The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

Utopia Post Utopia:

Configurations of Nature and Culture in Recent Sculpture and Photography

Albert Bierstadt
Dorit Cypis
Robert Gober
Larry Johnson
Richard Prince
Lorna Simpson
Jeff Wall
Oliver Wasow
Meg Webster
James Welling

Essays by:

Fredric Jameson
Alice Jardine
David Joselit
Eric Michaud
Abigail Solomon-Godeau
Elisabeth Sussman

Saying the Unspeakable

David Joselit

"a picture's worth a thousand words"

The equation between pictures and words is so "natural" to us—so profoundly assumed—that its significance is easily overlooked. Common wisdom tells us that photographs pay us with language: that the value of a picture may be measured by the words it can displace, or replace. And it is for this simple reason—to save breath, or to save ink—that most photographs are made. Whether its purpose is to memorialize one's family, document a disaster or sell a product, the photograph is a site where textual information is exchanged for visual information. In the realm of art, however—and particularly modern art—the photograph's mass cultural identity as a fragment embedded in language has typically been repressed. The modernist photograph was idealized as a world unto itself: a transparent "decisive moment." In dramatic contrast to this attitude, much of recent "postmodern" photography has manifested itself as a site where image and language are in flux, where one defines and/or erodes the other.

There have been several artists from the 1970s to the present who have dramatized this picture/language interchange by appropriating photographs from the mass media. This choice of source material is especially meaningful because it is within the media—particularly television, magazines, newspapers and advertising—that the exchange of word and picture is literally commercialized: any advertising executive knows that a picture is more economical than language, that it is literally worth a thousand words. Artists like Barbara Kruger, Sarah Charlesworth and Richard Prince have developed strategies whereby "commercial" photographs, like advertising images, are rephotographed and presented in new formats: cropped or fragmentary pictures are freed from their linguistic moorings or re-oriented with new texts. In 1977, for instance, Richard Prince began a series of works in which "he photographed magazine advertisements with the text cropped out of the picture and often re-presented them in sets of three to four similar images such as hands with watches."[1] It is significant that Prince's manipulation included two steps: first he divorced the image from its text; and then he combined these image fragments together into a series. Prince's work pushed the transformation from word to image to its ultimate conclusion by making a wordless catalogue of pictures—in effect an entirely photographic language: the archive.

In his recent article, "The Body and the Archive," Allan Sekula analyzes the archive as a photographic institution by exploring its 19th-century role in police work and the related field of criminology. Sekula defines the archive as a kind of picture market, where one image derives meaning through comparison with others: he writes that "it was only on the basis of the tentative construction of a larger "universal" archive, that zones of deviance and respectability could be clearly demarcated,"[2]; and later, that "the archive is a vast substitution set, providing a general equivalence between images."[3] But at the center of Sekula's essay is the development of two alternate methods of organizing the archive. The

first, exemplified by the Parisian police official Alphonse Bertillon, was discursive: Bertillon classified criminals on cards which combined photographic portraiture with physical descriptions and other written data. The second method Sekula describes, that of the English statistician and founder of eugenics, Francis Galton, was to develop the image of a "criminal type" by superimposing several images into a composite portrait. As the author concludes, "Bertillon's nominalist system of identification and Galton's essentialist system of typology constitute not only the two poles of positivist attempt to regulate social deviance by means of photography, but also the two poles of these attempts to regulate the semantic traffic in photographs. Bertillon sought to embed the photograph in the archive. Galton sought to embed the archive in the photograph."[4]

Given Sekula's analysis of the archive as a "vast substitution set" of representations where one image is exchanged for, and given value by another, Prince's choice of the archive as a compositional model is prescient. After all, the "archive" Prince draws on for his material is the prodigious commercial marketplace, another "vast substitution set" where images are circulated like currency. In Prince's work the archive is a potent metaphor: it proposes a situation where language is overcome by pictures, and where pictures are overcome by the market—traded for one another like commodities.

It is against this rich backdrop of the archive as the point of exchange between word and picture, and between picture and commodity that the six photographers in *Utopia Post Utopia* must be considered. In different ways each of these six embed the photograph in the archive, or the archive in the photograph in order to represent the picture's cultural status as a visual fragment embedded in words: they develop the formal structure of the archive as a photographic metaphor for language. But within the archive (within language) each of these artists tries to evoke (but not to *say*) something unspeakable, something wild, something reminiscent of nature, or of the body.

In describing the evolution of feminist thought from the sixties to the present the theorist and filmmaker Laura Mulvey has proposed one way of theorizing the "unspeakable."[5] Mulvey argues that the early feminist belief—that the woman's body was itself the site of political struggle—has been succeeded by a widespread recognition that male fantasy had detached "feminity" from the body itself, and transformed it into a culturally produced spectacle for mass consumption. Mulvey argues that this transformation of woman into spectacle has left the actual individual female body "unspeakable." She proposes that a new language for the body may be found in melodrama: in a drama where gesture and framing take on greater significance than language.

In our culture, a culture constructed of representations, there is much that is—in Mulvey terms—unspeakable. The artists in *Utopia Post Utopia* explore this territory by opposing language in the form of the archive, with unspeakable codes of gesture and photographic abstraction. Among them, the strategies of James Welling and Oliver Wasow are complementary to those of Larry Johnson: Welling and Wasow introduce photography as a metaphor for language which ultimately displaces words with pictures; whereas in Johnson's work, text becomes a metaphor for photography, in effect the photograph is "liquidated" into the currency of words. This see-saw between picture and word is predicted by Sekula when he writes, "Photography was to be both an object and means of bibliographic rationalization. The latter possibility emerged from the development of microfilm reproduction of documents. Just as photographs were to be incorporated into the realm of the text, so also the text could be incorporated into the realm of the photograph."[6]

The relationship between photograph and word in James Welling's work is inherent in the distribution of his pictures in this catalogue. During the organization of *Utopia Post Utopia* Welling suggested the following intervention: "My proposal is to drop reproductions of my work into the text portions of the catalogue according to a predetermined plan which does not take into account the nominal content of the essays. Instead of illustrating certain texts, my work will appear 'incongruously,' 'randomly' according to a numerical plan."[7] Through this operation, Welling has provided a "picture logic" as an alternative to both the written commentary in this book and its design "grid." This parallel, subversive picture system is part of what Welling has called an "antagonism to language" in his work.[8]

This antagonism takes subtle form in his untitled sequence of small black and white photographs which are all shot from crumpled, folded, or otherwise manipulated pieces of aluminum foil. Like Richard Prince's "gangs" in which fragmentary commercial photographs of similar subjects are organized in a grid-like format, the series of photographs which comprise this work are subtle variations on what appears to be the same picture. By grouping these same-but-different images horizontally Welling encourages a reading of them as a sort of sentence, or more accurately an archive. But unlike Prince's work which makes the viewer aware of the cultural circulation of commodified pictures, Welling's photographs seem to say nothing about the surface of the world—or at least nothing that can be easily described in words. In reality, these pictures "say" too much: instead of fulfilling the promise of a referential photographic language, this untitled series delivers an extravagant wealth of sensual detail that the viewer easily falls into. As Welling himself has described it, "an infinitude of detail, an endlessly carved and ridged surface; hallucinatory detail."[9] By embedding each of the pictures in an "archive" of their fellows, Welling encourages us to "read" them through a system of meaningful equivalences. But what we have to read in these images is antagonistic to language: it's as though the photographs have been returned to a state of "natural" wildness which precedes words. It is interesting to note that in his own descriptions of these abstract images Welling uses terms like "*Metal:* Clubs, rock, sound waves, the Downtown Music Scene 1977; *Visionary:* of psychotic visions, the drawings of schizophrenics, hallucinatory visions, "closed eye vision;" . . . *Of Chaos:* unmediated by language, antagonistic to the structuring power of language; wild."[10]

But in spite of their differences, Welling, like Prince, begins with a commodity—aluminum foil—which is commonly used in the home. Unlike Prince, who reads the commodity as a surface in tact Welling digs beneath and releases a dizzying array of repressed or potential meanings. It is apt that when asked what kind of landscapes he saw his photographs to be, he replied that if anything, they were subterranean.[11] The surface that Welling's "landscapes" exist beneath, or literally beyond, is the terrain of language, and the commodified picture. It is significant that in the untitled work for *Utopia Post Utopia* (which dates from 1980–81); and in subsequent series of photographs made with Jell-O and velvet sprinkled with filo dough, Welling utilizes the techniques of commercial studio photography—but the result of this conventional photography is to create a hallucinatory "subterranean" landscape: a paradoxically "deep" place made from a shallow surface.

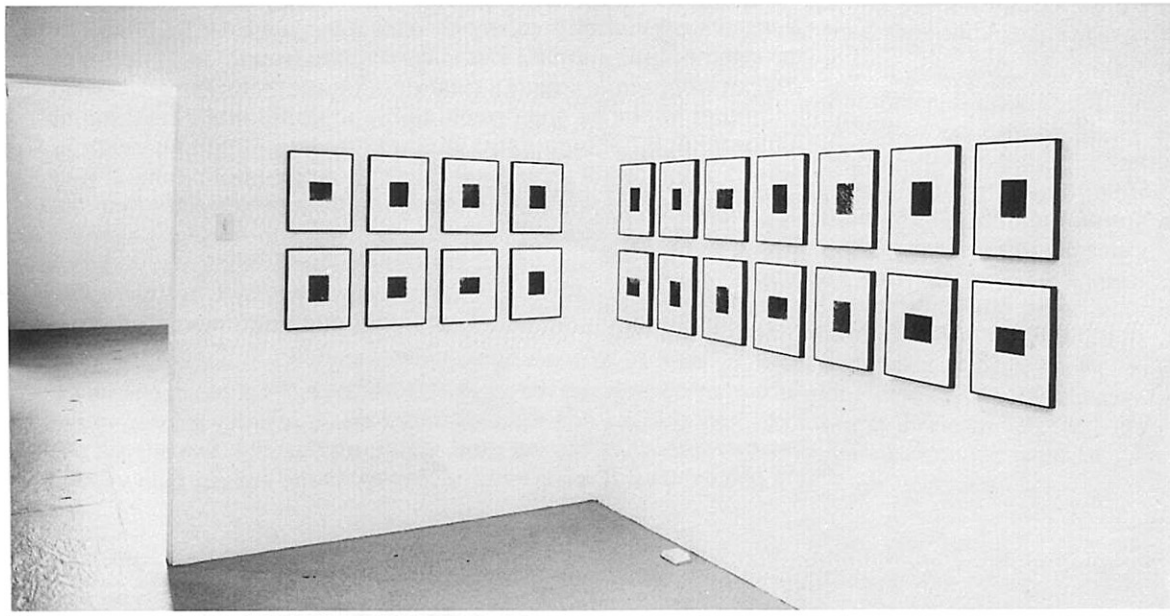
Such a landscape is also the result of Oliver Wasow's photographs, which are derived from collaged and rephotographed details of lushly colored magazine ads. Wasow makes what look like primordial scenes from the raw materials of advertising photography. It is immediately striking that his images, drawn from material

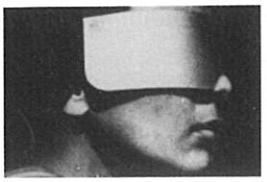
similar to Richard Prince's, seem to belong to fine art tradition of photograph-as-substitute-for-painting rather than the mass media model of the photograph-as-text. His images lend themselves to multiple translations: moving easily from allusions to the microscopic landscape of medical photography to larger-than-life science fiction worlds. A kind of alchemical transformation takes place through Wasow's several steps of rephotography causing the viewer to confound natural forms like trees or hedges with the traces of architectural or other man-made structures. In actuality, Wasow conflates these opposing paradigms in apparently seamless "commerce-scapes": an imaginative extrapolation of advertising into a plausible "natural world."

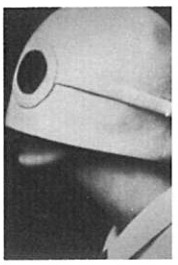
Wasow's landscapes concoct a crisis of legibility for the viewer—they are radically discontinuous in terms of time (are they the past or the future); space (are they microscopic or vast); and nature (what is man-made and what is not). Like Francis Galton's pictures of criminal types, Wasow's works are composite portraits—archives embedded in photographs—of a world where nature is confused with its multiple representations. The clue to this discontinuity is Wasow's practice of stacking two or three horizon lines in a single vertical composition: there is more than one landscape to enter into imaginatively within a single picture. But in spite of the apparent depth of these multiple vistas—superficially established through the conventions of perspective—these landscapes resist the viewer's attempts to enter them imaginatively: ultimately they are shallow and opaque.

Like Richard Prince, Sarah Charlesworth and Barbara Kruger, Welling and Wasow begin with a recognition of the ways pictures are circulated and exchanged for words commercially. Each creates the structure of an archive in place of language—for Welling the picture is embedded in the archive and for Wasow the archive is embedded in the picture—but they fill their commercially derived pictures with something wild, something reminiscent of nature, although drawn from the conventions of advertising and the mass media. If Welling and Wasow evoke a vision of nature through the means of commercial photography, Larry Johnson attempts to draw unstable emotions from the seemingly imperturbable surface of pulp journalism and the conventions of magazine design. Johnson draws on the mass media's process of packaging and selling the alienation, anxi-

James Welling
installation view
May 1987
Courtesy Kuhlenschmidt/Simon Gallery, Los Angeles

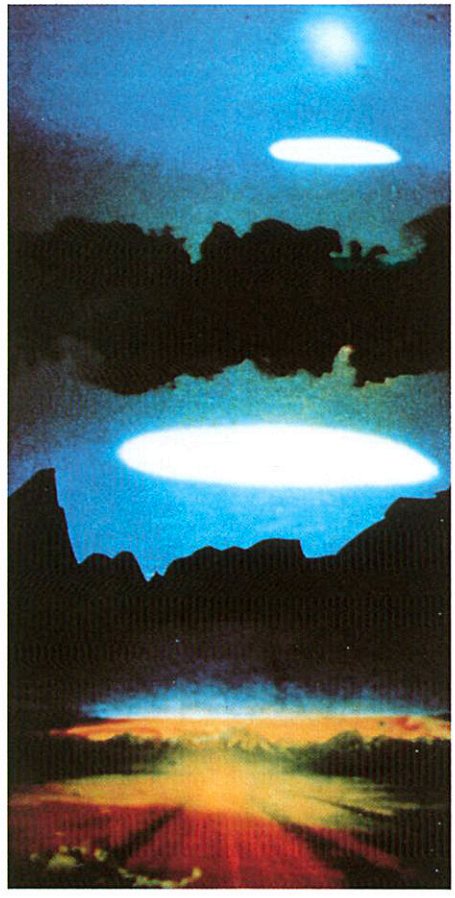




Richard Prince
Untitled
1982–84
Ektacolor print
86 × 48″
Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

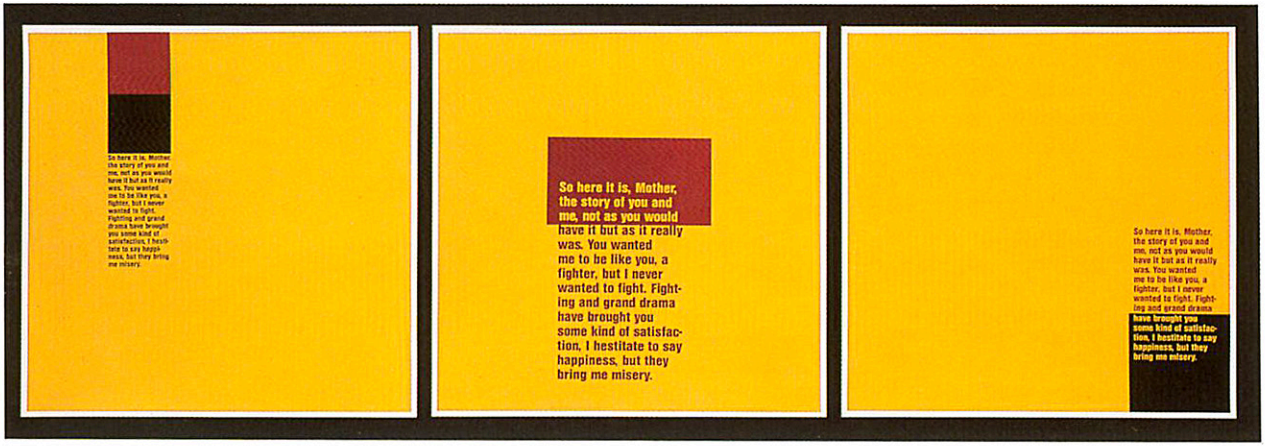


Oliver Wasow
Untitled
color photograph
24 × 12"
Courtesy Josh Baer Gallery, New York

ety and tragedy of strangers. He presents a series of same-but-different images where a text drawn from popular sources is presented in several upscale design formulas: he uses serialization—the grammar of the archive—to revivify the real pain submerged in the clichés of confessional celebrity biographies.

