garde from a repertoire of tactics—sporadic, fragmentary, improvisatory—into a strategy—a holistic plan with well-defined means, goals, localities, and protocols (De Certeau 1984: 34-42). But the tropism toward totality appears singularly oblivious to the avant-garde obsession with the isolated object and the fragment, an obsession which frequently translates into a wilful refusal to cohere and signify. This is why, paradoxically, critics like Matei Calinescu (1987) and Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1974), who berate the avant-garde's incoherence and fragmentariness, are able to register certain frequencies in its spectrum that are routinely missed by those who take it too seriously, so to speak, and try to ascertain from its traces a holistic rationale. We could perhaps say that, reverent towards the irreverence of its object, the critical discourse on the avant-garde is modernistic—ordering antitraditionalism into a tradition of sorts, striving for the critical myth that might disclose a pattern out of an "immense panorama of futility" and randomness. Seeking to challenge this bias, our goal here will be to produce an avant-garde criticism of the avant-garde.

We will attempt to reread and rewrite the avant-garde as a discourse of disconnected objects and splintered remains; our goal will not be to sublimate these into a generality, but to try to maintain them in their proper dispersion. One reason for doing this is simple curiosity about the shape that avant-garde criticism would take if it adopted the avant-garde strategy of refusing to cohere into any organic metanarrative. A second reason is the suspicion that the reexamination of these vestiges outside totalizing schemes might suggest alternative points of entry into our field of inquiry. We will seek out in avant-garde production undigestible residues unassimilated by traditional hermeneutics—the debris extant once holistic paradigms have done their work labeling, tabulating, classifying, tidying up. These residues will not be the loci of meanings to be unveiled but obtrusive kernels which produce effects. By focusing on them, we are suggesting a reorientation of critical discourse away from meaning and toward apprehending and conveying the opaque and enigmatic nature of objects and parts. A critical discourse bent on opacity will not pursue "truth"—explanation, a "more faithful" depiction of the object. Its intended objective will not be "coverage"—the subsumption of the largest number of particular instances under a general principle—but

"singularity": Alfred Jarry's "pataphysics," or the science of exceptions. It will operate through *performance*: the combination and circulation of images and affects across a textual field—in this case, the avant-garde. Our models for this exploration will be two critical paradigms based on the cognitive potential of the fragment and the irreducibility of singular objects: Walter Benjamin's use of montage and Roland Barthes's concept of the "punctum." Both Barthes and Benjamin endeavored to devise new forms of writing which would incorporate avant-garde strategies into the rhetoric of criticism. Finally, the object chosen for testing the scope of our approach will be the discourse of the American surrealist journal *View*.

WALTER BENJAMIN AND MONTAGE

Striving for order and continuity and ignoring the avant-garde's penchant for the singular and disconnected, most critical discourse disregards what Walter Benjamin considered the avant-garde's most valuable lesson: how to exploit the experiential and cognitive potentials embedded in fragment-ridden modernity. In the words of Susan Buck-Morss, "[For Benjamin] The effect of technology on both work and leisure in the modern metropolis had been to shatter experience into fragments, and journalistic style reflected that fragmentation. Could montage as the formal principle of the new technology be used to reconstruct an experiential world so that it provided a coherence of vision necessary for philosophical reflection? And more, could the metropolis of consumption, the high ground of bourgeois-capitalist culture, be transformed from a world of mystifying enchantment into one of both metaphysical and political illumination?" (Buck-Morss 1989: 23). Benjamin's answer to these two questions was affirmative; and the avant-garde provided valuable leads in this project. Working on fragments, exploiting the mobility of objects and the expressiveness of the new visual media, the avant-garde mimed central traits of the modern *and*, at the same time, was able to extract moments of criticism and knowledge from the "fantasmagoria" of public life. Montage, the recombination of disparate fragments, was the eminent formal and conceptual tool for attaining this goal. Much of Benjamin's criticism can be read as an attempt to import avant-garde montage into critical discourse. To this effect, and soon after completing his first book, an idiosyncratic academic study entitled *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin forswore "the pretentious, universal gesture of the book" and devoted himself to exploiting "the 'ready language' [of] leaflets, brochures, newspaper articles, and placards" (Buck-Morss 1989: 17). These brief, fragmentary forms were the

only ones capable of "immediate effectiveness" and of using to advantage the languages of his time. Consequent with this idea, and impelled by the need to make a living in the literary marketplace, the bulk of his subsequent production took the form of occasional writing: radio talks, narrative and quasi-autobiographical essays, aphorisms, and fragmentary observations. Subtly incorporating the principle of montage, they draw on a wide array of rhetorical modes, from fairy tales to newspaper headlines, from surrealist metaphors to the language of advertisements. His magnum opus, to which he devoted over a decade of intense research and which (perhaps appropriately) remained dispersed in drafts and notes at the time of his death, was the *Arcades Project* (*Passagen Werk*): a "montage" history of Paris as cultural capital of the nineteenth century.

Montage as a research and writing strategy gives in to the fragmentary character of modern material culture and simultaneously internalizes the disruptive effect of the new visual media of film and photography. These had the ability to wrench objects, spaces, and actions from their original contexts and to re-present them in new settings and combinations. "Every day the need grows more urgent to possess an object in the closest proximity, through a picture or, better, a reproduction," and photography and film stepped in to fulfil this need (Benjamin 1972: 20-21). They "priz[ed] the object from its shell," making it infinitely movable. In the process was destroyed the object's "aura"—that is, its symbolic or geographical distance, remoteness, and uniqueness. These are eroded when locations, artworks, objects, no matter how distant or precious, are seemingly at hand by virtue of their reproduction through newsreels, films, and the print media. Rather than lament the loss of integrity and authenticity such developments entailed, Benjamin interpreted the loss of aura as a progressive political development presaging "a salutary estrangement between man [sic] and his environment, thus clearing the ground for the politically-trained eye before which all intimacies serve the illumination of detail" (1972: 21). The fading of the aura then plunges into crisis concepts such as ontology, originality, or artistry, whose relevance wanes in the present regime of the image; at the same time, it encourages interrogation of the social and political uses of images. (See also Benjamin 1969: 217-252)

In the same way that mechanical reproduction dissolved the "aura" of objects, montage dissolved the "aura"—uniqueness, authenticity—of present ideologies and social relations. With its ability to reshuffle found elements ad infinitum, montage implicitly exposed the arbitrariness of the existing order of things; the (mystified) "naturalness" of contemporary life was "interrupted," portrayed as a historical—hence relative and mutable—stage.

