

BODY ART: SENSIBILITIES AND INTENTIONS

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ABSTRACT

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A new art, bearing the label "Body Art" has emerged during the past decade along with a new, post-formalist esthetic.

This thesis explores the characteristics of that esthetic, particularly its departure from the unique art object in using space and time systems that make new demands on the spectator. The particular character of the photographic image, the prime vehicle by which bodyworks are communicated, is also explored.

The essential intentions and sensibilities manifested by bodyworks are identified as being founded on either an empirical or an ontological approach, while a third category of works is tied to the emergence of a neo-Romantic search for the integrated self.

The emerging consensus among art educators, that a new, humanistic art program is needed to parallel the emergence of the post-formalist esthetic is described, and certain terms and concepts leading toward pertinent discussion of the new art forms are proposed.

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INTRODUCTION

A new art has emerged during the past decade, bearing the label "Body Art" in North America and "Art de comportement" - art of behavior - in Europe. Reacting first to the public nature of its often outrageous activities, most early observers of the new phenomenon decided that a Dadaist revival was taking place and dismissed it as a perishable, marginal movement.

Later (around 1972), as publications such as *artitudes*, *Flash Art*, *Heute Kunst* and *Avalanche* began to report on bodyworks in depth and the first thematic museum shows were organized (most notably in Luzern and Cologne), it became clear that Body Art is at once a specialized branch of Conceptual Art and an independent movement - if one can call a group of works so disparate in strategy, sensibility and visual appearance a "movement."

Body Art's perimeters are wide. At one extremity they touch on the field of "pure" photography, especially the kind of photography that is sequential (Muybridge, Marey) or where the intention is to catalogue social or morphological types (Sander, Rucha, the Bechers). At the other extremity, bodyworks fade into the realm of theater. The closest one can come to a definition is to generalize that Body Art is any form of visual expression that utilizes the artist's body as tool or support.

On a physical level, Body Art annihilates the boundaries that traditionally separate the space occupied and defined by the unique

art object from the space occupied by the spectator. This is a characteristic bodyworks share with all post-formalist works of art.

But the bodywork possesses another kind of contiguity as well: it destroys mental boundaries by presenting its subject in a spatial and temporal continuum that seems to exist in the here and now in which the spectator lives. The body remains clearly that of the artist rather than of some invented, surrogate-character. This sparks a new kind of empathy between artist and spectator, a relationship that can be exceedingly, disconcertingly visceral.

My interest in bodyworks is at once personal and professional. As someone who went to art school during the 1960's, I knew that no matter how alluring Abstract Expressionism was, it was a method that had exhausted its iconic potential. My fellow students and I painted our most personal feelings (or so we believed, at any rate), but in the end they always came out looking like DeKooning's feelings, or Bacon's or Hofmann's. And for those who continued to believe that art should mirror emotion, or at least an individual's world view, the Minimalists' unreferential object-making or the increasingly dry data-collecting of the Conceptualists seemed even less promising. Yet, anything outside those concerns seemed regressively "literary."

Body Art interests me insofar as it has re-introduced affective content to visual art. And post-formalist art, in general, seems of crucial concern because it has allowed the visual artist to venture into areas of reference that used to be the exclusive domain of films, literature, psychology, philosophy and so on.

In Chapter VI of this thesis I briefly describe how the development of post-formalism during these past ten years has been paralleled by the growing consensus among art educators that a similarly wider-ranging, more humanistic approach, concerned with the objective of self-cultivation, ought to replace the craft-oriented "self-expression" of present art programs.

The post-formalist esthetic proposes new art contexts and a wide range of possibilities of expression. It also demands the formulation of new terms of reference with which to discuss and evaluate art works that are not objects. And bodyworks, with their extreme intimacy of subject matter, sometimes accompanied by imagery that can only be termed scabrous, make additional and particular kinds of demands on the spectator's patience and understanding.

All these reasons make it extremely difficult to fully integrate post-formalist art in the curriculum at whatever level of instruction.

Convinced that the first step towards such integration of the new art must be a thorough exploration of its premises, I have attempted to fit these disparate works of art into a broad intellectual framework based on an enquiry into the artists' intentions (as revealed in their working strategies) and an evaluation of the various underlying sensibilities and world views - the latter by necessity involving a certain degree of interpretation.

I have made few specific proposals for the development of a new, post-formalist curriculum but, rather, sought ways to define new criteria and appropriate new terms of esthetic analysis which will

permit discussion and understanding of the new esthetic: the essential first step towards its integration in art programs.

That integration will undoubtedly happen soon: the new esthetic is all-pervasive and based on genuine intellectual and affective needs felt by artists everywhere. Art educators, too, are now convinced that a humanistic, analytical art program is needed. This conviction is documented in Chapter IV of this thesis.

CHAPTER I.

POST-FORMALIST USES OF SPACE AND TIME

THE UNIQUE OBJECT

More than twenty years ago, Harold Rosenberg alerted us to a profound shift in art, away from the formalist-rationalist tradition that, with the exception of the irrationalist schools of Dada and Surrealism, has dominated this century's artistic thought from Cézanne, through Cubism, to Mondrian and Albers. Rosenberg observed:

"At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or 'express' an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter."¹

The act of painting became an event in which the artist behaved as both actor and spectator. In the work of the action painter (DeKooning and Tworckow, Hofmann, Kline et al.) the ultimate imagery is the unforeseen product of gesturing with materials, gestures which succeed and supercede each other till the event had run its course. A completed DeKooning, as we see it hanging in the gallery or museum, is not the preconceived image arrived at through the traditional formalist's successive stages of rehearsal, recital, plan and execution. Rather, it offers a palimpsestic record of an event: "Creation is the game which the self plays with itself."²

Since the subject matter and the emotional tone of DeKooning's great "Woman" series of the 1950's resemble the bodyworks of several later artists in so striking a fashion, it is instructive to examine one of these paintings, Woman 1 (Plate 1), closely. It has been noted that DeKooning's women of this period are

"...demonic creatures whose heavy breasts and provocative poses suggest a more animalistic type appropriate to his rough, expressionist drawing style. These ferocious females originate from the 'aggressive' woman - the prostitute, faded fashion queen, pin-up model or movie starlet. Garish color photographs of such types, often torn from magazines and tacked casually to the studio wall, were frequently the artist's departure. He improvised on the forms, colors and costumes, freely associating body parts with surrounding material. In the resulting, highly charged compositions, the subject can be described best in compound terms, as 'woman-image', 'body-form' or 'female-landscape'."³

The above description of source material, impulse and atmosphere and especially the term "body-form" might be a faithful description as well of the photographic bodyworks of Luciano Castelli or Katharina Sieverding. And, moreover, DeKooning's own comments on Woman I - "...it eliminated composition, arrangement, relationships, light - all this silly talk about line, color and form..."⁴ - sound uncannily like the rejection of formalism of an authentic body artist.

However, Woman I is like a bodywork only insofar as it is clearly an event rather than a description of subject matter. The tempestuous brushwork places the artist squarely in the thick of the action: we follow the trial-and-error or perhaps just the trial-after-trial procedure through which the painter's internal energy (it would be presumptuously interpretive to call it anguish) slowly finds its counterpart in the accumulated energy of the brushstrokes on the canvas.



PLATE I

This is the classic expressionist's means of externalizing emotion: the painting is "finished" not when the woman in the picture has been sufficiently described - there is virtually no description in the painting, only allusion to a state of tension. Rather, completion depends on attaining a balance between internal tension and external (visible) tension: when the two are in balance, the painting is finished or, to be more faithful to the artist's impulse, the work is abandoned.

Again, the parallel is inevitable. The action painter's exorcistic drive for an equilibrium of tensions recalls the drive-to-exhaustion performances of a Chris Burden or an Acconci. But the differences are no less striking and, finally, crucially important: Woman I, for all its rejection of the formalist ethic is not yet a post-formalist work, not subject to the kind of "post-historical"⁵ concepts of space and time with which photographic bodyworks can be best approached, the concepts that will be elaborated further on in this text.

Woman I is an anti-formalist performance, not a post-formalist one. That an event has taken place is made clear by the presence of the creator in the painting, a presence manifested in the accumulated, non-linear drama of successive gestures. However, the artist's "self", so nakedly exposed in bodyworks, is not as directly or painfully felt in the painting. The emotional load carried by the gestures is at least in part projected on the "woman" who is the ostensible subject of the work. In a bodywork, subject matter and execution are one; in painting they are perceived separately. The "woman" shown in Woman I is a surrogate for the artist who has expressed without having been exposed.

It is ironic to note that while post-formalist art such as bodyworks are routinely accused of being "theatrical" and "literalist" art (this accusation is most notably made in Michael Fried's seminal essay on Minimalism⁶), it is a traditional painting like DeKooning's that essentially depends on the surrogate situation on which the theatrical playwright-character relationship is founded. In the theater, one unquestioningly accepts the medium's conventions and the feelings and ideas uttered by Hamlet are taken to belong to the character rather than to Shakespeare or to the actor who plays Hamlet. The same clear demarcation exists in painting, where it is DeKooning's women who are diagnosed as "demonic creatures", never the artist himself who is, instead, assumed to possess the lucidity and the rigor of thought we assume must go into the creation of a work of art: "Our passions outline our books and the intervals of calm write them."⁷

Why do we willingly accept this pretense when the "woman" in the painting is so obviously an arbitrary subject, when even as a fictional character she is so unconvincing a presence? After all, the "demonic" quality we attribute to her is clearly a description of the artist's state of mind, as denoted in the frenzy of his gestures. Our willingness depends on the understanding of painterly conventions in which the stretched canvas functions as the proscenium arch does in the theater: as a line of demarcation between "life" and "art". The canvas of the DeKooning is indeed an "arena", but it is also a stage which elevates all that it presents into the realm of fiction, of "acting" in the sense of playing a role, as against the actions performed in the course of daily life.

In *Woman I* and in action painting in general, this convention is not only adhered to but emphasized by the painter's overt attention to the edges of his canvas. The great, sweeping gestures of Franz Kline are, for all their seeming freedom and energy, obviously designed to fit into the designated space, the contours of the canvas are always in the painter's mind: they guide and determine the gesture quite as much as do the emotional necessities that inspire the gesture. In *Woman I*, the edges of the canvas become the second subject: the long vertical brushstrokes on both left and right are clearly guided by them and the right-hand edge is even echoed by the parallel, almost hard-edge vertical drawn by DeKooning.