Johnson encourages us to think of looking as simply reading: the word seems to have elbowed the photograph out of the picture, almost as though it had been liquidated into its thousand words. But Johnson's presentation of text as photograph shares much with conventional photographic images. The passages he uses are fragmentary "decisive moments" which were originally embedded in longer texts. More importantly, the structural logic of their presentation—their "grammar"—is that of the archive: the language of words is embedded in the language of photographs. One perceives these texts as pictures, too: each subsequent reading of the same text *feels* different just as no two pictures of the same person are exactly alike.

It is this sensation of difference amidst sameness which is at the heart of Johnson's transformation of the commodified text. As one reads his passages over and over, as they are given different inflections by the different design motifs that surround them, they take on the aspect of an hysterical chant. The text of Untitled (Grand Drama) is as follows: "So here it is, Mother, the story of you and me, not as you would have it but as it really was. You wanted me to be like you, a fighter, but I

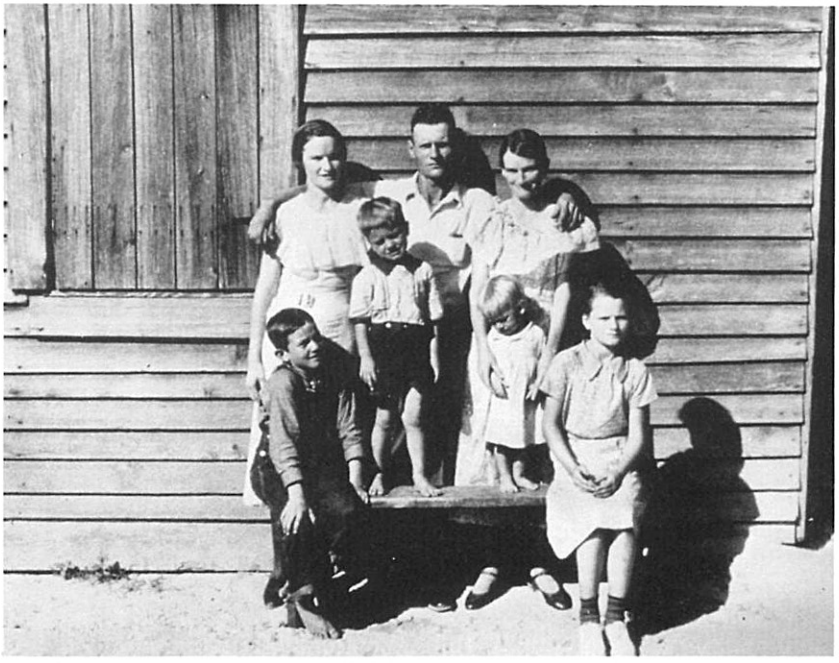


Larry Johnson
Untitled (Grand Drama)
1986
Ektacolor contact prints
18½ × 18½" (each)
Private Collection, Washington, D.C.
Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York

never wanted to fight. Fighting and grand drama have brought you some kind of satisfaction, I hesitate to say happiness, but they bring me misery." Through repetition this utterly clichéd passage becomes iconic: it expands to encompass the same-but-different desire between child and parent which is part of everyone's experience. The emotional instability at the core of Johnson's photographs is reflected formally by their virtually hysterical oscillation between picture and word. Untitled (Grand Drama) as well as Untitled (My Dad is My Hero) show the implosion of language and the photograph, as they beg the question of who or what is the subject of the picture: is "Grand Drama" about *a* mother, or *every*mother. At the heart of Johnson's work is a manic process of replication: the single subject of the word-picture is multiplied into several subjects, who are same-but-different.

In 1980 Sherrie Levine began re-taking existing pictures by modernist photographers like Walker Evans, Eliot Porter and Edward Weston. In effect these works functioned as portraits of Evans, Porter and Weston, for in the theft of "their" images, Levine underlined the assumption that photographs are the artistic "property" of their authors. Looking at these pictures of famous pictures, the viewer sees not the nominal subject (an adolescent nude, a poor family on a porch), but rather a "Weston" or an "Evans," or more accurately, Sherrie Levine, artist, inhabiting the role of the viewer and looking at a "Weston" or an "Evans." Levine's pictures are structured as a chain of subjects: a kind of archive of looks which circulate along an axis composed of those photographed; those who exposed the images originally; herself (the new author); and the viewer. These works made explicit what is implicit in every photograph: a chain of looking which includes the photographer and the subject as well as the viewer. Typically, however, this inherently social dimension of photography is repressed. As Craig Owens, among many others, has noted, "the effacement of the observer, and the claim to be objective that this effacement supports, are . . . *built into* the photographic apparatus."[12]

Any photograph of a human subject, no matter what its political intention, is an act of naming, and that naming is a form of control.[13] It is within the archive—which may ostensibly reflect an ideal social world—that this naming is institutionalized. Levine's appropriations function conceptually as composite photographs, (archives embedded in a photograph) which embody a discontinuous social group including such contradictory figures as impoverished subject and photographer, or male modern master with young female artist. There is not one



Sherrie Levine
Untitled (After Walker Evans)
1981
black and white photograph
8 × 10"
Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, New York

author or subject but several, and these are contradictory. Rosalind Krauss has argued that such a disintegration of the unified photograph has the power to problematize anxiety in the viewer: "The nature of the authority claimed by Weston and Straight Photography is grounded in the sharply focused image, its resolution a figure of the unity of what the spectator sees, a wholeness that in turn founds the spectator himself as a unified subject."[14] The conclusion Krauss leads us to is that a discontinuous photograph can cause the spectator to understand, see, or question his or her own sense of subjectivity.

Dorit Cypis, Lorna Simpson and Jeff Wall use techniques of serialization and superimposition (the structures of the archive) to explore the social or psychological discontinuity of the subject. In her installation works, from which single images are often drawn, Dorit Cypis literally inhabits the narrow space between camera, subject and photographer which goes unacknowledged in most photographs, and which, in Levine's work is collapsed onto a single appropriated picture. Cypis literally broadens this conceptual territory and physically explores it in slide installations where collages of superimposed projections are interrupted and reconfigured by the body of the artist in performance, or the spectator moving between projector and projected image. In these installations, constructed of multiple representations of the body (drawn from the mass media, the fine arts, and Cypis' "original" photographs) one's own body *is in the picture:* literally becomes one of many representations.[15]

Both in these expanded installation/pictures, and in her single images Cypis looks at the subject from inside out (and outside in). The location of the camera is profoundly upset, in a way that was only implied by Levine, who maintained a linear chain of command (or of looks) from viewer to new author to original author to subject. Cypis' ambitious goal is, in Krauss' terms, to erode the unified subject—the photographed, the photographer, and the spectator. In a series of three works each titled *Love After Death: Anatomy Lesson* Cypis applies her unsettled vision to a kind of imploded body of both male and female character. Each of these

works consists of a primary erotic picture accompanied by three smaller "footnotes" beneath. Through superimposition of slides of male and female bodies Cypis imagines not a sexual possession of woman by man (or vice versa), but rather a situation where female and male bodies *inhabit* one another: where the subject experiences his or her own identification with both sexes. The series of smaller photographs in each of the *Anatomy Lessons* recalls other models of having or knowing a body: for instance a reproduction of Rembrandt's painting *Anatomy Lesson* embodies both medical and fine art means of "getting into" a body. Through these juxtapositions Cypis' camera incorporates multiple visions: the vision of fantasy and sensation, as well as the cultural vision of medicine, perspective and fine art.

In another series of pictures titled *Nervous System,* Cypis imagines the transaction of bodies between a mother and daughter. These pictures result from a collaborative process of discussion and improvisation between the artist and her models, who are in reality a mother and child. In two of these images included in *Utopia Post Utopia,* the daughter is engaged in covering the vulnerable body of her mother: in one she pulls the hem of her nightgown at her ankle and in the other she muffles the mother's head in a cloth. In both images the mother's face—her identity—is obscured causing her to read simply as a body in the custody of her small daughter. The girl looks up guiltily, as though surprised in some unnatural act: the act of taking or re-inhabiting the womanly body of the mother. What begins as innocent play between mother and daughter results in an allegory: the child covers her mother's sexually available body (the metaphor for the adult body that she will have someday herself), and in repressing the subjectivity of her mother, can take this body for her own.

While Sherrie Levine's appropriations of modern master photographs eroded the apparently transparent act of naming (i.e. an image which ostensibly reads "poor southern family" is furnished with a multiplicity of names: "poor southern family," "Walker Evans," "Sherrie Levine") Cypis resists the act of naming altogether: her images envision unnameable bodies—and subjects—in transformation from male to female, or child to mother. In a recent article on Lothar Baumgarten's work in South America, Craig Owens made clear the symbolic struggle embodied in the name: "all of Baumgarten's work is concerned with what Jacques Derrida calls the *anthropological war*—'the essential confrontation that opens communication between peoples and cultures, even when that communication is not practiced under the banner of colonial or missionary oppression'—a war that begins with 'the battle of proper names.'" [16] Baumgarten provokes such a battle by combining colonial names with words used by indigenous South American peoples. Typically these oppositions coexist with the artist's photographs of landscapes—pictures which resist naming altogether.

It is such a terrain of conflicting names—expressed through a vocabulary of gesture and framing—that the work of Lorna Simpson and Jeff Wall explores. In Simpson's photographic sequences series of gestures are paired with words—particularly word games or analogies we associate with childhood. But Simpson denies any easy equivalence between her texts and the photographs which seem to illustrate them; instead she orchestrates a struggle between picture (gesture) and word which mirrors the large social struggle for control over one's own subjectivity, one's own name. In *Twenty Questions [A Sampler]* four circular images of a woman's shoulders and head, taken from behind are paired with four plaques which together read, "Is She Pretty as a Picture/Or Black as Coal/Or Pure as a Lily/Or Sharp as a Razor." In this text, reminiscent of playful word games or the kinds of analogies that are used to test IQ or scholastic aptitude (SAT), qualities of

Dorit Cypis
Love After Death: Anatomy Lesson
1986
Vacuform plastic, Cibachrome print, C-prints
40 × 39 × 2″
Lent by the artist

Dorit Cypis
Nervous System
1987
C-print, Plexiglas, wood
30 × 40 × 6″
Lent by the artist

whiteness and blackness, as well as good and bad characteristics of femininity are opposed to one another, and all projected onto the repeated image of the black, female subject. Woman as pretty picture is opposed to the sharp razor (which might read as woman as bitch) and black (as "bad" coal) is opposed to white (as "good" lily). These highly ideological, as well as racist and sexist, distinctions are deeply embedded in language. But Simpson's subject, who is the same-but-different in each of her four representations refuses to turn around: *she refuses to be named.* This subject will not be pretty (as a picture) or coal, or a lily, or sharp: she will exist outside of the multiple representations offered to, or forced upon her. This act of resistance by the picture to the word is implicitly offered to the viewer as well, who in looking into the reflective, circular surface of these photographs, seems almost to be gazing into a mirror.

The act of resistance at the core of *Twenty Questions* is made more explicit in other of Simpson's works. In *Tricks Are For,* the games of "flipping the spoon," and "pixie sticks"—innocuous childhood games—are filled with the promise of potential violence. In all of Simpson's pictures' social codes, as expressed through games (often word games) are unsettled through an alternate code of gestures. In Jeff Wall's transparencies gestures are equally socially eloquent: "In my pictures there is a lot of non-gesturing, or very small, compulsive gesturing, what I call 'micro-gesture.'"[17] Often the purpose of this type of gesture is what Wall has called an awareness of unfreedom: "So, in all my pictures I think there's a trace, a moment in which there is a kind of lucid awareness of the existing unfreedom. . . the heavy weight of unfreedom is at the point of becoming visible, becoming an object of rational reflection."[18]

Wall's photographs are large transparencies lighted from behind, which share the typological language and scale of painting. He is particularly interested in translating the heroic themes and figurative types of art history to a contemporary reality, and in spite of their apparent informality, his subjects are elaborately posed and locations painstakingly chosen. Wall's artistic role is similar to a movie director's, and the light box format he has developed continues the analogy with film (as well as television and advertising). The transparencies exist in a contradictory middle ground between the high art traditions of painting and the mass medium of film. This formal discontinuity—which implies a whole range of social imbalance—pervades every aspect of Wall's art: "To me, this experience of two places, two worlds, in one moment is a central form of the experience of modernity."[19]

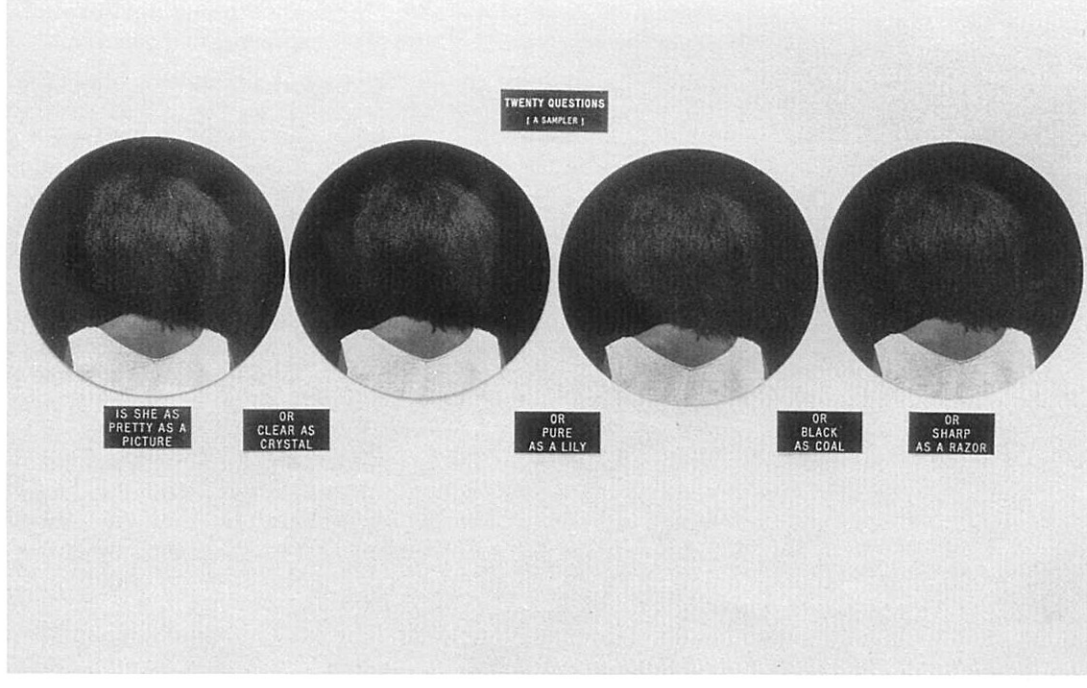
Within this landscape equally composed of the authority of painting, and the accessibility of film, dramas of gesture are enacted. In the ironically titled *Abundance* two women—apparently "bag ladies"—are posed around a box of free clothes. In the foreground stands one woman dressed in several layers of mismatched and tawdry finery. Her pose is that of a traditional aristocratic portrait: she stands erect, her left leg slightly bent forward in virtual *contrappasto,* one hand lifts the hems of her several dresses (worn over a soiled pair of pants) and the other grips an extravagant array of cast-off handbags; her hair is neatly pulled back and her eyes are directed out, in a steady and dignified gaze at the viewer. This formalized act of self-presentation is in stark contrast to the disposition of the second woman who leans over, and virtually into, the box of free clothing, eyes intently cast down to examine its contents—hers is a gesture of involuntary need. In Wall's terms these contrasting gestures establish two poles of "unfreedom," two myths about poverty. The first woman, who is ultimately ridiculous in her aristocratic pose, is metaphorically constrained by the system of authority (represented by the conventions of fine art portraiture) under which she is impoverished, and her companion is equally stereotyped, as grasping, almost animal in her need for

warmth and clothing. Both of these representations have an edge of cruelty: they show subjects who are cornered, who have lost the freedom of their own self-presentation.

Although it includes no vestiges of montage, Wall's *Abundance,* like Wasow's and Cypis' pictures, is *conceptually* a composite photograph, a picture embedded in an archive. Wall has superimposed traditions of film and painting as well as typologies of aristocratic dignity and animalistic debasement in one seamless picture. Like each of the six photographers in *Utopia Post Utopia* he resists an easy transaction between pictures and words (including names) by making a complex photographic work which is contradictory and hybrid, which refuses to be reduced to either a reassuring truism or vicious indictment of its subjects.

The grammar of the "photo embedded in the archive" and "the archive embedded in the photo" was utilized by Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine in the seventies and early eighties to unravel the codes of the commodified advertising photograph, and the instability of the photographic subject and author. At the core of Prince's and Levine's appropriations, however, is the conviction that their new configurations of pictures were *legible:* their appropriations made explicit the transaction between pictures and words, or pictures and names. Like Prince and Levine, the six artists in *Utopia Post Utopia* understand this equivalence between the photograph and language, but in their work this relationship is established only to be broken: they imagine the photograph as an active struggle between picture and word and this symbolic conflict is given powerful metaphorical significance—as an act of resistance to commodification and stereotypes of gender, race and class. What might be considered *utopian* in all of these works is the belief that the private can be reintegrated into the public. If the archive is a photographic idealization of the marketplace, or of the social body, then each of the six artists in *Utopia Post Utopia* is trying to introduce the "unspeakable" within social institutions, and this metaphorical blow against repression suggests a direction toward transforming them.

