Why are images so ambiguous?

IMAGE TO DESTROY, INDESTRUCTIBLE IMAGE

Dario Gamboni

I ONCE TRIED TO EXPRESS THE MUTUAL DEPENDENCE of iconoclasm and iconophily by saying that in the domain of cultural heritage, elimination is the other side of preservation, and that the history of iconoclasm accompanies that of art like a shadow, bearing witness to its substance and weight.[1] This exhibition shows that the two are not only inseparable but also sometimes indistinguishable. Attempts to get rid of a specific image or of images at large almost invariably lead to a proliferation of new images. The gesture of aggression itself, in retrospect or seen from a different perspective, can reveal itself to be a gesture of reverence – and vice versa.

This ambiguity was wittingly exploited in 1895 by an anonymous Argentinean caricaturist.[2] A painting exhibited at the Salón del Ateneo in Buenos Aires illustrated the miraculous origin of the sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Luján: gauchos and peasants are shown praying before the statue of the Virgin which, while being transported, has manifested its will to remain and be worshiped on this spot. In the cartoon, a few of them, labeled "atheists," are threatening the statue with their clubs and a raised fist. One could argue that the cartoonist has merely taken advantage of the relative ambiguity of the figures' gestures and attitudes to mock a superstitious legend or its choice as subject matter for a genre picture claiming the status of historical painting. But the irony goes deeper. The statue of the story is an active object that imposes its will upon the humans who are carrying it. The naturalist idiom of the painting, however, fails to convey this potency, and thus enables the caricature to revert to a rationalist distribution of agency: the humans are about to smash a piece of inanimate matter.

Jasper Johns brilliantly incorporated a comparable ambivalence within a single work of art in his 1961 *Painting Bitten by a Man*. The painting shows the imprint of a human mouth and teeth. It appears therefore to have been attacked and, in relation to other works by the artist depicting art critics as predators, one can interpret this attack as a metaphor of the spectator's gaze. The picture is here an innocent and impotent victim, unable to defend itself against the consumption to which it is destined. However, since the work is not in a vandalized state and the title is original, a suspicion must arise: whose teeth are these? Most probably the painter's, who at the very least anticipated the spectator's predatory gaze and

Augusto Ballerini / Miraculous Origin of Our Lady of Luján in the year 1630 / 1895 / oil on canvas / 25.8 x 40" / Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires

Anonymous / The Atheists / caricature after Ballerini's »Miraculous Origin of Our Lady of Luján« / published in Buenos Aires, 30, 27 October 1895

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_ I thank Laura Malosetti Costa for having brought these images to my attention.

BILDER FEHLEN NOCH

_ Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, Reaktion Books/Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1997, p. 336. I allow myself to refer the reader to this book for bibliographic references and further details about many of the cases and problems discussed in this essay. The following notes will be essentially restricted to the sources of quotations.

Jasper Johns / Painting Bitten by a Man / 1961 / encaustic on canvas, mounted on printing plate / 9.5 x 7" / Jasper Johns / © 2002 VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

made it a condition of the painting's completion. Only through this mark does the relatively undifferentiated surface come alive, animated by the capacity to have triggered someone to bite into it *à pleine pâte*.

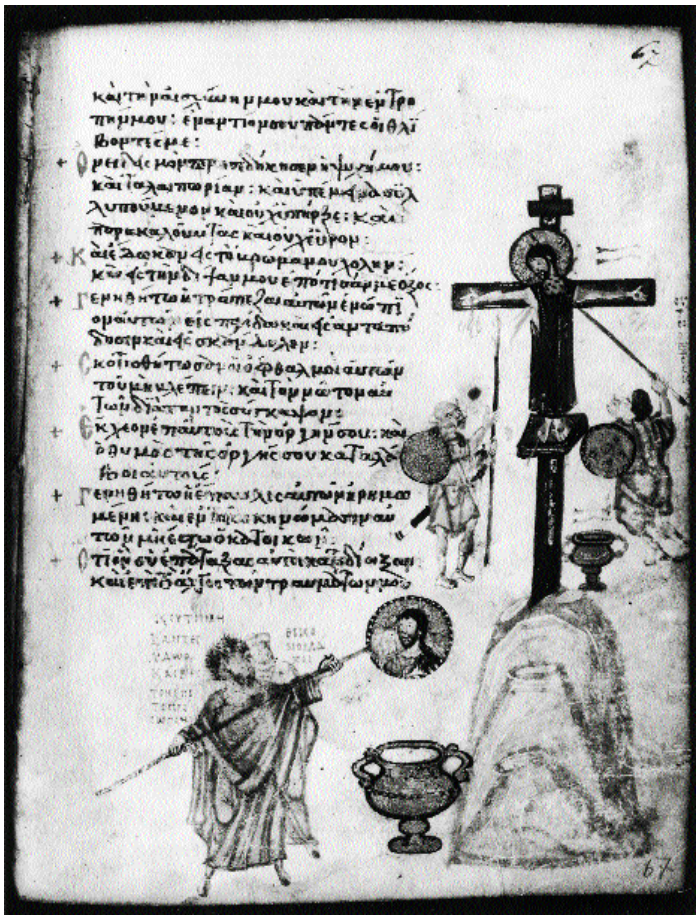
A third and last example brings us into the realm of popular culture and the museum industry. No one seems to have taken Mel Smith's 1997 long-feature film *Bean* seriously, but the choice and treatment of iconoclasm as the key element of its plot is most revealing. The scene in which Rowan Atkinson destroys James McNeill Whistler's *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother* (1871, Musée d' Orsay, Paris) belongs to the tradition of slapstick comedy, in which objects refuse to obey humans and hold them up to ridicule. Bean, merely interested in the picture's frame, removes dust from it, then sneezes, and irreparably ruins the painting by trying to undo each step of the escalation. His consummate awkwardness is matched by an exhilarating skill in the scene where he doctors a reproduction to substitute it for the original. The painting is exhibited in such a way and to such an audience that no one notices that it is a replacement, and Bean's unintentional assault shows no less respect than the unashamed political and commercial exploitation of "Whistler's Mother" by its new Californian owners. The original, on which Bean has drawn a new, grotesque head, eventually finds its way into his private home.

Ambiguity and ambivalence, however, are not identity, and the recurrence of several traits in phenomena separated by time and place does not mean that there exists a timeless grammar of iconoclasm and iconophily. What follows is clearly predicated upon the gradual emergence in the West, from the Renaissance and especially the eighteenth century onwards, of a specific domain of art, distinct and independent from religion, politics, and science. Major iconoclastic episodes like those of the Reformation, the French Revolution, and the Third Reich, contributed to the exclusion from the

Bean / director: Mel Smith / 1997 / color / 90 min / film stills / title role: Rowan Atkinson / © PolyGram

realm of art of images fulfilling extrinsic functions, prone to be attacked because of these functions, while damaging or destroying a work of art as such was deemed uncivilized. The Argentinean caricature showed that painting could not claim to manifest the sacred or to edify its public any more, and the iconoclast Bean could only be a clown. On the other hand, the ideology of progress saw the *tabula rasa* as a prerequisite for the construction of a new purified world. In art, the criticism of tradition and conventions led to the metaphorical "iconoclasm" of the avant-garde, which became a tradition in its own right while prompting an anti-modernist "vandalism" acting in the name of art. Who has bitten John's painting, the artist in revolt against his inherited medium, or the spectator outraged by one more monochrome? Finally, the growing importance of the uniqueness of the work of art as a material object, the visibility of its value and the measures taken to protect it have increased the tension between the desire to appropriate it and the interest of its preservation – a tension that Bean can again illustrate.

Chludov Psalter / mid-nineteenth century / cod. 129, fol. 67 / comparison of the effacement of an image of Christ with the Crucifixion / State Historical Museum, Chludar Collection, Moscow



The following essay examines the ambivalence of iconoclasm and iconophily in this chronological frame and in relation to specific parts of the present exhibition, focusing on representations of iconoclasm, the fate of political monuments (especially those from Communist regimes after 1989) and the relationship between avant-garde „iconoclasm" and "vandalism." I will then discuss the typology proposed by Bruno Latour and turn to the issue of representation in nineteenth and twentieth century art in connection with religion and science.

Representations of Iconoclasm

Images of iconoclasm are always reflections upon it. They propose an interpretation of iconoclastic actions, attribute motives to their perpetrators, and more or less explicitly pass judgment on them. Since the authors of such representations tend to be professionally involved in the production of images or works of art, one is not surprised to find out that they often take sides against iconoclasm. But this is not always the case: the authors may have been converted to iconoclasm, or they may belong to a different party or category than the craftspeople or artists under attack. In any case, their visual statements arise from a situation of crisis and contribute to a controversy.

Erhard Schön / Klagrede der verfolgten Götzen und Tempelbilder
[Complaint of the Persecuted Idols and Temple Images] / c. 1530 / woodcut / 5 x 14" / Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nurenberg

At the end of the eighth to mid-ninth century Byzantine "Quarrel of the Images," the illuminator of the Chludov Psalter compared the effacement of a painted image of Christ by means of a sponge with the Crucifixion itself. The iconoclasts, whose arguments we know only through those of their victorious opponents, did not mean to attack Christ through his images. But they objected to the cult use of images, as well as to the wealth and power that the Church derived from them, and they criticized the equation of image and prototype that this illumination precisely suggests.[3] During the Reformation, in which it is the iconoclasts who won, a pamphlet defended the images in an opposite way, by showing them as innocent and powerless productions of man. In the pamphet's text, the images complain that they are being attacked by the same people who had turned them into idols in the first place. The engraving, by Erhard Schön, compares the destruction of church paintings and statues with the Biblical parable (represented in the upper right corner) in which a man objects to the straw in his neighbor's eye but is unaware of the beam in his own. Schön adopts Luther's stance, according to which the images are neither good nor bad in themselves but depend on the use to which they are put and the words employed to interpret them. It is a position described by Werner Hofmann

E. Le Sueur / Vandalist. Destroyer of the Productions of the Arts / c. 1806 / gouache / 14 x 21" / Musée Carnavalet, Paris / © Musées de la Ville des Paris by SPADEM

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_ Jean Wirth, Soll man Bilder anbeten? Theorien zum Bilderkult bis zum Konzil von Trient, in *Bildersturm: Wahnsinn oder Gottes Wille?*, Cécile Dupeux, Peter Jezler and Jean Wirth (eds), exhib. cat. Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern, Musée de l'Œuvre Notre-Dame, Strasbourg, NZZ Buch-Verlag, Zurich, 2000, pp. 28-37.

H. Baron / The Breaker of Images / etched on steel by L. Massard / 6 x 4" /
in Augustin Challamel and Wilhelm Ténint, »Les Français sous la Révolution«, Paris, 1843 /
private collection

Francisco de Goya / No sabe lo que hace [He doesn't
Know What He's Doing] / c. 1814–17 / brush, gray and
black wash / 10.6 x 7" / Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche
Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin /
© photo: Jörg P. Anders

as liberating art and founding the modern aesthetics of the beholder[4] – and one can indeed compare the beam projecting from the rich man's eye with the mouth carved into Jasper Johns's painting.

During the French Revolution, coats of arms, statues, paintings, monuments, and buildings came under attack as symbols and instruments of the patrons who had commissioned them and whom they directly or indirectly represented: the king, the nobility, and the Church. They were first assaulted as surrogate targets, then in order to visualize the fall of the Ancien Régime, after which the remaining ones tended to be perceived as an "offense" to "republican eyes." Their defenders had to reinterpret them as historical monuments and works of art, essential to the identity of the nation and of mankind. They created the notion of cultural heritage and coined the terms "vandal" and "vandalism" to exclude those who continued to attack such objects from the civilized community and to banish their actions from the domain of enlightened, rational behavior. Le Sueur's *vandaliste*, desultorily leaning against the statue he has broken, looks relatively meek but is labeled a "destroyer of the productions of the Arts." In Lafontaine's drawing, the heroic gesture of Alexandre Lenoir – creator of the Musée des Monuments Français – in an attempt to protect the royal tombs of Saint-Denis is contrasted with the confused fury of the *sans-culottes*, who are ready to turn their hammers against him. This image remained attached to the Revolution and in an engraving published under the July monarchy, the gross appearance of a "breaker of images" and the feminine, politically inoffensive character of the sculpture he is about to deface present revolutionary "vandalism" as a sort of rape, a revolt of the lowly against beauty rather than tyranny. The art historian Louis Réau would extend this view to the interpretation of any damage done to art, defining vandalism as "Caliban's revenge," writing: "Inferior beings, conscious of their inferiority, instinctively hate all that exceeds them."[5]

A more profound view is expressed in a drawing by Goya. The man holding a pickaxe and pointing to the bust he has just smashed is balanced precariously on a ladder with his eyes shut. The inscription makes the meaning of this pose clear: "He doesn't know what he's doing." The drawing alludes perhaps to the anti-parliamentary violence that took place in Madrid on Ferdinando VII's return from France in 1814, and Goya may imply that those who participated in these events were acting blindly and didn't understand they were hurting themselves. But his use of iconoclasm as a

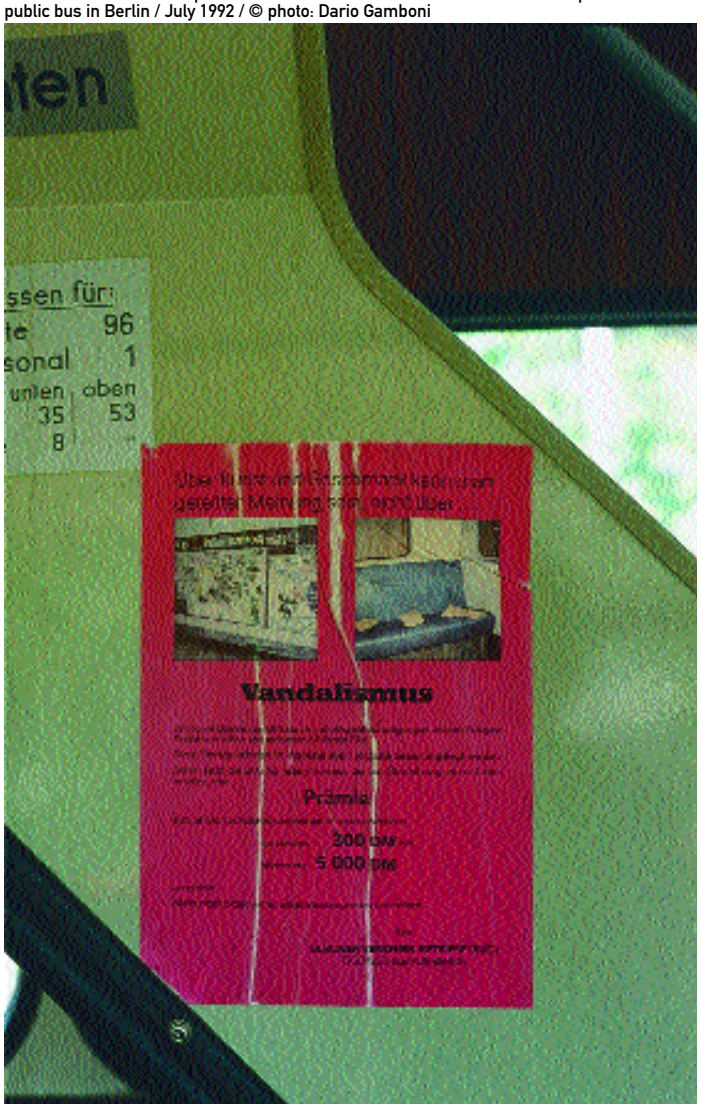
P.-J. Lafontaine / Alexandre Lenoir Opposing the Destruction of the Royal Tombs in the Church of St Denis / 1793 / drawing / 9 x 8" / Musée Carnavalet, Paris / © Musées de la Ville des Paris by SPADEM

4 _ Werner Hofmann, Die Geburt der Moderne aus dem Geist der Religion, in *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst*, W. Hofmann (ed.), exhib. cat. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Prestel, Munich, 1983, pp. 46-51.

5 _ Louis Réau, *Histoire du vandalisme. Les monuments détruits de l'art français*, Robert Laffont, Paris, 1994 (first edition 1959), p. 14 ("Les êtres inférieurs, et qui ont conscience de leur infériorité, haïssent instinctivement tout ce qui les dépasse.")

Sergio von Helder beating a statue of Nossa Senhora Aparecida on television (Recording), 12 October 1995

»One can have different opinions about art and taste, not about vandalism« / poster in a public bus in Berlin / July 1992 / © photo: Dario Gamboni



political metaphor is telling, and in its visual complexity and effectiveness, the drawing goes beyond the occasion of its creation and raises some of the central questions of our exhibition: does the iconoclast's weapon rebound and make him fall on the ground like his victim? Shouldn't he open his eyes and suspend the gesture of destruction?

A consensus was progressively built in the West around the condemnation of "vandalism" that Réau expressed in his brutally revealing way. It is typical of its logic that the same term was used to refer to attacks against works of art and to apparently unmotivated damage caused to any kind of public or private property: as a poster glued in the Berlin buses argued in 1992: "One can be of different opinions about art and taste, not about vandalism." However, as far as art and cultural heritage are concerned, a certain amount of unease and dissent never totally disappeared, fed by spectacular increases in financial value and physical protection. The attribution of resources to their preservation could be resented as an expression of materialism and passé-ism, privileging objects over human life, tradition over living experience. This is a point that a cartoonist made during World War I, describing as an "ante-bellum tragedy" the condemnation of a young boy for breathing on the glass of a show-case containing Egyptian mummies in the British Museum; released after a life of hard labor, he blows his last breath on the same

show-case and is found dead by an indignant guard. It can be argued that among the many factors involved in the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 was the importance of the statues as part of the "world heritage" for the international community, which had refused to politically recognize the Taliban. In addition to the iconoclastic argument that the statues were "mere stones," they did not fail to contrast the outrage provoked by the destruction with an alleged lack of international concern about the plight of the Afghan population.[6]

The Fate of Political Monuments

The argument that the Taliban put forward, nevertheless, was a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. Religious motives do play a role in some recent iconoclastic episodes, like the bizarre assault on the patron saint of Brazil, Nossa Senhora Aparecida, performed on television in 1995 by a minister of the Universal Church of the Reign of God, a controversial Protestant sect, or the more sinister destruction by Hindu militants of the Babri Mosque in 1992, after which a week of rioting followed in which over a thousand people died in India. But more than ever, these motives are combined with political and economic ones, especially given the importance of "ethnic" identity issues in recent conflicts. In more secularized societies, the importance of religious iconoclasm has declined together with that of religious art, and aesthetic considerations have also come to the fore in this domain.

