ANTHROPOLOGIES
OF ART

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On the Margins of Recorded History:
Anthropology and Primitivism

Francesco Pellizzi

Questionner historiquement veut dire: libérer et mettre en mouvement
l'avènement qui repose dans la question et qui y est enchaîné.
—M. Heidegger, Qu'est-ce qu'une chose? (1935)

The principal characteristic of history, and of the future, is our absence,
and we cannot be certain about something in which we have never
taken part.
—Josif Brodskij, Profilo di Clio (1991)

I am, by training a philologist and an ethnologist more than a student of the
anthropology of art, and a Mayanist who has, for the past twenty years, been writing
mostly about aspects of contemporary Western art. These different interests are all
present in my editorial work, so it is mainly from my experience as editor that I
offer the following observations. I shall refrain, in the interest of space, from dis-
cussing specific studies published in Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics, although it
pleases me to say that memorable ones were written by distinguished participants
to this very volume. My comments will touch on the object and subject, the aim
and method of a possible anthropology of art, principally in the perspective of what
I consider to be its modernist and primitivist roots.

An editor, by definition, should never try to be original—or risk coming
into conflict with most of what he might usefully publish; still, I feel I should at
least evoke the original motivation for setting up an “anthropological place,” or
multidisciplinary field in which to house studies of art coming from heterogenous
sources. From an anthropological perspective two things appeared evident in the
mid-1970s, when the journal Res was first being conceived: (1) that academic an-
thropology, after a strong early interest, had let both the art object and the object
of art fade away from its main concerns (to the point that the whole domain of art
came to be subsumed under the label “material culture” and relegated to marginal
sections of anthropological monographs—imagine if we applied such a characteri-
zation to the contents of the Louvre or the Met!) and (2) that we would not succeed
in bringing artifacts back into the center of anthropological concerns unless we ac-
knowledged that some of the anthropologically more innovative and relevant work on them was being carried out by researchers from other scholarly traditions.

The nature of the study of art within anthropology bears on the field's own distinctiveness, which is not easily defined: does it reside in the peculiarity of its object, or its method, or both? Regarding the first, how is such an object to be circumscribed? Is it a question of the art of certain kinds of societies that are to be studied anthropologically or of certain kinds of objects (for instance, cult objects) within those societies or perhaps in all of them? As Alfred Gell noted, the "study of differences" may remain—no matter how problematically in our ever more homogeneous age—as good a criterion as any to delimit the field. Difference, methodologically, translates into comparison, but what should or should not be compared with what—again, both within and beyond categorical distinctions between diverse societies or distant times? Relevant boundaries are not readily drawn or justified, except with recourse to broad and even coarse dichotomies that are ever less relevant in today's world. Similarly, one can speak, today, of a variety of anthropologies, pointing to various theoretical, procedural, even national styles and methods, some of which—perhaps even most—can in some way or other be applied to the study of artifacts. But in essence it all comes down to the fact that anthropology is intrinsically interdisciplinary, linking together many areas and levels of social expression. This does not mean that there is no specific rigor to anthropological endeavors. On the contrary, it implies more stringent demands: first of all, a hazardous and always precarious disposition of acceptance toward the object of inquiry in its own terms, or of the object as subject. The anthropological relationship must therefore, in some sense, become reciprocal. Secondly, though always in the perspective of this reflective relation, the object, the social object as well as the physical one (in the case of art), must, in anthropology, be ideally apprehended in the fullness of how, where, and when it occurs. As a consequence of such a totalizing ambition, anthropology paradoxically aims more toward the mapping of principles (principia) and cultural epiphanies than toward the isolation of specific causal chains of (social) phenomena, including artistic ones. Thus, anthropology may not be a science in the most commonly accepted sense of the word. Contradictions (though not necessarily unproductive ones) always lurk between anthropology's ideal of total immersion and exhaustivity and its equally basic reliance on comparison and multidisciplinarity.
In any event, whether it is seen as predictable or improbable, trite or shocking, an often motivationally obscure turn toward the alien animates and characterizes anthropology's original drive: it is still the sociology and social psychology of the unfamiliar, even when that must be dug out of the most humdrum settings, the most anodyne everyday practices, the most common sets of relations. Significantly, the development of modern anthropology as a self-conscious discipline is synchronous and attuned to that of psychoanalysis. Indeed, one could almost say that psychoanalysis is but one of the aspects of anthropology, focusing as it does on the alien within, the I as a stranger within ourselves. The inner wasteland of emotional relations into which the analysand must enter, as both detached observer and empathic student, is in some way analogous to that web of outer and inner relations that the anthropologist must face in his fieldwork—where, as is the case in psychoanalysis, his description of these inner and outer entanglements can never be innocent, or neutral.²

