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LOUISE BOURGEOIS AND THE LOGIC OF THE PART-OBJECT, 1947-1982

by

MIGNON ELIZABETH NIXON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1997

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

9/12/97
Date

Carol M. Armstrong
Prof. Carol Armstrong
Chair of Examining Committee

9.15.97
Date

Rose-Carol Washton Long
Prof. Rose-Carol Washton Long
Executive Officer

Diane Kelder
Prof. Diane Kelder

Jack Flam
Prof. Jack Flam

Rosalind Krauss
Prof. Rosalind Krauss

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

LOUISE BOURGEOIS AND THE LOGIC OF THE PART-OBJECT, 1947-1982

by

Mignon Elizabeth Nixon

Adviser: Professor Carol Armstrong

This critical study of the work of Louise Bourgeois encompasses the period from the late 1940s, when Bourgeois turned from painting to sculpture, through the early 1980s, the moment in which her work became known to a larger audience via her 1982 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In articulating the interrelations between Bourgeois's oeuvre and a series of historical frames--the history of modern sculpture, the American reception of Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and the American feminist art movement--this study attempts both to develop a fuller account of Bourgeois's production than has previously been assayed, and to consider how these histories might themselves be revised under the pressure of a more detailed assessment of Bourgeois's participation in them. In particular, it is argued that Bourgeois reworks the part-object logic of the body (as distinguished from the partial figure, and as developed in the work of Constantin Brancusi,

Alberto Giacometti, and Marcel Duchamp, among others) in relation to feminism and to post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories of gender.

The principal theoretical model of this analysis is the object-relations theory of Melanie Klein. The radical discontinuity of Bourgeois's project, it is suggested, operates at the limit of sculptural form, much as Kleinian theory, concentrated on the infantile drives and on immediate and fragmented bodily experience, posits a subject at the limit of psychoanalysis. It is argued that a Kleinian-based reading can account for these key features of Bourgeois's production: the extreme heterogeneity of the oeuvre; its destabilization of form and gender; and the intensity of affect it displays. This Kleinian-based analysis is further informed by the artist's own engagement with object-relations theory.

The principal contention of this study thus is that the collapse of form enacted in Bourgeois's work restages a Surrealist operation, reworking the counter-modernist logic of the part-object in specifically feminist and post-Freudian terms.

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Gorovoy, without whose expertise many of the readings offered here would have been more flawed, and Deborah Wye, chief curator of prints and illustrated books at the Museum of Modern Art and curator, in 1982, at that museum, of the first retrospective exhibition of Bourgeois's oeuvre. The catalogue of that show remains the standard reference to Bourgeois's sculptural production, and through her sustained involvement with Bourgeois's work over the past twenty years, Deborah Wye has given that work to history and, to a great extent, to me.

Thanks are also due to Nancy Malloy of the Archives of American Art for assistance with the Louise Bourgeois papers and to the staff of the Robert Miller Gallery for access to their archive. My work was crucially assisted in the 1994-95 academic year by the material support of the CUNY Graduate Center Milton Brown Dissertation Fellowship.

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Introduction

I.

The most often-cited statement in all the critical literature devoted to Louise Bourgeois is this one by Lucy Lippard: "It is difficult to find a framework vivid enough to incorporate Louise Bourgeois's sculpture," began her 1975 essay "Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out," pronouncing the defining problem for any study of this diverse production, in which "shapes and ideas appear and disappear in a maze of versions, materials, incarnations."¹

Since the groundbreaking retrospective exhibition organized by Deborah Wye at the Museum of Modern Art in 1982 (a show which not only staged Bourgeois's first retrospective but also cracked that museum's gender barrier), the reception of her work has dramatically expanded.² Extensively exhibited and aggressively

¹ Lucy Lippard, "Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out," in From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1976), p. 238.

² "Louise Bourgeois," curated by Deborah Wye, was held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from November 3, 1982 through February 8, 1983. Wye's catalogue to the exhibition, Louise Bourgeois, with a foreword by William S. Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), remains the most detailed and comprehensive account of the artist's production and has served as the primary resource for this dissertation. Unless otherwise noted, I have followed Wye's chronology of events in the artist's life and career and her dating of works (a complex endeavor undertaken in close

collected in recent years, her long-neglected oeuvre has become securely ensconced in the canon of modern sculpture.³ A standard inclusion in art-historical survey texts,⁴ and a frequent subject in the art press,

consultation with Bourgeois in preparation for the MOMA show). This study is also indebted to Wye's catalogue essay "Louise Bourgeois: One and Others," which offers the first detailed chronological survey of the artist's production.

³ In the introduction to the most recent monograph, Marie-Laure Bernadac makes the not atypical claim among writers on Bourgeois that after being "almost completely overlooked for thirty years" Bourgeois now enjoys "national and international recognition as one of the greatest artists of the century." (Marie-Laure Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois [Paris: Flammarion, 1995], p. 8). If, however, Bourgeois has joined, if not the twentieth century's roll of "great" artists, at least the modernist canon, there are notable exclusions. In one of the most recent surveys of post-World War II art, Jonathan Fineburg's Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being (London: Laurence King Publishing, 1995), she is, for example, mentioned only in passing, in a section devoted to the work of Eva Hesse. The uneven account of Bourgeois's work in dominant histories is not a central concern of this study, which is not primarily an analysis of reception, but the discrepancy between the artist's now-established prominence and her relatively minor place in some mainstream histories obviously must be understood within a gendered discourse. The gendering of greatness is the subject of Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" reprinted in Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 145-78; and of Carol Duncan's "When Greatness Is a Box of Wheaties" (1975), reprinted in The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 121-32. For an analysis of resistance to the inclusion of work made by women in canonical histories, see Griselda Pollock, "Vision, Voice, and Power: Feminist Art History and Marxism," Block 8 (1982), pp. 2-21.

⁴ Among recent surveys, see, for example: H.H. Arnason, History of American Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, 3rd ed., revised and updated by Daniel Wheeler (New York: Abrams, 1986), pp. 478-79, 586; Dore Ashton, American Art since 1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 57-59; Katherine Hoffman, Explorations: The Visual Arts since 1945 (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 80, 175;

Bourgeois's work, and the artist herself, have also featured widely in the popular media. Since turning seventy in 1981, she has become an international art-world celebrity and a feminist icon, and this shift from margin to center, from critical obscurity to media popularity, has fundamentally conditioned the recent reception of her work.⁵

If, however, the critical literature devoted to

and Harold Osborne, ed., Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 73. Bourgeois was, however, mentioned in surveys of modern sculpture from an early stage of her career. See, for example: Robert Maillard, ed., New Dictionary of Modern Sculpture (London: Methuen & Co., 1960, pp. 32-33); Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt, Modern Artists in America (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951), pp. 8-22, 86, 100, 133; and Michel Seuphor, The Sculpture of This Century: Dictionary of Modern Sculpture, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Neuchatel, Switzerland: Editions du Griffon, 1959; reprint 1961), pp. 192, 241.

⁵ A typical recent profile was entitled "Octogenarian Sculptress Bares All" (Jeffrey Hogrefe, New York Observer, May 2, 1994). Fashion magazines including Vogue and Brigitte (Belgium), have taken up Bourgeois's transgressive feminist persona, as in this notice that appeared in Mademoiselle, announcing her selection as U.S. representative to the Venice Biennale in 1993: "Members only: a woman makes the most of masculinity. Sculptor Louise Bourgeois aims below the belt. Now 81, she's made a life's work of bending and shaping the male member to her art's desire." (Joyce Caruso, Mademoiselle, June 1993, p. 72.) An official announcement of her selection, published as an advertisement in major American art magazines (and sponsored principally by Philip Morris), took a different line, casting her as visionary humanist: "She saw it all. Eyewitness to art and art's trends in the 20th century. And yet, as an artist, aware of all around her, she developed her own innovative, creative vision. Sighting subjects of universal scope--gender, sexuality, identity--interpreting them through human and symbolic forms. . . . This is Bourgeois at her creative peak. At 81, her vision crystallized. Her view ever expanding. And the art world looks on waiting to see what comes next."

Bourgeois's production has expanded over the past decade and a half, it has not deepened in the same measure. Art historians and critics have, for the most part, declined Lippard's challenge to find a framework that might, if not encompass, at least begin to theorize its complexity and discontinuity. Indeed, although Wye's exhibition was staged at the pivotal moment of art history's disciplinary revision of the early 1980s, Bourgeois's reception has been particularly impoverished at the level of theory. Even theories of sexuality and the body with which it would seem so obviously to engage have been neglected in readings of this oeuvre that, since the 1940s, has made the problematic of gender the crux of its obsessive engagement with the body.

Nor has "the problem of history" been adequately addressed.⁶ For although Bourgeois's artistic career has been shaped by complex involvements--with such artistic movements as Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism, with the intellectual communities of Existentialist philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, and with feminist politics--most

⁶ The speaker is Bourgeois, who recently remarked to interviewer Christiane Meyer-Thoss, "The problem of history is yours, not mine. I fit into history like a bug in a rug." Meyer-Thoss, Louise Bourgeois: Konstruktionen für freien Fall/Designing for Free Fall (Zurich: Ammann Verlag, 1992), p. 139.

accounts of her work have scanted these associations.⁷ That particular histories--most obviously the American reception of Surrealism and the American feminist art movement, but also broader narratives like the history of post-World War II American art and the history of modern sculpture, even the histories of modernism and postmodernism--might themselves be revised under the pressure of a more detailed assessment of Bourgeois's participation in them, has scarcely been broached.

I have attempted to address this double omission of theory and history in the context of an account that itself makes no claim to comprehensiveness. Not all Bourgeois's works (not even all of those that can be deemed key works) are considered, and those that are examined, are read in relation only to partial histories. The theoretical compass of this analysis, too, is decidedly narrow, principally restricted to a single psychoanalytic model, namely, Kleinian object-relations theory.

The objective of this account is, however, the

⁷ In 1983, Robert Storr argued that Bourgeois's subversive position within mid twentieth-century modernism made it "more important to examine the extent to which she did not belong to the various groups with which she was connected than to establish belatedly those associations," implying that it was Bourgeois's critique of, for example, Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism that required analysis, rather than her tangential affiliation with them. Storr, "Louise Bourgeois: Gender and Possession," Art in America, vol. 71, no. 4 (April 1983), p. 132. In the more recent literature, however, a mythology of Bourgeois's alienated individuality has obscured any careful analysis of her work within the contexts of its production.

encompassing one Lippard set forth: to propose a framework flexible enough to incorporate the broad field of Bourgeois's production. For while it does not consider the entire oeuvre, or attempt to comprehend the complex histories and theories that diversity of objects engages, this study does propose a logic through which to articulate pivotal operations within Bourgeois's work across a long period, from the mid 1940s, when the artist turned from painting to sculpture, to the time of her 1982 retrospective. (It does not address the significant body of work produced since 1982, which in scope and complexity demands its own detailed analysis.)

The features of Bourgeois's production this study attempts to analyze, and to read together, are these: the extreme heterogeneity of the oeuvre, its destabilization of form and gender via the part-object, and the intensity of affect it displays. The histories with which this account is primarily concerned, and which it attempts to examine together, are those of Surrealism and feminism in the postwar American context. For if, as Lippard suggested in 1975, a principal obstacle to any systematic analysis of Bourgeois's oeuvre is its resistance to the patriarchal structures of genealogy, sources, and influences through which art history is produced, this study instead examines the work's critical relation to history, and specifically its feminist reworking of Surrealism. Thus its primary

claim is that Bourgeois restages pivotal operations of Surrealism (particularly its subversion of modernist abstraction via the literalism of the part-object) in feminist and post-Freudian terms.

II.

Reading Bourgeois's work through the object-relations theory of Melanie Klein (a theory contemporary to Bourgeois's own practice and about which she is knowledgeable), this study contends that its radical discontinuity operates at the limit of sculptural form, much as Kleinian theory, concentrated on the infantile drives and on immediate and fragmented bodily experience, posits a subject at the limit of psychoanalysis. It is therefore argued that a structural congruity exists between the Kleinian object-relations model (specifically in its emphasis on the subsymbolic, or prelinguistic, register of experience), and Bourgeois's production (particularly in its concentration on the bodily fragment, or part-object).

A central aim of this study therefore is to read Bourgeois's practice theoretically, meaning not only that her work demands detailed theoretical interpretation, but also that it is itself productive of theory. For Bourgeois's engagement with psychoanalysis is both heterodox and critical, and while the Kleinian object-relations model can be seen as apposite for reading pivotal features of her

work, her sculptures also exceed and interrogate that theory in turn.⁸

That the theoretical framework through which Bourgeois's production is thought should be a psychoanalytically based model is suggested at the level of form by the work's phantasmatic representation of the body. For like psychoanalysis, Bourgeois's work investigates the interface of the physical and the psychical, and like Kleinian object-relations theory in particular, it enacts the phantasmatic as a function of the body. Rather than a product of the unconscious mind, as it is for Freud, fantasy for Klein is bound up in the physical experience of the drives; similarly, in Bourgeois's sculpture, the phantasmagoria of the body is registered less as an imagery of the unconscious (as in Surrealism) than as a physical trace of the drives.

In chapter two, I therefore extend the Kleinian analysis of Bourgeois's work to the processes of her sculptural production. Arguing that the engravings she undertook in the mid 1940s mark a break with the logic of painting (the medium in which she had previously worked), I suggest that by then transposing the physical techniques of gouging, digging, and incising from printmaking to

⁸ This occurs, for example, in a work entitled Fillette (1968), which, as I argue in chapter one, stages a shift from fantasies of infantile aggression privileged in the Kleinian account of the part-object, to the culturally repressed register of maternal aggression.

sculpture, Bourgeois defined her object making within a logic of the drives. The use of a system of cutting in her early sculptural works therefore is compared both with Surrealist automatism, and with the part-object logic of desiring production enacted in Marcel Duchamp's Large Glass.

The first two chapters further examine Bourgeois's engagement with psychoanalysis in the specific context of her association with the Surrealists, first in Paris in the mid 1930s and then in New York in the late 1930s and 1940s. For if the formal operations of her work can be read within a psychoanalytic framework of interpretation, from a historical perspective it is crucial to observe that Bourgeois, who began her artistic career under the sign of Surrealism, developed her work in an intellectual and artistic milieu shaped by psychoanalytic modes of thought (and by Freudian theory in particular).

In chapter three, which focuses on Bourgeois's production of the 1960s, I consider the implications of the rethinking, even remaking, of Surrealist objects (including works by Alberto Giacometti and Jean Arp) undertaken in the period of her most active involvement in feminist politics. Works such as Fillette (1968) and the contemporaneous series of Januses, as I attempt to show, offer a detailed analysis of the part-object as potentially subversive of phallogentric representations of the body. By shifting the phallus from the register of the symbolic to the subsymbolic

field of the drives, these works propose the part-object as one possible basis for a nonphallogocentric model of sexuality.

Central to this analysis of Bourgeois's production as a feminist reworking of Surrealism is a radical distinction between the categories of the partial figure and the part-object in modern sculpture. For a principal limitation of the critical reception of Bourgeois's work of the 1960s has been its elision of these two terms, subsuming her use of bodily fragments within the synecdochical logic of the partial figure that has been understood broadly to structure modernist sculpture. As developed in the work of Albert Elsen, the partial figure is a modernist device by which the bodily fragment is seen to retain, even to accentuate, the figure's completeness precisely through the process of abstraction.⁹ By contrast, the literalizing, fixating logic of the part-object that, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, underlies such Surrealist sculptures as Giacometti's Disagreeable Object (1931) and Suspended Ball (1930-31), reduces the body not to its formal essence but to its organs and drives.¹⁰

⁹ Albert E. Elsen, "Notes on the Partial Figure," Artforum, vol. 8 (November 1969), pp. 58-63; and Origins of Modern Sculpture: Pioneers and Premises (New York: George Braziller, 1974).

¹⁰ Rosalind E. Krauss, "Giacometti," in "Primitivism" and Twentieth-Century Art, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 503-33; and chapter 4, The Optical Unconscious (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

Thus in chapter three I argue that through her deployment of the part-object, Bourgeois can be seen to align herself with a counter-formalist history grounded in Surrealism. Reading her production of the 1960s in relation to the legacy of Surrealism in Pop and Process art, and specifically in connection with the contemporaneous production of Yayoi Kusama and Eva Hesse, I suggest that Bourgeois's turn from the vertical figure to the horizontal field, and from rigid to liquid materials, be considered within a larger feminist project of disarticulating phallic form via the drives.

The concluding chapter, devoted to an examination of Bourgeois's 1974 installation The Destruction of the Father and its critical reception, considers the problem of a Kleinian-based interpretation of her work within specific feminist artistic and political contexts of the 1970s and the 1990s. Here I argue that in the early to mid 1970s, together with artists like Nancy Spero, whose Codex Artaud also dates to that time, Bourgeois placed the problematic of female aggression on the table for feminist art, and that she did so in Kleinian terms. The discrepancy between the linguistic-based theory of Jacques Lacan and the Kleinian emphasis on the drives can be seen as a framing problem for feminist readings of Bourgeois's production, as I attempt to demonstrate not only in relation to the critical reception of The Destruction of the Father, but also with reference to

the artistic reception of Bourgeois's work in feminist practices of the 1990s, which restage aggressive female subjectivity through a turn to the drives.

III.

Thus far, I have asserted that the critical reception of Bourgeois's sculpture has been inadequate at the level of theory and have summarized my argument that the theoretical framework of Kleinian object relations can be seen to encompass this diverse oeuvre--to offer, that is, a model through which to broach a more systematic analysis of it than has been developed to date. I will now turn to a consideration of the principal literature through which Bourgeois's production has been critically and historically framed in order to demonstrate more precisely why a theoretically based analysis is needed.

Spanning more than fifty years, this corpus of writing substantially recapitulates the development of late modernist and postmodernist artistic and critical paradigms. My discussion therefore is necessarily selective, restricted to identifying key positions and texts, and focusing in particular on those that are not discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. In order to preserve a sense of the historical shifts that structure this literature, it is reviewed chronologically within four broad phases: from 1947 to the mid sixties (the period coincident with formalism in

critical discourse); from 1966 to the mid seventies (the period of Bourgeois's intensive consideration of problems of gender, contemporaneous with the development of feminist criticism); from 1976 to the early eighties (the period in which Bourgeois's work became closely associated with an expressionist-based rejection of formalism); and from 1982 to the present (the period since the MOMA retrospective, and concurrent with the consideration of poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories in art history and criticism).¹¹

1947-1964

Apart from reviews of her two solo painting shows, which appeared in major art magazines and daily newspapers in 1945 and 1947,¹² the first significant essay on Bourgeois's work was written in 1947 by Marius Bewley, director of Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery. Published as the introduction to a suite of engravings paired with short texts that Bourgeois produced under the title He Disappeared into Complete Silence, Bewley's elegant

¹¹ The critical reception of works produced since 1982 falls outside the scope of this study.

¹² Reviews of Bourgeois's 1945 painting exhibition at the Bertha Schaefer Gallery included the following: Howard Devree, New York Times, June 10, 1945, section II, p. 2; Art News, vol. 44 (June 1945), pp. 30, 37; New York Herald Tribune, June 10, 1945; and J[udith] K. R[eed], Art Digest, vol. 19 (June 1945), p. 31. In 1947, Bourgeois's second solo painting exhibition, at the Norlyst Gallery, received reviews in Art News, vol. 46 (November 1947), p. 42; New York Sun, October 31, 1947; New York Times, November 2, 1947.

and incisive essay, reprinted in 1949 in The Tiger's Eye, offered an auspicious beginning to the critical reception Bourgeois was then attempting to elicit for her work.¹³ Describing the parables that accompany the portfolio's engravings as "tiny tragedies of human frustration," Bewley emphasized the psychoanalytic dimension of the project, noting the presence of "several evocative levels" in the engravings, of which the short texts corresponded merely to the level of the artist's greatest conscious awareness.¹⁴ "In relating the parables to the engravings," he cautioned, it would, however, "be better to avoid any psycho-inquisitorial session."¹⁵

And so, from the outset, the role of the unconscious in Bourgeois's work, and the difficulties confronted by the critic in articulating its function were deemed crucial to the work's interpretation. As Bewley astutely observes, He Disappeared into Complete Silence is, however, manifestly concerned less with the individual psyche than with the

¹³ Marius Bewley, "An Introduction to Louise Bourgeois," The Tiger's Eye, vol. 1, no. 7 (March 15, 1949), pp. 89-92. Deborah Wye and Carol Smith note that Bourgeois's daybooks from the time indicate she undertook the portfolio "partly in the hope of making her work more widely known" and that she met often with Bewley and with Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to discuss her plans for the project. Wye and Smith, The Prints of Louise Bourgeois (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), p. 73.

¹⁴ Bewley, "An Introduction to Louise Bourgeois," p. 89.

¹⁵ Ibid.

psychic subject's positioning in the social field. The rhetoric of Existentialist philosophy pervades his essay, which, locating Bourgeois's work squarely within the intellectual debates of postwar New York, describes He Disappeared into Complete Silence as a response to the problem of "a cultural failure as it impinges on the individual."¹⁶ In this reading, the isolated architectonic structures that inhabit the barren landscape of He Disappeared into Complete Silence are bound not only by the tight frames of the plates, but also by the "cultural frame" within which a crisis of alienation is staged. And if "this problem of isolation and cultural failure is one which every modern artist has had to deal with," Bewley insists upon the particular determination of Bourgeois's work to bridge the psychic and the social, to represent an emotional experience that is in turn "intensified by seeing it through the glass of our cultural crisis."¹⁷

For Bewley, at least implicitly, the two axes of Bourgeois's work were Surrealism (in its engagement with the unconscious) and Existentialism (in its concern with radical alienation). His text recalls that moment in the late forties when the tension between these terms was seen to structure Bourgeois's developing artistic practice, and when the formal, intellectual, phantasmatic, and political

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁷ Ibid.

operations of her work were acknowledged and read together. In the critical reception of the two decades that followed--from her first exhibitions of sculpture until her engagement with feminist politics in the late sixties and early seventies--Bourgeois's work tended instead to be considered in strictly formal terms. For in this interval that coincided with the dominance of formalist criticism, and with the prestige of painting over other forms, Bourgeois's sculpture, refusing stylistic consistency, existed in an uneasy tension with critical discourse.

In October 1949, several months after the publication of Bewley's essay in The Tiger's Eye, Bourgeois exhibited her first series of sculptural works in an installation at the Peridot Gallery in New York, and, like her previous exhibitions of painting, the show received several notices.¹⁸ Reiterating the themes set out by Bewley, the reviewer for Art Digest observed that while the medium had changed, Bourgeois's work continued to project "the loneliness of the individual in contemporary society." If, however, the "severity of treatment" in the rough wood carvings underscored the "tragedy of isolation" that was Bourgeois's consistent theme, this lack of finish also

¹⁸ These included unsigned reviews in the New York Times, October 9, 1949, and New York Sun, October 14, 1949; M.G., "Debut as Sculptor at Peridot," Art News, vol. 48 (October 1949), p. 46; Stuart Preston, New York Times, October 9, 1949, section II, p. 9; and M[arynell] S[harp], "Telegraphic Constructions," Art Digest, vol. 24 (October 15, 1949), p. 22.

undermined the works's aesthetic autonomy. "Complete works of art must stand alone and do not necessitate a stage setting to complement them," the reviewer admonished, and the installation of the *Personages*, in which the totem-like works were set directly on the floor more like furniture than sculpture, controverted this basic tenet of formalist aesthetics.¹⁹

In retrospect, these early sculptures can be seen to critique the aesthetic values of late modernism within a Surrealist logic, to initiate a progressive erosion of the autonomy of the modernist work that was to intensify in Bourgeois's production of the fifties, sixties, and seventies. At the time however, the tension with late modernism was as often submerged as criticized. A second reviewer of the 1949 exhibition, writing in Art News, for example emphasized precisely the stark simplification of the figures, their abstraction of the human form to "elemental terms." In this reading, the reduction of form to simple abstract shapes was not undermined but reinforced by the roughness of the carving, with its primitivist associations to "African and Oceanic fetishes."²⁰

The reviewer of Bourgeois's next New York exhibition, installed at the same gallery the following year, expanded on this theme, describing the figures as "highly simplified,

¹⁹ S[harp], "Telegraphic Constructions," p. 22.

²⁰ M.G., "Debut as Sculptor at Peridot," p. 46.

almost totemistic." When grouped together they appeared "ready for use in some primitive rite."²¹ Threading abstraction through the elemental logic of primitivism, in emulation of so many modernist texts, this essay implicitly placed the Personages within the broad legacy of Modigliani, Brancusi, Picasso, Ernst, Giacometti, and so on, and within those European masters' artistic reception in New York School sculpture.

Echoing the discourse of formalism, this reading, through which Bourgeois's work was subsumed in the abstract logic of modernist sculpture, constituted the principal model of its reception until the 1980s. If, however, her sculpture could be read as abstract, and thus accommodated within a formalist model, the heterogeneity and improvisational, bricolagiste character of the works she produced through the 1950s--consisting primarily in roughly crafted constructions of wood and plaster strung on figure-sized poles--obviously prevented them from being considered emblematic of New York School abstraction. So while the discrepancies between Bourgeois's work and formalist values were repressed in critical discourse, they did not altogether vanish, and the reception of her work (which was not in any case widely exhibited in the fifties) was muted.

In 1954, four years after her second solo sculpture

²¹ P[esella] L[evy], "Louise Bourgeois," Art Digest, vol. 25, no. 1 (October 1, 1950), p. 16.

exhibition, the status of marginal artist was officially conferred on Bourgeois in an issue of Design Quarterly devoted to "Ten Artists in the Margin," where Belle Krasne grouped her with others including Reuben Nakian, Balcomb Greene, John Graham, Sidney Geist, and, most notably, Joseph Cornell. Quoting Cornell's description of his boxes as situated "in the margin of art," Krasne defined that liminal area as "outside the mainstream . . . where the new impulses arise as movements stiffen into academies."²² For Bourgeois, it was a prophetic designation; in the decades that followed her work was consistently positioned by critics in a marginal space "outside the 'movements' of modern art," as Krasne expressed it then.

After 1950, Bourgeois presented no solo exhibition exclusively of sculpture in New York until 1964. It was, however, a productive period and one of at least modest professional success. In 1951, Alfred Barr acquired Figure endormie (Sleeping Figure) for the Museum of Modern Art. In 1952, she designed the set for Erick Hawkins's dance, "The Bridegroom of the Moon." In 1953, she exhibited a number of drawings and new sculptures at the Peridot Gallery and throughout the decade participated in annual exhibitions of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the American Abstract Artists, and the Stable Gallery. A photograph from the mid

²² Belle Krasne, "Ten Artists in the Margin," Design Quarterly 30 (1954), p. 9.

1950s, published in Wye's catalogue, shows the elegantly dressed Bourgeois in conversation with a young Robert Rauschenberg, an image that poignantly encapsulates her position as both insider and outsider to the New York art world of the time.²³

In 1964, Bourgeois's relation to the contemporary scene shifted. That year, at the Stable Gallery, she exhibited a new and strikingly different body of work, comprising "shapeless forms" in plaster and a couple of small works in rubber, one "simply a mound that looks semi-liquid," as the critic for Arts described them.²⁴ Attempting to account for this abrupt change, Daniel Robbins published a survey of Bourgeois's sculpture in Art International.²⁵ "She participated in a milieu, actively involved in its struggles and intellectual ferment," he wrote of her position in the art world of the 1940s and 1950s, "but her work, changing and growing these last twenty-five years, always followed lucid organic principles entirely its own. In the mid-sixties it asserts its uniqueness as categorically as it did in the late forties, when it first received wide attention."²⁶

²³ Wye, Louise Bourgeois, figure 17, p. 107.

²⁴ Vivien Raynor, "Louise Bourgeois," Arts, vol. 38 (March 1964), p. 63.

²⁵ Daniel Robbins, "Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois," Art International, vol. 8 (October 20, 1964), pp. 29-31.

²⁶ Ibid.

The suggestion of an organic principle in Bourgeois's work, of the oeuvre as structured by an internal logic distinct from the larger context of "the 'movements' of modern art," offered a plausible means of interpreting its discrepancies with the sculptural practices of late modernism and was adopted by many subsequent critics. Grounding this difference at the level of form in a historical position he deemed "probably unique," Robbins noted that Bourgeois, "almost formed by one climate" (that of Surrealism in Paris in the 1930s), "was obliged to emerge in a totally different situation" (that of New York in the 1940s).²⁷ In contradistinction to the Surrealist émigrés who soon followed her from Paris, Bourgeois did not leave the old capital of the modern art world for the new as a mature artist, but as an emergent one. Moreover, unlike the war émigrés, she would remain in New York, becoming an American citizen in 1951.

For Robbins, Bourgeois's alienation as both non-native and "non-refugee," as caught between Surrealism and its American reception, offered an explanation for what he called "her persistent and irreconcilable difference, her total individuality."²⁸ And it was this move, from an analysis of the specificity of Bourgeois's historical position, which surely is pivotal to the development of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

work, to an assertion of her "total individuality," that opened the way to the now-established construction of Bourgeois as an artist outside of history. This was by no means the purpose of an article that sought precisely to situate the formal development of her work in its historical context, but in retrospect the description of Bourgeois's project as autonomous and radically individual helped to shape a mythic persona. Writing in the foreword to Wye's catalogue for the MOMA show, William Rubin would later evoke the apotheosis of this figure: "Louise Bourgeois is a loner . . . whose bona fides goes back . . . to a period when maintaining a wholly individual profile in the face of Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, David Smith, et alia involved an immense force of artistic and personal character."²⁹

The stress Robbins placed on Bourgeois's individualism was premised not only on its difference from contemporaneous sculptural production, but also on its internal discontinuity. For, as he observed, the oeuvre is constituted by ruptures: first the break with painting in the 1940s and then, in the early 1960s, the abandonment of the figure. Confronted by an abrupt turn to the horizontal, by the viscosity and formlessness of the work shown in 1964, Robbins subsumed its fracture, its splintering and extruding

²⁹ William Rubin, foreword to Wye, Louise Bourgeois, p. 11.

of the figure, in a perceived organic completeness in which each piece presented a microcosm of "forests, hills, oceans, caves."³⁰ Introducing into the critical literature an organic metaphor by which to sublimate these distinctly bodily, at times even scatological works, Robbins invoked "the supreme logic of nature" as the model for Bourgeois's sculpture.³¹

In a detailed account of the artist's working process, Robbins however emphasizes the corporeal associations of the materials, and of the organ-like structures they assume in works that seem to "quiver and ooze."³² In its attention to process and materials, and its privileging of the physical operations through which the shape of the work more unfolds than is impressed on those materials, Robbins's description thus detects in these pieces the concerns of slightly later Process art. Framing her production within the formal logic of abstraction, this important early survey therefore also, and more convincingly, demonstrates how her work exceeds the abstract.

1966-1975

When, in 1966, Lucy Lippard organized an exhibition entitled "Eccentric Abstraction" as a rebuttal to Minimalist rationalism, she featured pieces by Eva Hesse and others

³⁰ Robbins, "Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois," p. 30.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 29.

whose work was seen to articulate the interface of the body and the sculptural object.³³ The inclusion in the show of Bourgeois's "overtly sexual latex membranes"³⁴ forged a historical link between this new body-centered work and Surrealism. In a decisive repositioning, "Eccentric Abstraction" therefore served to shift Bourgeois's work from the past to the present, from the New York School reception of Surrealism to that movement's contemporary reception in Pop and Process art.

In chapter three, I discuss in detail the critical and curatorial frameworks of "Eccentric Abstraction," focusing in particular on the relation posed between Bourgeois's work and that of Hesse. Here it is useful simply to note that Lippard's exhibition both revived Surrealism as a dissident term in the history of late modernism, and underscored Bourgeois's role in activating and reframing Surrealism's critique of modernist rationality.

In 1969, William Rubin offered a different analysis of Bourgeois's position within the legacy of Surrealism, emphasizing not the work's criticality but its "inherent

³³ Lucy R. Lippard, Eccentric Abstraction (New York: Fischbach Gallery, 1966); reprinted in Art International vol. 10 (November 20, 1966), pp. 34-40 (page citations are to the reprint).

³⁴ Lippard, Eva Hesse (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976; reprint, 1992), p. 83.

conservatism."³⁵ Expanding the survey of Bourgeois's production published in the same journal five years earlier by Robbins, "Some Reflections Prompted by the Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois" registered the Surrealism scholar's surprise at the "continued viability" of Surrealist-based practices in the 1960s.³⁶ In contrast to postwar American painting, he concluded, "the best sculpture of the fifties and sixties" (including Bourgeois's, and in pointed contrast to that of Donald Judd) was not innovative but content modestly to rework the "poetic mythology and organic, biomorphic form-language" of Surrealist sculpture.³⁷

The author of the most influential American study of Surrealism (an account in which sculpture is distinctly subordinated to painting)³⁸, does not however mark the striking recapitulations of Surrealist practice in Bourgeois's new works. Neither the shift from vertical to horizontal, repeating a strategy pioneered by Giacometti in the early 1930s, nor the arresting deformation of shape and material, is identified specifically as a reprise of Surrealism. Concentrating instead on the works' organic

³⁵ William S. Rubin, "Some Reflections Prompted by the Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," Art International, vol. 8 (April 20, 1969), p. 18.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ William S. Rubin, Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968; reprint, 1977).

forms, Rubin simply places them within the broad history of biomorphic abstraction.

Two years earlier, Wayne Andersen's "American Sculpture: The Situation in the Fifties," published in Artforum, had presented an analysis of mid twentieth-century American sculpture as defined not in relation to painting, but by an autonomous and partly Surrealist-based tradition.³⁹ Examining the diversity of sculpture produced in America during the immediate postwar period, Andersen declared: "the radicalism of modern sculpture in this country is only disconcerting to those whose historical orientation demands stylistic grouping and continuity."⁴⁰ And, contrary to the received history of late modernism, he asserted, sculpture in this period was not subordinate to painting, but inadequately described in comparison with it, disprivileged by "the fact that the history of modern art has been written about painting."⁴¹

The shift of historical perspective announced in Andersen's account coincides with, and is perhaps prompted by, a change in critical discourse: namely, the growing attention to contemporary sculpture in the context of

³⁹ Wayne Andersen, "American Sculpture: The Situation in the Fifties," Artforum, vol. 5 (Summer 1967). In his essay, Rubin instead cites Andersen's lecture, "Surrealist and Neo-Plastic Fusion in Sculpture of the 40's and 50's," delivered at the Museum of Modern Art on April 10, 1968.

⁴⁰ Andersen, "American Sculpture," p. 63.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Minimalism. For if sculpture associated with the New York School had until then been notable primarily for its tangential connection to painting, in the context of the mid sixties it assumed at least the historical significance of antecedent.

Nineteen sixty nine was the year Bourgeois's work entered the canon of minor modernism, installed there by the combined efforts of Rubin's essay, Albert Elsen's introduction to The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture (the catalogue essay for an exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art, reprinted in Artforum as "Notes on the Partial Figure") and Robert Goldwater's study What Is Modern Sculpture?⁴² Significant not least for the art-historical authority of their pronouncements, these three texts are discussed in some detail in the chapters that follow. Here, however, it may be useful simply to consider the effect of their claims for Bourgeois's work in the critical context of the time. For the assertion of her position within a modernist sculptural tradition was forwarded just as that tradition was itself coming under intense pressure.

The erosion of the object in Minimalism and Process art; the displacement of sculpture's specificity as a medium in Earth works, installation, and performance art; and

⁴² Albert E. Elsen, introduction, The Partial Figure in Modern Sculpture (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1969); and Robert Goldwater, What Is Modern Sculpture? (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969).

critiques of modernism forged in feminist politics--all frame Bourgeois's production of the late 1960s as a critical, even a radical practice. Yet although Lippard had underscored this radicality in 1966 by including Bourgeois's latex pieces in "Eccentric Abstraction," in the art-historical reception of Bourgeois's work at the end of the decade, and especially in Elsen's account, her sculpture was instead inscribed in the dominant European modernist tradition. Thus Elsen compared her use of bodily fragments, "ambivalent shapes that simultaneously evoke fingers and figures," to the abstraction of bodily form in Brancusi and Arp, in which the device of the partial figure was seen to effect a compromise between "formal self-sufficiency" and "the meaningful prolongation of the human form in modern sculpture," or, in other words, between abstraction and representation.⁴³

Like Rubin, Elsen cast Bourgeois's work of the mid to late 1960s in academic terms, placing it within the established, not to say exhausted twentieth-century history of biomorphic abstraction. The effect of this belated reception into modernist history therefore was double-edged, both demonstrating Bourgeois's historical affiliation to

⁴³ Elsen, "Notes on the Partial Figure," p. 63. As such, the partial figure functions in Elsen's account a term through which to organize a multiplicity of practices, but also to conflate differences, to elide the dissidence of the bodily fragment-as-part-object in the sublimatory logic of abstraction. I discuss the implications of this model for the interpretation of Bourgeois's work in chapter one.

European modernism, and occluding her contemporary engagement with American postmodernism.⁴⁴ For if Bourgeois's work of the mid to late 1960s invoked Surrealism, it did so, as Lippard had observed, in order to restage devices of fracture and dissolution in relation to contemporary problematics of sexuality and gender. As such, it was concerned less with perpetuating a modernist tradition than with exploiting a tension in the field of modernism, and with turning that friction to a new purpose--a purpose that, as became clear by the early seventies, was defined by an intensive engagement with feminist politics.

In the aftermath of Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" of 1971, and in the context of Lippard's critical and curatorial support of a polemic organized around the term "women's art," Bourgeois's work was again repositioned, now to emphasize her role as a

⁴⁴ In 1971, J. Patrice Marandel, writing, like Robbins and Rubin in Art International, offered another historical survey of the artist's work, in which the problem of its relationship to late modernism was again the focus. Concentrating the analysis on marble works Bourgeois produced in Italy in the late sixties, Marandel considered the problem of the oeuvre's construction through discrete, seemingly autonomous bodies of work. Bourgeois's production, he concluded, occupied an ambivalent position with respect to history, simultaneously demanding and resisting interpretation within a historical perspective, through which the "periods" of her work might be seen to structure a coherent development. Marandel, "Louise Bourgeois," Art International, vol. 15 (December 20, 1971), pp. 46-47, 72.

precursor for contemporary feminist artists.⁴⁵ Of the six group exhibitions she joined in 1972, four were devoted to the work of female artists, and Bourgeois continued to participate in similar shows over the next few years.⁴⁶ Her commitment to feminist politics inside and outside the art world was conspicuous; in 1970, for example, she was quoted in the New York Times protesting the gender bias of the Whitney Museum, in whose annuals she had long exhibited (and in which her work was displayed as she spoke).⁴⁷

Bourgeois's grass-roots political activism (an engagement not only in feminist politics, but also in the civil rights movement and in opposition to the war in Vietnam) was central to her production in this period.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The essays in Lippard's From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art, in which her article on Bourgeois is reprinted, form the core of this body of work.

⁴⁶ Katy Deepwell discusses Bourgeois's participation in exhibitions of women artists in the 1970s in "Feminist Readings of Louise Bourgeois or Why Louise Bourgeois Is a Feminist Icon," Museum of Modern Art Papers: Volume 1, Louise Bourgeois, ed. Ian Cole (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), pp. 37-45.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Grace Glueck, "Women Artists Demonstrate at Whitney," New York Times, December 12, 1970; reprinted in A Documentary Herstory (New York: Women Artists in Revolution, 1971), p. 41.

⁴⁸ In a 1972 letter to the editor, Bourgeois appealed to readers of Art in America to support the legal defense of the Judson Three, artists accused of desecrating the American flag. ("Letter to the Editor," Art in America, vol. 60 [January-February 1972], p. 123). In 1973, she exhibited a large-scale work under the title Number Seventy-two (later known as The No March) in the Whitney Biennial in commemoration of contemporary protest marches. In 1972, she contributed work to "SoHo arts Festival for McGovern," in

Evoking the radicality of her practice, and its importance for rethinking modernist representations of the body, early feminist criticism however was not yet in a position to theorize the work's complex analysis of sexual difference. For without access to theories of psychoanalysis, which in the mid 1970s had yet to be investigated in relation to feminist art, critics could not adequately account for her work's phantasmatic dimension, for its representation of sexuality and gender at the level of the unconscious.

The most important study of her work published in the 1970s, Lippard's "Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out," therefore had three signal effects. First, its inside-out model of the body, and of the material construction of the work itself, suggested a phantasmatic logic, implying the need for a psychoanalytically based reading. Second, it demonstrated the importance of reintegrating the modernist and feminist dimensions of Bourgeois's practice, which had become split across discrete models of reception. Third, in its analysis of the discontinuity of the oeuvre as embodying both a feminist politics and a critique of formalism, and as structured by an unconscious logic, the essay attempted to theorize the most striking feature of her production.

1977 to "Solidarity with Chilean Democracy: Memorial to Orlando Letelier" and in 1979 to "Artists against Nuclear Power Plants." Political activism has inflected Bourgeois's production throughout her career and continues to do so today.

1974-1982

In 1976, on the occasion of the Whitney Museum's bicentennial exhibition "200 Years of American Sculpture," the pivotal problem of Bourgeois's ambivalent relationship to modernist history was reexamined through her earliest production. Both Rosalind Krauss's catalogue essay "Magician's Game: Decades of Transformation, 1930-1950" and Susi Bloch's interview with Bourgeois, published in the Art Journal on the occasion of that show, considered Bourgeois's use of the gallery space in her early installations and her ambition "for sculpture to form an environment."⁴⁹

To Krauss, it was an environment "on the model of surreality," one in which the unconscious was projected into the space of the real.⁵⁰ Bloch instead proposed a phenomenologically based reading of the early works.⁵¹ Implying that the logic of installing abstract structures in specific relation to floor, walls, and ceiling anticipated Minimalist strategies, she observed of a work called One and Others that "one's position and identity as 'viewer' is something precisely determined by the structure of the

⁴⁹ Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Magician's Game: Decades of Transformation, 1930-1950," in 200 Years of American Sculpture (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, and Boston: David R. Godine, 1976), p. 168.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Susi Bloch, "An Interview with Louise Bourgeois," Art Journal, vol. 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976), pp. 370-73.

piece."⁵² As Bloch noted in the interview's introduction, this exchange "emerges sometimes as cross-purpose of question and response."⁵³ For if Bourgeois readily accepted the interpretation of her work as, in her own words, "really the origin of the environmental sculptures,"⁵⁴ she intended by this to underscore its psychic resonance, to emphasize not the evacuation of subjectivity characteristic of Minimalism, but Surrealism's "projection of the Unconscious onto the space of the real."⁵⁵

This conversation, in which Bloch succeeds in eliciting Bourgeois's first systematic account of her early work, did not establish a new critical paradigm for her production. It did, however, crucially engage the question of an interplay between her work and pivotal developments in postwar American art, suggesting, as Lippard had also done, that this interplay resisted analysis within any simple art-historical model of influence.

Between 1974 and 1982, Bourgeois's work was the subject of small retrospective exhibitions, and for the first time,

⁵² Ibid., p. 372.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 370.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 372.

⁵⁵ Krauss, "Magician's Game," p. 168.

of significant catalogue essays.⁵⁶ If, however, these exhibitions, and the accounts that attended them, were concerned both to bind the fragments of Bourgeois's production together, and to integrate her oeuvre in the history of mid twentieth-century American art, the artist's practice itself meanwhile moved in yet another direction, turning, in the early seventies, to large-scale installation and performance works.

The difficulty of encompassing the range of objects, forms, and techniques Bourgeois's oeuvre comprised by this time is evident in reviews of her 1974 and 1978 exhibitions, particularly in their increasing reliance on the artist's own statements and their assertions of an expressionist or antiformalist logic. In 1975, Carl Baldwin, for example, suggested that although her works might appear "elusive and fundamentally non-referential," and the meanings offered by

⁵⁶ These included Jerry Gorovoy's catalogue, The Iconography of Louise Bourgeois, for a retrospective exhibition at the Max Hutchinson Gallery in 1980 and J. Patrice Marandel's "Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside," for the catalogue Louise Bourgeois: Femme Maison, a 1981 exhibition at The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. In a 1989 survey of Bourgeois's reception, Ann Sutherland Harris noted that public recognition of her work was closely correlated to the publication of significant catalogue essays: "In 1980, Bourgeois had not yet had an exhibition at any public or university gallery which gave her more than a brochure. Many people first discovered Bourgeois and had a chance to savor her work when the Museum of Modern Art in New York gave her a one-person show with a proper catalogue." "Entering the Mainstream: Women Sculptors of the Twentieth Century, Part 2: Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse," Galerie: Women's Art, vol. 2, no. 3 (Winter 1989), p. 8.

Bourgeois herself literal by comparison, these statements were "a significant indication of her vehemently antiformalist conception."⁵⁷

There can be no doubt that the delayed reception of Bourgeois's oeuvre was a function of formalism's dominance in the criticism of mid twentieth-century American art, or that it was the lifting of formalism's repression of the bodily which made her sculpture more meaningful for critics in the 1970s and 1980s than it had previously seemed. For, notwithstanding attempts to claim her work for the legacy of biomorphic abstraction, its tension with that tradition relegated it to a subordinate position in dominant accounts of modernist sculpture and postwar art.

If, however, the rejection of formalist strictures of aesthetic autonomy, medium-specificity, and stylistic consistency opened the way for new readings of Bourgeois's production in the mid 1970s, in the absence of an alternative framework through which to develop this analysis, criticism often reverted to a preformalist, biographically based mode of interpretation. Governing the critical reception of Bourgeois's work in this period therefore was a model of expression, which, emphasizing the autonomy of the individual in contrast to formalism's autonomy of the work, had by 1982 become a

⁵⁷ Carl R. Baldwin, "Louise Bourgeois: An Iconography of Abstraction," Art in America, vol. 63 (March-April 1975), p. 82.

privileged term in artistic and critical discourse.

Statements like the one which appears at the beginning of Wye's catalogue essay "Louise Bourgeois: 'One and Others'" were widely invoked: "The overriding emphasis on stylistic analysis prevalent for so long, no longer satisfied the intellectual and emotional needs of the art public. Instead, personal content and deeply felt themes were sought and explored."⁵⁸ Bourgeois's work, Wye argued, "spoke directly to these new needs, which welcomed stylistic diversity and deeply expressionist content."⁵⁹

Writing in 1983 about the return of expressionism in contemporary art, Hal Foster cautioned that, "contrary to expressionist belief, the unconscious is not at our transparent disposal."⁶⁰ And indeed, a principal limitation of writing about Bourgeois's work since the early 1980s has been its tendency to posit an unmediated access to the unconscious. In its emphasis on such a model of expression, the interpretive framework of Wye's 1982 analysis therefore is constrained in ways that

⁵⁸ Wye, "Louise Bourgeois: One and Others," in Louise Bourgeois, p. 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid. In one history of the period, Bourgeois is "the archetypal artist of the seventies whose personal, idiosyncratic work appeared in a wide range of modes and materials." Corinne Robins, The Pluralist Era (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), pp. 72-73.

⁶⁰ Hal Foster, "The Expressive Fallacy" (1983), Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), p. 62.

poststructuralist theory's critique of the subject (and its development in postmodern art practice) allow us to see, and so to rework.

At the time, however, the principal exception to the broadly enthusiastic critical response that greeted Wye's exhibition and catalogue was a review by Daniel Robbins published in the Art Journal, which, while deeming it the season's "most important exhibition of contemporary art in New York," criticized the MOMA retrospective's departure from chronology, its failure "to answer certain questions about artistic development."⁶¹ Instead, he complained, the installation was concerned primarily "to recreate a working mood of teeming creativity."⁶² At the core of this critique, which encompassed not only Wye's exhibition and catalogue but also a contemporaneous show at the Robert Miller Gallery in New York and its accompanying essay by Robert Pincus-Witten, was a defense of formalism against "the unjustified exultation of the antiformalist critics at what appeared to be a high tide in their favor."⁶³

Robbins deplored the emphasis on biographical material

⁶¹ Daniel Robbins, "Louise Bourgeois at the Museum of Modern Art," Art Journal, vol. 43, no. 4 (Winter 1983), p. 400.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

and statements by the artist.⁶⁴ "Before Christmas it was all over New York," he complained, referring to the story of Bourgeois's childhood trauma, brought to light by the artist in public lectures around the time of the exhibition.⁶⁵

The dependence on biographical material to interpret the work was, he warned, "a serious mistake, at least as serious as the errors of the formalist criticism of the preceding decades."⁶⁶ For if earlier critics had failed to attend to the thematic content of the work, the turn to biography ignored its formal operations and scanted its history, reducing it to the solipsistic logic of emotion.

In 1986, in a catalogue essay entitled "Louise Bourgeois and the Nature of Abstraction," Jerry Gorovoy, Bourgeois's closest associate, pursued this critique, focusing not on the MOMA exhibition itself but on the discourse surrounding it, which, he observed, "has been

⁶⁴ The two essays, however, are more different than similar in this and every respect. Wye's is a scholarly account of the chronological development of Bourgeois's work, which incorporates biographical material in its interpretation. Pincus-Witten's is a narrative of the artist's life and career, which includes descriptions of some works. His is the essay that foregrounds the Oedipal drama to which Robbins refers: "Murder or suicide. It is shocking to meet an artist who can so succinctly state what her art means. . . . The meaning is simply this: the murder by the artist of the father's mistress." Robert Pincus-Witten, Bourgeois Truth (New York: Robert Miller Gallery, 1982), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Robbins, "Louise Bourgeois at the Museum of Modern Art," p. 400.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

biographical or psycho-sexual in nature in its attempts to provide a narrative structure in which to encompass the formal diversity of Bourgeois's work." "The critical failure to deal with its formal matrix," he argued, "has isolated Bourgeois's sculpture from its actual historical context and obscured the influence her art exerted on her contemporaries."⁶⁷

Divided over two models, the formalist and the expressionist, the reception of Bourgeois's work in the aftermath of the MOMA exhibition was structured by a stalemate that remains to be unlocked.⁶⁸ Since 1982, the expressionist model has dominated and the formalist receded, paralleling the shift in critical discourse in this period: the work of reframing Bourgeois's production in terms more appropriate to its nonoppositional logic however has only begun.

1982-1997

⁶⁷ Jerry Gorovoy, "Louise Bourgeois and the Nature of Abstraction," in Louise Bourgeois (New York: Bellport Press, 1986).

⁶⁸ This impasse is enacted in Bourgeois's own statements, as an alternation between the exclusive concern with "formal perfection" she declared to Rubin in 1969 (and has continued to assert), and the emotionally charged autobiographical interpretations with which she has suffused the recent literature. Gorovoy pointed to this problem in 1986, observing that "Bourgeois's own statements about her life and work have directed attention away from her formal vocabulary. The stories of early childhood have been misconstrued as the meaning of the work. In actuality . . . these stories point to the essential motivation for her art making." Gorovoy, "Louise Bourgeois and the Nature of Abstraction."

The years since 1982 have been the most productive of Bourgeois's career, a period in which "the problem of history" in the reception of her work has rubbed elbows with the project of criticism, the perpetual reinvention of the artist's practice discouraging any impulse for closure on either count. Yet the most striking feature of the critical literature in this long restless phase of artistic experimentation and reworking has been its stasis, its almost unwavering conservatism. For although more has been written about Bourgeois's work in the past fifteen years than in the previous four decades combined, these readings have largely resisted the intensive investigation of theory that has defined revisionist accounts of modernism, and the critical response to postmodernism, in this period. Rather than invoke new critical frameworks through which, for example, the hybridity of her production, and its engagement with problems of sexuality and gender, might be repositioned, Bourgeois's work has instead been read through the most conventional model of art historical analysis: namely, biography.

Thus in the introduction to the most recent monograph, by Marie-Laure Bernadac, we read that Bourgeois "brilliantly revives the concept of art as autobiography, previously advocated by Picasso."⁶⁹ In this account (the title of

⁶⁹ Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, p. 9. Bernadac is the former curator of the Musée Picasso in Paris.

which is "Sculpting Emotion"), Bourgeois's work surfaced from obscurity in the 1980s because it was at that moment, "when criticism again began taking private life into account in the analysis of an oeuvre," that Bourgeois's "language could finally be heard."⁷⁰ Postmodernism, in this analysis, is defined not by a displacement of the author by the author function, or by a questioning of discourses of origin and originality, but precisely by "a return to subjectivity, to a form of expressionism, to an eclecticism perceived as liberating in the face of strict formalist norms."⁷¹

Under this definition, Bourgeois's work is truly postmodern in the most conservative sense of that term, rejecting modernism not via critique, but via retreat.⁷² The apolitical tendency of this particular antiformalism is made explicit with reference to the body: "This new focus on the self--observed in recent decades following a loss of

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷² In 1984, Hal Foster identified two postmodernist positions, "one aligned with neoconservative politics, the other related to poststructuralist theory." Central to neoconservative postmodernism, he observed, was "the return to history (the humanist tradition) and the return of the subject (the artist/architect as auteur)."
Poststructuralist postmodernism, by contrast he deemed "profoundly antihumanist," premised on "'the death of man' not only as original creator of unique artifacts but also as the centered subject of representation and history."
Foster, "(Post)Modern Polemics" (1984), in Recodings, p. 121.

values and the collapse of ideologies--mainly stresses the body, organic forms, and sexuality, all realms in which Bourgeois was a pioneer."⁷³ Bourgeois's "feminist stance"⁷⁴ notwithstanding, her engagement with the body is here registered not as a critical practice, undermining the patriarchal construction of gender, but as a personal, autobiographical preoccupation, enacting the artist's own "primal scene."⁷⁵

Steeped in the rhetoric of expression, not only this but most recent accounts of Bourgeois's work emphasize the artist's personal story. Wye's 1994, catalogue The Prints of Louise Bourgeois, in addition to providing a survey of the artist's print production, includes autobiographical commentaries by the artist captioning each series or plate. For the catalogue of a 1996 exhibition curated by Lawrence Rinder at the University Art Museum, Berkeley, Rinder authored a short essay, followed by Bourgeois's own

⁷³ Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Chapter one of Bernadac's study is entitled "Primal Scenes." She writes: "Primal scenes allude both to her childhood and her motherhood in a cyclic system of mutual cross-reference that would culminate in 1994 with the Red Rooms, those bloody parental and infantile bedrooms where the mystery of creation takes place in a highly charged atmosphere of taboo, desire, and disturbing eroticism that characterizes all her work." Bernadac, Louise Bourgeois, p. 14.

introduction and detailed commentaries on the drawings.⁷⁶

Christiane Meyer-Thoss's 1992 study Louise Bourgeois: Designing for Free Fall, too, follows a collaborative format, comprising an essay by Meyer-Thoss, an extended interview, and a series of seventy-nine numbered statements by the artist, composed of aphorisms and personal stories.

These stories and texts form the core of the Bourgeois literature produced since 1982. Beginning in December of that year, with "Child Abuse," a project for Artforum in which the artist narrated her childhood trauma in captioned pictures, she has fostered (and frequently authored) the biographical account through which her work has become so widely known.⁷⁷ Robert Storr, one of the foremost authorities on her work and the author of a forthcoming critical biography, has both criticized and defended the practice of constructing an account of Bourgeois's production through the interpretations she supplies, at one point suggesting that:

Despite the danger one runs into of falling prey to the intentional fallacy by granting the artist too large a say in the interpretation of her work, Bourgeois represents a case where that risk is clearly worth taking. Seldom has an artist been so cognizant and forthright about her own

⁷⁶ Louise Bourgeois with Lawrence Rinder, Louise Bourgeois: Drawings and Observations, with a foreword by Josef Helfenstein (Berkeley: University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1995).

⁷⁷ Louise Bourgeois, "Child Abuse," Artforum, vol. 21, no. 4 (December 1982), pp. 40-47. Bourgeois's sculpture Eye to Eye (1968-70) was reproduced on the magazine's cover.

motivations while so nearly helpless to alter or disguise them. Reading Bourgeois's work over her shoulder is to that degree like overhearing the monologue of an autistic child as she acts out her inner dramas with handmade dolls.⁷⁸

This passage, with its evocation of Bourgeois as a child-like, even autistic subject, is the hypertrophy of a critical tendency to treat her work as the naive effluence of her (feminine) psyche, as, in effect, pure expression.⁷⁹ And although Storr's reference is to the interview format itself--to the critic's encounter with the artist--the immediacy of "reading Bourgeois's work over her shoulder" is achieved for the reader, too, in many accounts.

⁷⁸ Robert Storr, "Intimate Geographies: The Work and Life of Louise Bourgeois," Art Press 175 (December 1992), p. E-5. The trope of Bourgeois as a child enclosed in her own imaginary world has appeared in other accounts as well. Paul Gardner began his 1994 monograph with this scene: "When Louise Bourgeois steps inside her studio, she passes, like Alice, a grave little child with golden tresses, through a looking glass that lands her in an enchanted and hallucinatory world. But it is a world of Louise's own making." Gardner, Louise Bourgeois (New York: Universe Publishing, 1994), p. 9. In 1995, Storr offered a critique of the over-reliance on biographical material in "The Discreet charm of Louise Bourgeois," Tate: The Art Magazine 6 (Summer 1995), pp. 24-31.

⁷⁹ It is therefore significant that Storr was among the first to caution against such a use of Bourgeois's statements, and to mark her resistance to it, presciently observing: "To further legitimize and extend the authority of 'Neo-Expressionism,' writers have been busy discovering its antecedents and annexing the mythic systems associated with them. Bourgeois, with her growing notoriety, represents a special temptation, since she has explored so many dimensions of personal symbolism, and since her life would seem to be a labyrinth of private and art-historical legends. But Bourgeois will be no more docile a presence within the new expressionism than she has been within the other movements that seemingly absorbed her." Storr, "Gender and Possession," p. 131.

That the reduction of Bourgeois's practice to the level of biography and subjective experience is the surest means of blunting its politics has been demonstrated by the dramatic shift in its critical reception from the 1970s to the 1990s. For if Bourgeois remains a feminist icon, the radical reception of her production has occurred in feminist art practice of the 1980s and especially the 1990s, and not in critical writing. The missed encounter between Bourgeois's production and psychoanalytically based feminist criticism in this period may partly be explained by this biographical turn. For her work is strangely segregated from the history of feminist art in the 1980s, and ignored by most of its principal critics, notwithstanding the prominence it achieved following her 1982 show, and despite the effect it has exerted on the work of younger artists.⁸⁰ As Foster observed, postmodernism is divided over politics, and however critical her practice might be, Bourgeois arguably has been coopted, if not by the right, at least by critical convention.⁸¹

⁸⁰ One author who does locate Bourgeois's production within a feminist history, and connect it both with postmodernist practice and with a psychoanalytically based account of sexual difference is Mira Schor. See her "From Liberation to Lack," Heresies, vol. 6, no. 4 (1989), pp. 15-21.

⁸¹ This is of course a simplistic explanation. Bourgeois's missed encounter with psychoanalytic feminism, and the neglect of her work by critics writing from a poststructuralist position, is a complex problem, and one that is considered from several angles in this study. Among the most obvious considerations: Bourgeois belonged to a

To the extent that critics' preoccupation with the artist as a biographical figure has tended both to explain her work with reference to her life, and to subsume the complexity and criticality of her production in the narrative coherence of a myth of origin, it has reenacted a tendency of art-historical scholarship that the work itself (if not the artist) insistently defies. Moreover, to the extent that biographically based readings elide the formal, material, and political dimensions of her oeuvre by attending primarily to the symbolism Bourgeois's statements confer on it, such accounts fail to explain the specificity of the works as objects. This, at least, is the argument I advance in chapter one.

If, however, it is dominated by biographical readings, the recent literature is far from monolithic. In particular, attention has focused on three pivotal aspects of her production: its Surrealist-based critique of modernism, its engagement with feminist and gender politics, and its phantasmatic logic. My survey therefore concludes with an outline of signal contributions to the study of her work in each of these areas.

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modernist generation; she worked within a traditional form, sculpture; and her practice was deeply antagonistic to textuality and to the language-based, Lacanian model of the unconscious privileged by psychoanalytic feminism. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that her work has attracted so little sustained attention from feminist critics in the eighties and nineties.

In historical terms, the most significant development in the recent literature has been the repositioning of Bourgeois's production in the legacy of Surrealism, accomplished principally through Rosalind Krauss's essay "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette."⁸² While earlier writers acknowledged the work's historical and formal connection to Surrealist practice, Krauss, author of a revisionist account of modernism in which Surrealism is the pivotal dissident term, analyzes Bourgeois's desublimatory representation of the body with specific reference to Surrealist sculpture. In particular, the part-object logic of Surrealism is invoked to underscore the misreading by which Bourgeois's work has traditionally been subsumed in the modernist history of the partial figure. Krauss's essay also demonstrates the correlation between Duchamp's Large

⁸² Rosalind Krauss, "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette," in Louise Bourgeois, ed. Peter Weiermair (Frankfurter am Main: Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1989; reprint Zurich: Edition Stemmler, 1995). The Surrealist history of Bourgeois's production has been investigated in a number of recent exhibitions. Krauss's essay was written for the catalogue of a retrospective that toured Europe from 1989 to 1991. In the catalogue for a 1994 exhibition of the Personages series at the Saint Louis Art Museum, Jeremy Strick discussed the "personage" motif in connection with works by Giacometti, Joan Miró, and Max Ernst. (Jeremy Strick, Louise Bourgeois: The Personages [Saint Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, 1994]). The 1995 "fémininmasculin": Le sexe de l'art exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, in which Bourgeois's work was prominently featured, centered on the problem of the abject body and its Surrealist antecedents. (Marie-Laure Bernadac and Bernard Marcadé, eds. fémininmasculin: Le sexe de l'art [Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995]).

Glass, and its autistic model of the bachelor machine, and the affectless, anonymous figures of Bourgeois's early work. A fundamental omission of the previous literature, the failure to read Bourgeois's work through Duchamp is, in this analysis, symptomatic of the work's interpretation within a dominant modernist paradigm of abstraction.

The cultural context of Surrealism in Paris, as Krauss observes, was inflected both by Freudian psychoanalysis and by art brut, art work produced by schizophrenics and actively collected by figures such as André Breton. If Duchamp's model of the bachelor machine was informed by the schizophrenic logic of a decentered, autistic subject, Krauss notes, Bourgeois's was as well, and one possible term through which to read both is Melanie Klein's case studies of schizophrenic children. Another is the radical reworking of Klein's theory in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's Anti-Oedipus. Finally, the "morphological ambivalence" of Bourgeois's production suggests a further term, that of Bataille's notion of the informe, a collapse of structural oppositions (such as male and female, or figure and ground) into formlessness.

Krauss's essay provides a framework through which to theorize Bourgeois's production within the discourse of Surrealism, to read its desublimatory account of the body and so to analyze its tensions with the formalist logic of abstraction. As such, it relocates her oeuvre from its

feminist-based critical reception of the 1970s to its generational context of the immediate postwar period, arguing that Bourgeois's critical engagement with modernism exceeds the interests of feminism.

In this study, I attempt to demonstrate that the history of Bourgeois's critical engagement with modernism (which I too contend is plied through Surrealism and an anti-Oedipal model of psychoanalysis) is specifically a feminist history. That is, I argue that the critique of a monolithic formalist modernism enacted in her work is a feminist critique, and one that is pivotal to defining the interests of feminism in twentieth-century art.

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Routinely referenced but seldom closely analyzed in accounts of her work after 1982, Bourgeois's engagement with feminist politics is the explicit focus of Robert Storr's "Louise Bourgeois: Gender and Possession" of 1983. Feminism, he observes, was the "agent of change" that brought Bourgeois's work public recognition. Moreover, through the feminist critique of art history undertaken in the late 1970s, it became possible to analyze the gendered power relations administering the hierarchy that distinguished marginal from mainstream. For Storr, the feminist art movement constitutes Bourgeois's strongest avant-garde identification: "Thus, though she rejected the polemical premise of an exclusively feminist esthetic,

Bourgeois nevertheless found herself part of a genuine avant-garde, and though the Surrealists and Abstract Expressionists had in their seasons swept her up similarly, she was this time unquestionably a dominant member."⁸³

Storr casts the "fundamentally subversive" politics of Bourgeois's production, its defiance of authority, as a twofold resistance to modernism and patriarchy, to the one buttressed by the other.⁸⁴ Reading the logic of her work as one of erosion and deflation of phallic authority, he deems her "a sapper beneath the walls which enclose the separate dominions of modernism."⁸⁵ This essay focuses in particular on Bourgeois's complex relation to the "father figures" of Surrealism, including Breton and Duchamp, projecting her exclusion from the "Surrealist elite" in America into the scene of her later involvement with feminist politics, and thus reading her work of the early seventies as a radicalized Surrealist-based practice.

In retrospect, the acuity of Storr's analysis might have created the expectation that the problematic of gender would become a focal point of reception, to be elaborated theoretically and extended historically across the field of feminist art. It was not, however, until 1989, in Mira Schor's "From Liberation to Lack," that Bourgeois's work was

⁸³ Storr, "Gender and Possession," p. 129.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

examined within a feminist history that reached from Surrealism to postmodernism, and not until 1994 that her position in feminist history was considered in a major study, Norma Broude and Mary Garrard's The Power of Feminist Art. Broude and Garrard take a skeptical view of the assimilation of Bourgeois's "pre-feminist" work of the 1950s and 1960s into dominant histories of the period. "Today," they argue "what is genuinely radical and rebellious about Bourgeois's woman-centered art is being further submerged by a mainstream criticism that wants to bend her into being a 'link' between masculinist movements."⁸⁶

Ann Gibson has focused specifically on this question of Bourgeois's relation to the masculinist avant-garde, examining her early sculptures in the context of Abstract Expressionism.⁸⁷ Emphasizing Bourgeois's double alienation as a woman and an outsider in the New York art world of the 1940s and 1950s, Gibson argues that this contingent position contributed to the development of an "ambiguous politics of gender" that could only be recognized in the 1970s. She concludes: "Bourgeois's midcentury sculpture functions best politically when its temporality is

⁸⁶ Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, "Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century," in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p. 20.

⁸⁷ Ann Gibson, "Louise Bourgeois's Retroactive Politics of Gender," Art Journal, vol. 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994), pp. 44-47.

understood as a form of what Julia Kristeva calls 'the future perfect,' that is, when it is understood retroactively."⁸⁸

Katy Deepwell's 1996 essay, "Feminist Readings of Louise Bourgeois, or Why Louise Bourgeois Is a Feminist Icon" provides a detailed account of the reception of her work by feminist artists and critics. Focusing in particular on essays by Lippard, Deepwell revisits the question of Bourgeois's role in a feminist avant-garde, raised earlier by Storr.⁸⁹ In the catalogue of the Whitney Museum exhibition "Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art" (1993), Leslie Jones also discusses Bourgeois's work in the context of feminist art's reception in the 1960s and 1970s, reading the representation of the "visceral and sexual body" in her latex pieces through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.⁹⁰

In the 1990s, the abject has become a pivotal logic through which to theorize representations of the body, and constructions of the subject, in contemporary art. More specifically, the shift from a semiotic-based analysis of

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁸⁹ Katy Deepwell, "Why Louise Bourgeois Is a Feminist Icon."