The growing autonomy of art weakened the position of genres such as church art, which remained dependent on commission, function, audience, and was submitted to the control of ecclesiastical authority.[7] In the course of the twentieth century, the modernization of taste and liturgy led to the elimination of nineteenth century realizations, considered guilty of historicism, academicism, and industrialization. On the other hand, attempts at reconciling the Church with artistic

Henry Mayo Bateman / The Boy who Breathed on the Glass in the British Museum / 1916 / drawing from Punch / reprinted in Bateman. A Book of Drawings. New York, 1921

THE BOY WHO BREATHED ON THE GLASS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM
An Ante-Bellum Tragedy

6 _ See the contributions by Pierre Centlivres and Jean-Michel Frodon in the present catalog, as well as Dario Gamboni, World Heritage: Shield or Target?, in *Conservation: The Getty Conservation Institute Newsletter*, 16, 2, 2001, pp. 5-11.

7 _ Olivier Christin and Dario Gamboni (eds), *Crises de l'image religieuse / Krisen religiöser Kunst*, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, 2000.

On ne se moque pas de Dieu [One Doesn't Mock God!] / pamphlet / issued in Angers / 1951 / reproduced in L'Art Sacré, 9-10 May-June 1952
left: Germaine Richier / Christ de l'Autel [The Christ of Assy] / crucifix for the main altar of the church of Assy / 1950 / bronze / height 73"


ON NE SE MOQUE PAS DE DIEU!

Christ de l'autel d'Assy, par G. Richier

Le Christ ? NON !
Un scandale pour la piété chrétienne !

Image du Christ vénérée à Limpias

Il faut proscrire des églises toutes ces déformations et ces déformations de la figure humaine qui n'arrêtent même pas l'image du Christ, de la Vierge et des Saints et qui deviennent par conséquent des blasphèmes visuels.
Cardinal Celso COSTANTINI.
(Observatore Romano du 13 fév. 1950.)

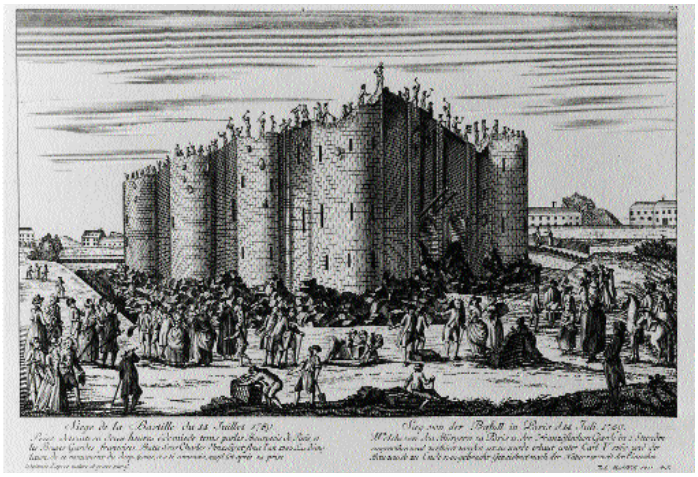
Seigneur, nous vous aimons !

L'église d'ASSY

Une curieuse propagande se poursuit en France et à l'étranger en faveur de l'église d'Assy (Haute-Savoie). Décorée par des artistes (??) athées qui prétendent renouveler l'Art Chrétien, elle est une insulte à la majesté de Dieu et un scandale pour la piété chrétienne. Le bon sens lui-même se révolte !

religious art with faith itself. These controversies were sometimes defined as a new "Quarrel of Images," although they had more to do with the form of images than with the principle of their use. But the difficulty of reaching a consensus on representations did lead to the adoption of aniconic solutions such as abstract art and an often destructive "purification" of churches supported by the Second Vatican Council.

Johann Martin Will / The Demolition of the Bastille, 14 July 1789, Paris / 1789 / engraving / 14 x 18.6" / Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, Vienna / © Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, Vienna



The French Revolution shows very well how the elimination of material symbols tends to be accompanied by a proliferation of new ones. The demolition of the Bastille was advertised as the destruction of a "symbol of despotism" all over Europe. The private entrepreneur in charge of it even produced profane relics representing the fortress, allegedly out of bits of the walls, to commemorate its fall. The troubled times that followed did not allow the more ambitious plans for the erection of symbols of the Revolution to be realized. As in the case of church art, the artistic status of political commissions decreased, while attacks against monuments tended to lose all political legitimacy, particularly when they came "from below." On 16 May 1871, the Colonne Vendôme was pulled down by the Paris Commune as a "symbol of tyranny and militarism," possibly also as a substitute for military victories in its struggle with the Versailles government. The column had been made from the bronze of German cannons, erected by Napoleon I on the site previously occupied by a royal statue, and refurnished with an effigy of the Emperor by his nephew Napoleon III. Photographs by Bruno Braquehais convey a sense of the collective emotions at stake. Courbet, who had pleaded earlier for the "screwing off" of the column, was condemned by the government of the Third Republic to pay for its reconstruction. Caricaturists tended to relate the episode with the painter's public persona and his work, for instance by borrowing an iconoclast's hammer from his 1849 *The Stone Breakers*. But Courbet himself argued that the monument was of low aesthetic value and although he was repeatedly hailed as an anti-traditionalist "iconoclast" in art, no one proposed to see in a positive light the responsibility he may have had in this literal destruction.

This evolution led Martin Warnke to conclude in 1973, in his introduction to a collection of essays on the history of iconoclasm, that it was a thing of the past and could only survive in the Third World.[8] But this view was challenged when, with the crumbling of the Communist regimes in

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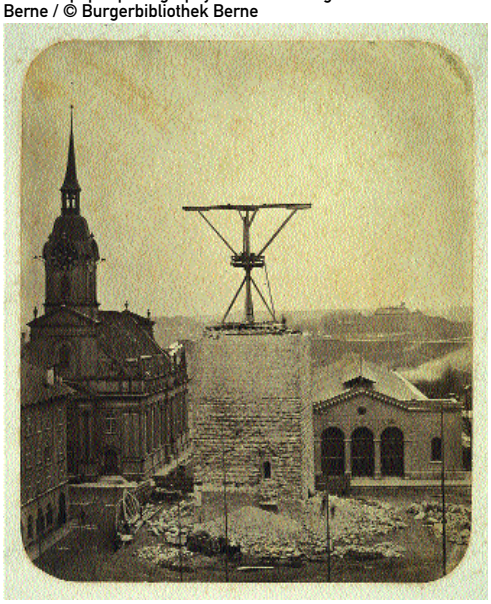
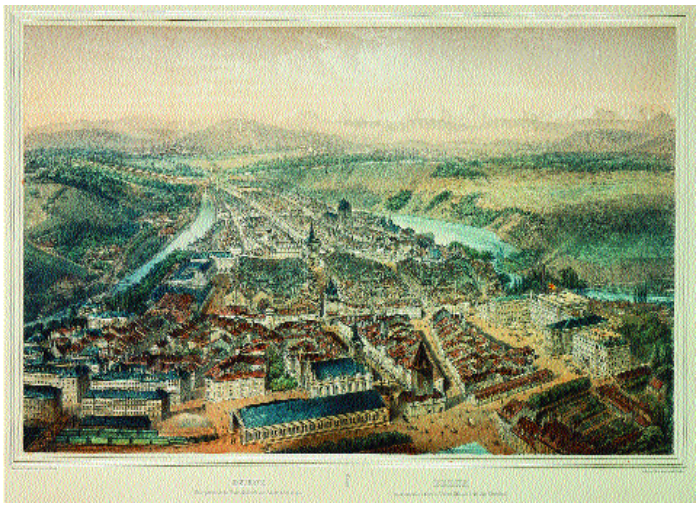
_ Martin Warnke, Bilderstürme, in *Bildersturm: Die Zerstörung des Kunstwerks*, M. Warnke (ed.), Syndikat, Frankfurt/M., 1977, pp. 7-13.

Demolition of the Christoffel Tower in Berne, spring 1865 / albumin paper photography / 9 x 6.6" / Burgerbibliothek Berne / © Burgerbibliothek Berne



Christoffel Tower in Berne / c. 1860-1865 / photography, black-and-white / Bernisches Historisches Museum, Berne / © photo: Stefan Rebsamen, Bernisches Historisches Museum

Demolition of the Christoffel Tower in Berne / albumin paper photography / Bernisches Historisches Museum, Berne / © photo: Stefan Rebsamen, Bernisches Historisches Museum



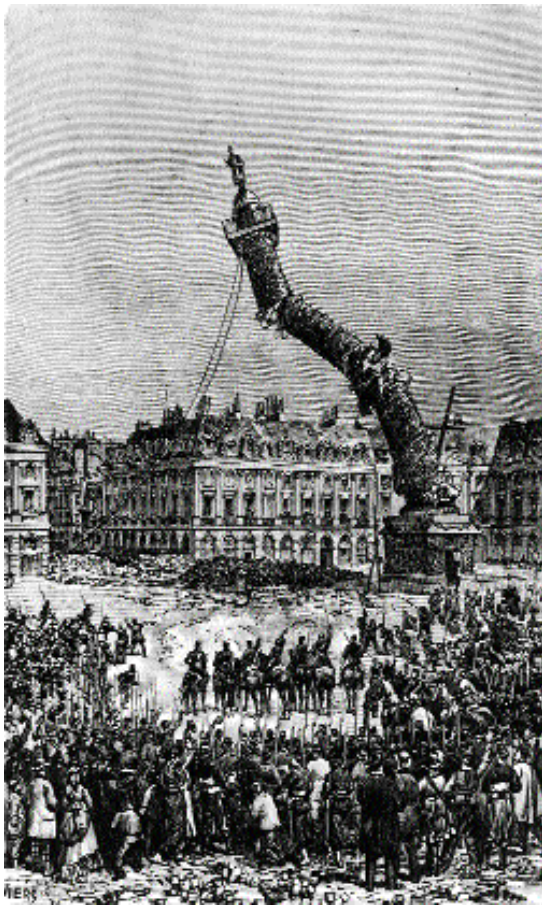
Fichot / Berne seen from the Goliath Tower / c. 1860 / Lithographie / 20 x 26" / Bernisches Historisches Museum, Berne / © photo: Stefan Rebsamen, Bernisches Historisches Museum

Feet of the Christoffel figure / fragment of the figure once placed at the Christoffel Tower, Berne / 1498 / 13 x 22 x 27" (right foot), 14 x 20 x 30" (left foot) / Bernisches Historisches Museum, Berne / © photo: Stefan Rebsamen, Bernisches Historisches Museum

Central and Eastern Europe, the monuments erected under their rule came under attack. The coincidence of the fall of the Berlin Wall with the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution made a comparison inevitable. Like the Bastille, the Wall was destroyed (almost) entirely, although in a less organized fashion, and it was turned more systematically into relics and souvenirs. Images of the removal or destruction of monuments proved the most dramatic and efficient visualization of the political transformations of which they were a part, and it has been argued that in some cases at least, their appeal for the mass media was one of the reasons why they took place.

To a large extent, this late twentieth century iconoclastic wave derived from the role that the personality cult and visual propaganda had played in the Soviet Union and its zone of influence. Far from the relative autonomy – and, according to some critics, irrelevance – that it enjoyed in the West, the art of "Socialist Realism" had been subjected to strict controls as a means of mass communication and it was a crucial part of the political fabric. The French cartoonist Serguei took

Léonce Schérer / cartoon / from Souvenirs de la Commune, 4 August 1871 / reprinted in Charles Léger, Courbet selon les caricatures et les images, Paris, 1920, p. 101



D. Vierge / The Fall of the Vendôme Column, Paris 16 May 1871 / wood engraving by F. Méaulle / 8 x 5" / published in Victor Hugo, L'année terrible, Paris, 1874

Demolition of a portion of the Berlin wall after 9 November 1989 / © Pavel Sima, courtesy Skowronski & Szelinski Verlag, Berlin

Fragments of the Berlin Wall sold as souvenirs at the Mauermuseum Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, Berlin / 1992 / © photo Dario Gamboni

advantage of this when he compared Mikhail Gorbachev's admission that the Soviet federation was a myth with a self-defeating act of iconoclasm in which the cracks inflicted upon the "superstructure" extend into the "infrastructure." A few weeks later, the First Secretary of the Communist Party had to sign a decree "on stopping the defacing of monuments that are linked to the state and its symbols."

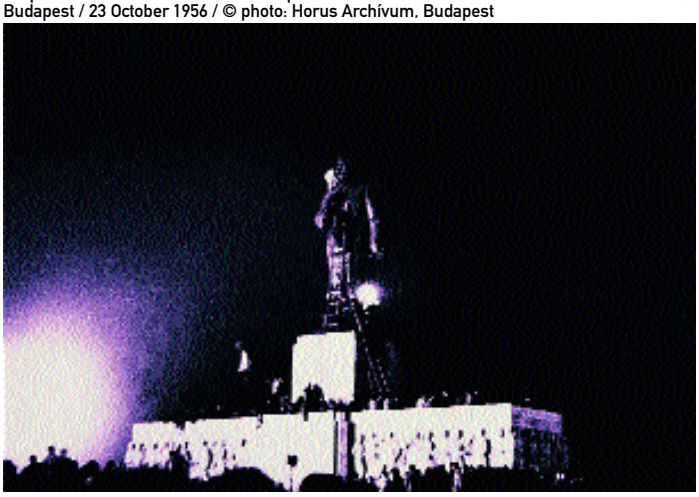
Some removals or destructions of monuments happened more or less spontaneously, as had been the case in 1956 in Budapest when the Revolution began with the pulling down of the statue of Stalin. Some received the half-hearted support of transitional authorities, and others were entirely planned and executed "from above" like the laborious removal of the most important Communist statue in Berlin – Nicolai Tomsky's 1970 monument to Lenin. The controversies surrounding its fate and the wealth of images it generated are good examples of the dynamics of iconoclasm. Opponents to the removal protested against the "violence" and argued that it amounted to a "cleansing action against dissenters" and an "elimination of history." After it was over, Lenin Square – renamed United Nations Square – became a sort of mourning place for the lost monument, its memory kept alive by stencil silhouettes and inscriptions denouncing the "iconoclasts" sprayed on the empty pedestal. Small posters were glued to the poles that used to carry flags, carrying pictures of the statue, which, in their turn, became targets of attack.

The End of Communism – And Now? / Die Zeit, 29 December 1989

While curators of monuments warned that the removal of the Lenin monument would provoke a visual collapse of

Serguei / cartoon / published in Le Monde, 21 September 1990

Preparations for the removal from its pedestal of Sándor Mikus's 1950-51 Stalin Monument, Budapest / 23 October 1956 / © photo: Horus Archívum, Budapest



the square for which it had been designed, no one defended it as a work of art. The elimination of Socialist Realism from public view was often justified with the argument that it had been a "non-art" exerting a "daily deformation of taste." [9] Given the development of the idea of the autonomy of art since the French Revolution, the reinterpretation of Communist monuments (and paintings) in terms of artistic and even historical heritage proved more difficult than it had been for those of the Ancien Régime. Musealization has been relatively slow and limited. "Statue parks" have been created in several cities, in order to remove monuments from their usual, often central locations, and to allow their preservation and a possible relocation. Revealingly, they sometimes display statues in a lying position or in a damaged state, as if to commemorate their fall and make clear that they are meant to document an era and not to be revered. Separated from their original context and function, the statues become available, ready to be

Nicolai Tomsky / Lenin monument / 1970 / with inscription protesting against its imminent removal / Leninplatz, Berlin-Friedrichshain, 1991 / © photo: Landesbildstelle Berlin

Platz der Vereinten Nationen [United Nations Square, formerly the Leninplatz] / July 1992 / with two sprayed stencil silhouettes of Tomski's Lenin monument and of the Television Tower / © photo: Dario Gamboni

Platz der Vereinten Nationen [United Nations Square, formerly the Leninplatz] / July 1992 / with the edge of the plinth of Tomski's Lenin monument carrying the inscription »Against Iconoclasts« / © photo Dario Gamboni

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_ Paul Stoop, Die lästigen Zeugnisse. Kontroverse Debatte um die Denkmäler im Osten Berlins, in *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 October 1990.

Platz der Vereinten Nationen [United Nations Square, formerly the Leninplatz] / July 1992 / with a poster carrying a damaged picture of Tomski's Lenin monument pasted on a pole / © photo: Dario Gamboni

spectacular pictures by foreign photographers or mockingly imitated by local teenagers.