Furthermore, the relocation of fragments yielded knowledge: as they entered new constellations, objects and traces evidenced meanings and potentials which remained dormant in their former arrangements. An additional epistemological advantage of montage derived from the fact that it allowed a non-discursive mode of criticism, one where contents would arise from the collision of individual fragments, and where the tensions ensuing from such clashes would not be smoothed over by theoretical gloss. Benjamin described his montage-history, the *Passagen Werk*, as a "construction out of facts. Construction within the complete elimination of theory. . . . This work must develop to the highest point the art of citing without citation marks. Its theory connects most closely with that of montage" (cited in Buck-Morss 1989: 73).

The idea underlying Benjamin's montage method was that philosophical-historical constellations of meaning could be conveyed by significantly chosen "dialectical images"—basic units of montage—rather than by argumentation. Dialectical images were "small, particular moments"—whether verbal or visual—in which "the total historical event" was to be discovered (cited in Buck-Morss 1989: 71). They were emblematic moments "blasted" out of the historical continuum—an urgent imperative, since "all historical continuity is that of the oppressors" (cited in Buck-Morss 1989: 290); the historian's task was to underline in these images the overlay of a number of unreconcilable tensions. These arose, first, from the conflict between transitoriness and permanence. All new historical developments contained *en abyme* the repetition of ever present conflicts and forces, which, like psychoanalytic symptoms, would continue to emerge until their satisfactory resolution. The celebration of the new mystifies progress as the motor of history, an idea constantly undercut by the obstinate return of what, in the form of suffering, injustice, and domination, remains unresolved. A second source of tension resulted from a struggle, informing all culture and history, between revolutionary potential and immobilism. While the historical unfolding perpetuated, most of the times, an unjust state of affairs, there lurked, at any point in this process of perpetuation, the potential to explode the continuity of "the history of the victors" and to catapult history into Messianic time. "The authentic concept of universal history," Benjamin argued, "is a Messianic one"—that is, one traversed by the promise of redemption, or in materialist language, of the revolution: "every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (Benjamin 1969: 264). A final source of tension resulted from the notion that present and past are interlocked in a mutually illuminating constellation. The present is always already foreshadowed in past history, frequently in the faint traces and negligible details that most

often attracted Benjamin's attention. Conversely, the past is constantly mediated by present awareness and interests, since "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (Benjamin 1969: 255). The confluence of these tensions within dialectical images added up to a fundamentally unreconciled "totality" (a "totality" under erasure) of the historical event(s) under scrutiny.

While preparing his history of the nineteenth century, one of Benjamin's research methods was the assemblage of dialectical images in the form of vast repertoires of citations and illustrations, which he later recombined in the attempt to produce materialistic history and criticism. The best-known examples of this working method are Benjamin's essays on Charles Baudelaire (1973 *passim*). At once scholarly and naggingly elusive, they advance by analogy and contiguity. Often pursuing suggestions buried in the poet's own writings, Benjamin connects Baudelaire to the contemporary figures of the revolutionary, the ragpicker, the *flâneur*, and the detective, with whom he shared peculiar ways of reacting to the phenomena of contemporary life. Important among these phenomena were the urban masses, which are alternatively seen by Baudelaire as a source of anxiety; a vast repertoire of images; an enigma; a formidable historical agent; and a spectacle. Living in the thick of this sea of people prompts mechanical, reflex behavior and a new type of "tactile," shock-driven perception anticipating that later institutionalized by the cinema. The machine-like character of modern existence arouses in Baudelaire a simultaneous nostalgia for and disparaging of the natural. This last is of a piece with his fascination with non-organic, "non-natural"—for him, that is—sexualities, prominent among which was lesbianism (Benjamin 1973: 90-94). On the basis of this idea, Baudelaire, always in Benjamin's reading, connects lesbians with automata. Besides being highly suggestive, these chains of association are infinitely expandable. Thus we might add that Baudelaire's association of female deviancy with automatons foreshadows Villiers de L'Isle Adam's Hadaly; and, more distantly, Maria, the rabble-rousing robot in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*; the contemporary queer aesthetic of the leather dykes (textualized in Pat Califia's short stories, for example) cased in shiny latex, studded jackets, and vinyl boots; and even Donna Haraway's 1985 "Manifesto for Cyborgs."

What kind of history-criticism is this? Does it show randomness or acumen? The word is ultimately Benjamin's, who was perhaps indirectly explaining himself when he stated: "Charles Baudelaire was fond of placing his theses in context crassly. *It was part of his theoretical shrewdness to obscure*

the connections between them—where one existed” (My italics, Benjamin 1973: 75).

The similarities of this collage method with the avant-garde extend to the language Benjamin used to describe his own work, a language often laden with a certain manifesto-like combativeness:

Materialistic historiography . . . is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock by which it crystallizes into a monad. (1969: 262)

Avant-gardist here is the suggested rough handling of the researcher’s materials—in words like “arrest,” “shock”; the interest in dissociation, dismantling into component parts (influenced perhaps by Benjamin’s friend Bertolt Brecht); and the “constructive” nature of historical analysis, a word which evokes, in German even more than in English, mechanical assemblages, articulated wholes.

This type of criticism subverted modernity from within. If the discrete, flattened-out images and objects of modernity shortcircuited the possibilities for sustained autonomous thought, Benjamin showed that these mystified forms could be appropriated as levers for dialectical analysis. Such dialectical reversal rested largely on the currency and popular accessibility of the iconic: “Only images in the mind vitalize the will. The mere word, by contrast, at most inflames it, to leave it smoldering, blasted” (cited in Buck-Morss 1989: 290). Benjamin’s historical work was as daring and unconventional then as it still seems now, and he paid dearly for his idiosyncracies. Seeking financial support for his *Passagen Work*, he sent a sample of his work in progress to his friend Theodor W. Adorno, who held a prominent position at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (the Frankfurt School). Adorno, whose philosophy is analogously “dissonant” yet more conventionally discursive in form, turned Benjamin down. The Arcades Project, Adorno wrote back to his friend, “tends to turn into a wide-eyed presentation of mere facts” lacking adequate theoretical mediation: “one could say that your study is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched. Only theory could break the spell” (cited in Wolin 1982: 130). Benjamin has known a belated *succès d’estime* which started in 1955 with the publication of a two-volume edition of his writings compiled and prefaced by Adorno. His ideas on the cultural and social impact of mechanical reproduction and his descriptions of modernity have become inevitable reference points in the understanding of the avant-garde. And yet this acceptance is mostly based on

contents, or (to mime Adorno’s language) on the reified, fetishized idea severed from the revolutionary form in which he often embedded it. This despite the fact that for Benjamin content was hardly separable from form; ideas insinuated themselves in the very process of dismantling-collating dialectical images; and, furthermore, by the critic’s own veiled confession, it was theoretically shrewd to obscure conceptual connections through montage. Benjamin’s work then still presents us with the challenge of assimilating not only his conclusions but his working method, something that we will try in a later section. The questions this experiment will try to answer is: what would a montage history of the avant-garde look like? What could it teach us?

