

Material

Uncatalogued



Miscellaneous

David Horvitz



February 15, 2012, Museum of Modern Art, New York

triplecanopy

Miscellaneous Uncatalogued Material: David Horvitz

Under discussion:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Radio Corporation of America, <i>Sir W. Mitchell-Thomson</i>, 1926 Giorgio de Chirico, <i>Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure)</i>, 1914 László Moholy-Nagy, <i>Construction in Enamel 3</i>, 1923

David Horvitz: This is a photoradiogram of Sir W. Mitchell-Thomson by the Radio Corporation of America. 🕒 It was made in 1926, when photographs were first being transmitted through radio waves and telegraph and telephone wires, which, up until that point, only transmitted language. Barriers between spaces seemed to become obsolete as communications began to travel from one place to another almost instantaneously. With photoradiograms, the image of an event could travel as well. 🕒

How does this work? The machine scans the image line by line and encodes it into an electrical signal—like Morse code—then sends it by radio wave to another machine, which reconstructs and prints the image. (This image was scanned in London; Mitchell-Thomson was the postmaster general of the United Kingdom at the time.) The result is a kind of half-tone picture. The photoradiogram machine was a precursor of the fax machine and of what would become the Internet. 🕒

William Smith: It’s easy to imagine Morse code operating in a visual or mimetic rather than symbolic or coded way here, given that the image is actually composed of discrete marks that vary in density to convey areas of light and dark. At the time, people might have compared the photoradiogram to a coarse engraving; to us it looks pixelated. Was the technology developed in a commercial context or a military or government context?

DH: The government consolidated this technology during the First World War, when it took over the radio industry and put a moratorium on patents. Afterward, there was an efflorescence of inventions. RCA was one of the main companies using this kind of technology for consumer applications after the war. Richard Ranger, who worked for RCA, designed the photoradiogram in 1924. The photoradiogram and similar technologies were used by wire services and to send weather information to ships at sea. But the first image transmitted across the Atlantic was of President Calvin Coolidge, sent from New York to London.

Brian Droitcour: When was the first cat picture sent by radio?

DH: I don’t know, but we could find out. 🕒

WS: This photoradiogram is a picture of Mitchell-Thomson, but it might as well depict a LOLcat. The real subject is the image’s own transmission and the technology underlying it. It is a proof of concept. The technology came first; the production of images that needed to be transmitted instantaneously followed.

You say that this image renders barriers between different spaces obsolete through the speed of its transmission. Yet the low resolution of the picture may also represent vast distances as well. The pixelated quality of the image points to an important delay inherent in its production. So while we may view this as a precursor to the Internet, it also makes us aware of the physical dimension of image transmission even at a moment when real-time viewing appears seamless.

DH: This next work is Giorgio de Chirico’s *Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure)*, from 1914. 🕒 We see many symbols of time: a clock tower; a steam engine; the railroad, which led to the standardization of time. The telegraph lines followed the railroad routes and gave birth to wire photos. The shadows in the painting evoke a sundial, which signifies local time, as opposed to the time of industry and commerce. (The part of the sundial that casts the shadow is called the gnomon, meaning “that which reveals” or “interpreter.” We derive the word *know* from the Greek and Latin root; this suggests that to know something is bound to a sense of time and place.) The perspective is contradictory too.

Paul Branca: There are multiple perspectives in this painting, and they don’t correspond. Because of the two perspectival vanishing points—there are at least two—there is another kind of time that must be taken by the viewer to read the perspectival logic, and that enlarges the painting. The smoke from the train is moving slightly to the right even though the wind is moving in the other direction. And the building doesn’t look like Gare Montparnasse. Why is he calling it that?

DH: I see this painting as depicting a moment of upheaval in our notions of space and time and as a setting for the emergence of technologies such as the photoradiogram ten years later. The steam engine enabled us to move faster than the earth’s natural rhythms, like wind and water—now we’re moving against the world. 🕒

WS: What about the bananas in the foreground?

DH: They’re not ripe. They’re not in time. 🕒

DH: Now we’re looking at László Moholy-Nagy’s *Construction in Enamel 3*. The artist called the supervisor of a sign factory and, using graph paper and a color chart, provided instructions on how to make the painting. “It was like playing chess by correspondence,” Moholy-Nagy said.

I’m interested in a fundamental shift in how we make and receive images—documentary images in particular—that occurred in the early twentieth century and has been echoed and amplified with the widespread adoption of the Internet: the ability for one person to depict an event and another to view it nearly simultaneously, thousands of miles away. This is the dawn of a certain kind of technological mediation, which is worth revisiting as we think about how our own experiences are informed and shaped by the transmission of images. 🕒

Unknown speaker: Are you placing a positive or negative value on this changed relationship to images—not just the evolution of communication generally, but the way in which images are transmitted—or just describing it?



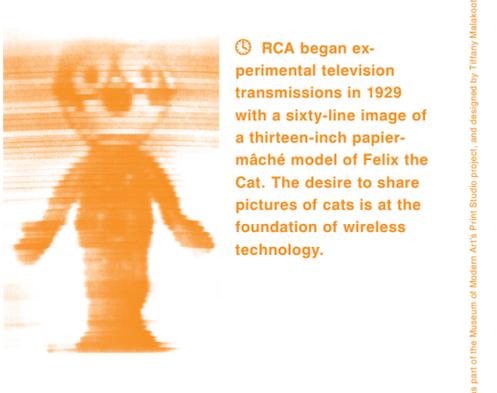
🕒 **Radio Corporation of America, *Sir W. Mitchell-Thomson*, 1926.** Photoradiogram, 4 x 5 1/4" (10.2x 13.3 cm). The New York Times Collection. Copyright the *New York Times*. Image courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art.

Photo of a photoradiogram of Sir W. Mitchell-Thomson by the Radio Corporation of America, 1926.

🕒 “The work of art requires witnesses because it salies forth with its image into the depths of a material time which is also our own. This sharing of duration is automatically defeated by the innovation of photographic instantaneity, for if the instantaneous image pretends to scientific accuracy in its details, the snapshot’s image-freeze or rather *image-time-freeze* invariably distorts the witness’s felt temporality, *that time that is the movement of something created*. ... It is thus now common to think of our memories as multidimensional, of thought as transfer, transport (*metaphora*) in the literal sense.” Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Photo of a photoradiogram of Sir W. Mitchell-Thomson by the Radio Corporation of America, 1926.

🕒 **João Ribas details the fax machine’s small but important role in recent art:** “Artists readily embraced the immediate, graphic, and interactive character of the fax machine, making it an important part of the history of telematic art, nestled between the legacy of Fluxus, mail art and the nascent practices of new media. ... The fax machine allowed for the creation of participatory, bi-directional, and collaborative networks over vast geographical areas in real time. This proliferation of media would serve in effect to reposition the value of artistic production—that is, it would shift the emphasis from the production of objects or pictorial signs to creating systems of exchange and interaction whose primary concern was the structure of communication. Moreover, the fax machine’s specific technological condition allowed for a connectivity of experiential time, a simultaneity between transmission and reception, between producer and audience, that could be made as performative and politicized as it was practical and expedient.” João Ribas, Brett Littman, and Kate Fowle, *FAX* (New York: Drawing Center, 2009).