Less direct forms of "neutralization" and appropriation have also been attempted. Inscriptions or objects were added to modify the message of monuments, to comment on them or put them between sorts of visual quotation marks. In 1990, the Polish-born Canadian artist Krzysztof Wodiczko contributed to an exhibition of contemporary art organized in Berlin under the title *Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit* with a temporary projection transforming Tomsky's Lenin into a Polish shopper equipped with a cart filled with cheap electronic products. Caricatures offered another possibility of appropriating monuments without actually touching them. A favorite target was Vera Mukhina's sculpture *The Worker and the Collective-Farm Woman*, realized to crown the Soviet Pavilion in the Paris World Exhibition of 1937 transformed for example in 1992 into an updated and disillusioned image of the state of the country. In 1993, the Russian expatriate artists Komar and Melamid presented an exhibition in New York and Moscow entitled *Monumental Propaganda* which intended to oppose the elimination of monuments as the latest instance of the "recurrent obliteration of Russian history." Among the entries was another transformation of Mukhina's statue by the American cartoonist Art Spiegelman, which, by a slight displacement, turned the heroic progress of the figures into an imminent fall. Komar and Melamid's own proposal consisted of "lifting a statue by hydraulic cranes, as if to remove it, but then leave it hanging in the air, ambiguously arresting the moment of dismantlement and extending it into eternal retribution."[10]

This project, which has been realized for the present exhibition, embodies its wish to suspend the iconoclastic gesture. Lifted from its pedestal, the hanging statue is shown to have lost its power over the spectators, but it is preserved and, by remaining present, can be remembered and submitted to scrutiny, instead of being replaced by a new "idol." This corresponds to Komar and Melamid's analysis of the link between iconoclasm and iconolatry in Russian politics: "This is classic old Moscow technique, either worship or destroy. Bolsheviks topple czar monuments, Stalin erases old Bolsheviks, Krushchev tears down Stalin, Brezhnev tears down Krushchev, and now this."[11] The suspended statue suggests a way out of this cyclical repetition by the very ambiguity of its situation: it can refer to the moment of its erection as well as to that of its removal, while preventing the completion of either.

11

_ Vitaly Komar quoted in Lawrence Wechsler, Slight Modifications, in *The New Yorker*, 12 July 1993, pp. 59-65.

10

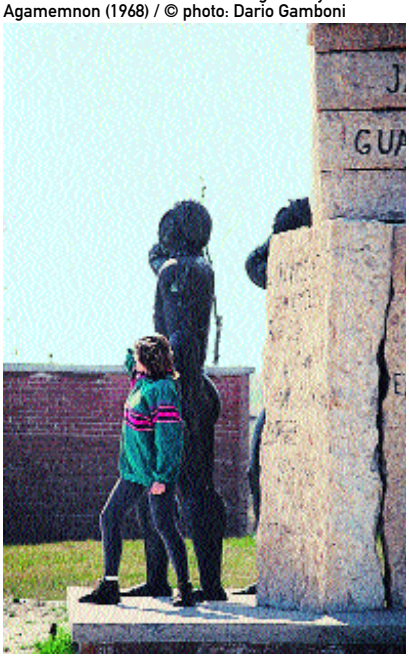
_ Komar et Melamid, What Is to Be Done with Monumental Propaganda?, in *Artforum*, 30, May 1992, pp. 102-103.

Open Air Museum of Socialist Realism, Moscow / 1996 / © photo: Michel Melot, Paris

Interviewed in the film *Disgraced Monuments* realized in 1993 by Mark Lewis and Laura Mulvey, the Russian art critic Viktor Misiano similarly stated that at the end of the failed coup, on 22 August 1991, the crowd gathered in Moscow on Dzerzhinsky Square in front of the KGB headquarters would have been content with playful, provisional abuses of the monument to the founder of the Bolshevik secret police, and that the removal of the statue authorized by the mayor Gavril Popov had signified the end of the "performance" and the start of the "mechanism of history." The interpretation of Russian history as a mechanical succession of phases of worship and destruction was brilliantly presented in the pavilion of the Russian Federation at the Venice Biennale in 1995 by means of a film using archive material shown in a loop. The video starts with the inauguration by the clergy of the monument to

Szobórpark [Statue Park], Budapest / 17 April 1995 / © photo: Dario Gamboni

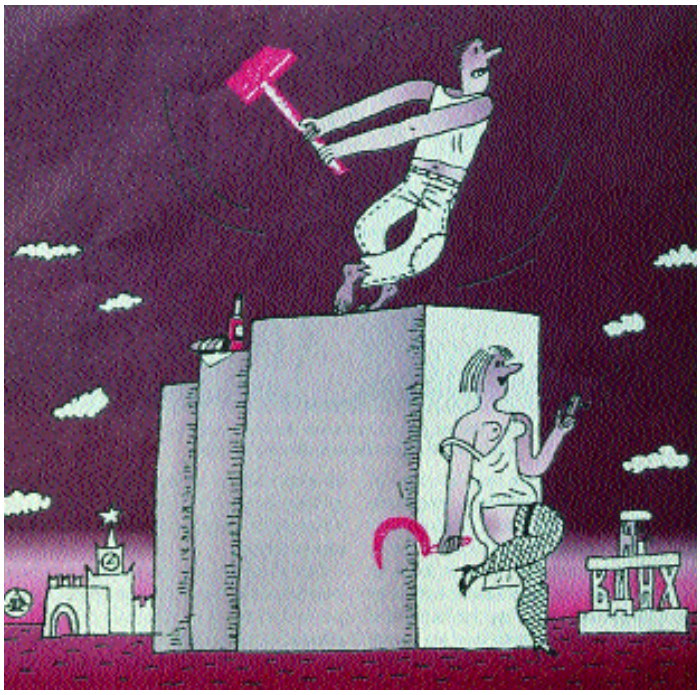
Szobórpark [Statue Park], Budapest /17 April 1995 / with a young visitor imitating the figures of the monument to the International Brigades by Makrisz Agamemnon (1968) / © photo: Dario Gamboni



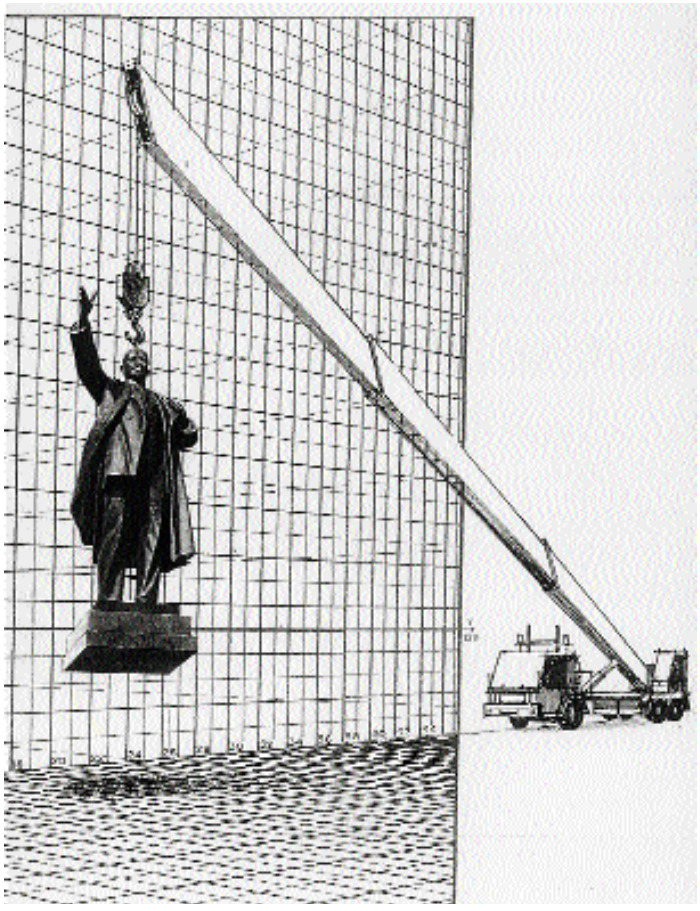
»We Are Innocent« / inscription on the central pedestal of Ludwig Engelhardt's 1977–86 statue of Marx and Engels / Marx-Engels-Forum, Berlin / 12 May 1991 / © photo: Landesbildstelle Berlin.

Vera Mukhina / The Worker and the Collective-Farm Woman / 1937 / chrome-nickel steel / Moscow / from Vladimir Kemerar, The USSR Academy of Arts, Leningrad, 1982 / © photo: Louise-Marie Fitsch

A. Chabanov / cartoon / in Izvestia, 1992



Art Spiegelman / One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (After) / 1992 / color photocopy / 11 x 8.5"



Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid / Project for the modification of a monument from the Communist era / 1999 / computer-assisted drawing / 11 x 8.5" / private collection

Alexander III in front of the church of Christ-the-Savior in Moscow, proceeds with the toppling of the statue in 1923, the blowing up of the church in 1931, projects for the gigantic Palace of the Soviets crowned by a statue meant to replace the church, the Moskva swimming-pool built instead, then its closure, and ends up with the inauguration by priests and politicians in 1994 of the substructure for the replica of the church (since completed), at which point the film starts again and makes us wonder who is the next czar.

Progress, Avant-gardism and »Iconoclasm«

David's rebellious pupils seem to have been the first artists to define iconoclasm as a condition for the renewal of art and to call for the burning down of museums at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, when museums were still a new institution. In 1851, the philosopher Proudhon suggested "for our own most rapid regeneration" to throw to the flames not only museums but "cathedrals, palaces, salons, boudoirs, with all their furniture, ancient and modern," and to forbid artists to practice their art for fifty years: "Once the past was forgotten, we would do something."[12]

This was in his *Philosophie du progrès*, and the link between the *tabula rasa* ideal and the notion of progress is obvious. It is particularly clear in architecture and city planning, where modernization has been (and remains) extremely destructive. Technical and utilitarian reasons are generally given as justifications but there are also aesthetic

Anonymous / »Als wie der größte Mann Berns auf Befehl der kleinen Götter des Materialismus geopfert und enthauptet wird« [How the Biggest Man of Berne is Being Sacrificed and Beheaded on Order of the Little Gods of Materialism] / woodcut / published in Die Schweiz, 3 March 1865 / 4 x 6" / Bernisches Historisches Museum, Berne

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_ Pierre Joseph Proudhon, *Philosophie du progrès* (1851), quoted in T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1973, p. 20.

arguments and, more implicitly, the targets may symbolize the past that has to be obliterated. In some cases, the parallel with iconoclasm cannot be missed. In Berne, for instance, the construction of the railway station in 1865 required the demolition of the Christoffelturm (Tower of St. Christopher), a part of the medieval fortification; station and tower represented respectively the "needs of progress" and the identity of the ancient town. A long fight between their supporters concentrated on the large wooden figure of St. Christopher (1498), which had survived the iconoclasm of the Reformation as a kind of gatekeeper. It did not survive progress, and a cartoonist interpreted its elimination as the beheading of "the biggest man of Berne ... on the order of the little gods of materialism." The statue was indeed cut into pieces and distributed as firewood to the poor, just as in the Reformation, while defenders of Christopher made relics out of a few remaining fragments.

The connection between the ideal of progress and destructive renovation was expressed in a sort of visual pun on the 1913 monument to a mayor of Lyon who had reconstructed a central quarter of the city, considered to be insalubrious: the personification of Progress holds above building tools a torch that one expects to symbolize enlightenment, as in Bartholdi's statue of Liberty, but that, in effect, is about to set fire to the medieval houses visible on the right. The advertisement poster for an American demolition company recently attested to the enduring faith in this identity of progress and the wiped slate: "Breaking into the Future!" Its optimism can seem outdated in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York, but it may well survive it. Even in the case of the destruction of the Twin Towers, a connection with the metaphorical iconoclasm of the artistic avant-garde became apparent when the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen publicly expressed envy at the degree of focus and dedication shown by the terrorists and called the attack "the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos." Two months later, the French conductor and composer Pierre Boulez was briefly detained by the Swiss police because he had apparently declared in the 1960s that opera houses should be blown up.[13]

Courbet and his followers were called "iconoclasts of art," whose dismissal of traditional notions of beauty was compared to the hammer of a stonebreaker chipping a statue of Venus "into a curbstone."[14] At the same time, the ruins left by the Communards were admired by some visitors as the

Thumb of the wooden statue of St Christopher mounted as a drinking cup / 1867 / painted wood and silver / height 13" / Gesellschaft zu Schmieden Berne

14 13

_ Anthony Tommasini, Explaining Stockhausen, in *International Herald Tribune*, 2 October 2001, p. 20; anonymous, Musical Terrorism? Swiss Detain Boulez, in *International Herald Tribune*, 6 December 2001.

_ Quoted in Champfleury, Courbet en 1860, here after Klaus Herding, *Courbet: To Venture Independence*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1991, p. 6.

Monument to Antoine Gailleton / Lyon / 1913 / bas-relief of Progress by Maspoli / montagny stone / 40.5 x 144" / state before restoration / © photo: Dario Gamboni

works of unconscious artists, and Joris-Karl Huysmans concluded from them that "fire is the essential artist of our time and that the architecture of the [nineteenth century], so pitiful when it is raw, becomes imposing, almost splendid, when it is baked."[15] Metaphorical iconoclasm became a distinctive element of the artistic program of the "avant-garde" – another reference to the idea of progress – around the time of World War I. The Futurists proposed to free Italy from its "cancer of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides, and antiquaries" by demolishing museums and libraries,[16] the Russian Constructivists, Productivists, and Suprematists tried to contribute to the construction of a new world promised by the Soviet Revolution, and the Dadaists radicalized the rejection of past art into an overall condemnation of art as such, seen as part of the values and civilization that the War revealed to be false and destructive.

Poster advertising a demolition company in Chicago / August 1997 / © photo: Dario Gamboni

15 _ Joris-K. Huysmans, Fantaisie sur le Musée des arts décoratifs et sur l'architecture cuite, in *Revue indépendante*, n.s., 1, November 1886, reprinted in Joris-K. Huysmans, *Certains* (1889), Union Générale d'Editions, Paris, 1975, pp. 397-399.

16 _ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Manifeste technique de la littérature futuriste, in *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909, republished in Giovanni Lista, *Futurisme. Manifestes, proclamations, documents*, L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, 1973, pp. 85-89.

Daniel Spoerri / Utiliser un Rembrandt comme planche à repassser (Marcel Duchamp) [Use a Rembrandt as an Ironing Board (Marcel Duchamp)] / 1964 / assemblage / 34 x 29 x 16" / Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv / © photo: Bacci Attilio, courtesy Galleria Schwarz, Milan

Marcel Duchamp / Die große Schachtel / 1966 / box, coated with red linen, contents 80 parts / 16.3 x 15 x 4" / Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz / photo: Koinegg, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz

The artist whose work is often considered to embody this nihilistic impulse in the most influential way is Marcel Duchamp, especially in his Readymades. His most explicit statement about the Readymades as anti-art is a note written between 1911 and 1915: "RECIPROCAL READYMADE / Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board."[17] Its impact was demonstrated by homages rendered in the 1960s and 1970s in the form of playful realizations. Daniel Spoerri replaced the "Rembrandt" with a reproduction of Mona Lisa in reference to Duchamp's 1919 *L.H.O.O.Q.*; Carel Blotkamp – without knowledge of Spoerri's work – used a doll's house ironing board and a reproduction of the *Portrait of Elisabeth Bar*, then believed to be by Rembrandt but attributed since to Ferdinand Bol.

If, according to Duchamp's own definition, a ready made is an "Everyday commodity promoted to the dignity of work of art by the mere choice of the artist," a reciprocal ready made is a work of art demoted to the status of everyday commodity.[18] Duchamp later asserted that this idea had resulted from the desire "to expose the basic antinomy between art and ready mades."[19] But the matter is more complicated with ready mades, as shown by the most famous (or infamous) of them, the tilted urinal that Duchamp attempted to have included under a pseudonym and the title

Marcel Duchamp / The Green Box / 1934 / box coated with green velvet, contents 93 parts / 13 x 11 x 1" / Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz / / photo: Koinegg, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz

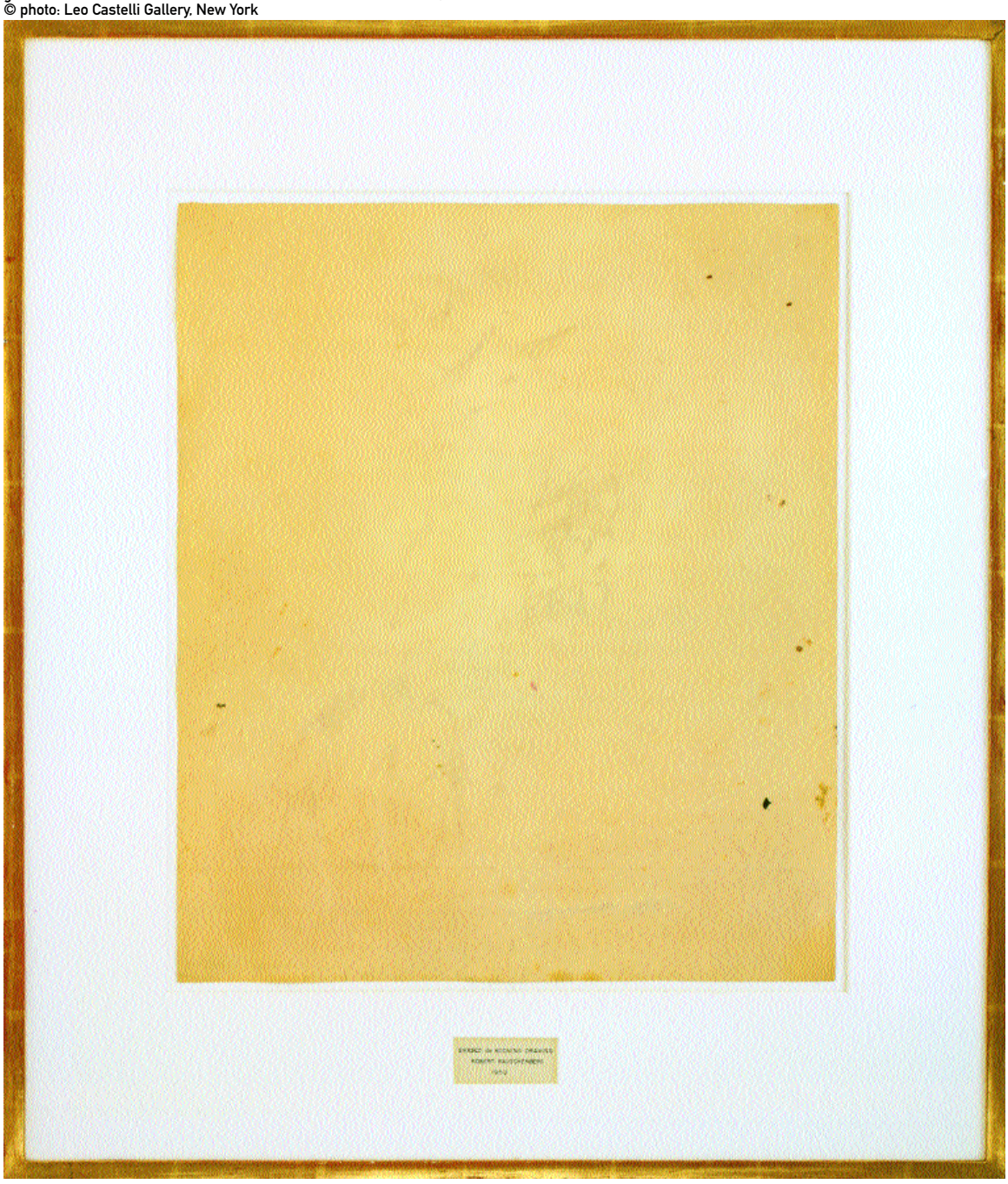
18 19 17

_ Marcel Duchamp, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (1934), quoted after Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe. Ecrits,* Flammarion, Paris, 1975, p. 49 ("READYMADE RÉCIPROQUE / Se servir d'un Rembrandt comme planche à repasser").