ROLAND BARTHES AND THE PUNCTUM

Like Benjamin’s, Barthes’s writing was centrally shaped by the desire critically to inhabit modernity. This he described as a combination of two forces: “on the one hand, a mass banalization (linked to the repetition of language)—a banalization outside bliss but not necessarily outside pleasure—and on the other, a (marginal, eccentric) impulse toward the New—a desperate impulse that can reach the point of destroying discourse: an attempt to reproduce in historical terms the bliss [*jouissance*] repressed beneath the stereotype” (1975: 41). In order to break up with the oppressive (i.e. stereotyped, repeated) half of the modern, Barthes aligned his critical work with the generation of the New. This was synonymous with producing “texts” as opposed to the more conventional “works.” And for the most part, Barthes’s texts took the form of deconstructive critiques purporting to destabilize the seeming coherence of classical aesthetic and cognitive paradigms. The (work turned into) “text” disrupted mystified totalities and established discourses; it questioned the continuity of language and the hierarchical ordering of the sentence; its main operating principle was the fragment: “words, tiny sintagms, bits of formulae, and *no sentence formed.*” (1975: 49). This embracing of the fragment manifested itself in a constant desire to transgress the presumed totality of the critical enterprise, a goal that led him to formulate his thought in brief, essayistic pieces and to work with a number of theoretical metalanguages without completely assuming any single one of them. He described himself once as

a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical; and at the heart of this critical language, between several discourses, those of sociology, of semiology, and of psychoanal-

ysis—but . . . by ultimate dissatisfaction with all of them, I was bearing witness to the only sure thing that was in me . . . a desperate resistance to any reductive system. For each time, having resorted to any such language to whatever degree, each time I felt it hardening and thereby tending to reduction and reprimand, I would gently leave it and seek elsewhere: I began to speak differently. (1981a: 8)

Barthes's inspiration for inhabiting the fragment came from the avant-garde. We could say that while Walter Benjamin adapted montage from Brecht, dadaists, and Russian constructivists, Barthes inherited many of his interests and methods from surrealism (I am following here Robert Ray's suggestion, Ray 1995: 94-119). He shared with André Breton and his coterie a reflective fascination with such phenomena as fashions, film, photography, advertisements, and mass-produced commodities. Particularly in his later work, Barthes combined autobiography, fiction, and speculative thought, all the while experimenting with the form of the critical essay. In this respect, his production harks back to such unclassifiable texts as Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*, André Breton's *Nadja* and Breton and Philippe Soupault's *Les Champs magnétiques*. A further tie to surrealism is Barthes's project of "joining writing ever more emphatically to the body" (Wahl 1986: v), and thus opening up the text to the disseminating intermittence of desire and eroticism.

An eminently surrealist concern in Barthes's work is the obsession with those textual details and features ("obtuse" he once called them) which defy intelligibility and mark the limits of semiological and semiotic analysis. Barthes's *S/Z*, his analysis of Balzac's novella "Sarrasine," ends with a lexia—"And the Marquis remained pensive"—about which Barthes writes: "Pensive, the Marquis can think of many of the things that have happened, or that will happen, but about which we shall never know anything: the infinite openness of the pensive (and this is precisely its structural function) removes this final lexia from any classification" (1974: 216). After the semiotic machinery has crunched down all components of the story, Barthes closes his analysis with this nod towards the meaninglessness perched on the brink of a perfectly meaningful system: "the pensive . . . is the signifier of the unexpressible, not of the unexpressed" (1974: 216). This closing gesture seems prophetic in retrospect. What in *S/Z* was a last-minute bow towards opacity, soon took center stage in most of Barthes subsequent writings, largely concerned with the constant imbrication of meaning and non-meaning in visual and verbal messages. Each of these terms stands at the beginning of a conceptual chain which traverses Barthes's late oeuvre. Meaning entails

pleasure, the pheno-text, the analyzable, the "obvious," the informational and symbolic level of the sign, "the labors of knowledge," and signification. On the edges of these formalizable contents, Barthes constantly sought to whip up the "meaningless" froth of bliss (*jouissance*), aligned with the geno-text, the "obtuse" or "third meaning," "the labors of writing," and signifi-ance. And propping himself up on this second train of concepts he sought to dislodge "the main categories which found our current sociality: perception, intellection, the sign, grammar, and even science" (1981b: 44).

This striving after what lies beyond signification yet intricately connected with it informs much of surrealism. Take, for example, one of its most emblematic works: Breton's *Nadja*, an autobiographical narrative of sorts mainly concerned with "facts of quite unverifiable intrinsic value [and of] absolutely unexpected, violently fortuitous character . . . facts which may belong to the order of pure observation, but which in each occasion present all the appearances of a signal, without being able to say precisely which signal, and of what" (1960: 19). Attention to such signals without codes became for surrealists a way of inhabiting the surrounding material culture. In these clues they discovered flashes of poetry and mystery pervading the everyday. Flea markets and the old-fashioned arcades, with their accumulation of dated, useless, and often surprising objects, became repositories of the marvelous; and so did seemingly banal photographs and popular films, which portrayed a familiar nature suddenly laden with enchantment. What surrealists most valued in these visual media was, in Breton's phrase, their "power to disorient" (1978: 43)—that is, their capacity to defamiliarize ordinary perception. In Louis Aragon's words:

All our emotion exists for those dear old American adventure films that speak of daily life and manage to raise to a dramatic level a banknote on which our attention is riveted, a table with a revolver on it, a bottle that on occasion becomes a weapon, a handkerchief that reveals a crime, a typewriter that's the horizon of a desk, the terrible unfolding telegraphic tape with magic ciphers that enrich or ruin bankers. . . . [O]n the screen, objects that were a few moments ago sticks of furniture or books of cloakroom tickets are transformed to the point where they take on *menacing or enigmatic* meanings. . . . (My italics, 1978: 29)

How did common things become terrible and enigmatic on the screen? By which mechanism did the prosaic turn mysterious, threatening, incommunicable? Since Aragon concentrates on shots of items of the *mise-en-scène* rather than on action or movement, it seems plausible to argue that

they were the result of the material basis of film: photography. In it, the surrealists, and Barthes after them, found an intriguing mixture of the knowable, anecdotal, and "obvious" together with the unknowable, enigmatic, and "obtuse." This vexing paradox at the center of the photographic image was trenchantly formulated by German critic Siegfried Kracauer, a friend of Adorno and Benjamin, in a 1927 essay titled "Photography" (a piece probably unknown to the surrealists and to Barthes, but peculiarly apposite to their ideas). In it Kracauer contrasts memory and the photographic image on the basis of their manner of capturing the past. Memory orders, selects; its images are "not a multitude of opaque recollections, but elements that touch upon what has been recognized as true." (1995: 51) It garners details out of the continuum of experience and rearranges them guided by the perceived truth value of specific remembrances. As a result, memory is "full of gaps" (1995: 50); it retains significant features and lets go of random, meaningless ones. It is then on the side of history, art, and "transparency"—that is, meaning, intelligibility. Photography, on the other hand, is a cipher of disorder and "opacity." Its automatic recording of time and space unselectively captures details that are relevant together with others that are irrelevant to present consciousness. In the absence of the ordering work of memory, "the photography dissolves into the sum of its details, like a corpse" (1995: 55) and "assembles in effigy the last elements of a nature alienated from meaning" (1995: 62). However, in the semiotic dross of the picture traces of meaning remain. This mixture of the transparent and opaque is (and here Kracauer seemingly modulates into surrealist language) a "terrible association" which "evokes a shudder" as the photo "conjures up anew a disintegrated unity. This ghost-like reality," he adds, "is unredeemed" (1995: 56). Like remnants of a ciphered text whose code has been lost, random details resist meaning and evoke a disintegrated unity. We can conjecture that in these unassimilated particulars resided the surrealist potential of photography, and, by extension, of film, literature, of any other cultural object or medium.