Just as structural needs and the rules of stagecraft shape the action in drama quite as much as it is shaped by the internal motives of the characters and the dramatist, so the esthetic demands of making a coherent visual statement on canvas shape the imagery that reports on the "event" and - even more important - shapes the spectator's response to the "event" into an esthetic experience of the canvas instead of the more visceral and empathetic response that the painter's anguish calls for. Formal coherence becomes "beauty" and the artistic event loses its capacity to report on lived experience or, rather, this experience is transposed into the esthetic realm, a paradox neatly summed up by V.C. Aldrich:

"...just as we responded to the physical object with feelings (visual and auditory sensations) which literally qualified it, so we respond to these original (sensory) feelings with other (emotional) feelings which may in turn literally qualify them, despite their psychic distance from the subjective pole of awareness. When this secondary qualification occurs, you have assumed the esthetic attitude and enjoyed an esthetic experience."⁸

The illusory space of painterly convention thus creates its own intrusive requisites which inevitably engender a dialectic between gesture-as-impulse and the image of that gesture. Implicitly, the same split is introduced between artist and spectator.

In the following sections of this text we shall describe how the photographic documentation through which bodyworks are communicated and the live evidence of performance art liberates the art work from the esthetic - and ultimately formalistic - intrusions of painterly convention embodied in the finite, unique work of art.

The result of this liberation changes the traditional relationship between action (event) and imagery, just as it changes the relationship between artist and spectator, thus opening a door to the new and significantly different insights - as well as new, challenging sources of confusion - offered by the post-formalist esthetic.

CONTIGUITY IN SPACE AND TIME

The gap or separation described in the previous chapter corresponds to the increasing differentiation between subject and object decried by Ortega y Gasset as the "dehumanization"⁹ of modern art. This same process is described by another writer as modern art's "development towards a purely formal content without any expressive purpose; its avoidance more and more of the content of living forms, human objects and personal sentiments."¹⁰

That varied and amorphous phenomenon called "conceptual art" is the contemporary creator's solution for the problem of dehumanization. It destroys formal content by refusing to anchor expression to a unique,

finite work of art. Instead, conceptual art tackles two principal areas of activity: first, the examination of the very nature of what we call "art." Secondly, the proposition of intellectual patterns or patterns of behavior liberated as much as possible from the medium of embodiment.

It is to that second area of concern that Body Art is linked, through the intermediate steps that artists took in the early 1960's. Even those who continued to work in painting or sculpture became aware that the work of art is essentially the illustration of a thought process, a visible document on how the ultimate image came into being through a number of choices whose nature is philosophical rather than esthetic.

"The basic problem is what to do with paint"¹¹ is a typical statement by a post-formalist painter whose preoccupation is with "process"- or "system" rather than with a preconceived image.

Others have gone further away from the limitations imposed by the unique object. During the past two decades artists have circumvented those limitations by moving towards the "unobject": by leaving the canvas and moving into real space (environments); by animating and giving voice to the figure who may be either the artist himself or an assistant-surrogate who functions as a "character" (performances); and by physically involving the spectator (happenings).

None of these are distinct categories or media. The difference between a performance and a happening, for instance, is merely in the degree of latitude to which chance and extemporizing are allowed to shape the action, the specificity of the "script" which determines the

visual as well as experiential character of the work. The environment, closest in nature to the unique work of art, presumes the existence of a given space whose specifics are allowed to become part of the subsequent visual creation.

What these activities have in common is their involving the spectator directly in the art work by dissolving the barriers between the separate arts on one hand and between art and life on the other. Even though a primarily visual experience, an environment differs from traditional art in that, in order to experience it, the spectator must move into the work physically, just as the work had moved into the physical space formerly occupied only by the spectator. As Kaprow wrote: "Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch."¹²

Such "specific substances" are, of course, the very building blocks of which lived experience is constituted. In post-formalist art the spectator must respond concurrently to the stimuli generated by the art work and by the conditions under which he experiences the work. The smells that are the by-products of a performance are inseparable from those of the gallery or the other spectators. In this respect, a post-formalist work exists only through the duration of the performance: although its content is encoded in and transmittable by the written or photographic documents prepared by the artist after the fact, the specifics of the experience are not repeatable and, hence, unverifiable.

This is the special temporality of post-formalist art: the time evoked in the work corresponds exactly to the time lived in

experiencing it. Perception then becomes not a stable, immutable package of sensory information but, rather, a continuum; a series of event fragments that decay in time and memory till its essential content is transformed into process. The spectators' own experiences mingle with the sensory data so that the only thing that remains immutable is artistic behavior: "...art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and between people and the components of their environment."¹³

The post-formalist sensibility, therefore, calls on the spectator to, at the same time, separate and reconcile the stimuli received from both inside and outside the art context. His role involves the most active participation. On the simplest level this means that in order to appropriate the essence of an environmental work, he must experience the work's spatial organization in a manner that is as much kinesthetic as it is visual.

On a more complex level, the spectator is asked, simultaneously, to enter into a discussion of the concepts examined by a particular art proposition and, in the case of bodyworks especially, to keep a cool head when it comes to differentiating between the art proposition and the simultaneously remembered needs and fears of his own body.

The first task - discussion - is, of course, an integral part of any art experience. It is the very constituent of even the most formalistic painting or sculpture which, without the clarifying verbalization, would remain no more than an unqualified and uncommunicable "experience."

The second task - differentiating by keeping the work of art in perspective as an occurrence willed by the artist - is a particularly challenging one for the spectator especially in those numerous instances where the bodywork involves painful or even self-mutilating acts by the artist. In a piece such as Vito Acconci's *Seed Bed*, 1973, the spectator walks on a raised section of the floor, having been told that underneath the false floor the hidden artist is masturbating. The first question that must occur to the spectator in the gallery is: Why am I here? As Johnson has noted, *Seed Bed* is "an extreme example of the artist's relation to the spectator becoming the art object."¹⁴

Johnson's thesis is that the "art object" is present even in the least visual manifestations of conceptual art; what she means by the phrase is very much what others mean when they discuss a work's "content." Her observation is a perceptive one, for, indeed the most compelling issue raised by *Seed Bed* is the nature of the spectator-artist relationship created in the gallery - or, after the fact, created in the mind of the reader of a description of this work.

The infinite number of questions raised by *Seed Bed* would include the following considerations:

- a) the artist as exhibitionist
- b) the spectator as voyeur
- c) the artist as sufferer-victim
- d) the spectator as judge-victim
- e) history of the seed as symbol
- f) onanism in art (first suggested area of exploration: abstract expressionism)

- g) the significance of the false floor which separates artist from spectator
- h) the role of the gallery context in transfiguring the actual event into "art"
- i) relationship of Acconci with the Dadaist provocateurs of the 1920's
- j) relationship of Acconci with such contemporaries as Brus and Burden
- k) the economic implications of this objectless but otherwise marketable event: art as panderer?

Confronted with a post-formalist work, the spectator-critic must become both phenomenologist and interpreter: he must make use of all the evidence presented by the artist and assume that every scrap of evidence is intentional and germane. At the same time, while using all the visual and textual information provided by the artist, the spectator must match this data with any of the historical, psychological, philosophical and social contexts that might seem appropriate, the evidence being based on the artist's information which may imply, evoke or allude to these systems of thought or, best of all, might refer to them overtly.

We are in the realm of "systems analysis"¹⁵ or "systems esthetics"¹⁶ and in the absence of the finite, unique work of art, we find ourselves with no adequate terminology on one hand and with a need for infinite intellectual resources on the other. It may be that the only valid art criticism that can apply to post-formalist work is the sort of "think tank" approach favored by systems analysts.

As the unique work of art is replaced in areas such as body-works by what might be termed an "artefact" - any sign or utterance transmitted by an artist with the intention of creating "a work of art" - it seems likely that the most exhaustive analysis of such an artefact would be accomplished by a group consisting of, say, a semiologist, a linguist, a psychiatrist, a sociologist and a number of historians of varied interests. A humbling notion for the solitary spectator, critic or educator!

The signal danger here is that the pleasures and complexities of information processing can destroy the artist-spectator relationship by leading the discussion further and further away from verifiable evidence, to the point where artistic intention may become entirely engulfed by verbiage and ultimately subverted. Allan Kaprow sensed this danger as early as 1966, when he wrote:

"Words are our biggest problem; obviously, they are not only a form of communication. They carry intellectual customs and cultural memory. Instead of leading us to the present in order to come to terms with it, they are attaching us to the misunderstood past."¹⁷

Words are indeed a problem, for in addition to a post-formalist methodology, we are in need of new expressions. Even such terms as "performance" and "body art" are clearly inadequate in that they too easily invoke the traditional notions of theater and sculpture (the body as a medium or material for transformation).

At its most extreme, post-formalism can by-pass both verbal and visual information and proceed directly to bodily confrontation. In the Les Levine environment in which rows of live electric wires gave low-voltage shocks to spectators, the artwork functioned as a direct

modifier of audience behavior: "What I am after here is physical reaction, not visual concern."¹⁸

One's immediate reaction to a piece such as Levine's is that while this experience takes place within the framework of the art-world, it lacks the historical and symbolic continuity of what up to now has been considered art. After all, a "physical reaction" is neither ambitious nor interesting enough to qualify as communication and it is too vaguely amorphous to qualify as "artefact."

But even as unrewarding a work as this is still not the end of art as pessimists like Harold Rosenberg would have it: in its direct confrontation of the spectator it evokes (and questions) the border between esthetical and practical life. At times, in post-formalist art that border breaks down completely and we are left in a sea of vulgarity, hapless victims of a need for meaningful experience - at any cost.

Throughout history artists have functioned at various times as priests and educators, shamans and magicians, entertainers and keepers of the flame. The new post-modern artist assumes all these roles but above all he seems to act as an inquisitor - in turns kindly and severe - whose troubling questions are directed at the artist himself as well as the spectator.

In this challenging dialogue nothing is taken for granted and no system of thought is inadmissible. In the disappearance of the unique object we are not seeing the end of art but, rather, in the words of Hermann Nitsch, "I think we have now arrived at a point where art is free. We can now use it to find our existence."¹⁹

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE

The bodyworks under discussion in this text are meant to be communicated primarily through photographs. This is true, of course, in the cases where the event performed by the artist was designed to specifically take place in front of the camera with no "live" audience present (e.g. Luthi, Pane, Natalia L.L.). And, it is true, even of those public events organized by artists which after-the-fact exist only as a series of photographic images chosen and edited by the artist, often published as numbered editions which, with or without a complementary, descriptive text, constitute our sole knowledge of a particular work - always provided, of course, that we were not witness to the original performance (e.g. Nitsch, Muehl).

While we are dealing then with discrete works of art whose imagery, selected by the artist as the definitive vehicle of his communication, is as intentional and immutable as the imagery of any painting or sculpture, we must not presume that the traditional, perceptual approach to formalist art is still operative as an approach to bodyworks.