Thus, too, dreams and dreaming play a crucial role in predominantly oral societies—from the first inhabitants of Australia to the Bamana of West Africa—in the conception, creation, and use of objects imbued with aesthetic qualities (with symbolic metafunctional determinations of form), and this also holds true in "folk" enclaves of our post-Enlightenment world (fig. 1).³ But it is at the start of the modernist age that dreams took on a central role in our discourse on psychic processes while also becoming prime material for aesthetic expression in Symbolism and Surrealism. On this oniric register, as well as in others, a break occurred in the evaluation of the real just when the disruptions of the machine age were undermining Western rational continuities and positivist thinking. From the perspective of its origins, then, which largely determined what would be its future form and content, the anthropology of art cannot fail to explore the rapport between what we might call (adapting T.S. Eliot's notion) the "objective correlative" of our discontinuous modern subjectivity—the way the formalist explosion of art for art's sake disembodied the object, reducing it from a symbol to a sign—and the traditional manifestations of what we might call the "subjective correlative" in cultures in which the symbolic object springs from internalized, alien
(and often oneiric) experiences—located at the margins of an archaic consciousness that conceives of itself as embedded in the continuity of the socius. In other words, there might be a correlation to be drawn between the marginalized subject in archaic cultures, as expressed particularly in shamanic journeys and the self-alienating process of creating the cult object, and our modernist way of marginalizing the object as a by-product of an alienated, aesthetized subject. More generally, in my view, an anthropology of art by us cannot begin to interrogate the statute of any object while remaining unaware of those modernist premises that affect our relation to any contemporary or ancient artifact, whether exogenous or endogenous. A first consideration regarding such a statute could be that all art objects since modernism are constitutionally marginal—the color experiments of the Fauves as much as the products of surviving tribal cultures collected by explorers and anthropologists. The adoption of marginality as the central feature of our art religion is what establishes anthropology as a key instrument in our making and studying of artifacts.

I am trying to suggest two things about the content (the object), and the form (the subject) of a possible anthropology of art. Concerning the first, the root of the crisis of anthropology lies in the discipline’s original vocation, which was that of exploring the original, primitive, or archaic in bone remains, ruins, artifacts, as well as in remote and unrecorded forms of social life, still extant in so-called far corners of the world, which are or were in reality—in their own reality, the only one we are now inclined to consider legitimate—in fact so many centers of the world, unique entities immersed in their own unrecorded form of history. The expansion of our centrality was of course a function of the expansion of our commercial and military means, but significantly, anthropology is a product or attribute of the endgame of that expansion. Bernardino de Sahagun was the first great ethnographer (though Herodotus could legitimately stake that claim), and a most articulate voice after Dürer’s visual aphasia about the New World’s artificial marvels. Anthropology as a comparative study of “oral” societies and cultures, however, flourished only once our industrial development was in full swing. Compassion is, in a way, an acceptance of alterity, but it can also give way to a close engagement that tends to embrace, and in the end, obliterate, its object. Thus my second point, about the form, or subject, of anthropology: that the otherness, the alterity, is not just between “us” and “them” (as Wendy Doniger would say) but one between many of “them,” equally and existentially legitimate. By reflection this also implies that the us, which is the seat of what I call the subject, and the form, also becomes multiple, elusive, fragmented. The fragmentation of the Western self is a function
of our many anthropologies, that is, of the fact that we can speak at all in the plural about the discipline, which has by now become more of an attribute than a thing.