⁹⁰ Leslie C. Jones, "Transgressive Femininity: Art and Gender in the Sixties and Seventies," in Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art, Selections from the Permanent Collection (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), p. 33-57.

the body in art and theory of the 1980s, to a consideration of presymbolic, or subsymbolic, corporeal experience has defined much recent work. Bourgeois's oeuvre has figured prominently in accounts of the abject, and particularly in exhibitions attempting to frame abjection in a historical perspective (in which its origins are traced to the Surrealist circle of Georges Bataille). These include the Whitney "Abject Art" exhibition of 1993 and the "fémininmasculin" exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in 1995. Having been rediscovered in the early 1980s in the critical context of a rejection of formalist values, Bourgeois has, in a sense, been rediscovered anew in the 1990s, to be cast as a key precursor of work countering the preeminence of the signifier in poststructuralism with the collapse of meaning in the abject.

The appropriation of Bourgeois's work for a protohistory of the abject however has been characterized by the same iconographic emphasis that dominated its expressionist reception in the 1980s; that is, attention has centered on its imagery of the body, while the formal and phantasmatic structures, and the artistic, historical, and social contexts of its production, have been largely neglected. A notable exception is the recent exhibition "Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the feminine," curated by M. Catherine de Zegher, in which figures from the Personages series were

displayed with works from the 1920s and 1930s by Hannah Hoch, Claude Cahun, and Carol Rama. Writing in the introduction to the catalogue, de Zegher correlated the use of bodily fragments by these artists to the political context of Europe before and during World War II, arguing that these representations of "abject subject matter . . . deemed inappropriate by conservative culture" represented the repression of the cultural other within a phantasmatic logic.⁹¹

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That Bourgeois's sculpture operates at the level of fantasy, and that it probes the interface of the phantasmatic and the social through the body, was acknowledged by critics as early as the 1940s. It is therefore surprising that while expressionism and radical subjectivity have often been invoked to describe her practice, it has seldom been read systematically through specific theories of psychoanalysis. Recent essays by critics writing from positions within psychoanalytic feminism however have challenged the fixity of biographically based accounts, questioning the interpretive value of Freudian doxa (family romance, primal scene, myth

⁹¹ M. Catherine de Zegher, "Introduction: Inside the Visible," in Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), p. 25. The exhibition opened at the Kanaal Art Foundation, Kortrijk, Flanders in 1994, and appeared at the ICA Boston and the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1996.

of origin) ritually imposed on her work, and exploring alternative models of interpretation.

In an article of 1993, for example, Julie Nicoletta examines critics' obsession with an Oedipal biographical scenario, interpreting the Femme-Maison series of early paintings within a Lacanian framework.⁹² In "Louise Bourgeois's 'Cells': Gesturing towards the Mother," Hilary Robinson reads the artist's recent installations through Luce Irigaray's essay "Gesture in Psychoanalysis," suggesting that the staging of the body in space in the Cells be seen to enact a productive relation to, and painful separation from, the mother.⁹³ The crucial issue of process in Bourgeois's work, Robinson argues, can be analyzed within the logic of gesture, and the interplay of subject and object positions, that is pivotal to Irigaray's account of the mother-daughter relation. Finally, writing in the catalogue to the "Inside the Visible" exhibition, Rosi Huhn invokes the concept of the "matrixial field" in the work of the psychoanalytic feminist theorist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger to describe the subject's relation to the other as represented in Bourgeois's early engravings and

⁹² Julie Nicoletta, "Louise Bourgeois's Femme-Maisons," Women's Art Journal (Fall-Winter 1992-93), pp. 21-25.

⁹³ Hilary Robinson, "Louise Bourgeois's 'Cells': Gesturing towards the Mother," in Museum of Modern Art Papers, pp. 21-30.

sculptures.⁹⁴

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Attempting to integrate the Surrealist, feminist, and psychoanalytic histories of Bourgeois's production, this study attempts to account for its critique of modernism, enacted at the level of form, within a political and a phantasmatic logic. As such, it draws together the three interpretive strands that have most productively been followed in the analysis of her oeuvre since 1982, when I and other feminists of my generation encountered it for the first time. For what follows is, above all, a feminist reading, developed in relation to shifts in psychoanalytically based feminist theory over the past decade and a half, and shaped by the recent reception of Bourgeois's work by feminist artists. It is specifically a reading in which the part-object logic of the body enacted in Bourgeois's sculptures is seen to critique and to subvert a phallogentric paradigm of modernism by recasting dissident practices within it, principally those of Surrealism, in feminist terms.

⁹⁴ Rosi Huhn, "Louise Bourgeois: Deconstructing the Phallus within the Exile of the Self," in de Zegher, Inside the Visible, pp. 135-43.

Chapter One

Bad Enough Mother: An Object-Relations Lesson

A Frontispiece Cropped

Louise Bourgeois, wearing a tufted coat of fake monkey fur, grins broadly, a smile reported again and again in the widening crinkles of her face. Under her right arm she clasps a two-foot-long latex phallus, her 1968 sculpture Fillette. As her fingers firmly grasp the tip, behind her elbow nestle the big, shiny balls. The coarse, stubbled skin of the tip pushes through the V-shaped opening of a sleeve fitted over the shaft, the ridges formed by its raised seam mimicking the veins that run across Bourgeois's flexed hand below. In the pristine limpidity of Robert Mapplethorpe's print, this metonymy of the grin, the crescent of skin traced out by the veins on Bourgeois's hand, and the V-neck of the foreskin, inscribe a relation of identification and envy, sadism and desire, enacted in her pose (fig. 1.1).

Staged in 1982, the year of Bourgeois's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, the photographic session with Mapplethorpe was intended to produce a portrait for the

show's catalogue.¹ And to commemorate the moment in which her work of four decades was to be assembled for the first time in a retrospective exhibition, Bourgeois and Mapplethorpe together produced a picture that, whether intentionally or not, seemed to encapsulate its logic: physically enacting a charged relation between the artist and Fillette, the phallus-toting pose displayed a bodily logic, not to say an organ-logic, of sculptural production.

The picture that was actually used as the catalogue's frontispiece, however, was a cropped version of the now-famous portrait, reduced to a head shot.² This excision of Fillette from the photograph, displacing the grin from its gag, spoiled the joke, but its effect was not only to refashion Bourgeois's artistic persona through the substitution of a more enigmatic smile. Another consequence of this cropping was to interrupt an object lesson through which Bourgeois effectively demonstrated the logic of her sculptural production--a logic that ran directly counter to the interpretation of her oeuvre presented in the MOMA show. For if Bourgeois's pose and choice of prop dramatized a

¹ Deborah Wye, Louise Bourgeois. According to Jerry Gorovoy, Bourgeois's assistant, the photographic session was organized by Robert Miller, the dealer representing both artists, who were also friends. (Bourgeois and Jerry Gorovoy, interview by author, August 23, 1990.)

² For a discussion of the cropping of Fillette from the catalogue portrait in relation to fetishism, see my "Pretty as a Picture: Louise Bourgeois's Fillette," Parkett 27 (March 1991), pp. 48-53.

practice more literal than abstract, more literal even than figural, the portrait thus collided with the museum's effort to frame her oeuvre within the history of modernist sculpture and its formal language of abstraction.

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Writing about Bourgeois's work in 1969, the year after Fillette was made, William Rubin had cautioned that, "When themes of sexuality are pressed too literally, a set of emotions interposes itself between the viewer and the work in a manner uncondusive to aesthetic contemplation."³ This gentle rebuke, the only disturbance in an otherwise complimentary survey of the artist's recent work, derived from a central tenet of modernist criticism: that figure-based sculpture performs a sublimation of the body via its distillation to pure form, and that this sublimation is what the aesthetic is. Fundamental to this process of abstraction, as Albert Elsen emphasized in his canonical account of modern sculpture, was the "elimination of the distinguishing features of specific bodily parts."⁴

For in the synecdochical logic of modernist sculpture, which Elsen applies even to such graphically phallic works as Brancusi's Princess X (1916) or Torso of a Young Man (1917-22), the graphic part doubles as a sublimating whole. Princess X thus takes its place within the modernist

³ Rubin, "Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," p. 20.

⁴ Elsen, "Notes on the Partial Figure," p. 41.

tradition of the partial figure initiated by Rodin, to whom Elsen attributes the insight that "a complete sculpture need not presuppose the full figure, and parts of the human body are dispensable to the sculptor."⁵ Brancusi's innovation, according to Elsen, is to elide the procedure by which fragment is extracted from figure and comes to stand metonymically in its place. Thus in contrast to the "stumps and traces of amputation" left by Rodin, Brancusi contracts the body to its essential form, the head become egg-like oval, and stripped of its distinguishing features.⁶

Marking "the breakthrough in art to a new sexual candor," even overtly phallic works like Princess X or Torso of a Young Man, according to Elsen, therefore nevertheless resist literalism by means of sublimation, generating "associations with other forms in nature having a similar generalized structure."⁷ Similarly, in Sidney Geist's description, Torso of a Young Man "is itself a phallus,

⁵ Elsen, Origins of Modern Sculpture, p. 74.

⁶ Ibid., p. 76. Elsen explicitly positions Bourgeois in relation to Brancusi's legacy of abstraction: "As Brancusi was perhaps the first to discover, elimination of the distinguishing features of specific bodily parts leads to simplified forms that in turn lend themselves to analogizing or transposition within the body itself. . . . Louise Bourgeois has evolved ambivalent shapes that simultaneously evoke fingers and figures, and the irrational reminiscences of a lifetime." (Elsen, "Notes on the Partial Figure," p. 63.)

⁷ Ibid.

geometrical, rationalized, sublimated."⁸

Applying Elsen's analysis to Bourgeois's production, Rubin distinguishes between works in which the body is properly sublimated and those in which its distinctive features are displayed: "if the phallic character of Sleep [fig. 1.2, 1967, now entitled Sleep II], for example, can be savored and absorbed, like the sexuality of Brancusi and Arp, within the framework of the appreciation of the work as a whole, this is not true of Fated Portrait [fig. 1.3, ca. 1963-64, now Torso/Self-Portrait], despite the fact that it is an arresting work."⁹ Rubin's reading adheres to the protocol that abstraction obscures specific bodily parts and thus facilitates aesthetic contemplation; but in demonstrating how Torso/Self Portrait, with its frontal summary of breasts, ribs, and labia, resists sublimation, this reading also points up an elision of art history. This elision we could call the subsuming of the part-object (in psychoanalytic terms, the object of the drives) in the partial figure.

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⁸ Sidney Geist, Brancusi (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1968), p. 59.

⁹ Rubin, "Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," p. 20. Fated Portrait is not illustrated in Rubin's essay, but, according to Bourgeois, the reference is to the work now entitled Torso/Self-Portrait, which Rubin himself subsequently acquired and has since donated to the Museum of Modern Art. (Bourgeois, interview with the author, February 27, 1996.)

In her portrait with Fillette, Bourgeois seems to resist, if not deride, the history of modern sculpture articulated by Elsen and Rubin. For as the picture makes clear, if works like Fillette and Torso/Self-Portrait recast the bodily fragment as an object of psychic fixation, reducing the body not to its geometrical essence but to its organs, they do so by evoking the graphic properties of such precedents as Princess X and Torso of a Young Man.

Fillette, in short, counters the modernist logic of "a phallus, geometrical, rationalized, sublimated." And by invoking such precedents as Princess X (in the scandal of graphic phallicism coupled with a feminine name) or Giacometti's Disagreeable Object (in the scandal of an aggressive, club-like "objet sans base" that can also be rocked in the arms), Bourgeois seems to align herself with an alternative history of modern sculpture, one not of objects displayed for aesthetic contemplation, but of objects fashioned for psychic use.

When, therefore, MOMA cropped Fillette out of the picture, it not only divested the image of its erotic humor, but also restored authority to the interpretation of Bourgeois's oeuvre that was to structure the exhibition--that the work was, at least in some general sense, abstract. And what compelled this reading was precisely the absence, effected by the modernist repression of the part-object, of any alternative framework through which the fragmentary

logic of a work such as Fillette could be read.

Since the time of the MOMA retrospective, art history has gained an account of the part-object as antagonistic to abstraction, an account that centers on the subversion of modernism's formalist imperative through the desublimated body.¹⁰ To summarize one aspect of this analysis, forwarded by Rosalind Krauss, whereas the partial figure comprised a distillation of the body to its essential form, the part-object reduced it instead to drive: to organ. But because of its incongruity with the dominant modernist term, abstraction, the part-object was repressed, efficiently subsumed within the partial figure in the historical account of modernist sculpture. If, then, the MOMA exhibition of 1982 attempted to reconcile Bourgeois's oeuvre with the sublimatory principle of abstraction, it is now possible to read her production, via the history of the part-object in modern sculpture, as instead desublimatory and literal. In this analysis, the reductive logic of her work is placed not in the service of formal purity, but rather answers to the imperatives of the drives.

In her pose with Fillette, on the occasion of her own delayed art-historical reception, Bourgeois staged, in effect, an eruption of the part-object into the field of the abstract and a lowering of the bodily fragment onto the

¹⁰ See Krauss, The Optical Unconscious. Bourgeois's inclusion within this history is proposed in Krauss's "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette."

horizontal field of the drives. For what distinguishes Fillette within Bourgeois's oeuvre is less its being "her most explicit piece," as Deborah Wye suggested in 1982, than what Wye described as an "urge to rock this scandalous object [that] is almost irresistible"--the possibility, which Bourgeois enacted in the Mapplethorpe photograph, that the work could be shifted from an object of aesthetic contemplation to an object of use, a prop or doll.¹¹ Bourgeois's decision to pose with Fillette therefore not only privileged a particularly graphic work, but also inscribed that work within a part-object logic of sculptural production.

Bourgeois and the exhibition's curator, Deborah Wye, offer different recollections of the cropping of the catalogue portrait, Bourgeois recalling a strong reaction against the picture's transgressive eroticism that Wye does not remember.¹² But it is useful to imagine what the effects of publishing this picture in the catalogue might have been. Deferring for the moment the crucial question of

¹¹ Wye, "One and Others," p. 27.

¹² Bourgeois, interview with the author, August 23, 1990; Wye, conversation with the author, September 1990. Wye remembers the decision to crop the photograph as the consensus of the curator, the photographer, and the artist. In a subsequent interview, Bourgeois recalled the incident this way: "The glint in the eye refers to the thing I'm carrying. But they cut it. They cut it because the museum was so prudish." Carolyn Treat, "Louise Bourgeois: Art is a Guarantee for Sanity," interview, Kunst & Museum Journal, vol. 2, no. 6 (1991), p. 57.

the photograph's scandalizing impact, the triumphant eroticism displayed by the then-seventy-year-old artist (and widow of the distinguished art historian Robert Goldwater): might her antic grin, in conjunction with the phallic prop, have seemed to challenge modernist art history's abstraction-based account of the bodily fragment?¹³ Might the picture have offered an object lesson, tongue in cheek, addressing not only the interpretation of the artist's own work, but a striking omission in the art-historical account of modern sculpture?

A Retrospective Reviewed

Fillette did not occupy a central position in the MOMA retrospective. It was displayed, together with a number of other objects, in a plexiglass case, suspended from a hook. The special status Bourgeois assigned to the work by posing with it for her catalogue picture therefore was doubly canceled, first by the cropping of the portrait, and then by Fillette's positioning within the show.

¹³ It should be noted that Bourgeois herself often uses the word "abstract" to describe her own work. My suggestion therefore clearly is not that she objected to the use of this term in the MOMA catalogue. Rather, I am proposing that within a revisionist account of modern sculpture's uses of the body such as the one proposed by Krauss, Bourgeois's sculpture must be located within a very different logic than the one art history generally means by "abstract." And Bourgeois's deployment of Fillette in the Mapplethorpe photographs, enacting a literalizing and desublimatory use of that object, underscores this point, whether intentionally or not.

This was not simply a matter of repressing a display of transgressive female eroticism, or of censoring a scandalous display of the phallus in a picture by a photographer of increasingly scandalous reputation.¹⁴ To foreground Fillette would have been to overturn the entire interpretive framework of the MOMA show, shifting its terms from the sublimation of form via abstraction to the desublimation of form via the part-object.

For Wye, as for Rubin, it was a given of the exhibition that Bourgeois's work was not purely abstract and therefore not susceptible to strictly formal analysis.¹⁵ (Indeed, the unstable nature of the work's relation to abstraction might be seen as one of the show's central problematics.) But the possibility that Bourgeois's practice might be inimical to abstraction--might be, in other words, not less abstract but not abstract at all--would have contradicted

¹⁴ So controversial had Mapplethorpe's work become in the early 1980s that in November 1983, Mapplethorpe's portrait of Bourgeois, together with his photograph Man in a Polyester Suit, was seized by customs officials at Heathrow Airport from a shipment of works intended for Mapplethorpe's retrospective at the London ICA. (Patricia Morrisoe, Mapplethorpe: A Biography [New York: Random House, 1995], p. 276). The background to this incident was of course Mapplethorpe's status as the primary phobic object of conservative forces in the U.S. Congress, Exhibit A in the drive to cut public funding of the arts. Robert Storr addresses this aspect of the Bourgeois portrait's history in "Art against the Mainstream," MacDowell Colony News, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1991).

¹⁵ "Upon viewing Bourgeois's work as a whole, one realizes that undue emphasis on stylistic analysis would be inherently unrewarding." Wye, "One and Others," p. 13.

the museum's explicit purpose of instating the oeuvre in the history of modern sculpture (as that history was constructed at the time).

Writing in the foreword to the catalogue, Rubin argued that Bourgeois's work was structured by a biomorphic abstraction consistent with the general development of postwar American sculpture, situating her production securely within the American reception of Surrealism.¹⁶ In this account, while painting underwent "a profound shift into abstraction," postwar American sculpture "remained allusively figural . . . and determinedly organic," maintaining, at least for a time, its attachment to the body.¹⁷ The body or figure of Rubin's analysis is the metaphoric, poetically sublimated one of biomorphic abstraction, of which Bourgeois's production stands, for him, as an exemplary instance: "She saw how [Surrealist sculpture's] poetic mythology and organic, biomorphic form-language could be assimilated to a more native American tradition in which such sculptors as Smith, Ferber, and Lipton were already pushing beyond the accomplishments of

¹⁶ In this analysis, too, Rubin echoed Elsen, who had placed a number of postwar American sculptors, including Bourgeois, within a Surrealist-inspired chapter in the history of the partial figure: "The richly symbolic sculpture of the Surrealist-inspired American artists, such as Hare, Lipton, Roszak, Ferber and Bourgeois, broadened and increased the complexity of associations between human parts and non-human sources." Elsen, "Notes on the Partial Figure," p. 61.

¹⁷ Rubin, foreword, in Wye, Louise Bourgeois, p. 11.

Arp and early Giacometti."¹⁸

If, however, Rubin found it a relatively simple matter to locate Bourgeois's production within the history of Surrealist-based biomorphic abstraction, Wye, as the show's curator, confronted the thorny problem of accounting for the striking diversity and discontinuity of the oeuvre, comprising an almost unparalleled range of form, material, and scale:

Encompassing abrupt changes in medium and form, it moves unexpectedly from rigid wood poles to amorphous plaster nests; from pliable masses to stiff protrusions in rubber and plastic; from bulbous bronze configurations hanging on hooks or cords to their reappearance in solid marble on sturdy bases; from a tiny four-inch fetish pincushion to a room-size environment.¹⁹

This radical multiplicity had earlier confounded critics working within the medium-specific formal logic of modernist practices, as Daniel Robbins noted in 1964: "Its formal independence and the even more difficult question of its precise relationship to mid-twentieth-century art are elements of an artistic and historical mystery."²⁰ Yet it was precisely its characteristically "abrupt changes in

¹⁸ Rubin, "Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," p. 17. It will be my argument in chapter two that the part-object logic of Bourgeois's production connects it both intimately and uneasily with Surrealist work and that this link is articulated through a counter-modernist casting of the body that diverges radically from the compositional structures of New York School sculptural production.

¹⁹ Wye, "One and Others, p. 14.

²⁰ Robbins, "Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois," p. 29.

medium and form" that, as Wye pointed out, gave the work resonance in the new critical climate of the mid-to-late seventies and early eighties that "welcomed stylistic diversity and deeply expressionist content."²¹ In the context of this break with modernist principles of medium-specificity and formal consistency, the heterogeneity of Bourgeois's oeuvre seemed suddenly prophetic.

But if the critical framework of pluralism offered a new, more flexible construction to encompass the discontinuities of Bourgeois's production, Wye nevertheless acknowledged its insufficiency to an artist with a modernist history. Having begun her career in the late 1930s and, as Wye noted, "absorbed a Cubist-based abstractionist style" in her early paintings, Bourgeois could not simply be annexed to the generations coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s. So while Wye identified her as a precursor for "new work that emphasized personal, individualized, and even eccentric subject matter," and for "artists and critics who were exploring the intuitive and emotional direction in the arts,"²² she also took account of her modernist roots, offering this analysis of Bourgeois's work as both belonging to and deviating from the modernist tradition of abstraction:

²¹ Wye, "One and Others," p. 13.

²² Ibid., p. 29.

Bourgeois developed her own idiom within the sophisticated cultural language of twentieth-century art. After a basic foundation in abstraction, she awakened to a more direct expression of her interior world through the inventions of the imagist branch of Surrealism. Finally, however, her work became most closely aligned with the tradition of Expressionism, as she attempted to encompass in it raw, vulnerable, subjective states of being, involving elemental aspects of humanity.²³

This formulation bridged two responsibilities Wye faced as the first to organize an exhibition of Bourgeois's complex oeuvre: to position her production within the history of twentieth-century sculpture and at the same time to account for its evident tension with that history. My contention, following a full decade and a half after Wye's groundbreaking exhibition and catalogue (and offered in a substantially altered critical context), is that Bourgeois's production calls for an analysis that differs from the one Wye offered in 1982 in two fundamental respects.

First, the problem of situating Bourgeois's oeuvre within the history of twentieth-century sculpture requires a revision of that history--one in which the formal logic of abstraction must be distinguished from the literalizing, fixating logic of the part-object. That is, a properly historical assessment of Bourgeois's production demands a less repressive and unitary account of modern sculpture, specifically one that admits the bodily literalism of the part-object. For only by revising the history of modern

²³ Ibid., p. 33.

sculpture itself to encompass breaks and discontinuities like the part-object's subversion of the partial figure is it possible to articulate Bourgeois's relation to that history.

The second respect in which my reading of Bourgeois's work differs from the one offered by Wye in 1982 is in its interpretation of the psychological intensity of Bourgeois's work--what Wye described as the artist's attempts to encompass "raw, vulnerable, subjective states of being." I will argue that the striking intensity of affect in Bourgeois's work demands a more complex model of subjectivity than that of expression. In general terms, this model is psychoanalysis, which offers a framework for considering subjectivity in more complex, multivalent terms than is possible within a model of expression, limiting as it does a work's interpretation to, in Michel Foucault's phrase, a "figure who is outside and precedes it."²⁴

A Myth of Origin Decentered

In his classic analysis of the author function, "What Is an Author?" Foucault observes that in modern criticism "the author serves to neutralize the contradictions that are found in a series of texts."²⁵ "Governing this function,"

²⁴ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" (1969), in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 115.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

he notes, "is the belief that there must be--at a particular level of an author's thought, of his [sic] conscious or unconscious desire--a point where contradictions are resolved, where the incompatible elements can be shown to relate to one another or to cohere around a fundamental and originating contradiction."²⁶

Asserting that "Bourgeois looks to herself for the sources of her work," Wye's 1982 essay, which based its readings largely on the artist's personal experience as related to Wye in extensive interviews, similarly produced a figure to reconcile the often-noted contradictions of Bourgeois's production.²⁷ As in Foucault's analysis, the conceptual, stylistic, and material discontinuities of the oeuvre were resolved in the person of the author. The MOMA show and its catalogue thus precipitated a critical reception that since 1982 has focused intensively on biographical content and psychobiographical readings, approaches Bourgeois herself has fortified by routinely citing and amplifying the traumatic early experiences she

²⁶ Ibid. Consider, for example, Rubin's comment about Bourgeois that "Her strongly etched artistic profile--which transcends the mutations in typologies and methodologies of her varied oeuvre--is felt in the consistency of her concerns and in the high order of her realization." Foreword, Wye, Louise Bourgeois, p. 11.

²⁷ Wye, "One and Others," p. 33.

identifies as the principle sources for her work.²⁸

In 1979, Bourgeois delivered a public lecture, repeated at MOMA at the time of her retrospective, in which she claimed childhood trauma as the origin of her work. With overtones of Surrealism's Oedipal psychomythologies, she related the genesis of her work to a traumatic scene: her father Louis's affair, under the family roof, with his daughter's English tutor. This lecture, accompanied by slides made from family pictures interspersed with slides of her sculptures, and published concurrently with the exhibition in Artforum as a project entitled "Child Abuse," supplied a narrative to cut through the stylistic and conceptual contradictions of her oeuvre.²⁹ Its portrait of a childhood riven by betrayal became the foundational

²⁸ It should be said that these tendencies have increased markedly in the years since the MOMA show and that by the standards of the moment Wye's balanced monograph would hardly qualify as an instance of a biographically based reading. My point is rather that her strategic use of biographical material and autobiographical statements to organize the heterogeneity of the work via a model of expression had a galvanizing effect on the critical reception of the exhibition and on subsequent accounts of Bourgeois's work.

²⁹ Bourgeois, "Child Abuse." The sparse text included such statements as these: "Everything I do was inspired by my early life. On the left, the woman in white is The Mistress. She was introduced into the family as a teacher but she slept with my father and she stayed for ten years. . . . So what role do I play in this game? I am a pawn. Sadie is supposed to be there as my teacher and actually you, mother, are using me to keep track of your husband. This is child abuse" (pp. 33-34). For a useful reading of the "Child Abuse" project, see Michael Corris, "Fuzzy Bourgeois," in Museum of Modern Art Papers, ed. Ian Cole, p. 17.

text for an interpretation of her work as originating in psychosexual trauma.³⁰ Further, the antipatriarchal sentiment of this story, heightened in subsequent, more elaborate autobiographical accounts by chilling reports of paternal tyranny and sexual degradation, consolidated Bourgeois's identity as a feminist artist in biographical terms.

The catalytic effect of this origin myth, referenced in virtually every article on Bourgeois's work written since 1979, has been to shift attention from the structural operation of her work to its psychological sources. The stress placed on biographical material by critics and by Bourgeois herself, and the power of this experience as the artist presents it, have established a critical orthodoxy in which meaning is strictly bound to the text of Bourgeois's own statements and interpretations. And while the significance of the statements and writings Bourgeois has generated in a stream of interviews, videotapes, articles, and public lectures since the 1970s is evident, the failure of critics to mediate this material through some analytic model,³¹ to question the definitive exigetical function it

³⁰ "Because Sadie, if you don't mind, was mine. She was engaged to teach me English. I thought she was going to like me. Instead of which she betrayed me. I was betrayed not only by my father, damn it, but by her too. It was a double betrayal." Bourgeois, "Child Abuse," p. 45.

³¹ This is not to suggest that no critic has ever attempted to do so. For a review of studies that are structured by specific analytic models, see the discussion

has assumed, undeniably has impoverished the reception of her work.

The irony that Bourgeois's delayed historical reception should be framed in these terms is that the oeuvre itself is structured not by narrative but, on the contrary, by heterogeneity, discontinuity, and a radical decentering of subjectivity. The biographical turn in interpretation therefore can be seen as not only reductive but as profoundly incompatible with the objects of its analysis. It will be my contention that it is possible to take account of this diverse production--its nonlinear unfolding, its hybrid formations, and its striking multiplicity--while still considering it within a framework of subjectivity, as Lippard demonstrated two decades ago in her pivotal essay "Louise Bourgeois: From the Inside Out."

In Lippard's reading, this breakdown of uniformity and linearity serves to counter the formalist logic of modernism: the nonlinear, non-medium-specific logic of Bourgeois's production--its material eclecticism, its shifting among formal modes, its range of scale and theme, and above all its confluences of sex and gender--are powerfully subversive of teleological, masculinist modernism.³² Focusing on the work's structural dimension,

of recent literature in the introduction.

³² For a detailed reading of Lippard's writing on Bourgeois, see Deepwell, "Feminist Readings of Louise Bourgeois."

specifically its inside-out logic of construction, Lippard underscores the projection of the body's internal states. Rather than representing--and rationalizing--the body as seen from without, the work is seen instead to enact its physicality as experienced from within. Interior states of the body (the drives) are physically projected as objects; further, in an interplay of processes that materially enacts the psychical relay of introjection and projection, these objects articulate a shift between the inside and outside of the body: "the latex pieces, hanging, folding, rising with a curious and sensual combination of limpness and stiffness, are the plaster pieces inside out."³³

Lippard's analysis drew on statements by the artist not as texts revealing of a personal iconography, but rather to sketch the associative logic of the work, as when she noted Bourgeois's linking of Femme Pieu (ca. 1970, fig. 1.4), a pincushion-size prone female figure stuck with needles, to a fur piece held together by needles which the artist kept as a child.³⁴ But in the context of increasing critical attention to expressionist content in contemporary work in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and of the artist's concomitant public statements about the biographical sources of her production, Lippard's complex reading of the physical processes of Bourgeois's sculpture as a kind of interplay of

³³ Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 241.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 246.

introjection and projection was subsumed in more straightforward psychological interpretation.

And this move to psychologize the work, as Wye observed, coincided with a shift toward pluralism and expressionism as the predominant critical and curatorial paradigms of the period:

Her work seemed to fill a distinct aesthetic need that became acute near the end of the seventies: a need for personal content and meaning well beyond what was found in much of the well-known work of the day. New work that emphasized personal, individualized, and even eccentric subject matter began to flourish, and the words most often heard in conjunction with this new art were meaning, content, emotional impact, and expressionism.³⁵

The critical emphasis on identity-centered art and on autobiographical narrative in the current decade has insulated this reading from subsequent examination, sustaining a biographically based reading of Bourgeois's work in which the dimension of trauma is now particularly accentuated.³⁶

³⁵ Wye, "One and Others," p. 29. This analysis shaped the reception of the exhibition. In Grace Glueck's review of the show in the New York Times, for example, she writes "Miss Bourgeois's art, which occurs in a wide range of modes and materials, is sometimes messy, unpleasant and hard to put in a category." Wye answers this difficulty by saying, "What makes the show possible . . . is the art world's drift to pluralism and a new interest on the part of the art-going public in works of more 'emotional' content." Glueck, "Louise Bourgeois, a Life in Sculpture, at Modern Museum," New York Times, Friday November 5, 1982, p. C-1.

³⁶ The turn to trauma as a model of interpretation in recent criticism has intensified the attention to personal experience in readings of Bourgeois's work. In conjunction with the recent exhibition of Bourgeois's drawings curated by Lawrence Rinder at the University Art Museum, University

But if a signal effect of such analyses has been to displace the structure and operation of the work itself as an object of attention, overshadowed as it has become by the story it is seen to tell, how might it be possible to encompass the structure of the work, as well as its thematic content, while still preserving a framework of subjectivity--as this oeuvre surely also demands? For there is no doubt that subjectivity is structural to Bourgeois's production. It is not, however, a matter of a particular subject "who is outside and precedes" the oeuvre, but of a model of subjectivity that Bourgeois's work can be seen to articulate--not a fixed origin but, as Lippard suggests, an interplay of psychic processes.

I will propose here, as one alternative to a strict biographical reading, a psychoanalytically based one. Such an analysis would have two significant advantages.

First, it would release the meaning of the work from a slavish dependence on authorial intention. For in psychoanalytic terms, a gap between intention and effect, rather than defying interpretation, opens a space in which polysemic meanings can arise. To assert a fixed origin behind (or before) the work therefore is to exclude the possibility of meanings produced precisely in the space between intention and effect. And since Bourgeois's

of California Berkeley, for example, Paul Ransohoff, D.M.H. presented a lecture entitled "Trauma into Art: Psychoanalytic Perspectives" (March 1996).

production can be seen to articulate a model of subjectivity, rather than to represent a biographical subject, this unnecessarily confining mode of interpretation can even be seen to pervert the logic of the work.

The second advantage of a psychoanalytically based reading, as opposed to one structured by expression, would be to analyze rather than resist the discontinuities of Bourgeois's production. For while the models of biography and expression attempt to organize the heterogeneity of the oeuvre around the personality of the maker--a personality that controls its expressions--psychoanalysis, via the unconscious, is in itself a discourse of discontinuities. Thus while psychoanalysis does provide an account of subjectivity, it is an account based precisely on discrepancies, an interpretive model, that is, in which contradiction and incongruity are deemed productive. And while a biographically based reading necessarily centers on a given subject, a psychoanalytically based interpretation can attend instead to the model of subjectivity articulated in the work.

A Part-Object Reading Proposed

Within psychoanalysis, the model of decentered subjectivity, of a field unbounded by requirements of formal or thematic consistency, finds its most radical articulation

in Melanie Klein's object-relations theory.³⁷ For Klein attempts to encompass conditions of the most extreme psychic fragmentation--in particular the infantile drives and the schizoid mechanisms of psychosis--within a psychoanalytic framework. In this study I will employ the model of Klein's work at the limit of psychoanalysis--the point at which the coherence of the subject breaks down--to analyze Bourgeois's work at the limit of form. As I will hope to show, the nonteleologic unfolding of Bourgeois's production, its shifting among formal and material modes, and its part-object logic of the body, can be read in Kleinian terms as an enactment of the drives.

In using Kleinian theory as a model through which to analyze Bourgeois's sculptural production, I will not

³⁷ In this study, the distinction between Kleinian object-relations theory and the better-known theories of her followers, and especially D.W. Winnicott, is strictly preserved. In general terms, object-relations theory is distinguished from Freudian psychoanalysis by its concentration on the pre-Oedipal, mother-infant relation, rather than on the subject's relation to paternal law and the symbolic order. For Klein, this infantile relation to the mother is fractured and menacing; for Winnicott and subsequent theorists associated with the object-relations school, it is symbiotic and nurturing. The difference between Klein's articulation of infantile experience and Winnicott's will be explored in some detail below, but it hinges on this fundamental discrepancy: Klein's insistence on an infantile subjectivity that is profoundly alienated and decentered (the effect of a phantasmatic projection of the bodily drives) as against Winnicott's emphasis on the responsibility of the "good enough" mother to produce for the infant a sense of wholeness and well being. Put another way, Klein's object-relations theory centers on the (psychotic) operation of the infantile unconscious, while Winnicott's concern is with the conscious behavior of the mother.

attempt to constitute the artist herself as a Kleinian subject. Nor will this study claim Kleinian theory as a source for her work, or assert that the artist self-consciously structures her work in Kleinian terms. Rather, it will argue that the Kleinian model opens a space for analyzing features of Bourgeois's practice that have long resisted interpretation. These features include the formal, stylistic, and material heterogeneity of the oeuvre; its destabilization of gender via the part-object; and the intensity of affect it displays.

Because the Kleinian model has not enjoyed the currency of other revisions of Freud, it is necessary to outline its basic structure before turning to the problem of its possible interpretive value with respect to Bourgeois's production. The principal distinguishing feature of Klein's psychoanalytic model, in contrast to Freud's, is the extreme fragmentation that is a function of its grounding in infantile, prelinguistic experience. Unlike its Freudian counterpart, the Kleinian subject is not constituted as an individual consciousness, nor by its progression through a series of developmental stages; rather, it is a complex of disjointed, uncoordinated sensations. Displacing the discrete consciousness of Freud's model, and its unitary history of the subject, Klein concentrates instead on the infantile drives, analyzing the interplay of states--or to use her term, positions--of a volatile subjectivity that

remains perpetually in flux.³⁸

In perhaps its most dramatic divergence from Freud, the Kleinian model rejects the primacy of castration. Operating in the atemporal field of infantile experience, rather than the temporal-linguistic field of the Oedipal subject, Kleinian theory is concerned not with the neurotic symptom that is an effect of sexuality, but with the psychoses that arise from the bodily drives. Within this account, castration reenacts losses already suffered, such as the loss of the breast in weaning, but it elicits no definitive anxiety. Put another way, within the ahistorical framework of object relations, castration does not mark an origin but is subsumed within a nonhierarchical, nonlinear field of positions.

The principal concern of Klein's theory is infantile anxiety, which is posited as a function of aggression--both external aggression and, especially, destructive fantasies that the subject struggles to suppress. In contrast to Freud's emphasis on sexual development and repression, Klein instead sees aggression as the pivotal psychic site of struggle. The infant, she observes, "has sadistic impulses directed, not only against its mother's breast, but also against the inside of her body: scooping it out, devouring

³⁸ For an excellent summary of Kleinian theory's relation to and divergence from Freud, see Juliet Mitchell's introduction to The Selected Melanie Klein (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 9-32.

its contents, destroying it by every means which sadism can suggest."³⁹ And because the infant, in its attempt to free itself from these sadistic impulses, projects aggression onto external objects, it also produces fantasies of "persecutors who it fears will devour it, scoop out the inside of its body, cut it to pieces, poison it--in short, compassing its destruction by all the means which sadism can devise."⁴⁰

Constructing her model of subjectivity around the infant, and so in relation to an immediate and fragmented bodily experience unmediated by language, Klein, in contrast to Freud, privileges not the unconscious, but fantasy. And for Klein, fantasy is produced physically, not as a work of the unconscious mind, but as a bodily operation. The act of biting, for example, may produce in the infant a fantasy of destroying a bad object (the withholding or aggressive breast), while sucking may enact the incorporation of a good one. Or, alternatively, the bad object, torn by biting, may multiply phantasmatically into a swarm of internal persecutors that in turn threatens to annihilate the incorporated good object. And these fantasies, according to Klein, position the subject. Thus, for example, paranoid fantasies of being attacked by the bad breast lock the

³⁹ Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States" (1935), in The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 116.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

subject into what Klein terms the paranoid-schizoid position, while anxiety about the destructive effects of aggressive impulses toward the good breast cast the subject in the so-called depressive position.⁴¹

The interplay of positions in Klein's model is radically incongruent with Freud's developmental stages in that these positions persist, not as states into which the subject may regress, but as ever-present conditions in which, as Juliet Mitchell has written, "one is sometimes lodged."⁴² That is, the infantile experience of immediate and fragmented bodily experience is for Klein the ground of subjectivity itself, the psyche being, in her description, forever riven by the drives.

Thus even in the most cursory outline, Klein's theory of the psyche can be seen to encompass a set of concerns pivotal to Bourgeois's practice, namely, to reiterate: a part-object logic of the body; an extreme intensity of affect; a presexual conflation of gender; and a discontinuous logic of positions, as opposed to a linear

⁴¹ Klein's first formulation of the depressive position, and of the interplay of positions as an alternative model to the Freudian theory of developmental stages is presented in "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States." As Mitchell observes, Klein's substitution of a structural for a developmental notion "facilitates the making of a connection between adult psychosis and infant development--a 'position' is an always available state, not something one passes through." (The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 116.)

⁴² Mitchell, introduction, The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 28.

succession of stages. In a Kleinian-based reading, then, the inconsistency and discontinuity of the formal development in Bourgeois's work can be viewed not as an eclectic practice, but as a nonlinear interplay of positions. And the collapse of binary oppositions--including male and female, inside and outside, figure and ground, self and other--that in Bourgeois's work produces the disarticulation of gender and form, can be read in Kleinian terms as enacting the pregendered fantasy-logic of the infantile drives.

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If Kleinian theory offers an interpretive framework for reading Bourgeois's production that exceeds other psychoanalytic models, the argument for such a reading is further supported by Bourgeois's own knowledge of Klein's writings and by notable historical conjunctures between Bourgeois's production and artistic receptions of psychoanalysis.

Having lived around the corner from André Breton's gallery Gravidia while an art student in Paris, stopping in daily on her way to classes at the École des Beaux Arts, and having later belonged to a circle of émigrés in New York that included Breton, Marcel Duchamp, André Masson, Yves Tanguy, and Roberto Matta, among others, Bourgeois had, from the beginning, developed her work under the impress of psychoanalytic modes of thought. Her engagement with

unconscious operations such as fantasy and dream is evident in her graphic work of the 1930s and 1940s, drawings that display concatenated motifs suggestive of the Surrealist exquisite corpse, and a disjointed drawing style evocative of automatic writing, the Surrealist graphic technique modeled on Freud's principle of free association.

But Bourgeois, it should be noted, never counted herself a Surrealist. Acknowledging that her contact with Surrealism was direct, she claims to have "suffered at the hands of all these pontificating men," adding that she saw her own production as "a rebuttal of what they stood for."⁴³ What she objected to in the Surrealists, and particularly in Breton, was both this pronounced sexism and what she perceived as a certain sardonic detachment in their exploration of the unconscious.⁴⁴ To her, Surrealism seemed indifferent to what she termed "the tragedy of life,"⁴⁵ and an engagement with the unconscious at the level of the most intense psychic suffering became a central preoccupation, registered in her work in physical terms--at the interface of body and object.⁴⁶

⁴³ Bourgeois, interview with the author, February 27, 1996.

⁴⁴ Bourgeois, interview with the author, February 27, 1996.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Asked by Donald Kuspit about the Surrealist "notion of the work of art as a kind of manufactured dream" in relation to her own production, Bourgeois stated: "I have

If, however, Bourgeois repudiated the detached affect of the Breton circle, and took a skeptical view of its preoccupation with dreams, jokes, and sexual love, she nevertheless shared with its intimates one pivotal interest, namely the production Hans Prinzhorn had famously called "the art of the insane."⁴⁷ Describing Prinzhorn's eponymous study as "one of the major events of this century," Hans Bellmer underscored the importance of schizophrenic art not only for the Surrealists, but in shaping the culture of Paris in the 1930s.⁴⁸ Cast as an art-critical study, rather than a clinical analysis, Prinzhorn's book, expanding the associative models of automatic writing and the exquisite corpse that arose from Freud's treatment of neurotics to encompass the dimension of psychosis, drew the immediate attention of artists such as Max Ernst. Further, exhibitions in 1928 and 1929 by such

never mentioned the word dream in discussing my art, while they talked about the dream all the time. I don't dream. You might say I work under a spell." In reply to Kuspit's next question, "Isn't being in a spell also a Surrealist idea?" Bourgeois drew a distinction between the mental state of dreaming, unfolding in the unconscious mind, and the active physical state of working under a spell, in which the unconscious mind and the physical act are conjoined: "The 'spell' is acted out on a physical level; it is not a passive state, like a dream." Quoted in Donald Kuspit, Bourgeois (An Interview with Louise Bourgeois by Donald Kuspit) (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), pp. 31-32.

⁴⁷ Hans Prinzhorn, Bildnerei der Geisteskranken (Berlin: J. Springer Verlag, 1923; reprint, 1968).

⁴⁸ Hans Bellmer quoted in John M. MacGregor, The Discovery of the Art of the Insane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 281.

famous schizophrenic artists as Aloyse and Wolfli spurred Breton to begin collecting and actively promoting schizophrenic art, numerous examples of which were included in Surrealist exhibitions in Paris, London, and New York during the 1930s.

Bourgeois's drawings of the 1930s and 1940s, which display the rigid spatial divisions, repetitive motifs, and machinic systems that are all typical features of art brut drawings, testify to the artist's early engagement with this type of production. Works by Wolfli, Klotz, Aloyse, Neter, Julie Bar, and Robert Gie all find parallels in her work of this period, and particularly in a suite of engravings published in 1947, entitled He Disappeared into Complete Silence, which I will consider in detail in chapter two. But if Bourgeois, like so many of her contemporaries, participated in the artistic reception of schizophrenic art, and if she gleaned something of psychoanalytic theory through her contact with the Surrealists in Paris and New York in the 1930s and 1940s, it was only in the 1960s, at the time of her first involvement in feminist politics, that she turned directly to the study of psychoanalysis.

Bourgeois undertook an intensive study of psychoanalytic literature during the 1960s and 1970s, reading works by Freud and Lacan, Joan Riviere, Karen Horney, and Helene Deutsch, as well as the object-relations

theories of Klein, D.W. Winnicott, and others.⁴⁹ She was particularly drawn to Klein's use of psychoanalytic techniques in the treatment of children and psychotics, subjects whose inability to speak seemingly excluded them from the talking cure. Substituting simple toys for words, and replacing dreams and free association with play, Klein was able to engage even profoundly disturbed children in imaginary scenarios. Through this play, she elicited material for analysis, observing the children's enactments of fears and anxieties that in her interpretation resulted from the patients' sadistic impulses and from the anticipated retaliation of objects attacked in fantasy.

Of great significance for Bourgeois during this period was Love, Hate, and Reparation (1937), a book Klein co-authored with Riviere, which examines the interplay of infantile destructive and reparative fantasies in adult life.⁵⁰ According to Bourgeois, Klein's analysis of the

⁴⁹ Bourgeois, interview with the author, February 27, 1996. The books she acquired for her library in that period also include a broad survey of popular psychology and self-help manuals, indicative of her great interest in popular culture, including not only literature but fashion, music, and television.

⁵⁰ Bourgeois, interview with the author, February 26, 1996. Divided into two parts, "Hatred, Greed and Aggression" by Riviere, and "Love, Hate and Reparation" by Klein, the book examines such issues as delusional hate, pathological envy, envy of the other sex, rivalry, and making reparation. Klein's emphasis in this book is particularly on the interaction and intrication of hate and love. Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, Love, Hate and Reparation (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964).

intrication of love and hate, and in particular her model of reparation as a means of psychically restoring an object damaged in fantasy, resonated powerfully with the artist's own conception of the physical processes of sculpture as enacting impulses of extreme aggression, as well as the desire to repair and nurture the objects of sadistic fantasy.

Klein's analysis of psychotic elements as present at all times in all subjects was also a signal feature of this model for Bourgeois. Here she found a psychoanalytic model to encompass "the tragedy of life," the psychotic states of radical alienation with which her early production was so closely identified. This was a theory specifically concerned with psychic fragmentation and the death drive. And it was a model in which the castration complex was deemphasized, in which, that is, subjectivity was less strictly bound by sex.

This is not to suggest that Kleinian object-relations theory functioned as a source for Bourgeois's work in the 1960s and '70s. Rather, it appears to have been one of the many frameworks through which this intellectually and politically engaged artist thought her production. But the coincidence of Bourgeois's feminist activism and her involvement with Kleinian theory in this period must underpin any Kleinian-based analysis of her work. Her often-expressed antagonism to the phallocentrism of Freudian and Lacanian theories, and the salience of the American

feminist critique of Freudian theory in the 1960s and 1970s, are notable in this context. More important, however, than any explicit theoretical or political identification, at least for the analysis that I will offer here, is the possibility that through her simultaneous engagement with feminist politics and Kleinian object-relations theory Bourgeois was able to rethink the part-object-based logic of her work more explicitly in relation to gender.⁵¹

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My proposal of a part-object-based analysis of Bourgeois's work thus is bounded by two principle histories: the countermodernist history of the part-object in twentieth-century sculpture, and the post-Freudian history of psychoanalysis. It will therefore be my contention that Bourgeois's work is structured so as to resist both the abstract logic of modernism and the binary logic of Freudian psychoanalysis, and that these two counter-operations are joined by the part-object.

This reading can be summarized as follows: (1)

⁵¹ Moreover, quite apart from any explicit relation to Klein, Bourgeois's production can be seen to articulate its own theory--not in the form of texts, but of objects. In attempting to interpret these theoretical objects, I have elected to cast them in Kleinian terms--not in order to make the objects appear congruent with a particular theoretical model, but in order to articulate their modes of operation. And underlying this effort of interpretation is the presumption that the art-historical reception of Bourgeois's work has suffered from the failure of critics to engage theoretically with its operations, to examine these works as theoretical objects.

Bourgeois's work subverts abstraction via the literal logic of the part-object; (2) the pregendered operation of the part-object in turn destabilizes the binaries of gender; and (3) these two operations--the desublimation of form and the destabilization of gender--are mediated by a feminist politics.

A Feminist Reading Revised

The transgressive sexuality of Bourgeois's work of the 1960s and '70s made her an iconic figure for the feminist art movement. She participated in a number of group shows and political actions and was widely celebrated as a feminist artist avant la lettre; as Wye has noted, "even pieces made twenty years earlier became a rallying point for some feminist artists."⁵² But the significance of the

⁵² Wye, "One and Others," p. 26. In 1972 alone, Bourgeois participated in four exhibitions devoted to the work of female artists: "13 Women Artists," organized by the Women's Ad Hoc Committee in New York; "American Women Artists Show" at the Kunsthaus, Hamburg, held in cooperation with Gedok, the feminist organization of German artists; "American Women: 20th Century" at the Lakeview Center for the Arts and Sciences in Peoria, Illinois; and "Unmanly Art," at the Suffolk Museum and Carriage House in Stony Brook, New York. In 1974, her work was included in group shows at the Erotic Art Gallery and the Women's Interart Center, Inc. in New York, and in the exhibition "Works by Women from the Ciba-Geigy Collection" at the Kresge Art Center Gallery, Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, and she participated in the "East Coast Women's Invitational Exhibition" at the Museum of the Philadelphia Civic Center. She also participated in political actions, including a demonstration at the Whitney Museum of American Art in December 1970, in which a group of women invaded the museum's "Sculpture Annual" to protest the low percentage of women artists included. An exhibitor in the show, Bourgeois

feminist art movement for Bourgeois seems to have resided less in her role as precursor, or even in the identity of feminist artist, than in feminism's critique of the gender relations structural to patriarchy, in which she found a model through which to rework the part-object logic of her production.⁵³ For now Bourgeois began to attack the binaries of gender from below, at the presexual level of the drives.

In the 1960s, Bourgeois's production abruptly shifted from the totemic carved wood poles and segmented figures constructed from stacked wood fragments on which she had focused during the 1940s and '50s to explicitly sexual, organ-like structures made from a broad range of media. These included liquid materials such as plaster, cement, latex, wax, plastic, and bronze, as well as fabric, wood, clay and highly polished marble. Disrupting the consistently vertical orientation of the Personages,

attended the protest wearing a red armband and was quoted in the New York Times account as saying "Since we've been discriminated against for so long, we need special privileges. The question of quality should be suspended for the time being." Quoted in Grace Glueck, "Women Artists Demonstrate at Whitney," New York Times, December 12, 1970.

⁵³ This is not to suggest that feminist activism, inside and outside the art world, was not a central preoccupation for Bourgeois during this period. As Deepwell has noted, "Bourgeois's willingness to show with other women certainly increased her reputation amongst women artists even while it may have contributed very little to her achieving a 'mainstream' status in the international dealer/critic/museum system." Deepwell, "Why Louise Bourgeois Is a Feminist Icon," p. 38.

figures, and Spiral Women of the 1940s and 1950s, these new works collapsed onto the horizontal in viscous fields (End of Softness, 1967, fig. 1.5), involuted coils (Rondeau for L., 1963, fig. 3.14), and bulbous clusters (Cumul, I, 1969, fig. 3.7); lay prone (Femme Couteau, ca. 1969-70, fig. 3.23); or were supported from the ceiling by sturdy hooks (Fillette, 1968, fig. 1.6). Textural articulation shifted from the flat painted surfaces of the wood pieces to the manifold tactilities of flesh: lubricious (Soft Landscape, I, 1967, fig. 3.8), blistered (Portrait, 1963, fig. 3.2), dimpled (Amoeba, ca. 1963-65, fig. 3.4), glossy (Sleep II, 1967, fig. 1.2), and scratchy (Fillette, in an early state, fig. 1.7).

When, in the early 1970s, Bourgeois's work was exhibited in a number of shows devoted exclusively to work by women artists, this collapse and fracturing of the body and emphasis on surface texture was read in relation to the contemporary feminist critical project of identifying characteristics particular to art made by women. That is, it was subsumed in an essentialist logic, so that critics underscored Bourgeois's use of female forms and female erotic imagery.

Posing the question "Is there a women's art?" Lippard enumerated a series of formal traits indicative of "women's sensibility and imagery," many of which could be observed in Bourgeois's production: "a uniform density or overall

texture, often sensuously tactile . . . the preponderance of circular forms, central focus, inner space . . . a ubiquitous linear 'bag' or parabolic form that turns in on itself; layers, or strata, or veils . . . and a certain kind of fragmentation."⁵⁴ This was a moment when the connection between women's art and women's bodies seemed so intimate and inevitable that Lippard insisted "many women artists, whether or not they choose to acknowledge the role of interior space and central-core imagery, are consciously preoccupied with formal relationships between inside and outside," counting among them a roster of artists whose work would now be considered to exhibit rather diverse concerns--Bourgeois, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, and Jackie Winsor.⁵⁵ Lawrence Alloway could write of Lippard's category of "the central image" that "it spans a gamut from deep womb symbolism, as in Louise Bourgeois, to clitoral agitation, as in Juanita McNeeley."⁵⁶ And Barbara Rose, in an essay entitled "Vaginal Iconology," could observe that vaginal imagery undermined the phallic basis of male supremacy.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Lippard, "Prefaces to Catalogues of Women's Exhibitions, Part II, 1973: 'Why Separate Women's Art?'" in From the Center, p. 49.

⁵⁵ Lippard, "Fragments," in From the Center, p. 73.

⁵⁶ "For the latter" the reader was referred to Betty Dodson's volume Liberating Masturbation.

⁵⁷ Barbara Rose, "Vaginal Iconology," New York, February 11, 1974; cited in Lippard, "Fragments," in From the Center, p. 77.

It was a moment when attacks on the structures of patriarchy and on the phallus as their preeminent symbol also were commonplace. A notable example was Lynda Benglis's 1974 ad for Artforum, in which the artist posed "as a greased nude in sunglasses, belligerently sporting a gigantic dildo," as Lippard described the "coup de grace" of a series of four advertisements Benglis made picturing herself in pornographic tableaux.⁵⁸ This appropriation of the phallus played on both conventional representations of the female body as sex object and on the machismo of the art world.

But while Benglis's ad, like Carolee Schneemann's and Hannah Wilke's contemporaneous performances, Ana Mendieta's stagings of her body, Judith Bernstein's drawings of monumental phallic screws, and Judy Chicago's vaginal imagery, were structured by biological essentialism, Bourgeois's production was not.⁵⁹ On the contrary, her work was concerned not with difference as essentialized by sex but with the subversion of difference from below, via the part-object logic of the drives.

In 1974, the year of Benglis's ad and Rose's "Vaginal

⁵⁸ Lippard, "European and American Women's Body Art," in From the Center, p. 127.

⁵⁹ For an alternative view of Schneemann's and Wilke's performances as "theatricaliz[ing] their own objectification not in an essentializing way, but as a means for taking authority for their own representation as sexual subjects," see Amelia Jones, "'Presence' and Calculated Absence," Tema Celeste (Winter 1993), pp. 40-41.

Iconology," Bourgeois told an interviewer: "Sometimes I am totally concerned with female shapes--clusters of breasts like clouds--but often I merge the imagery--phallic breasts, male and female, active and passive."⁶⁰ Quoting the statement in her catalogue essay, Wye observed that Bourgeois's characterization of her work from this period had later shifted away from explicitly sexual concerns: "As Bourgeois discusses particular pieces now, however, she characterizes them as 'pre-sexual,' meaning that they function at the most basic level of the life force itself."⁶¹ The implication of "pre-sexual" here is "abstract"--abstract not only in the formal sense of the nonfigural, but also in the humanistic connotation of the nongendered or universal. But if, as I will hope to show, Bourgeois's project of the 1960s and '70s was to rework the sculptural part-object in relation to a feminist politics, then her term "presexual" suggests less a sublimation than a subversion of gender.⁶²

⁶⁰ Bourgeois, statement, in Dorothy Seiberling, "The Female View of Erotica," New York, vol. 7, February 11, 1974, p. 56. Quoted in Wye, "One and Others," p. 27.

⁶¹ Wye, "One and Others," p. 27.

⁶² It is worth noting that this notion of presexual objects did not find its way into the critical reception of the MOMA retrospective, despite Bourgeois's underscoring of the point. In Michael Brenson's review of the show for the New York Times, he quotes Bourgeois as saying "All these themes are pre-sexual. There is the anxiety. There is no realized and satisfied sex but foreknowledge." Brenson, "A Sculptor Comes into Her Own," New York Times, Sunday, October 31, 1982, p. H-29.

For by reworking the part-object explicitly in relation to gender--as a subversion of the binary structure of sexual difference through the pregendered logic of the drives--Bourgeois was, in effect, outlining an alternative, nonessentialist logic of feminist art production. As in Kleinian object-relations theory, it was a logic in which the conventional construction of masculinity and femininity as opposed on axes of agency and passivity, aggression and nurturing--axes drawn to diagram the negotiation of the castration complex--was radically destabilized. And, as the references to "phallic breasts" and "presexual" forms suggest, this attack on difference through the drives was mediated by both the Surrealist part-object (via such constructs as round phallicism) and by the Kleinian part-object (via its disprivileging of the phallus as a breast-like object of the infantile drives).

In the 1960s and '70s, while taking an active role in feminist politics, Bourgeois began to remake the body in pregendered terms, to explore its infantile, part-object multiplicity. And as I will hope to show, this remaking was articulated through subversive readings of objects identified with, on the one hand, Surrealism, and on the other, feminism. This conjuncture was forged in a horizontal space, at the presexual, prelinguistic level of the drives.

Scenes of the Phallus Restaged

The nexus formed by Surrealism, Kleinian object-relations theory, and feminist critiques of gender in my analysis of Bourgeois's work has of course a historical as well as a conceptual dimension. That is, these are not simply three analytical models through which it is possible to explore aspects of Bourgeois's sculptural practice, but also three histories that have engaged her and mediated the development of her work. The complex interplay of these models in Bourgeois's production, the articulation of which will be the subject of this study, can be glimpsed in two comparisons, both of which demonstrate the part-object logic of Bourgeois's practice.

The first, a comparison of Fillette and Giacometti's Disagreeable Object of 1931, examines her remaking of the Surrealist fetish via a part-object logic of the body and a feminist politics. The second, a comparison of the Mapplethorpe photograph and Benglis's 1974 Artforum advertisement, considers her unmaking of the Freudian figures of the phallic woman and phallic mother in relation to contemporaneous feminist production. Through these comparisons, I will hope to demonstrate the logic of the interpretive framework outlined in this chapter with reference to Fillette, the work the artist herself singled out for attention on the occasion of the first retrospective exhibition of her work, and to the document through which

she attempted to foreground it, the Mapplethorpe portrait.

Remaking the Fetish

First, compare Fillette to Disagreeable Object, about which Michael Brenson has written:

The round section is the head, the two concavities the eyes, and the tusk-like section the body. On the back of the body is a spine. On the back of the head are four grooves. If the viewer places his hand so that four of his fingers are in the grooves, he will be holding the work in a cradling or rocking position. However, along with being an embryo, the 'disagreeable object' is a club and a penis with spikes on the end. Like all the other 'objets sans base,' the Objet Désagréable is a contradictory image. One end is vulnerable and helpless, the other end is aggressive and menacing. . . . Cradling the child also means cradling the club and the penis.⁶³

Like Fillette, Disagreeable Object is a portable phallus that is subject to play: "You can carry it around like a baby, have it as a doll," as Bourgeois suggests Fillette can be used, or wield it like a club.⁶⁴ Both objects are "sans base," without bases and implicitly also without value, or in other words fashioned not for contemplation on pedestals but to be used as props. Embodying both vulnerability and aggression, both are contradictory objects, and in both cases this ambivalence is registered physically in the play between two positions, cradling and

⁶³ Michael Francis Brenson, "The Early Work of Alberto Giacometti, 1925-1935" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1974), pp. 117-18.

⁶⁴ Bourgeois, quoted in Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 243.

aggressive.

Fillette's recapitulation of key features of Disagreeable Object, even as it clearly reworks them according to a very different logic, demands analysis not via the art-historical logic of influence, but within a framework of remaking that I will cast here in feminist terms. Disagreeable Object is a work Bourgeois knew well, and whether or not it functioned explicitly as a source for Fillette, it clearly was one of the key Surrealist objects with which her production engaged. Recalling that Bourgeois claims to have seen her own work as a rebuttal of Surrealism, conceived antagonistically in relation to a production she associated with patriarchy in the form of "fathers" and "pontificating men," we can think of Fillette as in one sense a feminist revision of Disagreeable Object.⁶⁵

This reworking begins with the fetish. For a phallic prop deployed as a ritual object, alternately a club and a doll, immediately suggests that type of object which, in Freudian terms, is a phallic substitute with a double

⁶⁵ Discussing the interplay between Fillette and Disagreeable Object and Princess X, Storr argues that Bourgeois framed her resistance to the Surrealist fathers by, in effect, trumping their disagreeable objects with even more disagreeable ones. He points out that in her use of latex, Bourgeois conferred on Fillette a "genital ugliness" that, at the level of material, exceeds the desublimatory effects achieved by Brancusi and Giacometti at the level of form. Storr, "Prière de (ne pas) Toucher," in Bernadac and Marcadé, eds., fémininmasculin, p. 332.

function, operating as both a memorial to the lost (maternal) penis and a protection against castration.⁶⁶ Enacting the psychic split in which the fetishist simultaneously recognizes and disavows castration, the fetish is an ambivalent object, encapsulating, in Octave Mannoni's celebrated formulation, the contradiction "Je sais bien, mais quand même," I know very well, but nevertheless. Or this, at least, is how the fetish functions for the male subject, who, in the Freudian scenario, alone is eligible to practice this perversion. The female fetishist, for Freud, is an oxymoron,⁶⁷ unable to fear the loss of what instead she simply lacks.

Of Disagreeable Object, Hal Foster has observed that what is disagreeable is the evocation of castration, inscribed on the object by the spiked tip.⁶⁸ (This reading focuses specifically on what is disagreeable about the object for the male subject, but in the context of Bourgeois's recasting of it, the castrative threat of the spiked phallic weapon is even more pronounced for the female

⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-64), vol. 21, pp. 149-57.

⁶⁷ The term is Naomi Schor's. See her "Female Fetishism: The Case of George Sand," in The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 365.

⁶⁸ Hal Foster, Compulsive Beauty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), p. 93.

subject.) Yet, he notes, this aggressivity is mixed with affection, "the narcissistically disagreeable (the castrative) with the perversely desirable (the fetishistic)."⁶⁹ The object is both a spiked club that evokes and protects against castration, repelling touch, and a hand prop with finger grooves that offers itself to be rocked as a baby, its vulnerability underscored by large eyes and a prone, embryonic body.

Like Disagreeable Object, Fillette is a contradictory object. But the structural ambivalence that in both objects elides the oppositions aggressive/vulnerable and phallic/castrated, nevertheless operates differently in each. For while Disagreeable Object, in the manner of the Freudian fetish, invokes both triumph over castration anxiety and a defense against it, Fillette demonstrates instead the ambivalence of the fetish for the female subject: it displays triumph over the phallus itself, while also defending against phallic aggression.⁷⁰ Thus Fillette operates not as a conjuncture of the narcissistically disagreeable and the perversely desirable,

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Consider, for example, Bourgeois's statement about Fillette: "The phallus is the subject of my tenderness. It's about vulnerability and protection. After all, I lived with four men, with my husband and three sons. I was the protector. . . . Though I feel protective of the phallus, it does not mean I am not afraid of it. 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' You negate the fear like a lion tamer." Quoted in Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free Fall, p. 181.

as Foster describes Disagreeable Object's enactment of the fetish, but as a double evocation of the sadistically castrative and the maternally solicitous.

If, then, Disagreeable Object encapsulates castration anxiety and phallic aggression, while evoking the male subject's desire simultaneously to protect and mourn the lost maternal penis, Fillette seems to rework the fetish as an object of female aggression and desire, a projection of both sadistic aggression toward the phallus and a multivalent desire to possess, enjoy, and mother it.

1. Phallus=Baby

Strung up on a hook, Fillette appears castrated, "a big, suspended, decaying phallus, definitely on the rough side," as one male critic describes it.⁷¹ Tucked confidently under Bourgeois's arm, it appears phallic, although not phallic in the usual way. Toted like a pet phallus, the dominated object of the woman's erotic pleasure, it is specifically the phallic object of female desire. But supported from its underside, nestled against the body--fastened to the hip or snuggled to the breast--it suddenly appears to be very much a baby. This, at least, is how it looks in a series of shots from the contact sheets of the 1982 session with Mapplethorpe, in which Bourgeois mothers the object (figs. 1.8 and 1.9).

⁷¹ Lawrence Alloway, "Art," The Nation, March 27, 1972; quoted in Wye, "One and Others," p. 27.

There we see her cradling Fillette against her hip like an infant to be patted and stroked; cupping in her hand the balls that, with the sculpture upended and turned to face the camera, suddenly read as plump foreshortened infant legs; gazing tenderly down on the tip transformed to a tiny head arched back and fastened to a neck, the sculpture's shaft, that pokes up out of the collar of some little dress or blanket. Or, resting horizontally against the artist's breast, Fillette seems to relax open-mouthed in sleep, tended by a soothing hand, its head comfortably settled in the crook of an arm. In still other poses, however, it is pinned rigidly in place, an elbow and a clenched hand securing it to Bourgeois's hip as its body seems to stiffen, immobilized and frustrated in its swaddling outfit. Then, the bound body riveted by a fist, the head seems to yank back, the back to arch, the body frantically straining to free itself as the pressure of a fist or a gripped hand tightens against its every exertion, only to loosen suddenly, casually tucking the agitated, spent body under an arm and carrying it off.

The physical manipulation of Fillette in relation to Bourgeois's body, as she alternately pins it under her elbow and rocks it in her arms, thus performs the ambivalence of both the baby and the phallus for the female subject and so distinguishes Fillette from the more straightforwardly fetishistic Disagreeable Object. But the doubleness of

Fillette as both penis and baby also plays on a similarity to that work, for Disagreeable Object, too, conflates penis and baby, and lends itself to an interplay of aggressive and nurturing fantasies, the inclusion of finger grooves opening the possibility of a maternal relation to the object. In Disagreeable Object, then, the intersection of the maternal and the fetishistic exceeds the model of Freudian fetishism, a male perversion through which the maternal phallus is restored and sexual difference denied. For here the fetishist himself is cast in the protective role of mother, and the fetish made a baby.