🕒 **Giorgio de Chirico, *Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure)*, 1914.** Oil on canvas, 55 1/8" x 6' 5/8" (140 x 184.5 cm). Copyright 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; SIAE, Rome.

Photo of Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure) by Giorgio de Chirico, 1914.



🕒 “Rhythm seems natural, spontaneous, with no law other than its unfurling. Yet rhythm always implies a measure. Everywhere where there is rhythm, there is measure, which is to say law, calculated and expected obligation, a project. ... Rhythm appears as regulated

DH: I’m pointing to moments of transition, one of which is illustrated by a film made in 1937 by Chevrolet to show how photographs are transmitted by wire. At that time there was a sense of actively experiencing a moment of profound change. I do think that the loss of one’s sense of self in a particular time and space—the feeling that I am right here—is negative.

AP: It’s interesting that corporations were attempting to educate people about how the technology worked, conditioning them to these changes. Now, very few people think about how digital images are made and disseminated—it’s too complex, but also we’re already conditioned to accept this constant stream of technological advances or updates.

Today it seems obvious that everyone who can will use these technologies: The benefit is clear. But it’s actually fairly difficult to convince people that they need such things, or it was. I’m curious about how people are inculcated with a desire—a common need, even—for these technologies. Early Microsoft and Apple advertisements come to mind. Apple in particular presented the consumer as an almost heroic figure breaking through technological and cultural barriers. In this Chevrolet film, the wire image is clearly a progressive technology. You should understand this if you’re going to be a part of the new world that such technologies are creating.

WS: David, you’re critical of this compression of the time between the capture of an image and its reception, which suggests that reality risks being replaced by representation. But how do you express that sense of loss without being reactionary and while also accounting for the advantages of these technologies? Technologies like the photoradiogram were used to create pseudo-events but also to enhance real journalism. 🕒

DH: To me, it’s more a matter of synchronizing your life to a construction of time and space that has little to do with where you are and what you’re actually experiencing.

Photo of Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure) by Giorgio de Chirico, 1914.

AP: The generic global-village argument would be that one’s sense of place is actually reinforced by a knowledge of it in relation to many other places, and that those two positions—here and elsewhere—are not mutually exclusive and actually enrich each other. The cynical take would be that the creation of a kind of mass consciousness, in which we all share a narrative of time and space, is just a lubricant for mass markets. Magazines like *Time*—the aim of which was literally to present the image of an event happening in one place to the entire world nearly simultaneously—were essential to this process.

BD: But, David, you deal with this tension, especially in relation to digital-image culture, in your own work. On your Twitter account you often tweet things like, “I’m in Providence” or “I’m in Santa Cruz.” These are boring tweets, but they assert the specificity of your location. Twitter is trying to put everyone in the same place at the same time, and you’re just saying, “I’m not there, I’m here.”

DH: I often use Twitter when I’ve just gotten off a plane. I just say, “Los Angeles.” Usually I’m in this headspace of a mental shift. The tweets are telling me something just as much as they’re telling you something. But I have no real intentions or reasons why I type these things.

Peter Russo: You were doing a project last year in which you photographed yourself on beaches in California parks and uploaded the images to the Wikipedia pages for those parks. Are those still up?

DH: Some of them. I photographed the entire coast from the Mexican-American border to Oregon. California’s beaches, unless military property, are all technically public. There has to be public access to all the beaches. I photographed all the sites of public accessibility, placing myself within the image somewhat anonymously—back turned, a shadow, a silhouette, a figure that just happens to be there. I’m standing in the margins of the photograph, irrelevant to the photograph’s central subject.

Many of the photographs were removed because people had noticed the same IP address was uploading multiple images, specifically to the pages of California beaches, and they noticed that each one of them had this guy in it. They were thinking, “What the hell is going on? We’ve got to stop this, this person is messing with Wikipedia.”

Michael Mandiberg: Your body is always in these images. In addition to the beaches you were also photographing memorials and graves, which are markers of passing. 🕒 You’re trying to assert a part of yourself, your physical presence, into this corpus of history. Are you memorializing yourself? Is this a vanity project, a premonition of death?

DH: I hope it’s not read as a vanity project. I’m more interested in presence than in myself. This is the first time death has come up in my work, but you can’t ignore it. We’re all going to die. 🕒

AP: You complained that these technologies make us lose a sense of place, but you’ve used them to assert your presence in a number of places, in a way that’s allowed that presence to multiply. You’re now wherever and whenever you were, everywhere and all the time. Wikipedia allows you to disseminate this presence—or, really, to have other people do that work. Those people become the audience for the work, but also the authors of it.

DH: You can place an image into Wikipedia’s stream and others will circulate it however they see fit. You have no control over where it goes. I recently found a photograph I had uploaded to Wikipedia in an amateur music video that someone had created for a New Order song—one of those videos that are simply slide shows of random images someone found online. The video’s creator had written: “Oh, I had Googled ‘sadness’ and ‘loneliness’ and found all these images, and there was this one image of this figure standing at the beach.”

WS: Moholy-Nagy presented his telephone paintings as a radical critique of authorship, but the object still comes back into the galleries with his name on it. The art system has recuperated his work. Do you think these Wikipedia images are really out of your control once you post them? 🕒

DH: My projects are largely about letting go, not about claiming certain images as my own. Once an image has been broadcast it’s out of my hands; it can be received and reused in an infinite number of ways. The term *broadcast* actually comes from farming—it means “to disperse seeds.”

time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body.” Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life* (London; New York: Continuum, 2004).

🕒 “Ancient times, fitful lights and shadows. All the gods are dead. The knight’s horn. The evening call at the edge of the woods: a city, a square, a harbor, arcades, gardens, an evening party; sadness. Nothing.

“One can count the lines. The soul follows and grows with them. The statue, the meaningless statue had to be erected. The red wall hides all that is mortal of infinity. A sail; gentle ship with tender flanks; little amorous dog. Trains that pass. Enigma. The happiness of the banana tree: luxuriousness of ripe fruit, golden and sweet.”

Giorgio de Chirico, “Meditations of a Painter,” in *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).

Photo of Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure) by Giorgio de Chirico, 1914.

🕒 “It was the photograph that revealed the secret of bird-flight and enabled man to take off.” Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

Photo of Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure) by Giorgio de Chirico, 1914.

🕒 **Wonka**: Now I suppose you all know how ordinary television works. You photograph something and—

Mike: Sure, I do. You photograph something, and then the photograph is split up into millions of tiny pieces, and they go whizzing through the air down to your TV set where they’re all put together again in the right order.