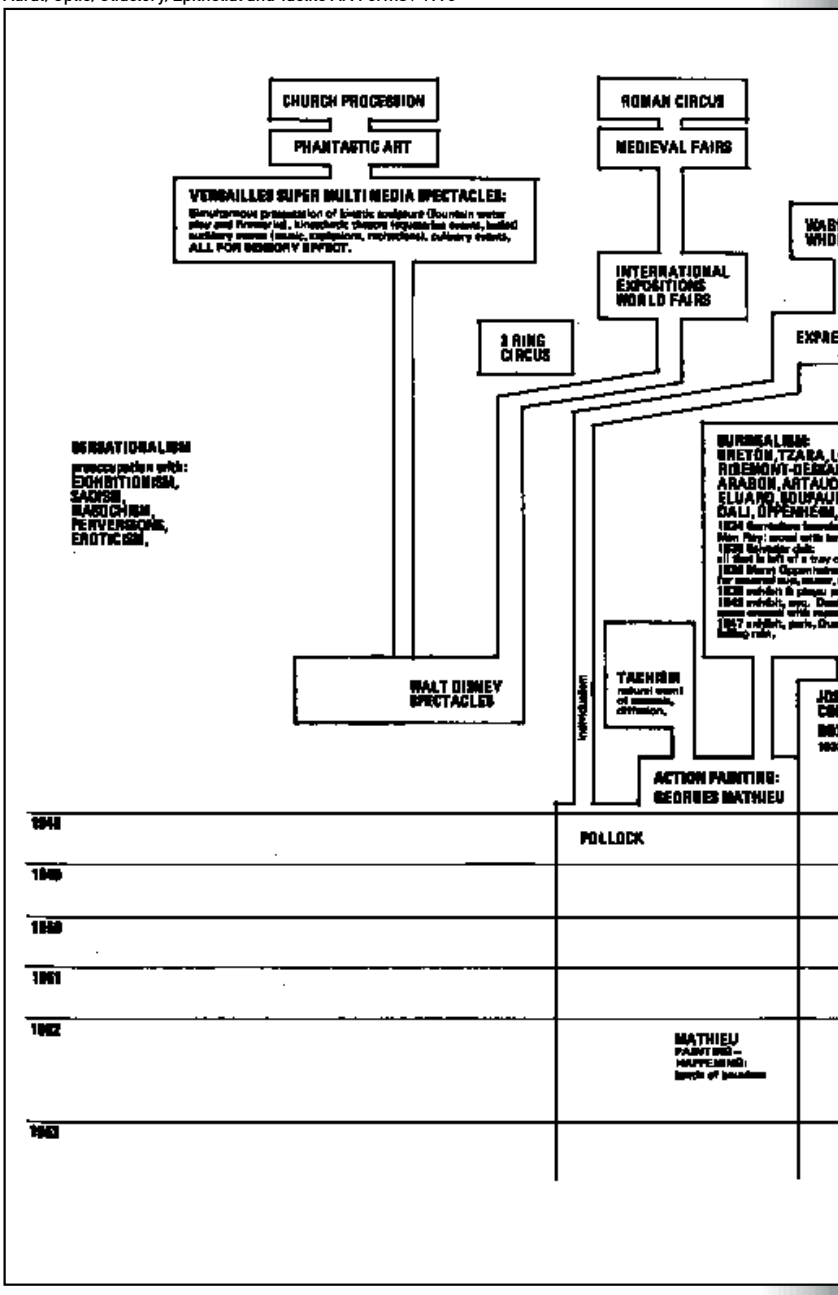
_ Marcel Duchamp, Apropos of "Readymades," in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds), Thames & Hudson, London, 1975, p. 142.

_ *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, Galerie Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1938 ("Objet usuel promu à la dignité d'objet d'art par le simple choix de l'artiste").

Robert Rauschenberg / Erased de Kooning Drawing / 1953 / traces of ink and crayon on paper / gold-leaf frame / 19 x 14.2" / San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco /
© photo: Leo Castelli Gallery, New York



George Maciunas / Diagram of Historical Development of Fluxus and Other 4 Dimensional, Aural, Optic, Olfactory, Epithelial and Tactile Art Forms / 1973



Fountain in the 1917 Exhibition of the American Society of Independent Artists in New York. This move was a test of the organizers' fidelity to their principle of unlimited inclusion, and to some extent a provocation, but it was also much more than that. In my hypothesis, one of the reasons for the title *Fountain* is a pun on the name of the seventeenth century French poet La Fontaine and a reference to his fable *Le statuaire et la statue de Jupiter* in which a sculptor, after wondering whether he will turn a beautiful piece of marble into "a god, a table, or a basin," opts for the god and ends up trembling in front of his own creation. Like Abraham attempting to shame his father Terah for selling idols, La Fontaine shames his sculptor for believing in the work of his own hands, an attitude that he compares with playing with dolls and man's passion for dreams and lies: "L'homme est de glace aux vérités, / Il est de feu pour les mensonges."[20]

One could argue that Duchamp similarly shames artists for being craftsmen and believers, and shows that art is only a matter of faith, magic, or consensus. At least this is the way in which the ready made has been interpreted by sociologists and philosophers of art. Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, defined it as a "ritual desecration," which "cannot unveil the truth on art without taking it away by turning this unveiling into an artistic manifestation."[21] But this is not the way in which Duchamp's closest friends saw *Fountain* in 1917. Rather than a "piece of marble" mocking the possibility of becoming "dieu, table ou cuvette," they saw it as a urinal mentally freed to become whatever the beholder wanted, especially a "buddha" or a "virgin," with which it was revealed to have formal analogies.[22]

Another characteristic of the ready made that modified the relationship between modern art and iconoclasm is the way in which it questions the importance of the artist's physical intervention and of the artwork's uniqueness. This change was demonstrated and thematized by Man Ray when a 1923 assemblage he had entitled *Object to be Destroyed* was

20 _ *Fables mises en vers par Jean de La Fontaine*, Verdun Louis Saulnier (ed.), Armand Colin, Paris, 1960, vol. 2, pp. 135-136 (Deuxième recueil de Fables, 1678, IX, VI; Un bloc de marbre était si beau / Qu'un statuaire en fit l'emplette / Qu'en fera, dit-il, mon ciseau? / Sera-t-il dieu, table ou cuvette?). On Abraham and Terah, see Bruno Latour's introduction to the present catalog.

21 _ Pierre Bourdieu, La production de la croyance. Contribution à une économie des biens symboliques, in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 13, February 1977, pp. 4-43 (p. 8: "L'art ne peut livrer la vérité sur l'art sans la dérober en faisant de ce dévoilement une manifestation artistique").

22 _ William A. Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, The Menil Collection, Houston Fine Art Press, Houston, 1989.

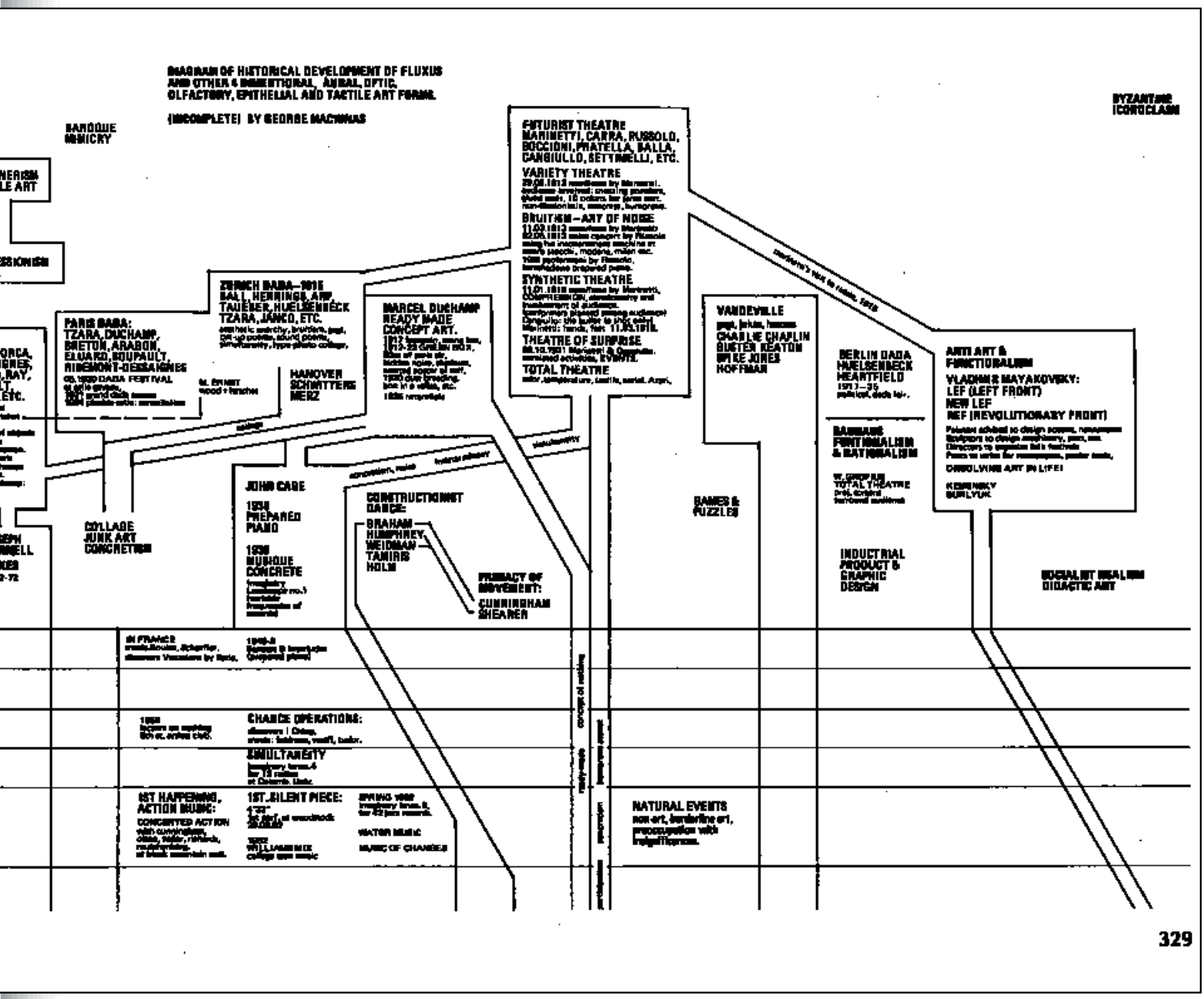
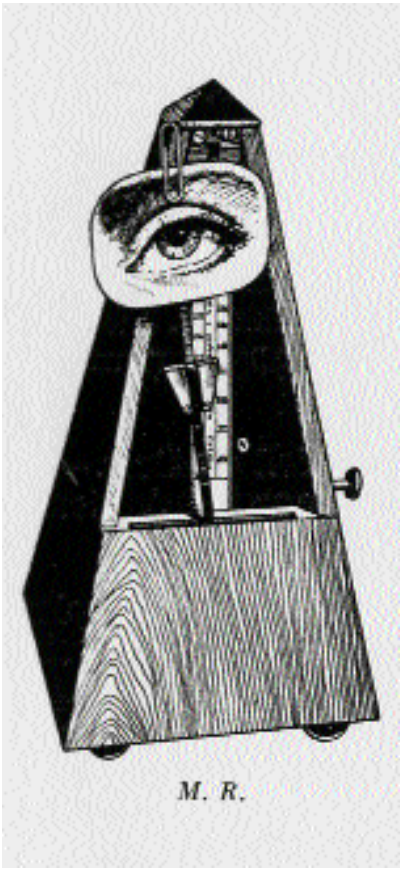


DIAGRAM OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FLUXUS AND OTHER 4 DIMENSIONAL, ANIMAL, OPTIC, OLFACTORY, EPITHELIAL AND TACTILE ART FORMS.
(INCOMPLETE) BY GEORGE MACIUNAS
BAROQUE MIMICRY
BYZANTINE ICONOCLASM
FUTURIST THEATRE MARINETTI, CARRA, RUSSOLO, BOCCIONI, PRATELLA, BALLA, CANGIULLO, SETTIMELLI, ETC.
VARIETY THEATRE
BRUITISM—ART OF NOISE
SYNTHETIC THEATRE
THEATRE OF SURPRISE
TOTAL THEATRE
ZURICH DADA—1915
BALL, HENNINGS, ARP, TAUEBER, HUELSENBECK TZARA, JANCO, ETC.
PARIS DADA: TZARA, DUCHAMP, BRETON, ARAGON, ELUARD, SOUPAULT RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES
HANOVER SCHWITTERS MERZ
MARCEL DUCHAMP READY MADE CONCEPT ART.
VAUDEVILLE
CHARLIE CHAPLIN BUSTER KEATON SPIKE JONES HOFFMAN
BERLIN DADA HUELSENBECK HEARTFIELD
ANTI ART & FUNCTIONALISM
VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY: LEF (LEFT FRONT) NEW LEF REF (REVOLUTIONARY FRONT)
DADAISM INTERNATIONAL & RATIONALISM
JOHN CAGE
1938 PREPARED PIANO
1939 MUSIQUE CONCRETE
CONSTRUCTIONIST DANCE:
GRAHAM HUMPHREY WEIDMAN TAMIRIS HOLM
PRIMACY OF MOVEMENT: CUNNINGHAM SHEARER
COLLAGE JUNK ART CONCRETISM
GAMES & PUZZLES
INDUSTRIAL PRODUCT & GRAPHIC DESIGN
SOCIALIST REALISM DIDACTIC ART
IN FRANCE
CHANCE OPERATIONS:
SIMULTANEITY
1ST HAPPENING, ACTION MUSIC:
CONCERTED ACTION
1ST SILENT PIECE:
WATER MUSIC
MUSIC OF CHANCE
NATURAL EVENTS
non-art, borderline art, preoccupation with insignificances.

stolen and probably destroyed by students of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts who protested in 1957 against Dada and Surrealism. The destruction mentioned in the title was meant to remain a fiction or be performed publicly by the artist. Confronted with this unauthorized enactment and having obtained his insurance claim, Man Ray emphasized the fact that an (aided) ready made cannot be eliminated by calling the replica that he realized *Indestructible Object*.

The radical 1960s and 1970s were the golden age for (neo-) avant-garde iconoclasm. In 1973, George Maciunas placed "Byzantine iconoclasm" at the top of his retrospective genealogical chart of Fluxus and related movements. Twenty years earlier, Robert Rauschenberg had gone beyond Duchamp's use of a reproduction of Mona Lisa in *L.H.O.O.Q.* by asking Willem De Kooning to give him a real drawing to be erased. This gesture was directed against an artist whom he admired and who belonged to the generation of Abstract Expressionists. Rauschenberg explained later: "I was trying to make art and so therefore I had to erase art." He had not wanted to erase one of his own drawings because the erased work would have gone "back to nothing."[23] Many other artists explored the possibilities of self-destroying works, and some of them were brought together in 1966 by the Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) organized in London by the German-born Gustav Metzger, who had written a manifesto entitled *Auto-Destructive Art* in 1959 and intended to "isolate the element of destruction in new art forms, and to discover any links with destruction in society."[24] This development pushed the assault on uniqueness and materiality further by challenging the artwork's claim to endure and to be preserved. It was also part of the move from product to process and from object to "happening" or "performance," famously exemplified by Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York*, his first autodestructive "machine-happening" executed (in both senses of the term) on 17 March 1960 in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art. In the same year, Tinguely also realized a *Machine for Breaking Sculptures* (since then destroyed). The equation of new art with the elimination of the past also had an impact on the teaching of art and the preservation of collections, as shown by the fate of a collection of original plaster models of the Grand Prix de Rome, banished in a cellar of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris since 1968.



Man Ray / Object to Be Destroyed / 1923 / drawing reproduced in Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme, Paris, 1938

Vandalism and the Destruction of Art as Art

Artistic assaults against artistic traditions did not go without a price. From the late nineteenth century onwards, works of

24 23

_ Barbara Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, Vintage Books, New York, 1987, p. 51; *Interview*, 6, 5, 1976, quoted in Felix Gmelin, *Art Vandals*, exhib. cat. Riksutställningar, Stockholm, 1996, p. 27.

_ Gustav Metzger, *Auto-Destructive Art* (1959), quoted in John A. Walker, Message from the Margin. John A. Walker tracks down Gustav Metzger, in *Art Monthly*, 190, October 1995, pp. 14-17.