In the Freudian system, the equation phallus=baby applies uniquely to the female subject, the equivalence of baby and phallus securing her, via the role of mother, a place within a phallogentric economy of desire. But the structure of "normal" femininity, in which the female subject turns to the baby as a phallic substitute, also can be seen as structurally similar to fetishism. As Rachel Bowlby succinctly explains the constitution of the maternal subject, "the baby-wish simply takes the place of the penis-wish: it is the substitute and it is also what hides its continuing existence."⁷² Seen this way, femininity in the Freudian scheme closely parallels fetishism, the quintessentially masculine perversion from which the female

⁷² Rachel Bowlby, "Still Crazy after All These Years," in Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, ed. Teresa Brennan (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 50.

subject is excluded. For the contradiction in which the baby serves simultaneously to allay and to deny the woman's disappointment about the loss of the wished-for penis produces a split subject (the mother) who, like the fetishist, can relieve her anxiety only by fixating on the very object that embodies it, in this case the baby.

Bourgeois's poses with Fillette in the Mapplethorpe photos enact and caricature the phallus=baby equation while offering a comic demonstration of the resemblance between fetishism and femininity as described by Freud. But the duality of Fillette also reverses the Freudian presumption of the baby as a substitute phallus, a phallic double. For in Bourgeois's demonstration, it is the phallus that is deployed as a substitute baby; here the focus of attention is not the baby's phallic aspect but rather the uncannily baby-like appearance of the phallus. And this figure of the infantile phallus, the phallus as a double, perhaps, of the child self (Bourgeois refers to Fillette as a "little Louise") potentially destabilizes the gender binarism of the Freudian scheme. For as the comparison of Disagreeable Object and its reworking in Fillette suggests, subjects of both sexes may project infantile desire onto the phallus, as onto the breast, just as both may mother it.⁷³

⁷³ Stuart Morgan has noted Bourgeois's occasional observation about Fillette that "these were her husband's genitals, cradled and cherished." Morgan, "Partial Recall," City Limits (London), April 26-May 3, 1990, p. 19.

2. Woman=Mother

What, then, does it mean, in psychoanalytic terms, to mother, to be in a maternal relation to an object? For Freud, the mother is synonymous with the woman. Through the maternal role, by shifting her desire for the phallus she lacks to the baby that serves as its substitute, the woman is constituted as a subject. Disagreeable Object, as we have seen, suggests an imbrication of fetishism and mothering in the fetishist's maternal devotion to the lost (maternal) phallus. Bourgeois's poses with Fillette undermine the Freudian model of mothering by dramatizing her desire--displaying its proportion via the outsized phallus--and then, when the phallus becomes baby, by projecting that outsized desire onto the child. For the poses Bourgeois strikes as Fillette's mother display the enormity and diversity of the mother's desire, and of her anxiety, settling uneasily onto the body of the infant. Surcharged with desire to protect and soothe the infant, but also with aggressive impulses to dominate, scare, even abuse it, Bourgeois's enactment of the maternal role evokes a dangerous, even furious compression of desire.

In this, Bourgeois's performance strips away the sentimentality that adheres to motherhood's cultural reputation, laying bare a repressed maternal aggression. Representations of the mother-baby relation and the fantasies surrounding it from the mother's position are

rare. As Susan Suleiman has observed, "for the most part "mothers don't write, they are written."⁷⁴ But more exceptional still is the representation of the mother as artist and of her, or any mother's, fantasies of aggression toward her child, what Suleiman calls "the portrait of the artist as mother; or, the momentary triumph of aggression over tenderness."⁷⁵

The mother's role in Bourgeois's play fluctuates between cathexis and indifference, pleasure and dislike, in a performance that bears all the intensity of fantasy. Mothering a doll,⁷⁶ Bourgeois tracks the unfolding of fantasy projected onto a multiple object--baby, phallus, double, erotic object, child self; and this bodily fantasy of holding, petting, and cuddling, of squeezing and pinning, is posed against the stereotype of the mother as a selfless and static figure, as body rather than bodily desire. Mocking that convention, just as it parodies the

⁷⁴ Susan R. Suleiman, "Writing and Motherhood," in The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation, ed. Shirley Nelson Garner, Claire Kahane, and Madelon Sprengnether (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 356.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 372.

⁷⁶ Barry Schwabsky has suggested that the doll-like aspect of Fillette "turns the tables on" Hans Bellmer's Poupées: "Her own 'little girl' turns out not to be constructed of female body parts--instead it is nothing other than the masculine organ. . . . Ultimately, and paradoxically, it [the phallus] is an attribute or possession of a girl and not a man; it becomes a kind of primitive doll." "Shamelessness," Sculpture, vol. 2, no. 4 (July-August 1992), p. 49.

construction of female desire as the wish for a little one, Bourgeois's performance shows a powerfully desiring kind of mother, while at the same time dramatizing the pathology of mothering conceived as the projection of all desire onto an infant body.

In Bourgeois's play between protective and sadistic impulses toward both phallus and baby, fetishism and mothering are brought together, but this conjuncture is not enacted via the practice so often observed in recent artistic and critical practice: namely, maternal fetishism. For when Bourgeois mothers Fillette, play enters the scene of maternal sentimentality, making fun of the mother's syrupy, lustrous gaze and dread of loss. Parodying the maternal fixation on the baby, Bourgeois's poses effect a displacement from the good patriarchal mother, her role fulfilled in the possession and nurturing of a little one, to the bad enough mother, a playful, aggressive subject.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ The bad enough mother is an inversion of the normative maternal figure, the good enough mother, made famous by Klein's celebrated follower, the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott. As noted above, Winnicott's revision of Kleinian theory is fundamental. In an inversion of Klein's description of the mother as, not a subject, but a fluid, phantasmatic construction of infantile anxiety and desire, Winnicott constructs the mother in conventionally patriarchal terms, as a natural nurturer capable of answering every infant need. As Janice Doane and Devon Hodges have observed in their cogent and nuanced feminist analysis of object-relations theory, while Winnicott apparently "empowers the mother by acknowledging her subjectivity and her work as nurturer," he "simultaneously creates them as objects for the regulatory discourse of experts." Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the

3. Fetishism with Humor

This play with fetishism and maternity is performed under the sign of humor, eliciting laughter in relation to two notoriously humorless practices. At least for the fetishist himself, who both suffers and derives pleasure by inflating his loss to tragic proportions, the fetishistic scenario is deadly serious. And the mother's role, in its conventional patriarchal form, is so voided of aggression as to be flatly banal. So it is through a comic misreading that Bourgeois's poses with Fillette associate fetishism, perversely, with femininity and humor.

According to Freud, the contradictory attitude of the fetishist, employing the fetish as a symbol of triumph over anxiety and as a defense against it, involves a strategic splitting of the ego. And the split subjectivity of the fetishist (which is shared by the woman, as we have seen) is also operative in the alien sphere of humor. Freud himself hints at this possibility, by means of an association. For

'Good Enough' Mother (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) p. 21.

For Winnicott, the selfless devotion of the good enough mother to the care of the child satisfies both the mother's natural desire and the infant's needs. Klein takes a very different view, believing that the "too good" mother can even block the experiences of anxiety and frustration necessary to what she calls symbol formation (i.e., language), or, alternatively, that the mother's goods (her milk, for example) can provoke the most extreme anxiety in the infant by triggering envy, aggression, and guilt. If, then, Winnicott's infant requires a good enough mother, Klein's infant subject requires instead the fantasy of a bad enough mother.

side-by-side with his essay on fetishism, and written in the same month of August 1927, is the one on humor.⁷⁸

Humor, Freud observes, is a strategy asserting the pleasure principle against reality such that trauma is displaced by pleasure, yields to the ego's insistence that, as he puts it, "traumas are no more than occasions for it [the ego] to gain pleasure."⁷⁹ The superego turns trauma into pleasure by adopting a parental attitude toward the child-like ego. Once split in this way, the subject achieves a sort of mastery over the trauma, but it is a special kind of triumph, a nonpathological denial whose effects Freud describes as rebellious, liberating, and elevating.

Like the humorist, the fetishist is split, using the fetish object both to refuse reality and to redeem it, to turn trauma into pleasure. Bourgeois hints at such a reading of her play with Fillette in her recounting of the photographic session. On the day she went to Mapplethorpe's Bond Street studio to have her picture made, she anticipated, she says, "a catastrophe" and prepared for the event by looking around her house for props that might be employed in the picture as "supports" to allay her

⁷⁸ Freud, "Fetishism," and "Humor," in The Standard Edition, vol. 21, pp. 149-57 and pp. 160-66.

⁷⁹ Freud, "Humor," p. 162.

anxiety.⁸⁰ She selected two, the shaggy coat and Fillette, a work made fourteen years earlier but that was at the time "hanging among others."⁸¹ "I knew, she says "that I would get comfort from holding and rocking the piece."⁸² When she and Mapplethorpe set to work, however, she was taken aback by his indifference. He said nothing, she recalls, not even "Louise, you are so beautiful," nothing to put her at ease.⁸³ Her anxiety intensified by this silence, she brandished Fillette as a mock fetish, a token of triumph over anxiety and a protection against it.⁸⁴

4. Bad Enough Mothering

If, then, Fillette and Bourgeois's poses with it encompass and parody a diversity of fetishisms, might it be possible not only to read Fillette as a feminist reworking of the fetish, but also to consider that remaking within a post-Freudian framework? For in Bourgeois's burlesque of

⁸⁰ Bourgeois, interview with the author, August 23, 1993.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Quoted from a statement by Bourgeois on August 19, 1990 at the Medal Day ceremony of the MacDowell Colony, published in MacDowell Colony News, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1991).

⁸³ Bourgeois, interview with the author, August 23, 1993.

⁸⁴ Parveen Adams describes the Freudian fetish as "a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it." See her "Of Female Bondage," in Brennan, ed., Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis, p. 255.

fetishism and Freudian femininity, the pivotal object of critique is the castration anxiety that is the bedrock of the Freudian model: it is the pre-Oedipal, mother-infant relation that stages the anxiety situation in Bourgeois's enactment, rather than paternal law.

In psychoanalytic terms, a turn from the castration complex to the pre-Oedipal relation invokes the model of object relations. Grounding her theory in an analysis of psychic positions arising from the infantile drives, Klein deemphasizes castration anxiety for both the male and the female subject, asserting instead the primacy of the mother in the formation of subjectivity. This emphasis on the mother does not, however, imply a symbiotic union with the infant. Rather, as Janice Doane and Devon Hodges have noted, for Klein the infant is "sadistic, paranoid, depressed," and the mother-child dyad structured phantasmatically as "a dynamic of persecution and remorse."⁸⁵ Klein's starkly unsentimental account of the mother-infant relation, contending that the child is born paranoid, prey to destructive impulses arising from the death drive which the mother is powerless to alleviate, utterly controverts the patriarchal opposition of maternal nurturing and paternal aggression, positing in place of mother and father a presexual fantasy object: the mother as breast.

⁸⁵ Doane and Hodges, From Klein to Kristeva, p. 19.

Enacting both a turn from castration to the drives and a shattering of the conventional account of pre-Oedipal symbiosis, Bourgeois's poses with Fillette can be seen to frame a feminist-based critique of phallocentrism in Kleinian terms. To propose such a reading is not, however, to invoke Kleinian doxa, for Bourgeois's performance centers not on the phantasmatic projections of the infant, but on those of the mother. In Kleinian theory the mother, reduced to an object of the infant's aggressive projections, does not exist as a subject, but as a "fluid construction of the child's desires and anxieties," an entity that is both female and male and that operates as both an external and an internal object.⁸⁶ The Kleinian mother, in short, is not a real person.

Given, then, that the Kleinian mother is a phantasmatic projection rather than a subject, Bourgeois's performance can be read in Kleinian terms only by means of a reversal. In a recent study of maternal ambivalence, Rozsika Parker asks the very question Bourgeois's performance seems to pose: what if the Kleinian schema were reversed, placing the mother in the position of the infant subject, confronted with the realization that "she hates where she loves"?⁸⁷

⁸⁶ As Doane and Hodges put it, "The Kleinian mother is not a person endowed with subjectivity." Ibid., p. 17.

⁸⁷ Rozsika Parker, Mother Love/Mother Hate: The Power of Maternal Ambivalence (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 17.

Transposing the Kleinian analysis of infantile ambivalence to theorize the coexistence of intense feelings of love and hate in the maternal subject, Parker articulates an interplay of destructive and reparative fantasies in the mother, a possibility that, as she observes, transgresses the cultural taboo on maternal aggression.⁸⁸

For in reversing the Kleinian schema and thus opening a space in which the maternal subject of aggression can be imagined, Parker uses Kleinian theory to subvert patriarchal conventions of female subjectivity to a degree that exceeds the Kleinian model itself. In particular, Parker emphasizes the incongruity of Winnicott's famed "good enough mother," who suppresses aggression and ambivalence in order to protect the child, and the maternal subject as Kleinian theory might constitute her.⁸⁹ As Parker points out, Klein's emphasis on the productive function of infantile ambivalence--which gives rise to symbolization--implies that maternal ambivalence, too, might be animating and generative

⁸⁸ Ibid. See in particular pp. 19-22.

⁸⁹ See D.W. Winnicott, The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment (London: Hogarth Press, 1979). As Parker observes, Winnicott "dwells primarily on the developmental importance for the baby of maternal ambivalence and says little on the role of ambivalence in . . . maternal development." Parker, by contrast, argues that "maternal ambivalence, despite--even because of--all the distress it can engender in mothers, may have a transformative and positive impact on the mother and, hence, on the work she has to do." Parker, Mother Love/Mother Hate, p. 14.

for both mother and child.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Here it is worth noting that as the mother of three sons, Bourgeois had a direct experience of maternal ambivalence to draw upon and that the problematic of mothering occupies a central place within her production. Discussing such works as Pregnant Woman (1947-49) and Harmless Woman (1969), which specifically figure pregnancy, Bourgeois emphasizes the "fantastic predicament" of giving birth and raising children: "The 'sexual' pieces that coincide with the birth of my children . . . were not sexual. They represent women's problems in regards to . . . our bodies' functions. Some people will say that [childbearing] is a pleasure. No, it is not a pleasure. It is a fantastic responsibility" (Bourgeois, interview with Jennifer Dalsimer, tape recording, April 9, 1986, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.). And in such works as Dagger Child (1947-49), an upright construction of wood slats with a tiny knife strapped to its side (a work from her early Personages series), she enacts the mother's experience of infantile aggression: "The Dagger Child is the child who is in the position to hurt you. He has the power to hurt the mother. The knife is like a little toy." (Quoted in Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free Fall, p. 180.) Maternal aggression, too, is specifically acknowledged, as in the story about Portrait of Jean-Louis (1947-49), a piece that, named after one of Bourgeois's sons, takes the form of skyscraper set onto stilt-like legs. Bourgeois recounts smashing this piece against her work table on one occasion when she was angry with her little son: "The legs broke. You can see the breakage in the original. So the sculpture had a real life." (Quoted in Gardner, Louise Bourgeois, p. 64.)

If, then, maternal ambivalence and the difficulties posed by the patriarchal construction of mothering are central to Bourgeois's production, it is perhaps not surprising that she should have found in Kleinian theory, with its unsentimental account of the mother-infant bond, a particular resonance with her own work. As Doane and Hodges observe of Klein herself, "it was not only a shrewd theoretical insistence on psychic mechanisms that led Klein to disassociate the infant from the mother; Klein herself was disassociated from normalized femininity. She did not exist within the confines of womanhood defined as selfless motherhood." Doane and Hodges, From Klein to Kristeva, p. 18.

5. Phallus=Part-Object

To return, then, to the comparison of Disagreeable Object and Fillette, and to read that juxtaposition in Kleinian terms: it is possible to say that Fillette remakes the Surrealist fetish as a part-object, shifting it from the register of castration anxiety to the register of the drives. Bourgeois stages this turn from the Freudian psychoanalytic model that structured Surrealist practice to a post-Freudian, and specifically object-relations model in her poses with Fillette. Grinning at the patriarchal overvaluation of the phallus, she travesties Freud's theory of female sexuality, lampooning the phallus=baby equation and the convention of female desire as the wish for a little one. In her hands the phallus becomes part-object, or in other words slips from its status as privileged signifier to become one more object of aggression and desire.

Indeed, a great many of the works Bourgeois made during the late 1960s and early 1970s, during a period when she was actively engaged in feminist politics, evoke early Surrealist objects. These include Trani Episode (1971-72, fig. 1.10), with its enactment of round phallicism; the Janus series, its suspended format and ambiguous confluences of sexual organs suggesting Giacometti's Suspended Ball; the clitoris-like Femme Couteau, its ambivalent conjunction of blade and delicately enfolded flesh an even more marked allusion to Disagreeable Object than the slightly earlier

Fillette; and Femme Pieu, its double evocation of prone vulnerability and prickly menace making it, too, a disagreeable kind of object.

But as Bourgeois demonstrates in her poses with Fillette, through a reworking of Surrealist-based practices, mediated by feminist politics and object-relations theory, she was able to articulate a part-object logic of the body in feminist terms. For if the troubling of sexual difference in her works of this period recapitulated certain Surrealist operations, it also recast those practices in a post-Freudian psychoanalytic framework, one organized not, like fetishism, by sexual difference and the castration complex, but by the pregendered experience of the drives. Fillette belongs to an economy of desire that is organized not in relation to lack and oneness but to doubling and splitting, to the presexual logic of infantile fantasy.

Bad Girls

To conclude this reading of Fillette, compare Bourgeois's performance in the Mapplethorpe pictures to Lynda Benglis's 1974 Artforum ad, which shows Benglis as the very image of the phallic woman, taut, glistening, and menacing.⁹¹ Underpinned by an inversive logic that is the stock and trade of the type of glossy, mass-cultural image

⁹¹ Krauss discusses this comparison in "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette."

it parodies, Benglis's ad turns the tables on the art world while at the same time of course turning it on.

Whether or not Bourgeois imagined the inevitable juxtaposition of Benglis's scandalizing ad and her own deployment of the outsized latex phallus-doll in the Mapplethorpe picture, the comparison articulates key differences. Benglis challenges the gender hierarchy of the art world by appropriating the phallus, fetishistically attaching it to a female body displayed to the male gaze. The phallus fully retains its conventional valences of power, virility, and aggression while in taking on the phallus, Benglis's body itself becomes both phallic and aggressive.

If, then, Benglis's picture plays on conventional representations of the female body as sexual object--as pin-up, bad girl, phallic woman--Bourgeois's poses with Fillette instead enact the artist's pleasure in playing the transgressive female subject, celebrating the scope of her desire while mocking the patriarchal overvaluation of the phallus. And the transgressiveness of this pleasure is further underscored by the contrast of Benglis's masked stare and nude, youthful, greased body, fetishistically posed, with Bourgeois's self-satisfied grin, repeated in the play of wrinkles around her mouth. Wearing a fur coat and toting an outsized phallus under her arm like a purse or a pet, Bourgeois burlesques the phallic woman even as she

embodies the scandal of female desire and aggression.

But if in the famous portrait Bourgeois antically subverts a fetishistic objectification of the female body, in other poses, as we have seen, she works to complicate a different stereotypical feminine role, that of mother. I have attempted to show how Bourgeois's mothering of Fillette can be read as a subversion of fetishism and of the Freudian description of female subjectivity within patriarchy, as well as to demonstrate how her mothering poses open a space for analyzing Bourgeois's production in relation to an object-relations model of psychoanalysis, one structured not by the phallus, but the part-object. I have suggested that Bourgeois's enactment of a mother-infant drama of aggression and nurturing, identification and envy, introjection and projection, helps us to see her sculptural production as belonging to a presexual logic of the infantile drives. And I have proposed that this shift from the vertical, temporal axis of the Oedipal subject to the horizontal axis of the drives is mediated by a feminist politics. In closing, I would like to consider how Bourgeois's poses with Fillette perform and parody her role as mother of feminist art.

Through a series of memorable poses struck for the camera, Bourgeois has achieved the status of iconic feminist artist. In 1975, she was pictured on the front stoop of her brownstone in Chelsea wearing a pair of lace-up boots, a cap, and, again, the monkey fur, over which was draped a

full-length armored latex sheath fashioned of coarse, bulbous, breast-like pods (fig. 3.13). Then in 1980 she posed for Duane Michaels, a portrait published in Vogue that shows a poker-faced Bourgeois modeling a close-fitting white tunic studded with fleshy protuberances, one of the costumes from her 1978 performance work, "A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts." And, in 1979, she appeared in a group portrait at a feminist dinner party in her honor, where she sat surrounded by younger artists, including Judith Bernstein, Mary Beth Edelson, Hannah Wilke, and Ana Mendieta, some costumed as if in homage to her in hats and feather boas. In recent years, she has posed regularly for women's fashion magazines, an antitype parodying images of female perfection. In Brigitte, for example, she was pictured in 1993 wearing a pink fur jacket, black beret, and rubber galoshes and holding before her an outsized pair of pliers.⁹²

For generations of feminist artists, Bourgeois has played the part of the bad enough mother, transgressing cultural taboos against female desire and aggression with scandalizing gestures, daring props, and cunning smiles. Through burlesque and parody she has embodied feminist resistance to phallocentrism, the objectification of the female body as sex object, conventional gender roles, and the patriarchal structure of the avant-garde. But the

⁹² Brigitte (December 1993), p. 3.

significance of these displays of antipatriarchal mothering exceeds the functions of persona and precursor for feminist art. For in them, as I have attempted to demonstrate, Bourgeois enacts a practice grounded in the anti-Oedipal logic of object relations.⁹³

In the catalogue of a recent pair of exhibitions entitled "Bad Girls," at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and the Wight Art Gallery, University of California Los Angeles, Marcia Tanner constructed a matrilineage of bad-girl mothers, including both Bourgeois and Benglis, to argue that through their identification with irreverent, transgressive artist mothers the youngest generation of bad-girl artists is able to subvert patriarchal law, to "ignore the entire myth of male hegemony, of patriarchal lawgivers in art and everywhere else."⁹⁴ The suggestion that through their connection to

⁹³ The term anti-Oedipal (borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis, Anti-Oedipus, which I discuss in chapter two) is used here instead of "pre-Oedipal" because of the latter's implication of a symbiotic state of oneness and plenitude, ultimately ruptured by the recognition of paternal law. In the Kleinian model of object relations, the mother-infant relation is not one of union but of radical alienation; feelings of aggression toward the mother and depressive anxiety about the destructive effects of this aggression characterize infantile subjectivity for Klein. Moreover, this infantile state of anxiety and alienation persists throughout life as one of the positions structural to subjectivity.

⁹⁴ Marcia Tanner, "Mother Laughed: The Bad Girls' Avant-Garde," in Bad Girls, ed. Tanner and Marcia Tucker (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 77.

strong mothers these daughters are able to escape the framework of patriarchy, evading the terms of the Oedipus and castration complexes, is a claim partly grounded in feminist psychoanalytic work centering on pre-Oedipal experience that posits an extrapatriarchal mother-daughter relation. This model of an empowering mother-daughter bond structured the "Bad Girls" exhibitions as the profoundly liberatory display of mother-taught subversion, as the coming of age of a generation of feminist artists who, unlike their predecessors, are positioned not only to produce critiques of the patriarchal construction of gender but also, as Tanner puts it, to "circumvent patriarchal constructs altogether."⁹⁵

This claim for a matrilineage outside the patriarchal history of art, grounded in a pre-Oedipal mother-daughter bond, is, however, precisely not the one I wish to make for Bourgeois's work and its relation to feminist art production. The disjuncture between Bourgeois's subversion of patriarchy through the bad enough mother, and the bad-girls claim to circumvent patriarchal constructs altogether, is evident in Tanner's invocation of that emblematic pairing of icons, the dildo-brandishing Benglis and the phallus-toting Bourgeois, in the Bad Girls catalogue. For what Tanner actually reproduces is instead a juxtaposition of Benglis's ad and Fillette hanging alone, standing fetish-

⁹⁵ Ibid.

like in place of the Mapplethorpe picture, a repression in reverse of the one performed a decade earlier in the MOMA catalogue. This omission of Bourgeois's pose allows Tanner to claim that Benglis's work "displayed a theatrical flair, a degree of bold insouciance, mischief, and daring that might have made the shy Bourgeois recoil."⁹⁶ It facilitates, in other words, a repression of the playful, aggressive mother at the very site that was to be charged with her laughter.

For the "Bad Girls" shows, dedicated to controverting a popular perception of humorless feminism, supposedly were structured by female laughter. Thus Tanner's essay explicitly took up Susan Suleiman's question, what happens to the avant-garde when the mother laughs?⁹⁷ Suleiman herself imagines a displacement from the patriarchal mother to the playful mother, subverting patriarchy and bringing into psychoanalytic existence the mother as a subject through the aggressive behaviors of laughter and play. She points out that in Freud's analysis humor is produced not by the unconscious but by the "parental agency" of the superego, which converts trauma into pleasure by adopting a

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 73.

⁹⁷ Susan R. Suleiman, "Feminist Intertextuality and the Laugh of the Mother," in Subversive Intent (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 141-80; and "Playing and Motherhood; or, How to Get the Most Out of the Avant-Garde," in Representations of Motherhood, ed. Donna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 272-82.

parental attitude toward the child-like ego.⁹⁸ That is, she suggests that the maternal role perhaps is not inimical to humor.

In contrast to the structural ambivalence of humor, the "Bad Girls" shows however produced a strict division between transgressive (bad-girl) and non-transgressive (good-girl) mothers, unwittingly reproducing a central Kleinian fantasy: the rigid separation of good and bad objects. This rigid opposition through which the shows were structured seemed markedly at odds with the stated purpose of overturning hierarchies of gender, race, and class and of high and low cultural forms, and especially of displacing feminine and masculine stereotypes.⁹⁹ It thus raised the question of whether such a determination to separate the bad girls from the good might be seen as manifesting an anxiety about feminist practice, as enacting what for Klein is the pivotal psychoanalytic problem--anxiety about one's own (in this case, feminist) aggression.

Positioning herself as the mother of the phallus-doll she grips under her elbow, Bourgeois did laugh. And her laugh did effect a displacement from the patriarchal mother to a playful, aggressive one. Performing a fantasy of

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 279.

⁹⁹ Marcia Tucker's essay, "The Attack of the Giant Ninja Mutant Barbies," employs Mikhail Bakhtin's model of the carnivalesque to analyze how contemporary feminist work overturns gender hierarchy through laughter and pleasure. Bad Girls, pp. 14-46.

aggression toward the phallus and the infant, she demonstrated how the artist/mother might be constituted as a subject through aggression. By turning the mother against the infant, the part-object against the phallus, and humor against the fetish, she produced the very figure of the bad enough mother.

The elision of this figure from two exhibition catalogues produced a decade apart and with strikingly disparate purposes--one a belated retrospective of Bourgeois's oeuvre that sought to locate it within the history of modern sculpture and the other a survey of transgressive feminist work--is one measure of its subversive effects. And, as I have attempted to show, this subversiveness is not simply a matter of a scandalizing pose, but of a destabilization of gender at the level of the work (the gender ambivalence of Fillette as part-object) and of the producer (the female subject of aggression).

If, however, Bourgeois's poses with Fillette enact the logic of her production, they also underscore her work's resistance to instantiation within either the history of modern sculpture as framed by the MOMA retrospective, or the history of feminist art as framed by the "Bad Girls" shows. For her work seems to reject altogether the art-historical model of genealogy. As I have suggested in the proposal of a Kleinian-based reading--one structured by the atemporal, horizontal field of the drives--ahistoricity is in fact a

salient feature of Bourgeois's work, which cuts across historical frames in a discontinuous play of positions. If, then, the difficulty for art history of encompassing her oeuvre seems to be partly a function of its resistance to the patriarchal framework of precursors, sources, influences, and followers, the question to which I would now like to turn is this: how might it be possible to account for Bourgeois's work in historical terms, acknowledging its resistance to art-historical genealogies without at the same time failing to analyze its dynamic relation to other artistic production?

Chapter Two

Bad Enough Fathers: A Surrealist Lesson

"I Am Not a Surrealist"

Here is Bourgeois in 1947, kneeling on the living room carpet, hands clasped in mock worship of Joan Miró, who, clad in a length of hand-painted cloth, is regally installed in an armchair throne, his bare feet resting on piles of books about Picasso (fig. 2.1).¹ Her hair carefully coiffed in a chic forties style, she wears a smart suit and stockings, the reinforced soles clearly visible on her shoeless feet, as is a dark seam traveling up the back of her left calf. The impress of the stockinged knee on that plush rug as Bourgeois kneels in front of the grinning Miró, his hand raised to acknowledge the tribute, is in contrast to the iconic Bourgeois--mugging for Mapplethorpe, modeling a rubber breast-dress, twirling in a leopard coat and dark glasses at the Mudd Club, snapped at openings in her seventies and eighties wearing a baseball cap and sneakers and chatting mostly with younger artists. As much as the scene itself, the soigné effect of the stockings is to return us to a time in her career virtually erased from art-

¹ The photograph of Bourgeois and Miró was published in Artforum, on the occasion of the 1994 Miró retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. Bourgeois, "Natural Talent," in "Miró at 100," Artforum, vol. 32, no. 5 (January 1994), p. 74.

historical consciousness.

This is not to say that there are not photographs enough of Bourgeois during this period: leaning forward from a stool to work at her easel, for example, the sweep of her astonishingly long hair trailing behind her; or, slightly later, posing next to an early sculpture atop Stuyvesant's Folly, the apartment building on East Eighteenth Street in Manhattan where she lived from 1941 to 1958, making her first wood constructions on the roof.² There is the portrait by Berenice Abbott of Bourgeois with her head thrust back and eyes turned to the sky, mimicking a pose favored by Man Ray, her neck arched and chin tilted up almost enough to produce the same phallic double. Or, in a snapshot, we see her standing with her three bare-chested little boys on a July day in 1945, at their country place in Easton, Connecticut, her husband Robert Goldwater in the background of the scene chatting in the shade with Charles Prendergast.³ There, wearing a flowered summer frock, ankle-laced espadrilles, and a bracelet, she smiles carefully, her hand gently cradling the shoulder of her youngest child.

Apart from the comic appeal of the tableau, however, the photograph with Miró is distinctive for its evocation of

² These photographs are reproduced in Wye, Louise Bourgeois, figures 12 and 14, p. 106.

³ Reproduced in *ibid*, figure 15.

Bourgeois's social life in the New York art world of the 1940s. For if art-historical accounts of her career have emphasized the artist's reputation as a loner, the decades spent outside the art-world mainstream, and her later status as a feminist icon, this picture draws back the curtain on another scene. Crawling around on the carpet in her stocking feet, capering with Miró, is a Bourgeois the artist herself has seemed at times to disavow, a modish, self-assured figure mocking male authority not from the margins, but within the confines of the art world's Manhattan living room. (One thinks, contemplating this Bourgeois, of Katherine Hepburn's forties roles.)

Bourgeois and Goldwater moved in what Robert Storr has called "the satellite-salons of the Museum of Modern Art."⁴ Having worked at the Louvre as a translator and guide during the 1937 Paris Exposition, Bourgeois had met many Americans, including Goldwater, who was in France to write his book Primitivism and Modern Art, and Alfred Barr, the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, who was to become a close friend and supporter of her work. As an art student in Paris in the 1930s, living on the rue de Seine, in a Left Bank building owned by Isadora Duncan's brother Raymond, she had also moved in Surrealist circles.

Bourgeois, however, never counted herself a Surrealist. A very young woman, yet an art student, she was excluded

⁴ Robert Storr, "Intimate Geographies," p. E-2.

from Gravida's inner circle. As she told Barbara Rose in 1987, "Of course for them [Breton and Duchamp] I was just a girl, and women were not to be taken seriously anyway."⁵ She became, she says, "a revolted character" upon observing "that the father figures like Marcel Duchamp, Henri Michaux, and André Breton refused to recognize women artists."⁶ With this realization, she says, the father figures became "not teachers," but "elders." "And I became completely opposed, to the elders."⁷ From this vantage point, as both insider and outsider, living alongside the charismatic and celebrated characters who dismissed her, Bourgeois conceived a deep and quite specific distaste for the Surrealists, and for Breton and Duchamp in particular.

"Marcel Duchamp could have been my father," she has noted, marking the generational difference between them but also alluding to an offensively patriarchal attitude she imputed to the older artist.⁸ And when she left Paris for New York "to escape my father figures," as she has said, it was primarily the circle around Breton and Duchamp she wished to flee.⁹ Soon, however, the Surrealist circle

⁵ Barbara Rose, "Sex, Race, and Louise Bourgeois," Vogue, September 1987, p. 825.

⁶ Treat, "Art Is a Guarantee for Sanity," p. 54.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Quoted in Kuspit, Bourgeois, p. 31.

⁹ Bourgeois, interview with the author, September 27, 1993.

seemed to tighten and engulf her. For in 1939, the year after Bourgeois's relocation to New York with her husband and their adopted son Michel, war was declared in Europe, and the famed contingent of artists and intellectuals, including Breton and Duchamp, soon escaped France to take up temporary residence in Manhattan.¹⁰

Yves Tanguy and Matta arrived that year, to be joined by Dali and Léger in 1940 and later by Max Ernst, André Masson, Breton, Duchamp, Le Corbusier, Ozenfant, Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss, so that Bourgeois found herself suddenly at the intersection of the French émigré community and its American reception.¹¹ "It was the Left Bank again," Bourgeois has commented, "and although I was now close to them, I objected to them violently. They were so lordly and pontifical."¹² It was the closeness of an exile community, knit together by language, homesickness, anxiety, and, perhaps most saliently, by guilt. And Bourgeois, whose fluency in English had drawn her to

¹⁰ For a useful account of the Surrealists' exile in New York during the war years, see Martica Sawin, Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

¹¹ This was literally the case insofar as Bourgeois and Goldwater, who moved to East Eighteenth Street in 1941, counted among their neighbors in the district of Manhattan stretching from Union Square to Greenwich Village, Duchamp, Breton and his family, Le Corbusier, Ozenfant, Frederick Kiesler, and William Baziotes, among many others. Sawin, Surrealism in Exile, p. 185; Pincus-Witten, Bourgeois Truth, unpaginated.

¹² Quoted in Gardner, Louise Bourgeois, p. 26.

Americans during her student days in Paris, and who had in the meantime become a New Yorker, was a valued translator and intermediary for the new arrivals.

Her contacts with the émigrés were more social, she says now, than professional.¹³ She met them at openings and dinners, or at lectures at the New School. In Connecticut, where she and her family spent long periods during the war years at their place in Easton, she had many neighbors from the intersecting circles of Paris and New York, including André Masson, who lived nearby with his wife and two children,¹⁴ Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy, the Gorkys, the Hares, and Alexander Calder.¹⁵ "André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and the elders were there," she recalls. "It was a very small circle. Everyone met everyone. I had very mixed feelings toward them, however, since they were not

¹³ "I saw them very often. I saw them at the New School. That was not the art world." Bourgeois, interview with the author, September 27, 1993.

¹⁴ According to Storr, "For Masson, her neighbor in Connecticut during the summer, her spoiled charge when he and his wife first arrived in America and an artist whose talents she disputed, Bourgeois nurtured a . . . special dislike." Storr, "Intimate Geographies," p. E-2.

¹⁵ Sawin notes that "the section of northwestern Connecticut beyond the commuter belt where the Masons [sic] had gravitated . . . became a virtual Surrealist outpost." Residents included, in addition to those mentioned above, Marie and Eugene Jolas, Naum and Miriam Gabo, Hans Richter, Robert Jay Wolf, and Julien and Muriel Levy. André Breton and his family visited frequently, as did Marcel Duchamp, Enrico Donati, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Sawin, Surrealism in Exile, p. 176.

interested in women, period."¹⁶

For Bourgeois, the arrival of the Surrealists was an ambivalent event, providing her with an intellectual community and a connection to France during the war years while also threatening to overwhelm her fledgling career on the New York scene. Immediately upon her arrival in 1938, she had set about forging a connection to the New York art world, studying with Vaclav Vytlacil at the Art Students League, where she took classes in painting and lithography, soon entering her work in a number of group exhibitions.¹⁷ An early friendship with Gertrude and Balcomb Greene, painters active in the American Abstract Artists Group, drew her into a community of painters, and her husband's colleague Alfred Barr was, she says, "my best friend at that time."¹⁸

¹⁶ Robert Storr, "Interview with Louise Bourgeois," Galleries (June-July 1990), p. 97.

¹⁷ Her prints were included in the Brooklyn Museum's "Fine Prints for Mass Production" show in 1939; in the Philadelphia Print Club's "15th Annual Exhibition of American Lithography" in 1943; and in the annual print exhibition of the Library of Congress in 1944. She also participated in the Museum of Modern Art's "Modern Drawings" exhibition in 1944 and its "Textile Design" show in 1945; in "The First Biennial Exhibition of Drawings by American Artists" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1945; and in the Whitney Museum of American Art's "Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Painting" in 1945. For an account of Bourgeois's early printmaking career, see Wye and Smith, Prints, p. 26. For a complete listing of group exhibitions in which Bourgeois's work was shown, see Wye, Louise Bourgeois, p. 111.

¹⁸ Bourgeois, interview with the author, February 27, 1996.

The arrival of the Surrealist contingent dramatically altered this world Bourgeois had entered with such a sense of release only a short time before. "I sulked," she says, describing her response to the exiles' arrival at center stage of the New York art world.¹⁹ In 1942 alone, Pierre Matisse organized the "Artists in Exile" exhibition, including works by Masson, Tanguy, Matta, and Ernst, and Peggy Guggenheim opened her Art of This Century gallery. Special issues of View were devoted to Ernst and Tanguy, and the first edition of the journal VVV, edited by David Hare and overseen by Breton and Ernst, appeared. Pierre Matisse exhibited Matta, Curt Valentine's Buchholz gallery and the Marian Willard gallery showed Masson, and the Valentine Gallery opened a show of Ernst's paintings.²⁰

That year, too, Duchamp arrived, "the most beautiful acquisition we have had," Breton noted at the time.²¹ The two collaborated on the celebrated "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition, mounted at the Whitlaw Reid mansion on Madison Avenue, for which Duchamp designed the installation, stringing webs of twine between the partitions

¹⁹ "I sulked. I suffered at the hands of all these pontificating men. Breton was the first. Duchamp was another." Bourgeois, interview with the author, September 27, 1993.

²⁰ For the history of Surrealist exhibitions in New York, see Sawin, Surrealism in Exile; and Rubin, Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage, pp. 159-86.

²¹ Quoted in Sawin, Surrealism in Exile, p. 225.

on which the works were mounted. Organized for the benefit of the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, it was the first show in which American painters were invited to show with the émigrés.²² Bourgeois was not included in the show. Describing her persistent, even redoubled resentment of the Breton circle in the New York years, she remarks, "They played favorites," adding, "I might have accepted it if I had been one of the favorites."²³

With, then, one foot in the exile community, which "took me seriously on a certain level, but . . . refused to help me professionally,"²⁴ Bourgeois kept the other firmly planted in the community of artists who would later be associated with Abstract Expressionism.²⁵ She took part in

²² The participants included Jean Arp, Hans Bellmer, Victor Brauner, Marc Chagall, Duchamp, Ernst, Giacometti, Frida Kahlo, Kiesler, Klee, Matta, Miró, Masson, and Tanguy and, among the Americans, William Baziotes, Alexander Calder, David Hare, Robert Motherwell, and Kay Sage, a group "largely compiled on a social basis," according to Sawin. (Surrealism in Exile, p. 230).

²³ Bourgeois, interview with the author, September 27, 1993. Bourgeois also notes the sexist dimension of this exclusion and her rivalries with male peers: "What I had against Breton and Duchamp was that they were anti-women in their professional life. I was very frustrated when Matta got in a show instead of me."

²⁴ Quoted in Kuspit, Bourgeois, p. 77.

²⁵ In the 1950s, Bourgeois's work was exhibited in group shows at the Stable and Poindexter Galleries; in the Whitney Annual (she exhibited her first sculpture in the Annual in 1951, having previously shown paintings and drawings); and with the American Abstract Artists. She was also a familiar presence on the New York scene. In 1950, she participated in the April "Artists' Session" at Studio 35 on Eighth Street, moderated by Alfred Barr, Richard

shows organized under the auspices of Artists for Victory, including one at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1942 and another at the Museum of Modern Art in 1943.²⁶ In February 1945, she participated in the "Personal Statement: Painting Prophecy 1950" exhibition at the David Porter Gallery in Washington, D.C., an important early grouping of painters who would come to define the Abstract Expressionist generation, including William Baziotes, Adolph Gottlieb, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko.²⁷ That summer, she was included in an exhibition entitled "The Women" at the Art of This Century, together with thirteen

Lippold, and Robert Motherwell and attended by artists including Baziotes, de Kooning, Jimmy Ernst, Herbert Ferber, Ibram Lassaw, Seymour Lipton, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, and David Smith. She joined nine other sculptors in support of eighteen painters from that group, subsequently dubbed "The Irascibles," in protesting the jury for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's as "notoriously hostile to advanced art." For an account of this episode, see B.H. Friedman, "'The Irascibles': A Split Second in Art History," Arts, vol. 53 (September 1978), pp. 96-102.

²⁶ According to a pamphlet from the exhibition, "The Arts in Therapy: A Competition and Exhibition Sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art in Collaboration with Artists for Victory, Inc.," Bourgeois received an honorary award for her entry of a tapestry; Alexander Calder and André Masson also received honorary awards.

²⁷ Bourgeois has commented that she eagerly cultivated her relationships with American painters and with Alfred Barr, partly in defiance of the Surrealist group: "I made friends with American artists who were my age and I showed with them at the Peridot Gallery from 1949 to 1953, at Norlyst, and at Egan, which was one of the key galleries for the Abstract Expressionists. And Alfred Barr was a supporter from the beginning. He included me in an early panel discussion along with de Kooning and the rest, and he bought a piece in 1953 [sic] which has been shown at the museum ever since." Storr, interview, Galleries, p. 100.

other artists, including Leonora Carrington, Gertrude Greene, Jacqueline Lamba, and Kay Sage.²⁸ In 1946, she exhibited with de Kooning, Gottlieb, and Rothko in the Bertha Schaefer Gallery's "Directions in Abstraction" show, and throughout this period she was a regular contributor to the Whitney Museum of American Art's annual painting exhibitions.²⁹

In June 1945, however, Bourgeois marked her attachment to France, organizing an exhibition at the Norlyst Gallery entitled "Documents France 1940-1944: Art-Literature-Press of the French Underground." For that show, she assembled an array of materials, including Resistance newspapers and periodicals such as Combat (a broadsheet founded in Algeria by Albert Camus in 1943, and for which Sartre served, in 1945, as the New York correspondent), Défense de la France, Resistance, and La revue libre. Also displayed were pamphlets and posters, photographs of the German occupation, and paintings by Pierre Bonnard, Pablo Picasso, and Jean

²⁸ In 1943, Peggy Guggenheim sponsored "31 Women," an exhibition juried by Duchamp (who proposed it), Breton, Max Ernst, and others. Bourgeois was not included in that show. For an account of Guggenheim's patronage of female artists, see Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein, American Women Artists: From Early Indian Times to the Present (Boston: G.K. Hall and Avon Books, 1982), pp. 226, 268, 311-13.

²⁹ Bourgeois's friendship with de Kooning during these years is documented in two photographs she took of him, one of the artist posing with his mother, and the other a studio shot of de Kooning before a painting from the Woman series, in progress. (Undated photographs from the archives of the Robert Miller Gallery.)

Dubuffet. Literary documents included poetry by Jean Cassou, Pierre Seghers, and Paul Eluard, and prose by Louis Aragon, Sartre, André Gide, and Gertrude Stein.³⁰

This tribute, through which Bourgeois expressed her solidarity with the Resistance movement, also suggests an identification with Existentialism that she has particularly emphasized in recent years, partly in response to art historians' increasingly insistent positioning of her work under the sign of Surrealism. For as the checklist of the "Documents France" exhibition reveals, with its inclusion of such works as Sartre's La Nausée, Existentialist literature exerted a strong hold on Bourgeois's imagination during this period.³¹ She was particularly moved by Existentialism's attention to the experiences of alienation and suffering, concerns she deemed inimical to the Bretonian-Surrealist tropes of games, jokes, and sexual love: "The Surrealists, Breton in particular, made fun of everything. I was moral, guilty. Another thing is that the Surrealists were pretenders. They pretended to be amused. They were always sardonic. The Existentialists were the opposite. They were

³⁰ Strikingly absent was any mention of the Surrealists or the expatriate community, although in her acknowledgments Bourgeois did thank Duchamp, and she has noted that in the organizing of the exhibition "Duchamp was actually very helpful to me." Bourgeois, "Documents France, 1940-44, Art-Literature-Press of the French Underground," pamphlet, June 1945, Norlyst Gallery; Storr, interview, Galleries, p. 100.

³¹ She has noted, for example, that Camus was particularly important for her. Interview by the author, February 27, 1996.

concerned with the tragedy of life. The Surrealists pretended the tragedy of life did not exist."³² For Bourgeois, who endured the guilt of having, as she imagined it, abandoned her home and family during the war years,³³ and who "suffered at the hands of these pontificating men"³⁴ (Breton and Duchamp), Existentialism represented the other to Surrealism, an intellectual framework through which to structure her work as "a rebuttal of what they [the Surrealists] stood for."³⁵

Resenting the Surrealist fathers and deeply ambivalent about her own absence from France during the occupation, Bourgeois looked approvingly on Sartre's indictment of the Surrealists' political lassitude in exile, as on his castigation of the Bretonian pose of studied detachment. She endorsed the philosopher's call for a deeper sense of social existence--what she was later to call, apropos of her

³² Ibid.

³³ As a holiday card, in 1944, Bourgeois produced a line block print commemorating the Normandy invasion, a cartographic rendering of the Normandy coast with a yellow sun rising in the West. Discussing this print, Bourgeois told Wye: "The runaway thinks about the people she left," recalling that the "increased feeling of wanting to do something for them . . . was wishful thinking. I felt helpless to do anything." Wye and Smith, Prints, p. 37.

³⁴ Bourgeois, interview by the author, September 27, 1993.

³⁵ Bourgeois, interview by the author, February 27, 1996.

own work, "the drama of one among many."³⁶ She claims, however, to have taken no particular interest in Sartre's efforts as a critic, including essays in the mid to late forties on the work of Alberto Giacometti, Alexander Calder, and David Hare.³⁷ And asked about the effect of her engagement with Existentialism on the development of her work, Bourgeois acknowledges that, while significant for her, "Existentialism was primarily a literary movement," and her artistic involvement with it less direct than her declaration "I am not a Surrealist. I am an Existentialist" might seem to suggest.³⁸

Yet it is notable that in the essays on Giacometti, Calder, and Hare, Sartre analyzes the sculptors' work, at least indirectly, in terms of a rebuttal to Surrealism.³⁹ Eschewing the symbolism to which he tended to reduce

³⁶ Bourgeois, statement, in Krasne, "Ten Artists in the Margin," p. 18.

³⁷ Bourgeois, interview by the author, February 27, 1996.

³⁸ Ibid. The statement "I am not a Surrealist. I am an Existentialist" has been quoted in a number of publications in the mid 1990s, probably first in "Art: Where We Are," New Yorker, May 23, 1994, p. 20.

³⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Quest for the Absolute" (1948; on Giacometti); "The Paintings of Giacometti" (1954); and "The Mobiles of Calder" (1948). All reprinted from Les Temps Modernes, in Sartre, Essays in Existentialism, ed. Wade Baskin (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1979). Sartre's essay discussing the work of David Hare, "Sculpture à n dimensions" (1947), translated in Women: A Collaboration of Artists and Writers (New York, 1948), is cited in Mona Hadler, "David Hare: A Magician's Game in Context," Art Journal (Fall 1988), pp. 196-201.

Surrealist practice, characterizing it as a kind of iconography of the unconscious, this counter-Surrealist sculptural production operates, according to Sartre, at the level of what he calls "the absolute," a ground zero of existence unmediated by the symbolic. In the case of Giacometti's figures, for example, "situated appearance" opens the way to "the absolute," offering proof that "man . . . is the being whose essence is in his existence for others."⁴⁰ Calder's mobiles meanwhile "signify nothing, refer to nothing other than themselves; they simply are, they are absolutes,"⁴¹ and Hare's work demonstrates "that our environment is part of ourselves; it transforms us and we transform it."⁴²

Bourgeois's early sculptural work, as we will see, explored the interface of the subject and its physical and social environment, her early installations of "Personages"

⁴⁰ Sartre, "The Quest for the Absolute," in Essays, p. 398.

⁴¹ Sartre, "The Mobiles of Alexander Calder," in Essays, p. 420. A passage in the first paragraph of this text is peculiarly evocative of Bourgeois's production as it was to unfold in the 1950s and 1960s: "With vile, inconsistent substances, with tiny slivers of bone . . . he fashions strange arrangements of stems and branches. . . . They are resonators or traps; they dangle at the end of a fine wire like a spider at the end of its silk thread or settle on a pedestal, wan, exhausted, feigning sleep; a passing tremor strikes them, animates them, is canalized by them and given a fugitive form" (p. 419).

⁴² Quoted in Hadler, "Magician's Game," p. 200.

constructing, as she put it, "a social space."⁴³ Noting in 1954 that her work arose "from the duel between the isolated individual and the shared awareness of the group," and dubbing her sculptures "confrontation pieces," Bourgeois used a language attuned to Existentialist thought to describe the operation of these works.⁴⁴ Contrary to Surrealism's practice of projecting the individual unconscious, Bourgeois here implies an attempt to map a social field, to locate the individual subject in relation to others. And her 1954 account of her own work closely echoes Sartre's contemporaneous description of Giacometti's figures as articulating the relation between subject and socius: "His figurines are solitary, but when placed together . . . they are united by their solitude and transformed into a small magical society."⁴⁵ And his quotation from a text by Giacometti, referring to a figural group as "a forest in which trees with barren, slender

⁴³ Quoted in Susi Bloch, "An Interview with Louise Bourgeois," p. 372. Wayne Andersen discusses the motif of the totem or personage in American sculpture in the late forties, including the work of Noguchi, Lippold, Ferber, Lipton, Smith, Hare, Geist, Dombek, Roszak, Nevelson, and Bourgeois in American Sculpture in Process: 1930/1970 (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975).

⁴⁴ Krasne, "Ten Artists in the Margin," p. 18.

⁴⁵ Sartre, "The Paintings of Giacometti," p. 405. Laurie Wilson has related the assembling of totemic figures in the work of Bourgeois, Smith, and Nevelson to Giacometti's figure groups, exhibited in January 1948 at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. Laurie Wilson, Louise Nevelson: Iconography and Sources (1978) (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), pp. 203-204.

trunks seemed like people who had stopped in their tracks and were speaking to each other,"⁴⁶ could serve as a description of Bourgeois's early Personages, attenuated, pole-like wooden figures, set directly on the floor without bases, which in her first exhibitions of sculpture, in 1949 and 1950, were arranged in conversational groups around the room (figs. 2.2 and 2.3).

If, then, Bourgeois considered herself to be "not a Surrealist," but an Existentialist, it was an identification as much with the most powerful contemporary critique of Surrealism as with Existentialism per se. For as I will hope to show, Surrealism was the movement--the set of practices, the circle of artists--to which she felt compelled to respond, in a complex reworking of its propositions that was to unfold over seven decades. Existentialism helped her to frame this reworking as a rebuttal; it constituted, that is, one politics (feminism being another) through which to critique and restage Surrealism, to work within its logic while articulating her difference from it.

Travestying the Phallus

In psychoanalytic terms, Bourgeois's antagonistic relation to Surrealism, this disavowal that is also an embrace, might be described in terms of a negative

⁴⁶ Sartre, "The Paintings of Giacometti," p. 405.

transference. First observed by Freud in his invention of the psychoanalytic method, transference is the process by which the analysand transfers or projects infantile wishes onto the figure of the analyst, usually by identifying her or him with an important childhood figure. In clinical terms, transference is the pivotal process in the talking cure, the enactment by which the analysand relives, and thus potentially reworks, formative infantile experiences and relations.

Using this term in a strictly nonclinical sense, I would like to invoke transference to describe the process by which Bourgeois rethinks the logic of Surrealism, embodied for her in the persons of Breton and Duchamp. My concern therefore is not with the child-parent relation that the transference is said to restage in the analysis--that is, with Bourgeois's relationship to her own father--for this reading will have nothing to say about Bourgeois as a subject. Rather, by examining her artistic practice as structured by a negative relation to so-called father figures and elders, it will attempt to demonstrate how Bourgeois's contentious relation to Surrealism proved so productive. For it is the argument of this study that Bourgeois's work is profoundly engaged with Surrealist practice, that indeed this connection is sustained, even intensified, in the 1960s and 1970s, long after the movement had ended, and during the period of Bourgeois's active

involvement in feminist politics. The persistence of her engagement with Surrealist practice thus calls for a reading that exceeds art-historical notions of influence to encompass the structural ambivalence of a negative attachment.

That Bourgeois might have seen Breton as a "father figure," his fabled charm evoking the double-edged seductiveness of her own cruel and seductive father, is easily imagined. Indeed, Bourgeois has made explicit the basis of her resentment of Breton in his resemblance to Louis Bourgeois, referring to Breton as a "father figure" and "a charmer, like my father."⁴⁷ Describing her experience of the Surrealist parlor game *Verité*, for example, conducted by Breton to elicit sexual disclosures, Bourgeois casts Breton's manner of presiding over the game in a tone reminiscent of the one she uses to recount her own father's pontifications at the family dinner table. "If you were not inclined to come out with . . . a revelation, then you were not interesting, that's all," she sniffs, recalling yet another slight from the Surrealist impresario, and prompting one critic to suggest that "it was in particular the sexual politics and sexual sport of his [Breton's] movement that offended, and in some ways frightened, Louise, forcing her first into retreat and then to fantasies of

⁴⁷ Bourgeois, interview with the author, September 27, 1993.

revenge."⁴⁸

The family circle was, in Bourgeois's account, a scene of the most intense sexual humiliation. She offers, as one example, this description of her 1990 assemblage Orange Episode (fig. 2.4), modeled on a childhood memory:

After the meal everyone was supposed to sing a song, recite a poem, and make a fool of themselves. . . . And my father, being the presiding master, would make what he thought were jokes. . . . [On one occasion,] he took an orange and drew a figure with a razor: first the head, and then these kind of wings . . . then the breasts--very big--then the belly. And when he pulled the skin off the orange, we saw there was something between the legs, something prominent and definitely masculine protruding from the navel. This was supposed to be a portrait of me, you see. And he told the assembled company, "Well, you see, I was trying to make a portrait of my daughter but, to my surprise, look what comes out. And I don't have to tell you that with such a beautiful thing, it is not my daughter." I would die of embarrassment and the whole room would explode in laughter. That was a certain kind of macho humor.⁴⁹

If, however, Breton's games echoed the cruel humor of her father, it is equally obvious that Bourgeois's resentment of this particular father figure was to be a generative dislike, that her response, at least in artistic terms, was in no way limited to "retreat" or "fantasies of revenge." For her oeuvre, grounded as it is in Surrealist practice, can be read as a critique of the patriarchal construction of gender, as, that is, not only a rebuttal to the Surrealist

⁴⁸ Storr, "Intimate Geographies," p. E-2.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Bourgeois and Lawrence Rinder, Drawings and Observations, p. 165.

father figures, but a reworking of their production in feminist terms.⁵⁰

This rethinking of Surrealism as the framework for a feminist politics begins in the 1940s, long before it is possible to speak of feminist art in a historical sense. Yet the critique of patriarchy Bourgeois undertakes to produce by appropriating and subverting Surrealist representations of the female body was acknowledged by critics even at the time. Reviewing Bourgeois's second and last solo show of painting, at the Norlyst Gallery in 1947, one critic noted: "Hers is a world of women. Blithely they emerge from chimneys, or, terrified, they watch from their beds as curtains fly from a nightmare window. A whole family of females proves their domesticity by having houses for heads."⁵¹ Proving their domesticity by having houses for heads, the figures Bourgeois called femme-maison, or woman-house, parodied the conventional construction

⁵⁰ For a discussion of Breton's conception of liberatory eroticism in a feminist perspective, and of female Surrealist artists' responses to it, see Whitney Chadwick, "Revolution and Sexuality," chapter 3, Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), pp. 103-140.

⁵¹ Art News, vol. 46, no. 9 (November 1947), p. 42. By reading it as ironic, as an implicit acknowledgment that the femme-maison subverts a Surrealist motif, I perhaps overinterpret the reviewer's comment. Whitney Chadwick reads it differently, arguing that "although Bourgeois pointed to the home as a place of conflict for the woman artist, critics read the paintings as affirming a 'natural' identification between women and home." Chadwick, Women, Art, and Society (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), p. 303.

"housewife" (figs. 2.5-2.8).

The part-to-part concatenation of this motif, as Rosalind Krauss has observed, reproduces the stylistic discontinuity of Surrealist painting.⁵² Evoking Surrealist modes of collective production such as the exquisite corpse, disparate elements are stacked, the organization of the body repeating the structure of a building. Collapsed into or bursting out of a housing that is no longer distinct from it, the body assumes an architectural logic, individual stories placed atop one another to produce the body as an assembly of parts, rather than a unitary whole.

Abrupt shifts of scale (the disjuncture between a tiny doll-like arm waving from the window of a doll-house-sized structure planted atop a woman's head and a grown-up arm dangling from the opposite side), medium (the appearance of an ink drawing within an oil painting), and technique (the discrepancy of graphic and painterly rendering), accentuate the concatenation and fragmentation of the image in terms familiar from the work of artists such as Victor Brauner and Toyen.⁵³ But the theme of the woman's body caged, of the head trapped and effaced by the house, also reworks this fragmentation of the body in relation to a feminist politics.

For Bourgeois's remaking of the fragmented and

⁵² Krauss, "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette."

⁵³ Krauss makes this comparison in *ibid.*

imprisoned female body in the woman-house can be seen to critique and resist the misogyny of Surrealist practice--so that, for example, the encaged head of the woman-house might be seen as a revision of Masson's mannequin-with-head-in-birdcage, made for the Surrealist Exhibition of 1938. The woman-house demonstrates how the part-to-part organization of Surrealist images can be used to enact not only a phantasmatic shattering of the female body, but also the alienation of the female subject within patriarchy. That is, Surrealism's disarticulation of the body is shown potentially to critique and disrupt the gender hierarchy that entraps the female subject.⁵⁴

In one work from this series, for example, three arms hail from the windows of a brownstone row house, animated below by elastic legs that spring up and part, opening the sex (fig. 2.5). The primitive, cartoonish rendering lampoons the equation of femininity and domesticity encapsulated in the figure of the housewife. In another example, a more voluptuous, eroticized figure stands nymph-like submerged in water, the head displaced by a pedimented building from the top of which streams a thick flow of

⁵⁴ Indeed, it was a work from this series that Lucy Lippard selected for the cover of From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art. And, as Deborah Wye points out, "The Womanhouse," was also the name of a collaborative site installation produced in 1971 by students in the Feminist Art Program of the California Institute of the Arts, under the direction of Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. The project explored the association of the woman's body and domesticity within patriarchy.

lines, hair or fire (fig. 2.7). Highlighted and circled, the figure's sex pops out in a caricatural emphasis that, again, seems to mimic the Masson Mannequin.

In the Femme-Maison series and related paintings of this period, Bourgeois began to articulate a critique of Surrealist production from within.⁵⁵ Deborah Wye, for example, offers this description of the woman-house motif: "a woman's most obvious sign of identity, her face, has been replaced by a house. The implication is devastating. Domesticity becomes the very definition of these women, since they have no other means by which to speak."⁵⁶ That Wye's description of works she places among Bourgeois's "most powerful images" echoes the discourse of feminist critiques of Surrealist representations of the female body, with their evocations of the woman masked and muted, or, as Mary Ann Caws has said "shot and painted," is instructive.⁵⁷ For another possible description of the femme-maison, as Wye implies, would be as an articulation of

⁵⁵ Thomas Lawson observed in a 1980 review of early paintings by Bourgeois that her Femme-Maison series represents a "partial rejection" of the patrimony of Duchamp and Picabia. He described the subject of the works as "man's image of woman--woman as object, woman as domestic slave--and how a woman feels about it." Flash Art 100 (November 1980), p. 45.

⁵⁶ Wye, "One and Others," p. 17.

⁵⁷ Mary Ann Caws, "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art," in The Female Body in Western Culture, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

the female subject's estrangement from herself under the patriarchal order. The collapse of the female body into house is an ambivalent image, simultaneously figuring the fracture of the subject and a resistance to that shattering.

*

Nineteen forty-seven, the year of Bourgeois's last exhibition of paintings, which featured the femme-maison series, and the year she turned irreversibly to sculpture, was also the year Miró arrived in New York. For Bourgeois, the friendship that formed between them seems to have marked a turning point in her relation to the father figures of Surrealism. As she has said, while for Breton and Duchamp, she was "just a girl," and "women were not to be taken seriously anyway," "Miró was different."⁵⁸

Bourgeois had become acquainted with the older artist in Paris in the 1930s, when she was a student at the École des Beaux Arts.⁵⁹ Passing by the Galerie Pierre, where Miró exhibited, every day on her way to lunch, she followed his work, and she observed him at the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière, where she was in charge of hiring models: "this tiny serious person working there was Miró, drawing the

⁵⁸ Rose, "Sex, Race, and Louise Bourgeois," p. 825.

⁵⁹ From 1934 to 1938 she studied there, as well as at the Académie Julian, the Académie Ranson, and the Académie de la Grande-Chaumière, and in a series of ateliers where she worked with such artists as Othon Friesz, André Lhote, Robert Wlerick, Roger Bissière, Fernand Léger, and Amédée Ozenfant. Wye, "One and Others," p. 15.

model's shoes."⁶⁰ They became friends in New York in 1947 "when we saw each other together at [Stanley William] Hayter's engraving workshop. We would dine together at Pierre Matisse's, on East 96th Street, along with Matta, Le Corbusier,⁶¹ the filmmaker Thomas Bouchard,⁶² Rufino Tamayo,⁶³ the composer Edgar Varèse and his wife Louise (the translator), and José Luis Sert."⁶⁴

In her recent remembrance of her friend, written to accompany the snapshots of Miró, his feet resting on the volumes devoted to Picasso, Bourgeois recalls the relation of the two older artists: "Picasso helped Miró tremendously, but did not influence him. Later, when Miró was established, Picasso was no longer a god to him. Miró loved to be told that he was greater than his master."⁶⁵ And it

⁶⁰ Bourgeois, interview with the author, February 27, 1996.

⁶¹ Pincus-Witten notes that Bourgeois considered Le Corbusier and Ozenfant close friends during this period: "Bourgeois was especially close to a circle of French intellectuals and artists who shared common history, ideals and, as it happened, cheek-by-jowl addresses. The closest included Marcel Duchamp, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant." Pincus-Witten, Bourgeois Truth, unpaginated.

⁶² Bouchard filmed Miró painting the mural the commission for which brought him to New York in 1947. Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews, ed. Margit Rowell (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1986), p. 31.

⁶³ Robert Goldwater published a monograph on Tamayo in 1947.

⁶⁴ Bourgeois, "Natural Talent," p. 73.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

is this wish to triumph over his god that is enacted between Miró and Bourgeois in the dinner-party picture, she kneeling before him, enthroned in his salon armchair, robed in the banner of Surrealism. (The drapery he wears is the banner from the exhibition "Le Surréalisme en 1947: Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme," mounted at the Galerie Maeght in Paris.)⁶⁶

Bourgeois's own gods had been Breton and Duchamp, whom she loved "until I turned against them . . . I objected to the behavior of my teachers. It was then that I went to Russia--as a gesture of antagonism--looking for other teachers, other gods."⁶⁷ The two trips to Moscow she made during the 1930s in search of a different avant-garde (which were to cause her some discomfort in 1951 when she, Duchamp, and Ozenfant were called to appear before Senator McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee) were followed by a more radical break when in 1938 Bourgeois married an American and departed France for New York, leaving her gods behind. The exodus from Paris that soon followed returned them to her, and it is the struggle to bring down her gods, with Miró now in the surrogate role, that we perhaps see enacted in a second picture.

⁶⁶ In another snapshot from that evening, Bourgeois, Miró, and his wife and daughter are shown unfurling the banner on the roof. See Wye, Louise Bourgeois, fig. 16, p. 107.

⁶⁷ Bourgeois, interview by the author, September 27, 1993. She visited Moscow in 1932 and in 1934.

In it, Miró strikes a similar pose, installed in the same chair, his feet settled on the same books, but in this one the banner is pulled up around his head, fully draping his body but for the face, the feet, and the arms stuck out akimbo. It is a pose in which he appears both baby-like, the robe wrapped loosely around him like a blanket, and phallic, the figure of the patriarch. Bourgeois's characterization of her friend is in keeping with the baby-like aspect of this pose: Miró was "a true naive, trusting, unable to take two steps without his supporting family. . . . He was a truly naive person in the best sense of the word: someone who could not grow up."⁶⁸ This infantilized persona is both underscored and belied by the desire "to be told that he was greater than his master," to embody phallic authority, and the contradiction between these postures of child-like vulnerability and phallic aggression is encapsulated in the second pose, with its conjuncture of swaddling and swaggering.

Bourgeois's play-acting with Miró, doubling the figure of the father/god in that of the baby/doll--objects of both tenderness and ridicule--foreshadows a much later series of works in which she brings down the phallus, notably Fillette and her 1978 performance work "A Banquet/Fashion Show of Body Parts" (figs. 2.9 and 2.10). Dressed up in a teat-encrusted gown, as the art historian Gert Schiff is in the

⁶⁸ Ibid.

fashion show, or wrapped in a foreskin-blanket, as Fillette is, the phallus is divested of its authority, cast as an object of travesty and humor. And the travestying of Miró in the Surrealist banner can be seen as an early enactment of the lowering of the phallus, and of the patriarchal authority it signifies, that is a pivotal operation in Bourgeois's work--and not, as has often been suggested, one that originates in the context of feminist politics.

Rather, this subversive play begins with the travestying of a prominent Surrealist (one who, however, "was strong enough to shake off the hold of Breton") in the banner of the movement itself. The possibility that Surrealism might encompass the structures of its own (feminist) critique therefore is one that Bourgeois already imagines in 1947.