Lorna Simpson
Twenty Questions [A Sampler]
1986
4 silver prints with plastic plaques
24" in diameter (each)
Lent by the artist



Jeff Wall
Abundance
1987
Cibachrome transparency, fluorescent light, Plexiglas, steel
222.5 × 122 cm (@ 87½ × 48")
Collection of the Ydessa Art Foundation, Toronto

NOTES

1. "An interview with Richard Prince by Jeffrey Rian," *Art in America,* March 1987, p. 87.
2. Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October,* number 39, Winter 1986, p. 14.
3. Ibid., p. 17.
4. Ibid., p. 55.
5. I am paraphrasing an argument made by Laura Mulvey in her talk for "The Other Body: Cultural Debate in Contemporary British Photograph," a conference at the Photographic Resource Center, Boston, September 12, 1987.
6. Sekula, op. cit., p. 57.
7. James Welling, "Proposal for an ICA Catalogue," October 1987.
8. Welling used this phrase in a conversation with me on October 15, 1987. It is interesting to note that in 1977 Welling made a series of photographs of fragments of writing from an old diary. In these pictures, words were rendered meaningless, and functioned rather as a rich design, as metaphorically complex as his pictures made from aluminum foil.
9. James Welling, "Area" unpublished text, 1987.
10. Ibid.
11. From conversation with the artist on October 15, 1987.
12. Craig Owens, "Improper Names," *Art in America,* October 1986, p. 133.
13. See Sekula's analysis of the role of the archive as a means of social control or surveillance in "The Body and the Archive," op. cit.
14. Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delecti," in Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour Fou; Photography and Surrealism* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art and New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1985), p. 95.
15. This same sensation of being in the picture also occurs in many of Cypis' single images whose reflective surfaces mirror the spectator.
16. Owens, op cit., p. 129.
17. Els Barents and Jeff Wall, "Typology Luminescence, Freedom; Selections from a Conversation with Jeff Wall," in *Jeff Wall Transparencies* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1987), p. 101.
18. Ibid., p. 102.
19. Ibid., p. 99.

Jeff Wall
Bad Goods
1984
Cibachrome transparency, fluorescent light, display case
229 × 347 cm (@ 90 × 136¾")
Collection of Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia

Beyond the Simulation Principle

Abigail Solomon-Godeau

From its very inception, art photography has historically couched its aesthetic claims in terms that precluded any privileging of its transcriptive, documentary or "objective" properties. Significantly, this became—albeit for vastly different reasons—as much the position of left and poststructuralist theorists of photography (most notably, Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes) and their progeny as it was the position of nineteenth century connoisseurs, fin-de-siècle pictorialists or today's art photography establishment.

In the former tradition, photography as an artist's medium is understood to pose the same sort of problem that classical realist modes of representation do; namely, to "innocent" themselves of interest or ideology by defining their method with reference to its putative transparency, objectivity, or verisimilitude. The "reality" presented in the realist text is thus taken to speak itself; to more or less effectively mirror a parallel and unproblematic reality that is understood as given in advance. But whereas the classical realist text must also presume the mediation of the author/artist ("nature viewed through a temperament"), photo-mechanical media (photography, film, and video) tend to both eclipse and occlude their human agency. Thus, insofar as photography's truth claims are founded *physically* on its light-sensitive chemical processes and mechanical means of production, its juridic and evidentiary authority far surpasses all traditional realist forms. This is merely an elaborate restatement of what has come to be accepted as photography's semiotic status and designation; at one and the same time both index and icon—a cultural sign which is both motivated (i.e., caused by its referent), hence natural, and in its representational codes, altogether conventional. A photograph therefore always manifests a double identity; a picture—a representation—and a trace.[1]

Effectively, this means that in most of their normative uses and functions, photographic pictures function to confirm and reproduce, if not actually themselves produce, messages and meanings which are already determined and marked by dominant ideological formations. The female body, to take an obvious example, is already densely meaningful before it receives photographic representation; the photograph may frame one set of meanings and connotations over others, but the important thing is that such meanings precede the photographic act. Paper slices of a (given) world, photographic meanings nonetheless appear to be spontaneously generated. Roland Barthes' witty readings of mass media photographs which run through the essays in *Mythologies,* or Walter Benjamin's withering dismissal of documentary or *neue sachlichkeit* photography are predicated on their shared understanding of photography's covert inscription of bourgeois ideologies. For Benjamin and Barthes, denial of the source of enunciation—the masking of ideology through the concommitant effacement of the source of enunciation—has an ethical aspect as well. Hence Benjamin, describing what he understood to be the components of progressive critical practices—components derived from Brecht's theories of epic theatre—stressed that photography needed not only to exceed the limitations or deceptions of appearances, but must additionally

confirm its own material specificity and enunciatory strategies. Consistent with Benjamin's theoretical formulations, radical photographic cultural practices have themselves operated on the assumption that it is precisely photography's mythic and confirmatory realism which must be subverted irrespective of any other agenda. In this very broad sense, radical photographic practices ranging from surrealism to photomontage, from productivism to pop, are similarly grounded in a rejection of photographic realism (and its consequent instrumentalities) as a prerequisite for transfiguration, analysis or critique.

On the other side of the aisle, so to speak, photographic aestheticism has similarly mandated an elision, denegration or even denial of photography's indexical aspects. In its institutionally and discursively powerful fiefdoms (whether of the Second Empire or of the American Empire) photographic aestheticism has had in effect to overcompensate for photography's quotidian, descriptive applications in order to secure its own (largely defensive) identity. For photography to be sui generis *art,* it had by definition to be a product of [male] human imagination, creativity, and individuality. Without the necessary leaven of subjectivity and expressive mediation—the insistence upon which has been *the* historical project of art photography discourse—the very notion of art photography would have been considered oxymoronic.

Whether constructed as idiosyncratic and exceptional (Frederic Sommers, Weegee), different from and superior to his peers (Timothy O'Sullivan) a founding father (Jacob Riis) or purely and simply an *exemplum virtutis* of photographic art (Eugene Atget), the art photographer (who may never have thought of himself thus) always exists in a troubled and dialectical relation to photography proper.[2] In both its trouble and its dialectic, this partly derives from the fact that photography as an art object is before anything else what all other photography is not: neither primarily illustrative nor descriptive; supposedly non-instrumentalized; inhabiting a separate sphere—i.e. the aesthetic—that is believed to be independent and autonomous, and perhaps most importantly, revelatory of the maker's unique and individuated subjectivity. Consequently, photographic aestheticism in its institutional incarnations is largely consecrated to the project of creating and securing authors, canons, styles. Such an enterprise operates to buttress and consolidate notions of a unified, self-possessed and originary subject who confirms the integrity of the work just as the ordering and exegesis of the work functions reciprocally to reconfirm the category of the author/subject.[3]

Inasmuch as the ideology of aestheticism is rooted in privatistic, contemplative, and quietistic definitions of art, the "real" of the social world is taken to be the point of departure, if not a scenic backdrop, rather than a transformed point of arrival. There is of course an economic dimension to all this, but this point needs hardly be elaborated, much less belabored. What instead needs to be emphasized is that within wholly different political, philosophical or aesthetic agendas for photographic practice, the camera's ability to accurately depict the truth of appearances is either problematized or depreciated.[4]

Where photography's transcriptive properties are actually valorized is, not surprisingly, within the genre of documentary itself, as well as in all the routine editorial and informational applications of the medium. In this respect, the photographic work of Lewis Hine, or the pictures in *The New York Times* are alike underwritten by the common sensical belief that a photograph of a child laborer or a Contra press conference both illustrates and verifies the text that accompanies them. Within contemporary left photographic discourse, however, there exists an important and seemingly irresolvable debate which, following the arguments of

Brecht and Benjamin, would question the adequacy of such a model of photographic transparency for a radical practice.[5]

The legacy of these critical formulations may be observed in the increasing deployment of image/text systems, photomontage, and work that attempts an internal interrogation of photographic norms, forms, and signification. While such practices do not necessarily signal the eventual eclipse of "straight" documentary modes within the photographic left, they do attest to the continuing relevance of the structural critique of photographic transparency.

It is against this conceptual convergence by which both photographic aestheticism *and* radical or poststructuralist criticism reject photography's indexical properties, that the peculiar position of postmodernist photographic practices needs to be examined. For if photography's equivocal and ambiguous relation to the real is an issue for both an essentially conservative and institutionally powerful aestheticism and equally a question for those who seek to contest this formation, where is the photographic postmodern to be situated politically? For it is, after all, one of the hallmarks of postmodernist art that it begins by bracketing the real altogether, fashions its artifacts through the technologies of reproduction, and acknowledges the reiterative and already-coded status of its own utterance. Furthermore, the medium of photography is now so deeply embedded within all aspects of contemporary art production that it becomes increasingly artificial to distinguish camera-made images or objects under the category of photographic postmodernism. Indeed, the cultural dominance of mechanically reproducible imagery is as evident in work that ostensibly repudiates it (for example, German, Italian or American pseudo-Expressionism) as it is in those works which explicitly acknowledge photography as a crucial term in contemporary culture and therefore in all art making.[6] For this reason it is possible to think of photographic postmodernism as a useful paradigm for postmodernist practices *tout court* insofar as it prompts crucial questions about the relationship of the art object to lived social reality, and gives prominence to the agency of photography in mediating that reality.

Given, however, the range and variety of postmodernist photographic work, certain distinctions need to be drawn from the outset. There is, for example, a distinction between what the art critic Hal Foster designated as an affirmative or an oppositional postmodernism—one of reaction and one of resistance.[7] But insofar as both practices may avail themselves of the same formal strategies—may even be premised on comparable diagnostics—their differences must be analyzed in more sustained and detailed terms. Ultimately, however, the important question from a left perspective devolves on the meaning and position of photographic postmodernism within the larger context of contemporary culture—a question which might be simplified to the following: are the now fully-familiar strategies of simulation, rephotography, appropriation and pastiche to be understood as a salutory demystification of photography's mass-media instrumentalities, a parasitic doubling of its mechanisms, or a swooning capitulation to its realer-than-real fascinations?[8]

As with most such sweeping questions, any attempt at an answer is inseparable from the task of definition, with the need to make distinctions, and, needless to say, is in no way detachable from the position of the interlocutor. It is for these reasons that a discussion of the six artists employing photography represented in the *Utopia Post Utopia* exhibition must proceed with the recognition that although united beneath the rubric of postmodernism, their work derives from different tributaries of postmodernism, is animated by different concerns, constructs different kinds of spectators, and is positioned differently in relation to the issues

raised. That said, these very differences are useful for my critical purposes, since they enable another kind of question—if or how does postmodernist photography, (of which this grouping may be considered a fair sampling) situate itself in relation to a social/political reality outside of representation? Necessarily, such a question is implicated in whatever epistemological status photography is accorded within the work.

In the work of Jeff Wall, the problematics of photographic transparency might be said to provide the very material of his art, insofar as these large, illuminated images are quite literally transparencies. At one and the same time both negative and positive, physically transparent but phenomenologically opaque (when mounted and projected), Wall's images tend to foreground certain attributes of photography which were particularly suggestive to the critics who first theorized its specific functions within the context of defining postmodernist art.[9] For example, to the extent that there is any validity in talking about an ontology of photography, it must surely lie in the photograph's contradictory declaration of presence and absence; the visual plenitude of the image and the (structurally inseparable) evacuation of the actual referent. Obviously, this gap between the absent corporeal subject and the overwhelming illusion of its presence is especially pronounced in the most illusionistic of photomechanical or electronic forms—i.e. film and video—where time, sound, and motion reinforce what Roland Barthes described as the effect of the real.

Interestingly, Wall's presentation of his work in book form adapts certain conventions from cinema, as for instance in his pairing of images from long shot to isolated close-up. Even more cinematic is the device of the illuminated transparency itself, which, like the brilliance of the movie screen, dominates space through its light. Furthermore, many of Wall's transparencies are set up in such a way as to suggest various narrative possibilities, thus evoking yet another aspect of cinema.[10] But what I am more concerned with here is the equivocal status of photography in Wall's work which is employed in one sense to gesture to the dense materiality of social and class relations (note Wall's "casting" of Canadian Indians, women, "criminal" or working class types, etc.) and with the other, to conjure it away by insisting (via the work's formal design) on spectacle, staging, illusion, immateriality.[11] For example, *Bad Goods* (1984) confronts the spectator with a pile of spilled lettuces in the foreground, a standing man—recognizably Native American—some distance back, in a desolate but banal *terrain vague* of industrial architecture, telephone poles, and mounds of earth and rubble. What are we to make of this image and how is photography "spoken" within it? Considered purely as image, which is its perceptable form when reproduced, *Bad Goods* resembles nothing so much as a type of quirky photographic *fait divers* that has provided the grist for entire careers in recent art photography. (i.e., Joel Sternfeld, Leo Rubinfein, etc.) In this latter incarnation, the photograph's ability to provoke narrative projection, its property of conferring significance in the mere act of freezing and framing, and its structural affinity for defamiliarizing and alienating effects, become, in sum, the content of the work. This is nothing more or less than the current recipe for photographic formalism, allowing its promoters and practitioners to celebrate what the medium "naturally" does while leaving adequate space for the maker's singular vision. Moreover, the meaning of what is routinely referred to as the nominal subject of such photographs is generally intended to be ambiguous. (This is, of course, yet another aspect of the dialectic of art photography insofar as documentary, editorial, and informational uses of the medium strenuously strive to minimize ambiguity.)

Yet Wall's work is not adequately or fairly understood by reference to this model of academic art photography, although this resemblance should not be dismissed

out of hand. Most obviously, Wall is making objects—life-sized transparencies—whose illusionism exceeds that of the small-scale photograph, whose formal references include commercial culture (the back-lit kiosk or advertising display) and high art (several of his transparencies are direct allusions to famous easel paintings) and whose choice of models, poses, and situations is intended to raise issues of race, class, and gender and the relations of capitalism which inscribe all three. But how? If the spectacular and illusionistic attributes of photography are so emphasized in the material construction of the work; if models are posed and staged as an ethical and/or political refusal of "victim photography," and if the object is intended to recall unrelated representational sites, what is supposed to be the spectator's conduit to the social reality of Canadian Native Americans, the value of food in a capitalist economy, or "bad goods?" In this instance, Wall has himself provided the gloss:

> This picture is constructed as a kind of triangle, one point of which is outside the image. The heap of rotting lettuces is the apex, and the two other corners are made up of the British Columbia Indian in the picture and the spectator in front of it. Both the spectator and the Indian are looking at the lettuces and at each other. But their social relation to that lettuce may be different. I say "may be" because the audience for pictures is changing as the economy worsens. Some spectators are getting a lot richer, some maybe poorer. The Indian may need some of the lettuce to eat. If so he'll have to scrounge through it and find what is not rotten. His view of the lettuce is partially determined by his class position, by his poverty, which is quite typical of, in this case, the native Indian people in British Columbia. . . . Many of them exist in the city apparently as victims of modernization, of development, of "progress," of capitalism. They are often depicted as just that, victims of capitalism, and not much more. I fear and dislike these sorts of representation. But this Indian will never move toward the lettuce as long as the spectator is also there, as long as the triangle exists. This triangle separates two people from each other and in doing that it is a kind of diagram of the consequences of the economy. In the economy natural products separate people from each other because they are also always forms capital takes. Lettuce, like any commodity, is just capital in a kind of natural disguise. Ideally, humans are united over food. But I suppose that presumes there's enough food for everyone. The Indian will not move towards the lettuce, he will not be seen as just a victim, as a "beggar" or whatever category you want to set up. He will not perform. That is his performance. His unfreedom is more important to him than food. He is not just a victim, he is also a fighter. In *Bad Goods* the whole structure of the picture is based on the figure's necessary unfreedom, and his expression of it. The only concept of freedom in it is, I guess, Hegel's: freedom is the rational recognition of necessity.[12]

I have quoted this description at such length because it illustrates not only (to my mind) a rather considerable gulf between the work's appearance and the artist's analysis, but more significantly because it underscores the contradictions of Wall's photographic use within an ostensibly politicized endeavor. Primarily this contradiction may be seen to be located in the instability of a directorial, synthetic mode of photographic presentation that wishes also—veristically—to insist on a "real" Indian and his real relation to agricultural produce as capital. In abjuring (responsibly) either pathos or documentary description, Wall is constricted by the Procrus-

tean bed of simulation; a conundrum illustrated in the use of a "real" Indian to stand for a "real Indian." Given the seriousness of Wall's intentions, their elusiveness in one's perception of the actual work itself may have something to do with an internal collision between the problematics of simulation and the mechanisms of allegory that might otherwise function as a meta-commentary. For while allegory produces a figure which is non-identical with itself, and thus able to signify something else, the photographic object is either taken as an equivalent of its referent (photographic realism) or as a simulacrum of it, thereby displacing the issue of the real altogether. Moreover, it is questionable as to whether the spatial diagramming on which this image depends is an appropriate allegorization of the relations between the spectator and the immobilized Indian. The spectator, it should be pointed out, is always in an empowered and mastering relation to an image, although both the scale and medium of Wall's transparencies work to diminish this disparity.