Wonka: So I said to myself, “If they can do it with a photograph, why can’t I do it with a bar of chocolate?” *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, dir. Mel Stuart, 1971.

Photo of Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure) by Giorgio de Chirico, 1914.



🕒 **David Horvitz**, photograph of Marcel Duchamp’s grave in Rouen, France, 2011.

Photo of Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure) by Giorgio de Chirico, 1914.

🕒 “The realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabilities of a given culture. As Klaus Theweleit noted, media are always flight apparatuses into the great beyond. If gravestones stood as symbols at the beginning of culture itself, our media technology can retrieve all gods. The old written laments about ephemerality, which measured no more than distance between writing and sensuality, suddenly fall silent. In our mediascape, immortals have come to exist again.” Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

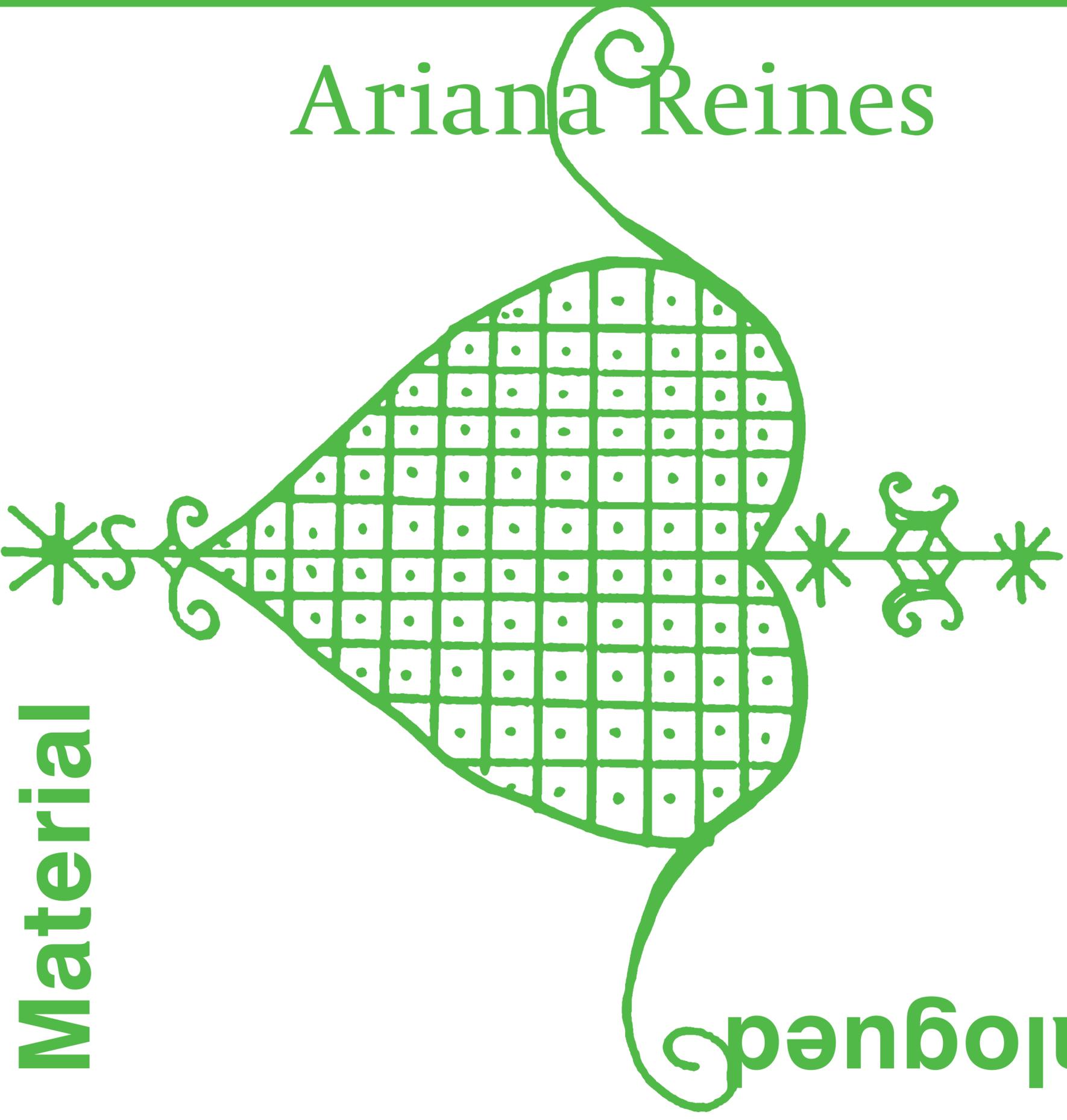
Photo of Gare Montparnasse (The Melancholy of Departure) by Giorgio de Chirico, 1914.

🕒 Noting a “popular suspicion of the archive of high culture, which relies on cataloguing, provenance, and authenticity,” Seth Price asks, “Insofar as there is a popular archive, it does not share this administrative tendency. Suppose an artist were to release the work directly into a system that depends on reproduction and distribution for its sustenance, a model that encourages contamination, borrowing, stealing, and horizontal blur. The art system usually corrals errant works, but how could it recoup thousands of freely circulating paper-backs?” Seth Price, *Dispersion*, 2002—.

Miscellaneous

Uncatalogued

Ariana Reines



Material

March 7, 2012, Museum of Modern Art, New York

triplecanopy

Miscellaneous Uncatalogued Material: Ariana Reines

Under discussion:

- Sherrie Levine, *Gustave Flaubert: “Un cœur simple,” 1990*
- Gustave Flaubert, *Un cœur simple, 1877*

Ariana Reines: When I was invited to participate in this program back in January, I told *Triple Canopy* that I’d like to present an essay in verse on Flaubert’s *Un cœur simple* (A Simple Heart) and that, as part of it, I wanted to try to learn how to do something with my right arm: make the *veve* emblem you have on your handout by sprinkling cornmeal, which is the way that it’s done in Haiti. I wasn’t asked to respond to Sherrie Levine’s Flaubert project. ☞ ■ I proposed to write an essay in verse on *Un cœur simple*, but I hadn’t even read the story. I just thought for some reason, at the time, that it would be an important thing to do. Then it turned out there’s this Sherrie Levine piece. It was more of a psychic or cosmic communication between me and Triple Canopy’s editors than an ordinary editorial or curatorial process, and I want to say that now so that you understand what’s really going on here.