Miró's "difference" from the Surrealist father figures resides in a willingness to be the object of humor, to subject himself to mock ridicule much as Schiff would do three decades later when Bourgeois paraded him around, together with a retinue of other male art historians, in the fashion show of body parts. Using the banner of Surrealism to mock a god, Bourgeois staged in her encounter with Miró what might, then, be called the production of the bad enough father. That is, she refitted the father figures whose authority she had fled, gods wrapped in the Surrealist flag, as objects of critique, or, as she says, rebuttal.

And in this parody of paternal authority, which

fashions Miró as a figure both phallic and infantile, Bourgeois not only anticipates Fillette and the future fashion show, but constructs a kind of counterpart to the bad enough mother she herself would later play in the Mapplethorpe photographs, posing with Fillette. For her costuming of Miró as a phallic god, exaggerating the "lordly and pontifical" mien of the Surrealist father figures, uses parody to trouble the patriarchal order much as her own enactment of the mothering role, projecting female desire onto the little one, would subsequently do. If, therefore, the patriarchal fable of phallic power and maternal passivity was later to be disrupted in Bourgeois's work by the figure of the bad enough mother, who transgressively enacts her own aggression, that fable was here disturbed by the figure of the bad enough father, who parodies his own authority.

And in this refiguration of the Surrealist artist-god as the bad enough father, enacted in Bourgeois's play with Miró, a space was opened in which to resist Surrealism without disavowing it.

Fantastic Reality

Subject to what she described as a growing dissatisfaction with painting's "level of reality," Bourgeois had, by 1947, turned her attention primarily to

sculpture.⁶⁹ Using the term "fantastic reality" to specify fantasy as the reality which painting fails to materialize (and which objects might allow her to realize more completely) she thus marks a connection to Surrealism during this period, invoking the projection of the unconscious that defined Surrealist production.

For to inscribe fantasy in the matrix of the real is the desire, precisely, of Surrealism. In Bourgeois's formulation, however, phantasmatic projection embraces the materiality of the body and of objects. If, therefore, her claim to "fantastic reality" seems to restage Surrealism's dream of intruding fantasy into the space of the real, her enactment of fantasy as bound up in physical existence, as a function of the body rather than a work of the unconscious mind, also signals a resistance to the particular fantasy-logic of Surrealism.

Remarking that she turned from painting to sculpture in the conviction that she "could express much deeper things in three dimensions,"⁷⁰ Bourgeois describes a phantasmatic projection to encompass the tangible, concrete level of experience. Further, in her reference to "deeper things," she evokes her attraction to Existentialism as Surrealism's other. For the determination to work at a deeper "level of reality" now transposes itself into sculptural production,

⁶⁹ Quoted in Wye, "One and Others," p. 18.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

literally deeper things in three dimensions.

The displacement of image by object in Bourgeois's oeuvre, undertaken in the service of the Surrealist-based construction of fantastic reality, thus also signals a twofold resistance. First, the enactment of fantasy as a function not of the unconscious, but of the bodily drives, resists the Freudian psychoanalytic framework of Surrealism. And second, the allusion to "deeper things" invokes the Existentialist preoccupation with the level of experience Sartre encapsulated as, "anguish, abandonment, and despair,"⁷¹ or, in Bourgeois's description, "the tragedy of life."

If, however, fantastic reality was the reality that painting failed to deliver, neither was it necessarily a function of sculpture per se. Called, in the manner of so many Surrealist figures, *Personages*, Bourgeois's early sculptural works stood for people. Fragile, attenuated posts of painted balsa wood scaled to the human body--portraits, *Observers*, and *Shuttle Women*--they constituted, as the artist would later note, "a kind of memorial" to the family left behind in France. Including a "portable brother--a pole you could carry around,"⁷² as well as an array of sentinels and interlocutors, these figures had,

⁷¹ Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 292.

⁷² Quoted in Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 240.

according to Bourgeois, "nothing to do with sculpture."⁷³ Rather, they were "physical presences," enacting a "reconstruction of the past" that needed "the room, the six sides of the cube" in which to operate.⁷⁴ Fantastic reality thus comprised the concrete articulation of a psychic world, or more precisely, an object world.

The physical process that in the shift from image to object opened onto three dimensions, or, to use Bourgeois's term, "real cutting,"⁷⁵ however was engraving, a medium in which she worked throughout the 1940s. "It was a revelation that you could get three-dimensional effects in drawing," she recalls.⁷⁶ Having worked in the medium for some time at home, using a small intaglio press, Bourgeois in 1946 began to frequent Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17, the printmaking studio where her friendship with Miró was formed the following year.⁷⁷ Hayter's workshop, which he moved from Paris to New York in 1940, attracted an international

⁷³ Quoted in Bloch, "Interview with Louise Bourgeois," p. 373.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Wye, "A Drama of the Self: Louise Bourgeois as Printmaker," in Prints, p. 23.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ For a history of the relocated Atelier 17 on the premises of the New School in Manhattan, see Sawin, Surrealism in Exile, pp. 152-55. Sawin notes that Hayter's shop was frequented by Tanguy, Ernst, Chagall, Lipchitz, Masson, Bazliotes, Jimmy Ernst, Motherwell, and, in the mid 1940s, by Ruben Kadish, Adolph Gottlieb, and Miró.

coterie of artists, including Miró and the Chilean Nemecio Antúnez, both of whom became Bourgeois's close friends.⁷⁸ Hayter himself was a master of the engraving process, and Bourgeois recently recalled for Wye his fixation on the metal filament that is dug out of the copper plate to produce the engraved line: "You were worth that length of hair, and Hayter could get an enormously long strip."⁷⁹ Embracing the physical demands of this process that, as she has noted, is "a muscular statement" ("You give the burin its power . . . you break the resistance"), Bourgeois approached sculpture by way of the exertions of engraving, a process that in her description centers not on the image per se, but on the material subtracted in order to produce it.⁸⁰

An action that delved into three dimensions, engraving edged Bourgeois's production away from the image and toward the object, from a Surrealist-automatist model of projecting the unconscious into image (particularly evident in such paintings as the Femme-Maison series of 1946-47, Red Room of

⁷⁸ Wye, "A Drama of the Self," p. 26. Antunez wrote an epigraph for the brochure that accompanied Bourgeois's 1947 painting exhibition at the Norlyst Gallery: "These are paintings of a city dweller . . . brown stone houses and jails . . . the bee sleeps in the dark and her domain is the sky. In her reduced geometrical space a cruel and blind life goes on." Wye, "One and Others," Louise Bourgeois, p. 17.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Wye, "A Drama of the Self," p. 26.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

1947-48, and Roof Song of 1947) to sculptural processes enacting fantasy as a bodily operation. The connection Bourgeois draws between engraving and sculpture at the level of cutting is most simply demonstrated in the technical affinities of prints made during the 1940s and contemporaneous sculptural works. For the techniques used in the early Personages series consist primarily in gouging, digging, and incising, methods specifically transposed from printmaking techniques.

In effect, the Personages project into three dimensions the architectonic structures of Bourgeois's contemporaneous engravings. Articulated by slots and punctures, grooves and nailed-on parts--by, that is, a repertoire of simple cutting methods that were not limited to the "three-dimensional effects" produced by the burin, but that generated fully three-dimensional objects--the Personages can be seen to announce a shift from protosculptural engraving to real cutting. Portrait of C.Y. (fig. 2.11), for example, shown in Bourgeois's first exhibition of sculpture, held in 1949 at the Peridot Gallery, is a simple post punctuated by three acts of cutting: the square top is pierced by a rectangular slot; the corners are filed off toward the base; and a cluster of nails is driven into the post below the slot, as if to crush the mouth. These three discrete operations construct a figure: the filing of the corners defines a body; the carving of a slot designates a subject; and the

pounding of nails into the post produces an object, an object that has generally been given the status of a fetish.

"Its identity as a fetish object," Wye writes, "revealed by nails aggressively piercing it, is unmistakable."⁸¹ Or as Jeremy Strick has suggested: "The nails Bourgeois hammered into the head of this figure allowed the artist to exorcise her anger, while perhaps also serving a function akin to sticking pins into voodoo dolls. In this sense, an animism related to that of tribal fetishes was present in the early Personages."⁸² The identification of Portrait of C.Y. as a fetish--a surrogate, a doll, a projection--situates it at the interface of the physical and the psychical, installs it, we could say, in the realm of fantastic reality. Rather than read the Personages animistically as fetishes, however, it is possible instead to consider them within a more elastic framework of phantasmatic projection, i.e., the Kleinian model of object relations.

Within this model, a work such as Portrait of C.Y. might be interpreted not as a fetish object, but as an object of the drives. For Bourgeois's deployment of the Personages as surrogates to be shifted in relation to one another and to the "six sides of the cube" suggests not the rigid fixity of the fetish, but the radical motility of the

⁸¹ Wye, "One and Others," p. 19.

⁸² Strick, Personages, p. 24.

Kleinian object. Structured by position, rather than by stage, the nondevelopmental Kleinian model is framed in spatial terms, not as a symbolic system, but as an object world. Within this spatial model, the psyche is understood to operate by positioning the objects that comprise, or populate, this world.

Staging an interplay of operations through which objects are destroyed, mourned, and reconstructed in fantasy, the Personages further can be seen to enact the problem Klein identifies as central to her object-relations model of psychoanalysis, namely anxiety about the destructive effects of one's own aggression. "Often a toy is broken or, when the child is more aggressive, attacks are made with knife or scissors on the table or on pieces of wood," Klein writes of her psychoanalytic play technique, in which the manipulation of simple toys is substituted for the free association of words.⁸³ In this account, destructive fantasies enacted through the drives in such aggressive physical acts as cutting, smashing, or stabbing instigate a relay of phantasmatic projections: paranoid fantasies of retaliation, reparative fantasies of restoring the damaged object, and depressive fantasies of loss and disintegration.

To return, then, to the Portrait of C.Y., the most salient feature of which is the thicket of nails driven into

⁸³ Klein, "The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance" (1955), in The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 41.

the figure at a level corresponding roughly to the head, mouth, or perhaps the heart: within a Kleinian-based interpretation, the voodoo-fetish of Strick's reading might be replaced by a more versatile object of projection, such as a doll (or personage). For in Kleinian terms, this work can be seen to enact destructive impulses arising from the drives, but also to dramatize the anxiety of aggression, to stage not only a fantasy of aggression, but a defense against it. Bourgeois's own account of the work broaches this possibility. The figure of an irritating houseguest, "this piece," she says, "kept me from doing to her what I did to the sculpture. It's a conversion toward another kind of energy. It kept me from being objectionable."⁸⁴ The driving of nails into the figure, then, in this account is both aggressive and protective, a release of violence that simultaneously forestalls aggression and protects the subject herself from its effects, "from being objectionable."

Bourgeois's description accords to Portrait of C.Y. a psychic use-value: the object absorbs aggression. And if, as I will hope to show, aggression can be seen to constitute the central problematic of Bourgeois's production, the Kleinian object-relations model, which takes aggression and the fear of its destructive effects as its organizing principle, and which is articulated in concrete, spatial

⁸⁴ Quoted in Strick, Personages, pp. 23-24.

terms, thus provides a useful framework through which to read the psychoanalytic dimension of Bourgeois's work.

Undertaken in the name of fantastic reality, Bourgeois's production evidently privileges this psychoanalytic dimension. Yet, unlike Surrealism, it is not self-consciously articulated in relation to any psychoanalytic model: Bourgeois's work is not Kleinian in the sense that Surrealism is Freudian. The artist's specific engagement with Kleinian theory came only in the 1960s, and has served not as a source, but as a framework through which to examine and to describe the operation of her work in psychoanalytic terms.

One of these operations is the enactment of aggression through the drives and another, directly related to the first, is the staging of a radical alienation that is an effect of aggressive fantasy. In the *Personages* series, and in particular in its two primary installations, in 1949 and 1950 (both of which are discussed in some detail below), Bourgeois enacts this interplay of aggression and alienation in the positioning of the figures. The full-scale staging of what might be thought of as the fantastic reality of aggression realized in these installations is, however, anticipated in an edition of engravings, paired with short texts, that Bourgeois published in 1947, giving the booklet the title He Disappeared into Complete Silence (figs. 2.12-2.20).

He Disappeared into Complete Silence

Pushing the burin against the copper plate to gouge out a line is, Bourgeois says, "the only way I know to convert extreme aggression."⁸⁵ If, however, He Disappeared into Complete Silence can be seen to enact in its engravings the destructive impulses arising from the drives, this demonstration is performed not only by cutting into the plate, but also by cutting off one object, or subject, from another. Architectonic and machinic setups isolated in shallow stage-like spaces are coupled with vignettes like this one, describing the breakdown of language, the extinction of speech, and the disintegration of feeling: "Once a man was telling a story, it was a very good story too, and it made him very happy, but he told it so fast that nobody understood it."

One of the last projects she would complete before shifting her exclusive attention to sculpture, the portfolio's plates clearly relate to Bourgeois's early sculptural works, which are in effect three-dimensional projections of the same architectonic, post-like structures that in He Disappeared into Complete Silence describe an urban landscape of vacant skyscrapers, abandoned machinery, and empty spaces. Set opposite the plates are brief stories, told in a flat affectless tone, which Marius Bewley, in his introduction to the portfolio, depicts as

⁸⁵ Quoted in Wye, "A Drama of the Self," p. 23.

"tiny tragedies of human frustration."⁸⁶ In one, a man tells a story so fast that no one can understand his speech; in another, a hardening of the middle ear isolates a man from the world; and in the last vignette, an abandonment ends in a solitary death.

Bourgeois's daybooks from 1947 indicate that she undertook the publication of the portfolio of engravings "with the hope of making her work more widely known."⁸⁷ She consulted Bewley, a poet and director of the Art of This Century, and Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art, about the texts that would accompany the plates, which she printed at Hayter's shop.⁸⁸ The first edition of prints she had undertaken to produce, and the last she would attempt until the 1980s, He Disappeared into Complete Silence demarcates a break in Bourgeois's production, a shift it is possible to read retroactively as a rupture with the logic of painting, and one through which a logic of sculptural production, or real cutting, begins to articulate

⁸⁶ Marius Bewley, introduction to He Disappeared into Complete Silence: Suite of Nine Engravings by Louise Bourgeois (New York: Gemor Press [text]); reprint, Tiger's Eye (citations are to the reprint). The engravings were printed on the hand press of Atelier 17.

⁸⁷ Wye and Smith, Prints, p. 73.

⁸⁸ For a detailed account of Bourgeois's work on the project, see *ibid.*, p. 73.

itself.⁸⁹

The architectonic structures depicted in He Disappeared into Complete Silence thus served as the basis of the Personages Bourgeois would exhibit two years later, wooden figures that, as one reviewer observed at the time, "convey through their severity of treatment the tragedy of isolation."⁹⁰ In the booklet, the radical alienation of subjects depicted in the flat, affectless tone of the texts is effected in the plates through the displacement of bodies by objects, or more precisely object systems. Water towers and elevator shafts, skyscrapers and telephone poles substitute for human figures to delineate an evacuated world of machinic self-immural. Windowless towers are stationed in discrete zones within empty frames. An elevator shaft-guillotine is captioned, "Once a man was waving to his friend from the elevator. He was laughing so much that he stuck his head out and the ceiling cut it off."

These operations of cutting and of cutting off, repeatedly enacted in the stories, are also inscribed in the

⁸⁹ Wye notes that "Having an edition in mind was very unusual for Bourgeois at the time. Not long after the completion of this project, Bourgeois definitively turned to sculpture." She speculates that the company of the other artists may have stimulated Bourgeois to attempt such an ambitious undertaking; that she may have wanted to impress Hayter; and that "her growing maturity as an artist gave her new confidence." Wye, "A Drama of the Self," p. 28.

⁹⁰ M[arynell] S[harp], exhibition review, Peridot Gallery, Art Digest, vol. 24, no. 2 (October 15, 1949), p. 22.

architectonic and machinic setups of the plates, and in the engraving techniques used to produce them. It is therefore possible to read He Disappeared into Complete Silence as organized by a logic of cutting that opens onto the "real cutting" of sculptural production. But it is not simply a matter of a physical process--a cutting action that registers lines by scratching, digging, or biting into the metal plate--anticipating its more complete realization in the sculptural operations of carving. Rather, in He Disappeared into Complete Silence, cutting is developed as a system of production, one that can usefully be contrasted to the Surrealist model of automatic writing. For if automatism was a Surrealist system of generating images from the unconscious (and one that Bourgeois had investigated in her painting and graphic work), cutting was instead a system through which to produce objects via the drives, through what might be thought of as a corporeal unconscious.

It is clear that in its evocation of loss, its litany of failures to connect, He Disappeared into Complete Silence can be read in relation to Bourgeois's contemporaneous turn to Existentialism as Surrealism's other, the flat, arid landscape of a silent skyscraper world seeming determinedly to cut off Surrealism's ceaseless flow of images and words, the rigid separation of structures to resist its promiscuous couplings. But in its connection with the drives, with a bodily logic of sculptural production, the portfolio seems

to diverge from this Existentialist identification and to circle back to Surrealism. Or, more precisely, via the possibility of a corporeal unconscious, of the bodily drives as object-producing, Bourgeois's work in 1947 seems to address itself to Duchamp, and specifically to the part-object logic of the bachelor machine enacted in the Large Glass.

In a number of Bourgeois's contemporaneous prints and drawings, as in the plates of He Disappeared into Complete Silence, the body is figured as building--as skyscraper, water tower, lighthouse--or as a circuitry of machinic parts. With their assembly of rotating mechanisms and electrical and hydraulic flows, these drawings evoke a structure encountered in many art brut works, the body-as-machine, seen, for example, in Robert Gie's 1916 drawing, Distribution d'effluves avec machine centrale et tableau métrique, in which identical figures are dispersed along the circuitry of a vast apparatus, connected by a labyrinthine system of wiring.⁹¹ Of more direct relevance for

⁹¹ The Gie drawing is in the Collection de l'art Brut, Lausanne. Two relevant drawings by Bourgeois from 1947 are published in Louise Bourgeois: Drawings and Observations, pp. 80-81. Bourgeois's paintings and drawings of the 1940s routinely exhibit the rigid spatial divisions, concatenated motifs, and compulsive mark making characteristic of the work of such well-known art brut artists as Wolfli, Aloise, Natterer, Julie Bar, and Gie, and are clearly indebted to the Surrealist reception of schizophrenic art--to the work of Ernst, Tanguy, and Masson, for example, all of whom were key figures in the émigré community to which Bourgeois also belonged. It is worth noting in this connection Hans Prinzhorn's description of the schizophrenic subject in Art

Bourgeois, however, the perfect self-containment of a mechanical system that is, in her phrase, "self-operating" is also the model of the Duchampian bachelor machine.⁹² For as I will hope to show, a possible reading of He Disappeared into Complete Silence--which, like many of Bourgeois's contemporaneous drawings, is structured by an autistic model of self-enclosure and self-operation--is that it comprises a response to the part-object logic of La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même, the Large Glass.⁹³

A system of interconnecting part-objects, its operation a perpetual hum of mechanical onanism, the Duchampian bachelor machine is "a dream," as Krauss has written, "of

of the Insane, a work which, as noted in chapter one, resonated deeply with these artists, and with Bourgeois: "We sense in our pictures the complete autistic isolation and gruesome solipsism which far exceeds the limits of psychopathic alienation, and believe that in it we have found the essence of the schizophrenic configuration." Prinzhorn, Art of the Insane, translated in MacGregor, The Discovery of the Art of the Insane, p. 204.

⁹² With reference to a 1949 drawing, Bourgeois evokes the autistic relation between the mechanical and the figural in her work of this period: "This has to do with pivoting on an axis, going round and round. . . . So it is a mechanical thing. By mechanical you mean something that works. I am interested in cars because they self-propel themselves for reasons that are reasonable and mechanical. So this is it: How am I going to be self-operating all by myself?" Bourgeois with Rinder, Drawings and Observations, p. 83.

⁹³ In 1943, the Museum of Modern Art exhibited the Large Glass, on extended loan from Katherine Dreier, in a show entitled "Art in Progress," the first time the work had been exhibited since Duchamp completed its repair in 1936.

both infantile celibacy and total autoeroticism."⁹⁴ It can also be considered a schizophrenic model of experience, if "schizophrenic" is used to designate specifically Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's distinction between the discrete body and integrated consciousness of the neurotic, and the multiply riven and decentered subjectivity of the schizophrenic.⁹⁵ In this formulation, the schizophrenic body is organized as a concatenation of machines, a machine being defined as "a system of interruptions or breaks."⁹⁶

Deleuze and Guattari offer by way of example the case of a patient of Bruno Bettelheim, a child called little Joey, "who can live, eat, defecate, and sleep only if he is plugged into machines provided with motors, wires, lights, carburetors, propellers, and steering wheels: an electrical feeding machine, a car-machine that enables him to breathe, an anal machine that lights up."⁹⁷ "Connecticut, Connect-I-cut," little Joey calls out, encapsulating the logic of the

⁹⁴ Krauss, "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette." Krauss's essay is the first to suggest that Bourgeois's turn to sculpture be read in relation to Duchamp and the logic of the bachelor machine.

⁹⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, preface by Michel Foucault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983). See especially Part I, "The Desiring-Machines." Krauss discusses this connection between the Duchampian bachelor machine and the anti-Oedipal model of schizophrenia in "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette."

⁹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p. 36.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

schizophrenic body, in which each machine corresponds to a part object, which, like a switching system, cuts into the current, breaking off the "associative flow": "the anus and the flow of shit it cuts off . . . the mouth that cuts off not only the flow of milk but also the flow of air and sound; the penis that interrupts not only the flow of urine but also the flow of sperm."⁹⁸

For Deleuze and Guattari, the distinction between the conventional psychoanalytic model, grounded in an unconscious constructed by repression, and what they term schizo-capitalism, is in effect a difference between fantasies produced by the mind and the material productions of the body. In the model of the part-object as "desiring machine," the unconscious is displaced by the drives. And, as the authors point out, this is also the model of the bachelor machine, of which Duchamp's Large Glass constitutes the key work within twentieth-century artistic production.

The Large Glass, then, is a self-operating erotic system. As such, it functions outside the terms of sexual difference, in an ungendered field of self-perpetuating desire. He Disappeared into Complete Silence, by contrast, mechanizes the body not as an autoerotic system, but, as I will hope to show, as an autosadistic system, a fantasy not of infantile eroticism, but of infantile aggression. Thus the conjuncture of object and drives that in the Large Glass

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

can be said to enact an anti-Oedipal logic of desiring production, in He Disappeared into Complete Silence can be read in relation to another model of schizophrenic experience, namely Klein's object-relations theory.⁹⁹

A theory of psychosis, Klein's model of infantile experience posits that infants live in the grip of psychotic states, states whose intensity is only gradually diminished by a growing awareness and understanding of external reality. These states, moreover, persist throughout life in episodes of extreme, if fleeting, paranoid disturbance. For Klein, then, the pivotal psychic experience is not, as for Freud, sexuality, but rather the death drive, and the destructive feelings it produces in the infant play a decisive role in the structuring of subjectivity.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus is indebted to Klein for its model of the part-object, but the authors criticize Klein's presumption that, in the normal course, this infantile logic of radical fragmentation is overcome through the internalization of whole objects--through, for example, the recognition of the "mother" as a whole person, no longer reduced, as in the part-object logic of infantile experience, to breast. Whereas Klein emphasizes the increasing capacity for integration and symbolization in the infantile subject, Deleuze and Guattari insist upon the subversive potential of a part-object logic of the body to elide hierarchies of part and whole, singular and multiple, and so on. It will be my argument that while Bourgeois's production is structured via a fragmented, part-object logic of the body, the articulation of this logic is more Kleinian than "anoedipal" in that it operates by means of an interplay of destructive and reparative fantasies that is strikingly congruent with the Kleinian object-relations model.

¹⁰⁰ While Freud's theory of neurosis is constructed primarily in relation to the unconscious and the defensive mechanism of repression, Klein's object-relations model

Destructive impulses issuing from the death drive trigger in the infantile subject an overwhelming anxiety of retaliation. This fear in turn gives rise to what Klein terms the paranoid-schizoid position as the infantile subject "projects all its badness into the outside world so that the hated breast becomes the hateful and hating breast."¹⁰¹ Thus, for Klein, the schizoid state is one in which internal aggression comes back to bite us.

In a famous case history, published in 1930, Klein demonstrated the primacy of aggression in her object-relations model. She recounted her analysis of a four-year-old boy named Dick who seldom played or spoke, except to string sounds together in meaningless sequences, and who seemed completely detached from the people around him, including his parents and nurse, whom he tended to treat, as Klein observed, like so many pieces of furniture:

For the most part, he simply strung sounds together in a meaningless way, and certain noises he constantly repeated. . . . but it was not only that he was unable to make himself intelligible: he had no wish to do so. . . . Again, sometimes he would repeat . . . words correctly, but he would go on repeating them in an incessant, mechanical way until everyone round him was sick and tired of

centers on the physical states of the infant and on psychic defenses "of a violent character" deployed to shelter the infantile ego.

¹⁰¹ Mitchell, introduction, The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 20.

them.¹⁰²

Employing her model of infantile fantasy, Klein concluded that Dick, whose other symptoms included a refusal to bite into food and an inability to grip knives or scissors, had as a baby become deeply disturbed by his own sadistic impulses to attack his mother's body. Through an interplay that is the pivot point of the Kleinian model, Dick feared, according to Klein, both his own sadistic desires and retaliatory assaults from the object of those attacks. And in order to defend himself against this fantasied destruction, precipitated by his own sadistic fantasy, Dick closed himself off from the world.¹⁰³

Unintelligible, flat, mechanical, the schizophrenic speech of Klein's little Dick or Bettelheim's little Joey operates not as language, organized semiotically as a system of differences, but as object, or part-object, organized instead by repetition. And for Klein, this prelinguistic oral production signals a profound anxiety about the destructive potential of the subject's aggressive fantasies, which can in turn be alleviated phantasmatically by

¹⁰² Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation in the Development of the Ego" (1930), in The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 99.

¹⁰³ The collapse of language into unintelligible sounds, spoken too fast to be understood, is of course the very condition of He Disappeared into Complete Silence, a world where even a good story is told "so fast that nobody understood it."

repairing the object damaged in fantasy. Kleinian theory therefore, again, is structured not by a developmental progression, as is the Freudian model, but by an interplay of destructive and reparative scenarios. It is a nonlinear model articulated by shifting positions, which, as Mitchell has observed, "always remain as part of . . . our normal and our psychotic development."¹⁰⁴

1. Blasting

My analysis thus far can be summarized as follows: if the Bretonian-Surrealist model of automatism is grounded in Freud's theory of sexuality and neurosis, and if the Large Glass constitutes instead a kind of autistic system operating through the schizo-logic of the part-object as desiring machine, He Disappeared into Complete Silence can be read in Kleinian terms, through the drives and the defense mechanisms of psychosis. To put it another way, He Disappeared into Complete Silence reworks the model of the Large Glass (which in itself counters--in advance--the Surrealist assertion of mind over body, of the unconscious over the drives) as an enactment not of autoeroticism but of autosadism, the self-perpetuation not of desire but of aggression arising from the death drive. Thus the part-object structures of He Disappeared into Complete Silence enact a model of self-enclosure in which the mechanized

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell, introduction, The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 21.

autoeroticism of the bachelor machine is displaced by the self-perpetuating anxiety (or self-destruction) of infantile sadism.

In He Disappeared into Complete Silence, then, cutting functions not within a system of desiring-production--as it does in the Large Glass, equipped with grinder, scissors, and bayonet for cutting off the flows of desire--but to enact fantasies of destruction. The difference between these two phantasmatic systems is most starkly drawn in the portfolio's plate seven (figs. 2.18 and 2.21), the engraving that in formal terms most clearly invites comparison with Large Glass. This plate, which Bourgeois describes as "a blasting, a total confrontation," depicts the violent interaction of two machines. A twinned apparatus with discrete registers corresponding to the parts of wife and husband, this collision of machines can be read, like the Large Glass, as a conjugal part-object machine. Accompanying the plate is the grisly scenario of a man who cooks and eat his wife:

Once, a man was angry at his wife, he cut her in small pieces, made a stew of her.

Then he telephoned to his friends and asked them for a cocktail-and-stew party.

They all came and had a good time.

Comprised of tanks, coiled tubing, pulleys, gears, and switches, the machine-figures displace the onanism of the chocolate grinder with the frenzied aggression of the wife-

grinder. Replacing the perfect self-enclosure of autoeroticism with the explosive sadism of the death drive, this violent coupling enacts the Kleinian fantasy of the good object become "the hated and hating" one, the condition Klein describes as "paranoid-schizoid."

Bourgeois describes plate seven as "a climax" within the unfolding of He Disappeared into Complete Silence.¹⁰⁵ The most complex image of the nine, its pulsing circuitry of rotating parts is in striking contrast to the flat, blank tone of the preceding plates, in which isolated windowless structures are formed by deeply incised, closely spaced parallel lines. Reiterating a vertical mark at equal intervals and with consistent pressure, these plates invoke in an insistent repetition the monotonous inflection of schizophrenic speech: plate one (fig. 2.12) displays a solitary column proportioned as a human figure, juxtaposed with a story about a beautiful girl stood up by her date; plate two (fig. 2.13) matches a pair of structures set at opposite sides of an empty frame with a text reading "The solitary death of the Woolworth Building"; and plate three (fig. 2.14) pairs a trio of spires--one skyscraper-like, one resembling a lighthouse, and one columnar--with the story of the man cut off from the world by his own speech, telling his story so fast that nobody understands it.

Recalling Bourgeois's remembrance of her apprenticeship

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Wye and Smith, Prints, p. 89.

in Hayter's studio--his obsession with "that length of hair" yielded from the copper plate by the engraving of the line, and her determination to impress the teacher by mastering the production of long, closely spaced parallel lines, "a test of greatness!" as she joked with Wye--and recalling, too, her account of gouging out a line with the burin as converting "extreme aggression," it is possible to read in the technical production of He Disappeared into Complete Silence an enactment of aggression, or more precisely of its suppression.¹⁰⁶ For the consistent iteration of the same line, producing the vacant building facades behind which the subject is immured, also sets up the murderous "blasting" of the wife-grinder that erupts in plate seven.

In her analysis of little Dick, Klein attributes the child's symptoms to a fear of his own aggression that inhibits all attachments, sealing him off from the objects of fantasied attacks, and from their imagined retribution. Thus self-immural perpetuates an infantile state that, according to Klein, is "wholly phantastic," meaning that, as she observes of Dick, "adaptation to reality and emotional relations to his environment" are "almost entirely lacking."¹⁰⁷ For Klein, the monotonous vocal repetition through which the child enacts his disconnection from the world signals a dread of his own infantile sadism. In this

¹⁰⁶ Wye, "A Drama of the Self," p. 27.

¹⁰⁷ Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation," p. 98.

framework of interpretation, the self-contained, uninflected structures of the early plates of He Disappeared into Complete Silence, read against the "blasting" that follows, therefore can be seen to enact a relay of aggressive impulses and efforts to suppress them that in the Kleinian model is the pivotal experience around which subjectivity is formed.

2. Fire

In He Disappeared into Complete Silence, the subject of aggression takes the form of a building or a machine; more specifically, the subject of suppressed sadism is figured as building, and the subject of sadistic violence as machine. And the interplay of these states of extreme inhibition and explosive sadism is enacted in a series of shifts--from the blank exterior of a building, for example, to a rooftop scene of machinic violence--that suggest less a narrative development than a nonlinear repositioning.¹⁰⁸ Reinforced by the non-narrative sequence of parables, this structure of shifting positions or states (which is consistent with the Kleinian account of psychic experience as a perpetual shuttling back and forth between states in which "one is

¹⁰⁸ According to Wye and Smith, the sequence of plates was not predetermined, and indeed "final decisions regarding the sequence of plates and pairings of images and texts were made in great haste." (Prints, p. 73). They quote Bourgeois as saying that the portfolio tracks "the presence of both closed and transparent moods. It is the swing of moods from night to morning. The distance between them is very great and there is a danger of cracking" (p. 82).

sometimes lodged") is produced by the movement from interior to exterior, from ground-level views to rooftop, from arid cityscape to deluge and flood, each vignette a frontal, close-up scene set in a stage-like space.

The shift from the first trio of plates to the fourth (fig. 2.15), for example, is from a ground-level view of windowless towers to an interior view of a similar building, its armature exposed as if under construction, the planes of the walls, floor, and roof delineated by a mesh of closely spaced fine lines. Outside is an electrical line or telephone pole; inside is a twisting coil, which Bourgeois calls a raging fire.¹⁰⁹ Contained to one floor, the fire is, as Bourgeois says, "compartmentalized"; it does not threaten to explode.

Plate five (fig. 2.16), however--a simple line rendering of a contraption that resembles a guillotine, fitted with little wheels at its base and a long cord trailing out of the frame--enacts, according to Bourgeois, "a self-inflicted punishment" for the "fire that is raging."¹¹⁰ To return to the model of an auto-sadistic machine, the guillotine is wheeled out to cut off the "fire raging inside," a fire that, in contrast to the love gasoline that fuels the autoerotic system of the Large Glass, instead kindles a rising aggression.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

In the end, however, the guillotine--modeled, Bourgeois says, on an old easel--"is not cut out to do the job."¹¹¹ The instability of a guillotine on wheels, trailing a string that might be used to release the lethal blade, or, alternatively, to drag the device across the floor like a child's push-toy, evokes the comic-sadistic exaggeration of infantile fantasy (as does the accompanying parable of the man who, waving to his friend from the elevator "was laughing so much that he stuck his head out and the ceiling cut it off").

The modeling of the guillotine on an easel also suggests a link to the Large Glass--a playful echo of Duchamp's move, registered in that work, to break out of the illusionistic space of painting and into the three-dimensional space of objects. For if 1947 marks the year Bourgeois turned irreversibly to sculpture (her first Personages being three-dimensional projections of the structures figured in He Disappeared into Complete Silence), this refitting of her easel as a guillotine, or cutting machine, might be interpreted as a wry announcement of that shift from image to object, from engraving to "real cutting."

3. Flood

Punctuating the burgeoning complexity and increasing

¹¹¹ Ibid.

agitation of the portfolio with a kind of caesura, plate six (fig. 2.17), interposed between the guillotine and "the blasting," reinstates the stasis and isolation of closed structures in which aggression is sealed off or quarantined. Recapitulating the format of plate three, the arrangement of three windowless towers, plate six shows a trio of structures, two posed precariously on narrow stilts, captioned by the phrase "Leprosarium, Louisiana." Within a Kleinian-based reading--one, that is, in which the sequence of plates is understood not as a narrative progression, but as a nonlinear interplay of positions--this break in the momentum of the booklet's plates toward the violent climax of plate seven signifies in its extremity of self-isolation the struggle to suppress aggression.

Following the machinic blasting of plate seven, explosively breaking the spell of self-immural, the final two scenes of the portfolio enact the aftermath of that sadistic display as a succession of elevated and depressed states. According to Klein, fantasies of sadistic violence give rise first to release and exhilaration, and then to guilt and abject despair, as the objects damaged in fantasy are feared to be actually destroyed. The juxtaposition of the final two plates of the portfolio similarly displays an abrupt passage from the high of elation to the low of depression.

Plate eight (fig. 2.19) shows a room with a single open

window, and four ladders suspended from the ceiling. Opening a connection between the immured space of the subject and the outside world, the window finds its bodily corollary in the text's account of a strange surgical operation, the boring of a passage into the skull:

Once an American man who
had been in the army for three
years became sick in one ear.

His middle ear became
almost hard.

Through the bone of the
skull back of the said ear a
passage was bored.

From then on he heard the
voice of his friend twice,
first in a high pitch and then
in a low pitch.

Later on the middle ear
grew completely hard and he
became cut off from part of
the world.

The delicacy of the link between self and other, figured in the story by the intricacy of the communicating channel, is displayed in the image itself by the upside-down orientation of the quartet of ladders that, shown as in a camera obscura, seem to float in a nongravitational field. If, therefore, this scene stages a release from "the trapping problem,"¹¹² reimagining the setup of plate four (in which the interior space of a room contains a raging fire), deliverance is made an ambivalent condition. Like the veteran who hears the voice of his friend twice (and like

¹¹² Bourgeois describes this plate as a "resolving of the trapping problem." Ibid., p. 92.

the subject of language), the subject of this space is positioned within a structure that is both communicating and entrapping.

If plate eight effects a reprieve from "the trapping problem," plate nine (fig. 2.20) enacts the inevitable resurgence of loss and despair. Scarred by deep tracks running down the plate, as if to cancel it, plate nine is a narrow, elongated frame that compresses a row of three structures, resembling the towers depicted in plate three, but radically flattened. Set side-by-side on the bottom edge of the frame, the frontal, windowless towers, crowned with skyscraper-like finials, are formed by a welter of lines, a denser concentration of the same deep marks that scar the plate (fig. 2.22). The bowing gesture of the middle building reinforces the downward thrust of the image, giving the effect of a collapse, while beyond the towers, waves of horizontal lines--suggesting, as Bourgeois says, a rising river--replace the electrical lines tautly stretched across the upper register of plate seven, the blasting. And the stark repetition of lines pushed or dragged across the surface of the plate stands in marked contrast to the intricate articulation of moving parts in plate seven, the latter corresponding to what Klein calls the "over-activity" of mania.

This displacement from the charged atmosphere of hyperkinesis suggested by flows of electrical current, to

the evocations of loss and collapse in the driving rain and surging river, produces what in Kleinian terms can be understood as an enactment of the depressive position, the despair of having destroyed one's most loved and most vulnerable objects.¹¹³ As Bourgeois explains it, the flood evokes the "guilt and depression" that come "after losing control."¹¹⁴

Overwhelmed with guilt about the damage done to the object in fantasy, the subject in the depressive position sinks into desolation; feeling itself completely alone, it drowns in the blankness and darkness of mourning, the scenario that closes He Disappeared into Complete Silence:

Once there was the mother
of a son. She loved him with
a complete devotion.

And she protected him
because she knew how sad and
wicked this world is.

He was of a quiet nature
and rather intelligent but he
was not interested in being
loved or protected because he
was interested in something
else.

Consequently at an early
age he slammed the door and
never came back.

Later on she died but he
did not know it.

¹¹³ The self-perpetuating paranoid anxiety that defines infantile existence in the Kleinian model is evoked by Bourgeois in her interpretation of the violent conflict in plate seven that, as she says, "turns out badly": "Every time you break things, you dig your own grave; you always lose ground." Quoted in Wye and Smith, Prints, p. 89.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 95.

Figures Who Talk to Each Other
Without Seeing Each Other

Bourgeois has related two accounts of the reception accorded her first sculptural works by her friend Marcel Duchamp. By one account, he dropped by one afternoon with Pierre Matisse and proclaimed the works he saw there "extraordinary."¹¹⁵ By the other, upon seeing the sculptures set up in the Peridot Gallery where they were first shown, he declared, "Louise, I don't know what in the heavens you are doing!"¹¹⁶ In either case, if the opinion rendered held great significance for the artist, this is not surprising, for the Personages were works that had much to do with Duchamp: indeed, as Krauss has suggested, "another name" for the anonymous figures in the Large Glass could be "figures who talk to each other without seeing each other,"

¹¹⁵ "The 1949 exhibition was brought about by Arthur Drexler, who at the time was a poet, and who subsequently became the historian of architecture at MoMA. I recall the name of Arthur Drexler with gratitude, for he was the first to discover me. He came to my house, viewed all of the works, and, as Peridot's advisor, said, 'We're going to show all of this.' Now obviously I was French. I belonged to a certain milieu. Pierre Matisse and Duchamp came by and said, 'This is extraordinary.' I told them it was simply a manifestation of 'homesickness.' They looked at each other and understood, that's all there was to it." Quoted in Alain Kirili, "The Passion for Sculpture: A Conversation with Louise Bourgeois," Arts, vol. 63, no. 7 (March 1989), p. 70.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Marcia Pels, "A Search for Gravity," Art International, vol. 23 (October 1979), p. 54. Citing this recollection, Ann Gibson remarks, "Duchamp's exasperation could only have reinforced Bourgeois's feeling that rejection would be generic to women and inevitable." Gibson, "Louise Bourgeois's Retroactive Politics of Gender," p. 47.

the name Bourgeois gave to a work that was included in her second exhibition of *Personages*, mounted at the same gallery in the following year.¹¹⁷

A striking feature of Bourgeois's debut exhibition of sculptures was its installation. The pieces were set directly on the floor, without bases, and installed in specific relation to the space of the gallery, or, as Bourgeois put it, "instead of displaying pieces the space became part of the piece."¹¹⁸ Dispersed throughout the room, some figures were placed in corners, others flat against the wall. Clustered in pairs or knots, or isolated, the works' arrangement conveyed the sense of a social space. Bourgeois has said that she adapted this configuration, given that "the gallery would not have permitted" her to place the *Personages* "in a closet which is in effect the way they were conceived."¹¹⁹ Produced in relation to "a claustrophobic space such as the top of the stairs under the roof," where they had been stored in Bourgeois's building, these works therefore were not intended to occupy the idealized, discrete viewing space of the gallery, but to

¹¹⁷ Krauss, "Portrait of the Artist as Fillette."

¹¹⁸ Bloch, "Interview with Louise Bourgeois," p. 372. With regard to her decision to present the works without bases, Bourgeois explained to Bloch: "Peridot worried about his floors. I explained that these pieces had to come without any kind of bases, coming directly to the floor on one point."

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 373.

operate in a social space: within the installation, she says, visitors moved "within an integrated work rather than around or between isolated works; you moved within the social space of the figures themselves."¹²⁰

This notion of the sculptural figures as articulating a social field in relation to which the viewer also moves and by which she or he is physically encompassed--"the space bec[o]me part of the piece"--echoes the viewing conditions Duchamp established for the Large Glass. A field of glass that viewers can look through to see one another even as they look at it to see the figures trapped inside, the Large Glass captures the viewer's body within its logic. And it is this possibility of collapsing the distinction between the inside and the outside of the work, between object and viewer, and between gallery space and social space, that Bourgeois also investigated in the installation of the Personages: "The privileged space has certain characteristics. It is closed and exactly defined and belongs to the artist. . . . The spectator is no longer merely a viewer if he is able to move from the stage of viewing to the stage of collaborating."¹²¹

This sense of enlisting the viewer in the articulation of a social field was intensified by the Personages' evocation of subjects. Bearing titles like Portrait of

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 372.

C.Y., Observer (fig. 2.23) and Attentive Figures (now The Listening One, fig. 2.24), the pieces, most of which were between five and six feet tall and fashioned from single pieces of wood--simply carved posts, beams, and planks--stood for people.¹²² Painted black, white, or red, the tapered posts were poised tentatively on the ground, many of them listing to one side or appearing so attenuated as to require the backing of the wall for support. Reviewers at the time noted the attempt "to express a conception of human relationships as well as of spatial relations," comparing the configuration to a "labyrinth" and a "skyscraper world," a world, that is, in which the architectural structures of He Disappeared into Complete Silence were, as one reviewer aptly put it, "projected from the floor."¹²³

The Personages not only reprised the engravings' narrow towers and listing stances but were articulated with grooves and slots, incised lines and nailed-on parts, operations that also recalled the techniques used to produce the portfolio's plates. One work, Portrait of Jean-Louis (a portrait of Bourgeois's young son) took the form of a

¹²² Bourgeois has given this account of the Personages series: "These extremely reduced forms, although apparently abstract because they were uncomplicated, were conceived of and functioned as figures, each given a personality by its shape and articulation, and responding to one another. They were life-size in a real space and made to be seen in groups." Quoted in Strick, Personages, p. 8.

¹²³ R.G., exhibition review, Peridot Gallery, Art News, vol. 49, no. 6 (October 1950), p. 48.

skyscraper set onto stilt-like legs, the upper part punctuated by a grid of little squarish window slots, gouged out with a punch, and a doorway framed by a ragged arabesque (fig. 2.25). The figure comes to a phallic peak crowned with a network of incised lines, while, tapering to points, the spindly props give it an unstable footing. This figure was placed beside a work entitled Tomb of a Young Person, an upright plank of wood from which two sharpened pegs are suspended by nails (fig. 2.26).¹²⁴ The dangling spindles of wood, reproducing the fragile supports of Portrait of Jean-Louis, bound the two figures together in a kind of joint isolation strongly reminiscent of the pairings in He Disappeared into Complete Silence, and of its second plate in particular, where two towers placed side-by-side are captioned by the phrase "The solitary death of the Woolworth building."

This emphasis on the staging of the figures in a space that is both phantasmatic ("a reconstruction of the past") and material (requiring "the six sides of the cube") clearly implicates both Surrealism and Duchamp in its construction. At the time, however, critics read the Personages not in relation to Surrealism's projection of the unconscious or to the Large Glass, and its collapse of the aesthetic into the register of the social, but rather in relation to

¹²⁴ Installation photograph, reproduced in Wye, Louise Bourgeois, plate 41, p. 55.

primitivism and abstraction: the totemic structures of New York School sculpture and the radical simplification of bodily form in biomorphic abstraction. One critic, for example, described the works as "superficially reminiscent of African and Oceanic fetishes," while also noting qualities of abstraction in the reduction of the human form to "elemental terms."¹²⁵ The second series of Personages, exhibited the following year, elicited suggestions of "a primitive mood . . . and a disturbed spirit at work"¹²⁶ and, from another critic, of "a totemistic aspect," the figures appearing "ready for use in some primitive rite."¹²⁷ It is not difficult to detect in these early reviews echoes of a contemporary critical discourse centering on primitivism, primordial mythologies, and the like. And the explicit invocation of elements of African tribal architecture in the carved post and post-and-lintel constructions of the Personages lends support to such a reading.

The staging of the second group of Personages in 1950 seemed, however, to call this interpretation into question. For this time, the status of the figures as subjects was subsumed in the anonymity of a roll call of figure types:

¹²⁵ M. G., exhibition review, Peridot Gallery, Art News, vol. 48, no. 6 (October 1949), p. 46.

¹²⁶ R.G., Art News, p. 48.

¹²⁷ P[esella] L[evy], exhibition review, Peridot Gallery, Art Digest, vol. 25 (October 1, 1950), p. 16.

Figure qui apporte du pain (Figure who brings bread), Figure qui s'appuie contre une porte (Figure leaning against a door), Figure qui entre dans une pièce (Figure entering a room), and Figures qui se parlent sans se voir (Figures who talk to each other without seeing each other). Moreover, while the titles of the first group had been given in English, and alluded to "New York City" and to Manhattan addresses like "Irving Place," the titles of the second series were in French, suggesting, perhaps, a repositioning of the Personages away from their affiliation with the New York School and a toward a connection to Duchamp and the Large Glass, comprising its own index of types--postman, waiter, carriage driver, and so on.

Or perhaps it was a connection to Surrealism in its New York School reception Bourgeois sought to mitigate, paradoxically, by this move back to French titles, and the uninflected repetition of the phrase "figure qui," "figure who." For the often-noted embrace of Surrealism in the works of sculptors like David Hare, Seymour Lipton, Isamu Noguchi, and David Smith during this period is a development from which Bourgeois may have wished to dissociate her own production, structured as it was in terms of a rebuttal to Surrealism. When, for example, in a 1946 review Clement Greenberg declared the work of David Hare (a friend of Bourgeois's and Goldwater's and an intimate of the Surrealist circle) to be "the most intensely surrealist art

I have ever seen," the suggestion might even then have seemed to be setting in motion a critical mechanism by which contemporary American sculpture would be seen as Surrealist-derived (whether for good, or, in Greenberg's assessment, decidedly for ill). And Bourgeois may have preferred to assert her own Parisian origins rather than hazard being swept up in the tide of Surrealism's next wave.

Surrealism in America

Greenberg's response to the Surrealist turn in American sculpture was famously aggressive; he warned against it. In 1946, he agonized over a change in the work of David Smith: "Gone is the 'geometricity.' . . . Everything coils back upon itself or else explodes into rococo elaboration. No real unity of style governs here . . . the elements are disparate."¹²⁸ Hare's work, too, suffered from "its diversity, its lack of a consistent plastic bias."¹²⁹ But by the following year, 1947, Greenberg could announce that the tide had been turned: "The baroque exuberance and invention that disrupted Smith's style in 1944 and 1945 has in this latest work been assimilated into a new unity of

¹²⁸ Clement Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Hyman Bloom, David Smith, and Robert Motherwell," The Nation, January 26, 1946; reprinted in Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 2, "Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949" (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 54.

¹²⁹ Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of David Hare," The Nation, February 9, 1946; reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 56.

style that moves again with that 'classical' sparseness and speed which is so indispensable to the new linear, pictorial sculpture of our time."¹³⁰ "Still somewhat prone to the self-indulgence and whimsy of surrealism to channel his powers into a style," Hare too could nevertheless be placed in the "forefront of what now begins to seem, not a renaissance, but a naissance of sculpture in America: sculpture that in its methods and very utensils no less than in its conceptions . . . attaches itself more intimately to industrialism than any other form of art now being practiced."¹³¹ And by 1949, with Surrealism seemingly vanquished as a force in American sculpture, Greenberg could write in praise of the young American "sculptor-constructors": David Smith, Theodore Roszak, David Hare, Herbert Ferber, Seymour Lipton, Richard Lippold, Peter Grippe, Burgoyne Diller, Adaline Kent, Ibram Lassaw, and Isamu Noguchi.¹³² The terms of the new sculpture-construction, which Greenberg went so far as to call "perhaps the most important manifestation of the visual arts

¹³⁰ Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of David Smith, David Hare, and Mirko," The Nation, April 19, 1947; reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 140-41.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹³² Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," Partisan Review (June 1949), reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 319. In Robert Goldwater's account, Bourgeois's wooden figures served as "an influential counter-statement to the methodology of welded metal" around 1950. A Dictionary of Modern Sculpture, ed. Robert Maillard (London: Methuen & Co., 1960), p. 32.

since cubist painting," were linear, pictorial, and solidly Cubist-based.¹³³

Bourgeois, of course, was not a sculptor-constructor; the logic of a "reconstruction of the past," staging figures in a phantasmatic-social space, could not have been further from the formalist imperative asserted by Greenberg. Indeed, Bourgeois's work would in time be subject to precisely the critique Greenberg made of Hare in 1946, regretting "its diversity, its lack of a unifying formal principle, of a consistent plastic bias."¹³⁴ (And it would similarly be susceptible to the description Goldwater offered of Hare's work a decade later as operating outside "a closed and self-sufficient system.")¹³⁵ If, however, in 1949 and 1950, Bourgeois's Personages resisted inscription in the most powerful critical framework of its time, formalism, this body of work was later to be recuperated in a very different art-historical assessment, offered by Wayne Andersen, and echoed by William Rubin. For in Andersen's view, "What unified the best American sculpture was its Surrealist bent in the forties":

¹³³ Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," p. 319.

¹³⁴ Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of David Hare," p. 56.

¹³⁵ Robert Goldwater, "David Hare," in Eugene Goossen, Robert Goldwater, and Irving Sandler, Three American Sculptors: Ferber, Hare, Lassaw (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 28.

Calder continued to remind us of Miró and Arp; Smith held to the Surrealistic mode of Picasso and Gonzalez; Noguchi was looking to Tanguy; Hare was close to Breton and the style of Matta; Roszak had resumed the style found in his earlier paintings, which had been inspired by de Chirico; both Lipton's and Ferber's work was aggressively Surrealistic.¹³⁶

In this account of American sculpture at the time of Bourgeois's sculptural debut, Surrealism catalyzed a diversity of approaches "only disconcerting to those whose historical orientation demands stylistic grouping and continuity," and her early work is recognized, together with that of Hare and Lippold, as a significant contribution to Surrealist-based sculpture in the late 1940s.¹³⁷

When, therefore, Bourgeois's work was belatedly written into the history of this period, it was in the context of the American reception of Surrealism, as Rubin noted in the foreword to the catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art's 1982 retrospective: "As a Frenchwoman who emigrated to America in the late thirties, she knew the language of Surrealism well enough to perceive that, in sculpture, it had far from exploited its possibilities."¹³⁸ For Rubin, Surrealism's great champion, the movement's preoccupations were painterly, not sculptural. Indeed, he is strikingly unconcerned with radical shifts in sculptural practice

¹³⁶ Wayne Andersen, "American Sculpture," p. 63.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Rubin, foreword to Wye, Louise Bourgeois, p. 11.

articulated by Arp and, in particular, Giacometti--moves, like the reorientation of the object on the horizontal, that would serve as the basis of Bourgeois's reworking of Surrealism.¹³⁹ Like that of a number of other sculptors, including David Smith, Seymour Lipton, and Herbert Ferber, Bourgeois's work in this analysis is seen to fill in an underdeveloped category of Surrealist production: "The organic, biomorphic language of the abstract side of Surrealist art wants to be three-dimensional, wants materials of more organic allusiveness than paint. Louise Bourgeois understood this, and picked up where certain veins of Surrealist art had left off, rendering certain of its ideas viable in a new way."¹⁴⁰ Characterized, according to Rubin, by an "inherent conservatism" that "has proved . . . congenial to the continued growth of smaller talents" such as hers, Bourgeois's oeuvre is, for Rubin, an extension of Surrealist practice, and like the work of other American artists formed by Surrealism, her oeuvre is understood to comprise an iconography of biomorphic forms "natural to sculpture."¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Rubin credits Bourgeois, together with Smith, Ferber, and Lipton with "pushing beyond the accomplishments of Arp and early Giacometti under the impetus of what was then known as Picasso's sculpture." Rubin, "Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," p. 17.

¹⁴⁰ Rubin, foreword to Wye, Louise Bourgeois, p. 11.

¹⁴¹ Rubin, "Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," pp. 18, 17.

So neither in Greenberg's formalist attack on Surrealism, nor in Rubin's subsequent defense of it, is a space opened for the project Bourgeois would undertake with her turn to sculpture: neither to disavow nor to fill in the gaps of Surrealist production, but to rework it in feminist terms, as a critique of the patriarchal construction of gender. But as I will hope to show, whereas Rubin understands Surrealist sculptural production as a weak term, the elaboration of which is properly suited to the secondary ambitions of a generation of American sculptors overshadowed by their painter counterparts, Bourgeois saw Surrealist practice as sufficiently strong both to repeat and to resist: to repeat in order to resist. For her, Surrealism offered not an "iconography natural to sculpture," but a radical inversion of sculptural logic through which to trouble the construction of nature, or at least of such naturalized terms as sex and gender.

Sleeping Figure

The terms of this feminist reworking of Surrealism were broached in the second Peridot exhibition. For here not only were the now-generic titles given in French, reducing the characters of the first series to Duchampian types, but the body was reduced to part-object, prefiguring the collapse of gender that would come to define Bourgeois's oeuvre. In perhaps the best-known work from this series,

Figure endormie (Sleeping Figure), purchased by Alfred Barr in 1951 for the Museum of Modern Art, this erosion of gender binarism is explicitly cast as an impending collapse onto the horizontal (fig. 2.27).

An attenuated figure, painted black, with legs tapering to points, the piece is trussed on either side by tall, moveable poles, propped up by the crutch-like supports of an external scaffolding. Encased in a long dress-like garment, it is crowned by a distinctly phallic, cleft head, drilled into the top of which is a small hole. Both female and phallic, a sleeping figure propped up in an erect pose, the work erodes distinctions of horizontal and vertical, as of female and male. And it figures the collapse of these terms in the instability of what might be called simply the figure--the vertically oriented body arising from a horizontal field.

If Bourgeois's work of the sixties and seventies will spread out, hang from the ceiling, flop on the floor, be stretched out on a table or worn on the body, Figure endormie announces this impending collapse of the erect figure and the gender hierarchy it embodies precisely as a recasting of Surrealist practice.¹⁴² The placement of the

¹⁴² In addition to the sculptural operations I will consider below, there are of course formal resemblances to Surrealist production: the similarity of a work such as the one now entitled The Listening One to Giacometti's The Couple of 1926, or to Ernst's Lunar Asparagus of 1935 (shown at the Museum of Modern Art in an exhibition from the collection in July 1946), and the repetition of Giacometti's

Personages directly on the ground, without bases, clearly must be read in relation to Giacometti's invention of this practice in the 1930s, displacing the object from an aesthetic plane to the extra-aesthetic register of the table and the floor, and then making the object itself coextensive with the base, or all base. The installation of the Personages so as to articulate a social space coextensive with that of the viewers reinforces this connection. And Giacometti's reorientation of the figure from the vertical to the horizontal, as in such works as Disagreeable Object or Woman with her Throat Cut, is a move reenacted throughout Bourgeois's production, anticipated in the extreme attenuation of the Personages series as a whole and particularly in the trussing and bolstering of the precarious Figure endormie.¹⁴³

In a reading of the gender politics of this work, Ann

Spoon Woman (1926) in Bourgeois's Personage of the same name are obvious examples. Laurie Wilson has suggested that both Bourgeois and Louise Nevelson developed their vertical totemic sculptures in relation to Surrealist works. Wilson, Louise Nevelson, p. 202.

¹⁴³ Giacometti's The Palace at 4 A.M., Woman with Her Throat Cut, and Hands Holding the Void were included in the retrospective mounted at Pierre Matisse Gallery in January 1948, with a catalogue essay by Sartre. Wilson argues that Giacometti's new works, the attenuated figures, served as the "catalytic force which quickened the pace of the latent totemic current in American sculpture," influencing the work of Bourgeois and Nevelson among others. (Wilson, Louise Nevelson, pp. 203-204.) My argument here is that the address of Bourgeois's personages is specifically to Giacometti's earlier Surrealist works and their logic of horizontality.

Gibson has recently suggested that this condition of instability has an autobiographical basis in Bourgeois's situation as a French émigré and female artist, doubly alienated from the New York art world of the 1940s.¹⁴⁴ Analyzing Figure endormie as an appropriation of the phallus, attached to a figure of contingency and precariousness, Gibson interprets it in relation to Bourgeois's marginal art-world position: "If Sleeping Figure's phallic form is Bourgeois's appropriation of the power of the phallus, it is then disempowered by its being rendered as erect yet unstable and as contingent as she felt as an outsider in this country."¹⁴⁵

While Gibson's analysis of this work as engaged by a gender politics is clearly important, I would suggest that the specific framework through which that politics is articulated is Surrealism (by which I mean both Surrealist sculptural production and Bourgeois's negative transference to the Surrealist fathers). This is not to say that the alienation Bourgeois experienced as an outsider and as a female artist in an oppressively masculinist cultural and professional context were not powerfully registered in her work. But Gibson's own reading of Figure endormie opens onto the possibility that in the terms of Surrealist

¹⁴⁴ Gibson, "Louise Bourgeois: Retroactive Politics of Gender."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

sculptural production Bourgeois found a logic through which to resist this alienation, a logic of rebuttal. For if Figure endormie stages the impending collapse of the phallus, it does so not only to disempower the female figure (or subject) who appropriates it, as Gibson proposes, but to render the phallus itself "unstable" and "contingent." That is, Figure endormie is as much a figure of phallic authority destabilized as it is a figure of female subjection to that authority.

The logic by which Figure endormie renders the phallus unstable and contingent is based in the desublimatory operation of the part-object. For in a double move, the precariousness of the phallus (as a figure of patriarchal authority) is linked to the literalness of its rendering (as penis). The fragility of the figure's posture, its threatened slide onto the horizontal, is a function of, in Alfred Elsen's phrase, the "distinguishing feature" that resists sublimation.¹⁴⁶ And the device by which this collapse is simultaneously figured and thwarted, the crutch-like armature, resembles a structure deployed by Giacometti, the trussing that supports the figure in The Invisible Object (1934) or that in other works takes the form of a

¹⁴⁶ In Elsen's canonical account of the development of modern sculpture, "the distinguishing features of specific bodily parts" are what the sublimatory process of abstraction seeks to eliminate. Elsen, "Notes on the Partial Figure," p. 41. For a discussion of Elsen's argument and its relation to Bourgeois's production, see chapter one.

scaffolding or cage.

In later works such as Fillette (1968) or the contemporaneous series of Januses, this instability of the phallus is enacted in the suspension of the phallus from a cord hung from the ceiling, a device that also recalls early works by Giacometti, Suspended Ball (1930-31) in particular. Figure endormie displays instead an erosion of the figure from below, an undermining of the erect posture of the body that threatens to precipitate its collapse. In other works from this second group of Personages, it is not the verticality of the body that threatens to give way, but its hierarchical structure. A work now called Breasted Woman, for example, consists in a carved post articulated by the stacking of swelling pendulous breasts (fig. 2.28). More elaborately carved than the works included in the 1949 show, Breasted Woman and a related work now entitled Spring invoke a part-object logic of repetition and reduction, in which the integrity of the figure is disrupted by a phantasmatic multiplication of parts. Like Figure endormie, these works enact the instability of the body, its susceptibility to phantasmatic projection, or, in Bourgeois's phrase, its inscription within fantastic reality.

Quarantania

Its imminent collapse foretold in the very rigidity of its vertical stance, Figure endormie threatens to slide from

the vertical posture of the figure and into a horizontal field that in 1950 could only be imagined in terms of Surrealism, of Giacometti. But a decade intervened before the unstable grounding of the Personages gave way to horizontality itself, the body transformed from upright figure to part-object. It was a decade in which the figure was held together by an insistent verticality.

In his 1969 book, What Is Modern Sculpture? Robert Goldwater used Bourgeois's Quarantania, I (1947-53, fig. 2.29) to demonstrate the principle of sculptural assemblage, the method deployed "at its most literal": "Each of its wooden elements, painted white or blue, is a separate unit anchored in a base that serves as common ground for a concentrated gathering of carved abstract shapes."¹⁴⁷ A cluster of five Personages collected on a stage-like platform, Quarantania, I recapitulates the first decade of Bourgeois's sculptural production. At the center of the group is Woman with Packages, a work from her debut exhibition, surrounded by four variations of the Shuttle Woman. The circle leans in around its central figure, precariously balanced on its tapered end and encumbered by the three low-slung sacs, their pendant shapes endlessly repeated in Bourgeois's production to designate what we could describe in Kleinian terms as "object."

For this recurrent morphology of a rounded, elongated,

¹⁴⁷ Goldwater, What Is Modern Sculpture? p. 97.

club-like or sac-like form (which may be, as in the *Personages*, balanced on its end, or, in later works, inverted and suspended from above) operates as an object of phantasmatic projection. In the early works, it constitutes the personage--a term to encapsulate subject and object. In the case of Woman with Packages, or Persistent Antagonism (ca. 1949-50, fig. 2.30), in which wooden batons threaded on a wire are hung on the figure like a necklace, a single work combines the form in upright (subject) and suspended (object) positions. And in later works, this form, often rotated onto the horizontal, is reduced to part-object--to, for example, the conflated breast-penis of Trani Episode (1971-72)--and deployed in a graphically corporeal logic. This reduction to part-object, however, was preceded in the 1950s by what might be thought of as a part-to-part logic, produced through the repetitive procedures of stacking and clustering.

If, then, Quarantania, I described a social space through the assembling of figures, reprising the logic of the two installations of *Personages*, and if Woman with Packages occupied a central position within that space to embody some notion of object relations--of the figure as positioned by its phantasmatic projections--then Bourgeois's work of the 1950s enacted the breakdown of the figure itself into objects. That is, the recognizability of the figure as figure was effaced, an effect of two principal events: a

vertical fracturing by which the hierarchical integrity of the figure was compromised, and, alternatively, a horizontal clustering of parts by which the figure's discreteness was eroded.

One and Others, a work of 1955 (fig. 2.31), restates the principal of "assemblage" articulated in Quarantania, I: an assembly of the same tusk-like objects, tapered at both ends, some painted with the striped or stippled patterns frequently seen in Bourgeois's drawings, is clustered on a platform. Here, however, the figures are tightly compressed, the distance between them, as Bourgeois says, "reduced to zero."¹⁴⁸ As one critic observed in 1953, of the twenty elements massed together in a related work entitled Forêt [^] (Night Garden), "they have no reference to the usual sculpture of forms in open space, at some distance from each other."¹⁴⁹ Reworking the formulation Figures Who Talk to Each Other without Seeing Each Other as an elision of perspective that makes it impossible for figures to "see each other," or to be recognized as figures, One and Others collapses the intervals of space that distinguish one from others, figure from ground. Thus while the vertical orientation of "figure" is preserved, even insistently repeated, it is simultaneously undercut by the extreme

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Storr, "Intimate Geographies," p. E-2.

¹⁴⁹ S[idney] G[eist], "Louise Bourgeois," Art News, vol. 27, no. 13 (April 1, 1953), p. 17.

density of the field.

It is impossible not to see in a work like One and Others an inversion of the empty, skyscraper world of He Disappeared into Complete Silence, the alienated self-enclosure of isolated towers become the industrial city's "lonely crowd," its population "held together by its separation," as a reviewer observed of Bourgeois's compressed scenes.¹⁵⁰ But if One and Others imagined urban alienation in terms of a depersonalizing compression, it also imagined the breakdown of the body itself into a system of "one and others," its schizoid fracturing. In another series Bourgeois undertook in the 1950s, this condition is produced not by the horizontal clustering of subfigural elements, but by the random, vertical stacking of fragments, threaded onto skeletal poles.

In these works, most called Figure (a variant group is entitled Spiral Women), wood scraps of diverse size and shape--wedges, blocks, shims, arcs, and carved, bone-like pieces--are swiveled on the axis of a metal rod (figs. 2.32-2.35). The nonhierarchical, part-to-part logic of this stacking procedure roughly corresponds to that of a list: items can be added or subtracted from either end of the rod, the bottom of which is planted in a block of wood and the top of which is fitted with a removable finial of plaster, wood, or wax. Their provisional structure accentuated by

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

the range of objects compiled in them, these pieces have been subject to a continual reworking that, in the case of those remaining in the artist's studio, continues to the present day.