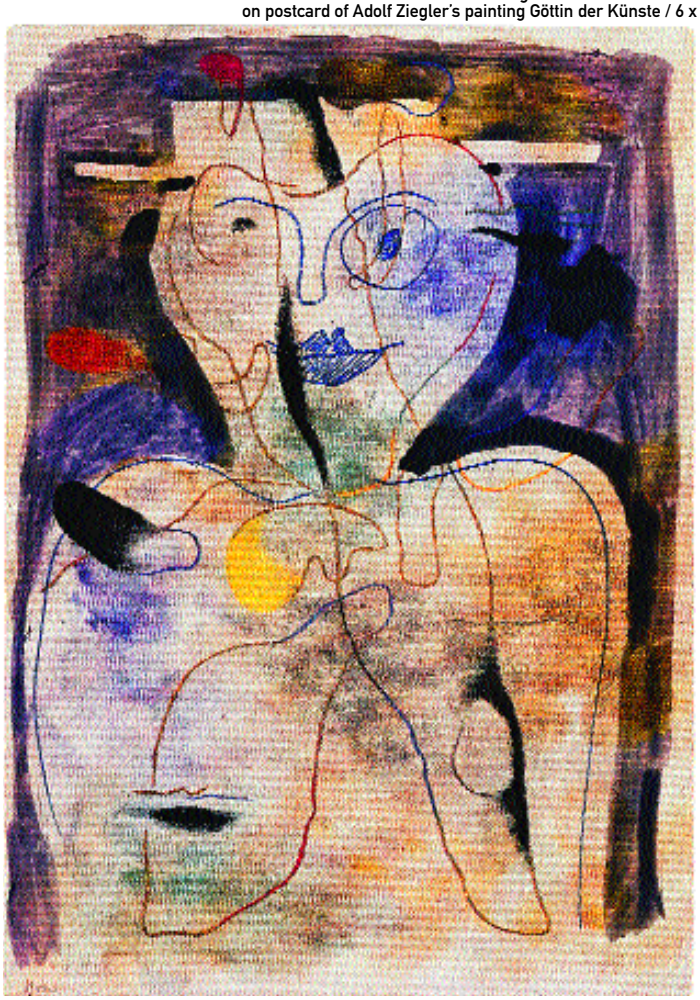
modern art came to be attacked as "degenerate" by those who identified representations of nature with nature itself, and the Nazis turned this condemnation into a cleansing operation that was part of their political program. They persecuted artists and burnt works or sold them outside Germany after declassifying them from museums. In 1937, they organized a pair of contrasting exhibitions in Munich. One of them, comparable to a "statue park," was devoted to "degenerate art" and meant to prove its infamous and perverse character. Revealingly, it made use of the "iconoclastic" display methods forged by the Dadaists and turned them against their authors. The other was devoted to the "new and true German art" (Hitler's words) and presented artists affiliated with the regime. Willi Baumeister, whose works were vilified in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition, bought postcards of paintings by Adolf Ziegler, the organizer of the Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung, and painted them over, turning, for instance, the "healthy" representation of the *Goddess of the Arts* into a grotesque male bust.

After the war, the Nazi persecution of "degenerate art" added to the condemnation of iconoclasm and ever since it has remained a favorite argument against the criticism of modern and contemporary art. But there has been criticism, as well as physical attacks, related in various ways to the avant-garde "iconoclasm." This is particularly

Opening of the Erste Internationale Dada-Messe [First International Dada Fair] / Burchard Gallery / Berlin, 30 July 1920 / © photo: Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin / from left to right: [standing] Raoul Hausmann, Otto Burchard, Baader, Wieland and Margarete Herzfelde, George Grosz, John Heartfield, [sitting] Hanna Höch, Otto Schmalhausen

The Dada wall in the »Entartete Kunst« [Degenerate Art] exhibition / Munich, 1937 / © photo: Stadtarchiv München, Munich

Willi Baumeister / Simultaneous Image »Man With Pointed Beard« / c .1941 / pencil, gouache and watercolor / on postcard of Adolf Ziegler's painting Göttin der Künste / 6 x 4" / Archive Baumeister, Stuttgart

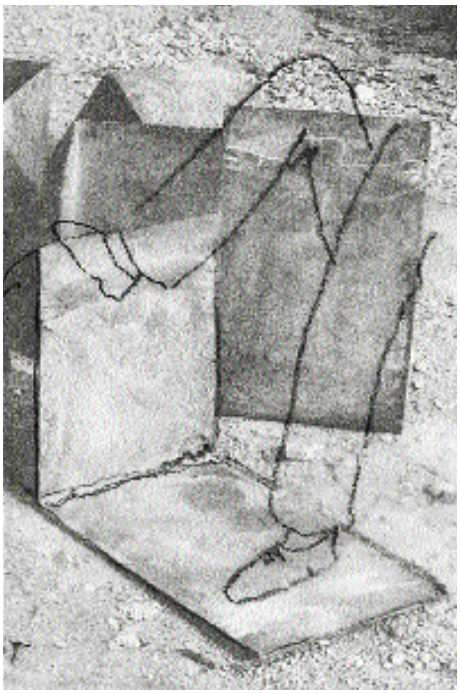


obvious in public space, where modern art came in contact with what has sometimes been termed "involuntary visitors" or the "non-public." An almost emblematic case is that of a work called *Action Sculpture*, which was meant to turn the "aggression of the public" into an alleged participation in artistic creation. The four hammers attached with ropes to its base, rather than being used as proposed to fold the exterior sheet-iron envelope onto the interior steel core, were probably stolen and employed against other sculptures that had not required any physical intervention. Here again, the iconoclast's hammer had not struck where it was expected.

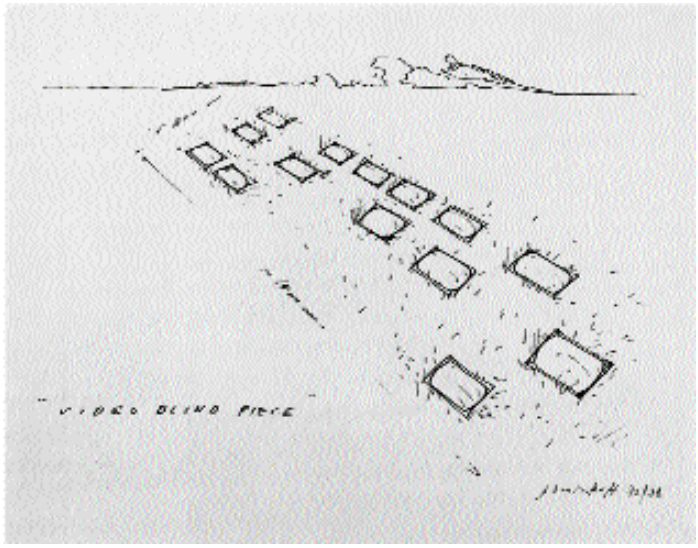
Action Sculpture was part of the 8th Swiss Sculpture Exhibition taking place in 1980 in Bienne, a small industrial town, where almost half of the works on show were anonymously damaged or destroyed. Interviews of passers-by and letters in the press show that the introduction of art "in the street" was not perceived as the intended democratization of art and enrichment of daily life, but as a sort of invasion. The targets were not selected at random but tended to be made of materials not traditionally associated with art or to show no easily recognizable sign of an artistic competence in the manual or technical sense. The "vandal" could only be found in one case: it was the owner of a gardening business, and he claimed that he had mistaken the work for rubbish, lying on the ground he had to prepare, and had it thrown away accordingly. The work in question was called *Video Blind Piece* and by Gérald Minkoff, an artist who had elected "Miss Understanding" as his Muse: the paradoxes it involves seemed to unfold themselves in its fate. *Video Blind Piece* consisted of fourteen exhausted television tubes buried in the ground with the screens facing up, disposed in a pattern similar to the one of the fourteen dots forming the word *video* ("I see" in Latin) in Braille. A blind person could not touch them and a seeing person could not read them; only the catalog of the exhibition provided the necessary explanation. When his "misunderstanding" was discovered, the gardener offered to help redo the work and even published an advertisement in the local newspaper to find the TV tubes "to restore a sculpture of the sculpture exhibition not recognized as such and for this reason removed to the refuse-dump." But rather than repentance and respect, the artist saw in this proposal a continuation by other means of the iconoclastic gesture, implying that the lost work could be repeated at will. In

Plaster models by winners of the Grand Prix de Rome between 1815 and 1900 / in store in a cellar of the Ecole des beaux-arts, Paris / 1994 / © photo: Marianne Haas, Paris.

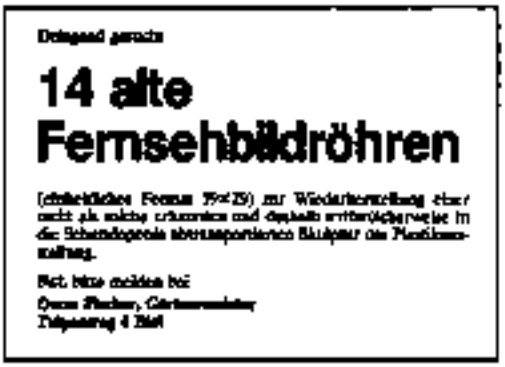
Roland Lüchinger / Aktionsplastik [Action Sculpture] / 1979 / steel / height 98" / in its damaged state / at the 8th Swiss Sculpture Exhibition in Bienne, 1980 / © photo: Jeanne Chevalier, La Fuentecilla.



Anton Egloff / Profil eines Fluges [Profile of a Flight] / 1976-1977 / bronze / with artist's drawing on tracing paper suggesting how his work was damaged



Gérald Minkoff / sketch of his 1980 Video Blind Piece / 1978 / reproduced in the catalog of the 8th Swiss Sculpture Exhibition in Bienne, 1980


Dringend gesucht

14 alte Fernsehbildröhren

[illegible] zur Wiederherstellung einer nicht alltäglichen [illegible] in der Schweizerischen [illegible]

Tel. bitte melden bei

[illegible]

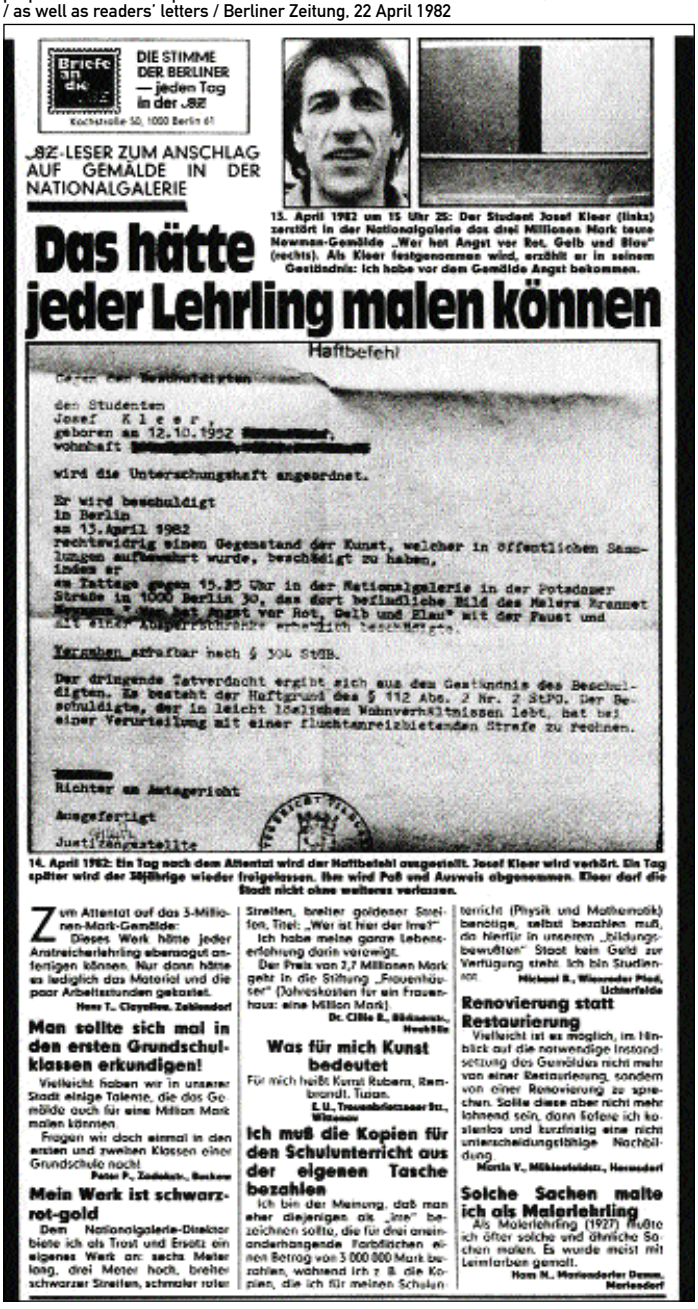
Advertisement for the reconstruction of Minkoff's Video Blind Piece / Bieler Tagblatt, 25 June 1980

the new version of *Video Blind Piece*, realized twenty-two years later for *Iconoclash*, Minkoff has opened the eyes of his TV screens and connected them to cameras watching the various parts of the exhibition, proposing a reflection on the fate of his work, the fragility of display, and the development of surveillance.

Museums have indeed been increasingly forced to protect the works they display from intentional damage. Here too, modern art has been a special target, but the thresholds associated with cultural institutions have tended to add particular psychological or psychopathological factors to the profile of "art vandals." The properties of the targeted works also play a role. Several late paintings by Barnet Newman, in which he proposed a modern version of the experience of the "sublime," seem for instance to have elicited fear and aggression in some spectators, as well as incomprehension of the type of artistic competence they require and the reasons for their financial value and the reverence they receive in the art world. At the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the same man slashed with a knife Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III* (1967-8) in 1986 and his *Cathedra* (1951) in 1997. In the first case, he declared that his act was an "ode to Carel Willink," a Dutch exponent of "Magic Realism" whose anti-modernist book *Painting in a Critical Phase* (1950) he quoted before the court; the restoration of the painting ended in a bitter dispute between the museum and the hired conservator, who was accused of having completed the destruction.[25]

In the Berlin Nationalgalerie, a student of veterinary medicine named Josef Kleer attacked Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV* (1969-70) in 1982 with one of the plastic bars meant to keep the visitors at a respectful distance from the painting. He placed on and around the damaged work several documents, which enabled the police to identify him, and explained that he had been afraid of the painting, that it was a perversion of the German flag and that its purchase with public funds was irresponsible.[26] The acqui-

»Any Apprentice Could Have Painted This« / with photo and papers of Josef Kleer, perpetrator of the 13 April 1982 attack on Newman's Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV / as well as readers' letters / Berliner Zeitung, 22 April 1982



Briefe an die

DIE STIMME DER BERLINER — jeden Tag in der „BZ"

Kochstraße 50, 1000 Berlin 61

„BZ"-LESER ZUM ANSCHLAG AUF GEMÄLDE IN DER NATIONALGALERIE

13. April 1982 um 15 Uhr 25: Der Student Josef Kleer (links) zerstört in der Nationalgalerie das drei Millionen Mark teure Newman-Gemälde „Wer hat Angst vor Rot, Gelb und Blau" (rechts). Als Kleer festgenommen wird, erzählt er in seinem Geständnis: Ich habe vor dem Gemälde Angst bekommen.

Das hätte jeder Lehrling malen können

Haftbefehl

den Studenten
Josef K l e e r,
geboren am 12.10.1952 [redacted],
wohnhaft [redacted]

wird die Untersuchungshaft angeordnet.

Er wird beschuldigt
in Berlin
am 13. April 1982
rechtswidrig einen Gegenstand der Kunst, welcher in öffentlichen Sammlungen aufbewahrt wurde, beschädigt zu haben,
indem er
an Tattage gegen 15.25 Uhr in der Nationalgalerie in der Potsdamer Straße in 1000 Berlin 30, das dort befindliche Bild des Malers Krennet [redacted] „Wer hat Angst vor Rot, Gelb und Blau" mit der Faust und [redacted] beschädigte.

Verbrechen strafbar nach § 304 StGB.

Der dringende Tatverdacht ergibt sich aus dem Geständnis des Beschuldigten. Es besteht der Haftgrund des § 112 Abs. 2 Nr. 2 StPO. Der Beschuldigte, der in leicht idyllischen Wohnverhältnissen lebt, hat bei einer Verurteilung mit einer fluchtanreizbietenden Strafe zu rechnen.

[redacted]
Richter am Amtsgericht

Ausgefertigt
[redacted]
Justizangestellte

14. April 1982: Ein Tag nach dem Attentat wird der Haftbefehl ausgestellt. Josef Kleer wird verhört. Ein Tag später wird der 25jährige wieder freigelassen. Ihm wird Paß und Ausweis abgenommen. Kleer darf die Stadt nicht ohne weiteres verlassen.

Zum Attentat auf das 3-Millionen-Mark-Gemälde:

Dieses Werk hätte jeder Anstreicherlehrling überzeugt anfertigen können. Nur dann hätte es lediglich das Material und die paar Arbeitsstunden gekostet.
Hans T., Clayallee, Zehlendorf

Man sollte sich mal in den ersten Grundschulklassen erkundigen!

Vielleicht haben wir in unserer Stadt einige Talente, die das Gemälde auch für eine Million Mark malen können.

Fragen wir doch einmal in den ersten und zweiten Klassen einer Grundschule nach!
Peter P., Zadekstr., Steglitz

Mein Werk ist schwarz-rot-gold

Dem Nationalgalerie-Direktor biete ich als Trost und Ersatz ein eigenes Werk an: sechs Meter lang, drei Meter hoch, breiter schwarzer Streifen, schmaler roter Streifen, breiter goldener Streifen. Titel: „Wer ist hier der Irre?"

Ich habe meine ganze Lebenserfahrung darin verewigt.