The esthetic gap between impulse and imagery - the gap discussed earlier in this paper in relation to DeKooning's action painting - hardly exists in the photographic image: "Photographs show people being so irrefutably there and at a specific age in their ^{lives}; group together people and things which a moment later have already disbanded, changed, continued along the course of their independent destinies."²⁰

Or, as an artist whose career has taken him from painting to the exclusive use of the camera has put it: "I use the camera for the same reason I left pencils for the spray-gun: to become more detached. The photograph is the most direct route between object and image. The brush is the most flagrant filter, the camera interferes the least."²¹

A photograph reports on a particular volume of space during a specific duration of time. This makes it the primary post-formalist tool because the space and time slices the image contains seem to be contiguous with the space and time in which the image is perceived. The direct link to the spectator's own history, the link or series of links which assure the efficacy of the systems-esthetic as a carrier of meaningful expression thus seems guaranteed. As Les Levine, writing about "camera art," notes: "The work should act as a feedback mechanism to the viewer's own working model of himself."²²

The most efficient tool thus far designed to analyze the temporal systems encoded in works of visual art is that of Micheline Sauvage.²³ Four "temporal modes" are identified (referred to as T1, T2, T3 and T4) and it is useful to apply this methodology in the comparison of a formalist work by Bacon (Plate II) and a bodywork by Burden (Plate III). It is to be noted that the Bacon painting is the middle panel of a triptych, while the Burden photograph is one of several sequential images that have been published of his performance. While in each case there is a time-scheme engendered by the sequence of images, what concerns us here is the temporal complexity of the painted as opposed to the photographed image. Note further that the iconography and emotional quality of the two pictures is highly similar.



PLATE II



Dreamy Nights

Poolerie, Graz, Austria

Art as Living Ritual: October 15, 1974

The gallery was dark. I covered my body with vaseline and walked into a small recess in the wall containing a sink filled with Spiritus (alcohol). I lit the Spiritus and lay underneath the sink with my back to the audience. I blew on a police whistle while writhing violently on the floor. After about a minute, an assistant threw water into the sink splashing the burning Spiritus onto my body. Water was thrown into the sink until the flames were extinguished.

PLATE III

T1 is the temporal mode that refers to the art object's history, its date of creation, critical history and the effects of time on the object. The Bacon is dated 1972 and of its fate we know that it is in a private collection in England. We don't know how long Bacon took to paint it.

The Burden image was photographed on October 15, 1974 and thence distributed in a number of editions as well as reprinted in countless magazines. Where is "it"? Surely it exists as completely in the pages of a magazine as it does in private collections for the visual differences between original photograph and its reproduction are minimal. The artist's statement remains, of course, constant.

T2 is the time taken by the spectator to perceive the image in its entirety, guided by the spatial organization of the image, by its internal dynamic. There is a hierarchy of importance in the Bacon painting: the organic mass of figures solicits our attention first. It is only after we have identified who these figures are and what they are doing that we move on to the surrounding space which is clearly decor, contributing to the understanding of the event only through the special mood conveyed by the artist's choice of color. The organic shapes take precedence over the geometric shapes and this plastic prerogative becomes a temporal prerogative.

In the Burden photograph there is a simultaneity of perception that leads us to react much as we would in a real-life situation. The flash of fire and the agitation below (the agitation is conveyed by the blurred image) leads us to exclaim: There is something on fire! The man is burning! What's going on? There is no hierarchy of importance,

one reacts to a situation that takes place in an organic continuum rather than step-by-step perception.

T3 is the time "evoked" by the picture, the duration of the action described. Here the Burden's attached statement describes the duration as just over a minute. The photograph by itself hints at a shorter period - after a full minute's burning the artist would have burned to a crisp, whereas we know that he came through intact. Yet, the duration connoted by the image is approximately right; we understand that it reports on a few climactic moments, no more. What is to be noted here is that our understanding of the temporal scheme derives from our knowledge of the depicted situation, from knowing the limits of the human body's capacity for survival.

The Bacon panel also evokes time. The bodies are in movement and we know that spatial displacement is inevitable linked to a temporal order. But, in the painting, there is no sense of time lived: Bacon is not descriptive enough so that the action depicted seems to transcend lived experience and move onto an abstract plane: "struggle."

Most importantly, the black doorway painted by Bacon is so denuded of description that it functions as a symbol. The iconography seems willed by artistic necessity and its significance transcends literal meaning. Bacon painted The Door. Burden's photograph happens to show, among other things, a door: insignificant even as a reportage on the place the event occurred in.

Photographs specify, painted images generalize - an axiom that can be extended to pinpoint the crucial difference between formalism and post-formalism.

Formalist art is created from à posteriori reasoning: it proceeds from observable facts to general conclusion. Post-formalist art is created from à priori reasoning: it proceeds from general propositions to particular conclusions.

T4, or time implied by the concerns of a work of art (rather than evoked by its imagery) conforms to the above axiom. The Bacon painting's perspective reaches into the infinity of philosophical speculation: "Life is struggle." The mood is one of shapeless melancholy. The Burden work, on the other hand, very much implies the here and now and, as a record of a particular event, it functions as an artefact. The mood is one of inquiry and wariness. The Bacon invites contemplation; Burden provokes inquiry.

The post-formalist "contiguity" is, of course, all the more pronounced in video-art where the unedited, time-lived segments of events correspond to the duration of time lived by the spectator while watching the tape.

Bodyworks composed of sequential photographs or juxtaposed photographs establish their own time-schemes, but there are only two cases in which the notion of contiguity entirely ceases to function. This happens in a video-tape such as Bill Viola's Return²⁴, which contains speeded-up segments and sudden cuts from one camera to another, as well as zoom-shots that are conspicuously accelerated.

The other instance of total non-contiguity happens in the series of bodyworks Suzy Lake executed in 1974-75. In "Suzy Lake as Bill Vazan"²⁵ the corporal transformations are achieved entirely through the means of manipulating the photographic print. There is no sense of

"time lived" in this work: one of the rare instances of a post-formalist work relying on the "craft-fetishism" of formalist tradition to convey its subject.

Photography being the most transparent of media - "(It) implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it"²⁶ - it is also the medium in which it becomes most difficult to separate reality from fiction; in other words, to separate the organic flow of human action occurring in the here and now from the artistic action that is structured by the artist in a conscious way so as to reflect artistic intention.

And, in the case of bodyworks, most art pieces are accompanied in addition to the visual evidence, by artist's statements which describe, more or less factually, the artistic gesture. With all this "documentation" at his service, the spectator-critic is greatly tempted to succumb to what Wimsatt and Beardsley identify as "the intentional phallacy"²⁷ - the substitution of biographical data for artistic evidence.

The bodywork is performed by the artist who is at once the subject and the object of the artwork. It is the artist, whom we identify by the name he carries on his passport - rather than as the fictional surrogate that appears in representational painting - who subjects his body to a host of indignities. We speak of "Oppenheim" letting his flesh be scorched by the sun; of "Le Va" hurling his body against the wall until he is exhausted.

These actions are performed in our own living space and time rather than in the once-removed, privileged sanctum of a securely "artistic" context and, hence, the location of the new context becomes all the more problematical.

That those new contexts exist is, in this thesis, being taken for granted. Carl André's contention that "If abstract art is art as its own content, then conceptual art is pure content without art"²⁸ is clearly inadmissible. Such a contention would reduce bodyworks to the status of symbols and artistic intention to the level of case history.

Most bodyworks are so rigorously structured and their documentation so obviously visually oriented that they exclude everything that is not art. Therefore, all visual and textual evidence furnished by the artist must be presumed to derive exclusively from artistic intention. And the evaluation of that evidence may include the discussion of any number of political, psychological, social or historical systems as long as the use of any of those systems is logically dependent of the material furnished by the artist.

We are in the realm of interpretation rather than formalist analysis, interpretation that is constantly complicated by the tendency of the photographic medium to become an active agent in the blurring of demarcations between reality and fiction - between visual evidence and artistic intention.

The "content" of post-formalist art lies somewhere in that blurred area in which the artist and spectator must find common ground.

Conceptualist Robert Barry declares:

"In my work the language itself isn't the art ... I use language as a sign to indicate that there is art, the direction in which the art is, and to prepare someone for art ... Art is about man himself ... It is about myself, about the world around me. And it is also about things that I don't know, about using the unknown."²⁹

The art experience is a complex game in which our senses play with structure. Post-formalist art "is about man himself" - and the game becomes all the more complex because the structures that build the art experience have the tendency to extend, stealthily and irrefutably, into the structures of our lives.

CHAPTER III

THE BODY AS THE CONTAINER OF THE SELF

"The most tragic problem of philosophy," wrote Unamuno - and he might as well have been discussing the fundamental problem of contemporary art - "is to reconcile intellectual necessities with the necessities of the heart and the will. For it is on this rock that every philosophy that pretends to resolve the eternal and tragic contradiction, the basis of our existence, falls to pieces."³⁰

If the history of the 20th-century art is to a great degree the history of its "dematerialization" as Lippard contends³¹ or, in Rosenberg's³² phrase, its "de-definition," it is because the unique, finite art object refused to shoulder the tragic contradiction. With Cézanne's (possibly apocryphal) declaration that in nature we must see the cylinder, the sphere and the cone, artists decided to split the load by dividing human experience into rational-irrational polarities.

Gradually, the division widened: Faith and reason, intuition and analysis, organic and geometrical, expressionistic and representational intentions were separated and consigned to opposing camps, one flying the Cartesian flag, the other that of Darwin. Mutual sustenance between the two became unthinkable and the nature-culture polarity became the fundamental tool used by critical perception.

The schism between subjective experience and language, between the intuitive and the discursive, between nature and culture - already an essential tenet of the post-Romantic generation and of its greatest representative, Flaubert - gradually became so pervasive by the time

Picasso declared that he painted not what he saw but what he knew was there, that its acceptance was implicit in all discussion of art.

Body Art - the term is so vague that one tries to use it as infrequently as possible - in all its various manifestations and inflections may best be defined as, in Max Kozloff's phrase, "a visual work of art (which) has been bodily executed by its maker."³³ Like most vital contemporary movements, Body Art is historically self-conscious: It means both to invalidate old truths and to satisfy urgent priorities.

Body Art is a rebellion against the Minimalism of the 1960's (even if certain manifestations of it occurred during the early 1960's - notably works by Klein and Manzoni - and as early as the Dada-connected piece, titled Tonsure,³⁴ executed by Duchamp in 1919). The Minimalist priorities focus on the elimination of all content that refers to anything beyond the spectator's direct perception of the object itself.