It has become a widely accepted tenet of the anthropological methodos to seek to transform the view from the outside into a view from the inside which reflects the presence of the observer. The hermeneutical condition of the anthropological encounter consists of this double reflection of a double awareness between us and others, and between them and us. What then might be an anthropological approach in cases where the object is familiar and belonging to the tradition within which anthropology was conceived? In other words, what might an anthropology of Western art be? After mentioning the constitutive role of difference, can we also speak of an anthropology of sameness? What about those cases, ever more common today, in which the anthropologist himself belongs to one of those traditions that were once the favorite preserve of anthropology? What might a native anthropology be, whether turned onto itself or looking at us? Certainly, at least part of the anthropological truth inherent to any study of ourselves must rely on a self-distancing, from turning what we think, do, and produce—what we surmise we are—into an exogenous image, something genetically given but not taken for granted. This exigency, once more, was sensed in different fields at the inception of modernism: eminently, among many others, by Franz Kafka and Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp, exploring wilder terrain than Paul Gauguin and Emil Nolde, was perhaps the first auto-anthropologist artist in our high-art tradition (this may be the link between the primitivist element in Cubism and his Fountain), while Kafka, far more radically than Joseph Conrad or Rudyard Kipling, was the first auto-anthropologist writer observing himself as an alien and as an animal, even—which may constitute his genetic link to Joyce.6

There can be no object, as such, at the intersection between the alien and the familiar where the study of art is one of the objects of anthropology. In our field, our awareness of our own historical relation to art objects is, in my view, directly or indirectly (and consciously or unconsciously) determined by the aesthetic and conceptual leap that took place at the start of the modernist movement: I see its gradient as the gap, or tension, between the functional reductivism of formalist facture (we could call it the essentialist component of modernist facture) and the anti-metaphysical “suchness” of the readymade/found object complex (which we could call the anti-facture inherent in its postmodern component), as if the strictures of functional formalism had needed the exogenous humus of primi-
tive forms and of the contents they were thought to convey. These were entities, in fact, whose artistic relevance to modernism derived precisely from their having been lifted out of their original context—alienated from their familiar uses and commonplace settings: African fetishes, early medieval stone carvings, archaic Russian icons, Polynesian and Melanesian "idols," etc. The readymade and found object are in some respect analogous to these, yet also quite distinct, both from them and among themselves: one might choose a made object as one would pick up a pebble on a beach, but generally readymades are mechanically produced. The (ideal) instantaneity of the method by which they are made tends towards the opposite of the "delay" that Duchamp still attributed to the Glass of his Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Handmade facture is "delay"—a delay in painting, for instance—while industry relies upon and provides the given, or the mold. Since Duchamp, our art object has been made to oscillate between these two terms, while the anthropological study of artifacts undergoes dialectical shifts of focus between creation and use, intention and reception.

Tools may be hundreds of thousands of years old (and, though sporadically, they are also made, found, and used by some animals), while the beginnings of art appear to be more or less synchronous with the development of both articulated language and the first burial practices. It would appear, then, that language enacts a critical transformation in the statute of the instrument: the instrument-as-spoken projects intention through time, separating the tool from both its maker and its immediate uses. The word itself is such a deferred instrument—again, a delay—being at once instantaneous and potentially distant, audible yet invisible, like an arrow that suddenly strikes from afar. It is also the word that summons up the ancestor, bridging the gap between his corpse—the image of his absence—and his lingering presence—the memory of his body and words: it is the word that re-animates the body-artifact in many rituals throughout the world. And yet a true anthropology of artifacts must first of all question what, precisely, makes the word an insufficient tool in evoking presences—why does the corpse need a substitute?

If the object is before anything else an instrument (organon), this means that it is a fragment and a function. It also implies that the objectuality of the object is not a given, set once and for all—it evolves in human history: it is something fluid, mobile, irrepressible. Here form is only one moment in a continuum of transformations; and the moment, on the other hand, is all: in it is condensed the being of all possible transformations. The formal hypostasis, then, finds its founding (ground) in the instant: there is no form without temporal determination (puntualeità), but the
continuation of the object—its permanence—undermines the object’s capacity to remain faithful to itself. So if there are objects and forms that are eminently fluid and changing, there is also a fluidity and transformativity intrinsic to every object.