Precisely these details are the focus of Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, an investigation of photography that is exemplary of his interest in the incommunicable and unintelligible, and that we will propose as a model for the study of the avant-garde. Like Kracauer, Barthes discerned in photographs a mixture of two signifying orders. Photography captured orderly, communicable, "generalizable" material; yet this appeared enmeshed with "the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This*" (1981a: 4). Such extreme singularity plunged images in "the vast disorder of objects" and forced the observer "to confront in [photographs] the wakening

of intractable reality" (1981a: 6, 119). Barthes called these two orders of meaning the *studium* and the *punctum*. "The studium is a kind of education" (1981a: 28). It consists of what an earlier essay (1977b) called "obvious meanings"—those that belong to "culture" and convey information: what the photo is about, what it tells us about its object and about the intentions of its author. But an erratic, obtuse order of contents, the *punctum*, occasionally disrupts the civilized *studium*. The *punctum* is a random detail which "rises from the scene, shoots out from it like an arrow, and pierces me" provoking "a wound, a prick, a mark made by a pointed instrument" (1981a: 26). In the *punctum* the photograph remains *pensive*: it looks back, thus involving us in its gaze; thinks without telling its thoughts; it signals without revealing. A substantial part of *Camera Lucida* is taken up with descriptions of *puncta*: wayward features of clothing, atmosphere, gesture, or physique that arrest Barthes's gaze without yielding to his analytical stare or to his language. The *punctum* can only be encircled yet hardly explained or named. "What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance"—hence, of the *punctum* (1981a: 51).

This enterprise rises at the limits of conventional semiotics and cultural analysis. Rather than to explain, it seeks to isolate the incommunicable by reading texts at a slant. So doing entails doing violence to the text—fragmenting it, highlighting the off-center details in blatant disregard for "civilized" reading protocols, with their respect for order and totality. This violence is motivated by the belief that the (a)semiotic material neglected by traditional hermeneutics may yield information in the form of paths of reading and affect that differ from the ones contemplated by the *studium*. For one, *punctum*-like details cast on the text a certain shadow, which reminds us that the enterprise of knowledge is never complete; hence its most "complete" picture should maintain ajar a door that gives on to unexplained latencies of image, language, and concept. The obtuse details also encourage a personalized narrative in which subjectivity mediates exploration and interpretation. The very intractability of this non-signifying substance forces the reader to mobilize nonce epistemologies and idiosyncratic conceptualities with the purpose of multiplying the possible points of entry into the text.

Hence the very "disorder" of his subject, photography, prompts in Barthes the following methodological stand: rather than explore the official canon of this art, he will tease out a few general considerations out of a number of favorite snapshots: "Nothing to do with a corpus: only a few bodies. . . . I decided to take myself as mediator for all Photography. Starting from a few personal impulses, I would try to formulate the fundamental feature, the universal without which there would be no Photography" (1981a:

8). The goal, he continues, is to "extend this individuality to a science of the subject, a science whose name is of little importance to me, provided it attains . . . to a generality that neither reduces nor crushes me" (1981a: 18). And thus the book advances driven by his personal interests and associations, which are eventually raised, through theoretical reflection, to a critical discourse on the medium. However egotistical and/or arbitrary this procedure might seem, it uncovers a neglected yet structuring condition of *all* knowledge: the fact that it operates from out of a body endowed with its own biography, desires, whims, and handicaps. In Barthes's words: "The work proceeds by conceptual infatuations, successive enthusiasms, perishable manias. Discourse advances by little fates, by amorous fits" (1977a: 110).¹

Barthes's and Benjamin's methods then import into critical discourse the avant-garde's unruly semiotics, based on fragmentation and on a fascination with asignifying substance. Their procedures refuse the bid for order of traditional hermeneutics and cultural criticism, and try to elicit a critical impetus from contemporary cultural conditions and modern media. Their methods will be seen here as complementary. One guides us to the incommunicable and opaque; the other, to the self-fractured historical vignette that can be collated into provisional aggregates. In what remains, the point will no longer be to talk about these methods, but to use them as models for research; the ultimate goal: to apply avant-garde reading methods to the analysis of the avant-garde itself.

VIEW MAGAZINE

Perusing through *View*, like through any of the little magazines that punctuated the history of the avant-garde, feels somewhat like walking through a junk store, or through one of the arcades that so inspired Walter Benjamin: objects accumulate, disjointedly, unequal in value and appeal, many of them ludicrously old-fashioned. And yet these objects have a biography; they had values and prompted attachments invisible to us in their present "fallen" state. Likewise, *View* presents a jumble of disordered fragments: articles, interviews, illustrations, reviews, book notices, and reports from the literary and art worlds. Faced with this clutter, historians usually seek to uncover these ruins' buried histories, to elicit meaning from them. One way to do so is finding a label that will unify and order the dispersed fragments. If we yield to this compulsion, the label that most readily comes to mind in relation to *View* is *surrealism*.²

Published between 1940 and 1947, *View* was coedited by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, both of whom were active in the New York literary scene since the late 1920s. Ford was mainly a poet and editor. Barely out of high school, he had published the short-lived poetry magazine *Blues. A Magazine for New Rhythms* (1929-30), which showcased established talent (like William Carlos Williams, H. D., Alfred Kreyenborg) together with rising stars (such as James T. Farrell, Erskine Caldwell, and Paul Bowles). Tyler was also a poet and a prolific and highly idiosyncratic essayist and film and art reviewer. Together, Ford and Tyler had published a novel, *The Young and Evil* (1933), which combined experimental techniques derived from James Joyce and Gertrude Stein with the camp idiom of gay street culture. Both editors claimed as *View*'s predecessors such well-known surrealist periodicals as *Minotaure*, *Verve*, and *London Bulletin*, all of which had disappeared with the onset of the war. *View* also shared the stage of surrealist activity in New York with *VVV*, the organ of the French surrealist group during their war exile in the United States. Edited by André Breton and the American David Hare, this short-lived journal (its two issues came out in 1944 and 1946) served as a nexus between the French group and the local avant-garde. *VVV* evoked *View* in name and graphic design. Both journals shared contributors (Max Ernst, Edouard Roditi, Kurt Seligmann, David Hare, Roger Caillois) and interests (mythology and magic, experimental writing, non-Western art and cultures). *View* was the more eclectic of the two, however, interested in untagged experimentation rather than in enforcing any form of surrealist orthodoxy, as the Breton group was notorious for doing.