William Smith: And I’ll just try to obfuscate. [*Laughter*]

AR: Yeah! I’m excited to do something that I’ve never done before with all of you tender-hearted people. This specific *veve* goes with the voodoo *loa* Ezili Freda; she’s the goddess of love — she is a bit of a cognate of Venus — but it’s very complicated, and her heart is not a simple one at all. I didn’t learn how to make the emblem with my hand, so instead we’ve printed the image, which I’ve been meditating on in an unintentionally insistent way. What I’m going to do now is read this weird essay, which is repetitive, so you can just relax, you don’t have to worry about paying attention unless you want to. Elements of the plot of the story *Un cœur simple* will come up. Then I’m going to read that entire story aloud in the courtyard, since it’s a nice day. 🗣️

🗣️

AR: It seems like you’re all stunned, in misery.

Lucy Ives: I can ask you a question. Will you take questions?

AR: I will take anything. [*Laughter*]

LI: This is a general question about the way you read Flaubert. Flaubert is an author I have a lot of trouble with because of his obsession with style and creating a work that has a kind of objective integrity. And so, when he famously says things like, “I am Bovary,” for example, I’m left wondering what that means, or how I’m meant to perceive the author within his texts. And I was thinking this morning, as I was rereading this story, there’s a moment where, after Félicité’s nephew has died, the news comes to her, and her head falls back and her eyelids turn pink. It’s a very strange moment. Then, also, when Virginie dies, there’s the description of the corpse: The face sinks and something happens to the eyes. I had an uncanny impression that at these moments of death the body of the author is somehow appearing in the text. So I wanted to ask you about your impression of Flaubert’s presence in his own text, or his relation to his own text as a body. ☞

AR: That’s a beautiful question, and it calls us to be attentive to color in this story. And I don’t mean only the color of the parrot or the pinkness of the eyes; there’s also a blue, almost Krishna blue — and I’m not some kind of weird Hindu-obsessed freak —but at the end, when Félicité is dying and she sees the green parrot before her, there’s also this bizarre blue light, and she inhales it. ➤ Also, the color of the Negro — and that’s how he’s referred to in the translations of the French. (At one point this family moves into the town and they possess a Negro and a parrot.)

To segue into the second part of your question, about those moments of death that also seem to exude or exhale the decrepitude of Flaubert’s own body: I connect those to that part of the story in which Félicité is meditating on the mystery of the Holy Ghost, which is sometimes depicted as a bird, sometimes as a flame, sometimes as a breath. I also think it’s interesting that sometimes the French term is translated as “the Holy Spirit” and sometimes as “the Holy Ghost”; Flaubert was living with the ghost of the Holy Spirit, which was locked up and destroyed. I see the slave, the Negro, who bears the parrot, as the emblem of the Holy Spirit in chains. And through the simple heart of Félicité, I see an effort to seek out the heart of the world, or the Holy Spirit of the world. And I see, well, a Negro carrying a parrot in this little French town. 🗣️ What it means is that the heart of the world is in chains. It’s a pretty simple device.

As the old outcast whom Félicité takes care of, and who camps by the river like a hermit, falls into decrepitude, he gazes at Félicité with amazement — almost the way she would later look at her parrot, Loulou — with this kind of delirious gratitude at the grace and kindness that is being shown to him in spite of everything.

LI: I think it’s interesting to end with delirious gratitude; it’s one of the strangest features of the story.

AR: I led a vision-quest thing in New Mexico a couple of weeks ago called “The Opening of the Mouth”. One of the people there, a brilliant thinker named Nomy Lamm, was writing something and said, “This is my hardest and my softest work.” We all know from history and psychoanalysis that it’s out of our own frailties that everything comes. So Flaubert’s decrepitude, while extreme, is no different from the decrepitude of all writers; we are all rotting and our hearts are necropolises, ♥ and everything that we do, everything that we make in this world, comes out of some kind of loss or mourning or desire. And yet something about what Nomy said made me want to learn how to read with my heart, to subjugate my intelligence or my critical faculty in a way that, perhaps, one is afraid to do when seeking the perfection of style.

In 2004, Levine created a series of small bronze sculptures of parrots, which she named *Loulou*, after the parrot in Flaubert’s story. 🗣️ I wonder if Levine felt she had to cast these parrots in bronze because she was in an art world and market, and a gender moment, where in order to enter this zone of the heart, attempt a soft work, and be taken seriously required the parrots to be cast in bronze. I see *Loulou* as an eloquent failure. I see Levine’s response to Flaubert as utterly of her time.

Christine Smallwood: I’m having trouble with this dichotomy you’re setting up between irony and

☞ Flaubert’s *Un cœur simple* was first published in the 1877 collection *Trois contes* (Three Tales). Sherrie Levine’s *Gustave Flaubert: “Un cœur simple”* is an appropriation of the Flaubert text, printed in one hundred copies on handmade paper, with its own layout and typefaces. The book was published in 1990 on the occasion of the exhibition series *Afinités sélectives*, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts of Brussels. Levine had previously reprinted the novella, word for word, under her own name in *New Observations* magazine in 1985. In 2002, she published “Pathos: Trois Contes,” an essay discussing *Un cœur simple*, in the journal *October*.

🗣️

■ Sherrie Levine, *Gustave Flaubert: “Un cœur simple,” 1990*. Image courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Library.



🗣️ Scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit canopycanopy-canopy.com/podcasts/34 to hear a recording of this conversation in its entirety, including Ariana Reines reading her essay "UN<3SIMPLE."



☞ “As for my ‘lack of convictions,’ alas, convictions smother me. I burst with suppressed anger and indignation. But, in the ideal I have of Art, I think that one must not show one’s own, and that the artist must no more appear in his work than God in his. Man is nothing, the work of art everything. This discipline, which may come from a false point of view, is not easy to follow.” Gustave Flaubert, letter to George Sand, December 31, 1875.

🗣️

➤ “A blue vapor rose in Félicité’s room. She opened her nostrils and inhaled with a mystic sensuousness; then she closed her lids. Her lips smiled. The beats of her heart grew fainter and fainter, and *vaguer*, like a fountain giving out, like an echo dying away;—and when she exhaled her last breath, she thought she saw in the half-opened heavens a gigantic parrot hovering above her head.” Gustave Flaubert, *Un cœur simple, 1877*.

🗣️

🗣️ “At dinner-time, Madame de Larsonnière’s servant called with the parrot, the cage, and the perch and chain and lock. A note from the baroness told Madame Aubain that as her husband had been promoted to a prefecture, they were leaving that night, and she begged her to accept the bird as a remembrance and a token of her esteem.” Flaubert, *Un cœur simple*.

♥ “How many of the dead we have in our hearts! Each of us carries within himself his necropolis.” Flaubert, letter to George Sand, November 12–13, 1866.



🗣️ Sherrie Levine, *Loulou, 2004*.

pathos. My reading of Flaubert has always been that he masters cliché. Cliché is the thing that, I think, bridges irony and pathos. We really genuinely inhabit all of our clichéd thoughts and experiences. And so this dichotomy seems like a straw man to me. The second thing I want to ask: I don’t remember the exact terms of the discussion between Flaubert and Louise Colet about her own work, but I do recall that her one creative work was autobiographical and that Flaubert was quite nasty about it. And so I’m wondering if part of what your essay is doing is recuperating some kind of conversation with Flaubert from a woman’s perspective. Because Flaubert was not—I mean, “*Madame Bovary, c’est moi*” has never really been understood as a *personal* identification.