As in Karl Kraus’s famous dictum, “origin is the goal” in anthropology. We may then speculate that the body is perhaps the first artifact that is not just a tool. The decorated archaic body, already an artifact in life, becomes also a power-object in death: it is the combination of *artificium* and distance that constitutes it as a thing of wonder, to be admired from afar and feared. But as admiration, and meraviglia, were gradually stripped from the corpse, this root object of awe—becoming aestheticized—the magic of the appearance/disappearance of life-as-form has been all but forgotten. Several artists of the start of the last century seem to have sensed (as had Proust) that art originally expressed the ways man has dealt with the finiteness of things: as if the corpse—*cadavre exquis*—had from the beginnings of culture contained in itself all the potential of a temporarily discarded tool, and as if, conversely, the life of the artifact, its substitute, were always a sort of life after death. In the corpse, the instrument becomes one with the medium; yet, anthropologically, the relation of the secondary artifact to the primary tool is not simple, not least because artifacts are for the most part made with tools (something that may have been in Duchamp’s mind). If one sees the corpse as a paradigm for the art object, one could view the living body as the original tool, the primary instrument. So while we can fathom many anthropologies of art, there is one that must precede all others: that which takes the human artifact, not just as *res gesta*, the thing as element of a story (and of the story of art)—but as organon, that is instrument, whose statute, from the painting of the corpse with red ocher onward, must in every age be redefined.8

From that perspective, we could almost say that by the inception of modernism the body-organon had become the serendipitous found object, while the corpse-artifact came to be reflected in the industrial product. And the cult objects and curios from tribal cultures that loom prominently in photographs of artists’ studios from a century ago were also readymades and found objects of sorts, whose unknown facture was imbued with “magic” (as Picasso called it), a product of their very alienness, at the time when explorer-anthropologists and artists alike, after they had ignored those objects for centuries, first encountered and appropriated them.9 A new polycentric anthropology of world art must acknowledge its own roots in modernist primitivism while striving to move beyond them.
At my very first seminar with Claude Lévi-Strauss, in fall of 1964, one of his star students, the brilliant and missed Pierre Clastres, who had just returned from a long, harrowing sojourn among the already vanishing Guayakí in the remotest Brazilian forest, was at one point showing images of certain large white tree-bark larvae, whose taste, he reported, “was said to be douçâtre”; at which his master sardonically interjected: “Do you mean to say that you didn’t actually taste them?” Lévi-Strauss was not asking for a certification of the nutritional content of the gooey molluscs: rather, as in so many passages of Tristes Tropiques (a book that already by its title undermined the fieldwork/discovery mystique it appeared to uphold), he was interested in their actual taste (to a Western palate)—a direct experience of alienness most members of an archaic culture would tend to shy away from. He was encouraging that same Western hunger for an esthetic of remote experience that he had actually singled out, with regret, as being part and parcel of the disappearance of any significant differences in the world.

The aesthetic tristesse my teacher referred to in the title of his famous book may have less exotic but deeper roots. Primitive art, as both an aesthetic category and a body of objects, has been viewed as the art historical correlate of late-colonial greed (in this, akin to négritude, now reduced to “jungle fever,” after Joseph Conrad’s demonic and prophetic shadow-play in the Congo). Yet, between Léry’s classical-looking Tupinambas and the quasi-Africanistic filles-de-joie of Avignon fame—a global esthetic had gradually risen, of which the West (Europe in all its forms and extensions) became the universal interpreter. Paradoxically, the modernist revolution enhanced and accelerated this omnivorous course, which appears to have been theoretically enhanced, in a way, by the concomitant discovery of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, as if “structuralism had always contained post-structuralism” (and modernism had always been postmodern).10 This also ties in with the effort to seek in primitivism a break in the notion of a progressive evolution of representation, and such a break, in my view, is also related to the rise of that “critique” of the common notion of “homogeneous, empty time,” which became, in Walter Benjamin’s terms, “the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself.”11 Concomitantly, the analytic theories of subatomic physics relegated any possible integration of the perceived to invisible and unfathomable realms, whose exploration would rely on instruments and models suffused with a “magic” aura and powers—at least in the sense that their mathematics, mechanics, and electronics were beyond common educated access, experience, and comprehension. To Analytical Cubism itself (and its paradoxical primitivistic traits) one could then apply Thomas Crow’s
words from a different context: "the [historical] phenomenon of breaking down—which is the literal sense of 'analysis'—... can itself serve as a tool of interpretation."\textsuperscript{12}