Inquiry might (and usually does) proceed from there, subjecting the dispersion of the journal to the unifying power of the name ("surrealism"). This label justifies the nature of *View*'s contributions, among them, the first interview with Breton published in America; short stories by Leonora Carrington; critical essays by Nicolas Calas and Roger Caillois; illustrations by Joseph Cornell and Man Ray; and the special issues devoted to artists Yves Tanguy, Marcel Duchamp, and Max Ernst. Surrealist affiliation also explains the abundant references to mythology and magic, such as Kurt Seligmann's essay "Magic Circles" (1942) and his drawing "Microcosmological Chart of Man" (December 1944); Wallace Fowlie's "Narcissus" (1943); and Ossip Zadkine's piece on the Minotaur (1944). Concern with magic and myth is typical of this stage of surrealist history. In the aftermath of their conflictive attempts during the 1930s to establish an alliance with left politics (with the Communist Party and the Popular Front), many members of the group chose, in the 1940s, to retreat from

contemporary entanglements into the interrogation of the eternal and transhistorical in myths, non-Western religion and art, ethnography, and anthropology.³ Yet in addition to its unifying, explanatory power, the surrealist affiliation of *View* produces a certain dispersion. As soon as the label is proposed, the picture taken, odd fringes, punctum-like details, dialectical images, and lateral montage-like connections start to insinuate themselves.

In addition to its interest in magic, myth, and experimental transatlantic culture, *View* put forward a peculiar vision of America evidenced in issues such as "Tropical Americana," "Americana Fantastica," and "The American Macabre," and in numerous writings and illustrations which conferred on the nation a peculiar enchantment owing little to myth and magic, and much to a mixture of violence, grotesqueness, and despair. Take, for example, the following montage of quotations: In the November 1940 issue, Edouard Roditi's "California Chronicle" conveys a sense of everpresent danger having to do with vigilantism, virulent xenophobia, fanatic conservatism, and squalor. "In Los Angeles one faces the facts: the garish illusions and conflicting ideas which give our age its neurotic drive. . . . Los Angeles poverty is more sordid than the sunlife [sic] of any other city except Shanghai." And further,

The notion has got around, amongst vigilantes in Modesto, Visalia, Salinas, Ukiah, and elsewhere, that all immigrants from the dust-bowl are undesirable aliens, that all aliens are homosexual, that all homosexuals are Jews, that all Jews are nazis, that all nazis are communists and that all communists are dangerous drivers. So drive slowly if you come to California." (1940: 3)

And in a later issue, Troy Garrison's "Plaza of the Psychopathic Angels" (1941) reinforces this dystopian view of the golden state, as he describes a park at the intersection of several old Los Angeles neighborhoods:

The southward tides of traffic and pedestrians move past rotted ancient structures whose windows reflect no light, past what must be the oldest cafe (where an Arab serves fairly good Mexican food at very reasonable prices) and, some five or six blocks away, flow through the backwash of "B-girl" cafes, burlesques, pawnshops, and human wreckage. Around the square, peculiar soapbox prophets hold forth. (1941: 4)

A similar perception informs Brion Gysin's "That Secret Look," (1941), a hallucinated view of New York city:

The streets below are like the stream of "The Old Mill" or "The Tunnel of Love" at Luna Park or Coney Island through whose fog of carbon monoxide you are swept clutching your neighbor, past bright tableaux; the desert island, the cemetery by moonlight, the axe murderer in the kitchen or famous scenes from fiction. (1941: 7)

These and similar descriptions scattered throughout the journal⁴ cast localism in a menacing light.

An important component of these contributions is a radical defamiliarization of city spaces that can be related to the surrealist practice of "psycho geography": an extremely subjective inhabitation of urban space centered on the search for "magnetic fields"—spots that prompted singular attraction or repulsion on the basis of the associations they triggered off. The city was lived as a vast spatialized unconscious seething with coincidences, surprising juxtapositions, and intimations of eroticism and death. Surrealists studied it with the hovering attention of the analyst as they pursued and amplified those details which intimated powerful latencies "from beyond." A similar defamiliarized view of the city was presented at the time in film noir, a genre contemporary with *View* and narrowly connected with surrealism.⁵ (*The Maltese Falcon* [Huston, 1941], usually taken as the "first" and one of the most representative titles of the genre, premiered the same year as *View*, and Parker Tyler published an essay on the film—"Every Man His Own Private Detective"—in an early issue.) The atmosphere of floating danger in which film noir unfolds impregnates common objects and situations with an aura of threat. This makes the city a deceptive space where harmless everyday appearances hide an underworld of deranged sexuality, corruption, and violence. This seething underside can be peculiarly entrancing; under its influence, the city becomes tinged with tragedy and heroism as the possible setting for an unnerving discovery, a decisive coup, a murder.

The hallucinatory geographies of *View* and film noir stand in stark contrast to more official portrayals of urban space at the time. The celebration of the 1939 World's Fair in New York provided a showcase for the utopian dream of the rational city. One of the most successful exhibits at the Fair was the General Motors-sponsored "City of the Future": a huge model display of skyscrapers among large park areas traversed with separate traffic routes for vehicles and pedestrians. This futuristic fantasy imagined a city which had finally solved its problems of pollution, crime, and congestion, and which struck a perfect balance between technological development and the welfare of its dwellers. The documentary film *The City* (Willard Van

Dyke, 1939), commissioned by the American Association of Urban Developers to be screened at the Fair, also evidenced this utopian perspective. It forcefully proclaimed the bankruptcy of the industrialized megalopolis, which was at present unable to provide its inhabitants with clean air, play space, good housing, and a clean environment. The solution the film proposed is decentralization into suburbs—indeed the main trend in post-war urban development in the United States. Both models for the city of the future dreamt up maximally legible and ordered spaces, devoid of threat or mystery. Their openness, spacious layout, and rational design seemed intent on erasing from the face of the city all the obtuse details, murky hide-outs, and deadly latencies that magnetized the imagination of the surrealists and served as a background for film noir.