AR: First, to the irony: I’m actually opposing the perfection of style and pathos. Irony and certain kinds of juxtaposition as elements of style are fine. I don’t have a problem with irony. I’m more concerned with the idea that the perfection of style is everything, as opposed to the pathos of Flaubert’s life or the pathos that this perfect style is meant to express. Flaubert has earned the reputation of being inhuman. He’s seen as this ironist, which is not the way I read him at all. I see the perfection of style in Flaubert as an expression of misery. I see any obsession with fashion as an expression of Occidental misery. The French represent the perfection of this misery. They always have, and they still do. Now this is not to say this misery isn’t elsewhere in the world, but in French culture it’s a jewel, it’s gemlike. The way I read the pathos of Flaubert, as Sherrie Levine very aptly called it—I see the perfection of his style as the utterly perfect expression of total failure, the misery of this culture. 🗣️ It’s a jewel, but it’s miserable—a miserable miracle, to borrow a phrase from Henri Michaux. And for me, reading Flaubert is a delight. When I read him, everything that I suffer just bathes over me like water.

With my essay, I was trying to write effortlessly and unconsciously, in the way that *Un cœur simple* opened itself up to me. What I wrote about my depressed return to New York was meant in some way to parallel the Occidental misery that I feel is exuded by the story. There’s a hardness and softness—the desire to express rage and the possibility to speak softly about my life in a way that Sherrie Levine perhaps could not have done at my age. This is like making lace, but it’s messy lace. Félicité tries to make lace at one point in *Un cœur simple*, but she can’t; her fingers are clumsy and she’s no good at it. She gives up.

Lara Weibgen: You describe Flaubert’s style as this miserable miracle, this jewel, and then you immediately talk about the pleasure of the text. They’re bound together.

AR: They are. They are absolutely one. But *Un cœur simple* exceeds the limits of Flaubert’s psychology, his situation, his personal decrepitude. That’s why I’m trying to open it up—beyond the way in which Levine did so by invoking his personal pathos: “Oh, this poor thing, look how he suffered.” When I read Flaubert I feel like the work is calling through time to my heart. And I think that he, with his one tooth, and his saliva blackened by mercury, his syphilis that he got fucking whores in Egypt, and the fact that he lived with his mother—all of that is there. And yet he’s made something that is a jewel, that is delightful, that hasn’t aged a day, that feels utterly true to my experience. And I feel, as a woman, that Flaubert has a great understanding of what is wrong with our world. 🗣️

To me, Levine is trying to enshrine something that is of the Holy Spirit. She’s accomplished a different kind of miserable miracle, a different kind of stylistic perfection. I think the form of the work says more about gender relations at that time than about the deeper, more universal message of this story. But I’m just going with my vibes on Levine.

Eileen Myles: Well, it’s kind of a feminist camp, male drag. “*Madame Bovary c’est moi*” is a kind of drag. When Rimbaud says, “I am an other” (*Je suis un autre*), that’s a kind of drag. When Sherrie Levine makes the hard harder, as Douglas put it, it’s butch drag—which was possible in the 80s.

AR: Power suit!

EM: Shoulders. A rack.

Douglas E. Martin: I want to ask you to do one alchemical thing. So: gold, bronze, and green.

AR: In alchemy, actually, the green lion is vitriol. The green lion is an epithet for sulfuric acid, for which vitriol is the acronym; it’s Latin, something like, “Visit the interior of yourself and you will find the philosopher’s stone.” There’s the chemical meaning of vitriol and the spiritual meaning. Everything in alchemy is allegory. Vitriol is allegorized in painting by a green lion biting the sun, which is bleeding. By burning through mere appearances — the Hindus would call it the veil of Maya, the world of illusions in which we all live—you can penetrate into the real truth of things. That’s the alchemical green. Why do I know that green is the heart chakra? Because the poet CAConrad was wearing a green shirt one day, and I’d been wanting to learn what those color correspondences are.

Sam Frank: If Flaubert is going in drag, and Sherrie Levine is going in butch drag, what persona are you adapting in your writing?

AR: I’m certainly in a kind of soft drag today. I wanted to attempt a way of thinking about reading that would be embodied. If I’m only willing to speak about the heart of someone else then I’m just a scholar or a steward of something. I wish to read as a poet. The decrepitude of Flaubert’s body did not seem to inflict itself upon his titanic, spotless reputation in literary history, and yet his prose is filled with these little stains — everything has rot on it, or it stinks a little bit. Flaubert isn’t hiding the shit of this world. I’m not saying that we shouldn’t wear clothes, that we should be naked and smear our poop on the walls together, and that that would be truer than sitting here and talking. And yet, I could have given only my feminist, postcolonial reading of Flaubert’s story and not brought up the fact that I miscarried or that love made me want to kill. And maybe that personal part of my essay was boring, and maybe if I had been listening to it I’d have been like, “Shut up!” But that’s also true. There will be things that are useful and things that are not.

EM: My interpretation of what you’re saying is that in doing this soft reading you get burned by the present. You enter the text thoroughly. Flaubert got burned by history, in a way, but now all the shit is gone — he’s Flaubert. How does one accomplish that in the present? I think this is a sort of feminist reading that allows you to enter the text and become invisible through your own magic, if that makes sense to you.

AR: That makes sense to me. 🗣️ ●

🗣️ “In 1849, Flaubert reads his first full-length adult work, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, to his two closest friends. The reading takes four days, at the rate of eight hours per day. After embarrassed consultation, the listeners tell him to throw it on the fire. Flaubert contracts syphilis in Egypt in 1850. Much of his hair falls out; he grows stout. Madame Flaubert, meeting him in Rome the following year, scarcely recognizes her son, and finds that he has become very coarse. Middle age begins here. ‘Scarcely are you born before you begin rotting.’ Over the years all but one of his teeth will fall out; his saliva will be permanently blackened by mercury treatment. ... In later years Flaubert comes to resent the insistent fame of [*Madame Bovary*], which makes others see him as a one-book author. The publication of *A Sentimental Education*, in 1869, is a critical and commercial flop. Of the 150 complimentary copies sent to friends and acquaintances, barely thirty are even acknowledged.” Sherrie Levine, “Pathos: Trois Contes,” *October*, no. 101 (Summer 2002).