Primitivism's own paradoxes, in this general picture, are integral part of its proto-Cubist gaze, which questions the point of view of its subject and the univocal consistency of its object. A testing of the margins of history could already be found in the proto-globalization of aesthetic taste and practice that long antecedes our present ecumenical networks of collective expansion, expression, and perception—for instance, in the Crusades (these days, alas, more than ever), seen as an attempt to reunify the West under the guise of confronting the East of its origins. But post-Romantic (and post-neoclassic) primitivism was certainly not immune from such inquietudes. After all, the synchrony of the Warburgian study of the re-discovery of pagan antiquity in the Renaissance with the rise of a philo-tribal pagan aesthetics in modernism is not coincidental. Among other things, both drives—I am again purposely echoing a psychoanalytical term—correspond to that testing and stretching of the margins of recorded history aimed at promoting and nourishing a new form of *Histoire Universelle*, in which the wish to recover a discontinuous time-depth is devoured, like a son of Chronos, by the exploration and accelerating assimilation, of vanishing alterities: pagan mysteries meet cannibal rite.\textsuperscript{13} All of this may be seen as curiously revealing of unsuspected, repressed, and unconscious features of the Western ethos and its cultural forms right at that juncture of modernist art and anthropology—the crossroads of the depths of psychological introspection and the expansive vistas of museum collections, monuments, and ruins.

I am suggesting that the anthropology of art may still be suspended on the margins of the analytic mode of the modernist revolution (including its self-reflexive mode, commonly referred to as postmodern), and the intuitive (mythological) one of its "discovery" and adoption of the primitive. It can also be noted how the modernist connection between art and science, through primitivism, also implied a new trans-anthropological bias, if I may call it that, which was, and still may be, drawn to the exploration of the limits of the human—physically, biologically, socially, psychologically, and artistically. Modernist art, *stricto sensu*, in this diffused Western form of consciousness (now spreading all over the world) occupies a special place—at once centric and ex-centric: Cézanne, its founder, who supremely incarnated that tension between extreme objectivity and extreme subjectivity in representation, which is at the core of the transitional experience of the neo-modern, famously called himself a "primitive," and Rilke, writing about him, went so far as to impute a quasi-animalesque quality to both the subject and the object of his art.\textsuperscript{14} Modernist
art history too, embarking on a search for hidden, metahistorical and infrahistorical symbols, establishes a metarepresentative relation with reality, which in fact corresponds to the analytical study of all those other invisible realities—microscopic and macroscopic, infrahuman and superhuman—that physical and social sciences claim to discover and describe in their analytical models.

One last time, we could see the root instance of the aesthetic globalization that we call primitivism as an essential rather than episodic constituent of our art historical consciousness—one we cannot escape to this day, except at the price of misappraisal and impoverishment regarding what we look at, and how. Perhaps, more than to an anthropology of art, I am pointing to a possible art of anthropology that would encompass and transcend the exactness of science and creativity's ruthless plundering (which Picasso and Morton Feldman advocated). In other words, we cannot ignore the artistic dimension of the anthropological approach, too often hidden beneath the scientific pretensions of academic discipline. As a healthy corrective to the latter, anthropology may also be seen as a rhetorical art that was developed parallel to, but also as part and parcel of, the other arts of our modern and modernist age (fig. 2).

The crisis of anthropology as a scientific discipline, parallel to the physical and theoretical disappearance of its favorite primitive object, could make us wonder if we could not apply to it the question that, according to Jacques-Alain Miller, Jacques Lacan asked about his own discipline toward the end of his teaching career: "What would be left of psychoanalysis, of what it has made us perceive, of what it has given us access to, once it was only a superstition?" Such a paradoxical survival in disbelief points to the possibility that there may still be in anthropology too, "something . . . which would refuse to be thought," and hence remain vital. Such superstition may also resonate with the equally counterintuitive late-Lacanian notion of "nullibility" (inspired by J. L. Borges, but not named by the writer as such), which is "the fact of being null part," "in the epoch in which the Other does not exist." This is also the non-lieu of contemporary world art, ethnographic as well as first world, which requires, in my view, a revaluation of the specific historicity of its heterogeneous constitutive elements and the post-primitivist ars anthropologica which I am here advocating.