Der Preis von 2,7 Millionen Mark geht in die Stiftung „Frauenhäuser" (Jahreskosten für ein Frauenhaus: eine Million Mark).
Dr. Cilla R., Blücherstr., Neukölln

Was für mich Kunst bedeutet

Für mich heißt Kunst Rubens, Rembrandt, Tizian.
E. U., Trauenbrietzener Str., Wilmersdorf

Ich muß die Kopien für den Schulunterricht aus der eigenen Tasche bezahlen

Ich bin der Meinung, daß man eher diejenigen als „irre" bezeichnen sollte, die für drei aneinanderhängende Farbflächen einen Betrag von 3 000 000 Mark bezahlen, während ich z. B. die Kopien, die ich für meinen Schulunterricht (Physik und Mathematik) benötige, selbst bezahlen muß, da hierfür in unserem „bildungsbewußten" Staat kein Geld zur Verfügung steht. Ich bin Studienrat.
Michael R., Wiesenacker Pfad, Uchterfelde

Renovierung statt Restaurierung

Vielleicht ist es möglich, im Hinblick auf die notwendige Instandsetzung des Gemäldes nicht mehr von einer Restaurierung, sondern von einer Renovierung zu sprechen. Sollte dieses aber nicht mehr lohnend sein, dann bitte ich kostenlos und kurzfristig eine nicht unterscheidungsfähige Nachbildung.
Maria V., Mühlenfeldstr., Hermsdorf

Solche Sachen malte ich als Malerlehrling

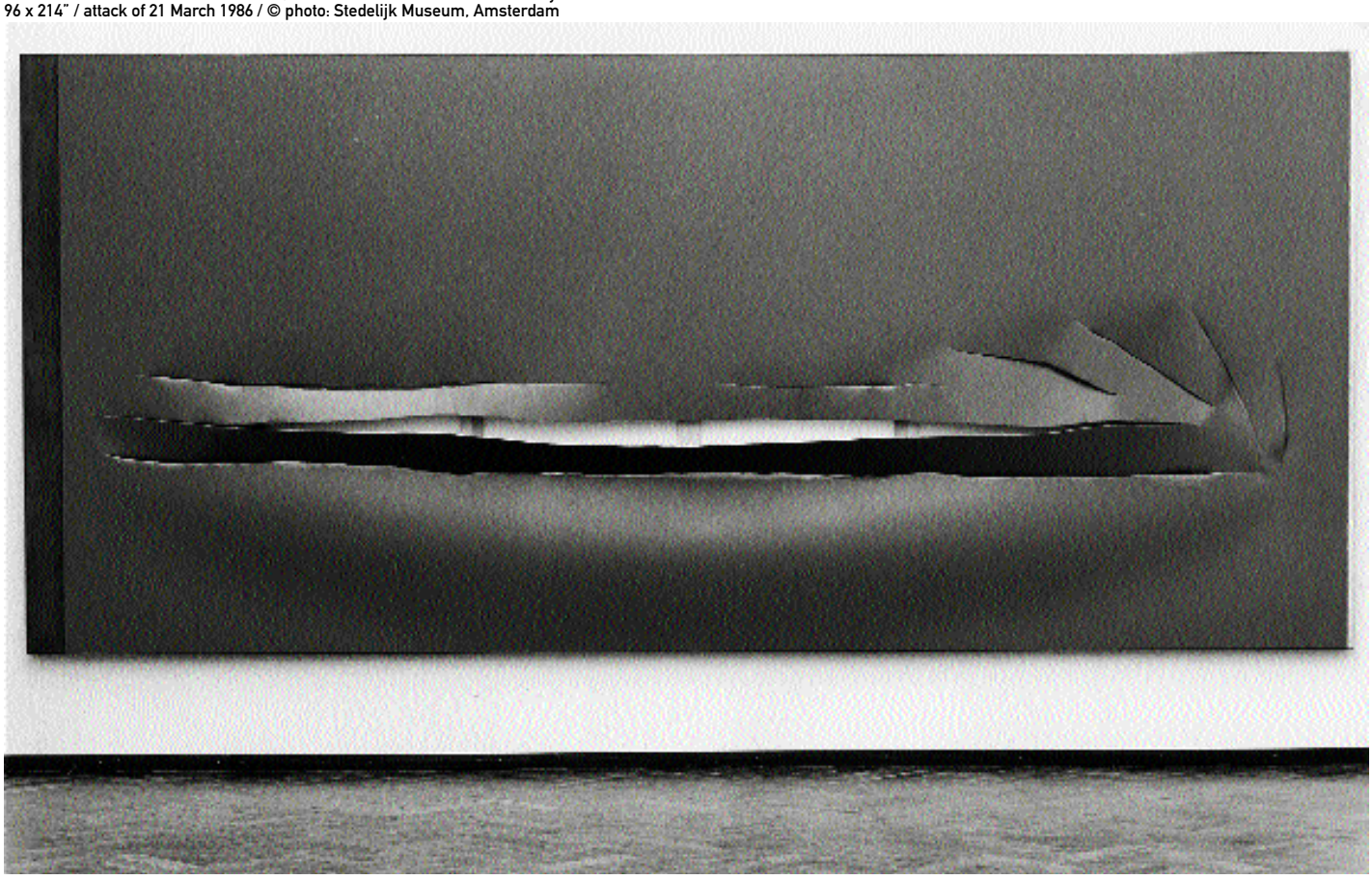
Als Malerlehrling (1927) mußte ich öfter solche und ähnliche Sachen malen. Es wurde meist mit Lemfarben gemalt.
Hans M., Marienborner Damm, Marienfelde

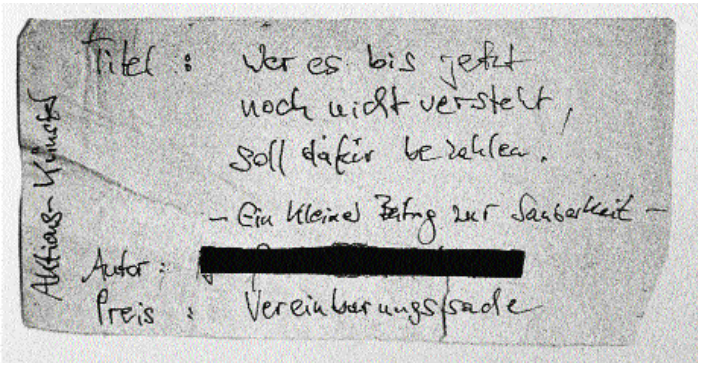
25 | 26

_ Peter Moritz Pickshaus, *Kunstzerstörer. Fallstudien: Tatmotive und Psychogramme*, Rowohlt, Reinbek, 1988, pp. 65-123.

_ Vernieler doek wil museum blijven bezoeken, in *NRC Handelsblad*, 3 April 1986; Jan Eilander, De Newman killer, in *Haagse Post*, 5 April 1986; Vernieler van schilderij ziet daad als kunstkritiek, in *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, 26 June 1986; Man vernielde schilderij 'om de discussie', in *Het Parool*, 18 September 1986; (anp), Verbod voor vernieler schilderij, in *Het Parool*, 2 October 1986; Renée Steenbergen, Kritiek face-lift doek Newman, in *NRC Handelsblad*, 16 August 1991; Christian Chartier, L'honneur perdu d'un restaurateur, in *Le Monde*, 31 January 1992; *Barnett Newman: Cathedra*, exhib. cat. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (*SMA Cahiers* 24), 2001.

Barnett Newman / Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III / 1967-1968 / acrylic on canvas / 96 x 214" / attack of 21 March 1986 / © photo: Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



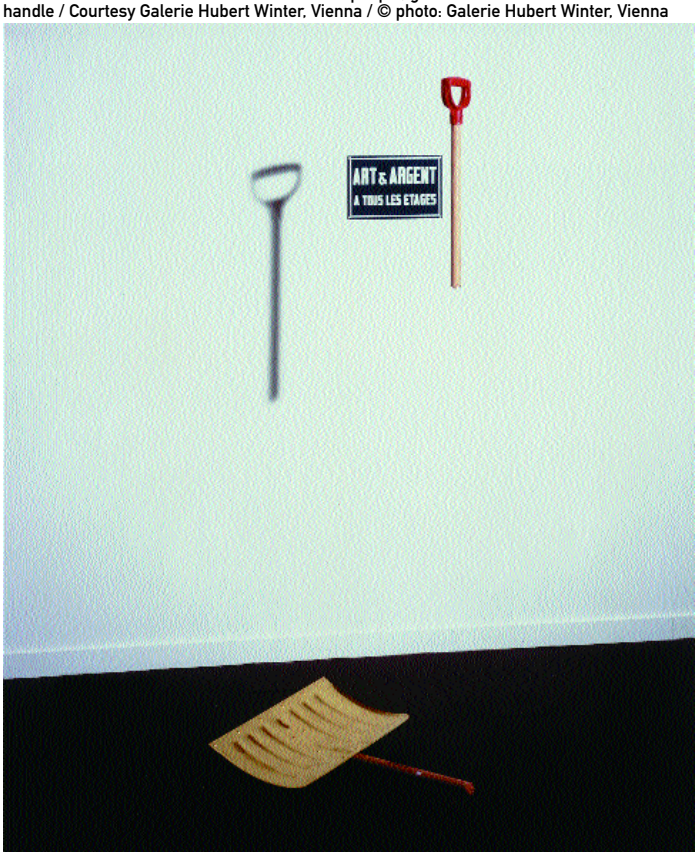


The two notes left close to Newman's Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV by Josef Kleer on 13 April 1982 in the Nationalgalerie, Berlin

sition of the work had been prepared by an aggressive fundraising campaign, and Kleer later declared that the other visitors' attitude towards Newman's work had reminded him of the dance around the Golden Calf. His personal history shows that he was experiencing a sort of identity crisis, but public comments on the damage, especially readers' letters published by a Berlin tabloid under the heading "Any appren-

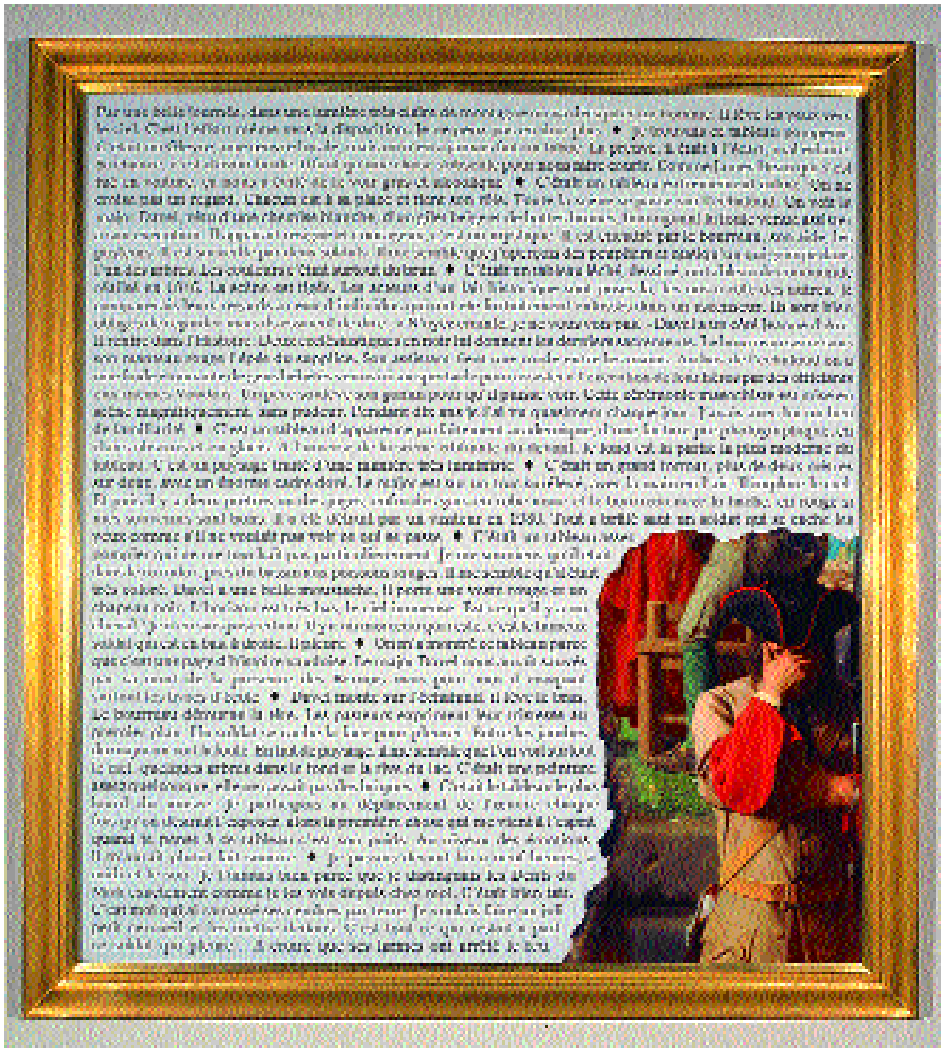
Arman (Armand Fernandez) / Conscious Vandalism / 1975 / happening at the John Gibson Gallery, New York / © photo courtesy Archives of Armand P. Arman, New York

Hans Haacke / Brocken R.M... / 1986 / enamel plaque, gilded snow shovel with broken handle / Courtesy Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna / © photo: Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna



tice could have painted this" show that his action corresponded to widespread opinions and attitudes. Kleer himself, however, did not criticize Newman's work by reference to older or more traditional art. In fact, he chose the documents he left around the painting in relation to its colors, included two slips of paper speaking of an "action artist" and of a "work of art of the commune" where he was living, and defined his intervention as an artistic "happening" and a way of "completing" the painting.

Even if one cannot take this claim seriously, it must be admitted that the line between a metaphorical artistic "iconoclasm" and a literal anti-artistic (or, rather, anti-modernist)



Charles Gleyre / The execution of Major Davel / 1850 / oil on canvas / 41 x 40" / Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, Lausanne / © photo: J.-C. Ducret, Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, Lausanne

Sophie Calle / Le Major Davel / 1994 / installation / detail / cibachrome in gilded frame / 59 x 53" / Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, Lausanne

Arnulf Rainer at his arrestment in the Wolfsburger Kunstverein / November 1961 / from: Peter Weibel (ed.), Wien, Bildkompendium Wiener Aktionismus und Film, Kohlkunstverlag, Frankfurt, 1970, p. 5

At the prize giving and opening of the exhibition »Junge Stadt sieht junge Kunst« Arnulf Rainer painted over one of the VW-award winning paintings. He was arrested and sentenced in 1962.

"vandalism" has become increasingly blurred. The "historical" avant-gardists tended to deface or appropriate reproductions of artworks – like the Mona Lisa or Ziegler's *Goddess of the Arts*, both of which would of course have been difficult to reach – or objects recognized to have little aesthetic (and financial) value. After World War II, Asger Jorn "improved" paintings found in Paris flea markets. Like Duchamp he added a moustache and a goatee to the portrait of a girl with a skipping-rope, as well as caricatures and the emphatic (or ironic?) inscription "The avant-garde will not give in" in the background. Jorn encouraged his colleagues of the COBRA movement to do the same and proposed "to improve old canvases, collections and entire museums," to "paint over the pictures to preserve their actuality and to help them from falling into oblivion."[27] Overpainting became the essential *modus operandi for* Arnulf Rainer, culminating (from our point of view) in the insurpassably ambiguous discovery in 1994 that twenty-five of his paintings and photographs had been overpainted in his studio at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts – by right-wingers trying to defame contemporary art according to the local press – by himself to help stimulate a stagnant market according to the police.[28]

The title of Arman's 1975 happening *Conscious Vandalism* emphasizes its distance as well as its inspiration from the allegedly "unconscious" vandalism of those who might have inhabited the "lower middle class interior" that

27

_ Troels Andersson, *Asger Jorn, en biografi*, Copenhagen, 1994, quoted in Felix Gmelin, op. cit., p. 25.

28

_ Djawid C. Borower, Übermalter Übermaler. Wiener Schlammschlacht: Der Fall Arnulf Rainer, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 February 1995.

Felix Gmelin / The Overpainting / 1996 / from The Art Vandal Series /after Arnulf Rainer (1973) and Arnulf Rainer? (1994) / oil on canvas /43 x 36" / © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2002 / © photo: Karl-Olov Bergström

Felix Gmelin / Kill Lies All / 1996 / from The Art Vandal Series / after Pablo Picasso (1937) and Tony Shafrazi (1974) / oil on canvas / 77 x 116" / © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2002 / © photo: Karl-Olov Bergström

the artist destroyed with a club and an axe in a New York Gallery. When Hans Haacke criticized the historical transformation of Duchamp's "iconoclastic" gestures into "relics" or commodities by breaking his 1915 *In Advance of the Broken Arm* and by replacing the first part of the inscription of *Eau & gaz à tous les étages* (Water & Gas on Every Floor) with "Art and Money", he resorted to replicas. Rauschenberg had erased an original drawing, but he had asked for it from De Kooning for that purpose, thus obtaining the author's permission – if not his approval. None of this applies when, the year following Picasso's death in 1973, the Iranian-born Tony Shafrazi sprayed the enigmatic phrase "KILL LIES ALL" on *Guernica* in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He shouted that he was an artist when arrested and later explained he had wanted "to bring the art absolutely up to date, to retrieve it from art history and give it life," admitting to having done something like "reacting against the father almost" but claiming that Picasso would not have been "able to question" his gesture. The attack, hailed by the "Guerilla Art Action Group," was condemned by other artists, among whom Louise Bourgeois, Hans Haacke, and Yvonne Rainer, who declared that Shafrazi had "attempted to suppress the artistic freedom of Picasso by infringing on the artist's inviolate right to make a statement without censorship, alerting, annexing, or parasitic 'joining'."[29]

Such infringing multiplied in the 1990s and the evolution has reasons to cause concern not only among museum curators.[30] In the Carré d' Art in Nîmes in 1993, the French Pierre Pinoncelli hit a 1964 version of Duchamp's *Fountain* with a hammer after allegedly peeing into it. He explained his "iconoclastic gesture" as a way of giving life again to what had become "a public monument" and claimed that Duchamp "would have understood" it.[31] The following year, Mark Bridger poured black dye into Damien Hirst's *Away from the Flock* at London's Serpentine Gallery, thus making the sheep suspended in a formaldehyde solution invisible, and covered the title of the work with a label reading "Mark Bridger, *Black Sheep*, May 1, 1994." In November 1996, a Toronto art student vomited a blue substance on Mondrian's *Composition in White, Black and Red* (1936) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, explaining that this action was the second in a

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_ Michael T. Kaufman, Guernica Survives a Spray-Paint Attack by Vandal, in *New York Times*, 1 March 1974, p. 60; On the Arrest of Jean Toche, in *Artforum*, 8, November 1974, quoted in John Henry Merryman and Albert Elsen, *Law, Ethics, and the Visual Arts*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1987, p. 322.