🗣️

🗣️ “It is just the account of an obscure life, that of a poor country girl, pious but fervent, discreetly loyal, and tender as new-baked bread. She loves one after the other a man, her mistress’ children, a nephew of hers, an old man whom she nurses, and her parrot. When the parrot dies she has it stuffed, and when she herself comes to die she confuses the parrot with the Holy Ghost. This is not at all ironical as you may suppose, but on the contrary very serious and very sad. I want to move tender hearts to pity and tears, for I am tender-hearted myself. Now surely, no one will accuse me of being inhuman any more.” Flaubert on *Un cœur simple*, letter to Edma Roger des Genettes, June 19, 1876.



🗣️ Scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit canopycanopy-canopy.com/podcasts/35 to hear Ariana Reines read Flaubert’s novella *Un cœur simple* in its entirety.



● *From an email exchange following the discussion at MoMA:*

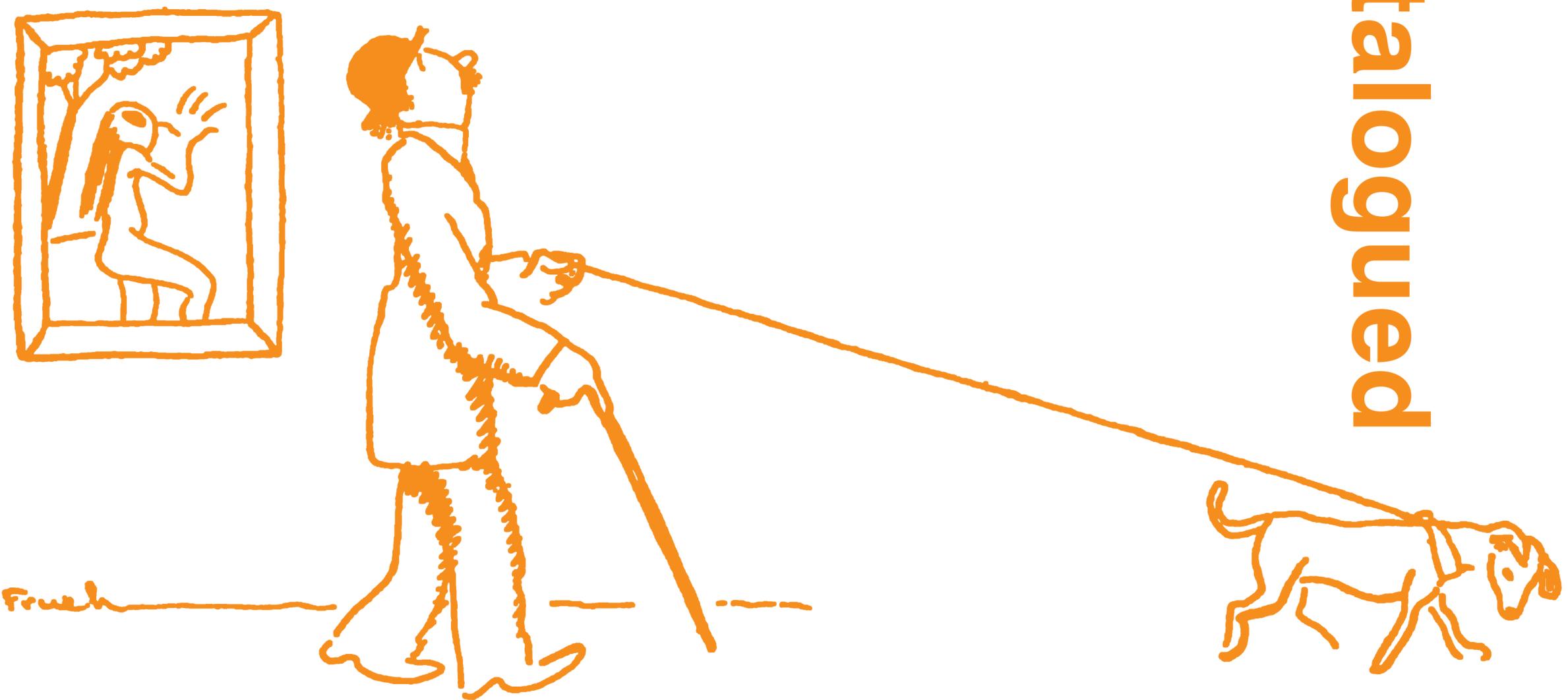
AR: I worry that printing Levine’s bronze parrot in this green ink is too merciful and generous to her work. What is elided in this document, and what is most important, is that Levine ignored the significance of the parrot’s being green, and of color—thus RACE and thereby the entire cruel order of imperialist bourgeoisie—in the story. Color was the crux of the entire thing. I wore green bracelets and referred to Levine getting the black right in the paintings that accompanied the parrots, but failing with the bronze—failing to read Flaubert precisely because of a blindness to color. That’s why I read the entire story aloud. It’s important to me that the critical barb in my soft reading not get disappeared by the wonderful—and marvelously economical—design and layout. My criticism will be clear in the audio, but it has been buffed out of the printed document a little bit too tidily; I fear it becomes reified, through design, into the edifice of Levine’s oeuvre, which would be a mistake.

WS: We probably do need a new line to this effect for the publication, because your critique of Loulou was so enmeshed in your essay. As an aside, I like that the bronze parrot is depicted in green ink. Maybe one of the reasons this seems to challenge your critique is that bronze isn’t necessarily opposed to green. After all, without regular maintenance Levine’s sculptures will eventually become green from the patina; maybe they already have a greenish tinge.

AR: Such a great point about bronze becoming green! Suddenly Douglas’s question about alchemy and vitriol and green is even more poignant. I completely missed the metallurgical valence. Maybe Levine deserves more credit than i’m giving her.

Uncatalogued

Material



Sarah Crowner

Miscellaneous

February 27, 2012, Museum of Modern Art, New York

triplecanopy

Miscellaneous Uncatalogued Material: Sarah Crowner

Under discussion:

- Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Dada Head*, 1920
- Marcel Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Beatrice Wood, *The Blind Man*, 1917

Sarah Crowner: I use art history in my work as a template or, in some cases, a pattern—cutting it up or reorganizing it. I like the idea of using a medium as a medium, something we use to approach ghosts or spirits, something between the living and the dead. ♣ Sherrie Levine has said that if art history has a voice—conscious or unconscious—then her approach is to listen to these voices and invite them to speak again, through a different means. To me, the *means* is an end itself: Art-making is a continual process, a negotiation between past and present, and not necessarily oriented around a final product.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s *Dada Head* from 1920 is a small-scale, polychrome sculpture made from turned wood, which is commonly used in the manufacture of table legs and other furniture. Taeuber-Arp was one of the few women artists in the Zurich Dada scene and was the partner of Hans Arp, with whom she often collaborated. She started her career as a dancer and went on to make abstract paintings, prints, stage sets, marionettes, sculptures, and architectural designs; she embroidered pillows (which she had framed and hung as paintings) and designed costumes.

♣ Like the three other *Dada Head* works that she produced in 1920, Taeuber-Arp identified this work as a portrait; Hans Arp once remarked that the *Dada Head* looks as if it could be used as a hat stand. ♣ The work can be read both ways.