It is not, as Lévi-Strauss somewhat defensively insisted long ago, just that any anthropological investigation needs first to exhaust all possible venues of historical description, documentation, and explanation before proceeding in its own
endeavor, with its own synchronous methods—as if anthropology could resign itself to being considered nothing more than a supplement or, worse, a *pis aller* of historiography.\(^1\) Anthropology itself may be no more, but certainly no less, than another, more immediate and direct form of history.\(^2\) Presenting his famous *Theses in the Philosophy of History*, Hannah Arendt referred to Walter Benjamin’s notion of the *nunc stans* (*Jetztzeit*) of social life: a presence of the now that applies equally well to the past as to the present displayed before our eyes (and which in itself can be as opaque as any science or fantasy of the past).\(^3\) Traditional oral societies, once
the favorite preserve of anthropology, tended to act, ritually, as if they were guided by Benjamin's dictum that “even the dead were not safe”—and the very subsistence of ancestors, not just ensuring their benevolence and protection, required constant care and regular conservation and upkeep. We have a somewhat similar attitude toward arts and crafts, and part of our cult of them is the study of their genealogies. But just as Nietzsche warned against the causal-magical thinking of historicism, so, too, we should beware of social determinisms of any sort, including the ideally non-reductive ones of anthropology, even when disguised beneath hermeneutic sophistication. “In every era,” noted Benjamin, “the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.” Yet we should also acknowledge the historicity of the ars anthropologica, what we might call, borrowing his felicitous expression, its “dialectical leap . . . in the open air of history.” In the eye of the maelstrom where anthropology and history connect, where causes and facts may become a posteriori and historical, and where, in one era’s passionate study of art or of any human doing, “constellations” may be formed with “earlier ones,” “the nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed.” Anthropology, freed of its old neo-positivist and its new postmodernist superstitions, might still offer some of the missing stimulus that art historians have long sought in it.

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1. Alfred Gell, The Anthropology of Time (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55: “It would be difficult indeed to justify most of the activities anthropologists engage in unless cultural experience made a great deal of difference to every aspect of thought and behavior, and one way of defining anthropology would be that it is empirically the study of the differences between cultures, and theoretically the study of the differences these differences make [emphasis mine].”

ethnologist, the informant is the one who is supposed to know, who again and again shames him for his foreign ignorance and naiveté; and yet as a scientist he must in the end think that he knows something more or better than his native—at least because of his access to the instruments of comparison—or sink, like Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim, into utter despair. The awareness of the intricacies of transference is what gives psychoanalysis a definite edge over the anthropologist's scientist's hubris.


5. In the fifth chapter of her important book *Other People's Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), Wendy Doniger introduced the notions of metamyth, meta-metamyth and even meta-metametamyth. These are myths about the telling of other myths—theatrical myths, so to speak, and among these, she chose myths that speak of strangers and those that incorporate alien myths of others. In a leap that attests to the compatibility of academic rigor with interpretive audacity, she identified the aliens of these myths not just with human outsiders but with gods, animals, children, and madmen. She also addressed the way myths deal with alien rites and vice versa. I evoke her work without being able to discuss it here because in the process she has brought to question the dialectical, *ante litteram* nature not only of the “we” that is ever dramatized in the narrations, but of the Western scholarly “we” that narrates the narrations of these narrations. In an endless set of Chinese boxes, the content (the “meaning,” one could say) is always different, ever transposed from one empty container to another, and the narratives of our interpretations are part of the mythological game, as Lévi-Strauss had already indicated long ago.

6. Eric Bulson, "Irish Hospitality," review of Jean-Michel Rabaté, *James Joyce and the Politics of Egosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), in *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 June 2002, 25; relates J.-M. Rabaté's view that "Joyce's method in *Finnegans Wake* . . . is not a process of appropriation but a linguistic opening up to otherness." The book "is not a stable text whose meaning can be assigned to any fixed intention. Rather, the very nature of its composition is an acknowledgement that it should be approached genetically, as a text always in the process of becoming, 'always poised in some sort of textual and sexual undecidability.'" Marcel Duchamp's *Rrose Sélavy* comes to mind, as well as his original statements about the role of reception as constitutive of the object. Again, J.-A. Miller has noted how late Lacanian theory of analytical practice adopted a "method" of "false translation" not unlike the one adopted by late Joyce, one that "wants the unconscious [or the textural truth of the narration, in Joyce's case] to be grasped only as a mistake" (Miller, "Lacan's Later Teaching," 38).