As best enunciated by Donald Judd, this process of elimination involves the demolishing of such "superfluities" as gesture, symbol and reference to the human figure and, above all, the elimination of composition which is the fundamental expressive vehicle of traditional Western art.

In Judd's view, composition is anathema precisely because it is expressive in its dependence on the coexistence of major and minor elements. Such hierarchy is necessarily moralistic in that it is based on value judgments about what is major or minor and this inevitably results in anecdote: the drama of choosing. Relationships imply choice and choices demand rational thought, while the Minimalist object means to be irrational. It does not relate, it is.

In her discussion of Judd's objects, Roberta Smith sums up the minimalist credo this way:

"...Donald Judd has achieved a static, weightless, fully volumetric space which is new to sculpture in that it excludes all references to the figure, to gesture, to movement. His accomplishment is based on a concept of order which is a denial of most kinds of order: it is an insistence on the independence of things."³⁵

Smith's phrases can function as an inverted picture of the areas of preoccupation proposed by bodyworks: this art is at its very essential an exploration of the figure. The human figure is used as a paradigm whose primary inflections - gesture and movement - become either the exclusive subject matter or are exploited in the exploration of secondary inflections which are manifested through behavior. Bodyworks insist on the interdependence of things: they concern themselves with the networks of behavior which tie the physical, visual phenomena of figure and gesture to the metaphysics of identity and the self.

The minimalist object is an immutable presence; it is self-referential and is, while a bodywork exists only insofar as it becomes a visual evidence of behavior. Minimalist objects are pure, distilled culture; in them the inner, anthropomorphic space of traditional form is finally rationalized and exorcised. The bodywork is culture poured into the vessel of nature.

For the body artist - and for post-formalists in general - there is no clear demarcation between what he sees and what he knows is there. In his view, nature and culture are inextricably bound up in a single myth, both perceptions being, in the end, equally pertinent and "natural" because they are both organic parts of our vital environment.

And once we come to terms with the basic verity of that proposition we must recognize that the human body, being a unique hybrid of atavism and social behavior, was destined to become the fundamental vehicle of the new expression.

That body is the artist's body and it is our own. The art experience has always been based on empathy, the identification of the self with the other: In Proust's phrase, "Only through art can we get outside ourselves and know another's view of the universe."³⁶ In body-works that empathy is pushed even further: the contiguity it establishes with the spectator's own space amounts to an unfair exercise of power, which is another way of saying that it practices violence.

This applies to all bodyworks and, of course, even more to those that, as so often happens, involve the self-infliction of violence. In those artists whose main preoccupation is the human organism itself, the body acts as a metaphor for ecology whose limits of endurance - and limits of power - are the object of study. The self-inflicted pain is not a symptom of masochism. Rather, it derives from the necessity to create "laboratory conditions" under which self-deprivation is merely the elimination of the superfluties that might compromise the objectivity of the experiment. Insofar as the artist's body serves as the guinea pig in the experiment, the artist agrees to play the role of victim.

In "Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art," Wylie Sypher describes the dehumanizing process, the sense of "void at the center of things"³⁷ as the constant theme which haunts modern art and offers this hopeful note: "As long as man is aware of this void and

Pollock's method is carried to its logical conclusion by the English artists Gilbert and George who, in a typical work like *Morning Light on Art for All* (Plate IV) become "living sculpture." The work's sole content is the affirmation of the artist's presence and the "art context" is assured only by the controlled situation created by the immutable photograph.

It must be noted here that although Gilbert and George's work is routinely classified as Body Art in the articles and anthologies devoted to that subject, their work qualifies only in the sense that the artists are present in the work as corporeal entities. But it is equally clear that the body's stillness, its evocation of "presence" rather than "being" also ties the work to the Minimalist esthetic. As well, the absence of demand for empathy precludes Gilbert and George's research from qualifying as a search for the self, a theme that must, by definition, derive from speculation rather than solution - another way of observing that this approach lacks the psychological resonance that animates authentic Body Art, and our vital interest in that art.

Authentic bodyworks exist not in a world in which "solutions" are possible or even pertinent. Rather, they inhabit a world where, in Karl Jaspers' phrase, "the insecure human being gives our epoch its physiognomy."⁴⁰

In such a climate of impending doom and rootlessness of the self, certain body artists resort to strategies that parallel in the most striking fashion the two dominant philosophic positions of our time.



PLATE IV

Like Logical Empiricism, which narrows the region of authentic knowledge to a point where only the measurable and verifiable phenomena of human concern are admissible, bodyworks executed by Burden, Oppenheim, Acconci and others confine their investigation to the physical capabilities of their bodies.

Other bodyworks, most pertinently those executed by the Europeans Urs Luthi and Arnulf Rainer (while, in interesting contrast, the Empiricists are generally American), echo the Existentialist's strategy of elevating into ontological principles the human emotions of anguish, abandonment and anxiety. But, be their strategy ontogenetic or ontological, the two groups agree that their field of study must be the human organism, the one and unique container of the self whose parameters are verifiable and hence conducive to a being seized and defined - even if that definition turns out to be of the narrowest (adversaries of Body Art would say "shallowest") sort.

THE EMPIRICAL APPROACH

Vito Acconci's Trademarks, 1970, (Plate V) typifies the bodywork at its most empirical. The artist makes a systematic exploration of his own body, seeing how far his bite marks can reach. All the discrete elements that used to compose the formalist work of visual art are here tied to the vital link of the artist's body which performs the following functions:

- a) the body as support (canvas - skin)
- b) the body as instrument (brush - teeth)
- c) the body as imagery (teeth imprints)

- d) the body as composition (the distribution of marks derives from the pliability and physiology of Acconci's body)
- e) the body as spectator (Acconci is both the actor and the verifier of his actions)
- f) the body as signature (the fingerprint)

Rather similar in their strategy of corporal exploration - even if somewhat less systematic and less beautifully self-contained - are those works in which the artist's body is examined - stretched, twisted, modelled as sculpture is modelled - for capability to engender new forms. Lucas Samaras' endless series of Autopolaroids (Plate VI) treat the body as the equivalent of the paradigm in linguistics. The body serves as a distinct entity composed of a network of forms: the work is then an inventory of the various conjugational or declensional forms that can be obtained from the basic entity.

Bruce Nauman is another artist associated with this exploration of "body language" - though it must be noted that both in his case and that of Samaras we are involved with metalanguage insofar as the forms are invented arbitrarily. There is no codification of "signs."

In passing, one may remark that while the intense activity in Body Art is contemporaneous with universal interest in the development of the sciences of Kinesics and Proxemics, there is not one single evidence in the body of writings on Body Art - either in artists' statements of intentions or in critics' analyses - that body artists have made conscious use of these new branches of behavioral psychology. Marshall McLuhan's blurb on the cover of Birdwhistell's astonishing



PLATE V

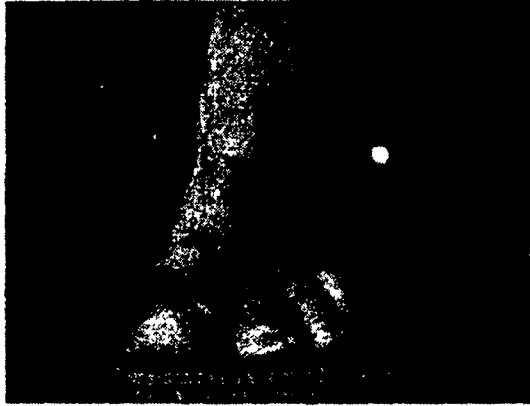


PLATE VI

study, entitled *Kinesics and Context*⁴¹, contending that the author "...is the first to have built a bridge between anthropology and the world of contemporary arts" seems premature at best, absolutely not supported by a close reading of Birdwhistell or Hall.

There is certainly a way in which art teachers might combine the strategies of Kinesics and Body Art (this will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis) but for the moment the two areas seem not to be actively concerned with each other.

The Californian, Chris Burden, is the artist who has taken the examination of the body's outer limits of endurance as his most consistent subject. Empirical to the end, he documents performance data with the precision of a scientist. A typical piece is *Sculpture in Three Parts*⁴², composed of a photo of Burden during the performance and the following description:

"I sat on a small metal stool placed on a sculpture stand directly in front of the gallery entrance, an elevator door. A sign on the stand read: 'Sculpture in Three Parts. I will sit on this chair from 10:30 a.m. 9-10-74 until I fall off.'
About 10 feet away, a camera was constantly attended by changing photographers waiting to take a photograph as I fell.
I sat on the chair for 43 hours. When I fell, a chalk outline was drawn on the floor around my body. I wrote 'Forever' inside the outline. I placed another sign on the stand which read: 'I sat on this chair from 10:30 a.m. 9-10-74 until I fell off at 5:25 a.m. 9-12-74.' The chair, stand, and outline remained on exhibit until September 21."

Burden's performances are loaded with such potent symbols as fasting, crucifixion and martyrdom, all conducive to the kind of speculation about sacred and profane art that Jindrich Chalupsky first indulges in in his essay "Art and Sacrifice"⁴³ and then dismisses as

irrelevant. I think that dismissal is warranted: symbolic speculation about Burden's iconography would be relevant only if the artist himself were not present, if he had used a surrogate whose anonymity could then function as symbol.

As it is, what is important about Burden is the empirical, quasi-scientific strategy which focuses on the physical organism as it describes the parameters of artistic action. The stigmata, no matter how suggestive, are false clues: they lead us away from the evoked temporality of event to the implied temporality of speculation which belongs to the realm of formalist art. Burden himself hints at this in the documentation: it is the drawn, immutable outline on the floor that is labeled "Forever" whereas he emphasizes that his bodywork encompasses exactly 43 hours.

Burden's oeuvre with its perverse use of false clues is an exceedingly useful reminder that bodyworks must be approached phenomenologically as intentional acts, suspending assertions about their existence independent of consciousness. We could possibly make such assertions if, in *Sculpture in Three Parts*, the intention had been to produce the image outlined on the floor and if that image had been preserved, say, on canvas. But the image exists only as a function of the total event and ceased to exist after the performance, just as the forms inventoried by Samaras survive only as photographic documentation.

Of course, those false clues, with their potent allusions to symbols and myths that are still pervasive in our culture, are not to be ignored. We have noted (in Chapter I) that post-formalist art demands the application of as many systems of cultural reference as the

of the absurdity of his position in it, there is some locus for a sort of humanism, even if it be unlike any kind of humanism held in the past by cultures based upon a different world from ours."³⁸

But how to construct a new humanism when the self is all but extinguished? As we discussed earlier in this chapter, the question is irrelevant to Minimalism which, indeed, revels in the absence of gesture and celebrates the "independence of things." A similar sense of accommodation with the status quo permeates Pop Art which exalts the mechanized world by producing an equally mechanized image of it under Warhol's slogan, "I want to become a machine."