Hannah Whitaker: The choice of the object is really clever: A hat stand is literally a stand-in for a head and so, by definition, can’t actually be a head.

William Smith: The beaded wires dangling from the *Dada Head* seem to gender the object. I know that another *Dada Head*—the one Taeuber-Arp identified as a portrait of Hans Arp—lacks these wires. The wires refer mimetically to earrings, but they may also signify decorative art in general. These materials are an accessory or supplement to the work’s otherwise pure, mechanically produced forms. ♣

SC: Part of the reason I keep returning to Taeuber-Arp’s work, and to other female modernist artists like Lygia Clark and Bridget Riley, is that I’m interested in understanding this connection between female abstractionists and the applied arts. ♣

Unknown speaker: Zurich Dada was a very aggressive, male group. Women did not fit in that well. To me the strength of the piece is in its subtlety. ➤ Its miniaturized scale belies the serious questions that it raises about gender relations in art. It’s lyrical; it’s humorous. Its potential for play is Dada.

SC: There’s something funny about the *Dada Head*. Is it the way it’s painted? Is it the conflation of a human with an object? Is it that it’s potentially useful? Or that being placed on a pedestal negates its usefulness? I’ve been thinking about humor in relation to my own work. Transforming a hard-edged abstract painting into a soft piece of sewn fabric requires a sense of humor—a playful attitude, not irony, as in a critique.

Alexander Provan: Doesn’t a lot of what’s funny in Taeuber-Arp’s sculpture have to do with its specific historical context, which is the tragedy of World War I? What she’s doing is taking an object that is, in some ways, characteristic of Western industrial society and extricating its use value, turning the object against itself. That kind of appropriation was characteristic of Dada; it was a rejection of the highly rationalized, industrialized culture that had been so widely trumpeted but had then led to WWI. ► Obviously, that’s black humor, which complements the pun of the object and its title. But to me that’s always seemed to be the essence of Dada humor: to highlight the absurdity of advanced industrial society and its products.

SC: But the humor is also visceral. Another artist said to me that abstract art could be funny when you insert the body into it. There’s something pathetic about the human body struggling within, for example, an abstract costume designed by Taeuber-Arp.

SC: Now we’re looking at *The Blind Man*, a magazine copublished by Marcel Duchamp, Henri Pierre-Roché, the French novelist who wrote *Jules and Jim*, and Beatrice Wood, a New York Dada artist. ⇨ The first issue was meant to be sort of a press release for the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in Manhattan in 1917, to which Duchamp submitted his urinal. The second issue was a reaction to the exhibition and focused on the rejection of *Fountain*. The issues you’re looking at are actually copies I made as part of a project in 2008; I sold them for the original prices, ten cents and fifteen cents, respectively. ☑ Part of the impetus for doing that project was to question how fine artists use graphic design and the medium of the magazine. Can an artists’ publication double as graphic design in the same way that Taeuber-Arp’s sculpture doubles as a hat stand?

Jenelle Troxell: In many ways, graphic design—or, more specifically, the little magazine—is like a hat stand. *The Blind Man* isn’t a vehicle for distributing formal visual experiments so much as a readymade. ♣ Its two issues exist to promote and justify the fountain, which became legible as it was mediated by and circulated within the particular context of the little magazine. Other Dada and proto-Dada publications of the time—*Rongwrong*, Man Ray’s *TNT* and *Ridgefield Gazook*, and *New York Dada*, the 1921 collaboration between Duchamp and Ray—were similarly short-lived. Publication of *The Blind Man* allegedly ceased after a chess match between Roché and Picabia—Picabia won, and so was permitted to begin publishing 391, while Roché lost, and so had to shut down his magazine. (Duchamp, the chess maestro, opted out of the match, likely because *The Blind Man* wasn’t meant to outlast the Independents exhibition.)

The contributors to such journals regularly read and edited one another’s work and often offered one another financial and literary patronage; they created a rich discursive network, with conversations begun in one little magazine often spilling over onto the pages of others. One of the most notable publications was *The Little Review*, a strong supporter of avant-garde movements started by Margaret Anderson in Chicago in 1914 and published until 1929. Anderson founded *The Little Review* explicitly as a means of instigating conversation and eliminating boredom. ✱ She promoted an “art of response” and regularly closed the journal with a prominent “Reader/Critic” section. Readers

♣ “A ghost had appeared to me. I could hardly have described the site of its workings. Yet it resembled somebody I knew, but who was inaccessible to me.” Walter Benjamin, “A Ghost,” in *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).



♣ Sophie Taeuber-Arp dancing in mask by Marcel Janco, Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 1916.



♣ Sophie Taeuber-Arp, *Dada Head*, 1920. Painted wood with glass beads on wire, 9 1/4" high (23.5 cm). Copyright 2006 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

♣ In one of her few published texts, Taeuber-Arp espoused a theory of craft that was informed by her affiliation with the group *Das Neue Leben* and related to the goals of the Bauhaus. “As a result of the present understanding of mechanical work, craftsmanship has once again regained its true status. We have learned to use ornamentation much more sparingly and to strengthen our sense of proportion. For the past twenty-five years, there has been a growing tendency to move away from ornamentation in general, but this plainness, which we admire so much in machines, ships, and airplanes, is not an end in itself; it can, however, be the best basis for a new style, and the pure form that corresponds to the material should become natural to us. It is up to us to work on this and, at the same time, to educate consumers who influence producers through their taste and knowledge of materials.” Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Blanche Gauchat, *Anleitung zum Unterricht im Zeichnen für textile Berufe*, (Zurich: Gewerbeschule Zurich, 1927).

♣ “Decoration is the specter that haunts modernist painting, and part of the latter’s formal mission is to find ways of using the decorative against itself.” Clement Greenberg, “Milton Avery,” in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

➤ “‘Glory’ and ‘major’ are words that do not quite fit when dealing with Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s achievement, and this may be what is lying at the core of most writers’ embarrassment about it. What if she had found glory and ‘majorness’ repulsive? What if she had seen heroism, in its phallogocentric bravado, as that which her art should try to undercut? (After all, it was under the antimilitarist spell of dada that she emerged as an artist during World War I.) ... What if she had tried to make an effectively ‘minor’ art?” Yves-Alain Bois, “Sophie Taeuber-Arp against Greatness,” in *Inside the Visible*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

► “A key persona of Dada, especially in Zurich and Cologne, is the traumatic mime, and a key strategy of this traumatist is mimetic adaptation, whereby the Dadaist assumes the dire conditions of his time—the armoring of the military body, the fragmenting of the industrial worker, the commodifying of the capitalist

didn’t always deliver, though: Thirteen pages of the September 1916 issue were left blank because readers “didn’t send in the content.”