_ See Jeffrey Kastner, Art Attack, in *Artnews*, October 1997, pp. 154-156; and Felix Gmelin, op. cit.

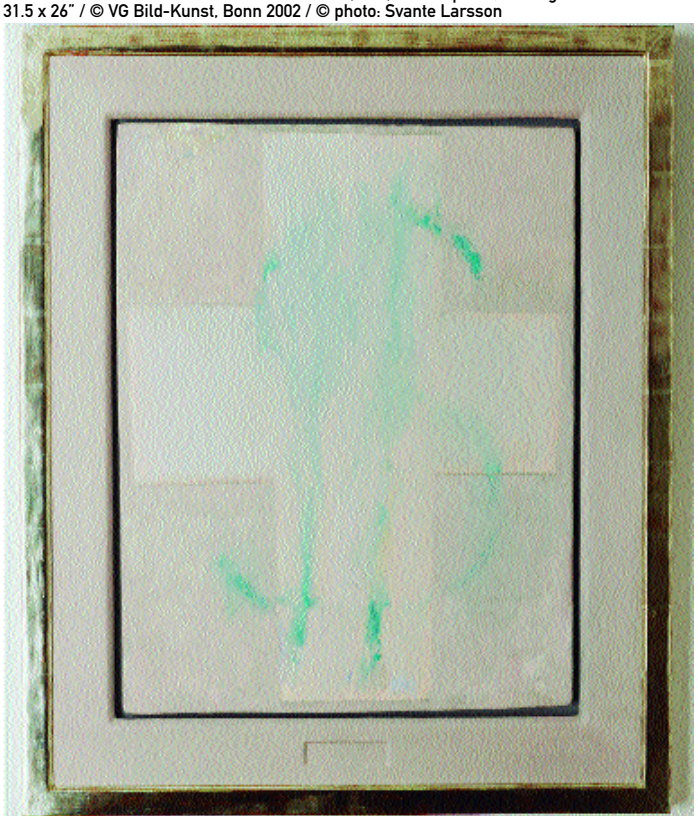
_ Gilles Lorillard, Un mois de prison avec sursis pour le "bourreau de l'urinoir", in *Le Midi Libre*, 28 August 1993; Nathalie Heinich, C'est la faute à Duchamp! D'urinoir en pissotière, 1917-1993, in *Giallu*, 2, 1994, pp. 7-24; Pierre Pinoncelli, J'irai pisser sur vos tombes, in *Bonjour Monsieur Pinoncelli*, Cahiers de création, Saint-Etienne, 1994, pp. 11-14.

planned three-part performance piece targeting with the primary colors "oppressively trite and painfully banal art." And in January 1997, the Russian performance artist Alexander Brener sprayed a green dollar sign on Malevich's *Suprematism* (1920-27) in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, defining his gesture as "a political and cultural action against corruption and elitism in culture."

The artistic status of the authors of these gestures is at best disputed, but they have put their "actions" and "performances" more squarely in the context of contemporary art theory and practice than their predecessors. Bridger declared for instance that "in terms of conceptual art, the sheep had already made its statement," and Brener found a passionate defender within the art world in the person of Giancarlo Ponti, editor and publisher of *Flash Art*, who wrote that his arrest was "an offense to the artist's freedom of expression."[32] But one can also notice a growing number of artists who deal with attacks against art in a reflexive way and who, to quote Bruno Latour's suggestion, turn iconoclasm into a topic rather than a resource.

In 1994, for an exhibition entitled *Absence* at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne, Sophie Calle

Felix Gmelin / Erased Green Dollar Sign / 2001 / from The Art Vandal Series / after Kasimir Malevich and Alexander Brener (1997) / oil on panel, white gold leaf frame / 31.5 x 26" / © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2002 / © photo: Svante Larsson



Felix Gmelin / The Avant-garde Will Never Change Its Spots / from The Art Vandal Series / 1996 / after an unknown artist and Asger Jorn (1962) / oil on polyester / 29 x 24" / © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2002 / © photo: Karl-Olov Bergström

32 _ Quoted in Kastner, op. cit.

Max Dean / As Yet Untitled / 1992-1995 / mixed media / installation views / © photo: Isaac Applebaum

devoted an installation to a large painting by Charles Gleyre that had been destroyed intentionally by fire in 1980. The lost painting, which represented the execution of a local hero by his own compatriots, is evoked by a photograph of its vandalized state and by a framed surface on which the artist has inscribed memories and comments about the work gathered from among the museum staff. One of its members considers that the painting has gained from burning; another one, who had gathered its ashes and says he wanted to put them in a coffin, suggests that the only remaining part, reproduced in the lower right corner, may have been saved by the tears of the depicted soldier, who conceals his sadness at the hero's imminent death. Calle's work is a monument to the posthumous mental life of a work of art, including the mourning process strangely visualized by its fate.

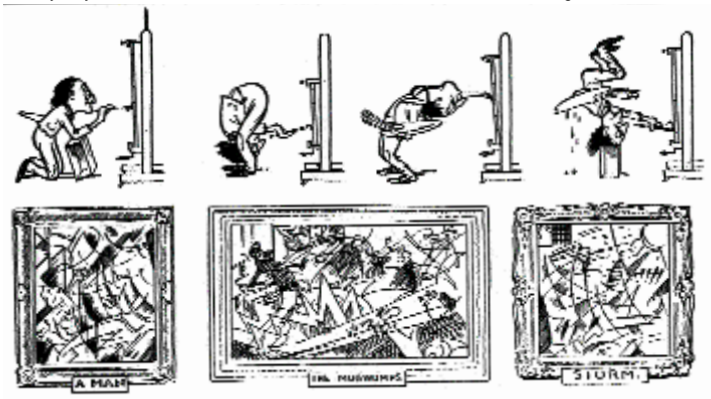
The Swedish painter Felix Gmelin, born in 1962, took a more systematic and exacting approach in his series entitled *Art Vandals*. Presented as a touring exhibition and on a website since 1996, it is currently being updated and augmented beyond the twelve works originally included, which each referred to a documented case of attack against a work of modern or contemporary art. Gmelin's paintings (and one object) propose a reconstruction of the damaged state of the works in question, which have normally been restored since, and generally include visible modifications that can amount to an explicit comment on the works and their fate. According to Jörgen Gassilewsky's introduction to the catalog of the 1996 exhibition, Gmelin "explores different vantage points, but does not endorse any one of them."[33] Indeed, *Art Vandals* avoids clearly taking sides on an issue that generally attracts passions or silence. On the one hand, Gmelin shows himself critical of Jorn, whose slogan "The avant-garde will not give in" is replaced by ambiguous arabesques and mocked by the title *The Avant-Garde Will Never Change Its Spots*. His generic embodiment of Rainer's overpainted overpaintings also strongly suggests that the Austrian artist was his own "vandal" and condenses visually Jasper Johns with Barnett Newman. But in his comment on Shafrazi's attack on *Guernica*, Gmelin suggests that Picasso might have approved of it, quoting his declaration that "a picture is a sum of destructions," and writes that by turning the painting "into a masterpiece, the museum helps to make the picture historic, thereby rendering it invisible in the present."[34] By following his titles with a mention of the type "After Pablo Picasso (1937) and Tony Shafrazi (1974)," he appears to endorse the claims of "collaboration" made by several of the "art vandals," and the title *Erased Green Dollar Sign* chosen for the work "after Malevich and Brener", while relating it to Rauschenberg's treatment of the De Kooning drawing, also suggests that the restoration of the Malevich painting amounted to the destruction of a work of art. The very recreation of the damaged state of works of art implies a valuation of this traumatic and fleeting moment in their "social life," and Gassilewsky considers that Gmelin's *mise en abyme* "honors institutions that exhibit the work of artists who honor artists who destroy the works of other artists."

This recreation can also be compared to Komar and Melamid's eternization of the moment when a monument has been lifted from its pedestal but not yet removed – or put back. But a closer expression with contemporary means of the call for a suspension of the iconoclastic gesture has been realized by the Canadian artist Max Dean with his installation *As Yet Untitled*, in which a robot takes a small picture from a reserve, presents it to the spectator, then puts it into a machine to destroy documents, before taking the next picture. If the viewer presses two hand-shaped metal poles with his or her hands while a picture is being presented, this picture is saved and put back into the cycle. One is thus made aware of an ongoing, automatic process of image destruction and of one's own involvement and responsibility in this process. Taking the opposite path from that blindly suggested by *Action Sculpture,*

33 _ Jörgen Gassilewski, Advantage Point, in Felix Gmelin, op. cit., p. 5.

34 _ Op. cit., p. 17. The statement comes from Pablo Picasso, Conversations avec Christian Zervos, in *Cahiers d'art*, 1935, pp. 173-178 ("Auparavant les tableaux s'acheminaient vers leur fin par progression. chaque jour apportait quelque chose de nouveau. Un tableau était une somme d'additions. Chez moi, un tableau est une somme de destructions.")

Henry Mayo Bateman / Brother Brushes II / detail / from A Book of Drawings, New York, 1921



As Yet Untitled forces us, like Goya's *No sabe lo que hace*, to open our eyes and our hands.

Motives and Typologies

Dean's work takes advantage of new modes of producing and eliminating images. In the age of technical reproducibility and electronic images, creating and destroying, defacing and refacing go even more hand in hand.[35] A few years ago, I fell victim to the crafty machination of vandals who had modified a photo-booth in such a way that each user would automatically receive a sprayed representation of his or her face.

The degradation and destruction of images and works of art is a very heterogeneous phenomenon and there have been many typologies proposed to analyze it, from Montalembert's distinction between a "destructive" and a "restorative vandalism" to Warnke's opposition between an "iconoclasm from above and from below," including various sets of categories based on background, context, objectives, and mode of execution.[36] Louis Réau distinguished between "avowable motives" and "unavowed motives," but his "psychology of vandals" amounted to a catalog of sins justifying the "excommunication" deserved in his eyes by "any attack against a work of beauty."[37] The use of motives and intentions as a basis for classification and interpretation is difficult because – in addition to the problems they pose for the understanding of any human behavior – their identification is complicated in the case of iconoclastic actions by the condemnation or at least the ambivalence that these actions elicit, in a context that is always polemical. Nonetheless, the typology proposed by Bruno Latour, which relies mainly on the "inner goals" of iconoclasts, may help to clarify on a more theoretical level the issues involved by the phenomena that we have been examining.

The elimination of political monuments seems to be clearly ascribable to Latour's "Cs," who are against the images

Joseph Beuys's former assistant Johannes Stüttgen holding the remains of Beuys' 1982 Fettecke [Fat Corner] in the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf / with another showing its original location in the background / 9 October 1986 / © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2002 / © photo: Bernhard Neubauer, Düsseldorf

36 37 35

_ Charles de Montalembert, Du vandalisme en France. Lettre à M. Victor Hugo, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, n.s., 1, 1833, pp. 477-524; Martin Warnke, op. cit.; pour d'autres typologies, voir Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, op. cit., pp. 13-24.

_ See the contribution by Richard Powers in the present catalog.

_ Louis Réau, op. cit., p. 13.

Ronald Searle / The Philistines: 4 / 1968 / ink / 9.6 x 8"

of their opponents and attack them as a way to reach and wound their adversaries. It must be added that the images or monuments themselves may have been produced and erected for a similar purpose, so that creation and destruction are literally part of the same process in its various phases and changing circumstances. However, it would be generally simplifying to assume that the images here are mere instruments and play no role in their fate. As the *topos* of the image that "hurts the eye" expresses, they can be felt to exert a violence to which the iconoclastic violence responds, and their specific material, formal, iconographic properties can all be actively involved in this.

The same can be said of anti-modernist "art vandals," who, for reasons of practical convenience (such as easy access), may select a target that stands for their generic foe, but who generally react also to the specific appearance and effect of a given work. We have seen that statues erected by fallen regimes have also been "estranged," modified, or completed as a way of appropriating them and helping bridge their original function and the status of historical monument. Such approaches come closer to Latour's "Bs," who are against "freeze-framing," although the reversible modifications they introduce may be paradoxically intended to allow the original objects to endure rather than be permanently eliminated.

"Innocent" vandals (Latour's "Ds") seem a suspicious category, always on the brink of revealing themselves to be something else, or at least of being attributed malicious intentions. Images and works of art have often been a "collateral damage" of military operations, but their destruction has been increasingly used to denounce the barbary of assailants, and recent "ethnic" conflicts have seen a rise of damages caused to purposely wound or weaken the cultural identity of adversaries. As far as preservation is concerned, John Ruskin already wrote in 1849 that the "restoration" of a building means the most total destruction which it can suffer because it is "accompanied with false descriptions of the things destroyed."[38] In the case of modern and contemporary art, the traditional mission of conservators and curators often comes into conflict with the built-in obsolescence of "iconoclastic" works, and only recently has one begun to look for ways to reconcile the artistic programs of self-degradation with the public's interest in the preservation of cultural heritage.

The most intriguing group of "innocent vandals" is comprised of those who explain that they have damaged or destroyed a work of art by mistake, because they had not understood it to be a work of art. The phenomenon is recent but there are already countless such stories, and it must be admitted that the evolution of art theory and practice in the twentieth century, especially the invention of the Readymade

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_ *The Works of John Ruskin*, London, 1903, 8, p. 242, quoted in Nikolaus Pevsner, Scrape and Anti-Scrape, in *The Future of the Past: Attitudes Towards Conservation*, Janet Fawcett (ed.), Thames & Hudson, London, 1976, pp. 33-53, 154-155.

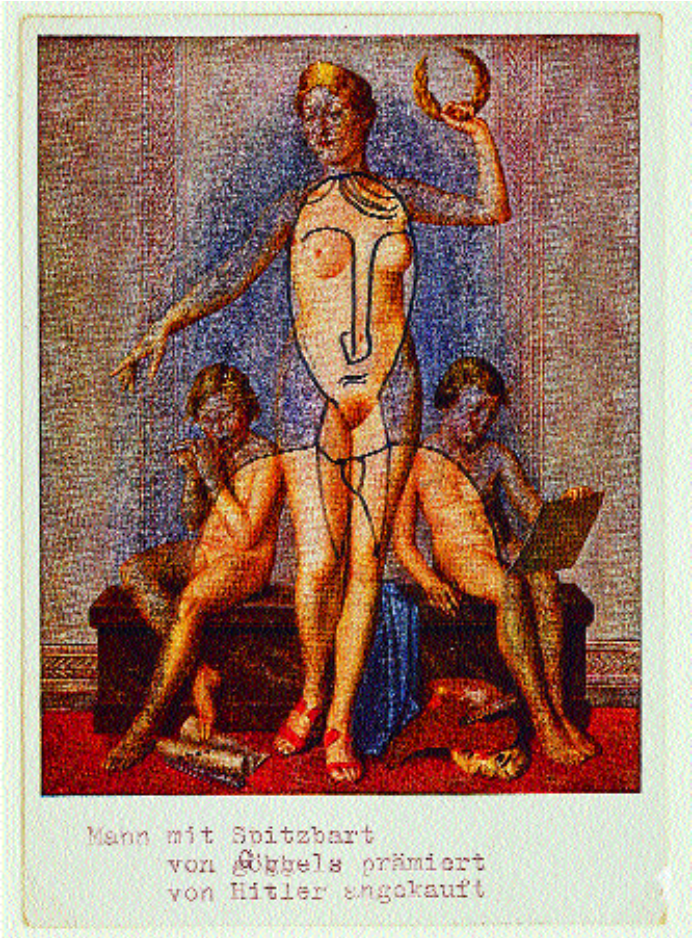
and its legacy, have created the conditions for such "mistakes" to happen, as we have seen with the disappearance of *Video Blind Piece*. However, these narratives often have a stereotyped character and are "too beautiful to be true." When sufficient information is available, the "mistake" tends to become less plausible as an explanation and to appear as an argument that enforces the attack while exonerating the assailant. Not surprisingly, Josef Beuys was the victim of such "mistakes" on several occasions. After his death, his assistant Johannes Stüttgen discovered in a waste-paper basket a *Fettecke* (fat corner) made of butter that Beuys had installed five meters high in a corner of his studio at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie. The school claimed that the janitor and his workers had "not recognized Beuys's work as an art object" when cleaning the room, but Stüttgen brought the case before trial and won.