Body Art, whether it be manifested as the private musings of an artist like Pane or Luthi or the public and indeed political activities of Beuys, is an attempt to arrive at a humanistic art, an art whose essential priority insists not so much on cognitive discoveries about identity or on the construction of some utopia, but on the reconstruction of the shattered self - and, concurrently, the reconstruction of art into an activity in which the formalist polarities can be brought closer together and culture and nature can be reconciled.

Jackson Pollock's famous statement of intentions, uttered in 1947, is a touchstone of the new humanism:

"My painting does not come from the easel. I hardly ever stretched my canvas before painting. I prefer to tack the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor. I need the resistance of the board surface. On the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting ..."³⁹

work indicates might be relevant. And, in Burden's case, it would be ludicrous to assume that he is divorced from all cultural influence and that he does not carry in his head those images of St Sebastian and the crucified Christ.

But we must not confuse intention with language. The positivistic bodywork's search for the self depends on differentiating between what Jaspers calls the Being and the Encompassing:

"We inquire after the Being which, with the manifestation of all encountered appearance in object and horizon, yet recedes itself. This Being we call Encompassing.⁴ The Encompassing, then, is that which always makes its presence known, which does not appear itself, but from which everything comes to us."⁴⁴

In its demand on the audience that it apply a measure of "distancing" to keep separate the elusive notion of the self and the all-pervasive presence of cultural Encompassing, Burden's work contains an element of social provocation. As all Body Art does, it renders the spectator conscious of his own responsibilities by forcing him to suspend moral judgment, a difficult situation when the material being manipulated is human. Formal art eliminated that dilemma by enclosing the art experience within the secure confines of the privileged, "sacred" space, an area in which moral considerations are obviated by the closed system's integrity. Body Art must, on the other hand, be confronted like any other life situation. As Horvitz has phrased the crucial question: "To what extent, if any, and under what conditions does morality have a higher claim on our actions and reactions than esthetics?"⁴⁵

This dilemma is focused on even more sharply in those pieces where, in order to test the limits of his body's endurance, Burden

requires the collusion of another person, as in Kunst Kick, 1974⁴⁶, where he was kicked down the stairs of the Basel Art Fair ("I fell two or three steps at a time" he notes, ever the objective observer), or in Shoot, 1971⁴⁷, in which he was wounded in the arm by a hired sharpshooter.

These works are underdocumented in one respect: they should include, besides Burden's testimony, that the the accomplice-aggressor as well as the spectator's. Insofar as we accept Burden's performances as "art" we have chosen esthetics above moral judgment and our participation as spectator is open to accusations of collusion.

If the ontogenetic branch of Body Art seems to operate in some hellish laboratory, like that of Dr. Frankenstein, then our own identity resembles nothing more than that of his confused - and deformed - assistant, Igor.

CHAPTER IV

THE BODY AS THE MIRROR OF THE SELF

"I have never succeeded in becoming completely used to existence, neither to that of the world nor to that of others, nor above all to my own. I sometimes feel that forms are suddenly emptied of all their content, reality is unreal, words are only noises stripped of all their meaning."⁴⁸

Ionesco's plaint, an excerpt from "I have never succeeded," is the plaint of man who finds himself alone in a universe of nothingness in which "forms are suddenly emptied of content" - a suggestive if involuntary reference to the tenets of Minimalism challenged by bodyworks.

As we have seen, the empirical approach to Body Art faces the dilemma by retreating within the confines of what is measurable and verifiable. Another approach is that of what might be called Existentialist Body Art, which challenges nothingness by focussing its attention on the body's capacity to express emotion; by a sort of cataloguing of life-signs which, at their purest (the artist hopes) are free of culturally imposed slogans and ready-made truths and, thus, must be evidences of the self.

This reductive process of liberating the self from the engulfment of cultural detritus (seen in reverse-parody in Ionesco's *Le Locataire* in which the tenant's possessions finally suffocate him) is the subject matter of Cioni Carpi's photo-sequences, each of which is titled "Transfiguration." In the end, Carpi's self is found in the body whose redemption resides in the fact that it is capable of action, of choice - no matter how limited the sphere of that choice:

"I, who know little or nothing of myself (much less of what is outside me) ... present myself as an object, even to myself, along with all I can take with me,"

writes Carpi in the accompanying text of Transfiguration 3.⁴⁹

What the artist "can take with him" includes, of course, the possession of an individual sensibility and the skills to manifest that sensibility. Existentialist bodyworks are distinguished by the riveting beauty of their photographic images. In contrast with the public performances of empirical artists, which are then documented in indifferently photographed "records," the existentialist works are posed in the studio and their very beauty seems to say that art - the clarity of deliberate discourse - can be a challenge to emptiness.

In the photo-works of Carpi, Luthi and others, the definition of personal sensibility echoes Camus' contention that "A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world."⁵⁰ Beauty is important to these artists because it defines and integrates an image, and definition is a major component of objectivity, of method.

At the same time, beauty in bodyworks of this type solicits the essential empathy of the spectator, by enticement this time (after all, beauty is the promise of happiness, according to Stendhal) as opposed to the empiric's strategy of provoking empathy.

In Arnulf Rainer's work, the focus is narrowed and sharpened on the search for the authentic self, that which is a genuine and unquestionable inflection of the integral self. As in Heidegger, it is assumed that authenticity is to be found at the end of a reductive process when all the trivia on which we fritter away our daily lives is removed and there remains only the elemental gesture which is only remotely cultural.

- Rainer's oeuvre is divided into two classes: "Bodyposes", which trace the loci of expressions in which the entire body is involved; and "Facefarces" in which the significant movements of specific facial expressions are drawn by the artist on the photograph of the expressive face.

A typical Rainer work like Happiness (Plate VII) is composed of a photograph of the artist's face and of a gestural drawing which reproduces the dynamics of the facial expression. We are far from the methodical approach of genuine Kinesics, but Rainer does succeed in establishing a connection between the language of gestural painting and body language. In the process, Rainer also carries Pollock's desire to be "in" the painting to its most efficient conclusion.

Just as his technique is based on the reconciliation of two hitherto opposite strategies, so is the world Rainer communicates an arena of contradiction. On one hand, there is the objectivity of the artist's camera which assures the kind of courage, clarity of vision and honesty in the confrontation with the self which are the essential components of the Existentialist's notion of authenticity.

But, at the same time, the self arrived at is a multiple one. Self-examination can only attain the rigor of meditation. Rainer himself describes his method as

"a kind of Anti-Yoga composed of tragicomical poses, mannered clowning and tired attitudes; graceless, without charm or chic. They don't pretend to be harmonious corporal expressions but tend, rather, to be in search of the many possible and impossible human beings that are hidden in each of us."⁵¹



PLATE VII

In his cheerful game of searching for the self, Rainer comes up with a multiplicity of selves: a rather absurd result but by no means a tragic one. Ironically enough, it is the gestural drawings, borrowed from formalism, which save Rainer's mission and even turn it into triumph. The drawings' reenforcement turns gesture into symbol, and, consequently, transforms the individual into hero.

The beings Rainer discovers are all himself and they are also each one of us when viewed from the inside: the courage one must possess in the search for authenticity confers on us the role of hero and Rainer's discovery - and triumph - is the realization that a man who reasons cannot have a banal inner life.

Cioni Carpi's sequences of paring away all that is not organically connected to the self is echoed in the phrase contained in a work of Urs Luthi's: "The personal dissolves so easily in the typical." That phrase is the key to Luthi's exploration of the self which in his case takes on narcissistic overtones, if only because of the dramatic lighting of the photographs which render Luthi's self-portraits as ravishing as the star close-ups of Hollywood's most artful cameramen.

But in other respects, Luthi is objective. "I treat myself as a stranger"⁵², he has said and insofar as his various guises are discovered by him with the same sense of surprise as that of the audience, the narcissism does not overwhelm the work.

Transvestism is a leit-motif in Luthi's work, as it is in the work of several body artists (Armleder, Castelli, Pfeiffer, etc.). But transvestism is not the subject matter; rather, its presence is a logical outcome of the methodical search for the self, which in Luthi

seems to be predicated on an acceptance of the multiple personality as normal: in the sense that there are parts of the self that are shaped by other selves that come in contact with it - rather like a chameleon's behavior.

Thus, there are two kinds of "transvestism" in Luthi's work. In works where he is shown alone, made up to assume various stages of androgyny, he typifies the contemporary bodywork's preoccupation with the construction of a finely-calibrated device with which to measure the multiple, intermediary stages that we now know exist between the rigid male-female poles of pre-Freudian thought. These actions delve into those parts of the self which exist only for the self in relation to itself.

Luthi's Self-portrait with Egki, 1974 (Plate VIII) represents another form of "transvestism" - the chameleon action the self performs with reference to others. Whether deliberately or not, Luthi has seized on John Dewey's theory of the self, whose intention is to reconcile the directions of "inwardness and outwardness" in a single harmony.

There is no sense of pain or pathology in the multiple selves uncovered by Luthi's transformations because, as already noted in relation to Carpi's work, the beauty of the images - the calm discipline one knows is needed to produce a succinct, coherent statement, whose fundamental seriousness and integrity are the sources of visual beauty - is in itself an assurance of psychic harmony.

There is, of course, a not inconsiderable measure of irony carried by the discovery that the art illusion can function as a solution for the post-formalist anxiety; but if we accept as valid the post-formalist esthetic's capacity to be informed by any segment of

human experience, then we will not reproach the artist who searches for the self for actually finding it!

Written some forty years ago, and with probable awareness of Duchamp's notion that the role of post-formalist art is at once the building up of unfulfillable expectations (and, hence, the destruction of fulfillable expectations - which is an excellent definition of the unique and autonomous art object), John Dewey's *Art and Experience* remains relevant to bodyworks. Dewey notes: "The esthetic is no intruder in experience from without ... it is the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience."⁵³

Including the art experience, no matter how "post-formalist." Fictional photo-works, like Luthi's - as opposed to the documentary photos that record "live" performances like Burden's - are especially conducive to introducing the fallacy that the esthetic subverts the authenticity of intention. We must keep firmly in mind that unfulfillable expectations belong in the realm of intention and subject matter; whereas the communicating expression must be coherent and whole. The only difference, in that respect, between the post-formalist esthetic and its antecedent is that the new esthetic must derive organically from the context of each individual work: that context including some degree of experiential input from the spectator - the input vehicled by empathy.