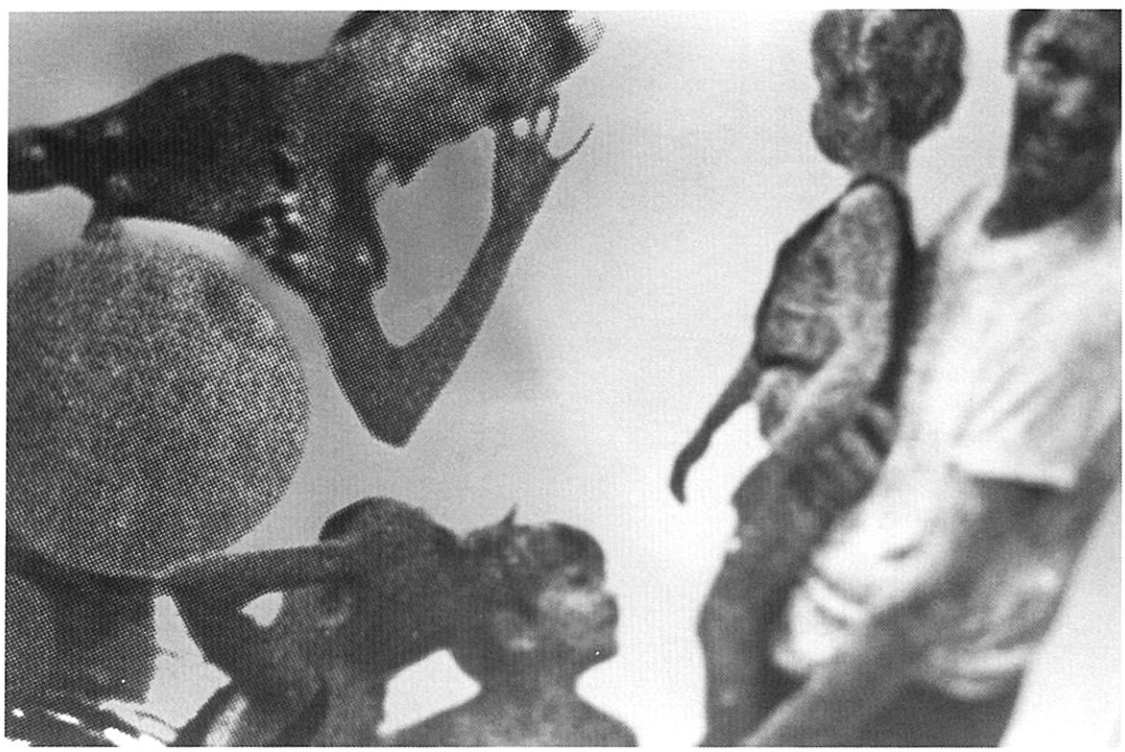
That the depredations of capitalism, colonization, racism, and deracination are not adequately addressed through a naïve belief in photographic transparency goes without saying. But the distance between Wall's theoretical apparatus and the ability of his work to communicate it is produced by the equivocal status of its photographic procedure which wants to traffic with the real on the level of social relations while bracketing them on the level of representation (as simulation, spectacle, or illusion). In one sense, this is a bit like the problem in figure/ground perception tests in which the ability to perceive the shape and form of figure or ground is predicated on the non-perception of the other. Similarly, Wall's passionate identification with the tradition of avant-garde painting complicates, rather than clarifies the discursive space in which his political analysis is intended to function.

In contrast to Wall's attempt to incorporate the spectacular and illusionistic aspects of photography into a practice that looks both laterally to worldly politics and retrospectively to avant-garde art history, Oliver Wasow, Larry Johnson and James Welling's work operates squarely within the coordinates of the postmodern as it is now generally defined in contemporary art discourse. Which is to say that it takes photography as the standard representative of the simulacrum, a phantasm which operates not through its mimetic fidelity to the real (in Platonic terms, the Idea), but through relations of semblance.[13] In the historically and politically vitiated universe of the simulacrum, the problem of the relationship of representational signs and systems to lived social reality is purely and simply a non-issue: "Ideology only corresponds to a betrayal of reality by signs; simulation corresponds to a short-circuit of reality and its reduplication by signs. It is always the aim of ideological analysis to restore the objective process; it is always a false problem to want to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum."[14] The persuasiveness, seductiveness, or even authority of the simulacral is thus located in an illusionism that possesses no authenticity, origin or source; that is, in effect, tautological. In the case of certain advertising or special effects photography this is in fact literally the case; the final image may be constituted as an aggregate of different operations and components. Johnson's modernist abstraction grounds on which his texts are overlaid, or Wasow's phantom landscapes are entirely generated by photomechanical procedures that need have no existing real world referents. As promulgated by Jean Baudrillard—most influentially in his *Simulations*—the reign of the simulacrum is formulated as a totalizing system that usurps and transforms older sign systems based on equivalence and reference producing in their stead a specular phantasmagoria enveloping the real, now dubbed the hyperreal: "This also means the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, in the minute

duplication of the real, preferably on the basis of another reproductive medium—advertising, photo, etc. From medium to medium the real is volitalized (sic); it becomes an allegory of death, but it is reinforced by its very destruction; it becomes the real for the real, fetish of the lost object—no longer object of representation, but ecstasy of denegation and of its own ritual extermination; the hyperreal."[15]

Beginning with Richard Prince's programmatic explorations of the hyperreal and its relation to the commodity fetish inaugurated nearly a decade ago, postmodernist photography has come to be largely identified with Baudrillard's complacently dystopic analysis. In Oliver Wasow's work, for example, the strategies of isolation and cropping of small sections of mass media images (primarily from advertising) and their subsequent transformation through rephotography produce oneiric near-abstractions that retain only the most tenuous connection to their original source. Alluding simultaneously to natural *and* cultural forms (e.g. landscape, U.F.O.s, industrial structures) Wasow's spectral pictures depict a kind of simulationist apocalypse in which recognizable fragments of landscape float in a lurid glow of unnatural light. Luminous ovaloid forms, fiery spirals, and technicolor skies evoke the optical effects of an atom bomb explosion. As is also the case in much of Prince's rephotography, these ambiguous and unlocalizable images are initially derived from the most banal and familiar mass media sources. But where Prince typically retains some vestiges of the advertisement's signifiers, Wasow's more extreme transformations effectively evacuate both the denoted and connoted meaning of the original source. For example, Prince's vacation and tourism series ("Black and White in Color") fastens on certain generic tropes and devices in ads and holiday brochures—the vivid sunsets, the beach, ecstatic couples, etc.—whose subsequent metamorphosis underscores the stereotypicality of these icons of consumer desire, while transforming them into something vaguely menacing, nightmarish. In other words, a significant aspect of Prince's work devolves on its analytic relationship to the commodity fetish or its signifiers. Accordingly, Prince's use of appropriation and successive stages of rephotography

Richard Prince
Untitled (Sunsets)
1981
Ektacolor print
30 × 45"
Courtesy Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York



functions to emphasize the void between the actual commodity, its signifiers, and the associative trains that make it desirable. The phantasmatic image world of simulation is thereby linked to the phantasmatic lure of the commodity, allowing, however minimally, for an act of critical perception by the spectator. In Wasow's work, however, it is emphatically Baudrillard's "allegory of death" that is represented, a closed and airless circuit that evokes reference only to immediately signal its dissimulative status. Thus is produced what is now recognizable as a quintessentially postmodern aestheticism; a development of some irony insofar as postmodernist art was initially theorized in relation to an anti-aesthetic impulse. The eerie beauty of Wasow's pictures is itself a paradigm of this aestheticism; its sci-fi allusions and patently synthetic facture resolutely detached both from indexical reference and from critical interrogation of the effect or the social function of the simulacral. Similarly, the formal pleasures of the images—their aesthetic effect—is in no way complicated, much less problematized, thereby producing a spectator whose relation to the work must be perforce one of aesthetic (and passive) contemplation and consumption.

In this regard, the manifestly "aesthetic" appearance of James Welling's photographs seem to me to support a somewhat different reading. To begin with, these photographs are not the result of technical manipulations, nor are their contents produced through appropriation or simulation. They are, in the language of art photography, "straight" photographs, and contact prints at that. That is to say, they are produced in accordance with a photographic *ethos* that underwrites the most fetishistic conceptions of the art of straight photography—from Edward Weston to Ansel Adams. Impeccably printed, exquisitely detailed, obviously tran-

Oliver Wasow
Untitled
1987
color photograph
24 × 20″
Courtesy Josh Baer Gallery, New York

scriptive—but transcriptive of what?—Welling's photographs take the implicit fetishism of the art photograph and elevate it to a prominent position that permits it to be apprehended critically. This fetishism, however, needs to be understood in two senses. In the more limited sense of the term, it is the fetishism of connoisseurship that his images play upon; a connoisseurship which in its art photography incarnation hypostatizes print quality, and projects upon the photograph such attributes as aura and uniqueness. And insofar as the art object—photographic or otherwise—is inescapably a commodity within a market system, it does not circumvent its ultimate fate as commodity fetish, "abounding," as Marx described it "in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." But in the more profound sense, it is the fetishism of photographic representation *per se* that Welling's pictures compellingly evoke.[16] This is a fetishism that is structured by the photograph's visual plenitude—a sight to be seen—and the absence (of the referent) it inscribes. The spectatorial fascination and desire that the image elicits is itself theorized as analogous to the fetishist's characteristic double movement of belief and disavowal, emblematized in the statement "I know very well, but nonetheless . . ."

The evocation of fetishism in its aesthetic and commodity forms in Welling's pictures is further underscored by their status as photographic abstractions. As such, they immediately prompt the viewer to supply a meaning (be it literal, as in landscape, or metaphoric and affective, as in the sublime). This instability of meaning within the image, and the opposing desire of the spectator to both produce and fix a meaning is a dynamic that structures all encounters with visual representation. Welling, however, is not simply making aesthetic capital out of photographic ambiguity as would a traditional art photographer. Rather, he is concerned to investigate that shifting space of (photographic) representation in which the meaning of appearance and the appearance of reality can both be seen to founder. "What can be said of my work is voiced in front of a deceptive, shifting representation which is in recurrent crisis."[17]

"A deceptive and shifting representation" is equally the substance of Larry Johnson's work, here enlarged from the sphere of the image to encompass analogous operations in language. Johnson's linguistic equivalent to the conventional, but affective mass media image is what might be called the generic utterance; an industrialized and hence wholly commodified form of speech purveyed in mass market publications such as *TV Guide* or *People*. In the multi-part untitled work in the exhibition ("My Dad Is My Hero") the appropriated text comes from another, albeit related form, the celebrity bio. Johnson's work is not only quotational in the most literal sense, it is structured as a formal quotation as well. Thus the saturated color fields or pastiched abstractions upon which the texts are printed operate to signal the collapse of a once-heroic and intransigent modernism into the ubiquitous banalities of interior, graphic, or product design. Such ritual debunkings of a compromised and historically superseded modernism are now a staple of recent art practice and amount to little beyond locking the barn door after the cow has been stolen. It is important however to remember that the progressive and principled advocacy of modernist art by theorists such as Theodor Adorno was sustained by the quality and ambition of the work itself as well as the recognition of its implicit critique of instrumentalism and commodification. The neutralization or cooption of modernism's critical impulses is by no means a phenomenon specific to modernism, but represents precisely the fragility of any critical practice within the emporia of high culture and its market relations. Thus, whether the demonstration of the shrinkage of modernist aesthetics to a graphic design option is understood as an elegiac and melancholic move, or as a cynical send-up of its historic ambitions, the crucial point is that such tactics are now themselves quota-

tional—a type of anti-academic academicism that carries less and less of a polemical charge.[18]

While certain of Johnson's texts narrate the life (or death) dramas of their celebrity protagonists—the lives of Robert Kennedy or John Lennon as the Passion Plays of the society of the spectacle—others (e.g. Untitled (Grand Drama) are confessional first-person accounts whose agonism or putative intimacy is revealed to be, as with the former genre, wholly codified and formulaic; their affective charge as spurious and synthetic as the modernist color fields on which they float.

Johnson's use of language by or about celebrities is a fairly programmatic one; the celebrity, as Guy Debord pointed out, is the spectacular equivalent of a human being. In other words, the relation of the human/spectacle/commodity to an actual human being is analogous to that of the spectacle (which includes discursive as well as iconic systems) to existing social relations under capitalism. Johnson's deployment of first-person utterances are, of course, no less "empty" or divorced from an individual enunciatory source. Their ability to prompt an empathetic projection is as much a specious lure as the vitiated codes of modernist art or the delusionary plenitude of the image. As with Wasow and Welling, Johnson proposes no positive term, no point of entry to social or political reality. Representation, whether in language, image, or art is held to be irrevocably severed from objective reference and wholly conscripted to the machinery of simulation.

This "crisis" in and of representation is arguably the common denominator both in postmodernist art in general and in the work of the artists discussed above in particular. Narrowed somewhat to the specifics of photographic use within postmodernism, it is evident that the very sophistication of the conceptual understanding of photographic imagery demonstrated by so many artists militates against its use as a privileged conduit to those social and political realities that photography in its mass media incarnations has so successfully occulted. In a certain sense, such a cul-de-sac is analogous to that produced by deconstructionist theory: having systematically problematized, if not dismantled, the philosophical ground that enables a categorical distinction between the real and its mystifications; indeed, having made any invocation to truth or reality both suspect and ominous, deconstruction can be seen to neutralize the traditional—and perhaps necessary—terms of political resistance and critique. The relevance of these observations to the work thus far discussed is fairly obvious. Its appositeness is perhaps most clearly seen in the problems posed by Jeff Wall's work which intends to engage with social relations and relations of production but must nonetheless reckon with the dissimulative status of the medium it employs to express those relations.

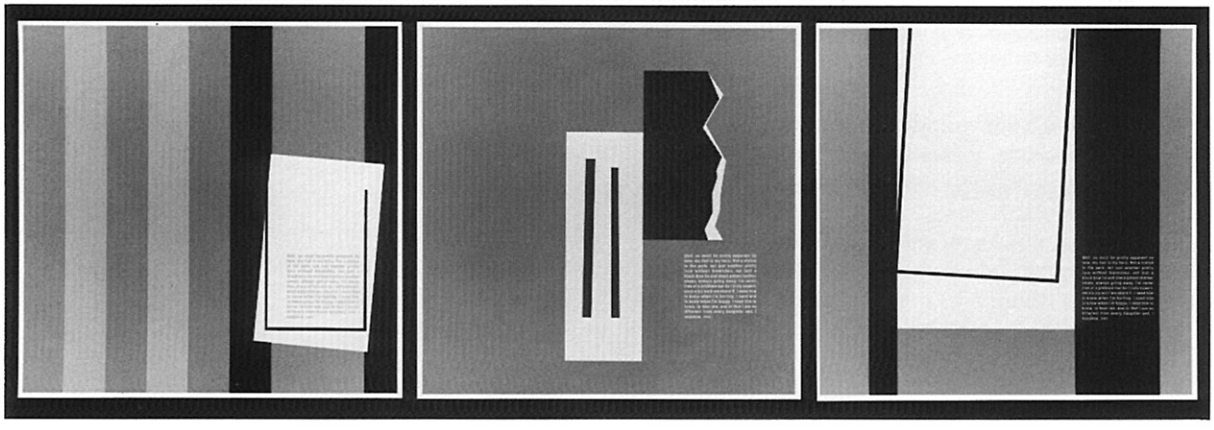
It is thus particularly significant to me that the two women represented in the photographic part of *Utopia Post Utopia* address issues—race and sexual difference—with an unabashedly positivist bias. This is, however, a question *only* of bias; in neither case is it a matter of attempting an "authentic" representation or effacing the conditions and forms of their enunciation. In Lorna Simpson's work, the social facts (and consequences) of race and femininity within white, patriarchal society are presented not through reference to the "glass darkly" of simulacra but through an interrogational or narrative mode which actively addresses each spectator. That the issue of photographic truth or duplicity is more or less dispensed with altogether in Simpson's work (photography is employed schematically and emblematically, rather than descriptively or metaphorically) may have something to do with the comparative dearth of images of blacks in the photographic mass media. In other words, because racial ideologies operate principally

by rendering people of color invisible in dominant representational systems, the act of imaging the black body can possess an entirely different valency in and of itself.

The problem of the black woman's visibility/invisibility is powerfully thematized in certain of Simpson's works, most notably in the one entitled *Twenty Questions [A Sampler].* In this work, four identical photographic rondels depict a black woman's head and upper back, seen from the rear. Photographed against a dark ground, the woman's head is barely distinguishable, the hair registering as a dim shape articulated by faint glints of light and texture. The brilliance and luminosity of the white dress she wears is itself a function of that technical aspect of black and white photography which dictates that one exposes either for the whites or the blacks; to shoot for resolution and detail in one is inevitably at the expense of the other. The primacy of white is thus inseparable from the eclipse of black. But the problematics of in/visibility are equally mobilized through the act of turning the model's face away from the viewer; a refusal and frustration of the spectator's desire to see. What is thus at stake is not so much an investigation of the real absence of the photographic subject that belies its iconic presence, but the *discursive* absence of a *specific* historical subject. Our desire to see her, however, is itself subjected to questioning. "Is she pretty as a picture?" is the first of the rhetorical queries Simpson poses, followed by three others. These unanswerable questions, couched in the home-spun language of the cliché (linguistic relative to the stereotype), make pointed reference to the dense matrix of desire and fear that underpins the perception of the (black, female) other. "Is she black as coal?," "Or pure as a lily?" "Or sharp as a razor?"