The disturbing readings of urban spaces in some of *View's* contributions have a continuation in the journal's peculiar perception of folk art and culture. The main exponent of this attitude is the special issue "Americana Fantastica" (January 1943). It opened with a short essay by Parker Tyler which defined the fantastic as "The city of the irrational. The irrational plus architecture" (5). The fantastic is "an uninterrupted series of exceptions"—an expression that evokes the irreducible singularities, "absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency" which, according to Barthes, involved photography in "the vast disorder of objects." Its sociological roots were "the imagination of the underprivileged aware of a fresh and overpowering strength. . . . The fantastic is the inalienable property of the untutored, the oppressed, the insane, the anarchic, and the amateur, at the moment when these feel the apocalyptic hug of contraries" (*ibid.*). Rather than art by the underprivileged and untutored, however, the rest of the issue is taken up with somber bizzareries by a number of highly self-conscious professionals: photographs by George Platt Lynes and Helen Levitt, a short written piece by Paul Bowles, and two "albums" (i.e. collections of texts, found illustrations, and collages) by Joseph Cornell: "Fantastic America, or the Land We Live In" and "The Glass Cage: Portrait of Berenice." Subsequent issues adhered closer to Tyler's definition of the fantastic and published art by children and amateurs. This included several poems by Joe Massey, a convicted murderer who submitted his contributions from the Ohio State Penitentiary (1943); the short stories "Dark Sugar," by Paul Childs (1944a), "The Watermelons," by Leo Poch (1944), a miner from New Jersey, and "Traffic Will Be Heavy" by Joan Doleska (1944), a housewife from Berwyn, Illinois; and "The Alienation of Language: Letters from a Corsican Boy to his English Sweetheart," which exploits the incongruous English of a poorly educated foreigner (1946). On other occasions, *View* writers rescued past exponents of the fantastic. This

was the goal of Edouard Roditi's essay "William Harnett, American Necromantic," (vol. 5, no. 4, Nov. 1945), about the nineteenth-century American painter; or of "Visions of the Comte de Permission," a transcription of the hallucinations of an illiterate sixteenth-century French court jester. ("Visions of the Comte de Permission," Vol. 5, no. 5, December 1945)

Through all these examples of the untutored fantastic runs a powerful streak of violence and morbidity. Massey's poems are intensely necrophilic and Poch's "The Watermelons" contains moments of unabashed sadism. Even the children's poems often seem selected for their salacious evocativeness; thus Ithell Colquhoun, aged six, writes, "He said / O my head [!!] / Is so red / Then he led me / To his bed . . ." (1944). This penchant culminates in "Tropical Americana," guest-edited by Paul Bowles (May 1945). In Bowles's own words, the issue "offers the tragic, ludicrous, violent, touching spectacle of a whole vast region still alive and kicking, as here it welcomes, there it resists the spread of so-called civilization." This form of resistance is, in his eyes, allied with the avant-garde, which, as a result, "is not alone in its incomplete war against many features of modern civilization; with it are the ponderous apathy and the potential antipathy of the vestigial primitive consciousness." (5) The issue is largely a collection of found texts (most probably apocryphal, although their sources are scrupulously credited), pictures, and collages which showcase violence and grotesquerie as tenors of everyday existence in a geographically vague "Tropical America." In the section "2 Documents," for example, a journalistic piece from *Cuadernos Americanos*, March 1944, tells the story of a woman who, in order to get rid of her skin disease, had eaten a human heart every day for the last few years; on the facing page, a report from the journal *El Occidente* narrates "a horrendous crime"—"Gabino Chan, 48 years of age, murdered his mother, a paralytic" (9). Further on, an ethnographic text (avowedly extracted from Bernard Flornoy's *Haut Amazone*) describes an impossibly gruesome head-shrinking ceremony in lush detail; and a reportage on the *chicleros* (rubber harvesters) expatiates on the sickly jungle environment in which they are forced to live: "An odor of organic matter in fermentation assails one's nostrils. It is hard to tell whether this smell is the precursor of the new life or a symptom of constant death. . . . When one is in contact with this kind of nature, one feels the danger of physical degeneration and moral perversion" (14). In these vignettes of tropical America, not just the work of folk artists but everyday life itself is a stage for a ghastly variety of the fantastic.

Invoked by literary scholar Marius Bewley, the ghastly reappears in the next issue, this time as the basis for a literary mode, "The American Macabre," (October 1945). In Bewley's definition, the macabre deals with the "coquetry of decay" and presents "death contemplating himself [sic] in the conviction he has a legitimate physical existence" (1945: 7). This mode shows a "steady line of development that has consistently been in close communication with the changes in national temperament, and which has arrived at its fullest definition in our own time" (ibid). One of its characteristics is its "promiscuous compoundability," which makes it appear in a variety of genres and authors—from Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, Hawthorne, Poe, and Mark Twain to Dick Tracy comic strips and contemporary pulp fiction. Bewley illustrates his arguments with quotes of singular savagery; besides, his intervention acquires a sharper edge by virtue of the pictures of mangled limbs and scarred faces which accompany it. One of these shots is captioned: "Photograph your injuries at once. You cannot photograph your pains but you can photograph the wound. Time heals everything—so photograph it now." Hence, in addition to describing and theorizing the macabre, Bewley's article performs it as well. The point which aligns his article with *View's* sinister localism is the notion that the macabre is an "endemic American growth," owing much of its persistence and versatility to the brutality of life in the country. As he puts it: "The limits of American expansion were achieved by the exploitation of humans, the degradation of slaves, the extermination of natives, the careful cultivation of brutality and callousness. . . . But it was necessary that such rugged characteristics should appear, not as perversions, not as macabre, but as the natural expressions of a robust spirit" (1945: 18).


These explorations of the sinister element of folk seem a grim reversal on New Deal-sponsored attempts to document local American art and culture. Developed in the mid-to-late thirties within the frame of the Work Projects Administration, numerous government programs sent hundreds of folklorists across the country with the purpose of recording songs, transcribing oral history and traditions, and sketching and photographing samples of autochthonous design and architecture. The result of these efforts were such monumental works as the American Guide series of the Federal Writers Project and the WPA Index of American Design, a collection of over 10,000 paintings and illustrations documenting the decorative arts in the United States. Interest in Americana was intensified through the 1940s by the nationalism encouraged first by the war effort, then by post-World War II international hegemony. By documenting the rich textures and variety of preindustrial material culture, these forays bore witness to the ingenuity and

creativity of "the people." *View's* writers, some of whom had taken part in WPA projects, spurned the patriotic, optimistic overtones of such reception of folk culture. Under their eyes, folk art warps the wrong way; instead of national essences and community spirit, it yields horror; rather than a foundation and origin, it is an endpoint, a vortex of death. This frightening potential of folk culture still circulates under several guises, not the least of which is the contemporary horror film. Think of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Friday the Thirteenth*, or the more recent *Kalifornia*, to name just a few, where rural communities appear as theaters of terror.