The degree of empathy the spectator brings to a bodywork is conditioned in equal part by the degree of tragedy evoked by the artist's actions and by the visibility of the photographic technique used by the artist in controlling how palpably present in the work he wants to be.



PLATE VIII

If, in Dewey's phrase, "the esthetic is no intruder," technique, on the other hand, certainly can be. This happens in Suzy Lake's piece *Suzy Lake as Bill Vazan* (Plate IX), where the transformations are achieved by the purely mechanical means of retouching - an updated version of the Surrealist's photo-collage. The tragic search for the self is thus reduced to a *commedia dell'arte* of slipping masks, to a game as artificial as it is light-hearted.

Lake's work puts in question the validity of Rainer's and Luthi's research by asking: Do our faces really reflect our inner lives, or are they just disposable masks assumed to fit various relationships? In one way, of course, Lake's strategy resembles Luthi's chameleon - actions, but her technique transforms tragedy to the artificiality of farce.

The difference is in attitude and precisely corresponds to the difference between Synthetic Cubism and Analytic Cubism. Lake begins from the assured harmony of her own self (her own, un-retouched face is always the first image of the sequence) and sees how far she can alter that self and still remain herself. In addition, her flat, iconographic depiction of the face reduces the sense of the artist being physically present.

Luthi's transvestisms, on the other hand, mirror the infinite number of the discreet inflections of the self, whose attainment is always left unfulfilled by the multiplicity of inner modulations and the contingency of outside relationships. And the dramatic use of atmospheric light assures that the actions are performed in organic space and time.



PLATE IX

CHAPTER V

BODY ART AS THE NEW ROMANTICISM: THE SELF SEEKS COMPLETION

In the most substantial study of Body Art published thus far, Lea Vergine's *Il Corpo Come Linguaggio*, the author notes that "at the basis of body art one can discover the unsatisfied need for a love that extends itself without limit in time ... for a kind of love that confers unlimited rights."⁵⁴

Writing in the context of present-day Italy, at a time when social order hangs in precarious balance and the most basic tenets of liberal democracy are being seriously questioned, it is not surprising that Vergine spots the source of this essential dissatisfaction is social factors: in artists' disenchantment with bourgeois culture and in what many of us suspect is art's tacit collusion with that culture.

The parallels with the conditions that spawned the turmoil of 19th-century romanticism are striking. In Vergine's allusion to the collapse of democracy we hear Camus saying that the 19th-century opened to the sound of falling ramparts (that of the ancien régime). And in the distinct romanticisms of the 18th and 19th centuries - the first dogmatic and striving "to extract a clearly definable doctrine and world-view from everything, even from their emotionalism and irrationalism"⁵⁵ the other sceptical and agnostic - we see prefigured the body artists who chose between the ontogenetic and ontological models in their search for the authentic self.

The two strains are united in their shared idealism: the feeling that there is a wholeness that can be attained through an art that can absorb and feed on all the various systems of energy that furnish the space-time continuum of vital experience. Romantics sought such a continuum in Nature; the new, post-formalist romantic finds it in an art in which the Natural is accorded equal importance with the Cultural.

While Vergine endorses bodyworks as being credible insofar as they stress self-knowledge and liberate the body, through exposure, from personal shame, she also detects in bodyworks the symptoms of the doomed. She lists the pathology found in the imagery of Body Art: autism, paranoia, sado-masochism, schizophrenia and so on.

There is a solipsistic streak which runs through bodyworks - an assumption that nothing but the self exists, and therefore that the self is the only object of real knowledge - and it may be a sign of triumph for Body Art that its powers of conviction, of eliciting the emphatic response of the spectator, are such that even as informed an observer as Vergine succumbs to its solipsism. For, in her diagnosis of pathology, she clearly fails to differentiate between intention and imagery and thus commits the fallacy we have discussed earlier in this thesis: the fallacy of mistaking the metaphorical use of language and subject matter by an artist for biographical verity. These are the two elements of expression Roland Barthes⁵⁶ identifies as "écriture" and "style" - the first being personal utterance, the second the artist's biological or biographical impulse for distributing signs. In Barthes, the two elements coalesce into "language."

The images that recur in bodyworks, those depictions of suffering, sacrifice, sense of loss, sensuality, eroticism and masochistic self-sacrifice are, of course, the very metaphors that European painting deriving from a "dark vision"⁵⁷ has been preoccupied with since the Middle Ages, the metaphors usually based on Christian mythology. And there are ample examples of the artist substituting his own figure for that of the mythological figure, a striking and recent example being Egon Schiele's drawing, Self-portrait as St Sebastian (Plate X).

(An even more recent - and secular - example is the oeuvre of Francis Bacon, in which the slabs of meat, packages of flesh, are uneasily, tentatively transformed into figures that, in the artist's own words, "recall ... bring back ... evoke a unique being."⁵⁸ The painter's hasty, anxious brushmarks "coagulate" into "images that endure." Bacon seeks "the perfect image" - the perfect, absolute being always sought by Romantic art: the lover who forgives, the one who stays.)

Schiele's assured draftsmanship and his masterful sense of composition reassures us in turn. In spite of the troubling subject matter, we are no more tempted to treat the painter as a case history than we would be to diagnose DeKooning's frenetic brushwork as symptoms of palsy. But the post-formalist contiguity of bodyworks can lead even the most informed spectator to such temptation.

Romantic art, by definition, is an art in which feeling dominates form and in the romantic - and post-formalist - bodywork, it sometimes seems to submerge it. Lacking spatial integrity and synchronous perception by the spectator, the bodywork's linear, narrative content (even when revealed in photographs as the works discussed



PLATE X

in this thesis always are, with the additional accompaniment of descriptive texts) cannot reveal esthetic order as readily as the unique art object.

But, in the end, it is the presence of esthetic order - consisting of Dewey's requisites of clarity, intensity and strength as Gestalt (cited in the previous chapter) - which assures the artist's behavior being elevated to the status of artistic behavior.

In addition, we must keep in mind that the new romantic's, the body artist's, attempts at attaining wholeness, at reconstructing the shattered self are not desperate acts, even if they are motivated by a condition of despair.

The will to create order from chaos, the will to seek completion is always a positive act and a creative one. The longing for "infinite love" may be a futile or even foolish sentiment, but the ability to shape that sentiment into coherent and compelling gesture is the ability to create art - an art, moreover, which contributes to the most haunting theme that recurs in Western art and literature consistently since the Middle Ages.

The will to create wholeness, to reconcile various systems and elements of experience into cohesive entities, motivates Dennis Oppenheim's work of the past ten years. Not all his works are "body-works" in the strictest sense: an early project, Viewing Station for Gallery Space (1967)⁵⁹, is concerned with inverting the traditional viewer-object relationship: "art" becomes the platform for looking at "life."

This is followed by a number of projects in which the artist's fingerprint, greatly enlarged, is drawn on various pieces of real estate. In the many subsequent landscape projects, the creative process (large, gestural drawings in which the artist's physical presence is always felt) is plugged into the very processes of nature.

For example, in *Annual Rings* (1968)⁶⁰, the concentric circles drawn by the artist into floating ice located on the Canada-U.S. border reproduce the growth rings of a tree: the gestural drawing takes its clues from a process of nature, more directly than with any artist "drawing from nature" because the interpretive filter of perception is absent.

The systems embodied in *Annual Rings* are multiple and concurrent. The natural flow of ice will alter and complete the drawing; the spring thaw will erase it. The diametrical straight line will eventually disappear, although the mental line it represents (the political border) will remain - that last interpretation's validity resting, of course, on one being or not being a cultural nationalist. At any event, it is clear that natural and cultural processes cooperated in the completion of this work. Its epigraph - and that of Romanticism - might be the line from Genesis: "And the whole earth was of one language and one piece."

More obviously within the parameters of orthodox bodyworks, is *Arm and Wire* (1969)⁶¹, a short film in which Oppenheim's forearm is pressed back against his upperarm and a piece of wire held between the two imprints its image on the skin. In the artist's words: "Here the arm is receiving impressions of its own energy. Material vs. tool

loses distinction as the results of an action are feed back to the source."

In its deployment of the body as both support and tool, *Arm and Wire* resembles Acconci's *Trademarks* (see Plate V), but we must note that in its use of a foreign element - the wire - Oppenheim's piece is less beautifully self-contained than Acconci's, whose imagery - the bitemarks - equally derives from the body. Oppenheim is, of course, primarily interested in "connecting" with things and he does accomplish that here; but we might still question the choice of the wire which lacks the emotional charge of a symbol of something the artist might wish to "possess."

On the other hand, it might be argued that the very insignificance of the piece of wire elevates the event into an existentialist "acte gratuit" in which the physical and visual demonstration of the corporal energy, no matter how arbitrary, is accepted as a sign of "being."

Much more potent in evocative power are the gestures in which the self tries to connect with another self. In Oppenheim's oeuvre, a prime example of this is *A Feed-back Situation* (1971) (Plate XI), in which the artist draws on his son's bare back while the boy tries to reproduce on his father's back the drawing he can feel but not see. In one sense the system is integral: "I originate the movement which Erik (the son) translates and returns to me. What I get in return is my movement fed through his sensory system."⁶²

But completion is never accomplished. The sensory system can only "translate" or approximate the message received and the disparateness



A Feed-back Situation, Aspen, Colorado, July 1971, Dennis Oppenheim, Erik Oppenheim. I originate the movement which Erik translates and returns to me. What I get in return is my movement, fed through his sensory system.

PLATE XI

of the two drawn images provokes some poignant questions: How much experience can one generation transmit to another? How much distortion is involved in any communication between two people?

Oppenheim's film, *Gingerbread Man*⁶³, is perhaps the most vertiginously cyclic of all bodyworks, the one in which the romantic's search for completion comes to the most sustained conclusion:

"... a symbolically human form is slowly broken down and subjected to the linearity of the intestinal track ... it is used to fill an internal space ... it is held captive ... (in a) life sustaining interaction. The residue - waste products - became the finished work."⁶⁴

Oppenheim is inconsistent only in the last sentence of that statement. The true finished product of the piece in Oppenheim's body which years after the action continues to carry within it some infinitesimal trace of the ingested material. That caveat aside, *Gingerbread Man* is a perfect enactment of the search for completion through the appropriation of another person's self - something intuited by those primitive civilizations which practice ritual cannibalism.

Anthropophagy is one logical solution to the romantic self's despair at ever being able to communicate with another so as to see his own self affirmed and integrated. In a key Romantic work, Sade's *120 Days*, we watch the characters move toward such a resolution (they stop just short of it) through progressively violent sado-masochistic actions which are unmistakably used as heightened forms of communication.