The instability of these Figures, produced by the mobility of the parts and by their often-disjunctive concatenations--as when long spears stick out menacingly from the spine--invokes a decidedly counter-formalist logic. The antithesis of Greenberg's sculpture-construction, the "new unity of style that moves again with that 'classical' spareness and speed which is so indispensable to the new linear, pictorial sculpture of our time," this compulsive "listing" of wood shims and plaster pods situates itself not in the register of the pictorial image, but of the corporeal object. It is a logic of construction that emphasizes not the economy of the Gestalt, but an obsessional excess; not speed, but an interminable repetition; not unity, but a boggling heterogeneity.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ In a formalist reading of these works, Jeremy Strick has argued that the stacked figures "were significantly more abstract" than the earlier Personages, suggesting the human figure "only by means of their verticality." In this analysis, the splintering of the figure into a heterogeneous array of pieces, "call[ing] to mind the broken shards of cubist space ... represent[s] a rethinking of cubism and constructivism." (Strick, Personages, pp. 26-27) Aligning Bourgeois's production with Greenberg's assertion that "the new sculpture . . . begins with Braque's and Picasso's cubist collages, springing up out of a mode of painting that thrusts forms outward from the picture plane instead of drawing them back into the recessions of illusionary space," Strick understands the fracture of the Personages into segmented poles as a move

One way of describing this counter-formalist logic of construction is as an enactment of object relations.¹⁵²

For the process of the figures' construction, a repetitive

away from figuration, released, as Greenberg would have it, "from the requirements of imitative representation": "Pieces of wood, they suggest nothing. . . They do not cohere into an image, but rather add to an abstract form. Even if that form suggests a figure, that suggestion is not a matter of illusion or resemblance." (Strick, p. 27; Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," p. 317.) Even David Smith, the contemporary sculptor Greenberg most admired (one of the few in whom he had not become disillusioned by the mid 1950s) takes a more figural approach, according to Strick: "Unlike, for example, the Tanktotem sculptures of David Smith, wherein abstract elements take on a figurative function by reason of their placement in relation to one another, a different placement of the segments of Untitled along the vertical axis would not alter their figurative reference (or lack of reference)" (p. 27).

My contention is that the structure of the stacked figures, like that of the contemporaneous clustered ones, cannot usefully be analyzed in relation to the opposition figurative/abstract, for the breakdown of the figure staged in these works is not a function of abstraction (with its implications of sublimation and decorporealization), but, on the contrary, of a displacement of the body from the vertical axis of the figure and the phallus to the horizontal axis of the infantile drives.

¹⁵² While the object-relations-based analysis I will offer here makes no claim for Bourgeois's knowledge of Kleinian theory during this period and does not suggest psychoanalytic theory as a source for her work, it is nevertheless useful to note that in a statement of 1954 she discusses her sculptural production in terms of "object relations," as "groups of objects relating to each other": "My work grows from the duel between the isolated individual and the shared awareness of the group. At first I made single figures without any freedom at all; blind houses without any openings, any relation to the outside world. Later, tiny windows started to appear. And then I began to develop an interest in the relationship between two figures. The figures of this phase are turned in on themselves, but they try to be together even though they may not succeed in reaching each other . . . and now I see my works as group of objects relating to each other." Statement quoted in Krasne, "Ten Artists in the Margin," p. 18.

cutting and stacking of disparate fragments, demands to be read as an enactment or acting out, and the works themselves as the material deposit of this compulsive action.

Moreover, the very instability of the works, and the ongoing rearrangement of the stacks, suggests a structure in flux, operating at the level of fantasy.

In the context of a Kleinian-based reading, the alternation between cutting and stacking, or piecing together, can be seen as reproducing the dynamic described by Klein as a relay between fantasies of aggression and reconstruction. For in the Kleinian world, aggression toward one's objects is haunted by guilt and the compulsion to restore, so that when the ego perceives the damage done to its objects (in fantasy), it attempts to repair them, to piece the fragments together (phantasmatically). In this account, the anxieties that arise when the ego "finds itself confronted with the psychical fact that its loved objects are . . . in bits" are explicitly anxieties of mending: "there is anxiety how to put the bits together . . . how to pick out the good bits and do away with the bad ones . . . and there is the anxiety of being interfered with in this task by bad objects and by one's own hatred."¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Klein, "Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," p. 124. In this connection, it is useful to consider Bourgeois's frequent allusions to an interplay of destructive and reparative operations in her sculpture, of which this one is typical: "You hack away, which is aggressive, and then you polish what you have made, oil it and take care of it for thirty years. That is a nurturing."

Encapsulating the fracture of the object into pieces and its restoration through the organizing device of the vertical pole, Bourgeois's stacked figures stage this object-relations problem of reparation via a part-to-part logic of construction, sorting through the bits and finding a way to fit them together.

Stacking up disparate pieces that never add up to a seamless whole, this method of production wards off the formalist dream of a pictorial unity in sculpture. And for Bourgeois, who claims to have abandoned painting precisely because she was not satisfied with its level of reality, who sought deeper things in three dimensions, we can imagine that to shatter this dream of the sculptural gestalt was a compelling ambition. At one level, then, the stacked figures resist the pictorialization of sculpture--with its implications, at least in Greenberg's description, of sublimatory, dematerialized, industrial-antiseptic design--by insisting precisely upon the homeliness of discarded materials and home-made fabrication.

At another level, however, the logic of the stacked figures can be seen to perform a kind of object-relations analysis of formalism itself. For in Kleinian terms, the picture (as distinguished from the object) is an image of

Working oscillates from extreme aggression to repair and a need for pardoning. It is the same with putting things together that have been broken or separated. Quoted in Storr, interview, Galleries, p. 102.

perfection, a device that serves to "disprove the idea of [the object's] disintegration."¹⁵⁴ And the desire for perfection, the desire that produces the picture, "is rooted in the depressive anxiety of disintegration, which is thus of great importance in all sublimations."¹⁵⁵ Within the object-relations framework, in which the picture both protects and perfects the "real object" by reducing it to image ("a picture . . . only"¹⁵⁶), the interplay of cutting and piecing together through which the stacked figures are produced in effect restages this "anxiety of disintegration" as a logic of shifting positions, an alternation between destructive and reparative actions.

If it is possible to say that the stacked figures comprise a kind of desublimatory reading of the pictorial turn in American sculpture during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and if this counter-formalist logic can be understood, via the model of Kleinian object relations, as an assertion of the corporeal object against the pictorial image, then this is a decidedly retrospective analysis of this phase of Bourgeois's production. It is, in other words, a reading grounded in the decades of work that followed--in the figure's collapse into a circling, liquid

¹⁵⁴ Klein, "Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," p. 125.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

field, a "soft landscape," a "lair," an "end of softness." For in the 1960s, Bourgeois's work would stage a dissolution of the vertical figure into a horizontal field (in, for example, such works as Lair [ca. 1962-63], Spiral/Summer [1960], Rondeau for L. [1963], and Amoeba [ca. 1963-65]), a move to be followed, slightly later, by the deliquescence of the body into the viscosity of organs (as in Soft Landscape, Unconscious Landscape, and End of Softness, all from 1967).

Looking back at the work of the 1940s and 1950s with this subsequent collapse in mind, it is possible to see in the insistent verticality of the stacked figures, an equally marked fracture, verging on disintegration. In the part-to-part logic of the stacked figures' construction, as in the incipient part-object logic of works like Figure endormie and Breasted Woman, it is possible to perceive a reorientation and dispersal of the figure, the outlines of a move from "personage" to "landscape." And in this fracture and disarticulation of the body, a breakdown of gender is also inscribed. Undoing the bodily hierarchies through which difference is produced, Breasted Woman, for example, subverts the vertical organization of the upright body, figuring it as a structure not of difference (male/female or high/low), but of repetition. In its conflation of male and female, a crossing up of gender that threatens to bring down the phallus, Figure endormie presages a collapse of sexual difference in the demise of the standing figure.

Yet the radical effect of the shift from the vertical axis of the figure to the horizontal axis of that field which Bourgeois has called by such names as "soft landscape" and "unconscious landscape"--the field that might also be designated as that of the drives--nevertheless would be difficult to extrapolate from the Figures and Spiral Women of the 1950s. In 1964, having had no solo exhibition of sculpture in New York for several years, Bourgeois resurfaced to present a body of work that seemed to contradict the logic of vertical figures as abruptly as her early sculptures had turned away from painting. Now, after a decade of figures--totemic carved wood poles and segmented towers constructed from stacked wood fragments--her production shifted to involuted coils and bulbous clusters made from a broad range of media, especially liquid materials such as plaster and latex. Described by the artist as a "change from rigidity to pliability,"¹⁵⁷ this shift from the upright wooden pole to the blistered latex flow, from the hierarchical logic of the figure to the horizontal discontinuity of the drives, unquestionably constitutes the defining turn in Bourgeois's production.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Wye, "One and Others," p. 24.

Chapter 3

Bad Objects: A Counter-Modernist Lesson

Disagreeable Substances

When, in 1964, Bourgeois presented a new body of work at the Stable Gallery, her first solo exhibition of sculpture in New York since 1950, one critic noted, in addition to some dozen works in plaster, the presence of "a couple of small works . . . cast in a disagreeable brown rubber substance," one of them nothing more than "a mound that look[ed] semi-liquid."¹ The overall tone of the show, the reviewer concluded, was "melancholy, as if the sculptor hadn't felt like working."²

Two years later, Lucy Lippard, writing about works Bourgeois contributed to Lippard's "Eccentric Abstraction" exhibition at the Fischbach Gallery, characterized the "small, flattish, fluid molds" as "decidedly unprepossessing, ignoring decorative silhouette, mass, almost everything conventionally expected of sculpture."³

¹ Vivien Raynor, "Louise Bourgeois," Arts, vol. 38 (March 1964), p. 63. Bourgeois had begun to investigate the possibilities of liquid materials in the late 1950s, experimenting first with plastic, which proved too brittle, and turning to latex by the end of the decade. See Corinne Robins, "Louise Bourgeois: Primordial Environments," Arts (June 1976), p. 82.

² Raynor, "Louise Bourgeois," p. 63.

³ Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 34.

These lumpy, rubbery-soft mounds, as Lippard observed, resisted any formal logic.

If the conventions of sculpture to which Lippard refers can in general terms be said to be organized around the category of the figure--with its vertical orientation, its discrete outline, its sexually differentiated structure--Bourgeois's output of the early sixties, although manifestly corporeal, obviously did engage a very different logic of the body. Yet these nonsculptural objects not only enact a corporeality that is incompatible with the conventions of the figure; they also radically depart from Bourgeois's own previous work, the upright wooden pieces consistently referenced by their titles as "figure."

As the selection of works for the Stable Gallery exhibition demonstrated, juxtaposing Night Garden, a painted wood assemblage of 1953, with the more recent series of pieces in roughened plaster, and a few executed in a brownish latex, the caesura marked by the fourteen-year interval between this show and Bourgeois's second exhibition of Personages, at the Peridot Gallery in 1950, signaled a decisive shift in the artist's production, a rethinking as fundamental as her turn, some twenty years earlier, from painting to sculpture.

Then (in the mid 1940s), the move from two dimensions into three had made possible the materialization of what Bourgeois called fantastic reality, a conflation of the

physical and the phantasmatic. Thus in the totemic Personages of her earliest sculptural work and in later figures made by the repetitive cutting and stacking of disparate fragments, she had staged objects in a psychic field, objects having "nothing to do with sculpture," as she said, but standing instead for people.

This displacement of the sculptural figure by the psychoanalytic formation object/subject implied a rupture with the abstract logic of modernism. For, placing her Personages directly on the floor without bases, and positioning them in relation to one another and to the room, Bourgeois eroded the visual field that surrounds and supports the sculptural figure, collapsing it instead into a psycho-social field.

In the later Personages and in the assemblages of the 1950s, this subversion of the visual field as a support for the sculpture was more directly linked to the vertical figure's phallic structure. In Figure endormie, as we have seen, the absurdly topheavy phallic figure, propped up by a scaffolding, verged on collapse. And in the subsequent wood constructions, whose fabrication alternated between cutting and clustering, the upright orientation and hierarchical organization of the figure came under attack via strategies of fragmentation and multiplication.

But in the body of work she showed in 1964, Bourgeois announced that this psychic field into which the figure

would now finally fall was to be not only horizontal and nonhierarchical, but liquescent and low. Turning to plaster and latex and forsaking the vertical armature of the Personages and even the organizing plane of horizontally oriented works like Night Garden or One and Others, Bourgeois now produced objects in which not only the phallic hierarchy of the figure but the structure of difference itself was radically elided. Thus figure abruptly succumbed to the condition of liquid.

As Daniel Robbins observed at the time, "these new sculptures seemed to have the capacity to quiver and ooze, adding that "no longer would one immediately associate them with figures."⁴ That the devolution of form into a viscous field, its subsuming in a lumpy plaster flow or a sticky deliquescence of brackish rubber, exerts a decidedly more intense pressure on the category of the figure than a work like Figure endormie or Breasted Woman, is undeniable. In those pieces, as I attempted to show in chapter two, the phallic integrity of the figure is eroded via a part-object logic: the insistent fragmentation they enact can be understood in terms of the Kleinian psychoanalytic framework of object relations, in which the body is imagined to be not a unified whole, but a discontinuous assembly of parts. In this analysis, Bourgeois's Figures can be seen to deploy an infantile, pregendered fantasy of the part-object precisely

⁴ Robbins, "Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois," p. 29.

against the phallic structure of the figure, in order to destabilize and decenter it.

But in the face of the sudden turn Bourgeois's production took in the early 1960s, the move she described as a shift from "rigidity to pliability," it is necessary to consider whether this Kleinian model of object relations can encompass works that are a function less of fragmentation, than of dissolution.⁵ To pose the question in a slightly different way, can a counter-sculptural practice in which form is dispersed in the radical in-difference of the flow productively be read within a logic of objects? I will hope to show that it can, and I will concentrate this reading on a register of experience pivotal to Klein's object-relations theory: namely, the drives.

*

In Klein's analysis, as we have seen, the drives operate within an atemporal, nonlinguistic, and ungendered space. In contrast to the Freudian model, which posits a pre-Oedipal stage in the development of the subject, Klein describes a kind of sub-Oedipal space, "an area where present and past are one and time is spatial, not historical."⁶ As an experience of the body not yet submitted to gender (or indeed, to any difference, the

⁵ Quoted in Wye, "One and Others," p. 24.

⁶ Mitchell, introduction, The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 28.

infant not yet able to distinguish the other's body from its own), infantile fantasy unfolds in an undifferentiated field--a horizontal space, that is, which is not vertically intersected by sexual or other differences. Further, unlike the Freudian pre-Oedipal phase, which is foreclosed by the subject's passage through the castration complex, this field as Klein describes it is not subject to repression, but remains open even after the subject's entry into language and assumption of a gender identity.

Whereas, then, the Freudian history of the subject is articulated by stages, the Kleinian mapping tracks the interplay of positions in a subsymbolic space. To reiterate Juliet Mitchell's formulation, "a position is a mental space in which one is sometimes lodged."⁷ Situated in a "perpetual present" of infantile fantasy that is never foreclosed, this ahistorical space of the drives is, then, not anterior or subordinate to Oedipal history, but operates in a kind of perpetual tension with it.

Within this framework of a temporality that is not historical but spatial, the abruptness of Bourgeois's move in the early sixties from the upright figure to the horizontal flow can be read not in developmental terms--as, for example, a progression (or regression) from fragmentation to dissolution--but in nonlinear terms, as a shift of position. Moreover, if the discontinuities of

⁷ Ibid.

Bourgeois's oeuvre, encompassing a striking heterogeneity of form, material, and scale, have most often be seen as eclectic, as a purely open-ended multiplicity of subject matter and formal means, a Kleinian-based reading might instead emphasize the structural interdependence of these positions.

The body of work Bourgeois exhibited at the Stable Gallery in 1964 displays a diversity and hybridity transformative of an oeuvre previously structured by discrete series and types. At the level of material, whereas Bourgeois had earlier worked almost exclusively in wood (with additions of plaster and wax to some of the stacked figures), beginning in about 1960 she employed plaster, clay, plastic, rubber latex, and, slightly later, marble and bronze. The new work was similarly discontinuous in form. Cutting into flows of liquid substances, she produced a series of pieces entitled *Lairs*, coils and spirals of rough plaster enfolding labyrinthine interiors. A wood *Still Life* (1962) appeared alongside a knotted length of plaster-coated tubing (*Spiral/Summer*, 1960), a suspended plaster nest (*Fée Couturière*, ca. 1963, fig. 3.1), and a molten sheet of poured latex (*Portrait*, 1963, fig. 3.2).

Within a Kleinian logic of positions, it is possible to read this heterogeneous array as enacting complex interplays of form and material, as Lippard demonstrated in 1975 with her observation that, in Bourgeois's oeuvre, "a shape may be

made first from soft plaster (which turns hard), then cast in latex so that a permanently soft mold, or skin, exists independently, then made in marble, which is the final epitome of hardness."⁸ In this relay of perpetual remaking--reversing inside and out, melting and congealing, folding figure into ground--Bourgeois invokes a phantasmatic model in which, to put it in Kleinian terms, no position is ever foreclosed.

Disfiguration: Portrait

A striking feature of the body of work Bourgeois exhibited in 1964 was its recapitulation of key strategies of Surrealist sculptural production. In particular, the horizontal orientation of many works (such as the series of *Lairs*), and the hanging of others (such as *Fée Couturière*) invoked devices pioneered by Giacometti in the early 1930s. While announcing a radical break from her previous Surrealist-based production, this new work therefore still securely located itself within a Surrealist logic.

Summoning the discontinuity and heterogeneity of Surrealism, together with its phantasmatic investment in the body, the 1964 exhibition also contradicted the modernist doxa of abstraction. That is, it resisted both the legacy of organic abstraction, with its emphasis on the radical simplification and sublimation of bodily form, and the

⁸ Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 242.

pictorial abstract logic of New York School sculpture championed by Greenberg; further, it ran counter to the new abstract logic of Minimalism.⁹ As such, the most salient feature of Bourgeois's new work in the contemporary context of its production was its refusal of an abstract logic.

Turning to sculpture in the late forties and early fifties, Bourgeois, as we have seen, rejected Greenberg's ethic of "a new unity of style" and a "new linear, pictorial sculpture," for him exemplified in the work of David Smith.¹⁰ Seeming almost to parody the trope of the "sculptor-constructor," Bourgeois fabricated her wood assemblages so as to underscore their handmade construction and noncompositional protocols of stacking and clustering, the almost homely effect of which was the complete absence of anything resembling a unity of style.

Shifting to liquid materials in the early sixties,

⁹ The complex problem of Minimalism's relation to the abstract and to the body is one that I will not attempt to parse here. Indeed, Minimalist sculpture was criticized at the time both for being too abstract (or ideational, as Greenberg argued) and for being too literal. For an account of these debates, and an insightful reading of Minimalist sculpture's investments in the body, see Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 35-70. My suggestion here is simply that the insistently organ-like, decentered corporeality of Bourgeois's work resisted "the abstract" as a complex of terms through which to rationalize or sublimate the body, with Minimalism standing, at the time, as one of these terms.

¹⁰ Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of David Smith, David Hare, and Mirko," p. 141.

Bourgeois seemed to reject even the essential coherence of external form. Portrait, for example, in its glistening viscosity and shapelessness, evokes not the architecture of a body, but the fluidity of its internal matrix. In 1982, writing in the catalogue to the MOMA retrospective, Wye echoed Vivien Raynor's earlier allusion to disagreeable substances, underscoring this work's repulsive effect and associating it with a fluid, diffuse corporeality. A ragged sheet of latex poured over a field of organ-like protuberances, it was, she observed, "shocking almost offensive in its revolting color, texture, and formlessness."¹¹

Projecting from the base of the frayed sheet that, oriented vertically, roughly approximates a torso, Portrait is a confusion of genital nubs and bulges, including a penis and one testicle, coated in the same clotted, mucus-like film that overflows the field. Surrounded by a welter of molten lumps and knots, the still-recognizable protrusions do not invoke the verticality, singleness, and hierarchy of the phallus, but conversely enact its collapse into a stickily tactile, undifferentiated field. Dissolved in a viscous corporeal film that in Wye's description is almost excremental, the phallus, or phallic figure, is shifted from the register of abstract form to that of the body's internal organs.

¹¹ Wye, "One and Others," p. 25.

This fresh attack on the figure, performed not, as in the stacked pieces, by cutting, but by melting and dispersal, therefore might be understood as a kind of disfiguration, a marring or ruining of the phallic and sublimated body. For if a logic of the figure implies an upright counterpart to the viewing body, Portrait is a hardened flow lifted onto the vertical. And if such a logic dictates a sexually differentiated body, Portrait is undecidable as to sex, producing a swarm of genital dimples, knobs, and protrusions that, far from articulating any external form, seem to lodge within the corporeal matrix itself. Finally, if the figure yields a synthesis of individual forms--a gestalt--Portrait is an insistently random diffusion of indistinct masses, its only unifying feature the thick latex coating that further blurs and blisters the field.

Wye's account of Portrait contains the suggestion that in the turn from rigidity to pliability the body is turned inside out, its fluid contents discharged. In place of the figure, however fractured, a bodily effluence is left to pool and congeal, to lie inert "as if the sculptor hadn't felt like working." And if the work of shaping matter into form has been abandoned, and sculpture supplanted by "shapeless forms," the materiality of these objects that fail to "show an intention to make a shape rather than let one occur," as Raynor observed, is more like bodily waste

than bodily form.¹² In this, the shift from rigid phallic figure to pliable flow evokes the operation of the drives, an infantile logic of the body that is productive, precisely, of waste and discharge.

*

Fully twenty years after the fact, Portrait's effect of melting and soiling, and its implicit debasement of the body, shifted from the phallic register to the infantile, elicited repulsion. Yet the vague disgust that Raynor had experienced before the puddling of a disagreeable substance, and that Wye registered more viscerally in 1982, confronted with the brownish color, sticky texture, and liqueous dissolve of Portrait, is difficult to summon today, in the wake of recent artistic practice conducted under the sign of abjection. Bodily secretions, like the bodily organs that produce them and the orifices through which they are excreted, have been so insistently represented in recent work, and the category of the abject so privileged within critical discourse, that the transgressive effects of these practices have been almost neutralized.¹³

¹² Raynor, "Louise Bourgeois," p. 63.

¹³ For a searching analysis of the turn to the abject in contemporary art, see Hal Foster's "The Return of the Real," in The Return of the Real, especially pp. 145-68. The theory of abjection that has enjoyed great prestige in contemporary art practices and in their critical reception is that developed by Julia Kristeva in Powers of Horror, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). For a discussion of the difference between Kristeva's theory of abjection and Bataille's notion of the

In the context of this contemporary turn to abjection, the critic might therefore seem obliged to treat Bourgeois's early experiments with a murky, bubbling latex as historical precedent for the recuperation of low substances and functions of the body in artistic production of the 1990s. And indeed not only her work of the 1960s but the entirety of Bourgeois's oeuvre have been read in these terms, as both the pivotal precursor and the contemporary avatar of work concerned with abjection.¹⁴

informe, see "The Politics of the Signifier II: Conversation on the Informe and the Abject," October 67 (Winter 1993), pp. 3-21.

¹⁴ This was the implicit argument of the 1993 Whitney Museum exhibition "Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art" and of the 1995 "fémininmasculin: Le sexe de l'art" exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, both of which showcased Bourgeois's production as historical precedent for contemporary work in which gender was seen to be elided via the evocation of an infantile, pregendered corporeality. In the catalogue to the 1996 "Informe: mode d'emploi," also organized for the Centre Pompidou, Rosalind Krauss referenced the earlier show's "heavy complement of artists associated with American and English 'abject art'" including, "in matriarchal place of honor, Louise Bourgeois" in the context of an argument for the radical incongruity of abjection and the Batailleian notion of the informe. The fact that "fémininmasculin" and "Informe: mode d'emploi" had in common certain artists (not including Bourgeois), and even certain works, she noted, required the curators "to be explicit on the subject of abjection, and to state why and in what way it must be differentiated in the strongest possible terms from the project of the informe." Rosalind Krauss, "Informe without Conclusion," October 78 (Fall 1996), p. 90.

For both the "fémininmasculin" and "Informe: mode d'emploi" exhibitions, Bourgeois's work was closely identified with the turn to abjection, in the first instance to be celebrated, and in the second to be negatively differentiated from the operation of the informe, with its insistent erosion of such categories as subject/object. Because the analysis of Bourgeois's production of the 1960s

In this chapter, I will however attempt to shift this positioning of Bourgeois's work of the early sixties as a precedent for the nineties category of abjection by reading these works within a logic of the drives, a logic within which, for example, the substance used to produce Portrait can be seen to evoke less the abjectness of bodily secretions than the destructive energy of the drives, and the same work's deformation of the body to evoke less a condition of abjection than a displacement of the phallic figure by a corporeal field--the horizontal field of the drives. Before this reading of Portrait and related works as engaging a logic of the drives can be developed, however, it is necessary to consider the specific framework of their production. For in the context of the early to mid 1960s, the precipitous meltdown they enact demands a very different kind of reading than can be supplied either by a theory of abjection or by one of the drives. These works first must be seen to counter late modernism's most privileged term:

I offer here reads her work instead through the drives, it does not invoke theories of the abject or the informe, although my readings are indebted to the insights of the Informe: mode d'emploi exhibition and its texts with respect to sculptural production of the 1960s with which, as I will hope to show, Bourgeois's work is deeply engaged.

This recent lauding (and alternate reviling) of the bodily imagery of Bourgeois's work has served to assign it a prominent position in the history of postwar art, while yet reinforcing its conventional, iconographically based critical reception. The problem of this work's sustained interrogation of modernist sculpture's account of the body (the object of the present study) has scarcely been broached by critics, despite the concentrated attention devoted to its imagery in recent years.

the abstract.

Deformation: Eccentric Abstraction

In Soft Landscape (1963, fig. 3.3), a grainy surface of plaster spackling applied to a peaked whorl of sticky yellow-orange latex marks the interface of inside and outside, grit sealing the bodily ooze like a poultice. The slightly later Amoeba (ca. 1963-65, fig. 3.4) consists in a puckered disk of plaster, swelling and drooping like clay or dough, kneaded thin. A mound billows up at the crown, while a small hole is poked through at the center to draw the eye inside, to an interior cavity closed off from its shell. And in Le Regard (1966, fig. 3.5), this attenuation of form to a slack skin, perforated to expose its nether side, is repeated, but figured more insistently as organ. A glutinous latex sac, stiffened by burlap, is slit open to reveal a cluster of bumps and knobs that, bathed in the same gummy latex, nestle as organs in a mucus-like surround.

The use of soft materials like rubber latex to desubliminate the sculptural object in its relation to the body was a project shared by Bourgeois and many other artists in the mid 1960s, and Lippard's "Eccentric Abstraction" exhibition of 1966 featured several of them, including, in addition to Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Bruce Nauman, Gary Kuehen, and Frank Lincoln Viner. The diversity of materials and attenuation of form displayed in the show

prompted Mel Bochner to comment irritably that "contrasting different textured materials" had become "a tedious proposition."¹⁵

Bourgeois's works, he noted, were "lumpy looking rubberized latex casting molds," while Sonnier's boxes melted into "scatological fiberglass shapes," and Nauman's "not-work," looking like "a lot of rags thrown on the ground or draped on the wall" had "no formal character and yet no particular content either."¹⁶ The deterioration of form into shapelessness reduced such objects to the condition of matter submitted to mindless physical process: in the nullity of this "not-work," form and content both were subsumed in the muteness of the autistic, or the inarticulacy of the infantile.

Hesse's work, however, received favorable notice. The "atrophied organs and private parts" of the stiffly varnished tubing that comprised Several and Ingeminate were not "garish or horrifying."¹⁷ Metronomic Irregularity II, a tangle of wire-stiffened cotton cord threaded through evenly spaced holes drilled in square boards, drew particular praise. It was also the work that most closely approximated

¹⁵ Mel Bochner, "Eccentric Abstraction," Arts, vol. 41 (November 1966), p. 58.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

a Minimalist logic.¹⁸

Lippard's curatorial brief in "Eccentric Abstraction" was to showcase contemporary sculpture that countered Minimalism's perceived sterility and rationalism with a dissident, bodily materiality.¹⁹ Describing the range of sculptural production subsumed under this rubric as "more closely related to abstract painting than to any sculptural forms," she used the term "abstraction" to designate a specifically nonfigurative evocation of the body.²⁰ In the context of the mid 1960s, its deployment therefore may be seen as defensive. For such was the prestige of the abstract in this moment, at the interface of the New York

¹⁸ In her monograph on Hesse, Lippard notes that Metronomic Irregularity II, diverging from the morphology she associated with Hesse and around which she had organized "Eccentric Abstraction," took her aback: "At the time, I was somewhat surprised at the precision of Metronomic Irregularity II. . . . I was even a little disappointed, selfishly, not because the piece wasn't beautiful, but because I had conceived this exhibition in terms of the more organic character of Hesse's work, paralleled one way or another by Viner's floppy pop-colored envelopes, Louise Bourgeois's overtly sexual latex membranes, Alice Adams' giant chain link womb form, Bruce Nauman's exhausted rubber streamers, Don Potts' undulating wood and leather sculptures, Gary Kuehen's frozen-to-melted conjunctions and Keith Sonnier's vinyl-versus-wooden enclosures, one of which "breathed." Lippard, Eva Hesse (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976; reprint, 1992), p. 83.

¹⁹ Lippard writes: "I was not trying to 'create a movement,' but rather to indicate that there were emotive or 'eccentric' or erotic alternatives to a solemn and deadset Minimalism that still retained the clarity of that notion. I had traveled on both coasts looking at work, with Hesse's image at the back of my mind." Ibid.

²⁰ Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 28.

School and early Minimalism, that to describe objects of an insistent tactility--bearing the impress of the desublimated, sexualized body--as abstract, was to inoculate them against a peculiarly damaging charge: that the works were vulgar.²¹ Lippard would later describe Bourgeois's work in terms of an inside-out logic of the body, a perpetual folding and unfolding of the corporeal matrix.²² But in 1966 it was not possible to think of the nonfigurative as other than the abstract.²³

Casting Bourgeois as precursor for a younger generation of artists whose work opened up "new areas of materials, shape, color and sensuous experience," Lippard posed the older artist in a mediating role between the postwar reception of Surrealism and the reemergence of certain of its strategies in sculptural production of the early

²¹ Thus Lippard wrote: "The makers of what I am calling . . . eccentric abstraction refuse to eschew imagination and the extension of sensuous experience while they also refuse to sacrifice the solid formal basis demanded of the best in current non-objective art" (Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 28). Notwithstanding this preemptive effort, Bochner describes Frank Lincoln Viner's work for example as "garish and immodest." "It is vulgar as is," he continues, "and doesn't become anything else." Bochner, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 58.

²² Lippard, "From the Inside Out."

²³ Indeed, Lippard does describe Bourgeois's sculpture as abstract: "Rarely has an abstract art been so directly and honestly informed by its maker's psyche" ("From the Inside Out," p. 238). Her account however centers on the work's insistent corporeality, its logic of the body as experienced from within.

1960s.²⁴ With their "indirectly erotic or scatological allusions, and emphasis on the unbeautiful side of art," Bourgeois's "latex membranes" in particular were seen to perform this function, linking the graphic corporeality of contemporary sculpture to the desublimatory operations of Surrealism.²⁵

If, however, Surrealism was the historical term that bound eccentric abstraction to fantasy and the body, in a critical environment conditioned by formalism that term also, as Lippard admitted, inimically evoked "literary pictorial associations."²⁶ And in order to deflect this stigma of the literary, or textual, she took pains to distinguish the "eccentric progeny" of Surrealism from their forebear, marking the difference in the new work's direct appeal to the viewer's senses. These were objects "felt, or

²⁴ Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 28. Robert Morgan observes that the presence of Bourgeois's work in the exhibition was pivotal to Lippard's claim for eccentric abstraction as a legacy of Surrealism and that Bourgeois's work came to her attention entirely by chance: "Louise Bourgeois was a lot older and wasn't well-known at that point. She was known to the abstract expressionist generation. She showed with David Hare and those people. It wasn't like she hadn't shown, but nobody in my generation knew her work. I met her because she was the wife of my thesis advisor at graduate school, Robert Goldwater." (Lippard, quoted in Robert C. Morgan, "Eccentric Abstraction and Postminimalism," Flashart 144 [January/February 1989], p. 75.)

²⁵ Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 34.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

sensed, instead of read or interpreted."²⁷ Bourgeois's latex pieces, she argued, short-circuited visual reception altogether, eliciting a "mindless, near-visceral identification with form."²⁸

1. The Genital Eye: Le Regard

A work such as Le Regard, conflating eye and labial slit, clearly does evoke a Surrealist logic. Eliciting associations to Georges Bataille's Story of the Eye as well as to Salvador Dalí's Un Chien andalou, it, like those works, corporealizes and sexualizes vision, claiming the eye itself as a sexual organ. Le Regard, however, does more than revisit a Surrealist trope of the genital eye, or reenact the collapse of vision into desire. It reworks the

²⁷ Ibid. In this suggestion that the proper mode of reception for these works was immediate and purely perceptual, Lippard reproduces the formalist paradigm of instantaneous viewing, albeit crucially shifted from the register of the visual to that of the haptic.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 34. Lippard uses the term "body ego" to describe this process by which the distance between subject and object, the space of viewing, collapses in a bodily identification with the object: "Body ego can be experienced in two ways: first, through appeal, the desire to caress, to be caught up in the feel and rhythms of a work; second, through repulsion, the immediate reaction against certain forms and surfaces." This collapse may, however, more usefully be read as an enactment of the drives. For while the concept of body ego implies an unconscious bound up in physical experience, an ego of whatever kind nevertheless is predicated on the existence of an "I"--is, in other words, subtended by a notion of centered subjectivity. In the splintering of the drives, by contrast, this unifying function of the ego/I does not yet operate, and the distinction subject/object does not obtain.

motif of the oeil-sexe from a female subject position--the position, that is, of a female reader of Surrealism, looking back from her artistic maturity in 1960s New York to the Paris of her artistic past.

The particular Surrealist discourse at issue here is that which developed in and around the journal Documents in the late 1920s and early 1930s. To invoke that circle of writers and artists, including Bataille and Michel Leiris, André Masson and Alberto Giacometti, is, however, not to propose a source or patrimony; the relation between Bataille's or Leiris's writings, or even a work like Giacometti's La Pointe à l'oeil (1932), and Bourgeois's production of the 1960s would not have been direct, but complexly mediated. If Le Regard can be seen to address the problem of the oeil-sexe, as Fillette does that of the fetish, it does so therefore as a backward glance, a return of the gaze, to a specific site of Surrealist production.²⁹

²⁹ The Documents circle as a dissident term within Surrealism, countering the liberatory model of sexuality and the unconscious propounded by Breton, has been the focus of intensive analysis in recent years. Most important, in the art-historical context, is Rosalind Krauss's The Optical Unconscious and her earlier essays on Giacometti, including her contribution to the catalogue Primitivism and 20th Century Art, ed. William Rubin, and her recent essays for the catalogue Informe: mode d'emploi. It is not my purpose here, however, to recapitulate the insights of this work, or to enter Bourgeois's oeuvre into the expanding canon of Bataillean production in twentieth-century art. Rather, I want simply to suggest that the Surrealist practice to which Le Regard can be seen to respond (at least in terms of its effects) is specific, centering on the logic of the "oeil-

To suggest that Le Regard returns the gaze of Surrealism by looking back at it is of course already to invest that work with a politics. Notorious for its propensity to leer, to make the female body the object of its erotic, often its sadistic, gaze, Surrealism was the target of Bourgeois's critique as early as the 1940s, when she formulated the femme-maison. In that graphic motif, the woman's subjectivity is erased both by the masking of her head with a house, and by the displacement of her face by her sex, which, outlined, opened, or otherwise accentuated, defines her objectification in the gaze of the other.

For Bourgeois, resentful of her exclusion from the circle of male Surrealists, this blinding of the gaze and highlighting of the sex perhaps signaled a subject position from which her own address to the other (the audience she most wanted to enlist) was barred. Her production, twenty years later, of a work entitled "the gaze," in which eye and sex are collapsed in a gluey stare might therefore be read as parody, returning the gaze of the viewer with a lewd, loose genital wink. But if it parodies the Surrealist oeil-sexe, Le Regard also expropriates it, finding in the genital eye a term through which to resist, or to revile, the

sexe" as developed in the work of Bataille and Leiris, and in sculptural terms, Giacometti. My reading is indebted to the account of this logic in Jean Clair's "La Pointe à l'oeil d'Alberto Giacometti," Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne, vol. 83, no. 11 (1983), pp. 64-99.

phallic gaze of a later modernism.

As Jean Clair has shown in his analysis of the effect exerted on Giacometti's La Pointe à l'oeil by Bataille's Histoire de l'oeil, the oeil-sexe of this particular Surrealist imaginary is deeply ambivalent, simultaneously vulnerable and aggressive, both "lance and shield."³⁰ To demonstrate this ambivalence, Clair focuses on a passage in Bataille's text in which, while fondling her genital, the narrator asks his lover, "à quoi lui faisait penser le mot uriner," to which she responds, "buriner, les yeux, avec un rasoir, quelque chose de rouge, le soleil."³¹ Thus, Clair observes, the oeil-sexe of this male fantasy not only bathes the subject in the tears and cum of desire, but also burns him with an acid that bites "like the burin into a copper plate," digging, scratching, blinding the eye of the gazer.³²

One possible reading of Le Regard, then, might be as a response to this male fantasy of the aggressive oeil-sexe that scratches out the phallic gaze. Recalling that

³⁰ Clair, "La Pointe à l'oeil," p. 73.

³¹ The standard English translation of this passage-- "Upon my asking what the work urinate reminded her of, she replied: terminate, the eyes, with a razor, something red, the sun"--preserves the rhyme, but loses the precise meaning of the term "buriner," or engrave, that is my concern here. Story of the Eye (1928), trans. Joachim Neugroschel (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1987), p. 38. Original quoted in Clair, "La Pointe à l'oeil," p. 75.

³² Clair, "La Pointe à l'oeil," p. 75.

Bourgeois turned to a sculptural practice pitted against Surrealism by way of engraving, a process she describes as "the only way I know to exert extreme aggression," and that she adapted its techniques of gouging, digging, and incising to produce her first sculptural figures, it is possible to read Le Regard as an intensification of that aggressive logic in the erosion of form to the condition of informe.³³ And if one motivation for the shift from painting to cutting (first engraving, then the "real cutting" of sculpture) was the possibility of staging aggression against phallic authority, embodied for her in the Surrealists themselves, then Giacometti's Surrealist sculptures, those he called disagreeable objects, supplied her, as we have seen, with both a model and a target.

One of the last sketches for a disagreeable object to be realized as a sculpture, the wood-and-metal version of La Pointe à l'oeil consists in a board incised with a rectilinear plan at either end of which a figure is positioned, one a "head-skull," in Giacometti's description, and the other a pin, driven through the phallic "point" of the title, and directed at the orbital cavity of the "head-skull." Staging its attack on the eye with this phallic

³³ Wye, "A Drama of the Self," p. 23. Wye also quotes Bourgeois on her use of a razor blade to scratch out an image: "The corner of a razor blade is very neat . . . it is very strong. You can have perfect control. I would take a razor blade and I would make come alive a tiny, incisive line. It was etching life out of the blackness."

instrument, La Pointe à l'oeil encapsulates both the anxiety and aggression of the eye, both the fear of castration or blinding and the apotropaic function of a gaze that is itself phallic.

This ambivalent status of the eye as both menacing and vulnerable, both phallic and castrated, was a central preoccupation of the Documents circle and, as Clair demonstrates, features briefly in Giacometti's work (which was however soon to shift to a different, phenomenological model of vision). For Bourgeois, whose practice in the 1960s deployed the disagreeable to counter not only the Surrealist itself, but also the formalist (and masculinist), the model of the oeil-sexe resisted detached, sublimatory contemplation to elicit instead visceral repulsion or desire. Looking back at Surrealism through late modernism, she seems to have aspired, in Le Regard, to produce an object disagreeable for both. And thus the phallic gaze is interrupted by a haptic doubling (a rebuttal to formalist opticality), and the gaping eye-slit is instated in the organ-logic of the drives (a feminist rereading of Surrealism's story of the eye). Replacing the object-of-the-gaze with the gaze-as-object, or, more precisely, part-object, Le Regard is the oeil-sexe, tongue in cheek.³⁴

³⁴ An important feature of the work is the bulbous tongue-like member that seems to wag loosely in the eye/mouth cavity.

2. Bourgeois and Hesse: A Tube Is a Tube

Lippard's assertion that within the framework of eccentric abstraction "a tube is a tube and not a phallic symbol" clearly addresses itself to a problem posed in certain works by Hesse, including two, Several and Ingeminate of 1965, that were shown in the exhibition.³⁵ The problem is simply this: to account for an object that is both graphically corporeal and yet nonfigural.

For Lippard, in 1966, this discrepancy was resolved in the notion of "sensuous abstraction," an imprinting of the abstract with the libidinal.³⁶ In retrospect, however, Hesse's work seems actively to erode the category of the abstract as much as to invoke it. For in their obsessive-compulsive repetition and systematicity, their arithmetic

³⁵ Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 39.

³⁶ "Abstraction is a far more potent vehicle of the unfamiliar than figuration," she argues, "and erotic sensation thrives on the unfamiliar" (Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," p. 40). Subsequent readings of Hesse's work have tended to preserve this formulation, suggesting, for example, that it operates in "an abstract, psychosexual dimension." (Maurice Berger, "Objects of Liberation: The Sculpture of Eva Hesse," in Eva Hesse: A Retrospective, ed. Helen A. Cooper [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992], p. 126.) Echoing its chronic recurrence in accounts of Bourgeois's oeuvre, the persistence of the term "abstract" in the critical literature on Hesse's work underscores not only the prestige, but also the striking elasticity of this concept, encompassing a vast heterogeneity of practices. And as Lippard's formulation "eccentric abstraction" suggests, even those practices that, like Hesse's and Bourgeois's, are seen to contest the rational and sublimatory logic of modernist abstraction nevertheless are deemed, in some sense, abstract.

ordering and ritualistic task performance, her grids and spirals, like the autoeroticism of slightly earlier works (including Several and Ingeminate), seem to enact an autistic, literalizing logic that is arguably the very antithesis of the abstract.³⁷

Intended to depose "literary pictorial associations" to Surrealism's engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis, Lippard's declaration that in Hesse's work "a tube is a tube and not a phallic symbol" invokes a literalism consonant with the part-object logic of the drives (in which, we could say, a penis is a penis and not a phallic symbol). For like many of the works Hesse produced in this period--dense spirals of taut cord pricked by nipple-like protrusions, net bags sagging under the downward pressure of weights wrapped in shiny membranes--Several materializes the body as an accumulation of part-objects. A spray of long snaky tubes, each attached to an individual string, the cluster fastened at a single point and dangled against the wall, Several clearly does resist identification as a phallic symbol: the very multiplication that renders it several, rather than single, denies such a reading. In the splitting, clustering, and suspension of the members a fantasy of the part-object is instead engaged.

Consisting of a pair of fat tubes stiffened by cord and

³⁷ For this reading, see Krauss, chapter 6, The Optical Unconscious, pp. 309-20.

papier maché and connected by a length of surgical hose, Ingeminate gives that fractured logic a machinic inflection. Looped onto the floor like the trailing line of some inscrutable apparatus, the rubber hose establishes a circulatory flow between the two inert balloons. And this mechanico-erotic circuitry of organs, as Krauss has observed of slightly earlier pieces, can be seen to enact the "desiring production" of the Duchampian bachelor apparatus."³⁸

For Hesse's production, which began in a formalist tradition of abstract painting, the bachelor machine can be seen to recast, or warp, the reductive logic of abstraction, interpolating another model of radical reduction: the body as part-object-machine. And if the conjuncture of body and machine in Hesse's work recapitulated Duchamp's bachelor apparatus, it also anticipated, in Krauss's analysis, the logic of "pure process" articulated in Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus.

In this Kleinian-derived model, as we saw in chapter two, the part-object is itself a machine, hooked to a series of other organ-machines by an autistic operation in which "each machine cuts into the continuity of flows produced by its neighbor only to produce a new flow for the next machine

³⁸ "In their strange connection of the organic . . . to the mechanical . . . the works move toward the domain that Duchamp had mapped in the Large Glass." Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, p. 315.

to cut into in its turn."³⁹ In the mid 1960s, prior to "Eccentric Abstraction," Hesse, as Krauss has observed, "discovered process, which is to say she came to understand the logic of flows of material--latex, fiberglass, rubber tubing--that would produce a continuum, a flux, into which the moldlike machines of her work could cut."⁴⁰ Thus Hesse "no longer needed to fashion objects that looked like machines" because "she had constructed the system of desiring production instead."⁴¹

Juxtaposing Bourgeois's Portrait (which might aptly be described as a flux into which the mold-like machines of other works--the Lairs--would cut), with Hesse's Several, Ingeminate, and Metronomic Irregularity, "Eccentric Abstraction" therefore produced not only a morphological comparison, but an operational one.⁴² For Bourgeois, as we have seen, the fantasy of the body as a part-object apparatus was a Duchampian legacy of the 1940s, reworked via a shift from autoeroticism to autosadism. In He Disappeared into Complete Silence, the alternation of machinic violence with currents of depressive anxiety enacted the relay of infantile positions described by Klein: a circuitry not of

³⁹ Ibid., p. 316.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "The ebb and flow of my work is in the pouring, then the cutting," Bourgeois observed in 1969. Statement in Art Now: New York, vol. 1, no. 7 (September 1969), unpaginated.

desiring production, as in the bachelor machine, but of self-perpetuating aggression. In the early sixties, this fractured logic of the body was transposed--in Portrait, Le Regard, Amoeba, the Soft Landscapes, the Lairs--into liquid, enacting the destructive energy of the drives.

Hesse's encounter with Duchamp's work came only in the mid 1960s, mediated by the delayed reception of his practice by a younger generation of artists. Yet in telescoped fashion the work she produced between 1965 and 1966 reenacts Bourgeois's move from a distinctly machinic apparatus of tubes, wires, and blades--seen in Hesse's oeuvre in works like Eighter from Decatur (1965) and Top Spot (1965)--to a part-object logic of production.⁴³ And it is here--not in the register of materials (where it is often located, in a contested priority over the use of latex), or of form (where it is often located, in a projected rivalry over the use of particular organ-like shapes), but of process, that a link between Hesse's work and Bourgeois's can be seen to exist.⁴⁴

⁴³ Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, pp. 314-15.

⁴⁴ Bourgeois first employed rubber latex in the works she exhibited at the Stable Gallery in 1964. That her use of latex therefore predates Eva Hesse's (undertaken, according to Lippard, in the fall of 1967) by perhaps four years is of minor significance for the discussion of the two artists I will offer here. I note it, however, because the radical heterogeneity and discontinuity of Bourgeois's practice has so frequently exposed her to the charge that her work is derivative of other practices, including Hesse's, whose work in latex was both more extensive and better known.

For Bourgeois, "the change from rigidity to pliability" precipitated the collapse of form into a liquid field. For Hesse, the discovery of liquid rubber in 1967 similarly opened onto "a whole new body of work, fed by the material's possibilities."⁴⁵ In neither case, however, was it a particular material that engaged "pure process"; rather, it was the productive logic of pouring and cutting, of the form of the part-object machine transposed into its system of operation, that opened this possibility.

Accumulation: Cumuls

In early January 1964, as Louise Bourgeois's show was being installed by Arthur Drexler at the Stable Gallery,⁴⁶ an exhibition by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama entitled "Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show," featuring a life-sized rowboat and oar studded with stuffed fabric phalli, was about to close at the Gallery Gertrude Stein.⁴⁷ The near-coincidence of the two shows could have held little significance at the time, given the very different critical receptions and art-world personae of the two artists. Bourgeois's work had been typically situated within the

⁴⁵ Lippard, Eva Hesse, p. 110.

⁴⁶ Robbins, "Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois," p. 29. Drexler had organized Bourgeois's first show of sculptures, at the Peridot Gallery in 1949.

⁴⁷ A second exhibition of works by Kusama, entitled "Driving Image Show," took place in New York in the spring of 1964.

histories of biomorphic abstraction, American Surrealism, and the New York School. Kusama, since her arrival in New York in 1957, had been associated with Neo-Dada and Pop, inhabiting a decidedly more glamorous cultural milieu. Yet by 1963 both artists had turned to an insistently part-object logic of production.⁴⁸

In the early sixties, Kusama pursued this project in her "Accumulations," found objects blanketed by dense fields of lumpy protuberances fashioned by stuffing small cloth sacks with cotton batting. The world of objects--a boat, an armchair, a ladder, a coat--was transformed into a profusion of overstuffed phalli, an absurdist operation that, in reducing phallic symbolism to a compulsive repetition of the organ itself, parodied patriarchal authority. This distortion of the phallic symbol as a phallic field overspreading the furniture, or a phallic projection lodging in the crown of a hat, read the phallus not as an analogue of the body but as a reproducible part, an object of phantasmatic reduplication.

In "Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show," the reproducibility of the phallus within a phantasmatic logic of the part-object was enacted not only in the encrustation of phalli, but also by the papering of the gallery walls

⁴⁸ In 1968, after "Eccentric Abstraction," Lippard included Bourgeois and Kusama, as well as Hesse, Nauman, Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, and others in a touring exhibition entitled "Soft Sculpture."

with oversized black-and-white photographs of the phallus-studded rowboat. Serially repeating the image of the boat--the silhouette of which itself traced a phallic contour and the surface of which was embedded with cloth phalli--the installation produced the phallus as a kind of *mise-en-abyme*.⁴⁹ And through this juxtaposition of the serial multiple and the obsessional multiple, the photograph and the part-object, Kusama's installation linked the structure of mechanical reproduction to that of psychic splitting.

A further effect of Kusama's projection of the phallic field of the Accumulation into a photographic field of replication was to associate the phallus with the real, or literal, as against the abstract. Affixing row upon row of lumpy protuberances to ordinary household objects (many of them recovered from the city streets), the Accumulations enforced a comic displacement of the phallus from the register of the abstract to that of the real. Extruding and multiplying the body's genital bulges, this encrustation generated a three-dimensional field that, in contrast to the abstract logic of distillation in modernist sculpture, absorbed the object in an excessive density.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ This reading is drawn from J.F. Rodenbeck's "Yayoi Kusama: surface stitch skin," in Inside the Visible, ed. de Zegher, pp. 149-56.

⁵⁰ As one reviewer noted at the time, disdaining Aggregation for "reproducing an obsessional quality rather than showing how it affects the object," "the object is there, but unrelated to what appears to be happening to it"--a description that neatly encapsulates the psychic

In the context of the early sixties, Kusama's deployment of everyday objects as the armatures or props for her Accumulation pieces invoked strategies of Pop art, a connection reinforced by her use of the mass-produced photograph, converted into a pattern of wallpaper. Yet the evidently phantasmatic logic of the Accumulations also located them within a Surrealist-based framework evocative of Bourgeois's formulation "fantastic reality."

In her 1976 interview with Susi Bloch, Bourgeois emphasized the significance of the manner in which she had installed the Personages within the gallery space in 1949. Their placement directly on the floor without bases and their arrangement in conversational groupings around the room produced a phantasmatic social space having, as she said, "nothing to do with sculpture." The Peridot Gallery exhibitions staged "the space of the viewer" as "the space of the maker." And via this "environmental" conception of space, Bourgeois claimed historical priority within a contemporary context of performance and installation: "This is really the origin of the environmental sculptures, or later the Happenings," she told Bloch.⁵¹ While this assertion failed to locate Bourgeois's own "environmental" conception within the Surrealist context of installation to

operation of projection. Sidney Tillin, Arts, vol. 62 (February 1964), p. 26.

⁵¹ Quotations from Bloch, "Interview with Louise Bourgeois," p. 372.

which it clearly belonged, it nevertheless served to underscore the connection she drew between her own early attempts to activate the gallery as a psychosocial space and installation practices such as Kusama's that engaged this proposition in the 1960s.

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In the winter of 1964, the scandalizing spectacle of Kusama's "One Thousand Boats Show" was an event on a different order from the comparatively sedate installation of new works by Bourgeois, most of which were conventionally disposed on pedestals. Indeed, writing at the end of the decade, Rubin would praise the "inherent conservatism" of this production, which, he argued, demonstrated "the continued viability" of a tradition of organic, figure-based sculpture originating with Brancusi and Arp and perpetuated in the American reception of Surrealism.⁵² That Bourgeois's engagement with this history might be more critical than corroborative was a possibility not broached in Rubin's text. (Had it not been for Lippard's interpolation of the work into the contemporary contexts of "eccentric abstraction," "soft sculpture," and, most significant, the American feminist art movement, and Wye's later championing of the work in the critical framework of pluralism, Rubin's laudatory essay might have had the effect of consolidating her position in modernist history as a kind

⁵² Rubin, "Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," p. 18.

of minor academic-abstract artist.) In retrospect, however, the confrontation of Kusama's *Accumulations* and these new works by Bourgeois, who had since the 1940s undertaken a part-object-based analysis of the figure in modernist sculpture, can be seen as productive of an important critique of modernist sculpture's phallogentric representations of the body.

As I attempted to show in chapter one, Bourgeois's concern in this period was precisely to reread the history of modern sculpture through the logic of the part-object, and further to rework that logic in relation to a problematic of gender. First adumbrated in the *Personages*, this project of rethinking the figure through the part-object was made explicit in such series as the *Lairs*, *Cumuls*, and *Soft Landscapes* of the 1960s.

From 1962 to 1964, Bourgeois engaged the problem of the part-object as the repressed counterpart to the partial figure explicitly in relation to Brancusi. Reworking Princess X in her Labyrinthine Tower of 1962 (fig. 3.6), and Torso of a Young Man in Torso/Self-Portrait of 1963-64, she read as part-objects these canonical modernist sculptures, conventionally subsumed in what modernist criticism had preferred to understand as the partial figure. Exemplified in Sidney Geist's description of Torso of a Young Man as "a phallus, geometrical, rationalized, sublimated," this account of the bodily fragment was, as Bourgeois's work of

the early sixties seemed to suggest, distinctly a function of repression.

A rising phallic form twisted back in unmistakable mimicry of the arched pose of Princess X, Labyrinthine Tower reads the earlier work not as partial figure, but as a swollen, gleaming phallic part. Similarly, Torso/Self-Portrait (fig. 1.3) reproduces the graphic frontality of Torso of a Young Man, recasting its phallic trinity as a bilateral symmetry of breasts, ribs, labia, and buttocks. And like Fillette, Torso/Self-Portrait hangs from a wire hook that, sunk into the plaster tip, underscores the object's contingency and instability, its unsuitability to stand in place of the figure.

If these works pressed themes of sexuality to the point of literalism (as Rubin declared of Torso/Self-Portrait), this strategy therefore served precisely to reenact the explicitly sexual logic of key modernist works, to assert the status of Brancusi's figural fragments as part-objects. In Rubin's analysis, it is however not only through the category of the partial figure that the body is assimilated in an abstract logic. Equally adaptive to this purpose is what he describes as an "organic, biomorphic, form-language" in Bourgeois's work through which the body is analogized to a range of organic structures.⁵³

Of a work entitled Cumulus (1969, now Cumul, I, fig.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 17.

3.7), he writes: "the hardness of the rising forms, the implacable character of their emergence, elicit a reciprocal rhythm of creasing, gathering, and pulling taut in the shroud that suggests the gyrations of sedimentary strata as they are torn open by igneous extrusions"⁵⁴ Its title derived from a type of dense, globular cloud, Cumulus is a clustered field of highly polished tubular mounds surmounted by glossy rounded heads that protrude from folds of skin or cloth--suggesting less a geologic rupture than a phantasmatic accumulation of phalli. Within the metaphoric structure of organic abstraction, Cumulus however reads as landscape, its bodily forms seen to echo the contours of earth and sky. The field across which the phallic clusters spread (as the title of the work itself suggests) therefore is imagined to delineate and propagate a space Rubin describes as "the world of germination and eclosion."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 17. Series like the Cumuls were discussed in similar terms by critics writing from a number of positions. In an article in Feminist Art Journal, which reproduced Bourgeois's Cumul I of 1969, Miriam Brumer, for example, observed that "in the work of Louise Bourgeois, forms jut aggressively into space, possessed by an irrepressible surge of life which seems to eject them from their sources." Concerned that contemporary feminist production not be essentialized as "inner-core imagery," Brumer's attempt to locate the work of Bourgeois and others within a broader art-historical framework resulted in an analysis that closely paralleled Rubin's. Noting that "abstraction . . . is often the most dynamic vehicle for the organic presence," she invoked a history of biomorphic abstraction encompassing Arp and Noguchi's "reference to the sinuous growth patterns in nature" and the "feeling of continuous growth" in the work of Henry Moore. Miriam

If, therefore, in the logic of abstraction the partial figure provides a term to sublimate the part-object (by reading it abstractly as figure), in this analysis landscape similarly subsumes the horizontal field of the drives (by reading it abstractly as nature).⁵⁶ Thus Wye suggests that the organic repetition of the Cumuls (the name later assigned to this series) recuperates the soft fields of earlier latex flows precisely as landscape, "the bubbling, blistering eruptions of Portrait" having "coagulated and regularized into repetitive mounds that came to be known as 'Cumuls.'"⁵⁷ In this account, the devolution of form that in Portrait dissolves the figure in a horizontal field reverses in the Cumul, form retrieved from liquefaction by the congealing of gluey puddles into the solidity of the plaster or marble landscape.

The contemporaneous appearance of a series of Soft Landscapes (figs. 3.8-3.10), in which a sticky tide overflows the field of cumul-like protuberances, however suggests a different reading, one in which the two series are considered together, and within a logic of the drives--a logic, that is, of destruction rather than sublimation. In

Brumer, "Organic Image: Women's Image?" Feminist Art Journal, vol. 2 (Spring 1973), p. 12.

⁵⁶ Wye quotes Bourgeois as stating, "It seems rather evident to me that our own body is a figuration that appears in Mother Earth." "One and Others," p. 25.

⁵⁷ Wye, "One and Others," p. 25.

a typical Soft Landscape (fig. 3.8), a field of low, soft mounds bubbles up from a thick pool of dark glistening plastic. Rather than the primeval landscape of Wye's description, "suggestive of the eruptive beginnings of the earth,"⁵⁸ this conflation of the cumul and the flow, conjoining operations of fracture and dissolution, of splitting and melting, can be seen to enact the breakdown of such traditional categories as "figure" and "landscape."

In the infantile logic of the drives, the repetition of the cumul can be seen to counter the good form of the figure with an obsessive multiplication of parts and disintegration of the whole. The cumul functions not as figure (when single), or as landscape (when repeated), but instead as part-object, eroding distinctions of inside and outside, body and space, figure and ground. Controverting the sculptural logic of verticality as the axis of the body and horizontality as the axis of the earth, both the Cumuls and Soft Landscapes situate themselves in the radically undifferentiated field of the drives, in which vertical and horizontal are folded together.

Executed mostly in carved marble, the Cumuls series was the product of regular visits Bourgeois made to Pietrasanta, Italy from 1967 to 1972. At the level of material, and of process, this body of work, in contrast to the latex flows, therefore locates itself squarely within a particular

⁵⁸ Ibid.

modernist sculptural tradition, the refractive, polished surfaces of the pristine forms invoking a canonical series of modernist works, from Brancusi's Prometheus to Arp's Bell and Navels. But contrary to Rubin's suggestion that via this resemblance the Cumuls recapitulate the history and logic of organic abstraction, they can instead be seen to enact a rupture: the splitting of the phallic figure into a part-object field. For like the Personages, which remake the phallic figure as part-object; like One and Others, which elides this figure in the density of the horizontal field; and like Labyrinthine Tower, which rereads Princess X not as phallus but as phallic part: so the Cumuls can be seen to recast the polished marble ovoid of modernist imagination as part-object.

In this interpretation, the obsessive repetition of the Cumuls accentuates the phantasmatic corporeality of Brancusi's production, in which fragments detached from the figure are obsessively honed, polished, reproduced. Extending the part-object logic of fragmentation, fixation, and repetition enacted in Brancusi's oeuvre, the Cumuls's aggregation of parts invokes thus another term, multiplication. Its clustering of phalli therefore counters a sublimatory principle of abstraction with a desublimatory practice of accumulation.

*

An accumulation of phalli projected onto a horizontal

field, the Cumul articulates a logic of production in which, as in Brancusi's Princess X or Giacometti's Disagreeable Object, the phallus, converted from an object of sublimation to one of psychic fixation, is shifted from figure to part-object. Appearing first as a multiplication of organs in Bourgeois's Personages series in the 1940s, this strategy of accumulation however assumes a different valence in the environment of the 1960s, the moment when repetition and multiplication became so pivotal to a range of artistic practices, Pop and Minimalism in particular.

Kusama's obsessive mode of invoking the phallus as part-object engaged directly with the discourse of Pop art, showing how the phantasmatic splitting and multiplication of the part-object might be related to techniques of mechanical reproduction and serial repetition. And by considering key works in Bourgeois's production of this period--including the Cumuls, as well as the Soft Landscapes, Double Negative (ca. 1963, fig. 3.11), Unconscious Landscape (1967, fig. 3.12), and the later performance "A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts" (figs. 2.9 and 2.10)--in relation to Kusama's Pop-inflected Accumulations, it is possible to situate them not only within the legacy of Surrealism and the history of modernist sculpture, but within a contemporary feminist critique of phallocentrism.

Read together, Bourgeois's and Kusama's work of the 1960s can be seen to articulate a part-object logic of

feminist production. Invoking phantasmatic structures of obsession, fixation, and splitting, both artists restage contemporary practices of repetition through the projective logic of Surrealism. And through this phantasmatic decentering of the body--the mutation and proliferation of its parts--both work to destabilize the authority of the phallus.

In her phallus-encrusted coats and hats, Kusama turned the body inside out and marked it as an object of phantasmatic projection. In costumes fabricated for the 1978 performance work "A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts," Bourgeois too explored this possibility of detaching the part-object field from a specifically sculptural locus and of mapping it directly onto the body. Affixing an array of bulbous protuberances to translucent sheaths worn by the performers, including Gert Shiff, who was famously draped in a gossamer shift fitted with long rows of tubular teats, Bourgeois, like Kusama, projected the part-object onto the body itself.

In Bourgeois's fashion show, however, it was not an obsessive phallic repetition that protruded from the gowns, but a multiplicity of part-objects, most, like those gathered in the Cumuls, undecidable confluences of penis and breast. For while Kusama's Accumulations preserved the priority of the phallus, even while submitting it to a vertiginous decentering and reduplication, Bourgeois's

multiform costumes produced instead the elisions and conflations of gender difference structural to the part-object.⁵⁹

A 1980 photograph by Duane Michaels, published in Vogue and later reproduced on the back cover of the MOMA catalogue, shows Bourgeois modeling one of these costumes, a tight-fitting, knee-length tunic studded with some two dozen demispherical cups and fat tubular phalli. Like the

⁵⁹ Bourgeois has emphasized the importance of fantasy in the realization of the performance, for which there was no set script. "The people . . . were not professional actors; they were turned into actors by the strong emotions that my objects gave them." Of one of the performers, she recalls, indicating him in a photograph: "Now this old gentleman came with patent-leather pumps, and you can see that he's very pleased. I draped him into a pregnant-woman costume and--don't ask me why--he liked that very much." Quoted in Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free Fall, p. 124.

The travesty of father figures enacted in Bourgeois's early dress-up play with Miró is here replayed by recasting the patriarch's body as a field of part objects. And as she points out, the costumes serve not only to parody or subvert patriarchal authority by reducing the phallus to part-object, but also engage the father's own fantasies of exceeding his gender role. In her conversation with Meyer-Thoss, Bourgeois however demonstrates her ambivalence about this gender play, alternating between attitudes of support and ridicule of her performers. At one point, she reports that Shiff was "pleased as punch with his costume, partly because of the personality it gives him, but also because of the sheer pleasure of exhibitionism." He became "another person from Gert Shiff," displaying "another kind of demeanor" (pp. 123-24). Here it seems that the effect of the fashion show, like the play-acting with Miró, is to elicit the patriarchal figure's own fantasies of relinquishing authority. At another moment, however, Bourgeois, pointing to a photograph in which she appears smiling, declares herself satisfied at having humiliated Shiff. "You see how pleased I am. This occurred when Gert Shiff appeared in the splendor of his costume. I had managed to make the older man look like a fool. The point was to make the father look ridiculous. That was the purpose and that was the accomplishment" (p. 126).

Mapplethorpe portrait (used in cropped format for the same catalogue's frontispiece), which positions the artist's body as the physical and psychical carrier of the object she totes under her arm, this pose self-consciously enacts a bodily logic of sculptural production. Here however, with arms pinned out of sight behind her back, the artist's pose more closely resembles that of the swaddled and straitjacketed Fillette itself. Fashioning her own body as a kind of phallic column, or after her Personage Breasted Woman, Bourgeois's parodic impersonation recasts the phallic figure as a corporeal field, across which part-objects of diverse kinds proliferate.

Like the phallus-toting pose of the Mapplethorpe portrait, which invites comparison with Lynda Benglis's earlier Artforum ad, the modeling of the part-object gown in the Michaels portrait also invokes other images. Standing before the etched-glass double doors of a studio room on the first floor of her narrow Chelsea row house, her head cocked slightly to the side, eyes slit, face creased with a sardonic half-smile, Bourgeois seems, for one, to mimic photographs of Duchamp. And if the wryly composed expression, together with the posture of her similarly slight frame, evokes that troublesome elder, the breastplate of rubbery protuberances she wears also might be seen to recast Prière de Toucher, the foam rubber breast, issued in an edition of 999 and mounted on velvet to adorn the cover

of the catalogue for the exhibition "Le Surréalisme en 1947."⁶⁰ (For a related photograph of Bourgeois posing in another latex breastplate, see figure 3.13).

As a type of publicity photograph, intended for publication in a mass-circulation fashion magazine, the Michaels portrait however also invites comparison with the performative poses of Kusama, who in the 1960s staged photographs of her own nude body, fetishistically displayed. In a publicity photograph for the "Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show," she poses nude between the prow of the boat and the wallpapered wall. Squeezed into that narrow interval, her back turned to the camera, she seems pinned in a phallic field that projects from all sides.

As in her poses with Fillette, Bourgeois's address to the camera by contrast resists the fetishistic gaze, deploying the sculptural object, toted or worn, to enact the body's refashioning in the fantasy-logic of the drives. Much as the poses she strikes in the Mapplethorpe series of pictures subvert such conventional stereotypes as the phallic woman and the female body as object-of-the-gaze (both of which Benglis reproduces in her Artforum ad), her pose in the breast-dress puts in place of the woman-as-fetish the female body cloaked in a field of part-object

⁶⁰ Florence de Mèredieu has noted the correspondence between Bourgeois's use of rubber in her work in general and Duchamp's cover for the catalogue of the 1947 Surrealism show. See de Mèredieu, Histoire Matérielle et Immatérielle de l'Art Moderne (Paris: Borda, 1994), p. 106.

projection.

In-difference: Lairs

In the body of work Bourgeois exhibited at the Stable Gallery in 1964, differences--of inside and outside, horizontal and vertical, figure and ground, male and female--dissolve in roiling surfaces (Rondeau for L., 1963, fig. 3.14), hanging nests (Fée Couturière, ca. 1963), and molten flows (Portrait). Organ-like, spackled by a thick, scrofulous skin or coated in a mucus-like film, these pieces, as we have seen, enact the breakdown of the figure into the part-object body of the drives.