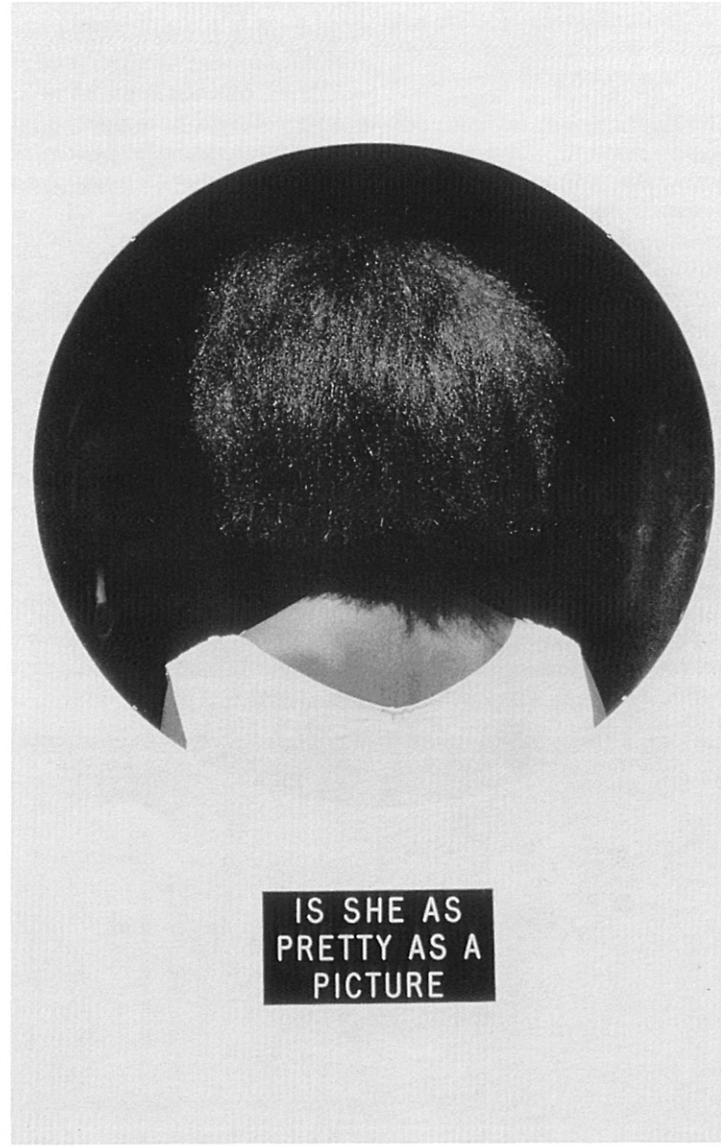
Simpson's format in this work and in the *Plaques* series is derived from children's or parlor games—Twenty Questions, Rock, Paper, Scissors, and Matchsticks. Games function as a conceptual armature in Simpson's work insofar as they constitute a conventional and arbitrary system which, like language and culture, are the givens with which each player must contend. Simpson's short texts accompanying her stark, large-scale photographs that isolate the gesture or the objects either obliquely communicate a predicament located in racial positioning as in *Rock Paper Scissors* ("It was impossible to make sense of the natural occurrence of things, being dark and heavy-handed") or raise tactical questions which are obviously political, as in *Tricks Are For* ("1. Take Aim Use Force 2. Do Not Disturb Be Careful 3. She Made Decisions Based on Past Experience"). In either case, the point of Simpson's textual strategies is that they demand a reading that directly implicates the spectator in the narrative of that absent/black/female subject. Simpson's work, in other words, neither conforms to Baudrillard's characterization of the aim of ideological analysis ("to restore the objective process") nor does it any way subscribe to vertiginous notions of "the collapse of reality into hyper-

Larry Johnson
Untitled (My Dad Is My Hero: Wintergreen and Black)
1986
Ektacolor contact prints
18½ × 18½" each
Collection of Michèle Cone, New York
Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York
Photo: Pelka/Noble Photography

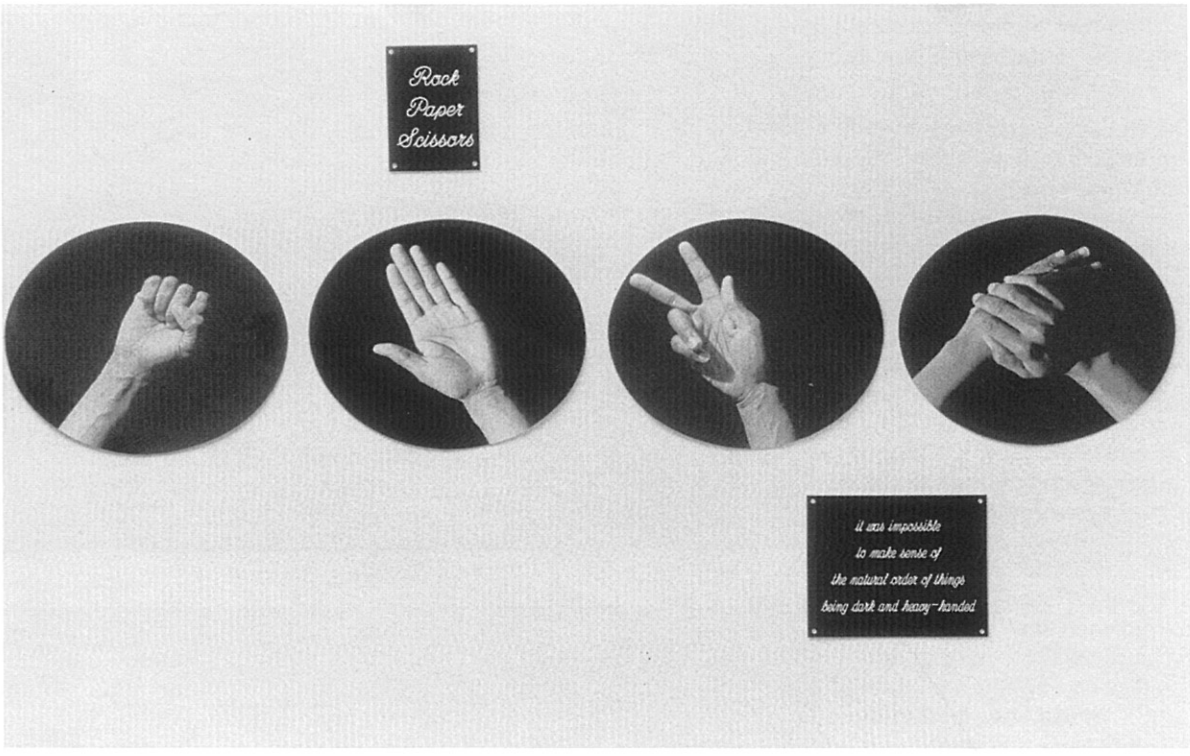


realism." Rather, the operative term in Simpson's work, and even more specifically, its mode of address, lies precisely in the activity of implicating the spectator (the verb "to implicate" is derived from the Latin *implicare,* meaning to fold within). This is an implication that extends beyond the viewing act which constructs meaning to the ethical or juridic sense of the word. For in the conscious or unconscious mechanisms of racism and sexism, we are all individually implicated.

The activity of implicating the spectator is equally apparent in the work of Dorit Cypis whose still images and objects have developed out of her mixed media installation and performance works. Cypis' work has always struck me as the feminist equivalent of the high wire performance executed without a net, for what is hazarded is that "strategic essentialism" (the term is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's) that risks all in its desire to reclaim the authenticity and integrity of the body. Accordingly, Cypis' work has always been phenomenologically inflected; the actual bodily movement of real spectators or of Cypis herself figures literally in the construction of her images or effects.



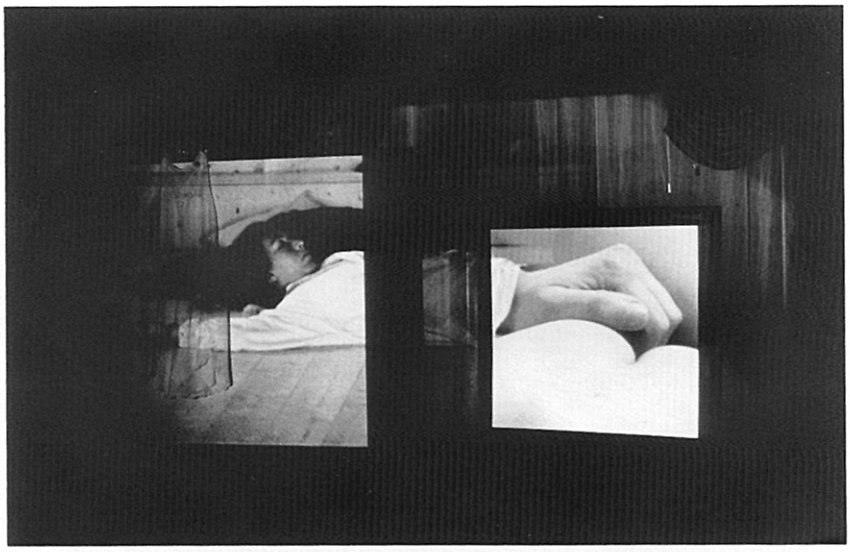
Lorna Simpson
Twenty Questions [A Sampler] (detail)
1986
silver prints, engraved plaques
24" in diameter
Lent by the artist



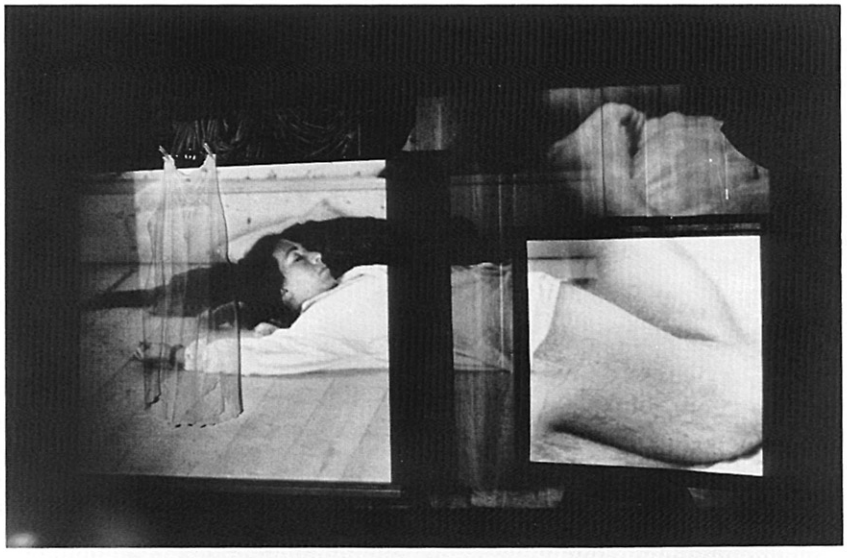
Lorna Simpson
Plaques
1986
silver prints, engraved plaques
15¼ × 13"
Lent by the artist

Cypis is recognizably postmodernist in a number of ways. Formally, her work exhibits that radical hybridization of media that was formulated as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the postmodern. Slide projections, appropriation of existing images, construction of sets and live performance are frequently combined in given works. Conceptually, Cypis is as profoundly aware of the seductions, persuasions, and blandishments of the image world as any third-generation postmodernist pasticheur. As a feminist artist, moreover, her awareness of the politics of representation—particularly the representation of women—determines the urgency with which she reckons with their power. But where the (feminist) postmodernist artist is largely concerned to articulate either the conventionality, textuality, or fetishism of such images, Cypis attempts to subvert their phantasmatic power through a kind of counter-insurgency of the corporeal body. Unlike other postmodernist practices that batten on the play of absence/presence through modern technologies of the spectacle, Cypis' work proposes the body as a positive term; at once the site of experience, memory, and potential resistance to the reifying and fetishizing effects of representation. This, moreover, is a sexualized body, and its undiminished capacity to provoke scandal, alarm or outrage can be gleaned from those incidents of protest or censorship that Cypis' work has occasioned.

Whether in her installation/performances or in her photographic work, Cypis' images are composites; multiple projections of transparencies whose legibility is determined by what the "interfering" body (the spectator's or Cypis') masks out. For example, in the three-part work entitled *Love After Death: Anatomy Lesson,* the large uppermost image in Part II which so disturbingly reads as a man's hand extending from a vagina, is in fact a composite of a medical photograph of a human larynx juxtaposed with separate slides made by Cypis of a model's limbs. Simul-



Dorit Cypis
Recollection
1987
Cibachrome print, wood, Plexiglas & fabric
37 × 40 × 6″
Lent by the artist



Dorit Cypis
Recollection
1987
Cibachrome print, wood, Plexiglas & fabric
37 × 40 × 6″
Lent by the artist

taneously projecting the three slides from three projectors onto a single screen, Cypis interposes her body between their trajectories to recombine their separate elements into a composite image which is then photographed by a stationary camera. Certain key images are used and reused in her work; a Tantric sculpture of coitus, the larynx, Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp.* a free-standing anatomical model ("The Invisible Woman") from a science museum, and so forth. Such images, whose discursive provenance ranges from science to religion to high art, constitute a kind of survey of the multiform meanings imposed on the body: site of scientific investigation, knowledge and power; emblem of mystic forces; object of polymorphous desire. The ambiguity of the images (some of which are photographed through scrims) is effected through plays on androgyny, metonymy, and an attempt to express a visual equivalent to stream-of-consciousness. Like Simpson's, Cypis' work does not pivot on an act of unmasking ideological forma-

tions, but rather, on an active engagement of the spectator whose own experience of body and sexuality is prompted through interconnected strategies of shock, defamiliarization, and association.

Cypis' fervent conviction that the body exists outside of representational systems, that it resists incorporation within those discursive, semiotic, or institutional systems that impose meaning and significance is not one that I share. An essentialism of the body, like a feminist essentialism, is a two-edged sword whose empowering or utopic qualities can mask a concommitant elision (or denial) of the political facts of domination and repression. That caveat notwithstanding, Simpson and Cypis's work is important for its inscription of a range of issues within postmodern art practice that move beyond the Baudrillardian framework so exhaustively mined over the past ten years. The political work of exposing the coded nature of the photographic sign, the critical elaboration of the mechanisms of simulation, the demonstration of the lure of both spectacle and fetish has been largely accomplished, and is now a taken-for-granted analysis familiar to any regular reader of, say, *Flash Art.* In our bleak and brutal historical moment it seems more than ever necessary to go beyond a postmodernist diagnostics of spectacular society, and to further investigate and formulate strategies of opposition. A prerequisite for such an enterprise within art practice must surely lie in the reforging of the liens between the political, the social, and the aesthetic. This, it seems to me, is the common denominator in the work of Wall, Simpson, and Cypis. I have nonetheless considered the two latter artists separately in that they seem both particularly concerned with the terms of their spectatorial address. Both artists begin with an acknowledgment of the mediating agency of representation, and neither would claim to be salvaging the representational modes they deploy as a direct route to the social or sexual formations they address. What enables them, however, to escape the conceptual (and political) impasse of the simulation principle is through their shared commitment to the production of an implicated—and active—spectator. But this implication, or this activity, is not limited to the evocation or demonstration of the spectator's role in producing (or failing to produce) meaning. It is rather in the nature of a second sight—an insight—into the contents of those meanings. Meanings, it must be added, that are not *only* hermetically contained within the "endless chatter" of the circulation of signs, but which in the absence of either recognition or challenge, by artist and spectator alike, will inevitably continue to be reproduced.