View's way of connecting folk art with violence and the macabre has a gender politics that can be attached to an extra-textual detail: Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford's flamboyant gayness. They flaunted it with graceful abandon throughout their lives. In fact, during the years of *View*, Ford lived with painter Pavel Tchelitchev in a very public union started in 1934 and that would last until the latter's death. From the vantage point allowed by this subcultural filiation, we could conjecture that Ford and Tyler's championing of untutored art and culture might have been prompted by a gay-informed sense of kin with the culture of other disenfranchised groups. In addition to identification, there is in their reception of folk a strong voyeuristic fascination with the tough masculinity expressing itself in this artistic culture. When showcasing amateur art in *View*, they stressed the rough backgrounds of the men who produced it—Massey was a barely literate prison inmate, Poch a miner, Paul Childs a porter and construction worker (see his autobiographical sketch, Childs 1944b). In the light of such homoerotic fascination, the violence and death ethos that emanates from folk culture at large can be attributed to the sense of threat which gay cultural producers have frequently attached to rough straight maleness. Examples of this oscillation between enthrallment and dread abound in Jean Genet's early novels, which often dwelled on the mingling of violence and eroticism embodied in the amoral world of street toughs, prisoners, and criminals. This is a central concern in *Journal du voleur* or *Notre-Dame des fleurs*, for example, a fragment of which (titled "It's Your Funeral") appeared in the "Paris Issue" of *View* of March 1947. In the American context, Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1947), a short film depicting the sadomasochistic dreams of an adolescent erotically fixated on sailors, is an articulate exploration of the violent underside of butch beefcake.

Ultimately this montage of images and contextual determinants forms a type of studium, a cumulative context for the discourse of the journal; traversing this field, the punctum which, for me, obtrudes in the above images is the pervasiveness of violence and death. It emerges in the unjustified

cruelty of Marius Bewley's quotations illustrating "the American macabre"; in the photographs of injuries accompanying this article—one of which prominently shows fresh stitches on a woman's blood-smeared forehead; in the pictures of "Tropical Americana" freaks; in the uneasiness emanating from Joseph Cornell's albums and from George Platt Lynes's and Helen Levitt's pictures. The insistent pulsion of death shows for me, above all, in Paul Eaton Reeve's "Homage to Battling Siki" (1942). This piece describes the rise and fall of a Senegalese boxing champion who moved to America, where he lived in grand style: he "transformed Broadway by appearing there in a full dress suit, high hat, tan shoes, two monocles, and attended by two giant Senegalese carrying jars of whiskey for presentation on demand" (1942: 22). Reeve's account suggests that the boxer eventually became mixed up in a criminal racket and was gunned down by the mob. The piece is illustrated with pictures of Siki in the ring, celebrated by fans, arguing with a policeman, and, lastly, dead in the morgue, his immense body laid out under the indifferent gaze of two stocky middle-aged men. Something evades me in such examples of the journal's insistence on deadly violence. I cannot easily bind this opaque compulsion by invoking surrealism's romance with death; by resorting to received truths about the historical moment—War anxiety, the dawn of the Atomic Age, contemporary anomie—nor by regarding it a stark refusal of the country's official mood, characterized by the smugness and complacency of the victor. The scars remain too tender and vulnerable, the brutality too oppressive, Siki's dead body too haunting.

And yet, as I have tried to suggest throughout, in such unruly details and objects the magazine's—and by extension, the avant-garde's—project largely resides: in moments that defy interpretation and evade the reader's questioning gaze; in fragments that short-circuit the bid for totality. To them I have turned my critical efforts here—not in order to make them signify but to prolong their opaqueness, and in doing so, to try out alternative inroads into our textual past. 

NOTES

1. Much so-called post-modern epistemology develops from the assumption that knowledge and discourse are always locally situated, inflected by singular contexts, bodies, and desires. Think of the contemporary proliferation of "situated critiques" (in the form of gay and lesbian studies, post-colonial studies, feminism, race studies) and of their influence in the realm of science studies (Harding and Hintikka 1983, Haraway 1989, Toulmin 1990)

2. The existing literature on the journal is rather scarce. See Myers 1981, 1983 for an autobiographical account by an insider. The extent of the critical literature is: Neiman 1991, a succinct but informative introduction to Ford's anthology of the journal (Ford 1991); Wollen's and Sawin's passing but thoughtful mention of *View's* presence in the post-war New York art scene (Wollen 1992, Sawin 1995); and Dickran Tashjian's more complete treatment in his history of New York surrealism (1995). These are totalizing accounts; they describe the brand of surrealism that the journal showcased, and—particularly in Tashjian 1995—compare *View's* surrealism with that practiced by the group of exiles led by Andre Breton. My focus in what follows is not totalizing as much as "disseminative": I will be connecting some writings that appeared in *View* with other contemporary cultural discourses on the basis of analogy and contiguity, thus tracing underground connections between them.

3. A result of the crossing of ethnography and surrealism is the appearance in *VVV* of some pieces by Claude Lévi-Strauss, written during his New York exile, and by Roger Caillois. This blend is also evident in Wolfgang Paalen's journal *Dyn*, irregularly published in Mexico in the 1940s, and, less connected with official surrealist circles, in Maya Deren's studies and documentaries of Haitian religion and folklore.

4. Along these lines, see also Forrest Anderson (1941), an hallucinated account of a cross-country journey, and Leonora Carrington (1942).

5. While post-war existentialism is routinely invoked in relation to the French reinvention of some American films as noir, most critics and historians have neglected the "genre's" surrealist filiation. As James Naremore points out in a recent article, "what needs to be emphasized is that French existentialism was intertwined with a residual surrealism, which was crucial for the reception of any art described as *noir*." The name film *noir*, he continues, derives from the *série noire*, a collection of hard-boiled fiction conceived and edited by Marcel Duhamel, a former surrealist active in the Breton group during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In addition, Hollywood thrillers were

admired and discussed in *L'Age du cinéma*, a surrealist publication of 1951, and in *Positif*, which maintained strong connections to surrealism throughout the 1950s and 1960s. They were also given their first important study in a book that was profoundly surrealist in its ideological aims: Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton's *Panorama du film noir américain* (1955), which has been described as a 'benchmark' for all later work on the topic. (Naremore 1995-96: 18)