The director of the school received a letter congratulating the janitor for having "done consciously or unconsciously, the only right thing to do with this Beuysian trash,

Auguste Rodin / Assemblage: Torso of the Woman Centaur and Minotaur / c. 1910 / plaster / 13 x 13 x 8" / Musée Rodin, Meudon / © Musée Rodin, Paris/ © photo: Adam Rzepka

Joseph Hoffmann / Palais Stoclet, Brussels / 1905 / Hall of Pillars / © photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg

Willi Baumeister / Portrait with Hat / 1955 / gouache, ballpoint pen / 6 x 4" / Archive Baumeister, Stuttgart / © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2002 / photo: Archive Baumeister, Stuttgart



namely to put it where it belongs, on the rubbish heap."[39] This comment makes explicit what the gardener's advertisement probably insinuated, as well as the meaning of many instances of "iconoclasm by mistake": by treating as waste what is presented to them as art, the "innocent vandals" reject this claim, express their contempt of the object, and lay on it the blame for its own destruction. A parallel can be found in Natalie Zemon Davis's interpretation of sixteenth century religious acts of violence, to which she finds "the character either of rites of purification or of a paradoxical desecration, intended to cut down on uncleanliness by placing profane things, like chrism, back in the profane world where they belonged" in order to redraw "the line between the sacred and the profane."[40] The element of joke also relates "iconoclasm by mistake" to the tradition of carnival, understood as a way to restore rather than overthrow a given order. Josef Kleer, who defined his action against Newman's painting as "a small contribution to cleanliness", also found the "order of values somehow downright topsy-turvy," and the author of *The Boy who Breathed on the Glass in the British Museum* used the same metaphor to describe the conversion of a painter to Futurism or Vorticism. With the means at their disposal, the "innocent vandals" attempt to put art and the world back on their feet.

Indestructible Images

Latour's "As," who are against all images, are expectedly rare in the domain of art, and, rather, represent a sort of limit. One misses a category situated somewhere between "As" and "Cs" for those who do not reject the principle of using images but certain images, favored or defended by others. This is for instance the case in the movement of modernization of church art, where a rejection of all images tended to appear only when other attempts had failed. One can locate to some extent "As" in the anti-art tendency of Dada and – provided one understands "image" in the restricted sense of mimetic representation – in the anti-figurative tendencies of modernism.

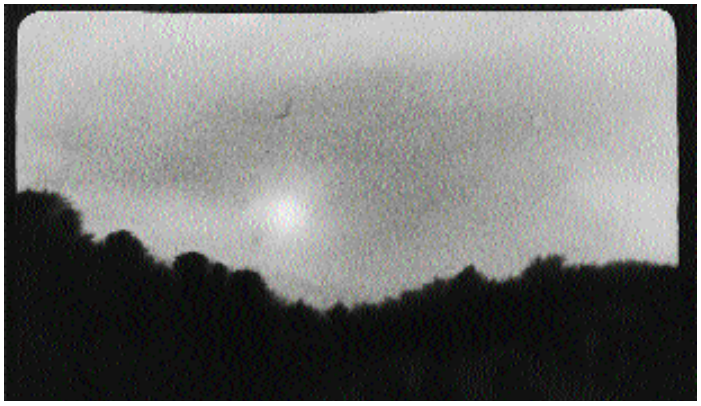
The more or less explicit references to the idea of a "murder of the father" we have encountered make clear that avant-garde "iconoclasm" can be linked to the desire and necessity to outstrip one's predecessors (in Rauschenberg's case the dominant generation). In 1968, Ronald Searle suggested that the iconoclasm of the "Philistine" springs from (real

40 _ Natalie Zemon Davis, The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth Century France, in *Past and Present*, 59, May 1973, pp. 51-91 (pp. 5, 83).

39 _ Letter of 21 October 1986 from Manfred Huppertz to Professor Irmin Kamp, reproduced in Johannes Am Ende (ed.), *Joseph Beuys und die Fettecke: Eine Dokumentation zur Zerstörung der Fettecke in der Kunstakademie Düsseldorf*, Edition Staeck, Heidelberg, 1987, p. 13 ("Er hat, bewußt oder unbewußt, das einzig richtige getan, das man mit diesem Beuys'schen Mist machen muß, ihn nämlich dahin zu befördern, wo er hingehört, auf den Müllhaufen!")

Battista Angolo del Moro (attributed) / A Vision of the Holy Family Near Verona / 1581 / oil on canvas / 35 x 43.25" / Allen Memorial Art Museum, Kress Study Collection, Oberlin College, Ohio / © photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Ohio

rather than merely feared) impotence. The logic of the art market and of art criticism (and history) supports this in-built aggression, which can also respond to real attempts at immobilizing tradition and to the growing cult of heritage. Not only have most artistic assaults against art been the source of new forms of creation, but the rejection of the artwork's claim to endure has provided experiments in other modes of preservation – for instance of process rather than product – that only begin to be acknowledged and explored.



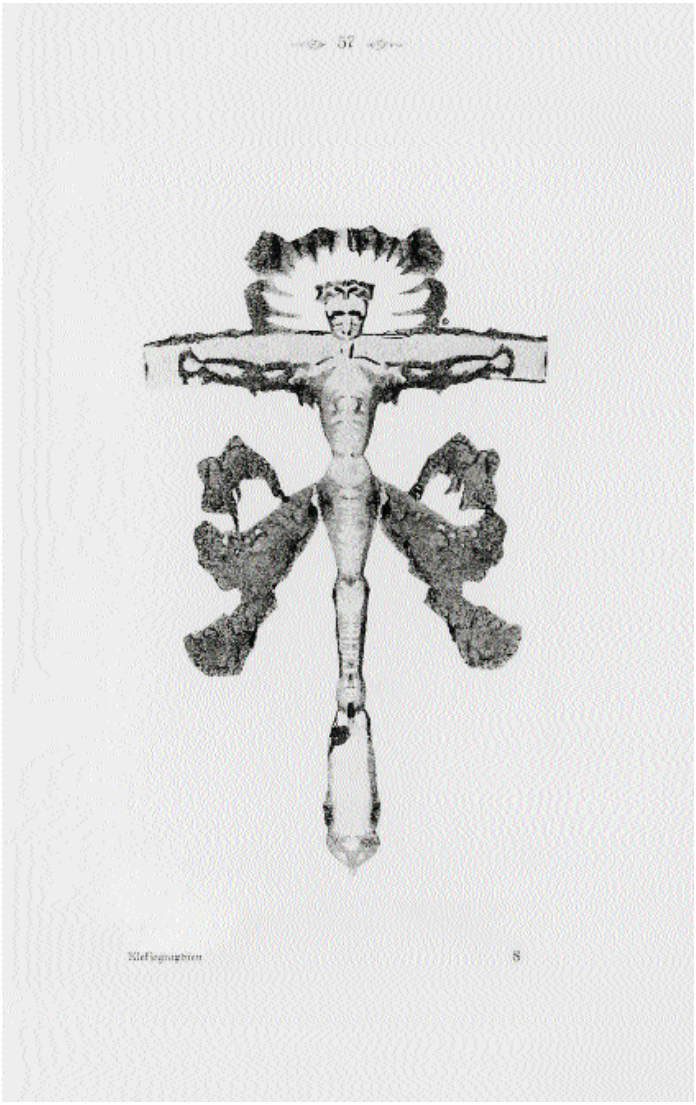
Markus Raetz / Aus der Serie »Im Bereich des Möglichen« [From the Series »In the Realm of the Possible«] / 1976 / diluted ink / 7 x 9.5" / Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau.

Many "iconoclasts" have been consistent with this logic in including the destruction of their own work in their calls for renewal. Marinetti, when proposing to free Italy from the burden of its past by demolishing its museums and libraries, also predicted that ten years later, younger creators rising to attack him and his fellow Futurists would find them burning their own books and would have to kill them, "for art can only be violence, cruelty and injustice."[41] The art dealer Ambroise Vollard recalled what Degas told him when he regretted that the artist had turned back into a ball of wax the almost finished sculpture of a dancer: "You think mostly of what it was worth, Vollard, but had you given me a hat full of diamonds, I would not have been as happy as I was to demolish this for the pleasure of starting again."[42] Rodin made a working method out of this constructive destruction, constantly recycling fragments and casts of his own previous works. Baumeister not only overpainted postcards of paintings by his nemesis Ziegler, but also of his own works.

Those who damage or "complete" works in order to bring them back from the status of historical monument to that of "iconoclastic" breakthrough, like Tony Shafrazi, claim to belong to the "Bs," who are against "freeze-framing" and not against images or art. We have seen that Jorn suggested to "paint over the pictures to preserve their actuality and to help them from falling into oblivion." But they fall victims to a form of materialism or realism by thinking that a work must be modified physically in order to survive or be resurrected, and they seem blind to the fact that they appropriate what they claim to be liberating, in a way that is bound to impose their view on others, maybe forever. Felix Gmelin, who does not confront his "art vandals" with this criticism, is led by the institutional theory to believe that "by turning Picasso's *Guernica* into a masterpiece, the museum helps to make the picture historic, thereby rendering it invisible in the present."

41 _ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Manifeste technique de la littérature futuriste, in *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909, quoted after Giovanni Lista, *Futurisme. Manifestes, proclamations, documents*, L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, 1973, pp. 85-89.

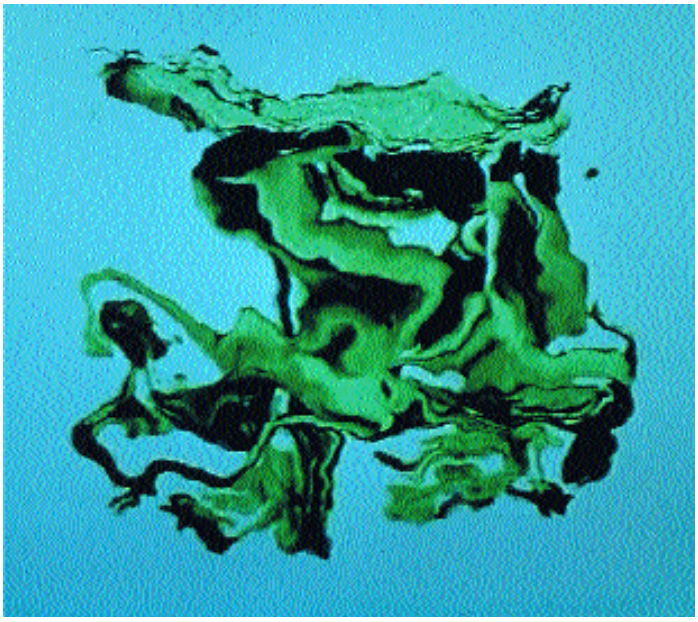
42 _ Vollard, *Degas 1834-1917*, Paris, 1924, p. 113 ("Vous pensez surtout, Vollard, à ce que ça valait, mais m'auriez-vous donné un chapeau plein de diamants que je n'aurais pas eu un bonheur égal à celui que j'ai pris à démolir ça pour le plaisir de recommencer.")



»Menschenhand hat nicht dies Bild gemacht ...« [This picture was not made by human hand ...] / Christ on the cross, interpreted blot by Justinus Kerner / before 1857 / from his book Kleksographien, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1890

Raoul Ubac / Natural Objects and Landscape / photographies / reproduced in Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme, Paris, 1938, p. 32

Minette Varí / Mirage / 1999 / video animation / 40 seconds / looped indefinitely / 100 seconds / videostill



"The museum" is only one actor of the collective process by which a work becomes "a masterpiece," a process that can make it more difficult, but never impossible, to see it "in the present."

In the case of works like Duchamp's *Fountain*, the iconoclastic "resurrection" also simplifies the matter by trying not only to erase the historical process of entering the canon but by reducing its initial ambiguity to the "iconoclastic," anti-art component. In fact, the great "iconoclasts" of modernism tend to oscillate between "As" and "Bs." We have seen it in the case of Duchamp, and there is no need to emphasize the extraordinary artistic fecundity of the Readymade. Something analogous can be said of Malevich, whose *Black Square on White Ground*, presented in 1915 at the "0.1" exhibition in St. Petersburg, was meant to "reduce everything to zero" before starting again and can be seen as the negation of all images or, in the artist's own terms, as "the embryo of all possibilities."[43] The fight against "freeze-framing" became ever more urgent in the 1930s when the totalitarian regimes endeavored to re-instrumentalize art and make it serve a univocal, controllable communication. Baumeister's overpainting of Ziegler's Nazi allegory is a perfect example of this fight: it makes a freezed and freezing image move again, and it reveals its implicit ingredients, the male spectator and sexuality.

Authoritarian tendencies, however, were not absent from the field of modern art itself. They are particularly apparent in the aniconism of rationalist architecture and of geometric abstraction, as the language of a Le Corbusier or a Mondrian sometimes betray, and they can also be found at the opposite end of the controversy between abstraction and figuration, in the manipulation of the viewer by Dalí and his followers.[44] The modernist identification of the work of art with its formal and material traits enforced these tendencies and allowed Leo Steinberg to criticize formalism in 1968 for its "interdictory stance – the attitude that tells an artist what he ought not to do, and the spectator what he ought not to see."[45] Those who considered non-objectivity as the sole end of art tended to accuse the defenders of "representation" of fostering and falling prey to an "illusion," as if painting had not always played on the tension between image and surface and reminded the spectator, like a remarkable late sixteenth century painting, that an image leads to another image.

This "interdictory stance" forced some modes of representation to lead a life in disguise, like "figuration" in abstract art or ornament in modern architecture, which tended to employ mostly or exclusively the suggestive power of the materials themselves. Unexpectedly, the use of marble facing returns to the late Antique taste for colored marble and its use in Byzantine architecture, where it paralleled the veneration of acheiropioetic images (i.e. not made by human hands) and contributed to the iconography as well as to the decoration of churches.[46] This is not so surprising after all because the dedication of modern and contemporary art to metamorphosis and to what Latour calls "cascades of images" is closely linked to a fascination for accidental images and for techniques that allow the artist to be an "operator," a mediator, or a "medium" rather than an author. Interestingly, this fascination tends to bring together the domains and resources of science, religion, and art around the genesis of images. One can think of the German physician and poet Justinus Kerner, a follower of Mesmer and early explorer of parapsychology, who made blots that he saw as creatures who had used his inkpot to enter into our world; of the Swedish playwright and painter August Strindberg, who in 1893-1894 claimed to produce true images of the stars by exposing to the night sky photographic plates immersed in developing fluid; of the Surrealists' interest in "fetishes," divination and the representational capacities of "natural objects"; and of post-modernist pseudo-mimetic images like Markus Raetz's series of ink drawings entitled *In the Realm of the Possible*.

Such images involve the spectator in their making and establish a problematic relationship with their author and with

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_ Kazimir Malevich, Du cubisme au suprématisme en art, au nouveau réalisme de la peinture en tant que création absolue (1915), in Kazimir Malevitch, *De Cézanne au suprématisme. Tous les traités parus de 1915 à 1922*, trans. Jean-Claude and Valentine Marcadé, L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, 1974, pp. 37-43; Charlotte Douglas, Evolution and the Biological Metaphor in Modern Russian Art, in *Art Journal*, 44, 2, Summer 1984, pp. 153-161

_ Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria, in *Artforum*, March 1972, reprinted in Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1972, pp. 55-91 (p. 64).

_ John Onians, Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity, in *Art History*, 3, 1, March 1980, pp. 1-24; James Trilling, The Image not Made by Hands and the Byzantine Way of Seeing, in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (eds), Nuova Alfa Editoriale, Bologna, 1998, pp. 109-127; J. Trilling, *The Language of Ornament*,Thames & Hudson, London, 2001.

_ For more details on this and what follows, see Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*, Reaktion Books, London, 2002.

their referent. Mallarmé, who referred to the ideal author as an "operator," adopted a position that seems paradoxical in being simultaneously iconoclastic and iconophilic, when he wrote that the agent of literary pleasure is a *beyond* that may not exist and defined as "impious" the temptation to "disassemble the mechanics of literature in order to show its chief cog – or nothing."[47] Pierre Bourdieu has described this attitude as "decisory fetishism," a desperate attempt at preserving the "play" (Mallarmé's word) of literature without sharing the "illusion" or "belief" on which it is based.[48] But Mallarmé admits that this *beyond* is a "lure" only to the extent that "we are prisoners of an absolute formula according to which only what exists exists." I think that the apparent inconsistency Mallarmé describes is an attempt to save literature from iconoclasm while confronting the latter, and a positive definition of "fiction" as literature's proper realm. One finds a contemporary and parallel attitude toward the visual arts in Odilon Redon's definition of the "sense of mystery," which consists of "a continuous ambiguity, in double and triple aspects, hints of aspects (images within images), forms that are about to be or will take their being from the onlooker's state of mind."[49] The physical and mental flow of images that Redon evoked in relation to drawings, prints, and paintings can now use the capacity for metamorphosis of virtual imagery. In a recent video animation by the South African artist Minette Varí, a coat of arms suggesting formality and stability transforms itself into moving nude bodies until it completely loses shape and then regains a heraldic structure. In the process, the initial Latin motto "The heat of history is in our breath" becomes "The fever of memory is in our veins"[50]: the dissolution of the initial image has allowed the transmission of memory.

47 _ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 382 ("fétichisme décisoire").

48 _ Clive Kellner, Minette Varí 1968, in *La Biennale di Venezia, 49. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte*, exhib. cat., Electa, Milano, 2001, vol. 1, p. 236.

49 _ Odilon Redon, *A soi-même. Journal (1867-1915). Notes sur la vie, l'art et les artistes*, José Corti, Paris, 1961, p. 100. (1902: "Le sens du mystère, c'est d'être tout le temps dans l'équivoque, dans les double, triple aspects, des soupçons d'aspect (images dans images), formes qui vont être, ou qui le seront selon l'état d'esprit du regardeur.")

50 _ Stéphane Mallarmé, La musique et les lettres (1894), in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, Henri Mondor and Georges Jean-Aubry (eds), Gallimard, Paris, 1945, p. 647 ("Nous savons, captifs d'une formule absolue que, certes, n'est que ce qui est. Incontinent écarter cependant, sous un prétexte, le leurre, accuserait notre inconséquence, niant le plaisir que nous voulons prendre: car cet *au-delà* en est l'agent, et le moteur dirais-je si je ne répugnais à opérer, en public, le démontage impie de la fiction et conséquemment du mécanisme littéraire, pour étaler la pièce principale ou rien.")