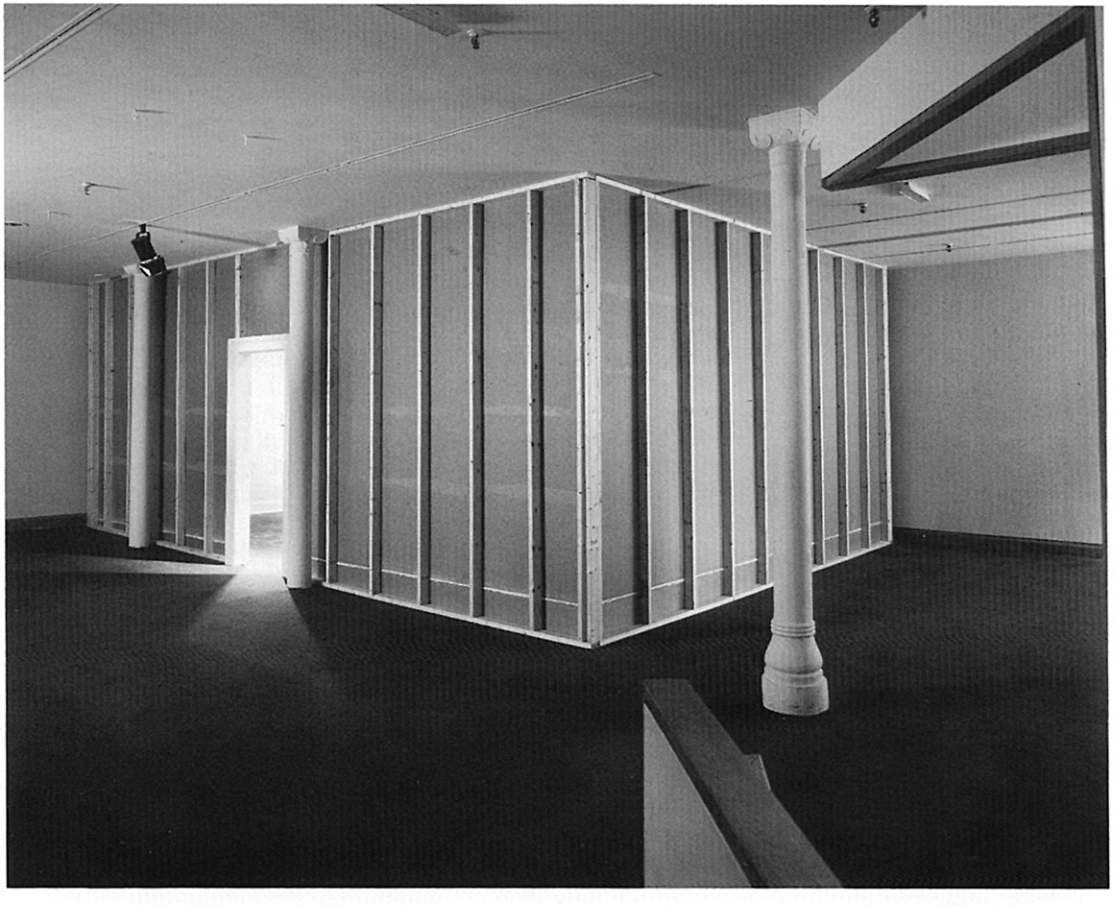
NOTES

1. Rosalind Krauss' seminal essays on photography have defined and developed the implications of this position from a variety of perspectives. See especially her essays "Notes on the Index: Part 1" and "Notes on the Index: Part 2," both reprinted in Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths (*Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985). See also Phillipe Dubois, *L'acte photographique* (Brussels: Edition Labor, 1983).
2. This complicated, not to say tortuous dlalectic between art photography and its Other has been recapitulated in the more recent history of video and television. See Martha Gever, "Pressure Points: Video in the Public Sphere" in *Art Journal,* Vol. 45, No. 3, Fall 1985, pp. 238–243. Exploring some of the same issues a decade earlier is David Antin's "Television: Video's Frightful Parent" in *Artforum,* Vol. 14, No. 4, December 1975, pp. 36–45.
3. The theoretical argument which has enabled this conception of the "author function" is, of course, Michel Foucault's. See his "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-*

Memory, Practice, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 113–138. For an elaborate and detailed demonstration of how these processes work in the construction of the male artist/genius, see Griselda Pollack's "Artists, Mythologies and Media: Genius, Madness and Art History" in *Screen,* Vol. 21, No. 3, 1980, pp. 57–93. For a case history of the construction of photographic authorship see my "Canon Fodder: Authoring Eugene Atget," in *The Print Collector's Newsletter,* Vol. XVII, No. 1, January–February 1986, pp. 221–227. See also Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's Discursive Spaces" in Krauss, *op. cit.,* pp. 131–150.

4. For example, from an implicitly aestheticist and explicitly formalist perspective, see Joel Snyder, "Picturing Vision" in *The Language of Images,* ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 219–246. Snyder's arguments are based on the demonstration of the historical, cultural, and hence conventionalized, determinations that produce the putatively realistic appearance of photographic pictures. The critique of photographic transparency from the left is most definitely stated in Martha Rosler's now classic essay "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)" in Rosler, *Three Works* (Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), pp. 71–87. See also her essay "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers and Makers: Thoughts on Audience" in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985), pp. 311–339.
5. For an overview of the literature and debates on this issue see my essay "Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions About Documentary Photography" in *The Event Horizon: Essays on Hope, Sexuality, Social Space and Media(tion) in Art,* ed. by Lorne Falk and Barbara Fisher (Ontario: The Coach House Press and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1987), pp. 193–214.
6. A symptomatic interpretation of the revival of painting as itself a response to the threat of photography is given in Douglas Crimp's important essay "The End of Painting" in *October 16,* Spring 1981, pp. 69–86.
7. Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface" in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* ed. Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), pp. ix–xvi. See too his essays in Foster, *Recodings: Art Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1985).
8. For an extended discussion of this question see my essay "Living With Contradictions: Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics" in *Screen,* Vol. 28, No. 3, Summer 1987, pp. 2–22.

9. Pre-eminently, the theorist of photography's relation to postmodernist art practices has been Douglas Crimp. See his essays "Pictures" in *October 8,* Spring 1979, pp. 75–88, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" in *October 15,* Winter 1980, pp. 91–110, and "The Museum's Old/The Library's New Subject" in *Parachute 22,* Spring 1981, pp. 32–37.
10. This play on the narrative implications of the photographic arrest has been an important aspect of postmodernist photography as exemplified by Cindy Sherman. See Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *op. cit.* and Judith Williamson, "Images of 'Woman'" in *Screen,* Vol. 24, No. 6, December 1983, pp. 102–116.
11. For a very different reading of Jeff Wall's work which stresses, among other things, his position within the tradition of the modernist avant-garde, see Ian Wallace, "Jeff Wall," catalogue essay for the exhibition at The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1983 and Ian Wallace, "Jeff Wall's Transparencies," catalogue essay for the exhibition *Jeff Wall: Transparencies* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art and Basel: Kunstalle, 1984).
12. Jeff Wall, *Transparencies,* with an interview by Els Barents (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1987), p. 101.
13. Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," in *October 27,* Winter 1983, pp. 45–56.
14. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations,* trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 48.
15. *Ibid.,* p. 142.
16. The now-standard formulation of the analogical relation of fetishism as theorized in psychoanalysis to the viewing of photographs is Victor Burgin's; my brief account of this argument is taken from his. See Victor Burgin, "Photography, Phantasy, Function," in *Thinking Photography,* ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1982), pp. 177–216. See also his "Re-Reading *Camera Lucida*" in Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1986), pp. 71–92. Christian Metz, best known for his utilization of psychoanalytic theory for a structural model of the spectator's relation to film, has also discussed the relation of fetishism to photography. See Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," in *October 34,* Fall 1985, pp. 81–90.
17. James Welling, "Abstract," in *Effects,* No. 2, 1984, p. 18.
18. See in this regard Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning" in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in recent painting and Sculpture,* exhibition catalogue (Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art and Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1986, pp. 29–49.



An Untitled Installation
Conceived by Robert Gober
1987–88
(exterior view)

Alice In Wonderland Looking/For The Body

Alice Jardine

"Thinking you're in a dream when you're awake. That's what a lot of direct experience has seemed like for quite awhile."

Richard Prince

Alice: "Why do so many people in the art world wear black?"
Friend: "[Let's hope] they're mourning the death of the Father."

"Wipe your glosses with what you know."

Joyce

I. Looking-Glass Room

Alice just wandered into the scene of in-appropriate contexts. Of writing on the wall. Of party games and space ships, twisted cribs and aluminum foil. Of giant Workers and female Buddhas. Entire rooms destroyed. Grass growing on the inside.

> *"A woman made the bed.*
> *A Prince made the joke.*
> *A Painter painted a son's river—Dead.*
> *A Door has been mis-yoked."*

She was told.

"Curiouser and Curiouser," thought Alice.[1] *This is a place where everything one recognizes hasn't happened yet, a place where one remembers the future. "Then she began looking about, and noticed that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible . . ."* (Alice, *pp. 185–86).*

Bob Gober's *camera lucida* is as different as is possible. It will catch you by surprise and lead you to lose your way. For this crypt, chamber, cave has no stationary cardinal points of the ordinary metaphysical kind. It is like an electronic switching box for worn-down but still operational binary codes: nature/culture, domesticity/history, inside/outside, leisure/work, ontology/ideology. As in the dream-work, logical connections are measured only by simultaneity (in time): every Western historical epoch is equally (re)present(ed) in space through each of its most sanctified arts (sculpture, painting, architecture, photography). And there are no contradictions, no "No's," only (infinitely reversible) axes of degree: realer than real, faker than real, realer than fake, faker than fake . . .

"'What do you know about this business?' the King said to Alice.

'Nothing,' said Alice" (Alice, *p. 155).*

One of the effects of nothing left to know for sure is a sense of loss: nostalgia. A nostalgia for the truth? for authenticity? For which is more authentic: the hand-sculpted moss? the hand-written joke? the hand-painted River? The hand-made door or its re-made frame perhaps? But this anxiety of authenticity (of truth, originality) is now a well-worn topos of postmodernist (when not modernist) art and cannot alone account for the strong, new affect produced at the interior of this strange phantasmagorical space.

*"You shouldn't make jokes . . . if it makes you so unhappy," suggested Alice gently to the Prince (*Alice, *p. 224*).

David Robbins has written of Gober's recent objects that they are "entirely without any idea of providing in the future physical rest or comfort, release or relief, to any body. Cordoned off from their natural working lives, they become inutile pictures of usefulness, memorials to a life of security and ease now strangely unavailable. They are corpus and doppelganger both, each haunting the other, both teasing us, and Robert Gober bravely stage-managing it all."[2]

What haunts in Gober's work is its intimate relationship to a body that is present *only* through its absence. Dis-embodied. U-topic. Dead? Or just missing perhaps?

"It seems very pretty [. . .] but it's rather *hard to understand. [. . .] Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't exactly know what they are! However,* somebody *killed* something: *that's clear, at any rate—" (*Alice, *p. 197).*

II. Down The Black Hole

*"Which way? Which way?" wondered Alice then (*Alice, *p. 33). For there were several possibilities at once and she didn't want to take a wrong turn. She looked up "hole" in the dictionary: "in OE, a 'cave'; a hollow place in a solid body; aperture, perforation, orifice, gap, tunnel, shaft." How could she resist? "I know* something *interesting is sure to happen," she said to herself (*Alice, *p. 57). And jumped.*

In fact, Gober's installation would seem to pre-view the first thing that one notices wandering through the photography in this show: the *intensity* of the presence or absence of representations of the human body in the different photographers' works. If one were to explore this show as a series of dreamscapes according to this criteria—and the artists themselves invite us to do so—there would be three. After that of Gober (and his ghostly collaborators), there is, second, the body-empty dreamscape of James Welling, Oliver Wasow, and Larry Johnson and, third, the body-full dreamscape of Dorit Cypis, Lorna Simpson, and Jeff Wall. I would ask my reader to note but not yet dwell on the fact that, with one exception, the members of the body-empty dreamscape are men; those of the body-full dreamscape, women.

Welling, Wasow, and Johnson are linked here not only by their gender and anti-anthropomorphism, but also by their complex relationship to strategies of appropriation now almost a decade old. All three, like other well-known appropriators (such as Richard Prince) attempt to show, through pastiche, that reality is but a system of effects. They do so "by remaking and thereby intensifying signs that are already fabricated from existing materials and techniques [exposing] the extent to which our reality has been invaded by fiction."[3] Yet, unlike Prince and many other appropriators of his generation, these younger photographers are searching for an

alternative to commodity critique. Dissatisfied with what are now perceived as *direct* attacks on commodity culture, all of their simulations ab-stract.

James Welling, probably the most well-known of the three artists in dreamscape two, photographs such man-made (and domestic) materials as aluminum foil and Jell-o to produce what Abigail Solomon-Godeau has qualified as "photographs that [are] as close to being pictures about nothing as could be contrived." Any meaning in them is only "in potentia"[4]—in the eye of the beholder. Welling has said that he wants his materials to "generate images" but images one cannot remember. Withdrawing any naturalized "content," he works against the "punctum" of both art photography and realist photography, comparing his photographs' effects to those of haptic vision: the "glitter" one sees just before falling asleep—or, I would add, the "snow" of a T.V. screen signed-off for the night.

Oliver Wasow, like Prince, "re-processes" advertising images because of their "hyper-real" qualities and, like Welling, refuses "naturalized content." But Wasow doesn't just re-photograph or generate images, he *cooks* them by putting them through every possible recipe of standard, commercialized reproduction: he xeroxes, collages, and Polaroids them until only im/explosions of vivid color remain, inviting the viewer into any simultaneously pre-historic and futuristic mindscape he or she wants to invent.

Larry Johnson, unlike Welling and Wasow, has given up on the specular image altogether. He simply photographs appropriated cliché texts against different design backgrounds or in various designer colors to emphasize the commodification of language, to attempt to revivify a language that has faded away. If the results weren't so depressing, one would be convinced his work was but an advanced form of visual aphasia.

*"This was a puzzler," chimed Alice (*Alice, *p. 237).*

Now Welling and Wasow, in particular, share several goals. Both want to "transcend historical specificity" ("The work should describe a world other than this one") and to produce a desire to "be in other times and places." Both, in a sense, are searching for "something more sublime than discursive history."[5] Also, both turn to a deliberate and rationalized *technique* "to give a new language to nature," to produce a kind of "meta-nature" never before seen. Both also find "deconstruction from within" problematic and want to critique from "somewhere else." Hal Foster has picked up on all of these goals and has provided an extremely perceptive reading of their work. According to Foster, Welling (especially in his very recent abstract painting) and Wasow are not just appropriative or abstract photographers/painters, but are *simulators* of abstraction. They belong to a new movement of "new abstraction" that has developed out of appropriation art, but which is also involved in the *representation* of another sort of abstraction: "the abstraction of technological modes of control of nature ([Jack] Goldstein), of scientific paradigms of (dis)order (Welling), of late-capitalist social space ([Peter] Halley), of cybernetic languages ([Ashley] Bickerton), of commodity and image production ([Meyer] Vaisman, Wasow)." For example, Wasow doesn't "appropriate media or art images so much as [he simulates] the abstraction that objects, images, and events undergo when they are transformed into commodity signs."[6] The problem is that these artists may be but "picturing" (rather than critiquing) abstractive tendencies inherent to late capitalism. "Like the critique of representation in appropriation art, then, the simulation of abstraction in this painting is a mixed enterprise, for finally both may be but ramifications of a much more practical and thorough 'critique' and 'simulation'—that of capital. [. . .] In short, more than this or any art, it is the abstractive processes of capital that erode repre-

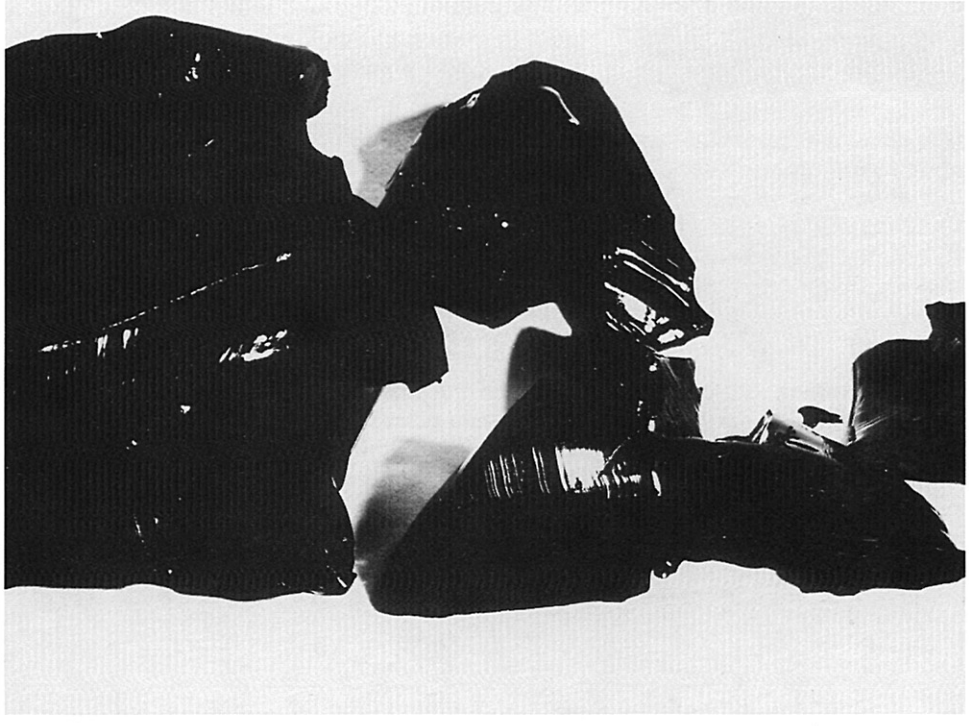
sentation and abstraction alike. And ultimately it may be these processes that are the real subject, and latent referent, of this new abstract painting."[7] The usual results of such a simulationist practice include conventionalism and passive pessimism, not to mention the usual nihilism, cynicism, and mystification overprevalent in this period of intense political and cultural reactionary withdrawal.