Emblematic of this collapse of difference was a structure Bourgeois called the Lair, comprising, as Wye has written, "complex mysterious interiors and seemingly formless exteriors."⁶¹ Flexible surfaces were slit or coiled, perforated or twisted, the form itself a flow, a spiral, a rhythm of turns punctuated by cuts and tears.

Writing about the Lairs in 1964, Daniel Robbins offered a first-hand account of their construction. The pivotal element of this structure was, he explained, a corporeal interface between soft internal organs and stiff skin.⁶²

⁶¹ Wye, "One and Others," p. 24.

⁶² Robbins, "Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois," p. 30. Robbins included in his account of works shown at the Stable Gallery a number not specifically entitled Lairs, noting that "although individual pieces of the new Bourgeois sculpture have identifying titles, they all share the same

The artist began by cutting a piece of fine mesh that, intricately twisted, served as "the core for poured liquid rubber which is sometimes patted and applied with a trowel or knife."⁶³ This rubber coating slathered onto the mesh armature formed the complex internal structure of the Lair. "Like living flesh," Robbins observed, "the rubber quivers and flaps. It gets cut and spliced, forming channels, ridges, walls, tendons, bridges." The effect of the wet rubberized gut was at this stage "appallingly real," he wrote, for "because of the transparent pink-ochre color of the freshly poured rubber," the internal parts carried a "viscous sheen like the inside of a mouth."⁶⁴

Built from the inside out, the Lair's "soft birth" of poured rubber yielded a pulsing flow of organ-like tissue. Next came the casting of the rubber mold, or "dermal matrix," in plaster or cement: "parts that once yielded to the touch" hardened into fixed forms. In the final stage of the process, the once rubbery-soft inside of the work, now solidified in a welter of passages and cavities, was "joined to a poured plaster shell, a smooth crust or skin which rolls gently, swelling or contracting as it manifests the interior life of the form."⁶⁵

construction as "Lairs."

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Access to the interior of the Lair was now restricted to partial views through apertures perforating its shell, disclosed only to part-to-part examination by an eye pressed against the hole or crevice. Blocking visual capture, the enclosing structure of the Lair enforces a fragmentary process of examination. Bulbous forms produced by the dribbling of plaster and cement on twisted sheets of wire mesh assume no memorable shape or profile. The textural articulation of the surfaces further enhances this effect of formlessness: unevenly applied, the rough skin is bumpy and cracked, ridges and creases raised by the troweling-on of the plaster further obscuring any continuity of plane.

Sheltered by these scrofulous exteriors are the interior spaces described by Robbins, some of them animated by organ-like clusters visible through cavities opened in the inert shell (Homage to Bernini, ca. 1967, fig. 3.15). Others are vacant or shadowed, marked only by a cavernous hollow or by slits and gaps puncturing the surface. The structure of the Lair therefore is less often an inversion--a turning outside-in of sculptural form--than a spiral, folding together inside and out.

The convulsive, twisting construction of Lair (ca. 1962-63, fig. 3.16), for example, recapitulates that of a slightly earlier piece, Spiral/Summer of 1960, which consists in a loop formed of plaster-covered wire mesh rolled into tubes and twisted into a snake-like coil. One

way of defining the relation of these two works is that Spiral/Summer comprises the armature around which Lair is constructed, a structure with no vertical or horizontal axis but fashioned by tying a length of tubing into a loose knot. In Lair, the openwork, linear design of Spiral/Summer gives way to a tighter, more intricate, and more muscular knot, through the loops of which it is no longer possible to see. Tracing a circuitry without inside or outside, and also without hierarchy or difference, Spiral/Summer supplies an armature to which Lair adds the density of corporeal mass. Rather than loosely tied, its spiraling form is solidly impacted, the spaces between the loops now eye-shaped crevices barely wide enough for a hand or finger to slide through.

Collapsed into prone contortion, the sculpture is not only undone as figure, its spine twisted into a knot, but is also eroded at the level of organic form. That is, the Lair does not perform a metaphorical substitution, likening the figure to organic form, but is rather structured so as to subsume both in the inertness of matter. The evidence for such a reading lies in the central feature of the Lair's construction: namely, the relation that is produced between interior and exterior.

Fundamental to the organic logic of biomorphic abstraction, Krauss observed in 1977, is "the symbolic importance of a central, interior space from which the

energy of living matter derives, from which its organization develops as do the concentric rings that annually build outward from the tree trunk's core."⁶⁶ In this analysis, the metaphor of the sculptural object as itself a living organism replaces the life-like representation that is relinquished in modernist sculpture's turn to abstraction, forestalling the suggestion that "the sculpted object might be seen as nothing but inert material."⁶⁷ Wye invokes this general metaphor of the sculptural object as reproducing an organic relation of interior and exterior in her reading of the Lairs as "resembling cocoons or nests" and "folded inwardly, seemingly as the result of an organic process."⁶⁸ Consistent with the titles of the works (and with Bourgeois's own characterization of them as structures of refuge and retreat), this description however does not address the destructive logic by which inside and outside are folded together, the concentric rings of the tree trunk distorted, as it were, into the twisting loops of the spiral.

Bourgeois's reworking of biomorphic abstraction in the Lairs can be seen to disrupt the organic continuity between interior and exterior in several ways. The spiral form

⁶⁶ Rosalind E. Krauss, Passages in Modern Sculpture (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), p. 253.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Wye, "One and Others," pp. 24, 26.

through which inside and outside are twisted together is one of these. Another is the deflation of form into, precisely, an inert mass that occurs in a latex Lair of 1963 (fig. 3.17). The soft counterpart of a conical plaster Lair of 1962 (fig. 3.18), this latex Lair flattens the other's orderly architectonic progression of graduated rings spiraling upward toward a sharp tip. Devolving, conversely, into a limp mound, the latex Lair droops and spreads, the cone deflated into a descending spiral of slack coils.

Compared with a canonical work within the tradition of biomorphic abstraction, such as Arp's Physiognomic Stone (1936)--also a rounded, inert mass, oriented horizontally and articulated by surface depressions--the latex Lair looks less organic than dead, even decomposed. Flaccid, shriveled, and pock-marked, it fulfills Raynor's observation that the tone of the Stable Gallery show was "melancholy, as if the sculptor hadn't felt like working." For against the swelling bulges and smooth contours of Physiognomic Stone--the transition from curves to hollows evoking a pulsation or dimpling of elastic flesh--the shapelessness of Lair effects not only a deflation of form, but a lowering of the work's affective register.

That this collapse into formlessness enacts the detumescence of the phallus is evident, particularly read against the hyper-erectness of such counterparts as the conical Lair and Labyrinthine Tower and the hypertrophy of

such precedents as Physiognomic Stone. The phallic figure, its verticality transposed in Physiognomic Stone into an exaggerated swelling, is reduced in Lair to an inert mound. Further, the deformation effected by the latex Lair engages a depressive reworking of phallic form. For as Raynor suggests, it is not only form that is deflated; the sculpture's inertness also suggests a suspension of work, a refusal to produce, a disanimation of form.

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"Life doesn't last, art doesn't last, it doesn't matter,"⁶⁹ Hesse commented of her extensive use of latex, "a medium known to be impermanent," as Lippard observed.⁷⁰ The susceptibility of this material to disintegration, and Hesse's indifference to its inevitable deterioration ("it made no difference whether it remained intact forever"⁷¹) conspicuously evoke the proximity of the artist's own premature death. But it is also possible to see in both Hesse's and Bourgeois's use of latex, exploited as a kind of antisculptural material--soft, impermanent, deformational--the displacement of an organic sculptural logic by an inorganic logic of process.

The depressive affect of the Stable Gallery show evoked for Raynor the listlessness of inactivity; for Robbins, the

⁶⁹ Quoted in Lippard, Eva Hesse, p. 210.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

production of the Lairs enacted a vital, even hyper-activity. Both responses however are conditioned by an organic model of sculptural production, one in which shape is imposed on matter in accordance with what Robbins calls the "supreme logic of nature."⁷² Yet the procedure he describes--of rubber poured and spliced, congealed and cast, and the resulting structure doused and spackled over with plaster--might be seen to invoke less a metaphor of growth than the circular logic of "pure process."

In her account of the artist's working procedure, as we have seen, Lippard underscored this self-perpetuating condition of Bourgeois's production, in which each object is intercepted by the material flow of the next. An object "made first from soft plaster (which turns hard)" is then "cast in latex so that a permanently soft mold, or skin, exists independently," and later made in marble--a process through which "shapes and ideas appear and disappear in a maze of version, materials, incarnations."⁷³ In the turn to flexible materials and the process of casting, Bourgeois engaged a working procedure in which each object, in effect, produces the next: the latex pieces are "the plaster pieces inside out"; the plaster Lairs in turn are the hardened casts of soft latex molds; the form of one work, a knot of plaster tubing, supplies the armature for another--and so

⁷² Robbins, "Sculpture by Louise Bourgeois," p. 30.

⁷³ Lippard, "From the Inside Out," pp. 242, 241.

on, as each object triggers the next in a succession structured not by stylistic or formal resemblance, or by consistency of material or scale, but by a kind of chain-reaction of physical processes.⁷⁴

With obvious parallels to the part-object connections of the Duchampian bachelor apparatus, and to the schizoid

⁷⁴ In a recent analysis of two works made by Hesse in 1968, Repetition Nineteen III and Area, Briony Fer has described Hesse's process in similar terms, as "a knot" that ties the two works together. Flattening out the cylindrical molds for Repetition Nineteen III, she painted the wire mesh sheets with latex and sewed them together to produce Area. As Fer explains, "there is no visible link" between the two works, "only this invisible one, where the discarded kernels of one set of forms have been turned into something unrecognisable, as Hesse said, quite 'disconnected'" (my emphasis). The discontinuity, or disconnection, of the two works at the level of form masks their connection at the level of process, where they are bound together by "a knot," or, as Fer also says, "an intricate structural point." Bourgeois's and Hesse's production therefore would seem to be linked by this interplay of processes that undermines conventional principles of stylistic, formal, or material continuity.

Further, Fer's emphasis on the psychoanalytic operation of Repetition Nineteen III and Area in terms of destruction and inversion suggests that both Hesse's and Bourgeois's works can be considered within a logic of the drives. First, Area, a series of crumpled flat rubberized sheets sewn together and placed along the floor and wall to mark that juncture, like the scattering of crumpled cylinders that comprises Repetition Nineteen III, obviously invokes a horizontal field. Second, quoting Hesse's remark that Area is "the insides we took out" of the molds for Repetition Nineteen III, Fer notes that "Area recycles that disused mold, turned, as it were, inside-out" so that "the mold is used only to destroy itself as a mold." This language of taking the insides out and physical processes that destroy objects only to recover and deploy them again, is evocative of Klein's account of the interplay of infantile drives (although Fer's project is rather to read Hesse's work through a Lacanian model of the object as marking an absence in the field of vision). Briony Fer, "Treading Blindly, or the Excessive Presence of the Object," manuscript, 1997, pp. 1-4.

system of "desiring production" outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, Bourgeois's work in the early sixties anticipates the anti-Oedipal formulation of the "body without organs," which Krauss has called "the body without an image, the gestaltless body, or the body without form."⁷⁵ Within this model of pure process, a perpetual repetition that, in its very circularity, elides difference, the works Bourgeois produced in this period, like Hesse's contemporaneous production, therefore can be read less as sculptures than as objects in which process is inscribed.

If, however, such a model helps to account for the interconnecting logic of these works, its emphasis on machinic systematicity in bodily production disaccords with another salient feature of Bourgeois's artistic process, namely, her tendency toward what Lippard called "random exploration with no immediate point in view."⁷⁶ For while a self-perpetuating logic of physical process clearly underlies the discontinuities of Bourgeois's practice, particularly in this period, it is also plain that the field of her production is more open, and more internally riven, than Hesse's.⁷⁷ The range of works Bourgeois has produced

⁷⁵ Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, p. 316.

⁷⁶ Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 248.

⁷⁷ Fer, however, underscores the nonlinearity of Hesse's working process, describing it in terms quite similar to those Lippard uses to describe that of Bourgeois: "Characteristic . . . was the way each work in [a] series had a tendency to veer off in an unlikely direction rather

from 1960 to the present indeed evidences an inconsistency deeply inimical to any notion of system. The insistent disordering of the oeuvre engages a logic that can therefore perhaps best be understood within the flexible framework of object relations and the Kleinian psychoanalytic play technique. For as Mitchell has observed, Klein "explored the borderland between the physiological and the psychological, seeing the one emanating from the other under the provocation of the external world."⁷⁸ Bourgeois's description of her works as "solutions" to psychic problems, of the process of their making as "an insight into the source of compulsion, a relief and a deflation of compulsion," similarly underscores their status as material imprints of psychic experience.⁷⁹

That the works do not function as representations of that experience, but as carriers of it, as objects of the play in which "the devastating effect of the emotions you go through" is registered, situates them within a Kleinian model of fantasy as a material enactment of the drives.⁸⁰

than move towards a predictable let alone logical conclusion." Fer, "Treading Blindly," p. 2.

⁷⁸ Mitchell, introduction, The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 31.

⁷⁹ Bourgeois, interview with the author, September 27, 1993.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free Fall, p. 123.

Sex Is Not One: Hanging Janus

"Hanging is important" in her work, Bourgeois has observed, "because it allows things to turn around." The hanging thing "is very helpless, it changes the hierarchy of the work; the base disappears."⁸¹

The disappearance of the base was of course a condition of Bourgeois's earliest sculptural work. The Personages stood directly on the floor, "like people." And in this detachment from bases they occupied a terrain mapped in the Surrealist sculptures of Giacometti, including, for example, Woman with Her Throat Cut and Disagreeable Object, which also were displayed "sans base."

Tapering to narrow points that unsteadily contacted the floor, and set in variable groupings around the room, the Personages were also contingent, susceptible both to the play of physical movement and to the play of fantasy. In this as well they evoked, albeit elliptically, Giacometti.

By the mid 1960s, when Bourgeois turned her pieces on the horizontal, or hung them from the ceiling, "floor-bound work," as Fer has noted, was no longer exceptional but "had become the norm."⁸² This reorientation of the sculptural object from its former perpendicular relation to the ground to a horizontal position coextensive with it (as in pieces

⁸¹ Quoted in Francesco Bonami, "Louise Bourgeois: In a Strange Way, Things Are Getting Better and Better," Flash Art, vol. 27, no. 174 (January-February 1994), p. 38.

⁸² Fer, "Treading Blindly," p. 7.

by Hesse, Carl Andre, Richard Serra, and Robert Morris, for example), placed the viewer in a startlingly different physical relation to the work, which was now "all but at one's feet, or literally at one's feet."⁸³ These works, as Fer observes, "erase from the field of vision, as it were, the height of a sculpture."⁸⁴

Bourgeois's hanging pieces, produced at roughly the same time as the floor pieces Fer describes, however placed the work not at one's feet, where it might be treaded on or tripped over, but about one's head, where it might be grazed or peered into. The first of these hanging things were pieces such as Fée Couturière and The Quartered One (ca. 1964-65, fig. 3.19), hollow plaster hives or nests that, like the Lairs with which they are contemporaneous, draw the eye into a shadowy interior space, a bodily architecture of cavities and pockets. Suspended in space, touching neither the horizontal plane of pedestal or floor, nor the vertical plane of the wall, these works evoked a dislocation of the body from the unifying structure of the figure.

Unlike Giacometti's suspended objects, dangled from the armatures of their metal cages in Suspended Ball and The Palace at 4 A.M., Bourgeois's hanging things were dropped directly from the ceiling, asserting, like their floor-bound counterparts, an immediate physical relation to the viewer's

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

body. Engaging the body from above, by occupying a space not below but rather above the field sculpture was "supposed to occupy,"⁸⁵ these works can be seen as joining in the project of displacement and disorientation that characterizes so much sculptural production of the 1960s.

And somewhat like those works that flatten the object into a shallow depth, Bourgeois's hanging pieces restage the viewer's relation to the sculptural object by invoking the gravitational pull of the body toward the floor. This use of hanging not to raise but to lower, countering the uplift of the phallic body by evoking the "helpless" sag of its hanging parts, is particularly evident in the 1968 series of Januses (figs. 3.20-3.22).

With their pendular scrotum-like couples, the Januses invite comparison with slightly earlier works by Hesse. Particularly close in morphology is Hesse's Vertiginous Detour of 1966, a rubber ball encased in papier maché and plaster and hung from the ceiling in a net bag that, under the gravitational pressure of the sphere, assumes a teardrop shape. The roughly contemporaneous felts of Robert Morris, Richard Serra's hanging pieces, and Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures also can be seen to frame the context of the Januses' project to rehang the Surrealist part-object. If, therefore, Bourgeois's hanging pieces invoke Giacometti and the part-object logic of Surrealist sculpture, this

⁸⁵ Ibid.

reworking undertaken in the mid to late 1960s is shaped and mediated by contemporary sculptural production in which the phallic logic of the figure is destabilized more radically and intensively than in Giacometti's brief engagement with objects sans base.

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Disagreeable Object, as Brenson observed, was double-edged, one end appearing "vulnerable and helpless," the other "aggressive and menacing." And in 1968, as we have seen, Bourgeois explicitly invoked this precedent, recapitulating Disagreeable Object in Fillette in order to rework the doubleness of the fetish as an interplay of aggression and affection, brandishing and cradling.

The hanging objects she made during this period, including Fillette and the contemporaneous series of doubled forms, cast in bronze, called Januses, also invoked Giacometti via another work, Suspended Ball. The suggestion that hanging is important because it "allows things to turn around" recalls the movement inscribed in that work by the cleft ball's stroking of the priapic wedge, its rhythmic rocking back and forth along the contour of the crescent's upturned curve. And, like Fillette, the Januses can be seen to enact the undecidability of Suspended Ball, which, split between tenderness and sadism, registers, in the sphere's tracking of the wedge, both "a caress" and "a cut."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Krauss, The Optical Unconscious, p. 166.

As in the stringing up of Fillette on its hook, the hanging of the Januses can be read as sadistic, an enactment of castration. Indeed, the elimination of the sculpture's support is in itself a move against the integrity of the phallus. Suspended from the ceiling, Hanging Janus, Janus in Leather Jacket (fig. 3.20), and Hanging Janus with Jacket (fig. 3.21), all of 1968 to 1971, can be seen as emblems (even trophies) of castrative violence, an implication underscored in the Januses "with jacket" by the jagged metal casings that sheathe the fleshy parts. Further, the muscular density of the forms, their suspension from sturdy hooks, the shiny black patina of the bronze, the leather-like stiffness of the folded metal bindings--all evoke a culture of sadomasochistic ritual.⁸⁷

Yet a baby-like fatness and roundness of creased, elastic flesh also suggests an infant body, the downward pull of the heavy, doubled bundles evoking the inertness of a body that cannot hold itself erect. In the two Januses "with jacket," the plump rolls are wrapped in sheets fastened snugly underneath at a point that doubles as the crotch of an infant body, diapered or gathered into a sling for carrying, and the bound scrotum of an adult genital, the

⁸⁷ Photographs of a 1993 "Party for the Clit Club" at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York show a male performer in tight leather pants and boots performing on a platform framed by two of the Januses, one suspended from a chain of shackle-like rings that trail down toward the floor. Reproduced in Liz Kotz, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Lusitania 6 (1994), special issue "Vulvamorphia," p. 128.

heavy swollen pendency of testicles captured in a close-fitting sheath.

Like Fillette, which alternates between baby and phallus, and so engages an interplay of nurturing and aggression, the Januses, doubled and suspended, oscillate between infantile helplessness and castrative violence. The curled metal sheets that enfold the body of the Janus-with-jacket function both as sling-like supports, and, jaggedly cut, as emblems of castration. The very juxtaposition of smooth, supple masses and stiff, serrated coverings produces this duality. Further, in an interplay of softening and sharpening, the phallus itself can be seen as divided between a baby-like vulnerability and a blade-like violence, as not only the object of tenderness and aggression, but also the split embodiment of both.⁸⁸

Compared to the structure of Brancusi's Torso of a Young Man--an obvious precedent that also displays the male genital as part-object and that also can be read as both phallic and castrated--the Januses reorient the part-object body onto the horizontal. Doubled over to conflate penis and scrotum, the two-headed Janus therefore casts the phallus not as an upright and unitary figure, but as a

⁸⁸ Storr situates the Januses within the gender politics of contemporary art, describing them as "wry phallic monuments" that can in part be read "as ironic observations on the priapic posturing of the '50s and after. . . . This is not ritual castration but a bemused and at times nearly affectionate contemplation of spent power." Storr, "Gender and Possession," p. 134.

pendant and divided organ, and the suspended format of the works further accentuates this difference, producing the part-object, in contrast to the phallus, as an organ that descends, or pends, from the body.

The Januses were produced by, in effect, twinning an earlier work, entitled Sleep, made first in 1966 as a plaster maquette eight inches high and enlarged in marble the following year.⁸⁹ The larger version, Sleep II (fig. 1.2), is the work Rubin admired in 1969 for its sublimatory "phallic character" akin to "the sexuality of Brancusi and Arp." As smoothly polished as a Brancusi Sleeping Muse, it takes the form of a swollen phallic head, ovoidal in shape, which protrudes from a foreskin-like double cowl. In twinning, turning, and hanging Sleep (which Wye describes as an isolated "cumul"), the Janus therefore performs a conflation, or double reworking of Princess X and Suspended Ball. For Princess X itself is a doubled phallic form that, pivoted onto the horizontal so that its two bulbous ends turned toward the floor, would look very much like a Janus. Encapsulating a part-object-based history of modern sculpture in the collapse of "Brancusi" and "Giacometti," these operations also can be seen to suspend and divide the work over gender. For as much as a doubling of the phallus,

⁸⁹ Wye, "One and Others," p. 25. Of the motif, Bourgeois says, "The element of Sleep was so important to me. It was like a self-portrait that stayed for many years and was incorporated into other pieces" (p. 84).

the Janus can be read as a troubling of sex.

In Janus Fleuri (fig. 3.22), the jagged casing of the pendular bulbs is transposed into a blossoming, a pulpy eruption that encircles the groin like a tongue. Thickly clotted, symmetrical, soft, this lingulate jacket suggests an overlay of female genitalia, a conflation of labia, vulva, and clitoris that overspreads the Janus like a lick. And confronting Janus Fleuri, with its multiple doublings, its labial symmetry, its fluid co-mingling of parts, it is impossible to ignore the aptness of Luce Irigaray's model of female sexuality as "this sex which is not one."⁹⁰

For in the corpus of feminist artistic production, and specifically of so many attempts to rethink the representation of the body in nonphallogocentric terms, Janus Fleuri is a work that seems to materialize with particular explicitness that condition which Irigaray would later describe as the "self-touching" of the female body. "Our depth," she would write, "is the thickness of our body, our all touching itself. Where top and bottom, inside and outside, in front and behind, above and below are not separated, remote, out of touch. Our all intermingled. Without breaks or gaps."⁹¹ Or rather, Janus Fleuri would

⁹⁰ This is despite the fact that Irigaray's eponymous study was not published until 1977, nine years after Bourgeois had produced Janus Fleuri. Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One (1977), trans. Catherine Porter, with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 213.

seem to enact "the sex that is not one" if it did not so evidently produce its doubleness through the logic of the part-object. For the undecidability of the Janus, its slippage between male and female, elides the very difference that Irigaray means to articulate.

In a recent study devoted to theorizing a "corporeal feminism," Elizabeth Grosz remarked on the ambivalence of many feminist theorists toward part-object models of the body, citing in particular Irigaray's pointed skepticism about any model in which the difference of the female body is disprivileged.⁹² Obviously crucial to any reading of Bourgeois's oeuvre, and perhaps particularly to the body of work she produced in the period of her most active engagement in feminist politics, is this question of whether a bodily logic of the part-object should be seen as simply one more phallogentric attempt to "get rid of sexual difference," as Rosi Braidotti has put it.⁹³ "Is the bypassing of gender in favour of a dispersed polysexuality not a very masculine move?" Braidotti wonders.⁹⁴ Or, we might ask, apropos of Bourgeois's rebuttal to Surrealism,

⁹² Elizabeth Grosz, "Intensities and Flows," chapter 7, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 160-83.

⁹³ Rosi Braidotti, Patterns of Dissonance (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), p. 121. Quoted in Grosz, Volatile Bodies, p. 163.

⁹⁴ Braidotti, Patterns of Dissonance, p. 121. Quoted in Grosz, Volatile Bodies, p. 163.

and reworking of a famously polysexual model of gender: can a part-object logic enact female desire?

I have argued that Bourgeois's deployment of the part-object, demonstrably different from the Surrealist strategies to which it so closely relates, shows that it can. In this analysis, Bourgeois's work might be seen to explore the model of corporeality Grosz attributes to Deleuze and Guattari, a "notion of the body as a discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events." It is a model, she suggests, that "may be of great value to feminists attempting to reconceive bodies outside the binary oppositions imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object and interior/exterior oppositions."⁹⁵

Bourgeois's project in the Janus series can be read as a feminist reworking of the body via a nonphallogentric model of sexuality: namely, a part-object logic in which female desire is encompassed in doubling and conflation, in decentering and a disruption of gender hierarchies. In this reworking, hanging is important because it erodes the unity of the phallus, evoking instead the phantasmatic arrangements of the part-object. For if the "helplessness" of the hanging object is a function of its dislocation from a supporting base, the hierarchy that is overturned when the

⁹⁵ Grosz, Volatile Bodies, p. 164.

base disappears and things are allowed to turn around is that of the upright phallic figure.

Following Irigaray's labial model, but reading it through a part-object logic in which both the female and the male body are not "one" but "all touching," the folded flesh of Janus Fleuri therefore might be described as something like this: a conflation of parts (penis, breast, testicles, labia, vulva, clitoris) wrapped in a tongue-knotted bundle that materializes the condition of "auto-affection." Or, we could say, to situate this description within a history of modern sculpture: when, in Janus Fleuri, a sideways Princess X dangled on a wire is wrapped in its vulvate covering, the cross-gendering of that work and the obscure eroticism of Giacometti's Suspended Ball take on a further dimension of complexity, are supplemented by what might be called the labial doubling of the sex that is not one.

Disagreeable Objects: Femme Couteau

In this chapter, I have argued that Bourgeois's production of the 1960s comprises a rethinking of the part-object logic of such early twentieth-century sculptural practices as those of Brancusi, Giacometti, and Arp, and that this reworking is mediated both by contemporary sculptural production and by a feminist politics. I have also suggested that Bourgeois's practice in this period, in its emphasis on a material logic of process, can be seen to

enact the alternately self-perpetuating and self-destructive logic of the drives. In my discussion of a final work from this decade, Femme Couteau (Knife Woman, ca. 1969-70, fig. 3.23), I will consider this displacement of the phallic figure by the field of the drives as opening a space for the enactment of aggression through the female body.

In a 1974 interview with Dorothy Seiberling, Bourgeois gave this account of Femme Couteau, a work Lippard describes as "a wrapped and folded marble blade with delicate pudenda exposed"⁹⁶: "the woman turns into a blade," she says first; but in the next breath the woman has become a girl, who "feels vulnerable because she can be wounded by the penis," and so "tries to take the weapon of the aggressor."⁹⁷ This anxiety, which encompasses not only the fear of physical harm but also the fear of one's own aggression ("when woman becomes aggressive, she becomes terribly afraid") and fear of being unable to be "receptive," arises "at the terror level which precedes anything sexual."⁹⁸

If we compare this account of the psychic contradiction encapsulated in Femme Couteau--a smooth, narrow, highly polished "objet sans base" that both invites and repels

⁹⁶ Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 246.

⁹⁷ Quoted in "The Female View of Erotica"; quoted in Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 246.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

touch--to Brenson's description of Disagreeable Object as "a contradictory image," one end of which is "vulnerable and helpless" and the other "aggressive and menacing," then it is possible to read Femme Couteau as reworking the anxiety embedded in Disagreeable Object from a female subject position. The subject position invoked in Femme Couteau is however decidedly unstable, encompassing not only the fear of being "wounded by the penis" but also the anxiety of aggression.

As Femme Couteau demonstrates in its remaking of Disagreeable Object, anxiety about genital mutilation "which precedes anything sexual," is a fantasy produced by subjects of both sexes. The suggestion that castration anxiety is an infantile terror, and that this fear manifests itself in adulthood not only in male fetishism, but in an anxiety of being both the object and the subject of a violence that is shared in by both sexes, is of course a distinctly Kleinian notion.

In its displacement of sexuality by the death drive, Kleinian theory subsumes sexual development in a drama of aggression. By this account, the Oedipal complex arises in both sexes at the age of about one year, and takes the form of "a dread of being devoured and destroyed"⁹⁹ that in turn gives rise to sadistic impulses toward the aggressive

⁹⁹ Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict" (1928), in The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 71.

female subject, and especially to fantasies of cutting out the insides of the mother, perceived as the "castrator."¹⁰⁰ In Klein's account, therefore, the sexual development of girls and boys is subtended by fantasies of sadistic violence and annihilation.

Subsuming sexuality in the destructive logic of the infantile drives, Klein's account erodes the phallocentrism of the Freudian model. In its destruction of form through melting and dispersal, suspension and turning, accumulation and splitting, Bourgeois's production of the 1960s engages this logic at the level of objects. Late in the decade, in works like Fillette, the Januses, and Femme Couteau, the destructive logic of the drives is deployed not only to decenter the phallus but also to evoke a phantasmatic coupling of sexuality and aggression--for both female and male subjects.

In conclusion, I will turn to a work of 1974, entitled The Destruction of the Father, which constitutes Bourgeois's most explicit analysis of the problematic of aggression in the psychosocial field of patriarchy.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

Conclusion

Eating Words: The Destruction of the Father

It is basically a table, the awful, terrifying family dinner table headed by the father who sits and gloats. And the others, the wife, the children, what can they do? They sit there, in silence. The mother of course tries to satisfy the tyrant, her husband. The children are full of exasperation. We were three children: my brother, my sister, and myself. . . . My father would get nervous looking at us, and he would explain to all of us what a great man he was. So, in exasperation, we grabbed the man, threw him on the table, dismembered him, and proceeded to devour him.¹

Counted among the handful of Bourgeois's best-known sculptures, The Destruction of the Father (1974, figs. 4.1 and 4.2) has assumed the status of a signature work. It is, however, a work that has seldom been shown; that, when exhibited, has proved difficult to install; and that, when reproduced, is barely intelligible as an image. It is, therefore, primarily known through the artist's account, condensed in a title that has come to stand for the whole of her production--as if to the question, "What is Louise Bourgeois's work about?" the answer might be: the destruction of the father.

This chapter considers The Destruction of the Father

¹ Quoted in Jean Frémon, preface, Louise Bourgeois: Retrospective 1947-1984 (Paris: Galerie Maeght Lelong, 1984), unpaginated.

both as a material object and as a text through which the artist's project is known and interpreted. Reading the two together, this study therefore concludes by revisiting a central paradox of Bourgeois's production, namely, its conjuncture of the ambivalent and the literal. As before, I will consider this problem within a Kleinian framework of interpretation--one that, as I have argued, encompasses both the morphological ambivalence of the pregendered, and the linguistic literalness of the subsymbolic. Further, I will suggest that the Kleinian object relations model, in its emphasis on the bodily fantasies through which speech and subjectivity are formed, may help us to read Bourgeois's production and naming of The Destruction of the Father in the early 1970s within the phantasmatic and political contexts of the feminist movement.²

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To begin, then, with the work that was exhibited in a show at the 112 Greene Street Gallery in December 1974 not as The Destruction of the Father, but under the title Le Repas du soir (The Evening Meal), it is, in general terms, an installation. Harbored within a tent of black cloth, measuring some nine feet across, is a platform studded with

² This is not to analogize the history of the feminist movement to the development of the individual subject. The Kleinian model of subjectivity, as we have seen, is a radically nondevelopmental one, in which a subsymbolic register of experience is preserved, and its relevance for Bourgeois's work resides precisely in this ahistorical logic.

protuberant forms covered in a wrinkled, ruptured latex. Overhung with a pendulous cluster of giant sticky globes, the horizontal field of undecidable lumps and bulges, corresponding in Bourgeois's account to the father's body, is dispersed and distressed. The stretching and buckling of the epidermal sheathes suggest a deathly slackness, an exhaustion of plasticity. At the level of form, the work itself seems to be eaten away, to be rotting like a corpse, even--but a corpse we confront from within, a corpse in which we are placed.

For the experience of viewing The Destruction of the Father, as critics have observed, suggests that of being inside a dead or dying body. "A central tablelike structure is enveloped by large globular protuberances in rough latex that suggest decay," writes Wye.³ The loose, sticky membranes, oozing gum, and the tuberous lumps dispersed over a horizontal field, exert an obscure disturbing effect, evoking the inside or underside of a body. Correlating The Destruction of the Father to the earlier Cumuls and Soft Landscapes, Wye suggests that "the bulging, swollen landscapes of the mid-sixties have now overgrown an entire inner sanctum to create a scene that closes in upon itself with the evocation of frightening claustrophobia."⁴

As in the earlier Portrait, the disordering of the

³ Wye, "One and Others," p. 29.

⁴ Ibid.

field, coupled with the puckering and cracking of the sweaty latex, is repellent. The rupture and scarring of the skins suggests a violent swelling, followed by a deflation into inert matter. Withered and depleted, the body stretched out in that cavern as a disorganized profusion of parts evokes not the sexual ambiguity of the Januses--both phallic and castrated, both tumescent and spent--but the stagnancy of a corpse.

If, therefore, we accept Bourgeois's account of a phantasmatic shattering and devouring of the paternal body, this scene can only be the prologue to the one that confronts us in the work itself, which seems so obviously to present not the act, but the aftermath of aggression, a body's dismemberment and decay. That this scene furthermore unfolds in an interior, uterine cavity reminiscent of the lairs suggests that The Destruction of the Father might also be seen to encompass the maternal body, that the phantasmatic space of a patricidal fantasy somehow overlaps or coincides with an infantile fantasy of the mother.

Forming a corporeal chamber in which the viewer is enclosed, the structure of the work reinforces this logic of a phantasmatic space in which the act of viewing, and its necessary condition of distance from the object, is overtaken and collapsed into the claustrophobic surround of a more immediate bodily experience. Visitors to the exhibition in which the piece was first displayed (a show

that also included works in marble, bronze, and plaster, some of them quite small, placed directly on the floor, while others, including the Hanging Janus series, were hung from the ceiling) remarked on the penumbral quality of the light. Lippard, for example, noted that the scattering of the sculptures in a vast, dimly lit space meant that "one had to go very close to come into any real contact with each piece."⁵ These were circumstances conducive not so much to aesthetic contemplation as to a tentative groping in the gloom, and one effect of this inhibition of sight was to dramatize the work at the show's center, the interior of which was bathed in a startling red light.

Dominating a dark room in which sculptures were almost randomly positioned, even from within The Destruction of the Father was, however, obscure. "The meaning of any of the forms or groups is far from clear," Alan Sondheim observed. While one of the shapes was "definitely masculine," most of the "disheveled" forms, "rough, raw, and flat, almost deathly white in color" and provisionally, even urgently arranged, seemed simply "abstract." Venturing that the work resembled "a kind of erotic horror--an exhaustion of emotion and libido--like a last slow mating before a slower death," he attributed this impression to "the roughness, even crudity, of its construction." "Its forms are crude," he continued. "Although they are made from six to seven layers

⁵ Lippard, "From the Inside Out," p. 242.

of latex, they have the appearance of extreme impermanence."⁶

The hybridity and evanescence of the materials, the gothic tone of the theatrical display in which viewer becomes spectator, the overweening affect of the scene--all colluded in a transgression of taste that set up The Destruction of the Father to be read in the 1970s as emblematic of a rejection of formalism.⁷ If, for critics at the time, the work's transgressive antiformalism was to be celebrated, for another viewer, confronting the piece more than twenty years later, it displayed a vulgarity bordering on kitsch. Underscoring, via a comparison with Salvador Dalí ("that most evidently despicable of twentieth century artists") the degradation of modernism effected by the work's debasement not only of the father, but of form, Adrian Rifkin was repelled by its "imagery of dejection," or one might say, abjection.⁸ And indeed it is impossible even today to overlook the intensity of the work's desecration of modernist aesthetics and, especially, its parody of disengaged viewing. For The Destruction of the

⁶ Alan Sondheim, "Louise Bourgeois," Arts, vol. 49 (March 1975), p. 23.

⁷ See, for example, Baldwin, "Louise Bourgeois: An Iconography of Abstraction."

⁸ Adrian Rifkin, "Reading the Sexual for Something Else," in Museum of Modern Art Papers, Volume One: Louise Bourgeois, ed. Ian Cole, p. 32.

Father makes the object of the gaze a carnal theater, in which the viewer is implicated as witness to the scene.⁹

This work therefore can be seen parodically to enact not only the consuming of patriarchal privilege over speech (what Storr called a "cannibalistic burlesque in which the artistic father is devoured by those condemned for so long to tolerate his pomposities") but also an eating away of the viewer's space of disinterested contemplation.¹⁰ And it is through its aggressive positioning of the viewer, who, swallowed in the maw of the work, is unable adequately to see it, that The Destruction of the Father is literal, or at least, fails to be properly symbolic.

Here it is necessary to distinguish between the obscurity of the abstract venerated by formalism and the obscurity of a tableau like The Destruction of the Father (or like the Étant donnés for that matter). For if, as Sondheim cautioned, it was "difficult to read the work in such a literal fashion" as the story supplied for its

⁹ In this, The Destruction of the Father can be compared to Duchamp's Étant donnés, which, first displayed in 1969, also attracted criticism as vulgar, kitsch, theatrical, delinquent, and so forth. Bourgeois's production in the early seventies of a work that implicates the viewer as onlooker to a scene of murderous violence and decay (in this instance purportedly against the body of the father) engages a logic so strikingly apposite to that of the Étant donnés that the relation of the two works would seem to merit further consideration within a model of reworking.

¹⁰ Storr's specific reference is to the Surrealist father figures. "Gender and Possession," p. 135.

interpretation seemed to demand, this is not only because it was "abstract," and such a narrative therefore might overdetermine its meaning, but also because the work was simply difficult to read. Because The Destruction of the Father failed to signify,¹¹ seeming to locate itself at the limit of formal coherence, Bourgeois's commentary served less as a guide to the work's meaning--a text through which to read it--than a substitute for it.

A principal effect of the story Bourgeois told about the work was, then, to discourage any reading of it as abstract, to reject its assimilation within the logic of the aesthetic. Proposing a text as literal as the work itself, she redoubled her effort to erode the space of interpretation available to the viewer. However morphologically ambiguous, The Destruction of the Father was, and has largely remained, a literal work.

Before turning to an interpretation of the phantasmatic logic of The Destruction of the Father, a reading that will attempt to reinvoke the work's undecidability and indeterminacy, a consideration of its political dimension therefore is in order. For in the specific context of the

¹¹ This "failure to signify" is to a degree historically specific. In the current context of the turn to abjection, the intensive reconsideration of the informe, and even the reception of Bourgeois's own work by younger artists, The Destruction of the Father is far more accessible to interpretation now than it would have been in the 1970s, when critics read it primarily through the oppositional framework of formalism and its rejection.

early 1970s, the implications of the shift from indeterminacy to literalness, effected via Bourgeois's account, must be seen as political. And in the context of the mid 1990s, in which the politics of her production is contested between feminist positions and a biographically based humanism, the issue of the work's politics is made urgent once more.

To move, then, from the ambivalent formal logic of the work to the directness of the speech that surrounds it, I propose to examine what might be at stake in the demand to be read literally.

Reading Literally

For a feminist, taking Melanie Klein "at her word--reading her literally as she asks to be read"--risks, as Mary Jacobus has observed, "a kind of theoretical regression."¹² For the "untroubled literalness" with which Klein moves "between phantasy and its objects" resists "the very aspect of Lacanian theory that has made it so inviting" to feminists seeking to reframe sexuality and subjectivity in linguistic rather than essential terms.¹³ "The current return to Klein" (she writes in 1990) in feminist psychoanalytic studies therefore feels, Jacobus says, "like

¹² Mary Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy': Poor Mrs Klein and the Pencil Shavings," Women: A Cultural Review 2, special issue, "Positioning Klein" (Summer 1990), p. 160.

¹³ Ibid., p. 161.

eating one's words."¹⁴

It is of course at the boundary of language, in the field of experience Lacan termed "the Imaginary" that Kleinian theory operates. As Lacan himself explained it, Klein's psychoanalytic play technique works "at the very limit of the appearance of language."¹⁵ And it is here that Bourgeois's work can be seen to operate as well, materializing in objects what Jacobus has argued Kleinian theory offers to psychoanalytic feminism, "a way to rethink both the Oedipus complex and the pre-Oedipal."¹⁶

Psychoanalytic feminist work in the field of art history has, however, experienced no return to Klein.¹⁷ Given the Kleinian model's emphasis on objects, rather than words, it is surprising that this model should be ignored in art history even as it is engaged in feminist literary studies.¹⁸ Perhaps it is the very obviousness (or

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 20. Quoted in Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy,'" p. 161.

¹⁶ Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy,'" p. 161. Jacobus notes that the pre-Oedipal is "no longer properly 'pre' in Klein, to the extent that the Oedipal itself is characterised for her by its prematurity."

¹⁷ An important recent Kleinian-based feminist analysis however is Briony Fer's "Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism," *Art History*, vol. 17 (September 1994), pp. 424-49.

¹⁸ The 1990 special issue of *Women: A Cultural Review*, "Positioning Klein," for example included essays by Jacobus, Elaine Showalter, and Janet Sayers.

literalness) of a connection between objects and object relations that precludes this theory's consideration by feminist art historians and critics. For if, as Lacan observed of the Kleinian model, it is "incapable of even so much as suspecting the category of the signifier,"¹⁹ such a failure may be particularly stigmatizing within a field of study where the interpretive power of language-based theories has only recently been securely established.

If it is, therefore, not so surprising after all that feminist critics and art historians should eschew the Kleinian object-relations model for its elision of the signifier, a turn to the drives in recent feminist art (including, to name but a few, the work of Annette Messager in France, Rona Pondick and Janine Antoni in the United States, and Mona Hatoum and Cathy de Monchaux in Britain) has called that resistance to account. For implicit in these artists' investigation of the drives is a critique of psychoanalytic feminist work of the late seventies and eighties as privileging pleasure and desire over hatred and aggression, an issue Jacqueline Rose identified in 1988 as problematic for psychoanalytic theory itself: "If psychoanalysis is the intellectual tabloid of our culture ('sex' and 'violence' being its chief objects of concern), then we have recently privileged--ought indeed to base the

¹⁹ Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 272. Cited in Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy,'" pp. 160-61.

politicization of psychoanalysis on that privilege--the first over the second."²⁰

As Rose points out, this privileging of sex over violence in psychoanalytic theory is not merely academic. For while the essentialism of sex and gender have been insistently interrogated in psychoanalytic theory, and, at least to a certain extent, across a broader cultural field, the phantasmatic structures through which violence is enacted have not received the same kind of intensive analysis. One consequence of this omission is that the naturalized opposition of masculine aggression and feminine passivity has been left largely undisturbed. The significance of the Kleinian model for feminists therefore can be seen to reside at least in part in its analysis of aggression not as a function of sexual difference, but as structural to all subjectivities.

My concern here, however, is of course not the turn to the drives in contemporary feminist practice, but a body of work that engaged a logic of the drives as early as the 1940s, in a rebuttal to the patriarchal structures of Surrealism. Bourgeois's practice therefore must be situated not only in the context of a return to Klein in the 1990s, following on a Lacanian-based semiotic analysis of the body in the 1970s and 1980s. It must also be considered in

²⁰ Jacqueline Rose, "Sexuality and Vision: Some Questions," in Vision and Visuality, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. 121.

relation to Kleinian object relations--with its shift in emphasis from neurosis to psychosis and from sexuality to the death drive--as that theory developed in the 1940s and 1950s, and as it was analyzed and attacked by Lacan in his own return to Freud. Further, Bourgeois's work of the 1970s, which is addressed here only through one pivotal example, must be read in the context of the artist's involvement in feminist politics during the late 1960s and 1970s, and of the contemporary reception of psychoanalysis by American feminist artists and intellectuals.²¹

Eating the Father

Produced in the context of the American feminist political movement of the 1970s, The Destruction of the Father (together with other projects, notably Nancy Spero's Codex Artaud of 1971-72) can be seen to have put the problematic of female aggression on the table for feminist

²¹ Jacques Lacan, it should be noted, was, for Bourgeois, another of the Surrealist-identified father figures who emigrated to New York during the years of the German occupation of France, and, in recent interviews, she has associated him closely with Breton and his circle. The conflict I will consider here is not, however, a matter of personal antagonisms. Bourgeois's difference with Lacan is theoretical and political. It is a difference that I will attempt to sketch through a crucial case study by Klein, and Lacan's more famous response to it. This reading will not however be grounded in any specific claim concerning Bourgeois's knowledge of psychoanalytic theory. Instead, I will hope to demonstrate that The Destruction of the Father is itself productive of theoretical and political positions that Kleinian object-relations theory can help to frame.

art practice. This is not to say that the problem had not been posed before: by Hannah Hoch and Claude Cahun as early as the 1920s, by Carol Rama in the 1930s, and by Bourgeois herself in the 1940s, to mention but a few crucial instances. In her introduction to the catalogue of the recent "Inside the Visible" exhibition, which featured the work of these four artists, de Zegher describes the part-object logic of their production in terms of an analysis of masculinist and specifically fascist anxieties about the fragmentation of the phallic body in prewar Europe. In this reading, female artists including Bourgeois recast the masculine fear of bodily dissolution (an anxiety projected onto the female body in representation) by disrupting the unity and hierarchy of the hyperphallic body through the fragmentary logic of the part-object.

As de Zegher suggests, the aggression performed in these works is that of parody and ridicule, "mocking the ideal of plenitude, with its illusion of homogenization."²² And in The Destruction of the Father, like her 1978 performance piece "A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts" and her poses with Fillette for the 1982 Mapplethorpe photographs, Bourgeois has seemed emphatically to reinforce the suggestion that through burlesque and parody her work embodies feminist resistance to phallocentrism. The strategies of cutting and fragmentation

²² de Zegher, introduction, Inside the Visible, p. 25.

enacted in these works however are not limited to parodic exaggerations of masculine fantasies; they also invoke the excesses of sadistic fantasy itself, from a female subject position.

The theme of The Destruction of the Father, as Bourgeois tells it, is a little girl's cannibalistic fantasy of revenge on the patriarch, enacted at the family dinner table.²³ The explicit theme of the work therefore is the degradation of the father, a lowering of the paternal body into the field of the drives where it is devoured in a frenzy of oral sadism. Overturning patriarchal authority in the most literal way--as if to show that, in order to shut the father up, it is necessary to eat him up--The Destruction of the Father submits the patriarchal body to the violence of infantile fantasy.²⁴

In Bourgeois's account of devouring the father, eating

²³ Recounting a similar remembered childhood fantasy, Bourgeois describes it as the origin of her interest in sculpture: "Once when we were sitting together at the dining table, I took white bread, mixed it with spit, and molded a figure of my father. When the figure was done, I started cutting of the limbs with a knife. I see this as my first sculptural solution." Quoted in Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free Fall, p. 118.

²⁴ Bourgeois gives another account of the work in which the destruction of the father is called an "oral liquidation": "The children grabbed him and put him on the table. And he became the food. They took him apart, dismembered him. Ate him up. And so he was liquidated. It is, you see, an oral drama! The irritation was his continual verbal offense. So he was liquidated: the same way he had liquidated his children." Quoted in Eleanor Munro, Originals: American Women Artists (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 166.

takes the place of naming in a substitution of oral sadism for speech. The little girl's desire to speak, and her frustration at being silenced, is transposed into another desire for oral power and pleasure--the desire to bite, to cut, to destroy the one who oppresses with his speech. The desire to talk back to the father is transformed in fantasy into the desire to turn the social ritual of the family meal with its sublimated conditions of cutting and biting into a cannibalistic ceremony in which the father's power, his words, are consumed and incorporated by the children in the eating of his flesh.

In infantile oral-sadism, as Klein graphically evokes it, the subject fantasizes the destruction of both father and mother, "who are . . . bitten, torn, cut or stamped to bits," and it is through such fantasies that the subject experiences the destructive effects of its own aggression, its subjectivity formed by the mouth not in the act of speaking, but of biting.²⁵ In The Destruction of the Father, Bourgeois frames an attack on language through biting, on Oedipal naming through sub-Oedipal oral sadism, staging an attack on patriarchy from the infantile position. Dragging the paternal body onto the table, and thus repositioning it on the horizontal axis of infantile experience where it functions as an object of oral-sadistic fantasy, she subverts the name-of-the-father logic of

²⁵ Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation," p. 96.

Lacanian theory through a destruction-of-the-father, part-object logic based in the Kleinian model.

Klein's case history of an affectless four-year-old boy named Dick gives an account of infantile aggression that enacts a similar logic.²⁶ Dick, Klein reported, seldom played or spoke, except to string sounds together in meaningless sequences, and seemed completely detached from the people around him, including his parents and nurse, whom he tended to treat, as Klein observed, like so many pieces of furniture. The analyst theorized that her little patient was the victim of an anxiety so intense it manifested itself as an eerie absence, the absence, precisely, of any trace of anxiety. Employing her model of infantile fantasy, she concluded that Dick had as a baby become deeply disturbed by his own sadistic impulses to attack his mother's body, a body that contained, in fantasy, the father's penis (among other things). Through an interplay that is the pivot point of the Kleinian model, Dick feared, according to Klein, both his own sadistic desires and retaliatory assaults from the object of those attacks. And in order to defend himself against this fantasied destruction by the father's penis, precipitated by his own sadistic fantasy, Dick closed himself off from all desire, and thus all anxiety.

One key symptom of Dick's inability to tolerate anxiety was his refusal to bite into food. Another was his

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 95-111.

inability to grip knives or scissors. Both enacted an underlying aggression against the father's penis, Klein argued, "the desire to eat and destroy it being specially prominent." Then, on one occasion, he "lifted a little toy to his mouth, gnashed his teeth and said 'Tea daddy,' by which he meant 'Eat daddy.' He then asked for a drink of water."²⁷ Turning tea into eat, he had turned the tables, turned the tea table into a scene of cannibalistic incorporation.

This is how Jacobus describes the challenge to Lacan produced by the little boy's play with anxiety: "Here little Dick, in Lacanian terms, acts out his foreclosure of 'the Name of the Father,' the big Dick of language. For little Dick, the paternal phallus is a penile body-part--a part that he wants to eat whole. Making a meal of the phallus, instead of naming the father, little Dick seems to say, in this primitive psychic gesture: I am both little Dick and daddy-Dick, Saturn's child and Saturn himself. The undifferentiated little Dick and daddy-Dick constitute a primitive, devouring identity."²⁸ Little Dick became a subject by biting rather than by naming, turning the father not into a name but into a part-object--something to eat and by eaten by, to introject and to project. The process of becoming a subject therefore engaged an aggressive fantasy

²⁷ Ibid., p. 104.

²⁸ Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy,'" pp. 165-66.

of turning against "his all-devouring, Saturn-like father."²⁹

Bourgeois's enactment of violence in The Destruction of the Father might be seen to suggest that, for the female subject who is cut off from phallic signification, a similar aggressive gesture is required to found subjectivity. A move to destroy the father therefore might be understood not only as a retaliatory attack on patriarchy from the field of the drives, but also as an act of aggression through which a speaking subject can be produced even when--as with the psychotic subject or the female subject under patriarchy--no subject position exists from which to speak. A closer reading of Klein's analysis of little Dick may help to show how The Destruction of the Father projects a female subject of aggression where (in the symbolic order) one does not yet exist.

Little Dick, as we have seen, was unable to use language, his speech being characterized by a complete indifference to the signifying function of words, as distinguished from random sounds. Similarly, he made no distinction between people and furniture, or between "objects and 'objects.'"³⁰ As Lacan would express it, little Dick found himself "eyeball to eyeball with

²⁹ Ibid., p. 164.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 166.

reality."³¹ Embedded in the matrix of the real, living in it "completely," he was unable to stand apart from it even to speak.³² Klein's treatment of her little patient therefore consisted in a projection. She put words in his mouth in order to force speech:

I took a big train and put it beside a smaller one and called them 'Daddy-train' and 'Dick-train'. Thereupon he picked up the train I called 'Dick' and made it roll to the window and said 'Station'. I explained: 'The station is mummy; Dick is going into mummy.' He left the train, ran into the space between the outer and inner doors of the room, shut himself in, saying 'dark' and ran out again directly. He went through this performance several times. I explained to him: 'It is dark inside mummy. Dick is inside dark mummy.'³³

Furiously critical of this intervention of Klein's, Lacan observes: "She slams the symbolism on him with complete brutality, does Melanie Klein, on little Dick! . . . She hits him a brutal verbalisation of the Oedipal myth, almost as revolting for us as for any reader--You are the little train, you want to fuck your mother."³⁴ Yet as he acknowledges, the interpretation that Klein offers Dick somehow fits, enabling him to talk back to the analyst, to become a subject: "From this point on, everything starts

³¹ Lacan, "Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis," in The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-54, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), p. 69.

³² Ibid, p. 68.

³³ Klein, "The Importance of Symbol Formation," p. 102.

³⁴ Lacan, "Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis," p. 68.

firing. . . . And very quickly the child makes progress. That's a fact."³⁵ For Lacan, Klein's interpretation is brutally violent precisely because it is literal. Yet as Jacobus points out, it is the literalness of psychosis itself to which Klein shows herself to be attuned in relaying, or projecting, speech for Dick.³⁶

Klein's "animal instinct," Lacan observes, "allowed her to bore through a body of knowledge which was up to then impenetrable"³⁷; pressing her advantage, she "plastered on" a brutal verbalisation of the Oedipal myth.³⁸ Lacan's description plays on the term "object relations" by casting Klein as a physical manipulator of objects, her activity become oddly sculptural. She slams. She hits. She bores through impenetrable material. She even plasters. The brutality of Klein's method, the violence of her speech, is underscored in the aggression of these metaphors. Like the little patients who act out their fantasies in violent

³⁵ Lacan, "The Topic of the Imaginary," in The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I, p. 85. In the previous seminar, Lacan observes that "it is clear that as a result of this intervention something happens. Everything is there." "Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis," p. 68.

³⁶ This willingness of Kleinian psychoanalysis "to accompany the regress of the subject's phantasies and projective identifications to the very limit of their appearance," as Jacobus describes its project, opens a window onto the region of experience that, in Lacan's account, will be called the Imaginary. Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy,'" p. 166.

³⁷ Lacan, "Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis," p. 69.

³⁸ Lacan, "The Topic of the Imaginary," p. 85.

assaults on the consulting room toys, Klein, who, "feels things" but "expresses them badly," presents her interpretations with an unrelenting literalness, which in Lacan's account is compared to the concreteness of objects.³⁹

Lacan attacks Klein by associating her theory, and even the analyst herself, with physical instincts. More significant for my purpose here--to read Bourgeois through Klein, and the reception of her work through Lacan's reception of Klein--is his invoking of the drives to project an aggressive female subject, an analyst who tells little Dick straight out, "you want to fuck your mother" (or so Lacan ventriloquizes her speech). As Lacan makes clear, the literalism of an Oedipal complex that is "slammed on," rather than uncovered, is violent, especially when spoken by a woman.⁴⁰ The pronouncing of this myth by a maternal figure to a male child escalates aggression into cruelty. For Lacan, therefore, Klein is a bad mother--but a good enough analyst. As he acknowledges, her bad mothering is somehow effective as a clinical intervention: "everything

³⁹ Lacan, "Discourse Analysis and Ego Analysis," p. 68.

⁴⁰ Freud, too, employed a famously aggressive clinical technique. The penetrating reason of his analysis had the effect, he argued, of overcoming the resistance of his patients to confronting unconscious wishes. Klein's penetration, however, is for Lacan a function not of piercing intellect, but of animal instinct. We could also say that, for Lacan, the aggressiveness of her clinical method is a misplaced gender attribute that is recast in terms of a naturalized female bestiality.

starts firing," and little Dick begins to speak, to play, to form attachments.⁴¹

In her account of The Destruction of the Father, Bourgeois projects a female subject of aggression with a violence that has sometimes struck viewers rather as Klein's exchange with Dick struck Lacan. "We grabbed the man, threw him on the table, dismembered him, and proceeded to devour him," she says, superimposing a patricidal fantasy onto the work much as Klein "plasters on" the Oedipal myth, "to give it its real name."⁴² But if "the destruction of the father" fantasy is a brutal verbalization--one that gives the scenario "its real name"--this is a violence that Bourgeois performs on and through her own work. Even as her statement produces the aggressive subject of the piece by slamming on an interpretation ("I wanted to kill my father"), this same move also kills off the signifier, or symbolic operations of the work, by fixing its meaning. In the grip of this referent, the work is no more a play of signifiers than is Dick's game of trains.

Yet, as we have seen, Klein's way of playing trains does get little Dick talking; as Jacobus explains it, the child's own literalness "colludes with Klein's to give her an opening."⁴³ And if it is possible to read The

⁴¹ Lacan, "The Topic of the Imaginary," p. 85.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Jacobus, "'Tea Daddy,'" p. 163.

Destruction of the Father through Klein's account of little Dick, then giving something a real name, putting it literally, might be seen to project speech for a mute subject, or for one that does not yet exist.

In the early 1970s, the moment when Bourgeois undertook The Destruction of the Father, it might be argued that a female subject of aggression could be produced within the social-symbolic field only as a projection. Rather than represent such a subject, The Destruction of the Father therefore projects it in the oral-sadistic fantasy of eating the father, enacted at the preverbal level of the drives, where aggression is not yet gendered and its subject not yet divided over sex.

Bourgeois was not alone among feminist artists of the early seventies in articulating this space between the field of the drives and the symbolic register of language. In Codex Artaud, Nancy Spero appropriated the writings of Antonin Artaud to similar effect, seizing his denunciations of patriarchal authority for its silencing of his speech and degradation of his body to project a female artist as subject of aggression. Juxtaposed with drawings of such obscene motifs as a long, stiff phallic tongue projected from a gaping mouth, the graffiti-like texts in bulletin typeface, as Benjamin Buchloh has observed, underscore both the subject's alienation from the symbolic order and its

compulsion to speak.⁴⁴ According to Buchloh, this subject is both "disgusted with the conditions of confinement and the evident absence of the linguistic competence to articulate oneself publicly, a condition that condemns the speaker precisely to the clandestine forms of speech, and elated at finding any means and sites of articulation at all in an overall regime of interdiction."⁴⁵

Spero's identification with Artaud as an outcast writer who violently protests the suppression of his speech is staged in gobbets of text that, elided and torn, reversed and inverted, are intercepted and overlaid by bodily fragments. Within a part-object logic, it is possible to read this splintered speech as produced from the drives, from a subsymbolic position in which the speaker is neither authorized nor competent to speak and yet speaks, producing language as the insistent physical marking of a surface with lines that, like those Klein fed little Dick, are more literal or real than properly symbolic.

The subversiveness of such subsymbolic speech is an effect of its violence--the defacing scrawl of the grafitto in Codex Artaud, the brutal literalism of the cannibalistic fantasy in The Destruction of the Father--but also of its insistence on being registered as speech, and not purely as

⁴⁴ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Spero's Other Traditions," in Inside the Visible, ed. de Zegher, pp. 239-46.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

gesture. It corresponds to the kind of talk that Lacan describes, apropos of little Dick, as a call. The child's "first communication, in the strict, technical sense of the term," his first appeal to another, is an anxious call for his nurse, precipitated by Klein's interpretations.⁴⁶

Beginning with this appeal, little Dick becomes a speaking subject. As Lacan observes, the difference between this demand and Dick's previous utterances is slight--the difference between "an affective call, mimed by the whole being" and "a verbalised call."⁴⁷ Yet the distinction is pivotal, marking the subject's entry into language.

I hope to have shown that it is this ultrathin space--in Lacanian terms the margin between the drives and the verbalized call--that in the early 1970s Bourgeois and Spero claim for a female subject of aggression.⁴⁸ If, however,

⁴⁶ Lacan, "The Topic of the Imaginary," p. 85.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ It is also possible to see a connection between this ultra-thin space into which a female subject of aggression is projected from the drives and the Duchampian logic of projection enacted in the Large Glass, which also maps a shallow subsymbolic space. As Krauss has observed in a comparison of the Duchampian bachelor machine with Deleuze and Guattari's anti-Oedipal model, "The body without organs is the place of inscription; it is textual, semiological. But its logic is not that of the signifier, that of representation." (Krauss, "Bachelors," October 52 [Spring 1990], p. 55.) The distressing of the signifier that occurs in The Destruction of the Father via Bourgeois's account of the work can be read as a compression of representation into the shallower space of inscription or, as I have suggested, as a projection of the signifier from the field of the drives. Because The Destruction of the Father is not only fully three-dimensional but architectonic, it is however

the speech through which The Destruction of the Father is so titled, and through which Bourgeois grafts on her fantasy of cannibalistic devouring and incorporation, can be read as a projection from the drives into this liminal zone, it is now necessary to return to the scene of the crime, to the patricidal fantasy's material surround.

Killing Romance

Unlike the Codex Artaud, The Destruction of the Father is not evidently a textual work. The fantasy that Bourgeois speaks over it, and that is signaled in the work's title, instead has the effect of a linguistic supplement. Yet this narrative has come to displace the object itself so completely that in many recent accounts the work's physical aspect is substantially ignored. Cannibalized by its title, The Destruction of the Father is submitted to an aggressive literalism that, as early critics of the work suggested, elides its complex structure. The fantasy that names The Destruction of the Father therefore also can be seen to destroy it at the level of the signifier, reducing it to its scandalous signified.

I have attempted to show that this reductive literalness, this attack on the signifier, is a crucial

perhaps more fitting to read its projection of the flattened signifier, or literal speech, in auditory rather than textual terms, as a call.

operation within the work in that it both projects, and evokes the suppression of, a female subject of aggression. For the exclusion of this subject from language is precisely the condition that precipitates "the destruction of the father" as a fantasy. That The Destruction of the Father itself is not spared this "oral liquidation," this violence of the drives turned on the signifier, has, however, had important implications for the work's critical reception.

One effect of Bourgeois's speech has been that other interpretations, equally attentive to its literalness at the level of form, have been foreclosed. For if The Destruction of the Father elides or compresses the space of viewing, enclosing the body in a clammy chamber--suffocatingly sticky, lined with a dense accumulation of raw, swollen extrusions--it is, at its most literal, a maternal body.

In the Kleinian model, it will be recalled, it is the mother's breast that is the first object of aggression, of "uncontrollable and greedy destructive impulses and phantasies" that soon extend to a complex arrangement of part-objects.⁴⁹ The inside of the mother's body, according to Klein, becomes the target of ferocious oral-sadistic and anal-sadistic fantasies, conceived first against the withholding breast, and then against a sort of generalized interior cavity, the imaginary container of objects of which

⁴⁹ Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940), in The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 148.

the child is jealous, and ones that it fears. Incorporating such objects as the father's penis and other children, the mother's body encapsulates the child's entire imaginative world. Attacks against it risk the complete annihilation of that world.

In the midst of these fantasied assaults against the insides of the mother's body, Klein argues, the Oedipus complex arises at the time of weaning, coming into play "so early and in such close connection with breast frustrations that in its beginnings it is dominated by oral impulses and fears."⁵⁰ Thus, for Klein, the Oedipal complex, which does not coincide with entry into the symbolic order, also does not map onto a speaking or gendered subject, but rather is enacted through the drives. Moreover, the Kleinian Oedipal complex is not formed in relation to a distinct mother and father, but arises out of attachment to a combined parent, or accumulation of parental part-objects: the father inside the mother.

For the little girl, Klein argues, the fear of retaliatory attacks against the inside of the child's own body is "the most profound anxiety . . . the equivalent of castration anxiety in boys."⁵¹ "The little girl has a sadistic desire, originating in the early stages of the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Klein, "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse" (1929), in Selected Klein, p. 92.

Oedipus conflict, to rob the mother's body of its contents, namely, the father's penis, faeces, children, and to destroy the mother herself."⁵² One patient, a three-year-old girl named Rita, graphically demonstrated this aggressive impulse by blackening a piece of paper, tearing it up, and throwing the scraps into a glass of water, "which she put to her mouth as if to drink from it, and said under her breath 'dead woman.'"⁵³

The desire to kill the mother, as Klein observes, "gives rise to anxiety lest the mother should in her turn rob the little girl herself of the contents of her body (especially of children) and lest her body should be destroyed or mutilated."⁵⁴ In this account of the early Oedipal scenario, the little girl fears that the mother's body will, in effect, turn itself inside out--that the mutilated body will become the mutilating one (just as the hated bad breast becomes, in Mitchell's phrase, "the hateful and hating breast").⁵⁵ This is the anxiety scenario that underlies what Klein calls the paranoid-schizoid position, in which the subject projects its own destructive fantasies onto external objects.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Klein, "The Psycho-analytic Play Technique," p. 49.

⁵⁴ Klein, "Infantile Anxiety Situations," p. 92.

⁵⁵ Mitchell, introduction, The Selected Melanie Klein, p. 20.

The cannibalistic scenario of The Destruction of the Father therefore can be seen to unfold within an infantile logic of oral sadism that targets not only the body of the father, but also that of the mother: the attack on the paternal body, indeed, is staged inside the mother. And if the enactment of a fantasy of overturning paternal authority in The Destruction of the Father can be read in political as well as psychoanalytic terms--as threading a psychoanalytic scenario through the needle of political agency--the work's violence against the maternal body similarly can be seen to materialize a feminist politics.