Oppenheim goes further than Sade, he implies that cannibalism is the ultimate metaphor for total communication: one can understand the Other only by literally absorbing the Other. The French artist Michel Journiac's piece, *Prise de Sang Humain*⁶⁵, in which the artist's

blood is used in the preparation of sausage (a recipe is included) is an even more overt use of the metaphor. As François Pluchart notes, for Journiac the body is "socialized meat which one can only encounter through rituals."⁶⁶ Cannibalism is also used constantly and with various degrees of explicitness in the performances of the Viennese group Orgies and Mysteries Theater led by Hermann Nitsch. These performances are closely tied to bodyworks but, since they don't exist in the form of a definitive visual documentation endorsed by the artist as fully representative of the event, they fall outside the scope of this thesis as do the similar activities of the Viennese Otto Muehl and Günter Brus.

Several body artists act as curators of their own pasts. The most miniscule details of private lives are collected, preserved and catalogued as proofs of the artist's existence. In a complete reversal of the strategies used by Rainer, Carpi and others who divest the self of all that is external and culturally induced, learned - in order to arrive at essence - an artist like Christian Boltanski ransacks the past in order to reconstruct it as faithfully as possible. He poses as a child of five in the original or reconstructed environments of his youth.

In a similar strategy, Joseph Beuys' *Arena* (1970)⁶⁷, is an autobiographic collection of all the images of the most significant drawings and objects made by the artist during the previous decade. This collection of panels served as backdrop for a performance, *Arena*, in which Beuys repeated the sentence: "I am a transmitter, I emit!"

Gina Pane's photo-sequence, Sentimental Action (Plate XII),
richer in symbolism, features, in Pane's words in the accompanying
text,

"my body as a conducting substance in a motion of
'going to the return,' coming back to its starting
point through a de-construction of the prime image
(mental puzzle): the red rose, mystic flower,
erotic flower, transformed into a vagina by a re-
construction in its most present state: 'the painful
one.'"68

Pane's awkward prose (equally obscure in the original Italian)
is obviated by the thrilling photographs which recount a return to the
very beginning: to the moment of birth and even beyond, to the bio-
logical, symbiotic mother-child relationship. The menstrual flow
whose cessation signals that the child has been conceived is recreated
by the thorns the child stuck in her arm.

The pain of childbirth and the pain of being - the pain of
the romantic self which is always in a state of disequilibrium since
it is always in the state of becoming - are connected in a closed circuit.
The roses' color alternates between white to red in each succeeding
photograph: the endless currents of innocence and eroticism (knowledge)
and the temporal, alternating flow of past and present are trapped at
last: contained in the artist's body and rationalized by the artistic
act.



PLATE XII

CHAPTER VI

BODY ART AND ART EDUCATION

THE SHIFT FROM THE OBJECT TO THE SELF

In 1968, a study committee sponsored by the United States' National Art Education Association issued a "position statement" titled The Essentials of a Quality Art School Program.⁶⁹ This important document identifies the four aspects of art in a school art program as the following: seeing and feeling visual relationships; producing works of art; knowing and understanding art objects; and evaluating art products.

Based on these broad areas of concern, the following concrete objectives are recommended in the position statement:

"As a result of the art program, each pupil should demonstrate, to the extent that he can, his capacity to (1) have intense involvement in and response to personal visual experiences; (2) perceive and understand visual relationships in the environment; (3) think, feel and act creatively with visual art materials; (4) increase manipulative and organizational skills in art performance appropriate to his abilities; (5) acquire a knowledge of man's visual heritage; (6) use art knowledges and skills in personal and community life; (7) make intelligent visual judgments suited to his experience and maturity; and (8) understand the nature of art and the creative process."⁷⁰

These objectives were defined a decade ago, at a time when conceptual art had made only a marginal impact on the wider art community which, in turn, had a tendency to regard the new art as an "anti-art" phenomenon concerned chiefly with the destruction of the gallery system by denying that system its basic unit of exchange, the unique art object: not an urgent priority for an art program at any level.

Body Art, at that time, hardly existed yet, even as an appellation. The term first appeared around 1970 in the obscure New York publication, Aválanche, which was the first in North America to report on the quasi-theatrical activities of the Viennese artists Brus, Muehl and Nitsch. It was around that time as well that Americans like Acconci and Oppenheim began to use overtly their bodies in artworks. Jack Burnham's seminal essay, Systems Esthetics was first printed in Artforum in 1968.

The NAEA's position statement, then, appeared at a critical junction, unknowingly the valediction for the formalist era rather than the definitive prescription for the future of art education it was intended to be.

Its axiomatic concern with visual relationships, visual experiences and manipulative skills - that last obviously implying the development of coordination and psychomotor skills as well as the experience of manipulating various media - is founded on the concept of the unique object. And the notion of "organizational skills" is still clearly based on the acceptance of composition as the essential - and spatial - structure of the artwork.

While people like Les Levine are warning us to notice how "art now reads out as software; as information,"⁷¹ the NAEA's objectives tend to place formal concerns above those of content, in tacit agreement with Clive Bell's dictum: "To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and color and a knowledge of three-dimensional space ..."⁷²; or a more contemporary version of it as pronounced by Meyer Schapiro: "What counts in all art are the elementary esthetic components, the qualities and relationships of the fabricated

lines, spots, colors and surfaces."⁷³

Art programs today are still based on those tenets, on the assumption that, as Suzanne Langer phrased it: creativity consists of feeling applied to material. Put in such general terms, the notion remains operative today, just as the NAEA objectives remain generally sound.

But these objectives are limited if we want students to acquire a grasp of post-formalist art. In conceptual and bodyworks, the elementary esthetic components no longer supply the complete information about the art experience. As described in Chapter I of this text, the post-formalist work incorporates systems rather than primary units and its reading requires the application of systems of thought that are not exclusively visual. And (as discussed in Chapter II) even the visual medium of bodyworks - photography - communicates differently from the imagery of hand-crafted objects.

"Emotion in art must become impersonal. Therefore, for the purpose of art, improvisation that is self-centered is meaningless and disturbing. Whatever is revealed in movement must be for the purpose and sake of the work and not the ego."⁷⁴

The above statement, written by Ann Halprin, happens to refer to the dance but it applies equally to the formalist's precept of visual art. Written in 1955, it represents precisely the point of view rejected by the American action painters and takes us back to the point where this paper began. Halprin's statement, of great historic resonance, is also an exceedingly clear symptom of the gap that now separates art education from the art being produced today: an art that is more

and more concerned with affective content, more and more self-centered.

Can the gap be closed? The most pessimistic answer to that is Gregory Battcock's, who contends that "art and education don't overlap." He scorns art in the schools for being product-oriented, intent on "getting results," while the new art is less concerned with results than with proposals. Battcock writes:

"All the lengthy research papers, the doctoral dissertations, the 'artistic' experiments, and the art education symposia in the world will not bring art and education into a positive, active relationship unless some of the basic principles of art are a lot better understood. As a matter of fact, such endeavors may tend to strain whatever didactic connections exist between education and art. In the end we should not be surprised to learn that art and art education are two vastly different phenomena that operate at cross purposes - as communicative systems frequently do. In this case, unfortunately, education tends to absorb energy while art seems to actuate it."⁷⁵

This is a "bottom line" declaration that most art educators will treat with contempt - and a twinge of recognition. For we must admit that there exists a gap between the inherently pessimistic stances, strategies and attitudes of post-formalist art (and especially the scabrous imagery of so many bodyworks) and the optimistic atmosphere of discovery art teachers try to create in the classroom.

The parallel is obvious: formalist art is predicated upon the notion of "progress" in the evolution of art objects and ideas. It was, in essence, an optimistic art, always reaching toward the ideal and the sublime, always hoping to be promoted to an avant garde. Post-formalist art, on the other hand, deriving from Duchamp's notion of an aesthetic that carries its own built-in failure, the falling short of its own intentions, is pessimistic or, at best, stoical.

Bodyworks, especially, are based on a world view which fully accepts contingency and chance and finds its sense of freedom in the free flow of events and ideas whose connections are allusive and tenuous, imperfect, unverifiable. Its intrinsic temporality, in contrast with the permanence of the art object, makes it an uneasy presence in the art room where the mood is, by definition, productivist or, as Marcuse would say, "aggressive."

Even that most permissive of classrooms, is aggressive from that point of view. Its notion of "self-expression" - seemingly so "liberating" - is actually channeled through "elementary esthetic components" (Schapiro) which are clearly spelled out, defined by social consensus, irrevocably "cultural" - precisely the values the post-formalist sensibility rejects.

There is a more immediate and practical factor in the art-education gap as well: How is the elementary or secondary-level art teacher, himself the product of a repressed society and operating in one of the most prudish institutions of our society, going to deal with the explicit subject matter of Body Art? That art's use of the body as social metaphor is often directly aimed at society, as a provocation against our culture's sense of shame when confronted with the human body.

Of course, art history classes have always included images of nudes and works of tenebrous vision such as Grunewald's depictions of the crucified Christ. But, as we discussed in earlier chapters of this paper, post-formalist works make a new and more visceral claim on the spectator's attention. They operate in our own time and space,

while paintings and sculptures inhabit their own safely detached context: they exist within illusionary space and within the securely defined boundaries of the "art context."

Even more awkward is the presence of a photographic image: Paintings are always accepted as fiction but photos look like facts (Reference: Sontag, p.17). And, in the case of a photo of a Nitsch performance, for instance, that picture may look like something out of a pornographic magazine. How are our school systems going to deal with this problem? If the answer is censorship then perhaps it is time we heeded Battcock and art and art education separated for good.

A more temperate solution seems to be verbalization, exorcising inhibitions through discussion. Post-formalist art is inevitably accelerating the existing trend in art education: away from laissez-faire "self-expression" and towards more discussion of esthetics and art history in the class room. Croce's dictum that art is not concerned with the useful, the moral and the intellectual no longer applies to the post-formalist art being made today and ought no longer apply to art education.

Studies such as Ellsworth's show that high school students would welcome more theoretical content in art classes (in fact, they react favorably to all aspects of art education except "dullness in teaching"). And, if there is one pervasive theme running through the papers published by art educators in the last ten years, it is the wish for a new, humanistic approach - and, by implication, a coming to terms with the post-formalist esthetic.

Ralph A. Smith writes about "the goal of self-cultivation, currently neglected as an educational objective"⁷⁷, and prescribes esthetic criticism as the foundation of art education.

Serge Chermayeff, in The Shape of Humanism⁷⁸, warns against art education "goal of excellence" and notes: "We have to accept the fact that reality is a process of living development, change and growths and that the notion of completion is a mortuary concept."