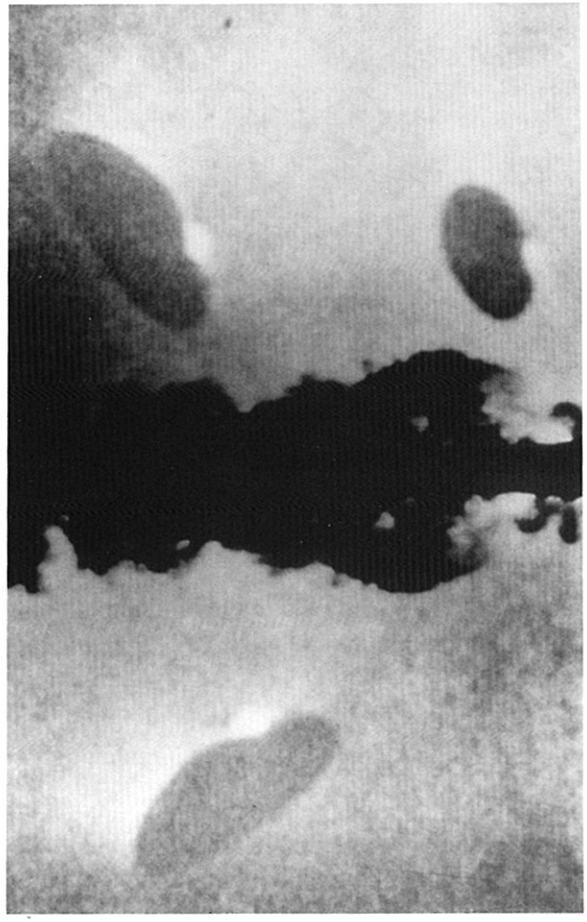
I find Foster's argument centered on the congruence between these strategies of simulation and strategies of late capitalism convincing and shall return to it soon. But, first, I want to reintroduce the category of gender—not that it has been at all absent.

*"[. . . But] it's all in some language I don't know," explained Alice (*Alice, *p. 190).*

Gender has not been at all absent, at a first level, because the desire to give to nature a new language; to de-emphasize time and re-emphasize space; to rediscipline *physis* through *techné;* to re-figure natural phenomena that cannot be described by any of our current conceptual machinery—all of these involve an exploration of *the feminine* that I have described elsewhere as "gynesis." Diagnosed as intrinsic to modernity, the gynetic process always involves some kind of re-conceptualization of the "non-knowledge" of any given master-narrative, a "space" or "spacing" of that narrative, coded as feminine. Gynesis (*gyn* indicating woman and *-sis* process) is intrinsic to what the French call *la modernité* because it is at work whenever 1) the Cartesian (male, Western) subject has been problematized; 2) representation, based in the dialectics of time and space, presence and absence, etc. has been radically questioned; and 3) truth has been visibly infiltrated by its own fictions.[8] This process is particularly relevant to photography, for with the invention of the photograph there was invented, in Walter Benjamin's words, a *new nature, a new space:* "another nature speaks to the camera in as much as it speaks to the eye; and, especially, it speaks in another mode because a space consciously elaborated by man is replaced by one where he operates unconsciously."[9]

James Welling
Gelatine Photograph 46
1984
silver print
16 × 20″
Courtesy Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York

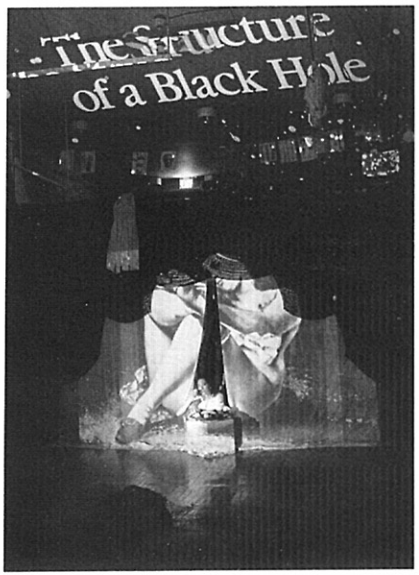




Oliver Wasow
Untitled
1987
color photograph
24 × 15"
Courtesy Josh Baer Gallery, New York

But secondly, if these photographers are operating/operated unconsciously by the abstract process of gynesis, they are also operating/operated unconsciously by their concrete gender positions in relation to the kind of photography they are doing. While it is important not to conflate the biological gender of the photographer with the construction of masculine and feminine subject positions within photographic representation,[10] it is obviously no accident that women still, historically, have easier *access* to the feminine position and men to the masculine one. And to the extent that the subject *position* of photography has always been male and the object *position* of photography, female, it seems to me that the loss of *the* object of photography—the fetishized woman's body—to a young and gender-conscious generation of men over the last ten years should have had a major effect on *the* (male) subject of photography. As Toril Moi, reading Luce Irigaray, puts it:

> "Subjectivity is denied to women [. . .], and this exclusion guarantees the constitution of relatively stable objects for the (specularizing) subject. If one imagined that the woman imagines anything at all, [her patriarchally assigned position as] the object (of speculation) would lose its stability and thus unsettle the subject itself. If the woman cannot represent the ground, the earth, the inert or opaque matter to be appropriated or repressed, how can the subject be secure in its status as a subject? Without such a non-subjective foundation [. . .], the subject would not be able to construct itself at all."[11]



Dorit Cypis
"Phantasmagoria"
1987
performed by Dorit Cypis and Leeny Sack

That is, the absence of *the* object (the fetishized female body and/or woman as ground) is congruent with the absence of the (male) subject (its "disappearance") in this new abstract photography. Even more simply put, I do not think it an accident that the majority of the practitioners of this contemporary body-empty photography (and painting)—Jack Goldstein, Philip Taaffe, Peter Schuyff, Peter Halley, Meyer Vaisman, Peter Nagy, Alan Belcher, Ashley Bickerton, James Welling and Oliver Wasow, among others—are *men.*[12]

Nor do I think it an accident that the majority of those photographers re-exploring the postmodern possibilities for the re-presentation of the female body, re-playing with her (seemingly inevitable) objectification by the photographic medium itself—are *women.* Connie Hatch, Francesca Woodman, Sherry Milner, Jo Spence, Sarah Charlesworth, Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Barbara Kruger—Dorit Cypis and Lorna Simpson—all of these women artists seem almost to be wandering about the subjective space Man has deserted, looking . . . for a way to re-envision the subject *and* object body he has abandoned entirely.[13]

"Excuse me, can you tell me where I am?," pleaded Alice.[14]

In a recent article on the work of Hans Haacke, Fredric Jameson considers who the possible practitioners are of photography done for specifically "artistic" reasons. He quotes Pierre Bourdieu for whom these practitioners (ie, those resisting "realistic" photography and therefore the social reproduction of the family) are necessarily "marginals": "bachelors, young people, unsuccessful family men."[15] I suppose the large number of important women photographers over the years must fall under the category of "young people" . . . In fact, over the past decade or so, it has been women artists and photographers of several generations who have been described by critics as the most genuinely "poststructuralist" or "deconstructionist."[16] One of the reasons for this is these artists' insistence not upon (feigning) the *abandonnement* of the universal (ie, patriarchal) subject/object paradigm, but upon (assuming the risk of) putting themselves directly into the paradigm *as* (anti-universal) *women.* But if a woman *places herself* in the masculine position of the subject of photography, what happens to the (inevitably?) feminized photographic object? And, most especially, what happens if a woman does this at our current advanced (capitalist) stage of exhaustion of the image universe?

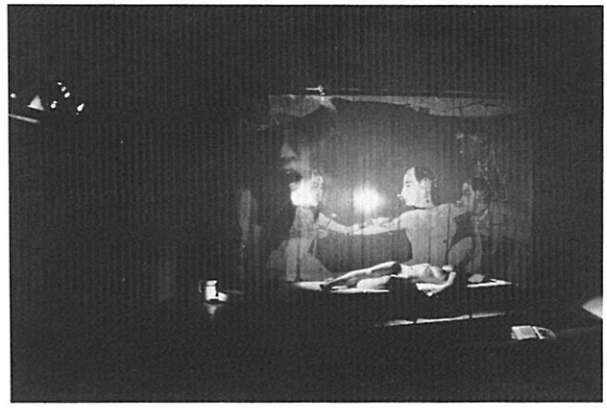
Many of the women photographers I have mentioned *literally* put themselves into the picture. Francesca Woodman, Jo Spence, or Cindy Sherman use themselves as models. Others use simulations or reproductions of themselves to emphasize their implication in every part of the process. On one level, for a woman to play with her own objectification in this way is simply to move beyond being objectified. It is for women to question themselves as they are seen, to question the impossibility of women representing themselves to themselves: "the subject poses as an object *in order to be a subject.*"[17] It is for a woman to deal directly with the question of how to possess her own body while being watched in a phallo-logo-*oculo*-centric culture. But, on another level, it is also more generally to rain chaos upon the *anthro*pomorphism of humanist art without, however, abdicating critique of one's own inevitable implication in the process (whatever one's gender position).

Of the two women photographers in this show, Dorit Cypis addresses these issues most directly. She herself has stated that she wants "to obscure divisions between the observer and observed, between reality and fiction, passive and active, between past, present, and future."[18] She does so through works named in a variety of ways: image-performance, projection installation, stimulation, theatrical in-

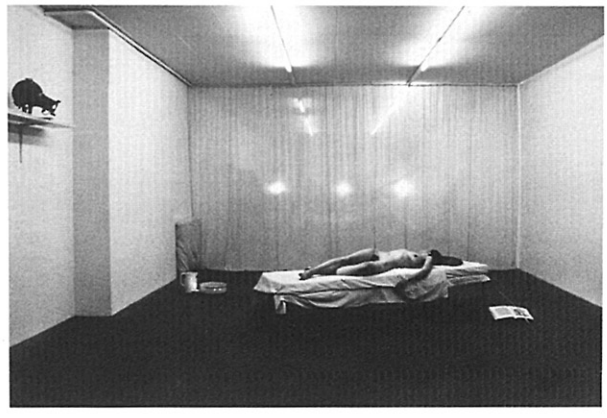
stallation, multiple slide projection, etc. Through an exploration of multiple sites/sights of/for and by the body, Cypis transforms both the subject and object of our viewing pleasure. In her installation, photomontage, and projection works, both the artist and the spectator change the image(s) by their movements through the dreamscape:

> "Formally, I have developed a system whereby it is the body of the viewer which intercepts the image. To create the photomontages, I physically weave my body in and out of the beams of images which are projected to superimpose onto a screen. My body acts as a matting device fragmenting the superimposed images, manipulating their new fusions into reconfigurations of visual meanings."[19]

Like many of her body-empty colleagues, Cypis exposes meaning through the combining and recombining of images culled from both the media and the real world, but unlike them she does so *with* the body, not without it. In fact, much of her work is openly physical, erotic. Cypis analyzes erotic phalloculocentric fantasy through the creation of phantasmagoria (originally a kind of spectacle in the 19th century where optical effects were produced by magical lanterns). In one of her more intense visual phantasmagoria, a nude female model lies provocatively on a couch surrounded by undulating screen memories of brilliant color and palimpsestic references—most especially to one of Cypis' earlier works, "Centipede," where a nude (Victorian) woman lies (while watching herself) with a (patriarchal) dictionary spread open over her sex. When the viewer is thoroughly immersed in this scopic language of fetishistic implications and erotic hypnosis, Cypis flips off the images and flips on the overhead lights. The viewer finds her/himself looking at (nothing but) a nude woman lying (as if) in a prison, hospital room, a morgue—



Dorit Cypis
"The Artist & Her Model"
(Model in the Mythic Environment)
1986
performance at De Zaak, Holland



Dorit Cypis
"The Artist & Her Model"
(Model with the room lights on)
1986
performance at De Zaak, Holland

as if evoking a flipside of male, heterosexual fantasy. Cypis' images in two dimensions—such as the *Love After Death: Anatomy Lesson* triptych—also produce these visceral shocks as images mutate through each other in multiple historico-bio-sex-graphic juxtapositions: the larynx (as woman's vulva) penetrated by the man's hand of the second work in *Love After Death* is underwritten by screen-memories of her grandparents (killed during the Second World War) and a portrait of the (female?) artist as a young child (detail of a Bruges painting). The strong emotional impact of such visual shocks to the body in Cypis' work goes strongly against the grain of the more cerebral work of her body-empty colleagues.

Female bodies constructed, dismembered, re-memorized, and forgotten, continue in the photographs of Lorna Simpson. But here they are re-presented with the deadpan neutrality of police mug shots—without, however, their usual function of establishing identity. The body in question is very often that of a young black woman photographed from the back, as if the artist had turned her back on her judges. Sometimes there are only fragments of the body—hands or feet usually. Simpson juxtaposes these images with word games presented as cultural matrixes. She (literally) selects these word games from (white, middle class) party game books of the 1950s and 60s (the time of her childhood), foregrounding the inevitably violent absurdity of their cultural logic:

hat: head
darkness: skin
scissors: cloth
razor: skin
bow: arrow.

Some of her more recent work such as *The Water Bearer* directly situates the black woman artist today as doubly problematized subject and object in post-modern culture: both more and less visible, constituted between high (silver) and low (plastic) culture, she is still in the difficult position of seeing without being seen. But *now* this could be positive, except that she must also remain the bearer of two pictures/pitchers simultaneously. Otherwise her art is once again discounted, judged not to hold water.

Lorna Simpson
Water Bearer
1986
silver print
40½ × 78″
Lent by the artist

Can a male artist today sustain himself in this problematic positioning of both subject and object? The third artist in our body-full dreamscape, Jeff Wall, recognizes in his work the extent to which all looking is constructed through the fantasies of ideology. And for him the resultant recognition of "non-identity with oneself" is the germ of all transformation and development. "All the people in my pictures appear there not as themselves, but are playing the part of someone else, someone maybe not very much like themselves. They are performing, so they are 'other'."[20] This insistence on "otherness" in Wall's images attempts to allow (female) sexuality and emotion to emerge from any given (male) techno-look.

Because of this insistence on otherness, the transparencies of Jeff Wall are very often included among those works primarily by women artists most seriously exploring the cultural construction of sexual difference ("The difficulty—and ironies attendant upon that difficulty—of male/female relationships determines all of Wall's work to date").[21] In transparencies such as *Picture for Women, Double Self-Portrait* (both 1979) and *The Destroyed Room* (1978), the gender positioning of the specularizing/specularized male *and* female body is clearly what is at issue. The ambiguity of the gaze in each swirls around the masculine and feminine poles revealing unconscious structures of specular fascination. In *The Destroyed Room,* for example, artifices of femininity are destroyed as if in a rage, with only the ironic, curtsying, simulacrum of the female body's enslavement to otherness left intact. Even in other images where gender does not seem to be the primary issue, male and female bodies are posed in such a way as to foreground "the passion of otherness."

This insistence upon otherness *in* the image is however overshadowed by the otherness *of* Wall's images. Wall's transparencies are dreamlike in and of themselves, no matter what they "represent" and as many critics have pointed out, seem almost to be using the technique of the transparency—a kind of superphotography situated between cinema and advertising signs—to but "speculate" on the image of the body in late capitalism.

> I think there's a basic fascination in technology which derives from the fact that there's always a hidden space—a control room, a projection booth, a source of light of some kind—from which the image comes. [. . . With transparencies] the site from which the image originates is always elsewhere. And this 'elsewhere' is experienced, maybe consciously, maybe not, in experiencing the image. Rimbaud said, 'Existence is elsewhere' and Malevich once wrote, 'Only that which cannot be touched can be sacred.' To me, this experience of two places, two worlds, in one moment is a central form of the experience of modernity. It's an experience of dissociation, of alienation. In it, space—the space inside and outside the picture—is experienced as it really exists in capitalism . . .[22]

Deliberate and rationalized, Wall's technique of the transparency may in fact be attempting to explore the position of the human body, but only *with regard* to the re-creation of a (now artificial) "aura" for the work of art. In any case, Wall's obsession both with how human bodies are psycho-historically positioned as well as with the "technology," "space," and "elsewhere" that overdetermine that positioning provide us with a strange condensation *and* displacement of what the two types of photographs we have briefly explored here are up to.

"[But] the great question certainly was, What?" (Alice, *p. 66).*

That the human, sexed body should be a primary marker—through different de-

Jeff Wall
The Destroyed Room
1978
Cibachrome transparency
fluorescent light, Plexiglas, steel
159 × 229 cm (@ 62 × 90")
Collection National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

grees of its presence and absence—of postmodern challenges to the metaphysics of representation in late capitalism should come as no surprise. Neither should the fact that men and women (as they continue to be defined metaphysically) are meeting those challenges differently at this turn of the century.

A desire on the part of both sexes to flee from specularization of the body would certainly be understandable, for example, in the age of AIDS. It seems clear that, today, "the great themes of the body—love and death—are no longer separate but are now collapsed into one wholly terrifying theme—the risk of death in sexual love."[23] And I think that newly terrifying congruence of love and death is present in some of this work, especially through Gober's evocation of panicky, disembodied domestic spaces or Cypis' instantaneous trans-portation of erotic fantasy into the morgue.