An arresting feature of Kleinian object-relations theory, as we have seen, is its displacement of the mother-infant relation from the pre-Oedipal symbiosis of the Freudian model (and cultural representation) to the sub-Oedipal violence of infantile paranoia. As Klein would have it, fantasies of the mother career wildly between states of identification and alienation. And within this logic, while the mother supersedes the father's power and privilege in the child's psychic life, she (or more precisely, it) does so as a figure--or structure--of ambivalence.⁵⁶

Kleinian theory's account of the subject as always already alienated from the mother exerts a destabilizing

⁵⁶ "Klein's 'mother,'" write Doane and Hodges, "is wonderfully difficult to place; she is both inside and outside, both male and female." From Klein to Kristeva, p. 16.

influence on stereotypically static and idealized representations of the mother. Recasting the mother-infant relation as a succession of "traumatic encounters,"⁵⁷ Kleinian theory forges in the pre-Oedipal bond the crucible of aggression for subjects of both sexes. Her radical disassociation of the mother from the infant also addresses, at least indirectly, the cultural construction of the female subject as synonymous with the mother. By constructing the mother as a phantasmatic structure, undecidable even as to sex, Kleinian theory therefore opens a rift between motherhood and femininity. And in the gender-political context of early twentieth-century Europe (in which Klein herself acceded first to the role of mother and then to that of psychoanalyst), this intervention serves to mark out, at the level of psychic experience, a space for the female subject distinct from the mothering role.⁵⁸

In the context of American feminist artistic production of the 1970s, the destruction-of-the-father logic of Bourgeois's turn to the drives can be read as both an attack on the symbolic operations of patriarchy from an infantile

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁸ For accounts of Klein's career, see Janet Sayers, chapter 5, "Sex, Art, and Reparation," in Mothers of Psychoanalysis: Helene Deutsch, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Phyllis Grosskurth, Melanie Klein: Her World and Her Work (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).; and "From Klein to Winnicott: a New Mise-en-scène for Mother," chapter 1, Doane and Hodges, From Klein to Kristeva, pp. 7-32.

position, and a splintering of binaries of gender. And while it is obvious that The Destruction of the Father embodied a particular political urgency in its historical moment simply as an attack on patriarchal authority, at our remove from the work's initial presentation it is also possible find in its conflation of paternal and maternal bodies--in the shifting phantasmagoria of the part-object--a broader critique of the social and sexual arrangements that psychoanalysis has termed the family romance.

For in Bourgeois's burlesque of the family meal, not only is patriarchal authority overturned when the father succumbs to the children's cannibalistic fantasies, enacted in utero, but the binary structure of the family itself is splintered and scattered across the field of part-objects that is the maternal body. The formal symmetry of patriarchal family relations thus disintegrates under the pressure of the drives.

Love, Guilt, and Reparation

The material was there taking all that room and bothering me, bothering me by its aggressive presence. And somehow the idea of the mother came to me. This is the way my mother impressed me, as very powerful, very silent, very judging, and controlling the whole studio. And naturally this piece became my mother. At that point, I had my subject. I was going to express what I felt toward her. . . . First of all I cut her head, and I slit her throat. . . . And after weeks and weeks of work, I thought, if this is the way I saw my mother, then she did not like me. How could she possibly like me if I treat her that way? At that point something turned around. I could not stand

the idea that she wouldn't like me. I couldn't live if I thought that she didn't like me. The fact that I had pushed her around, cut off her head, had nothing to do with it. What you do to a person has nothing to do with what you expect the person to feel toward you. . . . Now at the end I became very, very depressed, terribly, terribly depressed.⁵⁹

Alternating with aggressive impulses and the fear of retribution for destructive acts, Klein tells us, is the depressive position: the stillness that paralyzes the subject surveying the aftermath of its attack on the other and that constitutes "the central position in the child's development."⁶⁰ As Janice Doane and Devon Hodges have expressed it, "In Klein's work the oedipal struggle is subsumed and consequently redefined in terms of depressive anxiety and the attempt to restore the mother as a whole object."⁶¹

Observing this relay between pronounced aggressive and depressive attitudes in the her young patients' play, Klein was led to the crucial discovery of "the vital part which the tendency to make reparation plays in mental life."⁶²

⁵⁹ Bourgeois's account of She-Fox (1985), from a tape-recorded interview by Jennifer Dalsimer, April 9, 1986, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁰ Klein, "Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," p. 145. Cited in Doane and Hodges, Klein to Kristeva, p. 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶² Klein, "The Psychoanalytic Play Technique," p. 48.

And it is with a brief consideration of reparative operations, which Klein describes in terms of a desire to redeem the self by restoring the shattered other, in Bourgeois's sculptural practice, that I would like to end. For if her production can be considered in Kleinian terms, the desire for reparation it enacts must be seen as pivotal to such an account.

As we have seen, aggressive processes of cutting, scratching, and fragmentation alternate in Bourgeois's production with reparative acts such as stitching, wrapping, and polishing: "You hack away, which is aggressive, and then you polish what you have made, oil it and take care of it for thirty years. That is a nurturing. Working oscillates from extreme aggression to repair and a need for pardoning. It is the same with putting things together that have been broken or separated."⁶³ If, therefore, the violence of cutting can be seen to enact the ferocity of the drives, then the techniques through which the sculptural object is restored can be read in terms of a phantasmatic reparation. In her account of the making of She-Fox, a work of 1985, Bourgeois stages this interplay of aggressive and reparative actions explicitly in relation to the maternal body, providing an account of her sculptural process--which is to say of the conjuncture of physical and

⁶³ Quoted in Storr, interview, Galleries Magazine, p. 102.

psychic operations--that is strikingly Kleinian, both in the intensity of affect it displays and in its movement between attitudes of hostility, depression, and the desire for reparation.

In Bourgeois's description of beginning the sculpture with a cutting action that phantasmatically enacts a slitting of her mother's throat, a comparison with the misogynistic violence of such Surrealist works as Giacometti's Woman with Her Throat Cut inevitably must be invoked. In this late work, we could say, Bourgeois turns a Surrealist logic of phantasmatic shattering to a feminist reworking of the mother-daughter relation. If, therefore, Woman with Her Throat Cut can be seen to enact male sexual violence against the female body, She-Fox can be read as restaging that violence via an infantile fantasy of destroying the mother. Thus not only does the part-object logic of Surrealism suggest a means of attacking the phallic figure and subverting patriarchal authority; it also empowers an enactment of violence against the mother, in which the intensity of paranoid and depressive fantasies are enacted in relation to the maternal body.

In its arrogation of the aggressive gesture to the female subject, She-Fox evokes a transgressive pleasure in violence, as well as guilt at its destructive effects.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Discussing another work, Rabbit (ca. 1970), Bourgeois elaborated this point. "The theme of the woman cut in half is a theme of the passive state. It reminds me of

It stages the female subject's desire to attack not (only) the patriarch, but the mother. In Bourgeois's account of it, this work dramatizes the daughter's aggressive fantasies toward the mother, but also casts the mother herself as aggressive and controlling. Endowed with traits conventionally associated with the father, the mother of this description is powerful, judgmental, and silent, an ominous presence that controls the whole studio, arresting the progress of the creative work undertaken there.⁶⁵ Like the artist herself, who alternates between aggressive and restorative actions in the production of objects, the mother is not only an object of destructive and reparative fantasies, but also embodies these shifting positions as a subject.

For Bourgeois, then, aggression is played out in

the women, the lavandières in France, whom I used to see as a child. When they washed tapestries in the river, these girls knelt inside little boxes. You couldn't see their lower bodies; they looked as if they were cut in two. That gave me a fantastic pleasure, because I myself wanted to cut them in two. I wanted to move from the passive to the active, since I experienced myself as cut in two. I have always applied this aggression to women. It has been an unfulfilled wish, of course, but whenever it is made conscious there is an explosion of pleasure. Yet I am ashamed of the violence. The ransom from the pleasurable experience of aggression is that you feel ashamed." Quoted in Meyer-Thoss, Designing for Free Fall, pp. 132-33.

⁶⁵ This is in contrast to other accounts in which Bourgeois underscores her mother's professional role as a restorer of tapestries, an artisan who "repaired broken things," and whose skill in plying the needle is commemorated in such works as Needle (Fuseau) of 1992. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 134.

relation to the mother as well as to the father. The mother is both active and passive, both threatening and nurturing, an ambivalent structure through which the subject herself accedes to the aggression of political and artistic agency, as well as to the reparative work of remaking.

In Klein's account, creative work is understood not, as in Freudian theory, as a sublimation of the instincts, but as a process of enacting relations with others.⁶⁶ "The work of symbol formation, art and culture themselves, can be attributed to our attempts to make reparation, to regenerate the mother," as Doane and Hodges have summarized the Kleinian position.⁶⁷ And because the depressive anxiety that arises from aggression is never surmounted, "the subject is never fully finished with the mother."⁶⁸

The suggestion that creative work is a ceaseless interplay of destruction and reparation, or in other words a kind of pure process enacted at the level of psychic experience, seems an appropriate one with which to end a

⁶⁶ For Klein's account of creativity as grounded in the desire to make reparation, see "Infantile Anxiety Situations," The Selected Melanie Klein, pp. 84-94. She observes, for example, that "In the analyses of children, when the representation of destructive wishes is succeeded by an expression of reactive tendencies, we constantly find that drawing and painting are used as means to make people anew" (p. 93). See also Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation" (1936) in Klein and Joan Riviere, Love, Hate and Reparation. For an excellent summary and analysis of the Kleinian model of creativity, see Sayers, "Sex, Art, and Reparation."

⁶⁷ Doane and Hodges, From Klein to Kristeva, p. 12.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

study of the work of Louise Bourgeois, who, at this writing, remains, in her eight-sixth year, a productive and surprising artist. For within a logic of object relations, Bourgeois's work demands nothing if not to be experienced as unfinished.

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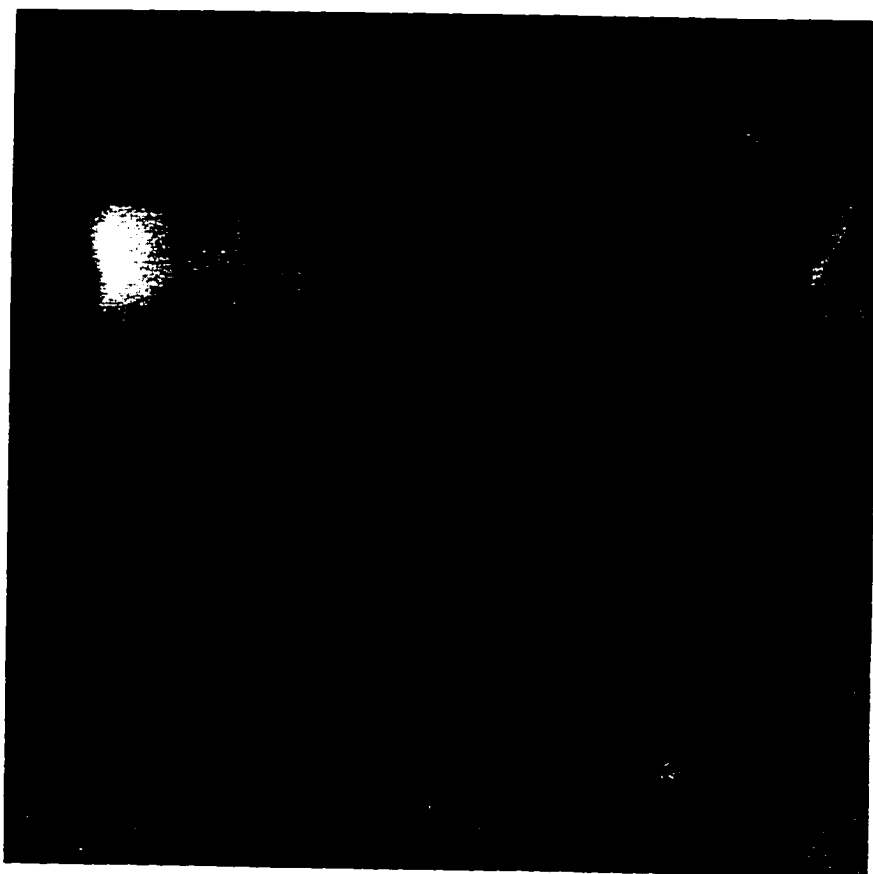
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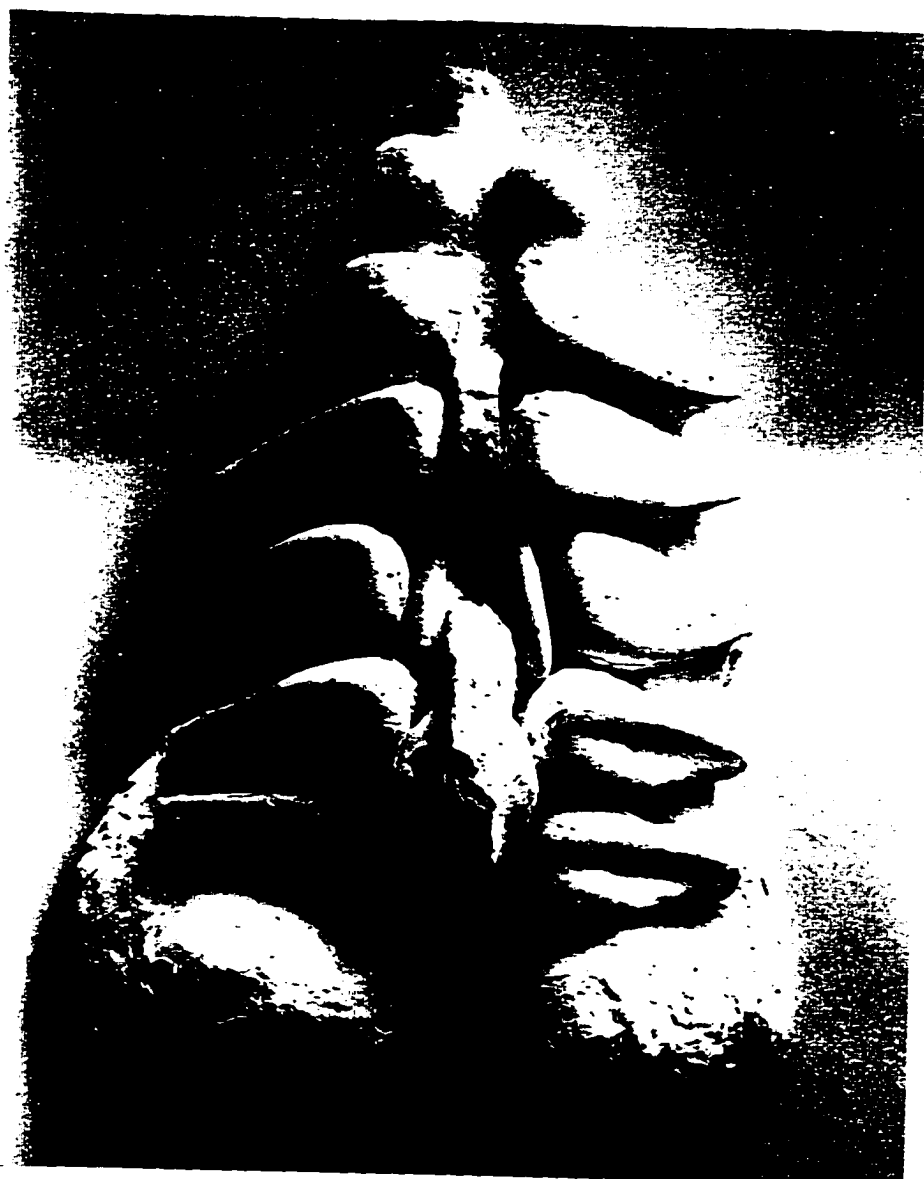
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1.1 Robert Mapplethorpe. Louise Bourgeois. 1982.



1.2 Sleep II. 1967. Marble. 24 x 30 x 24 in.
Collection of the artist.



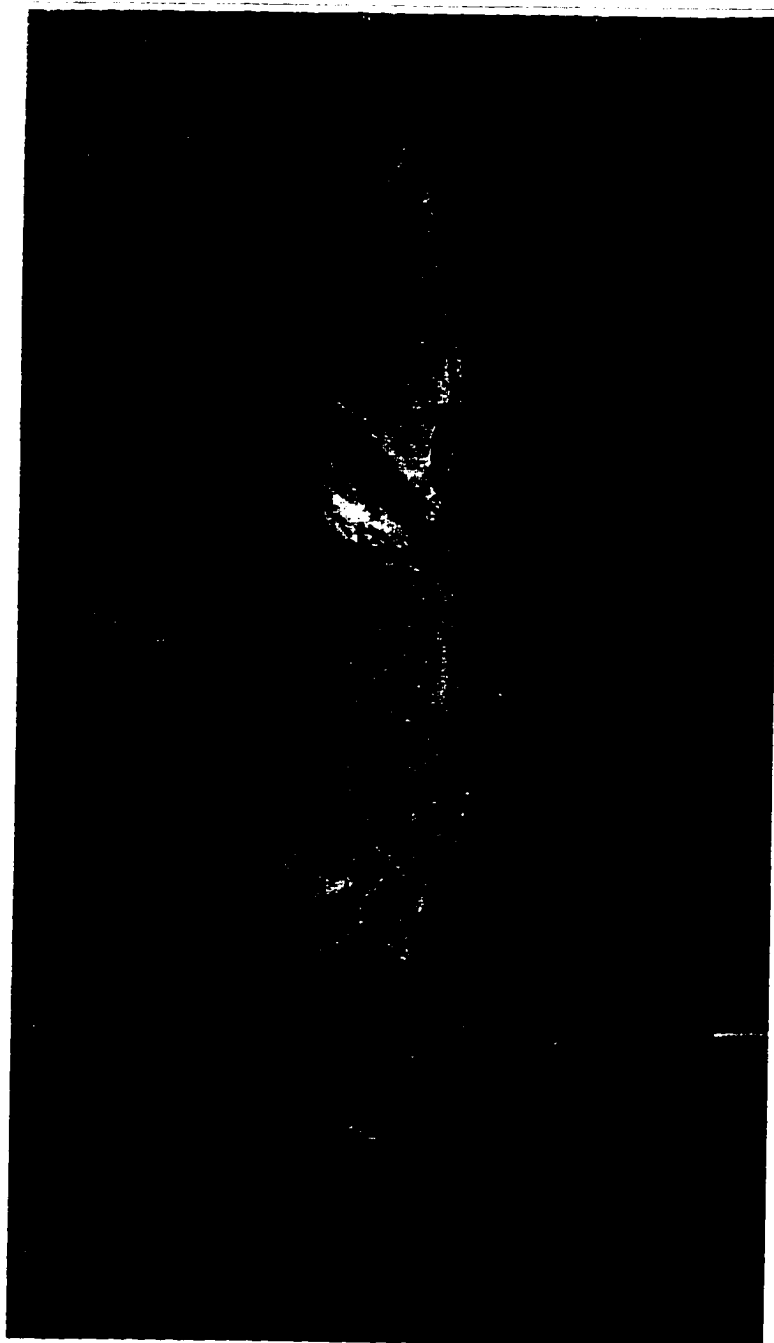
1.3 Torso/Self-Portrait. ca. 1963-64. Plaster.
25 x 16 x 7 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



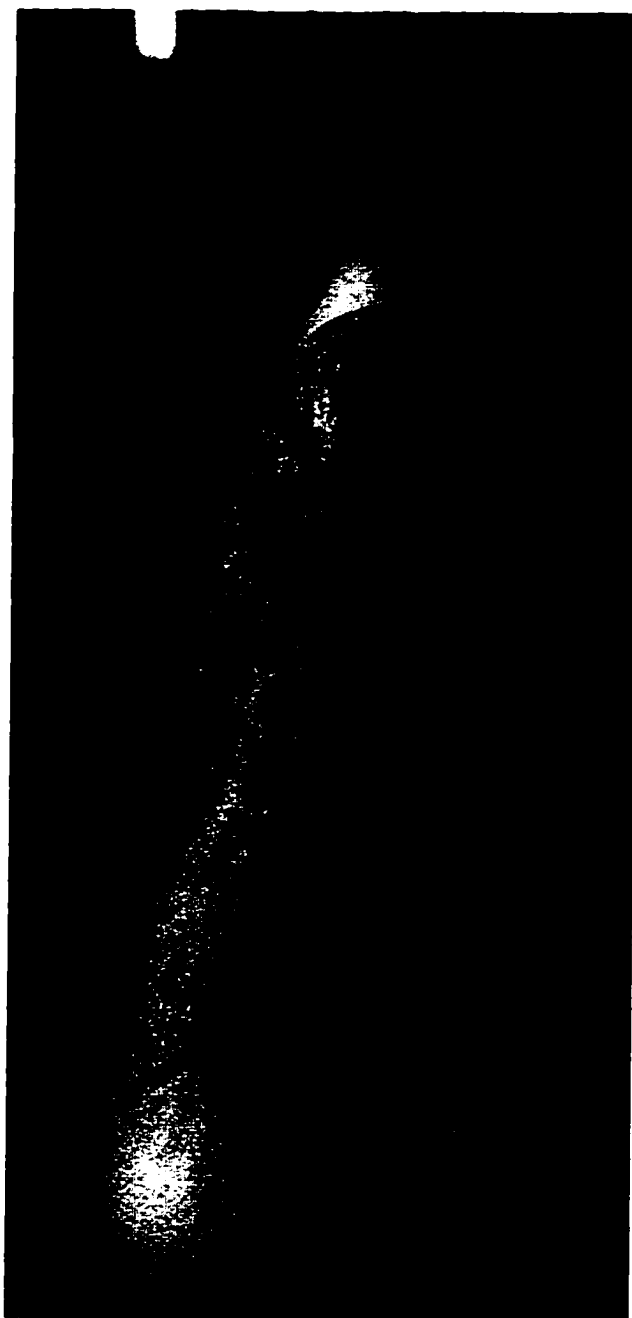
1.4 Femme-Pieu. ca. 1970. Wax and metal pins.
3.5 x 2.5 x 6 in. Collection Lucy R. Lippard, New York.



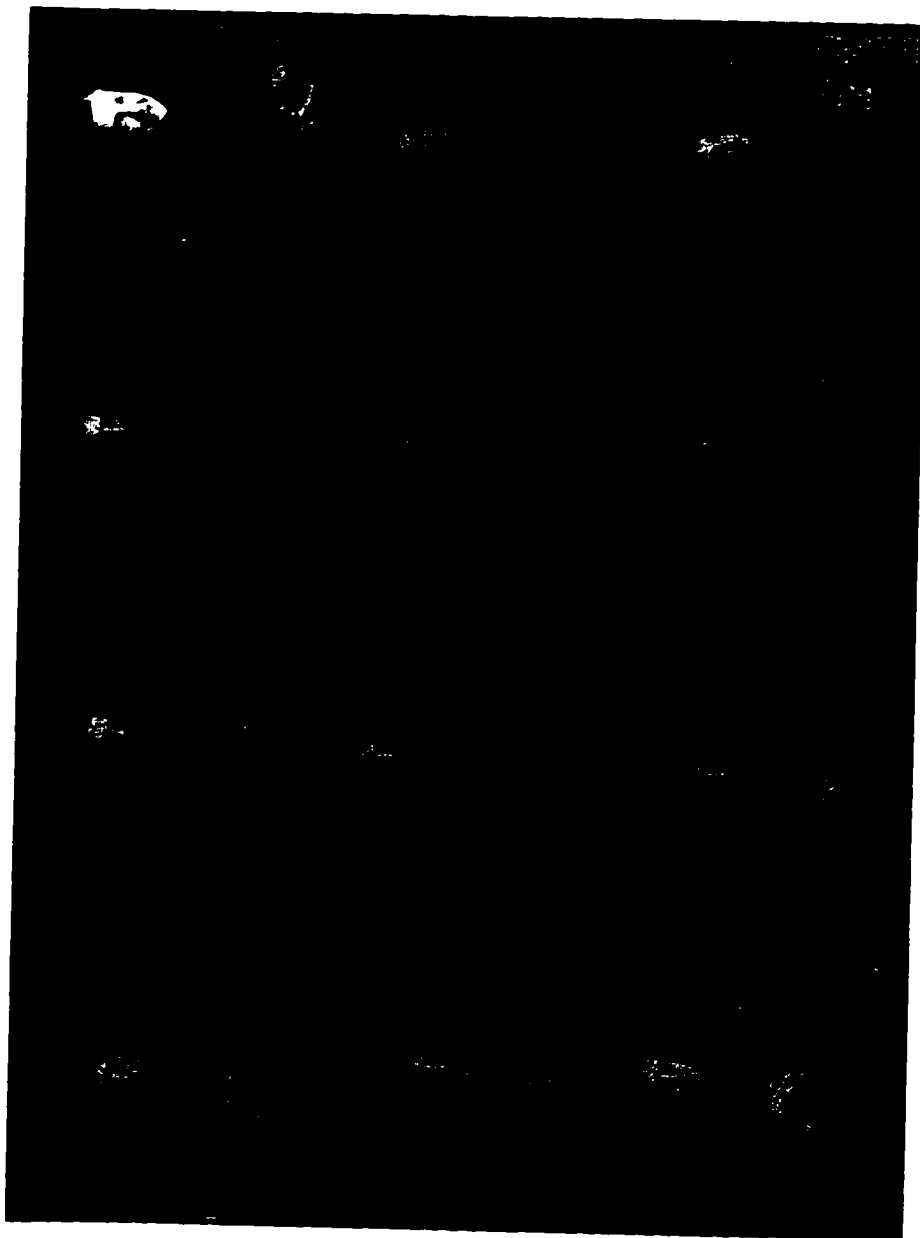
1.5 End of Softness. 1967. Bronze.
7 x 21 x 15 in. Galerie Lelong, Zurich.



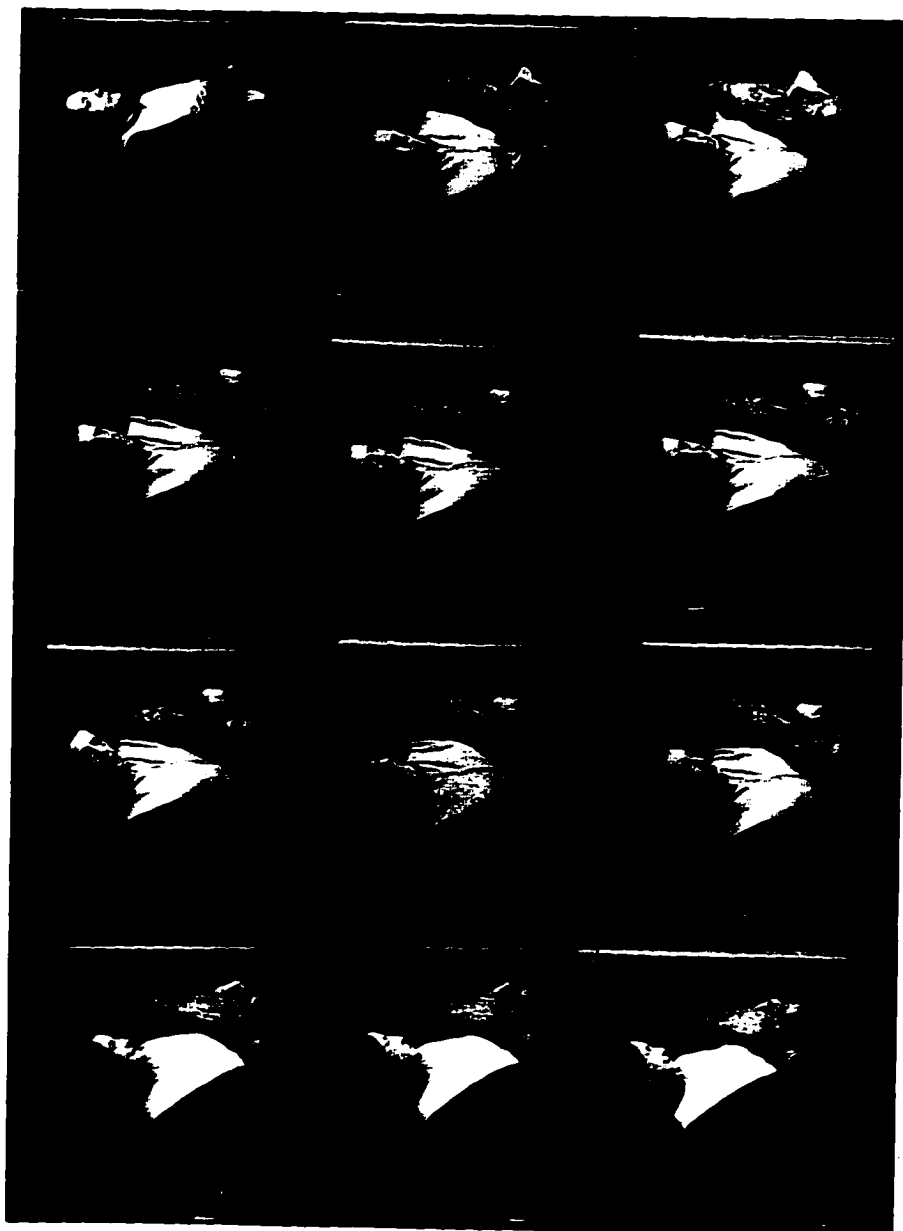
1.6 Fillette. 1968. Latex. 23.5 x 10.5 x 10 in.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist in
memory of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.



1.7 Fillette (early state). Photograph by Peter Moore.



1.8 Robert Mapplethorpe. Contact sheets for Louise Bourgeois. 1982.



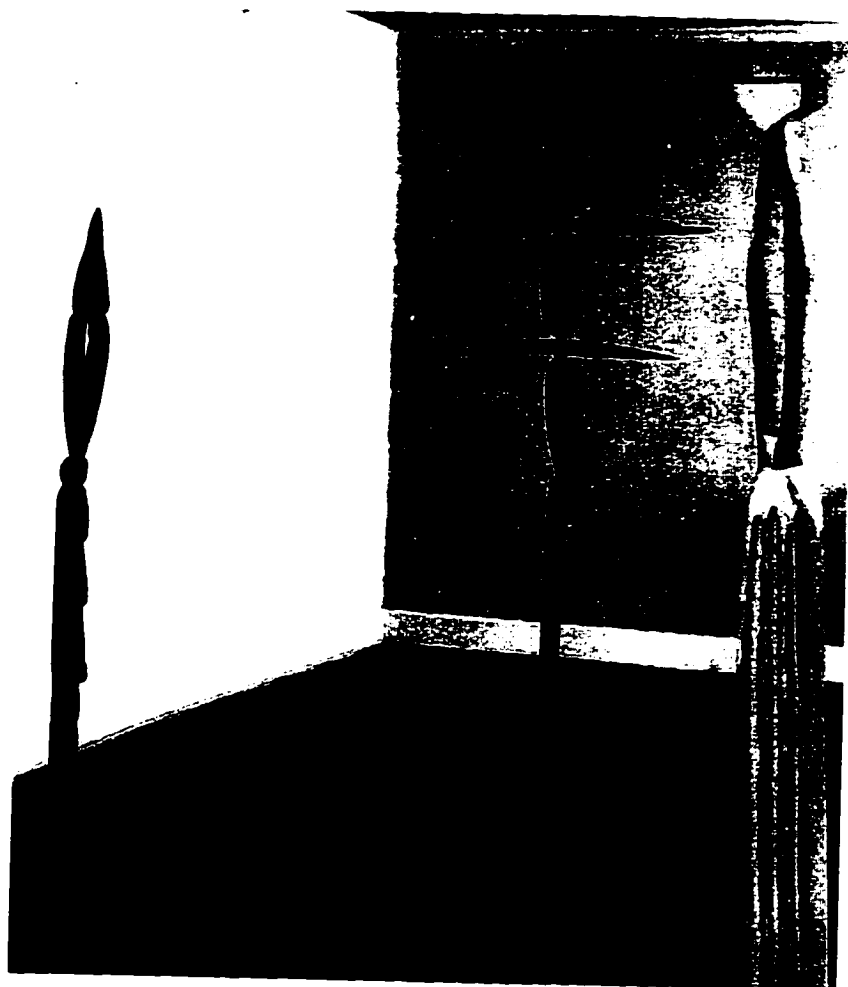
1.9 Robert Mapplethorpe. Contact sheets for Louise Bourgeois. 1982.



1.10 Trani Episode. ca. 1971-72. Hydrocal and latex.
16.5 x 23 x 23 in. Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



2.1 Photograph of Bourgeois and Joan Miró. 1947.
New York City.



2.2. Installation at the Peridot Gallery, New York. 1949.



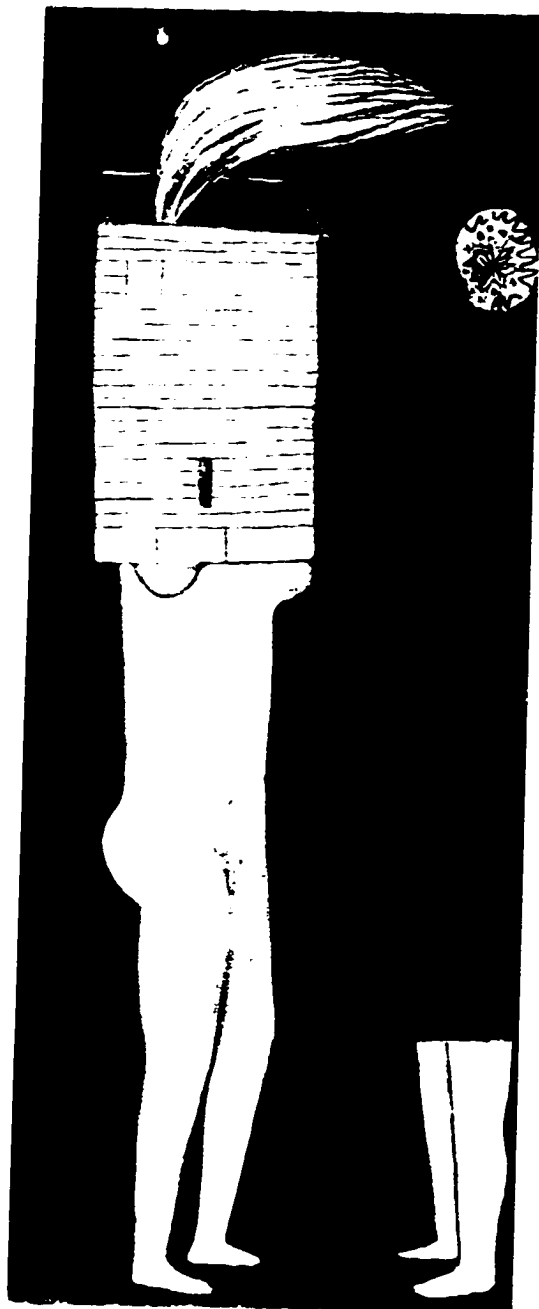
2.3 Installation at the Peridot Gallery, New York. 1950.



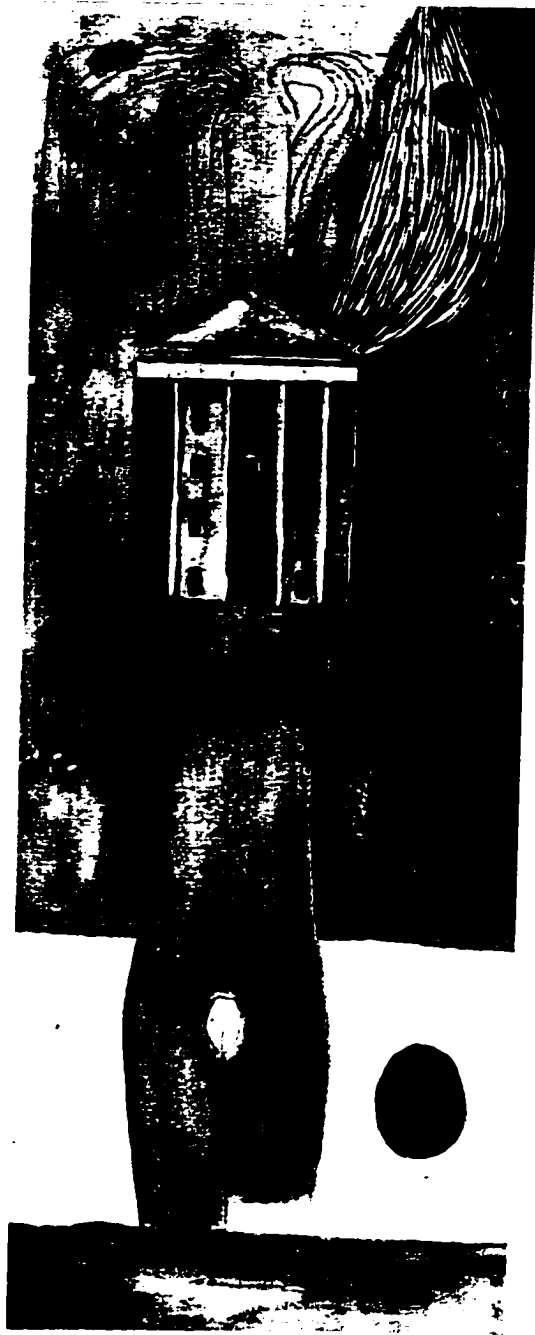
2.4 Orange Episode. 1990. Oil, gouache, and orange peel collage on board. 17 x 13 in. Collection Jerry Gorovoy.



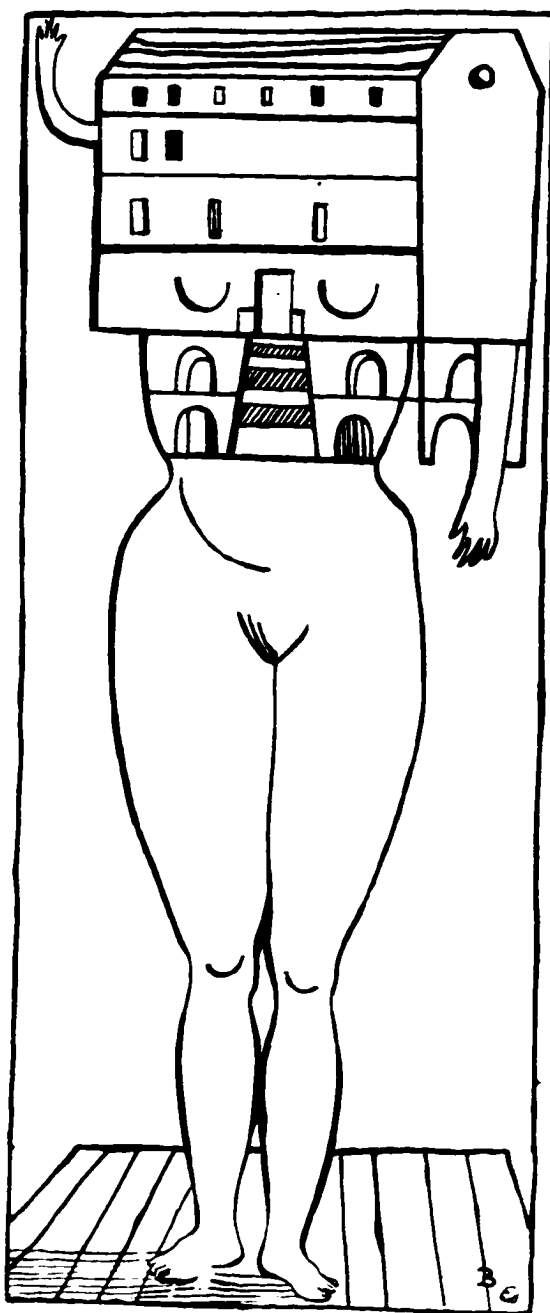
2.5 Femme-Maison. ca. 1946-47. Oil and ink on linen.
36 x 14 in. Collection John D. Kahlbetzer, Santa Barbara,
California.



2.6 Femme-Maison. ca. 1946-47. Oil and ink on linen.
36 x 14 in. The Grenoble Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene
B. Gorman, New York.



2.7 Femme-Maison. ca. 1946-47. Oil and ink on linen.
36 x 14 in. Collection John D. Kahlbetzer, Santa Barbara,
California.



2.8 Femme-Maison. ca. 1946-47. Ink on paper. 9.5 x 4 in.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



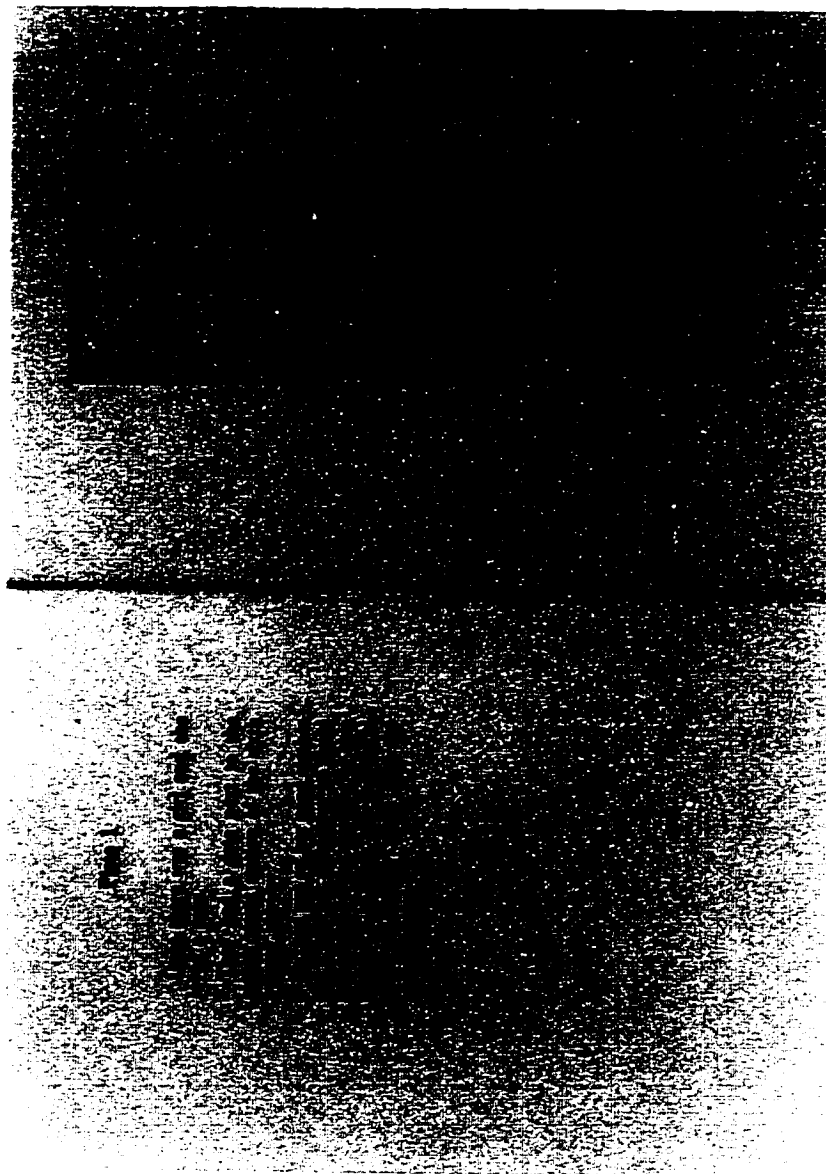
2.9 "A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts." Performance, October 21, 1978. Hamilton Gallery of Contemporary Art, New York. Photograph by Peter Moore.



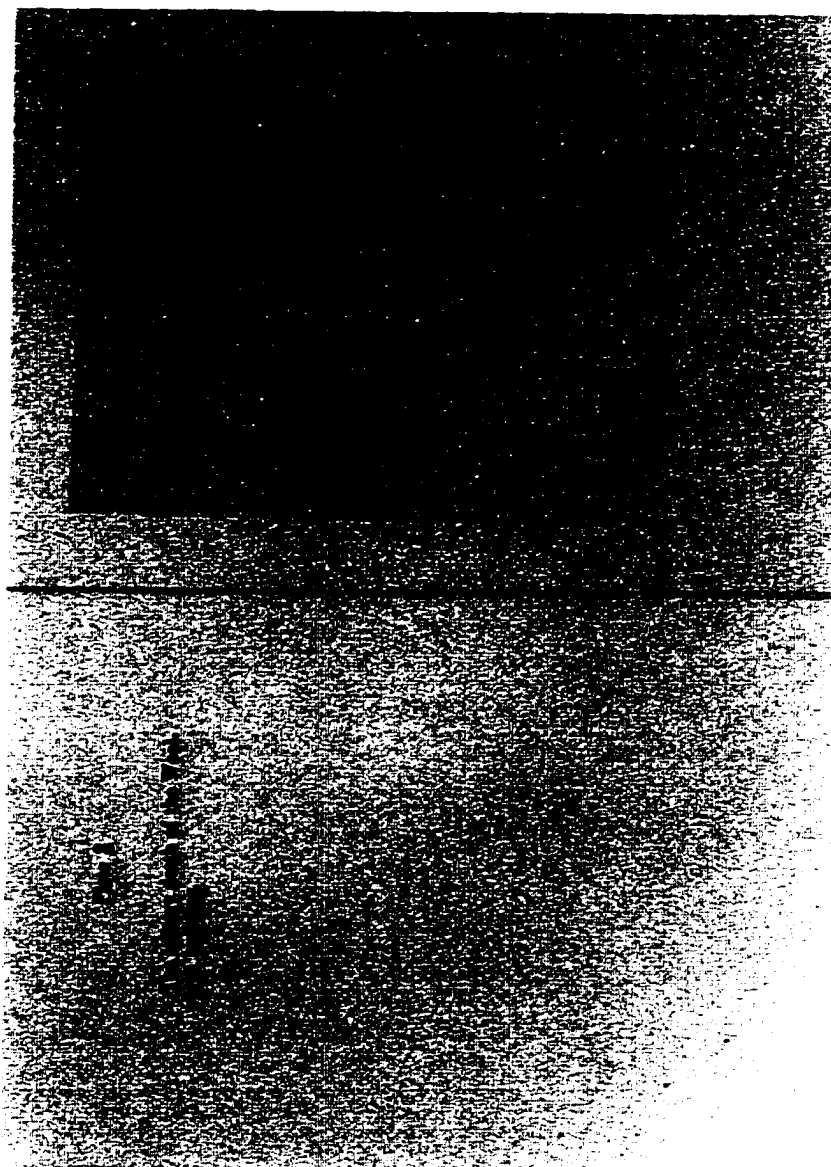
2.10 "A Banquet/A Fashion Show of Body Parts."
Performance, October 21, 1978. Hamilton Gallery of
Contemporary Art, New York. Photograph by Peter Moore.



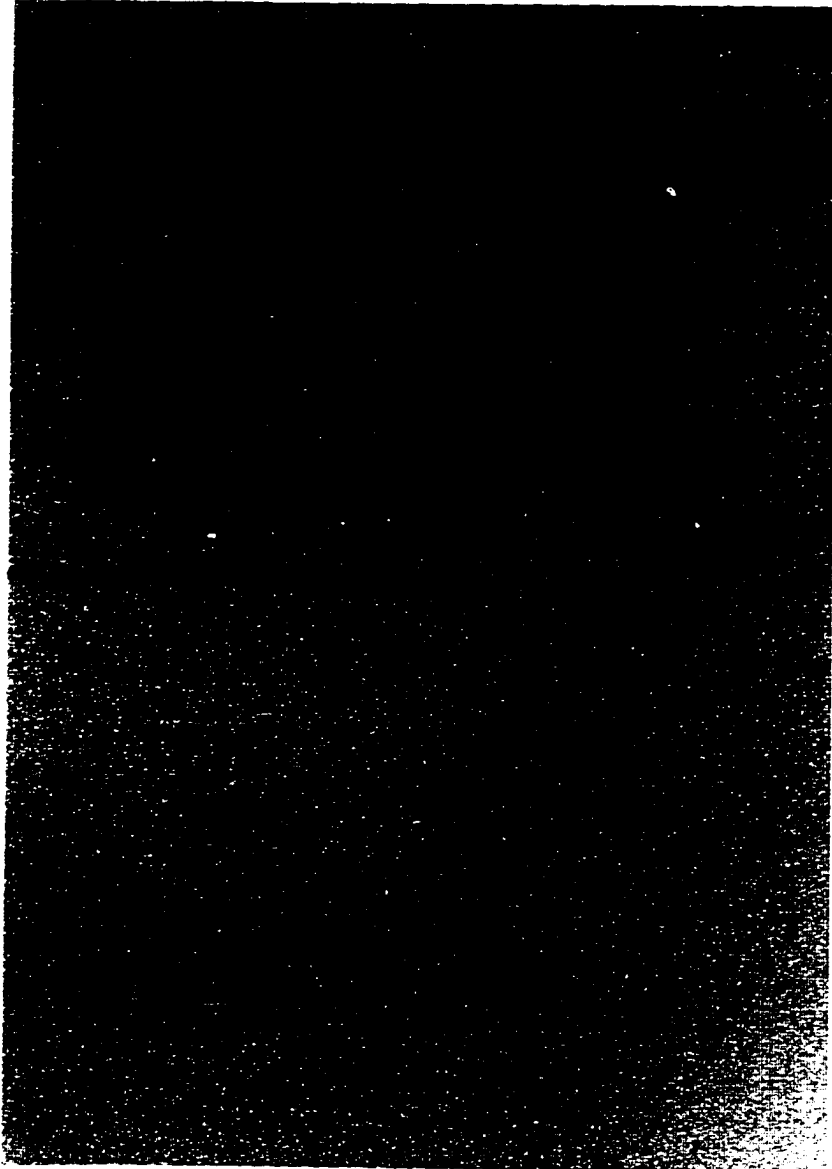
2.11 Portrait of C.Y. ca. 1947-49. Painted wood with nails. 67 in. h. Collection of the artist.



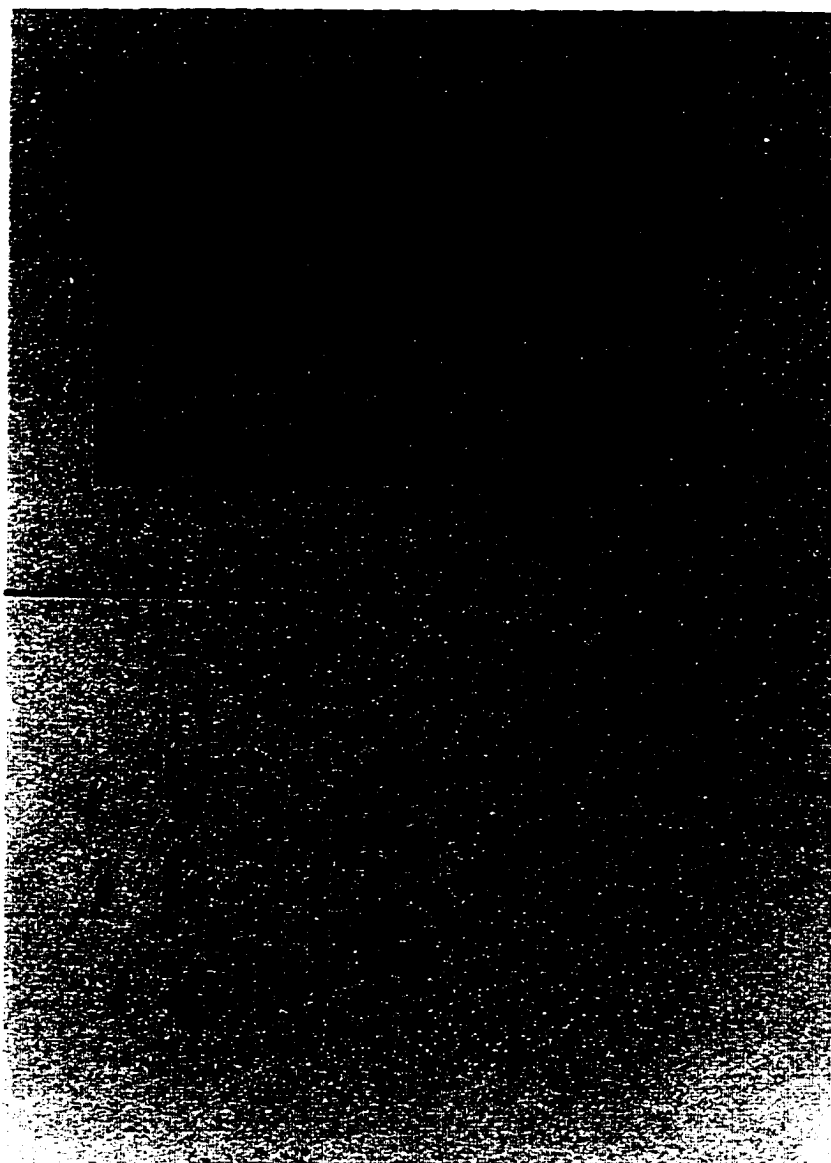
2.12 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 1.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.



2.13 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 2.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.



2.14 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 3.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.



2.15 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 4.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.

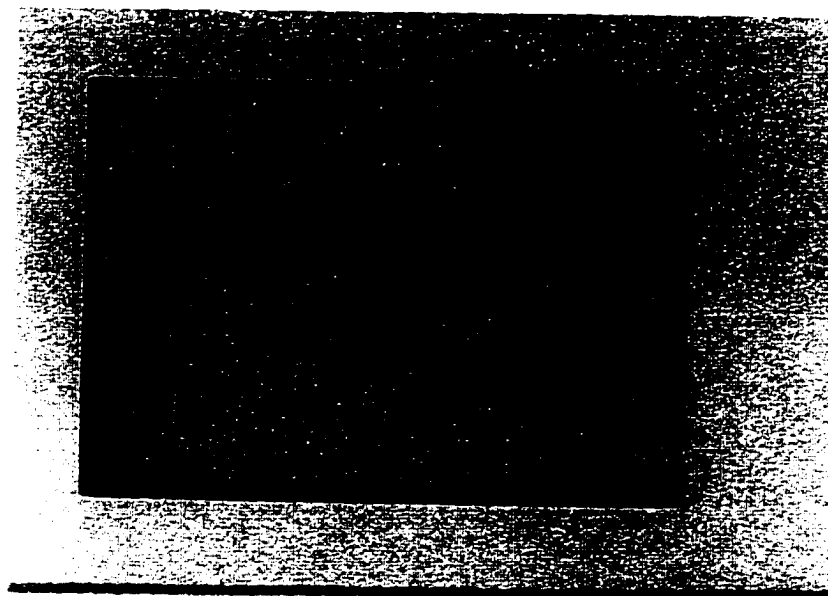
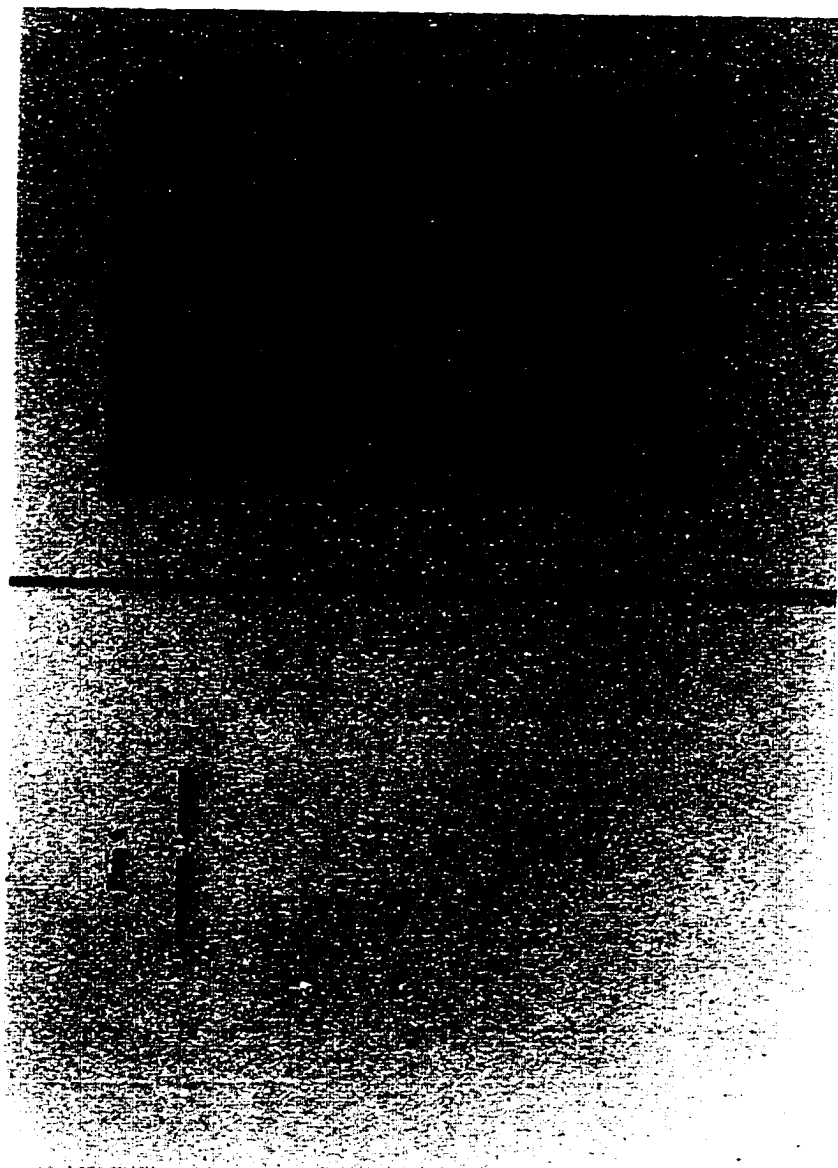


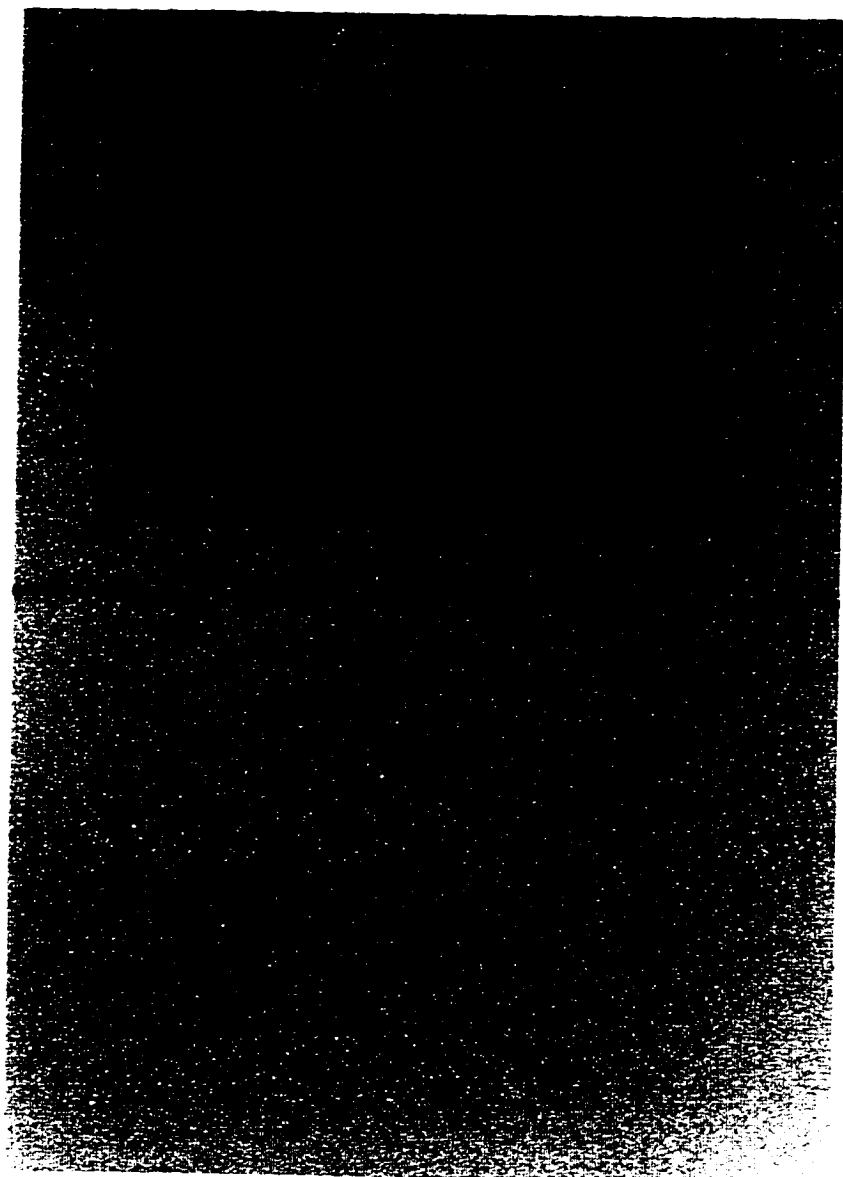
Photo 5

Once a man was saying to his
friend from the elevator.
He was laughing so much that
he stuck his head out and they call-
ing out it off.

2.16 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 5.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.



2.17 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 6.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.



2.18 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 7.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.

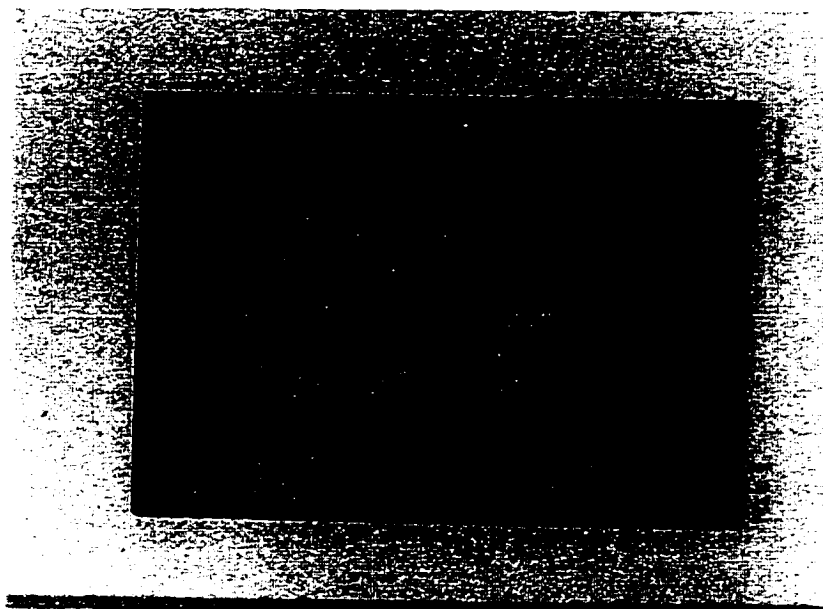


Plate 8

Over an American man who had
been in the army for three years
because he was in the car.

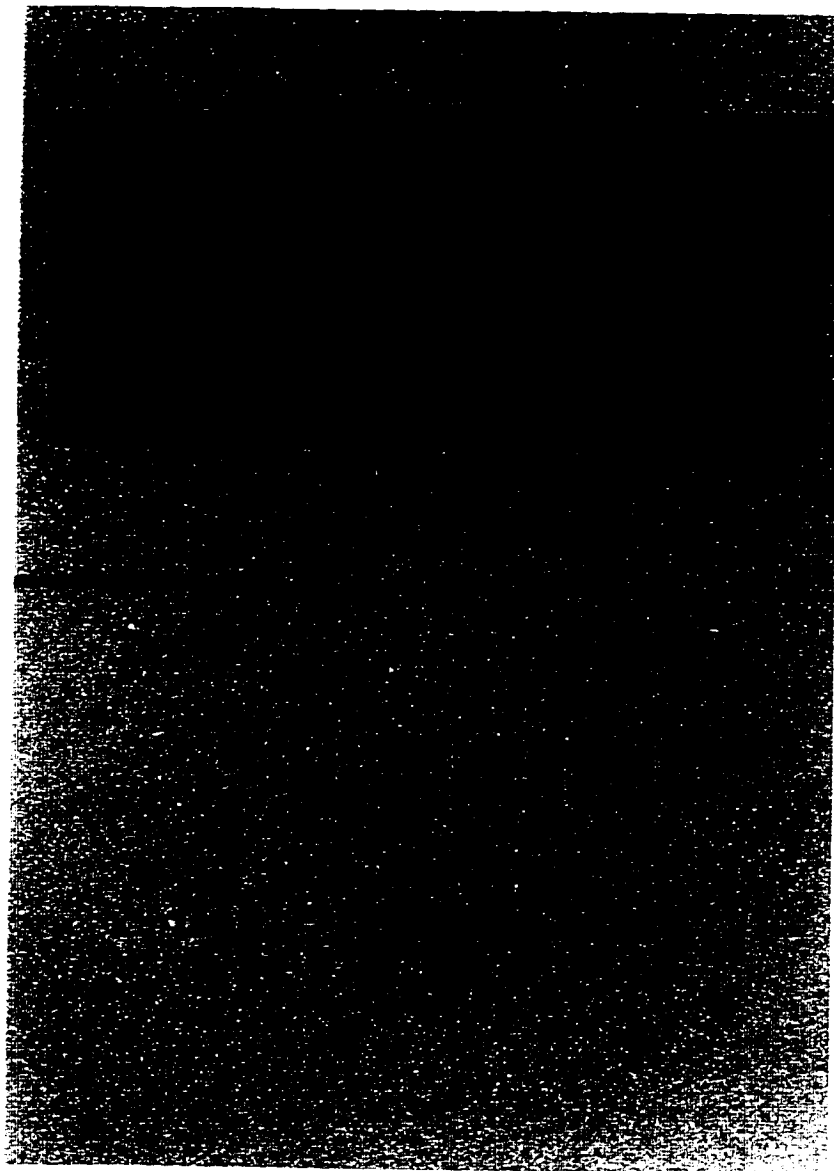
The middle car became almost
dark.

Through the back of the small
back of the car a passage was
found.

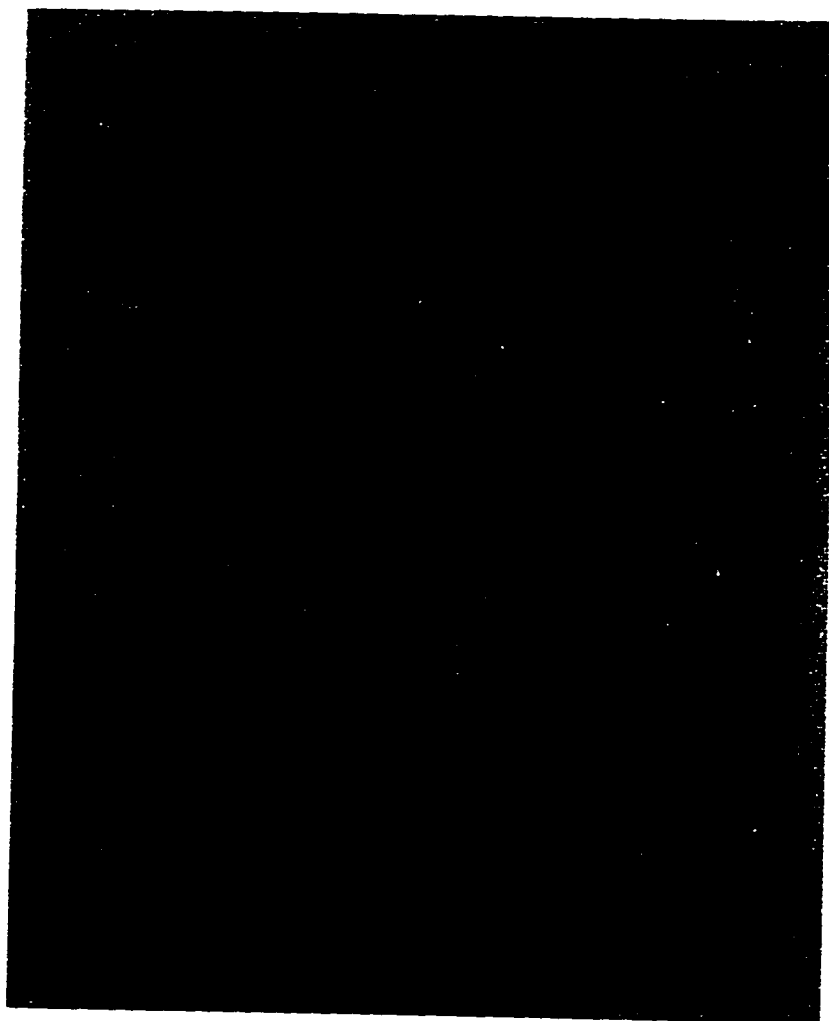
From there on, he heard the
voice of the driver (who, there is
a dark room and there is a lot
of light).