Most explicit of all is Allen Leepa's essay, Art and Self⁷⁹, which notes the "increasing gap between aesthetics of the past and present" and, while it phrases the problematics of the new art in a series of speculative questions rather than concrete suggestions about class room strategies, it offers this phrase which reads astonishingly like something written about the motivations of Body Art:

"Man is under great pressure to define himself - territorially, by physical space; socially, by status; emotionally, by dependence and independence; psychologically, by goals and roles."

Leepa concludes: "Art teaching, to be effective, must deal with the whole person. The student must be helped to define his own personality."

Clearly, familiarity with the premises of post-formalist art and, in particular, the strategies of Body Art, are indispensable tools for that purpose. And this familiarity is implicit in the NAEA's ultimate objective: "understand the nature of art and the creative process."

TOWARD A METHODOLOGY

The greatest hindrance in the path of affecting a genuinely esthetics-oriented art program is the fact that very little research exists that provides concrete rather than theoretical suggestions.

An important contribution in that area is the exhaustive "Guidelines: Curriculum Development for Aesthetic Education"⁸⁰, which proposes a curriculum based on a comparative study of the arts (dance, literature, music, theater, visual arts) i.e. on the transference of learning from one situation to another, using all the other arts to illuminate the visual arts:

The book's multi-discipline approach is a necessary one in the discussion of post-formalist visual art. The authors seem to have been guided by Langer's maxim: "1. No rule can cover any two of the arts; 2. No technical device or corresponding material can generally be taken from one to another; 3. But there are comparable created forms."⁸¹

Published in 1968, "Guidelines," thorough and rewarding as it is, fails to respond entirely to the challenge of the then just-emerging post-formalist esthetic:

First, it neglects photography, the primary medium of post-formalist art, particularly of bodyworks. As discussed in Chapter II of this text, photographic imagery operates in a different context from that of painted imagery: it has its own, specific ways of informing and/or subverting subject matter. Second, the book's perception of visual art is based on formalist notions in that it analyzes images in terms of primary visual components.

Let us deal with these two problems in turn.

The practice of photography must be included in all art programs that wish to encompass the post-formalist esthetic, for the following reasons:

1. In order that the student may be able to read the works of artists who communicate through the medium. It is generally and mistakenly assumed that the photographic image offers a faithful observation of a specific slice of space at a specific slice of time. In practice, however, it becomes clear that all photos are composed of part fiction and part reportage and that the degree to which one of these components outweighs the other is a critical factor in the evaluation of the artist's intention as well as of the mood and temporal structure of the bodywork.
2. In art that is not "product oriented," and this applies especially to performance pieces, the student still needs to preserve what he created in a concrete and immutable document. The new instant and automatic cameras are the obvious tools for this: they demand no special skills and eliminate "craft-fetishism" in the class room.
3. Photography, being relatively free from the contingencies of the perceptual, interpretive filter and the mannerisms of "écriture," is the most direct medium for approaching the self. A resonant project such as "put into one image as many details as possible about what's special about you"

would demand immense representative skill in any other visual medium.

Photography is also an excellent medium for the study of relationships within the immediate environment. Project: How, in his individual attitude, posture, claim on personal space, etc., does a teacher behave differently from a student? What are the visual ways in which authority manifests itself? How does one behave when one is telling a secret, a warning, a lie?

A single photograph can narrate; two photographs can narrate events that encompass immense distances in space and time. Project: Tell a story in just two photographs.

The medium can also be useful in gaining insight into the mechanics of other works of art. Project: Take a painting and try to reproduce its mood in a photo. What qualities can you duplicate, what qualities belong exclusively to the painted picture? Try the same, using a poem or a musical passage.

Photography can also be a tool in the discussion of perception and interpretation. Project: Take the portrait of someone, found in a magazine. What can you tell about that person with absolute certainty and what can you assume about him? Does everyone make the same assumptions? If not, then the project can turn toward the objective of self-identification: What do the assumptions you make tell about your personality? How many different personality types are found within the discussion group?

Such projects satisfy both the objectives of self-cultivation and comprehension of the fundamental concepts of esthetic criticism.

But those concepts require further definition where post-formalist art is involved and here the methods of literary and art historical analyses provide useful clues.

All high school students study literature and are familiar with such terms as simile, metaphor, lyrical, tragic, iambic pentameter, historical narrative, etc. These terms express relationships. But in discussing art in the art room, we still rely on terms (e.g. line, texture, dot, color, etc.) which are primary components, basic units of analysis whose literary equivalents are sound, metre, rhyme, etc. and not the terms of relationships.

Yet, post-formalist art is clearly based on interconnecting relationships of various kinds: between artist and spectator, event and medium, fact and fiction, intention and language (subject matter and technique), inherent behavior and social behavior (nature and culture): relationships that assume the guise of metaphor.

It becomes clear that in the discussion of bodyworks we must rely on binary terms rather than the formalist's primary components. Such binary terms are implicit in the loose classification of bodyworks attempted in Chapters III, IV and V of this text, while neater models have already been formulated by the art historian Wölfflin⁸², who reduced "forms of representation" to five significant polarities. One can tentatively approach the formulation of terms applicable to Body Art by adapting these polarities - as well as Herbert Read's Visual-Haptic⁸³ polarity - and by adding others.

The following, then, is a tentative outline of possible methods of post-formalist esthetic criticism by stretching and adapting previously-defined formal polarities:

Linear-Painterly: Clarity of contour and definition of detail as against blurred contours and merged details and boundaries. Botticelli and Flaubert are linear. Rembrandt and Proust are painterly. Warhol is linear, DeKooning painterly. Samaras' transformations (Plate VI) are linear both in process and sequential imagery, Luthi (Plate VIII) is painterly. Even when Luthi works with photo-sequences, there is no logical progression from one image to the next.

Plane-Recessional: Rationality of spatial organization, horizontal perspective as against recessional perspective. Seurat versus Redon (not only in respect to visual planes but with reference to the psychological "realism" of the picture). Zola versus Daudet. In bodyworks there are two applicable systems: time implied versus time evoked (see Chapter I) and the difference between a work in which the body clearly retains the artist's identity as compared to the body becoming a symbol. Event versus metaphor or ritual: Samaras and Burden belong to the first category, the Pane performance (Plate XII) is an extreme example of the second.

Another correlative might be the level of audience participation demanded by the work: Samaras' process is self-referential and morally neutral; Burden's provokes moral judgment. The first acts on an even "plane" of self-defining process, the other reaches toward the spectator by soliciting empathy and the event thus recedes into esthetic and moral ambiguity.

Closed-Open: Very much resembles the previous polarity but emphasizes clarity of statement as against the possibility of several different levels of analysis and interpretation. Lake's mechanical process (Plate IX) with its clear, progressive steps in closed; Pane

is extremely open to interpretation - including even her obscure statement of intentions. Analogies: Contrast Maillol with Bourdelle, Racine with Molière.

Multiplicity-Unity: In a multiple composition, individual details retain their identity (Botticelli). Other works form an organic whole where it is difficult to isolate one element from the other (Delacroix). Mauriac versus Kafka. The body as a physical organism either unitary/or inflectional (ontogenetic, or ontological strategy) as against the outward-directed neo-Romantic work where the body is plugged into other systems (Oppenheim, Pane).

Visual-Haptic: Hardly seems to apply to bodyworks except to those of Rainer (Plate VII) whose process reconciles the two poles and becomes a virtual illustration to Read.

Natural-Cultural: This polarity is the exclusive property of post-formalist art and the essential component of Body Art's pre-occupation with the authentic self. These terms are a leit-motif of any appraisal of the subject, including this thesis. A sharp contrast is provided by comparing the work of Gilbert and George (Plate IV) in which the body is made immobile and becomes a sculpture - nature is subjugated to the demands of pure culture - and Acconci's (Plate V) method, which is the exact reverse: art is denuded of all cultural content (except, needless to say, that of the "art context" which is a constant) and reverts to a natural function of the organism, in a gesture of pure atavism.

Joseph Beuys' work, "I Like America and America Likes Me"⁸⁴ (Plate XIII), in which the artist lived and "interacted" with an untamed

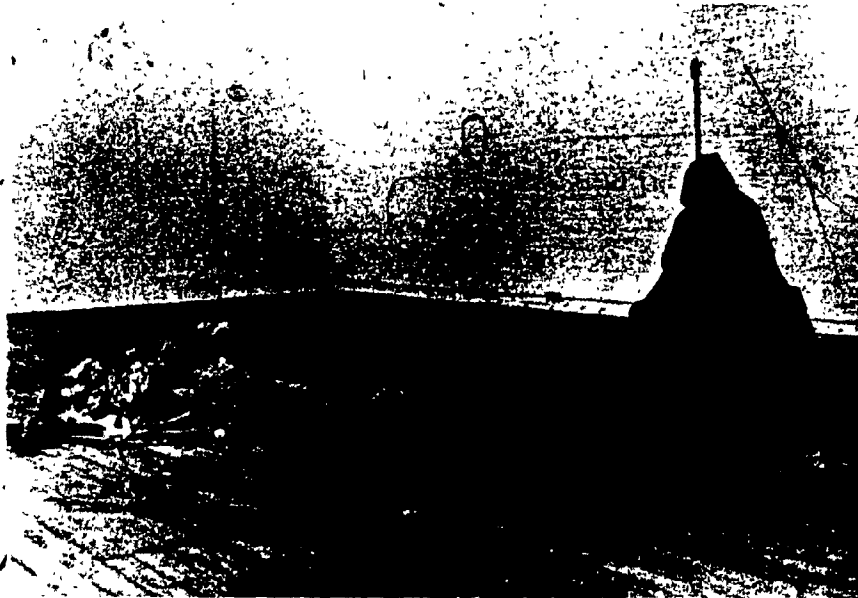


PLATE XIII

L X

coyote in a New York gallery during one whole week, is a virtual compendium of the various inflections of the nature-culture paradigm:

Straw versus gallery floor; fur versus felt; animal versus human; unpredictable behavior versus social behavior; America versus Europe - the last a piquant reminder that for the European romantic, in the grip of "asphyxiating culture," America has represented Nature ever since Chateaubriand returned to France from his dismal voyage to the New World and proceeded to transform his experiences first into a career and then into one of the most potent and durable of myths.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

- 1 Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," Art News, Vol. 51 (Fall, 1957), 19.
- 2 A.W. Levi, Philosophy and the Modern World (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 52.
- 3 Philip Larson and Peter Schjeldahl, Exhibition catalogue of DeKooning Drawings and Sculptures (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1974), unpaginated.
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