It has also been suggested that feminism's "bringing into the light" of woman's objectification (and thus of her inevitable commodification) and its sustained critique of male artists engaged in that process have made it impossible for "conscious men" to represent anything at all. According to this argument, those feminist men attempting to *expose* the objectification of women (à la Victor Burgin) are but reproducing, indeed reinforcing, that objectification whereas those abandoning the (male) subject position altogether are just "being good." Meanwhile (so the argument goes) those women artists exploring the subject/object paradigms at the root of Western representation are but regressing to an earlier stage of (essentially humanist) auto-bio-graphy . . .

But if I have insisted at such length on the body-empty and body-full spaces in this show—particularly as representative of larger movements in contemporary photography—it is because I think there is something more complicated going on

here as well: a historical conjunction of psychic, political, and economic tendencies producing a new *libidinal economy* whose points of reference include melancholia, allegory—and fear.

III. "A Grin Without A Cat"

". . . a grin without a cat. It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life" (Alice, p. 91). And she went on to dream of her passage from the body-full universe of the Uffizi Galleries to the body-empty universe of the Synagogue in Florence—of her passage from West to East through the Berlin Wall . . .

In contemplating the emphasis on "Utopia" in the title of this show, two texts in particular came to mind. First, the dictionary: Utopia means "no place," a signification which has become confused, in English, with the word "eu-topia" as a "region of ideal happiness or good order." *Topos,* besides indicating a place in general (especially a room, or burial place) can also be "a *place* or *part* of the body" (Liddle and Scott). U-topic—without a place on or part of the body . . . The second text that then came to mind was Jean-Joseph Goux's, *The Iconoclasts,* a brilliant reading of Utopia as the space at the end of Western Man's symbolization—the Empty Temple of the Judaic thought at our foundations.[24] There are no images in Utopias—something very often left out of discussions of utopian theories. Goux reminds us of that and of the fact that the relationship to the image, its presence or absence first of all, is directly related to fundamental religious, economic, and psychic modes of symbolization in the West. Goux also sustains the argument that "a certain conception of conception"—of sexual difference as "the symbolic of the symbolic"—is intrinsic to all of those modes.

Here I will but quote myself outlining Goux's complex argument in terms of gynesis:

> Goux's version of history begins with Moses' anger at the worship of the golden calf, a female deity—*mater*—and the Jews ensuing departure from Egypt with its female icons and hieroglyphic imagination. This literal and figurative departure from Egypt has been transcribed throughout the entire Platonic and Judeo-Christian tradition, according to Goux, and what has emerged from this transcription is *the* founding fantasy: the active negation of the Mother. Since the beginning of Western patriarchal history, "woman" has been but the passive matter to which "Man" could give form through the ever-increasing spiral of abstract universals: God, Money, Phallus—the infinity of substitution. Goux very carefully delineates the symbolic history of this Idealism: a certain relationship to death and desire, a fear of fusion, prohibition of incest with the Mother, the horror of "nothing to see" (castration), the anxiety of presence and absence, the separation of form and content, spirit and matter, value and exchange. [. . .]
>
> At the end of the nineteenth century, something clearly happened. The temples and statues began to shake and, in particular, two new sciences were born: dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis. According to Goux, it is no accident that each of these sciences posits three parallel phases. In the case of Marxism: 1) the separation of Man from Nature; 2) Man versus Nature; 3) the interaction of Man

> with *another* Nature [. . .] In the case of Freudianism: 1) separation from the Mother; 2) Man versus Woman; 3) reunion with *another* Woman. Goux then emphasizes the fact that the end points in these systems are remarkably similar; they involve, respectively, a reuniting of form with matter (*mater*ialism) and a new relationship to the feminine (but only after castration). For Goux, history has been the history of Man and men, but now we are entering a new historicity. The End of History, the Death of Man: a true *jouissance* as we move beyond the fear of falling back into the original maternal abyss and move toward "a new access to the feminine." This (re)union with the feminine is the end point of History—Utopia—where all images have been banned, God and his correlate the Subject are dead, money no longer circulates, and the Phallus, as the ultimate metaphor in patriarchal culture, collapses into metonymic indifferentiation."[25]

Now Goux is careful to point out that all of this is "neither completely a fiction, nor completely a reality." It is, in a sense, a theoretical fiction, a kind of "exact fantasy" (Adorno), which can help us to think about our (im)pending modes of signification in the West, described by Goux as situated within the "superconscious" and "hypernatural," "nonphallocentric" and "noncentralized" spatiality of (very) late capitalism: "a way of thinking still not conceived of, based in networks, a polynodal and non-representational organization."[26] The historicity we are moving in(to) operates in the realm of a hyper-real space where, as Baudrillard puts it, there is "no longer any God to recognize his own [simulacra and simulation], nor any last judgment to separate true from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance."[27] Subject to fascination with(in) this new space is the "operative subject"—whose traces Goux follows through contemporary art, music, fiction, and science (computer graphics such as those of the "new abstractionists" would seem to be exemplary in this regard). Ultimately, that which most fascinates in this new space is "the sublime," that which directly concerns the *unrepresentable,* that which cannot be contained within any known form of representation.

Other writers have insisted upon this new "pseudospace of the hyper-real" as a new configuration of Western psychical space—a locality, space, located between perception and consciousness. Julia Kristeva has written of our current psychical configuration in the West as one dominated by *melancholia* with its *soleil noir*—"bright light without representation": "As if overwhelmed or destroyed by an overly powerful wave, our symbolic modes have been emptied, quasi-annihilated, petrified. At the edge of the silence emerges the word 'nothing,' a modest response faced with such internal and external, incommensurable, disorder."[28] She links this melancholic imagination of "nothingness" directly to the rhetorical figure of allegory—like Walter Benjamin before her ("Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things"—*Tragic Drama*), while such critics as Craig Owens, Gregory Ulmer, Hal Foster and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in turn link the melancholic gaze of the allegorist to much of postmodern art.[29]

Now this tracing of contemporary variations on the fundamental iconoclastic impulse is of primary interest to us here in terms of the founding gesture of all iconoclasty: again, as Goux puts it, the prohibition to represent would seem to involve a violent, radical rejection of the (representation of the) maternal body at the same time as there is a new intensive exploration of "pregnant matter," of new (feminine) spaces (gynesis).

The work of the photographers in the second dreamscape of this utopian show

would seem to bear that out. But it would also seem that there is another position possible *within* and yet *resistant to* this dominant libidinal economy: that of the third dreamscape, where the relationship to the (maternal) body is (sometimes violently) fragmented, but not abandoned. It seems to be those bodies (primarily) constructed as female (artists) that are resisting, today, what Kristeva has termed "A nothing which is neither the repression nor the simple trace of affect, but which condenses in a *black hole*—as with the invisible and crushing antimatter of the cosmos—the sensorial, sexual, phantasmatic *mal-être* of [today's] abandonnements and deceptions."[30] Head to head with the Death of the Father and body to body with the (still alive) Mother (in themselves?), women photographers (and their male allies?) are directly attempting to re-figure *mater* by first re-figuring themselves.

IV. No Use Pretending

"When logic and proportion have fallen floppy dead,
And the white knight is talking backwards and the red queen's off her head . . ."
Jefferson Airplane
White Rabbit

Alice continued her wanderings, this time through a village in the East. There she found herself stumbling over people who had no home, no place to sleep, or dream. When she asked them who they were, they replied "soup kitchen"—whatever that meant. The deafening sounds of police sirens and street fighting, loud music and yells brought her to wondering about the so-called wonders of art in this land. When suddenly she stopped, dazzled by the bright lights of two very white holes in the wall, side by side, in bright, glittering contrast to the black holes around them. Lots of very chic people were wandering about in silence as if they were in a dream themselves, not quite sure why they were there either. Alice thought it curious that some of them even named themselves after cities—so they'd never feel lost?

In the white hole to the right there was an "American Postmodernist Photographer" showing his wares: words in bright letters arranged in various shapes on the walls. Alice went in and asked what the words meant. "Nothing" she was told.

So she headed straight for the other white hole in the wall. There a "French Deconstructionist Photographer" was offering something which sounded foreign, something like "Sue, get a disgrace zone." There were a series of identical photographs of a rather boring ocean on the wall. The proper names signed under the photographs were in each case different. Alice asked why and was told the photographs form "an ensemble whose proposition may be repeated ad infinitum, and whose originality may [ultimately] be guaranteed only by the signature of the buyer." This questioning of originality and of the subject through the logic of the signature made her think of a great French philosopher known as "Da Reader" but she was told this work had nothing to do with him. Alice went back out into the night and sat down, perplexed, watching the scene. ". . . No use now . . . to pretend to be two people," she thought (Alice, *p. 33).*

This literary critic's recent forays into the wonderland of the New York art world have left her with two strong impressions. First, it is no doubt too simple to blame contemporary artists and their critics for what strikes the outsider immediately: the recent acceleration of art colonization on the lower east side, of the gentrifica-

tion of Soho and other neighborhoods, with the inevitable "displacement of [their] subcultural, racial, and ethnic groups" that entails. Artists and critics are most often no more than "reluctant accomplices" in this process. But, nevertheless, we do know this is a *process,* linked directly to the art market and gallery system and, of course, finally, to the work of the artists themselves through complex lines of power and representation.[31] The refusal on the part of many people I met to make those connections in the late 1980s was a surprise to me. Naive, Alice.

Secondly, I was struck by what seemed to be a direct, unmediated relationship between this refusal of macro-political analysis and an even more vehement refusal of micro-political analysis. I heard "Politics don't belong in art"—as if those otherwise intelligent people saying this had been struck dumb by cultural amnesia. Is it possible I but dreamed the difficult and complex 1970s inversion of "the representation of politics" into "the politics of representation?"

This double refusal was most often articulated in the context of some kind of denunciation of "deconstruction" as "hegemonic," or "only a fashionable term." In tones of "renewed vigor," one hears calls for a "strategic inversion of many of the deconstructive techniques of the past decade or two."[32]

> Following a decade of deconstruction, an art of reintegration and recuperation is beginning to emerge from New York. Weary of taking things apart, American artists in their twenties and thirties are reversing the process to construct works of radical harmony that combine the extreme contradictions of a daily life at once dispirited and hyperactive into seductive hybrids which emanate cold optimism, warm spectacle, sexy critique, and plasticized faith.[33]

Now this (in itself, seductive) dismissal of "deconstruction" has already been gathering steam in the world of literary criticism for some time. For me, this new call has therefore seemed a bit like a replay of something which, however, *hasn't quite happened yet.* This is in part because "deconstruction" is but a (rather unfortunate) label designed in the U.S.A., which has come to designate a vast array of artistic practices ranging from the ridiculous to the sublime (literally)—a bit like "postmodernism" itself ("Alice's encounters with both in "the East" remained closest to the ridiculous.) But another reason the critical artistic *practice* of "deconstruction" has not yet disappeared is because the end of "deconstruction" would mean the end of the analysis of gender, of "otherness"—indeed the end of the psyche/politics/body connection all together. "Deconstruction" is directly linked, through its dialogues with psychoanalysis and philosophy, to the question of sexual and cultural difference and there are plenty of new, young women artists and artists of color out there ("in their twenties and thirties") who are not willing or able to give up the search for new forms of subjectivity (and objectivity) from within the new historicity we find ourselves in(to) now. That is, the artists and critics calling for an end to the self-conscious, radical, critical practice sometimes known as "deconstruction" are very often European white and male.

With regard to photography, when Hal Foster asks, "But rather than invert deconstructive strategies why not develop them?,"[34] one obvious and important answer is the following: "The current political environment, [. . .] does not favor critical practices in any media, and it seems reasonable to predict that the photographic practices that will remain most favored will be those that call the fewest things into question."[35] But another reason is that to *continue* this photo-analysis any further risks bringing the *hegemonic* (white male) *body* and its fantasies directly into focus. And there is a real, tangible *fear* of that. It is much easier to

New York East Village galleries
(303 Gallery and American Fine Arts)
1987
Photograph: Eric T. Michelson

follow passively the geneological movement of Western Iconoclasty to its inevitable, u-topic, anti-body end.

Now, I am not claiming that the artists' works I have considered here unproblematically *reflect* these issues. That is, the photographic works of our third dreamscape, for example, do not necessarily engage in any *direct* critical "deconstruction."[36] But I do think the exhibition as a whole, these works in particular, and the more general movements of which they are all a part, challenge us to a *radical* reconsideration of where we want to go with our relationship to the photographic representation of the human body—inevitably the maternal body. So that the "black hole" of our future dreamscapes will not have to be those already known: from Plato's cave to the maternal abyss; from Bataille's solar anus to Barthes' *stenope*. And least of all Kristeva's *soleil noir*. We need to look again. With (our) others. For the body. To take us into the twenty-first century.

NOTES Special thanks to Richard Ledes, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, and Jane Weinstock for their invaluable assistance in the writing of this article.

1. Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice* (NY: World Publishing Co., 1963), p. 35. All further page references in text. For some interesting speculation on Lewis Carroll, his obsession with photography and Alice Liddell's body (as phallice), see Herman Rapaport, "The Disarticulated Image: Gazing in Wonderland" *Enclitic* 6, no. 2, Fall 1982, pp. 57–77.

2. David Robbins, Exhibition Statement on Gober's show at the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, October 3–28, 1987.
3. Kate Linker, "On Richard Prince's Photographs" in *Arts Magazine* 57, November 1982, p. 122.
4. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Playing in the Fields of the Image" *Afterimage,* Summer 1982.
5. David Salle and James Welling, "Images That Understand Us" in *LAICA Journal,* Fall 1984, p. 43.
6. Hal Foster, "Signs Taken For Wonders" in *Art in America,* June 1986, pp. 86–87.
7. Ibid., pp. 91, 139.
8. Alice Jardine, *Gynesis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
9. Walter Benjamin, "La Photographie," *Poesie et révolution* (Paris: éditions Denoël, 1971), p. 19. My translation.
10. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Sexual Difference: Both Sides of the Camera," in *C.E.P.A. Quarterly,* (Spring/Summer 1987), p. 17. Also see, for an introduction to these issues, the catalogue *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), Kate Linker, Guest Curator and Jane Weinstock, Guest Curator/Film and Video.
11. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 136.
12. Sherrie Levine is one of the more interesting female exceptions to this male hegemony.
13. Obvious and interesting male exceptions to this female hegemony include (at one extreme) Victor Burgin (at another) David Salle, and to be considered here, Jeff Wall.
14. "Alice" quoting Laurie Anderson, *Americans on the Move* in *October,* no. 8, Spring 1979, pp. 45–57.
15. Fredric Jameson, "Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism" from *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business,* The New Museum (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1986), p. 44.
16. Witness Benjamin Buchloh's list of radical deconstructionist artists of the late seventies: Dara Birnbaum, Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, Martha Rosler, Jenny Holzer. Benjamin Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art" *Artforum,* September 1982, pp. 43–56. Buchloh describes the late seventies as an "historical situation in which radical political practice seems to have been restricted to feminist practice."
17. Craig Owens, "Posing" in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality,* The New Museum, 1984, p. 17.

18. "Love After Death: A Renaissance" by Madelaine Douglass in *Vinyl Arts Magazine,* January 1987.
19. Artist Statement, Dorit Cypis, 1985.
20. Jeff Wall, *Transparencies* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 102.
21. Donald B. Kuspit, "Looking Up at Jeff Wall's Modern 'Appassionamento'" in *Artforum,* vol. 20, no. 7, March 1982.
22. Jeff Wall, *Transparencies,* p. 99.
23. David Robbins, op. cit., p. 2.
24. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les Iconoclastes* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).
25. Alice Jardine, *Gynesis,* pp. 32–33.
26. Jean-Joseph Goux, *Economie et Symbolique* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 93.
27. Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Art After Modernism,* ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), p. 257.
28. Julia Kristeva, *Soleil Noir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 231.
29. cf. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" in *Art After Modernism,* ed. Brian Wallis (NY: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), pp. 203–235; Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression" in *Art After Modernism,* pp. 107–134; Hal Foster, "Re:Post" in *Art After Modernism,* pp. 189–201; and Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism:" in *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, Wash: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 83–110. Also see Baudrillard on nihilism and melancholy, "Sur le nihilisme," *Simulacres et simulation* (Paris: Galilée, 1981).
30. Kristeva, op. cit., pp. 99–100.
31. Cf. Hal Foster's "Between Modernism and the Media" in *Recodings* (Seattle, Wash: Bay Press, 1985), p. 35; see also, for example, Craig Owens, "The Problem of Pueril-ism," *Art in America,* Summer 1984, pp. 162–63; and Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification" *October* 31, Winter 1984, pp. 91–111.
32. Ashley Bickerton, Exhibition Statement, Cable Gallery, New York, 1986.
33. David Robbins, op. cit.
34. Hal Foster, "Signs Taken for Wonders," op. cit., p. 139.
35. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Photography After Art Photography," *Art After Modern-ism,* op. cit., p. 85.
36. Although I have wondered about the fact that none of the three artists in the third dreamscape *live* in downtown New York City.