WORKS CITED

- "Alienation of Language: Letters of a Corsican Boy to his Girlfriend." *View* 5.6 (January 1946).
- ANDERSON, Forrest. 1941. "Boston-San Francisco." *view* 1.4-5 (December-January).
- ARAGON, Louis. 1978. "On Decor." In *The Shadow and Its Shadow. Surrealist Writings on Cinema*. Ed. Paul Hammond. London: British Film Institute: 28-31.
- BARTHES, Roland. 1974. *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang.
- . 1975. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- . 1977a. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- . 1977b. "The Third Meaning. Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills." In *Image/Music/Text*. Trans. and ed. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang.
- . 1981a. *Camera Lucida*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
- . 1981b. "The Theory of the Text." In *Young 1981*: 31-47.
- BENJAMIN, Walter. 1969. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken.
- . 1972. "A Short History of Photography." Trans. Stanley Mitchell. *Screen*. 13.1: 5-26.
- . 1973. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: New Left Books.
- BEWLEY, Marcus. 1945. "The American Macabre." *View* 5.3 (October): 7-8, 18, 20.
- BOWLES, Paul. 1945. "The Point of View." Editor's introduction. *View* Special issue "Tropical Americana." 5.2 (May): 5.
- BRETON, Andre. 1960. *Nadja*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Grove Press.
- . 1972. *The Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P.
- . 1978. "As in a Wood." In *The Shadow and Its Shadow Surrealist Writings on Cinema*. Ed. Paul Hammond. London: British Film Institute: 42-45.
- BUCK-MORSS, Susan. 1989. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- BÜRGER, Peter. 1984. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P.
- CALINESCU, Matei. 1987. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. 1977. Durham, North Carolina: Duke UP.
- CARRINGTON, Leonora. 1941-42. "White Rabbits." *View* 1.9-10 (December-January): 12.
- CHILDS, Paul. 1944a. "Dark Sugar." *View* 4.1 (March): 7-8.

- . 1944b. "Paul Childs in his Selffigraph." *View* 4.1 (March): 27.
- COLQUHOUN, Ithell. 1945. Untitled Poem. "Children's Pate." *View* 4.2 (Summer).
- DE CERTEAU, Michel. 1985. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Berkeley: U of California P.
- DOLESKA, Joan. 1944. "Traffic Will Be Heavy." *View* 4.3 (October): 95-96.
- ELIOT, T. S. 1951. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." 1919. In Eliot, *Selected Essays*. London: Faber: 13-22.
- . 1975. "Ulysses, Order and Myth." In Eliot, *Selected Prose*. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. 175-78.
- ENSZENSBERGER, Hans Magnus. 1974. "The Aporias of the Avant-Garde." In *The Consciousness Industry*. New York: Seabury.
- FORD, Charles Henri, ed. 1991. *View: Parade of the Avant-Garde*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- FOWLIE, WALLACE. 1943. "Narcissus." *View* 3.3 (October).
- FRISBY, David. 1985. *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- GARRISON, Troy. 1941. "Plaza of the Psychopathic Angels." *View* 1.6 (June): 4.
- GREENBERG, Clement. 1961. "Avant-Garde and Kitsch." 1939. In Greenberg, *Art and Culture*. Boston: Beacon.
- GYSIN, Brion. 1941. "That Secret Look." *View* 1.7-8 (October-November): 7-8.
- HARAWAY, Donna. 1989. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge.
- HARDING, Sandra and Merrill B. HINTIKKA, eds. 1983. *Discovering Reality*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.
- KRACAUER, Siegfried. 1995. "Photography." In *The Mass Ornament. Weimar Essays*. Ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- MARX, Karl. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: Norton.
- MASSEY, Joe. 1943. "They Cannot Stop Death." *View* 3.4 (December): 123.
- MYERS, John Bernard. 1981. "Interactions. A View of View." *Art in America*. Summer: 80-92.
- . 1983. *Tracking the Marvelous. A Life in the New York Art World*. New York: Random House.
- NAREMORE, James. 1995-96. "Film Noir: The History of an Idea." *Film Quarterly*. 29.2 (Winter).
- NEIMAN, Catrina. 1991. "Introduction. View Magazine: Transatlantic Pact." In *View: Parade of the Avant-Garde*. Ed. Charles Henri Ford. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press: xi-xv.
- POCH, Leo. 1944. "The Watermelons." *View* 4.3 (October): 94.
- POGGIOLI, Renato. 1968. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. G. Fitzgerald. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
- RAY, Robert B. 1995. "Roland Barthes: Fetishism as a Research Strategy." In *Ray, The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard UP. 94-119.

- REEVE, Paul Eaton. 1942. "Battling Siki." *View* 2.3 (October): 21-22.
- RODITI, Edouard. 1940. "California Chronicle." *View* 1.3 (November): 3.
- . 1945. "William Harnett, American Necromantic." *View* 5.4 (November).
- RUSSELL, Charles. 1985. *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries. The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism*. New York: Oxford UP.
- SAWIN, Martica. 1995. *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- SELIGMANN, Kurt. 1942. "Magic Circles." *View* 1.11-12 (February-March): 2.
- SIMMEL, Georg. 1970. "The Metropolis and Mental Life." In *On Individuality and Social Forms*. Ed. David Levine. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- TASHJIAN, Dickran. 1995. *Boatload of Madmen: A History of Surrealism in the United States*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- TÖNNIES, Fernand. 1955. *Community and Association*. Trans. C. P. Loomis. London: Routledge.
- TOULMIN, Stephen. 1990. *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- TYLER, Parker. 1941-42. "Every Man his Own Private Detective." *View* 1.9-10 (December-January): 2, 6.
- . 1943. "Americana Fantastica." *View* 2.4 (January): 5.
- TZARA, Tristan. 1951. "Seven Dada Manifestoes." In *The Dada Painters and Poets*. Ed. Robert Motherwell. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- "Visions of the Compte de Permission." *View* 5.5 (December 1945).
- WAHL, François. 1986. "A Note from the Editor." In Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
- WEBER, Max. 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Scribner's.
- WOLIN, Richard. 1982. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. New York: Columbia UP.
- WOLLEN, Peter. 1992. *Raiding the Icebox: Essays on Twentieth-Century Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- YOUNG, Robert, ed. 1981. *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- ZADKINE, Ossip. 1944. "The Minotaur Lost and Found." *View* 4.2 (Summer).



UNPLANNED VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION: A CASE STUDY OF THREE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS



ELSA TRAGANT
UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

MIREIA TRENCHS
UNIVERSITAT POMPEU FABRA

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Within the field of second language learning and teaching, little attention has been paid in the past to the acquisition and instruction of vocabulary. The emphases in the late 70s and early 80s on syntactic structures and generative grammar gave rise to a number of studies on comparative semantics, componential analysis and the organization of the mental lexicon at the expense of a pedagogical perspective. Paradoxically, the notional/functional syllabuses and the communicative approaches from the last decades called for both careful vocabulary grading and a more complete look at the needs of language learners, who have always tended to consider the learning of words as the key to mastering a second language. Thus, already in the late 70s and especially in the 80s we hear voices concerned with how second language vocabulary is learned and how it is to be best taught (Allen 1983; Carter and McCarthy 1988; Judd 1978; McCarthy 1990; Meara 1980; Nation 1982; Richards 1976; Wallace 1982, to cite a few). Today, teacher training programs often include courses on how to improve learners' comprehension of vocabulary and how to help them with the storing and retrieval of words (for a review see Victori 1994). Thus, many teachers include in their lesson plans a varied