8. I touched on related aspects of these questions in Francesco Pellizzi, "Object of Worship and The Revolt of the Objects," in *La Abolición del Arte* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1998), 459–82.


10. Miller, "Lacan's Later Teaching." 36: "If its early demonstration is the real of structure, its second is that of the demonstration of the arbitrariness of structures . . . The structuralism of which the early demonstration is that structure is real, was itself taken by a dynamic in which a new meaning has appeared, in which structure is only a semblance, a construction. From this fact, structuralism, which is posed immediately as anti-historical, has on the contrary opened paths to a generalized historicity which shows the historical relativity of structures." Miller also notes how, since Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, "the lesson of social anthropology has always been that the real can be structured differently from the way we do it" (ibid.).

11. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" [1940], in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 261. The escape sought in the pagan "fragmented aesthetics" inspired by tribal polytheism may also correspond to the impulse to escape from the strictures of the Judeo-Christian messianic vision of history: "I fear that the destiny of the polytheistic notion of time, in the hands of Christian monotheism, may represent the first stage of the flight of humanity from the sense of the arbitrariness of existence into the trap of historical determinism." Josif Brodskij, *Profilo di Clio* (1991; reprint, Milan: Adelphi, 2003), 135 (my translations). Primitivism, in various of its forms, may actually represent one of the first attempts to recapture the arbitrary—a tendency represented by the study of chance phenomena (for instance, in biological sciences in the work of Jacques Monod or Stephen Jay Gould, and in physics, by aspects of quantum mechanics and chaos theory).

12. Thomas Crow, *The Intelligence of Art* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 50. Once more, Kafka comes to mind, with his slow-motion, quasi-cinematic compression of myriad inner states and minute observation of surroundings and events within single space-time units (already in his early *Amerika*, for instance). His narration implodes into the analytic description of sequences of minute "frames" of inner and outer perception that generate an impression of penetrability at first, where normal time awareness is disrupted: everything happens too fast or as if in slow motion (just as may be the case in the many-faceted image dissections and juxtapositions of Cubism). Yet, the narrative disintegration of organic and hierarchically structured forms does correspond to the revaluation of some of their primary features and qualities that can take on symbolic overtones.

13. For a sketch of the relation of Warburg's legacy to the origin, conception, and history of *Res* see

14. Filippo Fimiani, “Portrait of the Artist as an Old Dog: Of Rilke, Cézanne, and the Animalization of Painting,” Res 44 (autumn 2003). Here too, the breakdown of Western rationality, under the weight of industrial mechanization, connects with the classical representation of non-Western barbarity that had been entertained since the Renaissance by reversing it into a positive figuration of the instructive, the spontaneous, the synthetic, the symbolic, and the animalesque. This foray (we cannot see it as a return) to the margins of history, as I have called it here, parallels the scientific explosion of the biological, in all its forms, already reflected in Frankenstein’s monster—a being whose precarious integration of organs is artificially and mechanically engineered, but whose life results from an external electrical charge applied to an assemblage of heterogenous parts. What could be the ethos and possible aesthetic configuration of such a construction? Robert Musil dealt with this at length in The Man without Qualities, with the troubling question of the nature and humanity of those criminals whom we label “monsters”—and this was in unison and dissonance with the equally troubling fathoming of the clandestine experience of incest. See Robert Musil, The Man without Qualities, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Knopf, 1995). The sense of a trans-human substance to all reality has persisted and grown to this day, nourished by science and our generalized historicism: “Since the status of human beings is that of late-comers—in terms of precedence in the world—it is inevitable that the truth of things be non-human.” Brodskiy, Profilo, 144 (my translation).

15. Ibid., 6: “Superstition . . . is reconstructed in etymology as superstare, what is held above. In the figurative sense, it is . . . what remains, what continues to exist after its progenitors have ceased to be, it is something that describes what survives.” To an anthropologist reader, Miller offers many implicit but suggestive (Lacanian) insights on what the study of “superstition” could stand for, once freed from our “superstitious” misapprehensions about its object-to-be.

16. For these quotes, ibid., 24, 28, 29.


20. Ibid., 255.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 263