Later on the middle car, there
was a dark room and the driver
was in the back of the car.

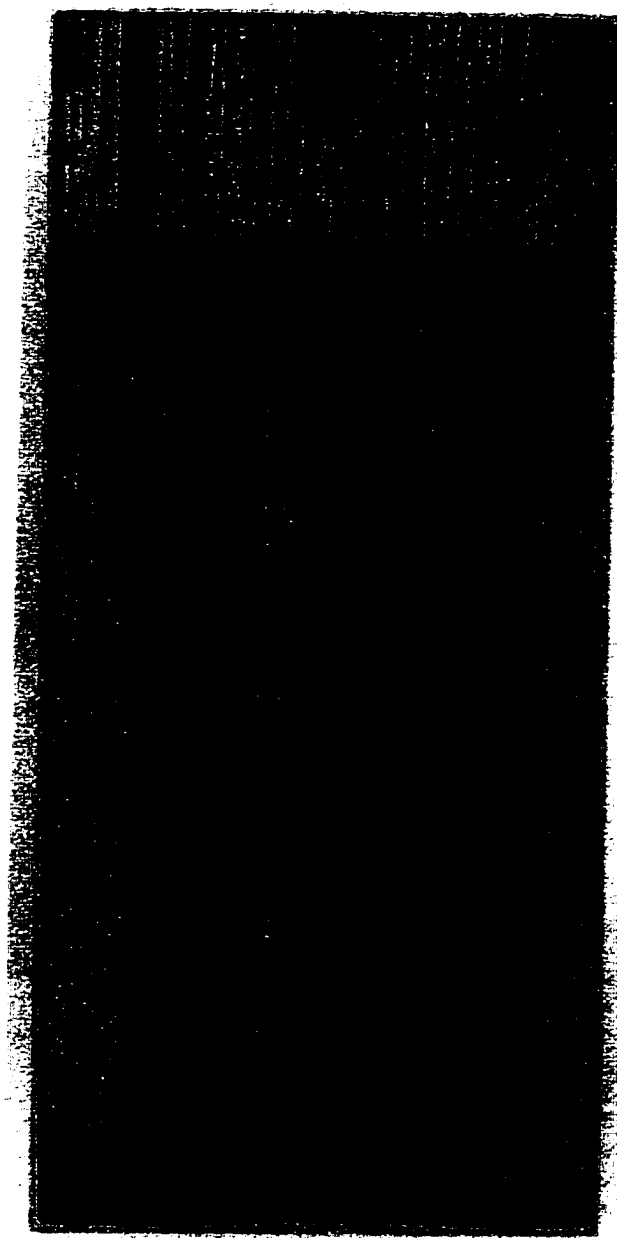
2.19 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 8.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.



2.20 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947. Plate 9.
Text and engravings, 10 x 14 in. Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Gift of the Junior Council, 1968.



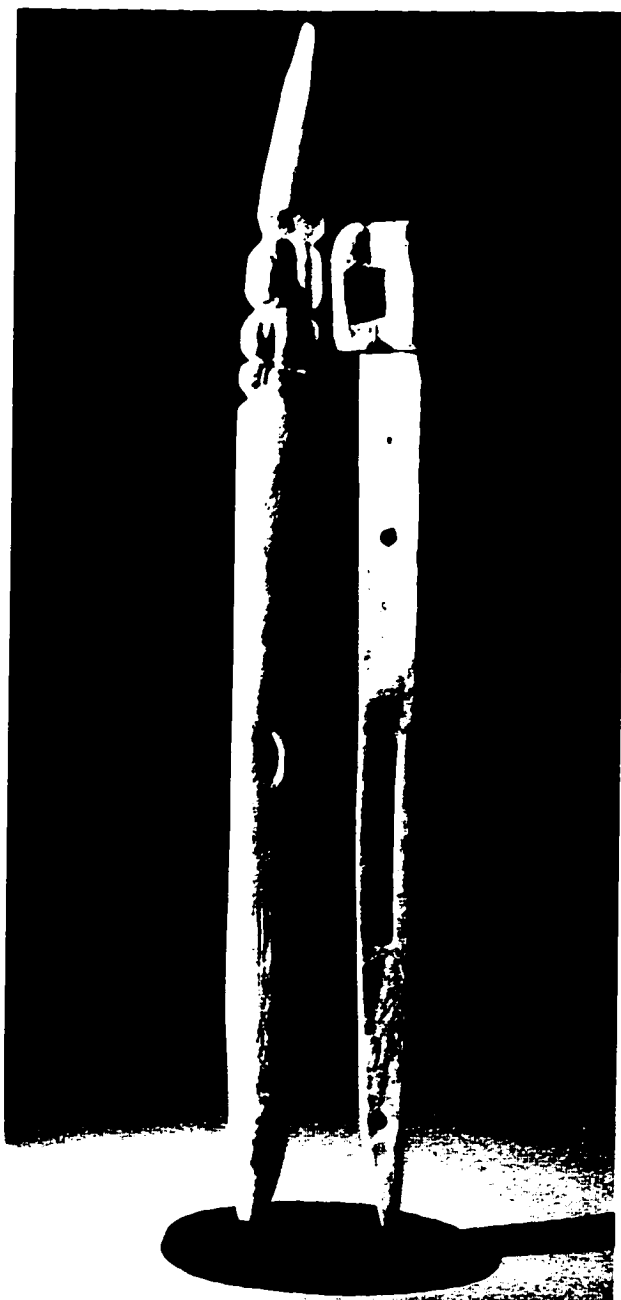
2.21 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947.
Plate 7 (detail). Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of
the Junior Council, 1968.



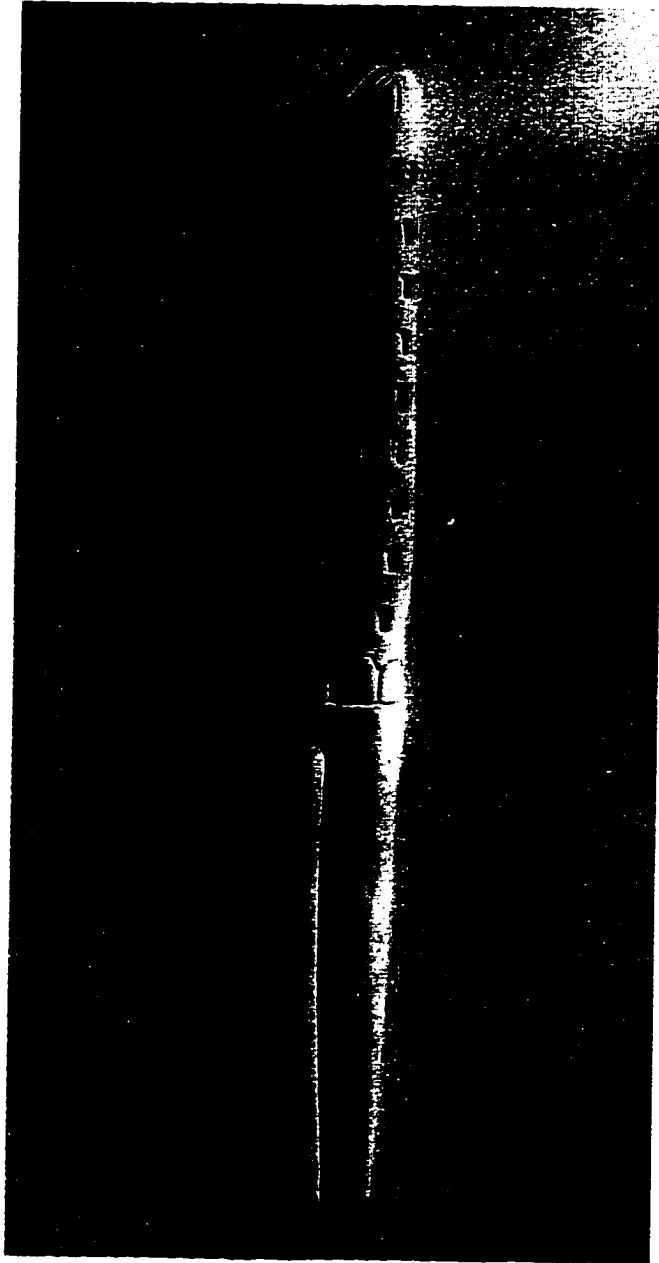
2.22 He Disappeared into Complete Silence. 1947.
Plate 9 (detail). Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of
the Junior Council, 1968.



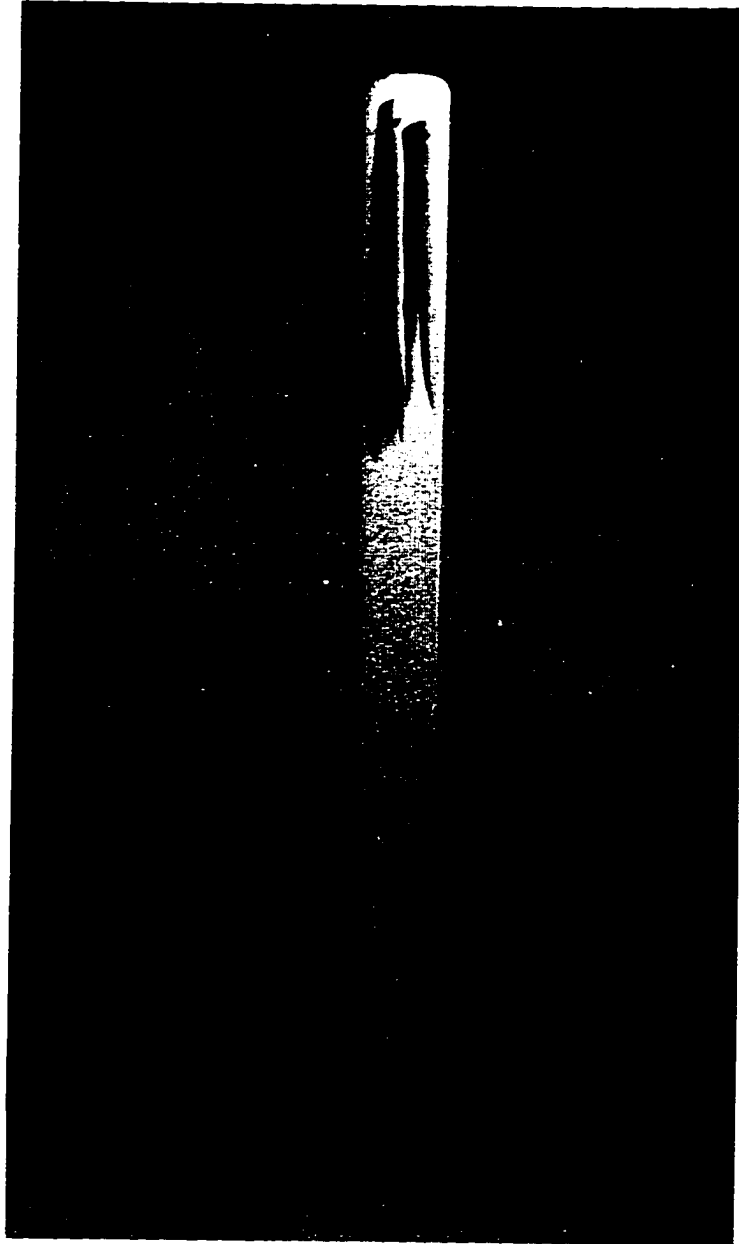
2.23 Observer. ca. 1947-49. Painted wood. 6 ft. 5 in. h.
Collection of Constance R. Caplan. (Photograph shows
version in bronze.)



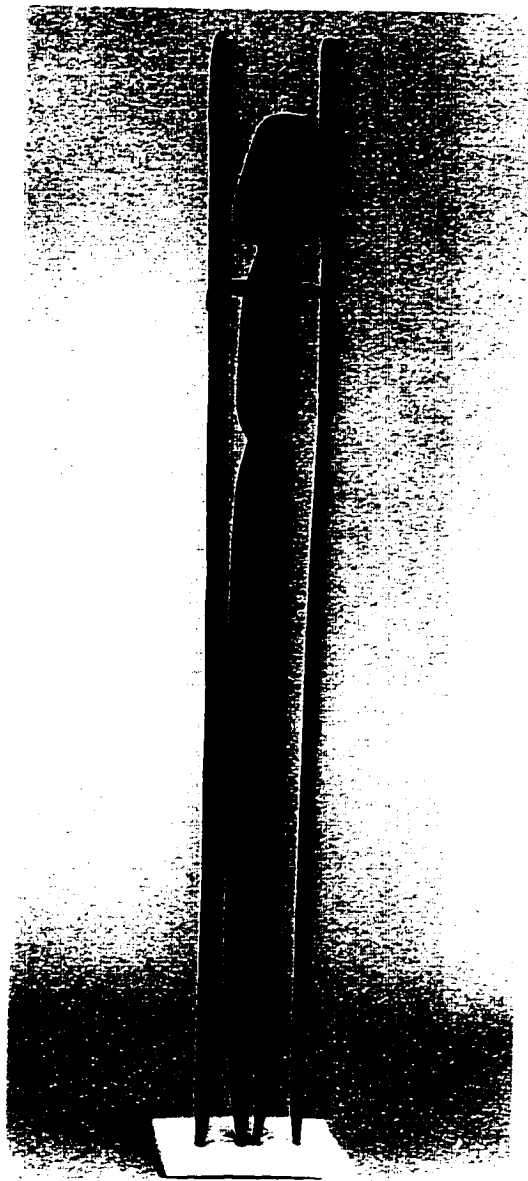
2.24 The Listening One. ca. 1947-49. Bronze (cast 1981).
6 ft. 8 in. h. Galerie Lelong, Zurich.



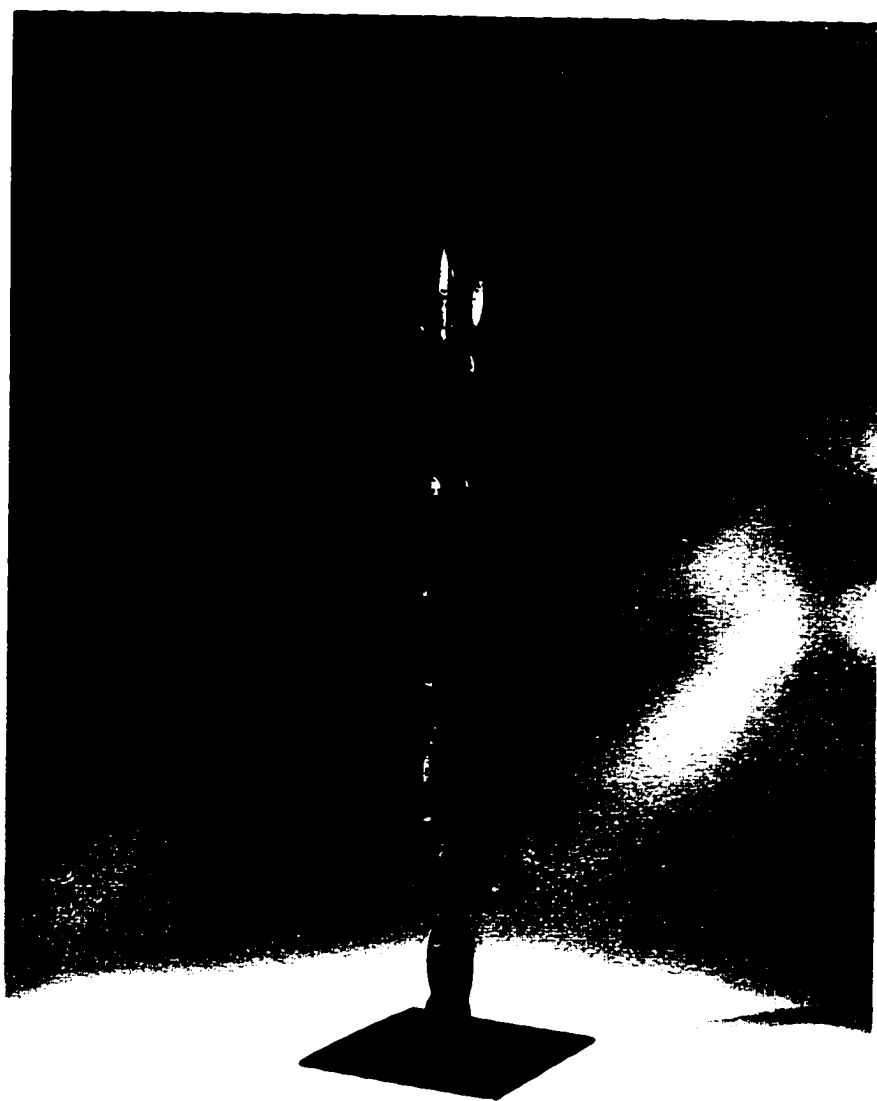
2.25 Portrait of Jean-Louis. ca. 1947-49. Painted wood. 35 in. h. Collection Katherine and Keith Sachs, Horsham, Penn.



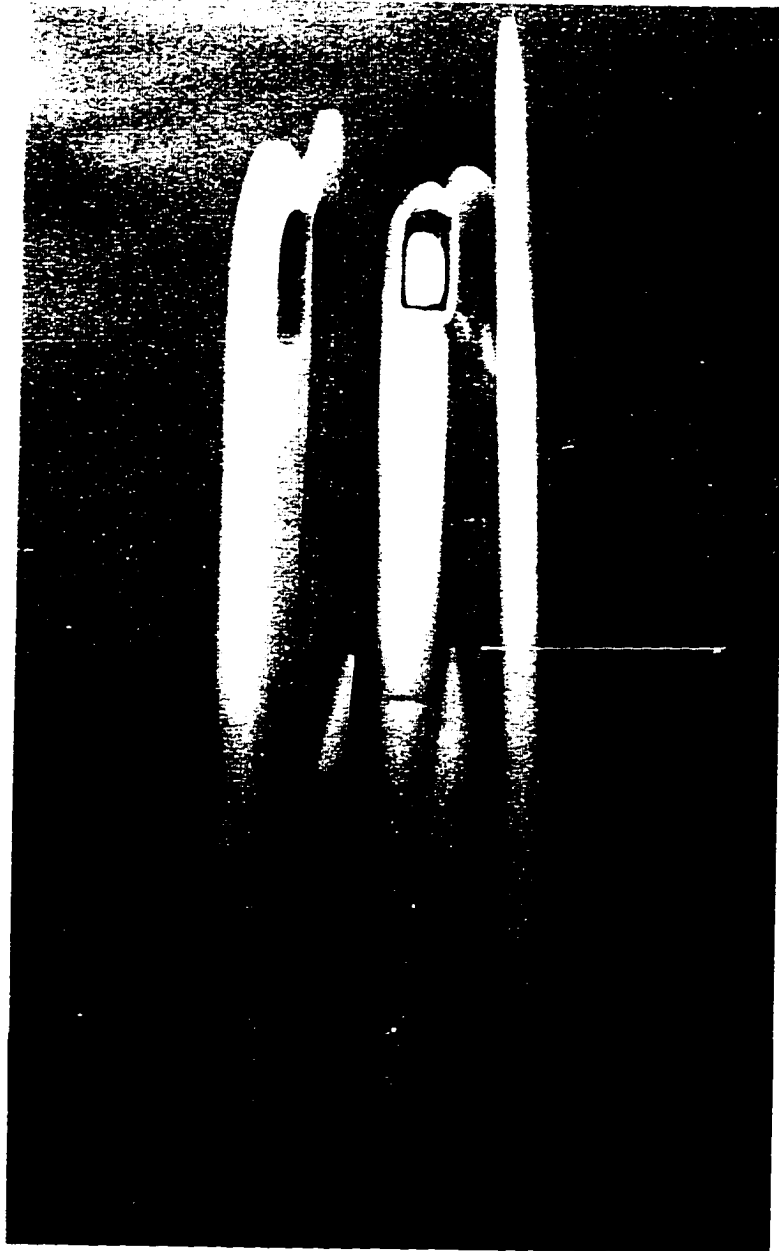
2.26 Tomb of a Young Person. ca. 1947-49. Painted wood.
46 in. h. Collection of the artist.



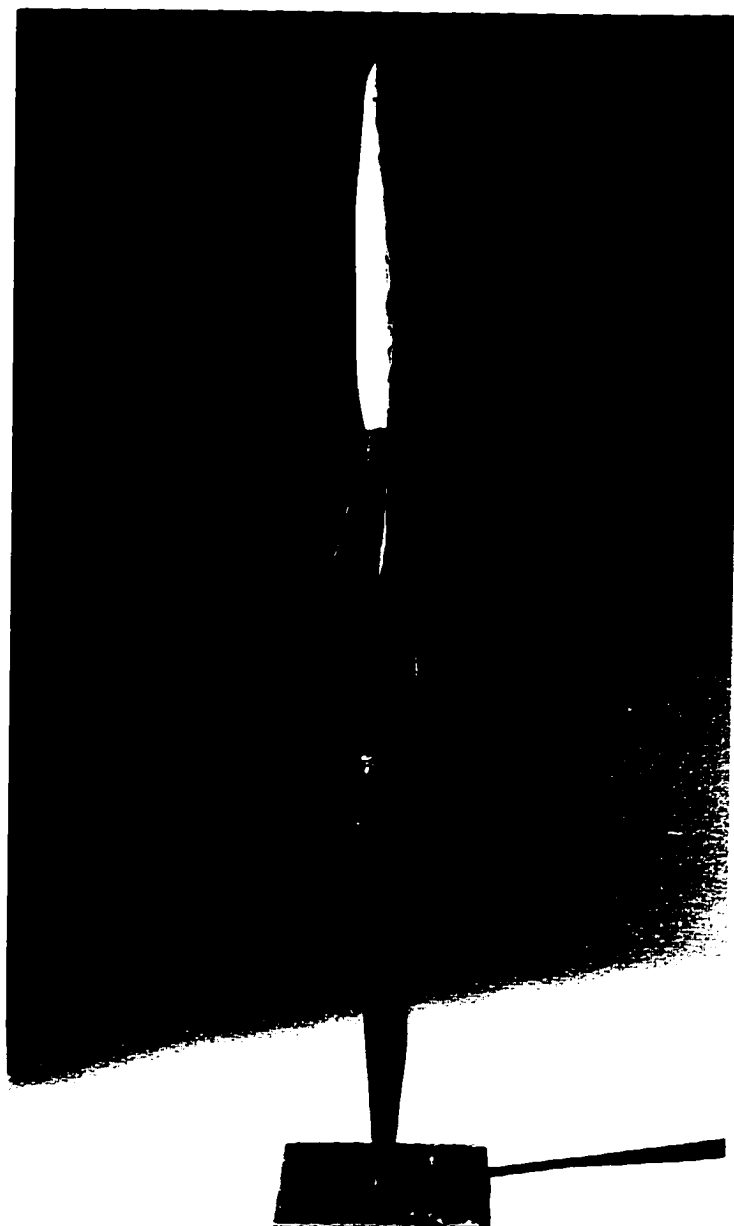
2.27 Figure endormie (Sleeping Figure). 1950. Painted wood. 6 ft. 2 in. h. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katherine Cornell Fund, 1951.



2.28 Breasted Woman. ca. 1949-50. Painted wood.
54 in. h. Private collection, New York.



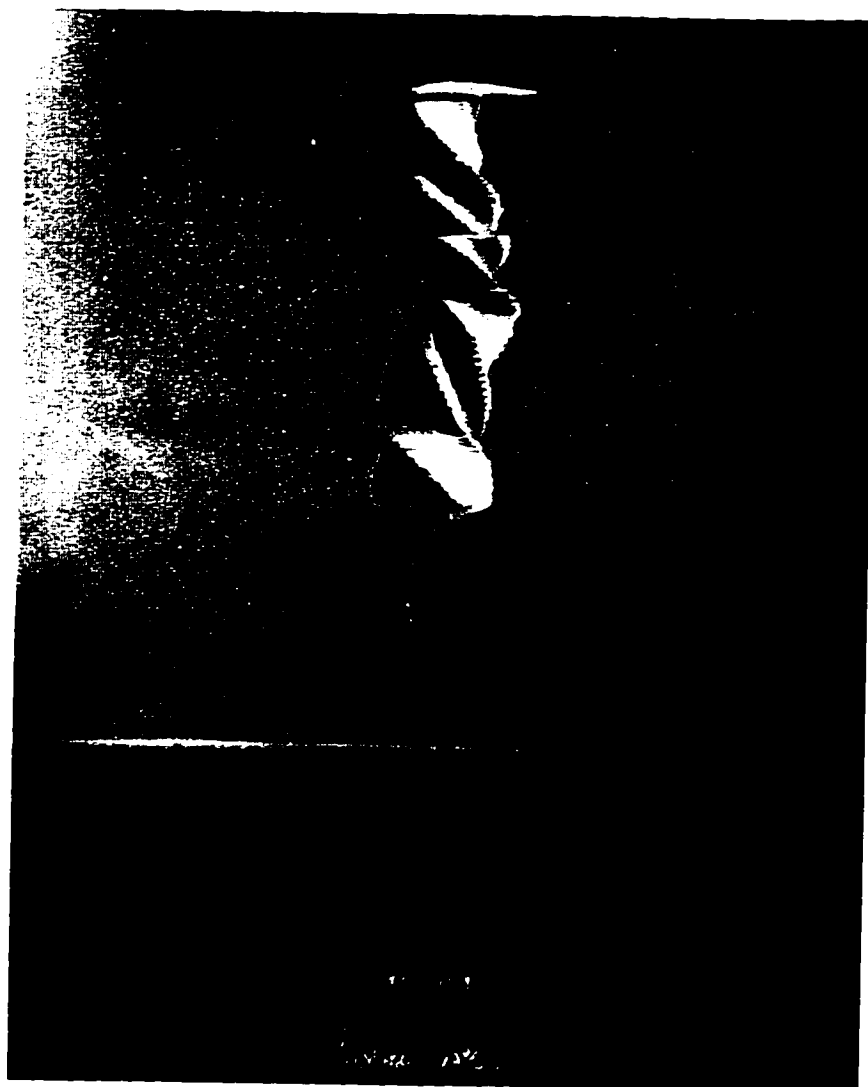
2.29 Quarantania, I. 1947-53. Painted wood on wood base.
6 ft. 9 in. h. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of
Ruth Stephan Franklin, 1969.



2.30 Persistent Antagonism. ca. 1949-50. Painted wood.
68 in. h. Private collection.



2.31 One and Others. 1955. Painted wood.
18 x 20 x 17 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.



2.32 Spiral Woman. 1951-52. Painted wood and steel.
63 in. h. Collection of the artist.



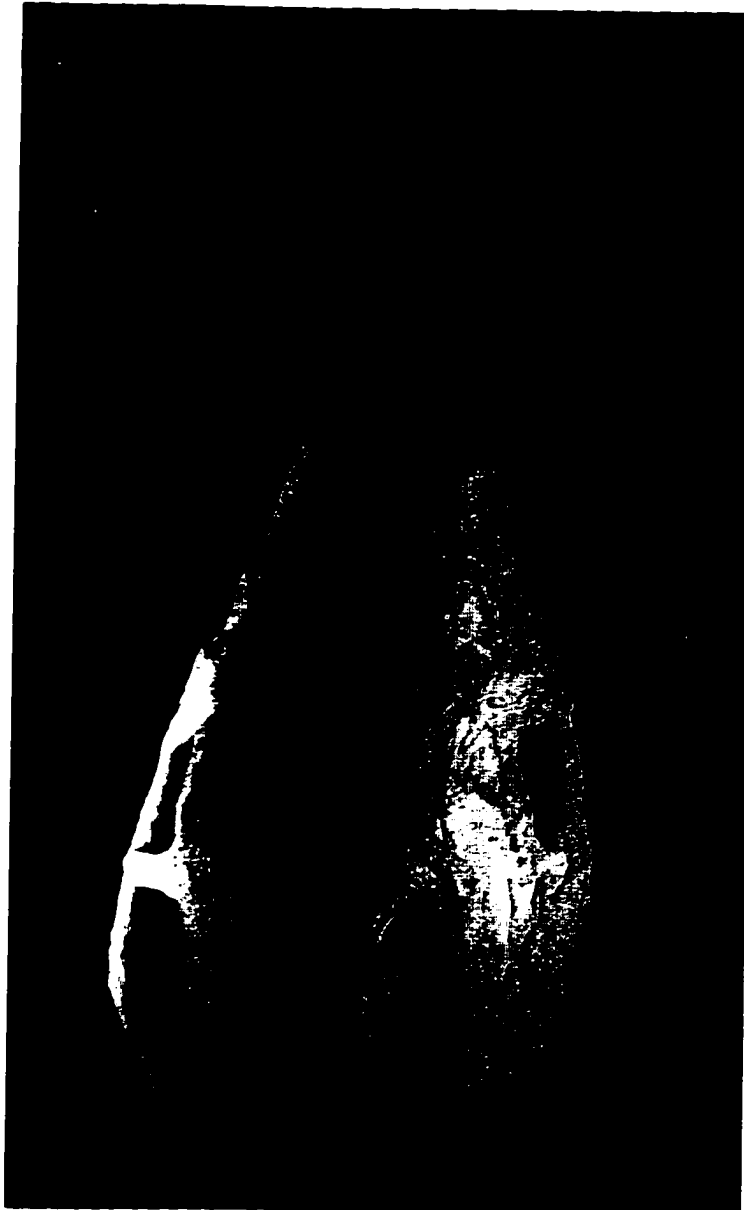
2.33 Untitled. 1950. Painted wood and steel. 68 in. h.
Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



2.34 Untitled. 1950. Painted wood and steel. 68 in. h.
Collection Suzanne Farver and George J. Berky.



2.35 Untitled. 1954. Painted wood, steel, and latex.
58 in. h. Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



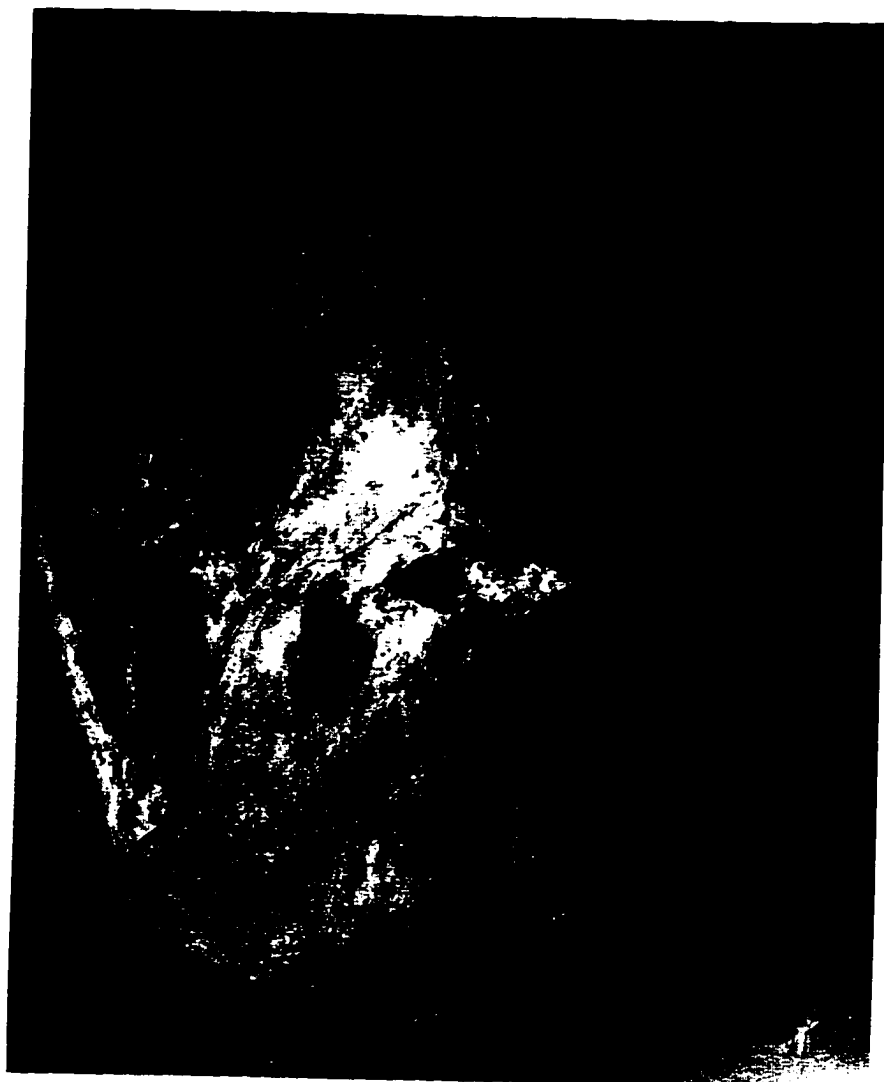
3.1 Fée Couturière. ca. 1963. Plaster. 39.5 in. h.
Collection of the artist.



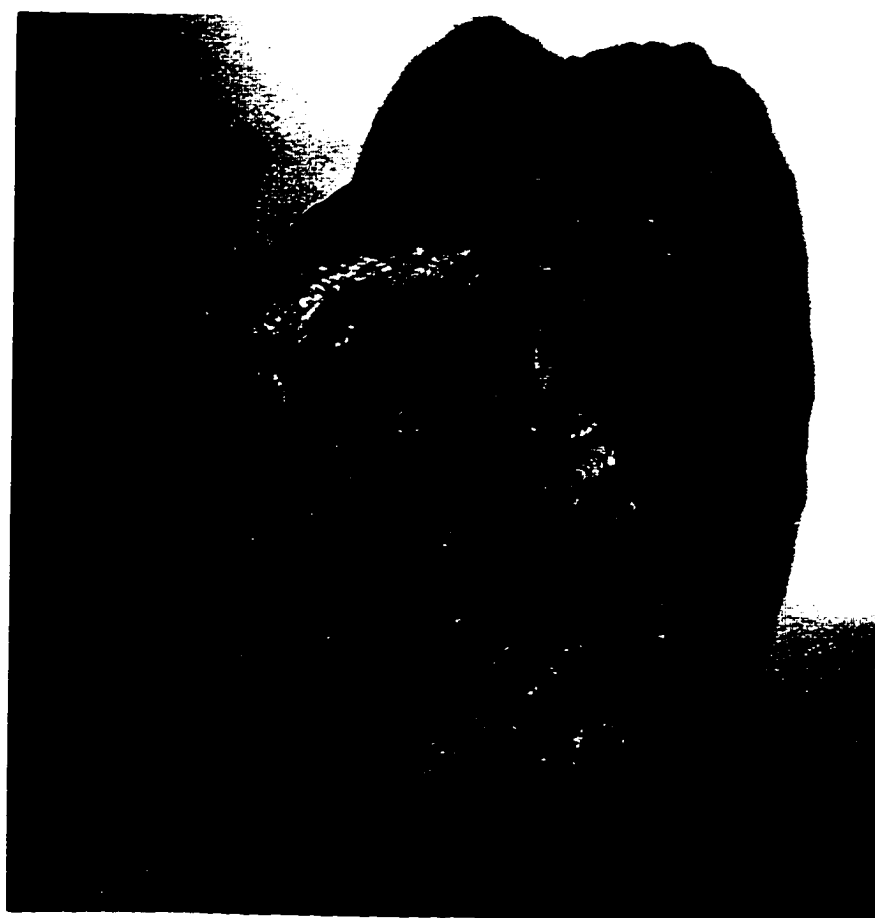
3.2 Portrait. 1963. Latex. 16 x 13 x 4 in. Museum of
Modern Art, New York. Gift of Arthur Drexler.



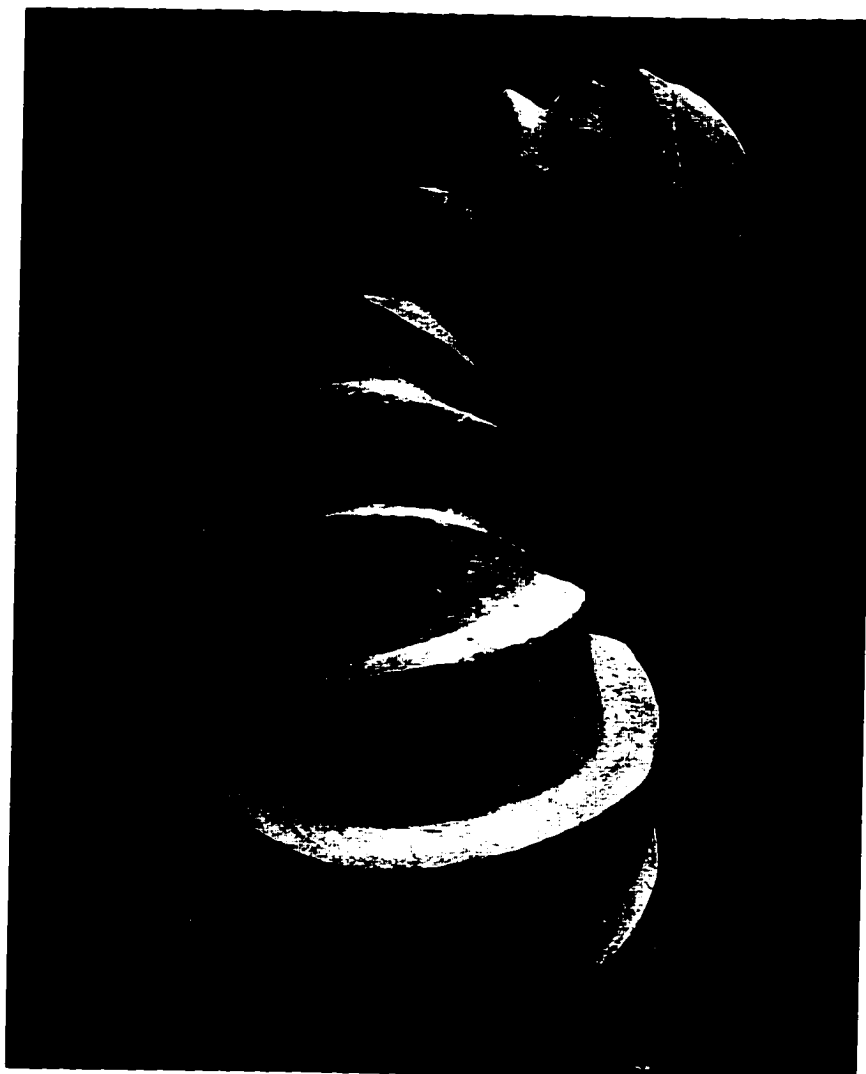
3.3 Soft Landscape. 1963. Latex and plaster.
7 x 8 x 8 in. Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



3.4 Amoeba. ca. 1963-65. Plaster. 36 x 30 x 12 in.
Private collection, New York.



3.5 Le Regard. 1966. Latex and fabric. 5 x 15 x 14.5 in.
Collection of the artist.



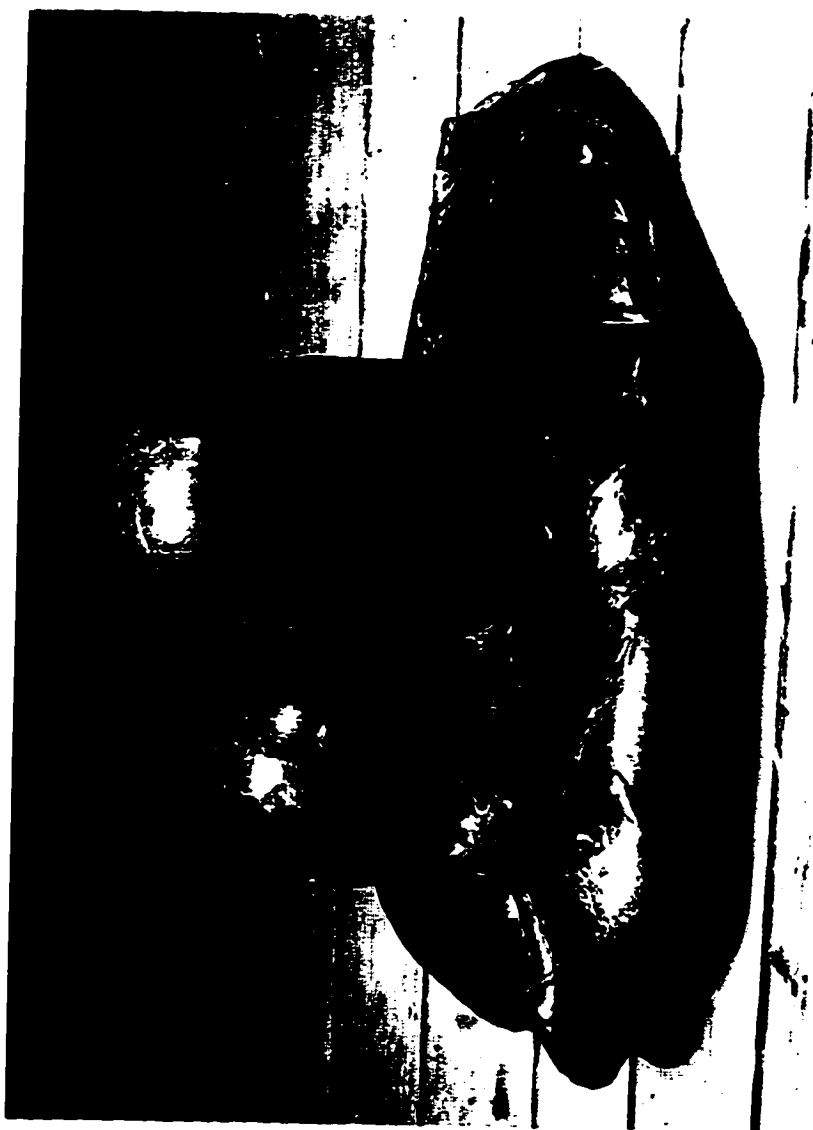
3.6 Labyrinthine Tower. ca. 1962. Plaster. 18 in. h.
Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



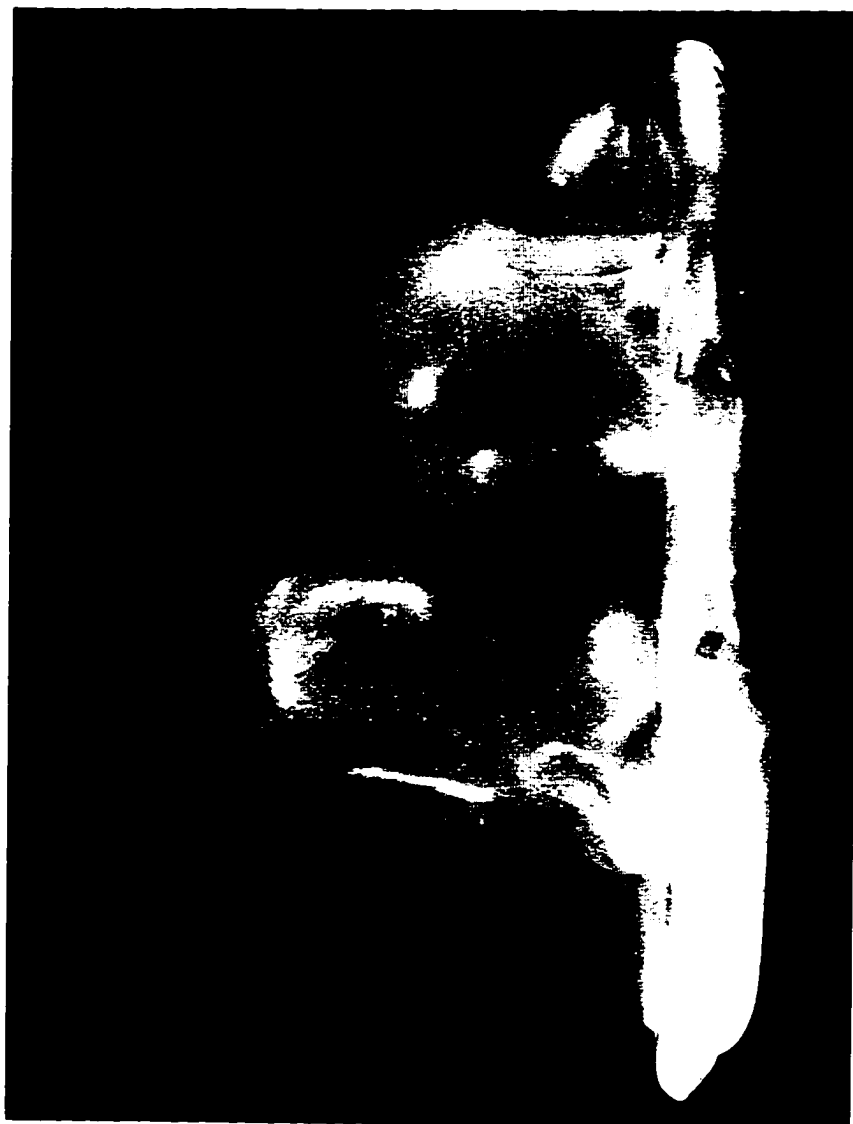
3.7 Cumul, I. 1969. Marble. 23 x 50 x 48 in. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



3.8 Soft Landscape, I. 1967. Plastic.
7 x 16 x 17 in. Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



3.9 Soft Landscape, II. 1967. Plastic. 7 x 16 x 10 in.
Galerie Lelong, Zurich.



3.10 Soft Landscape, II. 1967. Alabaster.
7 x 15 x 10 in. Kunstmuseum, Berne.



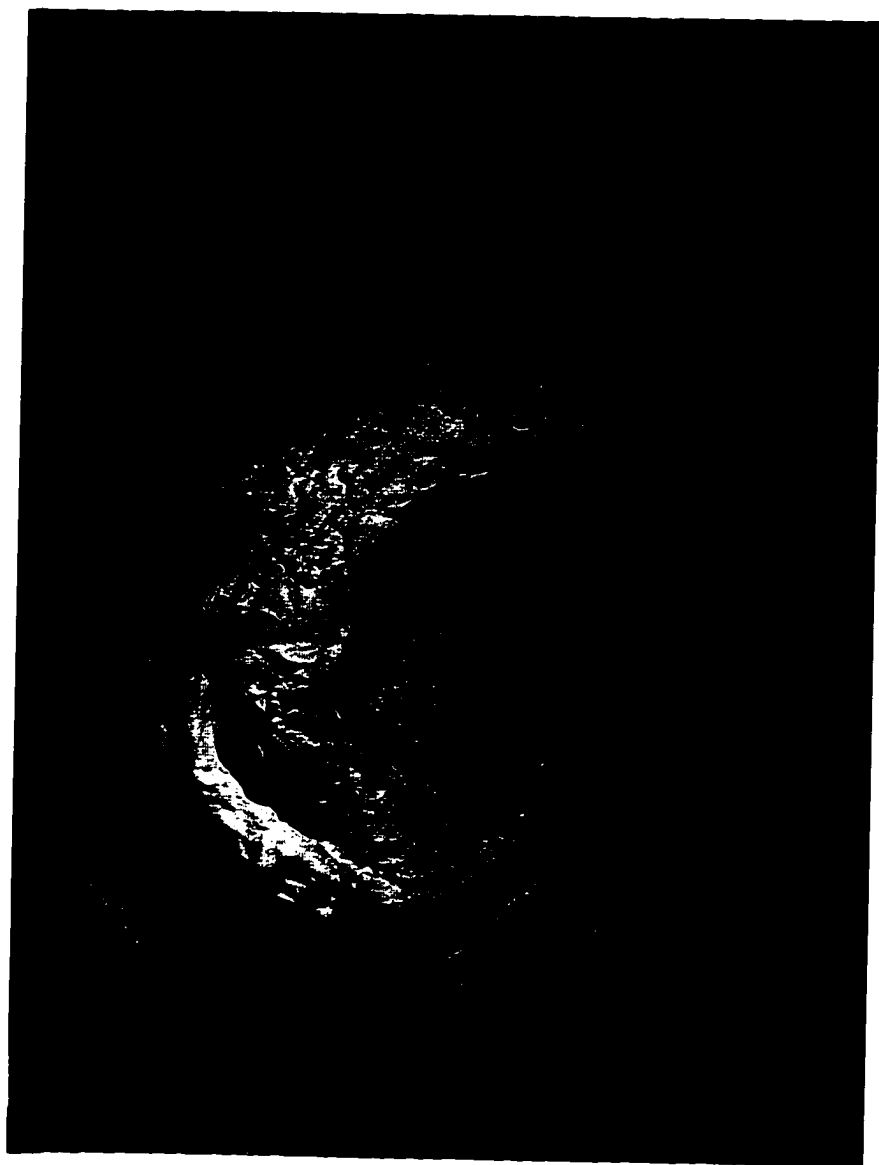
3.11 Double Negative. ca. 1963. Plaster and latex.
19 x 37.5 x 31 in. Rijksmuseum Kroller-Muller, Otterlo.



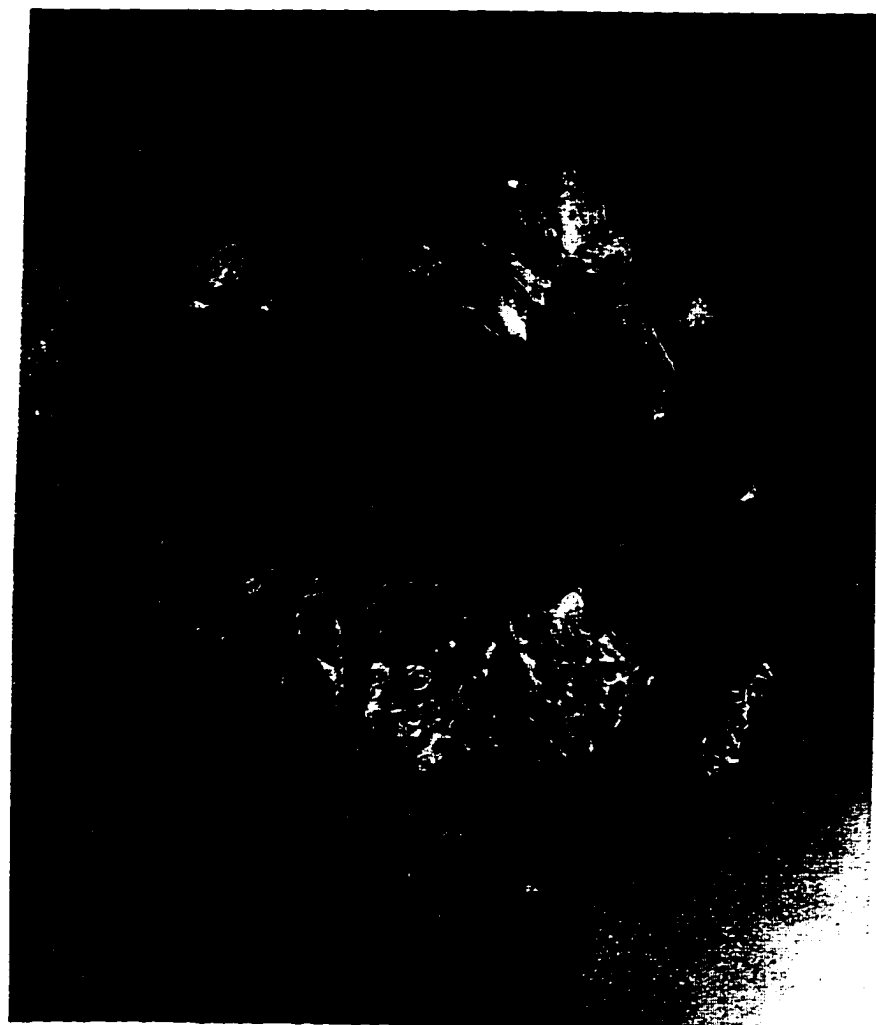
3.12 Unconscious Landscape. 1967. Bronze.
12 x 22 x 24 in. Galerie Lelong, Zurich.



3.13 Bourgeois posing in one of her latex costumes. New York, 1975. Photograph by Peter Moore.



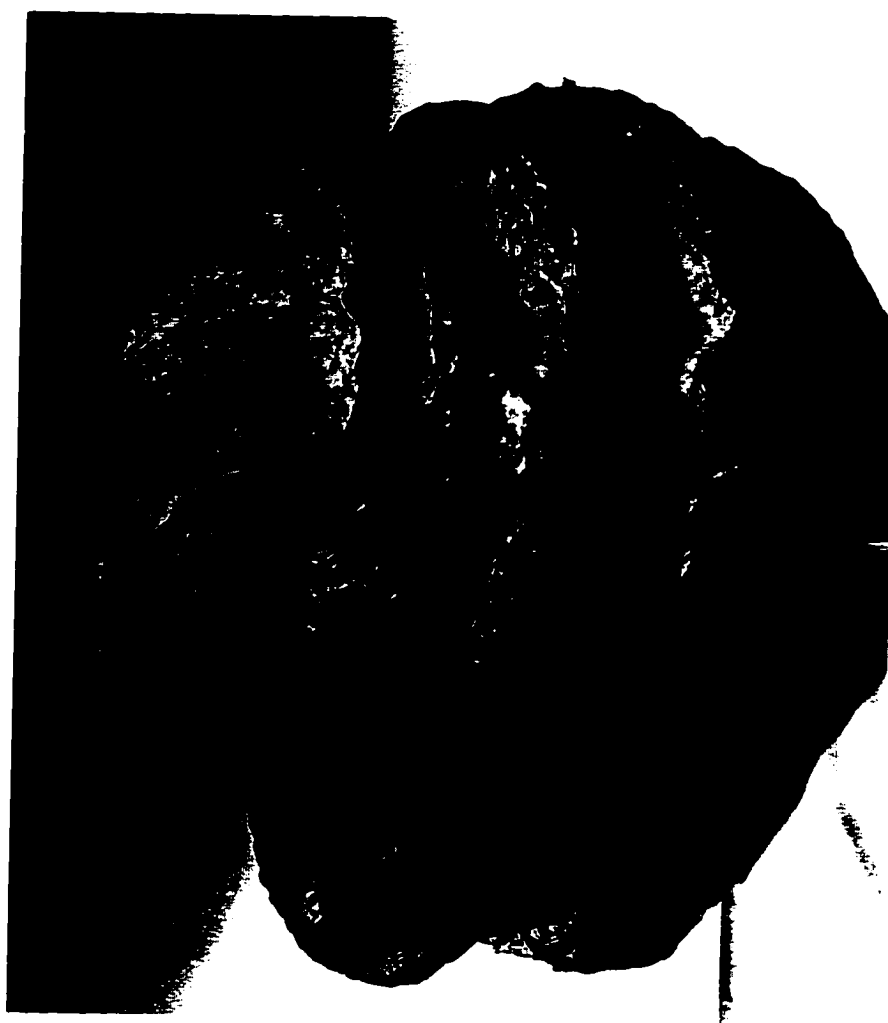
3.14 Rondeau for L. 1963. Plaster. 11 x 11 x 10.5 in.
Private collection, New York. (Photograph shows version in
bronze.)



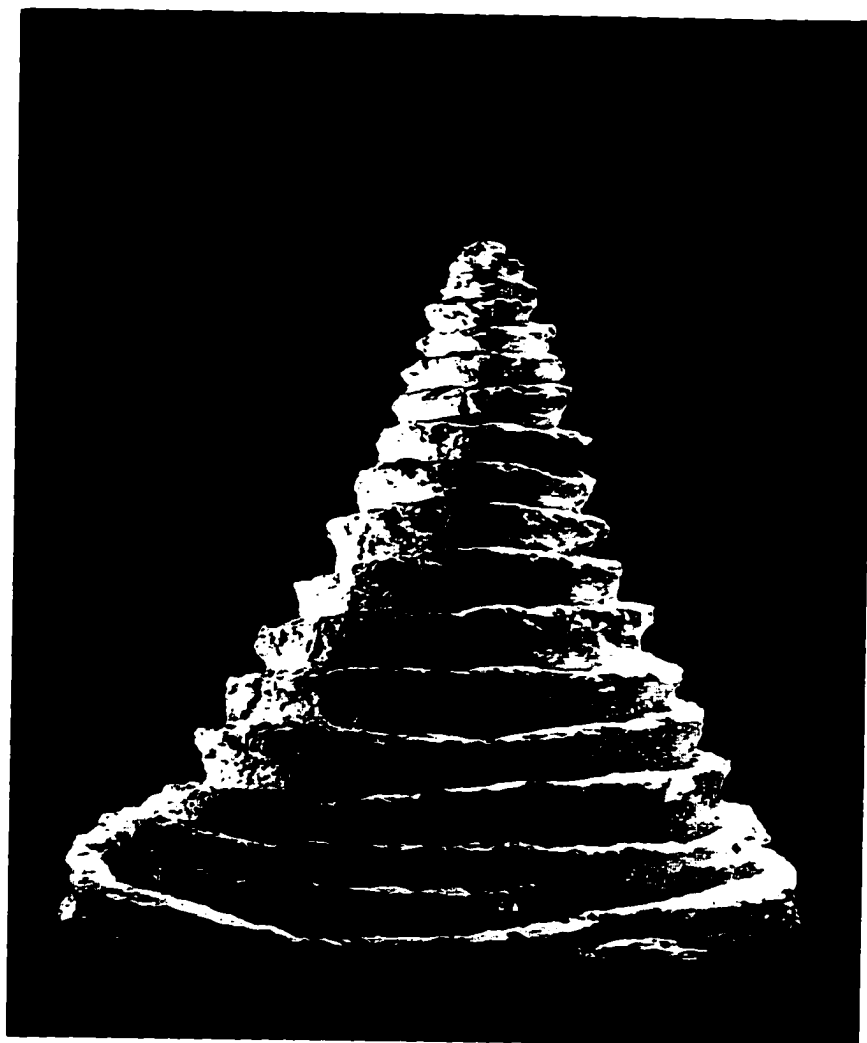
3.15 Homage to Bernini. ca. 1967. Bronze.
21.5 x 20 x 23 in. Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



3.16 Lair. ca. 1962-63. Plaster. 18 x 29.5 x 23.5 in.
Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



3.17 Lair. 1963. Latex. 9 x 16.5 x 14.5 in.
Galerie Karsten-Greve, Cologne, Paris, Milan; Robert Miller
Gallery, New York.



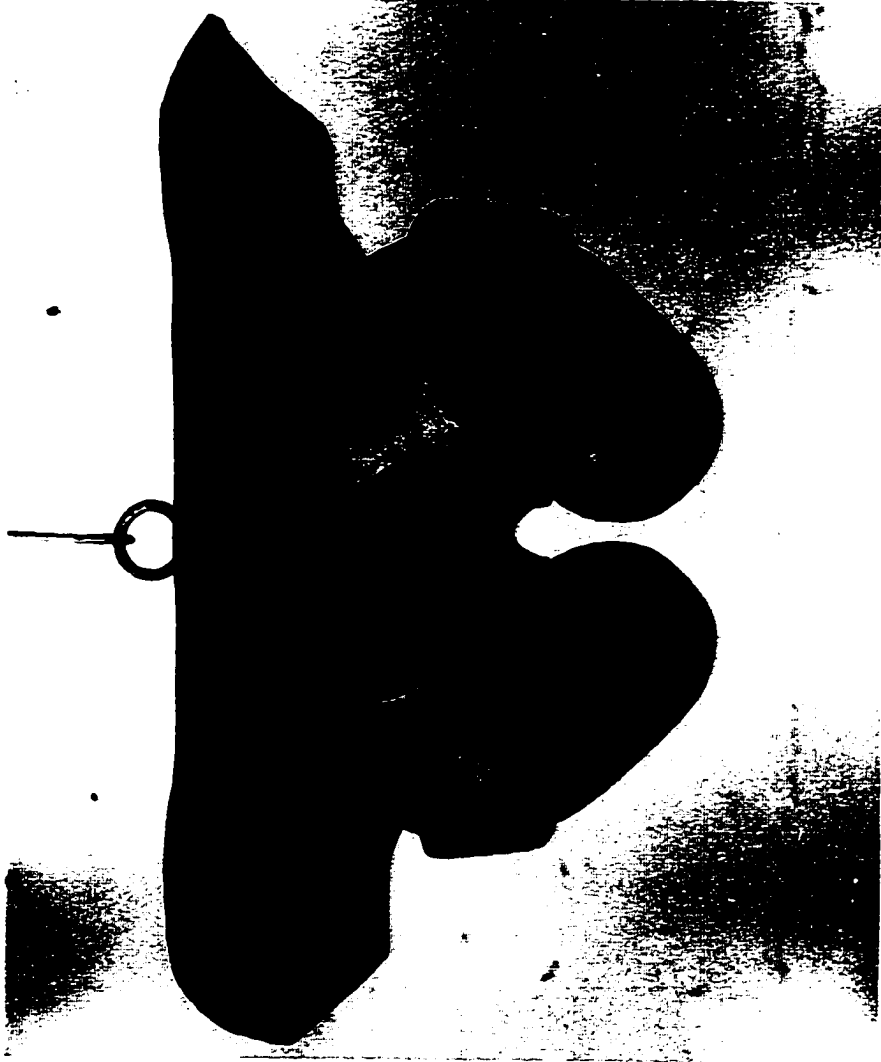
3.18 Lair. 1962. Plaster. 14 in. h. Robert Miller Gallery, New York.



3.19 The Quartered One. ca. 1964-65. Plaster.
62 x 24 x 20 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



3.20 Janus in Leather Jacket. ca. 1968-71. Bronze.
12 x 22 x 7 in. Galerie Lelong, Zurich.



3.21 Hanging Janus with Jacket. ca. 1968-71. Bronze.
10.5 x 20.5 x 6 in. Galerie Lelong, Zurich.



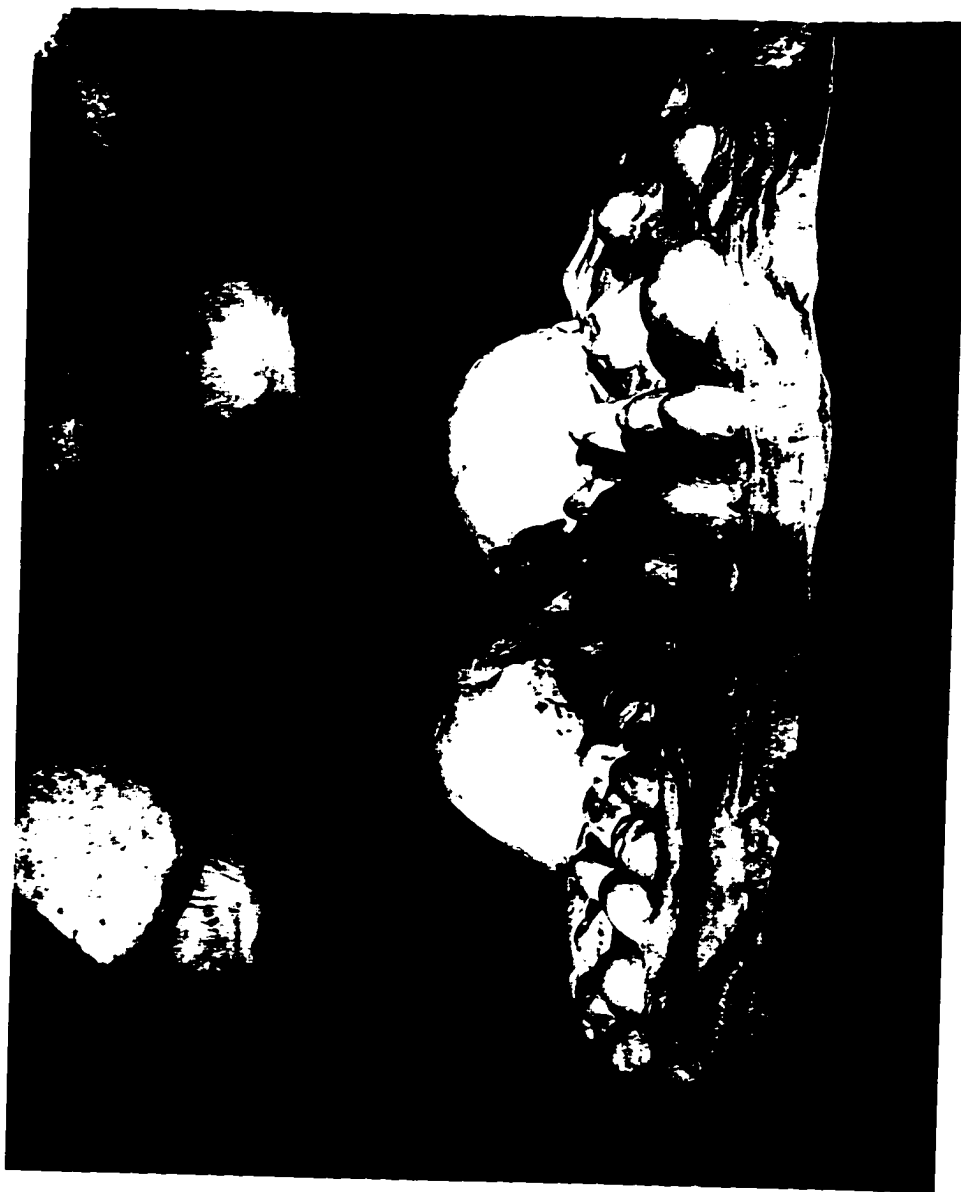
3.22 Janus Fleuri. ca. 1968. Bronze.
10 x 12.5 x 9 in. Collection of the artist.



3.23 Femme Couteau. ca. 1969-70. Pink marble.
26 in. l. Collection Jerry and Emily Spiegel, Kings Point,
N.Y.



4.1 The Destruction of the Father. 1974. Latex, latex over plaster, and mixed media. ca. 9 x 11 x 9 ft. Collection of the artist.



4.2 The Destruction of the Father. 1974. Latex, latex over plaster, and mixed media. ca. 9 x 11 x 9 ft. Collection of the artist.