WS: *The Blind Man* suffered a similar problem: a failed intervention. It had an open editorial policy that echoed the Independents exhibition’s mantra of “No Jury, No Prizes.” The cover features the somewhat-sad plea to “submit your work.” But with few exceptions it’s the same five people writing every article in the magazine. The imagined community didn’t materialize.

JT: It seems like you’re renewing the challenge to have a particularly responsive kind of art, which in turn encourages a response on the part of the viewer—but what kind of response?

SC: I see my work as a conversation with art history. I found out about *The Blind Man* while doing research on Beatrice Wood. Although raised in a wealthy family, she supported herself as a potter in California in the 1930s. She led a fantastically interesting life: She was friends with Duchamp, she knew Picabia, she was close with Edgard Varèse in New York. She later immersed herself in Eastern philosophy and theosophy and became close with Jiddu Krishnamurti. I did a project where I created unglazed, hollow ceramic vessels using the coil technique, which became portraits of Wood’s friends and lovers. I was using clay as a medium to get to her ghosts. Whether through paint or wood or clay or magazines—that’s my way of communing with the ghosts of people like Taeuber-Arp and Wood. For me, the response is the process of making the work, which I hope inserts these figures into a contemporary conversation from which they may have been excluded.

Calvin Rocchio: What’s interesting to me is how you can, through your practice, take this conversation and use it to spatialize histories, integrating references and materials that are external to them, at least temporally, rather than treating them as chains of events. ☉ I think of what you’re doing as spatial-historical diagrams.

SC: With Primary Information, I’m working on an artist’s book, which involves going through a variety of art-historical material from the MoMA Library, focusing in particular on the history of modern dance. I’ve xeroxed these sources, cut them up, painted over them, and silk-screened them. I am juxtaposing seemingly unrelated references in a way that makes sense to me, kind of creating the spatial-historical diagrams you just mentioned. Perhaps I am creating my dream art book using this found material. I’m using the library itself as a medium.

Tiffany Malakooti: But if you represent this in a purely visual manner, even if there’s a depth of research, doesn’t the history tend to become just another surface, a design element? Don’t graphic designers recycle art history like this all the time by employing formerly avant-garde styles, forms, and typography in advertisements?

Peter Russo: I think the formal aspect of the work alludes to the difficulties of working with art historical material in such a way. Take the collages for the Primary Information book: You see the spine of one magazine running horizontally across the top of the page, another spine running along the bottom of the page. Sarah may be flattening the material, but there’s still a lot of friction; she’s not reducing the various media to a single uniform surface.

James Hoff: I think this question becomes more complicated in artists’ books: The book itself is meant to be an art object, but necessarily involves elements of graphic design and typography. Sarah’s collages show a responsiveness to the relationship between these sources and the historical figures who made them. ♣ Through the design elements—the style of the book and its surfaces—Sarah channels the ghosts she has been describing.

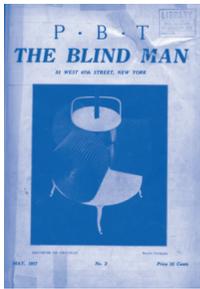
AP: But so much of the meaning of those materials depends on the historical context in which they were originally received—and from which they’re now being removed. Of course there’s value to recovering correspondences between these historical materials, but that inevitably leaves out how they acted on the world beyond this narrowly circumscribed area of art history. Talking about the wonderful interactions between various modernist projects reminds me of how these modernist graphic traditions were considered, employed, and transformed by third world revolutionary magazines like Cuba’s *Tricontinental*, which used avant-garde forms that had been incorporated into American commercial design to combat imperialism and advocate communism. Only by consuming—and then ejecting—these influences could Latin America develop its own form of modernism, one that also incorporated the region’s own histories and traditions. ✓

WS: It’s fairly common these days for artists to undercut modernism’s overblown pretensions. It’s easy to assume an ironic distance to art history and then attack. But you seem fully invested in the historical work that you engage in your practice; there isn’t any condescension towards the past.

SC: No, I love art history, it’s the most fascinating medium. And I’m not a very ironic person.

subject—and inflates them through hyperbole or ‘hypertrophy’ (another Dadaist term). Such buffoonery is a form of parody that Dada made its own.” Hal Foster, “Dada Mime,” *October*, no. 105 (Summer 2003).

⇨ Beatrice Wood was officially named publisher of *The Blind Man* in part because Duchamp and Roché, as foreigners, feared legal repercussions under wartime censorship laws. Wood recalls thinking, “The idea of jail did not bother me; it would be another new and exciting experience.” But a traumatic encounter with her father, who discovered copies of the magazine in his home, convinced Wood to distribute *The Blind Man* by hand rather than through the mail. Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself: The Autobiography of Beatrice Wood* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2006).



☑ Marcel Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Beatrice Wood, *The Blind Man*, 1917. Copyright 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; ADAGP, Paris; Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

♣ “It was parallel, if you wish, but not directly influenced [by Dada]. It wasn’t Dada, but it was in the same spirit without, however, being in the Zurich spirit. Even in typography, we weren’t extremely inventive. In *The Blind Man* it was above all a matter of justifying the ‘Fountain-Urinal.’ Marcel Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne and Marcel Duchamp, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Viking, 1971).

✱ “In the night, I wakened. First precise thought: I know why I’m depressed—nothing inspired is going on. Second: I demand that life be inspired every moment. Third: the only way to guarantee this is to have inspired conversation every moment. Fourth: most people never get so far as conversation: they haven’t the stamina, and there is no time. Fifth: if I had a magazine I could spend my time filling it up with the best conversation the world has to offer. Sixth: marvelous idea—salvation. Seventh: decision to do it. Deep sleep.” Margaret Anderson, *My Thirty Years’ War* (New York: Covici, 1930).

☉ “As an art historian, I am overly familiar with the notion of style, which is another way of imposing space upon time and denying duration under the illusion that successive events are similar events. To spatialize time is a faculty shared both by snails and by historians. ... The one quality of time never noted, is its absolute power to erode and erase identities between actions. These identities are created only by the abstracting mind, engaged in making time tangible by arresting it.” George Kubler, “Style and the Representation of Historical Time,” *Aspen*, nos. 5+6 (1967).

♣ “What is required is a take on style that does not automatically predicate itself on ‘the look of things’ (nor undertake the work of identification and classification that tends to follow) but rather proceeds from the specific mechanisms that connect subjectivities and surfaces in new circuits of production.” Ina Blom, “Questions of Style,” *Artforum*, September 2010.

✓ Cannibalism alone unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically.

The world’s single law. Disguised expression of all individualism, of all collectivisms. Of all religions. Of all peace treaties.

Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question. ...

The spirit refuses to conceive a spirit without a body. Anthropomorphism. Need for the cannibalistic vaccine. To maintain our equilibrium, against meridian religions. And against outside inquisitions. Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto Antropófago” (Cannibal Manifesto), 1928.